

BLACK WIND

by

Jason Nutt

jason@jasonnutt.com

FADE IN:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

The moon shines down upon the empty road that cuts through a vast, snowy field. A lone mailbox sits on a pole by the side of the road, swaying slightly in the breeze.

The revving of an approaching car grows louder. Then

A BATTERED PONTIAC FIREBIRD

tears into the frame. DAVE leans out the window, baseball bat in hand. He swings, connecting with the mailbox. The wooden box shatters as the car keeps roaring down the road.

INT. FIREBIRD (MOVING) - NIGHT

Dave gets back in the car with a little whoop of joy and glances at CHRIS behind the wheel.

DAVE

You see that fucker go, man?

CHRIS

It's a beautiful thing.

DAVE

Goddamn right it is!

He glances over his shoulder at HARRY and JACK drinking beer in the back seat. While Chris, Dave and Harry are in their late 20s, Jack doesn't look a day over 17. The four dress like rock concert refugees, all ripped jeans, dirty Kiss t-shirts and long hair.

DAVE

Top that, motherfuckers!

JACK

I dunno, Dave. You're a real Babe Ruth with those mailboxes.

DAVE

Fuck you, Jack. Let's see what you got.

JACK

Aw, c'mon, I don't like messing with people's property.

DAVE
Tough. Pull over, Chris.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

The car pulls to the side of the road. Dave gets out and watches Jack squeeze out of the back seat. Dave hands him the bat.

DAVE
Batter up, chief.

Dave gets back in the car. Jack glances down at the bat, then the road before him.

A large sign is positioned alongside the road, illuminated by the Firebird's headlights and reading: "NOW LEAVING GARRETSON, NEW YORK... COME BACK SOON!"

Jack stares at the sign and sighs, then climbs back into the car. Chris does a U-turn and slams on the gas. The Firebird rockets back down the road, away from the sign.

INT. FIREBIRD (MOVING) - NIGHT

Jack sits in the front passenger seat, bat in hand. Chris points out the window at an approaching mailbox.

CHRIS
There.

Jack leans out of the car and winds the bat up, squinting as the air rushes past. The roadside mailbox grows closer in the car's headlights.

DAVE
Don't miss, Jackie boy!

Jack winds up tighter, grits his teeth...

... And lets the mailbox whoosh past. He gets back into the car. After a moment of awkward silence:

HARRY
Try swinging next time.

JACK
I just didn't feel like it.

DAVE
Chickenshit. Gary would've.

Jack looks over his shoulder at Dave, who smirks. He turns back and stares out at the road.

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

The Firebird pulls into the parking lot of the store and screeches to a stop.

INT. FIREBIRD - NIGHT

Chris fishes around the pockets of his denim jacket and pulls out some crumpled bills. He tosses them at Jack.

CHRIS

Get me a hard pack of Reds, bitch.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

Jack ambles up to register. The young male CLERK behind the counter gives him a friendly smile.

CLERK

What's up, Gary?

JACK

It's Jack.

The clerk's smile falters.

CLERK

Shit, man, I'm sorry. You look so much like --

JACK

It's cool. Don't worry about it.

CLERK

Bet you hear that a lot. What can I getcha?

JACK

Hard pack of Marlboro Reds, please.

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

Jack emerges from the store, Marlboros in hand. The three other guys are leaning on the hood of Chris's car, slamming back Milwaukee's Best and shivering in the cold.

Harry tosses a can of beer to Jack, who hands Chris his cigarettes.

CHRIS

Thanks, bitch. Keep the change.

HARRY

What now?

Chris drops his empty beer can, stomps it with the heel of one grimy work boot and belches.

CHRIS

Shit, we got eight more innings to go. I'm up at bat next.

JACK

Can I drive this time?

CHRIS

You fuckin' high? You're lucky we don't strap you to the hood.

Dave stares at the road, panic-stricken.

DAVE

I think we're about to get rained out, Chris.

Headlights sweep over the four guys as a POLICE CAR pulls into the parking lot and stops beside them. They stand there, beers in hand except for Chris.

HARRY

Oh good -- here comes the Little League coach.

JACK

Eat shit, Harry.

SHERIFF HOWARD LITTLETON climbs out of the car and strolls around toward them, carrying himself with a kind of exhausted dignity that strangely suits him.

Chris notices the passenger side of the squad car open. He smirks and nudges his friends as DEPUTY ERIC PACKARD climbs out and hurries over to the sheriff's side. A friendly-looking young man of 27, if a bit dull.

Howard looks at the group and smiles wearily, looking older than his fifty-odd years.

HOWARD

Evenin', girls.

CHRIS
 How's it going, Sheriff?
 (to Eric, sneering)
 Deputy Packard.

Harry and Dave begin to snicker. Jack doesn't smile.

HOWARD
 How are the stats tonight?
 Batting a thousand?

Howard gestures past the four guys at the Firebird. They turn around follow his gaze: the baseball bat is clearly propped up against the front passenger seat of Chris' car.

They turn back to the sheriff.

CHRIS
 Hell, yeah. I think we'll make
 the Series this season.

HOWARD
 Nice to know you've finally found
 your calling. Too bad I gotta
 throw your ass in jail for it.

CHRIS
 Shit, that's practically my home
 away from home anyway.

HOWARD
 You gotta get out of the cold,
 Haig. It's killing the few brain
 cells you haven't fucked up
 already. What's with the beer?

DAVE
 We're all over 21.

Howard points to Jack.

HOWARD
 He's not.

Jack stares at the ground and mumbles:

JACK
 No, sir.

Howard takes the beer from Jack, raises the can to his lips and finishes it off, then turns back to the other guys.

HOWARD

Look, I'm too tired to make an arrest and you homos aren't worth the effort anyway. But if another mailbox gets busted up tonight, God save you from me. Understand?

Everyone nods.

HOWARD

Eric, take Chris' keys and drive 'em home in the squad car.

CHRIS

What about my car, man?

HOWARD

Pick it up tomorrow when you're sober.

Chris looks like he's about to protest, but finally nods.

HOWARD

You're too old for this shit, boys.

Eric walks over to the police car and looks at Chris, Harry and Dave. They shuffle over to him.

Jack moves to join them, but Howard grabs his arm.

HOWARD

Not you.

Eric looks over at Howard.

ERIC

I'll be back to pick you up.

Howard nods and watches Eric get in the car.

Chris, Harry and Dave sit in the back seat of the police cruiser. Their faces betray nothing as Eric pulls out of the parking lot and speeds into the night.

Jack turns to face the sheriff.

JACK

I'm --

Howard's open hand lashes out with surprising swiftness, catching Jack on the side of the face. The young man staggers backward.

The sheriff glances over his shoulder into the store. The clerk staring out at them quickly looks away. Howard turns back to Jack, who has regained his balance.

HOWARD

What's wrong with you? Haven't I told you those three are trouble?

JACK

They're good guys.

HOWARD

They're losers.

JACK

Why, because they're friends of --

Howard strikes him again. Jack makes a fist and winds up. Howard steps back. Jack freezes.

HOWARD

Do it. I dare you.

After a moment, Jack lowers his fist.

HOWARD

Raise your hand to me again and I'll break it off. You hear me?

Jack shrugs, rubbing the large red splotch on his cheek.

HOWARD

Don't mention his name again.

JACK

I didn't.

HOWARD

You were about to. When Eric gets back, I'm taking you home.

JACK

I'll walk.

HOWARD

You're not going anywhere.

Jack turns and begins to walk away.

JACK

Good night.

HOWARD

Hey, I'm telling you to stop!

Jack stalks out of the light of the convenience store.

JACK
Give it a rest, Dad. I'll see you
tomorrow.

Howard watches his son disappear into the darkness.

INT. POLICE CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

Eric drives down the dark country road, periodically glancing into his rearview mirror at Chris, Dave and Harry.

HARRY
So how does it feel, Packard?

ERIC
What's that?

HARRY
Selling out to the Man.

ERIC
Everybody's gotta make a living.

DAVE
Not that way.

CHRIS
Give it up, Dave. Eric here's too busy kissing the sheriff's ass to listen to old pals like us. Right, Eric?

Eric stares straight ahead at the dark road.

INT. HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

BETH PACKARD, a beautiful young woman of 28, sleeps on the couch in front of the TV in the cozy room.

She opens her eyes at the sound of the DOORBELL.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Beth checks the peephole and opens the front door. Jack stands on the porch, his cheek still bright red.

BETH

Don't come by like this without calling, okay? What if Eric came home early?

(beat)

Your dad hit you again?

JACK

I'm leaving town. Are you coming with me or not?

INT. FAMILY ROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Beth sits on the couch, watching Jack pace in front of her.

JACK

I gotta get out, Beth. If I stay any longer, I'm going to kill him.

BETH

No you won't.

JACK

Wanna bet?

BETH

You know you couldn't kill your father, so stop talking like that.

Jack stops pacing and stares down at Beth.

JACK

Please go with me.

BETH

I've got Eric, Jack. I'm sorry.

JACK

What about us? Or don't I count?

Beth stands up.

BETH

I'm not about to leave my husband for someone who still gets excited about Judas Priest.

JACK

Hey, you got a problem with Priest?

BETH

You don't have the guts to run
away from home anyway.

JACK

Whatever...

BETH

If you did, you wouldn't be
begging me to hold your hand like
this. You'd just leave like...

JACK

Like Gary?

She nods.

JACK

But you would have gone with him.

BETH

A long time ago, maybe.

JACK

Thought so.

Jack brushes past Beth to leave, then stops.

JACK

I'll always be second-best, huh?

Beth doesn't turn around to face him.

BETH

You're a nice kid, Jack. Give me
a call tomorrow night.

Jack storms out of the room.

EXT. LITTLETON HOUSE - DAY

The morning sun shines down on the large, secluded house,
which sits on the edge of an enormous field. A long-
unfinished addition juts out of the home, essentially a
rotting wooden frame with grungy plastic sheets
protecting the interior from the elements.

INT. LITTLETON HOUSE - FIRST FLOOR - DAY

Jack walks down the stairs and strolls past a doorway.
He stops and looks in.

IN THE FAMILY ROOM

Howard stands by the fireplace, pouring himself a shot of whiskey. He stares at

VARIOUS PLAQUES AND PICTURES ABOVE THE MANTEL

Framed portraits of a younger Howard in his police uniform, a number of plaques and certificates for "Sheriff Littleton," relics of a dedicated career in law enforcement.

In the middle of all of this, the photo of a pretty WOMAN in early middle age, smiling gently at the camera.

HOWARD

glumly stares at the photo. He raises his shot glass in toast and mumbles:

HOWARD

Happy birthday, Annie.

He slams the glass back and downs the drink in one gulp. After a moment, he glances around to see Jack watching him from the threshold. Howard's expression further darkens.

The two stare at each other. Jack finally backs away.

EXT. LITTLETON HOUSE - DAY

Jack fishes through the garbage can sitting next to the mailbox at the end of the driveway. He pulls out a POSTCARD FROM LOS ANGELES, brushes it off and breaks into a smile.

INT. JACK'S CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Jack drives his rattling old Toyota down a country road, tapping the steering wheel to the song on the radio. Suddenly the car begins to buckle and wheeze, belching smoke. He steers off the road.

EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

Jack stands in front of the car, staring at the smoking engine. Shaking his head, he slams the hood down.

He looks at the snowy fields around him. He sighs.

A police car pulls up next to him. Jack looks over to see Eric sitting behind the wheel, looking out at him.

ERIC
Car trouble again?

JACK
Nah, I'm out here for my health.

ERIC
Get in, smartass.

INT. ERIC'S CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Eric turns to Jack as they drive down the road. Jack stares at the postcard in his hands.

ERIC
How's your Mom doing?

JACK
Okay, I guess. She doesn't say much here.

ERIC
Does she mention my father?

Jack glances at

THE PHOTO ON THE DASHBOARD

A youthful Howard poses with FRANK PACKARD, a hearty man of similar age. Both smile in their crisp police uniforms.

Jack shakes his head. After an awkward pause:

ERIC
So what's new, man? You breaking any hearts yet or what?

JACK
Yeah, right.

ERIC
C'mon, can't your friends fix you up with someone?

JACK
What friends? I don't know if Chris and the guys really count.

ERIC

Why do you hang around them, Jack?

JACK

Why did you hang around them?

ERIC

I didn't know any better back then. You should learn from my mistakes.

JACK

I'm only 17, old man. I'm still allowed to do dumb shit. Beggars can't be choosers, anyway.

ERIC

Just promise me you'll give up on basement keggers and mailbox baseball when you turn 21, okay? Show some dignity.

JACK

I promise, Officer.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Jack gets out of the car and waves to Eric as he drives away. He trudges up the front crowded walkway. Two huge jocks, STEVE TAYLOR and MARK HARRISON, hurry up behind Jack, sneering as they follow him. Jack tries to ignore them.

TAYLOR

What, you got a police escort now, Littleton? Did Daddy pull a few strings?

HARRISON

Maybe Jack said he'd hook him up with some fresh meat in return.

TAYLOR

Who was the last crop?

HARRISON

Tracy Adams, Sue Williams, Cindy Miller...

TAYLOR

Cindy Miller? Really?

HARRISON

She told me all about it. Said that while they were duking, the sheriff would do this thing with his gun belt where he'd --

Jack glares over his shoulder at the two.

JACK

Shut the fuck up.

TAYLOR

How does it feel to know your dad's getting more high school action than you, Littleton?

HARRISON

Does he throw you a few scraps at least? Sloppy seconds?

TAYLOR

What would your mom think? Or is that why she took off?

Jack turns around and swings. The athletes easily dodge the wild punch and plow into him. Jack drops to the ground as Harrison and Taylor gleefully beat him.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Jack slowly walks down the empty hallway, bedraggled and in pain.

FEMALE (O.S.)

Jeez, Jack.

He turns around to see DAWN SELDON, 17, approaching him, a worn paperback of Jack Kerouac's On the Road in her hand. A vision of innocence and awkward beauty.

JACK

Hey, Dawn.

DAWN

What happened?

JACK

Don't ask. Whatcha reading?

Dawn holds up On the Road for Jack to see.

JACK

English class?

DAWN

For fun.

JACK

Are you kidding? Who reads that
shit for fun?

DAWN

I do. You should give it a shot.

JACK

I'd rather watch TV.

DAWN

You're such a bumpkin.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Jack slumps at his desk in the classroom, staring down at the postcard before him. In the next aisle, a STUDENT reads aloud from a copy of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, droning:

STUDENT

"... I cannot even look at you,
poor ruined one. And would I
speak, question, ponder, if I were
able to. No. You make me
shudder."

Beat. The ENGLISH TEACHER shoots an annoyed glance at Jack.

ENGLISH TEACHER

Wake up, Oedipus.

Jack bolts upright at the sound of the man's voice. He turns to the open book next to his postcard.

JACK

Uh... "God, God, is there a sorrow
greater? Where shall I find
harbor in this world? My voice is
hurled far on a black wind. What
has God done to me?"

Jack glances at Dawn across the room and rolls his eyes.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Students rush out of the building and board the nearby busses, or scurry towards the student parking lot.

Jack walks out and heads for the road. He notices

A BLACK JAGUAR

parked by the school, a shadowy FIGURE sitting inside and looking in his direction.

JACK

stares at it a moment, then turns away and quickens his pace.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Jack walks down the country road alone, staring straight ahead as a decrepit Chevy Nova pulls up alongside him.

In the car, Harrison and Taylor leer at him from the front seat. Three of their JOCK BUDDIES sit in the back, snickering.

HARRISON

Hey, faggot! Look at me when
I'm talking to you, faggot!

Jack ignores them, pressing on. The car keeps pace with him.

TAYLOR

Hop in, Littleton! We wanna be
your friends! You're a cool guy!

HARRISON

What's the matter, Jackie? You
gonna cry now? Gonna cry to
Daddy?

Suddenly the black Jaguar from the school shoots out of a side road ahead of the ancient car and slams to a halt.

The Chevy screeches to a stop.

The Jaguar driver gets out and stands in front of the Chevy. GARY LITTLETON, 28, is everything his younger brother could never even dream of being, radiating a road-hardened cool that borders on spooky.

Harrison beeps his horn impatiently.

Gary smiles at the teenagers in the car as he unzips his jeans and takes a piss on the front grill of the Chevy.

Harrison stares in disbelief. Finally he scrambles out of the car and stomps toward Gary, who zips up his jeans.

HARRISON

Who the fuck do you think --

Gary raises his arm, jabbing the athlete with his index finger. Harrison freezes, hypnotized by Gary's icy stare.

GARY

Disappointed I didn't wait for you
to take a drink? Get lost.

Harrison slowly backs away, then gets back into the car.

Jack watches as the Chevy maneuvers around the Jaguar and rattles down the road. He turns to Gary, frowning. Finally:

JACK

Gary?

After a moment, Gary begins to grin.

GARY

You're taller. Still an ugly
bastard, though.

Gary reaches forward and hugs the stunned Jack, who searches for something to say.

JACK

Nice car...

GARY

What can I say, life is good. You
got your driver's license, right?

INT. JAGUAR (MOVING) - DAY

Jack floors it down a desolate forest road, delighted. Gary sits beside him.

GARY

New York, Chicago, New Orleans,
San Francisco. I've seen it all.

JACK

Where'd you get the money?

GARY

Odd jobs, mostly. Lucked into it
sometimes.

Gary frowns as they round a corner and their unfinished
house comes into view.

GARY

What are you doing?

JACK

I thought we'd stop home and --

GARY

I'm not going into that house.

JACK

Don't you wanna say hi to Dad?

GARY

No, and listen to me, Jack. You
can't mention that I'm back.

JACK

Why not?

GARY

Because I'm asking you nicely.

JACK

But --

GARY

Just keep your mouth shut, for
chrissakes! Is that so hard?

Beat.

JACK

No.

GARY

Good. Now turn the goddamn car
around.

INT. DINER - DAY

Gary and Jack sit across from one another in a booth.

JACK

Weren't you ever lonely?

GARY

Sure, but you meet people on the road and it's not so bad. I eventually ended up in Los Angeles and called it home. Never really fell in love with the place, but it was good enough.

JACK

Mom lives in L.A.

GARY

She does?

JACK

(nodding)
Sends me postcards every few months.

GARY

How do you feel about that?

JACK

It's nice to know she still cares, even if she's not here.

GARY

I know what you mean. A boy should never grow up without a mother.

Silence. Gary clears his throat.

GARY

You out of school yet?

JACK

Graduating this June.

GARY

Then what?

JACK

I'm outta here.

GARY

Where to?

JACK

Anywhere but Garretson. Maybe I'll go find Mom.

(beat)

Why'd you take off like you did, Gary?

BETH (O.S.)

Morning, guys.

Beth approaches the booth in a waitress outfit. She notices Gary and almost drops the two glasses of water in her hands. After doing a double take, Gary recovers and flashes a grin.

GARY

How's it going, Beth?

BETH

What are you doing here?

GARY

Eating.

(looking over her
outfit)

What are you doing here?

Beth dumps one of the glasses of water over Gary's head and steps back, trembling.

BETH

Asshole.

Beth storms away. Diner patrons turn to watch her go.

Gary wipes his wet face with his napkin and sheepishly grins at Jack.

EXT. DINER - DAY

Gary and Jack walk out of the diner as a police car pulls into the parking lot. Eric gets out of the car and looks at Gary, who stares back with equal disbelief.

ERIC

No way.

Eric hurries over and embraces Gary, who looks over his friend's uniform.

ERIC

Jesus, Gary, where you been?

GARY

Everywhere. What's with the
getup, man? Halloween was months
ago.

ERIC

Figure it out, Einstein.

Eric gives Gary a playful punch. Gary eyes him strangely, his friendliness dissipating.

GARY
Working for the old man?

ERIC
Ever since graduation.

Gary shakes his head. He looks down at Eric's badge.

GARY
You must be pretty tight with him
by now, huh?

ERIC
He's like a father to me.

GARY
That's good. I'm glad you could
find a replacement.

The two stare at each other a moment.

ERIC
I guess I'd better let you guys
go. Where you heading now?

JACK
Chris'.

ERIC
Cool. We should get together
sometime, Gary.

GARY
Yeah. See you around.

Eric walks past Gary and Jack, who head for the Jaguar.

JACK
What the fuck was that about?

Upon reaching the Jag, Gary looks back at the diner.

GARY'S POV - THE FRONT WINDOW

Inside the diner, Eric can be seen taking Beth into his arms. They kiss, clearly more than just friends.

Gary stares at the two, his expression a mixture of disbelief and slowly growing rage.

INT. JAGUAR (MOVING) - DAY

Gary shoots Jack an angry look as the teenager drives.

GARY

Anything else I oughtta know about
that you're hiding from me?

JACK

I wasn't hiding anything, I just
didn't tell you yet. These things
happen.

GARY

Not to me.

JACK

Was she supposed to wait for you
to come back? You're the one who
disappeared.

Gary falls silent for a moment.

GARY

Some people should never wear a
uniform.

EXT. CHRIS' HOUSE - DAY

Gary's Jaguar veers off the narrow road to a lone
ramshackle house that has seen better days and owners.
The once proud home sits on the bank of a wide, frozen
stream that cuts through the forest.

Chris steps out the front door onto the rickety front
porch, beer can in hand, as the car pulls up to the home.
He watches Jack and Gary get out of the car.

CHRIS

No fuckin' way...

Chris staggers off the porch and practically falls into
Gary's arms.

GARY

What's going on, Chris?

CHRIS

Jesus, it's been a while.

GARY

No joke. You're looking good.

CHRIS

Fuckin' liar. I look like shit
and you know it. But you...

GARY

I can't complain. Jack said you
guys were living out here. Nice
place.

CHRIS

It's a dump, but who needs indoor
plumbing anyway? How long you in
town for?

GARY

A while, I think.

CHRIS

Got a place to stay?

GARY

No.

CHRIS

Now you do. C'mon, let Jack bring
in your bags. You look like you
need some serious doobage.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Howard sits around the neatly arranged office with his
two other deputies, KEITH SELDON and MIKE BECKER, both of
them bored and surly-looking in their late middle age.

HOWARD

Where's Eric?

BECKER

Still on his lunch break.

SELDON

Think we can start the staff
meeting without him? I got a card
game in half an hour.

Howard checks the clock on the wall behind him.

HOWARD

I don't see why not. Anything
going on out there?

The two deputies shake their heads.

HOWARD
Any bad guys on the loose?

SELDON
Nope.

HOWARD
You keeping the peace?

BECKER
Sure thing.

HOWARD
That's what I like to hear.
Meeting adjourned.

Seldon and Becker get to their feet.

SELDON
Thanks, boss.

HOWARD
My pleasure. Win a hand for me.

BECKER
You've heard of winning, haven't
you, Keith?

Seldon glares at Becker as Eric hurries in.

ERIC
Afternoon, guys.

BECKER
You look like you got some news
for us, young buck.

SELDON
(checking his watch)
Nothing too important, I hope.

ERIC
Gary's home. He and Jack were
heading for Chris Haig's place.

Howard stiffens a little, his expression remaining
neutral.

HOWARD
Really...

INT. HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Gary, Jack and the three guys recline on the ancient furniture in the disgustingly dirty room. A grungy old bong is being passed around; Gary declines when it's his turn, to Chris's incredulity.

CHRIS

You goin' pussy on us or something, Littleton?

GARY

People change, my friend.

HARRY

So what's up, man? Why are you back?

GARY

Just wanted to see home. Simple as that.

DAVE

Can't be that simple.

Jack glances out the window he sits by.

JACK'S POV - THROUGH THE WINDOW

Dawn trudges down the road outside, passing the house.

JACK

turns to his brother.

JACK

Gary, can I borrow the Jag for a few minutes?

GARY

Go ahead. Just don't crash it.

CHRIS

Don't confuse him with multiple instructions, man.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Shivering in the cold as she walks down the road, Dawn turns to see Jack pull up next to her in Gary's car.

DAWN
You suddenly come into an
inheritance or something?

JACK
I wish. Hop in.

INT. JAGUAR (MOVING) - DAY

Dawn looks around at the leather interior as Jack drives.

DAWN
How can your brother afford this?

JACK
Dunno. Does it matter?

DAWN
I guess not.

Jack pauses awkwardly a moment before saying:

JACK
I was wondering something.

DAWN
What's that?

JACK
Are you going to the Winter Dance
this Saturday?

DAWN
I wasn't planning on it. You?

Pause.

JACK
Nah. Those things are lame
anyway.

EXT. SELDON HOUSE - DAY

The Jaguar pulls up to the Seldons' poorly maintained, semi-secluded home; on the front lawn, Dawn's cute sister ELLIE, 6, builds a snowman. Jack and Dawn get out of the car.

DAWN
I have something for you inside.
Wait here.

JACK

Am I that offensive-looking?

Dawn glances at the numerous cars filling up the driveway.

DAWN

Dad's poker buddies are over. The house is pretty crowded.

Jack gives her a quizzical look. Dawn finally shrugs.

DAWN

Fine, come in. Just don't let my father see you. You know him.

A snowball smacks Jack in the face. He looks over to see Ellie sticking her tongue out at him.

INT. SELDON HOUSE - DAY

Dawn leads Jack through the front door and past the TV, in front of which sits Dawn's mom GRACE. The rail-thin, pale woman looks up at the two and smiles weakly, radiating about as much energy as the threadbare chair she slumps in.

BOISTEROUS LAUGHTER erupts somewhere in the house and Grace quickly turns her attention back to the TV.

JACK

follows Dawn down a hall to a staircase leading up. Dawn hurries past a nearby doorway and mounts the steps. Jack stops and peeks into the room.

IN THE ROOM

Keith Seldon sits at a table in the smoky room, playing cards with several loud, slovenly BUDDIES. Jack watches in the doorway, unnoticed.

BUDDY #1

Ante up, Keith. Let's get this over with.

Seldon takes the last of his cash and plunks it down in the center of the table.

SELDON

You bastards are bleeding me dry.

BUDDY #1

We're just waiting for you to
throw in your house one day.

BUDDY #2

Or that daughter of yours. Dawn.
I wouldn't mind winning a slice of
that pie.

BUDDY #1

The way Keith plays, it wouldn't
be too hard.

Everybody but the scowling Seldon howls with laughter.

SELDON

Over my dead body.

BUDDY #2

C'mon, Seldon, you mean you
wouldn't share the wealth?

BUDDY #1

Or are you hoarding it for
yourself?

SELDON

Shut your trap and deal.

JACK

stares at the men, hypnotized, until a HAND clamps down
on his shoulder, pulling him away from the threshold. He
looks over to see Dawn, who lets go and motions upstairs.

INT. DAWN'S BEDROOM - DAY

As Dawn hunts for something, Jack looks around at the
small pink room filled with stuffed animals and books.

JACK

You're gonna ruin your eyes
reading all these books.

DAWN

Good. Then I wouldn't have to see
this crappy town again.

Dawn hands Jack an ancient copy of On the Road.

JACK

Aw, come on...

DAWN

It's my mom's old copy. Promise me you'll give it a shot.

JACK

Does this mean we're engaged or something?

DAWN

Just trying to broaden your horizons.

The two stare at each other a moment.

JACK

Wanna go with me to the dance?

DAWN

I thought you weren't going.

JACK

Yeah, well... Now I am.

Dawn breaks into a slightly anxious smile.

DAWN

My parents don't approve of me dating boys yet.

JACK

You mean your dad doesn't approve and your mom goes along with what he says.

Dawn shrugs, but Jack has clearly hit a nerve.

DAWN

Whatever.

JACK

You gonna let that stop you?

DAWN

You gonna let me let it?

JACK

Not if you're making me read this stupid book.

Dawn's smile broadens, the anxiety dissipating.

DAWN

Then I guess I don't have a choice.

EXT. CHRIS' HOUSE - DAY

Gary, Chris, Harry and Dave step out of the house, watching the Jaguar stop in front of them. Jack gets out, grinning from ear to ear.

DAVE

It's gotta be a woman.

CHRIS

You get any action, little man?

GARY

Of course he did. Look who he's related to.

Jack hands Gary the keys.

JACK

C'mon guys, I'm a gentleman. You gotta take these things slow.

CHRIS

That's not what Beth tells me.

Jack goes pale. Gary turns to Chris, puzzled.

GARY

What's that supposed to mean?

Before Chris can answer, a police car pulls off the road and stops in front of the house. Howard gets out and freezes, locking eyes with the shocked Gary.

After a moment, the sheriff strolls toward the front porch. He pulls out a set of keys and tosses them to Chris.

HOWARD

Thought you might want these back.

(to Gary)

You're just passing through, right?

You'll be leaving tomorrow?

GARY

Actually, I was thinking about sticking around for a while.

HOWARD

I strongly suggest you reconsider that idea.

GARY
Thanks for the advice.

The two men stare at each other a moment.

HOWARD
Jack, get in the car. Now.

Jack glances at Gary, who nods.

GARY
We'll hang out later.

Jack gets into the squad car. Howard still stares at Gary.

GARY
I'll see you soon, Dad.

HOWARD
You better pray you don't.

Gary watches his father get into the car and drive away.

INT. PACKARD HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

Beth sits cross-legged amid a sea of boxes in the dirty basement, flipping through

OLD HIGH SCHOOL PHOTOS

Snapshots of a teenage Beth and several female friends; Beth with Chris, Dave and Harry, who appeared just as scummy then as they do now; Beth with Eric and Gary; and finally, a picture of Beth in Gary's tuxedo-clad arms, a prom portrait.

Beth lingers on the prom photo. A CREAKING FLOORBOARD upstairs awakens her from her near-hypnosis. She cocks her ear, listening. ANOTHER CREAK.

BETH
Eric?

UPSTAIRS

Beth emerges from the basement and wanders from room to room on the first floor of the house, looking around.

BETH
Hello? Eric?

Jack suddenly rushes up behind Beth and wraps his arms around her. She gives a little yelp and twists out of his grasp to face him.

BETH

Ever hear of knocking, jerk?

JACK

The front door was unlocked. You have no one to blame but yourself. Whatcha doing?

BETH

Nothing.

Jack places his hands on her hips. He leans forward and tries to kiss Beth but she pulls back, removing his hands.

BETH

Not tonight.

JACK

Then why'd you call me earlier?

BETH

I changed my mind.

JACK

That's not cool, Beth.

BETH

Sorry, Jack. You're on your own, if you know what I mean.

JACK

Please?

She shakes her head. After a moment, he sighs.

JACK

Can I at least get some water?

INT. KITCHEN

Jack leans against the counter, downing a glass of water. Beth watches him put the glass in the sink.

JACK

Whatever you want, I'm not giving it to you.

BETH

What makes you think I want something?

JACK

You got that look in your eyes.

BETH

Which look?

JACK

The same one you had before we fucked for the first time. It's Gary, isn't it?

BETH

Maybe. Got a problem with me talking to him?

JACK

I don't care if you do or not.

Beth smirks, unconvinced.

BETH

Don't be such a baby. I'm not your girlfriend.

JACK

But you were Gary's.

BETH

Years ago, Jack. Not anymore.

JACK

We'll see about that.

(beat)

He's staying at Chris'.

Beth leans over and takes him into her arms. They kiss until Jack abruptly breaks off.

BETH

Isn't this what you came for?

JACK

I'd rather beat off than stand in for my brother right now.

He storms out of the kitchen. Beth watches him go, then mumbles:

BETH

Wouldn't be the first time.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Jack speeds down the empty street on a rusty old ten-speed.

INT. LITTLETON HOUSE - NIGHT

The front door slowly opens and Jack slips in. He shuts it behind him and tiptoes through the dark house.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Jack enters the room and sees Howard sitting in his easy chair, cleaning a shotgun while watching TV. He glances at his son, then returns his attention to the tube.

JACK

Is that for me or Gary?

HOWARD

It just needed cleaning.

(beat)

Stay away from your brother.

JACK

I was out with friends.

HOWARD

Bullshit. You don't have any.
He's dangerous, Jack.

JACK

Why?

HOWARD

Because I say so.

JACK

You can do better than that.

HOWARD

I don't need to. Now get upstairs
before I change my mind and blow
your head off.

Jack leaves the room.

INT. JACK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jack sits on his bed in the adolescent chaos of his room, a shoebox full of carefully ordered postcards open before him.

He flips through the postcards from various cities, all of the messages written in the same handwriting and signed, "Mom." The top few feature photos of Los Angeles.

Jack opens his wallet and pulls out a tattered, folded-up L.A. postcard, unfolds it and places it atop the pile in the box. He picks up the newest one, glances at it, then folds it up and sticks it in his wallet.

He covers the box and flops back onto the bed, closing his eyes as a CHEESY HARD ROCK TUNE plays on his stereo.

EXT. CHRIS' HOUSE - DAY

Gary and Jack hover over the engine of Jack's dead Toyota -- the car now rests beside the house, around the corner from the Jaguar and Chris' Firebird out front. Gary tweaks the engine with a wrench as they talk.

JACK

You sure we shouldn't just take it to a shop?

GARY

Of course not. Nine times out of ten, if you want something done right, you do it yourself.

JACK

What if this is that one exception?

GARY

Trust me, it's not.

Jack watches Gary work. Finally:

JACK

You mind explaining what's up between you and Dad?

GARY

I just don't want anything to do with the bastard.

JACK
He's family, Gary.

GARY
Not mine. Not anymore.

JACK
Why do you hate him so much?

GARY
Because he's Dad. You live with
him -- I don't need to explain.
Now drop it.

JACK
Can I borrow the Jag tonight?

GARY
Sure. What's up?

JACK
Just some dumb dance at school.

GARY
Got a date?

JACK
Yeah, Dawn Seldon.

GARY
She was pretty foxy, last time I
saw her. Of course, she was only
7 back then, but still...

Gary pulls out a roll of crisp hundred dollar bills from
his coat and peels one off. He hands it to Jack.

GARY
I'm kidding. Have a blast.

JACK
Shit, Gary, we only need, like,
five bucks for Taco Bell.

GARY
Don't worry about it. Money's no
object. Whatever you need, you
ask me. Know why?

Jack shakes his head. Gary steps closer to him.

GARY
Because you're my brother. I love
you, doofus.

(MORE)

GARY (CONT.)

Now have fun tonight and don't
make a mess in my back seat.

Someone clears their throat behind them. The two
brothers turn around to see Beth standing at her car
nearby.

EXT. RIVER BANK - DAY

Gary and Beth walk away from the house, along the edge of
the frozen river.

GARY

Married long?

BETH

Five years this May.

GARY

Is Eric a good husband?

BETH

He's okay.

Gary stops walking.

GARY

How does he rate next to me?

BETH

He's different from you.

GARY

But there's no substitute.

Beth slowly cracks a smile as she stares into his eyes.

BETH

No, there certainly isn't.

Just as Gary grins, Beth winds up and smacks him across
the face. He reels back.

BETH

You could have written.

GARY

I wanted to.

BETH

But you didn't. So what happened?

GARY

I can't explain it, Beth.

BETH

Try. I deserve that much.

GARY

I had an epiphany, okay? I thought that if I didn't get out that night, I'd be stuck here forever.

BETH

Like that would be such a bad thing.

GARY

And that's exactly why I didn't ask you to come with me.

BETH

If Garretson is so horrible, then why are you here again?

GARY

How would you react if I said I've come back for you?

Beth smacks him again.

GARY

Would you knock that shit off?

BETH

You certainly took your fucking time getting here.

GARY

Better late than never.

BETH

Do you expect me to fall back into your arms just like that?

GARY

I wouldn't mind.

BETH

It's not going to be that easy.

GARY

It could be if you let it.

BETH

I won't.

GARY

So we'll do things the hard way.

Beth begins to smile in spite of herself.

JACK

stands by Chris' house, watching the two through the trees. He shakes his head in disgust and jealousy.

EXT. PACKARD HOUSE - BACK YARD - DAY

Eric chops wood with an ax. He looks over his shoulder to see Beth walking over to him.

ERIC

Where you been all day?

BETH

With Gary.

ERIC

Oh, yeah?

Beth notices the look of mild distaste on his face.

BETH

We were just hanging out, Eric.
Am I allowed?

ERIC

I didn't mean it like that.

BETH

Sure sounded like it. Jealous?

Eric picks up a fresh log and places it in front of him.

ERIC

You said it, not me.

BETH

Gary's ancient history. You
should know that.

They kiss.

ERIC

Just don't run off with him, okay?

BETH
Wouldn't dream of it.

Eric smirks.

ERIC
Sure you wouldn't.

Beth eyes him strangely as she heads for the house. He watches her go in, then raises the ax and slams it down on the log before him.

EXT. SELDON HOUSE - NIGHT

Jack stands next to the Jaguar. He watches Dawn emerge from her house and hurry across the front lawn. Both are well-dressed under their bulky winter coats.

JACK
Any problems?

DAWN
My dad's on duty with your father.
He doesn't know.

JACK
What about your mom?

DAWN
She won't tell him. As long as
I'm back by one, we're cool.

JACK
You look awesome.

DAWN
Thanks. You're not so horrible
yourself.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - NIGHT

STUDENTS file into the school and mill about in shivering packs outside.

INT. SQUAD CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

Howard and Seldon cruise through the high school parking lot, gazing out at the teenagers getting out of their cars. Both seem particularly interested in the young girls.

HOWARD

Wanna get some coffee in a bit?

SELDON

I don't got the money.

HOWARD

Not even for a cup of joe?

SELDON

I'm cleaned out.

Howard sighs.

HOWARD

Go ahead and ask me, Keith.

SELDON

For what?

HOWARD

For fifty bucks. Tell me you'll pay me back next week.

SELDON

You'll spot me?

HOWARD

No. I just haven't heard you beg in a while.

SELDON

Asshole.

HOWARD

They got help for people like you, you know. Doctors, support groups, that sort of thing.

SELDON

I'm just on an unlucky streak. Things are gonna change for the better soon.

HOWARD

Of course they will.

Outside, a pack of JOCKS and their DATES hurry from the parking lot to the school. Among the group are Jack's tormenters Steve Taylor and Mark Harrison, who holds hands with the weak knee-inducing CARRIE. Howard stares at her.

HOWARD

I gotta stretch my legs. I'll be back in a minute.

SELDON

You're gonna rob the wrong cradle some day, Howard.

HOWARD

What are her parents gonna do -- call the cops on me?

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

Jack and Dawn lean against the wall of the dark gym, watching the sea of kids in front of them dancing to the blaring MUSIC. They glance at each other uncomfortably, obviously out of their element: a few of their PEERS stare at them and point, as if surprised and amused by their presence. Jack turns to Dawn and gestures toward the exit. She nods, and they make their way out of the gym.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Jack and Dawn emerge into the slightly less crowded, slightly less noisy hallway.

JACK

We should have just seen a movie. I hate these fuckers in school -- I don't know why I thought they'd be different at a dance.

EXT. SCHOOL - NIGHT

Harrison and Taylor's gang enters the school. Carrie glances over her shoulder to see Howard walking down the front walkway, eyes on her.

She smiles at the cop, then turns to Harrison.

CARRIE

I forgot something in the car. I'll meet you inside.

HARRISON

I'll come with --

TAYLOR

Check out who showed up, man.

Taylor drags Harrison through the front doors. Carrie watches the group go inside, then turns and walks over to Howard, who stands in the shadows.

CARRIE

It's cold out here.

HOWARD

Blame it on the wind.

CARRIE

Yeah?

HOWARD

Sure. Winter ain't so bad until this wind blows back through town. Western wind. I hate being on duty nights like this.

CARRIE

You want me to warm you up tonight?

Howard takes her chin in his hand and smiles.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Carrie comes in to see Harrison, Taylor and the rest of their gang circling Jack and Dawn.

TAYLOR

Come on, Littleton, bust a move for us. Let's see how you dance.

DAWN

Don't you guys have anything better to do with your time?

TAYLOR

Suck me, bitch.

DAWN

You wish.

TAYLOR

Not really. Who knows what disease your daddy's given you.

Harrison pushes Jack.

HARRISON

Come on, motherfucker -- dance!

Jack shoves him back. Harrison grabs Jack and raises a fist as a TEACHER suddenly appears and separates the two.

TEACHER
What's going on here?

Jack grabs Dawn's hand and hurries past the laughing group.

INT. SQUAD CAR - NIGHT

Seldon shakes his head as Howard gets back into the car.

SELDON
Got the latest ride all lined up?

HOWARD
You can't prove nothin'.

Howard looks out the windshield and frowns.

HOWARD
Well look at this.

Seldon follows Howard's gaze.

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD

Jack and Dawn can be seen rushing over to Gary's Jaguar.

SELDON AND HOWARD

watch them drive away. Their surprise is obvious.

HOWARD
Did you know they were going?

Seldon shakes his head, his anger growing. Howard pauses.

HOWARD
She's growing into a beautiful young woman, Keith.

SELDON
Don't even think about it.

INT. PACKARD HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Beth and Eric sit on the couch, staring at the TV.

ERIC
... So I ask the guy for his
license. You know what he says?

BETH
Hmmm?

Eric glances at Beth, who continues to watch the tube.

ERIC
You're not even listening to me.

BETH
Sure I am.

ERIC
Why don't you pay attention to
what I say anymore? Am I boring?
Is that it?

BETH
Don't be stupid.

Awkward pause. Eyes fixed on the TV screen.

ERIC
I was thinking about getting a new
car. Something to impress
everyone with. Like a Jaguar.

BETH
Grow up.

ERIC
Maybe buy some new threads. You
think that would make me more
interesting? I'm curious.

BETH
I'm not listening anymore.

Eric angrily gets to his feet and hurries out of the
room.

ERIC
I'm going out for a drive.

BETH
Did someone say something?

INT. DINER - NIGHT

Jack and Dawn face each other in a booth as a tired, middle-aged WAITRESS places the check on their table. She watches Jack open his wallet and fish around for some cash.

WAITRESS

Anything else I can get you kids?

JACK

No thanks.

WAITRESS

You're one of the sheriff's boys, aren't you? Gary?

JACK

Jack.

WAITRESS

Sorry. Your father saved my life once. He was a good cop.

JACK

He's not retired yet.

WAITRESS

I reckon he still wears the badge. Don't mean a whole lot these days.

Jack hands her some money, then shrugs.

WAITRESS

I'm almost glad that pretty mother of yours ain't around to see what he's become. I'll get your change.

The waitress walks away. Jack and Dawn avoid each other's gaze in the uncomfortable silence.

Dawn notices the piece of cardboard sticking out of the wallet in Jack's hands. She points to it.

DAWN

What's that?

JACK

Nothing.

DAWN

C'mon, is it a picture of a naked girl or something? Let's see.

Before he can stop her, Dawn snatches the cardboard out of the wallet and unfolds it. It's the postcard from L.A. Her smile fades away as she glances at the message.

JACK

Most people have a mom. I've got a bunch of postcards, but it's cool -- at least she still writes.

He takes it from her and carefully places it back in his wallet.

DAWN

I'm sorry, Jack. Does she write you a lot?

JACK

Hard to tell. Dad throws her letters out if he gets the mail first.

DAWN

How do you know?

JACK

I've found most of them in the garbage.

(beat, grinning)

So... Your place or mine?

She breaks into a smile again.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

A single mailbox sits on a pole along the side of the road. The sound of an approaching car grows louder.

CHRIS' PONTIAC FIREBIRD

roars by with Gary at bat. He lets out a scream and swings with all his might, obliterating the mailbox.

INT. FIREBIRD (MOVING) - NIGHT

Gary gets back in the car as Chris, Dave and Harry shout in approval and clap him on the back.

CHRIS

Some things never change. You're still MVP, Littleton.

EXT. LITTLETON HOUSE - NIGHT

The Jaguar is parked in front of the home.

INT. HOUSE - UNFINISHED SECTION - NIGHT

Jack and Dawn walk through the large, unfinished wing of the house, illuminated only by the moonlight filtered through the plastic covering the myriad gaps in the wooden frame.

DAWN

Why didn't your dad ever finish this?

JACK

It was Mom's idea. When she left with Officer Packard and Gary disappeared, he kinda gave up.

DAWN

Do you remember your mother?

JACK

Not much. I was too young. Gary knew her better.

DAWN

He ran away the same night that she and Eric's dad left, right?

Jack nods.

DAWN

Coincidence?

JACK

You got me.

Dawn looks around in the semidarkness.

DAWN

Ever go to the movies or read a book and wish it would never end? Like you don't want to deal with your life after the credits roll or you get to the last page?

JACK

I guess.

DAWN

I feel like that all the time. I look around and imagine that any place would be better than where I am now.

JACK

No one's stopping you from leaving.

DAWN

I couldn't go alone.

Jack turns to her.

JACK

You wouldn't have to.

Jack leans forward and kisses Dawn on the lips. After a moment, she shoves him away.

DAWN

Don't do that! Don't ever touch me again or I'll fucking kill you!

Jack backs away. He stares at her, stunned.

JACK

I'm sorry.

Almost immediately her fury disappears. She turns away.

DAWN

Just take me home, would you?

EXT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

Gary emerges from the store and heads for the parked Firebird, opening a fresh pack of Pall Malls.

INT. ERIC'S CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

Eric drives down the road, approaching the grocery store. He sees Gary lighting up a cigarette outside.

EXT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

Eric tears into the parking lot and screeches to a stop before Gary. The cop gets out and storms over to him.

GARY
Evening, Officer.

Eric grabs Gary and slams him against the side of the store.

ERIC
You stay away from Beth, okay?

Gary pushes Eric away.

GARY
What the fuck, you been following me or something?

ERIC
I smelled something rotten and followed my nose.

GARY
Your wife doesn't seem to have a problem with me.

ERIC
Leave her out of this.

GARY
Kind of hard to do that, don't you think? Now get out of here and go maintain the peace or whatever you do. On second thought, stay. If you're anything like your dad, the town's probably safer without you defending it.

ERIC
My father was a great man.

GARY
My mom certainly thought so.

ERIC
You got a problem with two people finding happiness together?

GARY
Only when my life is ruined because of it.

ERIC
Then you'll understand where I'm coming from. People change, Gary. Beth loves me now. Don't you dare touch her.

Chris, Harry and Dave get out of the car and saunter over.

CHRIS
Need a hand, Gary?

GARY
No thanks. Eric here's about to
make himself scarce.

Eric gives Gary one last menacing look, then turns and gets into his car. Gary and the guys watch him speed away.

EXT. SELDON HOUSE - NIGHT

The Jaguar pulls into the snowy driveway and Dawn and Jack get out. She hurries across the lawn as Jack follows her.

JACK
Dawn, wait. Can't we just --

DAWN
No.

She slips inside, slamming the front door behind her.

A SNARL emerges from the darkness around him. Jack looks over to see

A DOBERMAN

rushing from around the corner of the house, its snarl turning into wild barking.

JACK

steps back and flinches as the dog lunges at him and stops short, held back by a leash.

GRACE

staggers out of the darkness, clinging to her end of the leash with both hands, a nightgown visible under her overcoat. Dawn's mother stares at Jack as the dog continues to strain against the leash and snap at Jack.

GRACE
Patton doesn't like strangers.

JACK

I can see that. Could I please talk to Dawn?

GRACE

Keith came home early. I don't think it's a good idea.

JACK

Then could you tell her that I'll call tomorrow?

GRACE

I'm sorry, but I can't.

JACK

Why not?

GRACE

Dawn isn't ready to get involved with anyone yet.

JACK

Shouldn't she be the one to decide that?

GRACE

I don't expect you to understand. Just please stay away, Jack.

JACK

But --

Grace loses her grip on the leash for a moment. The Doberman lunges forward a few more inches. Jack jumps back.

GRACE

Go home. Get out of here before Keith comes out and makes you sorry you stayed. Go!

Jack backs up toward his car as Grace slowly drags the barking dog around the house. He looks up at

DAWN'S BEDROOM WINDOW

Dawn can be seen peering out at him from the second floor, her face streaked with tears.

JACK

waves to her as he reaches his car.

DAWN

stares back glumly, not returning his wave. Behind her, SELDON can be seen entering the room. She looks over her shoulder at her father, and when she turns back to Jack, her expression has changed to that of fear, almost panic. Seldon pushes his daughter away from the window, glances outside, then jerks the shade down.

JACK

stares up at the vague, violently moving blobs silhouetted against the shade. He gets into his car as the Doberman continues to BARK in the night.

INT. FIREBIRD (MOVING) - NIGHT

Chris drives, Gary sulks beside him, Dave and Harry sit in the back. The tension in the car is palpable.

CHRIS

Shit, Gary, you expect Packard to hand her to you on a fuckin' silver platter? Beth is cheating on him.

GARY

We haven't done anything yet. Besides, Beth wouldn't be cheating on anybody. She and Eric don't count.

DAVE

How do you figure?

GARY

Because she was my girl. Fuck that -- she is my girl. We've still got that thing between us. Nothing's changed. She just doesn't realize it.

HARRY

Sounds like you're trying to convince yourself, Gary.

GARY

The bottom line is that Beth and I belong together.

DAVE

I wonder if your mom thought the same way about Eric's old man.

Gary twists around and grabs Dave, jerking him forward.

GARY

You mention my mother again and
I'll take your fucking head off.

CHRIS

Hey, man, be cool! Relax.

Gary shoves Dave into the back seat and turns back around, smoldering.

EXT. LITTLETON HOUSE - NIGHT

The Jaguar stops in front of the dark home, next to Howard's squad car and an old Buick that we haven't seen before.

INT. LITTLETON HOUSE - NIGHT

Jack walks through the front door and looks around, frowning; something feels wrong.

JACK

Dad?

He looks down to see Howard's sheriff jacket lying in a heap at his feet. He picks it up and drapes it over the bannister leading upstairs.

Jack wanders around the silent first floor of the house.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jack enters the dark kitchen and opens the refrigerator. He looks around, sees no one, and pulls out a bottle of Bud. Twisting off the cap, he sits down at the kitchen table in the corner of the room, sighs, and wearily knocks back the bottle in the darkness. It's been a long night.

He sits up slightly at the sound of FLOORBOARDS CREAKING overhead, holding his beer almost protectively to his chest.

A moment later, a figure walks in and flicks the wall switch without noticing Jack. The lamp over the table goes on: Carrie, Harrison's date, strides into the kitchen, clad in nothing but HOWARD'S GUN BELT (complete with service revolver) around her waist.

Still oblivious to the speechless Jack, she opens the fridge and peers inside.

After taking a long look, she shuts the fridge door and turns to see Jack. She lets out a surprised squeak, then immediately reverts back to her characteristic sultry cool.

CARRIE

So that's where the last beer went.

Carrie slowly approaches Jack with an almost cocky swagger.

CARRIE

What, you've never seen a naked girl before?

She takes the bottle from Jack's hands. Jack stares up at her from his seat at the table as she takes a swig of beer.

JACK

Not strutting around the kitchen, packing heat. My dad's heat, no less.

CARRIE

There's a first time for everything. Does it bother you?

JACK

Depends on what you're planning to do with the gun.

CARRIE

Your father's got some strange kinks. I don't know if I can go back to the standard teenage back seat lay again.

Carrie climbs onto his lap.

CARRIE

Want to see what I learned?

JACK

No thanks.

CARRIE

Your dad's asleep upstairs. He'll never know.

She leans forward and they kiss. Jack resists feebly and Carrie breaks off, staring at him in disbelief.

CARRIE

Are you gay or something? What's the problem?

JACK

You've ignored me for years. Why the sudden attention?

CARRIE

I'm just hoping you're a chip off the old block -- half the age and twice the fun.

JACK

Get off me.

Carrie pulls the pistol out of its holster and shoves the barrel under Jack's chin.

CARRIE

Stick 'em up. I never thought I'd ever say that during foreplay. You scared?

Jack nods.

CARRIE

So was I at first. You'll get used to it. Once you do, it's such a turn-on. Trust me.

Carrie kisses him again. This time Jack reluctantly submits, the pistol still poking him in the neck.

A HAND darts into the frame, grabbing the gun and wrenching it from Carrie's hand. She and Jack look up to see Howard trembling with rage before them, clad in a ratty bathrobe.

Carrie practically falls off Jack's lap as Howard hauls his son to his feet.

HOWARD

What are you doing, you dumb shit?

Howard throws Jack against the wall and looks over at Carrie, who scrambles to her feet.

HOWARD

Didn't I tell you to go home?

CARRIE
I don't fuck and run.

HOWARD
You do with me.

CARRIE
You fell asleep. It's your own
fault, old man.

Howard takes a step toward her. Jack grabs his dad's arm.

JACK
Don't do it, Dad --

Howard slams a fist into Jack's stomach. The teenager doubles over and crumples to the scuffed linoleum.

HOWARD
Shut up! What are you doing home?

JACK
I live here!

HOWARD
Of all the nights to come home
early, you pick this one.

JACK
Like it's any secret what you do.

Howard winds up and kicks his son in the gut. Jack howls.

The sheriff shoots a raging glance at Carrie.

HOWARD
Get out of here!

The girl drops the gunbelt and rushes out of the kitchen.

Jack swings his own legs around, sweeping at Howard's ankles and sending him to the floor. Howard drops the pistol.

The cop gets to his knees and grabs his son, pounding him with his fists. Jack fights back, swinging blindly, but his father has the advantage.

Howard pauses to catch his breath. Jack sits up and delivers a solid punch to his face. Howard flops onto the floor, grabs the pistol beside him and bolts upright.

Jack stares down the barrel of the gun. Howard pulls back the hammer. The two glare at each other over the pistol.

After a moment, Howard uncocks the pistol, slowly gets to his feet and staggers out of the kitchen.

EXT. CHRIS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Jack leans over the hood of his dead Toyota, wrench in hand and trying in vain to fix the car. He steps back and disgustedly flings the tool against the front bumper, eyes brimming with tears.

GARY (O.S.)

A lot of good that's gonna do.

Jack whirls around to face Gary, who slowly approaches out of the darkness.

JACK

Then could you fix it so I can get the fuck out of here tonight?

GARY

Your date went that bad?

JACK

Everything went that bad. It always does. Why can't I get a break? Why does the world insist on trying to beat me down?

GARY

Let's not get melodramatic here.

JACK

I hate this fucking town, Gary. I hate the people and their little fucked up lives and everything they stand for. I hate myself for putting up with it. But that's gonna change.

GARY

You get in a fight with Dad or something?

Jack nods.

JACK

I hate that bastard so much it hurts. I'm not as dumb as he thinks. I'll show him.

GARY

You have to do more than that, Jack. You have to make him pay.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

Jack and Gary walk along the edge of the frozen river, which gleams in the moonlight.

GARY

Of course you could come with me.

JACK

Where would we go?

GARY

Anywhere you wanted. It's a big country.

JACK

When do we leave?

GARY

As soon as things are taken care of.

Jack looks out at the ice-covered river. Gary notices his anxious expression.

GARY

It has to be done, Jack.

JACK

Why just me? Can't you help?

GARY

I'm free of him. You're not.

JACK

We could run away like you did.

GARY

It has to be a clean break, Jack. No loose ends.

JACK

But does Dad deserve it?

GARY

Are you telling me that after all he's done, you won't give him a taste of his own medicine?

JACK

I don't know, Gary.

GARY

Then forget leaving town. I'm not taking a coward with me.

JACK

I'm no coward.

GARY

Are too. You're a dumb coward.

Jack stops walking and grabs Gary.

JACK

Don't call me dumb.

GARY

Stop acting like it. Dad has you under his thumb, and that'll never change unless you do something about it.

JACK

You're telling me to murder our father.

GARY

I'm telling you to get behind the wheel of your own life. The old man's driving right now.

Jack falls silent a moment. Then:

JACK

What would Mom say?

GARY

I think she would tell you to kill the miserable bastard.

Jack looks back at the moonlight reflecting off the ice.

INT. SELDON HOUSE - DAWN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dawn lies in bed under her covers, staring at the ceiling, fresh bruises blossoming on her face. She lets out a sob.

Seldon sits at the foot of the bed, half-dressed and taking a pull from the Jack Daniels bottle in hand.

SELDON

Shut up. You're too old to cry.
Shit, you're just too old. Used
up. Howard's boy can have you for
all I care.

He stands up and shuffles unsteadily to the door.

SELDON

Good night, darling.

INT. CHRIS' HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - DAWN

Jack and Gary sit alone in the family room, staring out the window at the sun rising on the white horizon.

Jack looks down at the L.A. postcard in his hands.

JACK

What was she like?

GARY

You really don't remember?

Jack shakes his head.

JACK

I just remember being happy.

Gary settles back in the battered couch, thinking a moment.

GARY

Mom was always there for you,
ready to pick you up when you were
down, ready to forgive you even if
you didn't deserve it. She made
you feel safe. She made you feel
special.

(beat)

She was the most beautiful woman
I've ever seen. Her smile was so
sweet, her skin so soft.

(MORE)

GARY (CONT.)

When you scraped yourself, she was so gentle putting the bandage on. I'll never forget the way her fingers felt on my leg, my arm, my face. I'll never forget the way I felt when she touched me.

(beat)

Shit, Jack, she was Mom. What else can I say?

JACK

Is that why Dad is the way he is? Because she left?

GARY

Dad was always an asshole. When I was a kid, he'd always say, "Daddy loves you very much," but I knew the fucker was lying. He was too busy playing supercop to be a decent husband and father. Mom and I had each other, at least.

(beat)

And you, of course.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Jack trudges along the side of the empty road. He looks over as Eric pulls up next to him in his squad car.

INT. ERIC'S CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

Eric glances at Jack as they drive.

ERIC

How are things going?

JACK

They're okay, I guess.

ERIC

So who's Beth fucking?

Jack freezes. After a moment he turns towards Eric.

JACK

You think --

ERIC

No, no, not you, Jack. I know you're a good kid. It's Gary, right?

JACK

I dunno. I guess she wouldn't tell you, huh?

ERIC

She's been acting weird for months. I took an oath to uphold the law, man, and I meant it. I love helping people. But I love Beth more, Jack. If I found out she was cheating on me...

JACK

You'd what?

Eric stares Jack straight in the eye, pausing before saying:

ERIC

I'd blow his fucking face off.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Dawn sits at a desk, wearily taking notes and listening to the English teacher read before the large, bored class.

ENGLISH TEACHER

"O three roads, dark ravine,
woodland and way. Where three
roads met: you, drinking my
father's blood, my own blood,
spilled by my own hand: can you
remember the unspeakable things I
did there, and the things I went
on from there to do? O marriage,
marriage! The act that engendered
me, and again the act performed by
the son in the same bed -- ah, the
net of incest, mingling fathers,
brothers, sons, with brides,
wives, mothers: the last evil that
can be known by men: no tongue can
say how evil!"

As the teacher drones on, Dawn turns to see Jack across the room, staring at her. A BELL RINGS. The teacher looks up from his book as the students leap to their feet.

ENGLISH TEACHER

More fun with Oedipus Rex
tomorrow.

Dawn rushes out before Jack can catch up with her.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Students stream out of the school, Dawn among them. She seems distant, detached from the crowd surrounding her.

ACROSS THE STREET

Howard sits alone in his parked squad car. He sees Dawn in the crowd and starts his engine.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - PHONE BOOTH - DAY

Jack talks into the pay phone.

JACK

Gary, can you get me at school?
... Fifteen minutes? Thanks.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Dawn walks along the sidewalk, lost in her thoughts. Howard pulls up beside her and rolls down his window.

HOWARD

Need a lift?

DAWN

No thanks.

HOWARD

C'mon, it's goddamned freezing and
you look like you're about ready
to turn blue.

She stops walking and looks at him.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - NIGHT

Jack paces along the empty front walkway of the school. He looks up to see a familiar Chevy Nova rattling toward him.

The Chevy slams to a stop in front of Jack. Harrison and Taylor get out and grab him.

HARRISON

Who do you think you are?

The athlete jams his fist into Jack's stomach. Jack groans and doubles over.

HARRISON

You think you and your sicko father can screw my girl and get away with it?

JACK

She didn't seem to mind.

The two jocks proceed to savagely beat Jack to the concrete.

INT. DINER - DAY

Howard and Dawn sit across from each other in a secluded booth, sipping mugs of cocoa. The diner is largely empty.

DAWN

Thanks, Sheriff.

HOWARD

My pleasure. Call me Howard.

He notices the light bruises on the side of her face.

HOWARD

Where'd those come from?

DAWN

Sledding accident.

Howard nods despite his ill-concealed skepticism.

HOWARD

Did you and Jack have fun at the dance?

DAWN

I guess. He's a nice guy.

HOWARD

Of course he is. The apple don't fall far from the tree. My wife would've been proud of him.

DAWN

Do you miss her?

HOWARD

All the time. It's lonely without her. Very, very lonely.

Dawn shifts in her seat, increasingly uncomfortable.

HOWARD

Can't say I've ever gotten used to it. I like having some company, a warm body next to me at night. You know what I mean?

DAWN

I think so.

HOWARD

(smiling gently)
I'm glad.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Taylor and Harrison take off in their Chevy, leaving a bloody Jack lying on the walkway.

The Jaguar slams to a halt in front of him. Gary gets out and hurries over to his brother.

GARY

Jesus, Jack. Who did this?

Jack points to the Chevy rattling away. We CUT TO

THE JAGUAR

ripping down the road, easily gaining on the ancient Chevy.

GARY

swerves into the left-hand lane, around the Chevy, and slams on the gas. After a moment he hits the brakes and

THE JAGUAR

slides across the pavement ahead of the Chevy, blocking the road as it comes to a stop.

GARY

gets out of the Jag as Jack watches from the back seat.

THE CHEVY

squeals to a halt in front of them. Harrison and Taylor climb out and approach Gary.

TAYLOR

You got a problem, motherfucker?

Gary pulls out a PISTOL and smashes the butt end against the bridge of Taylor's nose. The hulking teenager crumples to the ground with a shriek, blood spurting everywhere.

Harrison stumbles backward. Gary reaches over and grabs him by the throat, shoving the pistol in his face.

GARY

You got some balls messing with my brother.

Gary lowers the gun and jabs it into Harrison's crotch.

GARY

Not for long.

HARRISON

Please, man, I'm sorry. I didn't mean it --

GARY

Oh, it was an accident you beat the shit out of Jack?

HARRISON

No, it wasn't, but I --

GARY

So you lied to me.

Gary turns Harrison around, bends him over the hood of the Chevy and rams the pistol over and over into the small of the teenager's back. Harrison screams in pain.

GARY

Come near Jack again and I'll kill you. You touch him, and I swear to Christ you'll pray for death. Got it?

Harrison nods through his tears. Gary tosses him aside.

INT. JAGUAR - DAY

Jack watches Gary get in and place his pistol in the glove compartment. Gary notices his staring and shrugs.

GARY

Self-defense.

He starts the car and hits the gas.

INT. SQUAD CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Dawn frowns as Howard pulls the car to the side of the secluded forest road and turns off the engine.

DAWN

What's going on?

Howard slowly draws closer.

HOWARD

I want you to know something. If you ever need anything, you come to me, okay?

Dawn reluctantly nods.

HOWARD

Don't matter if it's five bucks or a shoulder to cry on. I'm there for you, whatever you want.

He slides a hand onto her knee.

DAWN

I'm not going to have sex with you, Sheriff.

HOWARD

Like it would be a new experience for you to screw a middle-aged cop.

Dawn's eyes go wide, mouth agape. Howard shrugs.

HOWARD

Everybody's got a secret, Dawn. It's nothing to be ashamed of.

She scrambles for the car door but Howard grabs her.

HOWARD

Wait!

Dawn slaps at him as he tries to improve his grip on her. She knees him in the chest and he lets go with a gasp.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Dawn tumbles out of the car. Howard gets out to see her flee into the forest.

INT. JAGUAR (MOVING) - DAY

Gary pulls the car in front of the Packards' house and glances at Jack in the back seat.

GARY

I'll be back in a second.

INT. PACKARD HOUSE - FOYER - DAY

Beth opens the front door to see Gary standing there.

BETH

You can't come in. Eric's due home any minute.

GARY

I have to talk with you.

BETH

Ever heard of the phone?

INT. JAGUAR - BACK SEAT - DAY

Jack sits across the length of the cramped back seat, massaging his jaw. He glances down at the floor of the car, pauses, then reaches down.

He picks up a SCRAP OF PAPER from under the driver's seat: a ragged half of a SAN FRANCISCO POSTCARD; on the blank side, the handwritten words "Dear Jack" and a scratched-out sentence are visible.

Jack stares at the postcard fragment a moment, then pulls out his wallet. He takes out his postcard from L.A. and holds the two side by side.

THE HANDWRITING ON BOTH POSTCARDS IS IDENTICAL.

INT. PACKARD HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Beth and Gary face each other on opposite ends of the couch.

BETH
What do you want?

GARY
I'm leaving town soon and I want
you to come with me.

Beth sighs, her exasperation tinged with obvious excitement.

BETH
Eric --

GARY
Forget him. This is between the
two of us. Always has been.

BETH
You don't know me anymore.

GARY
I know enough. Some things never
change.

Gary takes her hand. They slowly draw closer together.

GARY
Why kid yourself? You have
nothing here, Beth. You deserve
more than this.

BETH
And I'd get it with you?

GARY
You never know until you try.

Their lips meet.

ERIC (O.S.)
This is just fucking great.

Beth wrenches away from Gary. They both jump up to see Eric glowering in the doorway in his uniform.

Eric launches himself at Gary, catching him in a tackle. They spill to the ground, tumbling across a coffee table.

The two get to their feet, swinging. Gary's movements are swift and precise; what Eric lacks in grace he makes up for in sheer brawn. An even match.

Gary slowly gains the advantage as Eric begins to falter. The cop finally drops to his knees. Gary steps back.

GARY

Had enough yet?

Gary winds up to kick Eric but Beth rushes over.

BETH

Don't --

In the second that Gary turns to her, Eric propels himself at Gary, driving him toward the picture window along one wall of the living room. He throws Gary at the window.

Gary tumbles through the glass, landing in the snow underneath the window outside.

Beth dashes over to the window. Eric slowly joins her, wincing.

Gary is motionless for a moment, cut and bloody on the ground. He finally gets to his feet and staggers away.

ERIC

It didn't have to be like this,
Gary. You should have stayed away
from her.

Gary disappears around the corner of the house.

Eric looks at Beth.

ERIC

How could you?

BETH

I didn't, Eric. That's the truth.

She hurries out of the room.

ERIC

Where are you going?

INT. JAGUAR - DAY

Gary turns the key and starts the Jag's engine. He notices Beth running out of the house toward him. She gets into the passenger seat and looks at him.

GARY
You sure?

BETH
No.

He nods and shifts into gear. Beth glances at the back seat and does a double take upon seeing Jack, who ignores her: his eyes are fixed on the oblivious Gary.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Eric runs outside to see the Jaguar tear down the road.

INT. SQUAD CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Howard pulls in front of the Seldons' home just in time to see Dawn hurry up the front steps. He sighs.

INT. SELDON HOUSE - DAY

Dawn rushes in to see Grace glassy-eyed in front of the TV.

GRACE
How was school, dear?

DAWN
Where's Dad?

GRACE
Upstairs. Why don't you sit and watch some TV with me?

Dawn moves to leave the room but Grace catches her arm. Mother and daughter lock eyes.

GRACE
Please, Dawn, just stay here.

General Hospital is on.

Dawn wrenches her arm away and hurries away.

EXT. CHRIS' HOUSE - DAY

Beth gives Jack a hand as he climbs out of the Jag. Gary watches.

GARY
How you doing, cowboy?

JACK
I'm fine as long as I don't move
or breathe.

BETH
Poor thing.

She gives Jack a little kiss on the cheek. Gary watches the brief look the two exchange. He frowns.

GARY
I got something that might make
you feel better.

INT. SELDON HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Dawn cautiously walks up the stairs. MUFFLED VOICES can be heard; she puts her ear to a closed door, listening to her sister Ellie and Seldon.

ELLIE (O.S.)
Daddy, what are you doing?

SELDON (O.S.)
Just hold still, darling. Please,
I won't hurt you.

Dawn begins to quietly weep. She dashes across the hall.

EXT. CHRIS' HOUSE - DAY

Gary and Beth stand beside Jack's Toyota, watching as Jack sits down behind the wheel and turns the ignition key. The parked car SPUTTERS TO LIFE. Jack looks up at his brother in amazement.

GARY
I told you, man -- you want
something done right, you gotta do
it yourself.

INT. SELDON HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Dawn throws open the closet and reaches up to the top shelf. She takes down SELDON'S GUN BELT, unholsters the REVOLVER and loads it with shaking fingers and angry tears.

INT. CHRIS' HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Chris, Dave and Harry are still crashed in front of the TV. They look up as Jack, Gary and Beth enter the house.

CHRIS

Jesus, guys, you look even shittier than usual.

GARY

We're taking lessons from you.

INT. GARY'S ROOM - DAY

Gary watches Jack sit down on the bed in the tiny, bare room.

GARY

Rest here. We'll talk later.

JACK

Thanks, Gary. For everything.

GARY

No problem, bro. Pretty soon we'll be gone and this town will be nothing but a memory.

JACK

Can I bring someone along?

GARY

That Dawn chick?

Jack nods.

GARY

I don't know, Jack. This isn't the fucking Children's Crusade. I'll think about it, okay?

JACK

Okay.

(beat)

You ever visit Mom in L.A.?

GARY

I haven't seen her in ten years,
Jack. Why?

JACK

I found something in your car, and
if I didn't know better, I'd swear
Mom wrote it herself.

For an instant, shock registers on Gary's face. His cool
returns almost immediately.

GARY

Don't know anything about it.

JACK

Did you know you and Mom have the
same handwriting?

GARY

No. Must be a family thing.

JACK

Must be.

Gary hurries out of the room, shutting the door behind
him.

Jack flops back onto the bed. The mattress begins to
sag, then abruptly stops, as if propped up underneath.
Jack sits up and flops down again. Same result.

He rolls off the bed and kneels on the grungy floor.

INT. SQUAD CAR - DAY

Howard sits up at the SOUND of a GUNSHOT. He looks at
the house, suddenly attentive.

INT. CHRIS' HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Chris smirks as he looks at Gary and Beth and toasts them
with his beer.

CHRIS

So the happy couple is reunited.
I hope it was worth the trouble.

GARY

No trouble at all.

CHRIS
I'll bet Packard has a different
opinion.

GARY
Like I give a shit.

INT. GARY'S ROOM - DAY

Jack reaches under the bed and pulls out a LARGE DUFFEL BAG wedged in there. He unzips it and peers in.

THE BAG

is filled to the brim with HARD CASH, neat bundles of crisp hundred dollar bills. Nearly buried in the money is a PISTOL identical to the one Gary brandished earlier.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Chris' eyes narrow as he stares at Beth.

CHRIS
So how was it, Beth? Did Eric beg
you to stay or what?

BETH
Shut up.

CHRIS
Did he get on his knees and remind
you of your wedding vows? Any
cheesy shit like that?

Beth stands up and stomps out of the room.

CHRIS
Did you at least return the ring?

Gary reaches over and grabs Chris.

GARY
Knock it off, Haig.

CHRIS
Relax, hombre. I'm just screwing
around. You're right -- she's
always been your girl.

Gary relaxes.

GARY

Told you.

CHRIS

Sure. Why else would she have played sheet hockey with your brother if she didn't miss you?

EXT. SELDON HOUSE - DAY

Howard slowly walks across the front lawn in the eerie silence. He opens the front door and enters.

INT. CHRIS' HOUSE - GARY'S ROOM - DAY

There's a KNOCK at the door. Jack zips up the bag and shoves it back under the bed. He sits down.

JACK

Come in.

Beth enters.

BETH

Chris is being his usual asshole self. Mind if I sit down?

INT. FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Chris, Dave and Harry stare in disbelief at Gary.

DAVE

You mean you didn't know?

GARY

I've been out of the loop for ten fucking years!

CHRIS

You should be flattered, Gary. The chick was so desperate for you that she went slumming with Jack. Is that devotion or what?

INT. GARY'S ROOM - DAY

Beth sits next to Jack on the bed.

JACK

So Eric's history, huh? Just like me?

BETH

You were never in the running, Jack. I'm sorry.

(beat)

You'll find someone someday.

Beth gently turns Jack's face toward hers.

BETH

Trust me. Nice guys don't always finish last.

She kisses him on the cheek as

THE DOOR

flies open and Gary storms in. He stares, aghast, as Beth and Jack part from one another and get to their feet.

Gary grabs Jack and swings him around, slamming him into the wall. Chris, Dave and Harry watch from the threshold.

GARY

You little bastard --

Gary shoves him into the wall again and again.

GARY

What were you thinking?

JACK

About what?!

GARY

You don't fuck my girl without a reason. Give me one, you little piece of shit!

BETH

Gary, let him go!

Beth tries in vain to pry Gary off Jack. Gary ignores her.

GARY

Why'd you do it, Jack? Tell me!

JACK
I wanted to be you, okay?

Gary stops shoving Jack and stares at him, speechless.

JACK
That's all I ever wanted to be,
you son of a bitch.

Jack rushes out, pushing past Chris, Dave and Harry.

EXT. CHRIS' HOUSE - DAY

Jack gets into his Toyota and starts it up.

GARY

steps out of the house to see Jack pull onto the road and speed away.

INT. SELDON HOUSE - DAY

Howard walks through the first floor of the house. No one in sight, the TV on but unwatched.

HOWARD
Hello? Keith? Dawn?

He reaches the stairs and walks up to the

SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY

Howard reaches the top of the steps to see Grace standing next to an open door. She holds a shell-shocked, blanket-clad Ellie in her arms.

HOWARD
Where's Dawn, Grace?

GRACE
She didn't mean it, Howard.

HOWARD
Go downstairs.

Grace hurries past Howard and heads downstairs. Howard walks over to the doorway and looks in.

IN THE ROOM

Dawn stands over the partially disrobed body of her father, the smoking revolver still in her hand. BLOOD flows from the neat little BULLET HOLE in Seldon's head, soaking into the white carpet underneath him.

She turns to face Howard, her expression neutral, almost lifeless.

DAWN

She's just a little girl, Sheriff.
I couldn't let him do it. I
couldn't let him do it to her like
he did it to me.

Howard nods, slowly entering the room.

HOWARD

I know.

She drops the gun, rushes into his arms and bursts into tears.

INT. TOYOTA (MOVING) - DAY

Jack drives down the road in his car, hands gripping the steering wheel.

EXT. CHRIS' HOUSE - DAY

Gary pulls Beth toward the Jaguar.

BETH

Where are we going?

GARY

To find Jack. You've got some
serious explaining to do.

INT. SELDON HOUSE - ROOM - DAY

Howard looks down at Dawn as he cradles her.

HOWARD

You're going to have to answer to
this.

DAWN

He was a bad man.

HOWARD

I know, Dawn, believe me. But you've killed him and the judge may not understand like I do. You could spend the rest of your life in jail.

Fresh tears begin to trickle down Dawn's face.

HOWARD

Murder is murder. But it doesn't have to be.

She looks up at him.

HOWARD

Your father was a piece of shit. He was never gonna pay off his gambling debts. No way. It wouldn't surprise anyone if he suddenly killed himself. Do you understand?

Dawn looks down at the body, the pistol lying next to it. She turns back to Howard and nods.

DAWN

What do I have to do?

Howard smiles and strokes her face.

INT. JAGUAR (MOVING) - DAY

Gary glances angrily at Beth as they drive.

BETH

I never loved him, Gary.

GARY

That's no excuse.

BETH

I don't need to give you one. You don't own me.

GARY

Oh, no?

EXT. SELDON HOUSE - DAY

Jack gets out of the Toyota in front of the house. He looks at the squad car in the driveway, then the open front door.

INT. SELDON HOUSE - ROOM - DAY

Howard strokes Dawn's head like a pet.

HOWARD

Everything's gonna be okay.
Everybody's got a secret.

DOWNSTAIRS

Jack walks through the front door to see Grace staring at the TV, Ellie on her lap. Neither acknowledge him.

JACK

Mrs. Seldon?

Grace continues to stare at the screen.

GRACE

She didn't mean it. It was an
accident, Jack.

UPSTAIRS

Howard looks down at Dawn, who stares back.

HOWARD

So what do you think, Dawn? Do we
have a deal?

DAWN

I don't know.

HOWARD

We both win this way. And no one
will know but the two of us.

JACK (O.S.)

You don't have to do anything,
Dawn.

Howard and Dawn look over to see Jack in the doorway.

JACK

It's justifiable homicide. With your mom's testimony, the courts will understand.

HOWARD

What the fuck do you know about the law?

JACK

Get away from her, Dad.

Howard steps away from Dawn, smirking. Jack's rage builds.

HOWARD

Who do you think you are, the Lone Ranger?

JACK

I'm taking Dawn out of here.

HOWARD

I'd like to see you try.

Jack flies at Howard. The two collide, tripping over Seldon's body and hitting the floor with a thud.

Dawn watches the two wrestle on the ground. Father and son pound the crap out of each other.

Jack grabs the pistol beside him and points it at Howard's face. The sheriff freezes, then smiles grimly.

HOWARD

Do it. I dare you.

Jack stands up and cocks the weapon. Howard gets to his knees and stares up at his son.

HOWARD

I hope your brother appreciates your doing this favor for him.

JACK

I'll see you in hell.

HOWARD

It'll be a regular family reunion down there. You don't know what you're getting into, Jack.

JACK

Wanna fill me in before I blow
your head off?

HOWARD

Your mother didn't run away with
Eric's father. Gary killed them.

Jack freezes, his confusion obvious.

JACK

Bullshit. How would you know?

HOWARD

I let him go.

INT. JAGUAR (MOVING) - DAY

Gary pulls up to the Seldons' house, behind Jack's
Toyota.

BETH

Don't talk to me like that.

Gary notices Howard's police car.

GARY

Wonderful.

INT. SELDON HOUSE - UPSTAIRS - DAY

Jack stares at his father, stunned.

DAWN

Come on, Jack.

Dawn pulls Jack toward the door. He tosses the gun aside
and they rush out of the room.

EXT. SELDON HOUSE - DAY

Beth follows Gary across the lawn.

BETH

Don't ignore me, Gary. I'm
talking to you.

Jack and Dawn burst out of the house and run into them.
Gary grabs Jack.

GARY
What's going on?

JACK
Get off me!

Jack wrenches away from his brother. He and Dawn get into the Toyota.

Howard emerges from the home to see Gary and Beth. As he rushes over to his car:

HOWARD
He knows, Gary. Get out of
Garretson now.

Jack's Toyota speeds away.

INT. TOYOTA (MOVING) - DAY

Jack is behind the wheel, Dawn beside him.

JACK
Are you okay?

She nods unconvincingly.

He looks in his rearview mirror as

HOWARD'S SQUAD CAR

begins to catch up behind them, lights flashing and siren blaring.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - DAY

Howard pursues the Toyota down the winding tree-lined road.

INT. JAGUAR (MOVING) - DAY

Gary slams on the gas in pursuit of Howard and Jack. Beth sits beside him, confused and angry.

BETH
Will you please tell me what's
going on?

GARY
Shut up, for God's sake!

INT. TOYOTA (MOVING) - DAY

The car begins to buckle violently. Jack grips the steering wheel, panic crossing his face.

JACK
You're shitting me.

Smoke billows from underneath the hood of the car. The engine sputters and dies as Jack steers the Toyota to the snowy shoulder of the road.

INT. SQUAD CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Howard smiles as he watches the Toyota coast to a stop.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Jack and Dawn get out of the car and see Howard approaching.

JACK
Come on!

Jack takes Dawn's hand and they flee into the forest.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

The two push through the dead, snow-encrusted trees, looking over their shoulders as

HOWARD

gets out of his car and pursues them into the woods.

JACK AND DAWN

head deeper into the wilderness, fighting against the thick snow and skeletons of bushes and trees around them.

HOWARD

keeps on their trail. He stares intently at the couple's footprints in the snow.

INT. JAGUAR (MOVING) - DAY

Gary stops the Jag behind Howard and Jack's cars, reaches over Beth and opens the glove compartment. He pulls out his pistol, to Beth's disbelief.

BETH
What are you doing with that?

GARY
Fucking basket-weaving.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Jack trips on a root and tumbles to the forest floor. Dawn tries to help him to his feet but he collapses again, clutching his ankle and wincing in pain.

JACK
Get out of here!

DAWN
Where do I go?

JACK
I don't know! Just go!

Dawn hesitates a moment, then gets up and flees into the brush as

HOWARD

reaches his son.

HOWARD
Well, isn't this a sorry sight.
Where's your little tramp?

JACK
Don't call her that.

Howard crouches down to Jack.

HOWARD
You're in the position to demand
nothing. Now get to your feet.

Howard grabs Jack and pulls him up. Jack groans in pain but unsteadily stands up.

They both look up to see Gary and Beth standing before them. Gary has his gun pointed at the two.

GARY
Don't move.

HOWARD
I wouldn't think of it.

Gary reaches over and pulls Howard's revolver out of his holster. He looks at Jack.

GARY

You blew it, Jack. We could've gotten away if you just did what I asked.

JACK

Whatever happened to doing something yourself if you want it done right?

GARY

I took a chance with you. I thought you could handle it.

HOWARD

You mean you thought he was dumb enough to obey.

(to Jack)

He was never gonna take you with him, stupid. It was all a set-up to get rid of me.

GARY

Not all of it. Things just worked out that way, though.

HOWARD

You gonna plug us right here?

GARY

Of course not, Dad. We're going home first. Might as well bring things full circle.

(to Beth)

You drive the Jag. I'll take these guys in the squad car.

BETH

Not until you explain what's going on.

GARY

Don't be difficult. When we get there, I promise.

DAWN

watches nearby, hidden behind a tree. She quietly hurries further into the forest.

EXT. LITTLETON HOUSE - DUSK

The squad car and Jaguar are parked in front of the house. The unfinished addition to the home looks eerie in the dying light, a skeletal silhouette against the orange sky.

INT. HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - DUSK

Gary stands in front of the fireplace, a CAN OF GASOLINE in hand and the two guns tucked into his jeans. He stares at Howard's awards above the mantel and shakes his head.

GARY

You were really something, weren't you, Dad? A real cop's cop. A lousy human being, but what a pig. Now look at you.

He glances over his shoulder at Beth, who ties Jack and Howard to the chairs they sit in.

GARY

Make sure those ropes are tight, Beth.

BETH

Sure thing.

CLOSE ON BETH'S HANDS

as she ties Jack's hands behind his back -- the rope is so loose, Jack could easily slip his hands through them.

JACK

looks up at Beth, who glances at him before moving on to Howard. He turns to his older brother.

JACK

Why, Gary?

Gary begins to wander around the room, dousing the furniture with gasoline.

GARY

I knew there was something wrong after Eric's mother died. It was the way Mom and Officer Packard would stare at each other, the way they'd talk to each other.

Jack glances at Howard, whose expression reveals nothing.

GARY

I didn't realize what was really going on until that night. Mom's birthday. You were at a sleep-over, Jack. Dad was on patrol as usual.

INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

18-year-old Gary walks down a hall to a halfway open door.

GARY (V.O.)

I was back from a party, a little drunk, and I heard them in my room.

INT. HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - DUSK (NOW)

Gary stops pouring the gasoline and stares at Jack.

GARY

They were fucking in my room, Jack. In my bed.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Gary peers through the door, staring in mounting horror as a MAN and WOMAN MOAN OFF-SCREEN.

He slowly opens the door and walks in, reaching down and grabbing the BASEBALL BAT leaning against the wall.

GARY (V.O.)

I don't know what happened then.

Gary raises the bat and brings it down out of the frame. As the WOMAN SHRIEKS we CUT TO

INT. FAMILY ROOM - DUSK (NOW)

Howard stares up at Gary.

HOWARD

Sure you do. You beat them to death. I know because I cleaned up the mess.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Howard, ten years younger, enters the bedroom to see Gary COVERED IN BLOOD, sitting on the edge of the gore-soaked bed and holding the BROKEN END OF THE BAT. He looks up at his father, dead-eyed.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - DUSK (NOW)

Jack turns to Howard.

JACK

Why'd you let him go?

HOWARD

They were dead. Nothing was gonna change that. And I loved Gary. I wasn't gonna send him to jail. So I told him to leave town and never return.

JACK

But what he did was wrong.

HOWARD

You didn't see his eyes. I looked into them expecting to see the Devil himself. And you know what? He wasn't there.

Howard looks up at Gary, who puts down the gasoline can.

HOWARD

That was when I realized that nothing matters. There's no God in a world where a son can kill his own mother like that, no higher power that will punish him for it. No good or evil, right or wrong. Just different points of view. So I let you go, Gary. And you had to come back.

GARY

I came back to tie up loose ends. I came back for closure.

HOWARD

I wasn't gonna talk, Gary. I'm as guilty in the eyes of the law as you are.

GARY

Yeah, well, it's amazing what you can convince yourself of after ten years in exile.

HOWARD

I just wish you were man enough to do it yourself in the first place.

Gary looks at Jack apologetically as he pulls out his pistol and the one he took from Howard.

GARY

I'm sorry, Jack.

JACK

Why the postcards?

GARY

Like I told you, a boy should never grow up without a mother.

Jack glares at his brother, saying nothing.

JACK'S HANDS

are still tied behind his back, but he begins to slowly, carefully slip out of the rope binding him.

INT. CAR - DRIVER'S POV (MOVING) - DUSK

The unseen driver steers down a dark forest road as the sun sets. A figure emerges from the shadowy trees ahead of him/us: Dawn, struggling through the brush and rushing out to the middle of the road.

The driver slams on the brakes as Dawn stands in the headlight beams, staring at him/us.

INT. LITTLETON HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - DUSK

Gary turns to Beth.

GARY

I also came back for you, Beth. You can't even imagine what it was like, ten years of loneliness. But that's over now.

He reaches over for her hand. She jerks it away.

BETH

Don't touch me.

GARY

Calm down.

BETH

How do you expect me to react?

Gary takes a step toward Beth. She backs away from him.

GARY

I didn't want you to find out the truth like this. But Dad's right, it doesn't matter what happened.

BETH

Yes it does, Gary. What you did was evil, no matter what your father thinks. And I want no part of it.

Gary snatches for her hand again and she spits in his face. He staggers back, staring at her in disbelief.

BETH

You don't own me, asshole.

GARY

I still love you, Beth. I always will.

Gary points a pistol at Beth's gut and PULLS THE TRIGGER. She flies backward and hits the floor with a THUD.

JACK

yanks his hands free of the rope and throws himself at Gary.

The two collide. The pistols fly out of Gary's hands.

GARY

shoves his brother away and scrambles for one of the guns.

JACK

dashes out of the room as

GARY

raises the pistol and fires, missing. He gets to his feet and sprints after his brother.

INT. HALLWAY - DUSK

Gary rushes into the hallway and stops, looking, listening. Nothing. He walks through

VARIOUS FIRST FLOOR ROOMS

Gary cautiously moves from room to room.

GARY

Come back, Jack. I won't do anything to you, I promise. We can leave together. Why are you hiding, anyway? No matter what I've done, Dad is the one who's wronged you. I never tried to make you do anything you weren't ready to do on your own.

He ends up back in the

FAMILY ROOM

Both chairs are now empty. Howard has escaped. Gary sighs.

GARY

Shit.

There's a BUMPING SOUND. Gary turns to see

JACK

sprinting upstairs.

GARY

heads for the staircase when

HOWARD

rushes up behind him, pistol pointed at his head.

HOWARD

Freeze, Gary.

GARY

Don't do anything stupid, Dad.

HOWARD

I'm not gonna do anything I
shouldn't have done ten years ago.

Gary suddenly ducks out of the way of the barrel. Howard pulls the trigger. The bullet strikes

A CHAIR

across the room, which BURSTS INTO FLAMES as the gasoline that Gary was pouring earlier IGNITES.

GARY

swings around and punches Howard as the FIRE SPREADS throughout the room.

Howard staggers back, dropping his gun next to Beth's body.

Gary points his pistol at his father, but flinches as FIRE licks near his face. He raises his arm in protection.

HOWARD

sprints out of the room to

THE FRONT DOOR

which is ABLAZE.

Howard turns and dashes up the stairs. Gary follows.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - DUSK

Howard rushes in and heads for his dresser. He throws the top drawer open and tosses aside clothes, finding an open box of ammunition and an empty holster.

He whirls around to see Jack standing by the door, pistol pointed at him. Howard hisses:

HOWARD

Put that down. I'm on your side,
Jack.

JACK

Don't ever say that, Dad. We're
not even playing the same game.

GARY (O.S.)

So do it, Jack.

Jack turns to see Gary standing next to him, pistol aimed at his head. SMOKE drifts through the second floor from downstairs.

GARY

You know you want to. You know I want you to. Pull the trigger and we go off and live happily ever after. Don't make me kill the both of you. I love you, cowboy.

JACK

You have a funny way of showing it.

GARY

So you're a little slow. You just need some encouragement.

Jack stares at his father, pistol still trained on him.

HOWARD

stares back. Fear creeps into his expression.

JACK

takes a deep breath. Steadies the gun with both hands. Takes aim. Pauses.

He SQUEEZES THE TRIGGER.

HOWARD

drops to the ground as the BULLET whizzes by his head and slams into the wall behind him.

GARY

scowls as he looks across the room.

GARY

Shit, Jack, you missed --

JACK

swings the pistol around and smashes it into Gary's face.

GARY

staggers back into the hallway, FIRING blindly. Most of the shots go wild.

JACK

is thrown against the wall with a shout, shot in the leg -- a flesh wound. He falls to the carpet, dropping his gun.

GARY

shakes off the pain and rushes into the room again as

JACK

crawls into the bedroom's bathroom and slams the door shut.

INT. BATHROOM - DUSK

Jack backs away from the door as it begins to SHAKE.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR

Gary throws himself at it.

GARY
Open up, goddamn it!

He steps back and FIRES his pistol at it.

INT. BATHROOM - DUSK

Jack hits the floor as BULLETS tear through the door, whizzing by overhead and shattering the ceramic tiles lining the shower wall.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR

CLICK! CLICK! Gary's gun runs out of bullets.

The door flies open and Jack rams into Gary. The two tumble across the room.

Gary slams a fist into Jack's leg wound. Jack howls and chomps down on his brother's fingers. An ugly brawl.

Gary throws his brother off and crawls away, staring at him in near-admiration.

GARY

I'm sorry it didn't work out,
Jack. I could've used a guy like
you out in L.A.

JACK

It's a real shame.

Jack scrambles out into

THE HALLWAY

which is filled with SMOKE. FLAMES from the first floor
have spread up the stairs. No escape that way.

Jack gets to his feet and rushes into another room. He
slams the door shut as Gary hurries after him.

INT. BEDROOM - DUSK

Jack throws open the window and looks out.

JACK'S POV

The unfinished addition to the house is ten feet below.
SMOKE billows around the house like dark clouds.

JACK

begins to climb out the window as

GARY

breaks the lock on the door and staggers in. He rushes
over to Jack and grabs him.

The two grapple. Jack is half out the window, straddling
the windowsill as Gary tries to drag him back into the
house.

Jack pulls abruptly, tumbling out the window and taking
Gary with him.

THE TWO BROTHERS

fall onto the bare wooden roof of the addition. They
roll down the incline and drop through a gap in the
planks.

INT. UNFINISHED ADDITION - DUSK

Gary and Jack drop through the roof and hit the ground with a graceless thud. Gary sits up, groaning, to see Jack disappear around some lumber.

Gary gets to his feet, wincing. He looks around. The setting sun shines through the DIRTY PLASTIC SHEETS covering gaps in the outside walls. Some inside walls are solid, some aren't. The skeletal maze of 2x4s is disorienting in the dying light.

He turns around to see the door leading into the original house. It's open, and the FIRE can be seen through the SMOKE, consuming the home and looking like nothing so much as a doorway to hell.

Gary limps over to the lumber pile and peeks around it. No Jack.

GARY

All right, Jack, I'm impressed.
Just come out and we can get out
of here. You can even bring Dawn
along if you want.

Jack comes out of nowhere, a 4-foot-long wooden 2x4 in hand. He swings it at Gary, who ducks.

Something's snapped in Jack. His eyes are ablaze, wild. He swings with all his strength, shouting incoherently as he attempts to crush his brother's skull.

Gary trips and falls, rolling on the ground to avoid the end of Jack's makeshift club.

Jack keeps swinging.

He brings the 2x4 down on Gary's left wrist. Gary screams.

Jack stands over his brother, crazed and sweating.

JACK

Come on, tell me I'm stupid! Tell
me I'm weak! Tell me I got
nothing going for me and that I'll
do whatever you say!

GARY

You're not stupid or weak, Jack.
You just don't know what you want.
That makes you vulnerable.

JACK

I already told you, Gary. I
wanted to be you. That was my
mistake.

Jack throws down the piece of wood and slowly limps away,
heading for a hole in the outer wall that leads outside.

GARY

slowly gets to his feet, picking up the 2x4.

JACK

stares out at the field visible through the hole in the
wall, oblivious to

GARY

who staggers toward him, raising the piece of wood and
ready to strike.

A GUNSHOT rings out.

JACK

whirls around to see

GARY

stumbling to the side, clutching his neck as blood pours
through his fingers. MORE GUNSHOTS, more bullets
puncturing his body. He collapses in a bloody heap.

JACK

looks over at

HOWARD

He slumps against the doorway leading inside, revolver in
hand and Beth's body at his feet.

He stares vacantly at Gary's body, then turns his gaze to
Jack. He points the revolver at his teenage son.

The two eye each other wearily.

JACK

You gonna shoot me now, Dad?

After a moment, Howard lowers the gun and motions to
Beth.

HOWARD

She's still alive. Give me a hand.

EXT. LITTLETON HOUSE - DUSK

A squad car pulls up to the burning home. Dawn gets out with Eric. They stop and stare at

HOWARD, JACK AND BETH

emerging from the blaze. Jack and Howard are nominally supporting Beth, but all three look as if they are about to fall over.

Eric and Dawn rush over. The barely conscious Beth falls into Eric's arms. The two sink to the ground.

BETH

I'm sorry, Eric.

ERIC

Don't be. It doesn't matter anymore.

JACK AND DAWN

stare at each other.

DAWN

I don't want to go home, Jack.

JACK

We could go for a drive.

DAWN

A really, really long drive.

Jack looks at the Jaguar nearby, then back at Dawn.

JACK

Ever been behind the wheel of a Jaguar before?

They look down at

ERIC AND BETH

who fiercely cling to each other, as if something is threatening to tear them apart.

JACK

looks up at Howard, whose face reflects an emotion never seen until this point: one of remorse, even grief.

HOWARD

It was all for your mother, Jack.
I just wanted to make her proud.
When she was gone, I --

JACK

Shut up.

Howard takes a step towards Jack, who slowly backs away, shaking his head.

HOWARD

Jack...

JACK

Goodbye, Dad. Fuck you.

Jack and Dawn hurry to the Jaguar. Howard watches his son leave, tears beginning to trickle down his face.

INT. JAGUAR (MOVING) - DUSK

Dawn drives. She looks at Jack.

DAWN

What now?

JACK

One last stop.

The house can be seen burning through the rear window.

INT. CHRIS' HOUSE - DUSK

Chris, Harry and Dave sit around, still watching TV.

HARRY

Anybody feel like doing anything?

CHRIS

No.

HARRY

Just checking.

JACK AND DAWN

burst through the front door; Jack leans on Dawn slightly for support. Chris sits up and glares at them.

CHRIS

Why, come right in.

JACK

Blow me, shit-for-brains.

All three guys suddenly snap to attention as the couple storm out of the room.

INT. GARY'S ROOM - DUSK

Dawn watches Jack slowly get to his knees and reach under Gary's bed. He pulls out the traveling bag full of money and stands up.

JACK

Okay, we're set.

The two head for the door. Chris and the two guys suddenly appear, blocking their way.

CHRIS

Who the fuck do you think you are?

Jack hauls back and slams his fist into Chris' face. Chris stumbles back into Harry and Dave's arms.

Jack reaches into the bag and yanks out the pistol. He aims it at the three guys. Their eyes widen like saucers.

Chris goggles at Jack, who smirks.

JACK

I'm Jack Littleton.

(beat)

Bitch.

He and Dawn push by. Chris, Harry and Dave let them pass, then look at each other, stunned.

INT. JAGUAR (MOVING) - DUSK

Dawn drives. She glances down at the open bag of cash at Jack's feet, then up at him.

Jack slumps in the passenger seat, staring at the pistol in one hand and the postcard from L.A. in the other.

He crumples up the postcard, rolls down the window and tosses it away. A moment later, he chucks the gun also.

DAWN

Where are we going?

JACK

We'll figure something out.

DAWN

Do we have a map?

Jack glances at

THE BACK SEAT

Nothing but the copy of On the Road that Dawn gave him at the beginning of the story.

JACK

grabs it and turns back around. He flips through the novel.

JACK

We don't need one.

Dawn glances at him anxiously.

DAWN

Everything's gonna be okay,
isn't it?

Jack puts the book down and holds out his hand. Dawn takes it. They both look out at the road in the waning daylight.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DUSK

The Jaguar rips down the road that cuts through a vast field. The car roars past the sign reading: "NOW LEAVING GARRETSON, NEW YORK... COME BACK SOON!"

In the distance, the skeleton of the Littleton home can be seen ablaze against the twilight sky, rising out of the horizon like a corpse that refuses to drop dead. It looks beautiful.

THE END