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Near the Lewis & Clark Trail

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NEAR THE LEWIS & CLARK TRAIL

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in

The Department of English

by
Chad Husted
B.A. Humboldt State University, 1991
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ABSTRACT

Near the Lewis & Clark Trail is a creative writing thesis that contains two distinct parts. Part one is a short story cycle: a collection of interlinked narratives that together, tell a larger, cohesive story. Many different points of view, narrative techniques, and non-linear time sequences are used in order to provide a pastiche of different voices, points in time, and perspectives, that ultimately form an overall narrative structure. In addition to the stories, there are several fictional documents that are used to separate the work at critical times, and to provide subtext. In between the stories are: a letter to a county judge, a fake police report, and a fictional newspaper article. Because these documents are meant to seem real, they are in different fonts, which offset them from the rest of the text, and are consistent with the fonts used in real life for these documents. The second part of the thesis is an original screenplay titled: After The Gold Rush. This is an adaptation of the first short story in part one, and also incorporates several plot points from the story cycle. The screenplay can be looked at as a singular work, or an exercise in adaptation.

PART ONE:

MAGIC KINGDOM

A SHORT STORY CYCLE

Open Spaces

I got disoriented on the prairie. Most of the roads were gravel and only a few had signs. Nobody up there needed them. Tourists usually stuck to the interstate, on their way up to Grangeville, or down to the Lewiston Valley. Who knew where they headed after that. It was a big part of the country, lots of space under the sky, and it seemed like people were always headed somewhere else. I'd been like when I was younger...a few months in Vegas, then to Seattle, up to Alaska, and then back down to California. I'd traveled the west like an old pioneer and that was the place I'd stopped—The Camas Prairie, in Idaho. The rolling hills looked the same in every direction, or at least, they looked the same to me.

“Go back to the Suburbs,” my father-in-law would say, “there’s plenty of stucco houses down there for you to navigate by. Up here we use a couple new fangled things like, oh, I don’t know...north, south, east, and west! You ever heard of those California?”

Most people called me Cal, but my father-in-law, he called me California, and sometimes I had to answer for the sins of an entire state. During that time, though, he was gentle, almost fatherly, and would just sigh and take one of his big, meaty hands and squeeze my shoulder. We knew that words were flimsy and avoided them when things mattered. He talked a lot more after his wife passed away, but that was just to fill

in the spaces she'd left behind. It had been almost two years since and none of us had expected another funeral so soon.

Henry and I had driven out to one of his plots near Big Canyon. He thought the bluegrass might be ready to cut, and stopped by to see if I wanted to drive out there and check. He'd been a champ through the whole ordeal. I told him that the best thing I could do was to keep busy and let Jil work through her own grief. She wouldn't talk about it anyway, just sat around and stared at old pictures of the three of us. The day before I'd come home from work and she'd picked off the tips of her fingernails and lined them in two neat rows on the coffee table.

"Jesus honey!" I said. "Are you okay?"

She looked up with disgust as her eyes came into focus.

"Of course I'm not okay. Just go... go do something. I want to be alone," she said and went back to staring at her fingernails.

Henry was my brother-in-law, and during this time he stopped in almost every day and took me on some farm errand or another. He was one of the only people I could tolerate being around and that was because he didn't try to say too much. We talked about farming and sports, but he never asked if I was okay or if there was anything he could do, and that's the way I wanted it. The sympathy of that town was crushing me; people bringing food by, helping out with chores, not bringing their children with when they came to the house—it was too much.

We got out to the field after driving miles on a skinny dirt road that curved like a spine over hills covered with wheat, bluegrass, and bright yellow canola fields. Behind the hundred-acre parcel of bluegrass, which

wasn't blue at all, but a deep dull green, was Big Canyon. Suddenly, everything fell in on itself and there was an immense canyon with rock walls that broke in smooth, angular slices that carved through the landscape for miles before opening up at the Clearwater River.

We parked and Henry jumped out immediately and wandered into the bluegrass field. Then he pulled one of the heads off, broke some seeds loose, and cradled them in the palm of his hand. I walked over slowly, taking in the view, and by the time I got there he was chewing on the seeds and I could tell he was deep in thought. Hank took farming real serious. He studied new techniques, played the market with his surplus grain, and was always looking for new ways to improve their yield. He threw the left over seeds down and spat.

"It's too hot," he said. "We're gonna have to cut at night or else some of the heads will shatter and we'll lose a decent amount of seed."

Henry said these things for my benefit. I'd grown up in Los Angeles and didn't know shit about farming so he always told me why they did things a certain way.

"You wanna start cutting tonight?" I asked, looking for something to keep me from going home before ten-thirty, when I had to get ready for my real job at the Juvenile Detention Center down in Lewiston.

"You wanna put in a couple hours out here with me before you head down to the valley?" he asked, knowing I'd say *hell* yes. Hank could do most everything himself but often pretended to need my help.

We decided to get started right away. He called his wife Kathy on the cell-phone and asked her to tell Jil—which was a relief, because then I didn't have to. We drove into town, got the swather, and I flagged in the

truck, driving out front with a radio, so I could warn Hank if any cars were coming. He plodded along behind, barely doing ten miles an hour.

The swather was used for cutting grass crops and seemed alive when it moved. The cab was raised a good four feet above the axle and resembled the shell of some giant insect. Out front was a ten foot steel rod that sat horizontal to the ground and was covered with thousands of six inch steel flanges. It looked like a giant row of teeth.

I pulled ahead once we got off the main road and parked on a rise so I could tune into the college radio station in Moscow while Hank caught up. The sun was starting to sink and there was a yellow glow on most everything and it seemed to illuminate an old decaying barn in the distance. They were everywhere, barns from the turn of the century that were never torn down and had been cooked by the sun into a grayish brown color and crumbled in on them selves. Jil and I used to take pictures of all the old relics of the prairie: half buried tractors, burned out grain silos, and those beautiful dead barns. There was so much space up there that people just left things where they stood and moved on.

We got back to the field after what seemed like hours. I parked the truck, climbed into the swather, and we started cutting right off. We sat and stared out the oversized front windshield and listened to the Mariners game on the radio. I watched the bluegrass disappear as we rolled over it, piled in neat rows behind us.

I went home at ten-thirty to get ready for work, and Jil was lying fetal on the couch in front of the TV. There were several empty beer bottles on the coffee table, and she seemed out. I stood there in the half-light of the doorway and stared at her for some time. She looked so

beautiful to me, her matted auburn hair hanging over part of her face and wrinkled dress climbing up her smooth pale thighs. It was almost too much to take.

I bent down to kiss her forehead and it wasn't soft but clenched like a fist. I wanted to touch her, to help her but I couldn't and that was the worst part of all, but still...I wanted to do something so I scooped her up in my arms and carried her towards the bedroom. As I tried to gently lay her in bed, I felt my back start to go out and dropped her. She bounced three or four times and rolled over without waking. I dragged myself to the shower in defeat and stood under the scalding hot massage stream until the water was luke warm.

The drive down was always the worst part because I had to pass by the place, and always looked to see if the skid marks were still there. After that it was okay, I'd find something on the radio and cruise. It was about sixty miles to Lewiston, which sat in a deep valley where the Clearwater and Snake Rivers came together and headed west towards Portland.

We'd lived in the valley until the baby came, but then moved to Nez Perce in order to be close to Jil's family. During the flood season, I used to walk down to the river every morning after work and watch things float past. Once I saw the roof of a house drift by. Another time, I saw a full-sized Appaloosa, kept up by a bloated stomach while the rest sagged in the water like it wanted to sink. Most of the time it was just the bits and pieces of people's lives and I couldn't tell what things had been before the river turned them into debris.

I got to work ten minutes early, and instead of going in I waited around the corner until the swing shift people drove off. That way I didn't have to hear any gossip or make small talk with people I didn't like. It looked like an office building, except for the razor wire on the fences and the abundance of surveillance cameras. I waved at one of them and the front door opened magically and let me into the lobby. The next weighed five hundred pounds, and the lock sounded like a bone breaking as it popped open.

My partner Loretta was sitting in the control room, reading the log book while she drank a cup of coffee. She was about fifty and had gray brown hair that hung just below shoulders that were always covered by the same Seattle Seahawks jacket. I liked working with some of the older women, especially ones with children of their own. They didn't have anything to prove and could calm some of the toughest kids just by going maternal.

"Any meds to give out?" I asked.

"Let's see," she said, leafing through the medication book to make sure everyone had been properly drugged.

"Idiots!" she said with disgust. "They forgot to give Fred his Haldol."

There were two-way microphones in each room so we could listen in, or talk to kids if we needed to without entering their rooms. I turned on the sound in Fred's cell and he was babbling like a lunatic.

"I'm an ancient Ninja warrior," he mumbled to himself in a voice I didn't recognize, "skilled in the art of shadows."

"Great," I said, "Fred's a Ninja again. We'd better give him something before he tries to walk through the walls."

Before I finished my sentence, she handed me the sheet for Fred to sign, and dug out the appropriate bottle from the medication locker. I took the pill, pink and harmless looking, put it in a paper cup, and walked over to the observation room.

I looked through the window and Fred was in the corner. He sat in the lotus position whispering to him self. Loretta turned on the light in his room and he looked up at me with a blankness that was so complete, I wondered if they hadn't given him medications already and someone forgot to write it down. It happened sometimes.

"Fred..." I opened the door and leaned in. "How ya doing buddy? I heard you talking and thought I'd check in and see what was up. You okay?"

It took Fred about fifteen seconds to come back to the world.

"Oh, hey, yeah...um...they never gave me my meds," he said. "I feel like I'm in a video game."

"Yeah, I know. Why don't you come on over here and we'll take care of that right now."

He groaned like an old man when he got up and his bare feet slapped the floor as he wandered over, scratching his crotch absently. I gave him the cup and he took his pill. Then he took a long drink from the water fountain that was built into his stainless steel sink/toilet unit, opening his mouth wide afterwards and moving his tongue around so I could make sure he'd actually swallowed it. I wondered how many pills this kid had already taken in his life.

I handed him the pen and paper so he could sign. When I first started working there, I took a defensive step back whenever I put a pen in someone's hand, but I'd been slipping for a while.

"Okay Fred, see if you can get some sleep man," I said and locked the door between us. I looked over my shoulder as I walked away and his head was pressed up against the glass. It stretched and distorted as I moved down the hall, and from the end of the corridor I could just see a sliver of his face framed in glass. It reminded me of the joker from a deck of cards.

After the first hour of paperwork and security checks, our duties were mostly janitorial unless some kid got arrested before our shift ended. Most nights were quiet, but once in a while they'd bring in a couple of stoners, a B&E, or maybe a drunk Indian kid who'd been letting off some steam. There were lots of varieties of fucked-up kids, lots of stories about drugs, bad parents, molestation—you name it. The intake was always the worst part. I had to watch them shower, check for contraband and abuse, make sure they put a lice killing agent on their heads and crotches, and then watch while they stood there, naked and wet, for three minutes while the Lice-All did its job.

I walked around with a flashlight and looked in all rooms. There were ten juveniles in lock-up that night, three girls and seven boys. I got a real weird feeling when I looked in on them. I wondered if their parents could sleep knowing that their babies were locked-up, but the reality of the situation was that most of them didn't seem to give a shit. I can't explain what it did to me when I closed the door on a kid and they stared through three inches of shatterproof glass in disbelief. Some nights I'd feel something heavy follow as I turned my back and walked past the rest of the faces behind the rest of the five hundred pound doors.

I tended to dwell on things. Graveyard shifts could do that and I was happy to be distracted by anything but my own life. I decided to

keep busy by doing a bunch of extra cleaning, so I got the floors all mopped and then moved on to the kitchen. Something happened while I was scrubbing the stainless steel counters. I mean, one minute I was working away, singing along to the radio, and I noticed that I couldn't seem to get things clean enough. No matter what I did there seemed to be this slight film on everything I looked at, and I couldn't leave it alone. I scrubbed everything twice and it was still there, so I started all over, cursing at the table as I went. Then I did it all again...again...and again.

I woke up with my head between my knees and, at first; I didn't know where I was. I sat under a table and my whole body ached. I had no idea how much time has passed, but as I looked around I realized that Loretta stood about ten feet away and watched me cautiously.

"Loretta," I groaned. "What's up?"

She had a tear running down her cheek, and looked like she was trying to decide whether to come over and hug me, or run for her life.

"Are you okay Cal?" she asked. "I mean, I heard all this yelling and when I came to see what was happening I found you sitting down there and you were shaking and saying all of these terrible things. You want me to call someone so you can go home? I wish you'd just go home and take some time off. Maybe this is too much for you right now."

She sounded truly worried and it made me feel even worse, like an invalid.

I slowly stood up. My clothes were soaked with sweat. The kitchen was as clean as it had ever been.

"I'm okay," I said, "Just worn out. You know, it's hard to sleep these days and I been doing a lot of farm work on the side. Please...I need to work. Don't make a big deal out of this Loretta."

She nodded in sympathy but it didn't make things any better. She led me to the couch in rec. room, told me to lie down, and promised to wake me up if anything happened.

Naturally, something happened.

Loretta shook me awake and said that the police were on their way over with a wild one. They were coming straight from the hospital where he got into it with the cops and a couple of orderlies as he'd tried to escape.

Loretta locked herself in the control room and let me out into the sally port, which was a small parking area surrounded by razor wire. A squad car pulled up, and as I unlocked the gate, I realized that things were not good because I couldn't see a head in the back seat and that meant one thing: someone was hog-tied. This happened once or twice a month and it was hard to have a smooth intake if the kid had already gone a couple rounds with the cops.

Officer Anderson got out of the car first. He was huge, had a big bald, head that was covered with freckles, and always seemed happy with the way things were going. He could be wrestling some punk into the back seat of his car, and he'd still seem somewhat jolly—like it was nothing personal at all.

The other guy's name was Blake. He sat in the passenger side talking to the kid in back and I could tell by his body language that he was baiting whoever it was. Blake had a textbook case of 'little man's

syndrome'. He pulled his five two frame out of the car with quick, jerky motions and came over to Anderson and me.

"Fucking little bastard," he said. "He got lucky."

I noticed that he had a shiner starting to develop under his left eye.

"Looks like he snuck one in, huh Blake?" I couldn't resist these kinds of comments.

He gave me his menacing cop stare.

"You're gonna think that's real funny when you need my help and I'm a few seconds too late."

"I'll keep that in mind the next time I'm wrestling around with a ten year old," I said and shifted my attention to Anderson. "Who's in the back seat Mike?"

"Your buddy Pat," he said and didn't bother with the last name because we all knew Pat. "They found him down in California. They got him at Disneyland."

Pat was my favorite. He was violent, didn't listened to anyone, but there was something about him. Pat had this look most of the time—like nothing in this world could touch him. He'd run away from foster care months earlier, and I'd been wondering about him. I'd missed him.

I got the handcuff keys from Anderson, which really pissed Blake off, opened the back door of the police car and there was Pat; his arms and legs were shackled. He was on his stomach with his legs pulled behind by a chain that was fastened to his handcuffs, and I had this flash of recognition: only babies lay like that. For a second I put my hand on Pat's head to keep balance.

He looked up at me, and there was a hospital mask over his face, which meant he'd been spitting at people. I pulled the mask off and he had this huge grin.

"What's up Dog?" he said in his best approximation of gangster talk.

"You okay Patrick?" I asked.

"Shit," he said. "They're punks."

"All right Pat," I said. "Let's get down to business. I want to take the legs cuffs off and let you walk in here like a man, but you gotta be cool. Besides, it'll really piss Blake off if you cooperate."

He smiled and winked at me. I took the shackles off and helped him squirm up from his belly and out of the car. There was blood all over his shirt and a blood soaked bandage on his left forearm. I held him loosely at the right elbow and he stared at Blake as we walked towards the door, smiling. Anderson smoked a cigarette and looked at the moon. It was just a job to him. He was as neutral as a glass of water.

I took Pat to the intake corridor, which was closed off from the rest of the compound and had a small holding cell, bathroom/shower area, equipment room, and a computer to do all the paperwork. Anderson and Blake followed us in and stowed their guns in a locker while I placed Pat in the holding cell.

"Jesus Cal!" Anderson said. "You left a fucking pair of scissors on the counter." He picked them up and waved them at me. "You gotta be more careful."

He handed the scissors over and I put them in the back pocket of my jeans.

"Oh yeah. Thanks Mike," I said and changed the subject. "What happened to Pat's hand?"

"He punched out a window trying to escape from the hospital. The little bastard's motivated...I'll give him that." Blake said and gave me another dirty look. "I'm going out to smoke, Mike, let me know when amateur hour's over and we can get outta this dump."

Pat was up against the window of the holding cell watching us. He paid attention to everything; which keys opened which doors, what shift people worked, and who didn't get along. He was always looking for something he could use.

Anderson gave me all the paper work: the warrant, hospital clearance, and summary of new charges—which were three pages long. It took about fifteen minutes and then and I opened the gate for them to leave. I waved to Blake and smiled. He gave me the finger as they drove off.

I went back inside and waved to the camera so Loretta knew that everything was fine. As I waved, I took the scissors out of my pocket and set them on the other side of the computer monitor so the camera wouldn't see them.

"You got it covered?" she asked over the intercom.

"Yeah, it's just Pat," I said trying to sound casual. "Go ahead and get some chores done if you want."

I felt like everything was far away, like when you look through the wrong end of a telescope. It didn't really matter if she was watching...she wouldn't be able to do anything about it.

I took the keys off my belt and opened the door to the shower and equipment room—got the computer set up like it was business as usual.

Then I opened the door to the holding cell and Pat was lying on his back with an arm over his face.

"Get out here!" I snapped, and he swiveled around, eyes narrowed, and his mouth tightened. He got up and walked out of the cell, gave me an appraising look but said nothing. I set the keys next to the pair of scissors and pulled my plastic chair closer, so he was within arms reach. I leaned back and gave him a disgusted look.

"You're a piece of shit."

I said this without emotion.

"I'm sick of trying to help you—you're hopeless."

Pat leaned forward and I could see the hair on his cropped head, stand up a little. He started looking real cold and I could tell he was thinking about going after me. His eyes darted up and down the corridor and then caught sight of the keys on the counter. He didn't look directly at them but his face broke into a cocky smile. Then his eyes flicked to the side again, noticed the scissors and his smile dropped.

"You're a big disappointment to me Pat. I can't believe I brought you into my house to meet my family. I don't know what I was thinking, bringing a no good little fuck like you into my home."

Pat didn't know what to do. He was totally unprepared for it—put his head down between his knees and groaned, looked at me, looked at the scissors, and then put his head down again. He stood up and walked down the corridor towards the holding cell, like he was thinking about locking himself in, then turned around at the last minute and walked back.

"I didn't tell you to get up," I said, "sit your ass down."

He sat down and looked at me. We stared for about a minute, breathing heavy, but not taking our eyes off of each other. He nodded, as if he'd made up his mind about something, and I leaned back and waited for what I thought was coming.

"I know what you're trying to do," he said. "I heard about your kid."

I closed my eyes and put my hands behind my head. I started crying, put my head between my knees, and started to blubber.

Pat reached out and touched me on the shoulder, pulled his hand back like he didn't know what the hell to do but wanted to do something. Instead, he got up and walked into the equipment room. I heard him rummage around and he came out with the finger printing supplies, laid the ink-board out on the counter, took an FBI fingerprint card from the left hand drawer and started to print himself. He took each finger and rolled it across the appropriate square, leaving perfect swirls that looked like the pictures of galaxies you see in science magazines. He walked back into the supply room, came out with a handy-wipe, and started to clean the ink off his fingers. I'd stopped crying by then, but I didn't know what to do about anything.

Loretta's voice came over the intercom and she sounded worried, like maybe she'd seen something.

"You okay in there, Cal; want me to come in and help out?"

"No," I said quickly. "We're fine, just having a talk."

I could barely form a thought but the words came out.

"Come on," Pat whispered. "Get it together man...you don't want to lose your job."

I went into the supply room, got the lice-killing shampoo and the black sweats and green T-shirt that all the kids had to wear. I followed him to the bathroom and sat on the edge of the sink, watched him take off his clothes and put them into one of the numbered bags we used to keep personal items separate. He got into the shower, put the lice killer on his head and crotch, then stepped out.

I looked over at him and he was standing there naked, looking back at me without shame. There were scars all over his chest and arms, and over his right breast was a tattoo of a giant "W" which stood for the west side. Blood soaked through the gauze bandage on his forearm. On his upper left bicep were three large elliptical scars that I knew he did with a lighter. There was a small circular scar on the back of his left hand where one of his foster parents had driven a roofing nail.

"You'll be okay Cal," he said and shivered. "Everything's gonna work out, you'll see. You can have more kids."

I took some toilet paper and blew my nose; then I stood up and washed my face in the sink. Pat got back into the shower and rinsed the chemicals off. He stood under the water for some time. He shook water off his head like a dog does, then opened his mouth, gargled and spit into the drain.

I took the bag with his street clothes into the supply room and hung it up with the others while he dried off and got dressed. He came out and sat back down in the chair across from me, smiled and said he wanted to get some sleep if I was ready to take him to his cell.

When I opened the door to his room, he walked in and didn't look back, like he was embarrassed for seeing me like that. I closed the door and watched while he made up his bed in the dark. When finished, he

saw me standing there and quickly turned away. He lay down on his side and faced the wall. He hugged himself...I saw his body start to quiver—but he didn't make a sound.

Later that night, while Loretta was cleaning the bathrooms, I turned on the microphone and listened to his shallow, fragile breathing as he slept.

Hugo Ball
1001 1/2 Riverview
Clarkston, WA

Judge Darrin McCarthy
Washington Circuit Court
Clarkston, WA 98251

Dear Sir-

This letter is in response to the malicious and exaggerated accusations that have been filed against me regarding the night of Sunday, July 10 1998, and subsequent events that followed shortly thereafter.

First of all, let me stress that I am seeking no damages for the heinous and mean spirited behavior of my neighbor, one Corky Sullivan III. Granted, the fact that I had blood pouring down my face, which could have (I grant you this) obscured my appearance and which could have had something to do with my neighbor's refusal to acknowledge that, yes, I was the legal resident of sed apartment and therefore had a perfectly legitimate reason to jimmy open the lock to the basement in the wee hours of Sunday morning.

Did I mention that I almost lost an eye? As to my neighbor's neglect, which hints at no small amount of hostility, I haven't a clue. I

can only guess that some deep seeded issues existed before the day in question and have little to do with the yours truly except that they caused me an hour spent handcuffed in the back of a patrol car in addition to the severe trauma inflicted on my hindquarters. As to the feud that followed, and especially the allegations of cable theft and other transgressions, I have no comment at this time...

Exhibit A

Now, being an officer of our esteemed legal system, you are no doubt, accustomed to many vast and grizzly crimes but the shot gun before you, believe me, I know that it was only loaded with salt rocks (I can still feel little pebbles in my ass that heat up when I touch them), but this is yet another example of the extreme and discomforting hostility that I was exposed to on the night in question. I ask you, what defense does a man have when he's hanging upside down through a basement window, attempting to navigate at least a six foot fall without breaking any of one's girlfriends possession or damaging one's own person.

The first hint that my activities had met with unfavorable ramifications came as a small pop and was immediately followed by a

scorching pain in my posterior region and a free-fall to an uncarpeted floor. Again, let me reiterate that I am seeking no damages for this infraction of my civil liberties but merely am seeking to expunge the night's follies and those in the weeks following from my permanent record.

I am well aware of the gravity, which accompanies some of the charges being made against myself. I know that tampering with, or altering federally monitored telecommunications systems is quite illegal and even though my computer and engineering backgrounds are damning, I must once again deny any involvement with my neighbor's cable, telephone equipment, etc. I'm told that altering a signal so that only one channel is called up, regardless of the commands punched into the system or remote control- is a difficult and involved process- but I must humbly reiterate that these skills are not possessed by myself or any person with whom I associate.

I have been instructed, by this court to give a full account of all that transpired during this particular time period and this is exactly what I plan to do...

Late Night Cable

There is fire on my TV.

A burning body on channel one-thirty-seven is sandwiched between an infomercial for a revolutionary new stain remover, and one-thirty-nine's late night "reality" programming—which consists of several versions of *Cops* mixed with disaster footage, *When Animals Attack*, and *America's Most Wanted*. Sometimes it's hard to stay optimistic.

With the sound off, it seems like the world is about to end as I channel surf from one horror to the next. Wars, serial killers, and crappy soft-core porn with titles like "Intimate Heat," and "Low Burn." Hollywood gossip exposés, terrible action movies starring washed up karate experts with bad mullet haircuts, personal injury lawyers asking: "Have you been injured in accident?" and just when it seems like things can't get any bleaker...I change the channel and it all goes black for an instant, there's a *Flash*..and I'm looking down from space. The earth shimmers inside a small teardrop of atmosphere and through speckled clouds, the landscape rushes by at the speed of a satellite's orbit. The camera pans in, and then slowly back out as the world drifts by. Ahh.... You could do Yoga to this shit. The NASA channel's better than *Prozac*.

It seemed to come out of nowhere, a rustling of bushes and the sound of someone trying to open a window...then BOOM!

This was last week and I've been keeping a low profile cause I accidentally shot my neighbor as he tried to break into his own house. Christ, it wasn't like they were real rounds or anything, a little salt rock was all. The cops even agreed I was right to shoot.

"You gotta be careful," one of them said. "You never know in these times."

But I knew...I knew.

Beer #2

Did I tell you that my woman left? I say woman because she was not my wife and that, above all else, was the reason she left. Don't get me wrong; I'm no prize, I know that, but neither was she. She liked the way I talked, and I liked the way she smelled and how soft she felt when she'd spoon me at night. I was driving a forklift over at Potlach and getting paid union wages. I was working four tens a week, moving shit around with a machine for god's sake, and then three day weekends on top—man, I was feeling good.

Then this puke, this fucking rookie, runs me over. One minute I'm bitching to a supervisor and then next, this yahoo comes around the corner on the forklift and tags the both of us. My back and neck are

ruined. Some people would be thinking—disability...*Cool*—but I don't play that shit. I like to work for my gravy.

I wasn't laid up a week 'fore I started driving Lucinda crazy. Sitting around barking at her all day and pounding beer and Loritabs cause my neck hurt so bad that I wanted to shoot something. I could get so drunk, nodded out from pain pills, whatever, and I was still painfully aware of the exact angle my head hung and how lightning bolts seemed to shoot down into my shoulders and spine. There are lots of kinds of pain, lots of levels—emotional, physical, spiritual...this was crazy pain. Fuck! It hurts just to talk about this shit. I gotta take my medication.

Beer #4

That's better. I was working myself into a bad mood there for a minute but damn—what's the use of being in a bad mood when I've got so much prime TV to watch? I love late night cable. It's the end of a peak season. Basketball's over! The Stanley Cup's in Dallas...that's a sign right there the universe is out of whack? Who cares about baseball? I'm in the doldrums as far as sports are concerned.

Did I mention that I've ordered out for pizza eleven days in a row; I can barely stand to look at the kitchen for some reason. Anyway she's gone. Gone because I didn't want to get married for a third time—don't even get me started on that shit—and because I'm in pain all the time

and what could be worse than watching someone else suffer when you can't do jack about it?

Flash... There are millions upon million of ants, devouring a decaying mound that must have been something at some point. It's huge. I don't know where they are, looks like Africa and the sounds turned off, but I know that whatever it was had four legs and was big as a truck.

Flash... Wrestling...for God's Sake.

*Flash...*In slow motion, a mushroom cloud slowly spreads up, and into the night sky. It's an aerial view, like one you'd have if you were on the plane that dropped the bomb.

*Flash..*Two people with enormous smiles are sitting at a table in front of the ocean and even though I can't hear anything, it's obvious they're selling some bogus get rich scheme. Across the bottom of the screen, yellow, almost golden letters appear: "Jim Arnsdale of Cedar Rapids Iowa made \$83,000 in just three weeks with no money down. That's right, No Money Down!"

*Flash...*Oh shit. Tonight's the night. I almost forgot about the live heart transplant on the surgery channel. They're going to pull out this woman's heart and replace it with a mechanical one until they find a donor, or the right person dies.

They've been running an advertisement all week—It's the patient, a middle-aged woman, married, mother of two, runs her own business;

she's talking about the operation. She says that before her health problems, she had all these romantic notions about her heart, and then she chuckles... "And now it's just a pump." The woman is trying to sound brave. "It's just a piece of gristle that pumps blood. A machine that's..." she chuckles again nervously, "that's not working so good these days."

Her husband, who's been sitting there with his head down during the interview—he reaches out, squeezes her knee and when he looks up...Damn. The cameraman smells a shot and zooms way in on the poor guy's face. Shit, this is gonna be juicy.

So about the shotgun incident; I guess I should come clean to somebody. I was sitting here, or I suppose lying would be more accurate. I heard this noise, and honest to god, next thing I know I'm standing on the back porch in my boxer shorts with the shot gun and there's the neighbor, crouched down at his own window, trying to force open the lock with a screw driver. He's got blood all over his face, I mean, it's pouring down from this nasty cut right above his eye, and he's talking to himself. He keeps saying over and over, as if this is the first time it's ever occurred to him: "I'm in love, I'm in love."

Next thing I know BOOM! I blast him right in the ass and he falls through the window and there's a thud as he hits the floor in the basement and starts thrashing around howling in pain. Then I go inside and call the police before someone else does. The cops get there and I

tell them he's a burglar. They run in there with their guns drawn and manhandle the kid out, slam him on the hood, cuff his ass, and throw him into the back of the squad car. I let them figure out that he really lives there and when they do...I act just as surprised as they are. "Oh my god," I say. "What have I done?"

Here's the weird thing. Here's what scares the piss outta me. I shot that poor kid cause he didn't want to sit in my dump of a house and drink beer with me. I shot him for that. I keep waiting for the lonely police to show up and drag me away but they don't come. Nobody does.

*Flash...*yet another cop movie.

Flash...The Scuba Channel. A diver drifts through the deep blue waters, at the edge of a coral reef. We see his silhouette from below, a small shadow against the backdrop of sunlight filtering through water, and above, far in the distance and blurred almost beyond recognition, is the surface. Fish of all colors and shapes swirl around him curiously. Anemones sway on the reef like trees in the wind.

Oh shit...I'm gonna miss my operation.

*Flash...*They've already done the prep work. We can't even see our poor nervous housewife, just a hole in the blue surgery cloth where the chest is. A large, black line has been drawn right down the middle, and without so much as a how do you do—the surgeon takes a circular saw and starts to cut through the breastplate. A nurse sucks the blood up in a tube faster than it can come out, as a thin, white layer of fat is pulled

back and metal clamps are wedged into the sternum. They pry open her chest like it's some exotic nut and there's her heart just sitting inside this sack, twitching—it looks like some unborn alien. Jesus. I gotta run to the kitchen and stock up.

Beer #6

Christ. This is unbelievable. I can barely watch, but there's no way I'm turning the channel either. They pull her fucking heart out. I mean they're doing all kinds of technical shit with all kinds of technical pieces of equipment, but what they essentially do is rip out her heart. Then they throw it on a scale and it sags on either side and the life just drains out of it. You want to know what all that woman's desire, all her dreams, passion, everything, weighed in at? Fourteen Ounces. That look on her husband's face, the nervous laugh, that clumsy hand on her shaking knee? Fourteen ounces. I'm stunned, awed, stupefied... a million different things at once and none of them can get around this withered piece of meat, sitting on a scale, shrinking before my eyes. Thank god for commercials. I need to fortify. Didn't I just get a beer?

Beer #7

The thing with the kid next door was that we used to be friends. He'd come over occasionally and we'd talk about everything under the sun, and even though the kid was an egg-head, I kind of liked him.

Then one day he stopped coming over and was always busy if I asked him for a beer, and I knew...I knew he didn't wanna be around me cause I'd slipped to such a sorry state.

I don't know how I changed, but I know I did cause the look in people's eyes changed. You don't ever want people to look at you this way, trust me. Better they hate you, better they wanna bash your fucking head in; anything's better than the way they looked. That's why I shot that little bastard. What right's he got looking at me like that; he don't know.

Oh yeah, back to the action.

The doctor's got the Jarvic7 all cued up and ready to go, he's holding it up to the camera like he's the torchbearer at the Olympics fer Christ's sake. It looks like a miniature engine to me, sitting there in the doc's hand. The heart's been taken off the scale and put in one of those bags with a yellow, biological hazard sign on it—might as well feed it to your dog now, it's done for. But I can't help thinking while I watch them drop the fake one in like they're changing an oil filter...I can't help wondering if that's gonna make things any easier?

Near the Lewis & Clark Trail

1.

Henry Reed sat on the lowered tailgate of his truck and watched his sons playing while a big thunderstorm moved in from the southeast. The distant rumblings were getting closer and the air had a kinetic feeling, a kind of tension that often announced a storm. He drove all over the prairie, tending fields which ran from one to three hundred acres and were spread across the vast space that connected several small farming towns. Between working his fields, running to Grangeville for parts, keeping the books, spending time with his family, and a thousand other things that had to be done—Henry didn't get much time of his own. So during the course of each day, he would take his breaks sitting on the back of the truck with a cup of coffee, quietly staring out towards the horizon, letting everything soak in.

The hills were bald. They looked completely different with all the crops in. The bluegrass stubble had been burned off, and the winter wheat was already in the ground. At the beginning of harvest, it had seemed like the entire prairie was breaking out in a rash. When he'd gaze out over a large area, there would be patches of brown dirt appearing

through the gold and green colors of the crops and with each field harvested the rash spread.

Now the whole place looked foreign and desolate, but also beautiful in a way that made him happy to get home each night. Once it got a little cooler, most of the farming would take place at the computer down in the basement, but he liked to get outside as much as possible while it was still nice. Sometimes he'd make up an errand—not an outright lie, but something that could have waited indefinitely, just so he could get the boys out into the fields for awhile so they could connect with the land. This was important to Henry. He hoped to pass the farm on to one of his kids if he could stay in business that long. The rail line down to Lewiston had already been closed, and there had been talk about tearing out the dams. If this happened they would probably go under—the river provided cheap transportation to Portland, and without it, survival got even more complicated.

Bart and Louis were playing by a mound of freshly turned dirt. Bart was surveying the scene like an archeologist, poking the ground with a stick and looking down intently, as if he were searching for tracks. Louis followed closely behind, stuffing things into his pockets and showing off for Henry, who'd been grouchy all day.

At age two, Louis had started putting anything that caught his eye into his front pants pockets. His parents tried to get him to stop but it

was futile; he kept putting things into his pants. Finally, they got tired of half-chewed ends of suckers and other goodies floating in the laundry so they got him a pair of pants that didn't have pockets. The next day, Henry found him outside the house crying, holding a pile of junk in his shirt and leaving a trail of debris. With snot bubbling out of his nose, Louis had informed Henry that he was losing all of his treasure. That's what he called the things he found, *treasure*, and he said it with so much wonder in his voice that Henry didn't want to interfere with whatever phase his boy was going through. Eventually, his wife Kathy had invented the game "pockets."

Several times each day, and right before the kids took their baths, one or both parents would yell "pockets" and chase Louis around the house, tickling him until he agreed to give up his treasure. After they sorted out the perishables, the rest was kept down in the basement in a cardboard box with "Allied Van Lines" written in large black letters on each side. Louis called it his "treasure chest" and had no idea that the contents were worthless. On his third birthday, Henry took Louis out by the barn where he'd secretly planted a mint condition silver dollar for his son to discover. The kid had seen it, walked around and looked at it from every possible direction...and then left it lying on the ground, preferring to put the tab from an old beer can, a piece of twine, and a small patch of the dog's hair in his pocket instead. This had puzzled and delighted Henry to no end.

"Hey, dad," Bart yelled, expecting immediate attention. "Dad!" He nearly screamed as he ran towards the truck with his brother trailing behind. "What happened to the house that used to be here?"

Just then the first drops started to fall and Louis let out a squeal of delight when a flash of lightning was followed several seconds later by a muted thunderclap.

2.

He had been heading back from Cottonwood earlier in the week when he noticed a swarm of vans and police cars by an old house that he'd driven by for decades. It was a rotted-out place from the turn of the century that hadn't been occupied since before Henry was born. Behind the crumbling house was a large barn, and a small, rusted, aluminum shed. No one ever stopped at the place; there was no reason to.

Henry pulled up in front of what remained of the old farmhouse and parked behind the police cars and vans with Tri-County Drug Task Force written in large yellow letters. He walked up on the porch in order to get a better view of things. The wood on either side of the doorway was darker than the rest of the sun-bleached exterior and formed two rough torso shapes where chairs had sat for generations. Off to his left, a group of people gestured towards the shed and spoke excitedly. Henry

knew most everyone up on the prairie and spotted Norm Wilkes, a Clearwater County Sheriff he'd gone to school with. Henry walked up slowly and tapped Norm on the shoulder. "What gives, Norm?"

Norm looked back without turning around and it took a few seconds for a sign of recognition to register on his slack face. That was when Henry knew something bad had happened.

Just as Norm started to say something, several men wearing plastic suits and masks, with respirators strapped to their backs, walked out of the small shed. The yellow suits and black gas masks with strangely shaped eyes made them look like insects.

"Jesus..." Henry said under his breath.

"Not hardly," Norm replied, seeming to snap out it. "meth-lab, a couple of stiffs inside with dirt in their mouths, fucking flies everywhere."

Henry hadn't done much more than exchange pleasantries with Norm in years and realized how different he sounded. The last time they'd spoken it was probably about the same high school basketball game that they always talked about when they ran into each other. This was another person—he'd gotten fat, and his face was pasty and pockmarked from drinking too much whiskey, but the eyes had a cold, appraising look that suggested he'd seen some bad things.

One of the insect men dragged a body out of the shed. He pulled the stiffened corpse for about fifty feet and then yanked his hands away like it was a plague victim. They all approached the body and the man in

the yellow suit flipped it over. As the body turned, a stench of chemicals and decomposition floated up and everyone stepped back, putting their hands up to cover their faces, but then there was a look of recognition and some couldn't help but lean forward.

"Son of a bitch," Norm said, "that's Gary Olsen's boy."

The man in the suit immediately went back in and pulled out the other corpse, moving in a less erratic pattern this time and laying the body down more gently.

It was an older man, maybe thirty-five, with three small dots tattooed at the corner of his left eye in the shape of a triangle. His hand was curled inward and had stiffened in a way that made it look like a claw. His teeth were blackened with soil.

"Who the hell's that?" Another man asked.

"Henry," Norm said. "You ever see this guy before?"

He closed his eyes as the shock and horror set in, and something deep and elemental rushed out of him and seemed to scatter across the hills and dissolve. When Henry looked up, the circle of faces appeared to be distorted, shimmering as if he were seeing them through gasoline vapors.

"Nope," was all he could manage in reply.

The men stood around, shifted from foot to foot like the ground was hot, glanced at the bodies, then away, and then back again.

Jack Olsen had worked the harvest for Henry's family a few years back and he couldn't make sense of what lay at his feet. The kid had worked hard, was respectful, and didn't do things half-assed.

"This doesn't make any sense," Henry said aloud and several people looked up hopefully, like they were waiting for someone else to say it, but then their faces clouded over and they either turned away, or stared dumbly down at a nineteen year old boy who looked like he'd choked on fire. Floyd Patterson walked over to his truck and threw up by the front tire.

"Christ..." Harold Weber said, "my daughter went to the prom with that boy."

3.

There was a meeting that night and the high school gymnasium was packed with frightened, angry people. Henry sat up front with his wife Kathy and listened to their panicked voices. Periodically she'd dig her sweaty fingers into his forearm as she reacted to what people were saying. John Wilson blamed the government. Sheila Gardener blamed MTV. Reverend Yates pointed to a loss of faith. Angela Gifford, the social studies teacher at the high school, urged parents to pay more attention to what was going on with their kids. Harold Weens blamed liberals, the sixties, and anything else he could think of. Margie Nelson

started crying before she could blame anyone. Henry sat there listening, having nothing to offer. Every time an idea floated across his mind, he'd see the image of a boy lying in the dirt with a look on his face that reminded Henry of a documentary he'd seen on Mustard Gas. He couldn't reconcile this with the image of a boy who'd gotten such a kick out of cooking hot dogs over the engine of the combine during breaks. That was all the kid had ever eaten—hot dogs wrapped in a slice of wonder bread. He'd bring two packs of Ball Park Franks, a loaf of Wonder Bread, and a six-pack of Pepsi at the beginning of each week, and store the extras in Henry's fridge. If Henry offered to share some of his lunch, Jack would decline politely and start working on one of his dogs with a smile, threading it with a bent clothes hanger like he was baiting a hook.

Norm got up last and gave an explanation of what had happened, and again—his tone had unnerved Henry.

"It looks pretty straight-forward," he'd said. "They were trying to cook up some crank and they poisoned themselves."

When the meeting concluded, people shuffled out quickly and avoided making eye contact with each other.

It had started when Kathy was pregnant with Bart. Henry was widely considered to be one of the most sensible people around. He didn't seem to worry about most things and this made people think he always knew what to do. As Kathy grew bigger and bigger, Bart swelling inside her like a newly formed planet; shifting against the confines of the womb, and generally raising hell with Kathy's body-- something seemed to grow inside Henry too: uncertainty. He would lie in bed each night and fret about the smallest, uncontrollable things while his wife, who was huge, uncomfortable, and supposed to be at the mercy of a vicious assault of hormones and mood swings, slept like a stone and grew more stoic by the day. By the time the baby was born Henry thought he was going to have a nervous breakdown he worried so much, and part of this had never left him.

At certain times, especially when his children or his wife were threatened, Henry would become totally irrational. Kathy had reverted back to her old self too, which was expressive and passionate, but she retained a small part of her "Zen Master" state, which is what Henry had called her inexplicable serenity while she was with child. Whenever Henry got crazy she would become calm, understanding, and talk to Henry the same way he had talked to others, back before love had turned him inside out. Once, when Bart was almost two he was so sick with the

flu that they had to put him in an ice bath to keep his fever down. He'd screamed and cried between fits of vomiting, and at one point he looked up at Henry with the fear of a child who had no understanding of what was happening to him, his eyes pleading for his dad to do something, *to make it better*. It was too much. Henry snapped, started to weep uncontrollably and then became furious that he was so helpless. He went down to the basement and smashed a chair against the wall like some maniac while his wife handled the situation upstairs. She was stronger than he was, it was that simple, but it had taken children for both of them to realize this.

5.

On the way out of the meeting Kathy held out her hand and Henry gave her the keys without saying anything. She drove to their old make-out spot, which was a small butte where they could see any car approaching long before being discovered. It was hard to find privacy in a small town, they'd learned that in high school, but it had added an element of excitement and romance to their courtship. It was still their spot. They came several times a year and drank a bottle of wine while they listened to the radio and pretended they were still young. It was also a place for serious conversation--for making family decisions, or the occasional screaming match that they didn't want the kids to witness. On the night

of the meeting they didn't do anything but sit and listen to each other breathe.

Henry ended up lying on the seat with his head in Kathy's lap, staring out the window at the stars, and looking for the satellite he knew passed overhead but not finding it.

6.

The baby-sitter was watching TV with an open history book lying next to the couch she was curled up on. When they walked in the door she dragged her sleepy body upright and started putting toys and books away mechanically. Laura was sixteen years old and already five foot nine. She was wirey, with short blond hair that flared upward in places from a failed perm, and if Henry squinted his eyes she looked almost like a husk of wheat, except for the flash of steel from her braces.

Henry made coffee while Laura got her stuff together, and Kathy disappeared into the kids' bedroom and didn't come out.

"As soon as the coffee's ready I'll give you a ride home, okay?" Henry tried to smile and appear light-hearted, but it was a miserable effort and made his face look distorted.

"Yeah, sure Mr. Reed. Can I have a cup of coffee too? I've gotta cram for a test tomorrow," she said as she popped into the kitchen with her backpack slung across one shoulder.

"You bet. Just don't tell your parents I'm giving you coffee at this time of night. " The moon had just risen and was almost full as he drove the babysitter home. It cast a sickly yellow glow across the hills and made them look alive. Laura surfed the three FM radio channels while Henry stared straight ahead at the road.

"Were you out there today? I mean...did you see Jack?"

"Yeah," was all Henry could think to say, and then it occurred to him that kids in the area probably knew more about what had happened than anyone else.

"Did you know what he was doing?" He asked.

She sighed and rolled the window down. Cold air rushed in and Laura's hair flew around, hiding her face. "I heard he'd gotten into crank. You'd be surprised," she said and went back to the radio.

When they pulled up to Laura's house, nobody came out to meet them. Henry could see her mother Irene peeking through the curtains. Both Henry and Irene watched the girl walk slowly up to the front porch and their eyes met for an instant as she swung the door open and disappeared inside. He could see two shapes swirling around each other in the kitchen-- having an animated discussion about something. He imagined Laura was getting into trouble over something, but the last thing he saw as he backed out was the two shapes coming together, suddenly, in what must have been a worried mother hugging her only child.

On the way home that night, Henry saw a single light in an unfamiliar place. There were certain patterns to the way the black emptiness of the prairie was arranged--Henry didn't think about them, but driving across the same space for twenty years had made him pretty familiar with what things should look like... and something was wrong with the horizon to the left. There was one light that didn't belong and he was pretty sure where it was coming from. He turned down a side road and headed towards it, feeling more unsettled, as he got closer to the old farmhouse. Yellow light escaped between cracks in the aluminum siding of the shed and gave it an unnatural glow. There were no cars around so he got out and crept towards the shed.

Police tape hung limply on both sides of the open door. It was completely silent and the gravel under his feet crunched like frozen snow. He leaned into the doorway. A single light bulb hung from an extension cord over the rafters and swayed back and forth slowly.

In the center of the shed was what looked like a high school chemistry set. Distillation tubes, flasks, Bunsen burners, and other technical equipment were haphazardly put together with brackets, and in some places, electrical tape. It looked perfectly harmless, like the toy of some precocious child. On the floor were the outlines of two human

shapes, which seemed like they were swimming or reaching out towards something. Between the outstretched right arm of one, and the left knee of the other, were a bunch of wildflowers lying fanned out in the dirt. As he scanned the ground, he saw several small divots surrounding both shapes. They were tiny furrows where the two had clawed at the ground, swallowing handfuls of dirt, which Norm had told him was an attempt to stop the burning in their throats. As the realization of this slowly sunk in, Henry felt dizzy. He backed away from the scene and staggered out of the shed.

He sat for several minutes with the engine running, staring at the old house, which was lit up, in his headlights. Henry got out of his truck and went inside the house. A large square of light was cast on the wall opposite the front opening and there were luminous speckles, in various shapes, where the wood had rotted through and this gave the whole interior a dim, grainy quality. He walked up to the wall and ran his fingers across the mantle above the fireplace. When he looked at his hand each fingertip was covered with a gray film of dust and he remembered that dust was mostly comprised of human skin and hair particles. He stood there for some time, wondering whose skin was on his fingers. He wanted to know who had lived in the house, what kind of people they'd been, and what had happened to them. At that moment, he felt like he needed to know these things; they were important.

As he got back into the truck, he put a hand on the front windshield and on the way home, every time a car came in the opposite direction, he saw four dull fingerprints.

8.

Two days later, a large crowd turned out to help bulldoze the shed. There were trucks parked along the road for hundreds of yards leading up to the property. It looked like a festival was about to take place. There were hundreds of people milling around by the time things got going. No one gave an order, there was no vote taken, but at precisely three o'clock, Fred Stevens hitched a chain around the doorway to the shed, got in his tractor and started driving. The doorway stretched, turned from a rectangle to a diamond shape, and then the whole structure came apart, making a series of loud groans and pops in protest as it fell flat. No one said a thing as the same process was repeated on the barn and the farmhouse, which didn't want to come down but finally collapsed in a heap of dust and splintered wood.

The crowd stood almost motionless until there was nothing but two large piles, one of wood, and one of aluminum siding. Bill Stevens hauled off the scrap metal and the woodpile was doused with diesel fuel and set on fire. By sunset, you couldn't tell that anyone had ever lived there. A small mound of dirt where the charred remains of the wood had

been buried was all that remained. They'd even dragged a section of chain link fence over the ground to erase the footprints and tire tracks.

9.

This was where Henry sat with his two sons and waited for the thunderstorm. He stared at the spot where a house had stood just days earlier and watched the heavy drops bounce and sink into the oblivious ground as his clothes began to stick to his body. They moved inside the truck and continued to watch the rain beat the freshly turned soil. In the distance-- a few hundred yards from where the house had stood, half buried and overgrown with weeds, was an old tractor. He tried to picture someone driving it up out of the ground, tried to imagine what the field it was buried in would have looked like if it were covered with yellow canola flowers instead of weeds.

He thought about all of this while his two children chattered excitedly, watching bolt lightning dance across the prairie, and asking questions that he couldn't begin to answer. Louis had learned the dreaded *why* word, and it followed most explanations that Henry gave.

"But why daddy?" He'd asked and pursed his lips, looking up intently as if he were about to be given the secret of the universe. Henry felt his chest clench with love and tried to explain about lightning, thunder, rain, baseball, and a host of other things.

"You're too young to understand," Bart said, puffing out his chest a little, and then he turned towards his father and asked calmly: "What happened to the house dad?"

Henry flinched and then covered up with a smile as he put his large, callused hand on Bart's wet head, surprised again at how perceptive a six year old could be.

"They tore it down."

"Why?" Louis asked before Bart could.

"It was old," Henry replied after a few moments and then, to change the subject he yelled "pockets."

Bart and Henry leaned in close while Louis, who made sure they were paying attention before he started, slowly pulled items out and named them. *String...Screw...B.B...Fishing Hook...*and then he pulled out what looked like a rock, but on closer inspection was much more. Cradled in his son's tiny hand, a little bigger than a quarter, was a small, tarnished medallion. Henry quickly poured a cup of coffee from the thermos into the lid. He put the medallion in the coffee and swirled it around as if he were panning for gold. The boys didn't make a sound as he dumped the coffee through his finger and out a crack in the door. Then he took a handkerchief and rubbed the piece of metal vigorously. He placed the medallion on the palm of his hand and held it down low so that his children could see it.

On one side was a picture of a man's head and the engraving:
"T.H. Jefferson."

On the edge of the coin, curving along the circumference it said: "The President of the United States of America." The date was 1801.

On the other side of the coin were two hands coming together underneath a pair of crossed tomahawks. On that side of the coin it promised: "Peace and Friendship."

"What is it?" Bart asked.

In a low reverent tone, before Henry could say that he had no idea whatsoever, Louis blurted out his favorite of all words: "treasure!"

10.

After the storm had passed, Henry took the kids home and then drove out to one of his fields to inspect the damage. Pools had collected in various low spots, washing out seed in some places, and the vast, Idaho sky was reflected from above on the surface of the asymmetrical puddles. It looked like pieces of the sky had fallen. Henry sat quietly and watched the giant, rapidly dissipating thunderheads float past his feet.

Hugo Stories

His parents tried to make him into a child prodigy. They hung parabolas and other geometric shapes over his crib, played Mozart while he slept—all his toys were specially designed to promote early brain development. They read books about how to make your kids smart, how to mold their thinking patterns, how to make them better.

When he was eight, Hugo burned down part of his house trying to simulate and control a forest fire. When he was eleven, he flooded the upstairs when his attempt to recreate an aquatic ecosystem—a series of linked fish tanks, sprung a leak. When he was thirteen Hugo made napalm out of gasoline and Jell-O. At sixteen, he tried to build an atom bomb—thank god that one never got out of the design phase.

They all had Hugo stories. It had started when Karen brought him home to meet the family and there had been a steady supply of Hugo's mishaps from that day forward.

He was always bringing assorted crazies home, falling into bizarre situations, or coming up with hare brained ideas that inevitably led to trouble. It could be as simple as a trip to grocery store, but if you were

going with Hugo there was always a chance you'd stumble home three hours later with no groceries and a fantastic story.

Henry's favorite was about the UFO convention—nobody ever figured out why they'd chosen the Camas Prairie for their gathering, but Hugo decided to infiltrate the meeting “in the name of science,” and get to the bottom of things.

He ended up getting drunk and passing out in the back of one someone's pick-up and called them from Portland the next day, from some commune, and he swore he had no idea how he'd gotten there. That night he'd tried to escape by crawling through the organic vegetable garden to the compound's wall. Actually, it was more like fence—one you'd see surrounding an apartment complex, more a statement than a real security measure, but as Hugo tried to climb over...he'd slipped and caught his leg on the fence, made a tremendous racket as he hung upside down thrashing in the bushes.

“It was wet!” Hugo had shrieked in his defense as a man from the commune, the man who'd given him a ride back to Idaho in exchange for some work, sat at Henry and Kathy's kitchen table and told them the story over a cup of coffee.

“There was dew, lots of dew. For god sakes, tell them about the dew,” he pleaded as the man went on to explain that they'd heard yelling,

and then a panicked scream followed by broken branches, and as they'd gone to see what it was...

The man doubled over in near hysterics, unable to continue with the story—he held up a hand like a batter signaling the ump that he's about to step out of the box, regained his composure and went on with the story.

“We got out to the back of our garden and this fellow here was hanging upside down with one of his pant legs caught on the top of the fence... and as we started to get him down he screamed, *don't kill me, I won't talk, I swear I didn't see anything.*”

At this point the man totally lost it, laughing so hard he started to wheeze and choke, and through choppy breathes he'd asked Hugo: “What'd you think we were going to do son, sacrifice you to the Klingons?”

There was the one about the time he cut up a Habanera pepper and didn't wash before rubbing his eyes and going to the bathroom.

One about when he super glued his hand to a model airplane he was making with the boys; the time he cut off part of his pinky chopping firewood—and there was what Cal referred to as: “the mother of all Hugo stories.”

Cal loved that one; he said it contained the essence of what it's like to be Hugo, and he had the telling of it down to an art. At least once a year, Cal would tell the story, usually in response to a current Hugo

situation; Cal would drift over to the Canadian Thistle incident and his eyes would light up, his hands would make subtle gestures as he spoke, and he would bring the moment alive.

It was obvious, each time he told the story; how much Cal and Hugo had adopted each other—two California transplants with little or no family ties, and they'd stuck together. Many of Hugo's greatest moments were witness by Cal, who became the official storyteller. Cal relished Hugo's eccentricities as a brother might admire something about a sibling that drove him crazy.

Look at that sorry bastard...One-hundred and sixty IQ and watch this...you see that? I told you he'd jack it up without loosening the lug nuts...priceless. That's what I'm talking about—all theory and no application. Check this out...See him stare into the tool box with that crease in his brow...that's cause he doesn't have a clue which tool he needs, he's just waiting for one of us to wander over and tell him what to do...Let's lay back a minute and watch the genius at work. I'll tell you a story while we wait; I'll give you an example to illustrate my point. I was actually around for this one, and the kid was in rare form.

It was mid summer, July, and the weather was great. It was one of those seasons where everything was doing exactly what it was supposed to. The Farmer's Almanac was right on the money, and beautiful days punctuated by moderate rainfall just kept coming for weeks at a time.

We'd all been down at the river, having a family picnic—rafting, fishing the banks for trout, floating down river in rafts—it was one of those perfect days and everyone was sun-burned, full, and pleasantly exhausted by the time we all got back up on the prairie.

It was a gorgeous night, there was this warm breeze, like a whisper, and no moon at all, so the stars were really bright and Hugo got all carried away, and had this idea that he was gonna sleep outside—he wants to get back to nature, so he gets out of bed in the middle of the night, and without so much as asking anyone if it's okay, he sleeps in a nearby wheat field...which just happens to have been sprayed for Canadian Thistle that very day.

He wakes up and hives cover his whole body, I mean everywhere, and he slides into a hissy fit—laying around like a god-damn baby for near a week. And of course, he's too messed up to leave, so we're stuck with his whinny ass and his calamine lotion, and by the time he's well enough to move, he's practically evicted from Henry's place—even the kids are sick of him, so they send him down to stay with us in Lewiston, and he gets even worse.

Picture a fair skinned, freckle faced, redhead with oozing pustules all over his body moping around your crib, reading books about quantum physics and moaning softly to himself. I swear, I was ready to kill the guy, but then he started to rally, like he always does, and another two days went by and he was so insanely happy that he just had to go.

I couldn't take it anymore; I drove him back up to the Prairie, dumped him on Henry's door, and took off before anyone could protest. This was a Wednesday if memory serves, and by the time we went up there for Sunday dinner, he was completely off the bend—in one of his manic moods that drove everybody crazy except the kids, who loved it when Hugo got all weird and energetic.

We were all sitting around after dinner and the phone rang. It was for Hugo and turned out to be his uncle, this scientist who works for the government, and Hugo starts talking a mile a minute about how the Mariners suck and how his Uncle lost the bet and that he's ready to collect...he's got something special planned and needs a little help. And then he looks over at us—like we're intruders, even though the guy hasn't had his own place in months, so he picks up the portable and runs down into the basement and that's the last we think or hear of it—just another Hugoism, but wait...he isn't done yet, no, he's been scheming about how to make up for what he calls "the Canadian Thistle Debacle."

The next time there's a family get together out at Henry and Kathy's, he paces around for most of the day, checking his watch, going down in the basement, getting on the computer, and making suspicious phone calls. Karen and Kathy can tell he's up to something, and they know that usually, this means Hugo's gonna be injured in some idiotic way and were all gonna have to nurse him back to health, so they're watching his every move—getting ready to head off whatever he's got planned.

They enlist the boys to spy on Hugo, so during the whole afternoon, he's sneaking around and the kids are sneaking around after him, trying to find out what he's sneaking around about.

Then he relaxes, he knows we're on to him and doesn't want to give anything up, so he starts to watch the football game with everybody else and he kind of forgets about whatever it is and we're all sitting around, talking and having a nice family day, when Hugo looks at his watch and shrieks: "Jesus, it's almost time!" and out of nowhere, he starts to try to talk everyone into climbing up on the roof, which, given Hugo's coordination difficulties, nobody's in a big hurry to do. But he throws such a fit and begs and pleads as if this is the most important thing, so we all end up getting on the damn roof.

The kids love it cause they're never allowed up there, and Hugo calls some number on the cell phone to make sure his watch is dead accurate. So about an hour before dusk and we're all standing up on the peak of the roof like a bunch of morons, when he tells us to look up and smile, and he starts to count down from ten.

As he reaches zero, most of us look up—because hell, why not, this is Hugo we're dealing with, and as the time runs out he grabs Karen and gives her this long kiss and she's totally surprised and swept away by it and leans back like they're in some 40's movie or something. This goes on for about thirty seconds then Hugo stops, checks his watch, declares that

"it" whatever "it" is, has passed, and we all get down from the roof, and he refuses to answer any questions because it'll ruin his surprise.

So life goes on and we forget all about the incident...Kathy and Karen were sitting around one day and this manila envelope came in the mail and it was addressed to "the family," and had NASA and other government stamps and stickers all over it, and even said "classified" in large block letters across the bottom.

They opened it immediately, and at first, they were confused because it was a bunch of pictures, satellite photos, and the first looked like it was of the Northwest, you could see the Cascades and the Bitterroots clearly. They're not in the center of the picture, you can't really tell much about the center, but with each photo, it seemed to zoom closer in on the same point and pretty soon they could tell that it was the prairie, and a couple pictures later they could see a small box, so tiny that it doesn't look real at all. All around the box are different colored fields, some golden from wheat, green from bluegrass, and a brilliant yellow of the canola fields.

A few photos more and the tractor, and combine are visible, and slowly, as they leafed from picture to picture, they could see people on top of the roof, and it kept getting clearer and closer until they were looking at themselves—looking up into the sky, and Hugo and Karen are kissing and I swear to god...it's a perfect shot—she's leaning way back and her eyes are closed.

Some of us are looking at the two of them— the old man, he's got this "what in the hell are you doing boy", expression on his face, but most of us are looking up in anticipation of Hugo's next trick, especially the children, they're looking up like a flying saucer or god, or something is about to fall out of the sky and float down and land right on that roof in the middle of nowhere.

The last picture's framed and hangs up in the living room of Henry and Kathy's house; we've all got a different one, and they're all pure Hugo.

Come on...let's go bail him out with that car before he stabs himself with a screwdriver or gets battery acid on some sensitive area...

"Hey Professor! You need a hand?"

***Class Action Lawsuit Filed against
Disney for "Loss of Innocence"***

Yesterday, prominent tobacco attorney, Jeffrey Grey, announced a class action lawsuit, filed by over thirty families against the Disney Corporation for events which occurred at the Disneyland Theme Park, in Anaheim California, on August 15th, 2000.

The incidents stemmed from an apparent 'wilding' spree of three juvenile runaways, who committed acts of vandalism, assault, destruction of property, and intimidation of guests, while visiting the park.

Grey, fresh from working out tobacco settlements in several western states, which earned his firm an estimated 324 million dollars, was quoted as saying, " I want to take some cases where I can make a difference and help some people."

The plaintiff's claim their children have been emotionally scarred by seeing Disneyland defiled, and that by allowing the 'illusion of magic' to be dispelled, constituted a breach in contract by the Magic Kingdom.

"Their job is to make us believe everything is wonderful." Grey said at a press conference, "On August 15, 2001, the Disney Corporation neglected its duties and endangered the fantasy worlds of our children—and for that," he concluded, "They must accept responsibility and make restitution."

The case is scheduled to begin later in the year, and the plaintiffs are rumored to be seeking 97 million dollars in punitive damages.

Several Disney character actors have filed separate lawsuits related to the incident of August 15.

-Associated News

Orofino

I was sick of listening to drunks and addicts talk shit, it seemed like that was all I did. Once in a while someone called up and threatened to commit suicide, or a wino stumbled in off the street and then I actually earned my money, but most of the time I sat around and told lies with a bunch of dead beats like myself. It was Christmas Eve and we were all gathered around the TV, watching *Cops*.

"Bullshit!" Lockjaw cackled, as a police officer tried to scare a weeping passenger into snitching on her boyfriend. We watched *Cops* every night after their AA and NA meetings at the church across the street. Whenever there was a drug seizure, they would all lean forward in anticipation and get this hungry look.

I sat there staring into space, not really watching or thinking about much, when this flash kept catching my attention and I looked over and it was the television light reflecting off a gold tooth in Lockjaw's mouth. I watched it bob up and down clumsily, covered by a thin, silver sheen of saliva, which stretched between her upper and lower choppers like a tiny spider web. She was truly a horrible sight, disfigured from a stroke, ugly, and very disagreeable—but I kind of liked her. We'd play cribbage and she would curse and call me a "dirty cock sucker" every time I

pegged a point. But she always seemed happy when I came in for a shift and made me little pictures with crayon and napkin. They were like something from kindergarten, and she was so proud of them that it made me feel soft towards her.

It was snowing outside. The ground was slowly disappearing under patches of white and the roads were icing up. It didn't look good. I had a long way to drive when I got off work and a lot of it was up hill. It was supposed to snow for days, and my only hope was to get up to my girlfriend's family and then get snowed in. That was the master plan. I was supposed to be back to work the day after Christmas but hoped it would snow enough to block the roads and keep me up on the prairie for a couple of extra days.

I had two hours left of the shift from hell. Everybody was skittish, trying to force a good mood, but it wasn't working.

We'd sat down for our dinner, delivered by "Meals on Wheels", and it was supposed to be something special: Salmon. Almost immediately, Richey and Shauna—the speed freaks, started fighting about everything, just arguing to argue. They were being so meticulous about things, and they talked so fast, that I was sure they'd gotten hold of some crank somehow. Fuck. I didn't want to deal with throwing two people out in the snow on Christmas Eve. I was sitting there, watching them, trying to decide how to handle things when Frank went completely out of the box.

He was a full-blooded Nez Perce Indian, at least six foot four with this perfectly straight, so black that it was almost shiny hair, hanging almost to his waist. Every morning he would stand in front of the mirror and meticulously comb it out. He took one bite of the salmon and spit it back on his plate like a child.

“These are hatchery fish. I won’t eat this shit—they’re soft.”

“You can’t tell a hatchery fish from a wild one,” I said impatiently.

“The fuck I can’t!” He said, then stabbed his finger viciously into the salmon’s body several times. It broke apart easily and several small pieces, not flaky like salmon should be, but gooey and wet, flew onto the table and floor. Then he gave me this ‘I told you so’ look, squashed the rest of the salmon in his giant hand and walked outside to smoke.

Our resident wino, Tony T., had already suffered a seizure earlier in the day. One minute he was standing in the lounge telling one of his Viet Nam stories, when all sudden he got this calm, peaceful look, and he seemed to know what was going to happen. He scanned the room helplessly, said, “oh no,” and fell over, flopping around like a landed fish. We moved all the furniture out of the way and called an ambulance. That was about all you could do when someone seized up.

Just after dinner I’d gone out to see how Frank was doing. He’d been pacing the front yard in the snow, looking restless. I went out and offered him a cigarette.

“How ya doing?” I asked.

He stopped dead and walked directly over to me, looked me in the eye. “I’ve got two daughters,” he said, “I need to be home.”

We didn’t say anything for a while after that. Several other people filtered out and the whole crowd sat around, smoking and telling lies. Then, I swear to god, Tony T. came stumbling around the corner in his hospital gown. He walked across the church parking lot and when he saw us he got this enormously stupid grin. He slipped in the snow, somehow wobbled to his feet, gave us a body builder’s flex, and we saw him in all his glory. The only thing under his gown was a ragged pair of boxer shorts, and an I.V. was still hanging out of his arm.

“I forgot my smokes,” he blurted out to no one in particular.

“Jesus Tony. What the hell?” I said. Trying to keep a straight face.

“What,” he laughed innocently. “It’s only a few blocks and I need smokes.

Everybody was laughing hysterically but Frank. He had this pained, uncomfortable expression, and I knew we were going to lose him.

Technically, I was supposed to call my boss and get approval before doing anything, and then I had to document that talked and write down his instructions in the log—but it was a pain in the ass. The place was subsidized by the state of Idaho, and there was so much administrative bullshit, that most of the time I solved my own problems.

Frank was a pretty trustworthy guy, besides, I wanted to keep his mind occupied so I asked him to sit in the office and tell anyone who called that I was on the toilet. We had a 24-hour crisis line so the phone had to be answered. I'd get fired for sure if something like this got out, but I didn't give a shit. I figured I could run Tony back to the hospital in five minutes and no one would ever know. They took things pretty seriously and Tony might have been thrown out of the program. I knew he was homeless and maybe that affected my decision making, but fuck, it was Christmas Eve.

I hustled Tony in my uninsured car, another bad idea, got his cigarettes, and we drove off towards the hospital.

"Tony T." I said. Trying to sound serious and official. "You gotta stay put man. They'll toss you for leaving the hospital like that. If you want some smokes get a nurse to call and we'll send some over."

"Sorry," he said without looking the least bit sorry. "They got me so doped up that I don't know what's what. It's great."

I pulled into the hospital's main entrance. "This never happened, okay?"

"Yeah, yeah. I'm not gonna remember this tomorrow anyway," he said and poured himself out of the passenger seat and stumbled towards the door.

I was back in five minutes. Through the window I saw Frank quickly hang up the office phone as I pulled into the driveway.

I was so sick to telling people what they could and couldn't do; being the referee in all of their arguments; and listening to confessions—it was exhausting.

“Look, Frank...use the pay phone, that's what it's there for.” That was all I said.

A few minutes later he was outside again, pacing the sidewalk and chain smoking. Lots of people walked out. They'd stare out the window or start thinking about home and then...suddenly; they'd pack up their shit and walk out the door. Frank had that look.

I had less than an hour left of my shift and had already decided not to notice that Richey and Shauna were high, when Frank marched into the office and told me he was leaving.

“I'm sorry,” he said, “you people have been really good to me but I gotta get home for Christmas. My daughters deserve better than this.

I took a minute and tried to choose my words real carefully.

“Frank, you know I can't stop you if you want to leave...but I really wish you'd think this over. Once you get back out there the same stuff is going to be waiting for you. You've only been sober for ten days and the first bar you pass is going to look like the promise land. Think this over carefully, I'm trying not to preach here...but this could be it. You can only lose to this thing so many times before there's nothing left.”

He nodded his head as I spoke, as if he were considering my words. When I finished he looked down at his feet for a good ten seconds and then let out a huge sigh.

“That’s it then,” he said. “I’m going.”

After that there was nothing to do but fill out the paperwork. I tried to page one of the counselors but none of them called back. I shook his hand. He said, “sorry about the fish,” threw his backpack over his shoulder and walked out into the snow towards the highway. I had no idea how he thought he was going to get all the way to Orofino, which was a good thirty-five miles up the river. The snow had completely covered the road and it was really starting to come down. I had a half hour to go.

I went back into the office and started turning out paperwork, getting everything ready for the next poor bastard’s shift. Behavioral notes on all the clients, a detailed explanation of Frank’s departure, shift-change report, and medication forms—the paperwork went on and on.

I said goodbye to all the clients, gave Richie and Shauna a smile and a nod that said I knew exactly what they were up to, and waited out front for my replacement. He showed up ten minutes late and I thought I was going to kill the guy; I was so keyed up to get away from that place.

“There’s no fucking way,” I told myself as I rushed towards the highway, “that you don’t get up there.”

I was prepared to wreck the car in order to get to my fiancée. I don't know why, but I felt like I had to be there. I'd promised her nephews that I'd take them sledding, and believe it or not, that's what I kept thinking about as I tried to hurry without sliding off into a ditch—tearing ass down some hill on a sled with a couple of kids on my back, holding on for dear life.

I drove through Lewiston, crossed the river, and there was Frank, standing on the other side of the bridge with his thumb out, shivering.

“Fuck!” I screamed and pulled over about a hundred yards down the road. I cursed Frank and the fact that he needed help. There were several ways I could drive up to the prairie and one of them was in Orofino. The problem was that it was narrow, unpaved, and wound up a steep ravine with no guardrails. I didn't feel up to driving in those conditions, shit I come from California, I can't drive in the snow worth a damn, but there was no choice, I couldn't leave him out in the snow.

He pulled open the door and when he saw me, he hesitated like he thought I was coming to try and bring him back.

“Frank,” I said. “I'm going up to Nez Perce and I'll take you through Orofino, but you'd better get in this car right now if you want a ride cause I'm in a big fucking hurry.”

He jumped in and I started to drive as fast as I could get away with. A couple times we slid on the ice towards the river, and Frank barely seemed to notice he was so deep in thought. That was okay with

me because I wanted to concentrate on driving through that freaking blizzard which was threatening to strand me in Lewiston, where I would have to spend Christmas alone, thinking about all the stuff that I didn't want to think about. Being around kids helped, I never had any problems when I was around Jil's family. Her family liked me, I could tell, and it felt nice. They didn't know about all the shameful things I'd done back in California.

The highway was deserted, but as we drove past the Indian Casino, a big tent like structure with flashing neon signs, the parking lot was half full.

"Can you believe that," Frank asked me? "All those folks drove out here in this weather, on Christmas Eve, just to play some slots. I don't get it."

I was hunched over the steering wheel like an old lady, nervously watching the road. It was nice to hear someone else's voice.

"How you feeling Frank?" I asked.

"I feel like a drink," he said and laughed awkwardly.

Then we sat in silence for a moment.

"You grow up in Orofino?" I asked.

"Kooskia," he said, "just up the river. Hey, you know what it means...Orofino?"

"Not a clue," I said. "Sounds like Spanish."

“It means fine gold. Orofino creek, up near Weippe was where they first discovered gold in Idaho, three cents worth.”

“Who, you mean the Nez Perce?” I asked. I was new to the area and didn’t know much about its history or anything else. All I knew was that I liked it there.

“After that, the whole area got over run with prospectors from Oregon and California; greedy, dishonest people who wanted something for nothing—people kinda like us.” He said and smiled mysteriously, leaned the seat back, and stared out the window.

I turned on the radio and neither of us spoke for the rest of the drive, we just listened to country renditions of Christmas songs and counted the miles to Orofino. I guess we both had a lot on our minds. It took us over an hour to drive thirty five miles, and when we finally got there, we drove right through the center of town and it was all lit up and people were gathered on the streets. Some were Christmas caroling and others staggered from one bar to the next.

It almost looked like a town from a western movie, except for the neon signs and cars. We turned down a small road, wound into a modest housing track, and he pointed out a lime green, one story house with lights that hung unevenly from the rain gutters, and a Christmas star in the window. On the door it said: “Season’s Greetings,” in big green and red letters. All the lights were off inside.

“Well...that’s that I guess,” Frank said and reached out his hand.

“Good luck man,” I said. “You’re a warrior, you’ll survive.”

“Damn right,” he said, “I always do...hey, wait here a second friend, will you?”

He went quickly into the house and returned with a brown grocery bag.

“I really appreciate the ride. Here’s some elk back-strap and a left over six pack.” He said and walked back towards the house before I could say anything.

It was still snowing hard and all of my good judgment told me not to take the Gifford Grade because there wouldn’t be any help if I stalled out or crashed, but it didn’t matter to me. I felt so strange, like I was in the middle of a defining moment but couldn’t tell what it was.

When his door closed I drove to a gas station downtown. I ran in, bought a sixteen-ounce coffee, a stale doughnut, and inhaled them while the car was gassing up. I had to drive right back through the middle of town to get over to Gifford Grade road. At the end of Main Street there was a little dive bar, and I could’ve sworn I saw Frank’s giant frame duck quickly inside as I drove past. I didn’t stop. As I headed up the canyon I kept telling myself that life depended on this. I had to make it. If I didn’t, something bad would happen—I could feel it.

It took forever. I was doing twenty miles an hour at the most and couldn't see more than twenty feet. At one point I lost traction going

around a corner and slid towards the edge, took my foot off the accelerator and braked gently. The car came to a stop, lost momentum and started to backslide. *NO* I thought. *Not now. Don't do this to me now.* As the car slid backwards I prepared to go over the side and even thought it was okay to go out like this, but after about twenty feet it miraculously stopped. I couldn't get any traction and had to slowly back down to the previous corner where it was flat and I could gain a little speed before heading up another incline. It took about twenty minutes but worked and once again I was climbing maniacally towards my goal.

My heart was jumping out of my chest and I was making all kinds of promises to anyone I thought might have any pull in the universe. I'll do this, I'll do that, just let me get this one break, then suddenly the road leveled off and the prairie unfolded before me. It looked like I was driving on the clouds.

"Yeah baby." I shouted, like I'd just made the winning free throw. I stopped the car after a mile or so and got out to take a piss. It was beautiful. I felt so good, that I wrote the word *Love* with my urine in the snow. It was crooked and barely legible, like a child might have written it in crayon for the first time. That was exactly how I felt.

It took another few minutes but I got there and the house was empty. The lights were on and the door was unlocked as usual, so I walked in and collapsed on the couch. There was a note on the table

that said: "We're at mass, come on over or we'll be back in an hour or so. Merry Christmas Honey."

They were Catholics. They believed in God and the American dream—all that stuff. I didn't believe in anything...but I wanted to so bad. At moment, I might have been the happiest man alive. Over in the corner, the Christmas tree shined and it seemed to sink down inside of me like sunlight. I lay there, exhausted, watching the shadows change every time a light blinked. I looked at the presents, wrapped, colorful, and covered with bows. The whole thing was like some sort of treasure heap and the blinking lights made it seem to shimmer as I watched the blurred reflection in the window.

I fell asleep knowing that soon, they would all get back and the whole house would come alive. I was right in the middle of this crazy dream...we were down on the river, Jil and I, and she was standing up to her waist in the water, reaching out towards me with a half-eaten sandwich as I dug a pie-tin into the sandy bottom. I slushed it around, and as the current slowly carried the sand and rocks away—I saw something sparkle below. I dug down through the debris, expecting to find a big lump of gold, but realized that it my own wedding ring.

Then I heard the sound of voices, happy voices, the rapid approach of feet, and two little kids jumped all over me.

"Wake up, wake up," they urged. "We want to play."

Half-Time

She's looking out the kitchen window, the small one over the sink with the curtains that you can see out of better than in. The kids call it the peephole. From there she can watch her husband putter around the shop, supervise the children's jungle gym, see the food bowls of taupe and gray, the family cats—so many had been killed by coyotes that they'd stopped naming them. She can see the barn, and off in the distance, she can see the crop dusters, maniacs all of them, flying close the hills, dumping their loads, then pulling up violently before crashing into a hillside.

When cars pull onto their gravel driveway from the road, the headlights bank off the stained glass wind-chime on the porch and shoot into the window, refracting in all directions and for an instant, if it's real dark and the moon isn't out—it looks like fireworks have just exploded outside. She loves this place by the window; it's hers.

Out in the yard; dangling, climbing, hanging, yelling, and jumping—are four men and three small boys, all moving about frantically except her father, who sits up top and watches the spectacle. They look like some sort of monster: seven heads, fourteen arms and legs, all waving and pumping and moving.

What a tangle of men, She thinks to herself. Enough to make a woman run screaming!

Her sisters are all in the living room fawning over the baby, the first and only girl of the new generation. She'd come into the kitchen for a glass of water ten minutes earlier and stood silently watching the scene outside.

It hasn't rained in twenty-four days, and the ground is starting to crack. The crops are shriveled and look spooky. They could be in for another month—they don't say drought, it's a dry spell.

During half-time of the Lakers/Sonics game, the men had all gone out to stand around the open hood of a small, beat-up, Japanese car. They milled around pointing and gesturing like they all knew exactly what the problem was. Her husband Henry, who worked on all the farm equipment himself—he looked like there was no hope at all, but he'd been looking at Hugo's car like that for over two years and it was still plugging along.

Nobody reached in, or touched the engine, or tried to do anything, they just stood around talking about it, like men loved to do, and slowly the kids had lost interest and gravitated over to the jungle gym. Then Hugo had gone over and started chasing them around and, she didn't know how it happened, and couldn't hear much of what was being said, but one by one the rest had been absorbed into the game of tag until there was a writhing tangle of men, looking like some fearful multi-headed

Hindu god with a skeleton made out of the yellow and brown angles of the wood and plastic jungle gym.

God help us! She thinks and smiles. She's been staring for some time when her father, who's been sitting up top like a statue, snatching up and tickling any of the kids who got within his reach, attempts the six-foot slide. He gets part way down, comes to a stop, wobbles to the left, and falls over into the sandbox from about four feet up. Everyone stops and they all look his way to see if he's all right.

She leans forward trying to hear what is said as her dad gets up and brushes sand from his jeans.

"Aw the hell with it, I'm going for a beer," and just like that, the moment is over.

The monster breaks into pieces which all strut and saunter towards the house—the boys seem like caricatures of the men they try to imitate. Henry looks into the small window, sees her silhouette and smiles a knowing smile that rushes through her like wind. She quickly scurries into the living room as the men and boys fill up the house with noise and smells and the basketball game is turned on in anticipation of the second half.

The Cosmologist's Nephew

What is cosmology? Pushed to its speculative limit, the widest definition would be "a system of beliefs leading to an explanation of the mystery of existence." But this would put much of the practice beyond the scientific method, which insists on prediction and testability...

We shall later claim that, still keeping within the scientific method, we can broaden the definition slightly by recognizing the recent advances in high-energy particle physics and state that "Cosmology also deals with the ontology of things—that is, inquires into being—In this case, the existence or being of the cosmos and its contents." Clearly, this then becomes nothing less than an inquiry into the question of creation. It can say nothing about the reason for the event but rather provides a description of the consequent processes that began just after the instant of creation.

—Allan Sandage

I always think I know what I'm doing...but the facts don't usually support this assumption.

My Nissan Sentra was backed all the way up our cracked, crooked driveway, until the open trunk hung right above the stairwell that led down to our basement apartment. I loaded all my shit into the car as quick and quiet as possible, I didn't want to get caught, not even by some neighbor I hardly knew.

There was stuff lying at odd angles on the living room floor—thrown down as I'd piled everything up before actually making trips up to the car. It was a big pile, an asymmetrical lump covered with various protrusions: guitars, clothes hangers, and a fishing pole. It occurred to

me that I'd brought all those things together—they were all in my orbit. An old telescope, a relic from my childhood, poked through a lump of dirty clothes. I pictured the night my uncle set it up on his deck for me when I was eight, moved it slowly across the sky, lifted me up to look as he talked somberly about what I was seeing; it was like we were in church or something. My uncle was nuts...talking to a child about the shape of the universe, about the big bang, about the moon and why it affected the tides more than the sun—all kinds of crazy things.

I was having problems fitting everything into my car. I'd always been able to fit everything into my car. I didn't like this new development, which was further compounded when I caught the bungee cord in the face as I tried to pull it over the excess stuff heaped under a tarp on the roof. The hook on the other side detached. I was pulling as hard as I could and the cord had about stretched its limit, but was still a couple inches shy of the rack. There was an instant when the resistance disappeared and it registered in my brain that this...this was not a good thing—then bam! It clocked me in the face, right over my left eye, and I started to bleed like nobody's business. My activities were looking more nefarious by the moment as I lay there dazed, dumbly clutching a bungee cord, and bleeding profusely. Do I get the message? Do I even ponder the thought that maybe this is a sign of things to come? No Sir. Not me. That would be too easy.

As I drifted back to the world...the first thing I saw was a bee. It seemed gigantic as it flew inches over my face, hovered over a rose bush, and then flew off until it was just a speck of dust in the sky. I heard footsteps and then the neighbor, Corky, hung his fat, sweaty face about three inches from mine, and his breathe stunk like the ass-end of something horrible. He was drunk as a pig, and tried to pull me up long before I was ready to get up. The trees were looking nice from that position, everything slowed down the instant that bungee cord cracked me in the face and the ground felt real comfortable. He mumbled for a while, and then I made out the first signs of language. I heard Corky say to himself: "he needs help."

I got sucked in. In my weakened state I couldn't beat back his assault of hospitality and the next thing I knew we'd staggered next door. I had this moment of clarity as we stood, wobbling on his porch; I could see inside his house and it seemed a different world, full of angry TV explosions and heavy with smells of mold and cigarettes. I turned to the side and caught the sunlight as it fanned through a small willow tree and reflected off the wet soil from our garden. The pull was just too strong—he led me inside and I collapsed on the couch with an oil rag pressed above my eye.

I watched him walk down a long dark hallway and come back with two glistening bottles of beer. Then he pulled the door closed and all the

natural light suddenly vanished, replaced by an artificial blue that flared from the television.

I felt myself sink into the couch, felt it give. Damn I was comfortable. Who cared about the outside world? The beer was cold and the couch was oh so soft. But then I remembered about the car, packed with stuff, sitting in the driveway for all to see. I tried to push myself up from the couch and he put one of his hands out and gently eased me back down.

"Relax chief," he said. " You need to fortify. "

I struggled again, turned onto my side, and slid one leg onto the ground for leverage.

"I gotta," I pushed up to a knee. "I gotta get going."

Corky looked like some evil gnome, sitting in his lazy boy chair, illuminated by the TV as he gurgled down beer. My head was starting to clear and the idea of flight was returning. There was mold on the walls of his living room. Various comforters and sleeping bags were tacked over the windows with roofing nails.

"Your eyes get used to it."

"What?" I asked.

"The dark... That's what you were thinking wasn't it? After twenty minutes you can even see shadows...don't like the sun." He said and trailed off. "Spent too much time in California, too much fucking sun and not enough weather."

"Yeah," I said, not wanting him to gain momentum—who knew how long he could keep up once he started rambling? "How bout another beer?"

He grunted and rolled out of a lazy boy which sat just a few feet from the giant screen—underneath, wrinkled and dirty, was a hand sewn pillow that hasn't seen much but the back of that guy's ass for months. If I could feel bad for a pillow... well, that would be the one.

He lumbered back and put another beer on the coffee table in front of me. He settled in and produced a giant, complicated remote control from the crack between the arm of the chair and the cushion. He waved the remote like a conductor in a symphony.

"I got the new shit," he said proudly. "Installed it myself...five hundred and sixty three channels fer Christ sakes!"

He was on the verge again—I could feel it building, feel the momentum. I bet he hadn't talked to anyone that wasn't standing behind a cash register in weeks. I felt bad but...God, the stink. That's what I kept coming back to: how bad it stank—like death or something worse, but it was freaking me out. I was trying to pound that beer and escape, so I could leave my girlfriend yet again.

"Pay per view, French porno's, ultimate fighting...I got it all baby."

He threw down a sizeable amount of beer in one giant gulp, again rolled out of the lazy boy, and returned with two more beers before slumping back down and seeming to lose animation, even life as he sunk

deeper into the cushions with each breathe. He rocked back and forth, reached out—stretched another beer towards me and I had to lean forward and meet him half way to pull it from his sweaty paw. I had three beers in front of me and none of them were finished.

"I even got fishing. You wouldn't believe how much fishing I got, fresh and saltwater. You should stop by sometime, watch a little basketball or something."

I was already starting to forget about the outside world; the sun, the smells, all that July light putting a touch on everything—It couldn't penetrate there. The idea of those things seemed ridiculous. I thought about black holes. Corky lived in a black hole—a stinky, black, hole. I had to get out.

"Well, I..." I stammered.

"Yeah, sure!" he said. "Whatever. I know you want out of this pit. I know..." he trailed off and then jerked awake and on track. "I know what people think of me."

What could I say to that? Luckily he passed out and I drained my second beer, dumped the third one out in his sink, onto his dirty dishes, and set the bottle on top of a mound that was overflowing from an extra large trashcan. I went out the back door, cut across his yard and into ours, ducked down the stairwell and surveyed the scene. The people upstairs, a single mother with two children who she screamed at

constantly could get home at any moment and then my betrayal would be out. I don't know why I cared—I 'd be long gone, but I just did.

The apartment was the basement of an old house on a bank over the Snake River on the Washington side. It was square, with one communal room, a laundry room—so the overall shape of our place was that of an "L", or maybe a "U" with one of the sides being shorter than the other. The Laundry room, however, was a chunk out of the middle and therefore we had rooms on both sides, connected with flimsy doors, which made the place seem incomplete and insecure to me. The lock on the bedroom side was so old and the door so warped that it took the both of us, one to pull the door with a foot wedged against the wall, while the other flipped the small ornate knob upward and hoped that the lock caught. I always insisted on locking it—I wanted to build up a defense against all the screaming and bad parenting that filtered through the floors daily.

It looked deserted with only her things in it. Like a motel room when you were doing that last scan to see if anything had been forgotten. The pictures of her family, especially the young nephews, who were my favorites, made my chest heavy and something moved down inside of me. I shook it off, choosing to listen to brain, who sounded like he knew exactly what to do.

I walked from each of the three rooms, separated by angles more than walls, and searched for trinkets and family objects; anything that would remind her of me.

The car was packed. A bookcase and two guitars I could barely play made silhouettes in the back windshield. The note was out on the table, can't forget the note. You make up your own version—they all amount to the same thing so I'll leave out the particulars.

I felt a little sick as I walked through the living room, the semi-bathroom that was more like a hallway between the kitchen and bedroom. I lingered, looked around—a half burned scented candle sat on the windowsill above the kitchen sink; a Mickey Mouse blanket that I won at the county fair. These were *our* things and they sat there silently... accusing me. They would all soon become *her* things. This had happened before.

"This place sucks." I said it out loud—as if to break the spell those shared objects were casting over me. "Gotta move...maybe get some grub on the way out of town."

I remembered my work clothes—that crappy job. I got my overalls out of the washer, clean but soggy, put them in a plastic grocery bag and walked out the front door. I paused dramatically before locking myself out and heading up the stairs with one less key hanging from my chain.

I headed over the bridge, which spanned the Snake River and connected two towns: Lewiston, Idaho was on one side of the bridge, and

Clarkston, Washington on the other. We lived in Washington but worked in Idaho. I ambled through town, down a side avenue and around a corner, which led across the tracks and came to a dead end at a loading dock on the river.

The place I worked was about a quarter mile before the loading dock and sat right on the border between the part of town with actual shops and commerce going on, and then the part where the work was getting done. Dirty cars lined the parking lot, covered daily with a fine, gray dust the perpetual afternoon winds would kick up from the railroad tracks...right onto the cars I had just washed. That pretty much summed up the job. On top of that, the owner was mean.

I parked horizontal to the building, in the alley at the back of the lot. I felt a little guilty again, like I was breaking in, using the key to enter the garage on a Saturday afternoon when nobody was around.

I threw my damp overalls on the desk, made a Xerox of my middle finger, taped that to the owners computer screen, then wrote a note to the manager, who was a pretty decent guy and I had nothing against.

I remember putting the key to the garage on the note and looking around at all the nice cars. I could have driven off in a brand new Buick right then.

I cut onto the bypass, skirted downtown, and crossed the river again—the Clearwater this time, and headed up the grade. I climbed up into hills covered with tired looking brown grasses and a charcoal tone

underneath reminded me of the fire a year earlier. I'd watched it consume the whole hillside in a matter of hours. At the top of the grade, the road flattened out on the Palouse Prairie and the highway soon turned into a country road.

The car rose and fell over small prairie fields, covered with crops, or in some cases just dirt. It was haying season and the smell of cut grass was thick and sweet in the air. I had all the windows down and the air was rushing in and surrounding me as I sped across the prairie. A brown cloud was visible in the distance and I rolled up all the windows and drifted through a giant dirt cloud as a farmer tilled a hard, craggy field. Then I burst out the other side and everything was clear and bright again. I couldn't keep the car below eighty, I'd try to slow down but would get so wrapped up in looking at everything and the speed would creep up and next thing I knew...I was driving a hundred and it seemed like we were going slow.

I got pulled over just outside Colfax, speed trap and wheat capitol of the northwest. There was a giant sign that flashed the price per bushel of three different kinds of wheat. It was five miles past Colfax and I saw the flashing lights and pulled over. It occurred to me that my car was uninsured. It had California plates; I had a Washington address; and my driver's license was from Idaho.

The cop sauntered up to the passenger side and tapped on the window with his ticket book. I rolled it down and handed my license,

registration, and an eight-month expired proof of insurance card. He looked down at me with a hint of suspicion and I remembered that I had a nasty cut over my eye and a car full of things.

“This your stuff?” he asked.

“Yes sir,” my usual reply when dealing with law enforcement.

He walked behind the car as he scanned my license and registration. He walked abruptly back to the window and looked at me with disgust.

“Jesus, three states...make up your god damn mind already,” he said as he scratched angrily at his book.

“I only just moved here a couple of months ago, sir. I came to work things out with my girlfriend and things haven’t gone well so I’m going back to California.”

I was really getting depressed, the second sign of the day was slapping me in the face—I’d just realized that I didn’t really know where I was headed.

He looked up at the covered tarp on the roof, looked pointedly at my cut and smiled.

“A little trouble with the Bungee cord?” he asked.

I hung my head in defeat as he started to laugh.

I was trying to shrink into my chair when he tossed my paperwork onto my lap, still laughing.

“Get your shit together Einstein,” he said and walked off.

I was in shock. That was my first time ever getting off on a ticket. I jumped back in the car and took off, the junction was only fifteen miles away and it was dark by this time and starting to cool of a bit. My stomach was tight and uneasy as I pulled into the junction gas station. I bought some Tums but they didn't help either. I headed west. That part of Washington was dry and hilly. There was lots of river country, and several damns and reservoirs.

This part of the drive was best at night—when the desolation was cloaked in purple blackness and the stars were so bright they seemed almost angry. At Vantage, I crossed a body of water on a long, thin bridge. I didn't even know what it was. A lake, a reservoir, or what? On the other side was a place called the Gorge, which hosted rock concerts. From the traffic I guessed that one had recently let out, groups of teenagers were gassing up and getting snacks before heading back to Seattle or wherever they came from.

They all looked so excited. It made me feel old.

The rest of the drive was ruined. No darkness, no stars, just a line of cars, all trying to pass each other and get home as quickly as possible. I realized that I was heading towards a city where this was normal. I was choking the steering wheel. My chest kept pulling, something was moving around in there.

For the next two hours, I drove towards Seattle in a long, frantic, line of cars. We drove up and over Snoqualmie Pass, the road opened

up, and the race was on. I wasn't even using the gas, drifting down from the pass at seventy, the car felt heavy and slow. As we curved in descent I started to catch glimpses of the outer reaches of Seattle through the hills. I got heavier with every mile. My thoughts grew dark. Where was I going? Forget that...why was I going?

The brain was letting me down—he seemed so cocky earlier. I pulled off the interstate and sat under an overpass on a path of gravel. I sat there for who knows how long, at that point it seemed like time had all but stopped. I thought about my girlfriend, all the things she'd done for me, and how she 'd always tried to understand, even when I wasn't making any sense. How she balanced me out.

What can I say? I turned around so fast and was up and back over those mountains in what seemed like nothing. I was so focused on getting back and covering things up before she got home the next day. I wasn't even seeing the road, and long, empty moments would pass when my mind was absolutely still. The landscape flew by, getting bright, and then fading away in seconds as my Nissan rushed past.

Hours later I stopped off in Colfax to get coffee and take a piss. I sat down at a booth, and out the window—I could see the price of winter wheat flashing above.

“HEY!” a terse voice shook me out of my thoughts.

It was the cop. “I saw that piece of shit parked out front. You lie to me before?”

“No sir,” I replied. God I was tired, so tired, but happy. “I couldn’t leave. I’m going back.” I tried to say this matter-of-factly, like I didn’t care whether he believed me or not.

“The woman?” he nodded his head and sat down across from me at the booth. He looked tired too.

“Lucy, the special!” he yelled and a squat woman came out of the kitchen.

“Don’t shout,” the woman screamed back and then turned to me. “We’re making a fresh pot, the other stuff was burnt—it won’t be but five minutes.” Then she disappeared back into the kitchen.

The cop turned in his chair, gripped the top of the booth and cracked his back in booth directions. We sat in silence for a couple of minutes, both thinking our own thoughts; finally, he sighed heavily.

“I pulled a double tonight. God damn I’m tired.” To emphasize this, he put a large, stainless steel thermos on the table between us. “Two hours left...I gotta take a shit.”

He got up and started to walk back towards the bathroom, paused, and turned back to me for a moment. “Be careful with that bungee this time around chief,” he said and lumbered towards the john.

I jumped back on the road as soon as the coffee was ready, made Lewiston is less than an hour, coasted down the seven mile grade and crossed the bridge into Idaho. I drove through town, crossed another bridge into Washington, and turned off into our little neighborhood by

the river. I was home. Now all I had to do was break into my house, put everything back in place, and think up a good story to explain the eye, which had started bleeding again after I picked it.

I killed the lights four houses before ours, killed the engine and coasted back up the cracked, crooked driveway. I got out and sat on the hood of the car. It was a good hour before dawn and a piece of the moon hung high in the sky. I snuck around back with an old screwdriver from the trunk of the car...I'd broke in before that way, so I thought I was home free.

I was delirious as I crouched above the basement window. Just as the latch clicked and I knew I was in...just then there was an explosion, like a bomb, and all hell broke loose. I remember falling, landing on my head, breaking a lamp with my foot, and the world slowed down again, just like it had earlier that day with the bungee. Everything got thick and slow, and heavy, and next thing I know, I'm in the back of a squad car wondering what the hell had just happened. I mean—who knew?

Later, much later...the cops let me go, helped me clean my face and unload the car. We made a new pile on the floor of the living room. All the same things, but this time—the shape was different. As I rushed to put everything in it's place, I kept dropping things; shirts, books, a blanket, they fanned out and followed me like the tail of a comet.

When Karen got home I was asleep, and she stood over the bed, making small talk as I came to life. At one point, I thought I'd made it,

everything was perfect...and then she reached out towards one of my small, figurines, which sat on the dresser. She arched an eyebrow at me that could have meant a million different things. She reached out and turned the figurine, ever so slightly. It was a small statue of the Buddha, fat belly and all, with his arms raised—laughing. She took a quick look around the room—noted the cut on my face, and she smiled but didn't say a damn thing.

It was then that I realized how fundamentally unfair life was; how my brain was a low down, dirty liar; and how much I loved that woman—who was about to cuddle up and make spoons right before she skewered me for the truth.

I was so busy trying to think up a story that would explain the broken lamp, my eye, and the salt rock in my ass...that I didn't remember about work until the next morning, when it was too late to do anything.

Orange County Fables

Dieter Brahm pulled Lederhosen stubbornly over his potbelly, and fastened the buckles of his exaggerated mountaineering boots. He drank cups of coffee in rapid succession like they were shots of whiskey, shooting free throws on a Nerf hoop in the kitchen while he practiced English.

“And in his debut game...from the Republic of Germany, the six inch and five foot Dieter Brahm, is having much of a game face today.” He pretended to introduce himself.

“The Laker’s have big, big troubles. ‘Dis wily German looks like he came to play. The Shaq-Daddy is looking much nervous.” And then Dieter broke off his pre-game monologue and cut right to the action. He clutched the Nerf ball in his left hand, awkwardly faked right, stumbled to his left, around the refrigerator...and dunked the orange-sized ball—momentum throwing him into the kitchen wall and shaking the mobile home to it’s foundation.

This was Dieter’s pre-work ritual: Coffee, Nerf basketball, and English. He put in at least an hour each morning, before snatching up the giant horn, which sat behind the front door, pulling an alpine hat over his balding head and going to the job.

To get to the Magic Kingdom from his mobile home near the ocean in Huntington Beach, Dieter Braun took a left on Pacific Coast Highway and drove south. Tan men with beepers littered the three-par golf course—sunlight reflecting off mirrored shades and beer cans. Tiny black shapes, striped with various fluorescent colors, were silhouetted against the dull green water of the Pacific Ocean. The surfers floated in small enclaves. They sat on their boards, huddled like seals, and waited for the big waves. He saw the water treatment plant in the distance; clouds of pollution spewed from a smoke stack and were dispersed by the wind.

He took a left on Beach Boulevard and drove inland, past the first line of tracked housing, past strip malls and endless lines of car dealerships—a giant whale floated high above, it hung two stores down from the one it advertised. Tethered in the breeze, it said: “Two percent financing on SUV's, buy now. Now!”

He went by the Huntington Mall, with the *Macaroni Grill* in front, and the *Barnes and Noble* in back...past the *Mega-Plex Theatre*, the arcade, batting cages...past all the theme restaurants; *Camelot*, *Buffalo Bill's Round-Up*; *The Wax Museum*. He drove past the small cluster of motels that charged by the hour, skirted Little Saigon and Korea Town.

He despised *Knott's Berry Farm*—the competition. As he rolled by in his economy car, Dieter deftly extended the middle digit of his left hand and waved it for all to see. He clucked his tongue, as if in sympathy, and declared with a thick, guttural accent: "Amateurs!"

Dieter turned right at Katella, staying far away from the dreaded Harbour Boulevard—always under construction, always crowded, swarming with tourists and more and more and more theme restaurants and theme hotels and convention areas.

Dieter took another right, turned down a small side street that was the cast and crew entrance to the Magic Kingdom. Dieter drove up to the gate, scowled at the security guard, and pulled into the employee parking area.

The walk to his station was the worst part because he felt so ridiculous in lederhosen, wearing an alpine hat, and carrying a horn that looked like it came from a Doctor Seuss book. Sure, other people were dressed up like stuffed animals—but Dieter still felt self conscious in his uniform.

He sounded like Arnold Swartzenegger would if he drank whiskey and smoked cigarettes every day of his life. Dieter became an American by default when his beloved East Germany gave up and was swallowed by the west. Dieter preferred communism. He wasn't ambitious, liked to drink too much and work at something that didn't require much thinking or commitment. One thing he did good, one thing he was truly good at, was mountaineering.

He could climb like a mountain goat, drunk or sober, and when he'd ended up in Orange County, California, with no real skills, poor English, and a bitter, cynical attitude...the odds of his ending up working

at *Disneyland*—climbing the Matterhorn in a ridiculous outfit that looked like something out of the *Sound of Music*—were astronomical. But there he was, cursing in German as he climbed around the perimeter of the fake mountain—always unshaven and wearing a disgusted frown that frightened many children on the ride more than the pathetic abominable snowman with the battery operated eyes. This was nothing compared to a disgruntled German in lederhosen, dangling from a rope as you approached him at sixty miles and hour.

Dieter was not an overly thoughtful man; he didn't spend a lot of time contemplating life, but when he stared down from his artificial precipice on the throng of tiny, ant-like shapes hurrying from one illusion to the next—he was baffled. What were those fools doing down there? Couldn't they see through the capitalist ploy? He looked down, scowled and said with supreme disgust: "Pigs!"

One thing he loved that went against all the old communist party teachings was American basketball. He loved the uniforms, the flashy play, and idiotic commercials—the whole spectacle. During his first week at *Disneyland*, his co-worker Hans had showed him the secret of the mountain, and it wasn't what he'd expected at all. He'd followed Hans through a series of service tunnels, up a slender, rickety staircase—into the tip-top of the mountain, and discovered a small room with wooden floors, and to Dieter's disbelief...an old wooden backboard with a rusted rim and the tatters of an ancient net. *What a Country!*

During his week of training Hans explained the rules thoroughly, quizzing Dieter to make sure he understood every nuance to the game of horse.

"How you climb the mountain or blow that stupid horn is your own damn business, you figure it out," but Hans was adamant about horse—no lay-ups, no bouncies, and absolutely no dunking.

"Not that there's any danger of that from your sorry ass," Hans added, and went on to explain that the loser of the game had to climb around the mountain in full view of all below, while the winner blew an elongated horn so everyone would look up to see the idiot in funny clothes, rappelling down the side of the Matterhorn. This was supposed to make the mountain seem real, and in addition to blowing the horn, the winner got to spend some quality time with the bottle of *Rebel Yell*, which Hans claimed against all logic to be the best American whiskey.

At First, Dieter had to do all the climbing, he was so terrible at basketball, but he practiced and practiced—a couple times he actually slept in the old room, shooting late into the night before the next day's show down with an increasingly aggravating Hans.

All in all, he was getting used to America, even though there were just "too many choices," for Dieter's taste. He never thought he'd find a job that was easier than working in the ball bearing factory back home. If it weren't for the clothes, annoying tourists, and that beyond stupid horn, the job would have been a perfect combination of Dieter's three

favorite pastimes: drinking, basketball, and mountaineering. Because of their isolated work area, it was virtually impossible for management to check up on them, as long as someone got out and climbed around every hour—nobody gave a damn what they did.

Things had been heating up between Hans and Dieter. There were several questionable calls by Hans that led up to the head-butting incident, but Dieter had to put his foot down. No bouncies meant: *no bouncies*. He hadn't made the rules.

Since the incident, Hans hadn't returned to work for two weeks. Having his neutrality violated—he took things hard, "as the Swiss often did," Dieter thought with a pang of regret, actually missing Hans since the people down below had figured out that one European in funny clothes could do the job just fine. They now worked split shifts and had taken to shooting free throws (best out of 100) and leaving top scores along with an insult or two written in chalk on the floor.

Dieter was drinking more and he'd lost his passion for basketball. He was so melancholy that he actually lost the will to disparage tourists and began climbing around quickly, with his head down in defeat, avoiding all eyes as if he had something to be ashamed of. One the day in question, Dieter was sitting in the corner of the room, drinking beer and reading the sports page, when he heard a commotion below, the sound of shouting, and sirens in the distance.

Dieter jumped up, his shirt was un-tucked, and the lederhosen were hanging at the waist because he hadn't put the shoulder straps back on after his last trip to the restroom—which was in a tiny closet in the corner of the room.

Suddenly, two security guards burst into the room, scanning it for something. They went and looked in the closet without consulting Dieter.

“What...what is this, what happens?” He stammered.

The two guards looked around the room, looked at each other.

“What the...he got him a basketball court up in this bitch,” the shorter one said in disbelief.

The taller one eyed Dieter with suspicion: “What are you doing up here?”

“I work here, what do you do here?” Dieter replied.

“You see a kid up here? We chased him onto the ride and he jumped off somewhere and we lost him,” the taller one continued.

“Kid...I see no kid, is dis some kind of joke?” Dieter felt like he was back in East Germany, felt the tingle of fear that climbed up his spine every time he spoke to a policeman.

The shorter one still scanned the room in confusion. “Yo, you play ball up here?” he asked.

Dieter gave his deadliest look. “I am playing like a mother fucker; I am having much, much, game.”

The short one burst out laughing, picked up the ball and started dribbling it behind his back and through his legs. Dieter watched, fascinated.

“Check this guy out.” And then he dribbled over to Dieter.

“You gotta learn how to talk about this shit right before you ever gonna do this shit right. It’s: ‘I got game.’ And you’re not ‘playing like a mother fucker,’ that’s old and wore out...say this: ‘my game’s deep, I be strokin’ the three’s, coming inside on yo ass like I was Ron Fucking Jeremy, shit...my game’s so deep’...”

“Quit messing around! This guy doesn’t know what the hell you’re talking about,” the taller one interrupted.

“Man...you think you’re the boss—talking like you all that, just cause you used to be a security guard at Nordstrom’s—you better step off that shit.” The shorter one seemed agitated.

The taller one turned to face the shorter one, moved closer. “And I’m sick of listening to you Darrell, talking like some kind of gangster...you’re from Newport Beach, your parents go skiing in Europe every winter—get over it. Besides, I bet you can’t play ball worth a shit.

“Naw, naw...you didn’t just say that you Bryant Gumble mother fucker.”

They were standing toe-to-toe, bumping chests. Dieter moved over and pushed them gently apart, stepped in between.

“Okay, Okay...it is enough.” Dieter said, trying to diffuse the situation.

“The fuck it ain’t,” Darrell said. “I want some satisfaction from this punk.”

The tall guy seemed ready to blow. “Oh, you want some satisfaction. That’s rich. I’ve been carrying your lazy ass for months: you don’t work, you don’t show up on time...always talking that shit.”

They pushed against Dieter, trying to get at one other.

“Okay, okay. You think you all that, then let’s go...let’s see,” and he picked up the basketball again.

The taller man looked at his partner in amazement. “Are you crazy? We’re in pursuit of a suspect.”

“Man, quite talking like a cop, you’re not doing nothing but getting me mad. That kid’s long gone—you gonna represent or crawl back down this mountain like a bitch?” Darrell said and took a long jump shot that clanked off the front of the rim.

“That’s it,” the tall man said and turned to Dieter. “What’s your name?” he asked.

“I am Dieter Braun,” he said proudly, relishing the possibility of seeing his first real game.

“You ever watch NBA games Dieter?” the tall one asked.

“Yes, yes. I enjoy Lakers very, very much.”

“Okay, then you know what a foul is...right?”

“Of course! I am understanding the game very well.” he replied.

“Good,” the tall one said, “you can referee. I don’t trust that little bastard—blow that horn over there whenever you see a foul.”

Darrell, the short man, was busy warming up: shooting jumpers, lay-ups, dribbling around the room. He threw the ball at the taller man, who caught it easily.

“You ready punk?” Darrell sneered.

“Ten by ones, make-it-take-it, win by two...take the ball back to that stain on the floor back there, okay?” the taller man was all business. He threw the ball back at Darrell: “You shoot for it.”

Dieter sat leaning against the wall with the horn across his lap, waiting and watching in awe.

He was so wrapped up in the game, that he didn’t blow the horn when the tall man practically beheaded the shorter man as he drove the lane. Darrell fell hard, rolled to his feet quickly, and Dieter thought there might be a fight...but he turned on Dieter instead.

“DAMN D! You gonna call that shit or what?”

“Oh yes,” Dieter said, and blew a quick note on the horn, pointed at the tall man and said: “foul”.

“What?” the tall man erupted, “I barely touched him.”

Dieter shook his finger as an indication that whining would not curry favor.

“Gimme the rock.” Darrell called to Dieter.

He was confused. “I’m sorry...”

“The rock, the pill, the freaking ball!”

“Oh.” Dieter threw a bounce pass to Darrell, who was waiting at the top of the key.

The game was magnificent. The two men were equally matched, both average players, but to Dieter they seemed like gods—their movements poetry, and the game they played was art.

The tall man carried the day, making an awkward left-handed hook shot to win 16-14 and he celebrated as if it were the NBA finals. Darrell stalked over to Dieter angrily.

“Tell me you didn’t see that?” he demanded. “He took five steps,” the man held up five fingers and inch from Dieter’s face for emphasis. “You robbed me D. sure as if you beat me down and stole my wallet—I been robbed.”

Darrell paced around the room cursing, tossing the ball from one hand to the other, railing against the inequities of life.

“That wuz nothing but bullshit,” he said.

“Face it,” the tall man said, “you lost.”

“I didn’t lose shit,” Darrell said. “I want me a rematch.”

“Tomorrow,” the tall one said and smiled. “Let’s put twenty on it.”

“Yo D...what shift you work tomorrow?” Darrell asked.

“Ten in the am until ten in the pm,” Dieter answered.

“Cool...” he said. “We take lunch at five.” He winked at Dieter, then turned quickly on the tall man. “Let’s go, you’re gonna get us fired you lazy bitch. Let’s go look for that kid.”

They crossed the room, tossing insults back and forth, and disappeared down the stairs.

Dieter slowly walked over to the ball, which had settled directly under the rim. He picked it up and dribbled several times, tried to put it between his legs and the ball bounced off a foot and rolled across the room.

“Yo man,” he called out to an imaginary team mate. “Give to me the rock.”

Santa Ana Police Report #5463857463-09

Appendix: B (Narrative Summary)

On July 17, 1996, at 4:37 a.m., officer Caesar Ramirez and myself were called to 1435 Pineville road, to investigate an apparent multiple homicide. Crime scene indicators led me to believe that the murders were drug related.

The first victim, Seth Green, a 28-year-old white male, was known as a dealer of Methamphetamine and was classified by the DEA as having nominal contact with the Mexican Mafia. He had multiple arrests for drug distribution, possession, and was stopped near the Mexican border (case # 7869786 San Diego County Sheriffs Dept.) with over one hundred thousand dollars in cash—at the time, he was unemployed.

Green's body showed signs of torture including: ligature marks on the neck area, a severed left thumb, broken left foot, and severe bruising of the groin. Cause of death was determined to be from blunt trauma to head. Ligature marks on the wrists and ankles suggest that Green was tied-up at some point. Defensive wounds on the victim's hands and forearms, and the disturbed nature of the crime scene indicate that the victim was probably killed after getting lose and fighting with assailants. The victim was stabbed three times post mortem, and the presence of two other blood types than the victim's—suggest this as a possible scenario.

The second victim, Maria Escobar, a 17-year-old Hispanic female, was strangled and showed signs of sexual assault. The disrupted bedroom area, as well as the fact that the bodies were found in separate rooms, suggest that the sexual assault may have been intended as a means to get information from Green.

The home was searched thoroughly by the offenders and several empty 'stash places' were clearly visible to officer Ramirez and myself. A holed out book contained numbers and beeper codes, as well as addresses in Mexico. A floor safe, installed under the refrigerator—evidenced by scrape marks on the floor where someone had moved it—was open and empty.

The most likely scenario is that of a drug robbery, but several informants have corroborated that Green had a falling out with criminal associates, so an act of vengeance or discipline are also possible motives.

While searching the premises, a third party was discovered, nearly comatose on the floor in a second bedroom. The man was eventually identified, after being hospitalized for two days, as John Andersen (no record), called "Cal" by his criminal associates. Andersen was non-responsive and needed hospitalization for malnutrition, acute drug sickness, and was extremely agitated and disturbed upon learning what had happened.

Andersen claimed that he was Green's childhood friend and had been given permission to 'crash' there for the night. He couldn't explain why he was sleeping on the floor, between the wall and the bed—which undoubtedly is the reason the offenders never discovered him. Andersen claimed to know nothing of the incident, Green's criminal history—or why anyone would kill him. An absence of blood, fingerprints, and his extreme reaction to the news of what happened seemed to corroborate Andersen's story.

Andersen was admitted to Bellevue hospital for observation and disappeared shortly after being released. His present whereabouts are not known. Andersen is wanted for questioning concerning the murder, three days later, of Jesus Gonzales, whose blood was later identified at the scene of the Green/Carson Murders through DNA testing.

Magic Kingdom

I lasted a few months. Before that it was Spokane, Seattle, Portland, a couple days in Sacramento, then Orange County. I kept running away and they kept dragging my ass back to Idaho and locking me up—then I'd get out and run again.

Most of the time we stayed off Harbour, near all the cheap motels and activity. Harbour Boulevard went near from the coast all the way to the foothills of the San Bernadino Mountains. Miles and miles of strip malls, pawn shops, bowling alleys, car dealerships, driving ranges, titty bars, and of course—Disneyland. A day didn't go by when some pasty fat guy from the Midwest, or a Japanese tourist didn't ask for directions to the Magic Kingdom.

A few miles south was a stretch of road where all the whores flagged down cars. Toe-head's mom worked that area and they bounced from one shitty apartment complex to the next, but always stayed close to either Disneyland or Knott's Berry Farm, cause she said they were good for business. Sometimes we'd sneak in and stay at Toe's place, his mom didn't really care, but she was a speed-freak and had all these crazy boyfriends who definitely cared if a bunch of street kids were crashed in the living room.

Toe-head was a big kid but he was dumb as dirt. He had this enormous jaw that made his face look out of whack, weird shaped eyes, and these thin, blue lips. *Innocent*, that's what his mom said, cause even though she was a whore and a pretty messed up person—that was her child and she couldn't think he was plain stupid. His mom was like lots of different people locked inside of one: a little kid, a vicious bitch, a junkie-whore, legal expert, or a mom—you name it. She was in jail when I first got down there and I sort of adopted Toe cause he was so damn useless at getting by.

My other partner, Speck, had come down from Lewiston with me. He was tall and lanky, had this bright red hair, and a ferocious mouth and attitude. He was kind of crazy if you want to know the truth. He'd rock back and forth all the time, and seemed like he was watching a movie and you just happened to be in it—like nothing was real.

I remember we both had to see the psychologist up at St. A's cause we had an incident with some other kids. The guy said I was mostly pissed off, but Speck, he came out of his meeting labeled as a *sociopath who experienced psychotic episodes*, and I looked that shit up and didn't like what I read at all.

That's why I had to sneak off by myself sometimes. Between a retard and a psycho, I was always handling something—micromanaging some point of stupidity. Whenever I got tired of being the tit feeder, or thought the family services people were sniffing around, I'd disappear to

my secret spot and take the day off—do a little reading and drink some beer, or maybe just lay on my back in the rubber plants and stare up at the sky till I fell asleep.

The stars seemed smeared down there, not like they did in the country, but smaller and weaker, and a little dirty. It wasn't smog so much as what they call 'light pollution'. When you got a big city, or something that throws off too much light, it fucks up the view of the stars. Like that pyramid casino in Vegas that has a giant spot light pointed into the sky, it messes up the view at an observatory hundreds of miles away. I read all about it in jail and I'll tell you what—those were some pissed off astronomers.

You'd have loved my spot; it was perfect, a small draw surrounded on all sides but one by freeway ramps. If you didn't know the secret way in, you practically had to break down on the interstate to discover it. That's how I found it. I saw it from a distance cause there was a camp fire burning down at the bottom of the draw and I needed to get off the road, so I snuck around the side and crept behind a willow tree that was backed up near the outer cement wall of a housing track.

There were a dozen or so Mexicans camping out like they were in a state park or something. They must have been illegals and trying to keep things on the down low. I wasn't in a mood to trust nobody, so I just waited them out behind that willow, watching through the branches while they passed a bottle around the fire and laughed. Off to their left—

all sleeping together under a pile of dirty blankets and flannel shirts—
were a bunch of little kids.

After watching for hours with nothing much to do but think, I had this crazy notion that they might be headed up north towards the part of the country I kept running from. They looked like migrant farm workers. Basically, a country wetback dressed like a redneck—Peterbilt and John Deere Hats, faded jeans, Budweiser t-shirts, big belt buckles on Saturday night.

There was this one guy though; he looked different. He was younger than the rest and had a mouth full of over-sized gold teeth, like his dentist didn't know what the fuck he was doing. This kid wore a Lakers jersey and camouflage pants. He was telling them a story in Spanish, and his face was all beat-up. He moved around a lot, acting it out while he told them about getting his ass whipped, and I couldn't tell what he was saying, but they were busting up like it was the funniest thing ever. They all looked pretty bad—skinny, dirty, and beat-down by life, but they laughed and laughed like it was no big deal. Like everybody camped out between freeway entrances.

I woke up the next morning and they were gone. The fire was out and the ashes were scattered—you could barely tell that people had camped there. I stuck around for a couple days, checking the place out and I liked it. From then on it was my secret spot. It had trees and bushes for cover, and rubber plants that were so deep and soft they were

like beds. You even got used to the hum of cars, and on weekends you could watch the fireworks over Disneyland. I kept a sleeping bag, something to read, and a cooler with some beef jerky and beer stuffed under a bush—my emergency supplies.

The way I got there was to climb into this drainage ditch about a mile off and walk in. It was one of those dirt trenches that ran between the tracks of suburbs. When it rained those ditches filled up in no time and became like rivers. I heard that once in a while they even flooded into the neighborhoods—just like real nature. The rest of the time they were more like swamps: shallow, stinky water—lands of algae, and underneath you could see these faint golden shapes moving around. These were all the goldfish that people had flushed down their toilets over the years.

The first time I went back, I'd just walked under a small concrete bridge that connected two neighborhoods, when I came across this really old lady—a gook lady, and she was wearing a straw hat, squatting down by the water and fishing it with a cane pole. We both kind of startled each other and I raised up my hands, like to say that I wasn't gonna mess with her if she didn't mess with me, and she smiled and there was more black in her mouth than teeth. From then on it seemed like every time I ducked into the spot I would run into this old lady, and she would be squatting there with the cane pole perfectly still in the crutch of her arm and smoking a pipe. I called her the bird, cause she was all pointy

and would get down by the water and sit so still that I swear to god—she looked like some exotic bird that escaped from the zoo.

One day I had a couple of forties and I was ducking out for the night, when I crept around the corner, and damned if the old bird didn't haul in a big assed carp that flopped around on the bank of the ditch while she dug in her pail. I watched as she pulled this small, curved knife out of her pail, walked her hands up the line to the fish, and then put one of her fingers through its gill and held it up above her head like a trophy. She shook it at the sky and said a bunch of stuff in that weird language of hers, and I remember getting the feeling that she was saying some kind of prayer.

She cut a slice out of the fish's side, pinched the meat between her thumb and forefinger without setting the knife down, popped it into her mouth and chewed. Then she noticed me and waved that I should come over. I went and squatted down next to her, and she cut off another slice from the fish—a splotchy, gold and silver Coy, who'd wiggled around in protest while she peeled away a bite sized strip of meat from its side. She handed me this little piece of raw fish meat and I remember thinking, *what the fuck*, and tossing it into my mouth. I didn't want to be rude or anything, and it wasn't half bad if you didn't think about where it came from—only, she kept cutting and passing, so I had to keep eating, and pretty soon we'd wolfed down half of this ditch fish and when I thought about it like that...well, I started to feel a little sick if you want to know the truth.

I took out a cigarette as an excuse to stop eating and offered one to her. She smiled, tore off the filter, and stuffed the rest into her pipe.

Then she sat back against the bank of the ditch, hit on the pipe, and blew a small ring of smoke over the water. We never hung out for very long cause we didn't have nothing we could talk about, speaking different languages and all, but we'd kind of agreed, without ever saying anything, to share the same territory. I brought her a smoke every time I passed and she minded her own business.

The old lady actually lived in a house that backed up against the ditch. She'd put ladders on both sides of the concrete wall and would scramble over with her pole, bucket, and all her shit in hand. I saw her doing this one time and waited down at the bottom of the ladder while she climbed down. I must have scared her 'cause she yelped when she looked up and I was standing right there, and then this voice on the other side started screaming, and a young woman scrambled over the fence in a panic. She got in my face, like I was trying to rob the old lady or something—poked me in the chest, and started to yell at me in bad English: "What you do to my grandmother? Go away! I call cops, I call cops!"

They were having some kind of party, cause all these people climbed up on the wall and stared over while this young woman screamed at me. Fuck, I didn't know nothing about them people. For all I knew they were about to jump that fence and barbeque my ass, but then the old bird started in on her granddaughter but good. I couldn't understand a thing, but she pointed to me several times and by the time she was done, the bitch who was screaming at me—she looked like she was gonna cry. There was like total silence and all these gooks were watching me.

“I’m very, very, sorry,” she stammered and then looked over at the old bird, who still didn’t look satisfied.

“I did not know you were a friend of my grandmother. Please accept our family’s apology for my rudeness.”

She looked like she was being tortured, it was obvious she didn’t want nothing to do with me, but she bit the bullet and invited me over for dinner while the old bird looked on, and I swear—the day I come across a judge who can give the stink-eye like that is the day I start to walk the line.

Next thing I knew, we’d climbed into their back-yard and I was the honored guest at a cook-out, sitting with the old bird while all these people waited on us. They all came up and paid their respects like she was the top dog. Once in a while she’d call over one of the younger kids and have them translate some small talk, but she never really asked me anything personal, just made polite conversation. I never even found out her name but one of the grand kids told me that they were called Hmong—mountain people from a place called Laos. They lived up in the hills all across South-East Asia, and best as I understood it—they were kind of like gook Indians.

He told me the old lady had walked to Tailand in the 70’s and lived in a camp for two years before floating to America on a boat. I went inside to take a piss and I realized that they had a pretty nice house, and it suddenly occurred to me that the old lady wasn’t back in that ditch cause she needed food, like I’d figured—I guess she just liked to fish.

In the hallway, there was a picture on the wall of a beautiful young woman and she was holding up an AK-47 and had this perfect smile—

full of straight, white teeth, and I realized that it was the old bird—years and years earlier, and man...she looked tough.

Every time someone came up and paid their respects, the old lady would introduce me, and she always said this word when she pointed to me, like it was my name, so I asked one of her grand kids and she said it meant 'refugee'. You believe that? The old bird thought I was a refugee.

Even though Toe-head's mom was a junkie and associated with all these criminal types, he was gullible as a tourist. We had to watch him constantly because he just didn't seem to learn. He lived in this fantasy world—always wanting to pretend we were ancient warriors or wizards or some stupid shit like that. We'd be begging money to buy beer, but Toe would have to make up this whole story about how the beer was some magic potion and we had to recover it to save the princess. I swear we just didn't know what to do with his ass sometimes.

It was Toe's birthday and I'd told him that we would go to the Magic Kingdom. His mom had been gone for a couple of days and most likely forgotten his birthday, so I really wanted to take him to Disneyland. Speck, Toe, and me weaved our way through the traffic of tourists, who walked down the sidewalks with balloons and slack faces—like they'd seen so much that their eyes were tired. At the front, were

several small ticket booths, and I squeezed between the lines. I scaled down the price list on the wall and nearly choked—thirty-five bucks a person. I felt a little desperate. I don't know why, but it was like my responsibility to do something good for Toe's birthday.

We walked up Harbour, down some side streets, over to Katella and a few other spots but nothing came up. I was bored and decided to put everything into the task at hand, just to see if we could do it. For a while, nothing happened so we just kept walking...looking for some kind of opportunity to make some cheese. A couple of hours later, we saw this really old guy wobble out of a bottomless strip bar like he'd just learned to walk. Easy prey. We all immediately crossed the street and followed from behind. Speck took off running at the next intersection, cut over one street and then sprinted up a few blocks so as to get in front of our guy—then we could ambush him at the next light. This was our usual approach.

We upped the pace so we would be close enough to strike when Speck came at him, which he did, breaking a bottle over the guy's shriveled head. Speck always over did things. The guy was so old and drunk that we could have just shoved him into the bushes and taken his shit...but no, Speck's gotta go and add aggravated assault to our petty larceny. I ain't apologizing for nothing, don't get me wrong—if that guy had money to pay some woman to flash her pussy he sure as hell could contribute to the Toe-head Disneyland foundation...but that don't mean

we gotta bust shit over his head. I swear; some people just don't know how to act.

The old guy laid there moaning and crying like a sissy, so I bent down and rifled through his pockets. I found the wallet and something in a wrapper, shoved them into my pocket without looking and we took off.

We ran a couple blocks over, cut across a condemned school and into a drainage ditch, and under a bridge that connected two neighborhoods. The first thing I pulled out was a condom, extra sensitive. The idea of that old bag of bones squirming around on one of them strippers was beyond disgusting. Then I pulled out the wallet and it was one of those Velcro jobs with writing on it that was faded way past reading. I almost choked when I opened it up—there was a huge wad of cash. I counted five hundred and eighty-three dollars.

My head was spinning. This was the mother load and I didn't even know what to do with it. I gave a hundred dollar bill to each of them, put one in my front pocket and folded the remainder up and put it in my sock, under the arch of my foot.

At first we just sat there, not really being familiar with a lot of options, and then Toe said in a real quiet voice, "I'm hungry," and we set off to spend our loot.

We went to a Seven-Eleven on Katella and loaded up. Hot dogs, nachos with cheese, microwave burritos—it was a feast. We could get

absolutely anything we wanted and sure enough, Toe-head was getting sick about twenty minutes later behind a dumpster. We'd started looking for a wino but weren't having any luck. They were good for anything that required an adult. You gave them the money and they rented the motel room, bought the beer, whatever.

"Jesus," Speck said, "whenever we need one of them old dead-beats it seems like they're all at Thunderbird convention or something." He cackled at his own joke and seemed like he was heading for one of those weird spells.

"Let's go to McDonalds," Toe-head groaned from behind the dumpster. He came out wiping spit from his chin, and smiled that big dumb smile of his.

We were heading over to Baskin Robbins a little while later when we spotted Earl—older than dirt and drunk all the time if he could help it. He stank like his own piss and his hair stood up in a big tangled dreadlock that hung over the front of his head like some monster about to strike. He was actually pretty intelligent if he wasn't too drunk to talk. We'd shared motels with him before and he wasn't a crook or a pervert or anything like that—just a messed up old guy who loitered outside of convenience stores begging change for beer. That's what he was doing when we saw him, and it was still early in his day, so he was part sober and didn't look at all happy about it.

"Buy a guy a forty," was all he said when we walked up.

Toe-head immediately pulled out his wad of change left from the hundred I'd given him and handed Earl a five-dollar bill.

"Put that away," I snapped.

He looked confused.

"Why?" he asked.

"Look, Toe, pretend we're like famous outlaws and this is our loot, see, and we gotta keep it secret from all the other pirates so we don't get jacked—get it?"

He shook his head in excitement, his mouth opened, and spit rolled down his chin and flew right on my leg. Damn!

We went behind the dumpster and Earl came out with two forties for everybody. It took us about twenty minutes to pound them down and then we stumbled over to the Magic Kingdom.

"Welcome To The Happiest Place On Earth," it said on a neon traffic sign, and then flashed what must have been the same thing in about a hundred different languages.

"For fuck's sake Pat, let's get some whores. I ain't ever had a whore and I want one. I wanna get a whore." He cackled again, and then barked at this fat lady who walked by.

"Relax Speck," I said. "We got enough money to do whatever, but first I'm gonna take Toe to Disneyland. You can come if you want." I knew he'd hang with us, cause he hated to be alone more than anything.

"Yeah, yeah, let's do this shit so we can fuck some whores," he

yelled and a pack of tourists looked over at us like we were the devil, and I couldn't help but laugh at everything.

I was nervous buying the tickets without an adult, but the lady acted like a robot—she took my money, pushed a button, handed me the tickets and said: “*Welcome To The Magic Kingdom,*” without showing any sign of intelligent life.

We walked through the turnstile and down that road you always see in the commercials—cobblestone streets, little shops, and then a bunch of fuckers in costumes clowning around and posing for pictures. Big deal! But I gotta say...those kids loved it. I mean—the little guys were going crazy. They were running around in this state of amazement. The look on their faces was pure magic—I didn't know what to make of it all. The parents seemed tired, they hunched on park benches gathering strength while their kids ran amuck. Then this vendor tried to sell me a five-dollar box of popcorn. Five bucks for a measly box of corn—what kinda shit is that?

The first ride we went on was called: “*It's A Small World,*” and Toe loved it. He clapped along while all these little wooden munchkins sang about how great everything was. Jesus! Speck and me got bored fast, and he still had that look—his eyes darted around like he was searching for the right moment, or whatever it was that set him off.

“This is for retards,” he said and jumped off the boat.

He landed on a platform where all the happy munchkins were singing and kicked the nearest one square in the face. He laughed, crouched down and whispered: “check this out.” All I could do was watch helplessly as we floated away. Then we heard Speck yell, and a bunch of people in the boat behind us screamed.

“I’m the fucking boogey man bitch—that’s who I am!” And that was the last we heard of Speck for a while, cause by then I’d decided to ditch his crazy ass. As soon as we got off the ride I took Toe by the hand and headed towards the opposite end of the park.

Toe didn’t want to leave Speck behind, but a quick ride on “*Space Mountain*” was enough to make him forget. He didn’t even breathe as our car dropped into the pitch black and shot into space. It was just a roller coaster with lots of lights that were designed to look like distant stars, but I must admit it was pretty cool—flying through the universe like we were on Star Trek.

After that, we walked around for a good hour just checking everything out. My senses were getting overloaded—there were flashing lights and crazy noises coming from everywhere. Each ride had some sort of blinking, talking, singing, sign...and then the actual sounds of the ride itself; the people waiting for the ride; the background noise from all the other rides... man, I thought my head was gonna explode.

Toe had the same look as all the little tikes and he kept running ahead to investigate, and then running back to tell me about something.

“Pat, Pat, you gotta see this,” he’d say and pull my arm towards the next spectacle. I was starting to see why all them parents looked whipped and beaten.

We were cutting through Looney Tune Land when he stumbled across Speck. He was sitting perfectly still, about two inches away from the face of a life-sized statue of Bugs Bunny—just staring. Man, I wonder what that place looked like in Speck’s fucked-up head.

Toe jumped all over him, talking about all the things we’d seen and Speck slowly started to come out of it—looked at us, and finally there was a sign that he knew who the hell we were. He nodded his head and gave me the thumbs up.

“Forget the whores,” he said. “This place rules.”

And we were off. Toe and Speck headed towards the next attraction, and I tailed behind wondering why I felt so damn tired.

Then we discovered the “*Pirates of the Caribbean*.” Man, what could be better n’ that? Sailing around the world tearing shit up, getting drunk as a pig, and jacking anyone who crossed your path. What a kick-ass job!

The first time I had no idea what we were in for. The boat slowly drifted down a canal of water, by this outdoor restaurant where these couples were having a romantic dinner, and then we floated by an old shack and entered a swamp.

We passed a cave and lying on the ground were two skeletons. Each had a sword stuck in it and there was this heaping mound of treasure between them. Then we dropped down into total darkness and a raspy voice warned: “*Dead men tell no tales!*”

We rounded a corner and floated down a long, narrow canal, and I felt an electric current run through my body as we drifted through the darkness and the sound of canons grew louder.

We dumped out into this huge area and passed right between two old time ships having a sea battle. Pirates stood on board and shook their swords at each other while they loaded up their canons and fired. It looked real enough for Toe and Speck cause they freaked, standing up in the boat and screaming shit like there were real people on them or something.

“Yo Bitch! I got your wooden leg right here,” Speck yelled at the peg-legged captain of one of the ships and grabbed his crotch.

Every time a cannon fired, a bubble machine would go off in the water to make it look like a splash, and each time, Toe would flinch and then look relieved. His eyes were darting around trying to catch all the action, and then we drifted away from the sea battle and could hear music in the distance.

We came around a corner and boom! The pirates got this raging party going. They got all this money and jewelry and they’re just tearing up this town—chasing all the women and beating down all the men.

Laying on the ground, not ten feet from our boat there was this fat pirate hugging a whiskey jug, passed out with a couple of life sized pigs, who looked drunk too.

Speck let out a howl of delight.

“Yeah boy...” he bellowed. “It’s party time.”

Toe was motionless. He crouched down in the boat and stared with these huge eyes, I mean, he was completely under their spell, and he was having the time of his life. I had to give props to old Walt Disney; that was one bad-assed ride.

And then it happened...right in the middle of our third time through the Pirates, right before everything hit the fan—I had this feeling of satisfaction. It’s hard to even explain it—but I looked at Toe, how happy and innocent he seemed, and it set something off in me. I swear to god, I’ve taken lots of beat downs and I never cried about it, but right then, while these mechanical thugs were singing and dancing, while they looted this town; right then I felt a tear roll down my face and I almost lost it—something came over me.

This was right before the incident. Who knew Speck brought his thirty-eight? Who knew he was gonna start taking pot shots at the pirates, and Toe would jump off with him, pick up a wooden sword, and start kicking ass on a bunch of robots? What am I—a psychic?

But that was it for us, I jumped off trying to get control of those two, this security alarm started bleeping, and you should have seen the

look on the faces of the people in the boats behinds us. They floated through the town that the pirates were supposed to be sacking, and Speck was waving a gun in the air and whooping like a gut shot Indian. Toe was running from pirate to pirate, just beating the shit outta those robots with his wooden sword, and I was standing there like an idiot trying to figure out what the hell to do.

The first boat floated by as Toe ripped one of the pirates from the ground, threw him down, and stomped it to pieces. All this intricate machinery and wiring hung out of the damaged pirate—who no longer looked realistic at all, but like a big toy that hadn't been taken care of. We stopped for an instant as the next boat went by and a family looked at us in horror. Thank god Speck had run out of ammo, cause he started cursing at the boat like they were next. He waved his gun and they all dove onto the floor of their boat and hid.

“PUSSIES!” Speck laughed as it drifted off.

“Speck! Toe!” I yelled, and pointed to a small tunnel that led down.

It turned out that there was a whole system of tunnels underneath the park. You wouldn't believe all the crazy shit down there. At one point, we sprinted past a large doorway and there were a bunch of people in costumes, holding lunch trays, and waiting in line. Snow white was getting a heap of mash potatoes spooned onto her plate and smoked a cigarette. There were a bunch of midgets in dwarf costumes behind her

in line. We stopped at the entrance to the cafeteria for and instant—just staring. Toe looked confused.

I pulled them further down the tunnels. At every intersection there were colors on the wall and directions, so I figured we could run to the front of the park, then surface and sneak on out. We would have made it too, except for one fat security guard who couldn't mind his own business.

He didn't know the gun was empty, so when Speck pulled it out and started shaking it in his face, the guy looked like he was going to piss his pants and he sank to the ground in fear.

So there we were, standing over a security guard with a gun, when two police officers came walking down the tunnel. Perfect.

Speck took off down one tunnel and Toe and I went down a different one. I got us to the surface as quick as possible and headed towards the biggest group of people I could find, holding Toe by the wrist so I wouldn't lose him.

They were about to have a parade, so a huge crowd had gathered and lined the edges of the cobblestone street, waiting for the show. We pushed in and worked our way towards the front, then sat down in the crowd so nobody would spot us.

Toe was still having the time of his life—he didn't get the whole thing about consequences.

I was trying to think, trying to come up with some kind of plan for Toe but the best I could come up with was to separate and try to sneak out the front individually. Toe didn't like that at all. He started to pout like you wouldn't believe, so we ended up just trying to walk out the front entrance like everybody else, and that didn't work for shit. There were a bunch of pigs at the entrance and they must have had a picture or description, because they jumped all over us; one dove on Toe and got him in a chokehold. A cop tackled me and we fell over a trashcan and I landed on top of him and rolled free. I took off through the crowd, back into the park.

The parade had just started. All these Disney characters danced down the road, and I kept moving into the crowd and ducking down, then moving again. I didn't want to get sent back to Idaho. It didn't really sink in until then, but I was trapped and they knew what I looked like. That was the point when I realized we'd probably get caught, but that don't mean I was gonna lay down. No chance.

I snuck, climbed, swam, crawled—you name it, they chased me for hours and I kept going underneath, into the tunnels, and then I knew that all the rides had service passages, so I kept sneaking into those too. Man, I actually started to believe I might escape, my luck seemed that good. But later that night, during the last parade of the evening—right then, I came running down the middle of *Main Street U.S.A* with a cop on my ass, jumping and dodging for all I was worth. As I cut around this

horse and carriage, Mickey Fucking Mouse walked in front of me from out of nowhere and we collided full on. I slammed into Mickey and we flew into a concession cart, which tipped over, and spilled out an ocean of popcorn as we both lay there—stunned.

Mickey's head was laying a good six feet from his body, which was pinned by the cart. Instead of a mouse head, there was this old man with silver hair and a look of absolute terror on his face. I tried to struggle to my feet but this mob of security guards jumped on me. They dragged me off like a criminal while fireworks exploded above, fairy dust floated down, and a bunch of tourists stared in horror while their kids started to cry.

So here I am. Looking at the back of some pig's head while we drive up interstate 5—thinking about all the places I went wrong.

It's late and we been driving all night. I can't move. I'm leaning back, relaxing as much as I can so the cuffs don't dig in, and watching the stars out the window. We're back in the country and they're bright as fuck—the sky is purple, and there's this band of light—the Milky Way, just glowing up above.

I watched the moon come up, change colors, and slowly travel across the sky. Now it's sinking down and I bet there's only a couple hours left before sunrise. I'm thinking about those wetbacks, how they laughed all night long—like there was nothing in the world that they

couldn't take. I close my eyes and picture the old bird, crouched down by the water, with a cane pole across her lap—digging ash out of her pipe with that curved knife and wondering if I'll be coming by for a smoke.

I sit here and feel my so-called home getting closer—some of my scars start to itch, but that's all right, cause I know the game's not up. It's a long drive baby—lots of time to make something happen.

PART TWO:

AFTER THE GOLDRUSH

AN ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY

EXT. NIGHT - THE LEWISTON VALLEY - NIGHT

(TITLE SEQUENCE)

We look down from high above, into the Lewiston Valley. The lights below resemble small jewels, shining from the bottom of a deep, dark pool of water. Dark veins wind on either side of the small city and come together to form a larger artery, the Snake river, which flows to the west.

We slowly descend into the valley.

FOLLOW a police car as it passes.

EXT. POLICE CAR - NIGHT

In the back seat, beaten and bloody, PAT PLUMMER, 16, wanna-be gangster and general nuisance, stares out the window on his way to jail.

As they drive over a bridge, a sign welcomes Pat back to Idaho.

We see Pat through the window. Store fronts seem to rush past, blurred neon signs dance across Pat's face as they are reflected on the window.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER - NIGHT

A man sits and eats a bowl of cereal, stares without expression at a TV that's mounted inside a wire cage.

The man is CAL ANDERSEN, a corrections worker who'd rather be a farmer. Although Cal isn't marked in any way, it's obvious from his demeanor that there is something very wrong with this guy.

On the TV is a newscast without sound.

A REPORTER is standing in front of a flooded main street, in a small river town. It looks like a place you'd see in a western movie, except for the junked-out cars and neon signs.

The reporter gestures excitedly in his bright yellow poncho. In the background, a river rages out of control.

A small house is in the process of being overrun by the rising floodwaters. As the river eats away at the house's foundation, it slowly starts to break apart.

Cal watches, transfixed as the house is torn from the foundation and slowly floats down the river. For an instant, the house is perfectly suspended on the water and turns slightly on its axis, gliding downstream gracefully. Then it is quickly ground down to nothing but a roof and trail of debris.

CLOSE on Cal's face. He spoons cereal into his mouth as he watches intently.

EXT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER - NIGHT

The police car pulls up to a fenced-in building. It is surrounded by razor wire and there are cameras mounted at every corner.

CLOSE on Pat's face, through the window, as he looks out.

The jail is reflected on the window and behind it, Pat stares in disbelief.

(END TITLE SEQUENCE)

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

A dark muscle car slowly winds its way through a run-down neighborhood. Houses, trailers, and various pieces of junk line the street without any sense of order or symmetry.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Inside the car are Pat and his brother, KYLE PLUMMER. Kyle, near thirty, but looks a weathered forty, and his oversized frame is covered with jail tattoos.

Pat seems a little scared as Kyle turns and hands him a wad of hundred dollar bills.

KYLE

You ready?

PAT

Why don't you do it?

KYLE

Stop fucking around and get in there.

PAT

How much?

KYLE

Go as high as forty five hundred...But you should do better than that.

PAT

Fuck it.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Pat gets out of the car, swaggers down the street to a house where a small group of MEXICANS hang around in the front yard. Some of them look like migrant workers—others like gang members, but all stop what they are doing and watch Pat approach.

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

At the door, he's met by a balding Mexican who's as wide as he is tall. CHINO, the makeshift bouncer of this drug house, nods at Pat as he steps up onto the porch. Chino's cell-phone RINGS.

CHINO

'Sup Kyle? Yeah, I'm looking at his ass right now. That's your little bro, no shit?

Chino hangs up, turns a closer eye on Pat.

CHINO

Your brother's got you doing all the work out here?

PAT

What can I say? I'm in training.

CHINO

Victor, take this guy back to talk with Lupe.

Pat follows a young gang member, VICTOR, into the house.

INT. DRUG HOUSE - NIGHT

The house is surprisingly clean and the first thing one sees is a cheap painting of Jesus on the cross.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Pat follows Victor through a kitchen, where TWO MIDDLE AGED MEXICAN WOMEN stir huge caldrons on a large stovetop.

They are burning sugar, which they use to cut black tar heroin after it caramelizes. They might as well be making cookies from their expressions.

They arrive at a back door and Victor KNOCKS then opens the door for Pat.

INT. OFFICE - NIGHT

Inside are LUPE and JOSE.

Lupe runs heroin and methamphetamine for the Mexican Mafia. He looks perfectly ordinary in khaki pants and a collared shirt as he reclines behind a large desk.

Jose, his bodyguard, is huge, and wears a large gun in a shoulder holster over his tank top shirt.

Pat walks towards Lupe confidently.

PAT

Nice to meet you, I'm Kyle's brother Pat. I'm gonna make the runs while he's on parole.

LUPE

You don't look like Kyle.

PAT

We're half-brothers. Same mom, different dads.

LUPE

You gringos are lost.

PAT

Let's do this; I got a history test to study for.

Lupe smiles; he likes Pat.

Pat sits down in an office chair as Lupe takes a lunch-box from under the desk, pulls out a large amount of black tar heroin.

PAT

What'd my brother say, thirty-two?

LUPE

Your brother didn't say shit. Forty-five.

PAT

We gotta get ours too...thirty-five.

LUPE

Three-Nine.

PAT

Yeah, that'll do.

Pat takes out a huge wad of hundreds and starts to count them out on the table.

Halfway through, Lupe grabs Pat's hand and snatches up one of the bills.

LUPE

What the fuck is this shit?

This is just a week after they've put out the new hundred dollar bills, and Lupe, who isn't even a citizen of the United States, is unaware that new money has been issued.

The mood instantly changes.

Lupe picks up his cell-phone and starts to talk quickly in Spanish.

Jose moves a little closer to Pat, who starts to realize he might be in a lot of trouble.

Lupe hangs up the cell-phone and slams it down on the desk. He fixes Pat with a look that is merciless.

LUPE

Where's your brother?

PAT

No. No man, you got it all wrong. They put out new money, it's supposed to be harder to counterfeit.

LUPE

What do I care about that? We're making a business transaction and you give me some Monopoly money.

Lupe nods to Jose, who grabs Pat by the throat and pins him on the desk.

LUPE

That stupid gringo uses a kid to try and get over on me. I'm gonna ask you for the last time.

Pat's POV: He looks down the barrel of a big-assed gun.

PAT (O.S.)

Jesus... Go ask someone, I'm telling you...

At this point, one of the middle-aged Mexican women from the kitchen walks in and starts to bitch at Lupe. He waves the hundred-dollar bill for emphasis, and asks her something in Spanish. She nods.

WOMAN

Si. New dinero, yes.

The woman bitches for a moment in Spanish and then SLAMS the door on her way out. She opens it back up, sticks her head in, and says in English:

WOMAN

Leave the Gringo be. He's just a boy.

Lupe starts to laugh and Jose pulls Pat up from the desk.

LUPE

You must have the saints in your corner kid.

PAT

Fuck man.

LUPE

Sorry kid. I'll give you a hundred back for the stress. Apologize for being so rude Jose.

JOSE

(a very insincere) Sorry.

LUPE

Hey, want some dinner. My wife just finished making tamales?

A beat. Pat smiles as if nothing happened.

PAT

Hot Damn! I love tamales.

FADE TO BLACK WITH SUBTITLES: SIX MONTHS LATER

EXT. PRAIRIE - EARLY MORNING

We're flying across the rolling hills of the prairie.

An old rusted tractor lies half buried by time.

A sun-bleached barn crumbles in on itself.

We descend on a car, parked on the side of the highway.

Cal sits on the hood of his car, looks at the road.

CLOSE UP of road. Large, faded, skid-marks, lead off the highway and into a small canyon.

Close on Cal's face as he sits perfectly still and stares at the marks.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION FACILITY - DAY

Cal walks down the narrow concrete hallway with another MAN and WOMAN. They hold a mattress between them and stop outside a heavy door with a small square window. The woman has a pair of cuffs in her hand.

CAL

How long's he been in there?

MAN

He's been raising hell for half the night. All cranked up, and he was working on a car and the battery exploded so he's got acid all over him.

They look into the window and a distorted teenage face smashes up against the glass.

The boy inside is MARK BUTLER, a seventeen-year-old speed freak. He smashes his head against the glass again and a sick thud echoes down the corridor.

MARK

Fucking pigs! I want my money back...bunch of criminals.

CAL

What's this?

MAN

He says the cops stole his drug money.

Cal cracks his neck violently in both directions and shrugs his shoulders like he's loosening up for a swimming meet.

CAL

I guess we should get in there, that acid's gotta be burning by now.

INT. JAIL CELL - DAY

The woman opens the door and both men rush in with the mattress held between them. They use it to force him into the corner and then pounce.

MARK

Mother Fuckers!

The boy is pinned under the mattress and Cal is lying on top of it with his head dug under the boy's chin. The other man lies across Mark's legs and has them in a bear hug. The kid SCREAMS like a wounded animal.

CAL

It's okay. It's okay; just let it go.

Slowly, the fight goes out of Mark and he relaxes his body. The woman cuffs his hands and they pull him up and drag him out of the cell.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Cal washes battery acid from his face, stares into the mirror as he dries off with a paper towel.

A middle-aged woman is reflected in the mirror.

SUE WEBBER is a fifty-something housewife who went back to work after her kids grew up and left home.

SUE

Want some coffee?

CAL

God yes.

SUE

Pat's about to get himself into trouble with the bitch again.

CAL

It's not even ten o'clock yet. What now?

SUE

She keeps giving him violations for looking out the window. He's already lost every privilege known to man.

CAL

Yeah, I'll talk to him after class.

SUE

He already got kicked out for swearing.

Cal shakes his head and splashes one more handful of water on his face, wipes it on his shirt, and follows Sue down the corridor to Pat's cell.

INT. PAT'S CELL - DAY

Cal enters. Pat reads a collection of *Farside* comics, laughs to himself. He looks perfectly at home in jail.

PAT

This guy's a fuckin' genius...they send you in here to make me behave?

CAL

Yep! Why you messing with your own program Pat? You're supposed to get out tomorrow, don't you want out?

PAT

Fuck her! Why'd they put a window in these cages if we aren't supposed to look out 'em?

CAL

Patrick...look, I know, but you're gonna lose if you push things—just ease up, okay?

PAT

Yeah, yeah. When we gonna play some more ball? I been working on my game.

CAL

I'm gonna have to start charging you for lessons?

PAT

You ain't shit.

Cal gets up to leave, squeezes Pat's shoulder in a fatherly way as he heads out.

CAL

I'll bring you lunch in a couple hours.

INT. CAL'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Cal returns home after a long and stressful day at the jail. He looks utterly exhausted as he walks into the living room with his lunch pail in one hand and the mail in the other.

His wife JILL sits on the couch surrounded by several beer cans.

She wears a cast on her left arm, and several cuts on her face and forehead seem almost healed—but she doesn't!

She stares intently at the coffee table while she tears off the tips of her fingernails and lines them up on the coffee table.

She doesn't even look up as Cal enters the room and watches her.

CAL

You OK?

She slowly looks up and her eyes come into focus after several seconds. She looks at her husband with disgust.

JILL

Of course I'm not OK. What kind of stupid question is that? Go away...go do something. I want to be alone.

Cal hangs his head and lumbers off to take a shower.

Jill pretends to stare back at the fingernails, but looks up as soon as Cal walks past. She seems like she is about to say something; call him back, curse him, something, but she can't get the words out and the moment is lost.

INT. JAIL - DAY

Cal sits at a computer with a cup of coffee, types with one hand.

Pat changes from his green jail sweats into his street clothes.

As he takes off his shirt, CLOSE on Pat's upper body. It's covered with scars, burns, and crappy hand drawn tattoos.

CAL

You look like a road map.

PAT

You're just jealous cause I'm so young and pretty.

Pat pulls his jeans on and starts to lace up his high-tops. He looks excited.

PAT

I hope there's a party tonight. I need to get laid.

CAL

Come on Pat, don't tell me shit like that. It makes me worry.

PAT

What the fuck can you worry about that for?

CAL

Oh, a little something called AIDS, or possibly a shotgun wedding. I don't know if the world's ready for another Pat Plummer.

PAT

Yeah, yeah. You're worse than my friggin' mom.

CAL

Ready chief?

Cal tears off a computer sheet and hands it to Pat, who signs it and takes the back copy as if he's conducting a typical business transaction.

They shake hands and Pat leaves.

INT. PAT'S HOUSE - DAY

Pat sits on the couch, watches TV, as his brother KYLE enters.

KYLE

Hey, the punk's home again. What's new little brother?

PAT

I go back to court in two weeks, you gonna show up for that one? You're supposed to be my guardian you loser.

KYLE

Hey! I work you little fuck—you just run around causing trouble.

PAT

You're a criminal.

KYLE

I work hard at it.

Kyle shoots across the room and takes his brother down to the floor, gets Pat in a chokehold and pushes his face into the ground.

KYLE

God-dammit. What'd I teach you. Never let someone get behind you like that.

Kyle shoves Pat's head into the floor several times for emphasis and then lets him go.

As they get up, Pat looks hurt for just an instant but covers it by trying to punch Kyle, who instantly takes Pat back to the ground and viciously pulls his arm behind his back. Pat doesn't give up, he grunts, squirms, tries to wiggle free, and Kyle has to work to keep him subdued as they wrestle around on the floor, knocking over an end table and lamp.

KYLE

Good. That's good Pat. We don't accept weakness in this family.

PAT

(wincing in pain) You've been using that as an excuse to pick on me since I was ten; ever consider that you're just a sick fuck?

Kyle lets Pat go and rolls on the ground, laughs hysterically.

Pat gets up and examines his arm. Then he looks down at his brother, kicks him playfully in the ribs, and Kyle just laughs harder. Pat smiles—they're family.

INT. PAT'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Pat, Kyle, their mother HELEN, little sister JODY, 6, and Kyle's partner in crime, SHERMAN LOOKING GLASS, sit around the dinner table and eat Kentucky Fried Chicken off paper plates.

Sherman's a giant, full-blooded Nez Perce Indian, who's both an ultra-traditionalist and a common criminal—depending on his mood and finances.

Helen is not an actively bad parent, but prefers to pretend things are fine even though two of her three children spend more time in jail than at home.

HELEN

Patrick, your PO called and you'll be expected at school across the river tomorrow.

PAT

Fuck. I can't go over there.

HELEN

Why not?

PAT

I just can't. I got enemies over there.

HELEN

You're too young to have enemies. Besides, you'll be at school. What could happen at school?

Helen laughs nervously and looks down at her youngest, bounces her on a knee.

Pat looks over to Kyle for some support, but all he does is shrug and look at their mother like she's an idiot.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A fat, bald TEACHER drones on with a complete lack of enthusiasm.

TEACHER

...And so, the founding fathers were committed to creating a place to live that was free of tyranny and religious oppression. Many even believed that the new world was theirs by covenant with god. We came to know this attitude, which fueled the westward expansion, as Manifest Destiny...

The door opens and a disheveled Pat walks in, sleepy eyed.

He walks quickly up to the teacher and hands him a yellow slip.

PAT

I'm Pat. They told me at the office to come to this room.

TEACHER

Ah yes. Patrick, sit anywhere you'd like.

Pat scans the room, sees WENDY MCCOY, class president, honor student, and youngest sibling to five older brothers who are all smart enough to do what she tells them.

Pat sits down directly across from Wendy and glances over shyly as the teacher continues.

TEACHER

Where were we? Oh yeah, Manifest Destiny.

Pat is the only one in the entire class who isn't bored as he continues to steal glances at Wendy, who's noticed Pat's attentions.

INT. ECONOMICS CLASS - DAY

Pat sits right across from Wendy, trying to be sneaky about how he ogles her. He's smitten.

TEACHER

Okay...Diminishing returns. Who can give me an example of diminishing returns?

Pat looks over at Wendy and decides to go for it. He raises his hand.

TEACHER

Uh...Pat, yes.

PAT

I guess diminishing returns would be a product that shrinks every time it changes hands.

TEACHER

I... I'm not exactly sure what you mean by that, could you give us an example?

Pat seems to ponder this for a moment.

PAT

Okay, say you're a dope dealer. Say you drive to Yakima and buy an ounce of crank. You cut that til it's three-quarters as pure as what you bought, and...you'd be an idiot if you didn't figure the guy above you did the same thing, so by the time the guy below pulls that trick, you've got something that's getting smaller by twenty five percent every time the shit changes hands. See what I mean?

The teacher looks at Pat like he's got AIDS and wants to donate blood.

PAT

(He's interested) Is that right?

EXT. HALLWAY BETWEEN CLASSES - DAY

ANGLE on Pat's distorted face as he savagely beats another BOY. He's pulled the kid's shirt over his head, hockey style, and pounds him ferociously. He shifts his balance and smashes the kids head against a nearby locker.

As the boy goes down, Pat kick's him in the face, and stomps on him without the slightest hesitation or sign that he understands the fight is over.

A group of BOYS jump on Pat and start to give him the same treatment as their friend lies in the fetal position, and barely moves.

Pat curls into a ball and takes his punishment until a GYM TEACHER and SECURITY GUARD pull them off.

Pat immediately jumps to his feet and he's smiling like a hyena. He leans over, spits blood, and gives the whole crowd the finger.

The security guard drags him away, right past Wendy, who appears to be sickened by Pat's behavior.

INT. PAT'S CELL - DAY

Pat sits on his bed, reads a magazine.

His eye is black and swollen. There are several cuts on his face.

CAL

One day, you lasted one damn day?

PAT

I told 'em what would happen if they sent me over there. Besides, I made it through two periods.

CAL

What happened?

PAT

This kid jumped me and got what his pussy-ass deserved.

CAL

He's in the hospital with three broken ribs and a severe concussion; you're getting too big to be fighting like this.

PAT

What are my charges?

CAL

The witnesses said he went after you first...

PAT

See!

CAL

Anyway, with about five other kids facing reciprocal charges for jumping you, they'll probably let everybody slide rather than spend the money.

PAT

Sweeeeeeet! I thought I was gonna get sent down to Saint A's for this one.

CAL

You won't be lucky forever.

PAT

Hey...why you always taking my side?

CAL

Somebody's gotta.

PAT

How's that little stud of a kid of yours.

A beat.

CAL

Uh...Yeah, he's fine.

CLOSE on Cal's face as he lies to Pat.

CAL

He made his first basket the other day. I held him up and I'll be damned if he didn't make his first shot—It was amazing.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Cal's family is assembled around a simple, but wholesome dinner table.

Cal's father-in-law, JERRY, says grace.

He's a big man who looks like he could work any twenty-year-old under the table, cook dinner for the family, and still have enough energy to play with his numerous grandchildren.

Around the table are Jill, her sister LAURA, her husband ERNEST, and their two children JOSHUA and LARRY, who are six and four respectively.

Cal's wife stares blankly as her father prays.

JERRY

Heavenly father bless this food and this household. We thank you for the good crops this year, and pray for the newly departed, please give us strength...

Cal abruptly gets up from the table and goes outside.

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

Cal lights a cigarette.

He let's out a drag of smoke as he sinks down into a lawn chair, stares at the stars above—which are luminous.

The smoke collects above his head and takes the color of a bug-light mounted on the porch. It looks like a dirty halo.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Inside, the family passes food around and continues with dinner as if nothing was amiss, but only the children look comfortable.

Jill eats mechanically and shows very little response to anything.

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

Cal sleeps on the lawn chair with his arms wrapped around his chest. It looks like he hugs himself.

The door slides open and little Larry walks out in his pajamas, drags a small Winnie-the-pooh blanket behind.

He pulls on Cal's shirt, but when he doesn't stir, Larry climbs up and nestles himself on top of Cal and tries to cover them both with his blanket. It barely covers Cal's chest and Larry lays his head down like he's going to sleep too.

EXT. PORCH - LATER

Laura comes out and picks Larry up off of Cal and he hangs over her shoulder like a limp rag.

She pauses over Cal and looks down gently. She runs her hand through his hair as if he was one of her children and Cal stirs slightly and shifts his position without waking.

Laura takes her son inside and closes the door.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

HAROLD WITHERSPOON sits at a desk processing paperwork in a very efficient manner. He's the boss, and worries more about liability than the kids.

There's a knock at the door and Cal enters and sits down across from Harold.

HAROLD

Cal, good to see you. Sit down, this will only take a minute.

CAL

What's up chief?

HAROLD

I've heard some disturbing things from a fellow employee and I'd like to address a couple of 'issues' we might be having.

CAL

Issues?

HAROLD

Come on, don't make this even harder. I want you to take some time off, paid of course, and get yourself together.

CAL

What's that bitch been saying?

HAROLD

First of all, you can't go around using the word bitch in the workplace.

CAL

Do you ever go back there and see the way she treats kids? That lady's messed-up.

HAROLD

We're not gonna have this conversation Cal. This is about you. You've been undermining her authority and I won't have that.

CAL

I'm not undermining shit. I'm trying to make a goddamn difference and that bitch is teaching every kid who comes through here that adults are abusive and hypocritical.

HAROLD

Look. I'm gonna move you over to graveyard and that's that. You're the best one-on-one, and they've been bringing in some crazies lately...take a couple days. You can start Sunday.

CAL

I don't want any days.

HAROLD

Tough shit.

CAL

Great. That's just great.

Cal gets up and walks toward the door in disgust.

CAL

Did you hear what Matt Jensen's father did to him up in Orofino?

HAROLD

Who?

CAL

Exactly. You don't even know these kids' names.

INT. PAT'S HOUSE - DAY

Pat lies on the floor, plays airplane with his little sister. He holds her up with his feet and she spreads her arms wide.

PAT

Wow! You're flying. What's it look like up there with them birds?

JODY

It's beautiful.

There's a KNOCK, and Pat's probation officer LUCY WILSON enters the room without an invitation.

PAT

(Sarcastic) Hey, come on in. Make yourself right at home.

LUCY

You been studying?

PAT

Nope.

LUCY

I suppose I'm not surprised. Oh well, none of the high schools will take you. (she yawns) We might have to home school for a while.

PAT

That's for hippies.

LUCY

If we don't do that, you might get sent to a group home.

PAT

No fucking way. If you even try that I'm gone. I don't care how many times you catch me; I ain't living in one of them homes.

LUCY

Well Patrick, what would you suggest? You can't just run around terrorizing the whole valley.

PAT

Why not?

LUCY

Tell your guardian that he better work something out or they'll take custody of you.

PAT

You know he isn't going to do shit.

LUCY

Is there anybody else?

PAT

What about Cal Andersen over at the jail? He went to college. I bet he'll home school me.

LUCY

He's got enough on his hands Patrick, don't bother him, okay?

PAT

What's that supposed to mean?

LUCY

Nothing, just leave Cal alone, promise?

PAT

Sure, we promise, don't we Jody?

From her perch on Pat's feet Jody pledges:

JODY

Cross our hearts and hope to die.

EXT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER - LATER THAT DAY

Cal has finished his shift and walks out to his car.

Pat speeds up in a muscle car, slams on the breaks when he sees Cal, and leaves a big skid mark right in front of the jail.

PAT

Hey Cal.

CAL

Patrick, what's up?

PAT

I need someone to home school with. Those pussies banned me from all the High Schools.

Cal gives Pat a bemused look and slowly nods yes. He can't help but like this kid. Pat drives off and Cal heaves a heavy sigh and we see beneath the mask. He looks awful.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Cal drives up the river, listens to classical music.

A road-sign says: OROFINO

Cal pulls into a rough looking bar.

INT. JERRY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The phone RINGS. A light is turned on and Cal's father-in-law, Jerry answers it. There's a picture of his wife on the bed stand but by her absence it is apparent that he's a widower.

JERRY

Hello... Floyd, yeah what's up?... He what. Where is he now? No... No... Just keep him there and I'll be over as soon as I can.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Jerry enters a seedy looking working class bar. There are lots of people drinking and playing pool. It looks like the type of place where people wait till a fight is over before they do anything about it.

Behind the bar is FLOYD DEACON, an old friend of Jerry's.

JERRY

Hey.

FLOYD

Thanks for coming out.

JERRY

Where is he?

FLOYD

He's laying in the back room right now.

JERRY

All right then, where's the son-of-a-bitch that did it.

FLOYD

Well, that's the thing Jerry. Cal did it.

JERRY

What do you mean?

FLOYD

Uh... He's been coming in for about six weeks now...and he comes in and picks fights.

JERRY

Cal?

FLOYD

I don't even think he tries to win.

JERRY

What?

FLOYD

I'm telling you, he let this guy beat him up.

JERRY

... Jesus, that doesn't sound like him at all, he sees too much of that at work.

FLOYD

I'm sorry; I shoulda called you earlier.

JERRY

It's alright, thanks for the heads up.

Floyd pours two shots and both men throw them down and sit in silence.

INT. JERRY'S PICK-UP TRUCK - NIGHT

Cal leans in the corner of the passenger side with an ice pack over one of his eyes.

Jerry takes a breath, like he's going to say something, stops, tries again, stops. He's trying to think of the right thing to say but can't.

CAL

I know, I know.

JERRY

Son, this isn't gonna change anything.

ANGLE ON Cal, half his face is obscured by an ice pack.

CAL

There's this moment when some kid at work is trying to kill me, or I'm beating some guy's ass in a bar...or maybe I'm getting my ass beat...and there's this moment when I feel so alive.

JERRY

What's going on at home?

CAL

I don't know. We try, we really do but everything's different now.

JERRY

Cal, I never lost a child the way you did, but...

CAL
I will not talk about that, do you hear me Jerry?
I will not talk about that.

JERRY
Alright you stubborn son-of-a-bitch, just stop
getting into fights.

CAL
Yes sir.

JERRY
I mean it.

CAL
I know.

INT. CAL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Cal and Jerry come into the house to find Jill passed out in front of the TV. They both stand over her for a moment and look.

She's pale and lies in the fetal position. Even in sleep she looks tortured.

JERRY
God, she looks awful.

Cal gently picks her up and carries her off to the bedroom. He comes back out and sits down on the couch.

Jerry walks into the back room and comes out with a shotgun and a 9-mm. pistol.

CAL
It's not that bad.

JERRY
It'll help me sleep.

CAL
Make sure you keep the twelve gauge up; it's a
bitch if you don't keep it oiled.

JERRY
God night son.

Jerry leaves and Cal curls up in the exact same position his wife had been lying in and falls asleep.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Pat and his best friend FRANKLIN sit on the curb. Franklin looks like the kid everyone picks on in school, probably would be if he weren't Pat's friend.

Franklin flicks matches at Pat, who picks gum off one of his high-tops with a stick.

PAT

I'm bored.

FRANKLIN

Yeah, this is almost as bad as being in school.
Whatcha wanna do?

PAT

Don't know, what do you wanna do?

FRANKLIN

Well, seeing as you just got out of jail...(he flicks another match at Pat for emphasis) AGAIN! I think you should choose.

PAT

Wanna go to the mall?

FRANKLIN

Naw.

PAT

Basketball?

FRANKLIN

Naw.

As the two talk, a Budweiser delivery truck pulls up and stops almost directly in front of them.

A tan DELIVERY DRIVER, who is obviously drunk staggers across the street and starts to piss behind a dumpster.

FRANKLIN

Look at that sorry bastard. How white trash is that?

Pat walks over to the passenger side and looks into the window.

CLOSE on Pat as he smiles mischievously at Franklin.

FRANKLIN

Pat...no!

PAT

Oh yes.

FRANKLIN

We can't.

PAT

Frankie, We gotta. What are the odds this ever happens again?

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The Budweiser truck races down a small road that curves along the river. Dust kicks up in the air and the truck almost slides into the river as it takes a turn.

INT. BEER TRUCK - DAY.

Pat and Franklin both wear Budweiser T-Shirts, Budweiser hats and are pounding cans of Bud.

PAT

Whoa baby. I better slow down, wouldn't want to lose the spoils.

FRANKLIN

Fuck the king of beers. We just jacked his ass.

Franklin grabs the CB radio and yells through the microphone.

FRANKLIN

Who wants a cold refreshing Budweiser?

EXT. FRONT YARD OF HOUSE - DAY

Pat and Franklin pull the beer truck into the driveway of a house that looks like it's falling apart. There are a group of SKATEBOARDERS doing various tricks in the driveway when the truck skids up and the two boys jump out.

PAT

Alright boys. Come and get it.

The boys let out a collective whoop, and start to load cases of beer into the garage.

FRANKLIN

Grab a couple kegs...we wouldn't wanna short ourselves.

PAT

Frankie, let's dump this bitch.

The two boys back the truck out of the driveway and speed off.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

Pat and Franklin stand with their hats off in mourning as the Budweiser truck slowly sinks into the river and disappears.

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

There's a huge party. A house that looks like an adult hasn't been around for a long time is filled with TEENAGERS of various ages.

Pat sits with some of his friends, drinks keg beer out of a 'big gulp' sized cup while they smoke weed.

Almost everyone is wearing Budweiser memorabilia stolen from the truck.

His friends are SPECK, a psychotic skate-boarder; TOE-HEAD, a big, dumb, blond kid who looks like he was a fetal-alcohol baby, and Franklin.

They sit around the keg in lawn chairs like royalty while other smaller and less seedy teenagers approach meekly and leave as soon as they fill up their cups. It's obvious that Pat and his posse make a lot of the other kids uncomfortable.

SPECK

Yeah baby. That's some gas weed if I ever smoked it once.

TOE-HEAD

What?

SPECK

Gas weed. The Mexicans smuggle it up to the tri-cities packed in the axles of big trucks. You get that little extra something from the grease, oil, and gas residues...Ahh.

PAT

That's disgusting. Fucking dope makes you stupid.

Pat snatches the joint out of Speck's hand. He takes a hit, and then takes a long drink from his cup and burps.

PAT

I feel so good. This was like fate man, that beer truck just pulling up in front of us. Pure poetry.

FRANKLIN

Hey Pat. Isn't that kid over there from across the river?

The whole crew watches a small boy who's filling up at the keg. He's trying hard not to look over at Pat and his friends but can tell they are staring at him.

The boy is JEB MITCHELL, a nice kid who is no match for any of Pat's friends.

PAT

Yep, that's Jeb but he's alright.

SPECK

They jump you over there and now they think they can sneak over and drink our beer. Fucking farm faggots.

Speck quickly moves over towards Jeb and starts to intimidate him.

SPECK

You're on the wrong side of the river, bitch.

JEB

Excuse me.

SPECK

(In a sissy voice) Excuse me.

JEB

Look...we're just hanging out. I'm not looking for any trouble.

A small crowd starts to assemble in anticipation of a fight. Jeb's cousin WENDY has come over to see what's happening and sees Jeb being humiliated.

Pat has noticed Wendy and everything else disappears.

WENDY

Leave him alone you goddamn primate.

The crowd laughs at this and Speck looks even more prone to violence.

SPECK

Fucking cunt.

Wendy throws her bottle of beer and it hits Speck in the forehead.

She screams like an animal and starts kicking and clawing at Speck, who is surprised and frightened by Wendy's aggressiveness.

SPECK

Somebody get this bitch off me.

Pat comes up and grabs Wendy from behind and carries her off in a bear hug.

The crowd laughs as he carries her around the side of the house and away from Speck. Her cousin Jeb finally catches up with Pat and puts himself in his path.

JEB

Put her down.

PAT

Relax, I'm trying to help you out.

Pat gently sets Wendy down and she turns on him immediately, throwing punches at his face. Pat fends them off and can't seem to keep from smiling at her.

WENDY

Son-of-a-Bitch, I didn't ask you to butt in.

JEB

Wendy...Uh, Let's just go home.

PAT

It's okay, nobody's gonna bother you now. I'm Pat.

WENDY

You beat up that kid the other day.

PAT

So.

WENDY

That make you feel like a big man? I bet you can't even read you degenerate piece of white trash.

Wendy turns, shoots Pat a venomous look, and stomps off towards a group of GIRLS, who already gossip about what has happened.

PAT

Damn! She's ferocious.

JEB

You messed that kid up pretty bad.

PAT

He was trying to mess me up the same way.

JEB

I guess.

PAT

Look man, nobody's gonna bother you.

JEB

Why?

PAT

I'm in a good mood. I don't feel like watching anyone get picked on.

JEB

I hate that guy.

PAT

Don't mind speck, he's just pissed off at the world.

JEB

Thanks.

PAT

Your cousin's got a truckload of attitude. I thought she was one of those student council types.

JEB

She is.

PAT

Hey, tell your cousin I'm sorry.

JEB

For what?

PAT

I don't know...whatever she's mad about.

Pat winds his way through the crowd of people and most move aside slightly as he passes.

He catches Wendy's eye across the party and smiles awkwardly.

She shoots him another menacing look and turns away.

He ambles over to his friends and sits back down, grins like a happy idiot.

PAT

Nobody fucks with those two.

SPECK

That bitch reminds me of my mom. I don't want none of that.

He rubs a welt on his forehead where the beer bottle struck and everyone laughs.

Franklin hands Pat back his beer and they huddle conspiratorially.

FRANKLIN

How'd you do?

PAT

Crashed and burned.

FRANKLIN

How come you always like the girls who think you're scum?

PAT

This one's gonna come around; I can feel it.

Pat looks around dramatically, like a king surveying his land.

PAT

Isn't this the night though Frankie? I feel fucking great. Let's go tear something up, steal a car and drive a hundred across the prairie. I bet the stars are beautiful up there tonight.

FRANKLIN

Here we go again.

EXT. FRONT YARD - NIGHT

Pat's brother Kyle pulls his muscle car onto the front lawn. He and Sherman get out and walk through the house. Kyle is working on a 'mean' drunk and Sherman would rather be somewhere else.

KYLE

Where is that little fuck? (He bellows) PAT!!

Out back, the boys are lying around when they hear Kyle's voice and Pat immediately jumps up.

PAT

Fuck. Frankie, cover for me.

Pat starts trying to slink his way out of the party without being discovered, but the same crowd that parted for him scatters at the sight of his brother and Sherman.

Pat is caught halfway to the house and everyone spreads out and offers no help.

ANGLE on Wendy as she watches what happens.

KYLE

I see your punk ass. Get the fuck over here.

PAT

No way.

KYLE

You'd better get over here fore I lose patience.

PAT

Fuck you! Not tonight, I'm too happy tonight.

KYLE

Oh...you're happy. Isn't that nice. See how happy you are when I'm pounding you in front of your little friends.

SHERM

Cut the kid some slack man.

KYLE

Fuck it. He's gonna have to beg for it.

Kyle makes a lunge for Pat and starts to chase him around the backyard and because he's so drunk Pat keeps getting away.

He tackles Pat several times and he seems to barely worm his way free each time. Pat looks very scared, knows his beating is going to be worse because of the audience.

ANGLE on Wendy's face again.

Pat climbs up on the roof of the patio and starts to throw pieces of shingle at Kyle, as he tries to climb up. Several bounce off his head.

KYLE

You're fucking dead you little bastard.

Kyle gets up on the roof and Pat jumps off before his brother can get his hands on him.

Pat lands lightly and rolls to his feet quickly. He runs past Wendy towards the rear of the back yard and watches for his brother's next move like an animal that is being stalked.

Kyle jumps off the roof and there's a thud as he crumbles to the ground and doesn't get up.

Pat rushes over with concern on his face and looks down at his passed out brother. When it's apparent that Kyle is okay, Pat kicks him hard, and then stands on his brother's back and pretends like he's surfing.

The stunned crowd starts to laugh in disbelief.

SHERM

Get off him and give me a hand.

They pick up Kyle and start carrying him towards the front of the house.

SHERM

What'd you do to get him so pissed anyhow?

PAT

Nothing, same as always. I better stay away for a couple of days. If he doesn't remember this, don't remind him okay?

SHERM

I'm gonna have to tell somebody, it's too damn funny. Here's a couple bucks junior, I'll smooth out your retarded brother.

PAT

Thanks Sherman.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION FACILITY - NIGHT

Cal has started the graveyard shift and we see a MONTAGE as he performs various jobs.

He mops a floor.

Walks the dark corridors with a flashlight in hand, checks on all the kids.

Reads a newspaper.

Dances with a mop in the kitchen.

Holds a drunk BOY while he throws up in a toilet.

EXT. DETENTION FACILITY COURTYARD - NIGHT

Outside the jail is a courtyard surrounded by razor wire. Cal exits the back door of the jail and unlocks the gate so a police car can enter the courtyard in a secured area.

VERN JOHNSON, a very levelheaded police officer, gets out of his squad car and he and Cal help a NAITIVE AMERICAN TEENAGER out of the back. The boy's hands are cuffed and he's crying hysterically.

Vern is one of Cal's friends. As a cop, he's about as neutral as a glass of water. It's just a job to him.

EXT. DETENTION FACILITY COURTYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Cal and Vern sit on the hood of Vern's police car smoking.

CAL

What's his deal?

VERN

Burned down his mom's house. You know those HUD houses; it went up like kindling.

CAL

Why'd he do it?

VERN

I don't know. You gotta quit with all these why's...take some time off or something. You look like crap.

CAL

How do you deal with all this shit?

VERN

Cal... It's a job. I go home, watch the Sonics lose at home to a crappy expansion team, and I get so pissed off that I forget about all the other injustices of the world.

CAL

I don't know, I just can't keep things straight.
(After a moment of silence) Why would you burn down your own house?

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Kyle's muscle car pulls into the parking lot of the local Indian casino.

CLOSE on a neon sign that reads:

WELCOME TO THE RIVER CASINO. YOU THOUGHT THE GOLDRUSH WAS OVER BUT WE'VE GOT A FORTUNE IN SLOT PAYOFFS AND YOU CAN WIN A REAL LIVE GOLD NUGGET WORTH TWENTY THOUSAND DOLLARS.

The car winds through the parking lot and pulls behind the casino.

A single door is open and many colors of neon light flood out. They make a surreal silhouette of a large Indian who stands in the doorway.

The lights shine through his hair and make it seem like he wears a Ceremonial Head Dress.

The man in the doorway is BIG EARL, a giant full-blooded Nez Pierce Indian. Earl wears a string tie and his long hair is unbraided and covers his shoulders like a blanket.

Kyle and Norm get out of the car and approach Earl. Earl shakes Norm's hand but doesn't offer it to Kyle.

EARL

Sherman, how's the rez?

SHERM

Full of drunk, angry skins. How the fuck you think? This is Kyle, the guy I told you about.

KYLE

I got something sweet, but I need two more bodies and Sherm vouches for you absolutely.

EARL

How bout' the white boy, you vouch for him absolutely.

SHERM

He's all business.

EARL

Then it's nice to meet you.

The two men slowly reach out in SLOW MOTION and as their hands touch...

CUT TO:

INT. NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER - DAY

Close on a large glass case, two small silver medallions sit on a velvet pillow inside. On one medallion is what looks like one of the founding fathers. The other shows two hands shaking.

PAT(O.S.)

What are they?

CAL

It's a medallion given to the Nez Perce Indian tribe by Lewis and Clark as a token of our government's peaceful intentions.

PAT

Whoops. How come there's two of 'em?

CAL

So you can see both sides. One's a fake.

PAT

Who's the faggot with the braids?

CAL

That would be Thomas Jefferson

PAT

Whoops. What are we doing here? You're supposed to be home schooling me.

CAL

This is your history lesson.

PAT

A coin, what am I supposed to learn from that?

CAL

I don't know. I'll tell you the story and then we'll see if it means anything.

He fixes Pat with his most sober look.

CAL

Pay attention!

ZOOM in on one of the medallions. There's an engraving of two hands shaking, one Native American, and one Anglo-Saxon.

CAL (O.S.)

It all started with a handshake.

CUT TO:

EXT. CASINO - NIGHT

SLOW MOTION SHOT of Kyle and Earl's hands coming apart from the handshake.

INT. CASINO - NIGHT

As Kyle, Earl, and Sherman walk into the casino, Cal tells the story of the Peace Medallions to Pat in VOICE OVER.

CAL (V.O.)

We'd just bought everything west of the Mississippi from France, but we didn't really know what we were getting. The west was only known to the Indian tribes and a few trappers. Tom Jefferson was president and he wanted to know what we'd gotten.

The three would be robbers walk down the middle of the casino. Flashing Lights are everywhere and people's faces are highlighted as they sit at the seemingly endless line of slot machines.

CAL(V.O.)

A group of explorers led by Lewis & Clark were assembled to travel out west in order to survey the land and its people. Jefferson wanted to establish a trade route all the way to the Pacific, he saw the west as a key to America's development into a world power.

Kyle, Sherm, and Earl walk up to a cashier window and we see people counting money behind the bars.

CAL(V.O.)

This was almost two-hundred years ago, and now... there's not much gold left, the Indians all live on reservations, the salmon are almost extinct, and we are indeed a world power.

PAT(V.O.)

What are you, some tree-hugging commie?

CAL (V.O.)

No—but I think we can do better.

The men walk slowly around the Casino, taking in every detail.

They come upon a glass case, which holds a giant gold nugget.

Earl surveys the Casino and then gives Kyle a slight nod of the head.

Kyle smiles at Sherman, who is perfectly solemn.

INT. CULTURAL CENTER - DAY

We look at the Lewis and Clark peace medallion once again.

Cal turns to Pat, who looks slightly bored.

CAL

I want you to write a history of this coin. tell me where it came from, where it was rediscovered, and what you think it meant back then, and now.

PAT

How the fuck am I supposed to find all that shit out?

CAL

You're supposed to do research, I'll help you a little...but not that much.

PAT

Aw Man, I thought you would let me coast, this is more work than at school.

CAL

You should know me better than that. Ten pages typed, and I'm going to meet with your PO and give her a progress report every two weeks.

PAT

Come on man. I can barely write.

CAL

Bullshit, you write just fine. You fucked up Pat. I know how much you fear going to a group home; your ass is mine.

Pat looks like a little kid who's been sent to bed early.

INT. PAT'S ROOM - DAY

Pat sits in his room, surrounded by books and crumpled pieces of paper.

CLOSE on Pat's face as he reads. He looks interested. He puts the book down, scribbles something for a moment and then goes back to reading. This seems like a completely different kid.

Kyle throws Pat's door open without knocking and walks in.

KYLE

I must be high. What's this?

PAT

They're called books fuckhead. You read 'em.

Kyle couldn't look more horrified.

KYLE

Put that shit away. We gotta make some cheese so we can pay rent. Let's go.

Pat jumps up immediately and follows Kyle out of the room. This is family business.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Pat walks into a house with a pretzel bag, walks out with some money and no bag.

INT. TRAILER - DAY

A MAN sits on a dingy couch, smoking a cigarette.

Kyle kicks a door in and shakes down a client who owes him drug money. He comes out with a TV and a set of golf clubs.

EXT. DIFFERENT TRAILER - DAY

Pat walks into a house with a pretzel bag, runs out with a pretzel bag, a handful of cash, and three people chasing him.

He dives through the window as Kyle drives off. They laugh hysterically.

EXT. PAWN SHOP - DAY

Pat and Kyle drive up and start to unload the confiscated possessions of the drug addicts who couldn't pay Kyle what they owed.

They unload a TV, golf clubs, a VCR, boom box, and a velvet painting of Elvis.

KYLE

Put that back. That's the King...he stays with us.

PAT

That's the ugliest thing I ever saw. Look at that fat, sweaty bastard.

KYLE

Hey! Show some respect.

Pat and Kyle start to load their shit into the pawnshop.

A sign above the entrance reads:

WELCOME TO ALL-AMERICAN PAWN! GUNS, JEWELERY,
GOLD...WEDDING RINGS BOUGHT AND SOLD. WE GOT IT ALL...WE WANT
MORE.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

It's just starting to get dark. Pat and Kyle sit on the hood of the car and drink beer as the sun goes down. It's been a long hard day.

KYLE

You did good today Pat. Not only can we pay the rent, but we got enough left to re-up. Head down to Lupe's tomorrow and make a pick-up.

PAT

I gotta study tomorrow.

KYLE

Fuck that!

PAT

I'm trying to stay free. You could help me out once in a while you know.

KYLE

You ain't never going to a group home. I promise you that. I spent enough time in them places for the whole family.

PAT

Can I study tomorrow?

KYLE

Once you make that run you can do whatever the fuck you want.

INT. MEXICAN MAFIA HOUSE - DAY

Pat sits across from Lupe.

LUPE

Same as always.

PAT

Naw. Shit's tight right now.

LUPE

Tell me about it. We lost two shipments in two weeks.

PAT

Snitch?

LUPE

Not anymore.

Lupe reaches into a drawer, pulls out a human thumb, and plops it on the desktop.

PAT

(disgusted) Damn Dog. I gotta get out of the dope game; you fuckers are hard-core.

LUPE

My boss sent that up from T.J., asked me to show it to all my people. You don't wanna see the pictures that came with. How much you want?

PAT

Gimme half the tar and throw in an eight ball of speed.

LUPE

Kyle diversifying his investment portfolio?

He laughs at his own joke.

PAT

Hey man, I just do what I'm told.

LUPE

Sure. Sure you do. What's the crank for?

PAT

Wouldn't say if I knew, and I like you...your wife's tamales are the bomb.

LUPE

Your brother always gets the speed before he jacks somebody. He's so predictable it's sad.

PAT

Think so?

LUPE

Tell Kyle I'd better not see him unexpectedly...you either.

PAT

You think I'd fuck with you?

LUPE

Not you, your brother. He's got no sense.

PAT

What's that got to do with me?

LUPE

The hardest bullshit to see through is family bullshit.

Outside the door, we hear children SCREAMING in Spanish.

LUPE

God Dammit! (he turns to Pat) Every time my wife goes down south, those kids run all over me.

He gets up abruptly and stomps off to deal with his unruly kids.

Pat's POV; he sees a small stack of pictures that lie face down on the desk.

CLOSE on Pat as curiosity gets the best of him.

CLOSE UP of Pat's face as he looks at the pictures. He's visibly shaken, looks like he might be sick.

INT. JAIL - NIGHT

Cal sits in the control room, watches the surveillance cameras. One by one we see a different shot of a different part of the jail as Cal scans the small boxes on the screen.

Towards the bottom, we see Pat at the back door. He mouths to Cal that he needs to talk to him.

Cal grabs the keys and walks out.

EXT. JAIL - NIGHT

Pat and Cal sit on a curb outside of the jail.

CAL

You're the first person ever tried to break into jail.

PAT

I need some advice.

CAL

This sounds serious.

PAT

I'm in love, what do I do?

CAL

Who is she?

PAT

I met her at school over in Lewiston. She saw me beat that kid down and I'm pretty sure she thinks I'm the devil.

CAL

Just be yourself, that's the best you can do.

PAT

She saw Kyle treat me like a bitch. I don't know if I ever wanna see her again.

CAL

Bullshit.

A beat. CLOSE on Cal as he reminisces.

CAL

When I first met Jill... Man, it was like being in the river during flood season.

PAT

What do you mean?

CAL

I'm mean I had no brakes, no control of anything.

Pat looks absolutely terrified.

PAT

I'm done for.

CAL

You don't look so good, anything I should know about.

PAT

I saw some shit tonight you wouldn't believe.

CAL

You OK?

PAT

Ever wonder about all the different things that
coulda been?

CAL

Every day of my life.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Wendy comes out of school to find Pat on the hood of her car. He looks
awkward, but smiles like an idiot.

PAT

Hi. Remember me?

WENDY

What the hell do you want?

PAT

I just wanted to apologize for grabbing you the
other night.

WENDY

If they see you out here you're gonna get
stomped.

PAT

It'll be worth it.

WENDY

Stop staring at me like that.

PAT

Sorry. I'll leave you alone now, I just wanted to
tell you that...that...

WENDY

(impatient) What?

PAT

Never mind. I'll see you around.

Pat starts to slink away in defeat.

CLOSE on Wendy as she watches him walk away. Something gives.

WENDY

Hey wait.

Pat turns around and looks pathetic.

WENDY

Can I give you a ride someplace?

INT. WENDY'S CAR - DAY

Wendy's drives Pat across the bridge to Washington. There's an awkward silence for a moment and then Pat dives in.

PAT

I like you.

WENDY

You're not very subtle are you?

PAT

It's not in my nature.

They drive along the Snake River. At first, there are lots of houses and then, slowly, the space between things increases.

Wendy starts to get suspicious.

WENDY

How much further?

PAT

Pull up at those big rocks by the river, I want to show you something before we get to my house.

WENDY

You're not gonna cut me into little pieces or anything like that are you?

PAT

Right here, pull over.

They get out next to a giant cluster of rocks, which sit partially submerged in the river.

Wendy seems a little hesitant as she gets out and follows Pat, but she's also intrigued.

EXT. SNAKE RIVER PETROGLYPHS - DAY

Wendy follows Pat as he climbs up and over the rocks to a precipice that hangs over the river and is covered by ancient carvings that depict various hunting scenes as well as abstract tribal designs.

Pat leans against the rock and his form blends in with the artwork. One of the ancient hunters is driving a spear right into Pat's chest.

WENDY

Oh my God! This is incredible.

PAT

My friend Cal showed it to me and I've been coming out here to think a lot lately.

WENDY

What do you think about?

PAT

Everything. I'm writing this report on the history of this area and I like coming out here, knowing motherfuckers have been sitting on this rock for thousands of years...it makes me wonder.

WENDY

It's so beautiful, who did it, the Nez Perce?

PAT

I don't know yet. That's my latest homework assignment, to research this place.

Wendy can't help but laugh. The idea of Pat doing homework is just too ridiculous.

WENDY

You're kidding right?

PAT

No! I got blackballed from high school and my tutor's a slave driver. I never read so many books in my life.

Pat fixes Wendy with a stare.

PAT

Yes, this degenerate piece of white trash can read just fine...jail's good for that.

WENDY

What do you expect me to think when you run around assaulting people?

PAT

Yeah, I guess you got a point there. I love this place though.

WENDY

Me too.

The river flows past and neither Pat, nor Wendy seems in any hurry to go anywhere or say anything.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Wendy pulls back into the same parking lot that Pat had been waiting for her in.

It's empty except for Pat's car, which is parked right next to where Wendy had been parked earlier in the day.

WENDY

Patrick. You're a scoundrel!

PAT

I can't help it.

WENDY

You know, I actually believe that.

Pat gets out of the car and walks around to Wendy's side, leans into the window. Wendy looks up and their eyes meet.

Close on Pat, he looks scared.

PAT

Thanks for trusting me. I'll see you around.

He loses his nerve, back-pedals to his car without looking back and drives off.

WENDY

(To herself) Girl, what the hell was that?

INT. MECHANIC'S GARAGE - NIGHT

Kyle, Sherm, and Big Earl sit around a table and plan their robbery.

Pictures, newspaper articles, and a bottle sit on the table between them.

EARL

What's with the newspaper?

KYLE

Check out the article on the front page.

Earl picks up the paper and begins to skim it.

EARL

I remember this. Those banks got knocked off in Spokane last summer. Bunch of Nazi's or something, right?

KYLE

Never got caught, but we're gonna steal their MO. Give the law some bad information to chew on while we're gambling and whoring in Vegas with all that dough.

EARL

I like it.

SHERM

Good, cause you get to be the Nazi.

INT. PAT'S ROOM - NIGHT

Pat sits at his desk and reads a book while his little sister Jody lies on his bed, colors a picture.

Close on the picture: we see an Indian brave in full war paint, charging down a hill on horseback. He holds a Winchester rifle over his head defiantly and his mouth is open in a war cry.

Kyle throws the door open and enters. He sits down on the bed next to Jody and looks down tenderly.

KYLE

What you got there kiddo?

Jody holds up the picture proudly.

JODY

Sherman.

KYLE

It does look kinda like him don't it.

JODY

It is him! Do you like it?

KYLE

It's beautiful pumpkin, why don't you go watch a little TV and let me have a word with your brother.

JODY

Are you in trouble again? You're always extra nice when you're in trouble.

KYLE

(smiles fondly) Out!

JODY

Give this to Sherman. Tell him I wanna go fishing.

Jody pinches Pat on her way out the door and sticks her tongue out.

KYLE

That kid's smarter than the whole family combined. You got my shit?

Pat doesn't even look up from his book.

PAT

I put it in the lock-box under your bed.

KYLE

What's up your ass.

PAT

You got a job lined up.

KYLE

Where'd you get that?

PAT

You always get crank when you're setting something up.

KYLE

That's crap.

Pat turns on his brother and they stand face-to-face.

PAT

You promised you wouldn't rob any more banks when you got out. You fucking promised.

KYLE

I ain't gonna rob no bank.

PAT

Bullshit.

KYLE

I don't wanna fight right now Pat. Let's go shoot some pool, I'll spot you two balls per game.

Pat knows his brother isn't going to tell him anything, so he shifts gears.

PAT

Yeah, OK. I'm gonna take your money though.

KYLE

We'll see little brother, we'll see.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER - NIGHT

Cal trains a new EMPLOYEE. The guy wears an earring and has shoulder length hair.

CAL

First of all, you can do what you want, but I'd strongly advise you to take out that earring and cut your hair.

TRAINEE

What business is that of yours?

Cal starts to chuckle although he's trying to be polite.

CAL

I was thinking kids would rip that earring out, or grab hold of your hair during a fight. That's what I'd do.

TRAINEE

Oh.

INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT

The trainee walks down one of the corridors and a cell door clicks open.

Cal stands at the end of the corridor, watches closely.

The trainee walks past the door, opens it, and hands a pill to the kid inside, who swallows it.

Then the kid opens his mouth and moves his tongue around so the trainee can make sure he swallowed it.

The trainee then gives him a pencil and paper to sign for the medication. The transaction concluded, he closes the door and heads back in Cal's direction.

CAL

That was pretty good, except for two things.

TRAINEE

What now?

CAL

That open door you just put yourself in front of weighs five-hundred pounds and if one of the kids shoves, it's gonna hurt you bad.

He fixes the trainee with a serious stare. He's not riding him at all but trying to teach him to be cautious. Finally the trainee gets it.

TRAINEE

Yeah, you're right. That makes sense. What else?

CAL

A pencil's nothing but a shank that writes. You be ready to go whenever you put one in someone's hand.

TRAINEE

Thanks. I thought you were just being an asshole.

CAL

I'm trying to prepare you.

A beat.

He moves real close to the trainee, encroaching on his personal space for emphasis. CLOSE on Cal's face as he says:

CAL

Things hardly ever turn violent, this is a pussy jail. But it's the always being prepared for violence that kinda wears you out. You gotta be ready to go at all times. Anything can happen. Anything! Whether you're drinking a cup of coffee, or tying your shoe, they gotta think you're doing it to test them. (He points to his head) And never, ever, show weakness. They'll run all over you if you do.

INT. INTAKE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Cal and the trainee enter the area where new prisoners are processed.

CAL

Take a good look around. This is the intake area where we check people in. That's the shower down there—you make everybody shower and scrub with a lice killing agent so they don't infect the rest of the kids. (he points to a door on the left), that's the equipment room where we keep the clothes, fingerprinting gear, shackles, and miscellaneous supplies.

TRAINEE

What's the room with the window?

CAL

That's the holding area. Keep the new kids in there while you get everything ready and set up the computer, that way you won't get distracted. If you're working alone at night and a kid seems bent on fighting, just leave em in there til morning. There's a grate in the floor they can piss down.

Cal again fixes the trainee with a serious look

CAL

This is the most important thing to remember. When you're alone back here, it'll take a minute for anyone to get back and help you, and by then...Whatever's happened will probably be over, one way or the other.

INT. REC. ROOM - NIGHT

Cal and the trainee sit in front of the TV.

Cal puts a videotape into the VCR and turns a somber eye towards the trainee.

CAL

Ready?

TRAINEE

Bring it on.

ON VIDEO, we see a VERY LARGE MAN, who fingerprints an equally large TEENAGER. The intake corridor they are in is exactly the same as the place Cal just showed the trainee.

TRAINEE (O.S.)

That here?

CAL(O.S.)

Louisiana, same design.

With lightning speed, the teenager throws an elbow into the guard's throat, stabs him in the eye with one of his thumbs and starts to beat the injured guard savagely.

The guard flails his arms defensively and looks utterly helpless as the youth beats him to the ground, stomps on his head, tears the finger printing machine from the counter, and smashes the twitching guard repeatedly with it.

After what seems like a long, long time, but in reality is only thirty seconds...

TWO GUARDS enter the screen and tackle the youth.

The screen goes black and we PAN back to Cal and his stunned trainee.

TRAINEE

I don't know if I'm cut out for this.

CAL

Shit...We got cable TV, an open kitchen, and a ping-pong table. What more could you want on graveyard?

INT. PAT'S HOUSE - DAY

Pat comes in and collapses on the couch like he's had a hard day of work. Jody sits talking to a stuffed animal on the floor.

JODY

Who's Wendy?

PAT
What? Did a girl call for me?

Jody smiles coyly.

JODY
Maybe.

PAT
(angry) You better 'fess up girl, I'm losing
patience.

Jody yawns at Pat's threat.

JODY
I'm hungry.

INT. PAT'S CAR - DAY

Jody eats an ice-cream cone that is almost as big as her head and grins triumphantly behind a chocolate smeared face.

PAT
Happy?

JODY
Who's Wendy?

PAT
She's a real nice girl whose gonna kick your ass
if you don't tell me what she said.

JODY
Is she your girlfriend?

PAT
Please Jody, pretty please.

Begging doesn't work either.

PAT
What do you want?

JODY
Movies...I wanna go to the movies.

PAT

Ok. You win. What'd she say?

JODY

You're 'posed to meet her at your spot by the river. That's what she said. And She said you should listen to me more because I'm a girl and we're smarter.

PAT

She said that?

JODY

Go there when it gets dark tonight, and she said to take me with.

PAT

Nice try kid. The deal's closed, all you get is a movie and maybe some popcorn.

JODY

(she smiles proudly) That's what I wanted anyways.

PAT

I'm surrounded by women who are smarter than I am.

EXT. SNAKE RIVER PETROGLYPHS - SUNSET

Pat drives up to the giant rocks and Wendy sits on the hood of her car and reads a book. The sun is just starting to go down and the rocks are silhouetted against the sky.

WENDY

I wasn't sure Jody would pass on my message. I had to promise to take her to the movies...that kid drives a hard bargain.

PAT

You've no idea.

Wendy gets a bag of groceries out of her car.

WENDY
Know how to make a fire?

PAT
I'll work something out.

EXT. PETROGLYPHS - NIGHT

Pat and Wendy sit around a campfire between the giant rocks.

The light from the fire illuminates the ancient rock carvings, which seem to hang in thin air and surround the young lovers.

PAT
Jeeezz. No wonder they had religious rituals here, this would make a believer outta me.

WENDY
Look up.

Their POV: The sky almost glows. The bright band of the Milky Way is perfectly framed by the rocks into a canvas of the heavens.

PAT (O.S.)
Damn.

The camera slowly moves from the sky downward, and from above, we see Pat and Wendy kiss tenderly.

They lean forward, close their eyes, and Pat seems to tremble slightly as they kiss.

PAT
You know why I think they came out here?

WENDY
Why?

PAT
To kiss their women. What could be more religious than that?

WENDY

You're a snake charmer, that's what I think.

She moves closer, touches his face with her fingertips, and they start to kiss again.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. PETROGLYPHS - LATER

It's later and they lie on their backs, and hold hands as they look at the stars.

PAT

Please tell me you brought a bathing suit.

WENDY

You just wanna get me wet in my skivvies so you can try to get some action.

PAT

Woman, you know as well as I do that the only action I'm ever gonna get from you is action you want.

WENDY

I gotta go in my underwear so no looking at my butt. Promise?

PAT

Oh I promise...cross my heart and hope to die.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. PETROGLYPHS - NIGHT

Pat and Wendy hold hands as they jump off the rock into the black river below. We hear a SPLASH and then invigorated LAUGHTER

EXT. PETROGLYPHS - NIGHT

It's later and Pat and Wendy lie on their backs once again. The fire has died out and the embers glow faintly.

WENDY

I've got to admit it, you've been an absolute gentleman Patrick.

PAT

What'd you expect, I'd try to fuck you in the back seat of my car?

WENDY

At first, maybe. I always laugh at those stupid movies where the girl falls for the most fucked-up, rebellious boy...yeah right! And then all the sudden, I can't stop thinking about this jail kid I saw beat the living shit out of one of my classmates.

PAT

Is that how you see me?

WENDY

NO! I have five brothers and one father...I know men and I don't see any guile in you. I don't think it's because you're a thug at all. I think it's because you're sincere. You're so sincere it's frightening.

PAT

Really?

WENDY

Well, that and you're cute. You're very cute.

Pat brushes Wendy's hair from her face and stares intently.

PAT

What do I gotta do for you to be my girlfriend?

WENDY

See!

PAT

I can't help it. I like you; that's all I need to know.

WENDY

I want you to be my friend first; can you handle that?

PAT

There's nothing I can't handle, but...

WENDY

But what?

PAT

Do we still get to kiss?

WENDY

Are you kidding?

She rolls over suddenly and plants exaggerated kisses all over Pat's face, who laughs and pretends to struggle.

PAT

Help! She's an animal. Somebody help me.

EXT. NEZ PERCE INDIAN RESERVATION - AFTERNOON

Kyle's muscle car winds through the reservation and we see:

A house that looks like it might fall over at any second with a giant satellite dish mounted on the roof.

Some children shoot hoops on a crooked rim with no net.

A drunk man lies on the sidewalk.

A community center with a sign that says:

FETAL ALCOHOL AWARENESS MONTH

A giant mural depicts the ghosts of the almost extinct Salmon as they rise out of the river and swim towards the sky.

The car drives past the Bureau of Indian Affairs and there are several Cadillacs and brand new trucks parked out front.

EXT. SHERM'S HOUSE - DAY

Kyle pulls up to a small, modest house, steps onto the porch, KNOCKS, and enters.

INT. SHERM'S HOUSE - DAY

Inside the small living room, we're surrounded by Jody's colored pictures, pencil sketches of ancient Indian faces, as well as lots of pictures of tropical islands, exotic foreign places, and various wild animals.

This is how Sherm forgets where he lives.

Sherm sits on a lazy boy chair with a TV dinner in his lap, about ten feet away from a big screen TV.

On the screen we see the earth from above, taken from a satellite photo. We look down on the planet from above as our point of view slowly drifts across the landscape, which is partially obscured by clouds.

Kyle gets a bottle out of Sherm's cupboard and pours himself a drink as he sits down at a couch in the living room.

KYLE

NASA channel again?

SHERM

Yep.

KYLE

How long you been sitting there?

SHERM

All night.

KYLE

Pat's on to us. Fucking too smart for his own good.

SHERM

Maybe it's time he came up? We know we can trust him.

KYLE

You wanna cut big Earl out?

SHERM

He won't like it. We'll have to push up the job so he can't snitch us out or rob us, and I still might have to kill his ass.

KYLE

What's wrong with Earl?

SHERM

I don't like treaty Indians.

KYLE

That shit again?

SHERM

My people went on the warpath, Earl's people cut a deal with Uncle Sam.

KYLE

Then why the fuck did you want to recruit him in the first place?

SHERM

(getting agitated) Because you were in a hurry as usual...besides, I thought he might try to pull something and then I'd get to kill him.

KYLE

Whoa there. You're supposed to hold me in check, I'm the crazy one, remember?

SHERM

Not this time compadre.

KYLE

That's why you wanted me to pretend this was my idea when we approached Earl, you thought he'd be more likely to cross me?

SHERM

There's hope for you yet.

KYLE

This doesn't sound like you. The Casino gives back to the Rez, don't it?

SHERM

The Salmon's come full circle, it's come back to spawn and die.

KYLE

What the fuck are you talking about?

SHERM

I'm done trying to accommodate my enemies.

KYLE

I'm not your enemy.

SHERM

I know you got my back, you're whole family for that matter. I'm talking about organizations here: groups, clichés, gangs, governments.... the fucking BIA. They're all corrupt. Go look outside for fuck's sake, see where all the nice cars are parked.

KYLE

We shouldn't do this job, your head's all messed up. We're hitting too close to home.

SHERM

I've went along with a lot of your bad ideas...shit, I did time over some of them. You'll always be welcome in my home...but if you don't back me on this, I'll never look you in the eye again. Never!

KYLE

You've talked more in the last five minutes than you have all year you crazy Indian...you wanna go on the war path? Fuck it, let's go! I been bored lately anyways. One thing...Pat's out. This shit's too wide open, I'm not gonna bring him in like this.

SHERMAN

Works for me.

KYLE

Man, I never know what's gonna set you off or when. You could at least warn me when you feel the crazies coming on. Oh yeah, Jody gave me this. Said it's of you.

Kyle takes out the colored picture, which is rolled up like a treasure map, and hands it over to Sherm.

CLOSE on Sherm's face as he looks at the picture, transfixed.

SHERMAN

Your little sister's got some strong medicine...this gives me an idea.

EXT. LIBRARY - DAY

Pat waits outside the library for his next session with Cal.

Cal drives up, Pat jumps into his car, and they drive off.

INT. CAL'S CAR - DAY

PAT

What now, you got some fossils for me to dig up with a toothbrush?

CAL

I had a bad day. Let's go hoop it up.

PAT

Really?

CAL

Yeah, you've been doing well, that last paper actually made sense. I figure you deserve a break.

PAT

Sweeeeeet!

EXT. PARK - DAY

Cal and Pat play pick-up basketball with a bunch of GUYS.

Cal is astonishingly good.

We see a Montage of them playing various opponents:

He's bombs three-pointers effortlessly, takes the ball to the rim, steals the ball from an opponent.

He plays like he's possessed by something.

After the last game, Pat approaches a HUGE WHITE GUY and shrugs his shoulders as if to say "I told you so," as the man counts out money and disgustedly hands it over.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

Cal and Pat sit by the river and drink Gatorade.

PAT

I forgot how damn good your game is.

CAL

You found that out the hard way.

PAT

Man, I'll never forget that. I called you a pussy in front of your wife and kid and damned if you didn't drag them over to the court and humiliate me in front of the whole crew.

CAL

I ever tell you I had a full ride to UCLA?

PAT

Get the fuck outta here.

CAL

True story.

PAT

What happened?

CAL

Things didn't work out for me down there.

PAT

Hey...why'd you move up here anyway?

CAL

I got into trouble somewhere else.

PAT

You wanna enter the two-man tournament this year?

CAL

Every year you ask me that and every year I sign us up...

He gives Pat a look.

CAL

...And every year we forfeit cause you're in jail. You think you want it bad enough to stay outta jail?

PAT

This is our year baby—I feel it.

Pat suddenly remembers something.

PAT

Fuck. I gotta go. I'm gonna meet her family tonight.

CAL

Lord have mercy.

INT. WENDY'S HOUSE - EVENING

Pat and Wendy sit on opposite sides of a couch. They look nervous.

Pat's POV: Wendy's father ED stands over Pat.

So do her five brothers, JIM, JOHN, JOSH, JAKE, and JEREMY.

All six wear grim stares and make no bones about their lack of approval.

ED

Where'd ya'll meet?

PAT

You from the south or something?

ED

Texas!

Pat seems amused, almost like he's about to start laughing.

ED

I say something funny?

PAT

My people got run out of Texas.

Wendy's dad smiles at this.

PAT

We met at school.

JOSH

Then how come I don't know you? I go to the same school.

PAT

I got kicked out.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

They all sit around and eat dinner.

All five of her brothers stare at Pat like they want to kill him.

Pat's not shaken at all by the family's attempt to intimidate him. He respects it.

He decides to force their hand.

PAT

This is damn good. If you didn't have six kids...I'd swear you were a faggot you cook so good.

WENDY

Patrick!

JIM

(stands up) What the fuck did you just say to my dad?

ED

Jim, John. You take your sister to the store to get some coffee.

JIM

Wait a second, I'm the oldest...

ED

Boy, you better move your ass.

WENDY

DAD! PAT! JIM...

ED

Now goddammit.

Wendy looks around in exasperation as Pat and her father stare at each other across the table.

WENDY

I hate every man alive.

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

Pat and Wendy's dad sit on the porch.

Through the glass door, three of her brothers look on sternly.

ED

You've got balls kid; I'll give you that.

PAT

Sir...I'm sorry, but I can't sit there and be intimidated, I'm not made that way.

ED

My daughter's got more sense than this.

PAT

I'd be just like you if some punk was interested in my little sister. But I have nothing but good intentions towards your daughter. You can believe me or not, I don't care, and if you run me off I'll understand, but I won't go away. Besides, she ever bring home trash like me before?

ED

No!

PAT

She the type to do stuff just to piss you off?

ED

No!

PAT

Then maybe she knows some things you don't.

ED

You scare me.

PAT

You can't scare me cause I got nothing to lose. I know you're only trying to look out for your kid.

Wendy's dad is completely bushwhacked by Pat's honesty.

EXT. SCENIC LOOKOUT - NIGHT

Pat and Wendy sit on the hood of her car, look down at the lights of the Lewiston Valley below.

PAT

I think they like me.

WENDY

Are you retarded? They despise you. I've never seen them act like that.

PAT

It's just a matter of time; I'll wear 'em down.

WENDY

You're insane. What'd you and my dad talk about anyway?

PAT

Guy stuff. Now it's your turn to meet the family.

INT. SHERM'S HOUSE - DAY

Sherm and Kyle get ready to rob the Indian Casino.

On the coffee table are lots of guns, pipe bombs, smoke grenades, and three digital watches.

Both men wear flak jackets.

Sherman pulls pieces of Kevlar out of a third flak jacket and replaces them with ordinary plastic.

Kyle gives him a puzzled look.

KYLE

"The fuck you doing?"

SHERM

(regarding the jacket) Just in case.

KYLE

I'm glad you're on my team you sneaky bastard.

There's a KNOCK at the door and Big Earl enters.

He looks at the gear appraisingly, looks at the Flak jackets.

EARL

Got one of those ghost shirts for me?

SHERM

Not much use if someone shoots you in head.

He tosses the jacket to Big Earl.

SHERM

You got your shit straight?

EARL

I'm ready.

KYLE

Put your left hand on the table and keep it still
so I don't mess this up.

Earl puts his hand on the table, Kyle takes a marker and we see a CLOSE UP as he draws an SS. tattoo, which look like twin lightning bolts.

He puts it in the webbing between Earl's thumb and pointer.

EARL

If my mother could see me now. Hey, there was
nothing about the tattoo in the newspapers.

SHERM

This is just a little present for this skinhead who
tried to shank Kyle last time we were inside.

KYLE

Don't smudge it, and make sure the camera
sees it.

SHERM

(to Earl) Gear-up and get moving, you got an
hour to be in position. Don't forget what you're
supposed to say. And be at the back door of the
casino at 9:20 exactly.

EARL

We been through this a million times. You fuckers just make sure you're back there with the money.

KYLE

We'll be there Earl. You just do your job.

Earl puts the pipe bombs, several guns, and various equipment into his backpack, puts the watch on his wrist, and leaves.

KYLE

Whatcha think?

SHERM

I think that's why we got the police scanner. He don't rob that bank, we don't go in either.

KYLE

I feel good.

SHERM

You always feel good right before we start shooting and looting.

KYLE

Let's roll.

INT. MALL - DAY

Pat and Wendy stroll through the mall as they window-shop and enjoy each other's company.

WENDY

Your brother's not going to punch me or anything, is he?

PAT

He'll probably like you more than he likes me. He's always sweet to the ladies.

WENDY

I'll bet.

PAT

My mom's kinda weird so don't worry about her.

WENDY

What do you mean?

PAT

She takes a lot of medication, gets depressed a lot, and sometimes she just ain't there, even though she's looking right at you and nodding her head.

WENDY

What about Jody?

PAT

She's better than all of us, you're gonna love her.

INT. MALL FOOD COURT - DAY

Pat and Wendy eat fast food as they people watch.

Across the walkway, outside a baby store, Cal's wife Jill shuffles past and stops suddenly outside a window that displays various baby outfits.

Wendy's POV: She notices Jill, who stands at the window and shakes.

WENDY

Poor thing.

Pat looks Jill's way and she seems so different that it takes a moment for him to recognize her.

PAT

Oh my god. That's Cal's wife.

Jill suddenly breaks down outside the baby store.

She falls to her knees and begins to weep hysterically as she reaches toward the baby clothes.

Pat vaults over the rail of the food court and sprints over to help Jill.

He touches her shoulder and she hugs his leg as she looks up helplessly.

She doesn't recognize Pat.

PAT

It's me Pat. Cal's friend. Are you alright Mrs. Andersen?

Recognition slowly sinks in and she begins to cry more fiercely, still clutches Pat's leg.

Wendy comes over and they help Jill to her feet and lead her over towards the food court.

Jill surrenders completely and slumps between the two.

INT. FOOD COURT - DAY

The three sit at a table in the food court, Jill sips a glass of water and seems to have pulled herself together somewhat.

JIL

I was gonna have a good day today. I promised myself I'd come down to the valley and have a good day.

PAT

What's wrong, what happened to your arm?

CLOSE on Jill as she realizes that Pat doesn't know her child was killed.

JIL

Oh sweet Jesus. You don't know.

INT. EARL'S CAR - DAY

Big Earl pulls across the street from the Lewis & Clark Bank and leans his seat way back, waits.

EXT. SHERM'S HOUSE - DAY

Kyle and Sherman get into a cleaning van and drive off.

INT. EARL'S CAR - DAY

Earl stares at the digital watch around his wrist.

CLOSE-UP of watch. It reads nine o'clock exactly.

Earl grabs his gun, puts a pipe bomb in his front pocket, and pulls the ski mask over his head.

EXT. STREET - DAY

He puts a backpack on as he crosses the street.

He lights the pipe bomb as he enters the building.

INT. BANK - DAY

Earl enters the almost deserted bank, looks around quickly.

He throws the pipe bomb into an uninhabited corner and it EXPLODES.

EARL

On your faces race traitors. Now!

He regards a lone teller.

EARL

Not you bitch. Gimme the cash drawers and you'd better hurry.

The terrified woman quickly takes the cash drawers and puts them into a gym bag that Earl throws at her.

It takes about twenty seconds and Earl reaches out with his tattooed hand to grab the bag of money.

He stops just before the exit, takes a backpack off, and lays it on the ground gently. Then he yells for all to hear:

EARL

Suck on this you niger loving' commies...White Power! White fucking Power!

EXT. BANK - DAY

Earl comes out of the bank, gets into his car and speeds off. A few stunned BYSTANDERS try to figure out what they just saw.

INT. STOLEN VAN - DAY

Kyle and Sherm ride in a large cleaning van.

EXT. STREET - DAY

As the van heads down the street, it pulls over as an army of POLICE CARS, and an AMBULANCE speed in the opposite direction.

INT. STOLEN VAN - DAY

CLOSE on Cal's face as a FIRE ENGINE, steams past outside the window.

KYLE

(Getting pumped up) Fuck yeah, baby. It's on!

EXT. LEWIS & CLARK BANK - DAY

The bank is surrounded by POLICE CARS. Lots of COPS and REPORTERS mill around.

Close on the COP who looks like he's in charge as he talks into his police radio.

COP

Send the bomb squad over, fucking Nazi's left a present behind.

CLOSE on a FEMALE REPORTER as she gives a report.

REPORTER

In a daring maneuver, the Lewis & Clark Bank was robbed and according to witnesses, allegedly booby-trapped by militant white supremacists.

EXT. CASINO PARKING LOT - DAY

Kyle and Sherm pull up to the casino, park, and quickly hustle into the back of the van to prepare.

INT. BACK OF VAN - DAY

KYLE

Where the masks at?

SHERM

You're gonna love this.

He pulls two Ceremonial Head Dresses out of a trash bag and they have painted facemasks attached to them.

The masks show enraged Indians in colorful war paint.

KYLE

Let's take this bitch over.

They jump out the back of the van.

They look like a cross between military commandos and Indian warriors.

INT. CASINO - DAY

Kyle and Sherman blitz into the casino, Sherm beats a SECURITY GUARD down with the butt of his M-16 assault rifle.

Kyle throws smoke grenades, and then heads towards the cashier's window with an AK-47 trained on the small, scattering CROWD of gamblers and employees.

SHERMAN

Everybody out! Get the fuck out or you're dead!

He fires a few rounds at the ceiling and follows Kyle as the place erupts into pandemonium.

Both men arrive at the CASHIER window and Kyle shoots both SECURITY GUARDS behind it dead as they spray bullets in his direction.

He dives through the opening as the MONEY COUNTERS flee out the back door.

CLOSE on Sherman as he purposefully strides over to the glass case, which holds the giant gold nugget inside.

He shoots and the whole thing collapses.

He quickly grabs the gold nugget and puts it into a duffel bag, heads back towards Kyle, dives through the cashier window, and covers Kyle as he jams money into the bag.

SHERM

Move your ass! I'm gonna take a look outside.

He heads out the back door and we hear GUNSHOTS.

EXT. BEHIND CASINO - DAY

Kyle runs out back. Sherman is slumped against the wall and Big Earl lies in a pool of his own blood, clutching a handgun as he convulses.

SHERM

I knew it.

KYLE

Stay here, I'll be back with the car.

He tears off his mask, drops his money and gun, and runs like a panic stricken witness into the parking lot.

KYLE

Help me, somebody help me. They're heading towards the front door.

A COP sees this and immediately changes course, runs around the casino towards the front door.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Kyle jumps into the cleaning van, speeds off towards the back of the casino.

EXT. BEHIND CASINO - DAY

Kyle drives up and just as he exits the van, a POLICE OFFICER comes out the back door, gun drawn.

They both shoot and hit each other.

The cop falls dead with a shot through the neck and Kyle jerks back, hit in the left bicep.

He throws Sherm into the back of the van, throws the bags of money in, and drives off.

INT. VAN - DAY

Kyle drives while Sherm lies in the back.

KYLE

Hang in there partner.

SHERM

Bastard got me good, fucking vest didn't work.

Sherm laughs, then coughs up some blood, laughs again.

SHERM

It don't even hurt. You'd think it'd hurt.

KYLE

I'm gonna take you to the house while I dump this piece of shit. Anytime you say, I'll take you to the hospital, you hear me, anytime you say.

SHERM

I'll be OK.

Kyle pulls his cell-phone out and makes a call.

KYLE

Pat, thank god. Listen, get Jody out of the house...get her out now, and open the garage, I'll be there in ten minutes.

INT. PAT'S HOUSE - DAY

CLOSE UP of Pat as he listens to the phone.

As the camera PANS OUT we see Wendy and Jody, who eat cereal at the kitchen table.

WENDY

That your brother?

PAT

NO! Um...Wendy, can you come over here for a minute?

Wendy walks over and Pat leads her into the bathroom and closes the door.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

WENDY

What is it?

PAT

I need to ask you to do something. I need for you to take Jody over to your house until I call, don't talk to anyone, and don't let her watch the TV.

WENDY

What's wrong?

PAT

I don't know, I don't know, Kyle's done something bad, he's on the way here.

WENDY

What do you mean by bad?

PAT

I don't...

Jody pushes the door open and peeks a mischievous head in.

JODY

Are you kissing?

Pat looks from Wendy to Jody and back again. He knows Kyle's getting closer.

PAT

Please...(kicks the door closed) you gotta get her outta here; I don't know what's coming.

Wendy turns away, doesn't say anything to Pat but her look is withering.

She opens the door and walks out.

WENDY (O.S.)

Hey kid. You wanna go get an ice cream cone?

EXT. PAT'S HOUSE - DAY

Kyle drives into the open garage, which Pat closes immediately behind him.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

Kyle jumps out and opens the back door.

KYLE

Help me with Sherm.

They carry Sherman into the kitchen and lay him down on the floor.

Pat's visibly shaken.

KYLE

I'll be back in fifteen minutes. Have Sherm ready to go. Don't take his vest off, tie a sheet around his middle real tight. Got it?

PAT

What the...

KYLE

Just do it!

He goes back into the garage and SLAMS the door. Sherm looks up at Pat with a strange smile.

SHERM

You look so tall from down here.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET- DAY

Wendy and Jody sit and eat ice cream. The sounds of SIRENS can be heard in the distance.

JODY

Are my brothers gonna go to jail again?

WENDY

No sweetie. Nobody's going to leave you.

Close on Jody's face.

JODY

You owe me a movie; if Pat goes to jail you owe me for him too, okay?

EXT. PAT'S HOUSE - DAY

Kyle drives up in his car and pulls into the garage.

He gets out quickly and closes the garage door behind him.

EXT. PAT'S HOUSE - LATER THAT DAY

A car pulls up to the curb, Pat's mom kisses a WHITE TRASH MAN and gets out.

She carries flowers.

INT. PAT'S HOUSE - DAY

Pat's mom, Helen, walks into the house and stops suddenly, drops the flowers.

Her POV: We see a large pool of blood and the scattered flowers lying on the kitchen floor.

HELEN (O.S.)

(screams) Jody! Pat, oh Jesus.

EXT. CAMUS PRAIRIE - DUSK

The sun is just starting to sink below the rolling hills as we fly once again over the prairie from above.

We pass over a small community, the houses look like small, ornate boxes and the spire of a church stands out among them.

We pass over a combine, which looks like a toy, as it mows a bright yellow canola field below.

We continue on, away from civilization, and start to descend as an old, abandoned farmhouse stands on the horizon with the sun sinking below.

CLOSE on a crumbling grain elevator that sits behind the farmhouse.

INT. GRAIN ELEVATOR - DUSK

We look down from above, into the elevator. Kyle and Pat kneel over the wounded Sherm, who smiles.

He lays on a perfectly square, white sheet, which is stained with his blood.

PAT

Hang in there Sherm.

KYLE

I'm gonna go get a doctor in Grangeville, call me on the cell phone if anything comes up.

SHERM

Kyle don't...

KYLE

Save your strength partner. We can heal in jail.

He gives Pat a gun and a cell phone, leaves.

EXT. JAIL - SUNSET

Cal pulls up in his car, walks towards the jail.

Sue Webber and two FBI AGENTS come out the front door and approach Cal.

CAL

What's up Sue?

The FBI agents interrupt.

AGENT #1

Have you seen or heard from Pat Plummer or his brother Kyle.

CAL

The fuck?

SUE

You didn't see the news?

CAL

What'd they do?

AGENT #2

(like he thinks he's dirty Harry) Answer the question.

CAL

Fuck you!

SUE

Maybe we should all go inside.

INT. JAIL OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE on Cal as he sits across from the two feds.

CAL

You don't know he's involved.

AGENT #1

Yeah right.

AGENT #2

We found a lot of blood in the van and at their house; at least one of them is wounded. They the type to go to the hospital?

CAL

(to himself) Pat's not involved. He wouldn't, he just wouldn't.

AGENT #1

Their little sister's missing. We may be dealing with a child abduction. You gonna help us or what?

CAL

I wish I could, I don't know anything... but I doubt Pat's involved, he's not like that.

AGENT #2

You doubt it? We know his brother was involved and Pat's missing. Can you explain that?

CAL

No, I can't. It looks bad though.

AGENT #1

He's got an assault against you in his rap sheet. He stabbed you with a pencil when he was thirteen and you say he's not like that.

CAL

It's complicated.

AGENT #2

Yeah, so is telling those three guards' families that dad's never coming home. You want to explain it to them?

INT. LEWISTON POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Wendy enters the police station, holds Jody's hand as they approach the front desk. It's crowded and frantic with activity.

WENDY

Sit down over there honey.

JODY

I don't like cops. They're mean.

WENDY

It's okay, I'll protect you. (to the cop) Excuse me sir. Can we talk to someone in charge? I just saw the news and there's a few things you need to know.

INT. GRAIN SILO - NIGHT

Pat leans over Sherm, who looks a little better...but not good.

SHERM

Stop hanging over me, you look giant. Hey, how long since Kyle left?

PAT

About ten minutes.

SHERM

Funny...seems like it's been hours. Hey, lay down here next to me for a minute.

PAT

What?

SHERM

Get on your back like me, you gotta see the sky, it's amazing.

Pat lies down next to Sherm and we see the sky from their POV, framed in a circle by the grain silo.

A large cloud covers a portion of the circle and the rays of sunlight filter down towards the two.

SHERM

You ever look for shapes in the clouds when you were a kid?

PAT

Yeah, I do that with Jody sometimes.

SHERM

Looks like a big steelhead.

PAT

Naw...it's too fat around the middle. It's more like a Whale.

SHERM

Yeah, a whale...I ever tell you about the beached whale I saw with my grandfather?

PAT

No.

INT. KYLE'S CAR - DUSK

Kyle cruises up to a doctor's office and we see a sign that says: CLOSED!

KYLE

Fuck!

He looks down and we see a torn page from the yellow pages in his hand.

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

FRED BROWNING, a youngish, resident doctor, walks through an empty parking lot towards his car.

He still wears his hospital scrubs.

Kyle pulls up next to his BMW and approaches the man amiably.

KYLE

Excuse me, you a doctor?

FRED

(snotty) No, I'm an exotic dancer.

Kyle grabs Fred by his hair and smashes his head into the back end of his BMW several times and then throws Fred onto the pavement while he opens the trunk of the Beamer.

He grabs Fred by the hair once again, yanks him to his feet, and stuffs him into the trunk.

Without a word he transfers the money, a black doctor bag, and several guns to BMW.

He jumps into the car, digs through the tape cassettes as he speeds off.

KYLE

Fucking John Denver?

INT. GRAIN ELEVATOR - DUSK

We look at the clouds overhead once again.

SHERM

I was seven or eight, something like that. My grandfather took me camping on the Olympic Peninsula. We built a sweat lodge, got a big fire going and heated up a bunch of rocks...It was the first time I'd built the sweat and my grandfather said it was an important thing. I was so excited. I remember looking at him, his old withered skin just hung there and made these folds on his face. He looked like he knew all the answers...

We got up the next day and we hiked to the ocean and there was a giant Grey Whale, lying half in the water. It had these enormous eyes and looked right at us. It was just laying there, you could see its body heaving up and down with breath, and it was alive but just laid there while the tide slowly moved out. I wanted to get some help but my grandfather wouldn't let me. He said "boy, Look at this guy, look how great he is." He stroked his hand along its side as he talked and the whale just laid there staring. "You think you can tell this whale what to do? You can't tell him shit, look at him." Then he made me touch him and he started talking to the whale in the native tongue and I didn't know what he was saying, but we stayed there for a long time while he had a conversation with this dying whale.

PAT

Then what happened?

SHERM

Then he said we had to go, that it was rude to stay any longer. The whale needed to be alone so we left...Hey Pat?

PAT

Yeah Sherm.

SHERM

I want you and Kyle to make sure I get my privacy. I don't want anybody on the Rez to know what happened to me.

PAT

You're not gonna die, Kyle's getting a doctor, you'll see.

SHERM

It's okay, I'm ready to go man. I've been ready for a while. (He spits up blood and shivers, then smiles gently at Pat) AHHH...I feel good. Nice view too.

PAT

Don't talk Sherm.

SHERM

Hey Pat, you know why whales beach themselves?

Pat stares down, dumbly as Sherman starts to go into his death throws.

SHERM

Cause they feel like it.

Sherman reaches into his vest, seems to put his hand on his heart, like he's looking for something in there, and then dies.

Pat reaches in and slowly removes Sherman's hand.

It clutches the picture that Jody gave to him of the Indian Brave.

Pat sits back, falls partially on his side, and looks up once more at the sky, which glows faintly with the colors of a fast retreating sun.

EXT. GRAIN SILO - NIGHT

Kyle parks the BMW outside, walks quickly into their hide out.

KYLE (O.S.)
Fuck! God Dammitt. Fuck!

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Kyle pulls over, gets out.

He opens the trunk, pulls the terrified doctor out by his hair, and throws him into a wheat field.

KYLE
You got shitty taste in music.

He drives off.

INT. GRAIN SILO - NIGHT

We look down into the grain silo once again.

Pat lies back with his arm draped across his face.

Kyle digs a hole.

Sherman lies on his back, still.

He lies at an angle to the perfectly square, white sheet, and a strange pattern of blood has soaked almost to the edges in places.

As we move closer we see Jody's picture, which lies across his chest.

A large shiny lump holds the picture in place and sits almost exactly over Sherman's heart.

It's the gold nugget from the casino!

Sherm's POV: The stars above, framed in a perfect circle, are so bright, they seem like they're on fire.

We fly up the silo and into the heavens beyond.

EXT. BMW - NIGHT

The car speeds past a SIGN that says:

SPOKANE 60 MILES

INT. BMW - NIGHT

Kyle drives and Pat stares straight ahead at the road.

PAT

You killed people.

Kyle doesn't look over or say anything.

PAT

You killed someone with a daughter the same age as Jody. I heard it on the radio.

KYLE

What do you want me to say?

PAT

I don't want you to say anything...you killed people you never even met.

For an instant, Kyle looks almost like he's gonna break down, like he might actually care...

And then it's gone.

KYLE

Fuck it. I did what I did, I'm not gonna cry about it now, it's done.

PAT

Let me out.

KYLE

What?

PAT

You're gonna pull me into this.

KYLE

The cops are gonna think you were involved.
They might shoot your ass on the spot. You
better come up North with me for a spell.

PAT

Pull over.

Kyle pulls the car over and they both get out.

EXT. SIDE OF THE HIGHWAY - NIGHT

KYLE

So that's it, you just gonna turn your back on
family.

PAT

I wanna go home.

Kyle takes a deep breathe, seems to think things over.

Suddenly, he punches Pat in the face twice and throws him to the ground.

He takes a pair of handcuffs out of his back pocket, slaps them onto Pat's
wrists, then drags him around by the chain in the middle.

He cries the whole time he does this.

KYLE

(barely in control of his emotions) You tell em' I
kidnapped you and that you ran off into the
fields while I was taking a piss...You don't fight
or nothing, just look like a whipped dog...you'll
be okay.

He grabs Pat again. This time, in a hug, and then he lets go suddenly.

He gets into the car and drives off without even a look back a Pat.

Pat turns around and starts to stumble slowly in the other direction.

A low hum resonates as we FADE TO A BLACK SCREEN.

INT. DANCE HALL - CONTINUOUS

(DREAM SEQUENCE)

Cal walks into a deserted bar with a small stage and dance floor.

As the lights come up, the band appears out of nowhere.

The band is made up of various characters that have interacted with Cal during the movie. They're all dressed up like a Mariachi band.

They're playing a slow, sad, song, and Pat walks out of the shadows and starts to sing in Spanish.

The blue stage lights come up and Cal's wife appears on the other side of the dance floor.

She looks like a completely different person. She is no longer tortured; her face is bright, as if nothing bad has ever happened to her. She almost looks innocent.

Slowly, Cal and Jill approach each other, making eye contact the whole way. They embrace and start to dance.

As the song progresses, they clutch each other with more urgency, Cal seems as if he tries to pull himself into his wife. The lights come up and fade as they twirl to the music.

As they spin in each other's arm, we notice that Jill is now swollen, pregnant in the late stages.

Cal holds one of her hands and has the other on her belly.

He has a look of awe on his face.

Jill's hand is on Cal's shoulder and she is gently caressing his hair as they dance in perfect harmony.

The lights GET BRIGHTER, as the music gains momentum.

They swirl around and into each other, and we see a MONTAGE, which flashes to the rhythm of the music:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Cal's wife puts a baby sock in her husband's lunch pail. She's pregnant.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

CAL'S SON stands on a chair next to him while they brush their teeth.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cal's wife sits reading their son a bedtime story.

EXT. CAL'S HOUSE - DAY

A car drives off. Cal's son waves from the passenger window and we see the driver, Cal's wife, Jill.

She catches his eye, smiles lovingly...and then, they're gone.

INT. DANCE HALL - CONTINUOUS

Cal's wife looks wilted, in pain, and guilt ridden.

Her belly is now perfectly flat.

A RINGING sound invades the dream and:

The band disappears.

Cal's wife disappears.

Pat stands at the microphone with a bloody chest and blood all over his hands.

He stares at Cal for a moment, then vanishes.

Cal is alone on a dark, empty dance floor.

INT. JAIL REC ROOM - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

Cal wakes from his nightmare to a RINGING TELEPHONE.

He groans in agony and seems to pull into himself as he gathers strength.

He closes his eyes, concentrates, and gets control.

The clocks says 2:30 am.

He now looks almost robotic, his eyes are slightly glazed and Cal looks like someone you would cross the street to avoid.

He's out of his mind with grief, but if you don't know the story...crazy is crazy!

INT. CONROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

We hear several more RINGS and then Cal stumbles into the control room looking disoriented.

CAL

JDC, this is Cal speaking. Pat, huh. Where'd they find him? No shit. Bring him over after he gets cleared by the hospital; I'll be waiting.

CLOSE on and FOLLOW Cal as he walks out of the control room and into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Cal walks into the kitchen.

He whistles a tune as he takes a key, opens a locked cabinet, and examines a row of knives.

He takes a medium sized, very sharp-looking carving knife.

As he walks out of the kitchen, he whistles the same tune.

INT. INTAKE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Cal sits at the same computer we saw earlier when he discharged Pat. He has a blank look on his face, if anything, there's a touch of a smile with nothing behind it.

He cleans his nails with the carving knife and watches a TV monitor, which shows the back gate.

EXT. JAIL - NIGHT

We've come full circle to the opening of the movie.

Pat looks out the window from the back of a police car, stares at the jail in disbelief.

Cal opens the security gate, and the police car drives into the secured area.

INT. INTAKE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Pat stands behind a large, glass window in a holding cell.

He looks like he's gone a couple rounds and stares at the Police Officer like he wants to go a couple more.

COP

That little fucker can scrap.

PAT (O.S.)

I ain't done with you yet pig.

COP

What an animal. They should sterilize the whole family.

CAL

Are you done here?

COP

Yeah, why?

CAL

(deadpan) Then get the fuck out.

EXT. JAIL COURTYARD - NIGHT

Cal opens the security gate and the cop gives Cal the finger and drives out.

INT. INTAKE CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Cal enters the building once more and walks past Pat (who stares through the glass at Cal) without saying a word or even looking at him.

INT. REC ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Cal sits and watches TV while he spoons cereal into his mouth.

Cal watches the house being destroyed by flood, ONE MORE TIME.

We see him from a different angle and now notice the carving knife, which lies across his lap.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

He walks into the kitchen, washes the bowl like a robot, dries it, leaves the kitchen, knife in hand, whistling.

INT. INTAKE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

A door clicks open and Cal enters the intake corridor where Pat is.

He holds the knife down low against his leg and then...

He sets it on the other side of the computer.

CUT TO:

SAME PLACE THROUGH THE JAIL'S SURVEILLANCE CAMERA

We see Cal from a different perspective, on a grainy, black and white screen. We're looking through the surveillance camera and from this angle...we can't see the knife. Cal sits innocently at the computer, preparing Pat's file like it's business as usual.

On video, everything looks kosher.

INT. HOLDING CELL - MOMENTS LATER

We see through the window from Pat's POV: He looks down at Cal, who sits pecking at the computer and doesn't look up at Pat, although they face each other through the glass.

We ZOOM in on the KNIFE, which sits next to the computer monitor. It's clear...Pat sees the knife.

A low hum resonates as Cal hits a key on the computer and we HEAR it start to print.

Cal gets up and stares straight at Pat. They stand eye-to-eye, separated by three inches of impact-resistant glass.

Pat's POV: We see Cal through the glass, staring at Pat but...

There's nobody home!

Cal walks OUT OF FRAME, and we HEAR a key enter a lock.

Pat's door swings open.

CAL (O.S.)

Get your ass out here.

Pat's had a bad time, he now knows what happened to Cal's child, but with all that he's just gone through, he's not in the mood for this.

INT. INTAKE CORRIDOR- CONTINUOUS

Pat walks out and sits down in a chair, right next to where the knife lay.

Cal stares pointedly at the knife, just for an instant, and then sits down at the computer next to Pat.

CAL

They found blood everywhere in the car. I thought you were dead...or worse, I thought you'd killed someone.

PAT

Hey Cal, I heard about...

CAL

Shut the hell up.

He fixes Pat with a look of complete and utter disgust.

CAL

I'm done worrying about you. You're nothing but a white-trash little fuck. I don't know why I ever treated you like a person, you're just some little wanna-be who thinks he's a gangster.

CLOSE on Pat's face.

He's hurt. He actually cares what Cal thinks.

PAT

Cal, you don't have to...

CAL

I told you to shut your mouth. If you say one more word, I swear to Christ... I hate you and your whole fucked up family.

Cal takes several deep breaths and it's obvious that it's difficult to say this to Pat.

He looks over at the knife quickly and then goes right back to baiting Pat.

CAL

I'm gonna recommend that they put you in a group home. I don't wanna be your teacher anymore.

Cal knows the right buttons to push. At the mention of a group home, Pat's demeanor changes and he looks ready to pounce.

Pat seems to consider something, gets up and walks back to the holding cell and looks like he might lock himself inside; but he turns back at the last moment and seems to have made up his mind.

Pat calmly walks back towards Cal.

CAL

I didn't tell you to get up; sit your ass down.

Pat picks up his plastic chair and turns it so he sits face to face with Cal.

He looks a little sad as he says:

PAT

I know what happened to your kid.

A beat.

Cal jumps out of his chair so fast that it goes flying and snatches up the knife, which he waves in Pat's face.

CAL

Shut your mouth! (he slaps Pat hard across the face) You don't know shit...you don't fucking know.

Cal stands over Pat, who looks up at him with an almost eerie calm.

Cal looks as if he's going to stab Pat, then like he might stab himself.

He wants to do something, he wants to hurt back but can't...and this makes him feel even worse.

He loses it completely. He cries like someone who's never wept before and the floodgates open—boy do they open.

CAL

You can't...

Pat looks unbelievably serene. This kid suddenly stares with eyes that seem ancient and wise.

He reaches out tenderly and puts a hand on Cal's head, who leans forward and pushes his face down into Pat's lap like he's trying to disappear.

PAT

It's okay, let it out...just let it go Cal.

CAL

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

PAT

It's alright. Everything is gonna be fine. Just breathe...take deep breaths and let it all go. That's what I do when nobody's around. That's good Cal—just breathe.

DISSOLVE:

INT. INTAKE CORRIDOR – MOMENTS LATER

Cal has a towel around his neck and looks like he's just lost a twelve-round decision.

Pat writes on a large placard in pen.

Pat walks into the storage room and comes out with a large camera.

He's checking himself into jail. He's been locked up so many times that the routine is second nature to him.

He hands the camera to Cal.

PAT

Make sure and highlight my prominent
cheekbones.

Cal takes the picture and there's a FLASH, and then a FULL SCREEN image of Pat with bunch of numbers held in front of him, and as we get closer we see that under "CHARGES" Pat has written "EVERYTHING" and there's a small, crooked, happy face after his name.

Cal sits back down after snapping the picture and Pat puts the camera away and comes back with a fingerprinting kit.

He sets it up with the precision of an FBI agent and looks down at Cal as he starts to print himself.

PAT

How you feeling?

CAL

Like shit. I can't believe I did that.

PAT

You didn't do anything.

CAL

You're too much Pat. Nothing ever shakes you,
does it?

A beat.

PAT

I got a good poker face.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Pat stands under the shower and Cal sits on the sink and stares off into space. He looks exhausted but somehow relieved.

Pat steps out of the shower and Cal hands him a small cup of Lice-All.

Pat lathers up his head, armpits, and crotch, and then stands there shivering.

PAT

Keep your eye on the clock, I hate this part.
Three minutes seem like forever when you're
naked, cold, and wet.

CAL

What you did today Pat...you're a special kid. I
know not many people clue in to that but I do.

PAT

I ever tell you about my dad?

CAL

No.

PAT

When I was little, I had blond hair. Look at me
now, right? But then I was a little toe-head, and
my old man disowned me because he said my
mom musta fucked someone else cause they
both had black hair and dark eyes.

CAL

God.

PAT

So last year. Last year, this clown gets out of
jail—broke, no job, no nothing—and he tells me
he wants to be my Dad again.

CAL

What'd you do?

PAT

I spit in his face and he beat the crap outta me.

CAL

I'm sorry.

PAT

No...That's not what I'm talking about. I'm not sorry, cause I figure that being a parent doesn't have anything to do with who knocked who up.

There's something he wants to tell Cal, and as he stands there naked and shivering, he spits it out awkwardly.

PAT

Remember the first time we met and I tried to stick that molester with a pencil and you jumped in and I stabbed you instead? Remember how you manhandled me all the way back to my cell?

CAL

Yeah.

PAT

I was laying there thinking about how to get you back when you brought me something to read, and you told me you were sorry it happened like that but if I attacked anyone in school again, you'd do the same thing and it wasn't personal. And then a year later, you brought me up to your house and let me eat dinner with your whole family...and even though I said "fuck" at the dinner table, you all treated me like I was something...you liked me.

CAL

Pat...

PAT

Wait! I'm not finished. So anyways, over the past few years, especially when I was younger and Kyle was at the penitentiary, I used to pretend that you were my dad, and I'd picture your house and your family...

And I wanted a dad, you know. Somebody who gave a fuck if I got into trouble or whether I was getting good grades. I used to love it when you'd give me those lectures about not picking on the weak, or...or going to school. I ain't never gonna see my brother again except on America's Most Wanted...and he's the closest to a father I ever came.

Pat seems like he's about to get choked up so he gets back into the shower and starts to wash the Lice-All off his body.

He shakes water off his head like a dog, then gargles water and spits it into the drain.

We see Pat's naked body again. All the scars, tattoo's, and burn marks make him look like some war veteran, but this is only a kid who got born into the wrong family.

INT. REC. ROOM - NIGHT

It's later that night and Cal and Pat watch basketball on TV.

Pat eats an apple and once again wears the green sweats issued by the jail.

PAT

I'm beat.

CAL

You ready to get some Z's?

PAT

Yeah. It's been a long day...shit, it's been a long year.

CAL

Seems like a lifetime.

INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Cal and Pat walk down the hallway and we see them from behind as their FOOTSTEPS echo off the concrete walls.

As they pass each cell, we see YOUNG BOYS who stand at the window, look out.

They heard some of what went on.

They pass Speck, who's also in jail again.

As he walks by...Pat punches the window right where Speck's face is.

SPECK

You straight?

PAT

Yeah...anybody asks, you didn't hear nothing.
We all slept like babies.

SPECK

Got it.

PAT

Thanks dog.

They walk down to the last cell and Cal opens the door with a large key.

Pat walks in and doesn't look back.

Over his shoulder, he says:

PAT

Get it together Cal. I plan on being out for the
basketball tournament and I want that fucking
trophy.

INT. PAT'S CELL - NIGHT

He swings the door shut behind and lays down facing the wall.

Through the window, Cal stares down at him and then we CLOSE on Pat as tears start to roll down his face and he cries without making a sound. His body spasms and he rocks himself.

After a moment, he shuts his eyes pointedly, as if that will make the world go away.

INT. CAL'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Cal stumbles in from the longest and strangest night of his life.

Jill lays on her side and Cal gently spoons her and buries his head into the back her neck. His face disappears in her hair.

Jill's awake, but pretends to sleep.

She puts a hand over his, which is draped across her side, and then closes her eyes.

They're gonna make it.

FADE OUT WITH SUBTITLES: THREE MONTHS LATER

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

Pat and Cal sit center court, put on their high tops.

A CROWD gathers around and as the camera PANS OUT...

We see Frankie, Speck, and Toe-Head. All wear UNLV jerseys and Budweiser hats.

FOUR CORRECTIONS WORKERS watch Pat closely.

There's a pile of chain shackles at their feet.

Pat wears a shirt that says JUVENILE CORRECTIONS.

PAT

Told you I'd be out for the tournament; you gotta have faith man.

CAL

How'd you swing this?

PAT

I filed a monster lawsuit and told them I'd drop it if they let me play ball.

CAL

You ready?

PAT

I been locked down twenty hours a day for three months. These pussies got no idea what they're in for.

Jill, Wendy, and Jody stand together in the crowd.

Pat flashes them a roguish smile and blows them a kiss as he and Cal approach the REFEREE and the OTHER TEAM.

Pat eyes the kid on the other team, shakes his head in sympathy.

The kid looks a little terrified of someone who was brought to the game in shackles.

Before he inbound the ball, Pat leans forward and whispers to his opponent:

PAT

Don't worry, the doctor says I'm much better. I ain't killed nobody in almost a year.

As the screen goes black we hear a WHISTLE and then a ball BOUNCING.

PAT

Cal! Yo Cal. Gimme the ball. These punks can't guard me...I'm Pat!

FADE OUT

VITA

Chad Husted received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Humboldt State University, in 1991. He grew up in Huntington Beach, California, and now resides in Boise, Idaho. He is thirty-two years old, married, and plans to pursue a career teaching and writing fiction.