

The Legends Of Jesse Dark

Screenplay By
Glenn Gers

Based On The Novel By
Michael Doane

November 17, 2008

Valuable Illusions, Inc.
glenn@writingforscreens.com

This story takes place in 2008 -- but flows back-and-forth in time between Jesse in jail and the events that brought him there.

The transitions are moments of memory, and in them we are always on faces: we dissolve between a character's face in two different times-of-their-life.

Though changes in personal style will help make the different "times" clear on screen, in the script they are also noted in italics after a transition.

*Look out kid
It's something you did
God knows when
But you're doing it again*

- Bob Dylan

EXT. OUTSIDE YANKTON - DAY (3 YEARS AGO)

Winter, South Dakota. Flat prairie farmland, buried in snow, remote and silent and empty.

JESSE (V.O.)
A legend is a story. A myth. A romantic tale that may or may not be true.

Isolated farmhouses. Grain elevators. Stands of bare trees. A freezing disc of sun.

JESSE (V.O.)
A legend is also the key to a map or a chart; a method by which we understand distances and locate ourselves.

A pickup truck travels along a road - small, far away.

INT. INGERSOLL'S PICKUP - CONTINUOUS

PETER INGERSOLL driving: a weathered, gentle farmer, 50.

JESSE DARK in the shotgun seat, 17 years old. A farm kid with short hair and cheap clothes.

JESSE (V.O.)
We all have a lot of legends.

They see something ahead of them.

JESSE
Oh - God.

INT. YANKTON JAIL - EVENING (NOW)

Jesse, locked in a cell. Lost in thought, remembering.

It is three years later. He is 20.

He's wearing dirty hospital-uniform "whites". His unkempt hair falls to his shoulders; he's got a scruffy beard.

JUNEAU (O.S.)
Brought you some company, Jesse.

Jesse looks up, expressionless -

- watching SHERIFF RONALD JUNEAU lock CRIPPLED HORSE into the adjoining cell.

JUNEAU

This here's Crippled Horse.

Crippled Horse is Native American, late 20s, tough and doomed. He takes Jesse in, as Juneau leaves.

CRIPPLED HORSE

Big bad Jesse Dark.

JESSE

Do I know you?

CRIPPLED HORSE

Nope. But everybody in South Dakota knows they caught Jesse Dark. Jesse Dark's in Yankton jail.

Jesse says nothing.

CRIPPLED HORSE

I'm in for murder, but I din't do it.

(Beat)

You ever been in prison?

JESSE

Not until now.

CRIPPLED HORSE

This ain't prison. This is jail. I did eighteen months in Sioux Falls for assault. Got this:

He pulls up his filthy shirt to reveal a patch of ugly cross-hatched scars crawling across his abdomen.

Jesse tries not to let it rattle him.

JESSE

Liposuction?

Crippled Horse grunts a laugh, lowers the shirt.

CRIPPLED HORSE

Can I ask you something?

JESSE

Sure.

CRIPPLED HORSE

You're this big famous drug dealer. You got jet planes, power boats. You can buy women - you can buy whatever the fuck you want.

(MORE)

CRIPPLED HORSE (cont'd)

(Beat)

Why'd you wanna steal a baby?

Beat.

JESSE

I thought I could give him a name.

Crippled Horse nods. Thoughtful.

CRIPPLED HORSE

What name was it gonna be?

JESSE

Maybe Chance. Or Escape.

(Beat)

Escape Dark.

INT. BUS STATION - COLUMBUS, OH - THE SAME TIME

HARPER ADAMS watches the last few PASSENGERS climb off a bus and collect their luggage from its metal belly.

She is 21, with short hair and a funky-artsy style that looks good - but like it may be a little too much work for her.

As the BUS DRIVER slams the luggage bays shut:

HARPER

This is the bus from St. Paul?

DRIVER

Yep.

The Driver climbs back in and shuts the door -

- leaving Harper standing there.

Alone. Remembering:

INT. PARKED CAR - VERMILLION, SD - NIGHT (LAST YEAR)

It is a year ago: March, a cold wet night.

Harper's in the shotgun seat; her hair is long, her style is self-effacing college-grunge.

She's watching PROFESSOR BILL RYSON - good looking, 40ish - take cash from his wallet, hold it out to her.

HARPER

You're the one who wants it.

PROF. RYSON
You want me to score the pot? We'd
have to drive to Omaha.

Beat.

HARPER
"Score"?

PROF. RYSON
Ridicule and contempt don't really
become you, Harper.

HARPER
(Taking the money)
Yeah - but they are.

EXT. MAIN STREET, VERMILLION - CONTINUOUS

Harper gets out, crosses the street - the main drag of a college town: five stoplights, old low brick buildings, respectable shops closed for the night, a half-dozen cafes and beer bars still open.

She goes into the lit-up, shabby Grand Finale Bar. Music thumps within.

INT. GRAND FINALE - CONTINUOUS

A mediocre STUDENT BAND thrashes in the Back Room. Cigarette butts gather in corners of the grimy floor, under wobbly tables. The pool table looks like a lawn overrun by dogs.

Harper makes her way to the bar. Scans the STUDENT CROWD as MARVIN - the 50ish ex-hippie owner-bartender - comes over.

HARPER
You look tired, Marvin.

MARVIN
Capitalism. Wears me out.

HARPER
Willie around?

MARVIN
Busted.

HARPER
You're kidding.

MARVIN

Last night.

Harper grimaces. Checks the room again.

HARPER

Who else is selling?

MARVIN

Nobody. "Just Say Bolt" is on another clampdown.

Harper sighs. She didn't even want to do this in the first place. Marvin, drying a glass, watches. Leans to her:

MARVIN

Okay - listen. Don't let this get around, all right?

INT. JESSE'S APT. HOUSE - LATER

Harper follows Professor Ryson up the steep stairway in this old wood-frame apartment house. They whisper:

HARPER

What if he rapes me and kills you?

PROF. RYSON

No finals.

They find the door. Ryson knocks. From within:

JESSE (O.S.)

Who?

Ryson goes blank.

HARPER

You don't know us.

Pause.

JESSE (O.S.)

Good enough.

Jesse opens the door: not yet the scruffy fugitive he'll be in a year. His hair is long but clean; no beard. Thrift-shop-gypsy clothes. No shoes, thick socks. Joint in one hand, glass of red wine in the other.

From this first moment - as Jesse takes in suddenly-self-conscious Harper and her twice-her-age boyfriend - they are drawn to each other, wary, vulnerable.

HARPER
Marvin sent us.

Jesse steps back to let them in.

INT. JESSE'S APT. - CONTINUOUS

Used furniture, bottles, ashtrays, pot paraphernalia. Lots of used paperbacks, CDs. Sartre's *Being And Nothingness* open face-down on a coffee table; a cutting-board arranged with black bread, apples, cheese, nuts. Jazz playing low.

JESSE
You want some wine?

PROF. RYSON
Sure.

Harper shakes her head. Jesse pours Ryson's, hands it over. As Ryson sips:

JESSE
It's bad.

PROF. RYSON
(Winces)
Yes, it is.

Jesse shrugs. Looks at Harper, who has an odd expression.

JESSE
What?

HARPER
The glass is clean. You sure you're a dealer?

JESSE
Pretty sure.

Beat. Harper breaks eye contact, goes to browse the room.

PROF. RYSON
So: we're here to -

Jesse has produced a plastic bag as if from nowhere.

PROF. RYSON
Right. Exactly.

Ryson follows Jesse to the sofa, where Jesse rolls a joint. Silent, at ease, priestly. A chill-out king.

PROF. RYSON
Are you a student?

JESSE
Mmm-hmm.

PROF. RYSON
What's your major?

Harper, standing by the big windows, winces.

JESSE
Philosophy.

He finishes the joint, gives it to Ryson.

JESSE
You a student?

Ryson blinks. Jesse's deadpan. Ryson hesitates, then shakes his head and lights up.

PROF. RYSON
Professor. Psychology.

Jesse nods, starting to roll another. Harper comes to join them as Ryson savors, exhales - passing her the joint.

PROF. RYSON
Sweet. Good weed.

Rolling his joint without looking at it, Jesse watches her lips make an "o" as she inhales.

She notices. To break the spell, as he lights his:

HARPER
Most campus dealers are wanna-be
gangstas or horny nerds with
unexpected power.

JESSE
You've made a study.

Harper nods, tired of her life. Ready for a change. Ryson smokes, ruminating.

PROF. RYSON
Typology Of College-Town Dope Dealers.
Two volumes. Chapter six.
(Beat)
Harper's a photographer.

Harper meets Jesse's eyes. The only one in the room with no clue what's going on is the psych professor.

HARPER

So what does one do with a philosophy major when they're done with school? Teach?

JESSE

You question the very concept of Doing.

Harper nods: not at the answer, but at the expert volley in the game of non-answering. He studies her, amused.

HARPER

Where're you from?

JESSE

The wild west.

HARPER

Wyoming? Colorado?

JESSE

Just west.

She decides he's too good at this game, looks around the room instead. Jesse watches her.

His cell phone rings. He considers Harper and Ryson - then answers. Noncommittal, careful:

JESSE

Yeah. Twenty-five. Uh-huh.

(Jots a note)

I'll be there when I'm there. I'm not Domino's.

(Hangs up. Beat.)

Sorry.

(Stands)

Off on my appointed rounds. Neither cold nor rain nor late of night.

PROF. RYSON

Oh - right - sure. Sorry. Just moved right in here.

As Ryson and Harper get up and Jesse lets them out:

HARPER

What's your name?

JESSE
Jesse Dark.

HARPER
For real?

Jesse shrugs, nods.

PROF. RYSON
Nice to meet you, Jesse Dark.

Jesse nods. Harper nods.

Prof. Ryson and Harper go down the stairs.

Jesse, in his doorway, watches with a trace of sadness. But that might just always be there.

INT. YANKTON JAIL - AFTERNOON (NOW)

We come back out of memory, to the present:

Jesse sits behind bars. Remembering the night he met Harper. Sheriff Juneau comes to unlock the cell.

JUNEAU
Jesse. Your lawyer's here.

JESSE
I have a lawyer?

INT. YANKTON JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM - SOON AFTER

Juneau brings Jesse in. SIMON LARSEN BUTT - conservative, 40ish, unpacking his briefcase - gestures for Jesse to sit, sorting and considering legal documents.

BUTT
My name is Simon Larsen Butt. Your case has been assigned to me by the county public defender's office.

JESSE
I'll bet people make a lot of jokes.

BUTT
Not people who want me to get 'em out of jail.
(beat)
So exactly what is going on between
(MORE)

BUTT (cont'd)
you and Chief John Bolt of the
Vermillion Police Department?

Jesse says nothing. Butt nods. Reads:

BUTT
Aside from possession of weight and
intent to sell, he's charging you with
vandalism - resisting arrest - assault
- arson - inciting to riot - and
attempted murder of a police officer.
(Beat)
I assume you want to plead not-guilty?

JESSE
I didn't do any of those things. I'm
not sure if that makes me not-guilty.

Butt looks at Jesse a long time.

BUTT
Son: you get convicted of these
charges, you could be in a federal
prison until you're a very old man.

JESSE
I sold very small bags of marijuana to
college kids who asked me for it.
That's all.

Butt waits for more. Jesse stares him down.

BUTT
Okay. For the time being, let's move
on to this business with the baby.

Jesse sighs. Looks down, shakes his head. Butt watches him
a moment - proceeds with a touch more sympathy:

BUTT
The hospital administration is aware
of your - history. They're willing to
drop the charges if you'll sign this
affidavit.
(Reading, formal:)
It says you renounce all claim to the
child for all time; that you are
penitent of the criminal act you have
committed and will, in good faith, not
attempt to apprise the child of your
existence or communicate with the
adoptive parents in any way, for the
rest of your life.

Butt slides the papers, and a pen, across the table. Beat.

JESSE
Did you meet them?

BUTT
The "adoptive parents"?

When Jesse nods, Butt nods.

JESSE
Are they decent people?

BUTT
Seem to be.

Beat. Jesse picks up the pen. But then stops.

JESSE
Can we change "criminal act" to
"outlaw act"?

BUTT
What the hell does that mean?

JESSE
I'm not a criminal. I'm an outlaw.

BUTT
What's the difference?

Jesse stares at him.

DUSKEN (V.O.)
Attitude.

INT. JESSE'S APT. - VERMILLION - AFTERNOON (EARLY SPRING)

It is a year ago - the day after Jesse met Harper.

Jesse and DUSKEN LOWE are smoking pot and watching *Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid* on TV.

JESSE
"Attitude"?

Dusken: a burned-out rock star - and still young. Black clothes from distant cities, restless and edgy from pharmaceuticals. The fact that it's impossible to tell if his fury and loathing are directed at you or himself gives Dusken a strange, dangerous allure.

We notice his deformed hands, but don't linger on them.

DUSKEN

An "outlaw" is just a good man who got dealt a losing hand. Heart of the American soul. Outlaw nation, born in rebellion, desperate for freedom.

JESSE

Why do you sound like a Republican?

DUSKEN

Because the suits co-opted the whole mythology, man! What's the best way to stop a revolution? Buy it. And then sell it right back. "Hey kids - get your nose pierced at the fucking mall!" Corporate marketing machine selling us fake outlaws who take on the system from the back of a limo.

JESSE

Spoken by the only one in this room who's actually been in the back of a limo.

DUSKEN

So I know: Elvis, Dylan, punk, rap - it's all fuckin' hot dogs, man. Units. The system is screwed. We must rise up. Rise up and defy it!

JESSE

I can't rise up, Dusken. I'm too stoned.

There's a knock on the door. Dusken grins.

DUSKEN

But you gotta rise up anyway.

Jesse gets up with some effort and goes to open it -

- revealing Harper.

HARPER

Hey.

JESSE

Oh. Hey.

HARPER

We forgot the pot. Last night.

Jesse nods, steps back and gestures her in.

Dusken watches, intrigued by the sudden jolt of awkwardness in the room.

Harper sees Dusken - but disregards him, going to the look out the windows in daylight: a sprawling view over a flat reach of farms extending toward Yankton, twenty miles away.

HARPER

Wow.

JESSE

This is Dusken.

DUSKEN

I know Harper.

HARPER

Dusken doesn't like me. I took his picture.

DUSKEN

Tried to get my hands.

HARPER

I didn't.

DUSKEN

Two things women want from me: fuck a rock star or weep over a deformity.

HARPER

I'm glad I'm not you, Dusken.

DUSKEN

I'm glad I'm not me, too.

Jesse is heading for the bathroom:

JESSE

Let's play nice, okay?

INT. JESSE'S APT. - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

He retrieves a bag of pot from behind a loose baseboard - then looks at himself in the mirror.

Something he hasn't done in a long time.

INT. JESSE'S APT. - THE SAME TIME

Dusken's pulling on his coat.

DUSKEN
I'm trav'lin.

HARPER
Don't on my account.

Dusken chuckles, goes to the door. Stops there.

DUSKEN
I've never seen him like anyone.

HARPER
Me?

DUSKEN
Go figure.

Dusken smiles, leaves. Harper waits, uncertain.

Jesse emerges from the bathroom, sees Dusken's gone. Beat.

JESSE
It's the same as last night. You can
try it if you want.

HARPER
I trust you.

This is weirdly powerful to both of them.

Jesse covers by bringing her the bag. She puts it in her
coat pocket. He backs away.

They just stand there.

HARPER
Well...I oughta go.

INT. JESSE'S APT. - BEDROOM - LATER

They make love all through the dying winter afternoon.
Tender and sweaty and pale, very hungry for each other.
We see it in jump-cuts, that continue into:

INT. JESSE'S APT. - BEDROOM - EVENING

Drifting, intimate, naked talk in bed. Candles burn.
Harper watches Jesse light a joint. He offers, she declines.

HARPER

First time I ever got high, right after graduation? My best friend and me. She said - "We should have done this in high school." We thought that was incredibly funny.

Jesse exhales, considering the implicit criticism.

JESSE

I like the feeling of not being in one place at the same time.

INT. JESSE'S APT. - BEDROOM - EVENING (JUMP CUT)

HARPER

I don't know. He's a professor. He's taking this huge risk, right? It validates you.

(Beat)

Then it finally dawned on me - with this whole drug adventure - that the risk is what he's really attracted to.

(Beat)

The moron needs me to validate him. Who's more pathetic?

JESSE

You gonna tell him about this?

HARPER

About this? I already told him.

JESSE

What did he say?

HARPER

I don't know. I didn't tell him. I wrote him a note.

(Beat)

Well - not a note. I bought him a card.

JESSE

What kind of card?

HARPER

You know: like a greeting card.

JESSE

They have a card for that?

HARPER
I got a blank card.

JESSE
Did you leave it blank?

HARPER
That would have been good.

INT. JESSE'S APT. - BEDROOM - NIGHT (JUMP CUT)

HARPER
You good friends with Dusken?

JESSE
As friend as I have, he is.

HARPER
You're so stoned.

JESSE
Ya think?

HARPER
I can see why he likes you.

JESSE
He needs someone to roll his joints.

HARPER
Why do you like him?

JESSE
Razor Heart.

Silence.

HARPER
I was trying to get a picture of his hands.
(Beat)
I didn't want to sell it or anything.
It just seemed real.

JESSE
What did he say?

HARPER
Nothing. He grabbed my camera and smashed it against a wall. A couple of days later, I got a Nikon in the mail.

JESSE
He likes you.

HARPER
He used to give me piano lessons.
When I was, like, nine. Back when he
was Clark.

JESSE
"Clark"?

HARPER
Third Degree Burn used to practice in
our garage, 'cause his Dad wouldn't
let him play anything except
classical.
(Beat)
He only started acting like a "Rock
Star" after his hands got messed up.
(Beat)
Guy's making more money in a week than
his father made in his whole life?
Still used to fly back between stops
on his tour.
(Beat)
To see Laura.

A sad, shadowed silence. Carefully:

HARPER
Kind of a stupid friend for a dealer
in this town to have, though - isn't
he?

JESSE
It just happened.

She's watching him smoke, drift.

HARPER
Jesse Dark sounds like a made-up name.

JESSE
It is. My parents made it up.

HARPER
It sounds like an alias.

JESSE
They probably knew I'd need one.

He's lost in thought, remembering:

EXT. YANKTON - ALLEY BEHIND A BAR - MORNING (12 YEARS AGO)

Jesse (age 7) and ROSE DARK (age 9) stand staring at:

BILL DARK, their father. Sleeping curled on the pavement, with the broken bottles and his own vomit.

Rose begins to collect newspapers and throw them on him. Jesse helps.

They make him look like a pile of trash. Then they run away.

INT. YANKTON JAIL - DAY (NOW)

We are back in the present.

Jesse sits in his cell, remembering.

JUNEAU (O.S.)
Lunch, Jesse.

He looks up as Sheriff Juneau hands a bag of take-out food through the bars. Takes it.

JUNEAU
Listen - your transfer to Vermillion has been approved by the Federal Court. I'm sorry. We stalled as long as we could.

JESSE
I know. Thanks.

JUNEAU
Bolt's gonna come get you, himself. Tomorrow.

Jesse grimaces, nods. Juneau takes a folded sheet of day-glo paper from his pocket - passes it through the bars:

JUNEAU
Looks like it's gonna be a hell of a party.

Jesse unfolds it.

A xeroxed flyer: **FREE JESSE DARK! Protest outside Yankton Jail!** A map, a schedule.

JUNEAU
I heard they're passing 'em out far away as Lincoln. Talking about you on
(MORE)

JUNEAU (cont'd)
the radio, too. And the Internet, of course.

Jesse shakes his head, half-laughs, like: *crazy kids*.

JUNEAU
What the hell have you gotten yourself into, son?

Jesse looks up at the Sheriff. Remembering:

INT. DARK HOUSE - DAY (12 YEARS AGO)

Jesse's childhood:

The front door opens, revealing Juneau - 12 years younger.

"LADY" DARK looks out at him: a nickname bestowed by Bill Dark when he first met her - a young soldier stationed in West Texas, amazed by her grace. She is about 30, wearing a turtleneck sweater.

JUNEAU
Morning, Lady. How are you?

She smiles, shrugs.

JUNEAU
Jesse called me.

Lady frowns - glances back:

Jesse (age 7) and Rose (age 9) are lurking in a doorway.

She reluctantly invites Juneau in.

INT. DARK HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Lady gestures to the coffee-pot.

JUNEAU
No, thank you. Lady - why can't you talk?

Lady finds a Things-To-Do pad and pencil, scribbles: **BAD COLD**.

Juneau reads it, then looks in her eyes. She is steady.

JESSE
He kicked her. In the neck.

They both look at the little boy in the doorway, his big sister a step behind. Juneau turns back to Lady.

JUNEAU

That true?

Lady shakes her head, still meeting his eyes - until Juneau gently reaches to pull down the collar of her sweater. She looks away - but doesn't try to stop him.

Juneau studies the bruises on her throat. Lets go.

JUNEAU

You need to see a doctor.

Lady shakes her head, but won't meet his eyes any more.

JUNEAU

I can't help you if you won't charge him.

Lady looks up. Determined. Shakes her head.

JUNEAU

This sort of thing doesn't stop by itself. It just gets worse.

Lady shakes her head again. But then a flicker of fear -
- as they hear the front door open.

Everyone waits.

Bill Dark comes in, wearing Sioux Feed coveralls, carrying an empty lunch bucket. He stops.

BILL

Ronnie.

(Going to the coffeepot)

Hope you don't catch Lady's cold.

JUNEAU

I'm not worried.

Bill nods, pouring himself a mug. Tension.

BILL

Can I help you with something?

JUNEAU

Lady wants to be your punching bag, I can't stop her. I see marks on these children - we're stepping in.

BILL
Children fall down, Ronnie.

Juneau nods, puts on his hat. Glances at the kids, an apology in his eyes.

JUNEAU
I'll come by, check in now and then.
Make sure gravity's not getting too
intense around here.

Bill watches Juneau walk out. Calls after him:

BILL
Kid's a lying little shit! Makes crap
up to get back at me, 'cause I keep
him in line!

Juneau doesn't bother to respond. The door shuts.

Bill looks at Jesse. Burning. Jesse stares back. Age 7.

SLR CAMERA P.O.V. - JESSE - SUNSET (SPRING)

Jesse smokes a joint, looking out his apartment window.
Remembering.

*It is a few weeks after Jesse and Harper became lovers. Her
clothes and stuff are all around; she's been more-or-less
living with him.*

He comes in and out of focus; the frame adjusts. There's a
tiny blackout and a shutter-click -

- Jesse looks at us, startled.

INT. JESSE'S APT. - CONTINUOUS

Harper lowers the camera from her eye, a little uncertain.

Jesse smiles, watches her as she takes a few more, but he's
guarded now and she quits.

HARPER
I feel like you think I'm taking away
your soul.

He turns to her, surprised.

JESSE
The other way around. You're giving
it to me.

She takes one just then, without looking through the lens.
It's more real than the others - and they both know it.

He looks out the window again. Scared, happy. She watches.

HARPER
The wild west.

JESSE
Huh?

HARPER
The night I met you. You said you
were from the wild west.
(Beat)
Your window looks at the sunset.

JESSE
(Looking out)
Does my window do that?

Harper studies him.

HARPER
There's women who really dig the Dark
Mystery, you know?
(Beat)
I'm not one of them.

JESSE
What do you want to know?

HARPER
What do you want?

JESSE
You.

HARPER
No. In life. Do you have dreams?
Besides the bad ones.

He looks away, pretending not to know what she means.

HARPER
I've seen you sleep.

Jesse shrugs. Harper grimaces. He sighs, gets up and goes
to roll himself another joint.

HARPER
Why do you sell grass?

JESSE
So I don't have to buy it.

HARPER
Where were you born?

JESSE
Yankton.

HARPER
Really? That's right near here.

JESSE
I know.

HARPER
Can I meet your family?

JESSE
Sure. You can go to hell.

She blinks. Gets up, trying not to cry. He watches her:

JESSE
That's where they are.
(Beat)
They're dead, Harper.
(Lighting up)
Just let it go.

Harper watches him drag deep and stare out the window.

HARPER
I'm sorry. I just...
(Beat)
Something is happening between us.
Something amazing.

JESSE
I know.

Silence.

HARPER
I want it to happen.

Jesse says nothing. Thoughtful.

JESSE
You want to go out tonight?

INT. GRAND FINALE - BACK ROOM - LATER

Open Mike Night on a tiny crudely-lit stage. A SOLO ACOUSTIC SINGER just finishing a song. Mild applause.

At a table in the back corner, Jesse claps absently, eyes on the door; Dusken, unable, stomps one boot on the floor.

Harper, next to Jesse, watches the careful required cool of two town-legends making a rare public appearance.

GINA, a stunning freshman, comes toward Dusken.

GINA

Hi. My name is Gina? Listen, I don't want to, you know - bother you - I just - I have, like, fifteen bootlegs.

(Beat)

Maybe I'm not supposed to say that.

Dusken looks her over. Holds out a crippled hand, gallant. She hesitates, shakes it and - eyes-like-Os at her FRIENDS across the room - accepts the seat he pulls next to him.

Jesse's paying no attention; Harper's watching his edgy distraction.

GINA

I mean - I would have completely paid for them. If they were released - and all - you know. You were just so amazing, live. I mean, the album is great - but, live - it was like -

DUSKEN

I know. I wish I could be live now.

GINA

I mean it. "Crawling Through Midnight" in Seattle? And "Third Last Song" from the second night at Cincinatti?

DUSKEN

I don't remember my fucking tour.

GINA

You should download it. Seriously.

Jesse gets up abruptly, leaning down to Harper:

JESSE

You don't know me.

HARPER

Huh?

JESSE

Just go home - you don't know me.

HARPER

Jesse -

- but he's already moving toward the rest rooms.

DUSKEN

(Delighted)

Hey look: ThunderBolt and Lightweight.

INT. GRAND FINALE - BY THE DOORS - CONTINUOUS

Vermillion Police Chief JOHN BOLT moves through the suddenly-uneasy CROWD, followed by a young Deputy, ROGAN.

Bolt is a middle-aged man - bitter, angry and armed. He locks eyes with Dusken across the room - leaning back to instruct Rogan, who then heads back out to the street.

Bolt approaches the table, looking at Dusken with contempt.

DUSKEN

Officer Krupke.

BOLT

I hope you ladies are of drinking age
and have I.D. to prove it.

Harper and Gina get out their wallets.

INT. GRAND FINALE - MEN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jesse's squirming through a window over a toilet -

EXT. ALLEY - BEHIND THE GRAND FINALE - CONTINUOUS

- jumping down, clumsily. He turns and runs -

- skidding to a stop, pissed -

- as Rogan pulls a police car into the alley entrance ahead of him, and switches on the light-bar.

Jesse raises his hands.

EXT. ALLEY - BEHIND THE GRAND FINALE - SOON AFTER

A CROWD from the bar has gathered to watch:

Jesse's palms are on a wall, feet splayed, coat off. Bolt, checking the coat, watches Rogan pat him down.

Rogan shakes his head, turns Jesse around.

BOLT

You have anything you want to tell me about Dusken Lowe?

JESSE

Kind of a one-hit wonder. His first album had three top-ten singles, but the long-awaited second album has yet to appea-

Bolt grabs Jesse and slams him down on the hood of the police car. As he ratchets on the cuffs, too tight -

DUSKEN (O.S.)

He's represented by my attorneys, you know.

Bolt turns. Dusken's edging through the gawkers.

Jesse meets Harper's frightened eyes over the whirling colored lights. Expressionless.

DUSKEN

You remember my attorneys, don't you?

Dusken savors the showdown. Beat.

Bolt begins unlocking Jesse's cuffs.

BOLT

I'm working with the University, Mr. Dark. To get your state money revoked. Then your ass is out of my town.

Jesse nods, rubbing his wrists. As Rogan gets behind the wheel, Bolt warns Jesse - gesturing at Dusken:

BOLT

You keep associating with him - you're gonna come to a bad end.

Jesse watches Bolt open the passenger-side door.

JESSE
I've already been.

Bolt hesitates just a fraction of a second - then gets in and slams his door. Rogan blips the siren to clear a path.

As they roll away, Harper comes toward Jesse - scared, silent. His eyes are on the police car.

JESSE
I've got to go stop by my dorm room for a minute. You want to come with me?

HARPER
What "dorm room"?

INT. DORMITORY - HALLWAY - SOON AFTER

Cinderblock walls, fireproof doorways, note-pads taped to doors.

Jesse leads Harper to a door, unlocks it.

INT. JESSE'S DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A bland, undecorated room. Harper watches Jesse take clothes out of the dresser and stuff them in a laundry bag, rearrange the desk. Making it look like someone lives there.

JESSE
People write my papers and take my tests. As long as I have a C average, I keep my hardship grant from the state of South Dakota. That pays my tuition, room and board.

Beat.

HARPER
What's your hardship?

He doesn't answer, instead indicating the dresser:

JESSE
I left the top drawer open about half an inch last time I was here. It was closed when we came in.
(Beat)
Bolt doesn't know where my apartment is. I pay cash, no lease, no names, and I don't let people in.

HARPER
You let us in.

JESSE
This is my life, Harper.

Silence.

HARPER
You wanted all this to happen tonight.
You knew if Dusken went to the Finale,
Bolt would come by.

JESSE
I just think you might be better off
if you don't know me.

HARPER
I don't know you, Jesse.

Silence.

HARPER
So I'm fine - right?

He smiles, reluctantly. Sighs, shakes his head.

CLOSE-UP - SMALL FRAMED PHOTOS - THE SAME TIME

All of LAURA BOLT, 17 years old. Some with Dusken - younger,
before his fame; hands unbroken.

They're in little frames, amid a clutter of pill bottles,
cigarettes stubbed-out in shot glasses, scribbled lyrics.

Gina's hand picks one up.

INT. DUSKEN'S FARM - STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

She's in her coat, browsing the instruments and recording
equipment, the souvenirs from Dusken's "local prodigy" youth
and his year of fame - as well as a lot of 60s revolutionary
and Western outlaw memorabilia.

Dusken leans in the doorway, watching her.

GINA
So this is where it all happens, huh?

DUSKEN
Yep.

GINA

I knew you didn't give it up.

She sets the photo back down and wanders to the piano; plays "Für Elise" really badly.

GINA

I took piano lessons. When I was little.

DUSKEN

Me too.

GINA

(Re: photos)
Who is this?

DUSKEN

My mother.

GINA

I'm saying all the wrong things, aren't I?

DUSKEN

You're saying all the usual things.

She watches him come into the room, find a pill bottle - looks away as he gulps some down, picking up another photo:

GINA

What really happened to your hands?

DUSKEN

What are you referring to, ma'am?

GINA

I heard like some manager messed them up, over money.

DUSKEN

I like the one where God sent down his angels to do it, because I played too beautifully.

Gina frowns, examines the picture more closely.

GINA

Jesus. She's the girl in "Crawling Through Midnight," isn't she? She's got the razor-heart tattoo.

He flicks the switch on his way out, leaving her in the dark.

Music begins: Dusken's song "Crawling Through Midnight." It continues - subtly developing from rehearsal sketch to the finished album track - as we drift between this night and glimpses of memory:

INT. GRAND FINALE - DAY (4 YEARS AGO) (MONTAGE)

Dusken, younger, rehearsing after-hours, working out the unfinished song with Third Degree Burn; it's strung-out, personal, poetic.

The bar is empty, except for Marvin.

And Laura - dancing, alone, losing herself in the music. Eyes on Dusken.

His hands are graceful, his voice raw. Dusken watches Laura dance as he sings, losing himself in her.

INT. SIOUX CITY MOTEL ROOM - DAY (3 YEARS AGO) (MONTAGE)

Laura's sweating and freaked-out - Dusken wrestling with her, trying to keep her from hurting herself -

LAURA	DUSKEN
You have to let me die,	It's the drugs, Lo - you took
Dusken! I need to die! No	bad drugs - just hang on -
it's <u>me</u> - I have to die -	just ride it out -
Laura, curled up in the bed,	head in Dusken's lap, screaming -

INT. BOLT'S HOUSE - THE SAME TIME (MONTAGE)

Bolt sits alone at his kitchen table, in pajamas and a bathrobe. Drinking coffee, flipping through an album.

Photos of Laura. Many the same as Dusken's.

INT. DUSKEN'S FARM - BEDROOM - THE SAME TIME (MONTAGE)

Dusken lies naked in bed, Gina moving, naked, on top of him -

As he touches her, we really see Dusken's hands for the first time: twisted, mangled fingers, all the wrong lengths; ugly bulges and hollows in the palms, crawling with livid scars.

He's the most vulnerable we will ever see him.

INT. CONCERT HALL - NIGHT (3 YEARS AGO) (MONTAGE)

Dusken, a star, wailing out "Crawling Through Midnight" - lyrics about the girl with the razor-heart tattoo.

EXT. WOODS - DAY (3 YEARS AGO) (MONTAGE)

Laura's car parked on a back road. Laura slumped inside.

OD'd. A feast for bugs.

We see the tattoo on her shoulder: a razor-blade slicing into a plump, cartoon-y heart.

INT. BOLT'S HOUSE - NIGHT (MONTAGE)

Bolt is crying.

INT. JESSE'S APT. - BEDROOM - THE SAME TIME (MONTAGE ENDS)

Jesse sits on the floor with his back to the wall, looking at Third Degree Burn's Razor Heart CD.

The cover photo has a model's shoulder, with a tattoo heart and a real razor blade cutting into it.

The song ends.

Jesse sets it aside. Lights a joint.

Watches Harper sleep.

INT. DUSKEN'S FARM - STUDIO - LATER THAT NIGHT

Dusken clumsily plays a keyboard - fingers like flesh-and-bone spiders. He has headphones on, so all we hear are keys clicking and Dusken humming to himself.

Gina, wrapped in a sheet, appears in the doorway.

Without turning or removing the headphones, Dusken tosses her a set of keys -

- she catches them, dropping the sheet to do so. He doesn't look up.

DUSKEN

Take the Jeep. Go home. Leave the keys with Marvin at the Finale, tomorrow or something.

She stands there, naked, watching Dusken. She walks off, leaving the sheet in the doorway.

He keeps clicking - wincing, frustrated.

Fed up with his claws, Dusken bangs them on the keys -

- then hurls the keyboard across the room.

He trashes the studio, kicking equipment, throwing bottles, overturning tables.

Then he stops - looking down at Laura's face behind shards of glass in a broken frame on the floor. Impulsively he touches a fingertip to it - but he has almost no nerves left and didn't notice it was cut. Blood smears across her smile.

DUSKEN

Shit.

Dusken kneels in the wreckage, staring at the bloody photo.

INT. JESSE'S APT. - BEDROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Daylight. Jesse wakes in the bed, alone.

Harper watches him, from across the room. He smiles.

HARPER

Listen.

JESSE

Okay.

HARPER

This is just - I know - this is months away, and everything.

(Beat)

This graduate program in New York.

(Beat)

They arrange housing. Like a student apartment. And - I mean, it's just -

(Beat)

It's a way out. Of all this.

Long silence.

JESSE

That would be great.

HARPER

I mean - you know - I'm not talking about - some kind of major - anything.

JESSE

Yeah. No - it's good.

HARPER

We have time. We'll talk about it.

JESSE

Right.

Silence. Jesse's cell phone rings. He doesn't move.

They watch each other. It rings again.

He reaches over and gets it.

JESSE

Yeah. Uh-huh. Twenty-five.

Harper watches Jesse retreat back into the The Zen Dealer. Both of them self-conscious.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT (NOW)

Harper sits on the bed of a bland, cheap motel in Columbus, Ohio, TV remote in hand. Absently flipping channels, trying to pull herself out of the past.

We are back in the present: later in the night when Harper waited at the bus station while Jesse was in jail.

On the TV - she stops flipping on: AN ENTERTAINMENT NEWS HOST, backed by a graphic of Dusken and a **FREE JESSE DARK** button:

NEWS HOST

In music news: coming out of three years of seclusion after an accident with a tractor engine crippled his hands on his South Dakota farm, former Third Degree Burn front-man Dusken Lowe has agreed to perform new solo music live on a local college radio station tomorrow afternoon.

Harper stares, stunned, at the TV.

NEWS HOST

Lowe's performance will coincide with a demonstration protesting yesterday's arrest of reputed-drug-dealer Jesse Dark, whose anti-police and pro-marijuana activities in South Dakota are being called "pranks" and

(MORE)

NEWS HOST (cont'd)
"protests" by some, but "terrorism" by
law enforcement agencies.

She puts her head in her hands.

HARPER
Oh, Jess...

We hear a dim chant: Free Jesse, Free Jesse...

INT. YANKTON JAIL - THE SAME TIME

Jesse sits in his cell. Lost in thoughts of Harper.

CRIPPLED HORSE (O.S.)
Hey. What is that?

Jesse listens. Unruly voices outside.

Free Jesse, Free Jesse...

He stands on his bunk, looks out the cell window:

JESSE'S POV - OUTSIDE YANKTON JAIL - CONTINUOUS

There's a handful of RAG-TAG KIDS - neo-hippie Pot-Heads,
anti-globalization Activists, artsy Collegiates, disaffected
punked-out Runaways - chanting in the gathering evening:

KIDS
Free Jesse! Free Jesse! Free Jesse!

Some play acoustic guitars; one has a conga drum, several do
percussion on cans and bottles. Tents are set out, sleeping
bags, travel backpacks, heavily-stickered hand-painted vans.
A cluster cook around a charcoal grill.

Some hold signs: **FREE JESSE DARK.**

INT. YANKTON JAIL - (RESUME)

Jesse stares through the bars at the Rag-Tag Kids.

Not sure what he's looking at. Or who they're talking about.

Remembering:

INT. GRAND FINALE - CONTINUOUS

Jesse steps in from the street, concerned. Harper follows him, wary. They stop, looking at:

Dusken, squinting through the smoke of a joint in his mouth. He bends over the pool table, lining up a shot. He's been sleepless on speed for days.

It is a few weeks after Dusken trashed his studio.

A pretty good LOCAL BAND is in the back room, just hitting the last chords of "Razor Heart."

Marvin meets Jesse's eyes from behind the bar; he called to alert them Dusken was in need of intervention.

LEAD GUITAR (O.S.)

"Razor Heart." That's for - uh, the author - Vermillion's own dark angel:
Dusken Lowe -

Applause and hoots, which Dusken barely acknowledges before knocking a ball into a pocket.

Jesse comes over, as the band begins another song:

JESSE

Dusken - whatcha doin'?

DUSKEN

(Finding the next shot)
Playing pool.

JESSE

What do you say we go play pool in
Sioux City?

DUSKEN

I oughta be able to play pool in my
own fucking home town.

JESSE

Yeah, you ought to. But considering
reality -

DUSKEN

Fuck reality.

JESSE

We don't fuck reality, Dusken. It
fucks us.

Dusken smiles, shrugging - looking past Jesse, who turns:

Blue-and-red lights twirl in the street outside the doors.

JESSE

Dusken -

DUSKEN

High noon at last, my friend.

Bolt comes in and stops, stunned.

Dusken winks at him, exhaling a plume of marijuana smoke.

As Bolt reaches to get his cuffs -

- Dusken turns and heads for the back room, handing Jesse the pool cue as he passes.

INT. GRAND FINALE - BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The Band falters as Dusken pushes through the crowd -

- and gets up on the stage with them.

DUSKEN

Mind?

They shake their heads, awed. A stunned hush falls.

Bolt slows, coming toward the stage. Confused.

Dusken goes to the KEYBOARDIST, hunching over the keys -

DUSKEN

See if you can do this.

Behind Bolt, Jesse and Harper watch from the doorway -

- as Dusken, with crippled hands, awkwardly picks out a tune; the keyboard mike catches his low, haunting humming.

The room is silent. More kids crowd in.

The Keyboardist starts to play along with Dusken, filling in places Dusken's claws can't manage. The band catches up, finding the song -

DUSKEN

Then here...

- he plays the bridge, eyes shut - and they get it: they know Dusken's sound, they're fans.

He nods. It's alive without him now, so he opens his eyes, letting them vamp -

- and takes his place at the Lead Guitar's mike. Facing the crowd in the smoky glare of a few cheap lights.

DUSKEN

I wrote this song for a girl named
Laura.

He looks right at Bolt, red-eyed with speed. Begins to sing.

The song is about innocence and loss.

They met before he made a record, she was sixteen years old - daughter of a cop...Dusken was a year older, but cloistered, inexperienced. Laura was the one who wanted to be bad, to do drugs. And Dusken was in love with her.

During the song we get quick, silent flashes of memory - from his time with Laura -

- and then he sings about what happened after she died.

He sings directly at Bolt.

We keep getting flashes of memory - the secret story:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY (FLASHBACK - SILENT - JUMP CUT)

Dusken, driving toward his farm, his hands intact -

- skids to a stop: a police car is parked like a roadblock. Bolt and Rogan, waiting.

INT. GRAND FINALE - STAGE - (RESUME)

Marvin joins Jesse and Harper at the back of the room.

MARVIN

When this is done - you get him out
the back, fast.

Jesse nods. All of them hypnotized, watching.

Dusken sings - beautiful, passionate, out of control.

EXT. WOODS - (FLASHBACK - SILENT - JUMP CUT)

Bolt and Rogan walk-push through the woods.

Dusken's scared. His hands are cuffed, in front of him.

INT. GRAND FINALE - STAGE - (RESUME)

Dusken slurs, rants. Singing to Bolt as if there's no one else in the room -

- and Bolt is boiling, frozen in a crowd of rapt, enchanted kids -

EXT. WOODS - (FLASHBACK - SILENT - JUMP CUT)

- Dusken screaming, writhing, thrashing -

- as Rogan holds Dusken's hands down on a big rock and Bolt smashes them with a hammer - his merciless face spotted with blood -

EXT. WOODS - (FLASHBACK - SILENT - JUMP CUT)

- Dusken staggers alone through the woods, screaming - his ruined, blood-pulp hands curled to his chest -

INT. GRAND FINALE - STAGE - (RESUME)

Dusken wails out the end of the song - clawed hands held in the light, on the mike, by his face.

And then it's over. Silence.

Dusken staring into Bolt's eyes. The Band is stunned.

The crowd goes wild - they've just witnessed something majestic, insane, heart-raw.

Bolt turns and pushes out through the crowd, stone-faced.

Dusken watches him go, sweating, speeding, triumphant.

EXT. FIELD - LATER

Dusken's headlights stab into the dark, rearing as he pulls off the dirt road. He skids to a stop - leaps out, leaving the door open and lights on -

- Jesse getting out, standing back, watching Dusken kick and whoop at the stars.

DUSKEN

Did you fuckin' see it?! Death by music! Bam-bam-bam! What do you think - is that the first track for a new album, or what?!

JESSE

Maybe you should lay off the speed for a while.

DUSKEN

Fucking pot-head! What happens if there's something to fight, Jesse?

JESSE

You lose.

DUSKEN

Outlaws, man. Losing is winning.

JESSE

And then what?

DUSKEN

What's he gonna do?!
(Beat, slowing:)
What's he gonna do to me that's worse than what he's already done?

Silence.

JESSE

You know - you two actually have a lot in common.

DUSKEN

(looks away)
Don't.

JESSE

You both think you killed Laura.

Silence. Dusken stares out at the dark fields.

DUSKEN

I didn't stop her.
(Beat)
I didn't give her the drugs. But I didn't stop her.

They stand in the rural night, lit by headlights, listening to the dull ping of the door-alerts. Coming down.

JESSE
You can't stop people.

DUSKEN
Whatever.

INT. JESSE'S APT. - THE NEXT MORNING

Morning light. Harper's waiting. Sipping coffee.

Jesse lets himself in. Notes she's pissed. Gets coffee.

HARPER
You need to get out of this town,
Jesse.

JESSE
What am I supposed to do in New York?

HARPER
What are you going to do here? Just
be stoned forever?

JESSE
I don't understand "forever."

HARPER
Don't pull that hippie bullshit on me,
Jesse - I'm not one of your customers!
What do you see, down the road? A
farmhouse where we grow our own? A
bunch of kids we forget to take care
of?

Jesse turns away and stares out the window.

HARPER
This thing with Dusken and Bolt is not
gonna get better. And you're in the
middle.

JESSE
Dusken won't hurt me.

HARPER
You're counting on Dusken Lowe to take
care of you?!

JESSE
Who should I count on?!

HARPER
Fuck you Jesse!

Jesse grabs her as she pulls on her coat -

JESSE

I'm sorry. Wait - wait!

- she struggles, hits him.

He lets her. Waits for her to listen.

JESSE

I need you to come somewhere with me.

INT. JESSE'S CAR - HIGHWAY 50 - LATER

Jesse drives them in silence.

Harper has her eyes on the empty prairie horizon.

He glances at her. Then turns back to watch the road ahead.
Like he's driving them off the edge of the world.

JESSE'S POV - THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD - THE SAME TIME

Highway 50, South Dakota, heading west.

DISSOLVE TO:

P.O.V. - THROUGH A WINDSHIELD - NIGHT (3 YEARS AGO)

A dirt road in a blizzard. Snow twirls in the dark.

We're pulling up to an abandoned farmhouse, lit only by the
headlights. No address, no mailbox.

INT. INGERSOLL'S PICKUP - CONTINUOUS

*Jesse is 17 - the farm kid we met in the first scene. It is
two days before that moment.*

Ingersoll stops the truck. Beside him: Jesse and Rose -
she's pale, 19, eyes dark and scared. She hugs a pillowcase
full of clothes and a shoebox held shut with a rubber band.

INGERSOLL

Generator's shot. I'll pick up the
parts in town tomorrow, come by in the
afternoon to help you start it up.
Even then, only works for the kitchen.

Jesse nods, tense, looking at the derelict house.

JESSE

Thank you.

Beat.

INGERSOLL

You know - your father wasn't always like this.

JESSE

Neither were we.

Ingersoll grimaces, nods, gives Jesse a flashlight. Jesse turns to Rose, who hesitates, then fumbles open the door.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Jesse, bent against the wind, lugging a box and two more pillowcases, leads Rose to the door as Ingersoll's headlights swing away.

He unlocks it, lets Rose go in. Then he stops, looking down.

At his feet is a worn WELCOME mat.

He bends to pick it up, slings it off into the darkness.

INT. FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Jesse closes the door, but the wind still moans outside.

They survey the dirty, cobwebbed room by flashlight. He puts his stuff down, collects newspapers and parts of a broken chair, kneels to light them in the fireplace.

JESSE

It'll warm up soon. It's not so bad in the daytime. You'll see tomorrow.

She sits, in her coat, gloves, scarf.

ROSE

He'll take this out on her, you know.

JESSE

I'll go back and make sure she's all right.

ROSE

Make her come with us.

JESSE

I tried.

Rose nods, absently. Jesse goes to the door.

ROSE

Where are you going?!

JESSE

There's firewood in the barn.

ROSE

Do you have to? I mean, do we need it?

He stands there, scared of her fear. Beat.

JESSE

You want to come with me?

INT. FARMHOUSE - SOON AFTER

Firewood burning, bright, crackling.

Rose is on the sofa, under a blanket, staring at the fire; Jesse's wandering the room, looking for anything useful.

ROSE

Jesse?

JESSE

Yeah?

ROSE

We'll never go back?

He opens a closet. There's a half-dozen wire hangers and an old coat. (*The coat we see him wearing in Vermillion.*)

JESSE

Never.

ROSE

Promise.

JESSE

I promise.

She nods. Pulls the blanket up, and shuts her eyes.

Jesse takes the coat out, sniffs it, brings it with him to an armchair. He drapes it over himself like a blanket and sits, watching Rose.

Remembering:

CLOSE-UP (JESSE'S P.O.V.) - A CHILD'S DRAWING (12 YEARS AGO)

Jesse's childhood:

As Rose (age 9) draws. Not a prodigy - but free, imaginative and colorful.

ROSE (O.S.)
- and when the Princess flew away, she
left behind a shower of jewels.

We look up from the page to her face. She smiles at us.
Gentle and sweet and unafraid.

CLOSE-UP (JESSE'S P.O.V.) - A PAINTING (3 YEARS AGO)

A hellish self-portrait of Rose in red and black, screaming and splattery.

It is a few weeks before the snowy night they run away.

JESSE (O.S.)
People laugh at her in school. She
walks around in her own little world.

Lady's hand flips through painted pages: more of the same.

INT. DARK HOUSE - KITCHEN - SOON AFTER

Jesse stands watching Lady flipping through Rose's sketchbook. He brought it to her, evidence.

She signs: *Rose is all right.*

JESSE
Rose is not all right!

Lady: *she's just - different.*

JESSE
Yeah - she's different! Than she used
to be. Something has happened to
Rose. We need to help her.

Lady stares at him. Afraid to let this thought in. She looks down at her hands.

They "mumble:" *I'll pray.*

JESSE
Yeah. You do that. Pray.
(Disgusted)
"Our father, who art in heaven."

Lady grimaces, won't look up.

Listens to the door shut as he storms out.

INT. DARK HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (3 YEARS AGO)

It is a few nights later.

Very late. Bill's passed out on the sofa, brandy bottle on the floor, lit by a droning TV, face slack, belly exposed.

Rose, in pajamas, is standing over him with her back to us, holding a kitchen knife.

Jesse comes past the doorway, heading for the kitchen - sees her and freezes.

JESSE
(Whispers)
Rose.

She turns. Rose has painted herself: her face, her clothes, garish, frightening. She stares from inside a mask of paint.

CLOSE-UP - PSYCHIATRY TEXTBOOK - THE NEXT DAY

Lists of symptoms, technical terms. Cold and bewildering.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. YANKTON - PUBLIC LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

Jesse sits by himself, flipping through pages, desperate, helpless. 17 years old.

A pile of self-help and academic books on mental illness around him.

AND INTERCUT WITH:

CLOSE-UP - DARK FAMILY PHOTOS - A FEW NIGHTS LATER

On a mantle - old snapshots: Cowboy Jesse - Ballerina Rose.

Lady & Bill - sunlight - holidays. A family.

Lady's face comes smashing into the photo frames, knocking them flying -

INT. DARK HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

It is the snow-storm night they run away:

- shoved by Bill in a drunken rage - she falls to her knees, clutching her face -

- as Jesse leaps on Bill's back -

ROSE
Stop it! Stop it!

- Bill reeling backwards to slam him against a wall - Jesse falling off, wind knocked out, curling on the floor -

- Bill whirling on him, unbuckling his belt -

- then Rose starts to scream.

Bill turns, startled -

- as she doesn't stop. Her eyes huge, teeth bared, veins popping. Walking toward Bill, who can't move.

They all stare at Rose - as the scream keeps going on -

- until she's right in his stunned face.

Breathless, she stops a second - eyes fixed on him in horrifying silence -

- then she starts again - ripping her throat, in his face -

- until Bill drops the belt, putting his hands over his ears -

- Rose screaming at his back as he staggers out of the house.

The door slams. Rose stops. Staring at nothing. They hear the car start.

INT. DARK HOUSE - ROSE'S ROOM - SOON AFTER

Jesse is stuffing Rose's clothes into a pillowcase.

Lady comes to stand in the doorway, watching. Scared.

JESSE
I can't tell you where we're going,
unless you're coming with us.

Lady: *my son - my daughter - do - not - leave -*

JESSE
He never hits her!

Lady stares.

JESSE
Don't you get it?! You and I are all
torn up - but he never touches her.

Lady shakes her head, denying.

Jesse angrily picks up the pillowcases and shoves past her.
Lady watches him go.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DARK HOUSE - KITCHEN - THE NEXT DAY

Lady in her kitchen, smoking. Remembering. Bruised, alone
with her wadded Kleenex, lipstick-tipped butts. Religious
calendar by the phone, holy cards on the 'fridge.

Jesse lets himself in.

Lady looks at her teenage son, eyes filling with tears -
pride as much as pain -

- then she tries to hide them, gesturing for Jesse to sit,
getting up to fix him a sandwich.

JESSE
Please come with us.

Lady's hands: *He's my husband. Better or worse.*

JESSE
But it's not "for better or worse!"
It's always worse! How can you live
with what he's done?!

Lady's hands: *God sees.*

JESSE
Yeah?! God sees like you speak.

Lady slaps his face.

Jesse watches as she quietly returns to making his sandwich.

JESSE
We're not coming back.

Lady turns: *What about money?*

JESSE
I'll get a job.

Lady looks at him.

A long time.

Then: *I have money. Enough. For all three of us.*

Jesse takes it in, overwhelmed.

She nods.

JESSE
Pack. I'll wait.

Lady shakes her head: *Tomorrow morning. I have to tell him. I owe him that.*

JESSE
You don't owe him anything. But if you have to tell him - then do it when he gets home, with me here. Then we can go.

Lady: *No. In the morning. He'll be sober.*

JESSE
He's not sober in the mornings, he's hung-over -

Lady: *I have to do this my own way. Come get me tomorrow morning. He'll be home soon.*

Jesse hesitates.

She gently steers him to the door. Touches his face.

Then she pushes him out.

EXT. YANKTON - ROADSIDE - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Jesse's trudging home in the bitter cold, carrying a box of food and supplies for the night.

He slows, seeing:

Rose - running toward him on the side of the road, wearing the old coat from the closet, barefoot, eyes big with fear.

As she gets closer he sees, when the coat flaps open, that she's naked beneath it.

ROSE
Someone came.

JESSE
Ingersoll?

ROSE
I don't know. I was washing. I went out the back.

JESSE
Rose - for Christ's sake, he just came to fix the generator.

She nods, shivering uncontrollably, not listening.

ROSE
Did you see Mom?

EXT. YANKTON - FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

Very small in the frozen landscape:

Jesse sets the box down on the side of the road and takes Rose on his back.

Carries her, leaving the box, Rose's feet dangling above the cruel, cold earth.

INT. DARK HOUSE - KITCHEN - SOON AFTER

Lady scribbles fitfully on a small pad.

The table is littered with crossed-out attempts on other pages.

She hears the front door -

- hastily rips the page off the pad, grabs up the drafts and stuffs them into her pocket as she goes to the counter.

By the time Bill comes in, she is preparing his dinner. Gives him a distracted smile which he doesn't bother to return, getting a beer from the refrigerator.

As he opens it, he looks down.

A single crossed-out page is on the floor.

INT. DARK HOUSE - GARAGE - LATER

Bill searches among the junk and clutter by the light of a single bare overhead bulb.

Finds a chain.

INT. FARMHOUSE - THAT NIGHT

Jesse wrapped in the coat on the chair, Rose lying under the blanket on the sofa. Going to sleep, watching the fire.

ROSE
Tell me again.

JESSE
Tomorrow morning, I'll get Ingersoll to drive us. We'll go to the house and pick up Lady.

ROSE
What if he's there? What if he blew off work?

Silence. New version:

JESSE
You stay here. I'll go with Ingersoll to get Lady. Then we'll come back here, for you.
(Beat)
He'll drive us all to Sioux City. From there we can get a bus.

ROSE
To where?

JESSE
Anywhere we want. Someplace warm. You can have a garden all year round.

ROSE
Just far.

He nods, in the dark.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. INGERSOLL'S YARD - THE NEXT MORNING

Jesse walking up the frozen driveway. He stops.

Ingersoll's got the pickup hood raised, working on the engine. He looks up at Jesse:

INGERSOLL
I think it's the fuel line. You want
to give me a hand?

INT. FARMHOUSE - LATER THAT MORNING

Rose sits, in the old coat, by the pile of stuffed pillowcases.

She fidgets. Gets up, goes to the window. Fidgets there, staring out.

Rose comes to a decision, and hurries to the door.

INT. DARK HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER THAT MORNING

Empty. Quiet.

Rose appears, tentatively, outside. Peers in.

Lets herself in. Listens, very still.

Goes to open a drawer.

INT. DARK HOUSE - HALLWAY - SOON AFTER

Rose walks through the empty house.

In one hand, she carries a box of "strike anywhere" matches.

She stops at an open doorway, startled.

INT. DARK HOUSE - BILL & LADY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Clothing, mostly Lady's, is strewn all over the bed, still on hangers - and Bill is passed-out, in his work clothes and boots, with a brandy bottle.

Rose, in the doorway, stares.

After a moment, she backs away.

INT. DARK HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SOON AFTER

Rose methodically sets fire to the sofa, the curtains.

The room begins to burn around her.

INT. DARK HOUSE - BILL & LADY'S BEDROOM - SOON AFTER

Smoke drifts and thickens. Bill snores.

We move past him to the closet door.

It shudders.

INT. DARK HOUSE - CLOSET - CONTINUOUS

Lady kneels on the floor in the dark, shoulder against the door. Eyes wide, breathing fast and shallow and terrified.

Her hands are chained up together tightly at the wrists, suspended from the clothes-rod, padlocked.

Smoke curls in under the door.

Her fingers are moving, frantically.

Praying in sign language.

INT. INGERSOLL'S PICKUP - CONTINUOUS

Exactly as in the first scene of the film:

Ingersoll driving. Jesse in the shotgun seat, lost in thought.

They see something ahead of them.

JESSE

Oh - God.

POV - THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD - CONTINUOUS

The Dark house is burning, flames eating through the roof, billows of smoke rolling out of the windows.

EXT. DARK HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Rose stands by the road, watching it burn. Her smiling face streaked with tears of joy, relief.

She turns as she hears the pickup skid to a stop behind her -

- confusion and then fear flooding her face as Jesse and Ingersoll jump out -

ROSE
No. NO! She's with you!

Jesse just stares at Rose, shocked, pale -

- as Ingersoll runs past them - into the burning house.

ROSE
SHE'S WITH YOU!

Jesse and Rose turn at an awful sound -

- the Dark house collapsing in on itself.

Rose stares at the flaming wreck - horror overtaking her, her mouth opening to scream - but no sound coming out.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. STATE HOSPITAL, YANKTON - ROSE'S ROOM - DAY (NOW)

Rose stares out a window. Expressionless. Lovely.

Later on the day Jesse drove Harper west on Highway 50:

SADIE, a middle-aged Nurse, moves past Rose, collecting magazines, putting away a hairbrush and bottle of moisturizer.

SADIE
Sometimes we sit with her, brush her hair and whatnot. Try to keep her company.

Rose doesn't react to Sadie at all. She is motionless in a rocking chair, staring at a grate-covered window.

SADIE
Caught us by surprise. It's not your usual day.
(To Harper)
Every Sunday. Without fail.

Harper nods, tries to smile. Shell-shocked. Standing by Jesse in the doorway.

SADIE
Well - I'll leave you all alone.

JESSE
Thank you, Sadie.

Jesse and Harper let Sadie go out past them.

Jesse sits on the metal-frame bed, near Rose. Harper stays by the door.

JESSE
Rose, this is Harper.

HARPER
Does she hear us?

JESSE
I don't know.

Silence.

HARPER
She's really - beautiful, Jesse.

JESSE
Yeah.
(beat)
I just watch her keep getting more beautiful.

Harper watches Jesse, watching his lost sister.

He nods. Eyes on the catatonic young woman in the rocking chair. Almost whispering:

JESSE
Like a sunset.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HARPER'S DORM ROOM - DUSK (JUNE)

Harper is looking at her black-and-white photos of Jesse.

A few weeks after the hospital visit. June. College is over.

She shuffles them into a photo-paper box. Hesitates, then puts the lid on.

Sets it in a moving-box, tapes it shut.

She keeps packing.

INT. JESSE'S APT. - THE SAME TIME

Jesse sits looking out his window.

He reaches for the phone. Picks it up.

Puts it down.

INT. DUSKEN'S FARM - LIVING ROOM - THAT NIGHT

Under a home-made sign, **GOOD LUCK HARPER - BON VOYAGE**, a big cake with a New York City skyline in colored icing.

The farmhouse is crammed full of COLLEGE and LOCAL KIDS, music pounding.

Jesse enters, in his ratty old coat, wary of the noise and the crowd. Asks a STUDENT:

JESSE
Seen Harper?

STUDENT
Who's Harper?

Jesse nods, heads down a hallway.

INT. DUSKEN'S FARM - STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Jesse scans the crowded room from the doorway.

In a corner, drinking a beer and looking very conscious that he's out-of-place, is Professor Ryson. Their eyes meet.

Jesse reluctantly comes in, approaches.

JESSE
Hey.

Professor Ryson nods.

JESSE
Have you seen her?

PROF. RYSON
Not for months.

Jesse grimaces. Shrugs.

JESSE
Sorry.

Professor Ryson shrugs, too. Drinks his beer. Jesse stands with him, uncomfortably, a moment more - then heads out.

Ryson watches him go. Left alone in a roomful of drunken kids.

Thoughtful, he takes a cell phone from his pocket, opens it.

EXT. DUSKEN'S FARM - SOON AFTER

Jesse comes out of the house, weaves through the tangle of cars left randomly in the untended front yard. Stops - pissed.

His car's boxed in.

DUSKEN (O.S.)
Word got out.

Jesse turns. Dusken stands in the shadows, carrying an open fifth of Jack Daniels, looking at his lit-up house, disgusted. He's edgy, angry, speeding.

JESSE
Yeah, I noticed.

DUSKEN
"Party at Dusken's farm!" All my friends are here. My good, close friends - who don't give a shit if they make tonight a cop-magnet. Gonna bring John Law down on me for sure.

JESSE
Have you seen Harper?

DUSKEN
She's not in there?

Jesse shakes his head. Dusken nods, pulling a bottle of pills from his pocket.

DUSKEN
Wouldn't that just be perfect.

He can't manage the child-proof cap. As Jesse takes it for him, opens it - and Dusken gulps some down with bourbon:

DUSKEN
When do you two take off?

JESSE
We don't. I don't.
(Beat)
Not just yet. I have stuff...that I
have to work out. Here. I'm gonna
catch up with her.

DUSKEN
Right.

JESSE
I am.

DUSKEN
No wonder she's pissed at you.

JESSE
She understands.

DUSKEN
Yeah. Harper's always been really
stupid.

Jesse grimaces - holds out his hand for the bottle. As
Dusken passes it and watches Jesse take pills with a swig:

DUSKEN
Do you know what you're doing?

JESSE
Why? Is that supposed to be a good
thing?

INT. DUSKEN'S CAR - LATER

Dusken parks outside Jesse's apartment. Jesse's staring out
at the dark, lost in thought.

DUSKEN
Jess. You're home.

Jesse looks. Disappointed, he doesn't move. They sit.

DUSKEN
There's no new fucking songs. I keep
trying. I just don't believe in it
any more.
(Beat)
He has no idea what he took from me.
(Beat)
I want to kill him, so bad. Like he
killed me.

JESSE
You're not dead.

DUSKEN
How the fuck would you know?

JESSE
Good point.

Jesse opens his door.

DUSKEN
See you tomorrow.

JESSE
(Getting out)
Yeah.

DUSKEN
And the day after.

JESSE
And the day after.

DUSKEN
And the day after.

Jesse shuts the car door.

INT. JESSE'S APT. HOUSE - SOON AFTER

Jesse lets himself in. Harper's sitting on the stairs.

JESSE
I went to your party.

HARPER
I didn't.

Silence.

HARPER
Everybody leaves their family, Jesse.
Everybody.
(Beat)
Your family didn't let you do that.

Jesse shrugs.

Harper shakes her head, gets up. Comes down the stairs.
Goes past him, to the street door. Turns.

HARPER

If this is all so right, why can't you
do it straight?

JESSE

I'll catch up with you later, Harper.
I swear it.

She looks at him for a long last moment, then leaves.
Without looking back.

Jesse lets her go.

Climbs the stairs, slow. Gets out his keys and fumbles with
the lock. Starts to push the door open.

Stops. Shaken.

Realizing she's right.

Pulls the door shut and turns to head back down the stairs -

JESSE

Harper!

- when the door behind him is suddenly yanked open, from
inside -

- by Bolt.

He grabs Jesse from behind and drags him back -

INT. JESSE'S APT. - CONTINUOUS

- slamming him face-first into the wall -

BOLT

GET UP AGAINST THE WALL!

JESSE

Ow! I'm up against the fucking -

BOLT

KEEP YOUR HANDS WHERE I CAN SEE 'EM!

JESSE

My hands are - fuck!

The muzzle of Bolt's gun is against the back of Jesse's head.
He's terrified, face to the wall. Bolt's emptying Jesse's
pockets, throwing everything on the floor -

BOLT
It's not you I want, son - you know
that -

JESSE
I know -

BOLT
I've got your drugs, you're in
possession of felony weight, intent to
sell to minors is ten years.

JESSE
Okay. All right.

BOLT
Now - you're going to help me nail
that bastard selling drugs to kids.

Uneasy beat.

JESSE
He doesn't sell drugs -

BOLT
YOU WANT TO HELP YOURSELF?!

JESSE
Yeah - okay! Okay!

They stand there. Both breathing heavily.

BOLT
You're gonna invite him over here.

JESSE
Okay.

BOLT
And we're gonna get this place all set
up with hidden camer-

Jesse impulsively turns - startling Bolt, grabbing the gun
with both hands - pushing it up -

- as he shoves Bolt backwards -

- the gun going off BOOM! - lighting up the room a second -
the sound is deafening -

- Jesse frantically shouldering Bolt back across the room
into the wall, knocking the wind out of him -

BOLT

Ooof!

- Bolt kneeling Jesse in the groin -
- Jesse doubling over, letting go, staggering away -
- Bolt gasping, dropping to his knees - vaguely pointing the gun - BOOM! -
- Jesse flinching as plaster sprays from the wall by him -
- Bolt is between Jesse and the door - aiming now -
- so Jesse turns toward the big windows, running - crossing his arms over his face -
- BOOM!

EXT. JESSE'S APT. - CONTINUOUS

- glass shattering - Jesse tumbling through the branches of a tree - falling in the starry night -
- a thud as he hits the ground and rolls, grunting -

EXT. VERMILLION - STREET - CONTINUOUS

Harper, walking a few blocks away, stops. Hearing gunshots. She looks back.

EXT. ALLEY BEHIND JESSE'S APT. - CONTINUOUS

Jesse scrambling away as Bolt fires down at him from the broken window - BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Even though Jesse's gone. Until the gun clicks empty.

Dogs bark. Bolt fumbles for his radio.

EXT. WOODS - SOON AFTER

Jesse runs in the dark, away from the town. Bleeding.

A siren in the distance.

EXT. STATE HIGHWAY - LATER

Jesse walks along the side of the highway, trying to clean himself up, pushing his empty pockets back in.

As a car passes - he turns to walk backwards, thumb out.

FADE OUT.

INT. HARPER'S APT. - VERMILLION - THE NEXT DAY

Harper sits on the sofa.

Bolt paces, letting silence intimidate. Rogan stands by the door, formal. No one in this room has gotten any sleep.

BOLT

You're going to study photography in New York City.

HARPER

If you let me.

BOLT

And you're telling me you never once took a single picture of this boy?

HARPER

I told you. He didn't like it.

Bolt eyes the suitcases and taped-up boxes by the door, then Harper.

She looks him dead in the eye.

HARPER

Got a warrant?

Bolt stares her down.

Each a little scared by what is boiling up inside them.

The phone rings.

Harper checks Bolt for permission, he nods. She picks up.

HARPER

Hello?

OPERATOR (ON PHONE)
Collect call from "Jesse". Will you
accept the charges?

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. PAY PHONE - ST. PAUL, MN - THE SAME TIME

Jesse stands on a squalid urban street-corner, dirty, frayed
and scared. Listening to her silence.

Harper stares at Bolt, paralyzed.

HARPER
No.

JESSE
Harper -

OPERATOR
I'm sorry, sir, she won't accept the
charges.

JESSE
Harper!

The line goes dead. Jesse stands there.

INT. HARPER'S APT. - VERMILLION - CONTINUOUS

Bolt watches Harper talk to the dead line:

HARPER
Look - Dad, it's not a good time. The
police are here. Yes, about "that
guy." Well, he's gone now - yeah - I
don't know - that's what they want to
know. Yes. No. Okay, I will.
(Quick, embarrassed)
Love you too.

She hangs up, looks at Bolt. He buys it.

EXT. PAY PHONE - ST. PAUL, MN - THE SAME TIME

Jesse hangs up, shattered.

He becomes aware of someone standing nearby:

MARIAN EMBRACE ALL THINGS is 70 years old, city-dwelling Lacotah Sioux, barely five feet, wearing layers of clothes, her shopping bags overflowing with scrounged street junk.

MARIAN

You buy me a bottle of Thunderbird.
We drink it. Then you break the
bottle on the wall and I will read
your destiny in the broken glass.

Jesse stares down at the wrinkled face, barely grasping her words. Shakes his head.

Marian nods, expressionless. Studying him. She turns and walks away, lugging her shopping bags.

Jesse stands there, eyes on her retreating back.

HARPER (V.O.)

Jesse. I'm so sorry about the phone.

He stays by the phone, lost.

In a series of dissolves:

After a while, he sits on the sidewalk.

HARPER (V.O.)

Bolt was standing right there and I
didn't know what else to do.

The sun shifts. People pass. He just sits there as night falls.

HARPER (V.O.)

Vermillion was a circus after your
"great escape." I stayed three more
days, hoping you'd come back or call
again or something. But you didn't.

He lies down on the sidewalk, curls up.

INT. HARPER'S APT. - NEW YORK - A FEW DAYS LATER

Harper sits on the floor of her tiny one-room apartment, suitcases and boxes half-unpacked. She's writing in a notebook:

HARPER (V.O.)

So now I'm in New York. At last.
It's like I'm - cut loose. And
everyone at school already has this
(MORE)

HARPER (V.O.) (cont'd)
real...amazing edge. I feel like a
total idiot half the time.

EXT. DOWNTOWN ST. PAUL, MN - THE SAME TIME (MONTAGE)

Jesse: shoplifting in a cheap store.

Eating his loot on the street in a landscape of seedy bars,
run-down apartment houses, vacant stairways, broken windows.

HARPER (V.O.)
New York is like - you know sometimes
when you're sound asleep, and the
alarm goes off? That's what it's
like, over and over and over. It's
like taking the SATs 24 hours a day.

EXT. STREET - NEW YORK - DAY (MONTAGE)

Harper in New York, walking uncomfortably among the quick and
the fashionable.

HARPER (V.O.)
And all I keep thinking is: Jesse has
to see this. Or that.

EXT. ALLEY - ST. PAUL, MN. - THE SAME TIME (MONTAGE)

Scrounging cans, Jesse looks up to see Marian Embrace All
Things finishing a bottle of Thunderbird with a HOMELESS MAN.

HARPER (V.O.)
At least maybe now you won't be
dealing any more. I hope you won't be
mad at me for saying I'm glad.

Marian's eyes meet Jesse's as the Homeless Man smashes the
empty bottle against the wall. Then she goes to read the
broken glass.

HARPER (V.O.)
I don't know where to send this
letter. Maybe I'll just burn it, and
hope the smoke reaches you.

EXT. SHOWGIRLZ - NIGHT (A WEEK OR TWO LATER)

Jesse sits on the sidewalk with a small bundle of scavenged
belongings, his back against a lit-up storefront decorated
with silhouettes of women: **SHOWGIRLZ! ALL NUDE! LIVE GIRLS!**

HARPER (V.O.)

I hope you're okay, Jesse. It was good that you ran. But don't keep running. Unless it's in my direction.

(Beat)

Run to me.

Jesse just watches the night parade.

The **LIVE-NUDE** door slams open and a YOUNG MAN comes running out -

- tripping over Jesse -

- going sprawling, skidding on the pavement -

- as RICHARD RAGLAND (RAGS) storms out of the club: African-American, middle-aged but still intimidating, even without the baseball bat.

Rags walks past Jesse, handing him the bat -

- and kneels, roughly searching the Young Man's pockets.

YOUNG MAN

I didn't!

RAGS

Fuck you, you didn't - lucky I don't take your teeth, too.

Rags pulls a wad of cash out of the Young Man's pocket and stands -

- starts to methodically, brutally kick the Young Man, who tries to crawl away -

- Rags following, kicking him along the sidewalk, ignoring the gleeful encouragement of the gathering STREET TYPES -

- just getting the job done, kicking the thief down the block.

At the corner, Rags stops.

Still glaring and fuming, he walks back - past Jesse - toward the club doors.

JESSE

Excuse me.

Rags turns around.

Jesse is holding out the baseball bat.

Rags considers him.

RAGS

C'mon.

He gestures for Jesse to come with him into the club.

INT. SHOWGIRLZ - CONTINUOUS

Jesse follows Rags through a dim cavern of pounding dance music, past shadowy CUSTOMERS and LAPDANCE GIRLS.

Rags unlocks the Manager's office and disappears inside.

INT. RAG'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Jesse comes to the doorway, sees Rags getting a key-ring the size of a tambourine out of a desk drawer.

RAGS

Just had an opening come up, to work here.

(Beat)

I got a strict no-stealing policy.

JESSE

I noticed.

RAGS

What's your name?

JESSE

Jim. Smith.

RAGS

What's your story?

Jesse just stares.

RAGS

You drug-addicted?

JESSE

Hard to tell, while I'm homeless.

Rags nods. Studying Jesse.

RAGS

We're open noon to midnight. Starting off: you sweep and mop, run for lunch, this and that. I get to trust you: you cover the door - 'cause I hate the

(MORE)

RAGS (cont'd)
customers and I don't want to touch
their skeezy greenbacks. Fifty bucks
a week, cash off the books.

Beat.

JESSE
That's less than minimum wage.

RAGS
Look at the mathemagician. There's
more.

INT. RAINBOW - HALLWAY - SOON AFTER

Rags leads Jesse along a hallway painted a sloppy succession
of sky blue, lime green, cherry red, lemon yellow.

RAGS
Everybody here calls it the Rainbow.
(Gestures at walls:)
The cheap bastard who owns it just
patches shit together with whatever
falls off a truck or walks away from a
construction site.

Rags unlocks Room 308, steps aside.

INT. RAINBOW - ROOM 308 - CONTINUOUS

Jesse takes in the stained wallpaper, sagging bed with a worn
mattress, dresser with a missing drawer, filthy bathroom.

RAGS
No parties. No cooking. No pets.
Payday is Monday - no advances.
(Beat)
I'll buy you sandwiches 'til then.

Jesse nods. Rags studies him a moment.

RAGS
You running from something serious?

Beat.

JESSE
Why would I run from something that
wasn't serious?

Rags nods, gives him the key. Goes to the door.

RAGS

Tomorrow morning - down in the basement, I got a lost-and-found, confiscations, whatnot. We'll scrounge you up some clothes, a blanket and a towel.

JESSE

Thank you.

Beat.

RAGS

You know how some places, it's like one big family?

JESSE

I've heard of it.

RAGS

This ain't like that.

Rags leaves, shutting the door.

Jesse sets his bundle on the bed. Goes to look out the window. He's very far from home.

Through the wall: *a slap, a woman shrieks - furniture turns over and glass breaks.*

INT. RAINBOW - HALLWAY - SOON AFTER

Jesse comes out of Room 308.

Hears: *yelling, more slaps.*

Goes to the door of Room 307 and knocks.

CARL opens it: a vain, insecure, half-naked wanna-be pimp in his mid-20s. Holding a big gun.

CARL

Who the fuck're you?

Jesse looks past him, at CANDY - pale, bad dye-job, mid-20s, huddled in a corner in her underwear, nose bloody, sobbing.

JESSE

Are you all right?

She turns. Ashamed. Wipes her face.

CANDY

Fuck off.

Beat. Jesse nods. Backs up - Carl eyeballing him.

When Carl slams the door, the stick-on number 307 falls off.

Jesse stands staring at the door, jazzed. Takes a breath.

As he picks up the fallen number - he hears something:

A child is crying.

Jesse absently sticks the number back on the door. Looks up:

The sound is coming from a dust-furred vent high in the wall.

The child could be anywhere in the huge old building.

INT. RAINBOW - ROOM 308 - CONTINUOUS

Jesse lets himself back in. Sits on the bed.

Through the wall, bedsprings begin creaking. Candy's voice:
yeah, yeah, baby, do it!

The child wails, distant.

There will be no sleeping tonight.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GRAND FINALE - DAY

Empty, the chairs upside-down on the tables. Marvin, behind the bar, looks up from a book as the door flies open and a STUDENT pokes his head in:

STUDENT

You gotta see this.

EXT. GRAND FINALE - CONTINUOUS

Marvin steps out and squints into the sky -

- where dozens and dozens of colorful helium balloons float down -

- plastic bags of pot tied to each one with party-ribbons.

Each bag has a printed sticker: **JESSE WAS HERE.**

CITIZENS OF VERMILLION are watching, confused -

- STUDENTS are running madly, laughing, fighting to catch them.

Bolt pulls up in a police car, whooping the siren, leaping out trying to restore order.

Marvin grins.

INT. SHOWGIRLZ - THE NEXT MORNING

Before they open. The work lights are on, exposing stains and cigarette burns on threadbare modular sofas and crappy carpets. LAPDANCE GIRLS drink take-out coffee, do their hair and make-up.

Rags is showing Jesse, in coveralls, the ropes:

RAGS

There here's your supply closet. This is the DJ station.

(Pointing to Girls)

You got Sandy, Candy, Brandy, Mandy, Susie, Floozie, Dasher, Donner and Vixen.

(To Girls)

This here's Jim.

The Girls mumble greetings, sizing him up. His neighbor Candy, applying make-up to a black eye, meets his gaze and looks away.

Rags shows Jesse a clipboard at the DJ station:

RAGS

This's the stage rotation. Ten minutes each, no excuses. They can't dance for shit and the money's on the laps - so you gotta enforce the rotation. On the subject of enforcement - I'm not here: you know what this is?

He takes a cattle-prod from a hiding place. Jesse nods.

RAGS

Don't zap the head or the vitals, 'cause it's made for a 900-pound cow, not a C.P.A. on his lunch break.

Jesse nods again, numb in the avalanche of ugliness.

INT. SHOWGIRLZ - LATER

Open for business. Dance music thuds. Garish-colored light. LAPDANCE GIRLS wander among CUSTOMERS. No acrobatic pole performances; this is a place for furtive groping in exchange for cash.

Jesse goes to the DJ Booth, checks the clipboard, turns on the mike: feedback. Winces, everyone glares.

JESSE
(Awkward, into mike)
Porsha, up next.

Sorting a stack of CDs, he stops: Razor Heart. He smiles slightly -

- and is putting the CD in the mixer tray when Candy comes over.

CANDY
Sorry about last night.

JESSE
Whatever.

CANDY
No - it was nice.

Jesse shrugs and goes to his supply closet. Candy follows. He does his janitor's work, trying to stay disengaged, all during:

CANDY
You healthy?

Jesse looks at her, startled. Beat.

JESSE
I'm fine.

Candy nods. Glances around, leans in closer:

CANDY
Listen. You have to promise me to keep this a secret.

Jesse nods, wary.

CANDY
I heard about this guy. Across the river? Runs this - business.
(Beat)
I'm white-bread, right? I'm from
(MORE)

CANDY (cont'd)

Wisconsin. I get four months pregnant with a healthy white-bread baby: I can go to this place in Chicago. Like for unwed mothers. They give the baby to rich people?

(Beat)

And they pay me. Ten. Thousand. Dollars.

Jesse looks at her a long moment.

JESSE

Great.

CANDY

I'll give you two hundred bucks. When the money comes in. To get me going.

Beat.

JESSE

I don't think so.

She lingers a second, trying to decide whether to be insulted. Then shrugs, nods. But as she turns away, Jesse thinks of something:

JESSE

Is that kid like that every night?

CANDY

What kid?

JESSE

Crying. All night.

CANDY

Half the people here cry all night.

He watches her walk away to find someone to straddle. Jesse fends off a sensation of drowning - leans into the mike:

JESSE

Um - Porsha? You're up.

PORSHA sulks her way up on to the tiny stage as "Razor Heart" comes on the sound system. She glares at Jesse.

PORSCHE

The hell am I supposed to do with this?

JESSE

You don't like it?

PORSCHE
You dance to it.

Jesse shuts it off, but Porsche's walking off the stage -

JESSE
Wait a minute, just tell me what to -

CANDY
It's mine.

Candy's getting on stage in the silence. She takes off her dress, gives him a look: *let's go*.

Jesse puts Razor Heart back on.

Candy begins to dance - lousy, hopelessly unerotic, but she likes the music.

Jesse watches...even more lost than ever.

INT. RAINBOW - ALLEY DOOR - MIDNIGHT

Jesse, wearing big yellow rubber gloves, drags heavy trash bags toward the alley door -

- stops, hearing noises down steps to the basement. Notices the alley-door lock is bent-in, useless.

INT. RAINBOW - BASEMENT - SOON AFTER

Jesse comes uneasily down the steps.

Sees - amid the dim, warm, dry clutter of chicken-wire storage cages and piles of junk -

- Marian Embrace All Things, settling in for the night. She sees him.

They stare at each other. He whispers, not wanting to give her away:

JESSE
What are you doing here?

MARIAN
I live here. Thirty-four years.
(Beat)
What are you doing here?

Beat.

JESSE
I don't know.

She nods. Studying him.

MARIAN
I'm Marian Embrace All Things.

JESSE
I'm Jesse - Jim.

MARIAN
Knew a number of Billy-Bobs. Never a
Jesse-Jim.
(Beat)
You lost your people?

JESSE
Yeah.

MARIAN
Me too.

INT. RAINBOW - STAIRWAY - SOON AFTER

Jesse trudges up, worn out, alone -
- and freezes.

BENNY PINDER is standing on the third-floor landing: about three years old, hair tangled, face dirty, clothes stained. He stares at Jesse, two fingers in his mouth.

JESSE
Hi.

Benny whirls and flees upstairs.

Jesse follows -

INT. RAINBOW - 4TH FL. HALLWAY - SOON AFTER

- as Jesse comes out of the stairway, he hears a door slam shut. He didn't see which.

Wanders along the hall:

JESSE
Kid? Don't be scared. Just want to
talk.

Silence.

Jesse stands looking uneasily at the rows of doors on each side of the patchwork-colored hallway.

No way to know.

CLOSE-UP - A "WANTED" POSTER - THE SAME TIME

Featuring an "Identikit" sketch of Jesse. As Bolt's fingers pin it to a bulletin board -

INT. VERMILLION POLICE STATION - NIGHT (SUMMER)

- by the front desk, where a POLICE CLERK works the switchboard. Rogan stands nearby, studying a newly-copied stack of the posters:

ROGAN

I dunno, Chief. I bet he's long gone out-of-state by now. I don't thi-

BOOM! Everyone ducks-and-flinches as a fireball erupts outside the front window.

EXT. VERMILLION POLICE STATION - CONTINUOUS

Bolt's police car, parked at the curb, burns furiously.

Bolt, Rogan and the Clerk run out, guns drawn - backing away from the heat.

Bolt looks up and down the dark street. No one there.

ROGAN

Chief?

Bolt comes around to the front of the burning car to see -

- spray-painted on the hood: **JESSE WAS HERE.**

HARPER (V.O.)

Dear Goddamn Jesse.

INT. NEW YORK CITY SUBWAY - DAY (LAST WEEK)

Harper sits, rocking slightly as the train rolls under the city.

It is early fall; almost "now." She's cut her hair and changed her style. She looks the way she will in about a week - when she'll go to wait for a bus in Columbus, Ohio.

Her eyes are on a HIGH SCHOOL KID, sitting opposite, listening to an iPod. Among the band names and logos scribbled on his notebook is a hand-drawn version of the "WANTED poster" sketch and: **JESSE WAS HERE.**

HARPER (V.O.)
I've been trying to forget you.

Harper studies the drawing.

HARPER (V.O.)
It's been four months. I think about forgetting you a lot.

INT. RAG'S OFFICE - SHOWGIRLZ - THE SAME TIME

Jesse is alone, using the computer at Rags' desk.

His hair is long and unkempt, he has a scruffy beard and moustache -

- *the guy who's gonna be in Yankton jail soon.*

HARPER (V.O.)
But then Dusken calls.

On his screen: **The JESSE DARK WEB RING.** Illustrated with:

- *A blown-up smudge of Jesse's face in a Junior High School Class picture.*

- *fan-art paintings and drawings based on the Identikit sketch.*

HARPER (V.O.)
Or I see someone on the street with a "Jesse Was Here" button.

Resigned, Jesse scrolls down a long list of sites:

Jesse Sightings.

Quotes From Jesse

Jesse Facts

Jesse Rumors

Jesse Art

Jesse Political and Environmental Action!

JESSE WAS HERE products: buttons, pipes, papers, t-shirts.

Links to NORML, High Times.

Jesse clicks through pages:

HARPER (V.O.)

I can't tell if you sent Bolt off the deep end -

- *Photos of the window he jumped from (now repaired); candles, flowers and bongos left on the ground below it, a shrine. Spray-painted on the wall - **JESSE WAS HERE**.*

- *Snapshots of **JESSE WAS HERE** graffiti all over the Midwest.*

- *Girls flashing **JESSE WAS HERE** on their bellies and breasts, guys mooning with it on their asses.*

HARPER (V.O.)

- or if he went there first, and dragged you and the rest of the country down with him.

Jesse gets to the page he's seeking: **HARPER: HOW MUCH DOES SHE KNOW?**

- *Harper's yearbook photo.*

- *Blogs from "Jesse Groupies" stalking Harper, including snapshots of Harper dodging into her art school or apartment building -*

HARPER (V.O.)

The school has to keep getting me new apartments and unlisted numbers - 'cause of the "Jesse Groupies."

- *head down, wearing big sunglasses and a floppy hat.*

Jesse stares at the grainy, blurry images of Harper.

HARPER (V.O.)

On the plus side, I went from being this hick chick to a major celebrity with all the Art Students. Turns out they're sort of suckers that way.

INT. HARPER'S ROOM - NYC - DAY (SUMMER)

She sits quietly, watching activity around her.

We reveal she's watching D.E.A. AGENTS search her belongings.

HARPER (V.O.)
Bolt gets the F.B.I. and the D.E.A. to
visit me now and then. Suspicion of
conspiracy, or something.

INT. ART SCHOOL DARKROOM - NYC - THE SAME TIME

Harper's takes a single frame of negative from a hiding place
- fits it in the enlarger.

HARPER (V.O.)
What everybody wants most is your
photograph. But I threw all of mine
in the East River when everything
started to get so crazy.

She stares at the ghostly negative-image of Jesse's face.

HARPER (V.O.)
Except one picture. But I don't print
it. And I look at it less and less.
(Beat)
Like I said: I'm trying to forget you.
(beat)
All the time.

The photo is from that moment in the spring, by his apartment
window, when he was so unguarded.

INT. RAG'S OFFICE - SHOWGIRLZ - CONTINUOUS

Jesse stares at Harper's image, captured in a distant city.

The door opens and Jesse quickly quits the Internet.

Rags comes in, wearing a jacket and tie, carrying a large
envelope. He's fine with Jesse being on the computer, and
has other things on his mind - opening the envelope, during:

RAGS
Turning into a friggin' vampire,
Jimbo. Getting a little too used to
it here.

JESSE
Yeah. I keep meaning to book that
trip around the world.

RAGS
This just might be your big
opportunity, then.

He takes a stack of eviction notices and preprinted checks from the envelope, sets them in front of Jesse.

RAGS

Everybody upstairs gets a month's notice and a relocation check.

JESSE

Relocation?

RAGS

Seventeen hundred sixty-two dollars and thirty-nine cents. Rainbow's been bought. Big company's gonna tear it down and build a multi-use structure.

JESSE

Isn't this already a multi-use structure?

RAGS

Guess they're not the right uses.

He indicates "the line" and then goes to get his giant ring of keys and set it on top of the stack of notices, during:

RAGS

Your mission, should you decide to accept it, is to get each and every tenant to sign on the line, one to a customer. No signature, no check. Not home: you open up, leave a notice inside. Don't tape it to the door, 'cause I don't want to hear later I-never-got-the-notice.

JESSE

You want me to throw everybody out of here?

RAGS

Everybody. Plus:
(Shows a small envelope)
I put a bunch of made-up tenants on the list. You get two, aside from yourself.

Rags opens the flap on the envelope: it's thick with bills.

RAGS

Five-thousand-two-hundred-some-odd dollars. Cash money.
(Pocketing it again:)
(MORE)

RAGS (cont'd)
When every one of these things is
signed.

Jesse stares at Rags. Rags nods.

RAGS
Emancipation proclamation.

INT. ART SCHOOL DARKROOM - SOON AFTER

Harper's staring at the negative image. A knock startles her
into hastily wiping away tears, switching off the enlarger.

STUDENT (O.S.)
Harper?

HARPER
Yeah?

STUDENT (O.S.)
Your Dad's on the phone.

HARPER
My Dad?

INT. RAGS' OFFICE - SOON AFTER

Jesse's on the phone. Trembling. Waiting.

HARPER (ON PHONE)
Hello?

JESSE
I was afraid that maybe they're
tapping your phone.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. ART SCHOOL OFFICE - THE SAME TIME

Harper struggles to conceal her shock from the STUDENTS and
SECRETARIES working and chatting around her.

HARPER
Are you okay?

Silences between their lines, like they fear exploding if
they allow themselves more:

JESSE
Yeah. I will be. Soon. Are you?

HARPER

I don't know.
(Beat)
What's that music?

JESSE

I'm working in a lap-dance club, in
St. Paul.
(Beat)
I'm not one of the dancers.

They both smile a bit.

JESSE

Harper? I'm gonna - start again.
Somewhere.

She says nothing. Looks down.

JESSE

I want to know if you can come with
me.

She looks up.

HARPER

Yes.

He lets it sink in. Tries not to break down.

JESSE

In a few days I'll call again, like
this. I'll tell you someplace we can
meet.

(Beat)

You can't take a plane. You can't use
a credit card. No names, no traces.

HARPER

I'll be ready.

Silence.

JESSE

We do this: it's probably forever.
New names. New lives.

HARPER

You know how to do that?

JESSE

No.

HARPER
I guess we'll have to figure it out as
we go along, then.

He smiles. She smiles.

JESSE
Yeah.

Silence.

JESSE
Harper? I love you.

HARPER
I sure hope so.

He smiles, hangs up.

INT. RAINBOW - 3RD FL. HALLWAY - LATER

Jesse - carrying Rags' huge key-ring and a clipboard-full of
eviction notices - stands at the door of Room 306, watching
the TENANT sign forms. Detaching a pre-printed check,
handing it over:

JESSE
We're all going to a better place.

TENANT
Yeah. I'm sure that's why they're
doing it.

Jesse moves on as the Tenant withdraws. He does a shave-and-
a-haircut knock on the door to Room 307.

The number falls off. As he gets it and sticks it back on -
- Carl opens the door, in a silk robe, bleary, gun in hand.

CARL
What the fuck? You woke me up.

JESSE
Sorry. Candy here?

CARL
No. Whasamatter?

JESSE
Nothing. I need to give her some
papers.

CARL
I'll take 'em.

JESSE
They're for Candy.

CARL
I heard you. I'll take 'em.

JESSE
Is your name on the lease?

Carl cocks and uncocks his gun, thoughtful. Taps the muzzle on Jesse's chest.

CARL
Keep fucking with me. We'll dance.

He shuts the door. As Jesse walks away:

JESSE
"We'll dance."

But he says it low enough Carl won't hear.

INT. RAINBOW - 4TH FL. HALLWAY - LATER

Jesse, with his keys and clipboard, moves door-to-door along another hall.

Knocks on Room 416. Nothing. Knocks again.

INT. RAINBOW - ROOM 416 - LATER

Jesse unlocks the door, steps in.

It's messy and stale. Hot plate, half-size fridge.

Jesse freezes:

Kiddie bed in the corner. A few toys.

Jesse comes in further, looks around.

On the night-table by the unmade adult bed: a sleep mask, ear plugs, a bottle of scotch.

He sniffs. Winces. Kneels to look under the bed.

Benny scrambles out the other side, wearing just a filthy diaper.

Jesse glimpses Benny's back: a mass of cuts and bruises, old and new.

They stare at each other across the bed.

JESSE

Hey - hey, it's okay. I'm not gonna hurt you. What's your name?

Benny stares, wide-eyed, silent.

JESSE

It's okay. Not gonna - no hurt -

Jesse moves very slowly - Benny tries to dart past -

- Jesse intercepts him, Benny scratches and kicks, screaming -

JESSE

Whoa - shh, shh, it's okay - don't be scared -

INT. PINDER'S BATHROOM - SOON AFTER

Jesse gently finishes washing Benny in the tub. Benny sits uneasily - but loving the warm water and soft touch.

JESSE

See - we're done. Not so bad, right?
We'll get you some stuff for the rash.
Get you all fixed up.

Jesse stands him up, dries him with a towel, wraps him with it. Benny holds his arms up to be lifted out of the tub.

As Jesse does - Benny hugs him.

Jesse holds the child close - staring at the tile wall over his little bruised, scarred shoulder.

INT. SHOWGIRLZ - FRONT DOOR - SOON AFTER

Rags looks up as Jesse approaches.

RAGS

How's it going?

JESSE

John Pinder. In 416.

RAGS

He's a bartender at the Marriott over on St. Clair.

(Checks his watch)

Probably already at work. Get him in the a.m.

JESSE

There's a little boy in that room with belt-marks on his back.

Rags takes a moment, studying Jesse.

RAGS

Yeah.

(Beat)

We don't bring the Authorities to the Rainbow. It's bad for business.

Jesse stares him down. Reckless. Unafraid.

JESSE

Is it?

RAGS

That's how it is.

JESSE

The kid is being neglected, he's being abu-

RAGS

You want to call down the law - "Jim"? Gonna get into it? Spend a bunch of time hangin' with the cops, makin' your case - "Mr. Jim Smith"?

Jesse grimaces, looks down. Rags watches him.

RAGS

You know where you are now, son?

Jesse nods, looking down. Burning.

Rags watches. Reaches out, lifts his chin to make sure Jesse sees his eyes.

JESSE

I know.

Rags nods, lets go. Jesse turns away, going back to work.

INT. RAINBOW - BASEMENT - LATE THAT NIGHT

Jesse sits with Marian among the junk, passing a bottle of Thunderbird back and forth.

MARIAN

Yeah. Benny's Mom? Elaine. She had an "accident" - she said, with a door. Benny was three. Door busted her jaw, and her leg.

(Beat)

That's one mean door.

(Beat)

In the hospital, she knows she can't go back. When she can walk, she calls up John Pinder, says she wants Benny. John Pinder says she can come over any time, wait downstairs. He'll toss the boy out the window. Four floors up.

(Beat)

I see her sometimes. Works in a flower store now.

Jesse stares into the dark recesses of the basement, finishes the Thunderbird. He looks at Marian.

She nods to the wall. Jesse throws.

Marian goes to bend over the broken glass.

MARIAN

I don't see any future.

Beat.

JESSE

I'm gonna die soon?

MARIAN

No sir. A long life - but with no future in it.

Jesse doesn't know how to take this. Marian doesn't mind.

INT. RAINBOW - 3RD FL. HALLWAY - LATER

Jesse, drunk, weaves slightly coming up to the door of Room 308 and fumbles his key into the lock -

- startled as the door to Room 307 opens.

CANDY

Hey.

She has a black eye and her lip is so swollen she lisps.
Seeing his expression:

CANDY

Don't.

Jesse bites back what he wants to say.

CANDY

Carl said you had something for me.

JESSE

It's in the office. Can I get it to
you tomorrow?

CANDY

Yeah.

(Smiles, crooked)

Hey: I think I found a guy to knock me
up. College kid.

Then - self-conscious, gestures to her face:

CANDY

Soon as this gets better.

Lets a splinter of despair show for just a second, then tries
to smile again - and turns away, going back into Room 307.

Jesse stands staring at her door. As if her despair was
contagious.

And then we see it: something clicking.

Jesse steps back.

Staring at the doors.

INT. SHOWGIRLZ - A NIGHT OR TWO LATER

Rags looks up from his rotation list at the DJ station as
Jesse down sets a stack of signed eviction notices.

JESSE

That's everybody - except Pinder.

Rags looks at Jesse, wary. Jesse's poker-faced.

JESSE

I'll go now, where he works. Public
place, everybody's on best behavior.

(Beat)

(MORE)

JESSE (cont'd)

You don't want me talking to this guy
alone.

RAGS

Real late in the game to blow
everything now, Jimbo.

JESSE

Have my money ready when I get back.

Rags mulls it over. Looking for the catch. Jesse waits.
Finally:

RAGS

Go on then.

Jesse turns -

- and stops dead.

Dusken is standing there, wearing a fringed leather jacket,
floral-print neo-hippie shirt, cowboy boots.

JESSE

Jesus.

DUSKEN

On my way, but not quite there yet.

Jesse stands, stunned, taking him in.

RAGS

You going, or what?

JESSE

Yeah. I'm going.

(To Dusken)

I have to go - do this - thing.

DUSKEN

I've got your back.

INT. DUSKEN'S RENTAL CAR - SOON AFTER

Dusken drives them through night-time St. Paul.

DUSKEN

Harper called. Said you were working
in a lap-dance joint in St. Paul. How
many can there be, right? More than
you think.

JESSE
She shouldn't have told you.

DUSKEN
She said you two were going to need
some serious bread.

Jesse looks at him - then out the window.

DUSKEN
You mad at her for asking me?

JESSE
No. I'm mad at myself, for not
thinking of it a long time ago.

DUSKEN
(Grins)
There's some blunts and a lighter in
the glove compartment.

Jesse takes them out. Looking down at them, thoughtful.

DUSKEN
Don't tell me you've been working at
that place straight.

JESSE
It's amazing what you can do straight.
(Lighting up:)
What's with the new look?

DUSKEN
Well - you've got a legend to live up
to now.

Jesse passes the smoke, shaking his head.

JESSE
Oh - don't start.

DUSKEN
Haven't you heard? Jesse Dark ran
boats from the Gulf of Mexico right up
the Missouri River. Spent every
summer in Thailand, kept a hundred
grand buried on campus. Bolt had nine
cops with him. You were so stoned you
flew instead of fell.

Jesse's barely listening. Something is slowly dawning:

JESSE

Wait a second: I've got a legend to live up to?

DUSKEN

Well, Jesus, Jesse - legendary shit doesn't just happen by itself, nowadays.

JESSE

Oh fuck.

DUSKEN

I'm you, man.

JESSE

"Jesse was here."

Dusken grins, winks. Jesse stares, upset.

JESSE

Fuck, Dusken! Shit! All of it?! Burning Bolt's car?! The fucking balloons?!

DUSKEN

Was that inspired?

JESSE

I can't believe you! What am I supposed to do?!

DUSKEN

What you always do. Be Jesse.

JESSE

I don't want to be "Jesse"! I'm trying to get out of this, Dusken! You gotta stop.

DUSKEN

Stop? It's the first time I've been alive in fucking years.

JESSE

Right - and I'm fucking dead!

DUSKEN

You're not dead. Jess: come in on it! Bring Harper! It'll be great: Bandidos Yanquis!

Jesse stares at him, unable to reply. Turns away, unseeing - trying to think of a way out.

DUSKEN
What - you're mad at me?!

JESSE
Fuckin' A I'm mad at you!

Dusken sighs, pulls over, stops the car.

JESSE
I don't want to have a "talk" now,
Dusken. I gotta do this - thing.

DUSKEN
Yeah. We're here.

Jesse looks: they're at the Marriott.

INT. MARRIOTT - HOTEL BAR - SOON AFTER

Jesse and Dusken are way-out-of-place in the Corporate Midwest Deluxe decor. They stand at the bar, watching:

Bartender JOHN PINDER, about 30, in a white shirt, black vest, clip-on bow tie and plastic name-plate, signing the eviction form. He slides it toward Jesse.

Jesse trades it for the check. Watches Pinder him examine, fold, and pocket it.

Jesse keeps looking at him. Pinder stares him down.

PINDER
We done? Or what?

JESSE
Can I get a shot of JD.

Pinder stares a second more - shrugs. Pours it.

JESSE
I saw your son today.

Beat.

PINDER
So you've seen him. So what?

JESSE
I saw his back.

PINDER
Kids fall down.

Jesse takes a breath. Looks down at the shot in front of him, struggling for control. Looks up at Pinder:

JESSE'S POV - CONTINUOUS

It's Bill Dark behind the bar, wearing Pinder's clothes - and when he speaks, Pinder's voice comes out of his mouth:

BILL DARK/PINDER
What the fuck are you looking at?

INT. MARRIOTT - HOTEL BAR - (RESUME)

Jesse stares at him...them.

JESSE
Do you have any idea what you've done?

PINDER
Listen, whoever-the-fuck-you-are -

JESSE
I live downstairs.
(Very deliberate)
Room 308.

PINDER
Okay, Room 308: I'm at work. You come near me or my kid again, I'm telling the police you're a fucking child molester. Okay - Room 308?

JESSE
He's a child.

PINDER
Yeah? You fucking listen to the fucking child whining and crying all the time! You clean up his fucking piss and shit every fucking day!

WAITRESS
Everything okay, John?

PINDER
Yeah.
(Lower, to Jesse:)
Your shot is on the house. Get the fuck out of my bar.

Jesse leans closer. Gentle. Urgent.

JESSE

Let him go. He's not a weapon. Let his mother take him off yo-

PINDER

No! She left. She never gets him back. Never.

JESSE

I can try and find a foster ho-

Pinder takes out a billy club from under the register.

PINDER

You get. The fuck. Out of my bar.

Beat. Jesse nods. Backing up:

JESSE

You change your mind - I'm in Room 308.

But he backs right into Dusken, who's not moving. Eyes on Pinder:

DUSKEN

Do we have a problem here?

PINDER

You two want to leave now.

DUSKEN

No we don't.

Jesse looks at Dusken - confused to suddenly be between the showdown parties, instead of one of them.

JESSE

Yeah, we do.

DUSKEN

No, we don't.

JESSE

Yeah we do.

Jesse tries to pull Dusken away - but Dusken shakes him off, jazzed, speeding. Locked in a glare-war with Pinder.

DUSKEN

He's got to ask us to stay.

JESSE

What?

PINDER
Okay, that's it -

Pinder starts down the bar to come out with the club -
- until Dusken pulls a silver revolver from his belt:

DUSKEN
Don't even think about it, asshole!

Jesse turns to stare at Dusken as Pinder freezes, hands up -
- and CUSTOMERS scream, throwing themselves to the floor.
Dusken's aiming the gun, arm out, at Pinder's face.

JESSE
What the fuck are you doing?!

DUSKEN
Time has come! No more bullshit.
"The tree of liberty must be watered
with the blood of - shitheads, or
everything gets all - fucked up."
(Beat)
Thomas Jefferson.

Jesse stares at Dusken.

JESSE
What?!

DUSKEN
Rebels, Jesse. Outlaw nation.

Jesse just stares, then walks out of the bar -
- leaving Dusken there, pointing a gun at the bartender.

EXT. MARRIOTT - FRONT ENTRANCE - SOON AFTER

Jesse hurries out of the lobby, meeting no one's eyes.
Dusken comes running after him, gun in hand.

DUSKEN
Jess - wait!

Jesse doesn't stop. Dusken grimaces, getting out his car
keys and moving toward the Valet stand -
- where the VALET hastily backs away, hands up.

Dusken remembers he's got a gun in his hand. The Valet runs.

DUSKEN

Fuck.

Dusken runs after Jesse.

EXT. ST. PAUL - BACK STREET - SOON AFTER

Jesse comes around a corner. Dusken yells, chasing him.

DUSKEN

Jesse!

Jesse stops and whirls:

JESSE

A gun?! A fucking gun?!

DUSKEN

Oh: big fucking deal.

(Holds up his claw)

I can't pull the trigger!

JESSE

Thank you! What I really needed was police in a whole other state thinking I'm armed and dangerous!

DUSKEN

Hey, ease up. The car's a rental, under a fake name. I got this outlaw thing down, man -

JESSE

Stop it! Just - STOP the outlaw BULLSHIT!

DUSKEN

Oh, right! 'Cause all you did was sell drugs!

JESSE

Not for FUN!

DUSKEN

You've got fans out there, man! They need to see you. They'll rise up if you tell 'em to!

JESSE

Rise up and do what?! Give you your fucking hands back?!

DUSKEN

Fuck my hands! I don't want my hands
back!

JESSE

What do you want?!

Dusken struggles desperately to find words:

DUSKEN

I want everything - not to be - like
it is!

This hangs, aching and truthful, in the empty night street.

JESSE

I don't want to be legendary, Dusken.
I don't want to lead the revolution.
I want a life - a regular, ordinary,
normal life!

DUSKEN

Yeah? What is that? Exactly? A
"normal life"?

JESSE

I DON'T KNOW!

Jesse's scared. Dusken shrugs, helpless.

DUSKEN

Then fuck it.

JESSE

No! NO! NO! We gotta - we can't -
just - this can't be right, Dusken!
This can't be it! Cause it hurts!
This all hurts too much!

(Beat)

If it was like this for everyone -
they'd be like us, right?

DUSKEN

This is not our fault!

JESSE

Who cares?!

(Beat)

About that. Really.

Jesse looks at Dusken...across the great abyss of letting-go.
Suddenly, finally, knowing he's there.

Sad but certain, Jesse turns and walks away.

Dusken lets him go.

INT. RAINBOW - ROOM 308 - CONTINUOUS

Jesse's packing the shabby clothes and sparse belongings collected during his exile into a cheap new backpack.

He stuffs Rags' envelope of cash deep into the packed clothes, burying it.

He zips the pack shut. Sets it on the bed and sits next to it. Leans back against the crappy wallpaper.

Waits.

He's expressionless. On a mission.

DISSOLVE:

Night fades. Daylight creeps in - washing out the electric bulb in the ceiling.

Jesse doesn't move. Staring into space.

INT. RAINBOW - ROOM 307 - LATER

Carl, asleep. Alone. The clock on the night-table says it's just past noon.

Jesse, using Rags's key-ring, unlocks the door. Looks in at:

Poking out from under the pillow - Carl's gun.

INT. RAINBOW - 3RD FL. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Jesse withdraws, shuts the door. Goes down the hall a few steps, to his own door, 308.

Using the keys, pries at the corner of his room number.

INT. RAINBOW - ROOM 416 - SOON AFTER

John Pinder is asleep, too. Wearing ear plugs and sleep mask.

Benny is watching cartoons. Turns, calm and curious, as Jesse lets himself in.

He allows Jesse to take him by the hand and walk him out to the hall. Stays there, peeking in -

- as Jesse comes back in, now carrying the cattle prod.

Goes to stand over Pinder.

Switches on the prod. Gently uncovers one of Pinder's legs -

- and zaps it.

Pinder howls and flails - blind, deaf, confused -

- as Jesse backs away, Benny howling in the doorway like Pinder -

- Pinder pulling the mask half-off and trying to get up, his leg folding under him, useless -

- watching Jesse run out, tossing the cattle prod aside -

INT. RAINBOW - 4TH FLOOR HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

- Jesse grabs up Benny and runs, clumsily -

INT. RAINBOW 3RD FLOOR HALLWAY - SOON AFTER

- breathless, carrying Benny, Jesse staggers down the hall to his room -

- goes in and shuts the door.

The number is now 307.

INT. RAINBOW - ROOM 308 - CONTINUOUS

Jesse locks the door, brings Benny to the bed.

Sits with his back to the wall, Benny curled in his lap.

They wait.

Listening as heavy, unsteady footsteps thud in the hall.

Coming toward them -

- going past their door. Pinder pounding on Carl and Candy's door -

PINDER (O.S.)
I'LL FUCKING KILL YOU!

- the door smashing open -

- a gun shot.

A body falling.

Jesse holds Benny, sitting on the bed. Very still.

EXT. SHOWGIRLZ/RAINBOW - LATER

CORONER'S ASSISTANTS wheel out a body bag.

COPS put Carl - cuffed and confused - into the back of a police car.

Candy, amid a cluster of Lapdance Girls standing behind the yellow tape, watches him go. Stunned at her good fortune.

Rags talks to DETECTIVES and SOCIAL WORKERS. Next to him, holding Benny, is Marian Embrace All Things. The boy clings to her, calm.

Rags glances at the GAWKERS beyond the flashing lights and yellow tape -

- and sees Jesse, in the crowd, watching.

The faintest hint of an annoyed, approving smile creeps on to Rags' face.

Jesse smiles back.

Rags looks away, to answer a question -

- and when he looks back, Jesse is gone.

INT. ART SCHOOL OFFICE - NYC - SOON AFTER

Harper, trying to conceal her nerves, follows a STUDENT in and picks up the phone from the desk.

HARPER

Dad?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. BUS STATION - PAY PHONE - ST. PAUL - CONTINUOUS

Jesse is on a pay phone, backpack slung on one shoulder. They talk with electric-edgy caution: afraid to dream.

JESSE
Columbus, Ohio.
(beat)
It's halfway between us, and if I was
looking for me - I wouldn't look
there.

HARPER
Sounds good.

JESSE
I'll be on the bus from St. Paul.
Gets into Columbus a little after six.
Day after tomorrow.

Long beat.

HARPER
See you there, then.

Jesse smiles slightly. Harper does too. She hangs up.

INT. BUS STATION - TICKET WINDOW - SOON AFTER

As Jesse sets his pack down on the ledge and digs out some
cash:

JESSE
I need a one-way ticket to Columbus,
Ohio, leaving tomorrow night - and a
round-trip to Yankton, South Dakota,
that gets me back in time for it.

TICKET CLERK
(Absently, typing it in)
Yankton's kind of in the wrong
direction for where you want to end
up.

JESSE
Yeah.
(Beat)
I know.

The Ticket Clerk prints out the tickets.

EXT. SADIE'S HOUSE - EARLY THE NEXT MORNING

Sadie, the nurse, comes out her front door - carrying a car-
mug, collecting her newspaper. She stops, shocked.

Jesse is waiting for her.

SADIE

Oh, Jesse. You shouldn't be back here now. They've been asking about you.

She glances across the street, where a NEIGHBOR is watching them from a window. The Neighbor lets the curtain fall back shut.

JESSE

I need to say goodbye.

SADIE

(Smiles a little)
You mean hello. She delivered yesterday.

Beat.

JESSE

Delivered what?

Sadie stares at him.

SADIE

Oh Lord. I thought you knew.

JESSE

Sadie?

SADIE

We couldn't even tell until she was too far along to...stop. It might have been one of the patients, but we think it was probably one of the staff.

JESSE

Sadie - what are you talking about?

CLOSE-UP - ROSE'S BABY - LATER

Sleeping. Tiny face, puffy eyes, curled hands. Soft, sweet, vulnerable beauty. Pure innocence.

INT. HOSPITAL - ROSE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jesse stares down into the bassinet - his scruffy face shaken, heartbroken, overjoyed.

He's got his hair tucked down into his collar to hide it, and is dressed in orderly's whites.

Like he'll be, in jail. An hour from now.

He kisses his fingertips and gently touches the baby's forehead.

There's a nervous little knock on the door. Sadie peeks in.

SADIE

Jesse. You have to go.

Jesse nods, not looking up from the baby. Sadie withdraws.

Jesse goes to kneel by Rose, sleeping curled up in her bed, IV taped in the back of her hand.

He kisses her on the cheek. Gets up, wiping away tears.

Then he ever-so-gently picks up the baby.

EXT. CORRIDOR - HOSPITAL - SOON AFTER

Sadie looks up from a chart, at the Nurse's Station desk, as Rose's room door quietly opens.

Jesse's standing there, carrying the blanket-swaddled baby.

She stares at him, horrified.

Jesse waits a second.

She doesn't move. Doesn't speak. Shocked. But silent.

Jesse nods, grateful -

- and comes out. Walking away down the long drab corridor.

Passing busy NURSES, shuffling PATIENTS.

Toward the Fire Exit, far down at the end.

Passing a DOCTOR.

Walking just a little faster.

Passing a Recreation Room full of mentally-ill people.

The Doctor turning, uncertain. Watching him.

Jesse refusing to look back.

Almost running now. Toward the Fire Door.

Almost there.

Turning sideways, protecting the baby as he bucks the fire-door push-bar open -

- letting in a flood of daylight -

EXT. HOSPITAL - EXIT - CONTINUOUS

- and he stops, stunned - facing police cars with flashing lights and COPS with guns aimed -

- who all begin yelling different orders, over each other.

Jesse stands, frozen, holding the sleeping baby.

CROWD (V.O.)

Free Jesse! Free Jesse! Free Jesse!

JESSE'S POV - OUT JAIL WINDOW - THREE DAYS LATER (NOW)

The memories have brought us to "now":

The Demonstration has swelled to a couple of hundred RAG-TAG KIDS. Smoking joints, passing petitions, chanting -

CROWD

Free Jesse! Free Jesse! Free Jesse!

INT. YANKTON JAIL - CONTINUOUS

Jesse stands on his bunk, watching them through the bars.

CRIPPLED HORSE (O.S.)

You know how if you say something over enough times it doesn't make any sense any more? Your name is that way now.

JESSE

Tell me about it.

Jesse cautiously holds up a hand. A huge cheer rises outside. Uneasily, he lowers it, turning away to get down -

- and to find Bolt, standing with Juneau, outside his cell door.

BOLT

The legendary Jesse Dark.

Jesse sighs. Looks down.

Trying to decide if it's worth arguing about. Or explaining.

Bolt signals Juneau to unlock the door.

INT. YANKTON JAIL - MAIN ROOM - SOON AFTER

Bolt walks Jesse in, hands cuffed behind him.

Juneau gives Bolt transfer papers and a pen.

D.J. (ON RADIO)

You promised us a live song, Dusken.

DUSKEN (ON RADIO)

Yes I did. Live and acoustic. This one's going out to our very own Chief of Police, Mr. John Bolt.

Dusken strums and sings Pete Seeger's "If I Had A Hammer."

Jesse can't help but smile. Glances at Bolt, signing the papers.

Bolt's pale, and veins are visible on his forehead.

BOLT

Could you turn that off, please?

As a DEPUTY does, Bolt hands the signed papers to Juneau - looking out:

BOLT

You need to get my vehicle's path of egress cordoned off.

CROWD (O.S.)

Free Jesse! Free Jesse! Free Jesse!

JUNEAU

I got three officers, including me.

Bolt grabs Jesse by the arm and marches him toward the doors.

BOLT

Goddamn rinky-dink operation.

JUNEAU

You could always wait.

Jesse gives Juneau a look, on his way out: *thank you.*

Juneau nods: *sorry.*

EXT. YANKTON JAIL - SOON AFTER

A huge cheer rises as Jesse steps out, cuffed, with Bolt.

The wave of noise startles Bolt for a moment.

The Rag-Tag Kids are screaming, thrusting fists in the air, clapping, waving signs, throwing empty cans. Even Jesse's kind of scared.

CROWD

FREE JESSE! FREE JESSE! FREE JESSE!

Bolt grips Jesse's upper arm, tight - Jesse winces as Bolt walks him to the car.

EXT. BOLT'S POLICE CAR - CONTINUOUS

Bolt pushes Jesse against the car door as he gets his keys.

Jesse surveys the faces of the kids across the top of the car: creatures from another tribe. He's a thousand years older, and they have no idea who he is. He admires their innocence and passion. Sadly.

CROWD

FREE JESSE! FREE JESSE! FREE JESSE!

Bolt unlocks the car, grabs Jesse, pulls him back a step.

JESSE

Free Jesse.

BOLT

Shut the fuck up.

Bolt opens the door and professionally pushes Jesse down into the back seat.

Then as he slams the door - it happens:

The Kids surge forward, their chant dissolving into a roar - like a dam breaking -

- a flood of kids, knocking down the barricades - swirling around the car like a tide -

INT. BOLT'S POLICE CAR - CONTINUOUS

- Jesse stares at the faces, hands, bodies pressing against the windows - hearing the rain of hands on the roof, pounding in protest - the car is rocking -

EXT. BOLT'S POLICE CAR - CONTINUOUS

- Bolt reaches for his gun but the Kids crushing around him grab his arms, wrestle it from his grasp -

EXT. YANKTON JAIL - CONTINUOUS

Juneau appears in the doorway, looking out as his DEPUTIES come up behind him with shotguns -

- but Juneau shakes his head. The Deputies stand down.

INT. BOLT'S POLICE CAR - CONTINUOUS

Jesse watches Bolt being lifted up, past the windows by the mob of kids - rising up out of sight -

EXT. BOLT'S POLICE CAR - CONTINUOUS

- the kids pass Bolt up above their heads like a rock star at a concert - kicking and flailing as they carry him away -

INT. BOLT'S POLICE CAR - CONTINUOUS

- Jesse whirls, scared, when the driver's door opens -

- and a long-haired neo-hippie in a floppy hat, carrying a big old coat, slides behind the wheel and slams the door.

It takes Jesse a second to recognize Dusken -

- even as he takes off the hat and the long hair comes with it. Dusken grins. He's growing a beard and moustache like Jesse's.

Jesse can't speak. Astonished.

DUSKEN

Miracles of modern recording science.

The car shakes and shudders as the kids pound on it.

Dusken jingles Bolt's keys.

Jesse hastily turns around as Dusken slides open the divider between them, reaches in to unlock the cuffs -

JESSE

You did this?

DUSKEN

We did this.

JESSE

How do we stop it?

The cuffs snap open. Jesse turns -

DUSKEN

We don't.

- to find Dusken shoving the coat and wig-hat through the divider to the back.

Jesse just stares.

DUSKEN

Find a new name, Jesse. And walk away.

Jesse hesitates, in the quiet chamber amid the chaos -

- then he takes the deal, pulling on the big coat and the wig-hat -

- as Dusken, in front, puts on a pair of sunglasses and starts the engine with a race-car roar.

Palms slam on the hood, windows, roof.

Jesse - disguised - puts his hand on the door handle.

Looks back at his friend.

JESSE

You take care.

Dusken smiles a little, but shakes his head.

DUSKEN

Not my style.

Jesse smiles, too. Sad. He opens the door -

EXT. YANKTON JAIL - CONTINUOUS

- and climbs out, merging into the crowd - as the siren gives a warning whoop -

- and the kids yell and slap and pound on the slowly moving car - seeing only a dim figure inside -

- the legendary "Jesse Dark" -

- Bolt, bouncing on a sea of hands, screams in frustration -

- Dusken turning on the siren and rolling forward, parting the crowd like a motorized Moses - gathering speed -

- and then, clear, tearing away with a smoky squeal of burning rubber -

- as the Rag-Tag Kids go wild, chasing, whooping.

All except one nameless neo-hippie, silent in the crowd -

- watching his life drive off without him.

Jesse turns away, putting his hands in the coat pockets -

- and stops. Looking down at what he's found there.

A thick rubber-banded pack of bills. At least ten thousand dollars.

Jesse shakes his head and pockets it again -

- turning to walk against the tide of Rag-Tag Kids wandering in the wake of the stolen police car -

- a lonely disguised figure, lost and found in the exact same moment.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BEACH - LOS ANGELES - DAY (TWO YEARS FROM NOW)

Waves rolling in, crashing on the sand. A public parking lot.

A beat-up RV parks at the edge of the sand, facing the Pacific and the lifeguard towers.

Jesse and Harper climb out, taking in the scene, the fresh air. They are dressed in cheap, funky clothes.

It is two years later.

Harper is eight months pregnant.

Nearby, a FAMILY is stuffing beach gear into a minivan, brushing off sand. The MOM smiles over at Harper's belly.

MOM

You know if it's a boy or a girl?

HARPER
(Smiles)
Girl.

MOM
Picked out a name yet?

HARPER
Rose.
(Beat)
Rose Escape Parker.

MOM
"Escape." That's unusual.

Harper looks over at Jesse, part of an ongoing debate: *I told you so.*

He smiles, shrugs. To the Mom:

JESSE
It was my mother's maiden name.

The Mom nods, polite, baffled -

- watching the young man and his pregnant wife walk down toward the ocean.

JESSE (V.O.)
*Somebody once asked me what the
difference is between a criminal and
an outlaw.
(Beat)
The criminal wants what was never his.
(Beat)
The outlaw wants back what he's lost.*

They stand at the edge of America, and then begin to walk along the beach -

JESSE (V.O.)
*But in the end, you can't get it back.
None of us can.*

- letting the waves wash away their footprints behind them.

JESSE (V.O.)
*Citizens, outlaws, and the rest of us
in between: every day, we start again.
We make up our lives as we go along.
(Beat)
That's all we can do.
(Beat)
And it's enough.*

- The End -