

MASTERS OF HORROR

Episode #11 - "Pick Me Up"

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

UNDER TITLES (if applicable) a HIGH LONG LONESOME SHOT of a twisty-turny mountain grade.

CLOSER: This so-called "highway" is a two-lane route, rolling, serpentine, hilly and curvy. The kind where an hour drive between stops is normal and natural.

BOOM DOWN / PUSH IN until we are kissing-close to:

A RATTLESNAKE

A Northwestern Diamondback as thick as your arm. On the prowl. Mean devilish face, fixed slit eyes. It is CROSSING the road when we HEAR O.S. the familiar ENGINE NOISE of a long-haul BUS.

INT. BUS - DAY - TRAVELING

The DRIVER (his oval nametag reads FERGUS) spots the snake in the road ahead. His expression lights as he SPEEDS UP.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The bus PASTES the snake dead center, flattening it.

INT. BUST - DAY - TRAVELING - RESUMING

Fergus is alight with the sadism of a 5 year old.

FERGUS

Gotcha.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

LOW ON SQUASHED RATTLESNAKE - A pair of boots enter the shot. Rattlesnake boots. A hand reaches down and peels the snake off the asphalt.

WALKER'S VOICE (O.S.)

You're not done yet.

BACK TO THE BUS - IN PROGRESS

The horrendous NOISE of the bus throwing a rod contrasts the preternatural SILENCE of this pine-tree wilderness. The bus begrudgingly rumbles to the shoulder and STOPS. Forest QUIET.

INT./ EXT. BUS - DAY

The pneumatic door chuffs open and FERGUS steps down, contrite. Still captain of his vessel. Sees SMOKE wafting from the engine.

FERGUS

Ahh, crap.

(to passengers)

That's all she wrote, folks.

Fergus boards the bus and gets on his radio. The PASSENGERS begin to disembark - about seven of them. Last off is STACIA, our principal: Late 20s, short blonde hair, hiking Docs, silver drop earrings, tough, confident, old enough to know better.

Every PASSENGER except Stacia unlimbers a CELLPHONE and wanders about like sages trying to divine water, their arms in the air, trying to find a signal.

STACIA

Oh, this is special.

She ducks back into the bus. To Fergus:

STACIA (CONT'D)

How far are we from Ganderton?

FERGUS

More than an hour, still.

STACIA

Is there anything around?

FERGUS

Just that little Trading Post we passed about ten miles back. Guess I should have stopped there. For bathrooms, snacks, stretch your legs, you know.

She grabs her rucksack out of the bus and slings it. One of the PASSENGERS - DANNY, and early-20s roustabout with a guitar case - notices her. He goes into instant damsel-in-distress mode.

STACIA

What about up ahead?

FERGUS

A motel off the highway some twelve, fourteen miles up.

STACIA

That'll do.

DANNY

You're not gonna walk, are you?  
Nobody walks.

STACIA

Yeah. Nobody reads, either.

DANNY

All alone on the road? Want me  
to ride shotgun for you?

She sizes him up in a withering instant.

STACIA

No way.

She has a SWITCHBLADE in her hand and cleans her nails with it. Snicks the blade out.

STACIA (CONT'D)

I've got all the friend I need.

Danny fades back to talk to Fergus. As Stacia departs she encounters a woman named BIRDY, from the bus. Birdy saw the knife.

BIRDY

That bad, huh?

Stacia realizes she's busted. Rueful. Almost apologetic.

STACIA

Can get to be.

BIRDY

So young and so bitter, hm?

Stacia almost leaves it at "whatever." Hesitates. Turns back to Birdy.

STACIA

You ever been married?

BIRDY

Been there, done that.

STACIA

He ever hit you?

BIRDY

Anyone strikes me, only strikes  
me once.

(beat)

I see you're still wearing a  
ring, though.

Stacia is, in fact, still wearing a wedding ring.

STACIA

That's to remind me of my past mistakes. See ya.

BIRDY

(thoughtful)

You take care, now.

STACIA

I almost always do.

Stacia marches away while the other passengers mill around.

ON DANNY

Slowly watches Stacia crest the next rise until she's out of  
sight. Then he turns back to Fergus, still in the bus.

DANNY

Hey, can't you get Triple A, or  
something?

FERGUS

Yeah, great idea: I'll just  
call a little ole hick tow  
truck. That'll work.

Slow, growing RUMBLE of a powerful diesel engine as a  
customized SEMI TRAILER pulls into view behind the bus  
(opposite direction), then veers parallel.

A power window buzzes down.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

The driver of the Truck is JIM WHEELER - late-40s, balding,  
a big man with the look of a military vet turned cowboy  
bearing of a ex-cop or rescue worker, veneered with a seen-  
it-all, done-it-all weariness. Down vest, gimme cap, Cat  
boots.

WHEELER

Looks like you folks had  
yourselves a little mishap.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Fergus debarks the bus. He LEANS on Wheeler's Truck as though bending the rail at a bar. Wheeler's gaze goes flat - for just a split second.

FERGUS

I can't get anybody on that  
damned radio, and -

WHEELER

Hey, mind my lacquer there,  
buddy.

Fergus jerks his hands off the Truck as though shocked.

Wheeler's expression seems to shape-shift back toward human. Friendly again.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

Listen, you're in a spot. I'll  
take your passengers to the  
trading post, if they don't mind  
riding in the back.

(louder, to PASSENGERS)

They serve a damn good  
breakfast. Great coffee. Phones  
that actually work.

FERGUS

I have to stay with the bus.

WHEELER

Anybody else?

DANNY

Yeah, that works for me.

Danny rushes to retrieve his gear from the bus.

WHEELER

(whistles through his  
teeth)

Anybody else? Last call.

Birdy steps up.

BIRDY

Long as you promise you're not  
some psycho or something.

This breaks a grin from Wheeler, VERY homey.

WHEELER

I promise, ma'am.

Danny lifts Birdy's bag into the back of the Truck. Big, chromed rollbar there, festooned with powerful halogen floods.

A YOUNG COUPLE - DEUCE and MARIE, 20s, traveling on a budget, have that air of battling newlyweds about them but they're probably not married yet. They argue it out sotto voce, away from the others, but Wheeler can read them like a book.

MARIE

We can't just go with some dumb  
trucker that shows up outta  
nowhere! What the hell is that?

DEUCE

Cool it, he'll hear you -

MARIE

Well, fuck him! Nobody with  
brains hitches rides anymore!  
He's gonna grind us up into cat  
food or sell me into white  
slavery or some goddamned thing.

DEUCE

Marie, just -

Marie OVERRIDES Deuce and shouts at Wheeler, waving disingenuously.

MARIE

No thanks! Have a nice day!  
(under her breath)  
... probable lunatic.

DEUCE

(defeated)  
Great. Good one.

EVERYBODY ELSE from the bus, except FERGUS, has boarded the Semi Trailer.

DANNY

Hey, who gets to ride up front?

WHEELER

(re: Birdy)

Let that pretty lady ride up here.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Birdy boards and this is what she sees: Immaculate leather, tinted glass, custom appointments. Tiny, expensive police scanners mounted under-dash offer a jumpy, active spray of LED light. A feathered earring hangs from the mirror post. On the visors are geegaws and lapel pins, old jewelry and other decorative knick-knacks, rigorously arranged to avoid clutter. Across the dash, a variety of high-end fuel and acceleration monitors that change color as the Truck speeds or slows according to a five-speed manual shift.

BIRDY

You sure travel in luxury.

Wheeler smiles at her.

WHEELER

It's my home. Seat belt.

BIRDY

So what're you carrying in back?

WHEELER

Just meat.

BIRDY

They say meat's dangerous nowadays - with all those growth hormones, not to mention "mad cow".

WHEELER

Oh, mad cow?

He moos back at her.

BIRDY

Didn't you just promise me you weren't a lunatic?

WHEELER

(mock serious)

Rest assured, mine's all organic meat. Kosher too.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Wheeler pulling away without a backward look, leaving Deuce, Marie, and Fergus at the broken-down bus. Fergus shrugs.

FERGUS

I got a deck of cards.

INT. WHEELER'S TRUCK - DAY - TRAVELING

Wheeler loves driving and is utterly serious about every move.

BIRDY

What kinda engine you got in this thing?

WHEELER

Four and a quarter cat, eighteen speed, double locking differentials-

BIRDY

Whoa, that's plenty. I don't need chapter and verse. Wouldn't understand most of it, anyway. Love the way you shift.

WHEELER

I'll bet you know how to drive stick.

BIRDY

My preference.

As Wheeler SHIFTS smoothly, Birdy notices he is wearing a rather LARGE auto pistol in an upside-down breakaway rig under his left armpit, beneath his vest.

BIRDY (CONT'D)

Say now. I hope this isn't too personal, but -

WHEELER

(interposes)

Heh. My gun? Don't you be concerned.

Wheeler digs into his vest and flops open a BADGE WALLET with police ID.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

Just a lowly deputy sheriff up  
Triple Pines way to pick up a  
few extra dollars.

BIRDY

You sound more like a city  
fellow.

WHEELER

Actually I'm originally from  
Brooklyn, New York. Got too  
crowded. Too damn congested. Too  
many fucking witnesses.

BIRDY

Witnesses?

WHEELER

(ignores her)

So one day I left the wife and  
kids and took off driving and  
never looked back. Tell me, does  
that make me a bad person?

BIRDY

No worse than anybody else I  
guess.

WHEELER

I needed to hear that.

BIRDY

You must like driving.

WHEELER

When I get lonesome I pick  
people up, give them a ride,  
make conversation. Most often I  
let them go.

BIRDY

(laughs)

Well that's reassuring.

WHEELER

You're not a bit scared because  
you can tell I'm normal, right?

Birdy seems put at ease, almost ... charmed.

BIRDY

Mister, I never met anybody that was "normal" after you get to know them.

WHEELER

Are we gonna get to know each other?

BIRDY

Honey, I'll let you know.

EXT. THE ROAD - DAY

As she hikes along - emphasizing Stacia's isolation a BREEZE brings the woods TO LIFE around her - chirping, croaking, things moving through the trees.

She shakes her head. With false bravado:

STACIA

Just eat each other, fellas, okay? I'm just passing through.  
(sotto; to herself)  
Unless any of you remembered to bring some ... toilet paper.

EXT. DISABLED BUS - DAY

Fergus is indulging in a smoke outside the disabled bus when he spots Walker heading toward him with the slow, deliberate gait of a guy who spends most of his travel time on foot. WALKER has that rumpled college-boy look about him - late 20's, charming in a rough, burry way. He wears half his wardrobe, many shirts, a hooded sweat, an all-weather duster.

A lot of things in a lot of pockets. A slouchy cowboy-style hat with a plain band. The rest of his "home" is in his backpack. He would be almost handsome ... but right now his gaze is malignant, his eyes chromium. He almost resembles a reptile himself.

WALKER

Hey there.

FERGUS

Hey.

Fergus TURNS to meet Walker - REVEALING to CAMERA that his right hand rests on a REVOLVER in a spine holster beneath his driver's jacket.

Walker APPROACHES. The change is uncanny. Now his manner is utterly open and friendly, his smile solicitous.

WALKER

You wouldn't be headed anywhere up near Lansdale, would you?

FERGUS

We ain't headed nowhere, right this minute.

WALKER

Break down?

FERGUS

Yeah. I think the tranny on this ole bitch picked today to eat itself and die.

WALKER

That sucks.

INT. BUS - DAY

Marie and Deuce have noticed what's going on outside.

MARIE

(re: Fergus)  
Oh, don't talk to him, you schmuck!

DEUCE

Marie?

MARIE

Some guy just strolls in, out of the nowhere, he could be -

Deuce's lips curl and he offers up some unanticipated backbone.

DEUCE

Honey? Would it put you out terribly if for, say, five minutes, you might -  
(harsher)  
keep your fucking paranoia to yourself?

Marie mouth STALLS in the open position as she loads fresh invective.

DEUCE (CONT'D)

Shut. Up.

EXT. BUS - RESUMING WALKER AND FERGUS - DAY

Walker scans up and down the road. Nobody.

WALKER

In theory, then, if the bus worked, you probably would have given me a ride?

FERGUS

Sure, amigo. You got the fare, I got the ride.

WALKER

That's what I was hoping.

Walker SEES Marie's sulking face, through the bus window.

WALKER (CONT'D)

How many here?

Fergus jerks his thumb toward the bus.

FERGUS

Just those two. Everybody else caught a ride back to that roadside store.

WALKER

What, you mean somebody offered a ride, and you guys didn't take it?

(beat)

Man, that's against my principles.

FERGUS

I'm supposed to pick them up once they get this bus rolling. If they can. You just gonna hang around?

WALKER

(thoughtful)

Maybe for a little bit.

FERGUS

Smoke?

WALKER

I don't.

Fergus digs out a smoke for himself and cups his hand over the lighter flame. Fergus LOOKS DOWN and SEES the DEAD SNAKE dangling from Walker's coat.

FERGUS (CON'T)

What the hell is that -- ?!

Walker looks down as though he just noticed it himself.

WALKER

Oh. This.

Walker HEFTS the deceased snake.

WALKER (CONT'D)

Just road kill. You want to touch it?

FERGUS

No fucking way.

WALKER

Most people think snakes are slimy, right? Don't want to touch Them. They're not. They're pretty sturdy.

(grins)

He can't hurt you.

Walker pulls out the dead snake, a fist on each end, LIKE A GARROTE.

WALKER (CONT'D)

Unless I help.

Walker SLINGS the five-foot snake lengthwise to WRAP Fergus' neck. Fergus RECOILS, turning as Walker CATCHES the free end of the snake and before he knows it, Fergus is being STRANGLED.

Fergus GASPS his last and SLUMPS.

INT. BUS - DAY

Marie checks her window again and her expression goes sheet-white, because she SEES:

Fergus SLUMPS into Walker's grasp as he is strangled by Walker with the snake. Walker OPENS one of the luggage compartment hatches and DUMPS Fergus inside.

MARIE  
 (welling panic)  
 Deuce ...

Deuce has to elbow past Marie to see ... and doesn't believe what he sees.

DEUCE  
 What the ... hell ...?!

Walker is APPROACHING the front of the bus. The open door.

Deuce LUNGES to intercept WALKER.

EXT. BUS - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Deuce BLOCKS the doorway and STEPS DOWN in time to realize that Walker HAS FERGUS' PISTOL.

DEUCE  
 Stop right there.

WALKER  
 You stop. Right here.

He FIRES. BANG! Deuce catches the slug in the forehead and DIES in a sprawl. Walker STEPS INTO the Bus footwell.

INT. BUS - DAY - CONTINUOUS

MARIE  
 Go away! What do you want?!

Walker indicates the BUS RESTROOM behind Marie.

WALKER  
 Need to wash my hands.

MARIE  
 Fuck you!

Marie PILES TOWARD the back of the bus, hitting the EMERGENCY EXIT there and floundering off into the woods, her cellphone long-gone. Walker shakes his head. SIGHS as though he now must doggedly give chase, or something.

WALKER  
 Yeah...fuck me.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Stacia marches grimly along until she hears a strange NOISE O.S. from somewhere around the bend ahead. She FREEZES like a spooked animal. The sound repeats and she zeros-in ON:

LONG SHOT - REVERSE ANGLE

An ANIMAL in the road. Not dead. In pain. Future roadkill.

Muddy/dirty, mortally crippled by a vehicle but still ALIVE and in agony.

STACIA

Oh my god...

WITH STACIA as she nears the animal. First fear. Then revulsion, then apprehension, then finally pity. As if she'd found her own pet mangled by a car.

STACIA (CONT'D)

You shouldn't be out here by yourself. You see what happens?

(Of course Stacia is talking more about herself).

The animal's only response is to SCREECH again in MORE pain as Stacia almost-but-not-quite works the nerve to TOUCH it.

She RECOILS. Looks around for an option. SEES:

A ROCK. About the size of Stacia's head. A bad answer to a thorny problem. The conclusion is obvious but for her, picking up that rock is like walking the last mile on Death Row.

STACIA (CONT'D)

If I don't, somebody is going to eat you. Shit - somebody is going to eat you anyway...but at least you won't feel it, right?

Stacia returns with the rock. This is hard, but necessary. Hesitant. Regret. Pain. But not a breakdown. More sympathetic than she ever acts toward people. She WALKS INTO:

A LOW, DISTORTED UP-ANGLE

As though from the ANIMAL'S POV. Stacia RAISES the rock above her head. Falters. Raises it again. Perhaps she even SCREAMS in frustration and anger.

She SWINGS the rock DOWN to BLACK OUT FRAME. CRUNCH. The IMPACT kills ALL SOUND for a beat.

ON STACIA AS SHE BACKS AWAY.

STACIA (CONT'D)

Sorry...

EXT. TRADING POST - DAY - TO ESTABLISH

Popular road stop that's probably been there for ninety years. Gas pumps and antiques for sale out front, even an old piano. WHEELER'S TRUCK in the lot.

INT. TRADING POST - DAY

Most of Wheeler's load (the bus passengers) sit warming up on coffee or making calls from a single pay phone.

ROCKO, the market's clerk, is on duty.

Wheeler's HANDS place two six-packs of beer, candy, mints, chips, pork rinds, spicy jerky, and a few candy bars.

Rocko totes up the haul.

ROCKO

Sugar addict, huh?

WHEELER

Anything wrong with liking sweets?

ROCKO

(warily)

It was only a joke.

WHEELER

(dead serious)

That's why I'm laughing.

Rocko spies Wheeler's big-frame .45 auto, holstered beneath his vest. Rocko's manner curdles.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

Gimme a coupla them spicy beef jerkys, too.

Rocko's gaze is still full up with the gun. He SWALLOWS nervously.

WHEELER (CONT'D)  
 (points to cigarettes)  
 And two packs of them. I'm a  
 nicotine addict too.

Wheeler's expression channel-changes. Gruff, yet avuncular.  
 He touches the butt of his gun.

WHEELER (CONT'D)  
 You got one of these?

Flustered, Rocko drops the cigs. Wheeler leans closer over  
 the counter and enunciates:

WHEELER (CONT'D)  
 Have you got a piece back there?  
 A gun?

ROCKO  
 (stammers; afraid)  
 No! I ain't! I mean, I don't!

Wheeler draws the auto and racks the slide. Rocko cringes  
 like he's about to eat lead and see his life flash before  
 his eyes. Wheeler comes CLOSE, intimate.

WHEELER  
 Don't be afraid. That's what  
 this does, it eliminates fear.  
 It's a scepter of power. You  
 point it and people...fall down.  
 Here.

Wheeler EJECTS the clip and hands the gun to Rocko.

WHEELER (CONT'D)  
 Careful, now. Point it at me.

Rocko lifts the gun, quaveringly.

ROCKO  
 It's...heavy.

WHEELER  
 See? Don't you feel more  
 powerful? More in control? Now  
 all you need is the will to  
 kill, my friend.

Rocko has the muzzle casually aimed at Wheeler's chest.

Wheeler moves it off-target with one finger. Still with a smile.

WHEELER (CONT'D)  
But don't point it at anyone  
unless you intend to shoot them,  
okay?

ROCKO  
(skittish, fascinated)  
Why...?

WHEELER  
'Cos I appreciate those rest  
stops and convenience stores.  
Punks are always trying to knock  
'em off. I hate that.  
(a thought)  
Oops, almost forgot.

Wheeler gently grabs the gun and racks the slide. A  
CARTRIDGE bounces onto the counter.

WHEELER (CONT'D)  
Left one in the pipe.

ROCKO  
You mean I coulda actually  
really, like shot you?

WHEELER  
Guess fate didn't want you to.

Wheeler reholsters the gun and shows Rocko the bullet.

WHEELER (CONT'D)  
Hollow point. Makes this teeny  
hole going in. Coming out, it's  
like a big slice of cherry pie.

Wheeler GIFTS Rocko with the bullet.

WHEELER (CONT'D)  
See, you gotta think things  
through before you ever pick up  
a firearm.  
(beat)  
And don't forget about that  
jerky.

Rocko is still fighting an inner war for composure.

ROCKO

Eh ... coming right up.

WHEELER

You okay? You look kinda upset.

ROCKO

Take it back. Okay Mister. I'll take my chances without it, if you don't mind.

WHEELER

You disappoint me.

EXT. TRADING POST - DAY

Wheeler EXITS, bag in one arm, chewing on the jerky. Rocko STARES dumbly after him, holding the BULLET like a talisman.

Wheeler pauses at an old beat up piano amongst the man's antiques on the patio and noodles out a jazz progression with surprising skill.

Birdy comes over to voice her approval.

BIRDY

You play even better than you shift. What other surprises have you got in store for me?

WHEELER

I recall you were in interested in what's in the back my truck.

BIRDY

I bet it's not kosher.

WHEELER

Well, you can come have a look.

Wheeler leads her to where the truck is parked - far away from where the other passengers are downing their coffee.

CUT TO:

RAPID TRACKING SHOT

Marie running desperately through the woods - stopping - looking back. No one seems to be following. She catches her breath and runs on.

CUT TO:

EXT. REAR OF TRADING POST - DAY

Wheeler just locking up the double doors at the rear of the semi trailer.

No sign of Birdy. She's gone.

WHEELER

Bye bye birdy.

Danny hurries over and interrupts Wheeler.

DANNY

Mister, I'm kind of worried about the four on that bus? Like they never showed up? Like maybe they're still in trouble back there?

WHEELER

(mocking him)

Is everything you say, like, a question?

This derails Danny momentarily. Then he gets it. Oh.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

(dramatically)

So you suspect ... foul play?

Danny assumes a wounded look. Wheeler lightens up, still mocking.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

Sorry. Dude.

DANNY

That lady, Birdy? She says you're some kind of cop.

WHEELER

Hm. Some kind. In emergencies. Have you seen her around? Maybe she's off powdering her pretty little nose.

DANNY

Look, isn't that an emergency. If they're still out there with no water, stranded?

WHEELER

I guess you speak the truth. I suppose it'll take ten minutes, out and back. I bet those suckers at the bus are ready for a lift about now. Shit, I got all day. All night too, as far as that goes.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Walker stalks Marie.

WALKER

Oh, Marie ...? Marie ... ?

Marie DOESN'T MOVE. Maintains her hide. She grumbles quietly.

MARIE

Oh, fuck me.

WALKER

I've got your credit card, Marie.

(beat, no response)  
Somebody might abuse your personal information ... steal your identity.

He sounds like a chiding chaperone. Like he's having fun doing this. Marie is lost in the forest and stalked by a malefactor. What the hell should she do?

INT. WHEELER'S TRUCK - DAY - TRAVELING

Danny is looking around in slow amazement at all the stuff inside the cab, as they speed back toward the bus site.

WHEELER

You wiped your feet, right?

DANNY

Huh? Oh - yeah.

WHEELER

Wouldn't want you getting dogshit on my carpeting. Expensive.

DANNY

There don't seem to be many cops  
out here.

WHEELER

What are you getting at?

DANNY

Well, I mean, highway patrol,  
state troopers, sheriffs, that  
kind of thing?

WHEELER

Out here there's less than one  
cruiser for every hundred square  
miles. Like I told the lady: I  
usually don't work here. I just  
come here to -

DANNY

Unwind?

WHEELER

Yeah. That's a good word.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Wheeler's Truck blazes past. A HIGHWAY SIGN facing the  
opposite direction. It's been there for decades and reads:

COUNTING SHEEP MOTOR HOTEL  
EXIT 60-A - 16 MILES

EXT. FOREST - DAY

MARIE - Exhausted. She stops running. Gets her bearing.

MARIE

Oh shit, I've been running in  
circles.

We RACK to REVEAL Walker, standing patiently BEHIND her. Her  
fear and her gaze are targeted the wrong way. She SENSES him  
in time to turn, but not in time to AVOID getting grabbed by  
the throat and PINNED with savage strength to the nearest  
tree. Walker is frighteningly strong.

WALKER

Do me a favor, Marie. Skip the  
part about how you'll "do  
anything."

Now Marie is in total bugfuck panic mode.

MARIE

No - don't - wait --!

Walker MASHES her larynx with his thumb, reducing her voice to a gurgle.

WALKER

Fucking tourist.

EXT. BUS - DAY

The bus running lights still on, idle. Nobody home.

Wheeler's Truck pulls up beside it. Same direction as the bust is pointed. Shot from across the road with a panoramic view of the mountains and water.

INT. WHEELER'S TRUCK - DAY

Danny jumps out.

DANNY

Where are they?

WHEELER

Hey - careful, now!

EXT. BUS - DAY

Danny continuously moving CLOSER to the bus.

DANNY

Hey! Where is everybody!?

Wheeler dismounts and checks it out.

WHEELER

Maybe that guy from the bus company showed up with that van and, y'know, gave 'em a ride.

DANNY

And they'd just leave the bus with the lights on and the door open?

Danny charges into the open bus.

WHEELER

Can't fault you there.

Wheeler waits impatiently while Danny looks around. Nothing.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

They're gone. Why don't we be gone, too?

EXT. HIGHWAY - AT MOTEL BILLBOARD - DAY

Where we once saw Stacia. Now Walker's boots crunch INTO FRAME.

PAN UP to take in Walker who smoothly turns and sticks out his thumb.

WALKER'S POV

A beat-to-shit VAN. We can already hear the speed metal pounding from the stereo.

As the Van stops, the cargo door racks open and pot smoke billows out. Three occupants: STONEY, the driver, barechested, shaved head, sunglasses, and a great many piercings with thick, dangly ornaments, most notably on his FACE. And LILY, a goth-pale willowsprout with ivory skin.

STONEY

Climb aboard, lost traveler.

Walker shakes his head, smiles to himself, and boards the REAR of the Van through the sliding door. We NOTICE Walker now has the RATTLESNAKE HEAD mounted on the front of his hat.

It still has a slight stain of blood on it.

INT. VAN - DAY - TRAVELING

Lily cranks around to scope Walker. He can see the rings on her nipples as she leans back to offer him an already-open beer.

LILY

Care for a taste?

WALKER

Don't mind if I do, ma'am.

That cracks Stoney up.

STONEY

Oh, wow - "ma'am."

LILY

Shut up, Stoney; he's just being polite. Ain't you?

Walker offers a modest toast with the can as acknowledgement.

STONEY

How'd you wind up way the fuck out in this piss-poor excuse for the middle of nowhere?

WALKER

Walked.

Lily offers Walker a huge smoldering spliff.

STONEY

Like, on foot? Dude.

LILY

Never mind him. He's Stoney, and you can call me Lily. Where you headed?

WALKER

Thataway.

Stoney giggles again.

STONEY

Totally western. "Thataway."

Lily yanks out one tape and roots around for another.

LILY

Well, you just tell us how far you want to go.

WALKER

I generally always go all the way.

LILY

(re: Walker's hat)  
Nice head.

Walker settles crosswise, his back against the port side of the cabin.

Lily squirms out of her seat and straddles Walker to get at the beer cooler, giving him an unobstructed close-up of her crotch. Above her fishnets, beneath her leather skirt - no panties. She takes her time getting back to her seat.

WALKER

I could've got that for you.

When Lily stares at Walker, she looks almost hungry.

LILY

I know.

ON STONEY

Surreptitiously slipping on a nasty pair of brass knucks.

ANGLE ON WALKER

Calmly slipping on a pair of leather gloves.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The Van bombs down the road, music blasting. We hear Walker's VOICE:

WALKER (O.S.)

So are you two in, like, a band?

O.S.: Sudden SCUFFLE. Sounds of MEAT hitting MEAT. GASPS.

EXT. BUS - DAY (DUSK)

HANDS (Wheeler's) lever open the luggage bay to REVEAL the bodies of Fergus and Deuce, stuffed inside, sprawled.

Wheeler DRAGS out the limp form of Fergus and seems to SMELL him. To "scent" him.

Wheeler's gaze SNAPS toward the treeline. He moves as though laser-targeted, almost breaks into a trot.

EXT. FOREST - DAY (DUSK) - (CONTINUOUS)

Wheeler bulls through the underbrush. Scanning, searching.

Until he SEES:

WHEELER'S POV - MARIE

Immobilized, tied with barbed wire to a tree, clothes shredded, eyes wide with primal terror.

MARIE

Thank God. Please help me.

WHEELER

Tell me who did this. Answer me.

MARIE

(her throat crushed, she  
can barely speak)

He ran away.

WHEELER

Describe him, Goddammit!

MARIE

(gurgles)

Maybe 25 - cowboy hat, duster.

Wheeler starts to walk away. Marie gasps.

MARIE (CONT'D)

You can't just leave me here.  
Come back you bastard.

Wheeler just leaves her there to die. She's not worth  
killing because this is not his victim.

(We don't make a big deal out of it at this point, but DANNY  
is nowhere to be seen).

EXT. COUNTING SHEEP MOTEL - NIGHT

It gradually surges into view as Stacia approaches it, with  
an expression of having found Paradise. She has walked the  
day away.

STACIA

About fucking time.

She checks her billfold to see if she's got enough cash to  
buy herself a room for the night.

AS SHE HIKES CLOSER:

We see the Counting Sheep is a rickety Bates Motel clone  
squatting close enough to the highway so we can see the  
sputtering neon sign: COUNTING SHEEP "RESTFUL" MOTEL. The  
dirt lot is half-full with road-punished travel vehicles -  
dusty autos with luggage carriers and out-of-state plates.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The Van speeds away from CAMERA.

TIGHT ON THE DRIVER'S SIDE WINDOW - TRAVELING

As the window cranks down and a GLOVED HAND tosses a fistful of litter to the wind.

ON THE ROAD

As the trinkets rain down and scatter - nipple rings and piercing posts.

INT. VAN - NIGHT - TRAVELING

Walker is at the wheel removing the gloves. No music.

Nobody sits in the passenger seat. Walker glances over his shoulder.

IN THE BACK OF THE VAN

Stoney is GONE. Lily is tied up, duct-taped. Now there's fear in her eyes, and this pleases Walker, who WINKS at her.

WALKER

I am so glad you came along. I was working awhile ago ... had to interrupt before I could finish up. So you coming along like this was really lucky. For me.

WALKER'S POV THROUGH WINDSHIELD

As the Van crests a rise, on approach to the Counting Sheep Motor Hotel. His new destination.

INT. ROOM 12 - NIGHT

Two sagging beds, half-hearted Western chintz, threadbare furniture, viral carpet, and a TV that shows things in Martian colors. Stacia's rucksack is on one bed.

INT. ROOM 12 BATHROOM - NIGHT

Stacia peels her grimy clothes and regards herself in a scabby mirror. The hot water in the shower stall is already blasting, making steam.

STACIA

Jesus, that's good.

Stacia enjoys the shower with almost blissful relief. Hears a THUMP on the wall from the adjacent bathroom (in Room 11) which we MATCH with:

INT. ROOM 11 BATHROOM - NIGHT

WALKER has slammed the medicine cabinet door to REVEAL himself in the mirror: Shirtless, sweating, a bit manic. Dots of BLOOD on his chest. Mops his face with a towel. He rummages in a paper bag and tears a generic version of a brand-new X-ACTO KNIFE from its blister pak. He tests the tip of the blade with his finger.

WALKER

Oww.

Camera backs into the room carrying Walker.

Walker looms over LILY, from the van - naked, gagged, tied spread-eagled on top of a VINYL TARP snugged over the entire bed. The TV is on, masking noise.

PRODUCTION NOTE: IN FILMING THIS SEQUENCE, WE WILL MATCH MOVEMENTS OF WALKER AND STACIA IN AND OUT OF INDIVIDUAL BATHROOMS SO THEY ARE IN UNISON. CAMERA MOVEMENTS MATCH EXACTLY.

Walker is feeding quarters into the magic fingers apparatus on the bed.

Walker leans over the semi-conscious Lily ... and SMILES the most generous, friendly smile we've ever seen.

INT. ROOM 12 BATHROOM - NIGHT

Still in the shower, Stacia tries readjusting the hot water and the knob comes off in her hand. She can't shut off the hot water and she can't reconnect the knob which came loose.

STACIA

Piece of shit motel.

She hops out of the shower. Steam now fills the small bathroom. She wraps a towel around herself.

Camera backs up with her as she hurries into the motel room, sits on the bed, and dials the phone beside it.

STACIA (CONT'D)

Hello? Come on...pick up... The hot water won't shut and the old bastard won't pick up. Where the hell are you?

She's growing increasingly frustrated as she slams down the phone and gets to the bathroom and shuts the door on the steam.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Wheeler's Truck STOPS in the middle of the road, where the headlights illuminate a Man's body in a ditch by the roadside.

WHEELER

Still warm.

Wheeler scans around with a big baton flashlight before getting out.

INT. ROADSIDE DITCH - NIGHT

Wheeler leans over the limp, dead form of STONEY, from the Van. A broken bone jutting out of his neck. He is not horrified or repulsed. He just looks at the corpse. Then riffles through Stoney's clothing and comes up with a pack of cigarettes. Wheeler shakes one out and lights it, puffing thoughtfully as he SPEAKS to Stoney's corpse.

WHEELER

Somebody powerful enough to snap your neck without even working up a sweat. Could've hid it but he had to show off.

INT. ROOM 12 - NIGHT - LATER

Stacia ASLEEP on the bed, wearing only a T-shirt, the TV droning.

O.S. RHYTHMIC THUMPING AND GROANING - coming from Room 11.

Stacia WAKES. Groggy. She orients. It sounds like somebody is having noisy SEX next door. She rolls her eyes ... then LISTENS, vaguely amused, until it gets boring.

SLOW TRACK THROUGH THE WALL FROM ROOM 12 TO ROOM 11

Where Walker is rinsing off maniac sweat and a little blood, humming. He BELCHES rather obnoxiously at his image in the bathroom mirror.

The crimsoned X-Acto knife CLATTERS into a pool of blood on the bathroom sink.

Walker STROLLS into the room, languorously. Glancing at the TV.

WALKER

Told you you'd be prettier  
without all that makeup. Without  
all that attitude, too.

He glances at the TV. Porn is playing. Switch it off.

WALKER (CONT'D)

That porn shit embarrasses me.  
There's no romance to it. It's  
just clinical y'know?

Lily is flayed, half-butchered, yet STILL ALIVE, her eyes  
dully tracking her tormentor.

Walker inserts a quarter into the magic fingers machine that  
makes the bed vibrate.

WALKER (CONT'D)

Just meat, stuck into more meat.  
Doesn't mean anything. Filling  
holes. Hell, you can make a hole  
practically anywhere.

He RAISES the knife again, suddenly miffed.

OVERHEAD SHOT

Moving from above Walker across the wall to Stacia's room  
where he listens.

Then across her wall to the next room where it's revealed  
that he's checked in too.

RESUME STACIA IN ROOM 12

STACIA

(yells through the walls)  
Keep it down in there. Shut the  
fuck up.

She can HEAR Walker's muffled voice raised in anger next  
door. She shakes her head.

ANGLE ON WALKER

Walker reacts to her voice.

WALKER

(yells back)  
Real sorry.

Walker is now fascinated by the fact that there's a girl next door. He's lost interest in Lily.

BACK TO STACIA

She ransacks her jeans for change. Pulls them on. Barefoot.

EXT. COUNTING SHEEP MOTEL - NIGHT

Typical hotel breezeway with ice and vending machines at one end (near the Office). Stacia's short of change.

STACIA

Shit. Of course...

Walker startles her, appearing and slotting a quarter into the machine.

WALKER

(intrudes with 25 cents)  
No problem. I've got loads of quarters.

(beat)  
Ma'am.

Stacia says nothing. She doesn't want to be beholden to anybody. Walker presses the issue.

WALKER (CONT'D)

You're welcome.

STACIA

(resistent but mindful of "manners")  
Oh...Uh...thanks.

WALKER

My pleasure.

STACIA

You see the manager around...anywhere?

WALKER

Grampaw? Probably gettin' his beauty sleep. With a bottle, know what I mean?

(beat)  
Anything else I could help you with? I'm handy.

STACIA  
 (re: beverage)  
 This is plenty, thanks.

WALKER  
 You hear them two goin' at it?

STACIA  
 Oh. God. Did you hear that too?

WALKER  
 Sounded like a rodeo. Some  
 people just ain't got no shame.

STACIA  
 They stopped.

WALKER  
 Probably wore out.  
 (thinks about it - is  
 bemused)  
 Whew. What a workout.

STACIA  
 (still jittery - wants to  
 escape)  
 In that case I'm going to try to  
 get some sleep now.

WALKER  
 (courtly)  
 Well. Good night to you, then.

Before Stacia can flee, Wheeler appears.

WHEELER  
 Excuse me - I don't mean to pry  
 or anything, but were you by  
 chance with that bus load of  
 people? The one that broke down  
 on the way to Ganderton?

STACIA  
 (suspicious)  
 How would you know that?

WHEELER  
 I hauled a bunch of them to the  
 trading post. How did you get  
 away?

STACIA  
(lying)  
I hitched a ride.

WHEELER  
(to Walker)  
What about you? You hitch-  
hiking, too?

WALKER  
Not presently, no.

Walker indicates to the van.

WHEELER  
Any of you fellow travelers care  
for a smoke?

WALKER  
I don't indulge.

Stacia just tries to get back to her room, stuck between  
them.

WHEELER  
Hold on a second.  
(indicates the night air)  
Savor this quiet. Before it  
starts raining.

Stacia reluctantly accepts a cigarette.

WALKER  
Rain rinses the air. Clouds  
clear, there's tons more stars  
to see. It's like a reward, for  
staying up late.

STACIA  
(vague, wary)  
Uh, yeah.

WHEELER  
Rain plays hell with my truck,  
though.

WALKER  
But it can't hurt you.

WHEELER

Plenty of other things out here than can hurt you. The woods are full of predators.

STACIA

Right. Listen - thanks guys, but I've got to go call my boyfriend.

WALKER

I thought you were going to "try and get some sleep".

STACIA

(insistent)  
He's picking me up tonight. Real soon.

Stacia finally makes it back to her room. Beat as Wheeler and Walker size each other up.

WHEELER

You made her a bit nervous, I think.

WALKER

Maybe it was you.  
(beat)  
Just a first impression. It don't mean nothin'.

WHEELER

You have that way with women, am I right?

WALKER

They warm up eventually.  
(re: Wheeler's truck)  
Big truck. What're you hauling?

WHEELER

Dog food. But I don't have a full load yet. Soon, though.  
(they're done)  
Well, I've gotta hit it pardner.  
Nice talking with you.

Wheeler exits to his own room.

Walker watches him go. After Wheeler's door shuts, he says:

WALKER

I'll be seeing you later. I bet.

Wheeler holds another quarter up into the light.

WALKER (CONT'D)

I bet you a quarter.

INT. ROOM 11 - NIGHT

Walker ENTERS and stops before the mirror, suddenly smacking his head.

WALKER

Oh, I get it! Trucker Burt out there, he knows ... but he's like one of those cheetahs that chase something and don't kill it - don't eat it.

He is speaking to the INERT CORPSE of Lily, bloodied on the bed.

WALKER (CONT'D)

They play with it. Honey ...?

(beat)

Never mind.

Walker stretches, rather pleased with his deduction.

INT. ROOM 12 - NIGHT

ON STACIA, not-really-watching the cartoons on TV. Feeling anxious. Feeling trapped. Vaguely agitated, like someone who knows they are being spied upon. UNDER the drone of the TV she hears a SKRITCHING noise OS.

She damps the TV volume. The NOISE is coming from the bathroom. She sneaks up on the bathroom door. Skritch, skritch ...

INT. ROOM 12 BATHROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The shower is still running and the place is full of steam.

Stacia, in full-on slasher movie stealth mode. Peeking around the jamb.

Above the sound of the water is skritch, skritch, coming from the small, closed bathroom WINDOW.

Stacia moves into the bathroom, her switchblade palmed. She hates her own fear.

STACIA  
 God ... dammit ...

Her eyes follow the skittering SOUND up and across the ceiling.

STACIA (CONT'D)  
 Great. We've got party rats.

EXT. ROOM 12 BATHROOM - NIGHT

As Stacia's SHADOW crosses the bathroom glass, the light changes to REVEAL WALKER, standing back in the shadows behind the motel, having OBSERVED all the foregoing.

Walker GRINS, then reaches forward with his switchblade.

SKRITCH-SKRITCH, again on the windowsill.

EXT. ROOM 13 - NIGHT

Wheeler listens at the wall separating him from Stacia.

INT. ROOM 12 - NIGHT

Stacia sits on the bed. Nervous. Something has triggered all her alarms and she cannot sit still.

She looks to the far wall - bordering Walker's room. Then to the opposite wall - bordering Wheeler's room. Reluctantly, she DECIDES.

STACIA  
 (a whisper)  
 Right. Dammit.

... and begins to GATHER up her things.

Stacia peeks out through a curtain slit. All clear. OPENS her door silently.

INT. ROOM 13 - NIGHT

Wheeler lies on his bed in an almost meditative state. His eyes SNAP open at some sound we cannot hear. But he does.

He checks the time and rolls out.

EXT. ROOM 12 - NIGHT

WITH WHEELER as he does not make a single noise. He GENTLY tests Stacia's doorknob. OPEN. He cautiously opens the door.

INT. ROOM 12 - NIGHT

TV still on, shower still running, sound down, a shape under the sheets. Wheeler clues in immediately.

WHEELER

Well, I'll be damned.

He SWEEPS the sheets aside. Just pillows. No Stacia. Then he SEES the room key, left behind on the dresser. Stacia has flown in the middle of the night.

The SKRITCHING sound begins again, OS at the bathroom window.

Wheeler, with a hurried sense of mission, checks his watch, then EXITS. HOLD on the empty room.

INT. ROOM 12 BATHROOM - NIGHT

Full of steam, the CAMERA MOVES from the room to the bathroom window as WALKER pries it up. A ghostly apparition coming through the steam as he climbs through the window.

OS SOUND of Wheeler's Truck starting up, revving, backing out.

This SPEEDS Walker through the window. He senses his quarry is already lost and when he sees the door to Room 12 standing open, that confirms it.

WALKER

(marveling)

Son of a bitch.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Stacia marches along, eager to put the motel far behind her.

STACIA

(to herself)

I can't believe I took a shower  
in that place. Yeek, yeek,  
yeek ...

She imitates the musical sting from Psycho, making a stabbing motion with one hand.

STACIA (CON'T)

Real smart.

OS sound of Wheeler's Truck, coming over the rise BEHIND her.

As before, Stacia seeks the nearest cover and flattens out.

After a beat, the Truck comes grumbling by at walking speed, a door-mounted SEARCHLIGHT sweeping the sides of the road.

INT. WHEELER'S TRUCK - NIGHT - TRAVELING

As far as Wheeler can tell, the coast is clear. He NODS to himself and begins to accelerate smoothly - checking his watch against the odometer.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Stacia watches the Truck from her hide, taillights dwindling.

EXT. HIGHWAY - ELSEWHERE - NIGHT

LONG SHOT of flashbar lights gradually approaching. No siren. PULL BACK to include Walker, on the hoof now, WATCHING and deciding to fade back. It might be the cops.

A van-style AMBULANCE blazes past, headed in the direction Walker came from. After a beat, Walker steps back out onto the road. It's a little like the Tortoise and the Hare, his confidence in his "pursuit" of Stacia.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT - RESUMING STACIA

She looks back over her shoulder, almost as if she can sense Walker back there - somewhere.

THE FULL MOON - a long, baleful shot as CLOUDS skirt across it. The distant rumble of THUNDER and oncoming rain.

EXT. HIGHWAY - BILLBOARD - NIGHT - LATER

Wheeler's Truck is parked in darkness beneath a faded and half-collapsed BILLBOARD for a long-gone roadside attraction, reading (with intentional TYPOS):

THE HORRIBLE THING!  
WHAT IS IT?!  
DARE YOU SEE IT'S SECRET'S REVEALED?!  
LANSDALE EXIT ROUTE 245 - 6 MI.  
"COLD" SODA - BEER - GIFTS

RAINDROPS begin to pellet down on Wheeler's windshield.

INT. WHEELER'S TRUCK - NIGHT

He eyes the rain with dismay. Checks the time. One hour has elapsed. He pops a can of beer and takes a long, slow pull.

Lights a cigarette. Patient.

A LIGHTNING STRIKE illuminates the landscape and reveals the distant form of Stacia, humping over the crest of the last hilltop.

WHEELER

Well, hello.

He waits for just the right moment to NAIL Stacia with his high-beams. Bang!

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Stacia freezes in the oncoming rain, surprised by the light.

Wheeler debarks the Truck wearing a rain slicker and carrying a powerful flashlight. Friendly:

WHEELER

Hey, stranger.

Stacia claws out her switchblade as Wheeler approaches.

STACIA

Stay right there! I've got a knife!

Wheeler SHRUGS.

WHEELER

I've got a gun. So I win.

Wheeler SHINES the light on his own face, haunted-house style.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

It's me. From the motel.

Stacia SQUINTS at him. Oh, yeah. She really does have nowhere to run.

STACIA

(hesitant)

What ... are you doing out here?

Still the distance and tension between them, an uneasy stand-off. Wheeler tries another approach:

WHEELER

Look - here. It's okay. I'm a cop.

He displays his BADGE WALLET.

STACIA  
(incredulous)  
Are you sure?!

This bemuses Wheeler. He pretends to ponder it.

WHEELER  
Hmm. Yeah.  
(beat)  
Come on. It's starting to bucket  
down. I can give you a lift to  
Ganderton; I'm headed that way.

It's a lot like coaxing a small animal out of the  
underbrush.

WHEELER (CONT'D)  
Come on. Please. It's for your  
own safety, really.

STACIA  
What does that mean?

They have drawn ever-closer, closer ...

WHEELER  
It means there are dangerous  
people out on this road tonight.  
Which is why I'm out here. Can I  
please explain this inside,  
where it's dry, huh?

He unholsters his automatic and offers it.

WHEELER (CONT'D)  
Look, see? You can even hold  
the gun.

Stacia cracks. She hustles to the Truck, PAST Wheeler,  
getting there first.

STACIA  
Come on if you're coming!

Stacia really has nowhere to run.

INT. WHEELER'S TRUCK - (AT BILLBOARD) - NIGHT - RAIN

Stacia and Wheeler both board the Truck, soaked.

STACIA  
Gawdamighty, Hell isn't hot ...  
it's wet.

WHEELER  
Can't fault you there.

He hands her a TOWEL from behind his seat and she ruffs her head.

STACIA  
I thought you were that other  
guy. From the motel? I think  
he's following me.

WHEELER  
He's the reason I'm out here  
tonight.

STACIA  
Some kinda manhunt thing?  
What'd he do?

WHEELER  
He hurt a few people. You know about territory? He's like a poacher, coming in where he don't belong, and hunting. He hitches rides. Hard to track.

Wheeler puts the Truck in gear and MOVES back out onto the roadway - back toward the Motel.

Stacia notes Wheeler's odd "decorations" - his souvenirs.

Among them, a KEYCHAIN FOB referencing the HORRIBLE THING roadside attraction referenced on the billboard. Its logo:

I SAW THE HORRIBLE THING AND SURVIVED!

STACIA  
So what's the Horrible Thing?

WHEELER  
I think it was a two-headed baby skeleton. Something awful like that. Nothing gives me the creeps more than some monster baby. Ever seen one?

Stacia takes note of the road, and their trajectory.

STACIA

Hey, wrong way.

WHEELER

I want to cover the stretch  
between here and the motel. Then  
turn around and head out. Just  
to be sure. Nobody'll pick that  
guy up in this rain.

STACIA

Oh.

She scans the interior of the Truck cab a bit nervously. The way Birdy did.

STACIA (CONT'D)

(wary)

Don't you need backup, or  
something?

WHEELER

Not just yet. You may have  
gathered that this is kinda  
personal, between me and him.

(lightens up)

So what's your story?

STACIA

Same as everybody - just trying  
to get from one place to the  
other.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT - RAIN

Walker marches down the road in utter darkness. Stops.  
Spreads his arms to the night sky.

WALKER

Come on, asshole! I'm right  
here!

INT. WHEELER'S TRUCK - NIGHT - TRAVELING - RAIN

Resuming Wheeler and Stacia.

WHEELER

Staying out here will get you  
from alive to dead in a hurry.  
Sure you don't want to hold the  
gun?

Stacia eyes the pistol.

STACIA

I wouldn't even know which way  
to point it.

Wheeler seems to glaze over, to withdraw into himself.

WHEELER

Never turn down a ride. Never  
turn down a weapon.

STACIA

You lost me there.

Stacia eyes all the "souvenirs" inside the cab. Uneasily.  
Then, a flash of realization stiffens her.

STACIA (CONT'D)

But, wait - if you're after that  
guy who was in the room next to  
me, why didn't you just arrest  
him at the motel?

WHEELER

That's not how it works.

STACIA

How what works?

Wheeler has never really had to explain himself before.  
Ponders it out.

WHEELER

We're completely different. He  
rides. I drive. He gets picked  
up. Me, I do the picking up. He  
doesn't have any standards.  
He'll do anybody. He's like a  
mad dog.

STACIA

You mean like ... you're the  
hunter, and he's the hunted?

WHEELER

Some hunters only hunt dangerous  
prey. Fighters. Survivors. Not  
easy kills. He hunts whoever he  
can take.

(beat)

That's wasteful.

STACIA

(wary)

I'm not sure I follow you.

WHEELER

I know. Listen, I need to show you something. It'll all become clear.

Wheeler reaches across, apparently for the glovebox. The smoothest, most natural move in the world. Then, like a striking viper, he grabs the back of her neck and THUMPS her head into the dash, once, twice, and Stacia GRAYS OUT before she knows it.

WHEELER'S POV - STACIA'S TATTOO

The crescent moon on her neck fading out last of all.

(SPECIAL EFFECTS SHOT)

FADE TO BLACK with engine SOUND of the Truck OVER.

FADE IN SLOWLY

INT. WHEELER'S TRUCK - NIGHT - RAIN - LATER

First there is only the sound of the Truck, OS, different pitch. Time has elapsed.

EXCU - STACIA'S EYES

As they flutter open. She is still in the Truck, moving along. OS RADIO:

RADIO VOICE (VO)

... and just for variety, let's add some rain to that rain, heh. Build yourself a nice fire and watch some cable tonight, 'cos it ain't fit for man nor beast out there, and if you gotta-gotta go, wear your hip-waders ...

STACIA'S POV - TRUCK WINDSHIELD

Stacia can see the reflection of her torso. Crisscrossed with seatbelts. Hands bound. The Truck wipers sluice water from the glass.

CLOSE-UP - HARNESS BUCKLE

A racing-style, X-shaped seatbelt buckle sitting near her sternum.

CLOSE-UP - STACIA'S WRISTS

Bound with duct tape.

RESUME STACIA'S POV - THE DASHBOARD

Her switchblade sits there among the souvenirs, just out of reach.

And ... WHEELER. Driving, smoking, a beer in his crotch, watching the road. Without looking at Stacia, he knows she's back. He trims the radio SOUND.

WHEELER

See, it's the chit-chat I never get right. Now I'm thinking I should have said something ... y'know, fancier. Like maybe I should have said, "gee, I sure like your earrings." And you would have said, "thanks." Then I say, "Think you'd give me one as a souvenir?" And you'd say, "no," and then I get to come back with, "Hey, I could have asked for one of your tits; I like those, too."

Stacia's eyes are rolling in horror. Wheeler's speech unnerves her more than mere physical violence, which she expects, anticipates. This is just ... weird.

Wheeler REACHES OVER. Stacia FLINCHES. Wheeler RIPS OUT her left earring and hangs it on the dash grille. As Stacia FREAKS OUT --

STACIA

Owww jesus CHRIST --!

WHEELER

(not missing a beat)  
And then you'd flip out, and then you'd try to jump out of a moving truck, which won't do you no good because your door don't open from the inside, just so you know.

Stacia writhes within her restraints, sucking air from the pain.

STACIA

Why are you doing this?

Wheeler looks directly at her for the first time, and it's not a pretty sight to see.

WHEELER

You know, when you're fishing, bait usually doesn't ask stupid questions.

STACIA

You're not a cop.

WHEELER

That's equally stupid, but at least it's not a question. You get one more try before I get out the duct tape again.

Skating the rim of panic, Stacia considers what to say very carefully.

STACIA

How long was I out?

WHEELER

'Bout forty minutes or so. No permanent damage.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The Truck roars PAST FRAME, kicking spume.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT - FURTHER ON

Vapor coalesces off the highway surface. Dark, ominous. We hear the distant SOUND of Wheeler's Truck, growing CLOSER at high speed.

WIDEN ANGLE

To reveal Walker standing there, waiting patiently.

Wheeler's headlights illuminate him. Here comes the Truck.

INT. WHEELER'S TRUCK - NIGHT - TRAVELING

Wheeler hits the brakes, skidding to a power stop PAST Walker's position. He reverses gears and BACKS UP. Crushes his beer can and stows it. Tucks his gun into his crotch. Perfect, methodical, a man-machine series of moves.

WHEELER  
Okay, here we go.

EXT HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The Truck barrels BACKWARD to Walker's position. Walker is standing there with his thumb out. Wheeler buzzes the passenger-side window down.

WALKER  
Hell of a night.

WHEELER  
Yeah.

WALKER  
You offering me a ride?

WHEELER  
I think that's how it's supposed  
to go.

Stacia's eyes are drifting from one madman to the other.

Walker seems amused that Wheeler has captured Stacia.

WALKER  
Sure you got room?

Wheeler snorts. Yeah, sure. Walker BOARDS, scrunching Stacia over.

WALKER (CONT'D)  
Hello again.

INT. WHEELER'S TRUCK - NIGHT - MOVING

The Truck ROLLS. Walker points to the road ahead.

WALKER  
Hold up.

WHEELER  
What?

WALKER  
Snake. Don't hit it.

EXT. TRUCK - ON ROADWAY - NIGHT

A large RATTLER moves across the road in front of the Truck, which STOPS.

WHEELER (O.S.)

Why not?

INT. WHEELER'S TRUCK - NIGHT - RESUMING

The trio's eyes all track the o.s. progress of the snake.

STACIA

(almost sub-aurally)

Because he's minding his own  
business.

They all - somewhat comically - wait for the snake. Walker appropriates a smoke from the pack on the dash, lights it, then says:

WALKER

You got another cigarette?

WHEELER

I thought you didn't.

WALKER

Fooled you, didn't I?

Wheeler snorts and passes Walker a beer. Walker reaches and meets Wheeler's hand EXACTLY halfway, in front of the immobilized Stacia.

WALKER (CONT'D)

(to Stacia)

'Scuse me.

He doesn't open the beer. He holds the cold can against his head, meditatively.

WHEELER

I gotta a blonde joke for ya...

WALKER

Do tell.

## WHEELER

This Blonde is walking through Central Park in the middle o' winter and she sees this Rattlesnake freezin' in the snow! The Snake opens one eye and says, "Listen, Babe..."... "I just got outta the Zoo and I'm freezin' my ass off here. Could you pick me up and take me back?". "No way," says the Blonde, "you'll bite me. I can't trust you". "Listen, honey," says the Snake, "I promise I won't bite you". Now the Blonde was a do-gooder for about ten minutes, so she picks up the Snake and starts walkin' it back to the Zoo. The Snake starts getting cozy in her hands, warmin' up...ya know...and he up n' bites on the boob! Gives her the Big Deep Sleep, ya know! "Oooooohhh," screams the Blonde, going down. "You promised not to bite me!". And the Snake says "Listen, Babe..."...

## WALKER

"You knew what I was when you picked me up". The way I heard it told, it was a scorpion and a toad.

## WHEELER

Gee...you know the punchline, huh...so you're notta dumb blonde...that's good to know.

The snake's gone. Wheeler puts the Truck in gear and rolls.

## WALKER

Snakes are great. They've got three sets of teeth. Disposable skin. Smell with their tongues. They belong out here. Rain brings 'em out when the pavement's wet, sometimes.

Every LOOK, every GLANCE, every SMALL MOTION of both men should be fraught with impending violence. We just don't know how the storm will erupt.

Stacia is helpless between them, mildly tharn with fear, but angered at the helplessness of her predicament.

STACIA  
(tight, measured)  
Where are we going?

Wheeler ignores her, speaking across her, to Walker:

WHEELER  
Where you headed?

Walker inclines his nose forward toward Stacia. Shrugs.

WALKER  
Where are you taking her?

WHEELER  
Undecided.

Stacia SNEEZES explosively. She can't help it. She hates it. She SNEEZES AGAIN.

STACIA  
Oh, no, goddammit ...

Wheeler holds up three fingers.

WHEELER  
Wet weather, it's usually three.

Stacia sneezes again, despite herself.

STACIA  
Dammit!

In a perfect 1-2-3 move, alert for the slightest sign of betrayal or action, Wheeler hands over a Kleenex, which Walker takes and uses to wipe Stacia's nose.

STACIA (CONT'D)  
Don't fucking touch me!

Wheeler SPINS on her.

WHEELER  
Hey! You are a passenger!

WALKER

Yeah. Be polite.

(beat; to Stacia)

See, our judgmental friend here is the kind of guy who likes to hunt. He likes to theorize about prey, worthy opponents, fair game, all that. Very romanticist.

(pointed)

He thinks he's not a predator. You should have seen him back at that bus.

EXT. BUS - EARLIER THAT DAY (FLASHBACK)

RESUMING the shot where Wheeler discovers the bodies of Fergus and Deuce in the luggage bay. Wheeler "scents" Fergus as -

DANNY reappears from the front of the bus.

DANNY

This is not good, dude. Not good. We need to haul ass back to that restaurant or get on your CB and call -

Wheeler overrides Danny with a finger to the lips. Shhh. As though to alert him that they are being WATCHED.

AT THE TREELINE

Walker, having abandoned Marie, hesitates to spy on what he's leaving behind and sees Wheeler and Danny.

RESUME WHEELER AND DANNY

WHEELER

I need to show you something.

Wheeler GRABS a fistful of Danny's HAIR and BOUNCES his face off the side of the bus. As Danny REBOUNDS, Wheeler SPINS, coming out of the turn with his PISTOL out and CLOCKING Danny hard enough to knock out teeth. Danny DROPS bonelessly to the ground.

WHEELER (CONT'D)

Idiot.

His eyes move back to the treeline, all his senses alert, now. (FLASHBACK ENDS.)

INT. WHEELER'S TRUCK - NIGHT - TRAVELING

RESUMING our trio. Stacia notes the speedometer. 70 mph. Slick, curvy roads. Wheeler ominous in his concentration. Walker continues his "explanation," indicating Wheeler's collection of "trophies," now including Stacia's earring.

WALKER

See all these little souvenirs?  
Trinkets, geegaws?

Walker indicates the HORRIBLE THING keychain.

WALKER (CONT'D)

He never saw the Horrible Thing.  
He just kept the keychain.

WHEELER

You call that proof? Am I  
supposed to laugh?

Walker continues talking to Stacia, captive, hideously intimate:

WALKER

Your genuinely dangerous  
individuals? They almost never  
look crazy. No weird tattoos, no  
stitches on their face, no  
oddly-shaped heads. They are ...  
not... predictable.

WHEELER

You within spitting distance of  
having a point?

STACIA

He drives. You ride. The only  
question is which one of you is  
a bigger psycho.

WALKER

I told you...be polite.

STACIA

My money's on the trucker here.

WALKER

Is that right?

Wheeler's HAND moves and Walker is ready to pounce ... but Wheeler is just reaching to fiddle with the radio. Static. A weird Conelrad tone.

WHEELER

It's the ozone. Screws up  
reception.

Walker looks UP toward the night sky.

WALKER

It wants to rain again.

And while Walker is looking / not-looking:

Wheeler whip-draws his pistol, cocking it, just as:

Walker draws his gun equally fast, pointing it at Wheeler -  
an INCH from Stacia's nose, where Wheeler is already pointed  
at Walker ... AS THEY PILEDRIVE ALONG AT 70 MPH.

STACIA

Wait! No ...!

WALKER

Your money still on the trucker?  
(to Wheeler)  
You get me, but I get her. Give  
it a minute, boss.

Walker shifts his gun so it presses against Stacia's  
forehead.

Wheeler keeps the bore between Walker's eyes.

WHEELER

Might be worth it.

Walker quickly shifts his aim back to Wheeler.

Stacia's EYES, millimeters from both guns, track down to  
REALIZE that Wheeler is NOT WEARING HIS SEAT BELT - all the  
harnesses in the front have been used to truss her up.

Walker purrs, enjoying the tension:

WALKER

Who ... gets ... who?

STACIA

Both of you ... get fucked!

Stacia STOMPS ON THE BRAKE while the Truck is going FULL-  
SPEED!

INTERCUTS:

INT. TRUCK OF THE FIGHT

EXT. OF THE TRUCK ON THE ROAD

INSIDE TRUCK - NIGHT

The Truck NOSES DOWN on the wet road as Wheeler's GUN GOES OFF right in front of Stacia's face. Walker's beer can EXPLODES as the rider-side window BLOWS OUT.

THE KNIFE jabs Stacia's neck - not deadly.

The Truck FISHTAILS so furiously that it MOMENTARILY GOES UP ON ITS FRONT WHEELS, and - Wheeler and Walker are BOTH JETTISONED THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD.

The Truck BOUNCES and judders to a teeth-rattling stop.

Wheeler and Walker CRASH-LAND onto the pavement, riddled with cubes of safety glass.

Stacia's LEFT HARNESS rips loose and her face BANGS into the dashboard. She REBOUNDS, nose bleeding, vision blurred, to SEE the two killers in the skewed spray of headlights.

OUTSIDE TRUCK - NIGHT

Walker ROLLS painfully over. He's got a huge wound in his chest from Wheeler's bullet.

WALKER

Ahhh ... god ... dammit!

Wheeler GROPEs blindly. Half his face has been sanded off by the pavement. His left arm is not working correctly. Broken bones grind.

Walker STANDS, wobbling, gasping, to HAUL WHEELER up by the scruff.

WALKER (CONT'D)

You can do better than this!

WHEELER

Show me what you've got.

Walker FLATHANDS Wheeler in the face, pancaking his nose.

Wheeler slams his fist into Walker's wound then throws him to the ground.

INSIDE TRUCK - NIGHT

Stacia SEES Wheeler's GUN on the floor. Can't reach it. The harnesses have been loosened by the momentum. She can ALMOST reach it - at considerable strain, maybe dislocating her wrist, her shoulder, to SCOOT the gun closer with her foot, to REACH DOWN with bound hands. Dizzy, panting, she advantages the loose harness to finally ... excruciatingly slowly ... collect the gun.

OUTSIDE TRUCK - NIGHT

Wheeler turns his attention to Stacia - heading for the overturned truck.

Walker comes after him, jumping him from behind. He wants Stacia for himself.

Wheeler goes down. Walker reaches the truck - his hand gropes through the windshield reaching for her.

INSIDE TRUCK - NIGHT

Stacia can't focus her eyes but does her best to RAISE the pistol. To THUMB back the hammer. Painful. She drops it.

Then she HEARS a siren approaching.

Red flashbar lights reflects on her as the sound of the approaching AMBULANCE comes closer.

HOLD HOLD HOLD ON STACIA

Her composure fracturing as the SIREN gets louder (o.s.) and the red/white flashbar lights REFLECT off her more intensively. Holding the gun. Gasping. Almost bursting into tears of relief. Almost laughing, borderline nuts.

STACIA

"Never turn down a ride ..."

That would be ... crazy ...

Stacia GRAYS OUT.

INT. AMBULANCE - NIGHT - RAIN - TRAVELING

Wheeler's eyes POP OPEN and he's staring UP at the underside of an ambulance bunk rack. IV bags dangle and the SIREN is wailing.

LEMMON (O.S.)

Hold still, pardner - you don't  
need to wake up.

Wheeler's POV follows an IV hose running out of him. Past bloody dressings. His leg immobilized in a splint. The face of LEMMON - a sandy-haired, bright-eyed young EMT - looms large from a LOW ANGLE.

LEMMON (CONT'D)

Lucky.

WHEELER

(dazed)

What lucky.

LEMMON

This bird watcher lady out in  
the middle of noplacethought  
she had a heart attack. Turned  
out to be indigestion. By the  
time we found her group, it  
started raining. So here we are,  
headed back to base ... pure  
luck, really. You lost you some  
blood. Arm's busted, leg's  
busted --

Lemmon holds up Stacia's switchblade.

LEMMON (CONT'D)

-- and I guess I should just  
mind my own business about this,  
huh?

The whole world is spinning and Wheeler is fighting for orientation. He can't hold his head up. It sags back - he's got a pneumatic collar around his neck.

Contusions and scrapes.

WHEELER

Had an accident.

LEMMON

Now you're getting it.

WHEELER

Lost control.

LEMMON

All you have to do now is just hang on, and don't think about the bumps in the road.

OS SNEEZE. A hand GRABS a tissue. We already know who it is.

Lemmon TURNS to hand a tissue to WALKER, now REVEALED to be in the adjacent bunk, less than two feet away from Wheeler!

Lemmon MOVES back to the cab of the ambulance.

As Wheeler's vision BLURS in and out of focus, Walker SNEEZES a second and third time.

WALKER

Three. It's always three, right.

Walker holds a finger to his lips. Shhhh.

OS indiscernable RADIO CHATTER (it should sound like the weird Conelrad noise Wheeler heard in the Truck), the peal of the siren OVER, highballing tires on wet roadway. We see that Wheeler and Walker are STRAPPED into their respective bunks, side-by-side.

Walker is equally bruised and battered from the wreck. He holds up his free hand, the one with the tissue. It is heavily bandaged. He stares wonderingly at the dressing, as though impressed.

WALKER (CON'T)

You bit me.

WHEELER

(dopey)  
What the hell are you about?

WALKER

I don't understand the question.

WHEELER

Understand that you're fuckin dead.

This news strikes Walker like a gas pain. Oh, puh-leeze.

WALKER

If I were you, I'd worry about them finding your Truck. I've already got my ride.

Wheeler LUNGES against his own safety restraints. Now he's mad again.

WALKER (CONT'D)

Wait. Calm down. You're going to bust a blood vessel.

(almost a whisper)

There's a helluva lot two guys like us could do with an ambulance like this.

Walker unfurls his Kleenex one-handed, like a magician, to reveal a SCAPEL he has purloined.

HOLD on Wheeler's dawning reaction as OS the SIREN is abruptly terminated.

Lemmon RE-ENTERS the ambulance bay.

LEMMON

Okay, boys 'n girls. Seat belts fastened? Luggage stowed?

Lemmon BENDS OVER to retrieve something from a low drawer.

ONLY WHEELER can see Walker SIT UP as far as the straps will let him, testing his reach. Walker makes a STABBING MOTION toward Lemmon's back. Yeah - good enough. As Lemmon RISES, Walker RESUMES his supine position and WINKS at Wheeler.

Lemmon RISES between the men with two big 60cc HYPODERMICS.

LEMMON (CONT'D)

(to DRIVER)

Watch this, Vinnie. Two at once.

WHEELER

What's in those?

LEMMON

Nothing but air, my friend.

Lemmon KNEELS forcefully and PLUNGES both hypos, left-right, INTO the chests of Wheeler and Walker, who begin to CONVULSE immediately. He GRINS as he watches them die.

VINNIE, the DRIVER, glances back from his driver's seat.

VINNIE

Awesome. What about dessert?

Lemmon RISES TO STANDING, and for the first time, we can SEE the berth ABOVE WALKER - which contains STACIA, beaten up, strapped down, IMMOBILIZED, gagged, and BUG-EYED WITH FEAR.

LEMMON

We save her for later.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

A HIGH OMNISCIENT POV of the ambulance, dwindling away on the dark road. The FLASHBAR is extinguished, leaving only headlights, taillights, and pretty soon, nothing at all.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END