

WHITE HALL FOREVER

Written by

Michael Beard

I327633

OPEN ON:

EXT. TRAIL - WOODS - DUSK

1938.

JANICE WATKINS (9, black) trots along. Around her shoulder is a raggedy satchel. In her hand - a glass carton of milk.

The young lady's evened pace grows laggard when ... up ahead in the darkened distance ... *footsteps* ...

Janice appoints a *complete standstill* when a silhouette's self-whispering pep-talk eases through the buzzing insects...

The shape appears from the shadows. . . CARL ARMSTRONG (16, white) **dons a pair of sky-blue overalls**. His busted lip complements a fresh black eye. With some debauched swagger;

CARL

Oh... well, shucks - I ain't be seein' folk out here too often...

(beat)

'specially folk so pretty...

Janice takes a step back - Carl has himself a step closer.

JANICE

I - I gotta keep on, sir - I'm runnin' late and I know my mama out lookin' for me --

Perturbed by Carl's unflinching eye contact;

JANICE (CONT'D)

Sir?

CARL

Why don't we take a look under that dress of yours?

Janice, engaging in a fearful recede, trembles.

EXT. FIELD - OUTSKIRTS OF TRAIL - MOMENTS LATER

Carl straddles Janice's nude corpse. Inhabiting his mind is an odd concoction of satisfied bewilderment. With his dirty fingers and untrimmed nails, he presses on her cheeks...

But, impending themselves through the tall grass . . .

. . . an approaching strut. His head swinging around;

CHEWY

Hey!
Who's there...?!

Striving for a visual conclusion, his squinting eyes probe the flat land that surrounds him. *The strut is no more . . .*

From the dark, a hurled-rock cracks Carl in his mouth. He plunges down on Janice's body.

While pushing himself up, a set of delicate black hands wrap piano-wire around Carl's throat. They squeeze.

HARD CUT TO:

BLACK.

WHITE HALL COUNTY, UNITED STATES

FADE IN

INT. HALLWAY - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - DUSK

1951

YOLONDA WATKINS (40, black) guides a stubby set of attic stairs back into the ceiling. She locks it. A pull-string dangles down.

INT. BOY'S ROOM - ARMSTRONG HOUSEHOLD - DUSK

An ordinary boy's room. ADAM ARMSTRONG (14, white) knocks out some mediocre push-ups. Soon switches to crunches.

INT. PARENT'S ROOM - ARMSTRONG HOUSEHOLD - SAME

Above the bed frame; a portrait of a sun-kissed cotton field. THOMAS ARMSTRONG (40, white) pages the morning paper. His wife TINA ARMSTRONG, (40, white) who married into the last name, a novel. Prescription pills are on her bed-side drawer.

Through their cracked door, Adam, their son, passes.

TINA

Adam, honey? Where are you headed?

ADAM (O.S.)

Riding to Chris's.

TINA
 Alright, back by eight-thirty!

The front door *shuts*. With a tone that's a bit defeatist;

THOMAS
 Mark my words. I'm gonna crack the
 code to this kid...

TINA
 He's at that age, Tommy. Just a
 phase. He'll come around.

The silence of a contemplating Thomas and a page-turning Tina
 is drained by a growing conflict...

EXT. FRONT PORCH - LINDA'S HOME - THAT NIGHT

ARTHUR (51, white) is at his porch's bottom. Adam and CHRIS
 (14, white) stand (not-welcomed) on his lawn. The latter
 feels rather pugnacious.

On the porch itself, behind Arthur: his niece LINDA (14,
 white) semi-neighbor BERNADETTE (50, black) and her daughter
 MALLORY (14, black.)

Though an early-teen, Linda is tiny. Assessing her as *feeble*
 wouldn't be a misguidance.

Meeting the bottom of Arthur and Linda's driveway: a road of
 division. Just across the street is a "colored" neighborhood.
 Bernadette's block. The Watkins, too.

CHRIS
 Let me guess; you *care* about her
 now? You know what she needs best?

ARTHUR
 This is a new low, Chris -- even
 for you. Simply a new level of low.

CHRIS
 You ain't wanna see how low I can
 get you *old faggot* -

ADAM
 Chris, relax -

ARTHUR
 (a step closer)
 Now, you listen here - *Linda*
lives under my roof, I am her
guardian -

CHRIS
Guardian?!

ARTHUR
 (frustration growing)
 - *and you're on my property.*

CHRIS
 What, you think I ain't aware of
 that?

Yearning to remain collected;

ARTHUR
 You -- I'll give you sixty seconds
 to leave before I call the police
 you -- *degenerate.*

CHRIS
 Go ahead! Call 'em up! Matter of
 fact, that ain't too bad an idea!
 'cause then, this *degenerate* could
 show 'em her Jesus-bruises!

"Yikes." With that, Arthur has reached his boiling point.

ARTHUR
 (tucking rosary)
 Alright. *You wanna come to my house*
and - alright.

BERNADETTE
 Oh, Arty, no -

LINDA
 Don't, Uncle Arthur! Please!

CHRIS
 (*finally*)
 Oh, gramps, I thought the day would
 never come.

Chris and Arthur move in for each other. Moving in with them,
 out of a keep-the-peace attempt;

ADAM
 Hey, let's calm down, now - words,
 communication, powerful things -

Arthur shoves the young Chris.

ADAM (CONT'D)
 Nope, not what we need, let's -

Chris, going above a favor-return, spits in Arthur's face.

LINDA
Chris!

BERNADETTE
Oh boy, that's our cue.

Arthur snatches Chris by his throat. Prying his elder's arm;

ADAM
Let him go! C'mon, he's just a kid!

Arthur releases the kid's throat - slaps Adam with the same hand. Taking advantage, Chris drives Arthur back after clutching his button-down. Both trip and fall.

Adam is surprised by the warm blood that trickles out of his nose, down onto his lips.

From the porch, a cemented Linda watches the brawl while Bernadette and Mallory wobble past it. A despondent Mallory turns and waves "goodbye." Linda returns an acknowledgement.

Chris, on his feet before the old-timer, lifts a leg and initiates a perennial stomp on Arthur's face. With his guard up;

ARTHUR
Lin! The police! Linda!

Linda rushes inside. Becoming aware;

ADAM
(pulling Chris off)
Chris, are you deaf?! What if my Dad comes? -- We gotta get outta here!

As Adam and Chris rush down her yard, Linda steps out.

CHRIS
He hit me first, baby! Everybody saw it!

The boys take off on their bicycles.

With black eyes blossoming and a blood-leaking face, Arthur crops up. He scrutinizes Linda - a unique countenance of frustration, confusion and anger.

YOUNG MAN (V.O.)
Let's go! Experts ain't supposed to take this long.

INT. BASEMENT - JIMMY'S HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Adam and Chris are in said young man's basement. JIMMY (15, white.) Chris and Jimmy stand behind Adam while he, with the help of paper clips, picks the lock-box of a safe.

ADAM

Experts also work best in silence.

CHRIS

Yeah, Jimmy. Christ, give him a minute, will ya?

Soon enough, the safe is opened for business. Adam pulls it open -- liquor. Bottles of varying sizes. Chris and Jimmy up.

INT. CLOSET - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - THE NEXT MORNING

This confined space allows BARRY WATKINS (40, black) to practice spiritual worship. Pinned to the wall are Bible pages. A prayer-reciting Barry clenches a rosary. Watching him: the painted eyes of Christ.

INT. BEDROOM - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - MOMENTS LATER

From the twin bed, Yolonda appraises a photo album. It fills her with stripped away euphoria. One of the photographs - a smiling JANICE. Age 8.

Barry, in a stained apron, peeps in from the hallway. On verbal eggshells;

BARRY

Plans for your day off?

Apparently, nothing. He sees what she's doing. Regarding the photos;

BARRY (CONT'D)

This early?

Yolonda's eyes *elevate* away from the fond memories and onto her husband - "*You saying I can't?*"

BARRY (CONT'D)

You right. Ain't my place.

(beat)

My boot's fallin' apart.

Yolonda sighs. Closes the album.

INT. HALLWAY - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - MOMENTS LATER

As Barry peers up the attic stairs, Yolonda begins stepping down - she hands him a roll of duct tape.

BARRY
My pocket covers most our payments,
Yolonda.

She folds the steps back into the ceiling --

BARRY (CONT'D)
Whatever you got up there is just
as mine as it is yours.

-- and locks up. Deciding to abstain;

BARRY (CONT'D)
I'll be home by six. Get some
sleep, 'Londa.
No one need it more than you.

Barry walks off.

INT. KITCHENETTE - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - MOMENTS LATER

Barry tapes the bottom of his boots back together.

YOUNG BOY (O.S.)
Daddy?

Barry rotates - unalloyed bliss from the sight of JEROME WATKINS, (11, black) his and Yolonda's spawn. Jerome fidgets with an old tennis ball.

BARRY
What you doin' outta bed, crazy?

JEROME
What you?

BARRY
(a grin)
Gotta go in a little early is all.

JEROME
Kids got school?

BARRY
(a beat, downcast)
Yeah.
(back to normal tone)
Yeah, they do.

Jerome deflates. Aiming to hoist his spirts;

BARRY (CONT'D)

Hey.

I got somethin' for ya.

Barry kneels down as Jerome scurries across the wooden panel - hands his boy a pocket-sized bible. At a *whisper*;

BARRY (CONT'D)

Now, this ain't gonna be stumblin'
across Mama, right?

After Jerome shakes his head "no," Barry hugs him.

INT. KITCHEN - ARMSTRONG HOUSEHOLD - THAT MORNING

Above their coffee pot: a portrait of ANDREW JACKSON.

Adam fixes his school-lunch. Enjoying a cold beer and some Tina-prepared biscuits and gravy is Thomas, wearing his ironed police uniform. He goes over Adam's report card.

Tina, twisting the lid off of a pill bottle;

TINA

How 'bout it, Tom? Our boy's
somethin', ain't he?

After swallowing a pill, Tina slides one to her husband. He chews it, ingesting it all the same. After a gulp of beer;

THOMAS

That he is. With his Demo-rat
teachers and those short-bus
friends - I don't know how he pulls
it off.

Timorous;

ADAM

Thanks.

While Adam locks his lunchbox, Thomas's eyes ask Tina "Should I keep going?" to which her look bridges - "Good enough."

INT. POLICE CAR - MOVING - MOMENTS LATER

Thomas drives, Adam is in passenger. The simplicity of a school drop off is laced with unspoken tension.

ADAM
Have you heard from Arthur?

THOMAS
Have I *heard* from Arthur?

ADAM
Or Linda? Either of them call?

THOMAS
Don't believe so.

Satiated, Adam takes in a veiled breath. Skeptical;

THOMAS (CONT'D)
They in some kinda trouble?

ADAM
I'm not sure, really. Chris said something about a break-in.

THOMAS
Ya get what ya earn.

Thomas, an expression of antipathy, pops a smoke between his teeth.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
They cryin' about a break in, huh?
Surprised it doesn't happen more,
tell ya the truth.
(grabbing lighter)
You don't got the slightest clue on
the type of people they live across
from, son.
(sparks it)
Killers.

Adam gazes through his window. Just another day.

INT. KITCHEN - MOBILE HOME - THAT MORNING

From the newspaper's local sports section, Chris scissors out an image of a singlet-bulging wrestler. He probes the photo. It suffuses Chris with cloistered elation.

The champion athlete is DALE (17, white.) A high-schooler at White Hall East. From outside;

MAN (O.S.)
Chrissy, wait 'til you get a look at this.

Furtive, Chris stuffs both the newspaper + severed image in his bag.

His dad PETER, (45, white) wielding an army green tote, enters. As he sets it down, a look at the walls; military portraits and plaques. Alcoholics Anonymous certifications.

Chris meanders over - from the tote, Peter retrieves his old pair of military-issued binoculars. With insincere ardor;

CHRIS

Oh, no way!

PETER

(proud)

You remember them, don't ya?

As Chris handles the vision enhancers, Peter clutches a holstered knife - it's long and lethal, having also derived from the military. This ignites (actual) excitement.

PETER (CONT'D)

Now, I know you remember this.

CHRIS

Wow...

(handling it)

I always wondered what happened to the bastard that kicked me out of kindergarten.

PETER

(after a laugh)

What happened to him is that I made the mistake of lending shit to your Uncle.

As Chris straps the binoculars around his neck;

PETER (CONT'D)

But hey, they're yours now.

CHRIS

Mine?

PETER

Absolutely. You're at a good age.

CHRIS

Uh - yeah, awesome, Dad. Thanks.

PETER

Sir yes, sir!

Peter chuckles while *Chris tugs the knife out of its holster ... parsing the blade's jagged ridges ...*

PETER (CONT'D)
 (glancing around)
 You seen the paper, Chrissy?
 (having to *snap fingers*)
 Ay! *You got shit in your ears?*

CHRIS
 Oh, uh -- No, I haven't.

Peter sighs. Hopes to God he isn't losing his mind.

ARTHUR (V.O.)
 We'll discuss after school.

EXT. BUS STOP - THAT MORNING

ARTHUR (V.O.)
 You come right home.

White + lower class students, Linda included, await the school bus at a corner next to Linda's driveway.

Linda, her vision avoiding her fellow kids, notices something across the street...

...hovering the end of his government-assigned position... Jerome.

His hand detains his trusty tennis ball, but Jerome's innocent eyes... they're on Linda. Before she can react;

YOLONDA (O.S.)
Jerome Watkins!

Linda watches him turn and sprint back home...

INT. PARKED - SCHOOL BUS - MOMENTS LATER

Linda goes to sit with TWO WHITE GIRLS who, melodramatic in their disgust, aren't allowing it. So, further back trots Linda. Leaving her no space after scooting to the seats edge is A WHITE BOY.

She takes a seat all by her lonesome. Linda - an exercise in tear-suspension - tugs at the fabric of her dress.

INT. MEAT PACKING PLANT - LATER THAT MORNING

Barry minimizes poultry down to sandwich slices.

INT. OFFICE - MEAT PACKING PLANT - A MOMENT LATER

Unkempt files are spread across the boss's desk. Mentioned boss is DON (55, white.) He uses his window to scope out the workers. Opening his door;

DON

Ay, Barry! I need ya a minute.

INT. MEAT PACKING PLANT - SAME

BARRY

Yes, sir!

Barry removes himself.

DON (V.O.)

They pleased with how I'm runnin' the ship?

INT. OFFICE - MEAT PACKING PLANT - A MOMENT LATER

The desk divides Don and Barry. The former is seated, the latter stands.

BARRY

I ain't heard no complaints. We runnin' just as well, I think.

DON

C'mon, Barry. Act like we in the truck. You the only one that'll shoot me straight. They loved Ol' Butch. They don't love me.

Off of Barry's reflective face;

DON (CONT'D)

I know what that means. If you don't speak up, you'll be kissin' your wife goodnight and your raise goodbye.

"Are you serious?"

DON (CONT'D)

Alright, c'mon, obviously I ain't gonna do that, but you know what they sayin'. How do I get that Butch-respect?

BARRY

(a moment)

Th- they ain't too happy with the little side business. Some think - for keepin' quiet and all - that they should get a cut.

DON

Oh, *those cocksuckers*, I bet they do --

(reserving himself)

Anything else?

"Not that I can think of" indicates Barry.

DON (CONT'D)

Alright. And, listen; I contacted the station.

That officer... I'm sure you don't need me tellin' you that he got some serious pull. Deputy, uh -, well, shit, I don't remember his name, but he said Ol' Butch called and tried the same thing.

Barry expected such. Seeing this;

DON (CONT'D)

We know you didn't do it. Alright? You gimme some time and he'll be kickin' rocks in his bare-feet.

Barry remains. Not too sure that'll be the case.

INT. CLASSROOM - SCHOOL - THAT MORNING

MR. MURPHY (38, white) teaches. GARY, (15, white) a resident of reclusivity, reads a novel. Chris and Adam are seated next to each other. As Chris tugs a straw from out of his pocket;

ADAM

It's a Monday morning, kid. Ease up.

CHRIS

Old Arty ain't call Officer Tom or his officer buddies.

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)
 (pulling paper from mouth)
 I'm celebratin', *kid*.

ADAM
This is how you do it?

Paper slaps Gary's neck once Chris emits it from the straw.
 Laughter from the class. Facing the disruption;

MR. MURPHY
 Boys, please.

GARY
 (wiping it off)
 I didn't do anything, sir.

CHRIS
 Well, Mr. Murphy, he ain't
 listenin' to your lesson -

More peer-chuckles.

MR. MURPHY
 I can't say Chris is wrong.
 (perplexed)
 Wow. Never thought I'd say that.
 Gary, let's save the book for
 lunch?

Gary closes it. Leaning into Adam;

CHRIS
That's how I do it.

Adam shrugs it off.

INT. STALL - GIRL'S BATHROOM - SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

A brown paper bag rests at Linda's feat. She detaches the lettuce from her sandwich, sets it on some laid out tissue paper. She then drops the bread, meat and cheese in the toilet.

As Linda opens her juice box, the bathroom entrance opens;

CHRIS (O.S.)
 Lin?! C'mon, I see your feet, let's
 go!

FEMALE TEACHER (O.S.)
Christopher!

Linda pours the apple juice in with her sandwich-majority.

INT. HALLWAY - SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

MISS SAVELLO (50, white) isn't happy to see Chris and Adam outside of the women's bathroom.

MISS SAVELLO

In what *world* are you permitted to enter the ladies room?

ADAM

He was just looking for -

MISS SAVELLO

Was I speaking to you?

CHRIS

Miss Savello, listen. *I get it.* If you were in the girls room, and a man went lookin' for you -- *you'd be head over heels!* And, who knows -

MISS SAVELLO

How dare you!

Savello goes for an arm-grip but is too slow - Chris gallops down the hall. As the teacher runs down on the pupil, Jimmy approaches and joins Adam;

JIMMY

(disappointed)

For Christ's sake - now, what'd I miss?

Linda exits the bathroom. The three of them amble on. Leaving Jimmy to ponder;

ADAM

Hey, so Miss Savello is chasing Chris down.

She seems to be fine with that. Ambling on;

ADAM (CONT'D)

(penitent)

Hey, Lin -

LINDA

He's upset with me, not y'all. Cops ain't involved - that's all I wanna say.

ADAM
 (easy enough)
 Oh.
 Well -- okay.

JIMMY
 You wanna leave early with me, Lin?
 (to Adam)
 It's alright, my little teacher's
 pet, you ain't gonna have to waste
 your breath 'cause I ain't wastin'
 mine by askin'.

Debating, Linda glances at the clot of school children: she spots her school bus bullies.

LINDA
 Can't get in trouble for much else.

JIMMY
 That's the spirit. Come and get me
 once you find Chris.

Jimmy breaks off from Adam and Linda.

INT. STALL - BATHROOM - SCHOOL - LATER

Chris, in hiding, assumes the coast is clear by now. He exits.

INT. BATHROOM - SCHOOL - SAME

DALE (the wrestler) enters. Sporty spice. Confident, not cocky. Chris grows static - physically and emotionally.

DALE
 Hey, Chris! What's goin' on?

Tongue-tied;

CHRIS
 Oh, h-hey, Dale. How - um, I heard
 you placed first - that's, that's
 amazing.

DALE
 Yeah, man. Off the record? I
 thought it'd be a challenge.

Dale's joke discharges some fake laughter from the volatile Chris. *This is not the kid his friends have come to know.*

DALE (CONT'D)

But, say - coach is letting me take over PE this Wednesday. You gonna be there?

CHRIS

Me? Oh, uh - yeah, for sure, for sure.

DALE

Awesome. Be seein' ya, champ!

Dale enters a stall. Chris yearns to say more, but opts out at the risk of sounding un-cool.

INT. KITCHENETTE - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - SAME

Jerome is seated and sniveling. His hands, palms down, are laid on the table. An undeniable attention force paces behind him. Yolonda. She grips a wooden ruler.

YOLONDA

Last chance, boy.

JEROME

I'm sorry, Mama! I promise, I won't

-

Yolonda raises the measuring stick and slaps it down on Jerome's knuckles. Yanking his hands away;

YOLONDA

No! Keep 'em!

Jerome's soaked eyes plead with his mother's ... Yolonda's face reads "one last chance." His hands slide back where they were.

YOLONDA (CONT'D)

Don't feed me no more shit, Jerome. Lemme hear you say it.

Jerome tries - but can't articulate it... again, Yolonda cracks down on his knuckles.

JEROME

I lied!

YOLONDA

That's right. *You lied.*
You lied to your mother.

Jerome's eyelids - fastened. Her grip slackening;

YOLONDA (CONT'D)

Don't be scared of me, boy. I ain't
the one you supposed to be scared
of.

(a bit reposed)

I ain't the bad guy.

Jerome weeps.

CHRIS (V.O.)

Mrs. McDonnell - you don't got her,
do you?

INT. BURGER JOINT - LATER THAT DAY

Inhabiting a booth is Chris, Linda and Jimmy. Fatty carbs for
the boys, just water for Linda. As Chris opens his book bag;

JIMMY

I ain't a sped so, no, I don't.

CHRIS

Fuck off.

(pulling out folder)

You think you got it bad, look what
this bitch has me doin' -

Chris opens the folder -- the image of Dale dwindles out onto
the floor.

JIMMY

(laughing)

Why the hell do you have that?

CHRIS

God damnit - that Chrissy bitch
keeps sneakin' shit in my folder. I
told you, remember?

JIMMY

Definitely *did not* tell me that.

(kneeling to grab picture)

Gimme this queer shit.

As Jimmy crumbles it;

CHRIS

Yeah -- yeah, man, throw that shit
out. I'll make sure it don't happen
again.

LINDA
Want me to handle her?

Jimmy finds that just hysterical. A sequestered smile;

CHRIS
Don't worry about it, baby.

Chris looks at his bitten-burger -- appetite has dismissed itself.

INT. KITCHENETTE - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - THAT NIGHT

Yolonda and Jerome sit across from one another. His hands are lap ridden. Hot plate in front of each. A third plate is in front of an unoccupied seat.

The front door opens, work boots being unlaced. Yolonda fixes her posture.

AT THE FRONT DOOR: Barry rehearses a succinct and silent prayer. When finished, he enters the kitchen - his obscene hours are no match for his wholesome smile.

He kisses Yolonda's head, the same for his boy. A palpable variance of tension; one angered and scared, one upset and defeated. Taking a seat;

BARRY
How was everybody's day?

Yolonda dines. Barry has himself only a few bites before his chewing ceases. To his boy;

BARRY (CONT'D)
What, you ain't hungry?

Jerome's eyes decline to heighten. Barry glances to his wife for confirmation; on a count of her indifference, he won't be getting any.

BARRY (CONT'D)
What's going on here, now?

YOLONDA
Yeah, you a hungry boy, ain't ya Jerome?

If it were means to concluding this quarrel, Jerome would skip dinner. With dotting compassion only a father can employ;

BARRY
Hey, it's alright, son. We -

YOLONDA

Take a bite.

Jerome glances at his mother. "Pick up the fork."

He shows his hand after gripping the fork. Knuckles are purple and swollen. Barry sees. Leans back in his chair with cloistered anger.

YOLONDA (CONT'D)

Tell your father what you did.
Go on *and* tell him what you decided
to do.

Barry's proposal is a total contrast; laced with understanding.

BARRY

Hey.
(breathing space)
Remember what we talked about?

Jerome nods.

BARRY (CONT'D)

There ain't nothing God won't
forgive. And, there ain't nothing
we can't discuss.

Yolonda has not a hint of respect for this idealized discipline.

JEROME

(a sigh)
I took my ball to the end of the
block.

YOLONDA

And?

JEROME

(a breath)
I watched the bus.

Quite frankly, expecting worse;

BARRY

Hm.

Yolonda darts her husband a tenuous eye. Taking that in consideration;

BARRY (CONT'D)

Well, you living in this household,
you gon' live by your mothers -
(*quick*)
Our, word. Since we wasn't clear
then, is we clear now?

The boy nods. A slight grimace from Yolonda. Jerome won't budge so Barry pulls a chess move; sets his fork down.

BARRY (CONT'D)

My stomach gonna keep growlin' 'til
you dig in.

Jerome, at a sedating speed, complies. Barry takes a breath. For now, all is well.

INT. GIRL'S BEDROOM - LINDA'S HOUSE - SAME

A portrait of Christ observes Arthur as he spanks Linda with a paddle.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LINDA'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Linda sits on an ice pack. Arthur stands above her, the Holy Bible in hand;

ARTHUR

*"Train up a child in the way he
should go; even when he is old, he
will not depart from it!"*

LINDA

(*eyes misting*)
I didn't want that to happen to
you. I'm sorry.

Arthur stops himself from reading. Closes the scripture.

ARTHUR

Dead or in prison.
(*brief respite*)
You stick with them and that's
where you're headed.
Look at yourself, Lin. I don't know
who you've become. You're not you.

Each syllable pierces Linda's heart.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

The hidden bags of vomit tell me that you've turned your back on the Lord. That's why you perpetuate such --- wicked behavior. With wicked people.

Still.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

It's them or me. *Him* or me.

Arthur wields no mischief. Seeing her sadden;

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

Honey, your father is a sick man. His mind was not in the right place while he was doing what he did. His despicable actions... the ones that he forced upon you are the very epitome of sin -

LINDA

(quick)

So, why do you keep in contact?

Following a moment of Arthur's tense inactivity;

ARTHUR

Now, my brother and I haven't spoke in -

LINDA

I get the mail, Uncle Arthur! You think I don't see the letters? Or those stupid little comics you cut out for him?

(now crying)

What would God think of that?

Her uncle runs an emotive thumb over the spine of his Bible.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Do you want me to say sorry? An apology, is that what you want?

Albeit an avoidance of eye contact, Arthur's listening.

LINDA (CONT'D)

They care about me. Those *wicked people*? They accept me. It ain't gonna be too hard a choice If I gotta pick between that or - this. Whatever this is.

That stung. Arthur corrects his posture.

ARTHUR
 (processing)
 Well...
 (deciding)
 Since you seem to have an
 understanding that it's all well
 and good out there - now's the time
 for you to leave.
 (a beat)
 Now is when you pack a bag and you
 walk out that door and you find out
 what it's like.

Arthur rarely makes jokes - this time being one of them. Linda, fuming just a moment ago, is now fearful that she must fend for herself.

INT. BEDROOM - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - LATER THAT NIGHT

Yolonda once again withdraws from reality by way of a photo album. After laying his rosary across a drawer, Barry sits on the edge of their mattress.

BARRY
 There's, uh - something I wanna
 talk about, angel.

"Hm."

BARRY (CONT'D)
 I was thinkin' --- Sunday morning,
 I was thinkin' think you two should
 come to service. You and Jerome.

Anticipating such;

YOLONDA
 Yeah? What good that gonna do me?

BARRY
 (a verbal tiptoe)
 He need to hear us.

Yolonda closes the booklet.

YOLONDA
 Barry. . . I want you to *look me in
 my eyes* and tell me - we all equal.
 That we all in his good graces.

Barry has entered dangerous territory.

BARRY

Bad folk of all color -- but
there's good folk, too. He can -

YOLONDA

- and we taught Janice that same
bullshit.

Barry should have known better.

FLASHBACK: EXT. GRASSY TERRAIN - DUSK

Janice struggles to escape as Carl remove her blouse.

BEDROOM:

YOLONDA (CONT'D)

You know why they ain't give a fuck
about us or our daughter? 'cause
they don't got to. We gum beneath
their shoe.

BARRY

The Lord tests the strongest.

YOLONDA

I ain't got need for no tests.
We've been tested. I don't know
about you, but do you wanna know
what I learned?
I learned that to me, and to *my*
child, if you above the law, you an
enemy.

Barry sees no use in perpetuation.

INT. KITCHEN - ARMSTRONG HOUSEHOLD - THE NEXT MORNING

Adam has a bowl of cereal. Thomas, in uniform, enters from
upstairs. As he pours himself a cup of joe;

ADAM

Morning, Dad.

Thomas opens a cabinet - snags a bottle of whiskey. Spikes
his coffee.

THOMAS

Gonna have to take the bike today,
bud.

ADAM

Yeah, Mom told me.

Thomas goes for the front door --

ADAM (CONT'D)
Stay safe, pops!

-- and closes it. Adam is left with his soggy breakfast.

INT. MEAT PACKING PLANT - THAT MORNING

The hot sun embraces the windows. Rosary out, Barry lays slices of meat against wax-sheets. He sees an obvious drug-addict, AJ (30, white) come in from a side entrance.

Aj enters the office. He hands Don some crumbled cash. After counting the currency, Don hands him tight bags of powder.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MEAT PACKING PLANT - SAME

A patrol car parks. The steering silhouette removes his sunglasses. Uses the rearview to remove his sunglasses. Tilts a flask back.

INT. MEAT PACKING PLANT - A MOMENT LATER

The white workers negate their stations; some hide, some peek through the windows. The minorities stay put and stay slicing -- they know better. Thomas enters.

Lets the heavy door slam. Thomas zeroes in on Barry and positions himself in front of Barry's station. Just stands in place. Barry slices at his average pace.

THOMAS
Lookin' a little nervous there,
blacky. You know what that says to
men like me? To us lawman?

Thomas inspects his soft eyes.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
That tells us lawman that there's
somethin' on your chest. Somethin' -
maybe - you wanna admit.

Thomas lifts Barry's rosary about an inch from his chest.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Say, what's that Bible say about
magic?

A slight-shrug from Barry.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Does it say dead little girls can
make people disappear?

BARRY
(quick)
That's my daughter.

With a grin;

THOMAS
Oh, c'mon, blacky. You ain't think
I forgot now, did you?

As Barry unwraps a hunk of beef;

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Do I make you mad, Mr. Watkins?

The heightened speed of Barry's slicing tells Thomas that the
answer is "yes."

INT. OFFICE - MEAT PACKING PLANT - SAME

Don, peering up from a file, notices the habitual-harassment.
He rises from his seat.

INT. MEAT PACKING PLANT - SAME

As Barry remains composed;

THOMAS
Why don't you show me, blacky?

BARRY
I told you, I don't know what
happened -

THOMAS
And I don't believe you.

Popping out from the office;

DON
Ay! Someone with a question wanna
talk to the boss, right?

The officer shoots the head-honcho a look - unpleasant.

DON (CONT'D)
Well, let's go! Some of us can't be
dickin' around all day.

When Thomas leans forward, he removes a slice of ham from Bary's stack. Simultaneously, he takes the time to *whisper* in the meat-slicer's ear;

THOMAS

I'm gonna get you.

He then saunters toward the office. Barry, continuing his duty, troubles to shake it off.

INT. CAFETERIA - SCHOOL - THAT DAY

Adam, Chris, Jimmy and Linda (without a tray) sit at a table. Sitting by himself, watching them while wishing he'd be welcomed, is Gary.

MR. BROWN (60, white) comes up to them;

MR. BROWN

Christopher, Principal Soyner wants to see you in his office.

"Can't say I'm surprised," reads Chris's face...

STERN MALE (V.O.)

How many chances have we given you?

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

Chris is seated across PRINCIPAL DOUG SOYNER (58, white.) The man is tempted to throw in Chris's metaphorical towel.

CHRIS

(semi-careless)

Lost count.

PRINCIPAL SOYNER

Listen, this Gary kid -

CHRIS

He said something?

PRINCIPAL SOYNER

I can't -- won't ya lay off him?
He's got enough goin' on as it is.
Plus, his parents think he's - uh -

An immature smirk grows on the Principal's face. He takes both of his pointer fingers and presses the tips together. Blushing and adjusting;

CHRIS
I don't understand...

PRINCIPAL SOYNER
He's an easy target, alright? I get it. I've been in your shoes. I just - isn't it obvious I want you to succeed? To excel?

CHRIS
 I guess.

PRINCIPAL SOYNER
"You guess?" What do you mean you guess? Everyone wanted you outta here after putting a dead squirrel in a students locker -- I'm the reason you ain't.

Soyner may be a drag - but he's not wrong.

PRINCIPAL SOYNER (CONT'D)
 Let me make myself clear - if any teacher, any student, if anyone comes into this office with a complaint about you - you're gone.

Chris reflects.

INT. TRUCK - MOVING - DUSK

Don drives, Barry is in shotgun.

DON
 So - I'm startin' to think this woman of yours is a produce of make-believe.

BARRY
 Oh... she real, alright. Hard workin'.

DON
 Am I ever gonna get to meet her?

Gazing out at the passing trees;

BARRY
 You ain't someone she'd take to.

Don, finding that just hysterical, erupts

DON
Hey, say no more, message received.

Barry forces a smile.

EXT./INT. TRUCK - MOVING - DUSK

The truck PARKS in the dividing road. Barry drops down and heads for his side of town. Opening his glove compartment;

DON
Come here a minute.

With reluctance-induced legs, Barry staggers to the drivers side door. Don reaches out a chocolate bar.

DON (CONT'D)
For your boy. Or, for you, if you want it. *Assumin' he exists and all.*

Don laughs as Barry (slow) takes it.

DON (CONT'D)
You might need to freeze her. Been sittin'.

BARRY
Thank you, Don. I appreciate it.

Don drives away. Barry reflects and heads up his street.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOBILE HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Peter is asleep. From outside, Chris enters.

CHRIS
Dad.

PETER
(waking)
Hey, buddy.

CHRIS
Linda needs to stay here again.

PETER
Needs to?

CHRIS
Arty kicked her out. She's outside. Can she?

PETER
 (adjusting awake)
 No sharing a room.

Chris goes back outside.

INT. KITCHEN - MOBILE HOME - THAT NIGHT

Peter whips up some dinner. Resting on the living room couch, petting the cat that lays on her lap, is Linda.

PETER
 Lin, where's the boy at?

She points to his bedroom door - it's shut. Peter sets down the spatula, lowers the stove's head, and plods over. When he opens the door;

INT. BEDROOM - MOBILE HOME - SAME

Chris, half-way under the covers, quickly tucks *something*.

CHRIS
 Knock, Dad!

PETER
 Hey! It ain't my job to entertain
 your guests. Supper's almost ready,
 let's go.

Peter closes the door. Chris sits up and shoves a folded and creased journal under his mattress.

TINA (V.O.)
 Your father wants to see you.

INT. KITCHEN - ARMSTRONG HOUSEHOLD - THAT NIGHT

Adam finishes his dinner. The muffled echo of music from an down below.

ADAM
 Down stairs?

Tina nods.

INT. BASEMENT - ARMSTRONG HOUSEHOLD - MOMENTS LATER

Adam heads on down until reaching a closed door. He knocks.

THOMAS (O.S.)
Yeah, come in.

Adam opens the door.

INT. THOMAS'S SANCTUARY - ARMSTRONG HOUSEHOLD - SAME

A record spins.

Adam watches his father down a double shot. Then, with a handful of darts, Thomas positions himself in front of a dart board. The target? A head-sized photo of a smiling BLACK MAN.

As Thomas chucks the darts forward, Adam takes this time to inspect the signs that are along the walls...

"BLACK BUSINESS BUT WE TREAT WHITE," "THIS BEACH IS WHITE ONLY," and, among the most gut-wrenching, an animated poster of an alligator biting a black baby - "AMERICA'S FAVORITE LICORICE DROPS."

When a dart sticks between the black man's eyes;

THOMAS
Adam.

ADAM
Mom said you wanted to see me?

Thomas pours himself another double-shot.

THOMAS
That's right.
(downs it, reacts)
As your dad, as your caretaker -
it's my obligation to make sure
y'all are toyin' with the right
people.

Adam isn't sure what he means. Thomas removes the needle from the spinning record.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Bein' your age and fuckin' with
certain someones ain't exactly a
challenging concept.

Adam glances away - sees a chair. It's demolished.

ADAM
What happened to the chair?

THOMAS
You ever think about your uncle?

Adam nods.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
You ever wish you met him?

ADAM
Of course.

THOMAS
Y'all would have hit it off. Now,
you bein' an only child and all, I
don't expect ya to understand --
siblings fight. Him and me, it was
damn near an everyday occurrence.
You know what'd come after?

ADAM
You'd get in trouble.

THOMAS
(opening wallet)
Not just in trouble -- *I'd feel
bad*. I'd have a guilty conscience.
Ain't supposed to hurt family.

Thomas hands his son a photograph - Thomas and Carl. As Adam holds it, Thomas pours himself another shot.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
The last fight we had, he had this
black eye that I - tell ya the
truth -- I'm talkin' ---
(shows size with hands)
Now, you's a smart kid, so you can
guess what I'm gettin' at.

Adam isn't sure.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
He was a bitchy little fucker, so -
he stormed out. All out on his own.
I caused it.
(beat)
That's when my apology was taken.
*That's when a faceless, spineless
nigger took my apology*.
The niggers - do you know what they
is, Adam?

Safe to say he doesn't. After a shot from the bottle, Thomas slobbers a bit.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Lemme tell you what they ain't --
they ain't family. This is an
 American truth. *This an Armstrong*
truth. Are you understandin' what
I'm sayin'?

(closes on Adam)

Do you understand the words that
are comin' out of my mouth? 'Cause
 what I'm sayin' is the shit they
 afraid to teach in school.

Thomas backs off. Has a look at his precious signs. The
 temperature of his anger nears scolding.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

They're useless.

He picks up the foamy shot-glass. Uses his fingertips to toy
 with it...

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Useless.

(Adam is spooked)

Useless, meaning-less, no good
 fucking *murderers!*

Thomas *hurls* the shot glass against the wall - it shatters.

ADAM

Dad...

THOMAS

No - shut up, shut your fucking
 mouth - this? This, right here?
 This is when you listen. You are my
 son and I am your father. Those God
 damn, good-for-nothin' apes are
 free game, that's who you -
 (gag/burps)

If you gonna fuck with anyone, you
 fuck with them. They're free game.
 Know where to go. We clear?

Adam shakes his head "yes."

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Nah, nah, nah, I need to hear you.

ADAM

We're clear.

Thomas lays his hand in front of Adam - the darts are his for
 the taking. "I'm fine."

THOMAS

Oh, "no thank you," huh? Fine, get outta here. Go spend time with mommy - go get some mommy milk and have mommy read you a bedtime story.

A staggering Thomas stumbles over to his bottle. A, for want of a better term, scared Adam surveys his unhinged father.

EXT. FACTORY - THE NEXT MORNING

A cigarette-smoking Don writes on a clipboard while Barry loads meat into the bed of the truck.

DON

Hey -- I'ma have a word with that cop next time he come around.

Keeping at it;

BARRY

This been happenin' my whole life, Don. It ain't gonna stop with him.

DON

So, what, ya ain't ever think of puttin' your foot down?

BARRY

(a pause)

A man like me can only do so much in a place like this.

Don takes a drag.

INT. STATION HOUSE - TOWN - SAME

Thomas fills out a file. His partner OFFICER RUBRIGHT (37, white) hustles over to him.

RUBRIGHT

Armstrong.

THOMAS

What is it?

RUBRIGHT

Drugs. Comin' in and goin' out the meat plant.

"Are you kidding me?" asks an expressive Thomas.

RUBRIGHT (CONT'D)
I got the green-light from captain.

"No shit..." reads Thomas's face.

RUBRIGHT (CONT'D)
Looks like you found yourself a
reason, partner.

Thomas's mind has arrived at it's own warped conclusion.

INT. MEAT PACKING PLANT - MOMENTS LATER

Barry dismantles a poultry slicer. Stepping out from the office;

DON
Ay, thanks again for comin' in
early.

BARRY
Don't sweat it, boss.

DON
I'm runnin' out to the shitter.

Barry shoots a thumbs-up.

INT./EXT. PORT-A-POTTY - MEAT PACKING PLANT - MOMENTS LATER

Don and RICKY (25, white) stand behind the port-a-potty. Ricky counts out bills while Don handles a few bundles of powder.

DON
Five hundred all together.

Don turns to face the parking lot entry-way; like clock-work, in rolls a patrol car.

DON (CONT'D)
Ah, shit -

Don yanks Ricky inside the unsanitary bathroom. Don slams the door once they're both in.

INT. PATROL CAR - MEAT PACKING PLANT - SAME

Rubright puts it in park.

THOMAS

Take the car around. See if you
find anything in those crates.

Rubright nods. Thomas exits.

INT. MEAT PACKING PLANT - A MOMENT LATER

Barry straightens when Thomas enters. With demented
excitement;

THOMAS

If it ain't my favorite blacky!

Thomas's warped mind, upon his arrival at Barry's station,
has come to its own conclusion.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Drugs, bein' sold and delivered out
of this establishment. The charade
has gone on long enough, now. Time
to give me some real answers.

BARRY

No idea, sir. Must've gotten wrong
information -

Placing a hand on his holstered nightstick;

THOMAS

Are you calling me a liar?

INT./EXT. PARKING LOT - MEAT PACKING PLANT - SAME

Peeping through the port-a-potty door;

DON

Fucking pig. Here -

Don rips the money from Ricky's hands and shoves the bags
against his chest. Speed-walking toward the plant...

INT. MEAT PACKING PLANT - SAME

The officer tightens his grasp around the weapon-handle.

BARRY

Now, Officer -

THOMAS

This badge don't take kind to being called a liar.

BARRY

We both know I ain't never said such a thing -

Thomas whips out the baton and cracks Barry's innocent mouth. As he stumbles backward, the cop smacks Barry in his knee; he drops.

THOMAS

Fucking niggers never learn.
See what happens when you don't cooperate?!

Barry, for support, reaches up a hand up on a step ladder - Thomas effectively breaks it after slamming down the nightstick.

The entrance *flings* open! From the doorway;

DON

Ay! That's enough, now!

Securing weapon;

THOMAS

You ain't done nothing wrong here -

DON

Not yet, I ain't.

Gazing down at the whimpering Barry;

THOMAS

This who you fightin' for?

DON

I fight for the truth and the truth is what you need to hear.

THOMAS

Is it?

DON

You're gonna get what you deserve just like that scumbag, pervert brother of yours!

A visible plummet of Thomas's heart.

DON (CONT'D)
*What happened to him ain't got
 nothin' to do with my workers!*

From the floor;

BARRY
Don, please --

Thomas lets Barry have a stomp - out cold.

DON
*Ay! How's about you lose that shiny
 little badge and try me?*

Thomas holsters his baton...

DON (CONT'D)
*You ain't like the sound of that
 too much, huh, do ya?*

With an expression that doesn't indicate deep thought, Thomas withdraws his .22 Revolver. Setting the sights on Don;

DON (CONT'D)
No, don't!

Pop! A bullet rips into Don's gut. A gurgling fall to the outside ground.

While Thomas heads for the entrance, blood drains from the head of Barry's unconscious vessel. From outside -- two pops!

INT./EXT. SIDE - MEAT PACKING PLANT - SAME

Rubright digs through Don's truck. While he trashes it, a thick slit in the seat garners his attention. Rubright peels the two sections apart and reaches down - his eyes light up. He tugs out a large, plastic wrapped bag of powder.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MEAT PACKING PLANT - A MOMENT LATER

Thomas repeats the barbaric motion of smacking himself in the face with his revolver. Three shots - Don lay deceased in a pool of blood. One to his stomach and two to his face.

THOMAS
Christ.

The bloodied officer hawks up mucus-infused blood on Don's body. Heading for the car...

ADAM (V.O.)
Did you kill him?

THOMAS (V.O.)
I did what was necessary, son.

INT. PATIENT'S ROOM - HOSPITAL - LATER

Major discoloration of Thomas's battered face. Rubright, Tina and Adam surround the bed. His boy doesn't buy his alibi.

THOMAS
I ain't do nothin' besides ask for
ID. *That's it.*
(a beat)
Look at my face, son. If you --

ADAM
Answer my question.

RUBRIGHT
Kid, you'd be crying next to
daddy's corpse if he didn't do what
he did.

THOMAS
That's enough. I'm here, right?
Ain't I breathin'?

Tina and Rubright stand proud.

CHRIS (V.O.)
Linda don't mind 'em.

EXT. RIVER - DUSK

Chris, Adam and Jimmy are gathered on + around a bench. Cans of beer. Adam's mind is elsewhere. Chris notices an injured bird. He rises, picks up a rock...

CHRIS
Hell, she's at the black-block
playin' cards with 'em as we speak!
I don't care what she says. The
offer nothin'. Our teacher's pet
agrees.

Chris stands above the poor, whimpering bird. With his sneaker, he kick-shoves it a bit.

JIMMY
You don't like the blacks, Adam?

Chris elevates the gripping-rock hand and slams it down on the bird. A squeal. Fur shoots into the air.

CHRIS
Fuck no, he don't! They took
Officer Tom's brother! Kid wasn't
even - shit, how old was he, Adam?

The last conversation Adam wants participation points for.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
(snapping fingers)
Yo!

ADAM
My fault, what's up?

CHRIS
How old was your uncle when he went
missin'?

ADAM
Dude, I don't know.

CHRIS
Fifteen, sixteen?

ADAM
Sure.

Jimmy and Chris exchange a look -- "He'll get over it."

INT. HOSPITAL - SEGREGATED - THAT NIGHT

Jerome is bunked in bed with a head-wrapped, unconscious Barry. A standing Yolonda gapes out at the rain.

JEROME
Mama?

YOLONDA
Yes?

JEROME
You know who did this?

YOLONDA
I got a pretty good idea, child.

Jerome dwells.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - WATKINS HOUSEHOLD - THAT NIGHT

Linda exits Bernadette and Mallory's house through their front door. *Linda makes good time plodding down the sidewalk until she's cemented in her tracks ...*

... at the end of the block, darkened by the shadow of a house ... a woman ... Linda, stuck and staring, can't tell if this is an imaginative figment or a red-blooded human ...

... so, Linda waves. Soon, with just the pointer and the middle finger ... the silhouette waves back ...

... Linda, frightened, jogs out of the colored neighborhood.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - ARMSTRONG HOUSEHOLD - THE NEXT MORNING

Adam lifts the kickstand of his bike. From a window;

THOMAS

Hey! You need a ride, buddy?

ADAM

(starting to pedal)

No. Thank you.

THOMAS

Alright, ride safe. Say, you got your lunch?

Thomas, a bit healed, watches his son ride off

INT. GYM - SCHOOL - THAT DAY

MR. AUBDREY (40, white) and Dale wrestle as the rest of the class, Chris included, watch, propped on one knee.

MR. AUBDREY

Now, Dale here is gonna show what ya wanna do --

Chris is entranced ...

A sweat droplet *slapping* the mat snaps Chris out of his reverie. Chris indulges in a persona-procuring scan of his peers - no eyes were on him. Except, far off to the left... Gary. *His eyes.*

INT. LOCKER ROOM - SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

Unanimous horse play as boys change back into their school attire. Dale drops his towel and enters a shower.

As he pulls his shirt off, Chris sneaks an ogle at Dale's torso and back. Pure vulnerability. Gary, running a comb, has been scrutinizing this.

Once Chris follows Dale's lead and enters the shower, Gary invades Chris's gym locker. *He grabs Chris's school bag ... unzips it ... sees that same notebook Chris stuffed under his bed ... opens it and pages through ...*

This is not a simple coincidence. Gary replaces Chris's notebook, zips the bag closed, shuts the locker.

INT. BEDROOM - **WATKIN'S HOUSEHOLD** - LATER THAT DAY

ANDRIA (30, black) a hospital-provided caretaker, succors Barry's bedrest. A reticent Jerome glances at the pretty nurse. Smiling;

ANDRIA

Come here.

Crouching down to his level;

ANDRIA (CONT'D)

Your daddy is gonna wake up stronger than ever.

JEROME

When?

ANDRIA

Before you know it.

YOLONDA (O.S.)

Hallway.

Andria's eyes dart up - firm in the doorway - Yolonda. The nurse, her smile wiped off, stammers toward her. Jerome watches Andria pull the door shut.

INT. HALWAY - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - SAME

At once, Yolonda open-palm slaps Andria. The gasping nurse loses her footing. She's smacked again. Janice plops down on a radiator and touches her lip - blood.

The expression of no-nonsense Yolonda asks if they're on the same page. Trembling, red-faced and wet-eyed, Andria nods.

FEMALE STUDENT (V.O.)
Miss C.! Jimmy is getting drunk!

INT. CLASSROOM - SCHOOL - THAT DAY

Jimmy, tucked in the back corner, garners the attention of every (conscious) student along with MISS CALHOUN (30, white.) She rips his bag open; airplane bottles of liquor.

JIMMY
Listen, I can -

MISS CALHOUN
Explain it to Principal Soyner -
out of my classroom!

Given his prior behavioral outings, Jimmy's face says that his forthcoming outcome is all but concrete.

CHRIS (V.O.)
I thought I was gonna be the first
to go.

EXT. TRAIL - WOODS - DUSK

Adam, Chris, Jimmy and Linda walk in unison, a stoned trail beneath their sneaker. Sparking a joint;

ADAM
How's your mom gonna take it?

JIMMY
(puffing)
Oh, she's gonna be *thrilled*. That's
why I ain't going home right now -
her excitement would be too much
for me.

They laugh.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
(thumbing Chris)
Leave the dumb questions to you
know who -

CHRIS
Hey, last I checked, I'm gettin' my
education.

JIMMY

Yeah, yeah. Ha-ha. I give it a week.

Laughter. Chris's face says that less wouldn't surprise him.

INT. BEDROOM - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - THE NEXT MORNING

Tucked in bed, reading his father-bestowed bible - Jerome. It's shoved under his pillow when footsteps near. His mother sneaks in the doorway.

Jerome, with just his head popping out of the covers, makes, for the *first time*, Yolonda smile.

YOLONDA

Deb is on her way.

Jerome hasn't much to say.

YOLONDA (CONT'D)

You gon' keep watch on your daddy?

He nods. Yolonda plants a warm and pregnant kiss on Jerome's forehead.

INT. CLASSROOM - SCHOOL - LATER THAT DAY

MR. EPPS (65, white) lectures literature to a condensed group of students - all equally uninterested. Leaving respect at the door;

CHRIS

Bathroom.

Forcing a facade of friendliness;

MR. EPPS

Now, Christopher, I thought we had went over the - how do I say, asking-to-attend-the-restroom policy?

CHRIS

Yeah, I'm more into the I-will-piss-on-this-floor-policy.

Subsiding for the sake of argument;

MR. EPPS

You know where the pass is.

Chris removes himself, grabs the pass -

MR. EPPS (CONT'D)
Five minutes, Christopher! I mean
it!

- and exits.

INT. BATHROOM - SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

Upon leaving the stall, Chris is met with an anxious Gary.

CHRIS
Fuck's your problem?

Both are still.

Gary claims a firm grasp on Chris's head and yanks him inward
-- plants a kiss on his lips.

Chris reacts with revulsion and embitterment... until a soft
unfastening of his tight-locked eyebrows.

Chris's eyes broaden when *it registers*. He breaks from the
unsolicited endearment - heaves Gary against the wall.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Don't -- *don't you ever fucking do
that again!*

Gary's eye's plead that Chris "stops lying to himself." Gary
is yanked by his collar and slammed against a stall. Holding
him against it;

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Do you hear me?! Don't touch me
ever-the-fuck again you little
faggot!

That aggressive stance remains until Chris's hands mitigate
Gary's shirt.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Keep your fucking mouth shut.

Chris storms out. Gary stays put.

EXT. BAR - TOWN - THAT DAY

Thomas, his face almost at a hundred percent, is seen through
a bush sharing both a smoke and some laughs with his pals.

Hiding in the shrubbery, surveying... Yolonda.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - SAME

Jerome dribbles his tennis ball. Bernadette and Mallory hang clothes along her laundry line. Waves are exchanged.

BARRY (O.S.)
(dazed)
Yolonda?

The boys eyes about pop from his head - he sprints inside. Bernadette's split second worry fades off.

INT. BEDROOM - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - A MOMENT LATER

Jerome runs into his parents bedroom where, *finally*, Barry is cognizant.

JEROME
Daddy!

BARRY
(aware)
My boy... Jerome, my son -

Jerome leaps into bed with his father!

BARRY (CONT'D)
Ah, easy now -

Jerome holds him close.

LINDA (V.O.)
I've seen your bad days.

INT. CAFETERIA - SCHOOL - THAT DAY

Chris seems to be skipping lunch. He gnaws on his cuticle. Adam and Linda, just the former with a tray, are concerned. Eyes sicking them;

CHRIS
Jesus Christ, for the millionth time, I'm havin' a bad day. A kid ain't allowed a bad day?

ADAM
Look who you're talking too, brother. We've seen you at your worst -

CHRIS

I ain't too sure about that, Adam.
I really ain't too sure. Y'all both
must've only seen me jumpin' for
joy 'cause, if you knew how I got
at times like this, then you'd know
to zip your God damn lips and to
fuck off!

Gary exit the lunch line. The victim seems to have stumbled
across some new found confidence. Seeing this;

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Catch me later. I'm out.

As Chris walks off;

LINDA

So, I gotta walk alone?!

Linda takes his leaving as a "yes, I am."

ADAM

I'll walk with you.

Linda looks off. Adam peers down at his meal. Not hungry.

INT. BEDROOM - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - SUNSET

Though still bedridden, each passing hour has allowed growth
for Barry's alertness. Jerome hasn't yet left his side.

BARRY

I wish you got to meet her, too.

JEROME

What you think Mama gonna say about
Don?

Barry has an idea. Deciding to change topics;

BARRY

Know what, boy? I got a question
for you. What's got your eye at the
end of our block? Is it the chipped
concrete? The fainted paint-job?

Jerome eyeballs the bedsheet while his dad giggles.

BARRY (CONT'D)

Oh, come on, now, Jerome. We human.
Those butterflies in your stomach?

(MORE)

BARRY (CONT'D)
They human, too.
Whose got ya?

After a long-limbed halt;

JEROME
She white.

BARRY
Little blondie?

Jerome nods.

BARRY (CONT'D)
The one who friends with Mallory?
(he nods again)
And, why you ain't talk to her yet?

JEROME
Mama.

BARRY
Hm. Mama.

Barry can not -- will not -- allow his pride and joy to live through his mother.

BARRY (CONT'D)
You think that's your Mama's
business?

JEROME
How you mean?

Barry thinks.

BARRY
Say you and me made wanted to split
a pizza. Pepperoni - your favorite.
I brought it home and we eat it.
How'd that make you feel?

Jerome isn't sure what to say.

BARRY (CONT'D)
You'd feel good, right?

JEROME
Yes.

BARRY

Right. Now, say that you sleepin'.
And, while you catchin' some Z's, I
went out - just myself and me - and
ate a whole pepperoni pizza. That
make you sad?

JEROME

... I thought I was sleepin'?

BARRY

Exactly. Since you was asleep,
you'd have never known and you'd
have never gotten hurt. So, with
your little blondie, what do you
say we treat it like Mama's in bed,
safe and sound?

Jerome nods. His indeterminate confidence is a total one-
eighty from the postulating credence Barry showcases - that
everything will be alright.

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT - ABANDONED - DUSK

Chris and Jimmy smoke a skimpy joint. What was once an active
court has been ransacked and robbed by nature.

JIMMY

You feelin' it?

CHRIS

Can't tell.

JIMMY

Yeah. Takes a while, sometimes.

A caterpillar inches along the bench. Chris ignites a match
from his pack. Eyeballing this;

JIMMY (CONT'D)

You sure everything cool?

It's an obvious "no," but Chris nods "yes" while flaming the
innocent insect. Crushing out the joint;

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Here --

(offering)

Save this for another day. It'll
get you baked.

Chris takes it. Jimmy clears his throat.

EXT. BAR - TOWN - THAT NIGHT

Thomas, in a drunken-stupor, closes in on his car. *He pauses when he reaches the driver's side door ... whoever was seeking his undivided attention ...*

... well, they got it ...

Wrapped around his shattered driver's side mirror is an archaic, copper-colored piano wire.

Thomas runs his pointer over the rigid cord. He doesn't show it... but, he's petrified.

INT. BEDROOM - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - THAT NIGHT

Jerome sleeps on his fathers chest. Barry mulls things over. His intramural-analysis suspends when he hears the front door open. Arriving in the doorway ... Yolonda.

A verbal chess match.

BARRY

You ain't rid of me yet.

Yolonda sits.

BARRY (CONT'D)

Good day?

YOLONDA

Not as good as yours.

Barry takes a breath.

BARRY

Say, I was thinkin' we send some flowers to my boss's house.

She leans back in her chair. Bemused;

YOLONDA

This what's on your mind?

BARRY

(takes a moment)

He saved me, Yolonda. A wife and daughter are thinkin' he's gone for no good reason.

YOLONDA

So -- if someone, *anyone*, sent us
flowers for *our daughter* - that
woulda helped?

BARRY

(an unrevealed anger)
*I'm tryin' to make you see that it
wouldn't have hurt!*

A pregnant beat. Yolonda, exhausted enough, pushes up from
the seat.

YOLONDA

He ain't save no one.
(a moment)
Was the man upstairs, right?

Yolonda leaves.

EXT. PORCH - MOBILE HOME - LATER THAT NIGHT

Linda walks off the porch as Chris approaches.

LINDA

*Chris, where were you?! You had me
worried sick --*

CHRIS

I just need to sleep.

Linda remains.

INT. CLASSROOM - SCHOOL - THE NEXT DAY

Mr. Murphy's. Chris's erroneous behavior prevents the focus
of a gum-chewing Adam. A reading Gary incentivizes an idea.

ADAM

Psst.

CHRIS

What?

Adam, nudging to Gary, removes the gum from his mouth. Chris
shakes his head "no."

ADAM

Why not?

Chris's attention glosses over his peers - the prank is chockfull of expectations he wants to keep up. But, he can't.
Fed up;

ADAM (CONT'D)
Alright, you wanna act weird?
(standing from desk)
I'll show you weird.

CHRIS
(realizing)
Adam, no -

Adam slithers back in his seat after stuffing the gum in Gary's hair. Students lose it. Mr. Murphy, facing the comedic reasoning;

MR. MURPHY
Damnit, Chris! Why on earth would you do that?!

CHRIS
It wasn't -

Gary explodes from his chair.

GARY
Tell them why on earth you would do this!
(all listen)
Tell them why.

Chris fidgets in his desk. As to the tension between them? Adam has not a clue what the hell is going on.

GARY (CONT'D)
(concealing tears)
Own up to it. *Own up to yourself.*
(moment)
Or, should I take -

Chris leaps from his desk and mangles Gary's nose with a fiery jab. A classroom gasp when Gary slumps to the floor.

ADAM
Chris!

Students rush to Gary's aide. The bloody mess has pushed Mr. Murphy into predominant in-articulation. Chris brims with disorientated anger.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

An all too familiar setting for these two.

PRINCIPAL SOYNER

I suppose, after every thing, after
all that - I suppose I wasn't clear
enough.

The kid is dispirited.

PRINCIPAL SOYNER (CONT'D)

Your time at White Hall East has
come to an end. We wish you the
best.

You'd think Chris is deaf.

PRINCIPAL SOYNER (CONT'D)

Nothing, huh? Nothing to say?

CHRIS

Y'know, when my Dad hears -

PRINCIPAL SOYNER

He's heard. And, if he isn't here
already, he'll be out front within
minutes.

Chris hovers in the seat.

INT. CAR - PARKED - SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

Peter has a talent of masking emotions. But, here? Any fool
can see how he's feeling. Chris sits in shotgun.

CHRIS

Can we go?

PETER

Nah... we're gonna wait for Linda.
Why waste the gas, right?

CHRIS

That's - like - six hours from now.

Peter, evidently, has all day.

THOMAS (V.O.)

Two weeks - no bike, no friends, no
nothin' --

INT. KITCHEN - ARMSTRONG HOUSEHOLD - SAME

Thomas and Tina lay down the law.

THOMAS

-- Until we straighten you out.
Christ, Adam, *suspended?*

TINA

(upset)
I thought we raised you better than
this!

ADAM

Chris has been --

THOMAS

Hey. Do we need to go over my
feelings on excuses?

ADAM

(after a beat)
I don't deserve this.

Thomas's mouth goes agape.

THOMAS

You don't deserve this?

TINA

Thomas -
(reaching into purse)
Honey --

THOMAS

Adam - what you *think* you deserve?
Life couldn't give two shits about
that.

Without question, Thomas chews the pills Tina palms him. A demeanor-altering inhale. Tina grabs a beer from the fridge.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

(accepting drink)
You know better, boy. What the hell
were you thinking?

With contempt, Adam watches his father crack and guzzle down half of the drink.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

I'm goin' to the station.

Thomas storms out.

EXT. ICE CREAM PARLOR - MOMENTS LATER

Through a gate, we see a uniformed Thomas standing in line. He reads the dessert menu that hangs above the workers. Behind the gate ...

Yolonda.

EXT. OUT FRONT - MOBILE HOME - THAT DAY

Peter's car rolls in its spot.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOBILE HOME - A MOMENT LATER

Chris, Linda and Peter enter.

PETER
Join me in your room, would ya?

Hesitant, Chris follows.

PETER (CONT'D)
(stopping him short)
Lin. You too.

Chris and Linda capture a connection of confusion. Regardless, all three enter --

INT. CHRIS'S BEDROOM - MOBILE HOME - A MOMENT LATER

It's an ordinary boys room. Peter straightens out.

PETER
Y'know, my captain used to say we
didn't need the dogs when I was
around.

They listen.

PETER (CONT'D)
Can either of you guess why?

Shrugs. Peter refers to his nose.

PETER (CONT'D)
(a beat)
He said it was a gift. Sometimes I
think it's a curse.

Peter reaches into his back pocket; an empty cigarette pack. He dumps the joint roach in his palm. Holding it up;

PETER (CONT'D)
Found this under your mattress.

The boy's skin transcends the pale-pallet.

CHRIS
H-hey, Dad -

PETER
Not a word.

Chris obeys.

PETER (CONT'D)
Where was I? Ah, right - something caught my attention.

Peter sticks a hand beneath the mattress - tugs out a black notebook. Unlike Chris, Linda is even *more* fuddled than she was moments prior.

CHRIS
Dad -

PETER
(raising his pointer)
Not another word.

Chris listens.

PETER (CONT'D)
Lin. . . Tell me what this is?

As he hands it off to her, Chris tries to snag the notebook - is barred by his wrist-grabbing father.

CHRIS
Dad, you don't understand -

PETER
Open it, Lin.

CHRIS
Linda, I promise you, that is *not* mine -

Linda opens it -- glued to pages are male models of the sort. Dale, too. Some papers are stuck together.

Still-shocked, Linda drops it. Backing out of the room;

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Linda, please, baby -

LINDA
 I'm sorry, I don't feel good.

She rushes out of the trailer. Chris goes after her -

PETER
 Boy, you *sit your ass down at that*
God damn table.

Chris is aware of the consequences if he goes after her. So, he doesn't. He just sits.

INT. HALLWAY - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - SAME

Barry is asleep in bed. Jerome is locked on the attic's door dangling string. It isn't locked. Has a look in his parents bedroom - Barry snores.

After dragging over a chair, Jerome stands on it. He grabs the string and, very gentle, tugs it down. As he guides the steps out, Jerome takes another look in his parents room - Barry hasn't flinched.

The stairs are in place. Jerome places a foot on the bottom step.

INT. PATROL CAR - TOWN - SAME

Thomas, in a drug addled part of town, parkes at an alley way. A beat-up HOMELESS BUM (45, white) lays outside of it. Thomas exits.

INT. ATTIC - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - SAME

A tiny window allows the setting sun light to illuminate the concise attic. Jerome reaches the top - boxes.

EXT. SIDEWALK - TOWN - SAME

Thomas stands above the busted-lip bum.

THOMAS
 Ay -

The officer jerks back when the Bum grabs his pant leg.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
 Don't touch me, you fucking doper.
 I got word of an assault.

INT. ATTIC - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - SAME

Crawling around, Jerome's eye is caught by something peculiar - a bloodstained flap on a cardboard box. He inches toward it.

EXT. SIDEWALK - TOWN - SAME

Struggling to get the words out;

HOMELESS BUM
Do - down there --

Bum's limp finger directs Thomas's vision down the dark alley.

THOMAS
 What they look like? They look like
 us?

A "no" head shake colors the cop intrigued. Thomas pulls out his gun and begins a venture down the alley-way darkness...

INT. ATTIC - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - SAME

Jerome pulls the box closer... separates the flaps...

EXT. ALLEY - TOWN - SAME

Thomas pulls the hammer back during his inactive plod. Dead silence. Fires a shot upward - from the void, an anxious groan.

THOMAS
 I hear ya, fucker!

INT. ATTIC - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - SAME

Jerome's hands enter the box; pulls out a hunk of plastic wrap. Starting to unravel...

EXT. ALLEY - TOWN - SAME

Thomas closes into the abyss...

THOMAS
 (a bit shaken)
 Last chance now...

He fires another shot upward - the brief light exposes the corner where Yolonda stands -- *she attacks!*

INT. ATTIC - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - SAME

Jerome thins the plastic wrap as he unrolls - Carl's bloodstained overalls flop out. Jerome leaps back.

EXT. ALLEY - TOWN - SAME

Yolonda thrashes Thomas with a meat tenderizer. He falls, uttering helpless bleats during Yolonda's crazed skull-bashing.

Trotting down the alley whilst counting cash; the homeless bum. Thomas's face is just about caved in.

HOMELESS BUM
 Ay, you fuckin' him up good.

Yolonda drops the mallet. Squats over Thomas's body...

HOMELESS BUM (CONT'D)
 And, here I was thinkin' you was one of those no-good, no payin' niggers.
 (Yolonda grabs cop gun)
 So, where we stashin' the body?

Pop!

Yolonda pulls the trigger - shooting the bum in the head. He slumps. Yolonda places the gun in Thomas's limp hand. After that, she grabs the bum by his ankles, drags him closer and puts the tenderizer's handle in his grip.

Yolonda throws her hood up, removes Thomas's badge and leaves the alley.

EXT. ROAD - BUSY - SAME

Linda rushes to her (former) house. Uncle Arthur's.

INT. BEDROOM - WATKIN'S HOUSEHOLD - **DUSK**

A newly awake Barry finds the low-spirited Jerome both out of character and alarming.

BARRY

Anything you wanna tell me, Jerome?

Jerome shakes his head. After a beat;

BARRY (CONT'D)

Say - that chocolate bar still in the freezer.

JEROME

Yes.

BARRY

Good...

Well, I'd say there's no time better than now for some fresh air.

Barry sits up.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOBILE HOME - SAME

Chris *hears* Peter's scolds, but he doesn't listen. His eyes are on the front door. It's ajar and practically begging.

Peter takes a moment to rub his eyes, Chris uses this - he darts out. An unattached Peter watches him go. It may be better this way.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - SAME

Jerome shepherds his father through the door. Barry, using his walker, basks in the fresh air.

BARRY

No longer will we take God's green earth for granted. You got the sweet?

Jerome pats his pocket.

BARRY (CONT'D)

Good. He'll be watchin' us enjoy it, then.

EXT. LOT - MOBILE HOME - A MOMENT LATER

Chris takes off on his pedal bike.

EXT. STREET - SEGREGATED NEIGHBORHOOD - MOMENTS LATER

Barry and Jerome stroll along.

JEROME

Can we eat it, Daddy?

Barry takes in the awesome sky.

BARRY

No time better than now.

Jerome goes for the dessert - Barry puts a hand over his sons when he sees Linda, just across the street, ambling toward her lawn.

BARRY (CONT'D)

Hey. That her, ain't it?

It is.

BARRY (CONT'D)

Well, go on, now! I'ma be right here.

JEROME

B- but, the police could come.

BARRY

Boy, when's the last time a cop strolled up that road? You should know, you out here more than anyone!

JEROME

... She don't know me -

BARRY

That ain't gonna change unless you do somethin', son.

JEROME

Mama told -

BARRY

What Mama said don't matter. The Lord don't align stars for no reason. You trust me, right? *Do you trust your father?*

Jerome toys with the confection's wrapper.

BARRY (CONT'D)

Jerome.

On that, Jerome runs over to Linda's side of town. Barry, hovering at his corner, appraises his boys swagger -- or lack thereof.

Jerome's presence brings Linda to a standstill. Wiping away her tears, she doesn't seem to be nervous or threatened -- Jerome is both.

LINDA

Not supposed to be over here,
y'know.

Jerome steps on her sidewalk.

EXT. BUSY ROAD - SAME

Chris pedals. Fast.

EXT. SIDEWALK - LINDA'S HOUSE - SAME

Jerome offers her the candy bar.

LINDA

Do you take candy from strangers?

"No."

LINDA (CONT'D)

Then, tell me your name.

JEROME

Jerome.

LINDA

Nice to meet you, Jerome. I'm
Linda.

Past her shoulder, a motion - a white boy, speeding toward them on his bicycle. Alarmed, Jerome drops the chocolate at her feet and sprints back to his father.

Linda rotates --- Chris. Picking up the chocolate;

LINDA (CONT'D)

Leave me alone, Chris!

Jerome re-positions his father - they head back home. Barry, lending an ear to the arbitrary drama;

CHRIS

Lin, please! I need you to listen -

Linda rushes up her lawn.

BARRY

Lin, huh?

JEROME

Linda.

BARRY

(grin)

Ah, Linda. Was that so bad?

Jerome smiles. "No. It wasn't so bad."

Chris, on the outskirts of Linda's lawn, scrutinizes Jerome and Barry as they enter their domicile. Wrathful.

INT. ADAM'S ROOM - ADAM'S HOUSE - THAT NIGHT

Adam has been consternated. OFFICER GIAMO (50, white) examines the room's boyish decor.

GIAMO

He was a good man, your father. A *great* man. A great cop.

ADAM

What happened?

GIAMO

Y'know, in times like this, I always found it -

ADAM

Where'd you find him?

Giamo takes a breath.

GIAMO

(lying)

In his car.

Adam is lost.

GIAMO (CONT'D)

If there is anything -

ADAM
Please leave.

Following a transient notion, Giamo follows orders.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LINDA'S HOUSE - THAT NIGHT

Linda, resting on Bernadette's lap, is a *mess*. Mallory is next to them - she runs a hand through Lin's coarse hair.

MALLORY
Only lessons, no mistakes - that's what my grand-pop always said.

BERNADETTE
That's right, child.
(a fleeting thought)
Arty found this place, this program that we thinks gon' do you real good.

A distressed Arthur enters. Holds a pamphlet.

ARTHUR
Hey, sweetie, wanna - um, can we talk a second?

Careful, Linda's head arises.

INT. ADAM'S ROOM - ARMSTRONG HOUSEHOLD - THE NEXT MORNING

The sun is out. Tina's sobbing occupies the home's drab silence. Adam, lost, eyes his ceiling fan.

INT. KITCHENETTE - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - LATER THAT DAY

Yolonda ties her boots. She takes a look at her board-game playing husband and her son as she trots past.

BARRY
Remember this game, angel?

Yolonda takes it in. Then, exits their home.

MOMENTS LATER:

Jerome reads his father's copy of the Bible. Barry, using the same ruler his son hands were beaten with, taps on the page.

BARRY (CONT'D)
Can you read that for me?

JEROME

One - J-jah -

BARRY

John.

JEROME

One - John - two-eleven.

Gazing down to his scripture-copy;

BARRY

Very good, son.

"But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going... for the darkness has blinded them."

Jerome nods.

BARRY (CONT'D)

That remind you of anyone, Jerome?

Not off hand. Barry, arriving at a conclusion;

BARRY (CONT'D)

Get your shoes on. I ain't gonna have you be blinded by the darkness.

Jerome rises.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - LINDA'S HOUSE - **DUSK**

Linda sits on her porch-swing. A pamphlet in her hand. With his tennis ball, Jerome comes trotting down his street -- Barry observes from a safe distance.

Linda's stare fastens Jerome to the cracked concrete.

LINDA

You sure make a great statue!

Jerome gawks - a bit skittish.

LINDA (CONT'D)

You coming or what?

He checks his lefts and rights. No one - specifically, no one who could trouble him - is visible. Jerome jogs across, ambles up Linda's yard.

LINDA (CONT'D)
 Now you don't have to stare - from
 across the way, at least.

ARTHUR (O.S.)
 Lin! Dinner!

Oh -- JEROME LINDA
 You hungry?

JEROME
 (a moment)
 How do you mean?

LINDA
 (a chuckle)
 How do you mean, "how do you mean?"
 You hungry or you ain't?

ARTHUR (O.S.)
 (coming down hall)
 Lin, plate's gonna get cold -

Arthur steps out.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
 Oh. New friend?

LINDA
 His name is Jerome.

ARTHUR
Jerome. Pleasure to meet you. I'm
 Arthur. Gonna join us for supper?

LINDA
 He ain't sure.

Jerome is suspended.

END OF THE ROAD:

Perusing from a lengthy distance, using the battle-hardened
 binoculars, is Chris. Mind wandering to *all* the wrong places.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - LINDA'S HOUSE - SAME

JEROME
 Yes. I will.

ARTHUR
 Alrighty. I'll get ya a plate
 fixed.

Arthur heads in, Linda follows. Jerome (apparently) forgets how to shift his legs. In the doorway;

LINDA
Ain't nothing to be scared of.

Jerome follows her inside.

END OF THE ROAD:

Chris's breathing and heart rate accelerate. He smashes the binoculars against the pavement.

INT. COLORED BATHROOM - TOWN - SAME

Across the street - the White Hall Police Station House. Officers participate in prolonged hugs. All feel the loss. Standing on the faucet, examining the first stage of grief with a sinister smile... Yolonda.

JEROME (V.O.)
My - my mama, she don't let me do
much. Me and my dad, we talk.

INT. DINING ROOM - LINDA'S HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Arthur, meeting eyes with Linda, semi-threatening points to her plate. She picks up her spoon. His bright smile making a triumphant return;

ARTHUR
Hey, conversation is key. I find
myself talking a bit too much
sometimes!
(chuckles)
What are some covered topics?

JEROME
Covered topics?

The table is accepting Jerome's mental disadvantages. A frantic front-door pounding. Arthur heads down their stub of a corridor. Opens it...

INT./EXT. FRONT PORCH - LINDA'S HOUSE - SAME

With his hands up;

BARRY
I ain't mean no harm, I ain't here
to take nothin' --

ARTHUR

Hey, no issue, sir, what's going on, what do you need?

BARRY

Jerome, he here? My boy, is he here with y'all?

ARTHUR

Jerome? Yeah, he decided to join us for -

As Arthur rotates, Jerome is promptly by his side.

BARRY

What, you ain't look at the time? Mama gonna be home any minute now!

Jerome may faint.

EXT. SIDEWALK - SEGREGATED NEIGHBORHOOD - A MOMENT LATER

Jerome sprints toward his home. His dad trails behind. Chris observes them. He's a bit closer than before, hidden below some bushes.

INT. KITCHENETTE - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - LATER THAT NIGHT

Barry and Jerome eat. Yolonda comes from down the hall. Shocked and worried;

BARRY

I thought you was workin', 'Londa -

YOLONDA

(to Jerome)

Me and you's need to have a talk.

Jerome's vision latches onto his father. Barry's solitary expression says it'll all be okay. The young man removes himself.

Before exiting the kitchen, Yolonda heaves the gifted handheld bible in Barry's lap.

INT. BEDROOM - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - MOMENTS LATER

Still.

YOLONDA

Why'd you go up the attic?

Jerome knows that any answer he spews will get him in trouble. But, mother knows best.

YOLONDA (CONT'D)
Now ain't the time to lie to me,
boy.

He shrugs - "I don't know."

YOLONDA (CONT'D)
You tell Daddy what you saw?

Shakes his head no.

YOLONDA (CONT'D)
You gonna see a whole new side of
me if it ain't keep like that.

Yolonda's eyes are fixated on her sulking son.

CHRIS (V.O.)
Hey, uh - Adam's dad died.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOBILE HOME - THE NEXT DAY

Peter, still on his puzzle;

PETER
Wow - how'd he go?

CHRIS
We ain't sure.

PETER
Wow. Huh. That's a damn sin...
Well, he was proud of Adam. Proud
of his boy. Startin' to see that's
hard to come by.

A plunging impalement.

CHRIS
I'm, uh -- I'm gonna see how he's
holding up.

Peter lays a piece. Chris bites his tongue and exits.

EXT. TRAIL - WOODS - LATER THAT DAY

Adam, Chris and Jimmy sit on the log. Adam is *tired*. An amateur joint passed around.

JIMMY

I still miss my pops and I was six when he died. If that makes you feel any better.

ADAM

Thanks, man. I guess I -- I don't know, I guess I'm in shock or something.

Chris, offers Adam the joint. He turns it down.

CHRIS

Any idea who did it?

ADAM

No.

CHRIS

Was in the city, right?

Adam nods.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Was a nigger, then. Opened and closed case.

Adam shrugs. Silence.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

(exhaling)

Speaking of such - Linda found herself a new boyfriend.

JIMMY

A new boyfriend? *Already?*

CHRIS

Mhm.
I know where he lives.

JIMMY

(cautious)

Why do you know where he lives?

CHRIS

He's across the street.

JIMMY

From her?!

You could hear a pin drop after Chris's nod.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
 Wait... so... what you're sayin'
 is...?

Chris keeps on nodding.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
Fuck...

CHRIS
 I learned one thing from the look I
 got. He don't got boys like we do.
 He don't got anyone.

JIMMY
 Okay, and?

Inhaling + passing the joint;

CHRIS
*Willin' to wager he'd enjoy a game
 of football.*

Hoping to ascertain;

ADAM
 (anti)
 And ... what is it you have in
 mind?

CHRIS
 I ain't takin' no more disrespect.
We're done with it. And, those two?
 Together?

Chris holds their attention.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
 Well, that's just plain
 disrespectful. How do you think
 Officer Tom would like seein' that?

Adam shakes his head.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
 He *wouldn't like it.* Would make him
 sick to his fucking stomach.

JIMMY
 (definitive)
 Look, I been lookin' for this since
 y'all handed old Arty his ass on a
 silver platter. Ya got my answer.

CHRIS
 (to Adam)
 What's brewin' in that big brain?

Adam gazes off. Closing on him;

CHRIS (CONT'D)
 Listen... you're *the good one*.
 You're the best of us... but right
 now? We're all the same. You're
 lost.
 (it's working)
 And you're angry.

Rubbing the back his neck;

ADAM
 You know where he lives *exactly*?

CHRIS
 Can point it out like *that*.
 (*snaps*)

A moment;

ADAM
 Nothing crazy, right? I don't wanna
 be hurtin' any body.

CHRIS
 Nah, nothin' bad.

ADAM
 We won't get in trouble, so - that
 helps.

Smiling;

CHRIS
 Daddy teach you that, huh?

Adam, crestfallen and hollow, bobs his head in agreement.

INT. BASEMENT - JIMMY'S HOUSE - THE NEXT DAY

Adam, Chris and Jimmy. Jimmy stuffs a glass bottle of liquor
 in his schoolbag.

CHRIS
 Y'all gonna go up to his door.

ADAM
 You're not?

CHRIS
 (heading up steps)
 I gotta do somethin'. I'll meet
 y'all there.

JIMMY
 (opening airplane bottle)
 So much nicer when my mom ain't
 home, huh?

Adam reacts duly.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
 I didn't mean that -

ADAM
 I know you didn't.

Adam twiddles his thumbs while Jimmy downs the drink.

EXT. ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Adam and Jimmy trot along - the latter has the bag around his
 back.

ADAM
 Football is in there?

JIMMY
 Yes, sir.

ADAM
 Let me have it a while.
 (beat)
 Little more natural.

JIMMY
 (reaching in bag)
 See? That's why you're the brains.

Adam wrenches a grin.

EXT. DIVIDING ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

They trot along Linda's sidewalk, making their way into the
cracked street.

JIMMY
 (at Linda's house)
 Dumb broad.

ADAM
 Wait a minute.
 (panic)
 (MORE)

ADAM (CONT'D)
 We're not black, what if they call
 the cops or something?

JIMMY
*Dude. The cops ain't gonna bother
 to -- regardless of who your dad
 is. They got better things to do.*

"You're right." Adam inhales, shakes his jitters.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
 Good?

ADAM
 Yeah. Yeah, I think so.

Within a few steps they arrive in -

EXT. SIDEWALK - SEGREGATED NEIGHBORHOOD - MOMENTS LATER

Peculiar looks from the outdoor folk.

INT. BEDROOM - **WATKINS HOUSEHOLD** - SAME

As Jerome reads his copy of the scripture, Barry highlights a
 verse with his pencil.

BARRY
*"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your
 adversary the devil prowls around
 like a roaring lion, seeking
 someone to devour." That, my boy,
 ain't a healthy way to live. And,
 that's Mama. Every day and night -
 what I just read you is what she
 believes.*

As fate would have it, a knock at the door.

BARRY (CONT'D)
 Gimme a second.

Barry's a bit ruffled when he opens the door to two white
 boys.

BARRY (CONT'D)
 (admittedly uneasy)
 Uh... what can I do for you
 gentleman?

JIMMY

Howdy! We're friends of Linda.
We're havin' a pick up game and she
told us to go get the new guy --
But, didn't tell us his name.

Conflicted;

BARRY

She sent y'all up here? How's she
know where -- she ain't ever been
here.

JIMMY

She told us she watched him walk
home. But, Linda can be an airhead.
That's why he love her.

Jimmy expected some laughter - doesn't get any. Clearing
throat;

JIMMY (CONT'D)

We all gotta be home by sun down
so, if he's allowed of course, it
wouldn't be long.

BARRY

Uh...

(a beat)

Jerome! Come here a minute.

Jerome plods on over - stops at his father's side.

JIMMY

Hey! We're Linda's friends. I'm
Jimmy.

Jimmy extends a hand. Jerome (as if never seeing a handshake)
participates.

JEROME

Jerome.

JIMMY

Jerome. Great to meet you. This is
Adam.

ADAM

Good to meet you both.

Jerome's focus is solely on the pigskin.

BARRY

They was talking about a football game. Linda sent them on down for you.

(friendly)

He been wanting one of them.

ADAM

Here -

Adam tosses it and Jerome feels an unmatched sensation upon his catching-grip.

BARRY

You remember when Mama home, right?

JEROME

Can I go with them, Daddy?

BARRY

If you can tell me what time Mama come home!

A pitiful jealousy in Adam's eyes while watching their back and forth.

BARRY (CONT'D)

(removing watch)

Hold onto this. You be back on this porch no later than five. You gonna have a ball but I mean it, Jerome - five-o'clock.

JEROME

Five-o'clock.

BARRY

Well, alright.

(to the new friends)

The knees gave up way back or else I'd join ya.

They laugh. Jimmy rushes out onto the sidewalk -

JIMMY

(waving hands)

I'm open!

Jerome's throw would benefit from more elbow grease but Jimmy manages to snatch it. All cheer.

BARRY

Look at that. A natural.

(reminded)

(MORE)

BARRY (CONT'D)
 Oh, Jerome, you can't be forgettin'
 this --

Barry rushes inside -- unclear until he returns with the
tennis ball. Grabbing it;

JEROME
 Thanks, Daddy.

Jerome and Adam meet Jimmy at the sidewalk.

BARRY
 Alrighty! Y'all be safe, now!

JIMMY
 We will!

He watches them march on and exit the colored neighborhood. A
 deep breath. Barry turns his back and shuts the door.

EXT. LOT - MOBILE HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Chris's strut grows laggard as he looms his trailer; loud
 rock music from inside.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOBILE HOME - A MOMENT LATER

On the table, a near-emptied alcohol bottle. A cigarette-
 puffing Peter dances. An old fling SARAH (35, white) finds
 his moves cackle-inducing.

CHRIS (O.S.)
 Dad!

Noticing him;

CHRIS (CONT'D)
 (wielding bottle)
What the hell is this?

PETER
 (hammered)
*Wooooooooooooow, it's my boy, the
 faggot! Sarah, you remember Chrissy
 don't you?*

SARAH
 How could I forget?

PETER

By lookin' at him - you wouldn't think he takes it up the ass, would ya? Does he got that look to him?

Sarah erupts. A *boiling* Chris storms out of sight.

INT. BEDROOM - MOBILE HOME - A MOMENT LATER

Pacing. Chris's teeth could crumble from the anger-promoted clench. He rips open a drawer, tears clothes out - a search. Not in here.

Same goes for a different drawer, throwing shorts and socks behind him until he finds it... the military-issued knife. A gift from his father.

Chris stuffs it down his jeans after wrapping it in a sock.

EXT. TRAIL - WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Adam, Jimmy and Jerome have reached the log.

ADAM

Here we are.

JIMMY

Jerome, go out!

He listens. Jimmy passes a stinging *bullet* that slaps Jerome's forearms. Jerome picks the ball up as Jimmy laughs and pulls the liquor from his bag. After a shot;

JIMMY (CONT'D)

(offering to Adam)

Eh? Take the edge off?

ADAM

... Yeah, fuck it.

Jerome, watching the drink make Adam wince, closes on them. Adam returns to Jimmy the bottle.

JIMMY

(to Jerome)

Want?

JEROME

What is it?

JIMMY

Perfect time to find out.

Adam *snatches* the ball from Jerome, Jimmy puts forth the bottle.

JEROME

Water?

JIMMY

Not quite -
 (pressing against his
 lips)
 Just put it to your mouth, tilt ya
 head back -

JEROME

(pulling back)

No!

Jerome sees that he's (somewhat) insulted them. Betraying his true desire;

JEROME (CONT'D)

Okay.

JIMMY

Okay?

Jerome seizes the liquor and, without much thought, downs some. Immediately spits up what didn't go down. Adam and Jimmy get a real kick out of it.

JEROME

What is that?

JIMMY

White Hall's finest, baby.

CHRIS (O.S.)

What's up, homos?

Chris parks his bike. A sock is snug around his handlebar. Approaching his people;

ADAM

Chrissy Boy.

JIMMY

Fuck took so long?

CHRIS

Sup new guy. Linda's friend, right?

Jerome nods.

ADAM
His name is Jerome.

CHRIS
Jerome... well, Jerome, welcome to
our field.

Chris plucks the bottle from Jerome's frail hand. Sucks down
four-five shots. Shakes like a horse.

JEROME
Say, when's Linda coming?

A beat.

CHRIS
I gotta ask you somethin', Jerome.

"Yes?"

CHRIS (CONT'D)
Linda...
Our nice, little Lin... *you think*
she's cute?

Jerome nethers his beat-up sneakers.

JIMMY
Welp, you got your answer.

CHRIS
I mean, you *have* to, right? Didn't
y'all have dinner the other night?

JEROME
Yes.

CHRIS
You didn't happen to notice any
black eyes on the old man, did ya?

Laughter from those who understand.

JEROME
No.

CHRIS
Hm.
(putting bottle to lips)
She likes you, you know.

As Chris takes another shot, Adam and Jimmy straighten up;
whatever is supposed to happen is about to happen.

JEROME
She said that?

CHRIS
Duh! You datin', ain't ya?

JEROME
No.

This upsets Jimmy. Adam is unsurprisingly a bit relieved.

CHRIS
Oh.
(we came this far)
Well then, all that's left is the
big q.

JEROME
The big q?

CHRIS
The big q, that's right. *The big
question.* If she'd wanna be your
girlfriend.

Jimmy inflates. Adam, for better or for worse, is back in it.

JEROME
She told you she liked me?

CHRIS
Boy, did she.

Jerome debates...

JEROME
Okay. I'll ask.
I don't care what my Mama says.

With all eyes on him;

JEROME (CONT'D)
I'll do it tomorrow. At dinner.

Addled;

CHRIS
...dinner? *At her house?*

JEROME
Yes.

CHRIS
 (deducing)
She invited you back?

JEROME
 Yes.

Chris glances to his boys -- it's go time.

CHRIS
 Ain't that sweet. Congratulations.
 (holding out bottle)
 Here. To celebrate -

JEROME
 I'm okay.

CHRIS
You're okay? Nah, nonsense, c'mon,
 take a shot.

Adam and Jimmy observe the repartee.

JEROME
 Really, I'm fine, I didn't like it -

CHRIS
 So --- so, what're you saying here,
 Jerome? What're you tellin' us? We
 invite you out, offer drinks, and
 you just -- *you're gonna turn it
 down?*

Jimmy is electrified - Adam is overwrought.

JEROME
 I don't mean to make you mad,
 really, the taste is -

Chris smashes the bottle against Jerome's face. Adam and
 Jimmy hop off the log as Jerome and his tennis ball flop to
 the sippy ground.

Chris drops the remnants and lifts a bleeding Jerome from the
 grass -- begins choking him. Trying to pull him off;

ADAM
Chris, look at him! Stop it!

Using the grip he has on his throat, Chris rips Jerome back
 to the ground.

JEROME
P-p-please, stop!

Chris drags Jerome. Adam and Jimmy stay back.

ADAM

Chris, that's enough, man -

JIMMY

Adam's right, dude! Come on, man,
he got his -

CHRIS

(dragging)
Shut the fuck up!

Chris, unrestrained and unhinged, stops dragging. Jerome rolls onto his stomach, attempts to crawl away. Chris reaches in his jeans and clutches the handle. Realizing;

ADAM

(sprinting over)
No! Stop!

The crawling concludes when Chris, over and over, sticks the blade in Jerome's upper and lower back. Adam tackles Chris to the ground - Jimmy rolls Jerome on his back. Cradling his head;

JIMMY

Hey, hey - you're alright, okay?
Look at me!

He's not alright. This is not alright.

Rolling in the grass, Adam and Chris wrangle over the weapon. The former is able to maintain it -- he hurls it out of sight.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

(tears in eyes)
*Adam! I need some help, man! Get
the fuck over here!*

Adam charges over. He gets down on his knees and cups Jerome's head. Their eyes lock.

ADAM

Hey, don't go, do you hear me? Just
--

Jerome let's out a broadened and grating sigh. It's his final breath.

The boys are engrained in the event. Nothing more than the unrefined sounds of nature. Chris, still off in the distance, examines his orchestrated carnage.

CHRIS

I... wait...

With engulfing enervation;

ADAM

What have we done?

The boys monitor the innocent corpse.

HARD CUT TO:

BLACK.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - **PUERTO RICO** - NIGHT

1974.

Lounging around in a breathtaking suite. Chris (early 40's) sparks up a cigarette as he prepares his film camera. JACK, (30) pulling on a shirt, sees his lover light up.

JACK

*What, you can't read? Can't smoke
in here!*

CHRIS

I'm an on-and-off reader. Take that
sign. My eyes don't register. But,
the bill on my credit card?

(takes photograph)

Well, I can read that just fine.

When Jack rolls his eyes - a knock at the door. The younger man gazes through the peephole.

CHRIS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Who is it?

JACK

Did you order room service?

CHRIS

No, dummy. You act like you ain't
been watching me this whole time.

Jack opens it.

A black woman, age 60-65, wears a hotel uniform. Yolonda. Carries a balancing tray - two opened bottles of beer.

YOLONDA
Room service! Two lagers?

JACK
Uh, we didn't --

CHRIS (O.S.)
Oh, yes we did, honey. Bring us two more and there's a heavy tip in it, sweetheart.

Yolonda smiles and hands the tray off to a grinning Jack. As he shuts the door...

INT. HALLWAY - HOTEL - PUERTO RICO - SAME

Yolonda's smile snaps off of her face. Her speed-walk deviates into the ladies room.

INT. HOTEL - PUERTO RICO - MOMENTS LATER

Chugging contest. Placing it on the drawer after finishing;

CHRIS
(burps)
Don't make bets you know you ain't winning.

Jack finishes his.

JACK
Yeah, yeah - give it time. I'll get to you.

CHRIS
Can I have a cigarette in peace now?

Chris stands. "Whoa..." An overwhelming sense of... *blur*. His skin has faltered to a troubling, ghoulish pale.

JACK
Chris? You don't look too good...

Chris flops out of awareness. He, convulsing on the carpet, foams at the mouth. A panicking Jack tries to hold him still... only for him to back off... he's a little woozy, too... Jack soon succumbs to a grand-mal seizure.

INT. HALLWAY - HOTEL - PUERTO RICO - MOMENTS LATER

With a devious smile and ordinary street clothes, Yolonda trots past their hotel room.

BLACK.

INT. ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM - INNER CITY SCHOOL - MORNING

A word down facility. Mr. Armstrong is written across a chalkboard. Adam (late 30's) is center focus of over twenty youngsters - primarily black and hispanic. Welcoming;

ADAM

Although Mrs. G is flu-stricken,
she'll be back to you all on
Monday.

From somewhere in the clump;

CITY STUDENT

Ain't worried.

Giggles.

ADAM

Right. Well, as you can see behind
me - my name is Mr. Armstrong. You
can call me Mr. A, Mr. Arm, Mr.
Super Strong, whatever's easiest.
And, for the less observant out
there, I'm gonna be your
substitute.

No enthusiasm.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Alrighty, uh -
(a beat)

I've lived in New York now for
about - - *sixteen years?* Yeah, that
sounds right. And, with each
passing day, my love for the city
grows. Show of hands, who here was
born and raised?

Some hands raise.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Good amount of migrants, I take it?

The eight-year-old decides he has something to voice;

DARIUS
I got a question.

ADAM
(presently surprised)
Oh - yeah, why don't you tell me
your name?

DARIUS
Darius. With a name like that and
all, your arms gotta be strong,
right?

ADAM
(chuckle)
Uh - I suppose at least one of
them, yes.

DARIUS
You think they strong enough for
Andre's fast ball?

ADAM
Well, Darius, I would have to meet
this Andre and --

DARIUS
Hit 'em!

From the back of the classroom, as an initiation of sorts,
Andre chucks a tennis ball at Adam's chest. While the kids
laugh, their teacher wields a hardened stance.

ADAM
I . . .

Dissipation of the youthful joy as the ball rolls toward the
door...

ADAM (CONT'D)
I'm sorry --

Adam excuses himself.

INT. HALLWAY - LOFT COMPLEX - THAT NIGHT

A french-fry eating Adam, satchel around his shoulder,
approaches his door. He moves the key in the lock, fidgets
with it until a *snap!* The tip of the key has broken.

Frustrated, Adam drops his satchel onto the dirty floor. He
reaches inside until gripping two paper clips. Using them, he
begins picking his lock.

INT. KITCHEN - LOFT - THAT NIGHT

No disconnect between the kitchen, living area and sleeping space. Adam opens hid silverware drawer and grabs a fork - it's all plain fake-silver. Except for the knives. They're plastic.

Alone, Adam gorges on a fast-food slider.

LATER:

Using his rotary phone, Adam awaits an answer.

ADAM

Hey, Maya, it's me again -- I miss you! I've been thinking and -- I don't know, I've been worried, I guess -- Okay. Call when you can.

(meek)

Love you.

He hangs up.

HOURS LATER:

Adam sleeps in a bed made for two. Next to a bottle of pills, resting faced down - a framed photograph.

He tosses and turns until *jolting* awake. His damp hands snag his prescribed medicine; swallows well above the recommended dose. "It was only a dream."

INT. ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM - INNER CITY - THE NEXT MORNING

Adam writes an equation on the chalkboard. Sensing their disinterest;

ADAM

"I'm never gonna use Math in my life." Who has thought and/or said this? You can be honest.

A few hands raise.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Good. Now, who would like to know why you will be using mathematics in every living, breathing moment of your life?

Any hands that were up lower back into their laps - a knock at the door. MRS. BENNETT (70) enters.

MRS. BENNETT
Mr. Armstrong?

ADAM
(can't you see I'm busy?)
Yeah?

MRS. BENNETT
You have a call waiting in the
staff center. I'm told it's an
emergency. I'm here to take your
place for the time necessary.

ADAM
An *emergency*?

MRS. BENNETT
I know nothing more.

Adam doesn't seem to have many options.

INT. STAFF CENTER - INNER CITY SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

Adam enters. FELICITY (35) sits behind a desk. Close-by; a
corded-phone resting next to its box.

ADAM
Hey, I'm Mr. Armstrong, the current
substitute for -

FELICITY
Waiting right there unless, by now,
they hung up. I know I would've.

ADAM
(pointing at phone)
Did they, um... did they say who's
calling?

FELICITY
Unfortunately, they did not but, I
can assure you, it's very easy to
find out.

"Noted."

Adam takes his time on over, places the phone against his
ear. Adam is the focus of this conversation. Concealing the
image on the other end.

ADAM
Uh... hello?

FEMALE (O.S.)

Adam?

Perplexed;

ADAM

Who's this?

LINDA (O.S.)

It's Linda!

ADAM

(what is happening)

Uh -- oh, hey. What, uh, what's this about?

LINDA (O.S.)

(pepped up)

Been a while, man. Wow. It's good to hear from ya. Been too long. Hope you've been good, I've been alright. Nothing crazy. It's Chris. Did you know we were married? Him and me?

ADAM

Um - no, I didn't... what's going on here, Linda?

LINDA (O.S.)

(a cigarette sparks)

He's gone.

To Adam, her delivery is more unnerving than the news.

ADAM

Oh, um... wow, that's horrible. I'm sorry.

LINDA (O.S.)

Took a trip to Puerto Rico. Him and his - buddy. You can't see me but I'm using air quotes.

(hoarse laugh)

A trip I didn't know about -- nothing new there, but, I don't know, you know how the doctors can be. Bunch of mumbo-jumbo.

ADAM

(a moment)

I, um - wow, my condolences -

LINDA (O.S.)
How're the kids?

ADAM
The kids?

LINDA (O.S.)
The kids you teaching! You teaching school, right? Keeping our youth in check? I bet y'all wish you was still allowed to hit 'em, huh?

ADAM
 Hey, listen, Linda -

LINDA (O.S.)
Alright, alright, you're busy - I had no clue he had one, but he's got a will. And, you're in it. Wants you to carry his casket.

ADAM
 Oh.

Dead air.

ADAM (CONT'D)
 Well, y'know -

LINDA (O.S.)
Think about it. I gave - the woman who answered - who sounds like a total bitch, she has the number to reach me at. I gave it to her. Call when you make up your mind.

Feeling as if he has;

ADAM
 Well, Lin, I'm in New York now and, y-know,

LINDA (O.S.)
Hey, just gimme a call, alright? Gotta run, bye!

An abrupt end. Not what he expected, for better or worse.

WOMAN (V.O.)
 Adam, you need to go.

ADAM (V.O.)
 Feeling dictatorial tonight, huh?

INT. KITCHEN - LOFT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Not even this candle-light dinner can mask the distance of Adam and his girlfriend MAYA (30, black.)

MAYA

I'm not *dictating*, Adam. I'm helping. Or, trying to -

ADAM

I don't wanna do this.

MAYA

Hearing this is necessary for your well being. For ours. Whether you wanna "do it" or not. If you confront what happened -

ADAM

Nothing happened!

MAYA

-- if you confront what happened, your chances of acceptance increase by a substantial margin --

ADAM

Jesus Christ -- are you hard of hearing?

MAYA

My god, Adam - listen to yourself! Are you hard of hearing? It's been two years of this! *Two years we've been together* and on the rare occasion I feel permitted to mention your past, *your incredibly ambiguous past*, you get angry. *And scary.*

He's indeed incensed.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Your therapist calls and asks if I'm alright. If you don't see an issue with -

ADAM

She called you?

MAYA

Do you think that's the point I'm trying to make?

ADAM

Oh, right - I forgot when it comes to my questions and what I wanna know, it doesn't matter. *Right?!*

Adam slaps away the salt shaker - Maya then lends her hands beneath the table.

ADAM (CONT'D)

How fucking convenient.

He takes a breath. Soon removes himself and starts cleaning the mess after grabbing the broom and pan;

MAYA

Adam, for sake of our relationship, you need to attend this funeral. You have to go back home. Then, maybe, we can truly be transparent with one another -

ADAM

And if I decide not to?

MAYA

I don't wanna make this any more of a fight than it is -

ADAM

(reddening)

That's great, I wanna ask a question. What happens if I stay here?

A lull.

MAYA

Then I can't see a future between us.

Adam rises from the spilled seasoning. Maya's fingers go deeper in her pocket.

ADAM

Let me get this straight, ultimatums?

MAYA

I need to know what happened.

Now pacing back and forth;

ADAM

No, you don't. You wanna know what happened.

Lowering her tone;

MAYA

Adam, if you'd pay attention - true attention - to yourself and to the things that you do and say, you would understand why I believe -

ADAM

Please, be quiet.

His freneticism heightening...

MAYA

I don't think you grasp the nature of closure --

Adam flips the table. Maya leaps up and, from her pocket, rips out a pocket-knife; out slides the blade. Save for his trembling hands, Adam is shock-still.

His eyes are latched onto the reflective point.

MAYA (CONT'D)

(tears welling)

You need to stay away from me, now. It's time to back up.

It's Adam and the weapon.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Now!

(swipes with knife)

Following the swipe, Adam slaps Maya. Both she and the knife crash onto the hardwood. Maya sobs.

Adam probes the harm he's inflicted. Her woe-full tears are dampened by the sound of soaring skies...

INT. ROOM - HOTEL - NIGHT

Moonlit gloom. A silhouette enters, flicks on the light switch. Adam. The hotel isn't slummy but worse it could be. The phone rings. Adam hustles to it;

ADAM

(frantic)

Maya?

LINDA (O.S.)
 (sniffling)
Ain't quite the four seasons, I know.

Again, hold on Adam.

ADAM
 (taking a seat)
 Oh - yeah, no, not quite. How'd you get this number?

LINDA (O.S.)
Hey, I think you should go with me. Arthur - my uncle - I know you remember him - he hosts counseling sessions. Grief, marriage, all that.

ADAM
 Uh -- I don't know, Linda. I'm pretty exhausted -

LINDA (O.S.)
 I need it. I need you to be there. Please.

He looks off...

INT. GYMNASIUM - CHURCH - LATER

Folding chairs. Seven-eight people, all genders and hues, sit in the circle. Tissues for the taking. Arthur (now in his 70's) leads the meeting.

Adam is next to a woman. Her face is riddled with scabs, her teeth a urine-yellow, She's paper thin. The confined likeness of a meth addict. This is Linda.

Some chew on a toothpick. Not Linda. In her mouth is a two-inch metal hair clip. They're stiff and straight. Chewing on it is just one of her bad habits. With her emotions on full display;

LINDA
 It's been thirty years now, for thirty years, me and him. Every day. I know I never really *knew* him -
 - but *how do I move on from that?*

ARTHUR
 Life's cruelest path has been laid ahead of you. No debate in that.
 (MORE)

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

But, do you remember when we last spoke?

Linda nods.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

God's providence. For those unaware, Linda here is my niece. And, through imperative transmission with our Lord, my sins were allowed liberation. And, during the fifteen years Lin would not speak to me, I didn't fret. I knew we'd be brought together again.

Adam almost *winces*.

LINDA

This is God's revenge. Mhm. For the things he did. This is -- *retribution*. For what he's done.

(looks to Adam)

For what I've done. For what we've done.

Adam avoids contact. He regrets ever taking the initial phone call.

ARTHUR

Now, Lin, the Lord has many ways in which he completes his mission but -- *out of vengeance...* that's not one of them.

Having enough;

ADAM

What makes you the expert, Arthur?

ARTHUR

(a moment)

Well, Adam, I've dedicated nearly sixty years to the study of the scripture --

ADAM

So, your expertise -- it derives from a work of fiction? Some would go as far to say a *fairy tale*?

Some are insulted. But, all eyes are on him.

ADAM (CONT'D)
 You don't know the mind of God. *You don't even know if he's real.* If we did; what would be the use of *all this?*

Arising;

ADAM (CONT'D)
 I'll be outside.

Adam exits.

INT. ROOM - HOTEL - THE NEXT MORNING

The mirror helps Adam in the positioning of his tie.

MOMENTS LATER:

Two over-the-counter pain meds go down the hatch. Adam eases in a chair. The balloon of tranquility he strives for is popped by an outdoor *HONK!*

INT. TRUCK - MOVING - MOMENTS LATER

Arthur drives. Adam in passenger.

ARTHUR
 I've kept you in my prayers. I want you to know that.

"Great."

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
 You're too good of a man for a mistake like that to simply waltz out of your life.

Adam's anxiety heats up.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
 Have you considered reaching out?

ADAM
 You got the wrong guy.

ARTHUR
 (after a beat)
 You need closure, Adam.

That seals it.

ADAM

Arthur, with all due respect --
have you seen your niece?!
 Look what happened. *She counted on you.* Now she's tweaking at her husband's funeral. *With help from the twenty dollars I felt obligated to lend her.* But, let me guess, the Lord's work, right? That's *God's providence?*

(bites tongue)

You don't know what's good for me.
 You don't know what I *need.* Twenty years ago - maybe. But now?

The old man lends his ear.

ADAM (CONT'D)

You're a stranger. All of you,
 strangers. For good reason.

Arthur cedes.

INT. CHURCH - LATER THAT DAY

Closed casket. Not the biggest turnout. No telling if Chris would be pleased. While the priest speaks, a seated Adam searches for someone. Linda, hair clip between lips, is in the front row.

EXT. ARTHUR'S HOUSE - LATER

Linda's childhood home. Cars occupy the driveway and are parked along the curb. Not much has changed.

INT. KITCHEN - ARTHUR'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The modular home is pretty packed. Linda and Adam stand in the buffet line. Only Adam fixes a plate. A tug on his pant causes Adam to turn around - CALEB (6, white) is smiling.

ADAM

Uh - hey, little guy.

Caleb hands forth a photograph. All smiles; Adam, Jimmy and Chris. Caleb rushes off and after Adam takes the image.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Who is that?

LINDA
That's Jimmy's boy. Monica's around
here somewhere.

ADAM
Where's Jimmy?

"He doesn't know." Linda feeds him an informative look.

INT. LIVING ROOM - ARTHUR'S HOUSE - THAT NIGHT

Just about everyone has cleared out. Linda races through the kitchen clean up. Adam comes down the steps. He has weep-bloated eyes.

ADAM
Hey, I'm gonna head back on Monday.

Linda lights up.

LINDA
(still cleaning)
Oh, yeah? That's good. Good to have
you back a little longer. What's
keeping you around?

ADAM
(thinks)
I don't really know.

LINDA
Preachin' to the choir.

Adam reflects on that.

INT. HOTEL - THE NEXT MORNING

With coffee in hand, Adam reads the paper. The phone rings. Grabbing it;

ADAM
Adam, here.

EXT. PARKING LOT - HOTEL - MOMENTS LATER

Linda's running car is parked. She rolls down her window as Adam reaches her door. Popping one of those clips between her forced-smile;

LINDA
Hey, honey, how are ya -

ADAM
 (hands over bill)
 Hey. Here's -

LINDA
 (snatching it)
 Oh, 20, thank you so much, Adam,
 like I said, there's just no food
 at the trailer and -

ADAM
 When's the session?

LINDA
 Oh, you decided you wanna go? Don't
 feel pressure, no need to feel
 pressured, I mentioned it thinkin' -

ADAM
 Lin - just tell me when it starts.

LINDA
 (putting it into drive)
 7:30. Tell you what, stay by the
 phone, I'll give ya a call and
 we'll figure out rides. Sound good?

His enabling behavior provides him with a twisted sense of solace. Through the window of a fellow hotel room, we see Linda drive off as Adam backs away.

INT./EXT. - CAR - PARKED - CHURCH - THAT NIGHT

An emptied lot. Linda, tweaked, applies lipstick in the rearview. From shotgun;

ADAM
 Would you call this a good turn
 out?

LINDA
 Hard to say. Boy scouts use the big
 gym some nights for dodgeball.
 Can't stand those fags.

Adam can't tell if she's serious.

INT. SPARE GYM - CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

Yet again, Arthur runs the show. Yet, the show seems to be only Adam and Linda.

ADAM
 (peeps watch)
 It's 7:45.

Nothing.

The entrance *croons* open. Arthur goes to help when the end of a cane sticks through the door crack.

ARTHUR
 (approaching)
 Let me help you here -

ELDERLY WOMAN (O.S.)
 I'm sorry, the bus ran a little
 late -

ARTHUR
 Not a problem in the slightest.

Arthur guides her on in. All it takes is one solitary exchange from Adam and Linda. They know. Impossible to forget.

Yolonda Watkins. Wears Barry's rosary.

YOLONDA
 Hi, everybody.

Yolonda, with her walking-assistant, wobbles to a chair that Arthur has pulled out for her. A groaning sit;

YOLONDA (CONT'D)
 Thank you.

Linda can't look away. She gnaws on a hair clip. Adam, troubling to remain conscious;

ADAM
I'm sorry --

He excuses himself - Linda follows.

EXT. PARKING LOT - CHURCH - A MOMENT LATER

Adam paces toward a pay phone.

ADAM
 (to himself)
*It's okay. You're alright, Adam.
 Call a cab, just wait for a cab --*

Jogging over to him;

LINDA

Hey!

ADAM

No! Go away, I can't be here, I
don't wanna be here, I need my
medicine --

He reaches the payphone.

LINDA

Adam. Listen to -

ADAM

(digging in pockets)
No! You fucking junkie, I don't
wanna hear anything, I don't wanna
see anything, I need to go back to
my room --

Linda retrieves a bag of pills from her purse. She pulls out two anti-anxiety meds. Using her drug-induced strength, Linda shoves Adam against the brick wall.

ADAM (CONT'D)

(struggles)

Get your filthy fucking hands off -

LINDA

Listen to me. We've tried to move
on - we can't. You can't.

He tries to slide away - she ain't allowing it.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Let's just see what she has to say.
I have some painkillers in my bag.
We need this.

Adam shivers.

INT. SPARE GYM - CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

A loose circle. Yolonda, Arthur, Adam and Linda. Adam's nails are in his mouth, his eyes on the floor.

YOLONDA

Adam.

Plays mute.

YOLONDA (CONT'D)

Adam.

With a void in his stomach and tears in his eyes, Adam glares up at her.

YOLONDA (CONT'D)
I do not believe you were the hands
that took my child.

ADAM
Then, why are you here?

All eyes on Adam.

UADAM
Your son, your only boy, *your only*
child - was taken from you -

YOLONDA
Could've happened to anyone.

ADAM
Stop it. No. It happened to you. He
- - you're lying. *You're a liar.*

ARTHUR LINDA
Adam! Adam, come on, relax.

Adam looks off - resisting. Caressing her rosary;

YOLONDA
I wanted to give my condolences.
For your friend.
(to Linda)
And your husband.

Linda cries. She grabs a hair-clip from her bag.

YOLONDA (CONT'D)
There was always a part of me that
envied him, my boy. His heart
didn't have a hint of anger. Livin'
like that - I didn't think it was
possible until - it came to me --
(tears)
The last thing he'd want is for
Mama to be sad.

Tears trickle down Adam's jaw-locked face.

YOLONDA (CONT'D)
The road The Lord lays upon us is
the road we must take.

Adam isn't sold.

ARTHUR

Yolonda has an offer she would like
to vocalize

Straightening up;

YOLONDA

I've - at my house -- I have
prepared dinner. For the four of
us.

Standing;

ADAM

I -- I can't be here -

Linda rushes after him when he exits.

EXT. PARKING LOT - CHURCH - A MOMENT LATER

Adam stumbles out. When Linda stops at the door;

ADAM

Go inside!

As Linda lingers;

ADAM (CONT'D)

Please.

She listens and re-enters the church.

Out in the lot, Adam leans against Linda's aged sedan.
Prolonged gusts.

ADAM (CONT'D)

(to himself)

*You're a fucking murderer, you
should be in jail, you piece of
shit --*

(slaps himself)

*Shut up! Shut your fucking mouth.
Deep breaths.*

As he grips the driver-side mirror, Adam's inhaled breaths grow much
more precise. He continues adding pressure on it; stumbles
back when it snaps off.

Adam inspects the crappy vehicle. He hurls the mirror against
the drivers side window - it *spider-webs*.

The window caves when Adam's bare-fist burst through it. He reaches inside and breaks off the turn-signal. He travels to the hood of the car; smashes both headlights.

Adam throws the turning-mechanism and crawls onto the hood. He unleashes a bestial scream and cracks Linda's windshield with a fury of punches.

He's winded. Something catches his eye...

Rolling down the desolate road are thousands of blood-stained tennis balls. They vanish when he blinks.

A fresh sensation of understanding overcomes Adam like a heightened wave.

INT. SPARE GYM - CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

Yolonda, Arthur and Linda remain. Adam swings the entrance open - he's sweaty and his hands are damaged. As he storms in...

LINDA
(all gawk)
Adam, what the hell?

Adam wraps Yolonda up in a sobbing bear-hug.

ADAM
I'm so sorry, I am so, so sorry --

Yolonda pats his back -- she isn't pleased by her current feeling of strict and genuine empathy.

ARTHUR
Uh... I'm gonna grab the first aid kit...

Arthur goes off. Adam breaks off from Yolonda.

ADAM
Dinner.

Yolonda nods.

EXT. PARKING LOT - CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

Arthur guides Yolonda to his truck. Adam writes Linda a check while she studies her demolished automobile.

As Yolonda, Arthur, Adam and Linda hop in the truck;

ARTHUR (V.O.)
My truck it is. I'll drop you two
off later tonight.

INT./EXT. - TRUCK - MOVING - SECLUDED ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Arthur drives. Yolonda in shotgun, Adam + Linda in the back.
Shrouding trees.

LINDA
You weren't lying about the
seclusion, huh?

YOLONDA
Best way to live.

Linda grins.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - YOLONDA'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Her abode is the only detectable development on this hunk of
land. As the truck pulls in, the headlights illuminate her
large backyard. A spacious shed is enclosed by a tall fence.
The engine quiets.

INT. TRUCK - PARKED - DRIVEWAY - A MOMENT LATER

YOLONDA
Everyone about ready?

ARTHUR
Yes, ma'am.

LINDA
Seems like it.

Arthur opens the drivers door, Yolonda the passenger.

YOLONDA
I'm gonna need some help outta here
--

Adam and Linda egress. Grabbing her hands;

ARTHUR
Here, I got ya --

Yolonda plants her cane on the driveway. She saunters her
stone walkway and obtains a key. Unlocking the door;

YOLONDA
If y'all could be so kind and
remove your shoes for me.

LINDA
Yes, ma'am.

ADAM
No problem at all.

Yolonda holds the door for them. All three enter. She gives the road and her land a quick inspection. The door locks after it shuts.

INT. KITCHEN - YOLONDA'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Adam, Linda and Arthur sit at a tiny kitchen table as Yolonda, cane-free, removes a pie from the fridge.

LINDA
Looks delicious.

YOLONDA
You're too sweet.

What hangs on the walls makes Adam's stomach churn; emptied photo frames.

Yolonda places a chocolate pie dish in front of both Adam and Linda. Could be something out of an advertisement.

ADAM
(skeptical)
No cane?

Pulling down another plate;

YOLONDA
Oh, yeah. Somethin' about being home. One or two slices, Arty?

Linda takes a bite.

ARTHUR
Oh, don't tease me. My doctor would *chew me out*.

YOLONDA
Hm.
Right.

Adam follows Linda's lead - takes a bite.

ADAM
(chewing)
Wow -- really great.

ARTHUR

Ignoring you not saying grace is
troubling but I'll look past it for
now.

Yolonda observes the dining duo.

MOMENTS LATER:

Plates are cleared.

LINDA

I don't like to sound repetitive
but, wow --
(yawning)
That was something.

Adam yawns the same.

YOLONDA

Makes ya a little sleepy, don't it?

ADAM

It does.

ARTHUR

That'd have me up all night.

YOLONDA

(standing)
Here, let me take these from ya --

ADAM

Oh, I don't mind --

YOLONDA

I got it.

She removes their plates and maneuvers to the sink. Adam catches Linda dipping in and out of consciousness. He shoots Arthur a look of concern.

ARTHUR

Lin!

Unresponsive. Adam shakes Linda -- she jolts awake. Startled;

ADAM

You okay?

LINDA

(nervous + out of it)
Yeah. . . No, actually, something
is wrong...

Arthur and Adam, focusing on Linda, don't notice Yolonda opening a drawer in the b.g.

ARTHUR

What do you need?

LINDA

Nah, I think --- I don't know, I feel kinda weird -

ARTHUR

Here, let's get you to a couch.
Adam, would you -

What do you know?

Adam is unconscious. When his eyelids peel apart... *something is wrong.*

ADAM

I gotta use a bathroom . . .

As Adam uses the table to push himself up, Linda falls out of her chair.

ARTHUR

Linda!

Adam, struggling on his feet, sees Arthur rush to his niece's aid. Adam's attention peers over to a hammer-wielding Yolonda.

Adam attempts to mutter a response when Yolonda strikes the back of Arthur's head. His muscles agitate once he smashes onto the floor.

As Arthur groans, Adam uses the fridge as a support system... guides his back against it... he shoves off... that's when his eyes roll back --- Adam smashes down. Out cold.

Yolonda studies her scene - blood barrels from a twitching-Arthur's impact wound. She kneels down, rolls him on his back.

Yolonda corrects her posture, raises the hammer and **descends** it -- the action dismantles Arthur's lower jaw. Can spew his religious dogma no longer.

Though unorthodox in its completion, step one is done. Yolonda tosses the tool into her sink.

HARD CUT TO:

BLACK.

OVER THAT...

The point of a shovel scoops dirt and tumbles it atop of a sobbing Linda.

LINDA
(muffled)
Please, God!!! No, no, please!

EXT. BACKYARD - YOLONDA'S HOUSE - HOURS LATER

Behind the shed: a home-made grave. Yolonda continues piling soil on top of its occupants --- Arthur's corpse rests on a handcuffed Linda and a handcuffed Adam. A howling beseech;

LINDA
(muffled)
Pleaseeeeeee! Yolonda, I didn't do anything to you, please!

More to herself;

YOLONDA
(heaving dirt)
You keep thinking that, child.

Linda's vociferous supplication refuses to terminate. Yolonda clocks her with the shovel. Knocks her out.

An alert Adam keeps still. The space between Linda and Arthur's interlocked limbs allow dirt to drop on his face.

Yolonda, exhausted, sticks the shovel in the grass. Takes a breath. Adam's eyes perk up when she removes the weeding-gloves and walks off.

Adam hears the back door open. On that, he shifts the best he can - his ankles are handcuffed, too. Another groaning shift... the back porch light now sheds some light on the burial - two stab wounds in Adam's stomach.

Just when he feels it's all over, Adam spots Linda's purse. His fastened hands grab the bag + drag it in his lap. Adam empties it.

Countless of those metal hair clips topple out. He throws the bag aside and grabs two; inserts them the lock and picks.

No luck. He pulls his kneecaps to his chest - rolls up a pant leg. Adam stuffs the hair clips in his sock. Pain not subsiding, he rotates over to a section more spacious.

Adam places his feet on top of Arthur. He throws his bounded wrists outside of the hole, and plants them on the grass. It aches to pull himself up...

As soon as Adam pops out from the grave, a gun barrel smacks him in the temple.

HARD CUT TO:

BLACK.

INT. SHED - YOLONDA'S YARD - THE NEXT MORNING

Adam is propped against an elongated rack - one that's home to multiple emptied shelves. He continues this laggard motion of swaying forward and backward, in hoped of knocking something down.

There are two fresh stab wounds in his upper and lower back.

His mouth is bounded by a cut of moldy fabric. His legs are straight ahead - ankles still linked by handcuffs. His wrists are handcuffed behind his back.

In his oblique and between Adam's shoulder blades are two fresh stabbed wounds.

Outside footsteps cease Adam's motion. The door opens...

Who wouldn't be an intimidating figure has managed to instilled Adam with veracious fear... Yolonda. A six-shooter tucked in her jean's waist band.

YOLONDA
Surprised, ain't ya?

Tears well.

YOLONDA (CONT'D)
That taste a little funky?

It certainly does.

YOLONDA (CONT'D)
I figured. Took some time to find on account of the police not helpin' in the slightest. But, when there's a will, there's a way.
(reaching behind pants)
Ain't far off from this --

Yolonda acquires something -- Peter's military-issued knife.
Chris's gift. The very gift that claimed Jerome's soul.

Her daunting, knife-wielding steps inward make Adam vomit.

YOLONDA (CONT'D)

Ah, can't have you going on me just
yet --

She cuts his mouth free. The leftover, liquidized dessert
slaps against the floor.

YOLONDA (CONT'D)

You ain't got a clue of the
heartbreak that the last name
Armstrong caused me, do ya?

ADAM

Pl - please, you got the wrong -

YOLONDA

Oh, wrong guy, right? Different
Armstrong?

Adam tries to compose himself.

YOLONDA (CONT'D)

I wanna know somethin', Adam. Who
gonna miss you the absolute most?

Adam can't look in her direction.

YOLONDA (CONT'D)

Any idea what it's like to lose
someone you love?

Yolonda kneels down, places his injured back against the
racks.

ADAM

Y- yes, I do.

YOLONDA

That's right. Your daddy.
They ain't ever caught who did
that, did they?

"No."

YOLONDA (CONT'D)

Ain't that funny. Police can't even
watch their own. Hm.
But, it's nice to know that you've
had these same thoughts.

Yolonda places the tip of the blade against Adam's bruised temple. He quivers while she drags it down his cheek ... his neck ...

YOLONDA (CONT'D)

The thoughts that keep you up at night.

... down his chest until, finally, stopping at his stomach.

YOLONDA (CONT'D)

That they ain't never eatin' another meal again.

Yolonda slaps the blade into Adam's belly. Though he doesn't, he *sure as hell* could scream. Yolonda tugs it out - continues her malevolent downward-drag.

YOLONDA (CONT'D)

(reaching his groin)

The fact they won't ever be havin' a child.

ADAM

Yolonda, please -

Yolonda whales the knife through Adam's jeans; soaking the denim is blood from his testicle area. *That* makes him scream.

She rips the knife out, guides it down his pant legs... Gently using the blade to toy with his toes...

YOLONDA

(toying with his toes)

And, above all else, they ain't never... ever, takin' another step.

Two quick insertions; left foot, right foot. Yolonda stabs the bottom of his feet. She wipes the blade against a near-unconscious Adam's shirt.

YOLONDA (CONT'D)

Those are some of the thoughts that ate me alive the last twenty-somethin' years.

(arising)

You only gotta deal with 'em 'til you bleed out.

ADAM

(soft)

Please, God --

"Ha." That amuses Yolonda.

YOLONDA

Here --

Yolonda rips the rosary off her neck and drops it in Adam's bloodied lap.

YOLONDA (CONT'D)

Lemme know what good it does ya.

A ghost faced Adam sees her off. His forward slump is accompanied with some hissing breaths. He spits up an abhorrent amount of blood after a cough.

Breaths. Not too deep, though - injuries won't allow that.
"Okay. Last chance."

Adam rolls over and inches his cuffed hands down his back, maneuvers them around his pants until they reach his feet. His fingers pinch the top of his sock - he tugs it downward. Operation sock-removal is painstaking. But, he soon rips it off -- hair clips spill out.

Adam pulls his kneecaps to his chest - sneaks his connected wrists under his person - it's a struggle but he won't stop until his hands are in front of him. It works.

He corrects his posture. Grabs two hair clips and sticks them in the ankle-lock... Adam is picking the lock.

Adam's face, as he and the hair clips work through procedure - ask one thing; "Please, God. Don't give up on me."

It works. The cuffs linking his feet together fall to the floor.

ADAM

(quiet)

Yes! Oh, God, yes, thank you.

Now, his arms. Adam inserts the clips. Concentrates every ounce of his focus on this life-altering task.

Soon, that beautiful sound of a disengagement.

Adam's arms are released. There current gelatin-like stature won't cut it. Adam partakes in weak arm circles.

Paler than an egg-shell, Adam uses one of the emptied shelves to yank himself up. Much like a baby, he falls to the floor the moment he's on two legs.

ADAM (CONT'D)

(quiet)

No, no, not now, come on -

Adam ignores (the best he can) the unendurable discomfort of rubbing his legs for activation. Once they're in position, Adam again uses a shelf for help up.

One steps turn to two... two turn to three ... three to four. Each harrowing step leaves a trail of blood.

Adam reaches the shed door. He twists the knob, *s l o w*, and barely pushes the door open. Adam slithers out into the night.

EXT. BACKYARD - YOLONDA'S HOUSE - A MOMENT LATER

Adam staggers through the grass. About sixty feet ahead; the house; approx. eighty-hundred feet ahead. For the interior, not one light is on. Adam's destination: the fence.

He heads for it after lowering himself into an army crawl position. He trudges along and reaches the gate...

"*Shit.*" Locked.

Adam works through the excruciating act of standing. He glances through a back porch window; nothing changed. Adam grabs a handful of fence and begins climbing. His flat-foot wounds spurt blood; the pain is too immense.

Adam drops in the grass.

His eyes move to his next destination. The *only* destination. The back entrance. Except, something has changed ... the kitchen light is on.

Rolling back on all fours, Adam makes his way through the grass, up a few agonizing steps until reaching the back door.

He peeps in... no sign of her. Below both the pace of a snail and the sound of a church mouse, Adam twists the door handle - *unlocked.*

INT. HALLWAY - YOLONDA'S HOUSE - A MOMENT LATER

Adam finds no point in closing the door once he pulls himself inside. Soothing jazz from the kitchen.

Blood-stained steps down the corridor...

As he closes on the kitchen, the light exposes Adam and, specifically, his fresh scars. . .

the music stops...

Adam freezes. Prepares. The very moment he steps forward -

POP! Yolonda fires the revolver. His wounded-feet dodging-act makes Adam slips. He lands on the hardwood hall...

She steps out from the kitchen. The woman and her gun hover above Adam - a colossal sense of leverage. Yolonda pulls the hammer back ...

Adam, with what may be his last grain of strength, sprouts up and tackles Yolonda; a *SHOT* goes off in the ceiling. They spill into the --

INT. KITCHEN - YOLONDA'S HOUSE - SAME

They crash into the kitchen table - a photo album falls off it.

Though the force Adam uses to tear the gun away from Yolonda is enough to make him slip - he catches himself on the counter top.

Adam's back is to her - Yolonda obtains a butchers knife following a reach inside an opened drawer. She sinks the blade, deep, in his lower back.

ADAM

AH, fuck!

She rips the knife out of him and cocks back to commit the fatal wound ...

Adam whips around and fires! - a bullet strikes Yolonda's heart. She indulges in a glance at her lethal puncture.

Gun-drawn, Adam is prepared to end this. Yolonda, a firm palm pressed against her wound, staggers to the table. Slides out a chair - uses it.

The weapon's sights, what Adam uses to inspect Yolonda, show him that *Miss Watkins is in bad shape*. Her eyes are on her table-top.

Following some introspective and wheezing gusts, Adam lowers the revolver.

He careens over to the dinner table. Crouching down;

ADAM (CONT'D)

(agony)

God fucking Damn it...

He lifts himself up. Adam grabbed the photo album - sets it in front of Yolonda. Opens it for her. He too, yanks out a table seat. Flops down.

Yolonda leers at the young man while he admires the jet-black six-shooter. Then, he looks up from it. Adam and Yolonda's eyes connect. "Your move."

Adam's vision reverts back to the gun. His blood-stained teeth are shown when he chuckles to himself.

Adam slides the gun across the table. "Your move."

A costive, Yolonda pulls the weapon close. Runs a delicate finger over the trigger...

At a fractured pace, she rotates a bit. Straight ahead of her the dishwasher and faucet...

Yolonda tosses the .22 in the sink.

She faces him. For the first (and only) time, Adam and Yolonda are on a synchronized wave length.

As each take their final breaths, they've arrived at the same conclusion; hate has never, nor will it ever, cure hate. On them we

HARD CUT TO:

BLACK.