

crashingMTN

Joshua Smith

Disclaimer: This is a fictional story. Do not glorify, imitate, or reenact any of the stunts, violence, language, and general behavior depicted herein.

Only diegetic sound. No score.

PART I

Rinse the blade.

PRE-LAP: ANGLE GRINDER.

INT. FABRICATION BAY/COMMERCIAL SHELL - DALLAS - DAY

His gloved hand pins the sheetmetal to the edge as the steel keens under the wheel and sparks like sungrit burst and skitter and die across the darkness of the floor.

The chainlink shakes.

GC (O.S.)  
*Yo, STURGILL.*

SILAS STURGILL JR (34) stops and slides his muffs to his collar. Broad plenty and dumbed by rage he talks like char on bone. Most days not at all.

The GC waves him out. He pockets his earplugs and lifts his goggles. Flash burns mar his face. A false left eye.

They stride past the Crew bent to ductwork.

GC (CONT'D)  
(into phone)  
You send the lien to Lee and if he  
don't answer you drive to his house  
and you wake his ass up.

Sturgill's eye cuts to a slab of sunlight on the ground. Dust spirals bright there. They reach the spot.

GC (CONT'D)  
(into phone)  
It's business. I really don't give  
a damn what you say.

Sturgill tilts his chin up. His voice comes in dragging.

STURGILL (PRE-LAP)  
It's no accident.

EXT. STAGING YARD - DAY

The Child inside her pulls her off-center like a stone that kicks.

One hand on the grab handle and the other on Sturgill's shoulder MIRA (25) takes a ginger step down from the driver's seat of a F-150 XL mudder.

A Crew Hand chucks his hardhat sideways then topples a line of duct. Thunder sharp.

MIRA (PRE-LAP)  
But who would you sue?

INT./EXT. STURGILL'S TRUCK (MOVING) - MIDTOWN - SUNSET

STURGILL  
It's a breach of contract, Mira.

MIRA  
But does a verbal count as a breach?

Highrises of steel and glass blaze like false falls above the lithium and litter-pocked street.

His eye flicks to the low gas gauge. Then to the center console.

STURGILL  
Who told you to bring the mail.

MIRA  
I was on the way out.

He grabs the stack and fans them. He hands one over and she tears it open.

Nerves gone mindless Souls shuffle past storefronts boarded like eyelids stooping and curling between charcoal-tarp lean-tos strung out along both sides of the trenches, bodies unhinged like misstrung marionettes encroaching the gutters of drumfire and flood rot.

MIRA (CONT'D)  
It's a check. Five hundred and forty-nine dollars.

She nods grinning. He nods. Turns his head to her.

MIRA (CONT'D)  
I'm kidding. Kind of.

He snatches the letter and eyes 5.49. He crumples the papers into his fist and smacks the ball off her cheek.

STURGILL

You wanna camp out here next month.

She unfolds the check then tears along the perforation.

STURGILL (CONT'D)

The kid's first sight's gonna be  
asphalt and piss.

She irons the check out over her belly and takes her phone  
and deposits the check.

STURGILL (CONT'D)

We're two months behind and one  
month away and you're over here  
laughin it up like we won the damn  
Powerball.

INT. KITCHEN - LOW-INCOME HOUSING - NIGHT

Sturgill dumps a tin pillbox into his palm. A heap of  
phosphorescent tablets. Clear as dreams. Real as stones.

He runs the tap over a glass. The faucet coughs the color of  
pennies.

He stares at a roach trap. At the drain strainer clotted with  
Cheerios. At the green milk cap lodged there.

He grabs a mug and fills it with whiskey and downs the  
tablets in one long draw. He wipes his mouth across the  
reverse flag inked in black on his arm and spits like a green  
lion of no country.

LIVING ROOM

The news drones from a 65in LED TV. He shrugs over to the  
couch where Mira sits and heels at its edge.

PUNDIT (V.O.)

Has surged 116 percent in just one  
year and yet the LISEP's TRU number  
is closer to 25 percent. The  
byzantine bloat is grinding the  
bones of the very people who

Mira remotes the TV off. He presses his ear to her stretched  
belly and hears. The thrum of life.

MIRA

Tell me how you married a face.

STURGILL  
I married a face.

MIRA  
And how many ships were launched? A  
thousand? Or ten thousand?

STURGILL  
A boatload.

She slaps his shoulder and he stretches his neck and kisses her hard on the cheek then sits hooking her close.

Ambulance sirens yelp down a distant street. A helicopter beats overhead an iron drum. Blades of entry light rake across the carpet from the landing like live wire.

MIRA (O.S.)  
I'll hafta give Mother a call.

EXT. IN THE LEE OF A LOADING DOCK - DAY

Sturgill squats next to Homeless Man slumping in the non-place. The sweet rot of necrosis boils black from calf to bare foot. Flesh mourning itself.

STURGILL (V.O.)  
Your mother's not saving us.

Sturgill offers a fast food sack. The Man sets it down.

MIRA (V.O.)  
Silas, let's pray.

Sturgill pulls a tin can from his coat. Shakes one out.

STURGILL (V.O.)  
I'm thinkin I said.

The Man clasps the tablet and salutes with his fist then downs it dry.

Sturgill rests a clipboard on his knee.

STURGILL  
Got some questions for ya.

EXT. MAILBOX OF A FORECLOSED HOUSE - DAY

Sturgill tears open an envelope curbside near a sopping couch. Inside a new credit card reads Ephraim Estavillo. He turns it in the light.

INT./EXT. F-150/BANK BRANCH ENTRANCE - MORNING (RAINING)

Sturgill cases the dark reflection of the double glass. An armored truck pulls to the curb. He glances at his watch then jots the time down on a small notepad.

An Armored Guard rounds the truck. The barrel of his holstered pistol strikes the scant light.

INT. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. BRANCH LIBRARY - DAY

ONLINE CLASSIFIEDS

City Painting Job 30 per hr.

Be prepared at 9:30am with standard painting uniform, cap, white top and pants, face mask and green vest.

No experience needed.

Sturgill chicken-pecks the last line.

The home screen clock reads 00:00:00:55. He hovers the cursor over PAY as if it's the firing circuit of an IED. Then he clicks and leans back like he armed the charge.

EXT. BANK BRANCH - DAWN - HIGH OVERHEAD

The day-raw of a low dawn bleeds red. The moon a plum of bone on the horizon. The land thawing its monadic hush after a freezing desert night.

EXT. DUMPSTER ENCLOSURE - MORNING

He empties the tin of tablets and chases them with the last of a plastic water bottle he crinkles. He tosses both into the hollow dumpster then crouches low and retrieves a garden sprayer and a grocery tote from behind the bin.

EXT. BANK BRANCH ENTRANCE - MORNING

35 Men in matching painter outfits loaf. Some gripe stalking in tight circles darkened with doubt. One Soul leans against the stacked stone column dead-faced.

The 36th arrives in a windbreaker blond wigged and masked. He sets down a 2-gallon garden sprayer and pumps. A fine mist settles over the flowers under a reluctant sun.

He scans the building. New enough. Planters kept. Pavement de-gummed once or twice. Clean glass. No trash.

A few Painters glance his way. He checks his watch and adjusts his earbuds.

Lime green chrysanthemums. Their color matches his vest where a bee lands. The bee climbs slow.

He swats it down and drops the hose and strides toward the double doors. The bank swallows him whole.

INT. BANK LOBBY - MORNING

He moves to the counter along the wall and turns his head to the Security Lady watching nestled squat in her hi-vis vest near the door.

He checks his phone and bumps the volume up then slips a blister pack from his pocket and clicks a lozenge free and tucks it under his mask between his gum and cheek.

He studies his watch. The second hand drags itself to the hour tick by tick by tick. One before ten.

He unzips his windbreaker and turns to face the doors. The seconds cling like second skin.

An Armored Guard enters carrying two deposit bags.

Sturgill paces to the center of the lobby and pounces pullings out a canister of bear mace from under his pit and spraying the Guard's face like a lesser fire extinguisher.

SECURITY CAM

The Guard recoils and drops a bag as Sturgill snatches it and bolts. The Security Lady rises and gets some spray before he leaves.

EXT. BANK ENTRANCE - MORNING

He strides past the Onlookers and armored truck.

EXT. CROSSWALK - MORNING

A Motorist slams horn as he crosses with his shoulders squared and his jaw like flint.

EXT. SCENIC TRAIL - MORNING

He slips into The Loop where giant reed crowd the path.

EXT. TRINITY RIVERBANK - MORNING

He hauls the loot onto an air mattress and climbs on.

He drifts downriver.

He sheds cap and wig and mask and windbreaker and vest.

He gropes for the dye pack sewn into the kevlar seam and takes out an aerosol canister from his cargo pocket and sprays the spot.

He fastens a rotary cutter and gives one clean slice. Hundred-dollar banknotes spill out. Each bound \$10,000.

He pushes fifty bands into a black trash bag. Coins and checks he flings.

The deposit bag he swings up to the sky. It lands on the river. A red cloud bursts with a pop.

Coughing he tosses his gloves and scoops water and flushes his eye. Police sirens. Still far.

Hitting the sandbar he splashes off the mattress and slashes it with the rotary cutter and scrambles up the west bank.

EXT. WHITE ROCK ESCARPMENT - MORNING

He climbs onto a ledge winded and drenched. He squats and crams the loot deep into a limestone nook. A bufo toad hops in the foreground.

He Zercher-hefts a one-man slab and drops it at the opening and steps back. He takes up another rock. One more.

EXT. BISHOP ARTS DISTRICT - MORNING

Storefront speakers needle the cool of the morning haze. The apparitions of window-gazers hold in glass. None turn as he shoulders past.

EXT. CURBSIDE - MORNING

He drops into the backseat of a sedan as his steeltoes track in tawny chips.

OLDTIMEY JUDGE (PRE-LAP)  
And had your truck not been repo'd.

INT. SEDAN (IDLE) - MORNING

He exits and the Driver turns to the darkened seat. His smile dies on his face.

OLDTIMEY JUDGE (PRE-LAP)  
And if that young driver hadn't  
been as attentive as he was, you  
might not be standing here today.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Sturgill stands poker-faced beside his Public Defender. The OLDTIMEY JUDGE (65) scratches at the white hair spooling from his ear.

OLDTIMEY JUDGE  
At any rate, given your refusal to  
aid in the recovery of the stolen  
funds, and the so-called mitigating  
factors of both your absentee  
upbringing and whatever leniency  
your brief service record might  
warrant, the State of Texas finds  
you guilty of assault with intent  
to cause harm, possession of a  
dangerous weapon, criminal  
conspiracy and endangerment and the  
first-degree felony of aggravated  
robbery. This court hereby  
sentences you to reap the storm. An  
aggregate total of 23 years in  
federal prison.

The Judge hammers the gavel and rattles the scales.

INT. PRISON BUS (MOVING) - NOON

The sun nukes its bald scream. Chains clink along the rail and jarring. Oven heat and mote-d air as if someone shook out a vacuum bag.

OLD VOICE (V.O.)  
You have the silence for one.

Sturgill gazes out at cattle grazing under the shadows of the cirri sweeping the verdant plains. A shy sky brims like a waterpark deep in fall. Closed.

OLD VOICE (V.O.)  
 The mind wanders. Always much time  
 to kill. Much time to forget.

Blonde hills rise like the topography of a woman. Breathing  
 skin. Hip to ribs to shoulder.

Phone poles clip across every two seconds or so.

OLD VOICE (V.O.)  
 Watch the time spiral all the way  
 down. Down. Down.

EXT. PERMIAN BASIN - FORT STOCKTON, TX - DAY - HIGH OVERHEAD  
 Country burns to sand.

OLD VOICE (V.O.)  
 Gentle it goes for the gentle. For  
 the cruel. For the intelligent.

In the landlocked hollow stands the behemoth TDCJ Lynaugh  
 Unit, its walls of gunmetal and ashen bone endures the sun's  
 continual onslaught. Anvils of daylight. Nothing moves.

OLD VOICE (V.O.)  
 Quiet it goes for the quiet. For  
 the mean. For the repugnant.

INT. BUILDING 12 - LYNAUGH UNIT - EARLY MORNING

Old knucklebones grip the bars of a grate no wider than a  
 coffin set on end. Clear-framed glasses refract as OLDBONES  
 (90) steps in bulbous and bald as a skull.

OLDBONES  
 You count and recount all the  
 things you are no more. Until your  
 count becomes the truth.

Sturgill eyes Oldbones grin as it climbs slow in decrepit  
 segments. Cadaver flesh mottled with the fungal greens and  
 sallows of a molding orange. A face no more.

GUARD (O.S.)  
 Don't frat.

Sturgill secures the mound and pushes the laundry cart on.

GUARD (PRE-LAP) (CONT'D)  
 Clear the fence.

EXT. REC YARD - DAY

Sunflare chisels Sturgill's squint. He backs up eyeing the electric fence sign.

The hottest hour and heat that burns the capillaries of the ears and sucks the water out of each cell.

Swarms of inmates thrash in monkish schisms running their flags shirtless with banned fists gassing their sets. Beasts all, shadowboxing no shadows their crazed calisthenics lash syncopated and solar, warlike and without end.

He steps tracing the perimeter under the ironshade of barbed veins. Tumbleweeds congeal along the base. Double coil razor wire knotted atop twin chainlink fences a Goliath and a half tall spaced twenty feet apart.

They loom like nations.

The southwest peaks of the high country remain clean as a razor blade. Perfect as a noose.

The desert boils on its back at peace the way a furnace is, thistles clawing at the scaled earth, calcined stones strewn sun-riven across the downcountry for days, all things yearning within a crucible of emptiness that chews the teeth of men and wheels the very grindstone of the world toward no blessed break.

Sturgill's inner ear RINGS. And out of the dusthaze a black ghostrider emerges.

An outer patrol on horseback walking headstrong from his route with a smartphone bound to his hand and a rifle laid across his lap like it had been born there.

INT. PERIMETER TOWER NO. 3 - DAY

A Sharpshooter tosses a burrito into the microwave and slams express. The machine whirs to life and he steps out.

EXT. REC YARD - DAY

The Sharpshooter shuts the door behind him and steps out. He stakes his feet and stands wide. CCTV under the deck.

STURGILL

Circuit's been down for a while.

No response. Sturgill raises a hand to cover the guardglare.

STURGILL (CONT'D)  
Bet you guys got AC.

He points toward the administration building.

STURGILL (CONT'D)  
Over in the bubble.

The Sharpshooter swats at nothing seen.

Sturgill turns back and paces the wire for a time.

He stops and zeros in through the fences toward the mountain range on storm clouds surging like ink loosed in water. Like black fire.

DEERNUM (PRE-LAP)  
It's Apache.

INT. PRISON LAUNDRY ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Choked by the alkaline bite of bleach and lye a Lipan Apache Mexican named The One With The Long Deer Legs called DEERNUM (45) loads mesh bags with Sturgill along a wall of churning washer-extractors.

DEERNUM  
Was told it meant I run toward death. Or from it. Not much of a vision quest. Da Rez, they got nothin but Jacks and Johns and Jims now. I dunno. Maybe they got tired.

Sweat dapples Deernum's shorn scalp. The head of a dark mole.

STURGILL  
So what do I call you.

DEERNUM  
Just call me Deernum.

A shuffle of Inmates mill and moil amid the miasma. One wheels a mound of bedding into the cage.

STURGILL  
What'd you do.

Deernum straightens and sniffs.

DEERNUM  
Strangled a woman. And I'm doin all day and a night for it too OK.

STURGILL  
You know where they run the  
priority circuits.

DEERNUM  
You aimin ta fix them.

Sturgill stops and glances at a Guard at the far end of the  
room.

DEERNUM (CONT'D)  
Most everybody already knows. The  
way out is through an airduct in da  
boiler room.

STURGILL  
Does it lead to the CO side.

DEERNUM  
If it ain't known. It could.

STURGILL  
Doesn't sound like it if nobody's  
tried.

DEERNUM  
Tsk. All that vent talk started  
with da COs.  
(beat)  
Da better the mirage. Da better da  
prison.

MERCY (PRE-LAP)  
You'd do good. Not to talk to him.

INT. THE REC - EVENING

MERCY  
He's in a snitch program. Some  
think. He's also Texas Syndicate.

DEAN MERCY CURTIS (32) broods under the stark overheads with  
a Two of Spades branding the side of his neck. His  
constricted pupils flense across the board machinelike and  
wolfish and quick.

Pawns click under the table.

STURGILL  
Those aren't lines I draw.

MERCY

No one gives a shit about the lines  
you draw. I'd just mind my own race-  
car. Is all.

Two Whites mean mug Sturgill from across the room. One too  
big to ignore.

STURGILL

Guess I'll sleep with one eye open.

MERCY

On account of the eye.

STURGILL

On account of what it cost.

MERCY

What it cost.

STURGILL

All are evil. All the time.

The pop of zipgun headshot and the room erupts. Mercy palms  
something from his sock and slides it across.

MERCY

Go on. It's a gift.

Sturgill returns to the board. He grabs it and thumbs the  
foil. The outline of a tablet.

MERCY (CONT'D)

For amusing me.

(checks)

Check.

Sturgill flips it back.

STURGILL

I'd rather earn it.

Sturgill lifts the king and finds luft.

MERCY

You'll need another five thousand  
more games for that.

(checks)

Check.

(beat)

Until your eye becomes checkered.

INT. STURGILL'S CELL - NIGHT

At his bunk Sturgill lifts his rolled blanket. A square of foil.

He walks over and tosses it through the bars and it hits the tier floor and drops through a slat.

PRE-LAP: CART WHEELS CREAK.

EXT. DOG RUN ALLEY - DAY

Sturgill steers a laundry cart across pavement. Oldbones ambles to the fence. A Guard lags in the distance.

OLDBONES  
Look up Soldier.

Sturgill stops. He flares his nostrils. Fixed.

OLDBONES (CONT'D)  
What's a story if not for another  
time. Gave you one nasty tick, too.

STURGILL  
(through his teeth)  
Fuck off.

Sturgill's lids snap a percussive flash of white light. The Guard closes in.

GUARD  
Don't frat. Keep it goin.

OLDBONES  
Gently now.

Sturgill stares then pushes the creaking cart on.

OLDBONES (CONT'D)  
I do not kill to eat. I kill by  
birthing. And when my children wake  
in darkness, they feed on  
innocence.  
(beat)  
I am no liar. I never lied.  
(beat)  
Do you remember. Huh.

His glasses press into the chainlink.

OLDBONES (CONT'D)  
I said I remember one thing though!

He shakes the fence with force.

OLDBONES (CONT'D)  
I RE-MEMBER ONE THING!

SMASH TO

INT. GARAGE MAN-CAVE - PIKESVILLE, CA - MORNING

SUPER: FIFTEEN MONTHS LATER

A Glock muzzle knocks the bone of Sturgill's head.

He stirs. His arms cradle his head on the red felt of a poker table. Tats coil like kudzu across a trellis of muscle.

In crisp police uniform GRIN WHEELER (34) stands a blockheaded Rottweiler of a man.

WHEELER  
You should've finished it. Get up.

Sturgill jars his head up and stands.

The acrylic of his prosthetic catches the light. A man-cave of consumer idiocy. Iron to lift. Cinnabar neon. Guns coiled under glass. A heavy bag hanging like hog. The rot of a dying world.

WHEELER (CONT'D)  
I said the girl's alive.

STURGILL  
She's not.

Wheeler pulls his phone out.

WHEELER  
Lucky I don't cuff you myself.

Wheeler dials 911.

STURGILL  
Give me a head start, Grin.

WHEELER  
The gun's already gone off.

FEMALE DISPATCHER (V.O.)  
911, what's your emergency?

WHEELER

I'm reporting a home invasion in progress.

FEMALE DISPATCHER (V.O.)

Where's the intruder now?

STURGILL

Anne cheated on you.

Laughter oozes out of Wheeler. He stops.

WHEELER

With who.

FEMALE DISPATCHER (V.O.)

Sir, can you hear me?

Sturgill springs berserker. Hysterical strength drives Wheeler through the display glass. The phone hits the floor.

Wheeler goes for his gun. Sturgill clamps Wheeler's wrist. A shot rings the room.

FEMALE DISPATCHER (V.O.)

Sir, are you there?

Sturgill wrenches the gun free and it drops. Wheeler lunges for a takedown as Sturgill cinches a standing guillotine and swings backwards. They collapse to concrete.

Wheeler pounds hip, rib, flank, heart.

The house door opens. Wheeler's Daughters (7 and 9) stand under the doorframe. Backpacks on.

The garage narrows to the sound of Sturgill's breathing. He tightens the hold. To sleep.

INT. WHEELER'S MASTER BEDROOM - MORNING

Sturgill ransacks the nightstand. Unopened mail. Loose bullets. A lighter. Glock mag. His passport. He stops.

A reunion invite. A photocopied ultrasound tucked inside. He exhales like a flint strike then stashes the photocopy into the duffel and leaves.

INT./EXT. MUSTANG/MCKINLEY ELEMENTARY - MORNING

A black 77 Cobra II pulls up and the Girls exit.

STURGILL  
Be good, do good.

PRE-LAP: KNOCKING.

EXT. FRONT DOOR - LATE MORNING

Sturgill knocks. Loud.

LENA GALENE (28) answers. Gingerhead. Dour. She leans onto the jamb and gives a glare clear as ice and laced with splinters.

STURGILL  
Five minutes. Then I'll be outta  
your hair. Wet hair.

She smirks like she means it to hurt.

LENA  
My hair is wet because I have work.

She shuts the door. He hits it again. She opens.

STURGILL  
You have something to tell me.

LENA  
I have nothing to tell you. My  
world would be no different. I know  
enough to know some things.

STURGILL  
So you're a psychologist and an  
engineer?

LENA  
No. You're just neither.

Lena slams the door shut.

STURGILL  
I went to Ty's dealership this  
morning. Cops were everywhere.

INT. MUSTANG (MOVING) - LATE MORNING

They ride silent like the cry of newts in a fire.

LENA (PRE-LAP)  
This is not the kind of thing you  
hold back, Saul.

Lena pulls her phone out.

STURGILL

Don't.

Lena stays on her phone.

STURGILL (CONT'D)

I mean don't call.

LENA

I'm gonna call.

STURGILL

Said don't.

LENA

You don't get to tell me what I  
can't do.

He pulls the Mustang over.

STURGILL

Give me the phone.

Lena freezes and stares.

He reaches under the seat and pulls out chain cuffs and leans across and handcuffs Lena's wrist to the center bolt then grabs Lena's phone and tosses it out the window onto the road.

They stare each other down.

She starts to speak but doesn't. He turns back onto the road.

EXT. E-MOTORS LOT - LATE MORNING

The Mustang noses in and parks at the far end of the lot.

INT. MUSTANG (PARKED) - LATE MORNING

He rolls up a light duffel and stuffs it inside his waistband and holsters Wheeler's Glock and pulls a hunter's hoodie over his head.

LENA

You won't change anything.

He exits the Mustang into the light.

LOT

A sword walking. Past trophy e-cars. The walls ahead already buffed bare with the never-failing labor of forgetting.

FRONT DESK LADY (PRE-LAP)

Sir!

INT. SHOWROOM - LATE MORNING

The Front Desk Lady signals the Security Guard.

INT. DALE'S OFFICE - LATE MORNING

He goes straight to the framed picture on the desk. Lena and Ty at a National Park.

FRONT DESK LADY (O.S.)

Sir, please.

INT. MUSTANG (PARKED) - LATE MORNING

Lena yanks at the door handle. No good. She grabs the window handle. It spins.

She pounds the glass.

LENA

*HEEEEEY!*

She notices the glovebox. She opens it. An OTs-38 Stechkin revolver. Black on black.

DALE (PRE-LAP)

The weaver, right.

INT. DALE'S OFFICE - LATE MORNING

Clean-cut and bookish TY DALE (29) shuts the door.

STURGILL

And you the weevil.

DALE

Sit.

Sturgill dumps the framed picture in the wastebasket and plunks down in Dale's swivelchair. Dale lifts his brow then sits.

DALE (CONT'D)

I figure you're not here to lease.

(beat)

I know about you and Lena.

(beat)

About your river date.

(beat)

Whatever it was. Let's leave it there to rot.

Dale grins like he made quota.

DALE (CONT'D)

(beat)

I think it'd be best if you did like yesterday. And leave.

Abruptly.

STURGILL

I'm here for the money.

DALE

Then you better buy some stock.

(beat)

Or are you planning to set the place on fire.

Sturgill reaches his waistband quick and tosses the duffle onto the desk.

STURGILL

Fill it with cash.

DALE

And somehow

STURGILL

Shut the fuck up n bring the fucking cash.

Dale nods and rises with the duffle and exits. Sturgill watches through the glass wall as he passes toward the backroom.

Sturgill sits for a time then stands. He spits into the wastebasket then checks the door. Locked. The double cylinder deadbolt doesn't budge.

He draws and fires. Bullets shred through the laminated glass and the lungs of the room give and crash down.

HALLWAY

Sturgill steps out toward the backroom.

## LARGE BACKROOM

He circles a desk and spots Dale hidden. He hauls Dale by the collar and drags him to the back vault.

STURGILL (CONT'D)

Open it.

2-5-7-7-2 and it unlocks. Sturgill loads bands of cash into the duffle then pulls out a red monster box and sets it on the counter.

STURGILL (CONT'D)

What's this.

Dale leans over.

DALE

Gold Eagles.

STURGILL

How much.

DALE

Five hundred ounces.

STURGILL

How MUCH.

DALE

I dunno. A million.

Sturgill heaves the 40-pound box into Dale's chest and grabs him by the arm and leads him out.

## HALLWAY

SECURITY GUARD

Easy now!

Sturgill repositions Dale. Gun at his neck. He inches Dale forward.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)

I said Don't move!

Sturgill stops.

STURGILL

I just want the box. Move on down.

Dale double nods.

DALE

Let him out.

The Security Guard backpedals as Sturgill inches Dale forward.

LOBBY - SECURITY CAM POV

The Security Guard backs into the lobby. Sturgill cuts toward the doors with Dale staggering at his hip.

EXT. E-MOTORS LOT - LATE MORNING

Sturgill pulls his Hostage across the lot to the Mustang. The Security Guard trails from a distance. He loads the duffle and the box and slams the hatch shut.

Dale steps back and locks eyes with Lena from the side mirror. Sturgill hops in and ignites and reverses and burns-out.

Dale folds down crosslegged onto the asphalt as rubbersmoke wafts across his face. Tube man inflatables whip like red ribbons in the morning heat.

DEERNUM (PRE-LAP)

Only the honor block mans da boiler room.

INT. LAW LIBRARY - DAY

A placard above the table reads NO TALKING ZONE. Sturgill and Deernum sit at a table with books out.

STURGILL

Then you gotta point one of em out.

DEERNUM

If the lights go down. A riot'll go down.

Mercy approaches the table and braces an arm on top of Sturgill's open book. All of Mercy's tensile musculature leans in.

MERCY

You teachin him to read.

STURGILL

How bout you roll your window up.

MERCY

You know, Fish. You might wanna think before you talk. Some have an odd habit. Of losing their voice around me.

STURGILL

Fuck off.

Mercy stands straight. The law clerk ARI (55) yells from the counter.

ARI (O.S.)

SILENCIO. You got five more minutes.

STURGILL (PRE-LAP)

That's what I meant.

INT. DAYROOM - MORNING

Sturgill presses the receiver harder to his ear.

PHONE CALL - DAYROOM/BACK HOUSE KITCHEN

Mira cradles the half-year-old Child in the crook of her arms and closes the freezer. The phone sits on speaker on the counter.

MARY CLAIRE (48) stands near the window hunched in particle gold.

STURGILL

No priors. No gun spec.

MARY CLAIRE

You left her in the dark, Silas. That was you.

STURGILL

And have her talk me out of it. Put her on.

MARY CLAIRE

That's already been decided.

Mira draws the Child under her shawl and he feeds.

STURGILL

Are you in Pikesville.

MARY CLAIRE

There's no earthly way of finding out. So just save your breath.

STURGILL

Where.

MARY CLAIRE

Are you about done?

STURGILL

How many teeth does he have again.

Mira lifts the Boy's lip. His golden gums gleam raw as a desert sun.

MARY CLAIRE

Four. He's on the booba now.

Sturgill smiles like a man seeing light after a long time underground.

Mira's face holds still as marble.

STURGILL

(beat)

Where're you guys stayin.

MARY CLAIRE

No.

VOICE RECORDING

You have one minute remaining.

STURGILL

Mira. Drop the name.

Mira inhales.

MARY CLAIRE

Is that your last word?

Mary Claire shakes her head to Mira. The Child clutches Mira's collarbone.

MARY CLAIRE (CONT'D)

If there's more, say it now.

Sturgill holds in silence on the line for a long time.

MIRA

(beat)

Redding!

Mary Claire pounces on the phone and hangs up. She shoots Mira the look one gives an only child.

PRE-LAP: NONSENSICAL YELPS.

INT. STURGILL'S CELL - NIGHT

The cellblock drowns in the dark dead as the buried. A crazed Inmate across the way rages ad lib complaints calling the blackout A CURSE. A CONSPIRACY. THE WORK OF THE DEVIL.

Sturgill hangs from the bars of his iron cage.

He lifts his head up high and stares at a dark absence where a vent shaft should be. Hole for air and no air. Grave as the will to breathe.

On his bunk he shifts on the sweat of the pad. Stalactite nubs sprawl across the ceiling. A sulfur bloom.

His mouth moves wordless with the harrowing.

LEGAL AID (PRE-LAP)  
So your appeals attorney quit.

INT. LEGAL VISITATION ROOM - DAY

Sturgill studies the LEGAL AID (30) across the table inside the pale brickpulse of a closed room. Chapstick sheens off her lips like plastic fruit.

LEGAL AID  
And he didn't file the right  
paperwork either. So your motion is  
a nonstarter.

He inhales and lifts his head. She talks. Loud.

LEGAL AID (CONT'D)  
We can proceed without counsel. Or  
secure someone new. Means  
extensions, delays.

He reaches the back of his neck.

LEGAL AID (CONT'D)  
Happens too often. But that's how  
the system's built.

His fingertips graze his scars.

DEERNUM (PRE-LAP)  
You'd still be runnin blind though.

INT. PRISON LAUNDRY ROOM - MORNING

Sturgill and Deernum feed sheets onto the heated rollers. A pinch point hazard sign hangs where the drums meet.

DEERNUM  
There's no way to know da land.

Sturgill ignores and keeps feeding the sheet.

DEERNUM (CONT'D)  
You still gettin pages from her.  
(beat)  
She your first stop.  
(beat)  
Wouldn't risk it myself.  
(beat)  
Hard lines do make clean ends.

STURGILL  
You don't have blood out there  
walkin around with your name.

DEERNUM  
(beat)  
Couldn't tell ya how it feels. But  
it doesn't make me wrong.

INT. BUILDING 12 - DAY

X ROW stenciled on the ironwork. A Guard shadows Sturgill and his cart down the tier.

INT. OLDBONES' CELL - DAY

Inside a sauna of a cell Oldbones' engorged knuckles suffer their essential tremors as he dissects with a filed paperclip what's left of a half-eaten scorpion.

STURGILL (O.S.)  
Laundry.

Oldbones turns. A jeweler's monocular set deep in the hollow of his eye. He stands.

Sturgill spots near a stack of novels a taxonomic hoard of bug husks pinned to cardboard with stripped staples.

Blister beetle and blowfly. Darkling and dung roller. Painted lady and saltbush moth. Nomad bee and hawk wasp. Glowworm.

GUARD

Speed it up.

Oldbones groans fetching his mesh bag from under the cot.

OLDBONES

No man can. No man dare.

Oldbones steps to the bars and hands the bag over and leans into the bars.

OLDBONES (CONT'D)

The answer is the kleptoparasitic  
bee. The hive-mind saboteur.

Sturgill and the Guard move on.

OLDBONES (CONT'D)

It does not build. Just waits. And  
in that brood cell it lays its own  
hunger. And when the light comes  
what wakes does not belong to you  
anymore.

Sturgill stops to fetch from another cell. Oldbones presses his mouth to the bars.

OLDBONES (CONT'D)

Never befriend another man's  
demons.

Sturgill and the Guard continue down the tier out of view.

INT. PRAYER ROOM - NIGHT

Several Men kneel on thin rugs reciting aloud. Sturgill sits apart on the floor with his elbows over his knees carrying nothing behind his eye.

Mercy enters with a Dumptruck who outsizes the room. Sturgill stands quick. They close the distance.

STURGILL

You oughta block your time.

The prayers continue unbroken.

MERCY

Sure. But we're not here to pray.

(beat)

(MORE)

MERCY (CONT'D)

The pill you took belongs to an OG.

(beat)

Come to the dayroom and we'll talk it out.

(beat)

We take you in and read you your charges. And we have the council decide. Might even get an invite.

Sturgill doesn't speak.

MERCY (CONT'D)

Or we can do it the way I like. I'd love to have to.

STURGILL

Not goin.

MERCY

Ok. Sorry. To've interrupted.

Sturgill doesn't blink. Mercy nods and they turn and walk out slow. The prayers continue unbroken.

PRE-LAP: THE HISS OF SHOWERHEADS.

INT. MCR SECURITY CAM - SHOWERS ENTRY - EVENING

A lone Cossacks type rolls in on the cam.

A Guard checks the duty board and grabs a key set.

INT. POD C SHOWER GALLERY - MORNING

Sturgill stands in boxer briefs with his back to the wall rinsing the steam from his hair.

Mercy barrels in with a box cutter riding his hip.

Sturgill bolts to the towel rack with *VAE VICTIS* arching across his upper back Roman-chiseled. He snatches a towel and wraps it around his forearm and lets it hang.

Mercy stutter jabs and Sturgill catches the blade in the net of the towel and twists. The blade clatters across the tile.

The Men punch. Lock. Scramble for footing.

Mercy shoulders Sturgill against the wall.

Elbows. Knees. Sturgill eats it all and drops.

Mercy peels off and goes for the cutter on the floor.

Sturgill rises and Mercy pins him back to the tile with the blade. Buries it once. Blood streaks the tile.

DISTANT MARIACHI MUSIC.

Mercy stabs his torso two more times. Sturgill falls.

Mercy presses the blade to Sturgill's throat. Sturgill grips his wrist as the blade inches down. Into his throat.

MARIACHI blasts as the Guards step in, the noisebox swinging from a Guard's beltloop. Pepper spray arcs wide drenching both men.

A taser hits Mercy. A Third Guard circles detached as a Roman senator. Mercy claws for stabs as Sturgill scraps on instinct.

Blood slicks everywhere.

PRE-LAP: THE HUM OF A VENTILATOR.

INT. PECOS COUNTY MEMORIAL - TRAUMA ROOM - DAY

He lies like the corner plant wooden and papery. Blood runs black up the tube taped to his arm.

CUT TO BLACK

INT. INFIRMARY ROOM - LYNAUGH UNIT - DAY

Fluorescents gloss the walls mummy pale.

An overbed table with runny slop. Bandages run spotted dark from neck to waist.

Sturgill props himself on the cot with one elbow and looks up at the ceiling vent. An iron maw spitting no air. Its grille gone to rust and years.

He swings his legs down with one hand bracing the cot's frame. He steps and chains tauten. He lifts his other arm and watches his fingers tremble to catch an nonexistent breeze.

The door unlocks and opens. Boots step in from the hall and Guard 1 approaches slapping a folder and pen onto the tray.

GUARD 1

If you're willing. You can witness  
an execution in a few months.

Guard 1 realizes then flips a paper over and taps. Sturgill writes left-handed. Guard 1 reads.

GUARD 1 (CONT'D)  
How the hell would I know.

He writes. Guard 1 reads.

GUARD 1 (CONT'D)  
Killed many. Well into his seventies.

He writes. Guard 1 reads.

GUARD 1 (CONT'D)  
This is their second try. First time they couldn't stick a vein 'cause he'd dehydrated himself so bad.

GUARD 2  
You don't wanna go. Don't sign.

He leans over to sign.

INT. INMATE MOVEMENT CORRIDOR - MORNING

Flanked by the jaws of two Guards, Sturgill walks, a steel door ahead. Lock release.

INT. UPPER WALKWAY - MORNING

The Guards nudge Sturgill forward along the rail. Deernum holds court with a Man in scrubs outside the Mental Health Unit below.

Sturgill watches but doesn't stop.

GUARD (PRE-LAP)  
Laundry.

INT. BUILDING 12 - DAY

A Guard shadows Sturgill on laundry duty. The gauze around his neck matted clean.

OLDBONES  
They cut you dumb now.

GUARD  
Laundry.

Oldbones grabs his mesh bag and a tri-fold brochure. He hands both to Sturgill. The Guard intercepts.

OLDBONES  
Just a VA brochure, boss. I'm only  
looking after his soul.

The Guard unfolds it and checks it.

OLDBONES (CONT'D)  
But do not follow me. I follow  
fire. I follow rot.

The Guard hands it over to Sturgill.

OLDBONES (CONT'D)  
Will you be there to see me  
rendered.

Sturgill walks off with the Guard.

OLDBONES (CONT'D)  
As seers are I am no seer. So what  
does that make me.  
(beat)  
Ana atba al-afan. Ana atba al-nar.

Sturgill stops and turns around but the Guard pushes him on.

INT. STURGILL'S CELL - NIGHT

Lights out.

Sturgill tosses on the pad. The VA flyer on the writing shelf  
glows a faint bioluminescent cobalt. Like fishbelly light.

He studies the flyer up close. A minimalist map. He tears  
along the glowline.

DEERNUM (PRE-LAP)  
We've got eyes now.

EXT. PRISON LAUNDRY ROOM - MORNING

Sturgill and Deernum stuff the dyers.

DEERNUM  
Ten miles north. Then east to Fort  
Stockton.  
(beat)  
And I have news, too. Some nut-bat  
that calls himself Major.  
(MORE)

DEERNUM (CONT'D)

He's worked in the boiler room before.

(beat)

And the guy who can get that Philips head. His name's Ari.

ARI (PRE-LAP)

I heard.

INT. LAW LIBRARY - DAY

Ari folds his book sitting with his boots crossed on the service counter. He slips his glasses down.

ARI

But I don't look like some tool of yours, do I.

Sturgill scratches at his throat patch.

ARI (CONT'D)

Tango n ABT are at *WOAR* righ now. But I know you ain't AB. And I ain't Tango neither-s. You offerin what. Mouthwash. Hair products. Detergent. Hm. Can't snort it. Can't huff it. And you sure as hell can't wash with it. What am I gonna do with a buncha *detergent*.

(beat)

But I do love me some African Pride.

Ari hooks his fingers into his scalp and scratches it raw.

ARI (CONT'D)

And I can use some mouthwash.

Sturgill stares.

ARI (CONT'D)

For brew, my guy. For brew. My breath don't stink.

Ari points with his glasses.

ARI (CONT'D)

*How-ever*, the offer is only good until one of you-s get caught. Ain't the only option. But somethin I gotta consider.

Ari brings his feet to the floor and leans in.

ARI (CONT'D)

You *tryin* don't change one second  
of *my* time.

Sturgill stays planted.

ARI (CONT'D)

Standin there like I already didn't  
give ya da damn answa.

INT. REC YARD - DAY

Sturgill nears the bald MAJOR (56) with his neck inked in  
reptile scales. His head rests back basking on a bench.

Sturgill blocks his sun. Major lifts his head up.

MAJOR

Sit down then.

He sits. One of Major's eyes clouds white.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

Funny you want my help. I heard  
when you had your voice there, that  
you had asked if I served. Had  
said, Major. What is he the Major  
of. I'll tell you what I'm the  
major of. The war that never ends,  
bitch. And now you want my help.

Major unpacks a cigarette and places it in his mouth.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

Should've smoked outside. But I am  
but flesh n blood. Teeth n hair.

Major shifts.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

And all the prison's electricity  
runs through there.

Major nods and lights up then exhales.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

The backup generator, too. And  
seein that I also know the pain of  
losing an eye, I'll be honest with  
you. I lost it years back  
transferring from Leavenworth. Man  
gassed a can of hot shot. Paint  
stripper. Bleach. Piss.

(MORE)

MAJOR (CONT'D)

Whatever else they mix to make it  
burn. Threw it in my face while my  
hands were cuffed behind my back.  
Why. I got the wrong kind of  
attention.

(beat)

And that's it. Ain't a soul in here  
wants to see the next man rise up  
and do better.

Sturgill turns his face away and clinches his jaw.

MAJOR (CONT'D)

And. And, my friend. Not everybody  
sees the walls.

Major laughs and blows smoke phlegm-heavy and toothless until  
Sturgill gets up and leaves.

PRE-LAP: CART WHEELS GRIND.

INT. GEN POP CELLBLOCK - MORNING

Sturgill rolls a hamper down the cellblock. The steps of a  
thousand walks.

INMATE (O.S.)

Hey, how's this shit always coming  
back smellin like ass, huh.

Sturgill stops and looks back.

INMATE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Man, get back to your bitch work n  
rinse it the fuck out next time!

Sturgill nears a cell and slams a ladle against the bar. He  
takes the mesh bag and a note from Ari's hand.

ARI

Ya already know, Young Blood. Ya  
already know.

INT. RECREATIONAL LIBRARY - NOON

Sturgill scans the decimals aisle by aisle.

He traces the spines and pulls The Country of the Blind and  
Other Science-Fiction Stories by H. G. Wells. He flips  
through then holds it by the spine shaking the pages  
straight. Nothing.

INT. STURGILL'S CELL - EVENING

Sturgill reads Wells on the top bunk.

He comes across a highlighted word. Under. He flips the rest slow.

Metal. The last one. Table.

INT. RECREATIONAL LIBRARY - DAY

Sturgill sits at the metal table and scans. Then he runs his hand under edge of the table to the corner. Nothing.

He shifts to the other side and runs his hand again. His fingers snag tape. He unfastens it. A wad of TP.

MERCY (PRE-LAP)  
Wassup Fish.

EXT. REC YARD - DAY

Mercy approaches Sturgill repping pull-ups on the bar.

MERCY  
Found out what got ya in here.

Sturgill drops down with the weight of an ox and steps aside. Another inmate jumps up. Sturgill scans the yard.

MERCY (CONT'D)  
I want out, of course. Whadaya say.  
For an old friend.  
(beat)  
Or maybe the brass wants to hear  
what you're up to. I'd hate to have  
to. But I do. I know them boy  
scouts over in the boiler room.

He stares Mercy down.

MERCY (CONT'D)  
And I can work with the snitch. If  
he's in.

Sturgill gives a slight nod then walks off and starts jogging. Mercy hocks phlegm.

LENA (PRE-LAP)  
FBI marshals.

INT. MUSTANG (MOVING) - DAY

The car hums down a heatbrined stretch of highway. Lena eyes I-15 S. She turns to him with one wrist cuffed to the bolt.

LENA

They practically live there. Year round.

No reaction but the rush of the road.

She turns her face to the window. The rotation of some tired sphinx.

LENA (CONT'D)

They will extradite you. Have you regret your life real soon.

STURGILL

Regret is a waste of time.

LENA

Then keep making the same mistakes.

STURGILL

(beat)

You hungry.

Lena shakes her head.

STURGILL (CONT'D)

You thirsty.

LENA

Of course I'm thirsty. It's boiling in here.

He grabs his hoodie and tosses it over her wrist.

EXT./INT. DRIVE THRU/MUSTANG (IDLE) - DAY

The Server hands out the drinks.

Sturgill slots them keeping an eye on the rearview. He passes Lena the bag.

INT. MUSTANG (MOVING) - DAY

Sturgill rolls the Mustang onto the street outside the exit lot. He looks left.

Lena pulls out the Stechkin revolver and holds the muzzle to his head.

LENA  
Stop the car.

He inhales. Then turns right.

LENA (CONT'D)  
Stop.

He drives on.

LENA (CONT'D)  
Stop the car and un-cuff me.

He heads through a green light and onto the onramp.

LENA (CONT'D)  
Pull to the shoulder, Saul. Now.

He merges.

STURGILL  
I'll pull over when you pull the trigger.

LENA  
I won't miss.

The Mustang hits sixty.

LENA (CONT'D)  
Pull over.

Seventy. Seventy-five.

LENA (CONT'D)  
You deaf, too?

She jams the barrel hard into his temple.

He lifts his foot and the engine tapers. Lena steadies the gun.

They ride the stillness of their breath and of the road and and of the heat.

LENA (CONT'D)  
Makes no difference to me if you die.

STURGILL

(beat)

It's a Russian Stechkin. It shoots  
from the bottom barrel.

(beat)

And it swing loads with a very  
special kind of bullet that doesn't  
eject when it's fired. SP-4 rounds.

(beat)

Bullets I do not have.

She stares down the side of the barrel frame.

He veers right. Sharp and hard. Brakes shriek.

Lena's arm jerks forward yanking the trigger as a muffled  
snap spiderwebs the driver-side window. He rips the gun from  
her grip.

LENA

Saul.

He draws the revolver to her face. She gives no flinch.

LENA (CONT'D)

You will be sho

A snap. Blood and matter leap across the passenger window.

Blood mist hangs in the air.

He breathes once then pounds the driver-side glass until it  
implodes like it took a shell of rock salt.

CBP OFFICER (PRE-LAP)

She ride like she looks.

EXT./INT. MUSTANG (IDLE)/TJ BORDER CHECKPOINT - DAY

A CBP OFFICER (50) eyes the Mustang purring at idle. Sturgill  
nods.

CBP OFFICER

How far you goin and how long you  
stayin.

STURGILL

TJ. Three days.

CBP OFFICER

Where're ya comin from.

STURGILL

Mecca.

The Officer leans peering into the hatch. A red sleeping bag bulges under glass.

CBP OFFICER

What you got back there.

STURGILL

What.

CBP OFFICER

In Mecca. Ya inta lettuce work.

STURGILL

No Sir.

CBP OFFICER

You ran it on the Chiriaco straight or you cut the Box Canyon.

STURGILL

The Box.

CBP OFFICER

Less of me, huh. You carrying any firearms.

STURGILL

No Sir.

CBP OFFICER

Got any at home.

STURGILL

Yessir.

CBP OFFICER

Who'd you leave em with.

STURGILL

Under lock and key.

CBP OFFICER

Now. Can you provide me verifiable documentation. *Proving* the authenticity and ownership of this 1977 Mustang Windsor V8 Cobra II.

STURGILL

V6.

CBP OFFICER  
Hell. Cologne block. That a dog ta  
drive.

STURGILL  
Second gen. And it feels like it.

CBP OFFICER  
She don't sound tired.

A microwave beeps behind him.

CBP OFFICER (CONT'D)  
Uno momento.

He steps away inside.

Sturgill notices a jagged shard of glass along the bottom  
frame. He covers it with his forearm.

The Officer returns chewing something molten.

CBP OFFICER (CONT'D)  
Alright, go on through.

Sturgill eases toward the Aduanas Checkpoint.

ROUGH VOICE (PRE-LAP)  
Satan's havin himself a field day.

EXT. TACONETA - EL PASO - DAY

A marbled sky streaks east to west.

RANGER CORY FLYNN (59) sits thumbing his phone. A bonewhite  
brim crowns the folds engraved above his brow.

Brizzled and sunworn RANGER THOMAS CALDWELL (33) aka Champ  
sits across. His spine holds but his nose can't. Cartilage  
long since caved by fists.

FLYNN  
It's palpable. Ya got. *Things*  
jumpin around the cities. Nonhuman.  
Rabid. Hostile. Look here, they  
fortified a homeless encampment up  
in Bellingham Washington. Half-mile  
wide. Pushin fent, tranq, K2,  
i.t... God-knows.

CALDWELL  
Cartel's springing up where you'd  
least expect.

FLYNN

Each servin his own law. The result  
is ruin. And our pay don't even  
match inflation.

CALDWELL

Ya oughta've held off on the fifth.

FLYNN

Wouldn't trade him for the world.

CALDWELL

I meant the whiskey you drank last  
night.

FLYNN

I'm drunk on truth, Caldwell. We  
need every arrow we can muster.  
Wheat and tares, rats and hares.  
All grown up together. And  
judgment'll find each out like  
lightning in a field. Has to. It  
comes because it is what is owed.

CALDWELL

A part of me doesn't want to  
believe that.

FLYNN

You can't beg water from stone. But  
it don't stop folks from tryin.

A Cook slams down a tray of tacos then stalks off. Flynn  
stares at the tacos. Then at Caldwell.

Flynn's phone lights up 703.

PHONE CALL - TACONETA'S TACOS/KING AIR

HAIR PARTED LEFT (45) rides the jet a man all breath and  
blood and thunderheaded. His voice slides like water down  
marble.

Another suited Man sits silent conference style.

FLYNN (CONT'D)

Let me guess

HAIR PARTED LEFT

El Paso. Taconeta. Fish Tacos. No  
salsa.

Flynn eyes the tube of antacids on top of the metal napkin  
dispenser.

HAIR PARTED LEFT (CONT'D)  
Remember the fugitive outta  
Lynaugh.

FLYNN  
Which one.

HAIR PARTED LEFT  
The ex Marine. Robbed a dealership  
in Pikesville this morning. Took  
what seems to be a monster box the  
dealership's refusing to report. He  
crossed the taco stand twenty  
minutes before the APB. What I want  
is the hostage. But she wasn't  
seated when he crossed. Gotta hunch  
he's gunnin for Del Norte.

FLYNN  
And what if he's not.

HAIR PARTED LEFT  
You've got friendlies in Chihuahua.  
Y'all can grab some margaritas and  
bitch about how the times are a-  
changin. I'll send you the intel.

Caldwell moves the tacos closer to himself.

FLYNN  
How's the other side.

HAIR PARTED LEFT  
Look Flynn, no promises, but the  
girl is connected. I know her  
personally. So you take his head  
like you're holdin a grudge and  
you'll be in my good graces. You  
get me. Like she's your own  
daughter.

A Teenage Girl moves up the aisle with a orange slice.

FLYNN  
Understood.

She leans against his seat like a rite rehearsed. Bites.

HAIR PARTED LEFT  
And my good graces are a mighty  
fine place to be.

He places a hand at her back and leaves it there.

HAIR PARTED LEFT (CONT'D)

Better than some grimy hole-in-the-wall on some random Monday bored as the everlivin daylight. Am I right.

FLYNN

I'll see to it.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

Mucho gusto, Compadre.

Hair Parted Left hangs up. Flynn rises and pockets his phone.

FLYNN

Chop-chop, Champ. The bullring calls.

Flynn walks off. Caldwell hurries a bite and follows. Flynn doubles back for his soda.

EXT. MOTEL EL SOL PARKING LOT - CHIHUAHUA - EVENING

Sturgill parks and cuts the engine. It hisses and retracts and ticks a bestial hot gut.

INT. MOTEL EL SOL ROOM NO. H23 - MIDNIGHT

The mirror catches him slouching on the bed framed as if through a door.

A shoulder holster droops from the bedposts. The cufflinks on the nightstand don't catch the light. Clothes air out.

The Stechkin weighs under calloused hands. A jolt jets through him a twitch in his jaw. Fireworks.

More pops.

He rises and parts the curtain with two fingers. Slow. Trained.

Outside Revelers light fireworks in the lot. They drift toward the rear of the Mustang.

He crosses to the duffle on the dresser. The sonogram juts from the zip. He folds it like a receipt and slides it into his back pocket.

He goes and squats in front of the fireplace and inserts the gas key into the valve and turns on the gas and pulls back the mesh curtain. He strikes a lighter and flames unfurl.

Fireworks blast outside. He rises and tucks the revolver into his waistband and grabs the ice bucket and exits.

EXT. OUTSIDE MOTEL ROOM - MIDNIGHT

Their noise carries a tin-ish echo through the night air.

Sturgill exits the room and steps to the curb and fixes a hard stare. He heads across the breezeway.

ICE MACHINE

Half-moons hail down.

NEAR MUSTANG

He sets the ice bucket on the hood and unlocks the driver side door through the empty frame and pulls the seat forward and slides out the monster box from under the seat.

Moths flicker near the room's wallsconce and open maw.

INT. MOTEL BATHROOM - MIDNIGHT

Fluorescent lights trip on. He sets the ice bucket in the sink and runs the cold water and draws the shower curtain and places the monster box in the tub.

FIREPLACE

He squats. The fire writhes like fire tied to rock. He places the revolver atop the flames.

He cuts the faucet in the bathroom and brings the ice bucket and sets it in front of the fireplace and pulls up a chair and sits hunching over.

After a time he hooks the revolver with the poker and flips it. The barrel glows lava-red. The grip smokes black.

Fire-cracks spilt the dark. He stiffens. Waits.

He hooks the revolver and holds it over the ice bucket and drops it. Quenching steam erupts and the gunmetal crackles.

BATHROOM

He stomps the barrel and bends it against the tile until it breaks.

PRE-LAP: BONES CLACK.

INT. THE REC - DAY

Sturgill sits across Mercy at a domino table.

MERCY

Three is too many.

Sturgill stares.

MERCY (CONT'D)

A friend of mine. His cousin went hang-gliding over a lake. She got up in the air and panicked and started unclipping her harness. Then she dropped. A hundred and fifty feet down. Dead before the splash. Family didn't understand why. Wasn't a suicide. Wasn't an accident.

Sturgill eyes the room then back to Mercy.

MERCY (CONT'D)

The three of us are up there right now. You get the snitch to pass you the screwhead before Labor Day night.

Mercy sets a bone. Sniffs.

MERCY (CONT'D)

He won't know what hit him.

Sturgill muses. Mercy spreads his arms wide.

MERCY (CONT'D)

I'm tellin you, I've shot bird and bull alike. Felled trees taller than these here walls. Built and burned houses. All the same. And not *once* did I ask another man for permission.

Sturgill surrenders a nod. Mercy folds his hands over the table.

MERCY (CONT'D)

You heard about the catfish.

Sturgill shakes his head.

MERCY (CONT'D)

A particular man in Block R fed a catfish through the toilet.

(MORE)

MERCY (CONT'D)

Kept it alive on scraps. And when the guards finally found out, she was blind and big as a baby. And after they killed her. They said the guy never spoke again. Just sat there all day. Mouth open.

Mercy demonstrates.

MERCY (CONT'D)

You understand. Cut him loose.

Sturgill nods.

MERCY (CONT'D)

And keep your mouth shut.

Sturgill raises his brow-line.

GUARD (PRE-LAP)

This here. Is the time.

EXT. EXECUTION COURTYARD - EARLY MORNING

Oldbones sits strapped to a steel-frame chair bolted to the concrete. Black-clad from crown to boot. Chest and wrists and legs bound by belts.

Razor wire loops dull as dead mercury above the walls. The horizon smolders rosa ash. Five riflemen stand at the ready with Winchester Model 70s cradled in their arms.

GUARD

Last words.

OLDBONES

Can you spare a smoke.

The paper bull's-eye taped to Oldbones' chest flutters then falls still. Oldbones spits thin.

The Lead Guard regards the Squad. A Rifleman unpacks a cigarette.

A thud.

Sturgill stands distant in the witness booth. With cuffed hands he hits the polycarbonate glass again. Inside the Guards step close and the Priest enters.

The Rifleman tongues a tooth then sets the cigarette between his own lips and lights it.

OLDBONES (CONT'D)

I am as reformed as the next. And still, the blood does in fact remain on the blade. But I remember one thing though. I remember today as if it were all my days henceforth.

The Rifleman drops what's left and crushes it under his boot.

GUARD

Squad ready.

Chambers snap clear as clockwork.

Birds chitter beyond the walls. Oldbones looks up. The sky bleeds bright at its eastern edge.

And nowhere. Not one bird.

INT. WARDEN'S OFFICE - EARLY MORNING

WARDEN BANNOCK

(into phone)

There ain't no reason to think it's some plague. People pay good money to have the worms ran outta em.

WARDEN BANNOCK (65) sees a sealed letter open at his desk.

WARDEN BANNOCK (CONT'D)

You think I run some country club. Omelets on Tuesdays, french toast on Thursdays... Let me pull their salt for payroll. Strip rations to starch and bone. See how they like famine... And if these complaints keep comin up, the unit'll sleep in tents, with every last one of em sportin pink... 'Cause I couldn't care less, bye.

Bannock hangs up and whacks the comm.

WARDEN BANNOCK (CONT'D)

Send me a runner, Shelly.

He sniffs. In a moment a Courier enters.

WARDEN BANNOCK (CONT'D)

This here is a Stay of Execution. I believe they're already outside.

COURIER

Yessir.

WARDEN BANNOCK

Go ahead n halt procedure. I'll  
notify the Shift Sergeant  
immediately. He'll radio it in.

The Courier jumps for the door.

WARDEN BANNOCK (CONT'D)

HERE.

Bannock holds up the letter.

WARDEN BANNOCK (CONT'D)

Take da pappa with you. Hand it to  
the Team Leader.

The Courier returns and grabs the letter and exits.

Bannock opens a drawer and pulls out a woodcarved cigar box.

He lifts the lid. He selects one and rolls it between his  
fingers and sets it in his mouth and lights and stokes.

He peels off the gold leaf band and sets it on the brass  
scale under Lady Justice. Fixed. He tilts the chain down with  
a pressing finger.

EXT. OUTSIDE CORRIDOR - EARLY MORNING

The Courier runs hard with the letter in hand.

EXT. TRANSFER GATE - EARLY MORNING

The Courier reaches the Guard at the gate. The Guard stares  
then moves aside.

COURIER

You gotta open it.

The Guard cycles through the keys on his keyring.

SALLY PORT

The Courier rushes in then spins around.

COURIER (CONT'D)

And this one.

A VOLLEY OF RIFLE FIRE.

INT. WITNESS BOOTH - EARLY MORNING

The Courier steps through the entry gate as the Squad breaks line. The ghosts of the barrage dissolve to wafts.

Sturgill stands witness. The Guards turn him to leave and Sturgill's prosthetic eye pops out and falls to the ground and he goes and picks it up.

EXT. EXECUTION COURTYARD - EARLY MORNING

Blood worms the black cloth down to the pale dust.

The ground drinks. What's left pools a tithe to the old god of bullets with no bullets left to pay.

INT. STURGILL'S CELL - DAY

The postcard reads Grin Wheeler. Sandpiper Ln. Pikesville CA.

Sturgill tears the address off and folds it twice and places it into his mouth and chews.

He tears open a salt packet and pours it into a two ounce squeeze bottle already cloudy with ghostmilk.

He flicks shards of foil into the bottle and twirls it to fizz.

INT. FINISHING ROOM - DAY

Sturgill and Deernum work industrial iron presses flattening staff uniforms side by side.

DEERNUM

Tomorrow's still on.

Sturgill nods and folds. Deernum watches Sturgill and gauges.

DEERNUM (CONT'D)

Been thinkin. Last few days.

(beat)

If I'm not careful. And if I ignore it. I know I'll find da other shore of hell is closer to my waking than I ever thought possible.

(beat)

I relive every sin here. None of it has ever left my mind.

Sturgill hits the counter with his fist twice and opens his palm.

DEERNUM (CONT'D)  
Don't worry, I've got it.

Sturgill stares furious. Sick.

DEERNUM (CONT'D)  
He stabbed you everywhere but da  
back, and it's me you don't trust.

Sturgill slip out a note and slides it over. Deernum unfolds it and reads.

DEERNUM (CONT'D)  
You know what you need.

Sturgill smacks the machine loud.

DEERNUM (CONT'D)  
What. I don't understand the  
question.

He stares through Deernum.

DEERNUM (CONT'D)  
What. Why am I in treatment.

Deernum lowers the press. It hisses.

DEERNUM (CONT'D)  
Because I agreed to it.

Sturgill squares up to Deernum.

DEERNUM (CONT'D)  
What, man. What do you wanna hear.

Sturgill raises his chin and waits.

DEERNUM (CONT'D)  
That she. Well. She was my wife.  
(beat)  
I dunno know. What.

Deernum turns and stares through the press.

DEERNUM (CONT'D)  
(beat)  
I'd say we got it about da same.

Sturgill shakes his head.

DEERNUM (CONT'D)

You think I'm talkin about da  
crime. I'm talkin what we have left  
to go to.

(beat)

Only you can't see it for what it  
is.

Sturgill steps in and snaps two shots to Deernum's jaw. He  
folds and drops. Sturgill steps over and past.

The iron hisses. Smolders.

INT. OUTSIDE LAUNDRY ROOM - EVENING

Inmates line the wall. A Guard takes roll call. He stops at  
Sturgill.

GUARD

Where's your badge.

Sturgill nods to the door. The Guard turns to Another closest  
to the door.

GUARD (CONT'D)

Get him his badge.

Sturgill heads to the door.

INSIDE LAUNDRY ROOM

Sturgill jogs in and snatches his badge off the counter and  
heads back out.

As he exits he slips a plastic wedge between the door and  
jamb behind him. He holds up the badge.

INT. INMATE CORRIDOR MOVEMENT - EVENING

Sturgill breaks the corner ahead of the Guard and drives his  
palms to the cinderblock then splays his legs on the other  
side and climbs stretched overhead.

The Guard turns the corner and passes under.

The last Inmate clears the corridor door into the rotunda. He  
drops and peels off.

OUTSIDE LAUNDRY

He digs at the plastic with his fingertips. The door clicks  
shut. He yanks the wedge free and looks back.

He bolts to the rail and looks up and monkeys on and lunges hands catching the third-tier ledge. He pulls up and swings over.

INT. UPPER LAUNDRY CHUTE - EVENING

He jogs the hall. The chute hatch hangs padlocked. Above it a Danger Risk of Falling sign.

He pulls the 2oz bottle from his sock and drips ghostpeel into the lock. It fizzes out.

He grabs an empty cart and wheels it near and pulls the handle back and snaps it off and strips off a long piece of his shirt and threads it through the lock and inserts the handle and ties a clove hitch and torques the handle.

It snaps jagged slicing his palm.

Blood patters the floor.

He yanks off the second handle and wraps it and jams it between the lock and shirt and throws in. Full body. The locking pins pop and he opens the hatch and drops everything down and climbs in and lowers himself closing the hatch.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - EVENING

He slams to the floor knocking the wind out. He clutches his femur as if it hummed and gasps.

He limps up and hides the tools fast and hobbles to the padlock and works it blind. He enters and locks it back and crosses the room and slips onto the gangway and reaches the bedding cage.

He combos the lock and locks himself inside and digs into a hamper. The stench hits like surf. He reels then bends into the cart and vomits.

He stops. From across the room HUMANLIKE GROANING.

The polycarbonate lens of the industrial clock gleams back red. The lockdown alarm sounds off and he climbs in.

MINUTES LATER

An outage snaps the room quiet and black.

THE NEXT MORNING

GUARD 1 unlocks the cage. GUARD 2 follows.

Each flips through separate hampers. Guard 1 raises a sheet.

GUARD 1 (O.S.)  
A damn near war crime. They needa  
quit the potato salad.

Guard 1 heads to another hamper. Guard 2 sifts deeper in his.

GUARD 2  
My sister-in-law makes a mean  
potato salad.

GUARD 1  
Yeah.

Guard 2 stops. He stands straight up looking into the hamper  
then turns to Guard 1 who takes notice.

GUARD 2  
She puts bits of jalapeño in it.

GUARD 1  
Changed your life.

Guard 1 pulls a hamper as it gains momentum and wheels out.

GUARD 2  
I'll bring some next potluck for  
you to try.

INT. LOADING DOCK - DAY

Guard 1 loads the last hamper and shuts the doors.

CUT TO BLACK

The engine starts.

LATER

DOORS OPEN. WHEELS ROLL. VOICES ECHO. SILENCE.

INT. LAUNDRY FACILITY - EVENING

He noses upward from the gray bedding pale as ash in the  
belly of a laundry plant.

PRE-LAP: DOOR CHIME.

INT. 24/7 MART - DAWN

Sturgill enters reclined glancing at the Nightclerk.

An Oldtimer stands like an upside-down question mark in front of the drinks. Keys twitch from a lanyard on his belt.

EXT. 24/7 MART - DAWN

Under the flat light of the stucco sconce the Oldtimer steps out toward his Bronco.

Sturgill jogs in and pulls his key cord and garrotes him around the throat as he breaks to his knees and Sturgill tightens.

The cord snaps and Sturgill grabs his wallet and slides into the truck.

INT. STOLEN SUV (MOVING) - SUNSET

He drives east as the sun drips down his mirrors static gold.

INT./EXT. STOLEN SUV (MOVING)/RIVERSIDE - NIGHT

He breaks sudden. Then sits for a long moment.

EXT. TRINITY RIVER - DAWN

He plods across the ford. Blackwater to his shins.

EXT. WHITE ROCK ESCARPMENT - MORNING

He climbs the stone shelves.

He pulls free a series of limestone slabs and reaches deep and pulls out the black trash bag.

INT. STOLEN SUV - DAY

The gauge nicks E as he glances back and pulls over.

EXT. CURBSIDE RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY

He peels the FOR SALE placard off the tan car's rear window.

EXT. HOUSE DOORSTEP - DAY

He rings the door cam. A badge icon sticks to the corner of the window. Voices argue in an island tongue.

INT. TAN CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

He drives west under an overpass.

The moon bares its sliver of a fang above the black freeway as if existence had popped into motion between radio stations. Brief and crackling then blurred by distances.

MORNING

The fall sun coppers his head.

He nods off at the wheel slamming the concrete barrier at a narrow angle riding up the sloped surface and lifting before correcting.

He reaches an industrial sector and parks.

INT. TAN CAR (PARKED) - LATE MORNING

A crisp double tap on the glass. Sturgill blinks awake with DEPUTY CASTOR HELM (28) at the window. Sturgill turns the window down.

HELM

Here's the deal. I'm giving a moving notification. You have seventy-two hours to move your car.

Sturgill swallows air. His voice squeaks out.

STURGILL

(beat)  
Why's that.  
(coughs)  
Why's that.

HELM

Neighbors called you in. So now you have seventy-two hours to move. I'm gonna go chalk your tires now.

His voice drags hoarse and raw.

STURGILL

Thought this was a public street.

HELM  
It is a public street.

STURGILL  
Then what's the problem.

HELM  
Where're you headed.

STURGILL  
Navajo County.

Helm eyes the red of the sleeping bag in the hatch.

HELM  
Whatchya got over there.

STURGILL  
What.

HELM  
(beat)  
In Navajo County.

STURGILL  
My mother-in-law got something of  
mine.

Helm stares.

STURGILL (CONT'D)  
She owes me money.

HELM  
What's your name.

STURGILL  
Chet.

HELM  
You gotta move your car, Chet.

STURGILL  
Yessir. I'll move it now.

Helm chalks the tires then dawdles back to his patrol car.

Sturgill turns the engine. Stalls.

Helm drives by and Sturgill salutes then retries. No good.

He pops the hood and leans over the engine.

INSIDE TAN CAR

Sturgill searches the compartments and the glovebox. Papers. Receipts. A pair of cataract sunglasses.

He shuts the glovebox and takes out the black bag from under the passenger seat and pocket two bands and pushes the bag back under the seat.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL STREET - EARLY MORNING

Sturgill walks as Helm rolls down the cruiser's window and pulls alongside.

HELM

What's wrong with her.

STURGILL

Coil.

HELM

Where're headed.

STURGILL

Navajo County.

HELM

I mean I can take you to get the part.

Sturgill nods. Helm idles and gets out and opens the cage door.

HELM (CONT'D)

Go head. Hop in.

STURGILL

Rather walk.

(beat)

Done that ride before.

Helm smirks then swings the backdoor shut and motions a spin.

HELM

Go head.

Sturgill steps off the curb.

HELM (PRE-LAP) (CONT'D)

Ready for the new season.

INT. POLICE CRUISER (MOVING) - LATE MORNING

STURGILL

Am I ready. Is your question.

HELM

What I ask.

STURGILL

Foosball.

HELM

Football, yeah.

(sniffs)

Is that comin from you.

STURGILL

Needa shower.

HELM

You ain't kiddin. Maybe you oughta  
be back there.

STURGILL

I used to keep up with it.

HELM

What's that.

STURGILL

NFL. But I got to a point where, ya  
know, what're they doin for me.

HELM

Guess you're not into those fantasy  
picks, huh.

STURGILL

No.

HELM

We're gonna stop by the station.  
It's on the way.

STURGILL

Makes sense.

HELM

Needa pick up my partner.

STURGILL

Sure.

HELM  
Means you gotta ride in the back.

STURGILL  
If I've got to.

HELM  
You've got to.

STURGILL  
I'm agreeing.

HELM  
And I'm tellin you.

Sturgill flushes his nostrils.

HELM (CONT'D)  
I'm jus messin with ya.

Radio cracks.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)  
45-32, attention Crane, Crockett  
and surrounding counties.

Silence. Radio cracks.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)  
Be advised, one of the fugitives  
that escaped from Lynaugh Unit in  
Fort Stockton matches the  
description of a recent carjacking  
in Fort Stockton. The stolen  
vehicle was found abandoned west of  
Dallas yesterday.

Helm cuts the radio and side-eyes the tat on Sturgill's arm.

STURGILL  
When I did watch the games, I'd  
follow the whole season. College,  
too. You follow college.

HELM  
Yep.

Both Men stare forward. The cruiser eats up the road and  
passes a truck hauling bundles of pine.

STURGILL  
I prefer college. The storylines.  
The upsets. A lot more  
unpredictable, you know.

HELM  
The rivalries.

STURGILL  
The rivalries. They run deep.

HELM  
They do.

Helm speeds.

HELM (CONT'D)  
(beat)  
What's your favorite.

STURGILL  
Favorite rivalry.

HELM  
Yep.

STURGILL  
I'd go with the Iron Bowl. Auburn,  
Alabama. You.

HELM  
Same. Who ya rootin for.

STURGILL  
Auburn, of course. You.

White-noise hums through the cab.

HELM  
Same.

Helm goes for his Glock as Sturgill jumps the wheel. The cruiser veers into the clear zone careening through exploding shrubs before clipping a billboard. Airbags deploy.

The Men struggle and a shot pops the airbag. The magazine knocks loose and drops. A shot cracks the ceiling.

Sturgill goes for the safety orange shotgun racked at center console. Locked.

Helm opens the door unbuckling and scrambling low for the mag. His other hand finds his radio. Sturgill rips the walkie free and unbuckles and slips out of the cruiser.

Helm slams the mag back in and steps out and collapses to the ground. Sturgill sprints for the brushline.

Helm takes aim. Fires. Bush. He flattens to his stomach.  
Fires. Bush. Fires again. Dirt.

Sturgill hits the brush and vanishes.

Helm tries to stand but can't. He hops to the door. Gathers himself.

Sturgill has already circled and leaps from the shrub line and clears the gap and pounces and punches.

He beats Helm down and grabs the cruiser door and slams it against Helm's head. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. Eight. Nine. Ten. Eleven. Twelve. Thirteen. Out.

EXT. CLEAR SKY - NOON

A black hawk curves high above. Its silhouette rakes across the pale rind of a waxing gibbous.

EXT. DESERT SALT FLAT - NOON

The cruiser chokes. Dies. A severed coax cable droops from the headliner.

Sturgill steps out. His footsteps crunch of bonechip. Salt sweeps over miles of polygonal fissures.

He runs.

A murderous God-ball out of the Book of Judges hangs terrible and pure.

A speck in the absolute of negative space.

Apparitions of wind and heat spiral and kick as Sturgill pushes off the magnetic ground by the balls of his feet outpacing his own heartbeat like a man acquainted with distances, the chemical zap of saline aerosols in each inhale, the entire execution of his arc burning with dead reckoning and breathlessness.

He slows. Stops. He seals his palm over his dead eye and presses.

He traces the horizon's edge. The silence sweeps in and bludgeons ecclesiastical.

He turns and backtracks, a flame sitting on his head.

EXT. DESERT SALT FLAT - AFTERNOON

He pops the trunk and digs and finds a red sports drink and twists it open and drinks some like it's the last color left on earth.

EXT. DESERT SALT FLAT - DUSK

He looks up from the car door. A kettle of vultures continue their curious circles. He steps out and treks.

INT. EXPRESS INN ROOM - JUÁREZ, MEX - NIGHT

A five-point badge rests beside a ranger hat. Both silvered by lamplight. Caldwell snores buried under the comforter.

Banging at the door. Again.

Caldwell cracks the door. White flashlight blasts through.

FLYNN  
We got our lead.

EXT. RESPRESA EL REJÓN - MORNING

Mallards rasp. The reservoir yawns black and wide. Sturgill stands an omen in the open mouth of man's open wound.

A grebe skates the smoking obsidian plane a smudge perfected.

Murk bears down crushing the underworld to pitch. He dips his hands into the substrate and claws his head and face. Moss-rot tendrils tease like a many-snaked thing then vanishes.

He dips under. Fully. Yet stands clay-faced. He has not moved.

The licks of the nascent waterline gnaw at his ears. He turns around and wades through the backwash and reaches the shore of white stones picked clean by water and time and sun.

He climbs into the Mustang and it trundles off. The red sleeping bag visible through the hatch glass.

CALDWELL (PRE-LAP)  
He gone.

EXT. MOTEL EL SOL SERVICE ENTRANCE - LATE MORNING

Caldwell joins Flynn. Both hatless.

CALDWELL  
About an hour ago.

Flynn nods mulling.

CALDWELL (CONT'D)  
There's a chance she's there. Maybe  
the loot, too.

FLYNN  
Only takes one.

CALDWELL  
One coin.

FLYNN  
One apple. Rotten and foolish.

CALDWELL  
You wouldn't smile half as much  
without me.

Flynn remains unblinking in the breeze.

CALDWELL (CONT'D)  
Or zero times any number.

Flynn huffs toward the truck.

INT. MOTEL EL SOL ROOM NO. H23 - LATE MORNING

Dynamic entry. Flynn leads point with a 12-gauge. Caldwell  
posts at the window.

Flynn sweeps to the bathroom and cracks the door then slices  
the pie barrel first.

BATHROOM

Flynn steps in and waits out the flickering. He sees the  
scuff marks on the tile.

CALDWELL (O.S.)  
What'dya got.

Flynn's crow's feet scrunch. He draws the curtain slow then  
quick. A bundled mass of comforter and blankets in the tub.

He leans over and peels the comforter back some.

CALDWELL (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Flynn.

He rips the comforter back all at once. The monster box.

He snaps the lid off. Slabs wrapped in white EPE foam each cradled in black closed-cell foam.

He picks one up and tears it open. 1kg gold bullion. He tallies by twos. Sixteen.

ROOM

Flynn lays the shotgun on the bed as his phone buzzes. He sets the gold on the nightstand and pulls his phone out and read.

FLYNN

Hope's holdin me to our daughter's Thanksgiving. Needa see the baby.

CALDWELL

Might well keep that promise.

Flynn pockets his phone. He picks up the gold.

FLYNN

We pinch him from the inside.

CALDWELL

You oughta take the shotgun in the bathroom. But he might take longer than we think.

FLYNN

Could move the gold out.

CALDWELL

Best should.

FLYNN

That last one was too much trouble.

CALDWELL

Mostly.

FLYNN

Which is heavier. Sixteen kilograms or twenty-one grams.

CALDWELL

Is that the soul. Twenty-one grams.

Flynn flashes the gold in the mirror.

FLYNN

You ever exhaust all possibilities.

Flynn turns from the mirror toward the fireplace.

FLYNN (CONT'D)

Find yourself doing the very thing  
you swore was not possible.

He squats and picks up a piece of something embedded in the carpet nap. He brings it close. A metallic chip.

CALDWELL

If it's a go we best pack it now.

Flynn pinches the chip with his fingernails.

CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Flynn.  
(beat)  
Hey.

FLYNN

I'm just wondering. Where's he  
gonna bury all that gold.

CALDWELL

All tha gold in em hills.

Caldwell chuckles. Flynn flicks the chip.

EXT. OUTSIDE MOTEL ROOM - LATE MORNING

Flynn exits and walks down the breezeway carrying the box.

He loads it into the truck.

The Mustang growls from off the street corner. Flynn ducks to the side of the building. The Mustang cruises past.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - LATE MORNING

Caldwell watches through the curtain as the Mustang parks.

CALDWELL

Damn you, Flynn.

He swings around and grabs the shotgun and slips into the bathroom.

EXT. OUTSIDE MOTEL ROOM - LATE MORNING

Sturgill exits the Mustang.

A kingcloud drifts bright-white over the rooftops. He steps through the bite of the breeze to his door then veers toward the Housekeeper four doors down.

#### UNDER THE BREEZEWAY

He holds out a tip then crosses his hands.

STURGILL  
No housekeeping.

He spots the black F-150 and moves toward it. Past the service door. At the far end.

Front tow. Mounted headlights. Push bar grille.

Through the tint. A laptop mount. Two hats on the dash.

He rounds to the truckbed. Rear tow. Texas plates KPR-1467.

He glances back. The Housekeeper watches. He walks back across the breezeway.

Past the service door. Past the cart. To his own.

#### OUTSIDE ROOM

He draws his gun. He inserts the key and turns then lets the plastic key fob dangle from the lock. He presses and cracks the door.

He leans in and doesn't blink and opens the door.

#### MOTEL ROOM

The bathroom door stares back. Ajar. The width of a bullet.

He heads in toward the bathroom then cuts right at the nightstand. He holsters. Silence.

The remote tilts northwest.

He turns around and lifts the mattress and swings it at the corner as Caldwell readies from around the corner and blasts through foam.

Sturgill dives over the bedframe and scrambles out.

#### EXT. OUTSIDE MOTEL ROOM H23 - LATE MORNING

Flynn rises from behind the cart and fires. Sturgill draws and returns fire from the hood. A pillar obstructs.

Sturgill rips another through the doorway as Caldwell advances.

Sturgill enters the Mustang. The engine catches reversing as Caldwell steps to the curb and aims and blasts the windshield.

Sturgill swerves parallel. Caldwell pumps and steps wide and blasts shattering the passenger window.

Sturgill kicks the gas. Caldwell pumps again and aims and blasts. The rear glass explodes as the Mustang shreds off.

Caldwell jogs back.

He stops cold.

Flynn lies splayed on his back. A third eye of lead. Blood finds the grout line and runs.

EXT./INT. ROAD/MUSTANG (MOVING) - DAY

The Mustang knifes through the hot desert like a gleam of black bone.

His dead eye rides naked. He looks into the rearview and claws his seat and persons before ripping the mirror clean off.

Geometric rows of maguey crisscross the flatland. The Mustang eats heat and wind howling through the oblong crater in the windshield.

Sturgill straps a hoodie to his chest. Belt cinched tight.

EXT./INT. TOWN ROAD/MUSTANG - DAY

He drives past a shot-up ALTO bleached blush on the shoulder. Past casitas of plywood leaning out of the dust. Past a hostel missing doors.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Needle-nose pliers boil in a coffee pot. Sturgill unplugs the machine.

EXT. ROADSIDE TIENDITA - NIGHT

The Owner eyes Sturgill's chest then his face then raises and fetches the whiskey.

INT. MOTEL ROOM BATHROOM - NIGHT

He slashes a towel with a pocket knife.

He slumps back on the toilet as he packs the entry wounds across his pectorals with strips of towel.

He unscrews a handle of whiskey and chugs. He uncovers the first wound and pours whiskey in the holes.

He goes in with the pliers. Glass. Heartworms of iron. Buckshot sunk so deep the pliers hold his heart in place.

He packs the wounds again with clean strips and stretches duct tape around his torso.

INT. RANGER TRUCK (MOVING) - DAY

Caldwell drives with tears lit in sunflash.

His phone vibrates 202. He picks up.

PHONE CALL - RANGER TRUCK/USS PORTLAND LPD-27

Hair Parted Left leans on the starboard railing.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

I'm calling because Flynn was a constituent of mine.

CALDWELL

Whadaya want.

The LWSD pans the sky.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

This ain't exactly an elk hunt.

Hair Parted Left looks up. A fleet of drones drift fifty feet above the main mast in loose formation like a digital skywatch.

HAIR PARTED LEFT (CONT'D)

And if you miss again. The colossal goat rope you tied will be on you and you alone.

CALDWELL

I'm more worried about the Sinaloas.

The gunner locks.

HAIR PARTED LEFT  
Just slow down and follow  
procedure.

CALDWELL  
What should I call you.

Drones burst aflame firestorming in death spirals.

HAIR PARTED LEFT  
We are the mirror. Above and below.

Hair Parted Left ends the call.

Caldwell pokes the phone to see that the call has ended.

EXT. SIDE OF THE ROAD - DAY

Wirelines buzz overhead. Broken pillar stumps stab the horizon. A skeleton blowout of a policia municipal truck rusts on cinderblocks.

Through the bars of a cellblock waterhole, a Señora merchant leans on the counter twisting her hair into a braid, her eyes on Sturgill crown to boots.

He lifts the clear 1.5L bottle and guzzles.

He sifts through glass scattered across the mat. He coughs and a blotch of blood splashes down. He looks up through the elliptic void in the glass.

Death unmasked. The face of a self-devouring loop his eyes reject outright. The good one. And the stone.

PRE-LAP: TIRES OVER GRAVEL.

INT. MUSTANG (MOVING) - DAY

The Mustang rages on. Windshield gone. Frame quaking in the flux.

EXT. COPPER CANYON SWITCHBACK - DAY

The muscle car cleaves the canyon a black flea beetle plunging through the gloom of the pines.

One of six gorges. A jagged labyrinth of switchbacks, nowhere tunnels, rusted bridges, mineral mines, steep abyss drops, rivulets scouring stone and scragged evergreens shrub-ed across endless cascading acres.

LATER

Over shale slopes. Over sandy wash. Past abandoned rail.

Hugging the river when it dares. Around curves where lichen boulders bite into the desolation of the open road.

Across a break where a lone meat goat strays from the shade stunned doe-like as the Mustang bulls through and crunches on. A canyon trestle glints in bronzed relief like a sentinel wreathed in fire.

EXT. CEROCAHUI ENTRANCE - SUNSET

The Mustang slows.

A FALCON (36) perches oaf-heavy atop a 30gal drum with an M16 slung across his back. His BDUs hang loose and in both hands he clasps a dark bottle. The arid wrath of Rayleigh scatter holds flooding inside his bloodshot eyes.

STURGILL

Donde es cuarto. Yo quiero room.  
Cuarto.

The Falcon blinks slow. Lashes long. He swings his rifle up over the dome of the sun and chortles with belly.

INT./EXT. RANGER TRUCK/COPPER CANYON SWITCHBACK - MORNING

Caldwell rides into the climb head-on. Folds in between his eyes. Weather and thought.

INT. BACK BUNGALOW - EARLY MORNING

The walls hold the dull hide of drought.

Sturgill lies prone on the wicker sofa. Arms flung wide and slack as if his day had already ended in a blaze of thought and fire.

He wheezes and lifts up shaking.

EXT. BACK BUNGALOW - EARLY MORNING

A motorbike leans against the fence. Sable and sleek and still as a blade balanced.

He steps onto the loud porch boards. An old blonde cat naps in the sun.

He plods through the spire's cruciform shadow cast long over the mud field toward the side of the church. Its adobe paling in the rising light.

A slope climbs steep to the summit.

EXT. TEMPLO MISIÓN DE CEROCAHUI - EARLY MORNING

The lostworld masonry of a Spanish courtyard unfolds. Kids skip across the old cobble a small rubber ball.

He enters through the stone arch, its symmetry rising to the apex of a mass Sturgill cannot bear or name. Burden as meaning. Eden its cost.

INT. TEMPLO MISIÓN - EARLY MORNING

Sturgill stops. The back pew is empty save for candles. He stands there stubble hardening in the votive glow.

His EARS RING.

CUT TO BLACK

PART II

Sheath the blade.

INT. BACK HOUSE BEDROOM - REDDING, CA - MORNING

Mary Claire unzips the laced duvet shell and tears it off already moving to the next.

At the dresser corner Mira hitches the Child higher on her hip. The sliding glass door bleeds the only pale source of every morning.

MARY CLAIRE

Your father didn't water the hens.

Mary Claire unhooks the gray fitted sheet and circles the bed making quick work of the other corner.

The fitted. The duvet. The top. All flung in a heap on the rug-ed floor.

Mary Claire hustles out.

LIVING ROOM

She stoops stripping the velcro from the folding bed.

MARY CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Check the mail. And I got  
everything to make nachos. But  
you'll have to serve yourself.

MIRA

Of course.

Mary Claire grabs all the toys. E-plastics. Teething keys.  
Squirt gun. And dumps them ringing in the playpen.

MARY CLAIRE

And take these.

She bends down uncurling the cover without a thought.

INT. LAUNDROMAT - REDDING - SUNSET

The motors drone. Mira loads a comforter from a coyote brown  
sea bag. The Child kicks at her thigh hanging from her other  
arm.

A MAN (40) slinks up beside her machine. He digs out a  
palmful of quarters from his pocket and feeds one into her  
slot.

MIRA

Oh no. Don't.

MAN

I got extra.

Another coin.

MIRA

Please, stop.

MAN

Your husband Army.

MIRA

No. No.

MAN

Iran.

MIRA

You have no idea. Ok.

MAN

Lemme

He goes for the bag and she snatches it before he does.

MIRA  
I said I got it.  
(beat)  
He's killed. Men.

The Man glances at the Child. Mira does too.

MIRA (CONT'D)  
Excuse me.

She slaps the washer door shut and heads out with the Child leaving the stroller behind. The door chime trips as she exits.

EXT. LAUNDROMAT - SUNSET

She stops at the curb and the Child stills. Afar off fire sirens ride the air. The alpenglow underbelly shines a rose quartz so stark it fills her eyes with the desert's longing.

MIRA (PRE-LAP)  
Then the giant hands came.

INT. BACK HOUSE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mira sits, the Child between her wrapped legs, as she reads to him in the playpen. She turns the page.

MIRA  
The worm thought he was going into  
the sky. He twisted east. He  
squirmed west. But the hands

A car honks long. Mira climbs out of the playpen and crosses to the kitchen window.

The microwave clock reads eight. She pulls the blinds halfway. Headlights hover in gravel smoke. They idle at the far end of the narrow lane near the front home.

The glass holds her face but not her eyes.

EXT. RANCH LOT - EDGE OF SALT FLATS - NM - DAY

Out of the wilderness the Wanderer comes staggering foot over foot as one struck blind. Columns of dracosmoke tower above and behind.

His face a map of salt. Sunburnt to the ears. Eyes the slit of snakes.

Sturgill passes through a gravel lot packed with hauls of all kinds. Livestock trailers and diesel rigs and buggies and trucks and sleeper cabs.

He reaches the front corrals and squeezes between the rails and drops into the shallow trough and slurps the fouled water. Face sunk low. As if each cell were drinking.

EXT. LIVESTOCK AUCTION - DUSK

The Crowd breaks off.

He cuts past the blackening barn. Darkness trails him into the yard where the horses load out. Rows of rigs blur through the plumes of red dust.

EXT. LOADING CORRAL - EVENING

He shadows the load-in. A 4-horse slant-load gooseneck. The old Hauler leads in the first spotted paint mare by habit then heads off for the next.

Sturgill goes to the clipboard hanging from a hook welded to the trailer's frame. A bill of sale and transport docs. Two Quarters and a Spanish mare.

He watches the Hauler lead in the third. A nervous black.

The divider swings shut. The Hauler wipes his forehead with a belt-rag then heads for the office to settle up.

Sturgill moves in. The rear door still unlatched and cracked a few inches. The horses whine and shudder and shuffle at his scent.

He slips into the fourth stall and crouches low and pulls a saddleblanket off the divider to break his shape. The latch clicks. He waits.

INT. HORSE HAUL - EVENING

The spook of iron hoof. Salt lines Sturgill's upper lip. A pawing strike rings the divider.

He looks down at his thigh and from under the divider a wave of horse piss and pissfroth slosh across the vulcanized rubber. Aluminum and ammonia. Proteins and urea.

EXT. DOT WEIGH STATION - NIGHT

The rig crawls up onto the scale. The horses stir in the trailer under the sodium lights possessed of insects. The frame flexes and groans.

He moves fast unlatching the rear door and popping the spring pin. He turns back and unlatches the divider then drops down dark as a frogman crouching out low to the edge of the station lot.

He looks back. Within the frame the mare hulks near invisible in the black of the haul quaking in fierce repose. The darkness shapes her there until she erupts and clamors out.

TRUCK LOT

He stalks the truck cabs and enters one.

A bobble-frog sits on the dash. He hunts opening compartments and feels along the visors. A photo of a troop of smokejumpers geared up on the tarmac.

He lets it fall to the passenger floormat and exits and slips toward the bush line.

EXT. REMOTE ROAD - DAWN

He chorks up from a croaking swale and takes the road.

MORNING

He stops and breathes the length of the road down. Then keeps on.

DAY

A sunblasted gas station beckons on the outskirts of some construction work for a subdivision.

Closer and its windows reflect darkly. Not the desert. Not its glare.

PRE-LAP: THE GREAT HUM OF A BUSTED ICE MACHINE.

INT. GAS MART - DAY

He strolls an aisle snagging foods under a section of strobing ceiling light. The shelves wax with silt.

He goes to the counter. Missing persons tagged with QR codes paper the cigarette wall. A dummy security cam eyes off tilt above.

Faint Spanish. He stuffs his pockets.

EXT. RECEIVING BAY - DAY

Migrants and their children roast under the shade. Some on crates eating. Victims of the sun.

Along the parapet a white utility van idles.

STURGILL

Donde esta.

A Man shakes his head and goes toward the van. The Dayclerk moves toward the bay door.

STURGILL (CONT'D)

Where are you going. What city.

The Driver climbs into the driver's seat. The Others follow climbing two by two over the bumper. Sturgill crowds the window ripping out a hundred-dollar bill.

STURGILL (CONT'D)

Donde.

He tears off another two.

STURGILL (CONT'D)

What city. Where.

INT. VAN (MOVING) - DAY

On the floor. Waist to waist. Shoulder to shoulder.

The Man beside Sturgill sniffs his air. Sturgill notices. The Man curls his nose and flushes his nostrils.

Another Man just as close scratches below his earlobe with a pointed finger. Sturgill swats behind his ear and pinches off a fat tick. He pops it.

STURGILL

How much longer. Time.

Forms jostle in the dark. The ceiling drips with heat. A slick of sudsy fluid slides toward Sturgill.

## STURGILL (CONT'D)

Que hora es.

Across from him a blackeyed Child opens his mouth wide.  
Something dark. Chocolate cupcake.

EXT. DESERT ROAD - DAY

The panorama blitzes brighter now. And bleaker. The van  
glides across the blacktop like grease.

A curtain of clouds sweep in from the foothills as stakes  
like nails stickle the desert floor holding the hide of the  
earth down by the hundreds.

EXT. BUS STATION - MESA OUTSKIRTS, PHX - DAY

He unloads a bin. Wind scatters the calcified trash through  
the terminal. Far off rotors chop the air.

He digs into the ashtray and rubs the ash into his hair.

EXT. TICKET BOOTH - DAY

The plexiglass streaks with grime as he bows to it. His bad  
eye bare and a cashew in the hollow of his ear he slides the  
ID of Oldtimer under the glass.

The Clerk takes it blind. No word. no nod.

EXT./INT. I-10/P1-DOUBLE DECKER BUS (MOVING) - SUNSET

The sulfuric skies shock the desert rock a free radical red.

Perched at the second-deck window he slots his prosthetic eye  
back in then swipes the ash from his hair.

The TV up front displays the manhunt and his mugshot on mute.  
He glances across the aisle. An Old Woman naps.

EVENING

His head smudges against the window fogging the abandoned  
steeltown crawling past.

Gray kilns caved in. Grayer mills. Ironhusks and oilghosts  
dragging and scrapping the long miles of the horizon. To  
sleep.

PRE-LAP: GLASS SHATTERS.

EXT. THE SIDE OF A GARAGE - DAY

He drops the dumbbell and picks the long shards free.

INT. GARAGE MAN-CAVE - DAY

He jumps down and slaps the fluorescents on. They trip stark and he scoffs at the gaud of midlife.

He goes to the mini fridge and grabs a beer and drops into the recliner like he's doing it a favor and jackknives it and sinks deep and cracks the pull-tab.

The black flatscreen stares back. The remote sits like a leaden tome on the poker table.

SMASH TO

EVENING

A gun muzzle taps Sturgill's skull multiple times. All sound gone sour. His brain reverberates a kicked drum.

Wheeler holsters his gun. He stands and they grip and shoulder in. Beer cans clatter.

WHEELER

You.

(beat)

You didn't go to Mira.

STURGILL

She moved.

WHEELER

Anne's not gonna like this.

STURGILL

Then you hide me.

WHEELER

(beat, sniffs)

You didn't go through the septic,  
did ya.

Sturgill heads to the heavy bag. Jabs. The leather snaps.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

How long've you been out.

Sturgill's sister ANNE (29) storms in like she's from Jersey.

ANNE

(beat)

What the hell are you doing here?

Sturgill flares his arms out.

ANNE (CONT'D)

They let you out?

She steps in. Then catches the smell and recoils.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Oh no. Nope.

Anne backs up.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Are ya planning on stayin here?

WHEELER

Whadaya think blood is for, Anne.

ANNE

(beat)

Alright. You gotta get inside

WHEELER

He stays. In the garage.

(points at Sturgill)

You've got one week. Any longer and we all run the risk. Anne, honey, give us a minute.

Anne exits. Wheeler pulls some whiskey and two glasses.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

Your a godsend. This couldn't be better for the both of us. Blood does pumps both ways, don't it.

He gurgles one out for Sturgill. Then himself.

STURGILL

Depends on whose blood.

WHEELER

You can stay here. But I need a favor from you.

Wheeler hands the glass.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

There's a woman. I want her followed. Shadowed. Know where she goes. And that's it.

Sturgill rubs his knuckle into the side of his head.

STURGILL

And if I don't.

WHEELER

I don't. Means you go back.

STURGILL

Prison doesn't scare me.

(beat)

Prisons don't scare me.

WHEELER

I don't care where you go. It won't be here.

STURGILL

(beat)

We're nowhere near blood. Not even close.

(nods)

But I'll do it.

WHEELER

Works for me. Drink.

They drink.

NIGHT

Hair wet and in day clothes Sturgill wolfs down a plate at the poker table. Anne stands watching.

STURGILL

I was gonna say it. If you didn't let me stay.

ANNE

Just keep your mouth shut. And while you eat, too.

Anne turns and stops at the door.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Go ahead and feel free to break in and do the dishes.

She scoffs then exits slamming the door.

INT. WHEELER'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Wheeler's Daughters sit at the table munching. Their eyes glaze over a cereal box. Wheeler slips Sturgill a sticky note as they move past.

WHEELER  
Time to meet Cherry.

STURGILL  
Cherry.

WHEELER  
Your accomplice.

EXT. WHEELER'S DRIVEWAY - MORNING

Wheeler leads Sturgill to a covered vehicle next to Wheeler's police cruiser in the drive.

WHEELER  
Got it cheap at a police auction.

Wheeler whips the cover off. A pristine all black Mustang.

WHEELER (CONT'D)  
Cobra II.

STURGILL  
Trenbolone.

Wheeler stays at the hood. Sturgill runs his fingers the length of the clear coat.

WHEELER  
You know stick, right.

STURGILL  
You know any good jokes.

Wheeler dangles the keys.

STURGILL (CONT'D)  
(beat)  
Don't make me take em from you.

SMASH TO

INT. MUSTANG (MOVING) - MORNING

Sturgill shifts gears weaving through mild traffic.

INT. MUSTANG (PARKED) - MORNING

He kills the engine slipping off his fishing cap and leaning low over the dash. Four Roofers rip ash-gray shingles from a one-story roof.

EXT. LENA'S ROOF - MORNING

A portable radio on the roof belts mellifluous female vocals.

Tool belt slung low on her hips Lena rises to the aria.

Her red fire hair bathes in the rich light of the golden-apple sun as she wipes tar across her gray shirt then peels her gloves off and combs her fingers through her tangled curls pulling them back in a fierce yet dainty motion before securing her ponytail with practiced ease.

INT. MUSTANG (PARKED) - MORNING

Sturgill stares and wads the note and pops it inside his mouth and eats. Time frozen in the church of her.

INT. PRODUCE SECTION - NIGHT

Sturgill walks over to Lena picking through bags of grapes.

STURGILL

I grew up on a vineyard actually.  
But I haven't touched a grape  
since.

She doesn't look up.

LENA

That's not good.

STURGILL

Know what we measured grapevines  
in?

LENA

Humor me.

STURGILL

We measured them in vineyards.

Lena turns her shoulders. Pops a grape.

LENA

Who plants a vineyard and doesn't  
eat its grapes?

She pushes her cart forward.

Sturgill stands boots staple-gunned to the tile.

WHEELER (PRE-LAP)

It's loaded.

INT. WHEELER'S GARAGE - NIGHT

Sturgill reps out strapped deadlifts. Wheeler steps in mid-set and extends the OTs-38 Stechkin by its barrel and handles the handle near Sturgill's face.

Sturgill slams with the bar and unstraps. He takes the revolver. Wheeler paces back picking at his beak.

WHEELER

So the girl can throw a hammer,  
huh. Whadaya make of her.

STURGILL

Nothing. Detached.

WHEELER

That's Bear's Breath. No  
muzzleflash. No blast. And it keeps  
the casings so no forensics. It's  
why Russians fall out of windows  
with little holes in their heads.

Wheeler whacks a fat roll of cash on the poker felt.

STURGILL

I'm no killer.

WHEELER

You do this and you get my help.  
Guns. Cash. A passport. I cover it  
all.

STURGILL

I don't kill.

WHEELER

You killed for country.  
(beat)  
And this garage *is* your country  
now. Only difference is. I'm the  
one applying the pressure.

STURGILL  
Your life ain't at risk. It's not  
the same.

WHEELER  
You want an imminent threat.

STURGILL  
What'd she do.

WHEELER  
She's messin with my livelihood.  
There ain't an alternative to some  
things.

STURGILL  
It's about money.

WHEELER  
What isn't. And money doesn't come  
from trade. It comes from blood.

Sturgill rubs his hand across his scalp.

WHEELER (CONT'D)  
You oughta figure out what you  
value more. Can you kill someone  
you don't know, for reasons you  
don't know, to save your ass from  
time you know for a fact you don't  
want.

(beat)  
You don't leave here clean. Do it  
and you disappear. Don't. And you  
disappear.

Sturgill swings the cylinder out. Loaded.

INT. MUSTANG (MOVING) - MORNING

Lena's e-car pulls in from the road.

A procession of shopping carts grind their cargo past an  
illustrious archway of plaster climbing sky like smoke from a  
charnel pit.

INT. MUSTANG (PARKED) - MORNING

Sturgill slips a hunter's hoodie over his holster. Then fits  
a lurebrand ballcap.

EXT. MAGNOLIA BAPTIST LOT - MORNING

He follows. Past the bronze saint pointing. Past the abstract fountain gutted for repair.

INT. BAPTIST LOBBY - MORNING

Lena smiles through niceties with an Older Woman.

He circles like a bear sniffing spring. Then drops to a chair and locks his eye onto an Elder positioned across from him.

The oxygen tank. The mask.

Lena climbs the stairwell and he rises bold as an air horn.

INT. HALLWAY - MORNING

Lena enters a room. He approaches the vision panel and peers in. Then enters.

INT. ROOM NO. G208 - MORNING

He brushes past pastries and drops into the seat beside Lena.

JANUS (26) and NOHL (25) fill out the semi-circle of folding chairs. All but Sturgill armored in ironed cloth.

Sturgill scans. No one moves. Their own Pandoras sucking down the faces of their souls.

Janus speaks up as if to a full room.

JANUS

Let's get to it. Hat off.

Sturgill removes his cap.

JANUS (CONT'D)

We have somebody new! I'm Janus, the Life Group coordinator. We're all family, so let's do it right. Give us your name and testimony, please.

STURGILL

My name's Saul Bass.

NOHL

Like your cap.

Sturgill wrings his cap.

STURGILL  
It's a trout.

NOHL  
No, I meant I like your cap.

STURGILL  
(beat)  
I visited a friend. Heard the preacher and it all clicked. Found Jesus.

JANUS  
You mean Jesus found you. What's your line of work, Saul?

Sturgill's eye catches Nohl's Bible.

STURGILL  
I write books.

JANUS  
What about?

STURGILL  
Things and stuff.  
(beat)  
Mostly stuff.

The Group stares. Janus resets.

JANUS  
Did you forget your Bible?

STURGILL  
It's on my phone. And I forgot my phone.

JANUS  
You and Lena can share.

STURGILL  
(to Lena)  
We've met before. Grocer's Market.

Lena shakes her head.

STURGILL (CONT'D)  
The lame grape joke.

LENA

Oh, yah. Now that you mention the lameness.

Sturgill raises his eyebrows.

JANUS

What a wild start! Now, who's ready to read? Nohl? Nohl here has a twin Leon. But he doesn't come around anymore, does he?

Nohl shrugs.

JANUS (CONT'D)

Not unless you two are switching places on us.

NOHL

It's possible.

JANUS

Go ahead and read verse 4.

The whiteboard reads Song of Solomon 8:4-5.

NOHL

I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, until he please.

JANUS

Now all my sisters in chorus.

JANUS & LENA

Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?

Sturgill scans the room. Heads bowed with trailing fingers.

JANUS & LENA (CONT'D)

I raised thee up under the apple tree. There thy mother brought thee forth. There she brought thee forth that bare thee.

JANUS

I believe we're all single here. Saul?

Sturgill nods.

JANUS (CONT'D)

We're not a singles club, but sometimes that's just the way things go.

(beat)

So, Saul. How would you apply this passage to your life? Personally.

He inhales.

JANUS (CONT'D)

Put you on the spot.

STURGILL

Love is a force.

JANUS

The Shulammite says later love can't be bought. You believe that?

STURGILL

You oughta ask someone who's in love.

JANUS

Hard to tell if you're joking.

LENA

(beat)

You come near with your mouth.

Sturgill holds Lena's gaze. Says nothing.

LENA (CONT'D)

It's from Isaiah.

He watches her lips.

LENA (CONT'D)

Means your words don't match your heart. But I'm teasing.

JANUS

There goes Lena! We are a sarcastic bunch today!

WHEELER (V.O.)

Tell me you didn't follow her in.

STURGILL (V.O)

Do I look like a dumbass.

INT. MUSTANG (MOVING) - MORNING

Sturgill follows Lena's e-car down the freeway.

WHEELER (V.O.)

See where she clocks in on Monday.  
You can have this done before poker  
night.

He parks on the other side of the street as Lena pulls through the guardshack of the Naval Surface Warfare Center.

INT. MUSTANG (PARKED) - EVENING

The crossing arm lifts. Lena's e-car exits the barricade and he turns the key and the Mustang catches.

STURGILL (PRE-LAP)

She works at the Naval Warfare  
Center.

INT. WHEELER'S GARAGE - NIGHT

Wheeler enters in uniform as Sturgill trails with his neck toweled.

STURGILL

That's military warships and  
whatnot.

WHEELER

I don't care if she's Green Beret.

STURGILL

You hafta tell me why.

Wheeler grabs two beers from the mini fridge.

WHEELER

She witnessed somethin of a  
beatdown. Driving by one night.

Sturgill scoffs. Wheeler tosses Sturgill a beer. They both sit.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

A lil flashlight therapy. The  
crackhead died because of a heart  
condition. But she's sayin  
different. Wouldn't've even've  
known it was her if it weren't for  
my ears.

Wheeler lifts his pant leg shows his outer calf. A smiling skeleton in a cowboy hat clutching a pistol. 155.

He lets it fall. They drink.

STURGILL  
I'm calling Mira.

WHEELER  
No use callin. She's already  
surveillance-d. The fact that I'ma  
cop buys you time. But not much.

Wheeler sits back and taps to the badge.

WHEELER (CONT'D)  
I loved this thing. Locked onto  
this thing like a damn pit bull  
when i first started. Polished it  
every week.

Wheeler looks down at the badge.

WHEELER (CONT'D)  
Should've seen the last one I got  
replaced. Had scratch marks from a  
warehouse dispute. This Foreman  
goes back into this trailer. Then  
all you hear is this big BAM. So I  
step up to the door, gun drawn, and  
BANG the door swings open and this  
guy bursts out with the lower half  
of his face hanging off. The guy  
shotgun-ed himself in the face.

STURGILL  
What the hell's a shotgun doin in a  
warehouse.

WHEELER  
I dunno. But get this, I'm backin  
up and I shit you not, he literally  
chases me against a wall and a CNC  
machine. Now, I wasn't about to  
shoot him. So I slide into a gap,  
you know, scared shitless. This is  
my sophomore year. But at the same  
time he's reaching out wantin help.  
So I squeeze as far as I could  
along that machine until I couldn't  
go any further. Must've blasted his  
vocals clean out. 'Cause all you  
can hear was the blood. And the  
gurgling.

Wheeler knuckles the tip of his nose and presses up and sniffs.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

That's about the worst of it. Don't know why things happen. But I've some guesses now that I'm older. But I really don't care much now. To know. What does it mean. I don't even know what it means.

(beat)

You've seen a hell of a lot worse. You ever think about it.

Sturgill shrugs.

STURGILL

(beat)

Sometimes I think about what didn't happen.

(beat)

Then I think about what did.

(beat)

Then I think maybe there ain't even a difference.

Sturgill stands and heads to the heavy bag.

Wheeler rises and heads to the glass casement of guns.

WHEELER

You needa get it done already. I'm not cancelling another poker night.

Wheeler walks over to the heavy bag.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

You think by putting it off you can buy yourself time. But this *is* your out. You were never not complicit.

Sturgill stares Wheeler down. Wheeler's jaw moves side to side.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

No. I know you will. You will.

JANUS (PRE-LAP)

You know what clears brain fog?

INT. BAPTIST LOBBY - MORNING

Sturgill scopes the clinical space. Lena chats with an Older Woman.

JANUS

Mushrooms!

STURGILL

Naw, I'd rather not trip.

JANUS

You're thinking of psilocybin, silly. The ones I mean are non-psychoactive and nootropic.

STURGILL

Ah.

JANUS

We had prototyped this folding fungus protein chip. To fortify plant-based snacks. And they actually

STURGILL

Sounds interesting but. I gotta leave for a minute.

Sturgill heads off.

NEAR THE HANGING GROWTH RING SLAB

Sturgill sips his coffee facing the halo of a dead sun.

The plaque reads Like a tree planted by streams of water. Psalm 1:3. Oak tree from the original grove, 1896.

Lena approaches.

LENA

The dark rings are when it survived wildfires.

STURGILL

So where are you from.

LENA

Stockton, originally.

STURGILL

You didn't grow up on a pig farm, did you.

LENA  
A vineyard.

STURGILL  
You left that part out.

LENA  
Didn't feel like telling some rando  
in the produce aisle.

STURGILL  
Dinner or coffee.

Lena shifts her weight to one leg.

STURGILL (CONT'D)  
Or bookstore. We can go to the one  
off Charm Quark Ave. After Group.

LENA  
(beat)  
Ok.

STURGILL  
It's a date.

LENA  
It's not a date.

STURGILL  
I don't care what you call it.

LENA  
You're calling it a date. It's not  
a date.

STURGILL  
Call it whatever you want.

LENA  
No thanks. No coffee. No bookstore.  
And no date.

Lena turns and walks off.

INT. BOOKSTORE CAFÉ - LATE MORNING (RAINING)

Rain needles the glass sideways. Sturgill roams an aisle and  
picks up a book. Peruses.

Lena enters folding her umbrella.

She pins her hair back rutilant in the storelight. A ruby. A tilt of skywire snapping straight. A thousand bad dreams.

Lena browses the shelves. They catch each other's glances but they don't look away fast enough.

LENA (PRE-LAP)

Can't say.

ENCYCLOPEDIA SUPPLEMENTS - LATER

The air swims thick with paper dust and wet rock and the singe of coffee grounds.

Their sleeves graze as Sturgill and Lena walk the aisle like bowing branches.

LENA (CONT'D)

There's a lot of confidential things involved.

STURGILL

You can give me an idea.

LENA

Naval systems. That's as much of an idea I can give you.

STURGILL

Littorals.

LENA

Littorals. The team next to mine works on those.

STURGILL

You hungry.

LENA (PRE-LAP)

I'm going out with this guy.

INT. MANEUVERING AND SEAKEEPING BASIN - MORNING

Lena and Hair Parted Left lean over the rail facing the dark test pool.

LENA

But I can't find anything.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

You know it won't be good.

LENA  
I need to know.

HAIR PARTED LEFT  
Send his plates if you can. 202.

LENA  
I don't wanna bother you if you're  
out of country.

HAIR PARTED LEFT  
You know, you're cutest when you're  
not cognizant of it.

LENA  
Don't care.  
(springy)  
You're still my hero!

Lena walks down the rail. Hair Parted Left watches her go  
then leans off the rail and suppresses a smile.

HAIR PARTED LEFT (PRE-LAP)  
No Saul Bass.

EXT. TOMAHAWK TRAIL - NOON

The land sours in its own sweat.

HAIR PARTED LEFT (V.O.)  
No publisher. No Pikesville.  
Nothing in the States. I don't need  
the plates to spell it out for you.

Sturgill and Lena veer off the loop trail.

Sage rakes their shins as they crush all earthy rot up the  
wash under a smelting ore of a sun pouring heavy on their  
heads.

LENA (V.O.)  
I just. It's just not taking.

HAIR PARTED LEFT (V.O.)  
Lena. He could be anyone.

They come to the bank under a witness of willows. He shrugs  
his pack off. A red bedroll bound tight on top.

FADE TO BLACK

PRE-LAP: THE SOUND OF RIVER WATER.

EXT. SANTA ANA RIVERBANK - LATE AFTERNOON

Ravens perch in the leaf-scatter. The river laps dull under the full weight of the day. Sturgill elbows up from the crushed reeds.

Lena sits squat in the shallows washing low.

She crosses to the makeshift picnic dressed and drinks the last of her canteen. He rolls the red sleeping bag tight over and over.

LENA

I need some more water.

STURGILL

You can fill up there.

She levels her eyes at him.

STURGILL (CONT'D)

You washed it in.

LENA

I washed in it, but it doesn't mean I want to drink from it.

STURGILL

It's clean.

LENA

I'm concerned about parasites.

STURGILL

You want to hide this for how it looks. Not for what it is.

(beat)

But you'll never give me what I give you. It's your deficiency. As a woman.

LENA

It is textbook deficiency.

Sturgill reaches his bag and unzips it.

LENA (CONT'D)

You don't see yourself as clearly as you'd like to believe.

Bear's Breath. He pulls out a water bottle and gives it a shake. She remains still.

He launches the bottle up and out into the river.

STURGILL  
There. We meet in the middle.

LENA  
I knew you were wrong.

She turns up the bank.

STURGILL  
Jail

LENA  
Jail and prison are two different things.

STURGILL  
Shouldn't bother you.

Lena stops and turns.

LENA  
Of course it bothers me.  
(beat)  
And I'm hiding something, too, ok.  
A friend flew in from the East Coast. I've known him since university. And we decided. I'm with him now. Exclusively.

STURGILL  
What's his name.

LENA  
Ty.

He scoffs.

LENA (CONT'D)  
I'm gonna go now.

She heads up a ways up the slope then stops and turns.

LENA (CONT'D)  
You wanted to conquer me. But what you want can never be conquered. Only given. How do you not see this?  
(beat)  
I don't ever want to see you again.

STURGILL  
I'm not beggin you.

LENA  
No begging needed.

STURGILL  
I don't need you either.

LENA  
You don't need anybody.

STURGILL  
You're right.

LENA  
I'd appreciate it, if you found a  
different church.

Sturgill feigns a laugh.

LENA (CONT'D)  
(beat)  
I want something else. Even if it  
is suburban. Even if the handcuffs  
are golden. I think I paid for it.  
(beat)  
I don't have to deal with this.  
(beat)  
And I won't.

STURGILL  
Then don't.

Lena turns up the slope and he follows.

NEAR AN UPTURNED TREE

Lena gets to a maze of sycamore root and examines it close  
pinching the fungal-black filaments jutting out.

He moves up behind her and hand clamping her wrist his mouth  
pressing the ridge of her neck. Lena turns and grasps his ear  
in the cup of her small hand before tearing free through the  
sage.

He walks after her for a time then stops. Lena shrinks into  
the field.

INT. WHEELER'S GARAGE - NIGHT

Wheeler readies the river. Three older GENTLEMEN crowd the  
table. The side door unlatches and Wheeler springs like a  
Doberman in a war dream.

GENTLEMAN 1  
You dealin or what.

WHEELER  
(to Sturgill entering)  
Is it done.

STURGILL  
The worst of it.

GENTLEMAN 2 (O.S.)  
Let him take my spot!

WHEELER  
He's not playin.  
(to Sturgill)  
Is it done.

Sturgill nods.

WHEELER (CONT'D)  
Rest in my room if you can. The  
passport's in the dresser. How's  
that freedom taste.

Wheeler pats him hard on the back and walks him to the door.

WHEELER (CONT'D)  
Gotta smell to it, don't it.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - NIGHT

Sturgill closes the door behind him. Listens. Leans in.

GENTLEMAN 1 (O.S.)  
Who the hell was that.

WHEELER (O.S.)  
He's what you call the price of  
fuckin up. Just like you. 'Cause  
you've been bleedin out all night.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sturgill picks up Wheeler's phone on the nightstand in the  
dark room. He FaceTimes Mira.

FIRST RING. SECOND. He covers the camera with his thumb.

THIRD.

Mira appears haloed in soft lamplight.

MIRA'S VOICE

Grin?

(beat)

Have you heard from Silas? Hello?

A Child's cry. Sturgill ends the call and tosses it onto the bed. It lights up.

Anne stands silhouetted in the doorway.

ANNE

I'd feel better if you'd stayed outta my bedroom.

STURGILL

If he kicks me out. I tell him.

ANNE

We were *separated*, Silas. A sloppy New Year's kiss counts for nothin, ya hear? It ain't on anybody's conscience. Not mine. Not his.

STURGILL

Maybe the wine blacked it out.

ANNE

Yeah, I'm gonna need a drink after talkin with your smart ass.

(beat)

You think Mira needs you back. She doesn't.

Anne slams the door. Sturgill grabs the phone and opens the Voice Memos and hits record.

STURGILL (PRE-LAP)

You look lost.

INT. BAPTIST LOBBY - MORNING

Dale stands. Not with one shadow but two.

STURGILL

Lena didn't mention me.

DALE

I've been here plenty. And no.

STURGILL

Whadaya do.

DALE

I sell e-cars. If you ever need  
some wheels.

Dale hands Sturgill his business card. Plain gloss.

DALE (CONT'D)

This is just until I finish my  
master's in quantum engineering.

STURGILL

So what's your story.

Janus joins in.

DALE

My testimony you mean.

Sturgill shrugs.

DALE (CONT'D)

I came to Jesus when I was three.  
MIT courses at nine. I'm a  
certified genius actually.

STURGILL

Certified, huh.

DALE

145 IQ. Plan on retesting it, bump  
it 5. It's the top end of  
exceptionally gifted, semi-genius,  
genius. All generally relative.

STURGILL

Maybe you should have others say  
you're a genius.

JANUS

Oh, he's a genius.

DALE

There you go. Guess you'll always  
be stuck using implied  
hypotheticals.

STURGILL

I ain't ever stuck.

DALE

Or is your eye evil because I am  
gene'ous.

STURGILL

What was that.

JANUS

It's Scripture. And a pun. And a fancy way of saying you're.

A deadlock stare.

JANUS (CONT'D)

I'll leave you two at it.

Janus leaves.

A duel of wills.

NOHL (PRE-LAP)

And it came to pass.

INT. ROOM NO. G208 - MORNING

The Group sits with Bibles open. Lena and Dale together.

NOHL

When David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire.

JANUS

Before I forget Lena's hosting a luncheon this afternoon. You're all invited and yes, that includes you, Saul.

Lena presses her lips together peeved.

LENA

It's also our last lunch for the Group. Remember, Janus?

JANUS

That. Is correct. Ty, now that you're back with us why don't you share your first impressions?

DALE

I only have one observation, Janus. The Bible says David encouraged himself. At his lowest. Wives taken. Kids taken. In fire and ash. He pulled himself out.

STURGILL  
What's your point.

DALE  
I would argue. Hell, I mean hellish situations. Suffering. Is exactly what we need in order to make things right. And in those cases you gotta do it yourself.

STURGILL  
Don't forget. David got everything back.

DALE  
No one's arguing that.  
(to Lena)  
You cold.

Dale shrugs off his jacket and lays it over her lap. Sturgill seethes.

JANUS (PRE-LAP)  
Ghosts.

INT. LENA'S DINING ROOM - DAY

Low laughter stirs half-meant as the Sunday parea plays a card game around a glass-top table.

NOHL  
Not Poseidon.

LENA  
Ghosts aren't honorable.

DALE  
(to Sturgill)  
You look spent.

NOHL (CONT'D)  
What about Hamlet.

JANUS  
Saul, was that your card?

Sturgill scratches his thumbnail between the groove of his bottom teeth and nods.

The wall clock ticks metronomic.

JANUS (CONT'D)  
We can play Life, if you guys want?

NOHL  
Hey Saul, I tried googling your novels, but I didn't find anything.

STURGILL  
Bass isn't my real name.

Sturgill stands and leaves.

DALE  
(beat)  
That's the third time.

JANUS  
So what.

DALE  
Hope he's not shootin up in there.

Dale and Nohl chuckle.

DALE (CONT'D)  
(to Lena)  
You know that's what you're  
thinking.

Lena holds her tongue.

DALE (CONT'D)  
So who's hosting next week.

INT. LENA'S BATHROOM - DAY

Sturgill's gaze drops from the mirror woozily. He turns the faucet and gathers a gowpen of cold benediction and splashes it across his leaden face.

He opens the medicine cabinet and rummages then squats and checks the lower cabinet digging over clutter and pulling out a 2-pack of pregnancy tests. One gone. One left.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Sturgill reenters.

STURGILL  
I gotta head out.

The Group ad libs their goodbyes. Sturgill shakes hands with Nohl then hugs Janus.

He stops at Lena then tosses the pregnancy test. The glass rings.

Sturgill exits as Janus and Nohl hush themselves.

Lena grabs the test and slinks away. Dale follows without a word.

EXT./INT. STREET/MUSTANG (PARKED) - DAY

Sturgill crosses the street to the black Mustang and slips inside.

He unholsters the black Stechkin from under his hoodie and sheaths it in the black glovebox.

INT. LENA'S BATHROOM - LATE MORNING

The bathwater steams the room full. Sweet and rich as mock figs.

Lena lowers herself in. The water breaches the rim.

She lies long ways. Tilts her head back. Submerges.

Seconds stretch. The surface stills. The calm holds.

Banging at the front door. She explodes up.

SMASH TO

INT. BACK BUNGALOW - EVENING

Sturgill wakes ripped from old realities. The room soaks in early nightfall like a father at the wrong door.

He shifts his weight to the edge of the sofa and rises.

At the dresser he dips his forefinger into a shot glass of pine resin in water. He drinks the gelatin.

OVER SINK

Sturgill works the fishtank tubing jutting from a blood-madder incision under his pit just lateral the nipple. He milks the line slow between his thumb and knuckle.

Pus and blood ooze through.

He opens the tap and watches it all swirl down the drain.

He straps his shoulder holster and fits into a jacket and grabs a whiskey bottle from the shelf and heads to the open doorway. He stops and pulls the stained lace and mesh netting aside.

The blonde cat lumbers toward the door.

PRE-LAP: BUZZSAW.

He leaves.

EXT. BACKYARD - REDDING, CA - DAY

Buzzsaw snarls in the adjacent yard. A black phoebe perches on a pad of cacti.

The wind-lanced lot lies cluttered and mostly de-spidered and invariably lived-in with nothing out of place because nothing ever moves.

Mary Claire pins a white tablecloth to the clothesline strung between an almond tree and the redwood fence. A red wheelbarrow leans against one of two muraled sheds. To the side dead vinewood hangs imbedded in the chainlink.

Bermuda buttercups ripple against the sea-green vinyl slats of the back chainlink. The levee fence holds three straight lines of barbwire across its length.

Mary Claire carries the Child (2) and latches the hen run. The roosters thrash in frenzy.

Amidst the crisp susurrus bees reel over the white almond blossoms sun-drunk. The house in yellow.

Mira steps out carrying a big cookie with two candles on a dessert plate. The fescue waves bright as springfire.

Mira flicks the lighter. No good.

MARY CLAIRE  
Just go get it then.

INT. BACK HOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

Mira opens the freezer door. Vapor spills out as she grabs a flat Tupperware container.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

She crosses the yard with the Tupperware and butter knife lowering the container onto the grass under the almond tree.

EXT./INT. TARAHUMARA MOUNTAINS/RANGER TRUCK - SUNSET

Huarache runners bridge the shoulder knifing their long shadows over the dirt and the dust.

CALDWELL

If I passed. I passed you early.

EXT. OUTSIDE SCRAPYARD - MIDNIGHT

Caldwell parks the truck.

He strolls along the chainlink. Beyond the fence the Mustang gleams against floodlight as though the black bull still boils.

INT. UNDER A SKELETON TREE - MIDNIGHT

High beams spear the dark.

Caldwell shovels sandy dirt over the monster box half-buried in a hole.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Mira's shovel crunches hard into the ground at the base of the almond tree as Mary Claire bounces and coos the Child.

The wind kicks and white petals pepper down.

Mary Claire pretends to eat the Child's belly as Mira kneels by the hole and sets the container on her lap.

A Cascade breeze rushes in. Mira shivers goosebumps then pops the lid open. A frozen slab of dark red and off-white.

She wedges the organ loose with the butter knife and inverts the Tupperware. The placenta and umbilical cord drop an ice-brick into the hole.

Mira stands and grabs the shovel and waits. Then she shovels dirt over.

EXT. SCRAPYARD - MORNING

The DUEÑO (55) drags the chainlink gate wide.

Mud daubers nest in the cavities of engine blocks. Hoods yawning like autopsies. Ironhusks surrendered to earth and rust and time.

Caldwell crouches at the Mustang's hatch. No brainstains. Not a hair. The wind tugs the strung hubcaps into a weak chime.

The Dueño leads Caldwell to a railcar office graffitied in apocrypha and blood names. A generator wheezes by the door.

INT. SCRAPYARD OFFICE - MORNING

The Men step in.

A deer's skull and antlers watches unsparingly blank from the wall.

CALDWELL

Hay algo más que puedes decirme sobre él. Quizás algo que escuchaste de otras personas que venían para abajo.

DUEÑO

Una viejita sí dijo algo de un recién llegado. En la iglesia.

CALDWELL

Ella dijo que a él le falta un ojo.

DUEÑO

No lo describió mucho. Nomás dijo que llegó un hombre nuevo.

CALDWELL

Qué iglesia. Iba bajando.

DUEÑO

No. Allá arriba en Cerocahui. Dijo que se estaba quedando en uno de los cuartitos de atrás.

Caldwell works his teeth with his tongue and nods.

EXT. EDGE OF A PRECIPICE - MIDNIGHT

A lullaby of bush crickets buzzes from the valley thicket.

He splashes White Lightning over the cliff and it sprays sideways.

He kills the rest then tosses the bottle and titans under the clear-eyed stratum of darkness standing there for a time and a time and a half, all sense of direction crumbling beneath his boots like sand as his Cyclops eye scours beyond the new moon's grave to the spur of quivering stars stirring reckless and terrible and black as the holes of this world.

DAWN

He sits overlooking the valley as the sun lays its measure on the tilt of the range. First flakes die in his hair.

The wind rustles a nearby bush and he casts a sidelong glance back then turns his head downhill and rises squatting low.

A dozen Federales backing a half dozen armed Marshals crouch along the side of the church. Rifles poised like black scythes sweeping across the mud field toward the back bungalows.

Sturgill side-steps along the ridgeline fixed on the unfolding raid.

He climbs down the cliffside and moves along a narrow edge. Slides to the brink. Then holds.

INT. BACK BUNGALOW - DAWN

A Marshal rips a curtain down and forces light in raw. They all pace room to room spectral yet certain with each space emptier than the last.

Amid the slack faces Caldwell appears in the doorway as his breath evaporates in the chill of the dawn.

EXT. BACK BUNGALOW - MORNING (SNOWING)

Caldwell rounds left of the bungalow and looks down. Mudprints. He looks up at the ridgeline.

EXT. DROP-OFF - MORNING

Glock drawn he descends some.

His boot slips. Scree under shale. He teeters then catches himself.

Rockfall.

His footing drops and he slides down fast swallowed by brush.

Dust kicks up behind him and he smacks the rockface and the air shoots from his lungs and he rolls through brush gun gone, sky arching sideways then gone.

SMASH TO BLACK

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Mira pats the dirt down with the shovel.

She props the shovel up against the tree.

MARY CLAIRE  
Holding the tears in, Miss  
Mirabelle May?

MIRA  
Here.

Elias passes from Mary Claire to Mira.

MIRA (CONT'D)  
(beat)  
My tears've been buried.

Mary Claire stands and teeters in the breeze.

MARY CLAIRE  
Your sister-in-law sent a voice  
recording of him. Been keeping it  
from you.  
(beat)  
He sounds half-gone.

Mira seals her lips tight.

Mary Claire heads up the porch to the house and Mira follows with the Child in her arms.

EXT. EDGE OF THE PRECIPICE - MORNING (SNOWING)

Caldwell tops the summit and inches to the farthest edge. Sun dogs bracket the sun.

His phone buzzes 202 and he answers.

HAIR PARTED LEFT (V.O.)  
It's your call.

PHONE CALL - PRECIPICE/HIGHRISE SUITE (NIGHT)

Hair Parted Left reclines across papers. Behind him the city simmers in galaxies of neon and glass and flame.

CALDWELL

If you don't mind, I'm gonna stay a bit and practice my Spanish with them Federales.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

Flynn was someone I could count on.

CALDWELL

Not another like him.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

He was what you call an old broom.

CALDWELL

How's that.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

He knew how to sweep quiet.

(beat)

Hard to believe he'd risk his soul for a sodie.

(beat)

Lesson learned I guess. Beautiful view, huh.

CALDWELL

Yessir. It is beautiful.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

Mind if I keep you in the rotary.

CALDWELL

No, thank you. Respectfully.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

The sun out.

Caldwell holds his silence.

HAIR PARTED LEFT (CONT'D)

Caldwell. El sol don't ever blink.

No matter who is watching.

(beat)

And neither should you.

Caldwell remains still. Hair Parted Left hangs up.

Caldwell inhales watching the horizon glare like a door left open for too long.

He turns around. A Ranger stands in the field waving him down with a hat. He heads down.

EXT. CANYON FLOOR - DAY

Sunlight inches across the rocks. He lies facedown with saliva and dust and blood mingled in his breathing.

The wind shears through the canyon walls a creature made of tongues.

He drags himself forward by his arm and flips on his back. A blurred red mass caught in the brush up-canyon. He elbows up wincing and forces himself upright.

He staggers closer to the red sleeping bag. Misshapen. Stringed tight.

He reaches up and yanks it free from the clawing brush and it smacks against the stone.

And like some wood-wose gathering snow to his form he drags the bag by its strings as the gravel and the stone hiss beneath it.

The snow picks up. He nears the mouth of a cave. His eye flicks to a nearby pine.

He snaps off a dead branch and tears his sleeve into strips with bloodied fingers. He slathers pine resin across the fabric.

He pulls out a lighter from his pocket and sets and holds. It catches.

INT. CAVE - DAY

Torchlight hurls shadows wild across the walls.

His boots stop their crunch. Something in the dim.

He kicks at it. A clatter and a femur sticks forward. Black denim clinging like rot to root.

Heartbeats of torch flame.

The beam bends over a ravel of belts.

Loose boots.

Split shoes.

A welter of bodies and rags and tangled limbs. Mummified skin drawn taut as drumskin. A jawbone jutting out the side of a skull.

Skulls stacked on ribcages. A bonefield. A vault of the dead.

He drags the bag close and squats. His hand moves to the drawstrings and loosens them. Slow.

The flame sputters and sluices. Then dies.

CUT TO BLACK

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY

Mary Claire steps through as Mira trails with the Child. Mary Claire touches the doorknob to the kitchen just as the side gate creaks and bangs against the house.

The Women freeze. One watching the other.

EXT. BACK PORCH - DAY

Mira carries the Child out toward the side of the house and reaches past the corner and stops.

Mary Claire passes and goes to the gate agape. She touches the redwood.

MIRA

Leave it. Please.

Mary Claire swings it back and wedges a chunk of concrete at the bottom and returns to the back porch into the house.

Mira adjusts the Child in her arms and inhales. Her eyes glass in the breeze as she stares down the long gravel drive toward the street.

She stands there holding the Child carved outside of time like some roadside altar. The final tether of their love left wholly fetal curled quiet against her breathing chest.

Behind her the bleach-bright tablecloth ripples and lifts and sinks.

White petals drift down.

FADE TO WHITE

PRE-LAP: BLIZZARD HOWL.

EXT. CAVE MOUTH - DAY

He leans onto the stoneface. HISSING. His panting clouds upward.

Snow like fallout snags in his hair. He zips up. The snow at his boots steams and sinks dark red.

STURGILL'S VOICE (RECORDED)  
Was gonna start with the boy, but  
it felt dishonest. And don't you  
lie. Not to him.

A pale gray thread unspools above the pines. Thin. Fading into the thick of it a spider's dragline.

He fishes out of his back pocket the sonogram print of his Son and unfolds it.

STURGILL'S VOICE (RECORDED) (CONT'D)  
Life hangs on our word.

The wind plays with the corners.

Grainy static caught in a womb of false light. The head. The body. The faint arms. The bones of his Child.

STURGILL'S VOICE (RECORDED) (CONT'D)  
And no man. No man gets through  
clean.

He folds the paper in thirds and sets it in his mouth and chews and eats.

STURGILL'S VOICE (RECORDED) (CONT'D)  
Only to break his word.

The ice rages down.

STURGILL'S VOICE (RECORDED) (CONT'D)  
And I'm not about to run dry of  
whatever the hell makes this life  
worth living. Only. I can't give  
you mine.  
(beat)  
Not yours to keep.  
(beat)  
Not ever.  
(beat)  
Not yet.

He pushes off the stone and limps down the gravel into the haze.

His gait wide and bent dragging toward the storm what cannot follow.

TINNITUS.

SMASH TO WHITE