VERVE

MISSISSIPPI MUD

Written by

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FADE IN:

Dusk. A rural Mississippi countryside. Bleak and malevolent. Violent rain bludgeons the terrain.

Voice of a southern teenage girl.

GIRL (V.O.)
The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul...

Another desolate landscape. An old, rickety windmill struggles to keep up with the storm.

GIRL (V.O.)
...he leads me in the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow death I fear no evil...

Another landscape. Silo's dot the horizon, abandoned barns and overgrown barbwire fences serve as the only sign of human existence.

GIRL (V.O.)
...for you are with me; your rod and staff--they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies...

A sprawling meadow melting into the edge of the forest. Far in the distance sits a house--draped in darkness.

GIRL (V.O.)
...you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life...

INT.GIRLS BEDROOM.NIGHT

CLOSE ON HER FACE. A battered and swollen eye. The other one sitting above her tear streaked cheekbone. For the prayer she's composed herself best she could.

GIRL
...and I shall dwell in the house of the lord forever. Amen.

CONTINUED:

She crosses her chest and releases a shaky sigh.

QUICK SHOTS

--On her bureau stands a JESUS NATIVITY SET. She moves the Virgin Mary aside, lifts the barn and pulls out a key from underneath.

BED

She lays flat on the floor and reaches underneath the bed to pull out a CHEST.

--Locks pop. The CHEST jumps ajar. She pulls out a BLACK PLASTIC TRASH BAG tied closed with a knot.

--TRASH BAG and various items of clothing are stuffed into a backpack.

--Feet slip into a pair of RAIN BOOTS.

INT.KITCHEN.NIGHT

She scoops several handfuls of CHEERIOS into a Ziploc bag and seals it shut.

LATER

We are now facing the girl, looking directly into her sullen eyes. She speaks softly as to not wake anyone in the house.

GIRL
Forgive me lord for I have sinned.
But I have faith that you will
protect me....becuase this is what
you have chosen.

Flip to reveal she is in her BATHROOM, speaking to herself in the mirror.

INT.BATHROOM.NIGHT

Her gaze drops, she cups a handful of water into her mouth from the running faucet, then grabs her toothbrush and stuffs it into the backpack.

INT.HALLWAY.NIGHT

She creeps past a narrowly cracked bedroom door. A slight hesitation, she peeks in. T.V glare illuminates the room. A pair of feet sit motionless at the end of the bed.

BACK DOOR

She pulls on a yellow raincoat, flips the backpack strap over her shoulder, unlocks the door and slips out.

OUTSIDE

The downpour is tumultuous and unforgiving. Rain plummets her face. She heads into a barren field stretching into the horizon. At first she walks, after several steps it turns into a slow trot, she pulls the backpack straps over both shoulders and breaks into a hysterical sprint into the darkness.....

INT.FIRST NATIONAL BANK.DAY

CHASE WALDRUP (35) simple, friendly and his PREGNANT WIFE, RILEY (31), a no bullshit bitch with the attitude to boot, wait in a small, downscale, bank lobby. Riley is less than pleased to be here. Chase is oblivious to this.

CHASE
It's been rainin' for six days. You'd think the sky woulda ran outta water. And I hear it worse up in uh, Carroll County...supposedly it's really comin' down up there. Don't imagine it's too good for the farmers...can't be too good for the farmers up there. Thing is when there's a drought all you hear 'em talkin' 'bout is needin' rain but soon as it gets to rainin'--

RILEY
You got somethin' you plan on sayin' when we get in there?

CHASE
Whaddaya mean?

RILEY
Whaddaya mean 'whaddya mean'? A plan. Some way to dig us outta this mess.

CONTINUED:

CHASE
I was gonna hear what Sam had to--
I don't have nothin' written down
but--Riley, there ain't much to
say. Facts are facts.
(Beat)
It might not be as bad as you think
anyhow...Show some faith.
(Long pause)
The world ain't comin' to an end.

RILEY
Our's is.

CHASE
Last time he said he'd run the
numbers again and see if--

RILEY
I know what he said, Chase.

A DOOR opens off screen drawing the attention of both of them.

From the office emerges LUTHER GUTHRIE (40's), carrying the rugged disposition of man who the world hasn't been very nice to and in return hasn't been very nice to the world.

Following him is SAM WEBB (40's) a portly fellow with a kind face. They seem to have been discussing something heavy. Luther and Chase exchange a glance. Tension. There's history.

WEBB
Mr. and Mrs. Waldrup, pleasure to
see ya again.

INT.SAM WEBB'S OFFICE.MOMENTS LATER

Simple, blue collar. The faux wood decor is decorated with a framed picture of Ronald Reagan. An American flag stands in the corner next to a plastic Ficus plant.

Webb sits reclined in his chair. The Waldrups sit across the desk from him, erect, tense. Neither party at ease.

WEBB
Boy, it's rainin' out there.

RILEY
Cats 'n dogs.

CHASE
Dogs n' cats.

CONTINUED:

Short beat.

CHASE
I hear it's really comin' down out in Carroll County.

WEBB
Is that right?

CHASE
That's what they're sayin'.

WEBB
Can't be too good for the farmers.

CHASE
Don't imagine it is.

Another short, uncomfortable beat.

WEBB
Why don't you tell me how that job hunt comin' along, Chase?

CHASE
Good. Good, well uh, nothin's came about yet but it's only been, oh...
(Looks at Riley for help)
What's it been three months? Three months and a Sunday or two?

RILEY
Sixteen weeks.

CHASE
Sixteen weeks. So I'm guessin' somthin's fixin' to fall inta place soon.

WEBB
Uh-huh. How 'bout you Mrs. Waldrup, any luck with a second job yet?

RILEY
Hospital won't allow it, 'member? We been over this. Nurses ain't permitted to--

WEBB
Right, that's right, you did run that by me.

CONTINUED:

Webb leans forward and uncomfortably shuffles through loose papers on his desk.

WEBB
We'll here's the thing, you see, I ran your numbers again and the only way it could work is--well, you see, okay, well, it's been over thirty days since the Notice to Accelerate, so at this point we can't accept a partial payment no more... you're gonna hafta pay the entire delinquent amount plus all the late fees that've been rackin' up. This was all in the demand letter.

CHASE
Demand letter? We never received no deman--

RILEY
Yeah we did, Chase.

WEBB
You see now--

RILEY
You said--

WEBB
Sorry, go ahead.

RILEY
Last time you said there was a way for us to pay it down in increments.

WEBB
With all due respect, Mrs. Waldrup, you folks been defaulting on your mortgage payments for some time now...we're talkin',this is, I mean this is stretching back even before you were laid off, Chase. Now thirty days have passed since the notice to accelerate was issued and--

RILEY
Quit with all the bank jargon, Sam.

Webb clears his throat. Tries again.

CONTINUED:

WEBB
That opportunity you're talkin' 'bout came 'n went. The demand letter came on what, the 14th? Y'all have 'bout two weeks before the court's gonna go 'head with the foreclosure process. At that point--

RILEY
There's gotta--

WEBB
Sorry, go ahead.

RILEY
There's gotta be somekinda, uh...loophole or somekinda system for folks outta work.

CHASE
What if I say to hell with the unemployment checks and instead I, uh... naw,that wouldn't work neither.

WEBB
Listen. The bank doesn't wanna seize your house any more than you wanna give it up. We ain't in the business of owning real estate, we make our money when people pay their mortgage.

RILEY
Whaddaya tryin'a say?

Webb opens his mouth to respond to Riley.

RILEY
(pointing at her stomach)
An' what am I s'posed to do 'bout her?

CHASE
Her? I thought we was gonna wait till it came out.

RILEY
Well it's a her.

Chase's mouth breaks into goofy, self conscious grin.

CONTINUED:

CHASE
A baby girl. Ain't that a blessin'...

Riley sits arms folded, her eyes still locked on Webb, awaiting an answer.

WEBB
At this point with the mortgage payments and the credit card debt and the issues with the IRS I'd say filing for bankruptcy is most likely your best bet.

RILEY
Bankruptcy? Jesus Christ.

WEBB
There's also, well you see, there's one more um...

RILEY
Go 'head with it.

WEBB
Certain bank policy issues that are out of my, uh, my-- well, due to your..infractions, regretfully I have to inform you that we're gonna have to put a nine month suspension on your banking account here too.

RILEY
Meaning?!

WEBB
It's bank policy. Policies that are outta my, uh, my juris--

RILEY
Meaning?!

WEBB
You'll be able to withdraw what's left in the account there but for the next 275 days you won't be allowed to make any new deposits. You're frozen out so to speak. It's bank policy.

CHASE
Christ Sam we went boar huntin' together!
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

CHASE (CONT'D)
Don’t that gimme some kind of uh,...special--there isn’t nothin’ you can do? No kind of exception you can make?

WEBB
Certain bank policy iss--

RILEY
What about your boy, Sam. How do feel about those policies?

Chase shoots his wife a pointed look. Webb’s demeanor stiffens.

RILEY
(eye’s locking on Webb)
If I could twist a few screws to help him out you know damn well I would.
(beat)
I need you to twist.

Webb stares hard into Riley’s eyes. His jaw clenches subtly. A nerve’s been hit. He decides not to address her question.

WEBB
Wayne and Rhetta Beasley lost their home last September and I'd be lyin’ if I said it waddn't hell at first but they’re okay now. Got a new place out in Tallahatchie County. Wayne found himself a job at the correctional facility up there and Rhetta ,uh...not 'zactly sure what she does but the point is they're alright. When you feel up for it take a look over this packet.
(Slides packet across desk)
It'll help get y'all back standing after the dust settles...Things don't always work out the way we 'spect them to but they always work themselves out some way or 'nother. You folks are gonna be just fine now.

Webb tries his best to eke out a smile. The room reverberates a silent, uneasy tension.

INT. WALDRUP TRUCK. DUSK

Chase sits behind the wheel. Riley slumped against the passenger window. No words. A CROSS methodically swings back and forth from the rearview mirror as the truck moves along the road.

Squeaky wipers and the distinct sound of rain pinging off the roof save us from complete silence. Zero eye contact. Then, finally.

CHASE
(softly)
He said the Beasley's are doin' fine...so..ya know...we might be, uh,....things aren't, uh...

Chase's voice trails off. Riley's eyes stay locked straight ahead. More silence. They arrive outside the nurse's entrance at HUMPHREYS COUNTY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL.

Riley, eyes still fixed ahead.

RILEY
I get off at 6:30. Try not to forget.

She gets out and SLAMS the door behind her.

INT. BASEMENT. DAY

At the bottom of rickety basement steps sits a behemoth of a REFRIGERATOR. Chase stares at the beast, sizes it up, then looks at the steep narrow stairs behind him. A seemingly impossible task.

Chase stands backwards on the steps and carefully lowers the fridge down horizontally onto its side. The wooden steps creak under the weight.

He grabs the top of the fridge; hunched over at an awkward angle. With a grunt he begins to drag the fridge backwards up the steps.

Slow and unsure, he blindly steps backwards with his left foot and plants it on the next step. He pauses. The cumbersome fridge shifts its weight. Chase struggles to adjust his grip.

Another grunt. A pause. Then his right foot cautiously inches back in the same manner as the left, desperately searching for the next step.

CONTINUED:

He pulls the fridge with all his might; it budges, just barely, the steps moan. Sweat has already begun to bead around his brow. Chase cranes his neck to look behind him. The door at the top of the stairs is a lifetime away.

LATER

Chase is near the top of the staircase. Two or three steps left. Breath is heavy. He steps back slowly and steady with the left foot, phase one of this cyclical method. He yanks on the fridge.

It doesn't budge. He yanks again, harder. His hand slips. The fridge starts to slide. Frantic hands search for a hold. The refrigerator shifts off its course and ferociously crushes his knuckles against the wall. He screams in agonizing pain and inherently clutches the wounded hand.

The fridge starts on a rapid free fall back down the steps and ends in a deafening CRASH back at the bottom. An hour's work undone in a moment.

INT. ELDERLY WOMAN'S KITCHEN. NIGHT

Chase and an ELDERLY WOMAN stand in front of the fridge.

ELDERLY WOMEN
I think I like the othuh wall betta.
(ponders)
Yeah, put it 'gainst the othuh wall.

Off Chase's expression.

EXT. ELDERLY WOMEN'S DRIVEWAY. NIGHT

Chase stands outside his PICK UP TRUCK. Rain beats down. He examines his bloody, tissue wrapped hand, tries to make a fist, cringes in pain.

The front door of the house opens, the ELDERLY WOMAN ambles out sheltered by an UMBRELLA. She makes her way over to Chase and hands the umbrella to him.

ELDERLY WOMEN
Hold it over me.

Chase abides.

CONTINUED:

She hands Chase a small amount of cash, mostly singles. Then unscrews a JAR pinned under her arm, scoops out a handful of change and begins to count it out.

ELDERLY WOMEN
Been tryin' to get rid of this for some time now.

CHASE
Yes, Ma'am.

ELDERLY WOMEN
I'm sure ya don't mind.

CHASE
No, Ma'am.

She finishes counting and dumps the change into Chase's bloodied bandage. Chase eyes his earnings. No more than $25.

CHASE
You take care now.

The elderly women takes her umbrella back and walks away inviting the rain to spit on Chase's head. Chase opens the door to his pickup truck and climbs in. He sits brooding in silent anger. Distraught. Exhausted. He watches the elderly women hobble back inside and close her front door.

SMACK! A handful of coins explode on the windshield and scatter across the dashboard onto the upholstery. Chase erupts into an animalistic rage. Rapidly and violently he pummels the STEERING WHEEL with both fists.

ACROSS THE STREET

From a distance we watch a grown man have a spoiled toddlers conniption. His cry is inaudible. All that can be heard are the short, spastic whimpers teetering out of the horn.

INSIDE THE TRUCK

Then, as fast as the outrage began, it ends. Tears follow. He sobs hard. The way a man cries when he's been holding it in for years.

Deep breaths. He wipes away snot, tears and saliva from his face. Still weeping, he bends down and begins to pick up the coins strewn across his truck floor.

INT. WALDRUP PICKUP TRUCK. NIGHT

Chase travels down the road. Rain falls down in sheets, assaulting the windshield, rendering visibility non-existent.

He mumbles to himself, eyes his severed knuckles, then mumbles some more. He glances at the FOLDER from the bank resting on the passenger side dashboard.

He stares at it a beat, contemplates, then grabs the FOLDER and pulls it onto his lap. Checks the road then pulls out one of the sheets of paper and begins to study it.

The information makes him frown. He flips the sheet over in a search for better news; squints and tries to make out the fine print.

THUD! A heavy, wet object bangs off the front of the truck. Chase slams on the breaks, his truck comes skidding to a stop on the slick road.

CHASE
What in the Sam hill?!

EXT. ROAD. NIGHT

We sit road level facing Chase's truck. One HEADLIGHT is out, the other illuminates the sea of rain falling from the ink black sky.

Chase timidly steps out and makes his way to check the damage.

He peers back down the road. Blackness stretching into eternity. Waits for his eyes to adjust. He squints and is able to spot a figure about 150 feet back, pushed off to the side of the road.

Chase slowly walks towards it. Each step brings with it additional angst. Shrouded in a haunting darkness all that can be heard is the rapid patter of rain colliding with asphalt.

Chase approaches, curious at first, but as he nears and the figure begins to take shape, his curiosity gives way to trepidation.

Wrapped in a blood sodden raincoat lays the RUNAWAY GIRL. Neck mangled, body contorted into an inhuman shape.

CONTINUED:

Chase gasps and jams a fist into his mouth. He kneels down and lightly shakes her in a weak attempt to bring the fresh corpse back to life.

CHASE
Oh Lord....Oh, Jesus fucking Christ. Fuck. Fuck, fuck....fuck.

He stands, surveys his surroundings. Nothing. No witnesses, not even the moon saw him.

As he glares at the muddled body he draws a forearm across his brow to clear rain. What now? Several seconds pass. He looks around again, just for good measure, then uses the heel of his boot to nudge the body further off the road into a shallow ditch.

CHASE
Jesus Christ. Jesus fuckin' Christ.

The body slides to a rest, Chase looks around once again then slowly trots back to his idling TRUCK.

Three quarters of the way between the BODY and his TRUCK, HEADLIGHTS pop over the horizon, several hundred yards away, heading towards him.

CHASE
Christ.

Temporary paralysis suffocates him. He eyes his TRUCK, then the BODY, then the oncoming HEADLIGHTS, then back to his TRUCK again.

Impulse kicks in. He runs to the TRUCK, hops in, throws it in reverse and guns it <u>backwards</u> to the body. Tires spit rain water.

He hops out and pops down the TAILGATE on his truck bed. Checks the distance of the approaching vehicle. Impending doom.

He grabs the body by the wrists and tries to drag it out of its shallow grave. The dead weight is stubborn, he struggles, losing grip several times letting the body slide back into the muddy ditch.

Finally, he gets a solid grip under her armpits and is able to pull her out onto the road.

CHASE
Jesus fuckin' Christ!

CONTINUED:

He props the body into a sitting position then squats, bear hugs her around the shoulders, and with a guttural snort, power lifts her torso into the truck bed. THUD. Her legs dangle freely out off the tailgate.

He pauses for a moment--sucks wind. The body begins to slide off the tailgate, he catches her. After he secures the body in his arms he takes several deep breaths, fighting exhaustion and preparing for the next big heave.

He lifts the body all the way into the TRUCK BED. Grabs a TARP and scrambles to cover as much of the body as he can; a poor attempt.

The approaching car is now mere yards away, it becomes evident the once unidentifiable vehicle is a POLICE CRUISER.

The CRUISER pulls up parallel to Chase in sync with him shutting the tailgate.

Officer DALE WERNER(28),rail thin, and green behind the ears, stops his cruiser and rolls down the window. He exudes a quirky, boyish innocence.

WERNER
Evenin', partner. You stuck?

CHASE
No. Well, yeah, I was, I uh, managed to drag her on out.

WERNER
Yup, it's a tough night. F-150's rarely get stuck. I seen plenty of Silverado's suckin' mud, it's rare to see a 150.

Chase stands still as a statue, numb to the biting rain.

CHASE
Yeah, well, she's gettin' old so...

WERNER
Ain't we all, partner. How old is she?

CHASE
What?

WERNER
Your truck. How old is she? Looks like a ninety six.

CONTINUED:

CHASE
Ninety four.

WERNER
Mmmmm. Could be why she's gettin' stuck.

CHASE
Could be.

WERNER
I see Silverado's eatin' mud all the time but I'll be damned if I ever seen a 150.

CHASE
Well she's gettin' old so...

WERNER
Yeah, you said that.

Awkward silence. Idling engines and rain patter.

WERNER
Don't let her die.

CHASE
Wh-what?

WERNER
You leave that engine runnin' long 'nough she gon' stall out 'n you gon' be stuck all over again.

CHASE
Right, well I'd better get goin' then. I 'preciate it officer.

WERNER
Alrighty, stay dry, partner.

Werner rolls up his window and pulls away. Chase's tension dissipates.

The cruiser doesn't move but five feet before it stops abruptly. Red break lights elucidate Chase's face. Werner slowly backs up until he is even with Chase again and rolls the window back down.

WERNER
You ain't happen to see a teenage girl runnin' about?

CONTINUED:

Chase is frozen once again. His brain trying to play catch up.

WERNER
Luther Guthrie’s girl done ran off. To be honest it don't much surprise me. She always has been a wild card. Was only a matter of time before--well, it ain’t any business of mine I suppose. Give us a holler if ya spot her, will ya?

CHASE
I’ll keep an eye out.

WERNER
Alrighty partner, stay dry.

Hanging overhead we watch the rain fall away as the cruiser drives off. In Chase's TRUCK BED the blatant outline of a human body, poorly hidden under a TARP; feet sticking out and all.

INT. HUMPHRY’S MEMORIAL HOSPITAL. YOUNG BOY’S ROOM. NIGHT

A HEART MONITOR beeps. A RESPIRATOR hisses. Tubes run out of a gravely ill YOUNG BOY.

Riley enters with a tray of food and places it beside him.

RILEY
Kitchen says we’re runnin’ outta spinach. I tried tellin’ ‘em it’s just a little boy but they convinced Popeye’s in here eatin’ it all up.

The boy fights to smile.

RILEY
You’re looking stronger every day. ‘Fore long your muscles gon’ bust out your shirt.

The boy emits a weak giggle. Riley leans in close, brushes the hair back off his forehead.

RILEY
(hushed)
I’m proud of you.

CONTINUED:

INT. NURSE'S QUARTERS. MOMENTS LATER

Riley enters the room, plucks off her gloves and begins washing her hands. Another nurse, LYNETTE, washes her hands at the next sink.

RILEY
He's on his way out.

LYNETTE
Sorry, Riley.

RILEY
Don't waste your sympathy on me.
(beat)
I dunno what's worse; when they got no shot at all or when there's help just outta arms reach like that boy in there.

LYNETTE
They both end up in the same place.

RILEY
But they don't have to is my point.
(beat)
Who ever said 'money ain't everything' musta had a shit ton of it.

Another nurse pops her head in the door.

NURSE
Chase on the phone.

HALLWAY

Riley saunters over towards a PHONE mounted on the wall. Picks up.

RILEY
What.
(Listens)
WHAT?!

EXT/INT. WALDRUP TRUCK. NIGHT

Chase sits in his idling truck outside the hospital. Wet hair plastered to his forehead, clothes stuck to his skin. His mind running laps trying to digest what just happened and how to explain it.

CONTINUED:

The trance breaks when he spots Riley jogging out from the hospital, newspaper over her head to shield her from the rain. She scurries up to the passenger door and pulls. It's locked.

RILEY
Damnit, Chase!

Chase snaps to and unlocks the door. Riley climbs in. She looks at him anticipating an explanation, instead he simply returns the stare.

RILEY
Speak!

CHASE
I was comin' back from Greta's place after haulin' that fridge 'n on my way home I stopped over at Gravelston Farm to pick up some eggplant 'cause I was hoping you'd fix up one of them eggplant casseroles but they wasn't sellin' em'cause of the rain n' all. But at that point I had my mind set on eggplant cassarole so I headed over to that stand out there on Rokeby with the little boy who got the eye that point in towards his nose but they had the road blocked off, somethin' 'bout downed power lines then--

RILEY
Whaddaya mean you <u>think</u> you <u>killed</u> someone?

CHASE
I was gettin' to that.

RILEY
How you know for sure they dead?

CHASE
She dead.

RILEY
How!?

CHASE
I think her neck was broke.

CONTINUED:

RILEY
I'm sayin' how you know she dead for sure?

CHASE
She dead, Ry.

Riley buries her face into her hands.

RILEY
This can't be real.

CHASE
I'm tryin' to figure out why Guthrie's daughter was just walkin' 'round in the rain like that.

Riley's head pops out of her hands.

RILEY
Guthrie?! As in Luther Guthrie?! Isn't he the one who you--

CHASE
Yeah.

RILEY
Jesus. He's gonna think--

CHASE
I know.

RILEY
How you know it was her?

CHASE
That's what the cop said.

RILEY
Cop?!

CHASE
He ain't see her.

RILEY
Cop?!

CHASE
He ain't see her, Ry.

RILEY
Why was police there?!

CONTINUED:

CHASE
The girl ran off from home. Cop was lookin' for her.

RILEY
And he saw you?!

CHASE
Yeah, but I had already hid her body.

RILEY
Hid her body!? Jesus fuck, Chase. You better hope you wasn't spotted.

CHASE
Ain't no way. I was all the way up on route 149, nobody saw me. But here's the issue I took--

RILEY
You know one of them farmers up there is gon' find her first thing in the mornin'. Then the whole state gon' be lookin' for who done it and that cop gonna put two and two together.

CHASE
They ain't gon' find her, Riley, that's the issue I--

RILEY
The hell they won't. Right there on the side of the road like that. Won't take 'em but a few minutes.

CHASE
They ain't gon' find her.

RILEY
No? On what miracle?

Chase glances into the REARVIEW MIRROR. Riley doesn't understand. Chase jerks his head several times back towards the TRUCK BED. This time Riley follows the cue. She twists around and peers through the WINDOW back into the TRUCK BED where her eyes find the TARP COVERED BODY.

She looks back at Chase. He studies her expression. SLAP! Riley's hand across his face.

CONTINUED:

CHASE
I couldn't just leave her there! By the time I seen she was dead there was another car on top of me!

RILEY
So you took her?! That's about the dumbest thing you coulda done!

Chase's eyes tell us he's realizing just how fucked he is.

CHASE
I dunno, I could--what if--whaddaya say we just roll her out here in front of the ER? It'll look like she died on the way.

RILEY
If brains was grease you couldn't slick the head of a pin. Think 'about what you're sayin' before you say it.

Chase doesn't realize why his "plan" doesn't line up.

RILEY
They get hold of her n' forensics won't only tell how you killed her but what you had for supper 'fore you did it.

Anger and fear wells inside his gut.

CHASE
(shouting)
She was in the middle of the road! In the rain! In the dark!

RILEY
(shouting back)
And she's dead! What's your point!?

Chase ponders.

CHASE
It was a damn accident. People will understand.

RILEY
What people?

Chase studies his wife's face. Has something he wants to say, quietly deliberates wether he should say it.

CONTINUED:

CHASE
I could tell the police I found her on the road and was tryin' to save her and I was bringin' her here and that--and that, she musta, she musta, died after I left.

RILEY
Why would you just leave her here?!

CHASE
I dunno Ry,with the storm and the, the--there's always deer jettin' cross that road. They'll understand.
(beat)
I'll think of somthin'.

RILEY
'You'll think of somethin'. Chase, if you go to the police you won't be comin' back.

CHASE
And I ain't gonna have you dodging the law when you got my daughter in your stomach.

RILEY
We ain't have to run! The girl up an' ran off on her own which means she gotta reason to be missin'. They're lookin' for a runaway girl not a suspect.

CHASE
How you know the forensics won't come looking for us?

Riley considers taking a low blow but decides against it.

RILEY
In three months I'm having this baby and she ain't being raised without her father. End of discussion.

Chase goes quiet. Can't argue against that.

CHASE
Alright. What's next then?

CONTINUED:

CLOSE UP ON A BEDSIDE CLOCK. The second hand sweeps past making it 5:15 AM. BEAU SAWYER(60's) lays in bed, his eyes watching the ceiling fan.

INT. SAWYERS BEDROOM. DAWN

A faint blue glow seeps in through the curtains. The room is barren, unwelcoming. If a woman ever lived here she is long gone.

With a grunt, Sawyer swings his legs out of bed and sits looking off into space. He rubs his knees, his elbows, coughs up some phlegm that has accumulated in his lungs over night, then stands.

He heads towards the bathroom walking with the unsteady hobble of a man who has seen life catch up with him.

BATHROOM

He shaves in front of a fogged mirror.

CLOSE UP

Two feet slipping into black boots.

KITCHEN

Two eggs breaking into a pan.

A COFFEE MUG being filled half way with coffee, the other half with WHISKY.

Dressed in POLICE UNIFORM, Beau Sawyer sits alone at his Formica kitchen table in the lonely silence that he has grown accustomed to. He chews his eggs, disengaged; his eyes cold and distant.

EXT. POLICE STATION. DAY

On an angle high and wide above the local police station we watch a cruiser pull into the puddle ridden parking lot. Sawyer steps out, walks through the mud and into the building.

INT. POLICE STATION. DAY

The interior reflects the consequences of statewide budget cuts. An elderly secretary, BETSY (60'S) greets him.

CONTINUED:

BETSY
How you doin' this mornin', sir?

SAWYER
Still north of the dirt.

INT. POLICE STATION. BACKROOM. MOMENTS LATER

Werner sits reclined in a chair watching the morning news. Sawyer enters.

WERNER
Sheriff.

SAWYER
Deputy.

Sawyer takes a seat adjacent to Werner, coffee mug in his hand. After a few moments of silence...

SAWYER
(re: the tv)
Anythin' good?

Werner thinks.

WERNER
Lots a rain.

SAWYER
Mmhmm.

Both men continue to gaze at the screen. The newscaster talks about what else--rain. Sawyer sips his coffee. For the duration of the conversation neither of them take their eyes off the TV.

WERNER
Luther Guthrie's girl snuck out the house last night and she ain't been home yet.

SAWYER
Mmhmm.

WERNER
I was thinkin' maybe I would ride over there in a bit, do some investigative work.

SAWYER
Mmhmm.

CONTINUED:

Long pause.

WERNER
Wanna ride with?

SAWYER
Mmhmm.

INT.GUTHRIE'S KITCHEN. DAY

LUTHER GUTHRIE, MRS. GUTHRIE and Beau Sawyer sit around the kitchen table. Werner stands behind Sawyer, arms folded. Luther fires up a cigarette. Sawyer addresses the couple with a calm, steady cadence.

SAWYER
Nobody is making those accusations, Luther. It's protocol, that's why I ask. And no, Ma'am, I ain't accusing you of poor parenting. Once again, just protocol.

LUTHER
Don't think I don't know what y'all think 'bout me. What ya'll think 'bout us.

SAWYER
It ain't like that, Luther.

WERNER
Luther, it ain't like that.

MRS. GUTHRIE
Well then how come you can just assume she up 'n ran off?

SAWYER
Well, Ma'am, I got a bevy of facts laid out in fronta me, you see, and facts don't lie.

WERNER
They don't lie, Ma'am.

SAWYER
It's my duty, as a law man, to examine those facts presented to the best of my ability.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

SAWYER (CONT'D)
If my intuition is on point, which it often is, those facts generally lead to me making some sort of assumption as to the course of events that took place. Now, your girl's missin'. Thats a fact. Some of her clothes is missin', too. That's also a fact. Her tooth brush is missin'....fact. With no sign of forced entry and no sign of a struggle I'd bet my chips that your girl left outta here on her own volition. Why? I dunno.

MRS. GUTHRIE
Don’t make no sense. She got no reason to leave. Got nowhere’s to go.

SAWYER
Perhaps. But the young are seldom rational.

LUTHER
So that’s that?
(smacks hands together)
Poof. She disappeared like piss in a lake. Now what? We supposed to sit on our ass till she come back? Is that what a law man does? Hell’s bells, I’ll be damned.
(To Mrs. Guthrie)
We can relax now knowing we got the Brothers Duke on the hunt.

MRS. GUTHRIE
Luther.

LUTHER
I’d hate to see you two wastin’ valuable time that could be spent eatin’ at Jackie’s and pullin’ cats outta trees.

Stone cold faces from Sawyer and Werner. Luther takes a long drag from his cigarette. Exhales. Then leans forward.

LUTHER
Betcha' this. If Howie Boykins little girl was missin' you'd have every cop in Mississippi lookin'. Hell you'd have the hounds out.

CONTINUED:

MRS. GUTHRIE
The state police at the very least.

WERNER
I can assure you--

LUTHER
The back door was open plain as day. Any swingin' dick coulda just walked on in here. Y'all seen the rain. Tell me who chooses to run away in a gully-washer like that? Fuck your facts.

MRS. GUTHRIE
Luther.

Sawyer is unfazed by Luther's rising temper.

SAWYER
You was born 'n bread in Louise, Luther. You know better than anyone how it is. Quiet town. Good people. Christian people. We don't bother nobody and nobody bothers us. Why your girl left?
(shrugs)
But then again there are a whole lot a things that happen in this world that I ain't sure of.

WERNER
She brought her dagum toothbrush, Luther.

Sawyer holds up his hand to indicate for Werner to stop but holds eye contact with the Guthries.

SAWYER
They got the point, deputy. My hunch tells me she gon' come back when she's ready n' willin. Like you said, she got nowhere to go.

EXT. JACKIE'S DINER. DAY

Establishing shot.

INT. JACKIE'S DINER. DAY

Sawyer and Werner sit in a booth.

CONTINUED:

WERNER
Know how they say you can tell it's fixin' to rain if the cows are lying down?

SAWYER
Somethin' 'bout tryin' to get a dry spot before the rain comes.

WERNER
Yessir. Well I was under the impression it was the humidity in the air that weakened their leg bones.

SAWYER
Mm.

WERNER
Either way tell me why I drove past the Keenan Ranch the other day and there wasn't but one cow lying down. Hell I think some of them was square dancin'. Buncha dumb cows.

SAWYER
Could be.
(beat)
Or perhaps the whole thing is bullshit.... Excuse the pun.

A waitress comes to fill their coffee mugs. She pours and leaves.

WERNER
Where you figure the Guthrie is?

SAWYER
Well, Dale, if I knew the answer to that question we wouldn't be sittin' here sippin' on coffee, now would we?

WERNER
I reckon not.
(beat)
She could be in a million places.

SAWYER
Yeah, but she's only in one.

CONTINUED:

WERNER
Yessir, that's true.

SAWYER
Odds are she's holed up somewhere drinkin' beer and smokin' dope with another delinquent who's equally if not more disgruntled than herself. When the fun runs short she'll be home.

WERNER
Comin' of age.

SAWYER
Loss of innocence.
(beat, to himself)
I suppose they're one in the same.

WERNER
I wonder if she knows how worried she got her daddy.

SAWYER
It would surprise me if she cared.

WERNER
Yessir. I figure we should start askin' 'round. You know, people who might have seen her or know where she of ran off to.

SAWYER
Wouldn't be a bad place to start. Gotta be delicate now , deputy. Wouldn't wanna stir up any commotion. Last thing we need is a big ol' misunderstandin...those often get messy.

P.O.V FROM GROUND

Riley and Chase stand over us, glaring downwards. They look perplexed, distraught, unnerved. Chase rubs his jaw. Riley pulls her hair back into a ponytail. We see fiber glass and piping in the ceiling, suggestive of an unfinished basement.

RILEY
Jesus. Fuckin'. Christ.

CONTINUED:

FLIP TO THEIR VIEW

We are now staring down at the mangled BODY, back pack resting next to it.

RILEY
She gotta go.

CHASE
Don’t look like she goin’ anywhere.

RILEY
Right now you’re lookin’ at first degree and I’m gonna be the accomp- uh, access--uh, whatever it is they give to the other person.

She bends down and pulls one of the girls boots off. Clunk.

CHASE
I don’t think those is your size.

Riley walks over to a small IRON FIREPLACE, yanks open the handle and pops the BOOT into the blaze. Chase looks on, dumbfounded, waiting for an explanation. Riley wipes her hands clean.

RILEY
No evidence, no crime.

She makes her way back over to the body and starts on the other boot.

RILEY
C’mon now, quit your dagum staring. This mess ain’t gon’ clean itself. All her clothes and everything in that bag need to go.

Riley pulls off the other BOOT, clunk, and brings it over to the FIREPLACE. Chase squats down, unzips the BACKPACK and pulls out some clothing.

RILEY
That’s how you wind up caught-- leaving belongings behind.

CHASE
(re:the body)
‘N whadda ‘bout her?

Riley pauses, eyes up the small fireplace then the body.

CONTINUED:

RILEY
Well God knows she ain’t fittin’ in there. You gon’ have to bury her out back.

Chase cringes at the thought. He continues to pull items from the BACKPACK and heave them over near the fireplace. The bag of CHEERIOS lands among them. Riley picks it up.

RILEY
No use in tossin’ these.

CHASE
Huh?

Chase is still on the floor digging through the back pack. He pulls out the knotted BLACK TRASH BAG.

RILEY
Were you not in the same bank as me earlier? Did you not hear what Sam Webb said? Things are changin' round here! Last time I checked food ain’t free and money don't grow on trees--

Chase lets out a high-pitch shriek, startling Riley and cutting her off mid sentence. He is on his knees holding the BLACK TRASH BAG bag open, mouth agape.

RILEY
What?!

Chase remains frozen, staring into the bag.

RILEY
What?!

In a trance, Chase methodically stands up clutching onto the trash bag, arms rigid as if holding a porcelain dish, eyes still fixated inside.

RILEY
Say somthin’ damnit!

He turns the bag upside down, dumping its contents. A throng of fat, rolled, RUBBER-BANDED BILLS flop onto the concrete floor landing with a pleasant flutter.

Riley's face softens, pure disbelief. She looks at the money, then up at Chase. Chase looks at Riley, then back down at the money. Both rendered speechless.

CONTINUED:

All that can be heard is the crackle of the fireplace, rain patter muffled through the basement windows.

A craggy old women's voice breaks the silence.

VOICE (O.S.)
What's burnin'?

A startled jump from Chase and Riley. They direct their attention to the voice atop the staircase. Riley ducks her head under the banister and looks up. Chase remains back near the body, out of sight.

Standing at the top of the staircase is an elderly women in a nightgown holding a hot water bag.

RILEY
Jesus, Momma you scared the piss outta me.

MOMMA
What in tarnation is gon' on down der? It smell like the south end of a north bound cat.

CHASE
We're just--

RILEY
(quickly)
--Chase.

MOMMA
Is that you down der, Chase?

Chase looks to Riley, "should I answer"? Riley looks back, "answer, idiot".

CHASE
Ye--yes, Ma'am.

MOMMA
Huh?

CHASE
(louder)
Yes, Ma'am.

Momma takes a step down.

RILEY CHASE
No! No!

CONTINUED:

She stops.

RILEY
Basements' flooded, Momma. You don't wanna come down here.

CHASE
Yeah, you stay put now. We don't need you comin' down here 'n breakin' a hip.

MOMMA
Day's a little young for bacon 'n grits.

CHASE
No, I said we don't nee--

RILEY
Momma, please, would you?

Silence. Long pause....

MOMMA
You want Johnnycakes, too?

RILEY
No, just--

CHASE
I'll take some Johnnycakes.

Riley shoots Chase a menacing glare. He reconsiders. We hold on the silence for a beat until we hear floor boards creak as Momma recedes into the kitchen.

Their attention then returns to the situation at hand. The couple stands there in a mesmerized gaze--before them lays a pile of money and a bootless dead girl.

RILEY
Baby, if God has a sense of humor we're lookin' at it.

EXT. GUTHRIE'S PORCH. DAY

A gentle breeze rustles the leaves knocking the last of the rain water loose. A lone crow caws somewhere in the distance.

Guthrie sits slumped languidly in his rocking chair. Swaying gently. A lit cigarette dangles from his lips.

CONTINUED:

His eyes glazed over, fixed on nothing in particular off in the distance. Worry. Remorse. Confusion. Grief.

The sound of an ENGINE brings him back. He lifts his eyes and turns his head towards the hum of the approaching vehicle. A glimmer of hope. He slowly rises from his chair and begins to make his way down the porch steps.

The source emerges from the cottonwoods. A MAIL TRUCK. It stops; the mailman puts a few envelopes in Guthrie's mail box and drives away.

Any seed of hope that had been planted immediately fades. Guthrie flicks the cigarette off the porch and heads back inside.

INT.GUTHRIE'S KITCHEN. MOMENTS LATER

Luther enters. Mrs. Guthrie is on the phone. They look at one another as she speaks.

MRS. GUTHRIE
(into phone)
Oh sure.
(listens)
Yes, of course.
(listens)
Thank you, Wilma...I will. Buh bye now.

She hangs up.

MRS. GUTHRIE
She ain't with Judee Ann either.

Mrs. Guthrie waits for some reassurance from Luther but is met instead with an agony stricken stare. Her chin quivers.

MRS. GUTHRIE
(frazzled)
Oh, Luther.

Luther walks over and embraces his wife. She buries her face in his shoulder. They share a moment of sadness...

MRS. GUTHRIE
I need you to tell me everything is gon' be alright.

Hesitation. Luther doesn't *know* if everything will be alright. He does his best.

CONTINUED:

LUTHER
She’s gonna come home. And she’ll knock right on that front door.

EXT. WALDRUP’S BACK YARD.DAY

We are looking down at the DEAD GIRL, wrapped in her raincoat. Her eyes, still open, stare right back. A calm, peaceful look on her face. Her skin has turned blueish gray, rigor mortis has taken it course.

Plop. A load of dirt splashes over her face. We pull back to see that she lays in a DITCH. Chase stands over her, sweating, fatigued. He throws another shovel load full of dirt over the body and wipes his brow.

INT. WALDRUP’S KITCHEN. DAY

Riley sits at the KITCHEN TABLE. Piles of BILLS in front of her have been separated by denomination. Mostly $1’s, $5’s and $10’s. Definitely not drug money.

She takes another roll, peels off the rubber-band, licks her thumb and begins to count.

Chase enters the kitchen and stands behind her. Sweat bleeds through his shirt around the chest and underarms, dirt covers his face and hands.

Riley eyes him up, takes it in, nods, then goes back to counting.

CHASE
Where’s your Mother?

No answer.

CHASE
Ry, where’s your--

RILEY
Shhh....countin’.

Riley finishes sorting the money in her hand.

RILEY
Momma’s at Sullivan’s.
(beat)
There’s already ‘nough here to cover all our debts and I ain’t done sortin’.

CONTINUED:

CHASE
With who?

RILEY
The bank, the IRS, the credit card whatever else.

CHASE
No, who did Momma go to Sullivan's with?

RILEY
Who you think she went with? Did you not hear what I said? There's over eight thousand dollars here and I ain't done countin'.

CHASE
I'm headed into town.

Riley takes her eyes off the money for the first time and turns to face Chase.

RILEY
For what?!

EXT. GAS STATION. DAY

A HIGH POWERED HOSE blows water into a TRUCK BED. Bloody water careens through the grooves of the truck bed and drips onto the ground. Chase's troubled eyes scan the surroundings.

EXT/INT.WALDRUP PICKUP TRUCK.DAY

Chase drives alone in silence. Exhausted eyes, the weight of the world on his shoulders. He SLAPS himself twice in the cheek trying to get a grip. The gravity of the situation beginning to set in.

INT. HARDWARE STORE. DAY

A bored STORE CLERK watches as Chase enters the door.

CHASE
Where your headlights?

CLERK
You mean headlamps?

CONTINUED:

CHASE
No, I mean headlights.

CLERK
No, you mean headlamps.

CHASE
No, I--what's the difference?

CLERK
Headlamp is the technical term for the device itself. Headlight is referin' to the beam of light it produces.

Chase returns a blank stare.

CLERK
Dodge, Ford or Chevy?

MOMENTS LATER

Chase stands in front of a row of HEADLAMPS. His eyes study the options.

MOMENTS LATER

Chase stands in front of the clerk. He places a HEADLAMP on the counter.

CLERK
That gon' be it?

CHASE
For now.
(beat)
I, uh, a damn deer hopped out in front my truck last night up on route 149.

CLERK
Mmm. 45.99.

CHASE
Outta nowhere. Boom! Cracked my damn headlight -er headlamp.

CLERK
Mmm.

CHASE
Nine point buck...smack dab in the middle of route 149.

CONTINUED:

CLERK
Mmm.
(beat)
Don't tend to see too many deer this time of year. You gon' need a bag for this?

Chase tenses, swallows hard.

CHASE
You callin' me a liar? I seen a deer. I hit the damn deer. I don't care what time of year it is I hit a damn deer up on 149 last night. Why else would I be in here buying a headli--uh, headlamp?

CLERK
Sir?

Chase throws some cash on the counter.

CHASE
Here. Gimme the damn light.

He grabs the HEADLAMP and begins to leave the store. The Clerk watches on, puzzled.

CHASE
Ya oughta a learn to mind your business!

INT. SAM WEBB'S OFFICE. DAY

Webb is on the phone.

WEBB (INTO PHONE)
Yeah, but I've been on hold for the last 45 minutes. I already gave out the uh, what the- what--

VOICE (THROUGH PHONE)
And I apologize for that, sir. Your reference number, please.

Webb refers to a piece of paper on his desk.

WEBB
I already-
(sigh)
...014-R352-G739.

CONTINUED:

VOICE
Okay.
(beat)
Thank you, sir.
(beat)
Unfortunately, looks here like your claim has been denied at this time.

WEBB
I know it's been denied, that's what-- that's why I'm calling.

VOICE
If you're calling regarding an appeal, sir, I will gladly forward you to our appeal's department.

WEBB
My appeals have been denied that's why--I was just on with the appeals department they transferred me over to you.

Beat.

VOICE
Okay, sir.....I do urge you to re-issue the claim in six months time. At that point--

WEBB
No, you see, that's --six months is just--

VOICE
At this time your son's condition is not covered under your current HMO plan. Fortunately, you do have the option to raise your monthly premium--

WEBB
The premium is already sky high, and the, the uh, the deductible is --last time I was told the same thing and I told you people I can't afford to pay more.

VOICE
Sir, this is why I suggest you wait six months and perhaps by then you can reconsider adjusting your monthly premiums.

CONTINUED:

WEBB
In six months my son will be dead.

Long pause.

VOICE
If you would like to file an appeal
I will be happy to forward you over
to our appeals department, sir.

Webb is defeated.

VOICE
.....sir?

INT.WALDRUP'S KITCHEN. DAY

Riley stands over the KITCHEN TABLE which has now been swept clean of bills. Several SHOEBOXES sit meticulously arranged in a row on the table, chock full of cash.

She carefully arranges the last stack of bills, places a rubber band around them, and stuffs them into one of the shoe boxes.

She takes a step back and surveys the finished product. Her masterpiece. At first her glare is intense, deeply focused. As her eyes dance along the boxes her gaze begins to soften. A small, satisfied grin creeps across her face.

She closes her eyes and slowly tilts her head up towards the ceiling as if reciting a prayer. Tranquility.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK!!!

She spastically leaps out of her moment of bliss.

MUFFLED VOICE
(through door)
Sheriff's department.

Riley leaps into action. She grabs two of the SHOEBOXES under her arms and sprints into the living room where she tosses them on the SOFA.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK!!!

MUFFLED VOICE
(through door)
Sheriff's department. Anyone in?

CONTINUED:

Riley runs back into the kitchen; her socks cause her to slip and slide around the linoleum floor. She is clumsy. Awkward. She picks up two more boxes and heaves them into the LIVING ROOM. Bills flop out as they land.

RILEY
(shouting)
Justa sec.

She picks up the final box and runs it into the living room. Does her best to scoop the fallen bills back into their respective boxes but in her frenzy leaves some on the ground.

Then she runs back to the FRONT DOOR, grabs the HANDLE and pauses for a second. She takes a long, deep breath to compose herself.

KNOCK KNOCK!-- It startles' her, she flinches, then pulls the door open quickly. Sawyer and Werner stand in front of her. Werner is mid shout.

WERNER
Sherrifs dep--...Mornin', Ma'am.

RILEY
Mornin', Sheriff.

WERNER
Well actually, Ma'am, this here is Sherriff Sawyer, I'm Deputy Werner.

RILEY
What's the matter? I didn't call no police.

WERNER
Right, well we're here for questionin'.

RILEY
Questionin'?

WERNER
That's right, questionin'.

SAWYER
We'd just like a word with your husband, Ma'am, he 'round?

RILEY
No he ain't. And whateva it is you gotta ask him you can ask me.

CONTINUED:

SAWYER
With all due respect, Ma’am, I don’t believe you could provide us with the answers we’re lookin’ for.

RILEY
He get hisself into trouble?

WERNER
No, Ma’am, that ain’t the case. Luther--

He looks to Sawyer for permission. Sawyers gives him the approving nod.

WENRER
(hushed voice)
Not to cause any concern but Luther Guthrie’s girl snuck out the house last night and she ain’t been home yet.

RILEY
Uh-huh.

WERNER
So we're taking all the precautionary steps and measures required as enforcers of the law and all the uh, all the investigative processes that uh, are necessary in such a predicament to see if we can't uh,--you see the Guthrie's are gettin' worried, naturally, you know, picturin' the worst and whatnot. I don't have kids of my own so I can't realistically put myself in their shoes or what have you--

SAWYER
Deputy Werner saw your husband up on route 149 same night the girl went missin’, not too far from the Guthrie’s home. Figured your husband may have seen her. Saw what direction she was headed.

RILEY
Well, he didn’t.

CONTINUED:

SAWYER
Okay. Well. Once again. With all due respect. How can you be sure of that?

An awkward silence ensues. Riley stands arms folded, glaring back at Sawyer. His look is softer but his eye contact remains strong.

RILEY
'Cause, he didn't say nothin' 'bout it.

Werner's eyes have shifted away from Riley in the DOOR FRAME and have moved back into the LIVING ROOM where he squints at several turned over SHOEBOXES.

SAWYER
Right. When was the last time you saw your husband, Ma'am?

Werner's eyes have made Riley nervous. She steps outside and pulls the front door closed behind her.

RILEY
Listen, when I see Chase I'll tell him to give y'all a holler.

The sound of a TRUCK ENGINE accompanied by gravel crunching under tires grabs everyone's attention.

EXT/INT. WALDRUP'S TRUCK. SAME

Chase pulls the truck into the DRIVE WAY. From his P.O.V we see Riley, Werner and Sawyer congregated on his front steps. They all turn in unison and stare daggers at him as he approaches.

CHASE
(under his breath)
Jesus Christ.

EXT. WALDRUP'S FRONT STEPS. SAME

The three watch as Chase's truck comes to a stop. He throws the gear into PARK. The engine groans. The trio continues to stare at him. He stares back.

EXT/INT. WALDRUP'S TRUCK. SAME

CHASE
Oh boy.

EXT. WALDRUP'S FRONT STEPS. SAME

Several long, agonizing seconds pass before Chase cuts the engine off. He timidly opens the door. Creek. He climbs out.

CHASE
(nervous)
Howdy.

SMASH CUT:

INT. WALDRUP'S BATHROOM. DAY

Chase is on all fours VOMITING violently into the toilet. Riley stands in the door frame.

RILEY
Pull yourself together.

He hesitates over the toilet, burps, then sits on his ass, back against the wall. Short of breath, vomit gathered in the corners of his mouth.

RILEY
You're fine, they didn't suspect nothin'. For all they know the girl up 'n ran off on her own.
(beat)
Which she did. If they sniffed somethin' we wouldn't be sittin' here right now.

Chase nods.

RILEY
But why you go 'n tell 'em you hit a deer? Everyone knows there ain't no deer 'round this time of year.

Chase searches for an answer but finds none.

RILEY
I'll tell you what, that girl out there makes me nervous. I don't like her just layin' 'round like a damn lawn ornament. Not with police shoving their noses here n' there. You might have to dig her on up and move her somewheres else...

Chase, who's head had been hanging, now perks up.

CONTINUED:

RILEY
...and if you gon' do it you gon' have to do it soon. Ain't much longer 'fore she's gon' turn like spoiled meat--body gon' rot into pulp, skin and flesh gonna be sliding off her bones and once that happens...

Suddenly Chase jolts forward off the wall and pukes into the toilet again.

RILEY
...things could get messy.

EXT. TOW YARD. DAY

A TOW TRUCK enters through the main gate hauling behind it a broken down car.

INT. TOW STATION/ AUTO SHOP. DAY

Several TOW TRUCK DRIVERS sit around a table chatting. One is telling a humorous story. The mood is light. Happy.

Luther enters dressed in his soiled blue uniform, wearing a scowl on his face, wiping oil from his hands with a rag. The man telling the story is distracted by Luther's presence. The mood takes a noticeable shift downwards. The fun banter burns out. The story teller shuts up all together.

Nervous eyes watch Luther, gauge his mood. He feels them but acts as if he doesn't. Finally one brave DRIVER breaks the tension.

DRIVER
Your wife called, Luther.

Luther doesn't react, or seem to care.

DRIVER
'Bout twenty minutes back.

No response.

DRIVER
Sounded upset....

This, however, snags his attention.

CONTINUED:

LUTHER
How does what she sound like concern you?

DRIVER
It don't.

LUTHER
You felt the need to bring it up.

DRIVER
I dunno...I thought maybe you should know.

The other drivers are watching, tensing up, feeling sorry for their companion who has ventured onto dangerous ground.

LUTHER
Anything else you care to tell me 'bout how I deal with my wife?

The Driver has no response. His fate has been set. Luther approaches the Driver, who is still sitting in a chair, and stands right before him. Other drivers brace for impact.

DRIVER
I just....I thought it coulda been, I thought maybe it was news 'bout your girl--

Before the word "girl" fully leaves the Drivers mouth Luther has him by the THROAT. A death grip which collapses the windpipe entirely.

OTHER DRIVERS (IN UNISON)
C'mon Luther / Easy now / Let him go.

Their attempts at salvation are uninspired, and although Luther is outnumbered 5 to 1 nobody does anything. Instead they sit and watch as Luther chokes their co-worker like a rag doll.

The man struggles to free himself but this only agitates Luther further.

Luther lifts the man off his chair by the neck and SLAMS him into the wall. His grip tightens. The Driver's face is turning blue. Blood vessels in his eyes rupture.

Luther leans in close. Nose to nose.

CONTINUED:

LUTHER
Say somethin' 'bout them again and I'll cut the air out your lungs.

With that he lets go, the Driver gasps and crumples to the floor. The other drivers watch in shame but not awe, Luther has done something like this before--they knew he had it in him.

EXT.FIRST NATIONAL BANK. DAY

Chase and Riley pull up in their truck outside the bank. In unison they both glare at the DUFFLE BAG full of money then at the bank.

RILEY
Don't fuck this up.

INT.SAM WEBB'S OFFICE. MOMENTS LATER

Webb has a look on his face as if he was just asked something peculiar. Riley and Chase are on the edge of their seats-hanging on Webb's every word. After several long seconds....

WEBB
Well...I must say, that would be peculiar.

Chase and Riley slump back in their seats, deflated after not hearing the response they wanted.

WEBB
I suppose it's possible for folks to stumble across an unforeseen fortune...lottery perhaps, or maybe the timely death of a family member which would result in a life insurance settlement, but then again if the death was too timely that would cause a fuss in and of itself.

RILEY
What if there ain't a good reason? What if the debts are just paid off and that's that?

WEBB
Well, it would depend on how much debt we're talkin' about. If--

CONTINUED:

RILEY
Nine thousand, eight hundred sixty three dollars and twenty eight cents.

WEBB
Well--

RILEY
And an undisclosed automobile payment.

Webb looks uneasy.

WEBB
I'm assuming this hypothetical fortune would come in the form of cash?

RILEY
Cold n' hard.

WEBB
Well, you see, there are some instances in which cash just wont be accepted. Credit card bills, mortgage payments, back taxes-- things of that nature. You can't walk into the IRS and just slap down a bag of money.

To the Waldrup's this news is more than discouraging.

RILEY
So then it would all go down the toilet?

WEBB
'Course it wouldn't. What would hap--and we're still speakin' hypothetically--what would happen, hypothetically, would be the cash would get entered into a bank account and from there checks could be written out.

RILEY
And what if there's a lien on that account? And they can't open any new ones?

Webb is now fully aware of their ploy and the tension on his face shows it.

CONTINUED:

WEBB
Well the bank is aware of--there wouldn't be any way to, uh...sneak anything in without entering some murky waters. It's bank policy.

RILEY
Whaddaya sayin'?

WEBB
I'm not sayin' anyth--I--what? Nothin'. What're you sayin'?

An awkward silence. Webb sweats it out. Riley stares at him hoping he may cave, Webb notices this but again doesn't want to go there. Chase just looks nervous.

WEBB
(sotto)
I understand the walls are closin' in and when push comes to shove we gotta look out for our own neck...
(lower voice)
...but if you folks are fixin' to do something unholy I'd rather not know about it. Or else, being the Christian that I am...
(even lower)
I would feel obligated to bring it to attention.

Long silence. Tense, darting eye contact.

CHASE
Christ, Sam, we went boar huntin' together!

EXT. FIRST NATIONAL BANK. DAY

Chase and Riley lean up against their TRUCK. Defeat has engulfed them both. Riley looks straight ahead as she speaks. Chase waits for her to speak.

RILEY
That wasn't good.

CHASE
Sure wasn't.

RILEY
He wasn't as receptive as I hoped he would be.

CONTINUED:

CHASE
Sure wasn't.

RILEY
You know what this means.

CHASE
Sure do.

Long pause. Neither of them wants to say what's coming next.

RILEY CHASE
We on our own. We gotta kill him.

They look at one another for the first time in the conversation--surprised by what the other said.

RILEY
What!?

CHASE
What?

RILEY
What'd you say?

CHASE
What? I didn't say--I said--what'd you say?

RILEY
You said you wanna kill Sam Webb.

Chase realizes the enormity of his comment.

CHASE
What'd you say?

RILEY
I said we're on our own.

CHASE
I like your plan better.

A long silence ensues. Both Riley and Chase look off into the distance. Mulling over the situation they're in and contemplating how to best get out of it. Chase glides his hand across Riley's STOMACH with a gentle, fatherly touch.

CHASE
She got an angel watchin' over her this time.

CONTINUED:

Tears begin to sizzle in Riley's eyes. She fights them back. Lays her head on Chase's shoulder. His arm around her, comforting his wife with his eternal loyalty.

INT. SAM WEBB'S OFFICE

Hold on his face. He's thinking. Deep. Long. Hard. A clock ticks. Cluck. Cluck. Cluck.

He's eyes move onto something sitting on his desk-- out of our sight. He holds them there for a long while.

Flip to reveal what he's looking at. A FRAMED PICTURE of his son--the SICK BOY from the hospital. Webb's mind is made.

He picks up the office phone and dials.

WEBB
(into phone)
Yeah, Sam Webb here. The guy you told me about--I need his number.

EXT. RUNDOWN HOUSE. DAY

Sawyer and Werner stand on the stoop of a very modest home. Junked car parts and tattered plastic toys clutter the lawn. A malnourished dog barks hysterically from his chained dog house.

Sawyer knocks on the door.

WERNER
How you know this boy's friends with the Guthrie girl?

The door opens. A scrawny, wife-beater sporting, CLAYTON JONES (17) takes one look at the officers before trying to slam the door shut. Sawyer stops it with his hand.

Clayton realizes his attempt has failed and turns to bolt back inside. He doesn't make it far before WHAP! His MOTHER slaps the side of his head sending him toppling to the floor.

INT. CLAYTON'S LIVING ROOM. MOMENTS LATER

Old plywood paneling. Dated furniture. A creeking ceiling fan. Clayton sits on his couch messaging the side of his head. His Mother sits next to him, poised to strike again.

CONTINUED:

CLAYTON'S MOTHER
His Daddy used to run from the law. Look 'round, do ya see him?

SAWYER
Ma'am, I can assure you although your son has participated in some less than savory activities in his day that's not what brings us here.

Clayton squares his chest--a moment of triumph over his Mother.

SAWYER
(to Clayton)
How well would you say you know Abigail Guthrie?

CLAYTON
Who say's I know her?

WHAP! Clayton's Mother slaps him upside the head again.

CLAYTON'S MOTHER
What I tell you'bout bein' smart!?

SAWYER
Ma'am, it's not necessary to strike the boy.

WERNER
And in some states punishable by law.

Sawyer subtly shakes his head at Werner "now's not the time". Clayton holds a trained eye on his Mother.

CLAYTON
I don't know where she at.

SAWYER
So that's startin' with the fact that you're aware she's missin'?

CLAYTON
Everyone knows she missin'.

SAWYER
How's that?

CLAYTON
Cus' everyone knows.

CONTINUED:

SAWYER
She have a boyfriend?

CLAYTON
No.

SAWYER
You her boyfriend?

CLAYTON
No.

Sawyer hold his eyes on Clayton. Doesn't buy it. Tension.

CLAYTON
No.

WERNER
Ya sure?

CLAYTON
(re: Werner)
Who is this guy?

SAWYER
You still haven't answered my question. How well do ya know the girl?

CLAYTON
Not too well. A medium amount I'd say.

SAWYER
'A medium amount'?

CLAYTON
That's what I said.

SAWYER
Would you say it was a medium amount when I found you two fornicatin' in the car outside that grocery store near Five Mile Lake?

CLAYTON
Uh-

SAWYER
Or when I caught you two trying to boost a pack of Marlboro Red's from Randy Dowlings place? Was that a medium amount?

CONTINUED:

Clayton's Mother's eyes go wide. She is a steaming tea kettle.

CLAYTON
Uh--

SAWYER
Would you like me to continue?

CLAYTON
Naw.

SAWYER
Come again.

CLAYTON
No, sir.

SAWYER
That's 'no, sir Sheriff Sawyer, I would not like you to continue to dig me into this hole of shit I am now in with my mother.

CLAYTON
(reciting)
No, sir Sheriff Sawyer I would not like you to contin-

SAWYER
Listen, she ain't in trouble, we're just concerned about her safety at this point.
(short beat)
We have cause to believe she may be in harm's way.

Werner shoots Sawyer a look, he knows that was bullshit.

CLAYTON
(wryly)
I wouldn't worry 'bout her.

SAWYER
Worryin' fits in the job description.

CLAYTON
All I know is she's out there with someone else. I dunno who she with or where they headed but she ain't alone.

CONTINUED:

WERNER
Well that's as helpful as a Band-Aid on a broken leg.

CLAYTON
It's more than you piglets got goin'. In a town this small you can't track down one stupid girl.

Sawyer locks eyes hard with Clayton.

SAWYER
Ma'am, feel free to slap your boy around once we leave.

INT. WALDRUP'S DINING ROOM.NIGHT

Chase, Riley and Momma sit around the table eating their Chicken fried steak dinner. Sounds from the TV stream in from the living room. Chase hasn't touched his food.

MOMMA
(re: Chase's food)
What's the matta wit it?

CHASE
Nothin'. It smells good. My stomach's tender is all.

MOMMA
It ain't gonna eat itself. Pour some of the gravy over top. I left the giblets in.

RILEY
The chicken turned out good, Momma.

MOMMA
I know, I'm eatin' it.

Momma shoots a cutting stare at Chase. He feels it and responds by forcing a bite into his mouth.

Looking to Riley.

CHASE
(mouth full)
I wonder if the chicken ever thought 'bout leaving it's nest.

RILEY
What?

CONTINUED:

Swallows.

CHASE
I wonder if--

RILEY
I heard you but I don't--

CHASE
Maybe a fox been lingerin' 'round waitin' for the chicken to slip up.

It takes a moment for Riley to pick up on the innuendo.

RILEY
Yeah? And where you think the chicken would go?

CHASE
I suppose it could take all them eggs its just found 'n go build another nest somewhere's safe. Somewhere's that don't have a dead chicken buried out back that will only bring about more fox's.

MOMMA
How 'bout it goes into your mouth and muffles this nonsense.

RILEY
The fox's are dumber than a box of hair and there ain't as many eggs as you think.

MOMMA
Eat the food 'fore it grow cold.

CHASE
(slightly raised voice)
The nest ain't safe.

RILEY
The chicken was born in that nest, raised in that nest, watched her daddy die in that nest and sure as HELL ain't leavin' it for no fox!

Silence falls over the table.

CONTINUED:

CHASE
Okay. So what then? He waits till the fox gets him or the eggs run out?

RILEY
If that's what happens then that's what happens.

Riley, now worked up, slams the napkin down on the table.

RILEY
I need a word with you in the kitchen. 'Scuse us, Momma.

INT.WALDRUP'S KITCHEN. MOMENTS LATER

The conversation carries out under hushed but aggravated voices.

RILEY
We ain't goin' nowhere so you can drop that idea out your mind right now.

CHASE
All I'm sayin' is at least consider it. What 'bout my aunt out in Fort Worth?

RILEY
Texas?!

CHASE
It's just a thought.

RILEY
What you plan on doin' for work when you get there?

CHASE
There's that truckin' company my uncle used to work for and I'm sure they got hospitals out there, too.

RILEY
Is there room for Momma?

Chase has no response.

CONTINUED:

RILEY
God help me if there was a time you thought somethin' through start to end. Listen, damnit there ain't nowhere for us to go and if we were to try that money would burn up good n' quick. It ain't gonna last forever. All it's doing now is buyin' us some time, it ain't turnin' us into royalty.

CHASE
And I'm not talkin' about building a castle.

RILEY
Chase! Once we pay down the debts we'll be right back to being dead broke. We got my 83 year old grandmomma to worry 'bout and she's one egg short of an omelet.
(calmer)
Three months, three short months and this baby comin' out whether we ready or not. We ain't leaving this house. We can't leave this house.

CHASE
People 'round here are nosey is all I'm sayin'. You heard Sam Webb earlier.

RILEY
Even more reason to keep our noses clean.

Phone rings. Chase picks up immediately.

CHASE
(into phone)
Yeah.

VOICE
(through phone)
Good evening, may I speak with Mr. Chase Waldrup, please?

CHASE
(into phone)
Speaking.

CONTINUED:

VOICE
(through phone)
My name is Kenneth I'm calling from RCNS, the collection agency representing Ford Motors. I need to know if you are able to take care of your past due bill at this time.

Click. Chase hangs up.

RILEY
Who was it?

CHASE
Who you think?

RILEY
Tomorrow I'm gonna--

Phone rings again. Chase picks up.

CHASE
(into phone)
(annoyed)
What?

AUTOMATED VOICE
(through phone)
Hello. This is a friendly reminder from your friends at Capital One regarding your outstanding balance. If you are unable to-

Click. He hangs up again. A routine they have grown accustomed to--still painful nonetheless.

RILEY
Tomorrow after work I'm gonna go down to the bank in Jackson and see if we can't put the money in an account there. We gonna do this thing right.

Chase realizes Riley won't budge. She does her best to save face.

RILEY
Everything gonna work out just how it's supposed to. It always does.

KNOCK KNOCK at the front door. They look at eachother. Visitors are rare.

CONTINUED:

MOMMA (O.S.)
Milk boy's here.

FRONT DOOR MOMENTS LATER

Chase opens the front door. Sam Webb stands on the other side looking unsure of himself.

CHASE
Sam?

INT. WALDRUP'S LIVING ROOM. MOMENTS LATER

Riley enters with a pot of coffee and joins Chase and Sam Webb. Webb wrings his fingers, fusses with his hair, loosens his collar--all the telltale signs of a nervous man.

WEBB
I take my job seriously. I respect the law. I'm a good person--a good man.

Riley and Chase are put off by Webb's edgy intensity.

CHASE
We know Sam, we know that.

WEBB
I do my best to live life the way God would want.

CHASE
We know.

WEBB
Gettin' started I knew that part of my job would require I watch people suffer. Watch 'em lose things. It never sat right with me. I try to help all I can, I always do.

The couple exchanges confused glances.

CHASE
We know, Sam. Our situation ain't your fault.

WEBB
I signed the paperwork that put the Beasley's out their home. The Hubbard's and the Leonard's, too.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

WEBB (CONT'D)
And in a few days they gon' have me sign the paperwork that'll put you outta yours.

RILEY
You came all the way here to tell us that?

WEBB
When my oldest boy was playin' ball I paid Coach Gilroy 500 dollars to put him up on varsity. And last year at the county fair I placed 37 orders of my wife's rhubarb pie to see to it she placed first. 'Course neither of them ever found out but I did it 'cause I care 'bout them.
(beat)
Is it right being dishonest? I'd like to think so. If the intentions are right and nobody gets hurt.

Long pause. Chase and Riley look at one another, confused. Webb contemplates. Then...

WEBB
I don't wanna know where y'all got that money.

CHASE
Whoa! I dunno what you're talkin' 'bout. You got the wrong idea!

RILEY
Chase!

CHASE
He got the wrong God damn idea!

RILEY
Chase, he's tryin' to help.

Webb stands.

WEBB
Maybe I should--

RILEY
No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Take a seat, sit down. Just stay here for a sec, just a sec. Please.
(desperate)
Sam, please.

CONTINUED:

Webb eyes the door, then sits back down. He truly is conflicted. A long, pregnant silence.

WEBB
I don't wanna know how y'all got that money.

RILEY
You ain't have to. Chase, tell him he ain't have to'.

Pause. Chase, still uncertain, obeys his wife.

CHASE
You ain't have to.

Again Webb contemplates. His eyes move back and forth between the couple. Decisions, decisions.

WEBB
It's simple. You give the cash to someone you trust, they put it in their account under their name and write off checks to everyone you owe.

RILEY
What?

WEBB
You give the cash to someone you--

RILEY
I heard what you said but I--you want us to give that money to someone else?

WEBB
I don't <u>want</u> you to do anything. I'm tellin' you that's the only way it would work. The only way.

RILEY
So we just sign it over to them?

WEBB
There's no signing involved. No paperwork. It's strictly under the table.

RILEY
No record?

CONTINUED:

WEBB
No record.

RILEY
And what if they up ‘n skip town?

WEBB
That’s the risk you run.

CHASE
And what if we don’t trust nobody?

Webb shrugs.

WEBB
You’re gonna have to. What other options do y’all have?

RILEY
I was gonna head down to that bank in Jackson see if they--

WEBB
No bank in the country gonna let y’all open a new account. Not when you got a government lien on the current one. Paired with your toxic bankin’ records, they’ll tell ya to get lost. I can assure you of that.

CHASE
Then I’ll ask same my wife did: You came all the way out here to tell us that?

WEBB
I came to tell y’all I can help.

RILEY
Why should we trust you?

WEBB
I know my way through the system better than anyone. I know how to get caught. I know how to not get caught. I know what they do to those who do get caught. I’m puttin’ just as much on the line as y’all are. And I know if you hand me that money you’ll keep the house and be debt free come Monday afternoon.

CONTINUED:

A beat as the Waldrup's consider the offer.

RILEY
Why you doin' this, Sam?

WEBB
I'm tryin' to twist the screws.

Beat. Chase and Riley look at eachother for a long, ponderous moment then turn their eyes towards Webb.

RILEY
Maybe you are. But everything I got in this world I got by myself.

CLOSE UP ON HUMAN TARGET PAPER

BANG! A BULLET rips through the chest.

EXT. FIRING RANGE. DAY

Flip to see Sawyer holding a RIFLE, smoke trickling from the barrel. Werner standing to his side.

WERNER
Sweet shot, Sheriff.

SAWYER
Ain't so sweet if ya on the other end.

WERNER
No sir, that's for sure.

Sawyer cocks the barrel, the chamber regurgitates a shell.

SAWYER
I'm cleanin' you out today, son. I'm up what? Sixty? Seventy now? Your wife's gonna be madder than hell. Speakin' of which, how's she been?

WERNER
Well, you know.

SAWYER
No, I don't. That's why I asked.

WERNER
Welp. How's that sayin' go? 'Are ya married or are ya happy'?

CONTINUED:

Werner chuckles. Sawyer doesn't find this even slightly amusing.

SAWYER
Be careful, Dale. You'd be surprised how quickly someone can slip outta your life.

WERNER
I ain't gonna fret, Sheriff. I'd like to think there's a reason behind everything that happens.

SAWYER
Everything?

WERNER
I'd like to think.

Sawyer ponders.

SAWYER
You ever heard of Loretta Fortner?

WERNER
Can't say I have.

SAWYER
Mmm.

Sawyer aims the rifle back up to the target and fires again. BANG! He doesn't drop his eyes.

SAWYER
18 months on the job I was called to Mrs. Fortner's house....
(to himself)
..or was it 19?...
anyhow,her husband was in the yard, had been workin' on a log with an axe, he hauled back, the damn thing slipped out his hands n' caught their seven year old son clean between the eyes. Doctors had to shave down the boy's skull n' yank the blade out so they could get the casket closed. Wasn't much longer before the husband put a bullet through his own head leaving Mrs. Fortner behind with nothin' but her thoughts.
(looks at Werner)
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

SAWYER (CONT'D)
Why don't you go an' explain to her the reason behind that? I'm sure she's been wondering. I know I have...lives on Montgomery road.

Of course Werner has no rejoinder. Who would?

SAWYER
Oftentimes life has plans of its own. You can’t stop tomorrow from comin’.

The echo of another GUN BLAST causes Sawyer and Werner to look down the row. Forty yards down, in his own firing station, Luther Guthrie reloads. He looks up and notices them. He spits then heads over, shotgun in tow.

WERNER
Aw shit.

Guthrie heads towards them, his eyes burn holes through Werner. Werner turns noticeably uncomfortable. Swallows hard.

LUTHER
You boys figure you’d find my girl at a firin’ range?

WERNER
G’mornin’, Luther.

LUTHER
Ain’t nothin’ good ‘bout this mornin’ but glad to see y’all are enjoyin’ yourselves.

WERNER
We’re--

LUTHER
And don’t tell me you’re ‘doin’ everythin’ you can’, I ain’t dumb as a horse.

Luther can smell the insecurity seeping out. Werner buckles under the heat.

SAWYER
Things are in the works.

LUTHER
‘Things are in the works’, what’s that ‘posed to mean?

CONTINUED:

SAWYER
It means things are in the works.

Luther, growing increasingly agitated by the minute, shifts his eyes back and forth between Sawyer and Werner.

LUTHER
Y'all don't have any idea what you're doin' do ya?

SAWYER
Why don't you go home and be with your wife.

LUTHER
I don't take well to being told what to do.

SAWYER
And I don't take well to being told how to do my job.

Good ol' standoff. Toe to toe, nose to nose. Each man with a high powered weapon in his hand. The tension is palpable. Once again, Werner can't handle it.

WERNER
We questioned Chase Waldrup the other day.

LUTHER
Didja now?

Sawyer's eyes cut deep into Werner. Werner notices and tries to recover.

WERNER
I spotted him 'round your area near the time your girl went missin'. Thought maybe he seen her. No dice.

Something goes off in Luther's head-- a shred of suspicion.

LUTHER
Is that so?

Werner nods, he thinks he has diffused the situation.

WERNER
We're doin' everything we can.

CONTINUED:

SAWYER
The riff between you and that boy is dead and buried. Don't go lookin' for a reason to dig it back up.

Luther trades glares between both men then takes a step closer to Sawyer.

LUTHER
(to Sawyer, sinister)
I wonder if there'd be a heightened sense of urgency if you were the one missin'.

Luther holds his eyes hard and tight on Sawyer. Sawyer stares back. A long, silent, humming tension follows...

A GUN SHOT in the distance causes Sawyer to FLINCH ever so slightly. An imperceptible grin dashes across Luther's face.

LUTHER
I'm itchin' to find out.

Luther walks away, GUN slung over his shoulder. As Sawyer watches Luther slink away he addresses Werner with a hint of worry in his voice.

SAWYER
That's why you don't feed the animals.

INT. UPSCALE BANK LOBBY. DAY

Riley sits anxiously in a well furnished bank lobby. She shifts. She fidgets. A wealthy couple sits near her. The women's eyes judge Riley--classism at its finest. Riley notices. She shifts. She fidgets.

A FEMALE BANK ATTENDANT comes out of her office. She's stern, composed and all too pleased with herself.

FEMALE BANK ATTENDANT
(to Riley)
Why don't ya come on in.

EXT. UPSCALE BANK PARKING LOT. LATER

The beat up, broke down, eye sore known as the Waldrup truck sits in the back corner of the parking lot--the ugly duckling.

In the distance, out of focus, Riley exits the bank and heads towards the truck. At first she is even keeled but as she gets closer her emotions begin to wobble. It isn't yet clear if she is on the verge of elation or agony.

INT. WALDRUP TRUCK

Riley hops in and starts the engine. It coughs. Tries again. No go. Again. Sounds like an emphysema patient. A beat.

Her breath turns choppy. Her chin quivers. She slaps a hand over her mouth. A sea of tears begin to pool in her eyes. She fights them. Her face contorts. Her body begins to shake and the tears break free and flee down her face like escaped convicts.

She can't hold on any longer and finally gives in to her emotions displaying a level of genuine vulnerability we have yet to see. She buries her head in her chest and weeps.

INT. WALDRUP'S KITCHEN. DAY

Chase sits at the table staring at a stack bills and notice letters. The numbers are daunting. The front door opens, it brings his attention up. Riley marches in holding the duffle bag. No eye contact. She stomps off into the bedroom. Chase watches.

RILEY
Call Sam Webb.

The bedroom door SLAMS.

INT. GUTHRIE'S BEDROOM. DAY

Mrs. Guthrie lays in bed, covers pulled up to her throat, eyes wide open and glossed over. Luther enters with a bowl of soup.

LUTHER
You should think 'bout gettin' up for a 'lil, sweetheart. Layin' in bed all day ain't good for your legs.

CONTINUED:

She responds by pulling the blankets over her head.

LUTHER
At least get some food in ya.

MRS. GUTHRIE
Ain't hungry.

LUTHER
The food will make ya--

MRS. GUTHRIE
Said I didn't want nothin', Luther.

Beat. Blankets come off her head. She still faces away.

MRS. GUTHRIE
I shouldn't have cussed at her like that.

LUTHER
This ain't your fault. Mother's n' daughters argue, that's what they do.

MRS. GUTHRIE
Police say in most cases like this they come home within a day or so...

Luther ponders his wife's reasoning; chooses his next words carefully.

LUTHER
Police said they spotted Chase Waldrup up the road from here same night Abby went missin'.

Mrs. Guthrie flips around to face her husband. Her eyes nearly POPPING out of her skull.

MRS. GUTHRIE
You don't think...

LUTHER
I dunno.

MRS. GUTHRIE
You got over on him pretty good, Luther. What made you think he wouldn't come back for your neck?

CONTINUED:

LUTHER
I didn’t think he’d come like this. Don’t think he has it in him. But I dunno.

MRS. GUTHRIE
Well you need to find out!
(beat)
I knew this would happen. When you run your jooks on people you puttin’ more than yourself at risk.

LUTHER
You can’t place this on me.

MRS. GUTHRIE
Yes I can! And I will! I told you if you cheat people long ‘nough it’s gonna come back to bite us. I been told you that!

LUTHER
My beef with Chase ain’t that serious.

MRS. GUTHRIE
Look at ‘cha now tryin’ a backpedal. Luther, you wouldn't have brought it up if you didn’t think there wasn’t somethin’ to it.

LUTHER
You know better than to tell a man how to conduct himself.

Mrs. Guthrie flips back around, facing away.

MRS. GUTHRIE
If I was talkin’ to a *man I* wouldn’t feel the need *to.*

INT. ROADSIDE DINER. DAY

Stuffy air. Overweight waitresses. A spattering of local riff raff. Tacky 1970's color scheme. A squatting cliché.

A nervous Sam Webb enters and does a once over of the joint. Then he makes his way past several OPEN booths before seating himself in the far back corner. He removes his coat, turns it INSIDE OUT, and hangs it on the coat rack next to his seat.

CONTINUED:

He does his best to act normal but his body language says otherwise. His eyes bounce off each one of the patrons'--he's looking for someone.

A waitress comes to pour coffee, he shoos her away. After a minute or so a MAN comes out of the bathroom. An imposing figure. Broad shoulders, deep set eyes--Ivan Drago meets Anton Chigurh.

Webb's INSIDE OUT COAT grabs his attention.

MAN
You're Sam Webb?

Webb nods.

MAN
(amused)
You?

WEBB
Yeah.

MAN
You were supposed to sit near a window.

WEBB
Shoot,I thought you said don't sit near a window. Shoot I'm sorry. We can move if you'd like.

The Man takes a seat in Webb's booth.

MAN
Eh, it doesn't matter. You have it with you?

WEBB
Yeah, I have it. Black duffle bag, sorted by denomination. Left it in the car like you said. What, what, uh, what should I call you?

MAN
You don't call me nothin'. You understand? Nothin'. As far as you're concerned I don't exist. Can you grasp that?

WEBB
I got it.

CONTINUED:

The man breaks into a wheezy, irritating laugh. Webb looks mortified.

MAN
Ease up, man. You look like your sack just caught fire. You want some bacon?

WEBB
I'm okay.

MAN
Have some bacon.

WEBB
I'm okay.

MAN
This place has fantastic bacon.

WEBB
I'll get some on the way out.

The Man breaks into the annoying laugh again. Webb's anxiety grows worse.

WEBB
Are you gonna be able to clean it?

The Man's laugh cuts off as if his plug was yanked from the wall. His face hardens and he SLAMS his fists on the table. Silverware rattles.

MAN
What the fuck did you just say fat boy!? You think for one second I wasn't capable of upholdin' my end of the deal? Do I look like a sloppy-brained, limp dick, inbred redneck to you?

Webb knows he has overstepped. Goes quiet. Several patrons look over at the commotion. Webb wants to bail.

MAN
Didn't think so.

WEBB
So we're all straight on this?

MAN
What'd I just say?

CONTINUED:

Webb nods.

MAN
I ask the questions, Sam, you got that. Me. I ask ‘em.

Webb nods.

MAN
You got my cut?

WEBB
Your cut? Not now, I thought--no, you see,--Luther said we were all straight on this.

MAN
We are straight, Sam. I’m gonna launder the cash and keep a cut of the pot.

WEBB
Right. But I don’t--you see, deal was I pay you on the back end not up front, this was mapped out real clear, Luther didn’t tell me you expected that I was--

MAN
I didn’t expect anything.

WEBB
Okay, well--

MAN
Except that you’d be sittin’ near a window.

WEBB
Again, I’m sor--

MAN
What’s the figure?

WEBB
Around ten thousand--just over ten thousand.

MAN
Luther know how much there is?

CONTINUED:

WEBB
He said he don't talk numbers, that's what you're for.

The Man thinks for a moment.

MAN
I jus...I don't under-...why's a square like you gettin' mixed up in a jumble like this?

WEBB
Well, see, my son--there's some personal uh, pers-- I'm not gonna, gonna --I just need the money, what's it's matter to you?

MAN
I ask the questions, Sam.

Webb looks around the Diner. "What have I got myself into?". The man looks at him, amused by Webb's insecurity.

MAN
So I will ask you this, because what Luther told me didn't completely uh...
(lowers voice)
..this couple just up n' forked over ten grand?

WEBB
Well, it's not really their money, you see--they--well, its complicated. I'm not even sure how they-- it doesn't, you know, it doesn't matter, the thing is they're in debt real good, so...I told them I could dig 'em out.

The Man looks at Webb, deadpan. Hold...

Then he erupts into his laugh again.

MAN
(laughing)
And you're gonna stone cold rob 'em.

WEBB
Well that's--

CONTINUED:

MAN
What you plan on tellin' em when they ask where their money went?

WEBB
Certain aspects of what I'm gonna-- this isn't, uh, certain details needn't be discus--

MAN
You're right, less I know is for the better.
(beat)
Are you gonna need me to, uh...

The Man swipes a finger across his throat.

WEBB
What? No! Christ No!

MAN
I could cut you a hell of a deal. One of those two-for-one things.

WEBB
No! No. This is--are we done here?

The Man laughs once more then stands from the booth.

MAN
Be outside your car in ten minutes. In the mean time have some of that bacon.

INT. TOW STATION /AUTO SHOP. DAWN

Luther stands behind the counter, a smoldering ashtray in front of him. The MAN from the diner leans against the other side.

MAN
I know you got a full plate, Luther, but what you're saying is, I mean that's just-

LUTHER
Did he ask how you'd clean it?

MAN
Yeah. I told him to fuck himself. But Luther, c'mon man, think this through.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

MAN (CONT'D)
The guy lives the next town over. We can't just--what're you gonna do when he comes rappin' on your door asking where his money went?

LUTHER
I'll answer it.

MAN
And what're you gonna say?

LUTHER
What's he gonna say?

The MAN realizes he's not changing Luther's mind and doesn't dare to push it further.

MAN
Colder than tits on a witch.

The man smiles mischievously.

MAN
It's a nice chunk of change. Five grand split two--

LUTHER
Five? He was talkin' like it was more.

MAN
(shrugs)
He told me five.
(averts eyes)
It's still a good chunk of change. I just don't understand where the cash is comin' from. You know who this couple is?

LUTHER
He ain't say.

MAN
I mean where the hell you figure they found--

The front door opens interrupting the conversation. A fellow employee enters.

MAN
When you get off work stop by my place and we'll divvy it up.
(beat)
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

MAN (CONT'D)
You're right, Luther. This way's best.

EXT/INT. SAWYERS CRUISER. DAY

Sawyer drives along the dead-straight, 2-lane road named ROUTE 149. The local news plays over the RADIO gently in the background. Sawyer turns up the volume.

RADIO VOICE
...Local authorities continue their search for a Louise girl who disappeared from her home early last week...

SAWYER
Disappeared?

RADIO VOICE
...while foul play has yet to be ruled out authorities currently have no leads.

SAWYER
Leads? Foul play?

Then his eyes spot something on the road ahead that demands his immediate attention. Two flush, ripe, SKID MARKS in the opposite lane cause Sawyer to slow down before coming to a stop on the shoulder.

His rearview mirror frames the SKID MARKS beautifully. Sawyer picks up his POLICE RADIO.

SAWYER
(into radio)
Sawyer to Deputy Werner, you on radio, Dale?

WERNER
(through radio)
Right here, Sheriff.

SAWYER
(into radio)
What was your 10-20 when you spotted Chase Waldrup on 149?

WERNER
(through radio)
Oh....hmmm...I'd say I was near 'bout a mile south of Rokeby road.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

WERNER (CONT'D)
Maybe a mile point five. Couldn't have been more I was--

SAWYER
10-4.

Sawyer hangs up the POLICE RADIO and peers back at the skid marks in his rearview.

EXT. RT. 149. MOMENTS LATER

Sawyer walks alongside the SKID MARKS studying them like a drill Sargent would his line of cadets. Then he throws his eyes back down the road, towards the origin.

He approaches skeptically, same path Chase took several night prior. No sound save for the clucking of boots on pavement and the whistle of the breeze.

Immense concentration on his face. Werner's voice blares out from the POLICE RADIO mounted on Sawyers shoulder interrupting the silence.

WERNER
(through radio)
I'd say a mile and a quarter that's my best bet.

Sawyer ignores this. He approaches the area Chase pulled the body out of several nights before.

Sawyer studies the ditch. One part in particular looks out of place. The mud and grass has been interrupted by something. Sawyer cocks his head to the side--intrigued by the disrupted ground.

He sees something. He squats and sticks his fingers in the mud. Pulls them back out. Between his thumb and index finger he holds a BLOODIED TOOTH.

EXT. SAM WEBB'S HOUSE. DAY

Webb's truck pulls alongside his MAILBOX. Webb pulls out today's mail.

INT. SAM WEBB'S KITCHEN. MOMENTS LATER

Webb plops the mail onto the counter and works lose his shirt collar with the other hand. His eyes catch something.

CONTINUED:

He slows. He grabs an ENVELOPE from the pile of mail and tears it open.

Jittery eyes scan the letter inside...

His jaw slackens. His hand shakes. Sheer disbelief.

INT. HUMPHRY COUNTY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL. NURSES QUARTERS. DAY

Riley sits and gazes at a static, 12 inch, black and white TV. Lynette enters the room with an unlit CIGARETTE pinched between her teeth.

LYNETTE
Care for a butt?

RILEY
Got ‘nough trouble as is, I don’t need my daughter comin’ out half dumb.

LYNETTE
I’m askin’ you to stand out there with me.

Riley doesn’t respond.

LYNETTE
Beats lookin’ at that TV.

EXT. HUMPHRY COUNTY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL. MOMENTS LATER

Lynette and Riley stand outside the nurses quarters. Lynette smokes.

LYNETTE
Sam Webb was in here earlier.

Riley looks at her, didn’t expect to hear that. Tenses up.

LYNETTE
...visiting his boy.

Riley’s tension eases.

LYNETTE
Did ya hear? The insurance company went ahead and accepted the claim. They gonna go ahead with the treatment.

CONTINUED:

Riley is genuinely happy.

RILEY
Well I'll be.

LYNETTE
What are the odds, huh?

RILEY
Well, Lynette, God shine's on those who do good for others.

LYNETTE
I patch people up for a living an' God ain't shinin' on me.

Riley ignores the comment. Still feeling blissful.

RILEY
I suppose it's true what they say 'bout good things comin' in bunches.

LYNETTE
Well then there ain't enough bunches.

RILEY
Quit it now, things ain't that bad.

LYNETTE
You go 'n try to tell that to the Guthrie's.... Police sayin' the girl ran off but buzz 'round town is there's more to it. I might just believe it given this senseless world we live in.

A hint of concern dashes across Riley's face.

RILEY
You been watchin' too much crime TV.

LYNETTE
Maybe I have. But, Luther doesn't strike me as the kind of man who's gonna sit around and wait for the law to sort things out. You know how those vets are.

CONTINUED:

RILEY
His reputation would suggest that much.

LYNETTE
You ‘member when Luther and old Harold Cummins--

RILEY
At the high school football game. Yeah, I remember.

A long beat.

LYNETTE
That girl means the world to him. He won’t quit.
(beat)
You met her before?

RILEY
Not formally.

LYNETTE
She’s--well...If she ran off it wouldn’t surprise me. And if someone up n’ snatched her I wouldn't be surprised neither.

Just then Chase pulls up in the TRUCK. He beeps twice and waves. Lynette returns a small nod of the head.

LYNETTE
Call it whatchya want but the older I get the more I think if the good comes in bunches then the bad comes by the bundle.

INT. TOW YARD/AUTO SHOP.DAY

Luther sits alone in the break room, eating lunch, watching TV. A gentle knock on the door. Sam Webb steps in.

WEBB
Hey sorry to bother you, Luther. How’s it goin’?

Luther doesn’t take his eyes off the TV. They stay absently glued to the screen for the duration of the conversation.

CONTINUED:

WEBB
That's good. Well, somethin's come up, you see. I got some damn good news today and--

LUTHER
(flat)
Good for you.

WEBB
I appreciate that, Luther, but, uh, you see the thing is circumstances have changed now and I won't be needin' your friends help anymore so--

LUTHER
He ain't my friend.

WEBB
Okay, well your partner then, I won't be need-

LUTHER
Ain't my partner neither.

WEBB
Okay. Well who ever he is I gave him the money already, you see, he has the money, but then I got that news today and now I need the money back because--

LUTHER
Then call the deal off.

WEBB
That's the thing,I tried callin' the guy to let him know the deal's off but the number you gave me ain't workin'. So I was hoping maybe you could relay the message.

LUTHER
You said the number don't work. How you expect me to do that?

WEBB
Right. But I thought maybe you knew where to find him, or another way to get in touch or--

CONTINUED:

LUTHER
You thought wrong.

WEBB
Okay, well. Maybe you could tell me his name and I'll go ahead and find-

LUTHER
Don't know his name.

WEBB
We're talkin 'bout ten thousand dollars here for Christ sake!

Luther finally turns and looks at Webb. Realizing he's been double-crossed by the Man, it shows on his face. Luther's hardened grill is too much for Webb.

WEBB
Alright. Well I'll let you get back to your lunch there.

Webb turns and leaves the room.

EXT/INT. WALDRUP'S TRUCK. DAY

Chase and Riley pull into thier drive-way. From their P.O.V we see a CAR PARKED. They look at each other with confusion. Panic.

With the truck still rolling Riley hops out and hurries inside.

INT. WALDRUP'S LIVING ROOM. DAY

Momma sits on the sofa in a nightgown and shower cap, eating Ritz crackers and drinking Whisky.

RILEY
(loud whisper)
Momma, who the hell's here?!

MOMMA
Where?

RILEY
(louder whisper)
Here, Momma! Who the hell's here?!

MOMMA
I'm here damnit. Don't go gettin' yer gussie up.

CONTINUED:

RILEY
Who’s car in the driveway?!

Momma thinks for a second. Takes another cracker and nibbles.

MOMMA
Oh, him. Some boy said he was fixin’ to appraise the house. Said he had to inspec’ it first.

Riley turns and sprints out of the room. Chase comes busting through the front door.

CHASE
Who the hell’s here, Momma!

INT. WALDRUP’S KITCHEN. MOMENTS LATER

Through the KITCHEN WINDOW we can see the HOUSE APPRAISER outside in the back lawn. Riley comes dashing through the kitchen, she doesn't notice him. She leaves.

We hold on the image of him in the backyard. Clipboard in hand. Staring at the part of yard that has been dug up.

Riley slowly re-enters the kitchen, her neck craned towards the window. She watches the man who is standing mere feet from the buried dead girl.

Chase enters the kitchen.

CHASE
What in the name of Christ is goin’ on?

He notices Riley's gaze out the window. He follows her eyes. He sees what she sees. They stare. The ice cracking beneath their feet.

EXT.WALDRUP’S BACK YARD. MOMENTS LATER

EARL, the house appraiser, scratches his head as he studies the section of ground that has been dug up. Chase and Riley cautiously emerge from the back door like guilty toddlers.

EARL
So is it a boy or girl you got down there?

CONTINUED:

A stiff silence sweeps across the lawn. Riley's face goes white. Chase wants to run for the hills. Earl approaches the couple and offers a kind smile.

EARL
(to Riley)
In your belly. Did you take a peek or are you gonna wait it out?

Chase and Riley exhale relief from there lungs.

EARL
Touchy subject, I get it. M' names Earl, I'd tell ya my last name but don't think you'd care or remember. I'm from round 'bout Hattiesburg. Never been over to this part of the state before y'all sure do have some nice open land out this way. Sure do. Nicest I've seen in awhile and that's saying a lot cuz they have me running all up n' down this state. Did seven houses in Starkville n' after I wrap up here I'm headed to Itta Bena, got 4 houses out there in Itta Bena. I don't mind it up there though, friendly folks up there. They got this rib joint that--- look what happened my mouth runnin' off again. How you folks doin'?

RILEY
Seen better days.

CHASE
Just fine.

EARL
Well, you got a beautiful home here and a nice chunk of open land. Sure do. Beside a little bit a bolt settin' that needs tidyin' up around the bath tub this place looks spic n' span. You folks should be able to sell it for a pretty penny.

RILEY
We ain't sellin it. It's gettin' took from us.

Awkward silence.

CONTINUED:

EARL
Ah, one of them jobbers. Well...at least ya got your health.

Earl walks over to the dug up ground.

EARL
I apologize for my insensitivity but the bank don't tell me much. They just gimme an address n'send-- this darned divot here is still a concern.

He begins to stomp on it in an attempt to flatten it out. Chase and Riley tense up.

EARL
Issue is the septic system on this house is runnin' near 25 years old n' I'd bet my last dime the bank gon' wanna replace it. A new septic system will raise the quote on this place by a considerable amount. Talk about flushin' money down the toilet.

Earl chuckles. Chase and Riley share a look.

EARL
You happen to know how this came to be? You folks don't have nothin buried down there, do ya?

A few seconds of dead silence pass....

CHASE
Family dog.
(beat)
She was hit by a truck.

EARL
That's a darned shame. Well, I'm sure justice will be served out to the perpetrator. The reason I bring it up--

CHASE
It was an accident.

More silence.

CONTINUED:

EARL
Okay.
(beat)
The reason I bring it up is because right now she sittin' directly over top of your septic tank. Last thing we need is them out here diggin' away an' yankin' up--what was her name?

CHASE
I dunno know.

RILEY
It was a long time ago...

EARL
What I'm gettin' at, and now this may be difficult for y'all, but what I'm sayin' is she's gonna need to be relocated. At least to somewhere else on the lawn. You can think of it as a uh,...I don't know what you can think of it as, I was tryin' to be clever. I ain't gonna lie, it won't be pleasant, but whatever her name is...was...will finally be able to rest in peace.

Earl scribbles something on his clipboard.

EARL
Well I'm fixin' to go grab some lunch. Pleasure meetin' y'all and Best of luck with the pregnancy and whole housin' situation.

Earl tips his hat and walks away. We hold on Chase and Riley as they wait for Earl to leave the backyard...

RILEY
Get her. The fuck out. Today. Now. Take her somewhere else, it don't matter where. Just off this property. She's a liability.
(beat)
Actually it do matter where. Take over to Jim Forworth's place.

CHASE
The lumber yard? Why?

She shoots him a cutting stare.

CONTINUED:

RILEY
No evidence, no crime.

CHASE
I thought that wasn't--I thought you didn't wanna-

RILEY
I didn't, but circumstances have changed.

CHASE
That's a hell of a risk, Riley--

RILEY
This ain't up for discussion. They gon' find a body--

EARL (O.S.)
You folks mind if I use the John?

They snap around to find Earl standing near the edge of the house, hands in his pockets, smiling innocently.

EARL
I been pinching since Yazoo City.

INT. WALDRUP'S GARAGE. DAY

The garage door is pulled open. Light pours in. We are on the inside looking out at the silhouettes of Chase and Riley. They enter.

Riley begins rifling through some tools.

RILEY
Where is it?

CHASE
It might not be that simple...

Riley keeps plowing through the tools.

CHASE
...her body might not be, uh...

RILEY
She been dead 72 hours. We got 72 more 'fore she turns to cottage cheese. Now where the hell is it!?

CONTINUED:

Chase reaches up to a shelf and pulls down a SHOVEL. Riley takes it from him.

CHASE
It might not be all that simple.

RILEY
And the tarp?

Chase reaches up to another shelf and drags down a TARP. Riley takes that, too.

RILEY
I'ma dig her up 'n you gon' take her over to the lumber yard once it's dark. If that ain't simple I don't know what is.

CHASE
Why can't I handle it right now?

Riley stops what she's doing and addresses Chase directly.

RILEY
It's Sunday and you ain't exactly been a saint lately.

CHASE
Oh c'mon, I don't--

RILEY
And Chase, make sure you pray for us.

EXT. CHURCH. DAY

Establishing shot from the front lawn. The town's pride and joy. The nicest building around, no contest. Pickup trucks and SUV's populate the parking lot.

From outside we hear the daily Psalm being recited over an organ.

CHOIR (O.S)
Near the cross, a trembling soul,
Love and mercy found me;
There the bright and morning star
Sheds its beams around me.

INT. CHURCH. MASTER SHOT OF CONGREGATION

A packed house. People are on their feet singing along in unison with Priest and choir.

CONGREGATION
In the cross, in the cross,
Be my glory ever;
Till my raptured soul shall find
Rest beyond the river.

CUT TO THE GUTHRIES

Somber. Worn. They sit front row. The guests of honor.

CONGREGATION
Near the cross I'll watch and wait
Hoping, trusting ever,
Till I reach the golden strand,
Just beyond the river.

CUT TO CHASE AND MOMMA

Momma looks straight ahead. Chase steals looks at the Guthrie's who sit several pews in front of him.

CONGREGATION
In the cross, in the cross,
Be my glory ever;
Till my raptured soul shall find
Rest beyond the river. Amen.

At the consummation of the prayer people take their seats. The PRIEST approaches the pulpit. Silence falls over the crowd.

PRIEST
We gather here today with both pain and confusion in our hearts. One of our own, a beloved child of this community, has fallen upon difficult times.

INTERCUT. WALDRUP'S BACK YARD. SAME

With all her force Riley plunges a SHOVEL into the ground.

PRIEST (V.O.)
Our shoulders burdened with great angst and sorrow.

CONTINUED:

INTERCUT. CHURCH. SAME

Back to Priest at pulpit.

PRIEST
It is common in times such as these, times when we feel vulnerable and helpless, times when life's circumstances leave us perturbed, that our belief and our conviction may become confounded.

CUT TO CHASE

His eyes trade between Luther and Mrs. Guthrie. Luther turns back and catches him looking. Chase looks away.

PRIEST (O.S.)
This is when it becomes essential to remember as God’s children we must accept all circumstances from God.

BACK TO PRIEST

PRIEST
Jeremiah 29:11. For I know the plans I have for you,' declared the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

INTERCUT. WALDRUP’S BACK YARD. SAME

Hang over Riley as she shovels away. A three foot heap of dirt sits next to her. She has made considerable progress. The body lays curled in the fetal position in a heap at the bottom of the ditch.

PRIEST (V.O.)
God has indeed constructed a blueprint for our lives. It requires effort to understand and absorb God's wishes, but they are not obscure; the process of studying His Word reveals all His will.

INTERCUT. CHURCH. SAME

Back to priest. He looks directly at the Guthrie’s.

CONTINUED:

PRIEST
Holy Father, we ask that you send her home to us, we ask that you preserve and sustain her, comforting her in affliction, and rousing her in complacency. Cleanse her from her sin and beautify her with holiness.

CUT TO LUTHER

Thoughts building. Emotions tumbling around in his gut.

PRIEST (O.S.)
Discipline her not as a tyrant exacting revenge but as a loving Father, seeking her repentance and restoration.Love her and cherish her and build her to your glory.

INTERCUT. WALDRUP'S BACK YARD. SAME

CLOSE ON BOTTOM OF GIRLS FEET. They drag across grass. In the b.g. we see Riley pulling the girl by her wrists. She dumps the body onto the TARP.

PRIEST (V.O.)
All these things we pray in the name of our savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

INTERCUT. CHURCH. SAME

Back on Priest.

PRIEST
Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.

INT. CHURCH HALLWAY. LATER

The congregation files out the door. Luther is engaged in conversation with an elderly couple who appear to be giving their condolences.

Chase and Momma walk past. Chase and Luther lock eyes again before Chase sheepishly drops his gaze.

EXT. CHURCH. MOMENTS LATER

Chase and Momma leave through the church doors. Luther shouts out from inside.

LUTHER
Hey, Chase Waldrup!

Chase pretends not to hear. He continues to walk. Momma turns around then tugs at Chase's arm.

MOMMA
That boy hollerin' for ya, Chase.

Chase doesn't look back, he puts a hand on Momma's back in an attempt to hurry her along.

LUTHER
Chase Waldrup, hold up a step.

MOMMA
(to Chase)
Church steps ain't no place to lose your manners.

Chase slows then stops and turns to face Luther who has now caught up.

LUTHER
You have a minute?

CHASE
Uh...

Chase looks out into the parking lot hoping to find Riley waiting with the truck--she's nowhere to be found.

LUTHER
It's been awhile.

CHASE
Been a long while.

Awkward beat.

LUTHER
Not sure if you heard but my daughter's the one that, well she, uh--

CONTINUED:

CHASE
Right.
(awkwardly)
I'm..uhh..my prayers are with you..

More awkward tension.

LUTHER
Look,I was hopin' we could put all that behind us. Let bygones be. It ain't right what I did.

Chase returns a blank stare.

LUTHER
Nice day out ain't it?

CHASE
Yeah...it's warm for this time of year.

MOMMA
It's always warm this time of year.

Another beat.

LUTHER
I'm a straight shooter, Chase, so I'm gonna come right out with it. Father Wilson was givin' me some guidance and your name came up. Mentioned that you and your wife there went through somethin' similar a ways back.

Chase looks around uncomfortably.

CHASE
Well...I wouldn't say sim--

LUTHER
Right, well the circumstances wasn't the same but you folks can relate to what it feels like losin' a child n' all. Father Wilson said sometimes the best way to cope with these things is to talk to someone who's been through it.

CHASE
Yeah, uh, I ain't a spiritual guider or nothin'.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

CHASE (CONT'D)
I ain’t sure I uh...Luther, if you’re lookin’ for someone to--

LUTHER
I'm not a terribly religious man, but Father Wilson said God gives us strength to move forward even when life deals us a bad hand and that you and your wife are living proof. I'd like to believe that to be true.

CHASE
Look, I don’t--

LUTHER
She’s the most important thing in my life. She’s what keeps me breathin’. I’d go to the edge of the earth to get her back.

CHASE
Yeah,...I--

LUTHER
I need you to tell me everything is gonna be just fine.

Riley pulls up in the TRUCK. She HONKS twice. Her sleeves rolled up. Covered in dirt to the elbows.

Chase looks over--his way out. Luther’s eyes stay locked on Chase--gauging his reaction to the confrontation, awaiting an answer.

CHASE
I can’t do that, Luther. Truth is nobody knows how things are gonna end up. Sometimes I wonder if God himself knows.

INT/EXT. WALDRUP’S TRUCK. LATER

Riley is driving--shaking her head. Chase stares absently out the window. Momma sits between--in her own world.

RILEY
Of all the people to get chatty with...

No answer.

CONTINUED:

RILEY (CONT'D)
What's the matter with you?

No answer.

RILEY (CONT'D)
Don't be goin' soft on me, Chase.
Not now. We in too deep now.

Chase stays fixated on the passing country. More quiet.

CHASE
He knew 'bout Haley.

This gets a rise our of Riley. A name she hasn't heard in some time. She thinks.

RILEY
I don't see what business of his
that is.

MOMMA
None. That's how much.

CHASE
Said father Wilson told him talkin'
'bout it can--

RILEY
(snappy)
What do father Wilson know? Huh?
(beat)
Talkin' 'bout it ain't gonna change
what's been done. Things happen.
They sure don't ask your permission
first.

INT. COUNTRY STORE. DAY

A clerk sits behind the register filling out a crossword puzzle in the NEWSPAPER. Webb approaches the counter with a gallon of milk. Eyes blood shot, hair frayed. Terrible condition. The clerk sets down the newspaper.

CLERK
You feelin' alright there, partner?

WEBB
Just the milk will do.

As the clerk is ringing him up Webb glances at the NEWSPAPER on the counter. He spots something.

CONTINUED:

It's an ADVERTISEMENT "FORSWORTH'S LUMBER", with a big picture of the MAN (JIM FORSWORTH) smiling right next to it.

Just then, we, along with Webb, realize the MAN's name is Jim Forsworth.

WEBB
And the paper. How much for the paper?

CLERK
Sir, this here is yesterday's paper. Today's is just over there.
(nods head)

WEBB
I need that one.

CLERK
But, sir--

WEBB
How much God damnit!

CLERK
(confused)
But, sir, this here is old news.

INT. SAWYER'S OFFICE. NIGHT

Sawyer sits at his desk. He shakes it lightly, the desk wobbles atop a faulty leg. Betsy enters holding a file in her hand.

BETSY
Lab just sent this over.
(places file on desk)
It's Abigail Guthrie's dental record compared with the tooth you found up on 149.

Sawyer looks at the file, not sure if he wants to see what it has to say.

BETSY
Anything else, sir, before I quit the buildin'?

SAWYER
You know what kinda bolts this desk take?

CONTINUED:

BETSY
That’s my first order of business tomorrow mornin’.

SAWYER
That’s all I got.

Betsy goes back to her desk to gather her belongings and close out for the night.

Sawyer looks at the folder again. Grimaces. Anyway you cut it the information inside won’t be good. After a brief staredown he flips the file open. His eyes crawl back and forth down the page.

His face blank and emotionless save for the twitch of a raised brow. Mind churning. He shouts into the other room.

SAWYER
You like catfish, Betsy?

Betsy, now with coat and keys in hand, pokes her head back into the room.

BETSY
Sorry?

SAWYER
Catfish. You like it?

BETSY
This a trick question?

SAWYER
You know me too well, but no it ain’t.

BETSY
In that case then, yes, I do. If it’s cooked right.

SAWYER
My father was a catfish farmer. Started by chance as most good things do. He was makin’ a livin' growin' rice--had a place just east of Holly Bluff n’ during one of them summers where the rain won't quit his rice field flooded up. But my father, always making the most of what he had, turned the thing into a pond. Started raisin’ catfish.

CONTINUED:

BETSY
(faux polite)
That's nice.

SAWYER
Summer 1932 all the fish in Five Mile Lake started floating up dead on the surface and washin' a shore. The frogs followed. Wasn't long before the town was buzzin', people thought the plague had descended on lil ol' Louise, Mississippi.
(laughs)
My father was no different. He pulled out every last fish from his pond--was convinced they had the devil in 'em.

BETSY
Panic will do that to people.

SAWYER
'Course turns out it was where the moonshine runners had been hiding their bootlegged liquor, they were filling those oak casks and sinkin' 'em out in the lake. The moonshine was leakin' into the water and I already told you what happened next.

BETSY
Nothin' is ever what it seems now is it, Sheriff?

SAWYER
That's the point I'm gettin' at.

BETSY
May I ask why you tellin' this to me?

A beat.

SAWYER
Not sure. I tend to ramble when I'm thinkin'.

INT. WALDRUP'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

Chase sits on the edge of his bed massaging his temples.

CONTINUED:

--Pulling on a pair of BOOTS. Trembling hands struggle to tie the laces.

BATHROOM

Chase hovers over the toilet waiting to vomit. He dry heaves. Looks at himself the mirror. Vigorously splashes cold water on his face.

CHASE
C'mon
(beat)
C'mon.

BEDROOM

Chase leans in and kisses a sleeping Riley on her forehead.

LIVING ROOM

He creeps stealthily towards the front door.

MOMMA (O.S)
Where you goin'?

Chase nearly jumps out of his skin. Momma sits calmly in her recliner.

CHASE
Momma! Why you up? Go back to bed?

MOMMA
Where you goin' child?

CHASE
Go back to bed. I won't be long.

There is a long, unsettling stillness. Momma addresses Chase, worry in her voice, sadness in her eyes.

MOMMA
When Riley was a girl I knew when she was up to no good 'fore the 'no good' even got goin'. I could smell the contrition. She'd lie. I'd tell her she can crook the truth all she want with me but there ain't no foolin' him. He's always watchin'.

Chase is shaken to the core. Fear, guilt and uncertainty gush through his internal organs. He wants to say something but doesn't. He opens the front door and walks out.

CONTINUED:

MOMMA
(gently)
He’s always watchin’.

INT. SAM WEBB’S HOUSE. HALLWAY. NIGHT

Light pours from the room into the dark hallway. We sit out there and listen to Sam Webb’s voice bellowing out of the room.

WEBB (O.S.)
(aggravated)
No, you listen up now, Jim. A deal’s a deal damnit....

Beat. Then, slightly less agitated.

WEBB (O.S.)
I know and I’m sorry things didn’t work out, I..

Beat. Aggravated again.

WEBB (O.S.)
I got a helluva mean streak, Jim, and trust me you don’t...

Push into the room.

INT. WEBB’S BATHROOM

Webb stands before a mirror. Reciting his lines. Looking worried, insecure. Trying to conjure up any and every fiber of courage he has.

MOMENTS LATER

Webb opens the front door to his house. He turns and shouts upstairs.

WEBB
Hon’, I’m headed over to the Waldrup’s place to talk ‘bout the huntin’ trip. Don’t wait up.

He leaves.

INT. LUMBER YARD. OFFICE. NIGHT

In the stillness of night Jim Forsworth sits at a table inside his stark, windowless office. He looks unsettled. Thinking. The murky, yellow, fluorescent OVER HEAD BULB pulsates emitting static electric hum. ZZZ.ZZZ.ZZZ. Light flickers in and out.

The sound of a TRUCK ENGINE filtered through the wall brings Forsworth’s eyes up. Headlight beams slip in between the wooden planks on the wall casting odd shadows across his face during the intermit moments of darkness. He listens...

Engine cuts off. A CAR DOOR opens and closes. Footsteps...

More footsteps. Forsworth's eyes go to his OFFICE DOOR. It swings open. Luther enters--a man on edge.

EXT. LUMBER YARD ENTRANCE. NIGHT

From an angle above we see as CHASE’S TRUCK pulls into the LUMBER YARD.

EXT. BACK OF LUMBER YARD. MOMENTS LATER

The LUMBER YARD sits several hundred feet in the distance. Chase stands at the trucks' TAILGATE peering down at the BODY. She's mummy wrapped in the tarp, bungee cords holding everything in place.

MOMENTS LATER

Chase approaches an old rusted INCINERATOR. He pops open a trap door just large enough to fit a log through.

MOMENTS LATER

He stands behind the ancient machine. Screws on the propane tank. Hiss, click, click. Poof. The flame leaps to life.

MOMENTS LATER

Chase lifts the mummy wrapped body out of the truck bed and dumps her on the ground. Plop. He grabs hold of her ankles and begins to drag her towards the INCINERATOR.

HEADLIGHTS wrap around the corner, crawling quickly across the ground before they land on Chase and stop abruptly. Chase becomes fully illuminated against the dark night. Bent at the waist, dragging a dead body by the ankles. Frozen, he looks back at the source. A deer in headlights.

CONTINUED:

INTERCUT. WEBB'S TRUCK. SAME

Webb's face falls flat as he takes in the scene. From his P.O.V we see Chase, still frozen, caught red handed. Light reflecting off his eyes. A schoolgirlish gasp escapes Webb. He slams a palm over his mouth.

INTERCUT CHASE P.O.V

The headlights are blinding. Finally, the truck shifts into reverse and floors backwards. It travels 10 feet before slamming into a stack of logs. Stuck. Wheels churn desperately. Deeper and deeper into the mud they go.

Webb abandons his truck, stumbles out and bolts through a column of stacked logs. Chase finally drops hold of the body and pursues the fleeing witness.

A week of dizzying rain has turned the terrain into lumpy muck. Although both men are running with all their might neither is moving very fast. Their clunky boots sink into the mud with each step resulting in an awkward, uncoordinated foot chase.

In an attempt to slow his pursuer, Webb knocks over a pile of 2x4 WOOD BEAMS. Chase does his best to dodge the falling wood but one smacks him in the chest, he grabs a hold of it and continues his pursuit.

Chase is 20 yards behind and closing. Webb checks over his shoulder and as he does so his foot twists on uneven ground sending him face first into a sea of mud.

He scrambles to get back on his feet but struggles to regain footing. Chase comes into focus from the background-- wielding the 2x4 over his head like Samurai warrior. Webb looks back just in time to see the pine colliding with his forehead. CRACK!

INT. LUMBER YARD. OFFICE. SAME

Luther and Jim Forsworth now sit across the table from one another. The YELLOW LIGHT BULB strobes in a choppy, irregular sequence. ZZZ.ZZZ.ZZZ. Forsworth puts a BULKY MANILA ENVELOPE on the table.

FORSWORTH
Your half.

LUTHER
Is it?

A slight pause.

CONTINUED:

FORSWORTH
It’s all there. As promised.

A short stare down ensues. Forsworth quickly looks away.

LUTHER
On my way here I passed Georgey Leigton’s old house.

FORSWORTH
Hell, that’s a name I haven’t heard in, what’s it been, thirty years?

LUTHER
Do you know how he died?

FORSWORTH
Yeah, Luther I--everyone knows.

LUTHER
Do you know how he died?

Luther's odd behavior causes Forsworth to shift in his seat. The frequency of the BULB quickens. Light flickers faster, harsher, the BUZZING intensifies.

FORSWORTH
What're you--yeah, uh, you, you n' him was messin' ‘round out near the lake n' Georgey slipped in and drown. You were just a boy, Luther, there wasn't nothin' you coulda done. It was an accident. You shouldn't carry ‘round all that remorse.

LUTHER
I don’t.

Dead silence....Forsworth goes to change the subject.

FORSWORTH
Okay. So we’re finished here then?

LUTHER
I dunno, are we?

More silence. The electric BUZZ escalates towards its crescendo. Forsworth eyes the BULB, Luther eyes Forsworth.

FORSWORTH
Luther, I--

CONTINUED:

LUTHER
We found a model airplane in the woods a few weeks before. Georgey n' me. One of them radio-controlled ones. Real nice. The left wing was broke but Georgey convinced me he could take it home n' fix it new. Wasn't but two days later he told me he lost it. Told me it was gone. I believed him, I trusted him. 'Course when I found out he had kept the thing for hisself my feelin's towards him changed. Come the day I asked him out to the lake my mind was made.
(beat)
I'll ask you again...
(sinister)
...Do you *know* how he died?

On cue the LIGHT BULB POPS and darkness swallows the room.

Black.

EXT. BACK OF LUMBER YARD. NIGHT

Chase is in panic--moving a million miles a minute. He pulls a TOW CABLE from his truck and hooks it to the front of Webb's truck.

MOMENTS LATER

The lifeless bodies of Webb and the girl sit propped against the incinerator, heads dangle from limp necks.

Chase bear hugs Webb around the belly and slides him up the incinerator wall and head first into the slot. Tight squeeze. His stomach gets caught. Chase is forced to shove Webb by the ass. Its awkward to say the least. Chase BELTS OUT a foray of curses.

INT. LUMBER YARD. SAME

Outside the closed office door. Luther emerges holding the MANILA ENVELOPE. He examines his hands. Then his forearms. Then he heads towards the front door. He stops. Listens. He hears something...

EXT. BACK OF LUMBER YARD. SAME

Chase still cursing away. He shoves Webb’s ass with all his might. Clunk. Webb gives way and plops into the blaze.

P.O.V. FROM INSIDE LUMBER YARD THROUGH A WINDOW

Half the incinerator is blocked by Chase’s truck. Chase ducks behind the truck. He is obscured for a moment. Then he emerges dragging the girl. He flips her up over his shoulder and pops her in the incinerator with ease.

Hops in his truck and drives off hauling Webb’s truck behind him.

FLIP ANGLE to see Luther, concealed in darkness, having just witnessed this through a SMALL WINDOW. Flame from the incinerator reflects off the panes of glass. Luther’s eyes burn with the fervent passion of hatred.

CLOSE ON

The inside of a WINDSHIELD. Liquid floods across it.

EXT. ROAD SIDE. NIGHT

WEBB's TRUCK sits on the side of a desolate country road. Chase pours GASOLINE over the hood.

MOMENTS LATER

Opens the driver side door and scratches off the VIN NUMBER.

MOMENTS LATER

Unscrewing the LICENSE PLATE.

MOMENTS LATER

With his teeth, Chase tears away a chunk of fabric from his shirt sleeve. He lights it then tosses it on the hood. POOF. Flames lick around the truck. Chase stands back, watching the spectacle, processing what just happened. Through distorted heat shimmers we see his face contort--on the verge of a meltdown. Orange light bouncing off his cheeks.

LONG SHOT

Amidst an imperviously dark night the flame radiates a haunting glow; and from the distance we hear the ghastly howl of a debilitated man.

EXT. FULL MOON

An opulent full moon hangs ominously in the damp Mississippi air. Crickets, owls and lotuses sing their nocturnal lullabies.

INT. WALDRUP'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

The chilling BLUE LIGHT emitted from the moon sneaks through the curtains. We get the feeling it's humid. Chase hasn't slept a wink. His eyes focus on the shifting shadows on the ceiling as if they may provide a remedy for his predicament.

A noise from the HALLWAY catches his attention. His head lifts off the pillow. Hold....

There it is again.

Chase gently slips out of bed as to not wake his wife then cautiously tip toes into the hallway.

HALLWAY

His eye's sweep the hall. Nothing. Then he notices WET FOOTPRINTS dotting the floor leading around the corner. Like a bloodhound he follows the trail.

One foot print, then another and another. Hansel and Gretel.

As he rounds the corner he stops abruptly in his tracks. Right before him stands the DEAD GIRL draped in her raincoat. She is in the same condition in which Chase buried her-- battered, bruised, pale and bloody. She looks at him apathetically.

INT. WALDRUP BEDROOM. NIGHT

Chase's eyes pop open as he snaps out of the nightmare. It takes him a moment to figure out where he is. The pale moonlight glistens off his sweat drenched face.

Riley sleeps soundly on her side-- faced away from us. The sight of her laying there has a soothing effect on Chase. He scoots over and nuzzles up behind her. He actually looks at ease for a moment. But something quickly puts an end to this. Something doesn't feel right.

Chase pulls his arms back to find that they are lathered in MUD. He slides back away from Riley and watches in bewilderment as MUD oozes through the sheets like molten lava.

CONTINUED:

Chase pulls the mud soaked blankets back to find SAM WEBB; gashed and bloodied forehead, swollen eyes gazing back at him.

INT. WALDRUP BEDROOM. NIGHT

With a shrill shriek Chase jolts awake and sits up in bed panting like a scared pig. He looks at Riley--affraid of what he may see. She's there. No mud. Just lightly snoring.

He scampers out of the bed in what looks like a drunken stupor and stumbles into the hallway.

KITCHEN

Chase enters the Kitchen clutching his CHEST. His breathing is erratic,weezy.

He opens a CABINET and clumsily rifles through for a bottle of ASPIRIN. His shaky hands struggle with the child-proof lid before finally popping two tablets into his mouth. He chews then swallows them down with water from the KITCHEN FAUCET.

Chase braces himself against the sink, with each breath his anxiety dissipates further. Water and white aspirin paste dribble down his chin. As he regains composure Chase drearily gazes out the kitchen window at the FULL MOON. It meets his gaze-- big, bold and haunting in all its glory.

EXT. ROAD SIDE. EARLY MORNING

Sawyer and Werner stand before the charred corpse of WEBB's TRUCK. Smoke still trickling off the cooling iron.

WERNER
His wife called in 'n said he left out the house last night and ain't been home yet. A hunter called the truck in about an hour ago. Tags and VIN number been removed but it fits the description of Webb's vehicle.

SAWYER
I'd be surprised if it wasn't.

WERNER
This is gettin' eerie, Sheriff.
(beat)
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

WERNER (CONT'D)
I had a thought that he musta set fire to the truck here then quit town, you know, one of those self kidnappin' things?

SAWYER
Mmhm.

WERNER
Then I had another thought that maybe Sam Webb and the Guthrie girl are tucked up somewhere together.

SAWYER
Could be.

WERNER
But you doubt it?

SAWYER
Doubt it I do.
(beat)
You ever hear the joke about the woman who was happily married but her husband wasn't?

WERNER
No, sir. How's it go?

Sawyer opens his mouth to respond then decides against it.

SAWYER
From what I can tell he loved his wife plenty. And their boy for that matter. Then again, I've been deceived by love before.

WERNER
She ain't doin' so well--Mrs. Webb.

SAWYER
Given the circumstances few would be.

WERNER
Said last she heard he was headed over to the Waldrup's to talk 'bout boar huntin'. Said he was actin' funny.

This brings Sawyers attention off the truck and over to Werner.

CONTINUED:

SAWYER
Nothin' funny 'bout huntin' boar.

WERNER
No, sir. That's what I thought.
(beat)
Seems that whenever Chase Waldrup
'round trouble soon to follow.

SAWYER
That or he's the one makin' it.

WERNER
How you figure?

SAWYER
If you never met the devil on the
road of life it 'cuz you both
headin' in the same direction.

WERNER
Yessir.
(beat)
What's that mean, sir?

SAWYER
Phone Betsy, let her know we're
headed over to the Waldrup
residence.

WERNER
You take him to be caught up in all
this, Sheriff?

SAWYER
I think he got hisself into a mess
thick as the Mississippi mud.

INT. WALDRUP'S BEDROOM. EARLY MORNING

Riley in bed sleeping. Her eyes flicker. She stirs, rolls over to put an arm on Chase. He's not there. She wakes. Her groggy eyes search the room. Her dresser has been rummaged through. Closet doors flung open, clothes missing from the rack. She looks concerned, confused.

Chase enters the room carrying an armful of Momma's clothes. Riley sits up in bed.

RILEY
What the hell?

CONTINUED:

Chase stuffs the clothes in a duffle bag.

CHASE
Anything you can do without is gettin' left.

RILEY
Left where? What the hell, Chase?

Chase crosses the room and pulls more belongings from the dresser.

CHASE
C'mon, get up. Momma's already set to go.

RILEY
We ain't goin' nowh-

CHASE
God damnit, woman, get up!

Riley is taken back by Chase's uncharacteristic assertiveness. She calmly lifts the covers off her legs and steps out of bed.

RILEY
(calm)
You wanna tell me what's goin' on?

CHASE
This ain't the time for explainin'.

Chase moves her aside and continues packing.

RILEY
(calm)
Chase, tell me what's--

CHASE
Listen--

RILEY
No, you listen to me you sonnabitch! We are <u>not</u> leavin' this damn house. That's the end of it.

Chase stops packing and looks Riley square in the eye.

CHASE
I'll be cut down for what I done. Either by God or the law. I can't out run what's comin'.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

CHASE (CONT'D)
And if it’s the law that come first they gon’ come for you, too.

RILEY
What law? Sawyer n’ them? You could piss on a rock and tell ‘em it’s raining.

CHASE
People dead ‘cus of me.

RILEY
The girl? That what this is all about? You got a ‘lil guilt on your conscious? You gettin’ to feel sorry for yourself. She’s dead an’ no amount of repentin’ is gon’ bring her back. Might as well make use of what she left behind so she ain’t die in vain.
(beat)
If it’s any consolation know that everything that happened was out of your control. From that point on you were only doin’ what you had to do.

CHASE
No, Riley, I was doin’ what you told me to do. For Pete sake I’ve been doin’ what you told me for the last 13 years.

RILEY
Bullshit! I ain’t tell you to haul her body into your truck, you took that upon your damn self.

She realizes she has stumped him but stumping Chase is nothing new and it sure hasn't changed his position on the matter. She tries an alternative route.

RILEY
Sometimes you don't know what's best for yourself is all. Everyone need help now and again. I'm your damn wife. I love you, Chase. Nobody else in the world knows you like I know you and there ain't no way anybody cares 'bout you the way I do. That's for sure.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

RILEY (CONT'D)
But for the last week that money’s had us flirtin' with hell, we came this far and I ain't ready to skip out on it yet. Once Sam Webb has everything situated we can plot out our next move.

Chase is quiet. Then, almost to himself.

CHASE
All this. And for what?

RILEY
For what?! Chase, listen to yourself. That’s more money than either of us ever saw before!

CHASE
(exploading)
It don’t matter! It don’t matter no more!

Chase slams his fist into the wall. Again. Again. Again. Harder. Harder. Harder. The wall DENTS inward, drywall crumbles to the floor. Riley backs away in fear--she has never seen this side of her husband.

After he exhausts himself Chase collapses onto the edge of the bed.

CHASE
(soft)
I’m finished....

Riley sits beside him and places a comforting hand on his back. She speaks to him gently.

RILEY
Don't you see what this is? You think you just happened to stumble across that by chance? Of all times in the world that girl coulda chose to run away it was that night. Of all the people in the world to cross her path it was you. And she just so happened to have what we needed most, during a time in our lives when it was most needed.
(beat)
I don't believe in coincidence, Chase. I don't believe in odds or luck, I believe in fate. We know God works in ways we can't
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

RILEY (CONT'D)
unnerstand and most our lives we sit ‘round and try’n figure out why he does what he does but this one is hard to miss. This one slapped us clean across the nose... God put that girl in our lives. He delivered us that miracle. Why’d he choose to bless us? I dunno. I don't care. It ain't our place to question it. You talk about sinin'.... there ain’t no sin greater than to turn down God’s goodwill.

Chase takes a moment to let it soak in. Riley thinks she may have gotten through. Chase rises from the bed and continues packing.

CHASE
Sam Webb’s dead, baby. The money’s gone.

RILEY
Wh-what? What’re you--

CHASE
He’s the only one who know’s where it is. And he’s dead. It’s gone, Riley. It’s all gone.

The blood drains from her face. She shakes her head in a panicky disbelief.

RILEY
(lump in throat)
No...no..it’s not..it’s not-
(voice cracks)
N-n..I...

Once Riley’s brain registers the information she wobbles and falls onto her hands and knees. Trembling.

CHASE
If God put it there ask him why he took it away.

Air escapes the room. Silence. Chase packs. Riley, still on the ground, sobs. No words. Just the sound of clothes flopping into bags. Zippers. Sniffles. Whimpers.

CHASE
You said things happen without our permission. Well, here they are.

CONTINUED:

With two loaded duffle bags slung over his shoulder he grabs Riley by the wrist and drags her out of the room. She digs her heels in the ground. No use. Her butt slides and skips across the floor.

HALLWAY

Chase releases his hold. Riley sits on the floor like a pouting child, her knees tucked into her chest.

CHASE
I'm takin' the bags out to the truck. When I come back have your act together. Don't let Momma see you like this.

RILEY
Chase.

CHASE
What?

RILEY
Where we gonna go?

CHASE
I dunno.

RILEY
This is the end for us, ain't it?

Chase turns from the door to face his wife. He looks deep into her eyes.

CHASE
I hope not.

He turns, opens the door, and steps out.

EXT. WALDRUP'S FRONT STEPS

BANG!

A shotgun blast nails him square in the chest. He flies back onto the steps like a limp ventriloquist puppet. The gun shot echoes through the woods. A flock of birds scatter in the distance.

Hold on the maroon colored blood bubbling from the quarter sized craters in the center of his chest.

Riley comes to the front door. She looks at her husband. Watches him struggle for his final gasp.

CONTINUED:

Her eyes move towards the driveway where she finds Luther Guthrie holding a SHOTGUN--smoke percolating from the barrel. His face calm, serene. His shotgun still aimed forward. Their eyes meet.

Guthrie cocks the barrel. The shotgun spits out a shell which lands on the driveway with an unnerving ping.

He then lowers the barrel so it aligns with Riley's pregnant stomach.

She doesn't budge. Accepting her fate.

Cold in his eyes.

Hold.

He squeezes the trigger.

BANG!!!

The shotgun backfires.

The force of the kickback sends the steel barrel swinging back towards Guthrie's face where it nails him square under the chin--knocking him out cold.

INT/EXT POLICE CRUISER. DAY

Werner drives along absently minded, whistling a song. Sawyer sits shotgun. They round the corner and the Waldrup's driveway comes into his line of sight.

WERNER/SAWYER P.O.V

Chase--face up on the porch, a pool of blood making its way down the front steps. Riley kneeling beside him. Guthrie awkwardly sprawled out on the pavement--murder weapon to his side. The sun is out. Birds chirp. A beautiful spring morning.

Werner steps out of his car. His face ashen. Sound gradually becomes distorted,muffled. Most noise is muted out however other noises are intensified.

He takes in the scene that lay before him. Then all sound cuts out. Werner looks up to see Riley. Her eyes meet his. Two individuals whose lives will never be the same.

BLACK.

INT. SAWYERS OFFICE. DAY

Sawyer lays on his back under the desk like a car mechanic. He tries to screw a bolt back into place on the faulty desk leg. He fumbles, his frustration builds. The bolt won't fit, the screw driver slips and tumbles to the ground.

SAWYER
Damnit.

Sitting on the floor, shirt untucked, Sawyer looks despairingly at the desk. Around his shabby office. Then he gets an idea. He pulls open the desk drawer and takes out a bottle of Whiskey. Unscrews the top.

A quick knock. The door opens. Betsy pokes her head in. See's Sawyer about to indulge. Sawyer makes no attempt to cover it up.

BETSY
Oh. I- sorry...should I..

SAWYER
Go 'head with it.

BETSY
It's jus--well, Sheriff Reid from Rankin County is itchin' to talk to ya.

SAWYER
What line?

BETSY
He's here.
(lowers voice)
Right outside. I can tell him now's not a good time.

SAWYER
No, no, just gimme a sec. Count to 30 then send him in.

BETSY
Yessir. Sorry, sir.

She turns quickly and scurries out. Sawyer pulls himself off the ground, makes a half ass attempt to tuck his shirt in, sits in his chair and takes a healthy swig from the bottle. He waits.....and waits. Then grows impatient.

CONTINUED:

SAWYER
(shouting)
You can send--

SHERIFF REID (40's) enters cutting Sawyer off mid-sentence.

REID
Hey there, Sheriff, how ya been?

SAWYER
I'm still here. Yourself?

REID
It's goin'. Hell, the rain's been a bitch.

SAWYER
Some folks walk in the rain, others just get wet.

Silence. The comment soared over Reid's head.

REID
Word's spreadin' quick 'bout the events out this way. Between the murder, the two missin' person's and the poor sap who bought it in his own lumber yard I'd say you got your work shaped up.

SAWYER
Mm.

REID
It's gonna get ugly, Sheriff.

SAWYER
It already is, and if it ain't I don't wanna be around when ugly shows up.

REID
How's that young deputy of yours takin' it.

SAWYER
Well Sheriff, as I'm sure you're aware, given your line of work, things are gonna happen that are out of our control. He's about sick with guilt right now, it's only natural.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

SAWYER (CONT'D)
I told him to take some time, gather his thoughts and what-have-you. Soon as he comes to grips with the fact that there wasn't nothing he coulda done to prevent the inevitable he'll be back.

REID
Time heals all pain, ain't that what they say?

SAWYER
Time numbs pain, it don't heal it.

Reid eyes the Whiskey bottle sitting on the desk. Sawyer takes note.

REID
So the one fella shot the other fella then tried to shoot the dead fella's pregnant wife?

SAWYER
That's right.

REID
But the shotgun up and jammed on him?

SAWYER
Mhmm.
(beat)
Papers called it an act of God. I call it good luck...or bad luck dependin' on the party concerned.

REID
An' y'all recovered five thousand dollars cash from the assailant's residence and five more hidden away in that lumber yard?

SAWYER
That's right.

REID
Ain't that somethin'. Well, that's what brings me out here, Sheriff. Last week First Methodist Church up my way had one of their alter girls disappear. Sixteen years old. Senior member of the clergy.
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

REID (CONT'D)
She was in charge of the church donations. Turns up she was pickin' the pot for quite some time. Built herself a fancy little fortune. By the time someone caught on to what she was doin' she took her money and skipped town. Odd thing is they guessin' she made off with around 10 grand.

The two men look at eachother for a moment. Sawyer thinks.

SAWYER
Is that so?

REID
I'm afraid it is, Sheriff.

SAWYER
That's a shame.

A beat.

REID
That she's gone missin' or the fact she chose to steal from the church?

SAWYER
That would depend on whose perspective you take.

REID
You figure this whole mess to be connected?

SAWYER
Doubtful. But possible. It sure has me wonderin'.
(beat)
Just when you thought you have everything figured out somethin' else crawls along. I suppose it's life's way of keeping us on our toes.

EXT. ROAD. DAY

CLOSE ON TWO FEET.

They move briskly along the road. A pitter-patter of uneasiness. We pan up to see legs.

CONTINUED:

Then a torso, and finally a face. It belongs to a TEENAGE GIRL (16). We have never seen her before.

She is disheveled, tired, anxious, guilty. Her steps begin to slow, then she finally stops in her tracks; her eyes fixated on something ahead. Hesitation. Regret. A deep breath.

The angle flips and we see what see is looking at.....

The Guthrie home.

She walks down the driveway, up the front stoop and delicately knocks on the front door.

After a few seconds it opens. Mrs. Guthrie appears. She’s a wreck. With an oddly impassive look Mrs. Guthrie studies the girl.

GIRL
Hi Momma.

Black.