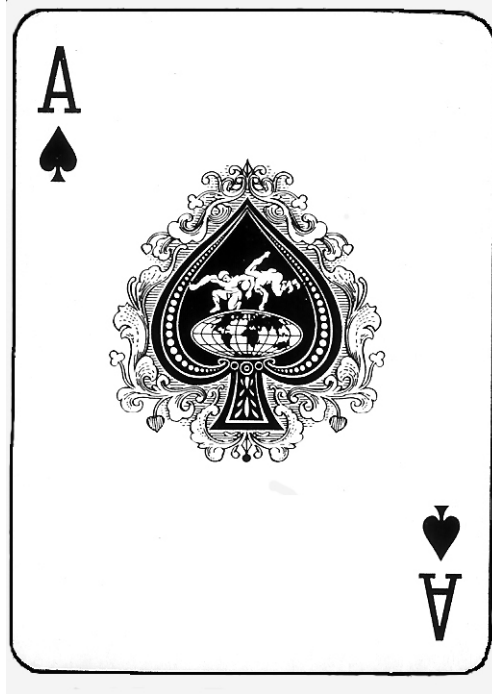




by

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"Ace of Spades"

FADE IN:

EXT. CHICAGO - PRESENT DAY

The mid-winter skyline.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

A high school in the suburbs, dusted with snow.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

MS. WELTER (40s, stern), an English teacher, red pen in hand, moves about the room handing out graded papers to the thirty 12th grade STUDENTS sitting at their desks.

MS. WELTER
(to all)
Read 'em and weep.

Several students GROAN.

RICK COOPER (Caucasian, class clown) looks at his paper, which has a "F" on it.

RICK
Hey! You musta made a mistake. I
deserve a higher grade than this.

Ms. Welter returns to Rick's desk.

MS. WELTER
Is that right? Well, maybe I'd
better have another look.

She picks up his paper and looks it over briefly.

MS. WELTER (CONT'D)
Why, I do believe you are correct,
Mr. Cooper. You even spelled your
name right this time. Please accept
my deepest apology and let me fix
this for you.

Rick smirks and gives a "thumbs up" to the other students as Ms. Welter takes her red pen and puts a "+" sign beside the F, then drops the paper back on Rick's desk. Rick's grin fades when he sees his new grade.

Ms. Welter moves to MARCUS SHAW (handsome and fit African-American), sitting near the center of the room.

MS. WELTER (CONT'D)
I'm sure it will come as no
surprise that the highest grade
belongs to Mr. Shaw...again.

She hands Marcus his paper, which has a red A+ on it.

BILLY (Caucasian) and MARCELO (Hispanic), sitting on either side of Marcus, raise their arms and bow in homage to him.

CHONTELLE WOODS (striking African-American), sitting in front of Marcus, turns around and smiles, then glances back at her B+ paper as Ms. Welter drops it on her desk.

MS. WELTER (CONT'D)
Sometimes I wonder if the rest of
you are just using this class to
catch up on your sleep.

A student in the back of the room SNORES. The others snicker.

MS. WELTER (CONT'D)
(slight smile)
Case in point.

She hands out the last paper and moves to the front of the room.

MS. WELTER (CONT'D)
Now, don't forget about our little
party next week, better known as
the SATs. You won't want to miss
it, especially if you plan on going
to college.

RICK
What if you're not going to
college?

MS WELTER
Then you don't have to show up. We
still need people to flip
hamburgers and pick up our garbage.

The BELL sounds. The students pack up their things and exit.

INT. LOCAL DINER - AFTER SCHOOL

Marcus and Chontelle sit at a booth sharing some fries and drinking milk shakes.

A WAITRESS (40s) delivers hamburgers and fries to Billy and Marcelo in the next booth. A few other CUSTOMERS are scattered about the diner.

BILLY

Marcus! Toss me your ketchup.

Marcus picks up the plastic catsup bottle on the table and flips it over Chontelle's shoulder and Marcelo's head to Billy. Billy catches it upside down in one hand, and, as he does, the top POPS open and the catsup FARTS out all over his fries. He looks at Marcelo, surprised.

MARCELO

Sweet!

They laugh then begin eating.

CHONTELLE

(to Marcus)

Why Harvard?

MARCUS

My mom... She was an only child, and her parents died when she was really young. So she's worked hard all her life. One day she made a promise to herself that her children would grow up differently, and that they would have the best education she could provide... And she says Harvard is the best.

CHONTELLE

What makes you think you'll get accepted?

MARCUS

...Fear.

CHONTELLE

Fear?

MARCUS

Yeah. My mom'll kill me if I don't get in.

He smiles. Chontelle smiles back.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

My grades are high enough. I just need to ace the SATs and hopefully that will do it.

CHONTELLE

...Harvard won't be cheap.

MARCUS

No shit. Especially law school.
That's why Mom's been saving up for
years.

CHONTELLE

And your step-dad?

MARCUS

(stiffening up)

Higher education isn't exactly on
his list of priorities. He thinks I
should join the Marines right after
graduation, just like he did.

He takes a drink of his shake.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

But I gotta get away from here, and
Harvard is my ticket.

CHONTELLE

(pouting)

You would go away and leave me here
all alone?

MARCUS

You can come with me.

CHONTELLE

Right. Like I'm gonna get into
Harvard.

MARCUS

(smiling)

I'm available for tutoring.

CHONTELLE

Oh yeah? What will that cost me?

MARCUS

...How about an arm and a leg?

CHONTELLE

That's what I was afraid of...
Would you settle for my heart?

Marcus smiles and feeds her a fry.

Marcus' brother, JASON (14), standing outside with blood
dripping from his nose onto his coat, BANGS on the window.

Marcus and Chontelle flinch and turn to see who it is.

MARCUS

Jesus!

CHONTELLE

Ohmigod!

Marcus jumps up and runs outside.

Chontelle grabs her purse and their coats and starts to follow, but the Waitress waves the check and flags her down.

WAITRESS

Hold up there, honey! This ain't no
Dine and Dash!

Chontelle returns to the register to pay.

EXT. DINER - CONTINUOUS

Marcus runs over to Jason, now standing on the sidewalk beside his electric scooter.

MARCUS

What happened?!

JASON

Whad'ya think?

Tears well up in his eyes.

Marcus takes him by the shoulders.

MARCUS

Hey, it's okay. It'll be okay.

Jason spits some blood.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Do you need a doctor?

Jason shakes his head no.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

You sure?

Jason nods yes.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Okay. Let's go.

Jason picks up his scooter and they run over to Marcus' Jeep Wrangler, parked in the parking lot. They put the scooter in the back then get in. Marcus STARTS the motor, shifts into reverse, backs out of the parking space, then speeds off as Chontelle emerges from the diner. She watches them for a moment then runs to her Volkswagen Bug and hops in.

EXT. THE SHAW'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

The Jeep races up the street and stops abruptly in front of a house typical of the middle-class neighborhood. Marcus and Jason hop out. Marcus hurries around to the back, reaches in and pulls out an aluminum baseball bat, then he and Jason run up to the front door and enter.

INT. SHAW'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Marcus gets a good grip on the bat as he and Jason move cautiously from the entry into the living room where their stepfather,

DWAIN NOLAN (Caucasian; early 40s; tall and fit), sits in his easy chair, drinking a beer and watching a ball game on TV. Two more empty beer cans are sitting on the end table beside him.

MARCUS

Where's Mom?

Dwain, focused on the TV, thumbs over his shoulder to the hallway.

Marcus and Jason back out of the living room and move down the hall to their parents' bedroom. Marcus opens the door, revealing

DIANA (early 40s, African-American, attractive but disheveled), curled up in a fetal position on the bed with her eyes closed, trembling and sniffing.

Marcus moves over to her and puts his hand on her shoulder.

Diana jerks away and cowers.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

(softly)

It's okay, Mom. It's me...and Jason.

Diana turns toward them, revealing her bruised cheek and swollen eye. She sits up and hugs Marcus, then sobs.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Do you need to go to the hospital?

She shakes her head no.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

That son of a bitch.

He consoles her for a moment then grips his bat and moves to the doorway.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
(to Jason)
Stay with her.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Marcus, wielding the bat, enters the room prepared to do battle with his stepfather, but he's gone. Three empty beer cans now sit on the end table beside his easy chair. As Marcus wheels around to go find him, they meet face-to-face.

DWAIN
I'll take that.

With a quick move he twists the bat out of Marcus' hand and WHACKS him across the bridge of the nose with the handle, knocking him to the floor, bleeding. As he steps forward to strike him again, Chontelle appears.

CHONTELLE
No!

She starts toward Marcus but Dwain turns and raises the bat.

DWAIN
Get the hell outta here, you little bitch! This doesn't concern you!

Chontelle steps back a little as Jason appears.

DWAIN (CONT'D)
I said get out! Now!

MARCUS
(to Chontelle)
Go! Go home!

Chontelle hesitates for a moment then exits through the front door.

DWAIN
(to Marcus)
Get up, you whimpy piece a shit!

Marcus stays down, holding his nose.

EXT. SHAW'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Chontelle runs to her car, hops in, opens her purse and removes her cell phone. She quickly dials 911 and puts the phone to her ear.

CHONTELLE
(to herself)
C'mon, c'mon...

INT. SHAW'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Dwain taunts Marcus, still lying on the floor.

DWAIN
I said get up!

Marcus shakes his head no.

Jason disappears down the hall.

MARCUS
(weakly)
You win.

DWAIN
What?

MARCUS
(louder)
I said, you win.

DWAIN
I win?! Hell, we're just gettin'
started! C'mon you pussy!
Stand up and be a man!

He moves to Marcus and gives him a swift KICK to the stomach.

Marcus doubles up and groans.

DWAIN (CONT'D)
Jesus... My 'ol man used to use a
pipe wrench on me and I never said
(falsetto; mockingly)
"you win."

Marcus looks up at Dwain.

MARCUS
(through tears)
You're not my dad.

Dwain raises the bat and steps toward him, but

Jason appears with a 9mm Glock and, holding it with both
hands, points it at Dwain's back.

JASON
That's enough! Back off or I swear
I'll kill you!

Dwain turns around slowly and grins.

DWAIN
You gonna shoot me, boy?

JASON
(shaking)
I will if I have to.

Dwain spreads his arms out wide.

DWAIN
Go ahead, then. Make my day.

Jason squints in anger and re-grips the pistol.

A SIREN fades in from down the street.

Diana enters, sees the situation and puts her hand to her mouth and begins trembling.

DIANA
(shaking her head)
No! No!

DWAIN
(to Jason)
Whatcha waitin' for? No balls, like
your brother? I thought maybe at
least one of you would turn out to
be a man... Guess not.

He steps toward Jason.

Jason aims just to the side of Dwain's head and pulls the trigger.

The gun FIRES and the bullet RIPS into the opposite wall.

Dwain flinches and cowers a little.

Diana covers her ears with her hands and screams.

DWAIN (CONT'D)
Jesus! You coulda killed me!

JASON
Next time I will!

The front door BURSTS open and two uniformed Chicago police officers, VINCE DONOFRIO (Italian-American, early 40s, fit), and HECTOR RAMIREZ (Hispanic, mid 30s, shorter), rush in with their pistols drawn.

VINCE
Put the gun down, now!

Jason squats slowly and lays the gun on the floor.

VINCE (CONT'D)
Now move away and put your hands
behind your head!

Jason complies. Hector moves over and picks up the pistol.

VINCE (CONT'D)
(to Dwain)
Drop the bat!

Dwain complies.

Hector checks on Marcus.

HECTOR
You okay, son?

Marcus nods yes as Hector helps him to his feet.

VINCE
Somebody wanna tell me what the
hell's goin' on here?

JASON
(pointing to Dwain)
The bastard beat up Mom, then us.

VINCE
(shakes head)
Jesus...

DWAIN
(to Jason)
You forgot a few details.

VINCE
(to Dwain; firmly)
Turn around and put your hands
behind your back.

DWAIN
Are you shittin' me?!

VINCE
We gotta take you in and hold you
for 24 hours.

DWAIN
That's bullshit!

VINCE
Hey, I don't make the laws.
(firmly)
(MORE)

VINCE (CONT'D)
Now, turn around and put your hands
behind your back!

Dwain reluctantly complies.

Vince holsters his pistol and cuffs Dwain.

HECTOR
You sure you folks are okay? I can
call an ambulance.

MARCUS
We're okay.
(gives Dwain a hard
look)
Just get him outta here.

VINCE
(to Hector)
You stay here and take their
statements. We'll head to the
station.

He leads Dwain to the front door.

EXT. SHAW'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Vince escorts Dwain (handcuffed) out of the house and to the
patrol car parked in the driveway with the LIGHTS flashing.

Chontelle stands on the sidewalk beside her car.

Hector's patrol car is parked behind Chontelle's car, the
LIGHTS also flashing.

Several NEIGHBORS gawk.

Dwain gives Chontelle a hard look as Vince opens the back
door of his patrol car.

DWAIN
(to Chontelle)
I suppose I have you to thank for
this, you little bitch!

Vince pushes Dwain's head down, sits him in the back seat,
closes the door, and moves around to the driver's door and
gets in. He STARTS the patrol car, backs out of the driveway
and pulls away.

Chontelle runs up to the door of the house and enters.

EXT. CHICAGO SUBURB - CONTINUOUS

Vince's patrol car leaves the residential area and enters an industrial section.

INT. PATROL CAR - CONTINUOUS

Vince glances in the rear-view mirror at Dwain.

VINCE
So you like beatin' up women and
children...

DWAIN
Fuck you.

VINCE
Fuck me? I oughta pull over and
give you some of your own medicine.

DWAIN
Go ahead.

Vince jerks the steering wheel to the side and whips into an empty parking lot next to a large warehouse. He slams on the BRAKES, throws the car into park and shuts off the engine.

EXT. WAREHOUSE PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Vince gets out of the patrol car, opens the back door, pulls Dwain out and squares off to fight.

DWAIN
What the fuck is this? Aren't you
gonna uncuff me?

VINCE
Hell no. That'll give me about the
same advantage you had over the
wife and kids.

DWAIN
Why don't you take 'em off and let
me whip your ass like I used to.

Vince smiles, steps around behind Dwain and removes the handcuffs, then squares off again.

Dwain faces him, puts up his fists and steps forward to fight.

VINCE
(backing off)
Forget it. I learned my lesson.

He pulls a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket and offers one to Dwain. Dwain takes it, Vince takes out his lighter and lights it for him, then lights one for himself.

VINCE (CONT'D)

Jesus, Dwain. You gotta knock this shit off. I can't keep coverin' your ass every time.

DWAIN

Goddamit, Vince, she's fuckin' her boss!

VINCE

No shit? Last time you said it was the mailman. And who was it before that...the grocery boy?

DWAIN

Fuck you!

VINCE

(grinning)

I always thought your dick was big enough, but maybe she doesn't. Or maybe you don't know how to use it.

Dwain squares off again.

VINCE (CONT'D)

Take it easy! I'm just tellin' ya: Get your shit together. You're a loose cannon... We got a good thing goin' here, and you're gonna fuck it up. All we need is a couple more big busts like the last one and we can retire early. Then you can dump your old lady and go out and buy all the pussy your dick can handle... You hearin' me?

DWAIN

(abdicating)

...Ya, I hear ya.

VINCE

Good... You can stay at my place tonight. I'll intercept Hector's report and tell the Chief you got the flu or somethin' and won't be in for a couple of days.

He pokes his index finder into Dwain's chest.

VINCE (CONT'D)
(firmly)
But this is the last time... Let's
go.

They flick their cigarettes to the ground and get in the patrol car. Vince STARTS the engine and they drive off.

INT. SHAWS' HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Chontelle and Jason sit on the couch next to Diana consoling her. Marcus holds an ICE PACK to his nose.

Hector tears a page out of his daybook and hands it to Diana.

HECTOR
Here's the number for the local
crisis center. They have some good
people working there, so don't
hesitate to call them if you need
to.

DIANA
(weakly)
Thank you.

HECTOR
Are you sure you don't need a
doctor?

MARCUS
We'll be fine.

HECTOR
Okay, then, take care.

He leaves, CLOSING the front door behind him.

JASON
What are we gonna do? He's gonna
come back here really pissed.

MARCUS
We gotta go someplace where he
won't find us.

DIANA
I don't understand it. The anger
management classes aren't helping
him.

CHONTELLE
Can't you get a restraining order?

MARCUS

Yeah, right. Like that'll stop him.

JASON

But where can we go?

MARCUS

I'm not sure, but somebody's gonna get killed if we stick around here.

CHONTELLE

You can come stay with us.

MARCUS

Get real, Chontelle. That's the first place he'd look. You want him beatin' the shit outta you and your family too?

CHONTELLE

No, but--

MARCUS

(interrupting)

Then let us handle it. It's not your problem.

CHONTELLE

But I care about you, so it is my problem.

MARCUS

I appreciate that, but this is just somethin' we gotta deal with as a family... Go home. I'll talk to you tomorrow.

CHONTELLE

I'd rather stay.

MARCUS

(firmly)

Go.

Chontelle gets up reluctantly and exits through the front door, CLOSING it behind her.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

(to Jason & Diana)

Go pack. We'll leave first thing in the morning.

Diana and Jason head down the hall to their bedrooms.

Marcus moves over to the window and watches Chontelle leave.

INT. TOPLESS BAR - NIGHT

The bar is crowded with PATRONS and the MUSIC is loud.

Dwain and Vince sit close to the stage, drinking and stuffing money into a TOPLESS DANCER's g-string.

EXT. SHAW'S HOUSE - EARLY DAWN

Marcus, Diana and Jason stand beside Marcus' Jeep, now parked in the driveway. Diana's and Jason's injuries look a little better this morning.

Marcus puts their suitcases and his baseball bat in the back, then Diana hands him her laptop computer case, which he wedges between the suitcases.

MARCUS
Okay, let's roll.

JASON
Hold on a minute. I forgot something.

MARCUS
Make it quick.

Jason runs back into the house and CLOSES the door behind him.

Diana climbs into the passenger seat and Marcus moves around and gets into the driver's seat. He inserts his key and STARTS the engine.

INT. SHAW'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Jason OPENS the folding doors of the entry closet, gets down on his knees and rakes the snow boots, etc., aside.

He reaches back against the wall and pulls up the carpet, revealing a cover to the crawl space under the house.

He lifts the cover and feels around until he locates a medium-sized duffel bag. He pulls it through the opening and sets it behind him on the floor. He replaces the crawl-space cover, tucks the carpet back down and replaces the shoes. Then he rises, closes the closet doors, grabs the duffel bag and hurries down the hall to his bedroom.

INT. JASON'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jason enters and moves to the side of his bed.

He kneels down, reaches way back between the mattress and box springs and pulls out a couple of Penthouse magazines.

He UNZIPS the duffel bag just enough to stuff in the magazines, then ZIPS it shut, snatches it up and hurries out of the room.

EXT. SHAW'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Jason, carrying the duffel bag, steps off the porch and sprints to the Jeep. Marcus gets out and lets him climb into the back seat, then gets back in, backs the Jeep out of the driveway and pulls away.

EXT. BILLY'S HOUSE - SHORT TIME LATER

Marcus' Jeep, with Diana in the passenger seat and Jason in the back seat, is parked in front of a detached garage behind Billy's house.

Marcus helps Billy lift the garage door, revealing a restored 1957 Chevy Nomad station wagon.

BILLY

She's old, but she runs good.

Marcus looks it over.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Dad always said this would be mine someday...but Mom won't let me have it 'til I graduate.

MARCUS

You sure we should be taking it?

BILLY

Hell, yes. You guys have always been there for us. It's about time we returned the favor... Besides, Mom hardly ever comes out here. (choking up a little) It reminds her too much of Dad... Anyway, I'll pull 'er out and you can hide your Jeep in here 'til you're ready to come back for it.

He gets in the Nomad, STARTS the motor and pulls it out of the garage and parks it beside Marcus' Jeep with the motor running.

Diana and Jason get out of the Jeep and help Marcus put their suitcases, Diana's laptop, and the baseball bat in the back of the Nomad.

Then Billy steps into the garage and guides Marcus as he drives the Jeep in. Jason and Diana get in the Nomad.

Billy and Marcus exit the garage; Billy closes the door and locks it. Marcus hands Billy the keys to the Jeep.

MARCUS

I really appreciate this, Billy.

He extends his hand. Billy takes it, then pulls Marcus into a hug and pats him on the back. Marcus' eyes water a little.

BILLY

You take care, bro. Call me when you can.

MARCUS

(choked up)

I will.

BILLY

(pushing away)

Go on. Get outta here.

Marcus smiles, then moves to the Nomad, gets in, puts it in gear and eases down the driveway. Billy watches them go.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The Nomad travels down the snow-dusted highway through the suburbs and out into the country.

INT. CLASSROOM - SAME DAY

All the students are present, except for Marcus.

Chontelle looks back at Marcus' empty seat, then turns to Billy.

CHONTELLE

(whispering)

Where is he?

Billy shrugs his shoulders.

INT. NOMAD - HIGHWAY - DAY

Marcus drives with Diana in the passenger seat, solemn, staring out her window. Jason, in the back seat, plays with his GameBoy.

Diana's cell phone RINGS in her purse. She removes it and looks at the display.

DIANA

It's him.

MARCUS

Shut it off! I already turned mine off.

Diana shuts off her phone, puts it back in her purse and resumes staring out the window. Marcus looks over at her.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

You okay?

Diana nods yes, but tears well up in her eyes.

DIANA

...It's just hard, leaving your job and everything you've worked for.

MARCUS

Yeah, well, it's a helluva lot easier after you've been smacked in the face with a baseball bat.

DIANA

...I didn't want everything to turn out like this for you boys.

JASON

We told you not to marry him.

DIANA

I know. I should've listened. But I thought it would be best for you to have a father-figure in your lives.

MARCUS

Some father-figure.

DIANA

I don't know what happened to him. Ever since he got passed up for detective he's been impossible to live with... I kept hoping he would get over it, but...

MARCUS

How much money did you take out?

DIANA

(toughening up)
All of it.

MARCUS
(surprised)
All of it?

DIANA
Everything I had my name on.

MARCUS
Jesus.

JASON
(from the back)
Serves him right, the bastard.

DIANA
(to Jason; firmly)
Watch your language, young man.

Jason scowls.

MARCUS
Well, I guess we've burned our
bridges.

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

The Nomad travels down the highway.

INT. NOMAD - HIGHWAY - DUSK

Diana drives with Marcus in the passenger seat now and Jason in the back. A "Welcome to Iowa" sign appears in the windshield then flashes by.

JASON
(yawning)
How much farther do we have to go?

A "Raley next exit" sign appears and flashes by.

DIANA
We'll pull off here for the night.

She takes the exit. A "Welcome to Raley (Population 986)" sign appears in the windshield.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The Nomad enters the small town of Raley and pulls into the "Roadside Inn" motel with a lighted sign that says: "Vacancy".

INT. NOMAD - CONTINUOUS

Diana parks in front of the motel, opens her door and starts to get out of the vehicle.

MARCUS

Be sure to pay cash so we don't
leave a trail.

DIANA

(smiling)
...I got this.

She gets out and goes into the office.

INT. CHONTELLE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Chontelle, in her pajamas and holding her cell phone, is propped up in bed. She checks her phone for messages, but there are none. She speed dials Marcus' number and puts the phone to her ear.

MARCUS (V.O.)

(filtered)
Sorry you missed me. Leave a
message.

BEEP.

CHONTELLE

(into cell phone)
Hey, it's me. Just checking to see
if you're okay... Call me. Bye.

She ends the call, lays the phone on the nightstand, then turns on her side and stares at it.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - EARLY MORNING

A sliver of light shines through the gap in the curtains.

Diana and Marcus are asleep in the two queen beds and Jason is sacked out on the floor. The clock on the nightstand between the beds reads: "9:26 A.M."

A loud KNOCK on the door.

The Shaws jerk up quickly and freeze. Another loud KNOCK.

MAID (V.O.)

(filtered)
Maid service!

MARCUS

Jesus. Scared the shit out of me.

Jason groans, then lays back down and pulls his blanket up over his head.

Marcus, clad only in his boxers, gets out of bed and moves over to the door where the "Do Not Disturb" sign is hanging on the knob.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

We're still sleeping! Come back later!

The maid doesn't answer, but they hear her CART roll down the hall.

Diana, in her nightgown, gets out of bed, goes into the bathroom, FLICKS on the light and closes the DOOR.

Marcus moves back to his bed, picks up a pillow and tosses it onto Jason. Jason, his head still under the blanket, gives Marcus the finger. Marcus smiles.

EXT. RALEY CELL PHONE STORE - LATER

The Nomad is parked in front of the cell phone store, which is located in a small strip of businesses, next door to a barber shop.

INT. RALEY CELL PHONE STORE - CONTINUOUS

A SALESPERSON shows Marcus and Diana some phones. Jason checks out other phones at a nearby kiosk.

DIANA

We need phones with a prepaid calling plan.

The Salesperson selects a phone and shows it to Diana and Marcus.

SALESPERSON

This is our most popular prepay model.

Jason rejoins them.

DIANA

Okay. We'll take two of those.

JASON

What about me?

DIANA
On your next birthday. Remember?

JASON
I thought maybe I could get it a little early.

DIANA
I don't think so.

JASON
I can buy it. I have money.

DIANA
(firmly)
I said no.

JASON
Rats! I hate being young!

DIANA
(to salesperson)
I wish I could say that.

EXT. CELL PHONE STORE - SHORT TIME LATER

Diana, Marcus and Jason emerge and freeze when they see Raley police officer TOM WORLEY (Caucasian, 40s, fit and handsome), ticket book in hand, looking over the Nomad. His patrol car is parked in a space beside the Nomad.

TOM
(noticing Diana)
This your vehicle, ma'am?

DIANA
Uh, no. Actually, we borrowed it from a friend.

TOM
With or without permission?

DIANA
With.

TOM
Good answer... Does your friend know that the tags expired six months ago?

DIANA
Really?

MARCUS

(under his breath)

If we get a ticket, Dwain'll find
out where we are and we're screwed.

Diana moves over to the front of the car and looks at the
tag.

DIANA

Why, you're right. We'll have to
let him know.

TOM

By all means. I was just about to
give you a ticket, but since this
is such a classic car, I'm going to
let you off with a warning. Just
make sure your friend renews his
tags right away...or leaves the car
parked in the garage.

DIANA

I sure will. Thank you.

Tom closes his ticket book and puts his pen in his shirt
pocket. He looks the Nomad over admiringly.

TOM

Sure don't see many of these babies
around anymore. My grandpa used to
have one. I always thought it was
such a boat. But, now, I wouldn't
mind having one.

DIANA

I really don't pay much attention
to cars...as long as they run.

TOM

I hear ya.

The Shaws step to the Nomad (Diana to the driver's side) and
open their doors.

TOM (CONT'D)

So, you folks are from Illinois?

DIANA

We, uh, just moved here from
Chicago.

TOM

I see. Had enough of the big city
life, uh?

DIANA

I guess you could say that.

TOM

Well, welcome to Raley. It's not a bad little town. Low crime. But I'd still keep your doors locked at night, just to be safe.

DIANA

Thank you. We will... Well, we'd better be going.

TOM

You take care.

He moves down to the door of the coffee shop and glances back at Diana before entering. Diana looks at him, then she and the boys get in the Nomad and drive away.

EXT. JAY'S FAMILY RESTAURANT - DAY

The Nomad sits in the parking lot of Jay's Family Restaurant.

INT. JAY'S RESTAURANT - DAY

Marcus, Diana and Jason sit in a booth eating lunch. Marcus looks through the local paper.

MARCUS

This place sounds good... "Small farm house; furnished, close to town and schools; six hundred a month."

DIANA

I always wanted to live in the country.

JASON

I could get a motorcycle!

DIANA

Six hundred a month. Could be a dump.

MARCUS

We'll just have to go take a look.

DIANA

Okay. Let's give them a call.

Marcus enters the number on his NEW CELL PHONE, presses CALL and hands his phone over to his mother.

Diana puts the phone to her ear and waits for an answer.

DIANA (CONT'D)
Yes. I'm calling about the farm
house you have for rent.

EXT. CHICAGO - HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

Chontelle, BACKPACK slung over her shoulder, walks to her car.

She UNLOCKS the door and opens it, but a male hand reaches around and SLAMS it shut. She turns quickly and finds herself face-to-face with Dwain, dressed in his street clothes. Chontelle steps back and looks around for help, but no one is nearby.

DWAIN
Alright. Where are they?

CHONTELLE
I...I don't know.

DWAIN
(grabbing her arm)
Don't fuck with me!

CHONTELLE
(pulling back)
I...I'm not. He hasn't called.

DWAIN
You better not be lying, you little
bitch, or everybody'll be lookin'
for you!

Chontelle begins to shake. Dwain lets go of her.

DWAIN (CONT'D)
Alright. I'm gonna let you off this
time. But if he calls, you'd better
let me know, or I swear I'll bury
you and your family in the same
grave. Understand?

Chontelle nods yes.

Dwain glances around the parking lot.

DWAIN (CONT'D)
Okay. I'll be checkin' back from
time to time to see if you have any
messages for me... And please don't
tell anybody that we had this
little chat, especially the police.
(MORE)

DWAIN (CONT'D)
Because if you do, it'll really
upset me. And you don't want me to
get upset, do you?

Chontelle shakes her head no.

DWAIN (CONT'D)
Good... Have a nice day.

He smiles, glances around, then walks away.

Chontelle quickly gets in her car and LOCKS the door. She
shakes and whimpers.

EXT. IOWA FARM HOUSE - DAY

The Nomad pulls up the gravel drive and parks beside a Ford
Explorer, which is sitting in front of a modest, two-story,
older farm house that has a root cellar door to the basement
on one side and a red barn out back.

Diana, Marcus and Jason get out of the Nomad and walk up to
the door.

Diana KNOCKS.

CATHY (Caucasian, early 40s, pleasant) opens the door.

CATHY
(smiling)
Hi! You must be the Shaws.

DIANA
That's right.

CATHY
I'm Cathy. Come in.

She steps back.

INT. FARM HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Diana, Marcus and Jason enter.

DIANA
(to Cathy)
I'm Diana, and these are my boys,
Marcus and Jason.

CATHY
(shaking Diana's hand)
Nice to meet you... Sorry to hear
about your situation.

(MORE)

CATHY (CONT'D)

If there's anything I can do, just
let me know.

Diana nods and her eyes water a little.

CATHY (CONT'D)

Well, this is my parents' house,
but they're getting along in years
and we had to move them into a care
facility in town.

DIANA

I see.

CATHY

Feel free to look around... I'll be
outside, if you have any questions.

DIANA

Thank you.

Cathy exits while the Shaws separate and look around for a
bit, then reunite in the kitchen.

DIANA (CONT'D)

Well, what do you think?

MARCUS

Small, and the furniture's kinda
old. But I like it.

JASON

Me too. They even have a barn.

DIANA

Okay, then. I'll tell her we'll
take it.

She moves to the front door and exits.

INT. MARCELO'S LOW-RIDER PICKUP - CHICAGO - DAY

Marcelo and Billy cruise down a suburban street in Marcelo's
low-rider pickup with the MUSIC blaring when a Chicago city
police car appears behind them and the LIGHTS begin flashing.

Marcelo looks in his mirror and turns down the music.

MARCELO

Aw, shit! What did I do now?

He pulls over and stops. The police car pulls in behind him
and Dwain, in uniform, gets out, tucks his night stick in his
gun belt, and approaches. Marcelo rolls down his window.

MARCELO (CONT'D)
(upbeat)
Mr. Nolan.

DWAIN
You boys were goin' a little fast,
weren't you?

MARCELO
Uh, I don't think so.

DWAIN
Well, I do... You boys got any
drugs in there?

BILLY
Jesus, Mr. Nolan. You know us
better than that.

Dwain leans down and glares at Billy.

DWAIN
When I want you to talk, I'll ask
you a question! Got it?

BILLY
(meekly)
Yes, sir.

DWAIN
Now, you boys realize that if I
wanted to find some drugs on you, I
could. Right?

MARCELO
What?!

BILLY
(to himself)
Jesus...

DWAIN
Do we have an understanding here?

Marcelo and Billy look at each other.

DWAIN (CONT'D)
(firmly)
I said, do we have an
understanding?

MARCELO
...If you say so.

DWAIN

Good. Now, with that in mind, have you talked to Marcus recently?

MARCELO

No, uh, I haven't.

DWAIN

You sure?

MARCELO

Yeah.

DWAIN

Don't fuck with me. Lying to a police officer is against the law...just like drug possession. Know what I mean?

MARCELO

Yes, sir.

Dwain leans down and looks in at Billy.

DWAIN

How 'bout you, Crawford?

BILLY

Haven't heard from him.

DWAIN

Of course not... Okay. I'm gonna let you boys off this time but I'll be keepin' an eye on you. And if you hear from Marcus, you better let me know. Understand?

MARCELO

Yes, sir.

DWAIN

Good... Now, you boys drive carefully.

He walks back to his car and gets in.

MARCELO

Shit! What a bastard... No wonder Marcus and them left.

He puts his truck in gear, turns on his turn signal and pulls away slowly.

INT. FARM HOUSE - MARCUS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Marcus, holding his cell phone, is propped up on the bed in his small, upstairs bedroom. He dials a number then puts the phone to his ear.

INT. BILLY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Billy is sprawled on his bed watching TV. His cell phone, lying on the small desk, RINGS. He gets up and answers it.

BILLY

Hello?

INTERCUT - TELEPHONE CONVERSATION - MARCUS & BILLY

MARCUS

Billy. It's me, Marcus.

Billy grabs the remote and turns down the TV.

BILLY

Marcus! Where are you?

MARCUS

Iowa.

BILLY

Iowa?!

MARCUS

Yeah. We found a nice little town and rented a place. I'm starting school on Monday.

BILLY

No shit? Well, I'm glad things are workin' out. But I gotta tell ya, Dwain is hell bent on findin' you guys. He pulled Marcelo and me over and threatened to plant some drugs on us if we didn't tell him where you were.

MARCUS

Jesus... I'm sorry, Billy. I didn't mean to put you in the middle of all this.

BILLY

Hey, man, you're my friend.

MARCUS

Well, I really appreciate everything you've done for us. And I hate to ask for any more favors, but there is one thing we need you to do.

BILLY

Sure. What is it?

MARCUS

The tags have expired on the Nomad.

BILLY

Ah, shit! I didn't even think to check that.

MARCUS

We almost got a ticket today, and we can't let that happen or Dwain'll find out where we are.

BILLY

Man, I'm sorry. I'll go by the DMV tomorrow and get new ones. What's your address?

He moves to his desk and writes the address on a scratch pad.

BILLY (CONT'D)

And your phone number?

He jots it down.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Got it... Have you talked to Chontelle?

MARCUS

Not yet, but I'll call her right after we hang up.

BILLY

You'd better. She's pretty upset. Dwain caught her in the school parking lot and threatened to kill her and her family if she didn't tell him where you were.

MARCUS

Jesus...

BILLY

He's crazy, man. You better make sure he doesn't find you or no tellin' what he'll do.

MARCUS

I know... And you be careful. He's probably watchin' you like a hawk.

BILLY

Fuck 'im. He's not gonna get any information outta me.

MARCUS

I know, but he can be pretty persuasive. So watch yourself.

BILLY

I will.

MARCUS

...Well, I'd better go. I'll call you again next week.

BILLY

Okay. Take care, bro.

MARCUS

You too. Bye.

He pushes the END button on his phone, then dials Chontelle's number and puts the phone back to his ear.

INT. CHONTELLE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Chontelle's cell phone, sitting on the nightstand, RINGS, but she's in her bathroom taking a SHOWER and can't hear it.

INT. MARCUS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Marcus, cell phone to his ear, hears

GENERIC GREETING (FEMALE)

(filtered)

You have reached the voicemail of...

CHONTELLE (V.O.)

(filtered)

Chontelle.

GENERIC GREETING

(filtered)

Please leave a message after the tone.

BEEP (filtered).

MARCUS

(into cell phone)

Hi. It's me. Sorry I haven't called sooner, but we've been busy getting settled... We rented a farm house near a small town, and I'm starting school on Monday... Once everything calms down, you can come visit... I'll call you tomorrow. Bye.

He closes his phone, lies back on the bed and stares at the ceiling.

EXT. RALEY COMMUNITY BANK - NEXT DAY

Diana, driving the Nomad, pulls into the bank parking lot, which is across the street from the police station. She parks, gets out with purse in hand, and enters the bank.

INT. BANK - CONTINUOUS

Diana goes to the new accounts desk, sits and waits to meet with an account representative. A teller calls out to her.

TELLER

Someone will be with you shortly, ma'am.

DIANA

Thank you.

WAYNE ROGERS (40s), the assistant manager (wearing his name tag), finally appears and sits behind the desk.

WAYNE

Yes, ma'am. How may I help you?

DIANA

I'd like to open an account.

WAYNE

Very good. Checking or savings?

DIANA

Both.

Wayne removes a pen from his shirt pocket and pulls some forms out of a drawer.

WAYNE

Let's get some information... Your name?

DIANA
Diana Shaw hyphen Nolan.

WAYNE
(as he writes)
Diana...

DIANA
Actually, let's just make it Diana
Shaw.

WAYNE
Okay... And may I see your driver's
license?

She opens her purse, removes her wallet, takes out her
driver's license and hands it to Wayne. He copies down the
information then gives it back.

WAYNE (CONT'D)
Looks like you'll be a year older
in a few days.

DIANA
Thanks for reminding me.

WAYNE
...Well, uh, let's see here...
Married, single?

DIANA
Uh, separated.

WAYNE
Sorry about that... Then you'll be
the only person on the account?

DIANA
Actually, I want to add my son,
Marcus, but he's not with me today.

WAYNE
No problem. I'll give you the forms
and you can just drop them off here
at your convenience... How much did
you want to deposit today?

Diana reaches into her purse and removes a cashier's check.

WAYNE (CONT'D)
A cashier's check. Very good.

He looks at the amount and his eyes widen. He clears his
throat.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

Ahem. I assume you'll want to put some of this in savings.

DIANA

Yes. And I'd like to set up an appointment with one of your financial advisors regarding my boys' college trust funds.

WAYNE

Of course. I'll be happy to arrange that for you as soon as we finish up here.

DIANA

Thank you.

WAYNE

(lowering his voice)

...You know, I just have to say that most of the minorities who come in here are deep in debt and want us to loan them more money. It's nice to meet someone like you who has their priorities straight.

DIANA

(stiffening up)

Is that right?

(raising her voice)

Well, let me just say, Wayne, that if it wasn't for pretentious bigots like you in positions of power, more folks like me might have a chance... Thank God for diversity, among people and banks! I'll take my business elsewhere.

With everyone now watching, she reaches across the desk, grabs the papers and wads them up, puts her cashier's check back in her purse and tosses the papers in the trash near the front door on her way out.

Wayne is speechless, and embarrassed.

EXT. BANK - CONTINUOUS

Diana emerges and pauses when she sees Tom and Cathy across the street in the police parking lot. Cathy hands Tom a sack lunch and gives him a quick kiss before she gets in her Explorer and drives off.

DIANA
 (to herself)
 You've got to be kidding...

As Tom turns to go into the police station, he sees Diana and waves.

Diana raises her hand a little, then turns and moves quickly to the Nomad. She gets in, STARTS the motor and drives away.

Tom watches her go.

EXT. USED CAR LOT - CHICAGO - DAY

Dwain, in uniform, gets out of his patrol car and approaches LIONEL (late 20s; African-American, ex-con), dressed in a white shirt and tie, shaking hands with a COUPLE and bidding them farewell.

LIONEL
 Thanks for stoppin' by, folks.

The Couple leaves. Lionel turns and heads back toward the sales office. Dwain hails him.

DWAIN
 Lionel!

Lionel stops and turns around as Dwain approaches.

LIONEL
 (forced smile)
 Officer Nolan. What brings you out this way?

He cuts his eyes around to see if anyone is watching.

DWAIN
 I have a job for you.

LIONEL
 Gee, thanks, man. But, as you can see, I already got a job.

DWAIN
 I need you to keep an eye on somebody for me.

LIONEL
 Yeah? Maybe you don't hear so good.
 I said I already got a job.

Dwain grabs Lionel's throat with one hand and whips out his pistol with the other and places it against Lionel's forehead.

DWAIN

Listen here, you piece a shit!
You're gonna do what I tell ya, or
else you're goin' back to the big
house to rot for the rest of your
life! You hear me?

LIONEL

(shaken; raspy)
Yeah, man. I hear ya.

Dwain backs off and holsters his gun. Lionel rubs his throat.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

How much you payin' me?

DWAIN

You're gonna do it as a favor for
me to keep your sorry ass outta
prison.

LIONEL

Man, I can't work for nothin'. I
got a wife and kids ta feed.

DWAIN

I don't wanna hear any fucking
excuses!

LIONEL

Can't you cut me some slack? I did
my time. I just wanna do my job
here and stay outta trouble.

Dwain removes his handcuffs from his belt.

DWAIN

Turn around and put your hands
behind your back!

LIONEL

Okay, okay. I'll do it... Who is
it?

Dwain puts his handcuffs back on his belt and removes a
folded- up copy of Chontelle's DMV record from his pocket and
hands it to Lionel. Lionel unfolds it and looks at the
picture.

EXT. RALEY HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Marcus pulls the Nomad into the parking lot and parks. He
gets out, throws his backpack over his shoulder then walks up
to the entrance and enters.

INT. RALEY HIGH SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

As Marcus walks down the hall looking for the Administration Office, the BELL rings and STUDENTS (predominately Caucasian) begin pouring out of their classrooms.

Marcus moves to the side of the hallway just as a door opens in front of him and NICOLE CARVER (Caucasian, 17, blonde, foxy), dressed in her cheerleader uniform and carrying her books, steps out and bumps into him. Marcus grabs her instinctively just as her boyfriend, JAKE BISHOP (Caucasian, 18, jock), wearing his letterman's jacket appears behind her.

MARCUS
(to Nicole)
Geez, I'm sorry!

JAKE
Hey, man, watch where you're goin'!

He shoves Marcus back.

MARCUS
I said I'm sorry.

Jake puts his arm around Nicole and leads her off down the hall as other students continue to emerge from their classrooms. Nicole glances back at Marcus.

INT. ADMINISTRATION OFFICE - SHORT TIME LATER

Marcus finishes filling out a form and hands it to BETTY (50s, full-figured), an administrative assistant.

BETTY
Very good. We'll send for your transcripts, which should arrive in about a week. In the meantime,
(handing Marcus a schedule)
here is a list of your classes.
Welcome to Raley High.

CLASSROOM - SHORT TIME LATER

The room is filled with STUDENTS (mostly Caucasian), including Nicole, Jake, SEAN WALKER (6', lean), KAYLEE (brunette, cute), and SUKIE (Japanese-American female). Marcus is sitting at a desk in the back of the room.

MR. SEIM (40s, math teacher) stands in front of the class. Several calculus equations are scrawled on the chalkboard.

MR. SEIM

Mr. Shaw, would you please stand.

Marcus, a little embarrassed, rises slowly. Everyone turns and looks at him.

MR. SEIM (CONT'D)

Class, I'd like for you to meet Marcus Shaw. He moved here recently from Chicago. Please do what you can to make him feel welcome.

Marcus smiles wryly then sits. Sean, sitting across from him, smiles and extends his hand. They shake.

Jake chews his gum and TAPS his pencil indignantly as Nicole gives Marcus a second look.

MR. SEIM (CONT'D)

Alright. Let's begin where we left off last time.

He moves to the chalkboard, picks up a piece of chalk and TAPS it next to an equation.

MR. SEIM (CONT'D)

Who wants to come up and solve this?

Silence.

MR. SEIM (CONT'D)

Now, don't be shy. Anyone? Jake?

Jake shakes his head no.

MR. SEIM (CONT'D)

Sukie?

Sukie shakes her head no.

MR. SEIM (CONT'D)

How about you, Nicole?

Nicole shakes her head no.

JAKE

Why don't we let the new guy do it.

He turns around and smiles smugly at Marcus.

MR. SEIM

I don't think that would be very fair, on his first day of class.

MARCUS
...I'll try it.

MR. SEIM
(surprised)
Really?

Marcus nods yes.

MR. SEIM (CONT'D)
Be my guest.

He holds out the chalk.

Marcus rises, moves to the front, takes the chalk and quickly solves the problem.

MR. SEIM (CONT'D)
(impressed)
Congratulations. That's correct.

Marcus smiles, hands him the chalk and returns to his seat, winking at Jake as he passes.

Jake chews his gum a little faster and begins TAPPING his pencil again.

Sean offers Marcus a high-five as he sits down. They SLAP hands.

SEAN
(smiling)
Way ta go.

MARCUS
Thanks.

MR. SEIM
(to class)
Well, it's obvious that the rest of you need to work on this... Turn to page 48 in your books.

Nicole turns and looks at Marcus.

HALLWAY - AFTER SCHOOL

Marcus, his backpack draped on his shoulder, walks down the empty hall past the door to the gym and notices that the varsity BASKETBALL PLAYERS, including Jake, Sean, WILL CONNOR (Caucasian, 6'6"), TIM REED (Caucasian, 6'2"), JOSH HOLMES (Caucasian, 5'8") and DANNY NIGHTPIPE (Native American, 5'11"), are practicing. He backs up and watches through the narrow, wire-meshed window in the door.

WENDELL JACKSON (late 50s, African-American), the janitor, comes down the hall pushing a dust broom. He pauses when he gets to Marcus.

WENDELL
(southern drawl)
You must be the new kid.

MARCUS
(smiling)
How could you tell?

WENDELL
Son, 'round here, folks like us
stick out like flies on whip cream.

Marcus smiles.

Wendell extends his hand.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
Wendell Jackson, better known as
Mr. Clean.

Marcus smiles and shakes his hand.

MARCUS
Marcus. Marcus Shaw.

WENDELL
Pleased ta meet ya, Mr. Shaw... Why
don't you go on in there and show
them boys how ta play the game? You
know white men can't jump.

MARCUS
Yeah, well, it looks like they're
doing okay without me.

WENDELL
...Where ya from, son?

MARCUS
Chicago.

WENDELL
Mmm, Mmm. Got m'self into some
serious trouble in that town.

MARCUS
Yeah? What kinda trouble?

WENDELL
Left Georgia when I wuz sixteen and
headed up north. Ended up in
Chicago workin' for an ol' Jew boy.
(MORE)

WENDELL (CONT'D)

He musta been circumcised a little too much, 'cause his wife decided she liked my salami better than his and proceeded to help herself to it whenever the ol' man wasn't lookin'.

Marcus chuckles.

WENDELL (CONT'D)

Well, one day he wuz lookin', so I had ta skedaddle to keep from gettin' circumcised m'self... I kept runnin' 'til my money played out and found myself here in Raley. Got a job, found me a good woman, and I been here ever since.

MARCUS

I see. Well, I didn't have to leave because of anything like that. I left because my step-dad kept tryin' to make a man out of me...with a baseball bat.

WENDELL

Jesus son of Mary.

MARCUS

Yeah, well, I skedaddled too...and took the bat.

He smiles. Wendell slaps him gently on the shoulder.

WENDELL

(grinning)

Good fer you, son... Well, if ya ever need anything, just let me know. Us fugitives gotta stick together.

MARCUS

Thanks. I appreciate it.

WENDELL

Now, get in there and show 'em a thing or two.

He holds the door to the gym open for Marcus. Marcus smiles and enters.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - CONTINUOUS

Marcus moves over to the bleachers and steps up a few rows, sets his backpack down and takes a seat.

The varsity CHEERLEADERS, including Nicole, Sukie and Kaylee, dressed in their gym clothes, practice their routines in the loft above the bleachers, out of Marcus' view.

Marcus watches as COACH WEBB (50s, a bit overweight) barks at his players.

COACH WEBB
(to Jake)
C'mon, Bishop! You gotta cut
quicker! Try it again.

Jake nods in acknowledgment. He moves to the top of the key and Sean throws him the ball as the other players set up again.

Jake whips the ball to Will, the center, then cuts quickly past him to the basket. Will pivots and hits Jake just in time for him to lay it in smoothly.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)
That's more like it! Okay, that's
enough for today. Hit the shower.

He begins picking up the balls scattered around the gym and places them in the ball bag as the players head for the locker room.

Marcus picks up his backpack and steps down out of the bleachers. Jake sees him and gives him a hard look. Sean, holding a basketball, notices Marcus and approaches.

SEAN
Hey.

MARCUS
Hey.

SEAN
Come to try out for the team?

MARCUS
No, I don't think so. Too much
homework.

SEAN
Yeah, right. You could take a year
off and you'd still be ahead of us
country hicks.

Marcus grins.

SEAN (CONT'D)
Do they play hoops where you come
from, or just hockey and shit like
that?

MARCUS

Mostly hockey and shit. Michael Jordan came to town and tried to teach us the game, but we went back to hockey and shit after he left.

Sean laughs. Nicole peers down from the loft.

SEAN

Think you can hit the basket from here?

He holds out the ball.

MARCUS

Which one?

SEAN

(chuckling)

Yeah, right... How about that one.

He nods toward the closest basket.

Marcus drops his backpack and, standing out of bounds on the sideline, BOUNCES the ball a couple of times then pushes off into a picture-perfect jump shot that SWISHES through the basket.

Coach Webb, at the other end of the gym, pauses and turns around.

COACH WEBB

(to Marcus)

Did you just make that?

SEAN

(surprised)

He sure as hell did, Coach.

Coach Webb pulls a ball out of the ball bag and rolls it to Marcus.

COACH WEBB

Try it again.

Marcus steps out with his foot as the ball reaches him and pops it up into his hands. He bounces the ball a couple of times and, again, nails a perfect jump shot.

SEAN

Holy shit!

Coach Webb approaches.

COACH WEBB

What's your name, son?

MARCUS
Marcus. Marcus Shaw.

Coach Webb extends his hand and they shake.

COACH WEBB
Nice to meet you, Marcus. Don Webb.

Where did you learn to shoot like that?

MARCUS
(shrinking)
My, uh, dad. He wouldn't let me eat dinner until I made ten in a row.

COACH WEBB
I see... Well, why don't you come work out with the team tomorrow. God knows we could use someone with your talent.

MARCUS
I appreciate the offer, but we just moved here, and we've still got a lot of unpacking to do.

SEAN
I can help.

COACH WEBB
Why, sure. Walker here has a strong back. He'll come over and lend a hand, then you'll be able to come to practice. How's that sound?

MARCUS
Uh, I don't know...

SEAN
C'mon, man. We need ya.

MARCUS
...I'll have to think about it.

COACH WEBB
Fair enough.

SEAN
(to Coach)
I'll work on him.

COACH WEBB
You do that... Well, nice meeting you, Marcus. You boys take care.

He heads for the locker room.

SEAN

You wanna go grab a shake or somethin'?

MARCUS

I would, but I gotta ride the bus home. My mom needed the car.

SEAN

No problem. I'll give you a lift. Let me get showered and I'll meet you back here in, say, fifteen minutes.

MARCUS

That's okay. I'll just take the bus.

SEAN

No way, man! I insist.

MARCUS

...Whatever.

SEAN

(smiling)

See you in fifteen.

He jogs off to the locker room.

Marcus takes a seat on the bottom row of the bleachers. Nicole, now in her sweats, descends the bleachers and takes a seat next to him.

NICOLE

Impressive.

MARCUS

(smiling)

Lucky.

NICOLE

Right. Like with the math problem.

MARCUS

Actually, we already covered that stuff at my other school.

NICOLE

Ah-ha.

MARCUS

...So, you're a cheerleader.

NICOLE

Head cheerleader.

MARCUS
Impressive.

NICOLE
Lucky.

They laugh.

NICOLE (CONT'D)
Actually, I just do it for the
exercise.

MARCUS
(sarcastically)
Of course.

NICOLE
What's that supposed to mean?

MARCUS
Nothing. It's just that you really
don't look like you need the
exercise.

NICOLE
Oh, but I do. I'm three pounds
heavier than I was last year.

MARCUS
(limp-wristed)
Oh my god! You can't be serious!

Nicole SLAPS him on the shoulder flirtatiously.

NICOLE
It's not funny!

MARCUS
(laughing)
Sorry. I couldn't help it. It was
such a Richard Simmons moment.

Nicole tries to remain serious, then laughs with him.

NICOLE
So, what else do you do to impress
people?

MARCUS
Hmm...let's see... I can roll over
and beg.

NICOLE
Really? Show me.

MARCUS

Do you have a doggie biscuit?

NICOLE

Sorry. Ate the last one for lunch.

MARCUS

Aw, too bad. Can't do tricks
without a treat.

NICOLE

...So, do you have a girlfriend?

MARCUS

Back in Chicago.

NICOLE

Hmm. A long-distance relationship.

MARCUS

I guess you could say that.

Jake, his hair wet and dressed in sweats, enters from the locker room and sees Nicole with Marcus.

JAKE

What the hell's goin' on?!

Nicole, startled, slides away from Marcus a little.

NICOLE

Uh, nothing. We were just talking.

Jake approaches.

JAKE

(sarcastically)

Talking, huh?

Marcus and Nicole stand. Marcus swings his backpack over his shoulder. Jake moves in close and taps him on the chest.

JAKE (CONT'D)

You may have everyone else around
here thinkin' you're the Ace of
Spades, but you know what I think?
I think you're a fuckin' joker.

NICOLE

Jesus, Jake. Lay off!

JAKE

(to Nicole)

Shut the fuck up! And keep your ass
away from this sonofabitch!

MARCUS

Now wait just a minute...

Jake grabs Marcus by the collar. Marcus drops his backpack.

JAKE

Why don't I just whip your black
ass and send you cryin' back to
Chicago?

Sean, hair wet and in his sweats, enters from the locker
room.

SEAN

Bishop! What the hell are you
doin'?!

JAKE

I'm gonna give Little Sambo here a
good whippin'!

SEAN

Like hell you are!

He rushes over, steps between them and pushes them apart.

JAKE

Stay outta this, Sean! Why are you
stickin' up for this motherfucker?

SEAN

(firmly)
He's my friend. And you're gonna
leave him alone.

JAKE

(laughing; squaring
off)
Think you're man enough to stop me?

SEAN

No...but he and I can together.

Jake glances back and forth between them.

JAKE

(to Sean)
You're makin' a big mistake.

SEAN

Maybe, maybe not.

JAKE

(to Nicole)
C'mon.

He grabs her by the arm and leads her out of the gym through the main doors. Nicole looks back at Marcus as they exit.

SEAN
You okay?

MARCUS
Yeah. I'm fine.

He picks up his backpack.

SEAN
He's such a prick. Always been a hothead, just like his ol' man.

MARCUS
I thought you two were buddies.

SEAN
No way. I just tolerate him, that's all.

MARCUS
Well, I'm sure as hell not gonna tolerate him. He's just lucky I didn't get mad.

Sean studies him for a moment.

SEAN
(grinning)
Right. What were you gonna do, scare him off with a math problem?

They laugh.

SEAN (CONT'D)
Let's go.

He SLAPS Marcus on the back and leads the way as they exit through the main doors.

INT. A CHICAGO DOUGHNUT SHOP - LATE AFTERNOON

Dwain and Vince, in their police uniforms, sit at a booth having coffee and doughnuts.

Their patrol cars are visible in the parking lot. A couple of other PATRONS sit at the counter. Dwain looks a bit haggard.

VINCE
Any luck?

DWAIN

Not yet. But they're out there
somewhere, so I'll find 'em.

VINCE

Hell, why don't ya just let 'em go?
You don't need all that baggage
anyway.

DWAIN

Goddammit, Vince, nobody walks out
on me like that!

The other Patrons turn and look.

VINCE

Calm down...
(lowered voice)
Well, let me know when you're tired
of fuckin' around. I got a guy
who'll find 'em for ya. He's not
cheap, but he guarantees his work.

DWAIN

I already got a guy on it.

VINCE

Who?

DWAIN

Lionel.

VINCE

(laughing)
Lionel? The crack head?
Hell, he couldn't even find his own
dick in broad daylight.

DWAIN

Just let me handle it my own way.

VINCE

Whatever you say. It's your fuckin'
life.

DWAIN

...I hate to bring this up, but the
bitch cleaned me out. So I gotta
dip into the kitty to pay some
bills.

VINCE

Jesus Christ, Dwain!
(shakes his finger)
Then it's comin' outta your share.
This isn't my fucking problem!

DWAIN

I know. It's my problem, and I'll
take care of it. Guaranteed.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DUSK

Sean's yellow Chevy SSR pickup travels down the road.

INT. SEAN'S PICKUP

Sean looks over at Marcus in the passenger seat.

SEAN

Want some advice?

MARCUS

What?

SEAN

Stay away from Nicole. She's
nothin' but trouble.

MARCUS

Why's that?

SEAN

Well, first of all, she's Jake's
girlfriend. Secondly, she's the
principal's daughter.

MARCUS

(surprised)

The principal's daughter?

SEAN

That's right. You might hold your
own with Jake, but you sure as hell
won't win going up against Mr.
Carver...not without getting kicked
out of school.

MARCUS

Jesus. Thanks for the advice.

SEAN

...So, what's your story? You have
brothers or sisters?

MARCUS

One brother. He's fourteen.

SEAN

And your parents? What do they do?

MARCUS

My mom's a paralegal and court reporter. But she had to quit her job when we came here.

SEAN

That's too bad... Hey, my uncle's a lawyer. Maybe he can find her some work.

MARCUS

That would be great.

SEAN

...And your dad? What does he do?

MARCUS

He was killed in a drug bust three years ago.

SEAN

Jesus... I hope he was one of the good guys.

MARCUS

One of Chicago's finest... We were just beginning to get the pieces put back together when my mom made the mistake of marrying his partner. But the guy turned out to be a jerk, so we left him and came here.

SEAN

Gotcha.

Marcus stares out the side window for a moment then turns to Sean.

MARCUS

What do your parents do?

SEAN

My mom's a nurse at the hospital, and my dad peeks up pussies all day.

MARCUS

Gynecologist?

SEAN

Yeah. He wants me to join him in his practice someday, but I can't see spending twelve years in college just so I can scope out vaginas.

MARCUS

...You could always become a chiropractor. Then you guys could put up a sign that says "Backs and Cracks."

SEAN

(laughing)

I like it!

Marcus smiles.

SEAN (CONT'D)

So, did they name you after Marcus Allen?

MARCUS

My dad did. He said he took one look at my legs and saw a running back. But my mom looked at my hands and saw a doctor. So she named me after Marcus Welby.

SEAN

So you're Marcus Allen Welby Shaw.

MARCUS

(grinning)

The one and only.

Sean laughs.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

(pointing)

It's right up here.

Sean slows, turns off the highway and eases up the drive to the farm house.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Sean's Chevy SSR pulls up to the farm house and stops. Marcus gets out and turns to Sean before shutting the door.

MARCUS

Thanks for the ride.

SEAN

No problem... I'll see you tomorrow. Don't forget to bring your shoes.

MARCUS

I dunno. I don't wanna rock the boat.

SEAN
Hey, man, boats are made to rock.

MARCUS
...I'll think about it.

SEAN
Okay, but bring your shoes...just
in case.

MARCUS
(smiling)
Bye.

He shuts the door and heads to the house as Sean drives away.

INT. FARM HOUSE - KITCHEN

Diana stands at the stove stirring a pot of soup.

Marcus enters, drops his backpack on a chair, then goes to the refrigerator, removes a soda, POPS the top and takes a long swig.

DIANA
So, how was your first day?

MARCUS
Fine.

DIANA
...And?

MARCUS
And what?

DIANA
I'm just being a mom and wanted to
hear how your day went.

MARCUS
I said fine.

Diana gives him a hard look.

DIANA
What's eating you?

MARCUS
Nothing.

DIANA
That doesn't sound like "nothing."

MARCUS

I just don't feel like recapping my day, okay?

DIANA

(shaking her finger)

Watch your attitude, buster! You may be the big man of the house now, but I'm still your mother. And that entitles me to a little respect. Get it?

MARCUS

(abdicating)

...Yeah.

DIANA

Come here.

MARCUS

What for?

DIANA

Just come here.

Marcus moves to her slowly. Diana hugs him for a moment, then holds him out at arm's length.

DIANA (CONT'D)

We're trying to start a new life here, and it's gonna take some mutual respect and cooperation if we're gonna make it. Understand?

MARCUS

I just miss Chicago...my friends, my Jeep...

DIANA

...Chontelle.

MARCUS

Yeah. And Chontelle.

DIANA

Well, I miss my friends too. Let's just give it a little more time, then we'll see if we can figure out a way to go back and visit everybody. Right now, we have another problem.

MARCUS

What kind of problem?

DIANA

Remember the policeman we met the other day?

MARCUS

Yeah.

DIANA

Well, it seems he's married to Cathy, our landlord.

MARCUS

Are you serious?

DIANA

I saw them kissing outside the police station today.

MARCUS

Jesus... What are we gonna do?

DIANA

Nothing much we can do right now. I signed a six-month lease on this place.

MARCUS

...This is bad, really bad.

DIANA

Well, they don't seem to know anything about us so far, so all we can do is pray that it stays that way... Once our lease is up, we can look for another place.

She takes a soup ladle, fills a bowl of soup, moves over and sets it on the table then yells up the stairs.

DIANA (CONT'D)

Jason! Come and eat!

INT. THE BISHOPS' HOUSE - JAKE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jake and Nicole are in Jake's bed screwing. Jake is on top; Nicole is uncomfortable.

NICOLE

I'm really not into this right now.

Jake keeps humping, breathing hard.

JAKE

Nobody'll be home for another hour.

NICOLE

I'm just not in the mood, okay?

Jake finally stops and rolls off of her.

JAKE

(frustrated)

Jesus! What the fuck's gotten into you lately?

NICOLE

(irritated)

I don't know. Sometimes I just don't feel like doing it. Alright?

JAKE

It's been that way a lot lately.

NICOLE

I can't help it. Maybe you should just be glad you get it at all.

She gets up and starts getting dressed.

JAKE

What's that supposed to mean?

NICOLE

Nothing. Just forget it. I gotta get home.

JAKE

Of course you do... It's Ace, isn't it? You've got the hots for Ace.

NICOLE

Fuck you.

JAKE

And fuck you!

Nicole grabs the rest of her things and leaves.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Son of a bitch!

INT. FARM HOUSE - NIGHT

Diana is asleep in the downstairs master bedroom. Marcus and Jason are asleep in their rooms upstairs.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - NIGHT

An indistinguishable ADULT MALE figure steps up onto the front porch and tries the DOOR. It's locked, so he steps off the porch and moves around the side of the house to the root cellar door. He OPENS it and descends the stairs into the basement.

INT. FARM HOUSE - BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

The figure moves to the stairs leading up to the main floor and begins ascending slowly. He pauses at the top of the stairs and slowly opens the door into the hallway.

INT. FARM HOUSE - MAIN FLOOR HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The figure emerges from the doorway to the basement and moves down the hallway to the master bedroom where the door is slightly ajar. He pushes it open and enters.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The male figure moves over to Diana, asleep on her side, and lifts the covers.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Diana screams.

INT. MARCUS' BEDROOM (UPSTAIRS) - CONTINUOUS

Marcus, wearing his boxers and a T-shirt, jerks up in bed and reaches over and FLICKS on the light. He hops up, grabs his baseball bat, which is leaning in the corner, and rushes out of the room.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - NIGHT - LATER

Cathy's Explorer and Tom's patrol car (with its lights FLASHING) are parked in front of the house near the Nomad.

INT. FARM HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Diana (in her bathrobe), Marcus and Jason (in T-shirts and sweat bottoms) are all gathered in the kitchen along with officer Tom (dressed in street clothes) and their landlord, Cathy.

Cathy's father ED (late 70s, stone-faced), sits at the kitchen table staring straight ahead. Cathy stands behind him with her hands on his shoulders.

CATHY

(to Diana)

I'm so sorry. He's never done anything like this before... I guess he just missed being at home.

TOM

(to Cathy)

I can't believe he walked all this way in the dark.

CATHY

You know how stubborn he can be. When he makes up his mind to do something, he usually does it.

TOM

(to Diana)

Must have given you quite a scare.

DIANA

Good thing I didn't have a gun or I might have shot him.

CATHY

Well, I'll get him back to the care center, and we'll make sure he doesn't do this again.

(to Ed)

C'mon, Dad.

She helps Ed stand and leads him out of the kitchen to the front door and they exit.

TOM

(to Diana)

I'll stop by tomorrow and put a lock on the cellar door.

DIANA

Thank you. That would be good.

TOM

...Well, I'll get outta here too and let you folks get back to bed.

He steps toward the door.

DIANA

I don't think we'll be able to sleep, now.

TOM
Try warm milk...and a shot of
whiskey.

He smiles and exits.

INT. SHAW'S CHICAGO HOUSE - NEXT DAY

The front door OPENS and Dwain, dressed in his police uniform, enters. He CLOSES the door and moves to the entry closet. He opens the folding doors, kneels down and rakes the boots aside, pulls up the carpet and opens the cover to the crawl space. He reaches around but can't find the duffel bag. He removes his flashlight from his belt, FLICKS it on, then leans down through the crawl space and shines it around. No duffel bag.

DWAIN
Son of a bitch!

EXT. EMPTY PARKING LOT - DAY

Dwain and Vince stand between their patrol cars, which are parked at the back of the parking lot.

VINCE
Goddammit, Dwain! I thought you
said you put it where no one would
find it!

DWAIN
I did!

VINCE
Well, you obviously didn't! Now
they're out there runnin' around
with our four hundred grand! You
better hope they don't turn us in,
'cause if they do, we'll be
spendin' our Golden Years in Joliet
instead of Jamaica.

DWAIN
Don't worry. I'll get it back if
it's the last thing I do.

VINCE
You'd better! Otherwise, it will be
the last thing you ever do! Son of
a bitch! I knew we shoulda divided
up the money.

DWAIN
I'll find 'em soon.

VINCE

Bullshit! We're gonna hire a professional...and it's comin' outta your share! Let's go.

They get into their patrol cars and drive away.

INT. RALEY HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY

Students mill about, getting ready for school to start.

Marcus, backpack over his shoulder, moves down the hall to his locker. He works the combination on his lock, opens the door, takes some books off the shelf and exchanges them for some in his backpack. Nicole, Sukie and Kaylee, clustered near Nicole's locker, watch him.

KAYLEE

He's cute.

SUKIE

And he's got a brain to go with his body...a rare combination around here.

NICOLE

He's okay, I guess.

KAYLEE

Okay? Honey, he's hot! All the girls in school are asking about him.

NICOLE

Yeah, well, tell them not to get too excited. He's gay.

SUKIE

What?

KAYLEE

There's no way this guy is gay.

NICOLE

Haven't you noticed who his best friend is?

KAYLEE & SUKIE

(looking at each other)

Sean.

The three girls turn and look at Marcus. He sees them and smiles. The girls whirl around and head down the hall in the opposite direction.

Marcus, confused by their behavior, watches them for a moment, then shakes his head, closes his locker and heads to class.

INT. FARM HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Diana peeks through the curtains at Tom (in his police uniform) as he installs a lock on the cellar door.

Diana's cell phone (laying on the table) RINGS. She moves over, picks it up and looks at the caller-ID. It's a local number, so she answers it.

DIANA

Hello?

INT. NEIL WALKER'S LAW OFFICE - DAY

Attorney NEIL WALKER (50s, distinguished), telephone to his ear, sits behind a cluttered desk.

NEIL

(into phone)

Ms. Shaw?

INTERCUT - TELEPHONE CONVERSATION - DIANA & NEIL

DIANA

Yes.

NEIL

This is Neil Walker. I'm an attorney here in Raley and my nephew, Sean, a friend of your son, Marcus, mentioned that you are a paralegal and stenographer. Is that right?

DIANA

Uh, yes.

NEIL

Well, I'm really in a bind. My top paralegal and her husband are moving to California next week and I'm having trouble finding a replacement. Would you consider applying for the job?

DIANA

Oh, my. We just got here and I still have a lot of unpacking to do.

NEIL

I understand. But I really need somebody, and I'd be willing to start you out at a thousand a week, especially if you could double as a stenographer for our depositions.

DIANA

That's certainly a tempting offer.

NEIL

Why don't you at least come by the office tomorrow so we can meet. I'll explain the job, and then you can decide if you're interested.

DIANA

I guess that would be alright.

NEIL

Excellent. I'm at 344 Second Street.

Diana grabs a pen and notepad and jots down the address.

NEIL (CONT'D)

How does one o'clock sound?

DIANA

That should be fine.

NEIL

Okay. I'll see you then.

DIANA

Thank you. Bye.

She pushes the "End" button on her phone, stares into space for a moment, then smiles.

A KNOCK on the front door.

Diana eases into the living room and peeks through the curtains at Tom, standing on the front porch.

He KNOCKS again. Diana doesn't answer.

Tom waits for a moment, then walks to his patrol car, gets in, STARTS the engine and drives away.

Diana watches him leave.

INT. BOY'S LOCKER ROOM - AFTER SCHOOL

The Raley varsity basketball team is dressing down for practice. Marcus enters, carrying his back pack and basketball shoes. Sean, clad only in his jock strap, notices him.

SEAN

Hey! You made it!

Jake, putting on his jersey at the other end of the locker room, turns to look.

JAKE

(to Will)

What the fuck is he doin' here?

WILL

Sean said the coach invited him.

JAKE

To do what? Add up the scores?

He smiles and several players nearby snicker.

WILL

Maybe he's gonna try out for your position.

JAKE

The hell he is.

Marcus moves over to Sean. Sean picks up a practice jersey and shorts, laying at the end of the bench, and hands them to Marcus.

SEAN

These may not fit very well, but they'll do 'till you get your own.

MARCUS

Thanks.

He dresses down as Jake and several of the other players head through the door to the gym.

INT. GYM - CONTINUOUS

Coach Webb, holding his clipboard, goes over plays with his assistant coach, LONNIE (Caucasian, 30s, brown-noser).

Jake, Will and several other Players enter from the locker room, grab balls and begin shooting. Sean and Marcus enter and move over to Coach Webb.

COACH WEBB
(to Marcus; smiling)
Glad you made it, son.

He extends his hand and they shake.

MARCUS
I'm still not sure I should be
here. But, what the hell.

Coach Webb blows his WHISTLE to get everyone's attention.

COACH WEBB
Alright, boys, bring it in!

The Players move over and gather around him.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)
I want to introduce you fellas to
Marcus Shaw. I invited him to
practice with us today, and if he
can cut the mustard, maybe we can
talk him into joining the team.
Whad'ya say?

JAKE
Gosh, Coach, we gotta big game
comin' up this week and we don't
have time to be breakin' in a new
player.

COACH WEBB
Let's just see how he does and then
we'll make our decision. Okay?

The players mumble. Jake scowls.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)
Alright. Let's run a few plays and
give Marcus here a chance to see
what we're workin' on. We'll use
the same teams as yesterday.

He picks up a ball and bounces it to Jake.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)
Team A will bring the ball down and
Team B will defend.

Jake, Will, Danny and two other Players move out onto the
half court line and wait as the B Team players, including
Sean, Josh and Tim, get set to guard the basket.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)
Alright! Let's do it!

He blows his WHISTLE. Jake and the A Team spread out and move toward the basket, with Will setting up at center.

They run a few plays while Marcus watches, then Coach Webb blows his WHISTLE.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)
Josh! Come take a breather and
let's give Marcus a crack at it!

Josh trots off the court.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)
(to Marcus)
I want you to cover Jake.

MARCUS
I dunno...

COACH WEBB
Go ahead. You'll do fine.

JAKE
(under his breath)
I'm gonna enjoy this.

SEAN
(to Will; smiling)
Take notes.

WILL
What?

SEAN
Never mind.

Marcus takes his position at the top of the key and gets set as Jake starts DRIBBLING the ball toward him.

COACH WEBB
Alright! Let's run the #2 play!

Jake hunches over, grins, and dribbles toward Marcus.

Marcus moves in close to him. Jake quickly tries to go around, but Marcus stays right with him. When Jake tries to pass the ball off to Will, Marcus knocks it out of bounds.

Coach Webb blows his WHISTLE.

JAKE
(to Marcus)
Lucky.

Marcus cracks a little smile.

COACH WEBB
Alright! Try it again!

He bounces another ball to Jake.

The players set up again and Jake dribbles toward Marcus. When Jake tries to cut around him, Marcus steals the ball, dribbles to the other end and lays it in.

Coach Webb smiles and turns to Lonnie, his assistant.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)
What did I tell ya?
(to the players)
Okay! Let's reverse teams, and this time Marcus will bring it down.

The A and B Teams switch sides and Marcus sets up at the half-court line with the ball. Jake sets up to defend him. Coach Webb blows his WHISTLE.

Marcus dribbles toward Jake, then fakes him one way and goes the other, feeding off to Sean, then cutting toward the basket. Sean pivots and fires the ball back to an open Marcus and he easily lays it in.

Coach Webb cackles and pokes Lonnie in the ribs with his elbow. Lonnie grins, then grimaces and rubs his ribs.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)
Alright! That's more like it! Let's run it again!

The Players set up.

JAKE
(to Marcus)
Okay, Ace. Let's see ya get past me this time.

Marcus dribbles toward him, then cuts to his right and passes the ball behind his back to Sean, who feeds it to Tim, who hits a jump shot. Jake stays on Marcus and sticks his foot out, tripping him. Marcus crashes to the floor, bruising his knee. Sean runs over and confronts Jake.

SEAN
What the hell do you think you're doin', Bishop? This isn't football!

Coach Webb blows his WHISTLE and he and Lonnie run out onto the court to check on Marcus.

JAKE
He tripped over my foot, Coach.

SEAN

Yeah, the foot you stuck out in front of him!

JAKE

Fuck you!

COACH WEBB

(to Jake)

I don't tolerate unsportsmanlike conduct, son, and you know it. Go shower!

JAKE

You gotta be kidding!

COACH WEBB

The hell I am! Go shower! Now!

Jake glares at Marcus then heads for the locker room.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)

(calling to Jake)

And make it a cold one!

(to Marcus)

You okay, son?

MARCUS

(wincing)

Yeah. I'll be alright. I just banged my knee.

Sean helps him into a seated position.

COACH WEBB

(to Lonnie)

Get 'im some ice.

Lonnie trots off to the locker room behind Jake.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)

Sorry about that, son. He's a pretty intense player and gets a little carried away sometimes. I'll have a little talk with him and get 'im straightened out.

MARCUS

Maybe I should quit while I'm ahead.

SEAN

No way! You can't let that bastard get the best of you.

COACH WEBB

He's right, son. You're a good player and we need ya. If Jake pulls a stunt like that again, he's off the team. Fair enough?

MARCUS

...I guess so.

Coach Webb pats him on the shoulder

COACH WEBB

That's the spirit!

He picks up a playbook off the bench and hands it to Marcus.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)

Here's a playbook to study. We're only using the ones I marked in red, so review those, and you'll be fine... And keep puttin' ice on that knee every couple hours.

Sean helps Marcus to his feet.

INT. RALEY GROCERY STORE - DAY

Diana, pushing a shopping cart half-filled with groceries, rounds the end of an isle and CRASHES into Tom, also pushing a cart.

TOM

Whoa, there!

DIANA

Oh, I'm so sorry!

TOM

(smiling)

Ah-ha. It's you again.

DIANA

Uh, yes. Hi.

TOM

Boy, you sure are lucky.

DIANA

I am?

TOM

You bet. I could cite you for reckless shopping. But since this is out of my jurisdiction, I'll have to let you off.

DIANA

Lucky me.

She turns her cart to go around.

TOM

...I heard you got a job.

DIANA

My goodness. News sure travels fast around here.

TOM

Small town.

DIANA

Or big mouths... Yes, I'm working for Neil Walker.

TOM

Good man. Does a lot of pro bono work for the underprivileged.

DIANA

The world could use more people like that for sure... Well, I'd better be going.

She heads for the check stand.

TOM

How would you like to have dinner sometime?

DIANA

(over her shoulder)

No thanks.

TOM

Why not?

DIANA

Your wife wouldn't approve.

TOM

(to himself; confused)

My wife?

EXT. FARM HOUSE - BACK YARD - LATE AFTERNOON

Jason, bored, throws some rocks at a fence post.

JIMMY HANSEN (14, chubby), the neighbor kid, wearing his helmet and riding his ATV, whips into the adjoining snow-covered field and begins flying around a makeshift motocross track.

Jason walks over to the fence dividing the properties and watches. Jimmy sees Jason and accelerates to show off. He whips around the track one more time and then rides over to Jason and stops. He shuts off the ENGINE and removes his helmet.

JIMMY

What's up?

JASON

Nothin'.

JIMMY

You the new neighbors?

JASON

Guess so.

JIMMY

Where ya from?

JASON

Chicago.

JIMMY

Big city kid, huh?

JASON

Kinda... Cool 4-wheeler.

JIMMY

Thanks... I wanna sell it, though, and get me a bigger one.

JASON

Really? Maybe I can buy it from you.

JIMMY

Yeah? That'd be great! I'll have to ask my dad first.

JASON

Sure. Just let me know how much. I got the money.

JIMMY

Cool! Then we could race!

JASON

Yeah!

JIMMY
Wanna take it for a spin?

JASON
Can I?

JIMMY
Sure.

He gets off the ATV as Jason climbs over the fence.

Jimmy hands Jason the helmet and helps him strap it on tight. Then Jason gets on the ATV, Jimmy STARTS the motor for him and points to the gearshift.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
Just push that down with your foot,
then give it some gas.

Jason steps down on the gearshift and CLICKS it into gear, then hits the throttle and nearly gives himself a whiplash as he ROARS off. He rides over to the motocross track and begins flying over the bumps with a big smile on his face.

JASON
Yee-haw!

He whips around the track then hits a large bump too fast and flies off, landing with a THUD and rolling in the dirt.

The ATV continues on without him, bouncing through the field, headed straight for a thinly iced-over pond.

Jimmy sprints after it. Jason gets up slowly and hobbles after it as well. The ATV bounces out onto the frozen pond and continues a short distance before it cracks through the ice and sinks out of sight. The boys stop at the edge of the pond and watch it disappear. Then Jimmy turns to Jason and extends his hand. Jason, a bit confused, takes it and they shake.

JIMMY
Sold.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - SHORT TIME LATER

Diana holds the back door open for Marcus as he emerges with the trash and puts it in the garbage can beside the porch. Diana sees Jimmy and Jason standing at the edge of the pond. Jimmy is twirling a lasso above his head.

DIANA
Looks like Jason found a friend.

Jimmy flings the rope out onto the water where the ATV went down, waits for the rope to sink, then pulls it in empty. He tries again.

DIANA (CONT'D)

What in the world are they doing?

MARCUS

Who knows...fishing, maybe.

DIANA

Fishing? My God. How big a fish do they have in there?

(shouting to Jason)

Jason! Time to eat!

Jason waves in acknowledgment. Diana and Marcus go back inside.

INT. FARM HOUSE - KITCHEN - DUSK

Marcus and Jason sit at the kitchen table. Diana serves them dinner.

DIANA

You boys will need to take the bus home tomorrow. I won't get off work until five.

JASON

Work?

MARCUS

You got a job?

DIANA

Thanks to you... Sean's uncle, the lawyer, called. He offered me a thousand a week, so I took it.

MARCUS

Alright! Now maybe we can get another car. Having one vehicle is the pits.

JASON

How about a Hummer?

DIANA

Don't be silly. We can't afford a gas-guzzler like that. Besides, we still need to be saving for college.

JASON
What if I help?

MARCUS
Right. What are you gonna do, use
your milk money?

JASON
I thought maybe I'd just pay cash.

Marcus and Diana look at each other and burst out laughing.

DIANA
I'll start looking in the paper
tomorrow for something affordable
yet reliable. Then we can take the
Crawfords' car back to them and get
your Jeep. How's that sound?

MARCUS
Excellent!
(to Jason)
Don't worry, little brother. We'll
pick up your scooter when we go
back so you'll have some wheels
too.

Jason discreetly gives Marcus the middle finger by using it
to scratch the end of his nose.

INT. NEIL WALKER'S LAW OFFICE - DAY

Diana leans over Neil's desk and helps him collate some
papers.

The RECEPTIONIST BUZZES on the intercom.

Neil holds down the button and responds.

NEIL
Yes?

RECEPTIONIST (V.O.)
(filtered)
Tom is here to take Ms. Shaw to
lunch.

Diana and Neil look at each other. Neil takes his finger off
the intercom button.

NEIL
You're having lunch with Tom?

DIANA

Not that I'm aware of... We bumped into each other in the grocery store yesterday and he asked me out to dinner. But I turned him down.

NEIL

Why's that?

DIANA

I told him his wife wouldn't approve.

NEIL

His wife?

DIANA

Yes. Cathy.

NEIL

Cathy? You mean his sister?

DIANA

Cathy is his sister?

NEIL

That's right. Tom's wife, Lynne, and their daughter, Kim, were killed in an auto accident a few years ago by a drunk truck driver.

DIANA

Seriously?

NEIL

Yes. We filed a wrongful death suit that settled for six million. Yet, despite the money, Tom still serves us as a police officer...and a damn good one, I might add.

DIANA

Ohmigod. I feel like such a fool.

NEIL

Well, if he asked you out, that's the first evidence I've seen that he's finally getting over Lynne's death.

DIANA

...I'm really not ready for another relationship.

NEIL

Don't think of it as a date. Just a free lunch. Are you hungry?

DIANA

A little, maybe.

NEIL

(smiling)

Then go to lunch with the man, for chrissake!

DIANA

I don't know...

NEIL

Go. And be sure to order dessert. He can afford it.

Diana looks at Neil for a moment, then smiles and exits.

INT. PAOLI'S ITALIAN RESTAURANT - SHORT TIME LATER

The restaurant is packed with the daily lunch CROWD. Diana and Tom (in his uniform) sit at a table for two, eating and talking.

FOUR WOMEN, sitting nearby, glance at Tom and Diana and whisper amongst themselves.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - DAY

The school bus comes down the county road and stops at the end of the driveway leading to the farm house. Jason and Jimmy, backpacks in hand, get off, and the bus continues on down the road.

Jason and Jimmy run up to the house where two DELIVERY MEN sit in a Midtown Electronics delivery truck. DELIVERY MAN #2 (passenger) has his feet up on the dash. DELIVERY MAN #1, (the driver) looks in his side mirror and sees Jason and Jimmy approaching. He gets out, clipboard in hand.

DELIVERY MAN #1

Is this the Shaw residence?

JASON

(puffing)

Yes. I'm Jason Shaw.

DELIVERY MAN #1

Are your parents home?

JASON
No. At work.

DELIVERY MAN #1
I see. Well, we have a delivery for you and we'll need someone to sign for it.

JASON
I can sign.

DELIVERY MAN #1
Hmm. I guess that'll be okay... If you wanna let us in, we'll get everything set up for you.

Delivery Man #2 gets out of the truck and approaches.

JASON
Uh, actually, it's a surprise birthday present for my mom, and her birthday isn't until Friday. So we'll just put it in the barn for now.

DELIVERY MAN #1
In the barn?

JASON
Yeah.

DELIVERY MAN #1
...Whatever you say, kid.

The Delivery Men get back into their truck and pull over to the barn. Jason and Jimmy trot over to the barn as well, drop their backpacks, and open the sliding doors.

The Delivery Men get out, move to the back of their truck, open the door and unload a big-screen TV box onto a dolly.

INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

Jason and Jimmy enter and move to the door of the tack room. The muddy tires of Jimmy's ATV are visible from under a tarp in one corner of the barn.

Jason opens the door to the tack room and FLICKS on the light. The Delivery Men enter with the big box. Jason points into the tack room.

JASON
In here.

The Delivery Men roll the big screen TV into the tack room and set it off onto the floor, then return to their truck with the dolly. Jason and Jimmy follow.

EXT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

Delivery Man #2 puts the dolly away as Delivery Man #1 moves to the cab and gets his clipboard. He returns to the back of the truck as Delivery Man #2 picks up two other medium-sized boxes and hands them to Jason and Jimmy.

DELIVERY MAN #1
I think that's it. We'll still be happy to set everything up for you whenever you're ready. Just give us a call.

JASON
Okay.

DELIVERY MAN #1
I need you to sign this.

He holds out his clipboard and a pen. Jason sets his box down and signs.

DELIVERY MAN #1 (CONT'D)
Enjoy.

JASON
Thanks. We will.

He looks at Jimmy and they smile at each other.

The Delivery Men get in their truck and drive away. Jason picks up his box and he and Jimmy run back into the barn.

INT. NEIL WALKER'S LAW OFFICE - DAY

Diana sits at her desk, which is stacked with files. She opens a bottom drawer and removes her purse. She takes out her cell phone and a small address book. She looks up a number, keys it into her phone then pushes the "Call" button. She puts the phone to her ear and waits for an answer.

CHONTELLE (V.O.)
(filtered)
Hi. I'm unavailable right now, so please leave a message after the beep.

BEEP.

DIANA

(into phone)

Chontelle, this is Diana Shaw. I wanted to call and let you know that Marcus is playing in a basketball game this Friday night, and I thought it might be a nice surprise if you could show up to watch... It's also my birthday, so we'll probably have a little party afterward... Anyway, having to leave like we did has been quite a strain on everyone, and I think it's time to start reconnecting with the people we care about... I'll email you the directions. Just make sure no one follows you... See you soon. Bye.

She pushes the "End Call" button on her phone and smiles.

INT. BARN - SAME DAY

Jason and Jimmy have turned the small tack room into their clubhouse, complete with big screen TV. A gunnysack covers the lone window facing the house. Jason vigorously plays an X-BOX motocross game while Jimmy pages through a Penthouse.

JIMMY

Can I take this home?

JASON

No way, man! I don't want the pages all stuck together.

A CAR pulls up outside. Jason runs over to the window, pulls the gunnysack back a little and peeks out. He sees Diana getting out of the Nomad.

JASON (CONT'D)

Code Red!

Jimmy stashes the Penthouse and turns off the TV with the remote. Jason moves over quickly, snatches up the game controllers and puts them on the floor next to the TV. They throw an old tarp over everything then move to the door. Jimmy FLICKS off the light as they step out. Jason closes the door to the tack room and LOCKS it with a new padlock.

JASON (CONT'D)

See you tomorrow.

JIMMY

Later.

He runs out the back door of the barn and Jason runs out the front.

INT. BOB'S BARBER SHOP - LATE AFTERNOON

BOB (50s), the barber, gives MAYOR DICK BISHOP (early 50s, commanding) a haircut while Tom, reading the paper, waits his turn. Neil enters.

NEIL

Bob. Tom. Mayor.

TOM

Hey, Neil.

NEIL

(to Bob)

Got time to fit me in?

BOB

I can get ya right after Tom.

NEIL

That'll work.

He takes a seat and picks up a magazine.

MAYOR BISHOP

(to Neil)

I hear you've got a little affirmative action goin' on over at your office, counselor.

NEIL

...That's affirmative.

Bob and Tom chuckle.

MAYOR BISHOP

Never been in favor of that myself, takin' jobs away from more qualified people.

NEIL

Well, you don't have to worry about that, Dick. There's nobody in this town more qualified than Diana.

MAYOR BISHOP

Now, you talkin' about what's between her ears or what's between her legs?

Tom puts down the paper.

TOM

Jesus, Dick, that's a helluva thing to say.

MAYOR BISHOP

I just don't like minorities takin' over the country.

NEIL

You mean like we did to the Native Americans?

Tom looks at Neil and smiles.

MAYOR BISHOP

That's different.

NEIL

Oh, really? How so?

MAYOR BISHOP

They were savages, for chrissake.

NEIL

...So you think they're better off now since we "civilized" 'em?

MAYOR BISHOP

Damn right.

NEIL

Well, let's see now... Before the White man got here, there weren't any taxes, there was very little crime, the women did most of the work, and the men went hunting and fishing all day... I don't see how you can say they're better off now.

MAYOR BISHOP

Well, when we're all shinin' shoes for a living and singing some goddam rap song as our national anthem, don't say I didn't warn ya.

TOM

...Gee, Dick. Your shoes look a little scuffed up. How 'bout I come over there and put a good spit shine on 'em for ya?

Bob and Neil laugh.

MAYOR BISHOP

Why, sure. And after that you can
kiss my ass.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - MORNING

Jason and Marcus, dressed for school and carrying their backpacks, emerge from the house, followed by Diana, dressed in a business suit. Diana locks the door and they move to the Nomad. Diana gets into the driver's seat and Jason steps to the passenger door ahead of Marcus.

MARCUS

What do you think you're doing?

JASON

It's your turn to ride nigger.

He hops in the passenger seat. Marcus reluctantly gets in the back seat.

EXT. RALEY HIGH SCHOOL - SHORT TIME LATER

Diana, Jason and Marcus pull up in front of the school in the Nomad. Other STUDENTS are arriving for class. Marcus gets out of the back seat, backpack in hand. Diana rolls down her window.

DIANA

Good luck on your SAT test. I'll be
thinking about you.

MARCUS

Thanks. I'm ready.

DIANA

That's my boy! Well then, we'll see
you at the game tonight.

MARCUS

Okay.

He removes a small gift-wrapped box from his backpack and hands it to Diana.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Happy birthday.

DIANA

(smiling)

You remembered... What is it?

MARCUS

Open it.

Diana unwraps the small jewelry box and removes a ring.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

It's a birthstone ring with our birthstones in it... Jason and I thought you might like something like that.

DIANA

I do! It's beautiful! Thank you. You're the best sons a mother could have.

Tears well up in her eyes.

MARCUS

...Well, I'd better go. I'll see you guys tonight.

DIANA

I'll pick up a cake and we'll have a little party after the game.

MARCUS

Sounds good.

He turns and heads toward the entrance with other Students as Diana and Jason drive away.

EXT. CHONTELLE'S HOUSE - DAY

Chontelle emerges, carrying her backpack. She walks to her car, gets in, STARTS the engine, and drives away. Lionel, parked across the street in a black, older Chevrolet pulls out and follows some distance behind.

INT. CHONTELLE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Contelle glances in her rear-view mirror at Lionel's vehicle. She picks up her cell phone from the console and enters a number.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - CONTINUOUS

Chontelle's car turns onto a 4-lane thoroughfare with moderate traffic. Lionel follows.

INT. CHONTELLE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

CHONTELLE

(into cell phone)
He's in the black Chevy.

She looks in her rear-view mirror and sees Marcelo's low-rider pickup pull out from behind Lionel's car and pass slowly in the inside lane.

INT. MARCELO'S PICKUP - CONTINUOUS

Marcelo, cell phone to ear...

MARCELO
(into phone)
Okay. Here goes.

He jerks the steering wheel to the left and swerves in front of Lionel's car.

INT. LIONEL'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Lionel HONKS and flips Marcelo off.

Billy raises up suddenly from under a tarp in the back of Marcelo's pickup and tosses some eggs onto Lionel's windshield. They SPLATTER and freeze.

Lionel turns on his windshield wipers, but it only makes things worse. Unable to see, he slams on his BRAKES, causing another vehicle to CRASH into the back of his car, giving him a whiplash.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

A major TRAFFIC JAM ensues as Chontelle's and Marcelo's vehicles continue on their merry way. Billy smiles and gives Lionel the finger from the back of Marcelo's pickup.

INT. RALEY HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - SAME DAY

The room is full of 12th grade STUDENTS, all sitting at their desks with two Number 2 pencils. Marcus, Sean, Jake, Nicole, Will, and Sukie are all clustered near the center of the room with Marcus sitting next to Sean and Jake sitting next to Nicole.

MR. WILSON (50s, teacher) stands at the front of the room with a stack of SAT tests in his hand.

MR. WILSON
Before we begin, I want you to
spread your desks out so no one can
see your answers.

The Students SLIDE their desks apart.

MR. WILSON (CONT'D)
And, Will, I want you to trade
places with Sukie... Jake, trade
places with Sean.

JAKE
(insolently)
What for?

MR. WILSON
(firmly)
Just do it.

They all comply.

MR. WILSON (CONT'D)
Thank you. Now, I'm going to pass
out the tests, but don't open them
until I tell you to... And if you
need another pencil, raise your
hand and I'll bring you one. Any
questions?

No one responds.

MR. WILSON (CONT'D)
Alright, then.

He moves around the room handing out the tests and then takes
a seat at his desk. He removes his watch and places it in
front of him.

MR. WILSON (CONT'D)
Okay, begin.

The students BREAK the seal on their tests, open them and
begin reading and marking their answers.

Mr. Wilson looks around the room, then removes a handful of
#2 pencils and a book from his briefcase. He spreads the
pencils out on his desk, opens his book and begins reading.
He glances up occasionally, but less frequently as he becomes
engrossed in his book.

Marcus is busy working on his test when a wad of paper hits
him in the chest and falls to the floor beside his desk. He
looks up but everyone is busy working on their test. He
glances at Mr. Wilson, busy reading his book, then leans over
and picks up the wad of paper.

Jake clears his throat loudly.

JAKE
Ahem!

Mr. Wilson looks up quickly and sees Marcus with the wad of paper.

MR. WILSON
(getting up)
Mr. Shaw! What is that in your hand?

MARCUS
Uh, nothing.

Mr. Wilson marches over to Marcus, grabs the wad of paper and unfolds it. It has several test answers written on it.

MR. WILSON
Well, well, what have we here?

MARCUS
It's not mine.

MR. WILSON
Oh really? Then whose is it?

MARCUS
I don't know. Somebody threw it at me.

Mr. Wilson holds up the paper and looks around the room.

MR. WILSON
Anyone want to claim this?

The room is silent.

MR. WILSON (CONT'D)
Well, Mr. Shaw. It looks like you'll be hanging by yourself... Please leave the room immediately and report to Mr. Carver's office.

MARCUS
But I haven't finished my test yet.

Mr. Wilson picks up Marcus' test, holds it up in front of his face and TEARS it in half.

MR. WILSON
Oh yes you have.
(pointing to the door)
Now, go!

Marcus gets up and moves toward the door. As he passes Jake, Jake smiles and waves bye-bye.

Marcus turns quickly and grabs him by the collar.

MARCUS
You son of a bitch!

Mr. Wilson steps between them and pushes them apart.

MR. WILSON
Break it up!
(to Marcus)
I said for you to go to Mr.
Carver's office. Now!

Marcus glares at Jake then exits. Jake smirks.

MR. WILSON (CONT'D)
(to students)
Alright now, the show's over. Get
back to work.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

JOHN CARVER (late 40s, ex-military) sits at his desk shaking his head. Marcus sits opposite, staring at the floor.

MR. CARVER
My god, son. Why would you want to
ruin your entire future by cheating
on the SATs?

MARCUS
(looking up)
I didn't! I was set up!

MR. CARVER
By whom?

MARCUS
Jake. Jake Bishop.

MR. CARVER
Surely you are mistaken. Jake is
one of our most respected students.

MARCUS
...The fact that he's going with
your daughter wouldn't influence
your opinion, would it?

Mr. Carver gets up, leans over his desk and shakes his finger at Marcus.

MR. CARVER
Listen here, you little punk! I've
dealt with troublemakers like you
before, and I'm not gonna let you
waltz in here and blame someone
(MORE)

MR. CARVER (CONT'D)
else for your mistakes...especially
the mayor's son.

MARCUS
(surprised)
The mayor's son? Jake is the
mayor's son?

MR. CARVER
That's right.

MARCUS
(to himself)
Jesus! I'm having a fucking
nightmare!

MR. CARVER
And I don't allow cussing in my
school! You hear me?

MARCUS
...Yeah.

MR. CARVER
What?

MARCUS
Yes, sir.

MR. CARVER
That's more like it... Now, I'm
going to expel you for a few days
so you'll have some time to reflect
on what you've done. Just be back
here on Monday morning with your
parents.

MARCUS
(wilting)
...With my mom. It's just my mom.

MR. CARVER
Now why doesn't that surprise me.

MARCUS
...What about the game tonight? I'm
supposed to play.

MR. CARVER
You're suspended from everything!
We don't let cheaters represent our
school.

MARCUS
But I didn't cheat!

Tears well up in his eyes and he wipes them with the back of his hand.

Mr. Carver moves around his desk, gently lifts Marcus up by the shoulders in what appears to be a conciliatory gesture, then turns him around and pushes him toward the door.

MR. CARVER

Go cry someplace else. I've got work to do.

Marcus shoves Mr. Carver's hands off his shoulders, whips around and squares off for a moment, then backs off and exits. Mr. Carver shakes his head and returns to his desk.

INT. THE SHAW'S CHICAGO HOUSE - DAY

Dwain drinks a beer while watching TV. The phone on the end table beside him RINGS. He answers it.

DWAIN

(into phone; gruffly)
Hello? ...What? ...What do you mean, "You lost her"? ...What were they driving? ...Son of a bitch! It was Marcus' buddies... I'm gonna kill those little bastards! ...What are you gonna do now? I'll tell you what you're gonna do. You're gonna go back to jail, motherfucker! ...Oh, yes, you are! But first I'm gonna come kick your ass!

He SLAMS down the phone.

DWAIN (CONT'D)

Goddammit!

He takes a swig of beer.

The phone RINGS again. He grabs it.

DWAIN (CONT'D)

(into phone)
What now?!

VINCE (V.O.)

(filtered)
Dwain. It's me, Vince. You okay?

DWAIN

(angrily)
Hell no, I'm not okay. Whad'ya want?

VINCE (V.O.)
(filtered)
Tony's got somethin'.

DWAIN
Whad'ya talkin' about?

VINCE (V.O.)
(filtered)
We'll pick you up in twenty
minutes. Be ready.

The line CLICKS.

DWAIN
Hello?

EXT. DWAIN'S HOUSE - SHORT TIME LATER

TONY (40s, off-duty cop) and Vince sit in Tony's car in Dwain's driveway. Dwain emerges from the house, slips on his coat, hurries over and climbs in the back seat.

INT. TONY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

DWAIN
What's up?

VINCE
(smiling)
Listen to this.

TONY
It's the oldest trick in the book.
When you wanna find somebody, just
keep an eye on their lover and
they'll eventually lead you to 'em.

DWAIN
Tell me somethin' I don't know.

Tony holds up a PDA with a GPS map showing on the screen.

TONY
I put a little tracking device
under the kid's car a few days ago
and I've been monitoring her
travels. She hasn't ventured
anywhere unusual, until now.
According to this, she's headed
west out of Chicago on Interstate
80.

VINCE
(to Dwain; smiling)
I told you we needed a
professional.

INT. RALEY HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY

Marcus stands next to his open locker as Wendell comes down the hall pushing a large, rolling trash can. No one else is around. Marcus closes his locker then SLUGS it hard with his fist.

WENDELL
Hey! Don't tear up the equipment,
son. They'll charge ya for it.

MARCUS
Yeah? Then I better get out my
checkbook.

He KICKS the locker this time as Wendell approaches.

WENDELL
Settle down there, boy. What's
wrong?

MARCUS
I got suspended.

WENDELL
Suspended? For what?

MARCUS
They said I was cheating on my
SATs.

WENDELL
Did you?

MARCUS
Hell no! That sonofabitch Jake set
me up.

WENDELL
Jake? The mayor's boy?

MARCUS
That's right. Mr. Perfect.

WENDELL
You got any witnesses?

MARCUS
No.

WENDELL

Land o' mercy, son, that ain't
good.

Sean appears around the corner at the end of the hallway.

SEAN

(to Marcus)

There you are.

He approaches.

SEAN (CONT'D)

So what happened?

MARCUS

I got suspended.

SEAN

Jesus...

MARCUS

I can't play tonight, either.

SEAN

Are you shittin' me?

MARCUS

(mockingly)

They don't let cheaters represent
the school.

SEAN

Son of a bitch!

MARCUS

...The worst part is having to tell
my mom. She's busted her ass for
years to get me into college...

(breaking down)

Now I've let her down.

Sean moves in and embraces him just as Sukie rounds the corner at the end of the hall. She stops in her tracks when she sees them hugging, puts her hand to her mouth for a moment, then whirls around and ducks back around the corner.

SEAN

It'll be okay. We'll get you out of
this mess somehow.

He holds Marcus for a few moments, then releases him.

SEAN (CONT'D)

You're still coming to the game
tonight, aren't you?

MARCUS
(wiping his eyes)
Hell, no.

SEAN
But you gotta come...to support the
team, and show the bastards they
can't get the best of you.

WENDELL
(to Marcus)
He's right, son. You should go.

SEAN
Promise me you'll be there.

Marcus shakes his head for a moment, then acquiesces.

MARCUS
...Alright. I'll go. But only
because you're my friend.

SEAN
(smiling)
Thank you.

INT. FOYER TO GYM - DUSK

SPECTATORS are streaming in, buying their tickets, then
entering the gym through the two sets of double doors.

Diana, Jason and Tom enter. Jason spots Jimmy and his father,
ROGER (40s), standing in line for tickets. Jason waves at
them.

JASON
I'm gonna go with Jimmy and his
dad.

DIANA
Okay, but meet us back here after
the game.
(digging in purse)
Let me give you some money.

JASON
I have some.

DIANA
You sure?

JASON
Plenty.

He moves over and cuts in line with Jimmy and his dad.

Diana sees Marcus, leaning against the wall out of the traffic flow.

DIANA
(to Tom)
There's Marcus... Isn't he playing?

TOM
I'm not sure... I'll get our tickets.

DIANA
Okay. I'll meet you at the door.

Tom gets in a ticket line as Diana approaches Marcus.

Marcus notices Tom.

MARCUS
(nodding toward Tom)
What the hell is he doing here?

DIANA
I invited him.

MARCUS
You invited him?! Why?

DIANA
Because we're seeing each other now.

MARCUS
Are you crazy?! He's a cop!

DIANA
Yes, but he's not Dwain. He's kind, considerate--

MARCUS
(interrupting)
I can't believe it! My whole life is going down the fucking toilet!

DIANA
Shhh! Don't make a scene in front of everybody. What's the matter with you?

MARCUS
...I got suspended.

DIANA
(shocked)
Suspended? What for?

MARCUS
For cheating on my SATs.

DIANA
...Right. Don't scare me like that.

MARCUS
I'm serious. That's why I'm not
playing tonight.

DIANA
My god, son. Why would you do
something like that?

MARCUS
I didn't! I was set up.

DIANA
Set up? By who?

MARCUS
Jake. The mayor's son.

DIANA
The mayor's son? Why would he want
to set you up?

MARCUS
It's a long story, but the bottom
line is: he hates my guts.

DIANA
...I can't believe this. Tell me it
isn't happening.

MARCUS
We have to meet with the principal
on Monday.

DIANA
(toughly)
Of course we will! And he'd better
get this straightened out
immediately or I'll slap him with a
lawsuit.

MARCUS
...Let's just forget about it for
now. I promised Sean I'd be here
for the team, so let's go in and
get it over with.

Tom waves the tickets at them, and they converge near the
entrance to the gym.

INT. RALEY HIGH SCHOOL GYM - NIGHT

The gym is packed with Spectators as Raley hosts Mayfield for the final game of the regular season. The Raley High School Band plays the school SONG and the Cheerleaders, including Nicole, Sukie, and Kaylee, are rallying the crowd. Mayfield's PLAYERS warm up at one end of the court.

PAUL STONE (40s), a basketball scout for Stanford, sits high in the bleachers jotting down a few notes on a small notepad.

Principal Carver stands just inside one of the double doors occasionally greeting a spectator as they enter.

Tom, Diana and Marcus enter through the other set of double doors and walk down the sideline in front of the bleachers looking for a place to sit.

Tom spots an open space a few rows up in the center of the bleachers. He touches Diana on the shoulder and points to the open space. Diana, Marcus and Tom step up through the spectators and take a seat next to Sean's parents, DR. & MRS. WALKER.

Tom and Dr. Walker shake hands.

TOM
Dr. Walker. Mrs. Walker.

DR. WALKER
Tom. Marcus.

Marcus sits between Diana and Dr. Walker. Mrs. Walker leans over.

MRS. WALKER
I'm sorry you can't be out there tonight, Marcus. Sean said you're an excellent player.

MARCUS
Yeah, well...

Dr. Walker pats Marcus on the knee. Marcus looks down at his hand.

FLASHBACK:

INT. DR. WALKER'S OFFICE - EXAM ROOM

Nicole, clad only in a paper gown, lies on the exam table with her feet up in the stirrups, eyes closed, writhing a little as Dr. Walker performs a manual exam on her.

END FLASHBACK.

Marcus glances up at Dr. Walker. Dr. Walker smiles.

Mayor Bishop and his wife, BARBARA, enter the gym and are greeted by Principal Carver.

MR. CARVER
Mr. Mayor. Barbara.

MAYOR BISHOP
John.

Mr. Carver and the Mayor shake hands.

MAYOR BISHOP (CONT'D)
We gonna have a good game tonight?

MR. CARVER
(ass-kissing)
We will with your son playing.

Mayor Bishop and his Wife move on toward the bleachers.

INT. BOYS LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The varsity players, including Jake, Will, Sean, and Danny, huddle around Coach Webb and assistant Lonnie.

COACH WEBB
Alright, boys. This is it. If we win tonight, we go to the playoffs. If not, well be sittin' at home thinkin' about everything we did wrong. So, what's it gonna be?

PLAYERS
We're gonna win!

COACH WEBB
That's what I wanted to hear! Let's go do it!

He leads them sprinting out of the locker room to the gym.

INT. GYM - CONTINUOUS

Coach Webb and his players jog in and move to their end of the court as the local crowd CHEERS and the Mayfield crowd BOOS.

Coach Webb confers with Lonnie as they get ready to play.

Chontelle enters the gym and looks around. Marcus notices her.

MARCUS
Chontelle?! What's she doing here?

Diana sees her and smiles.

DIANA
I invited her.

Diana waves until Chontelle sees where they are sitting. Chontelle waves back and makes her way to them. Diana and Marcus slide over so Chontelle can sit between them.

CHONTELLE
Sorry I'm late. I didn't wanna get
a ticket for speeding.

DIANA
I'm glad you made it.

Kaylee notices Chontelle with Marcus. She nudges Nicole and nods toward them. Nicole looks and sees Chontelle.

CHONTELLE
(to Marcus)
Surprised?

MARCUS
Speechless.

Chontelle leans in and they kiss briefly.

Kaylee leans over to Nicole.

KAYLEE
So much for your gay theory.

The ANNOUNCER taps on the MICROPHONE.

ANNOUNCER
Ladies and gentleman...

The crowds quiets. STONE COLD (fictitious), a young African-American acappella rap group, moves out onto center court.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
Please stand for our National
Anthem, which will be sung by Stone
Cold, an up-and-coming group from
Chicago.

The younger fans CHEER briefly as everyone stands.

As Stone Cold launches into a RAP rendition of the National Anthem, Tom looks over at Mayor Bishop, who nods "I told you so" then lifts his foot and simulates shining his shoe.

TOM
(to himself)
I'll be damned...

Cold Stone finishes singing and the crowd CHEERS as they leave the court.

Everyone sits, the BUZZER sounds, and the starting teams (Jake, Will, Sean, Danny and Tim for Raley) move out onto center court. Coach Webb CLAPS his hands and calls out to his players.

COACH WEBB
C'mon, boys! Let's do it!

CHONTELLE
(to Marcus)
I thought you were playing tonight.

MARCUS
I was...but I got kicked out of school.

CHONTELLE
What?!

MARCUS
It's a long story. I'll tell you later.

The players take their positions and the REFEREE throws up the ball. Mayfield gets the ball and moves down the floor, making an easy basket. Their fans CHEER.

MONTAGE:

The teams trading baskets, with Jake making most of them for Raley. Then the Raley players miss a few shots and Mayfield moves ahead by six points.

Raley plays down the clock for the last basket before the half. Jake tries a 3-point shot with two seconds left but misses. The BUZZER sounds and both teams head to their locker rooms.

INT. JUST OUTSIDE LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Wendell, the janitor, emerges from the locker room pushing a laundry cart and moves to the side to allow the Raley players to enter.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The Raley players file in and take a seat on the benches near the center of the locker room, a bit dejected due to the score.

Coach Webb enters and paces.

COACH WEBB

Alright, boys. We're only down six points, and we've got another half to make it up... We can do it! We've just gotta play better defense, and we've gotta get the rebounds! Let 'em have the outside shots. Just be sure to cover the boards. Got it?

Several players nod yes.

INT. GYM - CONTINUOUS

Marcus makes his way back to his seat carrying four soft drinks in a cup holder and a bag of popcorn wedged in between. Diana, Tom and Chontelle each take a soda. Marcus sets the tray between his feet, picks up his soda and shares the popcorn with everyone.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

COACH WEBB

Alright, boys. We know what we have to do. Let's get back out there and beat those bastards!

The players hustle out. Coach Webb puts his arm around Jake's shoulder and detains him for a moment.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)

Now don't forget. You gotta keep on your toes and move that ball around more. Got it?

Jake nods yes. Coach Webb swats him on the butt.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)

Alright. Get out there and kick ass!

INT. JUST OUTSIDE LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Wendell, holding a bucket (waist high) of what appears to be soapy water, stands to the side and allows the players to exit. Then, just as Jake comes through the door, Wendell steps into him, dousing the front of his trunks with the liquid. Coach Webb, emerging behind Jake, witnesses the "accident."

JAKE

Son of a bitch! Watch where you're going!

WENDELL

Sorry. I thought everybody was out.

JAKE

Shit! Now I gotta go out there lookin' like I pissed all over myself!

COACH WEBB

Calm down. No one's gonna notice. You'll dry off in a few minutes. Let's go.

Jake tries to brush off some of the water as Coach Webb whisks him off to the gym.

Wendell smiles as they leave.

INT. GYM

Raley gets the ball out to start the second half. The teams trade a few baskets, then Jake begins rubbing his crotch occasionally, trying to be inconspicuous. He misses several key shots and Mayfield goes ahead by several points. Then Jake begins rubbing his crotch more frequently and some of the spectators begin to notice and LAUGH.

Mayor Bishop leans over to his wife.

MAYOR BISHOP

What the hell's the matter with him?

BARBARA

He looks like he has to go pee... really bad.

Kaylee leans over to Nicole.

KAYLEE

Jesus. I hope you don't catch whatever he's got.

Coach Webb calls a timeout. He motions for Jake to come to the sideline. Jake trots over to him, rubbing his crotch a little on the way.

COACH WEBB
What the hell are you doing?

JAKE
(loud whisper)
I can't help it, Coach. My balls
are on fire!

He bounces a little, trying to avoid touching himself.

COACH WEBB
Jesus... Alright. Go to the locker
room and put somethin' on 'em, then
get back out here as quick as you
can.

Jake trots off to the locker room as the Mayfield crowd
CHEERS.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)
(to Terry)
Holmes! You're in for Bishop!

Terry strips off his sweats, trots onto the court and play
resumes.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jake enters, wincing, whimpering, and rubbing his balls. He
moves quickly to the sink, wets a paper towel and thrusts it
down his trunks. He bounces on his tiptoes trying to get some
relief. Wendell enters.

WENDELL
Only one cure fer that, boy.

JAKE
(frantic)
What the hell did you get on me?

WENDELL
One o' them toilets was all plugged
up and I needed somethin' really
potent. So I mixed Liquid Plummer
with some acid I found in the
chemistry lab.

JAKE
Jesus! My balls are burnin' up!

WENDELL
(calmly)
Only one cure fer it.

JAKE
What?

Wendell taps his pants pocket.

WENDELL
I got it right here.

JAKE
Then let me have it!

WENDELL
Not until you confess yer sins.

JAKE
Confess my sins? You're not a
fucking priest!

WENDELL
I want you to confess to getting
Marcus kicked out of school.

JAKE
Go ta hell!

WENDELL
Now that's not a nice thing to say
to the only person who's got a cure
for what's ailin' ya... Are they
turnin' gray yet?

Jake glances down his trunks.

JAKE
Jesus! You're gonna get fired for
this!

WENDELL
Maybe. But at least I'll still have
my balls, which is more than you'll
be able ta say.

Jake begins shaking and looking pale.

JAKE
I think I'm gonna throw up.

WENDELL
Well, when youz ready ta make yer
confession, I'll be right over
here. But don't take too long.
(MORE)

WENDELL (CONT'D)
The skin'll probly start comin' off
real soon.

He moves over and sits on a bench and begins WHISTLING.

JAKE
Jesus! Alright, alright! I confess!

WENDELL
Hold on.

He pulls a mini tape recorder out of his pocket and moves
over to Jake. He turns it on and holds it up to Jake's mouth.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
Go ahead, son. Speak up. What did
you say?

JAKE
(softly)
I did it.

WENDELL
What wuz that, son? I couldn't hear
ya?

JAKE
I said, I did it!

WENDELL
Did what?

JAKE
I got Marcus kicked out of the SAT
exam.

WENDELL
What's your name?

JAKE
Jake. Jake Bishop.

Wendell CLICKS off the tape recorder.

WENDELL
Thank you, son. Your sins aren't
forgiven yet, but that's a good
start.

He turns to leave.

JAKE
What about my cure?

WENDELL
Oh, yeah.

He reaches into his pocket, pulls out a round tin of black shoe polish and tosses it to Jake. Jake looks at it, confused.

JAKE
Shoe polish?

WENDELL
That's right. Black shoe polish.

JAKE
How's that gonna help?

WENDELL
The wax will help ta neutralize the acid. But you better get with it. Time's a wastin'. You can either have black balls or no balls at all. What's it gonna be?

Jake hesitates for a moment, then POPS the lid off the polish and puts a little on the fingertips of his right hand.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
Aw, c'mon now, boy. That ain't enough ta do ya any good. Take a bunch.

Jake scoops out a handful, turns away, sticks his hand down his trunks and begins rubbing it on his balls. He glances over his shoulder at Wendell.

WENDELL (CONT'D)
Faster boy! Yer manhood depends on it!

Jake rubs faster as Wendell exits, chuckling to himself.

INT. GYM - FEW MOMENTS LATER

Wendell, tape recorder in hand, enters and moves down the sideline to Lonnie, the assistant coach. He whispers something into Lonnie's ear, then hands him the tape recorder.

Lonnie holds it up to his ear and pushes Play. He listens to Jake's confession, then takes the recorder over to Coach Webb, who is busy shouting orders to the team.

LONNIE
You need to listen to this.

COACH WEBB
What is it?

LONNIE
It's Jake's confession.

COACH WEBB
What?

LONNIE
Just listen.

Lonnie rewinds it, then pushes Play and holds it up to Coach Webb's ear. He listens.

COACH WEBB
I'll be damned.

He turns and looks for Marcus in the stands.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)
(to Lonnie; pointing)
There he is! Get him to the locker room and into a uniform, now! Break the damn locks off the lockers if you have to and find him some shoes!

Lonnie motions to Marcus to come down out of the stands.

CHONTELLE
(to Marcus)
I think they want you.

MARCUS
What for? They know I can't play.

DIANA
You'd better go see what they want.

Marcus gets up and makes his way down to the floor. Lonnie shows him the tape recorder, points at Wendell and quickly explains the situation. Lonnie then quickly escorts Marcus to the locker room. Coach Webb shakes Wendell's hand and smiles.

The big game continues. Mayfield moves ahead by 8 points.

A short time later, Marcus, in uniform, returns with Lonnie and they move along the sideline to Coach Webb.

COACH WEBB
You ready, son?

Marcus nods yes.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)
Okay. Go check in for Holmes.

Marcus trots to the scorer's table and checks in for a substitution. Mayfield makes another basket, the BUZZER sounds and Marcus goes in for Josh, who takes a seat on the bench.

Mr. Carver moves over to Coach Webb.

MR. CARVER

Just what the hell do you think
you're doing, Don? That boy's
suspended!

COACH WEBB

(firmly)

I just unsuspended him.

Will throws the ball in to Marcus and Marcus brings it down the court.

Lonnie explains the situation to Mr. Carver and holds the tape recorder up to his ear.

Marcus makes a couple of 3-pointers, firing up his teammates, and they begin gaining on Mayfield.

Paul, the Stanford recruiter, perks up and watches Marcus with interest, taking a few notes.

The game clock winds down to less than a minute and Will throws up a hook shot that puts Raley ahead by one. The Raley crowd CHEERS and the Mayfield crowd quiets.

The Mayfield team brings the ball down the court, taking their time to let the clock run down. With just a few seconds left, they work the ball in and make a basket, going ahead by one.

Will quickly calls a timeout. The players step to the sideline and huddle around their coaches.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)

Alright. Will, you inbound the ball
to Marcus. Marcus, you take it down
the middle, then cut--which is your
best side?

MARCUS

Right.

COACH WEBB

Then cut right, move to the corner
and take the shot I know you can
make. Got it?

Marcus nods yes. The HORN sounds.

COACH WEBB (CONT'D)
Alright, boys. This is it. Let's
win this sonofabitch!

The teams break their huddles and take their positions on the court. The Referee blows his WHISTLE and hands the ball to Will. Will inbounds to Marcus, and Marcus, guarded closely by a Mayfield POINT GUARD, dribbles quickly up the court to the top of the key, then cuts right and whips to the right corner. He tries to get open for the shot, but his opponent covers him too well.

WILL
(to Marcus)
Shoot it!

Marcus still can't get a shot. With 2 seconds left, he sees Sean cutting to the basket, so he hits him quickly for a lay-up as the buzzer sounds. The Referee signals that the basket is good, and the Raley crowd goes wild, CHEERING at the top of their lungs.

Sean and Marcus point at each other as the Raley players empty the bench and surround Sean, laying him on the floor and forming a big dog-pile over him. The disgusted Mayfield crowd begins leaving. Marcus goes over and shakes Wendell's hand, then they hug for a moment.

Paul descends the stands and approaches Diana.

PAUL
Your son is a damn good ball
player.

DIANA
I didn't know how good until
tonight.

Paul removes his business card from his shirt pocket and hands it to Diana.

PAUL
I'm Paul Stone, a scout for
Stanford. I was here tonight to
watch Jake Bishop; however, he
"scratched" himself off my list. So
now I'm interested in recruiting
Marcus.

DIANA
Really?

PAUL
I think we could make him a pretty
good offer...if his grades are high
enough.

CHONTELLE
Is 4.0 high enough?

PAUL
That's what I wanted to hear.

DIANA
I appreciate your interest, but he plans on going to Harvard.

PAUL
Harvard? Not much of an athletic program there.

DIANA
Maybe, but he's not going to college to play games. He's going to get an education, and I want him to attend an institution that's produced some of our country's greatest individuals.

PAUL
I see... What about President Herbert Hoover...Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor...or Nike founder Phil Knight? We can even throw in some athletes, like John Elway and Tiger Woods.

DIANA
(smiling; conceding)
...I guess Stanford has turned out a few outstanding people as well.

PAUL
At least give it some thought. If I could get your phone number, I would appreciate it. We'll put together a proposal and give you a call.

He holds out his notepad and pen. Diana writes down her number.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Thanks. I'll be in touch.

He shakes Diana's hand, then goes over to talk to Coach Webb.

Diana, Chontelle and Tom descend the bleachers and go over to congratulate Marcus, who is chatting with Wendell.

DIANA
I'm so proud of you!

She gives Marcus a big hug. Tom extends his hand.

TOM
Great game.

Marcus shakes his hand.

MARCUS
Thanks.
(to Diana)
Mom, this is Wendell Jackson. Also
known as Mr. Clean.

Diana and Wendell shake hands.

DIANA
Nice to meet you, Wendell.

WENDELL
You got one fine boy here, Ms.
Shaw.

Diana beams with pride.

MARCUS
Wendell persuaded Jake to confess
to getting me kicked out of school.

DIANA
Is that right?

WENDELL
Aw, he wuz itchin' ta tell somebody
what he'd done. I jist convinced
him ta do it tonight... Poor
bastard. He's gonna be blackballed
'round here for quite a while.

DIANA
...Well, thanks for your help. We
really appreciate it.

WENDELL
You're welcome.

MARCUS
Wendell, this is Chontelle, my
girlfriend.

Wendell and Chontelle shake hands.

WENDELL
My, my. What a pretty thing you
are. But if I were you, I'd still
keep a close eye on this fella.
(MORE)

WENDELL (CONT'D)

After tonight, all the girls 'round
here are gonna be after 'im.

Nicole and Kaylee watch as Chontelle puts her arm around
Marcus.

CHONTELLE

I'm not letting him out of my
sight.

WENDELL

Good fer you, honey... Well, nice
meetin' you folks. I better start
cleanin' up.

MARCUS

Thanks again, Wendell.

WENDELL

My pleasure, son. You take care.

He exits.

TOM

(to Diana)

Well, I guess I'll take off too.

DIANA

Why don't you come over for some
birthday cake and ice cream.

TOM

Birthday? Who's having a birthday?

DIANA

(smiling)

I am.

TOM

Really? Why didn't you tell me?

DIANA

It's not that important.

TOM

Sure it is... Of course I'll come.

DIANA

Okay, then...

(to Marcus)

Chontelle can bring you home after
you shower.

(digging in purse)

And here, let me give you some
money to pick up some ice cream.

TOM
I'll cover that.

He removes his wallet, takes out a twenty and hands it to Chontelle.

DIANA
You sure?

TOM
It's the least I can do, since I didn't get a chance to get you a present.

DIANA
Well, thanks.
(looking around)
Jason must be outside.
(to Marcus & Chontelle)
We'll see you at home.

She and Tom exit with the remainder of the crowd.

MARCUS
I'll be right back.

CHONTELLE
(smiling)
Take your time but hurry.

Marcus gives her a quick kiss and trots off to the locker room.

INT. FARM HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Diana, Jason and Tom enter.

DIANA
(to Jason)
Go up and take your shower now so the rest of us will have some hot water.

Jason heads up the stairs. Tom takes a seat at the table.

Diana takes a birthday cake out of the refrigerator and sets it in front of Tom, then she removes a large knife from a drawer and lays it beside the cake.

A KNOCK on the front door.

DIANA (CONT'D)
(to Tom)
Excuse me.

She goes to the front door and opens it, revealing Roger Hansen, her neighbor.

ROGER
Ms. Shaw? I'm Roger Hansen...
Jimmy's dad.

DIANA
Oh, yes. Nice to meet you.

They shake hands, then Roger removes an envelope from his coat pocket and hands it to her.

ROGER
I've been meanin' to drop this off,
but I keep forgetin'.

DIANA
What is it?

ROGER
It's the title to the 4-wheeler.

DIANA
4-wheeler? What 4-wheeler?

ROGER
The one Jason bought from us.

DIANA
Jason bought a 4-wheeler?

ROGER
Uh, yes. He said you gave him
permission.

DIANA
Actually, this is the first I've
heard of it.

ROGER
Oh, my... I guess we should've
checked with you first, but he paid
us in cash, so we assumed you gave
him the money.

DIANA
How much are we talking about?

ROGER
Twelve hundred.

DIANA
Twelve hundred dollars?!

ROGER

Yes, ma'am.

DIANA

That's impossible. He doesn't have that kind of money.

ROGER

Well, he may not now, but he did the other day.

DIANA

My God...

Tom steps out from the kitchen and listens in.

ROGER

I'd be happy to take it back, but we used the money to buy Jimmy a new one... I, uh, probably shouldn't ask, but how's the new TV workin' out?

DIANA

TV? What TV?

ROGER

Uh-oh.

DIANA

What TV?

ROGER

The one Jason had us buy for your birthday. He said it was a surprise.

DIANA

And how much did that cost?

ROGER

Two thousand.

DIANA

Two thousand dollars?!

ROGER

It was one a them big screen jobbers. He said everyone had been savin' up for it.

DIANA

Well, I haven't seen the TV nor the 4-wheeler. But I do know one thing: I'm gonna get to the bottom of this.

ROGER

I, uh, didn't mean to cause no trouble for Jason. He's a good kid, and a good friend to Jimmy.

DIANA

Yeah, well, he's not leaving this house until he tells me what's going on.

ROGER

Of course... Well, I, uh, best be gettin' on home. Nice meetin' ya.

DIANA

Uh, yes. You, too.

ROGER

Good-night.

He leaves. Diana CLOSES the door, wheels around and sees Tom.

DIANA

I guess you heard all that.

TOM

I did.

DIANA

Excuse me for a moment while I have a little talk with my son.

She storms up the stairs.

INT. UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jason is in the shower. Diana enters and whips the curtain back. Jason tries to cover himself.

JASON

Mom! What are you doing in here?!

DIANA

I wanna know where you've been getting all this money to buy 4-wheelers and TVs!

JASON

It's, uh, Dwain's.

DIANA

Dwain's?

JASON

He had it hidden under the house.

DIANA

What are you talking about?

JASON

Remember that time I got the flu
and had to go home from school
early?

DIANA

What about it?

JASON

Well, I was trying to get some
sleep when I heard somebody makin'
noise in the hallway. I got up,
peeked out my door and saw Dwain
puttin' somethin' in the crawl
space under the house. So, after he
left, I went and checked it out...
It was a bag full of money.

DIANA

How much money?

JASON

I don't know. A lot... After that,
whenever I needed something, I'd
just take a little off the bottom
of one of the stacks so he wouldn't
know. When we came here, I brought
it with us.

DIANA

My God... Where is it now?

JASON

I hid it in my room.

DIANA

Then get your butt out of there and
go get it. I'll be waiting
downstairs.

JASON

Okay, okay.

Diana exits.

INT. FARM HOUSE - DOWNSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

As Diana descends the stairs, Chontelle and Marcus enter
through the front door.

DIANA

Where's the ice cream?

Dwain, holding a half-gallon container of ice cream in one hand and his pistol in the other, enters behind Marcus, followed by Vince and Tony, also brandishing handguns.

DWAIN
(holding up ice cream)
Right here, dear.

Frightened, Diana backs into the kitchen where Tom is sitting at the table. Tom sees Dwain with the pistol and reaches for the knife, but Dwain notices and waives his pistol at him.

DWAIN (CONT'D)
Uh, uh, uh. Not a good idea.

Tom pulls his hand back slowly. Dwain drops the ice cream on the table and snatches up the knife.

VINCE
The rest of you, take a seat!

Diana, Marcus and Chontelle move over and sit around the table.

VINCE (CONT'D)
Now, put your hands behind your back!

They comply. Vince removes a roll of duct tape from his coat pocket and tosses it to Dwain.

VINCE (CONT'D)
Tie 'em up!

Dwain lays his pistol and the knife on the counter and begins binding Tom's hands behind the chair.

Vince pulls a pair of surgical gloves out of his coat pocket and tosses one to Tony. Vince puts a glove on his left hand and Tony puts one on his right. Vince then moves over and picks up Dwain's pistol with the gloved hand.

After binding Tom, Dwain moves around the table and binds Diana, Marcus, and, finally, Chontelle.

VINCE (CONT'D)
(to Dwain)
Now, lay face down on the floor.

DWAIN
Me?

VINCE
Yes, you! Lay down on the floor!

DWAIN

Are you crazy?!

VINCE

No. But you are. And you just couldn't take it when your family left you. So you tracked 'em down and killed 'em all.

He raises his pistol, COCKS the hammer, and places it against Dwain's forehead.

VINCE (CONT'D)

I'm gonna give you three seconds to put your chin on the fucking floor! One...two...

Dwain drops the roll of duct tape and gets down on the floor.

VINCE (CONT'D)

Good boy. Now, if you so much as twitch, I'll empty my gun in the back of your head!

Vince holds Dwain's gun out to Tony. Tony takes it with his gloved hand.

Jason, dressed in sweat bottoms and a T-shirt, descends the stairs, duffel bag in hand. Vince wheels around and points his pistol at him.

VINCE (CONT'D)

Well, well. Just in time for the party. And it looks like you brought a present.

Jason freezes.

VINCE (CONT'D)

Get your ass over here and take a seat. Now!

As Jason moves past him, Vince jerks the duffel bag out of his hand.

VINCE (CONT'D)

I'll take that.

Jason takes a seat at the table as Vince unzips the duffel bag and peeks inside.

VINCE (CONT'D)

(grinning)

This is too fucking easy!

(to Jason)

Put your hands behind your back.

He kicks the roll of duck tape over to Tony.

VINCE (CONT'D)

Tie 'im up.

Tony lays his and Dwain's pistols on the table, picks up the duck tape and binds Jason's hands behind his chair. When he's finished, Vince points at Tom.

VINCE (CONT'D)

Do him first.

Tony sets the duct tape on the table and picks up the pistols, then he moves around to Tom and places the barrel of Dwain's pistol against the back of his head and forces his face down into the birthday cake.

DIANA

No!!

DWAIN

(to Vince)

Now, wait a minute. We didn't come here to kill anybody.

VINCE

Oh, yeah? What's the matter, Dwain? You're not going soft on us, are you? You didn't seem to have any trouble letting these boys' father get shot.

DIANA

What?!

MARCUS

(to Dwain)

You son of a bitch!

He tries to wiggle free.

VINCE

(to Tony)

Get on with it!

DIANA

(crying; shaking)

No! Don't do this!

TONY

(to Diana)

Maybe I should do you first.

He moves around and puts the gun on the back of Diana's head and forces her chin down on the table.

TOM
(with cake on his
face)
No, wait! I'll go first.

TONY
Jesus! Maybe we oughta draw straws.

VINCE
Dammit! Let's get this over with so
we can get the hell outta here! Do
him first.

Tony moves back to Tom and places Dwain's pistol against the back of his head and begins pushing it down toward the cake.

Tom suddenly tightens his arms around the back of his chair, rocks forward and jerks upward, WHACKING Tony in the balls with one of the chair's rear legs. Then he pushes off powerfully and drives Tony backward, SMASHING him into the wall and knocking the wind out of him. The chair breaks and falls to the floor in pieces. Tony drops the pistols and slides to the floor, incapacitated, holding his balls and gasping for air.

Tom rolls sideways onto the floor and grabs one of the pistols behind his back. When Vince steps around the table to shoot him, Tom FIRES several rounds into Vince's chest. Vince staggers backwards, drops his pistol, then collapses to the floor.

Tom rolls onto his knees and stands up. Dwain looks around to make sure the coast is clear then gets up as well. Tom twists sideways and trains the pistol on him. Dwain raises his hands.

DWAIN
Don't shoot!

TOM
Put your hands behind your head and
back up to the wall!

Dwain complies.

Tony, now recovering a little, leans over slowly and reaches for the other pistol laying on the floor. Tom twists around and SHOOTS Tony's outstretched hand (the one with the surgical glove on it).

TONY
Aghh!

He jerks his bleeding hand back and holds it with his good hand, grimacing.

TOM
Try that again and you're gonna
join your partner in Hell!

He moves over and kicks the pistol into the corner.

TOM (CONT'D)
(to Marcus)
Get the knife and cut me loose.

Marcus rises, slips his arms over the back of his chair and kicks it out of the way, then moves over to the counter where he twists sideways with his arms and picks up the knife. He then moves over to Tom and holds the knife point upward.

Tom backs up to him and begins sawing his wrists up and down while keeping the gun trained on Dwain. Once he has freed himself, Tom takes the knife from Marcus and cuts him loose, then points to the pistol lying in the corner.

TOM (CONT'D)
(to Marcus)
Go get that gun and shoot this
sonofabitch if he so much as moves.

He gives Tony a hard look.

Marcus moves over, picks up the gun and trains it on Tony.

Dwain eyes Vince's pistol, a few feet away.

Tom moves over to Jason and begins cutting him loose.

Dwain, standing behind Chontelle, suddenly drops to the floor, grabs Vince's pistol and comes up behind Chontelle, using her as a shield and holding the gun to her head.

DWAIN
(to Tom)
Drop it! And the knife! Or I swear
I'll blow her brains out!

TOM
Okay...take it easy.

He drops the knife and pistol, and raises his hands.

Jason breaks his wrists free but keeps them behind his back.

DWAIN
(to Marcus)
You too! Drop it!

Marcus drops the pistol.

Dwain steps out from behind Chontelle, keeping his pistol trained on Tom, and snatches the duffel bag off of the table.

DWAIN (CONT'D)
(smiling)
Looks like I win after all.

He steps sideways toward Tony.

DWAIN (CONT'D)
You gonna make it?

Tony nods yes.

DWAIN (CONT'D)
Fuck you.

He swings the pistol from Tom to Tony and SHOOTS Tony in the forehead, spattering the wall behind him with blood just before he keels over sideways.

Dwain points the pistol back at Tom and steps toward him.

DWAIN (CONT'D)
Now it's your turn...again...you sonofabitch! I hope you had a good time fuckin' my wife, 'cause it's the last fuckin' you're gonna get.

He raises the pistol and aims it at Tom's head.

DWAIN (CONT'D)
Except for the brain fuck I'm about to give you.

Jason springs out of his chair and knocks Dwain's arm to the side just as the gun FIRES. The bullet whizzes past Tom's head and hits the wall behind him.

Tom sees his chance and jumps on Dwain, wrestling him to the floor. They struggle to gain control over the gun.

Marcus snatches up a pistol, moves over to Dwain and sticks it in his face.

MARCUS
Want me to go ahead and make your day?! Huh?

Dwain stares down the barrel for a moment then releases his grip on the pistol in his hand. Tom takes it from him.

Jason jerks the duffel bag out of Dwain's other hand and leans down close.

JASON
(to Dwain; firmly)
You said you wanted me to be a man.
How'd I do?

Dwain lays his head down on the floor and closes his eyes.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - NIGHT

The Nomad, Tom's patrol car, Chontelle's car, Tony's vehicle, a coroner's van, and several police cars with their LIGHTS flashing, are parked in the driveway. FLOOD LIGHTS from the patrol cars illuminate the front of the house.

Two CORONERS, aided by two Iowa STATE TROOPERS, emerge with two bodies in body bags on a couple of gurneys and put them in the van.

Two other POLICE OFFICERS lead Dwain (in handcuffs) out of the house and put him in the back of a patrol car. The coroner's van leaves.

Diana, Tom, Marcus, Chontelle, and Jason emerge from the house along with another OFFICER.

Dwain gives them all a hard look from the back of the patrol car as they haul him off.

Tom puts his arm around Diana.

TOM
Don't worry. He'll die of old age
before he's eligible for parole.

DIANA
...Thank you for saving us.

TOM
(smiling)
And thank you.

DIANA
For what?

TOM
For saving me...in more ways than
one.

They hug.

MARCUS
Where's the drug money?

TOM
You mean your college tuition?

He smiles. Marcus smiles back.

INT. CLASSROOM

Mr. Seim sits at his desk in the front of the room. Marcus, the only other person in the room, sits at his desk retaking the SAT. Mr. Seim glances at his watch.

Marcus looks over his last answer for a moment, then rises, moves to the front, turns in his test and exits. Mr. Seim watches him go and smiles.

EXT. TOM'S LUXURIOUS RANCH HOUSE - DAY

It's a picture right out of Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous: Several head of cattle and half a dozen fine horses graze in the pasture near the expansive house and barn. A new Suburban is parked in the driveway.

Tom and Diana watch Jason whip around the pasture on his ATV, chased by a golden retriever.

Tom puts his arm around Diana's shoulder (both are wearing new wedding rings). Jason waves at them. They smile and wave back.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY

Marcus, wearing a Stanford letterman's jacket, sits on a bench reading a book. His book marker is a playing card: the Ace of Spades.

The camera pulls back, revealing Chontelle, stretched out on the bench with her head in Marcus' lap, also reading a book. Her book marker is the Queen of Spades.

FADE OUT.

THE END