

Dogman

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FADE IN:

EXT. HOUSE-TREE LEVEL-NIGHT

A caretaker's hut in the center of a lettuce field. An argument heard inside, the language foreign; German.

KITCHEN WINDOW

KURT SANDS, late thirties, screams at his wife, NATASHA, a voluptuous twenty-one. She screams back, then hides behind her palms, crying.

INT. HOUSE-BEDROOM

Six year old CHRISTOPHER lies in bed, listening calmly to the yelling. It stops. A beat later Kurt enters and sits on the bed beside his son. He strokes Christopher's hair, his mood miserable, fatigued.

CHRISTOPHER

Poppa?

Kurt begins to sob. Christopher embraces him.

KURT

I must go away. And I cannot take you with me.

CHRISTOPHER

Why?

Kurt is too choked to answer. The boy's eyes light up.

CHRISTOPHER

To find the treehouse!

Christopher slides out of bed and pulls a sheet of tattered notepaper from his chester drawer. He passes it to his confused father.

CLOSE ON PAPER

A sketch of an elaborate, whimsical treehouse.

BACK TO SCENE

Kurt is relieved.

KURT

Yes, I am going to find it.

CHRISTOPHER

And then you will come back for me

and momma?

KURT

Of course.

CHRISTOPHER

I can make most of my letters now.
Can I write them to you?

KURT

You had better!

Kurt kisses his son's forehead and rises.

KURT

Ich liebe dich, Christopher.

CHRISTOPHER

Ich liebe dich auch, Poppa.

KURT

Sleep now.

Kurt exits. A short, verbal exchange heard and then a door slams. Christopher climbs out of bed and pushes a chair to the window. He climbs up and looks out.

CHRISTOPHER'S POV

Natasha chases Kurt to the old station wagon, pulling at him. Kurt gets the door open, but she prevents him from getting in. Kurt pushes her and she tumbles to the dirt. Kurt finds his son in the window and waves to him.

EXT. HOUSE

Christopher exits from the house, running to Natasha as the station wagon pulls away.

CHRISTOPHER

Don't cry, momma! Poppa is going
to find the special tree and when
he does...

Natasha lashes out, knocking her son to the ground.

NATASHA

AWAY FROM ME!

She runs into the house.

CHRISTOPHER

Sits where he fell. Confused. Upset. Alone.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. STREET-NIGHT

A police cruiser pushes through evening traffic, overhead strobes activated.

SUPERIMPOSE: Twenty one years later

INT. POLICE CRUISER/MOVING-NIGHT

DEPUTY WALT KIBBELS, late twenties, drives. Built like a tank, with limbs.

WALT

Move aside, move aside!

POV THROUGH WINDSHIELD

The truck just ahead, pulling aside very slowly. Walt releases a burp from the cruiser's siren. The truck pulls over the curb, onto the sidewalk. Walt throws the HISPANIC FAMILY inside a not so nice look.

WALT

Goddam wetbacks.

EXT. HOUSE

Walt pulls the cruiser onto the lawn. Paramedic van and two police cruisers already on scene. Two DEPUTIES stand at the home's entrance. Argue with the small, but volatile GROUP, wanting to get in.

Off to the side, RINA SANCHEZ cries hysterical. Being restrained by two older HISPANIC WOMEN from entering the house. Rina sees Walt, breaks free. Runs to him.

RINA

He killed my baby, Walt. He
fucking killed my baby!

WALT

What happened?!

RINA

I don't know fucking know, man...
I left him here...with him...and
now my baby's dead. Ohhh, Walt...!

Walt guides her back to the older women.

WALT

Keep her here.

Moves toward the apartment. Pushes through the crowd to a spot beside his fellow officers. Addresses the group.

WALT

I'll take care of this. Now, go home.

(nothing)

GET OUTTA HERE!

They disperse.

INT. APARTMENT #4

The tiny apartment's wrecked. Overturned furniture, walls damaged, debris everywhere. FARLEY, a young deputy, and MORGAN DAVISON, a physically imposing African American quiet on Walt's entrance.

WALT

Where is he?

Farley gestures over his shoulder, toward the kitchen.

FARLEY

The family got here before we did, kicked the living shit out of him.

WALT

And the kid?

MORGAN DAVISON, a physically imposing African American paramedic, answers.

MORGAN

With the father.

WALT

What?!

FARLEY

This one got a little weird, Walt.

(beat)

He wouldn't let go.

WALT

My ass...

Walt moves to the kitchen. Slips on his first step in. His foot kicks the overturned deep fryer, sends it skidding. Falls flat on his back in a puddle of cooking oil. Ends up eye to with...twenty-seven year old CHRISTOPHER SANDS.

His face a bloody testament to the recent beating, Christopher clutches tight to what was once his five year old son, NICHOLAS.

The child's face is horrifically burned. Skin bubbled, peeling. Pink meat and skull bone visible. Nose melted away. Mouth frozen agape in an eternal, silent scream.

WALT

Jesus shit!

Farley and Morgan help Walt to his feet. Walt takes a moment to quell his stomach.

Then drops a hand towel over the child's face. He squats. Sniffs at Christopher's mouth. Takes note of the empty liquor bottle on the counter.

Walt attempts to pry Christopher's arms away.

WALT

Let go.

Nothing doing. Walt tries again. Christopher refuses. Walt slaps his face, brings focus to Christopher's blank eyes.

CHRISTOPHER

Walt?

WALT

That's right. Now, let go.

Removes the towel from his son's face, then quickly yanks Walt by the hair and pulls the cop's face until it touches the boy's.

CHRISTOPHER

Say sorry.

Walt grabs the foot-long flashlight from his belt. Brings it down across the top of Christopher's head. Christopher grunts under the blow, let's go of Walt, but still alert. Walt brings the flashlight down again. Christopher slumps.

Walt pulls the child's body free. But his attention remains on Christopher. Furious, he hits Christopher again and again.

ANGLE ON FARLEY AND MORGAN

Disbelief has them physically frozen. Then, Morgan moves. He wraps Walt in a bear hug. Walt shrugs the big man off like a bug, gets in another hit before Farley helps subdue him.

CUT TO:

INT. MONTEREY SUPERIOR COURT-DAY

Seated at the defense table, Christopher wears county issue, orange jumpsuit. His court appointed ATTORNEY sits beside, situates his files.

THE GALLERY

Standing room only. RINA sits just behind Christopher. Glares daggers at his back. Walt sits beside, a comforting hand on her arm. And in the back row, Christopher's mother, NATASHA,

aging well. A stubborn set to her face.

The jury box is empty.

JUDGE WILEY, late fifties, enters. Caught off guard, the BAILIFF abruptly concludes his personal call.

BAILIFF

Remain seated for the honorable
Judge Wiley...no talking while
court is in session.

Wiley sits. Takes a moment, still formulating. Addresses the gallery.

JUDGE WILEY

In the thirteen years I have been
on this bench I have never had an
accused stand before me and accept
complete responsibility for his
actions. Yes, men have entered
pleas of guilt, but not without
first seeking and receiving
concessions made by the state in
the form of reduced sentencing.
Mr. Sands has made no such
requests and has pleaded guilty to
the states charges that he
committed murder in the first
degree.

The PROSECUTOR turns in triumph. Gives Walt and Rina a thumbs up.

JUDGE WILEY

And that gives me great pause. Mr.
Sands?

Christopher stares straight ahead, not even there. His lawyer rises, gestures for him to do the same.

JUDGE WILEY

Do you fully realize the severity
of the possible penalties of such
a plea?

Christopher says nothing.

JUDGE WILEY

I will need a verbal response.

CHRISTOPHER

Yes.

JUDGE WILEY

You admit to killing your son,
purposefully and with malice?

The prosecutor rises.

PROSECUTOR
Your honor?!

JUDGE WILEY
Sit down.

He sits.

JUDGE WILEY
Better yet, get your butt up here.
(to defense attorney)
You too!

The two men approach the bench.

JUDGE WILEY
You two familiar with the term
kangaroo court?

Defense attorney nods.

JUDGE WILEY
Not here, not with me. Now, sit.

Prosecutor rolls his eyes.

JUDGE WILEY
Best unroll those eyes first,
prosecutor, don't want you to trip.

The men return to their respective tables.

THE GALLERY

Shifts, restless. Rina and Walt wonder what's going on.

JUDGE WILEY
Did you hate your son, Mr. Sands?

CHRISTOPHER
No.

JUDGE WILEY
Did you throw hot oil over his
body in order to cause his death?

CHRISTOPHER
No.

JUDGE WILEY
Then what the hell are you doing,
son?

CHRISTOPHER

It was my fault.

The Judge nods, understanding.

JUDGE WILEY

One thing I find very disturbing is that you have not made a statement as to what actually occurred that night. Will you do so now?

Christopher shakes his head.

JUDGE WILEY

Regardless, I find no evidence to sustain the states charges of first degree murder and therefor direct a reduced charge of child endangerment. How do you plead to this charge, Mr. Sands?

CHRISTOPHER

Guilty.

JUDGE WILEY

Fine. I will set sentencing for...
(checks calendar)
...one week from today. Do yourself a favor, son, think about that statement.

INT. MONTEREY SUPERIOR COURT-DAY

The court has been called to order. Wiley frowns at Christopher.

Superimpose: ONE WEEK LATER

JUDGE WILEY

No statement?

Christopher gestures no.

JUDGE WILEY

Mr. Sands, I am quite positive had there been even a minimal attempt on the part of the prosecutor and your attorney to find all parties culpable in your sons death, you would not be standing here alone. And as deplorable as I find their lack of action, I must in all honesty say, why should they have? If you make no effort to defend or protect your rights as a human being, then who will? Who should? Take better care of yourself, Mr.

Sands. Six years. Court adjourned.

An uproar. Rina spits at Christopher. Walt restrains her. However, a TWO MALE family members vault the barrier.

Punch Christopher several times before being restrained by the BAILIFFS.

Natasha runs from the courtroom. Judge Wiley slams his gavel down so hard it snaps.

JUDGE WILEY
ORDER...!

EXT. SOLEDAD PRISON-ESTABLISHING

INT. SOLEDAD PRISON

POV FROM CELL

Christopher holds his bedding, pillow and blankets. Waits as the cell door slides open. A GUARD stands behind him.

GUARD
Go on.

Christopher steps inside the dark cell. The guard yells to his left.

GUARD
Close it up!

The door slides shut.

Christopher looks over the room with little interest. A stainless steel commode. Bare walls. A set of metal bunk beds bolted to the wall. Christopher looks out the cell bars. Then, a metallic creak from behind. Christopher turns.

HIS POV

A pair of tiny legs dangle over the side of the lower bunk, their owner hidden in the shadows of the upper bunk. Nicholas leans forward into the light.

NICHOLAS
Hi Daddy.

CUT TO:

EXT. BLACKFIELD ANIMAL SHELTER-NIGHT

A building sits at its crest, surrounded by a fence. Directly overhead, a monster cloud rolls across the black sky. Consumes the half moon in its path.

SUPERIMPOSE: EIGHT YEARS LATER

INT. BLACKFIELD ANIMAL SHELTER

Corridor lighting illuminates a series of metal cages, forty-two in all.

In one, a half breed bitch lies curled around her litter. A tattered blanket between her and the cold concrete floor.

The bitch sniffs the air. She peels herself from her pups, moves to the cage door. Sniffs the air again and barks.

EXT. BLACKFIELD SKY

Lightning rips through the clouds center.

INT. BLACKFIELD ANIMAL SHELTER

The house has been roused, agitated. The chorus of yaps and howls bounce off steel and stone. Deafening.

EXT. BLACKFIELD SKY

Lightning tentacles flash across the sky, turns night to day. A heavy rain begins.

EXT. HOUSE

A two-story about a mile from Blackfield. An old pickup parked out front. A lone light burns in a basement window.

POV THROUGH WINDOW

Circular saw, tools, a pile of fat tree trunks, roots sawed away. A wood shop.

ANOTHER ANGLE

A shirtless MAN, with a wild head of hair and scraggly beard, works vigorously over a large chunk of tree trunk.

INT. BASEMENT

The man grunts under the effort of his work. Hair sticks to his sweaty face, obscuring his features. Thunder rumbles outside, pulling the man's attention to the window. Rain making its way in. Then, a distant voice.

NICHOLAS (V.O.)

I'm cold, daddy.

He pulls the hair from his eyes to look at the clock. Christopher Sands reacts to the time: 3:30 a.m. He slips into the shirt that lies on the floor.

INT. HOUSE/HALLWAY

The wood floor creaks under Christopher's feet as moves to another room and enters.

INT. HOUSE/NATASHA'S BEDROOM

Natasha, Christopher's mother, wakes at the sound of the door shutting. Rises. Still voluptuous.

Christopher looks around the room, furtively. Filled with hand carved furniture. Same style as the piece Christopher was working on: canoe-shaped bunk beds, a desk, it's bookcase filled with books. Model airplanes hang from the ceiling.

NICHOLAS (O.S.)

I'm cold.

And there, on the lower bunk, lies Nicholas. Shivering. Christopher strips the blankets from the top bunk. Lays them over his son.

CHRISTOPHER

Better?

Nicholas nods.

NICHOLAS

You going to work?

CHRISTOPHER

Yes.

NICHOLAS

Will you come right home?

Christopher nods.

EXT. CHRISTOPHER'S HOUSE/CHILD'S ROOM

Natasha has her ear to the door. Hears conversation. Frowns. Opens it.

ENTERS

Looks to the lower bunk. Empty, except for the pile of blankets.

NATASHA

This is ridiculous...

Christopher moves past her, exiting.

CHRISTOPHER

Knock next time.

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S HOUSE/FRONT DOOR

Christopher puts on a pair of rain boots, a slicker. Natasha

moves toward the kitchen.

NATASHA

Come, I make some coffee.

Christopher flips the slicker's hood over his head, exits.

NATASHA

It's raining. Take the truck!

He's gone. Natasha mumbles something in german. Irritated.

EXT. CHRISTOPHER'S HOUSE-RAINING

Christopher exits. Mounts his bicycle. Pedals into the rain.

EXT. BLACKFIELD STREET/RAINING

Christopher rolls to a stop in a residential area. Looks to a single family house, police cruiser parked out front. No lights on. A sign stuck in the lawn reads: WALT KIBBLES FOR SHERIFF

CUT TO:

EXT. BLACKFIELD HILLS-DUSK-FLASHBACK

Christopher and Rina, teenagers, look down across the valley. Blackfield's a mere spec against the vast agricultural fields. Rina shudders. Christopher wraps his coat around her.

CHRISTOPHER

Wanna go home?

(she shakes her
head)

I love you.

RINA

Me too. Always will.

They kiss.

NICHOLAS (V.O.)

I'm cold, Daddy.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSE-PRESENT DAY

Christopher hesitates, not wanting the memory to fade.

NICHOLAS (V.O.)

Daddy.

Christopher climbs back on on his bike and rides.

EXT. BLACKFIELD CEMETERY

Christopher leans his bike against the fence. Climbs over.

CEMETERY GROUNDS

Christopher pulls on the door to the old, wooden gardener's shack. Locked. Runs his fingers between the door and the shack's frame. Finds a gap. Gets a solid grip and yanks.

INT. SHACK

ANGLE ON DOOR

As it's ripped open. Christopher steps inside and looks around. He finds a box of lawn bags.

CEMETERY GROUNDS/MOMENTS LATER

Christopher stands over a grave, covered with multiple lawn bags, edges weighed down with rocks.

NICHOLAS (V.O.)

That's better.

EXT. BLACKFIELD MAIN STREET

Christopher maneuvers his bike around the many puddles that fill the many potholes.

EXT. GAS STATION

Open all night. A cop, FARLEY, drinks coffee under the overhead, chit chats with the CLERK as he empties trash cans. Farley sees Christopher pass by on his bike.

FARLEY

Be right back.

Climbs in his cruiser and drives off.

EXT. HIGHWAY-RAINING

The cruiser pulls alongside Christopher. Window lowers.

FARLEY

Where you going, Dogman?

Farley's sudden presence no surprise at all.

CHRISTOPHER

Work.

FARLEY

At four in the morning?

Christopher pumps the pedals harder, pulling away from the cruiser. He veers sharp right, onto an ascending, unlit road.

EXT. ANIMAL SHELTER-RAINING

Christopher locks his bicycle to the staircase. Unlocks the main entrance. Waits the beat it takes for the cruiser to arrive. Christopher points to the building.

CHRISTOPHER

Work.

INT. CRUISER

Farley dials a number on his cell phone.

FARLEY

Creepy bastard.

EXT. WALT'S HOUSE-SAME TIME

The same house Christopher stopped at moments ago. A phone rings inside.

INT. WALT KIBBELS' HOME/BEDROOM

Walt find the phone through squinted eyes. A figure lies beside, covered with blankets.

WALT

Yeah?

(listens)

Alright, swing by every half hour,
see what he's up to. Good eye,
buddy.

Walt hangs up, his face set in concentration. The figure stirs beside him. A woman's voice...

FIGURE

Who was that?

WALT

Farley.

FIGURE

What's he want?

WALT

He just ran into your ex.

Rina Sanchez sits up quickly.

RINA

What'd he do?

WALT

Don't know yet, but it could be
something good.

Rina lies back down, her back to Walt.

RINA
(mumbling)
...so full of shit.

WALT
Don't start, Rina.

RINA
Well, I'm sick of hearing it,
Walt. It's been two years!

WALT
And how many times have you seen
him in that time? Not once.

RINA
I don't have to see him. Went to
Sylvia's yesterday and had lunch
on one of his fucking tables!

WALT
Tables?

RINA
Felton's selling his furniture. I
told you?!

WALT
And I told the son of a bitch to
stop doing business with him!

RINA
You're a fucking cop, Walt. You
can do more than tell.

WALT
That's right, a fucking cop. And
this fucking cop plans to run for
fucking sheriff next year.

RINA
That's more important than me?

WALT
I didn't say that.

RINA
You don't have to!

Rina pounds her fist into the pillow.

RINA
He gives me nightmares. Feel like
he's always watching me or

something. I can't think about nothing else except wondering if he's gonna come after me. Gets so bad sometimes, I just want to run away, leave everything, leave you if I have to.

Walt suddenly concerned, pulls her to him. She lies her head on his chest.

WALT
Don't say that, baby. It won't be much longer. I swear it.

She kisses him. Reaches under the blanket. Fondles.

RINA
Like that?

WALT
You know I do.

She swings a leg over and straddles him, then reaches behind and guides him in.

RINA
How about this?

WALT
Mmm...

RINA
You gonna make my nightmares go away, Walt?

WALT
Yes, oh yes...

Rina climbs off. She grabs a pillow and hits him with it.

RINA
I'll let you know when they're gone!

She exits.

INT. ANIMAL SHELTER/OFFICE

Christopher separates two blinds with his fingers, peers out the window.

HIS POV

The cruiser drives off.

BACK TO CHRISTOPHER

He puts on a pair of aviation earphones that hang on the wall.

KENNEL AREA

Flooded, water seeps into the cages. The dogs, sensing Christopher's arrival, express their excitement vocally. Christopher wades in and gets to work.

WORK MONTAGE

Starting at the first kennel cage and working his way down, Christopher:

Sloshes through ankle-deep water with a 110 pound Rottweiler in his arms. Deposits the dog in the employee restroom.

Piles puppies into a wheeled garbage can. Scoops the mother under his arm. Rolls and carries the lot out of the kennel area. Deposits them in the shelter's office.

Uses a large squeegee to push water out of the kennel cage.

Grabs blankets from a large pile. Drops them in kennel cages 1 and 2.

Relocates the occupants of cages 3 and 4 to cages 1 and 2.

Opening cage 5, a Cocker Spaniel capitalizes on the opportunity, bolts for freedom. Christopher gives chase. Christopher prevails. Returns the Spaniel to its cage.

Just think, only 40 cages to go...

Christopher squeegees the last of the water out a side door.

INT. EMPLOYEE AREA/MONTAGE

Christopher fills two buckets halfway with dry dog food. Wets it down with water at the industrial sized sink. Adds a can of wet food to each. Mixes it with his hands. A little more dry, more canned, more water.

INT. KENNELS/MONTAGE

Christopher serves breakfast. Scoops the mixture out with bowls and drops them into the cages. As he opens a cage door, the Cocker Spaniel makes another break for it. Christopher doesn't even bother. Continues the feeding.

INT. ANIMAL SHELTER/OFFICE

Christopher pulls a clipboard from the wall, plops in a chair and reads from it. Without looking from the clipboard, Christopher pulls a dog treat from the desk drawer. Tosses to the doorway. The Spaniel gobbles it up.

INT. ANIMAL SHELTER/HALLWAY

Christopher carries the clipboard to the back of the facility. The Spaniel follows. And right behind the dog, Nicholas.

INT. ANIMAL SHELTER/QUARANTINE

Christopher matches information from the clipboard to another that hangs on the cage door. He pulls a restraining pole from the wall. Opens the cage door slowly. A heavy bark from inside sends the Spaniel running.

INSIDE CAGE

The huge Bull Mastiff backs to the corner of the cage. Bares its fangs and growls a warning. The dog fears the pole.

Christopher re-hangs the pole. Enters the cage. Sits just inside the door. The mastiff is not appeased. Very upset by the presence of this uninvited visitor.

Christopher gets on his hands and knees. Edges towards the dog, never making eye contact. The Mastiff snarls, it's feet shuffling wildly, preparing to lunge...

A growl grows in Christopher throat. He barks, howls. Eyes grow wild, mad even.

The mastiff is confused. Backs away. Christopher suddenly twists, turns his back to the animal and drops to his seat. He produces a treat, holds it over his shoulder.

CHRISTOPHER

(softly)

Here, boy.

The mastiff whimpers.

CHRISTOPHER

C'mon.

The mastiff moves forward, gingerly takes the treat. Christopher reaches back, pulls the dogs head in for a hug. Gets his face licked.

INT. EUTHANASIA ROOM

The Mastiff lies on a prep table, a rubber strap tied tight around its paw. A patch of fur has been shaved. Christopher prepares a syringe. The mastiff whines.

Nicholas sits on a chair.

NICHOLAS (O.S.)

Do you have to?

CHRISTOPHER

Yes.

NICHOLAS

Why?

CHRISTOPHER

He bit a baby until it died.

NICHOLAS

You're not supposed to kill
babies, are you, Daddy?

Christopher looks into the animal's eyes.

CHRISTOPHER

(softly)

No, Nic, you're not.

MOMENTS LATER

Christopher lifts the limp dog from the prep table.

EXT. SHELTER-MORNING

Rain has reduced to a drizzle. Christopher exits, carrying the mastiff. Uses a foot to pop open the door of the industrial size refrigerator unit.

INT. REFRIGERATOR UNIT

Oil barrels sit rowed, overflowing with dog and cat carcasses. Christopher lowers the mastiff into an empty container. Gently, rump first. The large dog fills the container. A honk from outside.

EXT. SHELTER

A truck backs in, its bed packed with 50 pound sacks of dry dog food. JOHN, the driver, hops out.

JOHN

Where you want it?

CHRISTOPHER

Here.

JOHN

Big order today. Let me get the
dolly and I'll give you a hand.

Christopher takes the invoice from John, signs it. Takes his copy.

CHRISTOPHER

Just drop it here.

Christopher enters the shelter.

JOHN

Jerk.

EXT. SHELTER-MOMENTS LATER

Christopher grabs two sacks from the mountain John left behind, carries them in.

INT. SHELTER-A LITTLE LATER

Christopher stacks the last of the sacks. He sits and wipes at the sweat. A very short break. He moves to a cart loaded with cleaning supplies and pushes it out of the room.

EXT. SHELTER-MORNING

A sedan pulls into the parking lot. Morgan Davison (ex-paramedic) climbs out. Juggling a newspaper, briefcase, mug of coffee and fumbling with his keys, he doesn't even notice the police cruiser until he's at the driver's side window. Walt smiles.

WALT

Morning, Morgan.

INT. MORGAN'S OFFICE

Morgan sits at his desk. Walt reads from his notebook.

WALT

Farley observed him entering the shelter 'bout four this morning. Pretty early to be conducting any official business, isn't it, Morgan?

MORGAN

We're built on top of a hill, in a hole. When it rains, it floods. When it floods it's official business.

WALT

So, the only time he's here at such odd hours would be for an emergency?

MORGAN

Where you going with this, Walt?

WALT

Made a few calls this morning. Had little talks with the rest of your crew.

They say, rain or no rain, he's

there 14-16 hours a day, seven days a week. You paying him for all that time?

Morgan thinks about lying, but...

MORGAN

No.

WALT

Don't know how the county would feel about that, Morgan. The liability issues alone...

MORGAN

Just leave the man alone, Walt.

WALT

Wouldn't be doing my job if I did.

MORGAN

So, now you're with the human resources department?

WALT

What's going on with you and this freak, Morgan? You part of some satanic cult that gets its kick off of slaughtering house pets?

MORGAN

You are one disturbed man, Walt.

WALT

Well, I can't think of any sane reasons you'd want to butt heads with me. Most people may not like cops, Morgan, but they at least have the sense not to make an enemy of one. So, what is it?

MORGAN

I just don't like you.

WALT

How could you not like me?

MORGAN

When he went away there was maybe a handful of people that thought Chris killed his son, most of 'em from your wife's family.

But with you whispering in everybody's ear for the last eight years, you got most everybody convinced he did do it.

WALT

That be illegal for a man in my position to do, Morgan.

MORGAN

Then maybe you ought to stop now, before you get caught.

WALT

That why you been helping him out, Morgan? To spite me?

MORGAN

Hell, it was your fault I hired him, Walt.

WALT

How's that?

MORGAN

That man spent six months looking for work, knocking on doors that were never gonna open 'cause everybody was afraid of going against you.

WALT

So, you wanna be a rebel?

MORGAN

No. Just got sick watching him knock.

WALT

There's gonna come a day when you're gonna regret not being my friend, Morgan.

MORGAN

That pussy must be some powerful shit, Walt.

WALT

What?

MORGAN

Men do crazy things to get it. Foolish, even dangerous things to hold on to it. And that's a lesson most men never learn, when to let that dangerous pussy go.

Walt rises leans over the desk, threateningly. Morgan sorta wishes he hadn't said that, but still determined.

WALT

My wife has suffered a great tragedy, Morgan. Don't fuck with me.

MORGAN

My wife suffers a tragedy five days of every month, Walt. It's called a period. Don't mean I go play in traffic every time she tells me to.

Walt grabs Morgan by the collar. Cocks back to punch.

MORGAN

Go on, Walt! Give me something to show Blackfield what their next Sheriff's all about.

Walt lets him go. Pulls a document from his pocket. Drops it on the desk.

WALT

See, nice and legal.

INT. SHELTER/FELINE QUARANTINE

Where all the mean cats stay. Christopher slowly pushes a net into a cage.

INSIDE CAGE

The huge black tomcat, big as a dog, hisses at the intruding net, sliding along the cage roof, lowering. The mesh drapes over the animal. As the net's rim touches flat against the metal floor, the cat reacts. Explosively.

ON CHRISTOPHER

Brute strength required to hold on. Inside the cage, the cat violently slams against its walls. Christopher yanks sharply on the pole, lifts and pulls the mesh wrapped cat out. Carefully walks toward the:

DOORWAY

Walt, passing by, stops when he sees Christopher.

THEY LOCK EYES

Hatred In Christopher's. Amusement in Walt's.

WALT

Woof.

Walt moves on. A hiss from the net. A paw frees itself. Strikes. Christopher grimaces.

INT. REFRIGERATOR

Christopher drops the cat into an empty barrel. It hits bottom with a thud. CLOSE ON his hand. Blood seeps through the paper towel he has wrapped around it.

INT. MORGAN'S OFFICE

Morgan sits at his desk, his poor mood evident. Christopher steps into the room. Wounded hand in pocket.

MORGAN

Wanna know what I was doing at four o'clock this morning, Chris? Looking at the ceiling wondering if the rain was gonna come leaking through the roof of that cheap ass house I'm living in. Wanna know how long I was doing that for? "Bout four seconds for I rolled my ass over and went back to sleep. How come you didn't go back to sleep, Chris?

CHRISTOPHER

What'd he want?

Morgan hands him the document. He reads.

MORGAN

Juvenile probationers. Owe the county some time and they're gonna spend it here.

CHRISTOPHER

We don't need any help.

MORGAN

Well, we're getting it. Starting tomorrow. And I'll need you to train 'em.

CHRISTOPHER

Somebody else can do it.

MORGAN

Who? The ladies?

CHRISTOPHER

You.

MORGAN

I said you godammit! Now, stop arguing with me.

CHRISTOPHER

Walt getting to you, Morgan?

MORGAN

You goddam right he's getting to me! And so are you. See, now, right or wrong, I know why he does what he does. Man's just stupid-evil. What I don't get is why you do what you do, why you stay?! Ain't like you got anything special going on here. Live like some kind of town ghost...

Christopher moves to exit.

MORGAN

You hold on! I ain't never been one to call a marker, but you better talk to me!

CHRISTOPHER

I never asked you for anything.

MORGAN

That the way it is? I put my ass on the line, my family on the line, but because you didn't ask me to, you don't owe me the mother-fucking courtesy of telling me why I'm doing it?

Christopher rises, pulls a ring of keys from his pocket and drops them on the desk. He exits. Morgan sits. Rubs at his temples, trying to keep the approaching headache at bay. He notices something. Drops of blood on his desk, on the keys.

EXT. ANIMAL SHELTER

Morgan yanks the door open. Looks for Chris, his bike. Both gone.

EXT. BLACKFIELD/MAIN STREET

Christopher pedals fast, cuts into a short alley that leads into the customer parking area for FELTON'S FURNITURE. Christopher leans his bike against the building. Moves to an iron door, pulls. It's locked. He peers through the bars:

INT. FELTON'S FURNITURE STORE

A COUPLE browses. DAN FELTON, owner, talks with a CUSTOMER about a coffee table carved from a tree trunk.

DAN

...all by myself.

CUSTOMER

Wow. How long's something like

that take you?

DAN

Oh, about eighteen hours. But
whose looking at the clock when
you're doing something you love?

EXT. FELTON'S FURNITURE STORE

Christopher, impatient, knocks at the metal.

INT. FELTON'S FURNITURE STORE

Dan, uncomfortable at the sight of Christopher, excuses
himself.

EXT. REAR ENTRANCE/FELTON'S FURNITURE

Dan doesn't bother unlocking, talks through the bars. Unable
to look Christopher in the eye.

DAN

What are you doing here?

CHRISTOPHER

Gonna have a little extra time.
Can bring you more pieces if you'd
like.

DAN

No, I wouldn't like. Can't sell
the ones I got. Now, get outta
here and don't come back.

Dan turn and walks.

CHRISTOPHER

Walt been here to see you, Dan?

Dan stops, keeps his back to Christopher.

DAN

I'm just a small business man,
Chris, that's all.

Dan returns to his customer. Christopher stands there a
moment. Stares after him.

EXT. BLACKFIELD MAIN STREET

Christopher locks his bike to a sign post. Enters a drug
store.

INT. DRUG STORE

Moves to the magazine stand. Picks up magazine.

EXT. DRUG STORE

Looking in on Christopher. He's not reading at all, but staring straight ahead through the plate glass window.

CHRISTOPHER'S POV

The real estate office across the street. Rina goes over some paperwork at her desk. Wears a smart-looking business suit. Moves her lips as she reads. Very sexy.

NICHOLAS (V.O.)

Better not, Daddy.

BACK TO CHRISTOPHER

The magazine is snatched from his hands. The drugstore CLERK.

CLERK

No reading the magazines. This ain't a library.

Seems like the entire store as stopped their business to gawk at the scene. Knowing, judgmental stares. The kind you get from those that swear they know your business better than you, and condemn you for it. Christopher takes a long look and each and every face. Exits.

EXT. MAIN STREET

Christopher unlocks his bike. Pushes the bike across the street. A car skids to a stop. Stops just a few feet short of hitting Christopher. Honks madly.

INT. CAR

The driver, SHIELA, pretty, early thirties. The passenger, MILDRED, ugly, late fifties. Shiela's daughter, seven year old ANGELA, in the backseat.

SHIELA

Watch where you're going, you idiot!

MILDRED

OhmyGod, that's him!

SHIELA

(to Christopher)

Get out of the way!

(to Mildred)

Him who?

MILDRED

Him! The one who went to prison for killing his child.

SHIELA
You're kidding.

They stare through the windshield.

THEIR POV

Christopher stares back.

BACK TO CAR

Mildred hides her face.

MILDRED
No. Oh God, he's looking at us.
Drive around, drive around!

Mildred's hysteria frightens Angela.

ANGELA
Mommy?!

Shiela cranks the wheel.

EXT. STREET-DAY

The car makes a wide berth around Christopher. Takes the next turn. Christopher continues on. Walks his bike to the corner of Rina's window.

CHRISTOPHER'S POV

A COUPLE are taking seats across from Rina. She conducts herself like nothing we've seen so far. Composed, but animated with the little she says. Professionally at least, a keen listener. The perfect salesman. And so damn beautiful.

NICHOLAS (O.S.)
Daddy, don't...!

A bang at the window startles all three.

THEIR POV

Christopher at the window, alone. Palm pressed against the glass. Frustrated anger on his face.

EXT. REAL ESTATE OFFICE

Nicholas pulls on his father's coat.

NICHOLAS
Now you're gonna get in trouble!
Go home, Daddy, go home!

RINA'S POV

Christopher gets on his bike, reluctantly. Not taking his eyes off her. He pedals away.

BACK ON RINA

Through the glass. She turns back to her clients. Tries desperately to continue with her meeting. Can't do it. She stands. Bolts from her desk.

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S HOME/BASEMENT-NIGHT

Christopher's runs a sander over a stump. The basement door opens. Natasha carries down a dinner plate. Sets it on the workbench. Christopher has stopped his work, keeps his eyes on the piece, not acknowledging her.

NATASHA

I make your favorite. Schnitzel
and potato salad.

CHRISTOPHER

Why?

NATASHA

Why?

CHRISTOPHER

What do you want?

NATASHA

(offended)

I make you a nice dinner and you
ask me what I want?

Natasha moves for the stairs. Stops and turns. Pulls a key ring from her apron.

NATASHA

Oh, your manager brought these.
Told me you left them behind.
Wanted I should tell you you
should be on time tomorrow for the
training.

(laughs)

Like you're ever late.

(eager)

Are there problems at work?

NICHOLAS (O.S.)

All she cares about is the rent,
Daddy. Tell her get out.

Nicholas stands on the workbench, beside Natasha. Arms crossed in a pout. Christopher tries to focus on Natasha.

NATASHA

You know how hard it was for you

to find this job.

NICHOLAS

Tell her to go!

CHRISTOPHER

No. No problems.

NATASHA

Good.

(stepping to Chris)

What is this here?

CHRISTOPHER

Nothing.

NATASHA

A table? Nice. Is Felton paying
you enough for these?

Christopher steps in front of the piece.

CHRISTOPHER

I don't want to talk.

NATASHA

He's so cheap, that man...

NICHOLAS

She didn't even like me, Daddy!

CHRISTOPHER

GET OUT!

Natasha takes the stairs quickly, frightened. Slams the door.
Christopher takes a pause, looks after his mother.

NICHOLAS

She's a whore.

Christopher shuts his eyes against the voice.

NICHOLAS

A smelly...

Christopher snatches up a hammer from the workbench.

NICHOLAS

...rotten...

Brings it down down hard on the stump. Again and again.
Breaks off its legs. Hurls the tool.

Picks up the stump and slams it to the floor. Stalks the
room, looking for something else to destroy.

NICHOLAS

...whore!

Drops to his knees, grits his teeth and groans. Tries to hold in the scream. Rocks to and fro.

CHRISTOPHER

I don't want to be here anymore,
don't want to be here anymore...

NICHOLAS (O.S.)

Daddy!

Nic's urgency pulls Christopher out of his state. He looks to the workbench. Nicholas is gone.

NICHOLAS (V.O.)

I can't sleep, Daddy.

Christopher rises. Fatigued.

CHRISTOPHER

I'm coming, Nic.

Climbs the stairs.

CHRISTOPHER

I'm coming...

INT. NICHOLAS' ROOM

Christopher flops into bed beside Nicholas. Nicholas lies his head on his father's chest. They sleep.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET-DAY

Seven year old Christopher is a bully's wet dream, and he knows it. Dressed in a short pants suit and bow-tie, he sprints as fast as his legs will allow.

Too concerned with checking his rear, he runs smack into two BOYS, same age, dirty t-shirts and jeans. WALT KIBBELS, the larger boy, clearly the leader.

BOY #1

Where ya think the kraut bastard's
going, Walt?

WALT

Don't know. Where ya goin', kraut
bastard?

Christopher cuts across the street. The boys fall in behind, step on the backs of his loafers.

WALT

Hey, Jose. How'd Adolf Hitler tie his shoes?

BOY #2
In little nazis!

The boys laugh.

WALT
That was funny. Why ain't you laughin', little nazi?

BOY #2
Yeah, why ain't ya laughin'?

Walt snorts up phlegm from the deepest part of his lungs. Spits it on Christopher's cheek. Boy #1 hawks a loogie on the back of Christopher's neck. Christopher presses on.

FURTHER UP THE STREET

The boys take turns spitting on Christopher. Two other BOYS catch up, titillated by the scene.

BOY #3
Hey, whatcha guys doin'?

WALT
Spittin' on a kraut bastard.

BOY #3
That's nuts!

BOY #1
Go on. He won't do nothin'!

BOY #3
Let's see.

Walt's mouth is just about bone-dry. Takes some work to get another load out, but he manages.

WALT
See.

Boy #2 and #3 rain Christopher with saliva.

EXT. CHRISTOPHER'S HOME

Three more have joined the pack, jeering and cursing. Chase Christopher to the edge of the lawn, hang back and laugh as he falls on his move to get inside his home.

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S HOME/LIVING ROOM

ARTHUR sleeps in a recliner, a beer clutched in one hand, a dead cigarette, topped with an inch of ash, in the other.

Natasha, now twenty-two, watches a soap opera.

Christopher bursts through the front door and disappears to the back of the house before Arthur registers he's been rudely awakened.

INT. BATHROOM

Christopher rubs hard at the spit with a washcloth. Arthur appears in the doorway. Lights a fresh smoke.

ARTHUR

What'd you do now?

(no answer)

Suppose you want me to run 'em off?

Christopher nods, grateful.

EXT. CHRISTOPHER'S HOME

Arthur pushes Christopher out of the front door, locks it. Christopher pounds and kicks at the door, screaming.

CHRISTOPHER

Momma! Momma!

Arthur's face appears from behind the window curtain. Growls at Christopher, points a finger toward the posse. Christopher spasms at the gesture, complies. Turns to face them.

The young posse not so young any more. Made up of Blackfield residents. Same faces as in the drug store. Christopher trembles. Looks to their stony faces with pleading eyes.

They envelop him.

CHRISTOPHER'S POV

Upwards, as the vicious, frenzied faces close in. Smother him. Deputy Walt's face pushes through a gap in the bodies.

CLOSE ON CHRISTOPHER

Now, also an adult.

WALT

You're all mine now, Dogman!

Christopher screams. Raises his forearm over his eyes in defense of the blows that are sure to come. And then, we see what he doesn't. His aggressors yanked away, one by one, leaving nothing but beautiful, blue sky.

NICHOLAS

Daddy?

Christopher uncovers his eyes.

Nicholas extends his hand, helps his father to his feet.
Nicholas steps off, gestures.

NICHOLAS

C'mon.

EXT. HILL-DUSK

We've been here before. With Christopher and Rina. Nicholas,
walks ahead of his father. Stops and sits. Pats the spot
beside him. Christopher sits beside. Strokes his son's cheek.

CHRISTOPHER

I don't want to be crazy, Nic.

NICHOLAS

You're not crazy.

CHRISTOPHER

I shouldn't be seeing you, talking
to you.

NICHOLAS

Are you going to leave me, daddy?

CHRISTOPHER

No.

NICHOLAS

You said you don't want to be here
anymore.

CHRISTOPHER

I don't.

NICHOLAS

Then...?

CHRISTOPHER

I want to tell what happened, Nic.

NICHOLAS

No.

CHRISTOPHER

Why?

NICHOLAS

Because something bad will happen
to you and I'll be all alone.

Nicholas becomes upset. Ready to cry. Christopher pulls him
to his lap. Holds him.

CHRISTOPHER

I'll never leave you, Nic. Never.

NICHOLAS

Promise.

CHRISTOPHER

I promise.

NICHOLAS

Okay.

Nicholas turns, takes a close look at Christopher. Rearranges his father's hair to cover his face. Makes a horrified face.

NICHOLAS

Scary.

Grabs a handful of Christopher's beard. Yanks.

NICHOLAS

Boo!

Laughs and jumps onto Christopher, wrestling. Christopher pins the boys arms, tickles him. Snorts like a pig near his ear. Nicholas loves it. Screams with joy.

NICHOLAS

Daddy, stop!

And on Nicholas' laughter, we..

CUT TO:

INT. NICHOLAS' ROOM-PRESENT

Christopher lies, awake. Nicholas sleeps soundly beside him. Christopher gets up. Carefully, so as not to wake.

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S HOUSE/BATHROOM

Christopher flips on the light. Looks closely at his reflection in the mirror. Runs his fingers through the mass of hair. Opens the medicine cabinet. Pokes around.

EXT. WALT'S HOUSE-NIGHT

Walt parks his cruiser.

INT. WALT'S HOUSE

Walt enters a dark house.

WALT

Rina?

Walt hangs his utility belt on a chair. Enters the kitchen. Picks up the near empty bottle of red wine off the counter. Drinks it. Hears something. Muffled crying. Moves to the back

of the house.

INT. BEDROOM

Rina lies on her stomach. Face buried in a pillow.

WALT

Rina?

She lifts her head. Turns to him. Eyes wet and bloodshot.

RINA

I FUCKING TOLD YOU!

EXT. SHERIFF KNEELY'S HOUSE

Walt's cruiser parked out front.

INT. SHERIFF'S/DEN

Walt and KNEELY are in mid-argument over the Sheriff's desk.

KNEELY

And what would be the charge,
Walter?! Making a mean face?

WALT

You know it's more than that,
Sheriff.

KNEELY

I don't know any such thing. Now,
listen to me carefully, Walter.
You don't cut out this nonsense
and I will pull my endorsement.

WALT

What?!

KNEELY

I'm not gonna let you piss on my
stamp of approval. Leave your
personal life at home.

Walt sits. Thinks on what Kneely's said. Eyes settle on
Kneely's desk. Two tree trunks support the huge desktop.

WALT

Jesus Christ!

INT. WALT'S HOUSE

Rina is livid.

RINA

Don't overreact?!

WALT

He's right, Rina. What am I
supposed to charge him with?

Rina storms to the bedroom. Slams the door.

INT. WALT AND RINA'S HOUSE/BATHROOM

Walt stands at the mirror in his boxers. Brushes his teeth.
Gargles mouthwash. Exits.

INT. BEDROOM

Stares at the empty bed.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Stands over Rina. Lies on the sofa with pillow and blankets.
TV on.

WALT

Coming to bed?

RINA

I'm in my bed.

WALT

I'll still work on it, Rina. Just
have to be a little more careful
is all.

Rina turns the TV off with the remote. Rolls over.

RINA

Well, when your done working on
it, you can get back to working on
this. Now, turn off the fucking
light.

Walt not happy about this at all. But turns off the light.

INT. BEDROOM

Walt flips through his phone book. Finds a number. Dials.

EXT. FARM LABORER'S HOUSING AREA-MORNING

Prefab apartment units. CLOSE ON one of many.

INT. APARTMENT

A woman of fifty makes her way down the hallway, enters a

BEDROOM

CHILDREN, six in all, sleep on two small mattresses and
various couch cushions linked together on the floor. With

age, luxury is lost. Seventeen year old VICTOR VARGAS sleeps like a rock on the bare floor. Wears a black skull cap we'll never see him without.

His mother steps carefully over her sleeping children. Pulls on his arm.

VICTOR'S MOTHER
Victor? Victor?

She pulls on his arm until he sits up, annoyed.

VICTOR
I'm up, I'm up. Damn!

She slaps him on top of his head.

VICTOR'S MOTHER
Watch your mouth!

INT. VICTOR'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM

Two more children sleep in the couch. PEDRO, Victor's father, passed out in the lazy-boy. Two adult males sleep at the foot of the television. Victor passes through, dressed. Moves to the kitchen.

MOMENTS LATER

Victor pulls the tortilla off the red hot burner. Waves off the smoke. Turns off the stove. Scrapes the last of the meat and beans from pots onto his tortilla. Wraps it up.

EXT. VICTOR'S HOUSE-MORNING

Victor exits, eating his burrito. Kicks beer cans across the lawn on his cross to the sidewalk. A car heard coming from behind. Pulls alongside Victor. Walt's cruiser. Victor tenses. Ready to run.

EXT. PROBATION DEPARTMENT

Probation Officer SHELTON checks his watch. Very concerned. He looks to the county van. Two teenage probationers sit inside. CHEWY, a hulking figure, and JESSE, his sidekick.

A police siren burps. Walt's cruiser pulls up. Victor exits and jumps in the van.

INT. VAN

Victor sits across from Chewy and Jesse. Jesse's eyes fall on Victor's skull cap.

JESSE
What the fuck you got on your head?

Victor smiles big.

CHEWY

What the fuck you smiling about?

VICTOR

Shit, you be smilin' too if your ass just got a pardon, nigga.

JESSE

Who the fuck you callin' nigga, faggot?

CHEWY

If you got a pardon, what the fuck you doing on this van?

VICTOR

Damn, shoot a mother fucker for mixing up his words.

Chewy looks like he just might do that.

CHEWY

Well, unmix 'em.

VICTOR

Okay, a reduced sentence with conditions.

JESSE

You talkin' outta your ass. Pardon.

VICTOR

We'll see when I'm walking the streets and you two is...

Chewy leans toward Victor.

CHEWY

Shut the fuck up.

VICTOR

Okay.

EXT. PROBATION DEPARTMENT

Shelton stoops to talk to Walt.

WALT

Sorry about the late wake up call, Shelton.

SHELTON

No big deal. What's going on, Walt? What did you need him for?

WALT

Thought he might have some
information for me, but he didn't.
Hey, you take the exam yet?

SHELTON

Failed it. Have to wait six months
for the retake.

(off Walt's reaction)

I was pretty sick that day, Walt.

WALT

I know you were, Shelton. Look,
I'll be sitting at the sheriff's
desk someday soon. Bet I could
help you out with that test next
time.

SHELTON

Think you could?! That'd be great,
Walt. And if you ever need
anything...

WALT

...I'll let you know.

EXT. ANIMAL SHELTER-MORNING

Morgan's pickup rolls into the empty lot. Exits, and again,
fumbles with all his accessories. Unaware of another's
presence until he's almost at the door.

MORGAN'S

face registers shock, then a huge smile cracks through.

MORGAN

Well, sweet Jesus!

MORGAN'S POV

Christopher sits at the entrance steps. Minus the beard, and
though he wears a baseball cap, there's no hiding he's cut
his hair. Morgan wraps him in a bear hug.

MORGAN

Look at you?!

Puts him down. Pulls off the cap to reveal a major hack job.

MORGAN

You look...good.

CHRISTOPHER

(sheepish)

Just shaved...haircut.

MORGAN

A really bad haircut, but we can
fix that. What's all this about?

Their conversation is interrupted by an approaching vehicle,
the county van. Shelton climbs out.

SHELTON

(to passengers)

Stay inside and stay quiet.

Makes his way to Morgan and Christopher. Shakes hands with
Morgan.

MORGAN

Chris, this is Officer Shelton.
Chris is my right hand, knows this
place better than anyone.

SHELTON

Chris?

Shelton's a little dubious. Morgan beams like a proud dad.

MORGAN

Got his hair cut.

CHRISTOPHER

Good morning.

Christopher extends a hand. Shelton shakes it uneasily.
Morgan pats Christopher on the back. Shelton slaps the van's
side.

SHELTON

Out.

Chewy, Jesse and Victor exit. Assembly line sneers. Shelton
steps toward the shelter.

SHELTON

Let's go.

INT. ANIMAL SHELTER KENNELS-A LITTLE LATER

Christopher holds a metal pooper-scooper. Not used to a
crowd, so he's a touch nervous.

CHRISTOPHER

Just scrape it up...

Scoops up some shit.

CHRISTOPHER

...put it in the can...

Drops it into a plastic can on wheels. The probationers back

up, grossed out. Christopher picks up hose. Taps the bottle that's attached.

CHRISTOPHER

Make sure to check you don't run out of bleach.

Sprays the kennel down.

CHRISTOPHER

Don't usually use bleach to clean the cages, but had a case of Parvo last week and bleach is the best thing for it.

Christopher picks up a long handled brush. Scrubs.

VICTOR

What the fuck's parvo?

CHRISTOPHER

Diarrhea.

VICTOR

Fuck the bleach, man. Give 'em some pepto!

CHRISTOPHER

It wouldn't help. They get it, they die.

VICTOR

Hey, Dogman. Who did your makeover, Sally Jesse?

Morgan steps in front of Victor, eyeballs him hard.

MORGAN

I don't need any more mutts in my shelter, Shelton.

SHELTON

Wanna clean these cages with your tongue, Victor?

Victor steps back, hands up in submission.

CHEWY

Yo, dog. What about the cages on the other side?

MORGAN

You don't worry about them. They're the bad boys. But don't let the ones on this side fool you either. They can get freaked out, so if you one of 'em scares you...

(probies laugh)
...let us know.

INT. KENNELS

Christopher carries trash bags toward the exit. Passes by Victor scrubbing a cage. Stops when he sees the bottle attachment on the floor. Picks it up. Shuts off the water flow. Victor steps out to investigate.

VICTOR
What's up?

Christopher takes the hose from him. Attaches the bottle.

CHRISTOPHER
Bleach.

Christopher picks up the bags, exits. Victor takes the bottle off. Turns the flow back on. Reenters the cage.

LATER

Christopher finds the bottle attachment again, where Victor left it. Getting irate. Looks for him.

CLOSE ON

A soaking wet sheepdog, biting at the stream of water that sprays it.

WIDER ANGLE

Victor keeps the hose steady on the dog, having a good chuckle. Then, a stream of water cuts across frame, catches Victor square in the face. He drops the hose, hands shielding.

CHRISTOPHER

walks towards Victor. Hoses him down. Picks up Victor's hose. Gives him a double barrel drenching. Victor scrambles for the exit.

INT. SUPPLY ROOM

Stacks of donated newspapers, towels, etc. Christopher dries the sheepdog with a towel.

NICHOLAS (O.S.)
Your hair looks stupid, Daddy.

Nicholas sits on a high shelf.

CHRISTOPHER
You said I looked scary.

NICHOLAS

Now you look stupid.

IRENE, an elderly employee, enters. Christopher is invisible to her. She eyes a box on the top shelf, next to Nicholas. Too high. Christopher watches her reach for it in vain.

CHRISTOPHER

Which one, Irene?

NICHOLAS

Don't help her!

It's obvious they've never spoken. Irene is speechless, can only point. Christopher gets the box for her. Nicholas doesn't like that at all.

IRENE

Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER

Sure.

Irene exits. Christopher returns to the sheepdog.

NICHOLAS

Why did you help her? She's never nice to you.

CHRISTOPHER

Nicholas...

NICHOLAS

She's not. She's mean and...

Christopher flips on the hair dryer. Drowns him out.

EXT. REAR OF SHELTER/YARD

Chewy and Jesse eat their county lunches. Victor sits shivering. Chewy tugs on a piece of Victor's wet shirt.

CHEWY

This one of them conditions for the reduced sentence?

Jesse and Chewy have a chuckle.

VICTOR

Shit ain't funny, man.

JESSE

You best stop fucking around with these fools and just do your time before they come down on you hard. Right, Chewy?

VICTOR

You suckers deaf or what, I got me
a get out of jail free card and
I'm about to use it!

CHEWY

I say you don't.

VICTOR

And I say I do and I bet I could
get you one if you two quit acting
like punks!

CHEWY

And now I say you better share
that card with me and Jesse or I'm
gonna whip your ass.

INT. MORGAN'S OFFICE

Morgan leafs through paperwork. Christopher passes by the
doorway.

MORGAN

Hey you.

CHRISTOPHER

Yeah?

MORGAN

Ready for some lunch?

CHRISTOPHER

Can't. Working on...
(off Morgan's look)
Sure, I could eat.

EXT. BLACKFIELD MAIN STREET

Morgan and Christopher exit Morgan's truck. Morgan gestures
to the barber shop. Christopher hesitates. Morgan pulls him
in.

INT. BARBER SHOP

STAN and BOBBY, older fellas, play checkers. Morgan and
Christopher enter.

MORGAN

Stan, my man here needs a touch up.

STAN

Damn, son, what did you do?

BOBBY

Stuck his head in a wood chipper,
looks like.

Stan guides him to the chair. Ties the smock around.

STAN

Well, we'll fix that. Who's your friend, Morgan?

MORGAN

Ask him.

Stan picks out a scissor and comb. Starts cutting.

STAN

From around here, son?

CHRISTOPHER

No.

STAN

What's your name?

CHRISTOPHER

(worried beat)

Chris.

STAN

Got a last name, Chris?

CHRISTOPHER

Yes.

Stan and Bobby exchange looks.

STAN

Got a real talker here, Bobby.

BOBBY

Well, you are always tellin' people to shuttup, Stan.

STAN

Shuttup, Bobby. Good to meet you, Christopher-with-no-last-name. Sit tight and I'll try and undo the your attempt at follicular suicide.

BOBBY

That's not a word, Stan.

STAN

Shuttup, Bobby.

EXT. BARBER SHOP

Morgan and Christopher exit. Christopher wears a smile and a better haircut.

CHRISTOPHER

What nice guys.

INT. RESTAURANT

Morgan leads Christopher to a booth in the rear. Sheila, the waitress, pours refills at a nearby table. Yes, it's the same one.

SHEILA

Be right with you, Morgan.

MORGAN

Take your time.

Sheila pauses on the pour. Eyeballs Christopher. Smiles at the stranger.

SHEILA

Hi.

CHRISTOPHER

How are you?

She laughs at the formal response. Carries the coffee pot back behind the counter. Sneaks another look at Christopher.

MORGAN

Back in circulation thirty minutes
and you already caught the eye of
the prettiest waitress in town.

(mocks)

How are you? Been awhile has it?

Christopher embarrassed by the question. Morgan senses, picks up the menu.

MORGAN

Food here is something else! BBQ
steak sandwich will bring tears of
delight to your eyes, the roast
turkey will make you slap your
mammy for cheatin' ya all those
Thanksgiving's, but the chicken
fried steak with country gravy
will...have you sittin' on the can
for a week waiting for it to drop.
Don't order it.

Sheila arrives. Brings her big smile with her. Aims it at Christopher.

SHEILA

Hi Morgan. Hi...?

CHRISTOPHER

Chris. I'm from around here.

SHEILA

(pause)

Good for you.

MORGAN

Sheila! Getting close to being on county time here, girl. We need to order. What do you think, Chris?

Shiela is staring. Christopher fumbles with his menu.

CHRISTOPHER

Don't know, didn't really look...

Shiela scoots Christopher over with her hip, sits. Takes the menu. Covers Christopher's hand with her own.

SHEILA

Mind if I recommend something?

CHRISTOPHER

Sure.

SHIELA

Chicken. It's the only meat in the walk-in that's still got it's original color. Everything's else's been sitting awhile.

MORGAN

Why, what's going on?

SHIELA

Nothing. It's always been like that. Bob's cheap, he doesn't buy until the we're down to the last on everything.

MORGAN

Many times as I've come here for lunch and you never said a word?

SHIELA

I didn't?

MORGAN

No.

Shiela scoots from the booth.

SHEILA

Two Sante Fe Chickens then?

Christopher nods. Morgan throws up his hands, looking ill. Sheila high-tails it.

EXT. SHELTER

Morgan pulls his truck into the lot.

INT. MORGAN'S TRUCK

Morgan kills the engine. Opens his door. Christopher stares off. Lost somewhere.

MORGAN

Chris?

CHRISTOPHER

You asked what keeps me here?

MORGAN

Yeah, but you don't have to...

CHRISTOPHER

My son. If I left, he'd be alone.

A long beat as Morgan tries to figure that one out.

CHRISTOPHER

Shiela's a nice girl, isn't she?

MORGAN

Yes, she is, Chris.

Christopher exits. Morgan sits a moment. Watches Christopher in the rearview. Concerned.

INT. QUARANTINE

Victor walks the row of cages, looking into each one. Then, a whine emits from a few cages down. Victor moves to the cage. Crouches. The pit bull inside, licks at Victor's fingers. Christopher enters.

CHRISTOPHER

Not supposed to be back here.

VICTOR

Yeah, so?

Christopher brushes it off.

CHRISTOPHER

You like pits?

VICTOR

Baddest mother-fuckin' dog on the planet. If people were dogs, the pit would be a mexican.

CHRISTOPHER

It's an english breed. Didn't get here 'til the late 1800's...

VICTOR

Listen to the Dogman acting like he knows something. Smartest thing a white bread like you ever did was make a baby with a Latina and you go and fucking kill it. Snuffed it out like it was nothing. But hey, it was half white...so maybe it wasn't such a bad thing.

Christopher's body tightens. Nicholas pulls at his hand.

NICHOLAS

Daddy...

Christopher relaxes. Points to the end of the row.

CHRISTOPHER

There's another one pit at the end. You'll really like that one.

Victor not sure, but curiosity wins. Victor moves to the last cage.

VICTOR'S POV

A dog crouches in the darkened corner, shivering. Victor taps at the chicken wire.

VICTOR

What is up, homeboy? Don't let the man get you down...

Victor throws a sneer Christopher's way, but he's gone. Turns back to the cage.

VICTOR

Bitch...

Victor's eyes bug out.

HIS POV

The pit leaps. Bounces it's paws off the chicken wire door. Snarling, spitting drool. Victor jumps back. Slams the back of his head against a wall. Ouch.

EXT. CHRISTOPHER'S HOME

Natasha pulls the truck into the drive. Carries grocery sacks from it's bed into the house.

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S HOME-DAY

Natasha moves for the kitchen. Stops short of the doorway.

Drops the groceries. Frightened.

CHRISTOPHER

sets down his glass of water. Begins picking up the food.

CHRISTOPHER
(apologetically)
Cut my hair...

NATASHA
You're never home this early!

Natasha bolts from the room.

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S ROOM-NIGHT

Christopher lies in bed. Alone. Stares at the ceiling.

CHRISTOPHER
Nic?

NICHOLAS
Huh?

Christopher sits up. Nicholas sitting at the foot of his bed.

CHRISTOPHER
Come here.

Nicholas climbs under the covers with his father.

NICHOLAS
What's wrong, daddy?

CHRISTOPHER
I can't sleep.

Nicholas begins singing softly.

NICHOLAS
Winnie the Poo, Winnie the Poo,
coming to play with you, hoo hoo
hoo...

CHRISTOPHER
Those aren't the words, Nic. I
made 'em up...

NICHOLAS
Shhh. Winnie the Poo, Winnie Poo,
coming to play with you, hoo, hoo,
hoo...

Nicholas repeats the verse over and over again. Christopher

begins to drift.

CUT TO:

INT. CHILD'S ROOM

Christopher is twenty-eight. Leans into his son's crib. Sings along with the melody that emits from the Winnie the Pooh carousel, spinning overhead.

CHRISTOPHER

Winnie the Poo, Winnie Poo, coming
to play with you, hu, hu, hu.
Winnie the pooh, Winnie the...

CHRISTOPHER'S POV

Nicholas is fast asleep.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Over Christopher's bent figure, the open door. Rina flashes by. Christopher catches it. Exits.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Rina opens the door as quietly as she...Christopher pushes it shut.

CHRISTOPHER

Where you going?

RINA

Out, man.

CHRISTOPHER

Stay home, Rina.

RINA

I can't stand that cryin' shit no
more!

CHRISTOPHER

He's asleep. C'mon, I'll make us
something to eat, watch a movie.

RINA

Tired of watching movies.

CHRISTOPHER

Well, what do you want to do? Tell
me, we'll do it.

RINA

I wanna go dancing.

CHRISTOPHER

Okay, tomorrow...

RINA

No. Now!

CHRISTOPHER

What about, Nic?

RINA

Call your mom.

CHRISTOPHER

You know I won't.

RINA

Then let's call my mom.

CHRISTOPHER

(even worse)

How about you, Rina? You're a mom.

Rina yanks the door open. Christopher pushes it shut again. Attempts to lead into the room by her arm.

RINA

Let go of me. Let go, mother
fucker!

Rina swings. Slaps Christopher's face. He offers no defense. She slaps him again, and again, until his nose is bloodied. He doesn't follow when she runs from the house. Nicholas cries in the other room. Christopher moves to him.

CUT TO:

EXT. RESTAURANT-MORNING

Christopher parks his truck.

INT. TRUCK

Christopher looks toward the restaurant.

NICHOLAS

Let's go home, daddy.

Christopher wasn't aware Nicholas was sitting beside him. Sighs and leans his head against the steering wheel.

CHRISTOPHER

Nic, please...?

NICHOLAS

Home.

Christopher starts the truck up. Puts it in gear. Looks at his son for a long beat. Drives.

EXT. CHRISTOPHER'S HOUSE

Christopher's truck leaves the road, takes to the grass.

EXT. BACK OF HOUSE

Open field. The truck cuts across, heads for a cluster of trees about a hundred yards behind the house.

NICHOLAS (O.S.)

I don't want you to like her.

CHRISTOPHER (O.S.)

Why?

The truck stops at the tree line. The two get out.

NICHOLAS

Because...

CHRISTOPHER

Give me a reason.

Nicholas still thinking. He follows his father into the cluster.

INT. ROOM

Not sure where, but it's a small enclosure. Christopher works at a small block of wood, set in a vise. His hands move fast, almost a blur. Breathing hard. Sweat flowing.

NICHOLAS (O.S.)

What's that supposed to be?

ANGLE ON PIECE

Taking on a bulb like shape, the beginnings of human features.

CHRISTOPHER

You.

NICHOLAS (O.S.)

Doesn't look like me.

CHRISTOPHER

It will.

He turns to Nicholas. Sits on a small bed, set in the corner of the room. Mopes.

CHRISTOPHER

Got a reason yet?

NICHOLAS

You're going to forget about me.

Christopher grabs a file from the workbench. Continues working at the wood.

CHRISTOPHER
I told you I wouldn't.

NICHOLAS
Grandpa told you the same thing.
You're just like him.

Christopher getting irritated.

CHRISTOPHER
That's not true.

NICHOLAS
She's probably a whore too.

Christopher drops the tools. Rises.

CHRISTOPHER
I'm going.

NICHOLAS
She's not gonna like you, daddy!

CHRISTOPHER
Stop it.

NICHOLAS
Nobody's gonna like you.

CHRISTOPHER
No more, Nic...

NICHOLAS
Nobody likes a man that kills
babies, Daddy!

CHRISTOPHER
ENOUGH!

Nicholas flinches under his father's fury. Christopher instinctively backs off, but his anger is still evident.

CHRISTOPHER
What do you want from me?!

NICHOLAS
What do you want from me?

CHRISTOPHER
Forgive me!

NICHOLAS
No.

CHRISTOPHER

That's not what he'd say. Nic
would not say that!

NICHOLAS

You mean you don't want Nic to say
that.

CHRISTOPHER

No, I mean you are not Nic!

NICHOLAS

Then who am I, daddy?

CHRISTOPHER

Something I made up.

Nicholas throws himself face down on the pillow. Christopher
regrets it immediately.

NICHOLAS

If you go, I won't ever come back.
I swear it. And then you'll be the
one that's all alone.

Christopher weighs the threat. Steps back to the bed. Picks
Nicholas up. Cries. Kiss his son. Nicholas hugs him back,
happy again.

NICHOLAS

See, daddy. You don't need anybody
else.

Christopher pulls him back in, doesn't want to let go. But he
does. Puts him down. Moves to the doorway.

CHRISTOPHER

Goodbye, Nic.

Christopher takes the ladder down.

EXT. RESTAURANT

Christopher's truck, parked again.

INT. TRUCK

INT. RESTAURANT

Christopher scans the busy dining room. Shiela exits from the
kitchen. Hurried, she drops two breakfast plates on a table.
And starts taking another order. Christopher sits in her
section.

LATER

Christopher fakes perusing the menu, poorly. Glances away constantly to look for Shiela. In the process of looking to the left when she appears on the right, startling him.

SHIELA

Hey?!

(off his surprise)

Sorry.

CHRISTOPHER

Good morning, Shiela.

SHIELA

Good morning to you. You are so polite!

CHRISTOPHER

Thank you.

SHIELA

Too polite for your own good probably, but I like that. What's it going to be?

Christopher goes back to the menu.

CHRISTOPHER

I don't know. What color is the bacon today?

SHIELA

(laughs)

You must think I'm horrible. Telling you stuff like that and still working here. It's really not that bad.

CHRISTOPHER

I don't think you're horrible. I think you're nice.

SHIELA

Really?

(pause)

That's so sweet.

COOK (O.S.)

Order's up, Shiela!

SHIELA

Be right back, k?

CHRISTOPHER

Okay.

A LITTLE LATER

Shiela returns.

SHIELA

Sorry, this is the worst time.
What would you like?

CHRISTOPHER

Not really hungry. Just came to
ask you...

COOK (O.S.)

Order's up, Shiela!

SHIELA

Damn. Can you give me a minute?

Christopher nods. Shiela leaves.

A LITTLE LATER

Christopher watches Shiela cut across the room, delivers
another breakfast. She veers to Christopher.

SHIELA

You're not hungry, so why are you
here?

(quick beat)

Sorry, that sounded rude, didn't
it? I didn't mean it to...

COOK (O.S.)

Order's up...!

SHIELA

OKAY, ALREADY!

The room falls silent. The COOK looks at Shiela with a hurt
expression.

COOK

...Brenda. Order's up, Brenda!

All eyes on Shiela, and Christopher. Shiela feels terrible,
moves toward the cook.

SHIELA

I'm sorry, Tom.

Christopher rises, very uncomfortable. Moves for the door.

EXT. RESTAURANT

Christopher climbs in his truck. Sheila runs out of the
restaurant.

SHIELA

Hey! No goodbye?

CHRISTOPHER

You're busy. Don't want you to get
in trouble.

SHIELA

Not busy now.

CHRISTOPHER

I have to get to work. Late
already.

SHIELA

Okay, bye.

A long, awkward pause.

CHRISTOPHER

Wanna go somewhere,
sometime...with me?

SHIELA

Tonight?

CHRISTOPHER

Tonight? Yes.

Shiela pulls a napkin from her apron. Hands it over.

SHIELA

Call or just show up. I'll be
ready about seven.

Shiela makes her way back to the restaurant. Stops to smile
at him one last time.

SHEILA

You better show up.

Christopher just nods, waves the paper at her.

EXT. SHELTER-MORNING/ESTABLISHING SHOT

INT. ANIMAL SHELTER-LATER

Chewy and Jesse wash metal dog bowls in the industrial sink.
Christopher takes a box of medical gloves down from a shelf,
hands it to them.

CHRISTOPHER

Water's dirty.

Chewy looks around first, then slaps the box to the floor.

CHEWY

I look like some bitch worried
about my pretty hands, Dogboy?

Get's in Christopher's face, arms spread out in invitation.

CHEWY

C'mon, faggot. Do something.

Christopher avoids eye contact. Waits. A long, tense beat before Jesse tugs at Chewy.

JESSE

Shit, he ain't no real Dogman,
Chewy. He's the puppyman. We're
the real mad dog mother fuckers!

And then he scoops a few sodden dog food kernels floating in the sink water and eats them up. Chewy does the same, then begins barking at Christopher. Christopher enters the kennels. The two bombard each other with low fives, busting a gut.

Morgan passes through the room.

MORGAN

Hey, put some gloves on you two.
Can't you see all that dogshit
stuck on them bowls. Mess around
and get sick.

INT. MORGAN'S OFFICE

Morgan doing paperwork. Christopher pokes his head in.

CHRISTOPHER

I need to leave early.

MORGAN

Leave early?

CHRISTOPHER

Need to get some things in town.

MORGAN

Since when do you want go to town?

CHRISTOPHER

You need me to stay?

MORGAN

No, okay, Hold on, I'll go with.

CHRISTOPHER

No.

MORGAN

No? Wanna tell me why?

CHRISTOPHER

No.

MORGAN

You're a grown man.

Christopher exits. Morgan's a little worried. Christopher pops his head back in.

CHRISTOPHER

Got a date.

Gone again. Morgan claps. Ecstatic.

MORGAN

Well, goddam!

EXT. SHELTER

Christopher kneels by his truck. Fingers the large slash that flattened the tire. Looks to the side of the shelter, the fenced yard. Victor plays with his favorite pit bull.

Christopher tempted to confront. Instead, opens the truck door, removes the jack from behind the seat.

INT. DRUG STORE-LATER

Christopher carries a basket to the counter. The clerk from the other day on duty.

CLERK

And how're are you today, sir?

CHRISTOPHER

(wary pause)

Good.

CLERK

Good? Good, glad to hear it.

Clerk starts ringing up the goods.

CLERK

Hmmm. Chocolates. Mama always said...

(laughs at the
terrible
impersonation)

After shave, socks, breath spray...

CHRISTOPHER

Oh, flowers. You have any?

CLERK

No, sorry, not here. Date, huh?

(Christopher nods)

Thought so. Flower's you can get

pretty cheap from the mexican
woman that parks outside of town.
Will that be all for you today,
sir?

Christopher pays. Moves to exit. Pauses at the magazine
stand. Looks to the clerk. Picks up a magazine and opens it.
Turns to the clerk again.

The clerk glances his way. Grins and winks.

CLERK
Good luck tonight.

Turns his attention to an approaching customer.

EXT. DRUG STORE

Christopher steps out. Takes in the sunshine. Breathes deep.
Smiles.

CHRISTOPHER
Good afternoon.

He says to the OLD MAN helping his WIFE along.

OLD MAN
Well, good afternoon to you!

EXT. TOWN LIMITS

Christopher in a jovial mood, take his time looking through
the many bouquets in the camper shell of the MEXICAN WOMAN's
truck. Mid-forties, plump, she's growing impatient in the hot
sun.

MEXICAN WOMAN
(brusque)
Don't you see any you want?

CHRISTOPHER
(spanish)
So many pretty flowers.

MEXICAN WOMAN
Oh...
(pleasantly surprised)
...you speak spanish.

CHRISTOPHER
A little.

Christopher points.

CHRISTOPHER
This one and this one.

MEXICAN WOMAN

Two? She must be very special.

Christopher pulls out another bouquet.

CHRISTOPHER

I hope so.

MOMENTS LATER

Christopher pockets his change. Hands his last choice of flowers to the old woman.

MEXICAN WOMAN

For me? Oh, how nice, how nice!

Overly flattered. Excited. Half hugs him. Jogs to the passenger side of the truck.

MEXICAN WOMAN

Raul, Raul!

RAUL, her husband, wakes from his nap.

HUSBAND

What?!

MEXICAN WOMAN

The young man bought me flowers!

Raul leans out the window. Sees Christopher's truck pull away.

HUSBAND

He's gone. Put them back and sell them again.

She hits him with the bouquet. Again and again, until the bulbs rip off.

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S HOME/LIVING ROOM

Natasha watches TV, crocheting. The front door opens and closes. A beat, then the heavy thumping of someone bounding up the wooden staircase.

INT. KITCHEN

Natasha enters. Spots the flowers immediately. In a vase on the dining table. She smells them. Adjusts the arrangement. Steps back to admire. Notices the other bouquet. Moves to investigate. Hears Christopher coming back down the stairs.

Quickly moves to the refrigerator. Rummaging around when Christopher enters.

CHRISTOPHER

You like them?

NATASHA

Like what?

CHRISTOPHER

I got them for you.

She moves to the flowers. Like she hadn't noticed. Lifts the vase.

NATASHA

For me?

CHRISTOPHER

I'm going out to eat.

NATASHA

Really?

CHRISTOPHER

Want me to bring you something back?

NATASHA

If you remember, why not.

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S BEDROOM

Christopher stands before the vanity mirror. Splashes on some after shave. Looks at his reflection. A flash of doubt. Rechecks his choice of clothing. Moves to the closet. Removing his shirt.

NATASHA

So, who is this girl?

CHRISTOPHER

You don't know her.

NATASHA

I may. What does she do?

CHRISTOPHER

A waitress.

NATASHA

A waitress?

CHRISTOPHER

Yes.

NATASHA

Is this the best you can do?

Christopher decides what he's wearing will do. Moves for the door. Natasha grabs his shirt.

CHRISTOPHER

Let go.

She does.

EXT. CHRISTOPHER'S HOUSE

Christopher drives away in the truck.

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S HOUSE/CHRISTOPHER'S BEDROOM

Natasha picks through the items on his dresser. Nothing. She opens the top drawer. Combs through the socks. Nothing. Her pace quickens as she goes through all the drawers. Moves to the closet.

EXT. SHIELA'S APARTMENT BUILDING

Eight units. Lower income, but tidy. Christopher's truck pulls into the lot.

INT. TRUCK

Christopher cuts the motor. Very apprehensive. He lowers his head. Lips move silently.

EXT. APARTMENT #4

Christopher knocks. Door swings open immediately.

SHIELA

Sorry, did I scare you? It wasn't like I was waiting at the door or anything.

CHRISTOPHER

No, I...

SHIELA

Okay, I was. You ready to go?

Christopher nods. From inside the apartment.

ANGELA (O.S.)

Mommy!

SHIELA

'Scuse me.

Shiela reenters, shuts the door behind her, but not all the way. It swings open on it's own.

INSIDE APARTMENT

Shiela hugs her daughter, Angela. Angela sees Christopher at the door. Whisper's a "who's that?" to her mother. Shiela is slightly embarrassed. Picks Angela up and hands her to the

BABY-SITTER. Meets Christopher at the door.

SHIELA

Ready?

CHRISTOPHER

Yours?

Shiela nods with trepidation.

CHRISTOPHER

Can I?

Shiela nods. Christopher enters the apartment. Holds out his hand.

CHRISTOPHER

Hi. I'm Chris.

Angela's a shy little lady. Just stares at Christopher.

CHRISTOPHER

What's your name?

Nothing. Christopher reaches into his pocket. Produces a stick of gum.

CHRISTOPHER

I have rules about giving candy to strangers, but if I knew your name, we'd be friends.

Angela's still not biting. Christopher throws another stick of gum into the pot.

CHRISTOPHER

I'd pay well.

Angela looks to Shiela for permission. Shiela nods. Angela's got quick hands.

ANGELA

Angela Fiona Woods.

CHRISTOPHER

Nice to meet you Ms. Angela Fiona Woods.

Angela giggles. Hides her face in the sitter's shoulder.

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S TRUCK

Christopher and Shiela climb in.

SHIELA

Wasn't trying to hide her. Just didn't want to freak you out.

CHRISTOPHER

Freak me out?

SHIELA

You know..."oh hell, she's looking for a daddy for her kid".

CHRISTOPHER

I didn't think that.

SHIELA

Her dad lives ten miles from here, in Greenfield, and he hasn't seen her in six months.

CHRISTOPHER

If my son had a mother like that, I'd try and find him a better one.

Shiela affected by this.

SHIELA

So, you have kids?

CHRISTOPHER

No.

SHIELA

You said son. I figured...

Christopher shakes his head. Starts the truck.

CHRISTOPHER

Where do you want to go?

SHIELA

How about the beach?

CHRISTOPHER

Okay.

INT. TRUCK/DRIVING

They ride in silence.

CHRISTOPHER

Sorry about the radio.

SHIELA

What's wrong with it?

CHRISTOPHER

It's broken.

Shiela nods, hoping there's more to the story. There isn't.

EXT. CANNERY ROW-DUSK

Christopher parks in the El Torito's parking lot. They exit. Shiela moves to the edge of the lot.

THEIR POV

Monterey Bay. Frosty waves curl, break over the rock formations that jut into the ocean. Further back, TOURIST'S climb these rocks. Walk the beach.

SHIELA

What am I doing in Blackfield,
with this just forty miles away?

CHRISTOPHER

So leave.

BACK TO SCENE

Shiela looks to Christopher.

SHIELA

Maybe one day when I have the
money. Ready to go in?

He turns from her, discomfited by her steady gaze.

INT. EL TORITO'S

Shiela and Christopher share a ocean view booth. A FAT MAN stands over their table. Manipulates a skinny balloon into the shape of a giraffe. He hands it to Shiela. Turns to her date.

FAT MAN

Any requests, sir?

CHRISTOPHER

A dog?

The man quickly produces a poodle. Hands it to Christopher.

CHRISTOPHER

Thank you.

FAT MAN

Will that be all?

CHRISTOPHER

Yes.

The fat man's doesn't move. Looks at Christopher, tapping the currency pinned to his shirt. Christopher busy with the poodle, awed. Shiela hands over a few dollars. He throws Christopher a look before moving on to the next table. This Christopher catches. Does the math.

CHRISTOPHER

I didn't know.

SHIELA

Don't worry about it. Ready to eat?

Christopher nods. Shiela taps a passing BUSBOY.

SHIELA

Excuse me. We're ready to, can you tell our waiter?

The busboy becomes very nervous. Looks around for some help.

BUSBOY

(spanish)

I'm sorry. This is my first night working here and I don't speak english...

CHRISTOPHER

(spanish)

It's okay. Can you send the waiter over?

BUSBOY

(spanish)

Yes, of course.

Shiela is impressed.

SHIELA

Where did you learn?

CHRISTOPHER

Just picked it up.

SHIELA

Just like that?

CHRISTOPHER

Uh, huh.

Empty pause. Shiela's getting irritated by the minimal conversation.

MOMENTS LATER

This date's going nowhere. Shiela plays with the straw from her Marguerita. Christopher stares out the window. The WAITER approaches, pen at the ready.

WAITER

You are ready to order?

CHRISTOPHER

I'll eat the same as her.

SHIELA

(forced cheeriness)

Oh no. More spanish, please.

The waiter's eyes sink. Not another gringo that thinks that pronouncing enchilada correctly passes for command of his language. Decides to turn the tables.

WAITER

(spanish)

My father told me a story once of how he had been pursuing my mother for a very long time, but she paid him no mind because he couldn't ride a horse. They are from a small town in Mexico and all the men ride horses there. My mother wanted a cowboy, but my father was afraid of horses! So, one day, choosing love over his fears, my father climbed on top of horse and managed to ride it all the way to my mother's home without falling off. He was so proud he shouted to the house, "Esmerelda, your cowboy is here!" Well, she was very impressed. And ran from the house and joined my father on the horse. Now, my mother is a big woman, and the horse was maybe not expecting that. Anyway, the horse stood on its hind legs and threw my mother and father to the ground, breaking his leg and her arm.

CHRISTOPHER

What does that mean?

WAITER

(english)

I'm sorry, I thought you spoke the language.

The waiter smiles in victory.

CHRISTOPHER

(spanish; explaining)

Got caught up in your story. What does it mean?

The waiters face falls. Now, bored with it.

WAITER

(spanish)

She begs to be impressed, so
impress her.

CHRISTOPHER
(spanish)
By breaking her arm?

WAITER
(spanish)
It worked for my father.

CHRISTOPHER
(spanish)
Did he have any stories about a
man that thinks he's going to lose
a woman because he's afraid to
just speak to her?

WAITER
Not that I remember.

CHRISTOPHER
(looks to menu:
spanish)
I'm not sure what the lady likes,
so let's have a little of
everything. Chicken enchiladas,
chicken and beef tacos, Mole'...

The waiter scribbles fast to keep up.

LATER

Meals finished. Shiela sips a Marguerita. She pushes the
glass to Christopher.

SHIELA
Have some?

CHRISTOPHER
No thanks.

SHIELA
Might loosen your lips.

Christopher declines. That does it. Shiela downs the
Marguerita. Scoots out of the booth.

SHIELA
What do you say, ready to go?

INT. TRUCK/DRIVING

They ride in silence.

CHRISTOPHER
Sorry about the radio.

SHIELA

I know, it's broke. You already said that.

CHRISTOPHER

Oh...

SHIELA

Guess I shouldn't complain. Those four words put you over twenty tonight. To me anyway. You seemed to have no problems talking to anybody else.

He looks to her, knows she's right.

CHRISTOPHER

Shiela?

She looks to him.

SHIELA

What?

Christopher next words cut off by something he sees beyond her. She turns.

FARLEY'S CRUISER

Rides the lane on Shiela's side. Farley glances over.

EXT. HIGHWAY 101-NIGHT

Farley's cruiser slows, falls in behind the truck. Hits the strobes.

MOMENTS LATER

Farley arrives on Christopher's side and shows surprise at Christopher's new look.

FARLEY

Well, damn?! Heard you cleaned yourself up...

Then he sees Christopher's passenger.

FARLEY

Shiela?

SHIELA

What's the matter, Farley?

FARLEY

(abruptly)

Step out of the car, sir.

Christopher exits. Shiela pulls on her door handle.

FARLEY
Stay in the truck, Shiela.

CHRISTOPHER
It's okay.

EXT. HIGHWAY

Christopher follows Farley to the back of the truck.

FARLEY
You been drinking?

CHRISTOPHER
No.

CUT TO:

SERIES OF SHOTS/ROADSIDE

Christopher stands, feet together, arms outstretched, head leaned back, eyes closed. Brings a finger to the tip of his nose...

Christopher's eyes follow the pen Farley waves in front of his face.

Shiela exits the truck. Farley steps to her, a warning finger raised.

FARLEY
Get back in the vehicle, Shiela.

SHIELA
He hasn't had anything, Farley!

FARLEY
Little Angela's not gonna be happy
if her mom's in jail for
obstruction, Shiela.

SHIELA
This is bullshit!

Shiela climbs back in.

MOMENTS LATER

Christopher walks the painted line at the shoulder's edge. Heel to toe, heel to toe. Farley waits at the end with a breathalyzer. Christopher blows. Farley frowns at the readout. Tucks the unit away.

FARLEY

Give me your license.

Christopher hands it over. Farley pulls out his citation book. Scribbles.

CHRISTOPHER

What's that for?

FARLEY

Speeding.

CHRISTOPHER

I was parked.

FARLEY

(ignores; keeps
writing)

Can't believe that girl'd be in
your truck if she knew who she was
riding with. What kind of lies you
telling her, Dogman?

CHRISTOPHER

My name's Christopher.

FARLEY

Is it now? Sign, Christopher.

Farley holds out the book and pen. Christopher makes no attempt to take it.

CHRISTOPHER

No.

FARLEY

You sign or Ms. Shiela gets your
full biography.

Christopher signs. Farley grabs it back.

CHRISTOPHER

She's gonna get it anyway, isn't
she, Farley?

FARLEY

Gettin' a little hot for ya, is
it? Then you shoulda stayed in
your hole.

Farley tears off the carbon. Lets it flutter to the ground.

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S TRUCK

Christopher climbs in. Waits for Farley's cruiser to get back on the highway.

INT. TRUCK

Christopher climbs in. A worried expression. Shiela is pissed.

SHIELA

What an asshole! You okay?

Christopher nods. Looks to her.

CHRISTOPHER

I need to tell you something
pretty important.

SHELIA

You do?

Christopher nods. But say nothing.

SHEILA

Okay...?

The hell with it. Christopher blurts it out.

CHRISTOPHER

I think I prayed too hard I
wouldn't screw this up.

Shelia takes a beat

SHELIA

You prayed? About tonight?
(he nods)
You don't seem the religious type.

CHRISTOPHER

I'm not.

SHIELA

You prayed about me?

CHRISTOPHER

Yes.

Shiela laughs.

CHRISTOPHER

I knew you'd laugh.

SHIELA

I prayed too!

CHRISTOPHER

No.

Shelia kisses him.

SHEILA

I did.

CHRISTOPHER

I'd want to show you something.

SHELIA

So show me.

INT. WALT HOUSE/KITCHEN-SAME TIME

CLOSE ON A CLOCK RADIO

Plays Country and Western.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

Walt pours himself a shot of whiskey. The glaze to his eyes tells us he's had a few already. The phone rings. He picks up.

WALT

Yeah?

(listens)

Is that right?

(listens)

You did good, Farley.

He hangs up, carries the bottle uneasily into the:

LIVING ROOM

Where he stops to gaze over Rina, sleeping on the couch. He kneels and curls the blanket back, exposing Rina's legs. He kisses the backs of her knees.

Rina responds, moans. Walt gets more aggressive, moves his kiss up. Rina wakes. She sits up abruptly, pushing Walt away.

RINA

I gotta pee.

Rina stands. Walt grabs her around the waist and puts his head to her belly.

WALT

I love you, Rina. More than the world.

RINA

(disgusted)

Let go, I gotta pee.

WALT

Tell me you know that. Tell me you trust I'll always take care of you, let nothing hurt you...

RINA

No, I don't know that, Walt.

Rina tries to move on, but Walt won't let go. He pushes his face into her belly, deeply breathing in her scent.

WALT

Rina, please, please...

RINA

I said I gotta pee!

Rina pulls herself free. Walt drinks from his bottle. A laugh makes him cough, dribbles liquor down his chin.

WALT

Goddam Dogman's gettin' more than me.

Walt tries to laugh again, but the humor's long gone. He tosses the bottle aside.

EXT. CHRISTOPHER'S HOUSE

The truck cuts around the back of the house. Takes to the field.

INT. TRUCK

A bumpy ride. Shiela wonders what exactly she's agreed to.

SHIELA

Where are we going?

CHRISTOPHER

Just a little farther.

Christopher stops the truck. Cuts the engine, leaves the headlights on.

POV THROUGH WINDSHIELD

A few feet short of the cluster. The headlights are unable to penetrate the thickness of the bush.

BACK TO SCENE

Christopher sees her trepidation.

CHRISTOPHER

It's okay. Wait here.

He exits. Enters the cluster.

ANGLE ON SHIELA

As the seconds tick away and she hears nothing. Leans out her window.

SHIELA
Christopher?

She points the flashlight toward the trees. Sees nothing.

SHIELA
What are you doing?

No answer. She looks back toward the house. Thinks about going back. A motor sputters behind her, somewhere in the trees. Catches and runs.

Then, a brilliant white light illuminates the trees from within.

Shiela jumps when Christopher leans in to shut off the headlights. Reaches in the glove box for a flashlight.

CHRISTOPHER
C'mon.

Holds out his hand.

MOMENTS LATER

Christopher leads Shiela toward the light.

UP AHEAD

The area around a tight grouping of trees has been cleared of forest debris. Grounded Halogen lights point upwards, arranged in a circle around these trees. A gas powered generator hums nearby.

SHIELA

Steps into the clearing. Squints against the lights, scans her front. Then up. Her jaw drops in awe.

SHIELA'S POV

Just like the blueprint Christopher's father left behind. A house linked by six trees. Christopher steps into frame, hand held out.

CHRISTOPHER
Wanna go?

Shiela can only nod. Christopher leads her to the ladder.

INT. TREE HOUSE

ANGLE ON

Shiela walks the rooms, eyes wide in wonderment. He hands her sliding along the smooth walls. Watches her use the flashlight to make out every detail of the room.

The hand carved table, shelves, bed. All miniaturized to suit a child.

SHIELA

Has anybody else seen this? They couldn't have. It'd be the talk of the town.

CHRISTOPHER

I don't think so.

SHIELA

How long did it take you?

CHRISTOPHER

Awhile.

SHIELA

It's beautiful, Christopher.

CHRISTOPHER

Thanks.

SHIELA

What made you build it?

CHRISTOPHER

I'll tell you, Shiela, but there's something I want to do first.

SHIELA

Okay.

Christopher walks into another room. Reappears with a CD player. Positions the box. Hits the play button. Music begins. Garth Brooks, "The Dance".

CHRISTOPHER

Can we?

SHIELA

Where? Here?

Shelia moves to him. Lets him pull her in close. And she does. Quite a team, these two. Move well together.

CLOSE ON SHIELA

Eyes shut in bliss.

CLOSE ON CHRISTOPHER

Trying for bliss. Settles for contentment.

BACK ON BOTH

Song ends. Shelia disengages. Moves to the boombox. Pushes the buttons that restart the song. Moves back to him. Resume where they left off.

Shiela moves her lips to his neck. Kisses him there. Then kisses his lips. He kisses her back. When they break, he guides her face back to his chest. And they dance some more...

CLOSE ON CHRISTOPHER

Bliss it is.

DISSOLVE TO:

Christopher and Shiela get passionate on the tiny bed. Shiela controls. Climbs atop. Pulls his shirt tails free. Reaches down the front of his pants.

Christopher enjoys, but again, conflict. He pulls her hand out. Guides her off of him and takes the top position.

SHELIA

What's the matter, don't you want to?

CHRISTOPHER

Yes.

SHEILA

Then?

Christopher gets up. Tucks his shirt in.

CHRISTOPHER

Not right.

SHELIA

That's my line!

Christopher sits on the bed. Rubs at his face. Burdened.

SHELIA

What's the matter?

CHRISTOPHER

You'll hear things tomorrow that'll make you wish we never met. Better I don't add to that

SHIELA

I doubt that.

CHRISTOPHER

I built this for my son, Shiela.

SHIELA

You said you didn't have children.

CHRISTOPHER

Nicholas died when he was six.

SHIELA

I'm so sorry.

CHRISTOPHER

So am I. How long have you been in here, in Blackfield?

SHIELA

I don't know, five years. Why?

CHRISTOPHER

Have you ever seen me?

SHIELA

I think I'd remember.

CHRISTOPHER

The other day, you were in your car with another woman. Angela was in the back. A man walked into the street. Had a bicycle. You screamed at him.

SHIELA

Were you there? Oh God, you must have thought I was a bitch.

CHRISTOPHER

It was me, Shiela.

SHIELA

Bull...?

She takes a long, hard look at him. And it clicks. Shiela gets up. Fixes her shirt.

SHIELA

Could have told me...said something!

CHRISTOPHER

I'll take you home.

SHIELA

No!

Shiela moves to the ladder, not taking her eyes from him.

SHIELA

And don't you even try following me, cause Farley saw us together and if anything happens to me they'll know...!

CHRISTOPHER

Don't walk, Shiela. It's late...

SHIELA

Get away!

Christopher pulls out his keys, tosses them to her feet.

CHRISTOPHER

Leave it where you want. I'll find
it tomorrow.

Shiela takes the keys. Moves for the ladder. Christopher
wants to follow.

CHRISTOPHER

At least ask me what nobody else
has, Shiela.

SHIELA

I will scream so loud...!

Christopher stops. She's climbs down. Christopher lets the
anger simmer. Steps to the doorway. Screams into the night.

CHRISTOPHER

ASK ME, SHIELA, ASK ME IF IT'S
TRUE?!

Too late. We hear the truck's engine turn over. Drive off.

MOMENTS LATER

Christopher shuts off the generator. Turns on the flashlight
as the lights dim and die. Blackness except for the sliver of
light the flashlight provides. He moves for home.

We watch him from behind as he exits the cluster. Stay in the
dark a beat. Then, another sliver of light. Walt. Points his
flashlight to the tree house. Moves that way.

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S HOUSE/FAMILY ROOM

Christopher sits. Eyes settle on the ketchup bottle standing
on the kitchen table.

CUT TO:

INT. ANOTHER KITCHEN-MANY YEARS AGO

Christopher, seven years old, sits tight lipped. Face banded
up good from the beating in the yard.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

Arthur squirts ketchup onto two slices of white bread.

Christopher closes the pieces together, brings them to his mouth.

ARTHUR
Not till I'm done.

Christopher puts the sandwich down.

ARTHUR
You better learn how to fight, cuz
I'm tired of being embarrassing by
you...

Arthur's face fades from focus, is replaced by EARL, a heavy set man with a beard, and a John Deere cap.

EARL
...and you're becoming a problem
between me and your mom...

JIMMY, a bean pole of a cowboy, assumes Earl's place.

JIMMY
...but you're a problem that can
be fixed. You get me?

Christopher is nine now. Jimmy is now BOB, a man in a suit.

CHRISTOPHER
Yes.

Bob slaps Christopher's face.

BOB
Yes sir!

CHRISTOPHER
Yes sir.

BOB
That's better.

TOM, a fat mechanic, is drunk. Holds a beer can.

TOM
Now thank me for not throwing your
ass out on the streets.

Christopher is sixteen. And he's getting bored.

CHRISTOPHER
Thank you...sir, for not throwing
me out on the streets.

TOM
You being a smart ass?

CHRISTOPHER

No.

TOM

Yeah, you are. And that's probably why your dad ran off.

CHRISTOPHER

He didn't run off.

TOM

Got sick and tired of you and that cold as a fish mom of yours...

CHRISTOPHER

He didn't run off!

TOM

Then why ain't he here?
(pauses, loving it)
Maybe he's dead?

CHRISTOPHER

No.

Tom hoists the beer to the heavens.

TOM

You son of a bitch! Coulda left a note warnin' the rest of us poor sons of bitches!
(to Christopher;
after he's had his
laugh)
Fuck you and fuck that nazi mom of yours.

CHRISTOPHER

Fuck you!

Tom grabs Christopher by the throat, pins him against the wall. Fumbles in his pocket. Produces a utility knife. Holds it to Christopher's neck.

TOM

I'll cut your fucking head off, boy.

Tom shivers with fury. The, comes to the little sense he has left, releases Christopher. Turns and weaves his way to the kitchen, grabs a fresh beer from a twelve-pack on the counter.

Greasy nails make popping the tab a struggle. Tom hurls the can against the wall. Begins to cry. Christopher walks into the kitchen, gets a fresh can, opens it for him.

TOM

Thanks.

Tom sips from the can, sets it on the counter.

TOM

I'm sorry, buddy. I'm just
tired...and lonely...that mom of
yours...

He puts his hands on Christopher's shoulder

TOM

...she just ain't never around for
me.

Tom moves in to kiss Christopher. Christopher snatches the
can off the counter. Crushes it against Tom's temple.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN-THAT NIGHT

Natasha looms over Christopher, sitting at the kitchen table.

NATASHA

And he's gone because of you! They
all leave because of you!

CHRISTOPHER

It's not my fault!

NATASHA

Then who's?! Who's?!

Christopher wants to answer that so badly, but doesn't.

NATASHA

And now who is going to pay the
rent, the lights, the food for
your mouth? Who's going to pay for
it, Christopher?!

CHRISTOPHER

You could get a job.

Natasha slaps him out of the chair.

NATASHA

Don't you ever...!

Grabs a plate from the table. Throws it at him.

NATASHA

...ever...!

Kicks at him until he scurries out of reach.

NATASHA

...ever say a thing like that to me again or I will kill you, I swear!

CHRISTOPHER

I'll pay the bills, I'll get a job.

NATASHA

(scoffs)

Oh, Mr. Bigshot-high school boy is going to work?

CHRISTOPHER

Yes.

Natasha calms a bit. Warms to the idea.

NATASHA

Maybe that's best. Take care of yourself for a change and then maybe you will appreciate me a little more.

Natasha exits. Christopher sits. Tries not to cry.

CUT TO:

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM-PRESENT

Natasha sleeps in the recliner, in front of the TV.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

Christopher stands over her. Looks down at his mother with a blank expression. He sighs. Pulls a blanket from the couch.

Covers her. Kisses her cheek. Moves for the door, notices she brought in the flowers. Is pleased by this. Exits.

Natasha's eyes open. She sits up. Wasn't sleeping at all. Touches her cheek where he kissed. Confused.

INT. NICHOLAS' BEDROOM

Christopher looks to the lower bunk. Empty.

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S BEDROOM

Christopher climbs into bed. Closes his eyes.

CHRISTOPHER

Nic?

Nothing. He turns off the light.

CHRISTOPHER

Goodnight, son.

EXT. FARM LABORER'S HOUSING AREA-NIGHT

Children play in the streets. Prefab apartment buildings. Young men drink beer in the courtyard. Tejano music blares from a party nearby.

INT. VICTOR'S APARTMENT

Victor lies on the couch watching TV. Pedro sleeps in his lazy-boy. A knock at the door. Victor doesn't move. Another knock.

VICTOR
(annoyed)
Goddam.

He rises, muttering obscenities.

AT THE DOOR

Victor looks through the peep hole. Oh, oh. Gets his wits together. Opens the door. Walt. The cap low over his face

WALT
You alone?

VICTOR
No, but they're all asleep.

WALT
Step out back.

Walt leads Victor to the back of the building.

VICTOR
What's up, man?

Walt takes a hold of Victor's shirt front, lifts and slams him against the building.

WALT
Every time I look at your stupid
face I want to shove it in, so why
hasn't he, Victor?

VICTOR
I'm trying man, I'm trying!

Walt clamps a hand over his mouth.

WALT
You're not trying hard enough!

Victor wants to say something. Walt takes the hand away.

VICTOR

I even got them other two to help,
but he won't go for it.

Walt punches him in the nose. Victor slides to the pavement,
Blood pouring.

WALT

You told them?!

VICTOR

I didn't tell 'em your name!

Walt covers Victor's mouth again. Rips his skull cap off.

WALT

I find out your lying...

Lifts his hand away.

VICTOR

I swear to God I wouldn't do you
like that, man.

Walt wipes his bloodied hand on Victor's shirt. Helps him to
his feet.

WALT

You like fire, Victor?

VICTOR

Fire's cool. I like fire. Yeah,
I'm down with some fire.

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S BEDROOM

CLOSE ON CHRISTOPHER

Lies on his side, having a restless sleep. Reflected lights
dance in the window to his back.

NATASHA (O.S.)

Christopher!

He wakes completely. Rushes from the room. We stay here. Move
to the window. Flames leap from the top of the cluster's
center. Christopher runs across the field.

EXT. INSIDE THE CLUSTER

Christopher stands at the base of the

TREE HOUSE

Engulfed by flames. The fire spreads through the treetops. A burning object rolls from inside, drops to the forest floor. He scoops two handfuls of dirt, tosses it on the flames. Picks it up. The carving of Nicholas, blackened.

NICHOLAS (O.S.)

I told you not to tell anybody,
Daddy! I told you?!

Christopher doesn't bother looking for Nic, knows he's not there. Moves for the nearest tree, sits against it and watches the fire. Sirens heard in the distance.

HOURS LATER

The last of the FIREFIGHTERS haul their equipment out of the cluster. Christopher where we left him. Natasha steps to him.

CHRISTOPHER

You ever go in?

NATASHA

No.

CHRISTOPHER

I wouldn't have minded.

Natasha stumped for words.

CHRISTOPHER

Why didn't we go away, back home,
after poppa left?

NATASHA

I don't know.

CHRISTOPHER

What's it like there, where I was
born.

NATASHA

Same as anywhere.

CHRISTOPHER

I always thought it would've been
better than that.

(re; tree house)

Nic would have liked it. I miss
him so much, Momma. So much...

And then, tears welled over a lifetime, pour freely. The raw cry wracks his body with heaving spasms that cut at his breath. Natasha is distressed by the scene, but makes no move to comfort.

And as quickly as Christopher's fit began, it ends. He pulls himself to his feet. Natasha is relieved, Reaches out to help him along.

NATASHA

Come, I make you something to...

Christopher pulls away. Picks up the carving of Nicholas. Spots something lying in the dirt. Picks it up and stuffs it in his pocket, nonchalant. Walks home alone.

INT. NICHOLAS' BEDROOM

The carving of Nicholas is on the desk. Christopher lies in the lower bunk, fixated on it.

CHRISTOPHER

Nic?

Nothing. Christopher exits.

INT. BASEMENT

Christopher pulls down a small box from the top shelf of the workbench. Opens it. A .38 special, filthy. He sifts through the many slots and shelves of the workbench, casting items aside in his search. Finds some oil and a clean cloth. Begins cleaning the weapon.

EXT. BLACKFIELD HILLS-SUNRISE

The sun sheds it's light on Blackfield.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Christopher looks down on Blackfield, gun in hand.

INT. WALT'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM

Walt wakes, finds himself splayed on the carpet near the couch where Rina still sleeps. Her hand hangs over the side of the couch. He reaches out to hold it. It retracts under the covers.

ON RINA

A relaxed, peaceful sleep.

INT. SHIELA'S APARTMENT

Shiela lies in bed, studies her sleeping daughter's face. Strokes her hair. Kisses her softly.

INT. VICTOR'S APARTMENT

All the children sleep. Victor's mother shakes him. He wakes

with a start, frightened.

INT. FARLEY'S APARTMENT

Farley eats toast, reads the paper. A cat jumps on the table. Farley puts it in his lap. Strokes it. Goes back to his paper.

EXT. ANIMAL SHELTER-MORNING

Christopher lets himself in.

INT. KENNELS

Christopher enters, is immediately hit by the stench. Moves to the closest cage, looks inside. Makes his way down the aisle, his tired expression growing more dire with the each cage.

INT. MORGAN'S OFFICE

Christopher enters, leaves the light off. Sits at Morgan's desk. Lies his head down, so weary.

AN HOUR LATER

Morgan enters, flips on the light. Startled by Christopher's presence.

MORGAN

JESUS! You scared the hell out of me!

CHRISTOPHER

Parvo's back.

MORGAN

Shit, how many?

CHRISTOPHER

I'll need help. Victor can hold.

MORGAN

He's just a kid, Chris.

CHRISTOPHER

When was the last time you were on the needle, Morgan?

MORGAN

Been awhile.

CHRISTOPHER

And if I remember right, you didn't like it much. You ready to stick half the kennel by yourself?

MORGAN

Hey, now. Don't threaten me.

CHRISTOPHER

You're a good man, and a better friend, but if you don't get that kid in there, I'm going home.

Christopher ends the conversation with his exit.

INT. MORGAN'S OFFICE-LATER

Shelton shakes his head at Morgan's request. Christopher listens in from the doorway.

SHELTON

He'd have to volunteer for something like that.

MORGAN

They're here to work.

SHELTON

This isn't work.

Christopher steps away.

INT. FRONT OFFICE

Christopher picks up the phone and dials.

MOMENTS LATER

Christopher completes his call. Hangs up. Waits.

CHRISTOPHER

Hold on.

INT. MORGAN'S OFFICE

Morgan's blood pressure elevates.

MORGAN

Then get them out of here!

SHELTON

Can't do that.

MORGAN

What do you mean, can't do that?!

SHELTON

I'll need higher authorization than you have.

INT. FRONT OFFICE

Christopher's still waiting for the phone. It rings.

INT. MORGAN'S OFFICE

MORGAN

They're the goddam reason we need
them in there! If it wasn't for
their sloppy work...!

Christopher returns. Points to the phone. A call on hold.

CHRISTOPHER

(to Shelton)

For you.

Shelton picks up.

SHELTON

Shelton here.

EXT. MINI MART

Walt at a payphone.

WALT

What's going on, Shelton?

INT. MORGAN'S OFFICE

Shelton's face shows surprise. Covers the mouthpiece.

SHELTON

Need a minute.

Morgan and Christopher depart.

SHELTON

Hey, Walt, what's going on?

WALT

You tell me. Just got a call from
dispatch saying you needed to talk
to me. Something happening over
there?

SHELTON

I don't know, Walt.

WALT

Well, talk to me.

Shelton starts talking.

INT. FRONT OFFICE-MOMENTS LATER

Christopher and Morgan sit and wait. Shelton enters. Fixes
Christopher with a curious look.

SHELTON

They're all yours.

The men rise, move to exit. Shelton lets Morgan pass. Stops Christopher.

SHELTON

What are you up to?

Christopher pushes passed him.

INT. EUTHANASIA ROOM

Victor snoops inside the wall cabinet. Christopher enters with a large mutt.

CHRISTOPHER

Get out of there. Stay by the table.

Christopher waits for Victor to comply. Shuts the door behind him. Locks it.

VICTOR

What you want me for, man?

Lifts the animal onto the prep table.

CHRISTOPHER

Put your hand here. Hold her.

Victor moves to the table, holds the dog down. Christopher steps to the wall cabinet. Grabs a syringe, the bottle, a tie-off strap. He then casually removes the gun from his coat pocket, sets it on a shelf. Pushes it to the back.

Christopher moves to the prep table. Ties the rubber strap around the dog's paw. Extracts the proper levels. Searches for a vein. Finds it. Inserts the needle.

VICTOR

What ya givin' it?

Christopher says nothing. Waits. Touches the dog's pupils. Fixed. Victor realizes it's dead. Removes his hand fast.

VICTOR

What the fuck'd you do?

Christopher hoists the animal off the table by its legs. Lies it on the floor. Christopher moves for the door.

CHRISTOPHER

Hang tight, there's plenty more.

VICTOR

I ain't gotta do this shit.

Victor cuts ahead of Christopher. Reaches for the doorknob. Christopher clamps a hand onto Victor's wrist. Twists his arm behind the back. Shoves against the back of his head, propelling him into the prep table.

Victor whirls, dances, ready to box. A cloth hits him in the chest, he instinctively catches it. His skull cap.

CHRISTOPHER

Ever get the feeling somebody
doesn't like you, Victor?

VICTOR

What the fuck you talking about,
yo?!

CHRISTOPHER

What, thought you were gonna do
Walt a favor and you'd be pals?

The thought puts Victor's mind into hyperdrive, something it wasn't really designed for. But eventually...

VICTOR

What you gonna do, man?

CHRISTOPHER

Just be here when I get back.

MOMENTS LATER

Christopher enters with a cardboard box. Pours the contents onto the table. Four puppies. Christopher tops off the syringe. Lifts one of the pups by the scruff.

VICTOR

C'mon, man...?

Christopher jabs the needle in it's stomach. Victor is repulsed. Turns away. When he does turn back, Christopher's finished with all four. Exits. The puppies whine, wander to the edge of the prep table, to Victor. He tries to resist, the crying is too much. He wraps them up, comforting.

SERIES OF SHOTS□

Chewy maneuvers a wheelbarrow full of carcasses out the door. He retches.

Victor restrains another animal while Christopher injects.

Christopher fills a syringe. Jesse hangs back doing nothing. That is until Christopher takes the needle to the table. Then, Jesse's in a hurry to exit.

Christopher checks another dog's pupils. Dead. He motions to

Victor and exits. Victor lifts the dog, carries to where the other fifteen or so lie. No more room. Has to stack this one.

Chewy and Jesse load the last dead into the wheelbarrow. Push it out. Christopher enters with a Border Collie. Sets it on the table. Victor restrains.

CHRISTOPHER

Last one, Victor.

VICTOR

Good.

The Collie's head raises up. Christopher pets the dog.

CHRISTOPHER

Keep him calm.

Victor takes over the petting. Christopher moves to a cabinet. Pulls out a bottle of bleach and sets it where Victor can see.

CHRISTOPHER

Know what that his?

VICTOR

Yeah, I know what that is.

Christopher prepares the injection.

CHRISTOPHER

He's about to die because of you.
All the other's, dead because
you...

VICTOR

I know, okay?! I know I fucked up.
What you want me to do?!

Christopher hands him the needle.

VICTOR

No.

CHRISTOPHER

He's already dead, Victor. We're
just speeding it up. Think I was
lying when I said this diarrhea
kills? He's gonna shit so much the
only thing left to shit will be
his insides. And he'll shit those.
Try and imagine the pain...?

VICTOR

You can't tell me there ain't no
medicines for this.

CHRISTOPHER

I could, but you'd think I was acting like I knew something.

VICTOR

There is, then!

CHRISTOPHER

Isolate 'em for a week or more, pump 'em full of fluids, electrolytes, antibiotics, medications...

VICTOR

Then why we doing this?!

CHRISTOPHER

He's here 'cause some sorry ass like yourself didn't want to cough up the time and the few bucks it takes to take care of him, much less pay the two grand it would take to keep him alive.

VICTOR

That ain't me, man! I ain't no sorry ass.

Christopher offers him the needle again.

CHRISTOPHER

Show me.

VICTOR

I ain't gotta prove shit to you, bitch-mother-fucker!

Victor is livid. Christopher calmly locks the door.

CHRISTOPHER

It's not for me. It's for you. You're a fake, Victor. A walking, talking, phony wanna be a man. Be the real deal. Clean up your own mess.

A thump at the door, followed by pounding.

INT. OUTSIDE E ROOM DOOR

Shelton and Morgan.

MORGAN

Open up, Chris. Chris?!

SHELTON

Open this door, now!

WALT (O.S.)
What we got here, Shelton?

Walt and Farley.

SHELTON
He's locked himself in with the
kid. They're arguing 'bout
something.

WALT
Let's give 'em another minute, see
if they make up.

MORGAN
Walt's out here, Chris!

INT. E ROOM

Christopher heard. Pushes the needle into the vein. Lets go
of the syringe, lets it hang there. Steps to the wall
cabinet, pulls the gun forward to the edge of the shelf.

CHRISTOPHER
Don't inject to fast, it'll hurt
him.

INT. OUTSIDE E ROOM DOOR

Walt didn't appreciate Morgan doing that.

WALT
Take him to his office, Farley.

INT. E ROOM

VICTOR
Why you doing this, man?!

CHRISTOPHER
You did this. YOU.

VICTOR
No!

CHRISTOPHER
Be the man you think you are,
Victor.

VICTOR
Fuck you!

CHRISTOPHER
Do it.

VICTOR

Fuck you!

Christopher palms the gun.

CHRISTOPHER

Do it...NOW!

INT. OUTSIDE E ROOM DOOR

Walt taps Shelton.

WALT

Okay.

Shelton follows Walt's lead. They ready to ram the door. It pops open. Christopher. Walt yanks him out, pushes him to the wall, pats him down. Cuffs him. Walt looks into the

E ROOM

Victor leans over the collie, sobbing quietly. The needle clutched in his hand, empty.

BACK TO WALT

Forcing Christopher to his seat. Yells.

WALT

Farley!

FARLEY (O.S.)

Yeah?

WALT

Bring Morgan back here.

WALT

Get out here, Victor.

Victor exits the E room. Tries to hide the tears. Walt waits for Farley and Morgan to arrive.

WALT

(to Morgan)

Thought you might wanna hear this.

(to Victor)

Tell us what happened.

VICTOR

When?

WALT

Just now, in there. What'd he do to you?

Victor looks at Christopher.

WALT

Don't worry about him, he can't hurt you.

VICTOR

Don't know what you talking about, man.

WALT

What?

VICTOR

How's that chump gonna hurt me?

SHELTON

What was all the yelling about then?

VICTOR

He's forty-niners, I'm straight up Raiders all the way.

Christopher laugh makes Victor laugh. Walt's ready to jump out of his skin.

MORGAN

Take them damn cuffs off of him!

Walt gestures for Farley to do it. Farley does. Christopher gets up. Walt takes ahold of Victor's arm.

WALT

You come with me.

SHELTON

Whoa, Walt. Where you going?

WALT

I got some questions I need to ask the boy.

SHELTON

About what?

Walt not used to this much resistance in one day.

WALT

About what just happened.

SHELTON

He told you what just happened.

Walt lets go of Victor. Moves for the door.

WALT

Come talk to me, Shelton.

INT. MORGAN'S OFFICE

Walt leans against Morgan's desk. Shelton's a little nervous.

WALT

Why'd you just step on my dick?

SHELTON

I didn't step on your dick, Walt.
But the kid's my responsibility.
I can't just let you take him
without...

WALT

Remember that little talk we had
about helping each other out,
Shelton?

SHELTON

I remember. You said you'd help me
study for the test and I said...

WALT

Study?

SHELTON

Yeah, how else could you help me
with the test?
(gets it)
I don't do stuff like that, Walt.
If I knew that's what you meant...

Walt realizes he's not on the same planet. Exits.

WALT (O.S.)

Let's go, Farley!

EXT. ANIMAL SHELTER

Christopher and Morgan watch the cruiser pull away.

MORGAN

What the fuck happened in there?!

CHRISTOPHER

I quit, Morgan.

Christopher walks for his truck.

MORGAN

Quit my ass, you'll be lucky if I
don't fire you!

Morgan's brain catches up to his mouth.

MORGAN

You quit?

CHRISTOPHER

So you don't have to fire me.

Christopher wraps Morgan in a hug. Climbs in his truck.

MORGAN

Where you going?

CHRISTOPHER

Got my own mess to clean up.

EXT. BLACKFIELD BANK-AFTERNOON

Christopher exits, carries a large envelope.

EXT. SHIELA'S APARTMENT COMPLEX/MAILBOXES

Christopher finds Shiela's box, writes down the number.

EXT. POST OFFICE

Christopher exits.

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S HOUSE/KITCHEN

Christopher writes. Finishes one page, starts another.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET-DAY

Walt's cruiser, parked. Walt inside, watching the street to his front. The county van drives by. Walt follows.

EXT. PROBATION DEPARTMENT

POV THROUGH WINDSHIELD

The county van drops the three young men out front of. Drives on. Spirits are low, Chewy and Jesse split from Victor without a word. Victor hangs back, watches them walk.

Starts to call after them, decides against. Walks the other way. Once he takes the corner, the vehicle rolls forward. Makes the corner. Victor seen up ahead. The vehicle accelerates, comes up alongside Victor. Victor oblivious, too many things on his mind.

VOICE (O.S.)

Get in.

Victor looks to the source.

VICTOR'S POV

Christopher, in his truck.

CHRISTOPHER

Or you could ride with him.

Christopher flips a thumb over his shoulder.

VICTOR'S POV

A Blackfield PD cruiser pulls to the curb.

INT. CRUISER

Walt pounds the steering wheel.

POV THROUGH WINDSHIELD

Victor climbs inside Christopher's truck.

EXT. STREET/DRIVING

Walt keeps just short of tail-gating Christopher's truck.

VICTOR (O.S.)

What the fuck's he doing?!

INT. TRUCK/DRIVING

Victor riveted on his side mirror. Christopher is unusually relaxed.

CHRISTOPHER

Waiting for me to run a red light
so he can shoot us both.

VICTOR

Well, don't run no fucking lights!

Christopher slows the truck. Pulls to the shoulder.

VICTOR

What the fuck you doing, man?!

CHRISTOPHER

Shuttup a minute!

A long, stressful beat for Victor.

EXT. STREET

The cruiser pulls back on the road.

VICTOR (O.S.)

What the fuck did you do that for?

CHRISTOPHER

Wanted to see if he's there yet.

VICTOR

He was there, man! He was there!

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S HOUSE/KITCHEN

Natasha making tea when Christopher and Victor enter. She stares at Victor, lip curled.

NATASHA

Who is this?

CHRISTOPHER

A friend.

NATASHA

Since when do you have friends?

VICTOR

Hey.

NATASHA

I'll be in my room. Tell me when your friend is gone.

Natasha exits.

VICTOR

Whose the bitch?!

CHRISTOPHER

My mother.

VICTOR

Shit, sorry, man.

CHRISTOPHER

Don't be. I think she's proud of it.

EXT. CHRISTOPHER'S HOUSE

Walt's cruiser makes a slow pass of the house.

VICTOR (O.S.)

There he goes again.

INT. FAMILY ROOM

Christopher pulls Victor from the window.

VICTOR

What if he tries and come in?

CHRISTOPHER

He won't.

VICTOR

What if he does?

Christopher pulls the gun from his coat, drops the on the couch. Victor picks it up.

VICTOR

What the fuck you doing with this?!

CHRISTOPHER

Was gonna use it on you. You hungry?

INT. KITCHEN

Victor and Christopher sits at the table. A meat, bread and condiment buffet.

CHRISTOPHER

Go on, eat.

Victor starts making his sandwich. Christopher layers two pieces of bread with ketchup. Slaps them together and bites. Victor is disgusted.

VICTOR

You not gonna put any meat on that?

CHRISTOPHER

Wanna try it?

Victor declines. Christopher grabs two glasses from the cupboard, milk from the fridge. Pours a glass for each.

CHRISTOPHER

Hurry up and eat. I wanna show you something.

EXT. INSIDE THE CLUSTER

Christopher looks at the charred treehouse.

CHRISTOPHER

Did you at least look at it before you lit it up?

Victor doesn't look at it now. Shamed.

VICTOR

Told you I was sorry, man.

Christopher moves to the ladder. begins climbing.

CHRISTOPHER

C'mon.

INT. TREEHOUSE

Christopher looking over the devastation when Victor appears at the top rung. Raises himself into the room. Slips.

Christopher catches him by the shirt. Pulls him in.

A LITTLE LATER

The silence is killing Victor.

VICTOR

What are we doing up here, man?

CHRISTOPHER

Christopher.

VICTOR

Okay, what are we doing up here, Christopher?

CHRISTOPHER

Ever put a sea shell to your ear and hear the ocean, Victor?

Victor shakes his head.

CHRISTOPHER

Sitting in this room used to work the same for me. I could hear Nicholas playing. I don't hear it anymore.

Victor grows apprehensive by this. Christopher senses.

CHRISTOPHER

It stopped before this.

VICTOR

That was your kids name? Nicholas?

CHRISTOPHER

Why do you think I killed him, Victor?

VICTOR

Yo, I didn't say it you did, that's just what I heard.

CHRISTOPHER

Smartest thing a white bread fool like me could ever have done was make a baby with a Latina and I went and fucking killed it. Snuffed it out like it was nothing, but hey, it was half white...

VICTOR

You want me to take it back, man? I take it back. You satisfied?

CHRISTOPHER
No, are you?

VICTOR
Am I what?

CHRISTOPHER
Satisfied I didn't snuff him out.

VICTOR
That's between you and God.

CHRISTOPHER
Do you think I did?

VICTOR
I don't know.

CHRISTOPHER
So ask.

VICTOR
You kill your son?

CHRISTOPHER
Yes.

Victor is shocked, but asks the only question anyone could.

VICTOR
Why the fuck would you do that?

CHRISTOPHER
I'll tell you.

CUT TO:

EXT. RINA'S PARENT'S HOUSE/FLASHBACK

Christopher knocks.

CHRISTOPHER (V.O.)
I remember like it happened today,
every detail. The note Rina left
telling me where she was, where
Nic was.

Rina's FATHER answers. Glares at Christopher. Shakes his
head. Shuts the door in his face.

CHRISTOPHER (V.O.)
And her not being there...

EXT. NATASHA'S HOUSE

Christopher at the front door. Natasha shaking her head.

CHRISTOPHER (V.O.)
...or there...

EXT. BILLIARD HALL

Christopher exits. Hopeless.

CHRISTOPHER (V.O.)
...or anywhere.

EXT. TOWN LIMITS

A Chevy Nova drives away from town.

CHRISTOPHER (V.O.)
I was used to her taking off, used
to her not being around. But she
took Nic this time.

INT. NOVA

Christopher drives. Something catches his eye.

CHRISTOPHER'S POV

A police cruiser parked in the high grass, behind a low-level billboard.

CHRISTOPHER (V.O.)
I knew all about Rina and Walt.
And I hated it, but I didn't know
what to do. Just didn't know what
to do...

EXT. ROAD

Christopher pulls the Nova onto a farm road. Parks it. Exits and pops the trunk.

CLOSE ON TRUNK

Christopher sifts through the clutter. Grabs a crowbar.

CHRISTOPHER

Cuts across the field.

INT. POLICE CRUISER/BACKSEAT

Behind the driver's side, Rina sits in Walt's lap. Kissing him hard. Rina reaches for Walt's belt buckle. Undoes it. Walt arches his back to lower his pants.

ANGLE ON

The space between Walt and Rina. Christopher stands outside the car. The two lover's oblivious.

CHRISTOPHER (V.O.)

But seeing it...

Rina mounts Walt. They pick up the pace.

WALT

Oh yeah...

EXT. BY THE BILLBOARD

Christopher staggers around the back of the cruiser, the hand over his mouth ineffective at containing the rush of vomit. He drops to all fours behind the billboard. Heaves.

CHRISTOPHER (V.O.)

Made me wanna do something real bad.

Christopher gets up. Moves back around the cruiser with determined fury. Suddenly stops. Sees something. Backsteps slowly.

CHRISTOPHER'S POV

Nicholas head, leaned against the passenger seat window, rocks with the motions of backseat activity. Sleeping.

WALT

Yes, yes...!

Nicholas's head jerks erect. Turns to the backseat.

NICHOLAS

Mommy?!

BACKSEAT

Nicholas crying now. Walt pushes Rina off.

WALT

Jesus!

EXT. CRUISER

Walt steps out. Pulling up his pants.

EXT. ROAD

The Nova speeds off the farm road, onto the hardball.

CHRISTOPHER (V.O.)

Nic saved all our lives that night.

EXT. LIQUOR STORE

Christopher exits with a paper sack. Climbs in the Nova.

INT. NOVA

Christopher pulls out a whiskey bottle. Guzzles a few shots worth. Starts up the car.

CHRISTOPHER (V.O.)

All except his.

INT. CHRISTOPHER AND RINA'S APARTMENT-NIGHT

Christopher paces the apartment in a stupor, stumbling. Sits on the arm of the couch, drains the last of the whiskey. Falls backwards. Bounces off the couch. Lands on the carpet. Doesn't bother getting up.

LATER

The door opens. Rina carries a sleeping Nicholas in. Startled at the sight of Christopher splayed across the floor. Jabs him with her foot. Nothing. She sets Nicholas on the couch. He wakes up.

NICHOLAS

I'm hungry, Mommy.

RINA

Mommy will bring you something later.

NICHOLAS

I want french fries.

Rina shakes Christopher. Pulls him to a seated position. Mostly out of it.

CHRISTOPHER

Where's Nic?

Rina sets Nicholas in Christopher's lap.

RINA

Right here. And he's hungry.

CHRISTOPHER

I can't...you, you do it. Not feeling real good, Rina.

RINA

I gotta go!

Nicholas pulls on his father's shirt.

NICHOLAS

I want french fries, daddy.

Christopher opens his eyes. Smiles and ruffles Nicholas' hair.

CHRISTOPHER

Okay, honey. Okay.

Christopher gets to his feet. Tries real hard to focus on Rina.

CHRISTOPHER

Tenminutes. Can you wait
tenminutes?

RINA

Just hurry up.

Christopher leans for Rina's ear, almost falls.

CHRISTOPHER

(whispers)

Don't love you anymore.

Weaves his way to the back of the apartment. Stops. Turns to Rina. Trying really hard to formulate.

CHRISTOPHER

Tenminutes.

INT. BATHROOM

Christopher turns on the shower. Cold water only. Strips.

INT. KITCHEN

Rina fidgety. Phone rings.

RINA

He's here. No, I'm still coming.

Just wait. Okay, okay!

(to Nicholas)

Mommy'll be right back. Don't you
move.

Rina picks up Nicholas. Sets him on the couch. Exits.
Nicholas waits a beat. Makes his way to the kitchen.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING

Rina climbs into Walt's cruiser.

INT. WALT'S CRUISER

Walt undoing his belt.

WALT

I'm dying here...

Rina lowers her head to his lap.

INT. APARTMENT/BATHROOM

Christopher steps into the shower. Reacts to the chill of the water.

INT. APARTMENT/KITCHEN

Nicholas pushes a foot stool to the counter. Climbs it. Plugs in the deep fryer. Opens the cabinet. Pulls down a bottle of cooking oil. Pours the contents into the fryer.

INT. WALT'S CRUISER

Walt leans back.

INT. SHOWER

Christopher hops around under the cold spray.

INT. APARTMENT/KITCHEN

Nicholas pours french fries into the fryer. The reaction of boiling oil and frozen food startles Nicholas. He falls off the stool.

INT. WALT'S CRUISER

Walt reaches orgasm. Rina sits up.

INT. APARTMENT/BATHROOM

Christopher steps out of the shower. Still a little typsy. But doing much better. Something outside the window catches his eye.

CHRISTOPHER'S POV

Rina climbs out of the cruiser. Wipes at her mouth with her sleeve. Walt pulls away.

INT. APARTMENT/BEDROOM

Christopher dresses quickly. Furious.

INT. APARTMENT/KITCHEN

Nicholas climbs back up the stool.

EXT. APARTMENT

Rina enters. Sees Nicholas.

RINA
Goddamit, Nic!

Nicholas turns, startled. Loses his balance. Reaches out to catch himself. Grabs the fryer.

RINA

Screams. Nicholas screams louder.

INT. APARTMENT/BEDROOM

Christopher bolts from the room. Down the hallway. Stops at the sight of Rina. She stands at the front door. Hyperventilating. He follows her eyes to the kitchen. To the floor. Now, Christopher screams.

CHRISTOPHER

NIC!

INT. TREEHOUSE

Victor is confused.

VICTOR

Thought you said you did it?
Sounds like a accident to me.

Christopher wants to stop there, badly. Pushes on.

CHRISTOPHER

I'm not done.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN/FLASHBACK

Nicholas' screams in pain, his legs and arms thrashing. Christopher screams in agony.

CHRISTOPHER

Thought about his pain then, the
pain that would come later. If
people were to me that way because
I was bastard with a stupid
fucking accent, how they would be
to him, a boy with no face?

And then, without obvious thought, Christopher covers Nick's mouth with his hand, presses down.

Nicholas' kicking subsides, his body shudders. He stills.

CHRISTOPHER

I wish I wouldn't have, I wish I
could do it again, but I can't. I
can't....

CUT TO:

INT. TREEHOUSE

Christopher's story has drained him, left him without even a tear to shed. Victor's very disturbed.

VICTOR

Why you tell me that shit, man?

CHRISTOPHER

I had to tell someone.

VICTOR

Yeah, but why me?

CHRISTOPHER

Nobody else asked.

VICTOR

You made me ask.

CHRISTOPHER

Maybe, nobody made you listen.

VICTOR

So, what now? I'm supposed to help you keep this a secret?

CHRISTOPHER

Can you keep a dog where you live, Victor?

VICTOR

What?

CHRISTOPHER

That pit you like so much. Could you keep it where you live?

VICTOR

No, I can't have no dog.

CHRISTOPHER

What if you could live out here, all this room. Would you like that?

VICTOR

With you?

CHRISTOPHER

No, I'm moving on. But you could stay, free room and board.

VICTOR

What about that mean old mom of yours?

CHRISTOPHER

I'll take care of her.

Christopher pulls an envelope out of his pocket.

CHRISTOPHER

I've wrote it all down. Just like
I told you.

VICTOR

What am I supposed to do with it?

CHRISTOPHER

Take it to the Sheriff in the
morning.

VICTOR

You crazy!? That cop already wants
to smoke my ass.

CHRISTOPHER

Don't worry about, Walt. After
tonight, you'll be the last thing
on his mind.

VICTOR

Why?

Christopher produces another envelope.

CHRISTOPHER

Five hundred dollars, and you can
stay here. All that for delivering
a letter, Victor.

VICTOR

Man, that sheriff ain't gonna care
about this.

CHRISTOPHER

He will, after tonight.

VICTOR

What with tonight? You gonna blast
that cop?

CHRISTOPHER

No. Will you do it?

VICTOR

(eyes on money)
Shit, I'll do it.

CHRISTOPHER

It'd be best for you if you stayed
here tonight.

INT. NICHOLAS' ROOM-NIGHT

Victor impressed by the furniture.

VICTOR
You made all this?

CHRISTOPHER
All the tools are in the basement
if you ever want to...

VICTOR
You really expect me to believe
you gonna let my ass stay here?

CHRISTOPHER
It's your decision, Victor.

Christopher moves for the door.

VICTOR
Yo?

Christopher stops.

VICTOR
I know why you did what you did to
your boy. You were right. Nobody
would have given him a break.

Christopher not so sure, but nods. Moves for the door.

VICTOR
Yo? You weren't gonna shoot me,
were you?

Christopher shrugs. Exits. Victor thinks about the
possibility.

VICTOR
Nahh...

INT. CHRISTOPHER'S HOUSE/FAMILY ROOM

Natasha watches TV. Christopher enters and sits.

NATASHA
Your friend is gone?

CHRISTOPHER
Sleeping in Nicholas' room.

Natasha sighs, irritated.

CHRISTOPHER
What made you so damn hateful?

NATASHA
What?

CHRISTOPHER

Poppa left because of you...

NATASHA

You shut your mouth.

CHRISTOPHER

They all left because of you.

Natasha gets off the couch, swings to slap. Christopher catches her hand. Guides her back to the couch. Steps to the door.

NATASHA

You go to hell you ungrateful son
of a bitch!

CHRISTOPHER

I forgive you anyway.

EXT. MORGAN'S HOUSE-NIGHT

Christopher knocks. Morgan answers. Just woke up.

MORGAN

Chris?

CHRISTOPHER

Did I wake you?

MORGAN

No, no, I'm good.

CHRISTOPHER

I'm leaving, Morgan. Getting out
of Blackfield.

MORGAN

What's going on?

CHRISTOPHER

Just time to go. I need a favor,
though.

MORGAN

Sure.

CHRISTOPHER

Give Victor that pit, the one he
likes.

MORGAN

What?

CHRISTOPHER

Can you do that?

MORGAN
Sure, Chris, sure.

Christopher pulls Morgan in for a hug.

CHRISTOPHER
I never had friend like you,
Morgan.

MORGAN
You okay?

CHRISTOPHER
Yeah.

Christopher moves for his truck.

MORGAN
You'll be alright, Chris. I know
you will be. Wherever you're going
can't be no worse than this.

Christopher nods. Climbs in his truck and drives away. Morgan
watches until the taillights of Christopher's truck disappear.

MORGAN
It just can't get no worse.

CUT TO:

INT. WALT'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM

Rina lies on the couch. A knock at the door.

RINA
Walt?

Walt pokes his head out from the kitchen.

WALT
What?

RINA
Somebody's at the door.

WALT
Well, get it.

Another knock. Rina's not moving. Walt moves to the door.
Opens. Nobody there. A plastic bag on the door mat. Walt
picks it up, shuts the door. Reaches inside, his back to Rina.

RINA
What is it?

Walt turns, holds the charred effigy of Nicholas. Rina
SCREAMS. Then, from outside.

CHRISTOPHER (O.S.)

Walt!

Walt moves to the curtain, peels it back.

WALT'S POV

Christopher stands on the lawn.

BACK ON WALT

He runs into the kitchen. Returns with his gunbelt, working the gun loose.

EXT. WALT'S HOUSE

Walt exits, gun aimed at Christopher.

WALT

On your stomach!

Christopher doesn't move. Walt grabs him by the shirt, tries to pull him down.

WALT

I said get down!

Christopher jerks free.

WALT

(continuing)

I'm not telling you again!

CHRISTOPHER

Want me to leave, Walt? Show me how bad you want it.

Walt realises what Christopher's asking.

WALT

Rina.

Rina steps into the doorway.

RINA

What?

Walt turns to Rina, holds out the gun. She grabs it and runs back to the doorway. Walt turns, finds Christopher smiling at him.

CHRISTOPHER

Remember when you were a kid, Walt? After a good beating? Not being able to sleep all night thinking, if I only this this, or

only did that...

WALT

Never had the experience, Dogman.
So, what's your point?

Christopher's hand shoots out, splaps Walt.

CHRISTOPHER

I'm gonna sleep like a baby
tonight.

Walt roars. Barrels in, swinging. Christopher avoids the punches easily. Maneuvers himself behind Walt and lifts him off his feet. Slams his face first into the lawn.

Walt lays there, dazed. Christopher backs off, gives the man some room. Walt rises, wobbly. Walt lunges. Runs smack into Christopher's jab. Blood squirts from his nose to Christopher's cheek. Walt's stumbles back, drops. Out cold.

Christopher is disappointed.

CHRISTOPHER

Funny. Always thought you'd put up
more of a...

BLAM, BLAM, BLAM. The rounds punch into Christopher's arm, shoulder and chest. He looks to Rina with pleased surprise. She fire again, catches Christopher in the throat. He pitches forward. Lands on Walt. Rina walks to him, emptying the clip into Christopher.

Christopher manages to roll off of Walt, exposing the wounds to Walt's chest.

RINA

Oh shit...

EXT. BLACKFIELD BANK-ESTABLISHING

INT. BLACKFIELD BANK

The TELLER shrinks under Natasha's verbal attack.

NATASHA

I have never heard such nonsense!
You get that manager over here
right this minute!

The teller fast walks to the MANAGER's desk. Practically pulls him back to her window.

MANAGER

Is there a problem, ma'm?

NATASHA

With her, I think!

The teller pulls his attention to the monitor, displays account information.

MANAGER

(remembering)

Oh, yes. I'm afraid your son made certain stipulations which restrict your access to his account.

NATASHA

Stipulations, what stipulations?! I have rent to pay!

EXT. SHIELA'S APARTMENT COMPLEX/MAILBOXES

Angela beats her mother to the box.

ANGELA

Let me, let me.

Shiela gives her the key, lifts her to the box. Angela unlocks, pulls the mail out. Hands it to Shiela.

ANGELA

What did we get.

SHIELA

What else, but bills, bills, bills...what's this?

Shiela tears at the large envelope. Pulls out a sheet of paper.

CLOSE ON PAPER

Just five words, written by hand. SO LEAVE

BACK TO SHIELA

As she peers into the envelope.

SHIELA

Oh my God!

Shiela shows Angela.

ANGELA

Wow!

CLOSE ON ENVELOPE

A wad of cash.

INT. VICTOR'S APARTMENT

Victor answers the door. Natasha.

VICTOR

Yeah?

NATASHA

Don't yeah me! Just put your shoes on, so we can go to the bank.

VICTOR

What the fuck's you going to the bank got to do with me?

NATASHA

Oh, that's a nice language you have...

Victor slams the door in her face. She knocks again, quick. Victor opens.

VICTOR

What?!

Natasha's desperate. So desperate, there's actually a nice tone to her request.

NATASHA

Could you please come to the bank with me?

CUT TO:

EXT. MONTEREY SUPERIOR COURT

BAILIFF (O.S.)

Remain seated for the honorable Judge Wiley...no talking while court is in session.

INT. MONTEREY SUPERIOR COURT

ON JUDGE WILEY

As he enters the courtroom and takes his seat. A grin spreads across his face.

JUDGE WILEY

It is so nice to see you again, Ms. Kibbels.

WILEY'S POV

Of Rina, in county orange, just knowing she's about to get...

CUT TO:

EXT. BLACKFIELD HILLS

Looking down on Blackfield. We hear a child laugh.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Nicholas runs, tries to evade Christopher. Father catches son and wrestles him down, snorting like a pig in his ear. And on the boy's giggles, we...

FADE OUT:

