

POSSUM SONG

Written by

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EXT. RURAL HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Moonlight and shadows.

A POSSUM waddles down the middle of the road. He stops, sensing danger. Looks back over his shoulder.

Pinpricks of light emerge in the distance behind him. Headlights. They grow closer, bigger.

The lights belong to a massive, gleaming black semi-truck. It bears down on the possum, coming right at him with demonic, otherworldly speed.

Blinded by the headlights, rattled by deafening ROAR of the the semi, the possum freezes. It's too late to flee.

The possum's lips curl back. His eyes close. His body grows rigid. He loses consciousness, falls over just as...

The truck THUNDERS over him, tires racing by on either side of his body, undercarriage passing overhead, the sound like a chorus of SCREAMING dead animal souls...

...and then the truck continues past him and is gone.

DAY

The possum lies rigor mortis stiff in the middle of the road, eyes squeezed closed, mouth a sharp-toothed rictus. Noxious liquid the color of anti-freeze is pooled on the asphalt beneath his anus.

Its ears twitch. Its back legs kick. It opens its eyes and springs to its feet, very much alive.

We follow the possum as it saunters away from the road and cuts into a mossy forest.

INT. TV STUDIO - BACKSTAGE HALLWAY - DAY

We follow country star EDDIE VESCO (32) -- rangy, blue-eyed, a tall glass of water -- as a starstruck PRODUCTION ASSISTANT (20s, female) escorts him down a backstage hallway.

SUPER: "NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE"

His manager RANDY (40s) follows.

RANDY

I'm just saying you need to rein in the spending a little. The advance--

EDDIE

You're my accountant now? Thought you were my manager.

RANDY

You won't take Jim's calls, so he told me to tell you. He's concerned.

EDDIE

He's always concerned.
(to Production Assistant)
That's why I don't take his calls.

He winks at her. She smiles, charmed.

RANDY

You signed a contract, Eddie. The clock is ticking. If you don't deliver demos in two weeks, you have to return the advance money.

EDDIE

Already spent the advance money.

This is so not what Randy wanted to hear.

RANDY

Shit. Okay. Shit. That being the case we need to come up with a plan, otherwise--

EDDIE

Eddie Vesco has a plan.

RANDY

What?

EDDIE

Eddie Vesco has a plan.

RANDY

You have a plan?

EDDIE

(to Production Assistant,
off Randy)
Best ears in country music, right there.
(to Randy, louder)
I have a plan.

RANDY

What's your plan?

EDDIE
You're about to find out.

Randy is confounded. Over the PA system, we hear the voice of show co-host KATIE COOK.

KATIE COOK (V.O.)(O.S.)
Now put your hands together and
give a warm Nashville welcome to
the one and only Eddie Vesco!

The Production Assistant parts a curtain. Eddies passes through it...

INT. TV STUDIO - STAGE - CONTINUOUS

...and strolls onstage to massive APPLAUSE. He's on the set of the "CMT Hot Twenty" TV show. Eddie waves to the audience. He crosses to shake hands with co-host CODY ALLAN, then gives her cohort Katie Cook a hug.

Eddie acknowledges the audience once more and then sits as the applause dies down.

KATIE COOK
Welcome back.

EDDIE
Good to be here.

KATIE COOK
You've been lying low on us.

EDDIE
Yes, ma'am.

CODY ALLAN
Tell us what you've been up to.

EDDIE
Well, after being on the road
forever with my last record, I
needed to step away for a awhile.
Decided to use that time to get
involved with a few community
programs that are close to my
heart.

KATIE COOK
We understand you volunteer at an
animal shelter?

EDDIE

Yeah, I love animals. But I'm here today to talk about my new project, which is CRIME.

CODY ALLAN

You do realize we're on national TV?

Audience LAUGHTER.

EDDIE

Ha! It's nothing like that. CRIME stands for Creative Rehabilitation of Inmates through Musical Education. Most folks know my story. I had substance abuse issues. Did some things I'm not too proud of. As a result, I was incarcerated for a spell.

The hosts nod sympathetically. Randy looks on from the wings.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

That's when I got focused on songwriting. Prison gave me a second chance. By putting CRIME behind bars, as we like to say, we aim to help folks turn their lives around. Just like I did.

CODY ALLAN

Sounds like a great program.

The audience politely CLAPS.

EDDIE

You can learn more about it on my Twitter. Uh, Instagram. There's a whatsit, a hashtag...

KATIE COOK

We'll post links. But now here's the question that's on everyone's mind -- when can we expect the next Eddie Vesco record?

The audience MURMURS in agreement. Eddie gives them a smile.

EDDIE

Funny you should ask.

OFFSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Randy listens. On pins and needles.

EDDIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Just so happens, I'm headed up to
the farmhouse next week.

Randy smiles, relieved. *It's about time.*

INT. MANSION - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Eddie lies in a giant bed inside his opulent bedroom. Next to him, his wife CHARLENE (28), former model turned painter now five months pregnant.

Both eat bowls of ice cream and watch Eddie's TV appearance.

CODY ALLAN (V.O.)(O.S.)
This is where you write?

One of Charlene's works hangs on the wall behind the bed -- an amateurish, strangely disturbing portrait of herself and Eddie on their wedding day.

EDDIE (V.O.)
Yes, sir. I rustle up maybe twenty
song ideas, just embryonic sketches
really, and then I head off to this
old farmhouse out in the country.
Can't say exactly where, you
understand.

On TV: Eddie winks at Katie Cook.

CHARLENE
Look at you winking at her.

Charlene jabs an elbow in his ribs. He chuckles.

EDDIE (V.O.)
Up there it's just me, an old reel-
to-reel recorder. A couple guitars,
a beat up piano. I work on the
songs until I've narrowed them down
to thirteen I can live with.

CODY ALLAN (V.O.)
And that's the album?

EDDIE (V.O.)

Pretty much. Then it's just a matter of bringing those thirteen songs back here to Nashville, prettying them up and setting them loose.

KATIE COOK (V.O.)

I bet our audience would love a behind-the-scenes peek at the Eddie Vesco creative process.

(off audience applause)

Any chance we could come visit?

EDDIE (V.O.)

Well, songwriting is a messy business.

(smiles)

But I tell you what. When I get back, maybe I'll bring one of the demos with me and you can give it a listen.

(to audience)

What do y'all think?

On TV: The audience goes wild. Eddie grins, eating it up.

Charlene switches OFF the TV. Eddie gives her a look.

EDDIE

I was just getting to the part where I talked about you and your painting.

She puts down her ice cream bowl. Nuzzles against him.

CHARLENE

You really have to go do this now?

EDDIE

I owe them a record.

(off her baby bump)

Besides, that baby is going to need diapers. Last I checked, those weren't free.

CHARLENE

But why some rundown old farmhouse? Why can't you just do it here? Or better, we could go to Paris. I could study paintings at the Louvre while you messed around with your songs.

EDDIE

There's just something about that farmhouse. Hell, it's brought Eddie Vesco a platinum record, a Grammy and two CMAs, and you.

CHARLENE

That's what I am to you? Some kind of prize?

EDDIE

I didn't mean it that way.

CHARLENE

And how do I know you aren't shacking up with some honey out there?

Eddie puts his ice cream down. Puts his arm around her.

EDDIE

I tell you what. You call anytime, day or night, and I'll pick up in two rings. Even if I'm in the middle of laying down the track that's gonna put Eddie Junior through college. How about that?

CHARLENE

'Eddie Junior?' What makes you so sure it's a boy?

EDDIE

I just reckoned we'd name it Eddie either way.

Charlene shakes her head. Crawls on top of him.

CHARLENE

You gonna write a love song for me?

EDDIE

Sorry, I don't take no requests.

Charlene punches him playfully in the arm.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Hey now, not in front of the baby. You don't want to set a bad example.

She turns off the nightstand light.

CHARLENE

Baby ain't here yet. We still got
time to be a little bad.

Eddie grins in the dark. Life is good.

INT./EXT. TRUCK - DAY (MOVING)

A beautiful sunny day. Eddie rumbles down a Nashville freeway, full of excitement as he energetically sings along to some Garth Brooks (or similar) on the radio.

EDDIE

(singing)

*I've got friends in low places,
where the whiskey flows and the
beer chases my blues away...*

NIGHT

Tired now, he moves down a deserted, two-lane rural highway, mumble-singing to Hank Williams' "Lost Highway."

EDDIE/HANK WILLIAMS

(singing)

*Now boys don't start
Your rambling round...*

He spots a pair of GLOWING EYES in the road ahead. Slows.

EDDIE/HANK WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

*On this road of sin
Or you're sorrow bound...*

Frozen in the headlights is a big fat raccoon. Eddie brakes to a stop. Quits singing. The raccoon just stares at him. Eddie gives the HORN a tap.

EDDIE

Go ahead, buddy. I'm waiting.

The raccoon resumes crossing. Its comical waddle makes Eddie smile a little.

HANK WILLIAMS (ON STEREO)

*Take my advice
Or you'll curse the day...*

The raccoon has just made it across the center yellow line when Eddie spots pinpricks of light in the distance. Headlights of an oncoming vehicle. They rush closer with demonic, otherworldly speed.

Eddie flashes his brights to get the driver's attention.

EDDIE
Slow down, mister.

The semi-truck doesn't. The raccoon is smack dab in the middle of the opposite lane now, right in the truck's path.

HANK WILLIAMS (ON STEREO)
You started rolling down...

Eddie lays on the HORN. The semi-truck just keeps coming, headlights growing bigger, brighter, blinding...

...and then there's a dull THUD and a SPLAT as the same massive, gleaming black semi-truck we saw earlier pulverizes the poor creature.

The truck thunders past with a harrowing ROAR...

...and recedes in the distance. All is silent.

HANK WILLIAMS (ON STEREO)
...that lost highway.

Eddie gazes sadly out the windshield at the dead raccoon. Its mouth agape, body flattened, gore besmirched.

EDDIE
Christ almighty.

Eddie glances in the rearview mirror. The semi-truck is long gone. Like it was never even there.

INT./EXT. TRUCK - NIGHT

Moonlight throws shadows across the road as Eddie navigates slowly down a narrow, one-lane dirt road lined by mossy forest on either side.

Nothing on the stereo now. It's quiet. Spooky.

The headlights illuminate a ramshackle farmhouse up ahead.

Eddie pulls to a stop. Cuts the engine. Kills the lights.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Eddie carries a duffle bag in one hand and a case of beer in the other as he approaches, taking in the old farmhouse. Sagging porch, peeling paint, yard overgrown with weeds.

Crickets sing. An owl hoots.

He walks up the rickety porch stairs. Pulls open a CREAKY screen door. Pushes the main door open.

INT. FARMHOUSE - ENTRYWAY/LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Eddie enters, drops his bag. Puts down the case of beer.

He crosses to the living room. Turns on the light. There's an old grandfather clock quietly TICKING. A threadbare couch. Coffee table. Ratty rug.

Eddie wrinkles his nose. Bad smell.

EDDIE

Jesus.

He crosses. Opens a window. Better.

HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Eddie moves towards a door at the end of the hallway. Just as he reaches out to open it, he's startled by a SKITTERING sound from inside the walls.

He stops. Listens. No more sounds. He opens the door.

MUSIC ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Eddie enters, flips on a light switch. He takes in the room.

It's filled with musical equipment, most of it old and worn. A couple acoustic guitars. An old electric hollow body Gibson. A stand up bass. Barebones drum kit. Dusty amps stacked six foot high in the corner. Mic stands. Cables.

Upon a low table sits a reel-to-reel four track tape recorder. Next to it, a beat to hell upright piano.

Eddie crosses to it. PLUNKS a key. He plays the intro lick to 'Dueling Banjos'...but hits a jarringly wrong last note.

OTIS (O.S.)

Always did manage to land on a sour note.

Eddie turns. Sitting against the wall is OTIS REDFERN (43, Black) -- scrawny, feral. Meth mouth, greasy hair under a greasy ballcap pulled low over his ears. His face is covered with weird scratch marks.

EDDIE

Thought there was a bad smell in
here.

Otis chews off a slice of his fingernail. SPITS it out.
There's another SKITTERING sound in the wall behind him.

OTIS

Critters in the walls.
(smiles)
My muses.

Eddie gestures to the four track tape recorder.

EDDIE

My songs on there?

OTIS

Seven down, five to go.

EDDIE

That's twelve, Otis. Seven and five
is twelve.

OTIS

Six to go then. You got something
for me?

Eddie reaches into his jacket. Removes a small plastic bag
filled with stacks of cash. He tosses the bag to Otis. Otis
tries to catch it, misses.

EDDIE

Five thousand dollars.

OTIS

Deal was thirteen.

EDDIE

Deal was for thirteen songs.

OTIS

You'll get your songs.

EDDIE

And when I do, you'll get the rest
of your money. Shit, I thought
you'd have ten for me by now. Ten
at least. What you been up to here
all week?

Otis scratches his the back of his forearm.

OTIS

You in some kind of hurry, Eddie?

Eddie steps to him. Kneels so they're face-to-face.

EDDIE

Nah, I ain't in no hurry.
Except...well, thing is, Eddie
Vesco's got this career that's like
a brand new Ferrari. It's waxed
down and gassed up and ready to
rumble. But for the past two years,
this Ferrari has just been sitting
on cinder blocks because your
junkie ass had to go and get locked
up again. So excuse me if the sight
of you sitting here scratching
yourself and munching on your
booger hooks has got me sounding
less than patient.

Otis chews another nail. Spits it out.

OTIS

I'll finish them songs.

(then)

Except I'm thinking maybe this time
you keep your money. And I'll keep
them songs. Go make my own record.
Tour the world. Make a million
dollars, marry some model...

EDDIE

Charlene isn't just some model.

OTIS

...live in a big ol' mansion...

EDDIE

She's an artist. And a damn good
one, too.

OTIS

...get me a gold record and a nice
new truck. I'm thinking maybe I'll
just do that instead.

Eddie smiles. Tugs the brim of Otis's cap down. Otis swats at
his hand, annoyed, but misses.

EDDIE

You do you, buddy.

Eddie stands. Crosses. Picks up an acoustic guitar.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Just make sure you think this
through.

Eddie strums an open chord. Winces. The guitar is out of tune. He plucks open strings and twists the tuning pegs, trying to put it right as he speaks.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
I mean, if you believe that night
after night thousands of people are
gonna travel from miles around and
spend money they don't have to see
your scrawny old ass stumble out
there quivering and shaking all
dope sick, then sure. Go for it.

Otis glowers.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Course, some folks may get upset
when that chicken squawk voice of
yours gives out after only two
songs. Or you have to cancel a
bunch of dates because of
"exhaustion" or "laryngitis" or
"the flu." But you know, haters
gonna hate.

Eddie continues tuning but for all his confident plucking and peg twisting, he's only making the guitar sound worse.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Media is a pain in the ass, too.
Sitting through all them
interviews, trying to smile and be
polite and sound smart. People
taking your picture all the damn
time. But a handsome, educated
young fella like you? I don't
foresee any problems there.

OTIS
Alright. You said your piece.

EDDIE
The only problem I can see, the one
detail that could get in your way,
is if anyone were to find out you
spent eighteen years in prison for
killing your wife.

Otis glares at him.

OTIS
I'm an innocent man.

EDDIE
Hell, maybe you are. Except you couldn't convince no judge and jury, could you? But hey, maybe you'll do better with the American public. They're a non-judgemental, open minded bunch. If you think that, then by all means. Shoot your shot.

Eddie strums the guitar. It sounds awful now, completely out of tune. Oblivious, Eddie puts it down with a smile.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Otherwise? Maybe we just stick to our arrangement.

Otis stands. Tears in his eyes. He steps to Eddie.

OTIS
You're a mean son of a bitch.
That's what no one knows about
Eddie Vesco. Underneath it all,
you're nothing but a lowdown
vermin.

Eddie turns. Strolls toward the door.

EDDIE
Finish them songs, Otis.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - BACK PORCH - NIGHT

Eddie kicks back in a rocking chair, drinking beer, watching fireflies dance in the yard. He listens through the wall as Otis plays a demo he's been working on. It has no vocals yet.

Eddie calls over his shoulder, into the house.

EDDIE
Damn, Otis. You sure can put chords together. Think how good those are gonna sound with my voice. Could be Eddie Vesco's best record yet.

Otis stops the playback.

OTIS (O.S.)
Gonna need you to go ahead and shut
the fuck up now so I can get to
work.

EDDIE
(amused)
Sure, buddy. You're the boss.

Eddie is taking another sip of beer when he's startled by a noise behind him. He turns and glimpses a naked rodent tail as it slithers into a hole in the wall.

Eddie shudders. Shakes his head. Takes another sip.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MUSIC ROOM - NIGHT

Otis sits on the piano bench, scratching. He ties a ligature around his arm. He takes out a baggie of heroin and a spoon. Then he looks to a small hole in the wall near the drum kit.

Inside the hole, two beady eyes stare back at him.

OTIS
Don't worry. I won't let nothing
happen to you.

Otis cooks up his heroin shot. Produces a needle.

OTIS (CONT'D)
Just need to take my medicine, then
we'll get started.

He draws the liquid into a needle. In the other room, the grandfather clock begins its MIDNIGHT CHIME.

FADE TO:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Blue skies and sun. Birds singing in the breeze.

Another glorious day in God's country.

INT. FARMHOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A bleary-eyed Eddie wakes on the couch, disoriented. He squints at the empty beer cans on the coffee table and remembers where he is.

He rises unsteadily, head throbbing.

KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Eddie enters the kitchen. Opens the fridge.

Inside, nothing but a half empty two-liter bottle of grape soda and a take-out container.

Eddie opens the take out container. It's filled with worms wriggling in dirt. He makes a face, disgusted. Yells.

EDDIE

Otis, goddamnit. Can you not keep
your fish bait in the fucking
fridge for Christ's sake?

No answer. Not that he was expecting one. He puts back the container, closes the fridge door.

HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Eddie snorts and scratches his ass and makes his way toward the music room door. KNOCKS on it.

EDDIE

You in there?
(beat)
Come on, Otis.

Silence. Eddie pushes the door opened.

MUSIC ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Eddie enters. Looks around the room. Finally spots Otis lying on the floor near the piano bench.

EDDIE

Rise and shine, buddy.

No reply. Eddie crosses. Nudges Otis with his boot.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Wake your ass up.

Eddie shoves him harder with his boot. Otis rolls over. His eyes are squeezed closed, stiff blue lips pulled back in a rictus of a smile.

Otis is deader than disco.

Eddie eyes the ligature nearby. The spoon. The needle. A baggie of heroin.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
(under his breath)
You dumb son of a bitch.

He backs away. Paces. Frightened. Unsure what to do. He eyes the tape recorder sitting on the table. Eyes Otis again.

At length he reaches a silent decision.

INT./EXT. TRUCK - DAY (MOVING)

Eddie motors up the narrow dirt road. The radio HISSES static. He turns it off, focused on the task at hand.

Eddie eyes the rearview mirror. Sees Otis's body wrapped in a blue tarp in the back of the pick up truck.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - SUNSET

Two tire-tracks cutting through weeds. Eddie pulls over.

He looks around. On one side, thick forest. On the other, an old railroad trestle bridge crossing a deep river.

Eddie walks to the back of the pick-up. He takes another look to make sure no one is around, then OPENS the tailgate.

The tarp SNAPS and RUSTLES in the wind.

EXT. EMBANKMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Shouldering Otis's tarp-wrapped corpse, Eddie crashes through underbrush and trees as he heads down the embankment toward the river. He sweats with the effort.

EDDIE
(breathless)
How'd a skinny bastard like you get
so damn heavy?

He stumbles, nearly falling. Rights himself. Continues.

EXT. RIVER BANK - MOMENTS LATER

Eddie lurches down the side of the river until he has reached the base of the trestle bridge. He tries to lower Otis gently to the ground but loses his grip.

Eddie winces as Otis hits the ground like a sack of potatoes.

EDDIE

My bad.

He checks one more time to make sure no one is watching, then unwraps the tarp.

He drags Otis corpse across the ground by its heels, then props it into a sitting position against the base of the bridge.

He then arranges the heroin gear nearby -- the ligature, baggie, spoon, hypodermic needle.

Eddie rolls up the tarp. Tucks it under his arm. Then he steps back, scrutinizes his work.

The wind blows harder now.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

I am sorry, Otis. But Eddie Vesco can't have folks sniffing around, asking about what you were doing at the farmhouse and such. Even if I buried you, well, you might still get found, and then it would look like foul play. Instead of what it was, which was you dying from the pre-existing condition of being a dumbass.

(then)

Not to speak ill of the dead.

(then)

So this is gonna have to do for your final resting place.

(then)

I guess I should say a few words.

Eddie removes his hat. Lowers his head.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Dear Lord, here lies -- er, sits -- Otis Redfern. He might not have been what you'd call a good man, but he wasn't the worst. Taught me a lot about music when we were cell mates. And he wrote some damn good songs for that first album of mine.

(then)

Otis, I hope we cross paths again one day. Don't want think too much about where that might be, but I reckon at least we'll have plenty of company.

(then)

(MORE)

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Amen.

(then)

Take care, buddy.

Eddie's just turning to leave when a GUST OF WIND blow's Otis's hat clean off his head, revealing a large bald spot.

As Eddie looks closer, he's startled to see small, downy white hairs sprouting from the top of Otis's head. Thick black hairs grow from the upper tips of his ears, which look strangely elongated.

Eddie turns away, disturbed, and heads up the embankment.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Eddie rolls up in his truck, blasting country music. He slams on the brakes, kicking up a cloud of dust that swirls in the headlights.

He kills the engine. The music and lights die. All is silent.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MUSIC ROOM - NIGHT

Eddie enters. Takes in the room. It feels different now that Otis died here.

He walks over to the tape recorder. Rewinds it a bit. He puts on the headphones. Hits playback on the last song Otis was recording. A slow, dark country dirge on piano. He hears Otis's phlegmatic, slurry delivery of the lyric...

OTIS (V.O.)

(singing)

*She said 'I've come,
But I cannot stay,
Wind what carried me here,
Gonna carry me away.'*

Eddie listens intently, moved by the song. The tune goes on a moment longer...then there's a PIANO CRASH like someone hitting the keyboard followed by...

...the SCREECH of animal?

Then silence.

Puzzled, he rewinds. Listens again.

OTIS (V.O.)

*Wind what carried me here,
Gonna carry me away.*

Then CRASH. SQUEAL. Silence. Eddie stops the playback. Takes off the headphones.

He crosses, sits at the piano. Takes a deep breath. Cracks his knuckles. In the other room, the grandfather clock begins to CHIME midnight.

Eddie plays a chord. Sings over it...

EDDIE
(singing)
*She said 'I've come,
But I cannot stay...*

He wrinkles his brow. Doesn't sound right. He tries again with a different starting chord...

EDDIE (CONT'D)
(singing)
She said 'I've come...'

Chord is still wrong. Frustrated, he tries again.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
(singing)
*She said 'blah blah blah,
How you doing today,
The wind...
It fucking blows...*

Eddie sputters out. He pounds the keyboard. Once, twice, three times, hitting it in time with the chiming of the clock. As both sounds die out he looks up and sees...

A possum. It's standing atop the piano, staring right at him.

Eddie SCREAMS! Equally startled, the possum HISSES and leaps from the piano.

The possum scurries across the room. Eddie jumps up from the piano bench, grabs a guitar by the neck. He brandishes it like a club as he chases Possum through the room, trying to corral it toward the door.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
You little bastard! Get!

But instead of going out the door to the hallway, the animal scurries the opposite direction, toward the drum kit.

Eddie swings at it and misses, hitting the crash cymbal. CRASH! The cymbal falls, hitting a snare drum, knocking it right in Eddie's path.

He trips over it, making an UNHOLY RACKET as more drums and cymbals come crashing down...

...and the possum squeezes into the hole in the wall.

INNER WALL - TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

The possum races through a narrow, twisting tunnel in the walls as Eddie rages other the other side.

EDDIE (O.S.)

Don't come back now! You hear?

Terrified, heart POUNDING, the critter clamors over a path strewn with scavenged food remnants -- apple cores, egg shells, animal bones, empty cans of cat food.

He hits a downhill section of the tunnel. Falls and tumbles head over heels into the...

INNER WALL - POSSUM DEN - CONTINUOUS

...where he finally rolls to a stop in thick nest of leaves, twigs, discarded food wrappers. The possum lies on his back, eyes closed panting, gasping for breath.

POSSUM JILL (O.S.)

Jack?

POSSUM JACK -- for that is his name -- opens his eyes to see POSSUM JILL standing over him, looking down, confused.

POSSUM JILL (CONT'D)

You're back already?

Possum Jack rolls to his feet. Shakes himself off.

POSSUM JACK

We've got to get out here.

POSSUM JILL

Why? What happened?

POSSUM JACK

Patron is gone.

POSSUM JILL

What?

POSSUM JACK

There was some new guy in the song place.

POSSUM JILL

Who?

POSSUM JACK

I don't know. The guy I saw last night on the porch. He tried to kill me. We've got to leave. Now.

Possum Jill grimaces. Begins to pace.

POSSUM JILL

Calm down. Let's think this through. You said this guy was in the song place?

(off his nod)

Was he making songs?

POSSUM JACK

He was trying.

Possum Jill ponders. Reaches a conclusion.

POSSUM JILL

Bite him.

POSSUM JACK

What? No. Jill, I'm telling you, this guy is crazy. There are people you bite, and people you don't, and this guy --

POSSUM JILL

Give him the itch. Make him the new patron.

POSSUM JACK

No. No, no, we'll go somewhere else. Somewhere new, a place with lots of patrons, where we can make an informed choice before --

POSSUM JILL

Oh no you don't.

She steps to him, simmering with anger.

POSSUM JILL (CONT'D)

This was your idea. I wanted to go to the city, where there's patrons everywhere, but no. You insisted we come here.

Possum Jack backs away, intimidated.

POSSUM JILL (CONT'D)

You said the old patron wouldn't endure, that he was taking too much medicine, that he was going to die any moment. You said we'd be able to feast on him the whole winter.

POSSUM JACK

We would've! If this new guy hadn't come along and --

Possum Jill makes a jack off motion.

POSSUM JILL

If-if-if-if-if. I'm sick to death of nothing ever being your fault.

POSSUM JACK

Fine. It's my fault. I'll take full responsibility if it makes you feel better. But we need to get out of here before --

POSSUM JILL

We're not going anywhere.
(then)
I'm pregnant.

Possum Jack takes this in, mouth agape. Possum Jill turns to face the wall, as if looking into the room beyond it. Her resolve hardens.

POSSUM JILL (CONT'D)

Bite him. It's our only hope.

LIVING ROOM - DAY

Eddie is crashed out face down on the couch. His phone rings from the coffee table. Once, twice. He wakes groggily. The phone rings a third time. He picks it up.

EDDIE

Hey, sugar.

CHARLENE (ON PHONE)

What happened to picking up in two rings?

EDDIE

Late night in the studio. How you doing?

INT. MANSION - ART STUDIO - DAY

The room is crammed with easels and drop cloths and painting supplies. Charlene wears overalls splattered with red paint.

CHARLENE

Been better. I was just at Moxie Art Supply. Our credit card got decline.

EDDIE (ON PHONE)

It did? I'll look into it. Just use the other one for now. What are you working on?

On Charlene's canvas, a lone figure walking down a deserted, moonlit highway. Charlene scrapes away a bit of paint with a sharp, stainless steel palette knife.

CHARLENE (ON PHONE)

'Wayfaring Stranger.' When are you coming home?

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

EDDIE

I practically just got here.

CHARLENE

The doctor wants to schedule a sonogram next week.

EDDIE

Really? I didn't feel no lumps last time we --

CHARLENE

Sonogram, Eddie. Where they tell you if it's a boy or a girl?

EDDIE

Oh. Right.

CHARLENE

Don't you think you should be there for that?

EDDIE

I don't see how me being there is gonna affect the outcome much one way or the other.

CHARLENE

Eddie...

EDDIE
I'm kidding. I'm kidding.

He wasn't.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
I'll be there. When is it again?

CHARLENE
On Wednesday.
(then)
How are the songs coming along?

There's a sudden SCRATCHING sound under the floorboards beneath his feet. He glowers. Forces cheer into his voice.

EDDIE
Good. Everything is good.

MUSIC ROOM - SUNSET

Eddie sits at the piano. He unscrews a handle of Jack Daniels and puts it on top of the piano. He looks down at the keyboard, determined. Trying to psyche himself up.

EDDIE
(under his breath)
Alright, Eddie Vesco. We're getting these songs done one way or the other.

He plays the opening chord of Otis's last song.

HOURS LATER

Atop the piano, the whiskey bottle is half empty.

A wasted Eddie plays the same chord again, badly.

He sways back and forth, glassy eyed. Then he leaps to his feet. Flips the bench over in a rage. He grabs a tambourine and HURLS it against the wall.

INNER WALL - TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Possum Jack winces as the tambourine HITS, the sound reverberating in the tunnel. He cowers, watching Eddie rage. *Is he really going to try to bite this mad man?*

MUSIC ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Eddie lies spread-eagled the floor, laughing maniacally.

Possum Jack timidly emerges from his hole. He creeps around the drum kit. Tiptoes underneath the piano.

He inches closer to Eddie. Petrified now, careful not to make the slightest sound.

Possum Jack approaches Eddie's outstretched hand. Summoning every last ounce of courage he opens wide his mouth...

...and BITES!

Eddie hollers! Scrambles to his feet. Sees Possum Jack's tail snaking around the drum kit.

Possum Jack sprints toward the hole in the wall, legs churning, safety just within reach.

Then he's suddenly hoisted in the air by his tail, upside down and nose-to-nose with Eddie.

EDDIE

Gotcha.

HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Eddie now carries Possum Jack by the scruff of the neck. Possum Jack SNARLS and HISSES, squirming to break free.

EDDIE

Relax, buddy. I ain't the killing type.

KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Still holding Possum Jack aloft in one hand, Eddie searches under the kitchen sink with the other.

EDDIE

Just gonna drive you somewhere...

He finds a sturdy, reusable shopping bag -- good enough -- and a roll of duct tape.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

...far enough away you don't never find your way back.

Eddie stands. Starts to lower Possum Jack into the bag. Possum Jack's eyelids flutter and his mouth goes wide and he's just about to lose consciousness from fear when his SCREECHES suddenly transform into intelligible English.

POSSUM JACK

Put me down! Please! Let me go!

Eddie stares. Gape mouthed. Astonished.

Then he SCREAMS!!!

He drops the possum on the counter backs away, terrified.

POSSUM JACK (CONT'D)

There's nothing to be afraid of.

Eddie's lips move but no words will come.

POSSUM JACK (CONT'D)

In a moment, you're going to pass out. But we'll speak again soon.

Eddie turns and races from the room in a panic.

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

He stumbles some ways down the hall and then stops, unable to continue.

His mouth goes wide and his eyes roll back and he falls like a sack of potatoes.

NIGHT

Eddie comes to with a start. Sweaty, achy, vision swimming as he stares at the ceiling. He scratches the throbbing bite wound on his hand.

Then he shifts his gaze and sees Possum Jack sitting atop his chest. Eddie SHRIEKS! He sits up, dislodging Possum Jack from his chest, and scrambles backward.

POSSUM JACK

You're okay. You're not hallucinating or going crazy or anything like that. I can talk. I always could. All that's changed is you can understand me now because you have the itch.

EDDIE

Wh-wh-wha--

POSSUM JACK

Relax. It's a good thing. It means
now I can help you make songs.

Eddie stares, slackjawed.

POSSUM JACK (CONT'D)

Come. I'll show you.

Possum Jack traipses down the hall. Eddie rises unsteadily.
Shakes his head. Hesitates. Then follows.

MUSIC ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Possum Jack walks into the room, then leaps up onto the
coffee table next to the tape recorder. Eddie follows.

POSSUM JACK

Let me know when you're ready.

Eddie eyes him suspiciously. He REWINDS the tape a bit. Hits
PLAY. Nothing but empty TAPE HISS. He rewinds further. Hits
PLAY again. Same hiss. Panicked, he rewinds the reel
completely back. Hits PLAY. There's nothing. The reel is
completely blank.

POSSUM JACK (CONT'D)

Old Patron's songs are gone.

It takes a moment for this to sink in.

EDDIE

No. No, no, no.

Eddie hits PLAY again, frantically fiddles with knobs on the
recorder, hoping against hope. But there's nothing. Eddie
hits STOP, defeated.

POSSUM JACK

We must make new songs. For New
Patron. That's you.

Eddie can't believe it. He looks like he might cry.

POSSUM JACK (CONT'D)

Pick an instrument. Any instrument.

EDDIE

Seriously?

POSSUM JACK

Pick one.

Eddie stands. Looks around. Grabs an acoustic guitar.

POSSUM JACK (CONT'D)

Do you know chords?

EDDIE

Some.

POSSUM JACK

Play a chord. Any chord.

Eddie smirks. Strums an open G.

Possum Jack begins to subtly sway from side-to-side as if animated by the notes' vibrations.

POSSUM JACK (CONT'D)

Excellent choice. Now look at me.
Look me right in the eye and play
it again.

Eddie strums the chord again. As the notes ring out...

...the room slowly transforms, growing dark and cavernous. The walls take on a skin like texture and are lined with downy white hairs. It's like being inside, well, a marsupial pouch.

Eddie looks around, freaked out.

POSSUM JACK (CONT'D)

Keep your eyes on me. Play the
chord one last time.

Eddie swallows hard. Strums the chord. Possum Jack sways more deeply now. His tail moves like a snake-charmed cobra. Eddie stares, hypnotized by Possum Jack's movement.

Then Possum Jack closes his eyes, opens his mouth as wide as possible...and goes completely rigid.

Eddie bursts into song. His hands dance across the guitar, simultaneously fingerpicking the bass line and melody of a rollicking uptempo romp.

Words fly out of his mouth.

EDDIE

(singing)

*Met an ol' gal down in Tullahoma,
And the lovin' she gave me,
Nearly put me in coma,
Now I'm on the run,
Her husband after me...*

Suddenly Possum Jack's eyes pop open. His mouth snaps shut. Eddie's music instantly stops. The room goes back to normal.

Eddie drops the guitar like it's bitten him and stares at Possum Jack in disbelief.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

The fuck was that?

POSSUM JACK

Making a song.

EDDIE

How do you know about Tullahoma?
Nobody knows about Tullahoma.
(changing courses)
Shit, who cares? Hot damn! Let's
get this on tape.

He hastily plugs in a mic. Positions it. Picks up the guitar again. He hits RECORD.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Okay. From the top.

POSSUM JACK

We must first reach an agreement.

Eddie grimaces, annoyed. Stops recording.

EDDIE

Everyone has a price, huh? Alright,
fine. What do you want?

POSSUM JACK

No harm must come to me or my kin.

EDDIE

Done. Won't touch a hair on your
head.

He goes to press RECORD again. But Possum Jack continues.

POSSUM JACK

Each day you must make an offering.

EDDIE
A what now?

POSSUM JACK
You must bring food.

INNER WALL - TUNNEL - SAME TIME

Possum Jill watches anxiously out the hole in the wall,
silently mouthing Possum Jack's words as he speaks.

POSSUM JACK (O.S.)
This offering must be delivered to
the song place each day by sunset.

It's clear she's rehearsed Possum Jack for the negotiation.

MUSIC ROOM - SAME TIME

POSSUM JACK
We must be left to consume this
offering, undisturbed, until
midnight.

EDDIE
(chuckling)
Four hour lunch break? You a union
possum?

POSSUM JACK
At midnight, you may enter.
Together we will make a song.

EDDIE
Just one?

POSSUM JACK
Upon its delivery, I shall depart.

EDDIE
So just one song per night?
(off his nod)
For how long?

POSSUM JACK
For as long as you are New Patron.

EDDIE
And how long is that?

POSSUM JACK
For as long as you endure.

Eddie makes a face, not liking this answer much.

POSSUM JACK (CONT'D)
Do we have an agreement?

Eddie ponders a beat before...

EDDIE
Yeah. We got an agreement.

POSSUM JACK
Excellent. The hour has grown late.
I must go now. We'll begin
tomorrow. Don't forget, the
offering must be made by sunset.

With that Possum Jack waddles off.

EDDIE
Right. Sunset.

Once Possum Jack is gone, Eddie picks up the guitar again.
Tries to play the song they just started together. His
efforts are fumbling, clumsy. He can't get through two bars.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Aw, fuck it.

Realizing the futility, he puts the guitar aside.

INT. RURAL GAS STATION - DAY

Eddie picks items from the shelves. Cheetos. Ding-Dongs. Slim
Jims. The wound on his hand is swollen, festering.

He grabs some anti-septic cream. Band-Aids. Cotton swabs.
Anti-itch cream. Then he makes his way to check out.

The CLERK (50s) sets aside the Bojangles fast-food chicken
sandwich he's munching on. Eyes Eddie's hand as Eddie puts
his items on the counter.

CLERK
Something got a piece of you, huh?

EDDIE
Yep. Possum.

CLERK
Couldn't have been no possum.
Possum don't bite.

The clerk rings him up. Eddie scratches himself.

EDDIE
Guess this one is special.

INT. FARMHOUSE - INNER WALL - POSSUM DEN - NIGHT

Possum Jill eyes the junk food, unimpressed.

POSSUM JILL
New Patron calls this an offering?

She picks up the Cheetos bag, reads.

POSSUM JILL (CONT'D)
'Ferrous Sulfate, Niacin, Thiamin
Mononitrate...' this is all
processed junk!

POSSUM JACK
He's new.

POSSUM JILL
Half these babies are gonna be born
dead if you feed me this stuff.

POSSUM JACK
I'll speak with him.

POSSUM JILL
When? I'm due in a week.

POSSUM JACK
Tonight. I'll encourage him to
offer more nutritious --

POSSUM JILL
Don't encourage. Demand.

He looks away, ashamed. Softening, she sidles up next to him.
Leans her head against his shoulder.

POSSUM JILL (CONT'D)
You're a good possum, Jack. And you
have a gift. You're a Legend. But
when it comes to patrons, you
always get this Stockholm Syndrome
thing--

POSSUM JACK
I know how they suffer.

POSSUM JILL
-- where you can't see what's
really going on.
(MORE)

POSSUM JILL (CONT'D)
 Patrons are not your friends. If
 you don't stand up for yourself,
 people will stick a knife in you
 every time.

Possum Jack grows pensive. Wistful.

POSSUM JACK
 I miss Old Patron. I feel like we
 had something special.

POSSUM JILL
 I was looking forward to eating
 him, too. But life goes on. This is
 the New Patron we've been given. We
 have to make the most of him.

Possum Jack nods along. She's right, as usual.

MUSIC ROOM - LATER

Possum Jack is frozen stiff, mouth hanging open, eyes
 squeezed shut. The room is in marsupial pouch mode -- skin
 walls covered with hair.

Eddie is on the electric guitar, ripping through an chicken
 pickin' outro solo that would make Brad Paisley sweat.

He hits a high note then rumbles down the neck like a runaway
 train into the finishing chord.

Possum Jack's eyes spring open and his mouth closes and the
 room goes back to normal.

Eddie hits STOP on the recorder. Wipes the sweat from his
 brow. Labors to catch his breath.

EDDIE
 I feel like I had a goddamn baby!

POSSUM JACK
 You like our song?

EDDIE
 Are you kidding me? Did you hear
 that, what I did there?

POSSUM JACK
 It's a good song.

EDDIE
 Fuckin' A.

POSSUM JACK

I assume you wish all of the songs
to be of a similar quality?

(off his nod)

Then I have a request. Rather, a
demand.

Eddie eyes him. Suspicious.

EDDIE

Do you now?

POSSUM JACK

High quality songs depend on high
quality offerings. We need better
food.

EDDIE

Like what?

POSSUM JACK

Food from the black path. Beyond
the woods.

Eddie scratches himself. Puzzles through it.

EDDIE

You mean the highway?

POSSUM JACK

Yes. Creatures felled by the Grim
Traveler.

EDDIE

Grim Traveler? What's that?

POSSUM JACK

The Grim Traveler rides the black
path at night. He is swift and
powerful and always on the horizon.

Eddie is even more puzzled now. Slowly it dawns on him.

EDDIE

Roadkill? Are you saying you want
roadkill?

POSSUM JACK

Yes! If you wish the songs to be of
high quality.

Eddie shakes his head, chuckles.

EDDIE
This just keeps getting better.

INT./EXT. TRUCK - DAY (MOVING)

Eddie drives down a rural highway, scanning the two-lane blacktop with mounting frustration.

Finally he spots something lying dead by the roadside.

He SLAMS on his brakes. Cuts the engine.

He snaps on a pair of rubber gloves and hops out of the cab.

EXT. RURAL HIGHWAY - DAY

Eddie pulls up a bandana over his mouth and nose, nearly gagging. The smell is overwhelming. His eyes water as he approaches the dead thing by the side of the road.

It's a skunk. Half-flattened, guts spilling out.

Eddie takes a plastic garbage bag from his back pocket, unfolds it. He winces as he kneels next to the dead skunk.

Trying to avert his eyes, he reaches out. Grabs the skunk corpse by its neck. There's a wet STICKY sound as he slowly peels it off the asphalt.

His phone RINGS. Still holding the dead skunk, he digs the phone from his pocket.

Caller ID says "Charlene." He frowns. Answers.

EDDIE
Hey, honey.

CHARLENE (ON PHONE)
Where are you?

EDDIE
Out on the highway.

CHARLENE (ON PHONE)
What highway? Are you almost here?
My appointment is in forty minutes.

Oh shit -- he totally forgot.

CHARLENE (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
You forgot didn't you?

EDDIE
What? No, I just --

Just then, the rotting skunk corpse he's holding rips in half. Entrails SPILL out and hit the pavement with a SPLAT. Eddie audibly gags, drops the skunk.

CHARLENE (ON PHONE)
You say something?

EDDIE
I was on my way. I had a blowout.
Front left tire. I'm not gonna make
it in time, sugar. I'm real sorry.

There's a long silence on the other end.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Hello? You there?

CHARLENE (ON PHONE)
Eddie Vesco, I don't believe you
for one minute.

EDDIE
It's the truth!

CHARLENE (ON PHONE)
Oh yeah? Send me a picture.

EDDIE
Charlene --

But she's already hung up. Eddie eyes the truck. Sighs.

INT. TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER

Eddie tosses the bagged skunk carcass onto the floor of the passenger seat.

Then he digs around in the glovebox. Finds a pocketknife.

EXT. RURAL HIGHWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Eddie JAMS the knife into his front right tire, yanks the blade sideways. There's a POP and HISS of air.

He watches as the tire deflates. Then he whips out his phone, puts on a sad, just-my-luck face, and takes a selfie next to the deflated tire.

He sends it to Charlene.

Then he goes back to the skunk. Finishes bagging both corpse halves, nearly puking in the process.

Work finished, he gets out his phone again. Dials.

EDDIE
(into phone)
Yeah, I'm out on old highway 13
just a ways past Gallows Creek. I'm
gonna need a tow.
(then)
Really? Ninety minutes?
(sigh)
Okay. See you then.

He hangs up, deflated. Looks toward the sun hanging low on the horizon. It'll be a race to be home before sunset.

His phone BUZZES. He checks it.

CHARLENE (TEXT)
You said front LEFT tire!

He looks at the truck. Realizes his mistake. *Could this day get any worse?*

INT./EXT. TOWTRUCK - DAY

Eddie sits in the passenger seat, anxious, fidgety. He gazes out the window. Watches the sun sink on the horizon.

EDDIE
So how fast can one of these trucks
go, anyway?

The TOW TRUCK DRIVER gives him a look.

TOW TRUCK DRIVER
Fast enough.

EDDIE
Sure. But like, what's the fastest
you've ever got it up to?

The driver thinks. Shrugs.

TOW TRUCK DRIVER
Speed limit.

Eddie lets it drop -- no use. The driver sniffs, looks disgusted. Eddie reeks like skunk.

INT. FARMHOUSE - ENTRYWAY - NIGHT

Eddie bursts through the door clutching the dead skunk wrapped in the garbage bag. We follow him as...

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

...he tears down the hall and then busts into the...

MUSIC ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...where he reaches into the garbage bag for the dead skunk. He arranges the corpse pieces on the coffee table next to the tape recorder, giddy relief overcoming his revulsion.

EDDIE

Food's here! I know I'm a little late, but no matter. Come and get it.

Eddie looks to the hole in the wall. Possum Jack stares out.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Suppertime, buddy. Ring-a-ding-ding.

POSSUM JACK

We can't accept this offering.

EDDIE

What do you mean? I got the good stuff. Felled critter on the black path, just like you asked for.

INNER WALL - TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Possum Jack looks to Possum Jill, beseeching. Possum Jill shakes her head, insistent.

POSSUM JILL

Be strong.

Possum Jack nods sadly. Addresses Eddie.

POSSUM JACK

I'm sorry.

MUSIC ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Eddie is angry, confused.

POSSUM JACK
We must be firm. Rules are rules.

EDDIE
Aw, come on, man.

POSSUM JACK
There will be no songs made
tonight.

EDDIE
This is bullshit!

Eddie sweeps the skunk parts off the table. Paces.

POSSUM JACK
I should advise you that you will
soon experience discomfort.

Eddie stops pacing. Concerned.

EDDIE
What do you mean?

POSSUM JACK
When a patron has the itch, a
patron must make songs. When a
patron can't make songs, the itch
grows worse.

Eddie scratches at his hand and recoils in horror -- thick
black and white hairs grow all over the back of it.

His nail are yellow. Longer than before. Claw like. He checks
his other hand -- same thing. *What the hell?*

POSSUM JACK (CONT'D)
We'll reconvene tomorrow. Try not
to harm yourself too much.
(then)
It's going to be a long night.

BATHROOM - LATER

Bug-eyed and pouring sweat, Eddie shaves the backs of his
hands with a razor. His body twitches all over.

In the living room, the clock CHIMES midnight.

He drops the razor. Tears off his shirt.

He starts scratching like crazy. Arms, shoulders, neck, face.

EDDIE

No!

He forces himself to stop. Puts his hands on the bathroom sink. Anchoring. Bracing himself.

The clock continues its midnight countdown. Eddie catches his reflection in the mirror. The man gazing back at him is ravaged and sick and all kinds of scared.

HALLWAY - LATER

Calmer now, Eddie trims his nails with nail clippers.

EDDIE

(mumbling)

Ride it out, Eddie Vesco. Just ride
it on out. You been through worse.
Keep your head. Focus.

A SCRATCHING in the walls startles him. His hands shake.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Focus, goddamnit.

His body twitches. Starts to convulse. He drops the clippers.

Eddie screams and thrashes and claws at himself.

KITCHEN - NIGHT

Body hash marked and bloody, roll of duct tape clasped between his teeth, Eddie yanks open cabinet drawers one after another until he finds...

Oven mitts.

He grabs one. Jams it onto his hand. Frantically tapes the mitt in place, looping tape around his wrist.

LIVING ROOM - DAWN

Eddie lies curled on the floor, feverish, oven mitts on both hands to keep from clawing at his flesh. Sunlight creeps through the window, hitting his eyes, making him wince.

He sits up. Looks himself over. Better now. No shaking. The urge to scratch himself subsided. He's made it through the night, but it's left him deeply rattled.

He chews at the tape on his wrists.

MOMENTS LATER

Mitts off his hands, sitting on the couch now, Eddie listens as an outbound phone call rings and rings. Finally...

CHARLENE (ON PHONE)
Do you know what time it is?

EDDIE
I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry, baby.

There's a long silence on the other end. Tears well in Eddie's eyes -- it's no act, he's really suffering.

CHARLENE (ON PHONE)
(sighing)
It's alright.

EDDIE
I shouldn't have come here.

She's concerned by the emotion in his voice.

CHARLENE (ON PHONE)
Are you okay?

He starts crying in earnest now.

EDDIE
I'm scared.

CHARLENE (ON PHONE)
Why? What happened, Eddie? Jesus, what's wrong?

EDDIE
I don't know. I just...I should have been there. For you. For you and the baby.

She sighs with relief -- *that's all this is about?*

CHARLENE (ON PHONE)
Yes, you should've. But if I wanted dependable, I wouldn't have married a musician, would I?

EDDIE
I want to be a good husband. A good father. Really, I do.

CHARLENE (ON PHONE)
And you will be. There's a long
road ahead. Plenty of chances to
make up for one little mistake.

Eddie sobs. He wipes the tears with the back of his hand.
Tries to control his voice.

EDDIE
I love you so much.

CHARLENE (ON PHONE)
I love you, too, honey. And Eddie
Junior, he's gonna love you just as
much as I do.

Eddie unpacks this.

EDDIE
Are you saying...

CHARLENE
That's right.
(then)
It's a boy.

Eddie smiles through his tears.

CHARLENE (CONT'D)
Now you go and write me that love
song, Eddie Vesco.

MUSIC ROOM - NIGHT

Still raw with emotion, Eddie walks into the room with a
solemn air. Possum Jack is already there waiting, perched
atop the piano.

Eddie gives him a distracted nod as he picks up the tape
recorder and mic. Positions them near the piano.

Possum Jack watches, intrigued. There's something different
about Eddie tonight.

Eddie sits at the piano bench.

EDDIE
Let's get to work.

Possum Jack nods, gets in position facing Eddie.

Eddie tries to clear his head. He takes a deep breath. Plays
a chord. Possum Jack sways from side-to-side.

Eddie plays the chord again. The room darkens.

He plays the chord a third time. Possum Jack's mouth springs wide. His body goes rigid.

Then Eddie's song is eclipsed on our soundtrack by the most dreamy, heartfelt, achingly beautiful piece of CLASSICAL MUSIC you've ever heard.

[note: *The classical piece will play over the following sequence.*]

INNER WALL - NEST - NIGHT

Possum Jill has her eyes squeezed shut, her mouth hanging open as she pants. She's in labor.

We move down her body, until we see the first jellybean-sized, pink larval BABY emerge from her birth canal.

INTERCUT EDDIE MAKING A SONG/POSSUM JILL GIVING BIRTH

The blind jellybean baby writhes with a swimming motion up the forest of hairs making up its mother's abdomen. Another baby emerges behind it. And another. And another.

-- Eddie leans back at the piano, eyes closed, swooning.

The next baby emerges already dead, and falls motionless to the floor of the nest. Many more live babies come out, and more dead babies too, until she has given birth to twenty possum babies.

-- Eddie sings, putting everything into it.

Guided by instinct alone, the sixteen survivors make the arduous journey up Possum Jill's belly until they reach...

INT. POSSUM JILL'S POUCH

Like the transformed music room, it's a cavernous space walled in by skin and hair.

In this pouch are thirteen teats -- twelve in a perimeter circle and one in the middle.

-- CLOSE ON: A reel on the tape recorder. It too is circular, with a hub at its center.

One by one the jellybean possum babies latch onto the available teats. Clinging to them for literal life, placing their tiny mouths around them and suckling.

Finally there is only one unoccupied nipple left.

The remaining four jellybean possum babies struggle towards this last prize, their only chance for survival.

-- Sweat pours down Eddie's face as he reaches the unheard song's crescendo.

As the last notes of the classical piece ring out, the possum babies jockey for position, a life-or-death game of musical chairs.

Then the music stops.

INT. INNER WALL - NEST

Exhausted, Possum Jill rolls onto her side.

INT. POSSUM JILL - POUCH

As she turns over, one lucky jellybean possum baby secures his mouth to the final, thirteenth teat.

The other three, having less purchase, lose their grips and tumble down the walls of the pouch...

INT. INNER WALL - NEST

...out of the pouch opening...

...through the forest of Possum Jill's abdomen hair...

...and to the floor of the nest.

Mouths opening and closing, tiny pink hands groping at nothing, they land next to their fallen brethren and blindly wriggle and squirm in the dirt where they will shortly die.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MUSIC ROOM - NIGHT

Eddie hits STOP on the tape recorder. He sways on the bench, eyes closed, rapturous. What a goddamn song he's just made.

Possum Jack's eyes dart back and forth in his head. He raises his snout -- SNIFFS. Grows agitated.

POSSUM JACK
Deliverance.

Eddie opens one eye.

EDDIE
Huh?

Possum Jack leaps from the piano...

POSSUM JACK
Deliverance has come.

...and waddles toward the hole in the wall.

Eddie closes his eyes again. At peace.

EDDIE
Indeed it has, possum.
(then)
Indeed it has.

Then a scraggly white whisker some six inches long suddenly juts from the skin above his upper lip.

His eyes partially open, as if sensing the change, but then droop and close again as Eddie sinks back into his bliss.

FADE TO:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAWN

The sun rises on another glorious day.

We move across the front yard, in through an open window...

INT. FARMHOUSE - ENTRYWAY/LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...past the living room where Eddie is crashed out on the couch...

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

...down the hallway...

MUSIC ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...past the tape recorder sitting on the piano bench, past the piano, past the drum kit and into the hole in the wall...

INNER WALL - TUNNEL

...through the winding tunnel maze and finally to the...

INNER WALL - NEST

...where Possum Jill lies on her side, stomach bulging and wriggling as her tiny babies -- which in their more mature state we will refer to as JOEYS -- suckle inside her pouch.

POSSUM JILL

I love them.

(blinks away a tear)

I love my Joeys so much.

Nearby, Possum Jack picks up one of the dead jellybean corpses and shoves it into his mouth. Chews.

POSSUM JACK

How many boys, you think?

POSSUM JILL

Five, maybe six? Who cares? They're all beautiful. I want every one of them to grow up strong and healthy and happy.

Possum Jack nods along, shoveling the dead jellybean possum babies into his mouth like peanuts from a snack dish.

POSSUM JACK

(mouth full)

I'm sure they will.

Possum Jill's expression turns solemn.

POSSUM JILL

I wish I shared your optimism.

POSSUM JACK

What do you mean?

She shakes her head, hesitant to elaborate. But then...

POSSUM JILL

It's just New Patron. I know he's trying. I know you're both trying. But that man -- he can't tell the difference between a raccoon that's been dead three hours and coyote that got killed a month ago.

POSSUM JACK
His nose is weaker than ours.

POSSUM JILL
There you go. Defending him.

POSSUM JACK
I'm not defending him, I'm saying
there are things patrons are good
at, and things that they aren't.

POSSUM JILL
Okay -- you know what they're
really good at? Killing. Patrons
can kill just about anything, can't
they? They're killing machines.

POSSUM JACK
Thanks for putting that thought in
my head. As if it wasn't hard
enough facing him every night.

POSSUM JILL
These Joeys can't survive on what
he's providing now. Fresh meat is
what they need. Patrons are natural
born killers.
(then)
Make him kill something for us.

Possum Jack ponders. Eddie isn't gonna like this.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MUSIC ROOM - SUNSET

Eddie holds a rotten snake carcass, its blackened skin dry
and flaking, almost no meat left on the bones.

EDDIE
Are you fucking kidding me?

POSSUM JACK
Not tonight. But going forward.

EDDIE
Absolutely not!

Possum Jack is confused.

POSSUM JACK
But you're good at it.

EDDIE

You're just assuming, man.
Stereotyping. I told you before I'm
no killer. Otherwise I would've
killed you first time we met.

Possum Jack swallows hard at the thought.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Eddie Vesco loves animals. Didn't
you read my Rolling Stone profile?
I'm a vegetarian. I don't fish, I
don't hunt -- hell, I don't even
own a gun.

Possum Jack glances over his shoulder. Sees Possum Jill
glaring at him, adamant. Knows there's no backing down. He
summons all his resolve.

POSSUM JACK

I'm afraid this is non-negotiable.

EDDIE

How do you suggest I get my hands
on a live animal then, mister non-
negotiable? Steal a goat from a
farm or some shit? I ain't going
and laying out a bunch of traps,
I'll tell you that much. That it is
time consuming proposition and time
is one thing Eddie Vesco does not
have.

Possum Jack thinks on it. Eddie paces, upset.

POSSUM

What's an animal shelter?

EDDIE

What?

POSSUM

You said you volunteered at an
animal shelter. What is it?

EDDIE

(annoyed)

It's this place where they take in
pets. Strays and such. Cats, dogs.
They take care of them until
someone comes along and...

Eddie is hit with a dark realization.

INT./EXT. TRUCK - DAY (MOVING)

A troubled Eddie pulls his truck to stop. Kills the engine. He dons sunglasses and a ball cap. His disguise.

He checks his reflection in the rearview mirror. Two long crooked whiskers jut from his upper lip. He d plucks them out, wincing in pain.

Then he takes a deep breath and exits the vehicle.

INT. ANIMAL SHELTER - DAY

Eddie enters. Downbeat, sick at what he's there to do. He RINGS a bell on the counter top.

A moment later, shelter worker LUCINDA (20s) approaches.

LUCINDA

Hey there, what can I do for you?

EDDIE

I'd like to adopt an animal.

LUCINDA

What are you looking for? Dog? Cat?

EDDIE

I couldn't do a dog.

LUCINDA

So a cat then?

EDDIE

(sighs)

Cat will have to do.

Weird answer. She scrutinizes him a beat.

LUCINDA

Aright. Come on back.

INT. ANIMAL SHELTER - KENNELS AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Lucinda guides him toward a cage filled with kittens.

LUCINDA

We just got this litter in just last week. Cutest little things you ever did see.

Eddie watches the fluffy kittens frolic inside the cage.
Tears well in his eyes.

LUCINDA (CONT'D)
You want to hold one?

EDDIE
No!

She's taken aback. Eddie struggles to control his tone.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Sorry. What I meant was, I'm
looking for a grown animal.
(then)
Actually, give me the oldest cat
you've got. A death row cat.
Whatever poor sonofabitch you're
planning on putting down next,
that's the cat for me.

Lucinda eyes him. Odd request, but okay. She walks him
further down the row. Points to a mangy old, one-eyed cat.

LUCINDA
Her name is Hecubus.

The cat HISSES.

LUCINDA (CONT'D)
But honestly? You don't want her.
She's got stage three kidney
disease. On top of which, she's
just plain old nasty.

EDDIE
She's perfect.

Lucinda shrugs, opens the cage. The cat hisses again as she
picks it up. She's about to hand it over, but stops.

Lucinda looks Eddie up and down, suspicious. Her scrutiny
makes him increasingly uneasy.

LUCINDA
Oh my God.

Eddie is freaked now. *She knows. She knows everything.*

LUCINDA (CONT'D)
You're Eddie Vesco!

Eddie is flooded with relief.

EDDIE

Yes, ma'am.

LUCINDA

I love your music! And I heard you were a real friend of animals, but I thought that was just for show. But no, here you are, doing a good thing with no cameras around or anything.

Eddie strains to smile.

EDDIE

Here I am.

LUCINDA

Can I get a picture?

EDDIE

Well, thing is...

LUCINDA

Just for me. Won't post it anywhere, except on that bulletin board over there. Promise.

EDDIE

I suppose if --

But she's already whipped out her phone and snuggled up next to him, cat held in between them. The cat HISSES as...

CLICK!

INSERT PHOTO: The cat is taking an angry swipe at startled looking Eddie as Lucinda grins at the camera, star struck.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MUSIC ROOM - NIGHT

The half-devoured corpse of Hecubus lays on the floor.

We see Eddie from behind as he bobs his head, listening to playback of his latest tune. Possum Jack also listens.

EDDIE

This one's a classic. Like something Waylon or Willie or even Hank himself might've written back in the day.

Eddie catches his reflection in the window.

He has a full set of long scraggly whiskers. His cheeks are covered in a downy white fur -- the same kind growing from the top of Otis's head. His ears are covered in hairs -- also like Otis's -- and jut out possum-like from his skull.

Eddie stares in horror. Then he turns to Possum Jack.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

What's happening to me?

POSSUM JACK

It's part of the itch.

EDDIE

What do you mean?

POSSUM JACK

When you get the itch, you can make songs. But making songs changes a patron.

EDDIE

Changes how?

Possum Jack hesitates. Reluctant to answer.

POSSUM JACK

You become a Legend. Like me.

Eddie unpacks it.

EDDIE

Are you saying I'm gonna turn into a goddamn possum?

POSSUM JACK

Not just any possum. A Legend. But only if you can endure the changes. Most find it too...burdensome.

EDDIE

Meaning what exactly?

Possum Jack looks away. Unable to meet his gaze.

POSSUM JACK

(quietly)

They kill themselves.

This hangs in the air a moment. Then Eddie seizes Possum Jack by the scruff of the neck and hoists him off the piano so they are face-to-face.

EDDIE

How come you never saw fit to tell
me this before now?

Possum Jack is terrified. His eyelids flutter. He's starting
to lose consciousness. He mumbles as he begins to nod off.

POSSUM JACK

...there's a way to stop...

Eddie gently puts him down, tries to calm him.

EDDIE

Don't go passing out. I'm sorry.
I'm not gonna hurt you. You okay?
You good? Need water or anything?

Possum Jack feebly shakes his head.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

You were saying there's a way I can
stop this thing?

POSSUM JACK

Yes.

EDDIE

How?

POSSUM JACK

Old Patron took a medicine.

EDDIE

What kind of medicine?

POSSUM JACK

Medicine he put in his arm.

Eddie puzzles through it.

EDDIE

Are you talking about heroin?

POSSUM JACK

It helped slow the changes.

EDDIE

That shit never helped nobody.

Eddie scratches his chin as he ponders. The hair on his hands
has all grown back now. His nails are more clawlike, longer
than ever.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
So I'm either going to turn into a
possum, kill myself, or become a
junkie and probably die of a heroin
overdose?

Possum Jack reluctantly nods.

POSSUM JACK
But think of the songs.

Eddie looses an ironic laugh.

EDDIE
Sure. The songs.

INT./EXT. TRUCK - NIGHT (MOVING)

Eddie motors up a narrow dirt road, radio hissing STATIC.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Eddie pulls the truck over. Thick forest on one side. Old railroad trestle bridge on the other.

EXT. EMBANKMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Carrying a flashlight, Eddie crashes through underbrush and trees as he heads down the embankment toward the river. Nearby an owl HOOTS, startling him.

He stumbles, nearly falling. Rights himself. Continues.

EXT. RIVER BANK - MOMENTS LATER

Eddie lurches down the side of the river until he has reached the base of the trestle bridge.

He approaches the place where he dumped Otis's corpse, he calls out as if to soothe his own nerves.

EDDIE
Sorry to disturb your place of
rest, Otis. Turns out maybe you
wasn't such a dumbass after all,
shooting that shit into your veins.
Anyway, you don't have no use for
that stuff anymore, so I'm sure you
won't mind if I...

He shines the flashlight at the base of the bridge where he left Otis's body...

But Otis is gone.

So is the the ligature, heroin baggie, spoon, hypodermic needle. Eddie shines his flashlight this way and that.

Nothing.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
(under his breath)
Critter must've dragged him off.

Eddie nods vigorously as if trying to convince himself. But even he doesn't buy it. He stares at the empty space, brain squirming like a toad.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BATHROOM - DAWN

Eddie shaves the downy fur from his face. His eyes are wild, bloodshot. He's been awake all night.

His phone BUZZES. He checks the caller ID. Puts it in speaker mode and answers as he continues shaving.

EDDIE
About time you called back. Where
you been the last four hours?

RANDY (ON PHONE)
It's six in the morning, Eddie.
What's going on?

EDDIE
Recording songs, Randy. Making
gold. This album is going to be a
masterpiece. All killer, no filler.

RANDY (ON PHONE)
Yeah? How many hits, you think?

EDDIE
Five, maybe six. Who cares? They're
all beautiful.

RANDY (ON PHONE)
Guess your furry little friend
really inspired you, huh?

Eddie stops shaving. His blood runs cold.

EDDIE
What are you talking about?

RANDY (ON PHONE)
That new cat you got. Picture was
all over the internet.

Eddie sighs, relieved.

EDDIE
Listen, I need you to do me a
favor. It's gonna sound a little
out of the ordinary, but don't go
getting your panties in a bunch.

RANDY (ON PHONE)
Sure. Name it.

EDDIE
I need you to bring me some heroin.

There's a long silence on the other end.

RANDY (ON PHONE)
Eddie...

EDDIE
It's not what you think.

RANDY (ON PHONE)
When I took you on as a client, you
assured me that you'd left all that
stuff behind.

EDDIE
This is different. It's not for
getting high. It's...medicinal.

RANDY (ON PHONE)
Come on, Eddie.

EDDIE
Like a preventative treatment. I
swear. I don't need much. Just
enough to get me through these last
few songs. That's it. After that,
I'll never touch the stuff again.
Scout's honor.

Another long silence on the other end.

RANDY (ON PHONE)
Have you talked to anyone else
about this?

EDDIE

No, sir.

RANDY (ON PHONE)

Well, don't. I'm gonna come up and see you, okay? I'll be there as soon as I can. You just sit tight. Stay where you are and don't do anything crazy.

EDDIE

You're coming now?

RANDY (ON PHONE)

I'll be there as soon as I can.

EDDIE

You bring that heroin, Randy.

But Randy has already hung up. Eddie scowls. Then he hears a RUSTLING behind the wall. Stops.

INT. FARMHOUSE - INNER WALL - NEST

CLOSE ON: Possum Jill's pouch. It's partially opened now, and inside we catch the odd glimpse of a tail, a tiny foot, a torso now covered in hair. The Joeys are maturing.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL: Possum Jill is in tears.

We hear Possum Jack come RUSTLING through the tunnel. He enters. Takes in the scene. He's almost afraid to ask...

POSSUM JACK

What's wrong?

Possum Jill turns her face to him.

POSSUM JILL

That cat was diseased. Two of the Joeys are sick.

POSSUM JACK

Really? I don't think --

POSSUM JILL

They're going to die, Jack. I've been through this before. I know the signs.

(sniffs back tears)

We need to do something.

Possum Jack turns away. Balls his fists. Frustration mounting.

POSSUM JILL (CONT'D)
Did you hear me, Jack? We need --

He whirls on her.

POSSUM JACK
Stop with the 'we' already. We both know who we really means.

Possum Jill recoils as if slapped. He turns back around. Refusing to meet her gaze, he scratches absentmindedly at the walls. Her expression darkens.

POSSUM JILL
Fine. You.

Joey tails snake out of Possum Jill's pouch opening, writhing faster as she becomes more agitated.

POSSUM JILL (CONT'D)
You need to give me the kind of support you promised when you dragged me this godforsaken place.
(then)
You need to provide human flesh.

Possum Jack stops scratching.

POSSUM JILL (CONT'D)
There's no other way. It's the only food that provides the nutrients these sick Joeys need now.

POSSUM JACK
And they'll get it. We've been through this before. New Patron is changing. I told him about the medicine.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MUSIC ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Behind the drum kit, Eddie is on his hands and knees near the hole in the wall. Listening.

POSSUM JACK (O.S.)
He can't endure. One way or another, he's gonna die soon. Then I'll chew off his limbs. Right away this time, no waiting.
(MORE)

POSSUM JACK (O.S.) (CONT'D)
The limbs, the head, I'll drag them
all piece-by-piece back into the
nest before someone can come along
and take New Patron away.

Eddie is shocked. Angry at the betrayal.

INT. FARMHOUSE - INNER WALL - NEST - CONTINUOUS

POSSUM JILL
We don't have time.

POSSUM JACK
You don't know that.

POSSUM JILL
A mother knows.
(then)
You have to act now.

Possum Jack turns away, angry, frustrated.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MUSIC ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Eddie silently fumes. Wheels turn in his mind. He settles on a course of action. Slowly stands.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - BACK PORCH - DAY

Eddie carries a hammer and some wooden planks. He scans the front porch. Then he spots it -- a little hole where the exterior wall meets the ground. A hole just big enough for a possum to fit through.

WHAM! He nails a plank in place over the hole.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - FRONT YARD - DAY

He places another plank over a hole near the front door.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - ROOF - SUNSET

WHAM! He nails a plank over a hole in the roof near the chimney. He wipes the sweat from his brow. Watches the sun drop over the horizon.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MUSIC ROOM - NIGHT

Eddie strolls in. CLOSES the door behind him.

Possum Jack is already sitting atop the piano.

POSSUM JACK

There was no offering today.

EDDIE

Sorry. Had some chores around the house needed seeing to.

Eddie removes a bottle of lighter fluid from his pocket. Approaches the piano.

POSSUM JACK

But our agreement --

EDDIE

You ever heard of Jerry Lee Lewis?

Possum Jack shakes his head. Eddie SQUIRTS some lighter fluid on the piano. Possum Jack SNIFFS, not knowing what to make of the substance.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

He was a wild one, ol' Jerry Lee. Used to call him The Killer. Most folks know him for marrying his thirteen year old cousin. Not the most savvy career move.

Eddie casually squirts more lighter fluid on the top of the piano as he circles.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

But he sure could play the piano. Didn't so much tickle the ivories as beat them into submission. He'd play with his fists, his elbows, his feet. Sometimes he'd even play when the piano was...like this.

Eddie produces a zippo lighter. Flicks it. The lighter fluid atop the piano instantly ignites. Possum Jack SQUEALS, turns to flee...but finds himself quickly encircled by flames.

POSSUM JACK

What are you doing? Stop!

EDDIE

I blocked all the exits. There's no way out.

(MORE)

EDDIE (CONT'D)
I could turn you, your wife and
babies into a family-sized bucket
of barbecued possum right now if
that's what I wanted.

Possum Jack is scared witless, eyelids fluttering as he
struggles to stay conscious. The flames leap higher.

POSSUM JACK
Make it stop! Please!

EDDIE
You think you're gonna trick me
into killing myself? Gonna chew off
my limbs? Feed me to your babies?
You think you're a killer, like
Jerry Lee Lewis?

POSSUM JACK'S POV: Eddie stops circling the piano. He leans
in closer, eye level to Possum Jack, his angry face lit up by
the flames in a hellish vision.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
You got another thing coming, Jack.

BACK TO SCENE

Eddie starts circling the piano again. The fire is spreading,
closing in on Possum Jack.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Here's what's gonna happen. We're
going back to the original terms of
the contract. You're gonna eat
whatever the hell I leave for you.
In exchange, you're gonna give me
two more songs. And then you and me
are done forever. Agreed?

POSSUM JACK
Yes! Fine! Yes!

EDDIE
You sure? Don't need to consult
your missus?

POSSUM JACK
I'm sure! Make it stop! Please!

Eddie crosses. Grabs a fire extinguisher leaning against the
stack of amplifiers. He walks back over, points it at the
piano. Possum Jack sees the strange contraption and freaks.

POSSUM JACK (CONT'D)
No! What is that thing? I said I
agreed! Don't shoot me! Don't
shoot!

EDDIE
We'll see who fucking endures.

Eddie DISCHARGES the fire extinguisher.

The piano is lost in a cloud of chemical haze. When it
clears, the fire is out and Possum Jack lies unconscious on
the piano top. Stiff body curled, mouth opened, green fluid
pooled beneath his ass.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
You look plum tuckered out. Take
the night off. We'll pick up where
we left off tomorrow.

Eddie smiles as he turns and walks out the door.

Possum Jill watches from the hole in the wall. She barely
blinks when Eddie SLAMS the music room door, so focused is
her anger.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

A sleek black Tesla rolls to a stop. Randy exits the vehicle.
He runs a finger across the hood of the car, annoyed at the
dust picked up from the road.

He takes in the farmhouse, unimpressed, then approaches.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - FRONT PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Randy KNOCKS on the door. There's no answer.

RANDY
Eddie, you in there?

Still no answer. He tries to knob. The door is unlocked.

INT. FARMHOUSE - ENTRYWAY/LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The smell hits Randy the second he walks in.

RANDY
Eddie?

No answer. He continues to the...

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The bad smell intensifies.

RANDY

Eddie? Where you at?

Randy suddenly trips over something. He stumbles, throws his hands up against the wall to keep from tumbling.

Then he turns and looks at what he tripped over.

It's Eddie. His body curled, mouth hanging open. Muscles rigor mortis stiff, face covered in scratches. He looks dead.

RANDY (CONT'D)

Oh, Christ, Eddie.

Randy leans in for a closer look. Tears well in his eyes.

RANDY (CONT'D)

Why? You had everything.

Eddie's eyes spring open. Frightened, Randy leaps back.

EDDIE

You took your damn time.

Randy puts a hand to his chest, tries to catch his breath.

RANDY

My God. I thought you were dead for a second there.

Eddie creakily gets to his feet. Scratches himself.

EDDIE

You got my medicine?

RANDY

I'm here to take you home.

EDDIE

I'm not going home.

RANDY

It's no good for you, being out here all by yourself. If it was, you wouldn't be passed out on the hallway floor at two in the afternoon and --

EDDIE

I'm nocturnal.

RANDY

-- you wouldn't be calling me in the middle of the night asking for heroin.

(then)

I spoke with Charlene. She's as worried about you as I am. She wants you to come home, Eddie. So come back with me. It's the best thing for you right now.

Eddie considers. Then...

EDDIE

No.

(then)

I signed a contract. And the thirteen songs I write here are going to keep my family fed for the rest of our lives. There's only two left to record. I'm not going anywhere until they're finished.

Randy shakes his head, not liking it. But he knows it's no use trying to change Eddie's mind once it's made up.

RANDY

They're really that good, huh?

EDDIE

Come listen for yourself.

MUSIC ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

As they enter, Randy looks like he's gonna throw up from the smell. He takes in the charred piano covered in bicarbonate dust from the extinguisher. The flies BUZZING around.

RANDY

Christ, what you been up to in here?

Eddie approaches the recorder with a smile.

EDDIE

You're about to find out.

Then Eddie stops dead in his tracks. The recorder is missing it's tape reel -- the one with all the songs on it.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

No...

Randy watches, concerned as Eddie whips his head this way and that, desperately scanning the room. His eyes land on the hole in the wall...just in time to see tail end of the tape snake inside it.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
You motherfucker!

He charges across the room.

RANDY
Eddie, what's wrong?

EDDIE
Jack and Jill.

RANDY
What?

EDDIE
They live in the walls. They stole
my fucking songs.

There's a CRASH as Eddie kicks the drum kit aside.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
They're trying to kill me so they
can eat me.

Randy watches, alarmed, as Eddie goes down on his hands and knees and yells at a hole in the wall.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Give me them songs back!

INNER WALL - NEST - CONTINUOUS

Eddie's words echo through the nest chamber, where a traumatized Possum Jack lies recovering from his recent fright, still covered in fire extinguisher dust.

We race past him, out of the nest and into the...

INNER WALL - TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

...past an empty tape reel and coils of unspooled tape. Possum Jill stands a safe distance away from the hole, her pouch bloated and full, Joeys squirming under her fur.

EDDIE (O.S.)
You don't, I'll burn this place to
the ground!

POSSUM JILL

Even you aren't that stupid. Do
that, you lose the songs forever.

Eddie's face fills the hole. Beet red and angry.

EDDIE

I'm warning you one last time,
missy. Hand them over!

POSSUM JILL

I don't scare as readily as my
husband, Mr. Vesco. You'll get the
tapes when we get what we asked
for. A human offering. Until then,
there's nothing to discuss.

She snatches up the tape, carrying it in her coiled tail and
dragging it away as she waddles toward the nest.

Enraged, Eddie shoves his arm into the hole up to his elbow.
He tries to grab her, but she's out of reach.

EDDIE (O.S.)

Come back here, goddamnit!

His hand just flops around, uselessly grabbing at air.

MUSIC ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Eddie pulls his arm out of the hole, defeated. Tears in his
eyes.

RANDY

Come on, Eddie. Let's get you home.

Randy helps him to his feet. Eddie is nearly catatonic.

EDDIE

I can't leave those songs.

RANDY

Sure you can. And once you're
feeling better, we'll book you a
real studio. Memphis, Nashville,
wherever you want. You can record
new songs. Better songs.

EDDIE

Those songs are my babies.

Randy puts his arm around Eddie.

RANDY

You're gonna have a real baby soon,
Eddie. Think about that.

Randy gently guides him toward the door.

RANDY (CONT'D)

Think about Charlene. She needs you
now. She needs you to be strong.

Eddie blinks a tear away.

EDDIE

You're a good man, Randy.

Randy shrugs off the compliment.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

No, I want you to know it. You're a
damn good man.

RANDY

Alright, Eddie. If you say so. Now
let's pack up your stuff and hit
the road.

Eddie stops walking.

EDDIE

Can I bring my guitar?

RANDY

Of course. Bring whatever you want.

Eddie turns, crosses. Grabs a big, hollow-bodied Gibson.

Randy has his back to Eddie. His eyes alight on the mostly-
devoured remnants of the dead cat in the corner. He then sees
various animal bones strewn around the room. Shudders.

Then Eddie SMASHES the guitar into the back of his head!

Randy stumbles forward, lurching, disoriented, not
understanding what's happening.

WHAM! Eddie cracks him again with the guitar. The body
splinters. Randy goes down, lands face first, unconscious but
still breathing.

Eddie snatches up a microphone cord. He leaps on Randy's
prone body. Loops the cord around Randy's neck. Pulls with
all his might, even as the tears roll down his face.

Randy gasps and chokes, hands clawing at the cord. But it's no use -- Eddie's grip is too strong.

Randy's face goes blue. His tongue protrudes.

Veins bulge from Eddie's forehead. He pulls tighter.

At length, Randy stops struggling. Eddie releases the mic cord. Randy's head drops, HITS to the ground.

Eddie slumps to a sitting position beside him, back against the wall, posture identical to Otis's when Eddie first saw him in this room.

Eddie buries his head in his hands and sobs.

At length he stops. Wipes his face with his sleeve. Eddie stands. Walks unsteadily to the door. He opens it. Stops at the threshold. Calls back over his shoulder...

EDDIE
See you at midnight.

Then he turns. Two beady black eyes stare out from the hole.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
And you better have that tape.

Eddie walks out and SLAMS the door closed behind him.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - SUNSET

Eddie drives Randy's Tesla down that forgotten country road we've seen before -- two tire-tracks cutting through weeds.

HARDCORE TECHNO blares on through the car's speakers. Eddie makes a face...

EDDIE
Jesus, Randy.

...and switches the stereo off.

He pulls over near the old railroad trestle bridge crossing a deep river. Eddie puts it neutral. Gets out.

Eddie pushes the car toward the embankment, one hand reaching inside to steer. As the car gains momentum, he lets go and jumps aside.

The ghosted car leaves the road, plunges...

EXT. EMBANKMENT - CONTINUOUS

...crashes down through underbrush and trees...

EXT. RIVER BANK - CONTINUOUS

...and SPLASHES into the river.

It gets dragged into the current. Slowly sinks as it moves downstream.

We see Eddie atop the embankment. Watching from above.

EXT. EMBANKMENT - CONTINUOUS

Eddie lingers a moment, then turns and walks away.

EXT. RURAL HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Eddie drags himself down the shoulder of the road. Exhausted, barely able to put one foot in front of the other.

Pinpricks of light emerge in the distance. Headlights. They grow closer, bigger, moving with demonic, otherworldly speed.

It's that same massive, gleaming black semi-truck.

The Grim Traveler.

Eddie stops walking, blinded by the headlights as they bear down on him. The sound of the engine is DEAFENING.

He freezes. His lips curl back, his body grows rigid. His eyelids start to flutter...

...but at the last possible second, he snaps out of it. Dives to the side of the road...

...just as the truck ROARS past him, the sound like a chorus of dead animal souls, leaving him in a cloud of dust and exhaust.

He rises to his hands and knees. The semi-truck is gone.

Eddie dusts himself off. Starts back down the road. Up ahead, he sees a familiar gas station.

EDDIE
Oh hell yeah.

EXT. RURAL GAS STATION - NIGHT

As Eddie approaches, the gas station lights go dead.

He finds the front door is locked. He spots the same clerk from before inside sweeping up.

Eddie POUNDS on the window to get his attention.

The clerk sees Eddie, points at his own wrist. Eddie looks at a sign on the door -- "OPEN 7AM - 11PM."

EDDIE

Come on, man. I'm starving. Just
want some food. I'll be quick.

The clerk ignores him, heads to the back office.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

(under his breath)
Asshole.

Eddie starts to walk away, dejected. Then his nose twitches. His eyes narrow. He follows the scent to the...

BACK OF THE GAS STATION

...where he finds a dumpster.

Licking his lips hungrily, he lifts the lid. Inside, flies BUZZ like crazy. He swats them away. Inspects the trash.

He's excited to find a half-eaten sandwich -- the same Bojangles chicken and biscuit sandwich we saw the clerk eating days ago. The biscuit is moldy. The chicken rancid, gray, writhing with maggots.

Eddie devours the sandwich in two bites, maggots and all.

Satisfied, he SLAMS closed the dumpster lid.

PRE-LAP: The grandfather clock CHIMES.

INT. FARMHOUSE - ENTRYWAY/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Eddie kicks the door open. The grandfather clock continues its midnight chime as Eddie enters.

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The clock keeps chiming. Eddie heads toward the music room.

MUSIC ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Eddie opens the door.

Sees Possum waiting for him atop the piano.

He looks to the tape recorder. Sees the reel has been put back in place. The tape is scratched and wrinkled in places, but not fatally so.

Eddie rewinds the tape a bit. Hits PLAY. The sound is warbly, some static here and there, but...

EDDIE

Nothing Nashville can't fix.

He hits STOP. Fast forwards until he's reached a blank spot where he'll record tonight. He stops the tape again.

Eddie's eyes then alight on Randy's corpse lying on the floor nearby. Half his face and the flesh of one hand have been chewed off. Eddie doesn't look grossed out by the sight. A little sad maybe, but it is what it is.

POSSUM JACK

I'm sorry.

EDDIE

(shrugs)

You got your needs. I got mine.
Story of the world.

POSSUM JACK

I didn't mean for it to turn out
like this.

EDDIE

Always does though, doesn't it? One
way or another.

Possum Jack nods in agreement.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

So we might as well sing our song.
While we still...endure.

Eddie eyes the instruments.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Don't know what to play tonight.
Hell, any instrument I pick you
make it sound great, so I guess it
don't matter.

POSSUM JACK
It matters. It matters a good deal.

EDDIE
Yeah? I tell you what. Why don't
you pick then?

POSSUM JACK
(shocked)
Me?

EDDIE
Go on.

Possum Jack considers carefully, like it's a great honor and responsibility. Finally he chooses an acoustic guitar, the oldest and most worn of all the instruments.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Good choice.

Eddie picks up the guitar. Sits to play. Stops.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
I wasn't really going to light you
and your family on fire. You know
that right?

Possum Jack looks skeptical.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
I just got a little crazy there for
a minute. You were right. Making
songs changes a person. Not just
the itch and the fur and all that.
But inside.
(then)
I guess I never did give Otis the
credit as he deserved, now that I
know how tough this songwriting
thing can be. But I'm glad I got
you on my team. I couldn't do it
without you.
(smiles)
Hell, you're a Legend.

Possum Jack nods, humbled. Gracious.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
So you really used to be like me? A
person.
(off his nod)
What's it like being a possum?
(MORE)

EDDIE (CONT'D)
I mean, what happens next? What can
I expect from here on out?

Possum Jack grows wistful. Looks away.

POSSUM JACK
Let's focus on the music.

His reaction troubles Eddie. Eddie studies Possum Jack a moment, then...

EDDIE
Whatever you say, boss.

...he picks the guitar back up. Strums a chord.

FARMHOUSE - LIVING ROOM

As the MUSIC starts from the other room, Eddie's phone RINGS on the coffee table.

The music continues, a wordless, sweet COUNTRY WALTZ.

The phone rings and rings and then abruptly stops.

INT. FARMHOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Eddie lies curled underneath the couch.

His phone RINGS from the coffee table.

His whiskered face twitches. He begins to wake.

The phone stops ringing.

Eddie crawls out from beneath the couch. He checks his phone. Scowls. Puts it back down. Not gonna deal with this now.

He crawls back under the couch. Closes his eyes.

INT. FARMHOUSE - HALLWAY - SUNSET

Eddie walks barefooted down the hall. Blinks away sleep. Scratches himself.

He hears a RUSTLING from the music room. Stops outside the door. Peeks through the keyhole.

EDDIE'S POV: Faces covered in blood, Possum Jack and Possum Jill eagerly feed on Randy, tearing flesh from his abdomen.

Eddie licks his lips. His stomach GROWLS.

EDDIE
(under his breath)
Lucky bastards.

He turns away. Continues onward toward the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Eddie opens the fridge. Still just the Mountain Dew, the take-out container filled with nightcrawlers.

His phone rings. It's Charlene. Eddie frowns. Decides he might as well face the music. He picks up.

EDDIE
Hey there, sugar.

CHARLENE (ON PHONE)
What is going on with you? I've
been trying to call you all day.

Eddie grabs the takeout container. Lifts the lid. Looks at the worms wriggling in the dirt.

EDDIE
Oh, just laying tracks.

CHARLENE
Is Randy there?

EDDIE (ON PHONE)
He was, but he's gone now.

Eddie scoops up a handful of worms and shoves them in his mouth, dirt and all. Chews. Not bad.

CHARLENE (ON PHONE)
Gone? Gone where?

EDDIE
I don't know. He dropped by.
Listened to a couple songs, said
good work, keep it up. Then he
moseyed on out.

INT. MANSION - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Charlene paces the gorgeous living room. We just barely glimpse another one of her paintings on the wall -- this one features an old ramshackle farmhouse on fire.

CHARLENE

Randy told me you asked him for drugs. He was supposed to call me when he got there. Eddie, I'm scared. I haven't painted in days and this stress isn't good for the baby.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

EDDIE

(mouth full)

I'm making music, Charlene. You have no idea how the songwriting process works. The kind of SSSSacrifices I've had to...

CHARLENE

What was that?

EDDIE

What was what?

CHARLENE

Eddie, you're hissing at me!

EDDIE

I didn't hiSSSSS! I don't know what you're talking about.

He dumps the rest of the worms in his mouth. Angrily chews.

CHARLENE

I'm coming up there.

EDDIE

Oh no you ain't. You -- Ow! Fuck!

The pain is electric. He drops the phone, hand shooting to his mouth. It comes away bloody. What the hell?

Eddie jams fingers in his mouth, feels around.

Then we see them -- his upper incisors. They've suddenly grown three inches long and protrude rodentine and razor sharp from his mouth.

They've also punched twin wounds clean through his lower lip.

Eddie cups his hand to his mouth and bolts from the room.

BATHROOM - NIGHT

Eddie pulls back his lips. Shoves his scared face into the mirror. Inspects his mouth.

It's worse than he thought.

The lower incisors have now grown, too.

Worse still, the rest of his mouth is crammed with tiny sharp teeth. More than any human mouth could house.

He rushes out of the room...

MOMENTS LATER

...and returns with a hammer. His heart pounds as he opens wide his mouth, pulls back the hammer.

Eddie closes his eyes and lets fly.

CRACK! He smacks himself in the mouth. His head jerks back with the impact, blood splatters. He drops the hammer.

One of the incisors now dangles loose from his jaw. He reaches into his mouth. Pulls...Pulls...

...and finally YANKS it loose, unleashing a fresh wave of pain. He drops the tooth to the floor, spits up more blood.

And that's when he sees his feet...except they don't look like human feet anymore. They're like hairy little hands. Like possum feet.

Eddie trembles. His bloody mouth goes wide. His eyelids flutter.

The phone RINGS from the other room. It's jarring, impossibly loud, more than he can take in his heightened state of fear.

Eddie's eyes close, his body stiffens, and he falls curled to the floor, unconscious.

The sun sets outside, leaving him in darkness.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Moonlight and shadows.

Crickets SCREECH like broken fiddles.

Owls HOOT bass notes.

A CAR APPROACHES.

INT./EXT. CAR - NIGHT (MOVING)

A worried Charlene drives her BMW down a narrow, one-lane dirt road lined by mossy forest on either side.

The headlights illuminate a ramshackle farmhouse up ahead. Eddie's truck is there, too.

She pulls to a stop. Cuts the engine. Kills the lights.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Charlene approaches carrying a handbag. She takes in the farmhouse. Sagging porch, peeling paint, weeds.

She walks up the rickety porch stairs. Pulls open a CREAKY screen door. Pushes the main door open.

INT. FARMHOUSE - ENTRYWAY/LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Charlene enters and is immediately hit by the smell.

CHARLENE

Eddie?

She claps a hand over her nose and mouth. Looks to the living room. He's not there. Charlene continues into the...

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Charlene hears SKITTERING in the walls.

CHARLENE

Eddie? You here?

Fear mounting, she approaches the music room door at the end of the hall. She gathers her courage. Opens the door.

MUSIC ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Charlene enters and winces, the smell even worse here. Flies BUZZ everywhere.

CHARLENE

Honey?

No answer. Then she spots the tape recorder sitting on the low table, a pair of headphones plugged into it.

Cautiously she approaches. She hits REWIND on the tape recorder. Hits STOP. She puts on the headphones. Hesitates. Then hits PLAY.

She listens. And starts to cry. We move in on her face as the tears roll down her cheeks.

EDDIE (O.S.)
What do you think?

She startles. Rips off the headphones.

Eddie stands in the doorway. The grandfather clock begins its midnight CHIME from the other room.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
You like my songs?

Charlene takes him in. Scratch marks. Strange white hairs all over his face. Ears pointy and elongated. Mouth bloody, front teeth missing.

She is terrified.

CHARLENE
What happened to you?

EDDIE
Don't you worry.
(smiles)
I'm gonna be a Legend.

He advances towards her. She backs away.

CHARLENE
Where's Randy?

Eddie can't help glancing toward the corner of the room.

EDDIE
Randy's gone.

She follows his gaze...and lands on Randy's half-eaten corpse, his face mostly chewed off. Charlene cups a hand to her mouth in horror.

The clock continues to chime.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
This ain't what it looks like.

He reaches out to her. She jumps back, evading his grasp.

CHARLENE
Don't touch me!

EDDIE
I had to do it. For the SSSSongs.

Terrified she reaches into her handbag. The only weapon she can come up with is a stainless steel palette knife. She brandishes it as she backs away, hands shaking.

CHARLENE
Stay away!

He continues toward her. She slashes at the air between them.

EDDIE
I wrote you a love song.

CHARLENE
Stop!

EDDIE
Just like you asked.

Charlene is sobbing now. Her whole body trembles. He reaches for her again. She jabs at his hand, just missing.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Don't be like that. You're setting
a bad example for the baby.

CHARLENE
Get back!

EDDIE
This is all for you.

CHARLENE
...n-n-n-no...

EDDIE
For you and Eddie Junior.

CHARLENE
...no...

He steps closer. Mad glint in his eye.

EDDIE
I told you not to come here. You
should have listened. But that's
okay. There's a long road ahead.
(MORE)

EDDIE (CONT'D)

(smiles)

Plenty of time to make up for one
little miSSSSStake.

Charlene backs against the piano, bumping into it. She hears a SHUFFLING behind her.

She whirls and finds herself face-to-face with Possum Jack, sitting atop the piano, every bit as startled as she is. Possum Jack widens his mouth and HISSES...

Charlene SCREAMS and jabs the palette knife at him out of pure reflex.

The blade plunges deep into his neck, cutting his HISS short, spraying blood everywhere. She lets go of the palette knife.

Eddie watches, wide-eyed as...

Possum Jack stumbles across the piano top, knife handle protruding from his throat, then tumbles down, bouncing off the piano keys to strike an ATONAL CHORD...

...before falling to the ground, mortally wounded.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

No!

Eddie rushes to Possum Jack's side, goes down on his hands and knees. Blood pulses from Possum Jack's neck. Eddie regards Charlene. Tears of anger, sadness, hurt in his eyes.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

What have you done?

Charlene hears a SCRATCHING sound. Turns to see Possum Jill scramble out of the hole in the wall, her thirteen Joeys clinging to her back, all of them staring right at her.

Possum Jill spots Possum Jack dead on the floor. She unleashes an UNHOLY WAIL of shock and terror.

The Joeys join in, opening their mouths and in a SCREECHING CHORUS of raw animal lament.

Charlene BOLTS from the room.

Eddie scrambles to his feet...

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Wait!

...and chases after her. He trips over a guitar stand. Stumbles forward. Crashes into a teetering stack of amplifiers. They tumble to the ground, blocking his path.

He gets back to his feet. Clamors over the amps.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Charlene!

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Eddie emerges into the hallway to find Charlene is already halfway to the front door.

EDDIE

Come back!

He lumbers after her. She sprints to the end of the hall and bursts through the front door.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Charlene races down the porch. Across the yard. She jumps in her car just as Eddie emerges from the house.

EDDIE

Charlene!

INT. CHARLENE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Hands shaking, Charlene hits the car's START button. The engine RUMBLES to life. She puts it in reverse and FLOORS it as Eddie staggers closer.

Charlene cranks the wheel, shifts into DRIVE as the car spins....

EXT. FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

...and she kicks up a whirlwind, leaving Eddie a ghostly figure obscured in a fog of dust.

EDDIE

...Charlene...

When the dust settles, she's long gone. A distraught Eddie listens as the car recedes unseen in the distance.

MUSIC ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Possum Jill stands over Possum Jack, in tears. She pats and nuzzles him reassuringly, smeared with blood from his wound. His breaths come in ragged GASPS.

POSSUM JILL

It's okay. You're going to be alright.

POSSUM JACK

Not this time. I can hear the Grim Traveler approach.

POSSUM JILL

It's only the wind. You'll get better. You just need to rest.

He coughs, SPLATTERING her face with droplets of blood.

POSSUM JACK

Bring the Joeys closer.

Possum Jill gestures. The Joeys gather around.

POSSUM JACK (CONT'D)

(to the Joeys)

Life is hard for our kind. But it is hard for all creatures. Everyone, even Legends, must one day walk the black path.

Possum Jill weeps, beside herself.

POSSUM JACK (CONT'D)

So be kind when you can. Sing your song while you still endure.

The Joeys nod sadly. Possum Jack turns to Possum Jill.

POSSUM JACK (CONT'D)

You're a fine possum. I know it wasn't always easy, being with someone like me.

Possum Jill shakes her head as if to dismiss the notion.

POSSUM JACK (CONT'D)

I could ask for no better companion. I hope we will see each other again some day.

(then)

Goodbye, Jill.

He closes his eyes. His body stiffens. His mouth goes wide.

POSSUM JILL
(sobbing)
No. No, Jack. Don't go.

But he's already gone.

Eddie enters. He takes in Possum Jill and the thirteen Joeys standing over the corpse of Possum Jack. He shudders. Possum Jill turns. Gives him a look full of accusation.

EDDIE
I'm sorry.

She and the Joeys just stare. Unnerved, he crosses. Grabs his tape recorder.

POSSUM JILL
Stop.

He stops.

POSSUM JILL (CONT'D)
Finish the songs.

EDDIE
Nah, I think we're done here.

He starts back toward the door.

POSSUM JILL
There is still one song left.

EDDIE
Twelve songs, thirteen? It don't make no difference.

POSSUM JILL
You're wrong. And if you think your companion is going to take you back, you're wrong there, too.

Eddie stops. Turns. Regards her.

POSSUM JILL (CONT'D)
She's probably already on the phone to the police.

EDDIE
Charlene wouldn't do that.

POSSUM JILL
You killed a man. You really think
she's going to let you anywhere
near her Joey now?

Tears well in his eyes.

EDDIE
Eddie. Not Joey. We're naming the
baby Eddie.

Possum Jill laughs darkly.

POSSUM JILL
Look at yourself.

He does. It's not a pretty picture.

POSSUM JILL (CONT'D)
There is no going back. We both
lost something tonight. Don't let
it be for nothing.
(then)
Finish the songs.

EDDIE
I couldn't even if I wanted to.
(off Jack)
He was the one with all the songs.

Possum Jill gives him a sad smile. Steps closer to him.

POSSUM JILL
Don't you understand? Those songs
were never his. They were always
yours. They belong to you, and you
alone. All my Jack did was reveal
what was already there, deep inside
of you.
(then)
He helped you become what you
always were. He helped you sing
your true self.

Eddie shakes his head, not wanting to hear it.

POSSUM JILL (CONT'D)
I am no Legend. I'm just an
ordinary possum. But the Joeys
inherited some of their father's
gift. There's only one song left.
Let us help you.
(then)
Let us finish.

Eddie's mind reels as he weighs his options. With so much sacrificed already, what is there left to lose?

EDDIE

What is it you want? That's how this works right? You want something in exchange. You're not eating me, I'll tell you that much. That's non-negotiable.

The Joeys on her back CHATTER, titillated by the notion.

POSSUM JILL

I am no longer young. Jack was my final companion. These will be my final Joeys. Soon they will leave my back and wander off and make their way into the world and I will never see them again. When they have gone, I shall have no reason to endure. But I want to walk the black path knowing I did what's best for them. That I gave them every chance to survive. To thrive. To share their gifts with the world.

(then)

Let us finish. Together.

LATER

Possum Jack is draped under a pillowcase, his final resting place festooned with animal bones, twigs, bits of orange peel, guitar picks and junk food wrappers.

Eddie sits on the piano bench, tape recorder next to him. Possum Jill faces him atop the piano, Joeys on her back.

Eddie gives her a solemn nod. Hits the RECORD button.

POSSUM JILL

Play a chord. Any chord.

Eddie hits a minor chord. As the sound reverberates, the Joeys climb down off Possum Jill. They fan out on either side of her, facing Eddie. A choir. They begin to sway.

POSSUM JILL (CONT'D)

Again.

He sounds the chord a second time. The room grows dark and cavernous. The Joeys' tails writhe in unison.

POSSUM JILL (CONT'D)
Once more, with feeling.

As the third chord sounds, the Joeys open their mouths, close their eyes and go stiff.

The song that bursts from Eddie is different this time.

The sweeping, lush ballad is no crude four track demo, it's a polished, full blown production with pedal steel guitars, strings, multi-tracked vocals, background singers, layered harmonies -- the works.

EDDIE
(singing)
*I was locked up in Trousdale
Doing hard time
Scratching at the walls
Thinking on my crimes.*

Eddie glances up to see the room has become a prison cell. Troubled, he quickly looks back down at the keyboard.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
*When along come the warden
Whistlin' a tune
'It's your lucky day, son,
Got a cell mate for you.'*

*The man was scrawny and dirty
He was ugly as sin
But I gave him a smile
Said come right on in.*

Sensing a flicker of movement, Eddie looks over as Otis enters the room behind him. He's dressed in prison garb.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
*I asked him his name
But he just shook his head
Looked me in the eye
And this what he said...*

Eddie pounds the piano harder, building to the chorus. At the back of the room, Otis mouths the words.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
*Come, sweet Joy
Don't take too long
Just listen, you will hear me
Singing Possum's song*

Eddie plays a turnaround, goes into the next verses.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
*So I called him Possum
 And Possum loved to sing
 About sin and redemption
 And all what's between.*

*He would sing about loss
 And he'd sing of regret
 Songs of beauty and heartache
 Gals he couldn't forget.*

Otis smiles wistfully at the memory of the songs, the girls.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
*He was locked up for killin'
 The woman he loved
 When I asked if he done it
 He just kinda shrugged.*

Otis shakes his head, annoyed -- *that's not how it happened.*

EDDIE (CONT'D)
*He said we're all sinners
 In the eyes of the Lord
 But I expect when I die
 There won't be no reward.*

OTIS
 I never said that. I'm innocent!

EDDIE
*And he sang...
 Come, sweet Joy
 Don't you take too long
 Just listen, you will hear me
 Singing Possum's song.*

One by one, the Joeys begin to unfreeze. Their bodies move to the music. Their tails languidly sway.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
*Well, they let me out of prison
 One bright summer day
 And I said goodbye to Possum
 Wasn't much more to say.*

Otis waves and disappears. Joeys crawl across the piano top toward Eddie. A tear rolls down Possum Jill's cheek. She knows she is losing them.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
*I had no family waiting
 No friends and no car
 Just one hundred dollars
 So I bought this guitar.*

The room becomes a Nashville street corner. Joeys gently leap onto Eddie. Climb up his arms. Over his shoulders.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
*Hung my hat on the corner
 Of Broadway and Third
 And I strummed that guitar
 And I sang Possum's words.*

Passersby stop to listen. Among them, the gas station clerk. Lucinda from the animal shelter. The Production Assistant. Katie Cook. Cody Allan. Manager Randy. A not-yet-pregnant Charlene. Joeys nuzzle Eddie's neck. Climb into his hair.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
*A crowd gathered round me
 And they filled up my hat
 With quarters and dollars
 And a record contract.*

The room becomes the opulent bed room in Eddie's mansion. The painting of Eddie and Charlene now depicts Possum Jack and Possum Jill. Charlene approaches from behind, puts her arms around Eddie. Joeys start to climb on her, too.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
*I made a gold record
 Got a house and a wife
 Had a pool and a truck
 And a pretty good life.
 But things for Possum
 They turned out all wrong
 He was jealous and angry
 Said I'd stolen his songs.*

Otis enters the mansion living room. Disgusted, envious.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
*When he got out of prison
 Possum paid me a call
 Said he'd tell the whole world
 The truth of it all.*

The room transforms to the music room the way it was the night Eddie first came to the farmhouse. Charlene still embraces Eddie, but now she is pregnant. Otis is slumped against the wall, chewing his fingernails.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
*I laughed in his face
 Said you can't do me no harm
 That same night Possum died
 With a needle in his arm
 Singing...*

The room becomes the river side, corpse Otis slumped against the column under the bridge. His hat blows off, tumbles away.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
*Come, sweet Joy
 Don't you take too long
 If you listen, you will hear me
 Singing Possum's song.*

The room is just the room now. A baby's hand presses out against Charlene's belly, the imprint visible through her skin. Except the baby's hand has claws, like a possum's paw.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
*The night Possum passed
 The songs they died too
 No more words would come
 And I knew I was through.*

*The money ran out
 And so did the wife...
 Lost my house and my truck
 And my pretty good life.*

Charlene sobs as she vanishes.

The room becomes another prison cell. This one smaller, filthy, filled with flies and animal carcasses and the corpses of Randy and Otis and Possum Jack. Beady eyes stare out from a hole in the wall.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
*Now they got me in Bledsoe
 Doing hard time
 Scratching at the walls
 Thinking on my crimes...*

The song slows and the instruments fall away, leaving only Eddie's voice. The room goes totally dark save for a lone spotlight on Eddie.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
*And Possum's old songs
 Are my only true friends
 So I just sit and sing
 While I wait for the end
 Singing...*

And now the instruments return. The lights come up and Joeys crawl into the opening of Eddie's shirt collar. Into his sleeves. Up his pant leg. His clothes bulge and wriggle as the Joeys move beneath them.

Eddie closes his eyes as he belts out the final chorus.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
*Come, sweet Death
 Don't you take too long
 Just listen you will hear me
 Singing Possum's song.*

Possum Jill blinks away another tear. Then she sadly turns away. Her children are on their own now. She climbs down off the piano.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
*...Singing Possum's song
 ...Singing...
 ...Possum's...
 ...song...*

The tune ends with an eerie, rising crescendo that builds and builds and then suddenly comes crashing down with a final, THUNDEROUS PIANO CHORD.

Eddie slumps against the piano, utterly spent.

The tape recorder runs out of tape, the tail end FLAPPING over and over against the take up reel.

At length Eddie opens his eyes. Looks around.

Possum Jill and the Joeys are gone. He's all alone.

PRE-LAP: A roaring FIRE.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

The farmhouse is engulfed in flames. Eddie's truck is on fire, too.

Light flickers across Eddie's whiskered face as he watches smoke rise into the black sky.

Eddie hears SIRENS approach in the distance. He turns and walks into the mossy forest, tape recorder under his arm.

EXT. RURAL HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Eddie walks down the center of the road, tape recorder still under his arm. He senses something behind him. Turns.

Pinpricks of light emerge in the distance. Headlights. They grow closer, bigger. The massive, gleaming black semi-truck -- The Grim Traveler -- bears down on him.

Eddie is blinded by the headlights. The sound of the engine is DEAFENING as the truck ROARS towards him.

He doesn't even try to get out of the way this time. His lips curl back. His body starts to grow rigid. He closes his eyes. Waits for impact.

Instead then there's a sudden RUSH of wind and a screaming HISS of hydraulic brakes.

Eddie opens his eyes.

The truck has come to a sudden halt inches from his face. Steam rises from the hood. The engine GROWLS as it idles.

Then the passenger door slowly swings open.

Eddie hesitates.

Then he approaches the monstrous black cab. He can't make out the driver inside, but he can hear ancient country music quietly playing on the stereo -- The Carter Family's eerie "Bury Me Under the Weeping Willow Tree" circa 1927.

Summoning his courage, Eddie climbs inside. The door closes all on its own. The RUMBLING of the engine merges with...

PRE-LAP: Audience APPLAUSE.

INT. TV STUDIO - GREEN ROOM - DAY

Eddie sits alone on a sofa, listening to the applause in the nearby studio. He wears a baggy, loose fitting coat and a cowboy hat pulled low over his ears.

His face is covered in a downy white fur that resembles the beginnings of a beard if you don't look too closely. His once blue eyes are now black and beady.

He bites his nails. Skittish, nervous.

The door opens. The same Production Assistant we saw earlier stands on the other side.

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT
Okay, they're ready for you.

Eddie stands.

BACKSTAGE HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

The Production Assistant escorts him down the hallway.

He moves slowly, hunched over. Almost waddling.

Unseen by him, the Production Assistant stiffens and recoils.
Eddie Vesco smells awful.

Over the PA system, we hear show co-host Katie Cook.

KATIE COOK (V.O.)(O.S.)
Now put your hands together and
welcome back the one and only Eddie
Vesco!

The Production Assistant parts a curtain. Eddie hesitates,
eyelids fluttering. He summons his resolve, and passes
through it...

INT. TV STUDIO - STAGE - CONTINUOUS

...and strolls onstage to massive APPLAUSE. He's back on the
set of "CMT Hot Twenty." The lights are bright as hell.

Eddie doesn't acknowledge the audience. Doesn't shake hands
with the hosts. He sits in his chair so fast its like the
music just stopped in a game of musical chairs.

KATIE COOK
Welcome back.

EDDIE
Same to you.

The audience chuckles. It unnerves him.

CODY ALLAN
You look like you've gone full
Grizzly Adams on us.

Eddie is puzzled. Doesn't get it.

KATIE COOK
Only thing beats a man who cleans
up good is one who dirties down
better. Am I right, ladies?

CAT CALLS and WHISTLES in the audience startle Eddie.

CODY ALLAN

Easy, now. Eddie Vesco is a happily married man.

Eddie flinches at mention of his marriage.

KATIE COOK

Now last time you were on the show, you offered to share something very special with our audience, isn't that right?

Eddie nods, bites his nails. The hosts exchange looks.

CODY ALLAN

Why don't you remind everyone what that was.

EDDIE

(mumbles)

A song.

They wait for him to elaborate. He doesn't.

KATIE COOK

As I recall, you were going away to record demos for your next album. And you promised to preview one these songs exclusively for us here at CMT Hot Twenty.

The audience APPLAUDS. Eddie looks and sees several POLICE enter at the back of the auditorium. He glances to the side, sees more police waiting in the wings.

KATIE COOK (CONT'D)

You want to tell us a little about this new song of yours?

Eddie grows thoughtful, feeling the weight of the moment.

EDDIE

Yes. Yes, I would, ma'am.

The audience quiets. He speaks haltingly, the effort showing.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

This is a special song. Last song we ever recorded. Number thirteen.

(beat)

This song iSSSSS from the heart.

He starts to choke up.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
This song is who I am.

The hosts exchange another round of looks. Folks in the audience look uneasy at the naked emotion on display.

KATIE COOK
Does it have a name?

EDDIE
I call it 'Possum's Song.'

KATIE COOK
Well, alright. Let's hear it!

A pregnant silence. Then the song comes over the PA.

It begins sweetly enough -- it's a rougher, less produced version the ballad we heard earlier. The audience seems to be into it though, swaying, bobbing their heads.

But then the vocals start.

And instead of Eddie's honeyed baritone telling that heartbreaking story we heard earlier...

...there's just a series of SNARLS and HISSES and SCREECHES, and terrified ANIMAL SOUNDS.

The hosts are stunned.

The audience is stunned.

Eddie is stunned.

Then Eddie looks down. Something stirs beneath his coat. Several somethings. The coat bulges as these somethings writhe and squirm, looking for a way out.

A coat button near Eddie's abdomen POPS OFF.

The audience GASPS, horrified as...

Through the pouch-like opening in Eddie's coat, one by one out crawl the thirteen Joeys.

They clamor across his body. Down his legs. To the studio floor. The scrabble across the stage, toward the audience.

Cody Allan screams!

Security guards rush Katie Cook offstage.

Pandemonium erupts in the audience. Folks scramble for the exits as the horrid hissing and screeching of the song continues.

Eddie looks out on the audience, troubled by their reaction to his beautiful song. And then he spots him. Standing absolutely still amongst the chaos.

Otis.

Alive and smiling and tipping his greasy ball cap.

Police clamor down the aisles toward the stage.

Something flops out of the back of Eddie's pants -- a long possum tail, pink, hairless and grotesque.

Eddie's eyelids flutter and then close and his body stiffens and he falls curled to the floor and we...

SMASH TO BLACK.