

WHITE HOT WINTER

By

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EXT. CABBAGE FIELD - NIGHT

Dew sodden crabgrass feathers the edge of the road as an empty Budweiser box tumbles along burnt roman candles and airplane bottles.

SANFORD WINKLESTEIN, 20s, hot mess, shaggy red chin, takes a knee and peers up with hopeful eyes, a candy apple Letterman jacket powder kegs his stature.

LIONEL NICHOLS, 20s, less masculine counter part, gelled black hair, damn near hyper ventilates at the engagement ring jutting out of the little black box, hot breath spews from a sterling smile.

It's cold as shit and they are lovers.

SANFORD

I know this isn't Myrtle beach or anything, but I just couldn't wait any longer. I mean we're lucky I even got the fucking thing. The jeweler and I got in a fist fight because, I'm paraphrasing here; "no faggot's getting married in my town." Jewish too, you fucking believe that?

Lionel's smile fades.

LIONEL

How did you afford this honey?

SANFORD

Why's that matter?

LIONEL

Because if the ring was funded by Emanuel Hertz, be it directly or indirectly I won't accept it.

SANFORD

Listen to you talk. My business with that man is over as of next Sunday. Ancient history, Atlantis, El Dorado, Montezuma baby.

LIONEL

Oh lord.

SANFORD

You remember that time we schooled the hornets in the play offs? Had

SANFORD  
 the whole team watching us kiss in  
 the locker room? Not a care in the  
 world? That was hot man, that was  
 real hot.

Lionel slumps off his truck bed and straddles Sanford.

LIONEL  
 I love you Sanford.

SANFORD  
 I love you more Lionel --

CRAGHHHHKK -- Sanford's head explodes. Crimson fondue pours  
 over bone and skin, spastic carotid arteries flap about like  
 pressurized water hoses.

Lionel falls back and screams as the sinewy mortar drenches  
 him with gore.

EXT. FOREST FLOOR - NIGHT

Smoke balloons from a sniper rifle atop a faded pull-tab  
 Mountain Dew.

THE NIGHT RANGER impishly grins behind the torn mouth hole  
 of a green ski mask and rears up, his campaign hat towers  
 over the county in the distance, blanketing the little  
 lights like a felt mountain.

EXT. SKYLINE - NIGHT

Modest town, yet somewhat sweeping from a distance.

A river snakes beneath an interstate.

Best Western and McDonald's sings reflect off jet black  
 water and jut over bare pine trees.

Raw steam billows from a recycling plant and shrouds a  
 Southern States grain silo.

Christmas lights glow amongst other buildings that are  
 either small or microscopic.

REBEL ROUSIN' RADIO  
 (filtered v.o.)  
*This is your boy, your host, master  
 of ceremonies, Floyd Harper  
 slinging the best wax this side of*

REBEL ROUSIN' RADIO  
*the Mississippi. We're talking  
 garage, psych, blues, soul and just  
 good old fashioned rock and roll.*

EXT. RECYCLING PLANT - NIGHT

EMPLOYEES exit in small waves, yellow hard hats pepper the parking lot.

REBEL ROUSIN' RADIO  
 (Filtered v.o.)  
*This special week long broadcast  
 has been brought to you by  
 Snapdragon county's annual  
 restaurant week, exclusively held  
 in the county proper.*

EXT. BARE PINE TREES/CLEARING - NIGHT

The Night Ranger yanks Lionel toward a 1955 FIRE PREVENTION SAFETY UNIT TRUCK.

The killer points a shaky gloved finger at the dark opening of the hatch.

Lionel collapses on the edge and quakes. His face winces behind a medley of blood, tears and snot.

REBEL ROUSIN' RADIO  
 (Filtered v.o.)  
*The winning restaurant will be  
 announced on New Year's day, and  
 that's forty eight hours and  
 counting. Right after the ball drop  
 in town square.*

The killer hands Lionel a set of index cards and lifts a tape recorder to Lionel's lips. Lionel stutters. The killer smashes his front teeth in with the tape recorder and presses record.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

TWO BEARDED TOWNSMEN pull a parade float beneath a street lamp.

Wind rips away at red petal paper surrounding the float as they wrangle an enormous disco ball from the truck bed, swinging it onto the float with a hefty thud.

REBEL ROUSIN' RADIO  
 (Filtered v.o.)  
*Grand prize is an article in the  
 Weekly Dragon and a spanking new  
 commercial oven.*

The two bearded townsmen fasten the disco ball to the top of a high striker tower, constructing a miniature version of New York City's Time Square celebration.

INT. LA VENTANA RESTAURANT - NIGHT

FAT TOWNIES stuff their drunk, red, ignorant faces with gringo style Mexican food. Hard hats and half empty pitchers litter every other table.

WAITRESSES hustle and bustle, make up runs, aprons flap crazily at the waist. This place isn't slammed, it's an all out war.

REBEL ROUSIN' RADIO  
 (Filtered v.o.)  
*All proceeds go to ladder twenty  
 two in memory of the Hansen Hill  
 fire. So grab your forks and knives  
 and may the best kitchen win!*

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT - SAME

A ticket machine spews, vegetables crackle, meat sizzles and curls over hot oil, wine hits scalding butter, flames lick hood vents.

REBEL ROUSIN' RADIO  
 (Filtered v.o.)  
*Up next is another piping hot tune  
 to keep that Carolina cold off your  
 back, drum and bass heavy r and r.  
 Track's called "That's it man" by  
 the Valentines. If this doesn't get  
 your blood pumping turn off the  
 radio now.*

ELADIO MARQUEZ, Mexican chef, swivels from pan to plate, phone cradled in his ear as he presses his rosary to his forehead and kisses it. Grass green eyes focus on food, steam billows over stainless steel and blanches his shaved head.

ELADIO

(To phone/Spanish)

*I booked the flights three  
fucki--three months ago. I  
understand that you don't know me,  
but it's imperative that my wife  
and I go on this trip. How is that  
possible? My bank account says I  
payed for it. I don't care if it's  
the bank's problem! I booked two  
fucking tickets for two fucking  
people to the mountains of  
Guadalajara! Hello?*

Black smoke seeps through the cracks of the oven. Eladio opens it with his clog and curses in Spanish, grabbing the sizzle pan with his bare hand and throwing it into the dish pit.

ELADIO (CONTD)

Shep! Donde esta primo!

EXT. DUMPSTER - NIGHT - SAME

SHEPHERD MCDOWELL gazes past stars in a trance. His apron rests on the lower back of a BEAUTIFUL MEXICAN WAITRESS as she pumps her rear like a Jack Rabbit. He's in his mid thirties with a bean pole stature, one hundred and sixty five pounds centralizes in size fourteen Timberland boots. A shoddily trimmed brown goatee sprouts around a semi-strong chin and his matte gray eyes are kind, there's sadness in them.

PLAP -- Shep falls back onto boxes and milk crates. Eladio stands over him glaring. Beautiful Mexican Waitress yelps and scampers.

Shep pulls his chili pepper pants over a ten inch bubbly purple scar on his thigh and lunges at Eladio. They tumble into a grease barrel.

ELADIO

(Spanish)

*What is wrong with you? I'm up to  
my ass in orders and you're out  
here fucking the staff? How many*

--

SHEP

-- English, por favor!

Eladio puts Shep in a headlock. Eladio's English is two steps above broken.

ELADIO

Tell me, have you have sex with all of them? Unprofessional pendejo! I find you in gutter at Snapdragon heights, coke on your nose, muerte, this is thanks?

Shep squirms.

SHEP

Don't take your bullshit out on me! Mad at me for getting some cutty on the fly! Not my fault Malone won't talk to you! You're the one who moved knee deep into the Night Ranger's playground!

Eladio releases his grasp from Shep's neck and gives him a look. Shep went too far.

ELADIO

Selling mucho specials. They are yours. You cook them.

SHEP

Don't go throwing in the towel on me. You're the cook, I'm the disciple.

ELADIO

This is a fucking business Shep. I no afford you having sex with everyone. Why will I sign the check? If this is what happens?

SHEP

Me co owning a business and working for one are two different things.

Shep pats Eladio on the back and limps toward the kitchen.

-- SERIES OF SHOTS --

- 1) Shep rubs a fresh opaque pig stomach with sea salt, cracked pepper and lime juice.
- 2) Shep's boot kicks the oven shut and his long pink knobby fingers place giant sea scallops onto a pan.
- 3) Shep removes the stomach from the oven and shoves the scallops inside, topping it with rich orange habenero salsa.

END SERIES OF SHOTS.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Shep slides his towel over a splotch of grime on the prep table. Lights get shut off in the dining room.

SHEP

Now keep in mind my menu's a far cry from a steak and potato as is, and I know what you're gonna say you're gonna say "but Shep I studied abroad in New York, I know a thing or two." Well what about me? Shit, I'm studying abroad right now. Matter of fact I'm studying three different broads as we speak.

Eladio trembles and removes a bottle of methadone from his chef coat, fumbles with the cap.

SHEP

How long?

ELADIO

Five months.

SHEP

They got rehab centers in Mexico?

Eladio sighs and kisses his rosary again.

ELADIO

Trip is no mas.

SHEP

She at least think about it?

ELADIO

She does not talk to me.

SHEP

So what was your plan then? Throw her in a fucking sack like luggage? Sorry...

ELADIO

Tell me right now..why..como se dice..

SHEP

Why should you invest in Pauline's Mexican Cantina?

ELADIO

Exactamente.

SHEP

Because it's the yin to this town's yang Eladio. It's a little red rose sticking out of a pile of dog shit and everyone living here are green back flies. It's Mexico in South Carolina big man. Half the money's yours anyway, what are you worried about?

Eladio pulls out his check book. Shep kisses him on the mouth.

EXT. FOREST RANGER TRUCK - NIGHT

Index cards litter the forest floor. Lionel's hand trembles as he scans the last one.

LIONEL

(Reading)

..If these conditions are not met,  
I will turn this speck of shit  
county into a modern day Pompeii.  
Sincerely, Arthur Crane.

The Night Ranger kicks Lionel in the chest, latching the sander spotted door with a gargantuan master lock.

Glowing red exhaust wafts over South Carolina plates.

The killer lurches into first gear, trudging through bare pines and brambles to the road.

Lionel curls his fingers around the grate separating him from the Night ranger, pleading.

The killer grabs a bottle from the glove box, splashing it in Lionel's face.

Lionel's face bubbles and sloughs to the floor board. He screams incomprehensibly.

Headlights lap at a pale blue wooden sign:

WELCOME TO SNAPDRAGON COUNTY

## INT. BRIEFING ROOM - NIGHT

GRADY MCDOWELL trades eyes with a smokey the bear poster as he paces back and forth with his heart on fire. He's in his late twenties with limbs like tree trunks. A thick brown mustache rests beneath a Roman nose and a bi weekly groomed high and tight sits atop his skull. His Doe eyes avert to a clipboard in his beefy hands.

GRADY

(Rehearsing)

So what do we got? I'll tell you what we got; gas tanks, about thirty of them, all chain locked, all full of goodies, all ready to be pried open. Mr. Hertz slings product twenty four seven, but is only ever seen doing so on the third Sunday of each month at his residence; Snapdragon Heights Housing Project. This coming Sunday back up will be stationed approximately fifty yards outside the entrance, the sheriff and one other officer, of whom is not myself, will stop by for a routine check up. Nothing unusual, just snooping around, stroking his ego, things of that nature. What's the code word? Fuck you, that's the code word.

BEEPPPGRRHKSK -- Grady's clipboard shoots into the ceiling as his radio goes off: *"ten fifty seven, Ms. Nichols says Lionel's missing again."*

Grady pulls his radio to his lips.

GRADY (CONTD)

(To radio)

Ten four.

## INT. LEVI'S OFFICE - NIGHT

LEVI MCDOWELL sits Indian style in front of his desk and churns home made ice cream. A green bandanna coils around a pony tail hanging between his shoulder blades. If his pale blue eyes were mouths they'd speak wonders. He's in his late sixties with big bones wrapped tight with leathery skin. A silver skull ring sits at the base of his middle finger.

MACK, 13, basset hound, a real sweet heart, studies the ice cream maker, ears perking at the gurgling crunch.

Levi spoons ice cream to his trembling lips. His crows feet look like little broken umbrellas.

Grady whips open the door. Levi keeps on churning.

GRADY

Joyce called, says Lionel's missing.

Levi shakes his head and keeps churning.

GRADY (CONTD)

She's got a letter to prove it this time.

INT. MANN HERTZ' LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

EMANUEL "MANN" HERTZ gargles and spits out scotch, made one with his leather bound couch as he brushes aside white blond hair to cradle his phone. Gray mutton chops stop just above the chin. Glassy gray eyes make his every move incidental.

Mann studies a BLOND WOMAN captured on eight millimeter film as it flips and flaps through the projector, scratches and indentations mark the celluloid from decades of use. The blond woman churns home made ice cream in just an apron, she peers over her shoulder, as if looking straight at him. Mann cherishes it.

MANN

(To phone)

Evening Walt, well I was gonna tell you what I wanted if you'd let me..that property by the max mart..yep, how do you figure? Bought a cherry pie around six and it was still vacant..well Jesus is the reason for the season big boy get with it, you either tell me who you're selling it to so I encourage otherwise or you sell it to me..Doesn't matter what I need it for...Shepherd? Shepherd as in Levi's Shepherd?.....Yeah I'm still here. What's he want it for? No not the price the...Mexican restaurant huh? Well I'll see you at the ass crack of dawn.

Mann disappears into his bedroom and reemerges with a yellow document, eying it, lost in thought.

INT. SLAUGHTER HOUSE - NIGHT

VIVIAN and SHADE HERTZ, identical twins, are built like professional wrestlers. Long flowing blond hair whips about as they wrangle PIGS AND PIGLETS running amuck in what appears to be an old gymnasium. Rickety bleachers still line the walls.

Vivian tugs at a chain snaked through the latch of a cast iron trap door. It careens over and smashes onto the hardwood floor. A NARROW STONE PIT shoots down into darkness.

Shade dives for a PIGLET and catches it by the hoof, throwing it inside. Squeals dissipate as it plummets. Faint fleshy impact echoes from beneath.

Vivian picks up a PIG and trudges toward the pit, clenching it in his gigantic arms. The pig latches onto the opening with its teeth. Vivian stomps on the snout, cartilage snaps, it screams and disappears.

MANN

Need y'all to head over to that property by the max mart for a little t-l-c.

Mann moves with a fawn like grace, a black duster twirls around his skinny denim legs. The door slams behind him.

SHADE

Why?

MANN

Because I said so.

VIVIAN

But it's Momma's day. What are you doing down here?

Shade sniffs Mann and rolls his eyes.

MANN

It's just for the taste son. Where's Randy?

VIVIAN

You been shacking up in the house every Saturday for the past ten years and all of a sudden you cut it short? Don't make sense.

MANN

I guess it must be important then.  
Now answer my question.

Mann brandishes an old magneto blasting detonator from a closet and unravels it toward the pit.

VIVIAN

He said something about hooking up  
with an old filly at red roof.

MANN

You boys have any idea how much  
sausage we sold at Piggly Wiggly  
last week?

VIVIAN

More than our allowance?

MANN

That sage and hazlenut's hotter  
than hellfire. It's so hot that  
I've had to pay Randy extra to  
grind it when he should be out on  
the streets earning. So if you're  
telling me that he skipped this  
responsibility to get some ass  
instead of my money, I'm gonna fuck  
him up for our posterity. You know  
what that means?

VIVIAN

What's that mean Shade?

SHADE

Means we should call him sooner  
than later.

MANN

You should call him right now.

SHADE

He'll be here don't worry.

MANN

I ain't worried about nothing. Grab  
this would you?

Mann hands Shade a bundle of dynamite. Shade lowers it into the pit. Pigs scream and whimper.

Mann pushes the plunger on the detonator box.

VIVIAN  
Gotta plug it in daddy.

Mann gives Vivian a look "I'm not plugging in shit." Vivian sighs and plugs in the detonator box. Shade sticks his fingers in his ears.

Mann pushes the plunger, BOOOOM -- Blood flowers into the air like a freshly dug oil well. Snouts and eyeballs paint the hardwood floor.

MANN  
Happy fucking new years, grab the squeegees.

INT. LEVI'S CRUISER - NIGHT - DRIVING

Grady lifts a crumpled ball of card stock from the floor board and unravels it: *Pauline's authentic Mexican cuisine, father and son flare*. Grady folds it, slipping it into his jacket. Levi glances at his skull ring.

GRADY  
Could've at least used it for kindling.

Mack's big brown eyes scan back and forth, tail in full swing.

INT. RECYCLING PLANT/OFFICE - NIGHT

JOYCE NICHOLS, 50s, general manager, stringy blond hair, face red from sobbing, hides behind a mountain of paperwork. She scribbles at machine gun speed, stopping for a moment to apply a brace around her writing hand and swig from a bottle of Parrot Bay rum. Grady and Levi enter, she doesn't look up.

JOYCE  
Evening sheriff.

Grady clears his throat.

GRADY  
Deputy.

Joyce looks up, handing Levi the letter over Grady's shoulder like Grady doesn't exist. Joyce recites:

JOYCE

*"Mrs. Joyce Nichols, by the time  
you read this your son will be hog  
tied in my cellar. Tell Levi that  
Lionel has two days to live before  
burning alive like my children."*

Levi studies indentations in the letter, he shades over with  
a pencil. It reads: **"TASTY TREATS."**

GRADY

Who would've done this Joyce?

JOYCE

Sanford and Lionel got tied up with  
Mann Hertz and this what happens.  
Lionel sold my Prelude, my tea cup  
Chihuahua, hawked my jewelry --

LEVI

-- Night Ranger's no longer lore.

JOYCE

How do you figure?

LEVI

Gut's never wrong.

JOYCE

If there is a night ranger, it  
ain't Arthur Crane.

LEVI

Tasty treats.

They look at Levi sideways, he pockets the letter.

LEVI (CONTD)

Secret message.

JOYCE

Every criminal in this armpit knows  
your hobbies.

LEVI

Try salvation.

JOYCE

Never gonna beat Helen's recipe.

GRADY

Joyce.

JOYCE

Not that anyone knows the  
difference, Mack's the only one who  
gets to try it and he can't talk.

Mack's big floppy ears perk at his name.

LEVI

Not anymore, shits in the house.

GRADY

You sleep in a bed now?

LEVI

Figuratively.

GRADY

Well let's say he's real. Let's say  
Art didn't die in the ambulance.  
Let's say he miraculously came back  
to life and escaped the morgue.  
Why's he targeting folks that had  
nothing to do with the Hansen Hill  
fire?

JOYCE

Because it's a hoax.

LEVI

He kidnapped the son of city.  
Where's the other one?

JOYCE

Called Walter, don't know why.

Levi points to the window, it's flickering orange. Grady  
takes off.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT - SAME

A DEAD GERMAN SHEPHERD lays chained to the base of a street  
lamp, engulfed in flames. Grady extinguishes it with his  
deputy jacket.

LEVI

Find your brother.

Levi holds Joyce. Joyce just stares at the dead animal and  
swigs her bottle of rum.

REBEL ROUSIN' RADIO  
 (Filtered v.o.)  
*Coming down to the ringer here at  
 restaurant week, day five everybody  
 day five.*

INT. WALTER'S OFFICE - DAWN

WALTER WINKELSTEIN, 50s, weak chin, strong blue neck tie,  
 wakes up in his closet on a bed just small enough to fit  
 inside it.

REBEL ROUSIN' RADIO  
 (Filtered v.o.)  
*Looking like the top three joints  
 are Mary Jane's Lobster shack over  
 by the plaza bowl, Pacino's  
 Pizzeria midtown and last but not  
 least with a close third is La  
 Ventana, red hot Mexican food  
 served gringo style. This is Floyd  
 Harper leaving you with a few  
 tracks until I come back. This is  
 "Bongo Beating Beatnik" by Joe Hall  
 and the Corvettes. We'll talk soon.*

Walter pushes open the door and winces as he dabs sweat from  
 his curly brownish gray hair.

His eyes focus and roll. There sits Mann, legs crossed lady  
 like. He slides Walter a mug of coffee that reads: "number  
 one dad!"

WALTER  
 What's in it?

MANN  
 Right off the bat with piss and  
 vinegar, I swear in another life we  
 might be married.

Walter adjusts his tie in the mirror.

WALTER  
 Enthrall me. Wait let me guess;  
 another laundromat?

MANN  
 Ring a ding ding, how much you  
 want?

WALTER

Mr. Hertz there's a laundromat on every block of this town, including my shopping center, but I don't see people doing laundry do you?

Mann points to the bed in Walter's closet.

MANN

No offense Walt, but I don't think you got the right to make that kind of distinction.

WALTER

How's my son?

MANN

Sanford is Sanford and you're a saint.

WALTER

I'm not selling you the property.

MANN

Mr. Winklestein, I'm getting sick of your mouth. Sanford came to me by his own volition. Grown ass man does what a grown ass man must do, but what you're doing right now is discriminatory. Now you can put the keys on the table, or we can take this to court, but I got one question for you; do you know what the honey pot is?

Mann slides a photo across the table, lifting his hand just enough for Walter to get a glance. Walter chokes on tears.

MANN (CONTD)

You feeling cajoled now you fucking kike?

Walter slides him the keys. Mann pulls a fresh sodden package of sausage from his duster and tosses it to Walter.

MANN (CONTD)

You can taste the fear in this batch.

INT. SHEP'S DODGE DART - MORNING

Shep pulls up and glances back and forth from his menu and a photograph stuck to his glove box, as if picking a favorite child.

POLAROID: Beautiful woman with red hair like Crimson dyed cotton, draping over her shoulders. Blue eyes, square handsome face. Laying in bed with a huge toothy smile. This is PAULINE. We'll meet her later.

Shep peels off the picture and tosses it out the window. He pats the dash of his car, or SAMANTHA, affectionately.

SHEP  
(To car)  
If you say so Sammy.

Shep eases out and a pain shoots up his leg as he grabs the Polaroid.

He shoves the photo into the glove box and locks it, pegs a sewer drain with the key, watches it slide into the void.

Shep notices a LIFTED WHITE FORD BRONCO down the lot and immediately retreats.

Shep peers over the steering wheel, watching Mann strut to the huge vehicle.

INT. MANN'S BRONCO - DAY

A lime green bra dangles from Mann's rear view mirror, he gives it a loving tug and sniffs it.

INT. SAMANTHA - DAY

Shep pretends to busy himself, eyes averting to the white bronco as it roars out of the parking lot.

Shep takes a cavernous breath and kicks open the door, cringing at the loud squeal it makes.

EXT. WALTER WINKLESTEIN'S OFFICE - DAY

Shep limps through the desolate parking lot. Litter sways through his long stilted strides.

Just as Shep grabs the door handle. Mann appears like an apparition.

MANN

Gets mighty hot in professional  
kitchens, I suppose it's the  
closest you'll ever get to fighting  
fires again huh?

SHEP

How'd you know?

MANN

Little bird. I see you and Pauline  
are still getting along. Couldn't  
help but notice you tossed her out  
and put her back. That was her  
picture wasn't it?

Shep nods.

MANN (CONTD)

So where are you going to grace us  
with this fine restaurant  
establishment?

SHEP

Whole in the wall spot, up the road  
a piece. Tons of foot traffic.

MANN

Who's the rich white guy?  
Disability ain't that lucrative.

SHEP

He's Mexican.

MANN

Mr. Marquez?

SHEP

You know him?

MANN

I know everybody. How'd you wrangle  
that old bean burrito?

SHEP

I can cook my ass off for peanuts.

Mann cackles, his lungs sound like bubble wrap being crushed  
beneath a pillow.

MANN

That's good Shep, that's real good.  
What are you going to call it?

SHEP  
Pauline's or Helen's. Leaning  
toward Helen's.

Mann stokes a cigarette just as quickly as he rolls it  
subconsciously, lighting fast.

MANN  
Quick question for you; how many  
people live in this town?

SHEP  
Fifteen thousand I think.

MANN  
Yeah I reckon around there too.  
Which means you can't walk but two  
blocks without crossing the path of  
an acquaintance. Needless to say  
I've run into your father almost  
every day of my life. Or at least  
enough to know that he only gives a  
rat's ass about two things, no more  
no less; the law and your maw. I  
doubt opening a restaurant in her  
honor is gonna change that.

SHEP  
I hope he'd at least be proud of  
me.

MANN  
You know what he said to me once?  
He said the only reason you ever  
became a fire fighter was to one up  
the old man.

SHEP  
There's a shred of truth in that.

MANN  
Try this for truth; Levi's heart  
stopped beating right after Helen's  
did, when she bled to death saving  
your gangling ass.

Shep swallows the knot of rage in his throat.

SHEP  
You ever lost someone you cared  
about?

MANN

See that brassiere hanging from my mirror? That belonged to the only woman I ever loved.

SHEP

That's your excuse? With all do respect of course.

MANN

That's my reason.

SHEP

Reason for what?

MANN

For offering you the building I just bought.

SHEP

Do what now?

MANN

That's America son, sorry I beat you to it. Say, you heard about restaurant week?

SHEP

Me and every other cook in Snapdragon, but I ain't competing.

MANN

Yeah it's too soon. Even if you bought the property you still wouldn't make the grain. Unless of course I gave it to you. Whole year's rent paid in full, renovations by my construction outfit, whole wait staff of round heeled red heads.

SHEP

Can't do red heads.

MANN

That a yes?

SHEP

What's the catch?

MANN

Well, you win you keep it. I tuck my tail and never bother you again.

MANN

You lose, you sling my product  
until I say otherwise.

SHEP

Seems a bit generous Mann.

MANN

Maybe, maybe not, maybe I can't  
think of a better feeling than  
having the sheriff's son work for  
me. That, young man, is the  
dictionary definition of an inside  
job. What's it gonna be? Some spot  
out in bumblefuck that'll fail so  
fast your head will spin? Or  
Pauline's or Helen's or  
whatchamacallit?

Shep gazes at Samantha. Gray, eaten with sheets of rust.  
Mann grins.

VIVIAN

(o.c.)

Broad fucking daylight, this is  
something else.

EXT. MAX MART/VACANT BUILDING - DAY

Shade grabs two Jerry cans from the back of a JOHN DEER  
GATOR. Vivian slings a ten foot OAK OAR over his shoulder,  
carved into the paddle are the words "wishyouwood."

They lumber toward the property, towering above spruce trees  
that line the sidewalk wrapped in Christmas lights.

The MAX MART OWNER steps out for a smoke and trades eyes  
with Vivian. Vivian nods and winks, Max Mart Owner rushes  
back inside.

SHADE

Question for you; how many loan  
sharks do you know that do a job  
and don't report back? None, you  
know why? Because extortion is  
fucking serious. I mean if you were  
sent out to break somebody's thumbs  
and they didn't come back and pay  
the boss, wouldn't you at least  
show your face or call?

VIVIAN  
Maybe he's busy.

SHADE  
Fuck that, he was supposed to be at the slaughter house last night and he's supposed to be here right now so where the fuck is he?

VIVIAN  
Randy's a known felon okay? I get it, he stabs people. I wouldn't put it past him to make a strong point stronger but there's no way he'd kill two of the county's best and brightest. Too much to lose for daddy.

SHADE  
So you thought about it too?

VIVIAN  
What?

SHADE  
You considered the fact that Randy may have killed Sanford and Lionel.

VIVIAN  
Crossed my mind, that don't make it true.

SHADE  
He fits the profile like a glove Vivian. Ain't from here, never talks about much, he's enigmatic you know?

VIVIAN  
Enigmatic? What's that mean?

SHADE  
Means he don't make sense.

VIVIAN  
What are you saying?

SHADE  
I'm just saying.

VIVIAN  
Saying what?

SHADE

I'm saying Randy's a suspect.

VIVIAN

Randolph Rudy killed Sanford and Lionel?

SHADE

It's not impossible.

VIVIAN

Well neither's fucking your mother Shade, but I'd give my worst enemy the benefit of the doubt.

Vivian takes his mammoth of a paddle and sends it flying through the glass of the vacant building.

SHADE

What's up your ass?

VIVIAN

You should seek help. Standing there telling me Randy's the night ranger, shame on you.

SHADE

I'm not telling, I'm saying.

VIVIAN

What's the difference?

SHADE

I'm just putting the card on the table okay? I could tell you that I went out to the cabbage field and killed them two boys but I'd just be saying "I killed them two boys." Notice the tone in my voice? Now register this; Randy's been parked a few blocks down watching this conversation. Did I say it, or did I tell it?

Vivian glances at the road, sure enough there sits a SHITTY 90s FORD MUSTANG. Shade storms toward it.

Vivian enters the vacant building and slings the Jerry cans at the walls, shatters and tears old trinkets and furniture from previous businesses and pisses on the floor.

EXT. RANDY'S MUSTANG - DAY

RANDOLPH RUDY steps out with snake skin boots, slim fitted jeans and blood crusted hands. He's short and balding, unreadable and built like an anvil. A black uni brow rests beneath a pronounced forehead. His leather jacket is ancient and he's fucking mean.

SHADE

Why are your hands bloody?

RANDY

Where's Mann at?

SHADE

Out and about and he's fucking hot.  
Where you been?

RANDY

I told you that already.

SHADE

Yeah you hooked up with some whore,  
but that don't explain being  
a.w.o.l. for twenty four fucking  
hours.

RANDY

You wouldn't believe me if I told  
you.

SHADE

Well then you better suspend my  
disbelief.

Vivian walks up.

VIVIAN

Hey Randy.

SHADE

Quiet. So?

RANDY

Well I ran over this baby deer on  
route twenty, didn't have the heart  
to keep on so finished it off with  
my mallet.

VIVIAN

The rubber mallet?

Randy nods.

SHADE

What happened to your shotgun Saint Francis?

RANDY

I lost it.

SHADE

Oh well it all makes sense.

Police sirens wail in the distance. Shade gives Randy a look and follows Vivian to the John Deer Gator. They split.

Randy checks his watch and peels out.

MOMENTS LATER..

Shep pulls up, gets out and drops to his knees. Completely crestfallen.

INT. LEVI'S CRUISER - MORNING - DRIVING

Mack's tail wags furiously as he jerks his head at passing objects on the road. Levi lifts him up by the scruff and plops him on his lap.

Mack retraces immediately, props his little legs on the window and averts his big brown eyes over and over again.

Levi double takes, creeps to a stop and implodes.

Ice cream cones line the road side all the way to the crest of the hill. Still frozen.

INT. RECYCLING PLANT/EMPLOYEE LOUNGE - DAY

A pair of crossed legs comparable to Tina Turner's belong to MALONE MARQUEZ, her narrow brown eyes lack bullshit. Nestled beneath Malone's tank top clad chest, which dons a tattoo of an intricate tapestry of blue roses and cobras, is a black acoustic Martin guitar which she strums as efficiently as she can. She's in her thirties and is a weathered bomb shell.

MARK NICHOLS, 7, overalls, sharp as a tack, clicks his light up sneakers together as Malone struggles to play.

Malone's hand jerks and clenches on the strings and she gives up, fighting a panic attack as she double checks the lock on the window.

Joyce watches from the hallway.

MALONE  
Sorry about that Mark.

MARK  
Mrs. Malone?

MALONE  
Ms. Malone honey.

MARK  
Who is that man that drops you off?

MALONE  
He drives me here when I can't.

MARK  
Why can't you drive?

MALONE  
You like kool aid right? You'd  
drink it whenever you could?

MARK  
Yep.

MALONE  
Well since I'm a grown up I can  
drink my kool aid whenever I want.  
So long as I have the money for it,  
but the kool aid that I drink is a  
very special kind of kool aid.

MARK  
Can I try it?

MALONE  
Just because it's special doesn't  
mean it's good, and no honey, you  
can't try it and I hope you never  
do.

MARK  
Your kool aid makes you sad. You  
can have mine.

Mark slides Malone his cup of Cherry red. All the water in  
Malone's body floods to her tear ducts. She removes her hard  
hat, her brown hair sways as she makes a bee line to the  
bathroom.

MALONE  
Hold that thought.

Joyce trades eyes with Malone as she splits. She picks up Mark and kisses him on the cheek.

JOYCE  
Don't talk to her.

MARK  
Why?

JOYCE  
Just don't.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Malone's lips wrap around the top of a flask, Joyce notices a slender Manila package edging over the toilet seat.

JOYCE  
Who's that for?

MALONE  
That's a damn good question Joyce.

JOYCE  
You can drink before and after the job, lord knows I understand, but not during.

MALONE  
I'm in a good mood.

JOYCE  
Lionel's dead.

Malone spits out booze against the mirror and hugs her tight.

JOYCE (CONTD)  
Or missing. Same fucking thing.  
You're fired. Get your guitar and go.

Malone massages her throat for the hundredth time.

INT. MALONE'S VAN - DAY

Malone collapses onto the front seat. Musical equipment is jostled in the back with a year's layer of dust. She counts down from ten, exhaling deeply, hand on chest.

A sign up the road points to 95 south. Malone has an epiphany, gazing at the sign.

INT. SAMANTHA - DAY - DRIVING

Shep fans himself with a CHECK, a determined smirk wiped on his face.

SHEP

(to Samantha)

See Mann thought he could set me up by smashing a couple windows. Little did he know I got a check to solve this microscopic dilemma! Shit I got twenty thousand right here in my hand, windows won't cost but five. I'm probably insured too. Devil wants to play ball, he's pitching against Barry fucking Bonds and I ain't hitting nothing but outside the park.

Shep tears into the parking lot at Wells Fargo.

INT. WELLS FARGO - DAY

Malone taps her green nail polished thumb against the counter and bites her lip. JOELLE, a fat woman with rosy cheeks and a floral print moo moo, glances at Malone judgmentally as she counts what seems to be all of the cash in the account.

JOELLE

Your husband is aware of what you're doing right?

MALONE

Of course he is.

Joelle slides Malone a bank bag, stuffed to the seams with cash.

JOELLE

This town's so tragic it makes me want to celebrate.

MALONE

You ever dated a junkie Joelle?

JOELLE

Not that I can remember.

MALONE

Well I fell in love with one, then I married one, then that junkie

MALONE  
broke my heart. Tell me, did that  
outfit come with a trough?

Malone snatches the bank bag and storms out. Shep crosses  
Malone's war path on the way in, looking back at her as he  
staggers up to the counter.

-- A SERIES OF SHOTS --

- 1) Eladio in a lobby with his nose in a healthy marriage  
magazine, gazing at smiling successful couples.
- 2) Eladio's leg bouncing.
- 3) Eladio checking the time on his watch, and the time on  
the clock hung beside a sad puppy painting.
- 4) Eladio pulling a methadone bottle from his pocket and two  
more empty ones following, falling to the floor.
- 5) Eladio taking a pill and kissing the crucifix of his  
rosary.

INT. CENTRO SAGRADO CORAZON - DAY

A gigantic tapestry of our lady of Guadalupe hangs behind a  
choir of TEN LATINO MEN AND WOMEN. They are approaching the  
end of a song named "Amor de dios."

VIOLINISTS wail over an ORGAN, knee deep in their millionth  
rehearsal.

Eladio raises his beautiful tenor voice and baton, track  
marks trace his elbow to the wrist. Tears stream down his  
cheeks seconds before crescendo as he plummets the baton to  
silence.

ELADIO  
(Spanish)  
*As a Catholic to Catholics;  
Beautiful, absolutely beautiful!  
Well done! Give yourselves a round  
of applause! Let's take a quick  
break and resume with dios mio,  
dios mio.*

INT. CONFESSIONAL - DAY

PADRE VELASQUEZ, 70, bushy black beard that softens his hard sharp face, exhales wisdom with a faded rose tattoo on his thumb knuckle, studying Eladio with small powerful dark brown eyes.

The following dialogue is in Spanish:

VELASQUEZ

She needs to return to church.  
Jesus misses her and that guitar  
was a beautiful addition to the  
choir. Is she still struggling to  
play?

ELADIO

She quit.

VELASQUEZ

Well she can see all the therapists  
in the world, but a doctorate  
doesn't match the divine.

SHEP

(o.s.)

Pssst. Eladio? You in there hoss?

Eladio rips open the curtain and glares:

SHEP (CONTD)

We got a problemo. A big one.

Eladio closes the curtain.

EXT. CENTRO SAGRADO CORAZON/PARKING LOT - DAY

Shep paces back and forth.

SHEP

Might have to put that vacation on  
hold big man.

ELADIO

Que pasa?

SHEP

Somebody fucked up my windows. Mann  
Hertz and sons had something to do  
with it. Then I go to the bank to  
deposit your check, who do I see  
storming out of there looking more

SHEP  
buttoned up than a queer on Sunday?  
Malone. Joelle runs the check,  
bounced like a ball.

ELADIO  
Why did Mann break the windows?

SHEP  
It's a long story.

ELADIO  
Explain.

SHEP  
I made a deal with him.

Eladio grabs Shep by his shirt and pulls him close.

ELADIO  
Look at my arm.

Eladio flips his arm over and the sun beams against hundreds  
of tiny old purple scars.

ELADIO (CONTD)  
That man is el diablo. You know  
what you have done?

SHEP  
All I have to do is win restaurant  
week. I'm saving us a shit ton of  
money.

ELADIO  
You have lost already Shep! You're  
pinche muerte.

SHEP  
Don't tell me that. Where you  
going?

ELADIO  
Getting my money.

SHEP  
It's about five which means La  
Ventana is packed already. You cook  
and I'll find your wife. If she  
stole from you she probably doesn't  
want to talk about it. Where do you  
think she is?

Eladio processes this information, painful but true.

ELADIO

She is with her therapist.

SHEP

Alright give me the address.

EXT. CABBAGE FIELD - DAY

Levi and Mack retrace through melted ice cream cones and cabbage. A creamy green trail snakes through the field, vanishing in the rear corner.

Mack halts, erect from head to tail. His big nose wiggles off dirt and he shoots toward the woods like a furry brown and white bullet.

EXT. WOODLINE - DAY

Levi gasps for air, hands on his knees. Mack wades in a CREEK, sniffing in all directions.

Levi and Mack slosh through the shallow brown water, iced over in shady parts.

Mack leaps out and tears toward a fallen Maple tree, comparable to the size of a small sky scraper.

GARGANTUAN MAPLE TREE

Jutting from the base of the tree are a pair of Chuck Taylors, fastened to a pair of legs.

Without hesitation, Levi pulls the legs and Sanford's body slides out and hits the earth.

Levi flips it over. The name stitched into the back of the Letterman jacket reads: WINKLESTEIN.

A RATTLESNAKE eases out of the headless neck, slithering through frozen torn flesh and sinew.

The beast rears, venom drips in big beads, the rattle echoes through trees like a sea of Cicadas.

Levi bobs and weaves, assessing a piece of plastic fastened to the snake with duct tape. Levi pats for a gun: "damn it." He pulls out his Maglite. The snake lunges, Levi stomps its midsection with his boot, CRUNCH -- lifts his bloody maglite from the head.

Mack flicks his tongue at the Snake's blood, Levi pulls him back, cutting away duct tape revealing a CASSETTE TAPE with a title that reads: "HANSEN HILL."

INT. FLOYD'S STUDIO/OFFICE - DAY

FLOYD HARPER, 30s, the man behind the microphone, is black and hip to the gills, snapping his long fingers as the last song fades. He adjusts the lapels of his leather jacket and swivels a 50s era "Elvis mic" to his lips, speaking with a low level croon.

Floyd removes his shades and spins around. There lays Malone. A PsyD in Psychology from University of Charleston hangs on the wall behind her.

Half the room is full of records, turntables and old rock and roll fliers from decades ago.

The other half is water color paintings, a Ficus and a Maple fainting couch.

Floyd hands Malone a letter and flips an AA coin into his hand without looking.

MALONE

(scanning)

*If you seek destiny and refuge I  
suggest peering beneath the dancing  
alligator at South of the border.  
Leave tonight or suffer until your  
lungs give out.*

FLOYD

Pardon my French, but that's some  
vindictive shit.

Malone tosses the tan manila package to Floyd. Floyd catches it, flattered yet uncomfortable.

MALONE

It's a friendly gift Floyd, I'm not  
gonna leap across the table and  
smooch you.

Floyd peels away the top to reveal a record. He smells it.

FLOYD

Whoever mailed this doesn't  
appreciate vinyl. It was wrapped  
too tight, noticed the sides of the  
package were curved which indicates

FLOYD  
warping. Thing probably sat out in  
the sun for --

MALONE  
-- When are you leaving?

FLOYD  
What do you mean?

MALONE  
Aren't you going to look underneath  
the dancing alligator?

FLOYD  
Crossed my mind.

MALONE  
Okay so take me with you, I could  
use the vacation anyway.

FLOYD  
Malone, accepting a gift from a  
patient is unprofessional. Taking a  
patient on a road trip is just  
plain inappropriate.

MALONE  
You're a disc jockey shrink honey,  
that's inappropriate. Now I've done  
all sorts of research about all  
sorts of things and came to the  
conclusion that the best way to  
continue my therapy is on the road.  
I was born to travel, makes me feel  
at ease. Same way a patient will  
flirt with their therapist not even  
realizing they're doing so, but  
because that's how they feel  
comfortable around men the doctor  
gets the wrong idea.

FLOYD  
Have you made any progress with  
your notebook?

Malone shakes her notebook in the air.

MALONE  
I'll drive.

INT. MALONE'S VAN - DAY

Floyd lurches onto the front seat with a duffel bag slung over his shoulder, cradling a HOME MADE DEVICE in his careful hands.

A fork and a spoon jut from the sides of an oblong forest green receiver.. which is connected to an a.m. radio box and a thick curly wire narrows at the bottom and splices to a plug that fits an ipod.

Floyd plugs it into an auxiliary port on the tape deck, pressing the big red power button, causing an electrical surge to ping pong from the fork and spoon like a pale blue rainbow.

Floyd pulls his shades to the bottom of his nose and glances at Malone as he lifts the microphone to his lips.

SULLY

(To mic)

Day six is upon us and I'm sitting next to the lovely Malone Marquez, guitar extraordinaire, say hi Malone.

MALONE

(To mic)

You over packed.

SULLY

(To mic)

Haven't we all? Colder than yesterday which was colder than the day before that, but I'll tell ya kids this winter's been white hot. I think we can all agree on that.

INT. LADDER 22 FIRE DEPARTMENT/OFFICE - DAY

SERGEANT SIMMS, 50s, ear to phone, sits behind a desk covered in Styrofoam coffee cups, each with brown lip and drip markings. A tight navy blue company shirt leaves just enough room for a pack of smokes, squeezed into his breast pocket. He's discontent, pale and Bic bald.

REBEL ROUSIN' RADIO

(Filtered v.o.)

*..which of course leads us to the next track by a Roy Jr, "Victim of the circumstances," it could be the best song of the sixties, if not*

REBEL ROUSIN' RADIO  
*the story of your life. We'll talk soon.*

SIMMS

(To phone)

Silver?..Does it have washers on either end?..and it's definitely not connected to your water heater?..what about wiring, do you see wiring that is unique to the mechanism? Alright well don't touch it and leave your home immediately okay?

Simms slams the phone on the cradle and marches to the door. The alarm cuts through the wall and fills him with power.

INT. ADMINISTRATION HALLWAY - DAY

Simms meshes with FIRE FIGHTERS as they hustle and bustle. He turns the corner, nodding and grinning at Levi with utmost respect as Levi extends his hand. It's been a while.

SIMMS

Don't tell me you knew.

LEVI

Had a hunch.

Levi shows him the tape Simms deflates at the title.

SIMMS

Couldn't be one of Hertz's goons?

LEVI

Tape's no prank sergeant, bonified manifesto. Threatened my children.

SIMMS

I don't have time to listen to it.

LEVI

You don't have time for coffee sergeant.

SIMMS

There's always time for coffee sheriff.

LEVI  
How big's your thermos?

They walk.

SIMMS  
Okay give me the quick version.

LEVI  
Arthur Crane ain't dead, Sanford  
Winklestein is, and Lionel Nichols  
is missing.

SIMMS  
That's your department.

LEVI  
He's blowing up the county Simms.

The gravity of the situation rattles Simms.

SIMMS  
I don't have enough trucks.

LEVI  
Charleston's coming.

SIMMS  
How many departments?

LEVI  
All sixteen, told them to bring  
coffee too.

SIMMS  
Tell Walt I'm sorry for his loss.

EXT. ROAD SIDE - DAY

A steel MEXICAN BANDITO towers over the highway holding a  
neon sign that reads: "SOUTH OF THE BORDER."

Smaller tacky signs flicker and hang from novelty  
architecture.

A short square building with an orange Sombrero roof called  
"Pedro's Diner," a motel called "Motor Inn" and a Shell  
station remain open.

Raggedy porcelain statues litter the place. One of which is  
an eight foot tall, dark green wacky alligator wearing a  
blue patchy vest, holding a huge red bottle rocket, frozen  
in some sort of Russian Kazotsky dance.

Shep pulls in, sputtering past Malone and Floyd as they study the base of the statue.

EXT. DANCING ALLIGATOR - DAY

Floyd scoops away mulch to reveal a letter. He reads the title and pockets it, digging harder until he unearths a roman candle with a Christmas bow stuck to it.

MALONE

Anything for me? Earth to Floyd.

The blue Roman candle trembles in Floyd's hand. He steadies it slowly.

FLOYD

My ass is famished, you want an enchilada?

MALONE

What did you put in your pocket?

FLOYD

Ain't nothing. Dead ass.

Malone grabs at his jacket, Floyd swivels.

MALONE

Let me see it! Don't make me hit you!

As Floyd dodges her, his foot catches on the side of the curb and they fall to the ground. Malone straddles him and tries for his pocket again but Floyd holds her hands back. She storms off. Floyd catches up, putting his hand on her shoulder.

FLOYD

It won't help your therapy.

MALONE

Hand it over.

Floyd rips off the imaginary band aid and shows it to her. The face of the letter reads: "*The cunt I tried to strangle.*" Malone slides it into her back pocket, massaging her throat.

MALONE (CONTD)

Let's get some food.

INT. PEDRO'S DINER/BOOTH - DAY

Food scraps cover the table. Floyd flips his AA coin into his palm repeatedly as Malone gulps down a second Margarita. Malone points to the Roman candle.

MALONE

That what did it? You never specified.

FLOYD

Doesn't make no damn sense. If we're dealing with a wannabe Arthur Crane how'd he know about the Roman candle? He must've been there when the fire started, must've attacked you two years later, must've been watching your therapy sessions, must've known we'd both be here tonight, and for what? A laugh? No one would go that far over a freak accident for shits and giggles.

MALONE

So we've digressed to the paranormal.

FLOYD

No I'm saying he didn't die.

MALONE

Okay so if it's him and he's bent on vengeance, why'd he try to kill me? I never even knew the Crane family.

FLOYD

Already, but maybe he just wanted to see if he had it in him.

MALONE

Apparently not.

FLOYD

My bad, let's talk about you.

MALONE

We always talk about me. My mouth's up here by the way.

Floyd gets embarrassed and Malone smiles for the first time, if only for a moment.

An old Delta blues number echoes throughout the empty diner.

Malone chokes on her Margarita and shoves her fingers into her ears.

FLOYD  
This the song?

Malone slams her fist on the table and storms outside, Floyd follows.

MOMENTS LATER...

Shep sneaks up to the table, eyes locked on the bank bag jutting from the opening of Malone's purse. He snatches it, darting toward the back, running face first into Floyd as he re enters.

SHEP  
Pardon.

Floyd watches Shep make his way to the kitchen, positive that he recognizes him. Floyd writes it off: "can't be." Floyd grabs Malone's purse and drops a fifty on the table.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Shep speed walks past steam billowing from the dish machine, trading eyes with THE MEXICAN DISHWASHER.

Shep hits the floor upon hearing a Pauline's voice coming from dry storage. He raises his finger to his lips, the Mexican dishwasher just stares at him.

PAULINE  
(Background)  
*No, see you're lifting that sack of potatoes with your neck and shoulders. How many times I gotta tell you? Lift with your legs, tighten your stomach... Good. You wonder why your neck and shoulders hurt all the time, it's 'cause you lift with them. Not supposed to. Ten shoulders rolls backwards then forward with your chin down. Then ten head turns over each over shoulder..... You'll be ruling the world in no time.*

PAULINE MERRIWEATHER, 40s, turns the corner and freezes. A big smile hesitantly stretches across her wide face. An amber stone hangs from a rose gold chain and rests against her cleavage. A pack of Virginia slims juts from the corner of her bra.

Shep fights a smile and continues out the back door.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY - WALKING

Shep shakes his head with Pauline in hot pursuit. Shep speaks without turning.

SHEP

Nice to know you're still fixing people. What are you doing out here?

PAULINE

I won the lottery.

SHEP

So you came here? How much you win? Hundred bucks.

PAULINE

Fifty thousand.

SHEP

Fifty thousand? You should be halfway to the keys by now. Buying toys, bathing in almond milk. I don't know.

PAULINE

How's your leg?

SHEP

You see me limping don't you?

PAULINE

Can I try to explain?

SHEP

Which part? The not returning my phone calls part, or the trashing your house and vanishing without a trace part?

Pauline hugs Shep from behind, he stops walking for a moment.

SHEP (CONTD)

Pauline, I finally stopped searching for you today. About five hours ago. Two years and five fucking hours.

Shep keeps on.

PAULINE  
Where you walking to?

SHEP  
I'm walking until I wake up.

PAULINE  
This ain't a dream Shepherd.

SHEP  
Yeah I know, it's a nightmare.

PAULINE  
You want me to pinch you?

SHEP  
I want you to go back to work.

PAULINE  
I quit.

SHEP  
When just now?

PAULINE  
Yep.

SHEP  
I don't think your manager would appreciate that.

PAULINE  
I am the manager.

Shep thinks long and hard.

SHEP  
If you would like to play putt putt with me I will allow it.

EXT. SHEP'S' HOUSE - DAY

Grady knocks. No answer.

GRADY  
Big brother? You in there?

Grady raises his fist to knock again but his eyes catch a flash of something familiar jutting from one of the three garbage bags next to the door. He rummages.

Nostalgia: A photo of Shepherd and Pauline holding each others asses in front of a cigarette outlet called "The Butt Shop." A pair of macrame gloves with Shep's name on the wrist. Various license plates.

Grady takes special note of a knee brace and smiles.

A blank envelope sticks out beneath the door mat. Grady studies it and pulls out a letter that reads: "Grave Yard."

Grady's eyes widen just as quickly as he sprints to his car.

EXT. SHOPPING CENTER - DAY

Watery eyes glare beneath puffs of hot breath as FAT TOWN FOLK brood on the side of the road holding up home made signs that read: "God took your kids, not Floyd" "Burn in hell Arty Crane" "Worst thing since the abortion clinic."

Emergency vehicles blow past the fat town folk in a constant red white and blue blur.

Grady pulls up and finds Levi sitting on the hood of his car, watching Mack sniff around the parking lot.

LEVI

You find Shepherd?

GRADY

Wasn't home. How's Walt?

LEVI

What's that?

Grady pockets the letter.

GRADY

Traffic ticket. Been a cop for five years and I'm still getting pranked.

LEVI

Night Ranger thinks he's real clever but I figured it out already. Left me a tape. Said something about two cylinders, one big and one small filled with liquid. Big one's a water heater. Talked to Simms, suspicions confirmed.

GRADY

Fuck. What about the small cylinder?

LEVI

That's why we need Shepherd.

GRADY

It's too easy pop, I mean the fact that we're already halfway there --

LEVI

-- We're nowhere close to halfway. We got Charleston fire helping us and only a third of the county's been evacuated. I don't think he rigged all of them, but I can't risk it. He probably planted bombs on one or two water heaters per neighborhood.

GRADY

Okay so he rigged one hundred and some change, someone would've noticed. We're not up a against a God damn ghost here.

LEVI

We're fighting a class c criminal. Just like every other criminal in this county.

GRADY

You think Hertz knows him?

LEVI

If he did he would've killed him by now. Bad for business.

GRADY

We gotta find Lionel.

LEVI

We gotta find Shepherd.

GRADY

Then fucking call him, I'm sure he'd love to hear from you.

LEVI

He doesn't answer my calls.

GRADY

When's the last time you tried?

LEVI

I'm about to tell a father that his son is dead, the least you can do is figure out where mine is.

GRADY

Can't believe it took all this for us to be a family again.

LEVI

Grady if you keep running your mouth I'm going to smack it.

GRADY

Why weren't you at the hospital?

LEVI

I told you already.

GRADY

Yeah you were out on a call. Well Shep was screaming bloody murder and he was only saying one thing; daddy, daddy, daddy --

Levi smacks him.

GRADY (CONTD)

You knew didn't you? You fucking dead beat.

Levi tackles him, they roll around on the ground. Mack barks his ass off. Walter runs out and pulls them apart. Grady wipes blood away from his nose.

WALTER

Why do I have two police officers fighting in my parking lot --

GRADY

Churn this flavor sheriff; Pina collada things happen in life and sometimes you gotta cut your losses and move on, crunch.

WALTER

You have five seconds, both of you.

Levi looks up at Walt from the ground, Walter's intuition grabs him by the throat.

LEVI  
Night Ranger got Sanford. I'm sorry  
Walt.

Walter storms toward his office, while he's already grieving  
he's too furious for tears.

WALTER  
I sold that son of a bitch one of  
my buildings. That fucking cock  
sucker.

LEVI  
Who are we talking about?

WALTER  
Don't be fucking daft  
sheriff! Emanuel Hertz!

LEVI  
We have reason to believe that  
Arthur Crane is alive and at large.

Walter sobs.

WALTER  
Get the fuck out of my parking lot.

Levi watches Walter barely manage to walk back into his  
office and turns to Grady.

GRADY  
It wasn't a parking ticket.

LEVI  
What?

GRADY  
Thing in my hand.

LEVI  
You've got five seconds.

Levi snatches the letter from Grady.

LEVI  
Oh lord.

INT. LA VENTANA KITCHEN - NIGHT

Eladio sweats missiles as he slides the last plate into the service window.

Eladio mutters the Our father in Spanish, pacing back and forth, clenching his stomach, yawning furiously.

Eladio removes a wet silk handkerchief from his chef pants and wipes his watery eyes, they water again, he wipes again.

Eladio pushes a GRINGO DISHWASHER out of his way and scrubs plates with steel wool. The silver wire catches on a pan handle and sinks deep into his finger. The water turns pink with his blood. He scrubs faster, switching prayers to the Hail Mary.

A plate falls off of the tray and shatters. He bends over to pick up the pieces and a wallet photo of Malone falls out of his pocket and sways, landing gently in the middle of the jagged chips of porcelain.

He weeps, baring his gold molars and incisor. He leans over the trash can retching air. He drinks half a Corona and throws it up. He stumbles outside.

INT. ELADIO'S EL CAMINO - NIGHT

Eladio shoves his key into the ignition, staring at thick bars of dusty residue all over the dash.

Crumpled up neon sticky notes and empty prescription bottles are scattered all over the passenger floorboard. He unravels a sticky note: "Nut up butter cup, The Mann -- 555 - 6574."

INT. MANN'S BRONCO - NIGHT

Mann grabs a box of fried chicken from a drive thru window and bites into a drum stick. He nearly chokes when he hears something.

RADIO

(Filtered v.o.)

*Sanford Winklestein was found dead in a cabbage field off of stone's throw avenue, Lionel Nichols was with him and is now missing. If anyone has seen Lionel please call missing persons --*

CRUNCH -- Mann smashes the radio with his fist. His phone rings. He sees Eladio is calling, he calms himself down.

INTERCUT Mann, ripping into a chicken leg and Eladio fumbling with the cap of a NyQuil bottle as they both try to not veer off the road.

MANN

Phil's meat department, you pack 'em we stack 'em.

ELADIO

Three pounds, bone in.

MANN

St. Marquez. You run outta prayers boy?

ELADIO

Si o no?

MANN

Your package has been processed and shrink wrapped. See you at the plant.

EXT. SNAPDRAGON HEIGHTS PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Mann and Eladio share a joint beneath the stars, the sky throbs above bare pine trees with red flashes. Sirens can be heard for miles.

ELADIO

What is wrong?

MANN

One, I think I know who the night ranger is and two...Amigo I got this shit straight outta Bangladesh, and it's the most caustic unholy thing I've ever seen. Cold turkey ain't no cake walk, but I'd pull out now. I mean we both know my China white's not to be fiddled with, but this shit's green.

ELADIO

It is supposed to be green, yes?

MANN

Not the weed, the dope. You ever seen green dope before?

ELADIO

No, nunca.

MANN

Yeah me neither. After you shoot it you ain't ever gonna be Eladio ever again. Your last tango with reality, as it were.

ELADIO

Mas fuerte mas bueno.

MANN

Come on, let's say hi to the boys.

EXT. SNAPDRAGON HEIGHTS COURTYARD - NIGHT

Vivian and Shade stroll down the stairs clutching HEAVY DUTY GARBAGE BAGS in one hand and weapons in the other. Shade's pink burly fingers curl around a pair of BOLT CUTTERS that seem like pruners in comparison to his stature. Vivian scratches between his shoulder blades with his behemoth of a paddle.

VIVIAN

I'm better at dealing with tweakers so I get the tweaker line.

SHADE

Viv, only reason you do it is because it's easier. Don't have to deal with a junkie passing out or dying on you. You know how many junkies I buried last week? Six. I buried six fucking junkies last week!

VIVIAN

'Least you don't have to deal with Dee Dee.

SHADE

At this point I'll suck a dick to deal with Dee Dee's trifling ass.

They laugh.

A spotlight flickers against an underfed KOI POND, sitting behind a POLE that has been half-assed into the patio with grout. Hanging from the pole is a DINNER BELL.

VIVIAN

Shall I green light this ominous  
hour?

Shade gives him the Shaka sign and Vivian rattles the wand back and forth, the triangular bellow bounces off the walls and cracked sidewalk where Rosemary has pushed its way through the weeds.

Ever so slowly....one by one...JUNKIES, 20-60, seem to just appear out of nowhere, straight from the woodwork, shuffling and moaning or pacing back and forth.

Vivian and Shade hustle and bustle like Australian Shepherds, corralling their human live stock.

THE METH ADDICTS beat up the DOPE HEADS or push them out of the way, of whom are either passing out or taking a knee to gather strength.

Vivian chimes the bell faster and harder until choking it, filling the courtyard with cathartic silence.

SHADE

Alright ya'll shit's not going  
anywhere, just wait your turn.

VIVIAN

Blue bellies line up here in front  
of me, all you dragon chasers in  
front of Shade.

SHADE

There goes Dee Dee again.

Vivian drops his garbage bag, slapping his paddle on the palm of his hand while marching toward DEE DEE, 18, dead in a year, on his knees.

VIVIAN

Who pissed in your Cheerios?

DEE DEE

Please Vivian, I haven't slept  
since fucking Friday.

SHADE

Stand up Dee, vindicate yourself  
for Christ sake.

DEE DEE

I can't.

VIVIAN  
 Did you just shit yourself? Stand  
 the fuck up, now!

Unbeknown to the boys, the junkies have shuffled over to the unattended bag on the ground and are tearing it apart. A tornado of screaming, fists, drugs and plastic.

Vivian brings the paddle right into Dee Dee's knee, the crunch of tendon and bone cuts through the clatter of the crowd. Dee Dee wails like he's living for the first time.

BOOM -- Mann holsters his pistol and hushes ARCHIE, 2, Manchurian wild boar, thick wiry fur hanging to the ground in dreads, hand sharpened tusks the size of chef knives, as he chortles at the end of a thick chain wrapped around Mann's fist.

Eladio keeps his distance.

VIVIAN (CONTD)  
 Dee Dee was cutting in line again,  
 same shit every Monday. Que pasa  
 Eladio?

ELADIO  
 Nada pendejo.

VIVIAN  
 What's pendejo mean?

SHADE  
 Means asshole, kind of.

VIVIAN  
 Fair enough.

MANN  
 Shut up, that him over there?

SHADE  
 Uh huh, but listen daddy he's been  
 through the ringer past few weeks.  
 Not a trick to be turned by the  
 Citgo and it's running him ragged.

Mann throws a honey bun on Dee Dee's throat and Archie trots over, sucking up the sweet snack. Dee Dee wakes up screaming.

MANN  
 Quiet! He hates that. Now all I  
 gotta say to Archie is g-e-t-h-i-m,

MANN  
and young man you'll be hollering  
'til ya see purple. So what's it  
gonna be? You gonna wait your turn?

DEE DEE  
Yes Mr. Hertz I swear.

MANN  
Sewwie. Randy up there?

Mann gives Archie a honey bun.

VIVIAN  
Might be, he was in the shower  
earlier. Said he was going out  
again.

Mann grits his teeth so hard they almost shatter.

MANN  
I sent him out to the cabbage field  
last night to break Sanford and  
Lionel's thumbs. Well boys, their  
thumbs ain't broken. So when I get  
up there he better be sitting on  
the couch, and if the house is  
clean, which it ain't gonna be... I  
will interrogate him with  
restraint.

Vivian gets on the horn.

INT. STAIRWAY - NIGHT - WALKING

SOME GUY is getting head from SOME GIRL by the second floor.  
Eladio and Mann simply ignore it as they ascend.

ELADIO  
Do you believe in fate?

MANN  
Not particularly.

ELADIO  
Senor Hertz, fate is a bitch, fate  
is what you call your life when  
things are not good. If things go  
well you like to say it's a good  
decision, hard work you know? Plan  
followed through? It is not until  
life is shit that you say the word

ELADIO  
fate. It is how people..com se  
dice? Do you know?

MANN  
Cope? How they cope with different  
things?

ELADIO  
Yes, exactamente.

MANN  
Or you do drugs. Can't blame ya  
really, that Malone's sweeter than  
a bag of cherries. I taught her  
shit bag of a father a parenting  
lesson way back.

ELADIO  
She never told me.

MANN  
I wouldn't ask her about it.

ELADIO  
Can I ask you?

MANN  
Caught wind he used to touch her,  
so one morning I woke his ass up  
with a pot of vegetable oil. Didn't  
think to check her bedroom while I  
was heating it up.

ELADIO  
What did she do?

MANN  
She kept asking me why I was  
laughing. After you.

HALLWAY

Mann unlocks all seven of the locks to his penthouse.

ELADIO  
Mann, I am beginning to think that  
I'm in perfectly fine mood, all of  
the time, but everyone in this  
country...is just too stupid to  
realize that they are not happier  
than me.

MANN

Here's my impression of you, ready?  
 "We met at sunset, her band played  
 in Cancun, I made her a meal, she  
 fell in love after the first bite,  
 we traveled the fucking country  
 side, her music speaks to me, she's  
 a god damn angel" yaddi fuckin'  
 yadda. You're a romantic Eladio and  
 you have problems, but I'm your  
 drug dealer not your therapist.

INT. MANN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A beautiful apartment and spotless. Mann tips over the trash can, throws a couple magazines on the floor, turns off the xbox and knocks on the bathroom door. No one replies, but the shower is on.

MANN

Let's get your product, it's about  
 to get white hot in this meat  
 locker.

Mann reemerges from his bedroom with a black balloon. Cash and drugs are exchanged, Mann winks and Eladio splits.

Mann tugs on Archie's chain and pats him firmly on the ass into the laundry room.

LAUNDRY ROOM

Inside is literally enough room to fit a washer, dryer, Archie, a water bowl and a food bowl. His tank-like skull salivates over a medley of nuts, grapes, prunes, green apples and peaches. Mann slams the door and Archie takes out his aggression on the food.

SERIES OF SHOTS -- HONEY POT PREPARATIONS --

Mann dragging a chair from the kitchen across the hardwood floor, aligning it with the television.

Mann opening the laundry room, putting his open palm in Archie's face who dodges it and runs happily into the living room, rolling around on the ground with a full belly.

Mann grabbing a bottle of Tide from the shelf and beating Archie with it until he cries and retreats back to his post.

Mann pulling a Budweiser towel from the dryer, kicking Archie in the ribs and slamming the door.

Mann placing the chair on top of the towel.

Mann grabbing a roll of GORILLA TAPE from a kitchen drawer and ripping off a piece, double checking its strength.

Mann opening the cabinets beneath the sink to reveal gallons of Betsy Bee Honey.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Randy pulls in, Vivian and Shade sprint up to him as he makes his way toward the courtyard.

VIVIAN

Must've been tight as a pin head.  
Ain't been but ten minutes ya  
wammer bammer thank ya mammer.

RANDY

Fuck you talking about?

SHADE

Went back to Red Roof right?

RANDY

No, I got high and saw Basket Case.  
Fuck's wrong with ya'll?

SHADE

Randy cut the shit.

RANDY

I ain't lying.

SHADE

What movie you watch?

RANDY

The Vanishing.

VIVIAN

Thought it was Basket Case.

RANDY

Double feature.

VIVIAN

You hear what happened?

RANDY

Yeah those two faggots got killed while I was spending last week's pay on a new shotgun.

SHADE

How Jesus wept.

VIVIAN

Whoa whoa whoa whoa shut your fucking chin slits! Did you or did you not talk to us from the shower earlier?

RANDY

Do I look I took a shower Vivian?

INT. MANN'S PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

Mann struts out of the penthouse momentarily. Walter eases out of the bathroom with a crowbar, practicing his swing, breathing "one, two, three."

Mann pushes open the door with a BIG GREEN OIL DRUM and rolls it into the living room, oblivious to the intruder behind him -- THUNK.

Mann's knees buckle as he plows into the coffee table. Walter flips him over and pummels away.

Archie loses it, bucking at the laundry room door. Walter grabs Mann by the collar of his shirt.

WALTER

"Hey ya'll, I'm just about to get to fuckin' my hayseed sister after I clean the tobaccy out my mouth."  
..How's my vernacular? Your corn fed fucking sons bought it!

Mann spits blood in Walter's face and smiles. Walter smashes his teeth in with the crow bar.

Mann kicks Walter in the chest and sends him flying into the wall.

The laundry room door explodes and Archie waddles out.. Mann holds up his fist, Archie halts. Mann spits out broken teeth.

MANN

You get a two second head start,  
and uh..last one's the rotten egg.

Walter books it, Archie roars.

SCENE SEQUENCE -- WALTER RUNNING/THE BOYS RUNNING -- NIGHT

1) Hallway: Walter rearing around the corner like an Olympian. Archie barrels his shoulder into the corner and smashes through the wall getting closer.

2) Courtyard: Vivian, Shade and Randy leap over the koi pond and up the stairs.

3) Stairway: the tusk catches the bottom of Walter's pant leg and Archie rears upward tearing flesh and polyester. Walter screams and leaps down the stairs twisting an ankle. He knocks over a trash can, Archie sends it flying into the air with his snout.

4) Elevator: Vivian and shade jump up and down "why the fuck didn't we take the stairs. Randy shakes his head.

5) Lobby: Walter jumps over the front desk and throws brochures, pencils and a computer monitor at Archie sending him into a frenzy. The snarling beast leaps up onto the counter and down to the floor. They disappear and the noises coming from behind the desk make conscious flaying seem a walk in the park.

END SCENE SEQUENCE.

INT. ELEVATOR/TOP FLOOR - NIGHT

The elevator opens. Mann spits out more shards of teeth and a piece of gum line.

MANN

Randy, fuckin, Rudy.

RANDY

Mr. Hertz.

MANN

Boys, maintenance is needed in the lobby.

Mann shoves his hand between the elevator doors as they close, motioning toward Randy presumptuously. Randy turns to the boys and nods "be seeing you."

INT. ELEVATOR - NIGHT

The further the elevator descends the louder Walter gets. Upon reaching the lobby, Vivian and Shade put their fingers in their ears in an attempt to block out the hellish screams filling the hallway.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Dorothy and Todo creep around the corner -- SNAP, Walter stops carrying on.

They reach the lobby at almost a crawl, peering around the corner.

Eladio is frozen solid, having witnessed the mauling in a horrified trance.

The boys suck through their teeth and cringe at the slushy gouging sounds. Archie comes around the corner drenched in Walter's blood. It drips off the ends of the wiry fur and onto the hardwood floor.

VIVIAN

Back up slowly Mr. Marquez.

Eladio inches toward the front door as Archie watches him, ready to strike. The door squeals, Archie chortles and charges toward it.

SHADE

Sewwie! Archie Sewwie!

Archie listens.

EXT. COURTYARD/PARKING LOT - NIGHT - WALKING

Eladio gets on the phone, taking note of the remaining HOARD OF ADDICTS in the courtyard eyeing him down like fresh meat.

INTERCUT Eladio talking to Shep while he narrowly escapes the addicts and Shep putting a golf ball toward a miniature statue of king kong. Pauline watching and thinking hard.

SHEP

Thing's rigged I just know it. Que pasa Eladio?

The ball swivels around the hole.

PAULINE  
It's the expert course.

ELADIO  
What is going on?

SHEP  
I am an expert and if the owner was here I'd ring his neck for fraud. What'd you say man?

ELADIO  
Where is my wife?

Shep sets up for another putt.

SHEP  
Followed her down to South of the border. She's here with that therapist of hers.

ELADIO  
Pinche border?

SHEP  
Nah man the rest stop.

Eladio throws his elbow into the jaw of an EMACIATED TEENAGER, grasping at Eladio's shirt.

ELADIO  
She is cheating?

Shep putts and misses the hole again. Shep throws his putter in a little man made pond.

SHEP  
No she ain't cheating. Honestly I'd be more worried about her being out and about with this Night Ranger business going on.

Eladio picks up his pace to a jog as the hoard follows him.

ELADIO  
Did she take my money?

Shep glances at the bank bag, then Pauline who sets up for a putt.

SHEP  
Yeah, just trying to gather the huevos to get it back. I'll keep you posted.

ELADIO  
Hablar con usted pronto.

Eladio hangs up and jumps into his car. Dirty palms and fists slap at his windows. He bounces his way out of the parking lot, gazing at the balloon of heroin on the passenger seat.

INT. MALONE'S VAN/PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Floyd holds his hands against the heat vents as the vehicle idles. Malone pulls out her notebook and readies her pen.

MALONE  
Right now right here.

FLOYD  
You sure?

MALONE  
I'm ready Freddy.

FLOYD  
Positive?

MALONE  
Just go with it.

Floyd rubs his hands together vigorously and pulls a bundle of tissues from his jacket pocket.

FLOYD  
Okay..Do you believe that the traumatic event were due, in whole or in part to one...an innocent mistake on my part? Two, my general ability to make good decisions... good. You just say the word and we'll continue later okay? Three, a one time act of incompetence? Four, my general lack of intelligence? Five, a one time thoughtless act on my part? Six, my general carelessness and failure to take adequate precautions? I can stop...Okay. Seven, an impulsive or emotionally immature act on my part? Eight, my general lack of emotional maturity...Nine, my generally sinful or bad nature?

Malone finishes scribbling yes or no and then rips her notebook to smithereens, weeping.

MALONE

I know it's supposed to help, but  
it hurts so fucking bad.

FLOYD

You know what this is kid?  
Progress, that's what it is. I mean  
you probably think you're looking  
some type of way, but what I see is  
a strong woman coming to terms with  
herself.

Floyd hands her a tissue from the little bundle.

MALONE

How does that make you feel?

FLOYD

Professional. What?

MALONE

I don't think I've ever been this  
happy being miserable.

She reaches into her back pocket and Floyd grabs her arm.

FLOYD

I don't think you're ready.

Malone leans in to kiss him and Floyd politely refuses her,  
although it's like water torture.

FLOYD (CONTD)

Are you familiar with transference?

MALONE

I could teach a fucking class on  
transference.

Malone pulls out the letter and with a deep breath reads it:

MALONE (CONTD)

*"I shine when you hold me in your  
hand, but I do not extinguish."*

INT. PEDRO'S MINIATURE GOLF - NIGHT

Shep watches as Pauline makes a hole in one. She laughs and  
hugs Shep. Shep pulls away from her.

SHEP

That's not funny. You know what's funny? I'm debating whether or not to take you back, right here, right now. Fifty fucking feet from the very spot momma got ripped apart like road kill, and all you can do is laugh? What's next? You been fucking my brother on the side?

PAULINE

You told your friend on the phone you hadn't gotten the money yet, even though you did. Why is that?

SHEP

Because I love you damn it!

PAULINE

Well I love you too and maybe I'm here because it's the only place I thought you'd never look. If I opened another practice anywhere in the world you'd be the first patient. Am I wrong?

SHEP

I don't owe you answers. You owe me answers.

PAULINE

You owe that girl her money back so take heart. I'll help you pay for repairs on your house.

SHEP

It's not a house it's a restaurant. What?

PAULINE

Shepherd you can't even cook a tv dinner.

SHEP

Well you should see me now. I'm a regular fucking Escoffier, and I'm not taking your money. What would that prove anyway? "Hey dad I stumbled accross that girl and now I'm back with her 'cause I got no self respect and I'm using her to impress you." No way Jose. Not while I'm still breathing.

PAULINE

Alright then steal the money and I'll bail you out. Because if this woman's got any wits about her she'll press charges, and I wouldn't blame her either.

SHEP

You know what Pauline? I don't need your assistance in shooting myself in the foot. Go on and get the fuck up out of here.

PAULINE

Make me.

Shep limps over, grabbing her by the shoulders and turning her around.

She doesn't budge. He pushes harder and she slaps him.

They fall to the ground and wrestle. She straddles him.

PAULINE (CONTD)

I don't want you to take me back. I don't deserve to have you, but I do deserve to explain. After you return what isn't yours.

SHEP

Pauline I can't just waltz up to somebody and give them back twenty something thousand dollars. It's not that simple.

PAULINE

Yes it is.

SHEP

No it ain't. Was leaving me that simple? "Shepherd will be better off in the long run if I just disappear. No phone call, no email, not even a message in a fucking bottle!

PAULINE

It's not that simple --

SHEP

-- Thank you! Smartest thing you ever said, and this whole shit storm I'm caught in is your proof.

SHEP

You know, you haven't changed a bit. You make everything so black and white just like before. I'm a man not a machine! Shit, you can fix me like a robot but you can't rip out my soul.

PAULINE

I never intended to rip out your soul.

SHEP

You didn't, the memory did. All this time I been thinking the night ranger got you.

PAULINE

Well he didn't.

SHEP

I'm shacking up tonight and my door's open if you want to dance. Only thing we were ever good at anyway.

Shep staggers toward the Motor Inn. He glances at Pauline over his shoulder, of whom is fighting tears.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Malone holds Floyd from behind as they walk briskly toward Pedro's, paranoid out of their skulls.

Floyd collapses against a parking block.

FLOYD

I've been offering you my services for free because I'm not a therapist anymore. That degree on my wall keeps me feeling guilty, keeps me walking out my door, keeps me from Evan Williams, keeps me paying for my sins.

MALONE

It was an accident Floyd.

FLOYD

Two children and a mother are dead because of me. I paid five dollars for a bundle of Roman candles two

FLOYD  
and a half years back, little did I  
know they were priceless, and  
timeless. Straight up.

\*CLLLANANAAGGGGHHHHHH\*

Malone and Floyd jerk their heads to find a stray black cat  
licking at a taco from a fallen trashcan. Malone sighs.

MALONE  
I stole Eladio's money, all of it.  
I mean half is supposed to be mine  
but who am I kidding right?

FLOYD  
You going to return it?

MALONE  
You know they still got Klan rally  
flyers on telephone poles back  
home? Let me say that again; klan  
rally flyers, home. Makes my blood  
curdle, what about you?

FLOYD  
I'm an eternal optimist and I will  
not apologize for that.

MALONE  
I respect that Floyd I really do,  
but I'm sick of pine trees, I'm  
sick of red necks, I'm sick of  
seeing cars blow past me on the  
highway going where I want to go --

FLOYD  
-- and where's that exactly?

MALONE  
Anywhere but Snapdragon South  
Carolina for starters, and you  
can't honestly sit there and  
disagree.

FLOYD  
I honestly do.

MALONE  
So then keep listening to why Kelly  
Ann or whoever got hit because she  
wanted to watch next top model and  
Scooter wanted to watch football.  
It's a crock Floyd, I'm out of it.

FLOYD  
You're my only patient.

MALONE  
Say that again.

FLOYD  
I don't need to.

MALONE  
Okay. I'm going to call my husband  
now, then I'm going to confess what  
I did. Then I'm going to divorce  
him tomorrow because he shouldn't  
have to put up with my bullshit.  
Then I'm going to leave.

FLOYD  
Leaving won't solve your problems.

MALONE  
Seeing me won't fill whatever void  
you've got either. I mean I know I  
tried to kiss you earlier. Forgive  
me you've got a sexy brain, but I'm  
not the doctor here.

Malone rummages through her bag, She pulls out her lighter  
and lowers it inside.

MALONE (CONTD)  
It's gone.

FLOYD  
For real?

MALONE  
Yeah fucking for real, all twenty  
five thousand. It was in a bank  
bag, awesome. I put my phone in the  
bank bag. I always do that! I  
always put my crap in random places  
and lose it.

FLOYD  
What's your number?

MALONE  
You don't have it?

FLOYD  
I've got it written down in my  
office. I don't keep patient  
numbers in my cell it's --

MALONE

-- Unprofessional got it, seven six  
zero...

INT. SHEP'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Shep dumps all five complementary ariplane bottles of booze into a complimentary glass. Stirring the dark brown concoction with his finger, ice cubes clang like little clear suitcases.

Shep hears Billy Ocean's "get out of my dreams" ringing muffled somewhere in the room. The bank bag rests on the corner of the bed, lighting up in center. He presses a pillow on top of it, it ends.

Shep jumps at a knock on the door. He turns off the lights, peering through the peep hole: Pauline.

Shep opens and pulls her in.

SHEP

Don't turn on the lights. We're  
being watched.

PAULINE

Can I at least turn on the bathroom  
light?

SHEP

Yeah, just leave the door cracked.

Pauline makes the rounds and motions for Shep to sit on the edge of the bed. He does. She points to the drink.

PAULINE

Strong?

Shep nods. Pauline paces back and forth like a shadow, sipping.

PAULINE

Man comes into my office with  
multiple sclerosis. Can't walk, can  
barely talk and his wife left him  
because of it, I help him walk  
until I go to his funeral. Next day  
girl comes in recovering from a  
shotgun blast to the face and it  
takes me months to help her raise  
an eyebrow, her husband's fate was  
twiddling his thumbs in Charleston.

PAULINE

Week later a fire fighter comes in with a fractured femur and a dislocated Contraletral knee and I helped him dance and fell in love with him and I left him because he was full of so much pain and it was selfish of me to do it but I knew it was for the best. He has a father who's a selfish old hound and should've been there for him but he never was, and now he shows up and I feel guilty and his mother died right here and he's such a jerk that he took me out to her grave. Shep I was the best physical therapist in South Carolina. You know what that means? I didn't do it for the money, I did it because I love people and I bust my narrow ass to keep them content. Now I'm a pair of tits at a middle-of-the-road cantina, literally. I'm going to give you money to fix this restaurant of yours, but you're a fire fighter honey, not a cook.

SHEP

Well don't sugar coat it honeybun, give it to me straight.

Pauline pulls him up and he stands her feet as they rock back and forth slow dancing.

PAULINE

What's your restaurant called?

SHEP

I don't know.

INT. ELADIO'S EL CAMINO/PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Eladio dials Malone, cursing the black balloon of heroin, keeping his eyes focused on the church down the lot.

INT. SHEP'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Pauline grabs Shep by the crotch. Shep picks up Pauline and throws her on the bed, ripping off her pants in one fowl swoop.

Malone's phone rings and rocks back and forth next to them as they smother each other.

EXT. CENTRO SAGRADO CORAZON - NIGHT - WALKING

Eladio pockets his phone and takes a deep painful breath. He dumps the heroin into a pile of blackish gray slush, pushed up against a curb by cars and foot traffic.

The green powder sizzles, eating away the slush as it melts completely. Eladio has a revelation and adjusts his lapels.

INT. PEDRO'S DINER - NIGHT

The Mexican dishwasher looks at Floyd with empty eyes, not understanding a word he's saying.

FLOYD

Mucho dinero. On the seat over there. No mas.

Malone juts in, following dialog is in spanish.

MALONE

I had a bunch of money in my purse and now it's missing, have you seen anyone here with a bank bag that looks like it doesn't belong to them?

DISHWASHER

Yeah. Some guy came in through the kitchen and the manager left with him.

MALONE

What did he look like?

DISHWASHER

Tall, brown hair and a bad looking goatee. He had a limp too.

MALONE

Thank you. Have a good night.

Malone pulls Floyd by the arm.

MALONE (CONTD)

Don't look so surprised, I married a Mexican. Our theif drives a shit box of a car so let's check the lot.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Sure enough there sits Shep's old beater.

INT. MOTOR INN/LOBBY - NIGHT

Floyd and Malone approach the TATTOOED CLERK wearing a sombrero.

MALONE

You check in a tall man with bad facial hair? Can't tell if he's ugly or handsome? We're friends of his.

INT. SHEP'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Pauline's bare ass lands on Malone's phone, butt dialing it.

INT. CENTRO SEGRADO CORAZON LOBBY- NIGHT

Eladio sighs relief and answers the call as the REMAINING CATHOLICS squeeze into the chapel.

ELADIO

Malone, I think you got some explaining to do....(indistinct sex on the other end).

INT. SHEP'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Shep and Pauline share sweat as they drench the sheets.

INT. MOTOR INN - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Malone and Floyd approach Shep's door.

INT. CENTRO SAGRADO CORAZON LOBBY - NIGHT

Eladio face flushes like a thermometer.

ELADIO

...Malone?..Mi amor?...No...No..No  
no no no!

Eladio wails in Spanish and kicks a water fountain ONE-TWO-THREE-FOUR TIMES and doubles over squeezing his foot filling the hallway with unrepentant bawling.

The casing of the water fountain sloughs to the floor and water shoots out of a pipe drenching him. Eladio gets up and limps into the chapel.

EXT. SHEP'S MOTEL DOOR - NIGHT

Malone knocks.

MALONE

Shepherd I know you're in there and I'm not mad, but I'd like to be the one to return the money to my husband. If that's okay with you.

Pauline opens with the bag of cash.

PAULINE

He's in the shower. Can I just say he felt really bad about it?

MALONE

Yeah.

PAULINE

He felt really bad about it. Wait a minute, you're Malone Marquez.

Malone gets embarrassed, Floyd puts his arm around her shoulder.

FLOYD

Yes she is. This is the Malone Marquez, the genius behind such hits as "robes and whiskey," "stinging love" and "I'll be the first." I'm her manager Floyd Harper, and the host of rebel rousin' radio.

Pauline shakes his hand, excited.

PAULINE

Is it true that stinging love came about after making love on top of a yellow jacket's nest? I know country weekly tends to embellish.

Malone pulls the right side of her jeans down, revealing faint scars on her right ass cheek.

FLOYD  
Malone, hear me out baby --

MALONE  
-- No.

FLOYD  
Just one --

MALONE  
-- Answer's still no.

PAULINE  
Don't tell me you quit.

SHEP  
Sugar, who you talking... Hey  
ya'll.

PAULINE  
You didn't tell me you were  
stealing money from the queen of  
country music.

SHEP  
I told her to get me if ya'll came  
by. Sorry Mrs. Marquez.

MALONE  
Ms. Malone will do just fine.

PAULINE  
Ms? I think I feel another song  
coming on. So what he do? Cheat?

SHEP  
Oh lord.

MALONE  
I wish.

FLOYD  
I'm going to get my radio.

MALONE  
We're leaving right now Floyd.

PAULINE  
That's fine. I just thought you  
should know you've got a very loyal  
fan base. I might go so far as to  
say family.

This hits Malone in a place she hasn't felt.

MALONE

Thank you very much. Shep, you steal from me again I'll hit you.

PAULINE

She's so cool.

SHEP

Oh lord.

Shep pulls Pauline in and shuts the door.

INT. MALONE'S VAN - NIGHT

Malone hops up onto the drivers seat. Floyd plugs in his home made radio, proud of himself.

MALONE

Why did you do that?

FLOYD

What I do?

MALONE

You know exactly what you did. That wasn't fair.

FLOYD

As an artist you always going to be on the spot. Everybody knows that.

MALONE

I don't think you understand how hard this is for me. Every time I strum my guitar it's a trigger and I miss it. I miss it every fucking day but I can't just bam, start fresh because --

FLOYD

-- Because what? Because you're more famous than you thought? Because a year ago you had every reputable country label knocking at your door? Because me, your therapist, wants nothing more than for you to succeed and be a happy person again --

MALONE

-- I'm afraid, for fuck's sake.

She turns the keys and Floyd's device wirrs, the electric beam bounces back and forth from the prongs..grows faint..fainter..POP -- under the hood of the van.

HOOD

The battery is fried like chicken. Malone gives Floyd a look.

MALONE

I will bring in the guitar, but I'm not playing anything.

INT. CENTRO SEGRADO CORAZON CHAPEL - NIGHT

Eladio gimps toward the alter and whispers something in Padre Velazco's ear. The wise priest nods and removes his microphone handing it to him. Eladio holds the little mic between his fingers like a joint.

ELADIO

(In Spanish)

Lately I've been having this dream about the devil. Before God created the universe. Before amoebas, before Spain, before we lost California...before heroin. Devil's been banished you know? Sent down to this place that's all his own...So he builds a capital city with trillions of followers. Little chubby cherubs poking and prodding at him like Hieronymous Bosch in heat, but in essence he is the eon-aged contradiction. You'd think he'd be the life of the party, but the son of a bitch just sits there with his hand on his chin in the darkest, most abysmal place imaginable waiting to prove his weight in salt, but the chance never comes. So he just waits and waits and waits. Now I wouldn't go so far as to say I empathize, what happened between him and the almighty is their shit sandwich, but I do sympathize.

Eladio walks over to the communion table and pours a glass of wine. People gasp and he shakes his finger at them.

ELADIO (CONTD)

Personally I think Sisyphus has it worse. Day in and day out with nothing but a chance to prove himself, so he continues to push the rock uphill despite the fact that it falls for the rest of eternity.

Eladio drinks the wine.

ELADIO (CONTD)

The man you see on stage is kneeling right before the crest of that hill looking down, and I'm not retracing my steps anymore. Took a phone call to realize that.

Eladio hands Padre Velasquez the microphone and limps toward the door.

LEVI

(o.c.)

Son, I need you to promise me that you won't follow me okay?

GRADY

(o.c.)

Promise.

INT. LEVI'S CRUISER - NIGHT

Levi points his knobby skull ringed finger in Grady's face.

LEVI

I know you haven't forgotten.

GRADY

I, Grady, hereby promise not to betray the McDowell family trust by crossing my fingers and or toes, and if doing so shall take heed to uncross them with suitable haste. However, in due time and under Levi's and or Helen's discretion and wisdom am I given the right to cross my beating heart.

LEVI

Permission granted.

Grady crosses his heart and Levi hugs him tight.

INT. HOLLYWOOD CEMETERY - NIGHT

Levi plods through graves and flowers using sprawling oak trees as make shift walking sticks.

He peers over his shoulder and he's completely alone with nothing behind him but police flashers that glide across the sea of marble in red and blue waves.

Levi spots something odd.

Moonlight radiates from the monument and dances off of a FIGURE propped against Helen's gravestone, sitting and beaming at Levi with a vacant stare.

HELEN'S SKELETON has been unearthed. The leg bones are crossed casually and her clasped skeletal hands rest where a lap would be. A wig and purple sun hat have been fastened to her skull. She's posed to look as though she's been expecting him.

Levi drops to his knees, taking off his jacket and biting it, screaming and cursing. Eyes bulging with rage.

Levi removes the hat and wig, uncrosses her legs, then her hands, a LETTER inside of them. He reads it and looks born again.

Levi rolls up a putting green that rests next to the grave and hugs it.

Levi daintily lowers Helen's skeleton into her casket and reburies her with his bare hands.

INT. GRADY'S CRUISER - NIGHT

Levi's old frame cracks and snaps as he eases his way into the front seat. Clumps of dirty grass jut from his nails. His face and arms are smothered.

LEVI

Raid's starting early.

Grady puts his car in gear. The back tire spins and kicks up clods of earth.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

Levi paces back and forth in front of the ENTIRE SHERIFF'S OFFICE, covered in filth, looking something fierce.

LEVI

This boy running around in a forest ranger suit's the worst thing to happen to this county since the abortion clinic. There ain't no reason we shouldn't have caught him yet. This town is home to fifteen thousand people. That's damn near a Hamlet, and the way things are going right now I may as well set up a soft serve stand at the graveyard, but I don't want to do that. The Night Ranger's a mascot of what Mr. Emanuel Hertz has turned this town into. All of us, including me, should be ashamed. I been sulking in my office for ten years asking questions that can't be answered. "Why me?" "Who did this?" "When should I off myself?" When I should've been asking; "If Helen were alive right now would she smack me in the mouth?" "Am I a deadbeat father?" "Do I give my eldest son the time of day?" All three answers are no. Helen wouldn't waste her strength to put me in my place, I am not a dead beat father and I love my children very much even if they don't know it, and I do not give my eldest son the time of day. He says "hey pop" every time he sees me out and about and you know what I do? I nod, I fucking nod. That's all I do. Not anymore. Let's go wrangle us a red neck.

-- SERIES OF SHOTS --

A bullet proof vest is strapped to a chest.

A can of mace is slid into a holster.

Shotguns are pumped.

Clips are inserted into pistols.

A battering ram is placed into a trunk.

A pair of handcuffs are swiveled behind the back of a belt.

Close to twenty Crown Vics zoom out of the lot.

EXT. UNKEMPT HOUSE - NIGHT

Sergeant Simms gulps down the last of his steaming coffee as he marches through weeds up to the waist. Fire trucks line the street behind them as OTHER UNITS evacuate the rest of the neighborhood. Simms knocks, no answer.

EXT. CHAINED CELLAR - NIGHT

Simms swings an axe onto the lock, snapping it open with ease. Simms rips out the chain and a muffled scream tears through the thick wooden doors.

Simms opens and rears at the eaten face of Lionel, floundering blindly in an ocean of beer cans.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Walter's legs have been ripped apart exposing the shins all the way down to the ankle. His shirt sticks to caked blood around puncture wounds.

The skin on the right side of Walter's neck pushes outward and the bone pops through it when Vivian and Shade lower him into the freshly dug grave.

VIVIAN

I don't want to go up there Shade.  
I really don't.

SHADE

Let's just hurry up and bury poor old Walt. Remember dad used to call us the twin towers? Let's be strong together okay? No need to crumble now.

INT. MANN'S PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

Mann turns off the news. In the reflection of the television screen is Randy bound to a chair. Shirtless and shoeless.

Randy sits drenched to the bone in honey. His eyelids flex to stay open, pushing at the dripping golden liquid, his hair glazed over his scalp. Honey drips over the waist band of his jeans.

Mann collapses onto the chair in front of him and taps his fingers on the green barrel that remains closed..for now.

MANN

You ever get to reading the paper?  
 ..and I ain't talking about the  
 snapdragon weekly. I'm talking  
 about the herald, the post, the  
 christian scientist e-t-c, alright?  
 This year marks the first time in  
 American history that this  
 speck-of-shit county is getting  
 attention. We're talking on an  
 international level, you believe  
 that? Moment some shit happens in a  
 place you've never heard of it's  
 like an old boy found life on Mars.  
 You got people from up-and-down the  
 east coast rubbernecking route  
 twenty. Shit, before now you didn't  
 read about me, you didn't read  
 about you, you didn't read about  
 the meth problem, the poverty  
 line...shit's bold baby.. Detroit's  
 got grizzly bears in an alley or  
 two. Cry me a goddamn river. Last  
 Summer I saw a panther on top of  
 the max mart, I shit you not.

Vivian and Shade walk in, eyes averted. Archie licks the honey off of Randy's leg, Mann kicks him in the head. Shade guides the poor animal into Mann's bedroom and shuts the door.

MANN (CONTD)

Now I got the sheriff up my ass, a  
 dead rich man up my ass, soon to be  
 all of America up my ass and I've  
 already had my prostate checked  
 this year. You smelling what I'm  
 stepping in?

RANDY

I'm not the fucking night ranger,  
 Mann.

MANN

We gotta cut off some of your pinky to be sure. Try not to think too hard about it. Anticipation's half the reason it hurts like a son of a bitch.

Mann motions to his sons and Vivian holds Randy down, Randy stares at the ceiling and Shade cuts off Randy's pinky down to the first knuckle. Snot squirts out of Randy's nose as he breathes through it, taking in the pain.

RANDY

Okay, okay I'm the night ranger. Can you kill me, please? I'm the night ranger Mann what did I just say? You don't need to do anymore of this fuckin' shit!

VIVIAN

I'm convinced.

SHADE

Me too, let's call it a night.

MANN

You think that hurt Randy? That ain't shit. I'll tell you what hurts. Falling in love with a woman and her leaving you, ripping your beating heart out of your chest and shredding it like paper at Kinkos. Not only that, but who with? A fucking knight in shining armour, badge flashing faggot, star quarterback. That's fucking pain brother. Only pain worse than that is inside this here barrel.

Mann pulls the latch, lifting off the lid. Inside the barrel is recurring wave of reddish brown, thousands and thousands little legs and torsos collide and mesh with each other.

MANN (CONTD)

These aren't you're momma's ants. These mean som' bitches right here are from Austrailia. Call them bulldog ants. You cut one of these fuckers in half, the head tries to eat the tail while the tail tries to sting the head. Each and every time I done it the same thing happens.

Mann pulls a ladle from under his chair and takes a scoop of the huge red and black ants, letting it hover over Randy's fore arm. A couple spill over and bite at the honey right away.

RANDY

Oh shit! Oh wow that fucking hurts!

Mann turns the ladle over and the ants take his arm in a frenzy. Lightning shoots out of Randy's lungs. Vivian takes a big bucket of water and washes them away. Mann moves his finger back and forth like a metronome and stops mid tick.

SHADE

I'm so sorry Randolph.

Vivian and Shade lift Randy up by the bottom of the chair and submerge his head down to the shoulders. Randy screams with a shut mouth until he can't breathe. He finally opens his mouth and the furry red bodies tunnel in.

The boys pull him out and he rattles his head while the insects puncture his face and neck. He shivers, spitting out ants and choking as they cling to the inside of his throat.

MANN

You look a little antiquated Randy,  
how about we dust you off.

Vivian dumps water on Randy's face. Welts begin to raise all over his body.

A knock at the door. Shade looks through the peep hole.

SHADE

It's Eladio.

Mann gets up, tosses Randy a couple Epipen shots and opens the door.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Mann eases the door shut and lifts Eladio's arms up, checking for a fresh track mark.

MANN

I take it you chose church huh?

ELADIO

I want to kill my wife.

MANN  
Must've been a boring sermon.

ELADIO  
Seriosio.

MANN  
Por que?

ELADIO  
She's seeing a therapist.

MANN  
Good for her, oh. Since when?

ELADIO  
I don't know.

MANN  
Where is she?

ELADIO  
South of the border.

MANN  
The rest stop?

ELADIO  
Yes.

MANN  
Must be a screamer...sorry, just seems like a lot of driving for a little infidelity. Could've gone to King's Inn or the Hampton or something. What's your proof?

ELADIO  
She call me. While they were --

MANN  
-- Having relations? It's okay calm down. Are you sure?....My guy's right in there and we call him "Randy the Dandy," You know why? Irony, that's why. You sure you're sure?

Eladio nods and Mann steps back into the apartment.

INT. MANN'S PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

Mann tosses Randy a towel. Vivian and Shade clean up the mess with their eyes fixed to the floor. Mann kneels down in front of Randy.

MANN

Listen here first blood, I'm gonna let you live on account of an ace of spades that needs flipping. You will not get paid, you will not make a mess and you will do it in a timely fashion. Am I clear?

Randy nods.

MANN (CONTD)

Go out there and talk to that beaner, he'll tell you what you need to know. We'll pump you full of Morphine, anti venom and cocaine after that.

EXT. SNAPDRAGON HEIGHTS/ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Police cars line the road, all idling, waiting, illuminated by the moon. Levi leans over Grady's window, sighs.

LEVI

Alright, in five minutes take the lot but don't go further. I'll have my radio on. Once I say "fuck you" ya'll start ripping them open.

GRADY

Really? That's your code word? Fuck you?

LEVI

Has to sound natural.

GRADY

Why do you have to go in alone?

LEVI

Has to look routine. Do not, no matter what happens, act before I say so. Uncross your toes Grady.

Grady grits his teeth.

GRADY

What if there's gun shots?

LEVI

If there is it'll only be one, and we'll have a barbeque to celebrate.

EXT. SNAPDRAGON HEIGHTS COURTYARD - NIGHT

PALE GAUNT FACES appear, shrouded behind bushes, glaring at Levi as he walks unscathed. A COUPLE ROTTEN TOOTHED TWEAKERS convulse under the spotlight, eyes locked on the sheriff, fuming. Levi winks and they scamper.

INT. STAIRWAY - NIGHT

Levi pulls his forehead from the entrance to the top floor, stiff with apprehension.

Randy tackles the door open, knocking Levi back. Levi grabs at the railing as he regains his balance, little neon spots pulsate in front of his eyes, he shakes it off.

Randy stops and faces him, clearly out of his skull, gnashing his teeth. Tears drip off the tip of his nose and spray upward as he blows them away in short under bitten spurts.

Bites cover him from hairline to Adam's apple, so many embedded stingers it looks like a five o'clock shadow. Levi sighs and shakes his head, he's seen this before.

Randy does the John Belushi down the stairs.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Levi approaches Mann's door, recognizes Eladio passed out next to a utility closet with the half full Tequila bottle. Levi shakes his head again, taps him with the toe of his boot and checks for a pulse, it's there.

INT. MANN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Vivian and Shade scrub honey crust off the hardwood floor with steel wool and deck brushes, their square jaws slump over their barrel chests.

Mann flips on the television, scratching Archie's scruff. Suddenly Archie sniffs at the air, as does Mann. Both noses wiggle toward the ceiling.

Levi lets himself in. Archie snorts, Mann punches him the shit out of him.

LEVI  
Evening line backer.

Levi simply stands there, staring into Mann's soul as if it were scotch tape. Levi motions for Vivian and Shade to leave, they look to their father, Mann approves. Levi gathers his nerves and tosses Mann the letter he found at the graveyard, covered in mud.

LEVI  
Read. Archie bucks at me once I'll shoot him.

MANN  
I don't think that's necessary quarterback.

Mann scans the letter and grins.

LEVI  
Truth.

MANN  
Let me ask you something Levi; when Helen told you she was pregnant with her first child, how long had ya'll been together? This of course includes the time ya'll were knocking boots behind my back.

LEVI  
Three months.

MANN  
Watch the pig real quick.

Mann disappears into his office. Archie glares at Levi, Levi glares right back. Mann re enters.

MANN (CONTD)  
Gander this document sheriff.

It takes Levi a second or two to process, but once he does he jumps and soars off of an imaginary cliff.

MANN (CONTD)  
That there's the first pre natal screening. Says six months deep does it not? You fucking believe that? All I got to show for my

MANN (CONTD)

first born son is a sheet of paper,  
a dead whore and a sheriff who  
treats him like a bastard. I  
suppose he is.

LEVI

This ain't true. Helen would've  
told me.

MANN

Why's he look like me? You and  
Grady are regular maple trunks.  
Shep's a fucking bean pole just  
like his daddy.

Mann picks up the letter.

MANN (CONTD)

This night ranger's a real peach  
putting you and me against each  
other like this, but it begs the  
question; what've I got to lose?  
Money?

LEVI

Your children?

MANN

Which ones you talking about? Those  
two adopted fuck ups in the  
hallway? Or my real son, who wants  
nothing more than for you, you of  
all fucking people to love him?

LEVI

Did you kill my wife?

MANN

I was aiming for Shepherd Levi, and  
don't blame me, blame the power  
steering reservoir. Thing had a  
leak like Johnstown.

Levi boils over, presses his gun against the bridge of  
Mann's nose.

MANN (CONTD)

I'm just kidding quarterback,  
nobody knows who ran her over but  
the som' bitch that did it.

LEVI

Fuck you.

MANN

Don't waste your breath with threats. If I ain't a God fearing man, I sure as shit ain't a man fearing man.

Archie lunges at Levi, Levi shoots him in the head.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Vivian and Shade make a bee line to the penthouse. Eladio wakes up.

EXT. SNAPDRAGON HEIGHTS PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Grady and the SHERIFF'S OFFICE pour in with a crouch, taking cover behind junk cars filling the lot.

Grady peers beneath A TRUCK with his Maglite, noticing the gas tank guarded with a chain.

Grady checks another vehicle, same deal. Grady motions to the OFFICERS and little Maglite flares litter the lot like pale blue fire flies.

EXT. COURTYARD - NIGHT

Dee Dee and a COUPLE JUNKIES WITH CLAMMY SKIN watch the commotion and snap their fingers repeatedly like beatnik applause. THE HOARD congregates, chortling like hyenas.

INT. MANN'S PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

Vivian and Shade see Archie in a lump on the floor and size up Levi. Mann seethes.

MANN

Let him go boys.

LEVI

I'm not going anywhere.

Levi cuffs Mann.



INT. ELADIO'S EL CAMINO - NIGHT

He unfolds it, flicking on the dome light.

ELADIO  
Pinche ingles.

Eladio spots Dee Dee sitting on one of the cars in the lot, watching everything, bewildered.

ELADIO (CONTD)  
Hey you! You want some money?

Dee Dee limps over.

ELADIO (CONTD)  
You read this I give you fifty.

INT. RANDY'S MUSTANG - NIGHT - TEARING ASS

Randy flips the ac knob to max, pointing all of the vents at the tiny pink volcanoes pushing through his skin.

EXT. ELADIO'S EL CAMINO - NIGHT

Dee Dee gulps.

ELADIO  
Ahora, gringo.

DEE DEE  
(Reading)  
*"I couldn't avoid stepping on the dewy grass jutting from the cracked sidewalk, when I caught a whiff of your wife's perfume. Your bedroom window was open an inch so I pushed it up with ease, making my way to a rocking chair in the corner of your room. For about five minutes I sat and rocked trying to figure out how I should kill her.*

Eladio smashes the bottle.

ELADIO  
Mas.

INT. RANDY'S MUSTANG - NIGHT - TEARING ASS

Randy blots with a paper towel. Green, yellow and red swirl together forming wet brown strings as he pulls the drenched paper from his face.

EXT. ELADIO'S EL CAMINO - NIGHT

Eladio grips the steering wheel so hard he leaves hand prints. Dee Dee keeps on.

DEE DEE

(Reading)

*I almost stomped your face in while  
you were dreaming in the bath tub  
with a toothbrush in one hand and a  
spoon in the other, spike in vein.  
I figured if I rubbed you out she'd  
wake up and I couldn't kill her the  
way I wanted to.*

INT. RANDY'S MUSTANG - NIGHT - TEARING ASS

Randy spots the steel Mexican bandito statue in the distance, pushing the pedal to --115mph--

EXT. ELADIO'S EL CAMINO - NIGHT

Eladio paces back and forth.

DEE DEE

(Reading)

*I walked back into your room and  
played a black acoustic guitar in  
the corner. At first I muffled the  
strings, slowly playing louder and  
louder until I realized my hands  
were wrapped around her throat and  
I could feel her turning blue. For  
some reason, I stopped and left her  
there. I'm sure she's given you her  
side of the story, albeit not as  
descript as mine. You're welcome  
Mr. Marquez.*

Eladio hands Dee Dee a fifty and peels out of the parking lot, screeching to a halt in front of Grady.

ELADIO  
Officer Grady!

GRADY  
Kind of busy Mr. Marquez. You still  
clean?

ELADIO  
Si, my wife is in danger. Someone  
is going to kill her.

GRADY  
Where is she?

ELADIO  
I think Shep is with her.

Grady shatters A TWEAKER'S ROTTEN MOUTH with his night stick  
and turns.

GRADY  
Where the fuck is she?

ELADIO  
Follow me.

INT. ELADIO'S EL CAMINO - NIGHT - TEARING ASS  
Snow begins to fall, wipping at Eladio's face.

INT. GRADY'S CRUISER - NIGHT - TEARING ASS  
Grady gets on the radio.

GRADY  
(To radio)  
Deputy McDowell requesting back up,  
got a ten fifty four in Hamer South  
Carolina, South of the border rest  
stop. Do you copy?

INT. RANDY'S MUSTANG - NIGHT

Randy pulls up outside Motor Inn, taking note of Malone's  
van.

OFF CAMERA: A guitar is tuned, blending with the droning  
frozen highway.

INT. SHEP'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

A case of beer is torn open and half empty on the floor. A deck of cards are scattered on the television stand. Shep, Pauline and Floyd all have their eyes fixed on Malone.

Malone nestles her guitar, lost in thought. She nods, positions herself and without further ado:

A strum here, strum there, almost proficient, barely back to normal and Voila! She's playing longer than she has in months..she strains...her thumb shakes...her wrist jerks..fingers tighten..her strumming choppy...her breath shorter..harder..choppier..harder..she stops and catches her breath.

Floyd and Pauline break into applause. Shep sin't amused.

SHEP

So why are ya'll here?

FLOYD

Feel like a motherfucking Goonie or something.

Floyd tosses Shep the roman candle.

SHEP

Hard put for learning lessons aren't you Dr. Harper?

FLOYD

I'm retired.

SHEP

Me too, so why are you buying fireworks?

FLOYD

Can't buy mementos.

Shep laughs.

SHEP

Arty Crane give that to you?

MALONE

Directed us to it. I too found something at the end of the treasure map.

Malone tosses Shep the letter; *The cunt I tried to strangle.*

SHEP

(Reading)

*I shine when you hold me in your  
hand, but I do not extinguish.  
Shit's a hoax I watched him die.*

FLOYD

Well then how did this person know  
she'd be with me tonight?

EXT. UNKEMPT HOUSE - NIGHT

Sergeant Simms slurps down yet another coffee, watching  
Lionel slide into the ambulance. Simms turns, wincing at the  
fire raging a mere mile away.

INT. SHEP'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Pauline flips on the television. A grease panned sketch  
fills the screen depicting the Night Ranger; thick black  
campaign hat, raggedy ski mask, voids for eyes -- Cuts to  
people crowded in the streets, rattled to the core,  
ignorant, cold, vagrant. Flames flicker down on the street  
from somewhere else in the county.

PAULINE

Shepherd look.

Shep averts to the screen, takes it in.

SHEP

It's a crock. All fucking four of  
us know that. He died from smoke  
inhalation.

MALONE

You sure you're sure? Let's go to  
the morgue and check documents.

SHEP

Let's go to Chucky Cheese and play  
in the ball pit.

T.V.

(Filtered v.o.)

*Sanford Winklestein was found dead  
outside a cabbage field on river  
road, Lionel Nichols has yet to be  
found...(Indistinct).....*

Shep pushes his tongue to his cheek.

SHEP

Town doesn't fare too well for  
homosexuals.

T.V.

(Filtered v.o.)

*So far five hundred homes have been  
evacuated. Most of the bombs found  
have been replicas, however close  
to one hundred and fifty have been  
carefully crafted and wired to  
water heaters counting down.*

Shep jumps when his phone rings. He rolls his eyes.

INTERCUT Shep walking to get a soda and Sergeant Simms  
gazing at his town in flames.

SHEP

Sargeant.

SIMMS

Where the fuck have you been  
Shepherd?

SHEP

I been trying to open a restuarant,  
you?

SIMMS

I just found Lionel Nichols buried  
in beer cans. Face ripped clean  
off. Other than that I just been  
fighting fires.

SHEP

He's alive?

SIMMS

He's breathing, although for his  
sake I wish he wasn't. Now look,  
Levi got a tape. I haven't had the  
chance to listen to it because I  
been too busy filling the streets  
with scared unhappy families. The  
gist is this; *I'm a fucking crazy  
person and I'm going to blow up  
Snapdragon county in twenty four  
hours.* Try twenty, quarter of the  
county's going up right now. This  
is literally a fire beneath your  
derelict ass.

SHEP

I'll visit him in the hospital, but I'm retired.

SIMMS

The night ranger said your name specifically, which means you need to lend a hand in this quagmire. So limp on over to Ladder twenty two, fulfill your duties as a fire fighter or I'll kill you before the night ranger does.

INT. MOTOR INN/LOBBY - NIGHT

Randy puts his elbow on the counter, shotgun beneath him, unreadable.

RANDY

Pretty brunette number came in with a black fella. Where are they?

TATTOOED CLERK

Who are you sir?

RANDY

Name's Randolph Rudy, but call me Randy. When Mann Hertz needs somebody to learn lessons he gets on the phone and dials a number, it rings five times and then stops. Few seconds go by and it rings again, then a man picks up and says "hello?" I am that man. Now where's Malone at?..and don't bother with the shucking and jiving 'cause I ain't gonna ask but once.

TATTOOED CLERK

I honestly have no idea.

Randy butts brochures off the counter with his SAWED OFF, a fish in a barrel's distance from the clerks forehead.

RANDY

One Mississippi..

BAM -- cranial confetti, a fleshy party popper explodes right off the tattooed clerk's shoulders, his body shoots back, arteries fill the mouth of his sombrero like salsa.

INT. SHEP'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Pauline, Shep, Floyd and Malone scatter.

INT. LOBBY - NIGHT

Randy flips through the tenant book. Doesn't find Malone's name, recognizes Shep's.

INT. SHEP'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Pauline pries at the window, sealed shut.

INT. MOTOR INN - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Randy whistles "Peter and the Wolf" as he closes in on Shep's door. He knocks.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Shep, Floyd, Pauline and Malone tremor behind the shower curtain, hands over mouths. KNOCK KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK KNOCK. BLAM -- the door explodes in muffled splinters.

They try not to piss themselves. Floyd holds Malone, Shep holds Pauline.

BEDROOM - SAME

Randy studies his surroundings. Made beds, belongings absent, no stirs what so ever. Randy retraces toward the door and halts, glancing back over his shoulder at Shep's menu on the night stand, chock full of red ink. He picks it up and reads aloud.

RANDY

*"Pauline's Authentic Mexican cuisine, father and son flare..."*  
 Boy that sounds enticing.... *"Not your Momma's taquitos."* Well shit fucking fire, that's an appetizer made in heaven. On to the entrees...*"love and loss a la panza con coyous de hacha..."* Whatever that means.

BATHROOM - SAME

Shep turns to Pauline.

SHEP  
(near silent)  
Means pig stomach stuffed with  
scallops.

Pauline smiles despite her fear, licking the tears from her lips.

BEDROOM - SAME

Randy flips over the menu.

RANDY  
Deserts. *"Home made ice cream  
inspired by Helen Marie McDowell,  
made by the sheriff."* Gag me with a  
meat fork. *"Rocky road killer,  
cookies and criminals."* What a  
fucking joke.

BATHROOM - SAME

CLICK -- the light comes on. CHHHCK CHHCK -- shotgun shells rattle on the tile.

Floyd mouths "one, two, three... four! They trample Randy with the shower curtain.

BLAM -- the toilet explodes as Randy catches Malone by the ankle, Malone kicks back at his face, the skin on Randy's chin rips off like a freshly peeled sticker, he howls.

BEGIN SCENE SEQUENCE:

Shep, Floyd, Pauline and Malone make a break for the exit.

Randy plods from the lobby holding his jaw, brandishing a COLT 45 PISTOL from his trunk.

The gang shimmies along the wall toward the opposite side of the building.

Randy's chin skin hangs by a thread, he applies fresh gauze and tape.

The gang crawls behind Azaleas, Pauline points at Shep's car down the lot.

PAULINE  
You still driving that thing?

SHEP  
That thing has a name.

FLOYD  
Hold up.

They huddle against the wall. CRUNCH -- leaves and grass give way. Randy walks past them, does a full three sixty and holds...retraces.

Malone peers around the corner, Randy swivels quickly, Malone ducks back, waits, looks again, watches Randy enter the motel.

MALONE  
I say we fucking run.

Just as quickly as they reach the car, Randy is already sprinting toward them, they leap in BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM -- Randy riddles the side of Samantha with three inch holes. Shep peels out.

END SCENE SEQUENCE.

INT. SAMANTHA - NIGHT - DRIVING

Shep looks in his rear view mirror, Randy simply stands there watching them disappear, waving. He jogs back into the motel.

MALONE  
We forgot Pauline!

Shep hits the breaks. Floyd kicks open the door and sprints.

INT. LOBBY - NIGHT

Floyd storms through the front doors. Malone tries to hold him back but it's no use.

FLOYD  
Fuck did she do huh!? I'm the one you want. Arthur Crane you hear me talking motherfucker! Two years in the pen, loss of my license! That not enough for you! Well then kill me now! I'm right fucking here you hear me tripping!

Someone grabs Floyd. It's Eladio.

ELADIO

That is not the Night Ranger senior  
Harper.

FLOYD

What are you doing here?

ELADIO

I know you have sex with my wife.  
It's fine, I don't deserve her.

Grady enters, glock drawn.

GRADY

All three of you back against the  
wall. Where's my brother?

MALONE

He went through the back, Eladio  
what are you talking about?

FLOYD

I would never touch your wife. I'm  
a therapist.

GRADY

Quiet. What's going on here?

MALONE

There's a man with a gun, and he  
likes to use it. That's all we  
know.

GRADY

Don't move.

Grady creeps around the corner.

ELADIO

(Spanish)

*I got the phone call earlier.*

MALONE

(Spanish)

*What phone call? What is going on?*

ELADIO

(Spanish)

*I just want you to be happy.*

MALONE  
 (Spanish)  
*What did you do?*

ELADIO  
 (Spanish)  
*That man is here to kill you. I  
 hired him.*

Malone slaps him, hard. Then spits in his face.

ELADIO (CONTD)  
 (Spanish)  
*I deserve worse.*

Malone has a panic attack, muffling sobs. Floyd's eyes shoot gigantic daggers at Eladio as Eladio creeps around the hallway.

ELADIO (CONTD)  
 Don't let her get hurt.

FLOYD  
 (Whisper)  
 Count with me  
 Malone..One..two..deeper  
 breaths..three..four.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Pauline prays, her back pressed to the corner, flexing her hands. Randy aims an ear in her direction, registers faint breathing.

Shep turns the corner behind Randy, tip toeing.

Randy turns on his heel, BAM -- a bullet tears an inch of flesh off Shep's shoulder as he leaps into one of the door frames.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

Grady hears the gunshot and sprints, Eladio right behind him. Grady looks back, sees Eladio, shakes his head.

INT. LOBBY - NIGHT

Malone panicks harder. Floyd picks her up and guides her outside.

INT. HALLWAY - SAME

Randy storms toward Shep and suddenly squeals, dropping to his knees. Pauline sinks her thumb and finger into the side of Randy's neck.

PAULINE

These are called trigger points. All of your stress goes right to the shoulders, it's common in shorter men. This is a deep tissue massage, also known as "Myofascial release."

An awe struck Shepherd lifts the pistol from the ground.

SHEP

Hertz sent you didn't he?

RANDY

I'm just following orders.

SHEP

I already know he set me up to work for him, why's he want me dead?

RANDY

I'm not here to kill you. I'm here to kill Malone.

SHEP

You just shot at me, and I'm fairly certain these aren't blanks in here.

PAULINE

What should we do?

Shep thinks.

SHEP

You got an automobile, sir?

Randy nods, Pauline and Shep move him through the fire exit.

EXT. RANDY'S TRUNK - NIGHT

Shep presses the pistol into Randy's back, Randy collapses inside beside a RIFLE nestled against the wheel well.

SHEP

Just hold out until Johnny Law gets here.

Shep shuts the trunk as Eladio and Grady run over.

GRADY

Shep! Are you okay?

SHEP

No little brother not really. Que pasa Eladio?

ELADIO

Hola.

GRADY

Where's the gunman?

SHEP

In the trunk.

GRADY

Locals on the way?

Shep dials 911 and waits for a ringtone, hangs up.

SHEP

Who called this in? Whole resort's dead as hell.

GRADY

Mr. Marquez.

SHEP

How did you know?

ELADIO

I had a feeling.

SHEP

Hell of a hunch amigo.

Grady turns to Pauline.

GRADY

Nice to see you're alive and well. So where'd you run off to?

SHEP

Grady.

PAULINE

Where is everyone else?

Grady motions toward the lobby. They run.

SHEP

Where the fuck is the fire department? Bell's been ringing five minutes.

GRADY

They're in Snapdragon, same with every other ladder within an hour's jurisdiction. Simms call you yet?

SHEP

Yeah, wants me back.

GRADY

So?

SHEP

So I'm considering it.

They approach the lobby. Malone thousand yard stares across the parking lot. Floyd walks up to Eladio, bubbling over.

FLOYD

I've dealt with a dozen different domestic situations in my time, but nothing like this.

SHEP

Hey, Great White. Step away from that Mexican.

FLOYD

You better check yourself white boy.

SHEP

I'm shaking in my boots cup cake, and you know what? You can't be a therapist and a disc jockey at the same time, you're either hip or square you can't have both.

FLOYD

Take it back.

SHEP  
It's the truth.

FLOYD  
No, the great white shit. Take it  
back.

GRADY  
Everyone. Lobby. Now, ahora.

INT. MOTOR INN LOBBY - NIGHT

Shep, Floyd, Grady and Eladio pace back and forth. Pauline  
holds Malone.

GRADY  
Okay, so, this what we're going to  
do. Wait until back up arrives,  
they'll arrest whoever's in the  
trunk, we'll head back home and  
figure this whole thing out.

ELADIO  
(Muttered Spanish)  
*I'm so sorry my love. I hope you  
will accept my contrition. The  
devil shall take my soul tonight,  
but it will forever be yours.*

FLOYD  
What are you saying Mr. Marquez?

SHEP  
And after we return to home sweet  
home?

GRADY  
Lionel's still missing, most likely  
dead, but I'm stuck in two thousand  
fucking four until A; he's hugging  
his momma or B; he gets a proper  
burial --

SHEP  
-- He ain't dead. Simms found him.

GRADY  
Get the fuck out, when?

SHEP  
I guess a little bit ago, said he  
found him in a basement swimming

SHEP  
around in a bunch of beer cans,  
said his face got torn up.

Malone pulls the riddle from her jeans, reads.

GRADY  
You didn't think to tell me?

SHEP  
Haven't had the chance to consider  
much of anything Grady, and if the  
cops are coming where are they?  
They ain't here now and they  
should've been already. I'm  
starting to think us being here is  
more dangerous by the minute.

ELADIO  
Lo siento mi amor, lo siento --

FLOYD  
Mr. Marquez? You know those little  
blow up dinosaurs, the ones you put  
in water? Little capsules?

Eladio nods.

SHEP  
Where's daddy?

GRADY  
Arresting Mann Hertz.

SHEP  
Say that again.

GRADY  
Arresting Mann Hertz. Pulled a raid  
at Snapdragon Heights tonight.

SHEP  
So what then? Ya'll get a neutron  
bomb or fifty cops grow a pair of  
balls over night?

GRADY  
Fifty one, dick.

FLOYD  
See the water has to be warm for  
them to grow, if it's cold the  
capsules don't do a damn thing.

FLOYD  
Same as growing up in an abusive household, same as an abusive marriage. No warmth, no growth.

SHEP  
Hey Floyd, Eladio's got problems, but he'd never touch his wife unless it was out of love.

FLOYD  
You sure about that Lieutenant?

SHEP  
Don't call me that.

FLOYD  
Well if you're not a fire fighter then what are you?

SHEP  
I'm a chef.

GRADY  
I'm a dancer.

SHEP  
You know what? Fuck all ya'll.

FLOYD  
He hired someone to kill her Shep.

SHEP  
Bullshit.

GRADY  
That's a felonious offense Senior.

SHEP  
Bullshit.

FLOYD  
Tell him.

Eladio looks at Shep, it registers. Shep rolls up his sleeves. Grady and Floyd hold him back.

SHEP  
You know what? Where's that money? I'm gonna fucking burn it.

PAULINE

Shep stop.

Shep grabs Malone's bag and dumps out the contents.

GRADY

Shep you're losing your temper.

SHEP

You'd kill your wife over money!

Shep opens the bag and flings it everywhere, bills drift to the ground. Malone doesn't seem fazed, just focuses on the riddle.

MALONE

Beer cans.

Everyone turns.

MALONE (CONTD)

That's what the riddle means.

SHEP

How do you figure?

MALONE

You said the sergeant found Lionel in beer cans. Letter says "I shine when you hold me in your hand, but I do not extinguish." Holy shit. Holy shit. He's going to blow up the recycling plant.

GRADY

Where's Eladio?

EXT. RANDY'S TRUNK - NIGHT

Eladio smashes bloody fist prints into the back of the car, cursing in Spanish, skin hangs off his knuckles.

BOOM -- Eladio flies back, his entire stomach peppered red with sheet metal. Eladio gazes at his soaked hands.

Randy lurches out, steps over Eladio and shoots him in the chest.

A HAMER COUNTY POLICE CAR peels down the lot, Randy aims and a glassy red puncture imbeds in the driver's portion of the windshield, the car veers and smashes into a light post.

INT. MOTOR INN LOBBY - NIGHT

Grady, Shep, Floyd, Pauline and Malone dart to the hallway.

EXT. SNAPDRAGON HEIGHTS PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Levi walks Mann through CORPSES strewn about on parking blocks and gravel. Officers arrest junkies and tweakers. Blue and red flashes wash over police tape throughout the lot. Heroin soaks up gasoline. Everyone shivers.

EXT. SNAPDRAGON SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - NIGHT

Levi walks Mann toward the entrance, Mack trots behind them trying to keep up. Mann looks back at the little dog and the fire raging in the distance, smiles.

MANN

It's a damn shame. Thought Shepherd was going to work for me.

LEVI

He'd never.

MANN

Yeah he would... Oh don't give me that look. It wasn't hard, broke him down and brought him back up. You know he's naming that restaurant after Helen? Said he was leaning toward Pauline's but I know he wants to be on your good side.

LEVI

Quiet.

Levi's phone rings, he reaches for it, Grady's calling.

In that instant Mann shakes free of Levi's grasp, slithers over to Mack and stomps on his back, snapping it. The dog writhes on the ground in a spasm.

Levi drops to his knees, holding Mack.

MANN

Kill my hog, I kill your dog.

Mann wraps his legs around Levi's throat and constricts, coiling around him, saliva squirts from the sides of his gritted teeth.

Levi chokes for a gasp, veins bulge and burst in his eyes, scanning the street, arms flail.

Mann screams, Levi breaks free, Mack's lifeless jaws wrap around Mann's throat.

Levi removes his Maglite, and with both hands brings it down against Mann's forehead like an axe, knocking him out cold.

Levi drags Mann toward the front doors like a caveman.

INT. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - NIGHT

Levi drops Mann in the center of the floor. THE RECEPTIONIST drops her jaw. TWO OFF DUTY OFFICERS bring Mann to his feet. Levi just nods and gets on the phone.

INTERCUT CONVERSATION: Grady runs and protects the others while Levi picks up Mack and gets into his car.

LEVI

Grady where'd you go son?

GRADY

I'm at south of the border. We got three corpses; an officer and two civilians.

Grady strafes and shoots at Randy down the hall, Randy ducks back.

LEVI

Is it our boy?

Grady and the gang make it out into the courtyard, fleeing toward the woods.

GRADY

No, don't have time to talk. Call Simms and tell him the Night Ranger's gonna blow up the recycling plant. I got three people I'm trying to protect here, one of which is your eldest son. Bring the whole band wagon.

Levi drops Mack's body onto the front seat and kisses his skull ring.

EXT. BURNING HOUSE - NIGHT

Simms wraps a blanket around a SOOT COVERED GIRL, 8, as the fire rages the house.

Asbestos sizzles and bubbles over treated wood. Vinyl siding melts like chocolate, imploding on itself. Shingles slough off the roof and onto the mulch.

Sirens wail in the distance, muffling the screams from inside.

SIMMS

Cover her fucking ears!

Simms loses his shit, jumping up and down with little balled fists, stomping on the ground.

INT. LEVI'S CRUISER - NIGHT - TEARING ASS

Levi takes out his badge and puts it on Mack's rib cage, patting him on the head and smiling.

LEVI

More of a cop than I am, filthy  
mutt.

Red and blue flashes paint the trees on the highway as BACK UP follows him. Levi pushes the pedal all the way down as he gets on the horn.

EXT. FIRE TRUCK - NIGHT - DRIVING

Simms brings the rim of another coffee to his lips and instead throws it out the window, patting his heart. His phone rings.

SIMMS

Sheriff, how was the raid?

LEVI

(Filtered v.o.)

Expectable. Night Ranger's gonna  
blow up the recycling plant.

Simms drops his phone and pulls a u turn, the fire truck damn near careens.

INT. LEVI'S CRUISER - NIGHT - TEARING ASS

Levi slides his phone into his pocket, glancing at Mack.

LEVI  
Message recieved.

EXT. WOODLINE - NIGHT

Grady, Shep, Pauline, Floyd and Malone all run for their lives.

Grady glances back, no Randy in sight.

Headlights lap over the trees as they approach the forest.

They peer over their shoulders.

EXT. RANDY'S MUSTANG - NIGHT - DRIVING

Randy's Mustang roars, ramping off of the curb and tearing up clods of grass and dead foilage, speeding toward the gang as they sprint toward the woods.

Grady gets a clear shot.

INT. RANDY'S MUSTANG - NIGHT - DRIVING

GRHICKK -- Randy's windshield splinters into televsion static. Randy rolls down the window, pokes his head out.

They disappear behind the trees.

Randy flicks on his high beams and hits the breaks, stopping a mere inch from the treeline.

EXT. WOODLINE - NIGHT

Randy steadies his rifle at their silhouettes strobing off of trees with his high beams.

INT. WOODS - NIGHT - RUNNING

BRRRGHKK -- Bark from a passing tree explodes next to Floyd.

Next to Shep.

Next to Pauline.

Bark rips across Malone's shoulder. She yelps and falls, her momentum sends her shooting across roots and rocks, blood bubbles from a thick laceration. Floyd picks her up.

MALONE

Had worse.

FLOYD

I knew you were gonna say that.

SHEP

Hope ya'll aren't claustrophobic.

Shep motions to a cave.

EXT. CAVE - NIGHT

A bullet pings against rock, shrapnel tears into Floyd's calf. He grunts, takes the pain. Shep picks him up. Floyd hops, leaning against Shep's shoulder.

PAULINE

Everybody here a smoker?

GRADY

Not me.

SHEP

Keep close boy scout.

They double check their lighters.

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

They flick their lighters and the sound echoes for miles. There's just enough light to exchange glances with the whites of their eyes, but the enormity of the room is apparent.

PAULINE

Alright so ya'll go left and we'll go right. Count your steps and don't go too far unless you got a eulogy in your pocket.

They flick their lighters, four small orbs of orange diverge in twos and dissolve into darkness.

EXT. CAVE - NIGHT

Randy pulls a FORD EMBLEM ZIPPO from his pocket and snaps the flint, testing the flame in the wind.

INT. CAVE OPENING - NIGHT

Randy's head crowns like a new born baby as he forces himself out, falling to the dank floor.

Water drips off a stalagmite onto his crusty face, dampening dried puss, sores open, he winces.

INT. CAVE/KNOOK - NIGHT

Malone and Floyd tuck into a corner fifty yards from the opening, hand over mouth, watching Randy gaze at the enormous golden brown dwelling.

He passes them. They tuck their heads. Malone peers to see him continue on and tucks her head again.

CLLCLLLINK -- Randy cocks and presses the barrel into Malone's temple. CLICK, CLICK, CLICK.

INT. SMALL POOL/STALAGMITES - NIGHT

Pauline and Shep tremble, submerged in water from the waist down. Pauline gives Shep a look as he fumbles with a medium sized rock.

PAULINE  
Shep, where's Grady?

INT. CAVE/KNOOK - NIGHT

Grady inches up behind Randy as Randy drops the rifle and pulls out a BUCK KNIFE.

Randy swivels and buries it into Grady's abdomen, handle deep, Grady yelps.

Randy grabs Grady's Glock.

INT. SMALL POOL/STALAGMITES - NIGHT

Shep spots the bottom of a stalagmite hanging by a thread and snaps it off.

INT. CAVE/KNOOK - NIGHT

Floyd leaps and puts Randy in a head lock. Randy picks up a rock and breaks Floyd's nose. Malone throws herself on top of Floyd and notices a faint light twenty feet behind Randy.

GROUND - SAME

Pauline's lighter illuminates the medium sized rock and Shep's Timberland boots, patting as he gets his footing. His stalagmite club resting behind the rock. He rears back.

SHEP

Four!

CAVE - SAME

Randy turns, SPLURCH -- the rock tears into his forehead. Out, fucking, cold.

Malone and Floyd open their eyes to find Shep and Pauline glowing with the light of Randy's lighter. Shep slings the makeshift golf club over his shoulder.

SHEP

Evening love birds.

Grady moans. Shep shines his lighter over the knife and blood loss.

SHEP (CONTD)

Oh no, oh fuck no. Come on little brother, we gotta get you somewhere.

LEVI

(o.c.)

Grady? Shepherd?

SHEP

Down here pop. Grady's got a knife in his belly but he's going to be tip top for service come Friday. Ain't that right?

Grady nods, Shep turns away to cry as he carries him.

Levi pushes through the opening, Maglites beam in from outside, washing over rocks and water and Randy as he gets up behind them, raising Grady's Glock.

Levi catches it in a glance and leaps in front of the gang, BAM -- Levi takes one in the shoulder. BAM -- Randy's right hand explodes. He cowers, screaming.

GRADY  
(Fading)  
About time you carried a gun.

EXT. MOTOR INN PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Shep holds Pauline as Levi and Grady are raised on stretchers. Floyd and Malone look to them and nod "thank you" before being driven away.

Shep turns, watches Eladio zipped into a body bag. Pauline kisses Shep on the cheek.

Shep watches Grady slide into the ambulance and slowly lets go of his hand.

LEVI  
Shepherd, come here.

SHEP  
Don't you worry about Grady, he's recieved many a black eye from me over the years. Toughened him up real good.

AN EMT slides Levi into the ambulance.

LEVI  
Would you stop please? Who says I want to live anyway?

EMT  
You've lost a lot of blood sheriff.

LEVI  
You're gonna be missing a lot of teeth if you don't let me talk to my son.

SHEP  
Don't listen to him.

LEVI

I have a confession to make; when you busted your leg up real bad over on Hansen Hill. I wasn't out on a call, I was drinking at the Sneaky Tiki. I was afraid. Afraid of the way I felt. Afraid to come see you and feel for you. I wanted to stay mad. Truth be told; It ain't your fault your momma died, never was. God took her away from me and I suppose I'll find out why when I see him. I love you Shep. I never said that to you and I'm sorry.

Shep's eyes well, he glances at Levi's PISTOL.

SHEP

What's that a damn six shooter? Looks like the man with no name's gun.

LEVI

There's a tape in my car you need to listen to.

Levi and Shep shake hands. EMTS shut the door.

PAULINE

We can take my car to the hospital if you want.

SHEP

I'm taking Samantha, and I ain't going to the hospital.

PAULINE

Why not?

Shep flicks his lighter, waves the flame back and forth, blows it out and winks.

EXT. SHOPPING CENTER - NIGHT

SNAPDRAGON COUNTY CITIZENS gather before the ball drop as their home burns to the ground around them.

Over half of county proper smolders or reaches the peak of a full fledged inferno.

CHILDREN make shapes with sparklers, unable to fully grasp the gravity of the situation.

MOTHERS and FATHERS cry.

EXT. BURNING PAWN SHOP - NIGHT

CRIMINALS pour out with stolen radios and television sets.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

CROW BARS obliterate car windows.

A FIST FIGHT reaches its bloody peak beside a newspaper bin, the newspaper cover reads; *who will win restaurant week?*

EXT. SNAPDRAGON RECYCLING PLANT - NIGHT

Simms evacuates PLANT EMPLOYEES in single frantic lines.

Smoke drifts through trees, billowing across the lot. Plant employees pull collars and scarves over mouths.

Shep tears into the parking lot. Jumps out, head to toe in uniform. Simms spots him, hurries over.

SHEP

Bomb squad?

SIMMS

They're a half hour away, we got five minutes. Remaining employees are almost out, all but Joyce.

SHEP

Does she know Gary's alive?

SIMMS

Heading in now to tell her.

SHEP

With all do respect sergeant, keep herding the cattle.

INT. SHOPPING CENTER - NIGHT

A FLANNELED TOWNSMAN works the pulley, the ball descends the high striker tower. Snapdragon county counts down.

SNAPDRAGON COUNTY CITIZENS

One.

INT. RECYCLING PLANT/FIBER BALING ROOM - NIGHT

Shep storms through a maze of crushed cardboard and paper, baled into gray rectangular blocks with sporadic patches of green and blue, stacked up to the ceiling.

SNAPDRAGON COUNTY CITIZENS

(v.o.)

Two.

SHEP

Joyce! We found Lionel!

Shep grunts, shouldering a bale stack, creating a domino effect, stacks hit the floor in small muffled explosions. The dust settles, Shep spots the baling office adjacent to the hallway leading to the smelting warehouse, light on.

INT. GRADY AND LEVI'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Pauline sits between Grady and Levi, holding their hands, fixated on the red orange fiasco outside the window in the distance. Heart monitors BEEP steadily.

SNAPDRAGON COUNTY CITIZENS

(v.o.)

Three.

INT. HOSPITAL CHECKOUT - NIGHT

Floyd fills out paperwork with his arm over a crutch, gauze wraps around his calf. Malone walks up behind him, her arm in a sling, she kisses him on the cheek.

SNAPDRAGON COUNTY CITIZENS

(v.o.)

Four.

EXT. EMERGENCY ENTRANCE - NIGHT

A PARAMEDIC pumps air into Randy's pale blue mouth. NURSES rush out and speed him through sliding doors.

SNAPDRAGON COUNTY CITIZENS

(v.o.)

Five.

INT. LIONEL'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Lionel weeps behind a bandaged face, tears and blood sop into gauze. Shock ensues, he gyrates, gripping the bed rail, rattling beneath myriad plastic tubes.

SNAPDRAGON COUNTY CITIZENS

(v.o.)

Six.

INT. RECYCLING PLANT/BALING OFFICE - NIGHT

Shep kicks open the door. No one inside.

INT. SMELTING HALLWAY - NIGHT

Shep sprints, his leg pains him, he punches it, he pulls his visor over his face.

SNAPDRAGON COUNTY CITIZENS

(v.o.)

Seven.

INT. SMELTING WAREHOUSE/POTLINES - NIGHT

Shep limps on, passing circular vats pouring molten aluminum into square pots of water lining the wall. Steam balloons and dissipates around him, giving the illusion of a sort of steam punk volcano.

SNAPDRAGON COUNTY CITIZENS

(v.o.)

Eight.

SHEP

Joyce! Where are you darling!

Shep reaches the end of the walkway, kicking another door.

Joyce lays sprawled with her hand around an empty bottle of Parrot Bay. Scattered pills rest at the mouth of a prescription bottle.

SNAPDRAGON COUNTY CITIZENS

(v.o.)

Nine.

Shep cradles Joyce toward the exit.

EXT. SHOPPING CENTER - NIGHT

The disco ball hits bottom, deafening silence.

SNAPDRAGON COUNTY CITIZENS

Ten.

INT. SMELTING WAREHOUSE/POTLINES - NIGHT

BOOOOOOOOOOM -- Shep hits the floor --

Liquid aluminum splashes, pooling toward Joyce's head, Shep throws her over his shoulder --

Aluminum sloshes over Shep's boot, melting it, encasing his foot --

Shep screams into a sprint, both legs limping. Silver explosions flower behind him.

INT. FIBER BALING ROOM - NIGHT - RUNNING

Shep chokes, burning cardboard drifts upward in flickering wafer thin coals --

Shep slips on melting plastic, braces himself, his hand soaks up a liquid Pepsi label, drying against his palm --

Light fixtures shatter and fall, Shep elbows one out of his way, the casing tears at his sleeve, blood sizzles with the heat --

Joyce's hair melts, Shep sprints with two limps.

INT. RECYCLING PLANT/MAIN OFFICE - NIGHT

Debris blocks the exit, Simms plows away at it from the outside --

Shep drops Joyce and joins Simms, pushing, shoving, punching, his bunker gear roars in flames, his visor cracks, melts onto his chin --

Shep picks up Joyce and aims her toward the self made hole, literally throwing her through it to the front doors --

Rubber melts off of copper wires, jutting from the electricity pipes on the ceiling, a surge shoots toward an overturned water dispenser.

EXT. RECYCLING PLANT - NIGHT

Simms drags Joyce to the parking lot --

SHRRRGKKBOOOM -- A lightning bolt tears through the entrance, Shep ragdolls at the crest, shooting through the parking lot like a human bullet --

Shep somersaults into a mulch bed, shattering his knee in the process --

Shep gazes, smoke wafts over stars, flames lick the moon. His eyes flutter, roll back, darkness.

INT. STATE PRISON/VISITING AREA - DAY

Dee Dee sits across from Randy, silent, shaking, phone rocking between his shoulder and ear. Randy looks around.

RANDY

Stop shaking.

DEE DEE

You're asking a lot.

RANDY

Got some cash in my dresser, you keep half. You can have my car too.

DEE DEE

What time?

RANDY

Three o'clock sharp. Be waiting on the gravel road by the old Shell sign. Behind the patch of woods at mile marker one hundred. Toss the bottle at two thirty.

Dee Dee nods, stands up. Randy pounds on the glass. Dee Dee sits back down.

RANDY

Thank you Dee Dee.

INT. PHYSICAL THERAPY OFFICE - DAY

A pair of crutches lay across Shep's lap, Pauline sits on the edge of her desk holding his hand with a huge proud smile on her face. Her PhD hangs on the wall behind them.

PAULINE

What are you thinking about?

SHEP

Never thought you'd fix me twice.  
What do you keep checking the time  
for?

PAULINE

Follow me.

Pauline helps Shep out of the chair.

EXT. PHYSICAL THERAPY OFFICE - DAY

There stands Grady leaning against Samantha, no longer gray and beaten with rust, but slathered in royal blue paint. Thick black racing slicks stretch over magnum 500 wheels. A solid white stripe runs from bumper to bumper. Shep cups his mouth, barely holding it together.

SHEP

You messing with me sheriff?

GRADY

I shit you not big brother.

SHEP

Is it Samantha?

GRADY

Uh huh, new and improved.

Shep crutches around it.

PAULINE

Aren't you going to get in?

INT. SAMANTHA - DAY

Shep eases onto the driver's seat. An urn sits beside two passports and a brochure for Guadalajara Mexico. Shep weeps. Pauline and Grady get in.

GRADY

I figure before you guys head south  
we could stop and visit mom and  
dad.

PAULINE  
You okay honey?

Shep nods and continues to cry.

SHEP  
I'm so happy right now I can't even move.

REBEL ROUSIN' RADIO  
(Filtered v.o.)  
*Be sure to drop off donations for the "Back on the Map Foundation" at the Rebel Rousin' studio or City hall, temporarily located on Chestnut Drive. All proceeds shall go to grieving families and or building supplies to literally put this county back on the map.*

INT. FLOYD'S NEW STUDIO - DAY

Malone pulls a microphone to the mouth of her acoustic guitar. She cracks her knuckles.

REBEL ROUSIN' RADIO  
(Filtered v.o.)  
*This next track is called "Carolina Hell Fire," a haunting yet catchy country number by Malone Marquez, written specifically for any losses suffered by last year's devastating event and a siren song for any of us, anywhere, going through hard times.*

Floyd removes his shades and gives her the nod.

FLOYD  
We're rolling.

Floyd presses the "on air" button. Malone takes a cavernous breath and plays flawlessly, not missing a beat. It's fucking beautiful.

EXT. SNAPDRAGON COUNTY PROPER - DAY

The sun beams down on black gutted buildings and CONSTRUCTION WORKERS as they hammer away, erecting wood over the now sweeping desolate landscape.

A BULLDOZER pushes rubble into big gray mounds.

INT. HOLLYWOOD CEMETERY - DAY

Shep putts a golf ball into the hole of a putting green that now rests between the headstones of: "Helen Marie McDowell" and "Levi Shepherd McDowell."

Grady puts his arm around Pauline and nods "thank you" before heading back to his cruiser.

INT. JOYCE'S HOUSE - DAY

Lionel removes an envelope from the mail box. He opens, finds a check for thirty thousand dollars from the "back on the map foundation."

A tear seeps over his jagged eye lid. Although his face is clearly scarred, the skin grafts look amazing. Joyce walks up beside him, reads the check.

Mark pretends to be an airplane on the front yard.

INT. SAMANTHA - DAY - DRIVING

Pauline and Shepherd speed down 95 South, windows down, hair snapping at the wind. Shep turns to Pauline, her eyes locked on the horizon, she feels his look and smiles. Shep simply watches her drive, there's hope in his eyes.

ANGLE ON PRISONERS, gathering road side trash.

EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

Mann fills a bag in slow defeated strides, wincing at the sunlight.

Randy watches him a few yards back, switching his attention to a motor oil bottle on top of a fast food wrapper, an incision made on one side.

Randy pulls open the slit revealing a switch blade. He tucks it, easing toward the front of the line, studying the field beside him.

INT. FLOYD'S NEW STUDIO - DAY

Malone holds the final note of the song, it reverberates through the room. She squeals with excitement, jumping up and down. A car horn BLARES outside.

MALONE

Band's here.

Floyd flips through an itinerary.

FLOYD

Okay, first stop Charleston.  
Tomorrow's Memphis. I ain't trying  
to be the designated driver the  
whole time so let's try and keep  
the black outs to a minimum.

Floyd drops his AA coin in the trash. Malone pinches his  
ass, heads outside. Floyd stares at his degree on the wall.

EXT. ROAD SIDE - DAY

Randy lowers the blade from his sleeve. Mann slows.

Randy puts his arm over Mann's shoulder, as if to have  
conversation. Mann gives him a look.

Randy flips the blade, glides it across Mann's throat. Mann  
drops, a red rainbow sprays out onto the asphalt.

A series of "What the fucks" and "Oh shits" echoe behind  
Randy as he takes off across the field.

EXT. FIELD/WOODLINE - DAY

Randy looks back. A GERMAN SHEPHERD tears toward him, TWO  
OFFICERS on the dog's heel.

Randy presses his back to a tree.

The German Shepherd swivels around the tree, Randy shoves  
the blade into its neck, the dog yelps and rolls.

EXT. CREEK BED - DAY

Randy leaps and snares his leg on a root, plummeting into  
the water.

Officer one grabs Randy's foot. Randy kicks him in the face  
and pulls himself onto land.

Officer two jumps on top of Randy. Randy wriggles, spots his  
Mustang through the trees. Randy shatters Officer two's nose  
with the back of his head.

EXT. GRAVEL ROAD - DAY

Randy soars through the open driver's side window, shooting across Dee Dee's lap.

Dee Dee peels like an orange, gravel shoots up thirty feet in the air.

INT. MOTEL SHOWER - DAY

Randy cries, overjoyed, wolfing down a cheese burger.

INT. MOTEL BEDROOM - DAY

Randy peers through the window blinds, it's quiet.

He moves to the edge of the bed, grabbing a bottle of Lubriderm from the night stand and applying it to horrible burn scars on his legs.

After a thick lathering of lotion, he crushes empty beer cans and shoves them inside the heels of his boots.

EXT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Randy speed walks toward bustling traffic. His clothing is puffy with multiple layers, as if he's wearing an additional outfit underneath.

He unbuttons his shirt and rips it off..

Screams fill the sidewalk..

He trips as he takes off his pants....

He pulls a campaign hat from inside his waist band and jogs, frantically breathing inside his forest ranger suit.

He closes his eyes and sprints into traffic.

THE END.