

"REINDEER GAMES"

Screenplay by

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**FADE IN:**

**FIGURE IN A SANTA CLAUS SUIT**

lies face-down in a nighttime expanse of snow. One of the body's red-sleeved arms is twisted at a sickening angle. The white snow beneath the figure is spreading with red.

**REVEAL EXT. SNOWY ROAD - NIGHT**

The figure in the suit lies motionless. Snowflakes drift.

**INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT**

Dark, rustic wood, an office with broken windows and whistling winter beyond. A second BODY in a Santa Claus suit lies dead in the doorway.

It's a man with a large build. The suit is riddled with holes. His face is missing.

**EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT**

More snow falling. A handful of cars in the lot. A third BODY in the same red-and-white outfit lies atop the hood of an old Pontiac. His head is not visible, having smashed through the windshield. His suit is charred and blackened.

A halo of broken glass outlines him. His black boots hang off the front bumper. The parking lot is silent.

**INT. ROOM - NIGHT**

Reflections of  
pool.  
now.

A floor scattered with shiny silver quarters.  
neon. There's a fourth SANTA here, face-down in a red  
The suit is far too big for him. Not that it matters

**EXT. SNOW-FILLED RAVINE - NIGHT**

ravine,  
precariously

where the fifth and final Santa lies at the edge of a  
which plummets a hundred feet down. The man rests  
atop the slope, upside-down, eyes closed.

face,  
DUNCAN.

His burned suit is smoldering. He has a sly but tired  
late-20's, sandy hair, cold and scarred. This is RUDY

He opens his eyes.

**RUDY (V.O.)**

I never was much for the holidays.

**CUT TO**

**BLACK:**

**THE SOUND OF A WINTER WIND**

rises, as a TITLE appears: "SEVEN DAYS BEFORE..."

And then, to complete the sentence: "...XMAS."

**FADE IN:**

**EXT. IRON MOUNTAIN STATE PRISON - DAY**

of the  
awhile.

Snow drifts down onto the stone walls and wire fences  
Iron Mountain, Michigan S.I.C. Winter's been here

**INT. PRISON CELL - DAY**

ceiling --  
pasted.

Rudy Duncan lies in his top bunk, staring at his  
where a handful of paper-cut snowflakes have been

echo

The sounds of YELLING INMATES and GATES slamming shut

across through the fortress. Rudy watches a spider scurry  
the paper snow. It's his excitement for the day.  
teenage He turns to the wall, where there's a photo of his  
family self with some co-workers at an auto body shop. And a  
Artful photo, cheery Midwesterners, with Rudy a scowling  
Dodger.

#### **A WALL CALENDAR**

18th. Shows the dates have been crossed off up to December

December 22nd is circled again and again.

Drops Rudy muses at the calendar, then hops out of his bunk.  
to the floor, crosses to a desk, finds a chewed-on pen.  
Turning back to the beds we reveal --

#### **THE LOWER BUNK**

mustached where Rudy's cellmate, NICK MASON (32), rugged,  
wall is and well-built, sleeps soundly. In contrast, his bed-  
Almost a COLLAGE OF PHOTOGRAPHS, twenty, maybe thirty of them.  
a mural.

twenties, All of them photos of A BEAUTIFUL YOUNG GIRL, mid-  
Gorgeous smiling out from beaches, parties and snowy scenes.  
brown hair, heartbreaking smile. Effortlessly sexy.

#### **RUDY**

snores, stares at the pictures for a moment, wistful. Nick  
pen turns over. Rudy climbs atop his bunk again, with the  
this time. And crosses December 18th off the calendar.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. PRISON YARD - DAY**

Nick  
absently whistles some "Silver Bells," then digs for a  
smoke.

The two of them, Nick and Rudy, shivering by the fence.

**NICK**

What's the first thing, man? What's  
the first thing you're gonna do?

**RUDY**

Haven't thought about it.

**NICK**

Hell you haven't.

**RUDY**

Get to thinking about it, it won't  
happen.

**NICK**

We walk outta here, we hit that road,  
what's the first thing you're gonna  
do.

**RUDY**

Ain't there yet.

**NICK**

Three days, man.

**RUDY**

Not yet.

**NICK**

Fuckin' Christmas, man. Fuckin,  
Christmas on the outs.

Dozens of uniformed INMATES wander the yard, stamping  
feet,  
his  
hands tucked away, breath frosting. Nick tries to light  
cig, but the wind plays havoc. Nick curses, tosses it.

**RUDY**

Hot chocolate.

**NICK**

What?

**RUDY**

Get a hot mug of chocolate.

(nods)  
First thing I'm gonna do.

**NICK**

(smiles)  
And a slice of pecan pie, right?

**RUDY**

And some pecan pie.

the Nick laughs, stares through the fence at the gates of  
prison's entrance road. Longingly.

**NICK**

She's gonna be out there, man. Right  
there. Right there waiting.

**RUDY**

Yeah.

**NICK**

Gonna walk out of this shitstorm and  
right into her arms.

**RUDY**

Yeah.

**NICK**

Got us a motel out Highway 5, bringing  
her own damn sheets, you read that  
part? Silk damn sheets. Lock ourselves  
in the whole week, drinking wine,  
taking baths, man, see if they got  
those room service steaks... anything  
I want to do. Remember when she wrote  
that? Anything I want...

**RUDY**

Yeah. Fuckin' Christmas.

but Nick grins. They stand there, shivering. It's freezing,  
the time they get outside is too precious to give up.

**RUDY**

All those pictures she's sent...  
y'know... you sure they're all of  
her, Nick? You hear sometimes they  
don't send their real pictures. Could  
be her cousin or something.

Nick studies him.

**NICK**

Why you gotta say a thing like that.

**RUDY**

I'm just saying.

**NICK**

Why you gotta. We were gonna give you a ride someplace, man. Now I just don't know.

**RUDY**

I'm just talking.

**NICK**

Fuck your hot chocolate, Rudy.

road

They trail off in silence. Nick looks out at the prison again. A snowy wasteland.

**NICK**

I'm gonna marry this girl.

**INT. PRISON CELL - DAY**

snowflakes.

Rudy lies in his bunk, staring at the same paper

**NICK (O.S.)**

Hey, hey, listen here. "I've made my list and I've checked it twice, and as long as you're naughty, it's gonna be nice. These cold winter weeks have been killing me, Nick, as I lie here alone. It's not enough to have your warmth in my heart anymore; I need your warmth next to me. Work at Penney's has been busy because it's Christmas and that's when we do almost half of our business for the whole year -- ", okay, whatever, whatever -- (skipping on)

" -- my manager's still mad at me for asking for the whole week off," whatever, whatever --

(smiles)

Here we go. "And all that gets me through the day is to close my eyes and imagine holding you, and kissing

you, and touching you, and tasting  
you everywhere because I know at  
that moment, I'll feel I've found  
the reason for my whole entire life."

Rudy still stares at the stone ceiling.

**RUDY**

For twenty-five, she sounds pretty  
mature.

**NICK**

Yeah. You grow up in Detroit, you  
get matured real quick.

Nick's doing pushups on the floor below, smoking a cig,  
reading sheets of pink stationery. With a new photo: of  
the  
pose.  
same GIRL, in a bikini by a lake. Vamping a childish

**NICK**

Sure as hell don't make me miss Millie  
Bobek. Guess I owe Millie, though.  
If I hadn't been rollin, her, I woulda  
never ended up here. And I woulda  
never met Ashley.

(studies photo)

That's the world for ya.

Nick climbs off the floor, paces back to the bunks,  
marvelling  
at the latest letter.

**RUDY**

What if she sees you, man, sees what  
you look like... and it's not there.  
You just don't do it for her.

**NICK**

Me and her got a connection.

(hands page to him)

Read this part. Read the part about  
stuffing her stocking.

Nick drops the page on his stomach. Rudy sighs, picks  
it up,  
brings it to his nose.

**RUDY**

She's using a new perfume.

**NICK**

No, I think that's just oranges. She writes here she's eating oranges.

**RUDY**

Oh.

**NICK**

Shoulda written to that magazine, Rudy. I'm gonna walk outta here, walk right into a relationship. Not some one-nighter, man... a relationship. You? You're gonna walk outta here with bus fare. Searching for the drunkest skirt in the room.

**RUDY**

Mornin', gorgeous. More egg nog?

**NICK**

Shoulda written, Rudy...

photo  
Nick drops back to his bunk, pasting the new lakeside among his collage of pictures. Admiring his pen pal:

**NICK**

Shoulda got yourself a girl.

lipstick  
his  
Above, Rudy peruses the page Nick gave him. Some marks pressed to the paper. He passes it back, closes eyes.

**RUDY**

All I want... is to make it to Sidnaw, and sit down for Christmas dinner. Watch some ball with my old man, sleep in my old bed, and have leftovers for bout six months.

**NICK**

Thought you hated Sidnaw.

**RUDY**

Just taste that Christmas turkey.

**NICK**

Thought you hate your old man.

**RUDY**

Five years, Nicky. Five years.  
(shrugs)  
I just want to go home.

YELLING.  
There's the echo of CRASHING metal gates. Prisoners  
Nick smiles, still staring at his girl.

**NICK**

Well, man. Me and Ashley. We'll be  
thinking about you.

**INT. MAIN PRISON FLOOR - DAY**

cells for  
MEAN  
the  
GUARDS monitor PRISONERS as they file out of their  
the afternoon meal. Rudy and Nick are motioned out by a  
GUARD, his bitter world etched in his face. They join  
line.

**RUDY**

Shit. Alamo's back.

tattooed  
hands  
Across Broadway, a parallel line is forming. A tall,  
Native American, THE ALAMO, steps out of his cell. His  
are the size of a man's skull.

**NICK**

Don't look like he missed the  
sunlight.

**RUDY**

Pinscher told me Alamo thinks I'm  
the one ratted on him beating up  
Cree. Since I was there, I saw it,  
he thinks I got him sent to solitary.

**NICK**

Aw, Rudy.

Rudy  
At that moment, Alamo glances over. Finds Rudy's eyes.  
swiftly looks away --

**RUDY**

Count me outta mealtime --

He slaps Nick an the back, heads back for their cell --

**MEAN GUARD**  
**GET BACK IN LINE!**

**RUDY**  
I'm not hungry, I'm gonna --

**MEAN GUARD**  
**SHOULDA STAYED IN YOUR HOLE! GET**  
**BACK IN FUCKING LINE!**

ready The mean guard pulls his blackjack. Another guard's  
behind him. They want Rudy to give them trouble.

Looks Rudy stops. Slides back into the line of prisoners.  
across Broadway. The Alamo's walked on up ahead. Rudy  
swallows, heads toward the mess hall.

**INT. MESS HALL - DAY**

splashed A GLOOPY SPOON of CHUNKY RED AND GREEN JELLO gets  
line. on Rudy's plate. Same with Nick. It's the cafeteria

**NICK**  
What the fuck is this?

**UGLY STAFFER**  
Holiday jello.

**NICK**  
What's this shit in it?

**UGLY STAFFER**  
Swallow and see.

Nick The ugly staffer grins from under his plastic hairnet.  
looks to Rudy, then turns back to the help:

**NICK**  
Just so you know, this man and I are  
outta here in two days. So while  
we're inhaling London broil and  
lobster bisque, you're gonna still  
be standing here smelling up the  
mystery creamfuck.

(nods)  
Who's in prison now?

on,  
The ugly staffer curls his lip. Nick smiles. Rudy moves  
taking his tray off the rail and turning --  
-- right into the chest of The Alamo. He looks up --  
into  
the most scarred and vengeful face a man could ever  
dread to  
see. The Alamo's a lifer. Many times over.

**THE ALAMO**

When you don't expect it.

**RUDY**

It wasn't me, Alamo --

**THE ALAMO**

That's when.

takes  
The Alamo strides into the cafeteria line. Rudy finally  
a breath, as if he's dodged death. Nick's at his  
shoulder.  
They share a grave and worried look. Trying to help:

**NICK**

Two days.

**INT. MESS HALL - TABLES - DAY**

a  
Rudy and Nick sit at a cafeteria table. Beside Rudy is  
talks  
frail, nervous, fiftyish inmate, ZOOK. Zook sits alone,  
to no one, always has the shakes.

**NICK**

So maybe after our week beneath the  
sheets, we'll head down to Motor  
City for New Year's. She says her  
roommate's skipping town for a few  
days, have the place to ourselves.  
Remember how her brother's a truck  
driver down there? I'm thinking he  
might be able to help get me some  
work.

**RUDY**

What, working security?

**NICK**

No, I'm through with that shit.  
Ashley's right. Gotta start doing  
something I got a stake in. Get a  
business going.

**RUDY**

I don't know, I've seen the business  
world.

**NICK**

Hotwiring cars, Rudy, does not qualify  
as a small business. Chop shop  
consultant; doesn't work on a resume.

whereabouts Rudy shrugs. He checks across the room, on the  
of The Alamo. The big Indian has his back turned.

**NICK**

Ashley's talking about maybe we can  
start something up together...

stone, Next to Rudy, Zook has stopped eating. He is still as  
staring at his tray.

**NICK**

Whatsa matter, Zook?

into They both watch Zook put down his utensils and reach  
his red-and-green jello with his bare hand.

**RUDY**

The hell you doing, Zookerman?

lifts a Gloppy gelatin drips from his hand, as the frail man  
large black cockroach out. Zook's shaking.

**NICK**

Just a roach, Zook.

**RUDY**

Good for you. Protein.

**ZOOK**

Monsters in the gelatin...

**NICK**

It's a roach, guy --

**ZOOK**

There are monsters...  
(voice rising)  
...in the gelatin...

**NICK**

Oh, man --

Zook stands up, holding jello aloft:

**ZOOK**

**THERE ARE MONSTERS IN THE GELATIN!**

**NICK**

(shakes his head)  
Fuckin, Zookerman --

**ZOOK**

**THERE ARE MONSTERS! IN THE GELATIN!**  
**THERE ARE MONSTERS! IN THE GELATIN!**

inmates

A GRUMBLING MURMUR sweeps through the cafeteria as  
sift through their jello, searching for --

**DISTANT INMATE**

Sonofabitch!

it

STAFFER

on

He pulls something bug-like out of his dessert, holds  
aloft, and then HURLS it at the cafeteria line. A  
ducks away. The inmates LAUGH and suddenly they're all  
their feet --

**ZOOK**

**THERE ARE MONSTERS! IN THE GELATIN!**

cafeteria

wheeling

to and

-- grabbing handfuls of jello and throwing it at the  
line. Inmates get errantly SPLASHED, and respond by  
on their fellow inmates -- red and green globs flying  
fro!

**GUARDS**

**SIT DOWN! SIT THE FUCK BACK DOWN!**

As GUARDS immediately rush in to restore order --

**NICK**

Rudy, don't move --

**RUDY**

Two days, we got two days! Don't do nothing. Don't touch nothing --

table and  
back,  
An INMATE at the end of their table picks up their  
overturns it, sending food flying. Rudy and Nick stand  
hands raised in surrender. Jello HITS Rudy in the face.

**NICK**

Don't move, Rudy!

**RUDY**

Standing right here, man!

senseless  
for  
Zook is still SHOUTING until a GUARD clubs him  
with a blackjack. WHISTLES are blowing. Guards SCREAM  
order.

**NICK**

(as a GUARD eyes them)

Ate the jello, jello was fine!

out  
room,  
feet  
The guard leaves them alone, runs on. The melee's still  
of control. As Rudy turns --  
-- and suddenly sees The Alamo charging across the  
with murderous eyes, a metal shank in his hand! Five  
away!

**NICK**

**RUDY, LOOK OUT!**

stomach  
Nick grabs him, trying to push him out of the way --  
-- and The Alamo's shank plunges deep into Nick's  
burying between his ribs. Blood splashes. Nick slumps.

**RUDY**

**NICK!**

pushes  
chair,  
roars

The Alamo pulls the blade out with a ferocious YELL,  
Nick to the floor and spins on Rudy! Rudy blocks with a  
stumbling back, cartwheeling over a table as The Alamo  
over him for the kill --

It

-- and two GUARDS tackle the big Indian out of nowhere!  
Knocking the knife away, hammering him with blackjacks.

blood

takes another three guards to keep The Alamo down.  
Rudy scrambles across the floor. Nick's on his back,  
pumping freely from his gut --

**RUDY**  
**GUARD! GUARD!**

**NICK**  
(in shock)  
Alamo...

**RUDY**  
**GUARD!!!**

Alamo.

No one's helping, the guards nearby all subduing The  
Nick grabs Rudy's shirt, gasping to speak --

**NICK**  
Jesus, Rudy --

**RUDY**  
Take it, man! You're all right!  
Hold it in! GUARD!

**NICK**  
Oh, fuck, Rudy... oh Jesus...

**RUDY**  
**GUARD!!!**

**NICK**  
Ash... Ashley...

**RUDY**  
No, man! No, no, no!

**NICK**  
(choking)

Tell her... I'll be there ...

**RUDY**

You're GONNA be there! We're getting outta here! TAKE IT!

**NICK**

Tell Ashley... I...

**RUDY**

**YOU TELL HER!**

**NICK**

...be with her...

Blood spills out Nick's mouth. His eyes go vacant.

**RUDY**

**NO!!!**

**NICK**

...for Christmas...

**RUDY**

**NICK!!!**

And Rudy's suddenly hauled backwards. A trio of GUARDS descend, grabbing Nick's body as his life fades away.

Dragging

his figure out of the melee. WHISTLES are blowing.

**GUARDS**

**GET HIM OUT OF HERE! LOCK DOWN!**

**RUDY**

**NICK!!!**

the

Rudy struggles, enraged, and gets blackjacked across skull for his trouble. He hits the jello-covered floor. And the world goes dark.

**INT. PRISON CELL - NIGHT**

his

Darkness and shadows. Rudy sits in a corner, holding head. The cell block silent for the first time.

Rudy's

Bootsteps from down the row. A SHADOW falls across

with somber figure. It's the Mean Guard. He stares at Rudy  
distinct pleasure.

**RUDY**

The man had two days...

**MEAN GUARD**

Well. Least he won't be coming back.

grabbing The guard grins a gold tooth. Rudy looks at him --  
Keeps -- and then springs to his feet, charges the room,  
through the bars. The guard takes a calm step back.  
the cruel smile.

**MEAN GUARD**

You need company tonight, Rudy...  
you just give a holler.

You he puckers a kiss and walks on. Starts whistling "Are  
he Lonesome Tonight?" Several shadowed VOICES request that  
the shut the fuck up. The footsteps and melody drift down  
row.

**RUDY**

on turns back, starts toward his bunk. And stops. His eyes  
Nick's empty bed. And the wall behind.

**THE PICTURES OF ASHLEY**

the Smiling, laughing, playing kissy-face. Hearts drawn on  
photos. All colors of stationery taped to the wall.

**RUDY**

foot of takes a seat on Nick's bed. There's a shoebox at the  
it.

Rudy opens it. It's filled with Ashley's letters.

pages. He trails a finger along them, must be over a hundred

He selects the one nearest the front. Surveys it.

**NICK (V.O.)**

Rudy, man, here we go, here, what she wrote here: "The car's waiting. The motel's waiting. And I'm waiting. I've waited for so long. I'm burning for you, Nick. My whole body. My whole heart. I'm burning for you..."

Ashley, a Rudy turns to the wall. To the lakeside picture of swimsuit siren. Rudy stares sadly.

**RUDY**

He was burning for you too...

And puts the letter away.

**CLOSE ON RUDY'S CALENDAR - NIGHT**

over. As his hand slashes through December 21st. Prison's

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. IRON MOUNTAIN PRISON - DAY**

door Snow swirls. Near blizzard conditions. A heavy steel  
CONVICTS, BANGS open, held by an EXIT GUARD. And FIFTEEN  
covered make that EX-CONVICTS, trudge onto a fenced drive,  
in snow.

**EXIT GUARD**

Your world and welcome to it,  
dumbfucks! Don't be a stranger now!  
We'll keep the lights on for ya!

Goodwill Rudy stumbles out with the group, shivering in a  
in hand-me-down coat. Thin canvas, wouldn't keep him warm  
summer.

Secondhand shoes. No possessions.

He clutches his sides with his hands, hunched over. All

the  
fifteen huddle and herd toward the gate at the end of  
fenceway.

**BEYOND THE GATE**

MEN,  
hats  
unlocks  
Wives  
trade  
The released cons reach the gate, where a GATE GUARD  
the fence to the outside world. Fifteen men are free.  
The ex-cons and relatives scan each other's faces.  
rush over to embrace their men. Pals nod to ex-cons and  
slaps on backs. Reunion time.

head  
But he  
The snow batters them, wind whipping. Rudy keeps his  
down, leaning forward, keeps walking. Toward the bus.  
can't help himself -- he glances up --

**TO SEE A YOUNG WOMAN**

poofball  
prisoners.  
bundled in a silver ski jacket, pink wool hat with a  
on top, scarf and mittens. Scanning the released

**RUDY**

bus.  
drops his head, looks away. Climbs onto the shuttle

**INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS**

Takes  
aboard.  
into  
the  
Rudy shakes his arms, basking in the vehicle's warmth.  
a seat at the back. A couple other lone ex-cons climb  
Then the cons with relatives start to pile in.  
Rudy's window is steamed against the cold. He stares  
his lap, then reaches for his coat pocket. Takes out

it. picture of Ashley, in her bikini by the lake. Stares at

He rubs his window with his sleeve.

and Outside, the woman in the silver coat turns this way  
climbing that, troubled. She's watching the other ex-cons  
onto the bus with their loved ones.

the The woman looks back to the prison. The guard closing  
coming. gate. The steel door has been shut. No one else is

Rudy watches her sadly.

up Aboard the bus, the seats fill up. Ex-cons are feeling  
their wives, kids are climbing on their absent daddies,  
buddies are jawing loudly 'bout how the neighborhood's  
changed.

poofball. The woman outside is now alone. Silver coat, pink

Rudy looks at the bikini picture again.

Then at the shivering bundle.

**RUDY**

Don't do it, Rudy...

EX-CON The bus ENGINE starts up. In the seat beside Rudy, an  
his makes out with his WIFE while his bratty KID punches  
leg.

windows. Out the window, the young woman is scanning the bus  
Rudy Then the prison again. She turns in a worried circle.  
looks swiftly away. Closes his eyes.

**RUDY**

Don't do it ...

sighs The bus door closes. It REVS and starts forward. Rudy  
with relief. The photo of Ashley falls to the floor.

**EXT. PRISON RELEASE GATE - CONTINUOUS**

snowy  
stops.

The young woman watches the bus pull away, down the road. But it doesn't get fifty feet before it suddenly

The door opens. And Rudy steps out.

The bus REVS up again and GROANS OFF into the winter.

eyes. We  
lips

The young woman pushes her poofball hat out of her get a look at her face for the first time. Skin pale, turning blue, but it's the girl from the pictures. It's Ashley.

them

She watches Rudy's figure trudge back toward her. Snow obscuring him until he's right in front of her. Both of shivering. Both of them standing there.

And finally:

**RUDY**

You Ashley?

Ashley nods. And Rudy sadly smiles.

**RUDY**

I'm Nick.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. TRUCK STOP - DAY**

on.  
Rudy and Ashley sit at a coffee shop booth. Coats still

Big rigs bluster by on the highway outside.

Two untouched cups of coffee sit before them.

She's watching him in silence.

**RUDY**

I like your coat.

Ashley says nothing. Rudy looks at his own:

**RUDY**

This -- this is just something they gave me at the door. Wasn't snowing when we signed up, y'know?

Ashley nods.

**RUDY**

How's your coffee?

Ashley looks at it, like she's just realizing it's there.

She lifts the cup, takes a sip. Puts it down.

**ASHLEY**

Good.

Rudy nods. Silence again.

**RUDY**

Gotta be ten degrees out there.

**ASHLEY**

Radio said negative five.

**RUDY**

Negative five?

**ASHLEY**

Yeah.

**RUDY**

I don't think it's negative five.

**ASHLEY**

Radio said.

Beat.

**RUDY**

Wind chill. That's probably what they meant.

Ashley nods. Rudy bites his lip.

**RUDY**

I was scared. Scared you were gonna take one look at me and change your mind. Scared I was walking into heartache. All those words... you put a picture in your mind of where they come from and when you see where

maybe it's not the same as your picture.

He trails off.

**ASHLEY**

I figured you walked outta there and saw me and walked right the other way --

**RUDY**

No, no --

**ASHLEY**

Saw my outfit or something, my coat --

**RUDY**

No, hey, I like your coat --

**ASHLEY**

Saw me --

**RUDY**

Ashley, no. That was me, that's what I was scared of. I mean, be serious... I ain't exactly looking like Mr. Universe here.

**ASHLEY**

You are to me.

Rudy goes silent. Whoa. Ashley considers.

**ASHLEY**

Thought you wrote you had a mustache.

**RUDY**

I can get another one going. Y'know, hey, whatever you want me to --

**ASHLEY**

No, no, no. Be like you want to be.

beside  
white

Another awkward pause. Rudy picks up a milk dispenser the coffee, puts it to his lips. It gives him a wide mustache. He stares straight-faced.

Ashley gives a bashful smile, covers it.

**RUDY**

Do that again.

**ASHLEY**

What.

**RUDY**

Smile.

Ashley smiles again, blushing now.

**ASHLEY**

No --

**RUDY**

One more. Smile. One more.

**ASHLEY**

(trying not to)

No, c'mon --

**RUDY**

I've been dreaming about that smile,  
Ashley Mercer. For a long time.

They stare across the table, drifting into one  
another's eyes.

**ASHLEY**

You're better than the picture in my  
mind, Nick...

(softly)

You're real.

Outside, another truck rumbles by, whipping up snow.

**SMASH**

**CUT TO:**

**INT. INTERSTATE MOTEL ROOM - DAY**

And Rudy and Ashley SLAM inside, kissing passionately,  
limbs intertwined, pawing at each other's coats. Rudy kicks  
the door closed. Mouths devouring, hands lost in snowy  
hair.

They collide with a side table, knocking over a lamp,  
tumbling onto the lumpy bed. Rudy tears at her silver coat and  
sweater

on,  
and

and turtleneck and capilene and whatever else's she got  
as Ashley's lips explore his neck and body. Writhing  
wrestling and rolling off the bed. Bang.

**INT. MOTEL ROOM - LATER**

Rudy and Ashley fuck like lovers in R-rated movies.

**INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY - LATER**

Ashley  
chest,

The bed sheets lie tangled on the floor. Rudy and  
rest naked amidst them. Her pretty young head on his  
all their inhibitions gone. Rudy strokes her arms.

**RUDY**

Tell me something. This the first  
time you've ever done this?

**ASHLEY**

Go to hell, Nick Mason, what's that  
supposed to mean --

**RUDY**

No, not that, no...  
(laughs, kisses her)  
I mean this, the whole thing. Start  
writing to a guy, guy in the bricks.  
Get a boyfriend like this. Tell me  
the truth.

**ASHLEY**

Well. You're not the first guy I  
wrote to. But you're the only one I  
kept writing to.

**RUDY**

Yeah. Me too.  
(considers)  
Why? I mean I know why for me, why I  
paid for the ad. But you... why start  
writing to some guy -- some con --  
you don't even know?

Ashley studies his face, smiles in reflection.

**ASHLEY**

I told you, Nick. Remember?

**RUDY**

Tell me again.

**ASHLEY**

All the guys I've ever been with... they never want to know me. Who I am on the inside. They just want to get inside. When they do, they think that means they know who I am. That I trust them. That they know me. That there's nothing left to learn.

(beat)

A guy like you, Nick -- six months before you can even touch my face. I figure a guy in that kind of bind, he's gonna hafta work to get to know me some other way.

**RUDY**

Had some bad relationships, didn't you.

**ASHLEY**

Not bad. Just regular.

(smiles)

You wrote me wonderful things, Nick. Personal things.

She turns to him, kisses his chest --

**RUDY**

Well, wasn't all me, y'know.

**ASHLEY**

Yes it was all you --

**RUDY**

Guy I was in with... he helped sometimes... some of the romantic stuff, actually... you'd like him --

**ASHLEY**

I'm talking about the heart, Nick. I'm not talking about the words.

**RUDY**

Y'know, some of the heart mighta been his too...

**ASHLEY**

Then he shoulda signed his name.

Ready

She turns over playfully, eases herself back atop him.  
to make up for lost time. With a kiss:

**ASHLEY**

And he'd be here right now.

**INT. SHOPPING MALL - DAY**

dragging  
him

Ashley runs through an Xmas-decorated megamall,  
Rudy behind her. Both of them laughing, as she hauls  
over to some cookie bakery company:

**RUDY**

Where the hell are you going?

**ASHLEY**

Provisions! We are not leaving that  
motel room again till after New  
Year's: we need ten days worth of  
provisions!

(to cookie matron)

What's good?!

**COOKIE MATRON**

Oh my, we've got a special on our  
chocolate crunchie elves, they're  
shaped like little helpers --

**ASHLEY**

THIS MAN... has not had a cookie in  
two goddamn years! Get him two of  
everything!

**RUDY**

Ashley, Jesus --

**ASHLEY**

Can't survive on our bodies alone,  
Nick.

(to cookie matron)

Hurry up!

**RUDY**

Ash... didn't you write me that you  
don't eat chocolate?

**ASHLEY**

Yeah, well you wrote me you were six-  
foot-four, baby.

(teasing smile)  
So don't talk to me about little  
white lies.

**INT. J.C. PENNEY'S DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY**

Ashley's  
confidence.

Teddy bears with nightcaps, green bows, red ribbons.  
tearing through men's clothing racks, all love and

Rudy's got a bunch of purchase bags weighing him down:

**ASHLEY**

You need a COAT!

**RUDY**

Ash, you've gotten me enough --

**ASHLEY**

No boyfriend of mine is going to  
walk around in negative-five degree  
wind chill without a goddamn good-  
looking coat!

She pulls out a hellacious black leather fringe number.

**RUDY**

Baby, c'mon, all this stuff... I  
haven't gotten you anything --

**ASHLEY**

You got out, Nick. You're here.  
You're my Christmas.

sighs.

She puts the jacket against his chest, smiling. Rudy

**RUDY**

It's two hundred dollars, Ash --

wickedly:

She whips a Penney's card from her purse, grins

**ASHLEY**

You forget where I work?

**RUDY**

(beat)  
Beauty and fragrances.

**ASHLEY**

Fifty percent off, motherfucker. Ho  
ho ho.

mirror,  
with a  
She runs off with the jacket. Rudy turns to a dressing  
left to stare at his reflection. An ex-con in rags,  
half-dozen holiday shopping bags. To himself:

**RUDY**

Just for the holidays, Nick. Then  
we'll tell her. We'll let her...  
have her holidays...

smile.  
Rudy nods till he convinces himself. Can't help but

**INT. TOY STORE - DAY**

Puzzles, Barbies and dinosaurs. KIDS scurrying, PARENTS  
chasing. Rudy and Ashley with a scared TEEN CLERK:

**TEEN CLERK**

You can't find... what?

**ASHLEY**

Toys for adults. Where are your toys  
for adults?

**TEEN CLERK**

Toys for... adults?

**ASHLEY**

C'mon. How old are you, sixteen?  
C'mon.

**TEEN CLERK**

We sell children's toys --

**ASHLEY**

(slams money down)  
I got fifty dollars to spend in your  
store, Jesus of Nazareth. Can you  
help me or not?

The clerk glances around, then, low:

**TEEN CLERK**

Slinky's in aisle five, Twister's in  
aisle one, Moon Mud's in aisle four.

**ASHLEY**

Thank you.

**INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY**

**CLOSE ON CONVEYOR**

and  
As bottles of wine, vodka and rum, cartons of egg nog  
orange juice, and countless prepackaged sandwiches come  
scrolling past.

**ASHLEY (O.S.)**

You know what I was thinking, after  
our holiday hideaway? Instead of  
going back to Detroit, maybe we could  
go gambling. Y'know? Drive up to  
that Indian place you worked at.  
Wouldn't that be fun? I haven't gone  
gambling in forever!

**EXT. SUPERMARKET PARKING LOT - DUSK**

eyesore, and  
Light snow falls. Rudy, in his new black fringe  
Ashley carry grocery bags across the icy asphalt:

**RUDY**

Well, I don't know about that --

**ASHLEY**

Blackjack, Nick, blackjack I am good  
at. I mean, they'd give us some free  
games or something, wouldn't they?  
Since you worked there?

**RUDY**

Security, Ash, I just worked security.  
They wouldn't be rolling out the red  
carpet --

**ASHLEY**

And the slots, slots I'm good at  
too. Wouldn't that be fun?

**RUDY**

We'll have more fun in Detroit.

**ASHLEY**

We could live it up and --

**RUDY**

Ashley. We're not going anywhere I

used to work.

It comes out too harsh. Ashley stops, a little hurt.

**ASHLEY**

I just... I thought you'd have friends there...

Rudy softens, touches her arms:

**RUDY**

Hey. I been in prison for two years, Ash. Believe me. Those guys wouldn't want to see me.

He kisses her. She nods, dismisses it, kisses back.

**ASHLEY**

Well, they don't know what the hell they're missing.

**EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT**

roadside  
tied to

Ashley's Chevy Nova pulls back into the lot of the joint. There's an artificial (silver) Christmas tree the roof.

She and Rudy climb out; she heads for the office:

**ASHLEY**

Baby, I'm gonna go tell 'em not to disturb us for the rest of the year. I get back in that room, you better be wearing nothing but a candy cane.

**RUDY**

I'll see what I can do.

**ASHLEY**

No, lover. I'll see what you can do.

admiring  
their

She smiles, sashays sexily away. Rudy watches her go, his good fortune. Then pops the trunk, collects some of shopping score. Gifts and goodies.

**RUDY**

(sings, sotto)  
I have no gifts to bring, parum-pum-

pum-pum. No treasures for the king,  
pa-rum-pum-pum-pum...

bags  
inside.  
Loaded down, he struggles to the motel room, balances  
on his knee, gets the key in the door, and heads

**INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT**

Pitch dark. Rudy fumbles his way in:

**RUDY**

...but I got a girl to be with, rum-  
pum-pum-pum...

**MERLIN (O.S.)**

Hi, Nick.

stocky  
door  
Rudy drops the shopping bags, whirls around, as a  
black shadow, MERLIN, all 280 pounds of him, KICKS the  
shut --

**RUDY**

What the fuck --

gets  
like a  
-- and SWINGS a baseball bat toward Rudy's chest. Rudy  
an arm down to deflect the blow, but it still stings  
mother. Rudy HOWLS. Merlin comes at him again --  
-- and this time Rudy slips by. Merlin's bat SHATTERS a  
dresser.

wrests  
Rudy grabs him by the neck, kicks out his knees and  
him to the ground. Grabs the bat --

a  
the  
groceries  
-- and gets DECKED from behind by another shadow, PUG,  
little white guy with a snarl. They go CRASHING onto  
bed, grappling for leverage, and then to the floor --  
-- where Rudy grabs a champagne bottle from the  
and BASHES it backwards, shattering it over Pug's head!

again  
crashing

Pug lets go, as Rudy scrambles up, and Merlin's got him  
in a bear hug. Rudy's struggling, whirling with him,  
into one wall, then another, YELLING for help --

**RUDY**  
**HEYYY!!! IN HERE!!! HEYYY!!!**

-- until he hears the PUMP-LOAD SNAP of a shotgun.

Rudy stops still. A lamp clicks on.

holds a

Standing in silhouette, a figure in a leather duster  
sawed-off on him.

**GABRIEL**  
Welcome home, Nick.

hold,  
stringy  
lot

Another lamp comes on. Rudy, still in Merlin's choke-  
gets a look at the gunman, GABRIEL. Weathered face,  
hair, early 30's. Handsome in a scuzzy way. He's seen a  
of road.

teeth,  
champagne.

Rudy stares, totally thrown. Pug, the little guy, bad  
bad hair, bad skin, gets up spitting blood and

**PUG**  
I owe ya a drink, ya fuck --

knuckles.  
Indian  
door.

-- and slugs Rudy in the gut. Merlin yanks him back up.  
Merlin's a black widebody, wears a goatee and brass  
Behind Merlin stands a fourth intruder, a stone-faced  
in a Grateful Dead long-sleeve. JUMPY. Guarding the

relaxes

Gabriel's studying Rudy, up and down. Nods. Merlin  
his choke-hold so Rudy can breathe.

**RUDY**  
You... you don't know me --

**GABRIEL**

Oh, I know you, Nick. I know you  
real well.

**RUDY**

No, you can't --

**GABRIEL**

The hell I can't.

As the room's door gets kicked open --

**ASHLEY**

Watch out, baby! I'm bringing in the  
fucking tree!

getting  
and the silver fake evergreen fills the doorway,  
forced through with Ashley's grunts and groans --

**RUDY**

**ASHLEY!**

through,  
Merlin traps his jaw shut. The tree comes squeezing  
followed by Ashley, face in branches --

**ASHLEY**

I'm telling you, we got the best one  
in the store... I don't know why  
people want their houses smelling  
like the stupid woods...

he  
She's GRABBED from behind by Jumpy. Ashley screams, but  
slams her against the wall. The tree hits the ground.

**RUDY**

**NO!**

**ASHLEY**

**NICK!**

locks  
Pug  
Rudy fights to help her, but Merlin's got him. Pug  
Ashley's arms. She fights, muffled cries, but Jumpy and  
have her held firmly. Her face to the wall --

**GABRIEL**

(re: the silver tree)  
Hope her taste in men's better than  
her taste in Christmas.

Ashley's turned to face him. Her eyes widen. Gabriel  
nods.

**GABRIEL**

Hey, sis. Happy holidays.

Rudy's jaw drops. He looks to Ashley. Then to Gabriel.  
Ashley YELLS, enraged, kicking and clawing. Jumpy slams  
her back against the wall for her trouble --

**GABRIEL**

Jumpy, don't hurt her, now.

Gabriel steps to Rudy. Studies him.

**GABRIEL**

So. This is the guy you been waiting  
for. Man of your dreams.

**ASHLEY**

Gabriel -- !

**GABRIEL**

(unimpressed)  
Must have a way with stationery.

**ASHLEY**

Gabriel, what are you doing!

Gabriel raises the sawed-off to Rudy's chest. Rudy  
flinches,  
but Merlin's got him.

**ASHLEY**

**GABRIEL!!!**

Gabriel fixes her with a stare. She shuts up. To Rudy:

**GABRIEL**

You better be here to be good to  
her, loverboy. 'Cause she's been  
good to you.

**ASHLEY**

Gabriel, let him go --

**GABRIEL**

Read a lot about you, Nick.

**ASHLEY**

What are you doing here?!

**GABRIEL**

Read you're a man of some knowledge.

**ASHLEY**

Gabriel!

**GABRIEL**

A man of some travels.

**ASHLEY**

**GABRIEL, I LOVE HIM!**

Merlin,  
Rudy's trying to speak, voice CHOKED. Gabriel nods to  
who again eases his hold. Rudy coughs.

**RUDY**

I'm... not... Nick...

Gabriel frowns. Rudy turns to Ashley.

**RUDY**

I'm not him. I...

(then to Gabriel)

You want something from Nick, you  
got the wrong guy.

**ASHLEY**

(hurt)

Nick...

off,  
Panicked.  
Gabriel looks from her to him, then lowers his sawed-  
and SWINGS it into Rudy's stomach. Rudy buckles.

**GABRIEL**

Who are you now.

**RUDY**

You got the wrong guy! She thinks  
I'm Nick, I'm not!

**GABRIEL**

(to Merlin)

Put him in the truck.

**RUDY**

I was in the joint with him! I knew

about him and her, okay!? I took his place!

**GABRIEL**

You what...

**RUDY**

I got out, Nick didn't! I pretended I was him! I knew about her letters! Jesus Christ, whatever you want from him -- I'm not Nick!

(to Ashley)

I -- I just wanted to be --

stares

A glance of regret amidst his desperation. Ashley back, confused, searching his eyes.

**GABRIEL**

You're not Nick Mason...

**RUDY**

I shared his cell!

**GABRIEL**

But you were saying you were...

**RUDY**

Yes!

**GABRIEL**

So you could get with my sister.

**RUDY**

Yes!

**GABRIEL**

So you could get down her chimney.

**RUDY**

Yes!

**GABRIEL**

And you think telling me that's gonna help your cause.

Rudy

Gabriel RATCHETS him across the chin with the gun butt. hits the floor. Gabriel spins on Ashley, enraged:

**GABRIEL**

Is this him!?

**ASHLEY**

(reaches for Rudy)  
Don't hurt him...

**GABRIEL**

Is this the fucker you been writing  
all year!?

**ASHLEY**

(reaches for Rudy)  
Please, Gabriel, don't...

Gabriel puts the gun to Rudy's head.

**GABRIEL**

**IS THIS NICK MASON!?!?**

**ASHLEY**

**YES!!!**

Gabriel doesn't shoot. Studies Rudy.

**GABRIEL**

Well, he's gonna have to learn to  
give you some respect.

motions

Gabriel KICKS Rudy in the jaw. Ashley screams. Gabriel  
to his boys: Jumpy and Pug drag her outside. Gabriel  
KICKS Rudy again. Rudy lies there and takes it.

KICKS

bags:

Merlin lights a cig, examines Rudy and Ashley's grocery

**MERLIN**

Hey. They got a shitload of cookies.

**GABRIEL**

Take 'em.

**MERLIN**

How 'bout the tree? You want the  
tree?

**GABRIEL**

Leave the tree.

room.

Merlin nods, tucks the bags under his arms, leaves the

Gabriel drops beside Rudy, with a sick smile:

**GABRIEL**

I've read your letters, motherfucker.  
Don't play no reindeer games with  
me.

**EXT. INTERSTATE - NIGHT**

highway,  
As we SWOOP DOWN onto a four-lane stretch of winter  
arcing into the blackness.

onward,  
CLOSING ON an 18-wheel tractor trailer, RUMBLING  
airbrush  
emblazoned with "Great Lakes Trucking." There's an  
thru  
painting on the door to the cab, of a skeleton looking  
Monster."  
a flaming radial tire, and the legend "Motor City

**INT. GABRIEL'S RIG - CAB - NIGHT**

cookies.  
Gabriel at the wheel, Merlin smoking, Jumpy eating

A TRUCK passes; Gabriel waves. A moment later, the CB  
crackles:

**PASSING DRIVER (OVER CB)**

Hey there, Monster! What're you  
hauling this far north?

**GABRIEL**

Hell, Bugeye. How you doin'? Ain't  
hauling, man, I'm up for the holidays.  
Gonna have myself a holiday... for a  
goddamn change...

**INT. GABRIEL'S RIG - TRAILER - NIGHT**

**CLOSE ON RUDY**

eyes closed, dried blood, head rocking side to side. He  
winces, waking, with the headache to end all headaches.

**ASHLEY (O.S.)**

Shh, Nick, shh. They won't hurt you  
now. You're okay...

Her hand strokes his face. Rudy's eyes struggle open.

**ON FULL SCENE**

mats,  
Nova.

They're in the back of the truck. There's some packing rope, two tall storage lockers, and Ashley's Chevy

finds his  
gaze.

Rudy's head is in her lap. He struggles to sit up, wrists tied with cord. He looks at Ashley, follows her

dipping  
Gives

In a corner, Pug sits guard in a beanbag chair. He's chewing tobacco, reading Road & Track, headphones on. Rudy a bored glance, then back to his magazine.

**ASHLEY**

I won't let 'em, Nick. They won't hurt you anymore.

**RUDY**

Your brother...

Ashley nods. Rudy looks around, remembering.

**RUDY**

...the truck driver...

**ASHLEY**

He's not a bad person, Nick... he's not...

From the corner, Pug spits some chaw. Ashley wheels.

**ASHLEY**

You're not gonna hurt him anymore!

Pug doesn't even look up. Still stroking Rudy's face:

**ASHLEY**

Since Janey moved in... Gabriel... he's come over more and more. To the apartment. Janey's the divorced one, 'member, with the tit job --

**RUDY**

What the fuck is going on.

**ASHLEY**

He read the letters, Nick. Some day

I wasn't there. He went through my room. He found your letters.

**RUDY**

What's going ON!!!

The truck shakes.

**ASHLEY**

He knows you worked in that casino.

Rudy stares at her. She's scared

**RUDY**

You motherfucker.

**ASHLEY**

Nick, no --

**RUDY**

You sold him out.

**ASHLEY**

Nick --

**RUDY**

When'd you decide to do it, Ash?  
After which of his letters, huh?  
The fortieth? The fiftieth? The  
first?!

**ASHLEY**

Nick, what are you --

tumbles  
She reaches out for him; Rudy scrambles to his knees,  
against the opposite wall of the trailer.

**RUDY**

**I'M NOT NICK!**

(raging)

You thought you'd fuck him over?!  
Well he's fucked you! I've never  
worked at some casino! I can't help  
you! Because he's not me!

**ASHLEY**

Nick, I love you --

**RUDY**

**JESUS CHRIST!**

**PUG**

Watch your mouth, man. It's Christmas.

**RUDY**

**I'M NOT NICK!**

He Ashley runs at him, wraps her arms around him tightly.  
tries to fight her off. She won't let go.

**RUDY**

Get the hell off of me!

**ASHLEY**

(hard whisper)

Nick, it won't work. It won't work!

eye. Rudy stops fighting. She has a terrified look in her  
Ashley Checks to Pug: he's watching them now, chewing slower.  
turns them away from the little guy's view

**ASHLEY**

He'll kill you.

**RUDY**

You're not hearing me here --

**ASHLEY**

My brother's killed people, I know he has. Truckers. If you talk him into thinking you're not you, you'll only get yourself dead.

**RUDY**

He didn't "find" Nick's letters, did he.

**ASHLEY**

Nick, please, it's me --

**RUDY**

You told him about Nick's letters.

**ASHLEY**

No, Nick, no --

**RUDY**

You're in on this.

**ASHLEY**

I love you!

Rudy stares at her coldly.

**RUDY**

Y'know, in a way, I'm glad it's me.  
'Cause you woulda broken his heart.

Ashley stares, panicked. Pug's still watching them.

**RUDY**

Your pen palls dead, lady.

**ASHLEY**

If you say that, if you keep saying  
that, they will kill you. If they  
think you're not you, they will kill  
you. Don't you see? I know what you're  
doing, but it won't work!

**RUDY**

Nick died for me....

**ASHLEY**

I won't let him hurt you! He just  
wants what you know!

**RUDY**

(ruefully)  
...maybe I die for Nick...

**ASHLEY**

Just tell him what you know, Nick!  
That's all they want! And we'll get  
out of this!

touching Rudy gives her a stone cold stare. Ashley crumbles,  
his face, shaking her head, tears. Devastated.

**ASHLEY**

He found them... I swear, Nick...  
(helpless)  
...he found them...

stop. The truck shudders through downshifts, to a groaning  
Ashley embraces Rudy fiercely, holding on for the last.  
The trailer gate RATTLES open into the truck's roof.  
Ashley shuts her eyes.

**EXT. REST STOP/INT. GABRIEL'S RIG - CONTINUOUS**

and  
surveys,  
The rig all alone at a snowy rest area. Gabriel, Merlin  
Jumpy climb inside as silhouette sentries. Gabriel  
then lifts a piece of paper:

**GABRIEL**

"My sweet, sexy Ashy-lashy, I have  
been dreaming of you constantly, and  
knowing you are out there makes these  
walls not seem so close or so strong  
or so cold..."

(to Merlin/Jumpy)

Women live for this stuff.

(reads on)

Dreaming 'bout your this, dreaming  
'bout your those, gettin' X-rated on  
me here, Nicky... where are we...  
oh, right, other side...

(turns paper over)

"Someday I'm gonna take you up by  
Lake S. Before I went in, before  
goddamn Millie, 'fore I had my  
situation, I used to work up at this  
casino, working security. Used to  
watch for people stealing chips,  
counting cards, getting piss-drunk,  
that kinda shit. Indian place, they  
hired this reject outta Vegas to run  
it, got about as much business sense  
as a buffalo patty. Anyways, it's a  
fun place to run some numbers and  
play."

Gabriel puts the letter down.

**GABRIEL**

You're a good writer, Nick. I give  
this writing an A-plus.

**RUDY**

I never worked at no casino.

**ASHLEY**

(hopeless)

Nick...

Rudy steps out of her hold and stalks forward:

**RUDY**

That's the guy I was in with, I did my last ten months with him. He rode a two-year bit for manslaughter -- split a guy's skull open at a bar for harassing his girl. That's Nick Mason. He worked at that casino. He's the one who wrote her letters. Me, I'm a damn mechanic, my last job was a Quickie Lube, I did five for lifting cars. I don't know shit about blackjack, I don't know shit about Indians. I'm not him.

Gabriel stares at him. Then crumples the letter.

**GABRIEL**

Bury this guy.

Merlin and Jumpy grab Rudy and THROW him from the truck. He HITS the snowy parking lot on his side, hands bound.

**ASHLEY**

Gabriel, you promised!

**GABRIEL**

I promised that when he helped us, we'd be gone! When he helped us! Loverboy don't want to play!

Merlin and Jumpy drop to the snow, picking Rudy up.

**ASHLEY**

You promised me!

**GABRIEL**

And you promised me you'd get your sweetheart to help!

Rudy meets eyes with Ashley. She's caught.

**GABRIEL**

He'd rather die than be with you, he'd make a fucked-up boyfriend anyway.

(to Merlin/Jumpy)

Bury him all over the place.

**ASHLEY**

**NO!**

her  
flying out  
  
dark

She charges at her brother. Gabriel grabs her, spins  
into control and PUNCHES her in the jaw. She goes  
of the truck. HITS the ground hard. In shock.  
Merlin and Jumpy march Rudy across the lot. A stand of  
and snowy woods ahead...

**MERLIN**

Beats prison, I guess.

**ASHLEY (O.S.)**

**NICK!!! NICK!!! NOOOOO!!!**

Rudy struggles, desperate but held firm. Jumpy loads a  
handgun, as he muses for the very first time:

**JUMPY**

The problem with prison... is that  
it is founded on the fundamentally  
flawed perception of rehabilitation  
through punishment. A society can't  
hope to create a "changed man" by  
surrounding him with the worst in  
his fellow man; what it  
"rehabilitates" is solely a conviction  
that if he can survive the inhumanity  
of prison, what then, can he not  
withstand? He has seen man's darkest  
soul and kept his sight: what is  
left for such a man? What faith?  
What fear?

At the woods' edge, Jumpy gives the gun to Merlin --

**JUMPY**

Don't get no blood on my boots --

chamber.

The gun goes to Rudy's head. A bullet fills the  
Ashley SCREAMS. Rudy shuts his eyes tight and --

**RUDY**

**WHAT DO YOU WANT TO KNOW!**

Merlin and Jumpy stop. Ashley stops screaming. Gabriel  
turns.

**RUDY**

About the Tomahawk! What the hell do

you want to know!

His guards look to Gabriel. Rudy nods, sweating.

**RUDY**

I spend six months writing poetry  
and my goddamn pen pal fucks me over.  
Thanks for the stamps, Ash. You want  
me, you got me. Whaddya want to know.

Ashley gasps relief. Gabriel smiles.

**GABRIEL**

Everything.

Merlin and Jumpy march Rudy back. Still on the ground:

**ASHLEY**

I love you... Nick, I love you...

Rudy won't meet her eyes.

**GABRIEL**

Hey. She says she loves you, Nick.

**RUDY**

She says a lot of things.

**GABRIEL**

She's getting you to help us... 'cause  
she knows if you don't, you're dead.  
You just tell us what we need to  
know, you two live happily ever after.  
My sister loves you, motherfucker,  
and I ain't gonna have you break her  
heart.

**RUDY**

Wish I had a brother like you.

**GABRIEL**

A girl says she loves you, you say  
something.

Rudy looks at Ashley. Her eyes plead forgiveness.

**RUDY**

I had better sex in prison.

**GABRIEL**

Heyyy. Be nice, convict. We're gonna  
be working together here.

(to his boys)  
Get him back in the rig.

out to  
goes  
Merlin and Jumpy wrench Rudy backward. Ashley reaches  
him, starts to speak. He looks right through her. She  
silent, casts her eyes to the snow.

**PUG (O.S.)**

He's not the guy, Monster.

sidled  
Everyone looks to the truck. Weasel-faced Pug has  
next to Gabriel. Spits some chaw.

It hits Merlin's boots. Merlin growls.

**PUG**

Whole time you were driving, he was  
telling her he's not the guy, he's  
not the guy. I know why he'd tell us  
he's not the guy. why's he telling  
her he's not the guy? What if he's  
not the guy?

Gabriel considers, jumps off the truck. Walks to Rudy:

**GABRIEL**

The man who wrote those letters loved  
Ashley, boys. He lived for her love.

(nods)

Let's see him live for love.

Gabriel puts a gun under Rudy's chin. Rudy flinches.

**GABRIEL**

Where's she work?

**RUDY**

What?

**GABRIEL**

(forces gun harder)

Wrote you a hundred letters, didn't  
she? Where's she work?

**RUDY**

J.C. Penney. Beauty and fragrances.

**GABRIEL**

What's her middle name?

**RUDY**

(thinking hard)  
Samantha.

**GABRIEL**

What'd they call her in high school?

**RUDY**

Bam Bam.

**GABRIEL**

What'd they call her in college?

**RUDY**

What college.

**GABRIEL**

Where'd she drop her cherry?

**ASHLEY**

Gabriel!

**RUDY**

Canada.

**GABRIEL**

Be more specific.

**RUDY**

A station wagon in Canada.

**GABRIEL**

What's her greatest fear?

**RUDY**

Her brother.

**GABRIEL**

Wrong, Nick. It's drowning.

**RUDY**

No. It's her brother.

Rudy stares him down. Gabriel shrugs.

**GABRIEL**

That's love.

He puts the gun away. Ashley regains her breath.

**GABRIEL**

Let's get back on the road. It's time to start talking, Nick. Time to start telling tales --

**RUDY**

Nick don't talk till Nick gets something.

back. Gabriel gives a challenging stare. Rudy stares right

It's a showdown.

**RUDY**

Hot. Chocolate.

The trucker slowly smiles. His crew chuckles.

**MERLIN**

You want that for here or to go?

**RUDY**

I been in Iron Mountain for two years, truck driver. I do one more crime, I'm back there for good, so fuck you and fuck your sister and fuck your trucker friends. You want to hear about some goddamn job of mine? I want some hot-goddamn-chocolate.

They've stopped laughing.

**RUDY**

And some pecan-fucking-pie.

**INT. TRUCK STOP - NIGHT**

**CLOSE ON HOT CHOCOLATE AND PECAN PIE**

Rudy's scarf  
The six of them sit in a booth, Ashley leaning on shoulder apologetically. The four truckers watch him his pie. "White Christmas" plays over the speakers.

**GABRIEL**

So when you worked there --

eating. Rudy raises a finger sharply. Silence. He continues Scrapes the last of his pie crumbs.

**GABRIEL**

You knew the place --

**RUDY**

Hey.

with Rudy stares hard. Gobbles the crumbs, washes it down  
his hot chocolate. Savors it. Sets the mug down.

**RUDY**

Y'know, I could really go for some  
onion rings.

his Gabriel nods to Jumpy, who snaps his arm up, SMASHING  
knuckles into Rudy's face.

**ASHLEY**

Gabriel! You said talk to him. That's  
all you ever said...

**GABRIEL**

We're talking, aren't we?

Rudy holds his nose. Blood trickles.

**GABRIEL**

How much money's in that casino?  
Day-to-day.

**RUDY**

I don't know.

**GABRIEL**

The hell you don't.

**RUDY**

(sighs, a guess)  
Five million?

**GABRIEL**

You wrote Ash that letter, you told  
her that story 'bout working Christmas  
Eve, bout how they'd send half the  
security guys home, nobody comin, in  
that night. And the rest of you got  
shit-faced drinking hot buttered  
rum. That a true story now?

**RUDY**

Christmas... Eve...

**GABRIEL**

You know where the guards are. You know how to get in and out. You know where the money is.

(nods)

We're taking down that casino, convict. You're the guy gonna tell us how.

Rudy turns slightly pale.

**RUDY**

Hey, it's... been two years --

**GABRIEL**

We got faith in you, Nick Mason.

(smiles)

You're our inside man.

**INT. TRUCK STOP BATHROOM - NIGHT**

It's  
pacing.

Rudy slams in, letting the door smack shut behind him.  
a tiny windowless closet. Rudy kicks a stall door,

**RUDY**

...goddamn it, Rudy... goddamn it...  
goddamn girl, goddamn Nick... you're  
so smart, so fucking smart...

reflection

He stalks a circle, grabs a sink, and stares at his  
in the mirror. He looks a wreck. He settles down.

**RUDY**

Where's your Christmas dinner now...

**INT. TRUCK STOP - MOMENTS LATER**

and  
Ashley

A COUPLE leaves the booth behind Gabriel's crew. Pug  
Merlin reach over, steal their leftovers and dig in.  
fidgets.

beside:

Jumpy regards the garlands painted on the windows

**JUMPY**

I've read where the retail industry

does fifty percent of its business between December 1st and December 25th. Half the year's business, in one month's time. It seems to me an intelligent society would legislate a second such gift-giving holiday, create, say, a Christmas Two -- late May, early June -- to further stimulate growth and prosperity. For who would protest such a holiday? Taking the fifty percent model, a Christmas Two would grow this country's annual per capita income by close to one-third.

Everyone stares at Jumpy.

**GABRIEL**

Christmas Two.

The Indian nods. Gabriel shakes his head.

**GABRIEL**

Ever since you started night school, you been givin, me headaches, Jumpy. Headaches.

(to Merlin/Pug)

Go see what's taking him.

**INT. BATHROOM - SAME**

his Rudy crouches behind the door, a piece of iron pipe in grip, ready to strike. Listening... listening...

in the AS the door SLAMS open, swinging fast and BASHING him head.

Rudy tags the floor, drops the pipe, knocked out.

Pug Merlin and Pug gaze down on him, shaking their heads. spits tobacco. Hits Merlin's boots again.

**INT. TRUCK STOP - MOMENTS LATER**

for Rudy's back, with a new facial bruise. Ashley reaches his hand; he pulls it away. Gabriel unfolds a piece of paper -- it's a crude map.

**GABRIEL**

Here ya go, convict. We cased the place in the fall, got the layout down. What you're gonna do is show us where each of these doors go, what the upstairs level looks like, where they got the alarms, all of it.

**MERLIN**

And where they hide the real money.

Merlin exhales some smoke in Pug's face. Pug hacks,  
shoves  
him.

**GABRIEL**

And Nick? If you even think about setting us up, giving us some bad information? We go down... you go down...

(lets it settle)

Now. Christmas Eve. How many guards are there gonna be?

Rudy surveys the table. All five waiting for him.  
Sighs.

**RUDY**

Hell. Ten?

**GABRIEL**

And which of these doors here lead up to the security level?

Gabriel passes the map across the table. Rudy stares at  
it.

**MERLIN**

Start talking, Nick.

Rudy's still staring.

**PUG**

Start talkin

**RUDY**

Who the hell made this map.

**GABRIEL**

What?

**RUDY**

I said, who the hell made the map?

**GABRIEL**

I did.

**RUDY**

This isn't the Tomahawk.

**GABRIEL**

What the fuck are you talking about.

**RUDY**

This is the front entrance, right?  
You get through the slots, you hit  
craps here, not blackjack. Blackjack's  
here to here -- lined up. What's  
this, the cage? Cage is over there,  
hard to get to, you got it all mixed  
around --

**PUG**

That's what it looks like!

**RUDY**

Since when? What the hell is this  
room?

**MERLIN**

Buffet. Whaddya think it is?

**RUDY**

Buffet is by the goddamn bar! What  
the hell kind of map is this?!

pulls Gabriel reaches across the booth, grabs Rudy's shirt,  
his face to table level:

**GABRIEL**

We walked the place for a week.

**RUDY**

And I worked there. For a year.

Neither man blinks.

**PUG**

Map is kinda dirty, Monster...

**RUDY**

They changed the layout.

**GABRIEL**

What?

Rudy nods, pretending to be dawning upon.

**RUDY**

They changed the layout -- whadda they call you? Mr. Monster? They remodeled the place. When I worked there -- listen to me -- guy that managed the joint, guy who ran it--

**ASHLEY**

Jack. Jack Bangs.

**RUDY**

Right, Jack Bangs. Uh... guy was always talking bout fixing the place up. Maybe get a better crowd. Musta gone and done it while I was in the Mountain.

(pushes map away)

I don't know this map, man. How the hell am I supposed to tell you what door goes where?

**GABRIEL**

They wouldn't have changed the security setup.

**RUDY**

When I worked there, this was Bangs, office. Back here. He kept a little safe in the... uh, the wall, money held take for himself, skim from the Indians. Called it the... uh...

(stumbling)

...the Powwow Safe.

**JUMPY**

The Powwow Safe?

**RUDY**

His personal safe, he gave it a name. Now you're telling me they've taken his office, put the buffet there? Then who knows what else they changed.

Gabriel stares at him, suspicious.

**GABRIEL**

So what the hell good are you...

**RUDY**

You'd have to get me inside.

(carefully)

Get inside, watch where the money's moving, see where the guards are going. Then I could work with your map.

**GABRIEL**

Wrong, convict. You walk in there, they recognize you.

**PUG**

So what?

**GABRIEL**

They recognize him, they'll remember him after the job goes down.

**RUDY**

They won't recognize me.

**GABRIEL**

Why not.

**RUDY**

Trust me. They won't recognize me.

**GABRIEL**

We'll trust you when we're rich. Why not.

**RUDY**

'Cause you're gonna get me a disguise.

Rudy locks eyes with Gabriel.

**RUDY**

I give you the wrong information, you're gonna shoot me. Well, I don't know your damn map. So you can either find a way to get me in there... or you can shoot me right now.

A WAITRESS comes over, drops their check on the table.

It

rests near Rudy. Rudy locks eyes with Gabriel.

And pushes the check his way.

**EXT. SNOWY HIGHWAY - NIGHT**

blacktop.

Now

The "Motor City Monster" RUMBLES along a two-lane  
Across barren Michigan tundra. A sign reads "You Are  
Entering Powahachee Indian Lands. No Littering."

**INT. GABRIEL'S RIG - CAB - NIGHT**

the

Gabriel drives, with Ashley beside him. Rudy sits in  
sleeper, Jumpy sitting guard.

**OUT THE WINDOW**

lot

they pass a brightly neon-lit building, with a parking  
full of cars. The Tomahawk Casino, with a red neon axe  
pointing the way.

PRIME

And a marquee which reads: "10X ODDS ON CRAPS. \$5.95

**RIB. PERFORMING TONIGHT: DAKOTA!"**

The truck motors on by. Gabriel nods to Rudy:

**GABRIEL**

Bring back some memories, Nick?

**RUDY**

More than you know.

**EXT. KNIGHTS INN - NIGHT**

amidst

gas.

A Midwestern castles-and-Camelot-themed chain hotel,  
an outcrop of roadside exit civilization: fast food and  
The Great Lakes Trucking rig parked in the hotel's lot.

**INT. KNIGHTS INN - HALLWAY - NIGHT**

Gabriel

Faux stonemasonry and torches. "Regal" purple carpets.  
and his crew escort Rudy into --

**INT. HOTEL ROOM**

-- his quarters. Jumpy marches Rudy to the bed, snaps a  
handcuff around his ankle --

**RUDY**

What the hell is this? What happened  
to working together?

-- and snaps the other cuff to the bedframe.

**GABRIEL**

Rather be back in the Mountain?

**RUDY**

Might as well be.

**GABRIEL**

Don't have Weather Channel in the  
Mountain, Nick.

phone Gabriel tosses him a TV remote. Merlin rips the room's  
out of the wall, takes it. They return to the hallway.

**GABRIEL**

Sleep good, loverboy. Tomorrow you  
got singing for your supper to do.

The truckers leave. Rudy tugs at his ankle cuff, sighs,  
collapses back on the bed. Ashley has remained.

Rudy sits up, sees her.

**RUDY**

Get your own room.

She approaches instead. Sits beside. Gently:

**ASHLEY**

He said he wanted to talk to you.  
When he found the letters... he said  
"when your boyfriend gets out, I  
wanna talk to him." I thought he  
meant back in Detroit. I thought he  
meant --

**RUDY**

But you knew why. Knew why, didn't  
ya.

Ashley stands her ground, guilty.

**ASHLEY**

I thought we'd have a few more days.

**RUDY**

For what? You to talk me into "helping"? What, he promise you a share of the winnings?

**ASHLEY**

No!

**RUDY**

Well, shit, Judas, you shoulda at least gotten that --

**ASHLEY**

Nick! He wants to know how to rob it, and he'll leave you alone! That's all he wants!

(breaking down)

I hate him, Nick... you know how...

**RUDY**

So get him outta your life. Get out of Michigan. They got perfume counters in Chicago, don't they?

**ASHLEY**

Not without you.

She reaches to touch him. Rudy turns his back on her.

**RUDY**

Since when do some trucker pals start thinking big, anyway?

**ASHLEY**

They run routes mostly east, retail stuff, warehouses. But Gabriel knows some guys in New York, Miami, guys he helps get guns to Detroit. Hides 'em with his regular loads.

**RUDY**

He working for them on this one?

**ASHLEY**

No. He wants to be working for himself someday.

**RUDY**

And I'm his ticket.

(considers)

What's the last place they took down?

**ASHLEY**

What?

**RUDY**

Gabriel and his guys. What's the last place they robbed?

Ashley frowns.

**ASHLEY**

I don't think they've ever robbed anything before. I think they've just driven guns.

Rudy looks at her with new interest.

**RUDY**

They've never done a robbery?

**ASHLEY**

(shrugs)

They're truck drivers.

For the first time in a long time... Rudy smiles.

**RUDY**

Then they do need me, don't they. They really need me...

**ASHLEY**

We're gonna get out of here, Nick. We're gonna get out of this...

**RUDY**

We? What "we"...

Rudy stares at her. The smile gone.

**RUDY**

Get your own room, Ashley.

**ASHLEY**

Nick...

**RUDY**

Get your own room.

wanting to  
Ashley pulls away, walks to the door. Turns back, say something, but Rudy's not even looking her way.

**ASHLEY**

If I'd told you what he wanted, you'd have been gone. You'd have gotten on that bus and stayed on it. And if that's selfish, I am. If that's lying, I'm a liar. But I been dealing with fucked-up brother and his fucked-up friends for a long time, and I was stronger than him then and I'm stronger than him now. 'Cause he showed up for money. I showed up for love.

(hard)

And if you're so ready to make me your enemy... then what did you show up for, Nick. What did you really want... with me...

With a fiery look, she strides from the room.

the end

Rudy stands, can't get far cuffed to the bed. Checks table, finds a Bible and a deck of cards.

parking

Out his second-floor window is a view of the rear lot.

FISHERMEN

Fishermen Do

Rudy watches as a Chevy Blazer parks and two drunk get out. The truck's bumper sticker reads "Ice It All Year Long."

hotel. He

Rudy watches the good ol' boys stumble toward the turns back, surveys his new prison cell

**RUDY**

They've never done a robbery...

(nods)

Christmas is looking up.

**INT. RUDY'S ROOM - MORNING**

the

St."

still

The bed has been dragged to the door to the bathroom, comforter and pillow are on the floor, "Miracle on 34th is on the TV, and Rudy lies asleep on the ground, ankle cuffed.

Two SHADOWS fall across him.

**INT. HALLWAY - MORNING**

passing  
Rudy is brusquely dragged out by Jumpy and Merlin,  
Ashley, who lies asleep in the hall, head on a pillow.

**MERLIN**

Having romance problems, Romeo?

**RUDY**

Not with you.

at  
They march him onward. Rudy glances over his shoulder  
at Ashley.

Who spent the night at his door.

**INT. GAME ROOM - MORNING**

with  
tossing  
in.  
A wood-panelled room adjacent to a small indoor pool,  
arcade games and a dart board. Gabriel's with Pug,  
darts, as Jumpy and a chain-smoking Merlin haul Rudy

**PUG**

Goddamn, Merlin. There any part of  
the day you don't smoke?

**MERLIN**

There anytime you don't got a mouthful  
of shit?

**PUG**

Cancer-sucker.

**MERLIN**

Acid-chewer.

Gabriel THWAPS a dart into the board, to shut them up.

**GABRIEL**

Take a look what Pug's bought for  
ya.

boots,  
Pug empties a shopping bag on a pinball machine. Cowboy

and a spurs, a black cowboy hat, a black rhinestone jacket  
longhaired wig tumbles out.

**RUDY**

A cowboy. You're going to send me into an Indian casino disguised as a cowboy. Have you thought this entirely through?

**GABRIEL**

Put it on.

Gabriel Merlin and Jumpy shove Rudy toward the merchandise.  
slams another dart into the board, then turns:

**GABRIEL**

You're a country-western singer up from Nashville for the the holidays. Visiting your Grandma on the lake, driving into the Tomahawk for some scotch and slots. You only play the slots, you got that? Don't want no dealer friend of yours recognizing you, you sidle up to shoot some craps.

**RUDY**

What kind of half-ass cowboy plays the slots?

**GABRIEL**

You do.

**RUDY**

At least gimme video poker.

**GABRIEL**

Shut the fuck up. You play what your girlfriend plays. Ashley's going in with you. You talk to her, otherwise you don't talk to nobody. You walk the room as many times as you want, but the second you come out, I want to know the run of the place.

Rudy examines his new hair and cowboy gear.

**RUDY**

Do I get a country-western name?

**GABRIEL**

You get recognized, convict, You get  
a country-western funeral.

**EXT. TOMAHAWK CASINO - DAY**

shadow

The Chevy Nova crunches into the parking lot in the  
of the gaudy neon axe.

**INT. NOVA - DAY**

and

Rudy's in "disguise": paste-on goatee, tinted shades  
black cowboy gear. Very Nashville Network.

handcuffs.

He's wedged between Jumpy and Merlin, wearing  
Gabriel, Ashley and Pug in the back.

**RUDY**

Y'know what, guys? I woke up this  
morning, I got a really lucky feeling  
going on. I mean it, I'm feeling  
that good. I wouldn't be surprised  
if I walk in there, pull a handle  
and hit jackpot. Hell, we wouldn't  
even have to --

**GABRIEL**

Get out.

**EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS**

unlocks

Rudy stamps feet, shivering in the cold, as Merlin  
his cuffs. Gabriel reaches to help Ashley out --

**ASHLEY**

Get your goddamn hands off me --

She edges toward Rudy, then stops. A chill still there.

**GABRIEL**

You got one hour.

**RUDY**

I'm gonna need some money.

Gabriel hands a bill.

**RUDY**

Ten dollars? What do I do with ten

dollars?

**GABRIEL**

Don't tip.

**RUDY**

Monster. If we're working together here, we gotta be working together. I can't walk in there looking like the Lone Fucking Ranger with ten bucks to throw down. You don't want me getting noticed, right? Not getting noticed costs a guy at least a couple hundred.

fingers  
wallets,  
Gabriel glares, turns to his crew. Muttered, rubs his  
together. Merlin, Pug and Jumpy reach for their  
grumbling. Gabriel takes a few twenties from each.  
Rudy nods thanks as Gabriel hands him the cash --

**GABRIEL**

(threateningly)

Don't. Lose.

slip her  
Rudy pockets the wad, hooks his elbow for Ashley to  
arm through. Grins with a drawl:

**RUDY**

You ready to gamble, darlin'?

She regards him warily, but puts her arm in his.

**RUDY**

(to the boys)

Y'all take care of my guitar.

Gabriel  
He tips his hat, and strides for the casino entrance.  
and his truckers watch them go.

**MERLIN**

(grumbles)

Who's robbin' who here, Gabriel...

**GABRIEL**

Get in there and watch 'em. Watch their every fuckin' move.

**INT. TOMAHAWK CASINO - DAY**

brightly  
ceilings  
tables

The cascade of JINGLING and JANGLING COINS fills the lit, horrendously-carpeted space. Wooden-beamed suggest a rustic theme, but the neon slots, lush green and red wheels of fortune are pure Midwest Vegas.

size of  
mill

The Tomahawk is tiny by Nevada standards, about the size of a large bingo hall. This morning, about FIFTY GAMBLERS about.

Powahachee

Skimpily-dressed COCKTAIL WAITRESSES, most of them Indians, pimp drinks. Bored DEALERS deal.

--

As the sound of slot machine payoffs suddenly go silent

**INT. JACK BANGS' OFFICE - DAY**

**CLOSE ON STEREO SYSTEM**

"Little  
currently  
Presses

And some scattered cassettes, labeled "Big Winners," "Little Winners," and "Medium Cash." A HAND pops the tape in the system -- "Big, BIG Winners" and flips it over. Presses play. The sounds of JINGLING and JANGLING return.

**ON FULL SCENE**

glass.  
suit  
air

An office overlooking the casino floor through smoked glass. JACK BANGS, late 50's, silver-hair, capped teeth, shark and high blood pressure, paces his office. He's got the air of a washed-up gameshow host, Wink Martindale, Peter Tommarkin, one of those hacks. Right now he's all

caffeine.

**JACK BANGS**

There's an S-word I'd really like to throw in the discussion here, guys, cause it's a big part of what's going on. Big element, 'kay? S-word. It's

a serious issue, serious factor, so  
I'm just gonna get it out there,  
throw it an out there, so we can  
know it, we can talk about it, we  
can get things done...

(big pause)

Snow. Are you with me, guys? Snow.  
Big time, fucking, grade-A, God-  
quality, S-N-O-W-snow.

with Two INDIAN GOVERNORS sit before him. Business-dressed,  
overcoats, ponytails. One gray-haired, one jet-black.

**JACK BANGS**

There's no snow in Vegas, 'kay? They  
don't know it, they don't want it,  
they got laws against the stuff.  
They got Egypt down there, right,  
they got Monte Carlo, Hawaii, they  
got ancient Rome, but where's the  
Winter Castle, right? Where's the  
Swiss miss Chalet? Where's the Big  
Fucking Igloo?

**YOUNG GOVERNOR**

We understand you, Mr. Bangs.

**JACK BANGS**

Capades? They don't do it. Mittens?  
Outlawed. Why?

**YOUNG GOVERNOR**

We're aware of your position.

**JACK BANGS**

(picks up a chip)

Because down there this is money.  
Up here this is heat.

(pleads)

You wanted Vegas quality, I brought  
it to you. You wanted Vegas press, I  
gave it to you. But guys, please,  
guys... I can't get you Vegas  
profits... till one of ya does some  
spirit dance and does something about  
this snow.

The tribal governors stare him down.

**OLD GOVERNOR**

We understand the Paiutes' casino

saw a net profit of twelve million dollars last year.

**JACK BANGS**

The Paiutes, they cook their books.

**OLD GOVERNOR**

The Waitela reservation made seventeen million.

**JACK BANGS**

(sobers)

Seventeen?

**OLD GOVERNOR**

Perhaps you have researched this, Mr. Bangs. Is the snowfall on our side of the lake that much greater than the snowfall on theirs?

Jack Bangs stares at them both. Considers his next move

--

**JACK BANGS**

I'm bringing in this great showroom act next week; these three Russian girls, they look like Meryl Streep, they can juggle anything.

**YOUNG GOVERNOR**

Mr. Bangs.

**JACK BANGS**

Guys. We're doing it right, here. \$5.99 prime rib? Nobody does that in Michigan. Nobody.

**YOUNG GOVERNOR**

The tribe is concerned that many of your... new ideas are not resulting in any new venues.

**JACK BANGS**

I'm putting liquor in the drinks, I'm giving 10-times odds on craps, I got the girls showing sixteen-percent more skin! Show me another buffet's gonna offer you Coke and Pepsi! Whaddya want me to do?!

**YOUNG GOVERNOR**

We want to see our casino making

money again, Mr. Bangs. Making money  
for our community.

**OLD GOVERNOR**

Like the Paiutes and the Waitela.

The young man stands, stares Jack Bangs in the eye.

**YOUNG GOVERNOR**

We want you doing the job... that we  
brought you here to do.

**INT. TOMAHAWK - DAY**

bucket  
two  
inside:  
Rudy and Ashley move away from a change booth, with a  
of quarters. Rudy messes with his cowboy getup, noting  
SECURITY GUARDS punch a code in a private door, step

**ASHLEY**

So does it look a lot different?

**RUDY**

Here and there. Restaurant, uh, that's  
the main expansion. Tables've been  
moved around; the big man's office,  
I dunno, might be upstairs now.

walks  
They settle at a slot machine. Another SECURITY GUARD  
past them. Rudy turns his back. Ashley notices.

**ASHLEY**

That guy knows you?

**RUDY**

Yeah, uh. Mike. That's Mike.

the  
At the door, Merlin and Jumpy enter, wandering through  
slots.

Rudy sees them.

**RUDY**

You start spending your brother's  
money. I'm gonna take a circuit around  
the joint, check for any new ins and  
outs. I'll snag us some drinks.

As he strides away --

**ASHLEY**

(sotto)

Be careful, Nick...

**MOVING THROUGH THE CASINO**

checking  
GAMBLERS.

with Rudy, ambling among the tables, making a show of  
out the layout. In reality, he's surveying the

Indian  
governors

Passing the cage, he walks right by Jack Bangs and the  
governors. Jack Bangs is all smiles, while the  
turn their backs on him and storm out.

**ARRIVING AT THE BAR**

**RUDY**

Couple rum and Cokes, please.

**INDIAN BARTENDER**

You want that rum and Coke or rum  
and Pepsi?

Rudy

Rudy gives him a strange look. The bartender shrugs.  
still scans the tables, settling on --

**A BLACKJACK TABLE**

One of  
jeans.

where a trio of COLLEGE KIDS are forking over chips.  
them's dark-haired with a goatee, a sweatshirt and  
Rudy studies this kid for moment.

**JACK BANGS (O.S.)**

Gimme a goddamn bottle of anything.

**BACK AT THE BAR**

a

Jack Bangs sidles up, distraught. The barkeep hands him  
bottle. Bangs takes a swig.

**JACK BANGS**

I can't go back to Vegas, Bear.  
They'll fuckin' kill me, 'kay? I

can't go back...

**BARTENDER**

What does the tribe want?

**JACK BANGS**

They want gold-paved roads is what they want. Talking 'bout the fuckin' Paiutes. Fuckin' Paiutes are on the interstate. Nothing I can do about that, man, I didn't pick the spot for your reservation.

**BARTENDER**

Neither did we.

**JACK BANGS**

Yeah, yeah, whatever.

Rudy gets his drinks, as Jack Bangs turns his way:

**JACK BANGS**

Hey. Hey, cowboy. Jack Bangs, I run the place. Nice to have you in the Tomahawk. Tell me something...

him.  
Rudy winces, glancing to see Merlin and Jumpy watching  
Frowns on their faces.

**JACK BANGS**

...does upstate Michigan need another roadside casino or does upstate Michigan need an international gaming destination?

**RUDY**

(wants outta here)  
Roadside casino?

Jack Bangs, smile falls flat.

**JACK BANGS**

Well, so how'd you hear about this place, then. Word-of-mouth? Mass mailings? Cable TV?

**RUDY**

Prison.

**JACK BANGS**

Prison?!

looks  
before  
Rudy shrugs, smiles, takes off with his drinks. Bangs  
sick, turns to a FAT GUY on the next stool over. But  
he can ask, the guy shakes his head --

**FAT GUY**

I just stopped in to use the can.

hands:  
Bangs turns to the bartender, puts his head in his

**JACK BANGS**

I can't go back to Vegas, Bear... I  
can't...

From the slots, we hear a JACKPOT PAYOFF.

**JACK BANGS**

Aw fuck.

**THROUGH THE TABLES**

walks Rudy, as Merlin sidles up next to him:

**MERLIN**

What the hell was that about --

**RUDY**

He didn't recognize me. Back off,  
willya? He didn't recognize me.

slots.  
where  
Merlin eyes him darkly, but lets him walk on into the  
As he nears Ashley, he glances to the blackjack table,  
the College Kid has left... heading for the bathroom --

**ASHLEY**

Hey Nick! We're up fifty cents!

between  
Coke  
-- and as a barely-dressed COCKTAIL WAITRESS crosses  
Rudy and Ashley, blocking her view of him --  
Rudy pretends to crash into her, splashing the rum and  
into his own face --

**RUDY**

Heyyyy!

Reaching Ashley, his goatee is dripping --

**ASHLEY**

Nick, what happened --

**RUDY**

There went my... damn... well, doesn't seem like security's all that switched... Ash, shit, this mustache is starting to fall off. I gotta fix this thing --

(hands her his glass)

-- drink this for me.

storms  
He hustles for the bathroom. A moment later, Jumpy  
by.

Stops at Ashley.

**JUMPY**

What happened?

**ASHLEY**

He started losing his hair.

**INT. CASINO BATHROOM - DAY**

back,  
The College Kid is zipping up when Rudy SLAMS into his  
money in hand, crashing him against the wall:

**RUDY**

Hundred bucks to wear this jacket --

**COLLEGE KID**

Jesus, man, don't kill me!

**RUDY**

Nobody's killing you, kid. Santa's giving you a rhinestone jacket and a hundred bucks.

**INT. TOMAHAWK SAME**

Merlin's at a slot machine, watching the hall to the  
bathrooms. A WAITRESS arrives, hands him a beer:

**MERLIN**

Thanks, sister. How are ya.

**WAITRESS**

Fuckin' freezing.

**MERLIN**

Hell yeah. You work here long?

**WAITRESS**

Five years. Since it opened.

**MERLIN**

How long ago was your makeover?

**WAITRESS**

My what?!

**MERLIN**

No, the place. The remodeling. moving everything around.

The waitress frowns.

**WAITRESS**

The Tomahawk's looked the same since I started, mister.

(shrugs)

Only the losers change.

Merlin stares at her. Then drops his drink to the floor,  
charging for the bathroom.

**INT. BATHROOM**

As Merlin crashes in, seeing the cowboy hat and jacket, back  
turned, adjusting a belt. As the figure turns around.  
It's the College Kid. Merlin stops in his tracks --  
-- as Rudy CRASHES into him from a stall, kicking his legs  
out, driving his throat into a countertop. Merlin hits the  
ground, gagging. Rudy wears the kid's sweatshirt:

**RUDY**

**GO! GO!**

The College Kid, shaking, hustles out the door.

**INT. TOMAHAWK - CONTINUOUS**

of  
As the College Kid, in Rudy's black getup, strides out  
the bathroom hall, walking for the casino exit.

go.  
From the slots, Ashley and Jumpy glance up, seeing him

From their vantage, it looks like Rudy. They frown.  
As they're watching the Kid hit the door, Rudy darts  
out of  
the hall, heads the other way.

**EXT. PARKING LOT/INT. NOVA**

leave  
them.  
Gabriel and Pug sit sentry, seeing the cowboy figure  
the casino. wandering into-the parking lot... away from

**GABRIEL**

Where the hell's he going?

**PUG**

Where the hell's your sister?

As the figure unlocks the driver's door of a Trans Am -  
-

**GABRIEL**

Get him!

off the  
Pug REVS the engine, speeds through the lot, cutting  
Trans Am from backing away.

sees  
Gabriel jumps out, HAULS the cowboy from his car and  
it's the College Kid. Rudy's gone.

**COLLEGE KID**

(scared shitless)

Oh man. It's your jacket, isn't it...

**INT. TOMAHAWK**

throat.  
Merlin stumbles out of the bathroom, holding his  
Catches Jumpy and Ashley's eyes from the slots:

**JUMPY**

Trouble.

**INT. CASINO KITCHEN**

aloft -- As Rudy charges toward COOKS, holding a buffet plate

**RUDY**

MEDIUM RARE?! You call this MEDIUM  
**RARE??!!**

-- hands them the plate, hurries past them, and out the  
--

**EXT. REAR OF CASINO - DAY**

he -- to the back of the building. In his stolen clothes,  
snowy charges across the staff parking area and into the  
expanse of meadow beyond.

Running for a thicket of winter woods.

**EXT. PARKING LOT**

Ashley Merlin and Jumpy stride out to join Gabriel and Pug.  
follows, stumbling to keep up.

**GABRIEL**

Where the HELL did he go?

**MERLIN**

Monster. There never was a structure  
change. This place was built the  
same from day one.

**PUG**

That motherfucker --

**MERLIN**

And Monster... he was talking with  
the casino manager. Nick was talking  
to him.

Gabriel darkens.

**GABRIEL**

Get. Him. Back.

**EXT. SNOWY MEADOW - DAY**

keeps  
the

Rudy races as best he can through the waves of snow. He  
struggling, losing his footing, fighting his way toward  
cover of trees. From far away...

**ASHLEY (O.S.)**

Nick! Run! RUN!!!

view

Rudy turns back to see Merlin, Jumpy and Pug round into  
back at the parking lot. They see him.

And charge into the snowfield.

Rudy breaks into the trees.

**EXT. PARKING LOT**

the

Gabriel pushes Ashley into the Nova and peels out of  
parking lot. Onto reservation roads.

**EXT. WOODS - ON CHASE - DAY**

deeper

Rudy darts among barren oaks and brush pines, crunching  
into snowdrifts, slowing him down. Stumbling forward,  
shivering, breath frosting --

but

-- as Merlin, Jumpy and Pug reach the treeline. Gaining  
struggling too. With guns held.

Rudy keeps battling through the drifts --

rest;

turns to

-- as GUNSHOTS start to ring out. Rudy glances back to  
the truckers are a hundred yards distant. But as he  
struggle on, treebark SPLITS apart beside him.

Rudy keeps running.

**INT. NOVA**

shortcut

Bouncing over a snowy dirt road, having found a  
into the woods. Gabriel searches the trees, Ashley too.

**EXT. WOODS**

Rudy's Merlin, Jumpy and Pug keep up their steady march.  
running figure now only fifty yards distant.

**MERLIN**

You keep running, Nick! Keep running now! Can't keep warm if you don't keep running! We'll just be right back here... keeping track of your trail.

bootprints. ANGLE to show Merlin's striding right in Rudy's

Pug FIRES off two shots.

panting... They KICK UP snow just behind Rudy, struggling,

**MERLIN (O.S.)**

Wherever you run... we'll get there. Fast as you want... we'll be there. We drive for a living, Nick. Twelve, fifteen, twenty-hour days.

brush Rudy's anguished, ducking behind some pines, trying to  
away his footprints. Realizes it's useless.

A BULLET whistles through the pine branches.

**MERLIN (O.S.)**

We got nothing but time.

louder. Rudy takes a breath, crashes onward --  
-- then stops at the sound of a RUMBLING. Getting  
Closer. It's a car's engine.

out Rudy spins for the source, focuses, and manages to make  
swale. a snow-covered dirt road fifty yards away, down a  
Another BULLET smashes treebark. Rudy runs for it.

**EXT. WOODED ROAD - DAY**

corner As Rudy leaps out to wave down the car, as around the  
comes a Chevy Nova --

widen, he

-- with Gabriel and Ashley inside. Gabriel's eyes  
floors the gas, RACING right for Rudy.

wooded

Rudy scampers toward the opposite roadside, a steep  
slope cradling a meadow and frozen river --

**ASHLEY**

No!!!

the

-- as Ashley grabs Gabriel's steering wheel, swerving  
other way. Gabriel fights her for control --

road,

-- as the Nova just misses Rudy, who dives off the  
hits the slope and tumbles head-over-heels toward its  
a hundred feet down, kicking up geysers of snow!

bottom,

Gabriel

On the road, the Nova skids to a stop. Ashley and  
leap out, as Merlin, Jumpy and Pug reach the road.

**AT THE SLOPE'S BOTTOM**

Rudy pops to his feet, a dazed snowball.

**BACK UP AT THE ROAD**

slope-top

Gabriel grabs a rifle from the Nova, steps to the  
edge and takes aim --

**ASHLEY**

**RUN!!!**

Sliding

-- as Ashley suddenly slams into him from behind --  
Sending the both of them tumbling down the slope!  
and tangled, the rifle flying from Gabriel's grasp --

**TO THE BOTTOM**

struggles

-- where they come to a tangled, snowy halt. Gabriel  
to clear the ice from his face --  
-- as the butt of his rifle cracks him in the jaw.

**RUDY**

That's for reading her mail.

He extends a hand to Ashley --

**RUDY**

Come on.

howls,  
the  
way  
-- and hauls her to her feet. Ashley beams. As Gabriel  
the two of them scramble away from the woods, Rudy with  
rifle, toward the meadow and its frozen pond.  
More GUNSHOTS ring as Merlin, Jumpy and Pug slide their  
down the ravine.

**EXT. FROZEN RIVER - CONTINUOUS**

bridge  
Rudy and Ashley race out across the ice. The traction's  
slippery, but there's no way around. There's a highway  
two hundred yards away, with sparse truck traffic.

**RUDY**

We get to the bridge, we're all right!

**ASHLEY**

Nick, the ice is --

**RUDY**

Get to the bridge!  
(waving at traffic)

**HEY! HEY! DOWN HERE!**

at  
way --  
He grips her hand tighter, as SHOTS crash into the ice  
their feet. Suddenly, the ground splinters and gives

-- and Ashley goes plummeting through to the river! She  
vanishes from sight in an instant!

stunned, at  
Rudy scrambles back, onto sturdy ice. He stares,  
the ripples in the freezing water.

Ashley's not coming up.

**RUDY**

ridge. Looks to the truckers in pursuit. Coming down the

Then the highway. Safety within sight.

tightly But he can't run. Cursing himself, he grips the rifle  
and LEAPS into the ice-hole --

**EXT. RIVER BENEATH THE ICE**

body -- plummeting underwater, the temperature hitting his  
like needles. He writhes, spinning around --

at -- and sees Ashley ten yards away, desperately pounding  
the ice above her. Strength giving out.

fight, Rudy struggles to her, wrapping an arm around her. She  
panicked, clawing at the ice, both of them pulled  
further away from the opening.

With Ashley safely in hand, Rudy raises his rifle-arm,  
pressing the barrel against the ice above them --

gray- -- and FIRES. A HOLE blasts a shaft of light into the  
reaches blue. Rudy FIRES again. Another HOLE caves in. Ashley  
for a sheath of ice, splashing --

**TO THE SURFACE**

surfaces -- clutching frozen ground, treading water. Rudy  
bridge. beside her, the both of them gasping, facing the

Instinctively, they spin around --

**TO FIND GABRIEL, MERLIN, JUMPY AND PUG**

-- standing right behind them. Guns trained.

**GABRIEL**

(rubs his jaw)

At the rate you're going, Nick...  
I'm gonna have a hard time ever  
considering you family.

He extends his hand, a gesture of help. But menacing.

**GABRIEL**

How lucky ya feeling now.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. GABRIEL'S RIG - DAY**

Pitch black. We can barely make out a huddled, fetal form, quaking and trembling. It's Rudy. Dripping wet, on the verge of hypothermia. Trying to stay conscious:

**RUDY**

I-I-I-I have n-n-no g-g-gifts to br-br-bring, pa rum-p-p-p-p-p  
(struggling)  
...pum-pum-pum. N-n-no treasures for the k-k-k  
(waits)  
...king.

The trailer doors swing open, crashing harsh light upon him. He squints into the light, shivering madly.

**RUDY**

Pa-rum-pum-pum-pum.

**INT. KNIGHTS INN GAME ROOM - DAY**

Gabriel is hurling darts again, focused, expressionless. Bullseye.

Merlin and Jumpy haul Rudy in. He collapses at Gabriel's feet, unable to stand. Still trembling.

A couple KIDS scamper into the doorway --

**MERLIN**

Game room's closed.

-- and Merlin slams the door in their face. Gabriel hurls another bullseye, then retrieves his darts from the board.

**GABRIEL**

A for effort, Nick, honestly, A for effort and an honorary degree. I'm surprised you never escaped from the Mountain.

**RUDY**

(teeth chattering)  
...never... tried...

**GABRIEL**

Nick, here's what we're gonna do. In the spirit of the season, I'm going to give you a chance. I understand you're unhappy. Right outta the lockup, here against your will, it's the holidays and there's reruns on **TV**.

(beat)

So we're gonna have a contest.

Gabriel strides back to him, with two darts.

**GABRIEL**

We're each going to get one of these. Whichever one of us hits closer to the bullseye... gets what he wants.

(beat)

You land closer, you get Ashley. And you guys get to go free. I land closer... and we start getting your help.

He lifts Rudy's shaking hand, puts a dart in it. Rudy's fingers are half-frozen, they don't bend. Gabriel has

to

wedge it in.

**GABRIEL**

May the best sportsman win.

Gabriel turns to the board, ten feet away, and tosses

his

ring.

**GABRIEL**

Damn.

He steps aside for Rudy. Rudy struggles to raise his

hand,

chattering,  
--

brings his  
finally

trembling badly. He focuses on the board, teeth  
tries to reposition his fingers, rears back and throws

-- except the dart remains in his frozen grip. He  
icy hand back, tries to move his fingers. And the dart  
tumbles out and hits the floor at his feet.

Gabriel smiles, steps close.

**GABRIEL**

Got something to say to me, Nick?

**RUDY**

...ttt..tt... two out of three?

CRASHES

Gabriel grabs his jacket and hurls him backward. Rudy  
into a chair, flanked by video games.

**GABRIEL**

What'd you tell that casino manager?

**RUDY**

Nnn... nothing...

**GABRIEL**

You were talking to him! What'd you  
tell him!?

**RUDY**

Nothing... I promise-nothing...

**GABRIEL**

**MAYBE SOMETHING ABOUT A ROBBERY?**

**RUDY**

**NO!**

the

Gabriel spins to the dartboard, pulls out a fistful and  
wheels. He whistles a dart at Rudy's head. it SMACKS

wall beside his ear.

third

He whistles another. It TRUNKS right above his head. A

HITS the wall by his chin.

**RUDY**

He thought I was some gambler... he didn't know me... he didn't recognize me!

**GABRIEL**

I been driving rigs a long time, Nick. Four, five million miles of road. Worked for people who wouldn't keep me on less I was driving fifteen hours a day. Tell 'em I needed sleep, I needed rest, shit, they'll hire someone else...

ear. Gabriel flings another dart. Just misses Rudy's other

**GABRIEL**

...Dispatcher's screaming for me to haul ass, he's got a load on the runback for me. Shipper's making me wait for the pickup, receiver's bitching 'bout the count...

Another dart NAILS the wall, right through Rudy's hair.

**GABRIEL**

...Got the cops at the bottom of every mountain, got the DOT at the top. And every day, every day, I see all those faces in their little airbag Hot Wheels, moms and pops and jam-faced kiddies, giving me that look to go to hell and get off their happy goddamn highway. Hey. They don't gotta get two thousand miles by sundown, or the gang don't eat come sunrise.

ringed Gabriel strides to Rudy, sitting stock-still, his head by darts. Stares him down.

**GABRIEL**

It's time for me... to be working for me. I want mine, Nick. And I need you.

(frightening calm)

Did you tell your manager there's gonna be a robbery?

**RUDY**

No, Gabriel... no...

Gabriel pulls the darts free. Backs away again.

**RUDY**

...he... he asked me... how I'd heard  
about his place... he didn't know it  
was me...

**GABRIEL RAISES A DART TO THROW**

**RUDY**

**I PROMISE YOU HE DIDN'T KNOW IT WAS  
ME!**

reprieve,  
-- and then lowers it. Believing he's gotten a  
Rudy relaxes, his shivering coming under control.

**RUDY**

Man, Monster... just... just don't  
start trying to hit me...

**GABRIEL**

Nick. I been trying to hit you.

into  
skewering  
Five  
feathering  
Gabriel rears back and WHISTLES another dart. It plugs  
Rudy's chest. Rudy screams. Gabriel FIRES another,  
him in the ribs. Then a third, fourth and fifth.  
Rudy howls in pain, his body too numb to defend itself.  
darts protrude from his chest, colorful plastic  
and spreading rivulets of blood.

**GABRIEL**

Maybe that'll help sharpen your  
memory.

Gabriel stalks close.

**GABRIEL**

Tonight we're gonna take another  
look at that map. And this time you're  
gonna tell me what I need to know.

**INT. RUDY'S ROOM - DAY**

the  
Rudy gets hurled inside by Merlin and Jumpy. He hits

sits floor beside the bed, where Ashley sits prisoner. Pug guard, watching "How The Grinch Stole Christmas" on TV.

**ASHLEY**

Nick! Jesus, Nick --

to She falls to his side. Merlin cuffs Rudy's ankle again the bedframe. He and Jumpy head out --

**MERLIN**

Pug.

Whoville. Pug's engrossed in the cartoon. They're singing in

**MERLIN**

**PUG!**

floor Pug snaps to. Shuts off the TV, spits some chaw on the and gone. Rudy and Ashley are left alone.

**ASHLEY**

Nick, oh my God, what'd he do to you? What'd he do?

She touches his bloodied chest. Rudy winces badly.

**RUDY**

He had some points to make...

Ashley helps pull his shirt off, sees the wounds:

**ASHLEY**

Jesus Christ, stay here, don't move, stay right here --

**RUDY**

(near-delirium)

All I wanted... was to make it home... for a little of Dad's turkey, and Mom's stuffing... Aunt Lisbeth's acorn gravy... Aunt Mary's cranberry buns...

washcloths Ashley has leapt to the bathroom. She brings wet back to clean and dress --

**ASHLEY**

We'll get there, baby... we'll get there...

**RUDY**

...Haven't had cranberry buns... in five whole years...

**ASHLEY**

Shh, now. Rest now. Two years, Nick. You haven't had cranberry buns in two years.

get

She kisses him softly. Rudy meets her eyes. Staring to his bearings back...

**ASHLEY**

You saved my life.

(beat)

You could have run, but you didn't. You saved me.

**RUDY**

You saved me.

**ASHLEY**

I saved you because I love you, Nick.

(smiles)

Why'd you save me?

still

Rudy studies her hopeful face, attending to his wounds.

weak and distant:

**RUDY**

Guy I was in with... car thief... I used to read your letters to him. I know they were private... I know, but... you spend twenty-four hours a day with somebody, you gotta talk, y'know? You gotta share. Or the room gets even smaller.

(beat)

And sometimes, I'd be reading them, and he'd close his eyes, get a smile on his face... and I'd know somewhere inside he was pretending you were writing to him -- He'd see your face, your pictures on the wall...

(beat)

Some nights I think he fell in love with you, too.

Rudy touches a hand to her hair.

**RUDY**

You gave a couple guys hope, Ashley.  
And with hope, there ain't nothing  
you can't survive.

his  
Ashley stares, touched, still kneading the cloth into  
chest.

him  
Rudy struggles up, his face level with hers. She kisses  
tenderly. Lingering.

down her  
And this time Rudy responds, mouth seeking, working  
neck.

Her eyes flutter closed.

**ASHLEY**

I'm sorry, Nick... I'm so sorry...

**RUDY**

Don't say my name...

**ASHLEY**

I love you, Nick...

**RUDY**

Ash. Don't say it. Don't say my name.

still  
Ashley hesitates. Carefully strokes his chest. He's  
kissing her, softly, still somewhat delirious.

**ASHLEY**

(a small frown)

I love you...

eyes  
As he returns to her lips, mouths joining. Ashley's  
close again, as they fold into each other...  
...and move slowly, tenderly, back to the floor.

**EXT. KNIGHTS INN HOTEL - DUSK**

Ashley  
A bitter cold sunset. Through a room's window, Rudy and

lie tangled in sheets on the carpet.

**INT. RUDY'S ROOM**

Ashley nestles against him. Rudy stares skyward. Hard.

**RUDY**

They'll have guns.

**ASHLEY**

What?

**RUDY**

You said they've run guns, in their trucks. So they'll have guns. To do this robbery. They'll have serious guns.

**ASHLEY**

I don't know...

**RUDY**

We'll need one.

Ashley frowns. There's a new look in Rudy's eyes.

**RUDY**

I'm going to have to be inside that casino. When it happens. I'll need to be part of it. I can't just be drawing some map.

**ASHLEY**

Nick, what are you talking about?

**RUDY**

We need to find a way to make me part of it.

**ASHLEY**

Part of... with them?

Rudy meets her eyes.

**RUDY**

If we're helping them with their robbery, we're gonna be doing more than just walking away. Like that's some Christmas bonus.

He nods, scheming the way he's always known.

**RUDY**

You want him outta your life? You want a real New Year to look forward to?

(bravely)

If we're gonna do this... we're gonna do it to get it all.

**INT. KNIGHTS INN RESTAURANT - NIGHT**

sits at  
A medieval-themed biergarten. A happy FAMILY of five  
a booth, singing along to "Good King Wencelas."

chewing:  
In the booth beside, Merlin and Pug are holding court. Merlin's puffing smoke rings. Pug watches dully,

**PUG**

Knew a guy in Joliet, smoked ten packs a day like you. His lungs got so black they couldn't find 'em with an x-ray.

**MERLIN**

That right? Shit. I used to run rigs for a guy loved your chaw there. Shit rotted out his tongue, had to build him one outta silicon so the poor boy could talk. You ever see a motherfucker with a silicon fucking tongue?

wad.  
The Happy Family stops singing. Pug considers, spits a

**PUG**

Hell. The guy from Joliet, those black-ass lungs were the least of his problems. Got so much smoke in him his lungs couldn't even hold it. Got into his system, man. Into his blood. Coming out his ears, man, coming out his eyes. Guy'd be walking the row, smoke'd be puffing out his skin.

shrugs,  
The Happy Family trade discomfited looks. Merlin  
takes another drag.

**MERLIN**

This trucker? Met a girl in a bar one night, she didn't know his situation. He's drunk, she's drunk, they get to mackin' hot and heavy and the woman swallows it. His tongue. Sucks it right down.

**PUG**

My guy would walk into a room, set off the goddamn sprinklers.

**MERLIN**

His lips went next. You ever see some silicon-fucking-lips?

glance  
The Happy Family flees their booth. Pug and Merlin over. And grab their leftovers. Rifling the grub:

**MERLIN**

(with disgust)  
Vegetarians...

biergarten,  
commenced.  
Behind them, Gabriel and Jumpy file into the leading Rudy and Ashley to the booth. Meeting

Rudy, battered and freezer-burnt, gets shoved in first. Gabriel throws down the casino map:

**GABRIEL**

Start singing.

**RUDY**

I have no gifts to bring, pa-rumpum-pum-pum

**GABRIEL**

Sing it in pictures, Nick.

charge.  
Rudy takes the map, glances at Ashley, and then takes

For the first time, he's giving the orders:

**RUDY**

What you gotta worry about first is the guards. Place doesn't look much richer than when I worked there, so let's figure you're gonna have to deal with ten of 'em. There'll be two on the floor, walking the room,

that leaves eight up above. Eyes in the sky. They see something up, they're the ones who'll hit the silent alarm and you're fucked.

**MERLIN**

How do we take them out?

**RUDY**

You gotta get someone upstairs.

**MERLIN**

How do we do that?

Rudy takes the map, points to the gaming tables area:

**RUDY**

Across from blackjack, there's a security doorway. Keypad access.

**GABRIEL**

What's the code?

**RUDY**

Uh... they change it every month. I wouldn't know.

(beat)

If there's trouble on the floor, you'll get security coming through. what you gotta do, is get inside that doorway once they do. You gotta draw 'em out.

**PUG**

Without having them hit the alarms.

**RUDY**

I got an idea on that one. Once you're up there, you gotta hold those guards down till some backup can get there. There's a security camera room that videotapes everything. You've gotta destroy every last one of those tapes.

**MERLIN**

What about the money?

**RUDY**

You lock down security, you move behind the cage. You hit the Count Room. There'll be a guy in there but he's got no guns; room's accessed by

another code. Cashiers'll know it.  
They'll have alarms.

**JUMPY**

What about the Powwow Safe?

**RUDY**

What?

**JUMPY**

The Powwow Safe. The secret safe.  
You said the manager's got a safe in  
his office where he hides skim money.

**RUDY**

Oh. Right. Yeah. That's, uh upstairs.  
Uh. Here. Powwow Safe.

his His confident manner wavers. Gabriel notices, narrows  
eyes. Rudy quickly grabs the map again:

**RUDY**

So. You're gonna need a man through  
here, two men at the cage, one to  
cover the count. You're gonna need a  
lookout outside, a sweeper through  
the back, and a gun guarding the  
front.

(beat)

You need six.

**GABRIEL**

We got five. Putting Ashley outside.

**RUDY**

You need six.

Gabriel eyes him darkly.

**GABRIEL**

**NO.**

**RUDY**

You go in with five, you're either  
leaving an alarm free or an exit  
free. Someone hits an alarm, you're  
fucked. Someone gets to a phone,  
gets outside, 'cross the street,  
whatever, you're fucked. You need  
six.

(nods)

Six is me.

**GABRIEL**

No.

**RUDY**

You guys get caught, I go away for good. I got an interest in making sure you don't. You need a sixth man covering an exit. What're you gonna do about it.

**ASHLEY**

Yeah. What're you gonna do about it.

She puts an arm around Rudy, smiles. That's her man.

**GABRIEL**

I want a map of that security level. Every room, every guard, every thing.

**RUDY**

Six men means six guns.

**GABRIEL**

No way.

**RUDY**

I'm no threat without a gun.

**GABRIEL**

No, you're not.

**RUDY**

There'll be people in that casino. I can't keep them from leaving if I don't get a gun. I don't need bullets, Monster... but I gotta be a threat.

**ASHLEY**

What's the matter, Gabriel? This is what you wanted him for, isn't it?

Gabriel's eyes don't leave Rudy's.

**GABRIEL**

No gun.

**RUDY**

Well. What you guys have to plan out, then... is how you're going to get to that cage and that security

level before anybody realizes anything's wrong. Running in with ski masks and bullets flying ain't gonna do it.

**GABRIEL**

That part, Nick... was planned out the day I read your letters.

**RUDY**

What. We all gonna dress up like cowboys?

**GABRIEL**

Not cowboys, Nick. Not cowboys.

Gabriel smiles.

**GABRIEL**

Not on Christmas Eve.

**INT. GABRIEL'S RIG - TRAILER - NIGHT CLOSE ON STORAGE**

**LOCKER**

side-  
and  
Pulled open to reveal FIVE SANTA CLAUS SUITS, hanging by-side. Red polyester coats and pants, white felt trim black buckles, black boots and red caps.

**WIDEN TO REVEAL TRAILER**

against  
Rudy. Ashley, Merlin, Jungy and Pug look on.

**RUDY**

You gotta be kidding me.

**GABRIEL**

'Tis the season, convict.

Finding  
He puts the suit back in the locker, pulls another.  
Rudy's size.

**GABRIEL**

Can't be attracting attention, right?

**RUDY**

What, we walking in there and delivering toys?

stacked He turns to see Merlin open another locker. This one  
with rifles, carbines and handguns.

**MERLIN**

Hell yeah.

**INT. RUDY'S ROOM - NIGHT**

**CLOSE ON SKETCH**

map of a floor plan, a sheet of paper overlaid on Gabriel's  
of the casino. A pencil draws a boxy room and labels it  
"Security Video Room." Then an eraser wipes it out.

**WIDEN TO REVEAL RUDY**

He's still cuffed to the bedframe, pulled close to a desk.  
sitting, working on the security level map.

The door opens; Ashley enters, looking worried:

**ASHLEY**

He wants to see your map.

**RUDY**

I'm almost done.

**ASHLEY**

He says he wants it now.

**RUDY**

If he wanted a photographic memory,  
he shoulda kidnapped one. I'm working  
on it here.

Whispers: Ashley walks over, puts her arms around his neck.

**ASHLEY**

How are we gonna do this, Nick?

**RUDY**

You're the getaway girl. The money's  
gonna get to you eventually. Gonna  
be my job to be the guy who walks  
outta there with it. But I can't do  
that without a gun. Any luck talking  
to him?

**ASHLEY**

Bullets or no bullets, he won't do it.

**RUDY**

Is there any way you could get into his truck?

**ASHLEY**

No.

**RUDY**

We need a gun, Ash. We need a gun...

"Security  
it

Rudy studies his map, then quickly pencils in the Video Room," in a totally different place than he drew before. Hands the paper to her.

**RUDY**

Here's the Picasso. Is he in his room?

**ASHLEY**

They all are. Football's on.

**RUDY**

(nods, thinks)

Keep 'em there for a little while.

Ashley takes the map, frowns. Rudy kisses her gently.

**RUDY**

We're gonna get you out of Detroit, Ash. Get you out of beauty and fragrances.

(smiles, then)

Remember that. After all this is over, when you know me, when you really know me... remember it was me.

smiles.  
out.

She searches his eyes, not quite understanding. But Rudy smiles back, nods toward the door. Ashley slips

Outside,

When she's gone, Rudy stands and turns to the window.

bumper

the Blazer with the "Ice Fishermen Do It All Year Long" sticker still sits parked.

the

Rudy reaches for his jeans pocket, and pulls out-one of game room darts, flecked with blood.

**HE GIVES IT A SOLEMN STARE**

**INT. RUDYS ROOM - MOMENTS L&TER - NIGHT**

hand. He  
shaped  
edges.

Rudy lies on his back, under the bed frame, dart in tears off the plastic feathering, to get at the cross-end, furthest-from the tip. Four protruding metal

to  
jags, but

He finds the Phillips screws on the bedframe, and tries work the dart-end into the grooves. It scrapes and with pressure he's able to do a quarter-turn at a time. The screw starts spiraling out.

**ANGLE ON BEDFRAME**

ankle

As two metal pieces split apart, and Rudy wriggles his handcuff off the frame.

**ANGLE ON CLOSET**

rips

As Rudy's hand grabs a paper-covered wire hanger and the paper off, untwisting the wire.

**ANGLE ON ROOM'S WINDOW**

As Rudy slides it open, and climbs outside.

**EXT. KNIGHTS INN PARKING LOT - NIGHT**

window

Light snow falling. Rudy drops from the second floor into some snowy shrubs and an empty parking space. He stealthily darts ahead to the ice fishermen's Blazer.

**AT THE FISHERMEN'S BLAZER**

tackle and Rudy peers in the windows, spotting fishing rods,  
gear boxes in the back seat.

and He takes his wire coat hanger, now stretched straight,  
jamming slips it between the driver's window and moulding,  
it around until it trips the door lock.

The lock pops up; Rudy pops in --

**INT. BLAZER**

Boning -- and raids the gear box. Bait, reels, fishing wire.  
knives. A compass. A first aid kit. A switchblade.

**RUDY**

Gun, gun, c'mon, boys like you gotta  
be keeping a gun...

of He rustles around in the backseat. Ice cooler, open bag  
pork rinds, another gear box. Nothing.

Some HEADLIGHTS sweep past the Blazer. Rudy ducks down,  
pockets the switchblade. Munches some pork rinds.

**EXT. PARKING LOT**

truck. Rudy scrambles out, heads to try another car, a pickup  
And then suddenly drops to the ground, seeing

**MERLIN AND JUMPY**

way stride outside, talking casually, kicking snow on their  
toward the Nova. Voices too low to hear.

**ON SCENE**

side. Rudy crouches behind the pickup, slips around the other  
Merlin and Jumpy walk right by him.

cars, Rudy criss-crosses through the parking lot, hidden by  
glances heading away from his room's window. His window. Rudy

seem back to see if the truckers notice that, but they don't  
to. They stand at the Nova, talking.  
backs Rudy shivers, waiting. They're not leaving. When their  
building. turn, Rudy dashes twenty feet to the cover of the  
He slips around the corner, out of sight.

**AROUND THE SIDE OF THE HOTEL**

moving Rudy hops through snowdrifts, pressed to the wall,  
toward a side entry --  
-- when he stops, hearing a woman's LAUGHTER.  
rippling Above his head are a row of windows. Reflections of  
this water on the ceiling inside. It's the hotel pool behind  
wall.

Sounds of SPLASHES. Murmured VOICES.

frosting. Rudy stands absolutely still. His breaths stop  
Because his breathing has stopped.

**INT. HALLWAY TO INDOOR POOL - NIGHT**

reads Rudy creeps down the darkened hall, past a sign that  
"Pool CLOSED. Open 9 am to 9 pm, No Lifeguard on Duty."  
The Rudy steps closer, back to a wall, standing in shadow.  
an small pool becomes visible, flickering blue water. From  
unseen end, a figure splashes backwards into view --  
Smiling It's Ashley. Hair wet, naked beneath the surface.  
and splashing someone offscreen --

**ASHLEY**

...and he's saying "We're not gonna  
help him just to walk away. If we're  
gonna help him... we're gonna get it  
all..."

She splashes again. Taunting --

**ASHLEY**

...he wants to help now, he wants to rob it now we could probably stay right here, he'd go on and rob it by himself --

toward  
As Gabriel steps into view, also undressed, moving her in the pool.

**GABRIEL**

He wants the money.

**ASHLEY**

No, baby. He wants me.

smiles.  
Gabriel reaches her, puts his arms around her. She

**ASHLEY**

He wants... your "sister"...

**GABRIEL**

...whoever she is.

ripples.  
And they kiss, entwining together, reflections and A steamy embrace.

**ASHLEY**

Nick Mason's gonna help us more than we ever dreamed.

**ANGLE ON RUDY**

in the shadows, hearing them. Staring into darkness.

**IN THE POOL**

slow.  
Gabriel turns with Ashley, wrapped together. Moving

**GABRIEL**

All those letters are about to pay off, baby... all those letters...

**ASHLEY**

To all those cons...

**GABRIEL**

Searching for a money man...

**ASHLEY**

We musta written what, twenty of 'em? And they were before this guy. One, two letters apiece, ten to the racetrack guy in Leavenworth --

**GABRIEL**

-- till he fucked his parole --

**ASHLEY**

-- plus the forty to Mason... how many letters is that?

**GABRIEL**

That's a book, baby.  
(presses closer)  
That's a book of love.

They kiss again. Gabriel strokes her wet hair:

**GABRIEL**

I can't take watching you touch him.  
I can't take his hands on you.

**ASHLEY**

One more day, baby. One more day to Christmas.

**GABRIEL**

I've been doing good, though.

**ASHLEY**

Didn't have to hit me so fucking hard. Didn't have to throw me outta the goddamn truck.

**GABRIEL**

Didn't have to send me down a fucking mountain.

**ASHLEY**

What, he should see me help you catch him?

**ON RUDY**

still in the shadows, welling with betrayal.

**ASHLEY (O.S.)**

He's shown us the setup, he's drawn

us the map, he's helped us do the plan. He wants a gun, give him a gun. Take the bullets out, whatever, but give him the gun. The more manpower we've got in there, the better. He won't try and make his move till the money's in hand.

**GABRIEL (O.S.)**

He'll be dead when he does.

**BACK IN THE POOL**

Gabriel and Ashley rock slowly, coupled, in the water.

**GABRIEL**

Y'know something, baby? If you were my sister? I'd still want to wake up Christmas morning with you...

**ASHLEY**

Mmm, baby. And I'd still want to be the tinsel round your tree...

And as their words turn to moans and murmurs...

**IN THE SHADOWS**

Rudy is gone.

**INT. FIRST FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT**

stairwell

He's

Rudy strides a corridor, eyes dead ahead, passing a on his way toward the "Exit" sign posted above a door. almost there, marching fast --

**RUDY**

Here's my present to you, truck drivers --

**AS THE EXIT DOOR OPENS**

**MERLIN (O.S.)**

Where the hell's Gabriel?

as

-- and Rudy dives to the stairwell, out of sight just Merlin and Jumpy stride back inside.

**JUMPY**

With his girlfriend. Making up for "Nick" time. I'm going down to the bar, you want something?

**MERLIN**

Get me a brew. I'm gonna check on our convict.

stairs -- They separate, Jumpy down the hall, Merlin to the

**INT. STAIRWELL**

flight Merlin trudges upward, while Rudy steps from hiding one down.

Checks the hall for Jumpy, then races out --

**EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT**

the Rudy slams out the side door, scrambling straight for  
free same Blazer. He jimmys the lock again, leaps in, tears  
pro. the engine panel and searches for ignition wires like a  
Stripping the plastic, trying to spark contact --

**RUDY**

Catch, dammit, catch! Like riding a bike, it's like riding a bike!

But there's nothing. The engine won't start.

**INT. STAIRWELL**

Merlin reaches the second floor, steps into the hall.

**EXT. PARKING LOT**

highway, Rudy jumps from the Blazer, looks at the lot, the  
the woods. His own footprints in the dusting snow.

**RUDY**

How far you gonna get, Rudy...

Forced Realizing the answer, Rudy looks to his room's window.

to race back. He tries clambering the wall, standing an shrubbery, but he can't reach. He whirls, desperate.

And his eyes find the Blazer.

**INT. SECOND FLOOR HALL**

Merlin ambles the corridor. Approaching Rudy's room.

**EXT. PARKING LOT**

brake  
Rudy flings open the Blazer door, slams the emergency  
down. Forces the gearshift into "Reverse."

**INT. SECOND FLOOR HALL**

the  
Merlin reaches Rudy's door. Searches his pockets for  
key.

**EXT. PARKING LOT**

sliding  
front  
Rudy darts to the front of the Blazer, slipping and  
on asphalt ice. He drops to his knees, pushing on the  
bumper.

The wheels start to move.

**INT. SECOND FLOOR HALL**

handle  
Merlin finds a room key. Puts it in the lock. Turns the  
but the door won't open. Merlin checks the key.

**MERLIN**

My room.

**EXT. PARKING LOT**

shrubs  
space  
picks up  
The Blazer starts to roll backwards, toward the snowy  
ringing the building. Headed for the empty parking  
below Rudy's window. Rudy keeps pushing. The Blazer  
speed, rolling on its own.

**INT. SECOND FLOOR HALL**

Merlin searches his pockets again, finds the right key.

**EXT. PARKING LOT**

his  
bumper,  
  
shrubs --  
  
right

The Blazer rolls toward the building. Rudy scrambles to feet, runs after it, leaps his left foot onto the the right foot onto the hood, then onto the roof -- -- getting two roof-steps worth of running start -- -- as the Blazer slows to a rest against the snowy -- and Rudy dives into the air, torpedoing himself through the window to his room --

**INT. RUDY'S ROOM**

-- where he crashes headlong to the floor, turning a somersault and landing sprawled across the carpet.

**INT. SECOND FLOOR HALL**

The key in the lock, Merlin hears the crash --

**INT. RUDY'S ROOM**

calmly  
bedframe.

-- and as Merlin opens the door, he finds Rudy sitting on the floor, ankle-cuff locked once again to the Spreading a deck of cards out before him. Starting a game of solitaire. He looks up.

**RUDY**

Hey.

The  
  
shut.  
  
hard,

Merlin frowns, takes a suspicious look around the room. window's open. Rudy continues his card game. Merlin watches him for a long time. Then pulls the door Once he's gone, Rudy collapses to the floor. Breathing heart pounding. The cards go flying.

**INT. RUDY'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

checks  
The LIGHTS go out. Rudy creeps back to the window,  
outside... and stops still. In parking lot...  
driver's  
...a cigarette glow burns inside the Nova. From the  
seat. It's Merlin. Now watching.  
watches  
Rudy steps back into the shadows. Closing window and  
the falling snow. Caged again, after all.

**DISSOLVE TO:**

**INT. RUDY'S ROOM - NIGHT - LATER**

back  
Pitch dark. Rudy asleep on the floor, as Ashley creeps  
in.

blanket  
Seeing he's asleep, she lies beside him, pulls a  
over them both, nestles into his body and kisses him.

**ASHLEY**

Merry Christmas-Eve, my love. My  
love, my love. Merry Christmas-Eve...

Ashley closes her eyes. With a smile.

her  
A moment later, Rudy's eyes open. Turning to look at  
stare...  
smiling, sleeping face... with a convict's vengeful

**INT. KNIGHTS INN LOBBY - DAY**

**CLOSE ON DESK CLERK**

In a elfin cap, smiling cheerfully:

**SMILING DESK CLERK**

Hello, gentlemen. And how can we  
help you on this holiday morning?

**CLOSE ON GABRIEL, MERLIN AND PUG**

Three grim faces.

**GABRIEL**

Checking out.

**EXT. KNIGHTS INN PARKING LOT - DAY**

guards  
their  
gut.

The three truckers stride to the Nova, where Jumpy  
Rudy and Ashley. In the b.g., the Ice Fishermen are by  
car, wondering how the hell it switched parking spaces  
overnight.  
Gabriel marches straight to Rudy and SLUGS him in the  
Rudy hits the snow --

**ASHLEY**

Gabriel!

**GABRIEL**

That's for the hundred bucks worth  
of pay-per-view.  
(then KICKS him)  
And that's for the two hundred you  
took outta your minibar.

**RUDY**

(chokes, pained)  
You guys were paying for the room, I  
just figured --

it at  
Rudy's

Gabriel KICKS him again, then pulls a handgun, points  
Rudy's head. Ashley screams, rushes him --  
-- as Gabriel's gun SHOOTS a thin stream of water into  
face.  
It's a forty-five caliber squirt gun.

**GABRIEL**

(cruel smile)  
You wanted a weapon, convict? You  
got one.

Jumpy and

Gabriel tosses the water pistol onto Rudy's chest.  
Pug haul him up. With venom:

**GABRIEL**

Merry Christmas-Eve.

**EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY**

with The Motor City Monster cruises the snowy landscape,  
Lake Superior beyond. Pug drives the Nova in convoy.

**INT. GABRIEL'S RIG**

and Gabriel hands copies of Rudy's sketched map to Merlin  
Jumpy.

Rudy and Ashley are in the sleeper.

**GABRIEL**

Commit this thing to memory. Every  
guard, every exit... don't tape it  
to your fuckin, wrist: remember it.  
That's the Gospel right there. The  
Gospel. Matthew, Mark, Luke and  
John...

strokes Rudy watches them studying his made-up map. Ashley  
his arm, gives a loving smile. Rudy stares at her.  
He smiles right back.

**EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY**

The rig and the Nova blow by a road sign: "Now Entering  
Powahachee Indian Reservation Lands."

**INT./EXT. TRAILER DAY - PREPARATION MONTAGE**

weapons The storage locker with the Santa suits SLAMS open.  
Merlin's hands PULL automatics and shotguns from the  
chest. Pug's hands UNLOAD ammo.

UP. A red-and-white Santa coat gets PULLED ON and BUTTONED

table. Jumpy's hands apportion GUNS and AMMO on a picnic

Black Santa boots STAMP TIGHT in the snow.

Santa A shoulder-strap ASSAULT RIFLE gets hidden under a  
coat.

AMMO CLIPS are taped inside a fat black buckle-belt.

A HANDGUN gets tucked under a Santa hat.

And the rig's trailer doors come CRASHING SHUT.

**EXT. LAKESIDE REST AREA - DUSK**

the  
Santa  
picnic

Lake Superior shimmers in the dying light. The rig's in empty rest area lot. On a nearby bank, four men in Claus suits and one woman without sit scattered at tables, guns at their sides. Staring out at the lake.

**RUDY AND ASHLEY**

boots,  
sky.

sit apart from the rest. Rudy in a red suit, black cap in hand. Ashley's head is in his lap, watching the

**ASHLEY**

Where should we go, Nick? When we're gone from here... where should we go...

several

The Nova drives into the lot. Pug gets out, carrying fast-food bags. Hurrying to stay warm:

**PUG (O.S.)**

Okay, who had the cheeseburger with bacon; what about a roast beef, I've got two roast beefs here --

**JUMPY (O.S.)**

Cheeseburger 'n bacon's mine --

**MERLIN (O.S.)**

I got a bacon too; there another bacon in there?

**PUG (O.S.)**

I got a bacon for him and a bacon for me; there's four cheeseburgers and two roast beefs --

**MERLIN (O.S.)**

Somebody better give me something with some goddamn bacon --

As they continue chow dispersal, Rudy stares over the lake.

Distant. Not even aware Ashley's there.

**RUDY**

This time right now... Dad's stacking wood out back, getting ready for tomorrow. Little blaze in the fireplace. Mom's setting out the good silver, hanging her cinammon sticks, up in the doorways. Getting out her scratchy old records... singing along...

Rudy smiles to himself. He's got a faraway look.

**RUDY**

I don't know where you're going. But I'm going home.

**ASHLEY**

We go together, Nick. Wherever... we go together. Remember?

**RUDY**

Well. I'm going home.

**GABRIEL**

sits by the water, staring over the lake too. With a white cotton Santa beard resting on his chin. He unwraps his roast beef sandwich, pulls his beard down to his neck, and takes a savage bite.

Munches away, stares to Rudy and Ashley. She meets his eyes. Gabriel smiles. And looks again to the water.

**ON FULL SCENE**

The snowy rest stop, the glistening lake. And the six figures scattered, watching day turn to night...

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. TOMAHAWK CASINO - NIGHT**

lights  
than a  
The neon axe lit up in full regalia, with Christmas  
now strung along the building's roof. There are fewer  
dozen cars in the parking lot.

**INT. TOMAHAWK - NIGHT**

only  
table.  
Filled with the JINGLING, JANGLING slots, but there's  
two FAT WOMEN sitting at them. Three INDIANS at a poker  
An OLD TIMER in his 90's playing blackjack.

**INT. SECURITY LEVEL**

Stairs  
opens a  
the  
A ragged headquarters, looking down to the casino level  
through smoked glass. Desks, file cabinets, pin-up  
centerfolds. A room with video monitors to one side.  
to a camera catwalk that rings the casino.  
Jack Bangs is at a table of wassail and cookies. He  
battle of brandy, pours a bit into the punch, and takes  
bottle for himself. Walks over to his HEAD OF SECURITY,  
watching the lack of activity below:

**JACK BANGS**

And all through the house... not a  
creature was stirring...  
(sighs)  
Why don't you go ahead and send most  
of your guys home, Ed.

**SECURITY BOSS**

Thanks, Jack. Merry X-mas.

brandy,  
The boss smiles, heads off. Jack Bangs swigs his  
eyes his high-tech security gear glumly:

**JACK BANGS**

Hell. Nobody even comes here to  
cheat...

**EXT. TOMAHAWK - NIGHT**

Ashley  
idling

The Nova pulls into the lot and parks. Merlin, Pug and  
inside. On the road, the Motor City Monster slows to an  
stop. In the cab, Gabriel turns to Rudy and Jumpy:

**GABRIEL**

Go.

Rudy gives Gabriel a withering look. He and Jumpy climb  
out.

Gabriel's rig rumbles up the road.

[NOTE: All five men, save Ashley, from now till story's  
end,  
are in their Santa Claus suits.]

**RUDY AND JUMPY**

make their way across the lot, heading for the  
entrance.

**RUDY**

Hey Jumpy, I want to ask you  
something. You have any problem with  
the fact that we're on our way to  
take millions of dollars from an  
Indian casino?

The Native American considers. As they walk:

**JUMPY**

Nick. It's true that Indian gaming's  
gone a long way toward restoring  
wealth and pride to communities who've  
been economically isolated and  
enslaved for centuries. Stronger  
infrastructure, better schools, higher  
employment... they're all the results  
of reservation casino success stories.  
Still, many natives believe that  
these are temples to a godless  
materialism and greed that will only  
infect the souls of indigenous peoples  
until their love of money has  
destroyed the spiritual values their  
ancestors died to protect and their  
homelands have become no different  
from any United States suburb,  
satellite city or industrial park.  
Destroying the Indian legacy once

and for all and leaving behind a  
nation of selfish, angry natives, of  
which I, it's true, am one --

-- as they hit the Tomahawk's doors --

**INT. TOKAHAWK - NIGHT**

-- and SLAM inside, stumbling into each other, suddenly  
LAUGHING and slapping backs. Surveying the casino:

**RUDY**

Hey-hey, egg nog for everybody!

laughs Rudy spreads his Santa arms wide and whoops. Jumpy  
with him, steadying his balance. Drunken and slurred:

**RUDY**

Let's win some MONEY! MONEY-MONEY-  
**MONEY!**

the Security Bartender. Two CASHIERS and one WAITRESS. Ed the  
Boss strides over, smiling tightly:

**SECURITY BOSS**

How you gentlemen doing tonight?

**RUDY**

We're out of work tonight, that's  
how! Christmas Eve! We're out of  
work!

**JUMPY**

(shakes his hand)  
Hi, Santa Claus, how are you. He's  
with Sears, I'm with Wal-Mart, twas  
the season...

**RUDY**

We're all outta gifts, boys and girls,  
but we got charitable donations!

to the Rudy grabs a wad of bills from his pocket, drops some  
floor. Jumpy retrieves them --

**JUMPY**

...bunch of us got together for the

union party. Hey, how late are you open?

**SECURITY BOSS**

(eyes on the money)  
All night and all day.

**RUDY**

I got wampum for the Cocktail Waitress Civil Defense Fund! Are there any representatives here present?

okay. A Waitress sidles close; checks with the Boss. He nods

**WAITRESS**

What can I get ya, Santa?

**RUDY**

Santa drinks American beer.

**SECURITY BOSS**

(to Jumpy)  
What's your game, guys?

**JUMPY**

Blackjack. Got a buddy from Woolworth's out parking the sleigh.

The Security Boss stares him down. Then:

**SECURITY BOSS**

Good luck, gentlemen.

him on He steps aside and indicates the tables. Jumpy claps the back, pushes Rudy on through the slots.

**EXT. RESERVATION ROAD - NIGHT**

signal one, Gabriel's truck at the roadside, hazards on, with triangles as if broken down. Gabriel places the last hurries back down the casino road.

**EXT. PARKING LOT/INT. NOVA - NIGHT**

car. Ashley sits between Merlin and Pug. Gabriel jogs by the

Ashley checks her watch:

**ASHLEY**

Three minutes.

**INT. TOMAHAWK - NIGHT**

Rudy and Jumpy sit at a blackjack table, beside the Old  
Timer.

Jovial ad libs as the Waitress brings Rudy's beer. Rudy  
doubles down, busts, and gets belligerent:

**RUDY**

(to the Old Timer)  
That was my card, pop!  
My card! You hit for  
my card!

**OLD TIMER**

I... sorry, Mister...

**RUDY**

That was my king!

**OLD TIMER**

Well...sorry...

**JUMPY**

(to the Waitress)  
How are you tonight?

**WAITRESS**

Fuckin' freezing. What  
Santa?

**JUMPY**

Jack and Coke.

**WAITRESS**

Want that Jack and Coke  
Pepsi?

can I get ya,

or Jack and

Behind them, Gabriel SLAMS through the casino doors.

**JUMPY**

Woolworth's!

**GABRIEL**

Hey, Sears! Hey, Wal-Mart!

**JUMPY**

Saved you a seat, man. Get in on a hand here!

Gabriel sidles to the table, claps Rudy on the back.

**RUDY**

(re: Old Timer)

Careful. Watch out for this guy.

They throw chips in. The Waitress circles around:

**WAITRESS**

What can I get ya, Santa?

**GABRIEL**

American beer.

The Old Timer hits and stays. Rudy hits and busts:

**RUDY**

POP! That was My card!

**OLD TIMER**

But... I had a five...

**RUDY**

You're hitting for MY cards!

**EXT. PARKING LOT**

Ashley's eyes on her watch. Nods to Merlin and Pug:

**ASHLEY**

Go.

**INT. TOMAHAWK**

glancing  
Jumpy has left the table, sidling to a change booth,  
at his watch. Passes a \$100 bill:

**JUMPY**

Could Fat-Man-With-Flying-Horse get some quarters, please?

**AT THE BLACKJACK**

shoulder:  
Gabriel slides off his stool, punches Rudy in the

**GABRIEL**

Be back, Wal-Mart. Watch my bank.

drinker.  
pull  
Rudy nods, slugging beer. He's becoming an unruly  
The Old Timer motions to hit; but before the Dealer can  
the card, Rudy slams the table, points to it:

**RUDY**

That is my card, guy. My card.

**DEALER**

He hit, mister.

**RUDY**

He didn't hit.

(to Old Timer)

You didn't hit. You're not hitting.

**OLD TIMER**

But you don't even know what it is!

and  
The dealer hits grandpa to twenty-one. Then hits Rudy  
busts him. Rudy stares darkly.

**IN THE HALL TO THE BATHROOMS**

Adjusts  
Gabriel walks to the men's room door. Then stops.  
the rifle under his red coat. And turns back.

**AT THE CHANGE BOOTH**

Jumpy is handed a bucket of quarters.

**EXT. PARKING LOT - SAME**

pockets.  
Merlin and Pug march toward the entrance, hands in

**INT. SECURITY LEVEL**

who's  
lot  
The Security Boss returns upstairs, beside Jack Bangs,  
watching the video monitors. On one screen, a parking  
cam shows Merlin and Pug approaching:

**VIDEO GUARD**

There's two more coming.

**JACK BANGS**

Hell, there we go. That's the spirit.

He drunkenly clinks his battle to the Security Boss,  
wassail.  
The Boss frowns.

**SECURITY BOSS**

Jack? Is there a union for department  
store Santas?

**INT. TOMAHAWK - ON BLACKJACK**

Rudy bolts up suddenly, sends chips and his chair to  
the  
carpet.

Points sternly at the Old Timer, slurring:

**RUDY**

Switch seats with me.

**OLD TIMER**

What? No...

**RUDY**

You're taking my money. Switch seats  
with me. Switch seats with me if  
you're not taking my money --

**OLD TIMER**

I'm ninety-two years old --

**RUDY**

Then get yourself another table!  
You're hitting Santa's cards and  
you're taking Santa's money!

**OLD TIMER**

There is no other table --

**RUDY**

**THEY'LL OPEN ONE!**

Rudy grabs the blackjack table and wrenches with all  
his  
might,

OVERTURNING IT, cards, chips, cash scattering --

**AND EVERYTHING HAPPENS AT ONCE**

keypad

Two SECURITY GUARDS at the door (?) rush for Rudy --  
Gabriel steps from the restroom, hall, moves toward the  
door to the security level --

flying, as  
guy --

Jumpy carries his bucket of quarters past the cage --  
Rudy tackles the Old Timer, fists and false teeth  
the Guards arrive, trying to wrench him off the poor

**RUDY**

(hard whisper)

Stay down, pop! Trust me, stay down!

As Gabriel stops just beyond the keypad door --

**IN THE SECURITY LEVEL**

merely

The Security Boss grabs more men, while Jack Bangs  
smiles at the sight. Guards wrestling a drunken Santa:

**SECURITY BOSS**

Help them down there! HELP them!

**IN THE CASINO**

Three guards CHARGE out of the keypad door --  
-- right past Gabriel, who slips deftly inside --

**AND UP THE PRIVATE STAIRCASE**

-- opening his coat, pulling his assault rifle --

**GABRIEL**

Right at the top of the stairs, right at the top of the  
stairs...

SMACK

-- charging to the top, starting right and running  
into a wall.

He spins, sees the doorway's on his left --

**TO A PRIVATE HALLWAY**

gun -- with three doors. Gabriel stops at the first, grips his

**GABRIEL**

Video room, video room --

confused. -- and swings open a closet bathroom. He frowns,  
Jumps to the second door --

**GABRIEL**

Map said video room --

leaps -- and swings open a storage closet. Gabriel grumbles,  
to the third door and flings it open,

**GABRIEL**

Map said goddamn video room!

**TO REVEAL THE MAIN SECURITY AREA**

Bangs, -- with two Guards sitting at their posts, and Jack  
the Security Boss and the Video Guard in the doorway to  
the video room. Which is on the far opposite side of the  
space.

AK-47 -- As they turn to see the furious Santa Claus with the

**GABRIEL**

**WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON???!!!**

-- as he SPRAYS the ceiling with GUNFIRE.

**INT. CASINO FLOOR**

of Where the RIFLE sounds, just as Jumpy grips his bucket  
quarters at the cashier's cage and wheels --

at -- throwing a fragmentation grenade's worth of quarters  
bars. the two Cashiers! Bits Of metal flying between the  
They SCREAM, stepping backwards in defense --

-- and Jumpy whips a sawed-off shotgun from his coat --

**JUMPY**

Step BACK from the desks!

**AT THE BLACKJACK**

pulling The five guards wrestling Rudy spin and scramble,  
pistols from shoulder holsters as --

**MERLIN**

CHARGES through the casino entrance, shotgun held --

**MERLIN**

**DROP 'EM! DROP, DROP, DROP!!!**

**RUDY**

(from the floor)

**DROP THE GUNS! NOW!**

But the guards don't. Whirling on Merlin --  
-- who OPENS FIRE, BLASTING two of the guards off their  
feet.  
Rudy stays on the ground, covering his head, holding  
the petrified Old Timer down --  
-- as the other three guards FIRE back, forcing Merlin  
to race behind the slots. BULLETS rip into slot machines -  
-  
of -- as GUNSHOTS ring out from the casino restaurant. Two  
the Guards spin to look behind them as --  
-- PUG storms in, contorted glee, twin pistols BLAZING,  
popping a steel flurry into an outgunned Guard.  
Merlin spins from hiding behind the slots. He and Pug  
both OPEN FIRE, blowing away the two remaining men from both  
sides.  
- One of the guards falls in front of Rudy, gun in hand -  
- -- but as Rudy-reaches for the guy's pistol --

**MERLIN**

Hold it right there, Nick. Your squirt  
gun's all you need.

Merlin steps to him, gun aimed. He and Pug collect the  
Guards,  
weapons.

**MERLIN**

Cover 'em.

Rudy gets to his feet, pulls the water pistol from his  
pocket.

Moves to round up the Old Timer, the waitress, the  
Poker  
Players and the Fat Slots Women.

**RUDY**

Sorry, guys. But what the hell were  
you doing here an Christmas Eve  
anyway.

**INT. SECURITY LEVEL**

The two Guards lie on the floor, with Security Boss and  
Video  
Guard. And the ruined Jack Bangs.

**JACK BANGS**

No... not here... please... mister...

Gabriel storms to the video room's doorway. Slams a new  
clip.

**JACK BANGS**

Mister. I'm begging, 'kay? I'm  
begging. This is not some card club,  
'kay? This is the Tomahawk. We're an  
international gaming destination.  
We're in guidebooks. You can't do  
this... you can't do this to me...

**GABRIEL**

Show's over.

He OPENS FIRE, BLOWING AWAY the wall of monitors and  
VCR's  
recording the robbery. SPARKS and METAL fly.

**EXT. PARKING LOT**

Ashley waits in the Nova, checking her watch. Behind  
her a

DEPUTY,  
  
firemen  
walking.

RED WRANGLER rolls in and parks. A FIRE CHIEF and his  
just off-duty, stroll toward the casino, laughing.  
Ashley sinks low, panicked. Presses her HORN. The  
spin around but don't see her. They shrug. Keep

**INT. TOMAHAWK**

Onto

Rudy forces the gamblers and employees behind the bar.  
the floor with Bear the Bartender, whispering hard:

**RUDY**

Get down and stay down, and you're  
gonna be fine. Just don't do anything.  
My friends are disturbed --

gun in  
him.

The hostages do as told. Rudy breathes relief, squirt  
hand. And then stares at the array of bottles around

**IN THE CASHIER'S CAGE**

Merlin and Pug force the cashiers to the floor:

**PUG**

What's the security code to the Count  
Room?

**CASHIER #1**

Security code? What security code?  
You just use a key!

**PUG**

**NICK SAID SECURITY CODE!**

**CASHIER #1**

Who's Nick?!

Count  
guns,  
  
pistols

Pug bangs the guy's head off the floor, stalks to the  
Room door. Just a key lock. Pug BLOWS it away with his  
kicks the door open --  
  
-- and gets SHOT TO HELL by three COUNT MEN inside,

ceiling. blazing! Pug puppets, dead. A wad of chaw hits the

Stunned Merlin FIRES BACK.

**EXT. PARKING LOT**

pistols -- -- as the Firemen hear the GUNFIRE, pulling holstered

**INT. TOMAHAWK**

taking -- while Merlin dives out of the cage, joining Jumpy,  
cover as the Count Men FIRE AWAY --

-- as Rudy scrambles back from the bar --

**MERLIN**

You said no GUNS in there! NO GUNS!

the Merlin and Jumpy leap up, GUNS BLAZING, firing through  
cage bars at the Count Men. Killing all three just as -  
-

**THE OFF-DUTY FIREMEN**

storm through the doors, pistols ready --

**FIREMEN**

**DROP IT! DROP THE GUNS!**

their Merlin and Jumpy are caught. Trade a look. And let  
weapons fall, turning just as --

**THE CHEVY NOVA**

firemen! CRASHES through the casino doors, MOWING DOWN the

slots The car SLAMS inside, crashing into slot machines. The  
casino send SPARKS showering into the air. Which set off the  
floor's SPRINKLERS. The room fills with watery spray.

stares Ashley swiftly climbs out of the mangled vehicle. Rudy  
care. darkly at her. She knows he knows. And she doesn't

**ASHLEY**  
(wild-eyed)  
**WHERE'S THE FUCKING CASH, NICK!**

**RUDY**  
Yeah. That's love.

She storms on by. The slots pay off behind her.

**INT. COUNT ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

Room.  
Jumpy, Merlin, Ashley and Rudy step inside the Count

There are stacks and stacks of bills.

Ashley smiles wide, throws Jumpy three laundry sacks.

**ASHLEY**  
**MOVE, MOVE, MOVE!**

Merlin, meanwhile, slams Rudy against the wall:

**MERLIN**  
You knew there were guns in here!

**RUDY**  
Merlin, I didn't know --

**MERLIN**  
You got Pug killed! You tried to get  
ME killed! You just lost your Get-  
Outta-Jail-Free --

**RUDY**  
I promise you, I didn't know!

As Merlin puts a gun to Rudy's head --

**GABRIEL (O.S.)**  
(over casino speakers)  
Santa Claus, Santa Claus, and Santa  
Claus... would you please bring our...  
mapmaker... to the security level?

Merlin stares daggers at Rudy. Shoves the gun away.

**INT. JACK BANGS' OFFICE - NIGHT**

Gabriel stands at the windows overlooking the watery  
carnage.

The taped jingle of slots still plays.

Blood  
Poor Jack Bangs lies on his desk, beaten to a pulp.  
runs down his face and shark suit. Tears and shock:

**JACK BANGS**

I can't go back to Vegas... I can't...  
go back...

**JUMPY (O.S.)**

What the hell is with this place?  
Thought the video room was back there --

Merlin and Jumpy lead Rudy in. Ashley follows. They  
carry  
bulging money sacks. Gabriel stares Rudy down.

**GABRIEL**

I told you not to fuck us with that  
map, Nick. I told you not to, and  
you did. How am I s'posed to keep my  
promises now?

(Ashley joins him)

How's she s'posed to keep hers?

He kisses her hard. Sloppy. Grins.

Then points to Jack Bangs:

**GABRIEL**

He won't tell us where it is. The  
Powwow Safe.

**JACK BANGS**

I don't know... what you're...

Gabriel hammers him with the butt of his rifle. CRACK.

**GABRIEL**

**THE POWWOW SAFE! WHERE IS THE POWWOW  
SAFE!**

**JACK BANGS**

What... Powwow...

**GABRIEL**

The Powwow Safe where you steal your  
money! Where you cheat your Indians!

**JACK BANGS**

I don't steal any --

Gabriel

Gabriel CRACKS him again. And again. Rudy winces.  
grabs Rudy, pulls him over.

**GABRIEL**

We KNOW about the Powwow Safe! We  
KNOW it's in here! We KNOW how you  
work! Because WE know who's worked  
for you!

(smiles)

Remember a guy named Nick Mason!? A  
security guard named Nick Mason!?

Gabriel pushes Rudy's head toward the desk. Jack Bangs,  
drooling blood, eyes swollen, turns his face to see.

**JACK BANGS**

Nick... Mason... ?

Jack Bangs stares at Rudy. Rudy stares back.

**JACK BANGS**

...so where is he?

**GABRIEL**

(laughs, mocking)

Where is he?! Where is he?!

**JACK BANGS**

He's not Nick Mason...

The smile fades from Gabriel's face.

**JACK BANGS**

Nick Mason... worked for me two years  
ago. This man...

(a spark of recognition)

...he's some cowboy...

at

Gabriel grabs Rudy, slams him against a wall. He glares  
Ashley for answers. She stares in disbelief.

Rudy meets her eyes.

**RUDY**

Fucked the wrong guy, Ashley.

(shrugs)

Story of your life.

**BACK TO GABRIEL:**

**RUDY**

I did time with Nick Mason, Monster.  
Told you that from the start.

Ashley's putting it all together...

**ASHLEY**

You... you... YOU --

**RUDY**

We still gonna spend Christmas  
together?

help  
Ashley CHARGES him. Gabriel stops her; Merlin and Jumpy  
hold her back. Gabriel spins on Rudy with his rifle:

**GABRIEL**

You are lucky, convict. You're  
spending Christmas with the birthday  
boy himself --

**RUDY**

Hey! HEY! THERE IS A POWWOW SAFE!

Gabriel hesitates. Doesn't fire.

**RUDY**

I did time with Nick Mason, remember?  
I knew he worked here, didn't I!?  
Well, some shit he told me!

come.  
Rudy steels himself for the shot. It still doesn't

**RUDY**

Nick told me his manager kept a safe  
in his office, his stealing safe.  
His Powwow Safe. I swear, please...  
Nick told me.  
(looks to Jack Bangs)  
Behind the liquor cabinet.

Jack Bangs dully meets Rudy's eyes.

shelves.  
safe  
Gabriel steps to the liquor cabinet, feels at the  
They split in the middle. And there is a combination  
mounted in the back. Gabriel turns to Jack Bangs:

**GABRIEL**

Open it.

He pulls him off the desk. Jack Bangs wavers,  
struggling. He looks at Gabriel. Then at Rudy.

**JACK BANGS**

I can't go back to Vegas...

**GABRIEL**

**OPEN IT!!!**

Jack Bangs steps to the safe. Spins the lock. Spins  
back. Spins forward. Click. Jack Bangs looks at Rudy.

**RUDY**

(nods)

Pow. Wow.

And Jack Bangs opens it --

-- reaching inside in the same swift motion, so that as  
the safe swings open to reveal it's a rack of WEAPONS that  
lies inside, Jack Bangs already has an Uzi in hand --

**JACK BANGS**

**VEEEEEGGGGAAAASSSS!!!**

BULLETS as he turns back to the room --

-- sending Gabriel, Ashley, and Merlin diving for the  
floor! Jumpy can't get down, as BULLETS riddle him dead --

-- and BLOW OUT the smoked windows overlooking the  
casino --

Jack Bangs keeps turning in a madman's circle --

-- BLOWING OUT the windows to the parking lot,  
shattering the liquor, sending Rudy scrambling under his desk --

**JACK BANGS**

**I CAN'T! GO BACK! I CAN'T! GO BACK!**

**I CAN'T! GO BACK!**

**GABRIEL**

**GO!!!**

out He and Ashley both scramble for the windows, jumping  
with two of the money sacks --

**TO THE CASINO FLOOR**

-- and landing on poker tables below, overturning them  
--

tables Jack Bangs keeps FIRING, into the casino, SHREDDING the  
after but missing Gabriel and Ashley -- as he JUMPS right  
them.

**BACK IN BANGS' OFFICE**

looking Merlin scrambles to his feet, whirling with his gun,  
for Rudy --

-- just as Rudy slams into him. Merlin's SHOT hits the  
ceiling.

toward the The two of them CRASH down, wrestling and rolling  
grabs parking lot window. Two guns spill to the floor. Rudy  
one, just as Merlin kicks out, leaping up --

-- and freezes, seeing Rudy's got a pistol on him.

Before Merlin can make a move, Rudy fires --

stain on -- and a thin stream of water shoots out. Leaving a  
his shirt. It's the water pistol. Rudy stares blankly.

off As Merlin swiftly snatches the second gun, a real gun,  
the floor. Rudy's dead to rights.

**MERLIN**

Hell. I'm gonna take pleasure in  
this...

pockets. With the gun on Rudy, Merlin finds a cigarette in his

Pops it between his lips, raises a lighter's flame --

-- and hesitates. Sniffing the air. Looking down.  
At the stain on his shirt. His lighter still lit --

**RUDY**

Me too.

catching  
FIRE!  
drops  
spreading  
-  
himself --

-- and Rudy fires the water pistol again, this time  
Merlin's lighter, which turns the stream into a ARC OF  
He's filled alcohol in the gun!  
FLAMING LIQUOR shoots into Merlin's face and eyes. He  
the handgun. Rudy keeps squeezing the squirt gun,  
the fire down his neck and chest. Merlin howls wildly -  
-- and staggers back, blind and helpless, pinwheeling

**OUT THE PARKING LOT WINDOW**

through  
flickering.

-- and CRASHING down on the hood of a Pontiac, head  
the windshield, boots on the bumper, dead. Flames

**RUDY**

Smoke 'em if you got 'em.

**IN THE CASINO**

in  
toward  
staggers,  
shattering  
down,  
entrance,

Gabriel and Ashley have scrambled to the Nova, tumbling  
with the money sacks. Jack Bangs gets up, stalking  
them, still FIRING and babbling.  
Gabriel FIRES back, hitting Bangs in the chest. He  
but stays upright. His bullets RIDDLE the car,  
the windshield, but Gabriel and Ashley keep their heads  
slamming it into reverse --  
-- and burning rubber backwards out the casino  
into the parking lot, and speeding out of sight.

Jack Bangs stops shooting.  
He staggers back toward the bar, totters there, and  
turns,  
gun still raised.  
Rudy stands at the base of the stairs to the security  
level.  
He puts his hands up, until he sees the dying look in  
Bangs,  
face. The uzi drops to the ground.  
A silence. Even the slots have stopped.

**RUDY**

I'm sorry.

Jack Bangs stares blankly. Surveys the wreckage of his  
poor  
man's empire. And gives a small shrug.

**JACK BANGS**

That's why they call it gambling.

He slumps against the bar and hits the floor. Dead.

**EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT**

Rudy ambles out into the snowy night. The lot is quiet.  
He  
takes a few wary steps toward the road --  
-- and hears a CLICK. He turns to see Ashley standing  
behind  
him, with a gun. Shaking her pretty head.

**ASHLEY**

Your turn.

Rudy shuts his eyes for the end.

**EXT. RESERVATION ROAD - NIGHT**

The Nova drives up a ramp into the back of the truck,  
in  
reverse. Gabriel gets out, pulls shut the trailer.  
Ashley  
collects the hazard triangles. They hurry to the cab.

**EXT. MICHIGAN HIGHWAY - NIGHT**

passing a  
way.

The Motor City monster storms through the night,  
couple POLICE CARS, sirens wailing, speeding the other

**INT. GABRIEL'S RIG**

Gabriel and Ashley inside, with the money sacks:

**GABRIEL**

With the wrong fucking guy! We took  
the place down with the wrong fucking  
guy! Is that Christmas?! Huh?! Is  
that Christmas?!

He grabs Ashley, kisses her wildly. Then turns back --

**TO THE SLEEPER COMPARTMENT**

Where Rudy lies sideways, hands bound with his Santa  
belt.

**GABRIEL**

God bless us every one...

**EXT. RIDGESIDE ROAD - NIGHT**

A winding two-lane road, overlooking a small ravine at  
a  
grassy overlook. The road is dusted with snow; there's  
been  
no traffic here for awhile.

The Motor City Monster steams to a stop beyond the  
overlook.  
Then starts backing up, such that the gate of the  
trailer is  
fifteen feet from the edge of the ridge.

A hundred-foot drop into the ravine below.

Gabriel and Ashley pile out of the cab. They lift the  
trailer  
trailer  
gate, extend the tire ramps. The ramps run from the  
to five feet away from, the ravine drop.

**IN THE CAB**

Gabriel pulls Rudy out of the sleeper. Marches him back

--

**TO THE RAVINE'S EDGE**

Ashley is  
with  
-- and gives him a look. Forces him to his knees.  
in the truck trailer, splashing the inside of the Nova  
a can of gasoline.

**GABRIEL**

You almost got away with it, Santa.  
Got outta the Tomahawk, got to your  
car, got halfway to Canada till you  
caught some ice in the road. By the  
time you hit bottom down there, whole  
car was burning like a comet. Musta  
burned up all that money too.

handfuls  
Rudy glances to the trailer. Ashley tosses a couple  
of bills into the car.

**GABRIEL**

Buncha guys in red suits busted in,  
they'll say. Started shooting. They  
won't be able to remember... if it  
was three, or four... or five. Four  
dead Santas and some burned-up cash.  
Merry Christmas, The End.

**RUDY**

Was it your plan, Monster? Or was it  
hers.

Gabriel smiles at him.

**GABRIEL**

She told me 'bout the convict  
magazines. Had to figure there'd be  
some boys in the pen with some useful  
knowledge. With nobody to talk to.  
Nobody to listen. So we stocked up  
on stationery.

Ashley hops down. Gabriel puts an arm around her.

**GABRIEL**

Hard life being a trucker's girl.

Rudy eyes Ashley. She stares darkly back.

**RUDY**

I saved your life.

**ASHLEY**

You shouldn't have.

**RUDY**

He did love you, you know. Nick. He did love you.

**ASHLEY**

Who wouldn't.

So cold. But Rudy doesn't pause.

**RUDY**

Maybe this is where you wanted him, Ashley. At the bottom of a ravine, dead as ice with a burnt-up heart. Maybe. But it didn't happen. 'Cause what you did for him was make him the happiest held ever been. You showed him hope and taught him mercy. And he died a peaceful man. You wanted to destroy some convict... and all you did was save his soul. Remember that. Love your money and remember that.

Ashley shivers, a touch shaken. But steels herself:

**ASHLEY**

Merry Christmas, Rudy.

**RUDY**

I'm glad it was me.

**ASHLEY**

Merry Christmas.

**GABRIEL**

Get in the car.

stops Gabriel hauls him up. Marches him to the trailer. Rudy at the ramp. Gabriel pushes. Rudy doesn't move.

**GABRIEL**

Get in the CAR!

**RUDY**

How'd you know my name...

He turns back to Ashley.

**ASHLEY**

What?

**RUDY**

Rudy. How'd you know my name?

**ASHLEY**

What are you talking about?

Rudy looks at Gabriel. He's frowning. To Ashley:

**RUDY**

You said Merry Christmas, Rudy.

**ASHLEY**

I... you told me your name was Rudy.  
You told me a million times, back in  
the truck, telling me you weren't  
Nick --

**RUDY**

No --

**ASHLEY**

You were screaming you weren't Nick!  
And we just didn't fucking believe  
you!

**RUDY**

But I never said Rudy.

**ASHLEY**

You said it a million times!

**RUDY**

I never told you my name.

He stares her down. Then stares at Gabriel.

**GABRIEL**

Ash?

**RUDY**

How'd you know my name was Rudy.

**GABRIEL**

Ash?

**RUDY**

How'd you know my name.

Ashley stares daggers. Shakes her head ruefully --

**ASHLEY**

Men.

-- and pulls a handgun, SHOOTING Gabriel in the heart.

ring of  
Ashley,

Gabriel falls to his knees in the snow, his mouth a shock. Blood spurts through his red coat. He stares at incredulous.

Gabriel

She steps forward and PUTS another bullet in his neck. falls still.

Ashley's breath frosts in the cold.

stare

Rudy watches her. Finally, she meets Rudy's eyes. They each other down for a long moment, before:

**RUDY**

Where is he.

A silence.

No one moves.

side of

And finally, the CRUNCH of footsteps from around the the trailer. And WHISTLING. "Silver Bells."

soon

A shadow moves across the snow behind the trailer, and steps into Rudy and Ashley's view.

It's Nick Mason.

Alive and well.

**NICK**

Merry Christmas, Rudy.

here.

Ashley smiles. Her muscles-and-mustache man pen pal is

**NICK**

I missed you, beautiful.

**ASHLEY**

I missed you too, Nicky baby.

of They share a passionate kiss. Ashley malts at the sight  
him, embracing happily. Then turns to Rudy:

**ASHLEY**

For your information. I never fuck  
the wrong guy.

Rudy just stands there, his mind playing catch-up.

**NICK**

Oh, hey. Have you two been properly  
introduced? Sweetness, this is Rudy  
Duncan, I did almost a year with him  
in the Mountain. Read him all your  
letters, talked about you all the  
time, made him feel like he really  
knew you.

(turns to Rudy)

My friend... wantcha to meet Millie  
Bobek. 'Member Millie Bobek, dontcha?  
My girlfriend fore I went in? Worked  
at that bar in Motor City, where I  
manslaughtered that guy? Hell. Didn't  
talk about her much once the Ashley  
letters started coming, I guess.

Rudy doesn't notice it's started to snow.

**NICK**

Millie here used to serve drinks to  
these gunrunning truckers, real big  
talkers, talking bout a real score  
one day. I was in the Mountain, man,  
what the hell, why not let her get  
friendly with 'em? Let her tell 'em  
an idea she had, 'bout writing guys  
in prison. Getting one who could  
show 'em a sure thing.

**RUDY**

She set them up. All of them.

**NICK**

Why not have her pretend to find me?  
Pretend to write me and reel me in?  
Tell her new trucker-man she'd pose  
as some sister of his named Ashley?

**RUDY**

And you set me up.

**NICK**

Always wanted to rob that casino,  
Rudy. Way back when I worked there.  
What better way than to get some  
guys to rob it for me.

Nick shrugs. Prods Rudy up the ramp. Into the trailer:

**NICK**

Paid the Alamo ten bucks to put the  
shiv in me. He's a lifer, what does  
he care. Paid a hospital guard fifty  
to put out the story I was dead.  
Once the wound healed up...  
(notes cash-sacks)  
Got out of the Mountain this morning.  
And tonight I'm a rich man.

**RUDY**

How'd you know I'd do it.

**NICK**

Do what?

**RUDY**

Walk outta there and tell her I was  
you.

Nick looks back at Ashley.

**NICK**

Because every time I read her letters,  
Rudy... you listened.  
(to Ashley)  
Keep your gun on him.

wrists and  
Nick forces Rudy inside, unties the belt from his  
lashes them to the bottom of the steering wheel.

**NICK**

Five Santas walked into that Tomahawk,  
Rudy. That's what the witnesses'll  
say. So we gotta have five Santas  
not walk out. Gotta have five...  
(working)  
This'll burn right away... in the  
fire...

Nick gets Rudy's wrists locked to the wheel. He laughs.

**NICK**

Hell, you never needed to convince Ashley you were me. Just the dumb fucking truckers. I figured I'd talked enough about the Tomahawk in the pen for you to get by --

**RUDY**

Talked about the old man's weapons stash, probably forgot I'd remember

**NICK**

Hm. Well. They'd have killed you if you weren't me, Rudy. We knew you'd start convincing 'em soon enough.

Nick slams the car door, locking Rudy in.

**NICK**

They had the weapons and the willpower. We just gave them their inside man.

**RUDY**

You gave them me.

**NICK**

I gave them me.  
(shrugs, smiles)  
Said some nice things about me, Rudy. I appreciate it. But don't worry. I do love her. And she loves me. You had that right all along.

car  
Nick reaches across him, releases the brake. Puts the  
into "Drive." Turns to Ashley:

**NICK**

Sweetness! Let's light up the tree!

Nick  
Nova.  
Ashley steps toward the ramp, taking out a matchbook.  
steps further into the trailer, to the back of the

**IN THE CAR**

his  
Rudy immediately wriggles his hands, trying to touch

cuffs of wrists together. Trying to press together the white  
-- his Santa suit. Trying to get the right pressure point

-- as a BLADE suddenly springs out of the cuff! The  
to switchblade he'd stolen from the Blazer -- it's lashed  
his right wrist!

Rudy starts sawing his wrist back and forth, cutting  
through the Santa belt --

-- his hands at the bottom of the wheel, too low for  
either Ashley or Nick to see --

**IN THE TRAILER**

Nick Ashley is at the hood of the car, LIGHTING her match.  
- is at the back bumper, ready to push it down the ramp -

**NICK**

Goodbye, Rudy! Nice spending time  
with you!

**IN THE CAR**

of The belt breaks! Rudy snaps his hands free! But instead  
trying to escape, he reaches under the steering column,  
RIPPING its panel away and pulling wires free!

races As Ashley tosses her match onto the hood, and FIRE  
the over the body of the car, TONGUES racing inside, over  
dash, over the seats, lapping at Rudy --

locate -- who ducks his head beneath the wheel, frantic to  
the right leads --

**IN THE TRAILER**

the Ashley jumps out of the way, to the snow. Nick pushes  
flaming car to the trailer's edge --

-- starting on down the ramp, the ravine ahead --  
-- and as gravity starts to take the metal bonfire --

**IN THE CAR**

Rudy sparks two wires together, FLAMES eating at him --

**RUDY**  
**LIKE RIDING A BIKE, LIKE RIDING A**  
**BIKE, LIKE RIDING A BIIIIIKE!**

-- and the ENGINE IGNITES!

wheel and Rudy slams the gearshift into "Reverse", grabs the  
looks over his shoulder at shocked Nick behind him --

**RUDY**  
**RULE ONE! NEVER PUT A CAR THIEF BEHIND**  
**THE WHEEL!**

-- and SLAMS the accelerator.

**ON FULL SCENE**

back As the burning Nova races backwards up the ramp, and  
into the trailer --

Terrified Nick turns to run but there's nowhere to go -

-  
Nick's -- and the car SLAMS into the trailer's back, CRUSHING  
legs between metal and metal!

**ASHLEY**  
**NOOOOOOO!!!**

Then Rudy faces front, pounds the shift into "Drive."

**RUDY**  
**RULE TWO!**

rage. Ashley stands at the bottom of the ramp, vengeance and  
She grabs her handgun, OPENS FIRE --

-- and Rudy SLAMS the gas again, shooting down the ramp

--

throwing her  
off  
smoking,

-- as he flings open the car door, dives and rolls --  
-- while the burning Nova COLLIDES with Ashley,  
onto the hood, and sending the tandem inferno speeding  
the ridgetop --  
-- arcing slowly as it PLUMMETS into the ravine, a  
blazing shooting star with a woman's figure hanging on.  
The shooting star hits Earth and explodes.

**SLOW**

**DISSOLVE TO:**

**INT. CASINO/EXT. SNOWY ROAD - MONTAGE**

the  
car

The same four shots that opened the film. The Santa on  
floor of the cage (Pug), the Santa on the hood of the  
(Merlin), the Santa in the hallway (Jumpy).

Gabriel.

And the Santa lying face-down on the snowy road.

**EXT. RAVINE'S EDGE - SAME**

suit

The last of the opening images. Rudy's motionless Santa  
figure, upside-down on the snowy incline, bits of his  
still aflame. He opens his eyes.

**ANGLE ON SNOWY ROAD**

Rudy staggers to his feet. Battered and dazed. Looks at  
Gabriel's body. Then looks to the trailer.

waist

Inside, Nick is still alive, bones broken from the  
down.

He's mumbling madly, staring at the ceiling:

**NICK**

...Rudy... help me... Rudy...

shut.

Rudy climbs the tire ramp. And pulls the trailer gate

the  
He climbs into the rig's cab. Starts the engine. Puts  
truck in reverse, taps the accelerator and hops out.

**NICK (O.S.)**

...Rudy! Rudy! HELP ME!!!

bottom.  
The truck rolls backwards. And into the ravine.  
Rudy listens to its TUMBLING SOUNDS all the way to the  
He then looks up the road one way. Then the other.  
And notices the two money sacks sitting in the snow.  
He stares at them.  
A long time.

**DISSOLVE TO:**

**EXT. RUDY'S JOURNEY - MONTAGE - NIGHT/DAY**

trudges  
empty  
"Sidnaw --  
In his burnt and battered Santa suit, Rudy's figure  
the snowy night. Two sacks over his shoulder. walking  
roads and highways. And passing a roadsign that reads  
35 Miles."

comes  
the  
Little  
He passes rural roads and driveways, and every time he  
across a mailbox... he puts a stack of cash inside. On  
soundtrack, the STRINGS and RUM-PUM-PUM-PUMS of "The  
Drummer Boy" start to rise --

Miles."  
With snow falling, he passes a new sign: "Sidnaw -- 27

window,  
driveway.  
With the sun rising, a PAIR OF CHILDREN huddle at a  
seeing the man in the Santa suit at the end of their  
Giving them something from his sack and ambling on.

-- and we follow Rudy's march, stuffing presents into  
mailboxes. At every-stop on the way.

**DISSOLVE TO:**

**EXT. A SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY**

with  
windows,  
  
long  
A cul-de-sac of Norman Rockwell Michigan homes. Graced  
with pines and a pristine snowfall. Christmas trees in  
windows, lights on inside, figures of FAMILIES in holiday gear.  
No one noticing the man in the Santa suit, his sacks  
gone, walking up the road.

**EXT./INT. FIFTIES-ERA HOME - DAY**

MOTHER  
inside;  
  
Concern.  
At cul-de-sac's end. Where a blackened red cuff KNOCKS.  
After a moment, the door opens to reveal a smiling  
and FATHER in their sixties. There's a party going on  
a dining table visible beyond them.  
The Mother and Father's smiles disappear. Shock.

**MOTHER**

Rudy...? Rudy?

**FATHER**

Son? Is... is that you...?

room,  
laden  
and  
The Santa Claus shuffles inside, right past them.  
The Santa Claus sleepwalks straight for the dining  
finding a dozen RELATIVES, laughing and eating. A table  
with turkey and stuffing, gravy and cranberry, wassail  
wine.

The relatives stop still. The room goes silent.

The Santa Claus sits down at the head of the table.

Yes, it's Rudy.

takes  
Without a word, he stares at the food before him. And

trimmings, a plate. He stacks it with meat and dressing and  
and sets it in front of him.  
And digs in. Stuffing his face in silence.  
His Mother and Father return to the dining room,  
gaping. The other relatives look likewise.  
All staring at Rudy.  
Then, while he eats, without another sound...  
...the Mother takes her seat at the table...  
...and the Father pulls up another chair.  
They touch hands privately, and turn back to their  
plates.  
There's a CLANK of silverware, a SCRAPE of china, a  
CLINK of glass, and one-by-one, the relatives resume their  
meals. CONVERSATION picks up where it left off, SMILES return  
to the table, LAUGHTER slowly rises in the room.  
There is Mr. Duncan and Mrs. Duncan, Aunt Lisbeth and  
Uncle Ray, Aunt Mary and Uncle Pete, toddler Sasha and  
teenage Sam, brother Mike and his girlfriend Jill, sister Stacy  
and her husband Bill, Grandpa Walter, little Wendy Sue...  
...and at the head of the table...  
Rudy Duncan.  
Home for Christmas.  
**CUT TO BLACK.**

**THE END**