

Devil's Blessing

by
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Loud, 80's pop music plays -- the song is Matthew Wilder's "Break My Stride." It blares, dial, throttled.

FADE IN

INT. JUDE'S HOUSE -- LIVING ROOM -- DAY

EMMY, 23,

lies splayed along carpet. Motionless. Silky skin -- pallid, beaded in sweat.

Wispy, long hair, tangled in froth and vomit. Deep-green eyes, rolled white.

Dying.

Doing it right in front of,

JUDE, mid 20s,

with that greasy glow one gets after a week break from hygiene.

Sits comfortably numb on a cushy recliner -- his body practically melted over it. A syringe dangles precariously, clinging to a vein in his arm.

Eyes are closed.

Is he dead? Possibly.

MUSIC THUMPS: "*Ain't nothing gonna break my stride. Nobody's gonna slow me down...*"

Moments pass. Then. Jude's eyelids flutter.

Then lift open. But only a slit.

Just enough to notice the semi-naked girl splayed before him.

Doesn't see her face, though. Her back is to him -- to us.

Jude tries to speak. But can't. Voice garbled -- strangled by the powerful drug still coursing through his body.

He fights through it...

JUDE

...Emm?

No response.

He pulls the needle out. Pitches it aside. Kills the brain-rattling loud music with a click of a button.

A burnt-tarnished metal spoon rests atop a tri-fold PAMPHLET - - a pamphlet pocketing a POLAROID PICTURE -- the two faces in the photo, are left obscured.

JUDE
(heartier)
Emmy?

But again, Emmy offers zero response.

Jude staggers to his feet. Knees buckle. Jude crumbles.

Bellies across the carpet -- snuggling up against the soft curl of her back.

JUDE
(sweetly)
Wake up, baby, we've got--
(re: vomit)
Emm?
(freaking out)
Emmy, baby, wake up...

FADE OUT...

...FADE IN

INT. JUDE'S HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- (LITTLE AFTER)

Jude storms in. A raging hurricane. Sobbing inconsolably.

His face, distorted, disfigured by grief.

He yanks open a cabinet drawer. Rifles through the contents...

...fishing out a butcher knife.

INT. BEDROOM CLOSET -- (SHORTLY AFTER)

Closet door pops open. Jude ferrets out a baseball bat. Takes some practice swings...

...Perfect.

INT. JUDE'S CLUNKER CAR -- DRIVING -- DAY (LITTLE LATER)

Spun on rage, Jude pounds the steering wheel with his fists, as the car whizzes down the city street like a shot.

Turns his attention to a flip phone. Flips it open. Scrolls through a list of names. There it is. Presses CALL.

Then waits.

JUDE
Answer the fuckin' phone, you slimy
prick!

Call rolls to Voicemail.

PERSONAL RECORDING
You got Teeter. I can't--

JUDE
--FUCK! FUCK! FUCK!

Jude cranks the steering wheel -- veering onto a residential street of a posh, white-collar neighborhood.

INT. TEETER'S POSH HOME -- ENTRYWAY/FRONT DOOR -- DAY

KNOCK. KNOCK. KNOCKING on Teeter's front door...

EXT. FRONT DOOR -- TEETER'S HOME -- SAME

...Jude hammers the door with his fist. Livid. Incensed.

JUDE
Open up, Teeter. I want more.

Rings the doorbell relentlessly, DING DONG! DING DONG!

Goes back to beating on the door -- always careful to keep the baseball bat concealed behind his hip.

Deadbolt CLICKS -- unlocked. Door snaps open.

FITCH, craggy, mid-30s. Boxers and wife-beater on, growls...

FITCH
...Ain't got no-oh you brought a
bat?

CLINK! bat thwacks skull.

INT. ENTRYWAY -- TEETER'S POSH HOME -- CONTINUING

Fitch stumbles backward. Topples to the marble floor, dizzy in pain. Head clutched in hands...

FITCH
...Suck-a-fuck, Jude. You got what
you paid for.

Blood leaks out a gash on Fitch's head, turning the glistening-clean floor, into a slippery mess.

JUDE
(wild-eyed)
Where is he, Fitch?

FITCH
Who?

Jude cocks for another swing.

JUDE
Don't eff with me Fitch, you know I meant Teeter.

Fitch staggers to his feet, shaking off the dizzies...

FITCH
...I just waxed this fucking floor.
Chill, dude. Just chill. Seriously.
A bat?

JUDE
Where is he?

FITCH
Enough of the broken record. I'll
tell ya, damn, man. He's--

--Fitch grabs a glass vase off a hall table -- chucks it in Jude's face.

SMASH! Jude shrieks in pain, face, chewed up by glass.
Fitch darts down the hallway, deeper into the house.

TEETER'S POSH BEDROOM -- (SECONDS AFTER)

Corner of mattress lifts up.

We see a handgun.

DOWNSTAIRS HALLWAY -- (MOMENTS LATER)

Fitch slinks down the hallway. Breath, bated. Handgun, aimed.

UPSTAIRS

a door SLAPS CLOSED.

BACK TO

FITCH

bolts down the hallway. Double-times the stairs.

UPSTAIRS LANDING

Then creeps down the hall, descending upon the only door upstairs -- that is currently shut.

Fitch SWAT-KICKS it open, bull-rushes in...

TEETER'S HOME OFFICE -- CONTINUING

...to find. No one. No Jude.

FITCH
(realizing mistake)
Sonuva-

CLINK! Bat thwacks skull.

Fitch collapses. Jude takes another swing.

THWACK. Fitch shrieks...

FITCH
...Quit pummeling me, bro. He's at
lunch. At lunch. You hear me?

Jude swings again. THWACK. Thumping Fitch's kneecap.

JUDE
At lunch, where?

FITCH
Where you think?!

Jude swings again. THWACK. Same kneecap.

FITCH
(writhing)
Please. Stop. Jude, man, my leg.
C'mon, enough.

Jude aims -- this time, Fitch's other knee.

THWACK. SCREAMS.

Jude continues the merciless assault until certain both kneecaps have been brutally crushed beyond repair.

JUDE
Lucky I don't kill you, you're just
as guilty.

Jude crosses to the door to leave, sweeping the gun up in his hand as he exits.

INT. LE BLUE RESTAURANT -- KITCHEN AREA -- DAY

Juicy steaks SIZZLE over flames. CLINKING. CLATTERING. Pots and pans. A team of COOKS, CHATTER, hard at work.

A dinning table is set up to observe culinary magic.

TEETER, late 20s, a buzz-cut hipster-type, slathered in tatoos, enjoys a meal beside two, lovely females.

TEETER

Sometimes shit happens, example,
you get a bad shipment, cut it
right -- shave the price and unload
it on some schmucks as a deal
reserved for preferred customers.

A RESTAURANT WORKER, whopper-eyed, fermenting in trepidation, scurries over to their table -- leans down -- whispers into Teeter's ear.

Teeter's pretentious grin is swallowed by a scowl, his eyes, narrow in murderous contempt.

EXT. MULTI-TIER PARKING GARAGE -- DAY

Choke-thick smoke, billows. Shattered glass, wreckage, litter pavement like junkyard-confetti.

Jude has crashed -- T-boned -- his car into the side of a TRICKED-OUT SUV, parked off by itself in the parking garage.

ONLOOKERS gather around. Point and whisper.

INT. LE BLUE RESTAURANT -- ENTRYWAY/HOST AREA -- CONTINUING

Teeter charges in -- ballistic with rage.

MEANWHILE, OVER BY ENTRANCE DOOR

Door flings open. JUDE blows through.

Teeter screams...

TEETER

(Apoplectic)

...WHAT THE FUCK YOU DO, YOU MOTHE--

--POP!POP!POP!POP! Teeter jerks backward -- hollow points, tearing up his chest. POP!POP!POP!CLICK!CLICK!

Lunch guest scream. Scatter like marbles. Teeter face-plants into the floor -- deader than dead.

JUDE
(To Teeter)
You killed her. I kill you...

Jude stuffs a small paper bindle down Teeter's mouth.

EXT. MULTI-TIER PARKING GARAGE -- (MOMENTS LATER)

Whirring SIRENS -- police -- converging on scene.

JUDE

Retches -- overwhelmed by emotion.

He crosses the parking garage. Hops in his car.

CAR ENGINE revvvs...

...Sputters. Then dies.

Jude cranks the ignition switch, again.

Engine wails.

Car bucks into reverse -- then - tires SCREECH as the car skids to a brake-grinding stop...

...skipping the mangled front bumper, sparking across concrete.

INT. JUDE'S CAR -- RUNNING FROM COPS -- DAY

Rough-and-tumble part of downtown.

Bustling street.

Sirens whirl -- COPS -- hot on heels.

Jude cuts the wheel, taking a sharp left...

...but he's traveling too fast...

...BAM! Car swipes a curb. Front wheel explodes -- KABOOM!

SPARKS SPRAY as bare metal-rim carves up asphalt.

Jude careens out of control -- slicing through oncoming traffic -- jumps a curb and WHAM! Smack into a stone-brick retaining wall.

Horn, bellows.

Smoke, billows.

Flames, WHOOSH, devour the hood of Jude's crumpled car.

JUDE

Showered in broken windshield, his face, chewed up and bleeding, stomp-kicks on the car door.

But the door doesn't budge.

Jude tries again...

EXT. BUSY STREET -- CONTINUING

...driver door kicks open, spilling Jude out onto the sidewalk. He run/limps across the busy, four lane roadway...

...CARS ZIP BY, horns screaming insults, as...

...Jude escapes into a five-story, red-brick tenement building -- a decrepit relic with rusty fire-escape tearing down the face like a jagged scar.

INT. TUMBLEDOWN TENEMENT -- MAIN LOBBY -- DAY

Forbidding. Rich in neglect.

JUDE

wheezing, face crumpled with doom, debates his next move.

Keep running? Surrender? Suicide?

Jude bites down on the barrel of the handgun. Pulls trigger.

CLICK.

JUDE

Shit.

Out of bullets.

What to do? He sprints up the creaky steps of a spiraling tall staircase -- greeting all guest when they first walk in.

INT. 4TH FLOOR HALLWAY -- TENEMENT -- SAME

Bag of groceries cradled in arms, a demure-looking MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN fidgets a key into a door's deadbolt lock.

Door's tarnished number-plate reads: Apt. 403

Meanwhile, down the long, dreary-looking hallway...

4TH-FLOOR LANDING -- FRONTING THE RESIDENTIAL STAIRCASE

...Jude's sights narrow in on her. He storms toward her, wielding the gun as he growls...

JUDE

...Keep quiet and I won't put a bullet through you. Nod if you understand.

She nods: "Hell yeah, I do."

JUDE

Good. Open the g.d door, then.

Rattled by nerves, she fumbles the keys to the floor.

Jude scoops them up.

JUDE

Which one? Which key?

She fingers a key.

MEANWHILE, BACK OVER BY THE STAIRCASE

Tactical boots STORM up wooden steps. Then storm onto the 4th floor hallway -- just in time for...

BACK TO

JUDE

slips into the woman's open apartment -- door quietly snaps shut.

INT. WOMAN'S MODEST TWO-BEDROOM APARTMENT -- CONTINUING

Rich in bleak, with cruddy wood-panel floors, and sparse, tatty furnishings. Sunlight filters through a window, splashing crumbling-plaster walls in ever-lurking shadows.

Jude points. She complies -- sits down the sofa, meek and vulnerable.

JUDE

What's your name, lady?

WOMAN

(reluctantly)

Patricia.

A WOODEN CROSS hangs up, over on a far wall -- focal point to a Jesus Christ death-shrine -- its array of candles, unlit.

JUDE
 (sick with hurt)
 We were going to name our lil'
 girl: Patricia.

She forces a polite smile. Jude turns, peeps out the door's peephole to see...

P.O.V. THROUGH PEEPHOLE

...no one. Not a soul.

A HORSEFLY swoops up. Circles. BUZZING bzzzz. Observes Jude through the peephole.

But then -- just as quickly -- Horsefly flies away.

A PUDGY COP, 30s, scurries by the peephole.

Then.

A BRAWNY COP, 30s, follows in pursuit.

BACK TO

JUDE

cranks the thumb-turn. Deadbolt -- CLACKS locked.

He turns to Patricia...

JUDE
 Listen, Patricia--

--but Patricia's gone. Plum vanished.

Jude groans petulance.

Then. HUMMING, motherly yet sinister, wafts in from...

PATRICIA'S KITCHEN

Patricia unloads a bag of groceries on the counter. Humming.

JUDE
 Whaddaya you're doing?

Patricia SQUEAKS, a frightened mouse.

PATRICIA
 How'd--what do you want?

JUDE
 Your ass on that couch.

PATRICIA
Take what you will but please don't-
don't hurt me.

JUDE
(boggled)
What?

PATRICIA'S LIVING ROOM -- CONTINUING

Jude marches Patricia by the arm, over to the sofa.
Plants her butt down on it.

JUDE
Do not provoke a situation you
regret. You need--I need some time
to think. To request more of your
patience. Nod if you understand?

Patricia nods 'yes.'

JUDE
Great. Now stay-the-fuck put.

Patricia's old-timey, tabletop telephone ERUPTS to life.
Jude shakes his head at Patricia -- don't answer.
She doesn't. Obnoxious ringing stops. Silence returns.

JUDE
Listen, I'm not here--

--High-pitch crackle of a POLICEMAN'S BULLHORN cuts him off
mid-sentence...

COP ON BULLHORN (O.S.)
...BE ADVISED YOU ARE SURROUNDED.
COME OUT NOW WITH YOUR HANDS UP.

Bullhorn fizzles out.

Jude slinks to the window -- peeks outside...

EXT. TUMBLEDOWN TENEMENT BUILDING -- DAY

...to find the vicinity in a frenzy, swarming with police
officers and other emergency/tactical responders.

BACK TO

JUDE

fevered with panic -- desperation, palpable -- Jude starts pacing the living room. Back. Forth. Back. Forth. Nibbling on his lower lip nervously.

Then.

Hands trembling, he sparks his last -- only cigarette.

Pulls a long, heavy drag. Exhales. Begins flicking at the filter with his thumb - thinking - wrangling thought.

THEN.

Fishes out his cellphone. Dials 911.

JUDE
 (into phone)
 My emergency? My emergency is I
 want these cops cleared from
 Wallison Apartments' property
 immediately. I have a gun, and
 I've got hostages -- do the math.

Jude clicks off. Bolts back to the window and looks out...

JUDE'S P.O.V.

...but the frenzy of cops -- they aren't going anywhere. In fact, a TACTICAL VEHICLE is pulling up, rolls to a stop.

BACK TO

JUDE

turns to Patricia -- but Patricia's gone. Plum vanished.

TV switches on. Jude cranes to see Patricia hunched over a 50s era, box set TV.

JUDE
 C'mon, lady, you're gonna force me
 to tie you up.

Channels, change. Land on a BREAKING NEWS REPORT.

PLAYING OUT ON TV...

...an everyday, inner-city breaking news report...

NEWSCASTER
 ...Joining us live on location, is
 Danika Wilson. Danika, tell us
 what you're hearing...

FIELD-REPORTER DANIKA
 ...I'm here at Willow and Hill
 Crest where a hostage situation is
 unfolding at this tenement building
 near downtown. Not yet confirmed,
 but appears to be following a
 flurry of activity near La Blues
 restaurant -- where a shooting
 spree purportedly occurred.

BACK TO

JUDE

JUDE
 Patricia! Sit your ass down, now.

Patricia complies. Sits.

Jude clicks the television off -- his cell phone rings. He
 checks caller ID. Then, reluctantly, answers.

JUDE
 Yeah?

NEGOTIATOR (O.S.)
 This is Matthew Bickford with the
 A.P.P.D.. I'd like to--

JUDE
 --hey Matty, go ahead and shut up
 so I can speak. I want you and all
 your piggy friends to pull back-

NEGOTIATOR (O.S.)
 --You know I can't do--

JUDE
 --Interrupt me again and I'll put a
 bullet through the dome of one of
 my hostages -- hear me?

Jude turns to Patricia, mouths, reassuringly: just joshin'.

JUDE
 (into phone)
 Y'got ten minutes.

Jude kills the call.

TV BLINKS ON. Jude slaps Patricia with a look.

JUDE
 Damn it Patricia, leave it off.

FIELD-REPORTER DANIKA

(on TV)

...Yes, Diane, confirmation on Le Blues -- where it appears a total of three fatalities...

...hits Jude like a mack truck, stopping him dead in his tracks...

FIELD-REPORTER DANIKA

...And now comes word of another incident off Lorff and Caroline in the Harper's district --- where a house fire has emergency workers scrambling to respond. Story developing.

JUDE

(dumbstruck)

That's not what--this makes no sense. None of it is true!

WOMAN

(brightening)

You didn't kill all those people?

JUDE

No. Just one.

PATRICIA

(hopes dashed)

Oh.

BACK TO

TV SCREEN

Field-Reporter Danika interviews a ten-year-old LITTLE BOY.

FIELD-REPORTER DANIKA

Tell me what you witnessed here today?

LITTLE BOY

(sniffling sadness)

Umm. He drove fast and Mr. Whiskers got scared and jumped out of my arms--scratched my face a little-- and umm and--

FIELD-REPORTER DANIKA

--Were you scared?

The brave little boy shakes his head 'no.' Then quips...

LITTLE BOY
 ...Mr. Whiskers was.

CAMERAMAN zooms in on a bloody clump of kitty-cat smeared across the roadway -- Jude do that? Apparently.

BACK TO

JUDE

His CELLPHONE RINGS. Jude answers.

JUDE
 Y'got five minutes left--

NEGOTIATOR
 (in one breath)
 --You listen to me you piece of
 shit or I will personally gut you
 like a pumpkin. So help me god, I
 will slaughter you. Watch the boars
 gorge upon your flesh -- but you
 walk out those damn doors this
 fucking minute, I will promise not
 to skull fuck you first-

--Jude kills the call, horrified by the contentious voice.

Patricia's landline rings, *BRRRRING. BRRRRING.*

Jude flinches, startled. Turns to Patricia to warn her not to answer -- but Patricia's nowhere in sight. Gone. Vamoosed.

Jude begins scouring the apartment for her...

KITCHEN

...pokes his head in. Nope. No Patricia. Head retracts.

LIVING ROOM

Jude looks around, perplexed -- where is she?

FRONT DOOR

A KEY scrapes into the metal belly of the DEADBOLT LOCK...

BACK TO

JUDE

scrambles for cover, trading the living room for...

PATRICIA'S BEDROOM -- CONTINUING

...where he lurks by the doorway, his sights set on...

JUDE'S P.O.V

...front door swings open. PATRICIA enters, cradling groceries.

BACK TO

JUDE

Hushed-like, he closes the bedroom door -- struggling to make sense of what he's witnessing...

JUDE

...What the fuck?

Footsteps -- CROAK -- as they cross across loose hardwood flooring.

They're coming this way. Jude skedaddles into Patricia's bedroom closet -- closet door snaps shut.

Pops back open, vomiting Jude -- his attention rapt by a doll he handles fondly.

The bedroom is no longer one of a middle-aged woman -- but of a little boy's.

Jude hugs the doll -- tears swelling -- in the DOLL'S EYES.

Jude's curiosity shifts to a child's CRAYON DRAWING, luring him from atop a nearby tool-chest dresser.

CRAYON DRAWING

A happy-go-lucky family of four.

BACK TO

JUDE

can't take his eyes off it -- overcome with emotion.

Bedroom door pops open. In walks Patricia.

PATRICIA

EEK...!

...she darts out the door, escaping Jude's clutches. Jude drops the drawing and gives chase.

CRAYON DRAWING

flutters like a leaf to the floor -- the image -- now a caustic crayon-drawing of a child, postmortem.

BACK TO

JUDE

lunges through the doorway -- and straight into...

INT. LITTLE ROCK BAR -- NIGHT

...a heroin-chic looking dive bar. Murky in crimson dim. Walls doused in mirrors and hard-to-find, vintage posters: Pink Floyd. Jack Ruby. River Phoenix.

JUDE

stands.

Delirious with bewilderment. MUSIC PUMPS. Someone tugs at his arm. It's Emmy -- alive! She clings to him, adoringly, with deep-green eyes and coquettish visage.

BACK TO

Jude

snaps to -- but he now looks everyday, healthy -- fresh, sans facial damage, clean shaven and hip-ly dressed.

Jude and Emmy wade through the sea of PARTY PEOPLE.

Some CAGEY-LOOKING GUY, 19, sporting a hoodie, approaches. Snaps a Polaroid picture of Jude and Emmy -- offers it to Jude -- tucked inside a PAMPHLET.

JUDE

Yeah cool, dude. Thanks.

EMMY

...(inaudible)

JUDE

Huh? We'll get it, then go.

Jude and Emmy cross the bar floor...

...over to a small hallway leading to a back-room guarded by a BIKER-LIKE BOUNCER and thick, heavy satin curtain.

INT. BACK OFFICE -- LITTLE ROCK BAR -- CONTINUING

Ugly florescent lighting. Just big enough to cram one wobbly, curb-rescued desk and a few folding chairs for guests.

TEETER

(to Jude)

My man, my man. Sit, sit. And Emmy, delightful as always.

JUDE

Glad to see business finally picked up.

TEETER

Yeah, well, what can I say, we found our niche. You guys want something to drink -- Fitch is on his way so -- so shit man, you musta had the little one by now. So...what's it like being a dad?

JUDE

I wouldn't know.

TEETER

(off their solemn looks)

I didn't know. Anyhoo. So, yeah. Frees you up for other ventures.

A brooding, STRUNG-OUT CHICK, 19, stumbles in -- throws her body down in a chair -- sliding it across tile up next to Teeter.

TEETER

Jude, this is Denver. Our new hire.

DENVER

(pointing at Jude)

Pretty sure you're the dude who popped my cherry in high school.

JUDE

Pfft. You serious?

Denver's snarled scowl suggests, yes, she is quite serious.

JUDE

(to Emmy)

We'll get this and go, ok--

DENVER

(growling)

--DON'T FUCKING DISMISS ME.

JUDE
 (to Teeter)
 Seriously dude, what's her deal?

TEETER
 Relax -- she's just having a little
 fun.

Denver's leering scowl gives way to a child-like grin.

DENVER
 (to Emmy)
 Love your dress. (then) We should
 fuck. Scissor one out.

Door flings open. In walks Fitch.

FITCH
 (to Jude)
 'Sup, sup, my fucker? (then) Oh,
 howdy there Emmy.

EMMY
 ...(Inaudible)

JUDE
 (to Emmy re: inaudible)
 What?

FITCH
 (to Emmy re: inaudible)
 I know, right!

Fitch tosses a rubber-banded bundle of small, white-paper
 bindles down on the desk for Teeter's approval.

FITCH
 (continuing, to Emmy)
 Took up Salsa dancing. Check these
 babies -- my calves, totally my
 best feature, aye? Rippage, bitches-
 -bitches love rippage.

Fitch preforms a quick Salsa move. He's actually pretty good.

JUDE
 So we're kinda in a hurry. Just
 want the usual. Same price?

FITCH
 Impolite much?

TEETER
 Same ol' Jude.

FITCH/TEETER
 Prices have, regrettably, gone up
 since last purchase.

But hey, what-the-hell. I hook my "preferred customers" up -- my peeps -- my likes. Same price. But this deal's only for those on the list, got me? So keep it on the D L for me.

Fitch scoops up three bindles -- Jude tosses down some cash.

FITCH

You'll wanna edge in to it. Been awhile, start off lite. Then bump up accordingly. Need hardware?

JUDE

Nuh-uh.

FITCH

Cool.

(to Emmy)

You still got my number, hit me up some time. Justa catch up.

Jude grabs his bindles then leads Emmy to the door...

FITCH

...Wait. Jude. You like. Forgetting something?

JUDE

(re: the cash)

Right there.

FITCH

Not that. The picture. Kid out there claims you stiffed him out of ten bucks on a picture.

JUST OUTSIDE THE OFFICE DOOR -- (MOMENTS AFTER)

...Jude and Emmy walk out the office door -- down the cubbyhole hallway -- through the satin curtain and out...

BAR FLOOR -- CONTINUING

...into the churning sea of drunk-happy people.

JUDE

(to Emmy)

Be right back...

...pecks a kiss on her cheek then beelines for...

RESTROOM STALL -- LITTLE ROCK BAR -- CONTINUING

...the fetid confines of a foul-looking stall.

He inspects the bindles of goods. Satisfied, he stashes the them down in the brim of his sock. Then...

...starts taking a piss.

He spots...

BOO!

...written on the stall wall. Then. More writing metastasis. Words, phrases, spreading like cancer -- until each wall of the stall is painted in cursive print.

Jude quickly zips up. Steps out straight into...

INT. CAVERNOUS ROOM -- CONTINUING

...a shuttered-looking place, grizzled by time.

JUDE

stands. Disheveled. Face -- battered. Clothes, filthy.

He reads strings of text as they unfurl like strands of ribbon across the walls, ceiling -- even etched into the wood floor beneath Jude's feet...

...like an invisible-hand is penning a book -- walls, ceiling and floor -- entire room -- the book's pages.

Jude's eyes trip over a rickety door. He crosses. Shoulder-checks it until it finally pops open...

INT. PATRICA'S APARTMENT -- HALLWAY -- CONTINUING

...spitting Jude out into Patricia's hallway where he finds...

...PATRICIA locking the front door -- cradling groceries.

Jude storms toward her, a rolling hurricane of spite.

JUDE

You drug me? Who are you? Some head fuck? Sit down...

...throws Patricia on the couch. She cowers, shielding her face fearfully with her hands.

Then. TV BLINKS ON.

Shows split-screen footage of Teeter's home ablaze, crackling with voracious flames...

FIELD-REPORTER DANIKA
 ...Charred remains of four bodies
 have been recovered so far, a fire
 allegedly started by the madman
 hold up at Willison apartments.

BACK TO

JUDE

JUDE
 That isn't true!

PATRICIA
 You didn't kill those people?

JUDE
 There was no fire. A family of four
 doesn't live there -- justa coked
 out fucking loser who killed my
 wife.

Cellphone RINGS. Jude answers.

NEGOTIATOR (O.S.)
 I'm losing patience, fuck face.

Jude peels back the curtain to peek out room's window.

JUDE
 (into phone)
 You better hope to God I don't--

Jude steps back from the window...

INT. JUDE'S HOUSE -- DAY

...to find himself plum in his blue-collar living room.

EMMY (V.O.)
 (via phone call)
 --Hope to God you don't what, Jude?

JUDE
 Emmy? That you, baby?

EMMY
 Listen, I gotta be quick, but I got
 a tidbit of good news you're gonna
 love to hear.

JUDE

That's wonderful, baby. You can
tell me over--

--CLICK. Whoops, hung up on her.

Nearby, a decorative, potted plant -- a 4-foot Ficus bush.
WOOSH! Bursts into flames.

But just as suddenly -- flames extinguish, without a single
leaf singed or charred.

Jude shuffles, baffled-like, over to the Ficus bush -- behind
him, a TODDLER, 4, skitters by - giggling playfully.

Jude spins around, but the tyke isn't there.

Then.

HUMMING, motherly yet sinister, wafts in from out of...

JUDE'S KITCHEN

...Jude walks in -- stumbling upon Patricia digging her hand
in a paper sack of groceries, humming ominously to herself...

PATRICIA'S KITCHEN -- CONTINUING

...JUDE

is back in Patricia's apartment.

PATRICIA'S LIVING ROOM -- CONTINUING

Jude scurries past the wooden cross -- now hanging upside
down, candles, aflame -- as he scatters through the front
door.

4TH FLOOR HALLWAY -- OUTSIDE APT 403 -- CONTINUING

Jude scampers down the hallway -- away from apt. 403 --
checking doorknobs for unlocked apartments.

OVER BY WOODEN STAIRCASE

Tactical boots BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! thunder up the creaky wooden-
staircase.

Turn the corner onto the 4th floor hallway -- just in time to
see: Jude, back turned, jiggling a doorknob--it's locked :(

PUDGY COP

Facing--don't face me, bitch!!

JUDE

Yes yes. Okay okay. My gun is empty
-- no bullets.

PUDGY COP

With your back facing me, I wanna
see you drop the fucking gun and
step five paces backward. Then get
down on your knees, belly to the
floor, with your arms stretched out
to the sides.

Jude does exactly that -- five paces -- lies prone, belly
down on the musty-looking hallway carpet.

A KNEE slams down on his back, pinning him to the floor.

BRAWNY COP

Stop resisting!

ZZZZAP. 50,000 volts of justice surge through Jude's body.
Then. It's over.

Handcuffs slap around wrists.

BRAWNY COP

You killed a lot of people, punk.

PUDGY COP

I got my shit from Teeter.

BRAWNY COP

Stop resisting!

JUDE

I ain--!

--ZAPPPP! ZAP! -- double dose of stun gun.

PUDGY COP

How we gettin' him out.

BRAWNY COP

Sneak him out.

PUDGY COP

Quite right.

They hood Jude using a sack cloth -- burying him in darkness.
Where he hears...

BRAWNY COP (O.S.)

...Slice him up?

PUDGY COP (O.S.)
Kinda wanna death-choke this bitch.

BRAWNY COP (O.S.)
(enticed)
Ewwww.

BACK TO

COPS

PUDGY COP
Then hack'um up.

BRAWNY COP
Quite right.

They jerk Jude up to his feet. Bounce him like a basketball off the wall. Jude crumbles, groaning hurt.

Cops stand him up again -- mad-handle him off down the hallway.

EXT. FRONT OF TUMBLEDOWN -- DOUBLE GLASS DOORS -- DAY

Jude bursts out, through the double doors. Tumbles down the tenement's stoop steps, rolling onto the cracked sidewalk.

His handcuffs break free.

Jude scrambles onto his feet -- throwing wild uppercuts blindly before shedding the hood to find himself alone -- standing stupid -- in the middle of a bustling sidewalk...

...No frenzied swarm of police. No tactical vehicles with flashing lights. No Negotiator. No feckless reporter...

...only curiously amused PEDESTRIANS scurrying every which way, going about their lives.

A stoplight BLINKS to GREEN -- traffic swings to motion.

A Metro bus stops. Picks up passengers. Jude -- one of them.

EST. JUDE'S HOUSE -- DAY

Beautiful day. Sun is shining. Birds sing.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- JUDE'S HOUSE -- CONTINUING

Front door kicks open. Jude stumbles in, winded, disheveled.

Finds Emmy, kicked-back, reading a COMPUTER GEEK magazine on the couch...

EMMY
...Close the door numb-skull, air's on.

Jude only eyes her with baffle.

EMMY
Where's the mail?

JUDE
W'huh?

EMMY
The mail? You were gonna get the mail?

JUDE
Oh. Was none.

EMMY
You feeling okay?

Jude sidles beside her on the couch.

JUDE
Feeling better. I missed you.

EMMY
While you were out checking the mail?

JUDE
Uh-huh.

EMMY
Can't say the same.

Jude tickles her. Emmy giggles playfully. Jude pulls her close.

JUDE
I love you so much.

Her wispy hair tickles his nose. He scratches the tickle with his finger -- a finger slathered in frothy vomit.

Reality descends, he's back on the floor, cuddling Emmy as she lies semi-naked on the carpet -- limp in death.

INT. JUDE'S HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- (MOMENTS LATER)

Jude storms in. A hurricane. Sobbing inconsolably.

He yanks open a cabinet drawer. Rifles through the contents...

...fishing out a butcher knife.

Carves it across his wrist. Flesh fillets -- then instantly heals up -- not a drip of blood lost.

A HARMONICA BLOWS. Someone else is in the house. Harmonica's notes sing the same song Patricia was ominously humming.

BUTTERFLIES flutter in from passing hallway.

Footsteps approach. Closer. And closer. And turn the corner, into the kitchen...

FITCH

...(playing harmonica)...
(feigning concern)
Ruh-Roh. What'cha do?

Fitch hints to Jude with his eyes.

Jude traces Fitch's look down to his wrists -- both -- slit and bleeding profusely.

FITCH

Tsk.Tsk.Tsk. Couldn't hold on?

JUDE

Out. Get the fuck outta my house.

FITCH

(mockingly)
Out. Get out. My house. My house.

Jude weakens, withers -- life ebbing, puddling on the linoleum floor. He tucks his knees in to his chest.

JUDE

I loved her so much.

FITCH

(pouty-lipped)
Awwww. So sad.

JUDE

You two killed her.

Fitch starts squirting Jude with a flask of lighter fluid.

FITCH
She chose her own death.

JUDE
Leave!

FITCH
(mockingly)
Leave! (then) But you earned your wages.

JUDE
(woozier)
Lemme sleep.

FITCH
No sleep.

Match STRIKES to flame. Flame sparks a happy-time sparkler.

JUDE
(life ebbing)
I want to be alone.

FITCH
See ya soon.

Fitch tosses the crackling happy-time sparkler onto Jude's lap.

WOOSH!

SMASH TO BLACK.

Static.

Then. A faint NOISE. Undulating. Distant.

But quickly swells in definition and volume. It's a song: Matthew Wilder's "Break My Stride."

Brain-rattling loud: "...Nobody's gonna slow me down..."

FADE IN

JUDE'S P.O.V.

Eyelids flutter, lift open. But only a slit -- just enough to notice a semi-naked girl splayed on the carpet before him.

Dying.

THE END.