

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA

Edmond, Oklahoma

Jackson College of Graduate Studies

**HOLLER:  
A CREATIVE RESPONSE TO CIVIL RIGHTS CINEMA**

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN LITERATURE

by

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Edmond, Oklahoma

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Holler: A Creative Response to Hollywood Race Cinema

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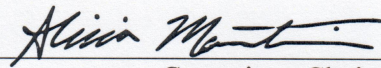
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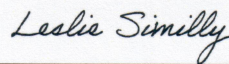
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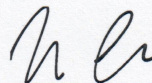
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## Abstract

*Holler* is a creative literature project: a feature-length screenplay that incorporates critical race theory and principles of twentieth century Southern and African-American literature into a story about the maintenance of white supremacy in the United States. The screenplay employs a modern-day lynching narrative in the vein of works like *Light in August* by William Faulkner and “Big Boy Leaves Home” by Richard Wright, wherein depictions of racist violence are vital to the work’s thematic underpinnings. *Holler*’s theoretical lens implements cultural and literary theory by scholars like Sharon Monteith, Jane Gaines, Laura Mulvey, and bell hooks, the narrative foundation relying heavily on gaze theory and its connection to race and class. The screenplay’s major objective is to work against the ideological function of contemporary Hollywood race films, which propagate a troubling post-racial conception of issues of race in America. It presents a modern-day lynching narrative, entrenched in twentieth century literary tradition, in an effort to rebuke the problematic suggestions that Hollywood race films cultivate and concretize with their significant cultural capital. The challenges in crafting such a work present primarily in the formation of a balance between narrative and theme, as well as in the precision required to thread a lynching narrative that does not glorify or amplify the violence or the ideologies that propel individuals to enact it. *Holler* manages these challenges through its constant, deliberate grounding of the narrative and in the manner with which it privileges, or undermines, the perspectives of particular characters as the story unfolds. The project is an ambitious, active repudiation of a troubling cultural trend, and it works toward shifting Hollywood race cinema in the opposite direction of its regressive politics and irresponsible wielding of cultural potency.

*Holler: A Creative Response to Hollywood Race Cinema*

## Critical Introduction

The feature-length screenplay *Holler* is written to be an indictment of the aesthetics, themes, and cultural impact of mainstream Hollywood films that center race, as well as a cinematic restoration of some of the core tenets of twentieth century Southern and African-American literature, as they pertain to discussions and investigations of race and white supremacy. The screenplay essentially works toward concretizing cinema, and the screenplay form, as literature. It does this by incorporating classic literary themes into the work itself and by utilizing the cultural capital of Hollywood cinema as a means of communicating the aesthetics of the twentieth century race novel, which has seen its cultural capital diminish as film, television, and new media have continued to grow in popularity and cultural relevance. I wrote *Holler* while pursuing my graduate coursework in Literature, using the knowledge and ideas I gained from these courses, particularly the courses focusing on cultural theory, research methods, and rhetoric, in the structuring of the screenplay. *Holler* integrates critical race theory and themes prevalent in the twentieth century race novel to form a contemporary narrative that seeks to critique, investigate, and rebuke the foundations of contemporary Hollywood race films, focusing specifically on the problematic temporal settings of these films, their quest to assuage racial unrest, and their erasure of the historical truths of racism and the propagation of white supremacy in America.

Civil Rights Cinema and Post-Racial Ideology

One of the most common, and cogent, criticisms of contemporary Hollywood race films centers upon their use of depictions of recent history to cultivate a cultural belief in the myth of a

post-racial America, wherein systemic racism, racist violence, and discrimination are believed to be relics of the past. The most popular of these films form a subgenre of the Hollywood drama that focuses on the Civil Rights Movement, sometimes through the lens of historical fiction and sometimes through fictionalized accounts of real-life figures and events. In “The Movie-Made Movement: Civil Rites of Passage,” Sharon Monteith refers to these films as “civil rights cinema,” a commercialized subgenre of American films wherein issues of race are filtered through a retrospective ideological slant that seeks to distance the white spectator from the realities of racism as it existed in the past, and perhaps more importantly, how it exists contemporaneously.

Through their manipulation of increasing calls for diverse stories and representation in popular culture, these films seek not to acknowledge or honor the complex history of race in the United States as it pertains to the experience of the marginalized communities who are bound within it; rather, civil rights cinema works toward the formation and maintenance of a cultural memory rooted in the erasure of extant systemic racism and inequity. Monteith describes cinema’s power of cultural memory formation:

Collective memory functions to coordinate and to fabricate national identity and unity.

Movie memories circulate among producers, directors, and audiences; an archival memory-store of civil rights iconography, or an ‘arcade’ of motifs, to borrow Walter Benjamin’s terminology, finds space in the popular cultural imaginary that is contemporary cinema. (122)

As film has come to replace the novel as the dominant narrative art form in Western culture and has the ability to serve as an observable approximation of lived realities, it has the unique

privilege of imbuing, or limiting, within the public consciousness a cultural knowledge of particular histories, a privilege civil rights cinema tends not to wield responsibly.

Monteith asserts that civil rights films achieve their ideological aims through providing narrative closure to issues that are still prevalent society, assuaging notions of racial inequity and injustice by presenting them as problems solved decades ago:

They function in a postmodern imaginary as socially symbolic texts in which racial tensions that remain unresolved in life find temporary resolution in narrative space. To do this, they focus on relationships between individuals, reducing larger historical events to personal histories, domesticating public memory of the Civil Rights Movement. (121)

The “domestication of public memory,” as Monteith describes it, is perhaps the most powerful and insidious component of the commercial popularity of civil rights cinema. By limiting the scope of racism, sanitizing the realities of its past, and presenting narrative closure to the interpersonal conflicts it sows, works of civil rights cinema like *Hidden Figures*, *The Help*, and *Mississippi Burning* actively promote post-racial ideology and help to quell civil unrest and the sentiments that underpin anti-racist activism, serving, in essence, to maintain a racial hierarchy and the status quo of white supremacy.

### The Cinematic Gaze and Temporality in the Hollywood Race Film

The cinematic gaze in civil rights films functions in a complex manner toward the buttressing of the subgenre’s ideological aims. These films complicate common understandings of Laura Mulvey’s gaze theory through their entanglement with time, history, and race. These films act as evidence toward assertions of short-sighted, white feminist qualities in Mulvey’s original articulation of the cinematic gaze as inherently male and its object as inherently female,

providing a complication of this characterization through the myriad ways in which matters of racial subject position affect the implications of acts of looking.

Mulvey's theory of the cinematic male gaze is a foundational work in feminist film theory, regarded as a starting point for understanding the manner with which cinema functions through a particular ideological framework and reinforces extratextual cultural notions pertaining to gender roles and the objectification of women. Critics of Mulvey's original gaze theory assert that it centers whiteness as standard and that it neglects social issues that complicate, and move beyond, gender binaries, their associations, and their embodiment in the filmic form. These critiques characterize Mulvey's theory as unequipped to consider the cinematic gaze as it functions with regard to matters of race and class, instead focusing exclusively on the cinematic act of looking as defined purely by gender binaries. Mulvey introduces her theory in "Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema," presenting the argument that the cinematic gaze is inherently male and serves to reify cultural notions of women as objects of sexual desire and men as the bearers of that sexual objectification:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.

(Mulvey 62)

Mulvey's theory, though compelling and foundational, is clearly myopic in how it conceptualizes gender within an imagined, constructed binary that neglects various other aspects of identity that form the subject positions that embody the male/female cinematic positions.

In “White Privilege and Looking Relations,” Jane Gaines extends the application of the cinematic gaze beyond the relatively simplistic active male/passive female paradigm, arguing that race and class must be considered with regard to the ideological alignment that the act of looking issues to the cinematic spectator. Gaines argues that Mulvey’s theory is inapplicable to films wherein race and class factor into the film’s narrative, using the film *Mahogany* (1975) to illustrate how the articulation of the gaze as simply active/male – passive/female is too limited to apply to a film wherein the central characters do not fit into the standard binary. In the case of *Mahogany*, the central characters are an upper class, white male photographer and a lower class, black female model. The act of looking is central to the film’s narrative, the implications of the cinematic gaze differing due to the subject positions of the characters, complicating the spectator’s compulsory alignment with its ideological underpinnings. Instead of merely assigning the active/male-passive/female labels to these characters, Gaines argues that the film’s employment of the gaze should be considered through a framework that adjusts for the subject positions at play—active/male and passive/female becoming active/upper class/white male and passive/lower class/Black/female—thus allowing for considerations of the complex historical and sociocultural associations at play within that dynamic.

To expand on Gaines’ critique of Mulvey would be to apply an intersectional lens to the standard cinematic gaze so as truly appreciate how the gaze functions and how it is more complicated than Mulvey, or Gaines, articulate it to be. The scope of the standard cinematic gaze in Hollywood cinema is not limited to gender, race, or class, so it should not be labeled merely as the male gaze, the upper or upper-middle class gaze, the white gaze, etc. The gaze exists at the intersection of many points of privilege, occupying the culturally assumed ‘standard’ of a set of sociocultural binaries (a cis-hetero-white-financially-privileged-male gaze), or, in other words, a



hegemonic gaze. Diane Ponteretto discusses these binaries and their relation to the hegemonic gaze:

Cultural representations of the body have been delineated according to a model for the human subject as male, white, heterosexual, middle class, leading to descriptions of corporeity rotating around a binary framework, an either/or condition, encoding distinctions of gender, race and class: male/female, white/black, heterosexual/homosexual, middle class/working class etc. Actually, given that the combination male+white+heterosexual+middle class seems to be the prototype for the human subject, the binary is more rightly defined as male/non-male, white/nonwhite, heterosexual/non-heterosexual, middle class-non middle class. (134)

The hegemonic gaze serves as the filmic form's concretization and perpetuation of these human/non-human binaries, and through the cultural power of the medium, serve to reify these perceptions in the real world.

These addendums to gaze theory and illustrations Mulvey's sociocultural neglects are also incomplete, however, as though they apply intersectionality to gaze theory, they neglect one of the most important functions of the cinematic gaze: temporality. The cinematic gaze does not simply *represent* cultural identity but works to *form* and *maintain* it through the associations that accompany its structure, and, due to cinema having the distinct power to capture and manipulate moments in time, the cinematic gaze carries a temporally fixed set of cultural suggestions and associations. Time works as an agent within the cinematic act of looking, the temporal specificity of the cinematic gaze housing its own assortment of ideologies and perspectives, thus complicating the manner with which the gaze operates, especially in genres like civil rights cinema, wherein history is a central narrative focus. Due to the forced spectatorial alignment that

accompanies the cinematic gaze, the spectator is not only forced to align with the socioeconomic subject position that the gaze embodies but also the historical knowledge present within that subject position and the cultural and ideological assumptions therein.

Films that center race through an historical narrative framework often wield the temporal privilege of the hegemonic gaze, simultaneously reifying the human/non-human, binary-centric standards of hegemony and inscribing in the spectator an understanding of racism as artifact rather than as an extant ideological force. The popularity of civil rights cinema in the United States is, in large part, due to its inherent alignment with the hierarchy of hegemonic privilege and that hierarchy's necessary maintenance through the most potent cultural agents, including the media and arts.

#### Literature vs. Film – Race and the Dominant Narrative Medium

As film and television have eclipsed the novel as the dominant narrative medium in American culture, the chasm between their respective relationships with race has also deepened. Cinema's rise in popularity as a viable commercial art form directly coincided with the growing popularity and prevalence of African-American literature in the Harlem Renaissance. Nascent mainstream cinema immediately began working against any potential threat of disruption to the status quo of white supremacy through films like D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of the Nation* (1916). Released just two years before the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance, *The Birth of a Nation* perfectly encapsulates the trajectory that commercial Hollywood cinema has taken with regard to race in America, essentially acting as ideological maintenance and standing stalwart against the perceived transgressive qualities of anti-racist American literature.

Though *The Birth of a Nation* served as a direct, confrontational battle cry for the preservation of white supremacy, the films that followed worked more conservatively toward such maintenance. While works by African-American writers gained prominence in the first half of the twentieth century and worked toward progressive ideals, acknowledging racist violence and its undergirding ideologies, Hollywood cinema sought to maintain its cultural standing through a systematic sanitization of the narrative form through strict moderation of depictions of violence, sexuality, and an overall unwillingness to wade into in-depth discussions of race or racism. The tenets of Southern and African-American literature in the early-mid twentieth century began to coalesce around a desire to actively address racism and racist violence, themes present in successful novels like *Light in August* by William Faulkner, *Native Son* by Richard Wright, and *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, to name a few. Simultaneously, Hollywood cinema steeped itself further into its conservative approach to handling racial issues, even its most progressive social problem films rarely wading into evaluating or acknowledging the undergirding ideals of white supremacy.

This trend has continued throughout cinema's rise as a dominant cultural medium and the novel's relative diminishment in cultural relevance. It is no coincidence that the beginnings of civil rights cinema not only follow the transgressive paradigm shift of the New Hollywood movement in the 1960s and 1970s but also coincide with the peak of Toni Morrison's commercial success. *Beloved*, Morrison's most successful novel, a harrowing story about the horrors of slavery, was released in 1987, just one year before the release of a notable early film in the civil rights cinema canon, the 1988 Alan Parker film *Mississippi Burning*. *Mississippi Burning* was one of the first films to embody many of the most problematic aspects of civil rights cinema, notably in its use of a white savior narrative in a story about racist violence

perpetrated against African-Americans and their allies. Set in the 1960s and loosely based on the real-life murders of three civil rights activists, the story centers two fictional white FBI agents as they attempt to solve the murders in small-town Mississippi. By centralizing these figures, setting the film two decades before its release, and limiting the amount of primary African-American characters, the film neglects to do any work toward investigating the systems that uphold white supremacy, standing in stark contrast to the aims apparent in the traditions of African-American and Southern literature.

Similar films flourish in this heritage today, utilizing historical frameworks, white savior characters, and tidy, domestic narratives to capitalize upon the demand for racial order, while maintaining plausible deniability of ill intent through the optics of diversity casting. Films in this vein include the aforementioned *The Help* (2011) and *Hidden Figures* (2016), as well as the 2013 Jackie Robinson biopic *42* and *Green Book*, the 2019 winner of the Academy Award for Best Picture. All of these films present themselves as anti-racist and pro-diversity while refusing to comment on, much less repudiate, the principles of white supremacist ideology, the Hollywood studio system leaving such commentaries to be depicted through the less culturally potent independent cinemas and increasingly niche literary forms like the novel, the short story, and poetry. In this manner, Hollywood cinema is able to tout itself as progressive on the surface, while the primary beneficiaries of white supremacy (a subject position most key Hollywood decision makers occupy) continue in their attempts to soothe racial tension at the cost of racial progress.

Holler: A Response to Hollywood Race Cinema

*Holler* is a feature film script that responds to many of these issues innate to civil rights cinema. It is a literary effort that provides an opportunity for the existence of a contemporary Hollywood race film that actively addresses the undergirding principles of white supremacy and honors the literary traditions of twentieth century race novels. There are far too few films in Hollywood that seek similar aims and achieve commercial promotion on par with civil rights films promoted as prestige, awards-season dramas. Films with aims similar to *Holler* (a film like *Get Out*, for example) are often only able to do so within genres not considered as prestigious as drama films and through production and distribution modes peripheral to, or independent of, the mainstream Hollywood production and distribution model. *Holler* presents a drama narrative about race that does not seek to assuage tensions or maintain a status quo but to instead challenge incorrect perceptions of racism as a relic, as propagated by the civil rights cinema canon.

The screenplay's most subversive element concerning civil rights cinema is in its presentation of a contemporary lynching narrative. *Holler* employs a lynching narrative akin to that of literary works like Richard Wright's short story "Big Boy Leaves Home" and William Faulkner's classic novel *Light in August*, wherein the lynchings of Black men and boys are rooted in a foundational component of white supremacist ideology: the white fear of miscegenation and the corruption of white female purity by Black men. Rather than situating this narrative in the past, however, *Holler* is set in the modern day, demonstrating racism as an extant force thriving in the legacy of its past incarnations. In this manner, the screenplay not only subverts civil rights cinema through its literary ancestry but also through its willingness to explore the underpinnings of racist ideology. *Holler* does not provide a pat moral or domestic resolution to racist violence like civil rights films do, opting instead to showcase the systemic

and cultural factors that undergird the racist institutions of the present day. It does so through its depiction of corrupt, racist police officers who participate in modern-day lynchings and through its subversion of the white savior trope. The protagonist, David, is a white schoolteacher who teaches predominately Black youth in order to separate himself from the culture of his notoriously racist hometown, but he eventually fails to act when his allyship can prevent further racist violence against the other protagonist, Mark, a grieving Black man seeking answers about the unsolved murder of his younger brother. This subversion of the white savior narrative serves to illustrate the multi-faceted and enduring principles of white privilege that propel and preserve the foundations of white supremacy.

By presenting this narrative in the present day, through a counter-white savior lens and a dual-protagonist vantage point, *Holler* opens itself to opportunities of progressive manipulations of the cinematic gaze. Mulvey's gaze theory does not acknowledge the possibility for the gaze to be employed subversively, but *Holler*, in the tradition of films like *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and *Sicario* (2015), presents a vessel through which the gaze can be weaponized to foster a spectatorial reckoning with prominent harmful ideologies. Whereas those films do so with respect to gender, a more traditionally Mulveian depiction of women as the object of an objectifying male gaze, *Holler* presents the opportunity for a race-centric reckoning with the suggestions of a hegemonic cinematic gaze through the scenes featuring the David character. The Mark character, then, serves as opportunity for the film to take an approximation of what bell hooks calls an "oppositional gaze," wherein the filmic form becomes the site of disruption and subversion through challenging default whiteness in cinematic spectatorship. Though hooks' theory is predicated upon Mulvey's neglects of Black female spectatorship, its logic is applicable to most sociocultural filmic subversions of the hegemonic gaze. These subversions

wield significant political power through their formal ascriptions of agency in figures who occupy subject positions historically robbed of that agency through meticulous, systemic means. The incorporation of counter-hegemonic gazes fosters a cultural potency in films that challenge the formal and narrative conventions of Hollywood films that promote and maintain post-racial ideologies and default to sociocultural hegemony.

*Holler* proceeds toward these ideals through its temporal setting, its subversion of the white-savior narrative, its implementation of literary themes, and its provision of opportunity for counter-hegemonic utilizations of the cinematic gaze, all of which serve as response to the genre conventions of civil rights cinema and all of the ideological implications and foundations therein:

Content Warning:

Racist violence, racist language, violence against women.



HOLLER

by

Lee Whitten

**OVER BLACK**

The VOICE of a WOMAN with a soothing Southern accent whispers over the darkness. The voice of **ROSE**.

ROSE (V.O.)  
Eeny, meeny, miney, moe, catch a  
nigger by the toe. If he hollers,  
let him go. Eeny, meeny, miney --

The sound of a CHILD LAUGHING.

ROSE (CONT'D)  
(laughing)  
MO!

SILENCE.

FADE IN:

**INT. EDWARDS HOUSE - NIGHT (1983)**

A WHITE TODDLER BOY in pajamas (**DAVID**) sits in the lap of a WOMAN (**ROSE**), laughing as she tickles him. We're CLOSE ON THE BOY, the image grainy and muted. Like a hazy, sentimental memory.

Behind Rose and David, a CONFEDERATE FLAG hangs on the wall. Prominent, decorative, and not afforded a second thought by the boy or the woman.

She stops tickling him.

He stops laughing.

A sleepy glaze washes over his face. The instantaneous fatigue of a small child worn out at the end of the day.

ROSE  
Shh... Go to sleep now, Davey.

DISSOLVE TO:

**EXT. YARD - ERICA'S HOUSE - DAY (PRESENT)**

Rural Arkansas. Approaching dusk. A small house situated deep down a dirt road. A DOG asleep on the porch.

**ISAIAH SCOTT**, a twelve year-old black boy, shoots baskets at a rickety goal attached to a tree. There's a patch of dirt under the basket where the grass has been erased by layoffs.

**INT. KITCHEN - ERICA'S HOUSE - SAME TIME**

**ERICA SCOTT** (40s), Isaiah's mother, washes dishes vigorously. She's stressed. Worrying. Mind running a million miles an hour. She watches out the window as Isaiah plays basketball in the yard.

ERICA (PRE-LAP)  
No, sir, he hasn't come home yet.

**INT. LIVING ROOM - ERICA'S HOUSE - DAY**

Erica talks on a cell phone. Paces around the living room. The sound of DRIBBLING echoes.

ERICA  
I'm telling you. It's not like him.

**EXT. YARD - ERICA'S HOUSE - AS BEFORE**

Isaiah dribbles. Shoots. Misses. Rebounds. Shoots. Sinks it.

**INT. KITCHEN - ERICA'S HOUSE - DAY**

Erica scrubs a glass. The DRIBBLING continues.

ERICA (V.O.)  
Something is wrong.

**EXT. YARD - ERICA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

The dog sits up and BARKS toward the driveway.

**INT. KITCHEN - ERICA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

Erica hears the bark. The dribbling STOPS. She drops her sponge.

**EXT. YARD - ERICA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

Isaiah picks up his ball. Peers down the driveway. It's long, shrouded by trees.

The dog BARKS.

Isaiah slowly starts walking down the driveway. Holding his basketball tight.

The dog BARKS.

THE SOUND OF A VEHICLE RACING AWAY.

The front door opens, and Erica steps out, drying her hands with a cloth.

ERICA  
Isaiah...?

**DRIVEWAY**

Isaiah rounds a corner of trees. Makes it to the edge of the driveway. Stops in his tracks.

**YARD**

Erica cautiously moves out onto the yard. Drops the cloth. Her movement quickly becomes more urgent. Rushing toward Isaiah now.

**DRIVEWAY**

The basketball falls from Isaiah's arms. At his feet is his brother, **TROY** (17). Beaten to a pulp. A piece of wood hung loosely from his neck. In sloppy red spray-paint: "DIE NIGGERS."

ERICA, in a full sprint down the driveway.

SILENCE, as Isaiah turns toward his mother and yells:

ISAIAH  
(inaudible; slow-mo)  
MAMA!

CUT TO BLACK.

**TITLE CARD: *HOLLER***

FADE IN:

**INT. KITCHEN - DAVID'S APARTMENT - DAY**

A WHITE MALE HAND softly touching a pregnant belly. A WHITE FEMALE HAND welcomes the man's touch.

**DAVID EDWARDS** (35) holds his five months pregnant wife, **SARAH** (30s) from behind as she washes dishes.

They're both well-dressed and conventionally attractive, occupying a quaint, one bedroom apartment.

David kisses her on the neck.

DAVID  
How's he doing today?

David speaks with a neutral, region-less accent. Almost affectedly so.

SARAH  
He's wiggling around as much as he can. Like a little worm.

She smiles, but there's a sadness there. It washes over David, too, as he pulls away from her and pours a bowl of Cheerios.

Weird.

DAVID  
The kids miss you.

She doesn't reply.

With an urge to fill the silence:

DAVID  
I heard Buchanan's looking for English teachers.

SARAH  
It was one spot. They filled it.

DAVID  
I'm sure something will come up. We just have to give it time.

SARAH  
Yeah.  
(beat)  
Hey, don't forget about --

DAVID  
Appointment at four. Dinner with your family tomorrow.

**INT. CAR/EXT. ST. LOUIS NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY**

David, driving a BMW, sips coffee as he's stopped at a stoplight in a poor St. Louis neighborhood.

Standing on the corner, two large BLACK MEN wearing durags laugh and shake hands as they greet each other.

David watches the men, his grip on the steering wheel tightening ever-so-slightly. One of the men meets David's eyes, and David waves with four of his fingers, his thumb still gripping the wheel.

The man on the corner, confused, returns the wave with a nod.

The light turns green. David drives through the intersection.

**INT. CAR/EXT. HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY**

David pulls into the teachers' lot at a small, run-down high school. He gets out of the car, locks it, and heads across the parking lot toward the entrance.

Dozens of STUDENTS also head the same direction, David the only white person among them.

KEITH (O.S.)

Flat tire!

David stumbles a bit before regaining his balance and turning toward the group of sophomores behind him, all laughing.

David singles out the one who did it. **KEITH.**

KEITH

Why you trippin', Mr. E?

DAVID

(playful)

If you showed that kind of footwork on the court you might've made varsity this year, Keith.

Keith's friends "OOH" and "AAH" and "DAMN." Keith stands still for a second, taking in the burn.

KEITH

Damn, Mr. E, that was cold. I respect it, though. I respect it.

David smiles and gives Keith a good-will bump on the arm as they make their way into --

**INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS**

-- where they stand in the security line, emptying their pockets and putting the contents in plastic bins as they prepare to go through the metal detector.

The **SECURITY GUARD** pats David on the back.

SECURITY GUARD

Good mornin', Mr. Edwards. How you doin' today?

DAVID

Not too bad, Carl. Yourself?

SECURITY GUARD

I'm good, I'm good. Your missus doin' alright?

DAVID

She's great. Thanks for asking.

David makes it through the metal detector, and Keith follows immediately after.

KEITH

Yo, Mr. E, I been meaning to have a conversation with you about that Dangerous Game paper --

DAVID

You have a good day, Carl.

The security guard nods to David.

KEITH

I could really use an extension because my moms has --

David and Keith walk down the hallway.

DAVID

Shingles again?

KEITH

Real bad shingles, Mr. E. Real bad shingles.

DAVID

This is what, her fourth, fifth time, getting shingles?

KEITH

Somethin' like that.

DAVID

Keith, you know how I feel about lying. I only respect it when it's believable. Paper's due tomorrow. Better get crackin'.

Keith stops in his tracks. Comically frustrated.

KEITH

Come on, man. I thought we was friends.

David keeps walking. Smiles back at Keith.

DAVID

Sorry, what was that? Can't hear you!

(gestures to his ears)

Shingles! It's affecting my hearing!

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

DAVID

Turn 'em in!

David walks around collecting assignments from students.

DAVID

LaKeisha. Pop quiz. What happens to Ivan?

**LAKEISHA** doesn't hesitate.

LAKEISHA

He gets killed by a knife trap or something.

DAVID

Good! Gabby, how did Rainsford get into the chateau?

**GABBY** thinks for beat.

GABBY

Um, he swam around the island, right?

DAVID

Nice! You guys have actually been doing the reading. I'm impressed. Michael, who wins in the end?



**MICHAEL**, a shy kid in the back row, doesn't make eye contact with David.

MICHAEL

I dunno.

David moves toward the back of the room slowly, observing Michael's demeanor. He prods gently --

DAVID

Okay, so you have two options.  
Zaroff or Rainsford. Which one  
wins?

MICHAEL

Rainsford.

DAVID

How do we know that Rainsford wins?

Michael looks over at David for the first time. His eyes are red and heavy, like he hasn't slept in days.

MICHAEL

Cuz he sleeps in the bed?

David makes purposeful direct eye contact with Michael. Pauses for a beat. Then --

DAVID

Good!

David returns to the front of the room.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Open to page seventy-seven in your  
text books!

The students GROAN as they pull out their text books.

DAVID (PRE-LAP)

Did he hit her?

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

The room is now empty except for Michael and David. Michael stays in his back row seat while David leans on one of the empty desks.

Michael nods yes to David's question.

DAVID

Was this the first time?

Michael slightly shakes his head no, just enough to make his answer clear. He's clearly terrified, embarrassed, trying to be stoic.

DAVID  
What did you do?

MICHAEL  
Sat there.

Tears form in Michael's eyes. He desperately resists them.

DAVID  
I'm gonna have to make the call.  
Okay?

Michael nods, wipes the tears off his face, snuffles. Gets stoic again. A scared kid trying to be a man.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
Michael, I need you to look at me.

Michael does, but it's hard for him.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
If you ever need anything, do not  
hesitate to call me.

David writes his phone number on a piece of paper and hands it to Michael.

Michael again fights the tears.

**INT. OB/GYN OFFICE - DAY**

David holds Sarah's hand as an **OBSTETRICIAN** performs an ultrasound.

OBSTETRICIAN  
So, if we enhance this image here  
we can see that you're gonna have a  
little boy.

David grips Sarah's hand.

**INT. CAR/HOSPITAL PARKING GARAGE - DAY**

David sits in the driver's seat, Sarah in the passenger seat. He kisses her on the cheek.

SARAH  
David, how are we gonna do this?

He pulls away from her.

DAVID

We'll figure it out. I'll get a second job. Your parents can --

SARAH

I'm not taking any more money from them.

DAVID

Sarah --

SARAH

I won't do it, David. I'm in my thirties. I can't keep suckling at their --

DAVID

Come on, babe. This isn't a pride thing. This is our child. I'm sure they wouldn't mind --

SARAH

I won't do it. I will not do it. We chose to do this when we did, and it turned out to be the wrong time, and it's our responsibility to deal with it. Not theirs.

He bites his tongue. Puts the car in drive.

**INT. WAITING AREA - CORPORATE OFFICE - DAY**

Little Rock, Arkansas. A small waiting area.

A white man, **PHILLIPS**, WHISPERS in the ear of **MARQUISSE (MARK) SCOTT** (25), Isaiah's brother, a handsome, well-dressed professional.

Replying to the whispers --

MARK

Yes, sir... Yes... Yes, sir.

Another white man in a suit, **JACOBS**, enters the waiting room.

JACOBS

Mr. Scott, Mr. Phillips, if you'll come with me.

MARK

Yes, sir.

The two get up and follow Jacobs.

**INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - CORPORATE OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER**

Mark and Phillips sit across from Jacobs.

PHILLIPS

As you and your team know, Mr. Jacobs, our UAV are singularly equipped for survey projects like the one you're undertaking. The efficiency gap between our drone and, say, a fixed-wing aircraft or helicopter, in addition to the safety and environmental benefits --

JACOBS

Remind me, are you the engineer, Mr. Phillips?

PHILLIPS

No, sir, I invested in the company a couple of years ago after my colleague secured the patent. It's his creation.

JACOBS

(to Mark)

What say you, son?

Mark hesitates. Lets the "son" thing slide. Clears his throat.

MARK

Well, to echo my colleague --

JACOBS

You're awful young. Do you have much experience in this kind of work?

MARK

As far as the engineering and mechanics go, I have quite a bit of experience.

JACOBS

But you've never worked specifically in energy?

MARK

Not specifically, no.

JACOBS

See the thing is, I've done field tests with three different LLCs with similar products. Most of those fellas have been doing surveying work for years and years, so they know their drones are suitable for this kind of survey work.

MARK

With respect, Mr. Jacobs, so do I. I've been working on this design since I was a sophomore in college. I mean, you saw in the field test, this thing is the only UAV on the market that can deftly transition between the gliding action of a fixed-wing and the vertical movement necessary for helicopter survey jobs. The batteries are a part of a complex structural design that maximizes the efficiency of the mechanics while maintaining a weight suitable for the video and topo equipment required for this kind of survey. I've spent hundreds and hundreds of hours workshopping this design and making structural improvements specifically for a job like this.

JACOBS

I'm not saying I doubt your ingenuity, Mr. Scott. It's just, you're very... young. Like I said.

MARK

I understand that. But the topographical survey technology you need is entirely compatible with this design, and I may be young, yes, but I know all of this because I made it for this job.

(beat)

Who else did you do field tests with? Achieve Aerial? Queen Bee? I know those guys. I know their products. They make drones that are one-size fits all. A lot of functionality, a lot of proficiency, sure, but our product is not merely proficient. It's not a loose, one-size fits all thing.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

It's a perfect fit, Mr. Jacobs. A perfect fit.

Silence from everyone. Mark stares ahead. Confident.

Phillips CLEARS HIS THROAT. More silence. Mark's confidence begins to wane as he meets Jacobs' stare.

MARK

We can do another field test, and I can show you the --

JACOBS

No, no. That won't be necessary.

OFF THEIR LOCKED GAZES --

**EXT. MARK'S HOUSE - EVENING**

A cookie cutter house in suburban Little Rock.

Mark parks his car in the driveway and hops out.

**INT. MARK'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

Mark bursts in the front door, elated. His wife **NAOMI** (20s), a black woman who radiates positivity, moves from the kitchen toward the foyer to greet him.

NAOMI

How did it --

Before she can get the words out, Mark grabs her and kisses her, not able to contain the smile on his face as he does so.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

You got it?

He nods. Beaming.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

Baby!

She kisses him again and gives him a gigantic hug.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

What did I tell you? What did I tell you?

He pulls away from her.

MARK  
Where's Olivia?

NAOMI  
I just put her down. Please do not  
wake her up, Mark.

MARK  
I just wanna see her.

**INT. BEDROOM - MARK'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER**

Naomi watches from the doorway as Mark watches over baby **OLIVIA** in her crib as she sleeps.

Mark sits on the floor next to the crib, watching Olivia sleep. Naomi joins him down there.

Whispering --

NAOMI  
That's a blessed little girl right  
there. Got the most brilliant,  
kindest man as a father.

She kisses Mark on the cheek. He smiles down at their daughter. Naomi begins lightly rubbing her crucifix necklace (which she always wears) as she lowers her head on his shoulder.

WENDELL (PRE-LAP)  
Jesus fucking Christ.

**INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE CRUISER - DAY (MOVING)**

Sergeant **WENDELL GROSS** (40s) of the Boone County Sheriff's Office drives down a dirt road.

*(Note: Boone County, Arkansas is several hours north of Little Rock and several hours south of St. Louis.)*

Wendell is a square-jawed, imposing white man in his late forties, and at the moment, he's shifting his focus between the road and a pack of **NICOTINE LOZENGES** in the glove box that he can't quite get a handle on.

A couple of **TEXTBOOKS** slide off of the passenger seat as he fiddles with the pack of lozenges.

Smoke becomes visible as he approaches a **CRIME SCENE**.

**DEPUTY HESTON** (40s) stands at the end of a driveway, waving Wendell over. Wendell parks, secures a lozenge, and unwraps it as he steps out of his vehicle.

**EXT. METH LAB EXPLOSION SITE - CONTINUOUS**

Wendell tosses the lozenge in his mouth as he approaches Heston.

Fire trucks and an ambulance fill the scene, where the remnants of an exploded single-wide trailer are charred and smoking.

As Wendell approaches Heston, Heston nervously fiddles with a **KEYCHAIN** on his belt loop, his fingers rubbing a **RABBIT'S FOOT** dangling amongst the keys.

WENDELL

How many?

Wendell and Heston walk toward the trailer.

HESTON

Mama, daddy, baby.

Wendell doesn't flinch. Sheriff **BILL DAVENPORT**, a gravelly-voiced not-as-young-as-he-used-to-be type, joins Heston and Wendell.

DAVENPORT

You'd think you'd get used to this shit.

WENDELL

You call DEA?

DAVENPORT

They're sending some guys over from Fayetteville. Should be here in a couple hours.

Wendell, Heston, and Davenport arrive at the scene as **PARAMEDICS** cover the charred body of a **TODDLER** in the rubble.

Wendell watches this happen. A subdued rage bubbles up to the surface, but he blinks it away.

WENDELL

Same stuff as the last one?

HESTON

Looks that way. From what made it out.



DAVENPORT

You think it's our ol' buddies  
again?

WENDELL

They might as well have their  
initials on it at this point.

(beat)

Who was this? Some of the Crowners?

HESTON

Jerry and Llywelyn. Kid's name was  
Trix, I believe. Like the yogurt.

WENDELL

Anybody contact next of kin?

HESTON

No, sir.

**EXT./INT. COCHRAN CROWNER'S DOUBLE-WIDE - DUSK**

Wendell KNOCKS and waits.

A few beats later, **COCHRAN CROWNER** (50), sweaty and drunk,  
cracks the door open, leaving barely any space for Wendell to  
see in, but Wendell is able to catch a glimpse of Cochran's  
wife, **JAYMA** (40s), crying on the couch behind Cochran.

COCHRAN

'an I help you?

WENDELL, confused by Jayma's crying --

WENDELL

Has somebody already been by here?

COCHRAN

Do what?

WENDELL

Did somebody come by about your  
brother?

COCHRAN

Tell him I ain't bailin' him out. I  
don't got it.

WENDELL

He's not in jail, Mr. Crowner.  
There was... There was an accident.  
I'm afraid he's deceased. Wife and  
boy, too.

Cochran's face shifts. Shock instead of anger.

COCHRAN

What...?

WENDELL

He was cooking meth in his trailer. Made a mistake, apparently. Whole place is gone. Sorry to have to tell you that.

Cochran grimaces.

WENDELL (CONT'D)

Listen, Mr. Crowner, I know this is a lot to take in, but if you know anything, or remember anything, about anybody your brother'd been hangin' around or cookin' for, give me a call, okay?

Wendell hands Cochran his card.

WENDELL (CONT'D)

You and the missus take care now.

Wendell gives a half-nod to Jayma, who has stopped crying for the moment. Cochran and Jayma look at each other for a beat. Cochran closes the door.

Wendell returns to his car. As he gets to the door, Heston's voice BURSTS from Wendell's walkie.

HESTON (V.O.)

Sergeant, we got another situation.

Wendell pauses for a beat. Then opens his door to climb in.

**INT. DINING ROOM - SARAH'S PARENTS' HOUSE - NIGHT**

An incredibly nice house wherein a bunch of Sarah's rich, white extended family SING "Happy Birthday" to Sarah's father, **FRANK**, while Sarah and David sing along.

COUSIN (O.S.)

Make a wish!

FRANK

Where are my girls?

Sarah, her **SISTER**, and her **MOTHER** all hug and kiss Frank. David watches, wearing a smile, but it's obvious that he's incredibly uncomfortable around these people.

Frank blows out his candles.

FRANK

I wished for Trump to go to prison!

The room LAUGHS. David and Sarah meet each other's gaze and smile, almost obligatorily.

**EXT. PATIO - SARAH'S PARENTS' HOUSE - NIGHT**

The party starting to die down, David and Frank sit out by the fire pit while Sarah stands a few yards away engaged in chit-chat with an **AUNT**.

FRANK

So you survived the cuts, huh,  
David?

DAVID

For now, yeah. Who knows what'll  
happen this time next year, though.

Frank takes the last swig of his wine and lights a cigar. David watches with disgust as the end of the cigar catches the orange glow.

FRANK

Ya know, that's what I hate about  
these --

A **COUSIN** walks by Frank and pats him on the shoulder.

COUSIN (O.S.)

Happy birthday, Frank.

FRANK

You guys heading out? Hey, drive  
safe! Thanks for the...

COUSIN (O.S.)

The guitar tuner!

FRANK

That's right.

The cousin's gone.

FRANK (CONT'D)

(to David)

I don't even own a guitar.

(beat)

But see, that's what I hate about  
these Republicans.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

They can cut taxes for themselves  
all the live-long day, but God  
forbid they put some money in the  
education system or Medicare --

David looks over and sees Sarah talking to the aunt.

AUNT

Have you guys talked about names  
yet?

SARAH

No, not yet.

DAVID, watching her. Then returning to Frank, who takes a  
deep drag from his cigar.

FRANK

-- or National Parks. These guys,  
they're cretins, David.

(beat)

You know, I honestly don't know  
what I would've done if Sarah  
married a Republican. Not that she  
would, but I'm pretty relieved that  
she brought you home instead of  
some hillbilly with those metal  
testicles hanging from their  
vehicle. What do you call those  
things again? Truck balls?

DAVID

Truck nuts.

FRANK

Truck nuts! David, in all  
sincerity, and I'm being serious  
now, I am so, so happy that you  
don't have truck nuts on your  
vehicle.

DAVID

Well, I drive a sedan, Frank.  
They'd probably scrape the  
pavement.

**INT. BATHROOM - SARAH'S PARENTS' HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER**

David washes up at the sink, looking at himself in the  
mirror. His phone VIBRATES in his pocket. He pulls it out,  
looks at the screen. "Abigail calling."

He pauses for a beat. Confused. Then answers.

DAVID

Hello?

**INT. BEDROOM - MARK'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

Mark and Naomi lie in bed, post-sex, her head on his chest.

NAOMI

I want to see where you're from  
sometime. Where rich, famous  
inventor Mark Scott came to be.

MARK

Famous?

NAOMI

The next Elijah McCoy.

MARK

You're ridiculous. And you've seen  
where I'm from.

NAOMI

I mean where you're really from.  
Your old neighborhood. The house  
you grew up in.

MARK

There's not much to see, really.  
The storm took the house. They put  
a gas station where it used to be.

NAOMI

So show me the gas station.

He smiles.

MARK

Okay. It's a long drive. And a  
pretty rough neighborhood.

THE PHONE RINGS.

NAOMI

It's almost ten o'clock.

Mark SIGHS. Gets up.

MARK

Probably work.

Mark grabs the phone and answers.

MARK

Hello?

Mark sits for a beat. Listens. His face changes. Drops. Keeps dropping. He looks over to Naomi. She sees the horror unfolding. They lock eyes.

**INT. BEDROOM - DAVID'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

David packs a suitcase while Sarah watches.

SARAH

You're sure you don't want me to come with you?

DAVID

No, I'll deal with it. You just stay here and take care of yourself. I'll call you if anything happens.

SARAH

But I want to be there for you. You can't go through this alone, David.

DAVID

I won't be alone. I'll have Abigail.

SARAH

But Abigail's... Abigail.

DAVID

I'll only be gone a couple of days, at most. Based on what they're saying, she's not gonna last --

Sarah hugs him from behind. Puts her head on his shoulder.

DAVID (CONT'D)

(softly)

I'm gonna be fine.

**INT. MARK'S CAR - NIGHT (MOVING)**

Mark drives on a dark highway. Going at least 80. Staring straight ahead. Naomi sits in the passenger seat. Awake. Her hand on his leg.

The baby is in a car seat in the back.

Naomi closes her eyes.

NAOMI  
 Heavenly father, please lift up  
 Troy tonight, Father. Please lift  
 this family up as we go through  
 this difficult --

Her VOICE FADES as we GET CLOSE ON MARK. Anger and sadness indistinguishable.

**INT. DAVID'S CAR - NIGHT (MOVING)**

David drives past a billboard that features a stock photo of a smiling white family next to text that reads: "Welcome to Harrison, Arkansas: Beautiful Town, Beautiful People, No Wrong Exits, No Bad Neighborhoods."

Directly above that billboard is another. Bold, black text upon a yellow background:

**"ANTI-RACIST is a CODE WORD for ANTI-WHITE."**

David takes a DEEP BREATH.

*(These billboards are 100% real, by the way.)*

**INT. CAR/EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT - NIGHT**

David parks in the visitor's lot of the North Arkansas Regional Medical Center, a tiny hospital in Harrison.

He looks at the clock on his car's radio. It's 3:30 AM. He pauses for a beat and looks around the near-empty parking lot.

On the other side of the lot, Mark reaches inside his empty car and grabs a diaper bag and bottle. David watches as Mark hurriedly carries the bag across the lot and into the hospital.

**INT. RECEPTION AREA - HOSPITAL - MOMENTS LATER**

David enters the hospital and heads to the reception desk. The night-shift **RECEPTIONIST**, the only soul in sight, doesn't look up from her magazine.

DAVID  
 Um, hi. I'm looking for Rose  
 Edwards? I was told she was in the  
 ICU.

The receptionist glances up at him.

RECEPTIONIST

Visiting hours are over. Are you family?

DAVID

Yeah, she's my... I'm her son.

RECEPTIONIST

Go down the hallway to your right. Take the elevator up to the third floor. Go to the nurse's station, and someone will show you where to go.

DAVID

Thank you.

David takes the hallway to his right, following the signs for the ICU.

**INT. ICU HALLWAY - HOSPITAL - MOMENTS LATER**

David passes by several rooms as a **NURSE** guides him down the hallway. David sees a GLIMPSE inside one of the rooms as Mark enters it with the diaper bag.

Inside the room, Troy Scott lies motionless in a hospital bed while Erica, Isaiah, and Naomi stand over him crying. Mark hands Naomi the diaper bag and shuts the door.

David takes a last look and keeps walking. The nurse guides him to a room.

NURSE

Here you are.

She KNOCKS LIGHTLY on the door and twists the handle open, letting David in.

**INT. ROSE'S ROOM - HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS**

With trepidation, David enters the room to find his sister, **ABIGAIL** (30), sitting down next to the hospital bed of an unconscious **ROSE** (the woman from the opening scene) while David's cousin, **RAY** (40) stands with his arms crossed.

Abigail sports a bad dye-job and pajama pants while a pack of Camels spills out of her purse.

ABIGAIL

Took you long enough.



Ray looks over at David. Ray is broad-shouldered and fairly good-looking with a rough-knuckled manner about him. The kind of guy who is rarely seen without a Carhartt jacket on.

RAY  
(emotionless)  
Davey.

Ray immediately looks away from David. Tension there.

DAVID  
What exactly...

ABIGAIL  
She's been sick for a while, Davey.

DAVID  
Why didn't anybody tell me?

Ray softly places his hand on Rose's. Avoiding any eye contact with David.

RAY  
You didn't ask.

David swallows whatever retort he could've made.

RAY (CONT'D)  
If you got anything you need to say to her, now'd be a good time to do it.

Abigail stands up. Ray lets go of Rose's hand and walks toward the door, scooting past David in the process. As he scoots, he looks David in the eye --

RAY (CONT'D)  
And I reckon you got somethin' needs sayin', huh, Davey?

Ray dispassionately pats David on the shoulder and exits the room while Abigail holds the door open for him. David doesn't look at either of them.

ABIGAIL  
We'll let you have a minute with her.

She closes the door, leaving David alone with Rose. He looks at her unconscious, dying body, attached to various tubes and machines.

DAVID  
 (sotto)  
 Fuck.

**INT. ICU HALLWAY - HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS**

Abigail takes a seat in the hallway. Ray stands, pacing, his attention seeming to be aimed toward Troy Scott's room.

ABIGAIL  
 You're surprised he came, aren't you?

Ray doesn't hear her fully. Focusing elsewhere. But he knows she said something. He turns his attention back to her.

RAY  
 What?

ABIGAIL  
 I said... Never mind.

Ray glances down the hall again. Then back to Abigail.

RAY  
 I didn't think he'd come, no. That what you asked?

ABIGAIL  
 You should get some sleep, Ray.

**INT. ROSE'S ROOM - HOSPITAL - SAME TIME**

David sits next to Rose's bed, head resting on his fists as he looks at her.

DAVID  
 Look, Aunt Rose, I don't know how to do this. I wasn't ready for this. I wasn't ready for this tonight. What do I even... Thank you? Um, thank you for taking us in. I know you didn't have to do that, and I appreciate it. I really do. And I'm sorry I left. But this place isn't for me. You knew that. This is not who I am.

He's almost rambling at this point. Trying to say the right thing. The thing he's supposed to say. But he can't quite figure out what that is.

DAVID (CONT'D)

I'm not these people, you know? No. I shouldn't say that. I should've called you. I know that. I know it seemed like I was ungrateful. I wasn't... I just needed... a clean break.

He stops. SIGHS. Adjusts in his chair. Tugs on his hair a bit.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Fuck. I don't know what I'm supposed to say.

(beat)

I'm gonna have a baby --

Before the words leave his mouth, Rose begins SEIZING. Machines BEEP. David jumps out of his chair.

**INT. ICU HALLWAY/ROSE'S ROOM - HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS**

The door to Rose's room opens, and Ray sees Rose seizing. David stands in the doorway, trying to walk out of the room but not committing.

DAVID

Hey...

Ray rushes into the room, knocking David out of the way. Abigail follows. David remains in the hall, unsure of what to do.

Ray tries to hold Rose's shaking body, to no avail.

RAY

Nurse! You're gonna be alright,  
Mama. You're gonna be alright.

Ray runs out of the room while Abigail holds Rose's hand.

RAY (CONT'D)

NURSE!

David's in shock. But nobody notices him. Like he's not even there.

**INT. PRIVATE FAMILY WAITING AREA - HOSPITAL - NIGHT**

David, Abigail, and Ray sit in the waiting room, a chair between each of them. Abigail sleeps. David and Ray are awake, neither of them looking at one another.

Ray's leg bounces, and he chews on his fingernails. David notices.

The sound of a WOMAN BAWLING interrupts the silence. David and Ray see through a small window in the waiting room door into the ICU hallway, where Mark holds a screaming, crying Erica.

ERICA  
MY BABY! MY BABY!

MARK  
(muddled)  
It's okay, Mama. It's okay, Mama.

David closes his eyes in a feeble attempt to ignore the pain on the other side of the door.

Ray looks away. And his leg begins to bounce more rapidly. He spits out a chewed fingernail.

David opens his eyes. Looks at Ray, who's in his own world of anxiety.

DAVID  
I'm gonna go down to the vending machine. Do you want anything?

Ray doesn't hear him. Or ignores him. Hard to tell with Ray.

David gets up and heads to the elevator anyway.

Ray's leg keeps bouncing.

#### **INT. FIRST FLOOR HALLWAY - HOSPITAL - MOMENTS LATER**

The elevator opens, and David steps out. The hallway is empty and poorly lit. The brightest light emanates from a couple vending machines at the end of it.

David turns and walks toward the machines, and WE PULL BACK to see Wendell sitting in a little chair in the shadows, seemingly asleep, a textbook and a highlighter precariously situated in his lap. David doesn't see him, but Wendell stirs awake and watches David approach the machines.

#### **AT THE VENDING MACHINE**

David slides his credit card, but the machine doesn't accept it. He slides it again. Nothing.

DAVID

Come on.

WENDELL (O.S.)

Card reader's busted. You got any cash?

David turns and sees Wendell approaching him.

DAVID

Just a twenty.

WENDELL

Here.

Wendell fishes a couple of ones out of his wallet. He offers them to David.

DAVID

Oh, you don't have to --

WENDELL

Take it.

DAVID

Thanks.

David takes the money and puts it in the machine. He buys a bottle of sweet tea.

WENDELL

Figure if you're down here at five AM on a Sundee morning, you could probably use some favorable happenstance.

DAVID

Yeah. It hasn't been my night.

WENDELL

I'm sorry to hear that.

Wendell pulls a nicotine lozenge out of his pocket. David watches as Wendell struggles to unwrap it due to his HANDS SHAKING.

WENDELL

These stinkin' things. Cigarettes are a lot more convenient, I'll tell ya that much.

With discomfort --

DAVID

Yeah.

Wendell finally gets the lozenge in his mouth and looks up at David, who begins to back out of the conversation.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Well, thanks for the --

With a mouthful of lozenge --

WENDELL

Hey, you're Davey Edwards, aren't ya?

DAVID

Yeah, I am.

WENDELL

I remember you from when you was about yea high. I used to mow grass for your Aunt Rose. How's she doin'?

David hesitates to answer.

WENDELL (CONT'D)

Oh. She's why... Got it. Well shit, I'm real sorry, bub. I'm Wendell Gross, by the way. I don't know if you --

Wendell extends his hand.

DAVID

No, I remember you.

David shakes it.

WENDELL

You play any ball after high school? I remember you being a good ball player when you boys went to state back in, when was that, ninety-eight? Ninety-nine? Real good ball player.

DAVID

Yeah, no. I just went to school. Now I teach, so.

WENDELL

You had talent. I remember you having talent.

DAVID

Yeah, well, I get to work with, uh, underprivileged kids in St. Louis, which is pretty rewarding, so I think I did alright without basketball.

WENDELL

Hell, if you got out of Boone County, Arkansas, I reckon you're better off than the lot of us.

David again begins to begin parting ways.

WENDELL

How's your cousin Ray been?

DAVID

You probably know better than I do. He's upstairs now if you wanna say hi.

WENDELL

Nah, that's alright.

DAVID

What are you... doing down here?

Wendell shows David his badge.

WENDELL

Black kid got beat up real bad, and the fellas that did it dumped him out onto his mama's yard. He's up there in the ICU. Ain't doing s'hot. They pulled the plug a few hours ago. Figured I'd wait down here and let the family have a little time before I start asking 'em questions.

DAVID

Oh. That's a shame.

WENDELL

Sure is.

DAVID

I, uh, ought to head back upstairs.

WENDELL

Yeah. Sorry for keeping ya. Hope Miss Rose gets to feeling better.

DAVID

Yeah, thanks. Thanks for the drink.

David walks away.

WENDELL

Hey, give Ray my regards, would ya?

**INT. BEREAVEMENT ROOM - HOSPITAL - NIGHT**

Mark watches with tears in his eyes as Erica stares blankly out the window into the ugly, empty parking lot, breathing hysterically without crying. Out of tears. She cradles Isaiah's head in her chest, not letting him go any time soon.

Naomi rocks the baby silently, tears streaming down her face. Her head on Mark's shoulder as Mark watches Erica.

ERICA

(quietly; to herself)

My baby... My baby...

**INT. PRIVATE FAMILY WAITING AREA - HOSPITAL - NIGHT**

David returns with his tea. Sits down. Abigail snores. Ray hasn't moved an inch.

DAVID

Wendell Gross was downstairs. Said to tell you hi.

Ray doesn't blink. Doesn't look at David. Stays completely still.

RAY

I'm sure he did.

Hostility there. David picks up on it.

The door opens, and a **BLACK FEMALE DOCTOR** comes in. Ray stands immediately.

RAY

Abigail.

Abigail jolts awake.

RAY

How is she?



DOCTOR

Well, as we expected, the seizures have only grown stronger as the night has gone on, and this latest one was too powerful for her.

Abigail immediately starts crying. Ray's face drops.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Unfortunately, another family is using our bereavement room, but this room is open to you all as long as you'd like. You're also free to see her if you wish to do so.

ABIGAIL

I wanna see her.

Ray peeps through the window into the hallway, toward the bereavement room.

RAY

Go on ahead. I don't wanna see her.

ABIGAIL

Davey, will you go with me?

David looks up at Ray, hesitates for a beat, then back to Abigail.

DAVID

Uh... Yeah... I'll go with you.  
Ray, you're sure --

Ray turns away from the door.

RAY

Y'all go on ahead.

The doctor opens the door for David and Abigail.

She shuts the door, leaving Ray alone in the waiting room. Ray watches the doctor for a brief moment, skeptically, like he's making sure she's doing her job correctly.

**INT. ROSE'S ROOM - HOSPITAL - MOMENTS LATER**

The doctor lets Abigail and David into the room and closes the door, leaving them with the now-deceased Rose.

Abigail cries as she places her hand on Rose's white, lifeless hand.

David watches, unsure of what to do, which is becoming the norm for him.

ABIGAIL

Come here, Davey... Come here...

David moves to Abigail. He puts his hand on her shoulder.

Crying harder now --

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

You should've been here...

He doesn't say anything. Just rubs Abigail's shoulder.

**INT. PRIVATE FAMILY WAITING AREA - HOSPITAL - MORNING**

Ray, still alone in the room, looks out through the window into the ICU hallway. It's empty.

He pulls out his phone and calls "Leon." He sits while the phone rings. His leg bounces as he waits. No answer. He stands, frustrated. He dials again. Lets it go to voicemail.

RAY

Pick up the fuckin' phone, Leon.

**INT. BEREAVEMENT ROOM - HOSPITAL - MORNING**

Erica cries, holding a sniffling Isaiah's head to her chest. To nobody in particular --

ERICA

Why'd they do that to him? Why'd they do that to him?

Mark doesn't cry. He clenches his hands together. Holding it all in. Tears stream down Naomi's face, but she doesn't make a sound. Just rocks the baby.

ERICA (CONT'D)

How we gon' pay for all this? I can't pay for all this --

MARK

Mama, don't --

Naomi hands Mark the baby, wipes her tears, and kneels in front of Erica and Isaiah. Erica continues crying.

NAOMI

Erica, look at me. Look at me.

Erica does, through the tears.

NAOMI (CONT'D)  
 We're gonna get through this,  
 alright? Don't worry about anything  
 right now. I got you, okay? We got  
each other. Okay?

Erica nods.

NAOMI (CONT'D)  
 Isaiah, we got each other, okay?

Isaiah sniffles.

ISAIAH  
 Okay.

Mark watches as Naomi locks eyes with Erica.

**INT. PRIVATE FAMILY WAITING AREA - HOSPITAL - AS BEFORE**

Ray stares at his phone. Waiting for it to ring, vibrate,  
 anything. After what seems an eternity, it finally VIBRATES.  
 "Leon calling." Ray almost jumps as he answers, too loudly --

RAY  
 It's about damn time you picked up  
 the --

He stops himself. Quiets.

RAY (CONT'D)  
 The boy just died, Leon. Just now.  
 (beat)  
 No, he never woke up...

A beat. Ray softens a bit.

RAY (CONT'D)  
 It's alright, it's alright. Stop  
 that now. Everything's gonna be  
 alright. You just need to calm  
 down, get yourself together. It was  
 a mistake. It was a real bad  
 mistake. But we're gonna deal with  
 it. Alright? Now what'd you do with  
 the --

The door opens. Abigail and David re-enter. Ray sees them,  
 switches tone.

RAY (CONT'D)  
I'll talk to you later.

He hangs up. Abigail, done crying, almost lifeless, waddles toward Ray.

ABIGAIL  
Can we go home now?

She sinks into Ray's chest. He hugs her, glances at David.

RAY  
Yeah. Let's go home.

**EXT. ABIGAIL'S DOUBLE-WIDE - MORNING**

A flamingo decoration hovers over an empty, plastic kiddie pool in the yard. A rebel flag hangs over the porch.

Ray parks his pickup in the driveway, David parking his car next to it.

Ray and Abigail climb out of the truck while David gets out of his car.

The front door opens, and Abigail's husband, **TY** (30s), mouth full of dip, steps out onto the porch, an empty Dr. Pepper bottle in his hand serving as a spittoon.

TY  
Yuns want breakfast?

ABIGAIL  
Where are the girls?

TY  
They're gettin' ready to catch the Sunde school bus.

Ray steps onto the porch, pats Ty on the shoulder.

RAY  
Ty.

Ray heads inside. Abigail steps onto the porch steps, David lagging behind.

ABIGAIL  
They're not going to church today.

TY

Bad news, huh? Well, I got bacon  
and eggs in there if yuns are  
hungry. Good to see ya, Davey.

DAVID

What's up, Ty.

Ty heads inside while Abigail lights a cigarette on the porch  
steps, blocking David's way inside.

ABIGAIL

Where's your stuff?

DAVID

Oh. I figured I'd stay in a hotel.

ABIGAIL

Don't be stupid, Davey. You can  
stay in the girls' room. They fall  
asleep in the living room most  
nights anyway.

We get the sense David would much rather stay in a hotel.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

Go get your shit.

**INT. BEREAVEMENT ROOM - HOSPITAL - MORNING**

Erica holds Isaiah close to her as Wendell asks them  
questions.

WENDELL

(to Isaiah)

And you didn't see the truck?

Isaiah seems nervous, on his best behavior around Wendell.

ISIAIAH

No, sir.

Wendell picks up on Isaiah's discomfort. Adjusts. Becomes  
softer.

WENDELL

Alright, son.

(to Erica)

And you don't know of anybody who  
would've wanted to hurt your boy,  
do you? You never heard Troy talk  
about any fights at school, any  
drug activity --

ERICA

My son was getting ready to graduate in the spring. He had a three-point-nine GPA. He just got accepted to U of A. He doesn't get in fights. He doesn't do drugs. He's a good kid.

WENDELL

I don't doubt that he was, ma'am. I'm just trying to figure this thing out. Trying to help as much as I can. I want to get these suckers, believe you me, and if y'all need anything from me, give me a call, alright? If you happen to remember something, or find something, I always got my phone on me.

He makes soft, purposeful, direct eye contact with Isaiah. *I'm not an enemy*, his eyes seem to say. It's futile, though. Isaiah is terrified of him.

Wendell inhales, moves his gaze to Erica --

WENDELL (CONT'D)

Y'all take care as best you can.

He gets up and leaves the room. Erica watches him as he scoots past Mark in the doorway.

**INT. ABIGAIL'S DOUBLE WIDE - MOMENTS LATER**

David drags his suitcase inside as Abigail puts her cigarette out in an overflowing ashtray by the door frame.

Ray stands in the living room, getting hugs from Abigail's daughters **BAILEIGH** and **KAEDYNNE** (7 and 8 respectively).

RAY

Hey, kiddos.

ABIGAIL

Girls, come hug your uncle Davey.

Clearly not very familial with David, the girls give him the most timid waist-high hugs possible, and he matches their enthusiasm. Ray and David make eye contact while this happens.

Yelling out from the kitchen --

TY  
Girls, yuns' food's ready!

ABIGAIL  
Hey, girls...

Abigail crouches down to their level.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)  
I need to tell y'all something,  
okay? Y'all know how Nana's been  
real sick the last few months?

The girls nod.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)  
Well this morning, Nana went to be  
with Jesus. Up in heaven.

KAEDYNNE  
So she died?

Baileigh immediately starts crying at that.

ABIGAIL  
Aw baby, don't cry. You're gonna  
make mama cry.

Abigail, tears in her eyes, hugs the girls.

ABIGAIL  
She's up in heaven now.

**INT. DINING AREA - ABIGAIL'S DOUBLE WIDE - DAY**

Everybody sits at the table, scarfing down the lackluster  
breakfast Ty made, except for David and Ray who both barely  
touch theirs.

Ray's leg bounces as he checks his phone. David watches.

Standing up with his plate --

RAY  
You know, I really oughta get  
going.

ABIGAIL  
You been here twenty minutes.

RAY  
I gotta call the funeral home.  
How's Tuesday work for everybody?  
(MORE)

RAY (CONT'D)

Davey, you still gonna be around by Tuesday?

DAVID

Yeah, that's fine. Tuesday's fine.

Ray heads to the kitchen with his plate.

RAY (O.S.)

Thanks for breakfast, Ty.

Ray walks back through the dining area, kissing Baileigh and Kaedynne on the tops of their heads as he leaves.

DAVID

I should probably call Sarah. Let her know what's going on.

ABIGAIL

How's she doing?

David wipes his mouth. Puts the napkin over his food so it looks like he ate some.

DAVID

Uh, she's good. Baby's good.

ABIGAIL

Tell her I say hi if you don't mind.

DAVID

Yeah, sure.

ABIGAIL

And tell her I'm sorry for last time.

DAVID

Oh, don't worry about --

ABIGAIL

Just tell her, Davey?

Ty makes eye contact with David and smiles. *Just do what she says, man.*

DAVID

I'll tell her.



**EXT. ABIGAIL'S DOUBLE-WIDE - MOMENTS LATER**

David steps out onto the porch. Dials. Waits. As he does, he meets Ray's eyes as Ray reverses out of the driveway. They watch each other, neither showing any emotion.

SARAH (V.O.)

Hey...

DAVID

Hey. Sorry. It's kind of early.  
Didn't mean to wake you.

Ray exits the driveway. Gone from view.

SARAH (V.O.)

No, I was awake. How is she?

DAVID

She, uh, she died this morning.

SARAH (V.O.)

Oh, David, I'm so sorry.

DAVID

No, don't be. It's fine. I think we're aiming for Tuesday for the funeral, so I should be back Wednesday.

SARAH (V.O.)

Do you need me to come down?

DAVID

No, no. You should rest. How are you feeling? How's little guy?

SARAH (V.O.)

We're both hanging in there, you know?

DAVID

Good. That's good.

SARAH (V.O.)

Are you okay?

DAVID

I'm too tired to feel one way or another right now to be honest.

SARAH (V.O.)

I'm so sorry, babe.

DAVID

No, it's alright. Really. It's kind of a relief in a weird way... You know, since she isn't suffering anymore.

SARAH (V.O.)

Yeah. Well, give everyone my love.

DAVID

I will.

SARAH (V.O.)

And tell Abigail I'm sorry for last time.

DAVID

Okay. Have a good day, babe. I love you.

SARAH (V.O.)

I love you too.

David hangs up.

Ty bursts out onto the porch, heading for his truck.

DAVID

Where you headed?

TY

Work.

DAVID

On a Sunday?

TY

Yes, sir. They don't care much about the sabbath at the Home Depot. Plus, anywhere beats bein' around a bunch of grievin' women.

Ty hops in his truck and drives off. David heads back inside.

**INT. ABIGAIL'S DOUBLE-WIDE - CONTINUOUS**

Abigail, holding Ray's Carhartt jacket, grabs her keys.

ABIGAIL

Hey, Ray forgot his jacket and won't answer his phone. Guess he's probably talking to the funeral home.

(MORE)

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

It's got his wallet in it, so I  
think I'm gonna run it over to him.  
Do you mind watching the girls?

The girls, on the couch watching TV, eyes red with tears,  
look over at David. David sees them look over at him, and his  
fight-or-flight tells him to fly.

DAVID

Oh, I can take it. They'd probably  
rather be with their mom right now.

Handing him the coat --

ABIGAIL

You sure?

**EXT. MISS MABEL'S PLACE - DAY**

**MISS MABEL** (70s), a white hippie, waters plants in a huge,  
colorful garden that wraps around her single-wide trailer,  
located deep down the same dirt road as Erica's house.

Wendell walks up to her.

WENDELL

Miss Mabel?

MISS MABEL

Wendell Gross, that you?

WENDELL

'fraid so.

MISS MABEL

You taller 'an I remember. You been  
keepin' on growin'?

WENDELL

Just horizontally.

MISS MABEL

You come to ask me about the  
killin'?

WENDELL

Yes, ma'am. You seen somethin'?

MISS MABEL

Sure did. Seen a red truck zoom  
past here like a bat out of hell.

(MORE)

MISS MABEL (CONT'D)

I was out here a-waterin' and I heard it zip by and as soon as I turned it was already a-way down yonder. All I seen was the hatch and the taillights. Blood red.

Wendell's interest is piqued.

WENDELL

Red from the paint...?

He lets the second half of the question hover in his silence:  
*Or the boy?*

MISS MABEL

I couldn't quite tell. Just red.

WENDELL

A red truck, huh? You see if it was old, new, Chevy, Ford? Anything like that?

MISS MABEL

Wish I could tell you different. My eyes ain't 'xactly reliable no more.

WENDELL

Well, I appreciate it.

MISS MABEL

It was that black boy from up the road, wasn't it?

WENDELL

Yes, ma'am, it was.

MISS MABEL

Shame. Awful shame what we keep doin' to those people.

WENDELL

Yes, ma'am.

**INT. DAVID'S CAR/EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY**

David drives down the dirt road, his eyes wide, taking in images of houses and trees and ponds he hasn't seen in years.

Ray's jacket sits in the passenger seat.

Up ahead, a RED TRUCK pulls out of a driveway and drives slowly toward David, eventually passing him.

As the truck passes, David locks eyes with the driver, **LEON FRYER** (late 20s), a rough-looking, fair-skinned Arkansan with a cigarette in his mouth and a Confederate flag decal on his rear windshield. David catches a glimpse of it in his side mirror.

Also visible in the mirror is a set of TRUCK NUTS dangling from Leon's bumper.

David registers Leon's presence as strange and turns down the same driveway from which Leon's truck emerged.

**EXT. RAY'S SINGLE-WIDE - CONTINUOUS**

Deep in the heart of the Ozark boonies, Ray's trailer and driveway are surrounded by woods.

David parks next to Ray's truck in the driveway and steps out, carrying Ray's jacket.

With trepidation, David steps up onto the porch and KNOCKS on the door. He waits. Nothing.

He KNOCKS again. Again nothing.

David cups his hands around his face and attempts to peek in through the window but can't see anything. He calls out --

DAVID

Ray?

He looks back at Ray's truck. *He's here. But where?*

DAVID (CONT'D)

Ray? You here?

He steps off the porch and tiptoes around the corner of the trailer and sees --

RAY walking out of a narrow path from the forest behind the trailer, holding a used BOWL, SPOON, and GLASS. Strange as hell.

Ray heads to the back door of the house, and David heads back to the front, waiting until he hears RAY ENTER.

Then he KNOCKS. After a few beats, Ray opens the door, surprised to see David.

Handing Ray the jacket --

DAVID

You left this at Abigail's.

Ray cautiously accepts the jacket.

RAY

Thanks.

Silence.

DAVID

Been a while since I've been out here.

RAY

Hasn't changed much.

Silence.

DAVID

Hey, I just want you to know that it wasn't because I was ungrateful. I just --

Ray looks at his feet, avoiding eye contact.

RAY

You don't need to do that right now, Davey.

He looks up at David.

RAY (CONT'D)

Everything's fine. Alright?

DAVID

Yeah. Okay.

Ray's phone RINGS.

RAY

I gotta get that. Probably the funeral home. I'll see you later.

Ray takes the call and shuts the door, leaving David alone on the porch.

RAY (O.S.)

(faintly)

I'm gonna need you to calm down, Cochran.

On the way back to his car, David peers around the corner, his gaze moving toward the woods... The path... *Why the fuck would Ray be eating in the woods?*

David's face changes. He's uneasy, suspicious...

He heads to his car. He glances back at the trailer, too far away now to hear Ray's conversation.

David opens his car door, and as he begins to get in, he looks over at Ray's truck dubiously, then back at the trailer. Unnerved, he climbs in his car and shuts the door.

**EXT. DRIVEWAY - ERICA'S HOUSE - DAY**

The door of a car parked outside Erica's house opens, and Erica's brother, **QUINCY** (late 40s), steps out holding some Tupperware full of food.

Several other cars fill the driveway, folks bringing food to Erica and the family.

Quincy walks up to the porch, where Mark stands by himself. Quincy sets the Tupperware down and gives Mark a hug. Mark hugs back, stoic. It's a brief embrace, beginning and ending with mutual thumps on each other's backs.

QUINCY

You good?

Quincy speaks with a noticeable New Orleans accent.

MARK

Yeah, I'm good. Thanks for coming,  
Uncle Quince.

Quincy picks up the Tupperware.

QUINCY

Where's your mama at?

MARK

She's inside. Everybody's inside.

**INT. LIVING ROOM - ERICA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

Mark follows Quincy inside, where NEIGHBORS and FRIENDS mill about and hug one another.

All of the attendees of this gathering are white except for the Scott family; nary a black neighbor or friend in sight. We get the sense that the Scotts comprise the entirety of the Boone County African-American community.

Quincy and Mark make their way to the --

**KITCHEN**

... where Erica is mid-hug with a NEIGHBOR. Erica is clearly exhausted. Running on fumes.

Quincy puts his dish next to all the others and immediately hugs Erica. Erica starts crying at the sight of him.

Mark watches their exchange.

QUINCY

I got here as fast as I could.

ERICA

They killed him, Quincy.

QUINCY

We gon' find 'em. We gon' find 'em,  
I promise you.

ERICA

I should've never stayed here. I  
should've gone back home.

QUINCY

Don't you think like that. This  
ain't you. This them. They did  
this.

Mark steps out of the kitchen into the --

**LIVING ROOM**

... where Isaiah sits on the couch next to Naomi, who holds the baby. Mark kisses Naomi on the cheek and ruffles Isaiah's hair before heading to the --

**HALLWAY**

... and into his --

**BEDROOM**

He closes the door behind himself. It's his childhood bedroom, but Troy took it over. Posters of basketball players and supermodels on the wall. An XBOX and tiny TV. Twin bed. The room of a typical teenage boy.

Mark sits on the bed. Takes a breath. He opens the top drawer of the nightstand. Sees an OPEN BOX OF CONDOMS. He smiles, closes the drawer.



The door cracks open, and Naomi cautiously steps in.

NAOMI

What are you doing, baby?

She carefully closes the door behind herself.

MARK

Just needed a minute.

Naomi sits next to him on the bed, puts her head on his shoulders.

MARK

It's been a long time since I've been in this room.

Looking up at a poster of a white pop star --

MARK (CONT'D)

He really made it his own.

Mark smiles. Naomi matches him.

NAOMI

(re: the poster)

I cannot believe he loved that girl so much. It doesn't make sense.

MARK

That kid loved skinny white girls and bad music.

(beat)

Should I say that at the funeral?

What was meant as a joke saddens them both.

After a beat, Naomi breaks the silence.

NAOMI

Where's all your stuff from when you lived here? Pictures, yearbooks...

MARK

I don't know. I'm sure it's boxed up around here somewhere.

Mark looks under the bed. Then moves to the closet. On the floor in the back of the closet is a cardboard box, labeled in marker, "Mark's shit." The "shit" is crossed out and replaced with "stuff" in different, feminine handwriting. Mark smiles at that.

MARK

Here it is.

Mark opens the box. Inside are several yearbooks, a high school basketball jersey, and a worn-out baseball mitt. Mark picks up one of the yearbooks and sits back on the bed next to Naomi.

Mark opens the yearbook, scanning through all the white faces until he finds himself. His senior picture. He's skinny with an awful mustache, but he has a huge smile. Mark's name in the yearbook is listed as Marquisse Scott.

NAOMI

Aw, you're so cute!

Mark laughs.

MARK

Like you would've ever spoken to me back then. You would've broken my heart in high school. I was ugly and nervous and had acne --

NAOMI

Shut up, Mark. Shut your mouth.

MARK

Did I not own a razor?

NAOMI

Are there any others?

Mark flips through the yearbook, gets to the sports group photos. He stands in the back, not smiling, in both the basketball and baseball group pictures.

MARK

There I am.

He keeps flipping until he gets to the miscellaneous photos of students hanging out and laughing in class, dressed up for Halloween, etc.

In one picture, he and a young Leon Fryer smile at the camera as lab partners, wearing huge goggles and lab coats. Mark chuckles softly.

NAOMI

You still haven't heard from him since the wedding?

MARK

Nope.

(beat)

I don't know how you can be best  
friends with somebody since eighth  
grade and then they just --

He snaps his fingers.

MARK (CONT'D)

Dip out.

Naomi puts her head on his shoulder, rubbing his knee as he  
looks at the picture of himself and Leon.

NAOMI

I don't know, baby.

**INT. LEON'S METH LAB - DAY**

HICK HOP MUSIC blares as Leon cooks up a batch of meth in a  
stripped RV. Flags of Confederate and Gadsden varieties serve  
as decor.

**EXT. LEON'S PLACE - DAY**

Leon steps out of the RV to smoke a cigarette. The RV is  
parked near the woods behind his trashy mobile home and next  
to a pen full of hogs.

As he lights his cigarette, his BANDAGED HAND shakes. The  
cigarette lit, he puffs away while unwinding the bandage to  
reveal a BADLY BRUISED HAND. Black, blue, red, bloody.  
Probably broken.

He tries to flex and release. Hurts too bad. Wincing and  
mumbling through the cigarette --

LEON

Gotdammit...

He uses the other hand to take a few drags. Stands in silence  
for a beat.

His phone VIBRATES in his pocket. He fumbles around for it  
with his non-injured hand, dropping his cigarette from his  
mouth in the process.

LEON

Shit.

He finally gets his phone and answers it.

LEON

Yeah?

(beat)

Yeah, this batch is almost done.  
Did you talk to the Crowners?

(beat)

And they know what's up?

(beat)

Yeah, no, you're right. It's her  
own damn fault. Nobody else to  
blame.

(beat)

Alright, yeah. I'll see you later.

(beat)

Hey Ray?

(beat)

I think my hand's really fucked up.

**INT. MISS HAZEL'S DINER - DAY**

WENDELL'S HAND trembles against his empty coffee cup in the smallest of small-town diners. The waitress and proprietor, **MISS HAZEL** (70s) refills his cup. The place is almost vacant.

MISS HAZEL

Got a lot on your mind, Wendell?

WENDELL

Yes, ma'am. Always.

MISS HAZEL

Real shame about that boy, huh?  
Wonder what he done to get the fire  
beat out of him like that.

WENDELL

You heard about that already?

MISS HAZEL

Seen it on Facebook. People sayin'  
all sorts of baloney about it.

WENDELL

Yeah, well, people are gonna talk,  
ain't they?

MISS HAZEL

I think he probably mouthed off to  
the wrong one, myself.

Miss Hazel grabs a meal from the counter between the bar and the kitchen and hands it to another customer.

WENDELL

Hey, how's your grandson doin'? He still workin' over at Big Cedar?

MISS HAZEL

Leon? He's been doin' odd jobs with ol' Ray Edwards for a while.

WENDELL

That right?

MISS HAZEL

It's good for him. Leon needs people like Ray. Good people. Not like those knuckleheads he went to school with. All in prison or dealing drugs.

Wendell's gaming her. Nodding along as she spouts on.

WENDELL

Right.

MISS HAZEL

He's a good kid. Just needs guidance is all.

WENDELL

Speaking of Ray, I ran into ol' Davey Edwards last night.

Miss Hazel refills a patron's coffee.

MISS HAZEL

Reckon he was in town to see Miss Rose 'fore she passed?

WENDELL

I think so. What's the deal there? He seemed a little...

Miss Hazel gets really close to Wendell. Leaning over the counter. Speaking in a hushed tone. The town gossip, this lady.

MISS HAZEL

Wendell, that boy, I tell you. That woman took him and his sister into her home, raised them as her own after their folks died.

WENDELL

That crash on Mary Doty Hill, right?

MISS HAZEL

Yessir. And Miss Rose, bless her heart, she had already lost a husband and wasn't even related to them kids by blood. That was her in-laws who died. She took those children in out of the kindness of her heart. And you know what?

WENDELL

What's that?

Whispering now --

MISS HAZEL

That boy moved up to St. Louis to teach little nigger kids and didn't even invite that woman to his wedding.

Wendell, used to this kind of language, doesn't blink. Keeps playing along.

Miss Hazel begins speaking in a regular tone again.

MISS HAZEL (CONT'D)

Didn't invite Ray neither. Leon says Ray's still sore about it.

WENDELL

I'll bet he is. I would be.

MISS HAZEL

And you wanna know one more thing?

She leans in close, whispering again.

MISS HAZEL (CONT'D)

That little you-know-what is a Democrat.

**EXT. DINER PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER**

Wendell exits the diner, almost smiling in amused disbelief, and unwraps a lozenge as he walks toward his vehicle.

**INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE CRUISER - CONTINUOUS**

Wendell hops in the cruiser, shuts the door, and sucks on his lozenge. His almost smile wanes completely. He's thinking. Hard.

**INT. GIRLS' ROOM - ABIGAIL'S DOUBLE-WIDE - DAY**

David, lying on one of two pink-sheeted twin beds, stares up at the ceiling. Bored out of his mind. Frustrated.

ABIGAIL (O.S.)

Davey?

Abigail enters the room without knocking.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

Ray called. Funeral's set for Tuesday. I'm about to go to town. Do you mind watching the girls?

DAVID

I can watch them.

ABIGAIL

By the way, I think we're gonna go over the will tomorrow too. So, ya know, don't make plans.

DAVID

Damn, I was gonna go see a show in Branson.

Abigail smiles.

DAVID

Hey, can I ask you something?

Abigail listens.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Are you and Ray still close?

ABIGAIL

Not like we used to be. Why?

DAVID

Just wondering.

She turns to leave. Turns back.

ABIGAIL

I'm glad you're here, Davey.

A beat.

DAVID

Yeah. Me too.

He isn't. Abigail leaves.

**EXT. ERICA'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

Mark and Quincy sit outside at a makeshift patio, watching as people hug Erica before departing. Quincy's a bit sauced.

QUINCY  
 (re: Erica)  
 That woman's been through more shit  
 in one life... Can't find no peace  
 anywhere. What her daddy did to  
 her, what your daddy did to her,  
 now this.

A long beat of silence. And then --

QUINCY (CONT'D)  
 I'm just tired of people hurting my  
 sister, man.

Mark begins to cry. Tries to stifle it. Sniffles. Quincy  
 tears up a bit, himself.

QUINCY  
 C'mon now, Marquisse.

Quincy locks foreheads with the crying Mark, holding the back  
 of Mark's head tightly.

QUINCY (CONT'D)  
 We their big brothers. We wanna  
 protect 'em, but we can't protect  
 'em all the time, Marquisse. We  
 can't protect 'em all the time.

Mark pulls away. Sniffs hard. Forces himself to stop crying.

MARK  
 He was a good kid. Nobody had any  
 reason to hurt him. Nobody.

QUINCY  
 You know who hurt him, Marquisse.

OFF MARK'S LOOK:

QUINCY (CONT'D)  
 You may not know the individual,  
 but you know who hurt him.

A long silence as Mark digests that. Quincy takes a swig of  
 his drink.



QUINCY

You know... I know how you see things. I know you wanna see the good in people. I know most of 'em treat you nice. Make themselves out to look like they ain't that way 'cause they friendly with you. Because you respectable, got your big house, your education, you mind your Ps and Qs. But I'mma tell you like I told your mama. There's a reason there ain't any other niggas in these woods up here.

MARK

Nah, man. I know these people. They're good people at heart. They just don't know much about --

QUINCY

Your brother's dead, Marquisse.

MARK

I know that.

Quincy stands up. Takes another swig.

QUINCY

They ain't gonna stop killin' us if we keep givin' 'em the benefit of the doubt.

Mark doesn't look at him.

**EXT. PORCH - ERICA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

Erica sits down on the steps. Naomi joins her as Quincy walks past them, briefly rubbing Erica's shoulder before heading inside. They look over at Mark across the yard, who sits by himself, clearly upset.

NAOMI

What do you think he said to him?

ERICA

I don't know, probably something meant to rile him up. Tough love. That's Quincy's way. Tough love, he calls it. When most the time he's just instigating.

NAOMI

Is he blaming Mark for --

ERICA

No, no. Probably just tryin' to tell him what he used to tell me about these folks up here.

(beat)

Quincy's an angry man, Nay. He's a good man, been a good brother to me. Never laid a hand on nobody. But boy is he angry. All the men down there are. That's why I stayed up here after the storm. Didn't want my boys to be as angry as their daddies was. See, Marquisse's daddy, he beat me, but Troy and Isaiah's daddy beat me. Like my own father used to.

(beat)

They all so angry.

NAOMI

I'm sorry. I... I didn't know any of that. Mark's never told me...

ERICA

Mark don't like to talk about it. And it's okay now. I mean it's not "okay," but I understand why they're angry. Don't make it alright what they done to me, but down there, we got no opportunities, nobody looking out for you except you and your own. It weighs on a person. Makes 'em feel small.

(beat)

My father worked at a mill in Westwego, Louisiana from 1960 to 1985. Worked fourteen hours a day, five days a week, stocked groceries on the weekend, and still couldn't afford to pay the light bill most months, let alone for hot meals or a good education for us kids. Made him angry. Made him drink. He'd slap my mama around, and if me or Quincy said anything, he'd slap us too. Angry, angry man. But if he didn't work the straight and narrow he would've ended up dead or in jail and left my mama to raise us herself. Like my boys' daddies did to me. So I get it. I'm angry too.

(beat)

I just don't need to hit anybody.

Naomi grabs Erica's hand, squeezes it tight. They both watch Mark across the yard, still stewing.

ERICA (CONT'D)  
 (re: Mark)  
 I hoped being up here wouldn't turn him angry like them, but I don't know if there is such a place.

Naomi squeezes Erica's hand tighter. Tears form in Erica's eyes.

ERICA (CONT'D)  
 I need to go to bed. I'm tired, Naomi. Boy am I tired.

Erica stands. Places her hand on Naomi's shoulder. Her eyes continue to well up as she and Naomi look at one another.

ERICA (CONT'D)  
 (eyes full of tears)  
 I appreciate you, baby.

Naomi gives Erica's hand one last squeeze. Erica walks slowly inside, the grief walloping her, not letting her forget about its presence, even momentarily.

Naomi and Mark meet each others' gaze. Naomi smiles, sadly.

**INT. LIVING ROOM - ABIGAIL'S DOUBLE-WIDE - NIGHT**

David sits on the floor as Baileigh and Kaedynne play with worn-out Barbie dolls.

DAVID  
 So what do you guys like to do for fun?

KAEDYNNE  
 I like cheerleading. And hunting. And riding the four-wheeler.

DAVID  
 (to Baileigh)  
 What about you?

BAILEIGH  
 I dunno. I like listening to music.

DAVID  
 Yeah? What kind of music?

BAILEIGH

Luke Bryan.

DAVID

Oh.

(beat)

I like hip-hop.

KAEDYNNE

We're not allowed to listen to hip-hop.

The front door opens and Abigail comes in with an armful of groceries.

DAVID

I was worried you weren't coming back.

**EXT. ABIGAIL'S DOUBLE-WIDE - NIGHT**

David stands on the porch, on the phone with Sarah.

DAVID

I just needed to hear your voice.  
This place drains me, Sarah.

SARAH (V.O.)

Just a couple more days.

(beat)

I miss you, David. The baby misses you.

DAVID

I miss you guys too.

David looks up at the rebel flag above him being WHIPPED by the wind.

DAVID (CONT'D)

I think we're gonna be good parents, babe. I think we're gonna be really good parents.

SARAH (V.O.)

Yeah. I think so.

OFF HIS LOOK --

**INT. MISS HAZEL'S DINER - DAY**

David and Ray sit across from Abigail. Abigail has a manila folder in front of her. She opens it and pulls out a document. Begins reading silently.

RAY

Well...?

ABIGAIL

Alright, so it says the house and the two acres will be left to Tyler and Abigail Carpenter. That's me.

She keeps reading.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

And, uh, the land in Newton County she's leaving to...

(beat)

David Edwards.

Silent surprise from everybody.

DAVID

What --

RAY

No, no. Read that again. There's gotta be some sort of mistake.

Abigail hands Ray the will. Ray reads over it.

ABIGAIL

That's what it says, Ray.

Ray finishes reading and looks, with intent, over at David, who is as surprised as anybody. Ray then looks to Abigail.

RAY

You know about this?

ABIGAIL

The envelope was sealed when she gave it to me.

RAY

This is... Nah, you know what?

Ray slides out of the booth. Exits the diner.

ABIGAIL

Ray --

Abigail follows him, leaving David alone at the booth. Miss Hazel comes over, refills David's drink.

With extreme friendliness --

MISS HAZEL

It's good to see you back in town,  
Davey.

He forces a polite smile.

**EXT. DINER PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER**

Abigail follows Ray out into the parking lot.

ABIGAIL

Ray!

He stops, turns around. He's still enraged, but speaks calmly.

RAY

She knew I wanted that land. She gives it to him... Just to what, to spite me?

ABIGAIL

Ray, you need to calm down.

RAY

I am calm, Abigail. You're the one yellin'.

**INT. MISS HAZEL'S DINER - SAME TIME**

David watches through the window as Ray and Abigail argue.

**EXT. DINER PARKING LOT - AS BEFORE**

ABIGAIL

You know, you're so mad that Davey never came down here and saw her, but when she was real sick, you weren't anywhere to be found neither.

RAY

That wasn't my choice.

ABIGAIL

What did you do to her?

RAY  
I didn't do nothin' to her.

ABIGAIL  
She cut you out of her will, Ray.  
Tell me what y'all were fighting  
about.

Ray paces for a beat.

David, showing some gumption, walks out into the parking lot.

RAY  
(to Abigail)  
Nah, I'll see y'all at the funeral.

ABIGAIL  
Ray --

Ray opens the door to his truck.

DAVID  
Wait, Ray --

As he climbs into his truck, Ray speaks to David directly --

RAY  
Fuck off, Davey.

He slams the door and pulls out of the parking lot.

LEON (PRE-LAP)  
What do you mean she found out?

**INT. LIVING ROOM - RAY'S TRAILER - NIGHT**

Ray sits with Leon.

RAY  
I mean she found out. I was  
reckless. Stupid. That's why I tell  
you to be careful with this shit.  
You're not still cooking in that RV  
are you?

LEON  
No. I told you. I go out to Tower  
Road.

RAY  
Good. We gotta be smart about this,  
Leon. They know we're up to  
something.

(MORE)

RAY (CONT'D)

They don't know a lot, but they're sniffin'. We gotta make sure they don't get a good whiff, understand?

LEON

What does her cuttin' you out mean for the...?

RAY

I don't know.

(beat)

After all I done for her. Left it to Davey, the kid who fuckin' abandoned her. Who called her once every few years. I was with her every day. Takin' her to chemo appointments. Takin' her to specialists. I drove her to MD Anderson and back twice. Twice. Then she just up and quits talkin' to me and gives my land, her son's rightful property, to that little...

LEON

My mama'd probably do the same if she knew I was slingin' crystal.

RAY

(sotto)

Spiteful old cunt.

A beat.

RAY

How's your hand?

Leon shows it to him. It's fucked.

RAY (CONT'D)

It'll heal. Just keep icin' it.

LEON

I don't know, Ray. It looks pretty bad. I think I maybe oughta go --

RAY

No, Leon. We talked about this. Every hospital 'round here is gonna report any shit like this to the cops. Just wait a little while. A few weeks, let everything cool down.

(MORE)



RAY (CONT'D)

From what I hear, they already know  
that somebody in a red truck  
dropped him off.

LEON

How do they know that?

RAY

Ain't important. What's important  
is you keepin' your fuckin' head  
down for a little while.

LEON

I just think --

RAY

What do you want, Leon? You want a  
broken hand for a few weeks or do  
you want to spend the rest of your  
life in prison?

Leon sits with that. Ray softens.

RAY

Listen. That little nigger got what  
he deserved. If you're the one gets  
punished for it, then what's the  
fuckin' point?

Leon backs down. Immediate contrition.

LEON

No, you're right.

Ray lightly slaps Leon's cheek.

RAY

You gotta learn to stop questioning  
me, Leon.

(beat)

Now go take the food out.

**EXT. RAY'S TRAILER - NIGHT**

Leon steps out holding a full bowl of instant grits and a  
glass of water. He pauses for a beat before stepping off the  
porch.

He walks toward the forest path, where he disappears into the  
darkness, still holding the food and water.

**EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT**

Wendell steps out at a traffic stop. Heston's car, blue and reds on, is parked behind a wrecked truck stuck in a ditch. A hopped up **MAN** is handcuffed and sitting on the grass.

Heston hands Wendell a baggie of crystal meth.

HESTON

Found this.

Wendell looks at it. Same shit as earlier.

WENDELL

(to the man)

Where'd you get this shit?

MAN

Fuck you! Ain't mine!

WENDELL

He have a phone on him?

HESTON

Yep.

WENDELL

Bag it. Check the records.

Heston returns to the man's truck. As he does, he pulls out his own cell phone and sends a text that we can't see.

**INT. RAY'S TRUCK - DAY**

Ray drives. His phone VIBRATES. A text. He looks at it. We don't see what it says.

**INT. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - NIGHT**

Wendell sits at his desk. Davenport hovers over him.

DAVENPORT

Let me guess. His last few calls were made to somebody we're familiar with?

WENDELL

Yep.

DAVENPORT

Think they know we're onto 'em?

WENDELL

If they do, it ain't through their own powers of perception. They're foolish. Arrogant. 'specially Leon. Probably cooks on his own property. If we could pay him a visit, I'm sure we'd find something worthwhile.

DAVENPORT

I'll talk to the DA tomorrow. See if we can't get a warrant to check it out. For my money, I'd say those two know what happened to that boy, too.

WENDELL

If they didn't do it themselves.

**INT. GIRLS' ROOM - ABIGAIL'S DOUBLE-WIDE - DAWN**

Restless, David lies awake in the twin bed. He pulls out his phone, checks his bank account app. "\$168.14" stares back at him. He plops the phone down on the nightstand.

**INT. HALLWAY - ABIGAIL'S DOUBLE-WIDE - MOMENTS LATER**

David tiptoes past Abigail and Ty's bedroom, where the door is cracked open. He casually peeks in as he passes by and sees Ty and Abigail passed out with a couple of empty beer bottles on the floor next to the bed.

David enters the --

**LIVING ROOM**

... where he quietly grabs his keys and heads to the front door as the quiet sound of CARTOONS fills the silence.

BAILEIGH (O.S.)

(whispering)

Where are you going?

In the living room, Baileigh watches cartoons from one couch as her sister sleeps on the other.

DAVID

(quietly)

I've gotta go check on something.  
If your mom wakes up, tell her I'll be back, okay?

Baileigh nods slightly. Returns her attention to the TV.

**EXT. ROSE'S LAND - DAY**

At the end of a narrow dirt road, David parks his car in front of a closed gate. He gets out and walks to the fence running parallel to the road.

He reaches behind one of the fence posts, feeling around until he is able to grab a hide-a-key hooked onto a nail. He slips the key from the nail, walks to the gate, and uses the key to unlock the gate's padlock.

He swings the gate open.

**EXT./INT. ROSE'S LAND/DAVID'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER**

David drives out onto the property, past a tacky wooden sign that reads "Welcome to Huntin' Holler!"

The dirt road ends, and David parks. He steps out into --

**A BEAUTIFUL HILLY PASTURE**

A gorgeous pond reflects the image of the Ozark mountains overlooking the pasture. A tire swing hangs from a tree near the pond. In the distance, a DEER slurps at a salt block, unaware of David's presence.

David looks around, taking in the scenery, the morning sun, the SOUND OF BIRDS CHIRPING. A home long forgotten.

He takes a beat. Thinks. Reflects. Almost happy.

And then he isn't.

**EXT./INT. ABIGAIL'S DOUBLE-WIDE/DAVID'S CAR - DAY**

David parks behind Ty's truck. Takes an anxious breath.

**INT. GIRLS' ROOM - ABIGAIL'S DOUBLE-WIDE - DAY**

David, getting dressed for the funeral, buttons his top collar and sleeves. He hears a light KNOCK on the door.

ABIGAIL (O.S.)  
Can I come in?

DAVID

Yeah.

She enters, wearing a dress that shows off the "Dixie Girl" tattoo on her shoulder. David ties his tie as she talks.

ABIGAIL

You know, I've been thinkin', and you know, Ray's really wanted the holler for a long time, Davey. He's been talkin' about it for years. Wants to build a house out there.

DAVID

I can't just give it to him.

ABIGAIL

What do you need it for, Davey?

DAVID

I don't need it. But I can't give it away.

ABIGAIL

I know y'all aren't as close as you used to be. None of us are. But he's your cousin, Davey. Closer than that, even.

DAVID

I need the money, Abigail. Sarah lost her job. And we're having a kid.

(beat)

And it's...

He trails off. Becomes emotional. Abigail softens.

ABIGAIL

What is it?

DAVID

I can't afford it.

(beat)

I live in a one bedroom apartment that I can barely afford. We were planning to buy a house before she got laid off, but I'm still paying off my student loans, buying my own books and supplies, plus a baby.

ABIGAIL

Don't her folks have money?

DAVID

She refuses to ask them. Out of fuckin' pride or whatever. And if I push the issue, she --

When he's at all riled up, David's Arkansas roots come out in his inflection.

DAVID (CONT'D)

I'm a schoolteacher. Even if everything's fine with the baby, I'll be pushing it. And if everything isn't fine, God forbid, if there's any complication or any accommodations... If Ray wants the land, he's gonna have to buy it from me.

ABIGAIL

I think you should talk to him. He'll understand. He's not as cold-hearted as you think he is.

**INT. DAVID'S CAR (MOVING) - DAY**

David, driving his nice sedan and wearing a suit he can't afford, drives behind Ty's truck as they pull into a church parking lot.

**INT. CHURCH - DAY**

Rose's funeral. A small Baptist church half-full of MOURNERS. On the front pew, David sits next to Abigail, Ty and the girls sitting on her other side.

**INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE CRUISER - DAY**

Wendell is parked. On the phone.

DAVENPORT (V.O.)

I talked to the D.A.

INTERCUT WITH:

**INT. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - DAY**

Davenport at his desk. Talking to Wendell on the phone.

DAVENPORT (CONT'D)  
 She says the phone calls aren't  
 enough for a warrant.

WENDELL  
 Figured as much.

DAVENPORT  
 We just gotta wait for 'em to make  
 a mistake, Wendell.

Wendell peers through his windshield, and we see that he's  
 parked --

**EXT. PARKING LOT - CHURCH - CONTINUOUS**

Wendell sees Ray leaning against his truck on the other side  
 of the parking lot, talking on the phone.

Wendell steps out of his vehicle and walks toward Ray.

WENDELL  
 (into phone)  
 I'll talk to you after while, Bill.

Wendell hangs up.

RAY  
 (into phone)  
 Cochran, I'm gonna need you to calm  
 down, alright? Now I know you're  
 goin' through a lot, and I'm sorry  
 about your brother, but she brought  
 this on herself. Didn't she? Ain't  
 nobody's fault but hers. Come over  
 tonight, and we'll talk this out.

Ray sees Wendell approaching. Lowers his voice.

RAY (CONT'D)  
 (into phone)  
 Remember the words, Cochran. Say  
 the fourteen.  
 (beat)  
 That's right.

He looks over at Wendell.

RAY (CONT'D)  
 (into phone)  
 I'll see you tonight.

He hangs up.

WENDELL

Sorry to bother ya, Raymond. Just wanted to offer my condolences.

There's a clear tension between them.

RAY

'preciate that, Wendell.

WENDELL

Figure with all you got goin' on, you hardly have time to mourn.

RAY

... All I got goin' on?

WENDELL

Been a real... What's the word? Confluence. Been a real confluence of events for ya the last few days, ain't it, Ray?

RAY

You know I hate it when you use them big words, Wendell.

WENDELL

Here's another one for ya then. Learned it from the back of a cereal box. "Pertinacious." You ever heard that one?

RAY

Can't say that I have.

WENDELL

Means determined as all hell.

Wendell begins to walk away. As he does, he spits out what otherwise would be a cordial parting phrase, but the way he says it makes it clear that this is no polite goodbye; it's a threat --

WENDELL (CONT'D)

I'll be seeing you, Ray.

Seething, Ray spits.

RAY

You take care now, Wendell Gross.



**INT. CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER**

Wendell takes a seat near the back and watches as Ray goes toward the front. A corny contemporary CHRISTIAN SONG plays over the speakers.

**AT THE FRONT**

Ray, silently angry, reluctantly takes a seat next to David. David looks at Ray for a beat, gaining the courage to lean over and whisper --

DAVID  
Can we talk later?

Ray ignores him. Cruelly. Stares straight ahead.

DAVID, incredulous and hurt.

PREACHER (O.S.)  
Proverbs 31:30 says to us, it says,  
"Charm is deceptive, and beauty  
does not last; but a woman who  
fears the Lord will be greatly  
praised."

**IN THE BACK**

Wendell watches David and Ray. Taking notes in his mind.

PREACHER (O.S.)  
Rose Marie Edwards was a God-  
fearing woman. Born right here in  
Harrison, Arkansas in 1943 --

**INT. BASEMENT - CHURCH - DAY**

Later, the reception takes place in the food hall/basement. A buffet of mostly fried, home-cooked meats and casseroles. Old WOMEN hug Abigail. Old MEN chat with Ray and Ty.

**HALLWAY**

David waits outside the bathroom. Wendell walks up, gets in line behind him.

WENDELL  
If I eat anymore, I don't know if  
I'll be able to find my damn belt  
buckle.

David smiles politely.

WENDELL (CONT'D)

I was just chattin' with your cousin Ray. Tough nut to crack, huh? Seems real preoccupied every time I see him.

David perks up. Wendell notices.

WENDELL (CONT'D)

Offered him my condolences. He couldn't be bothered.

DAVID

Yeah, he's been taking it pretty hard, I think. Been a little moody.

WENDELL

Right.

A long beat.

WENDELL (CONT'D)

How much do you know about what he gets up to when you and your sister ain't around?

DAVID

What do you mean?

WENDELL

I mean, you and him don't seem like best buds. And to tell you the truth, I don't care for him much myself.

DAVID

Why's that?

WENDELL

Oh, he walks around like he's a hard-working, blue-collar, salt-of-the-earth kinda guy. Like a normal fella just mindin' his business. But he's got some strange ideas, strange ways of lookin' at the world.

DAVID

Are you talking about... Abigail told me he left.

WENDELL

She told you wrong, friend.  
Probably not on purpose. He's got  
everyone thinking he's one thing.

Wendell swirls the lozenge around in his mouth.

WENDELL (CONT'D)

He isn't.

They watch Ray hug an OLD WOMAN and shake an OLD MAN's hand  
with a polite grin.

Wendell reaches into his pocket. Pulls out a card. Offers it  
to David.

WENDELL

Just in case you stumble onto  
anything you think I might ought to  
know about.

David takes it. They lock eyes. And then go back to casually  
waiting in line for the bathroom.

WENDELL

I've never pissed myself in a  
church before, but if this fella  
don't hurry up...

Wendell steps in front of David and KNOCKS on the bathroom  
door.

WENDELL (CONT'D)

You alive in there?

CUT TO:

**EXT. WOODS - RAY'S SINGLE-WIDE - NIGHT**

The treeline behind Ray's place. Silent. The limbs on the  
trees sway with the wind.

**INT. RAY'S SINGLE-WIDE - DAY**

Leon, Cochran, and Jayma sit in silence. Jayma, crying but  
out of tears, rests her head on Cochran's shoulder. Cochran's  
a mess. Sweat rolls down his forehead. His leg bounces. He  
looks like he smells terrible.

JAYMA

I don't think we can do this,  
Cochran. It's not right. I don't  
think we can go through with it.

Leon stares at the couple. Slouched in his chair like he doesn't have a care in the world. Decides to break the silence with a miscalculated --

LEON

It's all for the best...

Cochran glares at Leon.

COCHRAN

When's he getting here?

Cochran stands up and paces around for several beats.

LEON

I'm just sayin'. She ain't the girl  
you thought --

The front door opens, and Ray walks in. He makes immediate eye contact with Cochran. Sees Jayma on the couch.

COCHRAN

We need to talk about this, Ray.

JAYMA

We can't do this. We cannot do  
this.

Cochran, somewhat forcibly, grabs her arm, silencing her.

RAY

Leon, go make dinner. Meet me back  
here at eight.

Leon takes a second, then gets up and moves past Ray toward the door.

LEON

I'll leave y'all to it.

**INT. LEON'S TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER**

Leon attempts to crank the ignition with his injured hand, but it hurts too bad. He grimaces and looks down at the damaged hand.

**EXT. ERICA'S HOUSE - DAY**

Isaiah shoots a jump shot and makes it.

MARK (O.S.)  
You've been practicing.

Mark walks up to Isaiah. Isaiah passes him the ball.

ISAIAH  
Coach said I might get to play on  
the eighth grade team 'cause there  
aren't enough eighth graders.

MARK  
Yeah? You excited?

Mark shoots. Misses. Been a while.

ISAIAH  
They're a lot bigger than me.

Isaiah grabs the board. Makes another one.

MARK  
But I bet they don't work as hard.

Naomi steps out onto the porch, holding the baby.

NAOMI  
Mark, your mama wants to talk to  
you.

MARK  
Tell her I'll be in in a second.

Naomi rocks the baby, casually strolling back inside.

MARK  
(to Isaiah)  
Hey man, come here.

Isaiah holds the ball, walks over to Mark.

MARK (CONT'D)  
I'm gonna have to go back to Little  
Rock after the funeral because of  
work. I'm gonna need you to take  
care of Mama, okay?

Isaiah nods.

MARK (CONT'D)

You're the man of the house now, Isaiah. I know you didn't ask for that, but it's the way things are now. You gotta help Mama out as best you can. If she asks you to do something, do it. If she asks you to clean your room, clean it. Wash the dishes, mow the yard. And you don't even have to wait for her to ask you. Make things easier for her. Okay?

ISAIAH

Okay.

MARK

Come here.

Mark gives Isaiah a hug.

MARK

I love you, man.

ISAIAH

Love you too.

**INT. BEDROOM - ERICA'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER**

Erica lies in bed. Her sunken eyes tell her entire story.

Mark knocks on the open door.

ERICA

Come in, baby.

She scoots over so Mark can sit next to her feet on the foot of the bed.

MARK

You okay?

ERICA

Baby, I ain't ever gonna be okay.

(beat)

But I'm gonna deal. I just need to feel it for a little while before I get out of this bed. But I'm gonna get out of this bed, I promise you that.

MARK

I know you are, Mama.

ERICA

I didn't mean to interrupt you and Isaiah. I just want to know how you're doing.

MARK

(struggling)

I'm okay.

ERICA

You got yourself a good woman out there, Marquise. She's gonna help you through this. That child gonna help you, too. Believe me. That's a lucky baby, right there, you know that? Got two wonderful people bringing her up.

She squeezes his hand. Tears form in her eyes.

ERICA (CONT'D)

I wish I could've given you what you're gonna give to that little angel, Marquise.

MARK

What are you talking about, Mama?

She's crying now. They both are.

ERICA

I tried hard for you boys. I worked my tail off every day for you boys, I really did. I thought being up here would be better for y'all. I didn't want y'all growing up like I grew up. I just... I don't know where I went wrong.

He squeezes her hand tightly. One of his tears lands on their interlocked hands.

MARK

You didn't do nothing wrong, Mama.

Their eyes unite. Tears bubble as they squeeze the ever-loving hell out of one another's hands.

The baby begins to CRY OFF-SCREEN.

ERICA

Go take care of that baby, Marquise.

MARK  
 (smiling)  
 Yes, ma'am.

**INT. LIVING ROOM - ERICA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

Mark walks out into the living room to find Naomi changing the baby's diaper as the baby WAILS.

NAOMI  
 (to Mark)  
 We need some baby powder. I can go  
 to the store if you watch her --

Mark kisses her on the forehead and grabs his keys.

**INT. PHARMACY - DAY**

Leon browses the bandage and braces aisle. He crouches down to look at a wrist brace.

MARK (O.S.)  
 Leon Fryer? That you?

Leon stands up slowly, turning to see Mark standing at the end of the aisle, holding diapers and baby powder.

LEON, turning white, carefully slips his injured hand into his jacket pocket.

LEON  
 (slow; nervous)  
 What's up, man...?

Mark is genuinely excited to see Leon. He sets the items down and gives Leon a hug. Leon nervously reciprocates with his uninjured hand.

MARK  
 It's been a while, man. What have  
 you been up to?

Clearly uncomfortable --

LEON  
 You know. Same ol', same ol'.

Mark picks up on Leon's discomfort.

LEON (CONT'D)  
 (re: the diapers)  
 You got a kid now?



MARK  
Yeah, wife and baby. The whole thing.

LEON  
Congrats, man. I would've gone to the wedding, but, you know, things just...

MARK  
Right. Yeah.

Poorly playing coy --

LEON  
What are you in town for?

Mark's face changes. *Everybody's heard about what happened. Why the fuck would Leon not have heard?*

MARK  
You didn't hear?

LEON  
Hear what?

MARK  
Troy died.

Leon doesn't blink. A bad actor.

LEON  
Damn, I'm sorry to hear that.

*He didn't ask how.* Mark looks Leon in the eyes. Doesn't like what he sees.

MARK  
Yeah.

A long beat.

MARK  
Well I'll see you later, man.

LEON  
(quick; relieved)  
Yeah, see you later.

Mark walks away. Leon goes back to looking at wrist braces. Glances toward Mark, watching him walk.

MARK heads to the checkout, his mind churning.

**INT. MARK'S CAR - DAY (MOVING)**

Mark, deep in thought, drives past a billboard: "**DIVERSITY** is a code word for **#WHITEGENOCIDE**"

*(Again, 100% real.)*

Mark reads it. Takes it in. Drives past it.

**INT. LIVING ROOM - ERICA'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

Mark stares off into space as Naomi and Isaiah play with the baby on the floor. Quincy watches TV.

MARK, lost in thought.

He stands from the couch, almost leaping, and grabs his keys.

QUINCY  
Where you going?

MARK  
I gotta go see an old friend real quick.

NAOMI  
Mark?

Just like that, he's out the door.

**EXT. ERICA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

Mark pauses for a beat, sees a bucket on the corner of the porch housing multiple worn out baseball bats.

**INT. MARK'S CAR - NIGHT (MOVING)**

Mark drives slowly down a dirt road. He passes the entrance to a driveway.

MARK  
Oh --

He backs up. Turns down the driveway.

**INT. MARK'S CAR/EXT. LEON'S PLACE - MOMENTS LATER**

Mark parks next to Leon's truck. Takes a second. Scopes it out.

**EXT. LEON'S PLACE - CONTINUOUS**

Mark hops out. Opens the back seat. Grabs a WOODEN BASEBALL BAT.

He walks slowly toward Leon's trailer. He holds the bat down at his side, his sweaty, nervous hands squeezing the grip.

He steps onto the small porch. Lets out some air. KNOCKS. Waits.

The door opens. It's Ray. And we're --

**EXT. RAY'S SINGLE-WIDE - NIGHT**

David stands on Ray's porch.

DAVID

Hey, I just wanted to...

Behind Ray, Cochran and Jayma sit on the couch. David sees them.

Ray gives David a condescending once-over and promptly shuts the door in David's face.

COCHRAN (O.S.)

(muffled)

Are you taking fucking visitors while we're talking about this?

RAY (O.S.)

(muffled)

No, sorry.

David, hurt and confused, steps off the porch and gets in his car, taking a look toward the forest path as he does so.

**EXT. LEON'S PLACE - AS BEFORE**

Mark KNOCKS again. Still nothing. The muffled sound of HICK HOP coming from behind the trailer catches Mark's attention. Curious, he grips the bat and begins to walk toward the back of Leon's trailer.

**INT. DAVID'S CAR - NIGHT (MOVING)**

David drives down the dirt road from Ray's, livid and embarrassed. He abruptly pulls the car over into a gravel pull-off and turns the lights off. He takes a beat, then --

**EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER**

David treks through the woods toward Ray's, coming to the treeline at Ray's property, where he sees Cochran, Jayma, and Ray step out onto the porch, speaking inaudibly.

Cochran and Jayma both kneel, and Ray takes their heads into his chest and appears to pray with them. David watches, utterly confused.

Crying, Jayma hugs Ray. She and Cochran stand, say their goodbyes, and get in their truck. Ray watches as they leave, and David watches Ray. Ray heads back inside, and David heads to the path.

He follows the trail for an extended period of time, eventually arriving at --

**A SHED**

He cautiously and curiously steps toward the shed, dimly glowing from a single bulb hanging over the door.

Upon getting close to the shed, he sees that it's padlocked. He holds the lock in his hand.

DAVID

What the --

A BUMP FROM INSIDE THE SHED makes him drop the lock. He takes a step back. *Something's in there. Someone is in there.*

DAVID

(to himself)

Ray, what in the hell --

He reaches into his pocket. Pulls out WENDELL'S CARD.

**EXT. LEON'S PLACE - AS BEFORE**

Mark rounds the corner and sees that the lights to Leon's RV are on, and the door is open. The MUSIC gets LOUDER. He steps closer and closer, gripping the bat, raising it a little.

He finally gets close enough to see inside. He watches as Leon, oblivious, bops to his terrible music and mixes chemicals with his uninjured hand.

Mark sees the other hand, bandaged and braced. Puts two and two together. Shock, sadness, and anger all blend and contort within one expression.

Leon moves from one side of the RV to the other to grab a beaker, and as he moves back, he glimpses Mark outside. Mark's furious face meets Leon's strange, calm reaction. They stare at one another. Silent.

LEON

Okay.

Leon bolts toward the driver's door. Mark drops the bat and sprints to the driver side of the RV, where Leon manages to jump out of the driver's door and toward the treeline. Mark chases after him, running at full speed.

He tackles Leon. Leon gives Mark some difficulty, but Mark manages to roll on top of Leon and land several punches to the face and torso, knocking the fight out of him.

Out of breath, Mark leaves the bloody, groggy Leon for a moment while he retrieves his bat. He lifts the bat like he's ready to swing it, still catching his breath while Leon tries to sit up in the dirt.

MARK

Talk!

**EXT. WOODS - AS BEFORE**

David dials the number on Wendell's card. It RINGS TWICE before --

RAY (O.S.)

Give me the phone, Davey.

David turns. Ray has a pistol pointed at him, drawing it from an ankle holster, carefully setting a bowl of food on the ground as he keeps the gun leveled at David. Once the plate is on the ground, Ray snatches the phone from David's hand and ends the call.

RAY

Whose number is this?

DAVID

What's in the shed, Ray?

RAY

Who were you calling? The cops?  
DEA?

DAVID

DEA?! What the fuck are you... What are you into, Ray? Wendell Gross told me you were back --

RAY  
 Is that who you were you calling?  
 Wendell fucking Gross?

Ray hurls the phone into the woods and takes an aggressive step forward, pointing the gun at David's face. David shows Ray his hands. They're trembling.

RAY (CONT'D)  
 You been spyin' on me, Davey? That  
 what you been doin'? Spyin' for the  
 fuckin' cops?

A BUMP FROM INSIDE THE SHED. They both hear it.

DAVID  
 You're gonna kill me? You're gonna  
 kill your own cousin?

RAY  
 You ain't my cousin, cousin. Not  
 anymore.

He moves the gun closer to David's face.

DAVID  
 (panicked)  
 Abigail knows I'm here Wendell  
 knows I'm here they'll know you did  
 it they'll find me they'll --

Ray lowers the gun.

RAY  
 Look at you, Davey. Fuckin'  
 beggin'. My mother didn't raise you  
 like this.

Ray spits.

RAY (CONT'D)  
 What'll it take, Davey?

DAVID  
 What... What do you mean?

RAY  
 I want the land. And I want you  
 gone.  
 (re: shed)  
 And I want you to forget about  
 this. What'll it take?

DAVID  
I don't understand --

RAY  
Follow me.

Ray begins walking back toward the house. David doesn't move.

RAY (CONT'D)  
Come on. I'm not gonna shoot you.

David takes a last look at the shed. Follows Ray. Past the BOWL OF FOOD on the ground.

**INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE CRUISER - NIGHT**

Wendell sits in his car, looking at his phone. One missed call. He calls the number back.

**EXT. WOODS - AS BEFORE**

David's phone, resting on the dirt, lights up and VIBRATES.

**INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE CRUISER - AS BEFORE**

Wendell listens as the RINGING STOPS, followed by: "The number you are trying to reach is not available right now."

He looks down at his phone, puzzled.

**INT. RAY'S SINGLE-WIDE - NIGHT**

Ray and David enter the trailer. Ray walks into the kitchen while David stands by the door. In the kitchen, Ray appears to be writing something.

He re-enters the living room and hands David a CHECK. David looks at it with astonishment.

RAY  
Is that enough?

DAVID  
Where did you get this kinda money?

RAY  
Is that enough.

David looks down at the check, mulling it over.

RAY (CONT'D)  
 You got a kid on the way, right?  
 Got bills to pay, a wife to care  
 for.

DAVID  
 Ray, I don't --

They lock eyes.

RAY  
 I'm gonna ask one more time.

David looks at the check. Back to Ray. A decision.

**INT. LEON'S METH LAB - NIGHT**

Mark and Leon sit opposite each other on the floor, leaning against the wall. Leon's face is bloody and bruised, and he struggles to breathe without pain. Mark shoots daggers Leon's way, holding the baseball bat in his lap.

MARK  
 So this is your life now. What  
 happened to you, man?

Mark gazes around at the lab equipment.

MARK (CONT'D)  
 Who are you working with in all  
 this? Is it what's his name? Guy  
 that used to work at Big Cedar that  
 you started hanging out with. Used  
 to be in the Klan. Ray Edwards?

LEON  
 (grimacing)  
 Fuck you, Mark.  
 (beat)  
 Or should I call you Marquise?  
 That's your name, ain't it?  
 Marquise. Mar-kwiss.

Mark squeezes the bat. As angry as he's ever been. Leon grabs at his injured side.

LEON (CONT'D)  
 I should've gotten the Aaron Harvey  
 scholarship.

MARK  
 What?



LEON

My grades was just as good as yours. Do you know how hard I had to work to get straight A's? How many hours I spent studying after I got home from work? After cooking for my dad? After bathing him? I was the only one in our class who applied for that scholarship until the day before the application was due. I had my fuckin' hopes up, Mark. And then you --

MARK

And then I applied. And I got it. And I earned it, Leon. What choice do you think I had in all that?

LEON

You already had your college paid for. You had three scholarships already guaranteed by the time you applied for that one. But they gave it to you over me anyway. I wonder why...

Mark quiets for a moment, gathering his thoughts. Mark looks Leon directly in the eye. Leon meets his gaze.

MARK

I am so tired of this, man. Ever since I moved up here, I've been nodding along every time one of you people has said some shit like that. I've been telling myself you mean well, you just don't know much of the world. And maybe some of that's true, but...

(beat)

I am not the reason you couldn't go to college. I am not the reason your dad got into a four-wheeler accident and the cost of his medical bills bankrupted your family. I am not the reason the bank foreclosed on your house, or that you had to go to work at Big Cedar instead of going to U of A or that you're cooking meth behind your trailer.

(beat)

You know, you've always been this close to getting it, Leon.

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

This close to understanding that I am not your enemy. But you make the choice to buy into what they tell you is keeping you down, what Ray Edwards tells you, what some rich white guy on the internet tells Ray Edwards. You make the choice, every day when you wake up, to hate who they tell you to hate, who they tell you are taking your opportunities and your freedom or whatever the fuck, instead of making the choice to believe the truth: the people who tell you I'm the enemy... they wouldn't piss on you if you were on fire.

Leon is silent. His eyes unblinking, locked on Mark. Wheels turning.

MARK (CONT'D)

They wouldn't give you water if you were dying of thirst. They wouldn't let you in their home if you were bleeding to death on the doorstep. Because you're nothing to them. But they've convinced you that you aren't. And you choose to believe it.

Mark stops. Leon's expression is glazed over. Some of this is reaching him.

Mark glances down at Leon's bandaged hand. Tears form in his eyes.

MARK

You made the choice to kill my little brother.

Leon, for the first time in minutes, looks away from Mark, guilt painting his face.

MARK

What did he do, Leon? What did he do to deserve that?

Leon turns away. Can't bear to look at Mark.

MARK (CONT'D)

Tell me. What did he do? Why did you do that to him?

Leon desperately avoids Mark, barely able to get words out of his mouth --

LEON  
Stop it, Mark.

Mark hovers over him.

MARK  
Tell me, Leon. Tell me.

LEON  
Stop it...

Mark is in Leon's face now, Leon's head twisted away from Mark.

MARK  
TELL ME!

Leon turns violently toward Mark, their faces inches from one another, and SCREAMS --

LEON  
***STOP IT!***

Mark breathes heavy. Rests in Leon's space for a moment. Collapses back against the opposite wall. He catches his breath as Leon does the same.

Leon's expression continues to show the guilt, the gears turning, Mark's words penetrating.

MARK  
I was your friend, man. I was your best friend.

Leon closes his eyes. Grimaces. From the pain in the moment, from the pain in his body, all of it. Everything weighing on him. His eyes stay closed as the pain on his face fades to a sense of calm. A decision made. A choice.

LEON  
No.  
(beat)  
You're just another nigger.

Mark squeezes the bat. Sweat drips down his forehead.

Leon squirms to try to alleviate some of the pain. As he does, he casually drops --

LEON (CONT'D)  
Always have been. Always will be.

MARK. Rage.

This is not a redemption story.

**INT. RAY'S SINGLE-WIDE - NIGHT**

Ray, now alone in his living room, shirtless and wet from a shower, looks at his watch. It's 8:15. His leg bounces.

ON HIS TORSO is a small pectoral TATTOO OF A WHITE CROSS in the middle of a red circle. A DROP OF RED BLOOD in the center of the cross. The BLOOD DROP CROSS, the symbol of the Klan.

His BARE BACK. A TATTOO OF THE GADSDEN SNAKE. As his muscles move, the snake looks like it's slithering.

**INT. LEON'S METH LAB - AS BEFORE**

Leon's cell phone RINGS from the other side of the room. The DUKES OF HAZZARD THEME.

Leon tries to stand, too hurt to fully get up in one motion. As he does --

LEON  
Mind if I get that?

MARK  
Sit down.

Leon does. Mark glares at him. Mark's calmed a bit, but rests in his anger.

MARK  
Why'd you kill him?

LEON  
You might as well bash my head in already, Mark. 'cause I ain't sayin' shit.

MARK  
What the fuck did he do to you?

LEON  
He didn't do nothin' to me.  
Alright?

A long beat. Then --

LEON (CONT'D)  
Shoulda kept his hands to hisself's  
all.

They stare at each other. LEON with an unearned arrogance and MARK with a mounting fury.

**INT. RAY'S TRUCK/EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT**

Ray speeds toward Leon's place.

**INT. LEON'S METH LAB - NIGHT**

Mark paces around the room with his bat in hand.  
Deliberating.

LEON  
We just gonna sit here forever?

Mark pulls out his own phone. Dials a 9. Then a 1.

RAY (O.S.)  
(calling out)  
Leon?

LEON  
I'M IN HERE RAY HELP ME FUCKIN'  
HELP --

Mark jumps onto Leon and tries to cover his mouth. Leon bites Mark's hand and attempts to wrestle him off. They bump into a table, knocking a glass beaker down.

**EXT. LEON'S PLACE - CONTINUOUS**

Ray, approaching the lab with his gun drawn, hears the BEAKER BREAK. He rushes toward the RV.

**INT. LEON'S METH LAB - MOMENTS LATER**

Ray barges into the RV as Mark jumps off of Leon and reaches for his baseball bat.

RAY  
(gun drawn)  
DON'T YOU EVEN THINK ABOUT IT.  
(to Leon)  
What's he doing here?

Leon grimaces as he stands.

LEON  
He knows, Ray. He fuckin' knows.

RAY  
You're still cooking here, Leon?  
What did I fucking tell you?

LEON  
I'm sorry, Ray. I'm --

RAY  
You're stupid and careless is what  
you are. Do you see what fucking  
happens?

LEON  
I'm sorry, man. Christ. I'll move  
the fuckin' thing.

Mark, hands where Ray can see them, stares up at the barrel  
of the gun. And the hate-filled eyes behind it.

Staring down Mark --

RAY  
Leon, make yourself useful. Send  
out the signal. Tonight's the  
night. And use the fucking burner  
phones like I told you.

DAVENPORT (PRE-LAP)  
So what do we fuckin' do?

**INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - NIGHT**

Davenport paces around the room while Wendell and Heston sit  
in silence.

As Davenport talks, Heston rolls the rabbit's foot on his  
keychain around his fingers.

DAVENPORT (CONT'D)  
I'm tired, gentlemen. I'm tired of  
the billboards. I'm tired of the  
meth labs. I'm tired of CNN coming  
to town just to show the world how  
shitty we are. This is my home.  
It's embarrassing.

Staring into space, almost to himself --

WENDELL

You know, if we cared half as much about fixing the things that make us look shitty instead of how shitty we look, maybe things'd change a bit.

Davenport takes exception.

DAVENPORT

What was that, Sergeant?

HESTON

Wendell --

WENDELL

Sheriff, we got a family mourning the loss of one of their kids, feeling unsafe here. Feeling victimized, ostracized. A nice family that never done nothing wrong to nobody.

DAVENPORT

I am well aware of that.

WENDELL

We got entire families cookin', sellin', usin', dyin'. 'Cause this county's so damn poor and indifferent about it that these folks don't see any other options.

HESTON

Yeah, but --

WENDELL

I'm embarrassed, too. But it don't matter how I feel. It don't matter how we feel. People are hurtin', and it's our job to fix it, not to sit here and bitch and moan about our reputation.

DAVENPORT

Well how you recommend we do that, Wendell? We got no real evidence on Ray Edwards or Leon Fryer for the meth. Got absolutely nothing on the boy's murder except for the red truck.

(MORE)

DAVENPORT (CONT'D)

We're in a place where somebody  
'round every bend coulda had at  
least one reason to hurt that boy,  
and they all got red trucks.

(beat)

It's like Where's Waldo, but  
everyone in the picture's wearing  
that same damn sweater.

HESTON

Sheriff's right, Wendell. Why keep  
wasting our time if we ain't gonna  
find nothing?

WENDELL. Angry. Indignant. Calms himself.

WENDELL

I ever tell either of you the story  
about the starfish?

DAVENPORT

No, Wendell, I can't say I've heard  
the story about the starfish.

WENDELL

I saw one of them motivational  
speaker deals at a conference down  
in Little Rock --

HESTON

(giggling)

A motivational speaker.

WENDELL

Shut up and listen, Heston. Just  
listen.

HESTON, silenced.

WENDELL (CONT'D)

I saw this speaker in Little Rock,  
and she told this story about  
starfish. How they all wash up on  
the beach. Thousands of 'em wash up  
on the beach. And this fella would  
walk out there by the water, and  
pick up these starfish, and throw  
as many back in the water as he  
could. And this other fella sees  
him throwin' 'em back in, and he  
comes up to him and he says, "How  
come you're throwin' 'em back in  
the water? There's thousands of  
them things on this beach.

(MORE)



WENDELL (CONT'D)

You can't possibly make a difference." The one fella reaches down, picks up a starfish, and throws it in the water. Then he looks at the other guy and says, "Made a difference for that one."

Wendell stands up, tossing a lozenge in his mouth as he heads for the exit.

HESTON pulls out his phone under the table as it VIBRATES, the rabbit's foot resting in his other hand.

WENDELL (CONT'D)

You fellas have a good night, now.

Heston has a text message. "14." From an unsaved number.

Heston looks up at Wendell. Their eyes meet for an instant. Wendell looks down at the rabbit's foot in Heston's hand for a split second, then back up to Heston's gaze. Wendell takes a suck on the lozenge, then heads out.

Davenport, humbled, watches Wendell go.

DAVENPORT

(under his breath)

Fuckin' starfish.

Heston slides his phone back in his pocket.

**EXT. RAY'S SINGLE-WIDE - NIGHT**

Mark, hands tied and mouth taped shut, squirms in the bed of Ray's truck as Ray parks and hops out. Leon stays in the cab with the sliding rear window open.

As Ray circles around the truck, he glances at Mark with dismissive condescension, like Mark is nothing but an inconvenience to him. An errand.

Ray heads toward the path in the woods. Leon looks back at Mark through the cab window.

LEON

Your mama's been through enough already, and now you go and do this to yourself. Fuckin' shame.

Mark doesn't react the way Leon expects him to. Instead, he looks up at the sky, cloudless and full of stars, his eyes glistening.

**EXT. WOODS - SAME TIME**

Ray walks the path, arriving at the shed. He pulls out the key to the padlock.

He unlocks it. Opens the door. But WE STAY ON HIM for the time being.

RAY

Time to go.

He stares down at something. An expression of evil pity. And, finally, we see what he sees:

A WHITE GIRL, seventeen at most, bound and gagged, crying, staring up at Ray with desperate eyes. **LACY CROWNER.**

**INT. COCHRAN'S TRUCK/EXT. FOREST GATHERING - NIGHT**

Cochran and Jayma are parked next to several unoccupied trucks at the end of a dirt driveway in what appears to be a CLEARING IN THE WOODS.

Jayma's a mess. Cochran is stoic, staring ahead, sweaty and drunk.

JAYMA

(hysterical)

We can't do this, Cochran. We can't do it. She's our little girl. We can't...

Cochran stares straight ahead. Having second thoughts himself.

JAYMA (CONT'D)

It's not right. Tell Ray. Tell him we can't. It's not right. It's not right --

COCHRAN

**ENOUGH!**

Jayma bursts into tears. Face in her hands.

COCHRAN (CONT'D)

She's not our little girl anymore. We lost her. You heard Ray. She's sick. She's got a fuckin' sickness, Jayma. You want her to keep livin', keep going through life with a fuckin' sickness, Jayma? Is that what you want?

JAYMA  
 (bawling)  
 No no no --

COCHRAN  
 We can't be selfish right now. We  
 gotta do what's best for her.

Cochran exits the truck.

COCHRAN (CONT'D)  
 Come on. Let's go.

He goes to the bed of the truck. Grabs a duffel bag. Unzips it. Tugs at A WHITE GARMENT. The BLOOD DROP CROSS peeks out.

**INT. COMMUNITY COLLEGE CLASSROOM - NIGHT**

Wendell sits in a mostly empty night class, taking notes as the INSTRUCTOR writes on the board. His PHONE VIBRATES in his pocket.

**INT. LIVING ROOM - ERICA'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

Isaiah holds the baby as Naomi paces around the room talking on the phone. Erica sits on the couch, nearly expressionless.

NAOMI  
 (into phone)  
 He left hours ago and didn't say  
 where he was going.

INTERCUT WITH:

**EXT. COMMUNITY COLLEGE - NIGHT**

Wendell stands by his truck, parked in the community college parking lot. The phone up to his ear. Silent. In disbelief.

Quincy storms through Erica's living room. Grabbing his keys and coat.

QUINCY  
 Fuck this, I'm goin' to find him.

NAOMI  
 (into phone)  
 Can you hear me?

A beat.

WENDELL

Yeah. Yeah, I can hear you.

WENDELL, shaken.

ERICA, exhausted, staring aimlessly. And FROM HER FACE WE --

CUT TO:

A CROSS BURNING.

And we're --

**EXT. KLAN GATHERING - NIGHT**

And RAY, wearing purple klan robes, speaks in the middle of a circle of hooded KLANSMEN in their white garments. Lacy Crowner, still bound and gagged, kneels on the ground in front of the cross, crying and squirming.

RAY

Under better circumstances, we'd be here tonight to celebrate. To celebrate our heritage, to celebrate our purity, to celebrate our people. But instead, we're here for a cleansing.

COCHRAN AND JAYMA watch Ray, the fire reflecting in their eyes.

RAY (CONT'D)

Our water has gotten muddy, klansmen. And we simply cannot drink muddy water.

CHEERS and WHOOPS from the klansmen. Among them is HESTON, watching on as a willful participant. Nothing undercover about his presence here.

Next to Heston, is another KLANSMAN, tall and broad. HIS FACE glowing from the firelight, bright enough to see that he has ONE BROWN EYE and ONE BLUE EYE.

RAY (CONT'D)

Say it with me:

The klansmen join Ray in the incantation:

RAY (CONT'D)

We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children! We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children! We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children!

**EXT. RAY'S TRUCK - KLAN GATHERING - SAME TIME**

Parked across the field, Mark still tosses and turns in the bed of the truck.

Clothed in the Klan regalia, Leon stands by the truck, watching Mark's reactions to the INCANTATION. Mark breathes heavily, writhing in a futile effort to free himself.

Leon casually waves a pistol in Mark's direction.

LEON

Cool it, Mud.

**EXT. KLAN GATHERING - CONTINUOUS**

RAY

To preserve our race, to preserve our way of life, we cannot allow mud into our streams. And the only way to cleanse mud from our streams is to dam them up. Not only is it futile to argue, to reprimand, to punish, but it is cruel. A woman touched by mud is a sick woman, stricken with an illness that cannot be cured.

LACY, crying.

RAY (CONT'D)

What kind of people would we be if we didn't put that sick woman out of her misery?

Jayma cries into Cochran's shoulder. Cochran stares straight ahead.

**EXT. RAY'S TRUCK BED - KLAN GATHERING - SAME TIME**

Leon lowers the tailgate.

LEON

Let's go.

**EXT. KLAN GATHERING - CONTINUOUS**

RAY

And what kind of people would we be  
if we didn't enact justice upon  
those who spread the illness?

Ray looks across the field, the "congregation" following his gaze, to see Leon, walking slowly due to his various injuries, guiding Mark, at gunpoint, toward the circle.

GASPS and MURMURS and CHEERS.

Leon shoves Mark to the ground in the middle of the circle. Mark lies face down in the dirt. Leon puts a knee in his back and lifts his face toward Lacy.

LEON

(in Mark's ear)  
You're gonna watch.

RAY

You see this, Mud? You see what  
your people make us do?

Ray pulls a pistol from the waist of his robe. Levels it at Lacy. She looks up at him, shaking her head, crying. Begging with her eyes.

JAYMA looks away. COCHRAN watches.

Ray takes a beat to stare down at her. This is not reticence. Not hesitation. He's reveling in this.

RAY

(to Lacy)  
This is mercy, girl.

RAY PULLS THE TRIGGER. LACY SLUMPS. JAYMA WAILS. COCHRAN MAKES HIMSELF WATCH FOR AS LONG AS HE CAN BEFORE TURNING AWAY.

MARK SCREAMS UNDER THE TAPE.

Ray takes a beat to gather himself. Turns to Mark and Leon. Mark writhes under Leon's weight. GARBLED SCREAMS.

RAY

Let him speak.

Leon rips the tape from Mark's mouth.

MARK  
**NO! NO! NO! NO! NO! NO!**

RAY  
 (yelling)  
 Do you want to apologize, boy? For what your brother did to that poor girl?

MARK  
 FUCK YOU!

RAY  
 (yelling)  
 Look at her parents, boy! Your coon brother did that!

Mark sees Cochran and Jayma holding each other and weeping. Too distraught to pay attention to anything happening.

Ray kneels down in front of Mark. Quietly --

RAY (CONT'D)  
 Shoulda stayed home, nigger.

Ray stands, spitting on Mark's face as he does so.

RAY  
 Take him to the bridge.

Mark is turned over.

Lifted up by countless white-sleeved arms.

MARK  
**NO!**

*QUICK SHOT: David sits alone in his car. Thinking.*

BACK TO:

MARK. Being carried.

MARK  
**NO!**

*QUICK SHOT: David walks up to Abigail's porch.*

BACK TO:

MARK. Carried out of the field.

MARK

**STOP! NO!**

*QUICK SHOT: David enters Abigail's trailer. His nieces sleep on the living room couch, cartoons on the TV.*

BACK TO:

MARK. Carried onto a gravel driveway.

MARK

**PLEASE!**

*QUICK SHOT: David walks down the hallway, past Abigail's bedroom. She and Ty asleep.*

BACK TO:

MARK. A dirt road. He kicks and kicks, violently and desperately. One of the klansmen lets go of his leg, and Mark manages to KICK the man in the hip.

We hear the JANGLING of keys and see a RABBIT'S FOOT fall to the ground among a sea of white robes and violence, a torn chain dangling from the foot's metal cap.

MARK

**STOP!**

*QUICK SHOT: David climbs into bed.*

BACK TO:

A bridge.

WE STAY ON MARK'S FACE as a noose is slipped over his head.

MARK

**NO NO NO NO NO NO NO NO!**

*QUICK SHOT: David, tossing and turning in the twin bed.*

WE STAY ON MARK'S FACE as he's lifted by white arms.

MARK

**NO!**

*QUICK SHOT: David, staring up at the ceiling, unable to sleep.*

WE STAY ON MARK'S FACE as he's thrust over the railing.

*QUICK SHOT: David, drifting off now.*



WE STAY ON MARK'S FACE as the life snaps out of him.

*QUICK SHOT: David. Sound a-fucking-sleep.*

WE STAY ON MARK'S FACE as he hangs.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

**EXT. DIRT ROAD/BRIDGE - DAY**

As LAW ENFORCEMENT tapes off the area, we see images of FLASHING LIGHTS, YELLOW TAPE, POLICE GUNS IN HOLSTERS, BOOTS STEPPING ON THE DIRT ROAD. These images are intercut with --

**INT. LIVING ROOM - ERICA'S HOUSE - DAY**

COMPLETE SILENCE as NAOMI WAILS. ISAIAH cries. QUINCY fights the urge to rip apart everything in sight. ERICA, broken, stares straight ahead, her head wobbling dizzily as her eyes struggle to create tears.

**EXT. DIRT ROAD/BRIDGE - AS BEFORE**

Wendell and Davenport both arrive at the same time. Rushing to the scene, Wendell sees Mark's hanging body and pauses for a beat, staring at Mark in absolute disbelief.

Wendell collapses into a kneeling position, turning away from the sight, unable to breathe.

Davenport charges toward the crime scene crew.

DAVENPORT  
CUT HIM DOWN! CUT HIM DOWN,  
GODDAMMIT!

Wendell rips at his hair. Horrified. Revolted. Sick.

Shaking, he stares down at the gravel and sees the RABBIT'S FOOT resting a few feet from him.

**INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE CRUISER - MOMENTS LATER**

Wendell SLAMS the door shut. He digs through his console and finds a hard pack of cigarettes. Rips one out. Attempts to light it. His hands shake too badly to do so.

Frustrated, Wendell spits the cigarette out, hurls the lighter at the windshield, and SLAMS his fists into the steering wheel.

WENDELL

**FUCK FUCK FUCK FUCK FUCK FUCK!**

He lets it out.

Pauses.

Catches his breath.

And grabs a lozenge.

**EXT. ABIGAIL'S DOUBLE-WIDE - DAY**

David drags his suitcase toward his car as Wendell's cruiser pulls into the driveway.

Wendell steps out. He's still shaken. His movements are a series of anxious tics.

WENDELL

You headed out?

David opens his trunk and shoves his suitcase in.

DAVID

Uh, yeah. Can I help you with something?

WENDELL

You didn't happen to call me last night, did you?

David hesitates for a split-second. Glances up at Wendell.

DAVID

Nope.

Wendell gazes off into the distance. Swallowing his anger.

WENDELL

Didn't think so.

He heads toward his cruiser. Turns back.

WENDELL

You really hate this place, don't you?

David's taken aback.

WENDELL (CONT'D)  
 You think you're too good to be  
 here. Think we're all hicks.  
 Rednecks. Idiots.

DAVID  
 Look, man. I don't know what --

WENDELL  
 No, no, no. It's okay.

He looks down at his feet. Back up to David, with intent.

WENDELL (CONT'D)  
 I'd rather be a hick than a coward.

Wendell walks toward his vehicle.

WENDELL (CONT'D)  
I'll be seein' ya.

He gets in and drives away, leaving David speechless by his  
 car, watching the dust fill the air.

CUT TO:

**EXT. ROSE'S LAND - DAY**

Ray unlocks the gate. Swings it open.

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

David teaches.

DAVID  
 Darnell, what do you think Boo  
 Radley represents to Scout?

**INT. MISS HAZEL'S DINER - DAY**

Wendell enters. Takes a seat by the window.

**EXT. ROSE'S LAND - DAY**

Ray rips the "Welcome to Huntin' Holler!" sign out of the  
 ground.

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

David leans on a desk in the back of an almost empty classroom, talking to a dejected black STUDENT. The exact same blocking as page 9, but this time it's a different kid.

DAVID  
Did he hit her?

The student avoids any eye contact with David, but he manages to nod.

David scribbles his number on a piece of paper. Hands it to the student.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
If you ever need anything, do not  
hesitate to call me.

**INT. MISS HAZEL'S DINER - DAY**

Wendell sips on coffee as he pores over a textbook. He looks up to see Cochran and Jayma sliding into a booth across the room. Both of them look ghostly. Wrinkled clothes. Baggy, bloodshot eyes. Wendell watches them as they sit and avoid looking at one another.

**EXT. ROSE'S LAND - DAY**

Ray stands in the pasture, taking in the beautiful scenery.

**EXT. DAVID'S NEW HOUSE - DAY**

David and Sarah, holding a BABY, stand on the sidewalk of a nice house with a for sale sign out front. David puts his arm around her.

SARAH  
I love it.

**EXT. ROSE'S LAND - DAY**

Where the "Welcome to Huntin' Holler" sign once stood is a new one: a Blood Drop Cross with "Trespassers will be hanged" below it.

Where the tire swing used to be is now home to a NOOSE.

**INT. MISS HAZEL'S DINER - AS BEFORE**

Wendell, still watching the Crowners, takes a sip of his coffee. As he does, Jayma looks over at him. Their eyes meet.

**EXT. ROSE'S LAND - DAY**

Ray and Leon look in admiration at a newly built COMPOUND. Racist flags (Confederate, Blood Drop Cross) make clear what this place is.

Ray smiles. Puts his arm around Leon.

**INT. DAVENPORT'S OFFICE - SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - DAY**

Davenport fills out paperwork at his desk. Wendell knocks on the open door and enters. Davenport's eyes rise from his work.

WENDELL

Feds are about to head out to the property. I'm gonna ride out there with them.

Davenport smiles.

DAVENPORT

We got 'em. After all that, we finally got 'em. I'll be a monkey's uncle.

Wendell doesn't smile.

WENDELL

Yeah...

Wendell turns to leave, thinks better of it.

WENDELL

Bill, I, uh... I ain't gonna do this no more. I'm quittin'.

DAVENPORT

What do you mean?

WENDELL

I mean consider this my notice.

DAVENPORT

You're serious.

Wendell's unblinking gaze serves as an affirmative.

DAVENPORT

Why you gonna go and do that,  
Wendell?

WENDELL

Because I've been doing this job  
for twenty years, thinking I been  
helping people.

His voice straining, eyes clouding --

WENDELL (CONT'D)

Who the hell are we helping?

Wendell hesitates for a moment.

WENDELL (CONT'D)

Do you know how deep it goes, Bill?  
I mean, really.

Davenport doesn't answer. They're silent, not looking away  
from one another, until Davenport SIGHS and stands.

Davenport extends his hand. Wendell shakes it. They hold  
there longer than seems comfortable.

DAVENPORT

I'll miss having you around, son.  
What are you gonna do with  
yourself?

WENDELL

I don't know...

Wendell lets go of the handshake. Steps away. Davenport looks  
down at his hand, the RABBIT'S FOOT in his palm, left by  
Wendell during the handshake.

WENDELL (CONT'D)

Might become an astronaut.

Wendell exits. Davenport gazes up from the rabbit's foot to  
the empty doorway.

**INT. HALLWAY - SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER**

Wendell strides down the hallway, approached by a jittery  
Heston.

HESTON

Hey Wendell, why are Cochran and  
Jayma Crowner in holding cells  
downstai--

Wendell BUMPS into Heston and keeps on moving, never bothering to acknowledge him.

Heston, shaken by the exchange, turns from Wendell to another DEPUTY across the hall, who just saw everything. They share a very clear, anxiety-induced matching gaze. A realization between the two of them.

The DEPUTY'S FACE. SWEAT forming on his forehead. ONE BROWN EYE. ONE BLUE EYE.

**INT. CLASSROOM - DAY**

David scans the MSNBC site on his computer as his students work quietly on an assignment.

His brow contorts as he comes across a headline: "FBI Investigating Case of Two African-American Brothers Murdered Days Apart in Apparent Lynchings Near Harrison, Arkansas."

He clicks on the headline, his eyes darting back and forth across the page as he consumes the article.

We catch SNIPPETS of what he reads. Words and phrases like: "Considered to be the most racist city in the United States"; "Known for controversial billboards"; "Marquise Scott, an engineer"; "possible connection to the unsolved murder of Lacy Crowner, a local teenager found dead days later."

Amid the words, he sees photos of Mark, Troy, and Lacy, along with a crime scene photo of Mark's body, blurred, hanging from the bridge.

Abruptly, he closes the browser window. Swivels in his chair. Takes a breath.

**INT. BEDROOM - DAVID'S NEW HOUSE - DAY**

David sits in bed watching Sarah play with the baby, his mind elsewhere.

SARAH  
Coochie coochie coo!

The baby LAUGHS. David cracks a smile.

The doorbell RINGS.

DAVID  
I'll get it.

He gets up.

**INT. FOYER - DAVID'S NEW HOUSE - DAY**

David opens the door. It's Naomi.

Her car is parked in the driveway. Erica sits in the passenger seat, just as broken as the last time we saw her, staring aimlessly ahead. Isaiah sits in the backseat next to the baby's car seat. He watches David and Naomi's interaction.

DAVID  
Can I help you?

NAOMI  
Are you David Edwards?

DAVID  
Yes...

NAOMI  
The same David Edwards that sold property in Arkansas to Ray Edwards?

DAVID  
Um...

NAOMI  
Did you know what he was gonna do with that land?

David says nothing. His silence an affirmative.

Naomi slaps him in the face and marches back to her car.

Stunned, David watches her. As he does, Erica turns toward him and makes direct eye contact from the passenger seat of Naomi's car.

David touches his fingertips to his cheek, closes his eyes, still trying to process.

When he looks up, he finds an empty driveway. No Naomi, no Erica, no Isaiah. The car isn't there.

Maybe it never was.

**INT. NAOMI'S CAR - DAY (MOVING)**

Naomi drives on the INTERSTATE, Erica in the passenger seat beside her, Isaiah in the back with the baby.



Erica stares blankly out the window. Naomi reaches over to her, and they clasp their hands together, silent as Naomi keeps driving.

**INT. BEDROOM - DAVID'S NEW HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER**

David steps into the doorway. He watches as Sarah has the baby on the bed, in between two stuffed animals, poking each one, in turn, softly on the belly --

SARAH  
Eeny, meeny, miney, moe...

**EXT. THE LAND - DAY**

Wendell leans onto the closed gate outside of the compound, his cruiser parked behind him. Up the dirt driveway, Leon lifts an armful of lumber from the bed of his truck, his broken hand now in a cast.

SARAH (V.O.)  
... catch a tiger by the toe.

**INT. BEDROOM - DAVID'S NEW HOUSE - AS BEFORE**

Sarah continues poking the baby and the animals.

SARAH (CONT'D)  
If he hollers, let him go.

**EXT. THE LAND - AS BEFORE**

Ray walks out near Leon. Leon sees Wendell on the gate and stops. Leon sets the lumber down, and, with a shit-devouring smirk, waves to Wendell with his broken hand.

Wendell and Ray, though fifty yards apart, stare each other down.

RAY, with a waning confidence, the spoils of victory being interrupted.

WENDELL, sucking on a lozenge, not backing down, unbuckling his holster. *This shit ain't done yet.*

SARAH (V.O.)  
Eeny, meeny, miney...

RED and BLUE LIGHTS begin to emerge from the bend behind Wendell.

**INT. BEDROOM - DAVID'S NEW HOUSE - AS BEFORE**

Sarah tickles the baby's belly. The baby GIGGLES.

SARAH (CONT'D)

MO!

David watches, his cheek red from Naomi's slap.

CUT TO BLACK.

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