

EXT. WEST TEXAS - DUSK

Night's curtain descends on the Texas plain. The purple teeth of the Franklin Mountains but deckled brush strokes in the trembling distance.

EXT. GRASSLANDS

Jurassic silhouettes of rusted oil pump jacks bob their heads like thirsty birds. Forlorn sentinels to miles of open scrub and the silent, ranging ghosts of Kiowa and Apache.

EXT. TRUCK STOP

A gravel inlay somewhere off the 213 between Chaparral and Fort Bliss. Truckers asleep in the cabs of their big rigs.

EXT. TRUCK STOP - PARKING LOT

MIKE BUCK steps down out of his Dodge Ram. One calloused hand on his belt buckle, he worries a toothpick and studies the land. His face too young to have eyes that old.

MEXICANS in straw cowboy hats lean against the chrome bull bar of a Mack truck, beers dealt out on the hood. Cream-stitched accents in their flat brimmed Brush Hogs. The men lower their voices to mark Buck's passing.

INT. SHERWOOD DINER - NIGHT

A worn leather strap of shop bells betrays Buck's entrance. He takes a seat next to a grizzled old timer, NED. Buck folds his elbows on the service counter and cocks a construction boot on the brass foot rail. Pats drywall dust off his flannel.

AUNT GLADYS scoops crumbs from the counter with the front of her apron. Second she lays eyes on Buck she nods her head grimly, cracks a bottle of Lone Star, slides it across the countertop and gets a second bottle on deck.

GLADYS
Swing shift?

Mike Buck sets to work on the Lone Star like he just crawled across a desert.

BUCK
Just staying outta trouble.

NED

Believe that when I see it. You
gonna hold this job?

Buck nods to him, acknowledging him.

BUCK

Ned.

Ned slides his fifth infantry zippo across the paneled counter to Gladys who lights a Pall Mall and squints as she does it.

Gladys cracks open Mike's second beer.

GLADYS

You'll be alright. Just cool your hot head until probation run out. Then you can go back to being a lunatic.

Buck drinks the second beer slower. Gladys' Pall Mall spiraling blue smoke in a thin, slow coil.

BUCK

Was thinking I might join reserves. Maybe get active duty again.

NED

Shit boy, you already done two pumps.

GLADYS

You're like a con who wants to get back in jail for the free meals.

Ned wags his head at Buck, goitered neck wobbling like a turkey's waddle.

NED

When I come back from my war I had scrambled eggs for brains.

GLADYS

Still do.

NED

Battle will do things to a man.

BUCK

(shrugs)

Man's shooting at you, easiest thing in the world to shoot back.

NED

So what eats at you? You were a good kid before you gone overseas. Now every time you head into a bar you come out in the back of a police car.

BUCK

It ain't the shooting that eats at me.

Buck takes another inch off his beer. Staring into the bottle's iris like a portal to his memories.

BUCK (CONT'D)

First time I killed I was ten years old. Mom still alive. We come home from the doctors in Odessa and the sliding glass door to the backyard is all smashed in and blood all on the carpet. I got the shotgun out the closet while my mom called the police. Followed the blood trail upstairs to the bedroom and pushed open the door. And my hand on the bible, there's a full on eight-point buck standing in my mom's bedroom. Beautiful rack of antlers. He's just standing on the area rug, right between the TV and the Nordic Track. Panting.

Ned and Gladys lean in on the bar, picturing the scene in their minds.

BUCK (CONT'D)

It was the October rut. Buck musta been standing in the backyard, seen its reflection in the sliding glass door and charged. Then couldn't figure out where it was and howda get out. Run upstairs and got stuck in my mom's bedroom.

NED

What did you do?

Buck takes a sip off his beer. Across the bar, TWO MEXICANS in a corner booth conspire in hushed whispers. Their black bolo ties tipped with braided silver aiguilettes.

BUCK

The buck and I looked at each other a good while.

(MORE)

BUCK (CONT'D)

Him just as shocked to see me.
Both of us breathing heavy and him
with blood frothing off his flank
and all that glass stickin outta
him. There wasn't much else to be
done about it.

Buck takes a long pull off his Lone Star and wipes his mouth
with the back of his hand.

BUCK (CONT'D)

There was a woman in Iraq I coulda
saved but didn't. She looked at me
with those same eyes. That's what
I think about. That's what eats at
me.

Buck sets to peeling the label off his Lone Star, turning the
bottle in his hands. Then tries to force a smile.

BUCK (CONT'D)

Venison's good the first night.
But after a month or two you start
dreaming about pizza.

Ned shakes his head.

NED

I got back from my war I couldn't
walk in a room without looking for
the exits.

GLADYS

My late husband Ernie, you remember
Ernie. Every Fourth a July those
fireworks'd pop off he'd be running
for the bushes like a jackrabbit.

Gladys' chest rattles with a chuckle that ends in a cough.
She spits phlegm into a napkin, appraising it with a cocked
eyebrow before crinkling it up.

NED

Funny things to a man.

GLADYS

Every time Ernie'd leave the house
I'd see him checking windows and
rooftops. Just couldn't seem to
convince himself there's no one
trying to shoot him.

BUCK

I'll allow I've done that bit
myself.

Gladys leans forward on her elbows, her deep nicotined voice dropping to a baritone whisper.

GLADYS

You'll find time'll fix all that.

Buck nods.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

Listen to me, son.

Her eyes make crow's feet as she draws deeply on the Pall Mall. She blows smoke out the side of her mouth.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

You are not the child of your past.
You are the father of your future.

Buck looks up and holds her gaze.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

You didn't help that woman in Iraq.
Fine.

Gladys leans in closer.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

Find another woman to help.

She lets Buck chew on that a while. From the Juke Box, Patsy Cline fills in the silence with more loneliness.

And all at once THE LIGHTS CUT OUT.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

Gaddangit.

Darkness.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

Happens every time Eddie runs the
trash compactor.

BUCK

Aunt Gladys, where's your circuit
breaker at?

GLADYS

Wall outside the John.

Buck stands, hitching up his jeans by the belt straps.

BUCK
Hell, I'll get it. Heading there
anyways.

INT. SHERWOOD DINER HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Buck's fingertips trace the wood paneling to steady his way. He finds the fuse panel and flips the circuit breakers.

LIGHT RETURNS TO THE DINER as Patsy Cline's voice lurches back into key. The twang of the steel guitar haunting and desolate.

Buck takes his beer into the bathroom with him.

INT. SHERWOOD DINER - BATHROOM

Buck runs a tired hand over his face. Jaundiced in the cornmeal light of the 30 Watt bulb.

Buck pulls a prescription bottle of Prazosin from his jeans pocket. The label reads, "Anxiety, PTSD, Panic Disorder."

He palms his last two pills, downing them with a swallow of beer. Then chuck the empty bottle in the trash can.

One last glance in the mirror. He was handsome before he was broken.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Buck returns along the panelled hallway. Walls hung with framed black and whites of Country Western singers long forgotten.

INT. SHERWOOD DINER - CONTINUOUS

Buck steps back into the diner and finds EVERYONE SHOT DEAD.

THE TWO MEXICANS IN THE CORNER BOOTH - tagged in the forehead. One face forward in his chicken fried steak.

NED - lying belly-down under the bar stools, an exit wound spreading crimson on the vintage tooling of his scully shirt.

AUNT GLADYS - one ankle-nyloned leg askew, jutting from behind the counter.

BUCK
Oh, dear God.

INT. SHERWOOD DINER - BUCK

leans across the counter top. GLADYS' FACE CAVED IN LIKE A SMASHED PUMPKIN.

The register lying open - cash gone and change scattered across the counter top.

BUCK
God of mercy.

BUCK'S PUPILS DILATE, his breath coming in fast and thick.

Patsy Cline bravely soldiers on, singing of solitude and heartbreak.

OUTSIDE, A CAR DOOR SHUTS and an ENGINE TURNS.

BUCK SQUATS LOW TO THE GROUND AND CRAWLS TO THE WINDOW. He cups his hands to peer into the night.

EXT. SHERWOOD DINER - SAME

A POLICE BLACK AND WHITE turns on its lights and merges onto Interstate 213, GUM BALLS FLASHING.

INT. SHERWOOD DINER - BUCK

grabs the rotary phone by the register. HE HAMMERS THE SWITCH HOOK, but the line is dead.

BUCK
C'mon, goddamn it!

BUCK HEARS A MOAN BEHIND HIM. An awful, haunted sound. Buck VAULTS OVER THE COUNTER TOP to reach EDUARDO, the line cook.

INT. KITCHEN - EDUARDO

lies on the ground in his white apron and hair net. He has defensive wounds...a BULLET HOLE straight through both palms and into his neck. BUCK STRUGGLES TO HOLD EDUARDO'S NECK TOGETHER.

EDUARDO
He visto la cara de la muerte. El
rostro del mal.

Eduardo is in shock. Buck, using his whole fist to staunch the wound, applying pressure, hot blood running everywhere.

EDUARDO (CONT'D)
Tengo una botella de Cuervo debajo
de la estufa.

BUCK
Right - disinfectant!

Buck grabs the bottle of Cuervo from under the range. Unscrews it and hands it to Eduardo.

Eduardo just drinks and drinks.

Then relaxes. His eyes closed.

BUCK (CONT'D)
What happened, Eddie?

Eduardo's eyes focus on Buck.

EDUARDO
El policia entro. Le dispara al
hombre en la mesa de la esquina a
quemarropa. Despues le dispara a
Gladys y a todos los demas.

BUCK
Fue un robo?

EDUARDO
No vacio la caja hasta que le
dispara a todos. Como si le
ocurrio despues.

Eduardo is bleeding out, losing blood pressure in his head - passing out.

BUCK
Eddie, vamos a buscar ayuda. Todo
estara bien. Que puedo hacer?

Buck hands Eduardo a towel to staunch the wound, but it is a futile gesture.

EDUARDO
Solo encuentralo, Mike.
Encuentralo y capturalo.

Buck and Eduardo share a last look. Eduardo's eyes, pleading.

EDUARDO (CONT'D)
Find him.

BUCK TURNS AND RUNS.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRUCK STOP - NIGHT

BUCK RACES ACROSS THE PARKING LOT like a stone from a slingshot. He hops in his truck and pops the clutch so hard he STALLS THE ENGINE.

He starts her up again, knuckles gripping the wheel, and TEARS OUT ONTO THE HIGHWAY.

INT. DODGE RAM - BUCK

SLAMMING THROUGH ALL FIVE GEARS. He wills the Dodge faster until he spots flashing blue and red sirens half-a-mile ahead. Buck's pumping so much adrenaline he's PUNCHING THE ROOF OF HIS DODGE.

He marks the squad car pulling off the highway into a motel parking lot.

Buck passes the lot. Then kills his headlights, U-turns, and DOUBLES BACK.

EXT. MOTEL 6 PARKING LOT - BUCK

on foot, low-lining through the lot. Crouches behind a screen of yucca and elderberry, a spindly deodar crowning his head like a rack of antlers.

No sound but the Argon buzz of neon lights off the vacancy sign.

BUCK'S POV ON:

THE POLICE OFFICER standing in the Motel front office, talking to the NIGHT CLERK.

The Officer has a cold, unflinching gaze and casually rests a backhand on his holster.

EXT. PARKING LOT - SAME

Buck approaches the empty squad car. The gentle noises of the engine settling.

He squints at the plates. TEXAS STATE EXEMPT. No tags.

BUCK

Who in the hell are you?

Buck creeps around the passenger side. Finds the window rolled down a few inches.

He pushes up his sleeve, fits an arm inside the window, and POPS THE DOOR LOCK.

EXT. PARKING LOT - BUCK

glancing up at the Motel front office. But the Officer's back is still to him. Buck is sweating pretty good.

Buck opens the door of the squad car. He runs a thumb along the door frame of the Crown Vic until he spots a VIN number.

INT. SQUAD CAR - BUCK

pops the glove box. Finds paper and pen and scratches down the VIN number.

Buck grabs all the paperwork from the glove box and stuffs it in his shirt pocket. He's about to shut the door and bolt...

...When he spots a pair of LATEX GLOVES on the passenger seat. And underneath, a BLACK LEATHER SATCHEL.

Buck grabs the satchel and quietly shuts the door.

EXT. MOTEL 6 PARKING LOT - BUCK

DASHES BACK TOWARD HIS TRUCK, then stops on his heels. He runs back to the patrol car and OPENS THE DOOR AGAIN.

Buck uses the sleeve of his flannel to wipe down the door handle and glove box.

Buck looks up. And inside the Motel Office, the Police Officer is STARING DIRECTLY AT HIM.

BUCK HITS THE DIRT AND FREEZES.

INT. MOTEL 6 - FRONT OFFICE

The Police Officer carefully licks his palm and parts his hair.

He sees only his reflection in the brightly lit windowpane.

EXT. PARKING LOT - BUCK

races back to his truck and GUNS IT OUT OF THE PARKING LOT.

INT. DODGE RAM - NIGHT

MIKE BUCK SPEEDS DOWN THE INTERSTATE with no lights on for a mile until his heart rate settles back down. Buck pulls onto the shoulder and into a ditch and kills the engine.

BUCK

Sonuvabitch. Settle down, Buck.

He smacks on the dome light and looks at the car registration forms he snatched from the glove box. They are nothing but Chinese takeout receipts.

BUCK (CONT'D)

Who are you, you bastard.

Buck holds the black satchel in his lap and unzips it.

BUCK (CONT'D)

Breath easy.

Buck reaches inside and pulls out a plastic Ziploc bag...

...It contains \$60,000 in machine-counted stacks of \$100 bills.

Buck's breathing so quick he's liable to fog the windshield.

He reaches into the satchel again and pulls out a WALTHER P99. Fitted with laser unit and silencer.

The semi-automatic is sealed in a plastic Ziploc bag, the muzzle bore still warm to the touch.

BUCK (CONT'D)

God almighty.

Buck settles his breathing and reaches into the leather satchel one last time.

He removes a stack of papers. Rap sheets.

Each sheet contains a name, DMV photo, and address for a different person. There are ten sheets of paper. Eight of the names are X-ed out in red pen.

BUCK (CONT'D)
This can't be.

Buck looks at the ninth page and studies the DMV photo. He recognizes the face. The black bolo tie with silver aiguilettes... One of the MEXICAN MEN KILLED IN THE SHERWOOD DINER.

BUCK (CONT'D)
You a stone cold hit man.

Buck looks at the tenth rap sheet. Examines the DMV photo.

A woman. Sooty-lashed. Auburn and almond. Bout as pretty as a DMV photo can be.

NAME: JANIE COLE

ADDRESS: 47 Pinewoods Bluff, Las Cruces, NM.

BUCK (CONT'D)
Lady, you the last one standing.

CUT TO:

INT. EL PASO POLICE DEPT - MISSION VALLEY STATION - NIGHT

Mike Buck SLAMS OPEN THE DOUBLE DOORS. Eduardo's dried blood on his shirt, the black satchel clutched in his fist.

Buck cuts the entire waiting line and walks straight to the Duty Chief - interrupting the report he is taking.

BUCK
A woman is going to die - you gotta help her!

The Duty Chief, JIM BENSON, looks up over the tops of his wire frame glasses. Grey showing in his clipperead beard.

JIM
Take a number and a seat. These here folks been waiting on line.

Buck just stands there, a live wire, swaying foot to foot.

BUCK
I need to talk to someone right now.

JIM

Sir, I ast you to take a seat and
wait your turn on line.

BUCK

The hell with that! I just seen
five people murdered at the
Sherwood Diner off 213. A
goddamned cop did it!

Officer Jim Benson gets to his feet. He has stooped
shoulders and an insulin pump clipped to his belt like a
pager.

JIM

You been at the Sherwood Diner?

BUCK

What I said. There's a Officer on
a killing spree.

Jim takes in Buck's bloody shirt and the shell shock written
on his face. Jim eyes the civilians in the waiting room and
makes a judgement call.

JIM

Son, why don't you come back here
and tell me about it.

Jim shuts the bullet-proof glass of his service window and
unlocks the door for Buck to enter the station offices.

INT. EL PASO POLICE DEPT - OFFICES

Jim gestures Buck to a seat by his desk.

JIM

How about you take it slow. Tell
me everything?

Buck doesn't sit down. He just starts in to talking a mile a
minute.

BUCK

Officer came in and shot everyone
point blank. My Aunt Gladys, Ned,
and two Mexican gentlemen in the
back booth. Aunt Gladys is about
the only family I got left.

Jim Benson catches a heavy whiff of alcohol on Buck's breath
and snaps his head back on reflex.

BUCK (CONT'D)

The line cook told me it weren't no robbery. Said the officer shot everybody and only pulled out the register as he was leaving. Like it was a afterthought.

JIM

Easy, son. We got officers over there now. Had a trucker call it in on CB not 20 minutes ago.

Jim eyes the dried blood stains spider-webbed on Buck's arms.

JIM (CONT'D)

Trucker saw a fellow in a 1990 Dodge Ram with two-toned panelling blowing outta that diner faster than a scalded dog.

BUCK

That's right. That was me.

Buck reaches into the black satchel and pulls out the semi-automatic.

JIM IS ON HIS FEET, his hand on his holster.

BUCK (CONT'D)

I chased him to the Motel 6.
Stoled this gun out his squad car.

Jim Benson is on full alert. The blood on Buck's flannel still wet enough to stain the corner of Jim's desk.

JIM

I'ma radio this in real quick.
Need you to just relax and sit tight. You made a good choice coming in here.

Buck is overwhelmed with relief.

BUCK

Thank you. Thank you, officer.

INT. EL PASO POLICE DEPT - CUBICLES

Jim moves a few cubicles down to put a call in on his radio. He keeps his eyes locked on Buck.

INT. EL PASO POLICE DEPT - OFFICES

Buck rocks back and forth on his boots, unable to keep still.

He picks up one of Jim's cards from the business card holder on his desk. Runs a thumb over the gloss and tucks it in his shirt pocket.

Buck is nauseous from adrenaline. He clutches his stomach and puts his head between his legs.

Jim returns, hand on his holster.

JIM

The bullets at the diner are .40 caliber Smith and Wesson.

BUCK

Sounds about right.

JIM

That a Walther P99 you got there?

BUCK

Yessir.

JIM

Son, I need you to stand up and put your hands against the wall.

BUCK

Beg your pardon?

JIM

You heard me just fine.

Jim unholsters the speedcuffs from his utility belt. Buck's blood starts pumping fast.

BUCK

You got this all wrong.

Sweat breaks out all over Buck's body. His breath quickens and his hands begin to tremor.

JIM

Go ahead and put that gun on my desk, there. Turn around nice and slow for me and put your hands against the wall.

Buck draws the handgun from the Ziplock bag.

BUCK

I will do no such thing til you
listen to me.

Jim fumbles the leather strap on his holster.

Buck thumbs his safety, racks the slide, and LEVELS HIS SEMI-AUTO AT JIM. Boy is quick as a whip crack.

JIM

You want to think about what you do
next.

Buck's eyes widen exophthalmically. His pulse showing in his neck and temples.

BUCK

Listen to me, I didn't do this. I
come in here trying to help. I
already got two priors this year
and I ain't going back in for
nothing.

Jim radios into his shoulder mic.

JIM

10-33, all units, requesting backup
at Mission Valley Station, all
units respond, repeat -

BUCK

You gotta listen to me! I'm trying
to help you!

JIM

- suspect is armed, this is Officer
Jim Benson requesting backup -

Buck loses all control. Eyes rolling, shell-shocked. He's screaming like he's in combat.

BUCK

You're not listening to me! I
ain't going back in! You coulda
just listened to me!

Gripping the Walther P99, Buck shoulders the satchel and backs out of the offices.

Jim Benson, palms in the air, watches him exit.

SECURITY CAMERAS catch Buck's face, twisted in anguish, as he shoulders the emergency exit door and takes off into the night.

CUT TO:

INT. DODGE RAM - MOVING

BUCK PEELS OUT OF THE PARKING LOT, gravel spinning off the tires.

He PUNCHES THE STEERING WHEEL again and again.

BUCK
What'd I get myself into!

EXT. EL PASO - MISSION VALLEY

A BLACK AND WHITE, coming up fast on Piedras Street, FLIPS ON ITS SIRENS AND GIVES CHASE.

A second squad car SKIDS OFF OF COPIA STREET and joins the pursuit.

INT. DODGE RAM - BUCK

BOOKING IT UP THE 478 to Fort Bliss. His jaw set and determined.

EXT. EL PASO - VETERAN'S PARK - CONTINUOUS

Buck's pickup JUMPS THE CURB at Salem Drive.

The two cruisers pursue, SIRENS WAILING.

BUCK OFF-ROADS ACROSS VETERAN'S PARK, swerving around park benches and the nomad tents of the homeless.

EXT. EL PASO - MISSION VALLEY STREETS

Buck's Dodge crashes down onto Rushing Road, SPARKS FLYING OFF THE MUFFLER.

The gap is too much for the first Ford Crown Victoria. It BOTTOMS OUT IN THE ROAD DRAINAGE and is left dragging its bumper.

The second squad car follows too close and REAR ENDS THE FIRST. The two cars spin out, SKIDDING TO A STOP.

Their wide yellow headlights like owl's eyes staring dumbly into the empty night.

INT. DODGE RAM

Buck adjusts his rearview mirror. The cops seem to be alright. He checks his breathing, wipes the sweat off his face, and puts the pickup back into gear.

EXT. EL PASO - MISSION VALLEY

The Dodge cuts its headlights and disappears into the shadows of the foothills.

CUT TO:

INT. STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mike Buck barrels into the dark kitchen. Horizontal blinds cast tiger stripes across his body.

He rifles through his prescription bottles on the counter, reading labels in the dark, NOT FINDING HIS PRAZOSIN.

BUCK
Damn, damn...

Buck savagely RIPS OPEN THE FRIDGE. Seizes the last bottle of Lone Star from a cardboard six pack, twists off the cap with his forearm and GUZZLES IT.

Buck wipes his mouth with the back of his hand and licks it clean. He is sweating and his hands shaking.

BUCK (CONT'D)
C'mon...

Buck violently rifles through cabinets, FLINGING THEM WIDE - cereal spilling onto the floor. Rips opens the recycling and pulls out an empty bottle of Lone Star. Tips it to his lips, but cannot get the very last drops.

BUCK SMASHES THE BEER BOTTLE IN THE SINK, licking the remaining alcohol from the shards of glass.

HE SHATTERS EACH STALE BOTTLE, cradling the wet glass to his lips. Splintered fragments scattered across the counter top.

BUCK (CONT'D)
I coulda helped...

Buck sinks to the kitchen tiles, pressing the heels of his palms into his eye sockets, his mouth twisted in a silent scream. He covers his ears from a violent noise he alone is privy to.

BUCK (CONT'D)
God help me. Please.

SIRENS WAIL IN THE DISTANCE. Buck's body snaps rigid and alert.

He moves to the cloth-curtained windows of the breakfast nook and listens as the SIRENS CALL FAR INTO THE NIGHT.

Buck moves to the sink, splashing cooling water on his face. Palms away the salt of sweat and tears.

Buck pulls the rap sheets from his satchel and examines a woman's DMV photo.

BUCK (CONT'D)
Janie Cole.

Buck breathes deeply. Notches a finger to his pulse and marks time on the kitchen wall clock.

BUCK (CONT'D)
47 Pine Woods Bluff.

Buck makes a decision.

CUT TO:

EXT. SUBURBAN TRACT HOUSE - NIGHT

Buck opens the front screen door and raps the door knocker. He stands back to survey the neighborhood, hunching his shoulders against a light rain.

He checks the sight lines and rooftops.

Buck BANGS LOUDER on the door with his fist. A neighbor's dogs bark - it's the middle of the night.

A woman's voice answers.

JANIE [O.S.]
Who is it?

BUCK
Is this Janie Cole?

JANIE

Who's asking?

BUCK

My name is Mike Buck.

JANIE

Well, Mike Buck. If you've come selling something, your watch is about twelve hours fast.

BUCK

I'm sorry to bother you in the middle of the night, ma'am. But I gotta talk to you.

JANIE

Why don't you come back tomorrow when you've slept it off. Matter of fact, don't come back tomorrow when you've slept it off.

(then, cheerfully)
G'night, now!

Buck squints into the drizzling rain, falling harder now. This isn't going quite how he was figuring on.

Buck opens the screen door and KNOCKS AGAIN.

BUCK

Ma'am, you're in great danger.

JANIE

Mike Buck, you mind getting off my porch 'fore I call the police?

BUCK

Please, I don't want to come in. Just need to talk to you is all.

JANIE

It is nigh on midnight! If you're some kinda Jehovah's Witness, so help me I will shoot you where you stand.

The banshee wail of a lone police siren RISES IN THE NIGHT.

The hairs stand up on Buck's neck. He loses all patience.

BUCK

Ma'am, there is a very dangerous man out there wants to kill you!

(MORE)

BUCK (CONT'D)
Shot my Aunt Gladys and four others
at the Sherwood Diner outta
Chaparral. You got to let me in!

Janie is having none of it.

JANIE (O.S.)
I gotta shotgun with "Mike Buck"
written on the muzzle.

Buck gropes in his satchel for the ten rap sheets. He reads Janie's.

BUCK
Your name is Janie Cole. You drive
a white 1993 Dodge Colt Hatchback,
license plate 5JBY947. You
graduated Baylor with a degree in
journalism -

JANIE
This ain't funny! I'm calling the
police right now.

The approaching police siren GROWS LOUDER. Buck's eyes widen in panic.

BUCK
You're too late for that!

Buck jiggles the doorknob and BANGS ON THE DOOR.

BUCK (CONT'D)
Please, just listen to me. He's
coming! You gotta hide yourself!

Buck watches the RED AND BLUE STROBES gliding fast through a copse of canyon maple on the approaching alameda.

The squad car siren CUTS OFF. There is no sound now but driving rain. The FLASHING LIGHTS CLOSING IN.

BUCK DRIVES HIS SHOULDER INTO THE DOOR ONCE, TWICE.

Inside, Janie screams.

JANIE
Get on outta here! Leave me be!

Frantic now, Buck SHATTERS A WINDOWPANE WITH HIS ELBOW, reaches through the glass, and unlocks the door.

HE SHOVES HIS WAY INSIDE.

INT. TRACT HOUSE - BUCK

SLAMS THE DOOR SHUT and immediately parts the window dressing to watch the approach of the squad car.

JANIE COLE SMASHES A HEAVY LAMP OVER BUCK'S HEAD. Shards scatter across the melamine floor.

Buck drops to his knees, clutching his head in agony.

BUCK
Goddang-it, lady.

JANIE
I want you out!

BUCK
He's coming this second!

Janie cuts through the den to the kitchen.

BUCK (CONT'D)
I was at the Sherwood Diner off the 213. Police officer come right in and shot five people.

Buck lopes after her.

BUCK (CONT'D)
My Aunt Gladys, Ned, the line cook - everybody...

INT. TRACT HOUSE - DEN - CONTINUOUS

Buck stops short. Janie is returning from the kitchen with a CHEF'S KNIFE CLUTCHED IN HER HAND. She squares off.

Buck collapses his arms at his sides and looks at the ceiling. He runs a tired hand across his brow.

BUCK
Why is it so hard to help people?

At that moment, Janie and Buck hear the creak of the SCREEN DOOR OPENING.

Both freeze and listen.

INT. TRACT HOUSE - ENTRANCE WAY

A GLOVED HAND reaches through the shattered windowpane and twists the dead bolt.

The front door glides open, silent as a wafting breeze. Raindrops gather on the doormat.

INT. TRACT HOUSE - DEN

Buck grabs Janie's knife hand and twists it behind her back. The other hand he CLAMPS OVER HER MOUTH.

BUCK
(whispered)
Please. Just keep quiet. Please.

Janie struggles violently. They collapse to the ground. Buck pythons his legs around her like a wrestler and HOLDS HER TIGHT.

INT. TRACT HOUSE - ENTRANCE WAY

The standard police sidearm, the Glock 22, eases into the doorway, fanning the room left to right. But this sidearm is fitted with a SOUND SUPPRESSOR.

Two Belstaff leather tactical boots enter the house, silent as tiger paws. They carefully step over the wet and scattered shards of the table lamp.

One gloved hand quietly pushes the front door shut, locks it, AND SLIDES HOME THE DEAD BOLT.

A faint blue light shines from Janie's open cell phone lying on its side on the melamine floor tiles. The gloved hand picks it up. Pockets it.

The Police Officer's vulpine eyes scan the dark. His wet mouth curls in a thin-lipped smile...

Call him STARK.

INTERCUT:

INT. TRACT HOUSE - DEN

Janie struggles free of Buck's grasp, slipping his hand from her mouth.

JANIE
Help! I'm in here! In the den!

Buck clamps his hand back over her mouth and Janie BITES DOWN HARD.

BUCK
Goddang it!

INT. TRACT HOUSE - STARK

moves quickly for the den, gun extended and shoulders flexed. He pivots into the little room. IT'S ALREADY EMPTY.

One exit - a doorway leading for the kitchen.

Stark is too smart to chase. He backs out of the den the way he came. Slipping through the living room to approach the kitchen from a fresh angle.

INT. TRACT HOUSE - KITCHEN - STARK

steps and pivots, SWEEPING HIS GUN INTO THE KITCHEN.

It appears empty.

Again, JANIE SLIPS BUCK'S GRASP. She stumbles from the pantry alcove into the center of the kitchen floor.

JANIE
Officer! He's right there by the
pantry door!

STARK RAISES HIS SIDEARM IN ONE FLUID MOTION AND AIMS IT POINT BLANK AT JANIE'S HEART.

A moment of confusion registers in Janie's eyes before BUCK BODY TACKLES HER TO THE GROUND.

THREE SHOTS RING OUT - distorted by Stark's sound suppressor. Bullets SHATTER THE GLASS DOOR OF THE OVEN, ricocheting among the iron heating racks.

Buck OVERTURNS THE KITCHEN TABLE, sheltering Janie with his body.

INT. KITCHEN - BREAKFAST NOOK

Janie and Buck tangled together on the linoleum tile floor. Temporarily shielded from Stark's line of fire.

Janie too shocked to utter a sound.

LIT CANDLES, upset by the kitchen table, IGNITE THE PLEATED TABLECLOTH.

Buck is transfixed by the SPREADING FIRE. Panic and trauma written in his eyes.

INT. KITCHEN - STARK

hears their frightened breathing from behind the breakfast nook.

BUCK (O.S.)
I got your Walther P99! The one
you used to shoot everyone at
Sherwood Diner.

Stark steadies his underhand grip on the Glock and listens.

BUCK (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I'd love for this to be the gun
that kills you.

Stark turns on the KITCHEN LIGHTS.

He wraps one gloved hand around the brass curves of the vintage chandelier over the kitchen table. Then raises the light closer to the ceiling.

The chandelier casts Janie and Buck's penumbra in bas-relief onto the paneled wood of the breakfast nook. Stark studies the lie of the shadows.

He releases the chandelier to swing in a slow ellipse, carnival shadows dancing about the room. STARK SWIVELS HIS AIM on the breakfast nook and sees --

MIKE BUCK

lying on the floor, his Walther P99 rigid at arms length and

FIRING

a three shot burst - DEAFENING IN THE TINY KITCHEN.

STARK SPINS AND DIVES, rolling into the --

INT. TRACT HOUSE - DEN

Stark comes up on one knee, leveling his gun back at the kitchen and RETURNING FIRE but -

INT. TRACT HOUSE - KITCHEN

the screen door is already swinging shut, BUCK AND JANIE HIGH-TAILING IT ACROSS THE BACKYARD.

INT. TRACT HOUSE - STARK

his grey eyes narrowing to slits. He licks his pallid lips and smiles.

Stark strides to the kitchen doorway, RISING FLAMES AT HIS BACK. He carefully scans the open yard. Then pursues.

EXT. TRACT HOUSE BACKYARDS - NIGHT

Buck and Janie DASH HALF BLIND THROUGH THE POURING RAIN.

JANIE

He was aiming right for me. He meant to kill me!

BUCK

You believe me now?

JANIE

But he's a cop!

BUCK

You ever seen a cop with a silencer?

Janie's now seeing Buck for the first time.

JANIE

Who are you?

Buck runs as fast as Janie can keep up. Her fluffy blue house slippers suctioning in the mud.

BUCK

Faster now, he's coming!

Together, they cut across neighbor's backyards. Buck points to a big TWO STORY HOUSE - all the lights dark.

BUCK (CONT'D)

You know who live here?

JANIE

It's foreclosed. Been empty for months.

EXT. FORECLOSED HOUSE - BUCK

no hesitation -- hoists up a wrought iron patio chair and SMASHES IT THROUGH THE SLIDING GLASS DOORS.

JANIE
You outta your mind?

BUCK
Yes ma'am, I believe I am.

Buck tugs Janie right into the --

INT. FORECLOSED HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM

Buck stomps mud off his boots and watches his back trail. He unclips his semi-automatic and counts his remaining bullets.

Too few.

BUCK
(assessing)
I saw a baby's crib in your den.

JANIE
She's at my sister's house for the night.

Buck nods, then gives her a look.

JANIE (CONT'D)
I had a date tonight.
(then)
Didn't go the way I was figuring on.

Buck takes this in.

BUCK
Where's your daughter's daddy? Is he coming home?

Janie takes a deep breath.

JANIE
He ain't with us anymore.

BUCK
(quietly)
Dead overseas?

Janie nods, curtly. Buck opens the door to the garage a sliver. Then quickly backtracks with Janie up the carpeted stairs.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRACT HOUSE BACKYARDS - STARK

crosses the neighbors' backyards. Rain streaking down his face and dripping off his chin.

An older NEIGHBOR opens the screen door off his kitchen.

NEIGHBOR

Everything okay, Officer? I heard gunshots from the Cole's house.

STARK

Everything's under control. Go inside.

NEIGHBOR

This is my property, Officer, and you on it. I gotta right to know what the heck is going on!

STARK NO-SCOPES THE NEIGHBOR - TAGS HIM JUST ABOVE HIS RIGHT EYE.

The neighbor's head JERKS BACK, HIS BODY SLAMMED AGAINST THE PORCH RAILING and collapsing.

Stark is not interested in the neighbor. He keeps moving steadily.

CUT TO:

INT. FORECLOSED HOUSE - BUCK AND JANIE

perch by the upstairs bedroom window, watching the approach across the backyards. They whisper.

BUCK

Can't believe I missed him. Point blank range.

JANIE

Prolly on account a someone biting your hand.

Buck looks down at his hand and flexes it. It's more bruised than bleeding.

BUCK

I hope you've had all your shots.

Buck mops the wet hair back off his forehead.

JANIE

When's the last time you shot a gun?

BUCK

Baghdad.

JANIE

What were you, like a marine?
Seal?

BUCK

Army.

JANIE

What rank?

THUNDER RUMBLES down off the Franklin Mountains to the north.

BUCK

Sorry?

JANIE

What rank?

Buck grins.

BUCK

Bullet sponge.

JANIE

You can't hear, can you?

Buck points to his left ear.

BUCK

Just in this side.

JANIE

You gotta limp on that side too,
don't-chya. V.A. paying out for
that?

BUCK

I'll be alright.

Rain rivulets running down the window glass appear to cast
streaming tears onto Buck's face.

JANIE

You're a piece a trouble, aren't
you?

BUCK

I s'pose I am.

Buck studies the tree line for movement.

BUCK (CONT'D)

Here he come.

Stark's shadow glides across the patio, quiet as a wraith.

INT. FORECLOSED HOUSE - STARK

his Glock to the ground, steps in through the broken sliding glass door. He stands dripping in the dark family room.

Stark closes his eyes to put all his awareness into his ears. He tilts his head back and sniffs the air, concentrating. Mouth open in a silent keen.

Stark squats low to the ground. And then he sees it.

MUD TRACKS ON THE CARPET.

Leading upstairs.

INT. FORECLOSED HOUSE - STAIRWELL

Stark's boots on the edges of the birch treads where they join the risers. Ascending quickly without a sound.

INT. FORECLOSED HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM

Stark brushes open the bedroom door with the pads of his gloved fingertips. His gun site now on a 180 degree plane with his right eye.

Empty.

Stark crouches to the floor. Lowers his cheek to the carpet. Canted light catches every filament of the plush pile weave.

There. Not three meters distant. A few crumbs of alluvial soil. Cobalt and ferric against the stitched cream piling.

Stark glides across the room with eidolonic grace, like smoke in a breeze. He studies the closet door. WET FINGERPRINTS EVAPORATING off the cold metal door knob.

STARK FIRES A THREE SHOT BURST INTO THE CLOSET DOOR. High, middle, and low. He steps to the side of the door and listens.

Nothing.

Stark opens the closet door and turns on the light.

On the floor are only two items...

A muddy set of construction boots. And a pair of fluffy blue house slippers.

THE CLOSET IS EMPTY.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRACT HOUSE BACKYARDS - BUCK AND JANIE

SPRINTING THROUGH THE POURING RAIN, their socks caked with mud. Buck herding Janie toward the street.

BUCK

We'll take your car, police'll be lookin for mine.

They reach her Dodge Colt hatchback, parallel parked under the maples.

BUCK (CONT'D)

It's better if I drive.

Janie takes him at his word. She hands him the keys.

CUT TO:

INT. DODGE COLT HATCHBACK - MOMENTS LATER

Buck BURNS OUT OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD with the driving lights off, nearly blind in the dark of the night.

JANIE

Where we going?

Janie clutches the overhead hand grip, gritting her teeth against Buck's suicidal speed.

BUCK

North. They'll be looking for me back in El Paso.

Buck careens through the residential neighborhood at 50 mph, blowing a stop sign every eight seconds.

BUCK (CONT'D)

Alright, who are you and what've you done?

JANIE

I got no idea what you mean.

BUCK

Lady, you're on the hit list of a hired assassin! Now I'm involved in this too and I got a right to know what you done. I stuck my neck out for you and maybe you're not worth helping.

Buck zig-zags through the neighborhood grid - making a course impossible to track.

JANIE

I haven't done anything!

BUCK

You a criminal? Involved in drugs?

JANIE

Of course not. Are you?

Buck merges onto the 25 North. He turns on the driving lights and takes his speed up to 70 mph despite the pounding rain.

BUCK

Well, what do you do?

JANIE

I'm a journalist. I'm part time.

BUCK

What paper?

JANIE

I'm freelance.

Buck grabs the ten rap sheets from the satchel and dumps them in Janie's lap.

BUCK

I pulled these from his squad car.
The first nine are dead. The tenth one is you.

Janie looks through the pages, nine of them marked off with a red X.

BUCK (CONT'D)

Who are these people? What do you have in common?

JANIE

I don't know. I never seen these people before in my life.

BUCK

Why are all these folks dead? Why does an El Paso cop want to kill you?

Janie sees her own rap sheet and covers her mouth in shock.

JANIE

This my DMV photo! Who has access to DMV photos?

BUCK

Cops do.

Skeins of water strafed by the windshield wipers refract the opalescent rays of highway lights.

JANIE

I gotta brother-in-law who's a cop. They don't just haul off and kill people for money.

BUCK

I guess there's an exception to every rule.

JANIE

We outta just go to the police.

BUCK

I had that same notion. It did not pan out for me.

JANIE

It doesn't seem possible.

BUCK

Three billion dollars a year crossing the border from Juárez. I reckon they can turn a few cops if they've a mind to!

JANIE

Well then we go to the FBI,
something! We in America. This
stuff dudn't just happen!

Out of the rain, the STROBE OF A POLICE CRUISER appears
behind them.

BUCK

Sonovabitch.

There is no siren, just lights. COMING UP FAST.

JANIE

How could he do that?

BUCK

I-25 is the only route north outta
Las Cruces. He musta known I
wouldn't go back south to El Paso.
Musta read my foolish mind.

BUCK PUNCHES THE HATCHBACK UP TO 80 mph. Windshield wipers
pumping, the highway asphalt shining with rainfall.

JANIE

You gotta plan?

Buck watches the cruiser in his rearview mirror CLOSING THE
GAP AT 90 MPH IN A RAINSTORM.

BUCK

Hope he screws up before we do.

The police cruiser SWERVES TO RAM THEIR BUMPER. Buck slices
across the two lane highway, desperate to maintain traction
on the slick roads.

Buck merges onto Interstate 187.

JANIE

We could turn ourselves in at the
police station. They can't all be
bad cops! Just explain to 'em what
happen at that diner?

BIG RIGS materialize out of the rainstorm. Like lumbering
mastodons on the two-lane highway. Buck swerves into the
oncoming lane to pass them.

Cars FISHTAIL AND SKID as the police cruiser PASSES ON THE
INSIDE LANE. The squad car CLOSES IN.

BUCK

Police got a witness who ID'd me at
the crime scene.

JANIE

So what?

The Black and White moves in for another swipe. Buck pumps
the gas too hard, slipping into an ACCELERATION SKID.

The little hatchback HYDROPLANES. In jaw-clenched terror,
Buck SPINS THE WHEEL INTO THE TURN and regains his traction.

BUCK

So I got two priors, is what.

JANIE

So?

BUCK

So I'm just crazy enough to a done
it. Walked into the damn cop
station waving the murder weapon
for Gods sakes!

A highway sign emerges from the gloom: TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES,
NEW MEXICO. The Caballo Lake stretches out for miles off the
right shoulder of the road.

BUCK (CONT'D)

So why don't you tell me again.
What do these people have on you?

JANIE

I got no idea.

Highway 187 is vacant through the Caballo Lake State Park.

LIGHTS APPEAR AHEAD IN THE STORM. Buck peers through the
slapping windshield wipers.

BUCK

Almighty.

PICKUP TRUCKS BLOCKADE the cliff-side road ahead. Two pairs
of HIGH BEAMS AND RACK LIGHTS blind Buck and Janie.

The trucks are flanked by flint eyed Chihuahans armed with
automatics. Water streaming off the brims of their cowboy
hats.

And standing in front, an FBI AGENT in a flack jacket.

JANIE
Mike, what do we do?

Buck grips the wheel, eyes searching for options...

The CRUISER CHASING BEHIND, the GUN BLOCKADE AHEAD.

A cliff face to the left... And a sheer drop off to the reservoir on the right...

Gunmen ahead raise their weapons, as the Dodge Colt races toward them.

BUCK
Hold on, Janie.

Buck makes up his mind and YANKS THE STEERING WHEEL. JANIE SCREAMS.

And the hatchback SMASHES THROUGH THE HIGHWAY CRASH BARRIERS. The AIRBAGS DEPLOY IN MIDAIR, blinding them -

-- THE LITTLE CAR FLOATS THROUGH SPACE 40 FEET IN THE SKY, wheels spinning freely --

--and gracefully arcs over Caballo Lake, PLUNGING INTO THE FRIGID DEEP WITH A TREMENDOUS SPLASH.

EXT. HIGHWAY 187 - NIGHT

Stark SKIDS HIS CRUISER TO A HALT. Steps out with the tires smoking.

Stark nods to the FBI Agent. They advance to the edge of the cliff face and watch the surging waters below.

The splash of the Dodge Colt subsides, a few bubbles rising to the surface. The lake returns to placid but for the limpid tickles of the drizzling rain.

EXT. HIGHWAY 187 - STARK

rests a boot on the galvanized steel crash barrier, now twisted and bent. Stark draws a pack of Camels from his shirt pocket and shucks out a cigarette.

He lights it with a match, inhales, and blows out the match with the smoke.

STARK
Brille una luz allí abajo.

The Mexicans three-point their jeeps to cast their high beams over rolling black water. The pallid light sulphurous in the steaming rain.

The men study the lake in silence as if finding great meaning in the diluvial churning of the stygian deep.

STARK (CONT'D)
Tomorrow we move everything. Ya
está hecho.

One by one, the men shoulder their rifles and clamber aboard the corrugated beds of the idling pickups. The FBI Agent sidles into his dark blue sedan.

Stark is the last to leave, flicking his spent cigarette into the chill breath of the night.

FADE IN:

INT. DODGE COLT HATCHBACK - NIGHT

Janie and Buck return to consciousness in the smashed car. They cough in the cloud of airbag smoke. Buck wipes his bloody nose with the back of his sleeve.

BUCK
Are you okay?

JANIE
My ribs hurt.

BUCK
That's your seat belt saving your life.

Buck elbows down the deflating airbags to see out the front windshield. The headlights puncture the gloom no more than three feet. The lake bottom is as dark as the underworld.

Buck punches the dome light.

BLACK TANNIC LAKE WATER RUSHES in through the air vents. It bubbles up, covering their feet, their legs, their laps.

Janie can't stop coughing from the airbag smoke. She struggles with her door, her lungs seizing up from the cold.

JANIE
Unlock the doors!

BUCK
They are unlocked!

Janie pushes at her door, SHOVING WITH ALL HER STRENGTH.

JANIE
Mine won't open!

Janie POUNDS HER FISTS on her window. Buck leans back in his seat, resigned.

BUCK
You won't be able to smash it. The air pressure is too great.

JANIE
We're trapped in here!

Water gushes in, filling the back seat. DEAFENING in the tiny car.

JANIE (CONT'D)
What do we do?

Buck is breathing fast, but he's in control.

BUCK
We gotta wait.

JANIE
For WHAT?

BUCK
For the water to rise. When the car fills up the pressure equals out and we can open them doors.

Buck and Janie sit, WATER GUSHING IN past their bellies...

JANIE
Are you sure?

BUCK
Well, that's what I figure.

Underneath the water, Janie takes Buck's hand and squeezes hard. They wait, black lake water rushing up to their chests...

BUCK (CONT'D)
When I was in Tikrit with the 25th someone blew up an IED and a whole neighborhood went up in flames. I had to guard injured troops 'til they could fly in a UH-60. This local woman's pointing at a burning house and screaming about her kids.

The rushing water climbs around their necks. Buck's words come in short bursts, his voice choked by the freezing water.

BUCK (CONT'D)

But I can't leave my post. There's local men everywhere, and none of 'em are helping this woman neither. So she runs inside the burning building and never comes out. And all of us men listen to her screaming for her kids until that building come down.

Janie is shivering violently. Her mouth pressed up toward the roof, gulping air.

BUCK (CONT'D)

I just wanted to say all that I guess.

JANIE

Mike, is it time?

Buck looks as if he might prefer drowning to living.

JANIE (CONT'D)

Mike, we gotta go now.

Buck looks at Janie and sees the desperation written on her face.

BUCK

I know it. Let's get on with it.

Buck and Janie each gulp a last lungful of air and SHOVE OPEN THEIR CAR DOORS. MUSCLES STRAINING AGAINST THE PRESSURE.

INT. CABALLO LAKE - NIGHT

Two bodies rise through the murky deep. Ten feet. Then twenty feet.

Still they rise.

EXT. CABALLO LAKE - NIGHT

Buck and Janie BURST THROUGH THE SURFACE OF THE WATER, gasping for air. Treading water. Janie coughing.

Buck shushes her, keeping her quiet as he eyes the shoreline.

BUCK

It's okay, hush now. It's okay.

Truck engines decrescendo on the southern horizon. Aureate headlights dying into the night.

Shaking and shivering, Buck and Janie paddle to the shore.

CUT TO:

INT. ECONO LODGE - NIGHT

Janie's soaked clothing is draped on the radiator. She emerges from shower. A towel wrapped tightly around her body, another towel for a shawl, and a third towel wrapped around her head in a hair turban.

Buck jerks open the motel door, fresh from the rain.

JANIE

Shut that door, you're letting in
the cold air.

Buck toes the door shut and stands in the entryway wringing water out his hair with his fingers.

JANIE (CONT'D)

Where'd you go?

BUCK

Errands.

JANIE

You left me alone here?

BUCK

They think we're dead. Better'n that. They think we at the bottom of the lake with the murder weapon, the rap sheets, and all the money.

Buck produces a brown paper bag from under his flannel and sets it on the night stand.

BUCK (CONT'D)

Tied everything up in a nice,
pretty bow for 'em.

Buck strips off his flannel shirt stained with Eduardo's blood and throws it in the trash can. He lays the stack of machine-counted hundred dollar bills out on the dresser.

BUCK (CONT'D)
I counted it. 60 thousand.
(then)
Minus a few...

Buck pulls a liter bottle of Wild Turkey from the brown bag and breaks the seal. He stands by the hot radiator in his undershirt drinking.

JANIE
Really?

Janie watches Buck guzzle whiskey. His Adam's apple bobbing up and down until he comes up for air.

JANIE (CONT'D)
I don't know how I feel about that.

BUCK
Ain't about how you feel about it.
This the only way I sleep.

Janie holds the towels tightly around her body. She has no dry clothes to change into.

She lies down on the queen size bed and pulls all the covers up to her chin. She leaves the lights on and closes her eyes.

JANIE
I'm supposed to be picking my daughter up in the morning.

BUCK
You're s'posed to be a lot of things. You're s'posed to be cold and dead at the bottom of a lake.

Buck finds a chair and sets his feet up on the radiator. He folds his arms across his chest.

BUCK (CONT'D)
Can't ride two horses with one ass.

Janie keeps her eyes shut and the comforter pulled tight.

JANIE
You gonna be alright there?

BUCK
Like a pig in mud.

Buck takes a pull off his whiskey.

BUCK (CONT'D)
Got my sleep medicine.

CUT TO:

INT. ECONO LODGE - PREDAWN

Buck wakes to the SOUND OF HIS OWN SCREAMS.

He lies on the floor covering his ears. Janie kneeling beside him, shaking him.

JANIE
It's just a dream, Mike. Just a dream.

Buck takes deep breaths, clearing his head. His heart pounding.

BUCK
Was I loud?

JANIE
You just had a bad dream is all.

BUCK
Did I make a fool a myself?

JANIE
You did no such of a thing.

Janie looks him over.

JANIE (CONT'D)
Look at you. You're freezing and your clothes still wet.

BUCK
Radiator must be on a timer.

Janie pulls the comforter from her bed and drapes it over Buck. He rights his overturned chair and sets back down.

JANIE
Can't let you freeze to death and save that officer the trouble of shooting you.

BUCK
You gonna be warm enough without your blanket?

JANIE

I got so many layers I'm fixed to
roast. You'll wake up come morning
and find me cooked to a crisp.

Buck wraps the comforter about his shoulders.

BUCK

Well I thank you, then.

JANIE

Don't be silly.

Janie sits on the edge of the bed, still swathed in her towels. She unties the turban from her head and smooths her hair.

Buck stares ahead, peering into his past. Worry has chiseled lines on his forehead, but he is still handsome.

BUCK

It was mortar fire that blew out my
ear drum.

JANIE

I know it.

BUCK

You get to love the sound a mortar
fire.

JANIE

I hardly believe that.

BUCK

You hear the mortar it means you're
okay. It's when you don't hear it,
means you're dead.

Janie watches Buck uncap the Wild Turkey and take a pull.

BUCK (CONT'D)

That one time I didn't hear it, I
thought I was gone.

False dawn shows through the diaphanous white window
curtains. The rain has stopped.

BUCK (CONT'D)

(softly)

Mortar sucks the wind out of your
lungs. Eyes burning, nose burning,
ears ringing, people screaming.

(MORE)

BUCK (CONT'D)

You look around to see which of
your guys is dead and which are
going home early.

Janie just listens.

BUCK (CONT'D)

A man's shooting at you, you can
shoot back. But a mortar attack,
ain't much to do about it. Just
what they taught you in boot camp:
tuck your head down and grab your
nuts.

Buck remembers he is talking to a lady.

BUCK (CONT'D)

Pardon my speech.

JANIE

You just stay warm over there and
try and get some sleep.

BUCK

Yes ma'am. I intend to.

Janie lies down to go to sleep. Neither she nor Buck close
their eyes for a long time.

CUT TO:

EXT. ECONO LODGE - DAWN

The Franklin Mountains but pale adumbrations in the southern
sky. Buck stands in the chill wind.

Janie hands him a Styrofoam cup of black coffee from the
Motel office. Buck warms his hands around it and watches
dawn rise on the Texas plains.

BUCK

This the first time I ever woke up
dead.

Janie's voice is hollow and empty.

JANIE

It'll be alright.

BUCK

They say three times in your life,
everything you were expecting will
turn out to be wrong.

(MORE)

BUCK (CONT'D)
And you'll be forced to rethink
your whole life.

Crows festoon the skeletal fingers of a desiccated cottonwood
backlit in the grey light.

BUCK (CONT'D)
I guess this makes number two for
me.

Radio towers and water towers stand limned against the
curdled heavens.

Janie and Buck watch night retreat across the lowlands.

CUT TO:

INT. PINECREST DINER - MORNING

Janie and Buck eat in a booth looking out on the parking lot.
Buck digs into his huevos rancheros. Puncturing the yolks to
let them run into his Spanish rice.

BUCK
You thought up which of your
newspaper articles put you on a hit
list?

JANIE
I been thinking on that. Could be
when I covered the school board
vote over new football equipment.

Janie moves the napkin holder and creamer to spread the ten
rap sheets out on the table top.

JANIE (CONT'D)
...Or maybe the PTA meeting where
they cut funding to the gifted and
talented.

BUCK
This here's serious.

JANIE
Mike, I cover the school districts.

Janie spots a number scrawled on the back of one of the rap
sheets.

JANIE (CONT'D)
What's this here?

BUCK

VIN number for the squad car. I
musta scratched it down when I
stole those rap sheets.

Buck watches Janie take a sip off her lemonade and he
wrinkles up his nose.

BUCK (CONT'D)
For breakfast?

JANIE

You can drink Wild Turkey at four
A.M., I can drink lemonade at
eight.

Buck chews and sips coffee.

JANIE (CONT'D)
Besides, this is the theme today.
Lemons into lemonade.

Janie studies the rap sheets, the names and descriptions.

JANIE (CONT'D)
Nine people dead and I bet the
police don't even know they're
connected. I think I just landed
in the middle of the story that can
launch my career.

Buck scrapes the tortilla around his plate to scoop up the
salsa and beans. He speaks around a mouthful.

BUCK
Well, good luck on that.

JANIE
What's that supposed to mean?

BUCK
Me, I'm going west. Gonna start
over.

JANIE
Where?

BUCK
Where ever they need electricians.
Phoenix. Sedona. Maybe L.A.

JANIE
You got any friends out there?

Buck pats his back pocket.

BUCK
Hell, I got 60,000 friends.

Janie spreads a packet of blueberry jam on her toast. Then sets her knife down with a clatter.

JANIE
(suddenly angry)
Fine, go. Go on then!

Buck has his mouth full of eggs.

BUCK
I done something wrong?

JANIE
You said you're going to leave -
go!

BUCK
What you angry at me for? I ain't
cause any of this. I just tried to
help and look what it got me!

Janie eats in silence.

BUCK (CONT'D)
What!

JANIE
(snapping at him)
What about Gladys and all them what
died at the diner? You gonna let
that devil just up and get away
with butchering 'em?

Janie turns around the photos on the rap sheets so they all face Buck.

JANIE (CONT'D)
What about these other nine folks?
Maybe they're like me and Gladys
and never saw it coming? Maybe
they was mothers and fathers,
brothers and sisters. What kinda
man are you?

Buck looks about the diner. Customers in the other booths are doing their best to mind their own business.

JANIE (CONT'D)

You may not have much of a life to go back to. But I ain't like you. I got friends. Maybe not 60,000, but enough. And I gotta little girl who depends on me. I gotta life and I ain't walking away from it like a coward. And if you had moren half a nut in them jeans, you wouldn't let them bastards beat you.

Janie sidles out of the booth.

JANIE (CONT'D)

I intend to get that man if I have to do it alone.

Janie heads for the door. Buck gestures to the half-finished food.

BUCK

We gotta settle the bill?

Janie calls over her shoulder.

JANIE

Pick it up with one of your "friends."

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY 187 - DAY

Buck chases Janie outside, stuffing change in his pocket. Janie's crossing gravel toward the Pan American Highway, hobbling purposefully in her socks.

Buck calls after her.

BUCK

You a determined lady, I see that now.

Buck trots to catch up, his cold socks nicking on the gravel, but Janie does not slow down.

BUCK (CONT'D)

You fixing to walk to Las Cruces?

JANIE

If I have to.

BUCK

Those boys see you on their
streets, they'll kill you a second
time!

Janie wheels on him. Shouting into the westerly and wringing
her hands.

JANIE

Well what am I s'posed to do?

She is suddenly crying - all the tension and exhaustion
coming off her in waves.

JANIE (CONT'D)

Just give up and let them win?
Take my life from me and I don't
even know what I done?

Buck stops by the guardrail and watches her. LONG-HAUL
TRUCKS SLINGSHOT PAST on the northbound lane not eight feet
distant.

JANIE (CONT'D)

I gotta baby girl - Olivia.
Staying with my sister who don't
even like kids. Am I supposed to
just up and leave 'em for Sedona?
Or Phoenix? Or wherever
electricians go?

Tears run down Janie's cheeks. Buck's got his hands slung in
his hip pockets and studying the land rolling off to the
east.

A derelict farmhouse with walls buckled in. A cattle fence
of cedar stakes tied with barbed wire, running along the
highway to its vanishing point on the horizon.

JANIE (CONT'D)

What am I gonna do?

Buck takes a tentative step and folds his arms around Janie,
pressing her to him. She tenses up at first and then melts
into the embrace, a few silent sobs.

JANIE (CONT'D)

No one's on our side, Mike. What
are we gonna do?

Over her shoulder, Buck shakes his head. He's got no idea.

The cool breeze as crisp as a bite from a winter apple. And all that great Texas sky rolling overhead to make a man feel no bigger than a spec a dust.

BUCK

We got 60,000 friends on our side,
Janie. So we gonna start by
getting us some shoes and a car.

CUT TO:

EXT. CABALLO LAKE STATE PARK - DAY

Squad cars have closed off both lanes of Highway 187.

FIREMEN surround a monstrous AATAC Cyclone, boom extended over the lake. Hydraulic winch pumps respool steel cable as the DODGE COLT BUBBLES TO THE SURFACE OF THE LAKE like a submarine breaching.

POLICE stand with their thumbs hooked in their belts, shaking their heads at the black skid marks and the twisted metal safety barrier.

LIEUTENANT MILLER and Officer Jim Benson watch DIVERS resurface in the lake.

LIEUTENANT MILLER

They ain't finding no bodies.
Can't decide if that's good news or
bad news.

Jim reads from a stack of printouts in a manila folder.

JIM

Buck served in 25th Division, Light Infantry. He's got shrapnel in his sciatic nerve but the V.A. only rated him at twenty percent. He slipped through the cracks in '07 when the VA downgraded PTSD to "Adjustment Disorder." He's failed seven hearing tests in his left ear on account of mortar fire, but the V.A. don't pay out for no hearing loss.

LIEUTENANT MILLER

We all have a tough road to walk.

JIM

This guy's had the shit end of the stick shoved right up his ass.

LIEUTENANT MILLER

Jim, twelve hours ago this man was waving a gun in your face. Now you're fast developing a crush on him. You got Stockholm Syndrome?

Jim spreads his arms out defensively.

JIM

Just trying to figure out who we're dealing with.

Jim's CELL RINGS. Lieutenant Miller nods and Jim answers.

JIM [ON PHONE]

Yup?

BUCK [ON PHONE]

This is Mike Buck calling for Jim Benson. I'm the guy who messed up your night shift?

Jim swats Lieutenant Miller on the shoulder, shushes everyone, and puts the call on speaker. Officers huddle in close and listen.

JIM

This is Jim, here. How we doing this morning?

INT. PHONE BOOTH - INTERCUT

Buck thumbs the embossed lettering on Jim's business card. He chews on a toothpick.

BUCK

Been better. Wanted to apologize for the way I acted last night. Saw some friends die and got worked up is all. That's not an excuse, just an explanation.

INTERCUT AS NEEDED

JIM

Mike, that woman you came in hollering about. Janie Cole. Her neighbor's shot dead. Place broken into. And your truck's parked out front. Ms. Cole's gone and we're towing her car outta lake.

BUCK
Is there a question in there?

JIM
She okay?

INT. PAYPHONE BOOTH - BUCK

cracks open the phone booth door and calls to Janie in the service station parking lot.

BUCK
Janie, you okay?

Janie sits on the concrete wheel stop of a handicap spot, her legs crossed at the ankles.

JANIE
Who's asking?

BUCK [ON PHONE]
She'll be alright.
(Then)
Ain't gonna lie to you: she's a handful.

EXT. CABALLO LAKE - JIM

looks to Lieutenant Miller who circles his fingers - keep him talking.

JIM
Mike, I know the V.A. only rated you at 20%. Come in, we'll talk about it.

BUCK
Did you serve?

JIM
Would have. But there weren't any wars to fight when I graduated. My wife's kid served in Felujah.

BUCK
What unit?

JIM
2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry.

BUCK
How's he making out?

JIM
Died four years ago.

BUCK
I'm sorry.

JIM
He got home and couldn't get work, ended up hanging out with his bad crowd from high school. They're all out drinking and his buddy wraps his Cutlass Ciera around a telephone pole. Driver walks away without a scratch and my wife's kid dies after his ninth surgery. You believe that? Kid survives a full pump in Felujah, comes home and lasts one month.

Buck just listens.

JIM (CONT'D)
Not sure what the moral is. Person is the sum of the choices they make.

BUCK
Jim, I didn't do it. Any of it.

JIM
Well come in. We'll have a conversation.

BUCK
You think I killed those people?

JIM
Kid, you're the only suspect. I don't know how else I'm supposed to see it.

Buck works the toothpick from one side of his mouth to the other.

BUCK
That's about how I figured it.

Buck hangs up abruptly.

EXT. CABALLO LAKE - JIM

closes his cell phone and shakes his head at the huddle of police officers.

JIM
Bupkiss.

The Cyclone tows the Dodge Colt up onto dry ground. Dripping and steaming in the mid-morning light. The officers shake their heads: the car is completely empty.

One officer thoughtfully drops his cigarette to the ground and grinds it out with his boot. STARK.

Stark gets in his squad car and heads south.

EXT. PARKING LOT - BUCK

steps out of the phone booth off Interstate 25. He sets a brand new pair of binoculars to his brow and looks downhill to Highway 187.

He watches officers combing the accident scene and searching the wet hatchback. Janie joins Buck at his side, one hand on her hip and one hand shielding her eyes from the breaking sun.

JANIE
What do we know?

BUCK
One of your neighbors got shot.
Police came and prolly spotted my
pickup outside your house. Musta
got my car registration out the
glove box.

Buck chews his toothpick and watches Officer Jim Benson working the crime scene far below.

BUCK (CONT'D)
Now they know my name, where I
served, my V.A. rating. Everything
about me.

Janie nods.

JANIE
Lemme just look at my poor car for
one last time.

Buck lowers the binoculars and passes them to Janie. He pulls out a key fob and chirps the locks on a freshly washed Kia Forte with rental plates.

JANIE (CONT'D)
What else do we know?

BUCK

We know the police in at least two states will be hunting us high and low.

Janie squints through the binoculars until she's had her fill.

JANIE

I know one place they won't be looking.

CUT TO:

EXT. EL PASO POLICE STATION - CENTRAL DISTRICT - DAY

All brick and glass and 70's architecture. Janie furtively leads Buck down cement steps to a rear basement entrance marked "ARCHIVES."

INT. CENTRAL DISTRICT - BASEMENT ARCHIVES

Their eyes adjust to the dim light. Bulging rows of metal shelves sag under decades of paperwork.

JANIE

Phyllis? You down here?

An alto voice emerges from the stacks.

PHYLLIS

Wish I wadn't.

Janie and Buck follow the voice to a desk burrowed behind filing cabinets and piled high with paperwork.

PHYLLIS wears carpal tunnel wrist braces on both hands. She appraises Buck.

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)

This him?

Buck extends his hand with gentle courtesy.

BUCK

I'm glad to meet you, Phyllis.

Phyllis folds her arms across her chest.

PHYLLIS

Mm-hm.

JANIE

Did you check out those names for
me?

PHYLLIS

I shore did. How's the baby?

Phyllis heaves herself out of her chair and waddles to a file cabinet.

JANIE

She's staying with Charlene, today.

PHYLLIS

Charlene knows about as much about
kids as I do about Martians.

JANIE

Well, she's cheaper than a baby
sitter.

PHYLLIS

Mm-hm. You get watcha pay for, if
you ask me.

Phyllis slides open a filing cabinet and flips through
hanging files. Pulls one out and hands it to Janie.

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)

All eight of your names are dead or
missing in the past week. Two died
in car wrecks. Two apparent
suicides. One died when his house
burnt down.

Janie passes the file to Buck who reads it, shaking his head.

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)

As for your other question of the
VIN number, it ain't in our system.
But I did some digging.

Phyllis licks her fingers and flicks through pages from a
folder open on her desk.

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)

When an officer needs a new squad
car, he dudn't just call a factory
in Detroit and order it like you
order a pizza. He fills out a
whole mess a paperwork.

Phyllis triumphantly pulls a pink slip from a folder and
rattles it in the air.

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)

Turns out, the department purchased
your squad car six months ago. The
name on the requisition form is
Officer Raymond Espinosa.

Phyllis ceremoniously hands the form to Janie.

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)

There's your man.

Janie and Buck study the pink slip.

JANIE

Can you tell us anything about
Espinosa?

PHYLLIS

I can tell you he's dumber'n a box
a rocks.

JANIE

You can tell that just from a form?

PHYLLIS

He's using the old station codes on
his requisitions.

Phyllis reaches into the file and hands Janie a fat stack of
pink slips.

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)

Everything Espinosa's ordered in
the past year is being sent to the
Northeast Division. And that
precinct shut down three years ago.

JANIE

So all this equipment is being sent
to a station that doesn't exist?

PHYLLIS

Mm-hm. Tell them once, I tell them
a thousand times.

Phyllis curls her chubby fists on her hips and wags her head.

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)

You tell Espinosa to get his
station codes straight. Or Phyllis
down in Archives gonna knock him
into next week and kick his ass on
Tuesday.

BUCK
I'd shorely like to tell him that.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHARLENE COLE'S HOUSE - DAY

Stark steps through the front gate and surveys the yard. The bald grey earth showing through clinging wisps of yellowed grass. A coyote fence of bundled piñon stockades.

Stark pads up to the front porch. Firewood piled chockablock on the canted floorboards. A hollow sconce where the porch light should be.

He knocks on the door frame. CHARLENE COLE spies him from the kitchen and speaks through the screen door.

CHARLENE
Good afternoon, Officer.

STARK
You must be Charlene Cole.

CHARLENE
Guilty. Can I help you?

STARK
Well, a glass of water might be a great start if it's not too forward. Been driving around all day I like to die a thirst.

She considers him closely, eyeing him from head to toe. Stark flashes a badge.

STARK (CONT'D)
Just a few questions and I'll be on my way.

CHARLENE
Well, c'mon then.

INT. CHARLENE COLE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Charlene pushes open the screen door for him and heads into the kitchen. She grabs a glass from the drying rack and fills it with ice from the freezer.

CHARLENE
You like a pop, instead?

STARK
More than anything.

Stark puts a finger to his cap, saluting Charlene.

Stark's gaze turns to OLIVIA COLE. Seated in a height chair and wearing a bib.

STARK (CONT'D)
What a darling baby. You mind if I pick her up? I just love kids.

CHARLENE
Help yourself. You can keep her if you like. I had my fill of her.

STARK
I think I will keep her. I believe I will.

Charlene cracks a can of coke, fills the glass, and sets it down on a plastic place mat.

STARK (CONT'D)
This your beautiful child?

CHARLENE
My sister's.

STARK
(feigning surprise)
Janie's daughter. Is that a fact.

The temperature changes in the room. Charlene's face turns to stone.

CHARLENE
Is everything okay with my sister, Officer?

Stark ignores the question, dandling the baby. He sets Olivia on his knee where she looks at him doe-eyed, her lips working on her binky.

STARK
I believe I will keep you.

CHARLENE
What has Janie got herself into?

Stark looks up at Charlene. Eyes hard as granite. His gun hand lowers to his sidearm, thumb resting on the safety strap of the black leather holster.

Stark holds Charlene's gaze until she drops her eyes.

STARK

Do you believe in fate? That things happen for a reason. Or do they just happen randomly.

Charlene wilts onto a kitchen chair. She glances up at his unflinching gaze.

CHARLENE

I suspect things happen for a reason.

STARK

And what about when something awful happens. Something senseless. And violent.

CHARLENE

I imagine there is a higher purpose. The ants on my porch don't know why they get the broom. But there's the higher purpose of keeping my front step clean.

Stark regards her house. White paint flaking off the walls.

STARK

I think people are blinded by routine. Condemned to repeat the same mistakes. Men born bad only get worse.

Stark returns his gaze to Charlene.

STARK (CONT'D)

I believe when something truly awful happens it snaps us from our routine. And for a few moments, we are truly alive.

The baby stares at Stark and sucks her binky. Charlene twists a napkin in her hands.

STARK (CONT'D)

Do you believe you made good choices in your life?

Charlene considers her poor environment. In the yard a rusted swing set creaking with no discernible breeze.

CHARLENE

My life ain't been no easier than
anybody else's.

STARK

But do you consider yourself
fortunate? Fortunate to be alive.
Fortunate to have God's grace.
Fortunate to live in this country
and reap its advantages.

CHARLENE

I believe I'm more fortunate than
some and less fortunate than
others.

STARK

I asked you a question.

CHARLENE

I believe we make our own luck with
our choices.

Stark nods approvingly. Charlene shivers from head to toe.
She hugs a hand to her shoulder.

STARK

Can you keep a secret, Charlene?

CHARLENE

Same as anybody else.

Stark takes a sip of coke. His thin, pale lips leave no mark
on the glass.

STARK

Let's say something valuable
depended on it.

He cuddles Olivia in one arm. The way a wide receiver holds
a football.

STARK (CONT'D)

Something truly precious to you.
Could you keep a secret then?

CHARLENE

What do you mean to do?

STARK

I mean to know how well you hold a
secret.

She meets Stark's gaze.

CHARLENE
I am not a fool.

Stark nods.

STARK
No, I believe you are not.

Stark stands up and leaves the house. Olivia comfortable in his arm.

Charlene sits stock still in her kitchen chair, her posture rigid.

EXT. CHARLENE COLE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Stark settles into the police car and pulls the seat belt across him and the baby sitting splay-legged in his lap.

He drives away.

CUT TO:

EXT. EL PASO POLICE STATION - PARKING LOT - DUSK

Jim Benson trudges to the farthest edge of the parking lot. He has not slept in a good while.

Jim fits his keys to his Buick and FREEZES. Mike Buck emerges from a comb of barren Persimmon trees, GRIPPING A SEMI-AUTOMATIC.

Jim's hand moves instinctively to his sidearm.

BUCK
Easy now.

JIM
You made a fool of me last night in the precinct.

BUCK
You'll make a fool of yourself now if you reach for that sidearm.

Buck's gun is aimed at the ground.

BUCK (CONT'D)
Just come to parley is all.

Jim turns in amazement to see Janie emerge from the trees.

JIM
Janie Cole?

JANIE
I'm sorry to meet you in this way,
Officer.

JIM
You okay?

JANIE
A police officer tried to kill me
last night. Ran my hatchback into
a lake. Other than that I'm just
jim dandy.

Officer Benson scans the parking lot. Yellowed stalks of Sacaton davening in the brisk wind. The 120 hertz hum of overhead power lines the only sound.

BUCK
We know which police officer
massacred Gladys and everyone at
the Sherwood. Got the VIN number
on his cruiser.

Jim studies Buck and Janie, trying to figure out their angle.

JIM
I'm listening.

BUCK
I'm trusting you to do the right
thing, Jim.

JIM
I'll do my best.

BUCK
Raymond Espinosa.

Jim's face clouds over. His jaw thrust forward.

JIM
That's not funny.

JANIE
He's probably a friend of yours and
you don't want to believe it, but -

JIM
A damn good friend of mine.

Buck shifts in his place, stretching the hip he limps on.

JIM (CONT'D)
Officer Espinosa was killed in the
line of duty three years ago.

Buck looks to Janie in surprise. Buck fumbles.

BUCK
I'm sure sorry to hear that.

Jim sets his hands on his hips, studying the two amateurs.

Buck uncrumples a Xerox from his pocket and scratches his chin, thoughtfully. He hands the form to Jim.

BUCK (CONT'D)
What do you s'pose Espinosa's doing
signing requisition forms last
week?

Jim snatches the Xerox from Buck. As he reads it, Jim's face cycles through several different emotions.

JIM
Where'd you get this?

JANIE
Central Archives. They get a copy
from Accounts and Billing.

BUCK
Espinosa's been requisitioning
equipment six ways til Sunday.

Janie hands Jim a fat stack of Xeroxes.

JANIE
I'm sorry your friend is dead. But
for a dead man, he shore has a way
of keeping on top of his paperwork.

CUT TO:

INT. STARK'S SQUAD CAR

Stark cruises with the baby in his lap. Olivia eyeing Stark and Stark eyeing the streets.

Janie's cell phone BUZZES in his pocket. Stark pops it open to check the voice mail.

CHARLENE COLE [VOICE MAIL]
Janie, it's Charlene. I been
trying you all day!
(MORE)

CHARLENE COLE [VOICE MAIL] (CONT'D)
The scariest man come over and took
Olivia. I let him take her because
I was so scared. Please call me
and let me know you're alright - I
don't know what to do!

Stark shuts Janie's cell phone and pockets it. He runs a gloved hand through Olivia's hair.

The cruiser creeps through downtown El Paso, Stark's eyes scanning all streets and alleyways.

CUT TO:

INT. CENTRAL DISTRICT - BASEMENT ARCHIVES

Phyllis packs her purse, ready to call it a day. She hears the basement door shut quietly.

PHYLLIS
Hello? Who's there?

Jim Benson steps from the shadows, his face grim. Phyllis sighs.

PHYLLIS (CONT'D)
Damn if that woman ain't brought me nothing but trouble.

CUT TO:

INT. KIA FORTE RENTAL - NIGHT

Janie and Buck stake out the abandoned Northeast Precinct station.

Buck's halfway through a sixpack of Pilsner.

BUCK
For a station that closed three years ago, it don't seem particularly empty.

He and Janie watch the last silhouette of an OFFICER shutting off the lights and leaving the building.

EXT. ABANDONED NORTHEAST PRECINCT - MOMENTS LATER

Buck pops the trunk on the Kia Forte and grips a tire iron in his fist. He slams the trunk.

Buck crosses the street, making for the alley behind the precinct. Janie trots after him.

EXT. ABANDONED NORTHEAST PRECINCT - ALLEY

Janie keeps an anxious lookout. Buck uses his tire iron to SMASH THE LOCK on a chain link enclosure behind the precinct.

JANIE

Think this'll work?

BUCK

They won't be rigged for good security.

JANIE

How come?

BUCK

Cause a precinct's open 24 hours.

Buck turns to Janie and grins.

BUCK (CONT'D)

Besides, who ever breaks into a police station?

Buck picks his way into the chain link enclosure.

Janie rocks back and forth on the balls of her feet. A shiver runs through her.

BUCK (CONT'D)

You okay?

JANIE

Just got a bad feeling about my daughter is all. Charlene must be worried sick wondering where I am.

Buck grits his teeth, prying open the transformer box with the crowbar. He puts his shoulder into it.

BUCK

Must be tough. Raising a kid on your own.

Janie tucks her hair behind her ear and shakes her head.

JANIE

Her Daddy didn't die overseas, you know. He just run off.

Buck SNAPS the utility box wide open. He looks at Janie and turns back to his work.

JANIE (CONT'D)
I wish I was a war widow cause
there'd be honor in it. Truth is,
all the men in my life just come up
rotten.

Buck squats to his knees to examine the circuit panel.

BUCK
You believe it's going to rain,
sooner or later you'll be right.

JANIE
Excuse me?

Buck tracks the copper leads to the breakers.

JANIE (CONT'D)
What did you say?

BUCK
A person holds an idea long enough,
it has a way of proving true.

Buck shrugs.

BUCK (CONT'D)
A man doesn't just happen to you,
Janie. You get a vote in the
matter.

JANIE
I did not take you for a
relationship expert.

BUCK
I'm an expert in making bad
choices. World renowned. I charge
a consultation fee.

Buck opens all the circuit breakers. Everything in the
precinct AUDIBLY SHUTS DOWN.

BUCK (CONT'D)
I'm not saying you deserve to raise
a kid on your own. Only thing you
done wrong is pick the wrong man.

Janie hugs herself against the chill.

JANIE
They all leave in the end.

Buck's about to speak but says nothing. He pulls the Pilsner from his back pocket, takes a swig and lets it swish around in his mouth before he swallows it down.

BUCK
Well, that oughtta do it.

Buck shuts the utility box and walks over to the key-swipe door in back of the precinct. He tugs the door and it swings wide open.

Buck listens for an alarm but there is none.

BUCK (CONT'D)
Let's get on with it, then.

CUT TO:

INT. EL PASO POLICE HEADQUARTERS - INTERNAL AFFAIRS - NIGHT

LIEUTENANT KILKLINE and SERGEANT HOYT sit opposite Jim Benson at the conference table.

Jim reads from a manila file folder crammed with paperwork.

JIM
Police cruisers. Dispatch radios and scanners. Computers. 24 suits of body armor. Tear gas canisters. Riot gear. Batons -

LIEUTENANT KILKLINE
- What police officers are ordering this equipment?

JIM
Dead police officers.

Hoyt and Kilkline look at Jim in amazement.

JIM (CONT'D)
Or retired so long they might as well be.

Hoyt and Kilkline pour over the paperwork.

SERGEANT HOYT
All this equipment is approved by Central and sent to a station that doesn't exist?

LIEUTENANT KILKLINE

The Northeast Precinct was closed
three years ago for redistricting.
It's s'posed to be empty.

JIM

All these orders escalated in the
past three weeks. And here's the
thing. We're talking about a
shitload of guns.

Jim slides a manila folder across the table. It is
overflowing with pink requisition forms.

SERGEANT HOYT

Jesus...

JIM

Combat shotguns, sniper rifles,
Glocks, Smith & Wessons, SIG
Sauers. PS90 carbines. Semi-
automatics. This station that
don't exist got enough artillery to
outfit a Army battalion.

LIEUTENANT KILKLINE

How did you come by this
information?

Jim skims his palms across the table top. Noting the
brailled divots where the particle board shows through the
melamine veneer.

JIM

That's the thing of it. I wish I
could take credit for good police
work. But it wadn't me.

Kilkline and Hoyt lean in close.

JIM (CONT'D)

It was that fugitive Mike Buck and
the girl, Janie Cole. They're the
ones tipped me off.

CUT TO:

INT. ABANDONED NORTHEAST PRECINCT - NIGHT

Janie and Buck creep through the dark station. Carpet ripped
up and sheetrock dust covering everything. Cubicles covered
in plastic tarpaulin weighed down with broken cinder blocks.

INT. ABANDONED NORTHEAST PRECINCT - BACK OFFICES

Janie and Buck discover the back offices clean and filled with high-tech equipment. Monitors, laptops, police radios and scanners. A nerve center.

JANIE

(whispered)

It's not just one officer, Mike.
It's a whole department.

Buck examines an El Paso map on the wall, freckled with push pins.

BUCK

Something's coming in from Mexico.

Buck studies the dispositions, his fingers tracing lines on the map.

BUCK (CONT'D)

Everyone's converging at the border. Where I-10 meets the 85.

(then)

Janie, this is happening tonight.

Janie joins Buck at his side and studies the map.

JANIE

This is where the old Ewald Kipp Elementary School stood. I was researching a story on it...

Buck listens intently.

JANIE (CONT'D)

The land was bought in January. Property butts up against the Rio Grande wet lands. If the buyers were fixing on building a golf course it'd be a news event.

Buck unpins the map from the wall and halves it until it fits in his pocket.

BUCK

Didjya find the owner?

JANIE

I searched for months. Shell corporations stacked like Russian dolls.

Janie rifles through cabinets, pouring over files.

BUCK

Well, you ruffled some feathers,
looks like.

JANIE

Seems a petty thing to land me on a
hit list.

BUCK

They killed everyone in Sherwood
Diner just to get to one man.

Janie stuffs papers into her pockets and heads for the exits.
Buck follows.

EXT. ABANDONED NORTHEAST PRECINCT - MOMENTS LATER

Janie and Buck step cautiously into the alleyway.

BUCK

You get the feeling this is
bigger'n just some crooked cops?

JANIE

There's Mexican cartels who only
recruit soldiers and police. Half
the cops in Juárez belong to the
cartel. They monitor the police
movement, cross check points, free
prisoners, smuggle drugs in police
cars...

Buck lets the door shut quietly behind him.

BUCK

You're saying the cartels are in
Texas, now?

Janie shakes her head.

JANIE

Mike, let's get outta here.

BUCK

Yeah.

THUNDEROUS GUNFIRE fills the brick cavern of the alleyway.

Buck is lifted off his feet like he's sacked by a linebacker.
He finds himself on the ground, legs kicking.

SOUND CUTS OUT.

Buck stares up at the night sky. Sees Janie kneeling over him, SCREAMING. Her mouth moving, but he hears nothing.

TIME SLOWS.

GUNFIRE RATTLES OFF THE BRICKS, sending stinging grains of sand and dust burrowing into the skin.

A SQUAD CAR speeds past the alleyway and SKIDS TO A STOP. Backing up. STARK visible behind the wheel.

All at once, SOUND KICKS BACK IN.

JANIE
Mike, get up! RUN!

Somehow, miraculously, Buck rolls to his knees and gets up SPRINTING.

POLICE OFFICERS

leap from the squad car, muzzles flaring a split second before the CRACK OF GUNFIRE.

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - CONTINUOUS

Buck and Janie sprint across the train ties, ducking under the clearance of a grain hopper. AUTOMATIC BULLETS SPARKING on the four foot steel wheels of the rolling stock.

Buck runs off balance. His left arm not quite obeying him. No time to think about that.

EXT. SOUTH STANTON - BUCK

racing on adrenaline. He and Janie dash from the train yard onto South Stanton. CROWDS from the downtown nightclubs just visible down the street.

The revellers are loud, drunk, oblivious.

GUNFIRE NOW EXPLODES FROM TWO DIRECTIONS.

A new officer, COMANCHE, has joined the fight. He fires a GLOCK .22 continuously, reclipping without breaking rhythm.

BUCK SPINS

changing directions like a running back, sheltering Janie with his body. They dash into an office park.

EXT. SERVICE ENTRANCE - BUCK AND JANIE

turn into the alleyway, backs to the brick wall. Buck draws his Walther P99 from his belt for the first time.

MIKE BUCK

racks the slide and pivots out of the alleyway, FIRING a single bullet into an

ADVANCING OFFICER - AN FBI AGENT

whose gut EXPLODES OUT THE BACK OF HIS UNIFORM.

EXT. SERVICE ENTRANCE - BUCK

wide-eyed in shock at the violence of his action. Recognizing the FBI Agent from the blockade on Caballo Lake.

JANIE

tugging Buck up the alley.

INT. LOADING DOCK - CONTINUOUS

Buck collapses on the cement platform, his back resting against the locked steel rolling gates.

He examines his sleeve. Blood showing through the flannel and spreading fast.

Somewhere on Stanton Street a man is SCREAMING AS HE DIES.

INT. LOADING DOCK - BUCK'S POV

his eyes glazing over as SOUND CUTS OUT AGAIN. Janie is shaking him, talking to him. Buck hears only the distant sound of mortar fire from the corners of his memory.

Janie nervously checking the alleyway.

JANIE

Come on Mike, please! You need to deal with what's happening right now.

Janie takes Buck's face in both hands so he's forced to look her in the eye.

JANIE (CONT'D)
You get to choose who you are,
Mike. Every second of your life.
You can be the victim of your past.
Or you can snap out of it. And
choose who you want to be right
now.

Buck blinks his eyes. Listening. He starts breathing again.

BUCK
You ever been deer hunting, Janie?

JANIE
Never.

BUCK
A buck gets injured it dudn't just
run willy nilly.

Buck rises painfully to his feet.

BUCK (CONT'D)
He finds high ground. Turns and
watches his back trail.

Buck leads Janie up a metal flight of steps, to a floor of vacant offices. He KICKS A DOOR HARD WITH HIS BOOT, smashing the bolt lock through the trim.

INT. OFFICES - CONTINUOUS

Buck leads Janie to the corner office. Windows overlooking Stanton and Franklin. They crouch before the windows and watch the approach.

BUCK
Hunter comes up one side of the
hill, deer knows to run down the
other side.

JANIE
How do we know where they are?

BUCK
We'll know when they start
shooting.

Janie gently removes Buck's flannel. She rolls up his t-shirt sleeve to examine his shoulder. She curls her lip.

Buck covers his pain in long, slow exhalations. He scans his battlefield, a walkway wrapping around the entire second story.

BUCK (CONT'D)
If this guy was an amateur, he'd surround us. Then his gunmen'd shoot each other in their own crossfire.

JANIE
But he's a pro.

Janie finds office scissors from a desk and cuts off the sleeve of Buck's flannel. She works quickly, tying off the perforating wound on Buck's shoulder.

BUCK
He'll use his dogs to flush us out.
Lead us right to him. Unless...

Buck bites his lip, thinking.

JANIE
Unless what?

BUCK
Unless he baits us out.

JANIE
How's he gonna bait us out?

A plaintive sound wafts up from the street. It starts low and grows louder.

A BABY'S CRYING.

EXT. FRANKLIN STREET - STARK

steps into view. The Glock in his right hand is resting at his side. IN HIS LEFT ARM HE CRADLES OLIVIA.

Stark bounces her lightly up and down, to ease her crying. His eyes strafe the windows of the office building.

INT. OFFICES - JANIE

clamps a hand over her mouth, tears rolling down cheeks.

JANIE
That's my little girl.

Buck rolls open the window crank. He lifts his semi-automatic, leveling the slotted sight with his eye line.

BUCK
I can make this shot.

Janie violently yanks his arm down.

JANIE
Are you crazy? He's holding my
baby girl!

Buck hesitates. He believes he can make the shot. Janie's eyes pleading through silent running tears.

EXT. FRANKLIN STREET - INTERCUT

Stark dandles the baby. He raises his voice to address the darkened windows of the office building.

STARK
Janie Cole. Come out. We just
need to talk is all.

Olivia is WAILING.

STARK (CONT'D)
Call out to me, Janie. Let me know
where you are.

INT. OFFICES - JANIE

opens her mouth to shout. Buck presses her tightly to him, hugging her.

BUCK
(fierce whisper)
He will kill you - that's all he
wants.

JANIE
I gotta go out there - he's got
Olivia.

BUCK
You get yourself killed what
happens to Olivia? Is he going to
take care of her? Drop her off at
day care every day?

JANIE
What do I do?

BUCK
Stay alive.

JANIE
What if he hurts her?

BUCK
Your daughter is his bargaining
chip. He won't hurt her.

JANIE
Are you sure?

BUCK
Absolutely.

Buck surveys the scene below. He's not sure. Wheels turning
in his mind.

BUCK (CONT'D)
Bait.

JANIE
What?

BUCK
He's got us looking one direction.

Buck spins around to scan the opposite wall of the offices.
And sure enough, silhouettes of TWO GUNMEN flit past the
shaded windows.

Buck tracks their speed, their shapes appearing in front of
window blinds and disappearing behind the stucco walls.

BUCK FIRES THROUGH THE STUCCO WALLS. TWO DOUBLE TAPS.

Then listens. The sound of two bodies hitting the ground.

BUCK (CONT'D)
Get down, now.

AUTOMATIC BULLETS rake a line through the dry wall.

JANIE AND BUCK

duck flat to the ground as the line of bullet holes passes
RIGHT OVER THEIR HEADS. The second strafe SHATTERS THE
WINDOWS - covering them in falling glass.

BUCK (CONT'D)
Now!

Buck explodes like a cannonball, hurtling across the office floor with Janie in tow. Pieces of broken window glass hanging off Buck's neck.

He shoulders his way out the back door.

EXT. OFFICES - BUCK

strips two Semi-Autos off the fallen gunmen on the walkway.

Then leads Janie spiralling down an outdoor stairway.

EXT. FRANKLIN STREET - BUCK AND JANIE

RUNNING AS GUNFIRE ENVELOPES THEM.

Buck races for the nightclubs. PEDESTRIANS stand in the street and gawk. POLICE SIRENS close in from all directions.

The gates of hell open up as --

EXT. FRANKLIN STREET - STARK

marches through a throng of club patrons, gun level, FIRING ON BUCK AND JANIE. BAR GOERS HIT IN THE CROSSFIRE.

A BEWILDERED YOUNG MAN and HIS GIRLFRIEND

cross Stark's sight line. Stark GUT-SHOTS THE COUPLE, DROPPING BOTH OF THEM. Clearing his line of fire.

STARK

emptying his clip, looking for a kill shot on Buck and Janie.

A TAMAQUE VENDOR

struck in the cheek, spinning to the ground and

A FEMALE CUSTOMER

diving behind a mail box, hands covering her ears.

CAR TRAFFIC

screeching to a halt, vehicles akimbo in the street.

EXT. FRANKLIN STREET - COMANCHE

reading hand signals from Stark and doubling down an alleyway to flank Janie and Buck.

CLUB BOUNCERS

shove patrons to the sidewalk, ordering people inside. Screaming, pointing, shoving.

POLICE CRUISERS

now appearing from all directions. Mayhem.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - JANIE

sprinting down the alley, trapped in a dead end. No escape.

COMANCHE

now in a squad car, SKIDDING TO A STOP. Janie in his headlights, cornered against a brick wall. Comanche turns to open his door, already bringing up his sidearm as

MIKE BUCK

steps from an alcove, Glock eye level and FIRES.

COMANCHE'S FACE CAVES IN. Buck stands in the back-splatter breathing hard.

BUCK

Bait.

Buck in the adrenal haze of combat. He tries to rip Comanche from the squad car but the man is buckled in.

POLICE SIRENS CLOSE IN

Buck shoves his way into the squad car, sitting on Comanche's dead lap. Janie in the passenger seat, face stricken white.

INT. SQUAD CAR - CONTINUOUS

Buck smacks on the sirens and SLAMS THE CROWN VICTORIA into reverse. Buck's arm around the passenger seat and his head twisted as he steers BACKWARD OUT OF THE ALLEYWAY.

EXT. DOWNTOWN EL PASO - CONTINUOUS

Buck and Janie's squad car slips through the advancing wave of emergency vehicles and burns north on Mesa Street, engine SCREAMING ON SIX CYLINDERS.

EXT. FRANKLIN STREET - STARK

standing tall, a turbulent sea of people raging in chaos around him. Olivia clinging to his arm and crying.

Real POLICE and SWAT are now rushing up and down the street. Ambulances inching their way through the crowd.

Stark turns in a full circle. Janie and Buck gone.

Stark strides calmly through the throng, police rushing past him like jetsam on a river. He vanishes into the crowd.

CUT TO:

EXT. ABANDONED LOT - NIGHT

Janie and Buck sit on the curb by the stolen cop car. Comanche's body sprawled out cruciform on the pavement.

Janie cuts gauze and tapes it to Buck's shoulder. Iodine, scissors, and tape strewn out of a plastic drugstore bag lying by her feet.

BUCK

You supposed to go in the Army to serve others. But when you in the shit, boy you end up serving yourself. Just trying to survive and get home.

He chuckles.

BUCK (CONT'D)
Get home to what?

Buck's eyes are wide, vacant. His hands trembling. Janie watches him nervously.

JANIE
We're gonna get outta here, Mike.

SIRENS BAY IN THE DISTANCE. Blue neon liquor store lights casts pavonine reflections on the nacreous oil-streaked puddles of the alley.

BUCK

I coulda helped that woman in the burning building, Janie. But in that moment, I didn't. And I learned something about myself that day. And I get to live with it the rest of my life. Knowing who I really am.

Janie removes glass from his neck with quick efficiency. She tapes over the cuts and speaks to Buck - her voice low and calm.

JANIE

Mike, we're gonna need to keep moving.

BUCK

People who've never served, they never get to learn who they truly are. But I know. I ain't help that woman. That's who I am.

Janie tapes up the last cut. She rinses her fingers in rubbing alcohol and dries them on a strip of gauze.

JANIE

Mike, that is not who you are.

She places her hands gently on Buck's shoulders. He's wet with sweat.

JANIE (CONT'D)

That is who you were.

Buck looks at her, tortured eyes full of anguish. He hears her words, but he don't believe 'em.

Janie moves to Comanche's fallen body.

JANIE (CONT'D)

I never seen a dead man before.

BUCK

You get used to it.

Janie pulls lipstick and a receipt from the drugstore bag. She smears the lipstick on Comanche's thumb and rolls it across the receipt, FINGERPRINTING HIM.

JANIE

His watch is still ticking.

BUCK

You think his watch'll stop just
cause his time run out?

JANIE

I don't know. Just creepy is all.

Janie clips the fingerprint to the manila files smuggled from
the abandoned precinct. Janie folds them in half and
scribbles an address across the top.

JANIE (CONT'D)

Gimme 200 dollars.

Buck, still dazed, pulls 200 dollars from his pocket and
hands it over no questions asked.

He's holding onto his ringing ears and rocking slowly back
and forth. A ticking time bomb.

JANIE (CONT'D)

Don't you leave me now.

Janie marches to the street corner.

EXT. DRUGSTORE CORNER - JANIE

approaches two TEENAGERS lounging on the curb drinking pops.
Their bicycles splayed out on the sidewalk.

JANIE

You old enough to make some money?

The teens look at each other and look at her.

TEEN

Depends.

Janie holds out a c-note to one of the teens.

JANIE

You know the Police Station on
Campbell? You deliver these files
to Officer Jim Benson as fast as
you can.

The teen eyes the hundred dollar bill.

JANIE (CONT'D)

People's lives depend on it.

The teen scratches his chin.

TEEN
I think you got more money there.

Janie pulls out her other \$100 bill and hands it to the second teen.

OTHER TEEN
What's this for?

JANIE
If your friend don't deliver those files, that's for paying you to whoop his ass.

The teens take the money and climb onto their bikes. They serpentine down the street, none too quickly.

EXT. ABANDONED LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Janie cuts down the alleyway, returning to the hidden squad car. The dead officer sprawled in the oleaginous pavement.

BUCK IS GONE.

SIRENS approach.

JANIE (CONT'D
(whispered)
Mike? ...Mike?

Buck bursts from the adjacent liquor store and rounds the corner into the back alley.

JANIE (CONT'D)
Oh for God's sakes, Mike.

Buck uses his teeth to twist the cap off a one liter bottle of Jose Cuervo Especial. Turns the bottle to his lips and guzzles.

JANIE (CONT'D)
We have to go.

SIRENS ECHO OFF THE DOWNTOWN BUILDINGS, lights flashing in the distance.

JANIE (CONT'D)
Mike, he's got my baby!

BUCK
It's hopeless! We got no one on our side, Janie.

Buck takes a swig.

JANIE

We know where his meeting's happening. It's our one shot at finding my daughter. He makes that drop off, we might could prove your innocence. We have to take this shot.

BUCK

There's a thousand of em. Only one of me. I ain't help that woman, Janie. That's who I am.

JANIE

Don't you want to do the right thing?

BUCK

Don't make no difference. I'm a loser, Janie. Always will be!

Buck is screaming now.

BUCK (CONT'D)

Only 26 months of my life ever made any sense was overseas and I can't go back to that cause I'm a 20 percent-rated reenlistment-code-three goddamn loser!

JANIE

Fine. Go off and get drunk! I knew you'd leave me! You all do!

BUCK

Where you going?

JANIE

To get my daughter.

Janie marches off. Buck alone in the alley with the body.

SIRENS ECHO IN FROM ALL SIDES NOW.

Buck turns the Cuervo to his lips and starts to drinking. Then, SPITS IT ALL OUT ON THE GROUND.

It froths and bubbles on the pavement. Buck hawks and spits again.

Then winds up and HURLS THE BOTTLE against the alley wall - SMASHING IT IN A MILLION PIECES. Buck puts his hands over his ears, sinks to his knees, and SCREAMS IN PAIN AND RAGE.

CUT TO:

INT. ABANDONED NORTHEAST PRECINCT - NIGHT

A SWAT TEAM BATTERS OPEN THE DOORS to the precinct. Laser scopes of assault rifles PIERCE THE GLOOM.

SWAT COPS in black combat gear run point-and-follow, sweeping the building.

SWAT TEAM
Clear! Clear!

Jim Benson follows Lieutenant Kilkline and Sergeant Hoyt into the station.

INT. ABANDONED NORTHEAST PRECINCT - BACK OFFICES

They are COMPLETELY EMPTY. Sergeant Hoyt spreads his arms and wheels on Jim.

SERGEANT HOYT
Where's your phantom precinct, Jim?

Jim looks at the desks. Rectangles of dust missing where computers once rested.

LIEUTENANT KILKLINE
What do you think?

Jim spots a coffee mug on the window sill. He dips in an index finger. It comes away warm.

JIM
I think this was a functioning office not 30 minutes ago.

Lieutenant Kilkline scans the room. Dust marks clearly show the missing outlines of computers and printers, recently moved.

SERGEANT HOYT
Well, where in the hell are they?

JIM
Close. Really close.

CUT TO:

EXT. EL PASO - NIGHT

I-10 skirts the Rio Grande, cleaving the festering slums of Ciudad Juárez from the tan bricked homes and tree lined alamedas of El Paso.

EXT. OVERPASS - NIGHT

Janie stands on the 85 overpass where it dovetails with I-10. She climbs over the guardrail and crosses the westbound lanes, ROARING JUGGERNAUTS OF BIG RIGS inexorable as time.

Janie glissades down the beveled concrete face of the batter wall.

EXT. RIO GRANDE FLOODPLAIN - NIGHT

Stark leans against his cruiser and watches Janie advance. If he is surprised to see her, he don't show it.

CARTEL GUNMEN are loading an idling transport truck. Engine wheezing like it's out of breath.

Janie marches right up to Stark.

JANIE

This it? This your shipment in
from Mexico?

Stark shakes his head, no.

STARK

This is a shipment to Mexico.

Janie stands face to face with Stark, one hand on her hip. She looks in the truck bed. PILES OF GUNS.

JANIE

That's it, then. Just a bunch of
guns.

The ribbed spandrels of the overpass yawn in the echoing darkness; the felled fossil ribcage of some forlorn beast, long extinct. The dull rumble of east-west traffic enough to set your teeth on edge.

STARK

10,000 Mexicans kill each other
every year. And where do you
s'pose Juárez gets all of its guns?

Janie nods.

STARK (CONT'D)

America is so busy watching what's crossing the border from Mexico, they don't care what's going out.

JANIE

You're responsible for every person gets killed with these guns. You know that?

Stark's boot is cocked up on a rusted chicken feeder. An elbow resting across his knee.

STARK

You cannot change what men want. Nor what they will do.

WHORES, in their teens and twenties, emerge from a shack and watch Janie with interest. They have mahogany eyes and smoke hand rolled cigarettes.

One whore in a striped tank top cuddles Janie's baby against her shoulder.

STARK (CONT'D)

People will always want drugs. Governments will always forbid them.

Janie watches the young whore holding Olivia.

STARK (CONT'D)

This war will go on forever. And no one will lose. And no one will win.

JANIE

And whose side are you on? Coming after me and killing all those people?

STARK

When the rains come too late in the year and destroy a farmer's crops, does the farmer blame this raindrop or that raindrop? Which raindrop is the one that killed his crops?

Janie scans the terrain. The abandoned elementary school, incongruous across the bosque. Windows missing.

Cheerily painted zoo animals now sun-faded and peeling.

STARK (CONT'D)
Or does the farmer blame the storm
itself? A force of nature that has
always been and always will be?

JANIE
You killed those people. You did.

STARK
It could be that fate chose me to
act her will. But if I had not
killed those people, a thousand
others would rise up to take my
place. So it could also be that I
am just a raindrop in a storm.

JANIE
Let me have my daughter.

Stark stares at her for a long time. He nods to the whore in
the striped tank top.

STARK
Déjela celebrar a la muchacha la
una vez pasada.

The young whore hands Janie her daughter.

WHORE
Nos alimentará y darle a un
orfanato.

Janie holds Olivia tightly in her arms. She presses her
forehead to the child's forehead. Janie's face now lined
with tears.

STARK
They say they will provide for her
when you are gone.

Stark unclips the safety strap on his holster and draws his
gun.

Janie hugs her child. And then --

GUNFIRE EXPLODES ACROSS THE MESA.

Stark's gunmen DIVE FOR COVER behind the transport truck.

EXT. FLOODPLAIN - JANIE

MAKES A BREAK FOR IT, running for the cover of the vacant
elementary school, clutching Olivia to her chest.

Only Stark, unflinching does not move. Gun ready, his eyes scan the terrain for the shooter.

EXT. BOSQUE - CONTINUOUS

In the bosque of the Rio Grande the Tobosa grass grows belly high to a horse. Balsam-scented cottonwoods with deep-fissured bark stand sentinel to red Snakewood and harlequin-green tendrils of Indian root.

Stark spots dust rising from the flora. And then --

BUCK EMERGES FROM THE SCREEN OF COTTONWOODS.

EXT. FLOODPLAIN - STARK

gestures to his gunmen. Pot-bellied men with bowlegs and strong shoulders.

STARK

Matarlo.

Stark's gunmen OPEN FIRE ON BUCK. Stark low-lines to the school house, PURSUING JANIE.

EXT. BOSQUE - BUCK

ducking low and moving fast. Tar Brush and Fire-barrel Cactus pockmark the floodplain, screening his path.

Buck picks his way along the rolling stock. Treacherous terrain of train ties and gravel.

HE'S PINNED DOWN BY COVER FIRE.

Buck drops his spent semi-auto. Now a double-handed grip on his Glock. His shoulder is opened and bleeding fresh.

EXT. FLOODPLAIN - EL PASO POLICE AND SWAT TEAM

SURROUND THE I-10 and descend on the mesa.

They DRAW FIRE from the Cartel Gunmen.

EXT. BOSQUE - BUCK

slips from the train ties and SPRINTS for the abandoned school. He scans the building, noting a second story over the lunch room.

BUCK
High ground, Janie.

EXT. FLOODPLAIN - JIM BENSON

trots across the mesa in a flack vest and helmet, gun drawn. He surveys the battlefield and heads for the school.

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - STARK

point-and-sweeps through the empty rooms. Faded dioramas and dust-covered children's toys eerily abandoned.

Stark sets his cigarette to the window dressings and breathes gently. The desiccated wisps of fabric IGNITE.

The fire spreads rapidly, ENGULFING THE ROOM IN FLAMES.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - BUCK

drops his spent Glock. He stares in horror at the HELLISH CONFLAGRATION RISING TO SPREAD ITS FIERY WINGS INTO THE NIGHT.

Color drains from Buck's face. He struggles to quiet his breathing.

BUCK
Janie, he means to smoke you out.

Buck's bullet wound is freshly seeping. His brain POUNDING WITH ANCIENT MORTAR FIRE.

Eyes lit with terror, Buck swallows hard and makes a choice.

BUCK RACES INTO THE BURNING BUILDING.

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - JIM BENSON

picks his way carefully through a music room. Crates of rotted instruments sun-bleached and forgotten.

JIM
Janie, Mike, can you hear me? I
got your files and the fingerprints
you sent me. We know everything
now...

INT. CAFETERIA - BUCK

carefully walking the perimeter. Listening with his good ear over the CRACKLING ROAR OF FLAMES.

JIM (O.S.)

We got the nine rap sheets. All those folks are dead. A city inspector, a land surveyor. Everyone tied to this property...

INT. MAIN OFFICE - STARK

keen eyed and listening. Honing in on Jim's location.

JIM (O.S.)

They own the land on both sides of the Rio Grande, now. They can get anything they want across the border. This is their goldmine!

Stark spots Jim's shadow through the smoke. It glides upstairs behind the cafeteria. Stark ducks low through the SCORCHING HEAT, silently closing the gap.

INT. UPSTAIRS CLASSROOMS - BUCK

mops sweat from his eyes.

JIM (O.S.)

The man killed in the Sherwood Diner was a manager from the Wetlands Bureau. Anyone who came snooping here ended up on the hit list.

Buck studies the doorways down the hallway, trying to read Janie's thoughts. Where is she?

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

We know it wasn't you, Mike! You can stop running!

INT. HALLWAY - STARK

spots Janie far down the hallway, crouched in a window seat. She is huddled over Olivia, keeping her quiet. SMOKE NOW CHOKING THE HALLWAY. Janie looks intently out the window, searching for gunmen or any sign of rescue.

Stark hears Jim Benson climbing the stairs. Stark DRAWS A SECOND GUN from his thigh holster. Drawing a bead on Janie AND ON JIM.

He lines up both shots. Stark's thin-lipped smile.

And then --

HE FIRES.

INT. HALLWAY - BUCK

hurtles through the air, BODY-TACKLING STARK - SMASHING HIM HARD TO THE GROUND.

INT. STAIRWELL - JIM BENSON

takes a BULLET TO THE CHEST. It lifts him off his feet and sends him CRASHING DOWN THE STAIRS.

INT. HALLWAY - BUCK AND STARK

grapple and fight. Boots scraping against the pinewood flood. FLAMES RACING TO FILL THE HALLWAY.

Stark loses both guns. Grips Buck in a double arm bar and BASHES HIM HARD AGAINST THE DRYWALL. Buck's forearm blistering in the heat of the fire - BUCK SCREAMING.

Buck fights like an infantryman. Hooked fists to crush windpipes or gouge eyes. In the adrenal rage of combat Buck takes Stark's head in both hands and SMASHES IT AGAINST THE FLOOR.

INT. HALLWAY - BUCK

marine-crawls across the pinewood and REACHES INTO THE FLAMES TO GRAB STARK'S GLOCK.

STARK LURCHES TOWARD BUCK, as Buck SPINS AND FIRES.

The bullet CATCHES STARK IN THE THROAT, his carotid artery exploding in a shroud of mist.

CLOSE ON BUCK

who aims carefully and FIRES A SECOND TIME.

INT. HALLWAY - STARK

collapses to his knees, his brow furrowed as if to pose a difficult question. Stark falls face forward on the hardwood. Dead.

INT. HALLWAY - JANIE

rises from her crouched hiding place, cradling Olivia in her arms. She smiles bravely.

JANIE

Bait.

Buck nods.

WATER HOSES POUND THE BUILDING, QUENCHING FIRE.

Buck takes Janie in his arms, shielding her and the baby from fire and water.

Janie collapses into his arms in nervous exhaustion, sobbing, holding Olivia.

JANIE (CONT'D)

You came back.

She turns Olivia's head from Stark's bleeding body.

Buck safeties his gun and sets it on the ground. He holds Janie.

JANIE (CONT'D)

I thought you'd leave me. But you came back.

Buck cradles the baby's tiny hand in his blistered palm.

BUCK

You must be Olivia.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - NIGHT

Buck, Janie, and Olivia emerge coughing from the wet and smoking building. They are now drenched from the fire hoses.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - JIM BENSON

sits with EMTs who carefully remove his flak jacket and cut away his shirt. Revealing a NASTY RED WELT in the center of his chest.

Officer Jim Benson waves away the EMTs. He labors to his feet, wheezing as he approaches Janie and Buck.

JIM

Janie, I got your note. Led us right to you. You solved everything.

Jim places a tentative hand on Buck's shoulder. He pats it in a fatherly way.

FIREMEN AND SWAT POLICE rush in from all directions. Clearing the school room by room.

JIM (CONT'D)

You did good, Mike. You showed me who you really are.

Buck wipes sweat from his forehead and collects his breath.

He nods.

CUT TO:

INT. WEST TEXAS DINER - DAY

Buck sits in a booth wearing an electrician's coveralls, his table bathed in the lemon yellow light of morning. His left arm's still in a sling but he looks healed from his cuts and bruises.

Buck reads a front page article in the El Paso Times. The byline says, "WRITTEN BY JANIE COLE."

Janie sits opposite, making notes in her pad. She smiles at Olivia, seated next to Buck.

A WAITRESS arrives to refill Janie's coffee. She turns to Buck.

WAITRESS

Can I get you something to drink?

BUCK

Yes ma'am. I believe I'd like to try your lemonade.

Janie smiles.

Underneath the table she slips her feet out of her flats and rests them on Buck's lap. He cups a hand around the ball of her foot, absently kneading it, his other hand resting protectively on Olivia's shoulder.

Outside the Eastern sun crowns the Franklin Mountains in burgundy and tyrian. The crinkled edges of the foothills gently settled on the land like the folds of a blanket.

THE END