

Goodbye Saint Christopher  
by  
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FADE IN:

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - DAWN

A lonely two-lane blacktop cuts through an endless desert. The horizon glows like an ember waiting to catch fire.

A beat-up '91 Ford pickup rattles down the road - mismatched panels, dented fender, and the confidence of something that refuses to die.

A Saint Christopher medal dangles from the rearview mirror, clinking softly to the rhythm of bad suspension.

AERIAL SWEEP -

The camera glides above the truck, revealing a half-faded desert town up ahead, still asleep. Motels, boarded windows, and a flickering neon sign that reads:

"BUD'S AUTO REPAIR - WE FIX ANYTHING

INT. BUD'S AUTO REPAIR - CONTINUOUS

Steam hisses. Tools clatter.

FRANK CARLSON (54) - sunburned, unshaven, bearing the posture of a man held together by habit - tightens the last bolt on an engine. The motor rumbles to life. He doesn't smile. He just nods.

He sips cold coffee from a chipped mug that says "I can't fix stupid."

On the wall: a faded photo - Frank and his ex-wife KAREN, younger, arms around each other, beaming in front of this same garage.

He stares at it for a long moment, then quietly pulls it down, folds it, and tucks it into a drawer – a small funeral no one attends.

The garage door groans open.

Enter JERRY (40s) – khakis, clipboard, Bluetooth – corporate parasite in human form.

JERRY  
Morning, Frank. You got a second?

FRANK  
If it's about the coffee pot, I already replaced the fuse.

JERRY  
It's not the fuse. It's... corporate's restructuring the division.

Frank keeps working under the hood, deadpan calm.

FRANK  
You firing me or promoting me to customer?

JERRY  
They're calling it "early exit compensation."

Frank wipes his hands on a rag.

FRANK  
Translation: I'm expensive and over fifty.

JERRY  
It's not personal, Frank.

FRANK  
No, it's business. I've seen the movie.

Jerry hands him an envelope.

JERRY

Two weeks severance. You've been a good hand.

Frank takes it - doesn't look inside.

FRANK

Don't worry, Jerry. I won't make a scene.

(beat)

Not unless you try to hug me.

Jerry half-laughs, relieved.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUD'S AUTO REPAIR - MOMENTS LATER

Frank loads his tools into his pickup. A tow truck crew is already unbolting the sign.

Half of "BUD'S" falls to the pavement with a dull clang.

Frank watches it, expression unreadable.

FRANK (QUIETLY)

Guess Bud finally ran outta luck.

He climbs into the truck. The engine sputters, coughs, then catches.

He glances up at the Saint Christopher medal swaying from the mirror.

FRANK (MUTTERING) (CONT'D)

Well, Saint Chris... time to find a new damn road to save.

He lights a cigarette, exhales out the window.

The truck rumbles down the empty highway, the morning sun finally breaking the horizon –

a man heading somewhere, with no idea where that is.

CUT TO:

SUPER: GOODBYE, SAINT CHRISTOPHER

Cue music: a soft, dusty acoustic guitar carrying him into the light.

EXT. FRANK'S HOUSE - MIDDAY

Frank's modest desert home sits half-swallowed by dust and weeds.

A rusted mailbox leans like it's given up too.

He pulls up in his '91 Ford pickup, parks crooked, and climbs out.

Sparkplug jumps down, trots toward the porch with a low bark – alert.

A silver sedan is parked at the curb. A man in a cheap suit steps out, holding a folder.

PROCESS SERVER (40S)  
Frank Carlson?

Frank eyes him warily.

FRANK  
Depends who's askin'.

PROCESS SERVER

This is a notice of default and  
foreclosure action from Pioneer  
Mortgage. You're being served.

He extends the envelope like it's a loaded gun.

Frank doesn't take it.

FRANK

You sure you got the right house? I  
already lost the job - can't be  
much left to take.

The man shrugs, sets the envelope on the porch railing.

PROCESS SERVER

Sorry, sir. Just doing my job.

He walks away.

Frank stares after him - silence thick as the heat.

Sparkplug trots up, sniffing the envelope, then looks at  
Frank expectantly.

FRANK

You wanna read it? Be my guest.

He tears the envelope open anyway - reads in silence.

His jaw tightens. The words hit harder than the firing did.

He drops onto the porch step, head in his hands.

Sparkplug presses against his leg, sensing the storm.

FRANK (SOFTLY) (CONT'D)

First they take the shop... now the  
damn house.

Guess we're both outta places to sleep, huh, Plug?

Sparkplug rests his chin on Frank's knee, eyes full of loyalty no court can repossess.

Frank looks out toward the horizon – endless sky, endless road.

A hint of resolve flickers in his eyes, even as everything else crumbles.

FRANK (QUIETLY, TO HIMSELF) (CONT'D)  
Ain't goin' out like this.

He stands, walks inside, and grabs his keys from a hook by the door – a Saint Christopher medal dangles from it, catching a shard of light.

He pockets it.

Sparkplug perks up,

CUT TO:

INT. FRANK'S HOUSE - LATER THAT DAY

A modest single-story home. Lived in. Worn but clean.

The kitchen table is covered with unopened mail, a dead plant, and a half-finished jigsaw puzzle – the sky portion, nothing but blue.

Sparkplug the dog wags his tail, hopeful.

Frank drops his keys, opens the fridge. Beer, mustard, a jar of pickles.

He grabs a beer, pops it open, and flops into a recliner facing a muted TV.

On screen: A daytime talk show – "Finding Love After 50."

He changes the channel to static.

He opens the severance envelope – two checks and a HR form.

He sets them down, then opens a second envelope sitting on the counter – certified mail.

Inside: DIVORCE DECREE.

He reads it, silent. The only sound is Sparkplug's tail thumping.

FRANK

(softly, to the dog)

Guess it's official, kid. She got the house. And now I cant afford this dump!

He sets the papers down. Grabs the photo of Karen and him at the garage opening – the one we saw earlier – and studies it.

FRANK (CONT'D)

(to the photo)

You always said I'd die broke and alone.

Guess you were right.

He slides the picture into a drawer, closes it gently, and exhales.

Then – a quiet moment of comedy.

Sparkplug jumps onto the couch beside him.

Frank scratches his head.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Don't look at me like that. You didn't marry any better.

He raises the beer in mock-toast.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
To divorce, downsizing, and dogs  
that don't talk back.

He drinks.

Outside, a lawnmower hums somewhere. Life goes on – but not for him.

HOLD on Frank staring at the Saint Christopher medal resting on his coffee table, catching a sliver of light.

MUSIC CUE: a low, wistful guitar note – the sound of starting over, even when you don't want to.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT ROADSIDE BAR - NIGHT

A neon sign flickers: "LAST STOP GRILL - COLD BEER, WARM REGRETS."

Frank's pickup sits crooked in the dirt lot, Saint Christopher medal glinting in the windshield.

Inside –

INT. LAST STOP GRILL - CONTINUOUS

A dim dive bar that smells like smoke, fried food, and yesterday.

Frank sits at the counter, nursing a beer, half-listening to a busted jukebox play "Ain't No Sunshine."

The BARTENDER, a woman in her 60s with a smoker's laugh and sympathy radar, wipes down the counter.

BARTENDER

You look like somebody who just got  
laid off or divorced.

FRANK

(without looking up)  
Both. Same day. Guess I'm  
efficient.

She slides him a bowl of peanuts.

BARTENDER

Rough day?

FRANK

Nah. Just the sequel to a rough  
life.

They share a dry laugh – two people too tired to fake one.

LATER

Frank's had a few more. He's  
talking to the empty stool beside  
him like it's an old friend.

FRANK

Y'know, Karen used to say I fix  
things so I don't have to feel  
things.

(beat)

Joke's on her. I can't fix a damn  
thing anymore.

He downs the rest of his beer.

The bartender watches, maternal but detached.

BARTENDER

You driving?

FRANK

No. My truck's driving. I'm just a  
passenger these days.

10.

He tosses a few crumpled bills on the counter and heads for the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Frank climbs into his pickup, sits for a beat, staring through the windshield at the dark highway.

Sparkplug is curled up in the passenger seat, tail thumping weakly.

Frank reaches over, pats his head.

FRANK

Don't worry, boy. We're not going anywhere worth remembering.

He starts the engine.

The Saint Christopher medal swings, catching the bar's neon glow like a warning light.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE - "DRIFT DAYS" (NEXT MORNING TO TWILIGHT)

- Frank sitting at a diner counter, stirring coffee, watching couples laugh.

- Fixing his own truck engine in a motel parking lot, muttering to himself.

- Falling asleep in the cab with a dog's head on his shoulder.

- Empty highways, endless sun, nothing but the sound of wind.

A lonely man orbiting his own silence.

CUT TO:

EXT. USED CAR LOT - LATE AFTERNOON

Frank pulls into a small lot lined with half-dead vehicles and sun-faded flags.

A handwritten sign reads:

"WE BUY OLD CARS - CASH TODAY."

He spots something under a tarp - sleek lines, muscle-car curves. Curious.

He steps out, lifts the tarp, revealing a 1968 PONTIAC FIREBIRD, weathered but proud.

He grins for the first time in a while.

FRANK

Now you... you might be worth saving.

CAMERA PUSHES IN on the hood ornament - the faint outline of Saint Christopher etched in chrome.

Cue a soft guitar strum as the sun dips below the desert line.

FADE OUT.

INT. FRANKS HOUSE GARAGE - MORNING

Dust floats through a shaft of sunlight like ghost-ash. The old Firebird sits center-stage, hood up, proud but wounded.

Frank's toolbox is open, a scatter of sockets and half-empty coffee cups. Sparkplug lies nearby, chewing on a rag.

FRANK

Don't eat that--cost me more than my  
divorce lawyer.

He slips under the dash with a flashlight, humming a broken tune.

CLOSE ON - UNDER THE DASH

Grease, wires, and something glinting. Frank squints, try's to reach it but can't he sits up.

WIDE - INT: FIREBIRD.

An urn, dented but sealed with masking tape and a faded funeral-home label, rolls out and bumps against his boot.

Frank freezes.

FRANK

...Huh.

(beat)

Either you're a hell of a time  
capsule or I just got promoted to  
grave robber.

He picks it up carefully, wipes off the dust. The label reads:

"DANIEL REESE - CREMATED REMAINS. DO NOT DISCARD."

Frank blinks, half laughing, half unnerved.

FRANK

"Do not discard." Story of my life,  
kid.

"PVT. DANNY REESE - 1989-2011."

Frank stares. The name means nothing. But the weight - that hits.

He sets it on the workbench, wipes the dust with his sleeve.

Something about the silence in the room shifts.

Even the radio seems to hold its breath.

FRANK

(softly)

Well, kid... looks like somebody  
forgot you.

Frank leans back in his chair, beer dangling in one hand.

The Saint Christopher medal catches light from the hanging bulb.

He takes a long drag from his cigarette.

Eyes flick to a framed photo on the shelf -

him and Karen, back when she still smiled at him.

Next to it: the severance envelope he never opened.

FRANK (CONT'D)

(to the medal)

You still do cross-country rescues,  
Saint Chris?

MONTAGE - "TRACKING THE REESES"

\* Frank squints at his ancient desktop computer, painfully slow internet.

\* Search bar: "Danny Reese obituary."

\* Page loads: Killed in Afghanistan, 2011.

Beneath it, a photo - smiling, young, hopeful.

A local news clip: "Family seeks closure after personal effects lost in transit."

\* Frank prints it, pinning the photo to the corkboard.

\* Scribbles on a map - California to Kansas.

The line cuts straight through the heart of nowhere.

\* He fills a small gas can, checks the oil, slaps the dashboard of the truck.

It groans like it knows what's coming.

\* The urn, wrapped in an old flannel shirt, rests in the passenger seat.

Beside it, a pack of cigarettes and Saint Christopher swinging like a compass.

CUT TO:

INT. FRANK'S PICKUP - DAWN

He sits behind the wheel, the world still gray and quiet.

Ashtray full. Coffee cold.

The urn's seat-belted next to him, absurdly dignified.

He looks over at it.

FRANK

Guess it's you and me, soldier.

(beat)

Hope you don't mind cheap motels  
and worse music.

He starts the engine. The radio crackles – static gives way  
to a faint country song about "coming home."

Frank puts the truck in gear.

The Saint Christopher medal sways gently, catching first  
light as the truck rolls down the empty road.

CAMERA PULLS BACK – AERIAL:

The truck becomes a dot swallowed by the vast desert highway.

CUT TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD:

"THE ROAD TO TOPEKA."

FLASHBACK – INT. FRANK'S OLD GARAGE – NIGHT (YEARS AGO)

A younger Frank arguing with KAREN. She's holding a suitcase.

KAREN

You fix everyone else's problems,  
Frank, except your own!

FRANK

I fix what can be fixed.

KAREN

That's the problem—you don't even  
try with people.

The sound of a door slamming—

SMASH CUT BACK  
TO:

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

The pickup hums along a straight, empty stretch of asphalt.

Saint Christopher swings gently from the rearview mirror,  
catching the orange light.

Sparkplug's head hangs out the window, tongue flapping.

The passenger seat holds the urn, seat-belted and silent.

Frank drives one-handed, the other wrapped around a gas-  
station coffee cup.

FRANK

So, Danny boy... how long you been  
waitin' for someone to pick you up?

He waits for an answer that doesn't come.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Yeah, same here.

He takes a sip, grimaces at the taste.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Jesus. Coffee's as burnt as my love  
life.

CUT TO:

EXT. GAS STATION - DUSK

Frank fuels up, muttering to himself.

He glances at the pump screen, where a cartoon smiley thanks him for his purchase.

FRANK

You're welcome, robot overlord.

He looks through the windshield at the urn in the passenger seat.

FRANK (CONT'D)

I'm talkin' to you like you're real, kid. That's either progress or brain damage.

He shakes his head, puts the nozzle back, and climbs in.

CUT TO:

INT. TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

He turns on the radio - an AM preacher blasts through static:

PREACHER (V.O.)

"The Lord says--those who travel without purpose will not find their way home!"

Frank shuts it off immediately.

FRANK

Yeah, well, tell the Lord GPS was invented for a reason.

He drives on.

CUT TO:

EXT. OPEN ROAD - NIGHT

Headlights carve tunnels through the dark.

The road signs blur: BAKERSFIELD ? 250 MILES.

Frank glances at the urn.

FRANK

Bakersfield. You ever been?

(beat)

Don't bother. It's like if regret  
opened a strip mall.

He chuckles to himself.

Then his smile fades as a soft song plays faintly from the  
radio:

"I'll Be Seeing You."

He exhales, long and heavy.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK - INT. FRANK'S HOUSE - NIGHT (YEARS AGO)

The kitchen. Karen stands by a birthday cake with unlit  
candles.

Frank stumbles in, late, dirty, carrying a small box of spark  
plugs as a gift.

KAREN  
You missed dinner.

FRANK  
I had a breakdown on the freeway.

KAREN  
The car, or you?

He doesn't answer. She shakes her head.

KAREN (CONT'D)  
I don't need roses, Frank. Just  
you-on time. Once.

He lights the candles silently.

She watches him, eyes full of love that's starting to run  
out.

SMASH CUT BACK  
TO:

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

The road ahead shimmers under the high beams.

Frank grips the wheel tighter.

FRANK  
You ever screw up something good,  
Danny?  
(beat)  
Yeah... probably not. You're still  
the saint in this cab.

Sparkplug yawns loudly, like an answer.

Frank laughs softly.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
Fine, fine. Two saints.

He flicks his blinker and pulls off onto a rest stop.

EXT. REST STOP - NIGHT

A few semis hum in the distance.

Frank parks beneath a flickering streetlight, engine idling.

He reaches into the glovebox, pulls out an old notebook, and begins to write:

FRANK (V.O.)

"Dear Karen,

I met a soldier today. Didn't say much, but he listens better than I ever did.

I'm taking him home. Maybe I'll find my way there, too."

He tears the page out, folds it carefully, tucks it beside the urn.

FRANK

Don't lose that, Danny. It's the closest thing to closure I've written.

He leans back, eyes closing.

The hum of trucks becomes ocean waves, memory bleeding into dream.

FLASHBACK - INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT (YEARS AGO)

Frank on the bed, TV flickering.

Karen's on the phone, voice small, angry.

KAREN (V.O.)

I can't do this anymore, Frank. You don't talk. You just fix.

The sound fades into the hum of tires.

CUT TO:

EXT. REST STOP - DAWN

Frank wakes to the pink edge of sunrise.

Sparkplug licks his face. The Saint Christopher medal catches morning light.

Frank stretches, groaning.

FRANK

Mornin', Saint Chris. Mornin',  
Saint Danny.

(beat)

Let's see how far redemption goes  
on one tank of gas.

He starts the truck. The engine sputters, then steadies.

As he drives off, the urn reflects the sunrise - glowing faintly like it approves.

MUSIC: A low, hopeful guitar riff builds under the rumble of the road.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - MIDDAY

The pickup hums along a cracked, sun-bleached stretch of road.

Frank squints ahead – a shape in the distance.

A MAN IN CLERICAL CLOTHES stands by a broken-down car, thumb out, holding a cardboard sign that reads:

"ANYWHERE BUT HERE."

Frank slows, muttering to himself.

FRANK  
You gotta be kidding me.

Sparkplug perks up, tail wagging.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
You like him? Great. You pick him  
up next time.

Frank pulls over anyway – curiosity beats cynicism.

EXT. HIGHWAY SHOULDER – CONTINUOUS

The hitchhiker – FATHER JIM (late 40s), salt-and-pepper hair, wearing a rumpled black shirt with a loosened collar – jogs up with a grateful grin.

FATHER JIM  
God bless you, brother!

FRANK  
Yeah, He's been trying. Keep  
missing my exit.

Jim laughs, climbs in, careful not to disturb the urn on the seat.

FATHER JIM  
Oh-sorry, didn't mean to-

FRANK  
Don't worry, he's quiet.

Jim stares at the urn, half-smiling, half-unsure.

FATHER JIM  
Friend of yours?

FRANK  
(deadpan)  
Only one I haven't disappointed.

Jim chuckles nervously.

CUT TO:

INT. TRUCK - MOVING - DAY

Silence, except for the hum of the engine.

Frank drives. Jim fidgets.

FATHER JIM  
You headed far?

FRANK  
Kansas. Returning a soldier to his  
folks.

FATHER JIM  
That's noble of you.

FRANK  
Don't confuse direction with  
purpose, Padre.

Jim smirks, watching him.

FATHER JIM  
So, are you a believer?

FRANK

I believe in oil changes and  
caffeine. After that, it's all  
mystery.

FATHER JIM

Fair. But life's full of small  
miracles, you know.

FRANK

Yeah. Like my truck making it up  
that last hill.

They drive in silence again – until a roadside sign flashes  
past:

NEXT SERVICES 80 MILES

FRANK

Perfect. That's where I wanted to  
run outta gas.

EXT. DESERT ROAD - LATER

The truck sputters and dies on cue.

Frank slaps the wheel.

FRANK

You see that? Miracle expired.

FATHER JIM

(grinning)

Maybe the Lord's just telling you  
to stretch your legs.

Frank gets out, pops the hood.

Jim follows, shielding his eyes from the sun.

FRANK  
You any good with engines, Father?

FATHER JIM  
I can change a tire. Or turn water  
into wine.

FRANK  
(grumbles)  
Figures.

He leans under the hood, muttering as Sparkplug barks at the horizon.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
Don't worry, Saint Chris. We're not  
dead yet. Just practicing.

EXT. ROADSIDE - TEN MINUTES LATER

Frank sits in the shade of the truck, sipping warm beer from the cooler.

Jim sits beside him, wiping sweat from his forehead.

FATHER JIM  
You married?

FRANK  
Used to be. Twice. Same woman, both  
times. Guess I like reruns.

FATHER JIM  
What happened?

FRANK  
(beat)  
I blinked. She moved on.

Jim studies him, then nods.

FATHER JIM

You ever think maybe God gave you  
this road for a reason?

FRANK

Sure. Cheap rent and no traffic.

FATHER JIM

You deflect everything with humor.

FRANK

Better than prayer. At least I get  
a laugh.

Jim smirks. They sit quietly, the wind carrying faint gospel  
music from a far-off station.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK — INT. FRANK'S KITCHEN — NIGHT (YEARS AGO)

Frank fixing a toaster while Karen leans against the counter.

KAREN

You ever talk to God, Frank?

FRANK

Only when He breaks something.

She stares at him, disappointed but soft.

KAREN

Maybe that's why He stopped  
answering.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT ROAD - DAY

Frank wipes sweat off his brow, looks out at the shimmering horizon.

FRANK

Padre, lemme ask you something. You ever lose faith?

FATHER JIM

Every Tuesday. Then I remember—faith's not about knowing. It's about keepin' the engine running when the check light's on.

Frank chuckles.

FRANK

You're alright, Father. Kinda weird, but alright.

FATHER JIM

You too, Frank. Kinda lost, but I think you're drivin' in the right direction.

Frank glances at the urn, then at Jim.

FRANK

I got two passengers and no map. What could possibly go wrong?

They share a dry laugh as Frank starts the engine again — it catches this time, a small miracle indeed.

WIDE SHOT:

The truck pulls back onto the highway — two men, a dog, and a soldier's ashes heading toward redemption.

EXT. ROADSIDE MOTEL - NIGHT

A flickering neon sign reads:

"SUNSET INN - CABLE / COFFEE /  
COMFORT."

(One of those is a lie.)

The parking lot's half-empty. The  
only sound: a soda machine rattling  
in the breeze.

Frank's truck is parked crooked under a dying palm tree. The  
Saint Christopher medal catches the orange light from the  
motel sign.

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM - LATER

Frank sits on the edge of a stiff bed, the urn on the  
nightstand, a beer in one hand, a cheap motel pen in the  
other.

He stares at a blank page in the motel's stationary pad:  
"WELCOME TO SUNSET INN" printed across the top in faded pink  
letters.

Sparkplug snores at his feet.

The TV plays a static-riddled rerun of Wheel of Fortune.

Frank sighs.

FRANK

(to himself)

Alright, let's see if we remember  
how to talk to people.

He starts to write - slow, awkward, deliberate.

FRANK (V.O.)

"Dear Karen,

I met a soldier today. Didn't talk much – which is probably why we get along.

He doesn't interrupt, and he doesn't ask if I've found a real job yet.

I'm driving him home. Maybe he'll teach me how."

He stops, taps the pen against his chin.

FRANK (V.O.)

"I thought about you today. Don't worry – it passed."

He chuckles softly at his own bad joke.

Then his eyes drift toward the urn.

FRANK (V.O.)

"He was about our son's age, I think. The one we never had.

Maybe he's what we would've made if we hadn't been so busy fixing everything but ourselves."

A long silence. The TV buzzes.

He sets the pen down, rubs his face with both hands.

FRANK

Jesus, I'm talking to an ashtray and a ghost.

He takes a swig of beer.

The camera slowly pans across the room – the urn, the pad, the half-lit Saint Christopher medal hanging from the lamp.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK – INT. FRANK'S BEDROOM – YEARS AGO

Night. The sound of rain.

Karen is packing a suitcase while Frank sits on the edge of the bed, stubborn and silent.

KAREN

I begged you to come with me to see  
the doctor, Frank.

FRANK

I had work.

KAREN

You always have work.

She zips the suitcase, looks at him like she's memorizing what she's leaving.

KAREN (CONT'D)

You think fixing engines is noble,  
but all it does is keep you from  
fixing yourself.

She leaves. The sound of the door closing echoes into—

INT. MOTEL ROOM – NIGHT – PRESENT

Frank's eyes are open, staring at the ceiling. The beer's empty. The note half-finished.

Sparkplug jumps onto the bed, curling beside him.

Frank sighs.

FRANK

What's the point, huh? Even the  
dead don't write back.

He folds the letter anyway, slides it under the urn like an offering.

The Saint Christopher medal dangles from the lamp, turning slowly in the motel's weak breeze.

EXT. MOTEL BALCONY - MOMENTS LATER

Frank steps outside, cigarette in hand. The sky is black velvet and stars.

He looks out over the parking lot - quiet except for the hum of trucks in the distance.

He speaks softly, to no one and everyone.

FRANK

You ever notice, Danny... the world  
don't really stop for anybody?

You lose your job, your wife, your mind - and the gas station still wants exact change.

He takes a drag.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Maybe that's the trick. You just  
keep drivin' till you run outta  
reasons not to.

He flicks the cigarette into the dark, watches the ember fall like a tiny meteor.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - LATER

Frank crawls into bed, half-covered in a thin blanket.

He looks toward the urn on the nightstand.

FRANK

Night, soldier. Try not to haunt me  
'til morning.

He turns off the light.

The Saint Christopher medal catches the last flicker of neon  
through the blinds.

FADE OUT.

INT. ROADSIDE MOTEL ROOM - EARLY MORNING

A cracked blind leaks thin light across the room.

Empty beer cans, takeout boxes, and a Bible with a cigarette  
burn on the cover.

FRANK sits on the edge of the bed, tying his boots.

Across the room, FATHER JIM (60s) - disheveled, sunburned,  
and smiling like a man who's made peace with God's weird  
sense of humor - packs a duffel bag.

The silence is easy - the kind men earn after too many shared  
miles.

FRANK

You sure about that bus schedule? I  
heard it only runs when the  
driver's sober.

FATHER JIM

That's why I prayed for patience.  
Not miracles.

Frank cracks a half-smile.

FATHER JIM (CONT'D)

Besides, Kansas is your road now.  
Mine stops here.

FRANK

What, Saint Chris tell you to hitch another ride?

FATHER JIM

Something like that.

(beat)

You ever notice the Lord doesn't fix engines, Frank? He just sends people who know how.

Frank grunts – the closest thing he gives to an “amen.”

FRANK

Yeah. He's got a funny way of outsourcing compassion.

Jim zips his duffel. There's a long beat – quiet but loaded.

He glances at the urn sitting on the dresser, wrapped neatly in a flannel shirt.

FATHER JIM

That boy's been waiting a long time to go home. Don't keep him waiting.

Frank nods.

FRANK

You got a place to land?

FATHER JIM

Got a friend up north. Runs a rehab clinic for lost priests and found souls. Figured I qualify for both.

He extends his hand. Frank hesitates, then takes it – rough palms, honest grip.

FRANK

You're not half bad for a man who gets paid to talk to ceilings.

FATHER JIM

And you're not half bad for a man  
who thinks he's beyond saving.

They share a look – not heavy, just true.

Jim picks up his duffel, heads for the door.

He stops in the doorway, turns back – silhouetted by morning  
light.

FATHER JIM (CONT'D)

Keep your eyes on the road, Frank.

And if the road talks back...

(pause)

...don't interrupt.

Frank chuckles softly.

FRANK

Safe travels, Father.

Jim gives a lazy salute and disappears into the morning.

Frank sits there a moment, staring at the open door –

then at the Saint Christopher medal hanging from the rearview  
mirror outside.

He picks up the urn.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Alright, kid... just you and me  
again.

(beat)

Let's finish this.

He slings on his jacket, steps into the sunlight.

WIDE SHOT:

Frank walks toward the truck, the horizon waiting – pale blue and endless.

The motel sign flickers behind him, half-lit letters spelling "VACANT\*."

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. GAS STATION - EARLY MORNING

Frank's truck idles by a payphone.

He dials a number from memory, chewing on a toothpick.

FRANK

Hey, Jerry. It's Frank. Yeah.

Don't sell that Firebird yet?

(beat)

Good. I'm takin' her for a little trip.

(beat)

He hangs up, gets back in the truck, the Saint Christopher medal gleaming.

MUSIC CUE: acoustic guitar, melancholic but rising.

Frank looks at the urn.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Alright, Danny boy. Let's see where you call home.

He shifts into drive.

CUT TO:

EXT. TWO-LANE HIGHWAY - MIDDAY

The sun bakes the world flat. Mirage heat shimmers off the asphalt.

Frank drives, window down, radio static fading in and out of bad country songs.

Sparkplug pants happily in the backseat. The urn rides shotgun, belted in, Saint Christopher medal bouncing against the dash.

Frank squints ahead—color. Noise. Something out of place in the emptiness.

A roadside carnival: half-collapsed rides, cheap banners, a parking lot of dust and regret.

FRANK

Well, Danny boy, you wanted the  
American experience.

He pulls off.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROADSIDE CARNIVAL - CONTINUOUS

It's a ghost fair — a handful of RVs, a creaky Ferris wheel turning slow and sad, a few locals wandering around eating corn dogs that look older than the rides.

Frank steps out, stretches. The carny music wheezes through an old speaker.

Sparkplug trots beside him as Frank scans the midway.

He passes a sign:

"RING TOSS - WIN BIG!"

Behind the booth, a tired CARNY WOMAN (40s) smokes with the enthusiasm of someone who's stopped caring about lungs.

CARNY WOMAN  
Three bucks, cowboy.

FRANK  
I only play games I can lose  
gracefully.

CARNY WOMAN  
(shrugs)  
We got lots of those.

Frank chuckles, drops a crumpled five on the counter.

He throws a ring. Misses.

Throws another. Misses worse.

CARNY WOMAN (CONT'D)  
You throw like a divorce attorney.

Frank smirks.

FRANK  
Yeah, well, I've had practice  
gettin' robbed.

The final toss lands - wobbling around a Saint Christopher plush toy.

CARNY WOMAN  
Huh. First miracle we've had all  
week.

She hands it to him. The stuffed saint has a stitched smile and cheap plastic halo.

Frank looks at it, half amused, half moved.

FRANK

Welcome to the team, Padre Junior.

He tucks it under his arm and walks off.

CUT TO:

EXT. CARNIVAL FOOD STAND - MOMENTS LATER

Frank sits at a picnic table with a corn dog and a paper cup of soda, Sparkplug licking his fingers.

The urn sits opposite him like a dinner date.

FRANK

Hope you're not kosher.

He takes a bite, chewing, staring across at the families - laughing, taking selfies, living.

Then:

FRANK (CONT'D)

You know what's funny, Danny? These people think they're makin' memories.

(beat)

Truth is, they're makin' ghosts.

He sets the corn dog down, sighs, watches a teenage couple flirt by the Ferris wheel.

FLASHBACK - INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT (YEARS AGO)

Frank and Karen sit across from each other. She's mid-laugh. He's checking a bill, half-smiling, half-distracted.

KAREN

You ever just stop and be here?

FRANK

I am here.

KAREN

No, Frank. You're always somewhere else.

SMASH CUT BACK  
TO:

EXT. CARNIVAL - PRESENT

The laughter around him blurs into echo.

Frank blinks hard, takes another sip of soda, muttering:

FRANK

Yeah. Still somewhere else.

He stands, tosses his trash.

A little KID runs up to him, pointing at Sparkplug.

KID

Can I pet him?

FRANK

Depends. You good with lawyers?

The kid giggles and pets the dog.

His MOTHER smiles politely, thanks Frank.

As they walk off, Frank watches – the warmth, the smallness of it all – and something flickers in his face.

A longing he's not ready to name.

He looks at the urn.

FRANK (CONT'D)

They say you can't take it with  
you.

(beat)

Pretty sure you can, though. Regret  
fits anywhere.

He pats the urn affectionately, grabs his stuffed Saint  
Christopher, and heads back to the truck.

EXT. PARKING LOT - SUNSET

Frank loads Sparkplug and the urn.

He sets the little stuffed Saint Christopher on the dashboard  
beside the medal.

FRANK

Congratulations, soldier. You've  
been promoted to dashboard saint.

He starts the engine.

As he drives off, the dying sunlight hits the two saints -  
one metal, one stuffed - both absurd, both sacred in their  
own small way.

The carnival music fades behind him, replaced by open road  
hum.

MUSIC CUE:

A twangy, hopeful guitar riff, like someone smiling through  
tears.

CUT TO:

INT. FRANK AND KAREN'S HOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A small, dimly lit living room.

The furniture's neat but tired. The air hums with what isn't being said.

A TV flickers in the background - some sitcom laughter track mocking them.

Frank enters, grease-stained and exhausted, drops his jacket on a chair.

Karen's sitting at the table, still in her work clothes. A half-empty bottle of wine between two glasses.

KAREN

You said you'd be home by seven.

FRANK

Yeah, well, cars don't check their watches.

KAREN

(quietly)

It's ten-thirty, Frank.

He shrugs, opens the fridge, stares blankly inside.

FRANK

You want somethin'?

KAREN

Yeah. A husband.

He freezes.

Shuts the fridge slowly, turns to her.

FRANK

Look, I had a customer break down on the freeway. He's got kids, needed the car for work-

KAREN  
And what about me?

FRANK  
You don't break down. You  
just--wait.

KAREN  
That's the problem. I've been  
waiting ten years.

She stands, voice trembling but calm – the kind of calm that means she's already gone.

KAREN (CONT'D)  
You fix strangers' engines like  
they're your children, but you  
don't even ask how my day was.

You listen to carburetors better than you listen to me.

Frank looks at her, searching for a joke that'll defuse it.

None comes.

FRANK  
(softly)  
You knew who I was when you married  
me.

KAREN  
Yeah. I just thought I'd get  
promoted to priority at some point.

He takes a step closer.

FRANK  
What do you want me to do, Karen?  
Quit the shop? Sit around and talk  
about feelings?

KAREN  
No. I want you to show up.

Beat.

FRANK  
I'm here now.

KAREN  
(tears forming)  
No, Frank. You're somewhere else,  
as always.

She sets her glass down, grabs her coat.

FRANK  
Where you goin'?

KAREN  
Home.

FRANK  
This is home.

She looks at him for a long moment.

KAREN  
No, Frank. It's just a garage with  
walls.

She walks out.

The door shuts – soft, final, like a confession whispered in church.

INT. TRUCK – PRESENT – NIGHT

The flashback dissolves into the dark windshield.

Frank drives in silence.

The road hum fills the void she left.

He grips the wheel tighter.

FRANK  
(softly, to the urn)  
I could've fixed her, Danny. She  
just stopped bringin' in parts.

He laughs weakly, then sighs – the laugh dies on the way out.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
Don't look at me like that. You're  
ashes, not a therapist.

He reaches for the stuffed Saint Christopher on the dash,  
squeezes it like a stress ball.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
You ever notice how the road never  
judges?

You just keep drivin' and it don't care if you're lost or  
late.

A truck horn BLARES behind him, snapping him back.

He swerves slightly, exhales.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
Right. Eyes on the road, preacher  
man.

He adjusts the mirror, catches his own reflection – a tired,  
sad man finally realizing he's been both mechanic and wreck  
all along.

CUT TO:

EXT. GAS STATION - LATER

Frank fills up at a lonely pump, light buzzing overhead.

He glances at the Saint Christopher medal swinging.

FRANK

You still with me, Saint Chris?  
(beat)  
'Cause I'm startin' to think maybe  
I don't deserve a ride home.

He looks at the urn, sighs.

FRANK (CONT'D)

But you do, kid. You do.

He replaces the nozzle, gets back in the truck, and drives into the darkness.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRUCK STOP MOTEL - EARLY MORNING

A wide, cracked lot outside a 24-hour diner.

Frank's pickup sits under a buzzing light. Sparkplug dozes in the cab.

Frank leans against the truck, sipping burnt coffee, eyes hollow from sleepless miles.

A woman approaches - mid-30s, tired pretty, jeans and a denim jacket over a cheap tank top.

RITA. She's not hustling hard; just surviving the night.

RITA

You headed west or east?

FRANK

Depends which way redemption is.

RITA  
(smiles)  
Ain't on the map, honey.

She eyes his truck.

RITA (CONT'D)  
Need some company for the road?

Frank studies her – not leering, just seeing the loneliness behind the pitch.

FRANK  
Appreciate the offer. My back  
seat's taken.  
(nods toward the urn)  
Already ridin' with a dead man.

Rita looks at it, then at him.

RITA  
I've had worse dates.

They share a small laugh. It's not flirtation; it's recognition.

She sits on the curb beside him, lights a cigarette.

RITA (CONT'D)  
You look like somebody who stopped  
somewhere he didn't mean to.

FRANK  
Story of my life.

Silence. Just the hum of trucks idling, the faint glow of sunrise over the gas pumps.

Rita finishes her smoke, stands.

RITA  
You want advice from a girl who  
charges for conversation?

Don't let the next sunrise find you sittin' still.

She walks away, heels clicking on asphalt.

Frank watches her go – not lust, just empathy.

FRANK

(softly)

Hell of a preacher, lady.

He looks at the urn, mutters–

FRANK (CONT'D)

See, Danny? Even angels wear cheap  
perfume.

He flicks his cigarette, climbs into the truck, and drives  
off as the horizon flares gold

WIDE SHOT – NIGHT HIGHWAY

The headlights stretch across blacktop.

Saint Christopher glimmers in the glow.

The sound of the engine blends with faint, ghostly laughter –  
maybe memory, maybe mercy.

MUSIC: soft, yearning guitar picking over low hum of tires –  
the sound of movement without destination.

FADE OUT.

EXT. HIGHWAY – NIGHT

The truck slices through the darkness like a ship on an  
endless black sea.

Only the headlights, the hum of tires, and the Saint  
Christopher medal swinging lazily against the windshield.

A green highway sign flashes by:

"WELCOME TO KANSAS – THE HEART OF AMERICA."

Frank squints. He's been driving for hours – eyes red, jaw tight.

Sparkplug snores in the back seat. The urn rides shotgun.

Frank yawns, rubs his face, and flips on the radio. Static. Country. Preacher. More static.

He shuts it off. The silence feels heavier than noise.

FRANK

Well, Danny-boy, we made it to the middle of nowhere.

(beat)

Congratulations. You're officially more well-traveled than my marriage.

He chuckles weakly. Then – his head starts to nod.

The lines on the road blur.

EXT. HIGHWAY SHOULDER – CONTINUOUS

The truck drifts slightly.

Frank jerks awake, pulls over with a curse.

FRANK

Alright, alright. Coffee time.

He pulls into a deserted rest area – one flickering streetlight, a few vending machines, a distant semi idling like a mechanical heartbeat.

EXT. REST AREA - CONTINUOUS

Frank steps out, stretches, lights a cigarette.

The night air is cold and still.

He looks up at the sky - a blanket of stars stretching forever.

FRANK

You ever wonder if they're watchin'  
us, Danny?

(beat)

Don't answer that. You got the  
higher ground.

He takes a long drag, exhales into the night.

Then - something shifts.

The wind dies. The hum of the highway fades away.

Only the faint rattle of the Saint Christopher medal.

Frank turns - the passenger door is open.

The urn sits on the seat, lid faintly ajar.

Frank frowns, walks closer.

FRANK (CONT'D)

I didn't... leave that open, did I?

A soft breeze passes through the truck.

Then - the passenger seat is no longer empty.

A young man sits there - early 20s, lean, kind-eyed - wearing  
a military jacket.

His name tag reads: REESE.

Frank freezes.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
...Well, that's new.

The soldier looks straight ahead, calm as moonlight.

DANIEL  
You ever bring yourself home,  
Frank?

Frank blinks. His cigarette trembles.

FRANK  
What?

DANIEL  
You talk a lot about fixing things.  
(beat)  
Ever try fixin' you?

Frank laughs nervously.

FRANK  
Kid, I'm a mechanic, not a miracle  
worker.

Daniel smiles, faint, warm.

DANIEL  
Maybe they're the same thing.

Frank turns away, rubbing his eyes.

FRANK  
Alright, I get it. Too much  
caffeine, not enough therapy.

He turns back – the seat is empty. The urn's lid is sealed.  
Sparkplug barks from the back seat, tail wagging at nothing.  
Frank swallows hard.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
Okay, Saint Chris. Either I'm  
losin' it, or I just met a ghost  
with better manners than my ex-  
wife.

He exhales - half laugh, half disbelief.

Then he leans on the truck, looking out over the endless  
plains.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
If that was you, Danny... thanks for  
checkin' in.  
(beat)  
Next time, bring beer.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAWN

The first light of morning bleeds across the horizon.

Frank drives again, eyes bleary but softer now.

The Saint Christopher medal glints with each sunrise beam.

He glances at the urn, nods respectfully.

FRANK  
You keep talkin', soldier. I'll  
keep listenin'.

Fair trade.

He reaches for the stuffed Saint Christopher on the dash,  
gives it a pat.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Hang in there, Padre Junior. We're  
goin' home.

The road ahead opens wide – gold light spilling across Kansas fields like forgiveness itself.

MUSIC CUE: gentle acoustic – something between hope and surrender.

FADE OUT.

EXT. RURAL GAS STATION – MIDDAY

Frank's truck groans into a dusty one-pump gas station – the kind that sells jerky, fishing lures, and regret.

The heat waves shimmer. A hand-painted sign reads:

"LIVE BAIT – ICE – GOD BLESS."

Frank steps out, stretching his back, muttering:

FRANK

Back says fifty-eight, knees say  
ninety.

He clicks the pump handle and squints toward the office window.

Inside, the CLERK (teen, 17) scrolls on his phone, not looking up.

INT. GAS STATION OFFICE – CONTINUOUS

Frank enters, the bell above the door clings weakly.

A mounted deer head stares him down.

A dusty radio blares country pop.

FRANK  
Morning.

CLERK  
(not looking)  
Afternoon.

FRANK  
Depends which time zone hell's in.

The clerk blinks, unimpressed.

Frank grabs a coffee from a thermos labeled "HOT" (a lie), pours a cup, and adds powdered creamer.

He takes a sip – grimaces like it bit him.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
Jesus fuckin Christ!. This stuff  
could wake the dead.

He glances at the urn through the window and deadpans:

FRANK (CONT'D)  
No offense.

The clerk finally looks up, confused.

CLERK  
You say somethin'?

FRANK  
Just talkin' to my passenger.

CLERK  
Cool.

Frank stares a beat – the kid doesn't flinch.

FRANK  
You ever have a conversation that  
made you question evolution?

The kid shrugs, scrolling again.

Frank pays, drops a quarter in the charity jar marked "HELP LOCAL VETS."

He nods toward it.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
That's for the guy ridin' shotgun.

He heads out.

EXT. GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

Frank tops off the tank. Sparkplug barks at a cat sleeping on an ice chest.

Frank mutters:

FRANK  
Leave it. He's got seniority.

He finishes, wipes his hands, looks at the horizon.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
Whole country's runnin' on fumes,  
Saint Chris. At least we're  
consistent.

He climbs in and drives off, the Saint Christopher medal flashing in the sunlight as they merge back onto the empty road.

EXT. ROADSIDE DINER - LATE AFTERNOON

A chrome diner gleams alone beside the highway.

A faded sign: "BETTY'S EATS - PIE FIXES EVERYTHING."

Frank pulls in, parks crooked as usual.

The urn rides beside him; Sparkplug pants happily in the back.

INT. DINER - CONTINUOUS

Bell jingles. A jukebox plays faint Patsy Cline.

A few locals: a trucker, a waitress, a farmer in a seed-company hat.

Frank takes a booth by the window, sets the urn across from him like company.

The WAITRESS (50s, bright-eyed, chain-smoker voice) appears with a pad.

WAITRESS

Coffee?

FRANK

Depends. You brew it or interrogate it?

WAITRESS

(grins)

Both. You want pie with that mouth?

FRANK

Cherry. It's the least judgmental.

She walks off, shaking her head.

Frank leans toward the urn.

FRANK (QUIETLY) (CONT'D)

You'd like her, Danny. Sarcastic, no filter, probably owns a gun.

He looks out the window - families refueling, kids laughing over ice cream.

For a second, he almost smiles.

The waitress returns with pie and coffee.

WAITRESS  
You passin' through?

FRANK  
More like circlin'. Tryin' to find  
my exit.

WAITRESS  
(nods)  
We all are, sugar. Some just stop  
for pie first.

Frank chuckles, bites into the pie – genuine bliss for a rare  
heartbeat.

FRANK  
Damn. That's almost holy.

WAITRESS  
Tell your friends.

She walks off.

Frank stirs his coffee, watching the small-town sunlight  
catch the chrome napkin holder.

He sees his reflection – tired, human, alive.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK – INT. FRANK'S GARAGE – NIGHT (YEARS AGO)

A younger Frank works late, sparks flying as he welds.

Karen enters with dinner in a paper bag.

KAREN  
You gonna eat or wait till it  
fossilizes?

FRANK  
Five minutes.

KAREN  
(smiling sadly)  
That's what you said five years  
ago.

She sets the bag down, leaves quietly.

Frank looks up too late.

BACK TO DINER

Frank pushes the pie away, appetite gone.

He glances at the urn again.

FRANK  
Guess I've been waitin' five  
minutes too.

He leaves a generous tip, stands, nods toward the waitress.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
Thanks for remindin' me pie still  
works.

She winks.

CUT TO:

EXT. DINER PARKING LOT - SUNSET

Frank loads up, glances at the Saint Christopher medal.

FRANK

You still on duty, Saint Chris?  
'Cause we're almost outta excuses.

He starts the engine.

The sun bleeds orange over the wheat fields, the truck rolling forward toward the horizon.

MUSIC: A low, warm guitar strum – the sound of quiet redemption inching closer.

FADE OUT.

EXT. KANSAS HIGHWAY - DAY

The desert has turned to rolling plains – sun-bleached fence posts and wheat fields swaying in the heat.

Frank's '91 Ford pickup hums down the lonely road, dog hair swirling in the cab.

Beside him sits Sparkplug, watching the world blur past the window.

The Saint Christopher medal swings gently from the mirror.

Frank hums along to a half-tuned country station.

FRANK

You like that one, Plug?  
(snickers)  
Yeah, me neither.

Sparkplug yawns, drooling on the dashboard.

Suddenly – FLASHING LIGHTS behind them.

Frank mutters.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Well, here we go again!

He pulls over. Sparkplug barks once, sharp – like he knows the drill.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
Settle down, deputy dog. I already  
got one comin'.

The State Trooper's cruiser stops behind them. Out steps TROOPER WILSON (40s) – tall, crisp uniform, calm military bearing. He taps the rear taillight, notes the crack.

He approaches Frank's window.

TROOPER WILSON  
Afternoon, sir. You aware your  
right taillight's out?

FRANK  
I'm aware everything on this  
truck's out, except my luck.

Sparkplug growls softly. Wilson leans a little to see him.

TROOPER WILSON  
Friendly?

FRANK  
So far.

Wilson gives a half-smile.

TROOPER WILSON  
License and registration, please.

Frank digs through the glovebox – old maps, receipts, sitting between Sparkplug and Frank is Daniels urn nestled safely in a flannel rag. Wilson's eyes lock on it immediately.

TROOPER WILSON (CONT'D)  
Sir, is that what I think it is?

Frank freezes, his voice quiet.

FRANK

It's someone who deserves better than where I found him.

TROOPER WILSON

You're transporting cremains? That's a federal item. You got paperwork?

FRANK

Paperwork's what lost him in the first place.

Wilson straightens.

TROOPER WILSON

I'm gonna need to take that in for verification, sir.

Frank's hand clenches the steering wheel. Sparkplug lets out a low, warning growl.

FRANK

Easy, boy...  
(to Wilson)  
Officer, look... that urn belongs to Daniel Reese, Marine. Killed in Afghanistan. Got lost somewhere on the road to his parents. I found him in a junked Firebird. I'm takin' him home to his folks in Topeka. Twenty miles out. That's all I'm askin'.

Wilson's demeanor shifts. The name Afghanistan hangs heavy.

TROOPER WILSON

Afghanistan... What year?

FRANK

Oh-seven.

Wilson stares down at the asphalt, remembering.

TROOPER WILSON  
Kandahar. I was there.  
(beat)  
Lost a Reese myself. Not the same  
one, but... damn close.

Frank nods slowly. Sparkplug whines, sensing the calm after the storm.

FRANK  
You know how it goes, then. If you  
take him, he'll get lost again.

And his folks – they been waitin' long enough.

Wilson studies Frank, the dog, the dusty old truck – the whole picture of stubborn grace.

Finally, he exhales.

TROOPER WILSON  
All right, Mr. Carlson.

You follow me.

I'll make sure this Marine gets home proper.

Frank's eyes flicker – gratitude masked by fatigue.

FRANK  
Appreciate it, trooper. Didn't  
expect an escort to heaven's gate.

Wilson cracks a smile.

TROOPER WILSON  
Just keep that dog off my tires,  
you hear?

Frank looks down at Sparkplug.

FRANK

Hear that, Plug? No pee-zones  
today.

Sparkplug barks – almost like laughter.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL-TOWN KANSAS - DAY

Frank's pickup rumbles down a narrow road lined with telephone poles and wide, wind-tossed wheat. He follows the State Trooper closely.

A handmade sign greets him:

"Welcome to Maple Hollow – Pop. 1,702. God Bless Our Troops."

Frank slows, looking out the window at a town that time forgot – a post office, a feed store, one traffic light permanently stuck on yellow.

Sparkplug barks at a pair of old-timers sitting outside a diner. They wave lazily.

FRANK

Don't get excited. We're not  
famous.

He passes the local VFW hall, its flag at half-mast. A poster in the window reads:

"HONORING PVT. DANIEL REESE - GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN."

Frank stares. The realization hits – this is it.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. REESE HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

A small farmhouse set back from the road, white paint fading, an old swing creaking in the breeze.

Yellow ribbons still tie the mailbox.

The yard is tidy but frozen in time - hope suspended mid-gesture.

Frank parks, sits there for a long beat, engine idling.

He looks at the urn in the passenger seat.

FRANK  
(softly)  
You ready, kid?

He kills the engine, grabs the urn, Turns, and waves to the Trooper who salutes him back. Frank and Sparkplug reverently walk down the path approaching the house.

INT. REESE HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

MARTHA REESE (60s) opens the door. Her eyes are kind but hollow, her posture formal - the posture of someone who's practiced holding herself together.

She studies Frank, uncertain.

MARTHA  
Can I help you?

Frank swallows.

FRANK

Name's Frank Carlson. I-uh-found something that belongs to you.

He holds up the urn awkwardly.

Martha's breath catches. Her hand covers her mouth.

MARTHA

Oh my God...

She opens the door wider.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Please. Come in.

INT. REESE LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Walls lined with photos of Daniel: boyhood baseball trophies, high-school graduation, Army portrait.

A folded flag sits in a glass case on the mantle.

Frank stands stiff, hat in his hands.

Martha sets the urn on the coffee table gently, as if placing a child to sleep.

MARTHA

We thought the funeral home lost him. They said the courier never came.

FRANK

Found him under the dash of a Firebird.

(beat)

Guess he was still ridin'.

She gives a small, tearful laugh.

A door creaks behind them – TOM REESE (early 60s), weathered, quiet, wearing work gloves.

He sizes Frank up like a stranger who's brought both news and trouble.

TOM  
You military?

FRANK  
No, sir. Just a mechanic.

Tom nods once, wordless, and disappears toward the back of the house.

INT. REESE KITCHEN - LATER

Martha pours coffee into mismatched mugs. Frank sits at the table, uncomfortable in his own skin.

She slides a cup toward him.

MARTHA  
You came all this way just to bring him home?

FRANK  
Seemed like the right thing to do.

MARTHA  
Not many people do the right thing anymore.

Frank shrugs.

FRANK  
I'm new at it.

They share a small, genuine smile – the first human warmth in a long while for both of them.

CUT TO:

INT. REESE GARAGE - TWILIGHT

Frank wanders out back.

Tom's there, working silently on an old John Deere mower, tools scattered.

Frank lingers by the door.

FRANK

He liked cars, huh?

TOM

He rebuilt that mower when he was twelve.

(beat)

Still runs better than half the new ones.

Tom wipes his hands, studies Frank.

TOM (CONT'D)

You said you found him under a dash?

FRANK

Yeah. Firebird. Classic. Thought I was buyin' scrap. Turns out I bought history.

Tom's eyes narrow - suspicion or pain, hard to tell.

TOM

You a religious man, Frank?

FRANK

Not enough to brag about. You?

TOM

Used to be.

They stand in silence, only the tick of cooling metal between them.

CUT TO:

INT. REESE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A simple dinner: stew, bread, quiet.

Martha insists Frank stay.

Tom eats mechanically, barely looking up.

MARTHA

Daniel loved that car. Said he'd drive it to California one day.

Frank glances down at his bowl.

FRANK

At least he got a ride back.

Tom's spoon stops mid-air. The silence is sharp.

TOM

You think that's funny?

FRANK

No, sir. Just... seems like he deserved the miles.

Tom stares, then leaves the table. The screen door SLAMS.

Martha exhales, eyes wet.

MARTHA

He doesn't talk much since... well, since the knock on the door.

(beat)

(MORE)

MARTHA (CONT'D)  
Thank you for bringing him home,  
Mr. Carlson.

Frank nods, unable to meet her eyes.

EXT. REESE PORCH - LATER THAT NIGHT

Frank steps outside, leans on the railing.

Fireflies hover over the wheat field.

The night hums with crickets and memory.

He looks at the urn through the window - sitting safe now,  
surrounded by photos and warmth.

FRANK  
Guess you finally made it, Danny.

He lights a cigarette, exhales into the humid Kansas air.

Behind him, Martha's soft voice:

MARTHA  
You can stay the night, if you  
want. The guest room's clean.

Frank nods without turning.

FRANK  
Appreciate it. I'll be gone by  
morning.

MARTHA  
You don't have to be.

He glances at her, surprised - there's kindness there, not  
pity.

She smiles faintly, goes back inside.

Frank watches the field a moment longer, then murmurs to himself:

FRANK

Every man gets one good homecoming.  
(beat)  
Guess this one ain't mine.

He flicks his cigarette into the night. The ember drifts down like a tiny falling star.

INT. REESE HOUSE - NIGHT

The dining room is warm but heavy. The wallpaper has seen better decades; the silence is older still.

Martha sets down a pot of stew. Tom sits at the head of the table, posture rigid, sleeves rolled up, hands that look built for holding wrenches and regret.

Frank sits opposite the empty chair that used to belong to Daniel.

MARTHA

I know it's not much, but it's what Daniel liked.

FRANK

Smells better than anything I ever cooked. Which, to be fair, is a low bar.

Martha gives a faint smile. Tom doesn't.

They bow their heads. Tom mutters a short, mechanical grace.

TOM

Lord, thank you for what we have,  
and for whoever brought the rest of  
it back. Amen.

Awkward clinking of silverware.

MARTHA

So... you said you found him in a car?

FRANK

Yeah. Firebird. Under the dash, like he'd been hidin' out.

TOM

And what were you doin' with that car?

FRANK

Bought it for parts. Figured I could fix it, maybe sell it—before I knew who came with the glovebox.

Tom sets his spoon down. Hard.

TOM

You took my boy's ashes apart like a junker.

FRANK

No, sir. I... I didn't know what it was till I found his name.

TOM

You could've mailed it. Didn't need to show up like some damn savior.

FRANK

I'm no savior. Just a mechanic who ran outta excuses.

Silence. The clock ticks like a judge's gavel.

MARTHA

(gently)

Tom—

TOM

(snaps)

No, he needs to hear this. You think drivin' him home fixes somethin'? You got any idea what we've been livin' with?

Frank looks at him, eyes steady.

FRANK

I know what guilt smells like. I carry the same cologne.

TOM

Don't you compare yourself to me. You didn't bury a son.

FRANK

No. But I buried a marriage. Same hole. Different headstone.

Tom stands, fists balled.

TOM

Get out.

Martha's eyes fill with tears.

MARTHA

Tom, please—

TOM

He did his good deed. Let him go be noble somewhere else.

Frank rises slowly.

FRANK

You're right. I'll go.

(beat)

But for what it's worth, your boy made it further with me than I ever did alone.

He nods toward Martha.

FRANK (CONT'D)  
You raised a good one. You oughta  
forgive yourself for that.

He heads for the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. REESE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Frank steps onto the porch. Night air hits him like judgment.

He pulls out a cigarette, can't find his lighter. Tom's voice behind him:

TOM (O.S.)  
He enlisted the day we fought. Told  
me I was too old to understand  
duty.  
(beat)  
I told him he was too young to die  
for it.

Frank turns. Tom stands in the doorway, shadows cutting across his face.

FRANK  
You think that makes it your fault?

TOM  
Don't it?

Frank studies him, then holds out the crumpled pack.

FRANK  
You smoke?

TOM

Quit.

FRANK

(lights up)

Me too.

They stand there, two broken men sharing a silence that finally feels mutual.

FRANK (CONT'D)

For what it's worth, he's home now.  
You can stop drivin' circles around  
it.

Tom looks out over the dark field, jaw tight.

TOM

Maybe you should stay till mornin'.

Frank nods, flicks the ash off the porch.

FRANK

Yeah. Maybe I should.

CUT TO:

INT. GUEST ROOM - LATER

Frank lies awake on a quilted bed, Sparkplug at his feet.

Through the thin wall, he hears Martha sobbing softly and Tom's muffled voice trying to comfort her.

Frank stares at the Saint Christopher medal on his nightstand, turning slowly in the moonlight.

FRANK (V.O.)  
Sometimes bringin' someone home  
just means remindin' yourself where  
you went wrong.

He closes his eyes. For the first time, sleep looks like  
mercy.

FADE OUT.

EXT. REESE BARN - EARLY MORNING

The first light creeps through the slats of an old wooden  
barn.

Dust floats in the air like tiny ghosts.

Frank stands before the Firebird - Daniel's car - hood up,  
engine half-covered in cobwebs.

He runs his hand along the fender.

FRANK  
You waited long enough, kid. Let's  
see what you got left in you.

He pulls a wrench from his belt, starts loosening bolts,  
methodical, reverent.

CAMERA MOVES SLOWLY around him - every sound amplified:

the clink of a socket wrench, the low rasp of breathing, the  
distant chirp of waking birds.

Behind him, Tom steps in quietly, coffee mug in hand.

He watches from the doorway, saying nothing at first.

TOM  
Thought you'd be gone by now.

FRANK

Me too. Guess the truck had other ideas.

Tom walks closer, glancing at the scattered tools.

TOM

You know engines.

FRANK

They're easier than people.

Tom sips his coffee, studies Frank.

TOM

Ain't that the truth.

Frank leans over the engine bay, muttering under his breath.

FRANK

Kid had good taste. 400 cubic inches of pure stubborn.

TOM

Just like him.

They share a quiet smile – the first genuine one between them.

CUT TO:

EXT. REESE BARN - LATER

Sunlight pours through the open doors.

Frank's shirt is soaked with sweat.

He wipes his hands, leans against the car, exhausted.

Tom stands beside him, holding a fuel line.

FRANK

You sure about this? She's been sittin' a while. Might blow a gasket—or us.

TOM

Wouldn't be the worst thing that ever happened in here.

Frank nods. Climbs into the driver's seat.

He inserts the key, turns it—

CLICK.

Nothing.

He exhales, tries again.

CLICK.

Tom looks away, disappointment creeping in.

Frank stares at the dash — the cracked steering wheel, the smell of dust and memory.

He whispers to himself:

FRANK

Come on, Saint Chris. One good turn.

He turns the key again —

ENGINE COUGHS... STUTTERS... THEN ROARS TO LIFE.

The sound fills the barn — loud, alive, vibrating through the walls like resurrection.

Tom's face cracks – the stoicism breaking, tears spilling before he can hide them.

He presses his hand against the hood, trembling.

TOM

That's my boy. That's my damn boy.

Frank steps out slowly, lets him have the moment.

Martha appears in the doorway, drawn by the noise, covering her mouth as the sound floods her eyes with tears.

MARTHA

Oh, Tom...

Tom nods toward Frank, voice thick.

TOM

He did it. He brought him home.

Frank looks at them both, unable to speak. He just nods, steps back into the sunlight, wipes his hands, and walks out – leaving the family in their own grace.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIELD BEHIND THE BARN – CONTINUOUS

Frank steps into the tall grass. The engine's rumble echoes behind him, fading with the wind.

He looks at the horizon – open, endless.

He reaches into his pocket, pulls out his Saint Christopher medal.

Holds it up against the rising sun.

FRANK

You did good, kid. You're home.

He tucks the medal into his shirt and breathes – slow, steady, alive.

CUT TO:

EXT. REESE FARMHOUSE – DUSK

The sun burns low over the Kansas plains.

Frank stands by his truck, the engine idling softly.

Martha Reese wipes her eyes on her apron.

Tom Reese gives Frank a solid handshake – firm, no words needed.

Frank nods once, the closest he gets to goodbye.

He climbs in, glances back just once –

the farmhouse bathed in gold, a family whole again.

He drives off down the gravel road, the dust rising behind him like smoke after a battle.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. ROADSIDE DINER – NIGHT

A lonely diner hums beneath buzzing neon in the middle of nowhere.

A sign flickers:

"OPEN 24 HOURS - OR UNTIL WE QUIT."

Frank's truck pulls into the lot and idles under the glow.  
The Saint Christopher medal swings lazily from the mirror.

INT. DINER - CONTINUOUS

Frank sits in a booth, eyes on the window.

Outside, headlights streak across the highway like ghosts going home.

A waitress (40s) pours him coffee, doesn't bother asking.

He nods his thanks.

The local newspaper sits folded beside his plate of half-eaten pie:

"LOCAL MECHANIC RETURNS FALLEN SOLDIER'S ASHES AFTER TEN YEARS."

Frank doesn't read it. He just stares at it, quietly proud - and tired.

He picks up the Saint Christopher medal, turning it in his palm.

FRANK (SOFTLY)  
Guess we did alright, kid.

He leaves a few crumpled bills on the table, stands, and heads for the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. DINER PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

He climbs into the truck, fires it up.

The radio hums with static before finding a faint country song - "Take Me Home, Country Roads."

Frank looks east, then west.

He turns the wheel west.

The truck rolls onto the open road - taillights fading into the dark,

The Saint Christopher medal glinting faintly against the windshield.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FRANK'S GARAGE - MORNING

The old garage door creaks open.

Dust motes swirl in the light.

Inside, the Firebird waits - sun-faded, forgotten.

Frank steps inside, sleeves rolled up, toolbox in hand.

He places the Saint Christopher medal on the workbench.

FRANK

Alright. Let's bring you back.

He sets to work - the sound of tools, radio static, and redemption in motion.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE - "THE REBUILD"

- \* Frank sandblasting the frame, sparks flying.
- \* New paint - deep cherry red - gleaming under fluorescent lights.
- \* Tight close-ups: bolt threads, polished chrome, his reflection in the hood.
- \* He tunes the radio - old rock ballad fades in.
- \* The Saint Christopher medal now hangs from the mirror again.

WIDE SHOT: Frank steps back, sweat-soaked and smiling - for the first time in the movie.

The Firebird hums, purring like redemption on four wheels.

FADE TO BLACK:

TITLE CARD: SIX MONTHS LATTER.

EXT. FRANK'S HOUSE - SUNSET

The restored Firebird gleams in the driveway. Frank loads a small duffel bag into the trunk. Sparkplug watches from the passenger seat, tail thumping, ready for the next ride.

Frank pauses, looks at the house he might lose, then at the road he's about to take. A man caught between endings and beginnings.

His phone rings.

Caller ID: TOM REESE

Frank answers.

FRANK  
Tom? Everything alright?

INT. REESE FARMHOUSE - SAME TIME

Tom Reese sits alone at the kitchen table, the glow of a single lamp over him. His voice carries a heaviness, but also peace.

TOM  
We're okay here, Frank. Martha's  
sleeping better. House feels..  
lighter somehow, with Danny home.

Frank nods, quietly pleased.

FRANK  
Glad to hear it.

Tom hesitates - something more on his mind.

TOM  
I wanted to tell you somethin'  
before you disappear down that road  
for good.

Frank leans against the Firebird, listening.

FRANK  
Alright.

TOM  
I heard from Captain Harrington.  
Danny's C.O. The man who was  
supposed to bring him home.

Frank straightens.

FRANK  
He's alive?

TOM

Alive, yeah. But that man's been carryin' a weight a long time. He finally told me what happened.

Frank listens, jaw tight.

FLASHBACK BEGINS - TOM NARRATES

TOM (V.O.)

He volunteered for the escort. Said it wasn't duty - it was loyalty. He promised my boy he'd bring him home.

FLASHBACK - EXT. ARMY BASE - DAY

Harrington requests the escort assignment from Major Collins.

TOM (V.O.)

He did everything right. Signed the escort papers, took leave, picked up Danny's personal effects himself.

FLASHBACK - EXT. ROADSIDE STORE - DAY

Harrington drives the Firebird, the urn on the seat. He talks to it.

TOM (V.O.)

Him and Danny both had firebirds said Danny bragged about how fast his Firebird is and how some day they would race for bragging rights.

Harrington hides the urn in the glove box before going inside for coffee.

## FLASHBACK - PARKING LOT

Punk teens jump out of a Camaro. One hotwires the Firebird and steals it.

TOM (V.O.)

He went inside for two minutes -  
and kids stole the car. He watched  
'em drive off with his car, his  
uniform bag-and my son's ashes.

Harrington runs helplessly after the disappearing Firebird.

TOM (V.O.)

He tried to get help. But nobody  
listens to a man sayin' his heart  
just got stolen.

## BACK TO PRESENT - EXT. FRANK'S DRIVEWAY

Frank absorbs the weight of it. Sparkplug whines softly from inside the car.

FRANK

He didn't abandon Danny.

TOM

No. He lost him. And it damn near  
broke him.

(beat)

He told me he never forgave  
himself... until he heard your name.

Frank says nothing.

TOM (CONT'D)

He said to tell you-thank you. You  
finished his mission. Took you both  
a long road to get there... but you  
got him home.

Frank's voice tightens.

FRANK

I just did what anyone would do.

TOM

No, Frank. Anyone could've. But only one man did. That deserves to be said.

A long beat.

TOM (CONT'D)

Where you headed now?

Frank looks toward the horizon.

FRANK

Home. I think.

Tom smiles into the phone.

TOM

Give that woman of yours hell, Frank.

Frank cracks a small smile.

FRANK

Plan to show her how much I still love her.

TOM

God Bless you Frank!

They hang up.

Frank pockets the phone, gets behind the wheel. Sparkplug shifts into his seat, ready.

Frank rests a hand on the steering wheel—and on the Saint Christopher medal swinging from the mirror.

He starts the engine.

THE FIREBIRD RUMBLES TO LIFE.

Frank drives toward Karen—toward closure, toward forgiveness,  
toward whatever comes next.

FADE OUT.

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - GOLDEN HOUR

A cherry-red '68 Firebird rolls slowly down a quiet  
California street — restored to perfection. Chrome gleams.  
Paint catches the dying sun like a memory polished clean.

He turns onto KAREN'S STREET — that mix of nerves and  
nostalgia in his chest — and parks out front.

He shuts off the engine, exhales hard. For the first time,  
his hands tremble a little.

He looks at the house — warm, tidy, wind chime swaying.

He grabs the medal from the mirror, folds it into his palm  
like a lucky coin.

FRANK  
(to himself)  
Alright, Saint Chris... one more  
rescue.

He steps out and walks up the path.

INT. KAREN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The door opens before he can knock.

KAREN (early 50s) stands there - hair tied back, sleeves rolled up.

She looks good, but different. Stronger. A woman who built a life without waiting.

She looks down and see's Sparkplug joyfully wagging his tail he instinctively jumps into her arms .

KAREN

Now who is this little darling?

FRANK

That's Sparkplug!

Her eyes flick past him to the Firebird gleaming at the curb.

KAREN

The car you found the soldier in right.

(beat)

It's beautiful! Didn't think you had it in you.

FRANK

Neither did I.

Awkward silence. They haven't seen each other in years, but the air's full of everything unsaid.

KAREN

I saw you on TV. That story about the soldier's ashes.

You driving halfway across the country to return him to his family.

Frank looks down, embarrassed.

FRANK

Yeah... that was me.

Didn't mean for it to turn into a thing.

KAREN

It was a good thing, Frank. You did something decent.

Just...

(beat)

Took you long enough.

Frank half-smiles.

FRANK

Guess I had to get lost to learn where home was.

She studies him – searching for the man she once knew.

He doesn't look the same.

He's lighter somehow. Like the bitterness burned off somewhere in Kansas.

KAREN

You look different.

Tired, but... different.

FRANK

I quit smoking.

Mostly.

(beat)

Stopped yelling at the TV, too.

She laughs – small, surprised. The first crack in her armor.

KAREN

So what brings you back? You gonna  
open another shop?

Find another poor soul to fix?

Frank takes a long beat, eyes honest.

FRANK

No, Karen.

I just wanted to say I'm sorry.

For all the times I made you feel small so I could feel big.

For thinking work was life and you were... part of the  
equipment.

She looks at him – it hits, but she doesn't rush to forgive.

She just nods, eyes moist but steady.

KAREN

You really mean that?

FRANK

Every damn word.

Another silence – warm, not heavy.

KAREN

You hungry?

FRANK

Depends. You still burn spaghetti?

KAREN

(laughs)

Only on special occasions.

She steps aside – just enough for him to enter, not all the  
way.

It's not a reunion. It's a chance.

Frank hesitates, then crosses the threshold slowly – respectful, unsure.

The sound of wind chimes fades as the door closes behind them.

CUT TO:

INT. KAREN'S KITCHEN - LATER

Warm light. The smell of simmering sauce.

Karen moves quietly around the kitchen. Frank stands awkwardly, hat in hand.

On the counter, the local newspaper – headline:

"Mechanic Returns Fallen Soldier's Ashes After 10 Years Missing."

There's a photo of Frank shaking hands with Tom Reese.

Karen notices him looking.

KAREN

Didn't think I'd ever see your name  
in the paper without the word  
'arrested' after it.

FRANK

Hey now – I'm rebranding.

She smiles again. That old warmth flickers back.

KAREN

You did good, Frank.

You finally stopped running from something... and started running toward something.

Frank looks at her, serious.

FRANK  
Toward you, maybe.

That hangs in the air – too heavy to answer, too true to dismiss.

She turns to the stove, stirs the sauce.

KAREN  
Let's just start with dinner.

FRANK  
Fair enough.

KAREN  
"I'm not saying we start over, Frank. I'm saying... I see you trying."

He sits. She serves him.

Two people who used to be everything, starting over as something.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Through the window, they sit eating, awkward but smiling.

Outside, under the streetlight, the Firebird gleams – perfect, patient, the Saint Christopher medal glinting softly from the mirror.

CAMERA PULLS BACK - AERIAL SWEEP

The neighborhood fades into a sea of warm lights.

The sound of laughter drifts faintly from the kitchen.

FADE OUT.

Frank VO: Goodbye, Saint Christopher!

TITLE CARD SAME TIME: GOODBYE, SAINT CHRISTOPHER