

crashingMTN

Joshua VS

DISCLAIMER

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

Only diegetic sound. No score.

PART I

Rinse the blade.

ANGLE GRINDER.

FABRICATION BAY - COMMERCIAL SHELL - DALLAS - DAY

His left glove pins the sheetmetal to the edge. The steel keens under the wheel and sparks like sungrit burst and skitter and die across the darkness of the floor.

The chainlink shakes.

GC (OS)
Yo. STURGILL.

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

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

They stride past the Crew bent to ductwork.

GC
(into phone)
You send the lien to Lee and if he
dont answer you drive to his house
and you wake his ass up.

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

GC
(into phone)
Its business. I really dont give a
damn what you say.

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

STURGILL (VO)
Its no accident.

STAGING YARD - DAY

The Child inside her pulls her off center like a stone that kicks. One hand on the grab handle and the other on Sturgills shoulder MARY CLAIRE (25) takes a ginger step down from the drivers seat of a F150 XL mudder.

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

CLAIRE (VO)
But who would you sue?

STURGILLS TRUCK (MOVING) - MIDTOWN - SUNSET

STURGILL
Its a breach of contract Claire.

CLAIRE
But does a verbal count as a breach?

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

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

STURGILL
Who told you to bring the mail.

CLAIRE
I was on the way out.

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

Spines gone nerveless Souls shuffle past storefronts boarded like eyelids stooping and curling between charcoal tarp leantos strung out along both sides of the trenches their bodies unhinged like naked birds encroaching a furnace of rags and the gutters of drumfire and flood rot.

CLAIRE
Its a check. Five hundred and forty nine dollars.

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

CLAIRE
Im kidding. Kind of.

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

STURGILL

You wanna camp out here next month.

She unfolds the check then tears along the perforation.

STURGILL

The kids first sights gonna be asphalt and piss.

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

STURGILL

Were two months behind and one month away and youre over here laughin it up like we won the damn Powerball.

KITCHEN - LOW INCOME HOUSING - NIGHT

Sturgill dumps a tin pillbox into his palm.

A heap of phosphorescent tablets. Clear as dreams. Real as stones.

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

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

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

PUNDIT (VO)

Surged 116 percent in just one year.

LIVING ROOM

The news drones from a 65in LED TV.

PUNDIT (VO)

And yet the LISEPs TRU number is closer to 25 percent.

He shrugs over to the couch where Claire sits and heels at its edge.

PUNDIT (VO)
 The systems devouring its own
 grinding the bones of the very
 people it was designed ta

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

CLAIRE
 Tell me how you married a face.

STURGILL
 I married a face.

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

STURGILL
 A boatload.

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

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

CLAIRE
 Ill hafta give Mother a call.

THE LEE OF A LOADING DOCK - DAY

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

STURGILL (VO)
 Your mothers not saving us.

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

CLAIRE (VO)
 Silas. Lets pray.

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

STURGILL (VO)
 Said Im thinkin.

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

Sturgill rests a clipboard on his knee.

STURGILL
Got some questions for ya.

MAILBOX OF A FORECLOSED HOUSE - DAY

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

F150 - BANK BRANCH ENTRANCE - MORNING (RAINING)

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

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

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR BRANCH LIBRARY - DAY

ONLINE CLASSIFIEDS

City Painting Job. 30 dollars per hr.

Be prepared at 0930 with standard painting uniform and cap and white top and pants. Also face mask and green vest.

Sturgill chicken pecks the last line.

No experience needed.

The home screen clock reads 00.00.00.55. He hovers the cursor over PAY as if its the firing circuit of an IED. Then he clicks and leans back like he armed the charge.

BANK BRANCH - DAWN - HIGH OVERHEAD

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

DUMPSTER ENCLOSURE - MORNING

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

BANK BRANCH ENTRANCE - MORNING

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

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

He scans the building.

New enough. Planters kept. Pavement degummed once or twice.

Clean glass. No trash.

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

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

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

BANK LOBBY - MORNING

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

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

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

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

An Armored Guard enters carrying two deposit bags.

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

SECURITY CAM

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

BANK ENTRANCE - MORNING

He strides past the Onlookers and armored truck.

CROSSWALK - MORNING

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

SCENIC TRAIL - MORNING

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

TRINITY RIVERBANK - MORNING

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

He drifts downriver.

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

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

He fastens a rotary cutter and gives one clean slice. Hundred dollar banknotes spill out. Each bound ten thousand dollars.

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

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

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

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

WHITE ROCK ESCARPMENT - MORNING

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

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

BISHOP ARTS DISTRICT - MORNING

Speakers needle the chill of the morning haze as apparitions hang in the storefront glass. None turn as he shoulders through.

CURBSIDE - MORNING

His steeltoes track in tawny chips as he drops into the backseat of a sedan.

OLDTIMEY JUDGE (VO)

And had your truck not been repod.

SEDAN (IDLE) - MORNING

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

OLDTIMEY JUDGE (VO)

And if that young driver hadnt been as attentive as he was you might not be standing here today.

COURTROOM - DAY

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

OLDTIMEY JUDGE

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

The Judge hammers the gavel and the scales rattle.

PRISON BUS (MOVING) - NOON

The sun nukes everything.

Chains clink along the rail. Oven heat and moted air as if someone shook out a vacuum bag.

OLD VOICE (VO)
You have the silence for one.

Cattle spot the grassy plains sweeping sideways under the shadows. The sky weighs like a waterpark deep in winter.

OLD VOICE (VO)
The mind wanders. Always much time.
To kill. Much time to forget.

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

Phone poles clip across every two seconds or so.

OLD VOICE (VO)
Watch your life spiral all the way
down. Down. Down.

PERMIAN BASIN - FORT STOCKTON - DAY - HIGH OVERHEAD

Country burns to sand.

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

In the landlocked hollow stands the behemoth TDCJ Lynaugh Unit. Its walls of gunmetal and ashen bone endures the suns continual onslaught. Anvils of daylight.

Nothing moves.

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

BUILDING 12 - LYNAUGH UNIT - EARLY MORNING

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

OLDBONES

And each is weighed. And each is
left wanting.

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

GUARD (OS)

Dont frat.

Sturgill secures the mound and pushes the laundry cart on.

GUARD (VO)

Clear the fence.

REC YARD - DAY

Sunflare chisels Sturgills squint. He backs up eyeing the
electric fence sign.

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

Swarms of inmates thrash in monkish schisms running their
flags bare chested with banned fists gassing their sets.
Beasts all. Shadowboxing and crazed calisthenics lashing
syncopated and solar, warlike and without end.

Under the ironshade of barbed veins tumbleweeds congeal along
the base. Double coil razor wire knotted atop twin chainlink
fences a Goliath and a half tall spaced twenty feet apart.

They loom like nations.

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

Skull of sun.

The desert boils on its back at peace the way a furnace is
with every thistle its own shadow and image clawing the
scaled earth of calcined stones strewn sunriven across the
downcountry for days, all forms grinning inside a crucible of
emptiness that chews the teeth of men and wheels the very
grindstone of the world toward no blessed break.

His earhole RINGS.

And out of the dusthaze a black ghostrider emerges all legs
with a rifle set across its lap like it had been born there a
benchmark.

He removes his prosthetic then closes the good one.

Eyes silence.

Then an orange blur. A red dwarf star where the horseman should be.

PERIMETER TOWER 3 - DAY

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

REC YARD - DAY

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

STURGILL
Circuits been down awhile.

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

STURGILL
Bet you guys got AC.

He points toward the administration building.

STURGILL
Over in the bubble.

The Sharpshooter swats at nothing seen.

Sturgill turns back and paces the wire for a time.

He stops and zeros in on the mountain range. Clouds surge like ink loosed in water. A black fire.

DEERNUM (VO)
Its Apache.

PRISON LAUNDRY ROOM - EARLY MORNING

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

DEERNUM
Was told it meant I run toward
death. Or from it.
(MORE)

Not much of a vision quest. Da Rez
got nothin but Jacks and Johns and
Jims now.

Sweat dapples Deernums shorn scalp. The head of a dark mole.

STURGILL
So what do I call you.

DEERNUM
Just call me Deernum.

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

STURGILL
Whatd you do.

Deernum straightens and sniffs.

DEERNUM
Strangled a woman. And Im doin all
day and a night for it too ok.

STURGILL
You know where they run the
priority circuits.

DEERNUM
You aimin ta fix them.

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

DEERNUM
Most everybody already knows. The
way out is through an airduct in da
boiler room.

STURGILL
Does it lead to the CO side.

DEERNUM
If it aint known. It could.

STURGILL
Doesnt sound like it if nobodys
tried.

DEERNUM
Tsk. All that vent talk started
with da COs.

(beat)
(MORE)

Da better the mirage. Da better da
prison.

MERCY (VO)
Youd do good not to talk to him.

THE REC - EVENING

MERCY
Hes in a snitch program. Probably.
Hes also Texas Syndicate.

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

Pawns click under the table.

STURGILL
Those arent lines I draw.

MERCY
No one gives a shit about the lines
you draw.

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

MERCY
Id just mind my own racecar. Is
all.

Sturgill gives a half shrug.

MERCY
Or keep your ear to the ground.
(beat)
You know. Sleep with one eye open.

STURGILL
(beat)
I.
(beat)
I got the joke.

MERCY
Oh Im not jokin. Theres always

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

MERCY

Go on.

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

MERCY

For amusing me.

(checks)

Check.

Sturgill flips it back.

STURGILL

Its not over.

He lifts the king and finds luft.

MERCY

Oh its over. Checkmate.

(beat)

I find its always over before it hits you. The terms myopic.

STURGILLS CELL - NIGHT

At his bunk Sturgill lifts a blanket roll. A square of foil.

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

CART WHEELS CREAK.

DOG RUN ALLEY - DAY

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

OLDBONES

Look up Soldier.

Sturgill stops. He flares his nostrils. Fixed.

OLDBONES

A story for another time. Gave you one nasty tick too.

STURGILL

(through his teeth)

Fuck off.

A percussive flash of white light hits Sturgills mind.

GUARD

Dont frat. Keep it goin.

OLDBONES

Gently now.

Sturgill stares then pushes the cart on.

OLDBONES

I do not kill to eat. I kill by birthing. And when my children wake in darkness. They feed on innocence.

(beat)

I am no liar. I never lied.

(beat)

Do you remember. Huh.

His glasses press into the chainlink.

OLDBONES

I said I remember one thing though.

He shakes the fence with force.

OLDBONES

I SAID I RE MEMBER ONE THING

SMASH TO

GARAGE MANCAVE - PIKESVILLE, CA - MORNING

A Glock muzzle knocks the bone of Sturgills head.

He stirs. His arms cradle his head on the red felt of a poker table. VAE VICTIS coils in Roman chisel like new kudzu across a trellis of muscle.

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

WHEELER

You shouldve finished it. Get up.

Sturgill jars his head up and stands.

The acrylic of his prosthetic catches the light. A mancave of consumer idiocy.

Iron to lift. Cinnabar neon. Guns coiled under glass.

A heavy bag hanging like hog.

Debris of a dying world.

WHEELER
I said the girls alive.

STURGILL
Shes not.

Wheeler takes out his phone.

WHEELER
Lucky I dont cuff you myself.

Wheeler dials 911.

STURGILL
Give me a head start Rob.

WHEELER
The guns already gone off Silas.

FEMALE DISPATCHER (VO)
911 whats your emergency?

WHEELER
Im reporting a home invasion in
progress.

FEMALE DISPATCHER (VO)
Wheres the intruder now?

STURGILL
Anne cheated on you.

Laughter oozes out of Wheeler. He stops.

WHEELER
With who.

FEMALE DISPATCHER (VO)
Sir can you hear me?

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

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

FEMALE DISPATCHER (VO)
Sir are you there?

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

Wheeler pounds his fist into Sturgills hip. Flank. Rib.

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

The garage narrows to the sound of Sturgills breathing. He tightens the hold. To sleep.

WHEELERS MASTER BEDROOM - MORNING

Sturgill ransacks the nightstand.

Loose bullets. Glock mag. His passport.

He stops.

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

MUSTANG - MCKINLEY ELEMENTARY - MORNING

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

STURGILL

Be good do good.

KNOCKING.

FRONT DOOR - LATE MORNING

Sturgill knocks. Loud.

A WOMAN (28) finally answers. Gingerhead. Dour.

She leans against the jamb and gives a glare clear as ice and laced with splinters.

STURGILL

Five minutes then Ill be outta your hair. Wet hair.

She smirks like she means it to hurt.

REDHEAD

My hair is wet because I have work.

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

STURGILL

You have somethin to tell me.

REDHEAD

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

STURGILL

So youre a psychologist and an engineer.

REDHEAD

No. Youre just neither.

She slams the door shut.

STURGILL

I went to Tys dealership this morning. There was a robbery.

MUSTANG (MOVING) - LATE MORNING

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

REDHEAD (VO)

This is not the kind of thing you hold back Sal.

She pulls her phone out.

STURGILL

Dont.

She stays on her phone.

STURGILL

I mean dont call.

REDHEAD

Im gonna call.

STURGILL

Said dont.

REDHEAD

You dont get to tell me what I cant do.

He pulls the Mustang over.

STURGILL

Give me the phone.

She freezes and stares.

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

They stare each other down.

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

E MOTORS LOT - LATE MORNING

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

MUSTANG (PARKED) - LATE MORNING

He rolls up a light duffel and stuffs it inside his waistband and holsters Wheelers Glock and pulls a hunters hoodie over his head.

REDHEAD

You won't change anything.

He exits the Mustang into the light.

LOT

A sword walking.

Past trophy EVs. The walls ahead already buffed bare with the labor of forgetting.

FRONT DESK LADY (VO)

Sir.

SHOWROOM - LATE MORNING

The Front Desk Lady signals the Security Guard.

DALES OFFICE - LATE MORNING

Sturgill goes straight to a framed picture on the Tys desk. Her and Ty at a National Park.

FRONT DESK LADY (OS)

Sir please.

MUSTANG (PARKED) - LATE MORNING

She yanks at the door handle. No good.

She grabs the window handle. It spins.

She pounds the glass.

REDHEAD

HEEEEEEEY.

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

DALE (VO)

The weaver right.

DALES OFFICE - LATE MORNING

Clean cut and bookish and with something of a purified smugness breathed at the end of each of his words TY DALE (29) shuts the door.

STURGILL

And you the weevil.

DALE

Sit.

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

DALE

I figure youre not here to lease.

(beat)

I know about your little river date.

(beat)

Whatever it was. Lets leave it there to rot.

Dale smiles like he made quota.

DALE

(beat)

I think itd be best if you did like yesterday. And leave. Abruptly.

STURGILL

Im here for the money.

DALE

Then you better buy some stock.

(beat)

Or are you planning to set the place on fire.

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

STURGILL
Were heading to the backroom and
youre filling that up.

DALE
And somehow

STURGILL
Shut the fuck up and get your ass
up.

Sturgill stands.

DALE
(beat)
Whats your name.

Sturgill walks to the door spitting into the wastebasket as he goes.

STURGILL
It aint Sal.

DALE
No shit.

He draws his gun.

STURGILL
You have no idea who I am. Giving
you my name wont change that.

BACKROOM

They enter and Sturgill beelines to the wall safe.

STURGILL
Open this.

Dale draws close.

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

STURGILL
Whats inside.

Dale leans over.

DALE
Gold bullions.

STURGILL
How much.

DALE
Five hundred ounces.

STURGILL
How MUCH.

DALE
I dunno. Two mill.

Sturgill heaves the forty pound box into Dales chest and grabs him by the arm and leads him out.

LOBBY - SECURITY CAM POV

Sturgill cuts toward the doors with Dale staggering at his hip.

E MOTORS LOT - LATE MORNING

Sturgill pulls his Hostage across the lot to the Mustang.

He loads the duffle and the box and slams the hatch shut.

Dale steps back. Sturgill walks around and hops in and ignites and reverses and burns out.

Dale folds down crosslegged onto the asphalt as rubbersmoke wafts across his face.

Tube man inflatables whip like red ribbons in the morning heat.

DEERNUM (VO)
Da honor block mans da boiler.

LAW LIBRARY - DAY

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

STURGILL
Then you gotta point one of em out.

DEERNUM
If da lights go down. A riotll go down.

Mercy approaches the table and braces an arm on top of Sturgills open book. All of Mercys tensile musculature leans in.

MERCY

You teachin him to read.

STURGILL

How bout you roll your window up.

MERCY

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

STURGILL

Fuck. Off.

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

ARI (OS)

SILENCIO. You got five more minutes.

STURGILL (VO)

Thats what I meant.

DAYROOM - MORNING

Sturgill presses the receiver harder to his ear.

PHONE CALL - DAYROOM AND BACK HOUSE KITCHEN

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

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

STURGILL

No priors. No gun spec.

MIRA

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

STURGILL

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

MIRA

Thats already been decided.

Claire draws the Child under her shawl and he feeds.

STURGILL

Are you in Pikesville.

MIRA

Theres no earthly way of finding out. So just save your breath.

STURGILL

Where.

MIRA

Are you about done?

CLAIRE

Hes been spitting up his milk a lot lately.

Claire lifts the Boys lip. His golden gums gleam raw as a desert sun.

CLAIRE

Hes on the booba now.

Sturgill rubs his eyes like a man seeing light after a long time underground.

Claire's face holds still as marble.

STURGILL

Wherere you guys stayin.

MIRA

No.

VOICE RECORDING

You have one minute remaining.

STURGILL

Claire. Drop the name.

Claire inhales.

MIRA

Those your last words?

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

MIRA

If theres more say it now.

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

CLAIRE

(beat)

Redding.

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

NONSENSICAL YELPS.

STURGILLS CELL - NIGHT

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

Sturgill hangs from the bars of his iron cage.

He lifts his head up high and stares at a void where a vent shaft should be. Hole for air and no air. Nearer than the will to breathe.

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

His mouth moves wordless with the harrowing.

LEGAL AID (VO)

So your appeals attorney quit.

LEGAL VISITATION ROOM - DAY

Sturgill studies the LEGAL AID (30) across the table inside the brickpulse of a closed room.

LEGAL AID

So your motion is a nonstarter.

He reaches the back of his neck. She talks. Loud.

LEGAL AID

We can proceed without counsel or
secure someone new. Means
extensions. Delays.

His fingertips graze his scars.

DEERNUM (VO)
 Youd still be runnin blind though.

PRISON LAUNDRY ROOM - MORNING

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

DEERNUM
 Theres no way to know da land.

Sturgill ignores and keeps feeding the sheet.

DEERNUM
 You still hearin from her.
 (beat)
 She your first stop.
 (beat)
 Wouldnt risk it myself.
 (beat)
 Hard lines do make clean ends.

STURGILL
 You dont have somebody walkin
 around with your blood.

DEERNUM
 (beat)
 Couldnt tell ya how it feels. But
 it doesnt make me wrong.

BUILDING 12 - DAY

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

OLDBONES CELL - DAY

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

STURGILL (OS)
 Laundry.

Oldbones turns. A jewelers monocular set deep in the hollow of his eye. He stands.

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

Blister beetle and blowfly. Dung roller and glowworm. Nomad bee and hawk wasp.

GUARD

Speed it up.

Oldbones groans fetching his mesh bag from under the cot.

OLDBONES

No man can. No man dare.

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

OLDBONES

The hive mind saboteur.

Sturgill and the Guard move on.

OLDBONES

It does not build. Just waits. And
in that brood cell it lays its own
hunger.

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

OLDBONES

I follow fire. I follow rot.

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

PRAYER ROOM - NIGHT

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

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

STURGILL

You oughta block your time.

The prayers continue unbroken.

MERCY

Were not here to pray.

(beat)

The pill you took belongs to an OG.

(beat)

Come to the dayroom and well talk
it out.

(MORE)

(beat)

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

Sturgill doesnt speak.

MERCY

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

STURGILL

Im not goin.

MERCY

(beat)

Im sorry. To have interrupted.

Sturgill doesnt blink. They turn and walk out slow. The prayers unbroken.

THE HISS OF SHOWERHEADS.

MCR SECURITY CAM - SHOWERS ENTRY - EVENING

A lone Cossacks type rolls in on the cam.

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

POD C SHOWER GALLERY - MORNING

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

Mercy barrels in with a Stanley knife riding his hip rivets clicking.

Sturgill bolts to the towel rack and snatches a towel and wraps it around his forearm and lets it hang.

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

The Men punch. Lock. Scramble for footing.

Sturgill catches an uppercut as Mercy shoulders him to the wall.

Elbows. Knees. Sturgill eats it all and drops.

Mercy peels off and goes for the cutter.

Sturgill rises and Mercy pins him back to the wall with the blade. Slashes then buries it once.

Blood streaks the tile.

DISTANT MARIACHI MUSIC.

Mercy stabs his torso two more times. Sturgill falls.

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

MARIACHI MUSIC hustles in as the Guards approach and pepper spray arcs wide drenching both men.

The noisebox swings from a Guards beltloop blasts.

A taser prong sticks Mercy.

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

Blood slicks everywhere.

THE HUM OF A VENTILATOR.

PECOS COUNTY MEMORIAL - TRAUMA ROOM - DAY

He lies stiff and papery. Blood runs black up the tube taped to his arm.

INFIRMARY ROOM - LYNAUGH UNIT - DAY

Fluorescent light sinks into the walls mummy pale.

An overbed table with runny slop.

Bandages run spotted dark from neck to waist Sturgill props himself on the cot with one elbow.

Through the panel glass two GUARDS pass. The image of the Guards trail like human centipedes down the hall.

The door unlocks and opens. The Guards approach and One slaps a folder onto the tray. The afterimages fixed.

Sturgill swings his legs across and down. His chains tauten. Normal Guards.

GUARD 1

If youre willing. You can witness
an execution in a few months.

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

GUARD 1
How the hell would I know.

He writes. Guard 1 reads.

GUARD 1
Killed many. Well into his
seventies.

He writes. Guard 1 reads.

GUARD 1
This is their second try. First
time they couldnt stick a vein
cause hed dehydrated himself so
bad.

GUARD 2
You dont wanna go. Dont sign.

LOCK RELEASE.

INMATE MOVEMENT CORRIDOR - MORNING

Flanked by the jaws of two Guards Sturgill walks.

UPPER WALKWAY - MORNING

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

Sturgill watches but doesnt stop.

GUARD (VO)
Laundry.

BUILDING 12 - DAY

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

OLDBONES
They cut you dumb now.

GUARD
Laundry.

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

OLDBONES
Just a VA brochure boss. Im only
looking after his soul.

The Guard unfolds it and checks it.

OLDBONES
But do not follow me.

The Guard hands it over to Sturgill.

OLDBONES
Will you be there to see me
rendered.

Sturgill walks off with the Guard.

OLDBONES
As seers are I am no seer. So what
does that make me.
(beat)
Ramad wa turab. Turab wa ramad.

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

LIGHTS OUT.

STURGILLS CELL - NIGHT

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

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

DEERNUM (VO)
Weve got eyes now.

PRISON LAUNDRY ROOM - MORNING

Sturgill and Deernum stuff the dyers.

DEERNUM
Ten miles north. Then east to Fort
Stockton.
(beat)
And I have news too. Some nutbat
that calls himself Major. Hes
worked in the boiler room before.
(MORE)

(beat)
And the guy who can get that
Philips head. His names Ari.

ARI (VO)
I heard.

LAW LIBRARY - DAY

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

ARI
But I aint no Home Depot my guy.
And I dont look like some tool of
yours do I.

Sturgill scratches at his throat patch.

ARI
JIS n ABT are at WOAR righ now. But
I aint JIS neithers. You offerin
what. Mouthwash. Hair products.
Detergent. Hm. Cant snort it. Cant
huff it. And you sure as hell cant
wash with it. What am I gonna do
with a buncha detergent.

(beat)
But I do love me some African
Pride.

Ari hooks a finger under his kufi and scratches his scalp
raw.

ARI
And I can use some mouthwash.

Sturgill stares.

ARI
For brew my guy. For brew. My
breath dont stink.

Ari points with his glasses.

ARI
How ever. The offer is only good
until one of yous get caught. Aint
the only option. But somethin I
oughta consider.

Ari brings his feet to the floor and leans in.

ARI
 You tryin dont change one second of
 my time.

Sturgill stays planted.

ARI
 Standin there like I aint already
 given ya da damn answa.

REC YARD - DAY

Sturgill nears MAJOR (56). His bald head inked in feathers
 basks resting back on a bench.

Sturgill blocks his sun. Major lifts his head.

MAJOR
 Sit.

Sturgill sits.

MAJOR
 Heard it when you first got in.
 That you had asked if I had served.
 Said Major. Whats he the major of.
 (beat)
 Ill tell you what Im the major of.
 The war that never ends bitch. Now
 you want my help.

Major unpacks a cigarette and places it in his mouth.

MAJOR
 Shouldve smoked outside. But I am
 but teeth n hair.

Major shifts.

MAJOR
 And all the prisons electricity
 runs through there.

Major nods and lights up then exhales.

MAJOR
 The backup generator too.
 (beat)
 Some years back an inmate was
 transferring out to Leavenworth.
 Soon as he got there he got gassed
 with a can of hot shot. Paint
 stripper. Bleach. Piss.
 (MORE)

Whatever else they mix to make it
burn. Threw it in his face while
his hands were cuffed behind his
back. Was no reason.

They didnt know each other.

Happened just because.

(beat)

Aint a soul in here wants to see
the next man do better.

(beat)

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

Phlegm heavy and toothless Major laughs smoke. Sturgill looks
ahead and gets up.

CART WHEELS GRIND.

GEN POP CELLBLOCK - MORNING

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

INMATE (OS)

Hows this shit always comin back
smellin like shit huh.

Sturgill keeps on.

INMATE (OS)

Man you better do your bitch work
correctly n rinse it the fuck out
next time.

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

ARI

Ya already know Young Blood. Ya
already know.

RECREATIONAL LIBRARY - NOON

Sturgill scans the decimals aisle by aisle.

He traces the spines and pulls The Country of the Blind and
Other Science Fiction Stories by H. G. Wells. He flips
through then holds it by the spine shaking the pages
straight.

Nothing.

STURGILLS CELL - EVENING

Sturgill reads Wells on the top bunk. He comes across a highlighted word. Under.

He flips the rest slow. Metal.

The last one. Table.

RECREATIONAL LIBRARY - DAY

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

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

MERCY (VO)

Wassup Fish.

REC YARD - DAY

Mercy approaches Sturgill repping chinups on the bar.

MERCY

Found out what got ya in here.

Sturgill drops down and another inmate jumps up. Sturgill scans the yard.

MERCY

I want out of course. Whadaya say.
For an old friend.

(beat)

Or maybe the brass wants to hear
what youre up to. Id hate to have
to. But I do. I know them boy
scouts over in the boiler room.

He stares Mercy down.

MERCY

And I can work with the snitch. If
hes in.

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

REDHEAD (VO)

FBI marshals.

MUSTANG (MOVING) - DAY

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

REDHEAD

They practically live there. Year round.

No reaction but the rush of the road.

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

REDHEAD

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

STURGILL

(beat)
You thirsty.

REDHEAD

Of course Im thirsty. Its boiling in here.

He grabs his hoodie and tosses it over her wrist.

DRIVE THRU - MUSTANG (IDLE) - DAY

The Server hands out the sodas.

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

MUSTANG (MOVING) - DAY

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

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

REDHEAD

Stop the car.

He inhales. Then turns right.

REDHEAD

Stop.

He drives on.

REDHEAD
Stop the car and uncuff me.

He heads through a green light and onto the onramp.

REDHEAD
Pull to the shoulder Sal. Now.

He merges.

STURGILL
Ill pull over when you pull the
trigger.

REDHEAD
I wont miss.

The Mustang hits sixty.

REDHEAD
Pull over.

Seventy. Seventy five.

REDHEAD
You deaf too?

She jams the barrel hard into his temple.

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

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

REDHEAD
Makes no difference to me if you
die.

STURGILL
(beat)
Its a Russian Stechkin. It shoots
from the bottom barrel.
(beat)
And it swing loads with a very
special kind of bullet that doesnt
eject when its fired. SP 4 rounds.
(beat)
Bullets I do not have.

She stares down the side of the barrel frame.

He veers right. Sharp and hard. Brakes shriek.

Her arm jerks forward yanking the trigger as a muffled snap spiderwebs the driverside window. He rips the gun from her grip and draws the revolver to her face. She gives no flinch.

REDHEAD

Sal you're the

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

Blood mist hangs in the air.

He breathes once and for a long moment. Then hits the driverside glass once twice three times until it implodes like it took a shell of rock salt.

The view of the highway seems to widen and expand.

CBP OFFICER (VO)

How far you goin and for how long.

MUSTANG (IDLE) - TJ BORDER CHECKPOINT - DAY

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

STURGILL

TJ. Three days.

CBP OFFICER

Wherere ya comin from.

STURGILL

Mecca.

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

CBP OFFICER

What you got back there.

STURGILL

What.

CBP OFFICER

In Mecca. Ya into lettuce work.

STURGILL

No Sir.

CBP OFFICER

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

STURGILL

The Box.

CBP OFFICER

Less of me huh. You carrying any firearms.

STURGILL

No Sir.

CBP OFFICER

Got any at home.

STURGILL

Yessir.

CBP OFFICER

Whod you leave em with.

STURGILL

Under lock and key.

CBP OFFICER

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

STURGILL

V6.

CBP OFFICER

Hell. Cologne block. That a dog ta drive.

STURGILL

Second gen. And it feels like it.

CBP OFFICER

She dont sound tired.

A microwave beeps behind him.

CBP OFFICER

Uno momento.

He steps away inside.

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

The Officer returns chewing something molten.

CBP OFFICER
 Alright go on through.

Sturgill eases toward the Aduanas Checkpoint.

ROUGH VOICE (VO)
 Satans havin himself a field day.

TACONETA - EL PASO - DAY

A marbled sky streaks east to west.

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

A brizzled RANGER THOMAS CALDWELL (33) aka Champ sits across.
 His spine holds but his nose cant. Cartilage long since caved
 by fists.

FLYNN
 Its palpable. Ya got. Things.
 Jumpin around the cities. Nonhuman.
 Rabid. Hostile. Look here. They
 fortified a homeless encampment up
 in Bellingham Washington. Half mile
 wide. Pushin i.t. Fent. Tranq. K2.
 God knows.

CALDWELL
 Cartels springing up where youd
 least expect.

FLYNN
 Each servin his own law. The result
 is ruin. And our pay dont even
 match inflation.

CALDWELL
 Ya oughtave held off on the fifth.

FLYNN
 Wouldnt trade him for the world.

CALDWELL
 I meant the whiskey you drank last
 night.

FLYNN
 Im drunk on truth Champ. We need
 every arrow we can muster. Wheat
 and tares. Rats and hares. All
 grown up together.

(MORE)

And judgmentll find each one out
like lightning in a field. Has to.
It comes because it is what is
owed.

CALDWELL

A part of me doesnt want to believe
that.

FLYNN

You cant beg water from stone. But
it dont stop folks from tryin.

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

Flynns phone lights up 703.

PHONE CALL - TACONETAS TACOS AND KING AIR

HAIR PARTED LEFT (45) rides the jet a man of all breath and
blood and thunderhead. His voice chops down like water over
granite.

Another suited Man sits silent conference style.

FLYNN

Let me guess

HAIR PARTED LEFT

El Paso. Taconeta. Fish Tacos. No
salsa.

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

HAIR PARTED LEFT

Remember the fugitive outta
Lynaugh.

FLYNN

Which one.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

The ex Marine. He robbed a
dealership in Pikesville this
morning. Took what seems to be a
monster box the dealerships
refusing to report. Anyways he
crossed the taco stand twenty
minutes before the APB. What I want
is the hostage. But she wasnt
seated when he crossed. Gotta hunch
hes gunnin for Del Norte.

FLYNN

And what if hes not.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

Youve got friendlies in Chihuahua.
Yall can grab some margaritas and
bitch about how the times are a
changin. Ill send you the intel.

Caldwell moves the tacos closer to himself.

FLYNN

Hows the other side.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

Look Flynn no promises but the girl
is connected. I know her
personally. So you take his head
like youre holdin a grudge and
youll be in my good graces. You get
me. Like shes your own daughter.

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

FLYNN

Understood.

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

HAIR PARTED LEFT

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

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

HAIR PARTED LEFT

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

FLYNN

Ill see to it.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

Mucho gusto Compadre.

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

FLYNN

Chop chop Champ. The bullring
calls.

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

MOTEL EL SOL PARKING LOT - CHIHUAHUA - EVENING

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

MOTEL EL SOL ROOM H23 - MIDNIGHT

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

A shoulder holster droops from the bedposts. The cufflinks on the nightstand dont catch the light. Clothes air out.

The Stechkin weighs under calloused hands. A jolt jets through him twitching his jaw. Fireworks.

More pops.

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

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

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

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

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

OUTSIDE MOTEL ROOM - MIDNIGHT

Their noise carries a tinish echo through the night air.

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

ICE MACHINE

Half moons hail down.

NEAR MUSTANG

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

Moths flicker near the rooms wallsconce and open maw.

MOTEL BATHROOM - MIDNIGHT

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

FIREPLACE

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

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

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

Firecracks spilt the dark. He stiffens. Waits.

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

BATHROOM

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

BONES CLACK.

THE REC - DAY

Sturgill sits across Mercy at a domino table.

MERCY

Threes too many.

Sturgill acts like he doesnt hear and rubs his neck patch.

MERCY

A friend of mine. His cousin went hanggliding over a lake. She got up in the air and panicked and started unclipping her harness. Then she dropped. A hundred and fifty feet down. Dead before the splash. Family didnt understand why. Wasnt a suicide. Wasnt an accident.

Sturgill eyes the room then back to Mercy.

MERCY

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

Mercy sets a bone. Sniffs.

MERCY

He wont know what hit him.

Sturgill muses. Mercy spreads his arms wide.

MERCY

Im tellin you Ive shot bird and beast alike. Felled trees taller than these here walls. Built and burned houses. All the same. And not once did I ask another man for permission.

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

MERCY

You heard about the catfish.

Sturgill shakes his head.

MERCY

They say a man in Block R fed a catfish through the toilet. Kept it alive on scraps. And when the guards finally found out she was blind and big as a baby. And after they killed it. They said the guy never spoke again. Just sat there all day. Mouth open.

Mercy demonstrates.

MERCY

You understand. Cut him loose.

Sturgill nods.

MERCY

And keep your mouth shut.

Sturgill raises his browline.

GUARD (VO)

This here. Is the time.

EXECUTION COURTYARD - EARLY MORNING

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

Razor wire loops dull as dead mercury above the walls. The horizon smolders rosa ash.

Five riflemen stand at the ready with Winchester Model 70s cradled in their arms.

GUARD

Last words.

OLDBONES

Can you spare a smoke.

The paper bullseye taped to Oldbones chest flutters then falls still. Oldbones spits thin.

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

A thud.

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

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

OLDBONES

I am as reformed as the next. And
still the blood does in fact remain
on the blade.

Oldbones smiles severely.

OLDBONES

But today. Is all my days
henceforth.

The Rifleman drops whats left and crushes the cigarette under his boot.

GUARD

Squad ready.

Chambers snap clear as clockwork.

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

And nowhere. Not one bird.

WARDENS OFFICE - EARLY MORNING

WARDEN BANNOCK

(into phone)

There aint no reason to think its
some plague. People pay good money
to have the worms ran outta em.

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

WARDEN BANNOCK

You think I run some country club.
Omelets on Tuesdays. French toast
on Thursdays. Let me pull their
salt for payroll. Strip rations to
starch and bone. See how they like
famine. And if these complaints
keep comin up Ill have em sleep in
tents with every last one of em
sportin pink. Cause I can.

Bannock hangs up and whacks the comm.

WARDEN BANNOCK

Send me a runner Shelly.

He sniffs. In a moment a Courier enters.

WARDEN BANNOCK

This here is a Stay of Execution. I
believe theyre already outside.

COURIER

Yessir.

WARDEN BANNOCK

Go ahead n halt procedure. Ill
notify the Shift Sergeant
immediately. Have him radio it in.

The Courier jumps for the door.

WARDEN BANNOCK

HERE.

Bannock holds up the letter.

WARDEN BANNOCK

Hand it to the Team Leader.

The Courier returns and grabs the letter and exits.

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

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

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

OUTSIDE CORRIDOR - EARLY MORNING

The Courier jogs with the letter in hand.

TRANSFER GATE - EARLY MORNING

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

COURIER

You gotta open it.

The Guard cycles through the keys on his keyring.

SALLY PORT

The Courier rushes in then spins around.

COURIER

And this one.

A VOLLEY OF RIFLE FIRE.

WITNESS BOOTH - EARLY MORNING

Sturgill stands witness.

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

EXECUTION COURTYARD - EARLY MORNING

Blood worms the black cloth down to the pale dust.

The ground drinks. Whats left pools. A tithe to the old god of bullets with no bullets left to pay.

DEERNUM (VO)

If Im not careful.

FINISHING ROOM - DAY

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

DEERNUM

If I ignore that feeling. I know
Ill find da other shore of hell is.
Closer to my waking than I ever
thought possible.

(beat)

I relive every sin here. Nothing
has gone unseen.

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

DEERNUM

Its safe.

Sturgill stares furious. Sick.

DEERNUM

He stabbed you everywhere but da
back and its me you dont trust.

Sturgill slip out a note and tosses it Deernums way. He unfolds and reads.

DEERNUM

You know what you need.

Sturgill smacks the machine loud.

DEERNUM

What. I dont understand the
question.

He stares through Deernum.

DEERNUM

What. Why am I in treatment.

Deernum lowers the press. It hisses.

DEERNUM

Because I agreed to it.

Sturgill squares up to Deernum.

DEERNUM

Whadaya wanna hear.

Sturgill raises his chin and waits.

DEERNUM

That she. Well. She was my wife.
 (beat)
 I dunno know. What.

Deernum turns and stares through the press.

DEERNUM

Tomorrow night. Whatever happens.
 (beat)
 Jus remember. Clean breaks make
 clean ends.

Deernum turns to Sturgill.

DEERNUM

Jus my advice of course.
 (beat)
 But that goes for everyone. Not jus
 yours.

Sturgill steps in and snaps two shots to Deernums jaw. He
 folds and drops. Sturgill steps past.

The iron hisses. Smolders.

STURGILLS CELL - DAY

The postcard reads Rob and Anne Wheeler. Sandpiper Ln.
 Pikesville CA.

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

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

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

OUTSIDE LAUNDRY ROOM - EVENING

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

GUARD

Wheres your badge.

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

GUARD
Get him his badge.

Sturgill heads to the door.

INSIDE LAUNDRY ROOM

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

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

INMATE CORRIDOR MOVEMENT - EVENING

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

The Guard turns the corner and passes under.

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

OUTSIDE LAUNDRY

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

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

UPPER LAUNDRY CHUTE - EVENING

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

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

He pulls from his other sock a laundry handle and a long piece of a shirt and threads the fabric through the lock and inserts the handle and ties a clove hitch and torques the handle.

It snaps jagged slicing his palm.

Blood spots the floor.

He goes to a nearby laundry cart and yanks off a handle and wraps it and jams it between the lock and shirt and throws in. Full body.

The locking pins pop and he opens the hatch and wipes the floor of blood then drops everything down and climbs in and lowers himself closing the hatch.

LAUNDRY ROOM - EVENING

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

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

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

He stops. From across the room HUMANLIKE GROANING.

The polycarbonate lens of the industrial clock gleams back red.

MINUTES LATER

An outage snaps the room quiet and black.

MORNING

GUARD 1 unlocks the cage. GUARD 2 follows.

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

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

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

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

GUARD 1
Yeah.

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

GUARD 2
She puts bits of jalapeño in it.

GUARD 1
Changed your life.

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

GUARD 2
Ill bring some next potluck.

LOADING DOCK - DAY

Guard 1 loads the last hamper and shuts the doors.

CUT TO BLACK

LATER

DOORS OPEN. WHEELS ROLL. VOICES ECHO. SILENCE.

LAUNDRY FACILITY - EVENING

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

DOOR CHIME.

GAS MART - DAWN

Sturgill enters reclined glancing at the Nightclerk.

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

GAS MART - DAWN

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

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

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

STOLEN SUV (MOVING) - SUNSET

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

STOLEN SUV (MOVING) - RIVERSIDE - NIGHT

He breaks sudden. Then sits for a long moment.

TRINITY RIVER - DAWN

He plods across the ford. Blackwater to his shins.

WHITE ROCK ESCARPMENT - MORNING

He climbs the stone shelves.

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

STOLEN SUV - DAY

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

CURBSIDE RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY

He peels the FOR SALE placard off the tan cars rear window.

HOUSE DOORSTEP - DAY

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

TAN CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

He drives west under an overpass.

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

MORNING

The fall sun coppers his head.

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

He reaches an industrial sector and parks.

TAN CAR (PARKED) - LATE MORNING

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

DEPUTY CASTOR

Heres the deal. Im giving you a moving notification. You have seventy two hours to move your car.

Sturgill swallows air. His voice squeaks out.

STURGILL

(beat)
Whys that.
(coughs)
Whys that.

DEPUTY CASTOR

Neighbors called you in. So now you have seventy two hours to move. Im gonna go chalk your tires.

His voice drags hoarse and raw.

STURGILL

Thought this was a public street.

DEPUTY CASTOR

It is a public street.

STURGILL

Then whats the problem.

DEPUTY CASTOR

Wherere you headed.

STURGILL

Navajo County.

DEPUTY CASTOR

Whatchya got over there.

STURGILL

What.

DEPUTY CASTOR

(beat)
In Navajo County.

STURGILL
My mother in laws got something of
mine.

Castor stares.

STURGILL
She owes me money.

DEPUTY CASTOR
Whats your name.

STURGILL
Sam.

DEPUTY CASTOR
Sam what.

STURGILL
(beat)
Whadaya mean. My last name.

Castor eyes the stars and stripes on Sturgills arm.

DEPUTY CASTOR
You gotta move your car.

STURGILL
Yessir.

Castor goes and chalks the rear tire. Then walks back to his
patrol car.

Sturgill turns the engine. Stalls.

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

He pops the hood and leans over the engine.

INSIDE TAN CAR

Sturgill searches the compartments and the glovebox. Papers.
Receipts.

A pair of cataract sunglasses.

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

INDUSTRIAL STREET - EARLY MORNING

Sturgill walks as Castor rolls down the cruisers window and pulls alongside.

DEPUTY CASTOR
Whats wrong with her.

STURGILL
Coil.

DEPUTY CASTOR
Wherere headed.

STURGILL
Navajo County.

DEPUTY CASTOR
I mean I can take you to get the
part.

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

DEPUTY CASTOR
Go head. Hop in.

STURGILL
Rather walk.
(beat)
Done that ride before.

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

DEPUTY CASTOR
Go head.

Sturgill steps off the curb.

DEPUTY CASTOR (VO)
Ready for the new season.

POLICE CRUISER (MOVING) - LATE MORNING

STURGILL
Am I ready. Is your question.

DEPUTY CASTOR
What I ask.

STURGILL
Foosball.

DEPUTY CASTOR
Football yeah.
(sniffs)
Is that comin from you.

STURGILL
Needa shower.

DEPUTY CASTOR
You aint kiddin. Maybe you oughta
be back there.

STURGILL
I used to keep up with it.

DEPUTY CASTOR
Whats that.

STURGILL
I got to a point where ya know
whatre they doin for me.

DEPUTY CASTOR
Guess youre not into those fantasy
picks huh.

STURGILL
No.

DEPUTY CASTOR
Were gonna stop by the station. Its
on the way.

STURGILL
Makes sense.

DEPUTY CASTOR
Needa pick up my partner.

STURGILL
Sure.

DEPUTY CASTOR
Means you gotta ride in the back.

STURGILL
If Ive got to.

DEPUTY CASTOR
Youve got to.

STURGILL
Im agreeing.

DEPUTY CASTOR
And Im tellin ya.

Sturgill flushes his nostrils.

DEPUTY CASTOR
Im jus yankin your ch

Radio cracks.

DISPATCHER (VO)
45 32 attention Crane Crockett and
surrounding counties.

Silence. Radio cracks.

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

Castor cuts the radio.

STURGILL
When I did watch the games Id
follow the whole season. College
too. You follow college.

DEPUTY CASTOR
Yep.

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

STURGILL
Colleges the best. The storylines.
The upsets. A lot more
unpredictable you know.

DEPUTY CASTOR
The rivalries.

STURGILL
The rivalries. They run deep.

DEPUTY CASTOR
They do.

Castor speeds.

DEPUTY CASTOR
(beat)
Whats your favorite.

STURGILL
Favorite rivalry.

DEPUTY CASTOR
Yep.

STURGILL
Id go with the Iron Bowl. You.

DEPUTY CASTOR
Same. Who ya rootin for.

STURGILL
Auburn of course. You.

DEPUTY CASTOR
(beat)
Same.

White noise hums through the cab.

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

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

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

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

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

Castor takes aim. Fires. Bush.

He flattens to his stomach. Fires. Bush.

Fires again. Dirt.

Sturgill hits the brush and vanishes.

Castor tries to stand but cant. He hops to the door. Gathers himself.

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

He beats Castor down and grabs the cruiser door and slams it against Castor's head.

Two. Three. Four.

Five. Six. Seven.

Eight. Nine. Ten.

Eleven. Twelve. Thirteen.

Fourteen. Fifteen.

Sixteen.

Seventeen.

Eighteen.

CLEAR SKY - NOON

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

DESERT SALT FLAT - NOON

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

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

He runs.

A murderous godball out of the Book of Judges hangs final and pure.

A speck in the absolute of negative space.

Winds spiral and kick up heat as Sturgill pushes off the magnetic ground by the balls of his feet outpacing his own heart like a man familiar with distances, the chemical zap of aerosols the entire execution of his arc burning with all dead reckoning and breathlessness.

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

He traces the horizons edge. The silence sweeps in and bludgeons ecclesiastical.

He turns and backtracks. A flame sits on his head.

DESERT SALT FLAT - AFTERNOON

He pops the trunk and digs and finds a Powerade and twists it open and drinks it like its the last color left on earth.

EXPRESS INN ROOM - JUAREZ - NIGHT

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

Banging at the door. Again.

Caldwell cracks the door. White flashlight blasts through.

FLYNN

We got our lead.

RESPRESA EL REJON - MORNING

Mallards rasp. The reservoir yawns black and wide. Sturgill stands an omen in the open mouth of settled chaos.

A grebe skates the smoking obsidian plane a smudge perfected.

Murk bears down crushing the underworld to pitch. He dips his hands into the substrate and claws his head and face. Mossrot tendrils tease then vanish.

He dips under. Fully. Yet stands clayfaced. He has not moved.

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

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

CALDWELL (VO)

He gone.

MOTEL EL SOL SERVICE ENTRANCE - LATE MORNING

Caldwell joins Flynn. Both hatless.

CALDWELL
About an hour ago.

Flynn nods mulling.

CALDWELL
Theres a chance shes there. Maybe
the loot too.

FLYNN
Only takes one.

CALDWELL
One coin.

FLYNN
One apple. Rotten and foolish.

CALDWELL
You wouldnt smile half as much
without me.

Flynn remains unblinking in the breeze.

CALDWELL
Or zero times any number.

Flynn huffs toward the truck.

MOTEL EL SOL ROOM H23 - LATE MORNING

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

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

BATHROOM

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

CALDWELL (OS)
Whadaya got.

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

He leans over and peels the comforter back some.

CALDWELL (OS)
Flynn.

He rips the comforter back all at once.

The monster box.

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

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

Sixteen.

ROOM

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

FLYNN

Heathers holdin me to our daughters
Thanksgiving. Needa see the baby.

CALDWELL

Might well keep that promise.

Flynn pockets his phone. He picks up the gold.

FLYNN

We pinch him from the inside.

CALDWELL

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

FLYNN

Could move the gold out.

CALDWELL

Best should.

FLYNN

That last one was too much trouble.

CALDWELL

Mostly.

FLYNN

Which is heavier. Sixteen kilograms
or twenty one grams.

CALDWELL

Is that the soul. Twenty one grams.

Flynn flashes the gold to the mirror.

FLYNN
You ever exhaust all possibilities.

Flynn turns from the mirror toward the fireplace.

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

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

CALDWELL
If its a go we best settle in now.

Flynn pinches the chip with his fingernails.

CALDWELL
Flynn.
(beat)
Hey.

FLYNN
Im just wondering. Wheres he gonna
bury all that gold.

CALDWELL
All tha gold in em hills.

Caldwell chuckles. Flynn flicks the chip.

OUTSIDE MOTEL ROOM - LATE MORNING

Flynn exits and walks down the breezeway carrying the box.

He loads it into the truck.

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

MOTEL ROOM - LATE MORNING

Caldwell watches through the curtain as the Mustang parks.

CALDWELL
Damn you Flynn.

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

OUTSIDE MOTEL ROOM - LATE MORNING

Sturgill exits the Mustang.

A kingcloud drifts its glories wide over the rooftops.

He steps through the bite of the breeze to his door then veers toward the Housekeeper four doors down.

UNDER THE BREEZEWAY

He holds out a tip then crosses his hands.

STURGILL

No housekeeping.

He spots the black F150 and moves toward it. Past the service door. At the far end.

Front tow. Mounted headlights. Push bar grille.

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

He rounds to the truckbed. Rear tow. Texas plates KPR1467.

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

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

OUTSIDE ROOM

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

He leans in and doesnt blink and opens the door.

MOTEL ROOM

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

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

The remote tilts northwest.

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

Sturgill dives over the bedframe and scrambles out.

OUTSIDE MOTEL ROOM H23 - LATE MORNING

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

Sturgill rips another through the doorway as Caldwell advances.

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

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

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

Caldwell jogs back.

He stops cold.

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

ROAD - MUSTANG (MOVING) - DAY

The Mustang arrows through the hot air a gleam of black bone.

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

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

He straps a hoodie to his chest. Cinches the belt tight.

TOWN ROAD - MUSTANG - DAY

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

MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Needlenose pliers boil in a coffee pot. Sturgill unplugs the machine.

ROADSIDE TIENDITA - NIGHT

The Owner eyes Sturgills chest then his face then raises and fetches the whiskey.

MOTEL ROOM BATHROOM - NIGHT

He slashes a towel with a pocket knife.

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

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

He goes in with the pliers. The pliers hold his heart in place.

Glass. Heartworms of iron.

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

RANGER TRUCK (MOVING) - DAY

Caldwell drives with tears lit in sunflash.

His phone vibrates 202. He picks up.

PHONE CALL - RANGER TRUCK AND USS PORTLAND LPD27

Hair Parted Left leans on the starboard railing.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

Im calling because Flynn was a constituent of mine.

CALDWELL

Whadaya want.

The LWSD pans the sky.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

This aint exactly an elk hunt.

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

HAIR PARTED LEFT

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

CALDWELL

Im more worried about the Sinaloas.

The gunner locks.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

Just take your time.

CALDWELL

What should I call you.

Drones burst aflame firestorming in death spirals.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

We are the mirror. Above and below.

Hair Parted Left ends the call.

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

BUZZING.

ROADSIDE - DAY

Wirelines buzz overhead.

Through the bars of a cellblock waterhole a Senora merchant
leans on the counter twisting her hair into a braid. Her eyes
crawl over Sturgill crown to boot.

He lifts the clear 1.5L bottle and guzzles.

He sifts through glass bits scattered across the mat. He
coughs and a blotch of blood splashes down. Wiping with his
hand he looks up.

Death unmasked of its self devouring ellipsis that his eyes
reject outright. The good one. And the gone.

TIRES OVER GRAVEL.

MUSTANG (MOVING) - DAY

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

COPPER CANYON SWITCHBACK - DAY

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

One of six gorges.

A labyrinth of switchbacks. Nowhere tunnels. Rusted bridges.

Mineral mines. Abyss drops. Rivulets scouring stone and scragged evergreens shrubbed across endless cascading acres.

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

Around curves where lichen boulders bite into the desolation of the open road.

Across a break where a lone meat goat strays from the shade stunned into a buck as the Mustang bulls through and crunches on.

A canyon trestle anchors in dark relief like a sentinel wreathed in fire.

CERCAHUI ENTRANCE - SUNSET

The Mustang slows.

A FALCON (36) perches oaf heavy atop a 30 gallon drum with an M16 slung across his back.

His BDUs hang loose and in both hands he clasps a dark bottle. The arid wrath of Rayleigh scatter holds flooding inside his bloodshot eyes.

STURGILL

Donde es cuarto. Yo quiero room.
Cuarto.

The Falcon blinks slow and swings his rifle up over the dome of the sun and chortles with belly before lifting off the drum.

RANGER TRUCK - COPPER CANYON SWITCHBACK - MORNING

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

BACK BUNGALOW - EARLY MORNING

The walls hold the dull hide of drought.

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

He wheezes and lifts up shaking checking his chest.

BACK BUNGALOW - EARLY MORNING

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

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

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

A slope climbs steep to the summit behind him.

TEMPLO MISION DE CEROCAHUI - EARLY MORNING

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

Sturgill enters through an arch rising to the apex of a mass he cannot bear or name.

TEMPLO MISION - EARLY MORNING

The sanctuary glows empty save for candles. He stands there as time and stubble hardens.

His earhole RINGS.

Thirst of stone. Burden of meaning. Eden its cost.

CUT TO BLACK

PART II

Sheath the blade.

BACK HOUSE BEDROOM - REDDING, CA - MORNING

Mira unzips the duvet shell and tears it off already moving to the next.

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

MIRA

Your father didnt water the hens.

Mira unhooks the fitted sheet and circles the bed making quick work of the other corner.

The fitted. The duvet. The top.

All flung in a heap on the rug floor. Mira hustles out.

LIVING ROOM

She stoops stripping the velcro from the folding bed.

MIRA

Check the mail. And I got everything to make nachos. But youll have to serve yourself.

Mira grabs all the toys.

E plastics. Squirt gun. And dumps them ringing into the playpen.

MIRA

And take these.

She bends down uncurling the cover without a thought.

LAUNDROMAT - REDDING - SUNSET

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

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

MUSTACHED MAN

I got extra.

Another coin.

CLAIRE

Please stop.

MUSTACHED MAN

Your husband Army.

CLAIRE

No. No.

MUSTACHED MAN

I

CLAIRE

No. Please.

MUSTACHED MAN

Lemme

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

CLAIRE

Hes killed men.

The Man glances at the Child. Claire does too.

CLAIRE

Excuse me.

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

LAUNDROMAT - SUNSET

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

CLAIRE (VO)

When shadows fall.

BACK HOUSE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Claire sits the Child between her wrapped legs as she reads to him in the playpen.

CLAIRE

Across the hills. Where does the eagle go honey? Where does the eagle go?

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

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

The glass holds her face but not her eyes.

RANCH LOT - EDGE OF SALT FLATS - NM - DAY

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

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

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

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

LIVESTOCK AUCTION - DUSK

The crowd breaks off.

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

LOADING CORRAL - EVENING

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

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

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

The divider swings shut. The Hauler wipes his forehead with the back of his hand then heads for the office to settle up.

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

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

HORSE HAUL (MOVING) - EVENING

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

He looks down at his thigh and from under the divider and a wave of horse piss and pissfroth sloshes across the vulcanized rubber.

Aluminum and ammonia.

Proteins and urea.

DOT WEIGH STATION - NIGHT

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

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

He looks back.

Within the frame the mare hulks near invisible in the black of the haul quaking in fierce repose.

The darkness shapes her there until she erupts clamoring out.

TRUCK LOT

He stalks the truck cabs and enters one.

A bobble frog sits on the dash.

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

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

REMOTE ROAD - DAWN

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

MORNING

He stops and breathes the length of the road down.

DAY

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

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

THE GREAT HUM OF A BUSTED ICE MACHINE.

GAS MART - DAY

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

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

Faint Spanish. He stuffs his pockets.

RECEIVING BAY - DAY

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

Along the parapet a white utility van idles.

STURGILL

Donde esta.

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

STURGILL

Where are you going. What city.

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

STURGILL

Donde.

He tears off another two.

STURGILL

What city.

VAN (MOVING) - DAY

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

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

Another Man just as close scratches below his own earlobe with a pointed finger. Sturgill ignores.

STURGILL
How much longer. Time.

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

STURGILL
Que hora es.

Across from him a blackeyed Child opens his mouth wide. Something like darkness. Or chocolate cake.

DESERT ROAD - DAY

The foothill panorama blitzes brighter now and bleaker as the van glides across the blacktop stakes and crosses stickling the desert floor by the hundreds like nails holding the hide of the earth down.

BUS STATION - MESA OUTSKIRTS, PHX - DAY

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

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

TICKET BOOTH - DAY

The plexiglass streaks with grime as he bows to it. His bad eye bare he slides the ID of the Oldtimer under the glass.

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

I10 - P1 DOUBLE DECKER BUS (MOVING) - SUNSET

The sulfur clouds shock the desert rock a free radical red.

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

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

EVENING

Almond eyed his head smudges against the window fogging the abandoned steeltown crawling past.

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

GLASS SHATTERS.

THE SIDE OF A GARAGE - DAY

He drops the dumbbell and picks the long shards free.

GARAGE MANCAVE - DAY

He jumps down and slaps the ceiling lights on. They trip starkly and he scoffs at the gaud of midlife.

He goes to the mini fridge and grabs a beer and drops into the recliner like hes doing it a favor and jackknifes it and sinks deep and cracks the pull tab.

The black flatscreen stares back.

The remote sits like a book on the poker table.

EVENING

A gun muzzle taps Sturgills skull. All sound reverberating and gone sour.

Wheeler holsters his gun. Sturgill stands and they clasp forearms. Beer cans clatter.

WHEELER

You didnt go to Claire.

STURGILL

She moved.

WHEELER

Annes not gonna like this.

STURGILL

Then you hide me.

WHEELER
(beat sniffs)
You didnt go through the septic did
ya.

Sturgill heads toward the heavy bag.

WHEELER
How longve you been out.

Sturgills sister ANNE (29) storms in like shes from Jersey.

ANNE
(beat)
What the hell are you doing here?

Sturgill flares his arms out.

ANNE
They let you out?

She steps in. Then catches the smell and recoils.

ANNE
Oh no. Nope.

Anne backs up.

ANNE
Are ya planning on stayin here?

WHEELER
Whadaya think blood is for Anne.

ANNE
(beat)
You should get in

WHEELER
He stays. In the garage.
(points at Sturgill)
Youve got one week. Any longer and
we all run the risk. Anne honey
give us a minute.

Anne exits. Wheeler pulls some whiskey and two glasses.

WHEELER
Blood pumps both ways dont it.
(beat)
This aint no conscience. Youre a
godsend.

He gurgles one out for Sturgill. Then himself.

STURGILL

This has nothing to do with God.

WHEELER

Im not talking about you stayin here. You can stay here. Me being a cop buys us time but not much.

(beat)

Im talkin about you doin me a favor.

Sturgill waits.

WHEELER

Theres a woman. I want her followed. Shadowed. Know where she goes. And thats it.

STURGILL

And if I dont.

WHEELER

I dont. Means you go back.

(beat)

I dont care where you go. It wont be here.

STURGILL

I never liked you. Not even close.

(nods)

But Ill do it.

WHEELER

Works for me. Drink.

NIGHT

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

STURGILL

I was gonna say it. If you didnt let me stay.

ANNE

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

Anne goes to the door and stops and turns.

ANNE

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

She scoffs then exits slamming the door.

WHEELERS KITCHEN - MORNING

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

WHEELER
Time to meet Cherry.

STURGILL
Cherry.

WHEELER
Your accomplice.

WHEELERS DRIVEWAY - MORNING

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

WHEELER
Got it cheap at a police auction.

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

WHEELER
Cobra II.

STURGILL
Trenbolone.

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

WHEELER
You know stick right.

STURGILL
You know any good jokes.

Wheeler dangles the keys.

STURGILL
(beat)
I will take em from you

MUSTANG (MOVING) - LATE MORNING

Sturgill shifts gears weaving through mild traffic.

MUSTANG (PARKED) - LATE MORNING

He kills the engine and slips off his fishing cap and leans low over the dash.

Four Roofers rip ash gray shingles from a one story roof.

SUBURBAN ROOF - LATE MORNING

A portable radio on the roof belts mellifluous female vocals. Tool belt slung low on her hips the Redhead rises to the aria.

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

MUSTANG (PARKED) - LATE MORNING

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

PRODUCE SECTION - NIGHT

Sturgill walks over.

STURGILL

I grew up on a vineyard actually.
But I havent touched a grape since.

She doesnt look up from the bags of grapes.

REDHEAD

Thats not good.

STURGILL

Know what we measured grapevines
in.

REDHEAD

Humor me.

STURGILL

We measured them in vineyards.

She turns her shoulders. Pops a grape.

REDHEAD

Who plants a vineyard and doesnt
eat its grapes?

She pushes her cart forward and away.

WHEELER (VO)

Its loaded.

WHEELERS GARAGE - NIGHT

Sturgill reps out deadlifts. Wheeler steps in midset and extends the Stechkin by its barrel and hangs the handle near Sturgills face.

Sturgill slams down 4 plates and unstraps the figure eights.

He takes the revolver.

WHEELER

So the girl can throw a hammer huh.

Wheeler paces back picking at his beak.

WHEELER

Thats Bears Breath. No muzzleflash.
No blast. And it keeps the casings
so no forensics. Its why Russians
who jump out of windows are found
with little holes in their heads.

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

WHEELER

Ya understand.

STURGILL

Im not doin that.

WHEELER

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

STURGILL

I dont kill.

WHEELER

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

STURGILL
Your lifes not at risk.

WHEELER
You want an imminent threat.

STURGILL
Whatd she do.

WHEELER
Shes messin with my livelihood.

STURGILL
Its about money.

WHEELER
What isnt.
(beat)
Killing. To kill. That. Is moneys
first coin.

Sturgill rubs his hand across his head.

WHEELER
You oughta figure out what you
value more. Can you kill someone
you dont know. For reasons you dont
know. To save your ass from time
you know for a fact you dont want.
(beat)
Do it and you disappear. Dont. And
you disappear.

Sturgill swings the cylinder out. Loaded.

MUSTANG (MOVING) - MORNING

An EV pulls in from the road.

A procession of shopping carts grind and rattle their cargo
past an illustrious archway of plaster climbing sky like
smoke.

MUSTANG (PARKED) - MORNING

Sturgill slips a hunters hoodie over his holster. Then fits
his lurebrand cap.

MAGNOLIA BAPTIST LOT - MORNING

He shadows.

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

BAPTIST LOBBY - MORNING

She smiles through niceties with an Older Woman.

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

The oxygen tank. The mask. She climbs the stairwell and he rises bold as an air horn.

HALLWAY - MORNING

She enters a room.

He approaches the vision panel and peers in. Then enters.

ROOM G208 - MORNING

He brushes past the pastries and drops into a seat beside her. JANUS (26) and LEON LOCKE (25) fill out the semicircle of folding chairs. All but Sturgill armored in ironed cloth.

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

Janus speaks up as if to a full room.

JANUS

Lets get to it. Hat off.

Sturgill removes his cap.

JANUS

We have somebody new. Im Janus the Life Group coordinator. Were all family so lets do it right. Give us your name and testimony please.

STURGILL

My names Sal Bass.

LOCKE

Like your cap.

Sturgill wrings his cap.

STURGILL

Its a trout.

LOCKE
I meant I like your cap.

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

JANUS
You mean Jesus found you. Whats
your line of work Sal?

Sturgills eye catches Lockes Bible.

STURGILL
I write books.

JANUS
What about?

STURGILL
Things and stuff.
(beat)
Mostly stuff.

The Group stares. Janus resets.

JANUS
Did you forget your Bible?

STURGILL
Its on my phone. And I forgot my
phone.

JANUS
You and Lila can share.

STURGILL
(to Lila)
Weve met before. Grocers Market.

Lila shakes her head.

STURGILL
The lame grape joke.

LILA
Oh yah. I do remember the lameness.

Sturgill raises his eyebrows.

JANUS

What a wild start. Now whos ready to read? Leon? Leon here has a twin named Nohl. But he doesnt come around anymore does he?

Locke shrugs.

JANUS

Not unless you two are switching places on us.

LOCKE

Its possible.

JANUS

Go ahead and read verse 4.

On the whiteboard Song of Solomon. Chapter 8. Verses 4 and 5.

LOCKE

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

JANUS

Now all my sisters in chorus.

JANUS AND LILA

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

Sturgill scans the room. Heads bowed.

JANUS AND LILA

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

JANUS

I believe were all single here. Sal?

Sturgill nods.

JANUS

Were not a singles club but sometimes thats just the way things go.

(beat)

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

He inhales.

JANUS
Put you on the spot.

STURGILL
Love is a force.

JANUS
The Shulammite says later love cant
be bought. Do you believe that?

STURGILL
You oughta ask someone. Whos in
love.

Lila looks at Sturgill. He keeps straight.

JANUS
Fair enough.

WHEELER (VO)
Tell me you didnt follow her in.

STURGILL (VO)
Do I look like a dumbass.

MUSTANG (MOVING) - MORNING

Sturgill follows Lilas EV down the freeway.

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

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

MUSTANG (PARKED) - EVENING

The crossing arm lifts. Lilas EV exits the barricade and he
turns the key and the Mustang catches.

STURGILL (VO)
She works at the Naval Warfare
Center.

WHEELERS GARAGE - NIGHT

Wheeler enters in uniform as Sturgill trails.

STURGILL

Thats military warships and
whatnot.

WHEELER

I dont care if shes Green Beret

STURGILL

You hafta tell me why.

Wheeler grabs two beers from the mini fridge.

WHEELER

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

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

WHEELER

A lil flashlight therapy never hurt
anybody. But shes sayin she saw
different. Wouldntve evenve known
it was her if it werent for my
ears.

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

He lets it fall and they drink.

WHEELER

I know you want to call Claire.
But no use callin. Shes already
surveillanced.

Wheeler sits back and unpins his badge.

WHEELER

I locked onto this thing like a
damn pit bull when I first started.
Polished it every week.

(beat)

Shouldve seen the last one. Had
scratch marks from a warehouse
dispute. This Foreman goes back
into a trailer. Then all you hear
is this big BOHM. So I step up to
the door gun drawn and BAM the door
swings open and this guy bursts out
with the lower half of his face
hanging off. The guy shotgunned
himself in the face.

STURGILL

What the hells a shotgun doin in a warehouse.

WHEELER

I dunno. But get this Im backin up and I shit you not he literally chases me against a wall and a CNC machine. Now I wasnt about to shoot him. So I slide into a gap shittin myself. Its my second year. But at the same time hes reaching out wanting help. So I squeeze as far as I could along the machine until I couldnt go any further. Mustve blasted his vocals clean out. Cause all you can hear was the blood. And the gurgling.

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

WHEELER

Thats about the worst of it. Dont know why things happen. But I have some guesses now that Im older. But I really dont care much now. To know.

(lifts badge)

What does it mean. I dont even know what it means.

(beat)

Youve seen a hell of a lot worse. You ever think back.

Sturgill shrugs.

STURGILL

Sometimes I think about what didnt happen.

(beat)

Then I think about what did.

(beat)

Then I think maybe there aint even a difference.

Sturgill stands and heads to the heavy bag.

Wheeler rises and heads to the glass casement of guns.

WHEELER

You needa get it done already. Im not cancelling another poker night.

Wheeler walks over to the heavy bag.

WHEELER

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

Sturgill stares Wheeler down.

Wheeler's jaw moves side to side.

WHEELER

No. I know you will. You will.

JANUS (VO)

I know what clears brain fog.

BAPTIST LOBBY - MORNING

JANUS

Mushrooms. There's Lions Mane

STURGILL

Naw I'd rather not trip.

JANUS

You're thinking of psilocybin silly. The ones I'm talking about are nonpsychoactive and nootropic.

Sturgill scopes the space. Lila chats with an Older Woman.

JANUS

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

STURGILL

Excuse me. I gotta leave for a minute.

NEAR THE HANGING GROWTH RING SLAB

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

The plaque reads Like a tree planted by streams of water. Psalm 1.3. Oak tree from the original grove of 1896.

Lila approaches.

LILA

The dark rings are when it survived wildfires.

STURGILL

So where are you from.

LILA

Stockton.

STURGILL

You didnt grow up on a pig farm did you.

LILA

Maybe.

STURGILL

Dinner or coffee.

Lila shifts her weight to one leg.

STURGILL

Or bookstore. We can go to the one off Charm Quark Ave. After Group.

LILA

(beat)

Ok. But its not a date.

STURGILL

Call it whatever you want.

LILA

I just want to be clear. Its not a date.

STURGILL

You can say that.

LILA

No thanks.

(beat)

No coffee. No bookstore. And no date.

Lila turns and walks off.

BOOKSTORE CAFE - LATE MORNING (RAINING)

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

Lila enters folding her umbrella. She pins her hair back rutilant in the storelight.

A ruby. A tilt of skywire snapping straight. A thousand bad dreams.

Lila browses the shelves. They catch each others glances but they dont look away fast enough.

LILA (VO)

Cant say.

ENCYCLOPEDIA SUPPLEMENTS - LATER

The air swims of paper dust and wet rock and the singe of coffee grounds as their sleeves graze walking the aisle bowing like branches.

LILA

Theres a lot of confidential things involved.

STURGILL

You can give me an idea.

LILA

Naval systems. Thats as much as I can say.

STURGILL

Littorals.

LILA

Littorals. The team next to mine works on them.

STURGILL

You hungry.

LILA (VO)

Im going out with this guy.

MANEUVERING AND SEAKEEPING BASIN - MORNING

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

LILA

But I cant find anything.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

You know it wont be good.

LILA
I want to know.

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

LILA
I dont wanna bother you if youre
out of country.

HAIR PARTED LEFT
You know youre cutest when youre
not cognizant of it.

LILA
Dont care.
(springy)
Youre still my hero.

Lila walks down the rail. Hair Parted Left watches her go
suppressing a smile.

HAIR PARTED LEFT (VO)
No Sal Bass.

TOMAHAWK TRAIL - NOON

The land sours in its own sweat.

HAIR PARTED LEFT (VO)
No publisher. No Pikesville.
Nothing in the States. I dont need
the plates to spell it out for you.

Sturgill and Lila veer off the loop trail.

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

LILA (VO)
I just. Its just not taking.

HAIR PARTED LEFT (VO)
Lila. Hes lying about something.

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

FADE TO BLACK

THE SOUND OF RIVER WATER.

SANTA ANA RIVERBANK - AFTERNOON

Leaf scatter splits the light. The river laps loud under the full weight of the day. Sturgill elbows up.

Lila sits squat in the shallows washing low.

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

LILA

I need some more water.

STURGILL

You can fill up there.

She levels her eyes at him.

STURGILL

You washed it in.

LILA

I washed in it but it doesnt mean I want to drink from it.

STURGILL

Its clean.

LILA

Im concerned about parasites.

STURGILL

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

Sturgill reaches for his bag and unzips it.

LILA

You dont see yourself as clearly as youd like to believe.

Bears Breath. He pulls out a full water bottle and gives it a shake. She remains still.

He launches the bottle up and out into the river.

STURGILL

There. We meet in the middle.

LILA

I knew you were wrong.

She turns up the bank.

STURGILL

Jail

LILA

Jail and prison are two different things.

STURGILL

Shouldnt bother you.

Lila stops and turns.

LILA

Of course it bothers me.

(beat)

And Im hiding something too ok. A has friend flown in from the East Coast. Ive known him since university. And we decided. Im with him now. Exclusively.

STURGILL

Whats his name.

LILA

Ty.

He scoffs.

LILA

Im leaving now.

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

LILA

You wanted to conquer me. But what you want can never be conquered. Only given. How do you not see this?

(beat)

I dont ever want to see you again.

STURGILL

Im not beggin you.

LILA

No begging needed.

STURGILL

I dont need you either.

LILA

You dont need anybody.

STURGILL
Youre right.

LILA
Id appreciate it if you found a
different church.

Sturgill feigns a laugh.

LILA
I want something else. Even if it
is suburban. Even if the handcuffs
are golden. I think I paid for it.
(beat)
I dont have to deal with this.
(beat)
And I wont.

STURGILL
Then dont.

Lila turns up the slope and he follows.

NEAR AN UPTURNED TREE

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

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

He goes after her for a time then stops. She shrinks into the
field of light.

WHEELERS GARAGE - NIGHT

Wheeler readies the river. Three older GENTLEMEN crowd the
table.

The side door unlatches and Wheeler springs like a Doberman
in a war dream.

GENTLEMAN 1
You dealin or what.

WHEELER
(to Sturgill entering)
Is it done.

STURGILL
The worst of it.

GENTLEMAN 2 (OS)
Let him take my spot.

WHEELER
Hes not playin.
(to Sturgill)
Is it done.

Sturgill nods.

WHEELER
Rest in my room if you can. The
passports in the dresser. Hows that
freedom taste.

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

WHEELER
Gotta smell to it dont it.

LAUNDRY ROOM - NIGHT

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

GENTLEMAN 1 (OS)
Who the hell was that.

WHEELER (OS)
Hes what you call the price of
fuckin up. Just like YOU. Youve
been bleedin out all night.

MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sturgill picks up Wheelers phone on the nightstand in the
dark room. He FaceTimes Claire.

FIRST RING. SECOND.

He covers the camera with his thumb.

THIRD. Claire appears haloed in soft lamplight.

CLAIRES VOICE
Rob?
(beat)
Have you heard from Silas? Hello?

A Childs cry. Sturgill ends the call and tosses it onto the
bed. It lights up.

Anne stands silhouetted in the doorway.

ANNE

Id feel better if youd stayed outta
my bedroom.

STURGILL

If he kicks me out. I tell him.

ANNE

We were separated Silas. A sloppy
New Years kiss counts for nothin ya
hear? It aint on anybodys
conscience. Not mine. Not his.

STURGILL

Maybe the wine blacked it out.

ANNE

Yeah Im gonna need a drink after
talkin to your smart ass.

(beat)

You think Claire needs you back.
She doesnt.

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

STURGILL (VO)

You look lost.

BAPTIST LOBBY - MORNING

Dale stands. Not with one shadow but two.

STURGILL

Lila didnt mention me.

DALE

Ive been here plenty. And no.

STURGILL

Whadaya do.

DALE

I sell EVs. If you ever need some
wheels.

Dale hands Sturgill his business card. Plain gloss.

DALE

This is just until I finish my
masters in quantum engineering.

STURGILL
So whats your story.

Janus joins in.

DALE
My testimony you mean.

Sturgill shrugs.

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

STURGILL
Certified huh.

DALE
145 IQ. Plan on retesting. Bump it
5. Its the top end of exceptionally
gifted semigenius genius. All
generally relative.

STURGILL
Maybe you should have others say
youre a genius.

JANUS
Oh hes a genius.

DALE
There you go. Guess youll always be
stuck using implied hypotheticals.

STURGILL
I aint ever stuck.

DALE
Or is your eye evil because I am
geneous.

STURGILL
Whats that.

JANUS
Its Scripture. And a pun. And a
fancy way of saying youre. That
you.

A deadlock stare.

JANUS
Ill leave you two at it.

Janus leaves.

A duel of wills.

LOCKE (VO)
And it came to pass.

ROOM G208 - MORNING

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

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

JANUS
Before I forget Lilas hosting a luncheon this afternoon. Youre all invited and yes that includes you Sal.

Lila presses her lips together peeved.

LILA
Its also our last lunch for the Group. Janus.

JANUS
That. Is correct. Ty now that youre back with us why dont you share your first impressions?

DALE
I only have one observation Janus. The Bible says David encouraged himself. At his lowest. Wives taken. Kids taken. In fire and ash. He pulled himself out.

STURGILL
Whats your point.

DALE
I would argue hell. And I mean hellish situations because I dont believe in hell. Id argue that that suffering. Is exactly what we need in order to make things right. And in those cases you gotta do it yourself.

STURGILL

David got everything back. Dont
forget that.

DALE

No ones arguing that.
(to Lila)
You cold.

Dale shrugs off his jacket and lays it over her lap. Sturgill
seethes.

JANUS (VO)

Ghosts.

LILAS DINING ROOM - DAY

Low laughter stirs half meant as the Sunday paraa plays a
card game around a glass top table.

LOCKE

Not Poseidon.

LILA

Ghosts arent honorable.

DALE

(to Sturgill)
You look spent.

LOCKE

Hamlet.

JANUS

Sal was that your card?

Sturgill scratches his thumbnail between the groove of his
bottom teeth and nods. The wall clock ticks metronomic.

JANUS

We can play Life if you guys want?

Sturgill stands and leaves.

DALE

(beat)
Hope hes not shooting up in there.

Dale and Locke chuckle.

DALE

(to Lila)
You know thats what youre thinking.

Lila holds her tongue.

DALE

So whos hosting next week.

LILAS BATHROOM - DAY

Sturgills gaze drops from the mirror woozily. He turns the faucet and gathers a cold gowpen and splashes his face.

He opens the medicine cabinet and rummages then squats and checks the lower cabinet digging over clutter and pulling out a 2 pack of pregnancy tests.

One gone. One left.

DINING ROOM - DAY

Sturgill reenters.

STURGILL

I gotta head out.

The Group ad libs their goodbyes. Sturgill shakes hands with Locke then hugs Janus.

He stops at Lila then tosses the pregnancy test. The glass rings.

Sturgill exits as Janus and Locke hush themselves.

Lila grabs the test and slinks away. Dale follows without a word.

STREET - MUSTANG (PARKED) - DAY

Sturgill crosses the street to the black Mustang and enters.

He unholsters the black Stechkin from under his hoodie and sheaths it in the black glovebox.

LILAS BATHROOM - LATE MORNING

The bathwater steams the room sweet and rich as mock figs.

Lila lowers herself in. The water breaches the rim.

She lies back then tilts her head back. And submerges.

The seconds stretch the waters stillness. The calm holds.

Banging at the front door and she explodes up.

SMASH TO

BACK BUNGALOW - EVENING

Sturgill wakes ripped from old realities. The room soaks in early nightfall like a father at the wrong door.

He shifts his weight to the edge of the sofa and rises.

At the dresser he dips his forefinger into a shot glass of pine resin in water. He drinks the gelatin.

OVER SINK

Sturgill works the fishtank tubing jutting from an incision under his pit just lateral the nipple. Between his thumb and knuckle he milks blackmadder through the line.

He opens the tap and watches the pus and blood swirl down the drain.

He straps his shoulder holster and fits into a jacket and grabs a whiskey bottle from the shelf and heads to the open doorway. He stops and pulls the stained lace and mesh netting aside.

The blonde cat lumbers toward the door.

BUZZSAW.

He leaves.

BACKYARD - REDDING - DAY

Buzzsaw snarls in the adjacent yard. A black phoebe perches on a pad of cacti.

The windlanced lot lies cluttered and mostly despidered and invariably lived in with nothing out of place because nothing ever moves.

A red wheelbarrow leans against one of two muraled sheds. To the side dead vinewood hangs imbedded in the chainlink.

Mira pins a white tablecloth to the clothesline strung between an almond tree and the redwood fence.

Bermuda buttercups ripple against the sea green vinyl slats of the back chainlink. The levee fence holds three straight lines of barbwire across its length.

Mira carries the Child (2) and latches the hen run. Rooster wings thrash in frenzy.

Amidst the crisp susurrus bees reel over the pink and white almond blossoms sun drunk. The house in yellow.

Claire steps out carrying a big cookie with two candles on a dessert plate. The fescue waves bright as springfire.

Claire flicks the lighter. No good.

MIRA

Just go get it then.

BACK HOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

Claire opens the freezer door. Vapor spills out as she grabs a Tupperware container.

BACKYARD - DAY

She crosses the yard with the Tupperware and butter knife lowering the container onto the grass under the almond tree.

TARAHUMARA MOUNTAINS - RANGER TRUCK - SUNSET

Huarache runners bridge the shoulder knifing their long shadows over the dirt and the dust.

CALDWELL

If I passed. I passed you early.

OUTSIDE SCRAPYARD - MIDNIGHT

Caldwell parks the truck.

He strolls along the chainlink. Beyond the fence the Mustang gleams against floodlight as though the black bull still boils.

UNDER A SKELETON TREE - MIDNIGHT

High beams spear the dark.

Caldwell shovels sandy dirt over the monster box half buried in a hole.

BACKYARD - DAY

Claire's shovel crunches into the ground at the base of the almond tree.

The wind kicks and petals pepper down.

Mira pretends to eat the Childs belly as Claire kneels by the hole and sets the container on her lap.

A Cascade breeze rushes in. Claire shivers goosebumps then pops the lid open.

A frozen slab of dark red and off white.

She wedges the organ loose with the butter knife and holds the Tupperware upside down. The placenta and umbilical cord drop an ice brick into the hole.

Claire stands and grabs the shovel and waits.

Then she shovels dirt over.

SCRAPYARD - MORNING

The DUENO (55) drags the chainlink gate across. Behind him a railcar office graffitied in apocrypha and gang names.

Mud daubers nest in the cavities of ironhusks and hoods yawning like autopsies.

Caldwell crouches at the Mustangs hatch.

No brainstains. Not a hair. The wind tugs the strung hubcaps into a faint chime.

CALDWELL (VO)

Hay algo mas que puedes decirme
sobre el.

SCRAPYARD OFFICE - MORNING

A generator wheezes near the door and a deers skull and antlers watches unsparingly blank from the wall.

CALDWELL

Hay algo mas que puedes decirme
sobre el. Quizas algo que
escuchaste de otras personas que
venian para abajo.

DUENO

Una viejita si dijo algo de un
recién llegado. En la iglesia.

CALDWELL

Ella dijo que a el le falta un ojo.

DUENO

No lo describio mucho. Nomas dijo
que llego un hombre nuevo.

The Dueno switches the coffee maker on.

CALDWELL

Que iglesia. Iba bajando.

DUENO

No. Alla arriba en Cerocahui.
(points)
Dijo que se estaba quedando en uno
de los cuartitos de atras.

The hot gurgle starts to hiss. Caldwell works his teeth with
his tongue and nods.

EDGE OF A PRECIPICE - MIDNIGHT

A lullaby of bush crickets buzzes from the valley thicket.

He splashes a bottle White Lightning over the cliff and it
sprays sideways.

He kills the rest then tosses the bottle and titans under a
stratum of darkness standing there for a time and a time and
a half as all direction crumbles beneath his boots like sand
his Cyclops eye scouring beyond the new moons socket to the
spur of quivering stars stirring reckless and terrible and
black as the holes of this world.

DAWN

He sits overlooking the valley as sunshine lays its measure
on the tilt of the range. First flakes die in his hair.

The wind rustles a nearby bush and he casts a sidelong glance
back then turns his head downhill and rises squatting low.

A dozen Federales backing a half dozen armed Marshals crouch
along the side of the church. Rifle cones poised like scythes
sweeping across the mud field toward the back bungalows.

Sturgill sidesteps and backs up along the ridgeline.

BACK BUNGALOW - DAWN

A Marshal rips a curtain down and forces light in raw. They
all pace room to room spectral yet certain with each space
emptier than the last.

Amid the slack faces Caldwell appears in the doorway as his breath evaporates in the chill of the dawn.

BACK BUNGALOW - MORNING (SNOWING)

Caldwell rounds left of the bungalow and scans the ground.

Mudprints.

He looks up at the ridgeline.

EDGE OF THE PRECIPICE - MORNING (SNOWING)

Caldwell tops the summit and inches to the farthest edge.

Sun dogs bracket the sun. After a moment his phone buzzes 202 and he answers.

HAIR PARTED LEFT (VO)

Its your call.

PHONE CALL - PRECIPICE AND HIGHRISE SUITE (NIGHT)

Hair Parted Left reclines across papers.

CALDWELL

If you dont mind Im gonna stay a bit and practice my Spanish.

Behind Hair Parted Left a panoramic of the cityscape simmers in galaxies of neon and glass and flame.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

Flynn was someone I could count on.

CALDWELL

Not another like him.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

He was what you call an old broom.

CALDWELL

Hows that.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

Oh he knew how to sweep quiet and get those corners.

(beat)

Hard to believe hed risk his soul for a sodie.

(beat)

Lesson learned I guess.

CALDWELL

Yessir.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

Beautiful views over there. Am I right.

CALDWELL

Yessir. Beautiful.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

Do you mind if I keep you in the rotary. You know. If certain things were to come up.

CALDWELL

No thanks. Respectfully.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

The sun out.

Caldwell holds silent.

HAIR PARTED LEFT

Caldwell.

CALDWELL

(beat)

Yeah.

HAIR PARTED RIGHT

El sol dont ever blink. I mean ever. Even when it looks like its not up there.

(beat)

And neither should you.

Hair Parted Left hangs up.

Caldwell inhales the horzions glare then turns around.

A Ranger stands in the field waves him down with his hat. And he heads down.

SCREE UNDER SHALE.

ALONG DROPOFF - MORNING (SNOWING)

Sturgill grips the cliffside.

Along a tapering edge.

He looks up.

A long ways up.

He draws his Glock.

Aims up and waits a moment.

His footing gives and he slides to the brink of a ledge.

And holds.

The gun ticks down and is gone.

He climbs down some onto another narrow shelf.

He looks up again.

Then to the side.

He sidesteps along.

Then gets to long smooth couloirs converging and narrowing downward.

He wedges himself in and navigates down the ribs and slabs facing the walls.

Step by step.

Hand by hand.

He follows the half funnel to a new break in the rock.

Then slides a bit and settles.

He descends again.

Then some more.

He gets to a protrusion and clears the weak foothold with his boot.

Rockfall.

He fixes a boot into a new crevice and extends for another hold only to bail and try to return to his set side as his set foot gives and he slides hard falling and hitting different angles of the rock like a sandbag ragdoll careening down swallowed by brush.

SMASH TO

BACKYARD - DAY

Claire pats the dirt down with the shovel.

She props the shovel up against the tree.

MIRA

Im surprised your not crying Miss
Mary Claire.

CLAIRE

Here.

The Child passes from Mira to Claire.

CLAIRE

(beat)
My tearsve been buried.

Mira stands and teeters in the breeze.

MIRA

Your sister in law sent a voice
recording of him. Been keeping it
from you.

(beat)
He sounds half gone.

Claire almost lets a word out.

Mira heads up the porch to the house and Claire follows with
the Child in her arms.

CANYON FLOOR - DAY (SNOWING)

Sunlight inches across the rocks as the wind shears through
the canyon walls a creature made of tongues.

He lies facedown with saliva and dust and blood mingled in
his breathing.

He drags himself forward by his arm and flips on his back. A
blurred mass caught in the brush up canyon.

He elbows up wincing and forces himself upright.

He staggers closer to the sleeping bag. Misshapen. Strung
tight.

He reaches up and yanks it free from the clawing brush and it
smacks against the stone.

And like some stone heap gathering snow to its form he drags the bag by its strings.

Gravel and stone hiss beneath the slide.

The snow picks up as he nears the mouth of a cave. His eye flicks to nearby pines.

He snaps off a dead branch.

He tears his sleeve into strips with bloodied fingers.

He slathers pine resin across the fabric.

At the mouth of the cave he pulls out a lighter from his pocket and sets and holds and it catches.

CAVE - DAY

Torchlight hurls shadows wild across the walls. His boots stop their crunch. Something in the dim.

He kicks at it. A femur clatters forward. Black denim clinging like rot to rot.

Heartbeats of torch flame.

The beam bends over a ravel of belts.

Loose boots. Split shoes.

A welter of bodies and rags and tangled limbs. Mummified skin drawn taut as drumskin. A jawbone jutting out the side of a skull.

Skulls stacked on ribcages.

A bonefield.

A vault of the dead.

He drags the bag close and squats. His hand moves to the drawstrings and loosens them.

Slow.

The flame sputters and sluices. Then dies into darkness.

LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY

Mira steps through as Claire trails with the Child. Mira touches the doorknob to the kitchen just as the side gate creaks and bangs against the house.

The Women freeze.

One watching the other.

BACK PORCH - DAY

Claire carries the Child out toward the side of the house and reaches past the corner and stops.

Mira passes and goes to the gate agape. She touches the redwood.

CLAIRE

Leave it. Please.

Mira swings it back and wedges a chunk of concrete at the bottom and returns to the back porch into the house.

Claire adjusts the Child in her arms and inhales.

Her eyes glass in the breeze as she stares down the long gravel drive toward the street.

She stands there holding the Child carved outside of time like some roadside altar. The final tether of their love left wholly fetal curled quiet against her breathing chest.

Behind her the bleach bright tablecloth ripples and lifts and sinks.

White petals drift down.

FADE TO WHITE

BLIZZARD HOWL.

CAVE MOUTH - DAY (SNOWING)

His panting clouds upward. HISSING.

He leans against the stoneface. Snow like fallout snags in his hair as he zips up.

The snow on the ground near his boots steams and sinks dark red.

STURGILLS VOICE (RECORDED)
 Either way. Dont you lie to River.
 Not to him.

He fishes out of his back pocket the sonogram and unfolds it.

STURGILLS VOICE (RECORDED)
 Claire. Life hangs on our word.

The wind plays with its corners. Static grain caught in wisps
 of light.

The head. The body. The faint arms.

The bones of his Boy.

STURGILLS VOICE (RECORDED)
 And no man. No man gets through.
 Only to break his word.

He looks up to the sky and closes his good eye.

Blackness.

A long moment.

Nothing.

STURGILLS VOICE (RECORDED)
 And Im not about to run dry of
 whatever the hell makes this life
 worth living. Only.

He opens his eye as the ice rages down.

STURGILLS VOICE (RECORDED)
 I cant give you mine. Not yours to
 keep.

A pale gray thread unspools above the pines. Thin. Fading
 into the thick of it a spiders dragline.

STURGILLS VOICE (RECORDED)
 Not ever.
 (beat)
 Not yet at least.

He folds the paper in thirds and sets it in his mouth and
 eats.

Then he pushes off the stone and limps on down the gravel
 into the wailing tide of haze.

His gait wide and bent dragging toward the storm what cannot follow.

TINNITUS.

SMASH TO WHITE