

INT. FACTORY ASSEMBLY LINE - DAY

An oversized gear turns on its axis, pulling along a factory assembly line.

Frayed orange wires and piss yellow piping line the ceiling, woven through the buzzing florescent lights overhead.

A web of conveyer belts ferry car parts throughout the warehouse, a chaotic clutter of moving metal.

Sweat collects on the brow of a LANKY MAN (mid-20s) who stands in front of the noisy assembly line.

Burly workers, clothes dirty and stained, maneuver around the man. His eyes hollow, expressionless. Neglecting his job as well as the world around him - his mind elsewhere.

INT. FACTORY BREAK ROOM - LATER

The Man sits alone in a scarcely furnished break room. Paint peels off the walls. A faded vending machine hums nearby. He eats a sloppily-made sandwich from a brown paper bag, silent.

In front of him, a sketchpad. He draws and erases as he eats.

INT. FACTORY ASSEMBLY LINE - LATER

The Man stands back at the assembly line, toiling through the monotonous task before him.

A co-worker on the line, DONNIE, tries to get his attention.

DONNIE
Are you waiting on the
transmission?

The Man stares off, unresponsive.

DONNIE (CONT'D)
Hey! You hear me?

Another co-worker, RICHARD, taps his colleague, waving his hands.

RICHARD
Hey man, don't bother. He ain't all
there.

Donnie scoffs.

Just then, a cable overhead *SNAPS*, causing a robotic arm to swing wildly. It knocks into a suspended engine, which plummets down, pinning Richard to the ground.

A bone-crushing *CRACK* gives way to screams of agony and pain.

The Man rushes from the assembly line to see Richard's legs mangled, stuck under the engine. Blood pools from beneath him as he cries out.

Workers crowd as three men hoist the engine off of him. The Man ducks under the lifted engine to tend to his co-worker.

It's a gory fucking mess. Bone protrudes from shredded flesh, the surrounding fabric soaked through with blood.

The Man gets to work, trying to stop the bleeding. He ties a make-shift tourniquet around Richard's thigh.

Richard grimaces with each touch as The Man tears off his pant leg. Blood gushes, spraying the man as he works.

Around them - hysteria.

DONNIE
(screaming, frantic)
What are you doing?! Stop the
bleeding.

RICHARD
(wailing)
Fuck man, it hurts!

MEMORY FLASH:

- Scenery flies by the window of a moving vehicle.
- A bottle of booze rolls back and forth across a car floor.
- Ripped jeans, a bloodied leg underneath.
- A different voice cries out, a child's:

YOUNG BOY (O.S.)
It hurts, it hurts!

BACK TO SCENE.

The Man jumps up, stepping back from his co-worker, paralyzed from the memory. Shirt and hands covered in blood.

DONNIE
What? What are you doing? Where are
you going?

LANKY MAN

I'm sorry.

He backs away from the bloody scene, mumbling to himself. The crowd rushes past, pushing and prodding him as he begins to hyperventilate.

He turns, vision going blurry, as he tries to break free from the crowd. Richard's screams fade as he runs out.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

A dimly-lit, cramped apartment. Bed, fridge, and couch all share the same drab room.

Charcoal drawings and unfinished sketches adorn the walls, lining the space with dark, nightmarish visions.

Towers of old magazines occupy the corners of the apartment like monuments. A pet squirrel scrambles in a cage nearby.

The Man stops by its cage and sprinkles in bits of food. The squirrel chirps happily at the offering.

Upon second thought, he doubles back and takes the squirrel out of the cage. He hugs it tightly before opening the front door and putting him outside. The squirrel runs off.

INT. SHOWER - MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE on dark red blood circling the shower drain.

The Man stands perfectly still, allowing the stream to run over him, washing away the dried blood that stains his flesh.

INT. APARTMENT - LATER

CLOSE on trembling hands as they fashion a knot in a length of rope. He throws the rope over an exposed pipe on the ceiling, pulling on it to test its strength.

Climbing atop a chair, tears in his eyes, he slides the noose around his neck.

He looks around the modest dwelling, searching for words. Trying to say goodbye to nothing.

His gaze crosses a card table in the corner of the room. Motorcycle trader magazines lay open, intermittent "for sale" ads circled in red pen. He lets his eyes fall. Freezes.

Loosening the noose, he steps down to pick up a stray magazine sprawled on the floor in front of him.

He holds it up, touching a picture of a motorcycle in the far corner he's just noticed. A grainy black and white photo stares back at him - the object of his desire.

Reaching for scissors, he cuts the ad out from the page, tossing the rest to the floor - all useless to him now.

He stares at the picture with disbelief. The rope swings gently behind him, mocking him. He rips it down with haste.

INT. APARTMENT - LATER

A *Happy Days* episode plays cheerfully from the television as The Man packs meager belongings into a bag.

INT. APARTMENT - LATER

An iron presses down on a piece of bread as The Man attempts to make a grilled cheese. Once "toasted", he cuts it into fourths, stacks them into a tower, and coats it with ketchup.

The clock on the wall shows 11:59 p.m. He shoves a candle into the mountain of melted cheese and lights it.

The time changes to 12:00 a.m. - midnight. Closing his eyes, he blows out the candle.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. CAR RENTAL OFFICE - NEXT MORNING

The Man enters the front door of a car rental office. "WELCOME TO FLINT, MICHIGAN, WHERE EVEN THE RENTAL CARS ARE LOCAL!" is painted on the white concrete wall behind the counter. An overly-polite attendant greets him.

ATTENDANT

Welcome to Stay-A-Mile, how can I help you?

LANKY MAN

I want to rent a car. Cheapest one you got.

ATTENDANT

Absolutely. How long are you going to need it for?

LANKY MAN
Just two days.

He slides her a license. Doesn't take more than a second glance to realize it's a fake.

The attendant holds up the license next to The Man's face, her false veneer cracking, if only for a moment.

LANKEY MAN
It's an old photo.

ATTENDANT
(fake cheerful)
I guess so! Do you have another form of ID? A credit card perhaps?

LANKY MAN
I don't. I was gonna pay with cash.

He holds up a rubber-banded wad of money.

ATTENDANT
Okay, well, we'll see what we can do. What are the last four digits of your social?

LANKY MAN
Uhhh... I don't know it off the top of my head.

The attendant falters, forcing a calm demeanor despite growing concern that something is off.

LANKY MAN (CONT'D)
You know what, never mind. Could I just have my license back?

ATTENDANT
I'm sure it won't be a problem. Why don't you just have a seat while I get your paperwork started.

She motions to an uncomfortable seating area. He sits, skeptical and cautious.

Behind the counter, the woman flags down her supervisor. She converses with him in hushed whispers, looking over her shoulder and pointing to The Man.

Just as the supervisor reaches for a phone and begins to dial, The Man bolts out of the office.

EXT. ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

The Man runs along the road with a backpack over his shoulder, the car rental facility growing smaller behind him.

He slows to a brisk walk as a cop car flies by him, headed back from where he came.

EXT. TRUCK STOP - LATER

Arriving at a truck stop, he approaches an older man climbing into the cab of his vehicle.

LANKEY MAN

Excuse me. Can I hitch a ride?

TRUCKER

Well, that depends. Where you heading?

The Man takes the motorcycle ad from his pocket, unfolds it and reads off the address -

LANKEY MAN

Wellington.

TRUCKER

Ohio? Awfully long way to go to buy a motorcycle don't you think?

LANKEY MAN

This one's perfect.

The trucker glances down at the ad, sizing the stranger up, contemplating his answer. Decides he poses no threat.

TRUCKER

Well alright then, hop in.

The Man circles to the far side of the truck, getting in the passenger's seat. The truck rumbles off, bound for Ohio.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

CLOSE on the bloodied remains of a squirrel on the side of a road. A crimson road kill massacre.

Intestines trail the road leading to the flattened body. Intact, despite the tire treads tattooed across its back.

A bicycle speeds by the carcass before - SCREEEEEECH - skidding to a stop.

HOLDEN (12), a gaunt, feral boy with a skittish curiosity, discards his bike in the grass and rushes to examine the dead squirrel.

Sadness flashes across his face for a brief moment, fleeting as fascination begins to take over.

He picks the body up gently, turning it over in his hands as he carefully assesses the damage.

Satisfied, he walks it back to his bike and places it among numerous other dead animals in the front basket.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - LATER

Holden rides alongside a chain link fence before slowing to a stop, dropping his bike.

Careful not to draw attention to himself, he watches the kids through the fence - an outsider looking in.

Shouts and laughter echo from the playground, a childhood chorus.

His eyes move from one group to the next, drinking in the sights as kids play on a sun-bleached playground.

Children swing on monkey bars. Giggling boys chase after each other, running in circles across cracked blacktop.

Girls in crayon-colored dresses sit in the grass, braiding each other's hair.

His eyes settle on a YOUNG GIRL, arms spread like wings, spinning so fast she could take flight at any moment.

She notices him and stops - the two lock eyes. She stares at him, fascinated. He raises his hand to wave to her.

RINNNNNNGGGGGG - the school bell chimes. In an instant, she whips her head around, rushing back toward the school.

The children funnel inside. Holden watches until the girl disappears. Beneath him, he hears a rustling and looks down -

Three hairless baby rabbits sit in the grass at the base of the fence beside a burrowed hole. He kneels down to them.

Their eyes are closed shut, barely a day old. He picks them up, running his finger along their newborn skin.

Holden gently places the bunnies back in their nest. He rips up nearby grass and gathers twigs, sprinkling it all on top of them to hide the bunnies from predators.

Content, he picks up his bike and pedals off.

EXT. DESOLATE DIRT ROAD - LATER

A rolling dirt road that seems to stretch to the ends of the Earth. Holden pedals with haste, kicking up dirt behind him.

EXT. WOODED MOUNTAIN BIKE PATH - LATER

Dark, thick leaves block out the sky. The trail narrows and winds as Holden bikes deeper and deeper into the woods, leaving any trace of civilization behind.

The animals jolt and bounce in the basket, threatening to fall out at any moment.

Suddenly, he takes a sharp left, turning off the path and into a heavily wooded area. Holden pedals on.

EXT. CABIN - DEPTHS OF THE WOODS - LATER

Arriving at last at a wooden cabin in the heart of the forest, Holden is home.

A wrap-around deck encompasses a modest, single-story. Stretched out animal hides adorn every surface.

The slanted roofing and coarse wood reveal the cabin's hand-crafted construction.

Holden collects the animals from his basket and tucks his bike underneath the front porch, walking to a small shed that is setback from the house.

INT. TAXIDERMY SHED - MOMENTS LATER

Frightened faces of dead animals greet Holden as he enters the dark room.

A cavernous taxidermy workshop. Rodents are strewn across a wooden bench, each a work-in-progress.

Animals with missing heads, tails, and arms sit waiting in various stages of stitched-up disembodiment.

More Frankenstein's lab than trophy room.

Holden avoids looking at the finished creatures on the walls, disgusted by their presence on display. He gingerly lays out his finds, adding them to the work bench.

INT. DINNING ROOM TABLE - NIGHT

Holden sets the table with meticulous precision, eyeing the clock. He hears a truck *RUMBLE* up outside. A car door *SLAMS*.

Putting down the utensils, Holden rushes to the front door.

EXT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

FLETCHER (40s), a grizzly man, emerges from a dusty truck, his arms full of bags.

Holden barrels out of the cabin towards him. He grabs at the bags eagerly, unable to contain his excitement.

HOLDEN
C'mon, I gotta show you something.

FLETCHER
Can it wait a minute?

HOLDEN
No. I been waitin' all day.

INT. TAXIDERMY SHED - MOMENTS LATER

Fletcher studies Holden's newest addition with the careful eye of an artist. He looks over the squirrel, running through his checklist in his head.

Tail in good condition, all limbs in tact, fur coat unmatted and fresh, no tears on the head, skull unbroken.

Holden watches, beaming with pride at Fletcher's approval.

FLETCHER
Where'd you find this one?

Holden's face falls, turning white.

HOLDEN
Out by the creek.

FLETCHER
Then why are there tire marks on it? What did I tell you about going in to town?

HOLDEN
I only biked along the road -

FLETCHER
(cutting him off)
Did you go to the school again?

His silence betrays his guilt.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
What if someone had seen you? What
woulda happened? Shit.

Holden is deflated, the moment soured.

HOLDEN
Sorry... I won't go back.

Fletcher digs through the bags, trying to brighten the mood.

FLETCHER
I got a little something for you
while I was out today. Here.

He hands him two books, a nature guide and a mechanics
manual. Holden's eyes go wide.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Now whatta you say we go in and get
supper started?

INT. DINING ROOM TABLE - LATER

U-V-N-I-D-A-L-I

A row of letters sit in a line. Fletcher scans a Scrabble
board, spotting 'ANTE.' Block letters descend across the
board. He adds onto it - D-I-L-U-V-I-A-N making -

FLETCHER
Antediluvian.

HOLDEN
You're makin' that up.

FLETCHER
No I ain't. Look it up if you don't
know what it means.

Holden scoots out and leaves the table, bringing back a worn
dictionary. Flipping through the pages, he finds the word.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Well? Let's hear it.

HOLDEN
(reading)
Antediluvian. Adjective. Of or
belonging to the time before the
biblical Flood.

FLETCHER
Told ya so.

HOLDEN
It's still a piece of shit word.

FLETCHER
Nah, you're just mad I won.

Fletcher begins clearing the board.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Go put your PJs on.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Holden sits in front of a wall of VHS tapes, looking through recorded *Happy Days* episodes. White tape bearing handwritten titles mark each box. Fletcher enters.

FLETCHER
You pick an episode of Happy Days
yet?

HOLDEN
I don't know which one I wanna
watch.

Fletcher walks over to the shelf, picking two tapes.

FLETCHER
Here, how about "The Duel" or
"Ralph's Family Problem"? Those are
both pretty good.

HOLDEN
Oh, "The Duel"!

Leaping up, Holden grabs the tape and puts it into the VCR.
He presses 'PLAY.' On screen, the theme song blares.

THEME SONG (O.S.)
*These days are ours, happy and
free. Oh happy days.*

Fletcher shuts off the lights. The room dark, save for the flickering TV screen. He sits down on the couch, spreading his arms across the back, relaxed, calm. Eyes on Holden.

THEME SONG (O.S.) (CONT'D)
*These days are ours, share them
 with me. Oh baby.*

Holden's eyes are glued to the screen. Entranced by the TV, he takes off his shirt.

THEME SONG (O.S.) (CONT'D)
*Goodbye grey sky, hello blue,
 there's nothing can hold me when I
 hold you.*

CLOSE on the floor. A shirt falls to the ground, followed by shorts, then socks. Small white briefs land softly on top.

A pile of clothes, small and fragile in appearance.

THEME SONG (O.S.) (CONT'D)
*Feels so right, you can't be wrong,
 rockin' and rollin' all week long.*

Holden stands stark naked. His skin pale and milky, awash in the ominous glow of the TV screen.

Without hesitation, he moves to the couch, eyes never breaking contact with the screen.

Fletcher slides down from the couch. His head lowers as he kneels on the ground between Holden's legs.

CLOSE on Holden's face, the images from the screen dancing in the black of his eyes. His face blank, expressionless, removed. A million miles from this small, dark room.

THEME SONG (O.S.) (CONT'D)
*Sunday, Monday, Happy Days.
 Tuesday, Wednesday, Happy Days.
 Thursday, Friday, Happy Days.
 Saturday, what a day, groovin' all
 week with you -*

INT. HOLDEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Holden's bedroom. Sparse but distinctively his - a haven in its own right. A handmade dresser and bed line the walls.

Knick-knacks adorn the shelves. Rocks, sticks, mangled action figures - treasures from a misguided childhood.

Holden lies in bed, awake and alert. He slides out of bed, feet padding quietly on the wooden floor.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Holden checks that Fletcher is asleep before fishing out an unmarked VHS from behind a row of tapes.

Ejecting the tape in the VCR, he discards it on the floor, quietly inserting the unmarked tape in its place.

The screen crackles to life. Holden rewinds through recorded news clips, finally arriving on a tearful woman speaking at a news conference. He presses 'PLAY'.

WOMAN (O.S.)

I just want to know where my boy
is. Please, if you're out there I
beg you... I just wish I could look
him in the eyes and know that he's
okay.

Holden 'PAUSES' the tape, hits 'REWIND', then 'PLAY' again.

WOMAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

I just wish I could look him in the
eyes and know that he's okay.

Once again, 'PAUSE', 'REWIND', 'PLAY'.

WOMAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

I just wish I could look him in the
eyes and know that he's okay... I
love you Holden.

Holden 'PAUSES' the tape. His mother's face fills the screen. He reaches out to touch her cheek, the static electricity *BUZZES* around his fingers.

This grainy image all he has left. He hears a *CREEEAAK* and jumps, startled. It's just the wind.

Shaken, he ejects the tape and turns off the TV.

As the screen goes black, he fumbles for the box in the dark, slipping the tape into 'THE DUEL' case mistakenly.

Tucking it behind the row of tapes, he hurries back to bed.

EXT. FOREST - DAWN

A golden haze blankets the forest as a thick fog dissipates. Cold wind rattles, shaking the tree branches.

Fletcher and Holden walk in step through the awakening wilderness, checking animal traps for last night's offerings.

They barely speak, their silence a reverence for nature's quiet calm. Holden drags a cart behind him. Two dead foxes jostle inside.

Rounding a bend in the path, they come upon a fallen tree branch tangled in a leg trap.

FLETCHER

Sonofabitch. Damn wind must have
knocked it down last night.

Fletcher works to dislodge the branch, struggling against the jammed metal hinges of the trap.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

This is gonna take a while. I don't
want to fall behind. Go on up ahead
and check the line, I'll catch up.

Holden nods and continues along the trapline.

EXT. FOREST - LATER

A bloody hoof struggles against the jaws of a steel trap. A panicked DEER bites at its foot, tugging at the mechanism.

A branch *SNAPS*. The deer cranes its neck, startled by Holden, who has come upon it. It tries to run away, but can't - snorting with fear and pain.

Unafraid, he edges towards the deer as it tugs at the trap.

Holden reaches out and puts his hand on the deer, trying to calm it as it bucks and kicks.

HOLDEN

Shhhhhhhhh.

He pets its head and caresses it, trying to calm it down.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)

I'm gonna get you out, calm down.

Continuing to stare the deer in the eyes, Holden kneels down. The deer, now calm, follows suit, laying in the leaves.

Holden struggles to open the trap without hurting the deer, finally releasing the hinge and freeing its leg.

The deer hobbles backwards, its leg maimed, shredded and bloody as a result of the trap.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)
There you go, see?

Struggling to walk, the deer slowly moves away. Pausing for a moment, it turns back to Holden who smiles.

BANG. A gunshot crackles through the trees. The deer crumples to the forest floor, blood leaking from the hole in its head.

Birds fly out of surrounding branches and scatter. Holden wheels around to see Fletcher coming over the ridge, smoking shotgun limp by his side.

Holden stares at the dead deer. The warm eyes he was looking at just a moment ago are now black and vacant.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)
You didn't have to do that!

FLETCHER
You think you was being humane?
Letting it limp off into the wild
like that? Leg all torn up?
Couldn't run, couldn't defend
itself. It was weak. Dead the
moment it stepped foot in that
trap. That's how the world works.

HOLDEN
We don't even have room for it in
the cart.

Fletcher reaches down, grabbing the carcass violently by its legs and drags it along to where Holden stands. Point made.

FLETCHER
Come on, we've got a lot of line
left.

He leaves, dragging the deer over rocks and roots. Holden picks up the cart handle and follows, trailing behind, unable to take his eyes off of the dead, limp deer.

INT. CABIN - MORNING

Holden sweeps the cabin floor, watching from the window as Fletcher's truck drives away, headed into town.

INT. TAXIDERMY ROOM - LATER

One by one, Holden works his way through a pile of freshly-skinned pelts that Fletcher has left for him.

Trims the excess scraps. Places them in a wash basin. Stirs the water and pelts with a large wooden spoon.

An expert in his craft.

INT. TAXIDERMY ROOM - LATER

Clean pelts stacked beside him, Holden effortlessly strings each one up to a stretcher with rope, laying them out to dry.

His hands display his expertise, but his eyes betray his contempt for the work he does.

EXT. JUNK YARD - AFTERNOON

A Depression-Era junk yard long since forgotten, left to rot in the depths of the now overgrown woods.

This is Holden's playground, set back from the dirt path in view of the cabin.

A barren wasteland of scrap metal and ghosts of cars past. Rusted hulls line the rows of trees.

Over time, branches have grown in through the vehicles. Ivy snakes through every crevice, in and out of open windows and through shattered windshields.

It's hard to tell where the cars end and the trees begin - man-made machines and nature merged as one.

In search of something, he navigates the wreckage with ease, no stranger to this place.

He pops open the hood of a mossy 1940s Ford pickup. Rifling through the car's tangle of metal organs, he finds and removes the piece he is looking for.

EXT. JUNK YARD - LATER

Holden wheels out his pride-and-joy. A dusty, rundown motorcycle. Engine and wiring exposed. Vital pieces are rusted and falling off.

Opening a nearby car door, he extracts a rolled-up tarp hidden inside. He unrolls it across the ground.

The tarp contains an array of second-rate tools, pieces, and torn out book pages - Holden's makeshift work station.

Kneeling down beside the bike, he lays his collected pieces out and gets to work on the engine.

Holden hums to himself while he works. Content. Some small sense of purpose in the heart of the empty, lonely woods.

INT. DINNING ROOM - NIGHT

Silverware clangs against glass. Holden and Fletcher hunch over their plates, shoveling food into their mouths.

INT. DINNING ROOM - LATER

Plates pushed to the side. Another scrabble game in progress. Holden lays out his letters.

L-O-Q-U-A-C-I-O-U-S.

HOLDEN

Loquacious.

Fletcher eyes him with deep skepticism.

FLETCHER

And you know what it means? Can't play it if you dunno what it means.

HOLDEN

Means talkative.

Fletcher has been bested. A grin sneaks across his face.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Holden washes the dishes from dinner in the kitchen sink.

FLETCHER

You pick what we're watchin' tonight?

HOLDEN

Can we watch 'The Duel' again?

FLETCHER

No. We just watched it last night. I ain't watching it again.

HOLDEN

But it's my favorite one and I fell
asleep before it was over. Please?

Fletcher weighs this, mad at himself for caving, but not
looking to start a fight.

FLETCHER

Fine. Go change.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Holden sits on the couch in his pajamas, reading the
mechanics book. Fletcher enters with the tape in his hands.

Holden begins to take off his shirt as Fletcher puts in the
tape and hits 'PLAY'.

NEWS ANCHOR (O.S.)

Tom, authorities are doing
everything they can to find the
young boy, but warn that in cases
like this, its rare to find the
child alive after this many -

FLETCHER

The fuck is this?

Fletcher 'REWINDS' through the tape. The images on the screen
race backwards as the color drains from Holden's face.

Realizing what he's watching, Fletcher fumes. His veins
bulging against his skin, fist clenched.

He impatiently punches at the 'EJECT' button repeatedly until
the tape is spit out. Snatching it from the player, he storms
over to Holden.

With startling force, he snaps open the cassette and unspools
the tape in a violent frenzy. Eviscerating the tape inch by
inch.

Fletcher stands among the tape remnants, catching his breath.
Unrecognizable from a few moments ago, cold, taut.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I'm going to bed.

Holden sits in stunned silence, shirtless on the couch.

INT. FLETCHER'S ROOM - LATER

Holden slips into the bedroom. Fletcher's dark figure an ominous mound atop the bed.

Pajamas and underwear pool at Holden's feet. He climbs into Fletcher's bed, naked.

Fletcher stirs, startled by the feeling of Holden's bare flesh against his.

FLETCHER
(calm, leveled)
Get out of the bed.

HOLDEN
I just wanted to tell ya that-

FLETCHER
(enraged)
Get out!

Holden jumps out of the bed, collecting his clothes from the floor. At the door, he turns to Fletcher, stifling a sob.

Defeated, he leaves, shutting the door behind him.

INT. HOLDEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Holden lays awake, crying softly. He bristles as he hears Fletcher get out of bed, bracing for the worst.

But Fletcher's footsteps grow quieter as they recede down the hallway. Holden strains to listen to the muffled sounds as Fletcher rifles through boxes in the closet.

THUD. Something heavy is dropped on the table.

Moments pass in silence, when suddenly -

FLETCHER (O.S.)
Get out here.

Holden remains still, holding his breath.

FLETCHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I hear you snifflin', I know you're awake.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Holden moves out of the bedroom toward Fletcher, attempting to squelch the fear in the pit of his stomach.

A large, worn box sits atop the table, beckoning him closer.

FLETCHER

Sit down.

Holden pulls out a chair, doing as he's told.

Fletcher removes the lid from the box and begins to lay its contents out across the table in front of Holden.

Glimpses of the items can be seen - photographs, newspaper clippings, articles from magazines.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I been keepin' these. Whole box is full of em.

Headlines scream out from the pages:

"ECHOES FROM THE PAST, REMEMBERING HOLDEN BRIDGEWATER"

"PICKING UP THE PIECES - A FAMILY, BROKEN, TRIES TO RECOVER"

"THE BRIDGEWATERS TELL ALL: THE HORROR, THE AFTERMATH, AND HOW THEY'VE MANAGED TO MOVE ON"

Holden scans the pages, overwhelmed by the volume of stories.

HOLDEN

Why you showin' me this?

FLETCHER

Cause you need to know the truth.
They don't love you anymore. And
they ain't looking for you.

He picks one up and hands it to Holden: "GONE COLD: AFTER 10 YEARS, MISSING BOY PRESUMED DEAD."

Fletcher holds up a picture of Melissa, newborn in her arms.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

They had a new baby. Gone and replaced you.

Holden looks away, refusing to accept it.

HOLDEN

They wouldn't ever forget about me.

FLETCHER

They don't even know you. And you don't know them. You got their blood. That's it. I feed you. I put clothes on your back. I've taught you how to survive. They've moved on, Holden. And it's about damn time you did the same. They've got no place for you.

Sweeping his arm across the table, he gathers the articles, returning them to the box. Countless more left unseen inside.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

You ain't their boy anymore.

He puts the lid back on the box, hoisting it up.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

You're mine.

INT. HOLDEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Holden stares at the ceiling, unable to sleep. His eyes puffy and swollen from crying. No tears left to shed.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Runny eggs are pushed around a plate. Holden stares at his food with disgust. Behind him, Fletcher washes his dishes.

FLETCHER

You almost ready to go?

Holden does not look up.

HOLDEN

I ain't goin'.

A heavy pause sits in the air as Fletcher contemplates this.

FLETCHER

Well, alright then.

Fletcher turns and walks out of the cabin.

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Holden sits in the quiet of his newfound alone time, enjoying his day off. On the table in front of him is the nature book Fletcher gave him, which he flips through.

He grows alarmed as he reads. His finger moves along the page, tracing the text as he carefully scans the words.

HOLDEN
(reading under his breath)
Wild rabbits will sometimes abandon
their nest if they find it
disturbed. If left alone for more
than 12 hours, the mother likely
deserted her babies.

Holden throws the book down and scampers off the couch, racing out the door.

EXT. DESOLATE DIRT ROAD - LATER

Holden's bike bounds over bumpy terrain and gnarled roots as the trees begin to thin. He pedals harder.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - LATER

Throwing his bike down, Holden nears the pile of twigs and dried grass in front of the fence. He digs, searching through the pile. He stops. Hands covered in dirt, face sullen.

Uncovered from the pile are the three lifeless bodies of the bunnies. He picks them up, checking them for body heat.

They're cold to the touch, abandoned.

He takes deep breaths, trying to collect himself. All he can do is look away.

In the background, the school empties at the final bell. Children rush out to meet their eager, waiting parents.

Holden paces back in forth, horrified by what he's done. He stares back down at their soft white fur, breath uneven. He gently places grass back on top of them and mats it down. Once a nest, now a grave.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Holden slouches in his chair, his lack of intensity straining on Fletcher. Holden throws a few blocks together.

T-H-E

Fletcher's eyes bore into Holden, jaw tightening. Taking a deep breath, he strings together his own word off of the "T".

T-E-T-C-H-Y

FLETCHER

Tetchy. Know what that means?

Holden half-shrugs and sits forward to play his next word.

A-M

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

It's the act of being an irritable
little shit.

Fletcher flips the board into the air. Pieces fly everywhere.
The board slaps against the hardwood as letters rain down.

Holden pushes out from the table and storms off. Fletcher
watches him go.

He bends down and picks up the board, gathering the pieces
one at a time.

His stomach lurches as Holden reenters the room, gun in hand.

Holden places it onto the table and reclaims his seat.

Fletcher sits back down, leveled, reading the situation.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

What're you doin'?

HOLDEN

I hate it here.

The gun rests between them. Neither moves towards it.

FLETCHER

That right? You hate it here that
much, huh?

HOLDEN

What have I got? What kinda life is
this? You took me away from my
family. You destroyed my tape - am
I just supposed to sit here playin'
Scrabble every night with you? I
ain't happy, I ain't ever gonna be
happy. I'd rather be dead.

Fletcher reaches across the table and places the cold metal
into Holden's hand.

FLETCHER

You don't think you got anything to live for? Then go ahead, pull the damn trigger.

Holden's hand trembles, beads of sweat materializing on his temple. A moment passes, he can't do it.

Fletcher reaches across the table, taking it from his hand.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

(dismissive)

Wasn't even cocked.

He pulls the hammer back - cocking the gun.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

If you're gonna make a threat,
don't make it an empty one.

Fletcher walks away towards his bedroom. Halfway down the hall he hears a -

CLICK.

Holden has pulled the trigger, but the gun is empty.

Fletcher's heart falls heavy in his chest. Holden has called his bluff.

He turns to look at Holden, whose eyes exude sadness, betraying his disappointment.

In an instant, he charges at Fletcher - a jumbled mess of swinging fists, desperate to connect with flesh.

Fletcher allows the punches to land. Passively absorbing the first few before coiling his arms around Holden, wrapping him tighter and tighter, consuming the boy's blind fury.

Holden spits muffled words of hate and anger into Fletcher, his cries fractured and guttural.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I know, I know...I know.

Running out of energy, Holden's anger deflates. His body goes limp as he caves into Fletcher's chest, crying softly.

Fletcher scoops Holden up with care, the boy small and fragile in his arms. He carries him off to his room - in this moment, his protector.

INT. HOLDEN'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Fletcher lays Holden down on the bed, pulling the covers up to his chin and tucking him in.

He sits by the bed on the floor, listening to the rising and falling of Holden's breath as he drifts to sleep.

INT. HOLDEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Holden sleeps, wrapped in blankets - warm and secure. His door opens. Light from the hallway splashes onto his face. Outside, the world is dark.

Holden squints into the light. Confused. Scared.

Fletcher enters - manic. Eyes crazed, sleepless.

FLETCHER
C'mon. Get outta bed.

He rips the covers off of the bed and starts throwing clothes at Holden from the closet.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Hurry up and put these on. We're gonna be late.

HOLDEN
Late for what?

FLETCHER
We're going on a trip.

EXT. WOODED ROAD - MORNING

A thick veil of haze recoils into the tree line as the morning sun burns through it.

Fletcher's truck careens down the road, the trees bending to form a canopy overhead.

INT. FLETCHER'S TRUCK CAB - CONTINUOUS

In the front seat, Holden sits pressed against the window, wide-eyed with wonder as they roll through two-star towns.

Next to him, Fletcher sings along to the radio, his face eerie and ominous.

Holden's eyes swing between the passenger window and the windshield, torn between the excitement of the world around him and the inevitable dread that lies ahead.

As the song on the radio ends, Fletcher lowers the volume and turns to talk to Holden.

FLETCHER

I been thinkin' about what you said, and you're right. I can't expect you to sit around that cabin all alone.

Holden looks to Fletcher, hopeful.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

You know where we're headed?

HOLDEN

No.

Fletcher grins and turns his eyes back to the road.

EXT. FARM ROAD - LATER

Green stalks of corn line the dusty farm road. They ripple and shudder, writhing as the wind blows through them.

The road stretches all the way to the bruised morning skyline, lined with tractors and forgotten farming equipment.

Fletcher's truck appears and disappears in the rolling hills of the road.

Arriving at the intersection, it pulls off to the side of the road and comes to a stop.

INT. FLETCHER'S TRUCK CAB - CONTINUOUS

Fletcher throws the transmission into park. The engine hums softly. He stares off, his thoughts a lifetime away.

FLETCHER

My platoon was stationed near Quang Nam summer of '67. Stranded on the side of a mountain for weeks. We'd run outta supplies. Little ways down the mountain was a village, cept they weren't gonna give water to no Americans. Decided we'd have to pillage 'em if we wanted to make it home.

In the distance, THREE BOYS stroll along the side of the road, backpacks slung over their shoulders.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Everyone was on board 'cept for Briggs. Said he couldn't do it. Went against his morals, they hadn't done nothin' to us. So he stayed behind. By the time we made it back up the mountain, he was dead. Dehydration killed him.

The three boys come to a stop at a cluster of mailboxes, waiting for the bus.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
You don't survive in nature on principles. You die. Briggs was a principled man, but now he's rottin' in a shallow grave.

Fletcher turns, looking Holden straight in the eye.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
If you're lonely and unhappy, you can't sit around waitin' for the world to save you. Being a man is knowing when to take what you need. It ain't up to me to fix it for you. It's my job to show you the way-

Fletcher COCKS the gun, handing it to Holden.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
- but you've gotta get there yourself.

EXT. BUS STOP - CONTINUOUS

The three boys horse around at the bus stop, pushing each other and laughing. The smallest boy, CODY, eyes the truck down the road. He stares at it, suspicious.

INT. FLETCHER'S TRUCK CAB - CONTINUOUS

Fletcher nods his head to the boys.

FLETCHER
See those three boys standing right there? One of them's your new brother. Pick him.

HOLDEN
I can't.

FLETCHER
Yes you can, I know you can.

HOLDEN
I can't do this.

Holden places the gun on the center console.

FLETCHER
Time to be a man Holden. Which one?

Holden raises his arm, fingers weak, pointing.

EXT. BUS STOP - CONTINUOUS

Cody makes eye contact with Holden, whose finger is pointed right at him.

Cody nudges his two friends, alerting them to the truck.

INT. FLETCHER'S TRUCK CAB - CONTINUOUS

Holden lowers his hand.

FLETCHER
Alright then, go get him.

EXT. BUS STOP - CONTINUOUS

Cody and the two boys watch Holden exit the car and run across the road towards them.

INT. FLETCHER'S TRUCK CAB - CONTINUOUS

Fletcher spots a school bus driving out of the inky horizon, making its way down the long road towards them.

EXT. BUS STOP - CONTINUOUS

Holden reaches the boys and turns his attention to Cody.

HOLDEN
(panicked)
I need your help! Please!

CODY
What's wrong?

HOLDEN
We need directions to the hospital.
My dad - please.

CODY
You gotta go back that way by the -

HOLDEN
Can you tell my dad? We're lost.

CODY
That's your dad in there?

HOLDEN
Yeah, yeah that's him.

Cody looks to his friends, who shrug.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)
We're not gonna hurt you. We just
need directions.

Cody nods. Cody and Holden run towards the truck.

INT. FLETCHER'S TRUCK CAB - CONTINUOUS

Fletcher watches as the boys cross the road. He turns his
attention back to the bus, which is closing in.

EXT. FLETCHER'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Reaching the truck, Holden opens the passenger door. Cody
notices the gun on the console - just as Holden begins to
shove him into the cab.

Cody thrashes and kicks. Worming out of Holden's grasp. He
yells to his friends -

CODY
HE'S GOT A GUN! HE'S GOT A GUN!

Cody's friends take off running, flagging down the
approaching bus for help. Cody races after them.

FLETCHER
(yelling to Holden)
Go get him!

Holden's legs are frozen in place, unable to move. The bus approaches the stop, beginning to slow down.

Fletcher grabs the gun from the console and steps out of the car. He raises the pistol. A shot rings out -

BANG!

Cody goes down, tumbling into a cloud of dust. Holden runs towards his crumpled body. Cody grasps at his bloodied leg.

The engine *ROARS* to life. Fletcher pulls up alongside them.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Get him inside, hurry.

Cody's friends run onto the bus. Holden hoists Cody's body up, dragging him into the back seat of Fletcher's truck.

HOLDEN
(to Cody)
I'm sorry, I'm so sorry.

The moment the boys land in the car, Fletcher peels off. His foot heavy on the gas pedal as the tires spin feverishly.

In an instant, the car speeds down the road and out of sight.

Dust comes to rest on the road. Peace restored.

INT. FLETCHER'S TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER

Inside the truck, chaos - Holden pins Cody down as Fletcher drives like a mad man. Cody's screams of pain drown out the sound of the engine.

Blood gushes from Cody's leg, spurting out of the bullet wound as the truck bumps and bounces along the rough terrain.

HOLDEN
Why'd you shoot him? He's bleedin' everywhere!

FLETCHER
Because you couldn't get him in the goddamn truck!

Cody wails in the backseat as his leg continues to bleed.

HOLDEN
(panicked)
Keeps comin' out. What do - how -

FLETCHER
You need to put pressure on it.

HOLDEN
He keeps squirming.

CODY
It hurts, it hurts!

FLETCHER
Holden!

HOLDEN
I can't hold him down.

FLETCHER
HOLDEN! Look at me!

Holden snaps out of his shock. Fletcher's eyes pierce through the rearview mirror at Holden.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
He's bleeding to death and I can't take him to a hospital. I need you to get the bullet out and close that up, or he's gonna bleed out.

CODY
(crying)
I don't wanna die, don't let me die. Please.

Holden stares back in disbelief.

FLETCHER
(to Holden)
You can do this. You hear me? Just like takin' a bullet out of a pelt.

Holden nods, searching for confidence.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Use the seat belts to strap him down so he don't move. And you need to get something under his leg, use your shirt.

Holden takes off his shirt, creating a make-shift operation table out of the back seat. Fletcher digs into his pocket and hands him a swiss army knife.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
There's some alcohol rollin' around
under my seat, clean this real good
with it.

Holden opens a bottle of vodka and begins to sterilize the
blade of the knife.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Your hands too. You need to get the
bleeding to stop so we're gonna
have to tourniquet his leg. Use his
jeans. Tie 'em up real tight to cut
off the circulation.

HOLDEN
(to Cody)
Help me get these off.

Cody and Holden work to get his jeans off, brushing the wound
in the process. Cody writhes from the pain. They tie it up.

FLETCHER
Give him something to bite down on.
(to Cody)
This is gonna hurt like a
sonofabitch.

Cody bites down on his sock.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Pour the alcohol on his leg. Right
on the wound.

Holden pours it on the wound. Cody lets out a primal yell and
goes limp.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Don't worry about that. Probably
passed out from the pain. Now take
the knife and make a small cut on
both sides of it, gotta give
yourself some wiggle room.

Holden moves the knife toward Cody's leg, attempting to
steady it amidst the jostling car.

HOLDEN
The car's moving too much, you
gotta slow down. Pull over.

FLETCHER
I'd just as soon let him die. We
can't stop.

Holden takes a deep breath and holds the knife with both hands. He brings it against Cody's leg just as Fletcher hits a pothole. His hand slides and slices a gouge in the seat.

HOLDEN
(incredulous)
I ALMOST JUST CUT HIS FUCKING LEG
OFF, STOP THE CAR!

Fletcher SLAMS on the brakes, and the car screeches to a halt. Fletcher looks around frantically.

FLETCHER
You got 90 seconds.

Holden quickly makes two incisions on either side of the bullet. The cuts are haphazard and deep, the mangled flesh promising for a disastrous scar, even if Cody lives.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Good. Now get the pliers out of the
tool box. Douse them off too.

Holden does as he's told.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
You gotta dig for it.

Without hesitation, Holden plunges the pliers into Cody's leg, jiggling them around through the raw, bloodied tissue and flesh until he finds the tip of the round.

HOLDEN
Found it.

FLETCHER
Take it out careful as you can. But
make sure you get it all.

Slowly extracting the pliers, Holden pulls them out of the wound, bullet in tow.

HOLDEN
Got it.

Fletcher floors the gas pedal, the car accelerating once more, bounding across the dirt road.

FLETCHER
This ain't gonna be pretty, but you
gotta close it up. Grab another
round from the back. Smash it open
with a hammer.

Finding a loose bullet, Holden grabs the hammer from the toolbox, striking the bullet until the shell cracks.

HOLDEN

What now?

FLETCHER

Pour out the gunpowder into the cut. You're gonna cauterize it.

Fletcher pulls a lighter out of the center console, tossing it to Holden in the back.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Go on, light it.

Holden brings the flame to the gunpowder, which ignites in an instant. A ball of fire materializes, rolling across Cody's bare flesh. It evaporates into thin air. Gone.

It's over.

Holden collapses back into the seat, sweaty and shaking as he crashes from the adrenaline rush.

Cody's head bobs along with the road, unconscious, but alive.

Fletcher breathes a sigh of relief, his eyes back on the road ahead.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

You did good Holden, you saved his life.

EXT. FLETCHER'S TRUCK - AFTERNOON

Fletcher's truck is parked outside of the cabin. Holden unbuckles Cody from the back seat, trying to bring him back to consciousness with no success.

HOLDEN

(to Fletcher)

I can't get him to wake up.

FLETCHER

That's alright, I'll carry him inside. Help me clean this stuff outta here.

Holden gathers the assortment of tools and bloodied clothing from the backseat.

Fletcher tenderly carries Cody into the house, much the same way he carried Holden the night before.

INT. FLETCHER'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

With Holden following close behind, Fletcher brings Cody through the house towards Holden's room.

HOLDEN
Where you bringing him?

FLETCHER
He needs to rest.

HOLDEN
Not in my room.

FLETCHER
Well it ain't your room, it's my house.

HOLDEN
Can't he sleep on the couch?

INT. HOLDEN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Fletcher lays him down on Holden's bed and shuts the door.

FLETCHER
We can't trust him out there yet.
We're gonna need the lock.

He locks the padlock with a *CLICK*.

INT. KITCHN - CONTINUOUS

Fletcher tosses the padlock keys in the kitchen drawer and readies himself to head back outside.

FLETCHER
Things will be a little different
from here on out, you're gonna have
to get used to it.

Fletcher opens the door to leave.

HOLDEN
Ain't I coming with you?

FLETCHER

You need to stay here to take care of him. Make sure you clean his wound so it don't get infected. And see if we got any Vicodin left in the cabinet. He'll be in pain when he wakes up. I'll be back.

He shuts the door, the sound echoing throughout the kitchen as Holden is left alone to bear the burden.

INT. HOLDEN'S BEDROOM - LATER

A padlock *CLANGS* and is removed. The door *CREAKS* open.

Holden peers inside to find Cody awake on the bed, stifling pained sobs. His eyes go wide as Holden approaches.

CODY

No, NO! What are you going to do to me? Is he still here?

HOLDEN

Relax, it's just me. Here, take this - it'll help.

Holden attempts to hand Cody painkillers and water, but Cody refuses to accept them.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)

I'm not here to hurt you.

CODY

I don't believe you. You already lied to me once.

Holden holds them closer. Cody stares at the offering with disgust, rolling over to face the wall.

HOLDEN

Fine, be like that.

His eyes wander down to Cody's leg - a colorful palate of blacks and blues, blood vessels bursting like a firework display beneath his torn flesh.

CODY

(quietly)

Why... why me?

He looks down at Cody, shriveled up on the bed, shaking, helpless, pathetic.

HOLDEN

Huh?

CODY

I saw you pointing at me. At the bus stop. There were three of us there but...

He trails off.

CODY (CONT'D)

Did you *pick* me?

HOLDEN

I don't know what your talkin' 'bout.

Holden lowers his hand.

CODY

Go away. I'm not taking the pills.

Without another word, Holden leaves.

EXT. CAR JUNK YARD - EARLY EVENING

The horizon is ablaze with an auburn glow.

Mechanical skeletons litter the overgrown forest floor. A wasteland of broken down vehicles.

Headlights sweep across the foliage. Fletcher's truck pulls into the junk yard.

EXT. CAR JUNK YARD - LATER

Tools are strewn across the ground, scattered around Fletcher's truck, which is hoisted up on jacks.

Fletcher removes the car's final tire, discarding it into a nearby pile of scrap parts and metal.

Holden has stripped the seats from the back of the car. He cuts the fabric off of them with a hunting knife, tossing the strips into a blazing fire beside him.

FLETCHER

How's he doin'?

HOLDEN

Okay. Leg's pretty busted up, but I been cleanin' it.

FLETCHER

Best keep a close eye on it, don't want to risk it getting infected.

Reaching for a power drill, he begins to work on removing the truck's doors. He takes Cody's frayed backpack from the backseat, handing it to Holden.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I know I was hard on you earlier, but I want ya to know that you handled yourself like a man today. You did what you had to do.

HOLDEN

I know.

Holden digs through the bag, finding a small folded-up piece of paper inside. He opens it up. A letter is scrawled across it in flowery handwriting - 'Have a good day! Love, Mom :)'

FLETCHER

It ain't gonna be easy going forward, and I know I'm asking a lot, but I'm counting on you to help me out with him. You're gonna have to show him the ropes, help him get used to our way of life.

HOLDEN

Alright.

Holden casts the letter into the flame and watches as it singes and withers away, curling up into black ash.

FLETCHER

I mean it. He's family now, so you have to treat him like it.

Fletcher throws the doors onto the pile, completing the disassembly of the car. The evidence of their crime billowing in the thick black plume of smoke overhead.

The cold metal frame of the car all that remains. Its carcass abandoned, left forgotten to the forest. Blending in with the countless others.

INT. HOLDEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Bundles of blankets create a makeshift bed for Holden on the floor. Cody stirs, breath labored, restless and in pain.

Holden listens as Cody chokes on a sob, trying to muffle the noise, suffering quietly.

HOLDEN

You need rest if you want that to heal. And you ain't gonna be able to get any sleep if it keeps hurtin' like that.

CODY

Just go away.

HOLDEN

Let me help you, please.

Holden rises, moving toward the night stand. Cody goes quiet. Holden approaches the bed with the glass of water and pain pills in his hands once again. Cody doesn't move.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)

Trust me, it'll be okay.

Cody, hesitant, grabs the pills and the water from Holden. Holden retreats to his bed and huddles back under the covers.

He assumes Cody is asleep when -

CODY

(quietly)

He's not your dad, is he?

Holden remains still, pretending to be asleep.

INT. HOLDEN'S BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING

Holden has gotten dressed and ready in the dark, careful not to wake Cody up. He picks up the padlock, moving to the door.

CODY

Where are you going?

HOLDEN

I got chores to do, that's how it works round here.

CODY

What are you doing with that lock? I promise I won't go anywhere-

HOLDEN

I'm sorry, I ain't got a choice. I'll be back.

He steps outside and shuts the door, clicking the padlock shut as Cody cries out from behind the door. Holden walks away, overtaken with guilt.

EXT. WOODS - AFTERNOON

Holden drags a cart full of animals through the woods. His face red, sweat glistening from his cheeks despite the cold.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

An intense game of Scrabble is underway between Holden and Fletcher. Cody's crying can be heard from his room.

Fletcher tries to ignore it, focusing on his letter tiles. His eyes move between the door and the board, brow furrowing.

Cody's cries hang in the air, heavy and piercing.

INT. HOLDEN'S BEDROOM - DAY - WEEKS LATER

A gentle snow falls to the ground outside the window. Holden unwraps Cody's bandage to tend to his leg.

The wound has started to heal, deep purples giving way to soft beiges and pinks. The swelling has decreased tremendously, albeit still puffy and scabbed.

As Holden goes to throw out the used bandages, he notices intricate sketches and geometric patterns on the cloth.

HOLDEN

Did you draw this?

Cody shrugs, dropping his eyes. Holden looks around the room, spotting an uncapped pen on the night stand. Cody notices.

CODY

I'm sorry.

HOLDEN

No, it's fine. These are really good.

Holden smiles at Cody. Cody turns away to the window, preferring to watch the snow fall outside.

EXT. TAXIDERMY ROOM - NEXT AFTERNOON

One by one, Holden cleans the morning's catch. He works swiftly, eyeing the clock with a sense of urgency.

He pins up the last raccoon and rushes out.

EXT. WOODS - LATER

Trees and branches whip past as Holden races through the woods on his bike, headed into town.

EXT. MAIN STREET - LATER

Holden reaches a desolate "main street." The Vegas strip of a podunk Ohio town. He stops outside of a general store and heads inside.

INT. GENERAL STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Navigating the aisles with stealth, Holden works to avoid contact and attention from other shoppers.

Reaching the office supplies and crafts section, he picks out notebooks, pencil sets, and markers from the shelf.

Stashing them under his shirt, he swiftly exits the store.

EXT. FLETCHER'S CABIN - SUNSET

Darkness sets in on the cabin. Arriving home, Holden stows his bike beneath the porch and heads inside.

INT. HOLDEN'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Holden races into the room, arms full of drawing supplies. Cody flinches, startled by Holden's urgency.

HOLDEN

Look what I got for ya!

He lays out the supplies on the bed, spreading the haul out on top of Cody.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)

You don't have to draw on your bandages anymore. I got you colored pencils, paper, everything.

Cody takes it in. He picks up a notebook and flips through it before examining the array of colored pencils.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)

And if you need more colors or run out of paper or something, lemme know. I'll get you more. But uh, just don't bring 'em out when Fletcher's here. He doesn't like me goin' into town and all. So I just don't tell him.

Cody looks up at Holden, genuine appreciation on his face.

CODY

Thank you.

The two boys share a smile.

EXT. FLETCHER'S CABIN - DUSK - WEEKS LATER

A thick layer of snow enshrouds the cabin, the cold permeating the walls. Winter has arrived in full force.

INT. DINNING ROOM - MORNING

Fletcher and Holden clean their breakfast dishes in silence. Finally, Fletcher speaks.

FLETCHER

I took a look at Cody's leg last night, looks strong. Should be able to put weight on it now.

HOLDEN

Yeah. Seems a lot better.

FLETCHER

I'm thinkin' we should bring him with us on the line today. I want you to show him how to handle himself with the traps. Go wake him up, get him ready.

INT. HOLDEN'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The padlock *CLANGS* as Holden unlatches the door, turning on the light. Cody stares at him, disoriented and groggy.

CODY

What's going on?

Holden beams, all too excited to share the news.

HOLDEN

Get up, you're coming with us.

EXT. TRAPLINE - MORNING

Fletcher kneels before both boys. Cody nervously shifts his feet, unable to look directly at him.

While he speaks, he turns the rusted jaws of a body trap in his hands.

FLETCHER

You catch muskrat and mink with this. To set it, you wanna grab the springs and squeeze.

Fletcher mashes the springs together in his hands and sets the trap. He stands up and heads towards the next trap.

Holden follows. Cody limps after them, trying to keep up. Fletcher turns around and sees Cody falling behind.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

I don't think he's going to make it through the whole line. Not at that pace. You take the south traps with him. I'll go on ahead and meet you back at the cabin.

Holden nods and makes his way back to Cody.

EXT. TRAPLINE - LATER

Slowly but surely, the two make their way through the south set of traps. Holden guides Cody, teaching him as they go.

CODY

Do you ever keep any of them?
Like... alive? As pets?

HOLDEN

Nah, Fletcher doesn't let me...
been wanting to catch a squirrel
though, have a cage ready for it
and everything.

CODY

Where I come from, nobody does
that.

(MORE)

CODY (CONT'D)
You either have a dog or a cat.
Sometimes a turtle. But those kids
are weird.

Holden's focuses on prying open a trap, attempting to release
a dead raccoon inside.

CODY (CONT'D)
I got a dog back home. His name's
Obi. He's old and his breath
smells... I miss him.

Holden continues to work, unsure what to add to the
conversation. Cody tries a more direct approach.

CODY (CONT'D)
How come you never run away?

This catches Holden's attention. He stiffens.

HOLDEN
Cause I ain't got nowhere to run
to.

CODY
All you got out here is the woods.
No friends. Nothing to do. Don't
you ever miss home?

HOLDEN
This is my home.

CODY
I mean your real home. Where you
came from. Don't you ever miss
that?

HOLDEN
I ain't come from no where, you
hear me? This is my home and
Fletcher's my family. That's it.

CODY
What about your dad? And your mom?
They're your family. Aren't they
looking for you?

HOLDEN
There's no one looking for me.

Holden turns his attention back to the trap, unable to look
at Cody.

CODY

So what, you're just going to stay
here forever? Are you happy here?

Holden moves in on Cody quickly, threatening, radiating his
pent-up anger. He charges, shoving Cody to the ground.

HOLDEN

Look around you. You see this?
These woods, these traps? This is
what I've got now. This is my life.
And talking 'bout it with you ain't
gonna change that.

CODY

You could leave if you wanted to,
Holden. Could sprint right through
those trees before he'd ever know
you were gone.

Tears brim in Holden's eyes. He looks around, considering the
woods in ways he has never let himself before.

He meets Cody's eyes, holding his gaze. Cody takes in what he
has unleashed.

HOLDEN

Well it ain't ever gonna happen.

He reaches down, offering a hand to Cody, who he helps to his
feet. He picks up the raccoon carcass and continues into the
woods. Cody watches him go for a moment before hobbling after
him, trying to keep up.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Cody and Holden finish clearing the table from dinner. Holden
retrieves the Scrabble box and begins setting it up.

FLETCHER

Put that away, we ain't playing
tonight.

Holden looks up, confused.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Go wash the dishes.

HOLDEN

I washed the dishes last night,
it's Cody's turn.

FLETCHER

Well, I says it ain't. Go wash the dishes.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Holden washes the dishes with bitter aggression.

In the background, the sound of a scuffle. In an instant, the bathroom door flies open and Cody scrambles out, naked and soaking wet, slipping on the floor.

Fletcher runs out after him, grabbing him roughly by the arm and dragging his wet body back into the bathroom.

In the foreground, Holden continues to wash the dishes without bothering to turn around, his resolve absolute.

The bathroom door shuts. Cody wails from inside.

Holden scrubs at the dish, turning up the faucet pressure to drown out the sound of Cody's cries.

INT. HOLDEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The click of the front door echoes into Holden's room. His eyes crack open, sensitive to the sound.

He bolts up, searching the room. An empty bed. Cody is gone.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

A foot drags across the hardened winter soil.

Cody is making his escape. Frantic. Hobbling along as fast as his legs will carry him. Breath heavy.

He's not quite out of sight of the cabin when Holden appears far behind him, but fast approaching.

By the time Cody hears Holden's footsteps, it's already too late. Holden throws himself into Cody, tackling him hard into the ground.

Cody's lungs explode, unleashing a guttural cry of defeat, frustration and desperation intertwined in one note.

He scrambles across the ground, scrappy as he tries to claw his way out of Holden's grasp.

But Holden is scrappier, stronger, he pulls Cody back again and again, urging him to relinquish his efforts.

HOLDEN
Stop it. STOP IT!

Holden pins Cody, holding him still, catching his breath.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)
It's okay, just breathe.

Cody's body goes limp, caving. Tears and dirt smear his face.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)
Look around. We're in the middle of
nowhere. Ain't a road for miles.
You've got a bum leg and no way of
staying warm, you'd freeze to death
before you ever made it out. He
knows these woods like the back of
his hand, no where you can go he
wouldn't catch you. This is your
new life, you live here now. Best
for both of us if you just start
accepting that.

He stands, extending a hand to Cody, pulling him to his feet.

Holden takes Cody's arm over his shoulder to help him walk,
and the two make their way back to the cabin.

Fletcher stands watching in the window, awake from the
commotion. He stares at the two boys, unsure what to make of
the scene.

Holden notices Fletcher as he shuts the shades and turns off
the light - the cabin plunging into darkness once more.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)
And Cody... if you ever try to run
again? He'll kill you.

INT. HOLDEN'S BEDROOM - LATER

Holden can't sleep. Restless, mind wandering into infinity.
Unable to shake the forgotten memories as they force their
way back into his consciousness.

PRELAP: A BUZZING CROWD

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. CARNIVAL - DAY (FLASHBACK)

CLOSE on YOUNG HOLDEN (5) and NORAH (30s) holding hands. They fly through the air on a carnival swing ride, delighted.

The world spins. Colors and sounds whizz by, swirling and blurring into the background as the two scream with joy.

From the ground, TRAVIS (30s) looks on, waving up at Holden who giggles and waves back.

Norah and Travis share a look, enamored by this moment. Wrapped up in the bliss of parenthood.

The ride begins to decelerate as the swings move slowly back to earth, gravity taking over once more.

Holden and Norah stumble towards Travis waiting at the exit. A purple stuffed elephant in his arm - a trophy from the day.

HOLDEN
Again, again!

Norah looks at Travis with pleading eyes, mouthing "*I can't.*"

TRAVIS
Maybe next time bud, we've got to
hit the road.

HOLDEN
Just one more time. Please?

He looks from one exhausted parent to the other and knows they're not going to give in. Making one last attempt -

HOLDEN (CONT'D)
I can go by myself. I'm brave
enough.

Norah looks at Travis and shrugs. He nods.

EXT. CARNIVAL - MOMENTS LATER (FLASHBACK)

Holden hoists himself into the seat, brave and eager.

Norah buckles his seatbelt, giving him the stuffed elephant.

NORAH
Just in case you get scared.

She kisses him on the forehead and begins to walk away as the ride starts to whirl to life behind her.

NORAH (CONT'D)
 (loudly)
 Dad and I will be right here waving
 to you!

The two watch as the ride spins round and round, Holden appearing and disappearing as he rotates by.

As the ride slows to a halt, Holden's seat comes to rest on the far side of the ride, hidden behind the center column.

Kids begin to flood off of the ride, exiting by Norah and Travis who look around for Holden.

Final riders exit without any sign of Holden. The two split up, circling the ride in opposite directions, frantic.

NORAH (CONT'D)	TRAVIS
Holden?	Holden!

They reach one another on the far side. Holden is gone.

EXT. CARNIVAL - CONTINUOUS (FLASHBACK)

Holden thrashes and cries as he is pulled by the wrist through a riptide of people, Fletcher at the helm.

He searches every face he passes, frantically trying to find his parents. Fletcher drags him into a -

INT. PORTA-POTTY - CONTINUOUS (FLASHBACK)

- porta-potty. Fletcher's heavy breathing reverberates off of the plastic enclosure. The blue walls glow from the daylight outside.

Holden moans and cries. Fletcher's grip on him only grows tighter. He is twisted, turned, and spun as Fletcher removes Holden's clothes, forcing his appendages into new attire.

Scissors. Holden's hair peppers the floor in messy clumps.

EXT. CARNIVAL - MOMENTS LATER (FLASHBACK)

Holden emerges from the bathroom with Fletcher - barely recognizable. His hair shorter and his clothes changed. They funnel into the crowd, disappearing into the parking lot.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT - A WEEK LATER (FLASHBACK)

The sounds of frantic footsteps as Holden runs through the woods. Panting and terrified.

Tears streak his face, his eyes swollen. Bruises punctuate his wrists and arms, a tapestry of abuse.

Leaves crunch beneath his feet as he sprints aimlessly, lost in the labyrinth of trees and branches.

He turns left and right with reckless abandon, desperately seeking an exit.

Suddenly he hears a branch *SNAP* and turns to see a bright light behind him, a flashlight piercing through the black.

The light swings in his direction, illuminating his face before it drops to the ground. Hands reach through the dark and grab him.

FLETCHER

And where did you think you were going?

Holden thrashes and kicks at Fletcher who shakes him into silence.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Shhh, listen. Do you hear that?
Nothing. Complete silence. Ain't no sirens, no one stomping through the woods looking for you. You know why? Cause there ain't no one coming to save you.

He shines the flashlights around the surrounding trees.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Closest road is 3 miles from here and you been running in circles for the last 20 minutes. You can run all you want, but it's just you and me out here now. Best get used to it.

Tears fall down Holden's face as Fletcher shuts the flashlight off, darkness swallowing them whole.

INT. HOLDEN'S BEDROOM - FLETCHER'S CABIN - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Rain pours down the window as Holden sits looking outside. The cabin overtaken by a storm.

Holden reaches down to itch his ankle, raw and red, bound by a rope tying Holden to the bed.

He looks back outside and sees Fletcher dragging a coyote carcass back from a trap toward the cabin.

EXT. WOODS - DAWN - A WEEK LATER (FLASHBACK)

Holden sprints through the trees, trying to escape once more.

Over his shoulder he sees Fletcher charging after him.

He picks up his pace. Fletcher falls behind, turning back and running toward the cabin.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - MOMENTS LATER (FLASHBACK)

Holden emerges from the woods onto a dirt road. He looks around, confused. Spotting a phone booth, he rushes towards it as Fletcher's truck thunders into view.

Fletcher gets out of the car as Holden enters the phone booth, throwing the dirty glass door shut behind him.

FLETCHER

You just don't learn do ya?

INT. PHONEBOOTH - CONTINUOUS (FLASHBACK)

Holden surveys the booth, frantic. He lifts the receiver, scrambling to hold it to his ear. No dial tone.

BANG! Fletcher kicks in the glass door, forcing it inward. Trapping Holden inside.

Holden cries out, his screams drowned out inside of the booth as Fletcher drags him out across the dirt road. He flails and kicks at Fletcher, managing to connect with his jaw.

Fletcher swings at Holden in retaliation, knocking him hard in the back of the head. Holden falls limp.

EXT. CLEARING - LATER (FLASHBACK)

Fletcher leads Holden into a clearing, shoving him to the ground next to a freshly dug hole. Holden stares with terror.

Dropping to the ground, Fletcher pins down Holden's arms and legs, wrapping his hands around Holden's throat.

Leaning forward, his weight crushes Holden's windpipe as his face turns shades of red and blue.

Holden chokes and sputters, his lungs burning as he fights suffocation. He digs his nails into Fletcher's arms in vain.

Spittle bursts from the corners of his mouth as the world begins to fade, stars swarming his vision. He fights blacking out as he looks Fletcher square in the eyes.

Fletcher turns away, refusing to look at Holden, his grip around his throat tightening.

Holden's body flails, the moment lasting for an eternity. He stares straight through Fletcher, desperate.

HOLDEN
(garbled, strained)
Don't p ---- pl --- please.

Humanity seeps in, Fletcher is unable to look away. Suddenly, he releases his grip. Pushing off of Holden, he stands up.

Holden rolls into fetal position, choking in air, drinking in oxygen. Body trembling, sore.

Fletcher can't bring himself to look at him. Jaw tight. Fists clenched. He stifles tears.

FLETCHER
Fill in that hole.

He throws the shovel to the ground as he walks back into the woods, a broken man.

He vanishes into the trees, leaving Holden alone as the first rays of sunlight pierce into the clearing.

EXT. CABIN - MORNING (FLASHBACK)

Holden approaches the cabin cautiously, unsure of what to do or where to go. His face sweaty, blackened by dirt.

He stands timidly on the front porch, frozen with fear.

Fletcher swings open the door, his voice calm, leveled.

FLETCHER
I'm making breakfast. You want
anything?

Holden nods.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER (FLASHBACK)

Holden scarfs down a bowl of oatmeal like it might be his last. His neck riddled with bruises, stained with the marks of Fletcher's purple handprints.

Fletcher sits at the table reading the newspaper.

EXT. TAXIDERMY SHED - NIGHT - A WEEK LATER (FLASHBACK)

Holden drags a bag of animal scraps out of the shed toward the decrepit trash bin out front, struggling with the weight.

He looks small up against the cabin. His body fragile, throat still bruised, burst veins running up his neck to his ear.

Enshrouded in a circle of light from the cabin, he shivers in the wind. Just beyond the light, he can hear the woods. Calling him, taunting him, beckoning him to come closer.

The muscles down the length of his leg twitch, aching to run, to try. But his fear betrays him, he remains still.

He shuts the lid on the trash can and turns back to the cabin, shutting off the light, plunging the cabin into black.

INT. CABIN - THE NEXT NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

The cabin has been overtaken once more by the quiet of the night. Only the creaking of the woods can be heard.

Holden sits cross-legged in front of the television. The soft glow from the screen flickers across his face.

Flipping through the channels, he scans news broadcasts, looking for any sign of his story.

Images flash before him, the volume a whisper in the night. Finally, he finds one.

NEWS ANCHOR(O.S.)
... to Amy with the story.

ON SCREEN:

Seasoned NEWS ANCHOR (40s) looks sternly into the camera.

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)
Thanks Tom. Heartbreaking news out of Mansfield, Ohio today as 5-year-old Holden Bridgewater's parents gathered for a news conference.
(MORE)

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)

The young boy's mother, Norah Bridgewater, spoke directly to his captor, in a desperate plea for her son's life.

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS (FLASHBACK)

Holden rushes to the VHS cabinet. Taking out a blank tape, he pops it into the player, hitting record just in time.

ON SCREEN:

Norah sits at a table amongst a swarm of microphones. Her eyes are swollen. Her appearance disheveled, long-forgotten.

Camera flashes ignite, casting her in ghostly white shadow.

A cacophony of voices ring out, assaulting and forboding.

REPORTER 1

Ma'am, do you believe that Holden is alive?

REPORTER 2

Did you see anyone there at the carnival that day?

One voice manages to rise above the roar -

REPORTER 3

If you could say anything to your son's abductor, what would you tell him?

When Norah speaks, her voice is strained, broken.

NORAH

I just want to know where my boy is. Please, if you're out there I beg you...

Her voice quivers. She manages to hold herself together despite her plummeting tenor.

NORAH (CONT'D)

I just wish I could look him in the eyes and know that he's okay... I love you Holden.

NEWS ANCHOR

Tom, authorities are doing everything they can to find the young boy, but warn that in cases like this, its rare to find the child alive after this many -

Young Holden turns off the broadcast, pressing STOP on the VHS player, REWIND, and PLAY.

CLOSE on Holden's face, illuminated by the VHS footage as he rewatches the image of his mother on screen.

NORAH (O.S.)
I just want to know where my boy
is...

Thick tears rolls down Holden's cheek. He turns off the TV.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT - A WEEK LATER (FLASHBACK)

Blackness everywhere. Deafening breathing wheezes through the trees, lungs burning, gasping for air.

Branches and leaves whip at Holden's face as he navigates blindly through the dark, feeling his way.

This place unfamiliar to him, farther than he's ever made it.

Taking no time to look over his shoulder, he charges forward, determined, desperate. His breath fails him, his pace slows.

EXT. WOODED CLEARING - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS (FLASHBACK)

Entering into a vast clearing, he stops, catching his breath. Walls of trees line the space, fencing out the rest of the world. Silent, lit by the light of the full moon overhead.

He studies his surroundings, taking it all in. Something is different. The fire inside of him reduced to embers, gone.

Looking ahead - nothing but black. Dark. Unknown.

A bird calls out from a tree. Piercing the night.

He turns back to where he entered the clearing from. Reaching down, he takes dirt into his hands, letting it slip from between his fingers like sand in an hourglass.

His own slice of Eden.

Holden's breath levels off as he moves through the trees. Back from where he came. Resigned. This is home now.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING - WEEKS LATER (FLASHBACK)

Holden enters the kitchen and slumps down at the table.

Fletcher pours him a bowl of cereal which he begins to eat, sad, resigned. Fletcher clocks his demeanor.

FLETCHER
The fuck's wrong with you?

Holden answers without looking up.

HOLDEN
It's November 5th.

FLETCHER
Yeah?

HOLDEN
It's my birthday.

Fletcher's face falls. He reaches for his keys as he puts his coat on and heads towards the door.

FLETCHER
You stay here, I'll be right back.

INT. CABIN - LATER (FLASHBACK)

Fletcher enters with his arms full of bags. He puts them down on the counter and turns on the stove top.

Holden comes in from the living room to see what he has.

FLETCHER
You ever had a grilled cheesecake?

Holden shakes his head "no." Naive. Confused.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Well you're 'bout to. You'll see
what you've been missing.

INT. CABIN - LATER (FLASHBACK)

Holden sits at the table, waiting expectantly.

FLETCHER
Close your eyes.

Fletcher places a towering creation in front of Holden.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Okay open up. It's my own recipe.

Holden opens his eyes to an oozing stack of bread and cheese.

Fletcher has cut a grilled cheese in quarters, and stacked them like a slice of cake, complete with ketchup frosting.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
They didn't have any candles, so
this'll have to do.

He sticks a matchstick in the top of the "cake slice" and lights it.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Happy Birthday, Holden.

Holden smiles slightly, touched by the sentiment. He stares at the flickering flame as it burns down the wooden stick.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Make a wish.

He squints his eyes shut and blows out the match.

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF FLASHBACK.

EXT. JUNK YARD - PRESENT DAY

A shredded blue tarp whips through the air with a *THWACK* as Holden yanks it back, revealing to Cody what's underneath.

Cody is disappointed by what he sees in front of him, unsure what to say.

CODY
Uhh...

Holden does not share in this indifference.

HOLDEN
Whaddya think? She's a beauty ain't she?

CODY
What is it?

He wheels out his heaping pile of rusted metal scraps, his motorcycle, albeit calling it such would be generous.

HOLDEN
It's a motorcycle!

CODY
Does it run?!

Cody's mind races, drunk with possibility. His excitement swells. He props it up, looking for a way to start it.

HOLDEN
Nah.

Cody's face falls, he drops it back to the ground.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)
Careful with her!

CODY
What's the point of it if it
doesn't even work?

HOLDEN
Been fixing her up for a while.
She'll run alright, I'm just a few
pieces away.

The two stare at the bike. It looks much more than a few pieces away. Holden toes the ground, mustering the courage -

HOLDEN (CONT'D)
I figure, y'know, you could help me
with it. Give us somethin' to do
together.

Holden holds his breath. A lifetime passing as he awaits Cody's response. Nervous. Hopeful.

Cody looks around, uncomfortable by the proposition of friendship but enticed at the chance of freedom.

CODY
(cautious)
Does Fletcher know about this?

A sly grin crosses Holden's face. This is a game to him.

HOLDEN
Nope.

Cody returns a small, nervous grin.

EXT. JUNK YARD - LATER

The motorcycle has been splayed out across the tarp, dissected into pieces - a mechanical autopsy.

Holden crouches down, holding up the parts one at a time and explaining their function to Cody, who listens attentively.

HOLDEN

I already cleaned out the fuel lines and the carburetor, but I can't get the ignition to start so I'm thinkin' it's gotta be the spark plugs. We're also gonna need to find some replacement wiring -

He holds up a frayed, charred wire.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)

- cause I already burned through this one tryna start it up.

Holden points around the junk yard.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)

Lotta cars here probably have spare spark plugs, but the problem is gettin' 'em to work.

He motions to a burlap bag full of mangled plugs.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)

Already tried all of them but... nothin' yet.

CODY

So where do we start?

HOLDEN

Pick a car.

EXT. JUNK YARD - LATER

Holden and Cody wade through the sea of cars.

Stopping beside a rusted Buick, Holden pops open the hood and submerges his arms deep into the hull. He unscrews two greased-up plugs and hands them to Cody.

Cody tosses them into the burlap bag he's carrying. It is half-full at this point, they've been at it for awhile.

Scavenging complete, Holden drops the hood of the car shut. It slams down with a resounding *THUD*. All at once, the car's windows shatter, blown out by the force of the hood.

The two exchange shit-eating grins, pleased with the inadvertent destruction. Cody drops the bag to the ground.

EXT. JUNK YARD - MOMENTS LATER

They sprint through the junk yard, enraptured in the bliss of youthful havoc. Momentary reprieve from their harsh reality.

Holden bears a stick, bashing in windows one after another as he runs along the row of cars.

Cody jumps from roof to roof alongside him, cracking windshields and denting the aluminum in his wake.

The two approach a classic Ford, all four windows intact. They begin to open the doors, communication unnecessary in their shared mischief.

HOLDEN

1... 2... 3!

They slam all four doors simultaneously. A chorus of brittle glass shattering echoes throughout the woods.

CODY

COWABUNGA!

Out of breath and pleased with themselves, they slink to the ground in front of the car.

HOLDEN

Cowa-what?

CODY

Bunga. You know, like the Ninja Turtles?

HOLDEN

The what?

Cody is incredulous, unsure if Holden is joking. A matter he takes very seriously.

CODY

You don't know who the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles are?

Holden meekly shrugs his shoulders, suddenly embarrassed.

CODY (CONT'D)

So they're these turtles that mutated. Cause of this ooze. And it made them as big as humans! They live in New York, well... in the sewer. And they know kung-fu cause their rat dad taught them.

HOLDEN
Their rat dad?

CODY
Yeah, Splinter! He's great. And then after he trains them they fight bad guys and stuff. Oh! And they love pizza.

HOLDEN
Are they real?

CODY
What? No. Course not. It's a TV show, Holden.

HOLDEN
Oh, right.

CODY
I'm Michelangelo, he's the coolest and the one that says Cowabunga. You're probably Donatello, he's super smart.

Holden blushes. Foreign to compliments.

CODY (CONT'D)
And kind of a weirdo, like you.

Holden shoves him playfully.

CODY (CONT'D)
Here, I can show you what they look like.

Cody reaches into his book bag, retrieving his sketchpad.

His pencil glides across the paper effortlessly as the bodies of two Ninja Turtles begin to take shape.

HOLDEN
Where'd you learn to draw?

CODY
I dunno, I just do it whenever I'm bored. Like at school. Wanna try?

He rips a page out of his pad and hands it to Holden.

Holden draws a few lines on the paper. He stops, unable to bring the page to life. He looks over at Cody's sketch, trying to imitate the drawing on his paper.

CODY (CONT'D)
Don't just copy mine. You gotta
mess up, that's how you learn.

Holden crumples up the piece of paper, frustrated. Cody hands him a fresh piece.

Holden draws a new line, then immediately starts to erase it.

CODY (CONT'D)
You can't erase. Just go with it.

HOLDEN
Well ... what do I draw?

CODY
Whatever you want, whatever's in
your head. Use your imagination.

Holden stares down at the blank page. His brow furrows.

INT. DINING ROOM TABLE - NIGHT

The three share a meal around the table. Cody seems calmer.
Well-adjusted, all things considered.

Holden and Cody sit on the same side of the table, whispering
to one another and giggling.

Fletcher watches on from the opposite side - the third wheel
to their conversation.

He tries to interject.

FLETCHER
(to Cody)
Holden told me you set the trap
that caught that fox today. We
don't catch many of 'em round here.
Good work.

CODY
Thanks.

FLETCHER
Those pelts tend to sell for a
pretty penny in town.

A long silence.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
Holden, have you seen the Scrabble
board? Wasn't on the shelf.

HOLDEN
Yeah. It's in my room.

Fletcher's patience wears thin.

FLETCHER
Why's it in there?

HOLDEN
Cody and I been playin'.

Fletcher saws at his venison, ripping it apart with his knife. Holden puts his fork down.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)
(to Cody)
Oh! We should ask him.

(to Fletcher)
Cody was tellin' me he's never been
fishing before.

FLETCHER
(curt)
That so?

HOLDEN
Yeah and I was thinkin'... maybe I
could teach him. Can we go camping
up near the creek tomorrow night?

Fletcher's face is stoic, refusing to betray his thoughts.

FLETCHER
No. It's too cold to be out there.

HOLDEN
We'll build a fire.

FLETCHER
I said no.

Holden calls out the elephant in the room.

HOLDEN
I'll be with him the whole time. He
ain't gonna run away, I promise.

Fletcher stops chewing. He's been bested, his fears exposed.
He relents, begrudgingly.

FLETCHER
Fine.

The boys push back from the table hurriedly.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
But be back first thing in the
mornin', I ain't checkin' the traps
myself.

EXT. WOODS - THE NEXT NIGHT

A spark ignites in the black and burns out. Another spark.
This one catches, forming a glowing ember.

It grows into a flame that eats across a log, spreading down
the dried pile of wood as it climbs into a full-fledge fire.

Holden strings up their catch to cook atop the flame.

The blaze reflects off of Holden and Cody, who huddle close,
warming their hands. Nearby, the soft sound of water running.
The creek glistens in the moonlight.

The woods are different at night. Shadows creep in the dark.
Sounds of life echo into the unknown, surrounding the boys.

Stars blanket them. No city lights for miles to drown out
their view.

CODY
Wow. You can see the stars real
good out here. It looks nothing
like this where I'm from.

Holden looks up to take it in through fresh eyes.

HOLDEN
Yeah. It's really somethin' ain't
it?

He puts another log on the fire.

CODY
You know anything about any of
them?

HOLDEN
A couple of 'em, yeah.

CODY
Let me show you my favorite -

He searches the vast sky. Finding it, his finger points
skyward to a neat line of three small stars.

CODY (CONT'D)

- there. See those three in a line?
That's Orion's belt. Up there on
the left is his sword, and that
over there is his shield.

HOLDEN

Whoa. I never seen that one before.

CODY

Do you know the story about him?

Holden shakes his head "no".

CODY (CONT'D)

Myth says he was a hunter, best
around. He was super strong but he
thought he was better than everyone
else. He would brag that he could
kill every creature on Earth, that
there was nothing that could beat
him. But then this little scorpion
came to prove him wrong. Snuck up
on him and stung him and he died.

Holden's eyes go wide with wonder, wrapped up in the story.

CODY (CONT'D)

So they put them both in the stars
forever to remind people what
happened. But they're on opposite
sides of the sky, so they're
chasing each other all the time.
Then there's that one-

His hand glides effortlessly through the air.

CODY (CONT'D)

- big bright one, that's the North
Star. It's part of the Big Dipper.
My dad showed me that one when I
was little, case I ever got lost.
Always points North so you can find
your way back home.

Cody is overtaken briefly by the emotion of the memory. Home.

HOLDEN

I lied.

CODY

Huh?

HOLDEN

Before. When you asked me if I ever miss home? I do. I think about it all the time.

Cody is relieved to finally hear Holden admit it.

CODY

What do you remember about it?

HOLDEN

My mom. Her hair was the brightest red you've ever seen. She had so much of it. I remember how pretty she looked when she laughed. The way she'd whisper goodnight to me when she thought I was sleepin'. And I remember the way she smelled. Ain't ever gonna forget it. My stuffed animal used to smell like her, but... that faded a long time ago.

He stares across the flames at Holden as if he's never seen him before. Finally beginning to understand.

CODY

Why don't you try to go home?

HOLDEN

Because home don't exist anymore. Least not for me.

CODY

Course it does. It always does.

HOLDEN

I'd be a stranger there. I'm not their son. I been raised by someone else. Look at me.

Holden stands, putting himself on display.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)

I ain't the little boy they remember. Far as they know, I'm dead... and I'm thinkin' maybe that's for the best.

A long silence settles between the boys.

CODY

What would you do if you got out of here, then? Don't you have any dreams?

HOLDEN

I don't know. I never let myself think about it.

CODY

You've got to. Cause some day you're gonna grow up and be big. Too big for this place. What then? You gotta have dreams. I'm gonna be an artist. I'll have pictures hanging up in all sorts of museums.

Holden hangs his head, shifts his eyes to the ground.

HOLDEN

Only thing I ever dreamed of is having a friend.

The fire crackles and pops, punctuating the complexities of such a simple sentiment.

Cody rises, moving next to Holden on the other side of the fire, putting an arm around his shoulder.

CODY

Well you got one now.

The two boys sit, staring into the dancing flames as if looking for answers to questions left unasked.

CODY (CONT'D)

I got an idea.

Cody gets his bag, taking out a pen and retrieving a fish hook from the tackle box.

CODY (CONT'D)

Ever given yourself a tattoo?

HOLDEN

No.

CODY

My brother and his friends do it all the time. I'll do one on you and you can do one on me, that way we'll always have 'em, no matter what happens.

HOLDEN
(disgusted)
You're really just gonna stick me
with that?

CODY
Yeah, it won't hurt that bad.

HOLDEN
I don't know...

CODY
Trust me.

HOLDEN
(reluctant)
Alright. What's it gonna be of?

Cody's attention wanders up towards the stars.

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE on Holden's wrist - a flesh canvas for Cody's vision.

Cody dips a straightened fish hook into pen ink and jabs it gently into Holden's skin, forming a stick and poke tattoo.

Cody moves to refill the pointed tip with ink and we see what he is working on - across Holden's wrist are three small stars in a perfect row. Orion's belt.

EXT. WOODS - DAWN

Cody and Holden lay on the ground in front of the dying fire as the early morning light seeps into the dark sky.

Both of their wrists are red and swollen. A friendship made permanent amidst the swirl of blood and ink.

EXT. TRAPLINE - MORNING

Fletcher walks the trapline alone. He moves with a brutish gait. His footsteps heavy, the ground tremors from the force of his anger.

Cody and Holden approach, panting as they duck and dodge branches.

They quickly fall into step, trying to help with the traps.

HOLDEN
(out of breath)
Sorry we're late.

Fletcher continues his work, stoic and icy. Refusing to acknowledge the apology.

A dead bobcat stares up at Holden - its eyes glazed over, lifeless. He reaches down to open the trap.

Blood from the healing tattoo trickles down his wrist, dripping down and mixing with the animal's. He quickly wipes it away and pulls down his sleeve before Fletcher notices.

FLETCHER
I got it.

Fletcher reaches in front of Holden, making light work of the task and heaving the limp bobcat over his shoulders.

He continues on. The boys fall behind in shame.

INT. HOLDEN'S BEDROOM - LATER

Holden walks into his bedroom to discover a folded piece of paper on his pillow. He opens it up -

Cody's sketch - Michelangelo and Donatello with caricatures of Holden and Cody's faces in place of turtle heads.

EXT. JUNK YARD - AFTERNOON

The hood of a car drops into place. Holden tosses spark plugs in his burlap sack, holding it up to Cody.

HOLDEN
Maybe one of these is the one.

EXT. JUNK YARD - MOMENTS LATER

Holden removes a rubber tube from his mouth, positioning it over a tin can as gasoline starts to flow through the tube. Drop by drop, siphoning gas from the junk cars.

EXT. JUNK YARD - MOMENTS LATER

Cody and Holden kneel next to the tarp as Holden inspects the motorcycle, approving of Cody's work.

HOLDEN
Damn Cody, wiring looks good.
Followed that manual to a T.

Cody beams, proud.

CODY
Ready to try them out?

EXT. JUNK YARD - LATER

The two sit on either side of the motorcycle, failed spark plugs accumulating beside them.

Holden works with a familiar speed, unscrewing the faulty spark plug as fast as he can before throwing it on the ground and replacing it with a fresh attempt.

HOLDEN
Give her a go.

Cody presses the ignition switch and tries to rev the engine.

A high-pitched metal scraping sound as the starter whines without catching. Then silence. Nothing.

CODY
Nope, that's a dud too. Next one.

Holden tosses it into the pile and screws in a fresh plug. Holden gives Cody a nod, 'ready'.

Cody punches the ignition switch again and revs the engine. The engine spits and sputters. The scraping distinct this time, growing into a rumble as the engine turns over. Something catches.

It kicks to life, resurrected from the dead. The roar of the engine rips through the woods, a lion in the jungle.

It reverberates in their chests, a chorus of triumph echoing off of their rib cages.

The two leap off the ground in celebration, wrapping their arms around one another in a bear hug.

HOLDEN
WOOHOOOO!

CODY (CONT'D)
WE DID IT!

CODY (CONT'D)
Go on, ride it! What are you waiting for!?

Holden climbs atop the motorcycle, the moment too surreal for him to process. All of their work coming to fruition.

He swipes at the kick stand with his foot, revving the engine and taking a deep breath as -

SPFFFFFF. The engine sputters, chokes, gasping for life as rust clogs the line. It dulls and dies.

The stillness it leaves is deafening in its defeat.

CODY (CONT'D)

What happened?! Try it again!

Holden revs the engine. CH- CH- CH- CH-. It won't turn over.

HOLDEN

Well, at least we got it to run.

He puts the kickstand back down and dismounts the bike. Cody runs over, grabbing Holden by the shirt.

CODY

What do you mean?

HOLDEN

That thing prolly woulda broken down in no time anyway.

Cody's voice catches in his throat, unable to speak.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)

Well, what were you expectin-

THWACK. The bone-crunching sound of fist against flesh as Holden is struck across the face.

Fletcher stands over him, looking around like a wild animal, frantic to find the source of the sound. His eyes resting on the motorcycle. His voice booms out -

FLETCHER

I trusted you! And you're gonna make a fool out of me!?

Holden lays on the ground, face stinging, tears welling-up against his will, cheek already reddened and swelling.

Fletcher pulls him up and grabs Cody by the shirt, dragging both boys back to the house.

INT. HOLDEN'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The door bursts open as Fletcher wrangles Holden and Cody.

HOLDEN

We weren't doing nothing. I promise-

Fletcher throws Holden into his bedroom. He lands, crumpling to the floor as Cody is tossed in with him.

Fletcher locks them both inside, shaking the cabin to its foundation with his rage.

Cody lies in a heap on the floor. Holden slides over to comfort his friend, but Cody pushes him off.

CODY

You knew it wouldn't ever work. You tricked me. You want me here with you forever?

HOLDEN

Course I do! We're friends.

CODY

No we're not. If you were my friend, you wouldn't keep me locked up here.

HOLDEN

Take that back.

CODY

Coulda chosen any of those kids that day, but you chose me. You kidnapped me, Holden.

HOLDEN

That ain't true and you know it.

Holden wants to deny Cody's accusations, but is unable to defend his actions.

CODY

The last place in the world I wanna be is here with you.

He rolls over, turning his back to Holden.

Outside, snow begins to fall beneath the moon as the cold winter night sets in. Defeated, Holden turns off the light.

INT. HOLDEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Thick and pungent, the smell of smoke wafts through the air. Holden stirs and sits up, awake.

Light flickers from far off. He moves toward the window, spotting the source from the front of the house.

He rushes to the door - locked. Trapped inside, he panics.

Shoving the window open, he hoists himself up and squeezes through the frame, dropping into the accumulating snow below.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

Following the smoke, Holden inches his way around the exterior of the house, finally making his way to the front.

A fire rages, choppy and turbulent in the winter wind. Black plumes of smoke orbit above.

Fletcher emerges from the night, haphazardly pouring what must be a second or third can of gasoline on the fire. A handle of liquor clutched in his other hand.

A ghoulish smile slithers across his face as the flames jump around the darkened object.

Holden wanders closer, and closer, until he can make out the object. A charred slather of metal amidst the blaze. Its figure distinct and recognizable. His motorcycle.

HOLDEN
(screaming)
NO!

He breaks into a sprint, determined to save the bike. He throws snow on the fire in haste, a futile effort.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)
How could you!?

Fury pumps through his veins. He comes at Fletcher, shoving him with all of his might.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)
You monster!

Fletcher staggers before regaining his balance. He pauses to finish off the bottle, which he tosses into the flame. Then he turns and backhands Holden.

FLETCHER
(slurring)
Whatdchyu call me?

Holden recoils, fierce. Not giving up without a fight. He turns, spitting in Fletcher's face, the saliva laced with blood and contempt.

Fletcher's rugged hand palms Holden's face, making light work of his body weight as he throws him to the cold ground, stepping his boot onto Holden's throat.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)
I have half a mind to throw you in
that fire to burn 'long with it.

This is a new Fletcher, drunk, sinister, vindictive.

FLECTHER
You don't think I notice the way
you two been acting? Whisperin'
behind my back? Schemin' together?

Holden flails and writhes, unable to free himself.

FLETCHER
I shoulda never brought him into
this house. Been nothin' but a bad
influence on you.

Straining to speak, Holden gurgles out choked words.

HOLDEN
He's ... my.... f-friend.

Fletcher laughs, a cold, empty cackle.

FLECTHER
All he ever wanted was to get outta
here. He never cared about you. You
hear me? I'm the only one that's
ever cared about you. And now you
gone an' pissed me off.

He jerks his foot from Holden's throat. Holden gasps.
Fletcher comes unhinged.

FLETCHER
I'm gonna kill him. Ain't no other
way. I'm gonna fucking kill him.
First thing tomorrow. Gonna grab a
fistful of his hair. Drag him out
into the clearing.

He grabs Holden by the hair and drags him a few feet across the ground, giving him a drunken demonstration.

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Gonna put a twelve gauge between his teeth, tell him to bite down.

He shoves the toe of his boot into Holden's mouth.

FLETCHER

Then I'm gonna pull the trigger and lodge a bullet in him.

Fletcher makes a gun with his hand and pulls the trigger -

FLETCHER

BAM. Simple as that. Then it'll all be over and we can get back to the way things were.

Fletcher heads back to the house, leaving Holden to process this. He sways left and right, the scent of booze lingering.

Over his shoulder as he trudges away -

FLETCHER (CONT'D)

Rest up, Holden. We got a big day tomorrow.

The front door creaks on it's hinge and shuts. He's gone.

Holden is up in a flash, moving for the house with determination. His mind made up, his fate sealed.

INT. CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Holden bursts through the door, adrenaline racing. Putting into action a plan that feels all-too thought out. A scenario played out in his mind countless times before.

Fletcher is passed out on the couch, a dark, unmoving mound.

Holden rifles through the kitchen drawer until he finds the keys to the bedroom lock.

INT. HOLDEN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

He throws off the lock and opens the door. Once inside, he strips the bed and empties his drawers, piling up his belongings. Erasing all signs of his existence from the room.

He packs essentials into his backpack.

Giving one last, fleeting glance at Cody, he shuts the door. His stuffed animal lies on the floor, forgotten in his haste.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Padlocking Cody inside to protect him from Fletcher, he slides the keys underneath the door and hauls his belongings outside.

EXT. CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

The fire burns strong out front. Holden lugs the bundle of clothes and sheets to the flame, casting them into the fiery abyss. They catch instantly, turning to ash before his eyes.

EXT. WOODS - LATER

Harsh wind beats back against Holden as he slogs through the woods, face reddened. Legs pumping, feet shuffling through shin-deep snow.

His gait slow, despite moving as fast as he can. Lungs burning. Exhaustion setting in. He fights for every forward motion against the storm. Fueled by fear.

EXT. PAYPHONE - DIRT ROAD - LATER

A lone street light towers over a rundown phone booth, half-buried in snow beneath it. The same phone booth Holden made it to all those years ago.

Holden stumbles inside. His breathing labored. His body frail and weathered from the trek.

His frozen fingers dial 9 - 1 - 1.

Each ring lasts an eternity until someone picks up.

OPERATOR (O.S.)
911 Operator. What is your
emergency?

HOLDEN
There's a boy. He's been kidnapped.
And he's bein' held. In a cabin off
the dirt road, just past Alton Dr.

OPERATOR (O.S.)
Can you provide us with an address?

HOLDEN

That's all I know. You- you need to get there soon as you can. He's gonna kill him.

OPERATOR (O.S.)

We'll dispatch officers there now.
Can I just get your inform-

CLICK. Holden hangs up - the line goes dead.

Turning back the way he came, he heads off into the woods.

EXT. JUNK YARD - DAWN

Arriving back at the junk yard, Holden collapses behind a car, in view of the cabin. Fatigue overtaking him. He waits, impatient, his stomach in knots.

From far off, siren wails in unison, growing louder as the cavalry approaches.

Holden watches in wonder as the lights radiate in the early morning glow. Bouncing through the trees, the forest bathed in blue and red.

Coming into view, the cars glide down the dirt road and descend upon the cabin. Armed police spill from the cruisers as they move towards the front door, guns drawn.

They kick in the door, funneling inside, out of sight for several moments. Holden watches, transfixed.

Two officers emerge from the house. A bundle huddled between them. Cody. Holden exhales, relief washing over him at once.

Medics rush Cody into an ambulance, attending to him as more cops exit the house.

Fletcher is escorted out. Wrists bound by handcuffs behind his back. His body tired and haggard but his face passive, bearing no signs of remorse or fear. Unmoved, as if these events were inevitable. A matter of time.

His eyes search the trees around him. Scanning for something that lies beyond his line of sight.

An impossibility, Holden's sure of it, but it's as if Fletcher is looking right at him, sensing his presence.

Holden returns his stare, unflinching, defiant.

Fletcher is forced into the back of a vehicle as more cars arrive on the scene.

Holden watches as the car snakes down the road, vanishing into the trees.

Depleted, he climbs into the back seat of a nearby car, succumbs to the exhaustion consuming him and falls asleep.

INT. CAR - JUNK YARD - DAY

Holden's face twitches, absorbed in a deep sleep, his body contorted to fit the parameters of the backseat.

WOOF WOOF WOOF. The hoarse barking of a dog knocks Holden from his slumber. He peeks out the rear window.

Muddy German Shepherds pull armed policemen through the snowy junk yard, exploring every inch of the crime scene.

His blood runs cold, not wanting to be discovered.

The dogs move swiftly through the trees, quickly approaching. If he doesn't act fast he will be cornered.

Grabbing his belongings, he eases open the back door and slides into the snow. He army crawls to the tree line. Then he takes off running, deeper into the woods.

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - DUSK

Holden emerges from the woods, his clothes ragged and dirty. Skin blistered from the cold.

This is further from home than he has ever ventured. He's exhausted. He walks towards rusted railroad tracks, looking for any signs of life.

Seeing none, he resigns himself to a tree, plopping down in the snow for a short break. His stomach growls.

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - NIGHT

Holden walks along the tracks, using their rusted lines as a map toward civilization.

A horn blares. Holden turns, glancing over his shoulder. The faint lights of an approaching train break through the dark.

Smoke pulses out of the oncoming train as it nears Holden. He hides behind a tree until it is alongside him.

Bolting out, he increases his stride alongside the train, waiting for an opportunity to jump onboard.

Spotting a beaten up train car with an open door, he makes his move, running with everything he's got left.

He tosses his bag in first, which lands inside the car. With a leap, he grabs the handle and pulls himself in, collapsing onto the shoddy wooden floor. Safe, for now.

INT. TRAIN CAR - CONTINUOUS

His gaze drifts outward, the surrounding woods breezing past his eyes in a blur. He watches as everything he's ever known flies by, left behind as the train courses on into the night.

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

A foot bounces, heel jackhammering the tile. A woman sits in a waiting room, hunched over. Eyes puffy and red.

She sits next to her husband, her hands clenched around his. These are Cody's parents, MELISSA (30s) and CRAIG (30s).

A posse of police officers round the corner, one officer carrying a blanketed Cody over his shoulder.

The couple springs to their feet, gasping for air. They lunge towards the officers, pulling their boy into their arms in a tearful embrace. Melissa kisses his forehead repeatedly.

She looks to the officers, struggling to find the words to say "thank you" as effectively as she'd like. They nod in silent understanding, giving the family a moment alone.

INT. TRAIN CAR - NIGHT

The train moves swiftly along the tracks, nearing a stretch of urban sprawl - Detroit. Not far off, the soft glow of the city lights. Holden collects his bag and hops out of the car.

EXT. DETROIT OUTSKIRTS - CONTINUOUS

He tumbles through the snow, rolling to a stop. Venturing off, he heads for the city in search of food and shelter.

In this moment, simultaneously feeling more alive and alone than he's ever felt before.

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Back at the station, the family sits beneath sterile light. Cody, overwhelmed and exhausted, sits on his father's lap. An officer enters the room, carrying a box of evidence.

He takes a seat at the far end of the table.

OFFICER

Sorry to keep you here so late, we just have a few more questions for Cody.

MELISSA

Is this really necessary? It's four o'clock in the morning. He already told you everything he knows.

OFFICER

Ma'am, we have reason to believe your son wasn't the only child being held in that cabin.

Melissa and Craig share a worried glance, this is news to them. Melissa turns to Cody.

MELISSA

Cody? Is that true?

He stands his ground, determined to protect Holden's secret.

CODY

I already told you, it was just me.

The officer opens the evidence box, laying an assortment of Cody's drawings on the table, each depicting the two boys.

OFFICER

Cody, did you draw all of these?

Cody nods, his face losing color. The officer unfolds the drawing of Holden and Cody as Ninja Turtles.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

If it was just you in that cabin, then who is this other boy?

CRAIG

Cody, answer the man's question so we can go home.

Cody shifts in his seat, unsure what to say. He notices a trunk sticking out of the box - Holden's stuffed animal.

CODY

Can I have my stuffed animal back?

The officer looks to Melissa and Craig, exasperated. They shrug, unsure what more they can do.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - DAYS LATER - DAY

Trash shuffles around inside a crusted dumpster. A hand grips the rim of the container. Holden's face appears as he pulls himself out of the rubbish.

He lands on his feet, a half-eaten sandwich clutched in his hand. He attacks it hungrily as he exits the alleyway.

INT. CODY'S HOME - DAYS LATER - DAY

Melissa ushers Cody up the front steps of their home. Cars pack the driveway, spilling out into the street.

Inside, a boisterous crowd touting a "Welcome Home Cody!" banner awaits him with excitement, eager to see him.

Cody's senses are flooded with a hero's welcome. An assault of exuberant faces, fake smiles, and unwanted hugs. Drowning him in an overbearing show of affection.

The whole ordeal obligatory, lacking a reverence for the dark reality of Cody's experience. The celebration of a survivor whose story no one wishes to hear, the truth left unspoken.

INT. CODY'S HOME - LATER

Time has passed. Sandwich platters are empty, relatives have started to filter out. Melissa and Craig chat with neighbors in the kitchen over wine.

Melissa looks around, no sign of Cody.

INT. CODY'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Melissa opens the door to Cody's room and finds him inside.

He is alone in the pitch black, curled up in fetal position in the center of his bed, Holden's stuffed animal clutched tightly to his chest as he rocks.

He sobs with all of his might. Letting it all go. The entirety of the previous months hitting him all at once.

Melissa sits down on the bed next to him. She takes him into her arms, nurturing and strong. She holds him, rocking him as the cries slowly fade, his tears drying up.

MELISSA

Shhhhh. I know, I know. I'm right here. It's okay. You're home now Cody, you're safe.

EXT. DOWNTOWN DETROIT - WEEKS LATER - DAY

Holden wanders the streets, gaunt and malnourished. His clothes filthy and torn.

He passes a HOMELESS MAN, digging through the trash. The man's shopping cart, stuffed to the gills with all of his worldly possessions, is parked nearby.

Holden spots a rolled up blanket sticking out from the cart. As he walks by the homeless man - still preoccupied - he swipes the blanket from his cart and runs around the corner.

INT. URBAN CONVENIENCE STORE - MONTHS LATER - DAY

Holden browses the aisles of a grimy convenience store, eyeing various junk food, snacks, and refreshments. His clothes are dirtier and more worn than when we saw him last.

He looks up - checking to see if he is being watched. The store attendant is busy ringing out another customer at the register. Holden pockets several sticks of beef jerky.

He grabs protein bars on his way to the exit. A second attendant approaches him. He knocks the bars from his hand and beats him, forcing him out of the store.

EXT. DOWNTOWN DETROIT - NIGHT

Holden sits on the street later that night, covered by the blanket he stole weeks earlier. He looks uncomfortable. Cold.

The blinding beam of a flashlight moves across his face. Holden squints into the light.

POLICE (O.S.)

You can't sleep here. I'm gonna need you to move along.

Holden nods, gathering his things. The light clicks off. A portly uniformed POLICE OFFICER (50s) stands over him.

The officer gets a look at him, noticing how young he is.

POLICE (CONT'D)
What's a boy like you doing out
here at this time of night?

Holden clutches his things, looking to make a quick exit.

HOLDEN
I don't know. I was just headin'
home.

The officer looks at his belongings, skeptical and concerned.
Something feels off.

POLICE
Well why don't you let me give you
a ride?

HOLDEN
Oh no, that's okay it's pretty far
out of the way -

A tense moment. A stare down between the two.

INT. COP CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Holden rides in silence in the front seat next to the officer. His face oscillates between the yellow illuminating glow of the streetlights and the plunging darkness.

The officer steals glances at him, studying him from the corner of his eye. Holden gives him directions.

HOLDEN
It's a left up here.

POLICE
Where'd you say we were headed?

HOLDEN
It's just a little farther.

They're driving along the outskirts of the city now. Off the beaten path.

POLICE
You said straight?

HOLDEN
Yeah, just keep goin' straight.

Holden's eyes wander to the door handle. His hand a few inches from the lock. An exit within reach.

The officer grows suspicious.

POLICE

We've been driving for a while now,
you were an awfully long way from
home back there.

Ahead of them, they run out of road. A dead end.

HOLDEN

Sorry. Guess I missed a turn.

POLICE

Maybe we should just head back to
the station and have someone come
pick you up. Is there a parent or
relative I can call for you?

Holden pops the lock and grabs at the handle, thrusting open the door and scrambling out into the night.

The officer throws the car into park and unbuckles his seat belt, fumbling out of the car after him.

Holden is too fast. By the time the officer exits, Holden has vanished, taking refuge in the dark, familiar woods. Gone.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Holden ambles through the woods, crouching down against a tree to sleep. CLOSE on his face; scared, but determined. His features begin to shift, appearing older, becoming -

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TRUCK CABIN - PRESENT DAY

- the face of The Man from the opening. This is Holden, all grown up. The truck stops outside of a used car lot.

TRUCKER

Well, here we are.

HOLDEN

Thanks again for the ride.

TRUCKER

'Course. Hope she's a beaut.

EXT. USED CAR LOT - LATER

Through the window of the used car office, we see Holden conversing with a SALESMAN, unable to hear what they say.

Holden gestures emphatically, excited. The salesman nods and the two shake hands. Holden procures a wad of cash from his pocket and the man hands him a set of keys.

EXT. USED CAR LOT - MOMENTS LATER

The motorcycle sits propped up on the asphalt, metal gleaming in the sunlight. The exact make and model of the bike that Fletcher burned many years ago.

Back from the dead. The bike he always longed for.

Holden runs his hand along the curvature of the machine, admiring its pristine paint job, just as he'd imagined.

He takes the helm. His hands tighten around the bars with muscle memory. He closes his eyes, lost in the moment.

EXT. MOTEL - EVENING

A seedy rundown motel sits beside an abandoned dirt road. The building lifeless save for a single light coming from one of the rooms. Holden's new motorcycle parked out front.

INT. SHOWER - EARLY NEXT MORNING

Holden stands in the shower contemplative and still, allowing the scalding hot water to cascade over his head and down his back. Collecting his thoughts, preparing for the day ahead.

He reaches for the faucet to turn the shower off. We catch a glimpse of Orion's belt, still etched across his wrist.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - LATER

Holden stands in front of a dirty mirror, talking to himself as he practices. We hear snippets of a conversation he is imagining in his head.

HOLDEN
... it's been a long time...

HOLDEN (CONT'D)
... me? Yeah, yeah I've been good
... I have a job ...

HOLDEN (CONT'D)
... No, no, I don't. You still
draw? ...

He shifts, face growing serious.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)
... did you ever wonder what
happened to me? ...

He resets, trying it again with a more casual inflection.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)
... I always wondered what happened
to you ...

INT. MOTEL ROOM - LATER

Holden makes the bed, collecting his things to check out.

EXT. OPEN ROAD - LATER

Holden zigs and zags along the highway. Wind ripples through his hair as he races by the midwestern landscape.

Pure joy radiates from his face. Riding the motorcycle is a childhood dream come true.

The bike curves right as he takes an exit: Killbuck, OH.

EXT. GAS STATION - LATER

Holden rolls to a stop at a two-pump gas station. He parks the bike behind the station and strolls down a quiet street.

EXT. FARM ROAD - LATER

Holden walks toward a lone house at the end of a stretch of dusty farm road. Out front, a boy (20) smokes a cigarette.

He rises at the sight of Holden, a stranger walking towards him. Anticipation courses through Holden's veins as he nears.

HOLDEN
Cody!

The boy squints, walking forward with caution. The face before him all-too-recognizable.

He stares back at Holden as if seeing a ghost. He drops the cigarette, snuffing it out with his foot.

CODY

Holden?

He runs down the front steps, feet unable to keep up with his eager legs. The two reach one another and embrace. A long overdue reunion for a pair of old friends.

Cody holds Holden back, looking at him, soaking it in.

CODY (CONT'D)

This can't be real. That really
you? Standing right here in front
of my house?

Holden chuckles.

HOLDEN

Last I checked, yeah.

CODY

I can't believe you're even alive.
Started to wonder it'd been so
long. How is everything?

HOLDEN

I'm doin' alright. Got myself a
job, working with cars -

CODY

Of course.

HOLDEN

- place of my own.

CODY

No shit? Round here? Or closer
to... ?

HOLDEN

- oh no, up in Michigan.

Cody contemplates the situation as the initial shock and excitement wears off. Guarded, he stiffens defensively. Curious as to Holden's reason for visiting.

CODY

That's awfully far from Killbuck.
You come all this way just to see
me? After all this time?

HOLDEN
I've got somethin' I wanna show
you.

EXT. GAS STATION - LATER

Holden and Cody circle around the back of the gas station, to where the motorcycle sits in all its glory.

A grimace crosses Cody's face as memories flood back from a time he's worked hard to forget.

CODY
Wow. It's beautiful, Holden.
Exactly like you always wanted.
This one actually start?

HOLDEN
(smiling)
Made sure of it before I paid 'em.
She rides like you wouldn't
believe.

Holden looks at the bike, beaming with pride. Cody's eyes stay on Holden, unable to shake the pity he feels for him.

Holden faces Cody and extends his hand, offering him the keys which dangle from his finger.

CODY
What?

HOLDEN
Been looking for it for years, had
to find the right one. I got it for
you. It's yours Cody.

Cody shifts in the bright sunlight, gaze cast down to the ground, unable to bring himself to look Holden in the eyes.

He takes a cigarette out of his pocket and lights it, taking a long drag before responding.

He looks off into the horizon, smoke billowing out of his mouth as he mumbles his response.

CODY
I can't take that Holden.

The keys bristle in the breeze. Hanging heavy in the air. A long moment passes. He lowers his hand, pocketing them.

HOLDEN

Does it make you sick to your
stomach to see me?

Cody finishes his cigarette.

CODY

A little bit. Yeah.

Holden bristles, despite expecting the answer.

CODY (CONT'D)

It just hurts to see you so stuck.

Holden nods. He moves towards the motorcycle, defeated.

Cody stops him.

CODY (CONT'D)

Why don't you come back? We can
grab a drink and talk.

EXT. BACK PORCH - CODY'S HOUSE - LATER

The two sit, relaxing on lawn chairs, beers in hand.

CODY

I worried about you Holden. Every
day for years. Didn't know if I was
going to see you again. Police said
there was a call in to 9-1-1 that
night...

Holden nods, solemn.

HOLDEN

And you never told anyone about me?

CODY

Never. Figured that was what you'd
want. They asked though. First
night, police suspected there was
someone there with me. Found a
picture I'd drawn of the two of us.

HOLDEN

Do you still draw?

CODY

Nah, not anymore. Did enough
drawing in those four months to
last a lifetime...

He trails off, sad. Lost in thought. He reaches for another beer and his shirt sleeve hikes up his wrist.

Where his tattoo used to be is now a mangled mess of scar tissue, a patchwork of soft red lines indented in his flesh.

The tattoo erased after years of self-harm.

Holden notices, his heart sinking, pulling his sleeve down over his own in embarrassment. Suddenly feeling naked and vulnerable. He gestures to Cody's wrist.

HOLDEN

You do that?

Cody's silence serves as an answer. Then -

CODY

Comin' home wasn't so easy.
Suffocated by my parents.
Nightmares every night. When are
you too old to sleep in your
parents bed? 12? Couldn't ever go
to a sleepover. Moms in town talked
to me like I was damaged goods. I
wasn't a person anymore, I was a
news story. Thing is, everyone
wanted to know about it but was
always too afraid to ask. And all I
ever wanted was to talk about it...
but couldn't ever find the words.

Holden listens, soaking it all in. Aware that he is therapy for Cody, the only person who could ever understand.

CODY (CONT'D)

It wasn't you I wanted to forget,
Holden.

A long silence elapses. Holden takes a breath, prepared to say what it took him 10 years and 300 miles to say.

HOLDEN

I'm sorry. For everything I put you
through.

CODY

You've got nothing to apologize for
Holden -

HOLDEN

No, listen to me. I'm sorry.

CODY

Stop. Just stop, you were only a kid, he made you kidnap me -

HOLDEN

He didn't make me.

CODY

You couldn't have known how it was all going to -

HOLDEN

(shouting)

CODY! I *knew*.

Cody stops, taken aback by Holden's intensity.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)

And I didn't stop him. I could have saved you. I lied to you at the bus stop that day, promised he wasn't going to hurt you. Not because I didn't know any better, or because he made me, I did it for me. I wanted a friend. I didn't want to suffer alone.

Cody's jaw tightens, he wipes tears from his eyes.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)

I should never have put you through that. And I wish I could take it all back. I'm sorry.

A long moment passes between the two as the sun begins to set. Neither knows what else to say.

CODY

This mean your going home now? To see your Mom?

HOLDEN

No. It's like I said before...

CODY

She hasn't forgotten about you Holden, I'm sure of it.

HOLDEN

I've got two sisters now. Read about it in the paper. Never met 'em. Don't even know what they look like. They've gotten on with their life. Made a family again.

(MORE)

HOLDEN (CONT'D)
Last thing they need for me to come
back around.

Despite his disagreement, Cody does not push. He understands.

HOLDEN (CONT'D)
I'm heading back to Michigan
tomorrow. Got work on Monday.

CODY
My parents aren't around if you
want to stay here tonight.

INT. CODY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Holden finishes making up a bed for himself on the couch as
Cody enters, the purple elephant stuffed animal in his hand.

He offers it to Holden.

CODY
I kept this all this time. Thought
you might want it.

Holden takes it, turning it over in his hands, a relic from
another life.

CODY (CONT'D)
Wasn't sure if I'd ever be able to
give it back to you. Sure glad I
can.

He turns back towards his room.

CODY (CONT'D)
Thanks for coming back, it's nice
to know you're out there. See you
in the morning.

He shuts off the light.

INT. CODY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cody sleeps soundly in his bed. The clock shows 5:56 a.m.
Outside, the scream of a motorcycle engine pierces the night.

Cody rolls over, looking toward the window as the sound grows
fainter, unsure if and when he'll ever see Holden again.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Holden zooms west on Interstate 30 bound for Flint, Michigan. No cars for miles. A lone traveler on the desolate highway.

He veers right, pulling into the breakdown lane and slowing to a stop in front of an exit ramp up ahead.

The engine idles, dulling to a soft hum.

A moment of contemplation as he weighs his options. His leg bounces on the hot concrete, a nervous tick.

The vast highway stretches on in front of him. To his right, an exit sign reads "MANSFIELD, OH."

Holden revs the engine a few times, mustering courage.

He picks his foot back up and takes off down the exit ramp, headed off course.

EXT. BRIDGEWATER HOME - DAY

Holden's motorcycle glides through a lower class suburban neighborhood and to a stop.

He drops the kickstand and removes his helmet, unable to take his eyes off of the sight before him.

A modest red brick house lined with evergreen shrubbery. An old basketball hoop towers over the driveway, sans net.

The house that was once his home.

He basks in the moment, overtaken by the nostalgia that he's denied himself for so long.

And then movement catches his eye. Through the window, he sees a family having breakfast at the dining room table.

Two GIRLS (6 & 8) eat waffles with their hands. Holden takes a step forward, straining to see through the morning sun.

Sisters that he's never known, never even met.

A woman enters, placing orange juice next to both girls and taking a seat at the table. Her red hair vibrant, distinct. Holden's mother, NORAH (late 40s).

She's elegant, matronly. Just as Holden remembered her, albeit a bit older than when he saw her last.

She rubs one of the girl's shoulder lovingly as they finish their breakfast.

A few moments later they bound out the door, backpacks in tow, headed off for the bus stop. Holden turns his face to avoid being seen.

When he turns his attention back to the window, Norah is gone. Carrying on with her morning unaware of the visitor just beyond her four walls.

Then she reappears in the front door, headed down the steps towards her minivan. Right there, before his very eyes.

The moment he's dreamed of, coming to fruition after all these years. Time moves in slow motion, and still, it seems to pass by in the blink of an eye.

Before he can react, she's left. Pulled out of the driveway in her van, none the wiser.

He kicks up the kickstand and rides off after her, following a safe distance behind her so as not to draw attention.

EXT. GROCERY STORE PARKING LOT - DAY

The minivan pulls into the bustling parking lot of a grocery store and parks.

He follows her as she claims a cart and enters the store.

INT. GROCERY STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Holden watches as Norah carefully examines fresh fruit before placing them into her cart.

He is absorbed by her presence. It is something holy, an impossibility. She rounds the corner behind an end cap.

He trails her in a daze. Mirroring her path as they move across the store.

He watches her from afar, the length of the aisle separating them as she appears and disappears from sight.

Suddenly, she turns, moving her cart down the aisle toward him. He stops in his tracks, frozen. She looks up from her cart. The two lock eyes.

Confusion and disbelief cross her face. Recognizing, contemplating, refusing to believe the sight in front of her.

In an instant he turns, continuing on. She stands, rooted in place in a state of shock.

Norah abandons her cart in the middle of the aisle and runs to the front of the store after him.

She emerges, looking left and right. Shoppers bustle by her. Holden is no where to be found.

INT. MINIVAN - MOMENTS LATER

Norah sits in the silent car, staring off into space. Numb. Processing what she saw.

Part of her wants to believe her eyes, but the better half of her refuses to entertain the possibility. Could it be?

She shakes her head slightly, mounting the same conviction she's held numerous times before. No.

It can't be. It's not him. It never is.

She buckles her seat belt, turns over the engine, and backs out of the parking lot.

EXT. BRIDGEWATER HOME - LATER

Norah pulls into the driveway and exits the car. She makes her way across the front lawn to the steps.

Something catches her eye and she pauses in her path, turning back toward the street.

The mailbox is open, something jammed inside, spilling out.

Reaching in, she pulls out a small bundle of fur. The stuffed animal. Holden's. Her breath catches in her throat.

She looks around, but the street is empty.

Her hands shake. Eyes glisten, gleaning with tears - sad, wistful, relieved. She clutches the stuffed animal tighter.

Slowly, she allows herself to accept the reality - it was him. Her baby. Right in front of her, looking her in the eyes.

All she's ever wanted.

She heads into the house. Her stride brisk, filled with a newfound sense of purpose and something else, foreign to her after all these years - hope.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Heat undulates off of the asphalt, distorting the road ahead.
A striped back scorpion scurries across the road, seeking
refuge on the other side.

The sound of an engine approaches as -

SPLAT. The treads of a motorcycle tire flatten the arachnid
into the pavement, branding it on the road in its wake.

Holden breezes by, cutting through the air with ease,
coasting along the road with levity.

Headed off into the uncertain horizon.

FADE OUT.

THE END