

FARGO
the series

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ACT ONE

FADE IN

EXT. VAST PARKING LOT - TWILIGHT

Shot high and wide. We see a monochrome of bitter white, criss-crossed with grey tire tracks leading out onto a state highway lost in the sideways-blowing snow. Every so often there's the snow-covered hump of a parked car: there is no sound.

The camera tracks slowly, then tilts up to find the word

M O M

in block letters ten feet high. Pushing tighter, we see the smaller letters spelling out Mall Of Minnesota. We hear the sound of blowing WIND, then the desperate AHRRRURR, AHRRURR of a dying battery.

CLOSER on a CHRYSLER New Yorker, its rear window and windshield brushed clear. The grinding of the starter continues, then dies. A beat, then the driver gets out.

BOB TROTTER, of Trotter's Family Farmacy in the Mall, moves to the hood of his car. His movements are Frankenstein stiff and jerky because of all the goose down he's encased in. He's all alone as he opens the hood, leans in. Then straightens up as he hears the

CRUNCHING of tires on new snow. A beige TAURUS SEDAN, salt-corroded and missing a hubcap, drives slowly down the unplowed lane of the parking lot. Bob Trotter smiles, stiffly waves a greeting.

INT. TAURUS - TWILIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

The heater FAN is roaring like the wind outside. The driver, a blondish woman in her late forties named ANNE MENDELSON, works the heater controls with a hyperkinetic desperation -- hotter, cooler, AC, defrost -- then looks up.

WINDSHIELD POV -- Bob Trotter waving.

ANNE nods in recognition, turns the steering wheel.

EXT. VAST PARKING LOT - TWILIGHT

The Taurus noses in next to the Chrysler. The hood and trunk POP open slightly, then Anne gets out. She goes to the trunk, opens it fully, removes a pair of jumper cables. She tosses them to Bob Trotter, who bends stiffly and retrieves them from the snow. He connects the cables to his dead battery, then -- gingerly -- to hers, jumping back in case there's an explosion.

He grins sheepishly at his own skittishness, then slides behind the wheel of the Chrysler, leaving the door open, one leg outside the car. He turns the ignition key. AHRRURR, RRR, BRRRR as the engine finally turns over.

ANNE nods, then goes back to the trunk and comes up with a double-shot REMINGTON. Loads it as she walks up to Bob, who turns to her, his smile barely fading before the BOOM of the shotgun explodes the driver's side of the Chrysler. The camera JERKS skyward, into the dark grey and and purple Minnesota sky. A second BOOM echoes and laps over as we

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FROZEN LAKE - DAWN

An enormous pale blue sky, shot with pink. A vast white frozen nowhere with a curtain of windblown snow. The curtain parts, revealing fragments of what seems to be a small city of plywood shithouses.

INT. ICE FISHING SHACK - DAWN

CLOSE ON a brown plastic Emerson radio.

RADIO WEATHERMAN

Partly sunny today, with highs in the low teens in Hibbing, twenties down in Saint Cloud, and near zero again up in Fargo...

(whistles)

Pretty darn nippy, wouldn't you say, Lloyd?

LLOYD THE SIDEKICK

Pretty darn nippy, you betcha.

A WINDOW rattles ferociously in a sudden gust of wind, drowning out the rest of the patter and the opening bars of "Little Snowbird." The camera then tilts down to the HOLE in the ice -- a thin glaze has frozen the fishing line in place. Suddenly, the RED FLAG pops up.

MUSIC OVER -- snatches of Ann Murray gust in and out of the howling wind as the camera finds a pair of black five buckle artics, up a pair of red and black checked lumberjack pants, and onto a pair of fleece mittens folded peacefully over the barrel chest of dead NORBERT ANDERSEN, 68. His face is peaceful in repose, his eyes clear as the pale blue sky; tufts of white hair blow like prairie grass in the drafty air.

ANN MURRAY

...so Little Snowbird take me with you when you go...

Off the red flag bobbing up and down, and the man's pale unseeing eyes, and the howling wind

CUT TO:

INT. ANDERSEN'S AUTO BODY SHOP - DAWN

The howling wind fades into the shriek of an AIR COMPRESSOR as SONNY ANDERSEN, thirtyish, zips the lug nuts off the wheels of a late Eighties Grand Am. In between blasts of the air gun, we hear old Ann Murray trilling "Snowbird" from a radio O.S. And we hear footsteps echoing on the concrete floor, although apparently Sonny doesn't -- he moves around to the front wheel on the driver's side.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Sonny? Hey there, Sonny!

ANN MURRAY (O.S.)

...and fly yi yi away ---

BZZZT - the air gun drowns them out.

A huge sheepskin MITTEN enters frame behind Sonny -- it silently claws at his shoulder. Sonny freaks, jumping up and banging his head on the corner of the car's bumper as the air gun clatters across the floor.

SONNY

Ahh! Doggone it! Jeez!

TILT UP to the towering beanpole figure of LOU the cop.

LOU

Hey there, Sonny.

SONNY

You scared the heck outa me, Lou.
Jeez...

LOU

Yah, I'm real sorry. But this is...this can't wait.

SONNY

Trunk latch on the prowler sticking again?

Lou removes his hat, licks his fingers and slicks back his hair. His eyes are averted.

LOU

No, it's not the trunk latch. It's uh, it's your Dad, Sonny.

Sonny gets whiter.

SONNY

Aw, jeez...

LOU

I'm real sorry.

Sonny nods, bends down to pick up the air gun, methodically wrapping the cord around the handle: he's pulling himself together. Finally:

SONNY

How? Was it up the lake?

LOU

Yah. He looked real peaceful, Sonny.

(beat)

Sonuvagun even had a walleye on the line...

Sonny nods, smiles thinly.

SONNY

OK, then. Well, thanks much, Lou.

LOU

You bet. We carried him over to Molloney's already...

SONNY

Oh. Well, real good then.

(beat)

You know his heart was shot, Lou...

LOU

Oh, yah. Chief Gundersen may want 'an autopsy, but like you say, given his history, I sincerely doubt it --

SONNY

Yah, okay. Well, thanks again for telling me, Lou.

LOU

Yah, well, sorry again.

He puts on his hat, clomps toward the dim light of a glass entrance door. Sonny swings the air gun by the cord for a while, then sighs. He puts the tool on a work bench, then turns off a transistor radio, cutting off Ann Murray in mid-warble. He walks slowly, deliberately toward

An OFFICE -- its frosted glass door backlit by electric lights from inside. On the door, proudly: NORBERT ANDERSEN, and underneath, in smaller letters, & Son.

Sonny opens the door, reaches inside and retrieves his coat from a hook by the door. He looks inside, then turns off the light, fighting his emotions. As his footsteps echo in the now darkened shop,

FADE TO:

EXT. GUNDERSEN HOUSE - DAY

A two bedroom post-war tract house with a heating oil delivery truck and a Brainerd PD prowler in the driveway. NORM GUNDERSEN, in a hooded parka, slowly swings down from the truck with a cardboard pastry box in his hand. Carefully, he shuffle/skates the short distance along the front walk to the door. He goes inside.

INT. GUNDERSEN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Norm hangs up his parka by the back door and enters the kitchen, store-bought coffee cake in hand. He looks around for his wife. Blinks.

NORM

Margie?

He sets down the cake, cuts two large pieces and puts them on plates.

NORM

Got a walnut ring here.

He pours some Mister Coffee, cranes his neck toward the breakfast nook.

NORM

Honey?

He adds the milk and sugar as if in a dream state. He leaves the kitchen -- we see him stirring as he wanders to the foot of the stairs.

NORM

Marge? It's late...

MARGE (O.S.)

I know... I'm up...

Norm nods, returns to the kitchen for the two plates, heads back to the stairs.

CUT TO:

INT. GUNDERSEN BEDROOM - DAY

CLOSE on a painting of a LOON, half-finished, on an easel. The camera moves past the easel to

MARGE GUNDERSEN, dressed in her khaki police uniform and heavy red woolen socks. She sits on the edge of the bed, cradling the phone under her chin while loosening the laces on a shiny black vinyl-looking work shoe.

MARGE

(into phone)

Just make sure you make three copies this time, Lou -- we don't want any more autopsy reports goin' missing, okee?

She looks up and smiles at Norm as he enters with the coffee cake.

MARGE

(into phone)

Both, yah. We'll need to dust the vehicle AND take some plaster footprints -- yah, before the snow all melts.

Norm smiles at his wife's little joke -- the snow's not going to melt for another seven months. Then he wanders over to the easel and frowns.

MARGE

(into phone)

Yah, real good then, Lou. Just maintain the integrity of the crime scene...just hold down the fort. No, in a couple -- I'll stop over later, see how Angie's doin'. Yah, I know -- terrible. Okee then.

She hangs up, sighs.

MARGE

Bob Trotter's dead.

NORM

(stunned)

He's so young. How?

MARGE

Two blasts from a shotgun.

(shakes head)

We don't know if it was robbery or whatall, but geez, Norm -- he left two kids, and Angie expecting the third...

Norm looks tenderly at his pregnant wife, moves protectively toward her with the two plates of coffee cake in his hands.

NORM

Always liked Bob.

Marge straps on her weapon as Norm passes the easel, glances at, frowns. He switches both plates to his left hand, picks up a rag and rubs at a section of wing, sighing heavily.

MARGE

What's wrong, Norm?

NORM

These pin feathers -- they're no good.

MARGE

Oh, sure they are.

(beat)

I didn't hear yah leave, hon.
Emergency?

NORM

VFW -- tank was full after all.

MARGE

Oh, geez, that's too bad. That you had to run over there so early, I mean.

NORM

Yah. Faulty dipstick.

He hands her a plate, watches her lovingly as she scarfs down the walnut ring.

MARGE

This is good. Hildebrand's?

Norm nods, sits. She chews happily, then sniffs the air.

MARGE

Is that our furnace?

Norm sniffs his work clothes, his hands.

NORM

No, it's me.

(apologetic)

I'll go wash up.

MARGE

Oh, no, it's just, blaggh. I hate to be a complainer, yah know, but --

NORM

It's okay. Maybe the fumes are bad
for the baby.

(off the easel)

I should probably paint down the
cellar, too.

He rises heavily from the edge of the bed, goes to the easel,
starts to gather up jars of paint.

MARGE

Oh, for Pete's -- Norm, c'mere.

He lumbers over. She pats the bed next to her -- he sits
down again.

MARGE

Wouldn't be a real bedroom without a
painting of a loon, now. Would it.

She tries to bend over with the shoe, gets about halfway
down. He takes the shoe from her.

MARGE

Aw, jeez, Norm -- five more weeks.

NORM

I know.

He slips on the shoe, ties it. Then rubs her other foot.
She sighs.

MARGE

Feels good...

NORM

(surprised; pleased)

Oh yah?

He rubs some more, then reaches for the other shoe.

CUT TO:

EXT. ANDERSEN HOUSE - DAY

Under a leaden sky. A YELLOW CAB spins its wheels on the icy
driveway, then weaves backwards and out into the street.
FRITZ ANDERSEN, seriously unprepared for the cold in a
herringbone sports jacket and jeans, picks up his suitcase
and turns toward

THE ANDERSEN HOME. Vinyl sided, with bird feeder and
"Wilkommen" plaque by the door.

FRITZ. Takes in his ancestral split ranch with something
like dread. Then, shivering, he heads for the front door.

He rings the bell, shifting from one foot to the other while he waits. Then knocks -- looks back at the cab receding into the distance, frowns; leans on the bell with an old, recurring dread of being locked out, and freezing to death.

Then sees:

POV INSERT - NOTE

"Waited as long as I could -- we're at funeral home. Sonny."

FRITZ -- exhales a cloud of breath, crumples the note. Turns and walks toward the street.

CUT TO:

EXT. PIONEER LANE - DAY

A suburban street of snow-covered raised ranches with attached garages. A white geyser is thrown up by a snow blower; trudging behind the machine, barely visible, is

JIM PETERSEN, a stoic figure in a black snowmobile outfit, his face obscured by a purple and yellow Vikings scarf.

INT. PETERSEN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Spic and span to the max: even the duck refrigerator magnets are lined up in a row.

ASTRID PETERSEN, an outgoing blonde in Land's End corduroy jumper and a turtleneck with little red hearts on it, pops a paper towel-lined plate of bacon into the microwave.

ASTRID

Was it crispy enough for ya
yesterday, kids?

At the kitchen table, JIM, JR. wraps tape on the end of his hockey stick. His sister, LUANN, 18, doesn't look up from a PSAT study manual propped in front of a Tupperware OJ pitcher.

ASTRID

Kids? Was it?

JIM, JR.

Was what.

ASTRID

The bacon -- was it crispy enough, or
should I give it another twenty
seconds, ya think?

LUANN
 (bored)
 Yes, mother.

ASTRID
 Well, jeez, Miss Snippy -- some
 people would consider it a luxury...

Luann petulantly tosses her platinum mane, which is teased into a sort of late-Farrah flip.

LUANN
 It's gross.

The microwave dings -- Astrid takes the bacon out, opens a package of frozen pancakes and throws them in, then hesitates. She glances out the kitchen window at

EXT. PETERSEN HOUSE - DAY (ASTRID'S POV)

The white geyser of snow is almost at the kitchen door -- we vaguely see Jim Petersen through the blow-off.

INT. PETERSEN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

RESUME ASTRID as she smiles at the snowy figure of her hard-working husband, measuring his progress. Then confidently -- jauntily -- sets the timer on the nuke for 45 seconds.

JIM, JR.
 (re: sister)
 That's cuz Tracee Schmitz beat her
 out for Miss Pork last year.

LUANN
 Shut up, weenie.

ASTRID
 All right now, for gosh sakes, that's
 enough. Settle down before your
 father gets in...Luann, you need some
 protein in you for that SAT exam...

THE SIDE DOOR OPENS to a blast of wind and powdering of snow. We hear the stomping of boots in the mudroom O.S., a zipper going down, some hearty BRRRRing, and then Jim Petersen enters the kitchen as the microwave DINGS.

ASTRID
 Cold out there, hon?

JIM PETERSEN
 You betcha. Cold enough to freeze
 milk 'tween tit and pail.

He sniffs the air.

JIM PETERSEN

Bacon?

Astrid sets down the plate of bacon with a flourish. Jim takes a few pieces; starts to pass it to his daughter, who shakes her head.

LUANN

No thanks, Daddy.

JIM PETERSEN

(adoringly)

Now, Luann honey, you wanna be a Golden Gopher, you're gonna hafta eat a good --

LUANN

I'm not going to be a Golden Gopher.

JIM PETERSEN

'course you are, Pinkie. You're going to do fine on those tests, and next year, the University of Minnesota will have itself one heckuva --

JIM JR.

(rattling)

She means she doesn't want to go to U of M -- she wants to go to Wisconsin.

Jim the father chokes on a piece of bacon. Astrid rushes over with the plate of pancakes and sets them down.

ASTRID

(warning)

Heimlich!

As she belts her husband in the back. He recovers immediately, although his face is crimson.

JIM PETERSEN

But why?

LUANN

Wisconsin has a MUCH better communications program, Daddy.

JIM PETERSEN

(reeling)

Communications?

LUANN

Broadcast journalism. Terry Olsen on Channel 11 went there.

JIM PETERSEN

Well, yah, but gosh, Pinkie -- out of state tuition is...oh, boy.

ASTRID

Let's all talk this over another time, 'kay, everybody? You kids're gonna miss the bus, and I can't take you -- the Taurus is on the fritz again.

JIM PETERSEN

(dying)

It is?

ASTRID

Oh, they said it was just the alternator, but you know...

She takes off her apron, folds it neatly, and goes off somewhere. Poor Jim runs a hand through his thinning hair.

JIM PETERSEN

Yah, I know.

(to junior)

So -- yah got a big game today, Jim Junior.

JIM JR.

Mille Lac, yah.

(beat)

Didja think about what we talked about, Dad? About an early birthday present, I mean.

JIM PETERSEN

Yah, I sure did. And uh, I thought, must be a lot of goals left in my old Bauers. So...

JIM JR.

Coach says I'd be a lot better on my cross-over if I had a new pair --

(sarcastic)

You know, plastic ones, like the rest of the team's? They're still on sale at Nordic Sports -- only one fifty.

JIM PETERSEN

"Only?!" Well, heck -- is the coach buying?

Junior rolls his eyes. We hear a HORN honk O.S. -- the kids grab their stuff and bolt. Jim waves the plate of bacon after them.

JIM PETERSEN

Take some with!

Off the door slamming in the mudroom,

JIM PETERSEN

(chewing gloomily)

Wasting bacon...well, for pete sake.

CUT TO:

EXT. VAST PARKING LOT - DAY

Less monochromatic now, what with the yellow police tape snapping in the bitter wind and the red gumballs flashing.

A stout figure in a police parka -- Marge -- is crouched with her head and torso inside the driver's side of the late Bob Trotter's Chrysler, down on the floorboards. LOU the stringbean deputy chief watches her, coffee cup in hand.

LOU

All dusted in there, Chief.

(proud of himself)

Plus, one of the victim's battery cables looks to have been tampered with, prior to the shooting.

Marge nods; she's concentrating. Lou's a little disappointed in her lack of enthusiasm.

LOU

Which tells me, this was an ambush -- a professional hit, maybe...

A beat, and then Marge backs out of the tight space, turns to face Lou, bends down again -- we think she's going to be sick, but she's just found something.

MARGE

(coming up)

Here's your second shell casing.

As she holds up a shotgun shell on the point of a yellow pencil.

LOU

(disappointed)

I was down there! Why the heck didn't I see it?

MARGE

Well, it was right there under the floor mat, Lou...

She shrugs modestly, holds it up to

DENNIS FOO, the lab technician. He'd be the cliched Asian lab tech, except for his Minnesota accent and enormous size -- think Mike Yamaguchi from the movie as a sumo wrestler. He lumbers over.

DENNIS

What the heck's this, Margie?

He takes the pencil with the shell, peers at it, scowls and mutters.

DENNIS

Oh, now that's just great.

MARGE

What is.

DENNIS

These shell casings -- they're old.

MARGE

I'm not following yah there, Dennis.

DENNIS

I mean they've been used over and over -- so yah won't be able to just go down to Gustafsen's and see who bought 'em, yah see.

MARGE

Yah -- so we find a fellah that makes his own birdshot.

LOU

(supportive)

Yah, that's right.

MARGE

Okee then.

(to Dennis)

How'd those footprints turn out?

DENNIS

Oh, I think we got a pretty good set, Chief.

She nods, leans back inside the Chrysler, shakes her head.

MARGE

Who'd a thought birdshot could make such an unholy mess...

CUT TO:

INT. MOLLONEY'S FUNERAL HOME - (OFFICE) - DAY

Sonny Andersen and his Mom, ESTHER -- a mannish woman in a pale blue pants suit -- face MISTER MOLLONEY the funeral director across his pretentious desk.

MISTER MOLLONEY

Now, about the casket -- we have a very nice mahogany unit with bronze fittings...

SONNY

Ma?

ESTHER ANDERSEN

Well, um, uh...

MISTER MOLLONEY

(reassuringly)

We'll itemize everything for you, Esther, before you sign a single paper...

Esther Andersen starts sobbing. Sonny pats her hand, tries to strike a light note.

SONNY

Dad always wanted a mahogany fishing boat -- a Chris Craft, remember, Mom?

She sobs louder; her son pats her arm awkwardly.

MISTER MOLLONEY

(clearing throat)

Well, now -- there's no rush at all -- some of these decisions can be put off until Spring.

He makes a notation on the form in front of him, then screws the cap back on his gold pen.

SONNY

Spring?

MISTER MOLLONEY

When the ground thaws out -- you'll want to concentrate on the service now, of course, but the actual burial, well -- that'd be April at the very earliest.

ESTHER ANDERSEN

April?

She snothers into a handkerchief.

MISTER MOLLONEY

Or early May, at the very latest.

ESTHER ANDERSEN

Oh, dear...oh, poor Mister Andersen.
What will they, I mean, where will
you -- ?

FRITZ ANDERSEN appears in the doorway; Mister Molloney raises an eyebrow quizzically, Sonny scowls, Esther leaps up with surprising quickness.

ESTHER ANDERSEN

Fritz!

They embrace; he strokes her cheek, her blue hair.

ESTHER ANDERSEN

You remember Mister Molloney, the
funeral...

(choking)

...the funeral direc --

FRITZ

Mom, I'm so sorry. I was just
talking to him on the phone, when was
it --

SONNY

(dry)

Thanksgiving. It was at Thanksgiving.

Fritz looks at Sonny, guarded as a fighter in the neutral corner.

FRITZ

No. Not that long ago --

SONNY

Third quarter, Lions up by ten...Dad
kept the sound off while you
described your vacation in Greece.

FRITZ

(correcting)

Turkey.

Mister Molloney clears his throat: he's a busy man.

MISTER MOLLONEY

If that's all for now, then --

FRITZ

My Dad -- I'd like to see him.

Mister Molloney looks put; Sonny seizes on it.

SONNY

If you'd a been here, you'd know the
viewing's tomorrow from nine to --

FRITZ

I'm here now.
(to Molloney, hard)
Mister Molloney?

Molloney sighs, takes a key from his desk drawer, goes to a door, unlocks it.

CUT TO:

INT. COLD STORAGE - DAY

Pitch black. We hear FOOTSTEPS, then a light switch being flicked on. A single bulb illuminates

CLOSE on the face of Norb Andersen, just as we saw him out on the frozen lake.

ESTHER ANDERSEN (O.S.)

Oh, dear...

PULL BACK to see the storage area -- small and dark, it's more meat locker than morgue. Mr. Molloney withdraws, leaving Mrs. Andersen and her two sons alone to stare at the late Mister A. in a large styrofoam box.

FRITZ

(appalled)
Jesus...whose bright idea was this?

MISTER MOLLONEY

It's only temporary, although some folks like the styrofoam -- it's economical and it does last a heckuva long time...

Fritz silences him with a look; then goes forward and kisses his father's forehead.

FRITZ

Sorry I missed you, Dad. I would've liked to have been there.

ESTHER ANDERSEN

Oh no, dear -- it was just as well.
They say he went peacefully...

She cries into her hanky; Sonny makes an impatient noise.

FRITZ

But we're going to take you across,
Dad, just like you wanted.

(more)

FRITZ (cont'd)
 (whispers in his ear)
 Valhalla or bust, right?

He strokes his father's head, his arm -- the others are increasingly put off and agitated.

SONNY
 Jesus Christ -- what the hell's he talking about?

FRITZ
 I'm talking about Dad's last wishes.

Sonny leans across the styrofoam, which squeaks loudly as he gets in his brother's face.

SONNY
 Oh, yah? What'd he do -- send you a postcard in Turkey?

FRITZ
 Dad was a Viking --

SONNY
 Dad was an auto body repairman!

FRITZ
 (ignoring him)
 -- he was a Viking, and he deserves a Viking funeral.

Sonny snorts derisively; Molloney steps toward the light switch.

MISTER MOLLONEY
 Well I think that's enough for one day...

As the light goes off,

CUT TO:

INT. BRAINERD POLICE DEPARTMENT - DAY

Marge's on the phone as Lou and Dennis come in -- she waves them into chairs.

MARGE
 (into phone)
 Yah, but just so I'm clear now -- the duck license is good only for your mallards and your Mergensers, but not -- oh, they're protected. Well, that explains it then. Okay, thanks much. Yah, bye now.

She hangs up, looking pleased.

MARGE

Only two hundred and twenty-five licensed duck hunters in Little Otter County, so yah know -- that's not too bad.

DENNIS

And probably not too many with a size eight foot.

He puts a PLASTER CAST of a hunting boot print on her desk.

MARGE

(examines it, nods)

That is small. Well, sometimes the little fellahs have a lot to prove.

(to Lou)

Grab that list of hunters when it comes over the fax from Fish & Game, will you?

LOU

Yah, sure, Margie -- you off to lunch?

MARGE

(shaking head)

Off to Molloney's Funeral Home.

As she hoists herself up,

CUT TO:

EXT. MOLLONEY'S FUNERAL HOME - DAY

Establish a Brainerd P.D. prowler in front.

INT. MOLLONEY'S FUNERAL HOME - DAY

Marge enters the hushed main part of the funeral home -- she peeks through into a viewing room, where a closed casket sits surrounded by gladiolas of a color not usually found in nature. Nobody's there.

MARGE

Hello? Mister Molloney?

Down the hall, we hear the sound of a toilet flush O.S., then Molloney comes out of the john to greet her.

MISTER MOLLONEY

Chief, thanks for coming down.

MARGE

Well, yah said burglary, so for pete
sakes, that's what we're there for!

MISTER MOLLONEY

Follow me please.

INT. COLD STORAGE - DAY

MISTER MOLLONEY

If you could withhold this
until...that is, the pain and
suffering it would cause the
family...

Meaning his business: Marge gets the drift.

MARGE

I'll keep it under my hat.

Moloney points to the styrofoam box -- it's empty.

MARGE

Norb Andersen?

MISTER MOLLONEY

Disappeared.

MARGE

Ah, jeez...

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. STATE HIGHWAY 61 - DAY

We're at an intersection of two empty highways, both plowed but with patches of packed snow. The vast flat nothing of the white landscape is broken only by a five story GRAIN ELEVATOR with corrugated tin sides. Angled in front is a salt-streaked red pickup; in the distance, a white car speeds toward the intersection.

CUT TO:

INT. BRAINERD POLICE DEPARTMENT - DAY

GLORIA, a receptionist/dispatcher, does some quilting behind her high counter as you come in. You pass officers SCHMITZ and THOMPSON eating fast food at their desks, then the small holding cell, and finally a small private office. As we push into the office,

LOU

So what'd he tell yah, Marge -- the doctor.

MARGE

Oh, yah know -- nothin' much new. How yah sleepin', that sort of thing.

Lou cocks an eyebrow, waits for the answer.

MARGE

Well, other than getting up half the night to go to the bathroom...you know the uterus pushes on the bladder.

LOU

(doesn't want to know)

No. I didn't.

MARGE

Oh, yah -- then he checked, and it's less than a centimeter, so, yah know...

She shrugs.

MARGE

You got that list of duck hunters yet, Lou?

LOU

Yah -- I put it right there under those snack food requisition forms for you to initial.

He points to a corner of her desk; she flickers a look of mild annoyance, finds the faxed list under the forms.

MARGE

(reading)

Leo Lazzeroni, Bill Higgins, Emil Schmidlapper...

LOU

(snapping fingers)

Emil got into that pushing match down there at the drugstore over the last of the half-off Christmas cards, you remember? Had to go down and break it up...

MARGE

Now, Lou, let's look at the physical evidence before we go leapin' into motive, okee?

Lou looks chastened.

EXT. HIGHWAY 61 - DAY

The speeding white car -- a Cutlass Cierra, trailering a tarp-covered boat -- brakes and skids wildly as it reaches the intersection. It, too, is salt-encrusted, its windows and windshield smeared solid; the invisible driver straightens it out enough to make the turn down the side road, the boat trailer fishtailing insanely behind. Then sliding off the road and plowing over an embankment, where it disappears like an ermine in the snowfield.

CUT TO:

INT. BRAINERD POLICE DEPARTMENT - DAY

Lou frowns.

LOU

So gettin' back to the doctor's office, Chief, a centimeter -- that's what -- about an inch, right?

Marge reaches for her red stockinged feet, to massage them, can't. She grimaces.

MARGE

No, it's more like -- you multiply the inch by two point fifty-four to get the centimeter, Lou -- don't you remember we were supposed to learn all that.

LOU

Yah, but then we never really went over, did we. To the metric.

(beat)

You thinkin' of natural childbirth, Marge -- you and Norm? The breathing, 'and all?

MARGE

Well, geez, I don't know -- it's ALL natural, right? What could be more natural. But you know, the way I've been feeling lately -- whoo! Just knock me out when the time comes.

Lou nods, yah.

CUT TO:

EXT. SNOWFIELD - DAY

Extremely long shot. We see the white Cierra rocking back and forth in the deep snow -- a futile attempt. We see a MAN in a hooded parka get out, savagely kick one of the tires, then stagger off into the snow, trying to unzipper himself for a whizz. He stumbles, spins, falls on his back. Lies still for a beat, then flaps his arms, making an angel in the snow as we

PULL BACK and back, leaving him a speck against the infinite white.

CUT TO:

INT. BRAINERD POLICE DEPARTMENT - DAY

Marge stretches, yawns.

MARGE

Besides, I'll get enough huffing and puffing up and down the stairs with the laundry once it's over...

NORM appears in the doorway with a paper bag in his hand and customarily blank expression on his face.

NORM

Hi, Margie. Hi, Lou.

LOU
Hi, Norm. How goes the bird paintin'?

NORM
Oh, not too bad yah know.

LOU
(nodding)
Well, I'll be shoving off.

Norm unwraps a sandwich, hands it Marge. As Lou goes out, Gloria escorts a tall, somewhat stooped but powerful man named FINDERS and his long-suffering, timid WIFE into Marge's office.

GLORIA
Sorry, Chief, but this is Mister and Mrs. Finders.

She pronounces it "Finnders." Mr. Finders scowls, starts to speak.

GLORIA
Mister Finders wants to file a stolen property --

MARGE
Oh. Officers Schmitz and Thompson busy?

GLORIA
Out in the prowler, Chief, yah.

She looks apologetically at Norm; he shrugs, it's okay. Marge painfully slings her legs off the desk and slowly stands, a bit woozy. She offers her hand to Finders.

MOLLONEY'S SECRETARY
Well, then, Mister Finders --

FINDERS
It's FINDers.

MARGE
Oh. Like finders, keepers yah mean?

Norm cracks a faint smile; Finders does not.

MARGE
Okay, then -- what've yah lost, then.

FINDERS
Eighteen foot Challenger with a 75 horse Evinrude. The damn trailer was optional -- they got that, too.

MARGE

Yah say "they," Mister Finders -- yah see these fellas?

FINDERS

I'd a seen 'em, I'd a blown their heads off, wouldn't I?

MARGE

Oh, geez, I hope not.

FINDERS

(shaking head)

Didn't see a thing -- I must've been in the john...

(darkly)

Emptying my goddamn bag.

MARGE

(pained)

I see.

FINDERS

They just pulled into the driveway, hitched up, and drove away.

He pounds her desk with his fist.

FINDERS

Is that brass balls, or what?

MARGE

Yes, sir, that's pretty darn brazen. Well, sit down, let's get your address and whatnot.

He sits.

MARGE

Now then -- what's the reg number of this vessel?

FINDERS

MN 629-A.

She nods, writes it down; gestures to telephone.

MARGE

You wanta contact your insurance agent, you go right ahead.

FINDERS

I already called them -- from the car.

MARGE

Oh. Okay, then -- what color's this boat, then?

FINDERS

White hull with navy trim.

MARGE

And you say it was a 75 horse Merc they took, as well?

FINDERS

An Evinrude, yah.

MRS. FINDERS

But actually, hon, they left the motor.

He axe-murders her with his eyes; Marge catches it.

MARGE

Oh?

MRS. FINDERS

In the driveway, yah.

MARGE

(to Mr. Finders;
pointedly)

Then we're only reporting the theft of the boat then, sir, and not the Evinrude, is that correct?

FINDERS

(defensive)

Well, yah but -- plus all the electronic bells and whistles, and my new Fish Finder...

Marge nods, writes it down; gives him a look that says don't jerk me around again, Buster...

CUT TO:

INT. NAN'S BEAUTY PARLOR - DAY

We track past a row of hairdryers, like alien ants, until we come to the manicure station.

CLOSE on a very white HAND. A nail polish brush comes into frame: a gob of blood-red polish oozes off the tip of the brush, quivers, then slides gelatinously onto the index fingernail of

Anne Mendelsohn. As we PULL BACK, we see Anne in a wool sweater over a turtleneck; she's also wearing tight jeans tucked into rubber-soled LL Bean hunting boots. And we see

ELSIE MUELLER, 22, a small-town beauty with big hair and ten of the twelve signs of the zodiac painted on her long nails.

Spilling out of her manicurist's uniform is a voluptuous figure which will be the cause of heartache and misery for her down the road; men can't see the kindness and decency inside the spectacular chest.

ELSIE

...well, yah, but heck -- Chuck's got a pretty good thing goin' over at John Deere, even though I wouldn'ta minded tryin' my hand at the modelling -- yah know, a little longer.

Anne struggles to peel off her sweater; Elsie helps her, then goes to hang it up on the coat rack. When she comes back, Anne's frowning at her nails, which have been smeared by the sweater removal.

ELSIE

Oh, don't worry, Mrs. Mendelsohn -- I can fix that in a jiff.

She dips a cuticle stick in non-acetone, wipes the nails, and starts over.

ANNE

What kind of modelling then, Elsie?

ELSIE

Oh, I did some truck calendars and a hot tub TV commercial up in Michigan when Chuck was working the assembly line, but he didn't like that too much.

Anne, flushed and sweating, fans herself; Elsie waits patiently, then guides Anne's hand back to the little table so she can continue her work.

ANNE

Yah -- must get monotonous, but then it pays well.

Elsie smiles blankly, blows on Anne's nails.

ANNE

The assembly line, I mean.

ELSIE

Oh, that -- no, he liked that well enough, but they laid him off. I meant the modelling.

ANNE

Oh.

ELSIE

Yah -- they wanted me to do the Girls of the Upper Peninsula spread for Playboy, but Chuck pitched a huge fit -- said the guys at the plant would ride him about it.

ANNE

Well, heck -- it's your body!

ELSIE

(nodding)

I feel like it's a gift from God, and besides, Playboy's pretty tasteful, yah know, with the airbrushes and all...

ANNE

Besides, enjoy it while it still works. Look at me --- I'm a menopausal mess, and I'm only forty-seven...

ELSIE

Oh, you look great, honey. And I'd love to get my hands on your hair, maybe an extension -- ?

ANNE

(on a roll)

Don't let the man dictate to you. You want something, you do it -- otherwise, you'll be yes, honey, no honeying yourself into oblivion.

Elsie's not sure how to take this outburst, nor is she entirely sure of the meaning of the word oblivion.

ELSIE

(diplomatic)

Well, I'm sure your husband would never do that -- he seems like such a nice guy.

ANNE

Seems like, is right. They're all nice in the beginning, and then one morning you wake up alone and you go, is it still duck hunting season, or has he left me for good?

She starts to cry, then suddenly bolts for the door, opens it -- stands there cooling herself in the arctic blast of air. NAN, the owner, and an elderly CUSTOMER watch her.

CUSTOMER

Hot flashes, dear?

Anne shuts the door, exhales, nods.

ANNE

I'm too young for this! And that damn quack Doctor Johnson's cut back on my estrogen -- says it's all in my head!

The ladies shake their heads sympathetically.

NAN

What do they know.

Anne goes back to her chair; Elsie resumes work as if nothing's happened.

ELSIE

So -- how are the kids?

Anne smiles a tight smile, a parody of the proud parent.

ANNE

Well, Jerri-Ann works nights at the Velvet Turtle, of course, and Danny you know went and joined the Scientologists but now he thinks he wants to go into law enforcement. And the baby -- Denise? She married a Bible salesman and followed him to Birmingham, Alabama of all places!

She leans her head back, sighs, stares at the ceiling.

ANNE

You just do what makes you happy, because in the end, you're all alone.

Elsie pats poor Anne on the arm, at a loss for words.

CUT TO:

INT. PETERSEN HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

With the kids at school, polka music on the RADIO as Jim comes in from the cold.

JIM PETERSEN

Hon?

ASTRID (O.S.)

Upstairs.

He nods, does a self-conscious little polka step, then heads to the stairs.

INT. PETERSEN HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Astrid's folding laundry on their bed -- neat color-coded piles as Jim comes in and grabs her. Kisses her.

JIM PETERSEN

Mmmmmmmwhah!

Astrid pecks him back, pleased. Goes on with her folding.

ASTRID

Can I fix you sunthin before you go, hon?

JIM PETERSEN

No, that's okay.

He goes to a closet, pulls a suitcase down from the top shelf, and slings it onto the bed. He takes clean clothes from her different stacks and packs quickly, efficiently.

JIM PETERSEN

I can always grab something at the Clover if I hafta. A hard roll, maybe some fried walleye. Coffee, for sure.

ASTRID

(agreeing)

For a truck stop, the Clover does a nice walleye dinner.

JIM PETERSEN

Yah, but I don't get the whole dinner -- I wait til I get to Fergus Falls.

She hands him three pair of brown socks -- he takes them without looking and tucks them in behind his shirts.

ASTRID

We're a pretty good team, aren't we hon.

He nods, snaps the case closed, hoists it. Kisses her on the cheek: they've done this a thousand times...

JIM PETERSEN

Well, see yah next week, hon. You know where to reach me.

ASTRID

Yah.

She walks him to the bedroom door.

ASTRID

I'll talk to Luann about the Gophers, you know...maybe she'll change her mind about going out of state.

JIM PETERSEN

Well, if that's what Pinkie really wants, you know... Besides --

(conspiratorial)

If this third franchise looks good, that might be just the ticket. To get us above water and all.

ASTRID

Put you six feet under, you mean! Back and forth between Brainerd and Fargo, Fargo and Brainerd...

(shaking head)

Where's this third restrunt going to go, if it's not top secret...

JIM PETERSEN

No secrets from you, hon.

(pause for effect)

Sauk Center -- exactly halfway between the two. And a super high volume spot on the Service Road, right off the exit.

(visionary)

It'll be the third leg of Petersen's Golden Triangle of Kentucky Fried Chicken!

She looks at him lovingly, sighs.

ASTRID

Hon, you're too darn good to us.

She kisses his cheek, shoves her warrior out the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. GUSTAFSEN'S OUTDOOR SPORTSMAN - DAY

A new steel building with an enormous SODA MACHINE by the front door. Bright Evinrude banners flapping in the bitter wind. Big shiny fibreglas powerboats, lots of snowmobiles, various indeterminate snow-covered humps -- dinghies and trailers sleeping 'til spring.

MARGE's prowler pulls into the parking lot; we hear the dinging, the long wait, then her laborious exit from the vehicle.

She plods carefully toward the entrance, her arms folded across her belly, just in case.

CUT TO:

INT. GUSTAFSEN'S OUTDOOR SPORTSMAN - DAY

Bright and organized and about as atmospheric as a Price Club full of hunting bows, rifles, fishing rods, etc. OLLIE GUSTAFSEN, JR., in shirtsleeves and pheasant tie, is laying different lengths of bright-colored bungee cord on the counter as Marge enters.

OLLIE

Hey there, Chief.

MARGE

Hey there, Ollie.

OLLIE

Any news on the Bob Trotter situation?

MARGE

Oh, we've got a few pretty good leads there. Matter of fact, I was wondering -- who do you know packs his own birdshot?

OLLIE

Some of the old-timers, but off-hand...

(shakes head)

My Dad used to fool around with his own black powder recipes, but he's long since passed away...

(remembering)

He and Rufus Stillman.

MARGE

Well, Rufus is still around, so -- okee.

(changing tacks)

What about somebody coming around trying to sell a ...what the heck was it? A Challenger? Eighteen footer with a bunch of electronic gear -- fish finders, and stuff.

She laughs.

OLLIE

What's funny?

MARGE

Fish finders -- that's the fella's name whose boat was stolen. Finders.

OLLIE

Yah, sure I know him -- and he's a cold fish, too.

MARGE

Yah. So, you know the boat, then?

OLLIE

(resentful)

No, I guess he went to the Twin Cities -- they got the super discount marine down there...he just comes in here for little things, yah know -- cleats and whatnot.

(smiling)

So -- somebody walked off with it, huh?

MARGE

Drove off, yah. With the trailer.

OLLIE

Well, I'll sure be on the lookout.

(beat)

Ya might try up to Ottertail Lake, though.

MARGE

Oh? Yah think so?

OLLIE

Yah -- they got the illegal cigarette vending on the reservation. Plus I've heard you can get a pretty nifty deal on a used boat up there, too.

MARGE

Well, that's a tip worth checking out, Ollie -- thanks much.

DOWN THE AISLE -- Over Marge's shoulder, Fritz Andersen approaches, swinging a restroom key attached to a MACKERAL LURE. He sees Marge in her uniform, nervously fumbles the hand-off of the mackerel keychain back to Ollie.

FRITZ

You're out of paper towels.

OLLIE

Okee, well thanks for lettin' us know.

(beat)

Here's the bungee.

Fritz picks them up, looks off into space: mentally measuring. Also, a little paranoid, avoiding Marge's eyes.

FRITZ

All right. I'll take a three foot length, two sixes, and a twelve footer.

MARGE

(snapping fingers)

Fritz Andersen, right?

FRITZ

Uh, yeah. That's right.

MARGE

Jeez, I'm so sorry about your Dad.

FRITZ

Thank you.

He looks sideways at her, wondering who the hell she is.

OLLIE

She's the Chief of Police, yah know.

FRITZ

I can see that.

MARGE

Marge Gunderson -- we were in biology together, don't you remember?

(off his frown)

We were partners in the frog dissecting!

FRITZ

I've been away a long time...

MARGE

Yah.

(joking)

Plus, I wasn't pregnant in high school.

OLLIE

(indignant)

Not like the kids today!

MARGE

So, Fritz, what're you doing now?

FRITZ

Just tying up some loose ends. You know.

OLLIE
 (off the bungee)
 Loose ends! Hah, pretty good.

MARGE
 No, I mean, for work, yah know.

FRITZ
 Oh. I teach English lit.

MARGE
 Oh yah? I remember you went off to college someplace with a funny name, what was it?

FRITZ
 Rice.

MARGE
 (smiling)
 Yah -- Rice.

FRITZ
 Rice is funny?

MARGE
 Yah -- no. It's just, Rice yah know.

Fritz shakes his head, turns to Ollie with his wallet open.

OLLIE
 Sixteen eighty-four with the tax.

He starts stuffing the bungee cord into a bag.

OLLIE
 Watch out for those hooks, now -- they come loose and catch you wrong, they'll yank the eyeball right out of the socket.

FRITZ
 (dry)
 I'll watch that.

OLLIE
 Yah -- keep an eye out, hah-hah!

Fritz shakes his head a second time, takes his parcel and walks toward the door.

MARGE
 Sorry again about your loss, Fritz.
 Your Dad was a heckuva nice fellow.

At the door, Fritz turns and gives her a look.

FRITZ

Didn't you go with Tank Heinegger for a while?

MARGE

(blushing)

Yah, a little while...

FRITZ

I remember you now.

He goes out. Marge watches him, then turns to Ollie.

MARGE

Well, now, there's a cool customer for yah.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOUR LEAF CLOVER TRUCK STOP - DAY

Getting on to late in the afternoon: the immense sky begins to color. A grey PONTIAC GRAND AM exits the interstate and coasts up to the entrance, past the big rigs. Jim Petersen gets out, stretches, yawns, hurries inside.

INT. CLOVER - DAY

Jim at the counter, sipping coffee. Next to him, a giant trucker eats a plate of fried fish.

JIM PETERSEN

How's the walleye there -- any good?

The trucker nods, takes a fishbone out of his mouth and lays it on the side of his plate. The WAITRESS, a youngish blonde with muscular forearms, comes over with her order pad.

WAITRESS

Now, you know it is, Jim, yah've had the darn walleye special often enough.

JIM PETERSEN

Yah, well...

(grinning at her)

Okay then -- make it the special.

WAITRESS

(nodding)

That sounds like a winner.

As she writes,

WAITRESS

So -- didja close yet on that new franchise then?

JIM PETERSEN

Real soon now.

(confidential)

This one's a cash cow, Cherylee -- a sure winner.

She leans over the counter, shows a little friendly cleavage.

WAITRESS

Couldn't happen to a nicer guy, Jim.

He winks at her, takes his coffee mug and walks around the diner, stretching and shaking hands with other regulars. They all greet him warmly. Finally, he goes over to the jukebox, drops a quarter.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRACT HOUSE - FARGO - DAY

Like the Petersen house on Pioneer Drive in Brainerd, only this one's, say, a Dutch gambrel with a pig mailbox. A grey Grand Am pulls into the driveway. Jim Petersen gets out with a suitcase and a plastic Walmart bag.

INT. TRACT HOUSE - FOYER - DAY

Jim closes the door, puts down his stuff. Takes off his coat. We hear a washer/dryer roaring and humming in the BG.

JIM PETERSEN

Honey? I'm home.

He heads toward the kitchen.

THE KITCHEN. We see a pretty blonde woman, just like Astrid Petersen only with one little distinguishing detail -- a cleft chin, say, or gap teeth. She turns toward camera, a basket of laundry in her hands, then sees Jim. Smiles. Moves toward him with the laundry.

THE FOYER -- he takes the laundry basket from her. Kisses her.

JIM PETERSEN

Mmmmmwhahh!

JOANIE PETERSEN

How's the chicken business in Brainerd, hon?

JIM PETERSEN

(modest)

Oh, well...you know.

He goes to the shopping bag, takes out a geeky pink dress, some CD roms, and a bottle of White Shoulders, which he gives to Joanie. Joanie kisses him again.

JOANIE PETERSEN

You're too good to us!

(yelling upstairs)

Kids? Daddy's home!

Off the happy couple, arm in arm,

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

EXT. ANDERSEN HOUSE - BACKYARD PATIO - DAY

CLOSE on the rigid, staring face of Norb Andersen.

As we PULL BACK we see he's sitting propped up on a turquoise-webbed aluminum chaise lounge, half sunk into the snow. Someone's wrapped him in an Indian blanket, as if he's stoically enjoying a thaw in the weather. Screening him from the house is an impressive stack of CORDWOOD; as the CAMERA moves through the side yard toward the street, we see

MARGE getting out of her prowler car and walking to the door.

INT. ANDERSEN HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Panelled in walnut Mister Panel; a small bookcase prominently features a Bible, "Markings" by Dag Hammarskjold, and a collection of souvenir snow-shaker globes. Lace doilies and afghans on the matching Barcaloungers.

ESTHER ANDERSEN expertly cranks herself down from the recline position as the doorbell chimes O.S.

FOLLOWING ESTHER out to the

FOYER -- she opens the door, lets Marge in.

ESTHER ANDERSEN

Hello, Margie.

The Chief gives her a hug.

MARGE

Jeez, I'm sorry about all this,
Esther. I suppose Molloney --

ESTHER ANDERSEN

Oh, yah, he told me, and I just don't
know what this world's coming to.

Esther leads Marge, as if by Scandinavian pheromones, toward the kitchen in the back of the house.

ESTHER ANDERSEN

Can I make you some coffee?

MARGE

Oh, thanks no.
(patting belly)
The caffeine, yah know.

ESTHER ANDERSEN

Yah, can't be too careful, that's right. Then before you know it, they're all grown up...

Esther gets out a half-eaten kransakaaka, starts to slice it.

MARGE

How're the boys taking it, Esther?

ESTHER ANDERSEN

Oh, well...yah know. Sonny doesn't let on, but...and Fritz.

(shaking head)

It's just...rough on him, he was always sensitive.

MARGE

Yah.

Suddenly, Esther rips off a piece of paper towel and moves to the sliding glass door looking onto the backyard. She's rubbing her eyes with the towel.

MARGE

Oh, now...

She moves behind Esther to comfort her; rubs her back as Esther looks out onto the stack of CORDWOOD and the snowy patio beyond it.

ESTHER ANDERSEN

I miss Norb...

MARGE

Yah. I know --- me too.

Off the stack of firewood,

CUT TO:

INT. PETERSEN KITCHEN #2 (FARGO) - EVENING

Joanie Petersen opens the oven and checks on a pan of something. Jim Petersen rummages in a cupboard for chips; he's got a glass of beer going.

JIM PETERSEN

What's for dinner, hon?

Wife #2 closes the oven door, straightens up.

JOANIE PETERSEN

(brightly)

Broiled torsk. And then I thought,
what goes with poor man's lobster?
Potatoes au gratin! And since the
broiler's already going...

JIM PETERSEN

Good thinking -- cost-effective.

(fondly)

That's why you were the honors
student in home ec.

Joanie pauses only slightly while running water in the sink.

JOANIE PETERSEN

Home decorating.

JIM PETERSEN

(over the running
water)

What was that?

She turns off the water, dries her hands on a paper towel,
which she then uses to wipe some non-existent crud off the
counter.

JOANIE PETERSEN

Home decorating, Jim. That was my
major, yah know. In college.

JIM PETERSEN

(covering)

Isn't that what I said?

JOANIE PETERSEN

You said "home ec."

JIM PETERSEN

(an edge)

Home ec, home dec -- what the hell's
the difference?

THE BREAKFAST NOOK -- PAULINE and CARL ("Pete") PETERSEN, the
same general age and looks as Luann and Jim Petersen, Jr.
back in Brainerd, look up up at their father's annoyed tone.

PAULINE

What's wrong, Daddy?

JIM PETERSEN

Nothing, sweetheart. Nothing for you
to worry about.

PAULINE

Okay.

(beat)

Daddy, didjyou know the new Camaros
are in, down at Grody's?

Jim pauses in his hunt for chips; bracing himself.

PAULINE

Well they are. So I thought maybe
after dinner we could go take a test
drive, like you said...

JIM PETERSEN

(sick)

Jeez, hon, you're not sixteen 'til
March...

PAULINE

But I've got my permit! And if we
wait, all the good colors'll be
taken! Besides, you promised...

JIM PETERSEN

Okee, honey, okee...

JOANIE PETERSEN

(lightly)

Now, don't go crazy, you two.

(to Jim)

We got an overdue notice today from
Great Northern Bank, on the mortgage
yah know.

JIM PETERSEN

What!?. How could you forget to pay
the mortgage, for pete sake, Joanie?

JOANIE PETERSEN

ME? And how would I do that, when
you've got the payment coupons with
you?

JIM PETERSEN

Oh, boy. Maybe I got them mixed up
with the other place...

JOANIE PETERSEN

(innocent)

What other place?

JIM PETERSEN

(covering)

You remember, I took out a second
mortgage here to cover the franchise
fees on the Brainerd store...

(more)

JIM PETERSEN (cont'd)
 (sighing)
 Oh, brother...

He finally comes up with a bag of chips, rips it open with his teeth. Then peers inside the cupboard.

JIM PETERSEN
 What the heck?!

Jim holds up a couple of Blockbuster VIDEOS.

JOANIE PETERSEN
 Oh. Is that where they were. I've been looking for them for a week.

JIM PETERSEN
 (hard)
 These were due back a week ago?

JOANIE PETERSEN
 Yah, but hon --

JIM PETERSEN
 Yah but hon nothing, Joanie! I'm sorry, but that just frosts my butt, it truly does -- throwing money away like that...

JOANIE PETERSEN
 Yah but hon --

He slams them down on the counter, sloshing some of his beer in the process. Joanie jumps, winces.

JIM PETERSEN
 Dammit all to hell!

As he slams the mug again, and a couple of glasses fall off the shelf and shatter on the floor. Jim storms out of the kitchen; in the ensuing quiet,

JOANIE PETERSEN
 (to Pauline)
 Get the broom and the dust pan, Pauline.

As Jim storms out of the kitchen,

THE BREAKFAST NOOK -- Pauline slams her book closed.

PAULINE
 The big jerk -- those were HIS videos. Jeez!

JOANIE PETERSEN

Don't be too hard on your father,
 dear - he's under a lot of pressure...
 (sniffing)
 Oh...my torsk!

As she hurries to the oven,

CUT TO:

EXT. SNOWBANK - EVENING

Nothing but the sound of wind, the blank landscape. Then, suddenly, a TRUCK ENGINE roars into life. Revs up louder. Then an explosion of snow, and headlights shine straight into the camera as a TOW TRUCK screams over the bank. Then we see a BOAT TRAILER, which bounces and gets momentarily airborne as the truck blasts through the snow, jounces over the shoulder, then slides onto Highway 61. And keeps going.

HIGH and WIDE SHOT. The faint glow of winter sunset, and the truck and trailer gradually disappearing into the vanishing point.

CUT TO:

INT. BRAINERD POLICE DEPARTMENT - EVENING

Lou and Margie heading out of there for the night. She takes her parka down from a hook, starts to work it on. Then the hat.

MARGE

G'night, Stan.

She heads for the door, nods at STAN PACULA, the night dispatcher, behind the desk.

STAN

G'night.

(beat)

Say, uh -- Chief? On an emergency...uh --

MARGE

You just punch line two there -- it'll ring through ta the house...

STAN

Oh, yah, I know that, Marge. I mean, how much of an emergency is an emergency, I mean -- in your condition, and all...

MARGE

You just call, Stan, and I'll decide.

STAN

Okay, then -- real good. Well, good night again.

MARGE

Yah, good night, Stan.

A PHONE rings on the desk.

STAN

Brainerd Police, how may I direct your call?

He listens, nods, then:

STAN

Chief? It's Bill Murphy at Andersen's Auto Body -- yah know him, he's panel banger on the graveyard shift.

MARGE

Yah, sure I know him.

STAN

Yah, well, he says someone's made off with their tow truck.

MARGE

Okay, then. Call Norm for me, wouldja, Stan? Tell him I'm goin' over to Andersen's garage, and would he keep supper warm for me...

Lou holds the door for her; as they push out into the freezing cold,

CUT TO:

EXT. VIKING LOUNGE - NIGHT

The beer signs glow red and green onto the yellow snow piled up outside by the pickup trucks. The front doors open, and Fritz and Sonny Andersen, wreathed in cigarette smoke and country music, burst outside.

SONNY

Hoo, boy! Where'd I park the car?

Sonny looks around uncertainly -- it's quiet, only the crunching snow and some dogs barking in the distance.

FRITZ

You walked. Remember?

SONNY

Oh, yah. Good -- then I can walk back.

He spins on his heel, graceful as Baryshnikov, then lurches off toward home.

FRITZ

I'll give you a lift.

Sonny waves him off.

FRITZ

You wanna end up frozen to death in a culvert like old man Pisawicz?

Sonny considers, then shakes his head.

SONNY

Nah.

FRITZ

All right, then.

He puts an arm around his brother, leads him around the side of the lounge. They seem to have drunk their way out of their disagreements, until they round the side and reach the back parking lot, where

THE ANDERSEN TOW TRUCK, salt-streaked and muddy, parked by the dumpster. There's a boat trailer hitched to it.

SONNY

Where did you find it?

FRITZ

At the shop.

The beery camaraderie goes out of Sonny in a flash.

SONNY

Whatta you mean -- you mean you stole my truck. YOU!?

FRITZ

(shrugging)

I borrowed it -- I would've asked, but youd've said no.

SONNY

No! No, I wouldn't.

FRITZ

Yah you would.

Sonny goes over, wipes away a smear of salty road crud.

SONNY

What the hell'd you do to it?

FRITZ

I needed it for the boat.

Sonny sees the boat on the trailer; looks at his brother as if he's gone insane.

SONNY

This the boat you needed the gas for?

FRITZ

Yah.

SONNY

A boat with no engine...

Fritz waves his hand, never mind. He's peering past Sonny, into the darkness; then points.

FRITZ

Look over there -- what do you see.

Sonny looks -- a SNOWY FIELD behind the parking lot, dotted with crosses and snow-covered headstones. Sonny looks at it, then back at Fritz out of the corner of his eye.

SONNY

It's the Lutheran cemetery.

FRITZ

No -- it's a frusen helvete. "Frozen hell." That's what Dad always called it. No place for a true Norseman to be buried, he'd say.

SONNY

He did.

FRITZ

Yeah, he did. He always talked about the old country, the Norse legends -- Odin, and all that.

SONNY

Odin.

FRITZ

That's right -- the God of War. And Eric the Red beard --

SONNY

HOW much did you drink?

FRITZ

-- and how if he and Mom'd had a daughter, she'd be Lucia, for the Queen of the Lights...

Fritz looks off into the night sky.

FRITZ

God, all those long nights ice fishing at Little Ottertail.

SONNY

I wouldn't know -- he never took me.

FRITZ

You never wanted to go! You hated the cold! You always had your head in some Road & Track when it was time to go up the lake...

Sonny stares at his brother.

SONNY

(gently)

And I always thought YOU had your head up your ass.

Fritz catches the change in tone. Grins, looks inquiringly at Sonny.

FRITZ

(acknowledging)

I did.

(beat)

Well?

Sonny looks away, scratches himself under the collar of his lumberjack coat. Then:

SONNY

Guess you knew him better after all.

FRITZ

Not better, Sonny -- just a different part, maybe.

(beat)

You know he was claustrophobic?

SONNY

Get outa here.

FRITZ

It's true. What'd he drive?

SONNY

Pontiac. Bonneville, of course.

FRITZ

A Bonnie convertible, Sonny -- so he could throw his head back and see the tree branches overhead, the stars at night...remember?

Sonny nods. His big beery face like a kid's.

SONNY

God, what I wouldn't give to see him one more time...

Fritz nods, then gets Sonny in a headlock, drags him over to the tarped trailer. Then, like a matador, he yanks the tarp off the trailer -- we see an old wooden lake cruiser, a Chris Craft, in pretty bad shape but with beautiful lines and fittings. And we see the old man, arms folded across his chest, lifeless eyes staring up at the bare branches of the trees.

SONNY

Holy Shit! You stole Dad, too.

FRITZ

(shrugging)

I had to.

Sonny starts to laugh; it builds until he's maniacal. Then:

SONNY

Wait here.

Fritz watches him go inside the back door of the Viking Lounge. He looks at his father, smooths the white hair blowing in the breeze, as

SONNY comes out the back door with a something under his parka. Which he unzips, revealing a Viking helmet.

SONNY

(waving the helmet)

Valhalla or bust, man.

He lays the helmet by the old man's head.

SONNY

(to Fritz)

Valhalla or bust.

As he climbs into the passenger side of the truck,

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

EXT. FROZEN LAKE - DAY

Again, high and wide -- we see the little figures of Marge and Lou trudging across the frozen waste toward the ice fishing shacks.

Swooping down, we reach a shack with STILLMAN CAMP painted over the door. Marge knocks, enters, followed by Lou.

INT. FISHING SHACK - DAY

RUFUS STILLMAN, ancient and windburned, sits across the hole in the ice from WALTER MENDELSON, 40 something. Walter (Anne's husband), has a wool blanket draped over his waist and legs, probably sparing us the sight of his plumber's crack above his long johns.

MARGE

Sorry to barge in on you, Mister Stillman -- I'm Chief Gundersen, maybe you remember me --

RUFUS

Little Margie Gundersen -- yah, sure.

He starts to get up to give her his seat -- she waves him off.

RUFUS

And you know J.B. Mendelsohn, Felix's boy...

J.B.

(shaking hands)

Dad and Rufus hunted together for what, Ruf -- a hundred years?

RUFUS

Yah, seemed like.

MARGE

Well, we won't keep you, then.

Lou takes out a plastic evidence bag with the two shells in it, hands the bag to Rufus.

MARGE

These your shells, Mister Stillman?

He peers at them, deliberating. Then:

RUFUS

Yah, I tink so. J.B. and I make all our own birdshot, don't we then?

J.B.

(proud)

Yah -- waste not, want not. Why buy new casings when the old ones do, as my Dad always said.

MARGE

(to J.B.)

Then these could be yours, then, is that right?

He looks at them, brightens.

J.B.

Yah, I think they are -- I put an extra crimp or two around the edge, like that there, see? Sort of my trademark.

MARGE

I see.

(kiddingly)

I don't suppose you've got a size eight shoe, now do yah?

J.B.

Heck no, I'm an eleven wide. Why?

She glances at the blanket.

MARGE

Could yah do us a favor and show us, then?

He looks puzzled, but throws off the blanket and lifts both feet -- LL Bean hunting boots, size 11.

J.B.

What the heck kinda hunter has little bitty feet like that?

(chuckling)

My wife, maybe, but she hasn't hunted in donkey's years.

Marge and Lou exchange a look.

MARGE

Does your wife have access to your weapon, then, sir?

A sick look spreads across J.B.'s face.

J.B.
Well, sure, but...is she in some
kinda trouble, then?

MARGE
Well, she might be, at that.

Marge sighs.

MARGE
(kindly)
Maybe you'd better come with, Mister
Mendelsohn...

CUT TO:

EXT. MENDELSONN HOUSE - DAY

A woodframe farmhouse outside town, surrounded by nothing. Marge's prowler in the foreground; beyond, we see Anne Mendelsohn in the open doorway, wearing a tee shirt and jeans. Marge is bent over like a blacksmith, examining one of Anne's feet. Lou and J.B. are off to one side. We hear the wind sighing and complaining as we push in closer.

MARGE
...a size eight, Anne.

Marge straightens up, gestures inside.

MARGE
Why don't we go inside and talk, okee?

ANNE
No, I'm okay -- I'm so damn hot, this
is better...
(solicitous)
If you're okay, I mean.

MARGE
Yah, sure. So I have to tell yah,
Anne, we're here because of Bob
Trotter's murder. And before you say
anything, I'm going to advise you of
your --

ANNE
When was that?

She's completely flat, unemotional.

ANNE
The day before yesterday, right? Or
yesterday?

MARGE
Well, it was just before dark on --

ANNE

'cause if I killed him, I don't remember, but then again, the sonuvabitch wouldn't fill my prescription, do you believe that? I was going crazy there!

She looks at Marge, sees her condition, frowns.

ANNE

Look at you, your whole life ahead of you! You can't imagine what it's like when the baby-making machinery just goes kaplooeey!

MARGE

I'm sure it's rough, Anne. Come on, now...

ANNE

Poor Bob, I shouldn't've called him an S.O.B., but he just kept saying I had to call Doctor Johnson about the estrogen -- if anything happened, he'd be responsible without a valid prescription --

MARGE

Don't say anything more, Anne -- you need a lawyer, and I need to read you your rights --

ANNE

It wasn't right of him not to help me, was it. Not neighborly. This is Minnesota, for pete sake! We help each other here...

Lou moves in; J.B. stands rooted, mouth open, in shock. Marge takes Anne's arm, gently.

MARGE

It's okee now. Let's get your coat...

ANNE

I just need to turn off the oven, Margie. I've got a meatloaf for J.B. in there...

She smiles brightly; she's gone off somewhere. Marge pats her arm, nods okay. Anne steps inside the house, Marge following.

INT. HOUSE - FOYER - DAY

Anne opens the door of the hall closet.

ANNE

I may as well get my coat...

But comes up with the Remington, swings it level in Marge's direction.

MARGE drops to one knee, struggles with her holster, eyes wide and frightened as

ANNE -- sits in a little velvet-covered hall chair, turns the gun on herself.

MARGE

Oh, geez, Anne -- no!

ANNE

(dull)

Yes...

She pumps the gun, expertly.

MARGE

Please, come on...

ANNE

Unh-uh. What do I have to look forward to? Nothing? A big fat nothing, Marge...

As she raises the shotgun toward her mouth,

MARGE

Don't do this!

(desperate)

Tell you what -- Norm and I have a girl, we'll name her after you.

(thinks, smiles)

Annie Gundersen.

ANNE

(pleased)

Pretty name.

MARGE

Oh yah -- and you can be her godmother, whatta you think?

Stepping forward slowly, her eyes locked on Anne's.

MARGE

Come on -- you've got a new life ahead of you too.

She grasps the barrel of the gun, holds her breath, then eases it away.

MARGE

A whole new life...okee?

Poor Anne just nods numbly; then the tears finally start to flow. As Marge touches Anne's shoulder,

CUT TO:

XT. OTTERTAIL LAKE - DAY

A few stretches of open water, blue-black against the predominant ice and snow. The Brainerd prowler car zips past the dark trunks of the pine trees as we hear OVER "Running Bear."

CUT TO:

EXT. PROUDFOOT'S TRADING POST - DAY

A totem pole with a crown of snow, snowshoes and hides nailed to the asphalt-shingled sides of the low shed building. The prowler flashes by. A beat, and then it comes back from the other way and pulls into the parking lot, next to a bunch of pickup trucks.

INT. PROUDFOOT TRADING POST - DAY

A few knickknacks and post cards, but not enough to see how the place could possibly stay in business. A few old men -- ancient members of the Ojibwa tribe -- stand around, smoking.

PAN around to a bar, and now we see the real business of the place: shelves stacked neatly to the ceiling with CARTONS of cigarettes.

RAVEN PROUDFOOT, late twenties, a taciturn beauty with sapphire eyes and jet-black hair. She's pregnant. She takes a twenty dollar bill from a GUY in a Husqvarna baseball cap, hands him four cartons of smokes.

GUY

(to other guy)

Five bucks a carton! This is like being in the sixties again!

Raven puts the money in a strong box under the counter, glances out the small nicotine-stained window to see

RAVEN'S POV -- Marge and Lou exiting the prowler, heading her way.

RESUME RAVEN -- dropping a curtain made of Indian blankets sewn together down over the back bar, hiding the shelves of cigarettes.

RAVEN

Be cool.

Then, to the old men,

RAVEN

Kah wan hee wah ka!

The old Indians snuff out their cigarettes, then melt away through a back door as MARGE and LOU come in the front.

MARGE

(coughing)

Jeez!

She waves the smoke away with her hand as best she can, approaches the bar. Coughs.

MARGE

Hi. How ya doin'.

Raven shrugs so slightly, so noncommittally, it's like nothing.

MARGE

I'm Chief Gunderson.

(oops)

Not CHIEF chief, yah know -- just police chief.

She smiles apologetically -- the two younger guys, cigarette cartons stashed under their jackets, weasel their way toward the door.

MARGE

(taking them in)

And I was wondering if anyone maybe had a boat to sell?

Again, Raven shrugs: the two guys pause at the door, trying to open it without dropping their loot.

RAVEN

Boat?

MARGE

Yah -- you know, to go out on the lake with. Fishing, or whatall.

Raven looks relieved. Lou wanders around, reading postcards, looking for God knows what.

RAVEN

Oh.

(beat)

Nope. Not much boat business this time of year. Couple fellas came in here for some rope, a blanket -- they argued about buying gas for their boat. That's about it.

MARGE

Okay! Now we're gettin' somewheres.

She coughs again, fans the air.

MARGE

Whew! You mind steppin' outside,
please?

Raven does mind; two hundred years of suspicion and betrayal
boil up in her.

RAVEN

What for.

MARGE

Please.

She gestures to the door, cop-like. Raven complies sullenly.

EXT. PROUDFOOT TRADING POST - DAY

Marge and Raven out in front; Marge bent over, huffing and
puffing. She straightens.

MARGE

Thanks -- I gotta watch that smoke...
(holding baby)
You know...

RAVEN

Oh. Yah, I see that.

MARGE

So -- maybe you thought it was about
the illegal cigarettes? Well, no.
But it's your funeral.

RAVEN

They're not illegal - only untaxed.

LOU, standing in the doorway with a Taiwanese tomahawk, pipes
up.

LOU

How yah figure that, then?

Raven turns her icy sapphires on him, nullifying his
existence.

RAVEN

This is Ojibwe land. We don't
recognize your government --

MARGE

Okay, well -- let's not get into that now. I just saw the name, Proudfoot, so I thought what the heck...I knew a Shep Proudfoot, ya know.

RAVEN

My brother's up in Otumway.

MARGE

Oh, yah, I know, the parole violation.

RAVEN

It was YOU put him away?

LOU, brandishing the tomahawk, moves toward Marge as back-up. Marge waves him off.

MARGE

Yah, indirectly. But he'll be out in no time, and I hope he keeps his nose clean. Now then, the two fellers -- the ones that bought the rope and the gas and all? What'd they look like, dya remember?

RAVEN

(thinks)

Brothers. One called the other "Sonny."

MARGE

Oh yah?

RAVEN

Yeah -- 'cuz I thought, "what kind of name is that for a grown man?"

MARGE

Yah. Well, thanks much, Miss Proudfoot.

Raven nods, goes silently inside.

CUT TO:

EXT. FROZEN LAKE - DUSK

From the opening scene. Smoke drifts from the stovepipes of a few of the ice-fishing shacks. The tow truck/trailer rig appears from a copse of trees and cruises out onto the lake.

EXT. FROZEN LAKE - DUSK

Late afternoon, that beautiful melancholy wintry light you sometimes get.

The tow truck is on the bank with the now-empty trailer; the wooden boat sits on the ice near the Andersen's ice fishing shack.

As we pull in, we see NORBIE ANDERSEN, Viking helmet on his head, still bungee corded up in the boat. His sons each throw an armful of dry branches atop what is already a considerable pyre surrounding the boat.

Fritz takes a can of gas from the boat, splashes it on the pyre.

FRITZ

You wanna do the honors?

He takes out his Zippo, flicks it open. Sonny stares at the lighter, at his father. He shakes his head, then walks quickly over to the fishing shack and goes inside.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE ROAD - DUSK

Dark with spruce and hemlock. The Brainerd prowler slowly sleds down the snow-packed road -- we see the lake clearing in the distance.

CUT TO:

EXT. FROZEN LAKE - DUSK

The light's rapidly failing. Sonny emerges from the fishing shack with an armful of stuff -- the Emerson radio, fishing gear, half a six pack of Pabst Blue Ribbon, a red-and black checked lumberjack's hat. He opens a beer for himself, gives one to Fritz, then opens the third and places it in the boat.

SONNY

So long, Dad.

(eyes tearing)

Thanks for everything...

Sonny turns away, looks at his brother with watery eyes. Fritz touches his shoulder, steps forward and flames the Zippo, holds it to the gas-soaked pye. As it erupts,

THE EDGE OF THE LAKE. The Brainerd prowl car pulls up; Marge and Lou get out.

The Andersens stand there silently, holding the gas can and the Zippo. She takes them in, expressionless, then gets as close to the boat as she can, shielding herself from the heat of the flames.

MARGE

(squinting; to Lou)

MN 629A as in apple -- that Finders' reg?

Lou takes out a notebook, flips a page.

LOU

That's it, yah.

MARGE

But this isn't an 18 foot fibreglas boat with all the bells and whistles, is it? Well, Mister Finders' insurance company's going to be a little irate at him, filing a false claim and all.

She watches the flames lick at the wooden boat, then suddenly removes her police hat, turns to Fritz.

MARGE

Wouldn't be right, though, would it -- sending your Dad across the final river in a fibreglas boat...

FRITZ

No. We couldn't do that.

MARGE

You know, if you were to find another old wooden boat and bring it back where you got this one, well... that'd make things square, I guess.

FRITZ

Yah. Okay, thanks.

MARGE

BUY an old boat, Fritz, don't steal one.

He nods; she goes over to Sonny, touches his arm. He's weeping openly now, wiping his nose on the greasy sleeve of his Andersen's Auto Body jacket. She pats his arm, then gives a last look at the burning boat before turning and trudging through the snow.

CUT TO:

EXT. STATE HIGHWAY/INT. PROWLER - NIGHT

Lou drives; Marge's on the radio.

MARGE

...yah. Just put it on 375 for an hour.

(wincing in pain)

Yah, roasting pan and all - yah, the whole thing, hon...no, I'll be home to take it out -- Yah, love you, too Norm.

She clicks off, exhales deeply, then looks over at Lou; she's queasy with pain.

MARGE

You better find someplace to pull over.

LOU stares at her, wide-eyed with fear, as she flops over sideways in the front seat, holding her stomach.

LOU

Chief...?

He sees a DAIRY QUEEN, boarded up for the winter; he yanks the wheel hard, and the prowler blasts through the plowed-up snow and on into the DQ parking lot.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DAIRY QUEEN - NIGHT

Dark, except for the red light strobing in from the prowler, and Lou's FLASHLIGHT

MARGE -- legs up in a corner booth. Sweating. Groaning. yelping with pain.

LOU

Oh, boy...oh, jeez...

TIME CUT TO:

INT. DAIRY QUEEN - NIGHT

The flashlight's propped on the back of the booth, illuminating Marge's face, which is bathed in sweat and delivery agony/ecstasy.

MARGE

Aw, jeez...aw jeez...

LOU

There ya go, Chief. Nice and easy now...

We hear a SIREN O.S. It mingles with Marge's cries. Car doors slam as

LOU

Here it comes now, push. Come on
Chief, push it out, there ya go...

(excited)

There ya go!

TILT UP to the window -- we see Norm looking in.

LOU looks up, sees Norm's face pressed against the window, watching him with his hands cupped around Norm's wife's vagina, like a quarterback waiting for the snap.

LOU

Ah, jeez...

MARGE cranes her head up to the window, sees Norm.

MARGE

(relieved)

Norm!

Then she screams; the BABY cries. Lou cradles it out, holds it up, still attached to the cord, turns and presents it to the window, to Norm's terrified and wondrous face.

DISSOLVE TO:

MUSIC OVER -- Theme from "The Vikings" with Kirk Douglas.

EXT. FROZEN LAKE - NIGHT

From above, we see the burning boat, the brothers standing next to each other. We see the figures of other shadowy men emerging from their little shacks, walking forward to say farewell to their old fishing buddy, as we

FADE TO BLACK