

THUNDER & ASH

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EXT. DESOLATE INTERSECTION - NIGHT

Black. The whistling of country-road wind is heard. A voice, in near-whisper, speaks in narration.

JOHN (V.O.)
Everybody's got a debt to pay.

We open to the screeching sounds of a desolate small town traffic intersection as two cars violently collide audibly against a black screen.

Glass shatters. Metal warps. The sounds of slop and blood and gasoline leaking eek through.

Boom. The frame opens on a shot of an old F-150, the passenger-side door mashed-in and front of the vehicle crushed.

A shadowy figure, a young man, coughs blood and pains his way out of the bench seat through the driver's side.

He slides across it and heaves the bashed-in door open.

He falls to the ground onto some broken glass, ailing. The horn of another impacted car goes off.

HOOOOOOOOOOOOOONK.

A head leans forward onto it of an unconscious opposing driver.

The flash and heat of fire suddenly spark and illuminate the other car. It's an inevitable time bomb.

The bloodied young man scraps and crawls across the ground from his vehicle to the other.

MAN
No....no no no no....

He clamors toward the door, tears in his eyes. The horn still blares, echoing out over the cavernous expanse of darkness.

Ominous, almost melancholy score raises over the cacophony.

The young man gets to the door.

He looks in, horrified and in shock. The driver of the other vehicle is dead. The passenger. Dead.

It's already too late.

In the light of a single intersection overhead, he yells in a strained voice for help.

From a wide shot, we see no one to be found.

He looks back to the lifeless body in the driver's seat of the other car. Then back to his car.

He breaks down and falls to his knees. Cries.

FADE TO BLACK.

JOHN (V.O.)
Everybody's got a cross to bear.

The title rises from the darkness, slowly. A western-flavored score builds to theme. It reads:

THUNDER & ASH

INT. JOHN APARTMENT - NIGHT

Present day. As the score lingers and fades, a new sound bleeds over it.

No longer a horn, but the ringing of an old home phone.

RIIIIIIIIIING. RIIIIIIIIIIING.

We hard-cut open on a shot of the phone. A hand grabs for it clumsily in the dark, rousing from sleep. A man in his late 20s, John, answers.

JOHN
Uhhhh.....hello?

Still groggy, John clears his throat and sits up. A woman's voice is heard on the phone.

LINDA
John. Something....something happened.

There's a long pause. John sits up more, alert.

LINDA (CONT'D)
It's Danny. He had a seizure.

From a wide profile view, we see a silhouetted John sitting on the edge of his meager, one-room apartment in the dappled, dusky light of the early, early morning's sunrise.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - MORNING

We match-cut on a profile shot of John seated upright on an old Greyhound bus.

LINDA (V.O.)
 He's...he's gone.

John leans his head up against the glass of the bus window and looks out at the city fading away.

The bus rides out of the urban environment and on into rural plains and interstate.

EXT. BUS STATION - MORNING

John arrives in the town via Greyhound bus.

His cousin, PATRICK WESTON, 30ish, with curly hair and tattoos, is waiting to pick him up.

He greets him with an almost apprehensive embrace, hovering his arms in the air unsure whether to hug or not.

It's been some time.

JOHN
 Hey Pat.

PATRICK
 Hey, cousin.

The two hug. Patrick looks at John, holding a single backpack.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
 Any bags?

JOHN
 Just this.

PATRICK
 Oh, okay. Well.
 (motions to the lot)
 The car's just over here, then.

The two cousins load into an old family car - clearly a hand-me-down from his Aunt Linda.

They drive off.

EXT. TOWN - MORNING

We see a POV from the car in a montage of the small Texas town. The buildings are falling apart.

The signs, weathered and sun-faded, look neglected. Most businesses are gone, and homelessness and trash litter the few populated streets.

It's like a ghost town that's been re-animated unsuccessfully with a failed industry. John takes it all in.

PATRICK
Things have changed, haven't they?

JOHN
Huh?

PATRICK
I said, things have changed - you know? Since you've last been?

JOHN
Some things.

Patrick's an optimist.

PATRICK
Yeah. But still. Home is home, right?

John doesn't respond. He looks out at the town.

As economically-depressed and empty as it is - his cousin has a point. Home is home. And in the depravity, there's still some comfort of community. Familiarity. Nostalgia. We feel it all-too-easily.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
They got rid of the Eckerd's a while back. Closed it right there. But...of course they put a pharmacy in at the supermarket, so that's good.

Patrick keeps driving, trying to make conversation.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
Oh, and we got a Chick-Fil-A finally. So. Yeah, pretty exciting.

Crickets. John says nothing.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
Anyway, we went ahead and, uh, you know got the Plymouth running. So - you know - Mom said you could use her car while you're here if you'd like. So there's that.

John turns and makes eye contact with Patrick from the passenger seat.

JOHN
Thanks.

He looks back out at the town.

JOHN (CONT'D)

What happened there?

PATRICK

Oh, yeah. The fire. Man, must've been - pshhh - 8-9 years now. Huge wildfires from the state park. Blew over into town. It was in all the news. I'm sure you heard about it.

JOHN

Yeah, I suppose. I guess I just didn't know...how close it got.

Patrick seems haunted by the thought of it.

PATRICK

Close enough.

Neither say any more.

The air becomes still in the car, and they drive onward.

INT. DANNY'S APARTMENT - MORNING

John arrives at his brother Danny's apartment. It's a modest one-bedroom walk-up in a so-so part of town, but markedly nicer than John's own apartment.

John walks around and gives the place a once-over look. The walls are adorned with iconic Texas sports team memorabilia, books, shelves, old business and tax papers, and stacks of papers on tabletop surfaces.

Among them, John sees forms for Texas State Penitentiary Huntsville Probation and felon outreach programs.

John stands over his brother's desk and combs his fingers through the papers, trying to get a sense of his late brother's being.

Who was he in the years John hadn't seen him? What had he become? Good? Bad? It's hard for John to tell.

John goes through the apartment methodically - flipping the lights on and off in each room, surveying the contents of them, and moving on.

INT. DANNY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

When he finds his way to the closet, John flips a light on and sees something peculiar: A dusty shoebox with an ill-fitting cardboard lid. He carefully pulls it out and blows off the dust.

In an overhead shot John lies the box down on the bedspread. He removes the top lid and reveals a silver handgun with a dark grip and a handful of bullets under a rag in the box.

John is startled by the find. He carefully, gently pulls the gun out. It's already loaded. No safety. Ready to go. It surprises him.

John empties out the bullets from the weapon loose into the box and returns it to the rag covering it. As he's about to close the cardboard lid, however, he notices something else at the bottom of the box: An envelope.

On this envelope, in Danny's own handwriting, there reads: 'FOR JOHN'.

John feels a nauseous sensation. It's a letter for him. And what's more: **He knows what it's about.**

Beat.

John doesn't let himself get too emotional. He collects and re-centers himself, pushing back down the inevitable explosion of his own grief.

John thinks hard. He holds the letter right up to his eye-line. No. Not today.

HONK! HONK!

From outside the apartment, Patrick waits in the car. John leans over his shoulder and yells out the window.

JOHN
Yeah, I'm comin'!

He returns the letter to the box, along with the gun, and closes the lid.

EXT. AUNT LINDA'S STREET - DAY

John and Patrick cruise down a neighborhood block. The nostalgia creeps-in on John with a comforting familiarity. One of his childhood staples, less-destroyed by the apparent dilapidation of the town. Home.

INT. AUNT LINDA'S HOUSE - DAY

John walks into a modest craftsman house in a small neighborhood off of the main square. It's his aunt's home.

His cousin Patrick, clearly too old to be at home, still lives there. No sign of an uncle.

LINDA greets John.

She's warm and welcoming, with a comforting, small-town sort of air about her. She's shorter than the tall Weston boys, with warm-hued hair and a knit sweater on.

Linda opens her arms wide for a hug.

John is resistant, but sees the emotion on her face. He leans into the sentiment, and they hug.

Linda buries her face in John's chest with a long-anticipated reconnection. She holds her nephew tightly and speaks under her breath.

LINDA
It's gonna be ok. It's gonna be ok.
Alright?

Linda pushes John away from her face, but holds his forearms with her hands, not letting him go. She looks up to him.

LINDA (CONT'D)
You're here, now.

John reaffirms her.

JOHN
I'm here. I'm here.

Linda tries to hold in her grief.

LINDA
I'm sorry.
(wipes eyes)
I don't mean to be a wreck. It's
just-

She looks to Patrick, standing in the doorway still, then back up to John's face.

LINDA (CONT'D)
We're just so happy to have you back.
I'm so sorry it had to be for this.

She hugs him again.

JOHN
I am, too, Aunt Linda. Me too.

John completes the hug. Beat.

LINDA

I just. I just don't want you to worry. I've got everything handled. There's some paperwork to deal with and-

Linda catches herself.

LINDA (CONT'D)

You know what? Too much for now. Sorry.

(puts her hands on
John's arms again)

You just get settled. Welcome back home.

John nods in a bittersweet thanks.

INT. AUNT LINDA'S HOUSE BEDROOM - DAY

John settles-in and sits on the edge of the bed in the guestroom of Linda's house.

He looks around the room - untouched in probably 15-20 years. He sighs.

It's a lot, emotionally, to be back in the town.

JOHN

(whisper)

Okay....yep. Okay.

John takes a long, self-soothing breath. He sets his bag down and grabs the car keys out of a bowl on the side-table.

He's off on his own, ready to reacquaint himself with the town.

EXT. MAIN STREET ROAD - DAY

John drives his aunt's car back down the main road by himself. He surveys the town he's kept away from for so many years.

On the side of a few corners he sees something disturbing - drug dealers, heroin-starved addicts, and homelessness. His town, the memory of the space he knew, is an apparent state of decline and disrepair.

Why did this happen? Was it the fire? How had it been let go to such a devastating degree? How had nobody done anything?

JOHN
 (under breath, to
 himself)
 Jesus...

He keeps driving. He's hungry and decides to head to one of his old favorite spots.

John eyes the corner restaurant - an old diner - and looks with anxious anticipation at the sign. Is it still open? Or another victim of the wreckage and economic depression of time?

His car pulls up. It's open. John looks relieved.

INT. BIG EARN'S DINER - DAY

John enters a classic 1950s, greasy-spoon breakfast diner adorned in a collection of small-town signs and Texas memorabilia.

Short booths line the windows of the space, with a long countertop with barstools running parallel with them.

A large man in an apron waves at John from behind the counter. This is BIG EARN. They say nothing to one another, but John waves back.

John sits at a booth and looks at the menu.

He's been here before, but its been many years and he carefully surveys the space.

It is, at-once, both completely unchanged and totally different. A blend of memory and deja vu sets in, right as a waitress comes up to him.

ESPIE
 So, what are we thinkin' about today?

John is still looking over a menu.

JOHN
 Sorry?

He looks up. The server is smiling at him, brightly. She's a young, beautiful hispanic girl. 16-17 years old.

Her smile is radiant and her eyes, a glistening hazel color, pierce with soulful sincerity. This is ESPERANZA 'ESPIE' RAMOS.

ESPIE
 Oop - no. I'm sorry! I should've
 introduced myself. I'm
 (MORE)

ESPIE (CONT'D)

(taps name-tag)

Esperanza and I'll be your server today.

(she whispers jokingly)

But really you can just call me Espie. Everyone does.

JOHN

Espie?

ESPIE

Yep, that's me!

JOHN

Can I get a cup of coffee and maybe, uhhhh, #2. No melon, eggs scrambled. Salsa, too, if you have it.

ESPIE

Of course. Bacon or sausage?

JOHN

Bacon.

Espie smiles with a slight air of melancholy, bittersweetly.

ESPIE

Heh. You know another guy orders the exact same thing. Or, well, *used to*. Hmmm.

Espie looks sad. John isn't sure what to do.

ESPIE (CONT'D)

I'll - uh - be right back with your coffee.

Espie goes behind the counter to grab the coffee. As she's there, Big Earn comes to her and whispers in her ear. She looks shaken. She grabs the coffee and rushes it back to John.

ESPIE (CONT'D)

Here - ahem - you go.

JOHN

Thanks.

ESPIE

So. I didn't. I didn't know...

JOHN

Yes?

ESPIE

You're John Weston.

John nods.

JOHN

I am, yes.

Espie has a pit in her stomach.

ESPIE

Danny Weston's *brother*, 'John Weston'?

JOHN

The very same.

It hits her.

ESPIE

Oh my gosh. I'm. I'm - so - sorry
for your loss. It's-

John tries to silence her condolences.

JOHN

It's okay-

ESPIE

No, it's not. It's-

Espie's a kid. She feels the emotion more than she can describe her own consolation to John.

She grabs at her apron, as if to de-stress herself. She looks somber.

ESPIE (CONT'D)

Your brother was, like, my favorite customer.

She smiles, but her voice breaks. She laughs and wipes a tear away.

ESPIE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

JOHN

It's okay.

ESPIE

No, it's-

John reassures.

JOHN

Really, it's okay.

Espie leans and puts her hand on top of John's. The physical touch is sweet, but strange and unexpected.

ESPIE

He was a really good man.

John isn't sure how to react. He nods.

JOHN

Uh- thanks. Thank you.

Espie realizes she's been too personal. She wipes away the sullen face. Once again, she's the peppy waitress.

ESPIE

Anyway. Yes. I'll - um - I'll go
get your food!

John looks out the window. He closes his eyes and pauses. He listens to the sounds of cars passing by until-

PLINK. The sound of a porcelain plate being placed on the countertop.

John looks back down at the diner table in front of him. Bacon and eggs. Salsa. No melon. Espie's dropped the plate and quickly hurried along to her next table. What's she avoiding? Grief, awkwardness, embarrassment? Or just him? John isn't sure.

He looks back out the window. The sounds of swishing cars grow louder and echo-out until -

CUT TO:

EXT. CAR THROUGH TOWN - AFTERNOON/SUNSET

John continues his drive through the town. The surrounding areas. We see a montage of important spaces. The high school. His parents' old house. The church. The local motel. The hotspots he used to visit and places and people he knew all so well.

The drive is therapeutic, in a way - offering John a reminder and refresher of the many memories and experiences his mind tethers to his old stomping grounds. The sun sets.

To cap it off, John pulls the car over at his favorite old convenience store: Quick-N-Stop.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - EVENING

John enters a small, dilapidated convenience store.

He searches up and down the aisles, unsure what he's really looking for.

RUSS

John? Johnny Weston?

John turns around. It's the clerk at the register, a man of similar age to John. This is RUSS.

JOHN

Hey man.

RUSS

Holy shit, it is you. What's goin on, man? Long time.

JOHN

Yeah, definitely.

RUSS

My - uh - sorry for your loss. My mom told me.

JOHN

No, yeah. Thanks.

RUSS

So how ya been? How's the big city? You still remember us small-time folks?

JOHN

Heh. Yeah, I mean -

John's cut off by Russ' enthusiasm.

He realizes this is going to be an increasingly persistent conversational reaction as he reconnects with people in the town.

He has to just endure it.

RUSS

Anyway yeah me, man, I've been good. I got something good goin' on working with

(motions to cover his mouth, as if telling a secret)

'you know who'.

JOHN

Who?

John is confused.

JOHN (CONT'D)

The quick-n-stop?

Russ laughs.

RUSS

'The quick-n-stop' Ha, right? No.
No. This is just part-time, man.
This ain't my thing, no.

JOHN

Oh, sorry - yeah I didn't- I didn't
know.

RUSS

It's alright. I mean I've been
moonlighting with the big dog. Yeah,
about 18 months now. They started
me - uh- they call it "mulling" - or
maybe "muling" haha. But yeah I got
graduated up. So now they got me
handling night security at the front
of operations. Pretty cool. So,
like I said, this is just part-time.
Hopefully.

JOHN

Sorry, I guess I don't know who you
mean.

RUSS

Well, c'mon. I mean Danny was -
like- his *main* guy. Surely...

Russ leans in and speaks in a quieted voice.

RUSS (CONT'D)

You're telling me you don't know Moe
Cirillo?

John shakes his head.

RUSS (CONT'D)

Shit, man. I didn't know. Well
yeah. Things are good. I mean -
good as they can be here, am I right?

Russ chuckles with nervous laughter. John doesn't give him
much of a reaction.

John puts a bag of sunflower seeds on the counter. Russ waives
him off.

RUSS (CONT'D)

On the house.

JOHN

Thanks.

There's an awkward air in the moment. Russ tries to break it
with a non-sequitur of small talk.

RUSS

So yeah I'm sure you heard but we got a Chick-Fil-A a while back, too.

JOHN

Yeah.

RUSS

Right, right. So yeah, that's pretty cool. I mean - you know - like my main day off is Sundays. And they're not open Sundays. So that part kinda sucks. But it's - you know - it's whatever.

Russ yammers. John cuts him off.

JOHN

I'll be seein' ya, Russ.

John starts to walk out.

RUSS

Oh, haha. Yeah, sorry. Take care, man.

John nods. He walks out.

EXT. THE THIRSTY MULE - NIGHT

A slow dolly-in on the exterior of a classic Texas dive bar, 'The Thirsty Mule'.

The outside is dingy and dilapidated, like much of the town, but retains a sort of expected rustic veneer of honky-tonk cowboy culture and a saloon-style watering hole.

The windows and signage are littered with the chemical hiss, buzz, and flickering glow of neon lights.

A rogues gallery of trucks and old-school SUVs - Broncos, Blazers, Land Cruisers - line up along the accompanying unpaved lot.

Western music plays from inside the walls, escaping as the door at the entrance swings open and closed.

INT. THE THIRSTY MULE - NIGHT

The interior of the bar is even dirtier and more expectedly-run-down than the exterior.

Neon signs, old cigarette ads, famed Texas sports team memorabilia, old polaroids, and high school varsity posters paper the walls.

John sits with company drinking a bucket of beers.

A collection of old childhood friends, acquaintances of his brother, and family:

-A man with scruffy long black hair and a goatee, Josh Baldomero. A childhood friend sitting beside John.

-John's cousin, Patrick Weston. Sheepish and quiet, but happy to be there, sitting to the other side of John.

-A late-20-something female friend, Ashley Hemming. An old classmate of John's. A real cowgirl aesthetic. Biracial.

-An older, late-30-something friend of his brother, Alberto Thomas. The most-senior and responsible of the group, Alberto is clearly also now the town pastor. He sits across from John and eyes his return with careful hesitation.

-And, approaching the table, another late-30-something, Foxworth Rawlins. Fox wears a jean jacket and smokes from a cigarillo - walking up to the group with the jokey, unearned swagger of the class clown from school.

ALBERTO

About time, Fox.

Fox shrugs with a cigarillo still in his mouth and hugs Alberto.

FOX

Hey man, don't hate on me just because I got shit to do, okay? We can't all only be busy with the lord.

Alberto reacts.

ALBERTO

Alright, alright. Yeah yeah.

Fox turns toward John.

FOX

Little Johnny!

JOHN

Hey, Fox.

FOX

Shit, man. It's been a minute. How you been?

Fox catches himself.

FOX (CONT'D)

Oop. My bad. You know - I mean
'how you been aside from your brother
dying'.

Josh and Alberto cringe. Ashley rolls her eyes. Josh knocks Fox's shoulder.

JOHN

Nah, no. It's alright. It's alright.

John claps hands and gives a welcoming hug to Fox.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I've been good, man. Good.

FOX

Big city boy out here, back in his
'humble roots'.

John feigns laughter.

JOHN

Heh. Something like that.

FOX

Hey listen, man. I'm - you know-
I'm sorry I didn't make it to the
funeral. You know I don't do funerals,
man. Too much death.

ALBERTO

Dumbass, the funeral's on Saturday.

FOX

Huh?

ASHLEY

Hasn't happened yet.

FOX

Shit. My bad, man.

JOHN

It's fine.

FOX

No, it's-

JOHN

Fox. It's fine.

John feels an awkward air. He looks to escape it, if only momentarily.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 I'm gonna hit the bar. Anyone -
 want-
 (motions for beers)
 2? 3? 5?

Patrick gets up.

PATRICK
 Oh no, Johnny. I got it.

JOHN
 No, no. It's fine. No worries.
 It's - it's on me.

Patrick looks to John, who motions for him to sit back down.
 He does.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 So, I'll just get a bucket, I guess.

The group nods.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 Good. Be right back.

John heads toward the bar.

INT. THE THIRSTY MULE - BARTOP - NIGHT

John walks over to the bar to get a new bucket of beers.

On the other side of the bartop, a beautiful young woman tends bar. She cleans out a dirty glass mug with a rag, eyes focused down.

As she looks up, we get a good look at her. Dark blonde, late-20s, with an Old Hollywood-style figure and kind, striking green eyes. A real 'girl next door' presence. This is JEN WHITMORE.

John is taken aback for a moment. He knows this person.

As he approaches the bar, she locks eyes and, similarly, stammers. She, too knows him.

JEN
 Hey.

The moment is awkward.

JOHN
 Hey.

JEN

So....you - you're back.

JOHN

Today. Well, late last night. But,
yeah. Just got settled.

John looks around the bar-top.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Soooo...you're workin' here, then?

Jen plays off a light knee-jerk embarrassment dismissively.

JEN

Oh, pssh.

(waves off)

Sure. I mean I 'work' here but I
don't "work" here. It's just a temp-

(catches herself)

What can I get you?

JOHN

Oh, heh. Uhhh right. Can I get a
bucket of-

Jen knows him. She finishes the sentence with a knowing
anticipation.

JEN

Miller Lites. Of course.

John smiles. The first real smile we've seen.

JOHN

Yeah. Thanks.

He hands her a credit card. She waves it off.

JEN

I'm sorry about Danny. He was-

Jen calculates between an honest answer and a kind one. She
can't decide which John deserves.

JEN (CONT'D)

- well. He'll be missed, I know.

Jen pivots back to the bar and loads up a bucket of beers.
She opens all the bottle caps in quick succession and slides
it forward to him. John looks down and receives the bucket.

JOHN

Thanks.

John turns to leave, but catches himself.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Hey, listen. I'm here for a couple days if you. I mean. I don't know what you -

Jen cuts him off.

JEN

The funeral.

JOHN

Yeah.

Jen doesn't know whether to show compassion and console John or pretend everything is the same. The extended absence of time between the two in an unspoken shared past bleeds into a pronounced silence in the moment.

Beat.

JEN

I'm - sorry. You know, about Danny. It's a terrible thing. I know you know.

JOHN

Thanks. Anyway, I don't know if you-

JEN

Go -

(composes herself)

Go hang with your brother's pals and let Fox tell you about how he's going to leave and start a grow-farm in Oklahoma.

They both laugh.

JEN (CONT'D)

Seriously, though. We can chat later.

John nods.

JOHN

Are you still staying on Sycamo-

JEN

Sycamore Street. Yes. Still me.

JOHN

So, later?

Jen gives a warm nod back.

JEN

Later.

John returns to the group.

INT. THE THIRSTY MULE - POOL TABLES - NIGHT

The friends and family have now moved to the pool table area of the bar. As expected, Fox is regaling the group in a story.

MUSIC CUE: "Somebody" by Harper O'Neill.

FOX

Your brother was a good man. I mean he always kicked it with me, you know?

Fox points the pool cue at John.

FOX (CONT'D)

That, **AND** he sold me some really good weed.

Patrick and Alberto cut him off.

PATRICK

Fox!

ALBERTO

Come on, man - don't.

Fox, playfully, looks oblivious.

FOX

What?

JOHN

It's fine.

The group relaxes. Fox continues.

FOX

Anyway, yeah. He used to sell me some really good stuff. And, to be frank, I don't always know why he was nice to me. Because years prior, *I used to sell **HIM** some really BAD weed.*

The groups laughs. Even Alberto cracks a smile.

ASHLEY

Haha. That's the circle of life, I suppose.

Ashley swigs her beer and nudges Josh.

JOSH
Right, Alberto?

ALBERTO
I'd say there's a *little more to it* than that, certainly. But I'll give you the poetic humor of it all. Or, should I say, we give it:

Alberto raises a glass in salute.

ALBERTO (CONT'D)
(toasting)
To Danny.

The group responds in unison.

EVERYONE
To Danny!

The group clink beer bottles and drink, soaking in the memory of their friend. Celebrating his life. The music reaches its chorus.

We see a quick montage of shots of the group enjoying the moment. They hang out, shoot the shit, smoke, drink, and revel in each other's company as the musical track fades down.

Fox throws his jacket back on and sets down the cue.

FOX
Oop. It's about that time.
(looks at watch)
I gotta bounce, man. All these white people around? Make me feel nervous.

Josh rolls his eyes.

ASHLEY
Uhhh, hello?

Ashley gestures to herself.

FOX
Nah. Doesn't count.

Ashley looks offended and annoyed.

ASHLEY
What-

Josh cuts her off. Ashley lets it go.

JOSH
You're always around white people, Fox. Your whole life in this town.

Fox nears the exit. He jokes.

FOX
Yeah, and I always feel nervous.
Hence, why I smoke so much weed.

The group laughs again.

Fox knows he's the class clown of the bunch. Even John cracks a smile - a rare moment of levity in the cloud of his grief.

It's a nice moment.

John looks back, from afar, at Jen working the bar. She doesn't see him gazing at her, and he holds the look.

Beat.

John motions to Patrick.

JOHN
Hey. We should-

PATRICK
What's up?

John leans and nudges his head as if to signal to leave.

JOHN
Hit it, too. Probably, you know.

PATRICK
Oh, oh yeah yeah. Sure.

Patrick downs his beer. He hugs Josh and Alberto. John, still warming into the reunion, keeps some distance.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
Be seein' ya, guys.

ALBERTO
Take care.

John nods. The two cousins leave.

INT. PATRICK CAR - NIGHT

Patrick and John drive back together at night.

Patrick still eases his way into trying to rebuild familiarity with his cousin. He quips some friendly banter.

PATRICK
So. Good times tonight.

John looks out the window.

JOHN

Yeah...

PATRICK

Yeah. Yeah. Good to see everyone,
too. Good times.

John scans across the drug dealers and addicts on the street
once more. He grimaces at it from the passenger seat.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

I've got the spare keys to Danny's
apartment. So I figured I'd leave
those with you and just drop myself
back off, right?

John's mind is still on the decaying town. He doesn't respond.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

You could stay there tonight, I think.
Give you some privacy in going through
it, if you'd like-

John cuts into his offer with a burning question.

JOHN

Who's Moe Cirillo?

Patrick's eyes involuntarily widen, as if in fear.

PATRICK

Wha-what? Who?

JOHN

Moe Cirillo. It was a name my buddy
Russ said earlier. You know it?

Patrick rolls the windows up. He locks the doors. It's as
if they're speaking about a sinister presence that might hear
them.

PATRICK

I mean....do I know it? Yeah. Who
doesn't? He's why things here are
the way they are.

JOHN

How do you mean?

PATRICK

How do I mean? Pfft. Look around,
this town is sick. Dying, even.

John looks alarmed.

JOHN

Drugs?

Patrick solemnly looks over, driving, and nods.

JOHN (CONT'D)

And Danny? Him too?

Patrick closes his eyes in pain. He nods again.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Jesus.

PATRICK

I guess we all thought you knew.

John looks remorseful.

JOHN

No. No, I didn't.

Beat.

JOHN (CONT'D)

And this Cirillo....he's....?

PATRICK

In *this* town?

Patrick looks out to the dilapidated streets.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

Might as well be the Boogeyman.
God. The Devil. All of it, wrapped
up into one.

JOHN

What do you- what do we do about it?

Patrick shrugs. He's had these discussions with his other
cousin, Danny, in the past it seems.

PATRICK

Nothing much we can do.

(sighs)

Things are the way they are.

Patrick seems disgusted. He's watched his home destroyed and
feels powerless.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

First the fires. Then the depression.
Now it's all about the money. Money
and the drugs. Cartels bring it up.
Cirillo ships it back out. Been
like that for a while.

JOHN

Police?

Patrick shrugs.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I don't understand. Where does that
leave you? Aunt Linda? The- the
town itself...?

Patrick pulls up to his stop. He looks down to his lap,
dismissively. Defeated.

PATRICK

Just collateral damage, I guess. I
mean. You know my cousin Al, right?
On my dad's side? He was a dealer.
Just....Cirillo destroyed him.

John looks shocked.

JOHN

What do you mean?

Patrick ignores the question and opens the car door.

PATRICK

This is me.

Patrick gets out of the car and walks over to the other
window. He leans back into it and offers John a warning.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

But listen. A bit of advice?

JOHN

Sure.

PATRICK

I'd keep that name to yourself,
Johnny.

(beat)

It's more trouble than it's worth.

John nods. Patrick walks away from the car.

JOHN

Thanks, Pat.

Pat nods.

PATRICK

Goodnight, man.

JOHN

Goodnight.

Patrick enters his house. John looks to the post-it note on the dashboard kindly left for him. It reads: 'DANNY'S APT: 3502 Arbor Walk Court - 2D'.

He heads to his brother's apartment.

INT. DANNY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

John arrives back at Danny's apartment. As he walks throughout the space, he reflects once again on getting a sense of who his brother truly was in adulthood. His eye catches the probation form once more. He lingers on it as we hear a ringing.

RIIIIIIIING. RIIIIIIING.

With each ring the echo of the past comes forward until, in a quick cut, we're back with a younger John standing in his own modest apartment, staring at an answering machine.

INT. JOHN APARTMENT - NIGHT

John stands over his answering machine. The red blinking light of a message being left slowly fades in and out until-

BEEEEEEP. The machine goes off. A robotic callcenter voice reads a prompt:

"THIS IS A PRE-PAID CALL FROM - TEXAS STATE PENITENTIARY HUNTSVILLE - FOR INMATE..."

From the speaker, a voice we haven't yet heard. Danny himself.

DANNY
(voicemail)
Daniel Weston, Jr.

"...TO ACCEPT PLEASE PRESS ONE."

John stares at it, coldly. He doesn't answer. He doesn't move. He just waits.

BEEP. Nothing. He ignores his brother's call. As he turns his shoulder away from the machine, we cut back.

INT. DANNY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

On the turn of a shoulder Danny walks back into his brother's bedroom and over toward the shoebox he's left on the bed. As he approaches it again, he hears a noise.

INT. DANNY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Outside, John hears the loud engine noise of an old sedan.

Glug glug glug glug.

He goes to the window and peaks through the curtains. Outside are two men entrenched in shadow - one tall and one shorter - standing right up against a running car with the headlights turned off.

John is unnerved by the stalking presence of the two men, but decides not to engage. It's been a big day. This is a problem for another one. He makes his way back to the bedroom.

INT. DANNY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Back in the bedroom, John once again lifts the letter from the box on the bed. 'FOR JOHN'. He holds it close.

Beat. He resists the urge to open it.

Instead, he closes the shoebox up and slides it under the edge of the bed.

John turns the remaining light source, a table lamp in the bedroom, off. The action throws the apartment into darkness. CLICK.

One day down. A few more to go. Done for now, onward to the next morning.

INT. SUPERMARKET - MORNING

The next morning. Friday. John accompanies his aunt at the local supermarket. Like much of the town, the grocer is a dilapidated shade of its former self - with dirt-stained switches and door handles and the bleed and yellowing of rust and age dripping down the walls.

The supermarket is a place stuck in time and scope - not quite the new, bright, clean mass-chain megastore. Not the modest, Ma-&-Pop bodega, either. It's a relic very much of the town it's in. There's a comfort in it, almost.

John and Linda enter the store.

LINDA
I'll grab a cart.

John nods.

JOHN
Okay.

Linda heads over to the shopping cart trolley area. By it, a scruffy, almost homeless-looking man loiters.

He's 40 or so years old, with filth-drenched workman's clothes and a long, scraggily beard. He appears to be a drug addict. This is AL MCGINNIS.

Al is Linda's nephew through her deadbeat ex-husband. A relative from the other side of the tracks. Unrelated to John, but tangentially-connected, as most people in the town are.

John looks back and sees Al arguing with Linda, who grabs the cart and tries her best to ignore the man and dismiss him. Al grabs at her shoulder and pleads with her. She ignores. It appears he wants money. He pulls on her elbow as she pushes the cart. She rebuffs him.

John is unsure what to do - does he intervene or let his aunt deal with it? Would it be overstepping? He doesn't know. Al presses Linda.

AL MCGINNIS

It's not even that much. \$150.
\$200 tops.

LINDA

We went over this. No more.

AL MCGINNIS

Come on! I just need a *little bit*.

Linda gets more forceful.

LINDA

I said no. No, Al. That's it, okay?

Linda looks back at her aging nephew with a stern, knowing command. She raises her eyebrows and he goes silent as she pushes a cart away from him.

The argument seems to be settled. Al backs off for a moment.

Linda looks to John and smiles, trying to awkwardly play-off the situation. She begins returning with the cart. As she nears John, Al approaches her again.

AL MCGINNIS

I don't need you anyway, goddamn
bitch!

Al shoves Linda hard from the back. She pushes into the cart, knocking her head lightly and falling to the ground.

John rushes over as Al backs away, going back to the front entrance of the supermarket doors.

LINDA
It's alright. I'm alright.

JOHN
Linda, are you-

Linda doesn't want his pity or support. We can tell, embarrassed as she may be, she's also strong.

LINDA
I can get up, myself. No worry.

Linda stands and dusts herself off.

LINDA (CONT'D)
See? I'm fine, really.

JOHN
Are you sure?

Linda looks sad for a moment, then finds a smile. A brave face to put on top of her grief.

LINDA
I may be getting older, but I'm not dead. I'm good. Let's go get the groceries, yeah?

Linda tries to move past the situation. John relents.

JOHN
Yeah, okay.

INT. SUPERMARKET AISLE - MORNING

John and Linda make their way down the aisles, filling a shopping cart.

JOHN
So that's Al, now, huh?

LINDA
If you can believe it. Poor boy grew up to be just like his Daddy. Never learned any better. And, of course, none of what's been going on has helped.

John presses.

JOHN
Aunt Linda, how often does he - you know- *harass* you like that?

LINDA
Oh, it's nothing like that, really.

JOHN

Are you sure, because-

Linda cuts him off.

LINDA

He's had lots of troubles. It's nothing on me. Danny - he used to... 'deal' with him every now and then for me.

Linda reflects for a melancholic moment on Danny's passing. She pulls herself out of it with a bit of self-encouragement. She changes the subject.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Pat said you were in Dallas for a while? Consulting?

JOHN

Heh. Nice of him to frame it that way. Temping, is more like it. Nothing permanent. Since I threw out my arm - well -

John can't let it go.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Linda, listen...

LINDA

It's ok. I'm tough, you know? I can take it.

JOHN

'Take it'? Linda, you don't-

LINDA

I said it's nothing.

Linda looks back to John with a serious stare. She's got her dignity. She doesn't want it challenged.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Now, then. I'll grab the butcher stuff and we neeeeeed
(looks to list)
Eggs, milk, and a few other things.
Aisle 8.

Linda hands the list over to John.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Do you think you can manage? Meet me at the front to checkout?

John grabs the list.

JOHN
Oh, sure. Yeah. Aisle 8.

John looks to his aunt and smiles, then back down the long aisle from the back of the store toward the entrance, where he sees Al lingering outside the old, automatic sliding glass doors, asking each passerby for money.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I'm on it.

CUT TO:

INT. SUPERMARKET DAIRY AISLE - MORNING

John opens the door of the dairy cold-case and pulls out a classic old-school Libbey glass quart bottle of milk. He looks out toward Al with an intense ferocity. A brewing anger, rising.

He can't help himself. He holds the milk bottle down at his side and paces toward the exit, carrying it out.

CUT TO:

EXT. SUPERMARKET LOT - MORNING

John exits the store, heading toward Al. With the palm of his hand he carefully unscrews the top of the milk bottle with one hand and lets it fall by his side. The milk sloshes and spills out the top as he walks.

From a continuously-moving profile tracking shot we see John flip the bottle upside down, still walking, letting the milk spill out entirely into the parking lot. As he empties it, he nears Al, who looks back up with a smarmy grin. He chastises John.

AL MCGINNIS
Well well, little Johnny Weston.
What do you want? You happen to got
a 20 I could borrow?

Before he can finish, John increases the pace of his walk and rushes up to Al, hitting him in the side of the face with the milk bottle. SMASH! The glass shatters into a thousand pieces.

AL MCGINNIS (CONT'D)
Ahh! God! Dammit!

Al stammers back and leans down on his kneecap. John kicks it out from under him. This is the rage he's been hiding. Holding in. He kicks Al in the stomach. As he falls, John catches his shoulder and raises it up. He looks him in the eye and makes a fist. A single punch in the face - POW! Al slumps down.

John searches for a weapon on Al. Nothing. He pulls out a wallet. Nothing in it. He throws the wallet back at Al's face. It hits him in the eye, as he cowers in a fetal-like position from the beating.

JOHN

You think because my brother's gone
you can beat up on my family, huh?

John kicks Al in the side over and over. He threatens him.

JOHN (CONT'D)

(under breath)

I asked you a question.

No response. Al flinches and covers his bleeding face. John points his finger at Al.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You never touch her again. *Ever.*

Al nods, sobbing with a pathetic, pained wale.

John stands back up, wiping off his face and looking around the parking lot. He anxiously hopes no one has seen him. His eyes scan. Empty. No one.

He appears to be in-the-clear, except for one onlooker: A tall, big fellow from the diner stands, watching from afar, holding a shopping cart and about to enter the store.

It's Big Earn.

Big Earn stares at John, looking him in the eye. John gets his composure. The curtain goes back up on the grief and anger within. He blinks a few times, then nods at Big Earn.

Beat.

Big Earn nods back, saying nothing. He turns his gaze away from John and back toward the supermarket doors. He enters.

John looks back out to the empty lot.

CUT TO:

INT. AUNT LINDA'S KITCHEN - MORNING

John helps Linda unload the groceries and put them away in the kitchen. He waits until Linda exits the room, then washes his hands more openly. We see the sore, redness and ever-so-bloody lacerations on his knuckles as he runs them under the water, hiding it from his aunt.

INT. AUNT LINDA'S HOUSE - MORNING

John returns to the trunk and pulls out another box - some of Danny's things he's brought back over to his aunt's house.

He looks across all the framed family photos collecting dust in his aunt's home. They litter the walls and surfaces of the modest dwelling, adorning it with a sort of folksy charm and intense sentimentality.

John fumbles his fingertips across the tops of some of his favorite photo memories.

Him and Danny as kids. His cousin Patrick and him at summer camp. An older photo of a handsome 20-something that looks strikingly like his brother Danny.

He picks it up by the frame and raises it ever-so-slightly.

He knows this man. He recognizes the exuberance in the photo - the same brightness Danny radiated.

As he gazes at it, Linda enters.

LINDA
You should go see him.

JOHN
Sorry?

Linda walks into the room, arms crossed as if to self-soothe, treading carefully into the suggestion.

LINDA
You should go see him while you're here. I know it'd mean so much to him.

John seems resistant. He sets the old photo of the handsome man down.

JOHN
Yeah...I don't know.

Linda smiles and leans into him with a comforting palm of supporting.

She hands him another smaller framed photo.

It's the handsome man, older, with two young boys that appear to be adolescent Danny and John. This, of course, must be their father.

LINDA
To me, too.

Linda pauses, unsure whether she should continue to compel her nephew.

LINDA (CONT'D)
Anyway, just a suggestion.

Linda hugs John's side and walks out of the room. He holds up the photo trio and sighs. He'll go see his father.

INT. RETIREMENT CENTER - DAY

John enters a retirement home.

He walks to the directory and searches for a name, scanning his finger across it. It reads: "MEMORY CARE. BUILDING B."

He takes a deep breath and sighs with a melancholic reflection.

INT. MEMORY CARE ROOM - DAY

John sits in a solitary chair, silhouetted by the light from the single window in a small, quaint hospital-like bedroom.

In the bed lies a man in his 60s, asleep. John looks to the man, who awakens confused. This is his father, Daniel Weston, Sr.

DAN SR.
W-what...groggily who - who's
there...?

John leans in from the chair to comfort his father, who he hasn't seen in person in many years.

The elder's condition has progressed and deteriorated since John last saw the man, and his lack of lucidity is at-once surprising and heartbreaking - but he presses-on.

JOHN
Hey, Pop.

Dan Sr smiles.

DAN SR.
Oh....oh, there he is. *My boy.*

Dan Sr puts his hand out toward John. John reaches back and grabs it. Dan Sr weakly pulls him inward until the two are close by the hospital-like bed.

John keeps his eyes on his father and awkwardly fumbles with his other hand to pull up a chair behind him.

He sits at his father's bedside and smiles.

JOHN

It's good to-

Before John can build into conversation, Dan Sr finds a spirt of energy and cuts him off - speaking with an unexpected liveliness.

DAN SR.

I saw the horses the other day.
They don't come around much anymore,
though. They went....

Dan Sr's thought escapes him.

DAN SR. (CONT'D)

They went.....uh.....

His face goes blank, before recoiling and resetting his expression to a friendly smile back at John.

DAN SR. (CONT'D)

My boy.

John warmly receives it. He realizes this isn't the same father he last saw all those years ago.

Time and dementia have robbed a bit of his personality. But, somewhere in the twinkle of his eyes, there are still shades of him.

JOHN

It's good to see you, Dad. I missed you. It's been....well. It's been a long time.

DAN SR.

Yeessah. Yes, very good.

Dan Sr nods. A well of emotion rumbles in John's gut.

JOHN

I'm - I'm sorry. I'm sorry I never came and saw you. I guess. I mean. Well, I'm here now.

DAN SR.

You're here. And the horses. They - did you see the horses?

John nods, playing along, somewhat tearfully. The realization of the time he's missed with his father settles into reality.

JOHN

Yeah. Yeah, Pop. I saw the horses.

Dan Sr sees the sorrow on his son's face.

DAN SR.

Oh, it's okay. It's okay. You see me when you can. I know. I know. I'm okay here.

John nods in forced, unsure agreement.

JOHN

I'm just sorry, I-

Dan Sr cuts him off, reassuring.

DAN SR.

I see Aunt Linda all the time. She keeps me company. I know you're busy. It's okay. Really, son.

John nods. Dan Sr thinks for a moment.

DAN SR. (CONT'D)

I tell ya what. Next week. Next week - you and I? We go for a **big** roadtrip up to Austin and see a show? Yeah? How about that?

John knows it won't happen, but he entertains the idea to humor his father.

JOHN

That sounds great. Absolutely great.

DAN SR.

Good....good. 'Big' show. Will you get the tickets for us?

JOHN

Yeah, Pop. I'll get the tickets.

DAN SR.

Wonderful. And we can...we can see the horses....on the way.

Dan Sr looks back out, listlessly, into open space. His mind wanders, yet again. It's tough.

John sheds a tear he tries desperately to keep at-bay. He squeezes his father's hand.

JOHN

Definitely.

Dan Sr looks back toward John.

DAN SR.

I love you, son.

JOHN

I love you too, Dad.

Dan Sr loosens his clutch and nods, tired, as if to give a signal to John to depart. John carefully stands and slowly backs away, scooting his chair back into the corner of the room.

Dan Sr slowly leans his gaze away from the light of the window and toward the shaded, darker end of the room, as if to sleep.

John takes the cue. He walks toward the door and grasps at the handle of the room. Dan Sr rustles out a few more words.

DAN SR.

And take care of John. Be sure to call him. He's a good kid. He needs his big brother lookin' out for him. He needs *you*, Danny.

John freezes in place but doesn't look back. It hits him like a ton of bricks, but he stays frozen with his eyes toward the door.

DAN SR. (CONT'D)

You two....you need eachother.

His father has thought he was Danny, his deceased brother, the entire time.

Had no one told him what happened? Had he not remembered? Was there anything he could say or have done differently?

He spares the moment and reassures his father, speaking toward the door without looking back.

JOHN

Of course, Pop. Of course.

John exits the room.

INT. TOWN BANK & TRUST - DAY

John sits with the young bank manager, MIKE MENDOZA, in his office. They finish up the documents.

MIKE MENDOZA

So just a signature *there* and *there*
(motions)
And we can get this last stack
settled.

John signs two papers.

JOHN

Good?

Mike pulls the binder back and closes it.

MIKE MENDOZA

Very good. Thanks. Now, lastly -
ahem -

(pulls over one more
folder)

Of course, there is the matter of
the - erm - the *trust*.

JOHN

Trust?

Mike recoils, realizing he's going to have to break the news
to an oblivious John.

MIKE MENDOZA

Well, yes. Uh- yeah- you see
Danny...Danny had set up a *trust*.

Mike hands John a stack of forms. John looks confused.

MIKE MENDOZA (CONT'D)

He, I think, intended for....*you*...to
perhaps run it. It's, well. It's
quite a sizable amount. So.

Mike waits for John to respond as John scans the pages.

JOHN

I don't understand...

MIKE MENDOZA

It's about \$178,000.

John looks up in disbelief. Mike nods.

MIKE MENDOZA (CONT'D)

So, erm. Yeah. Like I said. 'Quite
sizable'.

John runs his finger over the name.

JOHN

Who

(motions to name)

Who is this for? This - Esperanza?
Esperanza Ramos?

Mike nods with a bitten lip, as if holding-in a revelation he
doesn't want to have realized but knows is inevitably coming.

MIKE MENDOZA

Espie, yeah.

John looks incredulous.

JOHN
 "Espie"? The- that - the- uh- *girl*?
 The girl from the diner? The
waitress? Wha-

John sets the papers down in his lap.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 I don't....why...

John closes his eyes and breathes in.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 Why would Danny leave nearly two-
 hundred thousand dollars to
 that....*teenager*?

John thinks a terrible thought.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 Were they....what- was *he*-

Mike catches him and cuts him off.

MIKE MENDOZA
 Whoa whoa. No - not - nothing like
 that. No.

Mike realizes he's the one who has to tell him.

MIKE MENDOZA (CONT'D)
 Espie Ramos is - erm - it's her
adopted name, you see. This girl
 (Mike taps on a
 photocopied ID photo
 of the young teen in
 the paperwork)
 was *originally* Isabella.

John's gaze goes cold. He knows the name coming. He looks up from the paperwork.

We keep the shot solely on him in a slow dolly on his blank, frozen face.

MIKE MENDOZA (CONT'D)
 Isabella *Rodriguez*. From...

Mike is tremendously uncomfortable.

MIKE MENDOZA (CONT'D)
 From...well, you know... I thought
 someone had told - I mean, *surely*
 you had - I guess I thought you knew.

John slowly exhales an icy cold, long-held breath. He closes his eyes. Under his breath and the darkness of his closed eyes, he mutters back a calm, pained whisper.

JOHN

No. I didn't know.

Mike delicately walks through his words.

MIKE MENDOZA

Well. There it is. As I'm sure you can imagine, this is why - of course - Danny put *you* in-charge. So for now...

Mike carefully leans over his desk and takes back the forms from John's clutches. He puts them in a locked folder.

MIKE MENDOZA (CONT'D)

I'll just hold onto these. And we can... well, we can pick this up again before you leave town if you'd like.

Mike takes a concerted effort to smirk at John.

MIKE MENDOZA (CONT'D)

It's ok.

Mike puts his hand out to shake and end the conversation.

MIKE MENDOZA (CONT'D)

It's good to see you, John.

John breaks his entranced introspection. He gives a forced smirk back and leans in, standing out of his seat, to meet Mike's gesture. The two shake hands.

JOHN

Yeah.

A slow, whispering sound of wind carries us out of the intimate room and the echoing of distant traffic - cars swishing as the air between them compresses and passes - transitions to -

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL STADIUM BLEACHERS - SUNSET

The old high school stadium. The sun-faded signs of decades-gone state championships and forgotten glory stain the rotting planks of wood and rusting metal of the bleachers.

John stands on the edge of the bleachers and looks out. A memory in this setting hits him like a wave of nostalgia.

Boom.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL STADIUM BLEACHERS - MAGIC HOUR

We're taken back to the same location 13 years prior.

We see a younger, teenage version of John sitting on the bleachers with another man. John's the same person we've known already, but cleaner-cut, with shorter hair and a shaved, more-innocent face.

The other man, 20-something and slightly older, sits beside him. He's square-jawed and handsome, with a rugged cowboy-like presence, furrowed brow, weathered skin, and scruff. His hair, shaggy and wild, is barely combed-back in a sort of accidental, effortless cool. He wears a waxed workman's jacket, a pair of worn-down denim, and old cowboy boots.

The young man has his legs kicked up on the seat of a lower level bench of the bleachers, swigging from a beer bottle. This is him. The legend. The ghost. DANNY WESTON.

DANNY

Well, I gotta admit. You finally did it.

JOHN

Oh, shut up.

DANNY

No, I'm serious.

JOHN

Shut it, man.

DANNY

You stop that! My little brother has received a baseball scholarship to - uh - let's see? **THE** most prestigious college program in the state-

JOHN

ONE of the most prestigious college programs-

Danny corrects.

DANNY

ONE of the most prestigious college programs in the state, yes, sorry. How terrible of me to misspeak. And I. Am. Proud!

Danny shouts to the empty field. John laughs.

JOHN

Heheh - shhhh - stop. You're gonna get us kicked out.

Danny ignores it.

DANNY

I'm like a proud stage mother, watching from the side curtains biting my nails....waiting for you to mess up and ruin it.

John laughs and rolls his eyes.

DANNY (CONT'D)

I kid, I kid. No, actually though, bro. I can't wait to see what you do. Austin's a big deal.

Danny is charismatic, encouraging, and confident in a way that makes him instantly likable and endearing. We can see how his legacy and reputation precedes him.

John seems more apprehensive. There's a lingering doubt.

JOHN

Yeah...but.

DANNY

Let's hear it.

JOHN

It's nothing.

DANNY

Nah, nah. Come on. *Spill it.*

JOHN

I don't know. Summer program, not even the fall. Redshirting. Plus they're gonna make me go early - and we don't even know if the stipend is enough to cover it. Which means I'll have to use some of the lawn business to cover - which pulls from you and Dad - and....I just. I don't know.

Danny leans over to be reassuring.

DANNY

Hey - hey. Come on, enough of that. You're gonna have a great time. So we have to find the money. Who doesn't? So what, the timeline isn't exactly right? Okay, no big deal.

John laments.

JOHN
 (under breath)
 Yeah but it's not how it's supposed
 to work out-

Danny cuts him off with pragmatic encouragement.

DANNY
 Things don't always work out like
 you dream they will, baby bro. That's
 life. And that's OK.
 (beat)
 Look, Johnny - I think - I - *know*.
 I know you want *this*, okay?

Danny wants to find his words, but hazards against seeming
 overly schmaltzy or sentimental.

DANNY (CONT'D)
 So, screw the doubt that's stopping
 you. You deserve it! Hell, *I* deserve
 it. *Damn* - whatever it is - farm -
 league - intramural - selection
 society prejudiced against, you know,
 an epileptic switch-hitter.

JOHN
 Heh. I don't know that that's the
official governing body title.

Danny laughs. John opens a new beer bottle.

DANNY
 Whatever. You know what I mean. I
 missed my shot. That doesn't mean
 you have to miss yours.

Danny looks to his brother. He sees hesitation on his face.
 Almost a sense of frustrated guilt. He presses him on it.

DANNY (CONT'D)
 What's goin' on?

John is resistant. Beat.

JOHN
 I just want it to matter, I guess.

DANNY
 And it will. *You will*.

Danny puts his arm on John and warmly pats his shoulder in
 brotherly support. John is appreciative.

JOHN
What about Dad?

DANNY
What about Dad?

JOHN
I mean who's gonna watch him. Take care of - I mean with the stroke - and then - I don't know how we'll even logistically-

DANNY
Stop. Okay? Stop.
(sighing breath)
You're gonna leave this town. You're gonna go to Austin. And you're gonna do great things. Not because you *want to*.

JOHN
Oh, no?

DANNY
No. Because you *have to*. Because you owe it. To this town to get outta here. To your family. *To me*.

JOHN
Is that right?

John speaks facetiously. He still assumes they're playing a game. He smiles, taking another swig from his beer. Danny returns a more-sobering glance. He means it.

DANNY
Everybody's got a debt to pay.

The moment drops into an unexpected gravitas.

JOHN
Yeah?

Danny nods, finishing his beer.

DANNY
Maybe this one's yours.

Danny looks to the heavens above. He thinks for a moment.

DANNY (CONT'D)
Hell, maybe it's mine. *Staying here*.

Danny looks out to the skies for a moment with a glimmer of despair in his eyes. Did he miss his own opportunities? Was he destined to be of-service to John's? He doesn't know.

The thought catches him with more of a blow to his reality than expected. He reflects on it.

Beat.

Danny recomposes himself. Back to a moment of levity. He holds his bottle up to mime a toast.

DANNY (CONT'D)

I mean it. *Great things*, little brother.

JOHN

Yeah.

Danny raises his bottle toward John.

DANNY

To the future.

John raises his bottle to meet him.

JOHN

To the future.

From the back we see a silhouette of the two young men, facing a beautiful magic hour sunset, looking toward each other.

They clink beer bottles in celebration.

On the sound of the toasting, the flashback continues to the two brothers drinking and driving down a long, dark road back home, Danny in the driver's seat.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL STADIUM BLEACHERS - SUNSET

Back to present day. On the edge of the gridiron, John stands with his hands in his pockets, looking out toward the horizon, alone.

The dying light of the sun continues to set.

John takes a deep breath and looks over toward the bleachers themselves, but doesn't move to sit at them.

John turns around and walks off-frame, toward his car.

The whispering wind carries us out of the frame, like a passing truck, the same as the sound brought us into the setting. With it, we move to -

INT. BIG EARN'S DINER - NIGHT

John sits down at a center-aisle booth in the diner.

He looks down to his mug of coffee that cools more and more by the second, grasping it with both hands and tapping his index fingers on the rim. He looks, introspectively, into the dark void of the liquid, as if recalling a haunting memory.

It's too much. He releases himself from reminiscing and shakes his head, pushing the coffee away and removing himself from a trance. A sweet, concerned voice echos in his head

ESPIE

(echo)

Is something wrong?

John looks up. The voice becomes clearer. It's Espie, wearing a name-tag and smock and holding a pot of coffee. John looks up.

JOHN

Sorry?

ESPIE

Is - is *something* wrong?

Espie nudges and nods at the mug.

ESPIE (CONT'D)

With the coffee - is there something wrong with the-

John cautions to cut her off.

JOHN

Oh, yeah. No. No. It's fine.
It's - yeah, no. It's great. Thanks.

Espie smiles at him.

ESPIE

Whew. Good. I thought for a minute there maybe I had accidentally poisoned you or somethin'.

Espie laughs nervously, hoping John will match her energy and accept the small-talk joke. He sees the effort and does.

JOHN

Heh, yeah. No. I'm - no poison today, heh. Thanks, really. I'm -

John waves her off.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I'm good.

Espie nods and walks off to tend to orders in the back of the diner. As she walks away, John carefully observes her.

In slow-motion we see his view of the teen in a perspective he hadn't considered before.

She's beautiful. Poised. Innocent. Kind.

She gleefully waves at other local regulars in the diner and speaks and laughs with a radiant smile and a true, hopeful demeanor as she goes about what anyone else might just see as a dead-end job.

She lives up to her name. And what's more - she cares about it. The town. The people in her job. And it's clear.

John looks on with bittersweet realization. He feels a deep pit in his stomach.

He knows something about this girl he hadn't previously considered.

He knows who she is. He knows what she stands for. He knows, perhaps above all, why Danny would leave her so much money.

And he knows, with certainty, why only he would understand being put in-charge.

EXT. MAIN STREET ROAD - NIGHT

It's night on the main square. John drives his aunt's car back to Danny's apartment.

A shady old, busted silver Buick LeSabre follows behind him, turning with every turn he makes.

As John pulls up to a traffic light, the Buick swerves from behind and pulls up beside him.

He looks over to see two men in the vehicle - A menacing, middle-aged wise guy with a salt-and-pepper beard (TROY HUNT) and a slightly younger, equally-as-menacing hispanic man. (LUIS GONZALEZ) It's the same two men he saw following him earlier from Danny's window.

A moment of extreme tension rises as the two vehicles idle side-by-side at the red light. Time passes quickly. John is unsure what to do. Tick tick tick.

Right as the light turns green, the Buick floors it and pulls diagonally in front of John's car, halting him.

From the passenger, the middle-aged man gets out and stands in front of John's window. He points a gun directly at him.

TROY HUNT

Out.

Troy has an unexpectedly northeastern mafioso accent. It immediately stands out in the Texan setting.

He waives with the weapon to force John off the road and toward an adjacent alley.

EXT. MAIN STREET ALLEY - NIGHT

Troy holds a gun at John, who has his hands up in surrender.

TROY HUNT

Do I look like an asshole?

JOHN

What?

TROY HUNT

Do I look like an asshole? No. So put your arms down, man.

John anxiously lowers his hands slowly. Troy lowers his weapon slightly.

TROY HUNT (CONT'D)

I'm not gonna shoot you in the middle of town, who do you think I am? Christ.

(motions to Luis)

Luis.

Luis hits John in the stomach.

JOHN

Ugh!

TROY HUNT

(to Luis)

Check him.

Luis pats down John for a weapon. Nothing. He checks his waist-belt, jacket, ankles. He's clean.

TROY HUNT (CONT'D)

What- nothin?

(surprised)

Got real 'wild west' man, out here. I'm impressed. You don't know us?

John shakes his head.

TROY HUNT (CONT'D)

Well, we know you. Don't we?

LUIS
Sure do. And we knew your brother.

TROY HUNT
Sure did.

John looks confused.

TROY HUNT (CONT'D)
Oh, excuse me. I *am* an asshole.
Sorry.
(places hand on chest)
See, I'm Troy. This is my associate
Luis. Say hi, Luis.

Luis waves.

TROY HUNT (CONT'D)
We're here because we need something
from you. You see Danny - Danny *was*
an asshole that did something stupid.
He stole from someone he shouldn't
have. He put it a place he shouldn't
have.

LUIS
Big time.

TROY HUNT
And that sorta stupid's got
consequences we can't ignore.

Luis seems to echo Troy, like a hype man.

LUIS
Sure can't.

Luis tries to push John down. John slips and scraps back up
to his feet. He shoves Luis backward onto his back and slugs
Troy, who tries to deflect.

TROY HUNT
Whoa, Christ!

Luis rushes John and knees him in the stomach. John turns
and slugs him. A scuffle between the two breaks out. Punch.
Punch. Kick. Slap. The rage we've seen boiling in John lets
a sliver of itself out. Troy watches.

TROY HUNT (CONT'D)
Hey-

The fight continues.

TROY HUNT (CONT'D)
Hey! That's ENOUGH!

Troy pulls his gun back out and extends his arm out at a diagonal toward the sky. He brazenly squeezes off a shot into the air. BANG! It startles John. Dogs in the distance bark. John and Luis stop fighting.

John breathes heavily and wipes blood from his lip, trying to catch his breath. Troy motions to Luis to ease off.

TROY HUNT (CONT'D)

You finished?

John shakes his head.

JOHN

I really don't- Don't know what you're talking about.

TROY HUNT

'Don't know'? Oh, pardon my impropriety.

(facetious)

There's this small issue of one 'Danny Weston' taking 200 large from an account over about 3-4 years. A tidbit of information that was, well, *only recently* brought to our attention. An account that belonged to a certain Mr. 'Moe Cirillo'. You see, my boss. *Our* boss. That makes him unhappy.

Luis hits John.

LUIS

We don't like when the boss is unhappy.

TROY HUNT

No we do not. Not one bit. So here's what we're gonna do.

(leans down)

You're gonna fix it.

Luis hits John again.

TROY HUNT (CONT'D)

Your brother owed Moe Cirillo. So, now, *you* owe Moe Cirillo.

JOHN

What? I don't-

TROY HUNT

'D-don't - don't- '. Big bro died, I get it. My condolences, kid.

(MORE)

TROY HUNT (CONT'D)

Luis here and I are all broken-up by that shit, truly. Ain't that right Luis?

LUIS

Damn straight.

TROY HUNT

And we liked Danny, didn't we?

LUIS

Like a brother.

TROY HUNT

Like a brother, right!

Troy motions to Luis, who strikes John in the back of the legs. He falls to his knees.

JOHN

Ah!

Troy leans over and speaks more-softly to John, hunched-over.

TROY HUNT

But, unfortunately, that brother screwed us over. So here we are. Coming to collect.

John raises his arm to hit Troy. Luis catches it and flips it around, subduing him.

JOHN

Ah!

TROY HUNT

\$200,000 by Sunday.

JOHN

I don't have that....I...

They strike him again.

TROY HUNT

Say it back to me.

JOHN

Wha...

TROY HUNT

Say it back to me.

JOHN

...\$200,000....Sunday...

TROY HUNT

There we go. See? Wasn't so hard?

LUIS

Not hard at all.

Troy motions to Luis, who gets John back up to his feet.

He holds onto consciousness from the beating as best he can. Troy is impressed.

TROY HUNT

Yeah, you got some muster, kid.
I'll give you that.

John takes a pained breath, spitting out blood.

TROY HUNT (CONT'D)

And you may be Mr. Hometown Hero
bullshit or whatever. I get it.
But that ain't gonna work on me, you
know? I'm not from here. I'm east
coast. So I don't give a damn about
this place or you.

LUIS

Not a one.

Luis hands Troy three big brass rings.

TROY HUNT

(to Luis)
Thanks.

Troy puts them on his hand. He takes a business card with a handwritten number on the back of it and slides it into John's breast pocket. John is bloodied and delirious.

TROY HUNT (CONT'D)

You call this number when you have
it. Sunday. Bring the money. Move
on.

Troy makes a fist with the brass rings.

TROY HUNT (CONT'D)

See you at the funeral.

Troy clocks John with the a heavy metal fist. It nearly knocks him unconscious.

Boom. Thud.

Troy and Luis walk away and get in their car, leaving him in the alley bleeding.

INT. JEN'S DOOR - NIGHT

Beaten nearly unconscious, John drives in a pained stupor to the only place he can think of: His ex-girlfriend Jen's house.

To his surprise and delight, she still lives in the same place. She gave him the correct address.

John knocks on the door with a hesitant thud.

Jen answers. She isn't happy to see him.

JOHN

Hey. I know, I know. I'm sorry - I just-

John motions to his bloodied face.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I didn't really know where else to go.

Jen sighs and motions.

JEN

Alright, come on.

INT. JEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

John sits at a stool by the opening between the kitchen and modest dining room, only a single lamp in the space illuminating his wounds.

Jen brings over a small first aid box. She begins tending to John's injuries.

JEN

Do you want to tell me what happened?

JOHN

Not really.

JEN

Jesus. So I just have to guess?

JOHN

Heh. Just a couple punks.
(recoils)

Ow.

John waves off Jen's help from the pain of it. She dismisses, annoyed. They've been in this dynamic before.

JEN

Stop it, you're fine.

Jen leans in to look at John's forehead.

The closer she gets, the more he feels a surreal sense of intimate *deja vu* - as if passing the threshold of personal space entertains something greater.

Jen examines him.

JEN (CONT'D)

Well I don't think you're going to need stitches, so.

Jen pats his head with a swab.

JEN (CONT'D)

That's *good news*, John.

John scoffs with a sarcastic laugh.

JEN (CONT'D)

Are we just going to sit here and pretend like we *don't* have a lot of unresolved shit we need to address with eachother? Or...?

JOHN

I was kinda thinking that was the plan, yeah.

Both laugh. John looks up to Jen, still tending to his injury.

JOHN (CONT'D)

The truth is, I'm a stranger here now, Jen. A tourist. I don't know this place anymore. I wish I did. But it's changed. Only thing that's the same....is *you*.

JEN

(incredulous)

Well that's not fair to say, is it?

JOHN

How do you mean?

JEN

Things change, buddy. Don't get it twisted - I have, too. That's time. That's getting older. Part of that is just being OK with it, though.

JOHN

Yeah, I don't know.

Jen is assertive.

JEN

There's nothing to know. That's the whole deal. That's *life*.

Jen leans over and places an alcoholic swab on John's face.

JEN (CONT'D)
This is gonna sting.

Jen presses.

JOHN
Ah. Ow.

JEN
Stop being a baby. Now, come here.

Jen gets even closer.

She lightly, delicately blows on the spot to dry the sting.
She looks down to John's eyes.

He awkwardly looks back up at her, seated, as she stands.

JOHN
I missed you.

JEN
I know. You should've come back
sooner. We weren't sure....*I wasn't*
sure...

Jen can't decide what she wants to share. How vulnerable is she willing to be? John doesn't make her have to choose.

JOHN
I know.

Jen backs up to re-compose herself and heads to her kitchen.
She pours two glasses of whisky. One for her, one for him.

If they're going to get into it, they might as well drink.

Beat.

JEN
And I missed you, too...*for a time.*

She hands John his whisky. He takes a swig of it.

Jen cautiously sips on hers and takes a step back.

JOHN
Heh. The conditional asterisk.

Jen walks away from John toward the bathroom, creating more distance.

JEN
To you, maybe I'm just some person.
(MORE)

JEN (CONT'D)
 Some girl. But to me? To
 me...you...were...a lot of things.
 At least then. Most chiefly, you
 were the future.

Jen looks down, disappointed.

JEN (CONT'D)
 But that's the future that didn't
 come to be.

John looks remorseful..

JOHN
 Jen, I...I know I said some things.

JEN
 I missed you. I did. Because I
 thought I was *in love with you*.

John looks surprised. He raises to his feet and slowly walks
 her direction.

JOHN
 And?

Jen shrugs. John gets closer.

JEN
 And I had a long time to think about
 it. You sure gave me that.
 (anxiously scoffs)
 Long, long time. I think...maybe...I
 wanted to be. But in the end I wasn't
 really.

John gets feet away from Jen. She looks at him with an intimate
 familiarity.

JEN (CONT'D)
 I was just in love with the boy who
 ran away. The idea of him, at least.
 Hoping he'd come back and rescue me,
 too.

Jen looks down, somber. Reflective. Thinking about what
 could've-been and never-was.

John takes a step even closer toward her, into her space.
 She looks down.

JOHN
 I'm-

JEN

It's fine, really. I am OK. Truly.
I grew up. And what I realized about
myself is I don't need any saving.
And I'm not mad I'm here. I work at
the bar, and the school. And I like
it and the people I see. I do. I'm
not 'trapped'. This is my *home*.
That was never going to change, even
if I did.

Jen leans into John and carefully, gingerly touches her finger
to his temple, wiping away the last of his wounds. He grimaces.

JEN (CONT'D)

Still hurts, though. That part I
suppose doesn't really go away.
Phantom pain.

Jen sips her whisky and leans her shoulder into the doorway
of her bedroom. She eyes John with a nostalgic, knowing
glance.

John leans into her, nearly touching lips. He looks deep into
her eyes with a familiar, knowing glance himself.

The old ways and motions of their relationship feel as if
they haven't skipped a beat in years.

They both know it's a mistake, but make their way into the
bedroom slowly, Jen inching back into the darkness of the
doorway and John following.

The night is still young.

EXT. TEXAS HIGHWAY - NIGHT

John has a nightmarish dream of him and Danny driving down a
long, dark country road.

It starts simply, with the two brothers racing down the path
in their old F-150. They laugh and joke with each other.

DANNY

And you said *what* to her?

JOHN

Stop.

DANNY

No, seriously. I am *intrigued*.
Because the little Johnny Weston
that **I know** would never, ever fumble
a pickup so hard.

*

JOHN
You're an asshole.

DANNY
I just want to know if you sealed
the deal or not!

JOHN
"Sealed the deal" - what are you 9
years old?

Both laugh. Danny retorts, facetiously, in a bad, joking
medieval accent.

DANNY
Maybe. Maybe I am 9-years-old.
Which, of course, would stand to
reason that I am developing quite
spritely as a young lad. And maybe
I should even be congratulated for
said accomplishment.

Danny looks over to John and gestures for praise.

DANNY (CONT'D)
Please, go on. Praise me.

John rolls his eyes.

JOHN
Like I said. 'Asshole'.

DANNY
Yeah but ya still love me, don't ya?

DANNY leans over to John and rustles his hair.

JOHN
Hey, come on. Stop! Eyes on the
road.

DANNY laughs and takes a swig of his beer.

DANNY
'Eyes on the road'. I'm lookin' at
the road, see? *Road.*

Danny gesticulates out to the darkness. Both brothers drink
their beers as they barrel down the country road. They come
up to a dark highway intersection.

JOHN
Seriously.

DANNY
Seriously, you look at the road!

Danny snarks and laughs, quickly swerving as if to unnerve his brother with a practical joke.

As he does, they swerve at high speed onto the dark intersection and collide with an oncoming sedan that was narrowly in his blind spot. BAM!

The crash is swift and horrific, tossing the two young men around in the cab and shattering and contorting their truck.

A torrential downpour of glass and metal fly through the air and shower them in debris.

The sound is loud, odd, and unimaginable. BAM! BANG! SCREECH! THUD!

EXT. DESOLATE INTERSECTION - NIGHT

We return to the scene from the opening of the story. The sounds of slop and blood and gasoline leaking eek through.

Danny's truck lands with a crunch on the oil and glass-encrusted pavement.

The passenger-side door is mashed-in and front of the vehicle crushed.

Danny coughs blood and pains his way out of the bench seat. He heaves the driver's side door open.

He falls to the ground onto some broken glass, ailing.

The horn of another impacted car goes off.
HOOOOOOOOOOOOOONK.

A head leans forward onto it of an unconscious opposing driver.

The flash and heat of fire suddenly spark and illuminate the other car. It's an inevitable time bomb.

Danny scraps and crawls across the ground from his vehicle to the other.

DANNY

No....no no no no....

He clamors toward the door, tears in his eyes. The horn still blares, echoing out over the cavernous expanse of darkness.

He looks in, horrified and in shock. The driver of the other vehicle is dead. The passenger. Dead.

It's already too late.

He looks to his own truck, then back to the lifeless bodies in the front seat of the other car.

A fire rises. From the backseat, the cries of a small child are heard. Danny's eyes widen in horror. There's a baby in the car still.

Danny limps his way over to the vehicle and heroically pulls a toddler out of the mashed-in backseat, pulling with all his might.

The sounds of the crumpling metal and cracks of his own bones in his fingers and wrists popping.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Ahhhh!

He pulls. He heaves. Until - BOOM. The door opens.

In the backseat the cries find a face: A 2 to 3-year-old Hispanic baby girl, ISABELLA RODRIGUEZ. The lone survivor of the car.

Danny holds the child close in his arms and backs away from the vehicle. She cries. He looks down at her, then back up to the darkness. Tears well in his own eyes.

In the light of a single intersection overhead, he yells in a strained voice for help.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Help!

Nothing. No one. Louder, a second time.

DANNY (CONT'D)

HELP!!!

The cry is jolting. Boom.

CUT TO:

INT. JEN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

John jolts awake, disoriented. He looks around in a hazy stupor. Did he sleep with Jen? Did they just share a bed?

The blur of dream, concussive pain, and late-night delirium leave him confused. He sits up in the bed.

Jen enters the bedroom, pacing back and forth, looking for a black jacket. She tosses clothes about and repeatedly enters and exits the room.

JOHN

Morning.

JEN

Hey. Morning. Can you - uh-

Jen tries to motion for John to get up. He overslept.

JEN (CONT'D)

Can you get ready? Do you need anything?

JOHN

Anything? For what?

JEN

We've gotta go. We're going to be late.

John's still in a dreamy stupor, waking up. It doesn't connect with him what she's talking about. He smirks.

JOHN

Late?

(chuckles)

Late for what?

The smirk fades. He realizes.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

The church is warm, inviting, and well-attended. The sounds of church organs and cheap paper programs being handed out shuffle over the murmurs of a congregation gossiping as they await the beginning of a service.

On an old black felt church announcement board reads an event:

'MEMORIAL FOR DANIEL RUTHERFORD WESTON, JR.'

It's Danny's funeral.

INT. CHURCH FUNERAL - MORNING

ALBERTO

I can't speak here today without addressing that....

Alberto is slightly tearful. He leans down and looks to his shuffling feet at the lectern.

ALBERTO (CONT'D)

Danny was a friend. He was.

(MORE)

ALBERTO (CONT'D)

Someone I personally have known, well, most of my life. I liked him a lot. I miss him dearly. He was....he was warm. He was *kind*. He was generous with his time and attention. And he really, truly cared. About everyone. He was a good friend to me, just as I know he was a good friend to many here, today.

Alberto stretches his hand out and waves among the enter congregation. He takes a breath. Beat.

ALBERTO (CONT'D)

But that friend was also...an imperfect man. And.....a criminal.

John, like much of the audience, looks stunned. He can't believe Alberto actually said it.

ALBERTO (CONT'D)

When Danny got back from Huntsville years ago I could tell the friend I'd known for so long wasn't the same. He was kind, still. Yes. He was generous. But there was a darkness.....within him. A rage. Something wicked inside you could tell he wrestled with. And I'd ask him about it and he would do what everyone here knows Danny did best: He would dismiss it. And laugh. And want to get the next round of drinks and hear about someone else's problems. What *he* could do. How *he* could help. He was like that.

Linda wipes tears away from her eyes. Her son, Patrick, comforts her. There is a sense, in some respects, she acted as a maternal figure to her departed adult nephew.

ALBERTO (CONT'D)

And so just as I saw him wrestle with that darkness, so have I been wrestling with how best to honor him here, today. My friend who so many loved. You see, no one here is perfect. Of course not. But are we even *trying* to be perfect? Or have the sense to know forgiveness is needed where innocence is lost? I'd ask everyone here to reflect on it, and their own imperfections.

Alberto exhales with gravitas. John sits in the pew, scanning the crowd.

A lifetime of friends, family, loved-ones, and strangers tearfully mourn his brother. He's taken aback by the magnitude of mourning.

ALBERTO (CONT'D)

It's heavy stuff, looking in the mirror like that. I wonder if Danny ever did the same. I just don't know.

Beat.

ALBERTO (CONT'D)

What I *do know* - is that there is evil out there. There is. And it tempts and shades us all, like a big shadow. Danny contended with more of it than he ever let on. More than most of us probably do. But God provides us the chance to rise above it, too. 'I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy.' Luke 10:19.

Beat.

ALBERTO (CONT'D)

So the question before you today - is one of action...and consequence. It's something I've been asking myself all week putting this service together - How do we contend with the contradictions within our own character? How do we fight the darkness and, hopefully, let the light back in?

Alberto looks up and right at John. They lock eyes.

ALBERTO (CONT'D)

We cut the heads off snakes. And empower the best of our better angels. I'd like to hope the best of Danny's better angels found him in the end. And that he found some solace in absolution. My friend. The man we all, here, loved.

Beat.

ALBERTO (CONT'D)

Let us pray.

In unison the crowded congregation's heads all fall as they look down and close their eyes. John once more scans the crowd.

In the back, he see something unfamiliar and unnerving - Troy and Luis - sitting on a back row. It alarms him.

CUT TO:

EXT. CEMETERY FUNERAL - NOON

A much more modest crowd gathers at Danny's gravesite. 5-10 people, a more intimate affair than the church service. The lord's prayer echoes out from Alberto as he lays Danny's coffin to rest in the cemetery plot.

Aunt Linda. Patrick. Jen. Josh. Ashley. Fox. A few others. The Weston boys' closest friends and family stand together in the small group. Fox pats John on the back, comforting him as Alberto finishes the prayer.

John looks down at the soil with a fixated stare. Bit by bit. Grain by grain. It moves and covers his brother's casket. He walks up in slow-motion, and releases a handful of dirt into the hole in the ground.

He looks up to the overcast skies, as if expecting something more. A voice. A presence. Something. He looks out across the old Texas countryside - the beautiful, distinct landscape of the rolling plains of the cemetery.

In the distance he sees two figures. It's Troy and Luis. They watch him from the horizon, ominously, leaned against their car.

Boom.

CUT TO:

EXT. FEED WAREHOUSE - DAY

Flashback. A memory from the past. The two Weston brothers play tag and run around, goofing off and getting up to trouble outside of an old feed store.

John, 5-7 years old, chases after his older brother, Danny (10-12 years old). The two brothers laugh and have fun as Danny taunts John to come get him. They run around the overgrown grass and edges of a cavernous old building.

Boom.

CUT TO:

INT. MEMORY CARE ROOM - AFTERNOON

John sits at the bedside of his father, who is sleeping. He holds his hand.

JOHN

We said goodbye to him today, Pop.

Dan Sr. Lies in the bed, restful. He looks uncharacteristically content - not in pain in his slumber. This comforts John. He speaks in almost a whisper, as if telling a secret - careful not to rouse his father awake.

JOHN (CONT'D)

It was a nice service. Good flowers.
Lots of people. Aunt Linda did a
really great job.

John buries his head into the bedside, finally allowing himself to mourn - privately - with his sleeping father. He cries.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You would've liked it.

Slow dolly out on a wide shot of the room.

INT. AUNT LINDA'S HOUSE - EVENING

Linda washes dishes in the kitchen of her small, modest house. She's cleaning up after Danny's wake in her home, which John seems to have skipped. John enters the room and sees this effort. He's appreciative.

John walks over to the other sink bay in the kitchen and grabs a dirty dish. He begins cleaning it out beside her. She looks up to him. He nods.

The back-and-forth reciprocation and acknowledgment of appreciation from his family echoes throughout all the ranks of relation.

The two stand in the silhouette of the kitchen window with their backs to the lens and scrub, side-by-side, as we slow-dolly out of the room, backward.

Suddenly, the doorbell rings. DING-DONG. Linda goes to get it.

INT. AUNT LINDA'S PORCH - EVENING

At the porch. Linda answers the door. It's Troy, standing inches away from the entrance of the home - separated by a thin layer of screen-door.

TROY HUNT

Hello, ma'am.

LINDA

Hello.

TROY HUNT

Sorry to intrude. You may - well you might not know me. But I knew your nephew.

John approaches the door behind Linda. Through the screened-in porch he looks angrily into the eyes of Troy.

TROY HUNT (CONT'D)

I couldn't make the service. So I just wanted to come by - and - *personally* send my regards to you and your family. All of them.

LINDA

Oh, well, thank you. That's quite sweet.

TROY HUNT

Yes, yeah it is.

Troy looks over Linda's shoulder to John.

TROY HUNT (CONT'D)

Hey there, Johnny.

John looks furious. He tightens his fist. Troy looks back to Linda.

TROY HUNT (CONT'D)

Would you mind if I had a word with young Johnny here? Sorry. Been a long time. Nice to "catch up".

LINDA

No, no. Yes! Of course. Take your time.

Troy smirks with a chilling glee.

TROY HUNT

Thanks, ma'am.

Linda exits. John opens the screen and walks onto the porch - nothing separating the two men now.

JOHN

You come to the house?

TROY HUNT

That's right.

JOHN

I swear, if you-

TROY HUNT

If I what? Nothing. You're not gonna do shit. Because if ya do? Well, I guess someone might....

Troy unhooks the safety buckle on his weapon, attempting to intimidate John. He speaks flippantly.

TROY HUNT (CONT'D)

Shoot you in the face. Slit your aunt's throat. Make it look like some sorta deranged mourner's murder-suicide. I don't know, just spitballing.

JOHN

If you-

Troy cuts John off. He continues on his list.

TROY HUNT

Go unplug your daddy from the machines in that shithole near Giddings keepin' him alive. Maybe give that bartender girlfriend of yours a good spook.

Troy slowly, carefully unholsters his gun and holds it at his waist, pointing it at John's stomach.

TROY HUNT (CONT'D)

Or maybe we just finish the job 'ol Danny started with the parents and wipe Miss Teenage Diner Dreams off the map, too.

John looks gutted. He's talking about Espie.

JOHN

No...

TROY HUNT

You're fuckin' with the wrong person. Trust me. You think it's just me? It's not. This whole town runs on his name. So you better smarten up. I'll ask you once more. **Repeat it.**

John looks exasperated, but he knows what Troy wants him to say.

JOHN

Tomorrow. \$200,000.

Troy holsters the weapon.

TROY HUNT

You get the money. You call the number.

Troy walks down from the porch back to his car.

TROY HUNT (CONT'D)

You try anything? I think you know what'll happen.

Troy gets in his car and drives off. John is left standing, alone, under the porch light. Fists-clenched, fuming.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - EVENING

John goes to the local police station. It's mostly empty, with only a deputy clerk at the front and the main sheriff in the back. A modest, small-town office. John dings the bell on the front counter and tries to compose himself. DING.

JOHN

Yes, hello?

The deputy looks uninterested, reading a magazine behind the counter. He looks to John, then back down to the pictures.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Hello?!?

The deputy is annoyed. He shouts to the back.

DEPUTY

Sheriff, someone to see you!

A tall, thin man with piercing blue eyes and weathered skin walks from the back to the counter. This is SHERIFF STEVE CLARK.

SHERIFF STEVE CLARK

What the hell is it, Warren?

The deputy leans and points at John, who stands at the counter, nonplussed.

SHERIFF STEVE CLARK (CONT'D)

Can I help you?

JOHN

Yes, please. I - uh- I'd like to report someone. A man, threatening my family.

SHERIFF STEVE CLARK

A man? What kind of man?

JOHN
 I don't. I mean. I don't know his
 last name - Troy, something. He's
 maybe 5' 10". Balding. A beard. He -
 he's threatening my-

The sheriff cuts John off.

SHERIFF STEVE CLARK
 Oh, I know you. Your Dan Senior's
 younger boy.

JOHN
 Yes, I am. That-

SHERIFF STEVE CLARK
 Sorry to hear about your brother.
 Tough luck.

JOHN
 Yes, but-

SHERIFF STEVE CLARK
 Listen, I don't want you to waste
 your breath here, okay? This person -
 did you see them physically harm
 someone in your family?

JOHN
 Well, no-

SHERIFF STEVE CLARK
 And you don't know their last name?

JOHN
 No, but it's a small town can't you-

SHERIFF STEVE CLARK
 And what did this person even want?

JOHN
 That's not - the point is -
 (points at face)
 These guys. They did this. They
 hit me the other night. That's
 assault, isn't it?

The sheriff seems flippant. He doesn't take it seriously.
 The reaction is shocking and concerning.

SHERIFF STEVE CLARK
 "Guys"? So now it's more than one.
 I guess I'm confused. This person
 knew you well enough to beat ya up
 and then, separately days later,
 threaten your family - but you can't
 (MORE)

SHERIFF STEVE CLARK (CONT'D)
 tell me how and you don't know their
 name?
 (incredulous)
 Heh. What a story.

John is angry. He knows who to mention.

JOHN
Moe Cirillo. There's a name. You
 know *that one*? Moe Cirillo is
 threatening me.

The sheriff goes stone-faced.

SHERIFF STEVE CLARK
 You should be careful what you say,
 son. You never know who's listening.

John grows irate.

JOHN
 You can't be serious! I'm *telling*
you that someone is **in danger**! Moe
 Cirillo is demanding- that - if-

He's cut off yet again.

SHERIFF STEVE CLARK
 I'd hold your tongue, there.

The sheriff walks from behind the counter and up to John. He
 hovers his fingers over the handcuffs on his belt.

SHERIFF STEVE CLARK (CONT'D)
 If I were you, I'd think long and
 hard about what's being asked of me.
 Especially from the man you mention.

John is speechless. The cops work for Cirillo, too. The
 sheriff eases up a bit.

SHERIFF STEVE CLARK (CONT'D)
 Mr. Cirillo is a friend to this
 town. I think you'd find that if you
 give him what he wants? This problem
 you're having will go away.

JOHN
 And if I don't?

The sheriff gives John an icy stare.

SHERIFF STEVE CLARK
 Well, you've been gone a long time.
 (MORE)

SHERIFF STEVE CLARK (CONT'D)

Probably don't remember your way around as well as you used to. Who's to say you don't get lost in the pines and never show back up? Would be a shame, wouldn't it, Deputy Warren?

DEPUTY

Real shame.

The sheriff winks coolly at John.

SHERIFF STEVE CLARK

Give Mr. Cirillo what he's owed. It's best for everyone.

John stands in shock. The police can't help him. He's going to have to do whatever he needs to himself.

EXT. BIG EARN'S DINER - EVENING

John returns to the diner to find Espie. He's frantic, and pushes his way through the entrance swiftly. His eyes scan back and forth. Nothing. Nowhere. She's not there. He races back out and around the corner to his car.

EXT. BIG EARN'S DINER ALLEY - EVENING

As John turns the corner around the diner to return to his car, he sees a towering presence of a man smoking on the back stoop of the restaurant's kitchen. He's larger-than-life, standing nearly 6.5 feet tall, with giant proportions and an imposing presence. Underneath the mountain of a man, though, are a set of kindly, world-weary eyes. This is BIG EARN.

He catches John as he's about to get to his car.

BIG EARN

She ain't here.

JOHN

Say?

BIG EARN

She ain't here today. Espie. At her grandmother's house tonight.

JOHN

Oh. Okay. You got an address?

BIG EARN

You gonna cause her trouble?

John shakes his head in a negative. Big Earn raises his brow. No response. John turns to walk back to the car. Big Earn stops him.

BIG EARN (CONT'D)
You probably don't remember, huh?

JOHN
What?

BIG EARN
Back when you were kids. Always
runnin' round back here. Y'all loved
this alley.

JOHN
Yeah, I remember.

BIG EARN
'Say your brother passed from a
seizure. That right?

John grows frustrated.

JOHN
That's what they say, yeah.

BIG EARN
You two were always gettin' into
trouble.

Beat.

BIG EARN (CONT'D)
Grand mal or somethin'?

JOHN
I don't know.

John thinks for a pronounced moment.

JOHN (CONT'D)
To be frank, I don't even know if
that's the truth, really. Or just
some bullshit to save face. Make
him look better.

BIG EARN
My cousin had grand mal. Terrible
thing. The convulsin'. He passed
from 'em, too. 'Bout 4 years ago up
in Temple.

Beat.

BIG EARN (CONT'D)
 'Course I never actually saw his. I
 only ever saw Danny's.

John looks surprised.

JOHN
 What?

BIG EARN
Your brother. Long time ago. He was
 'bout 10 or 11. You probably too
 little to really remember. You were
 both playin' here. Heh. Makin'
 trouble.

Big Earn motions to the pavement and the space.

BIG EARN (CONT'D)
 I come out with the trash and you're
 cryin' and wailing. Right here.

We see a quick cut of memory from the past. A small child,
 maybe 5 years old, crying. Another, maybe 10-12, convulsing.

BIG EARN (CONT'D)
 Your brother floppin' like a fish on
 a deck. Just no control. Nothin'.
 I try get the boy's head up, ya know?
 But he's just.....shakin'. Shakin'
 and shakin'. Uncontrollably.

Big Earn looks to John.

BIG EARN (CONT'D)
 And you were just standin' there.
 Terrified.

Beat.

BIG EARN (CONT'D)
 You don't remember?

John thinks carefully. He was too young, but the information
 is haunting.

JOHN
 No.

BIG EARN
 It's ok. I was terrified, too.
 (long breath)
 You watch a child just give over
 like that - and ya know there ain't
 nothin you can do but hold 'em in
 your arms. Hopin' for it to end.
 (MORE)

BIG EARN (CONT'D)
 Makes a man feel useless. *Terrified*
 of what God's gonna do next.

We see another quick flash of (a younger) Big Earn holding the adolescent boy in his arms as he has a seizure.

John looks heartbroken by the anecdote. Already emotionally exhausted, he presses Big Earn, trying to make his exit.

JOHN
 Why're you telling me all this?

BIG EARN
 God tests you so much.

Big Earn walks back to the back door of the diner, to re-enter. He looks back at John.

BIG EARN (CONT'D)
 Sooner or later, you want to test
 God. I'm sure I ain't know what
 he's gonna do next. But I've a
 feelin' what you are.

Big Earn thinks for a careful second.

BIG EARN (CONT'D)
 153 Comanche Way. Out there by the
 concrete plant off the farm road.
 Little pink house.

John nods in an affirmative thanks. Big Earn goes back inside. John walks to his car.

INT. THE THIRSTY MULE - NIGHT

John sits alone at the near-empty bar. He drinks a single beer, contemplating.

CUT TO:

INT. DANNY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

John sits in Danny's apartment, contemplating. With no one to protect his family, he realizes he must either confront Cirillo himself or once again run away and leave the town behind.

He looks across the framed photos, memories, and mementos throughout his brother's home. He stows a jealousy at the lived-life and connection to others Danny had, burdened with fear, anger, and guilt.

John goes to Danny's closet. He looks through his clothes and pulls a jacket - one he remembers from the past. He tries it on. It fits.

Beat.

John returns to the bed and sits. He leans over to an old corded bedside phone and presses the keys.

He calls a number and it rings. A voice answers.

TROY HUNT
You finally smarten up?

JOHN
I've got the money.

TROY HUNT
Good boy.

JOHN
Set the meeting.

TROY HUNT
'Set the meeting'. Heh.
(scoffs)
Tomorrow. 9pm. The old feed store
off Lost Pines. You know it?

JOHN
I do.

Beat.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I want to meet him.

Troy knows who John references. The talk of the town. The big boss. Moe Cirillo.

TROY HUNT
Heh. I wouldn't worry. He wants to
meet you, too.

Beat.

TROY HUNT (CONT'D)
9pm. Come alone. You try something
wise? You're dead. You try to run?
You're dead. You think you can play
with us? You're-

JOHN
-dead. I got it. See you then.

John forcefully grits his teeth, restraining his own anger, and slams the phone down to hang up.

He looks to the shoebox on the bed. He opens it once more and pulls a dirty rag off of the gun inside it.

The cool metal and shiny finish of the weapon glimmer in the day's dying light. He stuffs it into his jacket and looks to the letter addressed to him, also in the box.

John thinks for a concentrated moment, and grabs it.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

The next morning. Judgment Day. At the empty church, John sits in a pew alone. He thinks, he prays, he seeks clarity and perhaps forgiveness.

EXT. TEXAS HIGHWAY - NIGHT

We return to our flashback 13 years ago from a different perspective.

We now see John in the driver's seat of the vehicle, not Danny, swerving, drinking, and laughing down a long dark country road.

The same conversation ensues, but with reversed roles within the truck. The two brothers laugh and joke with each other.

DANNY

And you said *what* to her?

JOHN

Stop.

DANNY

No, seriously. I am *intrigued*. Because the little Johnny Weston that **I know** would never, ever fumble a pickup so hard.

JOHN

You're an asshole.

DANNY

I just want to know if you sealed the deal or not!

JOHN

"Sealed the deal" - what are you 9 years old?

Both laugh. Danny retorts, facetiously, in a bad, joking medieval accent.

DANNY

Maybe. Maybe I am 9-years-old.

(MORE)

DANNY (CONT'D)

Which, of course, would stand to reason that I am developing quite spritely as a young lad. And maybe I should even be congratulated for said accomplishment.

Danny looks over to John and gestures for praise.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Please, go on. Praise me.

John rolls his eyes.

JOHN

Like I said. 'Asshole'.

DANNY

Yeah but ya still love me, don't ya?

DANNY leans over to John and rustles his hair.

JOHN

Hey, come on. Stop! Eyes on the road.

DANNY laughs and takes a swig of his beer.

DANNY

'Eyes on the road'. I'm lookin' at the road, see? *Road.*

Danny gesticulates out to the darkness. Both brothers drink their beers as they barrel down the country road. They come up to a dark highway intersection.

JOHN

Seriously.

DANNY

Seriously, you look at the road!

Danny snarks and laughs, pushing on John's shoulder as if to unnerve his brother with a practical joke.

As he does, they swerve at high speed onto the dark intersection and collide with an oncoming sedan that was narrowly in his blind spot. BAM!

The crash is swift and horrific, tossing the two young men around in the cab and shattering and contorting their truck.

A torrential downpour of glass and metal fly through the air and shower them in debris. The sound is loud, odd, and unimaginable. BAM! BANG! SCREECH! THUD!

EXT. DESOLATE INTERSECTION - NIGHT

The impact immediately slams John into the steering wheel and knocks him unconscious. Danny, in the passenger seat, can't get out of his door.

For a final time, we see the truck land with a crunch on the oil and glass-encrusted pavement.

Danny tries to awaken John, but can't. He shakes his shoulder.

DANNY

Hey. Hey. Johnny - Johnny - wake -
wake up! Hey!

Danny coughs blood and pains his way out of the bench seat. He leans John back in the driver's seat and pushes his way over John's body. He heaves the driver's side door open, falling to the ground onto some broken glass.

The horn of the other impacted car goes off.

HOOOOOOOOOOOOONK. A head leans forward onto it of an unconscious opposing driver.

The flash and heat of fire suddenly spark and illuminate the other car.

It's an inevitable time bomb.

Danny musters all his strength and gets up to his feet. He carefully thrusts John out of the driver's seat, catching him in his arms and dragging John off to the side of the road, away from the accident.

It pains Danny greatly, and his knees buckle - forcing him back to the ground - unable to get his footing.

He's trying as hard as he can. Lives depend on it. Now or never.

He forces himself forward, scrapping and crawling across the ground from his vehicle to the other.

DANNY (CONT'D)

No....no no no no....

He clamors toward the door, tears in his eyes. The horn still blares, echoing out over the cavernous expanse of darkness.

He looks in, horrified and in shock. The driver of the other vehicle is dead. The passenger. Dead.

It's already too late.

He looks to his own truck, then back to the lifeless bodies in the front seat of the other car.

A fire rises. From the backseat, the cries of a small child are heard. Danny's eyes widen in horror. There's a baby in the car still.

Danny limps his way over to the vehicle and heroically pulls a toddler out of the mashed-in backseat, pulling with all his might.

The sounds of the crumpling metal and cracks of his own bones in his fingers and wrists popping.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Ahhhh!

He pulls. He heaves. Until - BOOM. The door opens.

In the backseat the cries find a face: A 2 to 3-year-old Hispanic baby girl, ISABELLA RODRIGUEZ. The lone survivor of the car.

Danny holds the child close in his arms and backs away from the vehicle. She cries.

He looks down at her, then back up to the darkness. Tears well in his own eyes.

In the light of a single intersection overhead, he yells in a strained voice for help.

DANNY (CONT'D)

Help!

Nothing. No one. Louder, a second time.

DANNY (CONT'D)

HELP!!!

The cry falls on the dead silence of the surrounding darkness.

Nothing. No one.

He makes one last, voice-cracking plea to the empty countryside.

DANNY (CONT'D)

HELLLLLPPPP!!!

The young child cries in his arms. Danny looks down to comfort her.

DANNY (CONT'D)

(softly)

No, no. It's okay. It's okay.
It's gonna - gonna be okay.

Danny thumbs over an embroidered name on the child's hat.

DANNY (CONT'D)
'Isabella'...

He looks back out to the wilderness.

Nothing. No one.

Danny looks over to his unconscious brother on the side of the road, then back to the deceased parents in the car.

He knows what he has to do.

Danny gains his composure, taking a deep breath and opening his flip phone to call 9-1-1.

DANNY (CONT'D)
Yes, hello? This - this is uh- Dan
Weston. I'm out on Farm Road 2243
where it meets Highway 67.

Danny looks around. He's alone.

DANNY (CONT'D)
There's.....there's- uh- there's
been an accident. A bad - bad
accident. We- uh- I - need an
ambulance.

Danny listens for the dispatcher. We don't hear their side of the conversation.

DANNY (CONT'D)
Our truck hit another car. It's -
uh - it- it's pretty banged up. The
other people....are....I - I pulled
a kid from the backseat but the
parents...

Danny can't bring himself to say the words. But he knows he has to.

DANNY (CONT'D)
I - I don't know that they're gonna
make it.

Danny listens. He holds the child close into his chest. He breaks down, tearing up. He wants to stay strong, but he can't.

DANNY (CONT'D)
No. No, ma'am.

Danny looks back up at the flaming car.

DANNY (CONT'D)
Two fatalities.

Danny takes a long, thoughtful breath and collects himself.

He pauses, as if time is about to slow to a halt.

He's making a decision he knows will change the trajectory of his entire life.

He looks over to his brother, unconscious, then back out to the black abyss of nature.

He finds his resolve.

DANNY (CONT'D)

No, ma'am. Just me. I was driving.

We see a wide shot of the young man standing between the two vehicles, child in-hand.

Danny closes the phone and waits.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

Back in present day, John sits in the empty church on a middle pew. He looks down at his feet, then back up to the stained glass at the altar.

He toys with the paper edges of the envelope for the letter addressed to him by Danny.

It's time.

John opens it.

The handwritten note begins with a familiar phrase and chilling reminder: "Everybody's got a debt to pay."

John confirms something he's already realized. Danny has been saving money while working for Moe Cirillo for years to give to the lone survivor of their terrible accident: Espie, now a teenager working in the diner.

John is overcome with the weight of responsibility, regret, and the consequences of his own actions he's now watching play-out over a decade later.

The emotion overwhelms him and he looks to the heavens to apologize to his departed brother.

JOHN

(whispered)

I'm sorry.

John looks back down to his feet, hands clasped-together, as if to pray. The day ends.

INT. TOWN BANK & TRUST - DAY

Back at the town Bank & Trust, Mike Mendoza prepares paperwork and stacks of cash for John.

John arrives with two large duffel bags and sets them on Mike's desk.

MIKE MENDOZA
You sure about this?

John nods.

MIKE MENDOZA (CONT'D)
Okay.

Mike begins filling the bags.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

John visits Russ at the convenience store.

He slides over a paper-bagged stack of cash across the counter and Russ accepts. They both nod in agreement.

INT. AUNT LINDA'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

John returns to his aunt's house once more. Perhaps a final time. He carries a stack of keepsakes, papers, and memories under his arm. Patrick greets him.

PATRICK
Hey.

JOHN
Hey.

PATRICK
Ma's out at the supermarket. Should be back in about 15.

JOHN
Oh, no worries. I was-

Patrick cuts him off.

PATRICK
You're leavin' again?

John doesn't have a response. He doesn't know, himself.

JOHN
 I just wanted to bring by some more
 things.
 (motions to stack
 under his arm)
 Photos and stuff.

Patrick has a clear frustration. He doesn't want to see another member of his family go. The subtext of the situation is broken-up.

Patrick gets to the point, immediately.

PATRICK
 You don't have to do this.

Beat.

JOHN
 I know.

PATRICK
 And it may not do anything.

John nods. He agrees, but shrugs it off.

JOHN
 Someone's gotta do *something*. Gotta
 at least *try*.

Patrick looks down and kicks at the ground, shuffling his feet.

PATRICK
 And that's you?

JOHN
 I don't know. Maybe. Maybe it is.

Beat.

PATRICK
 Just like that?

JOHN
 Just like that.

Beat.

PATRICK
 When Dad left...it was tough. I
 thought I was all alone.

Patrick's throat swells. He holds back a tearful frustration.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
 I don't have siblings. Ma
 homeschooled me for a while. So.
 You know...

Patrick doesn't want to feel sorry for himself, but he knows he sounds pathetic. He gets to it.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
 But you and Dan. You always treated
 me like somethin' more. Like
 brothers.

John holds back his own swell of tearful emotion. Patrick really considers what he's about to say.

He needs to. He means it.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
 I love you, Johnny. But
 (long pause)
 I lost **my brother**, too.

John holds-in his emotion. He's humbled by his cousin's vulnerability.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
 I don't much want to lose another
 one.

Patrick reaches out.

He hands John a photo of the three of them - Danny, Patrick, John - as kids. It's the very same photo John was eyeing at his aunt's house earlier. He holds on it and looks to the joyous faces of the three men as children.

A simple time. A better time. It hurts to think about.

John turns to Patrick. He looks him in the eye.

JOHN
 You won't.

John thinks. He has an idea. He turns to Patrick.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 I need a favor.

Boom.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE TOWN - AFTERNOON

The sun lowers from the highest point in the sky on the small town.

In the burn-off of dappled afternoon light, it almost looks pretty. Quaint. Maybe even like picturesque Americana in a perspective and light we haven't seen before.

Over the vistas we hear the resonance of a phonecall yet again:

BEEEEEEP.

"THIS IS A PRE-PAID CALL FROM - TEXAS STATE PENITENTIARY
HUNTSVILLE - FOR INMATE..."

DANNY
(voicemail)
Daniel Weston, Jr.

"...TO ACCEPT PLEASE PRESS ONE."

We cut back to John, who stares at an answer machine, coldly. He ignores it, yet again.

CUT TO:

INT. JEN'S DOOR - AFTERNOON

John returns to Jen's house. Yet again, she's frustrated by his unannounced arrival. At the door, she stops him.

JOHN
I know. I know, trust me.

JEN
You can't do this.

JOHN
There's something I need to say.

John takes a deep breath.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Something....something I *need* you to
hear. Please, Jen. I won't ask
again.

Yet again, Jen relents.

JEN
Alright. Come on.

We see a quick flash and bang of the accident as John recounts the events. Boom. Cut.

INT. JEN'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

On a slow dolly of Jen's reaction, John completes his story.

JOHN

15 years. That's what they gave him. 15 years in Huntsville. 8 with probation.

(scoffs)

Good behavior. I never saw him. Never visited. That...was it. I went up to the city as he went away. Never to return.

Beat.

JOHN (CONT'D)

And I'm ashamed. I am. Ashamed of being a coward. Ashamed of wasting the opportunity. Squandering the sacrifice. And...the future. Time moves so much faster than you ever expect it to. More than I ever thought. And the less I accomplished....the harder it became to return. Until....well. I just didn't see a way I could.

John looks Jen deep in the eyes.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I *should've* come back, Jen. I know. I'm ashamed of that, too. And I'm sorry.

Jen takes it all in. It's a lot. A heavy, long, pronounced beat of simply digesting the information occurs. Silence.

Beat.

Jen puts her hands on her knees and leans forward on her seat.

JEN

You're great at telling stories. Always have been. Not so good with the truth.

John looks confused.

JOHN

That....that *is* the truth.

JEN

(annoyed)

That's not what I mean. You know it.

Jen gets up and walks into the other room. John follows. An argument is brewing, and both can feel it.

JOHN

'Know' - 'what' - ? I don't want to have *wasted* what he gave me. I can't - I won't - it's not something I'm **okay** with. Just. *Existing* through this life. Knowing he gave up his for me.

Jen cuts him off. She stops and turns around. An air of annoyance and force grows in her tone.

JEN

Oh, come on. *Seriously?*

JOHN

Seriously what?

Here it is. She can't contain it. Jen walks right up to John.

JEN

Stop *pretending* like life is happening to you! It's not! YOU are not a victim, John!

JOHN

I never said I was-

JEN

Then stop -
(tearfully)
torturing us all with your brooding, depressive bullshit. You want to know a *real* victim out here? Look around. Take your pick. There's plenty of misery to go around.

Jen waits for a response. John backs down.

JEN (CONT'D)

You think you've done us in this town good by running away? You think you've *spared* us - saved me - from some negative...I don't know...*chaos* of "you"?

John holds silent. Jen lets it all out.

JEN (CONT'D)

This town *needed* you, John. It did. Just like it needed Danny. But more than that - it *loved* you. And you just...ran away. For so so so long. Your family. Your friends. Your community. They've *always* loved you. You may have forgotten this is your home -

Jen catches herself. She's unsure how much emotional vulnerability she wants to let on.

She gives herself permission to go there.

JEN (CONT'D)

-but don't think for a *second* we ever forgot about you. Because that...that's just not fair. Your home has always been here for you. Regardless of what you've done - what you'll do - with your life.

JOHN

Jen...

Jen puts her palm up to make him pause.

She's got to get through this.

JEN

I know you think there's something noble or stoic or sacrificial in honoring your brother. And I get that you feel a burden from him, I do. But don't tell me you wasted your life because you didn't live up to some standard. We're all just trying our best.

JOHN

I just wanted it to mean...*more*.

Jen closes her eyes and holds her tongue. She loves him. She tries to proceed with empathy, best she can.

JEN

We all make our own decisions, John. Don't make the mistake to think Danny didn't make his for a reason, too.

John nods.

JOHN

(whisper)
I know.

JEN

But, I'm sorry.

JOHN

I know.

JEN

What are you gonna do?

John thinks for a long moment. Beat.

JOHN
What I should've from the beginning.

Music grows, slowly and quietly.

Boom.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE TOWN - MAGIC HOUR

A montage of the empty town as the sunset hits it.

Neon lights turn on as the darkness falls.

The red and purple haze of the lowering sun glistens across the building windows like colorful bands of light.

INT. ESPIE'S HOUSE - MAGIC HOUR

Espie is sitting at home with her adoptive Grandmother, doing homework. She hears a knock at the door and goes to open it. We assume it's John, but don't see.

Boom.

CUT TO:

EXT. TEXAS HIGHWAY - SUNSET

As night falls once more on the small town, John drives out on the very same old country road his fateful accident occurred, through the burned trees and ghostly countryside toward the old feed warehouse.

There's a haunting, unique beauty to it.

EXT. FEED WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

John arrives at the old feed warehouse.

It's an old-fashioned shop-front building with overgrown grass pushing through the cracks in the surrounding sidewalk and gravel parking lot.

The front sign has been painted-over several times, with the faded lettering for 'FEED & SUPPLY' ever-so-slightly legible from the layers of age and decay on the building.

In the back of the old brick shopfront there is a larger attached metal warehouse peeking over the roof's horizon.

Cavernous and rusted, the metal structure has an odd, mysterious allure to it - like a dangerous playground for imagination.

John has been here before. Abandoned his entire life, the feed warehouse is a familiar spot of hijinks, stolen cigarettes, adolescent love interests, and games of 'war' and 'hide and seek' with his brother and friends. It's got the old age, wear, and varnish of something out of 'Stand By Me'.

It's surreal for John to see it manned, guarded, and functioning now - retrofit as a depot and outpost for drug packaging and running.

John walks to the front entrance.

A large, rotund guard with a shotgun in-hand looks him over. He motions with his head around the corner, toward a side entrance.

John arrives at the side. As he expects, Russ is guarding the door, pistol in-hand, himself.

John spreads his arms and is checked by Russ. He clears him. No weapons.

Russ nods. John nods back.

He enters the side of the building.

INT. FEED WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

John enters into the metal back building of the old feed warehouse.

The space has been cleared of trash and is littered with folding tables, bags, and mounds of drugs - bricks, piles, feed-sack bags. Anything to mask it all and repackage.

The enormity of the operation is startling to John.

He scans the warehouse. No one but him.

He looks to the surrounding corners - closed-in and barricaded with old machinery and farming junk from eras past.

One way in, one way out. The way he came.

John walks to the center of the room, where he sees two chairs. He looks back to the entrance and hears it lock.

CLINK. Locked-in. No turning back now.

John sits.

Beat.

We hear shallow, deliberate footsteps from the darkness. Directly in front of John, behind the opposing chair, a dark figure walks into the light, revealing himself.

He must've been there the entire time. Waiting.

As the figure comes into the light, we realize who it is: MOE CIRILLO. We finally meet the man.

Large, wide-shouldered, and imposing, Cirillo is middle-aged with dark, greying hair and a disheveled, western-themed suit. He wears a strange, foreign-looking black boot. Not quite combat. Not quite cowboy. The sound of the heel taps.

He walks with a slow, confident stride and a well-conveyed sense of power.

Cirillo circles around the opposing chair and sits.

MOE CIRILLO

You look like him.

John is trying to gauge Cirillo still. He doesn't react.

MOE CIRILLO (CONT'D)

I said *'you look like him'*.

Cirillo pulls a silver cigarette case from his suit jacket and flicks it open.

He leans forward in his chair and offers John a smoke.

MOE CIRILLO (CONT'D)

Your brother, I mean.

John waves off the cigarette. Cirillo raises his eyebrows for a moment in surprise, then shrugs it off.

He settles back into his armchair, hands laid on the armrests and knees spread, squared against John in the opposing chair. A position of power.

Cirillo's immediate magnetism is unexpected, but perhaps not surprising. Unafraid. Uncharacteristically relaxed. No posturing or forced menace. He's in control.

Cirillo is the boss, and he knows it.

MOE CIRILLO (CONT'D)

You know who I am?

JOHN

I do.

MOE CIRILLO

Yeah, 'course you do.

(scoffs)

No point in introductions, I suppose.

John holds a strained, angry expression. Cirillo leans in and looks inquisitive.

MOE CIRILLO (CONT'D)

Well, my guys searched you. Said you're clean. Brother of Danny, I find that hard to believe. But. Crazy things have happened.

John doesn't take the bait and react.

MOE CIRILLO (CONT'D)

(sits back)

You think I'm the bad guy, right?

JOHN

I do.

MOE CIRILLO

You think....what? *I corrupted him* or something? Because, you know, Danny came to me. Contraband trafficking. While he was still on the inside. 3 years. I didn't do that. *He did.*

JOHN

I didn't know.

MOE CIRILLO

'Course you didn't. Far as I can tell, you don't know much of anything about this place. Now. My money-

John cuts him off.

JOHN

I know what it was.

Cirillo redirects. He can't let the retort go.

MOE CIRILLO

Heh. You knew what it **used to be.**

Cirillo is annoyed.

MOE CIRILLO (CONT'D)

You know a decade or so ago, while you were gone? A fire came through. A *terrible* one. No doubt you heard about it. Burned this whole place down.

(MORE)

MOE CIRILLO (CONT'D)

(motions around)

Homes were lost. People died. Burned
and burned until it destroyed
everything. Just....gone.

Cirillo takes a long, melancholic pause. He looks down at his fingers and rubs them together slowly, as if focusing hard on recalling a painful memory.

John looks, transfixed. Cirillo, for all his faults, is a great storyteller. Captivating, instantly.

MOE CIRILLO (CONT'D)

And....for a time, at least...it
seemed like it was never gonna end.
Fire was just gonna go on forever.
Raging. But some weeks into it the
rains came. And finally, *thankfully*,
put it all out. And people in this
town gave a big sigh of relief, sure.
For a time.

Cirillo pushes the two fingers together and snaps, as if to snap himself out of the daze of memory, itself. John blinks in a flinch at Cirillo's snap.

MOE CIRILLO (CONT'D)

But after a while that relief just
faded and they all realized they had
nothing left. The fires had destroyed
it all. That place they knew? That
home? It didn't exist anymore. And
as much as they wanted it - it wasn't
ever coming back. No. It was just a
memory after that. All they were
left with was **thunder and ash**.

Cirillo looks up at John with a narrowed stare.

MOE CIRILLO (CONT'D)

When you have nothing left, you've
got nothing to lose. And when you've
got nothing to lose, you get
desperate. *Angry*. When you're angry
you get *violent*. And you're mad at
me?

John says nothing. Cirillo gets agitated.

MOE CIRILLO (CONT'D)

Son, you've never seen desperate
like I have. You think things look
bad *now?*

(laughs, haughtily)

You have no idea.

(MORE)

MOE CIRILLO (CONT'D)
No idea. When there's blood on the
 streets, no one wants to mop it up.

JOHN
 And you? You did?

Cirillo nods, proudly.

MOE CIRILLO
 That's right.

John looks around the warehouse.

JOHN
 And the drugs?

Cirillo is about to over-explain. He catches himself, and
 smiles.

Beat. A more-restrained response follows.

MOE CIRILLO
 It was an uncomplicated answer to a
 difficult question. Good for
 business, sure. But it's more than
 that. People here don't blame me.
 They *thank me*.

John isn't satisfied.

JOHN
 And my brother. What was he?

MOE CIRILLO
 Unfortunate. Some things we just
 can't control. Even when we want
 to.

Moe reflects.

MOE CIRILLO (CONT'D)
 I'm mad, sure. But I miss him, I
 admit, just like anyone else. Very
 few like Danny. He had a - fire -
 you don't see in a lot of people.
 Very good for us. Rage like that?
 Always bound to come with somethin'.
 Blind spots. Guess you could say
 mine was trusting *him*.

JOHN
 And his?

MOE CIRILLO
 (smirks)
 Strobe lights, most likely.

John is angered by the callousness.

MOE CIRILLO (CONT'D)

Something sorta beautiful about someone so strong being taken-down by something...so.....I don't know. *Inconsequential*. Serves me right, I imagine. Putting my money - my loyalty- in the hands of an epileptic thief.

(Beat)

I digress. It's a shame, still.

Cirillo shows an odd, unexpected remorse. John presses.

JOHN

What is?

MOE CIRILLO

That Danny had to go like that.

Cirillo takes a long pause. He allows himself to feel a moment of grief for Danny, too. Regret, even. He shows a bit of his cards - something we get the sense he doesn't often do.

It chills the hairs on the back of John's neck to hear.

MOE CIRILLO (CONT'D)

Had to be done.

John's fists tighten and eyes widen.

Cirillo - even in the vaguest of terms - confirms it.

Had Danny really had a seizure? Did Cirillo have him killed? Had he caused or enacted the seizure, himself? Was it a fronted story by the family to save-face? Or an inevitable truth, accelerated by a dangerous profession?

Too many questions with heartbreaking answers. None that bring his brother back.

John narrows his own gaze down at Cirillo on a dolly-shot inward toward his face. He closes his eyes tightly.

A moment of clarity hits him.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

We return to the church from earlier, John opens Danny's letter and begins reading it. The note is narrated by the voice of Danny. In-frame, the haunting first line once again reads:

"EVERYBODY'S GOT A DEBT TO PAY."

DANNY (V.O.)
Everybody's got a debt to pay.

Music begins. It builds, little by little.

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN BANK & TRUST - DAY

John fills duffel bags with cash and shakes hands with Mike Mendoza.

DANNY (V.O.)
You make decisions. Choices.

Boom.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET ROAD - DAY

John stands around the corner of an old main street building and says goodbye to his group of friends. Josh, Alberto, Ashley, and Fox give their farewells.

DANNY (V.O.)
We all do.

Boom.

CUT TO:

INT. AUNT LINDA'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

John walks into the living room of his aunt, who turns to him with a ghostly look on her face.

Linda knows he's confronting something, but doesn't know if it'll bring him the same end so many of her other loved-ones have now met.

There's an anxious sorrow staining her face, and tearfully she hugs John tightly.

DANNY (V.O.)
Choices we live with.

Boom.

CUT TO:

INT. MEMORY CARE ROOM - DAY

Back in Dan Sr's room, John sits at his bedside. On a slow, side-dolly shot we see John holding his father's hand, praying.

DANNY (V.O.)
 Choices we *die for*.

Boom.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH FUNERAL - MORNING

Back to the church. Danny's funeral from the day prior.
 Alberto's words ring out with greater conviction.

ALBERTO
 How do we fight the darkness and,
 hopefully, let the light back in?

Boom.

CUT TO:

INT. JEN'S APARTMENT - EVENING

John and Jen stand in the doorway of her apartment, inches
 away from one another, face to face. Their hands, at their
 sides, lean toward each other as if drawn to connect.

Their fingertips barely touch.

DANNY (V.O.)
 The ones we have to explain to others.

This is a goodbye, and they know it. But, hopefully, not
 forever this time.

John lifts his hand and lightly brushes the hair out of Jen's
 face. She smiles. He looks to kiss, but she goes in for a
 tight embrace and hugs him instead. They hold it for a moment.

John breaks away from it and walks out the door.

He lifts his hand and waves a 'goodbye' palm from the car.
 She does the same.

Music continues. Boom.

CUT TO:

INT. DANNY'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

John, wearing Danny's jacket, bids one final farewell to his
 brother's space. He holds up an old photo of the two of them.
 He smiles and carefully places it in his breast pocket, tapping
 his heart with it.

Literally, now, he carries the memory of his brother with
 him.

John grabs Danny's keys from his apartment and goes down to the garage.

CUT TO:

EXT. DANNY'S APARTMENT GARAGE - AFTERNOON

John pulls a cover off of Danny's old Ford Bronco. The sound of the cover coming off makes a whipping, rustling noise. It echoes out.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIN TRESTLE - AFTERNOON

Troy Hunt sits in a car under the train trestle on the outskirts of town - a common drop-off point. He fiddles with the vehicle, windows down, trying to get the car to start. He turns the ignition and tries the starter a few times.

Reeeereeeeeereeeeeereeee. GLUG.

Nothing. It won't start. Unbeknownst to him, Patrick has pulled wires out of the hood. He's not going anywhere.

He tries again. Nothing. Again. GLUG.

On the final sound of the starter puttering out, a hand comes into frame with a gun - aimed at Troy's head.

Boom.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH FUNERAL - MORNING

Back at the funeral. Alberto's words ring-out truer than ever, with bone-chilling prescience.

ALBERTO
We cut the heads off snakes.

Boom.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIN TRESTLE - AFTERNOON

Back to the lot under the train trestle. The gun fires.
BANG! BANG! BANG!

Troy Hunt is killed. The last shot rings-out with a booming bass reverb. It echoes into the cavernous warehouse, as if the locations and actions themselves are tethered.

CUT TO:

INT. FEED WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Back to the feed warehouse. John sits, center-frame, eye-line just above camera. With a new perspective on the machinations of John's plan, we now see him in a different light.

Maybe it's not Cirillo who is in-control. Maybe it's John. A slow dolly pushes in on him as he takes a deep breath and calmly re-centers himself.

DANNY (V.O.)

And the ones we have to accept ourselves.

Boom.

CUT TO:

EXT. BIG EARN'S DINER ALLEY - NIGHT

Back to the diner alley from earlier. Big Earn turns back and looks at John. They hold a glance at one another.

DANNY (V.O.)

None of us are the man we really want to be.

Boom. Music continues.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESOLATE INTERSECTION - NIGHT

Back at the crash. Danny holds baby Isabella close to his chest. He rocks her back and forth, waiting for emergency services to arrive. He looks up, eye-line almost to camera.

DANNY (V.O.)

But we try. We have to.

Boom. Music ends. We match-cut.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. FEED WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

John matches the same face, framing, and demeanor as Danny in the previous scene. The resemblance, in these two moments of pivotal decision-making, show the duality of their brotherhood, visually, more than anything.

John holds an icy stare on Cirillo. He clenches his fists and grits his teeth so tightly it feels as though they'll sand themselves down.

His anger is palpable until - again - a wash of clarity.

John eases his tensed posture. He almost smiles, even.

JOHN

It's funny.

MOE CIRILLO

What is?

JOHN

The feed store. That you picked it.
'Base of operations'. Whatnot.

Cirillo smirks.

MOE CIRILLO

Heh. I didn't pick it.
(points at John)
Danny did. Strategically - it's
served us well for years.

John feels a certain irony.

JOHN

There isn't a place in this town I
think I know better than this old
feed store. Not a place I went more
with my brothers and friends than
just hanging out here, shooting the
shit. I've probably been here a
thousand times. *Good* times. Memories.
Discovering all its - you know- nooks
and crannies. Like
(scoots chair forward)
For instance - that back galley looks
boarded-up, sure.
(motions behind him)
But I happen to know if you were to
walk three or four paces to the left
and remove the tile covering, there's
a grain hatch anyone could get into
from the basement level.

Cirillo looks unnerved.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Or that you're basically in a faraday
cage when all the doors are closed-
up back here. Just *kills* any cell
signal. Radio, even, too.

Cirillo's eyes widen.

JOHN (CONT'D)

And that....once you lock that
auxiliary entrance from *the outside*?
You need a key just to get out.

Cirillo realizes it. His own pride got the most of him. He's been bested.

CIRILLO

What did you do?

JOHN

You think you know this town. You think you *understand it*. And maybe you do.

Beat.

JOHN (CONT'D)

But I was born here. This is my home. I went to 1st grade with the idiot that frisked me at the door. My second cousin, Al, loads your gun. Christ, my **brother** was your right-hand man.

Cirillo grows fidgety. He's unsure if he should reach for his weapon or if the timing is premature.

He's only got one shot. He's smart enough to know it.

JOHN (CONT'D)

See, I spent years thinking I had walked away from everything. Everyone. Spent even *more years* trying to forget about them entirely.
(long breath)
And then I come back here....and I realize something: I hadn't.

Cirillo looks uncharacteristically alarmed. He slowly makes his hand toward his inner jacket holster.

JOHN (CONT'D)

And even though I gave up on them?
No one ever - ever - gave up on me.

Cirillo quickly reaches for his pistol.

Before he can, John pulls Danny's gun from his jacket. THWIP. He shoots Cirillo in the chest. One shot and a big flash.

BANG!

MOE CIRILLO IS KILLED.

His body slumps to the side, dropping to the floor. THUD.

On the sound, the strumming of a song begins.

MUSIC CUE: "Keep The Wolves Away" by Uncle Lucius.

INT. ESPIE'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

THUD. On the sound of Cirillo's body dropping, we return back to the knock on Espie's door.

KNOCK-KNOCK.

Espie answers it, but no one is there.

At her feet on the porch, however, are two large duffels. The very same from the bank, filled with cash. Nearly \$178,000.

On top of the bags there is a letter addressed to her from John.

She looks at it, tearfully, then back up to the emptiness of her surrounding neighborhood.

No one in sight. Music builds.

CUT TO:

EXT. TEXAS HIGHWAY - SUNRISE

Sunrise. The old Ford Bronco, Danny's car, takes off down a long country road with John at the wheel. The strumming and accordion tones of the music lift in volume.

He lets the sunshine hit his face, closing his eyes and taking-in the warmth.

A calm moment of comfort and relief, finally.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL STADIUM BLEACHERS - MAGIC HOUR

We see a quick flash of a happy moment - John and Danny sitting together at the bleachers, laughing, smiling, and looking forward to a hopeful future.

Danny raises his bottle to toast his brother.

DANNY

To the future.

John raises his bottle to meet him.

JOHN

To the future.

Boom.

CUT TO:

EXT. TEXAS HIGHWAY - SUNRISE

John opens his eyes, narrowing his gaze down the road once more. He doesn't smile, but you can see resolve in his demeanor.

The lone vehicle increases in speed. Music builds.

John's voice now, not Danny's, narrates a closing line:

JOHN (V.O.)
Everybody's got a debt to pay...
Everybody's got a cross to bear.

The Bronco flies down and into the sunset.

Music crescendos. Vocals of "Keep The Wolves Away" begin.
Boom.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END.