

Dirty Windows

FADE IN

EXT. GREENWOOD HIGH SCHOOL - NIGHT

TONY DEMETRIANO, 16, whistling, steps out of the door marked "Weight Room". His breath wafts away in plumes, he snaps the topmost button of his football letterman jacket.

Tony saunters toward the parking lot as he fishes his car keys out of his pocket.

Some movement by his car, the only car in the lot, catches Tony's attention. He stops whistling, slows his steps.

TONY

Quit it, Derek. I'm cold, hungry,
and horny. In that order.

ERIC TUCKER, 18, his face hidden behind a black ski mask, rushes Tony, slams his fist into Tony's midsection.

Tony doubles over, receives a knee in his face.

Another figure, SNYDER HAMBLY, 19, tall, lanky, and wearing a dark-green ski mask, runs up, grabs Tony's gym bag, tosses it. He takes Tony's arm, jams it tight behind his back.

Tony screams, then with his free hand shoves Eric away. He spins around, begins pummeling Snyder.

Eric slams his fist into Tony's face. Tony flies to the hard asphalt. He wraps his head with his arms as the two kick him.

They stop. Tony gasps and spits as he hears at least one attacker run off. He sees a still figure on the ground on the other side of his car.

TONY

Derek!!

Eric kicks him again.

ERIC

Shut up, faggot!

A beat-up tan-and-white Ford F150 pickup screeches to a halt next to them, and Snyder hops out. He and Eric grab Tony, toss him in the back bed as they would a sack of horse feed.

Tony grimaces, groans, holds his side, scrambles to move when they unceremoniously toss DEREK NOBUO, 16, in the bed too.

Snyder and Eric hop in the bed.

Tony kicks and thrashes, then relents after Eric slams his fist in his face again.

Snyder duct-tapes Tony's wrists, then his ankles. He hands the tape to Eric, who stuffs a rag all the way into Tony's mouth, then secures it in place with several turns of the tape around Tony's head.

Eric tosses the tape, picks up a crowbar, glares at Tony.

Tony's nostrils flare with his labored breathing.

Snyder hops down, jumps into the cab, revs the engine.

The pickup spins its tires leaving the parking lot.

Tony stares at Derek. He nudges his boyfriend with his foot.

Derek doesn't move. He's never going to move ever again.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

A pleasant thin coating of snow covers the ground.

ELIAS TUCKER, 45, pulls the Hummer H1 into an empty spot.

A huge, gnarled oak tree dominates the field. The light of the large blazing cross plays amongst the tree's arthritic limbs, casting shadows that dance across the entire scene.

White-robed, hooded figures mill about.

ROB TUCKER, 15, exits the big vehicle, stands beside it while clutching his own robe and hood.

Elias, already robed, comes round, jabs the boy in the chest.

ELIAS

Robert Brace, you start getting your head back in the game.

ROB

Mom didn't want to come. Don't know why I had to.

ELIAS

That's her business.

Rob stares at the ground.

ROB

(under his breath)
You're just gonna hit her.

Elias flicks Rob's chin, forces him to look at him.

ELIAS

What?

ROB

Nothing, sir.

Elias frowns.

ELIAS

What's with you tonight? Just what the hell's been with you lately?

Rob shrugs. Elias shakes his head, shoves Rob aside, opens the door.

ELIAS

Hop down, boys.

TIMMY, 8, and SANDY, 6, are downright cute in their little KKK outfits.

Eric, his black ski mask hanging out of his back jeans pocket, runs up to them.

ERIC

Dad! Dad!

Eric says something in his father's ear.

Elias stiffens. He points at Rob, then Timmy and Sandy.

ELIAS

Help them. I'll be right back.

His brows knit, Rob watches his father and brother approach the beat-up tan-and-white Ford F150 pickup parked away from all the other vehicles.

Snyder excitedly greets them, nervously rubbing the back of his neck, then wringing his dark-green ski mask.

Eric and Snyder immediately lead Elias to the back bed.

Elias looks down into it while Eric and Snyder natter at him. Elias darts his eyes about the gathering, then turns to the two boys, points off into the dark woods surrounding the flickering field.

Timmy takes Rob's hand.

TIMMY

C'mon, Rob, let's go lynch a faggot.

Rob shoots the smiling little boy a sharp look.

ROB
What did you say?

TIMMY
Let's go lynch a faggot.

SAMMY
(excited)
Yeah, Rob, or a nigger.

Timmy elbows his little brother.

TIMMY
Maybe tonight it'll be a kike.

ROB
Stop! Don't you ever say those
things to me again.

Timmy looks at his little brother, then back at Rob.

TIMMY
What's wrong?

Rob looks out over the field, breathes deep. He helps his little brothers don their hoods, then slips into his own. He puts a hand on each little back and ushers the boys forward.

Country music pumps from one pickup's cab. Some tables groan under the weight of home cooking, kept hot by steam tables.

Elias and Eric join them.

ROB
What's going on over there?

ELIAS
Mind your own damn business. C'mon.

Rob stops short.

Tony, in only his underwear, is still gagged and now bound to the base of the tree.

ROB
Dad, that's Tony Demetriano.

ELIAS
I know who it is. The school sod.
Tonight we're gonna take of that.

Everyone forms a semi-circle.

Someone cuts off the music.

The GRAND DRAGON hefts his leather-bound Bible.

GRAND DRAGON

"If a man lies with a male as he
lies with a woman, both of them have
committed an abomination. They shall
surely be put to death. Their blood
shall be upon them."

A man moves forward with a Louisville Slugger baseball bat on
which someone has ornately whittled "The Wrath of God".

Elias pushes Rob forward.

ERIC

Go on.

Rob looks back at his family.

ROB

Dad?!

ELIAS

For everything's that holy, son.

ERIC

C'mon, do your family proud. I did.

He and Elias exchange sidelong glances.

Timmy and Sammy, jittery with anticipation, watch Rob.

Rob looks forward again, takes the bat, approaches Tony.

Tony, eyes wide, darts them from the bat to the Grand Dragon
to Rob. He screams under the gag.

Tony watches as Rob steps right up to him, Tony's muscles
bulge as he tries to break the tight restraints.

Rob looks back at his father, his brothers, his Klan
brethren, his Grand Dragon, his Bible. His chest heaves under
his robe, he raises the bat.

Tony screams and screams. He kicks, digs at the hard ground,
tearing toenails, gouging his feet. He pisses himself.

The Klansmen chant.

Rob throws the bat down, produces his large and opened pocket
knife from under his robe.

Tony's eyes grow even wider, if that's possible, he doubles his efforts and his screams.

Rob gets on his haunches, and, as he slices through the restraints and the gag, he has his mouth right in Tony's ear.

ROB

Go!! Now!! Get out of here!! Go!!!

Tony scrambles to his cut feet, takes off at his best quarterback sprint across the field into the darkness.

Rob shoves his way through the dumbfounded crowd, runs to the Hummer and, removing his hood, hides in the back seat.

His eyes brim, he squeezes them shut hard. He slams his fist on the back of the front seat, again, again.

INT. HUMMER - NIGHT

Elias pounds on the door.

ELIAS

Robert Brace Tucker, unlock this door!! Right now!!

Rob sits there, frozen in place. He stares at his father with unblinking eyes.

Elias pounds on the door even harder.

ELIAS

I said NOW!!

Rob reaches across, unlocks the door, then presses himself against the door on his side of the backseat.

Elias slips in, slams the door.

ELIAS

Do you know what you've done?!

Rob gulps.

ELIAS

Answer me!

ROB

Ye-yes, sir.

ELIAS

Oh, so you deliberately defied me?!

ROB
Um...Ye--I mean, no, sir.

Elias backhands Rob hard across the face.

Elias grabs Rob by the front of his robe, drags him across the seat so his face is right in his son's.

ELIAS
The twelve-year-old that abomination rapes, that's on you now!

ROB
Dad, please!!

Elias backhands him again, shakes him hard.

ELIAS
You know what God put me through so I could save all the other boys. You know that! And you do that tonight!!

Elias backhands his son again.

ROB
Dad!!

Elias backhands him again, then again.

Rob, his chest heaving, his lip split in three places, his nose bleeding, stares at his father.

Elias, crying, pulls his son to him in a tight embrace.

His chin on his father's shoulder, Rob glares through the filthy windshield.

ROB (V.O.)
Some sociologist guy once wrote that we don't see the world like it really is but we see it like it's through a dirty window, smeared with all that garbage we pile up through life like prejudice, hurt, lies...and hate.

EXT. GREENWOOD HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Trees in full leaf. Blue sky. Campus bustling with activity.

The "Greenwood High School, Greenwood, South Carolina" billboard reads: "We Wish Everyone a Wonderful '01-'02 School Year! Go, Eagles!"

INT. GREENWOOD HIGH SCHOOL - FRONT LOBBY - DAY

MATT FINGERHUT, 15, his ever-present tennis racket jutting out of his backpack, waits outside the school office.

Matt examines the display case holding the tribute to Derek.

Rob slams out of the front office, stops next to Matt.

MATT

Can you believe they still haven't found Derek's body?

Rob glares at him.

ROB

Whadaya mean, "body"?

MATT

You've heard what Tony's said.

Rob rolls his eyes, makes a beeline down the hallway.

Matt falls in step beside him.

MATT

Ya gotta go home?

ROB

No. But I got a note Dad has to sign, and Principal Hawes wants me to talk to Doc.

MATT

Well, that's not too bad.

ROB

The school shrink, Matt? Thanks.

MATT

Yeah, but Doc's cool.

Matt has trouble keeping up with his best friend.

MATT

Rob, what's the matter with you? You gotta let jerks like Brendan roll off your back, man.

Matt's words trail off as Tony, approaching from the opposite direction, captures his attention.

Tony, gaunt and pale and stoop-shouldered, his clothes like big-brother hand-me-downs, slows his approach to his locker.

A paper banner runs above it. The banner had read "Welcome Back, Tony" except someone has Magic Markered out "Tony" and scrawled "Queer" in its place.

CALEB MORRIS, 17, cowboy from his Stetson hat to his Justin western boots, saunters by. Caleb "accidentally" rams his shoulder against Tony's, sending Tony into his locker.

CALEB
Smear the queer!!

He guffaws, goes to high-five his buddy, JACK NOLAN, 17.

Jack makes a face.

JACK
Leave the guy alone, willya?

Jack flicks Caleb's Stetson.

Caleb's expression immediately turns stern.

CALEB
Whoa! Nobody, but nobody, touches
the hat!

Caleb removes the Stetson and puts it through a quick, yet thorough inspection. Satisfied, he plops it back on his head.

Matt watches Tony over his shoulder.

Tony stands there, his thin body shaking, his hands clenched into fists.

TONY
I'm not on your fucking team
anymore, Morris, you fucking
asshole! You're all fucking
assholes!! You, too, Nolan!!

Jack spins around, stares back at Tony with a surprised expression, then flips his former quarterback the finger.

Jack spins back around. He and Caleb disappear down the hall.

Everyone walks past Tony, and Matt loses sight of him.

EXT. GREENWOOD HIGH SCHOOL - FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

Caleb meets Matt behind the bleachers.

CALEB
 Hurry up, Fingerhut. If I'm late
 again for practice, coach'll cut me.
 Where's that primo weed?

Caleb looks Matt up and down, smirks.

CALEB
 I never pictured a pussy like you as
 a dealer. I mean, shit, you play
 tennis. How gay is that?

MATT
 No one led our football team to more
 victories than Tony, and you treat
 him like shit.

Caleb scratches his forehead under the Stetson's brim.

CALEB
 What?

MATT
 Today, in the hall.

CALEB
 That? I was just trying to get the
 old Tony back. Jesus, the guy knew
 how to laugh once, take a joke.

Caleb rolls his eyes.

CALEB
 Tony boffs some guy's boyfriend, and
 the guy beats the shit out of him.
 So what? Take your licks and move
 on. What's the big deal?

MATT
 That's just a rumor, y'know.

CALEB
 Don't tell me you believe all that
 horseshit about burning crosses and
 the Klan? The Ku Klux Klan? Really?

He knuckle-scrapes the top of Matt's head.

CALEB
 Hello, this is 2001, not 1861.

Matt knocks his hand away.

MATT

1865. The Klan started in 1865. God, Caleb, you're such a fuckin' moron. No wonder why you play football.

CALEB

I'm the moron? Okay, Mr. "My Middle Name's a Big Fat Fuckin' F+".

Matt's jaw muscles work under the skin as he narrows his eyes at Caleb.

MATT

What about Derek disappearing like that? How do you explain that? And how do you explain he's still missing after eight months?

CALEB

I don't know! Maybe the fairy flapped his wings and flew away. I don't care. Why do you so much? What, you a goddamn fairy too?

Caleb eyes Matt's clenching fist.

CALEB

Where's that primo weed, dammit?

He glances at his watch.

CALEB

Fuck, Coach is gonna have my hide.

Matt punches Caleb in the face.

Caleb staggers back several feet.

MATT

How's that for smear the queer?

CALEB

You think the candy-ass captain of the tennis team can take me?!

Caleb tackles Matt, the two wrestle in the dirt.

Caleb gets in a few blows, but soon Matt has him beaten.

But Matt doesn't relent. He kicks Caleb.

CALEB

Awright, awright. Get off me!

Matt kicks Caleb more. His teeth clench, his eyes blaze.

MATT

How gay is this, you asshole?!

Finally, Matt stops. His chest heaving, sweat pouring down his face, he stares at Caleb, who's moaning with his arms wrapped around his sides.

CALEB

Fuck you, Fingerhut! I think you cracked one of my ribs! I'm tellin' my folks, you asshole!

In a daze, Matt grabs his backpack, then his tennis racket, and stumbles away.

INT. OFFICE OF JACOB ROWSEY PHD SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST - DAY

Rob and DOC, 34 but he looks 24, sit there, silently stare at each other. Doc taps his pen on his legal pad.

He clears his throat, then whistles a few random notes.

DOC

There must be some reason you put your fist in Brendan's face.

(under his breath)

Not that the jerk's not had it coming.

He quickly clears his throat again.

Rob looks up.

ROB

So it's okay what I did.

DOC

I did not say that.

Doc sits up.

DOC

C'mon, Rob. Get it off your chest.

Rob stares out the window.

ROB

(distantly)

Get what?

DOC

"It".

Doc eyes Rob's sudden fist.

DOC

Rob, a week ago you showed up to school with a black eye. You tellin' me, the first day of school and you got in a fight? You?

Rob darts a sidelong glance at him.

ROB

Matt and I were tossing the football. Matt throws like a girl.

Doc watches him silently.

Rob squirms in the chair.

DOC

Are you telling me the truth, Rob?

ROB

Coach is going to kick my ass, I'm missing practice. C'mon, Doc. I gotta go.

DOC

Robert, it's a simple question: Are you telling me the truth about your black eye?

Rob glares at him. Both hands are fists now.

ROB

Only my father calls me that.

Doc nods, jots down a few words.

DOC

That bothers you?

Rob unclenches his fists, picks at the chair's arm, shrugs.

ROB

I don't give a shit.

Rob flashes him that famous Rob Tucker winning smile.

ROB

You know me, Doc: Rob "Doesn't Give a Shit 'Bout Nothin'" Tucker.

Doc smirks, adopts a jaunty tone to equal Rob's.

DOC

Well, good, then. That includes
being late for practice.

Doc immediately erases the incipient grin from his
expression, replaces it with a hard frown.

DOC

That includes, Robert, you giving me
a goddamn straight answer and
stopping this fuckin' around the
issue today.

Rob's grin immediately disappears. He gulps.

ROB

Do you know what Dad will do to me
if I lose my place on the team?

DOC

What, Rob? What will Dad do?

Rob stares at him. He doesn't say a word.

Doc stares back at him.

DOC

What has Dad been doing to you, Rob?

Rob jumps up, grabs his bookbag, darts out the door.

Doc watches after the boy. Gritting his teeth, he slams down
his pen.

DOC

Shit!!

He leans forward, picks up his phone, dials.

DOC

Child Protective Services, I'm Dr.
Jacob Rowsey, SCDOE professional
license 1902326. I need to file a
"Suspicion of Abuse" report.

INT. GREENWOOD HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Rob races up to his locker, slams his fist into it, grits his
teeth, swears under his breath.

He puts his forehead to the locker and sags his shoulders.

ROB
 Rob, you pussy. Doc would've
 listened.

He slams his fist into the locker again, then gets his stuff,
 heads to practice.

INT. FINGERHUT KITCHEN - DAY

Matt's parents, NADINE and PAUL, both 41, load the dishwasher
 when Matt enters.

NADINE
 Listen, mister, you had better have
 a good explanation--

PAUL
 Oh, my God, Matt.

Matt's shirt is torn, his lip fat and split, his face
 bruised. A black eye has already begun to show. His knuckles
 are torn and ragged.

PAUL
 You got in a fight?

NADINE
 Who jumped you?

MATT
 No one fucking jumped me. Jesus.
 Everyone's a fucking moron today.

The parents look at each other.

PAUL
 What are you saying? You started it?

Matt rolls his eyes.

MATT
 I'm not saying a fucking thing.

Paul narrows his eyes at his son.

PAUL
 Enough with the f-bombs, Matt.

Matt shrugs, turns to leave.

MATT
 Fuck this day.

NADINE

Get back here, Matt. We haven't finished discussing this.

PAUL

We haven't even started.

Matt turns in the doorway.

MATT

Listen: I'm not going to tell you who and I'm not going to tell you why, so just stop riding my ass.

His father steps forward.

PAUL

Then march yourself to your room and don't come out till you have an explanation. You can forget dinner.

Matt rolls his eyes, snorts, practically spits in his face.

MATT

Fine. I'm not hungry, and I was headed to my room anyway.

He turns, starts out of the room.

PAUL

Matthew Jon, get back here!

MATT

LEAVE ME ALONE!!!

Matt pounds up the stairs, slams his bedroom door.

His parents stare at each other.

INT. MATT'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Matt sits on his bed, his back against the headboard, legs folded so he can prop against his thighs the black-covered notebook in which he's writing. He's dressed for bed.

All is quiet.

Matt takes a break from his writing, flexes his fingers, grimaces as he examines his ragged and bruised knuckles.

He pulls some newspaper clippings from the back of the notebook. They show Tony Demetrianio, Star Quarterback, Pride of the Eagles, captured in all manner of winning moves.

Matt stares at a particular photograph that perfectly captures Tony's buttocks in his tight football uniform.

Matt's eyes grow wide. He looks down: his rock-hard erection has pitched a tent in the crotch of his pajama bottoms.

He looks fast at the door. He crams the clippings and black pen in the back of the notebook, then shoves the whole thing back in its super-secret spot. He burrows under the covers and buries his face in the pillow.

INT. TUCKER RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Rob bangs down the steps to the finished basement, stops. It's a long room: one half a family room with a huge HDTV, the other half dominated by a pool table and a mahogany bar.

Rob frowns as he looks at the door in the middle of the left wall. He takes a step, hesitates, then walks over to it, sees his father has already unclasped the padlock, opens the door, walks carefully down the short flight of old wooden steps.

INT. SECRET ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Elias sits in the cramped space, reading his Bible by the glare of a bare bulb.

Rob looks around. The Confederate Battle Flag. The KKK logo. Newspaper clippings of KKK marches and of unsolved "incidents" surround a large, framed portrait of his family's direct ancestor, Hiram Wesley Evans.

ELIAS

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might."

Father looks at son, who rotely completes the verse:

ROB

"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

Elias places the Bible down with reverent care and stands.

ROB

You wanted to talk to me, Dad?

Elias puts his hand on his son's shoulder.

ELIAS

Whadaya say to watching the house
alone for the first time?

ROB

I appreciate that, sir. I want you
to trust me. After...

He averts meeting his father's eyes by looking at the far
wall of old bricks that shores up the far side of this
refurbished root cellar.

ROB

After --

ELIAS

Okay, you punched that Brendan kid.
You took your punishment. No need to
live in the past.

Rob casts his eyes about the small space.

ROB

Um...Isn't that what we do, Dad?

ELIAS

No. We live -- we fight -- FOR the
future. You're the superior one,
Rob. Don't ever forget that.

ROB

But, Dad, c'mon, how do we know
we're so superior?

Rob cringes under his father's "the look".

ROB

I mean, Dad, I have some friends and
I know some guys who are pretty okay
but they're not...y'know...white.

ELIAS

No son of mine hangs with niggers
and spics. What kind of example is
that to set for Timmy and Sandy?

ROB

Nobody cares about that sort of
thing anymore. Dad, why do we care
so much what color someone is?

ELIAS

Rob, what's happened to you? Where
are these questions coming from?

ROB

Dad, we're right but maybe other people are right, too. Can't we both be right? At the same time?

Elias punches Rob in the chest.

Rob stumbles backwards, trips on a box, falls against the portrait of Evans.

Rob narrows his eyes at his father.

ROB

What, Dad, don't want to repeat the mistake of giving me a black eye?

He watches his father.

ROB

How about breaking my rib again? Or splitting my lip in three places and busting my nose? People are starting to ask, y'know.

In a flash his father is standing in front of him.

ELIAS

You cheeky shit. How dare you bring up January, after what you did?

Elias smashes the back of his hand across Rob's face.

Rob fights shedding tears.

ELIAS

Grow up, boy -- we all went through that same initiation. Some of us went through a helluva lot worse. And we never betrayed our people.

Rob wipes his mouth with the back of his sleeve which shows a smear of blood.

ROB

Dad, if you could see Tony now, what we did to him. He's just a kid, Dad.

ELIAS

It is an abomination before the Lord our God. It wouldn't even be an issue if you had done what's right. We are in a war of extermination. Why can't you see that?

Elias punches him in the chest again, grabs him by the arm.

ROB

Ouch!

ELIAS

You will get your head back in the game and back into this family, Robert Brace. You hear me?

Rob grits his blood-stained teeth.

Elias backhands him again.

ELIAS

Do you hear me?!

ROB

Yes, sir.

Elias shoves Rob against the wall.

ELIAS

I cannot hear you.

ROB

Yes, sir! Yes, sir!! YES, SIR!!!

Elias punches Rob in the stomach, the boy doubles over.

Elias pushes Rob to the ground, kicks him.

Rob lies there: sputtering, spitting, fighting back tears.

Elias kicks him again.

ELIAS

Get out of my sight, you weak, worthless piece of garbage.

Rob staggers to this feet and, holding his side, leaves his father behind in the "secret" room.

INT. FINISHED BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Rob shuts the door behind him. He meets the eyes of MICHAELA, 40, his mother, who angrily stuffs laundry into the washer.

Rob pounds up the stairs.

Elias steps out of the secret room, shuts the door firmly behind him, clasps the padlock, spins the dial.

He looks at his wife.

MICHAELA
You're too hard on Rob, Elias.

ELIAS
Eric was so easy. The initiation was nothing on him. He liked beating that nigger to death.

MICHAELA
Rob's always been sensitive, you know that. There's a reason I didn't go to that lynching in January. I couldn't watch you --

Her voice becomes barely a whisper.

MICHAELA
-- break him.

ELIAS
What was that?

She returns to the laundry.

MICHAELA
Nothing, Elias. Just...nothing.

He shakes his head.

ELIAS
I've lost control of my entire family.

He storms over to the bar, grabs two Westsvleren Lagers out of the little refrigerator, plus a bottle of Ketel One Vodka.

Michaela gulps as she watches him fume as he pounds upstairs.

She flinches, her eyes brim as she hears Elias shout:

ELIAS (O.S.)
Dammit, Timmy and Sandy! Pick up these damn toys, you spoiled brats!

INT. ROB'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rob slams the door behind him, locks it.

He paces the room. His chest heaves. His jaw muscles work furiously under the skin. He clenches his fists tight.

He goes to slam one of them against the wall but stops his fist a half-inch from it.

He grimaces, holds his side.

ROB
Oh, God, it hurts. Goddamn!

Still holding his side, Rob stalks over to the big world map.

Pushpins dot the map: Australia, Germany, Japan, Africa, Alaska, Tennessee.

Rob stares hard into the map, and he relaxes, his teeth not quite as gritted.

He pushes a pin into Cuba.

He narrows his brimming eyes.

ROB
Don't cry. Do. Not. Cry.

Rob pulls out his desk chair, sits, pulls his thick history textbook over, viciously slams it open.

A drop of blood from his cut lip trickles down his chin.

INT. FINGERHUT KITCHEN - MORNING

Nadine listens on the phone, strumming her fingers.

Her husband walks by.

She waves at him, clamps the receiver to her shoulder.

NADINE
Can you talk some sense into him?
He's asking for money again. And he
sounds hungover.

Paul checks his watch. He takes the receiver.

PAUL
Andy, son, you gotta get yourself
under control up there. You're
letting all this newfound freedom go
to your head.

INT. MATT'S BEDROOM - SAME

His right Timberland boot already on and laced up, Matt finishes tying the other. His eyes grow wide when he notices his super-secret spot lies open. He rushes to check it.

His notebook's clearly been moved. He grabs it. The clippings are in a different order than he had left them. The black pen's missing.

He looks at his empty hamper, gulps.

MATT

Dad! Oh shit! Oh shit! Oh shit!

He folds the notebook, shoves it into the back waistband of his jeans. He grabs his wallet, keys, and tennis racket.

INT. FINGERHUT KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Matt stops short when he enters the kitchen and finds his parents standing there.

Paul has the phone receiver tucked loosely between his cheek and shoulder.

Matt gulps again, sweat running down his cheek. He stares at his father.

PAUL

(his expression and tone
stern)

I'll get to you in a second.

Matt rushes out the side door without so much as a goodbye.

Paul shakes his head, looks at his wife.

PAUL

I found an essay in his jeans pocket. Another F. That boy thinks sports aren't a privilege.

NADINE

Paul, how are we possibly going to survive a fourth teenager?

BRAD FINGERHUT, 6, walks into the kitchen, holding the half-chewed black pen, his mouth and hands stained black. The little boy is crying.

BRAD

I went through Matt's stuff. I'm sorry. Is that why he's so mad?

Nadine grabs a towel, gets down on her youngest son's level, starts cleaning him up.

NADINE

No, no. Your brother's just going through...something. Teenage stuff.

She glances at her husband. Paul makes the hand gesture that indicates their second oldest continues to drone in his ear.

NADINE

(to Brad)

We respect each other's things in this house, don't we? How would you like Matt going through your stuff?

Brad grabs his mother in a tight hug.

INT. TUCKER RESIDENCE - DAY

Rob opens the front door.

ROB

Where the hell have you been?

Matt pushes past him.

MATT

I walked, okay. Stop riding my ass.

ROB

Who peed in your Wheaties?

MATT

Nobody. Everybody. Just forget it. Are we gonna play some pool or not? Get ready to get your ass handed to you, Tucker.

INT. FINISHED BASEMENT - DAY

Soon Matt settles into a mean game of pool, and the two best friends laugh and joke.

EXT. TUCKER RESIDENCE - DAY

The two boys horse around in the huge front yard, toss a football, tackle each other.

Rob shoves Matt off him.

ROB
You've got a hard-on!

Matt folds his knees, wraps his arms around them.

Gritting his teeth, Rob presses his side. When Matt glances at him, Rob immediately pastes on that big smile.

MATT
Like you don't get a woodie ten times a day.

Rob lies back onto the soft grass, cups his crotch.

ROB
"Biggest one in four counties."

Matt snorts.

MATT
Yeah, you wish. Bullshit, Tucker.

They jump up when the PIZZA DELIVERY GUY arrives.

INT. FINISHED BASEMENT - NIGHT

Rob and Matt sit on the couch in front of the HDTV, play Soldier of Fortune on the Tucker's expensive home video-gaming console.

Matt looks beside him at his best friend. Matt's smile fades as he watches Rob get really, really into the vicious killing and the brutal, graphic hand-to-hand combat.

ROB
Die, you weak motherfuckers!! DIE!!

Matt gulps.

Rob glances at him, his toothy smile ear to ear.

ROB
C'mon, Mattie! Kill 'em! Fuck 'em up!! This killin' shit's fun, man!!

Rob focuses forward again, graphically slaughters characters on the screen with the caring he'd put into stepping on ants.

He laughs, throws up his arms.

ROB
Touchdown! Who fucked your asses?!?
Rob Tucker, that's who! Woohoo!!

INT. FINISHED BASEMENT - MORNING

Matt blinks awake, glances with one eye at the time: 11:17am.

He looks around: their clothes and shoes, empty bottles of Dr. Tucker's expensive beer, soda cans, popcorn bags, pizza box. The unturned-off HDTV stares at him with an eerie glow.

Matt crunches his abs, sits up. The blanket covers his lap.

Matt looks behind him at Rob, stretched out willy-nilly on the couch. Matt stares at his best friend's face, at Rob's eyes dancing under the lids. He looks Rob's half-covered body up and down, reaches out, almost placing his shaking hand on Rob's thigh, muscled and perfect. Matt's breathing quickens. His body glistens with sweat. He can't stop swallowing hard.

Matt closes his eyes. He gasps several times, then pops his eyes open. Gritting his teeth, he looks down into his lap as he ejaculates into the blanket as he grips the material in his clenching fists. He fights to remain silent.

When he finishes, Matt looks quickly at Rob, who remains asleep. Matt closes his eyes, breathes a long, deep breath.

He shoves the blanket aside and, nude, pads quickly toward the downstairs full bath.

Rob moves his head to watch Matt disappear around the corner. Rob then glances down at the blanket. Grinning, he picks it up and fingers Matt's fresh, hot, sticky ejaculate. His grin widens, his own breathing quickens as he becomes excited. His back arches as he adds his own ejaculate to the supply his best friend had just left. He breathes a shuddering sigh.

EXT. TUCKER SWIMMING POOL - DAY

Rob runs toward the pool.

ROB
Cannonball!!

Matt cringes as he watches Rob plunge into the deep end beside where Matt treads water.

Rob surfaces with a roar.

Matt splashes him.

MATT

Jerk!

ROB

More like, jerk-off, right, Mattie?

Rob splashes him, speeds for the other end of the pool.

Matt catches up to him and pushes him under.

Rob squirms free, surfaces, returns the favor to Matt. They go through several rounds of this drowning each other.

Matt surfaces to see his best friend gritting his teeth. Matt notices Rob is holding his side. Matt peers through the water, knits his brows at the sight of the big bruise.

MATT

Wow. How'd you do that?

Rob smiles, shrugs.

ROB

Coach had us running up and down the bleachers for conditioning, and I tripped big time.

MATT

Looks like it hurts.

ROB

I'll get over it.

MATT

You sure have to get over a lot of those things, Rob.

Rob floats over to the steps and sits, the water line ripples across his chest.

Matt swims up, sits beside him.

ROB

I like how the water jets out here.

MATT

Yeah. Me too.

The strong current pushes Matt's hand over Rob's crotch.

Rob looks down, then at his friend.

Matt, red-faced, pulls his hand away.

Rob grabs Matt's wrist under the water, returns his best friend's hand, first over then actually onto his crotch.

Matt widens his eyes.

Rob, eyes glinting, smiles again.

ROB

Go ahead, Mattie. It's okay. I wish you had put your hand on me earlier.

Matt's eyes grow even wider.

MATT

Are you sure?

Rob nods.

Matt slips his hand under the waistband of Rob's swim trunks. His breathing deepens.

Rob massages the crotch of Matt's trunks.

They stare into each other's eyes.

MATT

Whe-when did you know?

ROB

About a year now. You?

MATT

That obvious?

Rob shrugs again.

MATT

I was hoping it was a phase.

ROB

I don't think it's a phase, Mattie. At least, I hope to God it's not.

Matt moves closer to Rob.

Rob dances his fingertips up and down Matt's broad back.

They touch noses, then lips, tentatively at first, then with explosive passion.

They step out of the water, stumble their way back into the basement, pulling each other's trunks down the entire time.

INT. FINISHED BASEMENT - DAY

Matt, showered anew and in a fresh change of wear, stomps down the stairs in his Timberlands. He holds two plates of scrambled eggs and bacon.

Rob exits the "secret room", shuts the door behind him. Rob snaps the padlock closed, spins the dial.

Matt offers him a plate and Rob takes it.

They eat in silence.

Rob tosses his plate aside, the fork clangs on the china.

He pulls his heavy hikers over, quickly puts them on.

ROB
I got to get the hell outta here.
I'll drop you off at your place.
C'mon.

EXT. FINGERHUT RESIDENCE - DAY

Rob and Matt sit in Rob's car parked at the curb.

ROB
I've got to get outta here, Mattie.

He looks at his best friend.

ROB
I'm sorry to have to tell you this,
but you do too.

Matt stares back at Rob, then through the bug-smearred windshield at his house.

QUICK FLASHBACK

PAUL
(his expression and tone
stern)
I'll get to you in a second.

BACK TO SCENE

MATT

Wait a minute. How do you know what Dad said?

ROB

Huh? I have no idea what your father said. Listen, you -- Just goddamn listen to me, will ya, Matt?

Matt gulps, then nods.

ROB

You don't understand. I don't want you to understand. But you need to trust me on this one. You have to come too. You can't stay here.

Matt takes a last glance at his house, then taps the dashboard, points straight ahead.

Rob turns the engine over, pulls the car away from the curb.

EXT. DEMETRIANO RESIDENCE - DAY

Rob has his brows knit as he pulls the car to a stop at the curb in front of the big, stone house surrounded by towering lush trees and gardens which seem almost to hug the house in protection...or else attempting to hide a secret.

Rob looks at his best friend.

ROB

Whose place is this?

MATT

Tony's.

ROB

Tony's?! Tony Demetriano?!

Matt swings his door open, exits the car.

Rob reaches for him, just misses grabbing Matt's sleeve.

ROB

Matt!

He growls under his breath.

ROB

Shit!

Rob exits the car, chases after his best friend.

INT. TONY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Tony opens the door, takes a step back.

TONY

What are you two doing here?

Matt and Rob walk in as Tony steps aside. Tony shuts the door behind them.

Rob hangs back in the shadow of a corner of the room. He glances around: the posters of football players and favorite bands, the shelf groaning with trophies, dirty clothes piled high in one corner, dust-covered weight bench in another.

Rob doubles his glance back to the trophies. One, the largest, is shoved against the back of the shelf on its side. Rob looks at Tony with a frown.

MATT

We're going on a camping trip.
Wanted to know if you want to come.

TONY

Camping?

MATT

Yeah. The Uplands.

He glances behind him at Rob.

MATT

Right, Rob?

Rob shrugs.

ROB

(mutters)

Somewhere. Anywhere but here.

TONY

Camping? Hiking? The woods?

He gulps, glances at a collection of prescription bottles sitting on his dresser.

He looks back at Matt, then narrows his brows at Rob.

TONY

We have school tomorrow.

Matt cracks a grin.

MATT

You've never cut school?

TONY

Yeah, I've cut school. Plenty.

He glances again at the prescription bottles, then straightens his bony shoulders as he faces Matt and Rob.

TONY

Yeah. Yeah, I'll do it.

He hurriedly packs his back pack. He rummages around in his closet, stuffs one last thing in his pack.

Tony takes his prescription bottles, tosses them on his bed.

The three boys head back downstairs.

INT. DEMETRIANO RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

EMILIA and BART DEMETRIANO, who holds Tony's nine-month-old baby brother PAOLO, meet the three boys at the front door.

Matt and Rob don't miss the look of disgust Tony's father rakes over Tony. The man looks at Rob and Matt.

EMILIA

Got him out of his room. That's at least something.

Tony looks at Matt and Rob.

TONY

Let's just get out of here.

EXT. DEMETRIANO RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

Tony shoves his back pack and sleeping bag in the surprisingly-spacious trunk of Rob's BMW.

He looks back at his house.

TONY

Won't even let me hold my own baby brother, like I'll rub something off on him. Asshole.

The three boys get in the car and head out.

INT. FINISHED BASEMENT - DAY

Elias surveys the wasteland two teenage boys given free reign for an entire weekend leave behind.

Shaking his head, he starts tidying. He picks up the two blankets. Crinkling his brows, he sniffs. He inspects both blankets, discovers the volume of dried, crusty ejaculate smeared in their folds.

He frowns, rolls his eyes. He glances around, then picks up a condom wrapper from under the couch. He shakes his head again, though the corners of his mouth do curl upwards.

Elias stuffs the blankets into the washing machine, then glances at the door of his secret room, then up the stairs at the sounds of his wife and two youngest boys.

He heads to the door.

INT. SECRET ROOM - DAY

Elias stares at the four-inch screen of the portable unit as he flips through the recordings of the house's camera feeds.

He fast-forwards the appropriate recording. He hits play.

ELIAS

Okay, let's just see these blonde bombshells you two sex maniacs got lucky with in my house.

His breathing comes in gasps as his unblinking eyes widen.

ELIAS

Oh, no. Oh, no. Oh, Lord my God, no!

His whole body begins to tremble.

Elias glances at the framed picture of Rob, who holds a huge track-and-field trophy and fills the frame with that famous Rob Tucker mile-wide smile. Elias slams the picture face-down. There's the sound of cracking glass.

He buries his face in his hands.

When he looks up, his face reflects not mourning, not disappointment -- but hate.

Elias grabs the phone and dials.

ELIAS

George, get everybody together.
We've got a big problem.

He listens for a moment.

ELIAS

Yeah, for this we'll need him in the
sheriff's office to be on the alert.
I'll call him.

EXT. SOUTH CAROLINA UPLANDS - PARK - DAY

Rob parks the car in a far corner of the gravel lot. He sits there for a long moment, then gets out and heads to the back.

Tony and Matt join him there.

Rob pops the trunk.

ROB

You know we could just ditch this
car here. Ditch everything.

MATT

Ditch it?

Rob nods.

ROB

Just start over, Mattie.

He narrows his eyes, tightens his jawline.

ROB

Our parents hate us. Our school
hates us. All we get is shit
everywhere we turn. Fuck them. Fuck
them all.

Matt opens his mouth to say something, then stops himself. He takes a long breath, then asks:

MATT

You mean, run away?

ROB

Yeah, Matt.

Rob looks at Tony.

MATT

Where?

Rob shrugs.

ROB
I don't know. Florida. Cuba.
California.

He takes a wad of cash the size of a fist out of the front pocket of his pack.

Matt and Tony both whistle.

ROB
This will take us just about
anywhere we want.

They all three look at each other.

They all three nod.

Rob opens the driver's side door.

Matt and Tony watch in astonishment as Rob tosses his Rayban sunglasses, keys, then his cell phone onto the driver's seat.

Tony pulls out his wallet, from which he pulls everything but his driver's license and his Social Security card and tosses it all atop Rob's items.

Rob slips his own wallet out of his back pocket and pulls out the cards, including a Platinum American Express, and tosses them onto the driver's seat.

He looks at Tony, nods.

MATT
I don't know about this, guys. No
cards, no wheels.

ROB
Say the word, Matt, and I'll bring
you back home.

QUICK FLASHBACK

PAUL
(his expression and tone
stern)
I'll get to you in a second.

BACK TO SCENE

Matt empties his pockets onto the stash that litters the driver's seat.

Rob and Matt gather their brand-new packs, stuffed tight with everything they need, while Tony gathers his well-worn pack. They slip their packs onto their backs.

Matt swings his tennis racket a couple of times, then just tosses it into the back of the trunk.

MATT

Not like I've led the team to a single win. God, I'm such a loser.

Rob shoves his best friend on his shoulder.

ROB

Don't you ever say that about yourself again.

Matt squares his shoulders. He nods.

No one notices that Matt's black-covered notebook with the clippings has fallen out of his pack and now lies nearly invisible against the black lining of the BMW's trunk.

Rob slams the lid closed.

ROB

Gentlemen.

Rob takes the lead, and they start into the dense woods.

Rob and Matt stop, look back at Tony, whose feet seem rooted into the sandy loam.

Rob swallows hard, darts his eyes from Tony to Matt.

Matt steps over to Tony, puts his hand on his arm.

Tony pulls his arm away.

TONY

Leave me alone. I can do this.

Before long, all three boys move into the woods.

EXT. FINGERHUT RESIDENCE - NIGHT

DETECTIVE JUBAL BAILEY, 45, and DETECTIVE JEFF LUNDY, 42, wait at the door.

Det. Bailey glances at his colleague, indicates the evidence bag Det. Lundy holds with Matt's black notebook.

DET. BAILEY
Think they know?

Det. Lundy shrugs. He drops his cigarette butt from between his nicotine-stained fingers, grinds it under his shoe.

The door opens.

INT. FINGERHUT KITCHEN - NIGHT

Paul and Nadine and the two detectives sit around the table.

Det. Lundy's coffee mug is near empty while his partner's sits untouched.

Det. Bailey removes Matt's black-covered notebook.

DET. BAILEY
Did you realize, Mr. and Mrs.
Fingerhut, that Matthew identified
himself as gay?

PAUL
What?

Det. Bailey and Det. Lundy exchange a sidelong glance.

NADINE
Paul, c'mon. The way Matt sometimes
looks at boys on the sidewalk. The
movies and shows he watches. I
thought it was all just a stage.

She averts her eyes from meeting the detectives'.

NADINE
I was hoping it was just a stage.

She coughs into her fist.

NADINE
I mean, how's he going to be happy,
being one of...those?

Det. Bailey pushes the notebook across the table to them.

DET. BAILEY
That's a journal Matthew's kept,
obviously for a long time. Years.

Paul and Nadine leaf through the journal's pages, raise eyebrows at key passages.

Paul picks up the notebook, reads aloud:

PAUL

"I can nevr let mom + dad knwo the way I am I've alreddy brot them so muhc disapointmnet. bad grades my fuol mouht. this wood just give them one moer thing hate me four I'm suhc a piece of shit as a sun I don't do my chores. I nevr let thme knwo where I am. Fuck, what a lozre I am no wondre they love andy moer and let hm get away with os muhc."

Paul looks at his wife.

PAUL

Mattie wrote that three years ago.

Nadine takes the notebook, looks over the entry. Her expression is immensely sad. She takes a shuddering breath, looks at her husband.

NADINE

This is practically illiterate. How could we have missed something this serious? My God, he's our own son.

PAUL

No wonder he begged us to get that computer, with all that fancy correction software.

Paul regards the detectives, his expression almost pleading.

PAUL

My God, my last words to him were, I was going to chew him out for earning another F, as if that's goddamn important now. Or ever was.

The parents hug each other, then return their attention to the detectives.

NADINE

What happens next? What do we do to get our boys back?

Det. Bailey retrieves the journal.

DET. BAILEY

The boys have already been entered into the state-wide and national systems.

(MORE)

DET. BAILEY (CONT'D)
Every deputy and state trooper has a
BOLO on each boy. Have you ever
heard them talk about going
someplace in particular?

They both shake their heads.

NADINE
Matt once mentioned Rob has an uncle
over in Columbia.

Det. Lundy glances as his partner jots this detail down.

DET. LUNDY
Thank you for Matthew's head shot.
Our Services Dept is already
creating "Missing Persons" posters.

They all stand.

DET. BAILEY
I have a son of my own, a year
younger than Matthew.

Paul puts his arm around his wife's shoulders.

PAUL
Matt.

DET. BAILEY
Matt. I can only imagine what you
folks are going through. Please stay
by the phone.

Paul and Nadine lead them to the front door.

PAUL
Derek Nobuo's disappearance still
has all these kids on edge. He and
Tony were very popular.

Det. Bailey stiffens.

Det. Lundy shakes Paul's hand, then Nadine's.

DET. LUNDY
I'm sure there's an easy explanation
for all of this.

EXT. FINGERHUT RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

The detectives head toward the car.

DET. BAILEY
 Jeff, you sure you should've said
 that last bit?

Det. Lundy shrugs.

DET. LUNDY
 Gives her something to hold onto.

Det. Bailey stops.

DET. BAILEY
 Jeff, they left everything they had
 on the front seat. What's the easy
 explanation about that? Other than
 the obvious one. C'mon, man.

Lundy just shrugs again, takes his pack of cigarettes out of
 his breast pocket, coolly taps one out.

INT. SECRET ROOM - NIGHT

Elias listens on the phone, nods, jots down notes.

ELIAS
 Notebook? What kind of notebook?

Listens.

ELIAS
 Matt? About the Demetriano faggot?

Jots.

ELIAS
 How many times did I feed that
 abomination at my table?

Elias drops the receiver into its cradle. His jaw muscles
 work under the skin, his hand shakes more and more, he jots
 and jots down notes until the pencil snaps.

He pushes back his chair, stands. He steps over to a dark
 corner of the little room, pulls forward a plastic tote,
 which he opens. He extracts from it one, then another, then a
 third noose-knotted coil of rope. He blinks back tears.

ELIAS
 No! I have to.

He can't help but let the tears come. He casts his eyes
 heavenward.

ELIAS

Lord my God, why are you testing me?
Again. My own flesh and blood?

Elias slams his fist against the old-brick wall. He grits his teeth, narrows his eyes at a brick that's gone askew. He glances at several other bricks lower and to the left. He reaches up, depresses a button hidden atop an overhead beam. Those several other bricks immediately respond by popping forward. Elias removes the askew brick.

Elias reaches into the hole left by the missing brick, feels around, then brings his hand back grasping a plastic bag. He opens it, crinkles his brows at its only contents: two money rubber bands, a folded sheet of paper. He removes the sheet.

ROB (V.O.)

I guess now, Dad, you have to hate me too. But I was never the son you wanted me to be. Seems we both now know why. I hope God doesn't hate me as much as you promise He does.

Elias stumbles to his desk, drops in his chair. He pulls over his Bible, opens it to a random page, begins ranting verses.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The boys hike the woods and clearings. They stop when they see a deer and a fox and, once, even a bear.

They see a farmhouse in the distance, skirt far around it.

EXT. RANDOM CLEARING - NIGHT

The boys, exhausted, hardly have their sleeping bags rolled out before they fall atop them, each asleep almost instantly.

EXT. SALUDA RIVER - DAY

Three sets of clothes dry on rocks as the boys, in nothing but their underwear, one by one swing out on a vine over the river and let go.

ROB

Cannonball!!

They laugh, splash, playfully try to drown each other.

They drag themselves up onto the bank, stretch out side by side like three drying fish.

Matt pops to his feet, runs up the bank.

MATT

I'll betcha I can make it all the way to the other side!

TONY

You're crazy, Fingerhut!

Rob throws some dirt at Tony.

ROB

Get off his case. Matt says he can do it, he can do it.

Matt runs full speed down the bank, grabs the vine, swings out far over the river, lets go.

And lands short of the far bank.

And lies there. Face down. In the water.

Rob and Tony jump to their feet.

Tony runs, dives into the water, makes it to Matt in seconds.

TONY

He's bleeding from his forehead! I think he hit a rock!

Rob just stands there.

Tony swims back with Matt to their side of the river and pulls Matt up onto the bank.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Elias and GEORGE TUCKER, 45, stand at the front door.

Elias knocks.

MRS. FORT, 71, opens the door.

MRS. FORT

Hello?

ELIAS

Hi, ma'am. We were hoping you might have recently seen three teenage boys hiking through this area.

She raises her eyebrows.

MRS. FORT
 Actually, my grandson did. Strange
 for a school day.

Elias and his brother exchange glances.

ELIAS
 Did you notice their direction?

She points.

MRS. FORT
 Toward the Saluda. You tell them
 they need to be in school. Playing
 hooky. Why, in my day, --

ELIAS
 Yes, ma'am. We'll give their hides a
 real tanning. Thank you. Sorry for
 disturbing you.

EXT. SALUDA RIVER - DAY

Slowly, Matt blinks awake. He props himself up on his elbows.
 He touches the bandage on his forehead.

MATT
 I missed the other side?

Rob pounds him in the arm.

ROB
 Yes, asshole! What did you expect?

Tony puts his hand on Matt's shoulder.

TONY
 Man, you are nuts. And here I
 thought all tennis players were
 pussies.

Matt shrugs, grins.

MATT
 Guess not.

Rob looks at Tony's hand on Matt's shoulder.

ROB
 I got to take a leak.

He stomps off into the bushes.

EXT. SALUDA RIVER - DAY

Tony stands in the water up to his knees, fishing pole in hand, line in water.

Rob and Matt fish from the shore.

Something tugs on Tony's line. Tony reacts, plays with his prey that suddenly makes a run for it. The tip of the rod touches the water. Soon Tony lands a huge bass, holds it up, his face a cascade of dimples from his ear-to-ear smile.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Rob pulls his portion of the bass apart with his large pocket knife, puts some in his mouth, chews for a moment.

ROB

So you're trying to tell us Jon Faro is your cousin.

Tony nods while enjoying his own meal.

TONY

My second cousin, yeah. What of it?

Matt looks from one to the other, then focuses on Tony.

MATT

Jon Faro, the guy who just won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actor.

TONY

"Jon Faro" is his stage name. His name's Mike, Michaelangelo Demetriano. He's a great guy. His grandfather's a homophobic asshole, but Mike's great.

Tony frowns for a moment.

TONY

Well, actually, Mr. Demetriano's come around. That's what Mike says.

ROB

Tony, you are such a bull-shitter.

Tony's eyes, his whole expression, flares with anger.

TONY
Don't believe me, I don't give a
fuck. Why should you be any
different than anyone else?

Tony slams his tin plate down.

Rob and Matt exchange glances.

ROB
Tony, we're just ribbing you. We
don't mean anything by it, man.

Tony scrunches down further under his sleeping bag, rolls
over so his back is to Rob and Matt.

MATT
Tony?

Rob swipes at him.

ROB
Matt, leave the guy alone.

Matt waves his best friend off.

MATT
Tony?

Tony concentrates on digging his fingernails into his palm.

MATT
I believe you.

Tony slowly rolls back over.

TONY
About Mike?

MATT
About everything.

Rob stiffens.

MATT
About everything you said happened
to you back in the winter.

Tony stares at him.

TONY
Nobody believes me. Det. Bailey
doesn't. Dad doesn't. I can't even
get Doc to believe me.

He snorts bitterly.

TONY

All Doc can say is, "Open up, talk about it, get it off your chest." Like that would get me Derek back.

Tony turns his hard-eyed stare at Matt.

TONY

So why the fuck should you?

Matt shrugs.

MATT

Well, I do, that's all.

Tony allows himself a deep breath.

Matt gets under his own sleeping bag.

The three boys settle in for the night.

TONY

Matt?

MATT

Yeah?

TONY

Thanks.

MATT

Yeah.

INT. HUMMER - DAY

George has Elias's bag on his lap as he rifles thru it.

GEORGE

I can't find those batteries --

He pulls out the three lengths of rope. He regards Elias.

GEORGE

Three, Elias? Three?

Elias glances at him, then returns his attention to speeding them down the country highway.

ELIAS

"They shall surely be put to death."

George drops the lengths back into the bag.

GEORGE

Why's Rob making us have to do this?

Elias white-knuckles the steering wheel, says nothing.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

The three boys sit on a fallen tree.

Matt has removed his right Timberland, massages his ankle.

ROB

I still can't believe you didn't see that box turtle.

MATT

I saw the dumb turtle, Rob. Who knew those things moved so fast?

ROB

Uh...Any kid who's grown up in South Carolina, that's who.

MATT

Just shut up.

Tony rummages his pack.

TONY

Damn, I'm out of chocolate bars. Give me one of yours, Matt.

MATT

I don't have any left. I'm out of everything. I'm getting sick of fish, by the way.

TONY

Well, excuse me.

ROB

You two are pathetic. How could you eat through all your supplies?

MATT

Well, just vote me off the island, why don't ya?

ROB

That show is so stupid.

MATT
Something I don't want anyone
seeing.

Tony crinkles his brows at him.

Matt takes a deep breath.

MATT
A storm's coming. Let's get going.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

The three boys walk single file, Matt limping.

Rob whiffs, wrinkles his nose.

ROB
Man, we're ripe.

Tony's stomach growls.

They come out into a clearing.

Sounds of a nearby highway catch their attention.

Rob tosses his pack down, flops on his back on the ground.

Matt and Tony flop down beside him.

ROB
There's got to be a store off an off
ramp nearby. One of us will dodge in
and get supplies.

MATT
Steal? I'm not stealing, Rob.

ROB
Did I say anything about stealing?
We'll pay for the shit, but you know
there's gotta be news of the three
of us by now. And I can't go back.

MATT
Yeah, yeah. You keep saying that.
Jesus, Rob, it's me, remember? Why
the hell can't we go back? Just tell
me already, will ya?

He punches his best friend in the arm.

MATT

What the hell have you gotten me into? And Tony.

Rob jumps to his feet, grabs his pack.

ROB

We hungry or are we just gonna jaw all day?

They head toward the highway.

INT. GREENWOOD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

DEPUTY DALTON LOGE, 22, his build and crew cut speaking to his recent discharge from the United States Marines Corps, stands in front of a bulletin board in the Detectives Bureau.

One flyer in particular, partially obscured by an announcement of the annual sheriff's office spring cookout, catches his eye: a faded BOLO for a suspect vehicle in connection with the hate crime on the minor Antonio Demetriano and the disappearance of the minor Derek Nobuo.

The flyer describes a beat-up tan-and-white Ford F150 pickup.

DET. LUNDY

Deputy.

Loge looks up, barely keeps from sneering.

DEPUTY LOGE

Sir, yes, sir, Detective.

Lundy hands him a slip of paper.

DET. LUNDY

Sorry we can't keep you busy enough. Get this file for Det. Bailey and bring it to the conference room. And do it now, dammit.

Deputy Loge narrows his eyes at the tall, stringy man.

DEPUTY LOGE

Yes, sir. Right away, sir.

INT. GREENWOOD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Det. Bailey and Det. Lundy walk into the conference room where Michaela, sporting dark sunglasses, awaits with Timmy and Sandy to either side of her.

Det. Bailey pulls up a chair.

MICHAELA

I want you to understand my
husband's a good man.

DET. BAILEY

We understand that, Mrs. Tucker.
We're sure he is.

MICHAELA

He works long, hard hours to provide
his family a good -- a very good --
life. We want for nothing.

The detectives watch her in silence.

MICHAELA

We've had the best of everything:
vacations, homes, cars, clothes.

Bailey glances at his colleague.

DET. BAILEY

Timmy, Sandy, how about you let Det.
Lundy get you an ice cream? Whadaya
say, boys?

Timmy looks at his little brother, then back at the
detective, shrugs. He takes Sandy's hand and stands.

TIMMY

Sure. C'mon, Sandy.

Sandy regards his mother with earnestness.

SANDY

Remember, Mommy, Daddy says we can't
ever say anything to anybody.

He darts his eyes at the two big men.

Deputy Loge intercepts Lundy at the door, hands him a thick
file. He says a few words to the detective.

Lundy hooks his thumb over his shoulder at his partner.

Loge grins at the two boys, tousles Timmy's hair. He turns
and knocks on the door, then opens it, sticks his head in. He
glances at Michaela, then back real quick at the two boys. He
hands the file to Bailey, who nods.

DET. BAILEY
Deputy, please bring Mrs. Tucker a
cup of coffee.

DEPUTY LOGE
Sir, yes, sir.

The deputy darts his head out of the door, closes it.

Michaela manages a grin.

MICHAELA
He's eager.

DET. BAILEY
(rolling his eyes)
He's new.

He takes a deep breath.

DET. BAILEY
How long has your husband been
abusing you and the boys, Mrs.
Tucker? All four of your boys, I
assume, not just Rob.

Tears fall from under her sunglasses.

MICHAELA
Years. But he's a good --

DET. BAILEY
Good men don't hurt the people they
tell the world they love.

MICHAELA
You have to understand what that fag
-- what that gay man viciously did
to Elias when he was twelve.

Det. Bailey taps the folder Loge had brought him.

MICHAELA
Homosexuals do that, y'know. That's
why God hates them, considers them
abominations.

Det. Bailey frowns, fights to keep his expression blank.

She frowns back at him.

A stone silence ensues between them.

DET. BAILEY

Mrs. Tucker, where is your husband?

MICHAELA

He's out of control, Detective. He came home late last night, drunk, got even drunker. He slapped me. This time right in front of the boys.

She takes a deep shuddering breath.

MICHAELA

He hits the boys, as it should be. Elias's father hit him and his brothers, just like my father hit my brothers.

Det. Bailey shifts in his chair.

MICHAELA

But I overheard him tell my brother-in-law on the phone that Rob is gay. I don't know what makes Elias think that, but, Det. Bailey, if Elias really does think Rob is...is that, then you've got to save my son.

DET. BAILEY

You think your husband may actually hurt his own boy?

MICHAELA

I think, Detective, he's going to swing our son from a tree by the neck till Rob breathes his last.

She shifts in her seat.

MICHAELA

Five generations of the KKK promises that's what he's going to do.

She casts aside the sunglasses, buries her face in her hands, flinching at pressing in on her vicious black eye.

MICHAELA

I should have taken the boys and run a long time ago.

She looks up again at the detective.

MICHAELA

I don't disagree with my husband. I never have. I agree faggots are abominations before the Lord our God and should be exterminated.

DET. BAILEY

That's called genocide, ma'am.

Michaela looks at him squarely.

MICHAELA

But that's them. This is my son.

Deputy Loge walks in with a Styrofoam cup of steaming coffee. He hands it to her.

MICHAELA

Thank you, young man.

DEPUTY LOGE

Ma'am, yes, ma'am.

Det. Bailey scribbles a note, hands it to him.

Loge reads it, nods, darts back out of the room.

DET. BAILEY

Is your husband armed?

MICHAELA

Elias doesn't trust anyone. He always has a weapon on him.

DET. BAILEY

You know you can't go home. I'm already making arrangements for you to go to the women's shelter.

Michaela scoffs, almost spraying her coffee. A twisted grin slices across her pained expression.

MICHAELA

That's a joke.

DET. BAILEY

I've never been more serious.

MICHAELA

You really think I trust that you, a cop, can protect me? Hell no! The only reason I'm here at all is to beg you to find Rob before his father does.

DET. BAILEY
You can't go home. Period.

MICHAELA
What I do is my concern. But, no,
I'm not going home.

She stands.

MICHAELA
Save my son, Det. Bailey.

DET. BAILEY
I want to save all the sons and
daughters, Mrs. Tucker.

She glares at him.

He shakes his head as he watches her leave.

He quickly rises, opens the conference room door.

DET. BAILEY
Loge!

He waves the young deputy over, they talk quickly.

Deputy Loge nods, hightails it out of the Detectives Bureau.

Det. Bailey grabs the receiver of the phone on the wall and hits an extension.

DET. BAILEY
Yeah, Services, Det. Bailey. Delay
Mrs. Tucker for fifteen minutes.
Make up anything, a pile of forms
for her to sign. Anything. Thanks.

INT. '69 MUSTANG - DAY (MOVING)

Deputy Loge, changed into his civilian clothes, squints to keep an eye on the Tuckers' Range Rover pretty far up ahead of him on the country two-lane highway.

He glances up through the dirty windshield at the thick clouds threatening to open up with a real summer storm.

The Range Rover takes a right turn onto a gravel road.

Loge drives past the right turn. Half a mile up the road, he pulls a u-turn, heads back, turns onto the same gravel road the Range Rover had. He drives for what seems forever, then at last spies a house through the trees.

He stops the car away from the house, leans forward.
 The Range Rover is parked in the short driveway.
 Loge pulls his car over, cuts the engine.
 He lifts a cell phone tossed on the seat beside him, dials.

INT. HUMMER - DAY

The cell phone rings, Elias answers it.

ELIAS
 She was where? She did what? She
 told them what?! Everything?!?

Elias's expression contorts with rage.

ELIAS
 I'll kill her!!

George watches him, confusion etched on his face.

ELIAS
 (into the phone)
 Who the hell is Karla Cloverfield?

He listens.

ELIAS
 Get them out there and her and the
 boys to me.

Elias slams the phone closed, throws it at the dashboard.

ELIAS
 I'll kill her! I'LL KILL HER!!!

EXT. OUTSIDE HIGHWAY 385 UNDERPASS - DAY

The sky has indeed opened up. The three boys find themselves
 in a "gully washer" thunderstorm.

TONY
 Let's just get outta this rain.

Rob turns, grabs Tony's shirt, puts his face in Tony's.

ROB
 I'm sick of you giving all the
 orders all the time, you know that?

He shakes him.

ROB
You want so much to prove you still
got a pair of balls.

Rob grabs Tony's crotch and squeezes, hard.

ROB
Doesn't feel like anything to me.

Tony shoves him away, his expression contorted with anger.

TONY
Asshole!

Matt dashes under the underpass.

MATT
Get over here!

Tony and Rob glare at each other, then join Matt, and they huddle there, stomping their feet.

Tony accidentally knocks Rob.

Rob shoves Tony back.

Tony raises his fist at him.

KELLY (O.S.)
You'll never get along out here,
going at each other like that.

The wild-haired 19-year-old approaches out of the shadows, a big grin lightening his grimy face.

KELLY
Rule #2: Depend on each other.

The three boys eye him.

KELLY
Ya see, there are rules to living
out here.

He gestures as if he's seeing the words up in lights on a 42nd Street marquee.

KELLY
I call them "Kelly's Rules of the
Road".

Kelly looks the three of them up and down.

KELLY

You three newbs haven't been living out here for long, that's for sure.

He turns, walks up the cement incline, back to his "home": a box, a blanket, a tin box, some trinkets, and a fire.

Kelly sits cross-legged and beckons them.

They join him.

Matt leans in, squinting at the lettering on Kelly's T-shirt under his grease-stained and tattered Army-surplus jacket.

MATT

What's that say?

Kelly holds the jacket open: People are a lot like Slinkies: They're no good for anything, but they sure are a lot of fun when you push them down the stairs.

MATT

That's sick.

ROB

That's twisted.

TONY

(chuckling)

That's funny.

Kelly gives Tony a thumb's up.

MATT

Where'd you get that shirt? It looks brand new.

KELLY

Off someone's clothes line.

MATT

You stole it?

KELLY

Yep.

ROB

Don't tell me, Rule #1?

KELLY

Rule #4 actually.

He narrows his eyes at Matt.

KELLY

I've stolen off clothes lines, out of convenience stores, out of people's houses. It's called survival, kid.

MATT

It's called being a criminal.

KELLY

Wait till you get hungry -- not just hungry like you are right now, but REALLY hungry.

TONY

Never heard of a job?

KELLY

Y'see, it's that wage-slave mentality right there I'm out here to escape.

He holds out his arms.

KELLY

Mi casa, su casa.

He picks up the tin, opens it, pulling out rolling papers and a bag of marijuana. He starts rolling a joint, looks up.

KELLY

Want some?

Matt looks at Rob and Tony, then back at Kelly.

MATT

Wow, you just smoke dope, whenever you want?

KELLY

Yep. My parents and those rehab folks tried to convince me to stop, but I told them I was going to do what I wanted.

ROB

You told your parents to shove treatment, eh?

KELLY

(easily)

No. I would never disrespect them like that. I love my parents.

Kelly lights the finished joint, takes a long drag off it, pinches it between his lips as he grabs a six-pack of beer, tosses each of them a can. He takes one for himself.

Kelly takes another pull off the joint, then offers it to Tony, who takes it, takes an even longer pull off it.

Kelly opens his beer, guzzles it in four big gulps. He crunches the can and tosses it aside.

He belches, smiles.

KELLY

I told them up front, I'd go right back to drinking and drugging, and, then minutes after I left the two months of rehab I agreed to, I was downing a beer.

MATT

My parents would clobber me, I disrespected them like that.

KELLY

I told you, I did not disrespect them. I gave rehab my 110% effort -- scout's honor. I told them before I ever entered that center what I was going to do when I left there.

Tony offers the joint to Rob, who shakes his head. Next Tony offers it to Matt, who takes it diffidently.

ROB

Careful, Mattie.

Matt takes a long drag off it.

KELLY

Watch him. He's turning green.

Matt hacks, coughs.

MATT

Good stuff.

ROB

Yeah, like you would know.

MATT

I've done pot before.

ROB

No, you haven't.

MATT

What do you know, Rob? I don't see you taking a toke.

ROB

That's right, you don't.

Kelly gives him two thumbs up.

KELLY

Rule #7: You live a lie, you're only lying to yourself.

Matt takes another, smoother toke on the joint.

MATT

Man, that's de-e-e-ep.

Tony and Rob look at each other.

TONY

He's stoned.

ROB

He's stoned.

MATT

If this is stoned, it feels great.

Rob looks at Kelly.

ROB

What is this stuff, turbo-charged or something?

Kelly pats his tin.

KELLY

I only get the best.

Matt takes another long drag off the joint. His shoulders sag, his eyelids droop. A stupid grin erupts on his face.

MATT

Let Mom and Dad find my notebook. They hate me anyway. The only one they give a shit about is Andy. And the little brat.

He looks around the small group.

MATT

I work so hard, but everything I try to read makes zero sense to me. Then I have to take a test on it or write a paper. I try to talk to my teachers, they don't give a goddamn.

He takes another drag off the joint, his longest one yet.

MATT

Well, y'know, I just don't fuckin' care anymore either. Fuck them all, right, Rob?

Rob struggles to answer, then just shrugs.

INT. BAILEY KITCHEN - DAY

DESIREE BAILEY, 42, hands her husband a plate filled with a meal that's hardly been touched.

DESIREE

You've got to eat, Jubal. You're not Jeff: you can't survive off cigarettes, beer, and crackers.

He grins wanly at her, takes the plate. He scrapes the food down the disposal, the whole time looks out the window over the sink at his son, SHAWN BAILEY, and Shawn's buddy, BEN HARRINGTON, both 15. High school best friends -- nothing quite like it, or quite like it ever again.

The boys shoot hoops, laugh, with not a care in the world but that night's homework.

Desiree puts her arm around her husband's shoulders.

DESIREE

Talk to me, Jubal.

He looks at her, takes a deep breath. He turns around, leans back against the sink, wipes his hands with a dish towel.

DET. BAILEY

The KKK, Dez. The KKK. Y'know?

She nods.

DESIREE

It is unbelievable. This day and age? 2001?

Det. Bailey puts his fist to his mouth for a moment, then drops it, looks squarely at his wife.

DET. BAILEY

If I cross this half-cocked lunatic, Elias, who is doing terrible things like lynching young boys, what would he do to my family?

He turns around, looks out the window again.

DET. BAILEY
Am I really willing to risk that?

He looks over his shoulder, then heads out the back door.

EXT. BAILEY DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Det. Bailey walks up to the two teenage boys. He glances down the driveway, then down their street, then focuses his attention back on the boys.

DET. BAILEY
Hey, guys, come on inside.

SHAWN
Dad, we just got out here. There's plenty of light.

DET. BAILEY
Do as I say, son.

He puts an arm around each boy's narrow shoulders, heads them back to the kitchen door.

DET. BAILEY
And, Ben, Mrs. Bailey or I will drive you home.

They enter the house.

INT. BAILEY KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Shawn and Ben head toward the stairs.

DET. BAILEY
Guys!

They stop, look back at him.

DET. BAILEY
I don't want you two fellas out after dark.

Shawn sags his shoulders, sputters.

SHAWN
Dad.

He cocks his head at his best friend.

SHAWN
You're being weird.

Det. Bailey points at the two of them.

DET. BAILEY
No after dark. I mean it.

Shawn rolls his eyes.

SHAWN
Whatever, Dad.

DET. BAILEY
Um...What was that?

SHAWN
Yes, sir.

Shawn raps Ben on the arm. They head upstairs to his room.

Det. Bailey turns around.

DET. BAILEY
Dez, I'm no good here tonight.

DESIREE
Go.

She walks up to him, buttons the top button of his shirt, pushes up and straightens the knot of his tie. She puts her arms around his neck, leans in and kisses him.

She pulls back a small bit with a satisfied sigh and a grin.

DESIREE
I love you, Det. Bailey.

He returns her grin.

DET. BAILEY
I love you too, Mrs. Det. Bailey.

DESIREE
You've never backed down from any investigation, Jubal. Now go find those boys.

Det. Bailey grabs his suit jacket, heads out of the house.

INT. '69 MUSTANG - DAY

Deputy Loge watches the Range Rover through the windshield that the gully washer has washed off somewhat.

The cell phone rings, he answers it immediately.

DEPUTY LOGE
Sir, yes, sir.

He crinkles his brows.

DEPUTY LOGE
Are you sure, sir?

He listens for a moment, then shrugs.

DEPUTY LOGE
Okay, Detective. 10-4.

He flips the phone closed, then drives down the long gravel drive, pulls back onto the paved road.

He's about a quarter of a mile on his way back to town when a beat-up tan-and-white Ford F150 pickup passes him.

He crinkles his brows, watches in the sideview mirror the pickup hang a right down the gravel road he had just left.

Deputy Loge looks straight ahead again.

DEPUTY LOGE
Oh, my God!

Loge hangs an immediate u-turn, speeds back to the right turn. His tires kick up gravel as he floors the accelerator.

He slams the Mustang to a stop behind the pickup, jumps out, goes immediately to the back where he unlocks the Mustang's trunk. He unholsters his sidearm and slams the trunk closed.

Loge checks the pickup. It's empty. He looks at the front door of the house, expects it to open. It doesn't.

He assumes a combat stance.

He takes a deep, shuddering breath and gulps, shuts his eyes for a moment. He opens them again.

He instinctively reaches to his shoulder for his radio. He grits his teeth.

DEPUTY LOGE
Fuck!

He hears some noise from the back of the house. He runs around to the back, maintaining the combat stance with his gun raised.

There are two masked men, both clearly young. They drag Michaela and the boys out the back door. They hold weapons on their hostages.

DEPUTY LOGE
Sheriff's Office! On your knees!

The two masked men, Snyder and PHIL, freeze.

DEPUTY LOGE
Put your guns down, let your
hostages go, and get on the ground!!

Snyder rams his weapon's muzzle against Michaela's temple.

SNYDER
Put your gun down!

DEPUTY LOGE
You're not getting out of this. Now
surrender. No one needs to get hurt.

They start to back away.

DEPUTY LOGE
I said stop!!

Phil looks at Snyder.

PHIL
He doesn't have any back up. They
would have been here by now.

DEPUTY LOGE
Let the hostages go! I will shoot!!

They start to back away in earnest now.

KARLA comes out the back door. She has a hand pressed to a bleeding wound on her forehead.

KARLA
Michaela!!

Snyder points his pistol at Karla.

Loge puts a bullet square in Snyder's left temple.

Michaela screams.

Deputy Loge stares wide-eyed, his breathing comes in gasps. He white-knuckles the grip of his weapon.

Phil lets go of the boys, who run to their mother.

Deputy Loge rushes up to Phil, pulls the ski mask off, shoves Phil onto the ground on his belly. He puts his knee in the teenager's back as he handcuffs him. He flips Phil over.

Loge looks over his shoulder.

DEPUTY LOGE

Mrs. Tucker, did you tell anyone about this place?

Michaela, crying, clutches Timmy and Sandy to her as Karla holds her tight with an arm around her shoulders.

MICHAELA

No. Nobody. Nobody could've known. How did you know?

Deputy Loge turns his attention back to Phil.

DEPUTY LOGE

Who told you?

Phil spits at him.

DEPUTY LOGE

Who told you?!

PHIL

Awright, awright. It was --

INT. GREENWOOD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Det. Bailey, along with everyone else in the Detectives Bureau, immediately looks up as Deputy Loge crashes through the door, storms up to the desk of Det. Lundy on the phone.

Loge spins the man around in his chair, takes him by two fistfuls of his shirtfront, lifts him off his feet, slams Lundy against the nearby wall.

DEPUTY LOGE

You scum!! You goddamn traitor!!

Det. Bailey drops the file he's reviewing, rushes over.

DET. BAILEY

Loge, what the hell are you doing!?

Loge throws Lundy to the floor, where the man cowers. Loge points at him, his chest heave, his eyes blaze.

DEPUTY LOGE

Det. Bailey, sir, I'm placing this man under arrest for obstructing an ongoing investigation. He's a mole for the Ku Klux Klan and has been for years.

Det. Bailey stares at Lundy.

DET. BAILEY

What?!?

He looks hard at the deputy.

DET. BAILEY

You had better have proof, son.

DEPUTY LOGE

Sir, yes, sir, I do. Philip Leary gave me a complete confession, in front of witnesses.

Det. Bailey picks up a notepad off Lundy's desk. His expression gets angrier and angrier as he reads page after page after page of it.

He looks down at Lundy.

DET. BAILEY

Were you ever going to share any of this, Jeff? How much else do you know that we don't?

Lundy narrows his eyes.

Deputy Loge grabs him by fistfuls of his shirtfront again, drags him to his feet.

DEPUTY LOGE

Det. Bailey asked you a question.

Det. Lundy shoves Loge.

DET. LUNDY

Get your filthy hands off me. Who the hell do you think you are?

DET. BAILEY

YOU SONOFABITCH!!!

The entire room goes silent as everyone stares at him.

Det. Bailey punches his best friend in the mouth, Det. Lundy slams back against the wall.

Det. Lundy works his jaw as he stares hard at Bailey.

DET. BAILEY

No wonder this investigation's taken so long and gone nowhere all week. Jeff, they're just kids, out there, barely three steps ahead of a half-cocked lunatic.

Bailey's eyes go even wider.

DET. BAILEY

Oh, my God. No wonder I've never been able to solve the Nobuo case. You're my best friend, and you watched that case gnaw at me, damn near eat me alive.

He takes a couple of steps back, puts a hand on his forehead.

DET. BAILEY

Tony, that poor kid. Everything he reported to me was true. No one believed him. Even I started not to.

His fist clenches and he begins to raise it as if to strike Lundy again. He then stares down at his fist, releases it, flexes his fingers.

DET. BAILEY

You were best man at my wedding. You're Shawn's godfather. Oh, my God. I entrusted you with teaching my son right from wrong.

He straightens.

DET. BAILEY

(icily, his teeth clenched)
Loge, get this man out of my sight.

DEPUTY LOGE

Sir, with pleasure, sir.

He grabs Lundy by the arm, leads him away.

Det. Bailey does a quick rifling of the contents atop Det. Lundy's desk, then rushes out of the Detectives Bureau with the man's notepad and some other papers.

INT. ELIAS'S HUMMER - NIGHT

Elias and George sit there, staring out the windshield. Elias puts the mostly-empty vodka bottle to his lips, upends it.

George watches him.

The police scanner crackles.

GEORGE

Elias, he's your own boy, my nephew.

ELIAS

He's no son of mine. God would never give me a son like that.

GEORGE

Elias, that's not you talking.
That's the booze and what that guy did to --

Elias pounces on his brother, wraps his steel grip around George's throat, puts his face right in his brother's.

George's nostrils flare, and he cringes as Elias breathes heavily in his face.

ELIAS

Don't ever mention that thing to me.

Elias releases him, sits back.

George massages his throat.

GEORGE

Don't ever do that to me again.

George coughs, spits out the open window.

ELIAS

Oh, yeah? How 'bout this then?

Elias reaches under the seat, withdraws a Beretta 92FS handgun, points it at George.

George stares into his brother's wide bloodshot eyes.

GEORGE

For the love of God, Elias.

Elias finishes the vodka, throws the bottle out the window.

His cell phone rings. Elias puts it on speaker.

DET. BAILEY

Dr. Tucker, this is Detective Jubal Bailey. Good news, sir. Your son has been spotted in Easley, outside Greenville.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE COMMUNICATIONS - SAME

Det. Bailey regards his interested audience of Nadine, Paul, Emilia, and Loge hovering around him.

Bart hangs back, his arms crossed, his expression stern.

Det. Bailey also has his phone on speaker.

ELIAS (V.O.)

All the way up there, Detective?

DET. BAILEY

Yes, sir. We were surprised, too, how far they'd gotten.

ELIAS (V.O.)

That's excellent. I'll get up there immediately. You will meet me there with my wife, of course.

DET. BAILEY

Of course. Sorry she hasn't talked to you. We've asked her to keep all the phones free, in case Rob calls. We're going to continue to ask her to do that for the time being.

ELIAS (V.O.)

Understandable. I'm on my way now. I can't wait to see my son again.

DET. BAILEY

I knew you'd feel that way, sir. I'm on my way myself.

He and Elias hang up at the same time.

Det. Bailey looks at them.

DET. BAILEY

I sure hope this works.

INT. HUMMER - NIGHT

The two brothers wait, stare at the phone. It doesn't ring.

ELIAS

That's it. They got him somehow.

George nods. He lifts his notepad.

GEORGE

This tip the motorist called in, the one about the underpass, is going to be our last one.

Elias gets them underway.

GEORGE

Elias, where are we going?

ELIAS

You didn't believe that horseshit about Easley? That pig isn't going to send us so far off course unless the boys are actually nearby.

He revs the engine, George grips the dashboard.

EXT. BENEATH HIGHWAY 385 UNDERPASS - NIGHT

The storm has returned, but the four boys are under covers, and, given the detritus of empty cans and discarded candy bar wrappers lying about, they're comfortable inside and out.

They lie around the fire, telling stories.

KELLY

Here's a great one. I told this one to my clueless parents. Deer-in-the-headlights stares, the both of them -- it was priceless. I love 'em, but they sure are stupid.

INT. CLASSIC PRIVATE SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

Thirty BOYS, ages 15 and 16, their faces perfectly shaved, their hair perfectly coiffed, their insignia'ed blazers perfectly pressed, sit ramrod upright behind their desks situated in perfect rows. The boys stare straight ahead, their hands flat on their desks. No one dares say a word.

The TEACHER, despotic smirk on his bewhiskered face, tyrannical glint in his cold grey eyes, strolls up and down the rows, slaps his pointer stick onto his left palm in time with each step loud on the ancient wood floor.

At the front of the class, the teacher turns, slaps the stick one last time, hard.

TEACHER

Stand!!

Immediately and in perfect unison the thirty boys stand beside their desks, ramrod straight.

BOYS

(in thunderous unison)

Sir, yes, sir!!

INT. SAME CLASSROOM - NEXT DAY

TEACHER

Stand!!

Immediately and in perfect unison the thirty boys stand beside their desks, ramrod straight.

BOYS

(in thunderous unison)

Sir, yes, sir!!

INT. SAME CLASSROOM - NEXT DAY

TEACHER

Stand!!

Immediately and in perfect unison the thirty boys stand beside their desks, ramrod straight.

BOYS

(in thunderous unison)

Sir, yes, sir!!

INT. SAME CLASSROOM - NEXT DAY

TEACHER

Stand!!

Immediately and in perfect unison twenty-nine boys stand beside their desks, ramrod straight.

BOYS

(in thunderous unison)

Sir, yes, sir!!

The teacher knits his brows as he squints at JOSH BRENINGER, 15, who remains seated, stares straight ahead. Josh curls the corners of his mouth upwards.

The teacher moves to stand beside Josh's desk.

TEACHER
Mr. Breninger, stand.

Josh remains still and silent.

The teacher slams his stick down onto Josh's desk.

Josh fights to keep from flinching.

TEACHER
Stand!!

Josh remains exactly how he is.

INT. SAME CLASSROOM - NEXT DAY

The teacher moves to stand beside Josh's desk.

TEACHER
Mr. Breninger, stand.

Josh remains still and silent.

The teacher slams his stick down onto Josh's desk.

TEACHER
Stand!!

Josh remains exactly how he is.

INT. SAME CLASSROOM - NEXT DAY

TEACHER
Stand!!

Josh remains seated.

INT. SAME CLASSROOM - NEXT DAY

TEACHER
Stand!!

Josh remains seated.

INT. SAME CLASSROOM - NEXT DAY

TEACHER

Stand!!

Immediately and in perfect unison all thirty boys stand beside their desks, ramrod straight.

BOYS

(in thunderous unison)

Sir, yes, sir!!

The smiling teacher, those cold grey eyes alit with triumph, walks up to Josh, who keeps his stare straight ahead.

TEACHER

Mr. Breninger, I knew you would finally stand.

Josh eases his expression with quiet confidence. He turns his head, looks the tyrant straight into those grey, evil eyes.

JOSH

Yeah, but I'm sitting in my heart.

EXT. BENEATH HIGHWAY 385 UNDERPASS - NIGHT

Kelly clears his throat.

The boys are silent.

Rob spits into the flames.

ROB

That story's bullshit.

MATT

It's not bullshit, Rob. It's a great story.

ROB

Some kid go up against a teacher like that? Bullshit. Mattie, would you say that to that teacher?

MATT

Yes. Yeah.

Rob shoots him a look.

MATT

Well, no.
 (quickly)
 But I'd want to!

Rob rolls his eye.

ROB

Adults, they got all the power.

Kelly chortles.

KELLY

Only if you give it to them.

Tony stares hard-eyed into the fire.

TONY

That teacher sure didn't have any,
 not for just that moment. Woulda
 been worth the five-day suspension
 that kid probably got just for the
 look on that asshole's face.

KELLY

Amen. Rule #6, brother: You gotta
 stick together, you're going to
 survive in this world.

Tony stares even harder into the fire, stabs viciously at it.

TONY

(teeth clenched)
 They're all fucking assholes.

EXT. BENEATH HIGHWAY 385 UNDERPASS - DAY

Matt awakens. His eyes -- and his grin -- widen when he finds himself wrapped in Tony's arms.

Rob sits there, stares at the two of them.

Matt clears his throat, sits up as Tony stirs awake.

Tony sits bolt upright.

TONY

Our stuff!!

Rob nods.

Matt jumps to his feet.

MATT

That bastard! He took everything!

He looks at Rob, then puts his hand to his back pocket.

MATT

My wallet. That sneaky sonofabitch.
I didn't even wake up while he
slipped it out of my pocket.

Tony checks his own pocket.

TONY

Fuck. He got me too.

He looks at Rob.

TONY

You?

Rob nods.

ROB

Wad and everything.

TONY

Goddammit, Rob!

ROB

Whadya bustin' my chops for? What,
it's my fault we dropped our guard
around that bullshitting con artist?
He was softening us up with that
bullshit story of his.

TONY

I didn't say it was your fault, man.

ROB

That's right, you haven't said or
done much of anything. You worthless
faggot.

TONY

At least I'm not crashing around
like some jealous bitch, you goddamn
Abercrombie & Fitch drone!

Rob lunges for Tony, and the two boys are soon rolling on the ground, landing blows on each other.

Matt grabs each by the back of his collar, jerks them to their feet. He holds them apart, the muscles and veins of his arms bulging.

MATT
Just cool it!

He lets them go.

Rob and Tony start to go for each other again.

MATT
GODDAMMIT!!!!

Rob and Tony stop, stunned.

Rob stares at Matt's fists clenched at his sides. Rob gulps.

Matt's breathing comes in gasps, he blinks sweat out of his eyes. His whole body trembles. He lifts his fists in front of his face.

Tony and Rob take a step back.

Matt looks from them to his fists, his eyes widen. His breathing calms, he stops trembling, his fists unclench. He flexes his fingers.

He looks at Rob with blinking eyes.

ROB
Mattie? You okay?

MATT
I...I don't know.

He lets out a pent-up breath, manages a small laugh.

MATT
Jesus.

He looks at Tony.

MATT
Not bad, huh, for a tennis pussy?

Tony lets loose with a nervous chuckle.

Rob holds out his hand to Tony.

ROB
Sorry you're such a worthless
faggot.

Rob grins.

Tony shakes Rob's hand, grins back at him.

TONY

Sorry you're such a jealous bitch.

Rob shrugs. He glances at Matt.

ROB

Whadaya do? He's kinda worth it.

Tony glances at Matt too, then looks back at Rob, winks.

TONY

Kinda. He does have a nice ass.

ROB

I'm an abs man, myself. Your cousin.
Damn, man: now there's a six-pack.

TONY

Mike's always kept himself in shape.

MATT

Ah, guys. Crisis. Y'know. Can we
just try to figure out what we're
going to do, now that we're
completely broke?

He pokes around, picks up a piece of cardboard on which Kelly has scrawled "Sorry, you three -- Rule #1 Always look out for #1". Matt shows it to them.

MATT

Shit. So much for Rule #6.

EXT. OLD BARN - DAY

Two pickups speed up to the broken-down building, a pile of men and a couple of teenagers race over to Elias and George standing beside the Hummer.

Elias stares at them.

ELIAS

Who's left?

MR. LEARY

Practically no one. The authorities
raided your secret room and got
everything: names, addresses, guns,
money, and proof of everything the
Klan has done going back to Evans.

Elias slams his fist onto the Hummer's hood.

ELIAS

I'm going to kill that bitch!!

MR. LEARY

I gathered who I could, hightailed it outta there. They got Philip in custody, but I was able to get by the school and get Chuck and Daniel. Elias, they murdered Hambly's boy.

The father pulls his two teenage sons beside him, a strong arm around each.

MR. LEARY

You know, Elias, we're behind you all the way. Whatever you need.

Elias first puts his hand on Leary's shoulder, then solemnly looks at each teenager in turn.

ELIAS

Chuck, Daniel, you got to stay strong. You're our future now.

They nod.

MR. LEARY

What do you want us to do, Elias?

ELIAS

Spread out, find those three faggots. This is now search and destroy. For God and our homes.

George's eyes go wide as he watches his brother pull the Beretta from under his shirt.

Elias holds the weapon up in the air.

ELIAS

The fight's for real this time!

George gulps as everyone, especially the two teenagers, cheers and claps.

EXT. A RANDOM HOUSE - DAY

The three boys, ragged and filthy, press themselves on their haunches against the house. Their eyes reflect their exhaustion.

Matt looks beside him at Tony.

MATT
What did you see?

TONY
No one's home, and there are two
pies cooling on the counter.

He holds his stomach.

TONY
God, I'm hungry.

Rob and Matt glance at each other.

Tony moves to stand up.

TONY
I tested the door. It's unlocked.

Matt shakes his head.

MATT
Break into somebody's house? No. Uh-
uh. I can't do that.

ROB
Me, neither.

TONY.
It's not breaking in. I told you:
the door's unlocked.

Matt grabs Tony by the arm.

MATT
Don't do it, Tony. Serious, man. I
mean it: Don't.

Tony looks at Matt's hand, then at him square in the eye.

TONY
Are you stopping me?

MATT
You're not stealing their stuff.

Tony roughly pulls his arm out of Matt's grasp.

He stands, and Rob and Matt do too.

Rob stands in front of Tony, faces him. He puts his finger on
Tony's chest.

ROB
Don't do it, Tony.

He hooks his thumb over his shoulder.

ROB
Now, let's get outta here.

Tony's jaw muscles work furiously.

TONY
I'm hungry, and they've got food.

MATT
We're not doing it, Tony.

TONY
Rule #1: Always --

Rob stares at him aghast.

ROB
Oh, we're getting our advice from that jerk now?!? He's the whole goddamn reason we're hungry!

Rob throws up his hands, shakes his head, steps back.

ROB
Y'know, Matt and I've given you chance after chance. There's something really twisted up inside of you. Why don't you just go? Just get out of here already. Go!

Tony stares wide-eyed at Rob. He blanches, starts to breathe hard. Big tears drop down his cheeks.

TONY
You! It was you that cut me loose!

Rob darts his eyes at Matt. He gulps. He looks back at Tony, but he can't meet his eyes.

TONY
You killed Derek!!

ROB
(frantically)
I didn't. I swear to God, Tony, I didn't have anything to do with that part. Oh, God, please believe me. You've got to believe me, Tony.

Tony stares at him even more wide-eyed.

TONY

They wanted you to kill me with that bat, literally beat me to death. And Jesus Christ, you damn near almost did it.

Rob, looking like he might vomit, barely manages a nod.

Matt looks from one to the other.

MATT

Rob, what's he talking about?

TONY

Your "best friend", Fingerhut, belongs to the Ku Klux Klan.

He looks at Rob again.

TONY

You ruined my life.

ROB

I saved your life.

TONY

I HAD A LIFE!!!

Tony pounds his fist against his own chest.

TONY

It was mine, and it was good, and you all took it from me!!

He grabs Rob by his shirtfront, slams him against the house.

Tony stares hard at Rob, who does nothing to resist what Tony dishes out, and Tony's eyes blaze as he bares his clenched teeth at him.

Suddenly Tony deflates. He lets go of Rob, just stands there, his thin frame trembling as tears drop down his gaunt cheeks.

TONY

Why didn't you just take that bat to me? Goddammit, Rob, why'd you leave me like this?

Matt reaches out his hand, places it gently on Tony's arm.

MATT
C'mon, Tony. Nothing's better than
being alive. Right?

Tony slaps the tears off his cheeks.

Matt looks at Rob.

MATT
Rob?

Rob takes a deep, shuddering breath.

ROB
Now do you see, Mattie, why I can
never go back?

MATT
Your whole family?

Rob nods.

MATT
Is Dr. Tucker looking for us?

Rob nods emphatically.

ROB
And, if he finds us, he's going to
kill us.

Both Matt and Tony stare at him.

ROB
(nodding)
Kill us.

TONY
Even you?

Rob gulps.

ROB
Yeah. We're not human to him. We
don't deserve to live.

Matt suddenly punches Rob in the chest, takes his best friend
totally off guard.

MATT
You sonofabitch! Why didn't you tell
me?!? I thought we were best
friends!

ROB

Mattie, how could I tell you something like that? "Oh, yeah, did I mention my whole family has been a bunch of murdering bigots for generations now?" Oh, I don't know, Mattie, how about, "My dad's been beating me every day my whole life"? But what do I have to complain about? I get a brand new BMW out of it, right?

MATT

We could have told my folks or Coach or Doc. Any of them would have listened and done something.

Without warning Matt grabs Rob in a tight embrace.

MATT

(in Rob's ear)

God damn you, Rob, God damn you!! I would have helped. You didn't have to lie to me! You didn't have to go through all this alone.

Rob returns the tightness of his best friend's embrace.

All three look up as they hear a car's tires on the gravel driveway.

They take off back into the woods.

EXT. INTERSTATE 85 UNDERPASS - SAME

Some of the group of scruffy, homeless young people dance to the loud music while others lie about, smoke marijuana, drink beer and cheap wine.

Elias rushes forward, pushes his way through the small crowd, starts to kick their meagre possessions, scatters them. He kicks the brand-new radio, it smashes against the concrete. The music goes immediately silent.

Elias scans the gathering for the boys. He cranes his head to look at George, who's making sure no kids run off.

George shakes his head.

ELIAS

I'm looking for three teenage boys. Clean-cut, well-fed, have no business out here with you types.

He sneers at the couple of black kids. He spits on two boys who a moment before had been kissing.

Kelly steps forward, his arm draped over PATSY's shoulders.

Kelly holds up his beer.

KELLY

Chill, dawg. Sit down. Relax. Have a brew. There's a-plenty. All are welcome. *Mi casa, su casa.*

With one swipe, Elias knocks the beer out of his hand, with another swipe he knocks Kelly's arm off the girl's shoulders. He shoves her aside, then Kelly in the chest.

Kelly lands in the dirt on his backside with a thud.

KELLY

Didn't want a beer, all you had to do was pass. No need to get rough.

Elias bends over, grabs Kelly by two fistfuls of his filthy shirtfront, pulls the boy to his feet. He puts his face right in Kelly's.

ELIAS

I think you know exactly the three boys I mean.

Kelly makes a wide gesture as he smiles broadly.

KELLY

I have lots of friends.

Elias shakes him, then backhands him, hard.

George steps forward.

GEORGE

Elias.

ELIAS

Stay out of this, George.

He backhands Kelly again.

GEORGE

Elias!

Kelly's smile broadens. Blood drips from his busted lip.

KELLY

Yeah, memory serves I encountered a threesome in my recent travels.

Kelly throws his arms out again.

KELLY

We have them to thank for this largesse on this fine night.

Elias narrows his eyes.

Kelly cocks his head, his eyes glint with mischief.

KELLY

Y'see, I might have helped myself to certain of their provisions. A large wad of cash in particular. But sssh -- you didn't hear that from me.

GEORGE

That little thieving bastard stole all their money!

Elias lets Kelly fall to the ground, kicks him in the side.

ELIAS

Where's my son?

GEORGE

Elias! Stop! He's just a kid!

He kicks Kelly again.

Kelly squirms, but his broad, butter-wouldn't-melt smile remains in place.

Elias kicks him again.

KELLY

Rule #3, man.

Elias rams his boot into the teenager's side again, then stands there, his chest heaves, his fists clench.

ELIAS

What could that possibly mean?

Kelly chortles, then coughs, spits some blood.

KELLY

"Don't tell adults shit."

Elias moves to kick the boy again, but George grabs his shoulder, spins his brother around.

GEORGE

Enough! They're not here, and he's not going to tell us anything. Let's get outta here. We can't afford to stay in one place too long.

Elias storms back to the Hummer, stops, spins around.

George catches up with him, his eyes widen as he watches his brother take the Beretta from his back waistband, stalk back toward the kids.

George grabs his wrist, stops him.

GEORGE

What are you doing?!

ELIAS

How dare that little snot think he's got control over me?

GEORGE

He's a kid, Elias. He's a cocky, strung-out, thieving little shit of a kid. What's wrong with you?

Slowly, Elias lowers the weapon.

George points at the Hummer's passenger's side.

GEORGE

Get in, Elias.

Elias takes a step back toward the underpass.

GEORGE

Get in the vehicle, Elias!

Elias does as his big brother orders him.

George hops in behind the wheel, kicks up gravel getting them out to there.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Several miles later George stops them on the side of the desolate country road, kills the engine.

GEORGE

What was that back there, Elias?
Pulling a gun on a bunch of kids.
Are you insane?

He runs a hand through his hair, stares out the windshield filthy despite the recent downpours.

GEORGE

I think it's time we brought this
madness to a halt.

Elias holds the weapon in his lap.

ELIAS

(as if to himself)
Thinks he has control over me. No
one has control over me.

George reaches out to put his hand on his brother's shoulder.

GEORGE

C'mon, Elias, let's go home. It's
time to stop this.

Elias's eyes blaze as he turns them on George, points the Beretta right in his brother's face.

ELIAS

You weren't there for me then. Why
would you be there for me now?

George gulps.

GEORGE

We were all there for you, Elias.

Hot tears well in Elias's eyes.

ELIAS

You were my big brother, George. Why
didn't you stop him? You could've
stopped him. He hurt me, George.
Real bad.

George's voice is a whisper as he can't help but keep his eyes focused on his brother's twitching trigger finger.

GEORGE

I didn't know, Elias. I am so, so
sorry. If I had, you know I would
have protected you.

Elias calms. He looks squarely at his big brother.

ELIAS

No, George, I don't know that.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Matt, Tony, and Rob walk single file, not saying a word.

A small river gurgles nearby, Matt diverts them to its shore.

Rob and Tony follow him.

Matt takes a bar of soap out of his pack. He strips off all his clothes, wades out into the gently-flowing water.

Tony and Rob look at each other, then strip off all their clothes too, join Matt out in the water.

Matt at first offers Rob the bar, but then signals for his best friend to wait. Matt wades over to him and, slowly and gently, wipes the bar over Rob's wet right arm, then his shoulder, then his chest.

Rob reacts as if Matt is touching him with a live wire. Gritting his teeth, working his jaw muscles, he stares at Matt. He can't stop blinking and gulping.

Tony wades up to Rob, takes the bar from Matt, washes Rob's left arm, then begins on Rob's back.

Rob blinks faster and faster as his eyes refuse not to overflow with tears.

Rob continues to swallow hard as his tears flow freely now. His breathing comes in quick, spitting gasps. He turns his brimming eyes to Matt.

Matt nods, his expression gentle.

Finally, Rob can't hold it in any longer -- and, at last, he stops even trying.

He screams.

From the depths of his wounded and tortured soul, Robert Brace Tucker screams.

Tony and Matt wrap their arms tightly around Rob as Rob sobs, wails, and pounds Matt's back with his white-knuckled fists.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Det. Bailey screeches his car to a halt, hops out. He ducks under the "Police Line" yellow tape, hurries up to the driver's side of the abandoned Hummer.

He looks up.

DET. BAILEY
Anyone confirm these plates?

Deputy Loge rushes over to him. He flips open a notepad.

DEPUTY LOGE
Sir, registered to Dr. Elias S. Tucker, sir.

DET. BAILEY
We need the coroner down here ASAP.

DEPUTY LOGE
Sir, already called her, sir.

DET. BAILEY
Good man.

He points at him.

DET. BAILEY
Loge, when we ever get five seconds to breathe again, remind me to get on your case about the sir sandwiches.

DEPUTY LOGE
Sir, ye --

Deputy Loge spies someone waving for him, rushes off.

Det. Bailey walks around the vehicle, steps up into the passenger's seat. He snaps on latex gloves, gently moves George's head, half of it gone. He moves the body so he can retrieve the man's wallet. He extracts the driver's license.

DET. BAILEY
(to himself)
George T. Tucker, brother of said Elias S. Tucker, cardiologist and pillar of the community.

He looks out the smeared and splattered windshield, scans the area all around with pleading eyes.

EXT. LAKE GREENWOOD - NIGHT

The small river empties out into the north end of the lake.

Matt breaks the silence.

MATT
So, what's the plan?

ROB
The first cop we see, we just explain everything. It can't be Greenwood S.O., though. Or the police department.

MATT
Why?

ROB
Just trust me, Mattie.

Rob looks from his best friend to Tony.

ROB
Deal?

MATT
Deal.

TONY
Deal.

QUICK FLASHBACK

PAUL
(his expression and tone stern)
I'll get to you in a second.

BACK TO SCENE

Matt shuts his eyes for a moment, takes a deep breath.

All three boys stand a little straighter when they stumble upon a log cabin, a blazing campfire, girls roasting marshmallows. Radio music acts as the backdrop to their laughter and conversation.

They walk up to them.

ROB
Hi.

The girls look up at them.

REBECCA beckons them with a wave and a big smile.

The three boys sit amongst them, each taking a stick with a marshmallow on the end of it.

Rob, Matt, and Tony glance at each other, and try not to make their hunger so obvious as they devour their marshmallows.

A couple of men step out of one of the cabins.

DAD #1

Rebecca, just where did these boys come from?

ROB

We were hiking, sir, and we saw the campfire. Your daughter kindly invited us over to sit and relax.

DAD #1

Okay, Eddie Haskell, sit and relax where we can see your hands.

Matt clears his throat, licks his lips.

MATT

Um...Sir, do you have anything in that cooler maybe?

The two fathers glance at each other, Dad #1 opens the cooler, hands each one of them a sandwich.

They both watch as the three boys tear into their meals.

DAD #1

You're awfully dirty and hungry for one night's casual hike.

The other father puts his hand on his partner's shoulder, leads him back to the front of the cabin.

DAD #2

We'll just be sitting over here, cleaning our guns. You kids, don't mind us, especially you boys.

Rebecca and another girl exchange pained looks.

EXT. LAKE GREENWOOD - NIGHT

Close to the shore, kids play and splash and laugh.

Rob laughs the loudest.

Matt and Tony relax away from the others and further out in the water.

Matt watches as the water line ripples across Tony's chest.

Grinning, Matt moves over to Tony, who watches him with a growing grin of his own. Matt lifts Tony's hand out of the water, runs his own fingers up and down Tony's, then brushes Tony's stubbled cheek.

The bonfire blazing on the beach catches in Tony's smiling eyes.

Matt takes Tony's hand again, pulls him toward the silhouette of the island that dominates the middle of the lake.

EXT. ISLAND ON LAKE - NIGHT

Matt and Tony's naked bodies glisten with sweat as they make howling-at-the-moon love on the soft moss.

EXT. ISLAND ON LAKE - MORNING

Tony and Matt slip on their boxer shorts, dive into the water. Within minutes they're on the shore of the lake and dressed in their jeans and shoes and are pulling on their shirts. They walk up to Rob.

Rob looks at the both of them, smiles.

Matt wipes at his mouth.

MATT

You sure you're not mad?

Rob rolls his eyes.

ROB

I can't believe, Mattie, you even have to ask that. I'm not mad. I'm happy for you. Jesus, man.

Tony catches sight of Dad #1 waving them over.

DAD #1

Hey, come over here for a minute.

Rob, Matt, and Tony meet the two men away from the girls.

DAD #2

We were up the road at a store this morning, and we saw a flyer on a bulletin board about you three.

Tony and Matt look at Rob, who straightens, looks the man in the eye.

ROB

We're going home, sir. We promise. We know running away was the wrong thing to do.

DAD #1

Running away's always the wrong thing to do.

He hooks his thumb over his shoulder.

DAD #1

Get your stuff. I'll drive you home.

Rob turns around.

ROB

Tony? Matt?

They both nod.

MATT

I gotta take a serious leak.

TONY

Yeah, me too.

Dad #1 points.

DAD #1

The boy's bath house is over there. Take time to clean up some.

He checks his watch.

DAD #1

Be back in fifteen minutes. I'll be in the parking lot.

Matt and Tony pick up their packs, head off. Rob picks up his pack and follows after them.

INT. BOYS BATH HOUSE - DAY

Five minutes later Matt steps out of the stall.

MATT

God, I really had to --

He gasps, stands stalk still.

Elias, splattered with George's blood and brain matter, has the Beretta pointed directly at Tony and Rob.

Elias shifts his narrowed eyes at Matt, holds up a finger.

ELIAS

One word, one sound, and --

He takes a step forward, puts the muzzle of the Beretta within an inch of his son's face.

Rob gulps.

Elias points at their packs.

ELIAS

Pick up your stuff.

As they do so, he steps two paces over to the door, never taking his eyes or the weapon off them. He whistles.

Leary and his two sons rush in. They seize Tony, Rob, and Matt, ram the boys' arms up behind them. They clamp their hands over the boys' mouths.

ELIAS

Don't let anyone see us.

The three boys fight being led away but to no avail.

EXT. LAKE GREENWOOD PARKING LOT - DAY

Det. Bailey pulls his car to a halt, hops out as Loge in his patrol car and a couple of South Carolina State Troopers in theirs pull up.

Both Dads rush up to Bailey.

DET. BAILEY

Thanks for calling.

DAD #1

That one boy, the tall one, he promised they were returning home.

DAD #2

Yeah. All three of them seemed real eager to have us drive them home.

Bailey stiffens, rushes back to his car, pops the trunk. He rifles his files.

The others come up behind him.

Det. Bailey assembles a series of photographs. He turns to the men, shows them the photographs.

DET. BAILEY

This big old oak, it appears again
and again in these people's records,
going back years. Do any of you know
where this is?

They shake their heads.

Det. Bailey looks at the two dads.

DET. BAILEY

Sirs?

Both fathers shakes their heads.

DAD #1

I've lived here all my life, but,
sorry, Detective, I have no idea
where that is.

Bailey gets ready to curse, then stops, looks up.

DET. BAILEY

Yeah, but there's someone who does.

INT. GREENWOOD COUNTY DETENTION CENTER - DAY

Bailey slaps the photographs, one after another after another, in front of Lundy.

Lundy refuses to look down at them.

DET. BAILEY

Look at them, Jeff.

He continues to refuse.

Bailey puts his hand on the back of Lundy's head, pushes so that Lundy's face sits inches from the photographs.

DET. BAILEY

Look at them!

Lundy knocks Bailey's arm away, straightens up in his seat.

DET. LUNDY
It's an old tree. What about it?

DET. BAILEY
Where is it?

Lundy glares at him.

DET. LUNDY
Do you really think I'm going to
tell you that?

Bailey leans over the table towards him.

DET. BAILEY
The Jeff Lundy I know ran into a
burning building and saved an old
lady -- an old black lady. That Jeff
Lundy was a hero, he's a good man my
son looks up to. What happened to
him?

DET. LUNDY
This world's going to Hell, Jubal.

DET. BAILEY
Jeff, they're just three, scared
boys. Your boy is their age. What if
Steve told you he's gay?

DET. LUNDY
God wouldn't do that.

DET. BAILEY
What if He did? He did it to Tucker.

DET. LUNDY
No. No. That was Satan, the Great
Deceiver.

DET. BAILEY
Jeff, do you really believe that?

Lundy won't answer, just stares at him.

But the man's eyes brim.

Bailey pushes a couple of the photographs towards him.

DET. BAILEY
Where is this tree?

Lundy still won't say anything.

Bailey rushes around the table, spins Lundy's chair around, leans in close to him. He punctuates each shouted word with a jab to Lundy's chest.

DET. BAILEY
My best friend's still in there!!!

He slams his fist on the table.

DET. BAILEY
Where is THIS TREE?!!!

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Mr. Leary pulls the pickup to a halt, hops out. Elias hops out on the passenger's side and shoulders his large, bulging backpack. Both head to the truck's rear, where they help Chuck and Daniel get down the three boys, their hands tied behind their backs. They shove the boys toward the middle of the field.

Tony sees the huge, old, arthritic-limbed oak tree, refuses to go further. Chuck pushes him, but Tony digs his heels into the ground. His eyes are wide.

TONY
No! Don't make me! No! Please!!

Tony slams his eyes shut.

Elias looks at him, at the tree, back at him. He snorts.

ELIAS
You remember. That's good. No one's going to cut you free this time.

Elias glares at Rob.

Tony snaps his eyes open at Elias.

TONY
Please, Dr. Tucker. Please don't make me go near that thing again.

ELIAS
Then repent. Repent before the Lord thy God and He will fix your abomination.

Tony stares at him. His body stops trembling, and Tony stands up straight. He regards Elias with a suddenly calm and confident expression.

TONY
God, Dr. Tucker?

ELIAS
Yes. The Lord thy God. Repent and He
will fix you.

Tony continues to look at the man squarely. He looks at Matt and Rob, and he grins. He turns his attention back to Elias.

TONY
No.

ELIAS
Repent!

TONY
God can't fix me, Dr. Tucker, fix
us, because we're not broken. You're
the one who needs fixing, you sick,
twisted old bastard.

Elias slams his fist into Tony's midsection, then motions for Chuck to proceed with the doubled-over teenager.

ROB
Help!! Please!!

MATT
Help!! Help!!

ELIAS
Shout all you want. There isn't
anybody for miles and miles, and
nobody but Klan has ever known about
this place.

Rob looks at Matt, nods. They stop shouting.

The group stops at the base of the tree. They line up Matt, Rob, and Tony side-by-side.

They look up at the sound of the second pickup coming to a halt beside the first. Two men hop out of it, pull metal stools out of the back bed, rush over to them.

Tony regards Elias with his mouth open.

TONY
Your own son. Rob was right.

Elias shrugs.

ELIAS
I'm God's soldier. Soldiers don't
question orders.

Tony turns his head to Rob.

TONY
I'm so sorry, Rob. I wish you could
have told somebody.

Rob nods, his body trembles.

MATT
(crying)
I don't want to die. I want to tell
Mom and Dad how sorry I am. I want
to hold my little brother again. I
didn't mean to call him a brat.

Tony looks from one friend, to the other, then at Elias.

TONY
You're evil.

Elias nods slowly.

ELIAS
I know you boys think that about me.
But I'm not. I must do this -- even
to you, Robert.

His voice catches.

ELIAS
There are three twelve-year-old boys
out there I'm saving. Can't you
understand I have to do this?
Please, Robert, I need you to
understand that.

Rob shakes his head.

ROB
I can't, Dad. I won't.

Elias unshoulders the backpack, removes the three lengths of rope, each fashioned with a hangman's knot. He walks up, slips a noose one at a time around each of their necks: Rob begs him, Tony just glares at him, Matt cries.

Elias steps back, motions for the Klansmen to set up the stools, which Rob, Tony, and Matt are then forced to mount. The ropes are then swung around the thick overhead limb and expertly knotted off.

A warm summertime breeze rustles the leaves of the old tree. Matt calms as he feels the sun's rays on his cheeks.

He manages a small grin as he stands up straight, squares his strong shoulders.

MATT
Dr. Tucker, sir.

Elias looks at him.

ELIAS
(impatiently)
What?

MATT
I might be standing up here on this stool, but I'm sitting in my heart.

Elias pinches his lips together. He takes a couple of paces back, pulls his Bible out of the backpack, opens it.

ELIAS
"If a man lies with a male as he lies with --"

ROB
Dad, I repent!

Tony and Matt shoot horrified looks at him.

TONY
Rob!

MATT
Rob! No! Don't!

Rob ignores them.

ROB
Dad, I repent. I want the Lord my God to fix me and heal me of my abomination. Please, Dad, save me from myself.

Elias, eyes excited, beams a smile, rushes up to his son.

Rob manages a moment's glance at his two friends, then returns his full attention to his father.

ROB
(eyes blazing, teeth clenched)
You will never hurt me again!

Rob takes two, quick, deep breaths and cannonballs off the stool. At the last possible moment he uses his muscled legs as powerful coils, smashes the full soles of his heavy hiking boots into Elias's face.

Tony and Matt squeeze their eyes shut at the sound of the sickening SNAP of Rob's neck.

Rob's body spasms, then is still.

MATT	TONY
NOOOOO!!!!	Mattie, don't look! Don't look, Matt!!

Det. Bailey races his car up to the scene, halfway into the middle of the field, before he stops it, hops out, his weapon already drawn.

DET. BAILEY
Greenwood County Sheriff's Office!
On the ground! NOW!!!

Joined by Loge and other personnel, he rushes forward.

A STATE TROOPER gets on his knee beside Elias. The trooper checks Elias, then looks at Bailey, shakes his head.

Bailey pulls the noose from around Rob, lowers the boy gently to the ground. He puts his fingers on Rob's carotid. His head drops as his shoulders sag.

While another STATE TROOPER helps Tony, Deputy Loge gets the noose from around Matt, who immediately pulls him into a desperate hug.

Matt sobs into the front of Loge's T-shirt.

Loge stares wide-eyed at Rob's still body, then at Elias's as he strokes Matt's hair.

INT. GREENWOOD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Tony looks up, sees his parents coming down the hall. He rushes into the waiting arms of his father, who hugs him so hard it's almost as if father and son become one.

Bart weeps openly.

Emilia wraps them both in her arms.

EXT. GREENWOOD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

A crowd has gathered outside. Deputy Loge and another DEPUTY pull up to the curb, get out, yank Eric from the back seat, Eric's handcuffed hands behind his back.

Caleb rushes forward to get at him. Other members of the Eagles football team, especially Jack, hold him back. Caleb remains frantic, his prized Stetson hat falls onto the ground, Caleb grinds it under his boot, he's so focused on tearing Eric to shreds.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Det. Bailey and Deputy Loge watch as, with great care, the forensics team removes a skull from the deep grave dug in the grey sandy loam. One FORENSICS TEAM MEMBER hands it off to the deputy, who hands it off to the detective.

Bailey walks it over to the small tarp where the rest of the skeletal remains have been laid out. He gets down on his haunches, sets the skull down where it should be, then reaches out, runs his finger along the stitched name still legible on the right breast of the letterman jacket. "Derek" the stitching reads.

EXT. FIELD - DAWN

Fall-colored leaves drift from the old oak's gnarled boughs.

Matt, standing tall, watches with a contented grin as Tony, well along the way to filling his clothes back out, climbs the tree with an expression of triumph.

MATT (V.O.)

Some sociologist guy once wrote that
we don't see the world like it
really is but we see it like it's
through a dirty window, smeared with
all that crap we pile up through
life like prejudice, hurt,
lies...and hate.

Face it, that guy was right. But I
also know there's something a
helluva lot more powerful that can
clean that window -- I've seen it,
I've felt it, I've received it --
and that's...love.

FADE OUT