

STRAY DOGS

by

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EXT. SOMEWHERE IN THE DESERT SOUTH WEST - DAY

BEGIN TITLES OVER:

It is only mid-morning, but it is hot. Insects scurry for shade. Prairie dogs burrow under ground to escape the sun. We can see the heat shimmering off the surface of the Earth. It adds a surreal quality to the surroundings.

In the distance, where a long, dusty road meets the horizon, a small shape appears. A Sixty-four-and-a-half Mustang convertible. Its candy-apple red burns like a brilliant

fireball under the sun. As the car drifts closer we can see steam escaping from under the hood. Martha Reeves' HEATWAVE plays on the car's radio.

The car rolls on, looking as if it won't make another ten feet, until it reaches a small gas station on the edge of a desert town. The station is made of weather-beaten wood, it's windows long since dusted over. The pumps themselves look to have been around since the early Fifties. Above the station is a sign so faded it's barely readable: HARLIN'S.

JOHN STEWART - Young, good looking - gets out of the car and, mindful of a bandaged left hand, opens the hood. A plume of steam rises from the engine and hits him in the face.

JOHN

Oh shit!

John looks around for someone, anyone. After a few moments he reaches into the car and blows the horn. He waits, then blows it again. From out of the station walks DARRELL - a skinny man in coveralls that are caked with grease and dirt. He looks the part of a yokel.

DARRELL

You want somethin'?

JOHN

You Harlin?

DARRELL

Nope. Darrell.

JOHN

Harlin around?

DARRELL

He's up at the Look Out.

Darrell points a scraggly finger at a plateau in the distance.

JOHN

Will he be back soon?

DARRELL

Doubt it. He's dead. The Look Out's a cemetery.

JOHN

You own this place?

DARRELL

Yep.

JOHN

Then why do you call it Harlin's?

DARRELL

'Cause Harlin used to own it.

JOHN

But he's dead.

DARRELL

So?

John is confused, but chooses to drop the matter.

JOHN

You want to take a look at my car?
I think the radiator hose is--

DARRELL

Damn. Gonna be another hot one
today.

Darrell mops his brow with a greasy rag. It doesn't so much wipe the sweat as it does streak his forehead with dirt.

DARRELL(CONT)

That'll make five in a row. Never
seen it so hot. Sometimes I don't
even want to get out of bed. I'd
rather just lay there and try to
catch a breeze. I was in Mexico
this one time--

JOHN

Look, pal, I've got places to be.
Could you just take a look at my
radiator hose. It's busted.

Darrell is clearly upset at being cut off. He leans into the car and looks at the engine.

DARRELL

It's your radiator hose. It's busted.

JOHN

I know it's busted. What did I just

tell you?

DARRELL

Well, you know so much why don't you just fix it yourself?

JOHN

If I could do you think I'd be standing here wasting my time. Can you fix it, or do I have to go somewhere else?

DARRELL

Somewhere else? Mister somewhere else is fifty miles from here. How you planning on getting it there? You gonna push this heap yourself?

JOHN

Okay, I'm stuck. You happy? Now can you fix it, or not?

Darrell slams down the hood.

JOHN

Hey!

DARRELL

Yeah, I can fix it. Gotta run over to the yard and see if I can find a hose like this one, or close enough. Gonna take time.

JOHN

How much time?

DARRELL

Time.

JOHN

(Frustrated)

What time is it now?

DARRELL

Twenty-after-ten.

JOHN

Jesus. Twenty-after-ten and it must be ninety already.

DARRELL

Ninety-two. Only gonna get hotter.
I remember one time . . .

John wipes the bandaged hand across his forehead.

DARRELL

What happened to your hand?

Self-consciously John quickly drops his hand to his side.

JOHN

Accident.

DARRELL

You got to be more careful. I
remember one time--

JOHN

Yeah, right. Someplace in this dust
bowl I can get something to drink?

DARRELL

Truck stop up a piece. Not much,
but us simple folk like it.

JOHN

I'll be back in a couple of hours.
And be careful with her, will you?

DARRELL

Just a car.

John reaches into the car, pulls out a back pack which he
throws over his shoulder.

JOHN

It's not just a car. It's a sixty-
four-and-a-half Mustang convertible.
That's the difference between you
and me, and why you live here and
I'm just passing through.

Darrell watches John walk away . . . and spits after him.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT ROAD - LATER

John walks along a dusty patch of road into town. As he
walks on a pair of motorcyclers roar past John on their
Harleys blanketing him in a cloud of dust. He shouts after

them, but his words are lost under the whine of the cycles engines.

John hits town . . . such as it is: It's really nothing more than a detour off a desert road. There are only a few, little stores. A general store, a catalog outlet, a post office that doubles as a bus depot. All of them in buildings of graying wood. Just beyond is a truck stop/diner with a few eighteen wheelers parked outside it.

Along the side of the street sits an old, blind man dressed in raggedy clothes. His seeing eye dog lies next to him. As John passes the old man yells out.

BLIND MAN

Hey! You there!

JOHN

You want something, old man?

BLIND MAN

Don't call me old man. Ain't you got no respect, boy?

JOHN

You want something?

BLIND MAN

Yeah I want something. I want you to run over to that machine and get me a pop.

JOHN

You can't do that yourself?

BLIND MAN

Hell no, I can't do that myself. I'm blind. Can't you see that?

JOHN

I'm sorry, I didn't--

BLIND MAN

What'd you think I was doing out here with these glasses on? Sunnin' myself?

JOHN

I don't know. I thought you were keeping the sun from your eyes.

BLIND MAN

I ain't got no eyes. You want to see?

JOHN

Christ no!

BLIND MAN

Lost my eyes on Okinawa. Lost them fighting the war. Fought the war and lost my eyes just so you could come around here and make fun of me.

JOHN

I said I was sorry.

BLIND MAN

Don't be sorry. Just run over there and get me my pop before I die of thirst.

JOHN

Yeah, sure. You got change?

BLIND MAN

Change? You want my change? I fought the war and lost my eyes just so I could give you my change?

JOHN

All right, old man. Christ.

John walks across the street to a very old soda machine; it has bottles instead of cans. The blind man shouts to John.

BLIND MAN

Get me a Dr. Peppa! I don't want no Pepsi. Pepsi ain't nothing but flavored water.

JOHN

Yeah, yeah.

John puts change in the machine and pulls out a bottle of Dr. Pepper. He starts back to the blind man.

BLIND MAN

Don't forget to open it for me. I can't be opening my own bottle.

JOHN

Christ!

John goes back to the machine and opens the bottle, then walks back to the old man who takes a hearty swig of the soda.

BLIND MAN

Ah! Just what I needed! Want some?

The blind man holds the bottle out to John. A string of saliva runs from his lips to the bottle's neck.

JOHN

I'll pass.

John reaches down and pets the old man's dog.

JOHN

I think you'd better give your pooch a sip. He looks sick.

BLIND MAN

That's 'cause he's dead.

John jumps back.

JOHN

Oh, Jesus.

BLIND MAN

I hope you wasn't pettin' him none, was you?

JOHN

What the hell are you keeping a dead dog around for?

BLIND MAN

He's only just dead. What was I supposed to do with him? I can't take him away anywhere. And nobody wants to take him for me. Do you?

JOHN

He no!

BLIND MAN

See. Ain't nothing I can do but keep him here beside me. That's where he belongs anyways. Me and Jesse, that's my dog, not anymore,

but me and Jesse we been pals since
the war when I lost my eyes. He was
just a pup then . . .

As the blind man talks on John notices a very beautiful woman down the street, GRACE McKENNA She is dressed unpretentiously in cut-off jeans and a t-shirt. With her Raven hair and caramel skin it is obvious that she is Native American. Her arms are full with an awkward package she can barely manage. John walks to her leaving the blind man rattling on to himself.

JOHN

Can I give you a hand, beautiful?

GRACE

I'm just going to my car.

JOHN

That's right on my way.

Grace stops walking.

GRACE

My mother told me never to accept offers from strangers.

JOHN

My name is John. Now I'm not a stranger anymore. See how easy it is for us to get to know each other, beautiful?

GRACE

Do you have to call me that?

JOHN

I don't know your real name.

GRACE

Maybe I don't want you to.

JOHN

Maybe, but if you didn't I think you would have kept on walking.

GRACE

You're pretty full of yourself, aren't you?

JOHN

My cup runneth over, beauti--

GRACE

It's Grace.

JOHN

May I carry your package, Grace?

Grace hesitates, then gives the package to John. He has trouble with it himself.

JOHN

Jesus.

GRACE

You sure you can manage?

JOHN

I got it.

GRACE

Do you want me to carry your pack for you?

John blurts out emphatically:

JOHN

No!

He catches himself, and softens a bit

JOHN(CONT)

No, I've got it.

GRACE

What happened to your hand?

JOHN

Accident.

GRACE

You should be more careful.

They start walking towards Grace's car.

GRACE

It's very nice of you to help me. That package is kind of heavy, and it's so hot.

JOHN

No trouble at all, really.

They get to a car and John puts down the package.

JOHN

Wasn't nothing.

GRACE

Oh, this isn't my car. It's down a ways. I should have parked closer. I just didn't think it would be so heavy. I could drive up.

JOHN

That's all right. I got it.

John takes up the package and they begin walking again. The package seems to have gained weight.

GRACE

It's just new drapes and curtain rods. If I had known it was going to be so heavy I would have had them delivered up to the house.

John struggles with the package. Sweat starts to sheet his face.

JOHN

It's nothing. Really.

GRACE

I just got tired of looking at the old drapes. Had them long as I can remember.

JOHN

(Panting)

That a fact?

GRACE

I saw these in the Penny's catalog, and I just knew I had to have them. You ever seen something and just knew you had to have it?

JOHN

(Straining)

Yes, I have.

GRACE

'Course they cost a little more than I should really be spending. But, damn it, I don't hardly ever do anything nice for myself. I deserve nice things.

JOHN

(Can barely talk)

I . . . can't . . . argue . . .

They arrive at a Jeep Sahara.

GRACE

This is it.

John practically drops the package. He is covered with sweat.

GRACE

Thank you, John.

JOHN

You're welcome, Grace.

GRACE

You're not from around here, are you?

JOHN

Why you say that? Just because I help a lady with her package?

GRACE

You don't have that dead look in your eyes like the only thing you live for is to get through the day.

JOHN

I just drove in this morning.

GRACE

Drove into Sierra? What for?

JOHN

Didn't have a choice. My car overheated up the road.

GRACE

Good luck it didn't happen a few miles back. Maybe they never would have found you. Day like today you'd be dead for sure.

JOHN

Yeah, my luck. I get to be stuck out here in this hole in the desert.

GRACE

Least you can leave.

JOHN

Not until my car's fixed. I don't know how long that's going to take.

GRACE

And here I've made you all hot and sweaty.

Grace steps to John and places her hand against his chest. She rubs away some of the sweat.

GRACE(CONT)

I could use some help carrying this box into the house. Not far. You could shower, get something cool to drink.

John considers the offer, but there's not much considering to do.

JOHN

Well, I could use something cool.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT ROAD - DAY

John rides along with Grace in her Jeep.

GRACE

Where you coming from?

JOHN

All over. Chicago, Miami, Detroit. Just lately Albuquerque.

GRACE

You've been around.

JOHN

I guess I've got wander in my blood.

GRACE

Where you headed?

JOHN

I don't know. I have to make a stop in Vegas. Business to finish. Then maybe I'll head to Santa Barbara. I might be able to pick up some work there.

GRACE

You just travel around, no direction, no steady work. You must like taking chances.

JOHN

If you're going to gamble, might as well play for high stakes.

GRACE

What happens if you lose?

JOHN

I pack up and go somewhere else.

GRACE

(Wistfully)

Somewhere else. I've never been anywhere else. Just once. Years ago. Went to the state fair. It was nice, but it wasn't nothing.

JOHN

I couldn't stay in this place. I wouldn't. I'd just pick up, do whatever I had to do, and get out.

Grace looks to John and smiles.

GRACE

Sometimes I feel the exact same way.

CUT TO:

INT. GRACE'S HOUSE/BATHROOM - LATER

John, naked, steps into the shower and turns on the water. It shoots from the shower head and cascades over his body. As the water falls over him we hear:

VOICE(V.O.)

I want my money.

John press his left hand against the white tile to steady himself. His hand is curled in such a way we cannot see his pinky or ring finger. John leans back in the shower. Just as he does:

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

It is raining hard. Matching the backwards motion of the last scene John is thrown violently against a brick wall.

VOICE(V.O.)

I want my money.

THE ANGLE WIDENS TO REVEAL John being pressed against the wall by a big GOON. Another MAN stands partially hidden behind the goon's frame. With one hand the goon flattens John's hand against the brick, with his other he flicks open a switch blade. THE CAMERA FOLLOWS THE GOON'S HAND as he brings the blade around to John's fingers, THEN PANS TO A CU OF JOHN'S FACE which suddenly, violently, contorts in pain. John slides to the ground until he is framed between the legs of the two men. As John clutches his left hand the rainwater runs in streaks down his ashen, blank face.

CUT TO:

INT. GRACE'S HOUSE/BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

We see John's face reliving the experience as once again we hear the voice.

VOICE (V.O.)

I want my money.

THE CAMERA PANS WITH JOHN as he looks to his left hand. As a streak of blood snakes down the white tile we see that the pinky and ring fingers have been cut off, sloppily, at the joints.

CUT TO:

INT. GRACE'S HOUSE/BEDROOM - LATER

John, his hand rebandaged, is putting on his clothes. As he does he looks at himself. He bends to pick up his shirt which is draped over the back pack. As he lifts it we can see that the pack is filled with money. He closes the pack and stands. In the mirror, hidden in the doorway, he sees

Grace watching him. John slows perceptibly, but does not try to hide himself. After a moment Grace walks into the room carrying a glass of lemonade. She has changed into a sun dress.

GRACE

Thought you might like a refill on your lemonade.

John takes the lemonade and drinks it down. He rubs the glass against his forehead.

JOHN

That's good. Cools you right off.
(Tentatively)
I saw you watching me.

GRACE

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to.

JOHN

I didn't say it bothered me.

GRACE

Did you like it; me watching you?

JOHN

I guess. I've got an ego same as any man.

GRACE

Good, 'cause I liked what I saw.

John gives a smile as devilish as it is pleasant.

JOHN

Nice place you got here.

GRACE

Thank you.

Grace sits on the edge of the bed.

JOHN

Must get kind of lonely for a woman living by herself in a big house.

GRACE

I guess it must.

JOHN

What do you do anyway?

GRACE

A little of this, a little of that.
Mostly I tell fortunes.

JOHN

Where'd you learn to do that?

GRACE

From my father. He was the tribe's
Shaman.

JOHN

A medicine man?

GRACE

Those are white words, not ours.

JOHN

Nice house for a Shaman's daughter.
You must be good.

GRACE

Come here.

John goes to Grace and kneels before her. She takes his head in her hands and looks deep into his eyes. Her voice goes thick, but soft, like a morning fog.

GRACE

There's something in your past;
something you want to keep hidden.
There's a pain. Something . . .
someone you can't forget. And there
is something you want very badly.
It seems very far away to you, but
you are determined, and you will do
what you must to get it.

John closes his hands on Grace's and takes them from his face. He is more than slightly spooked by the accuracy of Grace's reading.

JOHN

My face tell you all that?

GRACE

It tells me what every face tells
me. Everybody has a past, they have
a pain, and they have something they

want.

(Seductively)

What is it you want?

JOHN

The same thing you do.

They silently stare into each other's eyes.

GRACE

Really? I want to hang drapes.

Grace walks from the room. For a moment John stares after her. He takes an ice cube from his glass and crunches it in his teeth.

CUT TO:

INT. GRACE'S HOUSE/LIVINGROOM

Grace is standing on a step ladder trying to hang the drapes. John stands behind her.

GRACE

Hold me.

John gently places his hands on Grace's waist.

GRACE

Tighter. I won't break, but I sure don't want to fall.

John holds her tighter as she finishes hanging the drapes. His eyes are transfixed on her ass.

GRACE

There. All done. Lift me down.

JOHN

What?

GRACE

Lift me down.

John lifts Grace down from the ladder. He holds her, his hands around her waist.

GRACE

You can let go of me now.

(With a wicked smile)

I'm safe. How do they look.

JOHN

Like you.

GRACE

Beautiful?

JOHN

(Kidding)

Like they're made of polyester.

GRACE

I like them. I was sick of looking at this room. I think they add a little life.

JOHN

Nothing like a little liveliness.

With a sexy pout Grace loads the next question.

GRACE

No more drapes to hang. Now what should we do?

JOHN

I have ideas.

GRACE

Such as?

John steps close to Grace and takes her by the shoulders. He pulls her to him and presses his lips hard to hers. Grace doesn't respond.

JOHN

All right, Grace. No more games.

GRACE

(Innocently)

Games?

JOHN

You flirt with me, then you run cold. You lead me on, then slap me down. I don't go for being jerked around.

GRACE

Really? And what game did you want to play? You carry my box for me,

and I fall into bed with you?

John grabs up his pack.

JOHN

I think I can find my own way back
to into town.

GRACE

Maybe I like to find out about a man
first. Maybe I like to know what
he's made of.

JOHN

I'm just flesh and blood, baby.
That and a few memories of bad
women; just like most guys. But you
already know that. You read my
fortune. Thanks for the lemonade.

John turns to leave.

GRACE

You never did answer my question.

JOHN

Still playing?

GRACE

That's not an answer. What is it
you want?

JOHN

You know what I want.

GRACE

Maybe I just want to hear you say it.

For a beat John stands and stares hard at Grace. His pack slides from his shoulder and thuds on the floor. With great determination, like a beast closing for the kill, John moves for her. Grace stands firm, ready for him; her head tilts back. Her breath comes deep and hard.

Just as John is about to reach her, just as he is about to take her, he is stopped dead by the booming voice of JAKE MCKENNA.

JAKE(O.C.)

Grace!

John turns to face Jake: An older man, still large and formidable for his age. A Charlton Heston with a thick Irish brogue.

GRACE

(Nonplussed)

Jake. I thought you would be at work, dear.

JAKE

Who the hell is this!?

JOHN

Who the hell are you?

JAKE

I'm her husband.

JOHN

(Shocked whisper)

Husband . . . ?

JAKE

Now who the hell are you, and it better be good, or God help me I'll break you in half.

JOHN

I . . . I was helping your wife. I met her in town. She needed a hand with her drapes. That's all.

JAKE

Didn't much look like you were hanging drapes.

JOHN

I swear to you that's all that happened. I haven't so much as set foot in your bedroom.

JAKE

A lot that means.

JOHN

Grace, tell him.

Grace says nothing. She picks up a glass of ice tea and sips at it coolly.

JOHN

Damn it, Grace! Tell him.

GRACE

(Coyly)

If he says that's what happened,
Jake, it must be true.

JAKE

I have half a mind to--

JOHN

(To Grace)

Is this what it's all about? You
sucker me up here so you can watch
the two of us beat the shit out of
each other over you? Forget it.

(To Jake)

You want to take my head off,
Mister, I won't even try to stop
you. I deserve it for being an
idiot. But if you're not, I think
I'll be on my way.

For a moment John and Jake stare at each other down before
Jake steps aside. John grabs up his pack and storms from
the room and the house.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT ROAD - LATER - DAY

John walks along the side of the road back into town. He
couldn't have been walking more than a few minutes, but
already he is caked with a mixture of sweat and dust. He
looks up at the relentless sun that beats down on him.

JOHN

Damn it.

John walks on a short way before a Cadillac slows beside
him. Jake is driving.

JAKE

Get in, lad. I'll give you a lift.
It's over one-hundred degrees out
there. Too hot to be walking.

John hesitates.

JAKE

Come on, get in. If I was going to

give you trouble I would have done
it already.

John climbs into the car. For a short time the two men ride
in silence. Jake notices John's bandaged hand.

JAKE
What happened to your hand?

JOHN
Accident.

JAKE
You've got to be--

JOHN
Yeah, I know. More careful.

JAKE
I guess we've never been introduced
proper. Jake McKenna.

JOHN
Jake McKenna. That's a solid name.

JAKE
I'm a solid man.

JOHN
John Stewart.

JAKE
What brings you to Sierra?

JOHN
My car overheated. I pulled in to
have it fixed.

JAKE
Where you headed?

JOHN
I've got to make a stop in Vegas,
then I'm heading to Santa Barbara.

JAKE
Live there?

JOHN
Got work. I know a man who's got a
boat. Wants me to sail it for him.

JAKE

You a sailor man? That'd be the life. Drive across the country, step on a boat and just sail away. A man could pretty well disappear like that. Just sail away until all he was was a memory. I guess a little place like this would just be a dot on a map to you after awhile.

JOHN

I hope so.

(Beat)

Listen, Mr. McKenna, about your wife: If I had known she was married--

JAKE

It wouldn't have made a difference to you, now would it? Not a wit. Do you know why? Because you're a man without scruples.

JOHN

Wait a second--

JAKE

Ah, I can smell it on you.

Jake wipes his hand across the back of John's neck and holds it to his nose.

JOHN

Hey!

JAKE

That's the sweat of a man who hasn't an honest bone in his body. Don't be offended, lad. A man who's got no ethics is a free man. I envy you that. Beside, I can hardly blame you. That Grace has a mind of her own, and a body to match, don't she? Eh?

Jake nudges John who smiles a nervous smile.

JAKE

She does at that. I knew when I married her she was a free spirit.

A woman with her looks and a man my age; what was I to expect? But you see a woman like that in a town like this and you don't think, you do. So, I married her. What are you to do, eh? Women.

JOHN

Can't live with them, and you can't shoot 'em.

Jake looks at John, his lips curled into a sly smile.

JAKE

I bet she led you on good, didn't she? Taking you up to the house with that smile of hers. Bet she wiggled her ass in your face more than once. Then me busting in like some wild bear. Bet you had a fire going under you.

JOHN

Like you don't know.

JAKE

Mad like a dog in heat, I bet you were. I can tell you got a temper on you.

John gives a little laugh.

JAKE

Bet you just wanted to snap her neck right then, didn't you? Bet you just wanted to kill her.

John starts to laugh heartily. Jake joins in, then stops abruptly.

JAKE

Would you?

JOHN

Would I what?

JAKE

Would you kill her?

John starts to laugh again.

JAKE
(Deadly serious)
I asked you a question.

John stops laughing.

JOHN
Why would I kill her?

JAKE
Because I'm sick and tired of her little games. Because you could do it and drift away on your boat and no one would ever see you again. Because I've got a fifty-thousand dollar life insurance policy on her, and I would be more than happy to give the man who does her in a good chunk of it.

For a moment John sits in silence not sure of what to make of the offer.

JOHN
I'm not a murderer, Mr. McKenna.

JAKE
How do you know if you've never tried?

JOHN
This is a joke, right? You just want to rattle me. Right?

They reach town and Jake stops the car.

JAKE
That's right. Nothing but a joke. That's all.

John gets out of the car. With a big smile Jake says:

JAKE
Enjoy your stay, lad.

Jake speeds away. John looks after him.

JOHN
This fucking town is crazy.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL GROCERY STORE - LATER

The store is small and dark and empty save for a tiny, older Mexican WOMAN who is behind the counter. John enters.

JOHN
Got any cold soda?

WOMAN
Eh?

JOHN
Soda. You got any soda?

WOMAN
Hablar slowly, por favor. My ingles
no es bien.

JOHN
Soda. You know.

John cups his hand and brings it to his mouth pantomiming.

WOMAN
Oh. Something to eat. Si.

She holds up a pack of Twinkies.

JOHN
Not eat. Drink. What the fuck is
drink in Spanish . . . uh, agua?

The old woman's eyes widen. She starts to scream, but quickly clamps her hands over her mouth. For a moment John thinks the woman is screaming at what he has said. Then, as if he feels a presence behind him, John turns slowly to face the tow though-looking, unshaven, tattoo-covered BIKERS. One holds a gun.

BIKER
That's right, lady. Keep it in you
and nobody gets hurt. That goes for
you too, stud. Gimmie the money.
Now!

WOMAN
Eh?

SECOND BIKER
The dinero, Senora. Hand it over.

John shifts his weight trying to hide his pack behind his back.

The woman goes to an old-fashioned cash register and rings it open. She hands the money to the biker.

BIKER

That's it? Lady, I got kids to put through school.

WOMAN

Es all I have.

The biker turns to John.

BIKER

Okay, pal. The wallet.

John pulls his wallet from his pocket and tosses it on the counter. The biker scoops it up and starts to leave the store. He stops.

BIKER

Toss me the pack.

JOHN

There's nothing in it. Just books.

BIKER

I'm a reader. Toss it.

John takes an unsteady breath.

JOHN

No.

BIKER

No?

The biker starts to walk back towards John.

SECOND BIKER

Hey man. Forget about it.

BIKER

No?

WOMAN

Senor, give him the pack.

BIKER

That's all right. He doesn't want
to give me the pack . . .

SECOND BIKER

He's fucking with you man. Shoot him.

The biker lightly taps John on the temple with the barrel of
the gun.

BLIND MAN

He doesn't have to give me the pack.

Again he taps John on the temple. John flinches in
anticipation of a shot. The biker goes to tap John's temple
again, but this time swings the gun hard, clipping John
across the forehead. John falls against the counter and to
the floor. The woman starts to scream.

SECOND BIKER

Fuck, man! Come on! Let's get out
of here!

The biker grabs up the pack, then, looking back at the
woman, sees a ring on her finger. He grabs her hand and
pulls at the ring. The woman screams wildly.

WOMAN

No! No!

SECOND BIKER

Christ, man! Would you come on!

BIKER

A little extra never hurt.

He pulls the ring from the woman's finger and pushes her
back. With John's pack slung over his shoulder he turns to
leave.

BIKER

Now we go.

From beneath the counter the woman pulls a shotgun.

WOMAN

You go to El Diablo!

The woman fires a shot that rips through the pack and into
the back of the biker. He falls to the ground, very dead,
amid a shower of blood and shredded money.

SECOND BIKER

Oh, shit! Oh, shit! Oh, shit!

JOHN

Noooooooooo!

As the second biker tears from the store the woman fires another shot that rips into the doorway, but misses him. We hear a motorcycle fire up and race off. John sits on the floor trying to grab pieces of the still falling money as the woman comes around the counter to his aide.

WOMAN

Senor? Senor, are you all right?

John clutches at the side of his bleeding head and mumbles something.

WOMAN

I call the policia.

JOHN

No!

John struggles to his feet.

JOHN

No police.

WOMAN

But, Senor--

JOHN

No police! Wait until I'm gone.

WOMAN

Senor, you need a doctor.

JOHN

No police!

John stumbles from the store as the woman calls after him. The screen burns a bright white.

FADE TO:

EXT. STREET - LATER

WHAT FOLLOWS IS A QUICK MONTAGE:

John walks along the street dazed and holding his head.

He sits on the ground next to a spigot that is dripping water. He cups his hands under the water and splashes it against his face, lightly wiping the cut above his eye.

John stands on the street side digging into his pants pocket. He pulls out a five dollar bill which he looks over before stuffing it back where he found it. He walks on.

CUT TO:

EXT. HARLIN'S GARAGE - LATER

Darrell is leaning under the hood of a car working on it's engine as John walks up.

JOHN

Hey.

DARRELL

Hey, your . . . what the hell happened to you.

JOHN

Nothing.

DARRELL

Don't look like nothing.

JOHN

Just banged my head. It was an accident.

DARRELL

Another accident? You got to be more careful.

John rolls his eyes.

JOHN

Look, I just want to pick up my car.

DARRELL

She's all yours. Put a new hose in it, and she runs like a dream now.

JOHN

How much?

DARRELL

Well . . . parts, labor . . . let's call it a hundred-fifty bucks.

JOHN

How much!?

DARRELL

Hundred-fifty.

JOHN

To replace a God damn radiator hose!?

DARRELL

A God damn radiator hose in a sixty-four-and-a-half Mustang. You know how long it took me to find that hose?

JOHN

About an hour and a half, because that's all the longer I've been gone.

DARRELL

That's about an hour and a half longer than I usually spend looking for parts. You're the one thinks that car's so damn fancy. What you expect but fancy damn prices?

JOHN

That's a Ford, not a Ferrari. You going to tell me no one else in this shit hole drives a Ford?

DARRELL

That's not just a Ford, that's a sixty-four-and-a-half Mustang.

JOHN

What's that got to do with the radiator hose?

DARRELL

I don't know, but it's the reason I'm living here and you're just passing through. Now you owe me a hundred-fifty dollars.

JOHN

It might as well be fifteen-hundred dollars, because I don't have the

money.

DARRELL

Then you ain't gonna have the car.

JOHN

Listen, man. I got rolled half and hour ago for everything I had.

John digs through his pocket and pulls the five dollar bill.

JOHN

A five is all I've got.

Darrell snatches the five from him.

DARRELL

Then you're only a hundred-forty-five in the hole. Now why don't you just take your Visa Express Silver Card, call Karl Malden and have him send you the money lickity split.

JOHN

I don't have a credit card. They took my wallet.

DARRELL

Now that's too bad. I sure hope you know how to wash dishes or shovel shit 'cause you're gonna have to work this one off.

JOHN

You son of a bitch!

DARRELL

Sweet talk me all you want, I still want my hundred-forty-five dollars.

John stands his ground for a moment as if deciding whether or not to fight for the car, then wheels and walks away.

CUT TO:

EXT. PHONE BOOTH - LATER

John is placing a call.

JOHN

Yeah, operator. I'll wait.

CUT TO:

INT. MR. VESCI'S OFFICE - DAY

It is the kind of well appointed office one would expect to find in a Las Vegas high-rise casino. MR. VESCI, dressed in a smartly tailored silk suit, sits behind his desk. RICHIE, a burly but impeccably dressed Italian, answers the phone. They are the two men from the flashback.

RICHIE

Yeah?

MR. VESCI

Richie, how many times do I have to tell you? You answer a phone hello, not yeah. You got no manners? What are you, a fucking Neanderthal?

RICHIE

Sorry, Mr. Vescei.

(Into phone)

Hello?

OPERATOR(V.O.)

I have a collect call from John Stewart. Will you accept the charges?

RICHIE

Mr. Vescei, it's that deadbeat Stewart.

Mr. Vescei doesn't acknowledge him.

RICHIE

He's calling collect.

At this Mr. Vescei's head springs up. He snatches the phone from Richie.

MR. VESCI

(Overly sweet)

John, what a surprise. I expected to be seeing you, not talking to you over the phone.

CUT TO:

JOHN

JOHN

I know, Mr. Vesce. I know. I was on my way to you, it's just . . . what a day I've had. You're not going to believe what's happened to me. I had the money, I swear I had it. I was on my way to you when my car breaks down in the middle of nowhere.

CUT TO:

MR. VESCI

Mr. Vesce cleans his nails completely disinterested in what John is saying.

MR. VESCI

That's a shame, John. A real shame.

CUT TO:

JOHN

JOHN

You don't know the how, Mr. Vesce. And that's not the half of it. I've got your money, and I go into this little grocery store to get something to eat and it gets robbed.

MR. VESCI(V.O.)

Let me guess. This robber; he gets your money.

JOHN

No. He gets shot by the old lady.

MR. VESCI(V.O.)

The old lady?

JOHN

With a shotgun. It kills him, and it shreds the money. I mean, what are the odds?

MR. VESCI(V.O.)

You're the gambler. You tell me.

JOHN

I had to beat it before the cops showed up. I don't have a cent to my name. I can't even get my car out of the garage. I tell you, Mr. Vesce, if it weren't for bad luck I wouldn't have any at all. So, I was wondering if you could wire me a hundred fifty-dollars so I could get my car. I'll pay it back with the rest of the money.

CUT TO:

MR. VESCI AND RICHIE

Richie looks as if he is ready to pound heads. THE CAMERA DOLLIES IN on Mr. Vesce as he speaks.

MR. VESCI

Let me get this straight: You owe me thirteen-thousand dollars, you call me - collect - then ask me to wire you one-hundred-fifty dollars just so you can get your car fixed.

JOHN(V.O.)

A hundred-forty-five really.

MR. VESCI

A hundred and . . . Now you listen to me you deadbeat, little punk: I don't care if you got hit by a truck and run over by a steamroller. You owe me thirteen-thousand dollars and I want it. I don't care how you get it, or where from, but I want it on my desk tomorrow, or I'll show you what real bad luck is.

Richie snaps a pencil he's holding in his hand.

MR. VESCI

Do you understand me you little fuck?

CUT TO:

JOHN

JOHN

Yes, Mr. Vesce.

CUT TO:

MR. VESCI

MR. VESCI

And John, don't make me come look
for you.

He hands the phone back to Richie who hangs it up.

MR. VESCI

Fucking kid. And look at you;
breaking fucking pencils. You're a
Neanderthal.

CUT TO:

JOHN

JOHN

Hello? Hello!? Operator, I got
disconnected. Hello . . .

John slams the phone down into the hook. His hand lingers
for a moment and he stares at the bandages that wrap it. He
lifts the receiver again and desperately dials a number.

JOHN

Cici? Hey Cici, it's John. Look,
I know it's been a while, but I'm
kind of . . . John Stewart . . .
Yeah, look, I know it's been awhile,
but I'm kind of in a jam . . . yeah
. . . One-hundred-fifty bucks . . .
That's a lie. I don't only call you
when I need money . . . on your
birthday . . . Two years ago . . . I
can't help it if you didn't get the
message. Cici, I don't want to
argue. I really need you to wire me
the money . . . What do you mean
serves me right . . . I didn't steal
your CDs . . . Well, you still got
my Mr. Coffee! Cici . . . Cici,
don't hang up on me . . . Cici!
Cici!

John slams the phone against the hook several times.

JOHN

God damn it! Shit! Damn! Damn!

Damn!

We hear an operator's voice from over the phone:

OPERATOR(V.O.)

Hello?

JOHN

Hello?

OPERATOR(V.O.)

Are you finished with your call?

JOHN

Yeah.

OPERATOR(V.O.)

Please deposit an additional seventy-five cents.

John again slams the phone against the hook, each time punctuating it with:

JOHN

Fuck you! Fuck you! Fuck you!

John marches from the phone booth. The phone falls from the hook and we hear a recorded voice:

VOICE(V.O.)

Thank you for using AT&T.

CUT TO:

INT. TRUCK STOP/DINER - LATER

It is a little diner-type stop one would find on most any open road: A counter with stools, laminated menus, a Wurlitzer in the corner belching out country tunes. A little worse for the wear, it's obvious the place does a brisk business although now it's a little slow. There is a SHORT ORDER COOK in the kitchen, and FLO - a stereotypical waitress with a bouffant and chewing gum - is behind the counter. A couple of regulars, ED and BOYD, are seated on the stools.

ED

One-hundred-thirteen degrees. That was back in July of forty-seven. Now there ain't no way it's gonna be hotter than that.

BOYD

Hundred and eight already.

John enters and sits at the end of the counter. He is sweating and obviously tired. He buries his face in his hands.

ED

Hundred and eight ain't a hundred and thirteen.

BOYD

Will be.

ED

You ain't nothing but an old fool.

BOYD

You got two years on me. What's that make me?

FLO

Why don't you both shut up and drink your coffee? How you can drink that stuff on a day like today is beyond me.

ED

He's always going on about something. This morning he wouldn't shut up about that coin.

BOYD

It's true.

FLO

What about a coin.

ED

It's nonsense.

BOYD

It is not.

ED

A coin's got two sides. When you flip it there's a fifty-fifty chance it'll be heads or tails. Boyd thinks if you flip a coin ten times half the time it'll come up each

side.

BOYD

It will.

ED

No it won't. You just don't know
shit about statistics.

A young couple - teenagers - enter. TOBY looks the part of a local. He is wearing jeans and a white T-shirt. His hair is cropped close and he looks to be a senior in high school. His girl, JENNY, is nondescript. She is not ugly, nor is she beautiful. She is the kind of girl most guys would pass without a second look. They sit at a booth.

BOYD

And what are you? A rocket
scientist?

ED

I got more brains than you've got
teeth.

BOYD

Put your money where your chicken-
lipped mouth is. I'll bet this
mornings pay I'm right.

Hearing this John's head jerks up from his hands.

ED

I ain't wasting my money on
something so stupid.

FLO

You two are like children.

JOHN

I'll take a piece of that bet.
I say it doesn't come up five times
each side.

BOYD

Well, a man with some gumption. How
much money you got?

JOHN

(Sheepishly)

Nothing.

BOYD

You want to make a kiddies bet?

JOHN

I'll bet my watch against your pay.

John takes off his watch and slides it across the counter to Boyd.

JOHN(CONT)

It's a Movado.

BOYD

Never heard of it. It's got no day or date. Hell, it ain't even got numbers. What's the matter? You couldn't afford a Timex?

JOHN

Next city you're in take it to a jeweler. He won't give you less than four-hundred for it.

Boyd looks the watch over.

BOYD

You're on, Mister. You got a quarter, Ed?

Ed hands over a quarter.

ED

I want that back when you're finished.

John takes up a closer stool.

BOYD

Sugar, you officiate.

FLO

I ain't got time for this.

BOYD

It'll only take a minute. Be a gal and help out. Everybody ready? Here we go.

Boyd flips the quarter, catches it, then flips it onto the back of his hand. It's heads.

FLO

One heads.

Boyd flips the coin again.

FLO

Two heads.

Three more flips and each time it comes up tails. The childishness of it all begins to wear off and everyone becomes more tense. Two more flips, both heads. Boyd flips the coin two more times; a heads and a tails each.

BOYD

One more. A tails is five and I get the watch. Heads, and you is a rich man.

Boyd flips the quarter in the same manner he has each time before. He uncovers it. It's a heads.

JOHN

Yes!

ED

Told you.

FLO

Stupid. Just plain stupid.

Boyd hands the quarter back to Ed.

BOYD

You was right, Ed.

Boyd starts to move off. John grabs him by the shoulder.

JOHN

Hey! I won; fair and square.

Boyd reluctantly fishes around in his pocket, pulls out a wad of money and hands it to John.

JOHN

Thirty-bucks? That's it?

BOYD

That's my morning's pay.

JOHN

I'm a rich man off of thirty bucks?

ED

You are around here.

JOHN

This is great. This is fucking great. I sit here and watch you toss a coin, sweat my balls off, put a thousand-dollar watch on the line for thirty fucking dollars?

BOYD

I thought it was a lot of money. Ain't that a lot of money.

John slumps down in the counter stool. Flo comes over to him.

FLO

Now that you're so well off, can I get you something, Hon?

JOHN

You got beer?

FLO

What would a truck stop be without beer?

JOHN

Let me have a Beck's.

FLO

We ain't got no Beck's.

JOHN

Kirin?

FLO

No, we ain't got no Kirin. We got Miller.

JOHN

Genuine Draft?

FLO

No. We got Miller. Regular Miller. You want it, or don't you?

JOHN

Yeah, give me the Miller.

SHORT ORDER COOK

Flo, order up.

FLO

I'll be right back with that beer.

Flo moves off.

JOHN

A waitress named Flo. Christ.

John feels something against his foot. He looks down and sees a cat rubbing against his leg. He gives it a good kick sending it sliding across the floor with a screech.

JOHN

Fucking cat.

In the background Toby gets up from his booth and goes to the bathroom. After he is gone Jenny walks to John.

JENNY

Hey, Mister. You gotta quarter?

JOHN

What?

JENNY

I wanna play a song on the juke.
You got a quarter?

John digs his good hand through his pocket and comes up with a quarter. He flips it to her.

JENNY

What happened to your hand?

JOHN

Accident, and yeah, I got to be more careful.

JENNY

Got any requests?

JOHN

That country shit all sounds the same to me.

JENNY

How about I pick one out for you?

John shrugs. Jenny plays a song. Patsy Cline's Your Cheatin' Heart. Jenny takes up a stool next to John's.

JENNY

You like Patsy Cline? I just love her. How come, I wonder, she don't put out no more new records.

JOHN

She's dead.

JENNY

Gee, that's sad. Don't that make you sad?

JOHN

I've had time to get over it.

JENNY

You're not from around here, are you? Where you from?

JOHN

Oz.

JENNY

You ain't from Oz. Oz is in that one movie.

JOHN

You're too quick for me.

Toby walks back into the room. He looks at Jenny. He looks at John. He looks at Jenny talking to John. He loses it.

TOBY

Hey! What are you doing with my girl?

John says nothing, ignoring Toby.

TOBY

I asked you a question.

JENNY

Aw, Toby, we weren't doing nothing. We was just talking.

TOBY

You shut your mouth, girl, and get

back over to our table.

(To John)

Now, I'm not going to ask you again, Mister. What were you doing with my girl?

JOHN

I wasn't doing anything.

TOBY

That's not the way it looked to me. Looked to me like you was trying to make time with her.

JOHN

Make time? Is everybody in this town slap happy?

JENNY

Honest, Toby. I just asked him for a quarter for the jukebox.

TOBY

Stay out of this, Jenny. We got man's business to take care of.

JOHN

Look, pal, I wasn't making a play for your girl.

TOBY

You expect me to believe that?

JOHN

I don't care what you believe as long as you leave me alone.

TOBY

Mister, I'm calling you out.

JOHN

What? You want to fight? Over her?

John looks Jenny over.

JOHN

You're fucked.

TOBY

You know who I am? Toby N. Tyler. My friends call me TNT. You know

why?

JOHN

They're not very imaginative?

TOBY

'Cause I'm just like dynamite. And when I go off somebody gets hurt.

JOHN

Fine. I was making time with your girl. Now I'm all scared, and I'll never make that mistake again. Now go away.

TOBY

Not before I settle with you.

JOHN

Christ, I don't believe this.

TOBY

Stand up.

JOHN

I wasn't hitting on your girl!

TOBY

Stand up, Mister, or I'll beat you where you sit.

John sits for a beat, then reluctantly stands and squares off with Toby.

FLO

Wait a second. What's the matter with you two; wantin' to bash each other's brains in? Take it outside. I don't want you bleedin' in here.

TOBY

Don't you never mind, Flo. This is gonna be over real quick.

John and Toby stand opposite one another clenching fists and waiting for the other to make the first move. The tension builds. We see it on the faces of Jenny, Flo and the regulars. Just then the record on the juke ends and the needle scratches off. The door to the truck stop opens and SHERIFF POTTER walks in. The tension is shattered. Toby, mindful of the sheriff, steps closer to John and whispers

menacingly into his ear.

TOBY

You're lucky, Mister. Don't think it's over. I called you out and I'm gonna see this through. You hear me?

(To Jenny)

Come on, girl. I got half a mind to make you walk home.

Toby takes Jenny by the arm and pulls her from the truck stop.

SHERIFF

What was that all about?

FLO

You know how that Toby is. Thinks every man he sees is after his Jenny.

SHERIFF

More like Jenny is after every man she sees.

FLO

(To John)

You pay Toby no mind. He just likes to show off for his girl. Give him a couple of hours, he'll cool off. Still want that beer?

JOHN

Yeah, I'll take it to go.

ED

How's it with you, Sheriff?

SHERIFF

Already started out bad. Couple of guys knocked over Jamilla's grocery store. She killed one of them.

John holds his hand to his face to cover the cut on his forehead.

FLO

Poor thing. Is she all right?

SHERIFF

'Cept that she lost her money and the sons of bitches stole her

wedding ring. That's when she started shooting. Can't blame her. The ring was all Carlos left her when he died.

BOYD

It's this heat. That's what it is. The heat makes everybody crazy. Ain't that right, Sheriff? People go crazy with the heat.

SHERIFF

I seen some bad ones in the heat. Once, couple of years back on a white-hot day I had a woman went crazy. Her little baby was so hot it kept cryin' and cryin' all day long. Husband came home and ask where the baby is. Turns out the wife put it in the freezer to keep it cool.

FLO

Lord! Put the baby in the icebox. Killed the poor thing.

SHERIFF

Baby didn't die. Just froze off all it's finger and toes. Just a little fingerless, toeless boy now. But the husband; he sees what the wife's done, so after he saves the baby he locks the wife in the refrigerator to see how she likes it. Now she died.

ED

What happened to the husband?

SHERIFF

State got round to frying him about a year later. Two people dead, and one boy who won't so much as be able to pick his nose.

BLIND MAN

It's the heat, I tell you. Just gets under a man's skin and turns him crazy.

ED

Come on, Boyd. We got to make tracks. That yogurts got to make Santa Fe before it spoils.

Ed and Boyd toss a few bills on the counter and exit. Flo stands near the cash register with John's beer.

FLO

Here's your beer, sugar.

John pays for the beer. Flo opens the register.

FLO

Let me get your change.

SHERIFF

Flo, I'm just gonna help myself to a refill on the coffee.

The Sheriff reaches around the counter for the pot.

FLO

You be careful now, Ned.

Just as the words leave Flo's mouth the Sheriff spills the pot. It shatters against the floor spilling hot coffee everywhere. Flo runs over to him.

FLO

Ned! Now look at what you done!
Are you all right?

SHERIFF

I think I burned my gun hand!

FLO

It'd serve you right. Jose, run get a mop and clean this mess up.

While everyone is distracted John notices that the register drawer has been left open. He looks around to make sure he is not being watched. Slowly he eases his hand towards the drawer. It gets closer and closer. As he his about to grab the money there the cat - the same one he kicked away earlier - hisses and claws at his hand. John jumps back startled.

FLO

Shasta! Now why'd you go and scare the nice man like that? Sorry about that, hon. Enjoy your beer, and try

to have a nice day.

JOHN
Yeah, I'll try.

John exits.

CUT TO:

EXT. EMPTY STREET - LATER

John walks a bit going nowhere in particular. He shields himself with one hand from the sun. At the side of an old building, in the bit of shade it throws, he stops to drink his beer. He twists at the cap trying to get it off. It sticks and won't turn. John tries again and again twisting harder, and working up a sweat from the effort. Finally the cap twists off, cutting into his hand as it rotates. John yells in pain. At the same time the beer comes foaming from the bottle and spills onto the ground. He throws the bottle, and clutches his bleeding hand.

JOHN
Damn it! God Damn it! I hate this
fucking town! Do you hear me? I
hate it!
(Quieter)
I got to get out of here. I got to
get out of this place.

Across the street John sees a sign on a building: JAKE MCKENNA REAL ESTATE. He thinks for a moment, then starts to walk towards the building.

CUT TO:

INT. JAKE'S OFFICE - LATER

Jake's SECRETARY opens the door to his office and shows John in.

JAKE
Thank you, Tracy. Why don't you
take lunch?

Tracy exits closing the door behind her.

JAKE
Good Lord. What happened to you?

JOHN

Just ran into a little trouble.

JAKE

Another accident? You've really got to be more careful. Can I get you a drink?

JOHN

No.

JAKE

Hungry?

JOHN

No.

JAKE

I'm surprised to see you. I thought you'd be halfway to Vegas by now.

JOHN

I had a problem getting my car back.

JAKE

You just seem to attract trouble, don't you?

Ignoring the question:

JOHN

Nice office you've got.

JAKE

I do all right. Real estate isn't a bad game such as it is around here. The trick is to underestimate the price when you buy it, and overvalue when you sell. You can turn a few dollars that way.

JOHN

Isn't that illegal?

Jake smiles.

JAKE

Now what can I do for you?

JOHN

I was hoping we could talk.

JAKE

Talk? About what?

JOHN

About things. About your wife.

JAKE

Sweet Grace? What about her?

JOHN

About what you said this morning.

Jake shakes his head as if he doesn't understand.

JOHN

You said you had an insurance policy out on your wife. Fifty-thousand dollars.

JAKE

I do.

JOHN

You said you'd cut that up with the man who did her in.

JAKE

I did?

JOHN

Don't play simple with me, Jake. You want me to spell it out for you? I'll kill Grace if you cut me in on the money.

JAKE

I think this heat's getting to you the way you're rambling on.

JOHN

I'm not rambling.

JAKE

You're talking like a mad man.

JOHN

You're the one who brought it up. This morning. In your car.

JAKE

That was just loose talk. I don't

want anybody dead.

JOHN

Bullshit. You wanted me to kill her.

JAKE

A man doesn't always mean the things he says.

JOHN

You meant it.

JAKE

What makes you say that?

JOHN

Because I think you're a slimy bastard who would have his wife killed just to get his hands on some money.

JAKE

And what does that make you?

JOHN

The slimy bastard who's going to do it for you.

For a moment Jake stares quietly at John, then walks to the office door and locks it.

JAKE

Let's say I do want her dead. What is it you want? This morning you weren't a killer.

JOHN

This morning I didn't know how badly I'd want to get out of this fucking town.

JAKE

And for that you'd kill Grace?

JOHN

For that I'd kill a nun on Easter Sunday.

JAKE

Just to get out of here? That doesn't seem much for a murder.

JOHN

How do you put a price on murder?

JAKE

I put it at fifty-thousand dollars, minus your cut, of course. Which is?

JOHN

Make it twenty.

JAKE

Twenty-thousand? I don't have that kind of money. I won't get the insurance until months after she's dead. I don't imagine you'll want to be around after poor Grace's demise. Twenty-thousand; that's more money than I could ever get my hands on.

JOHN

How much could you get?

JAKE

Maybe . . . ten-thousand. And that's a maybe.

JOHN

I need thirteen.

JAKE

That's a bit much.

JOHN

You're not buying a car, for Christ sake. You're having your wife killed. I'm the one who's neck is stuck out. It's thirteen, or it's nothing.

Jake considers all this for a moment.

JAKE

You drive a hard bargain, but I had a feeling you were my boy when I met you.

JOHN

I'm not your boy, Jake. I don't like you, and I don't like what you

are. I got no choice but to do business with you. This is just a nasty little marriage of convenience.

JAKE

Don't say that. I had a marriage of convenience with Grace, and look where that's lead. Well, looks like we got ourselves a pact.

JOHN

Do we shake hands?

JAKE

If you can't trust the man you've hired to kill your wife . . .?

For a moment the two men stand silent. All we hear is the ticking of a grandfather clock that stands in the corner.

JOHN

I guess I might as well get this done with.

JAKE

The sooner it's over, the sooner you're on your way. Now listen to me: It's got to look like an accident; that's the thing. If it doesn't, then it's no good. I won't get a dime, and it's my neck that'll be on the chopping block while you're living it up somewhere.

JOHN

What should I do?

JAKE

How the hell should I know? I've never had a wife killed before. I guess I should have hired a professional.

JOHN

You want to do this yourself? I don't have to do this, you know.

JAKE

Be quiet, boy. I'm thinking. It can't be done at the house. It should be . . .

Jake walks the office thinking a bit. An idea comes to him.

JAKE

This is what you do: Go to the house to see her.

JOHN

And tell her what?

CUT TO:

EXT. MCKENNA HOUSE - LATER

John stands on the porch talking to Grace through the screen of the front door. The look on his face is sincere. Her's is skeptical. IN THE FOLLOWING SCENES WE SEE THE ACTION TAKE PLACE AS WE HEAR JAKE'S VOICE OVER.

JAKE(V.O.)

I don't know. Tell her you had to see her. Tell her you don't care if she's married or not, you had to be with her. Sweet talk the woman. A stud like you must be good at that. Then . . . maybe shift the conversation. Get her thinking about that jeep of hers. She loves that thing. Maybe the only thing she does love. She'll want to take you for a ride.

FADE TO:

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Grace's jeep cuts hard across the desert. Grace has a wild, excited look on her face. John sits next to her looking somewhat nervous.

JAKE(V.O.)

She'll take you out somewhere in the desert. She loves it out there; ridin' through the red rock and the mesas. So do I. I guess we got that in common. She'll ride you out someplace quiet. Someplace deserted.

FADE TO:

EXT. DESERT - LATER

Grace has stopped the jeep on a plateau. John sits beneath its shade while Grace walks in the sun seemingly unaffected by the heat.

JAKE(V.O.)

There won't be anyone for miles around. Just the two of you and some prairie dogs. That's all. You can sweet talk her a little if you like. Makes no mind to me. Just put her at ease, make her feel relaxed, then do it.

JAKE'S V.O. ENDS. The scene is now synch with real time.

JOHN

Doesn't the heat bother you?

GRACE

Yeah, but I like the sun. I grew up on a reservation. The sun, the desert; they were like a religion to us. Jake's the same way. He loves the desert. I guess we're alike that way. That's about the only way.

JOHN

You love him?

GRACE

No.

JOHN

Did you ever?

GRACE

Depends on what you call love. When I was growing up I had nothing. I learned to want everything. I wanted more than Sierra anyway. Jake was my ticket. He's not much; he's older than me, different than me, but he's got more money than half this town put together. I courted him. I let him think he was courtin' me, but I reeled him in like a fish on a line. I wanted him. I wanted what he could give me, and I would've done anything to get him. Is that love?

JOHN

I'm guessing no.

GRACE

Yeah, I guess you're right.

JOHN

And I take it things didn't much
work out the way you planned.

GRACE

I'm still here, aren't I? See this?

Grace sweeps her hand before her across the expanse of the
desert.

GRACE(CONT)

All this nothing? I've spent my
life in this stinking desert. It
doesn't get to Jake like it got to
me. He doesn't mind being out here.
He doesn't mind being nothing but a
land broker. Big fish in a small
pond, he says. More like a little
fish in a dried up watering hole.

JOHN

You could just leave him.

GRACE

I don't know how.

JOHN

You just walk away.

GRACE

It's not that easy. Maybe you can
take chances; maybe you can wander
around like some stray wherever you
please. I can't. I don't want to
be alone. I need to know I'm going
to be taken care of.

JOHN

You need a meal ticket is what you
mean. Some guy you can latch onto
just long enough for him to get you
out of here.

GRACE

Is that so bad? It's not like I wouldn't try to make him happy. For awhile, anyway. I mean, I would . . . do things for him. I guess I'm no good that way. I guess I tried to sucker you along like that. Do you hate me for it? I wouldn't blame you if you did. But maybe it's like you said: You just got to do whatever it takes to get out.

JOHN

(Soft echo)

Whatever it takes.

Grace steps to the edge of the plateau.

GRACE

I wish I was a bird. I know it's stupid. Every child says that. When I was growing up some of the old ones on the reservation believed people could actually change into animals. I wish I could.

We see John behind Grace. He stares at her standing on the edge of the plateau. He rises and walks towards her slowly, but with deliberation.

GRACE(CONT)

If I was a bird I would fly to Florida; to Disney World. I always wanted to go there. I'd fly to New York. Maybe. I guess New York isn't the best place to be a bird. I'd fly to St. Louis, then New Orleans, all over Texas. Then I'd fly to California. I guess by then I'd have seen it all and I could die.

John now stands a few feet behind Grace. She kicks a rock and watches it sail over the lip of the cliff into the nothingness below.

GRACE(CONT)

They say you don't feel anything. The shock kills you before you hit the ground. I don't know how they would know that. But I heard it's just like flying; straight down into the ground. I guess if it doesn't

hurt it's a beautiful thing.

John tenses himself. Sweat forms on his brow as he stands directly behind Grace with his hands extended before him. They hover just below her shoulder blades ready to push forward. Suddenly Grace wheels. Startled by John she almost falls over the edge. John grabs her, her weight still going back. Grace's life is literally in his hands. She looks down at the ground far below, then up into John's eyes. She shows no fear, but instead wears a curious smirk.

GRACE

Hate's a funny thing. Right now I bet you don't know if you want to kill me, or fuck me.

John hesitates, then pulls Grace close and kisses her hard on the lips. The screen burns white and we:

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MCKENNA HOUSE/BEDROOM - LATER

John sits shirtless on the edge of the bed staring out a window. Grace lies next to him stroking his back. They both glisten with sweat.

GRACE

How far is it to California?

JOHN

From here? I don't know. Far. Far enough.

GRACE

Have you ever been there before?

JOHN

Yeah.

GRACE

Is it pretty?

JOHN

Beautiful. Beautiful beaches. Blue water and clear skies as far as you can see.

GRACE

Take me with you.

JOHN

I can't.

GRACE

Please. I won't hang on you. As soon as we get there you can dump me. I don't care. I just want to get out of here.

JOHN

Grace, I can't. I can't even get out of here myself. I need a hundred-fifty bucks to get my car back from that crazy mechanic.

GRACE

I know where we could get the money. A lot more than one-hundred-fifty dollars.

JOHN

(Suddenly intrigued)

Where?

GRACE

Jake.

JOHN

You think Jake's going to give me money just so I can take you out of here?

GRACE

He doesn't give it to us. We take it.

JOHN

From?

GRACE

He's got money. In a floor safe in the living room. I've never seen it, but he talks about it all the time. More like brags. He loves his money. Wouldn't think of spending some of it on me.

JOHN

You live pretty good.

GRACE

Yeah, a bird in a gilded cage.

JOHN

How much money has he got?

GRACE

Near as I can figure must be about a hundred-thousand.

JOHN

One-hundred-thousand!? That son-of-a-bitch lied to me.

GRACE

Lied? What do you mean?

JOHN

(Covering)

I . . . nothing. Just something he said.

(Changing gears fast)

So if the money's in a safe we'd have to get the combination--

GRACE

It's not a combination lock. It takes a key. He keeps it on him all the time. I mean all the time. It scratches up against me when we do it.

JOHN

If the key's on him, to get the key we'd have to . . .

GRACE

We'd have to kill him.

John takes a beat, then begins to laugh hysterically. He stands and starts to dress.

GRACE

John? John where are you going?

JOHN

I think this heat is making me crazy. I was crazy to come back here, I'm crazy for listening to anyone in this town, and I'd sure as hell be crazy if I spent another minute in this place.

GRACE

John, please--

JOHN

I don't know what I was thinking,
but I can't do it.

GRACE

What are you talking about?

JOHN

Kill someone. I can't do it.

GRACE

Is it so bad? It would be quick.
He wouldn't even have to feel it.

As she talks Grace comes up behind John.

GRACE

Sometime in the middle of the night;
when it's quiet. When he's asleep.
You just come up behind him and . . .

Grace lays her hands on John's back. Spooked, he jumps.

JOHN

Shit!

GRACE

It's not like he's a young man.
He's had time to live.

JOHN

Jesus Christ! Listen to yourself!
I can't do it, Grace. I can't do it.

John starts to leave, but Grace grabs him.

GRACE

John! I grew up on a reservation.
A fucking patch of desert in the
middle of nowhere. That's where
they stick Indian's, John. That's
where they leave us to die. My
mother died there. My father. I
had a brother who killed himself at
twenty-two because he couldn't take
it anymore.

John tries to pull away, but Grace holds him tight.

GRACE(CONT)

There's no hope there, John. I was lucky to make it this far. You've got to do this for me. I'll do anything for you. Anything.

John looks into Grace's pleading eyes. He sees all he can stand and pulls away. Grace chases after him.

GRACE(CONT)

How are you going to get out of here? You need the money. It's not so much for a hundred-thousand dollars.

Pushing Grace aside John heads out the door. Grace calls after him.

GRACE(CONT)

Whatever it takes, remember?

(To herself)

Whatever it takes.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET CORNER - LATER

The old, blind man sits with his dead dog. HE SPEAKS INTO THE CAMERA WHICH DOLLIES IN DURING HIS DIALOGUE.

BLIND MAN

It's the heat that makes you crazy. I don't know what it is, but it works that way for man and animal alike. I seen some peculiar things on a hot day. I seen a scorpion sting itself to death. It just keeps driving its tail into its body again and again. A little killer killing itself. Seen a coyote kill itself too. Just kept on biting and tearing at its own legs. Near tore one clean off before it bled to death. And what a man'll do when it's hot . . . A man could get hisself killed just for rubbing shoulders with another. I don't know what it is about the heat. I figger it's sort of like putting a

kettle of water over a fire. People is mostly water. We boil when it's hot. 'Cept when we boil the water's got no place to go. It just churns inside of us until we can cool off. If it's not too late.

JOHN STEPS INTO FRAME and sits next to the blind man. We realize the blind man has been talking to him all along.

JOHN

You sure seen a lot for a blind man.

BLIND MAN

Just 'cause I ain't got eyes doesn't mean I can't see.

JOHN

That a fact?

BLIND MAN

I can see just fine. For example: You're a young man who thinks he's got someplace to be.

JOHN

Maybe I do.

BLIND MAN

Or maybe you just think you do. You can run just as far as you can, but wherever you go, there you are.

JOHN

I think I've heard that before.

BLIND MAN

What do you want for free?

JOHN

You sure got a lot of philosophy, old man.

BLIND MAN

That's 'cause I've done a lot of living.

JOHN

Maybe one day I'll get to sit on a corner and spout wise.

BLIND MAN

Think you'll live that long?

John is clearly unnerved by this. He stands and starts to walk away. The blind man rattles his tin cup.

BLIND MAN

Ain't you got a little something for the infirm?

JOHN

I'm a little short. I'll catch you next time.

BLIND MAN

I won't hold my breath.

CUT TO:

INT. JAKE'S OFFICE - LATER

John opens the door to the office and walks in. Jake sits behind his desk ripping open letters with a very sharp letter opener.

JAKE

Well?

John hesitates for a beat, then:

JOHN

I went to your place. We talked, just like you told me. We drove out into the desert . . .

JAKE

Is the job done?

JOHN

No.

JAKE

You didn't kill her?

JOHN

The time wasn't right.

JAKE

You're out in the desert, the middle of nowhere with no one around for miles, and you say the time wasn't

right? What's the matter? You were hoping to get it on home video? A keepsake for the grandkids.

(Mocking)

Thank God I waited, or I never would have gotten it on tape.

JOHN

You know what I mean.

JAKE

I know all right. I know you're just enough of a shit to have a go at bedding a man's wife. You've probably bagged a few at that. You'd probably lie, cheat and steal without thinking twice. From that you'd just turn and walk away. But to kill; to get that blood on your hands. You can't wash that off. You'd be a marked man for life. Just like Cain. And you're a sinner who wants to walk with the saints. Ain't that right, boy?

JOHN

You know so much about killing why don't you do it yourself?

JAKE

I guess I have what you'd call a love-hate relationship with Grace.

JOHN

You love her, but you hate her?

JAKE

I hate loving her. I hate the kind of her person she is. I hate having to tolerate the little games she plays. I hate letting her use me. But I love her too much to do otherwise. And I certainly love her too much to kill her. I couldn't stand to watch her eyes roll back in her head as she sucks her last breath, or to see her pretty pink brains spill from her skull. But you? You got the killing in you, boy.

JOHN

Shut up.

JAKE

Came close this time and it scares you.

JOHN

Drop it, Jake.

JAKE

And next time, next time somebody is going to get dead.

JOHN

SHUT UP!

John lunges at Jake who, with surprising ease, grabs the younger man, twists him, and stretches him back down across the desk. Grabbing up the letter opener he holds it at John's throat.

JAKE

Like I said: Next time somebody's going to get dead. Best make sure it ain't you.

Jake lets go. John stands and collects himself.

JOHN

There's not going to be a next time. Nobody's going to get killed. Not by me. Sorry we couldn't do business. I'm getting kind of used to this place. Maybe one day you could sell me a retirement plot.

John starts for the door, stops, and turns back to Jake.

JOHN

Jake, how much were you going to pay me to do the job?

JAKE

Thirteen-thousand dollars. Had you done it. Isn't that what we agreed on?

JOHN

You think that's a lot of money?

JAKE

All I have in the world.

JOHN

That's what I like about you, Jake.
You're an honest man.

John exits.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

John is walking, head down and defeated, towards Harlin's gas station. He passes Jenny who is sitting on a corner drinking a soda almost as if waiting for him. She runs to John.

JENNY

Hey, Mister. Mister. I just. . .
I just wanted to thank you.

JOHN

For what?

JENNY

For defending my honor this
afternoon.

JOHN

I hate to bust your bubble, but I
wasn't defending you.

JENNY

But you was going to fight for me.

JOHN

I wasn't going to fight for you. I
was just going to beat the shit out
of your boyfriend.

JENNY

He's not my boyfriend. I mean, I
let him take me out and stuff, but I
ain't spoken for. Not yet that is.

JOHN

Get it through your head, little
girl; I'm not going for you. If
this Toby likes you, then if I were
you I'd marry him. You're not going

to get much better in this town.

JENNY

That's what I thought until you came riding in. I saw your car over at the gas station. It's cool. Want to take me for a ride? Desert's kind of lonely this time of day.

JOHN

How old are you?

JENNY

Eighteen. Well, I'm gonna be eighteen in two years, but that don't mean you can't take me for a ride if you want.

JOHN

No, I don't want to take you for a ride. What I want is for . . . Hey, you don't happen to have a hundred and fifty dollars I could--

From OFF CAMERA we hear Toby.

TOBY(O.C.)

Mister!

JOHN

Oh, shit!

Toby moves menacingly up the street towards John.

TOBY

That's right, Mister. You better be afraid. I told you it wasn't over, but you didn't listen. Now I find you sneakin' around with my girl behind my back.

JOHN

I wasn't sneaking around with your girl. Would you please tell him?

JENNY

You're too late, Toby. We're going to get in his fancy car and ride off and leave you behind.

JOHN

What the hell are you talking about?

JENNY

What's your name anyway?

TOBY

Oh, that tears it, Mister. I'm gonna bust you up but good. I'm gonna bust you into a million pieces and then . . . and then bust those pieces up, and then . . . and then spread them all around. That's what I'm gonna do. You don't know what you're dealing with, Mister. I'm crazy. I'm psycho crazy.

JOHN

Yeah, I know. You're TNT. Just like dynamite. When you go off somebody gets hurt.

(Frustrated)

All right. Let's do this.

JENNY

Toby Tyler, it don't matter to me if you beat him all up and knock out all his teeth and he's just drooling and bleeding all over hisself, 'cause we love each other and we gonna run off, and I'm gonna have his love child.

JOHN

Will you shut up!

TOBY

You gonna pay for that, Mister.

Toby and John square off, sizing each other up and preparing for a violent confrontation. Just as the two are about to clash we hear the voice of Sheriff Potter from OFF CAMERA.

SHERIFF(O.C.)

Toby!

The two men freeze in their tracks.

TOBY

Sheriff Potter.

SHERIFF

Toby, I just came from your mother's place. She's worried sick about you. She says she ain't seen you since this morning.

TOBY

That ain't true, Sheriff. I was home for lunch.

SHERIFF

Boy, I'm not trying to hear nothing from you except that you're heading home. Now run along.

TOBY

Yes, sir. Come on, Jenny.

JENNY

I want to stay.

TOBY

I said come on!

Toby grabs Jenny by the wrist and literally pulls her along. As she goes she yells back to John.

JENNY

Bye, Mister. Don't go nowhere without me. I wanna have your love child.

Toby points a vicious finger at John.

TOBY

Next time, Mister. Next time.

Toby and Jenny exit leaving John and the Sheriff alone.

SHERIFF

Kids.

JOHN

Yeah. What are you going to do? That Toby's a hot head.

SHERIFF

He is at that. No so much a fault of his own. Poor boy had quite a trauma as a child.

JOHN

What happened?

SHERIFF

His father worked in a strip mine north of here. Toby's school class went up to the mine one day. School takes field trips up there every year. Big day for the kids when they can see ore tore up out of the ground. Anyway, on this particular day Toby's dad up and falls into the machinery.

JOHN

Jesus!

SHERIFF

Yep. Tore him up good and spat out little, refined pieces of him. Nothing like the embarrassment of having your father refined in front of your classmates to put the anger in a young man.

JOHN

I guess.

SHERIFF

Like I said; you really can't blame the boy. Some people don't know how to avoid trouble. Know what I mean?

John stares at the Sheriff, but says nothing.

SHERIFF

Saw you at the truck stop this morning. You're not from around here.

JOHN

No, sir. And I'm not going to be around long if that's what you're worried about.

SHERIFF

Just curious. That's a nasty cut you've got.

JOHN

Not as bad as it looks.

SHERIFF

There was a young man over at Jamilla's today when it got hit. Way she tells it he got whacked around by one of the robbers.

JOHN

Wouldn't know anything about it.

SHERIFF

That's too bad. I was hoping you were there. Maybe you could help us catch the guy who got away. Or maybe you could explain about all that money that got tore up when Jamilla shot that biker.

JOHN

Wish I could help, Sheriff. But if you'll excuse me I'm going over to Harlin's to pick up my car. Then I'm getting the hell out of this place.

SHERIFF

Stay as long as you like, son. No rush.

JOHN

Maybe not for you, Sheriff, but I think I've had my fill of your little town.

John walks away up the street. The sheriff watches him go.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET CORNER - DAY

A dog licks at a small stream of water that drips from a fire hydrant.

CUT TO:

EXT. PORCH OF HOUSE - DAY

An old woman fans herself as she rocks in a rocker.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Toby shadow boxes outside his house.

CUT TO:

INT. HARLIN'S GARAGE - LATER

Darrell is cleaning his tools. John's Mustang sits prominently, washed and gleaming in spite of the dull light. John enters.

DARRELL

Hey there. I was beginnin' to think you wasn't comin' back. You don't look so good.

JOHN

Yeah, well, I've been around the bend a bit.

DARRELL

One of those days you feel like you been runnin' in circles and you ain't no closer to where you tryin' to get than when you started?

JOHN

You've been there?

DARRELL

Hell, I've had days I would gladly trade with a whippin' dog. Ain't much you can do when you feel like that 'cept tough it out.

JOHN

You believe that?

DARRELL

You think bad, and bad is what you get.

JOHN

That's a good piece of advice, Darrell.

DARRELL

No charge.

JOHN

Listen, Darrell, about that hundred-

fifty bucks for the car, as soon as I get where I'm going I swear I'll--

DARRELL

Two-hundred.

JOHN

What?

DARRELL

It's going to cost you two-hundred dollars.

JOHN

You said this morning the hose was going to run me one-fifty.

DARRELL

Yep. For the hose. But while you was gone I replaced a gasket. That's going to run you another fifty.

JOHN

I didn't tell you to replace any gasket.

DARRELL

Yeah, but it was shot.

JOHN

I didn't tell you to do it! You can't just do unauthorized work.

DARRELL

Well, now, you just know all there is about bein' a mechanic, don't you? I can't do unauthorized work. I suppose I can just let you ride out of here with a bad gasket. Then you get in an accident and get killed. Or worse. Who they gonna blame then? They gonna blame me, and there goes my reputation.

JOHN

What reputation? You're nothing but an ignorant, inbred, tumble weed hick.

DARRELL

Is that an insult? Are you
insulting me.

JOHN

Listen you stupid fuck, I want my
car.

DARRELL

Take it. As soon as I get my money.
Fifty dollars for an almost new
gasket. You don't know what kind of
a deal you're getting.

JOHN

I'm taking my car, and I'm taking it
now!

DARRELL

You listen to me, you fancy city
man. You owe me money, and this car
ain't going nowheres until I get it.
And if you take another five hours
I'll find another fifty dollars
worth of work to do on her. Now get
out of here! You're stinking up my
garage.

John is in a rage. He turns to leave and walks a few paces.
He sees a wrench lying on a table. For a second his mind
reels, then he snatches up the wrench and turns ready to
smash it down on Darrell's head. He stops cold. Darrell
holds a crowbar in a batter's stance ready to smash it into
the Mustang.

DARRELL

You want to play, Mister? I'll play
with you. You want to smash
something? So do I.

Darrell pulls back the crowbar, ready to swing.

JOHN

No!

DARRELL

What's the matter? The fight gone
out of you? I'm just gonna smash a
headlight. Maybe two.

JOHN

(Pleading, almost crying)

Please, just leave the car alone.

DARRELL

Yeah, you better remember that.

Darrell lays the tip of the crowbar on the hood of the car.

DARRELL

Get on out of here. And you better come up with my money.

Darrell drags the tip of the bar across the hood leaving a long scratch.

JOHN

Goddamn you! You son of a bitch!

DARRELL

There you go, sweet talking me again.

Darrell begins to laugh. It is a repetitive, almost demonic laugh that grows louder as the CAMERA SLOWLY DOLLIES IN ON JOHN'S anguished face.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - LATER

John walks along the street still in rage. A voice whispers to him and he slows.

JAKE(V.O.)

You've got the killing in you.

John turns and looks behind him. Jake is nowhere to be found.

JAKE(V.O.)

Maybe not this time, but somebody's going to get dead around you.

JOHN

(Quietly)

No.

THE SCREEN BURNS A BRIGHT WHITE.

FADE TO:

INT. BUS DEPOT - LATER

THE CAMERA PICKS UP JOHN as he enters the bus depot. The interior is poorly lit. There are a few benches for people to wait on, but they sit empty. Old, faded travel posters hang on the wall. A CLERK stands behind a ticket window. John walks up to him.

CLERK
Can I help you, sir?

JOHN
I need a ticket.

CLERK
Where to?

JOHN
Out of here.

CLERK
But, in particular?

JOHN
I . . . Mexico. You got a bus that goes to Mexico? That's where I have to go.

CLERK
Where in Mexico would you like--

JOHN
I don't care, just get me there.

The clerk is a little put off by John. He goes through his schedule looking for a bus.

CLERK
We have a bus to Mexico. Arrives in two hours. Have to make a couple of connections, but it will get you across the border.

JOHN
How much.

CLERK
One way, or round trip?

JOHN
(Pained laugh)
One way.

CLERK

Thirty even.

John counts his money.

JOHN

Twenty-seven, fifty. That's all I got.

CLERK

The ticket is thirty dollars.

JOHN

I bought a beer. That was two-fifty. I bought a beer, otherwise I would have thirty.

CLERK

I'm sorry, sir. It's thirty dollars for the ticket.

JOHN

Yeah. Just a little short. Figures. I just wanted to get out, that's all.

John starts to walk slowly away. Suddenly he turns, runs back to the clerk, grabs him by the shirt and pulls him close. John is half-crazed and almost in tears.

JOHN

Please, you don't understand. I have to get out of here. They're going to come looking for me. They're going to kill me. If I can't get this ticket then I'm going to have to do things to get out of here. I don't want to hurt anybody, I just want to leave.

CLERK

I'll give you the money! Okay? I'll give you two-fifty. Just . . . just, please.

The clerk tears himself away from John and hastily writes up a ticket. John shrinks, ashamed of what he has been reduced to.

CLERK

Here. Bus three-twenty-three. Gets

here in two hours.

John hands the clerk his money.

JOHN

(Meekly)

I'm sorry. It's just . . . the heat
. . .

He walks away a few paces, then turns back to the clerk who puts a "closed" sign in the ticket window.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUS DEPOT - LATER

WE SEE A QUICK MONTAGE OF JOHN WAITING FOR THE BUS. THE PICTURE BLENDS SHOTS OF HIM STANDING, SITTING, RECLINING ON THE BENCH. OVER THIS WE HEAR:

JOHN(V.O.)

Two hours. Two hours and you're
free. Mexico's not so bad. You'll
makes some money, pay Mr. Vesci
back. Throw in a little interest.
He'll understand.

John runs this throat. he has been waiting for awhile and is thirsty. He sees a soda machine down the street. Digging through his pockets he comes up with a little change and starts towards the machine. He looks back at the bus depot, then again to the machine. He moves slow and with a sense of trepidation as if leaving the depot may jeopardize his only chance at freedom. He begins to move more quickly. We feel the urgency in his action.

CUT TO:

POV - JOHN

THE CAMERA DOLLIES IN FAST on the soda machine. Just as John is about to reach it a FIGURE jumps into frame.

CUT TO:

WS - JOHN

We cannot clearly see who the figure is, but he hits John violently in the gut. The force of the blow doubles him over. John clutches his stomach and stumbles forward a few steps before a vicious blow connects with his chin sending

him reeling into the dirt a curled heap. The bus ticket falls from John's pocket. He chokes and spits up saliva, then rolls over. We see clearly for the first time that Toby is the attacker. He towers over John with his fists curled and a snarl on his lips.

TOBY

Get up, Mister! Don't ever let it be said Toby Tyler beat the living shit out of someone without giving them a fair chance.

JOHN

What the hell are you doing? Are you crazy?

TOBY

I'm doing what any man would do if he'd been offended. I'm beating you up.

JOHN

You stupid punk! You don't even know what you're fighting over!

TOBY

My honor, that's what I'm fighting over. Now get up off the ground, or do I have to whoop you where you lie?

Jenny comes running up the street.

JENNY

Toby! Toby Tyler, leave him alone!

TOBY

You stay away, Jenny. I aim to mess him up, and that ain't a thing for a woman to see.

Jenny runs to John and cuddles him where he lays.

JENNY

Don't be afraid of him none. I don't care what he does to you, we can still be together.

JOHN

Get away from me!

John sees his bus ticket on the ground. He grabs for it, but

Toby beats him to it.

TOBY
Now, what's this?

JOHN
Give it to me!

TOBY
Mexico? You're going to Mexico?

JOHN
I'm leaving. You never have to see me again. Just please, give me the ticket!

TOBY
This means something to you? Jenny means something to me.

Toby rips the ticket in half.

JOHN
Nooo!

TOBY
I'm gonna beat you so bad you gonna be eatin' nothing but soup the rest of your days. Rain dogs is gonna be prettier than you when I'm done. I'm gonna mess you up so bad you gonna make your own momma sick. I'm gonna . . .

As John stares at the pieces of the torn ticket Toby's words seem to drift to him from a million miles away. The world around him is like a dream, or a nightmare. A primal rage wells inside of John that rises up in a howl as he lunges for Toby landing blow after blow on the boy's face and head.

Jenny screams:

JENNY
Stop it! You're killing him!

Jenny runs to John and grabs his arm, literally hanging all her weight on it, stopping him from striking Toby again.

JENNY
You're killing him! Toby!? Toby!?

Jenny sinks to the ground and cuddles Toby. John stands. He looks at Toby, then at his bloodied knuckles in disbelief. He backs away, then breaks into a run.

CUT TO:

EXT. PHONE BOOTH - LATER

John is on the phone. He looks slightly frantic, but holds himself together.

JOHN
Hello, Grace? It's John.

CUT TO:

INT. MCKENNA HOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

Grace, in the kitchen, is also on the phone.

GRACE
(Coolly)
I thought you would be on your way to Vegas by now. Is there something you wanted?

CUT TO:

JOHN

JOHN
I wanted to talk.

GRACE(V.O.)
I don't think we have anything to talk about.

JOHN
What about us?

CUT TO:

GRACE

GRACE
There is no us, remember?

JOHN(V.O.)
Except I can't get you out of my head, Grace.

CUT TO:

JOHN

JOHN

I've thought about you every second since I left. I can still taste you on my lips.

CUT TO:

GRACE

GRACE

Stop it.

JOHN (V.O.)

Why? Am I making you hot, or does the truth scare you?

GRACE

Because I know you're full of shit.

CUT TO:

JOHN

JOHN

I mean it, Grace. I'm getting out of here, and I want to take you with me.

GRACE (V.O.)

I thought you couldn't leave. I thought you couldn't get your car.

JOHN

I could if I had Jake's money.

GRACE (V.O.)

Is that what changed your mind? The money?

JOHN

I don't give a damn about the money. I want you, and I want to get us out of this shithole. There's only one way to do that.

CUT TO:

GRACE

GRACE

Are you sure? About me, I mean?

JOHN(V.O.)

I came back for you; this morning I came back. Before I even knew about the money. You're what I want.

CUT TO:

JOHN

JOHN

The only reason I stormed off is because you sort of spooked me talking about Jake. But I've had nothing but time to think about it. It keeps coming back to you and me and us getting the hell out of here. But we've got to get the money, baby. We get the money, I get the car, then we get the hell out.

CUT TO:

GRACE

GRACE

You said you couldn't kill anybody.

JOHN(V.O.)

We don't have to kill him. Just knock him out and tie him up 'till we get away.

CUT TO:

JOHN

JOHN

It was your idea, remember? I'm doing this for you. I'm doing this so you can fly.

CUT TO:

GRACE

She bites at a nail and fidgets, but says nothing.

JOHN (V.O.)

Grace . . . Grace?

GRACE

After dark. I'll leave the back door unlocked.

She quickly hangs up the phone.

CUT TO:

JOHN

Slowly, deliberately, John hangs up the phone.

CUT TO:

INT. MCKENNA HOUSE - EVENING

It is getting late. Jake sits in an easy chair reading a paper. Puffs of smoke from his pipe rise from behind the paper and hang like a cloud over his head. Grace stands in the doorway, body stiff and arms crossed, staring at him.

JAKE

Who was that on the phone?

GRACE

Wrong number.

JAKE

You spent a long time talking for a wrong number. But then you make friends so easily. Don't you, Grace?

Grace has no answer for that, so she says nothing. A long moment passes, then:

GRACE

I put up new drapes, Jake.

JAKE

I know. I was here when your apprentice was helping you. Remember?

GRACE

You never said anything. About the drapes.

JAKE
They look nice.

GRACE
You haven't even looked at them once.

Jake quickly lowers the paper, looks at the drapes, then raises the paper again.

JAKE
They look nice.

GRACE
I picked them out for you, Jake. I thought you would like the colors.

JAKE
Uh-huh

Grace stares at Jake. She stares at the chain barely visible around his neck that disappears under his shirt. She knows that hidden there is a key, and she fixes on it intently. Jake looks up from the paper and sees Grace staring.

JAKE
What the hell you looking at, girl?

GRACE
Nothing, Jake. Absolutely nothing.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT - EVENING

The sun is setting. It strikes the horizon sending a ripple of golden light through the sky.

CUT TO:

EXT. PORCH OF HOUSE - EVENING

A man dances in the evening light with a small child in his arms.

CUT TO:

EXT. CORNER OF HOUSE - EVENING

A dog and cat huddle together in sleep.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET CORNER - EVENING

The blind man along with his still dead dog sit on the side of the street.

BLIND MAN

Well, that's it. Sun's going down.
People go home, trade stories over
dinner. They'll talk about the day,
about the heat, laugh about
something crazy it made them do.
They'll kiss, sleep a few hours,
then do it all over again.

THE CAMERA PANS UNTIL JOHN IS IN FRAME. He sits next to the blind man holding two Dr. peppers. He hands one to the blind man, and takes a sip of the other one.

JOHN

The day wasn't so bad. We all got
through it all right.

BLIND MAN

Ain't over yet. Night is part of
day; separate, but equal. Night is
when you let your guard down; when
you see things in the shadows and
hear things in the dark.

JOHN

You're a hell of a pessimist, old
man.

BLIND MAN

Night is when you want to sleep, but
the dry heat keeps you tossin' and
turnin'. It's when you wish the sun
was bakin' high in the sky so you
could see what it is you're afraid
of.

JOHN

You afraid of the dark?

BLIND MAN

Afraid of it? Boy, I live in the
dark. People are afraid of what
they can't see. I can't see

nuthin', so it's all the same to me.
Kiss from a beautiful woman, a lick
from a dog. The kiss of death.
It's all the same.

JOHN

You don't fear death?

BLIND MAN

We was born to die, boy. From the
minute you take your first breath
you got a death sentence hanging
over your head. You just don't know
where, or when, or how. Don't make
sense worryin' about the particulars.

JOHN

We're all just floating along like
twigs in a stream, so enjoy the
ride. Is that it?

BLIND MAN

More or less.

JOHN

Not this twig, friend. I got plans.

BLIND MAN

We all got plans. I planned on
seeing all my life. I know you
didn't plan on straying into town.

JOHN

No and I don't plan on sticking
around either. I don't guess I'll
be seeing you again. Take it easy.

BLIND MAN

Same back at you.

John stands. He drops a coin into the blind man's cup and
begins to walk away.

JOHN

Any parting words of wisdom?

BLIND MAN

Things ain't always the way they
seem. You got to ask yourself; is
it worth it?

John isn't sure how to respond. He is not sure if the blind man is speaking in generalizations, or if he somehow knows of John's plans.

JOHN

You talk too much, old man.

John turns and walks away.

The Blind Man lifts his sunglasses and we see that he is not really blind. He reaches into the cup and pulls out the coin that John tossed in.

BLIND MAN

Cheap bastard.

CUT TO:

INT. MCKENNA HOUSE - NIGHT

Grace stands by the back door staring at the bolt lock. Jake yells to her from off camera.

JAKE(O.C.)

What the hell you doin', Grace?

Are you coming to bed, or aren't you?

For a moment Grace's hand wavers above the lock. Suddenly, like a snake striking, her hand shoots out and unlocks the bolt. Just as quickly she turns from the door and heads to the bedroom.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE YARD JUST BEYOND THE MCKENNA HOUSE - NIGHT

A light is on in the bedroom window. After a moment it dims and the house is dark, silhouetted against the horizon by moonlight. JOHN STEPS INTO FRAME. The tip of his cigarette glows orange in the darkness as he takes a final drag and tosses it away.

CUT TO:

INT. MCKENNA HOUSE - NIGHT

The knob of the back door twists and the door opens. John slips quickly through the space and into the house quietly closing the door behind him. It is nearly pitch dark, and he has no bearings. He steps gingerly through the hall, but in the darkness he bumps into a table nearly knocking over a

lamp only to catch it just before it crashes into the floor.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM/MCKENNA HOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

Jake hears a noise and sits up in bed.

GRACE

What's the matter?

JAKE

You didn't hear something?

GRACE

How could I? I was sleeping.

JAKE

There's someone in the house.

GRACE

I don't hear anything. You were dreaming. Or maybe the wind blew something over.

JAKE

The wind isn't blowing.

Jake reaches into a drawer of the night stand. Buried under some papers is an automatic

GRACE

Jake, what is that?

JAKE

What does it look like?

GRACE

When did you buy a gun?

Jake climbs out of bed and moves towards the bedroom door.

GRACE

Oh my God, Jake, no. If it is someone they'll go away. Or call the police. Don't go out there.

JAKE

What are you afraid of? I'm the one's got the gun. Stay here.

GRACE

Jake. No. No!

Jake slips carefully out of the bedroom.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVINGROOM/MCKENNA HOUSE - LATER

John makes his way through the livingroom. He bangs his leg against something and nearly screams out in pain. He slaps a hand across his mouth and hops on one foot. After rubbing down his shin he starts through the house again. He waits at the door to the next room and listens. Hearing nothing he slowly pokes his head into the darkness. A moment later John backs from the door and we see the barrel of Jake's gun pressed against John's forehead. Jake continues to back him into the livingroom. He switches on a lamp.

JAKE

Well, well. As I live and breath.
I didn't expect to be seeing the
likes of you again. Thought you'd
be long on your way by now.

Jake continues to press the gun to John's head. John, of course, is a little nervous.

JOHN

Yeah, well, me too.

JAKE

Trouble with the car again?

JOHN

You could say. I don't even have it
yet.

JAKE

Darrell giving you problems?

JOHN

He did more work on the car. He
wants fifty bucks extra for it.

JAKE

Fifty dollars more. That's a lot of
money when you don't have a dime.
And where'd you plan on getting the
money from? Maybe you thought you'd
pay your friend Jake McKenna a

visit.

JOHN

It's not like that.

JAKE

Maybe you heard old Jake's got some money stashed away and you thought you'd help yourself to a little.

JOHN

Wait a minute. Just listen to me--

JAKE

You thought you'd come in here in the middle of the night and wham! Wail off and clock old Jake McKenna and turn his brains into wall paper.

JOHN

Jake--

JAKE

And then with Jake out of the way you could borrow two-hundred dollars. Or maybe two-thousand. Or twenty-thousand. Who's to stop you? Not Jake McKenna, 'cause old Jake would be dead.

JOHN

That's not the reason I'm here. I swear it.

JAKE

There's another reason? It better be good.

JOHN

I came for Grace.

JAKE

You came to take my wife from me?

JOHN

I came to kill her.

JAKE

Liar.

JOHN

It's the truth, Jake.

JAKE

That's a thick change of heart.

JOHN

Yeah, well, a couple of hours ago I just about killed some guy over a girl. Not for money, for a girl. And she was just going to stand there and let it happen, or let him kill me. Same way Grace played us this morning. I don't like that, Jake. Not twice in one day. And maybe I'm so pissed I'd twist the next off my own Grandma to get out of here.

JAKE

That's a lot of talk. A whole lot of talk.

JOHN

Damn it, Jake. If I don't get out of here some guys are going to come gunning for me. And if it comes down to me or Grace, then I pick Grace. You were going to give me thirteen-thousand. Give me two-hundred. I'll kill her and dump the body where no one will ever find it. But I need the money. I've got to have the money.

Jake is silent. He takes his time thinking. Finally:

JAKE

She's in the bedroom.

John stares at the automatic in Jake's hand. Hesitantly he turns and walks towards the bedroom.

JAKE

Hold a second. Come here.

John turns to Jake.

JAKE

I'm curious about something. I'm wondering just how it is you happen to know where the bedroom's at.

JOHN

Wh . . . what are you talking about?

JAKE

This morning when I came in on you and Grace, you swore you hadn't so much as been near the bedroom. Now you make straight for it.

JOHN

Come on, Jake--

JAKE

Don't Jake me, boy! It's a big house. Odd that you would know your way, except maybe you've been in the bedroom before. Maybe with Grace to keep you company.

JOHN

Nothing happened with me and Grace this morning.

JAKE

Then maybe this afternoon. When I sent you to kill my wife you ended up sexing her instead.

JOHN

Christ, Jake, please--

JAKE

Is that what happened? Did you even make it out to the desert, or did you just ply the afternoon between my sheets?

JOHN

You're not talking sense.

JAKE

Sense? If I had any sense I would have killed you this morning and been done with it.

JOHN

What are you . . . you can't . . . you can't kill me.

JAKE

A drifter, a loner, a trouble maker like you? Just passing through town, need money so he busts in on an, old man. Only this old man's got himself an automatic, and he knows how to use it. A man's got to protect his home. His wife. You're dead, boy, and your own mother wouldn't convict me.

JOHN

What difference does it make if I slept with her. You don't care about Grace.

JAKE

You're right. I don't give a damn about her. But to fuck a man's wife behind his back? That just makes a fool out of him. I don't like being made a fool of.

JOHN

I don't blame you. What man would? I admit it, okay? I came back here and I made it with Grace. But if you kill me you're making a big mistake.

JAKE

Not from where I stand.

JOHN

It's not me you have to worry about. It's her. She wants you dead, Jake. She wants you dead and she wants your money.

JAKE

What are you babbling about?

JOHN

Think about it. How do you think I got in here? Did you hear any glass break? Did you hear a door splinter? How did the evening end? After you went to bed did she linger a bit? Maybe just long enough to leave the back door unlocked? Is that what happened?

Like an old rag, Jake gradually soaks all this up becoming heavier with the weight of the knowledge.

JAKE

You'd tell me anything to save your pathetic life.

JOHN

You know what kind of woman Grace is. You know how badly she wants to get the fuck out of Sierra. What makes you think when you were planning on killing her she wasn't doing the same for you? What's she to you, Jake; a woman who would have you dead? Let me kill her. All I want is two-hundred dollars to get out of here with.

JAKE

Two-hundred dollars.

JOHN

Two-hundred dollars . . . that's how I put a price on murder.

Jake lowers the gun and smiles a toothy smile which John returns. Suddenly Jake swings his arm clipping John across the side of his head with the pistol and opening another bloody gash.

JAKE

I think not. Killing my wife for me; that's one thing. But fucking her . . . well, that's another.

Jake pulls back the hammer on the gun and levels it at John's head. At that instant Grace, who has come to the doorway, screams at Jake.

GRACE

Jake! No!

Jake whirls towards the shrill voice. In that split second John jumps on Jake locking a forearm tightly across Jake's throat, while pulling at the gun with his other hand. The gun fires once, discharging into the wall. The bullet shatters a picture of Jake and Grace that hangs there.

Grace presses herself against the wall and watches as the two men struggle. The expression on her face is an odd

mixture of fear and excitement.

The two men battle back and forth across the room. John's arm remains locked in a death grip around Jake's throat. He slowly squeezes the life out of the older man, riding him like a bucking bronco down to the floor. Eyes bulging, tongue swollen, spittle dripping from his mouth, Jake looks up at Grace who returns a cold, distant stare. Jake's head drops, and John falls back from the body puffing and dripping with sweat.

JOHN

Why the hell didn't you do anything?

GRACE

What was I supposed to do?

JOHN

You could have hit him, or kneed him in the balls.

Grace gives a little smile.

JOHN

Christ! You liked watching that, didn't you?

Grace eyes the gold chain around Jake's neck. She lunges for it.

GRACE

The money!

She yanks the chain, key and all, from the lifeless body. The action pulls Jake's head up, then lets it thump back down on the floor.

JOHN

Where's the safe?

GRACE

I don't know.

JOHN

(Incredulous)

You don't know? Jesus Christ! Don't you think you should have found out before we killed him?

GRACE

I'm not sure where it is. Not

exactly. I never saw it. I just heard him talk about it.

JOHN

Oh, that's great. We killed Jake because you heard him talk about some money that you've never seen. That's fucking brilliant!

GRACE

Don't yell at me!

Grace goes to the wall and presses herself against it. She counts out six steps, turns to her left and counts out three more.

GRACE

Right here. Six steps out, three steps left. That's where I heard him say.

John goes to the spot on the floor where she stands and claws at the wood paneling. He is unable to move it.

JOHN

Go get a knife, or something.

Grace runs off to the kitchen to get a knife as John continues to claw like an animal at the floor. After a few moments Grace comes running back. John takes the knife and uses it to pry at the wood. It slips a few times, then finally takes hold.

JOHN

I got it! It's coming!

A panel breaks free. Using his hands again John pries at another one until it pulls free. He stops to look at the floor.

JOHN

Nothing. There's no safe under here.

GRACE

There has to be!

JOHN

There isn't! There's nothing under here but more floor. Jesus fucking Christ! We killed a man for nothing but floor.

Grace goes to the spot and frantically digs with her hands.

GRACE

It's got to be here. I heard him talk about it. He bragged about it. Six steps out, three left.

JOHN

This is good. This is real good. This is so good they might not even charge us with murder when they catch us. They'll probably just lock us up for being idiots.

GRACE

If it isn't here, why would he wear that stupid key?

JOHN

You're calling Jake stupid? You!?

GRACE

Don't yell at me! I know it's here! I know it!

A light of realization floods into John's eyes.

JOHN

Wait. Wait a second.

John goes to the wall where Grace counted out the steps. He walks off six steps forward.

JOHN

Jake's taller than you. He takes bigger steps.

John turns and counts off three more steps. He is now standing several feet from where they had been digging. He goes to the floor and begins pulling at the wood.

JOHN

Give me the knife.

Grace hands the knife to John. He pries at the floorboards pulling them free. Underneath is a safe.

JOHN

The key!

Grace hands the key to John. He opens the safe and thrusts a hand inside. He swings it from side to side and we hear it slap against the metal sides. A look of fear and desperation comes over John's face. The look quickly dissolves. He pulls out his hand clutching a fist full of money. Grace runs to him and kisses his hand and the money.

JOHN

Look at it all, Grace.

John pulls out another fist full.

JOHN

There's easily a hundred-thousand in there. More than that.

GRACE

I told you. I knew it was there. Didn't I tell you?

Grace kisses John on the neck and cheeks, then hard on the lips. She falls back against the floor, and pulls John down with her.

GRACE

We'll split it right down the middle. Fifty-fifty. You don't have to take me with you. You can go your own way if you want.

Grace presses their lips and gives him a deep, long, wet tongue kiss.

GRACE

If you want.

JOHN

We're going all the way. Together.

Again Grace kisses John as their passions rise.

JOHN

Let's go in the bedroom.

GRACE

No.

She spreads the money across the floor and rolls in it.

GRACE

Let's do it here.

JOHN
What about him?

GRACE
Let him watch. I want him to know
what he's missing.

Grace kisses at John who is slow to get into it, but finally
and definitely commits.

FADE TO:

INT. MCKENNA HOUSE - LATER

John, shirtless, SITS UP INTO FRAME. Money is stuck to his
sweat-covered back. Grace, naked but hidden in the shadows,
reaches up and peels the bills from John's back. John pulls
on a shirt and dresses himself as Grace lays in the darkness.

GRACE
Now what?

John gathers up some of the money.

JOHN
You got a suitcase?

GRACE
Never needed one. I've never been
anywhere. I've got a backpack.

JOHN
Get it, and put the money in it.
Pack up anything else you want to
take with you.

GRACE
Where are you going?

JOHN
To get my car.

GRACE
Wait. What about . . . him?

JOHN
Put some clothes on him. When I get
back We'll load him in the trunk and
dump him in the desert. It'll takes
days for anybody to find him.

John exits. Grace stares at the body of her husband with a blank face. She sees Jake's gun lying on the floor and picks it up. Like a child with a new toy a sly smile curls her lips.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE THE MCKENNA HOUSE - NIGHT

John starts down the drive way and walks past Grace's jeep. He stops, thinks, and walks back. Opening the hood he reaches into the engine and disconnects something, then quietly closes the hood and walks on.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE HARLIN'S GARAGE - LATER

John walks to a shack near the garage and bangs on the door. He waits only a few seconds and bangs again. A light goes on in the window. Darrell shouts out.

DARRELL(O.C.)

What you want?

JOHN

Open up!

DARRELL(O.C.)

We're closed. Come back in the morning.

JOHN

It is morning.

DARRELL(O.C.)

Come back when the sun comes up.

The light goes out. John bangs and kicks against the door. The light goes back on and Darrell yanks the door wide.

DARRELL

What the hell . . . oh it's you.
Might've figured. What do you want?

JOHN

I want my car.

DARRELL

You got the money?

John pulls the money from his hip pocket and hands it to Darrell. The mechanic fingers it suspiciously.

DARRELL

Two-hundred dollars in hundred-dollar bills. And this morning you was broke.

JOHN

What's it to you?

DARRELL

I don't want no dirty money. I run an honest business.

JOHN

Honest like Al Capone on tax day. Where are my keys?

Darrell fingers the money a bit more, thinks, but not too much. He disappears into the shack and returns a moment later with with John's keys.

DARRELL

I think you know where to find her.

John starts to walk away.

DARRELL

By the way, I topped off the tank for you. No charge. Just my friendly way of doing business.

John walks away. Darrell looks at the money in his hand, smiles, and goes inside.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE THE MCKENNA HOUSE - LATER

John turns the Mustang up the drive. The headlights cut the darkness and land on an empty patch where Grace's jeep had been parked. John jumps from the Mustang and runs around frantically before admitting himself that Grace has left with the money.

JOHN

Damn it! God damn it! I knew she was going to do this to me. Damn her! Damn her!

Grace opens the front door and pokes her head out.

GRACE

John!? What the hell's the matter with you?

JOHN

I . . . nothing. I just stubbed my toe on a rock. Hurt like hell . . . that's all.

GRACE

I got the money all packed. I put the jeep in the garage. Figure that way people will think maybe me and Jake went away. Might buy us some time.

JOHN

Yeah. Good thinking.

GRACE

Had push it in. Funny thing; it wouldn't start.

JOHN

(Dryly)
Funny thing.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE/MCKENNA HOUSE - LATER

John's Mustang is backed towards the front of the house. We see a silhouette of John and Grace carrying something

[THREE PAGES (105 TO 107) MISSING FROM SCRIPT]

SHERIFF

Mrs. McKenna.

Grace, too nervous to speak, nods.

SHERIFF

Nice night for a drive. Morning really. I guess that's about the

only way to keep cool; riding around with the top down on a fancy convertible in the first hours of the day.

JOHN

Not taking a drive, Sheriff.
Heading out of town.

SHERIFF

Suppose you've had all you can of Sierra. What with that ruckus you had with Toby. Oh yes, I heard all about that.

JOHN

Sheriff, he didn't give me any choice. If I hadn't defended myself—
—

SHERIFF

Just cool down, son. I ain't accusing you of anything. Serves Toby right to get his ass whooped. If you hadn't done it, somebody else would've.

JOHN

(Cautiously)

Is there a problem up the road, Sheriff?

SHERIFF

Nope. No problems up the road.

Sheriff Potter looks in the back seat and sees the backpack.

SHERIFF

That yours, Mrs. McKenna?

GRACE

Yes. Yes it is.

SHERIFF

Taking a little trip?

GRACE

I had a fight with Jake. I . . . I just wanted to get away for awhile. Mr. Stewart was kind enough to take me as far as Montrose. I'm going to

take a bus to my sister's. I thought I'd stay with her for a few days.

SHERIFF

Is that right? Can't say as I blame you for wanting to head out for a bit. I know I've had my fill of this town. Sixteen years I've been the law and order here. So long I forgot why I ever wanted the job in the first place. Help people, I guess. Keep the peace. Problem is there's so much peace around here they don't much need me. Got a lot of speeders, but they're speeding through miles of nothing so I can't hardly blame them. Other than that, well, there ain't much to steal. I reckon that the last big crime we had was, what would you say Mrs. McKenna? A murder?

GRACE

I . . .

The Sheriff slips his gun from his holster.

SHERIFF

Why don't you step out of the car, son?

JOHN

I don't understand what the--

SHERIFF

Just step from the car. Nice and slow.

JOHN

Sure, Sheriff.

John eases himself from the car. He is obviously tense, as is Grace as she silently watches the scene unfold.

SHERIFF

Now step around to the back of the car and open the trunk for me.

JOHN

What for?

SHERIFF

I think you might just want to do as I say.

JOHN

There's nothing in the trunk, Sheriff.

SHERIFF

And as soon as I see that you're on your way.

GRACE

John . . . ?

JOHN

Grace! Just . . . let me handle this. Sheriff, I'm telling you there's nothing in that trunk. If that's not good enough for you, then I'd be happy to open it. Just as soon as you get yourself a search warrant.

SHERIFF

I could do that. 'Course we'd have to go back into town. There'd be a whole crowd of people around when the trunk was opened. A whole crowd of witnesses. That wouldn't be too pretty, now would it?

GRACE

John . . .

John thinks for a moment, then fumbles through his keys looking for the one that opens the trunk. Clumsily he drops them.

SHERIFF

Go on. Pick 'em up.

John goes down slowly to pick up the keys. Just as he touches them he lunges forward at Sheriff Potter. The Sheriff quickly steps to the side and lands a quick jab against the side of John's head that sends him to his knees.

SHERIFF

Is that the way you want it, boy? A bullet in the head in the middle of

the desert? Ends like this and you won't be able to spend a dime of that blood money.

GRACE

He killed him, Sheriff! I couldn't stop him! He made me come with him. He told me if I said a word he would kill me too.

JOHN

You bitch! You were in on it from the start!

SHERIFF

Shut up! The both of you. Ain't neither one of you too smart. Especially you, boy. Don't you think I had my eye on you since first you rolled into town? You smell like trouble. Stink of it like a ripe cesspool.

JOHN

I didn't do anything.

SHERIFF

Killing Jake McKenna's got to amount to something. He wasn't much of a man, but that don't give you the right to murder him. And don't tell me you didn't, 'cause I know you did. I was there. Like I said; I been watching you.

GRACE

Sheriff Potter, please. I can't go to jail. I wanted no part of it.

JOHN

You liar! You wanted him dead. You seduced me into killing him!

SHERIFF

For the love of God would you two give it a rest? Lord almighty. In all my years I have never seen anything so pathetic. How far did you think you were going to get with this? Neither one of you can wait to slit the others throat. Now use

what little smarts you got. If I was going to bust you I wouldn't have waited until after you killed Jake.

GRACE

What do you want?

SHERIFF

Same thing you want. I want to be out of Sierra; to be able to do as I please. But that takes money.

JOHN

That's what this is all about? A shakedown? You picked the wrong people. We don't have any money.

SHERIFF

Sure you do. Everybody in town knows about the money Jake kept hid in the house. It's a wonder the Mrs. here just now got round to killing him. Not for lack of trying.

This hits John like a fist.

SHERIFF

What'd you think, boy? That you were the first man to drift through this town she came on to? Not by a long shot. You're just the most gullible. How much did you get?

JOHN

(With trepidation)

Thirty-thousand dollars.

SHERIFF

You ain't passing these test, son. If I can't trust you I'm gonna have to arrest you . . .

The Sheriff twists his gun in the air.

SHERIFF(CONT)

. . .at the very least. I know there was more than thirty-thousand dollars. Now, how much did you get?

GRACE

Don't tell him anything. He can't do this.

SHERIFF

Can't I? You're out in the desert, all alone, with a body in your trunk. What do you think, boy?

JOHN

One-hundred-thousand dollars. A little more.

GRACE

Damn you! What did you do that for? He can't prove anything.

JOHN

No, you just wanted me to keep my mouth shut so I could go to a hanging alone.

SHERIFF

Nobody's going to hang. We're all gonna walk away with a little something. I ain't a greedy man. And, hell, you did all the work. One-hundred-thousand dollars. Split that three ways and it comes out to about thirty-three thousand. Give or take.

JOHN

And you're taking?

Sheriff Potter smiles. His features are distorted by the shadows cast from the headlights of his squad car.

GRACE

That's all talk. He's got nothing on us. He let you kill Jake.

JOHN

Not me. Us.

GRACE

It doesn't matter. He was there and he let it happen. He can't take us in.

JOHN

Give him the money.

GRACE
(Stunned)
What?

JOHN
You heard me. Count it out.

GRACE
He can't prove anything, John. He
can't turn us in.

JOHN
He can kill us. I don't know about
you, but my life is worth thirty-
thousand dollars.

Sheriff Potter reaches into his back pocket, pulls out a
plastic garbage bag, and tosses it to Grace.

SHERIFF
There you go, Mrs. McKenna. Just
put it in there.

GRACE
John--

JOHN
Do it, Grace!

Grace hesitates, then reaches into the back seat for the
backpack filled with money. She sees something and her
expression hardens.

SHERIFF
That wasn't so bad. What's thirty-
some-thousand to rich folks like
you? It didn't hurt a bit.

GRACE(O.C.)
Sheriff Potter.

The Sheriff turns to face Grace. She has Jake's gun in hand
and aimed at Sheriff Potter. The Sheriff panics. Before he
has a chance to take aim, Grace fires a round that hits him
in the gut. He staggers backwards and falls to the ground
in a sitting position clutching at the river of blood that
is flowing from his fat stomach.

GRACE
(Yelling at John)

Come on!

John cannot move. He stares at the Sheriff who sits quietly on the ground with a dazed, confused look in his eyes. He is soaked in blood, more dead than alive.

GRACE

Get in the fucking car!

John walks backwards, his gaze still fixed on Sheriff Potter. He practically falls into the car, fumbles the key into the ignition and peels off. He looks back and we see Sheriff Potter still sitting in the middle of the road lit in the darkness by the headlights of his car.

JOHN

What the hell did you do?

Grace answers in a voice that is either dazed or crazed.

GRACE

I shot him.

JOHN

You killed him!

GRACE

He was going to take the money.

JOHN

Thirty-thousand, that's all. We would have been free and clear. You didn't have to kill him.

GRACE

It's our money. He had no right to take it.

John looks at Grace. Her eyes are glazed as if she is watching a movie in her mind. Her hands are wrapped tightly around the gun. John stares at her.

JOHN

You're crazy, you know that!?
You're fucked up!?

GRACE

Just drive.

John continues to stare at her.

GRACE

I said drive!

The tail lights of the car fade until there is nothing but darkness.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT - MID-MORNING

A LONG SHOT of the Mustang parked out on a desert plateau. This is followed by another LONG SHOT, CLOSER THAN THE FIRST AND SET AT A DIFFERENT ANGLE. THIS IS FOLLOWED BY A THIRD LONG SHOT, STILL CLOSER AND AGAIN AT A DIFFERENT ANGLE. We can now clearly make out John who sits on the edge of the driver's seat, feet dangling out the open door and head buried in his hands. Grace is reclined in the passenger seat. She is asleep, covered with her jacket. We can just barely hear the crackle of a voice over the radio.

FADE TO:

CU - JOHN

John rubs his head with his hands. We can see the strain on his face. Over the radio we hear a DJ

DJ(V.O.)

. . . Nobody's sure where the biker was heading so fast, but the way he hit the semi-truck he won't be getting here now. Hey, I got area weather. It's gonna be hot, hot, hot. Just like yesterday. Just like everyday. Some surprise, huh? Weather man says it's going to top one-hundred again, so if you have to go outside, don't. makes you want to look into some retirement property in Alaska. Here's some news from around the area. Over in Sierra, that sleepy little town was tocked last night by the murder of a police officer. Authorities say they haven't yet made any arrests, but they have leads and hope to bring in suspects within--

John turns off the radio. Grace sits up beside him.

JOHN

Jesus, Grace. Did you have to kill him?

GRACE

He was going to--

JOHN

I know. He was to take the fucking money.

GRACE

You're tense. What are you all uptight about?

JOHN

You killed a man for no reason!

John stares at the automatic tucked in Grace's waist. Grace follows his eyes to the gun.

GRACE

Is that what's bothering you?

Grace stands and slowly walks around to John's side of the car. Nervously John stands.

GRACE

You think now that Jake is dead, there's all that money there and I don't need you anymore I might just sneak up behind you sometime and . . .

Grace points a finger at John, then pulls it back mimicking the recoil of a gun. She lets her hands drop to her sides. The two stand separated like gunfighters at high noon. Only John doesn't have a gun.

GRACE

Is that the kind of girl you think I am? What can I do to make you relax?

JOHN

You could give me the gun.

Grace smiles.

GRACE

Why don't we just finish what we started.

For a moment John doesn't move. Slowly he turns and goes to the cracked trunk of the car and lifts it fully open. We hear the sounds of buzzing flies. John's face contorts as the stench fills his nose.

JOHN

Christ, Jake. You need a bath.

John leans down to grab the body. We see Grace circle around behind him. John senses this and he tries to catch a glimpse of her from the corner of his eyes. He pulls at the body, then again, but cannot lift it from the trunk.

JOHN

Give me a hand.

Grace doesn't move.

JOHN

Are we going to dump him, or not?

Grace slowly goes to the opposite end of the body and takes hold.

JOHN

On three. Ready? One, two--

John whirls quickly punching Grace square in the face. It sends her to the ground, dazed, flat on her back. John immediately steps to her and grabs the gun from her waist. As she comes around Grace puts a hand to her mouth, then looks at the blood on her finger tips. Grace begins to laugh a wild, crazed laugh that cuts through John like a cold knife.

GRACE

You hit me. You hit a woman.
Didn't your momma ever teach you
anything?

Grace sees the gun in John's hand and stops laughing.

GRACE

Well?

For a moment John does nothing, then slips the clip from the gun and tosses them as far as he can in opposite directions.

JOHN

Well, nothing.

GRACE

Now what?

JOHN

Now we dump Jake, split the money, then you're on your own.

GRACE

But you said we could be together.

JOHN

Are you kidding? I'm not going down with you for killing a cop.

GRACE

What difference does it make? You killed Jake.

JOHN

We killed Jake. And it's a big difference. You kill an old man, that's one thing. Nobody cares about an old man. You kill a cop and they never stop looking for you. Never.

GRACE

He was a crooked bastard. He would have killed us.

JOHN

The police don't know that. And it's going to be hard to explain it to them with a noose around your neck. I'll take you as far as California. If we can even make that. After that I'm cutting you loose.

GRACE

But I want to say with you,

JOHN

Why? So when the cops catch up with us you can try and sell me out again? You take your hald of the money and run. You might want to try Mexico. With all that dough you'll live like a queen.

GRACE

I don't want to go to Mexico, John.
I want to be with you. Don't you
think I care about you?

JOHN

I think you're a lying, back
stabbing bitch. But it's nice to
know you care.

John goes back to the trunk and Jake's body.

JOHN

Come on, Jake. Time to go for a
walk.

John grabs a beer from a six pack and shoves it into the
pocket of Jake's coat. He lifts the body and carries it
towards the ridge.

JOHN

Poor, old Jake. Had a fight with
his wife, a few too many drinks,
wandered out into the desert and
fell off a cliff. You got to be
more careful, Jake.

John reaches the edge of the ridge. He stands Jake up and
holds him so that they face each other.

JOHN

Well, this is where we part company.

John leans close to Jake's body as if whispering into his
ear.

JOHN

You should've just let me go into
the bedroom. I would have killed
for you. Now look at yourself. Oh,
well. Bye bye, and thanks for the
loan.

John opens his hands and lets Jake's body tumble backwards
down to the ridge several meters below.

JOHN

Now all we have to do is try and--

John turns. Grace is standing directly behind him. He is
startled and begins to fall backward. THE CAMERA ANGLES ON
GRACE'S HANDS AT JOHN'S CHEST, but we can't tell if she is

grabbing for him or pushing him. John falls landing on the ridge below next to Jake's body.

CUT TO:

WIDE SHOT - THE DESERT

Grace stands on the ridge, and John and Jake on the ledge below. We hear Grace's voice calling out.

GRACE

John . . . John!?

THE CAMERA CLOSES TIGHT ON JOHN. We see his eyes flutter.

GRACE

John!

JOHN

Grace!

John stirs. He tries to sit up and a wave of pain crosses his body. His scream echoes across the empty desert.

GRACE

Are you all right?

JOHN

I think I busted my leg.

GRACE

Can you climb back up.

John tries to pull himself up the side of the ridge, but the pain is too great. He slumps back down on the ground.

JOHN

I can't make it. Grace? Grace!?

GRACE

I'm here.

JOHN

Grace, listen to me. In the trunk of my car is a rope. It should reach down here. Got get it, throw it down and I'll climb up.

GRACE

I'll get it.

John slumps further with pain.

Grace runs back to the car. She sees the rope in the open trunk. She starts to make a grab for it, then stops. She thinks for a moment before slamming the trunk closed. Running quickly to the driver's side she hops in the Mustang and grabs for the ignition key. Her hand fumbles at it for a moment, then she realizes the key isn't there. A look of panic floods her face. She jumps from the car and runs back to the ridge. She goes down on her stomach, dangling her head over the lip of the cliff, as if to get closer to John.

GRACE

John! Can you hear me? Are you still there?

JOHN

Where the hell am I going to go?

GRACE

John, you have to throw the keys up to me.

John's painfully fishes the keys from his pocket. He is about to throw them up to Grace when he stops and thinks.

GRACE

John, throw me the keys.

JOHN

What for?

GRACE

The trunk. It's locked.

JOHN

It's not locked. I left it open when I took out Jake's body.

GRACE

It's . . . it's locked.

JOHN

You closed it, didn't you, Grace?

GRACE

I was going to back the car to the ridge and pull you up.

JOHN

Bullshit, Grace. You were going to

drive off and leave me here.

GRACE

No. I swear it.

JOHN

And you're not one to lie, are you?

GRACE

Throw me the keys and I'll pull you up.

JOHN

Why don't you come down and get them so I can wring your pretty little neck?

Grace rolls on her back and looks up at the sky shielding her eyes with her hand. She rolls over again and yells down to John.

GRACE

John, if you don't throw me the keys, then I'll just walk away. Walk away and leave you here.

JOHN

Walk to where? We're fifty miles to the nearest town. It's going to be over one-hundred degrees today. How far do you think you're going to get?

GRACE

Someone will find me.

JOHN

Yeah, they'll find you. Dried up and twice dead.

GRACE

You idiot! You'll kill us both!

JOHN

At least I'll have company when I die. Ain't that right, Jake?

GRACE

For Christ's sake, John! Throw me the keys!

JOHN

What do you say, Jake? Should we trust her? No? I didn't think so.

GRACE

Fuck you! Do you hear me, John!?
Fuck you! John . . . John!?

Grace stands and walks back to the car. She takes the backpack full of money, slings it over her shoulder and heads out into the desert.

CUT TO:

JOHN

He reaches over to Jake and pulls the beer from his pocket. He pops it open.

JOHN

Here's to you, Jake. A friend to the end. And to Grace. What a woman. What a fucking woman.

CUT TO:

HELICOPTER SHOT - DESERT

We see miles and miles of nothing. Then in the middle of all this, we see a little speck. As we cross over it we see that it is Grace; far from anything, and with miles and miles to go to reach something. UNDER THIS WE HEAR Dwight Yokham's cover of Suspicious Minds.

FADE TO:

BLACK

ROLL END CREDITS