

**OUTLAW COUNTRY**

An original script by  
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FADE IN

MASTERFUL FINGERS pluck the strings of an acoustic guitar, old, wood nicked and dented.... creating MUSIC that seems to come from an America long forgotten.

THE GUITAR

is in the hands of (27 year old) ELI LARKIN, scruff for a beard, long hair... but not seedy looking. A man born from the earth and of the earth... sitting on the stoop of his cabin, totally into playing.

He begins to SING... just half sentences, but we make out the old classic "I've seen the light."

SMASH CUT TO:

LOUD ORCHESTRAL MUSIC accompanies the two women on stage BELTING OUT a country song. The women are so glittered up they seem more like dolls than human beings.

They are "the great ANASTASTIA LEE" and her daughter ANNABEL. It takes us a second to realize they are singing the same song Eli is singing.

The same song, two different worlds.

CUT BACK TO:

The much quieter world of Eli Larkin...

... head bobbing as he plucks the guitar, totally, soulfully into the music.

HIS FINGERS

fly over the strings. He's clearly not just great... he's a master.

We intercut the two worlds.

ANASTASTIA AND ANNABEL

DRAW OUT the last syllable of a word, bringing the crowd to its feet.

A ROW OF TRUMPETERS

rise up as one and BLAST OUT notes with the orchestra.

BY ELI'S CABIN

we can still hear the CHIRPING of birds as Eli pulls magic out of his guitar. He's also winding to a climax. Lower key, but emotionally powerful.

HIS FINGERS move so fast we can hardly see them.

ANASTASTIA AND ANNABEL

finish the song with a BLAST of electrical guitars, a bow and a pair of smiles. The crowd ROARS its applause.

BACK AT ELI'S CABIN

the NOW MUTED APPLAUSE (from the last scene) is interrupted by A SINGLE CAR HONK.

Eli plucks out the last note of the song... glances back at a chevy coming to a stop in the background, kicking up dust.

Eli puts down his guitar, flashes a half-cocky, half-smile at his friends... and straps on a gun.

CREDITS END

CUT TO:

INT. CHEVY - DRIVING ALONG A DIRT ROAD

Bumping at breakneck speed through the night, trees racing at us, then disappearing. The driver knows these roads well.

His name is REX (25). Big belly, big beard. Solid and sober with a dry sense of humor. Eli rides shotgun beside him.

In back are RAY (29), short and nervous with shrewd careful eyes and an easy smile, and FERON (22), all skin and bones. Life liver, death risker, wild man.

... and SON, a quiet 22 year old who looks five years younger.

The guys talking, giving Feron shit. We hear "What's this scruff shit?" "Fu Manchu."

Referring to Feron's first growth goatee and soul patch.

RAY  
He's growing a second dick.  
(suddenly)  
Shit--

Feron is pointing a gun at him.

ELI  
Christ, Feron.

FERON  
He bugs me I shoot him.

Feron's smiling. Hard to tell if this is a joke or serious.

ELI  
He bugs everyone.

Still smiling, Feron puts the gun away. Guess it was a joke.

REX  
All a twitter about the goddam dog.

RAY  
(goadng)  
Gonna put a 22 in his little doggie brain.

FERON  
We ain't killing no dog.

RAY  
Then he'll kill you. That dog stays  
up at night thinking of ways to  
kill people.

ELI  
You all indulging in animism.

SON  
Shit. Animalism.

ELI  
Ani--mism. Giving him human traits.  
Like what the dog really wants to  
do is go on a homo sapien killing  
spree, and then he's going to plan  
his vacation, sit in a puddle of  
sunlight in Hawaii.

RAY  
Dog couldn't find Hawaii on the map.

FERON  
He could find Tennessee though, right,  
Ray? Dog being from Tennessee.

Rex CRACKS UP.

REX  
Made Ray go quiet.

SON  
Lost in thought.

FERON  
Hope he has a G.P.S.

RAY  
Eat me... tweaker freaker.

Ray slaps Feron on the back of his head, kind of laughing  
about it, kind of serious. The way it always is.

CUT TO:

THE MEN

walking tensely through the woods now, their breath visible  
in the cold air. Getting closer to game time.

Feron sidles up to Eli.

FERON  
How'd it go at Caterpillar?

ELI  
Rafe says I just gotta bring in my  
Social.

FERON  
 Shit, foreman Eli. With his little  
 thermos. I don't see it.  
 (beat)  
 You tell Tarzen yet?

ELI  
 Not telling him 'till it's hundred  
 percent.

FERON  
 Better hope he doesn't find out  
 before.

Eli nods. This has been on his mind too. They come to the  
 edge of the woods.

A CHAIN LINK FENCE

disturbs our view of a rural airstrip on which sit FOUR CROP  
 DUSTING PLANES (brand new).

RAY  
 Shit, here comes Trixie.

A GERMAN SHEPARD

comes at them (it seems out of nowhere) on the airstrip side of  
 the fence--a furious, feral creature, man-murder in his eyes.

Ray pulls out his pistol. Feron pulls out his gun too.

ELI  
 No gun shots.

Everyone stares as Eli moves toward the fence, keeping his  
 eye on the dog.

ELI (CONT'D)  
 He's a pack animal. Just gotta let  
 him know he's got a new pack.  
 (to dog)  
 You think you the alpha dog, huh?  
 We just puppies to you.

The dog backs up, thrown by the man coming toward him. He  
 curls his black gums at Eli.

ELI (CONT'D)  
 You got ugly teeth, you know that?  
 Eat too much crappy food.

Eli advances... eying the dog, showing no sign of fear.

ELI (CONT'D)  
 Problem is you don't go hunting any  
 more, right? Get your dog food  
 right from the store. Master puts  
 it in your bowl, it's still shaped  
 like a can. You go, yeah master,  
 yeah master.

Distracting the dog with his patter.

The dog backs up some more, a new look in his eyes, maybe a bit of fear.

ELI (CONT'D)  
 Hell, you're no Alpha. Number two  
 maybe. A Beta. Or a Kappa. Or a  
 Zed. You a Zed?

The dog rises from his haunches, hackles up... preparing to leap. We can see it in his eyes.

ELI (CONT'D)  
 No... you... don't!

The dog cocks his head. A LITTLE GROWL sounds in his throat, threatening to become a big growl.

ELI (CONT'D)  
 Sit.

The dog's eyes fill with dog fury. Are you fucking kidding?

ELI (CONT'D)  
 (rages it out)  
 SIT!!!!

Man and animal stare at each other across the chain link fence. And then...

... the dog gives A WHIMPER of canine ambivalence and sits.

ELI (CONT'D)  
 (grins)  
 Animism.

Eli opens a pre-cut flap in the fence (they've done their prep work). The group heads into the airstrip... toward the planes.

The dog gives A WHIMPER. Is his new pack abandoning him? Eli gives him a backwards glance and the dog goes still.

INT. PLANE

Feron and Son enter the plane, quickly go about their business, hot-wiring the engine, notes on flying in Son's hand (they've prepared for this for awhile)

ANGLE ON AIRSTRIP

One by one, THE PLANES gather speed and lift off from the runway, wobblingly, barely clearing the treeline.

Amateurs all.

INT. ELI'S PLANE

Floating through the clouds. Eli lights a smoke, enjoying the moment. He smokes hand-rolled.

OUR VIEW drifts around him, taking him in. This scruffy man with blue eyes. Smoke drifting around him. Half cowboy, half modern guy. A crinkly smile on his face.

We note a tattoo of a guitar on his forearm, the neck in the shape of a rifle point. We drift down to his knuckle, see a tattoo of a blue bullet. Like the guitar gun just shot a bullet up his arm.

OUR VIEW continuing to drift... over to the passenger seat, where...

... THE DOG from the airstrip sits beside him, sniffing the air. The co-pilot.

EXT. FIELD IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE - NIGHT

The planes land one by one on the grassy field. Nothing but trees behind us and before us.

CUT TO:

THE HEADLIGHTS OF A CAR

come toward us out of a winding dirt road in the black forest, snaking its way to this makeshift "landing site."

THE PLANES glint in the moonlight. Eli and his group stand before them, watching as...

A TOP OF THE LINE BMW

bumps to a stop before them and SEVERAL MEXICAN MEN get out--TATTOOED GANG-BANGERS with Indian features.

ALFONSO GONZALEZ is the leader. He's dressed in jacket and slacks that barely hold in his prison muscles.

ALFONSO  
Hola, amigo.

Alfonso goes over to the planes. Actually kicks a tire.

ALFONSO (CONT'D)  
They sweet. How much you want for them, friend?

Eli glances at Feron. A whole conversation in the glance.

ELI  
What we agreed on. Fifty thousand.

Alfonso looks like he's about to burst into tears.

ALFONSO  
C'mon, don't do this to me, man. That was last week. Did you see what the Dow did? Economy's ass. We give you thirty thousand.

ELI  
These are tangible assets. They can fly away from you.

A wave of anger passes across Alfonso's features. Immediately, three assault guns are lifted and pointed at Eli and his men.

The man nearest Alfonso holds a duffle bag... filled with cash we assume.

ALFONSO  
I give you twenty thousand. I could take the planes for free. What you going to do, follow me to friggin' Mexico? You're a cocky hillbilly, but you're not stupid.

Eli doesn't seem any more bothered than a toad in the sun.

ELI  
See that tree at the edge of the field. The tallest one?

ALFONSO  
(doesn't look)  
I'll take your word.

ELI  
Silvery thing near the top? That's a sniper rifle. It's aimed at the back of your head.

Alfonso still doesn't glance at the tree, but we do. We note something glinting there. Could be anything.

Alfonso stares hard at Eli and his three friends.

ALFONSO  
Why would you bring five men to steal four planes?

ELI  
One of them likes to climb trees.

Alfonso gestures to his men. They move toward the planes but jump back as a plane's windshield EXPLODES in a shower of glass.

Alfonso slowly turns to look at the tree for the first time.

ELI (CONT'D)  
He's gone back to aiming at the back of your head.

ALFONSO  
Okay, you got my attention. I give you forty thousand, man.

ELI  
Tell your men to drop their guns.

Alfonso nods to his men and they lower their guns.

ELI (CONT'D)  
I said drop the guns.

A note of panic creeps into Alfonso's eyes.

ALFONSO  
We ain't dropping shit. Let's negotiate like equal partners, man.

ELI  
 Bullet goes through your brain,  
 it's like turning off a light. Rips  
 through your cranium, your speech  
 center, your motor center. You  
 could be about to say something,  
 but the word never comes out. What  
 happens to that word is a question  
 for the philosophers.

Alfonso looks like he's about to cry, he's so angry.

ALFONSO  
 I see a dead man talking to me.

ELI  
 (cracks up)  
 You're in the wrong movie, man.

Without taking his eyes off Eli, Alfonso gestures to his men... who drop their guns.

Immediately, Feron and Ray point their guns at Alfonso.

ELI (CONT'D)  
 Take off your clothes.

ALFONSO  
 (quiet)  
 You do not want to do this.

But Eli does want to do it. Alfonso says something in Spanish again and then begins to remove his clothes. So do his men.

The number of tattoos is dizzying.

ELI  
 It's like a bad dream, isn't it?  
 Y'all walking across a hot runway  
 in Mexico. Ow, ow, ow. People  
 taking pictures with their cells.  
 Look at the naked Mexicans.

Alfonso's eyes are daggers. Son has come down from the tree. He grins at the naked gang, rifle swinging in his hand.

Rex pulls keys from Alfonso's pants, opens the BMW's trunk. Eli throws in the duffel bag of money and all the clothes.

ELI (CONT'D)  
 Sa--ludos, amigo.

Eli and his guys get into the car and the BMW peels out HUMMING at 60 miles per hour down the dirt road that leads out of the woods.

ALFONSO  
 (shouts after them)  
 That car is 90 thousand, you madre cun.

CUT TO:

THE BMW - A BIT LATER

The car moves noiselessly along a cracked one lane road.  
We're deep in the country now. We pass a sign that states:

**YOU ARE ENTERING SLAUGHTER TENNESSEE**

**Population 3,482**

ON ONE SIDE OF THE "HIGHWAY"

SHADOWY FIGURES pick for coal along the steep embankment.

ON THE OTHER SIDE

scraggy fields and wintry woods are punctuated by an occasional cabin or trailer. A MAN burns trash on his front yard.

The BMW heads up a small hillside.

VIEW THROUGH WINDSHIELD

Amidst a huddle of simple, rural houses and trailers, sits a mansion with marble columns and a circular gravel driveway.

The mansion would be modest in Bel Air but it's monumental here--gigantically ostentatious in this world of poverty.

King of the Lilliputians.

CLOSER - MANSION

A MAN emerges from the house and is illuminated by the gas-lit lanterns flanking the marble pillars.

He is dressed in a suit, but his hair is just a little too long for the office and he's too tan. His grey eyes are cold, and calculating... with a touch of crazy mischief. His name is TARZEN LARKIN.

His eyes gleam at the sight of Eli emerging from the luxury car.

TARZEN  
Kings don't ride donkeys.  
(to the men)  
Y'all go inside, drink up my  
bourbon.

He puts a paternal arm around Eli.

TARZEN (CONT'D)  
Young prince and I got some  
business to attend to.

ELI  
What kind of business?

TARZEN  
Bizzy-bizness.

Eli glances backwards as he's led away by Tarzen.

FRONT DOOR OF MANSION

The guys remove their shoes before entering the palatial interior. A show of deference to the king.

Eli and Tarzen stroll through Tarzen's large grounds, stables on one side, a paddock containing a single WHITE MARE on the other.

The WHITE MARE gallop/walks across her paddock, leaning her head over the fence and shaking it.

Tarzen pauses to scratch the horse behind his ears.

TARZEN (CONT'D)  
 Look at her.  
 (to mare)  
 You my favorite, you know that.  
 A hunnerd thousand kittle bits of  
 muscle and hoss pow-ah.

Eli tussles the mare's head, lifts her gums. He knows horses.

ELI  
 She's regal, ain't she? What's her  
 name?

TARZEN  
 "Preemptive Strike." Fast out of  
 the gate, then keeps on  
 accelerating. Other horses get no  
 chance to employ their own  
 strategies, such as they are.  
 That's the Bush Doctrine.  
 Preemptive strike. Ain't good  
 public relations, but it's good  
 strategy. Better known as git the  
 other guy before he gits you.

Moves away from the horse toward his WHITE CADILLAC parked a few feet away. Opens the door.

TARZEN (CONT'D)  
 (mock authoritative)  
 Git on in.

CUT TO:

INT. TARZEN'S WHITE CADILLAC - DRIVING

Tarzen drives. Eli sits in the passenger seat. A cross dangles from the rear view mirror. A pistol lies across Tarzen's lap. More comfortable while driving than in his belt.

ELI  
 Where we headed?

TARZEN  
 Where we headed? Are we there yet?  
 Shit, You sounding like a kid. Oughta  
 put you in a booster seat in back.

They drive in silence for a moment.

TARZEN (CONT'D)  
I been hearing echoes. You a man  
with a plan or some such.

ELI  
Shit, ain't much to plan for in  
this town. Might end up eating bugs.

TARZEN  
(nods)  
Everything good then? Sun out. Take  
nice, calm naps in the afternoon?

ELI  
My cheeks hurt from smiling.

Tarzen grins at him. Smart ass. Guides the car off the road.

THE CADILLAC

bumps onto a grassy patch of lawn before an immense, thick  
forest. 4 OTHER CARS are parked here as well. All luxury cars  
of one stamp or another.

A COUPLE OF THE MEN from the cars loaf about at the edge of  
the woods. Their figures visible in the country darkness from  
the embers of their cigarettes.

Tarzen kills the ignition, and glances at Eli.

TARZEN  
Meet some associates of mine.

He exits the car.

EXT. CADILLAC - SAME TIME

Eli exits the car as well.

ELI  
I'm honored.

TARZEN  
Yes, you are.

Tarzen heads with Eli toward his waiting "colleagues."

TARZEN (CONT'D)  
You sittin' at the grown-up table now.

Tarzen's "colleagues" amble toward them. The men are dressed  
for hunting and hold rifles. Shrewd, self-possessed older  
men. The keepers of the universe. They are:

TREVOR PETERS--a canny looking man with a taut face and  
embalmed looking black hair.

JACK MAN FOLCUM--A whale of a man in loose-fitting clothes  
and suspenders with ice-cold blue eyes.

BILL WORTHER--close-cropped white hair and an intelligent, aggressive face reminiscent of John McCain.

LEVON PACE--middle-aged, black, with the air of someone with enough "Fuck you" money to say "Fuck you"... a lot.

TARZEN (CONT'D)

Eli, meet the BAOF. Businessmen from all over the fucking place. Gentlemen, my nephew Eli. He's gonna be comin' with me on these expeditions now.

Eli reacts, surprised to be given a place at this table so casually, but this is the way Tarzen works. Thinks about it a long time, then presents it casually.

Tarzen tosses Eli a rifle.

ELI

What we shooting at?

TARZEN

If you're Trevor, you shooting at tree branches. Rest of us shooting at quails.

ELI

Hunting quails at night? Shit, they all tucked in their nests, watching TV and shit.

TARZEN

(gives him a look)  
Guess we're hunting the quails with insomnia.

MOVING THROUGH THICK WOODS NOW

Branches swinging in our way. Glimpses of fractured moonlight.

TREVOR

(explaining to Eli)  
Way for us to talk without eyes on us.  
'Less you count the rooks and Cherihoots.

Something scary about these hard cold alpha males with rifles moving through the forest at night. It's a primal image.

CUT TO:

EXT. DEEP IN THE FOREST - LATE NIGHT

Less foliage here. The men continue to walk in a line, talking in low voices. We hear murmurs of "... all know why we're here..." "Goddam indictments..." "... prosecutor thinks he's a white knight..."

BILL

Puttin' 'em in jail like they loadin' potatoes in a sack.

TREVOR  
Way of 'em cuttin' down on  
unemployment.

JACK  
Hard times, invest in prisons.

TARZEN  
In my portfolio... I know that.

Something cagey going on here, the men talking around the  
issue. No one saying what they mean.

LEVON'S EYES

glitter with anger. He's staring right at Tarzen.

LEVON  
Put that prosecutor nose up in the  
bottom of a hog pen. Eyes filled  
with dirt.

BILL  
Second that.

Eli notices that Bill has quietly slipped the safety off his  
rifle. It hits him, some real serious shit might be going  
down tonight.

The businessmen gangsters continue to walk through the woods, no  
one saying anything, but everyone waiting for Tarzen to talk.

TARZEN  
(finally)  
Prosecutors're like cockroaches. Kill  
one, three more pop up somewhere else.

BILL  
(snaps it out)  
Don't hear of no task force in  
Slaughter.

TARZEN  
Now, Bill, what's that supposed to  
mean?

Tarzen continues walking ahead of everyone else... as if  
tempting them with the back of his close-cropped head.

Eli slips the safety off his rifle. Seems like anything could  
happen in this patch of black woods in the middle of nowhere.

BILL  
Means you're not the one at risk.  
Walking between the rain drops on  
this one.

Tarzen stops walking. He slowly turns to face Bill. His eyes  
are filled with rage. He does not like to be contradicted.

TARZEN  
Indictments, shit. They're fucking  
flesh wounds. We got a rainy day  
fund for shit like this.

(MORE)

TARZEN (CONT'D)  
 Prosecutors, juries, judges, shit  
 everyone strapped for cash these  
 days. You're just mad at this  
 prosecutor. Getting all emotional.  
 Acting like you're having your  
 period.

Bill really would like to kill Tarzen now. He glances at the others. Hard to tell who's on who's side right now.

TARZEN (CONT'D)  
 I guess I have a different  
 perspective than you. We  
 individuals, but we also a group.

He stares at Bill with searing eyes. This is the moment of truth.

TARZEN (CONT'D)  
 You welcome to leave the group any  
 time you want. Find your way back  
 to your Lexus alone.

Bill actually turns to glance at the woods, perhaps wondering if he really *could* find his way back alone.

He turns back to Tarzen... and *backs down*. We can see it in his eyes. He doesn't even have to say anything.

TARZEN (CONT'D)  
 Apology accepted. Emotions running  
 high.

Tarzen is definitely *the man* here. The MVP of the MVPs. He continues on.

The sound of LOAD FLAPPING rips a hole in the moment.

RAPID CUTTING

GUNS are snapped into position, EYES squint down barrels...

A HUNDRED SHOTS

are fired at once. Creepy really. The powermongers of the South SHOOTING the shit out of the forest to kill a single bird.

A QUAIL drops to the ground--just broken bones and gore. It's head hangs from its neck by a sliver of flesh.

CUT TO:

INT. TARZEN'S CADILLAC - DRIVING - NIGHT

Tarzen and Eli are heading home. They drive in silence for a long moment. Finally Tarzen turns to Eli with an eerie sweetness in his gaze.

TARZEN  
 You my most valuable player, you  
 know that. When your daddy got sent  
 up, he asked me to look in on you  
 time to time.

(MORE)

TARZEN (CONT'D)

I did it out of a sense of duty at first. But then I began to take an interest. You were always hanging around in a pack, dirty from the woods, pine needles in your hair and shit. Like you lived in never never land 'cept without the magic. Chewin' sap from the trees, smoking cigarettes, making blood oaths probably. Shit, kids love that stuff. Brotherhood of the pack and all that. Man's a pack animal. Might *change* your pack, but you always *in* a pack.

Tarzen glances at Eli. Has Eli *changed his pack*?

Eli doesn't say anything. Holding his own counsel now. Tarzen suppresses a wave of irritation.

TARZEN (CONT'D)

Know why I got the mansion on the hill... three businesses all profitable?

Gives Eli half a second to answer this rhetorical question.

TARZEN (CONT'D)

I wake up every morning thinking I'm poor... and that everyone's out to get me.

ELI

Only one of those is true.

Takes Tarzen a second to puzzle this out. Then he LAUGHS.

TARZEN

That's the case, too. That's the case.

FLASHING LIGHT suddenly play across Tarzen's features. A police siren? Tarzen immediately reaches for the handgun on his lap.

ELI

Heat lightning.

It's true. FLASHES OF LIGHTNING vibrate the sky and fields all around them. It's a freaky image.

TARZEN

(face taut)

What the fuck *is* lightning anyway?

ELI

Wikopedia it when I get home.

Tarzen glances at Eli. Is he fucking with him?

THE CADILLAC

ROARS past beneath us through a FLASHING, unstable landscape.

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP - TARZEN

lost in deep thought, Perhaps pondering the conversation he just had with Eli, working it out.

OS We hear A FEMALE VOICE:

FEMALE VOICE  
Come out, come out wherever you  
are.

OUR VIEW loosens to reveal Tarzen lying on his back in bed, his expression as still as wet cement.

LIANNE (Tarzen's young, hottie of a girlfriend) rises up from under the blanket, where she had been giving him a blow job.

LIANNE  
(mock tragic)  
Ain't nothing happening, baby.

HER HEAD

SNAPS BACK from a punch we absolutely did not see coming. Blood streams out of her nose.

TARZEN  
I'm thinking.

FADE TO BLACK

FADE IN:

HEAVEN

Or it may as well be. We are on a grassy lawn, surrounded by rose bushes that explode a profusion of colors--red, blue, yellow, white. Butterflies dance around the flowers.

IN THE MIDST OF THE GORGEOUSNESS OF IT ALL

sits ANASTASTIA LEE (the woman from the opening concert montage), sipping a glass of tinkling ice tea.

She's 55 and looks her age even though all signs of aging have been erased--through surgery, through make-up, through force of will.

She is dressed in a perfect yellow summer dress. It says something about her that she is on display even in her private moments.

Anastastia's daughter ANNABEL (22) joins her mother on a second pillowy chair. A little round glass table stands between them.

Annabel is gorgeous, blonde, with a nature as shy as it is prideful. She wears a tight T-shirt that says "GIRL CANDY."

ANASTASTIA  
 (sleepy-eyed)  
 Why are you wearing a T-shirt that  
 says "eat me?"

ANNABEL  
 It doesn't say eat me, it says girl  
 candy.

Anastastia gives her a look. (We'll see that look a lot.)

ANASTASTIA  
 I never met anyone more proud of  
 her tits.

Annabel flushes.

ANASTASTIA (CONT'D)  
 Did you come to keep me company? I  
 was going to take a nap.

ANNABEL  
 I want to sing a solo number  
 tomorrow.

ANASTASTIA  
 I'm sorry, sweetheart, the line-  
 up's set. The band's not prepared.

ANNABEL  
 You change songs on 'em all the  
 time.

Anastastia closes her eyes, talking to the sun, which is  
 burning her eyelids orange.

ANASTASTIA  
 This concert's not about the music,  
 sweetie. You could sing out donkey  
 brays and those hillbillies will be  
 just as happy. We're going to  
 Slaughter because it seems I've  
 lost my way (or that's what the  
 critics say) and so I must fake  
 affection for a locale that repels  
 me in order to appear authentic  
 again. Do you detect an irony?

ANNABEL  
 Then it shouldn't matter if I sing.

ANASTASTIA  
 Honey, you're going to force me to  
 be honest.

ANNABEL  
 Cities will crumble.

Anastastia opens one eye.

ANASTASTIA  
 Sarcasm doesn't become you.

She waits a beat, then hits her with the truth.

ANASTASTIA (CONT'D)  
Your voice ain't good enough.

Annabel is truly stricken by this.

ANASTASTIA (CONT'D)  
You're voice is very sweet, honey.  
It's like a wildflower. But you're  
not ready to sing solo. That's why  
we made a duet album. Baby steps.

Annabel's eyes have filled with tears. Anastastia doesn't notice because her eyes are closed.

ANASTASTIA (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry, sweetheart, but I don't  
want you embarrassed up there. Your  
tits aren't that nice.

The silence of the rose garden fills up the pause between them.

ANASTASTIA (CONT'D)  
Mmmm. It's so quiet you can hear  
the wings of the butterflies  
opening and closing. Like little  
fairy gusts.

Her voice becomes a sleepy drawl.

ANASTASTIA (CONT'D)  
You know they used to call 'em  
"flutter bys?" But it was too hard  
to say, so it became "butterflies."  
Sometimes people simplify things  
until they don't make sense any more.

Anastastia grows silent, mouth partly open. Is she asleep? Annabel lifts up her mom's glass and then puts it down with a BANG.

Anastastia bolts awake.

SMASH CUT TO

WINDSHIELD WIPERS

sluicing away a wall of rain to reveal a toy-strewn front yard. The view immediately blurs again from a new sheet of rain.

We're back in Slaughter, Tennessee.

ELI'S CHEVY

pulls to a stop in the puddled driveway of an unpainted single story house. Eli gets out, hatless, umbrella-less.

INT. HOUSE - SAME TIME - DAY

Eli enters. There are toys everywhere. A plate with dried eggs is filled with half smoked cigarette butts.

SUSIE, a four year old, enters the room, chased by her 5 year old brother SAM.

A ten year old boy, JONNY, enters the room, grins at Eli.

JONNY  
Can I shoot your 22?

ELI  
What kind of hello is that? Can I  
shoot your 22?

JONNY  
(grins)  
Hello.

ELI  
Where's mama at?

JONNY  
Afternoon shift.

Eli opens the refrigerator. It's almost empty.

ELI  
What happened to all the money I  
give you all?

JONNY  
Invested.

Jonny can't help glancing at the closed door of the bedroom.  
From inside we hear ADULT MALE LAUGHTER.

Eli stares at the closed door a long time. Finally he reaches  
into his pocket and hands Jonny a wad of cash.

ELI  
Find a place to hide this mom won't  
find it, okay?

JONNY  
Okay.

Eli bends down to Jonny's level.

ELI  
You the man of the house for a bit.  
It's messed up, but it's what it  
is. I got my eye on a house on Lime  
drive. How'd you like that? Move in  
with me on Lime Drive? You and  
Susie and Sam.

JONNY  
Bank won't give you a loan 'less  
you got a job.

ELI  
Then I'll have to get a job, huh?

Jonny's eyes well with emotion. Would he really do that for them?  
Eli rises to a standing position.

JONNY  
You let me shoot the 22 yesterday.

ELI  
 That wasn't me. That was an  
 imposter pretending to be me,  
 letting you do things I wouldn't  
 let you do.

Behind the closed door, we hear a TV BLARING.

ELI (CONT'D)  
 I got some business with Ajax. Take  
 your brothers and sisters and go  
 outside and play, okay?

JONNY  
 It's raining.

ELI  
 Play rain games.

Jonny has some inkling what's up.

JONNY  
 Ajax is okay. He doesn't hit us or  
 anything.

ELI  
 (mock angry)  
 Get the hell out of here.

Jonny leaves and Eli goes toward the closed door.

INT. BEDROOM

A GOATEED MAN (AJAX) lies in his pajamas in bed, leg raised  
 on a pillow, smoking a huge spliff. The guy is Eli's age.

TWO OTHER EQUALLY SEEDY LOOKING GUYS are in the room too. One  
 of them is definitely tweaking, his eyes flashing paranoia.

Ajax grins at Eli.

AJAX  
 Eli, man. What it is. Grab a toke.

ELI  
 You selling bedside now?

AJAX  
 Don't know how it's none of your  
 business. Your mom the one gave me  
 refuge.  
 (points to raised leg)  
 They got me on disability.  
 (huge stoned grin)  
 Pain in the goddam ass.

THE MATRIX II plays on the flat screen TV. Keanu swinging  
 the infinite suited doubles into each other.

Ajax's tweaked out friend keeps staring out the window.

AJAX (CONT'D)  
 Crazy ass went to his ex's and  
 slammed her around. Cops at his  
 place now.

Ajax lifts up his cane, points it so it moves right up to his  
 tweaked out friend's eyes.

AJAX (CONT'D)  
 Wo... wo...

Tripping out his stoned friend with the cane.

ELI  
 The kids gonna know y'all smokin'  
 in here.

AJAX  
 Shit, they think it's incense.  
 (beat)  
 Your brother Jonny's okay. I let  
 him do deliveries for me sometimes.

A fire comes into Eli's eyes.

ELI  
 Hell you do.

AJAX  
 Ask him you don't believe me. Wants  
 to be an outlaw just like his big  
 brother.

He grins at Eli, trying to goad him.

AJAX (CONT'D)  
 Ain't I a *mother--effer*?

A noxious double entendre. Eli snatches Ajax's cane from him.

AJAX (CONT'D)  
 What you gonna do, Keanu? Hit a  
 lame man?

Eli's eyes are dark fires. There's the SOUND of a car entering  
 the driveway. The sound has saved Ajax from a smack down.

Eli throws the cane to Ajax. It bounces off the wall and hits  
 Ajax on the head.

LIVING ROOM OF HOUSE

Eli moves quickly through the living room, glances at his  
 brothers and sisters sitting on the mussed couch watching TV.

ELI  
 Thought I told you to play outside.

Through the window we see A FORD PROBE pull into the driveway.

JONNY  
You gonna take us to the Anastastia  
Lee concert?

ELI  
(distracted)  
Listen to that heigh ho, heigh ho  
music? Thought you knew better'n that.

JONNY  
Everyone's going. Mama and Ajax are  
goin' but they don't want us with 'em.

Eli is staring out the window. He's hardly heard. He heads out  
the door. Johnny exchanges glances with his siblings.

EXT. HOUSE - SAME TIME

Eli passes his mom, DONNA, a former hottie in her thirties (but  
fighting age with every cell in her body) as she heads up the  
walkway with groceries.

She greets him with over the top affection.

DONNA  
Look who's paying us a visit! Oh  
my, look at you, I think you get  
handsomer every day.

ELI  
I don't want to hear of Jonnny  
moving any more dope, you hear?

Donna's face flushes with anger. She's quick to anger.

DONNA  
You clean up your own back yard  
first before you come jibber  
jabberin' over here.

Eli gets into his car.

ELI  
You better get yourself another shift.

DONNA  
What's that supposed to mean?

ELI  
You ain't getting no more help from  
me. Well run dry.

He SLAMS the door of his car. Donna's face is bitter and  
lined. Meanness and struggle have aged her mercilessly.

DONNA  
I don't want you comin' aroun' my  
kids any more. You hear me?! You a  
bad influence.

Eli PEELS OUT onto the street.

DONNA (CONT'D)  
 (shouts it)  
 What kind of son are you?!

CUT TO:

ANGLE ON BILLBOARD

Overlooking the blacktop. On it, a twice life-sized photo of ANASTASTIA LEE with daughter ANNABEL (smaller) peering over her shoulder (the mother and daughter from the rose garden) It reads:

**HOMECOMING CONCERT**

**FIRST LADY OF COUNTRY, ANASTASTIA LEE, IS HEADIN' ON HOME**

**ONE NIGHT CONCERT IN SLAUGHTER!**

**(AND BRINGIN' HER DAUGHTER! IT'S A TWO-FOR!!!!)**

Eli's Chevy WHOOSHES past beneath the billboard and continues on along the completely empty interstate.

INT. MAIN OFFICE CATERPILLAR PLANT - SECONDS LATER

Eli enters, hands his documents to THE GIRL BEHIND THE DESK. She takes a long moment of personal time to stare at his tattoos and generally ragged demeanor, then...

... with aggressive slowness, punches in his info. On the monitor, we see names, but no Eli.

GIRL  
 (just what she expected)  
 I'm sorry, sir, but you're not in  
 our system.

But Eli has already left the room...

... STORMING through the inner offices now. A SECRETARY tries to stop him, but Eli blurs right past her.

THROUGH AN OPEN DOOR

we glimpse RAFF PORTER (50s, nice enough guy), staring at us. He quickly hangs up the phone as Eli bursts in.

RAFF  
 I was gonna call you today--  
 (he's sweating bullets)  
 Branch manager calls me up. His son  
 dropped outa Louisiana State. Asks  
 can I give him a job. Guy has my  
 gonads in a vice.

ELI  
 You say, sorry, the job's already  
 given.

RAFF  
 Shit, cuz, he's the branch manager.

ELI  
 (truly rattled)  
 You goddam pussy. Bank's giving me  
 a house loan based on my having  
 secure employment.

RAFE  
 Your name's on the waiting list. I  
 swear to God--

But Eli has already SLAMMED the door behind him. Rafe picks up the phone. His hand is trembling.

INT. CATERPILLAR PARKING LOT

Eli gets into his car and then goes still. He doesn't turn the ignition. He doesn't do anything. He just sits there.

His dreams have just been smashed.

CUT TO:

OUR VIEW MOVING SLOWLY TOWARD A LITTLE YELLOW HOUSE

Just a simple two-story house with a small square of lawn in front. A sign on the front lawn says "For Sale."

MOVING IN ON ELI

sitting in his car across the street, staring emotionally at the house. Such a simple thing, owning a house this size. But Eli knows he won't own it for a long time. Maybe forever.

Finally he turns the ignition and slowly pulls away from the curb.

MAIN STRIP OF SLAUGHTER - DUSK

As night falls, Eli drives through the main intersection, on his way home.

VIEW THROUGH SIDE WINDOW

We see a row of stores. People buying things. *America*. We drift past the bank now, the main artery of this commerce.

And there, under the awning, stands Rafe, chatting with none other than Tarzen Larkin.

*The man who just denied him his dream is chatting with the man who doesn't WANT him to HAVE his dream.*

TARZEN

turns to glance at Eli in his car, smiles an ambiguous smile.

Eli stares back at him. Every ounce of cockiness is gone from him. We see the sad-eyed, lonely boy he once was.

CUT TO:

HAUNTING, MELANVHOLY GUITAR MUSIC begins to play on the sound track. Similar to the music from the beginning. The music takes us to...

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

DOZENS OF MEN AND WOMEN are picking coal from the muddy embankment. The harrowed faces of the recently unemployed.

We drift from this image to STRONG HANDS dropping chunks of muddy coal into the trunk of a car. The hands belong to Eli.

INT. ELI'S ONE ROOM CABIN - NIGHT

We're deep in the woods. THE GUITAR MUSIC continues as Eli puts the coal into a stove. We can see his breath as he works.

INT. CABIN - A LITTLE LATER

As a fire burns in the stove, Eli sits on a broken-sprunged couch playing his guitar. (It's the music we've been hearing.)

Fingers fly over the strings. Not just good, he's fucking good.

ON THE 30 inch TV, THE HEAD CHEF from "HELL'S KITCHEN" rages mutely (the sound is off) at his contestants.

Eli begins to SING. Just bits of a song. Is it an old time song? A song he's working on? Hard to tell.

It's a song about a man who disappeared. He disappeared because no one was looking for him. But you can find him if you really look... past the lawn... past the apple trees... where the tall grass grows.

That's the refrain, "where the tall grass grows." The MUSIC takes us to other places...

INT. ELI'S SIBLINGS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Jonny and his brother and sister sit huddled together on the couch watching Letterman on TV...

...trying not to listen to the RHYTHMICALLY SQUEAKING BED SPRINGS in the next room. Jonny turns up the volume on the TV.

OUR VIEW drifts away from the kids, leaving them for now...

INT. TARZEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Tarzen and a sun-glassed Lianne (hiding her bruises) play pool. Friends and lovers again. We drift away from them as well...

And suddenly we're...

TRACKING WITH A CARLOAD OF TEENAGERS AT NIGHT, one leaning out the window, gun in hand, hair blowing wildly... He shoots.

## TRACKING WITH BULLET

as it ROCKETS toward the "You are entering Slaughter" sign. BAM! Sign has a new bullet dent. Thunder EXPLODES on the soundtrack.

CUT TO:

ANOTHER CRASH OF THUNDER AND A FLASH OF LIGHTNING as...

... below us, a line of black limos and equipment trucks, move dirge-like down the winding country highway.

INT. ONE OF THE LIMOS - DRIVING

A foursome in the back of the limo, kids (basically) being ferried along, drinking brandy. Foremost amongst them is 22 year old Annabel Lee. Not raining yet, but about to.

The others in the limo are:

ORVILLE--head roadie--big belly, big beard, kid-like blue eyes.

MIKE HAMMOND--a handsome black man in a cowboy hat.

KIM--back up guitarist--an earthy, freckled girl-woman, who we just know likes sex a lot.

They're all playing Texas hold 'em. Orville tosses three bucks into the pot.

KIM

Orville ain't a bluffer. Must have something.

Kim plays a riff on her guitar. Just fucking around.

KIM (CONT'D)

Or thinks he has something.

ANNABEL

Medium pair probably. Looks good til a royal shows up on the flop.

ORVILLE

We playing poker or is this a quilting circle?

Mike CRACKS UP. Annabel wiggles her fingers at Orville.

ANNABEL

I can read your mind, cuz.

ORVILLE

You knew what I was thinking, you'd have me arrested.

ANNABEL

Shit, Orv, you're Ferdinand the bull. Tries to look all fierce while he smells the daffodils.

KIM  
Still living with mom and dad in  
Slaughter, right?

The girls just love giving Orville shit.

ORVILLE  
Yeah... the three days a year I'm  
not on the road.  
(lays down cards)  
You all gonna have to stop teasing  
me, you're going to make me cry.  
Ten high.

KIM  
Shit, he was bluffing.

Orville takes the pot. Glances out the window.

ORVILLE  
You feel a cold wind just pass  
through you?  
(off Annabel's look)  
Just passed your ancestral home.

Annabel gets up to look out the side window.

A SWAMP DOTTED WITH CATTAILS sweeps past, dead trees stranded  
like people in a flood.

ORVILLE (CONT'D)  
See that apple tree. Over there.

Beyond the swamp, we make out an apple tree, a half collapsed  
farm house... all gone to nature.

ANNABEL  
I don't remember anything.

Caught up in the emotion of the moment. Annabel leans her  
head against Orville, wondering about her past. Something  
touching about the closeness of these cousins.

THE LINE OF LIMOS

has turned off the road into a rural rest area--half a dozen  
picnic tables in the shade of pine trees.

ORVILLE  
(off Annabel's look)  
Chop Suey time. Your mom's got a  
schedule.

CUT TO:

A truck ROARS past the roadside rest stop, revealing...

... ANASTASTIA LEE, doing her Tai Chi between picnic tables.  
*A slow motion fight with some invisible God only she can see.*

At a nearby table, Annabel plays backgammon with Kim.

ANGLE ON OPEN BACK OF EQUIPMENT TRUCK

Orville helps re-tie equipment that's shifted on the journey. Very at home doing this work, the boss here.

SARAH approaches--a pretty tomboyish roadie with a rose tattoo on her exposed shoulder.

SARAH

First lady wants to see you.

THE FIRST LADY

is flushed from exercise. She drinks from a plastic water bottle. Notices Orville approaching with his knapsack.

ANASTASTIA

I'd like some fairy dust for the journey.

Orville opens his knapsack. Inside are many tightly sealed bags of pot. All sizes. He's clearly a dealer.

Anastastia takes the proffered joint, starts to give him cash.

ORVILLE

I don't sell to you, ma'am.

ANASTASTIA

I've known you since you were a pea.  
Please don't call me ma'am. Orv?

Orville is heading back to the equipment truck. This is hard for Anastastia, asking a favor.

ANASTASTIA (CONT'D)

Keep an eye on your cuz while we're  
in Slaughter, okay?

(beat)

This here's the 6th circle.

And suddenly, THE RAIN is pouring down, coming in bucket-fuls. Everyone runs for cover.

CUT TO:

VIEW THROUGH LIMO WINDOW

OUR VIEW floats past craggy fields... KIDS playing in puddly driveways on motorized scooters... the 6th circle...

... We're passing the old Slaughter mine now... crumbling concrete entrance, the whole area cordoned off with barbed wire.

FWOOP! The image is abruptly shut off by the limo blinds SLAMMING down. We are:

INT. ANASTASTIA'S LIMO - DRIVING

sealed herself from the landscape of her birth, as the rain PIT PATS on the roof of the limo. Annabel SNUFFS OUT the last of her joint, eyes already rimmed with red.

But the marijuana hasn't relaxed Anastasia one bit. Her face is fraught with worry.

CUT TO:

EXT. VAST FAIRGROUND IN SLAUGHTER - EVENING

The fairground has been converted to an outdoor concert arena. Muddy puddles reflect the sunny sky. The squall is over.

ROADIES set up equipment on a makeshift stage.

TARZEN, swapping stories with THE CHIEF OF POLICE, waves A CRISP, GUILILESS MAN IN HIS THIRTIES over.

TARZEN

'Lo, congressman. Great event, huh?

CONGRESSMAN

Sure is.

Called over like a little boy. And *acting* like a little boy too, all nervous and fidgety.

TARZEN

Unnerstand there's a bill coming up giving land off highway 80 to the county. I'd intended to build an itty bitty motel on that land.

CONGRESSMAN

Well, I sure will take that into consideration, sir.

TARZEN

Seems we give an awful lot of shelter to our flying squirrels, might wanna give a little shelter to our humans too.

The two older men staring holes into the congressman.

TARZEN (CONT'D)

I know you do the right thing.

Tarzen goes back to talking to the chief of police, dismissing the congressman just like that.

THE ARENA starting to fill up now. The moment before the moment.

Feron flirts with Sarah (the roadie with the rose tattoo) setting up mikes on stage... making her CRACK UP. OUR VIEW drifts to...

... ELI walking with the his siblings, who are all over him, jumping on his back, hot with excitement. Eli's gaze falls on...

THE STOOP OF A TRAILER

where ANNABEL sits with Orville, sharing a smoke.

Eli stares at Annabel, taken by her. She glances at him and he quickly looks away.

Annabel says something to Orville, turns back to Eli, eyes a limpid blue. Very taken by him as well.

Eli glances back at her and she's still looking at him. *The way it's worked since the time of the Pharaohs.*

The moment is smashed into oblivion by the arrival of Eli's mom.

DONNA  
(to her young uns)  
What the hell you doing here?  
Didn't I tell you to stay on home?

JONNY  
Eli taking us.

DONNA  
The hell he is. Put away the dog. I say you can have a corn dog?

JONNY  
E did.

Jonny is holding a corn dog.

DONNA  
We ain't taking nothing from him.  
Y'all comin' with me, I can keep an eye on you. C'mon, git, git! I mean it. Don't mess with me right now. Mama's angry.

Jonny glances at Eli, who gives a reluctant nod.

Jonny throws out the corn dog, heads off with his mom (but constantly turns back to look at Eli).

Eli is left alone at a concert he never wanted to attend.

COLORED LIGHTS sweep over the audience. THE DRUMMER pounds out A BEAT that gets everyone's blood thumping.

In the background, we make out Anastastia and Annabel making their way to the stage. APPLAUSE grows around them. It's beginning.

TARZEN

takes off his sunglasses, catches Anastastia's eye, smiles a humorless smile.

(Something happens in that glance. Anastastia definitely knows him and she is definitely NOT pleased to see him.)

CLOSER - ANASTASTIA

Anastastia turns sharply to MASON WILLOW (her head of security) walking alongside her--a small man, with a perennial four days growth of beard and mean black eyes.

ANASTASTIA  
Put extra eyes on my baby tonight.  
I don't want her wandering.

Mason nods.

Anastastia shakes off the moment... breaks into a big ol' smile as she and Annabel ascend the stage. She surveys the crowd.

ANASTASTIA (CONT'D)  
Well, THANK y'all for HAVING me--yee?!

The APPLAUSE grows to a ROAR. Anastastia holds up her hand.

ANASTASTIA (CONT'D)  
Y'all wanna hear some real country?

The band starts up and Anastastia and Annabel begin to sing. The song is pretty, but calculated. Commercial dross really.

Annabel's eyes fall on Eli and she noticeably flushes, rattled by the intensity of his stare.

ELI

stares and stares, caught up in her innocent/not so innocent gorgeousness.

And then something else catches his attention.

ELI'S POV - SEVERAL FEET AWAY

Jonny sits on Ajax's shoulders, eating a brand new corn dog, raptly watching the concert as Ajax dance/sways beneath him... totally happy on Eli's enemy's shoulders.

Changed his pack... just like that. A chill goes down Eli's spine. His eyes go dark.

Annabel continues to sing, not seeing Eli now, wondering where he went.

SMASH CUT TO:

STEAMING GUTS

spill out of a SCREAMING pig--a violent and ghastly image, made all the more ghastly because of its casual nature. We are:

OUTSIDE ELI'S CABIN - EVENING

PIG BLOOD sluices through a wooden culvert into a basin. Far off, we hear the muted SOUNDS of the concert.

RAY AND REX drag/carry the gutted pig (still twitching a bit) to a wooden baking box set up over a stone grill.

Beyond them, A CHEVY pulls to a dusty stop and Eli gets out.

RAY  
(looks over shoulder)  
Thought you was yippie yai yaying  
with the first lady.

ELI  
First lady of country, shit.  
(beat)

(MORE)

ELI (CONT'D)  
 She did for country what panty-hose  
 did for sex standing up.

Ray and Rex CRACK UP. But not Eli. Not in a good mood right now.  
 Walking with them, lugging a cooler of ice toward the grill.

RAY  
 You okay, E?

REX  
 He on his *cycle* right now.

Eli smiling now, amused despite himself. The men lift the pig  
 the last few feet to the baking box.

RAY  
 (mock sings)  
 "Blonde hair and eyes of blue,  
 Big arm and anchor tattoo,  
 I ain't yer gal but I'll be true..."

Ray and Rex sing together (they've done this before), their  
 voices a DEEP BASS.

RAY AND REX TOGETHER  
 "... if I sit on yer lap 'stead of  
 Sue."

They heave the pig into the baking box.

Eli is still in his own dark thoughts. Glances at the red sea of  
 pig blood in the basin, still warm from life, steam rising...

HIS OWN REFLECTION

wobbles in place in the thick blood. Like a peek at the future.

CUT TO:

EXT. CONCERT AREA - NIGHT

It's over. Roadies clear the equipment from the stage. A lone  
 drunk pukes over the fence of the arena.

The moment after the moment.

ANNABEL'S TRAILER

Annabel exits the trailer. Sees TWO SECURITY GUYS at a picnic  
 table, pretending not to look at her.

Annabel turns to her trailer.

ANNABEL  
 Mama, am I being goddam watched?

Anastastia is staring at her out the window of the trailer.

ANASTASTIA  
 No, you are not being *watched*.

Like it's the silliest question in the world.

ANNABEL  
Then what are you doing right now?

Anastastia moves away from the window. Annabel stares at her *keepers* on the picnic table.

ANNABEL (CONT'D)  
How y'all doing?!

The men wave awkwardly at her, look away shyly. They don't like this either.

ANNABEL (CONT'D)  
(beneath her breath)  
Harpoon me with a stick.

Sarah (the roadie with the rose tattoo) passes Annabel's trailer.

ANNABEL (CONT'D)  
Hey, Sarah, where you going?

SARAH  
Party in Slaughter.

Annabel turns from her *keepers* on the picnic table to the trailer where her mom is waiting for her.

ANNABEL  
Can I come too?

SARAH  
Shut up!

ANNABEL  
(hushed voice)  
I'll meet you out back of the trailer.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S FORD PROBE - DRIVING

Annabel sits in the passenger seat, quietly conveyed, face turned toward the side window...

... watching THE MOON dance through the trees, appearing and reappearing in forest gaps. A primal image. Suddenly:

THE FORD PROBE

pulls to a bumpy stop off road, beside dozens of other cars in the woods, looking like giant bugs under the towering pines.

EXT. THE WOODS - NIGHT

Everyone walking now,. Distant PARTY NOISES from deep in the woods. Annabel turns at the sound of A ROARING MOTORCYCLE.

## THE MOTORCYCLE

races through the trees, SKIDDING over a natural (skinny) rock bridge over a gorge. It barely makes it across.

The driver skids out onto safe earth, lets out a relieved WHOOP. Annabel is all eyes. She's never seen a world like this.

## AHEAD OF THEM

is Eli's cabin, people all around, drinking, LAUGHING. A good, wholesome, wild evening ahead.

Sarah pauses to put her hand under her jeans, rubs herself, then daubs her neck as if it were perfume.

SARAH  
(grinning at Annabel)  
Essence a la me.

She heads toward the party, Annabel following.

## INT. ELI'S CABIN

Annabel and Sarah enter. The cabin is filled with a mix of people. Some of them scruffy, some very straight looking.

Feron spies Sarah and Annabel, heads over, grinning.

FERON  
Welcome to our little midst.

CUT TO:

## INT. CABIN - A BIT LATER

Feron has Sarah in the corner and is talking a blue streak at her, totally, unapologetically on the make.

Sarah enjoying every minute of it. She's a girl who says "Shut up" a lot. We keep hearing it. "Shut UP!" "Shut UP!"

## EXT. CABIN - SAME TIME

Annabel wanders out onto the front yard, feeling invisible. It's a fairly wholesome scene. People passing with plates of fresh baked pork and corn on the cob.

## AT THE EDGE OF THE YARD

Tarzen (a coterie around him) is telling some sort of anecdote, getting everyone LAUGHING.

Orville is here too, unseen by Annabel, talking to friends...

Just beyond the CHATTER, we hear distant GUITAR MUSIC. Annabel moves to the side of the cabin, drawn by the music.

## AROUND THE CORNER

we make out FIGURES around a small fire, Eli and a couple of others with guitars... jamming, just fucking around. Everyone playing off each other, very casual, but good...

... Eli gets into some serious guitar picking and the others, in deference to his talent, immediately become supporting musicians.

Annabel can't take her eyes off him.

## ELI'S FINGERS

on the strings are like wild animals bounding through the woods... following the grace of instinct.

He begins to SING a bit. His VOICE has a ragged, tuneful simplicity that goes right to the heart.

ANNABEL (in the background)

is rooted to the spot. She's never heard music so soul-achingly good, sung purely for the pleasure of it.

## THE GROUP

has stopped playing, fucking around now, giving each other shit. Eli senses he's being stared at, looks up...

... and Annabel quickly covers... heads toward them as if she had never been just standing there.

ELI  
(smiles)  
Hey there.

Moves to give her sitting room.

Both of them feeling they know each other by now, neither able to act like it. Someone hands her a jar of moonshine with cut up peaches in it. We hear, "Put hair on your chest."

ANNABEL  
I don't know if I want hair on my chest.

But she takes the jar, takes a sip, winces. Someone says, "Don't be a puppy." She takes another sip, meeting the challenge.

ANNABEL (CONT'D)  
(to Eli)  
I swear, if I had my eyes closed,  
I'd a thought you were three people  
playing three guitars.

ELI  
Carpooling.

ANNABEL  
Carpooling, huh?

Smiling at him. A challenge in her eyes. Eli lifts up the guitar again. Plays.

ELI  
One melody goes a bit slow.

Plays another, between the beats of the first.

ELI (CONT'D)  
This one simple but quick.  
Carpooling the tunes, one in the  
front... two in the back.

Playing three melodies now, each inside the tempo of the  
other, his fingers moving a mile a minute.

ANNABEL  
(stunned)  
Screw me.

The men glance at each other. They'd like to take her up on it.

ANNABEL (CONT'D)  
Can I?

She takes someone's guitar. Starts to play a slow tune.

ANNABEL (CONT'D)  
Now I gotta play a faster tune in  
between the beats, right.

She starts to do that, but the tunes get all over each other.  
Eli goes behind her.

ELI  
I'll start, then you take over.  
(an aside)  
You got a nice way with the strings.

Annabel plays the slow tune again. Eli reaches around her,  
plays the faster one, the two tunes playing off each other.

ELI (CONT'D)  
(soft)  
Ready? I'm gonna let go now and you  
take over.

Annabel is very aware of his physical presence behind her.

ANNABEL  
I'm ready.

Eli stops playing. Annabel takes over, playing two melodies  
now, getting into it.

Eli is still leaning over her. He starts to play a third  
melody, this one real slow, slower than all of them.

ANNABEL (CONT'D)  
Shit.

It's wild. One guitar. Three melodies. She starts to take  
over... does it for a second... then loses it.

ANNABEL (CONT'D)  
Damn it.

Tries again. Not going to let it go. We get a sense of the resolve in this girl.

She gets it.

ANNABEL (CONT'D)  
(grinning ear to ear)  
Shit.

ELI  
Carpooling.

RAY  
Three trains running. What the old blues guys used to call it.

And now Annabel's playing another tune, having fun with it. We hear a guest say, "Old Hank," recognizing it.

Eli starts to play the same tune but with his own twist.

The two smiling at each other. They play for awhile together. They could probably do this for a long time.

ANNABEL  
(starts to sing)  
"Hear that lonesome whippoorwill,  
it sounds too sad to cry..."

The old Hank Williams classic, "I'm so lonesome I Could cry." Her voice is plaintive and beautiful. A bit thin, but the thinness adds to the aching melancholy of the song.

Eli joins in. We're listening to a real duet now, as far from the duet Annabel sang with her mother as this cabin is from Annabel's gated community in Nashville.

Neither trying to do anything great. Just playing and singing.

ANGLE ON TARZEN

surrounded by the usual noisy crowd... but aware only of Eli and Annabel. He stares at them with a strange intensity, seeing a whole future neither would ever dare imagine.

A RUSTLING NOISE

THROUGH THICK FOLIAGE

we dimly make out Ajax (Eli's mom's pot-dealing boyfriend). handing money to Orville, moving off with a thick baggy...

... Orville heading off... pauses... considers staying at the party... then moves on toward his car. His business is over. Is this why he was here in the first place?

ANGLE ON TARZEN

He saw this covert moment, files it away... turns his gaze back to the guitar circle. Bigger fish right now.

CLOSER - GUITAR CIRCLE

Eli and Annabel in the thick of it. A GUEST comes up to Eli, whispers something in his ear.

ELI  
(puts down guitar)  
Excuse me.

He holds eye contact with Annabel. Brazenly.

ELI (CONT'D)  
I'll see you later.

Annabel holds eye contact too. Her neck is flushed.

Eli passes Tarzen and Tarzen takes him by the shoulder.

TARZEN  
She's not your people.

ELI  
Don't know what you mean.

TARZEN  
You can't hear me now 'cause you're  
in the thick of it.  
(beat)  
I'm saying you should stay with the  
folks who love you.

Tarzen lets Eli go on. A deep sadness in Tarzen's gaze.

TARZEN (CONT'D)  
Tuck it away, son.

AT THE EDGE OF THE WOODS

Eli joins Rex. Both stare through the trees at the rock bridge. We make out CASE (the guy tweaking in Ajax's bedroom earlier) talking to Feron (on his bike), Feron a bit lit now. Case looks pissed.

ELI  
Feron gets into it with Case, let  
me know.

THROUGH THE TREES

Feron races across the rock bridge on his motorbike. He pops a wheelie at the end, skids into a WHOOPING 180 on safe dirt.

INT. ELI'S CABIN - BATHROOM - SAME TIME

Annabel enters Eli's bathroom. Taking a moment alone. Stares at herself in the mirror. Hesitates...

... then reaches under her jeans like she had seen Sarah do earlier, touches herself, then touches the same finger to her neck. We see the moisture there. It glistens.

She immediately thinks better of it. Washes it off, blushing a bit. Washes her hands.

She flushes the toilet, even though she hadn't actually peed, and leaves the bathroom.

INT. HALLWAY OF ELI'S CABIN - SAME TIME

Annabel exits the bathroom. She notices a half open door away from the party proper. Hesitates... heads toward the door.

EXT. WOODS - ROCK BRIDGE - SAME TIME

A motorcycle REVS its engine. Spewing Black exhaust. Atop the bike, sits Case, eyes a chemical haze.

Through the smoke, we see Feron shouting something. Men drink moonshine around us. It's getting out of hand.

And Case is off... racing over the rock bridge. Eyes crazy. The back wheel SKIDS on the soft rock, goes over.

Case leaps from his motorcycle, trying to make it to a tree jutting from the side of the ravine. Grabs it, loses his grasp.

The motorcycle CRASHES on the rocks below.

CASE

bounces off the side of the ravine and then lands with an awful thud on the rocks below. BELLOWS in pain, holding his leg. MEN race down to the bottom of the gorge.

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE RAVINE

an ashen Case lifts up his jeans. Part of his shin bone protrudes from the skin.

Ajax lifts him up. Someone else lifts his legs.

CASE  
Jesus goddam! Watch it!

Every movement of the leg hurts like a motherfucker.

INT. AJAX'S CAR

PEELING OUT. Case lies in the rear of the car MOANING in pain. He ties his shirt tight around his leg into a makeshift tourniquet.

Takes a packet of powder out of his pocket, gives himself a snort. Eyes burning. Red-rimmed already.

AJAX  
Think Feron put oil on your wheel.  
The freak.

Case's eyes go wild.

CASE  
Turn the car around!

AJAX  
No we ain't. We're getting you to  
hospital.

Case's eyes are lit in an amphetamine glare.

EXT. PARTY - SAME TIME

Relatively calm... though a lot of people are drinking. Feron emerges from the woods with some other guys.

ELI'S CABIN - ELI'S BEDROOM- SAME TIME

The PARTY CHATTER is muted here. Annabel moves through the room... taking in Eli's living quarters.

The bed. Green army blanket taut as a drum. Guitar in corner. Another (beat-up) guitar held up by nails on the wall.

ELI'S VOICE  
That's my daddy's guitar.

Annabel turns from staring at the guitar on the wall. Eli has just entered the room. His eyes are a quiet blue.

ELI  
He taught me to play while he was  
in prison. I'd visit and the two of  
us would sit across from each  
other, playing our guitars and  
staring at each other, not saying  
anything.

ANNABEL  
(voice breaks)  
It must be nice to remember loving  
him that much.

ANGLE ON ELI AND ANNABEL

Both know exactly what's going to happen, wanting it to happen as much as they've ever wanted anything to happen.

Eli moves toward her and Annabel practically charges him. A hunger in the kissing. Immediately sexual. Everything pent up in their lives released in the kiss.

Their bodies press up against each other. Annabel's back is against the wall. Eli undoes her blouse, still kissing her.

Annabel is breathing heavily, hardly able to get the words out.

ANNABEL (CONT'D)  
I didn't shower.  
(tries to laugh it off)  
I probably stink.

This doesn't impact Eli one bit. He lifts her blouse over her head. We glimpse hard nipples under a pink bra.

He kisses her breasts, her under arms, taking her all in. Breathing her in. Her legs wrap around his hips.

They kiss and move against each other... hungry for each other's bodies.

She gives out a LOUD MOAN... collapses with her head on his neck, arms around him. Begins to laugh.

ANNABEL (CONT'D)  
 Oh my God...  
 (laughs again)  
 That's never happened before.

Staring into his eyes, her eyes shining. He kisses her again. A different kiss, quieter.

The kiss less sexual.. But slowly becoming sexual again. Eli unbuttons her pants, pulls down the zipper.

ANNABEL (CONT'D)  
 (quiet)  
 No... just like this.

They kiss and move against each other, her pants half off.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. YARD OF ELI'S CABIN - SAME TIME

Case moves through the yard, blind to everything but Feron talking to friends ahead of him, eyes lit with a chemical rage. Ajax is a blur behind him.

WITH EACH STEP

THE SPLINTERED BONE in Case's shin pushes out through his skin. It takes a certain kind of rage to not faint from the pain.

Moving fast despite his injury. We catch the GLINT of a knife.

Tarzen staring. Piercing black eyes.

TARZEN  
 (at last moment)  
 Cutter.

Feron whips around and Case is on him. Someone SCREAMS. The two men look like they're embracing, but actually they're in a death struggle, Feron impaled on Case's knife. Case's eyes widen.

No... Somehow, Feron had gotten hold of the knife.

Case is the one impaled. His eyes register this, then go glassy. He slips down Feron's body and lies crumpled on the ground.

INT. ELI'S CABIN - SAME TIME

SHOUTS from outside. Eli and Annabel react... unfurl themselves from each other.

EXT. YARD OF ELI'S CABIN

A crowd has gathered around Case, bleeding to death on the front yard. Someone dials his cell.

Annabel takes a step back. Her face is pale.

ANNABEL  
Is he--is he--

ELI  
(put together what happened)  
I'll take you home...

Ajax stands on the fringe of the scene, staring daggers as Eli leads Annabel away from the scene. This isn't over.

TRAILERS NEAR CONCERT AREA \_ MOMENTS LATER

Eli walks a pale and rattled Annabel to her trailer. They pause before the door.

ELI (CONT'D)  
Can I see you again?

Staring right into his eyes.

ANNABEL  
(quiet)  
You better.

She reaches into her little purse, pulls out a pen and writes her number on the back of his hand.

And they're kissing again. Right back into it. That stage of a relationship. Annabel's voice is breathy, fighting her arousal.

ANNABEL (CONT'D)  
I better go.

He lets her go. She goes in, looks back at him. Hard to end this.

CUT TO:

INT. TARZEN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Darkness, TWO FIGURES are going at it like animals. LIANNE GASPS as Tarzen pulls her hair back, enters violently from behind.

Tarzen pumps so hard it's like he's trying to slam his way through her. He's only partly in the moment. The other part is thinking, planning, his eyes filled with violence and madness.

FADE TO BLACK

FADE IN

INT. LIVING ROOM OF ANASTASTIA'S GATED COMPOUND - DAY

Anastastia and Annabel are tiny figures in the vast elegance of Anastastia's living room, sitting across from each other at a white table, playing scrabble.

They sit in silence for a long moment staring at the board.

ANASTASTIA  
 (finally)  
 We never talked about it. What  
 did you do at that party before  
 that nice man killed that other  
 nice man?

No response. Annabel lays down a word on the board. "Sucks."

ANASTASTIA (CONT'D)  
 I believe that's slang.  
 (beat)  
 We'll allow since it's so apros pro.

Annabel glances at her cell phone beside her on the table...  
 still not ringing. The moment is not lost on Anastastia.

Nothing is lost on Anastastia.

ANASTASTIA (CONT'D)  
 I know those hillbillies can be  
 irresistible with their roll-their-  
 owns and mountain dew breath.

ANNABEL  
 You have something to say, why  
 don't you just say it?

ANASTASTIA  
 The Larkins are a bad fact. Hang out  
 with them, you get pulled into a  
 vortex of shit.  
 (grows quiet)  
 You have no idea how long their reach  
 is. You're just a baby, honey.

ANNABEL  
 (almost a whisper)  
 I'm legal.

ANASTASTIA  
 Talking about yourself like you're  
 some sort of vial in a pharmacy.  
 (beat)  
 Legal, but not child proof  
 apparently.

ANNABEL  
 Does that even mean anything?

Annabel gets up from her chair, heads for the door.

ANASTASTIA  
 Honey, the police don't want you  
 out of this safe haven until that  
 murderer is apprehended.

ANNABEL  
 I didn't witness anything.

ANASTASTIA  
 The murderer doesn't know that.

Annabel stares at her for a second and then, simply, disobeys her. She goes out the door.

EXT. COMPOUND - SAME TIME

Annabel exits the gates of the compound. Immediately TWO UNIFORMED DEPUTIES get out of a squad car parked at the curb.

DEPUTY  
Ma'am, we'd prefer if you didn't  
leave the vicinity.

ANNABEL  
Are you going to arrest me, officer?

DEPUTY  
No, ma'am. This is for your own  
safety.

ANNABEL  
Then I'd like to take a walk.

Annabel begins to walk down the street. The deputies get back in their patrol car and begin to follow alongside her.

Annabel glances furiously at them.

CUT TO:

ELI

is also walking... holding his cell phone before him.. The cell phone reads "No Service"... The words suddenly blip off.

Eli stands at the only spot on his property that gets service--the edge of the woods. He begins to dial.

INT. ANASTASTIA'S HOUSE - SAME TIME

Alone at the table, Anastastia stares at her daughter's RINGING cell for a long moment. Then she reaches for it... answers.

ANASTASTIA  
Hello... No, she's not available. I  
don't expect her back for some  
time, she's away with friends...  
Please don't call this number  
again.  
(eyes burn)  
She does not want to speak to you.

She CLICKS off the phone.

EXT. FIELD OUTSIDE ELI'S CABIN - SAME TIME

Eli stands at the edge of his field. The wind KICKS UP around him, blowing the trees like crazy. His eyes stirred with emotion.

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP - ANASTASTIA

We're so close on Anastastia's face we can see the cracks in her make-up. Her face is a mask hiding the flaws of age. Only her eyes are alive. They are full of churning, scheming life.

OS We hear Annabel returning... a door SLAMMED behind her.

ANASTASTIA (CONT'D)  
(softly)  
Did you have a nice walk?

Annabel does not answer. Might not have heard.

ANASTASTIA'S CRACKED LIPSTICK LIPS

part for a second as if about to say something, then go back to being closed. The lips of a giantess.

INT. ANNABEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Annabel lies on her side in bed in her brightly lit room. Cell phone is in her hand.

Waiting... futilely.

Her eyes are sad, full of defeat. She's been lying like this for some time. She'll be held in this house forever.

SMASH CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP - ELI

driving through the night, the lights of passing lamp posts flashing over him, one after another.

EXT. NASHVILLE - STREET BEFORE ANASTASTIA'S COMPOUND - NIGHT

Eli's Chevy comes to a stop at the end of the street.

Eli takes in the dark windows of Anastastia's compound. The gate. The patrol car parked in front. He takes it all in.

He gets out of the Chevy, stretches like a cat in the cool night air.

INT. COMPOUND - ANNABEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

OUR VIEW moves slowly toward Annabel asleep on her bed.

A SHADOW crawls over her. Annabel's eyes open and A HAND clamps over her mouth. We recognize the bullet tattoo on the wrist. Annabel's eyes light up.

Eli removes his hand.

ANNABEL  
(softly)  
Oh my God... You.

ELI  
Only me.

She grabs his hand as if not sure it can be real... stares at him. Her eyes are quietly urgent.

ANNABEL  
(a whisper)  
Get me out of here.

CUT TO:

INT. ELI'S CHEVY - DRIVING - NIGHT

Eli drives. Annabel sits in the passenger seat, head resting on Eli's shoulder. Totally trusting him. Eli's eyes are soulful and quiet...

... feeling the tremendous unburdening responsibility of loving another person.

THE CHEVY

pulls to a stop at Eli's cabin and Eli and Annabel get out.

The cabin door opens and Jonny exits. In the background, we make out his brother and sister running around.

ELI  
(reacts)  
When'd you get here?

JONNY  
Hour ago. Travis gave us a lift to the road.

ELI  
(to Annabel)  
My brothers and sister. Sometimes their mama leaves 'em alone and they come here.

Annabel is surprised but not thrown by this.

INT. CABIN

Eli enters with Annabel. Eli's siblings immediately turn into quiet, staring creatures.

ELI (CONT'D)  
Everyone, say hello to my friend, Annabel Lee.

JONNY  
Hello, Miss Lee.

She stoops down to smile at him.

ANNABEL  
Call me Annabel.

CUT TO:

INT. ELI'S CABIN - LATER

Everyone is playing Monopoly. The kids can't take their eyes off Annabel. Annabel holds up her little steam iron.

ANNABEL  
Watch out, this little steam iron  
has a quest for power.

She rolls the dice... stares up at Eli, eyes shining, seeing this other side of Eli. She could not love him more.

THROUGH THE WINDOW

A CHEVY pulls up in the driveway, much like it did in the beginning of the movie.

Eli sees it. A wave of worry passes over his feature.

ELI  
I'll be right back.

He goes outside.

The group continues to play Monopoly... but everyone is aware of Eli outside talking to the men in the Chevy.

Finally Eli comes back into the house.

ELI (CONT'D)  
Something I have to take care of.  
(to Annabel)  
You be okay here for awhile?

Curiosity in Annabel's eyes, but not wanting to push him.

ANNABEL  
When do these little dudes go to bed?

ELI  
(grins)  
Johnny knows.

JONNY  
(his grown-up look)  
We got one more hour.

Everyone seems sad to see Eli go.

ELI  
I'll be back after bed.

CUT TO:

INT. ANASTASTIA'S MANSION - NIGHT

Anastastia walks along the upstairs hallway in her nightgown. She pauses before her daughter's bedroom... KNOCKS softly.

ANASTASTIA  
(beat)  
Honey?

She opens the door.

INT. ANNABEL'S BEDROOM

The covers have been thrown off Annabel's bed in a hurry.

SMASH CUT TO

ANASTASTIA

pacing the living room, something like hysteria in her eyes. We've never seen her this worked up. She talks on a cordless phone.

ANASTASTIA (CONT'D)

... She's at that Larkin boy's place... Because I know it, I'm her mother... Well, I'm sorry, sir... She's a child I don't care what the law says... She's still a child!

Hangs up in a rage. While talking, she's poured herself a large glass of Bourbon. She downs it in one gulp.

We get a glimpse of the white trash hellion she once was.

CUT TO:

THE NIGHT-BLACKENED INTERSTATE

A Chevy ROARS past beneath us and drifts off into the distance.

INT. CHEVY - DRIVING

Much like the early scene in the Chevy. Rex drives. Eli rides shotgun. Ray and Son is in back.

ELI

Where we headed?

REX

Tarz wants us to put the brakes on a grower eating into his consumer base.

ELI

Shit, when did Tarzen ever care about a grower?

SON

Tonight.

Everyone turns to him, not used to him talking.

Son looks very serious tonight. Dark eyed. Internal. The men ride in silence. No one likes this particularly.

EXT. ROCKY FIELD IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE - LATE NIGHT

The Chevy pulls to a stop near an outcropping of rocks and the men get out. They head toward the boarded up entrance of the old abandoned Slaughter Mine.

Rex pulls off the boards. They enter the gaping mouth of the mine.

INT. MINE SHAFT

A FLASHLIGHT BEAM plays over a generator. Eli flicks a switch and the whole mine comes to pulsing life... lights shining down from bare bulbs in the ceiling.

The men move through this checkered light, Enter an open elevator.

RAY  
(presses button)  
Third level from the bottom.

The open elevator begins its descent, RATTLING downward into the bowels of the earth. The passing blackness is as pure as death.

The elevator comes to A CLATTERING stop.

INT. MINE SHAFT - A THOUSAND FEET BELOW GROUND

The men walk on a catwalk... head into a heavily mined out chamber. Stop, frozen, hardly believing what they see.

THE CHAMBER

is lit with so many overhead lights it's bright as day. Brighter than day. Bright as a bolt of lightening.

Row after row of the chamber is filled with some of the most succulently beautiful MARIJUANA PLANTS we've ever seen.

They hear A NOISE... go suddenly alert. The mine is silent. Far off we hear the DRIP, DRIP, DRIP of water. That's it.

SON  
Probably just a gas fart.

ELI AND THE OTHERS

move through the chamber... ripping up the plants, putting them in sacks they brought along for the purpose.

Suddenly we hear the KA-CHUK of a shotgun being cranked into action. Eli slowly looks up.

A BIG MAN stands in the doorway, pointing his shotgun at the intruders. We recognize him. It's ORVILLE--Annabel's cousin and best friend.

ORVILLE  
Let's see yo mine rats put your hands in the air.

Eli puts up his hands. So does Rex and Ray. Where the hells's Son? Eli glances around, can't see him.

Eli turns to Orville, recognizing him.

ELI  
You work for Annabel Lee, right?

ORVILLE  
(immediately defensive)  
She don't know nothing 'bout this.

ELI  
How'd you know we'd be here?

ORVILLE  
I was just checking out my plants  
and here you all are, like a bunch  
of silver fish.

Eli tries to think this through. This is way too big a coincidence.

BEHIND A ROW OF PLANTS

Son rises slowly into view, gun in hand. Dead eyes fixed on Orville.

Eli sees Son's gun barrel pointing between a leafy plant.

He throws a plant at Orville, who dodges it, SHOOTs at the same time. Son also SHOOTs. Both men miss.

Eli moves fast. Tackles Son, lifts him to his feet, gun-less now.

SON  
What the--

Orville's freaking out. He points the shot gun wildly at them.

ELI  
We got our hands up. We're going to  
walk on out of here, you never see  
us again.

Orville's answer is to COCK the gun, point it right at Eli.

ELI (CONT'D)  
We were just looking for free weed.  
Heard people growing 'em in caves  
these days. Stumbled into the wrong  
one, I guess.

Orville stares at Eli with popping eyes. Doesn't know whether to believe him or not. Finally decides to believe him.

ORVILLE  
You go stumbling back here, you're  
dead.

EXT. CAVE - A BIT LATER

Dawn lights up the desert landscape. Eli and his men leave the mine. Orville behind them, gun pointed at their backs.

They get into the Chevy and the Chevy drives off. Orville stares after them, then slowly lumbers back into the cave.

INT. CHEVY - DRIVING - MORNING

Sunlight bleaches out the men's tired faces.

ELI  
That wasn't a coincidence. Someone gave  
him a ring. He knew we were coming.

RAY  
Tarz the only one know we were coming.

REX  
Why would Tarz set us up? Undermine  
his own operation.

RAY  
More likely one of us. In cahoots with  
that fat guy on the sly and shit.

The men stare at one another, wondering.

ELI  
What you don't know, you don't know.

RAY  
If it's red, it's red, if it's tall,  
it's tall, if it's a fish, it swims.

REX  
'less it's a dead fish.

RAY  
If it's a dead fish, it's et.

Laughing about it now. Everything returning to normal.

SON

is his usual quiet self, but there's something new in his  
eyes tonight. An extra gravity perhaps.

The Chevy pulls up before Eli's cabin.

REX  
We should tell Tarzen. This thing  
didn't work out.

ELI  
I'll tell him this afternoon.

RAY  
Eli got more important things to  
attend to right now.

The men are staring at Annabel, who has just exited the  
cabin. Eli smiles an ambiguous smile. He gets out of the car  
without saying anything.

The Chevy drives off, all the men looking at Annabel.

ELI  
Where the kids?

ANNABEL  
I drove 'em to school. It's eleven  
O'clock.

Eli nods... liking this. He heads toward the cabin.

ELI  
Your friend Orville's growing pot  
in a cave.

ANNABEL  
You saw Orville?

She's definitely thrown by this.

ELI  
It's all good. We just had a talk.

Annabel puzzles this one out. Files it away. More interested  
in him right now, than his night.

INT. CABIN

Eli and Annabel enter the cabin. This is the first time the  
two of them have been alone. Completely alone. It's a  
significant moment.

ANNABEL  
(voice breaks)  
You tired? You need to sleep?

Eli shakes his head. He leads her into the bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM

The two stand facing each other. Annabel stares into his  
eyes. Without saying anything, keeping her eyes on his eyes  
the whole time, she begins to unbutton her shirt.

Eli kisses her as she takes off her shirt. He takes off his  
own shirt... his pants.

The two get completely undressed. Something ritualistic about  
the moment.

Completely naked, they go into each other's arms. They kiss  
passionately, but unhurriedly.

They have all the time in the world. Eli leads her to the bed.

HIS TATTOED HAND

caresses her breast... moves down her body.

Annabel closes her eyes, then opens them. Staring. A shadow  
rises over her. We see the moment Eli enters her in her eyes.

They move together, eyes open, watching each other, savoring  
the moment as much with their eyes as with their bodies.

EXT. CABIN - SAME TIME

UNIFORMED MEN spread out in the field before Eli's cabin...  
We barely make them out in the high grass of the field.

INT. BEDROOM OF CABIN - SAME TIME

Oblivious to what's going on outside, Eli and Annabel continue to make love.

Tender with one another, lying on their sides, touching every part of each other. Quiet in their arousal.

EXT. CABIN

At least HALF A DOZEN DEPUTIES are spread out before Eli's cabin. Guns drawn, aimed at the cabin.

THE SHERIF'S CAR is parked in the driveway. THE SHERIF himself stands behind the car.

SHERIF  
(loud)  
Eli Larkin! Come out with your hands up!

INT. BEDROOM

Eli pulls aside a curtain, sees the men with guns.

ELI  
(fierce whisper)  
Stay here.

EXT. SHACK

Eli exits his shack with his hands up, wearing jeans but no shirt.

BEHIND HIM

a scared Annabel appears with just a blanket covering her.

The Sheriff approaches Eli, cuffs his hands behind his back.

SHERIF  
You're under arrest for the murder of Orville Wright.

Annabel lets out A GASP. Eli turns quickly to her, stunned eyes... as shocked as she is.

He's pulled into the patrol car. Twists around to face Annabel, stares into her eyes.

ANGLE ON ANNABEL

receding into the distance as the patrol car holding a handcuffed Eli drives away from the cabin. She stands absolutely still... stunned... not knowing what to think...

... but beginning to think the worst. A DEPUTY, left behind to ferry her home, tentatively approaches her. His squad car is a blur in the background.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. MORGUE

Orville lies on a slab. His eyes are open but he is blind to the fluorescent lights shining down on them. There's a small red hole in his temple where the bullet went through.

THE SLAB

is pushed into one of many drawers in the wall of the morgue. He will never be seen again.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE PRECINCT - DAT

A still handcuffed Eli sits in the interrogation room before TWO POLICEMEN.

POLICEMAN #1

We got your finger prints at the murder scene. We got Marijuana plant residue on your clothes I'm gonna bet will match the plants found in the cave. It's pretty simple. You killed him, took his weed...

ELI

I didn't kill anybody.

Someone KNOCKS at the door of the interrogation room. POLICEMAN #2 gets up, talks to someone at the door...

... returns to Eli, looking pissed. He unlocks his cuffs.

POLICEMAN #2

Get the hell out of here.

INT. PRECINCT PROPER

Tarzen comes toward Eli, grinning.

TARZEN

Who's your B.F.F?

Next to him is a SHARP LOOKING MAN in a suit and tie. Clearly a lawyer.

CUT TO:

INT. MERCEDES - DRIVING

Tarzen drives. The lawyer sits in the passenger seat beside him. Eli is in back.

ELI

Must be one helluva lawyer you got there.

TARZEN

Hell, he's just for show. Found him in Broxton. What is it you do again?

The "lawyer" grins revealing a couple of missing teeth.

TARZEN (CONT'D)  
(cracking up)  
Dentist, I think.

Tarzen guides the car onto a dirt road.

TARZEN (CONT'D)  
Dress a stranger in a suit, bring him to the Slaughter police, they assume he's a lawyer. Goddam rubes. Fact is, they had no case against you once I informed them where you were last night.

ELI  
Where was that?

TARZEN  
Quail hunting with me, goddam it. Ain't that right?

"LAWYER"  
Yup.

TARZEN  
I enjoyed our night of quail hunting, didn't you?

Eli stares at him, wondering where this is going.

TARZEN (CONT'D)  
Only killed one quail... but he was a big one, huh?

A chill goes down Eli's spine.

ELI  
You mean Orville?

TARZEN  
I don't mean anything. I'm just talking. I'm in a good mood, I talk. Been like that since I was a kid. That's right, I'm your alibi, son. Who's your bee ef ef, huh?

Reaches back to slap Eli's head.

TARZEN (CONT'D)  
Thing about alibis, though, they're loose constructions. You say, officer, I just felt sorry for that boy, saw him in prison and my heart went soft and all I could think was, how can I help him get out? Who the hell goes night quail hunting anyway? Not that I'd ever do that. Go back on my word. My word is my bond.

TARZEN'S EYES in the rear view mirror bore into Eli's.

TARZEN (CONT'D)  
 This isn't all generosity, I'm not  
 ashamed to admit that. You are a  
 valuable asset to me. And I'm  
 protecting my asset.

ELI  
 You don't own me.

TARZEN  
 You sound like a teenager saying  
 that. You don't own me. Something a  
 teenager would say. Fact is I do. I  
 own you.

He pulls the car to a stop. Nothing but a swamp with cat-  
 tails on both sides of the road.

(Is it the same swamp Orville pointed out earlier? The swamp  
 where Annabel's "ancestral home" once stood? Could be.)

TARZEN

turns around to face Eli.

TARZEN (CONT'D)  
 Where I go, you go. Where you go, I  
 go. Maybe you'd rather go to  
 prison, huh? Genetically  
 predisposed to prison. Is that it?  
 (off Eli's look)  
 I understand. It's hard. I have  
 something over you, you got nothing  
 over me.

He exits the car.

TARZEN (CONT'D)  
 Come on out. Both of you.

EXT. SIDE OF ROAD - DUSK

Eli and "the lawyer" join Tarzen at the edge of the swamp.  
 Tarzen's taken out a gun.

TARZEN  
 I'm going to do you a huge favor.  
 This is an act of generosity and  
 altruism--

In mid-sentence, he shoots "the lawyer" in the head. He does  
 this with the casual grace of hitting a stray beach-ball that  
 came his way.

He doesn't even look at "the lawyer" as he falls into the swamp.

TARZEN (CONT'D)  
 Even the balance. You got something  
 on me, same as I got on you now. You  
 witnessed me killing another man.

Eli is frozen in a kind of horror. Tarzen stares emotionally  
 at his nephew.

TARZEN (CONT'D)  
 I need to know you're good with  
 this. You've been kicking at the  
 stable door recently.  
 (beat)  
 Can you say that? I'm good with  
 this?

Eli is staring at the swamp where "The lawyer" lies face up,  
 blood pooling around him.

Turns to Tarzen, eyes burning with fear and anger. Tarzen's  
 eyes are a feral warning.

TARZEN (CONT'D)  
 Careful, this is a life and death  
 moment.

Eli stares and stares at him, knowing his uncle has him, but  
 not wanting to say it. It kills him to say it.

ELI  
 (finally; beneath his breath)  
 I'm good with this.

TARZEN  
 Gimme a hug.

He takes a step toward Eli, opens his arms, lets the hand  
 holding the gun dangle a bit.

Eli stares at the gun... tempted. Tarzen sees this. Smiles  
 just the littlest bit.

Eli steps forward, gives him a hug. Tarzen puts his arms  
 around his nephew, pats his back as if to say everything's  
 going to be alright.

CLOSE-UP - TARZEN

deep in the hug. His eyes go soft. The hug seems to have  
 actual meaning to him. Given the circumstances, it's one of  
 the creepiest expressions we've ever seen.

CUT TO:

INT. SQUAD CAR - DRIVING

Annabel is being ferried home.

A SINGLE DEPUTY up front, driving. Annabel sits silently in  
 back. She's clearly been crying, but now she's still. She  
 seems to be in some sort of shock.

DEPUTY  
 Long night, huh?

Annabel doesn't answer. Might not have heard.

THE SQUAD CAR

pulls up before the gates of Anastasia's mansion.

## ANGLE ON DOORWAY OF MANSION

Before the squad car comes to a complete stop, Anastasia is out the door. She must have been waiting and watching.

Her face is a wreck. We've never seen her like this. No make up. Bags under her eyes. She's clearly been up all night.

She's dressed in black (in honor of Orville we assume.)

## ANNABEL

exits the police car. She stands frozen for a moment, still in shock. She sees her mother in black... and loses it.

She runs crying into her mother's arms. Anastasia puts her arms around her daughter, holds her for a long moment.

## ANASTASTIA

There. It's okay, baby. It's okay.  
You're home, baby.

She begins to lead Annabel toward the house. Annabel complies... back in her mother's arms (or clutches) again...

... but at the door, she casts one last *fearful, weary, hopeful, yearning* glance at the outside world.

FADE TO BLACK