

THE WAY OF THE SNAKE

Written by

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OVERHEAD SUBURBAN TOWN - NIGHT

Fly down streets, past streetlamps, trees, houses all in a blur. Then soar into the sky, showing the town as a diagram of uniformity: streets and lights laid out geometrically, predictably, properly.

Fly higher, ever higher, so the lights are mere twinkles. The uniformity takes on a new design: it's not all straight and square. Seen in the large perspective, it curves and flows, twists and turns, like a giant snake.

Then fall meteor-like back to earth, down to the town, past a billboard-size sign.

CLOSE ON SIGN

It says "Sharon Park, A Pleasant Place to Live". There's a drawing of a pastoral setting, a white house and the shining sun. But the paint is peeling and the metalwork around the sign is all rusting terribly.

BEHIND THE SIGN

A group of homeless derelicts have built some cardboard homes out of the wind.

CONTINUE FLYING

Down streets -- many boarded up homes and stores. But the downtown area still tries to maintain a small-town charm. The Post Office and City Hall are quaint brick buildings, but in need of some sprucing up.

THE HEIGHTS

The one neighborhood still in fine shape: where the upper class live. Gated houses, large hedges, two-and-three-story palaces hidden like fortresses.

Fly quickly past those... and then the houses start getting smaller and more beat up.

A PARK

Sits in the dividing line between the very nice and very rundown neighborhoods.

Some trees are dying from lack of care, but a small forest of them near the Heights remain full and leafy.

IN ONE TREE

Is a form, indistinct, but it's a living thing, not a structure. Its outline makes it look like some creature of prey looking for something to attack.

The tree is an ancient oak that probably saw the Revolutionary War. Gnarled, twisted but still strong.

CLOSER ON: THE FIGURE IN THE TREE

It's a teenage boy around seventeen, dressed all in black. He's thin, a bit ghost-like, but his face is set and determined. His face is also battered. An open cut still leaks a little blood on his cheek. One eye is black.

This is DEVIN. He surveys the area like a hunter. His hands barely hold the branches around him -- he's sure of his balance, even though he's a good twenty feet off the ground.

Then the tree shakes.

Devin is up like a shot, skillfully moving from branch to branch. He may be a geek, but he can climb -- from years of having to escape from one thing or another.

He rushes down the tree and almost collides with:

JOEY, a skittish boy of thirteen. He idolizes Devin and tries to imitate his moves, but it's obvious he's scared to death of being up in the tree.

DEVIN

Got it?

JOEY

Sure I got it. I'd never fail ya,
Dev.

DEVIN

Show me.

Joey fumbles in a pocket and pulls out an iPhone.

JOEY

I got the whole thing, good angle,
too.

He deftly hits some buttons and plays a video for Devin.

THE VIDEO

Shows Devin in the middle of a group of larger teens. We can't hear what he's saying. He's surrounded but fearless, talking back to them, daring them to attack. They do and he goes down under fists and feet.

DEVIN (O.S.)
Stop it there.

The video freezes on a foot about to give Devin that cut in his cheek.

You can half see the face of the teen whose foot is about to do the damage.

DEVIN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Brad.

BACK TO DEVIN AND JOEY

Devin's face is a mask as he watches the video of his beating.

DEVIN (CONT'D)
He's the one we get. Good work,
Joey.

JOEY
I'm your personal videographer.

Devin chucks him under his chin.

DEVIN
Couldn't ask for better. Let's go.

He whips down the tree like an expert. Joey descends slowly and awkwardly.

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE TREE

Devin drops down silently like a cat burglar. He sees the back of a girl staring out across the park.

He sneaks up to her and puts his hands over her eyes. She almost jumps as he does, but then stands still.

DEVIN (CONT'D)
You can't see.

CAROL
Not unless you let me.

It's some ritual they have. He takes his hands away.

DEVIN

Behold: the world as it really is.

She kind of smiles and turns to him. CAROL, Devin's friend and classmate. She'd be very pretty if she tried, but she doesn't because Devin doesn't approve of make-up and such.

CAROL

Is it any different from what I was looking at before?

DEVIN

Sure! I'm in it now.

She really starts to smile at that, but then sees Joey having a hard time getting down.

CAROL

Devin! Help him!

JOEY

I'm OK, sis.

He's not. He falls the last four feet but jumps up quickly.

JOEY (CONT'D)

See, all good.

He tries to hide a slight limp as he joins them.

DEVIN

So he lives in the Heights, right? That way, I think.

He points down a street.

CAROL

You're not going to do that again?

DEVIN

Why not?

JOEY

Yeah, why not?

CAROL

You'll get caught. And you'll get beat up. Again. Or worse.

DEVIN

Have they caught me yet?

CAROL
Your luck will run out some day.

DEVIN
Not today. Let's go.

A shadow falls across them and they freeze. It looks like someone in authority with a long coat and hat.

Then Carol wrinkles her nose.

It's RUFUS, an older homeless man, humming madly to himself. He wears a tattered black raincoat and a homburg.

CAROL
Ew. The park's full of them.

DEVIN
No, there's only one of him. Hey, Rufus, whaddya know?

Rufus smiles at Devin and doffs his hat.

RUFUS
Evening. I know you're ascending to the heavens. Listen: beware the silver gate.

DEVIN
You're the man, Roof.

He digs in a pocket and tosses something. Rufus catches it -- an apple.

RUFUS
Good boy. Always thinking of my health.

He rambles off.

CAROL
You shouldn't encourage him.

DEVIN
Someone should. Let's fly.

He runs off in the direction he'd pointed. Joey starts to go but Carol stops him.

CAROL
You're not going.

JOEY
I have to.

CAROL
And what do I tell Mom and Dad when
the police arrest you for
trespassing?

He holds up his iPhone.

JOEY
I'm his videographer.

CAROL
Great. Evidence of the crime.

JOEY
I have to go. He needs me.

She doesn't like it, but she also wants to stay with Devin.

CAROL
Only if you stay on the ground.

JOEY
Awww...

CAROL
And I'm coming with.

JOEY
You like seeing him steal. Admit
it.

Joey takes off after Devin. Carol shrugs and follows.

EXT. BRAD'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Brad's house is not one of the huge mansions, but it's still
a decent-sized spread.

There's a wall with a hedge, but nothing heavy-duty around
it.

Devin examines the wall, looks at a tree growing from the
pavement that towers over it.

Joey and Carol catch up.

CAROL
What if they're home?

DEVIN
Even more fun.

She scowls. He smiles.

DEVIN (CONT'D)
Big game tonight. Brad's playing.
His folks never miss it.

He hoists himself up the tree.

JOEY
What do you think you'll take?

DEVIN
His soul.

Joey shoots Devin with his iPhone.

JOEY'S POV

Devin climbs like a squirrel to a branch that goes over the wall, then disappears into the darkness.

JOEY AND CAROL

Look up, then at each other.

JOEY
How am I supposed to document this
if he's in there and I'm out here?

CAROL
Use your imagination.

EXT. BRAD'S HOUSE GROUNDS - NIGHT

Devin climbs out over the wall, looks out at the yard.

It's perfectly manicured, with a well-kept garden. Off to the back is a personal basketball court.

Devin drops to the ground, considers the house.

It's two stories, looks like a huge face with two rectangular eyes at the top.

Devin walks up to the front porch, but doesn't go up. Instead, he heads back to the basketball court.

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT - NIGHT

Devin pads across it, staring at the house all the while.

Then he sees it.

The one basketball post is only a few feet from the house, right over the roof of the back porch. That's his way in.

He takes a deep breath by the post, pulls gloves from a pocket and puts them on.

Then he's up the post like a rocket, as if he barely touched it. Now he's up on the roof.

ON THE ROOF

He steadies himself on the slanted surface, makes his way carefully to a window.

He looks inside.

HIS POV

It's a guest bathroom, unremarkable. But is there an alarm?

ON THE ROOF

Devin examines all parts of the window, pulls out a pocketknife and digs into the sill a little bit.

He finds a wire.

Holding his breath, he cuts it. Nothing happens.

He pushes on the window. It opens. He ducks inside.

IN THE BATHROOM

He's through it quickly -- nothing in it for him.

IN THE OUTSIDE HALLWAY

He walks into the hallway outside the bathroom. There's a lamp on. He sees three doorways in front of him. Only one is shut. He knows that's Brad's bedroom -- only a teenage boy would keep his door closed.

Shut but not locked. Devin goes inside.

INT. BRAD'S BEDROOM

Devin turns on a light. It's a trophy room. Award after award for basketball, baseball, hockey. Devin frowns at it all.

He examines Brad's desk -- this is not a place where Brad spends much time.

So Devin tries the closet -- a mess of dirty sports clothes, things thrown every which way. Devin abandons that and goes to the bed.

He looks under the pillow. Nothing. Checks under the mattress. Nada. Then in the space between the bed and the wall.

Bingo.

He pulls out an envelope, tattered and smudged with fingerprints.

Opening it, he glances inside and lets out a whoop.

HIS POV

Brad and some other male students cross-dressing. Then some photos from trans-gender magazines.

Great blackmail material.

Devin puts it all back in the envelope and heads out.

IN THE HALLWAY

He starts back to the bathroom, but passes one open door.

HIS POV

The master bedroom: huge, ornate, oak-paneled.

DEVIN

Thinks about it, ducks into the master bedroom.

EXT. BRAD'S HOUSE

Carol and Joey stay off to the side, not in front of Brad's house.

A car races down the street. The gated driveway opens and the car pulls in.

CAROL

Not good.

Joey pulls out his iPhone.

JOEY

Devin, they're back, they're back.

IN THE MASTER BEDROOM

Devin holds out his phone -- probably the cheapest phone you can get, but it has a walkie-talkie function and he hears Joey.

DEVIN

Roger that.

But he doesn't want to leave yet.

He cases the bedroom, looks at the computer, the expensive high-def TV set-up, zeroes in on the night tables by the bed.

He checks one -- some ladies' jewelry, nothing he's interested in.

He tries the other. Books, stationery. But in the bottom drawer: an antique brass box.

He looks at it.

DOWNSTAIRS

A door opens and people come in.

IN THE BEDROOM

Devin plays with the box, can't open it. Tries a variety of pressure techniques -- and finally the top pops up.

He pulls out a ring: jeweled, old, heavy. It's in the form of a snake with ruby red eyes.

He grabs the ring, puts the box back in the night table, runs out of the room. Instead of his pocket, he drops the ring down his pants.

IN THE HALLWAY

Someone's coming up the stairs, so Devin rushes into the bathroom, shuts the door behind him.

ON THE ROOF

Devin just about leaps from the roof to the ground. He lands hard, hurts one leg.

From the basketball court, he looks over at the branch he climbed in on -- no way he'll make it back up there.

He heads to the rear of the house.

BEHIND THE HOUSE

A back gate, glinting silver in the moonlight.

He runs to it, looks around, puts his hand on it...

And it's electrified: he's shocked with enough volts to put him down.

BLACKNESS

Devin's eyes blink open.

HIS POV

BRAD stands over him, with his parents behind. Brad is the All-American athlete, but his features are twisted with hate.

BRAD

Break into my house? Steal from me?
You cocksucking geek!

His fist smashes down on Devin's face.

BLACKNESS

LIGHTS FLASH

DEVIN'S EYES

Flutter open again. He tries to sit up, groans and falls back. He's been dragged or carried to the front of the house.

EXT. BRAD'S FRONT YARD - NIGHT

The flashing lights are on a police car that has just pulled up. Two men get out.

One is wide and massive. SOUTHEY is a deputy. He's slow but not someone you'd mess with. But he's the inferior here.

The other man is CHIEF CALDWELL, tall and slender, but muscled, coiled, a steel trap ready to be sprung. He always wears his chief's hat and he always takes center stage.

They walk to Brad and his family. Brad's FATHER has a receding gray hairline and is a little paunchy, wears lots of finger jewelry. Brad's MOTHER is a shadow, who lives for both the men in her life.

CHIEF CALDWELL

What did he take?

BRAD'S FATHER

Nothing on him. We probably scared him off before he found anything valuable.

BRAD

Idiot set off the silent alarm. We watched the recording of him climbing the wall all the way back from the game.

CHIEF CALDWELL

Cameras in the house?

BRAD'S FATHER

Only outside.

Chief Caldwell shakes his head and moves to where Devin lies.

Devin is now in a sitting position.

CHIEF CALDWELL

I'm very disappointed in you, son.

Devin just glares at him.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

First I hear you let yourself get beat up at school. Now you do this crazy stunt.

He shakes his head again, bends down.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Son, you just don't listen.

And the Chief wallops him in the face with a right cross.

Devin falls down.

Brad's mother gasps.

BRAD'S MOTHER
What are you doing?

Chief Caldwell won't even turn to look at her. Her husband restrains her from running to Devin.

CHIEF CALDWELL
Teaching my son a lesson.

Now he kicks Devin in the ribs with his boot.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)
You have to act up. You can't just do like everyone else.

Devin tries to get up and the Chief slaps him hard across the face.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)
You want to be treated like an outlaw, then here ya go.

He leans in close to the prostrate Devin.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)
There are rules in life, son. Learn to live by them.

He gets up and walks back to the others.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)
Southey, drag that sorry excuse of a boy into the car. Breaking and entering at least deserves a night in a cell.

Southey easily lifts Devin up and carries him to the police car.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)
You decide if you want to press charges. He won't be leaving town any time soon. You have my sincerest apologies. Ever since his mother passed, he's been impossible.

BRAD'S MOTHER
It must be hard for him.

CHIEF CALDWELL
Well it's hell for me.

He goes back to the police car and gets in. The car pulls out of the driveway. Brad and his family go inside. Brad's carrying the tattered envelope under his arm. His mother looks at it, but won't ask any questions.

ACROSS THE STREET

Carol and Joey watch everything through the open driveway gate while hiding in the shadows.

JOEY

Poor Dev.

CAROL

He shouldn't have gone in there.

JOEY

But he didn't deserve that.

CAROL

No one deserves that.

INT. POLICE CAR - NIGHT

Southey drives. Chief Caldwell barely glances back at his son.

CHIEF CALDWELL

How am I supposed to explain this?
My son breaking the law?

In the back seat, Devin's cuffed, but he manages to dig out the snake ring from his underwear. He cups it in his cuffed hands.

DEVIN

You told me to fight back.

CHIEF CALDWELL

I told you to win the fights. I hear they had you on the ground right away.

DEVIN

There were six of them.

CHIEF CALDWELL

I took on six punks in that liquor store hold up last month.

DEVIN

You had a gun.

CHIEF CALDWELL

You ever want a gun, I'll teach ya to use one. But why in hell climb into that kid's house?

DEVIN

To get something on him. Hold it over him. Get power over him.

Now the Chief stares back at him.

CHIEF CALDWELL

Power ain't in something you steal. It's right here --
(touches his fist)
Power's in your hands and how you use 'em.

They pull up to the police station.

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

The station has seen better days. Green paint peeling, crippled furniture, ripped seat cushions.

But it's not a small station - it's for a big town. There are several cells in the back.

Southey leads Devin to one and puts him in.

The Chief takes his hat off and sits at his well-organized desk, filling out the report on his computer.

CHIEF CALDWELL

Cool off in there. I'll be thinking of ya wrapped up in my clean sheets at home.

INT. CELL - LATER

Devin sits alone on a bunk. The snoring of a drunk in the next cell keeps him awake.

He holds out the stolen snake ring and stares at it, puts it up to catch the dawn coming in through a high, barred window.

The ruby red eyes spark.

Devin puts the ring on his finger.

EXT. POLICE STATION - MORNING

Devin gets into the police car with his father.

DEVIN

Are you serious? School today? I could have broken ribs.

CHIEF CALDWELL

So see the school nurse. You should have thought of all that before you decided to rob that boy.

DEVIN

They're not pressing charges.

CHIEF CALDWELL

I'm getting the feeling that boy will press charges in his own way. And you're gonna face him. Today.

Devin sulks in the passenger seat, stares at the snake ring on his finger, which he hides from the watchful gaze of his father.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING

Devin gets out of the police car, embarrassed as hell, in front of his school.

It's a dirty brick building with newly-installed metal doors in front and metal detectors inside.

Most of the teens make comments about Devin, with words like 'geek', 'fag' and 'Devastator' thrown his way.

It bothers him and some of the bullies stand in his way, but he doesn't fight, just goes around then and continues inside.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL MAIN HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Devin goes to his locker, tries to not call attention to himself.

But his locker is slammed shut in his face.

Brad and his group of bullies stands there, including TRENT, Brad's right hand and the verbal one of the bunch.

BRAD

How was jail?

TRENT

Yeah, meet any long, hard objects while incarcerated? In your anal area?

Devin opens his locker, keeping quiet, gets his books out.

BRAD

You look like dogshit.

TRENT

You look so ill, I think I'll throw up on you.

Trent empties an energy drink on Devin's head. Devin doesn't react in a big way, but he can't help himself from talking back.

DEVIN

Wearing your sister's underwear today?

Angry silence.

BRAD

What the fuck did you say?

DEVIN

Oh, those photos by your bed were your Halloween costume?

BRAD

You've been kicked in the head one too many times. By your own Dad.

DEVIN

Don't worry. I made copies of 'em on my phone. Gonna build a special website for 'em.

BRAD

Hope you enjoy your last day on earth. Once you set foot outside this school, we will devastate you, little Devastator.

A BELL rings for class.

TRENT

Ding ding! Down for the eternal count, little Devin. On your tombstone we'll write: "He lived life like a worm -- and we stepped on him."

They stalk off, revealing Carol waiting across the hallway.

CAROL

You shouldn't provoke them, Dev.

DEVIN

Yeah, my silence riled them up so much.

CAROL

You make a point of standing on the outside. You won't let anyone invite you in.

DEVIN

Why wait for an invitation when you can sneak in?

CAROL

You know what I mean. You ridicule anything normal.

Devin slams his locker shut.

DEVIN

Carol, from the time we're born, our freedom disappears. They've got it all laid out for us: do this, do that, go to school, obey the rules, get married, have kids, vote this way, buy that and die.

CAROL

That's the way life is...

DEVIN

That's the way death is. You don't have to do anything they tell you to. You don't have to obey any rules.

CAROL

And then you can go to jail. Like you did.

Another BELL RINGS.

CAROL (CONT'D)

Speaking of rules, we just broke one. We're late.

INT. CLASSROOM - LATER

Mr. Danforth, fussy and mustached, parades in front of the room as Devin and Carol rush in.

MR. DANFORTH

Oh, finally decided to join us?

They mumble apologies and sit, but Danforth moves in on Devin.

MR. DANFORTH (CONT'D)

You come into my classroom looking like that, Caldwell? What is the matter with you? You have something wrong with you. You just don't know how to fit in.

He pulls Devin to his feet.

MR. DANFORTH (CONT'D)

Since you're so fond of doing your own thing, you can stand in front of the room for the entire class and show off your poor appearance.

He pushes Devin to the corner of the room near the window and positions him facing the class.

Most of the class smirk at Devin and make comments.

Carol looks ashamed, has tears in her eyes.

Devin stands, impassive, as the class continues.

Another BELL rings long, loud, seemingly endless.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

Devin exits through a rear entrance of the school. It's near the athletic fields, where some students are practicing for various sports.

AROUND THE CORNER

Just off the school grounds, at an intersection where they can watch everyone leaving the school, Brad and Trent and the gang wait.

DEVIN

Walks casually over to an outdoor ring set. One girl and one guy are working out on them.

Devin gives them a nod and a smile; they both scowl at him and turn away.

Just as they do so, Devin's up the rings at lightning speed.

In a few seconds, he's on top of the ring set, which is just under a pine tree.

Then he's up in the tree without anyone seeing him.

IN THE TREE

He climbs to a height way above where anyone will be looking and stares off across the town.

HIS POV

A line of trees stretch across the town, each one growing close enough to the other for him to climb his way past the bullies. His own private freeway.

AROUND THE CORNER

Brad and the others get angrier and more frustrated as they see no sign of Devin.

EXT. PARK - AFTERNOON

Devin descends from a tree in the park where he'd been the night before.

A group of homeless people react to him dropping down in their midst.

Rufus is among them.

RUFUS

Watch out. You might fall too far.

Devin stares at him.

DEVIN

The silver gate. You knew about it.
You knew it was electrified.

RUFUS

A man gets to learn stuff when he's walking around all the time.

DEVIN

Whaddya got for me today?

RUFUS

You going to buy your comics?

Devin nods.

RUFUS (CONT'D)

Watch out for the super villain.
She'll be in costume.

Devin reaches in his pocket and tosses something to Rufus.

DEVIN

It's all I could get from the crummy cafeteria.

Rufus looks at a packet of crackers.

RUFUS

They'll go well with my lobster bisque.

DEVIN

I figured. Be seeing you.

He gives Rufus a little salute, but Rufus stops him.

RUFUS

That's not right.

Devin's confused, then realizes the homeless man is talking about the snake ring.

DEVIN

Got it from my last raid. Never seen anything like it.

RUFUS

Dump it. Or it'll eat you whole -- one gulp.

Rufus imitates a snake swallowing something whole.

Devin waves him away as he leaves.

DEVIN

You're a tiny bit insane, my friend.

Rufus does the 'crazy' circular sign and points at Devin's back.

RUFUS

Crazy messing with that, you are.

Devin doesn't hear and disappears around a corner.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STREET - LATE AFTERNOON

Devin's careful going down the streets in downtown -- watching out for Brad and his cronies.

This section of town is very rundown. A nearby bar is overflowing with seedy-looking types even though it's still light out.

The Comic Book store is sandwiched between two closed and boarded up storefronts. It almost looks closed itself -- just some yellowed old sci fi posters on the front. The windows are frosted, so there's no telling if anyone's inside.

Devin goes in.

INT. COMIC BOOK STORE - CONTINUOUS

Devin enters, barely glances at a girl dressed all in black with a short black leather jacket on at the counter. MR. DUNBAR, the man behind the counter, looks angry. The girl shoots Devin a look, but turns back to Dunbar.

There's no one else in the store.

Devin moves to the back racks of comics. But Mr. Dunbar talks loudly.

DUNBAR

You don't want my money!

Devin freezes, turns to see that it's a robbery in progress. He sizes the girl up.

She's maybe nineteen, short dark hair, a few tats and a nose ring. This is NOLA. She's smiling fiercely. She doesn't look like she needs much dough.

NOLA

No, I don't. But I'll take it anyway!

She's got a Colt Snub-nosed .38 Special under a comic book, pointed carelessly at Dunbar.

He's piled some money on the counter, but is taking his time with the rest.

She grabs for the money and there's a huge explosion. The girl falls backward onto the floor.

Devin runs forward.

Dunbar waves his Smith & Wesson M3000 Spring Sawed-Off Shotgun.

DUNBAR

You asked for this, you asked for this!

The girl gets up. Her left arm is useless. Her shoulder took some of the shotgun blast, though most of it missed her.

She's in pain, but she laughs.

NOLA

No, I asked for this!

She grabs the money from the counter and runs out the door.

Devin runs out after her.

DUNBAR

Bitch, I'm barely breaking even here!

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Nola runs down the street, runs into the seedy bar.

Devin follows her.

INT. BAR - CONTINUOUS

Nola pushes her way through the bar. Some of the patrons act like they know her and make way for her.

Devin follows and most of those same people block him.

But he's determined and he forces his way to the back of the place and out the back door.

EXT. ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

A trash-strewn alley. Devin isn't sure which way to go, listens carefully and hears feet to his left. He runs.

AROUND A CORNER

Smack into Nola's .38 Special. She's waiting for him, gun raised, her wounded arm hanging to the side.

NOLA

What, you need money for your comic books?

Devin stops, panting. He's actually not at all sure why he's there.

NOLA (CONT'D)

Or did you come to make a citizen's arrest? Cuff me, copper.

He shakes his head, but does put his hands up.

Then she starts to fall forward in shock from her injury. He catches her and puts her on a dirty sofa tossed nearby.

DEVIN

You need a doctor.

NOLA

I know what I need. But what about you?

She appraises him.

DEVIN

Whaddya robbing old Dunbar for? He never has anything there.

NOLA

Just following orders. Like you.

She points at the snake ring on his finger.

NOLA (CONT'D)

You must have been through the same thing to get that.

DEVIN

Actually I stole it.

She beams.

NOLA

Even better!

She looks down.

NOLA (CONT'D)

I'm bleeding on ya. Gotta jet.

She gets up. He starts to get up also. She holds the gun like a club.

NOLA (CONT'D)

Don't make me pistol whip ya,
pretty boy. Your face already has
too much signage.

He stops. She runs and disappears down the alley.

EXT. DEVIN'S HOUSE - LATER

Devin, now carrying a bag of comic books, approaches his house.

It's a small craftsman bungalow on a corner -- the only one in the neighborhood that's kept up. The lawn is cut, there's a small garden in a corner. The trash cans are sparkling out on the street.

This is far from The Heights -- a working class area where most people aren't working.

He waves to some smoking men on the porch of the house next door. One of them, with long greasy hair, stands up and leans out. ALBERT tries to stay friendly with the police chief and his kin.

ALBERT

Yo, Dev. Heard ya got busted.

DEVIN

It was nothing. Commander in?

Albert nods, makes a drinking motion with hand-to-mouth.

ALBERT

Yeah, been exercising for a while,
you know?

DEVIN

Yeah, I know.

As Devin goes up the steps to the house, the screen door slams open and his father stands there. His posture is perfect and his eyes gleam. But the bottle of Old Grand Dad in his hand is half empty.

And his gun is in a holster on his hip.

CHIEF CALDWELL
Home from the battle fields.

DEVIN
You're early.

CHIEF CALDWELL
Quiet day. Southey can handle it.

Devin almost says something about the comic store hold-up, but stops at the last minute.

His father grabs the bag of comics from him.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)
Why do you waste our money on this
drivel?

He takes the comics out of the bag and tosses them roughly on the lawn.

This is familiar activity to Devin. He doesn't go after them.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)
I'm disappointed in you, son. You
have no goals, no motivation.

His father goes to a wall unit and presses some buttons. The sprinklers go on in the front lawn, ruining the comics.

Devin almost says something, but holds himself back.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)
Come inside and eat.

DEVIN
Not really hungry.

CHIEF CALDWELL
You'll eat.

He pushes Devin inside.

INT. CALDWELL HOUSE

It's Spartan but everything is in order.

The center of the house is one room that's a combination kitchen/living room/dining room.

A small wooden table, barely big enough for two, is set. The meal is also Spartan.

The television is small and old -- it even has rabbit ears on it. It's turned on to a police show.

CHIEF CALDWELL

Sit. Eat. We never have meals as a family any more.

Devin sits but just glares at his father.

That makes his father happy. He chuckles a throaty rasp of a laugh. From Devin's reaction, it's obvious he hates that laugh more than anything.

DEVIN

Are we a family?

His father pours the Old Grand Dad into the already-used glass sitting next to his plate.

CHIEF CALDWELL

Don't we look like a family? Daddy and his boy?

He takes a swig of the drink.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Eat.

Devin looks at the unappetizing, probably cold food in front of him. He stabs at it dispiritedly.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Down the gullet, come on. That's an order.

DEVIN

You're ordering me to eat?

CHIEF CALDWELL

Until you're old enough to move out, I tell you what to do. Eat.

He pushes the table at Devin, so it slams into his stomach.

Devin stands up, angry.

DEVIN

That's enough, Dad.

CHIEF CALDWELL

I'll decide what's enough.

He pushes the table again, which slams hard into Devin's thighs.

Devin starts to walk away. The Chief's hand flicks towards his gun, then away from it.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)
Don't you leave this room. Eat.

He picks up the plate of food and throws it in Devin's face, hard.

The plate smacks Devin in the forehead, falls to the floor and breaks. The food covers Devin's face and shoulders.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)
See what happens when you don't obey? Your mother was too soft on you, boy, letting you eat when you felt like it. Now you get nothing. Nothing that's not sticking to you right now.

Devin's eyes blaze, but he just stands there.

DEVIN
Am I excused now?

Chief Caldwell laughs that hideous laugh again.

CHIEF CALDWELL
There's no excuse for you. Go. Stay in your room. You're not going anywhere tonight.

Devin leaves for a door in the rear of the house. His father takes another drink.

INT. DEVIN'S BEDROOM - LATER

It's a small room, too small for a teenager. No TV. The computer is antique.

There are no posters or photos on the walls, but there are stacks of books, comic books and fantasy magazines.

Devin, now cleaned up, is just finishing putting on his all-black night outfit.

He goes to his window and tries to open it, but it won't budge.

He looks closely at it.

HIS POV

His father has nailed the window shut.

DEVIN

Grimaces, walks to his bedroom door and very quietly, very cautiously, opens it, looks outside.

HIS POV

The light from the television creates an eerie flashing glow in the living/dining room.

Devin's father is passed out on his threadbare green sofa, the empty bottle on the floor beneath him.

One hand holds his dull gray Glock 21, a deadly-looking gun, on his chest as a child would a stuffed animal.

DEVIN

Sneaks out of his room and closes the door as slowly as he can. But at the least moment, the lock 'snicks' shut loudly.

CHIEF CALDWELL

Moves on the sofa, grumbles in his sleep.

Devin makes his way as silently as possible across the room. As he gets near the sofa, he stares with fear at that Glock which is pointed his way.

He ducks down as if to avoid it, goes to the front door.

His father has bolted and locked the door, so Devin has to carefully move the lock and bolt.

Both make noise as he does so -- he keeps checking on his father.

Finally, the door creaks open and Devin rushes outside.

EXT. CALDWELL HOUSE - NIGHT

Freedom. Devin jumps off the front porch, skipping the stairs.

But as he hits the sidewalk, a noise makes him turn.

It's Albert in the house next door, smoking something in the darkness.

He gives Devin a peace sign. Devin returns it and runs off into the night.

EXT. CAROL AND JOEY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Devin waits outside Carol and Joey's house. It's in the Heights, but probably the least opulent part of it. Still, it's a nice two-story brick home.

The tree near Devin shakes and Joey tumbles down it. Devin saves him from hitting the ground too hard.

JOEY

Hey, Dev.

He holds up his iPhone in one hand.

JOEY (CONT'D)

I was trying to get my own POV shot when I climbed out on the roof and down the tree. But it's hard to do one-handed.

DEVIN

Nice try.

He pulls out his own old cell phone.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

Glad I have you. This old thing won't even take photos. Dad doesn't believe in buying anything newer.

Joey just stands there for a beat.

CAROL

Guess you won't have video tonight, then.

Carol has just come out the front door. Her hair is in a pony tail and she has a little bit of lipstick on.

DEVIN

What do you mean?

CAROL

We're not allowed out with you if you're going to break into people's homes.

Devin looks at them, Carol feeling very self-righteous and Joey obviously disappointed.

JOEY

True, Dev. Folks won't let us.

DEVIN

Since when do you listen to them?

Joey perks up at that and is about to agree, but Carol steps in.

CAROL

Not everyone hates their parents.
Not everyone is angry at the world.

Devin regards her as if she's someone new.

DEVIN

I guess not.

CAROL

We are allowed to go out with you
if you do something normal, like go
have ice cream.

JOEY

Yeah, Dev, wouldn't you like some
ice cream?

Dev doesn't, but he sees Joey's eager eyes and Carol's pleading look and nods his head.

INT. ICE CREAM JOINT - NIGHT

The Ice Cream Place is rather run down. Plastic tables with gouges in them. A bored teen behind the counter. But it is decorated in bright red and yellow so it's trying to seem cheerful.

Devin sits across the table from Carol and Joey. Each has a big ice cream cone. Devin's is melting from his lack of interest.

CAROL

Isn't it nice to do something
normal? Instead of burglary?

DEVIN

Sure.

She smiles at him.

He gestures to some dark forms outside.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

Beats passing out in a pool of your own vomit after shooting up or drinking yourself into a stupor, like those guys out there.

CAROL

Oh, Devin.

DEVIN

Don't you get it, Carol? They want us to eat ice cream and behave. They want us to read the books they chose for us. They want us to do everything they prepared us to do. Like rats in a maze.

CAROL

And who are they? These mysterious people that control everything?

DEVIN

The ones that have the power.

He sees something out the window.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

Here, Joey, you finish mine. I'm sure you can handle it.

He gives Joey his ice cream and gets up to go.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

Something I gotta do. Something unsafe. Sorry you guys can't join me.

He goes. Carol disappointedly licks her cone.

JOEY

Who's that?

He points out the window. Carol turns to look.

OUTSIDE

Nola walks down the center of the street, her arm in a sling.

Devin follows her.

JOEY AND CAROL

Watch them. Joey with curiosity; Carol with sadness. Joey takes out his iPhone and tries to get footage of them.

He gets up and runs outside.

JOEY (CONT'D)
Be right back!

CAROL
Joey, stay here!

Carol's left with all the ice cream and no interest in it whatsoever. A smudge of chocolate remains on her lips.

Joey runs back in.

JOEY
Got her. Now I'm gonna use that new program I got to track her down.

Carol suddenly thinks that's a good idea.

CAROL
What new program?

JOEY
Face-match. All the other kids are using it.

He's already punching it into his phone.

CAROL
Let me see.

She moves over next to him and looks at his screen.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Nola strides down the center of a deserted street with confidence, not looking to either side.

She snaps the fingers of her good hand.

A man appears from the doorway and falls in behind her.

She snaps her fingers again.

Another man appears from an alley and matches pace with the first man.

Devin checks them out.

One is dark and bearded; the other blond and gaunt.

Devin follows them now from more of a distance.

EXT. PET STORE - NIGHT

The trio stop in front of a dingy-looking pet store off the main drag and stare in the window.

Devin comes up behind them and sees them looking at the caged animals.

Nola snaps her fingers and the bearded man produces a brick.

DEVIN

What is this? A PETA thing?

All three turn to look at him. The two men take threatening poses, but Nola waves them back.

NOLA

Finished your comics?

DEVIN

Real life is more interesting.

NOLA

Then watch and learn about
insurrection.

She snaps her fingers and the beard steps back to smash the window.

DEVIN

Amateurs. The front window? Major
alarms. Cops will be here in less
than five minutes.

Bearded guy sneers at him.

BEARD

You have a better idea?

DEVIN

I know a way in without any alarms.

BEARD

And why would you know that?

DEVIN

It's what I do. Get into places and
get out without people knowing.

The blond guy gestures to Devin's face.

BLOND

Looks like someone knew and wasn't
too happy about it.

Devin shrugs.

DEVIN

Can't win 'em all.

He heads down a very dark alley beside the pet store.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

Coming?

The two men look to Nola. She doesn't return their glance,
just follows Devin down the alley.

IN THE ALLEY

Without a word, Devin vaults up to a rusty fire escape
attached to the building behind the pet store.

He gets to the landing, hooks his legs on a rail and bends
down backwards, holding up both hands.

Nola looks up at him, then gives him her good hand.

He pulls hard, so she catapults briefly into the air, grabs a
railing with her good hand and lands on the landing with nary
a stumble.

She nods to him.

He continues up the fire escape and she follows.

Beard and Blond appear below and climb up the fire escape
beneath them.

ON THE FIRE ESCAPE

Devin stops next to a boarded-up window. Nola joins him,
breathing a little bit hard.

He pushes on the boards of the window and they slide aside.
Someone arranged them to look nailed shut, but it's a
disguise.

He pushes the window up and goes inside.

Nola's right behind.

INT. DARK HALLWAY

Devin walks in the dark as if he can see just fine. Nola stumbles behind.

Then: a glow. He's got his cheap phone out, using it to shine on a wall.

DEVIN

Shared wall. They never put an alarm back here. They don't even know it's vacant now.

NOLA

And why do you know?

DEVIN

It's my business to know.

He shines the light in a corner, where a hole has been smashed in the wall. Once again, phony boards have been plastered up which are easily moved aside, which Devin does.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

Knowledge is power.

He gestures for her to go first. She hesitates, then does.

NOISE from down the hallway. The other two men make a crashing racket in the dark.

Devin waits for them.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

Amateurs.

He gestures for them to go in. They do and he follows.

INT. PET STORE BACK ROOM

The hole in the wall leads into the storeroom of the pet shop. A bunch of boxes had blocked the hole. Devin has them attached to a wire, which he can pull to block the hole when he leaves.

NOLA

So you've been in here before.

DEVIN

Been in most everywhere.

NOLA

Looking for what?

DEVIN
Secrets. Knowledge...

NOLA
Is power. Yeah, you said.

Devin walks to the door of the storeroom and out into the Pet Shop.

INT. PET SHOP

It's a cramped, small but full pet store. Puppies bark, birds squawk.

Devin walks out and stands in the center of it.

Nola, Beard and Blond start searching the place.

NOLA
What kind of secrets would you find here?

DEVIN
What kind are you looking for?

NOLA
We need a snake.

Devin knows where they are -- over in the back in glass cases.

He shines his cell phone back there. The others follow him.

NOLA (CONT'D)
There she is.

She points to the largest cage.

IN THE CAGE

Is a female Burmese Python. It's about fifteen feet long and probably weighs a hundred pounds.

She's twisted up and around a huge log inside the glass.

DEVIN

Pops the clasp on top of the glass cage.

DEVIN

And what would you want with Bertha? She's been here for years. Nobody's stupid enough to take her for a pet.

NOLA

You know her name?

DEVIN

I know all their names.

He opens the top and Bertha looks up menacingly.

NOLA

We just need her. Orders.

DEVIN

So go ahead. She's yours for the taking.

He steps back. Nola snaps her fingers for the two men to come forward.

They do, and they start to put their hands in, but stop.

NOLA

Come on, we haven't got all night. I only have one hand, so I can't do it.

They reach for Bertha again. She starts to uncoil.

NOLA (CONT'D)

I didn't bring you along for your looks. Get it!

DEVIN

One of these killed a fourteen-year-old boy in Florida. Crushed the life out of him. Have fun.

This time bearded guy manages to touch the snake, but the reptile whips around quickly in response.

Both men jump back in fright.

Devin laughs and slams the top shut.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

Not much on planning, are you? Take the whole case if you want to move her. Snakes are natural escape artists.

He rolls the glass case easily forward.

DEVIN (CONT'D)
See? Wheels. They like to move
Bertha out front for the customers.

The men take the case and roll it back into the storeroom.

DEVIN (CONT'D)
Probably weights a buck-fifty. Hope
your boys have strong backs.

NOLA
I'm going to guess you know a
better way down than the fire
escape.

DEVIN
What's it worth to you?

NOLA
What's it worth to you?

DEVIN
Knowledge.

NOLA
About what?

DEVIN
You. Your group. Who gives the
orders. What you're up to.

Nola thinks about that.

EXT. PET STORE - LATER

The street is still deserted -- this is a rough part of town
so even the cops don't bother with it.

The two men have loaded the snake and its cage into a black
SUV with no plates.

Nola and Devin stand behind the vehicle, watching the last of
the loading.

DEVIN
I delivered. How about you?

NOLA
One hour. The water tower.

DEVIN
Why not now?

NOLA
We're on a schedule. Have to get
Bertha to her new home.

DEVIN
One hour. Water tower. You'll be
there?

Nola gives a quick grin.

NOLA
Trust me.

THE WATER TOWER

Looms like a giant mushroom on steroids.

Devin looks up at it. It's a decaying structure -- no longer in use, an idol no longer worshipped. The train tracks it used to serve are rusted and overgrown beneath Devin's feet.

This part of town isn't even part of town any more. It's way out in an industrial area that industry has long left.

Devin walks to the old metal ladder leading up to the tower and tests a rung.

It breaks off in his hand.

He tries another. It holds. He climbs about ten feet up. Some rungs are missing, so he shimmies up the pole till he gets a hand-hold.

As he swings himself around, a rung breaks and Devin hangs precariously.

He doesn't yell, but he's mad at himself for getting into this predicament.

DEVIN
Stupid...

He looks below for a clear space to land.

HIS POV

It's all rusty train tracks and rocks -- gonna be a hard landing.

DEVIN

Takes a deep breath and prepares to let go.

Then he hears something.

NOLA

Give me your hand!

Nola's actually above him on the tower ladder. She holds her good hand down to him.

DEVIN

You're hurt. You could never hold me.

NOLA

Try me. If I can't, we fall together.

Devin doesn't even think about it, swings up. Just as he does, the handrail he's holding comes off.

He grabs Nola's hand and she groans in pain as she takes his full weight.

It looks like her feet will slip from where they're hooked onto the ladder.

But she holds on and she starts swinging him.

He's scared but sees what she's doing -- getting him over to a steel cross-beam where he can climb back to the ladder.

The first few times, he's not close enough -- finally she gets him there and he grabs the beam with both hands.

Nola lets out a scream, almost falls, but catches herself, hangs in the air by her feet, then easily doubles her body up almost like an acrobat to get her hands on the ladder.

They regard each other across the yards of space between them.

DEVIN

Should I say thanks?

NOLA

Not yet.

DEVIN

When, then?

NOLA

After I beat you to the top.

And she's off and up, like a spider climbing everything she can touch. Somehow doing it all with one arm.

Devin hesitates, then climbs hand over hand to the ladder and clambers up as fast as he can.

UP THE TOWER

Devin moves fast up the decomposing hulk, but rungs still break off, handholds suddenly come loose. He pulls himself up to a platform, that promptly collapses under him.

He hangs by one hand about sixty feet up.

He sees movement in the darkness near him. Nola stands on the circular surface of the tower, holding on to a steel brace with her good hand.

DEVIN

Shall I email you an invitation? Or grovel a little? Help me.

She shakes her head.

NOLA

Prove yourself. Lesson one.

And she disappears upward.

Devin looks around, can't see much. He starts swinging his body out, again and again, finally he throws himself to the right with all his force.

He's about to fly off the whole structure, but suddenly sees the brace that Nola held. He grabs it and slams into the side of the tower with a grunt.

Then he's up, not looking down, just rushing to the top.

Nola is already there, looking at the crescent moon.

NOLA (CONT'D)

Now you can thank me.

DEVIN

Not till you tell me your name.

NOLA

How about "Mystery Woman?"

DEVIN
I don't talk to strangers. Or thank
them.

That gets a smile. She turns to him and holds out her hand.

NOLA
Nola.

DEVIN
Thanks, Nola.

And he sees she's got a snake ring on now.

DEVIN (CONT'D)
I'm betting you didn't steal yours.

NOLA
No, but I stole to get it.

DEVIN
Old Bertha?

She nods.

NOLA
She was step three for me.

DEVIN
Three?

NOLA
Yes. Step one was right here.

DEVIN
So I'm ready for two?

She shakes her head.

NOLA
You haven't even started. But you
can if you want to really earn
that.

He looks at the ring.

DEVIN
What will it get me?

NOLA
Everything.

DEVIN
Including you?

NOLA
I'm not a thing. And I'm not for
sale.

DEVIN
What if I say yes?

NOLA
Say it and see.

DEVIN
Yes.

And suddenly he's grabbed and dragged up to the platform at the very top of the water tower. He starts to struggle but they have the advantage.

AT THE TOP OF THE WATER TOWER

It's the Beard and the Blond. They're carrying him now and they take him right to the edge, stand him on the side.

NOLA
Ready?

DEVIN
To die?

NOLA
Life, death, it's all the same.

DEVIN
Then I'm ready.

And they throw him over the side.

He doesn't scream.

DOWN

Devin falls downwards like a meteor. And he laughs with exhilaration.

Death rushes up to meet him.

And he stops ten feet from the bottom. They'd put a bungee cord around his legs without his knowledge. The cord snaps back, tosses him up.

He laughs hysterically. He bounces up and down a few more times, loving it.

ON TOP OF THE TOWER

Beard and Blond haul Devin back up. He's smiling like the Cheshire Cat.

Nola can't help but smile back at him.

NOLA

Well?

DEVIN

I thought I was gonna die. It was great!

NOLA

That's step one. Ready for two?

DEVIN

Why me? Just because I stole the ring?

NOLA

It's the way you stole it. You could be useful to us.

DEVIN

Who's us?

Instead of answering, she gestures out at the view, the twinkling lights of the city.

NOLA

Tell me what you feel about that.

DEVIN

Anger, hate, death.

NOLA

Anything you like about it?

DEVIN

Destroying it.

NOLA

How?

DEVIN

Stealing its secrets. I take them from everyone who has power over me.

He jumps up on the railing and walks on it.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

That teacher Danforth is always on my ass. But I know he's a closet white supremacist. I have the files from his secret computer.

He jumps from one part of the railing to another.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

That dickwipe Brad. He likes putting on women's things. Not that there's anything wrong with that. But his team buddies might not like it.

He jumps again, pretends to fall, stops himself. Nola just watches.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

The coach -- he threw a football in my face -- he's having a fling with the principal's wife. I've got the video he made.

NOLA

And what do you do with all these secrets?

DEVIN

Nothing yet. Just having them gives me power.

NOLA

Not if they don't know about it.

DEVIN

They will some day. When I'm ready to leave.

NOLA

Why not leave now?

DEVIN

My Dad would track me down and kill me or worse. What about you?

NOLA

I'm free. I can go wherever I want. Courtesy of the Snake.

DEVIN

So you're in the club. What about me?

NOLA
Step Two is tomorrow night.

DEVIN
What do I do?

NOLA
You steal. But for us this time.

Devin's not sure about that.

NOLA (CONT'D)
Meet me at the square. Midnight.

Now she jumps to the railing.

NOLA (CONT'D)
One more thing. A gun.

DEVIN
You want me to steal one?

NOLA
Can you use one?

He shakes his head.

NOLA (CONT'D)
Learn.

She vaults over the side of the water tower and disappears.
Devin doesn't try to follow.

He checks out several avenues of descent, then carefully
climbs down.

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE TOWER

Devin jumps the last few feet. He starts to walk off, but
there's movement in the shadows near him.

Then the sound of glass breaking.

A homeless man, big and robed in dirty clothes, comes out of
a dark area, holding a broken bottle.

Devin veers away from him. But a shopping cart full of boxes
and plastic bottles is pushed in front of him.

Two more homeless people -- could be men, could be women --
follow the cart and stand menacingly near him.

He backs up and tries another direction.

A baseball bat hits him in the midriff.

DEVIN
Hey! What did I do?

HOMELESS MAN
It's what you're gonna do.

He hits Devin again with the bat.

Devin jumps up and tries to run fast, but he barrels right into someone big.

It's Rufus.

DEVIN
Roof! Save me!

Rufus waves the attackers away.

RUFUS
Gotta watch the company you keep.

He points to the snake ring.

RUFUS (CONT'D)
The people who wear that are our enemies.

DEVIN
What do you know about them?

RUFUS
Secret society. The real power behind things.

DEVIN
Then they're better than the assholes who chase you away and beat you now.

RUFUS
Nobody with power is our friend.

DEVIN
I'm your friend, aren't I?

RUFUS
Be careful, Devin.

He and the other homeless leave Devin beneath the water tower.

EXT. DEVIN'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Devin sneaks up to his house and carefully tries the front door.

It opens. He goes inside.

INT. DEVIN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Devin starts to slowly shut the door.

Then an axe smashes into it, closing it completely.

He turns and sees his father smirking.

CHIEF CALDWELL
Did you have permission?

He takes his Glock out of its holster, points it at Devin.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)
Did you?

Devin flinches, then stands up straight.

DEVIN
I don't need permission.

His father rushes across the room, pushes him against the wall and holds him in place with his arm across Devin's neck.

With his free hand, he cocks the Glock and holds it to Devin's head.

CHIEF CALDWELL
I give you credit for balls, son.
But rules are rules.

He takes a breath and starts to pull the trigger, then at the least minute, moves the gray Glock to Devin's ear and fires right next to it.

The bullet shatters a window.

Devin screams at the sound, pushes away from his Dad and holds his hand over his ear.

DEVIN
What the fuck, Dad? What if people hear?

CHIEF CALDWELL

In this neighborhood? Guns go off every hour.

He makes that raspy chuckle and holsters his gun.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Just remember who runs your life. And it's not you.

Devin wants to say something, but thinks better.

DEVIN

All right, you win. But I want you to do something for me.

CHIEF CALDWELL

You want me to do something for you?

DEVIN

The gun. Teach me.

CHIEF CALDWELL

Well now you're getting sense. You never wanted anything to do with guns before.

DEVIN

I'm learning about life. The guys with the guns don't get messed with.

CHIEF CALDWELL

Well that's good news, son. You trot on home after school and I'll teach you a few things.

Devin nods, heads to his room.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Make your own breakfast. I got an early call. Some crazy kids on the water tower.

He heads for the front door.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING

Devin walks up to his high school. The usual tormentors are there, giving him shit, but he ignores them, holds his head high, holds his hand with the snake ring on it even higher.

Suddenly he's surrounded by Brad, Trent and their gang.

TRENT

Missed you after school, worm boy.

BRAD

Maybe little faghead was getting
porked out back.

TRENT

Was that it, buttboy, getting
reared?

BRAD

That cutie Carol is wasting her
time on you. I think I'll step in
and save her with my rod of plenty.

Devin can't help it.

DEVIN

You just want to borrow her
clothes. Too bad she's not your
size, tranny!

Brad swings at him, Devin ducks, smacks Brad's face with the
snake ring, drawing blood.

Then he kicks Brad where it hurts most, runs for the door.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL MAIN HALLWAY

Devin dashes inside, but gets pulled aside by two Security
Guys manning the door.

SECURITY GUY

Starting fights again. Going on
your record, Caldwell. You'll never
graduate.

Devin knows better than to argue, runs to his locker, dumps
his books, grabs his gym bag and heads to the gym.

INT. GYM

Devin walks into his least favorite class, tries to sneak
around the back of the basketball court -- and runs smack
into cheerleader practice.

The girls sneer at him and wave pom-poms in his face. Then
they're gone and Devin sees Carol dressed in a cheerleader
outfit, her face full of make-up.

They're both stunned at this discovery.

CAROL

Oh, hi.

DEVIN

You joined cheerleading?

She tries a smile, does a half-hearted cheerleading move.

CAROL

It's good exercise, you know.

DEVIN

I'm disappointed in you, Carol. Do you like being part of a mindless group that doesn't think for themselves?

That does it for her.

CAROL

Get real, Devin. This is what girls do. We like it. And guys like playing sports. It's the way the world is.

DEVIN

Not the whole world.

He starts to walk away.

CAROL

Her name is Elizabeth Heller.

He stops and looks at her, confused.

CAROL (CONT'D)

She lives in Darby Hill, two towns over. Her father owns a liquor store.

She holds up her smartphone and plays the video Joey took of Nola and Devin.

CAROL (CONT'D)

She's nobody special. She's not some super mystery woman. No one is. You're going to have to deal with reality, Devin. It's not like the comic books.

That info does matter to Devin, but he tries not to show it.

DEVIN
Have a good life, Carol.

He rushes off, a bit angrily, right around the corner and into COACH PRENDERGAST. He's a bull of a man who sees everything in terms of win or lose. He's got a soccer ball in his hand.

He pushes Devin back, hard.

COACH
Late again, Caldwell. I'm beginning to think you don't like me.

Devin can barely look at him.

COACH (CONT'D)
Look at you. Pale, skinny. You think you're going to be able to survive?

He throws the soccer ball at Devin with as much force as he can. It hits Devin in the stomach and sends him sprawling.

COACH (CONT'D)
No reflexes, no coordination. You're not meant for success.

He yells out to the gym class.

COACH (CONT'D)
All of you, look at this. An example of what you don't want to be.

He picks up the ball and throws it at Devin again. Devin doesn't try to kick it, just lets it hit him in the chest.

COACH (CONT'D)
Weak, unfit, no skills of any kind. I can't do anything with this nothing.

He tosses the ball one more time. It hits Devin in the nose. Blood comes out of his left nostril.

He looks up with hate in his eyes.

DEVIN'S BACK YARD - AFTERNOON

That same look of hate in Devin's eyes. But now he's in his back yard after school.

His father has set up a make-shift shooting range, with cans and bottles against a concrete back wall.

Chief Caldwell holds the Glock out to his son. The dull gray looks like it could suck up all the light in the world.

CHIEF CALDWELL

Take it, son. First lesson: the weapon is your friend. Treat it with respect.

Devin takes the gun.

His father walks behind him, pushes him into position.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Stand up straight. Turn your body so you won't be as much of a target. Now hold it up.

Devin holds the gun up. His father hits him in the arms to make him hold it higher.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Hold it like you mean it, boy. Don't let it droop like a limp dick. Hold it hard, firm, up high!

Devin does. His father presses his body against Devin's, putting his arm out along Devin's arm.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Now just get used to aiming it like you were pointing your finger. Then breathe in. And as you're breathing out, just squeeze lightly. Don't pull. Like it's part of your body.

Devin's very uneasy with his father that close, but he does as he's told.

The gun fires and he's surprised at the recoil. The bullet hits the wall about three inches from a bottle.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Not shabby for the first time. You'll get it. You're my blood, after all.

He steps back.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Now you know what she feels like when she spits.

(MORE)

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

You know how she moves. You can tame her, you can handle her. Do it.

Devin tries again. Closer this time.

He fires again. The bottle explodes.

His father slaps him on the back.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Damn, you are a Caldwell! Proud of you, son. You do have what it takes. Again.

Devin tries. He misses some, but eventually hits all the targets.

His father walks over and sets up more.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Those boys won't fuck with you now. You've got the power. It's all about who can kill who first. Remember that, son.

As his father sets up targets, Devin reloads the magazine, shoves it in and holds up the gun.

HIS POV

The gun pointing right at his father as Chief Caldwell sets up the targets.

The Chief doesn't notice at first, and Devin's hand follows his father as his father moves across the back yard.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

I tried to teach you that all your life. You thought I was cruel, but I was just learning you survival skills. You'll thank me now. You've gotten tough. You can handle life.

Then he looks up and sees the gun pointed at him.

Angrily he stalks right up to the outraised gun.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

You don't point that unless you plan on using it.

He stands with his chest on the barrel of the gun.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)
Do you plan on using it?

Devin raises the gun to just over his father's shoulder and fires six times, close to his father's ear.

ALL SIX BOTTLES AND CANS

Are hit one after the other.

DEVIN'S FATHER

Holds his hand out for the gun.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)
Now let me show ya some fancy
stuff. More empty beer cans over
there.

Devin goes to the trash can where there are quite a lot of empty Pabst Blue Ribbon cans -- his Dad's beer of choice.

He grabs a bunch and goes out to the wall.

As he puts the first can near the wall, it's blasted out from under him.

DEVIN'S FATHER

Smiles grimly and fires the gun.

HIS POV

The gun is pointed right at Devin.

DEVIN

Jumps. The bullets hit the cans right out of his hands, then two whiz by his ears to ka-chunk into the wall behind him.

He stands there in shock.

HIS FATHER

Lowers the gun.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)
The point is to hit what you aim
at.

That raspy chuckle explodes from the Chief.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)
Ya look like you were about to shit
your pants!

He laughs uncontrollably.

INT. DEVIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Devin's father is half-bombed, watching re-runs of "COPS".

Devin walks past him towards the door. His father waves him
on.

CHIEF CALDWELL
You know how to handle yourself
now, son. Don't let them fuck with
ya.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

The square is deserted. In former days it was quaint. There's
the remains of an old band shell in the center. Now it's just
a place where the homeless get out of the wind.

There's a clock tower that functions. City Hall is not as
decrepit as some of the other buildings in the area. But
still: a lot of closed storefronts.

Devin walks past the bandshell, looks up at the clock.

Almost midnight.

LIGHTS

Blind Devin. He holds up his hand in front of his face, about
to run.

SOUTHEY
Your Dad know you're out this late,
Dev?

Southey steps out of his patrol car. He likes patrolling at
night and giving people grief.

DEVIN

Call him. He's probably passed out now but he might answer.

SOUTHEY

Why do I have the feeling you're up to no good?

DEVIN

My guess is that's the feeling you have about everyone.

There's movement in the shadows behind Southey. The policeman doesn't see it, but Nola and the Beard and the Blond are there. Both the men are armed. Beard points his gun at Southey's back.

But Nola runs forward, past Southey, right up to Devin.

NOLA

Sorry, darling. Didn't mean to keep a guy waiting.

She puts her arms around him and gives him a big kiss.

Devin's quite stunned but plays along.

DEVIN

You're always worth waiting for.

Nola turns and gives Southey a seductive smile.

NOLA

Everything copacetic, officer -- or is it a crime to make out in the dark?

She pulls Devin away towards a dark corner.

SOUTHEY

Curfew's one ayem. I'll be back then and you better be long gone.

DEVIN

I may not be as fast on the draw as you are, Southey.

SOUTHEY

Ya got lip, boy. Your father will hear about it.

Nola and Devin move into the shadow of the bandshell. They see Southey's headlights fade in the distance.

Quickly, she removes her arms from Devin and is all business.

NOLA
We haven't got much time.

DEVIN
Yes, Elizabeth.

NOLA
Who?

DEVIN
Maybe it's Beth or Betty. Elizabeth
Heller. Darby Hill. Dad owns a
liquor store.

Nola's face sets into tightness.

NOLA
Never heard of her.

DEVIN
Nobody around here would name their
girl Nola.

NOLA
I named myself. First stage of
freedom. Nobody owns you but you.

She starts to walk off.

NOLA (CONT'D)
Now do you want to learn about
power or do you want to play stupid
games?

Devin moves fast in front of her.

DEVIN
Your arm's better.

NOLA
No but the sling was a sign of
weakness.

DEVIN
What am I doing?

NOLA
That's always the first question
you have to ask. What are you doing
and does it move you forward or
backward?

DEVIN
I'm guessing upward.

She cocks and eyebrow.

DEVIN (CONT'D)
I have a skill and you want me to
use it for you. I can climb.

NOLA
How'd you learn to do that?

DEVIN
You get chased as much as I do, you
have to learn escape tactics. Plus
I have no fear.

NOLA
None?

DEVIN
I fall, I die. No biggie. So what's
the plan, Betty?

She scowls.

DEVIN (CONT'D)
Sorry. What's the Snake got in
store for me?

She points to City Hall and the Clock Tower.

NOLA
Mayor's office, top floor.

DEVIN
Easy. I know a way in.

NOLA
Yeah, but you don't know that he
has another secret office behind
his regular office.

She pulls a rolled sheet out from under her coat. A floor
plan.

NOLA (CONT'D)
Here, behind this wall. We don't
know how to get in. We do know he
has a locked desk in it. Bring us
the box in that desk.

DEVIN
What's in the box?

NOLA

No questions. Just bring it.

Beard and Blond have come up behind them.

DEVIN

Do they know your name is Betty?

She pushes him away, starts to walk off.

NOLA

Bring it to us at the Water Tower.

Devin watches them go.

CLOSE ON: THE SNAKE RING

It's on Devin's finger, on his hand which is pulling him up the side of the clock tower.

WIDE

Devin is a small speck on the side of the tower, but he's up right next to the big clock.

THE CLOCK HANDS

Are bigger than he is.

From there, he creeps across the roof of City Hall next to it.

ON THE ROOF

It's sloped and the shingles are coming off, but Devin knows where he's going.

He slides across it to the far side, where it overlooks a little cupola that sticks up. The white paint is faded and cracked on it.

He works on one of the windows on the cupola, lifts it open.

A wire is attached to it.

He takes out a pen-knife and cuts the wire.

Then he squeezes himself in the small window.

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

It's a pretty big office, with a marble floor and some ornate decorations.

Devin is way up top in the ceiling where the cupola windows are.

He's on a tiny ledge and it looks like there's no way down.

But right below him is a large chandelier.

He hooks his feet back on the window sill and hangs upside down.

He's still a good five feet from the chain holding the chandelier.

He unhooks one foot and almost falls. Now he's dangling by just his left leg.

The chandelier is still out of reach.

He takes a breath -- and wiggles his left foot free.

He immediately falls, but grabs hold of the chandelier chain just at the last moment.

He hangs there and the chandelier swings furiously back and forth.

Then the door opens below.

A small lamp is switched on.

But the chandelier makes creaking noises as it moves.

Devin holds on for dear life and looks below.

HIS POV

MAYOR ALLEN, a round wheel of a man who is almost always in a three-piece suit, waddles in, along with MR. HUGGINS, a nervous-looking bank employee.

MAYOR ALLEN

Our weekly clandestine rendezvous.
Quite exciting, eh, Huggins?

HUGGINS

Let's just hurry up.

Huggins holds a briefcase that he opens. Some papers rustle in his shaking hands.

Mayor Allen goes to one wall, pulls a book down -- and a panel opens in the wall.

DEVIN

Can't see into the room beyond. And his grip on the chain is getting slippery with sweat.

His hands slide down the chain and his foot hits some glass in the chandelier.

BELOW

Huggins freezes.

HUGGINS (CONT'D)

Did you hear that?

MAYOR ALLEN

You're always hearing something.
Every goddam week. Just come in and
give me the papers.

They disappear into the hidden room.

DEVIN

Steadies himself on the chandelier. He tries to find a way to sit in it and hide himself, but his weight makes the whole structure drop a foot or so.

BELOW

Allen and Huggins leave the secret room.

MAYOR ALLEN (CONT'D)

Will you stop worrying? None of
this is in the bank's computer. The
bad mortgages are buried in a
swapping scheme that neither of us
are gonna understand. But when
foreclosure time comes, bingo,
we're both richer than shit.

HUGGINS

I hope you're right.

MAYOR ALLEN

I always am. Drink?

He pours himself one from a decanter, swishes it around in front of Huggins. Huggins shakes his head.

MAYOR ALLEN (CONT'D)

Not sure I trust a man who doesn't imbibe.

Allen drinks.

HUGGINS

It's late. My wife suspects something.

MAYOR ALLEN

Let her think you're out catting around. She'll fight to hold onto ya.

THE CHANDELIER

Drops another few inches.

THE MAYOR AND HUGGINS

Look up at it.

THEIR POV

Too dark to see much. Maybe Devin's form is visible, but they're not looking for it.

THE MAYOR

Finishes his drink.

MAYOR ALLEN (CONT'D)

Damn place is falling apart. Can't get out of here for good too soon.

They leave.

DEVIN

Exhales. And the chandelier jerks down again. He loses his hold and smashes onto the marble floor.

The chandelier sways ominously above him. Could fall at any moment.

Devin slowly gets up. He's hurting.

He limps to the bookcase, tries to remember what book the Mayor moved.

HIS POV

It's "The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" by Gibbon. Devin pulls it and the panel opens.

He steps into it.

INT. SECRET ROOM

It's a tiny room with no ventilation. Devin turns on a light. In the middle of the room is a small scrolltop desk.

Devin goes to it. The top is locked. He pushes on it hard. Won't budge.

He takes out his pen-knife and pries at the lock. Takes a while, but it finally gives.

Inside is a long metal box that has one lock built into it, but has another padlock around it for double protection.

Devin lifts the whole thing -- it's heavy.

Devin struggles with it out the door.

IN THE MAYOR'S OFFICE

Devin looks back up at the chandelier. He can't get out that way.

He goes to the front office door and manages to get it open while holding the strong-box.

INT. OFFICE HALLWAY

It's dark. Devin stumbles over to the main stairwell and goes down.

ON THE PHONE

Is Devin's climb up the clock tower and run across the roof. Then it shows the Mayor and Huggins going in the front door.

DEVIN

Is surprised.

JOEY (CONT'D)

Figured I'd shoot them, too, so you'd remember it all.

DEVIN

How did you know I'd be here?

Joey cringes a bit.

JOEY

I followed you from your home. You never saw me, did ya? I learned it good just like you taught me.

THE VIDEO ON THE PHONE

Continues to play. The Mayor and Huggins come out the front door and for some reason they're laughing up a storm.

DEVIN

Starts to reach out for the phone, but headlights sweep across them.

DEVIN

Southey! Run!

THE POLICE CAR

With Southey at the wheel rumbles after them.

DEVIN AND JOEY

Run past the bandstand. Devin holds the strong-box and races at top speed. Joey tries to match him.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

Go home, Joey!

JOEY

I got the window rigged up so I can
get in easy. Nobody'll know.

DEVIN

Go home. I don't need you with me.

JOEY

But I'm your videographer.

Devin turns to face him while running.

DEVIN

You're a little twerp who's gonna
get me caught. Not get the hell out
of here!

That hurts Joey, who stops moving and stands in shock.

Devin just shakes his head and takes off.

SOUTHEY

Ignores Joey and drives his car after Devin.

JOEY

Slumps and maybe lets loose a little sob.

Then he walks off into the night.

DEVIN

Ducks into an alley, then through another.

He runs past a group of homeless.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

Cops! Move!

The homeless do move, but they don't run. Instead, they push
huge trash dumpsters across the alley so Southey can't drive
through.

Then they just move around the corner to another alley.

Devin stops running.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

Smart. Thanks.

HOMELESS MAN

Rufus likes you, boy. Just make sure you earn his friendship.

Devin isn't sure what that means but races away with the box.

SOUTHEY

Pulls up to the dumpsters, lights flashing. He's moving so fast, he smacks into them, but not much damage is done.

In the car, he swears to himself.

EXT. WATER TOWER - NIGHT

Devin runs up to the Water Tower, still carrying the strong-box. He looks exhausted.

He stops under the tower.

Suddenly forms leap down on him. He jumps back, but it's just Nola and her two male companions.

The bearded guy takes the box from Devin.

DEVIN

So you sent me on the night the Mayor does his weekly drop-off. You wanted me to get caught.

NOLA

What makes you think we knew about that?

DEVIN

You know about everything.

NOLA

Part of the test. Can't make things too easy for you.

DEVIN

So I did it. What do I get?

NOLA

This.

She snaps her fingers and Blond Guy puts a bag over Devin's head. Bearded guy puts down the box and ties Devin's arms behind him.

Devin's voice is muffled under the cloth bag.

DEVIN

What did I do to deserve this?

NOLA

Shut up and learn.

They drag him off to the black SUV parked near the water tower.

DARKNESS

It's pitch black. The only sound is Devin's breathing inside the bag.

Movement -- we can tell he's moving somewhere, but he can't see or hear a thing.

Then:

BLINDING LIGHTS

Devin, the bag now off his head, holds up his hands to block out the lights shining in his face.

The lights are torches -- real fire -- very close to him.

He flinches from the heat.

He's in a stone place, very dank, very dark. Could be a big cellar. Or part of an abandoned building.

But it's set up as a place of ritual.

A large, glowing red snake has been painted on the floor.

The torches are carried by Beard, Blond and two other hooded figures.

Beyond the snake on the floor sits a make-shift throne.

On that throne sits a man in red robes, a snake emblem on his chest. He, too, is hooded.

Nola stands near him. And near her in her glass cage is Bertha, the Burmese Python.

SNAKE MAN

You've done well.

DEVIN

Is that what we do, steal for you?

SNAKE MAN

You do whatever you're required to do.

DEVIN

And what do I get?

SNAKE MAN

The joy of serving us.

DEVIN

I've served too many people in my life. I only want to serve myself.

SNAKE MAN

By serving us, you free yourself.

DEVIN

Explain yourself, snakey.

NOLA

Devin...

DEVIN

Come on, you dress in a sheet here in someone's basement. How am I supposed to take you seriously?

The men with the torches move in ominously.

SNAKE MAN

The snake pre-dates humanity. The snake is eternal and relentless.

DEVIN

OK, you guys beat me up, too. Everyone else does. That makes you no different from anyone else.

SNAKE MAN

Look, son, we are the real power. Our society is broad, it encompasses the world.

DEVIN

Show me.

The Snake Man turns to Nola.

SNAKE MAN

He doubts us.

NOLA

He doubts everyone.

DEVIN
It's a healthy way to live.

SNAKE MAN
Tomorrow you will have proof.
Tomorrow you will have your
freedom. Then tomorrow night you
will get your final test.

DEVIN
Multiple choice?

SNAKE MAN
Sarcasm usually masks fear.

DEVIN
I'm not afraid.

SNAKE MAN
You'll prove that tomorrow night.
Take him out.

Beard and Blond move forward and put the bag on Devin's head again.

EXT. DEVIN'S STREET - LATER

Devin is pushed from the SUV with the bag still on his head. As he exits, they untie his hands.

Nola calls from the vehicle.

NOLA
You'll need a gun.

Devin, still hooded, turns to her.

DEVIN
Gun?

NOLA
Tomorrow. Get one.

The SUV speeds off. Devin takes off his hood. The sun peeks up over the horizon.

He's a few doors away from his house.

As he walks to his front door, Albert appears groggily on his porch at the next house.

ALBERT
Dude, you gonna get it!

He makes his fingers like a gun and fires at Devin.

Devin fires back; Albert pretends to fall.

Devin goes to his house and enters.

INT. DEVIN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Devin walks in to see his father snoring on the sofa.

He goes to the sofa, moves his father's feet and sits next to him.

Chief Caldwell sits up. He's had a rough night.

CHIEF CALDWELL

Did I tell you to wake me?

DEVIN

Dad, you've got more than one gun, right?

CHIEF CALDWELL

You know I do. Gotta be prepared.

DEVIN

Can I carry one tonight? I've got to show some assholes that I mean business.

CHIEF CALDWELL

That's the way, son. Listen to me: just show it. Don't even take it out. You have more power the less you flaunt it.

He gets up and goes to the living room closet, takes a locked box from the bottom of the closet, opens it.

Inside are several handguns, a shotgun and an MP5 9mm Submachine Gun. He strokes the last one.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

If they ever come for us, this baby will get some use.

He picks a handgun out. A shiny silver Beretta 92FS.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

This is a beauty. Big. It'll pack a punch and show you're ready for the big time.

He walks over to Devin and solemnly holds it out, grip first.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)
Now you are not legally authorized
to use this. You are not to fire it
unless you are in mortal danger. Do
you understand me?

Devin takes the gun from him and nods.

DEVIN
Thank you, Dad. This means a lot to
me.

Chief Caldwell impulsively hugs Devin. It's uncomfortable for both of them and it doesn't last long.

CHIEF CALDWELL
You're learning, son, you're
learning.

There might be something glistening in the Chief's eye.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING

Devin arrives at his school carrying a backpack. He looks at the usual crowd out front. Normally they'd come forward and give him grief.

Not one of them moves to him. A few talk among themselves and point at him.

Devin walks up to the door, almost at the same time as Trent does.

DEVIN
No quips?

Trent shrugs.

DEVIN (CONT'D)
Where's your fearless leader, the
cross-dresser?

TRENT
Gone.

DEVIN
Gone how?

TRENT

Moved. His Dad was called away on business or something. The whole family left last night.

He pushes past Devin and goes inside.

Devin follows, looks at the metal detector and instead hands his backpack to the security guard.

The guard just waves him through.

SECURITY GUY

You're good to go.

Surprised, Devin walks into the school.

IN THE HALLWAY

No one bothers Devin. No one talks to him, either.

He sees Carol in the distance, but she rushes quickly away.

INT. CLASSROOM

Mr. Danforth strides around his class. Devin rushes in a little late and sits.

Danforth looks at him but doesn't comment.

MR. DANFORTH

Who read last night's lesson?

He stares directly at Devin, but instead points to someone else.

INT. GYM

Devin, dressed for gym class, slowly approaches the Coach.

The Coach turns and looks at him.

COACH

I was outa line, kid. I should never have done that to ya.

Devin doesn't know what to say.

COACH (CONT'D)

Ain't your fault that you haven't
got the sports gene. Go run the
track. See you tomorrow.

Devin looks across the gym.

HIS POV

The Cheerleaders practice and Carol is among them. She looks pretty hot in her skimpy outfit. But she will not return Devin's stare.

DEVIN

Looks at the other guys in gym class who normally torment him. They keep their distance.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

After school, Devin leaves by the front door for the first time in years.

Trent and the other members of Brad's gang eye him but say nothing.

Devin walks away from the high school, past the nearby elementary school.

He sees Joey leaving by himself.

DEVIN

Hey, Joey!

Joey takes one look at him and runs off.

Devin hefts his backpack and walks west.

ON TOP OF THE WATER TOWER

Devin sits alone on the tower, watching the sun set. Very alone.

He lifts his backpack and feels inside, pulls the Beretta out, checks the magazine, hefts it, feels the weight.

NOLA

Feels good, doesn't it?

Nola has appeared behind him without a sound.

DEVIN

Good? This?

NOLA

The power. No one will mess with you when you have that.

DEVIN

Who messed with you?

NOLA

Who says anyone did?

Devin disengages the safety on the gun.

DEVIN

My father slaps me. Says it's to make me strong. The guys at school ridicule me, call me a fag and a freak. The Coach throws soccer balls at my face. That's why I need this. That's why I'm joining your group. So what about you?

Nola looks out at the final rays of the setting sun, doesn't talk for a moment. When she does, the words have to be pulled from her because she's never said them to anyone.

NOLA

My step-brother molested me. I told my Dad but the wife just complained I was jealous of her kids. She hit me with a broom, a goddam broom. The kids in my town, they just put up with everything because they think that's the way it always was and always will be. I know different.

She looks at Devin, tears in her eyes.

NOLA (CONT'D)

I'm different now. I can do things. I have control of my life. Soon you will, too.

Devin puts the gun's safety back on.

DEVIN

So what do I do?

NOLA

Don't know. The boss has to tell you when it's a big job.

DEVIN
Who is he?

NOLA
Does it matter?

DEVIN
Guess not.

He stands up.

DEVIN (CONT'D)
Let's go.

They both begin the descent from the tower.

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WATER TOWER

The Beard and the Blond wait with the SUV. The Blond holds the hood in his hands.

DEVIN (CONT'D)
Whatsamatter, you don't trust me?

BLOND
Not yet.

Devin looks at Nola.

DEVIN
How about you?

She looks at the ground.

NOLA
Not my call.

Devin shrugs, takes the hood and puts it on himself.

INT. SUBTERRANEAN CHAMBER

Devin takes the hood off and stands before the Snake Man on his makeshift throne.

He takes his backpack from the beard and pulls the gun out.

DEVIN
This good enough for you?

SNAKE MAN
Is it good enough for you? You have to use it.

DEVIN

When?

SNAKE MAN

Tonight.

The Snake Man stands and comes close to him.

SNAKE MAN (CONT'D)

Tell me what happened today.

DEVIN

Nothing.

SNAKE MAN

And that surprised you.

Devin nods.

DEVIN

No one bothered me. No one said a single bad word to me. That's never happened. Not as long as I can remember.

SNAKE MAN

Our powers are wide. But to remain powerful we need to control those who have power out there. When you gave us the Mayor's papers, that gave us control over him.

He puts his face even closer to Devin.

SNAKE MAN (CONT'D)

But sometimes there's someone in our way that we can't control. So we have to remove them. That's what you're going to do. Remove someone who won't bend to our will.

Now his face is maybe a half inch from Devin's.

SNAKE MAN (CONT'D)

Can you do it? Can you kill?

Devin's eyes waver.

SNAKE MAN (CONT'D)

If you do it, the whole world is yours. Don't look on it as murder. Those things out there aren't people. They're not living. They're like zombies. They're already dead.

Devin's eyes get steady again.

DEVIN
You're right. I'll do it.

SNAKE MAN
The power is in your hands from now on. Do this and you'll be part of our Inner Circle.

DEVIN
What if I get caught?

SNAKE MAN
It's all set up to look like a robbery. We already know that gun you hold is not registered. Your father took it from someone he locked up.

DEVIN
And who is it I have to kill?

SNAKE MAN
You must know. Why else would we choose you?

Devin shakes his head.

SNAKE MAN (CONT'D)
You will kill the Chief of Police, your father.

Devin's eyes go very wide and very white.

EXT. WATER TOWER - LATER

Beneath the water tower, the SUV drives off, leaving Nola and Devin.

NOLA
Are you going to do it?

DEVIN
I don't know.

NOLA
A life for a life. You take one and you get yours back.

DEVIN
Did you do it?

Nola looks at the ground again.

NOLA

Let's just say my step-brother
won't bother anyone any more.

Devin looks at the gun in his hand.

DEVIN

I just don't know.

NOLA

I do. He's the person you hate
worse than anyone in the world.
He's the reason you don't go home
at night. He's the one who makes
you feel like shit. If he's gone,
you can finally be someone.

She leans over and kisses him on the cheek.

NOLA (CONT'D)

It's the only way you can be free.

And she's gone into the night.

Devin walks away from the water tower. Before him a gang of
homeless people give him a very wide berth, parting on either
side of him.

EXT. DEVIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Devin stands outside his house, the gun hidden under his
shirt.

Albert flashes him a peace sign from next door. Devin doesn't
respond.

Devin walks up the front steps as if to his own funeral. He
carefully opens the door and goes inside.

INT. DEVIN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Devin slips into the house as quietly as possible.

As usual, his father is passed out on the sofa in front of
the television. All other lights in the room are off, so the
TV gives off its eerie illumination.

Devin walks softly over to the front of the sofa and stares
at his father.

Chief Caldwell snores and clutches a bottle of Old Grand Dad, which has spilled on the sofa and on the floor.

Devin looks at him with contempt.

He takes the gun out.

His father's snores get loud, then become mumblings. He moves around on the sofa, restlessly, as if dreaming.

Then he laughs that raspy chuckle Devin hates so much.

Devin takes the safety off the gun and points it at his father.

But he's no killer. He just holds the gun there, trying to work himself up to it.

He moves closer, points the gun right at his father's head.

And his father's eyes blink open.

Chief Caldwell stares at the gun without fear. He doesn't seem drunk or unsteady in any way.

He moves slowly, comes to a sitting position, staring at the gun.

CHIEF CALDWELL

Well?

Devin holds the gun on him but his hand shakes a bit.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Are you going to use it this time?
That's what you wanted it for all
along, wasn't it?

The Chief stands up, never taking his eyes off the gun.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

You hate me. You hate the way I
treat you. But it was to toughen
you up, son. It's the only way
you'll get by in this shit-world we
live in. You have to be tougher and
stronger and more of a killer than
the next guy. So are you?

He takes a step towards Devin.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Or are you still a pussy, the way
your Mom raised you?

(MORE)

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

She gave in to your weak ways, let you stay in your room and read your stupid-ass comics, play on your goddam computer. That won't get you shit, boy. There's a whole planet out there, ready to destroy you. You have to destroy first. So do it!

He kicks a small coffee table at Devin's legs. Devin jumps out of the way but it still hits him in the ankles.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Do it, pussy boy!

He throws the bottle of Old Grand Dad at Devin, but it misses and lands on a throw rug.

The Chief walks directly at Devin and hits him in the chest with both hands.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Do it, you little fuck!

And without thinking, Devin squeezes the trigger. The first shot goes wild, but then he's aiming at his father and firing the rest of the magazine, screaming the whole time, his face contorted, inhuman.

Then the hammer clicks on an empty chamber.

And the Chief still stands there, now laughing that loud raspy chuckle.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Ya did it, son, ya did it! I'm proud of ya. Welcome to the Inner Circle!

Devin doesn't get it, just stands there in shock.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Ya didn't think I'd let you have real bullets? Ya didn't think I'd give ya a gun that would really work? But ya did it, you pulled the trigger. You're one of us now, one of the Snake.

He opens his arms wide.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Come on, give Daddy a hug.

Instead, Devin picks up the bottle of Old Grand Dad and smashes it across his father's head.

Chief Caldwell goes down and is out for real, lying on the floor.

His labored breathing shows he's still alive.

Getting himself together, Devin bends down and searches his father, finds his keys.

He goes to the living room closet, takes out the locked box and opens it.

Quickly, he grabs a handgun and the 9mm Submachine Gun. He also grabs ammunition for both.

He gets his backpack and puts all of the weaponry inside, then leaves the room.

As he leaves, he takes off the snake ring and tosses it near his father's unconscious body.

A TREE

Shakes in the night wind. It's an elm, the leaves mostly dead, the branches mostly bare. But it's alive, this tree, still surviving even though it's decades old.

A foot appears on a higher branch, then another. Devin's feet.

He climbs the tree to a large branch that leads off the main trunk. Scurrying along the branch like a monkey, he follows it to where it hangs over a roof.

Gingerly, he lets himself down on the roof and makes his way like a cat burglar across to a window.

He taps on the window, adjusting his backpack.

No answer.

He taps on it again. A light goes on inside and a face appears at the window.

Joey. He won't open the window.

Devin tries to whisper to him.

DEVIN

Joey, please. I need your help.

Joey just stares at him.

DEVIN (CONT'D)
I didn't mean it, Joey. You were never a twerp. You're my friend, one of my only friends. I need you now.

Joey opens the window and walks away from it.

Devin hesitates for a moment, wondering if anyone else could be inside. Then he climbs in.

INT. JOEY'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joey's room is a pretty typical room for a 13-year-old -- posters from Harry Potter and Marvel Comics movies, tons of games, and general disarray.

DEVIN
Where's your phone?

Joey gets the phone and brings it to him.

DEVIN (CONT'D)
Play that video from when I went in the Mayor's office.

Joey finds it quickly and plays it. Devin watches.

HIS POV

The Mayor and Huggins come out of the building, laughing.

MAYOR ALLEN
Little idiot thinks we didn't see him.

HUGGINS
He almost made the damned chandelier fall on us.

MAYOR ALLEN
Well his Dad says to let him be, so we'll let him be. Teach him a good lesson.

DEVIN

Plays the video again. Joey watches him.

JOEY

They knew you were in there. If you'd waited for me, I could have told you before.

DEVIN

Sorry, Joey. I was wrong. About a lot of things.

The door to the room opens and Devin rushes to hide behind Joey's bed.

Carol comes in and quietly shuts the door behind her. She's in a robe.

CAROL

I heard voices.

JOEY

It's Carol, it's all right, Dev.

Devin comes out from his hiding place.

DEVIN

Is it?

He and Carol regard each other.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Carol. I didn't know what I was doing.

CAROL

So she dumped you, this Elizabeth?

DEVIN

No, it's not like that.

CAROL

What is it like?

DEVIN

It's not her. It's everything. The world isn't what I thought it was.

CAROL

The world just is what it is. And we have to make the best of it.

DEVIN

You have to help me get away. They're going to be after me.

She thinks about that for a minute.

CAROL
Let me get my clothes on.

She leaves the room.

JOEY
Just like the old days, Dev. We're
going out on a mission!

Devin tousles Joey's hair.

DEVIN
This is a little more dangerous. I
don't think you can come.

Carol comes back in, buttoning up her shirt.

CAROL
Tell me what's going on, Devin.

DEVIN
While we're moving.

She puts a hand on his arm.

CAROL
I'm not leaving till I know what's
really happening.

A DOOR SLAMS below and voices are heard.

CAROL (CONT'D)
It's just my parents. They had some
friends over.

JOEY
No they --

Carol shushes him.

Devin steps back. He turns for the window. As he gets there,
Carol comes from behind and tries to keep him in the room.

CAROL
I just wanted us to be... normal.

He shakes her off.

DEVIN
I know. I can't do that.

And he's out the window, just as the bedroom door starts to
open.

Joey throws himself against the door and tries to hold it shut.

A hand with a snake-ring on it pushes through.

JOEY
Run, Devin, run!

OUTSIDE

Devin climbs down the tree at top speed, carrying his backpack. He runs off into the night.

At the window, Carol peers out. Joey joins her. Then the blind is drawn.

EXT. LIQUOR STORE - NIGHT

One of those liquor stores that caters to clients who buy one large bottle and put it in a brown bag to drink immediately.

The automatic door opens, there's the 'ding' of a sensor, and someone slips in quickly to hide behind a rack of magazines.

BEHIND THE COUNTER

A hand reaches for a sawed-off double barrel 12-gauge shotgun hidden under the counter and slowly brings it out.

CLOSE ON: THE SHOTGUN

Pointed directly at us. It is cocked.

WIDER

The gun is pointed at the back of someone's head. The person turns around. It's Devin.

He's surprised, but doesn't move.

DEVIN
Are we on the surveillance camera
right now?

Nola holds the shotgun on him. She nods.

DEVIN (CONT'D)
Then you chase me outside.

Devin makes a break for it, dives under the gun and out the door.

Nola runs after him, threatening to kill him.

OUTSIDE

Devin runs around the side of the store to an alley. Nola follows.

IN THE ALLEY

Devin waits for Nola. She still holds the sawed-off level, right at his stomach.

NOLA

How did you find me?

DEVIN

Elizabeth Heller, lives in Darby Hill, Dad owns a liquor store. It wasn't hard.

NOLA

What do you want? I have to get back inside.

DEVIN

Is this what the power of the snake got you? You work nights in a cheap booze store?

NOLA

So I need a paycheck. I'm not in the Inner Circle yet.

DEVIN

Well I am.

NOLA

You did it?

DEVIN

I pulled the trigger.

NOLA

You killed him?

He shakes his head, pushes the barrels of the shotgun away from him.

DEVIN

It was all a fake. All of it. My Dad was in on the whole scheme. He's one of them. The entire thing is a set-up.

Nola isn't buying it.

NOLA

So your Dad played a joke on you. Doesn't mean anything.

DEVIN

Tell me where they are. I want the truth.

NOLA

In case you haven't noticed, I've got the gun.

DEVIN

So use it. Look, if you think the Snake are so damned wonderful, then let me find out for myself. I'm just one guy. What could I do? I certainly am not gonna call the cops.

The Ding of the door sensor goes off. She puts the gun down and goes around the corner.

Devin waits.

Then Nola's back, all dressed in her black outfit for night missions, the shotgun on a strap over her shoulder.

NOLA

I'm going with you. To make sure you don't act up.

DEVIN

What about the store?

NOLA

Closed for the night.

DEVIN

Won't your Dad be pissed off?

NOLA

I hope so.

A FREIGHT TRAIN

Rumbles through the night.

Devin and Nola are on top of one car, lying flat.

DEVIN

I'm telling you, they're not some rebel group. They're the people who are already in charge.

NOLA

So why go to all the trouble?

DEVIN

Who knows? Thrills? Kicks? Keeping people like us in line? Same old shit, just in a snake mask.

NOLA

Why go to them? Why not run?

DEVIN

I've been running my whole life.

THE TRAIN

Is stopped in a station. Devin and Nola sneak off and head to some abandoned factory buildings in the distance.

A SKELETAL STRUCTURE

An unfinished building rises over them like a dead Transformer.

The whole area is only partially built, rusted, ruined by the recession.

DEVIN (CONT'D)

Where?

Nola points to a corner of the structure. They walk over to it.

NOLA

This is over the county line, kind of a no man's land. Good if you're going to do something illegal, I guess.

She goes to a ringed metal trap door in the floor, strains to pull it open. Devin helps her.

NOLA (CONT'D)
Not easy for one person.

DEVIN
They're not big on individuality.

The trap opens, revealing stairs leading down. Nola pulls out a small pen flashlight.

NOLA
Storage areas -- supposed to be for the computer systems that never got installed.

She starts down. Devin follows.

INT. STORAGE AREA - NIGHT

They walk carefully down the stairs. Nola shines the light for Devin so he won't fall.

Devin looks into the darkness, tries to see if enemies await him.

But Nola flicks a switch at the bottom of the stairs. Dim fluorescent lighting kicks on. It's just a big, dead room.

She points to a door in the far wall.

NOLA
There. They may not be here.

Devin shifts his backpack, unzips one part of it.

NOLA (CONT'D)
If they're home, they know we're here.

She knocks on the door in a rhythmic code and waits.

They hear the door being slowly unbolted and unlocked from the other side.

Then it grates open, metal on metal.

A dark hole awaits them.

Devin takes out the 9mm Submachine gun and goes in.

INT. SUBTERRANEAN ROOM

Devin cautiously moves into to the room, aiming the gun ahead of him.

SNAKE MAN

You can put that down now.

Beard and Blond both stand behind Devin, both holding guns at his head from opposite sides.

SNAKE MAN (CONT'D)

You might get one of them. You won't get both.

The lights come on in the room. Besides the two armed men and the Snake Man, two other hooded figures stand at attention to the side.

Devin drops the gun and the backpack.

Nola enters behind him and goes to stand in the corner.

DEVIN

So this was a set-up? She was in on it?

SNAKE MAN

She didn't have to be in on it. We knew what you'd do. We know everything you do.

DEVIN

And what do I do now, according to you?

SNAKE MAN

Accept the inevitable. Join us.

Devin steps close to the throne, but also close to the cage that holds Bertha the Burmese Python.

DEVIN

I want to know who you are.

SNAKE MAN

You already know. We're the snake. We control all things.

DEVIN

But you already run everything out there. Why bother with this silly stuff?

The Snake Man sounds miffed.

SNAKE MAN

What we do is not silly, boy. Some roads to power are best traveled in darkness.

DEVIN

But if I'm in the Inner Circle, why hide your face from me?

Devin feints to rip off the Snake Man's mask -- the Snake Man jumps back. Beard and Blond move to grab Devin.

But instead Devin jumps to the right, kicks the snake cage over.

Bertha slithers out.

Devin picks her up and throws her right on the Snake Man.

Bertha's stored up a lot of resentment during her captivity. She immediately encircles the Snake Man and starts squeezing.

SNAKE MAN

Help me!

Beard and Blond try to get a bead on the snake's head without hurting their boss.

Then a BLAST of submachine gun fire makes everyone stop.

Nola has the gun and it's pointed at the room.

NOLA

Drop the guns.

BEARD

She'll kill him!

NOLA

Not my problem. Drop them.

They do.

Devin steps over to the groaning, screaming Snake Man and takes off his mask.

It's Mr. Danforth, his teacher.

DEVIN

Danforth ran all this?

CHIEF CALDWELL

One week it's Danforth, one week
it's Southey, one week it's Mayor
Allen, one week it's this girl's
Dad, another week the Mayor of
Darby... or even me when I feel
like it.

Devin's father is behind Nola and he has his Glock held
against her head.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Mexican stand-off, girl. You shoot
them, I shoot you. And believe me,
I don't care if any of them die.

Beard and Blond don't like that kind of talk.

The other two hooded men take off their hoods, revealing
Southey and the Mayor.

Danforth screams bloody murder.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

We take turns, son. You can, too.
You can be part of it all. Let me
tell you, Power is good.

DEVIN

That's what you think.

The Chief taps Nola with his gun.

CHIEF CALDWELL

What's it gonna be, girlie? I don't
mind a good old-fashioned shoot-
out. Anyway I write up the police
report, you're still gonna be dead.

Nola thinks for a moment, then brings the butt of the machine
gun backwards into the Chief's face.

His gun goes off, but doesn't hit anything. He goes down.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Get the goddam bitch!

Beard and Blond dive for their guns, but Nola fires, blasting
the guns out of their reach.

NOLA

Come on, Devin!

No need to tell him -- he's there with her and they're out the door, which they shut behind them.

The Chief gets to his feet.

CHIEF CALDWELL
Let's get those little bastards.

Danforth is turning blue. Southey and the Mayor try to pry the snake from Danforth.

MAYOR ALLEN
We've gotta save him.

CHIEF CALDWELL
Screw that little prick. Never liked him. Let the snake have her fun.

He's out the door. Beard and Blond follow. Southey and the Mayor stay to try and save Danforth.

ABOVE

Devin and Nola strain to get the trap door open. They're out, but they hear the others on the stairs below.

Devin takes the submachine gun from her. She hefts her sawed-off shotgun.

They look across the desolate fields to the train tracks where another freight train rushes past.

NOLA
We'll never make it.

DEVIN
Yes we will. Up!

He points at the skeletal structure above them. It links to other partial buildings nearby. There are a myriad of escape routes up there.

Devin and Nola run to the bottom girder closest to them and start climbing.

Chief Caldwell is first up the stairs. He sees them going up, aims his Glock at them. But they're zigzagging around the support structure so he can't get a bead on them.

Beard and Blond come up behind him.

CHIEF CALDWELL
You chase the girl.

BEARD
Do we shoot her?

The Chief shrugs.

CHIEF CALDWELL
Self-defense. I'm a witness.

He walks over to the bottom of the support structure and yells up to Devin.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)
Think you're the only one who's not afraid? Where do you think you got that from?

He starts climbing up, very steadily and quickly.

Beard and Blond do the same.

HIGH UP

Devin and Nola move as fast as they can. Nola slips a few times and Devin helps her.

DEVIN
Split up. He only wants me.

She nods and takes a girder to the south, walking on it as if it was a tight-rope.

Devin keeps going up, as high as he can.

Beard and Blond follow Nola. The Chief keeps climbing up.

THE HIGHEST POINT

Devin is at the highest part of the structure. He inches his way out on a girder -- and then stops dead.

HIS POV

The girder ends. Doesn't connect with anything. He's trapped.

He shifts his backpack up. Takes something out of it and fiddles with it on the girder.

He also rests the submachine gun on his lap.

A NOISE makes him look back the way he came.

It's his father, also inching out on the same girder.

They're ten feet apart.

Devin aims the submachine gun at him.

CHIEF CALDWELL

Go ahead, be an idiot. I sure
didn't raise you to be a moron.

He gestures to the lights of the city in the distance.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

All that can be yours, son. You can
do whatever you want. Money, power,
more girls than you can handle.

DEVIN

What is it the Snake group does?
Drugs? Blackmail? Embezzling?

The Chief shrugs.

CHIEF CALDWELL

A little of all of that. I've got
hundreds of little bastards out
there stealing for us, pushing for
us, pimping for us. You can run
them. You can be in charge. You've
got the balls. You've proved it.

Devin raises the machine gun higher, but slips a bit as he
does so.

The Chief takes that opportunity to kick the girder as hard
as he can, making Devin lose his balance even more. He drops
the gun and his backpack.

The Chief laughs his raspy rattle.

NOLA

Is now cornered by Beard and Blond. She's on a little
platform slightly above them, but there's no way for her to
go up. Her only way out is past them. She has her shotgun
pointed at them.

NOLA

I thought we were pals.

BEARD

Thought wrong.

BLOND

You were good, kid. But not good enough.

BEARD

Yeah, you should have killed that step-brother of yours instead of just putting him away.

NOLA

So are you going to kill me?

They both aim their guns, but they're a little nervous about the height and their balance.

BEARD

If we have to.

BLOND

We know you won't kill us. Don't have that killer instinct.

Nola considers that.

NOLA

Maybe not. But I don't have to kill you to stop you.

She fires, hitting Blond in the foot. He screams and starts to fall, clings madly to the structure, which screws up Beard's aim as he points his gun at Nola.

She fires the other barrel, hitting Beard's hand that holds his gun.

He now screams, blood flying from his wound.

She tosses the gun away, scrambles past them and heads towards an escape route. As she does, she takes off her snake ring and throws it off into the void.

DEVIN AND HIS FATHER

Sit on the girder, now about five feet apart.

CHIEF CALDWELL

Your girl pal is a fighter, I'll give her that. You can have her. You run things together.

DEVIN

If you've been making all this money for years, why do we live in a shit-hole?

The Chief laughs his raspy laugh again.

CHIEF CALDWELL

Screw the money. That's not what matters. It's being the power behind the power, running it all. I uphold the law by day and break all the laws at night. It's fucking fantastic.

He inches closer to Devin.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

So whaddya say, son? You can't be stupid enough to think you can get away. Where will you go? You can't even wipe your ass without Daddy to take care of you.

He holsters his gun and holds out his arms.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

It's a dead end, son. Come to Papa.

Devin looks at him for a moment -- and then jumps off the girder.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

No!

What he can't see in the dark is that Devin has hooked a bungee-jumping cord to the girder, which is also fastened to his waist.

DEVIN

Plummets to what looks like certain death.

But then the bungee snaps taut.

It starts to pull him back up to his father.

Just as it does, he grabs a girder, rips off the cord around his waist.

He climbs down into the darkness below.

CHIEF CALDWELL

Now sees what happened and sees that he's stuck at the top of the structure.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)
Shit on toast. Resourceful little bastard. I'm kinda proud of him. Still gonna whip his scrawny ass.

BELOW

Devin scrambles down the structure to the ground.

He looks for the gun and his backpack.

A noise makes him turn, ready to run. It's Nola.

DEVIN
You should have taken off.

NOLA
Where? They're all over.

They hear Chief Caldwell making his way down. And, more noisily, the wounded Beard and Blond falling the last few feet to the ground.

DEVIN
Let's go.

They run through the unfinished building site, into more desolate semi-buildings.

AROUND ONE CORNER

They freeze at movement before them.

It's a group of homeless, who look at them and wave them on.

HOMELESS MAN
Get goin' or they'll catch you.

They run through the homeless camp.

AROUND THE NEXT CORNER

They see the light of a freight train in the distance.

DEVIN
We can make it.

It's a long way off and there are a few more shapeless abandoned sites in front of them.

SOUTHEY

No, you won't.

Southey and Mayor Allen walk out of one of the sites.

MAYOR ALLEN

We knew where you'd be headed. Just had to wait for you.

Southey has a gun.

SOUTHEY

I thought you at least had brains, boy. We're offering you a real opportunity here.

MAYOR ALLEN

You want to just be a rat, living off other people's crap? Or you want to be a lion, king of the jungle?

DEVIN

Those are the only choices I get?

NOLA

What if we just want to leave?

MAYOR ALLEN

No can do, girlie. You might go telling on us.

SOUTHEY

That brutal attack on two law-abiding citizens is gonna put you behind bars for a while.

Devin picks up a bottle. Nola picks up a rock.

CHIEF CALDWELL

Don't be stupid, son.

The Chief has arrived behind them. He's got his Glock out.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)

No more running, no more fighting. You just come with us now.

Devin and Nola hesitate.

CHIEF CALDWELL (CONT'D)
 Nobody else here. We're all you've
 got. So get used to it.

He takes a step forward -- and a crowbar nails him right in
 the face.

He crumples to the ground.

Rufus steps out of the shadows with the crowbar.

RUFUS
 What a major league asshole.

SOUTHEY
 What do you think you're doing?
 Drop the weapon.

RUFUS
 For a cop, you're not very good at
 observing things. You haven't
 noticed you're outnumbered.

The homeless are all around Southey and Allen.

SOUTHEY
 I'll shoot.

But the homeless are quicker. They hit Southey in the head
 with a big brick and he goes down.

They're on Southey and Allen, pummeling them into
 unconsciousness.

Devin drops the bottle he was holding.

DEVIN
 You knew about all this, about what
 they were doing here?

RUFUS
 We know every damn thing they've
 ever done and who works for them.
 There are a hell of a lot of us and
 we're everywhere.

HOMELESS MAN
 They never notice us. We're like
 wallpaper -- part of the scenery.

DEVIN
 So you'll help us stop their
 operation.

RUFUS

Son, one thing I've learned is you get rid of one tyrant, another one takes his place. They all want to keep everything for themselves. We've learned to do without anything, so in a way, we're free.

NOLA

You won't help?

RUFUS

You're good folk and we'll help you do whatever it is you feel you have to do. But first we're gonna hide you for a while. We're real good at that. Follow us.

Rufus and the other homeless head off into the sunrise.

Devin looks at Nola.

DEVIN

You want to do this? Betty?

She grimaces.

NOLA

That's their name for me. First way to be free is to name yourself.

DEVIN

OK, Nola. You ready for a fight?

NOLA

Will it do any good?

DEVIN

We've got to try.

NOLA

Yeah, I suppose we do.

They link arms and follow the others into the sunrise.

DEVIN

New day. New hope.

ZOOM OUT

Way above them, so they're little ant-like figures on the building site.

Go higher and higher to see the twinkling lights of the cities and towns below.

The pattern formed by the lights still seems to be that of a large snake... but parts of it are fading to black.

FADE OUT.