

SIXTH AND MATEO

written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. SIXTH AND MATEO - EAST LOS ANGELES - DUSK

SUPER: LOS ANGELES, 1975

The sky bleeds orange and purple over downtown. A yellow CHECK-CASHING sign buzzes on. A primer-gray MUSTANG idles at the curb.

We don't know anyone yet. We only see:

A robbery collapsing in real time -- a wiry figure backing out of the store with a canvas sack and a pistol, a big kid frozen on the sidewalk, black-and-whites sliding crossways into the intersection, officers bracing over hoods --

-- and a BOY, seventeen, sprinting INTO all of it from the far curb, arms spreading wide --

BOY
DON'T SHOOT --

The intersection FIRES. The boy spins, falls backward into the last orange light --

-- and before he lands, the frame WHITES: a figure of light, wings filling the street, catching something the body leaves behind.

The body hits the pavement. The boy doesn't.

WHITE.

INT. SALVINGTON - VIEWING CENTER

Pearl light without walls. A vast dark SCREEN. Before it, the boy -- JOHNNY, 17, whole, terrified -- and beside him ARIEL, an angel built like a verdict, robes still settling from flight.

JOHNNY
Am I dead?

ARIEL
You are between. Your life will be shown. Then you will choose.

JOHNNY
Choose WHAT? I never chose anything in my life.

ARIEL
(turning to the screen)
That is what we are here to find
out.

The screen ignites.

EXT. ROMAN TORTURE CHAMBER - NIGHT (ON SCREEN / 300 AD)

SUPER: ARMENIA, 300 AD

Torchlight on wet stone. A man hangs by his wrists --
GREGORY, bloodied past recognition, unbroken. His lips move
in prayer.

The torches GUTTER. And standing in the cell -- having
arrived the way light arrives -- MICHAEL, armored, immense,
calm.

MICHAEL
Gregory. Your king will kneel. Your
nation will be first among all
nations to take the faith. And your
sons, and your sons' sons, will
keep it -- to the end of the age.

Gregory lifts his ruined face into the light.

GREGORY
(through broken teeth)
Then I can bear the rest.

CUT TO:

EXT. ARARAT VALLEY, ARMENIA - DUSK

SUPER: 1915

Stone houses, grass roofs, smoke rising straight in the cold.
Ararat holds the last light.

Hoofbeats. Distant. Many.

INT. STONE HOUSE - BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

One oil lamp. GREAT-GRANDMOTHER, 70s, pours melted wax into a
bowl of water, reads the shapes. Across the table, a YOUNG
MAN and his WIFE, bundles at their feet.

The wax settles. The old woman goes still.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER
(in Armenian, subtitled)
You leave tonight. There will be
two great wars. You will cross
water. You will live.

YOUNG MAN
And you?

She doesn't answer. Outside -- a scream, cut short. She lifts
a silver MEDALLION from her own neck -- a cross worn smooth
by a century of thumbs -- and hangs it on his.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER
Gregory's blood is in you. It does
not end in this valley.

She pulls a shelf from the wall -- a black crawl space behind
it.

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)
In. Now.

They go in. She sets the shelf back and turns to face the
front door.

It EXPLODES inward -- a horse's chest fills the frame, a
SOLDIER ducking the lintel still mounted, saber drawn.

The old woman stands in the middle of her room and does not
move. Her lips shape a prayer.

The saber catches the lamplight once.

BLACK.

In the black: hoofbeats fading. Two people in a crawl space,
breathing, trying not to.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - NIGHT

Snow and starlight. A thin column of REFUGEES climbs a goat
track -- bundles, children carried sleeping, an old man led
by a rope around his wrist. No one speaks. Speaking costs
heat.

The young man and his wife, near the rear. He has one hand
inside his coat, fisted around something at his chest.

Below and behind them, far down the black valley: three farms
burning, neat as candles.

The wife looks back once. The young man takes her face and turns it forward, to the pass.

EXT. SMYRNA HARBOR - DAY

Gulls and rust. A freighter's rail packed three-deep with refugees. The young man and his wife wedged at the rail as the hawsers drop and the pier begins to slide away.

He opens his fist against his chest: the MEDALLION, printed deep into his palm from days of holding.

The coastline shrinks. Somewhere beyond the haze, a white peak they will never see again.

YOUNG MAN
(in Armenian, subtitled;
to the medallion, or the
mountain, or God)
It does not end in this valley.

His wife's hand closes over his, over the silver, and the ship's wake widens behind them like a page turning.

INT. INFANT'S BEDROOM - EAST LOS ANGELES - DAY

SUPER: EAST LOS ANGELES, 1957

A zinc washtub on newspaper. An infant -- JOHNNY -- furious and naked, held by CLARA, 20s, while ANNA, 50s -- the young wife from the crawl space, grown old -- ladles water over his head. The MEDALLION hangs at Anna's throat.

An ARMENIAN PRIEST chants, crosses the air, flicks holy water.

The baby stops crying.

His eyes fix on the empty corner of the room -- and TRACK something across the ceiling, slow, deliberate, to the window.

Anna follows his gaze. Nothing. The priest chants on.

Anna crosses herself anyway.

EXT. MURKI CATERING YARD - EAST LOS ANGELES - DAY

SUPER: 1975

Grease-smoke and steam. Six catering trucks nose-in like tired horses. WORKERS load ice chests, stack tortillas, shout orders in three languages.

PETER, 50, moves through it like a general -- slaps a fender, points, a truck pulls out. JOHNNY, 17, humps a milk crate of sodas past him.

PETER

Two more. And check the propane on number four, Chuy smelled gas.

JOHNNY

Chuy smells gas everywhere. It's Chuy.

PETER

Check it anyway. A truck burns, we burn.

A white CADILLAC noses into the yard, horn tapping a little song. ARA gets out in a suit worth more than truck number four, an envelope in his breast pocket.

The yard's rhythm hitches. Workers glance. Peter wipes his hands on a rag that only moves the grease around.

ARA

Petros! Look at this operation. A kingdom!

PETER

You're late. First of the month was Tuesday.

ARA

(the envelope, offered
like a favor)

Costs went up. Insurance. Permits.
You know how it is.

Peter thumbs the envelope open. Counts without taking the bills out. His jaw sets.

PETER

This is short.

ARA

It's adjusted.

PETER

(low, in Armenian,
subtitled)

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)
We shook hands. In front of the
priest we shook hands.

ARA
(Armenian, subtitled;
smiling for the workers)
And in front of the priest I'm
telling you -- costs went up.
(English again, loud,
patting Peter's cheek
once)
Buy the boy a haircut.

He's back in the Cadillac before Peter's fist finishes
closing around the envelope. The Cadillac glides out.

Johnny stands holding the milk crate, watching his father
watch the car go.

JOHNNY
Pop --

PETER
(pocketing the envelope;
already moving)
You saw nothing. Partners fight.
Check the propane.

He walks into the steam. Johnny looks at the gate where the
Cadillac was, and his grip on the crate leaves marks in the
cardboard.

INT. JOHNNY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

SUPER: 1975

Cigarette smoke and vodka. A poker game at full volume.

PETER, 50, deals like he's dealing punishment. Around the
table: VOVKA, 50s, grinning ahead of his own jokes; ARA, 50s,
bulldog face, counting everyone's chips but his own; UNCLE
JOE on crutches in the doorway. CLARA washes dishes with her
back to all of it.

Peter rakes a pot.

JOE
Again he wins. Where does it all
go, Petros?

VOVKA
(in Armenian, subtitled)
Into the mattress!
(MORE)

VOVKA (CONT'D)
Like old Harut -- six thousand
dollars, and the thieves knew
exactly which mattress!

Laughter. Not from Ara.

JOHNNY, 17, and LITTLE GREG, 15, slide along the wall toward the hallway. Peter's arm hooks Johnny's waist without looking.

PETER
Here. My son.
(presenting him like
evidence)
Everything -- the truck, the heat,
this -- is for him. Best schools.
His own business. My name on a
building. You hear me, Johnny?
Legacy.

JOHNNY
I hear you, Pop.

Vovka pushes a full shot glass into Johnny's hand.

VOVKA
To the legacy!

Johnny looks to Clara. She's looking at the dishes. He drinks. Gags. The table roars -- Peter loudest, holding Johnny's arm one second too long before letting go.

INT. JOHNNY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Muffled laughter through the wall. Johnny shuts the door on it.

Single bed. Milk crate of 8-tracks. Taped over the desk: a magazine page -- JAGUAR XKE, silver, shot from low like an altar.

From inside a work boot in the closet: a fold of bills. He counts it on the bed. Ones and fives. Lawn money. Forty-one dollars.

He looks from the money to the Jaguar. The distance between them fills the room. Through the wall, Peter's voice -- LEGACY -- and the men laugh.

Johnny puts the money back in the boot.

INT. DON BOSCO TECH - AUTO SHOP - DAY

An engine block on a stand, opened like a patient. Boys in coveralls crowd around as JOHNNY -- sleeves rolled, hands sure -- walks a feeler gauge through a valve adjustment.

MR. REYES, 40s, shop teacher, forearms like driveshafts, watches over his shoulder.

MR. REYES
Who told you the clearance on an
L79?

JOHNNY
Nobody. You listen to it complain,
it tells you.

Reyes takes the gauge, checks the work. Perfect. He hands it back.

MR. REYES
(for the whole class)
Gentlemen, this is the only thing I
will say twice all year. Hands like
these are a license to eat for
life.
(to Johnny, quieter, as
the class breaks up)
Union shop'll take you at eighteen.
Journeyman by twenty-two. It's slow
money, Amilian. But it's YOUR
money, and nobody comes for it at
night.

Johnny wipes the gauge clean, precise, and says nothing -- but he hears it. The bell RINGS. The room empties around him, and he stands another second with his hand flat on the warm engine block, like taking a pulse.

EXT. WHITTIER BOULEVARD - NIGHT

Chrome river. Lowriders and muscle cars idle bumper to bumper under the neon -- TACOS, ZALES, ORANGE JULIUS. Radios fight each other from open windows.

The CUTLASS rolls in the current. Johnny drives. ANDRE rides shotgun conducting the radio; BIG GREG fills the back seat with WALTER and LITTLE GREG mashed beside him.

ANDRE
Slow up, slow up -- that's
Yolanda's cousin in the Monte Carlo
--

BIG GREG
Yolanda's cousin is six feet tall,
Andre.

ANDRE
I climb.

A SPOTLIGHT hits the mirror -- a black-and-white slides in
behind them, chirps its siren once. The whole car goes
statue.

JOHNNY
(into the mirror; even)
Hands where they can see them.
Walter -- hands.

The PATROLMAN strolls up the driver's side, flashlight
walking over each face like a hose.

PATROLMAN
Where we headed?

JOHNNY
Home, officer.

PATROLMAN
(light stops on Big Greg)
You. You're the Karagozian kid.
Diablo Loco.

BIG GREG
My mother calls me Gresha.

PATROLMAN
Your mother's not driving Whittier
at eleven o'clock.
(light back to Johnny)
Boulevard's closed to cruising at
eleven. Take it home or take it to
the station.

He slaps the roof twice and strolls off. Nobody breathes
until the black-and-white swings a U.

ANDRE
"Diablo Loco." You're famous, Greg.

BIG GREG
(looking out the window;
not smiling)
Yeah.

Johnny signals. Pulls out of the river. Under a windshield wiper, a FLYER flaps -- Andre snags it: a mimeographed sheet, a Christmas tree, girls' handwriting.

ANDRE
(reading; slow grin)
"Christmas Dance. St. Agnes Academy
for Girls. Friday."
(turning to the car)
Gentlemen.

EXT. ALL-GIRLS CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL - PARKING LOT - DUSK

A hand-painted banner: CHRISTMAS DANCE. A line of teenagers in full 1975 plumage snakes toward the gym.

Johnny locks a CUTLASS SUPREME, checks every handle twice. His crew waits: ANDRE, 17, lean, already moving to music nobody's playing; BIG GREG, 18, a refrigerator with a kind face; his brother WALTER, 15; LITTLE GREG.

ANDRE
It's not a bank, Johnny.

JOHNNY
It's my dad's. It comes back
scratched, you're carrying me to my
funeral.

At the doors: SISTER MARY PATRICK, forty years of teenagers behind her eyes, and a SECURITY GUARD with a neck wider than his head.

In line ahead -- CARLOS, 18, leaning on a fence post, one stiff leg; beside him PEEWEE, 16, small, eyes everywhere. Peewee nudges Carlos, nods at Big Greg.

PEEWEE
Carlos. Diablo Loco.

Carlos straightens. He and Big Greg find each other across thirty feet of teenagers. Neither looks away.

Johnny reaches the nun. Altar-boy smile.

JOHNNY
Good evening, Sister.

SISTER MARY PATRICK
ID.

JOHNNY
Left it home. Don Bosco Tech --
we're practically clergy.

SISTER MARY PATRICK
Your hair is too long for Bosco.
Next.

The guard rotates Johnny out of line like a turnstile.

EXT. SCHOOL - REAR ALLEY - MINUTES LATER

Dumpsters. A door with no outside handle. One high frosted window, cracked for the steam.

Big Greg pulls the door. Sealed. Johnny looks at the window.
At Big Greg.

JOHNNY
Boost me.

Big Greg makes a stirrup and launches him up the wall.

INT. GIRLS' RESTROOM - CONTINUOUS

Johnny comes through the window in pieces -- leg, torso, regret -- and lands between the sinks and CATHY, 17, mid-lipstick, watching him in the mirror. Beside her, SANDY, 17, frozen with a hairbrush.

Cathy finishes her lipstick.

CATHY
The dance is that way.

JOHNNY
(up, straightening his
collar)
I know. I'm making an entrance.

SANDY
You're making a felony.

The hall door swings -- SISTER MARY PATRICK's voice, close:

SISTER MARY PATRICK (O.S.)
-- checking every door, and if I
find one propped --

Nowhere to go. Cathy looks at Johnny one full second -- then steps past him and pushes open a stall door.

CATHY
(calling, sweetly)
Occupied, Sister! Zipper emergency!

SISTER MARY PATRICK (O.S.)
...Two minutes, girls.

The door sighs shut. Johnny breathes.

JOHNNY
Why'd you do that?

CATHY
(capping the lipstick)
Nothing's happened at this school
since the Kennedy administration.
(going)
You owe me a dance. Don't be bad at
it.

Gone. Sandy follows, filing Johnny under "trouble." Johnny
grins at the mirror like an idiot -- then slips down the hall
and eases the alley door open from inside, just as Big Greg
hauls on it with everything he has. The big man crashes
through and lands at Johnny's feet.

BIG GREG
I loosened it.

The boys pour in over him.

INT. GYM - NIGHT

Streamers, a mirror ball, a band in matching vests murdering
"Love Will Keep Us Together." Two hundred kids and forty feet
of nun-patrolled linoleum between the boys' side and the
girls'.

Johnny scans the crowd -- and finds Cathy already looking at
him.

ANDRE
(at his shoulder, tracking
Sandy)
The blonde's mine.

JOHNNY
The blonde would eat you alive.

ANDRE
God willing.

They cross the no-man's-land. Sister Mary Patrick's head turns like a gun turret, tracking.

Johnny arrives in front of Cathy. Offers his hand, formal as a duke.

JOHNNY
I believe I owe you a dance.

CATHY
(taking it)
You owe me a dance and a window.

The band downshifts into something slow. Couples fuse. Sister Mary Patrick begins circulating with a wooden ruler -- measuring daylight between bodies.

Johnny and Cathy, a careful ruler-width apart. Her hand light on his shoulder. His at her waist like it might set off an alarm.

CATHY (CONT'D)
So which is it -- Bosco kicked you out, or you never went?

JOHNNY
I go. Mostly. When there's a reason.

CATHY
And what are you when you're not being a reason-based student?

JOHNNY
I work my dad's trucks. Fix my car.
(beat)
I'm going to own something someday.
Not a truck. Something with my name on it.

CATHY
(studying him)
Huh.

JOHNNY
What.

CATHY
You said that like a man reciting someone else's prayer.

It lands. He covers it with a turn -- spins her, catches her a half-inch closer than the ruler allows. Sister Mary Patrick, across the floor, narrows her eyes.

JOHNNY

And you? What's Cathy when she's
not saving felons in bathrooms?

CATHY

Bored. You're the first interesting
thing to climb through a window all
year.

(beat; not joking now)

Don't make me wrong about you.

Over her shoulder, Johnny's eyes catch it: across the gym,
BIG GREG pushing off the wall, heading for the restroom --
Walter and Little Greg trailing. PEEWEE peeling off the
bleachers after them. Then CARLOS, the stiff leg keeping its
own time, cutting through the crowd on the same heading.

A geometry only Johnny sees. His feet stop.

CATHY (CONT'D)

What?

JOHNNY

(already stepping back)

I owe you the rest of this.

CATHY

You owe me all of it --

He's gone, threading dancers, snagging Andre off Sandy by the
sleeve as he passes.

Sister Mary Patrick watches the two boys disappear down the
hall, and her ruler taps once against her palm.

INT. BOYS' RESTROOM - CONTINUOUS

Big Greg splashes water on his face. In the mirror behind
him: Carlos. The door thunks shut -- Peewee's back against
it. Walter and Little Greg go still by the sinks.

CARLOS

Diablo Loco. Los Nietos.

BIG GREG

(turning, unhurried)

You know my name. I'm famous.

CARLOS

You know what you did.

WALTER

Leave him alone --

CARLOS
Nobody's talking to you, little
puto.

BIG GREG
Hey.
(stepping off the sink)
That's my brother.

A SWITCHBLADE opens in Carlos's hand. Snick.

The fluorescent overhead FLICKERS --

For one frame, something is in the room. A smear of shadow where nobody stands. It doesn't seize anyone. It LEANS -- into Carlos, into Big Greg -- settling into the space where conscience sits. Their eyes go wrong at the same instant: a shine, like animals in headlights.

The door bursts past Peewee -- JOHNNY and ANDRE.

Johnny sees the knife -- and sees the OTHER thing, folding into his friend's back like water into sand. His mouth opens. Nothing comes out.

Carlos lunges at Walter -- Johnny kicks the wrist -- the knife skates across tile -- Andre tackles Carlos into the stall, both crashing off the partition.

Big Greg picks up the knife.

JOHNNY
Greg. Greg -- no --

He grabs the big arm. It's like grabbing a moving car. Big Greg shrugs him off without looking, hauls Andre out of the stall by the collar with one hand --

The partition blocks our view. Three seconds of shoes and struggle.

Silence.

Big Greg backs out of the stall. The shine is gone. He looks at his own right hand like a tool someone left there.

On the floor, half in the stall: Carlos. Not moving. A dark tide crossing the grout lines.

BIG GREG
(quietly)
I didn't --

He folds the knife. Pockets it. Now his hand shakes.

Peewee at the door -- staring at Carlos. At Big Greg. Then, longest, at Johnny. Memorizing.

Through the wall, the band: love will keep us together.

JOHNNY
We're gone. Now.

One last look at the corner where the shadow was. Empty. Just a bathroom. They go. Peewee stays, alone with Carlos and the music.

INT. CUTLASS - MOVING - NIGHT

Streetlights strobe over five faces nobody is dancing behind anymore. Johnny drives with both hands. The radio is off. The silence has a body in it.

WALTER, in the back, shakes like a wet dog.

WALTER
He's dead. Johnny -- he's dead,
he's on the floor and he's --

BIG GREG
(staring straight ahead)
Say it again and I put you out on
Atlantic.

ANDRE
Hey -- HEY. Nobody's putting
anybody out.
(to Johnny; wired, too
fast)
It was self-defense. He pulled the
knife, everybody saw him pull --

JOHNNY
Everybody saw nothing.

He takes his eyes off the road one second at a time -- one face per second -- dealing it to each of them like cards.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
Listen to me. All of you. Nobody
talks. Not to brothers. Not to
girls. Not to priests. There was a
dance, we danced, we came home.
That's the whole night. Forever.

LITTLE GREG
(small)
What about Peewee?

Beat. Nobody has an answer for Peewee.

Johnny pulls to the curb -- Big Greg's house, porch light on, Rose's laundry ghosts on the line. Walter's out before the car fully stops, gone up the driveway at a run.

Big Greg fills the door frame getting out. Then leans back down into the window, close to Johnny. Quiet -- a channel just for the two of them:

BIG GREG

In there. Before Andre came in. You
looked at me like --
(he doesn't have the word)
You saw something.

JOHNNY

(eyes forward)
I saw you.

Big Greg holds there a moment -- knowing that's not an answer, knowing he's not getting one. He thumps the roof once, gently, and carries himself up the dark driveway.

Johnny watches him go. In the rearview, his own eyes -- and he adjusts the mirror so he can't see them.

INT. ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Incense in ropes of light. Gold and dark. A DEACON's censer swings; the choir climbs a chant older than the building, older than the country outside it.

The family in their pew: Peter mouthing the words from memory, Clara's eyes closed, Anna upright as a candle, the medallion at her throat catching the same light as the altar.

And Johnny -- standing when they stand, kneeling when they kneel, a beat behind everything, a boy operating his body by remote.

The PRIEST elevates the chalice. Bells. Every head bows.

Johnny's doesn't. His eyes are up, moving -- corner to corner, rafter to rafter -- searching the incense light for something he half expects to see.

Nothing. Only smoke, and sun, and gold.

Anna's hand finds his and pushes it gently down toward the pew rail, folding it into prayer, her eyes never leaving the altar.

INT. CHURCH - CONFSSIONAL - DAY

Darkness and varnish. Johnny's face striped by the screen.
Beyond it, FATHER SLATTER, 60s, a profile and a patience.

JOHNNY
Bless me, Father, for I have
sinned. It's been... a while.

FATHER SLATTER
Go on.

Silence. Johnny tilts his face to the ceiling of the box.

JOHNNY
Father. Can something get inside a
person?

FATHER SLATTER
Drink gets inside a person. Anger.

JOHNNY
No. Something. Get in them, use
their hands, and leave. And the
person's still standing there.

A pause longer than doctrine.

FATHER SLATTER
What did you see, John?

Johnny's mouth works. The whole thing, right behind his
teeth.

JOHNNY
...Nothing. A movie. It was a
movie.

FATHER SLATTER
(the moment closing)
Then for the language I'm sure was
in it -- ten Our Fathers, twenty
Hail Marys. Trust in the Lord with
all your heart, and lean not on
your own understanding.

JOHNNY
What if my own understanding is all
I've got?

FATHER SLATTER
That's fear talking. Go with God.
And stay out of trouble.

The little door slides shut. Johnny sits alone in the box with it.

INT. JOHNNY'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Steam off the pilaf. The family eats under a brass chandelier with one bulb out: Peter mopping his plate, Clara serving everyone but herself, ANNA at the end with the MEDALLION at her throat, and Johnny, pushing food into new shapes.

In the corner, a black-and-white TV mutters the news.

TV ANCHOR (V.O.)
...seventeen-year-old Carlos Coral
of Pico Rivera, fatally stabbed at
a school dance in Montebello Friday
night. Detectives say the
investigation is ongoing, and ask
any witnesses to come forward...

Clara crosses herself with the serving spoon still in her hand.

CLARA
At a DANCE. At a Catholic school.
Madonna.

PETER
Animals. This is what's out there.
This is why you work, you come
home, you stay home.
(fork at Johnny)
You hear?

JOHNNY
I hear you, Pop.

His fork hasn't moved in a full minute. Anna watches the fork. Then the boy. Her thumb finds the medallion at her throat and worries it, an old habit, a rosary of one bead.

ANNA
(in Armenian, subtitled)
Johnny. Eat.

JOHNNY
I'm eating, Grandma.

ANNA
(Armenian, subtitled; to
Clara, mild as milk)
He's eating. Look how he eats.
(MORE)

ANNA (CONT'D)
A bird in this house would starve
slower.

Peter laughs. Clara reloads Johnny's plate over his protest.
The table noise resumes around him.

Only Anna keeps looking. Johnny feels it, meets her eyes --
and it's Anna who looks away first, down at the medallion
between her fingers, as if it had said something.

INT. JOHNNY'S HOUSE - HALLWAY / KITCHEN - NIGHT (3 A.M.)

Dark house. Johnny's door opens without a sound -- he's in a
t-shirt, hair wrecked, a boy who has been staring at his own
ceiling for four hours losing.

Down the hall: a line of candlelight under the kitchen door.

He pushes it open.

ANNA at the table in her robe. One candle. Before her, a bowl
of water -- and a small pot of WAX cooling off the stove's
back burner. The old-country geometry of it exact: the same
bowl, the same posture, the same eyes as a stone house in
1915.

JOHNNY
Grandma. It's three in the morning.

ANNA
(not looking up; Armenian,
subtitled)
I know what time it is. Sit.

He doesn't sit. She tilts the pot; wax threads into the
water, twists, sets. She turns the bowl slowly, reading the
shape the way other women read letters.

ANNA (CONT'D)
Three weeks ago I poured, and I saw
a knife.
(turning the bowl)
I poured for your mother's
headaches. And the wax gave me a
knife.
(now she looks up)
Whose knife, Johnny?

The candle. The refrigerator hum. Johnny's face does its work
-- assembles the same armor it wore in a confessional box.

JOHNNY
It's melted wax, Grandma. It's
whatever you want it to be.

Anna regards him a long moment. Then she leans over the candle and blows it out -- the kitchen dropping to streetlight and shapes.

ANNA
(in the dark; mild as
milk)
The wax doesn't lie. People lie.
(the chair creaks; she's
rising, done)
Go to bed, my soul. You have
school.

He stands in the doorway while she passes him -- her hand finding his cheek in the dark, one press, gone -- and he stays there a while, alone with a bowl of water he can't read.

EXT. BIG GREG'S BACKYARD - NIGHT

A dead lawn, a clothesline, a garage radio playing low. Big Greg sits on an overturned bucket, elbows on knees, staring at nothing. He hasn't been sunny since the bathroom.

The gate creaks. Johnny.

He doesn't sit. He stands over his friend a moment -- then pulls something from his jacket pocket: the MEDALLION, chain pooled in his palm. Taken from Anna's room. We can see it cost him to carry it here; his fist has been closed around it so long the cross has printed his skin.

BIG GREG
What's that?

JOHNNY
Put it on.

BIG GREG
That's your grandma's --

JOHNNY
Put it on.

Big Greg doesn't move. So Johnny does it himself -- loops the chain over the big bowed head, roughly, like fitting armor on a man who won't stand still for it.

BIG GREG
Johnny. What is it for?

Johnny holds his friend by the back of the neck, forehead almost to forehead. When it comes out, it comes out low and fast, a thing escaping:

JOHNNY
I saw what was in that bathroom
with us. You didn't. Keep it on.
(beat; releasing him)
Just keep it on.

He walks out the gate before Big Greg can ask what that means. Big Greg looks down at the small silver cross on his huge chest.

Behind him, the garage radio drifts static for a moment, then finds its station again.

EXT. CATERING YARD - DAY

Steam and grease-smoke. Trucks in a row like tired horses. Johnny hoses out the back of one, sleeves soaked.

A horn. The MACH 1 MUSTANG noses in, primer-gray, loud on purpose. ARSEN, 19, leans out -- prison-yard muscle under a silk shirt, sunglasses at four in the afternoon.

ARSEN
(in Armenian, subtitled)
Look at you. Cinderella.

JOHNNY
When'd you get out?

ARSEN
Tuesday. County food, Johnny. I
lost six pounds. You want to make
me feel better, get in.

JOHNNY
I'm working.

ARSEN
You're hosing your old man's truck
for free. That's not working,
that's church.
(lower; no jokes now)
It's about Ara.

Johnny shuts off the hose.

INT. MUSTANG - MOVING - NIGHT

Elvis low on the radio. Streetlights strobing the hood. Arsen drives with two fingers.

ARSEN

Eleven thousand dollars. That's what Ara took your father for on the trucks deal. My dad heard it from Vovka, Vovka heard it from the accountant. You watched your pop count quarters at that poker table your whole life -- where you think it went?

JOHNNY

That's between them.

ARSEN

Between them.

(one laugh)

You sound like a priest. There is no "between them." There's who takes and who gets taken. Your family got taken. I'm talking about a correction.

JOHNNY

You're talking about robbing my uncle.

ARSEN

He's not your uncle. He's your father's partner who bought his wife a mink with your college money. You want to talk about sin -- THAT'S the sin.

Johnny watches the streetlights. Says nothing.

Which is not no.

EXT. ARA'S STREET - SAN MARINO - NIGHT

Old money quiet. Lawns like carpet. The Mustang sits dark at the curb, half a block from a white colonial with a PORCH LIGHT burning.

ARSEN

Light's on. Somebody's up.

JOHNNY
Nobody's up. Sonia leaves it on for
the dog.

Beat. Arsen turns and looks at him.

ARSEN
How do you know that?

JOHNNY
(still watching the house)
Easter. Christmas. Every name day
since I was six. I've eaten a
hundred dinners in that house.

Something shifts in the car. Arsen came with a crowbar.
Johnny came with the map.

Above the porch -- unseen by either -- the light GUTTERS.
Twice. Dies. Just a bulb burning out. That's all it is.

ARSEN
...God provides.

Johnny stares at the dead light a long moment.

JOHNNY
Side gate sticks. You have to lift
it.

EXT. ARA'S HOUSE - REAR - NIGHT

Arsen jimmies the crowbar into the doorframe -- Johnny's hand
stops him. Johnny tilts a flowerpot. Underneath: a KEY.

JOHNNY
(whisper)
Sonia locks herself out.

Arsen grins in the dark like a wolf.

INT. ARA'S HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Flashlight beams. Arsen dumps a jewelry box -- costume junk.

ARSEN
Rich man's got a safe -- where's
the safe --

Johnny stands in the middle of the room. Not searching.
Remembering.

He crosses to the closet, kneels, pushes back a row of furs -- and lifts a loose plank from the closet floor, easy, like he's done it before.

JOHNNY

Ten years ago I hid in here playing
hide-and-seek with his nephews.
Board moved.

His hand comes up holding a COFFEE CAN. Heavy. He peels the lid: rolls of hundreds, rubber-banded; a velvet pouch that shifts like sand.

ARSEN

(taking it, reverent)
Johnny. Johnny, Johnny. You're not
the driver. You're the brains.

Johnny looks down into the open floor -- the hole where his own childhood used to be, before he spent it.

On the dresser, a framed photo: Ara, Sonia, Peter, Clara, younger, arms around each other at somebody's wedding. Everyone smiling.

Johnny turns the frame face-down.

They go.

EXT. ARA'S STREET - NIGHT

The Mustang rolls off, lights dark until the corner.

Hold on the house. The dead porch light.

On the porch roof, a SHAPE that was crouching unfolds, stands, and steps off the edge into nothing.

The porch light flickers back on.

FADE OUT.

INT. JOHNNY'S GARAGE - DAY

The Cutlass on jack stands, Johnny under it on a creeper. On the workbench: new parts, boxed, chrome in wax paper.

Little Greg reads a sticker off a carburetor.

LITTLE GREG

Holley double-pumper. This is
eighty dollars.

JOHNNY (O.S.)
Seventy-five.

LITTLE GREG
You cut lawns.

Johnny rolls out. Wipes his hands. Doesn't answer. Little Greg looks at the parts, at his cousin -- and decides, you can watch him decide, not to ask.

JOHNNY
Hand me the three-eighths.

EXT. GRIFFITH OBSERVATORY - TERRACE - DUSK

The whole basin catching fire below -- ten thousand streets turning to filaments as the light dies. Johnny and Cathy at the balustrade, a paper cone of peanuts between them.

CATHY
Okay. There.
(pointing into the grid)
Whittier and Atlantic. My whole
life is four blocks of that.

JOHNNY
(pointing further out,
toward the ocean haze)
Malibu's out there. There's houses
on the sand with nobody in them.
Just sitting there. Empty palaces.

CATHY
How do you know they're empty?

Half a beat too long.

JOHNNY
Everybody knows that.

CATHY
(letting it go; watching
the lights)
I don't want a palace. I want a
house where nobody yells and the
door locks from the inside.
(beat)
That's it. That's the whole dream.
Cheap, huh?

JOHNNY
(looking at her, not the
lights)
No.

She turns. Finds him already looking. The city burns on below them, and neither one checks on it again -- and the kiss, when it comes, is unhurried, both of them careful with it, like it might be the one thing they didn't steal.

EXT. STARLITE DRIVE-IN - NIGHT

A hundred windshields glow blue under a sixty-foot screen. The CUTLASS -- waxed, new chrome breathing under the lot lights -- sits in the back row with a speaker hooked on the driver's glass.

Inside: Johnny in a shirt with the fold-creases still in it. Cathy appraises the dashboard, the new eight-track, him.

CATHY
The Cutlass got new shoes.

JOHNNY
Rebuilt the top end too. Hear that?
That's not a stock idle.

CATHY
Mm. And the shirt's not a stock
shirt.
(feeling his collar;
light, but not)
Catering must be booming.

JOHNNY
Christmas parties. Everybody eats.

She lets it go -- visibly decides to let it go -- and settles into his shoulder. On the screen, a car chase. He relaxes one muscle at a time.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
I'm getting popcorn. Butter?

CATHY
Obviously butter.

EXT. DRIVE-IN - SNACK BAR - CONTINUOUS

Bug-strobed fluorescence. Johnny waits at the counter, counting a folded twenty off a roll he shouldn't have.

The counter kid turns around with the popcorn.

It's PEEWEE. Paper hat. Name tag. Eyes that were at a dance.

Neither moves. The butter machine hums. Somewhere a car horn complains about a blocked view.

PEEWEE
(setting down the popcorn;
flat)
Small was fifty cents.

Johnny lays the twenty on the counter. Peewee looks at it -- a twenty, for popcorn -- then up at Johnny. And lets it sit there between them, untouched, so they're both looking at what it is.

PEEWEE (CONT'D)
I don't take twenties.

Johnny finds two quarters. Peewee rings it, drops the coins in the drawer, closes it with his hip. Slides the popcorn across.

PEEWEE (CONT'D)
Enjoy the movie.

Johnny takes the popcorn. Walks back across the gravel between the humps of parked cars, screen-light washing him blue, and doesn't feel his feet at all.

INT. CUTLASS - DRIVE-IN - MOMENTS LATER

He hands the popcorn through the window before getting in. Cathy takes one look at his face in the screen-light.

CATHY
Who was that?

JOHNNY
Who was who?

CATHY
The kid at the counter. You walked back here like a man leaving a funeral.

JOHNNY
(starting the engine)
Movie's a rerun. Let's get real food.

CATHY
Johnny. The movie just started.

He backs out anyway, speaker cord snapping off the glass, the little box bouncing once on the gravel. On the giant screen behind them, a car flips in silence.

INT. DANCE HALL - WEDDING RECEPTION - NIGHT

Plates SHATTER under the newlyweds' feet. The hall roars. A band in burgundy jackets drives a 6/8 rhythm, a clarinet climbing over it. Three hundred Armenians in their best.

Johnny's table: the crew, scrubbed and collared.

ANDRE
Why do they break the plates?

JOHNNY
Luck. Strength for the marriage.

BIG GREG
At my wedding we're breaking a whole set. Service for twelve.

On the floor, dancers link pinkies, a chain coiling around the couple. Relatives RAIN DOLLAR BILLS. Little Greg and Walter dart low through the forest of legs, harvesting.

At the table's head, PETER watches his people dance, and for once his face is open. He pulls Johnny into his side.

PETER
Someday, you. A nice Armenian girl.
I put the down payment, first table, right there.

JOHNNY
Pop --

PETER
Right there. Best table.

The music holds -- and the room's temperature drops.

ARA and SONIA enter. The mink catches every light in the hall. Ara walks like the building is his -- straight to the dance floor, produces a brick of HUNDREDS, and rains them over the couple slow, one at a time, so everyone can count. Gasps. Applause. Hundreds settle over the ones like snow over dirt.

Peter's arm slides off Johnny's shoulders.

Johnny watches his father watch the money fall -- and Johnny, alone in this hall, knows the coffee can some of that brick came home to. He fills his own wineglass to the top.

Ara arrives at their table, Sonia glittering.

ARA
Petros! You look old.

PETER
(rising, murder under the
smile)
You son of a --

Clara's heel finds his foot under the table. From the head table, glasses clink; hands wave Peter up.

UNCLE JOE
They're calling you to toast,
Petros.

Peter rebuilds his face muscle by muscle. Buttons his jacket. Goes. At the microphone, warm and booming:

PETER
(in Armenian, subtitled)
Friends! Family! Tonight we
celebrate Mikael and Parandzem --
and tonight, nobody in this room
owes anybody anything!

Laughter, applause. Only Johnny hears where it lands. He drains the glass.

Across the table, CATHY -- invited, a little at sea in this loud warm country -- leans in.

CATHY
The new carburetor. The clothes.
The wine you're drinking like
water.
(beat)
Where's it coming from, Johnny?

JOHNNY
Catering's been good.

First lie. It comes out smooth -- that's the worst part, how smooth. Cathy studies him a half-second too long, then lets the music have them.

Across the floor, ARSEN threads to VOVKA's ear. Whispers. Vovka laughs, whispers back. Arsen's eyes find Johnny. He taps his watch.

Johnny stands.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
I'll be right back.

CATHY
You're always right back.

He goes anyway. She watches him cross the whole hall to Arsen, watches them put their heads together.

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Big Greg's RIVIERA runs the coast, beach houses strobing. Johnny shotgun, Little Greg small in the back.

They pass a driveway -- and a shape under a streetlight snaps both front heads around: a JAGUAR XKE. Silver. The magazine page, made flesh.

BIG GREG
Tell me you saw that.

JOHNNY
Turn around.

LITTLE GREG
Why are we turning around?

Nobody answers. The Riviera swings a U across four empty lanes.

EXT. BEACH HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

The Riviera idles at the curb, lights off. The Jaguar sits at the top of a brick drive. Beyond it, a dark beach house, one upstairs window lit, and past that the ocean, breathing.

Johnny is out before anyone speaks. He circles the car once, slow, hands off, the way you walk around an animal. Tries the door -- locked. Cups his eyes to the glass: wood dash, chrome, leather going silver in the streetlight.

Big Greg arrives with a HAMMER from under the seat.

LITTLE GREG
(from the car, a hiss)
You guys. Let's go home.

JOHNNY
(eyes never leaving the
car)
Look at this house, Greg. Rolls in
the garage. Ferrari under the
cover. People like this don't come
down till summer. They won't miss
it. They won't even know it's gone
till June.

He hears it come out of his own mouth -- whose logic that is.
Who takes and who gets taken.

He takes the hammer anyway.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
Watch the window.

He wraps his jacket around the hammer head, sets it against
the wind wing --

HEADLIGHTS sweep the curve. HIGHWAY PATROL, black and white,
coming on slow.

Three statues against a Jaguar. The cruiser rolls past the
driveway. Past the idling Riviera with its lights off. Past
all of it.

Doesn't slow. Its taillights shrink up the coast and are
gone. The ocean keeps breathing. Nobody moves for three full
seconds.

BIG GREG
(a whisper, awed)
God loves us.

Johnny looks down the empty highway after the cruiser --
knowing, somewhere under the want, that's not who that was.

Then he punches the wind wing through in one muffled crack.

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY - LATER

The JAGUAR runs the coast road with its stolen heart wide
open, Johnny driving, Big Greg's arm out the passenger window
surfing the air. Speed and salt and engine howl.

At a light by the pier: a red CORVETTE rumbles alongside.
RICH KID, 19, sunburn and boat shoes, revs twice.

RICH KID
Nice car, beaner.

Big Greg starts out of his seat -- Johnny's forearm bars his chest. Johnny looks across at the kid. Smiles like a knife being drawn slowly.

JOHNNY
Pink slip's at home. Twenty bucks
says you eat my plates to the pier.

RICH KID
Make it fifty, Pancho.

The light hangs red. Two engines climb over each other. Green
--

The Jaguar leaves like something released rather than launched. The Corvette lunges, gains, noses ahead -- Johnny short-shifts, tucks the inside line past a parked camper, and the Jaguar walks away down the last two hundred yards, pier lights strobing over the silver hood.

They blow past the pier a full three lengths up. Big Greg ROARS out the window. The Corvette pulls alongside at the next light; a fifty comes across, flung, snapping in the wind. Johnny catches it against the wheel without looking.

BIG GREG
WHOO! Did you SEE --

JOHNNY
(folding the fifty into
his shirt pocket; cold
clean joy)
Everybody saw.

Behind them, in the little jump seat where no one is sitting, the darkness is comfortable. Enjoying the ride.

INT. THE BACK ROOM - NIGHT

A garage remade as a kingdom: a card table, a stolen Tiffany lamp, a cooler, a velvet painting nobody remembers stealing. The crew around the table as ARSEN deals cash like poker hands -- one for me, one for you.

ARSEN
Watches to Moushegh Tuesday. The
furs I got a guy in the garment
district --

ANDRE
(fanning his cut like a
hand of aces)
(MORE)

ANDRE (CONT'D)
I'm getting a suit. Powder blue.
Three-piece.

LITTLE GREG
You're fifteen.

ANDRE
I'm sixteen and I'm getting a SUIT.

Laughter. Big Greg matches bills against a magazine photo of the Lincoln Continental. Johnny counts his cut twice, flat-faced, and folds it away -- a bank teller at his own party.

Arsen watches him do it over the rim of a beer.

ARSEN
Look at him. Ice water.
(to the table; raising the
beer)
To the brains!

ALL
To the brains!

They drink. Johnny raises his bottle last, lowest, and in the stolen Tiffany light his eyes go once to the door -- to the dark yard beyond it -- the checking-the-exits look of a man who has started sleeping badly.

EXT. RESURRECTION CEMETERY - EAST LOS ANGELES - DAY

Brown hills, white stones. A small crowd in black around an open grave. A PRIEST's Spanish on the wind. CARLOS'S MOTHER held upright by two women.

At the fence line, far from the family, alone: Johnny. He didn't tell anyone he was coming. He couldn't have said why.

Across the grave, PEEWEE looks up. Finds him instantly, like he'd been waiting.

Neither nods. Neither looks away. The priest, the crying, the wind -- and these two, holding one piece of knowledge between them across a hole in the ground.

Peewee turns back to the grave first. Somehow that's worse.

Johnny walks back to the JAGUAR parked on the cemetery road -- silver, gleaming, obscene among the dust-colored cars -- and sits inside it a long time without turning the key.

BURGLARY MONTAGE

-- A dark den. A flashlight crosses framed diplomas. Johnny's gloved hands lift a coin collection from a drawer he went to directly. No searching. He knows houses now.

-- The back room. Arsen deals cash onto a card table like poker hands. Big Greg's cut into his sock; Johnny's into the work boot.

-- Johnny's bedroom. The boot won't close over the roll.

-- INT. ANNA'S BEDROOM - DAY. Anna opens her top drawer, lifts out the small velvet box. Opens it. Empty. She stands with it open in her hand, and looks toward Johnny's room.

-- A stranger's dresser. Johnny's flashlight crosses a wedding photo -- a couple, laughing. He turns it face-down. It's a habit now.

-- EXT. BIG GREG'S DRIVEWAY - DAY. Big Greg washes the Riviera, shirt off -- the MEDALLION small and silver against his chest. He wears it easy now. Johnny, arriving, looks at it one beat too long. Big Greg tosses him a beer. Johnny catches it and says nothing.

END MONTAGE

EXT. MURKI CATERING YARD - DAY

End of shift. Steam dying out of the trucks. Peter counts receipts on a clipboard as Johnny racks the last ice chest.

PETER
(not looking up)
Chuy says he saw you on Whittier
Tuesday night. Two in the morning.
In a silver car.

JOHNNY
Chuy needs glasses.

PETER
That's what I told him.
(now looking up)
Then Vovka says his sister saw you
at the Starlite in new clothes. And
your mother finds forty dollars in
your laundry.
(setting the clipboard
down; the whole yard gone
quiet around them)
So I'm asking my son, in my own
yard, one time. Where does it come
from?

The steam. A radio playing ranchera somewhere down the row. Johnny looks his father in the eye and does the thing all the angels in heaven can't stop him from doing:

JOHNNY
I've been working nights. Andre's
uncle has a body shop. Cash work. I
was going to tell you when it was
enough to matter.

Peter searches his son's face -- a man checking a bill for counterfeit with everything in him hoping it's real.

PETER
(picking the clipboard
back up; quieter)
A body shop.

JOHNNY
Sepulveda. Nights.

PETER
...Good. Good, Johnny. Work is
work.

He goes back to his receipts. Johnny racks the chest. And above them, on the roof line of truck number four, the pigeons all leave at once, for no reason at all.

INT. MOUSHEGH'S JEWELRY & LOAN - BACK ROOM - NIGHT

A desk lamp, a loupe, and MOUSHEGH, 60s -- a jeweler's apron over a cardigan, fingers like a surgeon, eyes like a customs agent. Arsen lounges across from him. Johnny stands. On the felt between them: Sonia's velvet pouch, emptied. Brooches, a rope of pearls, rings.

Mousheghs loupe stops on one brooch -- gold filigree, a pomegranate of garnets. He goes very still.

MOUSHEGH
(in Armenian, subtitled)
Where did you get this piece?

ARSEN
An estate. Sad story. Everybody
died.

MOUSHEGH
(not looking up; Armenian)
This is Van work. Old Country. A
woman carries a piece like this
across an ocean sewn into a coat.
(MORE)

MOUSHEGH (CONT'D)
(the loupe comes down;
English now, at both of
them)
There are maybe six families in
this city with jewelry like this,
and I have prayed at weddings with
all six.

Silence. The desk lamp hums. Johnny's eyes are on the
pomegranate brooch -- SONIA'S brooch -- like it might say his
name out loud.

ARSEN
Are you buying or preaching?

Mousheghs looks at Arsen a long moment. Then he counts bills
off a roll -- short, deliberately short -- and pushes the
stack across.

MOUSHEGH
Half. For pieces this hot, half.
And listen to an old man:
(to Johnny, only Johnny)
What burns inside a family burns
twice.

ARSEN
(scooping the money)
Everybody's a philosopher.

Arsen's out the door. Johnny follows -- and stops at the
threshold, one beat, under Mousheghs eyes. Then goes.

Moushegh picks up the pomegranate brooch and holds it under
the lamp, and doesn't put it with the rest.

INT. MOUSHEGH'S JEWELRY & LOAN - FRONT - DAY

Bells on the door. BACTRUM enters with a manila folder, takes
in the cases, the clocks, the framed photo of Mt. Ararat
behind the register.

Moushegh looks up from a watch movement, loupe still in his
eye like a monocle of armor.

BACTRUM
Detective Bactrum, Montebello.
(the folder, open on the
case glass: typed lists,
insurance photos)
Twenty-two burglaries, westside.
Somebody's moving coins, watches,
and estate jewelry.
(MORE)

BACTRUM (CONT'D)
Old, unusual pieces. The kind that
need a man who knows what he's
looking at.

MOUSHEGH
(the loupe comes down)
Then you want a man who knows what
he's looking at. I'm a watchmaker
with a loan license.

BACTRUM
Uh-huh.
(tapping one insurance
photo: a gold filigree
brooch, garnets, a
pomegranate)
Anything like this come over your
counter?

Moushegh looks at the photo the way men look at their own X-rays.

MOUSHEGH
Pomegranate is a common motif. In
my country it means abundance. Long
life.
(sliding the folder
closed, gently)
I'll keep the list.

Bactrum studies him one extra second -- the second that has
broken better men -- gets stone, tips two fingers, and
jangles out the door.

Alone, Moushegh stands very still. Then he opens the drawer
below the register -- and there it is, wrapped in a jeweler's
cloth of its own: the pomegranate brooch. Not with the
inventory. Not for sale. A thing he couldn't melt and can't
return.

He looks at it a long time, and Ararat looks down at both of
them from the wall.

INT. MONTEBELLO P.D. - DETECTIVE BULLPEN - DAY

A corkboard map of the county wearing twenty-two red pins.
BACTRUM stands before it with a coffee going cold. DET.
ORTIZ, 30s, drops a telex on the desk.

ORTIZ
Bel Air P.D. likes professionals
for theirs. Crew from Vegas, maybe
Frisco.

BACTRUM
Professionals.
 (tapping pins, one by one)
Professionals don't step over the
dog. Professionals don't take the
coin collection and leave the
Krugerrands in the same drawer
because they don't know what a
Krugerrand is.
 (a circle with one finger
 around the pins' center
 of gravity)
These are kids. And the middle of
every route they drive home is
right... here.

His finger lands on Montebello.

ORTIZ
That's also where your stabbing is
parked.

Bactrum's finger stays on the map. His eyes move to a second
file on the desk: CORAL, C. A school portrait clipped to the
corner.

BACTRUM
Same water. I just can't see the
pipe yet.
 (drainage the cold coffee
 anyway)
Pull me every kid at that dance
with a brother, cousin, or
boyfriend who owns a crowbar.

EXT. STARLITE DRIVE-IN - SNACK BAR - DAY

Daylight makes it smaller -- a cinderblock hut in an empty
gravel sea. PEEWEE restocks candy behind the counter. BACTRUM
leans on it like a man ordering coffee.

BACTRUM
Pedro Reyes. "Peewee."

PEEWEE
 (not stopping work)
We're closed till six.

BACTRUM
You were at the St. Agnes dance.
Door of the boys' room. Four people
put you there.

PEEWEE
Lot of people at a dance.

BACTRUM
Carlos was your boy. You rode with
him two years. And the night
somebody opens him up on a bathroom
floor -- you see nothing.
(beat; softer, the real
question)
Kid. Who are you more afraid of
than me?

Peewee's hands stop. One second. Two. Then they go back to
the candy, steady as a metronome.

PEEWEE
We're closed till six.

Bactrum straightens. Takes out a CARD, and instead of handing
it over, drops it flat into the empty popcorn tray where
Peewee will have to look at it all shift.

BACTRUM
When the arithmetic changes -- and
it always changes -- that's my
extension.

He crunches away across the gravel. Peewee looks at the card
in the tray. Doesn't touch it.

Doesn't throw it away either.

INT. MUSTANG - PARKED, SIXTH STREET - DAY

Waiting at a light after a fence run, engine idling. Arsen's
eyes leave the signal and drift across the street -- to a
storefront with a yellow sign: CHECK CASHING. An ARMORED
TRUCK squats at the curb, a GUARD wheeling a dolly of canvas
sacks inside.

Arsen's fingers stop drumming the wheel. He checks his watch.
Checks the store. The guard. The distance to the freeway
ramp, visible three blocks down.

JOHNNY
(watching him do all of
it)
What?

ARSEN
Nothing.
(the light goes green;
(MORE)

ARSEN (CONT'D)
 pulling away; a smile in
 profile)
 Counting.

Johnny looks back at the yellow sign shrinking in the mirror,
and something in him files it away with the things that keep
him up at night.

EXT. PALOS VERDES HOUSE - NIGHT

Fog rolling off the bluff. A long modern house, glass and
stone, dark. The Riviera waits down the slope, lights off,
Little Greg behind the wheel this time, hating it.

INT. PALOS VERDES HOUSE - STUDY - NIGHT

Flashlights. Johnny works a desk with gloved speed --
watches, cufflinks, an envelope of cash taped under the
drawer, exactly where he knew to feel for it. Big Greg lifts
a silver tray like a waiter in hell.

HEADLIGHTS rake the ceiling.

Both flashlights die at once. An engine purrs up the drive.
Car doors. A woman's laugh, close, right outside the glass.

 HOMEOWNER (O.S.)
 -- I told him, if it's not signed
 by Thursday --

Keys at the front door.

Johnny and Big Greg flatten into the dark of the hallway arch
-- inches from the entry -- as the door opens and the
HOMEOWNERS, 50s, evening wear, come in on a cloud of perfume
and scotch. The wife's hand slaps the wall switch --

-- the ENTRY light blooms, and the hallway where the boys
stand holds dark by one yard of shadow. Big Greg's silver
tray is a mirror hunting for a beam to betray them.

The couple drifts toward the kitchen, arguing pleasantly.
Refrigerator light. Ice in glasses.

Johnny touches Big Greg's arm: now. They ghost the long way,
through the study, out the French door Johnny unlatched on
the way in -- closing it behind them slow, slow, click.

EXT. PALOS VERDES - HILLSIDE - CONTINUOUS

The two of them run crouched down the ice-plant slope, fog streaming. Big Greg starts LAUGHING -- helpless, adrenaline laughter, the tray still under his arm like a stolen moon.

BIG GREG

Did you see -- she was RIGHT THERE -
- I could smell her perfume --

Johnny isn't laughing. He pulls up short by a parked car at the bottom, hands on knees, breath ragged -- and in the car's dark window, his own reflection.

And behind his reflection, a yard back, where the fog is: a SHAPE. Standing. Patient. The posture of something that has been keeping up without running.

Johnny spins. Fog. Ice plant. Nothing.

BIG GREG (CONT'D)

(still giddy, pulling him)
Come on, come ON --

Johnny lets himself be pulled. In the car window, the reflection empties out. The fog closes over the yard of space where nothing was standing.

EXT. CATHY'S HOUSE - PORCH - NIGHT

A porch swing, unmoving. Cathy sits on the top step with something small in her fist. Johnny stands on the walk below her, jacket in hand, arriving mid-sentence into an ambush.

JOHNNY

-- your mom said you didn't want to
come to the phone, so I figured --

She opens her fist. On her palm: a LIGHTER. Heavy, gold, monogrammed R.W.H.

CATHY

It fell out of your glovebox when I
got the map out. R.W.H.

(beat)

Which one of you is R.W.H., Johnny?

JOHNNY

It's Arsen's. He leaves junk in
every car he --

CATHY

It was in YOUR car. Under YOUR maps.

(standing now; one step down; eyes level with his)

The parts. The clothes. The twenty-dollar bills for popcorn. The kid at the drive-in who looked at you like -- like he KNEW something about you that I don't.

(beat)

You're stealing.

JOHNNY

Cathy --

CATHY

Don't say my name. Say "no." Look at me and say the word "no."

He looks at her. The porch light. The crickets. Everything in him assembles the lie -- and can't lift it.

So he kisses her instead.

And she lets him -- one second, two -- her fist with the lighter caught against his chest. Then she steps back out of it, unhurried, and puts the lighter flat against his sternum until he takes it.

CATHY (CONT'D)

That's not an answer.

(at her door; not turning around)

Come back with the truth, Johnny.
Or don't come back.

The screen door claps shut. The porch light goes off with him still standing in it.

EXT. BIG GREG'S BLOCK - DAY

The Riviera at the curb. And down the garage's side wall, in paint still wet enough to shine, four feet tall:

DIABLO MUERTO.

ROSE scrubs at the bottom letters with a brush and a bucket, getting nowhere. Beyond her, on the porch steps, WALTER holds a bag of frozen peas to a split eyebrow, his shirt torn at the collar.

Big Greg stands in the middle of his own lawn with a baseball bat, vibrating.

Johnny's Cutlass pulls up hard. He's out and crossing the grass before it stops rocking.

BIG GREG
They caught him coming home from school. THREE of them. He's fifteen, Johnny --

JOHNNY
I know how old your brother is.

BIG GREG
Los Nietos. Tonight. Me and the bat go visit Los Nietos --

JOHNNY
(a hand flat on the big chest; low)
And then what? A cop stands in that yard, looks at that wall, and starts asking WHY they wrote "muerto." You want Bactrum's people on this block? You want them looking at YOU?

The name of the thing they never say -- almost said. Big Greg looks at the wall. The bat lowers by degrees, like something draining out of him.

BIG GREG
So Walter takes it. And I mow the lawn.

JOHNNY
Walter takes it standing up, and it ends. Anything else and it doesn't end. Ever.

From the garage shade, UNCLE JOE, crutches propped, has watched all of it.

UNCLE JOE
(in Russian, subtitled)
In Kiev we had a saying. When the wall talks -- you listen. You don't answer.

Big Greg drops the bat in the grass. Crosses to Rose. Takes the brush out of her hand without a word and starts scrubbing his own name off the wall, twice as hard as she could, the letters smearing down over his knuckles like the paint is coming from inside them.

Johnny picks the frozen peas off the step where Walter's let them slide, and puts them back against the boy's eye himself.

WALTER
(not looking at him)
I didn't say anything. To anybody.
I want you to know that.

JOHNNY
I know, Walter.

WALTER
It didn't help.

EXT. JOHNNY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Cars stacked the length of the block. Bass from the backyard. Angle-parked across the front lawn like a monument: THE JAGUAR.

SUPER: DECEMBER 1975

INT. JOHNNY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Wall-to-wall teenagers. Big Greg pours from a bottle with a French label nobody can read into a line of Dixie cups.

ALBERT
(three cups in, listing)
What -- what is this?

BIG GREG
Something from a house in Bel Air.

ALBERT
It's beautiful.

The front door opens on HOOK, 20, trench coat, a nose that explains the name. He works down the line of handshakes to Johnny.

HOOK
You hear about your uncle Ara?

The room keeps roaring. For Johnny it goes underwater.

JOHNNY
No. What about him.

HOOK
Robbed. Cleaned out. Cash, Sonia's jewelry, everything. My mom says Sonia hasn't stopped crying in a month. They're saying it had to be somebody who knew the house.

Beat.

JOHNNY
Somebody who knew the house.

HOOK
That's what they're saying.

Big Greg arrives with three full cups, oblivious, sunny.

BIG GREG
OK, OK -- a toast!

Cups into hands. Everyone looking at Johnny. He lifts his, and his voice comes out with nothing in it at all:

JOHNNY
To beautiful girls.

ALL
To beautiful girls!

They drink. Over the rim, Johnny's eyes are the eyes of a man at his own funeral.

Behind them, unnoticed, Hook slides a slim bottle from the shelf into his coat. Even here. Everybody's working somebody.

EXT. JOHNNY'S FRONT LAWN - NIGHT

Party noise pouring from every window. Cathy comes up the walk in a party dress, a wrapped record under her arm -- and stops.

The JAGUAR. Angle-parked across the lawn, chrome drinking the porch light, a boy she doesn't know posing against it for a Polaroid.

She circles it slowly. The wood dash. The leather. The wind wing glass -- replaced, but the frame around it scarred, pried, wrong.

Johnny comes off the porch with two cups, grinning --

JOHNNY
You made it! Hey -- hey, what do
you think?

CATHY
(still looking at the car)
Whose is it?

JOHNNY
Mine. I've been telling you -- body
shop money, I got it for a steal --

The word hangs there between them, doing all its work.

Cathy looks from the scarred wind wing to his face. She hands
him the wrapped record -- flat against his chest, a door
closing --

CATHY
Happy early Christmas, Johnny.

-- and walks up into the loud house past him, leaving him on
his trophy lawn with two cups and everything he wanted.

EXT. JOHNNY'S BACKYARD - NIGHT

A hundred kids dancing on the slab. A DJ kid with two
turntables on a ping-pong table has the yard jumping.

Johnny pushes to the booth, takes the mic.

JOHNNY
Hey. HEY. Everybody hold it down --

Nobody holds anything down. Big Greg takes the mic.

BIG GREG
(a foghorn)
SHUT UP!

Instant, total silence.

JOHNNY
(into the mic)
Cops are cruising the block. Keep
it down and maybe they get bored.

And on the word "cops" --

LIGHT. A COLUMN of white drops out of the sky onto the yard,
blinding -- then the sound arrives: the CHOP of a police
helicopter, rotors beating the trees flat.

A hundred kids look straight up into it, hands shielding eyes, lit like a congregation.

Johnny stands in the center of the beam, mic in hand. Everything he owns is stolen. Everyone he loves is in this yard. The light has found all of it at once.

Red and blue coming up the driveway. Sirens from two directions.

FADE OUT.

INT. JOHNNY'S HOUSE - DAY

Late morning through curtains. Cups, ashtrays, a party's corpse. The doorbell RINGS. Then a FIST on the door.

Johnny, wrecked, in last night's shirt, edges to the window. Through the curtain gap: THREE MEN. Ball caps. Windbreakers. On the nearest hip, a HOLSTER.

JOHNNY
(a whisper)
Oh God.

EXT. JOHNNY'S BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Johnny comes out the back fast, crosses the wreckage to the doghouse, where BOSCO, a shepherd mix, is already barking at the side gate.

He drags a green SAFE from under a tarp -- small, but it moves like it's full of anvils. Two feet. Four. Bosco's barking climbs.

JOHNNY
Bosco -- quiet -- please --

BACTRUM (O.S.)
Leave it right there, son.

Johnny freezes over the safe.

DET. GIL BACTRUM, 50s, comes through the side gate with the unhurried walk of a man who has done this several hundred times. Two DETECTIVES fan out behind him.

BACTRUM (CONT'D)
Hands on your head. Slow.

Cuffs out. Johnny laces his fingers over his head and looks up -- over the fence, over the roofline, at the empty blue sky.

Nothing up there. Nobody.

INT. MONTEBELLO P.D. - HOLDING CAGE - DAY

Wire mesh and a steel bench bolted to the wall. The whole crew, collected like laundry: Andre trying to look bored, Little Greg's knee jackhammering, Big Greg motionless with his hands folded, Johnny watching the corridor.

A UNIFORM unlocks the cage.

UNIFORM
Sarkisian. Prints.

ARSEN gets up -- loose, unbothered, a man called for a haircut -- and is walked down the corridor.

Through the cage mesh and a wired-glass office window, Johnny can see him land in a chair across a desk from a DETECTIVE. The detective says something. Arsen says something back -- longer. The detective pulls a pad over and starts writing.

A second cop brings Arsen a paper cup of coffee.

ANDRE
(seeing it too)
Why's HE getting coffee?

Nobody answers. Down the corridor, Arsen talks, and the detective's pen keeps moving, and Arsen's hands are doing their salesman's dance -- open, easy, giving directions to somewhere.

Johnny watches through two layers of wire and glass, and can't hear one word of it.

LITTLE GREG
(a whisper)
Johnny. What do we say?

JOHNNY
(eyes on the glass)
Nothing. We say lawyer. That's the whole language. Lawyer.

INT. DON BOSCO TECH - AUTO SHOP - DAY

Between classes, the shop empty except MR. REYES breaking down a carburetor. Johnny stands inside the door -- out on bail, back at school, and the room already knows: two passing STUDENTS in the corridor slow, stare, whisper, move on.

JOHNNY

I'm not off the class list. I checked.

MR. REYES

(not looking up)

You're not off my list.

(he sets down the carburetor; wipes his hands; now he looks)

The union apprenticeship I wrote you up for in October. The one with your name on the top of the stack.

(beat)

They ask one question on page one, Amilian. You know which question.

Johnny does. The shop clock ticks. Somewhere a locker slams.

MR. REYES (CONT'D)

(handing him a broom; not unkind; the exact opposite of unkind)

Shop's still open to you. That door

--

(a nod at nothing, at everything)

-- you closed yourself. Sweep up.

We'll rebuild the L79 Thursday, same as ever.

Johnny takes the broom. Holds it like a thing from a previous life. And sweeps -- up the rows of workbenches, past the engine block still open like a patient -- the only future anyone ever offered him for his hands, going into a dustpan one pass at a time.

INT. MONTEBELLO P.D. - INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Steel table. Johnny on one side, seventeen and shrinking. Bactrum perches on the table's edge, a stack of FILE FOLDERS under his hand like a Bible.

BACTRUM

You scared?

JOHNNY

...Yes.

BACTRUM

Good. Smartest thing you've done in
six months.

He fans the folders across the steel. Twenty-two.

BACTRUM (CONT'D)

Bel Air. San Marino. Palos Verdes.
You boys had taste, I'll give you
that. You know what twenty-two
burglaries gets a seventeen-year-
old with no record? Juvenile hall.
Eighteen months, some counselor
writes a nice letter.

(beat)

That's not why you're in this room.

One more folder, from his jacket. Set apart. Opened. A
PHOTOGRAPH slides across the steel: a school portrait.
CARLOS. Combed hair, trying not to smile.

BACTRUM (CONT'D)

Carlos Coral. Bled out on a
bathroom floor at a school dance
while a band played upstairs. Two
hundred kids at that dance and
nobody saw anything. Except I hear
you were in that bathroom.

Johnny looks at the photograph. Carlos, combed and alive,
looks back.

BACTRUM (CONT'D)

Burglaries buy you juvie. A dead
boy buys somebody LIFE. Now -- I
don't think you held the knife. You
don't have it in you, no offense.
So here's the only deal I will ever
offer: give me the hand that held
it, and you go home a witness
instead of an accessory.

Silence. Down the hall, a phone rings and rings.

Johnny slides the photograph back across the table, gently,
like returning something borrowed.

JOHNNY

I think I better talk to a lawyer.

BACTRUM
(standing, collecting
folders)
Kid. You don't need a lawyer. You
need a miracle.

INT. POLICE STATION - BAIL WINDOW - DAY

PETER at the counter, hat literally in hand. He sets a bank envelope down and counts -- hundreds first, then fifties, then twenties, the bills getting smaller and older and softer as the stack goes down. Poker money. Truck money. Thirty years.

The CLERK counts along, bored.

Behind the glass door, Johnny watches his father's back -- the suit from the wedding. The count takes a year.

Peter signs where they tell him. His hand is steady. He turns, sees Johnny through the glass -- and for one second his face has nothing on it at all. No anger yet. No speech. Just a man looking at the bill for his legacy.

INT. JOHNNY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The front door isn't finished closing before it starts.

Peter's HAND catches Johnny across the face -- a crack like kindling. Clara cries out from the kitchen doorway. Johnny's head comes back level. He doesn't touch his cheek.

PETER
Twenty-two houses. TWENTY-TWO.

His hands go to his belt buckle -- the old-country grammar of it, the belt half out of the loops --

-- and Johnny doesn't run. Doesn't flinch. He straightens. Sets his feet. Presents himself for it, eyes level at his father, the red handprint rising on his cheek.

And Peter -- belt hanging from his fist like a dead snake -- can't. The boy standing still has taken all the mechanics out of it.

PETER (CONT'D)
(the belt shaking)
WHY? We fed you. We -- I carried
this family up the hill on my BACK.
For you! WHY?

JOHNNY
(quiet; the worst possible
answer)
You wanted a building with your
name on it. I got tired of waiting
for the building.

Clara's hand goes to her mouth. Peter stares -- struck harder
than he struck. The belt drops on the carpet.

He sits down on the arm of his own chair like a man whose
legs got old in one second, and puts his head in his hands.

Down the dark hallway, Anna's door closes. Soft. She heard
what she needed to.

Johnny stands in the middle of the room with his father
folded in front of him and his mother crying behind him, the
architect of all of it, and nowhere in the house to put
himself.

INT. JOHNNY'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Dark. Johnny on the floor, back to his bedroom door, knees
up. Down the hall, a strip of kitchen light, and his parents'
voices through it:

PETER (O.S.)
(in Armenian, subtitled)
Ten thousand for the lawyer. TEN.
THOUSAND. From what? You want me to
sell the truck? The truck IS the
money!

CLARA (O.S.)
Quiet. He'll hear you.

PETER (O.S.)
Good! LET him hear what he costs!

Something slams -- a hand on a table. Then quieter. Worse:

PETER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
My name, Clara. Thirty years I
carry it up the hill in this
country. He spends it in one
summer.

Johnny puts his head down on his knees.

At the hallway's far end, where the streetlight comes through
the front-door glass -- a shape in the light that could be a
coat on the rack.

Could be.

It's been listening too.

INT. COURTHOUSE - DEPT. 12 - DAY

Wood paneling and fluorescent hum. A cattle-call calendar: rows of families, a JUDGE processing souls like invoices.

Johnny stands at the rail beside a PUBLIC DEFENDER, 40s, carrying nine other folders under his arm.

PUBLIC DEFENDER
(reading the file for
visibly the first time)
People versus... Murk-- Murkijian--

JOHNNY
(quietly)
Amilian.

PUBLIC DEFENDER
Right.

Across the aisle, the D.A., 30s, crisp, doesn't look up from her legal pad.

D.A.
Your Honor, twenty-two counts
residential burglary. The People
additionally note the defendant is
a subject of interest in an open
homicide -- the Coral matter --
arising from the same social
circle. We ask bail be revisited
accordingly.

PUBLIC DEFENDER
Your -- Your Honor, my client has
no record --

JUDGE
(already stamping)
Bail is revoked pending the
People's motion. Remanded. Trial
date January twelfth. Next matter.

The gavel. A BAILIFF's hand closes on Johnny's arm. In the gallery, PETER is on his feet, hat crushed in both hands, the English coming too fast for him --

PETER
Wait -- what did -- what happened?
WHAT HAPPENED?

Johnny, being turned away, finds his father's face over his shoulder, through the moving crowd, for exactly one second. Then the side door eats him.

INT. COURTHOUSE - HOLDING CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Cuffs, echo, moving men. Keeping pace alongside Johnny: a compact man in a good suit -- GOLDFARB, 50s -- who slips a CARD into Johnny's cuffed hands like a communion wafer.

GOLDFARB
Marvin Goldfarb. Your uncle Vovka called me. Listen fast: the burglaries are arithmetic -- juvenile time, I can live with it. The homicide is the knife at your throat. Ten thousand dollars, and I sever you from that case so hard they'll need a map to remember your name was near it.

JOHNNY
My father doesn't have ten thousand dollars.

GOLDFARB
(peeling off as the
corridor ends)
Then he'll find it, or the county gives you a man with nine other folders. Happy Hanukkah, kid.

INT. COUNTY JAIL - INTAKE - NIGHT

Harsh light. A DEPUTY inventories Johnny at a counter: belt, shoelaces, wallet, into a manila envelope.

DEPUTY
Rings, chains, jewelry?

Beat.

JOHNNY
(looking at his own empty
collar in the scratched
steel mirror)
I gave it away.

The deputy licks the envelope, seals almost nothing inside it.

The cellblock door BUZZES. Johnny walks the gauntlet of cages -- catcalls, a cup raked on bars, a man laughing at nothing -- to an open cell at the end.

The door rolls shut behind him with a sound that goes through his teeth. Bare bunk. Steel toilet. A window painted over from outside.

Down the row, somewhere, a man coughs and coughs.

INT. COUNTY JAIL - VISITING ROW - DAY

Scratched glass and phone handsets down a row of dividers. Johnny in blues on one side. On the other: CLARA, holding the handset with both hands, and ANNA beside her, upright, black scarf, purse on her lap like a shield.

CLARA

Are you eating? You look gray.
Doesn't he look gray --

JOHNNY

I'm eating, Ma.

CLARA

Goldfarb says the trial --
(she can't finish the word
"trial"; presses her
knuckles to her mouth;
hands the phone to Anna)

Anna takes the handset. Adjusts it. Looks through the glass at her grandson a long, level moment -- no tears, no questions about food.

ANNA

(in Armenian, subtitled)
Show me your neck.

JOHNNY

Grandma --

ANNA

Your neck.

Slowly, Johnny pulls his collar open. Bare skin. The glass between them fogs slightly with her breath.

ANNA (CONT'D)
(very quiet)
Where is it?

JOHNNY
Somewhere safe. I promise it's --

ANNA
You are in this place, and IT is
somewhere safe.

She sets the handset down -- gently, no anger, which is worse -- and sits back, regarding him through the glass like a woman reading wax in water. Clara scrambles the phone back up, filling the silence with worry.

Johnny hears none of it. He's watching his grandmother watch him, one hand rising on its own to his bare collar.

GUARD (O.S.)
Time.

INT. COUNTY JAIL - CELL - NIGHT

SUPER: THREE WEEKS TO TRIAL

Concrete and steel. Johnny on a bare bunk in county blues. Down the row, a man coughs and coughs.

He stares at the ceiling, and the ceiling talks back in his own memory, the voices layered:

BACTRUM (V.O.)
A dead boy buys somebody life.

PETER (V.O.)
Let him hear what he costs!

HOOK (V.O.)
Somebody who knew the house.

Johnny presses his palms over his eyes.

The cell gets COLDER. Visibly -- his breath fogs.

In the corner, the darkness has a posture now. BEELZEBUB. No horns. No fire. A tall composed figure in the shadow, and its voice is patient, reasonable, almost kind -- and it deals only in true things:

BEELZEBUB

Let's take the inventory, Johnny.
You watched a boy die and said
nothing -- that's the murder. You
robbed the man who ate at your
father's table -- that's the
family. Your father is selling his
truck -- that's the legacy. The
girl believes your lies -- that's
the love. And the medallion? You
gave your own protection away
because you knew you didn't deserve
it.

(a step closer)

Every door you touch closes. There
is one door left that you can still
open yourself.

Johnny is off the bunk, at the bars, gripping them, forehead
against steel.

JOHNNY

(barely sound)

Why? I didn't want any of it.

BEELZEBUB

Wanting is how we found you.

Johnny's eyes go to the bunk. Hold there.

Beelzebub goes quiet -- the silence of a salesman who knows
the customer is sold.

Johnny's hands close on the sheet --

JOHNNY

(eyes shut; from somewhere
under the fear)

God. In the name of Jesus Christ --
help me.

WHITE.

The cell, the corridor, the frame itself floods with light --
and standing in it, filling it: MICHAEL. The armor from a
torture chamber in 300 AD. The same face. He does not raise
his voice. He does not need to.

MICHAEL

(to the corner)

Leave.

The corner is empty. Was always empty, says the corner.

Michael kneels to Johnny -- on the floor now, shaking -- and takes his face in both hands, a father with a fevered child.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Listen to me. The Devil is real,
and he is nothing. He owns nothing.
He makes nothing. All he has ever
had is fear -- and fear is a door
YOU hold shut or open.

(beat)

Sixteen hundred years ago I told
your grandfathers' grandfather the
same thing in a worse room than
this. He believed me. His blood is
in your hands. Look at them.

Johnny looks at his own hands.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Not one door is closed. Do you hear
me? Not one.

The light swells, takes the frame --

-- and cellblock fluorescents buzz back. Empty cell. Johnny
on the floor by the bunk, the sheet a harmless heap, his face
wet, his breathing slowing.

Footsteps. BACTRUM at the bars with a JAILER -- and Bactrum
STOPS. Stares into the cell. Not at Johnny. At the air above
him, where something is fading that a career cop has no
report code for. The color has left his face.

JOHNNY

(looking up, hoarse)

You saw it.

Bactrum works his jaw. Glances at the jailer -- who saw
nothing, who is bored.

BACTRUM

...I don't know what you're talking
about. On your feet. You made bail.

But his hands aren't steady on the keys.

And Johnny sees that they aren't.

INT. JOHNNY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Anna at the stove, fighting a smoking saucepan. Johnny at the
table with a manila ENVELOPE -- a law office return address.
He slides out the pages. Reads.

His face changes on page two. He flattens it: a POLICE REPORT. A signed statement. Fragments in his eyeline: "...subject ARSEN stated it was John's idea..." "...stated John planned the entries..."

JOHNNY
(under his breath)
Son of a bitch.

Anna crosses from the stove. Something in her fist.

She opens his collar with two fingers, like when he was small, and hangs the MEDALLION around his neck. The silver is warm. She has been holding it a long time.

ANNA
(in Armenian, subtitled)
I saw it on Big Greg's chest. I did
not give it to Big Greg.

JOHNNY
Grandma -- he needed --

ANNA
You do not give away what is not
finished with you.

She takes his face in both hands -- the same grip, the same hands, as Michael's.

ANNA (CONT'D)
It crossed an ocean on a dead
woman's prayer. It is not jewelry.
Do you understand me now?

Johnny's hand closes over the medallion.

JOHNNY
Yes.

ANNA
Don't ever take it off again.

She goes back to her saucepan like nothing happened. Johnny sits with the police report in one hand and four generations around his neck -- and for the first time in the picture, he looks like he knows exactly where he is.

FADE OUT.

EXT. CHURCH - STEPS - DAY

Noon mass letting out. Old women in black kissing cheeks. FATHER SLATTER works the crowd down the steps, a handshake machine -- until he sees who's waiting at the bottom rail.

Johnny. Not dressed for mass. Dressed for this.

Slatter finishes his goodbyes and comes down the last steps alone.

FATHER SLATTER

John.

JOHNNY

It wasn't a movie.

Slatter's hand finds the rail.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

The thing I asked you about. I was in the room. The light bent, Father. Something leaned into two boys like -- like a man warming his hands at them, and one of them put a knife in the other, and then it stood up and left them both there.

(beat)

I've seen them since I was small. I stopped saying so because of how people look at me. The way you're looking at me now.

A long silence. Pigeons. Traffic. Slatter looks out at the parking lot like the answer might drive up.

FATHER SLATTER

Forty years, I've preached the Adversary like weather. A figure of speech with horns.

(turning to him; and it

costs the man something)

And here's a boy telling me it rains.

JOHNNY

Do you believe me?

FATHER SLATTER

(the honest answer, which is not yes)

I believe you are not lying. Sit with what that took me to say.

(MORE)

FATHER SLATTER (CONT'D)
(a hand on Johnny's
shoulder; gripping now,
finding his footing in
the old words)

Then hear the part I do know, John,
and I know it to the floor of my
soul: whatever they are -- they own
only what you hide. Every secret is
a room you've given them a key to.
Take the rooms back.

JOHNNY

How?

FATHER SLATTER

You just did one.

Johnny looks up the steps at the open church doors, the dark
gold inside.

For the first time since a confessional box -- he breathes
all the way out.

INT. MONTEBELLO P.D. - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

The steel table again. This time Johnny doesn't sit alone --
GOLDFARB beside him, briefcase squared, retained. Across:
Bactrum, and the Carlos folder, and one week to trial.

GOLDFARB

My client appears as a courtesy.
The word "Coral" leaves your mouth,
Detective, and the courtesy's
concluded.

BACTRUM

(to Johnny, ignoring him)
Trial's Monday. After Monday the
offer's a pumpkin. Last time: the
hand that held the knife.

He slides the school portrait across the steel. Carlos,
combed, trying not to smile. The same move. The same photo.

Johnny looks at it. Then at Bactrum -- and there's something
new in the boy across the table, something that came out of a
jail cell that this detective was standing in front of.

JOHNNY

How've you been sleeping,
Detective?

Bactrum goes still.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
(leaning in; quiet;
nothing smart-mouthed in
it at all)
Since that night at the cells.
Because I sleep fine now. First
time in a year.
(sliding the photo back,
gently)
You saw what you saw. I was there
when you saw it. Whatever you and I
are in, Detective, it's the same
thing -- and it isn't this table.

GOLDFARB
(rising; delighted to
understand nothing)
And we're concluded. Monday,
Detective.

Goldfarb steers Johnny out. Bactrum sits alone with the
folder and the photograph of a boy trying not to smile -- and
for the length of one long breath, a career cop looks at the
empty air above the empty chair.

EXT. ST. AGNES ACADEMY - GATE - DAY

Girls in uniform streaming out at the bell. Johnny waits
across the street by the Cutlass, in a clean shirt, hands
empty and visible -- a man reporting somewhere.

Cathy sees him from the gate. Stops. Then crosses to him,
books hugged to her chest like a breastplate.

CATHY
You've got a lot of nerve coming to
my school.

JOHNNY
You said come back with the truth.
(beat; and then he just
does it, level, no music
in it)
The car was stolen. The clothes,
the parts, the popcorn money.
Twenty-two houses, Cathy. I go to
trial Monday and I'm probably going
away, and my father emptied his
life savings and half the parish to
buy me a lawyer.
(beat)
That's most of it.
(MORE)

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

There's a part you'd never believe,
and the day you want it, you'll get
that too. But that's the part I
could say on a sidewalk.

Uniforms flow past them on both sides, a river around two
stones. Cathy searches his face -- for the smoothness, the
salesman, the boy from the porch.

Not there. Just the truth, standing on a curb, waiting to be
sentenced twice.

CATHY

Why now?

JOHNNY

Because you asked. And because I
ran out of people I could stand to
lie to.

She looks at him a long moment. Then she shifts her books to
one arm -- freeing a hand -- and doesn't take his. Not yet.
She just walks beside him instead, down the sidewalk, in
step, which is its own sacrament.

CATHY

Monday. What time is the trial?

JOHNNY

Nine.

CATHY

I have a chemistry test at nine.

(beat)

I'll be in the third row.

INT. COURTHOUSE - DEPT. 12 - DAY

SUPER: MONDAY

The same cattle-call courtroom -- but now GOLDFARB stands at
the rail where a public defender once mispronounced a name,
and he holds the room like a man who has never once been
processed.

GOLDFARB

-- accordingly, Your Honor, the
People concede there is no evidence
connecting my client to the Coral
homicide, and withdraw the
association: the record is
corrected.

(MORE)

GOLDFARB (CONT'D)
As to the burglary counts, my
client pleads guilty to counts one
through four; the balance dismissed
per the agreement; full restitution
schedule attached. Sentencing in
thirty days.

JUDGE
(reading; stamping)
So entered. The defendant remains
at liberty until sentencing. Thirty
days.
(over his glasses, at
Johnny; the first human
sentence of the day)
Young man, the arithmetic of the
next thirty days is yours to write.
Next matter.

The gavel. In the gallery: Peter and Clara holding hands like
teenagers; Anna nodding once at the judge as if confirming
his math; and in the third row, in a St. Agnes uniform,
CATHY.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - STEPS - CONTINUOUS

The family spills down the steps into the sun -- and stops.

At the bottom, waiting beside the Cadillac: ARA.

The whole group goes still. Peter's jaw sets; Clara's hand
finds his arm. Ara ignores them all. His eyes are on Johnny.

ARA
A word. Just the thief.

Beat. Johnny walks down alone.

They stand a yard apart, the Cadillac ticking in the heat.

ARA (CONT'D)
(low; the bulldog face
working)
Restitution, the lawyer says. A
schedule. Papers.
(leaning in)
You. In MY house. Tell me how.

JOHNNY
Under the closet floor. The loose
board. The coffee can.
(Ara goes gray)
(MORE)

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

I knew because I hid there playing
hide-and-seek when I was seven.
Because I'm family.

(beat; taking the whole
weight of it, no flinch)
That's what I did with being
family, Uncle. And I'd stand here
and let you hit me for it, except
my grandmother's watching and it
would upset her.

Ara stares -- at the boy handing him the truth like a bill of
sale. All the bluster hunting for somewhere to land and
finding nowhere, because nothing is being hidden from it.

ARA

...Your father knows? How you knew?

JOHNNY

He will today. From me.

A long moment. Then Ara does the last thing anyone on those
steps expects: he laughs -- one short, ugly, involuntary bark
-- and shakes his head at the ground.

ARA

(getting into the
Cadillac; not looking
back)
Sixty years I know your family.
First one of you with the nerve to
rob me, and first one with the
nerve to say it to my face.
(the door, closing)
Pay your papers, boy.

The Cadillac pulls away. Johnny climbs back up the steps to
his family -- to Peter, whose face is asking -- and puts a
hand on his father's shoulder.

JOHNNY

Pop. Walk with me a minute. There's
a part you have to hear from me
first.

They walk. We don't follow. Some confessions the camera
leaves alone.

EXT. JOHNNY'S HOUSE - PORCH - DAY

Johnny on the steps, the law envelope rolled in his fist.
Down the block, a flatbed TOW TRUCK winches the JAGUAR up its
ramp -- evidence tag on the windshield, chains on the axles.
The silver body climbs at an undignified angle.

CATHY's VW pulls to the curb. She gets out, watches the
Jaguar go up with him a moment.

CATHY

The Christmas dance is Friday.

(beat)

I'm told you're taking me.

JOHNNY

Cathy --

An ENGINE announces itself: the MACH 1, loud on purpose,
stopping nose to nose with the tow truck like it's mocking
it. ARSEN leans out, grinning at the Jaguar on the ramp.

ARSEN

They're repossessing your dreams,
Johnny!

JOHNNY

(to Cathy, quiet)

Wait here. Please.

He crosses the lawn. Cathy watches him go -- and doesn't get
back in the car.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Johnny at the Mustang's window. Arsen dangles an arm out,
easy, like they're discussing weather.

ARSEN

What was your bail?

JOHNNY

Twenty thousand.

ARSEN

Same. Lawyers?

JOHNNY

Ten. If my old man sells the truck.

ARSEN

If he sells the truck, what does he
drive to work? Oh -- right.

Johnny doesn't take the bait. The sunglasses slide down the nose. Here it comes.

ARSEN (CONT'D)
Check-cashing store. Sixth and
Mateo, by the catering yard.
Armored truck drops the payroll at
four-thirty and leaves. Twenty
grand in a drawer behind one old
man and a glass window.
(beat)
Ten for me, ten for you. Your
lawyer's paid. Your father keeps
his truck. All you do is drive --
you don't even get out of the car.

The math hangs in the air, perfect. Ten thousand. The exact
number through the kitchen wall.

Johnny looks down the block: the Jaguar riding away on the
flatbed. Cathy at the curb, arms crossed. His father's
Cutlass in the driveway, FOR SALE soaped on the windshield.

Everything he needs. One drive away.

JOHNNY
You'd need a gun.

ARSEN
A fake. I wave it, the old man
opens the drawer, we're on the
freeway in ninety seconds. Nobody
gets hurt, nobody --

JOHNNY
I read the report, Arsen.

Beat. The grin flickers.

ARSEN
What report.

JOHNNY
My lawyer sent the discovery. Your
statement's in it. "It was John's
idea. John planned the entries."
(leaning to the window,
very calm)
You put your own cousin in the hole
to climb out of it.

ARSEN
They wrote that. Cops write
whatever --

JOHNNY
It's signed.

Silence. Arsen takes the sunglasses all the way off, and for one second the salesman is gone and something older and emptier looks out.

ARSEN
Then you NEED this job. More than me. Or you go to juvie on my signature and your old man drives a bus.

Johnny straightens off the car. One quick involuntary glance at the sky -- a man checking for rain.

Empty blue. Nobody is going to say it for him.

JOHNNY
No.

ARSEN
Johnny --

JOHNNY
No. That's the whole speech. No.

He shoves off the Mustang's door with both hands -- hard enough to rock it on its springs -- and walks back toward his own lawn without turning around.

IN THE MUSTANG'S BACK SEAT -- where no one was sitting -- two figures now sit: BEELZEBUB and SAMUEL. Slumped. Deflated. Scouts who lost the trail to a word of one syllable. Arsen sees nothing; he spins his tires and is gone.

And walking Johnny back to his porch, matching his step exactly: GABRIEL and RAPHAEL. They say nothing.

Johnny arrives at Cathy.

CATHY
What did he want?

JOHNNY
(beat)
A driver.

EXT. RIO HONDO RIVERBED - DAY

A concrete river with a trickle down its spine. Shopping carts, dragonflies, graffiti.

BIG GREG stands mid-channel, throwing rocks at a drowned shopping cart -- hard, methodical, a machine for being alone.

Johnny scuffs down the concrete bank.

JOHNNY

Your ma said you walked here.

BIG GREG

(throws; CLANG)

Ma tells everybody everything.

JOHNNY

Arsen's going to come to you.
Today, tomorrow. He's got a job --
a real one, guns-and- getaway real -
- and I told him no. Which means he
needs a driver with a back like
yours and a heart that trusts
people.

(beat)

When he comes: no. Whatever he says
I said -- no.

BIG GREG

(another rock; CLANG; not
turning around)

You come down here to give me
orders?

JOHNNY

Greg --

BIG GREG

(turning now; and it's
been building longer than
today)

Your grandma took that chain off my
neck like I STOLE it. Like I'm dirt
that got on something of yours.

(a step closer; the hurt
naked now)

You put it on me, Johnny. In my own
yard. "Keep it on, Gresha." Like it
mattered. Like I mattered. Then
your family reaches over and takes
it back, and you stood in that
kitchen and let them.

JOHNNY

It was never mine to give. I know
how that sounds --

BIG GREG
It sounds like everything of yours
is on loan.
(counting on thick
fingers)
You got the lawyer. You got the
girl. You got a family that fights
FOR you even when they're fighting
WITH you. You know what I got? A
Riviera, a wall with my name and
"muerto" on it, and a little
brother who flinches when I hug
him.

The trickle of river. A dragonfly stitching between them.

JOHNNY
(all he has)
You've got me.

BIG GREG
(a long look; then he
stoops for another rock)
Yeah.
(CLANG)
Go home, Johnny.

Johnny stands a moment longer. Then climbs the bank. At the
top he looks back: the big man alone in a concrete river,
throwing stones at something that's already sunk.

INT. JOHNNY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

The poker table -- but no cards. Money instead. Small stacks
of it the whole length of the table, worn bills weighted with
coffee cups, and around it the whole ARMY: Vovka, Uncle Joe,
two men from the yard, MOUSHEGH the jeweler with his hat in
his lap, and Peter at the head, a cigar box open in front of
him.

Johnny stops dead in the doorway.

PETER
Sit down.

Johnny sits. Peter turns the cigar box around: banded stacks,
a ledger page covered in names and numbers, some crossed out
and raised.

PETER (CONT'D)
Vovka. Joe. Hagop from the yard.
Sarkis. Moushegh --
(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)
(a beat on Moushegh; they
trade a look Johnny can't
read)
-- the church council. Your
mother's sewing money, which she
thinks I don't know about.
(closing the box; sliding
it to Johnny)
Ten thousand, one hundred forty.
Goldfarb is paid Monday morning.
The truck stays.

JOHNNY
Pop, I can't -- this is everyone's -
-

VOVKA
(a shrug the size of the
old country)
What. You'll pay it back. Or your
children will. Or theirs. This is
what the money is FOR, idiot boy --
we didn't cross an ocean to eat it.

MOUSHEGH
(quietly, turning his hat;
to Johnny only)
Some debts are how a family knows
it's a family.

Johnny looks down the table -- at every tired, ordinary,
undefeated face his whole life was spent trying to escape --
and can't speak. Peter watches him not speak, and nods once,
satisfied with exactly that.

PETER
Go to bed. Court is early.

The men reach for the cards. The game starts up around the
money like grass growing back.

EXT. BIG GREG'S DRIVEWAY - DAY

Suds and chrome. Big Greg washes the Riviera, radio going.
UNCLE JOE in the garage shade, crutches propped. ROSE hangs
laundry along the side yard.

ROSE
(in Russian, subtitled)
Gresha! Mine next!

BIG GREG
Yeah, yeah.

The MACH 1 rolls up the apron, stops astride the wet concrete. Arsen steps over the hose, smiling.

ARSEN
There he is. Samson.

BIG GREG
(not stopping the sponge)
Arsen. What's happening.

ARSEN
You still want that Lincoln? The
Continental on Whittier, moon roof?
(one finger)
One drive. You don't even get out
of the car.

Big Greg looks at the sponge. At the Riviera -- suddenly small, suddenly last year's car. Uncle Joe watches from the shade, too far to hear, close enough to know.

BIG GREG
Johnny in?

ARSEN
(no hesitation)
Johnny's in. He's meeting us there.

The lie costs him nothing. It never does.

Big Greg drops the sponge in the bucket.

BIG GREG
(calling)
Ma! Be right back!

ROSE
Where are you going? Gresha!

UNCLE JOE
Stay out of trouble.

BIG GREG
(already in the car, sunny
as ever)
Always, Uncle Joe.

The Mustang backs down the drive. Rose stands with a wet shirt in her hands, watching the empty corner long after it's empty.

INT. JOHNNY'S KITCHEN - DUSK

Johnny and Cathy at the table. Two coffees, untouched. He's been trying to say something; the silence has that shape.

CATHY
Whatever it is, say it.

The phone RINGS. Johnny takes it off the wall.

JOHNNY
Hello -- hi, Auntie Rosy --
(listens; his face)
When. ...With who.
(very carefully)
No. Nothing's wrong. Thank you,
Auntie Rosy.

He hangs the phone up with exaggerated gentleness, the way you set down something that might go off.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
Greg left with Arsen an hour ago.

CATHY
So?

JOHNNY
(grabbing his jacket)
It's four-fifteen. Where are your
keys?

CATHY
Johnny -- WHAT is at four-thirty?

He stops in the doorway. Looks back at her. Decides.

JOHNNY
I'll tell you in the car. All of
it. But we're leaving now.

INT. ANDRE'S TRIUMPH - MOVING - DUSK

Top down, Andre driving like he's being graded, Johnny shotgun, Cathy wedged behind them, hair whipping. Downtown rising against the last orange light.

ANDRE
Robbing a check-cashing store. They
just got OUT of jail. What is he,
crazy?

JOHNNY
Arsen's not crazy. It's worse than
crazy.

CATHY
Then what is he?

Johnny turns around in his seat to face her -- wind, dusk, no way out of the car and no way out of the sentence -- and says it. Out loud. For the first time in his life.

JOHNNY
There are things ON people, Cathy.
On Arsen. I've seen them since I
was a kid. At the dance -- in that
bathroom -- I watched one lean into
Greg and use his hands and step
back out. I've never told anyone.
Not the priest. Not you. Because it
sounds like this.

And Cathy PULLS BACK -- physically, her shoulders hitting the vinyl seat, her hand coming up off the seat back like it touched a stove. Not romance. Fear. The pieces clicking one by one behind her eyes -- the money, the lies, the dance, the boy who died -- reassembling into a world with THIS in it.

CATHY
Stop the car.

ANDRE
We can't --

CATHY
(to Johnny; shaking)
The bathroom. You SAW the boy get --
and you knew, this whole time, you
sat next to me at a wedding and you
KNEW --

JOHNNY
Yes.

No defense. No speech. Just yes. The wind fills the car.

Cathy looks at him -- really looks, the way you look at something before you decide what it is. Andre's knuckles white on the wheel, eyes forward, saying nothing. Which is its own answer.

Then Cathy -- deliberately, watching her own hand do it, a choice with weight in it -- reaches back over the seat and takes Johnny's hand.

And doesn't let go.

Under his collar, against his chest: the medallion.

ANDRE
(quietly)
Sixth Street.

Ahead, the yellow check-cashing sign. And parked at the curb in front of it, unmistakable: the MACH 1.

INT. MUSTANG - PARKED, SIXTH AND MATEO - DUSK

Across the street from the yellow sign. Arsen checks the mirror, the clock -- 4:26 -- the mirror. Beside him, BIG GREG fills the passenger seat wrong, knees against the dash, a kid in a big man's body.

ARSEN
Armored truck's gone. Old man's alone. I'm in, I'm out, ninety seconds. You slide over, keep it running, point it at the freeway.

BIG GREG
And Johnny's meeting us where?

ARSEN
(the smallest beat)
After. He's careful, you know Johnny.

Big Greg's hand comes up to his own chest -- flat, over the sternum -- feeling through his shirt for a weight that isn't there anymore. Finding nothing. He wipes the hand on his jeans instead.

BIG GREG
I don't like it. Arsen. My hands are sweating, I never -- I don't like it --

ARSEN
(out of the car already;
leaning back in; the
smile)
Ninety seconds, Samson. Then the Lincoln.

The door chunks shut. Big Greg slides over behind the wheel, both wet hands on it, and in the rearview mirror his own eyes look back at him -- and for half a second, the back seat behind them isn't empty.

He blinks. It is.

Down the block, through the windshield, Arsen pushes into the check-cashing store, one hand already going inside his jacket.

EXT. SIXTH AND MATEO - CHECK-CASHING STORE - DUSK

Orange and purple bleeding over downtown. The same sky as the first frame of the picture. We have been here before. Now we know everyone in it.

The Mustang idles at the curb, BIG GREG behind the wheel, both hands on it, sweating. Through the store window: ARSEN at the counter, back to us, something raised in his hand. An OLD CLERK's hands go up behind the glass.

The Triumph swings a U across Sixth. Johnny's out before it stops.

CATHY

Johnny --

JOHNNY

Stay in the car. Both of you.

He's crossing the street as the store door BANGS open -- Arsen backing out, canvas SACK in one hand, the fake pistol in the other, shouting back inside:

ARSEN

SAMSON!

Big Greg lurches out of the Mustang for the sack -- and FREEZES.

The sound arrives from everywhere at once: SIRENS. Two black-and-whites slide crossways into the intersection, a third jumps the curb, doors flying, officers bracing across hoods --

OFFICERS (VARIOUS)

POLICE -- DROP IT -- DROP THE
WEAPON -- ON THE GROUND --

Big Greg stands in the middle of the sidewalk, sack in his arms, a refrigerator-sized target -- too scared to drop it, too scared to move -- every muzzle in the intersection finding him --

-- and JOHNNY runs INTO the light. Between the guns and his friend. Arms spreading wide. Making himself the biggest thing on the street.

JOHNNY
DON'T SHOOT! HE'S NOT ARMED --
DON'T SHOOT --

For one impossible second, it holds. The whole intersection frozen: cops braced, Big Greg petrified, Johnny's arms out like wings, Cathy half out of the Triumph, hands over her mouth.

Then Arsen -- panicked, cornered -- TURNS, the fake pistol swinging with him toward the lights.

The intersection FIRES.

Sound falls away. In the silence: muzzle flashes like camera bulbs. Big Greg dropping the sack. And Johnny -- spun by an impact we don't see land -- falling backward into the last orange light, slow, arms still spread.

Before he touches the pavement, the frame WHITES: ARIEL, wings filling the street, catching him. Catching the part of him that matters. The body lands. The boy doesn't.

Now we know what we saw in the first three minutes. It wasn't a bystander. It was the bravest moment of his life.

Sound crashes back -- screaming, radios, Cathy's voice tearing across the street -- and we RISE, straight up: the intersection shrinking to a diagram, the cars, the lights, the body, the girl running to it. The grid. The basin. The curve of the earth.

INT. SALVINGTON - VIEWING CENTER

Silence like a held breath. The vast screen holds the last image -- the intersection from above -- then fades to pearl.

Johnny before it. Not wounded. Just -- finished watching. Ariel beside him.

JOHNNY
That's it? That's the whole life?

ARIEL
To this hour.

JOHNNY
(a laugh with no floor
under it)
I asked you at the start if I ever
chose anything.

ARIEL
You did. Watch again.

The screen blooms -- not the whole life. Five moments, plain and short:

-- The bathroom. Johnny stepping into Walter's sightline, saying nothing, walking his friends out.

-- The confessional. His mouth open, the truth right there. Ariel lets that one sit.

ARIEL (CONT'D)
That one you lost.

-- A dark backyard. The medallion forced over a bowed head. "Just keep it on."

ARIEL (CONT'D)
That one you gave away -- and it was still a gift.

-- The Mustang window. "No. That's the whole speech. No."

-- The Triumph. Turning in the seat. Telling her.

-- The intersection. Arms spread. The biggest thing on the street.

The screen pearls out.

ARIEL (CONT'D)
The enemy needed you to believe you had never chosen -- that you were only ever driven. It is the only lie he has. Everything else he told you in that cell was true, and it still was not enough -- because on that street you spent the one coin he cannot counterfeit.

JOHNNY
Which is what?

ARIEL
Yourself. For someone else.

Beat.

JOHNNY
So what happens now?

ARIEL

Now it is put to you plainly. Your body lies in Los Angeles County General. It can be returned to. Or you continue on -- Jerusem, and the life eternal, which I promise you is not a smaller thing than it sounds.

(beat)

The Father compels neither. This is the one hour where the choice is entirely, purely yours.

JOHNNY

If I go on -- what happens to Greg? He's standing in that intersection holding a bag of money, and the only witness who'd die for him is dead.

Ariel says nothing.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

And Bactrum's got a murder file with Greg's name one signature away. And my father's selling the truck. And I told Cathy the truth for the first time in my life and then got shot in front of her --
(stops; almost laughs)
You're not going to answer any of that.

ARIEL

It is not mine to answer.

Johnny looks at the pearl screen a last time. Somewhere in it: East LA, a kitchen, a smoking saucepan, a medallion.

JOHNNY

Sixteen hundred years ago, Michael told a man in a torture chamber that his people needed him more than heaven did.
(turning to Ariel)
Send me back.

ARIEL

(and here -- only here --
the angel smiles)
Gregory's blood.

The pearl light rises to white --

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. L.A. COUNTY GENERAL - WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Vinyl chairs and vending-machine light. CATHY sits very straight, a blanket someone put on her shoulders, dried blood on her dress -- not hers. A UNIFORMED OFFICER closes a notepad.

OFFICER

That's everything for now, miss.

She doesn't answer. She's looking at the double doors marked SURGERY like they owe her a sentence.

The entry doors BANG -- PETER, coat over pajamas, Clara and Anna a step behind, ANDRE trailing, and Peter is headed for the surgery doors like a man who will walk through them --

BACTRUM steps into his path.

PETER

My son -- where is -- MOVE --

BACTRUM

Mr. Amilian. Look at me. Look at me.

(and Peter does; and something in the cop's face stops him better than hands)

I was pulling up when it happened. Your son ran INTO it. Into the guns, arms out --

(his own hands, showing it; a cop's hands, unsteady)

-- to cover the other boy. The whole street saw it. Whatever gets said in the papers, you hear it from me first: I've worked thirty years, and I never saw a braver thing done by a grown man.

Peter sways. Grips Bactrum's forearm -- a drowning man's grip -- and the detective lets him hold on, lets himself be the railing.

Across the room, on a bench against the wall: BIG GREG. In handcuffs, a deputy beside him, a bruise blooming where a curb met his face. He's been crying the way big men cry -- motionless, leaking.

Peter sees him.

The room holds its breath -- the man whose son is behind those doors, and the boy his son took bullets for, ten feet of linoleum between them.

Peter crosses it.

Big Greg tries to stand; the deputy's hand and the cuffs make it a flinch. Peter stands over him -- and puts one hand flat on the big bowed head. Like a blessing. Like his father's father would have.

BIG GREG
(wrecked)
He came for me. He came -- I froze,
and he --

PETER
(pressing the head; almost
gentle)
Quiet. Quiet now. He knew what he
was doing.
(beat)
For once in his life, he knew.

The surgery doors open. A SURGEON in stained scrubs, mask down, scans the room -- everyone rises like a congregation.

SURGEON
Family of John Amilian?

PETER
(all of them, moving)
All of this. All of this is family.

SURGEON
He's out of surgery. Two rounds --
one through, one we removed. He
lost a great deal of blood.
(the pause every family in
every waiting room knows)
The next few hours will tell us.
You can sit with him. Talk to him.
Some of us think they hear.

Anna is already moving -- past the surgeon, through the doors, the medallion out of her purse and wound through her fingers before the doors finish swinging.

INT. MONTEBELLO P.D. - FRONT DESK - NIGHT

Graveyard quiet. A DESK SERGEANT reads a paperback under the counter.

The door opens on PEEWEE -- still in his drive-in shirt, a white card gone soft from a month in a pocket held out in front of him like a ticket.

PEEWEE

Detective Bactrum. It's his extension on there.

DESK SERGEANT

He's at County General. There was a shooting --

PEEWEE

I know about the shooting.
Everybody knows about the shooting.
(setting the card on the counter; standing up straight, a kid putting down something heavy)
Tell him the arithmetic changed.
Tell him it's about Carlos -- all of it, the whole night -- and tell him the knife was Carlos's first.
(beat)
I'll wait.

The sergeant reaches for the phone. Peewee takes a seat on the wooden bench against the wall -- the posture of a boy who is going to be sitting up straight for a while, and has finally decided he doesn't mind.

INT. L.A. COUNTY GENERAL - HOSPITAL ROOM - DAWN

Machines keeping quiet time. Johnny in the bed, tubed and still, bandaged shoulder and chest. First gray light in the window.

Around the bed: ANNA, the MEDALLION wound through her fingers like a rosary. PETER and CLARA against the wall, holding each other up, no argument left in either of them. The ARMENIAN PRIEST -- the same beard, older -- prays low.

ANNA

(in Armenian, subtitled;
worn to a whisper)
Where are you, Johnny? Come back to me. God -- please.

She presses the medallion into his slack hand and closes his fingers over it with both of hers.

The window's gray goes gold. Just sunrise. That's all it is. The light crosses the floor, climbs the bed, touches his hand --

Johnny's fingers CLOSE over the medallion on their own.

His eyes open.

Anna makes a sound that isn't a word. Peter and Clara are at the rail in one step; the priest crosses himself mid-prayer; LITTLE GREG, CATHY, and ANDRE crowd in from the doorway where they have plainly been all night.

Cathy stops at the foot of the bed. Johnny finds her first. Neither says anything. She was in the car. She knows what he told her, and she knows what she saw, and she is still here.

Peter grips his son's foot through the blanket -- the only part of him he can reach -- and holds on, and his face does what it did at the bail window, only now it breaks all the way through.

PETER
(thick)
Okay. Okay, Johnny.
(nothing about the name;
nothing about the cost)
Okay.

Over their heads, through the open door: GABRIEL and RAPHAEL against the corridor's far wall, among the passing nurses, unhurried, unseen.

Johnny sees them.

This time he doesn't look away and he doesn't pretend -- seventeen years of pretending, done. He looks straight at them and nods once. A soldier's nod.

Gabriel returns it. And the corridor is just a corridor: nurses, a gurney, morning.

Johnny turns back to the faces around the bed -- everything he chose -- and Anna's medallion is warm in his fist.

FADE OUT.

EXT. HOLY CROSS ARMENIAN CHURCH - DAY

SUPER: EASTER, 1976

Bells. A hillside church, doors thrown open, the crowd in their brightest spilling down the steps -- kisses, painted eggs cracking in children's fists.

Down the steps, slow, comes the family: Johnny, left arm in a sling under his suit, taking the stairs like a man re-learning them. Peter one step below, not helping, positioned to catch. Clara and Anna arm in arm. Cathy on Johnny's good side -- hers now, plainly, permanently.

And behind them, blinking in the light like he's not sure he's allowed to be in it: BIG GREG, no cuffs, in a suit two sizes small, ROSE and UNCLE JOE flanking him. Walter and Little Greg cracking eggs against each other's foreheads.

At the base of the steps, hanging back from the crowd: PEEWEE. Pressed shirt. Alone.

He and Johnny find each other, the way they always do.

Peewee comes forward one step. Two. And puts out his hand.

PEEWEE

I told them what I saw. All of it.
The knife was his -- Carlos pulled
it first.

(beat)

Took me a year to say a true thing.

JOHNNY

(taking the hand)

Took me longer.

Across the street, parked in the shade: an unmarked sedan. BACTRUM at the wheel, watching the steps over a folder on the passenger seat -- CORAL -- its edge stamped in red: CLOSED.

He watches Johnny sight him over the crowd. Bactrum lifts two fingers off the wheel -- half salute, half surrender -- and pulls away from the curb.

On the steps, Anna presses a red egg into Johnny's good hand and closes his fingers around it with both of hers.

ANNA

(in Armenian, subtitled)

Christ is risen.

JOHNNY

(in Armenian; the words
easy in his mouth)

Truly He is risen.

The bells swing full. The family folds him in and moves up the steps into the dark gold of the doorway -- and just inside it, where the candlelight meets the daylight, TWO FIGURES stand among the congregation. Unhurried. Unseen.

Johnny passes between them without breaking stride.

He doesn't need to look anymore. He knows.

FADE OUT.

THE END