FARGO

Based on the Film
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Episode 101
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The following text fades in over black:

This is a true story. The events depicted took place in Minnesota in 2006. At the request of the survivors, the names have been changed. Out of respect for the dead, the rest has been told exactly as it occurred.

FLARE TO WHITE:

EXT. TWO LANE HIGHWAY. RURAL MINNESOTA - DAY

The white becomes snowfall, a blizzard. Through it we can make out a two lane road. A car emerges from the snow -- rust-spotted, chains on the tires -- coming towards us.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR (TRAVELING) - DAY

LORNE MALVO, age unknown, birth place unknown, sits behind the wheel, his breath white with frost. If he minds he doesn't show it.

As he drives we become aware of THUMPING coming from inside the trunk. As if someone is in there who doesn't want to be. Malvo ignores it.

A DEER

appears in the road ahead of him. Malvo turns too late, HITS it. The CAR SKIDS off the road, ROLLS twice -- the trunk popping open -- before coming to rest on its wheels.

Beat. A MAN emerges from the trunk wearing only underwear. He is stunned from the crash, but sound enough of mind to know this is his chance. As we watch he LOPES off through waist-deep snow, making for the tree line.

Beat. The driver's door opens. Slowly, Malvo climbs out. His head is bleeding where it hit the windshield. He stands unsteadily in the snow, getting his bearings.

ANGLE ON THE OTHER MAN

Loping off through the snow. Malvo could catch him if he tried, but he makes no attempt. Instead he walks into the center of the road where the deer lays on its side, struggling to get up. Three of its four legs are broken, but still it fights for life. Malvo stands over the wounded animal, looking down.

CLOSE UP ON THE DEER

It's eyes wild, blood bubbles foaming from its nose and mouth, mortally wounded.

CLOSE UP ON MALVO

Studying it's eyes. What does he see in there?

We begin to hear a strange throbbing, churning sound, half animal, half machine.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN. NYGAARD HOUSE. SAINT CLOUD, MINNESOTA - DAY

LESTER NYGAARD, 40, home for lunch, sits at the kitchen table. Lester is the kind of guy who apologizes when you step on his foot. His wife, PEARL, 39, is heating up a can of soup at the stove. We get the sense she has been talking nonstop since Lester walked in the door.

PEARL
-- Saturday. I said we'd bring a Jello salad, but Kitty said meatloaf, so --

The surging, churning sound is louder now, coming from under the floor. Nygaard listens to it, both fascinated and slightly disturbed.

PEARL (CONT'D)
(exasperated)
Hon?

LESTER NYGAARD
(snaps out of it)
What's that, hon?

Pearl brings the pot over, ladles tomato soup into his bowl.

PEARL
(exasperated)
I said it's Scotty's birthday Saturday. We're supposed ta be at your brother's at one. With meatloaf.

LESTER NYGAARD
(beat, listening)
It sounds different today, don't ya think? Angry.

PEARL
I'm washing towels. That's the towel sound.

She sits. They eat.

PEARL (CONT'D)
Kitty says they just got one of those fancy European all in ones. Says it washes and dries. One machine. Can you believe that?

LESTER NYGAARD
I bet that set them back a penny.

PEARL
He can afford it, your brother. Kitty said he just got a big promotion. After only working there a year.

We can tell his brother is a touchy subject for Lester.

PEARL (CONT'D)
Kitty said they got one of those new surround-sound systems too.
(Lester eats)
Guess I married the wrong Nygaard. That's what I said. We had a good laugh.

LESTER NYGAARD
It's just slow now. At the shop.

PEARL
Oh, hon. That's what you always say. Slow.

Beat. They eat. Lester wipes his mouth, stands.

LESTER NYGAARD
Well, better get back to it.

PEARL
You make your own wins. That's what Kitty said Ron told her. Salesmen make their own wins. You gotta try harder, hon. Smile, for Pete sake. Maybe wear a nicer tie.

LESTER NYGAARD
(looks down)
You gave me this tie.

PEARL
Well, if you were a better salesman, I'da bought you a nicer tie.

The sound of the washing machine takes on a new urgency.

PEARL (CONT'D)
At least take a look. I keep thinking maybe it's the settings. Kitty said Ron fixes things around the house all the time. Says he took the toaster apart over the weekend. Good as new now. Browns to beat the band.

Lester's jaw is tight. He opens the door to the basement.

CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT. NYGAARD HOUSE - DAY

Lester stands at the bottom of the stairs. The washing machine is acting like a caged animal, roaring and bucking. Lester stares at it, hypnotized. We get the sense he's looking at his own trapped heart.

CUT TO:

INT. INSURANCE AGENCY. SAINT CLOUD, MINNESOTA - DAY

Lester Nygaard sits across from a YOUNG COUPLE.

LESTER NYGAARD
So, that's -- like I said, there's two kinds of policies you should be thinking about. You got your Whole Life and your Whole Life Plus. Which is -- has all the benefits of Whole Life -- plus a heck of a lot more.

YOUNG MAN
We just came in to get Charline on my health care.

YOUNG WOMAN
On account of I'm having a baby.

YOUNG MAN
Ya. A boy we're hoping.

YOUNG WOMAN
Or a little girl.

YOUNG MAN
But definitely one or the other.

YOUNG WOMAN
Ya. I'd just about hug the pants off a little girl.

LESTER NYGAARD
Oh ya? Even more reason to -- all the more --

He digs through his desk, pulls out a brochure.

LESTER NYGAARD (CONT'D)
-- because, I mean, what happens if you have an accident at your job?

YOUNG MAN
I work at the library.

LESTER NYGAARD
Well, what if you're in a car crash and you go out the windshield? Or say you're on a ladder cleaning out the gutters and fall off the darn thing and break your neck. These things happen every day. People fall asleep smoking in bed and burn ta death. What I'm saying is the morgue is full of guys thought they didn't need life insurance.

The young couple stares at him, horrified.

LESTER NYGAARD (CONT'D)
(losing steam)
-- for peace of mind, I'm saying. To know that your little boy --

YOUNG MAN
Or girl.

LESTER NYGAARD
Right. Or little girl is taken care of.

YOUNG WOMAN
(beat, creeped out)
We're supposed to be at my mom's by four.

YOUNG MAN
Ya, so we're gonna --

They stand, head for the door.

LESTER NYGAARD
Oh. Okay, well -- at least let me give you a brochure. Or I got these nifty pens. Look at that. Black and red ink. You just click the -- Okay, well, come on back if you --

The couple exits. Nygaard sits for a moment.

LESTER NYGAARD (CONT'D)
Well, heck.

CUT TO:

EXT. APPLIANCE SHOP. SAINT CLOUD, MINNESOTA - DAY

Lester stands outside the store, staring in through the plate glass window at a brand new washer dryer set. He's wearing a puffy orange coat and a wool hat with ear flaps.

An SUV pulls up down the block. SAM HESS, 40, climbs out with his TWIN SONS, MICKEY and MOE, 15. Hess is a big guy, intimidating. His boys look like two identical blocking sleds.

SAM HESS
(to the driver)
Circle for a bit. I'm gonna feed the boys.

The SUV pulls away. Hess and sons walk towards Lester.

MOE
Dad said I could get pie for lunch.

MICKEY
(snickers)
Ya. Hair pie.

Sam WACKS Mickey in the back of the head. Moe cracks up. Oblivious, Lester stares at the washer dryer. Walking by, Hess recognizes him.

SAM HESS
(stopping)
Will ya look at that.

MICKEY
What is it, dad?

MOE
Ya, dad. What is it?

Lester turns, sees Hess. It takes a moment for him to recognize him, but when he does he looks nervous.

LESTER NYGAARD
Oh, hey there, Sam.

SAM HESS
That, boys, is a black man.

MICKEY
He don't look black, dad.

MOE
Ya, dad. He don't look black. More like a big pumpkin.

MICKEY
(grinning)
Ya, a stupid big pumpkin.

Hess smiles at Lester, like a shark.

SAM HESS
Lester *Niggered*.

LESTER NYGAARD
Come on now, Sam. It's -- well, it's Nygaard. Same as in high school.

MICKEY
You went to high school with the black man, dad?

MOE
Ya, dad, did you --

SAM HESS
Shut up. How you been, Lester?

LESTER NYGAARD
Oh ya. Real good.

SAM HESS
Ya, me too. Got my own trucking company now. Hess and Sons. These are the sons. God help me.

MICKEY
Yeah, we're the ...

SAM HESS
Shutup. Got rigs all over the Great Lakes. Just bought a summer house up Bear Island. It's pretty sweet.
(to his sons)
Hey, you remember I told you the story of the boy I put in the oil drum and rolled onto the highway?

MICKEY
Is that him, dad?

MOE
Ya, dad. Is that him?

SAM HESS
Oh you betcha. Good old Lester pencil dick. Say, Lester. What was the name of that girl you went with in high school? The curvy one?

LESTER NYGAARD
Pearl.

SAM HESS
Ya, Pearl. What a rack on that girl.

MOE
(to Mickey)
Dad's saying she had big titties.

MICKEY
I know what rack means, ya fairy.

Hess smacks both boys in the back of the head.

MICKEY (CONT'D)
Ow.

MOE
Ya, dad. Ow.

SAM HESS
(to Lester)
You know she gave me a tug once. Homecoming, senior year. Had these nice fat hands. Real soft. Let me feel up her tits while she did it.

LESTER NYGAARD
We're married now. Going on eighteen years.

Sam is taken off guard by this. The kids crack up.

MICKEY
Oh, dad. That's embarrassing.

MOE
Ya, dad. Super embarrassing.

Hess's eyes narrow. His face is burning and he doesn't like the feeling.

SAM HESS
Eighteen years, huh? That's something.
(beat)
Never knew what she saw in you, really.

LESTER NYGAARD
Oh, well --

SAM HESS
I mean, help me out. Is it your stupid pencil dick or your little rat face?

Lester can tell he's in danger.

LESTER NYGAARD
Ya. Well. I should get back to it.

But Hess moves in front of Lester.

SAM HESS
A little guy like you.

MICKEY
He's real small dad.

MOE
A real pee wee.

LESTER NYGAARD
Ha. Ya. Real good seeing you, Sam. Real good. And meeting your boys.

But Hess won't let him go

SAM HESS
(to his sons)
Did I ever tell you how I used to beat this little guy up in high school? I'd write my name on my fist in Sharpie fore I punched him, so everyone would know who did it.

MICKEY
That's a good one, dad.

MOE
Ya, dad. A real good one.

Hess lifts his fist, shows Lester.

SAM HESS
Remember?

LESTER NYGAARD
Ha. Ya. That was -- a long time ago.

Slowly, Hess moves his fist right in front of Lester's face, enjoying his fear. Lester stands there, humiliated, not knowing what to do. Hating his helplessness, his base cowardice.

Then Hess drops his fist and smiles to show it's all just a big joke. Lester starts to relax. Then HESS FAKES A PUNCH. Lester panics, turns and RUNS FACE FIRST into the PLATE GLASS WINDOW of the appliance store -- CRACK! He falls to the ground, lays on his back.

MICKEY
Geez, dad. His face is pretty messed up.

MOE
Ya, dad. It's real messed up.

CLOSE UP OF LESTER'S FACE

As he lays there, his nose broken and bleeding, staring up at the sky. Beat. We PULL OUT and discover we are now in ...

INT. WAITING ROOM. HOSPITAL. SAINT CLOUD, MN - DAY

Lester, now sitting, lifts an ice pack to his nose. He is on a bench in the emergency room. And just as we realize this, we see that <u>sitting next to him</u> is LORNE MALVO, a nasty bruise and cut on his forehead from the car crash.

Lester lowers the ice pack. Beat.

LESTER NYGAARD
What a day.
(to a passing nurse)
Excuse me, miss. Do ya think --
will it be much longer? This thing
hurts like the dickens.

NURSE
We'll call your name.

LESTER NYGAARD
Ya, but I been here an hour
already.

NURSE
We'll call your name.

She walks away. Lester opens a soda, tries to drink, but it hurts too much. He puts the soda down.

MALVO
Could I have a sip?

Lester turns. Malvo is looking at him.

LESTER NYGAARD
Heck, take the whole can. I can't
drink the darn thing without a
straw.

He hands Malvo the soda. Malvo tips it back and drains it. Lester tries not to stare at Malvo's head injury.

MALVO
Obliged.
(puts down the can)
What happened to your nose?

LESTER NYGAARD
Oh, well. That was just -- a
misunderstanding.

MALVO
Is that you misunderstanding the
other fella, or him
misunderstanding you?

LESTER NYGAARD
Pardon?

MALVO
Who misunderstood whom?

LESTER NYGAARD
No. What I'm saying is -- it's not good to dwell on these things.

MALVO
Why?

LESTER NYGAARD
Pardon?

MALVO
Why is not good to dwell on things? Especially things that put you in the hospital.

Beat. Lester doesn't know what to say. Malvo watches him.

LESTER NYGAARD
It was -- I was outnumbered if you wanna know the truth. Three to one. Big guys too. Well, one of them. The other two were just kids. But big fer their age.
(beat, getting worked up)
Ya know -- if I was any kind of man -- I'da shown that Sam what's what.

MALVO
Sam?

LESTER NYGAARD
Hess. He was a bully in high school and he's a bully now.

MALVO
So why didn't you?
(off Lester)
Show him what's what.

LESTER NYGAARD
Well, his, uh, he had his sons with him, and --

MALVO
So you let a man beat you in front of his children. To send them a message.

LESTER NYGAARD
No. That's not --
(frustrated)
Heck. Just -- heck.

MALVO
In my experience, you let a man break your nose, next time he'll try to break your spine.

LESTER NYGAARD
Sam? No way. I mean, I don't think. It's just -- I guess I embarrassed him in front of his boys.

MALVO
You embarrassed him.

LESTER NYGAARD
By -- he was telling me about a time when he and my wife -- see, they --
(gesturing)
-- but he didn't know she was my wife, is the thing. And when I told him --

MALVO
A man slept with your wife, and you're worried you embarrassed him.

LESTER NYGAARD
Not slept with -- they didn't -- he said it was just -- she has soft hands, see? -- and I --

MALVO
Mister, we're not friends. Maybe one day we will be. But I gotta say, if that was me -- in your position -- I woulda killed that man.

LESTER NYGAARD
Well, now. Hold on.

MALVO
You said he bullied you in high school?

LESTER NYGAARD
(reluctantly)
Four years. Gave me an ulcer.
(humiliated)
One time he put me in an oil barrel and rolled me in the road.

MALVO
Seriously?
(Lester nods)
And now he tells you he had relations with your wife. Then bullies you again in front of his children. Friend, this is not a man who deserves to draw breath.

Beat. All the humiliation and pain Lester has suffered threatens to bubble up.

LESTER NYGAARD
Ya. Okay. But here's the thing --

MALVO
No. That is the thing.

LESTER NYGAARD
(beat)
Well -- heck -- I mean, okay. Okay. But what am I supposed ta do?
(beat)
Heck, you're so sure about it, maybe you should just kill him for me.

MALVO
(beat)
Are you asking me to kill this man?

LESTER NYGAARD
No. That was -- I was joking.

The nurse walks up.

NURSE
Mr. Nygaard.

Lester looks at Malvo.

LESTER NYGAARD
Ya, that's -- just a second.
(to Malvo)
We're just two fellas talking, right? Just blowing off steam?

Malvo studies him.

NURSE
Sir, it's real busy --

LESTER NYGAARD
Ya, like I said -- just a second.

MALVO
Sam. Hess.

LESTER NYGAARD
No. Now wait just a second -- that's not --

NURSE
Sir!

But Lester is focused on Malvo, like a mouse hypnotised by a snake.

MALVO
One word. Yes. Or no.

Lester looks at him, feeling a strange tickle down his spine. All he has to do is say no, but he doesn't.

NURSE
Sir, I'm gonna give your spot to --

LESTER NYGAARD
(stands)
Ya, I'm -- I'm coming for Pete sake.

He shares one last moment of eye contact with Malvo, then grabs his coat and hat, follows the nurse to an exam room. Malvo watches him go.

CUT TO:

EXT. TWO LANE HIGHWAY. SAINT CLOUD, MN - DAY

The site of Malvo's accident. The car is still there, its trunk now closed. TWO POLICE CARS are parked nearby, lights flashing. DEPUTY MOLLY SOLVERSON, 29 stands behind the wreck, kicking her feet to stay warm.

A THIRD CAR pulls up. Police Chief VERN THURMAN (40s) gets out. Molly comes over to greet him.

MOLLY
Cold enough for ya, chief?

VERN
Supposed to get down to negative ten later.

MOLLY
Heard that. Don't much like the sound of *negative*.

VERN
Thought I might strip down to my shorts. Work on my tan.
(nods)
So what's this here then?

Molly shows him the scene.

MOLLY
Chief, I arrived on the scene at thirteen hundred hours, found this late model Ford. Looks like she rolled a few times. I found a set of footprints leading away from the car. Possible our driver, injured, got confused, wandered into the woods. I was about to investigate.

Vern circles the car, crouches at the front grill.

VERN
Blood here. Hair too.

MOLLY
Saw that. I was thinkin' maybe a deer, but couldn't find the evidence.

Vern walks out into the road, looking for something. Fresh snow covers everything. Vern does some mental calculations, picks a spot and kicks the snow away.

VERN
Here it is.

Molly looks down, sees the underlayer of snow is pink with blood.

MOLLY
Son of a gun.

Vern walks back to the car. The driver's door is open.

VERN
(leans in)
Windshield's cracked. Blood there too. Driver musta hit his head

MOLLY
Or her head.

Vern hears something, straightens. It comes again louder. THUMPING. From the trunk.

VERN
You check the trunk?

MOLLY
No, sir.

The thumping continues. Vern and Molly approach the trunk.

ANGLE ON THE TRUNK

Something is inside, banging.

VERN

Thinks about opening it, the pros and cons.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
Should I unholster my sidearm?

VERN
Not unless you think there's a ninja inside.

He reaches down and pops the trunk. It swings open, revealing:

THE DEER

Still alive, flailing weakly.

VERN AND MOLLY

Look at the deer.

MOLLY
Huh.

Vern takes out his gun, puts the deer out of its misery. They stand for a moment in silence, breath misty.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
(beat)
So -- wanna take a look at those footprints then?

VERN
Sounds good.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS. SAINT CLOUD, MINNESOTA - DUSK

Vern and Molly, flashlights on, trudge through the deep snow.

MOLLY
(beat, walking)
How's Ida?

VERN
Any day now.

MOLLY
You got a name picked out?

VERN
I can't even get that woman to decide what color to paint the nursery.

MOLLY
(beat, walking)
Can't believe I missed that deer in the trunk.

VERN
Don't be. I been doin this a long time.

MOLLY
(thinks about it)
It's true. You are old.

VERN
Didn't say old. Said older.

Molly sees something.

MOLLY
Chief.

He looks where her flashlight is pointed. There, sitting in the snow, is A MAN IN HIS UNDERWEAR, frozen to death.

VERN
(beat)
Okay.

CUT TO:

INT. THURMAN HOUSE. SAINT CLOUD, MINNESOTA - NIGHT

Vern comes home. He hangs his heavy coat on the wall.

VERN
Hiya, hon.

IDA (O.S.)
In the kitchen.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN. THURMAN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Vern enters, kisses his wife. IDA (30s) is eight months pregnant.

VERN
Something smells good.

IDA
(touches her belly)
Your boy wanted a hamburger.

VERN
Sounds like my boy.

Vern goes into the

BEDROOM

Takes off his holster, locks his gun in the safe. Heading back to the kitchen, Vern stops outside the BABY'S ROOM. All the furniture -- crib, changing table, etc -- has been pushed to the center. We see a tarp, paint trays and clean rollers on the floor.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN. THURMAN HOUSE - NIGHT

Vern and Ida eat dinner.

VERN
(beat)
Molly found a wreck out one thirteen. Looks like the driver tried ta head out on foot, but got lost, froze ta death in the woods.

IDA
Oh my.

VERN
Ya. Funny thing is, the fella was just wearing underpants.

IDA
That so?

VERN
Ya. No ID. Nothin. Couldn't find his clothes anywhere.

IDA
Maybe he ate 'em.

Vern nods like that's a real possibility, then smiles. They eat for a bit.

IDA (CONT'D)
I was thinking maybe blue. For the nursery.

VERN
Ya?

IDA
Earlier. I was thinking maybe blue, but then I changed my mind.

VERN
Blue's nice.

IDA
Maybe green.

Vern nods. We can tell they've been having this conversation for months.

VERN
Green's possible.
(beat)
Well, I'm ready to get painting. Soon as you decide.

IDA
You're a good man, Vern Thurman. My sister was crazy telling me not to marry you.

VERN
(beat, chews)
Your sister is crazy.

They eat for a while in comfortable silence.

CUT TO:

INT. HESS TRUCKING COMPANY. SAINT CLOUD, MINNESOTA - DAY

A large garage housing a raised DISPATCH OFFICE. Through the office window we see Sam talking to BRUCE GOLD (40s). Gold is Sam's lawyer. TWO BIG GUYS sit with them.

In the main garage there is a big rig parked along the far wall. The logo on the trailer reads NARCOL. Sam Hess's truck is parked next to it.

Boxes of INFLATABLE WOMEN are stacked against the wall. Mickey and Moe have one of them open. Mickey is using a high pressure air hose to fill up one of the women. She gets fatter and fatter, then explodes. They crack up.

MOE
Dad said we should take turns.

MICKEY
Dad told me he thinks you're retarded.

Moe attacks him. They wrestle. Mickey gets Moe in a headlock. Lorne Malvo enters the garage, watches them.

MALVO
You're doing it wrong. You wanna press your forearm against the back of his neck, then grab your elbow with the other hand. Choke him right out.

The two boys separate, unsettled.

MICKEY
Whatcha want, mister?

MOE
Ya, mister. Whatcha want?

MALVO
Sign outside says Hess and Sons.

Malvo studies them, Tweedle Dum and Dumber.

MALVO (CONT'D)
Which is the older boy?

MICKEY
Me. Mickey. So that means I'm in charge when dad's gone.

MOE
Are not. Mom said --

MICKEY
Mom's got nothing ta do with it, faggot.

Upstairs, Sam sees his boys talking to Malvo, comes out of the office.

SAM HESS
Help you with something?

Malvo sizes him up, ignoring the hired muscle.

MALVO
You Hess?

Hess and the two big guys come down the stairs. It's clear they don't like strangers coming around, asking questions.

SAM HESS
Who wants ta know?

Malvo checks to see if there's another guy behind him asking questions.

MALVO
Me.

He nods to the big rig.

MALVO (CONT'D)
See you do work for Narcol. You know Romo?

SAM HESS
<u>You</u> know Romo?

MALVO
(beat)
Never heard of him.

Hess looks at his guys to see if they're hearing this.

SAM HESS
Is he serious?

Hess closes on him.

SAM HESS (CONT'D)
Only two reasons to come to my shop, friend. Either you need a truck. Or you drive a truck. You a truck driver?

Malvo is unintimidated.

MALVO
I was just talking to your boys. I think the younger one's a little dim.

SAM HESS
What did you say?

MALVO
His IQ seems low, I'm saying. Have you had him tested?

The two heavies close around Malvo.

MICKEY
Hit him, dad.

MOE
Ya, dad. Hit him.

Bruce Gold clears his throat. Hess looks at him. Gold shakes his head.

SAM HESS
I'm gonna restrain myself -- on accounta you got an obvious head injury -- and not beat you with you to death with a tire iron. But I'm gonna` ask you again. What the heck do ya want?

MALVO
Just wanted to get a look at you.

Malvo gives Sam a slow once over.

MALVO (CONT'D)
Okay. That'll do it.

Malvo walks out. Off Hess: *what the fuck was that about*?

CUT TO:

EXT. LESTER'S BROTHER'S HOUSE. MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA - DAY

An expensive two story home. Lester and Pearl stand on the threshold with a meatloaf. Lester's broken nose is taped, his eyes black.

PEARL
How does a grown man fall over his own feet?

LESTER NYGAARD
It was ice. I slipped on ice.
(feels his nose)
We should have cancelled.

PEARL
Don't be a baby.

Unhappy, Lester rings the bell. SCOTTY, 9, opens the door.

LESTER NYGAARD
(animated)
We're here.

The boy SLAMS the door in their face. Beat. Lester rings the bell again. KITTY NYGAARD, 32, opens the door. She's pretty, well appointed.

LESTER NYGAARD (CONT'D)
(tries again)
We're here.

KITTY
Come on in. Ron's working the ham.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN. BROTHER'S HOUSE - DAY

RONALD NYGAARD (30s) stands at the kitchen counter. It's clear he got all the looks and charm in the family. Lester holds a can of beer with a straw in it. Ron massages honey into a ham with his bare hands.

Behind them, Kitty and Pearl set the table. Scotty watches TV in the other room.

RON
-- took the whole team down to Duluth Tuesday. Big spread at the Marriot.

PEAL
Ooh. I've always wanted ta stay there.

RON
Ya. It's real sweet. King sized bed. View of the lake. You name it. Boss took me out for dinner.

KITTY
Just the two of them.

RON
Steak big as a catcher's mitt. Said, Ronny, you're going places in this world.

KITTY
Gave him a raise and a corner office.

PEARL
Hear that, Lester? A corner office. Where two walls meet.

LESTER NYGAARD
Ya. Real good.

PEARL
And him your younger brother.

LESTER NYGAARD
Ya. I said I heard.

KITTY
Vice President Sales, Midwest Region.

Ron massages the ham.

RON
Bought the surround sound to celebrate. Pretty sweet, huh?

Lester sips beer through a straw, watches his brother work the meat.

LESTER NYGAARD
You may have ta marry that ham, you get any more familiar with it.

RON
Saw it on Rachel Ray. She says massaging breaks the muscle down. Makes the meat juicier.

PEARL
Lester never wants to try new things.

LESTER NYGAARD
Now hold on -- that's not --

KITTY
Oh, we make Scotty try stuff all the time. Ron says we hafta open his horizons.

RON
Broaden his horizons. It's a big world, ya now. There's more to life than just Minnesota.

Lester sips gingerly from his can of beer.

RON (CONT'D)
Took a real tumble, huh?

LESTER NYGAARD
There's a spot over by the fire station. Always icy. Don't know what the heck I was thinkin'.

Ron washes his hands.

RON
(to Lester)
Come out ta the garage. Help me get some more beer.

CUT TO:

INT. GARAGE. BROTHER'S HOUSE - DAY

A sweet setup with tools hanging on the wall. Ron opens a mini-fridge, hands Lester a beer.

RON
We took Scotty to a specialist last month. Think he might have the autism. Won't stop drawin' on the walls. Also, Kitty found a mason jar in his closet. I guess he pees in it at night. What's that about? Hey. Wanna see something cool?

He goes over to a locked footlocker, opens the padlock with a key.

RON (CONT'D)
Take a look at this baby.

Lester comes over.

ANGLE ON THE FOOTLOCKER

Inside is a large automatic weapon, gleaming and deadly.

LESTER NYGAARD
Geez. What is it?

RON
That there is your M-249 SAW light machine gun. Sometimes referred to as 'the piglet.'

LESTER NYGAARD
Are you allowed to -- can you even have that?

RON
Is it legal? Technically no way. But I got a buddy works supply over Camp Ripley. And heck, I'm an American. I pay my taxes. Take a look. It's gas operated, air cooled. Shoots seven-hundred-twenty-five rounds per minute.

He takes the machine gun out of the box, hefts it, then hands it to Lester, who, unprepared for the weight, DROPS IT on the concrete floor.

LESTER NYGAARD
Aw geez.

Ron bends down. The machine gun is clearly damaged.

LESTER NYGAARD (CONT'D)
You shoulda told me it was so heavy. Is it okay?

RON
No, Lester. It's not okay. You bent the darn --
(sighs)
Why are you such a G.D. screw up?

LESTER NYGAARD
Hey, now --

RON
Ever since you were -- And now Kitty said she talked to Pearl last week. And she's had it. Your wife. Said yer acting just plain weird. Mopin' around. Said she caught you standing in the bathroom with yer toothbrush in yer hand just looking in the mirror. Said foam was comin' outta yer mouth like a rabid dog.

LESTER NYGAARD
That's -- come on -- that's not -- how I may -- or may not -- be feeling. And fer yer information I was -- I hadn't had a lotta sleep the night before. So the toothpaste -- that was just --

RON
Did you really trip on the ice and break yer nose?

LESTER NYGAARD
Ya. Yes. I told ya. Outside the fire station. Ya know they run the hoses and wash the trucks and the ground gets all wet. Real slippery.

Ron shakes his head.

RON
Guys at work. They talk about how they look up to their brothers. Their older brothers.
(beat)
Sometimes I tell people you're dead.

LESTER NYGAARD
You --

RON
I mean, heck, Lester. You're forty years old. When are you gonna get yer act together?

Beat. Lester stares at him, ire rising.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Lester drives. Pearl sits next to him, fuming.

PEARL
Yer own brother. You didn't haveta hit him. I mean, seriously. What is the matter with you?

Lester drives, jaw clenched. The world is pressing down.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE. ST. LOUIS, MS - NIGHT

A MAN sits alone in an office. This is MR. RUNDLE. Outside his window is the skyline of a mid-western city. His furniture is bland. No decorations on the wall. The man is similarly forgettable. His phone rings.

MR. RUNDLE
(answering)
Claims and Adjustments.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. CAR (TRAVELING). SAINT CLOUD, MN - SAME TIME

Lorne Malvo drives in a newly stolen car, on his phone. We see an SUV in front of him.

MALVO
It's me.

MR. RUNDLE
Mr. Malvo. Your call was expected yesterday.

MALVO
I got delayed.

MR. RUNDLE
Problems?

MALVO
Car trouble. Fixed now.

MR. RUNDLE
But you finished the assignment?

MALVO
Of course.

MR. RUNDLE
And when can they expect you in Duluth? The new client is anxious to begin.

MALVO
Soon. I took a detour.

MR. RUNDLE
And the nature of this detour.

The SUV ahead of Malvo pulls into THE LUCKY PENNY, a strip club. Malvo follows.

MALVO
Personal. Shouldn't be more than a day or two.

MR. RUNDLE
I'll let Duluth know.

Malvo hangs up. He watches Sam Hess get out of the SUV with his two guys, walk to the front door.

CUT TO:

INT. BACK ROOM. THE LUCKY PENNY - NIGHT

Sam Hess is giving it to a HOOKER, who couldn't look more bored, a cigarette dangling from her lips.

HOOKER
Oh, yeah, big fella. Oh, yeah.

Hess works towards his big finish, huffing and puffing. Then suddenly, he STOPS. BLOOD pours from his mouth. The hooker screams as Hess falls on top of her, revealing: LORNE MALVO, who has just stuck a KNIFE into the back of Hess's head. Hess blocks the hooker's view.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM. THURMAN HOUSE. SAINT CLOUD, MINNESOTA - NIGHT

Vern is sleeping next to his wife. The phone rings.

VERN
Ya?
(beat, listening)
Aw geez. Where?
(beat, listening)
Okay. Pick me up, huh?

He sits up, scratches. Ida is half awake.

IDA
Gotta go?

VERN
Homicide. Molly's coming ta get me. Go back to sleep, hon.

She throws her arm over him, sleepily.

IDA
Love ya.

VERN
Love ya too.

CUT TO:

EXT. THURMAN HOUSE. SAINT CLOUD, MINNESOTA - NIGHT

Molly pulls up in her prowler. Vern comes out, climbs in. Molly hands him a coffee.

VERN
Thanks.

Molly drives.

MOLLY
Ida sleeping?

VERN
Ya.

MOLLY
Bill's over the Lucky Penny. Says it's a real mess.

VERN
Bar fight?

MOLLY
Nope. Ya know those back rooms they got for hanky panky? Well, sounds like a customer was givin' it to one of the girls. Got himself stabbed in the head.

VERN
The girl stabbed him?

MOLLY
Bill says no. Says it was an assassination type deal.

VERN
(thinks about that)
Huh.

CUT TO:

INT. BACK ROOM. THE LUCKY PENNY - NIGHT

Sam Hess lays face down on the bed, the knife still sticking out of the back of his head. Vern and Molly stand by the bed looking down at him.

MOLLY
Whatcha want me to write for cause of death?

VERN
Put self-explanatory.

Vern crouches, examines Hess's profile.

VERN (CONT'D)
Well, heck. That's Sam Hess.

MOLLY
Hess that owns the trucking company?

VERN
Ya. With the two boys, both dumb as a dog's foot.

Molly looks around. A thought hits her.

MOLLY
Hold on. Isn't Hess tied to that syndicate of fellas outta Fargo? Gun runners and such.

VERN
So they say.

MOLLY
Geez. Ya think this was, like, an organized crime thing? A hit or the like?

VERN
(straightens)
Don't know what I think yet. Except that I was warm in bed a half hour ago.

CUT TO:

INT. FARMDALE MOTEL. SAINT CLOUD, MINNESOTA - NIGHT

The owner, a heavyset WOMAN, is yelling at a sullen TEEN. Malvo enters.

WOMAN
How many times I gotta tell ya? You can't just take dirty sheets offa one bed and put 'em on another. It's unsanitory.

TEEN
I shake ‘em out first.

WOMAN
You don’t have the sense God gave a clam, do you? Go shovel the walk.

The sullen teen exits.

MALVO
I need a room.

WOMAN
Just you?

MALVO
Pardon?

WOMAN
Is it just for you? The room.

MALVO
What difference does that make?

WOMAN
Different rate for two. And if ya got pets -- dog, cat -- that’s an extra ten bucks.

MALVO
What about a fish?

WOMAN
Excuse me?

MALVO
Would a fish cost me ten dollars?

WOMAN
Well --

MALVO
Or say I kept spiders. Or mice. What if I had bacteria?

WOMAN
Sir, bacteria are not pets.

MALVO
Could be.

WOMAN
Sir, perhaps you’d be happier in a different motel.

MALVO
I just want to know the policy. I'm a student of institutions.

WOMAN
(exasperated)
Sir, do ya have a pet or not?

MALVO
Nope. Just me.

CUT TO:

EXT. FARMDALE MOTEL. SAINT CLOUD, MINNESOTA - NIGHT

Malvo approaches his room. The teen is shoveling snow nearby.

MALVO
Why do you let her talk to you like that?

TEEN
Aw, she's not that bad.

MALVO
Son, she compared you to a clam.

The teen thinks about it. The woman is kind of a bitch.

TEEN
Well, what should I do?

MALVO
Guy insulted me once. I pissed in his gas tank. Car never drove straight again.

The teen smiles, puts down the shovel. He walks over to the woman's car. Malvo lets himself into his room.

INT. MOTEL ROOM. SAINT CLOUD, MN - CONTINUOUS

Malvo goes to the phone, dials the front desk. He looks out through the curtain. We can see the Teen with his pants undone, pissing into the gas tank.

WOMAN
Farmdale motel.

MALVO
Yeah, I'm looking out my window and there's a young fella urinating into the gas tank of a red Miata.

WOMAN
Son of a --

Malvo hangs up, watches as the woman comes out of the office with a shotgun. She YELLS at the teen, who panics and stumbles away, his pants falling down.

Malvo closes the curtain.

CUT TO:

INT. COFFEE SHOP. SAINT CLOUD, MINNESOTA - DAY

A family place. Molly Solverson sits at a table, going over a case file. LOU SOLVERSON (60) limps over with a pot of coffee.

LOU
Warm ya up, hon?

MOLLY
Thanks, dad.

LOU
Whatcha lookin' at?

MOLLY
Murder file.

LOU
Oh ya?

MOLLY
Ya. Sam Hess got himself killed last night over The Lucky Penny.

LOU
Ya don't say.

MOLLY
Ya. Knife in the head. But ya didn't hear that from me.

Vern Thurman comes in, sees Molly, comes over.

VERN
Hey there, Molly. Lou.

LOU
Coffee? Eggs over medium.

VERN
Won't say no. How's the leg?

LOU
Goes from my ass to the ground, same as the other. Thinking of doin' some ice fishin' this weekend.

VERN
Sorry to hear it.

LOU
Interested?

VERN
No. Only thing I ever caught fishin' in winter was a cold.

Lou goes back behind the counter.

MOLLY
Say, Chief. I been thinkin'. That fella in the snow. With the underpants. Somethin' odd about that.

VERN
Yer sayin' other than the fact he was just wearin' panties.

MOLLY
Ya. See, we know from the wreck that whoever was driving the vehicle cracked their head on the windshield. But the fella in the snow --

VERN
No head injury.

MOLLY
Right. So, ya see --

VERN
That's some good police work there, deputy.

MOLLY
(smiles)
Thanks.

VERN
But if he's not the driver -- I guess we gotta ask -- who is he?

MOLLY
I ran his prints. Nothin'. Plus, turns out the car was stolen.

VERN
Oh ya?

MOLLY
Ya. Over in Grand Forks. I called the local PD. Waiting for a call back.

VERN
(nods to Hess file)
Any thoughts there?

MOLLY
Not as such. The lady Hess was with didn't get a good look at the fella killed him on account of all the blood in her eyes. But we're checkin' the knife fer prints. Also Bill's goin' around to the stores, see if the knife was maybe bought here in Saint Cloud.

Vern studies her.

VERN
You'll make a good chief one day.

MOLLY
(surprised)
Me? What about Bill? He's got seniority.

VERN
Bill cleans his gun with bubble bath. No. It'll be you. If you want.

Molly nods. She does.

CUT TO:

INT. HESS HOUSE. SAINT CLOUD, MINNESOTA - DAY

Mickey and Moe, wearing black suits too short in the arms and legs, sit on the sofa, looking bored. Their mother, GINA HESS (30s) sits in a chair, wearing red. She's not from around here. Bruce Gold, Hess's consigliere, is there, drinking coffee. As are the TWO HEAVIES we saw at the garage.

BRUCE GOLD
When you talk to the police just keep it simple. Thanks but no thanks in other words. I've already talked to Fargo and they want to deal with this themselves. They're sending guys.

GINA HESS
Deal with what? He was in a whorehouse. I'm glad he's dead.

MICKEY
Ma, don't talk like that.

MOE
Ya, mom. Don't talk like that.

Through the living room WINDOW we see Vern's prowler pull up. Vern and Molly get out.

GINA HESS
Makes me live in the god damn north pole and then he has the nerve to -- I'm not kidding. I'm gonna sing at his funeral.

She breaks into tears, inconsolable. The men of Minnesota watch her cry, mystified by her emotional range.

A MAID comes in.

MAID
Mr. Mickey. You have a phone call.

Mickey and Moe stand together.

MICKEY
She said me, doofus.

MOE
Can't I come?

MICKEY
No. Geez. Stay here with ma.

Mickey follows the maid into the ...

KITCHEN

He picks up the phone.

MICKEY
Hello?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. FARMDALE MOTEL. SAINT CLOUD, MINNESOTA - SAME TIME

Lorne Malvo sits on his bed, clipping his toe nails.

MALVO
Mickey, it's Lewis Grossman. Your dad's estate attorney. First let me say how sorry I am for your loss.

MICKEY
Ok.

MALVO
Next thing is, I'm responsible for overseeing the dispersal of your dad's vast estate.

MICKEY
(brightening)
You mean the money?

MALVO
Right. Money, real estate holdings, automobiles. And -- well, there's no delicate way to put this -- the will is very clear. Your dad decided to leave everything to your younger brother, Moe.

MICKEY
Are you fucking kidding me?

MALVO
I know it's hard to hear. But the will is very specific. Quote, I leave the entirety of my vast estate to my second born -- and favorite -- son, Moe. That's sweet. He musta really loved that boy. Anyway, that's it. Again, sorry for your loss. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to call.

Malvo hangs up, finishes clipping his toe nails.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM. HESS HOUSE - DAY

Vern and Molly have come in while Mickey was on the phone. They stand talking to Gina, Moe and Bruce Gold.

VERN
Well, like I said, Mrs. Hess, we're checking some things on our end. But anything you could tell us -- about yer husband's business, or --

BRUCE GOLD
Appreciate the visit, Vern. But Mrs. Hess had no kind of involvement in Sam's business. Frankly, she's mystified. Her husband being a pillar of the community and all. I mean, heck, voted Saint Cloud Businessman of the Year, 1996 and 98.

VERN
Ya. Like I said, it's a puzzler. But if you or these big fellas have any information --

Mickey comes back from the kitchen, stands in the doorway.

MOE
(mouths)
Who was it?

Mickey waves Moe over (*come outside and I'll tell ya)*. The two go to the front door.

VERN
-- about enemies Mr. Hess mighta made or --

There is a HOCKEY STICK resting against the wall. Mickey GRABS it on his way out.

VERN (CONT'D)
-- you know, differences he mighta had with certain individuals, well, we'd appreciate the sharing of such information.

GINA HESS
When do I get the fat bastard's body back?

BRUCE GOLD
Gina.

Vern and Molly exchange a look. Through the LIVING ROOM WINDOW we see Mickey and Moe walk out into the front yard, Mickey holding the hockey stick.

VERN
Well, there'll be an autopsy today. And they're real delicate with that. I wanna reassure you. You won't be able to tell a thing.

MOLLY
Ya. It's amazin' what those fellas can do. My aunt had a stroke in the bathtub. Just real bloated when they found her.

Outside, MICKEY CLOBBERS MOE with a hockey stick. Moe staggers. Mickey hits him again.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
Puffed up like a fish. But -- what do ya know? -- we had an open casket.

Moe goes down. Mickey BEATS him mercilessly.

GINA HESS
(stares at Molly)
What the hell are you talking about?

MOLLY
-- just, they do nice work is --

Molly glances out the window, sees Moe on the ground, taking a beating.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
Chief! 217! 217!

She sprints for the door and out into the yard. We watch through the window as she TACKLES Mickey.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE CAR (TRAVELING). SAINT CLOUD, MN - DAY

Mickey sits in back, handcuffed. Molly drives. Vern is in the passenger seat.

MOLLY
I don't understand. Why would ya do a thing like that? And to yer own brother.

Mickey says nothing. They drive in silence.

CUT TO:

INT. LESTER'S CAR. SAINT CLOUD, MINNESOTA - DAY

Lester is driving to work. As he passes the Farmdale Motel, he sees Lorne Malvo exit his room. Lester slows, watches Malvo go into the Arby's next door.

LESTER NYGAARD
What the heck?

CUT TO:

INT. INSURANCE AGENCY. SAINT CLOUD, MINNESOTA - DAY

Lester Nygaard arrives for work. He takes off his puffy coat, hangs it on the coat rack. His boss, BO MUNK (50s) comes over.

BO
Heya, Lester.

LESTER NYGAARD
Oh, hiya, Bo.

BO
What happened to yer face there?

LESTER NYGAARD
Ya know that spot near the fire station?

BO
Where they wash the trucks?

LESTER NYGAARD
Yah, slipped on the ice.

BO
Ouch. Say, Lester. I needya ta pull the policy for Sam Hess.

LESTER NYGAARD
(beat)
For -- who now?

BO
Sam Hess, owns the truck depot over on Winslow. You know. Big fella. Well, he's dead.

The color goes out of Lester's face.

LESTER NYGAARD
Oh ya?

BO
Ya. Shame. That's a big policy.
(lowers his voice)
Murder, they're sayin'. Stabbed ta death is what I heard.
(off Lester)
You okay there, Lester?

LESTER NYGAARD
Oh sure. I, uh -- you know I went ta high school with him.

BO
Ya don't say. Well, anyway. I need ya ta pull the policy. Gotta get on the phone with his wife later.

Bo walks away. Lester stands there, feeling both terror and a peculiar elation.

CUT TO:

INT. ARBY'S. SAINT CLOUD, MINNESOTA - DAY

Lorne Malvo sits at a formica table, finishing his meal. Lester comes in, hat on, agitated. Malvo recognizes him.

MALVO
Lester.

Lester comes over.

LESTER NYGAARD
Did you -- geez.
(leans in)
Did you really kill him?
(almost can't say it)
Sam.

MALVO
Oh my god. Is Sam dead?
(off Lester)
How do you feel about that?

LESTER NYGAARD
I mean, of course. It's -- ya know, tragic --

MALVO
Then why'd you kill him?

LESTER NYGAARD
(too loud)
Now hold on a second.

Lester looks around, sits.

LESTER NYGAARD (CONT'D)
(quiet)
I never --

MALVO
You did actually. Remember? Yes or no.

LESTER NYGAARD
(hisses)
I never said *yes*.

MALVO
Well, you didn't say *no*.

Beat. Lester is tied up in knots.

LESTER NYGAARD
Now, that's not -- that won't -- in a court a law -- that won't --

MALVO
(dangerous)
Who said anything about a court of law?

LESTER NYGAARD
No. I just mean -- Aw geez. He had a wife. And those boys.

MALVO
He put you in a barrel and rolled you in the road. Your problem is, you lived your whole life thinking there are rules. There aren't. We used to be gorillas. All we ever had was what we could take and defend. The truth is, you're more of a man today than you were yesterday.

LESTER NYGAARD
How do ya figure?

MALVO
It's a red tide, Lester. This life of ours. The shit they make us eat.
(MORE)

MALVO (CONT'D)
Day after day -- the boss, the wife, etcetera -- wearin' us down. If you don't stand up to it -- show 'em you're still an ape deep down where it counts -- you're just gonna get washed away.

Off Lester: this resonates.

CUT TO:

INT. NURSE'S STATION. EMERGENCY ROOM. SAINT CLOUD, MN - DAY

Molly enters, approaches the nurse's station. SUE ROUNDTREE (30s), the same nurse from earlier, is working.

MOLLY
Slow day.

SUE ROUNDTREE
Bars just opened. Wait an hour.

Molly takes off her gloves and hat.

MOLLY
How's the Hess boy?

SUE ROUNDTREE
The which now?

MOLLY
Brother attacked him with a hockey stick.

SUE ROUNDTREE
Oh, Sure. Outta surgery. Doctor had to drill holes in his head, on account of the swelling. May have some brain damage is what I heard.

MOLLY
That's a shame. With their dad dead and all.

SUE ROUNDTREE
Family.

MOLLY
Ya.

Beat. Small talk over, Molly gets to the real reason she came.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
Say, while I'm here -- we found a car wreck out by Moose Lake yesterday morning.

SUE ROUNDTREE
Icy out there.

MOLLY
Sure is. Here's the thing though. The windshield was cracked. There was blood and all, but no driver. So I'm wondering -- you see any head injuries in the last day or so, coulda been caused by those circumstances.

SUE ROUNDTREE
There was this one fella.

MOLLY
Oh ya?

SUE ROUNDTREE
Ya. Looked like he banged his head real bad, but wouldn't give ID. So we couldn't treat him.

MOLLY
Can you describe him?

SUE ROUNDTREE
Real intense. Average height. Brown pants, if that helps.

Molly takes out her notepad, writes.

MOLLY
Brown pants. Anything else?

SUE ROUNDTREE
Just real intense. His eyes, ya know?
(beat)
Oh, and he was talkin' ta this other fella.

MOLLY
Other fella.

SUE ROUNDTREE
Ya. Here for a broken nose. Looked like they were maybe havin' an argument.

MOLLY
Ya don't say.

Sue looks through her files.

SUE ROUNDTREE
Lester Nygaard. He was here around four in the P.M.

MOLLY
You remember what they were arguing about?

SUE ROUNDTREE
Well, ya know, it's funny, but I wanna say they were arguing about that dead fella.

MOLLY
Who?

SUE ROUNDTREE
Hess.

MOLLY
(that's interesting)
Really.

SUE ROUNDTREE
(nodding)
Ya. Heard 'em say his name. Is that, like, a lead?

MOLLY
Oh ya.

Molly nods absently for a moment, thinking *jackpot*.

CUT TO:

INT. SAINT CLOUD POLICE STATION, SAINT CLOUD, MN - DAY

Vern sits in his office, eating take out. DEPUTY BILL OLSEN knocks.

BILL
Phone call, chief. It's the wife.

Vern picks up the phone.

VERN
Hey hon.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. THURMAN HOUSE. SAINT CLOUD, MINNESOTA - SAME TIME

Ida is in the kitchen.

IDA
White.

VERN
White what?

IDA
I decided. We're gonna paint the nursery white.

VERN
It's already white.

IDA
Well, I want to paint it again. The baby's room should have a new coat, don't ya think?

VERN
I do. Any particular shade?

IDA
What do ya mean?

VERN
Well, ya got yer bright white, yer snow white.

BILL
(hasn't left)
Eggshell.

VERN
Right. There's eggshell.

IDA
Oh. I hadn't thoughta that.

Vern realizes he's opened a whole other can of worms.

VERN
Tell ya what. Why don't I stop at the Home Depot, pick up some different shades and we'll figure it out tonight?

IDA
We're havin' a baby, Vern.

VERN
That's true.

IDA
No. I mean, it's finally sinkin' in. We're gonna have a baby.

VERN
(beat, happy)
I can't wait. See ya soon.

He hangs up.

CUT TO:

INT. VERN'S CAR (TRAVELING). ST. CLOUD, MINNESOTA - NIGHT

Vern pulls into the Home Depot parking lot. His radio squawks.

MOLLY
Come in, Chief.

Vern picks up the handset.

VERN
This is Vern, go ahead.

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. HOSPITAL. ST. CLOUD, MN - SAME TIME

Molly stands beside her prowler outside the hospital.

MOLLY
Chief, I'm over at the hospital. I was checkin on the Hess boy and --

VERN
How is he?

MOLLY
Uh, he's, uh -- you know, there could be some brain damage.

VERN
That's a shame.

MOLLY
Ya. Hey, so I got ta talkin to Sue Roundtree, and I asked her if they'd had any head injuries lately -- ya know my theory about the driver in that wreck -- and Sue says they did yesterday. A peculiar fella, she says. Real intense. And here's where it gets interesting. Cause she says the fella with the head injury was talkin to another fella. About Sam Hess.

VERN
Oh yeah?

MOLLY
Yessir. Says the two was thick as thieves. So suddenly I'm thinking, maybe these two cases, maybe they're connected, huh?

VERN
(impressed)
Could be. She say who the other fella was?

MOLLY
(looks in her pad)
Lester Nygaard.

VERN
Really.

MOLLY
You know him.

VERN
Sure. I know Lester. Sells insurance over at Bo's shop.

MOLLY
Ya. I called over. They're closed. So I was gonna go by Lester's place.

VERN
No. I know Lester. I'll do it. You call it a day. Good work.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN. NYGAARD HOUSE. SAINT CLOUD, MN - NIGHT

Pearl comes home, sees Lester's coat.

PEARL
Lester?

LESTER NYGAARD (O.S.)
(calling)
In the basement.

CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT. NYGAARD HOUSE. SAINT CLOUD, MINNESOTA - NIGHT

Pearl comes downstairs. Lester has his tool kit out. He's trying to fix the washing machine.

PEARL
Whatcha doin', hon?

LESTER NYGAARD
Trying ta fix the darn thing.
Looks like the motor mount broke.

PEARL
Ya sure ya know what yer doin'?

LESTER NYGAARD
Seems pretty straight forward.

He puts the screwdriver down.

LESTER NYGAARD (CONT'D)
Okay. Give that a try.

PEARL
But there's nothing in it.

LESTER NYGAARD
I'm sayin' just fer a test.

Pearl turns the machine on. Beat. It fills with water, then the agitator kicks in. A harsh shriek fills the air.

LESTER NYGAARD (CONT'D)
(panicked)
Turn it off.

Pearl tries to turn it off. The shriek worsens. SMOKE starts to pour out of the back of the washing machine. Lester finally pulls the plug. The shriek fades slowly, as the engine cycles down.

They stare at the now dead washing machine.

LESTER NYGAARD (CONT'D)
Well --

PEARL
You killed it.

LESTER NYGAARD
I, uh --

PEARL
You killed my washing machine.

LESTER NYGAARD
It's -- I was -- ya know, the tide. I was standing up to the -- I was bein' a man.

PEARL
But yer not a man, Lester. Yer not even half a man.

Lester stares at her, his nuts cut once again.

PEARL (CONT'D)
Honestly. I don't know what got into me, marrying you. My mom said, don't do it, Pearl. She said, he's the kind of boy who loses all the time. And you know what those boys grow up ta be, don't ya? Losers.

LESTER

Looks at his tools.

ANGLE ON A CLAW HAMMER

Resting on top of the tool box.

LESTER NYGAARD
Take it back.

PEARL
Or what? What are you gonna do? Ya can't even face me when we're having sex.

LESTER NYGAARD
I said take it back.

PEARL
Loser.

Lester picks up the claw hammer. He walks towards Pearl.

PEARL (CONT'D)
Stop kiddin' around. Put that down.

The first blow catches her by surprise. The pain of it, the blood that runs down her face. The moment hangs there. Then Lester BEATS HER TO DEATH with the hammer. Each blow is a release. Eventually, he stops. Stands there panting. Slowly the red haze lifts. He looks down at his blood spattered clothes.

LESTER NYGAARD
Aw geez.

He is about to panic, when he looks up.

CLOSE UP ON AN INSPIRATIONAL POSTER

taped to a bare concrete wall. On it a school of yellow fish all face the same direction, except one. The poster reads *There's Always One. Be the One.*

LESTER

Stares at it. As he does, an idea hits him. A brilliant, dangerous plan. Could he really do it? As we watch, Lester strips off his clothes, shoves them in a garbage bag.

Carefully Lester wipes the handle of the claw hammer to remove his finger prints. Over this we hear:

LESTER NYGAARD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(pre-lap, distraught)
Ya, it's me. I -- you need ta -- I need help.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN. NYGAARD HOUSE. SAINT CLOUD, MIN - NIGHT

Lester, dressed in new clothing, stands with his back to us. We move towards him as he practices for his phone call.

LESTER NYGAARD
Ya, it's me. I can't talk long. She's -- I did something --
(beat)
Ya, it's -- there's been an accident and I --

Beat. He picks up the phone, dials.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. FARMDALE MOTEL. SAINT CLOUD, MN - SAME TIME

Malvo sits on his bed, watching tv. The phone rings, which is strange, because no one has this number.

MALVO
(answers)
Yes?

LESTER NYGAARD
(worked up)
Ya, it's me -- Lester -- she's -- my wife, she's -- aw hell -- she's in the basement, and --

MALVO
How did you get this number?

LESTER NYGAARD
What? I was -- I saw you this morning on my way ta -- look, I'm freakin' out here -- I don't know what ta do.

MALVO
Lester, have you been a bad boy?

LESTER NYGAARD
Aw geez. I just -- can you come over? It's -- I'm on Willow Creek Drive. Number six thirteen.

MALVO
(beat, thinking)
Sure, Lester. I'll be right there.

Lester hangs up. Beat. He thinks about his next step.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM. NYGAARD HOUSE. SAINT CLOUD, MN - NIGHT

Lester pulls a chair over to the armoire. He climbs up, roots around on top, pulls down a SHOTGUN. He finds some shells, loads it. Malvo will be here soon and Lester plans to kill him and frame him for his wife's murder.

CUT TO:

INT. FRONT HALLWAY. NYGAARD HOUSE - NIGHT

Lester holds the gun in one hand. Practices opening the door with the other, raising the gun. It's too clunky. Plus he needs to lure Malvo inside the house before he shoots him.

LESTER NYGAARD
(practicing)
What did you do? You killed her.
You *killed* her.

Lester looks around. He decides to hide the shotgun against the LIVING ROOM WALL, just on the other side of the doorway.

Looking around, Lester loses his nerve a little. But no. He has a plan. This will work. He sets the shotgun in its hiding place, looks around. Has he forgotten anything?

THERE IS A KNOCK ON THE FRONT DOOR

Lester panics, tries to calm down.

LESTER NYGAARD (CONT'D)
(under his breath)
You killed her. *You* killed her.

Lester goes to the front door, takes a deep breath, opens it.

VERN THURMAN stands outside.

VERN
Evenin', Lester.

LESTER NYGAARD
(nervous)
What -- what do ya want?

VERN
Well, I suppose first I'd like ta
come in.

Lester looks behind him.

LESTER NYGAARD
Uh, ya. Well -- it's just -- now's
not a good --

VERN
Just take a second.

Vern steps forward and Lester, by instinct, steps back. Now Vern is in the house. He takes off his gloves and hat.

VERN (CONT'D)
Supposed ta get down to negative ten tonight, I hear.

Lester is a mass of nerves. Vern steps towards the kitchen.

VERN (CONT'D)
Pearl home?

Lester moves to block him, putting his back to the kitchen doorway.

LESTER NYGAARD
Uh -- no -- she's, uh -- at my brother's.

VERN
Okay then. How's the nose?

LESTER NYGAARD
Huh? Oh, hurts.

VERN
How'd that happen anyway?

LESTER NYGAARD
Slipped. Over at the fire station.

VERN
Ouch. Go to the hospital?

LESTER NYGAARD
Ya. They, uh, set it.

VERN
Talk to anyone while you were there?

LESTER NYGAARD
What do ya mean?

VERN
Well, the reason I'm here -- not sure if ya heard -- but Sam Hess got himself killed last night over at the Lucky Penny. Nasty business. And, well, I heard you were talkin' to another fella about Hess before he died. Over at the hospital.

LESTER NYGAARD
(pale)
No. I don't think --

VERN
What was his name again? The other fella?

Lester tries to decide what to say. Then the cuckoo clock chimes from the living room. 8 o'clock. Lester jumps, startled.

VERN (CONT'D)
Ya okay there, Lester? Ya seem a bit jumpy.

LESTER NYGAARD
Ya, I'm, uh -- it's just Pearl's gonna be home soon and --

Looking past Lester, Vern sees the basement door is open. He notices something on the floor. A BLOODY FOOTPRINT. Alarmed, Vern DRAWS HIS GUN.

VERN
Lester. Listen to me very carefully. I need ya to get down on the ground.

LESTER NYGAARD
No. Wait. Just -- listen to me -- it's not what it --

VERN
Lester. On the ground. Now.

Gun on Lester, Vern backs into the kitchen.

LESTER NYGAARD
No. Now hold on. Hold on. Don't - - there's nothin' down there --

Vern glances down the basement stairs.

ANGLE ON PEARL'S FEET

Visible at the bottom of the stairs.

LESTER NYGAARD (CONT'D)
-- That's not -- I didn't do nothin' -- I just got home. I just got home and --

CLOSE UP ON VERN

Trying to catch up to events. He keeps the gun on Lester, reenters the front hall. With his free hand, he keys his radio handset

VERN
This is Chief Thurman. I'm at six one three Willow Creek Drive. Requesting --

A SHOTGUN BLAST catches VERN in the BACK, spins him around.

REVEAL: LORNE MALVO holds LESTER'S SHOTGUN. It's 8 PM, and Malvo has come in through the back door. He FIRES AGAIN, the spray catching Vern in the chest and throat. Vern falls.

MALVO
Any more?

Lester is in shock, white as a sheet.

MALVO (CONT'D)
Lester. Are there any more cops?

Lester shakes his head. Malvo kicks Vern's gun away, looks down.

ANGLE ON VERN

Eyes wild, like the deer in the opening. He is mortally wounded, blood bubbles coming out of his mouth as he struggles for air.

CLOSE UP ON MALVO

Struck by the synchronicity of this. He studies the dying man's eyes.

MALVO (CONT'D)
What did you tell him?

LESTER NYGAARD
Nothing -- I, uh -- he asked about Sam.

MALVO
You got any more shells for this?

Lester shakes his head. Malvo lays the shotgun on the table.

MALVO (CONT'D)
Where's the basement?

Lester points. Malvo enters the kitchen, goes down the stairs.

ANGLE ON LESTER

He pulls two shotgun shells out of his pocket, eyes the shotgun. How long to grab it and reload?

He reaches out his other hand, then realizes it's bleeding. There's a shotgun pellet buried in the meat of his thumb. Then Lester becomes aware that his injured hand is now lit by flashing red and blue lights. Another police car has just pulled up outside.

CUT TO:

INT. MOLLY'S SQUAD CAR - SAME TIME

Pulling up to Nygaard's house, Molly sees Vern's prowler. She CLIMBS OUT of the car, approaches the door.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN. NYGAARD HOUSE. SAINT CLOUD, MINNESOTA - SAME TIME

Lester hurries over to the basement door.

LESTER NYGAARD
They're here. The police.

No response. Lester starts down the stairs into ...

THE BASEMENT

LESTER NYGAARD
I said the police are here. What do we ...

But Malvo is gone. Vanished like a ghost. Pearl lays alone on the floor, a bloody mess. The hammer next to her.

Off Lester: trapped.

CUT TO:

EXT. NYGAARD HOUSE. SAINT CLOUD, MINNESOTA - SAME TIME

Molly pounds on the door.

MOLLY
Saint Cloud Police. Open up.

Nothing. She looks in the nearest window, sees Vern laying dead on the hall floor.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
(upset)
Oh. Oh.

She keys her handset.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
Officer -- officer down! Send help.

She pulls her weapon, starts kicking the front door.

CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT. NYGAARD HOUSE - SAME TIME

Nygaard hears the front door CRASH OPEN upstairs. He is trapped. He looks around. No exit. Can he hide? No. They'll find him. Then his eyes hit the inspirational poster on the wall. There's only one way out. Lester, knowing he will be found at any moment, RUNS towards the wall, his head down. Crack. He knocks himself out.

CUT TO:

INT. FRONT HALLWAY. NYGAARD HOUSE - SAME TIME

Molly kneels next to Vern, checks his pulse. But her mentor and friend is dead. Struggling to stay professional, she straightens, her gun up.

MOLLY
Saint Cloud Police! If there's someone in the house, come out with yer hands up.

Nothing. Cautiously, Molly goes room to room, searching. We know Malvo could still be in the house. Each blind corner and dark space offers certain death. We can tell Molly is afraid, out of her league, but she keeps her wits.

CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT. NYGAARD HOUSE - NIGHT

Slowly, Molly comes down the stairs, gun drawn. She sees Pearl and Lester, laying face down. The basement looks like the scene of a massacre. From upstairs she hears ...

BILL (O.S.)
Molly?

MOLLY
Down here!

Molly assesses the situation. Pearl is clearly dead. Molly holsters her weapon, kneels next to Lester, takes his pulse.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
Husband's alive!

She looks up. There on the poster she sees A BLOODY HUMAN FACE PRINT with what appears to be a HALO over it.

There's always one. Be the one.

Off Molly: what does it mean?

CUT TO:

EXT. TWO LANE HIGHWAY. RURAL, MINNESOTA - NIGHT

A state police car is parked on the blind side of an overpass. Nearby a sign reads *Duluth 10 miles*.

CUT TO:

INT. STATE POLICE CAR - NIGHT

Patrolman GUS GRIMLY (30s) sits behind the wheel, sipping a cup of coffee. His walkie talkie crackles.

KURT GRIMLY (O.S.)
Dad. Come in, dad. Over.

Gus picks up the walkie talkie.

GUS GRIMLY
Dad here. Come back.

KURT GRIMLY
Vikings up by thirteen. Over.

GUS GRIMLY
What happened? Over.

KURT GRIMLY
Walsh kicked another field gold.
Over.

GUS GRIMLY
Sweet. Did you brush your teeth?
Over.

KURT GRIMLY
Yes. Over.

GUS GRIMLY
Homework? Over.

KURT GRIMLY
Did my math and science. Still have to do English. Over.

GUS GRIMLY
Okay, well. As soon as the game's over. Over.

A CAR SPEEDS PAST.

Gus hits his siren, pulls out onto the road. We stay with him as he follows the speeding car, it's tail lights visible through the front windshield.

The car in front of him pulls over. Gus pulls in behind it. Beat. He writes down the license plate number, notes the time. Then climbs out of the car.

EXT. TWO LANE HIGHWAY. RURAL MINNESOTA - CONTINUOUS

Gus approaches the driver's side, flashlight out. The inside of the car is dark, ominous. We can't see the driver.

Then the driver's side window rolls down. Now we see the driver is Lorne Malvo.

MALVO
Evening, officer.

GUS GRIMLY
License and registration please.

MALVO
Well, we could do it that way. You ask me for my papers and I tell you it's not my car. That I borrowed it. And see where things go from there. We could do that. Or, you could just get back in your car and drive away.

GUS GRIMLY
Why would I do that?

MALVO
Because some roads you shouldn't go down. Because maps used to say *there be dragons here*. And now they don't. But that don't mean the dragons aren't there.

From the prowler, we hear Kurt's walkie talkie.

KURT GRIMLY (O.S.)
Dad. Come in, dad. Over.

GUS GRIMLY
Step out of the car, please.

MALVO
How old is your son?

Gus puts his hand on his revolver.

GUS GRIMLY
I said step out of the car.

KURT GRIMLY (O.S.)
Dad. Come in, dad. Over.

MALVO
Let me tell you what's going to happen, Officer Grimly. I'm gonna roll up my window. And then I'm gonna drive away. And you're gonna go home to your son. And every few years you're gonna look at his face and know that you're alive because you chose not to go down a certain road on a certain night. Because you chose to walk into the light, instead of into darkness. Do you understand?

GUS GRIMLY
Sir.

MALVO
I'm rolling up my window.

The window rolls up. Gus stands there, knowing he should pull his gun. That he should order Malvo out of the car, but something stops him. The feeling the rabbit gets in the presence of the wolf.

So he stands there as Malvo's car pulls away.

KURT GRIMLY (O.S.)
Dad. Come in, dad. Over.

Gus walks back to the car, climbs in, closes the door. Beat. He picks up the walkie talkie.

GUS GRIMLY
Dad here. Over.

KURT GRIMLY
Detroit just got a touchdown. Over.
(beat)
Dad? Are you there? Over.

Beat. Gus sits, shaken.

GUS GRIMLY
I hear ya. We'll get 'em in the fourth. And hey, don't forget ta do yer English homework, okay? I love you.

A long silence.

KURT GRIMLY
Ya didn't say over. Over.

GUS GRIMLY
(smiles)
Over and out.

Beat. Gus sits in his warm car, while outside the temperature drops. Then he picks up his note pad, examines Malvo's license plate number.

CUT TO:

EXT. LESTER'S HOUSE. SAINT CLOUD, MN - NIGHT

It's really snowing now. Every police car in town is there, along with fire trucks and an ambulance. Patrolmen go in and out of the house. Molly sits on a planter by the front door, in shock.

Inside the lobby we can see Vern's body covered with a blanket. After a moment, Molly gets to her feet and walks down the driveway.

She passes Vern's prowler. Something inside catches her eye.

ANGLE ON TWO CANS OF HOUSE PAINT

In the back seat.

MOLLY

Stands looking in at them, and all they represent.

CUT TO:

EXT. VERN'S HOUSE. SAINT CLOUD, MN - NIGHT

Molly's car pulls up. She gets out, grabs the paint cans, starts for the house. There are responsibilities she will take on now, unspoken promises that must be kept.

The front door opens. Ida comes out. She knows from Molly's face that the worst has happened.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. ST. CLOUD, MN - DAY

Lester is in bed, unconscious. His head is bandaged. He looks terrible. Outside, snow falls. He wakes up. Gets his bearings. He is in the hospital. Not dead. Better still, he is not handcuffed to the bed. There are no cops.

Could it be? Could he have gotten away with it? He lifts his right hand to get some water, sees the BANDAGE.

He examines the spot where the shotgun pellet caught him. On his face is a hint of uncertainty.

CUT TO:

EXT. ICE. SAINT CLOUD, MN - DAY

Molly's dad, Lou, unpacks fishing gear from the back of his Suburban. Molly, in civilian clothes, sits on the tailgate, looking out at the snow. Her prowler is parked nearby.

LOU
I got two kinds of sandwiches. Tuna and turkey.
(beat, off her)
Tuna's for the fish. Unless ya think they'd think that's cannibalism.

Molly doesn't answer. Lou offloads a cooler.

LOU (CONT'D)
Nice service yesterday, I thought. Simple.

Beat. Molly is lost in thought.

LOU (CONT'D)
Ya know, I been looking for some more help at the restaurant. Someone to seat customers. Answer the phones.

MOLLY
(absently)
A hostess.

LOU
That what they call it? Anyway, not sure if that was somethin' you might be interested in.

MOLLY
(this gets a look)
I'm a police officer, dad.

LOU
Well, sure. I know that. I also know that people in this world are less inclined to shoot a hostess, than, say, an officer of the law.

MOLLY
(beat)
That's true.

He kicks snow off his boots.

LOU
So, does that mean you're gonna help yer old man out?

MOLLY
No. But maybe you could put that in the ad.

Molly jumps down from the tailgate.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
On second thought, I'm gonna head in ta work. Coroner's report should be in. Rain check on the fishin'?

He nods. She kisses his cheek.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
Love ya, dad.

LOU
Love ya too, hon.

Molly walks to her cruiser. Her father watches as we ...

FADE TO WHITE:

END OF PILOT