

Pony Car

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EXT. HIGHWAY - NEAR A SOYBEAN FARM - DAY

In the distance - along the faded pavement of a two-lane interstate that cuts through verdant, thriving soybean fields, a car's black hardtop and burnished, matador-red frame breach the horizon as it approaches a road sign in the FOREGROUND--

SCOWA CITY LIMIT POP 640

It's the kind of American-crafted icon that makes jaws drop and tongues dangle in its wake as it blazes across the landscape.

Except that this car is not blazing across anything.

As the vehicle nears, the engine rumbles when she lurches forward. This happens every fifty feet, then she hiccups to a crawling speed, lurches forward again, drifts back and forth across the divider line. Awaiting her approach is torture.

Finally, the car is close enough to admire - a 1968 AMC Javelin SST. On her approach, she rounds a curve, but at its apex her engine roars, tires skid. She missiles forward, juts left to right as she fights to grip the asphalt but glides toward--

EXT. SOYBEAN FIELD - DAY

The out-of-control Javelin mows an unplanned path through rows of the leafy-green crop. It swerves across the harvest and toward an abrupt dirt embankment.

The Javelin skids to a halt. Its front end kisses the embankment edge. Dust swirls, dirt clods roll down the slope that leads to a stand of oak trees that mark the farm's border.

Silence except for subtle metal pops from the settling engine. Despite the descending dirt cloud that shrouds the Javelin, the angle reveals a beautifully maintained vehicle, highlighted by a white rally stripe alongside flawless body contours.

A view from the front grill looking toward the windshield shows no driver, no passenger...until a tuft of hair sprouts delicately into view from behind the wheel; then a forehead...

then the conscience-stricken face of CASE WELDON (12) - slight and unassuming on the surface, but with midwestern, small-town boy survivor instincts. Case's brows raise "uh-oh" high after he determines he in fact emerged unscathed from the detour.

His look cranes past the front end of the Javelin as he appreciates how close he came to a cliff dive. He eases back into the driver's seat, closes his eyes, exhales in relief.

OFFSCREEN - the sound of footfalls over tilled dirt. Their approach snaps Case out of his repose. He sits stock-still. His anxious eyes sweep toward the steps closing in.

TIGHT on the face of LLOYD PELFREY - (37) sheriff's smokey hat, gold-framed polarized sunglasses. He kneels close to the Javelin, frames himself within the open driver's side window.

Lloyd eyeballs the skittish youngster. Case fixes to the seat, raises his hands above his head.

LLOYD
Well knock me down and steal my
teeth.

Lloyd takes a moment to confirm what he sees.

LLOYD (CONT'D)
'Quite a detour you took there,
son. Not to ignore the fact you
look four or five years away from
being legally licensed to engage
in said deviation.

Lloyd holds for the inevitable fish story. Nothing from Case.

LLOYD (CONT'D)
You're Carl Weldon's boy, ain't
ya?

CASE
(cautious nod)
Yessir.

LLOYD
You know me, boy?

Case nods.

LLOYD (CONT'D)
What's your name?

CASE
(trembly)
Case Weldon, sir.

Lloyd's eyes gesture toward Case's raised arms.

LLOYD
No need for that, this 'aint a
rollercoaster.

Case lowers his arms. The ANGLE on Lloyd always remains TIGHT.

LLOYD (CONT'D)

Yeah. I knew your daddy; I mean, the way everybody 'round here knows everybody. 'Shame he got took from you so young. I Had an uncle 'went the same way, 'cept the doctor said it was his booze habit 'brought the cancer to his liver.

Case's eyes shift to Lloyd, then forward again. He gauges the level of trouble he must be in.

LLOYD (CONT'D)

I know your momma too. She got hitched to Harlin Mackey after your daddy passed. Y'all live on his property out past Whisper Wood Crick, don't ya?

CASE

Yessir.

Lloyd's eyes scan past his lenses into the Javelin's interior.

LLOYD

I know this vehicle. 1968 American Motors Javelin SST...sports hardtop; matador red, white rally stripe, 280 horsepower, 343 Typhoon V-8 engine - biggest engine available until the 390 came out later that same year.

All this is lost on the frozen Case. Is he under arrest or no? Lloyd's gaze dances around the Javelin.

LLOYD (CONT'D)

You bet your sweet angels I know this vehicle. 'Known it from way before you were a twinkle.

Lloyd turns his attention back to Case.

LLOYD (CONT'D)

Question is, how's a boy like yourself end up behind the wheel and land within an ass hair's length of bein' buried under a crop of soybeans?

Case's chest heaves. For now, he forgoes an explanation.

LLOYD (CONT'D)
 (taps the door frame)
 I know you brung her out from
 Harlin Mackey's barn. I know she
 didn't always belong there, but I
 know that's from where you brung
 her. 'Care to start there?

Case trembles, his jaw clenches. He shakes his head.

LLOYD (CONT'D)
 Well shit, son. You're in an
 awful lot of trouble. And if I
 know Ol' Harlin Mackey the way I'm
 sure you do, I'm not just speakin'
 of the trouble-with-the-law kinda
 trouble. Thirty years gone by I
 ain't seen this beauty on the road
 but a few dozen times, and never
 once with anyone other than Harlin
 Mackey behind the wheel. 'Hate to
 think of what he might-

CASE
 I took it.

Lloyd studies the boy.

LLOYD
 If that's the case, I'd find it
 hard to believe an afternoon
 joyride would be worth the hide
 tanning waitin' for you when you
 bring her back. 'Not like Ol'
 Harlin ain't gonna miss her.

Case shoots a side look at Lloyd, senses that the man reads
 right through him.

LLOYD (CONT'D)
 Havin' said that, there must be a
 better explanation.

CASE
 (gulps)
 I just...took it...I wanna learn
 how to drive. My daddy ain't ever
 gonna have the chance to teach me.

Lloyd offers an understanding nod. He inventories the
 condition of the Javelin.

LLOYD

Well, on account of the fit of
dust you kicked up, this ol'
beauty needs warsh, but exceptin'
that, she looks in the same fettle
Ol' Harlin demands of her. 'She
gets back to the barn in time,
maybe the same can be said for
your hide.

Lloyd's look drifts toward the back of the Javelin. His eyes
squinch as he holds on something--

OUTSIDE THE JAVELIN - BEHIND THE DRIVER'S SIDE REAR WHEEL

A small puddle of blood has amassed in the dirt under the rear
bumper. A drop splashes into it from above.

TIGHT ON LLOYD

He studies the puddle, cranes to gauge what - if anything - in
the Javelin's wake may be its origin--

OUTSIDE THE JAVELIN - IN THE SOYBEAN FIELD BEYOND THE BUMPER

No telltale trail.

Lloyd's eyes shift back to Case. The boy feels Lloyd's stare,
turns with caution to meet it.

LLOYD (CONT'D)

Son, if I was to open up the
trunk... whadda you reckon I might
find?

Case locks on Lloyd, tries to summon a judicious response.

CASE

I dunno...nothin'...

Lloyd attempts to decipher.

LLOYD

Then you probably don't mind
reachin' for them keys...slowly.
And passin' them to me.

Case stares at Lloyd, deliberates. Lloyd holds on Case - clear
to convey this is not a request.

Case complies. His gentle hand tugs the keys from the
ignition. He passes them into Lloyd's awaiting palm.

Lloyd grips the keys, looks toward the trunk. Case's eyes
avert. He takes a deep breath.

OUTSIDE THE JAVELIN

Still always TIGHT on Lloyd's face when angled on him. He rises, takes cautious, crunchy steps over the dirt and flattened soybean leaves toward the rear of the vehicle.

LLOYD'S POV

Gliding across the side contours, the rally stripe. Another drop of blood splashes into the dirt just beneath the bumper.

BACK INSIDE THE JAVELIN

Case is paralyzed in the driver's seat. He tries to control his breathing, his heartbeat.

OUTSIDE THE JAVELIN

Lloyd approaches the vehicle's rear. Blood drains from the slat of the closed trunk, cascades toward the bumper, then globes up before periodic drops fall and splash into the dirt.

BACK INSIDE THE JAVELIN

Case tempers his breathing. His tense eyes shift toward the rear view mirror.

OUTSIDE THE JAVELIN

After a cautious pause, Lloyd gently jabs the trunk key into its hole, gives it a smooth turn. The lock thunks loose. The trunk lid springs upward.

BACK INSIDE THE JAVELIN

Case hears hinges groan OFFSCREEN as the trunk opens.

OUTSIDE THE JAVELIN

Lloyd steps back. His eyes hold on the contents of the trunk.

BACK INSIDE THE JAVELIN

Case's focus drifts as he recalls--

PRE-LAP - THE STINGING ECHO OF A FACE SLAP

INT. HARLIN MACKKEY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

FLASHBACK. Case tumbles across a linoleum floor, his head bounces off a kitchen sink cabinet. He cowers against the wood doors. Tears run down his pink, throbbing cheek.

His upward look is met by a tree-trunk-sized arm and hand that sends another sharp smack across his face. Then another.

A large male figure towers over Case - HARLIN MACKEY - (62) barrel-chested, big gut. His black-dyed, oiled-down hair and full sideburns defy his true age. His blue-black eyes stare icily at Case. His broad forehead and heavy eyebrows furl.

CASE

(through pain and quivers)

Please stop.

Harlin's lip gnarls. He slaps the boy's face sideways again.

HARLIN

(in Case's face)

What goes on between your momma and me, goes on between your momma and me. You best mind your own business or I'll slap you so far ta hell, you'll be talkin' to yer dead daddy.

Case's face crumbles. He huffs, helpless. His look whips across the kitchen toward--

A BEDROOM

framed by the open door, seated on the edge of a bed, DARLA - (27) blond, side-swept feathered bob - looks at Case with compunctive eyes. The left side of her face is red and swollen; her lip on that side is split. She sits still, does nothing.

IN THE KITCHEN

Harlin shoots Case a "stay put" scowl, then plods across the kitchen toward Darla in the bedroom.

Case looks on, powerless.

Harlin looms over Darla as she truckles; fear in her eyes. Harlin kicks the bedroom door closed behind him.

Case wails under the OFFSCREEN sounds of slaps and shrieks that echo from the bedroom.

BACK TO:

INSIDE THE JAVELIN - CASE

gulps. His transfixed look recalls--

EXT. HARLIN MACKAY'S PROPERTY / INT. BARN - DAY

Harlin hunches over a tool box on a work bench inside the open rustic structure. A riding lawnmower is mounted on a hand-cranked lift, spare parts and shop towels sprawled on the floor. Harlin's back is turned so he is unable to see outside.

A covered automobile is parked in the middle of the space. Just outside the barn doors, an axe sticks upright in a tree trunk chopping block next to a woodpile.

FROM OUTSIDE THE BARN - THE YARD AREA

Case approaches stealth-like, creeps toward the open doors.

INSIDE THE BARN - AT THE WORK BENCH

Harlin attaches a hex socket to a ratchet, turns toward the mounted lawnmower. He halts as he sees Case standing behind the trunk of the covered car, visible only from the waist up.

Case locks on Harlin. Harlin glares.

HARLIN

'Thought you knew better than to
ever come in here.

Case stands still, no retort. Harlin tosses the ratchet onto the work bench, stalks toward Case.

HARLIN (CONT'D)

'Guess you're just gonna have to
keep learnin' the hard way.

Just as Harlin steps past the rear wheel and around the trunk of the car, Case hoists the axe, swings with a vengeance.

The blade sinks into Harlin's chest, stops him cold. Blood gushes and streams from the crimson slit in his heart.

Harlin's glazed eyes lock on Case. He offers a last, pitiful gasp before he drops to his knees, then flounders onto his back as his lifeless body slaps the floor.

Case tempers his breathing; a bit unsettled, but what had to be done is done. He dials back in, eyes shift to the car as he reaches for the cover, yanks it off the matador-red trunk.

BACK TO:

INSIDE THE JAVELIN - CASE

Resolute eyes forward as he recalls--

INT. BARN - DAY

FLASHBACK. Harlin's dead body - wrapped in the blood-traced car cover - is crammed inside the Javelin's trunk. Blood-drenched shop towels are piled in a corner of the trunk pan.

Case stands at the trunk, looks down at the body as he shifts a hand crank that lowers the empty lawnmower lift. He reaches for a short-handle shovel, places it in the trunk.

Case's undaunted gaze holds on the body.

BACK TO:

EXT. SOYBEAN FIELD - DAY

ANGLE - INSIDE THE JAVELIN'S TRUNK

Harlin's dead body.

LLOYD - LOOKING INTO THE TRUNK

The gruesome image sinks in, then he steps away and toward--

THE JAVELIN'S DRIVER'S SIDE DOOR

Case stands in front of the open door, holds a staunch glare as he aims a nine millimeter handgun at Lloyd's face. In an instant, his face slackens toward quizzical, his eyes give Lloyd the once-over.

ANGLE ON LLOYD

reveals for the first time that - aside from the smokey hat and polarized sunglasses - he wears only a white t-shirt, sky-blue cotton boxer shorts, and boots laced over black wool crew socks. He holds a guarded stance, locks on Case.

Case's questioning eyes train on Lloyd, dart up and down. He gauges the man's appearance.

CASE

What happened to your clothes?...

A deliberating pause.

CASE (CONT'D)

Sheriff...How come you're not wearin' any clothes?

Lloyd holds on Case, inhales. His eyes drift down toward his shoulder as he relates--

PRE-LAP - THE FOLKSY DRAWL OF A MALE VOICE

EARL
I'm afraid it's unanimous,
Lloyd...

INT. SCOWA TOWN HALL - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

FLASHBACK. A badge patch sewn into the shoulder sleeve of a forest green, department-issued sheriff shirt - SCOWA POLICE. A name patch sewn above the breast pocket flap - PELFREY.

Lloyd - green-on-green Class A uniform, smokey hat atop his head, polarized sunglasses dangle from his breast pocket - sits at a boat-shaped table. Four feet of oak laminate separates him from--

EARL (65), FRANK (65), SAM (65) - seated across the table; homespun provincials who compose the town's board of selectmen.

EARL (CONT'D)
The board passed a motion to
disband the town police
department. Effective immediately.

LLOYD
(sardonic)
Do y'all suppose the criminals'll
be disbanding too?

FRANK
We ran the numbers, Lloyd. We
just don't feel a one-man
department justifies the allocated
budget compared to what Scowa pays
for state police coverage.

LLOYD
So y'all are takin' my town away
from me...

SAM
To be fair, state police already
cover eighty-one percent of
incidents in Scowa. That number
started growin' even in your daddy
Lester's time. It comes down to
sensible civic government
survival, and pivoting from less
fiscally-sound, traditional ways.

EARL

Of course, the board also voted to provide you one month's payment as a severance package, but we'll need you to turn in your cruiser keys, your weapon, and your uniform.

Lloyd's eyes pan across the men's faces.

LLOYD

Alright then. I s'pose y'all have spoken your piece.

IN THE CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Earl, Frank, and Sam are seated at the table, huddled as they engage in small talk.

A set of cruiser keys is placed on the table in front of them. Then a gun and duty belt. Then a ballistic vest. Then the green uniform pants and shirt.

The three selectmen shoot confounded looks at Lloyd.

Lloyd stands over the pile of gear, clad only in a white shirt, sky-blue boxer shorts, smokey hat, sunglasses, and boots.

EARL

What's goin' on here, Lloyd?

LLOYD

Just followin' orders. 'Board said "effective immediately".

The selectmen fix muted stares at Lloyd.

LLOYD (CONT'D)

(tugs the hat brim)

The smokey belonged to my daddy, so I'll be leaving' with it... Traditional ways and all.

Lloyd walks away. The speechless selectmen watch him exit.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NEAR A SOYBEAN FARM - DAY

A defiant, unemployed but lofty Lloyd walks along the shoulder.

OFFSCREEN - AN ENGINE ROARS, TIRES SKID

Lloyd whips toward the uproar. On the road behind him, the Javelin juts and rockets into the soybean field.

Lloyd looks on, taken aback.

BACK TO:

EXT. SOYBEAN FIELD - DAY

Lloyd gauges Case. The boy's eyes relent, his heaving chest settles. Lloyd extends a hand toward Case. Case's aim slacks. He lowers the gun. His trustful hand offers it to Lloyd. Lloyd grips the weapon, lowers it to his side.

Case holds on Lloyd, senses the chance to beat feet. Case steps away, then breaks into a full run - uncontested - out of the field and back toward the highway.

Lloyd's look drifts back to the Javelin as he recalls--

PRE-LAP - THE JAVELIN'S MOTOR ROARS

INT. AMC JAVELIN SST (DRIVING) - DAY

LESTER PELFREY (45) - unbuttoned blue sheriff's shirt - and YOUNG LLOYD PELFREY (10) - wearing Lester's smokey hat - grin ear-to-ear, windows down, wind whipping through their hair as the familiar Javelin rips down a two-lane highway.

LESTER

She sure can rally, can't she
Lloyd?

Young Lloyd beams, nods his head.

YOUNG LLOYD

Faster, Pa!

LESTER

Not too fast. I'm the law, not a
scofflaw.

He taps the gas extra. The Javelin gallops down the road.

EXT. ICE CREAM PARLOR - PARKING LOT - DAY

Lester and Young Lloyd exit the parlor, content as they sip milkshakes. They arrive at the gravel parking lot area, then halt when their eyes fall on YOUNG HARLIN MACKEY (34) - burly, looks similar to the present version, just fresher-faced.

Young Harlin stands between Lester and Young Lloyd and their parked Javelin.

YOUNG HARLIN

'Afternoon, Sheriff Pelfrey.
Fancy catchin' you off duty and
enjoyin' a little father-son
bonding time.

Lester holds his ground. Young Lloyd inches closer to Lester. He eyes Young Harlin as if he were a wildcat ready to pounce.

YOUNG HARLIN (CONT'D)

I 'magine it's time better spent
than chasin' your tail tryin' to
pin a crime on a law abidin'
citizen.

LESTER

Henry Garland says he went to bed
with a full gas barrel on his
farm, then woke up to an empty
one, and was left with no fuel for
his tractors. 'Aint the first
time, 'neither. When he filed a
complaint, he wound up in the
hospital with a baseball bat welt
on his head, and said you had
somethin' to do with it. I'm just
tryin' to get to the bottom of
things, Harlin.

YOUNG HARLIN

That old timer's confused, is all.
'Best you leave things be. Henry
Garland'll be just fine. As for
you, Sheriff...police work can be
dangerous. A man could find
himself in a hell of a
predicament.

Young Harlin's lip forms an iniquitous curl. His eyes shift from Lester to Young Lloyd. He sees the boy's fear; smells it.

YOUNG HARLIN (CONT'D)

Y'all enjoy your treats.

Young Harlin walks away confidently, leaves Young Lloyd uneasy, and Lester mistrustful.

BACK TO:

EXT. SOYBEAN FIELD - DAY

Lloyd is lost in the reverie, stares down at Harlin's body in the trunk.

PRE-LAP - THE CRACKLING SOUND OF A STRUCTURE FIRE

INT. PELFREY HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lester is fast asleep in his bed. Young Lloyd storms into the dark space, stifles a cough, shakes Lester.

YOUNG LLOYD

Pa! Wake up! The barn's on fire!

Lester stirs. The sounds and smells hit him. He bounces out of bed, bolts from the room. Young Lloyd follows.

EXT. PELFREY HOUSE - NIGHT

Snapping flames and black smoke engulf the adjacent barn.

Lester and Young Lloyd are bathed in a pulsing orange glow as they race off the porch and catch sight of the blaze. Their attention then shifts to a dirt driveway leading toward the property line.

Young Harlin sits behind the wheel of the idling Javelin. His admonitory eyes lock on Lester; his message is clear. The Javelin rolls away.

Young Lloyd's feeble eyes look up at his browbeaten father. The two watch powerless as the Javelin roars into the darkness.

BACK TO:

EXT. SOYBEAN FIELD - DAY

TIGHT ON LLOYD - he stands at the driver's side door of the Javelin, slowly slips back into the moment. His look shifts to the inside of the car, where Harlin's uncovered dead body now occupies the driver's seat, slumped over the steering wheel.

Lloyd wipes his hands off with a shop towel, then sets the towel on the hardtop.

ANGLE - LLOYD AND THE JAVELIN

A view from behind Lloyd reveals he is naked except for his hat, boots and sunglasses. His shirt and boxers are slung over the handle of the shovel that is stuck upright in the dirt next to him, alongside the folded car cover.

Lloyd peers down the dirt embankment, at the stand of oak trees below. He zeroes in on the broad side of a thick trunk.

He removes his hat, lowers the bowl over the shovel handle. He steps toward the Javelin, retrieves the shop towel, uses it to grab the gun.

Lloyd dips into the Javelin's cabin, reaches around the girth of Harlin's body, pops open--

THE GLOVE COMPARTMENT

Lloyd drops the gun out of the shop towel into the compartment, alongside three full nine millimeter caliber magazines.

He grips the gear shift, pulls it to neutral. He backs out of the cabin, pinpoints the tree below.

He shuts the door, grasps the door frame, digs his feet into the dirt, gives the Javelin a guided push forward.

The Javelin barrels down the embankment and crashes head-on into the thick oak tree.

Lloyd looks down at the twisted wreck, stone-eyed.

THE JAVELIN

Its front end is curled up against the tree like an empty pack of cigarettes. Harlin's dead body is contorted in the driver's seat, impaled by the steering wheel.

Lloyd gazes over both shoulders. No witnesses. He backs away from the embankment, eyes locked on the wreck below.

LLOYD

'Guess you were right after all,
Harlin. A man could find himself
in a hell of a predicament.

He tosses the shop towel onto the car cover, reaches down to retrieve his smokey hat, adjusts it on his head.

EXT. TRUSS BRIDGE - DAY

Clad in his white shirt and sky-blue boxer shorts, lugging the car cover folded under his arm so that only unstained areas are exposed, toting the shovel in the other hand, Lloyd ambles to the middle of a metal structure that spans a bosky river.

He halts, sets the cover atop a cross beam, places the shovel on the cover. He walks OFFSCREEN. The echo of his clopping steps grows distant, then pauses, then grows closer again.

He returns to the cover and shovel, a grapefruit-sized river rock in his grip.

He sets the rock atop the cover, wraps the cover around it and the shovel. He drops the cover over the beam. It plops into the flowing water and sinks; forgotten.

Lloyd continues across the bridge and toward a valley dotted with modest houses and farms.

FADE TO BLACK