

A NOBLE TRUTH

FADE IN:

INT. NEW YORK - TV STUDIO - OFFICE - DAY

Network news pundit, TRACEY MORRETTI, 32, with an award-winning smile, sits behind a desk in his office without said smile. He pulls a flask of whiskey from a drawer and takes a shot. He does not look happy.

He checks his watch, grabs a remote control, and turns on a television across the room. He starts flipping channels and stops on what looks to be an interview on the AWAKEN NETWORK.

A knock at the door. Off goes the TV; the fake smile returns.

TRACEY
Hey, fellas.

TWO NEWS STAFF MEMBERS, both males in their 30's, enter.

STAFF MEMBER 1
Morretti, where did you learn to
talk like that?

TRACEY
Just smoke and mirrors...

STAFF MEMBER 2
Good god, man, you could convince
TV Land that Charles Manson is just
a bit *quirky*.

They both laugh. Tracey forces a smile.

STAFF MEMBER 1
Remind me never to get on your bad
side.

STAFF MEMBER 2
So you're implying there's a good?

Another knock at the door. A PRODUCER, 60's and refined, pops his head inside.

PRODUCER
Good work today, Trace. The man
upstairs is very appreciative of
the damage control you've been
doing with this Gage thing. Keep it
up!

The Producer winks at Tracey and walks away. Something about this wink seems to trouble Tracey.

TRACEY

All in a day's work.

Staff Member 2 puts a disc in the DVD player.

STAFF MEMBER 2

I need to see this one more time.

ON THE SCREEN:

Tracey conducts a heated interview with news correspondent
BRADLEY KENDRICKS, 35.

BRADLEY KENDRICKS

Thirty kids are fighting for their
lives tonight because of tainted
inoculations they were given made
by Gage Pharmaceuticals--

TRACEY

Fighting for their lives? I'd
hardly call a stomachache, fighting
for their lives. I'm sure
McDonald's put more people in the
hospital the last time they brought
back the McRib.

BRADLEY KENDRICKS

That's funny, doesn't your boss,
Carl Rifkin, own Gage Pharm--

TRACEY

Let me tell you something about
Carl Rifkin: he has a deep love for
money. Do you think such a man
would knowingly create inferior
products that would inevitably hurt
his bottom line?

BRADLEY KENDRICKS

Carl Rifkin is a crook, and should
be tried--

TRACEY

Carl Rifkin is an American patriot
fighting every day to improve the
lives of every man, woman, and
child in this country. If you ask
me, it's people like you who act as
barriers to progress who should be
tried--

BACK TO THE OFFICE

STAFF MEMBER 2

Look, you can see his balls
actually break right there.

He points at Bradley, then ejects the DVD and grabs it.

STAFF MEMBER 2 (CONT'D)

I gotta get this back to Gary.

The interview on the Awaken Network comes back on screen.

ON THE SCREEN:

SAMANTHA TAYLOR, a 30-year-old hipster, conducts an interview
with musician, TIM PASTORIA, 32, dressed in blue-collar garb.

SAMANTHA TAYLOR

Thank you again, Tim, for coming
all the way from Mexico to be on
the show today. We know you don't
like to do interviews.

TIM

It's, uh, okay. I respect what you
do.

BACK TO THE OFFICE

STAFF MEMBER 1

It's, uh, okay...this guy's
certifiable.

STAFF MEMBER 2

All artists are.

STAFF MEMBER 1

He the "Silent Protest" guy?

Tracey gets up and ushers them to the door.

TRACEY

Thanks for stopping in, fellas, but
I've got a lot of work to do...

They leave. He sits behind the desk and takes another shot.

INT. TRACEY'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tracey gets into bed beside his WIFE, 33. He carries a troubled expression.

WIFE

Still?

TRACEY

I don't think I can do this anymore.

WIFE

Do we have to have this discussion every night?

TRACEY

It just doesn't feel right.

WIFE

This is who you are.

TRACEY

This whole house and everything in it was paid for with lies.

WIFE

And you're a great provider.

TRACEY

You're not listening. I--

WIFE

Go to sleep.

She smiles and kisses him, but the worried look is still there as she turns out the light.

LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Tracey sits in an armchair with his computer on his lap. The computer provides the only light in the room.

ON THE SCREEN:

Tracey opens a file titled, "Gage Pharmaceuticals: Carl Rifkin's Clandestine Human Experiment." He scrolls through; it's 20 pages long. He starts typing, then grabs a nearby book and opens it. He looks through it as if to cite something from it, but he stops and closes it.

He goes online, finds the interview with Tim Pastoria, and plays it.

ON THE SCREEN:

SAMANTHA TAYLOR

Tim's latest album, "The Silent Protest" has already gone platinum and shows no signs of slowing down. Why do you think people have been so receptive?

TIM

I don't know. People are tired...tired of being tired, I guess. Maybe this just gives them some hope.

KITCHEN - DAY

Tracey, his Wife, and their DAUGHTER, 2, eat breakfast together.

A knock at the door. Tracey gets up to answer it.

INT./EXT. DOOR - DAY

A POSTAL CARRIER holds a shoe-box-sized package.

POSTAL CARRIER

I've got a package here for a Tracey Morretti.

TRACEY

That's me. You know who it's from? I wasn't expecting anything.

POSTAL CARRIER

(examines the package)
Looks like it's come from Mexico.

TRACEY

Mexico?

POSTAL CARRIER

That's what it says. Sign here.

Tracey doesn't respond; he looks lost in troubled thought.

POSTAL CARRIER (CONT'D)

Sir?

TRACEY

Oh.

Tracey signs and takes the package. The Carrier leaves and Tracey shuts the door.

Tracey's Wife approaches as Tracey reads the package.

INSERT - THE PACKAGE LABEL:

"Tim Pastoria
Calle Cinco de Mayo 1927
Oaxaca, Mexico 68000"

BACK TO TRACEY'S HOUSE

Tracey braces himself on the door knob.

WIFE

Honey? Tracey?

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - DAY - 5 YEARS EARLIER

SUPER: "5 YEARS EARLIER"

A younger Tracey freewheels down New York's chunk of the I-90 on a beautiful summer day.

His 1965 Ford Thunderbird convertible is filled to capacity with his randomly packed belongings.

An upbeat song blares from the radio. Tracey sings along, matching its intensity.

INT. RESTAURANT/BAR - DAY

A younger Tim Pastoria, clean-cut and dressed in the same style blue-collar garb, is on his hands and knees fixing an ice machine in a dive Buffalo restaurant/bar. The bar is nearly empty, save three rowdy working-class drunks, MIKE, JAKE, and ANDY, all around Tim's age, sitting at the bar.

The OWNER, a good-natured but tough middle-aged male hippy, walks over to Tim and pats him on the shoulder.

OWNER

You're a lifesaver, Timmy.

Tim nods. Andy flags down the Owner.

ANDY
I'll take a Long Island.

OWNER
Sorry, buddy, we're out of ice, but
should be up and running soon.

He gestures to the machine.

Though Tim's face is turned away, Andy stares at Tim as if he knows him.

ANDY
Fuck it. I'll take a pitcher of
something cold.

The Owner goes for the drinks. A newscast plays on a television above the bar. The Rowdy Males watch.

ON THE SCREEN:

MALE ANCHOR
...the latest figures show
congressional approval ratings at
an all-time low.

FEMALE ANCHOR
Shocking. In an unprecedented case
in the Buffalo Courts, which has
grabbed national attention, Tiffany
Waters, a history teacher at P.S.
12, is being sued for defamation by
Salem Chemical Corp for encouraging
her students to protest Salem's
recent toxic spill in Black Rock...

The newscast cuts to a shot of TIFFANY WATERS, a disheveled middle-aged woman with wild hair, and thick bags under her sad eyes. She cries into her hands.

BACK TO THE BAR

Jake throws popcorn at the screen.

ANDY
Get a load of that princess.

He blows a few kisses at the television.

JAKE

This country is going to hell with a quickness. What's the point in trying if this is what you get?

MIKE

Fuck it. Serves her right for choosing such a shitty profession.

ANDY

Says the professional dreg of fucking society.

Some popcorn hits Tim. He turns to see where it came from but turns back quickly when he sees the guys.

ANDY (CONT'D)

Tim! Hey, Timmy!

Tim continues working, pretending not to hear.

ANDY (CONT'D)

Hey, fellas, check it out, Mr. Rock n' Roll is too good to say hello.

JAKE

Hey Tim!

He chucks a handful of popcorn at Tim. Tim turns but stays on his knees.

TIM

Take it easy, Jake.

JAKE

See, he remembers us.

ANDY

Nobody's seen you in forever.

TIM

Yeah, how you guys been?

ANDY

Can't complain. We're celebrating Mikey's most recent firing.

JAKE

Fucker fell asleep on his shift-- two guys backed into a loading dock and made off with three crates of power drills while he dozed behind a fork lift. They got it all on camera.

ANDY

Fell asleep? More like, passed out.

JAKE

Just like his old man.

ANDY

Hey, guard this.

He smacks Mike in the back of his head.

MIKE

Quit that shit. Like you should talk, Jake. You haven't been sober since the Music City Miracle.

ANDY

Now there was a real robbery.

JAKE

You should take my cousin up on his offer.

MIKE

I already told you I ain't movin' to Charlotte. I was born in Buffalo, and I'm gonna die in Buffalo.

ANDY

Probably the next time you pass out behind a fork lift.

They all laugh.

MIKE

Besides, the old man would miss me too much.

JAKE

He'd probably stop drinkin'.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Hey, you seen Tracey Morretti, politico extraordinaire?

Tim shakes his head.

MIKE

Is that guy famous yet?

TIM

Oh, I don't know.

ANDY

Not as famous as your bad breath.

Andy fans his nose, then smacks Mike again in the back of the head. Mike punches Andy.

TIM

Well, it's good to see you guys,
but I got a lot of work to do.

Tim turns back to the machine. He gets hit with more popcorn. Tim closes his eyes. He pulls a pen knife out of his pocket and plays with it while breathing rhythmically in what seems to be a strange form of meditation. He then uses the knife to turn a screw on the machine.

ANDY

What's with you, man? Can't say
hello?

JAKE

Hey, everybody said you went crazy,
man, but at least we know you're
okay.

The Owner returns with the drinks.

OWNER

Is there a problem here, fellas?

ANDY

No problem, Wavy Gravy. Just
saying hello to an old friend.

OWNER

Why don't you take it easy?

JAKE

Hey, you taking requests, Timmy?

MIKE

Can you play the "Choke Artists'
Blues?"

The Owner motions to a LARGE BIKER sitting at the end of the bar. The biker gets up and escorts the Rowdy Guys outside.

Tim looks to the Owner as if to say "thank you."

INT. ROADSIDE DINER - DAY

Tracey eats. He watches a *Crossfire*-esque TV show where TWO RABID PUNDITS argue.

ON THE SCREEN:

PUNDIT 1
Tiffany Waters is a threat to
national security--

PUNDIT 2
A threat to national security?
You're unbelievable...

BACK TO THE DINER

Tracey sighs. He flags down a YOUNG WAITRESS.

TRACEY
Hey, can I change the channel?

YOUNG WAITRESS
I'm not really supposed to let the
customers touch the remote...

He pulls a dime out of his pocket and presents it to her with
his charming smile.

TRACEY
There's a big tip in it for you.

She smiles, then walks behind a counter, takes a look around
to be sure her manager isn't looking, grabs the remote, walks
back to Tracey, and hands it to him.

INT. RESTAURANT/BAR - DAY

The Owner walks back behind the bar. He glances up at the TV,
playing the same show Tracey was watching.

OWNER
Man, whatever happened to peace,
love, and people just chillin' the
fuck out?

The Large Biker returns to his seat at the bar.

BIKER
Jerry's dead, man. Get a haircut.

The Owner laughs.

OWNER
Jerry's comin' back, just you wait
an' see.

He looks at Tim, who is packing up his toolbox.

OWNER (CONT'D)

You know we woulda done something
about this shit. Kids these days...

The Owner uses a pitcher to scoop ice from the machine.

OWNER (CONT'D)

You're a magician, Timmy. Your old
man would be proud of you, as hard
to please as that tight-corn-holed
motherfucker was.

Tim smiles. The Owner takes a look at the empty bar.

OWNER (CONT'D)

Now I just need some customers to
serve. Won't be long til I lose
this place. Everybody's leaving
town, and the people that do stay
go for the gimmicks--mechanical
bulls, karaoke, shuffle board--

TIM

You could try a taco bar or pinball
machine--

OWNER

I serve whiskey.

They both smile. Tim finishes packing the toolbox. He
latches it closed. The Owner gives him an embarrassed look.

OWNER (CONT'D)

I feel like a damned fool.

TIM

I know you're good for it.
Whenever things pick up, right?

Tim finishes packing his toolbox. He grabs it off the bar
and starts toward the exit.

OWNER

Don't worry about those sacks of
shit before. Your generation--I
tell ya. You keep 'em honest out
there, Timmy. You're one of the
good ones.

The Owner grabs a bag of food off the counter and walks it
over to Tim.

OWNER (CONT'D)
Almost forgot. For your mother.

Tim smiles and walks to the door.

EXT. RESTAURANT/BAR - DAY

Tim gets inside the cab of a large box truck and drives off.

INT. TRACEY'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT - RETURN TO PRESENT DAY

Tracey tosses and turns in bed next to his sleeping Wife. He hops out of bed and goes down into the

LIVING ROOM

Where he again watches Tim's interview.

ON THE SCREEN:

SAMANTHA TAYLOR
In 2001, Tim released his first album, "Reverse Bedtime Stories," which sold well--well enough for Albatross Records to book him on tour with stops in forty cities. Things were looking up for him, but he suddenly cancelled the tour after playing only his first show. *Rolling Stone* magazine called it "The Breakdown of the Decade," and likened his subsequent disappearance to that of *Pink Floyd* founder, Syd Barrett's. Were they too harsh, perhaps?

Tim takes his time to answer.

TIM
When you're sad, you see sadness everywhere. Impossible to see anything else.

BACK TO THE LIVING ROOM

Tracey rubs his forehead; this does little to ease the strained look on his face.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - DAY - 5 YEARS EARLIER

No more music. Tracey rubs his forehead and stares dead ahead. He looks exhausted and distressed. His gaze shifts to a mileage sign: "Rochester 40, Buffalo 100."

He pulls out his cell phone and makes a call.

EXT. TIM'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Tim parks the truck in front of a working-class home. He exits the truck and walk to the house.

INT. TIM'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Tim's mother, JANE PASTORIA, an aging Flower Child in terrible health, takes a long drag of a cigarette while pumping a fist at the television.

MRS. PASTORIA
Crooks, all of 'em!

TIM
Ma, what'd I tell you about
smoking?

She coughs up some phlegm and spits it into a tissue she has in her hand.

MRS. PASTORIA
You see this? Governor Davis
accepted two million dirty dollars
from big oil during his campaign
last year. They caught the crook.
Back in the sixties, we woulda
raised hell, but kids these days...

TIM
I fixed that stubborn machine at
the Erie Lounge.

MRS. PASTORIA
...Just don't pay any attention to
the world around them. Eh, but
what can you do?

Tim turns on a light and shuts off the television.

MRS. PASTORIA (CONT'D)
You'll never guess who called
today.

TIM
Governor Davis?

MRS. PASTORIA
Close. It was that old weasel
friend of yours Tracey Morretti. I
said, 'Whadda you want?' Can you
believe the nerve of that guy,
leaves you high and dry and
suddenly thinks he can just waltz
back into town and catch up after
all these years...

TIM
If I remember correctly, you
encouraged him to go--

MRS. PASTORIA
...he travels all over the world
and he leaves his friends
behind...and that father of his,
going after that poor Waters woman.

TIM
He didn't leave me. What'd you
tell him?

MRS. PASTORIA
Just that you were working and
wanted nothing to do with him.

TIM
That's not true.

MRS. PASTORIA
That guy's trouble. I've got a
head for these things. He's almost
as bad as you know who, but I'm not
saying anything. Told you I'd
leave her out of it.

TIM
So why don't you then?

MRS. PASTORIA
These people just get up and
leave...leave us behind. What does
anybody think is so great out there
anyway? Just movin' all over the
world like a bunch of unsatisfied
little ants. You almost got away
from me too, but you came back.
You're one of the good ones, Timmy.

TIM
I keep hearin' that.

Mrs. P reaches for the remote but misses by a few inches.

TIM (CONT'D)
Are you drunk?

MRS. PASTORIA
I'm sober as a Rembrandt.

TIM
Did you listen to the doctor at all? He said, very clearly, no alcohol.

MRS. PASTORIA
I'm in pain, sweetie. You wouldn't deny an old woman one of life's few subtle comforts, would you?

TIM
I guess you'd be more comfortable in the ground. Will you at least consider the treatment facility he recommended?

MRS. PASTORIA
Why would I go all the way to Florida?

TIM
Because it would be good for you.

MRS. PASTORIA
I'll tell you like I told him, I was born and raised here in Buffalo. I'm not leaving.

TIM
Look, I gotta get to work.

Tim hands her the bag of food.

TIM (CONT'D)
From Frank. He made it for you.

Tim takes off across the living room.

MRS. PASTORIA
You see the way people treat each other here? People are good to each other here. Why would anybody ever want to leave?

Tim exits.

EXT. TIM'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Tim gets in the truck and drives off.

INT. ANGELO'S SANDWICH SHOP - NIGHT

Tim works the cash register as drunks come and go. A PRETTY LATINA GIRL, 23, walks in and starts talking with a group of friends. Tim watches her.

A TOUGH GUY DRUNK, 22, steps up and orders.

TOUGH GUY DRUNK
Yeah, yo, I'll take a carne asada burrito and some cheese fries.

Tim is still watching the Girl. The Tough Guy snaps his fingers in Tim's face.

TOUGH GUY DRUNK (CONT'D)
Hey, anything there, bro?

TIM
...oh, sorry. What was that?

TOUGH GUY DRUNK
You fuckin' stoned or something?

TIM
No, no--burrito, I got it.

TOUGH GUY DRUNK
What kind of burrito, genius?

Tracey walks through the front door and up to the register.

TIM
Is that right?

TRACEY
Indeed it is, mate.

They smile and shake hands.

TIM
How'd you find me?

TRACEY
Your mom. Had to ask her three times. A ball breaker she is.

Tim points to his crotch.

TIM
A fine dust they are.

TRACEY
She's still got it out for me, huh?

TIM
Yeah, still thinks you left me.
She's crazy. Thinks anybody who
leaves Buffalo is a damned fool.

TRACEY
Well, I came back. What's that
make me?

The Tough Guy snaps his fingers in Tim's face again.

TIM
A damned fool.

Tim and Tracey smile.

TOUGH GUY DRUNK
Am I gonna get that burrito or not?

TIM
Yeah, yeah, sorry...

TRACEY
Tomorrow, dinner my place. My mom
would love to see you.

TIM
I don't know. I'm pretty busy.

TRACEY
Just give me a ring. I'm back in
town...

He holds up his phone.

TRACEY (CONT'D)
...That reminds me. What's your
number?

Tim smiles, grabs the phone, and puts in his number.

TIM
There you go, old buddy.

Tracey smiles. They say goodbye.

TOUGH GUY DRUNK

Jesus christ, why didn't you just
kiss him and get it done with?

INT. TIM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Tim walks inside. It's a bohemian pad with minimal furniture and decor. The floor is littered with books, CDs, and guitars. In place of a sofa is a pile of pillows.

Tim grabs a book and sits on the pillows. He opens the book and starts to read, then looks up at the fireplace. Something about the fireplace seems to be troubling him.

He tosses the book aside, pulls out the knife, and continues his nervous game, opening and closing the blade.

INT. DIVE BAR - DAY

Tim is on his hands and knees again fixing an ice machine. He tries to torque a stubborn bolt, but it won't budge. He gets up and walks to the door.

EXT. DIVE BAR - DAY

Tim walks to the box truck. He climbs inside the back, scans some boxes on a shelf, and grabs one. Tim grabs his knife out of his pocket but doesn't cut open the box. Instead, he puts the box back on the shelf and the knife back away.

He grabs a journal and pen from his back pocket. He opens the journal and uncaps the pen. It looks as though he's got something big on his mind, but he doesn't write anything. He takes a nervous look over his shoulder. Nobody. He struggles for another few seconds before stuffing the journal and pen back in his pocket.

He grabs the box again, then the knife. He opens the blade and cuts the box open, then grabs out a machine part.

Tim's phone vibrates. He pulls it from his pocket and checks the screen: "Tracey." He ignores the call and puts the phone back in his pocket.

INT. TIM'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - DAY

Tim walks into the living room with a bag of food. His Mother is passed out in an armchair--a bottle of whiskey on the table next to her.

Tim grabs the bottle, storms to the back door, and chucks it in the yard. He pulls out his phone and dials.

TIM
Tracey? Hey, it's me.

EXT. TRACEY'S PARENTS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Tim parks the truck in front of a mansion. He hesitates to exit the cab.

INT. TRACEY'S PARENTS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Tim has joined Tracey, Tracey's mother: DIANE MORRETTI, and TRACEY'S GRANDPARENTS for dinner. They sit around a beautiful table in the dining room. Diane, 50 and attractive, is elegantly dressed...and drunk.

MS. MORRETTI
More wine anyone?

TIM
No thanks, Ms. Morretti.

Tracey holds out his glass. His Mother fills it.

TRACEY
Easy, ma.

GRANDMOTHER
So how was the trip back from Columbia?

TRACEY
Long.

GRANDMOTHER
I bet it feels good to finally finish journalism school.

TRACEY
I'll miss the sleepless nights.

The front door can be heard being opened, then closed. MR. MORRETTI, 55 and wearing a suit and tie, joins the party.

MS. MORRETTI
I thought I smelled pussy. Did you run into some skank on the way over?

MR. MORRETTI
No, you were here, dear.

GRANDFATHER
Now you both promised you'd be on
your best behavior for Tracey.

MR. MORRETTI
Sorry, dad, force of habit.

GRANDFATHER
Don't apologize to me, apologize to
your son.

MR. MORRETTI
I'm so very sorry, my dear Boy.

Mr. Morretti winks at Tracey. Tracey forces a smile.

GRANDFATHER
So now that you've graduated, what
are you going to do?

TRACEY
Well, uh, I'm not really sure--

MR. MORRETTI
How would you like to report for
Rifkin Media?

TRACEY
I, uh...

MR. MORRETTI
With the press we've been getting
on this Waters case, one of his
main guys has been all over me. I
could probably leverage you a sit-
down with the big dog. What do you
say, Trace?

TRACEY
That man's a tyrant and, uh--

MR. MORRETTI
That man can make you rich--

MS. MORRETTI
And sore around the ass...

Mr. Morretti gives her a look.

MS. MORRETTI (CONT'D)
...You've still got the paddle
scars from your initiation into
their little club, don't you,
William?

Tracey's Grandmother gives Ms. Morretti a look.

TRACEY
Yeah, well, I'd rather help people--

MR. MORRETTI
Every young person everywhere says
that after graduating. Then they
get realistic. What do you say we
make a few calls tomorrow after we
get you settled in?

TRACEY
Uh...

Mr. Morretti winks again.

TRACEY (CONT'D)
(forces a smile)
...sure.

MS. MORRETTI
Tracey just got back into town, why
don't you give him some time to
adjust before selling off his soul?

MR. MORRETTI
Fine, we won't talk about selling,
Diane. Let's talk buying. How
much did Tracey's latest adventure
cost you?

MS. MORRETTI
Is there something wrong with
helping my son?

MR. MORRETTI
Yeah, if it's helping him into
inertia. You've been paying for
the kid's trips since he graduated
high school. How's he supposed to
learn to be a man when he never
sticks anything out?

GRANDMOTHER
Enough you two!

MR. MORRETTI

A summer in Australia, a semester in London, a year off wandering around South America, this recent jaunt to Madrid...

MS. MORRETTI

What's wrong with the boy learning culture? He certainly doesn't get any from you, William Morretti, White-Collar-Cock-Sucker at Law. And now you're going after this poor woman too. I swear I shoulda left you when I had the chance--

GRANDMOTHER

Enough! Where did we go wrong?

Ms. Morretti pours herself a tall glass of wine.

MS. MORRETTI

So, did you finish early? We weren't expecting you so soon.

TRACEY

Uh, yeah, I must have given you the wrong dates or something...

GRANDMOTHER

Well, it's nice to have you back.

MS. MORRETTI

Nice to have you back, too, Tim. How've you been?

TIM

Well, uh, good, I guess.

MR. MORRETTI

Well, uh...you should speak with confidence. They teach you that right away in journalism school. Am I right, Trace?

MS. MORRETTI

William! (gives him a dirty look)
So how's the music coming, Tim?

TIM

Well, uh...

Mr. Morretti gives him a look. Tim hangs his head.

TIM (CONT'D)
 ...it's alright.

MS. MORRETTI
 (to the Grandparents)
 Tim here is a brilliant songwriter.
 His band went on tour last year--

MR. MORRETTI
 And how'd that work out?

Tim hangs his head again.

MS. MORRETTI
 William!

MR. MORRETTI
 What? It's an honest question.
 That's the problem with you kids
 these days, can't stick anything
 out. It's all about "me, me me."
 I'm telling you, Trace--

MS. MORRETTI
 How dare you talk to him like that!

MR. MORRETTI
 Oh, come off it, Diane. You're too
 sensitive. Look what you've done
 with your own son. Can't commit to
 anything...And, Tim, you're living
 in the best country in the world.
 Why exactly do you need to protest?

Tracey pulls his phone from his pocket and puts it to his
 ear.

TRACEY
 Oh hey--yeah, gimme a sec...

He gets up from the table and walks to the

KITCHEN

He puts the phone away once he's out of sight. He leans into
 the doorway and motions for Tim to come. Tim meets him
 there. Tracey's Parents continue to argue.

TRACEY
 I can't take this shit. Let's get
 out of here.

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

Tim and Tracey sit at the bar. No bartender is present. Tracey takes a look around and sighs.

TRACEY

Ahh, the little city that could...I swear this is the place dreams come to die.

Tim smiles. Tracey glances up at a television playing the evening news. Tiffany Waters is on the screen; she's crying.

ON THE SCREEN:

TIFFANY WATERS

Please...please, I didn't mean anything by it. My husband's sick. I can't take this anymore...

BACK TO THE BAR

TRACEY

I can't take this anymore, either.

TIM

Can't take what?

Tracey hesitates, then points at the television.

TRACEY

This...these people...this town... this country...the fear...the suspicion. We live in the supposed greatest nation in the world and can't stop bickering like little children. I mean, how the fuck could my dad prosecute that woman?

TIM

If he doesn't, someone else will.

TRACEY

Yeah, well not me. This just isn't the way.

TIM

And what is?

Tracey looks him directly in the eyes.

TRACEY

The St. James Way.

TIM

Excuse me?

TRACEY

You ever hear of the Camino de Santiago?

TIM

Nunca.

TRACEY

It's a web of routes all across Europe that run together to some cathedral in Northwestern Spain. People walk it, ride bikes, horses. It's supposed to be a spiritual quest.

TIM

Like a pilgrimage?

TRACEY

Yeah, like a pilgrimage. When I was in Madrid, my buddy Carlos walked it from Leon all the way to Galicia. Said it was the best experience of his life. He met a Buddhist monk from Japan who taught him about the Eightfold Path, karma, reincarnation...

TIM

Sounds like quite an experience.

TRACEY

When he got back to Madrid, he became a Buddhist--said he finally understood the true nature of things. Taught me all he knew. I'd like to take a similar trip, only here in America. Hit the road, head West, have a spiritual experience in the desert, meet people along the way.

The MALE BARTENDER, 27, approaches.

BARTENDER

Holy shit! Big Mouth Morretti and Tim Pastoria.

(MORE)

BARTENDER (CONT'D)
Where the hell have you guys been?
Nobody's seen either of you in
forever.

TRACEY
Hey, man, I've been away.

BARTENDER
Buffalo's been boring without your
bullshit. What can I get ya?

TRACEY
I'll take a pint of whatever's on
tap. What do you want, mate?

TIM
Oh, I don't, uh, drink anymore.

TRACEY
And a water, too.

BARTENDER
Sure thing, fellas.

He goes for the drinks.

TRACEY
So you don't drink or write
anymore, huh?

Tim watches a YOUNG COUPLE sitting together across the bar.

TRACEY (CONT'D)
What are you looking at?

TIM
A fight.

Tracey looks. The two are sitting quietly.

TRACEY
I don't hear anything.

TIM
It's not verbal. Look at her body
language: arms crossed, shoulders
turned slightly away. She's
steaming.

TRACEY
You don't miss a beat, do ya, mate?

TIM
What's with this "mate" crap?

Tracey shrugs his shoulders and gives that award-winning smile.

TRACEY

So, how've things been around here?

TIM

About the same. Someone comes, and twenty people leave.

TRACEY

How's your mom?

TIM

She'd say she's alright, but she's getting worse. She drank before my father died but nothing like after.

TRACEY

That's too bad.

TIM

Yeah, she complains non-stop about her "pain" but the doctors can't find anything wrong with her. I go over every day to check on her. I--

Tracey puts his hand on Tim's shoulder.

TRACEY

Yeah, well things ain't exactly roses at the Morretti household either. I mean, you saw my parents: married and miserable. She's kicked him out so many times, but she won't leave him. I'll never get why people put up with so much bullshit.

The Bartender comes back with the drinks.

BARTENDER

Because they love your company, Trace. That's three dollars.

TRACEY

Three bucks? Damn, I've been in N.Y.C. too long.

Tracey goes for his wallet, but Tim draws first and pays.

TRACEY (CONT'D)

Thanks, mate...So what's the deal with Dan Phillips?

TIM

He O.D.'d last April. Heroin.
That shit's all over town,
man...crack too. You wouldn't
believe how many kids we went to
school with are trifling with that
crap.

TRACEY

Shit.

TIM

You know, when Stephie Freemont
told me about Dan, my first
reaction was to smile. (he smiles)
I couldn't stop smiling. That kid
was my fucking friend and I smiled
when I heard.

TRACEY

I heard Margo Molina got stabbed...

Tim hangs his head.

TRACEY (CONT'D)

...was a prostitute or something?

TIM

...yeah.

Tears well in Tim's eyes. Tracey puts his hands on Tim's
shoulders again.

TRACEY

This country is ripe for
revolution. People are miserable;
they want a change--to believe in
something that works, not all this
vehement negativity...

TIM

Misery can be a great ally.

TRACEY

...I want to get out there. Meet
people, find the real truth, the
truth uniting us, then write a book
exposing the cancers of our society--
greed, apathy, corporate and
political corruption, socioeconomic
inequality--all the forces that
obfuscate the real light. I'm
talking a total overhaul, writing a
complete revolution...

Tim's head pops back up.

TRACEY (CONT'D)
...and I'd like for you to come.

Just then, the Young Couple start shouting at one another. The Man slaps the Woman across the face. Tracey rushes over.

TRACEY (CONT'D)
Don't you fucking touch her!

MAN
How about I touch you instead?

The Man shoves Tracey; Tracey swings but misses. The Man socks him in the eye.

Out of nowhere, Tim busts the Man's face open with a beer bottle. His nose explodes. Blood everywhere. The Man drops to his knees; the Woman screams.

MAN (CONT'D)
You broke my fuckin' nose!

TRACEY
This wasn't your fight, Tim.

The Bartender comes over.

BARTENDER
Why don't you pick up your teeth
and get the hell out?

The Bartender grabs Tim's shoulder. Tim looks ready to kill.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)
Hey, killer, why don't you call it
a night?

Tracey grabs Tim and they walk to the door.

EXT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

Tracey and Tim walk into the parking lot. The Woman runs past them. Tracey walks after her for a few steps then stops.

TRACEY
(almost inaudible)
I'm so sorry...I'm so sorry...

Tracey gets a call. He answers and changes his demeanor.

TRACEY (CONT'D)
Oh, hey, sweetie...uh huh, I'm
back...tonight?

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

Tracey parks in front of a large apartment complex where a pretty hippy girl, MARIE, 26, waits for them on the sidewalk.

TIM
Where we going? I can't do this--

Tim reaches for the doorknob. Tracey puts his hand on Tim's shoulder.

TRACEY
Relax, man.

Marie hops over the side of the car and falls into the back seat. The car pulls away into the dark night.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - NIGHT

Tracey and Marie engage in an animated conversation as the car moves through a decaying Buffalo neighborhood. Tim stares at the broken houses; his face matches their exterior.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

They drive by a party in a dilapidated West Side warehouse. Broken glass, pulsating music, drinks in brown paper bags...

EXT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

The three walk toward the party. Tracey and Marie continue their conversation and don't see that Tim is on the verge of a panic attack. His breathing is labored and brow wet, but he continues moving. They pass a series of characters on their way to the entrance.

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

The warehouse is vast and crowded with hip party members. A live band is playing loudly somewhere inside.

They walk through an enormous foyer with several rooms branching off of it. The party doubles as an art festival, and some of these rooms contain exhibits of various media.

THE MAIN ROOM

Directly ahead is filled with drunken dilettantes, whirling care free to the sexy sound of the live band.

FOYER

The three split up. Tracey heads to the main room, and Marie disappears into a darkened corner to meet with some suspicious looking people. Tim takes a deep breath and wanders into a

SMALL ROOM

Containing a visual art exhibit. People stare, point, and whisper to each other as Tim passes. Tim takes a quick sweep through the room, looking at different paintings, but stops when he sees one piece in particular. He quickly looks away.

Tim forces his eyes back toward the painting but keeps them lowered. He approaches it slowly, eyes rising a little higher with each step.

When he arrives at the piece, he scans it. His eyes move to the bottom corner where the signature reads, "Margo."

The panic returns full force. Tim drops and braces himself on his knees--big, heaving breaths.

INT. TIM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

A fire roars in the fireplace of the dark apartment. Something is thrown into the flames. The fire eats it up.

RETURN TO THE WAREHOUSE

Tim returns to upright position and backs away from the painting. He staggers into the

FOYER

As several people watch his struggle.

MAIN ROOM

Tracey dances with a PRETTY GIRL while the band rocks the room.

FOYER

Tim stumbles backwards into a table, knocking it over. He loses his balance and falls to his knees.

LEAD SINGER (O.S.)

The next song we're gonna play was written by local legend, Tim Pastoria. Wherever you are, Timmy, this is for you.

The guitarist plays a heavy yet melodic riff. Tim clutches his stomach as if someone just kicked it. He pulls himself to his feet.

He takes a deep breath and seems to have regained some composure but quickly loses it again when he looks in the corner and sees a SHADY LOOKING MAN lighting a crack pipe sticking out of Marie's mouth.

Tim rushes over to the table where Marie and the group of Degenerates she's with are sitting, and flips it over. He shoves the Shady Man into a wall.

The Shady Man punches Tim in the face. Tim staggers back and pulls the pen knife out of his pocket but keeps it hidden along his side.

Tracey re-enters the foyer with his conquest but ditches her when he sees his friend in trouble.

Tim approaches his target and opens the blade. He has the look of death in his eyes.

But before Tim has chance to use the knife, Tracey unleashes a massive blow to the Shady Man's face, knocking him unconscious. Tracey grabs Tim by the shoulders.

TRACEY

You alright?

Tim doesn't respond, but he does retract the knife and put it back in his pocket.

TRACEY (CONT'D)

Let's get out of here.

Tracey leads Tim to the exit.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Tracey and Tim sit on a stoop, away from the madness.

TRACEY

It's okay, man. Just take it easy.

Tim breathes heavily.

TRACEY (CONT'D)

Just relax, you're okay.

TIM

These--fucking vampires!

TRACEY

What happened?

TIM

I just wanna go home. I gotta get up early tomorrow--

TRACEY

Okay, okay, I'll get you home...you think anymore about what I said?

TIM

Yeah, I just can't--

TRACEY

Look, the reason I finished school early is because I quit. I never went back when I got home from Madrid. I don't know, man, things just changed. I didn't even want to come back to Buffalo. The only reason I did was to get you.

TIM

Really?

TRACEY

Yeah. I've seen your writing-- heard your music. You're a fucking genius. You have a talent that can benefit this world, but you're pissing it all away here. Maybe you can't see it now, but I do. Look around. This whole fucking country is sick. And we can do something to help it.

TIM

What's your plan?

TRACEY

Nothing definite. Just head west,
then maybe south into Mexico. Got
any cash saved up?

TIM

More than I need.

TRACEY

Passport?

Tim nods.

TIM

My final shows were booked in
Mexico.

TRACEY

I know there must have been a good
reason why you came back to this
place. But there's a lot of life
out there. Just think about it,
okay?

Tim smiles.

TRACEY (CONT'D)

What do you say we grab Marie and
get the hell outta here? I know
you gotta get up early tomorrow.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - NIGHT

Tracey drives Tim and Marie through a decaying inner-city
neighborhood. Tim watches young kids playing in the street.

INT. BAR - DAY

Tim is on his hands and knees working on another ice machine.

INT. ANGELO'S SANDWICH SHOP - NIGHT

Tim works the register as drunks come and go. A fight breaks
out between TWO MALES, and Tim just watches it.

INT. TIM'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Tim enters quietly. He puts a bag of food in her fridge. He
hears her snoring in the living room; she stops.

MRS. PASTORIA

Is that you, Ray? I swear to god
I'm leaving you, Ray. I told you I
wasn't gonna stay in Buffalo
forever...

She continues her delusional ramblings.

As Tim walks over to her, he sees an empty bottle of whiskey,
a bottle of prescription medication, and a syringe on an end
table next to her.

Tim grabs the bottle of pills and throws it against the wall,
then storms to the back door.

EXT. TIM'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Tim walks to a picnic table in the yard and sits on top. He
pulls out his knife and opens it. He drags the blade across
his left wrist but not with enough force to break the skin.

He bursts into tears. He puts the knife away, pulls out his
phone, and dials a number.

TIM

I'm seriously gonna kill somebody.

TRACEY (V.O.)

What are you talking about? You
okay?

TIM

I just need to get the fuck out of
here. I'm in. Let's go. Let's go
right now.

TRACEY (V.O.)

That's my boy! Are you sure?

TIM

I don't want anybody to die.

TRACEY (V.O.)

Alright, I'll be there in a couple
of hours.

INT. TIM'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Tim leaves a note by his Mother's side.

INT. TIM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Tim rushes through his apartment, stuffing random articles of clothing into a large, military-style duffel bag.

When he finishes, he scans the room. He focuses on the fireplace: the same one as in the flashback.

EXT. TIM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Tracey parks in front. Tim throws his bag in the back seat, opens the passenger door, and gets inside.

TRACEY

Ready?

Tim nods. They take off.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - DAWN

Tracey drives; Tim stares at the light coming up over the horizon.

INT. DINER - DAY

Tracey and Tim eat breakfast. Tim looks dazed.

TRACEY

So we're really doing it, huh?

Tim doesn't respond.

TRACEY (CONT'D)

I've been thinking a lot about how we should approach this book. If we're trying to find what unifies people, we should look for what they oppose. If we find their enemy, I think we find our story. In previous generations the lines were clearer. We got no Cold War, no Vietnam, no Kent State--

TIM

And that's a bad thing?

TRACEY

Well, you know what I'm saying.

TIM

What about nine-eleven? Or round two in Iraq? Yes, having a common enemy might unite people but against one another. Isn't the point to find out what brings all people together? Look, I can't deal with this shit right now, alright?

Tracey watches a morning news program on a television above the counter. TWO PUNDITS argue.

TRACEY

The journalist's primary job is to dig for and expose truth, not to entertain or advance a hidden agenda. But you can't blame us entirely for this infotainment shit. The people also have a responsibility to hold us accountable. A healthy democracy both requires and inspires a healthy media. I'm so tired of the tyranny of the loud and pandering.

Tracey looks at a nearby table where an OBSESE MOTHER, 32, argues with her proportionally OBESE DAUGHTER, 12. The Mother checks her cell phone.

TRACEY (CONT'D)

I want to break down society and build it back up the right way.

TIM

And what way might that be?

OBESE MOTHER

Sugar bear, did you just text mommy to 'pass the syrup?'

The Girl nods and smiles. Tracey watches with a look of disgust.

TRACEY

Maybe we're beyond repair...God, I can't wait to get out of the U.S. again.

TIM

So what's our plan?

TRACEY

I say we try to make some ground between us and home for a few days, then we should start interviewing as many people as possible to get to the heart of our story. We could even work some jobs along the way to get a feel for the people.

TIM

Have you ever worked a real job?

TRACEY

I filed papers for the Admissions Office at Columbia for a few months.

TIM

We should get right into this. I don't wanna wait--

TRACEY

Relax. We got all the time we need. I got a few buddies we could stay with along the way. One's in L.A.--said we can crash with him while we get our ideas together. Then we head down to Mexico.

TIM

Why Mexico?

TRACEY

How you going to write about something you've never left? Perspective, my dear boy. Plus Latin women are the sexiest in the world.

TIM

I don't feel so good.

TRACEY

(lying)
You look fine.

TIM

No, I get car sick real easily.

TRACEY

So we'll get a bucket.

EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

Tim pukes outside the parked convertible.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Tim pumps gas as Tracey exits the gas station. Tim's phone vibrates. He checks the screen: "Ma." He ignores the call and stuffs his phone back in his pocket.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - DAY

Tracey drives across flat farmland as far as the eye can see. Tim looks to be easing up. He studies the scenery. His phone vibrates again, but he doesn't even check it.

LATER

They pass a sign welcoming them to INDIANA. Tracey talks on his phone.

TRACEY

Passive-aggressive? This is all about action, which is more than I can say about you...yeah, look, I know he's upset, ma, but maybe I'll get rich this way...fuck Carl Rifkin. That man represents everything wrong with journalism today...maybe I will say that to dad's face. Look, I gotta go...yeah, okay, later.

Tim's phone vibrates again; he checks it and puts it back in his pocket.

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Tracey pulls into a roadside motel and parks.

EXT./INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Tracey unlocks the motel room door, and he and Tim walk inside. They choose beds, then plop themselves down.

TRACEY

Tacos?

Tim grumbles a response. He lies down and closes his eyes.

LATER

Though the light is on, Tim and Tracey are asleep. Both lie fully clothed, including footwear, on top of the covers.

EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

Tim pukes outside of the convertible again.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Tracey finishes pumping gas, and they take off. They pass THREE DRIFTERS/HIPPIES, all early 20's, trying to thumb them down just outside the gas station.

TRACEY

These guys might have something interesting to say.

TIM

Like what? How to roll a joint with a maple leaf? Keep driving.

TRACEY

They might have somethi--

TIM

They had their chance...Keep driving.

TRACEY

Okay, okay...

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - DAY

Tracey drives through more countryside. He plays with a digital voice recorder. He hits a button, and it plays his father's voice, recorded at Tracey's "Welcome Home" dinner.

TIM

That your dad?

TRACEY

The one and only.

TIM

You recorded him?

TRACEY

I was just testing this thing.

His Father starts yelling at his Mother.

TRACEY (CONT'D)

You know, when I was sixteen I caught the old man with another woman. He didn't even try to cover it up. He just winked at me and said, "Welcome to the Club, Trace." I think my mom knew. Every time she'd approach the subject, my dad would evade it, then smile at me and wink. "Welcome to the fuckin' Club," huh mate?

He winks at Tim. Tim looks uneasy with this.

LATER

Tracey drives down a desolate road while talking on his phone.

TRACEY

Where again? Okay, see you soon.

He hangs up.

TIM

I don't know, man. Let's just keep going--

TRACEY

Relax, Kyle's good people.

EXT. FRACKING SITE - DAY

Tracey pulls over when they pass a pipeline resembling an oil derrick sticking out of the earth. KYLE BARTON, 26, an already burned-out journalist, is the only person there; he photographs the wastewater storage pond.

Tracey and Tim exit the car and approach him.

KYLE

The scourge of the fucking earth.

TRACEY

It's nice to see you too. Though I hardly recognize you without skyscrapers in the background.

KYLE

You give yourself too much credit.
(he points to the fracking site)
Welcome to the fucking machine,
broheim. It never fails to amaze
me the new and exciting ways humans
beings manage to fuck up our lives.
Can you believe this filth?

TRACEY

I imagined evil spirits dancing
around a tribal fire or something.

KYLE

Evil can look just like your next-
door neighbor...This the rock star?

Tracey nods.

TIM

Is that an oil derrick?

KYLE

Close. This forced breathing tube
is the lifeblood of fracking,
gentlemen. I hope you brought your
own water.

LATER

Tracey and Tim walk to the T-Bird and Kyle to his truck.

KYLE

I'll drive, fellas.

INT. KYLE'S TRUCK - DAY

Kyle drives; Tracey sits in the passenger seat and Tim in the
back seat. They pass endless farmland in all directions.

KYLE

The E.P.A.'s found elevated levels
of chromium, arsenic, and sulfates
in the drinking water here, but the
gas companies got to the locals
first. Now every Tom, Dick, and
Cheryl Ann in Asswater, U.S.A. is
chugging down contaminated water
and smiling about it, while
defending those demigods just short
of offering up human sacrifices in
their name.

TRACEY

No place is sacred anymore.

KYLE

I'm sitting on a fucking story here, but nobody's giving me dick.

TRACEY

Maybe you should try showing a little cleavage?

Kyle smiles.

KYLE

So that's how you do it...

EXT./INT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

The three knock on the front door. A LARGE WOMAN, 35, answers. She stands behind the screen door.

KYLE

Hello, ma'am, I'm with the Prairie Times, and I'm doing a piece on the local water supplies tainted by Geocentric Gas's fracking in the area. I'd appreciate a few moments of your time to answer some questions.

ANGRY MALE (O.S.)

Who is that, Darleen?

DARLEEN

Just some folks from the newspaper.

ANGRY MALE (O.S.)

Tell them to get off my property.

DARLEEN

Oh calm yourself down. I'm sorry, I'd like to help you fellas, but we haven't had any problems around here.

KYLE

These problems can be insidious, ma'am. You might not even know you have an issue.

Darleen scratches a large rash on her wrist, but does so discreetly. Only Tim sees this.

ANGRY MALE (O.S.)

Or better yet, go talk to those
sons of bitches down at the V.A.

DARLEEN

Sorry, he's been on edge since he
got back from Iraq. The V.A.
denied his P.T.S.D. claim. Mental
wounds just ain't a priority, I
guess. It's like the whole world
just forgot about him.

ANGRY MALE (O.S.)

Those topsheetin' motherfuckers--

DARLEEN

I told you to calm! I'm sorry, I
just don't have time for this boys--

KYLE

But--

DARLEEN

Good luck finding help with your
fight.

EXT./INT. ANOTHER FARMHOUSE - DAY

They speak with another FARMER, 35, male, and bitter.

BITTER FARMER

Look, Geo--whatever, sent one of
their guys down here with pamphlets
and water samples showing
everything was grits. I'm apt to
warn ya, I don't take kindly to
folks wasting my time.

TRACEY

So you're just going to take their
word for it?

BITTER FARMER

Yes sir, I am.

TRACEY

Stalin could have made good use
with you.

BITTER FARMER

You know, I moved down here to get away from all you lying, thieving bastards, and your cameras, and tape recorders, and everything that goes with it. I prefer nature.

KYLE

Then it's in your best interest to speak with me.

BITTER FARMER

And it's in your best interest to get off my property.

EXT./INT. A THIRD FARMHOUSE - DAY

They speak with an ELDERLY MALE FARMER, 60.

ELDERLY FARMER

Well, the cows have been sickly as of late, but all-in-all, I haven't noticed anything too bad.

TRACEY

And when does it get too bad?

ELDERLY FARMER

Sorry, but I'm just not interested.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Kyle, Tracey, and Tim sit at a table in a crowded local bar. Tracey and Kyle are visibly drunk; Tim is not.

KYLE

What happens when an unstoppable force meets an immovable redneck?

TRACEY

He buys another shot.

KYLE

Not this reporter. Next round's on you, and every one after that, for that matter, 'til I can get one of these muppets to talk. How can so many people give so few fucks about so fucking much? I mean, they're being fucking poisoned...Poisoned! And they don't care.

TRACEY

One of life's great mysteries.

KYLE

Like how you ever got into
Columbia?

TRACEY

You might not suspect it, but I
give a mean handjob.

KYLE

So that's how you convinced Neil
Young here to come with you?

TIM

What about the husband?

TRACEY

What?

TIM

That woman's husband. She seemed
so preoccupied with caring for him--
maybe being poisoned is just one
more blurry line added to an
already crowded docket of concern?

KYLE

That man was a fucking troglodyte.
I'd be surprised if he were
housebroken.

TIM

It sounded as if he has every
reason to be upset.

TRACEY

And so does every other
motherfucker in this place.

LATER

Tracey and Kyle sit at the table and do shots. Tim talks
with an OLDER DRUNK, 40, by the bar.

OLDER DRUNK

You know, if meetin' the people's
what you want, I got a buddy of
mine's cousin who manages a farm in
Nebraska. Could probably get you
on if you're interested.

TIM

Yeah, that'd be great--

A LOUD DRUNK sitting at the bar has the attention of several other drunks. He spits in the air and catches it in his mouth. The others erupt in celebration. Tim walks back to the table.

KYLE

God, I need a fucking story. I'm going outta my head here.

TRACEY

Weren't you going out of your head in New York, too?

KYLE

That's different, man. That was then, this is now. I just need some experience. To swallow some real life.

TRACEY

Like your buddy over there?

He points to the guy who just ate his spitball.

KYLE

God damn, I need my story...one big one. I'll be damned if I stay here--damned if I move back home to Pittsburg. Too many ghosts there, man. No, I got my eye on the Big Apple, and nothing is getting in the way.

INT. KYLE'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Kyle drives with Tracey and Tim down a country road. He comes to a stop outside of a

FARM

He hops out and motions for Tracey to follow. They walk to the truck bed.

TRACEY

You gotta piss?

Kyle opens the latch and drops the back door. Two bags of fertilizer lie in the bed.

TRACEY (CONT'D)
Hell of a time to plant a garden.

KYLE
Is your friend cool?

TRACEY
As Christmas...why?

KYLE
Look, man, I told you I'm getting
the fuck outta this town. You
gonna help me or not, Trace?

Tim opens the door.

TIM
The truck alright?

Tracey looks at Kyle, then the bags; he hoists one up on his
shoulder.

TRACEY
(to Tim)
Just keep watch.

Kyle grabs the other bag and a shovel. He and Tracey walk
down to the

Pasture

They hop a fence and walk to a small stream. Kyle cuts into
the bag with the shovel, then dumps its contents into the
stream.

KYLE
It won't kill them, just make 'em a
little sick.

TRACEY
What if it gets into their milk?

KYLE
Naw, it'll be okay.

Tracey takes a few steps back. He pulls out his phone and
holds it up to take a picture of Kyle. The moonlight is just
bright enough to make out Kyle's face--but Tracey doesn't
snap the shot.

KYLE (CONT'D)
Hand me that other bag, buddy.

Tracey puts the phone away. He grabs the bag, cuts it open with the shovel, and dumps it in the water. Tim approaches.

TIM

What the hell are you doing?

TRACEY

Just go back...go back.

Kyle sings a song like "Get Along Little Doggies" by Woodie Guthrie.

INT. KYLE'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Kyle speeds down a country road. He and Tracey are piss drunk and roaring just as loudly as the engine. Tim sits silently in the back seat.

INT. KYLE'S HOUSE - DAY

Tracey sleeps on the couch. Tim lies on the floor; he stares at the ceiling with heavy eyes.

EXT. FRACKING SITE - DAY

Kyle drops Tracey and Tim off at Tracey's car. They say goodbye and get inside

TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE

Tim scans the front page of a PRAIRIE TIMES paper. Under the title it reads, "The People's Press."

TRACEY

What a night. That's going to make one hell of a story.

TIM

For another book, maybe. I don't think that's our angle.

TRACEY

Remember, find the enemy. Geocen--

TIM

You mean, Kyle Barton?

TRACEY

So you saw how the sausage was made. Big deal.

(MORE)

TRACEY (CONT'D)

Look, Kyle works this rinky-dink press out here in Vacaville. Fuck him. In fact, we could even shed some light on his little cow cocktail last night.

TIM

That you helped him stir? I still don't think that's our angle. He's going after the wrong story...the wrong people.

TRACEY

And who are the right people?

TIM

I don't know, but we should get started with this. I don't want to wait.

TRACEY

So write.

TIM

It's not that easy.

TRACEY

I've done it a million times.

TIM

This isn't one of your journalism classes where articles are edited and trimmed for the limited margins on a crowded page. Some writing isn't informed by evidence but by experience. A world without guardrails.

TRACEY

What do you mean, guardrails?

TIM

I don't know...it's...it's like coming across a strange cave, alright? Curiosity draws you inside...

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - DAY - NEAR FUTURE SEQUENCE

Tracey drives down a desolate stretch of country road with Tim sitting in the passenger seat.

TIM (V.O.)

...Then when you're alone in the dark, in the real silence, thoughts just start coming at you--some good, some...who knows? And as you continue, just as the light of the entrance fades, another illuminates from the distant end...

Tim shields his eyes from the falling sun, which is dead ahead of the car.

TIM (V.O.)

...and you arrive at this point--this decision you have to make: do you go for the new light or fumble back through the darkness for the entrance? What you're really looking at whenever you experience art of any worth is the result of someone pushing on toward that light. But sometimes that light doesn't lead anywhere...

INT. TIM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

A fire roars in the fireplace of Tim's dark apartment.

BACK TO THE NEAR FUTURE SEQUENCE ON THE ROAD

Tracey stares straight ahead.

TIM (V.O.)

...sometimes you get lost following something you don't know if you yourself may have created. Some people never come back from that. That's the price you pay for real art--for real life, I guess. Taking that risk. Stepping away from the guardrails...

END OF THE NEAR FUTURE SEQUENCE

TIM

...I don't know, man...I don't know if I can do this again...alone.

TRACEY

Shit, you're really living it, aren't you?

(MORE)

TRACEY (CONT'D)

Look, there's something out there for us both. We're gonna find it together. This I promise you.

Tim nods.

EXT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Tracey smiles as Tim slowly re-enters the parked car. Tim looks ill. He wipes his mouth with his shirt sleeve.

TRACEY

That was a waste of five bucks.

They take off through endless farm land.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - DAY

Tracey and Tim pass a road sign welcoming them to NEBRASKA.

TRACEY

I didn't even know you wrote music until Sam Goldstein sent me your CD while I was in Peru. I mean, I knew you played guitar, just not like that. You take a trip down to the crossroads?

Tim stares at the horizon.

TIM

So you quit school?

TRACEY

Yeah...these universities are robot factories anyway. I see my parents, and their misery, and I can't think of a single reason why I'd go through with that sham. Where's my buy in? I can't imagine waking up one morning next to a wife I hardly know, then dressing up to go out into the world and attack some defenseless woman like Tiffany Waters--to be one of these zombies...these machines. It's like living one damned lie.

TIM

It's the American way.

TRACEY

Luckily I see myself as more a citizen of the world than of this country. Shit gets bad here, I can just up and go someplace brand new. I can't imagine living here for the long haul anyway.

TIM

Yeah, as long as mommy's still around to cut a check.

Tracey smiles.

TRACEY

How many kilometers we still got?

TIM

What the fuck's a kilometer, *mate*?

Tracey laughs.

TRACEY

Miles, sorry.

TIM

I don't know. He said to take the 77 North, about an hour outside of Omaha.

TRACEY

You sure you really want to do this?

TIM

You were the one looking for a story.

Tracey looks uncharacteristically uneasy.

EXT. COMMERCIAL FARM - DAY

The Boys slowly pass a sprawling commercial farm just off the highway. Tracey turns onto a long driveway leading to their destination. He looks to be holding back a panic attack.

Tim studies his surroundings. He takes a deep, relaxing breath. He looks to be at ease.

EXT. COMMERCIAL FARM - DAY

Tracey and Tim speak with the FARM MANAGER, 45.

FARM MANAGER
So Langdon sent ya, eh?

Tim nods.

FARM MANAGER (CONT'D)
And you swear you ain't from the
media?

TRACEY
No, we're just a couple of drifters
on our way to Cali.

The Farm Manager checks out Tracey's convertible.

FARM MANAGER
Looks to me you're driftin' in
style.

TIM
Okay, I'll level with you. We're
writing a book about our
experiences on the road. We're not
undercover with the I.N.S. or with
some organization looking to expose
the evils of exploited labor. We
just want to work.

FARM MANAGER
Alright, I'll tell you what. You
do need papers to work here, but
you're both clearly able-bodied and
legal U.S. citizens. I'll pay ya
off the books through the end of
strawberry season. After that,
you're on your own.

TIM
Deal.

FARM MANAGER
But anyone catches you workin' out
here without a permit, I'mma tell
'em you're trespassin' on my
property. Got it?

Tim nods.

FARM MANAGER (CONT'D)
You make a buck ninety per box.
Lodging's around back.

EXT. COMMERCIAL FARM - DAY

Tim and Tracey walk to the fields. Both hold empty boxes.

PICKING MONTAGE

-Tim is all business--head down, picking with efficiency.

-Tracey, however, looks as if work makes him ill. He picks a strawberry and drops it in his box. He takes a good look at the other WORKERS, all picking as quickly as Tim is. Tracey's breathing becomes labored.

-Tim and Tracey watch as a crop duster sprays a far-off field, covering the Workers below in pesticides. Many start coughing, but they continue working.

-Tracey takes heaving gasps of breath, as if having a panic attack. He drops his box and wanders off. Tim watches him.

-Tracey sits in the grass far from the other Workers. He smokes a cigarette and seems to be calming down.

-The day is almost over. Tracey has rejoined the other Workers and walks with them, empty handed, as they bring in the last of their boxes.

A MEXICAN MALE, 40, falls to his knees and clutches his back. He drops his box of strawberries, which tumble onto the ground. A BEARDED MAN, 55, walks over and helps the fallen Worker to his feet as the other Workers place down their boxes and help gather the injured man's strawberries.

While the Workers are distracted with helping their fallen Friend, Tracey steals a box of strawberries. Tim sees this.

INT. HOUSING UNIT - NIGHT

The housing unit is narrow, with two long rows of beds. Tim sits on his as Tracey engages TWO MEXICAN MALES, both 35, in conversation.

TRACEY

Nobody should put up with this.
You guys gotta organize. Fight the
power.

MEXICAN MALE

Is not so bad. I've lived with
worst.

Behind them, TWO OTHER MEXICAN MALES, 30, argue. Words are exchanged in Spanish, and one pushes the other. The man who got pushed punches the other guy in the face. Tim rushes in to break it up.

TIM

Tranquillo, tranquilo!

Tim tries to restrain one of them, but he gets punched in the face. The Bearded Man separates the Fighters; they stop. His presence is subtle but commanding. He is clearly a respected member of this community.

BEARDED MAN

Que paso?

Both Fighters speak at the same time. Tracey approaches Tim.

TRACEY

I didn't know you spoke Spanish.

Tim shrugs his shoulders then rubs his eye.

The Fighters shake hands and part ways. The Bearded Man approaches Tim and Tracey.

BEARDED MAN

Thank you for tryin' to stop that.

Tim nods.

TRACEY

Why were they fighting?

BEARDED MAN

Well the one guy accused the other of stealin' a box of strawberries he picked. Guess he didn't like bein' called a thief, so he threw a punch.

Tracey's face turns red. He forces a laugh.

BEARDED MAN (CONT'D)

Tensions are always high when they're sprayin' the fields. I'm gonna have a cigarette. You boys care to join?

TIM

I don't smoke, but I could use some fresh air.

BEARDED MAN

Well, I'll be a tulip if you find any out there. (chuckles) The name's Rick.

Tim smiles. They shake.

EXT. HOUSING UNIT - NIGHT

Rick pulls a pack of cigarettes from his pocket.

RICK

So you're writin' a book, huh?

TRACEY

There are so many people out there who seem lost and angry. We seek the truth that unites us, so we can write a better world.

RICK

Lost *and* angry...So where you from?

TIM

Buffalo, New York.

RICK

You're a long way from home. And what do you do?

TRACEY

Well, I guess I'm a journalist.

RICK

You guess, huh? And what's a journalist out here pickin' strawberries for?

TRACEY

It's nothing permanent.

RICK

It ain't permanent, he says. (chuckles) You know what is? The damage the pesticides out here'll do to your lungs.

TIM

We won't be here very long, so--

Rick looks into Tim's eyes.

RICK

And what do you *need* to be workin'
out here for?

Tracey sees that the comment has ripped open a wound in Tim.

TRACEY

We're writing a book and--

RICK

Yes, you already told me that.

Rick takes a good look at both Boys, then a deep breath.

RICK (CONT'D)

Ain't nobody out here 'cause they
wanna be. I mean, some are here
'cause they love to be outdoors,
and prefer the fields to the
packin' plant, while others, they
prefer workin' with animals to the
pesticides and machines. But truth
is, nobody's out here 'cause they
want to be. We all got a reason to
need to be here. What's yours?

TRACEY

I, uh...

RICK

You boys told me you're lookin' for
the truth--now that's what I aim to
give you. I spent a lotta time in
my life runnin'--from place to
place, job to job, woman to woman.
Don't nobody wanna be runnin'.

Rick takes a deep breath.

RICK (CONT'D)

You look at me now, and you see a
peaceful man. But when I was
younger, I was angry...can't say
exactly what for. Well I took this
anger out on an unsuspecting
stranger one night just outside of
Topeka. I'd broken into his house
around midnight and was makin' a
good haul. Everything was goin'
right until the dumb bastard got
the great idea to get up to take a
piss. When he saw me in the living
room, he damn near shit his pants.

(MORE)

RICK (CONT'D)

Couldn't speak, couldn't run--just frozen-up like a goddamn block of ice. Something about seein' that bastard lit a fuse in me. It was dark, and I knew he couldn't see my face, but instead of me runnin', like I shoulda done, I raised my forty five, walked over, and pumped nearly a round into his skull, all with a big smile on my face. (chuckles) How I remember smilin'. That bastard's weakness--least he coulda' done was fight back.

Tim and Tracey are both captivated by the story. Tracey has his voice recorder in hand but is too distracted by Rick's words to even turn it on.

RICK (CONT'D)

Well, I ran and kept runnin' for nearly a year after that. Police had no idea who'd done it. I left no prints and was just driftin' through town. So I just kept right on driftin'. But after about a year, the headaches started--migraines, that wouldn't go away. I'd get chest pains, shortness of breath--couldn't sleep at night. The pain got to be too much. I knew there was only one thing would cure me. So one day, I decided to drift back to Kansas to pay the guy's wife a visit. Fellas, you have no idea how difficult it was for me to ring that doorbell, but I did it, and when she answered, I froze up, jus' like her husband did on that fateful night. She had no idea who I was, but the warmth of her character set me right at ease. She welcomed me inside where we sat at the kitchen table. That's where I explained to her what I had done. I told her about the drugs, and the anger, and the hatred that had dominated my life.

The sentiment stirs his emotions, but he catches himself before any burst through to the surface.

RICK (CONT'D)

We both wept, but instead of her getting angry at me, she did the opposite, sayin' that me comin' down there after all that time and tellin' the truth healed the pain she felt inside.

TRACEY

(to himself)

A noble truth.

Tim looks to have heard this.

RICK

It healed somethin' up in me, too. But regardless of healin', I went away for a long, long time. When I got out, I felt like a new man steppin' into the world again. Wasn't angry no more or lookin' to hurt anyone. I guess you could say that taking that man's life gave me one of my own. It's funny how life works out, huh?

Tracey looks deeply tormented.

TRACEY

(almost inaudible)

And she forgave you? (in a normal tone) Have you spoken with her since?

RICK

No, I have not. Sometimes it's better to let sleepin' dogs lie.

TRACEY

Yeah, but maybe you should talk to her--

RICK

Now, I'll never get to truly make up for what I had done, but as long as I have life left, I can choose to live it the right way.

Tim's form hangs limp on his weary bones and energy seems to have all but completely drained away.

TIM

And what way might that be?

RICK

Now how in the hell am I supposed to tell you that? There is one thing though that I can tell you for certain: life is for the living. And don't you forget that.

TIM

You really seem to have a way with the people around here.

TRACEY

Yeah, you should organize--

RICK

That's a big job, fellas. A lotta people'll have to buy in on something like that for it to work. People are tired--

TRACEY

Exactly. But life is for the living...

Tracey smiles--Rick too. Rick drops his cigarette and puts it out with his boot.

RICK

Alright fellas, I'm gonna get me some sleep...Can I see that?

He grabs Tim's pen and journal, then flips to a blank page and writes something.

RICK (CONT'D)

...this is my number. Use it if you got any more questions.

TIM

Thanks, Rick.

TRACEY

Yeah, thanks.

Rick re-enters the housing unit. Tim and Tracey stay behind. They both stare off into the darkness in separate directions.

INT. HOUSING UNIT - NIGHT

The Workers are all asleep in their beds. Tracey, however, is wide awake. He tosses and turns for a moment, then hops out of bed. He shoots over to Tim's bed, but Tim isn't there.

EXT. HOUSING UNIT - NIGHT

Tracey runs outside and sees Tim sitting on the porch under a light, writing in his journal. Tim is uncharacteristically enthusiastic.

TIM

I think I may have found our angle.
Forget the enemies thing--

TRACEY

Let's get the fuck out of here. I
gotta get out of here.

TIM

Keep your voice down. People are
sleeping.

TRACEY

C'mon, man, we gotta blow.

TIM

What's wrong?

TRACEY

We just gotta go. Get your stuff.
I'm leaving in fifteen with or
without you.

Tim looks defeated.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - NIGHT

The Boys cruise through open prairie. Tim gets some much needed sleep; Tracey is wide awake. There looks to be something big on his mind, and his focused eyes are dully illuminated by the dashboard lights.

EXT. ABANDONED MOTEL - DAWN

Tim and Tracey sleep in the convertible parked behind an abandoned freeway motel.

Tim wakes and squints as he watches the sun rise above the horizon in a brilliant display of orange and red light. He pulls out his journal and writes.

Tracey opens his eyes but doesn't move. He watches Tim.

Tim glances at Tracey to see if he's watching, and Tracey quickly shuts his eyes. Tim continues to write.

EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

Tim hangs out of the passenger door of the parked convertible and looks as though he might be sick. He makes a few guttural noises but no liquid comes. He re-enters the car.

TRACEY

You pull the trigger?

TIM

Not this time.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - DAY

Tracey drives through open prairie extending to the horizon in all directions

TIM

You gotta be kidding me. He just walked up and said that?

TRACEY

I couldn't believe it myself. I mean, here I am, about to get my ass stomped by three Spanish pricks, and out of no where Carlos walks over, puts his hands on their shoulders and says, "Compassion, my friends." In Spanish, of course...

TIM

And they just walked away?

TRACEY

Yeah, as if I didn't even make out with the one guy's wife.

Tim laughs with a long-repressed joy. His phone vibrates. He pulls it from his pocket, checks the screen, and puts it away.

TIM

What else did ol' Carlitos teach you about Buddhism?

TRACEY

A lot...I'd have to say my favorite lesson was "lean into your suffering."

TIM

What's that all about?

TRACEY

Means to go toward that which is causing you grief. To accept your suffering and stop allowing it control over your life. That's what this trip is all about. Heading into the heart of the world's suffering so we can find a cure. There's so much beauty out there--it's really worth saving.

TIM

I dig it...Speaking of going toward suffering, I can't stop thinking about Rick's story yesterday...

Tracey looks uneasy after hearing the name "Rick."

TIM (CONT'D)

...You know I spent a few days behind bars the winter before last?

TRACEY

No, I didn't.

TIM

I walked into Albright Knox Art Gallery in December--just after I'd cancelled my tour...

INT. ALBRIGHT KNOX - DAY - FLASHBACK

Tim stares at a painting, the same from the warehouse party, signed "Margo" in its corner.

TIM (V.O.)

...and I walked right up to a painting and ripped it off the wall.

Tim rips the painting off the wall.

INT. TIM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

A fire roars in the fireplace.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

TIM

I was about to crack it over my knee when the curator stopped me.

TRACEY

What'd he do, hit you with a humidifier?

TIM

(laughs)

No, but he did call security. I spent a couple of days in the Erie County Holding Center, but they dropped the charges, when they, uh--

TRACEY

Soup cans?

TIM

What?

TRACEY

Was it a Warhol?

TIM

Oh, uh...you wouldn't know the artist.

TRACEY

That's some shit...

He takes a deep breath.

TRACEY (CONT'D)

...I got a kid somewhere in Peru.

TIM

No fucking way!

TRACEY

Yeah, I had a few indiscretions while I was down there. That Pisco's some serious shit, mate.

TIM

You even know if it's a boy or girl?

Tracey, equally disturbed, just shakes his head. They look at each other for a moment of impossible silence, then erupt in laughter.

TIM (CONT'D)

Do your parents know about this?

Again, Tracey just shakes his head and smiles.

TIM (CONT'D)

You really are a crazy fuck, you know that?

They both laugh, then Tracey grows solemn.

TRACEY

That's not all...

He searches for the correct words, but they fail to show.

TIM

What's not all?

TRACEY

...Hey, I saw you writing something this morning.

TIM

Oh you did?

TRACEY

Yeah, what'd you write?

TIM

Nothing really--just some collected thoughts.

TRACEY

Can I read these "collected thoughts?"

TIM

Uh, well, you're driving and all--

TRACEY

Nonsense, mate, pass it over here.

Tim reluctantly grabs the journal from his pocket, flips to the correct page, and hands it over. Tracey reads it aloud.

TRACEY (CONT'D)

"I don't feel like poetry/I can't write when I'm wrong/I can't fake my way singing the most ancient of songs/When the Summer Solstice sets/I'm the first who always forgets/What it means to be man/How do I how and then ask how?/Why do I why and then wonder why?/All I have left is a bright light in the sky/But it shines from the inside/And it's enough."

Tracey takes a look at his friend.

TRACEY (CONT'D)

I think we're gonna make something
of this book just yet.

Tim smiles.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - NIGHT

They drive through WESTERN NEBRASKA. The dying sun has just enough strength to illuminate the world before them. The once lush and flat prairie has turned into a series of rolling, golden brown hills.

TRACEY

What do you say we camp it under
the stars tonight?

Tim nods.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - NIGHT

Tracey has turned off the highway and creeps down a lonely rural road in search of a spot to set up camp. He locates a descent patch of earth and pulls the car over.

TRACEY

Looks good.

The two exit the car. Tracey walks to the back and opens the trunk. He grabs two sleeping bags and tosses one to Tim.

EXT. MAKESHIFT CAMP - NIGHT

Tim sits on a rolled-out sleeping bag and slowly opens and closes his knife. Tracey attempts to light a fire under gathered sticks. He lights a wad of paper but that quickly burns out, leaving the tee-peed wood to remain unscathed.

He tries the same routine again, using new paper, but gets the same result. He tosses his lighter on the ground.

Tim picks up the lighter, grabs a new piece of paper, lights it, and starts the fire. He lies back down on the sleeping bag and continues to play with the knife.

Tracey plops himself down on his own sleeping bag. He observes Tim's nervous game.

TRACEY

So what's the deal with the knife?

Tim continues to play with it, unaffected by the question.

TIM

You remember when Rachel Robinson had that nasty seizure during Economics senior year?

TRACEY

How could I forget? Wasn't she an epileptic or something?

TIM

Yeah...There was a lotta commotion going on in that room, but I was watching one thing: Margo Molina. She sat in the back corner, weeping. But it wasn't as if she wanted attention--no one was even looking at her. It was as if she was sitting in a crowded hospital waiting room and a doctor just told her her mother passed away, and nobody else cared...I fell in love with her that day. And it took me about a year of trying, but she finally came around and loved me too. She was so beautiful, man.

TRACEY

Is that how you know Spanish?

TIM

Yeah she taught me. Talked nonstop about the town in Mexico her parents were from: Oaxaca--she said it was the only place she'd ever been where she felt truly alive. She always wanted to take me. Her parents both died when she was a kid. She had no other family. She said speaking Spanish to me somehow made her feel less alone. It made me feel less alone, too.

TRACEY

It's a lonely world.

TIM

We got a place together in Allentown after high school.

(MORE)

TIM (CONT'D)

She read a poem I'd written one day and encouraged me to turn it into a song. I'd never even considered writing songs before that. I took off from there. People always said I was the greatest, but she was better--she just had this fire I could never top. The first few years were good...

INT. TIM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - FLASHBACK SEQUENCE - TIM AND MARGO

-Tim sits on a chair in his candle-lit apartment. A feminine hand holding a dropper drips something on his tongue. He swallows and closes his eyes. He reaches for his guitar.

TIM (V.O.)

...We pushed each other to touch new areas of our minds--areas we could never go to alone. She could fucking paint like nobody you'd believe...

-A feminine hand splashes paint on a blank canvas.

-The flames roar in the fireplace.

TIM (V.O.)

...but I was the only one who ever saw it. Every time she finished a piece, she'd tear it apart, and throw it in the fireplace...

-The feminine hand tosses a painted canvas in the fire.

TIM (V.O.)

...Those flames ate more talent than anyone would ever know. I was only able to save one painting before it got destroyed.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

TRACEY

The one from the Albright Knox?

Tim smiles and nods.

TIM

She really could have been something.

(MORE)

TIM (CONT'D)

But she'd destroy these masterpieces...and always with a big smile on her face. But I knew better. I could see her slowly withering away with each creation--every brush stroke bringing her closer to her own demise. She had this insatiable emptiness, an emptiness I knew before I'd met her. Even the thought of writing used to torture me. As if each word written was a small crucifixion--a sacrifice I made to a hideous world--a world that didn't understand--a world that couldn't care less whether I lived or died after it was read--fucking vampires. Just consuming and consuming and never giving back. They don't deserve beauty. With her though, I felt whole--beautiful. But I guess that wasn't how she felt with me. Maybe it wasn't how she felt with anyone...

INT. TIM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - FLASHBACK SEQUENCE - TIM AND MARGO

-A feminine hand injects a clear liquid into a tattooed feminine wrist.

-The feminine hand reaches for a paint brush, grabs it, then drops it to the floor.

TIM (V.O.)

...Early on, I watched the art eat her away. Later, I watched a syringe do the same. For twelve terrible months, I did everything I could to bring my best friend back to life.

-Tim's guitar sits in its opened case in his bedroom. Yelling can be heard from another room. A glass is thrown against a wall and breaks just above the guitar case. Tim walks over and shuts the case. It's daytime.

-It's night, and the case is still closed.

TIM (V.O.)

I quit drinking, drugs--I stopped writing.

(MORE)

TIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Even when she started disappearing for days on end, and I found out that she'd been selling herself for smack, I still convinced myself I could bring her back. I tried everything, man, and in that year I watched my best friend wither into a god-damned corpse...

-TWO POLICE OFFICERS open an alley dumpster. A tattooed, feminine arm is all that can be seen of a body buried in trash.

TIM (V.O.)

...They found her frozen body in a dumpster in an East Side alley just before Christmas. The coroner blamed the twenty-seven stab wounds they found in and around her torso, but I knew it happened long before that.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

TRACEY

Is that why you cancelled the tour?

Tim nods.

TIM

I couldn't do it without her.

TRACEY

That's horrible.

TIM

Then my dad died a few weeks later; I took over his business and stopped writing altogether.

TRACEY

They ever find the killer?

TIM

There was an investigation that lasted all of a few weeks. She had no family. Who gives a shit about a dead hooker in a dead fucking town anyway?

TRACEY

So there were no leads?

TIM

Well, the obvious suspect was her pimp--some scumbag Rican from the West Side, but his story must have checked out 'cause they let him go.

TRACEY

This system is so fucked--

TIM

I know it was him, man. I can't tell you how many nights I went out looking for him. I started carrying this with me, just waiting for us to cross paths.

Tim holds up the knife; the opened blade flickers in the fire light.

TRACEY

You think you would have used it?

TIM

Who knows? I think so, but how could I ever be sure about something like that?

TRACEY

If that happened to me, I'd kill the son of a bitch. There's no real justice in this world. Sometimes you gotta take it yourself.

TIM

Spoken like a true Buddhist...

TRACEY

You still think about her?

TIM

Every second of every day...You know, it's funny. She used to say that trying only caused pain--and I can see that. But giving up just seems so much worse. I just don't think I can do this alone.

TRACEY

You don't have to. I'll be your Buddha Buddy, buddy.

Tim smiles.

TRACEY (CONT'D)

So if this whole thing lasted for a couple of years, why didn't I know about it?

Tim stares into the dark night.

TIM

You'd been away.

A full moon and bright stars penetrate the pitch blackness of space surrounding them. There is just enough light to make out the shadows of the hills in the distance.

EXT. MAKESHIFT CAMP - DAY

Tracey and Tim pack up the car and take off.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - DAY

Tim looks relieved after his night of camping and therapy, and sits in the passenger seat with a grin ready to burst across his face. He examines the golden, rolling hills surrounding him.

Tracey examines the same scene but with a furrowed brow. The two pass a sign welcoming them to COLORADO.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - DAY

They pass a sign indicating that DENVER is not far off.

TRACEY

I know I've been a shitty friend. Your mom is right. I should have been there for you. I'm sorry. But there's some pretty heavy shit I've been dealing with too.

TIM

Forget about it, mate.

They both smile.

TRACEY

No, there's, uh, something big--

TIM

Hey, I called Rick. He recommended we stop at a ranch outside of Denver to do some interviews.

(MORE)

TIM (CONT'D)
I'm going to call and set up a
meeting...

Tracey gives an uneasy smile.

TIM (CONT'D)
...We should brainstorm some ideas
at our next stop. I think I may
have found our angle on the story.

TRACEY
Yeah, yeah, sure--hey, we should do
a little celebrating tonight. I
hear Denver's a wild city.

TIM
Alright.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - DAY

The city of DENVER emerges in the distance; the ROCKY
MOUNTAINS tower in the background.

EXT./INT. BAR - NIGHT

Tracey and Tim approach a bar in a posh section of town and
walk inside. This is a hip, mellow scene with an open mic
night. A GUITARIST plays a song.

They stride to the bar. Tracey scans the room and notices
several beautiful young women.

TRACEY
There are some honeys out tonight.

Tim focuses on a DARK-HAIRED BEAUTY, who breaks from a casual
conversation with her FEMALE FRIEND to glance back at him.

TRACEY (CONT'D)
It's too bad you don't have your
ax. Could woo some of these
turkeys right into our slumberbags.

Tim tries to avoid staring at his new interest but can't help
it. They exchange bashful smiles.

A PRETTY YOUNG BARTENDER approaches, directing the Boys'
wandering attention onto herself.

PRETTY BARTENDER
See anything you like?

TRACEY

I do now.

TIM

We'll take a pitcher, and a couple shots of whiskey.

PRETTY BARTENDER

You got it.

She goes for the drinks.

TRACEY

Whoa, where the fuck did that come from?

TIM

You said you wanted to celebrate.

LATER

Tracey and Tim have gone hard and are visibly tipsy. They enjoy each other's company and are laughing like old friends.

TRACEY

Remember in eighth grade when we took out that classified ad putting Kevin Spencer up for sale?

TIM

What'd we write? "Twelve-year-old boy for sale..."

TRACEY

"...good help in home, garden, or bedroom. Twenty-five dollars or best offer." And they actually printed it.

TIM

Oh my god, C.P.S. would not stop hassling his parents.

Big laughs. Tim looks at the Dark-Haired Girl, and she looks back.

A DIFFERENT MUSICIAN finishes up his song, and a MALE BARTENDER approaches the microphone.

MALE BARTENDER

Let's give Bill here a big round of applause.

Applause.

MALE BARTENDER (CONT'D)
 Bill was the last person who signed
 up for the evening, so we're
 looking for anyone else who'd like
 to come up and play.

Tim takes another look at the Dark-Haired Girl, then sets
 down his beer and strides to the stage with an unsure
 confidence.

MALE BARTENDER (CONT'D)
 Looks like we got one now.

Tim approaches Bill as Bill walks off the stage. They
 exchange a few words, then Bill hands Tim his guitar. Tim
 walks on stage.

MALE BARTENDER (CONT'D)
 And what's your name?

TIM
 Tim.

Tim sits on a stool and strums a few random chords to muster
 his confidence

MALE BARTENDER
 Okay, it's all yours, Tim.

The Bartender walks off stage. Tracey cheers.

TIM
 This is a song I wrote years ago
 about someone I used to know.
 (deep breath)
 "Have you seen Margo Molina/in head
 to toe tattoos/that leave all those
 who meet her to fight from
 staring?/While it's true that she's
 stopped caring/is it false that she
 can't stop the painful thoughts
 that brought her to where she is
 now?/For in a lifetime/few can be/a
 perfect fit in society/and she
 knows/the beauty's in not
 trying/Have you heard Margot
 Molina/playing secret shows where
 no one goes and singing soul songs
 (MORE)

TIM (CONT'D)

to the heavens?/With the whole
world as her theater/she only
performs behind closed doors/Though
I still hope someday I'll get to
see her/For in a lifetime/few can
be/a perfect fit in society/and she
knows/the beauty's in not
trying/And have you fucked Margo
Molina?/twenty bucks you have/she
took you in, made you grin, while
lyin' on your back/I'm askin' who
despises/the need for these
disguises?/And she just disagrees/
For in a lifetime/who can be/a
perfect fit for society/and she
hopes/the beauty's in not trying."

Tim awakens from his trance; the audience awakens from their own.

TIM (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Passionate applause from all around. Tim has struck a chord. He returns the guitar to Bill. They exchange words, smile, and shake hands.

Tracey stands at the bar with a smile on his face; he applauds as Tim approaches.

TRACEY

Unbelievable song, ma' man.

TIM

Thanks. Could you tell who I wrote it about?

TRACEY

Kevin Spencer, right?

Smiles. The Pretty Bartender approaches.

PRETTY BARTENDER

(to Tim)

The cute girl over there bought you this.

The Bartender hands him a beer. The Dark-Haired Girl smiles and waves. Tim smiles bashfully.

PRETTY BARTENDER (CONT'D)

I may not be an expert, but I think she wants you to talk to her.

TRACEY

Noted.

Tracey grabs Tim, and they walk over to ANGIE, the Dark-Haired Girl, and her Friend, REBECCA's, table.

ANGIE

We liked your song.

REBECCA

Yeah, the girl you wrote it for is lucky.

TIM

Oh, she's, uh--

TRACEY

Not as lucky as we'd be if you asked us to sit.

The Girls smile. Tim and Tracey sit.

FLIRTING MONTAGE

-Tracey waves over a Waiter. Everyone is all smiles.

-The Waiter brings more drinks. The four do shots.

-The Girls get up from the table. Angie writes something on a napkin and hands it to Tim.

END MONTAGE

Tim and Tracey continue to sit at the table.

TRACEY

Get up early, my ass.

TIM

You came on too strong.

TRACEY

Girls like confidence.

TIM

Confidence, yes, frequent suggestions as to the impressive size of your cock, no.

TRACEY

American girls are prudes, anyway.

GLEN ANDERSON, 65 and still hip, approaches the table. He has a kind and sincere aura.

GLEN

You got some real talent there, you know that?

TIM

Oh, that was flat--

GLEN

No, no, I mean that. I got an ear for these things. I used to produce for Vulcan Records. You ever think about recording?

Tracey's eyes light up.

TIM

Well, uh, I--

TRACEY

We got him in the studio already. Tracey Morretti, (holds out hand) manager. He's recording with Tundra. About to sign him to a two-album deal...

Tim gives him a look.

TRACEY (CONT'D)

...however, we'd be willing to renegotiate should a more lucrative offer present itself.

GLEN

Tundra? Never heard of them.

TIM

I think what my friend meant to say was thank you, but we're not interested.

TRACEY

That's not exactly true.

GLEN

Well, I'm sorry to bother you guys.

TRACEY

You're no bother. Please, take a seat.

Glen gives Tim a look. Tim nods; Glen sits.

LATER

The three are locked in deep discussion.

GLEN

I thought you sounded familiar.
Your first album--the protest tunes--
--was strong, but it was missing
something. I'd love to get you
back in the studio. Hell, I got
one my house if you'd be
interested.

TIM

Well, Glen, I appreciate your
support, I really do, but we're
writing a book--and we got a
meeting with the head of a ranch in
Park County tomorrow morning.
We're going to try to get on as
stable hands, or whatever else they
have--

TRACEY

Yeah, but all that can wait. This
is a great opportunity.

TIM

I'd prefer to just stick to the
plan--

GLEN

You guys got a place to stay
tonight?

TRACEY

We never think that far ahead.

GLEN

I've got a guest house. You're
welcome to stay with my wife and me
for a few days. We'd love the
company.

TIM

(to Tracey)

Look, I'd really prefer to just
keep going.

TRACEY

How about we crash tonight and make
a decision tomorrow?

TIM

Alright.

GLEN

Excellent. I live in the mountains just outside the city. You're gonna love the view.

TRAVEL MONTAGE

-Tracey and Tim get back in the convertible.

-They follow Glen's BMW through a twisting mountain pass. To the right is a steep drop into an endless, black void. Tim stares into it.

-They've survived the mountain pass and approach a rustic mansion in the woods.

-They park and get out of the car. They follow Glen inside.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. GUEST HOUSE - DAY

Tim is up early. He sits on his bed and writes in his journal. Tracey is sleeping in a bed nearby.

Glen's wife, DELILAH, 65, earthy and elegant, knocks on the door.

TIM

Come in.

Delilah opens the door and sticks her head inside.

DELILAH

Breakfast.

The light hits Tracey's face; he shields his eyes.

EXT. GLEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Tim and Tracey sit with Glen and Delilah at a table outside overlooking a beautiful Rocky Mountain valley. They eat a hearty breakfast of fruits, oatmeal, toast...

DELILAH

More oatmeal?

TRACEY

Oh, no thanks, Delilah. I'm not feeling too well.

Tracey holds his stomach. His face is flush.

DELILAH

It's organic; it'll be good for you.

Tracey waves it away again. Delilah presents the oatmeal to Tim. Tim holds up his bowl, and she piles more in.

DELILAH (CONT'D)

Glen and I are big fans. We had tickets to your Denver show.

TIM

I'm sorry. I'll refund your money...

DELILAH

Oh no, don't worry about that. We're just glad to see you're okay.

GLEN

Music isn't exactly the healthiest profession. A lot of our heroes passed early. I was with Janis a few weeks before she died. Man, that girl had the pipes of a rusted church organ. Something sacred and powerful in that soul.

TRACEY

I love Janis Joplin. We have no equivalent of her today.

DELILAH

Well, the country has changed--

TRACEY

That's what I've been trying to tell this guy. Other places are so much better.

GLEN

Other places are good, but better only exists in the mind. If you can keep it sharp enough, wherever you are can be better.

TRACEY

Yeah, but the sixties really were better. Freedom, love, revolution, rock 'n' roll. There was something actually going on. The most action we see now is on a movie screen.

DELILAH

I don't know about better. Don't get me wrong, they were good times: Glen and I were at Newport when Dylan shocked the world, and Monterrey when the U.S. was introduced to Jimi Hendrix. But we were also at Altamont, where the whole experiment took a dark and sinister turn.

GLEN

It's easy to think of the sixties and forget that one.

TRACEY

That was only one show.

GLEN

Tell that to Meredith Hunter's family. It's always easier to look back and see what you want-- especially if you weren't even there.

TRACEY

Yeah, well forget your parents, and our grandparents, yours was the greatest generation. You began a revolution. People today can hardly change a light bulb.

GLEN

I wouldn't get too down on your peers. Every generation is merely reacting to the struggles it's presented with.

DELILAH

And yours certainly does have some dreadful problems.

TIM

Is there anything can we do about it?

DELILAH

There are no perfect answers. But
I know something that can help.

EXT. GLEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Tim, Tracey, and Delilah sit on yoga mats facing the valley. They sit full-lotus in silence. Tim and Delilah look serene. Tracey can't sit still; he sweats.

TRACEY

So how much longer we gotta do
this?

DELILAH

As long as it takes. Just relax
and focus on your breathing.

Tracey shuts his eyes. He holds still for a brief moment, then opens them again.

TRACEY

I just remembered I had to, uh, buy
something for the car. I, uh,
gotta--

Tracey gets up and takes off across the lawn. Tim and Delilah continue to meditate.

LATER

Tim and Delilah sit at the breakfast table. They sip tea.

TIM

My mother was a tie-dyed, flower-draped participant in the sixties. She headed out to San Fran during the Summer of Love, then travelled the country for awhile, meeting people, talking revolution...then she suddenly moved back to Buffalo, married my father, and got a job taking calls for some insurance agency; she hasn't left Buffalo since. When she would tuck me in at night, she used to tell me about the changes you all made. About the protests, and freedom...

DELILAH

The two don't always go together.

TIM

...She used to be happy. But that was a long time ago. The only time she talks now is to bitch about the world or her pain. My parents never talked. All they did was argue. She always threatened to leave him, but my father forbade it, and she never did. Then after my dad died, she started cursing out anyone who'd ever think to leave. Crazy isn't it?

DELILAH

The heart is a complex entity.

TIM

It may sound strange, but I think I wrote my entire first album for her. Thought maybe it could make her remember those better times...those times when she was happy. She's sick, and I just left her. I'm a terrible person--

DELILAH

You're not.

TIM

People get down on my generation all the time. Call us selfish; say it's all about "me." I'm just another part of the problem.

DELILAH

Please, from Plato on down to Rush Limbaugh, older generations have always been wagging their fingers at the younger. It's a defense mechanism. As people begin to age, they start thinking of their legacy, and when they take a look around at all the terrible messes they've made, or enabled to be made, it's only natural they'd distance themselves from responsibility. All-in-all, it's just another form of running away. What I say is that as long as you're alive, you're responsible for the upkeep of your world.

TIM

But how many people are really
alive...

DELILAH

More than you'd think. And that
doesn't count all those who wish to
be.

TIM

Your generation accomplished real
change: the Civil Rights Act, the
end of the Vietnam War...

DELILAH

Yes, we did topple some pretty high
walls, but the problems were still
there waiting for us on the other
side. We had grand aspirations of
uniting the world under peace and
love but fell far short of
realizing those goals. It's easy
to be a revolutionary; it's far
more difficult to be an architect
of civilization. We've achieved de
jure equality in this country, but
de facto hatred, racism, and
socioeconomic inequality are still
ramped. How do you protest such
abstractions as hatred? Depression?
Denial? Those are things that
people must change within
themselves. Is it logical not to
trust anyone over thirty? Logical
to assume peace can be achieved
through mass consumption of L.S.D.?
Revolution for the sake of
revolution is meaningless.

TIM

How did things get so bad?

DELILAH

That's a difficult question to
answer. People get so consumed
with their own problems, those on
the outside can be overwhelming
...You said your mother was sick.
Do you mind my asking her
condition?

TIM

The doctors don't know. She says she has pain...has always had pain, and because of it she drinks, which is causing even more damage. I've tried to help her--my father tried to help. She wouldn't let us.

DELILAH

The sixties left a lot of casualties. Some people went off on trips and never came back, even some of those who did were never the same. I was lost for a long time, but I found myself through meditation and self-understanding ...You say you're selfish. Do you know there's good and there's bad selfish?

TIM

So it's like cholesterol, huh?

Delilah smiles.

DELILAH

There's nothing wrong with taking some time to discover who you are and your mission in life. It's only then you're best prepared to truly give back to the world. If more people out there did the same, that'd be one giant leap for mankind. But you can't push people to take that leap--most will refuse. They have to want to change. They need something to inspire them. Your momma has made her decisions too. If she's deciding each day to hurt you by not helping herself, then how can she expect you to continue to care?

Tim again stares off into the valley.

DELILAH (CONT'D)

Your first album was good, but it could have been better. It's wonderful that someone in your generation is finally writing protest songs, but you need to be alive before you can want any change in the world outside of you. Otherwise, what are you changing?

Tim says nothing. He looks lost in thought.

DELILAH (CONT'D)

I hope you also know that it's not your job to go saving the world.

TIM

You're not supposed to give up.

DELILAH

There's giving up, and there's growing up, hon.

Glen exits the house as Tracey storms across the yard.

GLEN

Hey, Timmy. I've got the mics all set up. What do you say we hit the studio after dinner?

Tim smiles.

Tracey fakes a smile at Delilah then pulls Tim aside.

TRACEY

Hey, we're gettin' outta here.

TIM

I don't wanna--

TRACEY

I called up the girls. Party tonight.

TIM

But I'm going to record--

TRACEY

God, I can't take another free-range, free-trade meal with these Dead Heads. Grab your stuff and let's boogie.

Tracey takes off for the guest house.

TIM

I'd like to stay.

Tracey stops and comes back over.

TRACEY

That car is leaving in fifteen with or without you.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - NIGHT

Tracey drives a winding mountain pass. Tim stares into a dark valley to his right.

PARTY MONTAGE

-Tim and Tracey sit with Angie and Rebecca and eight of their friends on the back porch of a large log cabin in the mountains. They drink heavily and tell wild stories. Many laughs, though not for Tim. He drinks a beer.

-Rebecca sits on Tracey's lap; they're all smiles. Angie sits beside Tim. She rubs Tim's thigh and laughs at someone else's story. Tim looks uneasy; he sucks down a beer.

-A LARGE MALE comes to the door and motions for everyone to come inside. Angie gets up and motions for Tim to come, but he stays in the chair.

-Tim, all alone, stares into a dark valley.

-Tim walks into the house, which is crowded with partiers, who chug beers, smoke bong, and laugh. A TATTOOED MALE is giving a SHIRTLESS MALE a tattoo at the kitchen table.

-Tim searches for those familiar to him. He walks through several rooms, finding more debauchery in each, but does not see them.

He sees a light on in a back room. He walks over just in time to see Angie snort something off a coffee table. She throws her head back just as Tracey goes in for the same.

When Tracey throws his head back, his eyes meet Tim's. They stare at each other for a brief moment before someone closes the door, unwittingly cutting Tim off from the scene.

END PARTY MONTAGE

INT. LOG CABIN - DAY

Tim wakes up in bed next to Angie. She's naked, as is he. He looks at her, then clutches his stomach as if ill. He jumps out of bed, throws on his clothes, and races

DOWNSTAIRS

Tim runs through several rooms and checks the faces belonging to the bodies passed out in random places. None satisfy his quest. He runs back

UPSTAIRS

And into a

BEDROOM

where he sees Tracey sleeping with Rebecca. He storms over to Tracey and jabs his shoulder.

TIM

Hey, man, we gotta go. We've got a meeting at the ranch in an hour and we're gonna be late--

TRACEY

Let's go tomorrow.

TIM

No, we told them we'd be there today. We should go today. I want to go today--

TRACEY

Relax, man. Focus on your breathing.

TIM

But--

TRACEY

Look, I'll call the ranch and reschedule when I get up. We'll just go a little later.

TIM

But I gotta go--

TRACEY

Back to sleep. Same as me.

Tracey goes back to sleep. Tim storms out of the room.

EXT. BACK PORCH - DAY

Tim stands alone and stares at the green valley under the Rockies. His phone vibrates. He takes it out of his pocket and checks the screen: "Ma."

He doesn't answer and it eventually stops vibrating. He checks the screen again: "15 Voice Messages."

Tim hesitates, then presses a button and puts the phone to his ear.

MRS. PASTORIA (V.O.)
Timmy, it's me...I don't know
what's going on...Please call me--

Tim presses a button and the phone beeps.

AUTOMATED VOICE (V.O.)
This message has been erased. Next
message.

MRS. PASTORIA (V.O.)
Tim, please, it's your mother. I
need you here--

Tim's eyes well with tears. He turns the phone off again and stuffs it in his pocket.

Tracey comes to the back door.

TRACEY
Hey, man, Eli said he'd take us up
to the ski resort today to check
out the alpine slide. You in?

TIM
...Yeah, sure.

INT. SUV - NIGHT

ELI, 30 and bearded, drives. Tracey sits in the passenger seat with Rebecca on his lap. Tim sits in the back next to Angie, and JIMMY, 25, to her left.

The crew has concluded their day at the resort and drive out of its exit.

ELI
Who's up for dinner and drinks?

Applause from everyone but Tim, who continues to stare out the window.

INT. WESTERN STYLE BAR/RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The six friends approach a booth. Tim waits for Angie to sit, then sits on the opposite side of the table; she frowns. Tracey sits next to him, sealing Tim off from easy escape.

There's an open mic night and a RUGGED OLDER GENTLEMAN, 55, in a cowboy hat and boots is bringing the place down with an old Western tune. Everyone drinks and watches the show except Tim. The song ends.

TRACEY

Man, those were the good ol' days.

ELI

I heard that.

JIMMY

They don't have tunes like that in Wilkes Barre, believe me.

The Guitarist starts into another tune.

TRACEY

That where you're from?

JIMMY

Yeah...and Eli's from Montana, Angie's from Boston, and Rebecca's from Cleveland. Half this town's population works at the ski resort.

ELI

Yeah, nobody's from around here except the locals.

ANGIE

Yeah, and the snow is cold here too, right Eli?

Eli laughs, realizing the stupidity of his comment.

ELI

Alright now, Boston, you take it easy over there.

TRACEY

You all work at the resort?

JIMMY

(nods)

It's a scary world out there. I'm never gonna leave.

REBECCA

I tried getting a real job, but
this is about all I can find--with
a master's, mind you.

ELI

What about stripping?

Jimmy gives her a look up and down, then shakes his head.

Rebecca holds up her hand with all five fingers pointed in
the air, then she starts seductively pushing her fingers down
with her other hand as if she were stripping away articles of
clothing, until only the middle finger is left in the air.
She hums a burlesque-style tune throughout.

REBECCA

Like what you see, assholes?

Eli and Jimmy laugh.

ANGIE

So, you said you guys are writing a
book?

Tracey inflates himself with pride. Tim gives him a look.

TRACEY

Yeah, it's nothing big. We're just
looking for the truth uniting all
people so we can use it to
revolutionize this country's
antiquated social, political, and
economic structures.

JIMMY

Well, the truth is that this
country isn't the democracy they
teach all the little kids in
schools. It's an oligarchy
controlled by big business,
lobbyists, and career
politicians...

ELI

Here he goes again...

JIMMY

...it's a well-oiled machine and
everybody knows it.

ANGIE

No, they don't, and that's the
problem.

REBECCA

Yeah, they keep us so distracted
with our debts, this damn war--

ELI

So the federal government forced
you to enroll at Carnegie Mellon?

REBECCA

No, they didn't. But they do test
billions of dollars worth of bombs
in the desert each year. How about
investing that money in the people?

ELI

And how will we defend ourselves if
everybody's got their noses in a
book? If we invest in the people,
as you say, people will die.

REBECCA

That's a pretty slippery slope
you're treading there.

ELI

Hey, it is a ski town...

ANGIE

You're missing the point--

JIMMY

We need to just take up arms and
storm the capital.

TRACEY

Now you're talking.

Tim gives him a look.

ELI

And who'd give your burned-out ass
a gun?

JIMMY

Please, man, you can walk into any
Walmart in the country and walk out
with a rifle an hour later.

REBECCA

No, revolution should be peaceful.

JIMMY

What's a revolution without guns?
You think Batista would have just
handed Castro the keys to the
kingdom if he didn't have an army
in the jungles behind him?

REBECCA

Yeah, but this isn't fucking Cuba.

ELI

Do you even know how to fire a gun?

JIMMY

Well, no, but how hard could it be?

ELI

Spoken like a true fool. You're
all so ungrateful for what this
country's given you--

JIMMY

Ungrateful? I love my country--

TRACEY

Hey, you know something we can all
agree on?

Shoulders shrug.

TRACEY (CONT'D)

Shots!

Tracey calls the BARTENDER over, and the Bartender pours six
shots. They do their shots, except Tim, who pushes his away.

The Rugged Guitarist continues his song on stage.

TIM

(to Tracey)

I called the ranch this afternoon
and they said we could swing by
tomorrow--

TRACEY

Naw, we should stay a few more
days. Eli's throwing a costume
party this Friday and I'm gonna go.

TIM

What the fuck? This morning you
said we'd be out of here by
tomorrow!

The Rugged Guitarist finishes his song. Applause.

TRACEY

Relax. Take a look at Angie here...

Angie gazes at Tim from across the table.

TRACEY (CONT'D)

...You got this cute little thing all over you and you want to leave so soon?

TIM

That's not the point! You said we were going to write!

A BARTENDER hops on stage and speaks into the microphone.

BARTENDER

Let's give Ramblin' Jack Two another big round of applause.

Applause.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)

Looks like we've got a vacant spot right now if we got anybody out there'd like to fill it.

The group turns their attention to Tim, who's on the verge of a panic attack. Tim pulls out the knife and starts opening and closing the blade.

ELI

Hey, Superstar, why don't you show us what you got?

ANGIE

Yeah, go on up.

JIMMY

C'mon, Timmy!

BARTENDER

It looks like we got ourselves another geetarista in the audience.

The crew chants Tim's name; he erupts. He stabs his knife on the table, spilling several drinks, and leaves it there.

TIM

What the fuck do you people know about being a star?

(MORE)

TIM (CONT'D)

You hide out in this desolate little mountain town cut off from the rest of life, and talk about revolution! Say you got it--say you did rebel. Then what? What comes next? Do you go home? Raise a family? Get your head out of your fucking ass? What the fuck do you know about change? What happens when the Goliath you overthrew grows right back, just in a different fucking form?

TRACEY

Take it easy--

Tim shoves Tracey out of his way and onto the floor.

TIM

And you're the worst. Fuck you!

Tim runs to the door.

EXT. WESTERN STYLE BAR/RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Tim runs outside and shoots into an alley between the restaurant and another building. He leans against the wall. Sweat runs down his forehead and blends in with his tears. He retches a few times, but no vomit comes.

He takes a deep breath and pulls out his phone. He dials and puts it to his ear.

TIM

Ma?

MRS. PASTORIA (V.O.)

Timmy, is that really you?

TIM

...yeah.

MRS. PASTORIA (V.O.)

Where the hell are ya? I've been all alone here.

TIM

I saw your fucking pills--the syringe. You're killing yourself, ma. You're killing me.

MRS. PASTORIA (V.O.)
Oh don't be such a dandy. I told
you I'm in pain.

TIM
Everybody's in pain, but we don't
all pump that shit in our arms.

MRS. PASTORIA (V.O.)
I know, I know. I've been doing a
lot of thinking lately. It's been
a long time since I've learned to
take care of myself.

TIM
You're damn right it has.

MRS. PASTORIA (V.O.)
I've decided on Florida. I'm
leaving soon...I'm sorry I haven't
been much of a mother to you.
Hell, I guess I haven't been much
of anything, really...You know, you
takin' off reminds me--my daddy
left me when I was just a little
girl. Then I took off a few years
later, just like you did.

TIM
You said he died.

MRS. PASTORIA
It was easier to just think that
...I've been thinking about that a
lot lately...I wanted to say I'm
sorry, Timmy, and that I get what
you're doing. I think it's time
maybe I do the same. I'm gonna
sell your father's business and
this old dump too soon enough...
There's something out there for
you, hon, and it wants to find you
as bad as you want to find it.
Just remember us all when you
finally get there, okay?

TIM
Okay.

MRS. PASTORIA (V.O.)
Remember to take care of yourself
and call me if you need to. I'm
always right there with you.

Tim wipes away some more tears.

TIM
I will. Take care of yourself,
too.

Tim smiles and puts the phone away.

INT. WESTERN STYLE BAR/RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Tim approaches his friends, still seated at the table.

TIM
Look, I'm sorry about before. I
just got a lot on my mind--

ELI
Then there's no need to add any
more worry to it. You're cool.

Eli smiles and pulls Tim's knife from the table. He hands it over. Tim takes it, retracts the blade, puts it back in his pocket, and smiles. Tim pulls Tracey aside.

TRACEY
What's up?

TIM
Listen, I'm sorry for pushing you,
but we're in this thing together
and I'd really appreciate it if you
respected me more.

TRACEY
What do you mean?

TIM
I mean it's important for me to
keep appointments when we schedule
them. Now, I told this guy we'd be
there tomorrow, and I aim to be
there. If you can't respect that
then you're going to have to write
this book yourself.

TRACEY
Okay, okay...damn, man. Okay, we
can leave tomorrow...How you doing?

TIM
Better.

ANOTHER MUSICIAN prepares to perform while the friends do shots at the table.

EXT. LOG CABIN - DAY

Tim and Tracey stand outside the front door with bags in hand. They exchange "goodbyes" with Eli and Angie, then walk to the car and hit the road.

TIM

You ever get the feeling that most people just don't want to be seen?

Tracey jokingly covers his face with his hand.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Tim and Tracey stand beside the car; Tim checks a map.

TRACEY

You sure?

TIM

Yes, it's supposed to be right here. I'll call.

Tim pulls out his phone, dials, and puts it to his ear. He hears no ringing. He checks it.

TIM (CONT'D)

Fuck, I've got no service out here.

TRACEY

It's okay, man. We can literally find hundreds of other places on the way--

TIM

Will you stop with that bullshit! You expect to write a fucking book about people you've met on the road, and you won't even meet anybody!

TRACEY

What do you say we do Vegas instead?

TIM

What, so we can interview some hookers and slot jockeys?

(MORE)

TIM (CONT'D)

Look, you were the one who wanted to search for something real-- something true--and the only truth I see is that you can't handle sitting still for more than a few seconds unless you got a beer or bong in hand. How are you supposed to write about a world you've never really lived in?

TRACEY

Oh, and you're better, huh? How? You act like some kinda fucking martyr--like having your talent is the worst fucking thing that could have been given to you. You pissed that away like you're pissing away every second on this trip. Are you even able to have fun?

TIM

I'd be able to have more fun if you were able to admit to yourself that this shit ain't all fun and games.

TRACEY

Well a lot of it is--

TIM

And a lot of it isn't. You think there's just some magic secret out there we're gonna stumble across? We're gonna go out to the desert, chant some mantras, and it'll all make sense? I can tell you the secret right now--no matter how many people we interview we're only gonna come to one conclusion: this whole world is fucked. Everybody's just doing their best to get by, and this idea of a brilliant, universal truth isn't just hanging there waiting for us to pluck it like some overripe orange from a god-damned tree. We didn't even have to leave Buffalo to figure that out. You've been looking for an enemy. Look around. You're the fucking enemy...

Tim looks around.

TIM (CONT'D)
...We're the enemy. I can't
believe I let you take me for a
ride.

TRACEY
I'm sorry, I just...I got something
big on my mind--

Tim watches a FARMER, 60, riding a tractor in his field. The Farmer looks to be exhausted to the bone from a lifetime of hard work. His back is curled and hanging head looks ready to fall off of his shoulders.

TIM
Forget Cali. Let's head south.

TRACEY
Like Arizona?

TIM
Mexico.

TRACEY
You're a crazy fuck, you know that?

Tim smiles.

TIM
But we really need to get started
on this book when we get there.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - NIGHT

Tracey drives while Tim stares into the darkness.

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Tim and Tracey sleep in separate beds.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - DAY

Tracey drives south down the I-25.

RETURN TO AWAKEN NETWORK'S INTERVIEW WITH TIM

ON THE SCREEN:

SAMANTHA TAYLOR

So, can you tell us what this
"Silent Protest" is?

TIM

Well, it's, uh, it's not a protest
in any traditional sense--no rich
vs. poor, black vs. white, dove vs.
hawk...there are no picket signs or
chants. It's an inner thing--a
protest against all those forces
that cripple the spirit: hatred,
self-deception, ignored health
problems, loyalty to those who
abuse and shame us...

SAMANTHA TAYLOR

Do you believe it possible for this
philosophy to serve as a model
world revolution?

TIM

Maybe, maybe not. That's not
really the point. I think it can,
however, help individual people to
lead an inner revolution--for each
person to hit "reset" and start all
over again with a healthy viewpoint
and the proper tools to achieve
their goals. A world of happy,
healthy warriors defending their
true selves at all costs. Then,
what's left to rebel against?

RETURN TO THE ROAD TRIP - FIVE YEARS EARLIER

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Tim and Tracey sleep in separate beds.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - DAY

Tracey drives south down the I-25. They listen to the news.

NEWS BROADCAST

...Migrant workers on a farm in
Central Nebraska went on strike
this morning with demands of better
working conditions...

Neither Tim nor Tracey is paying attention.

TIM

You think this thing'll get us
safely through the desert?

TRACEY

Yeah, it'll be fine.

TIM

What about getting it registered?
I hear your car could be confis--

TRACEY

Naw, naw, everything's fine, man.
I've driven in Peru, Thailand and
Madrid. I can handle this.

TIM

K.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - NIGHT

They pass a sign: "LAST US EXIT BEFORE MEXICO."

EXT. MEXICAN BORDER - NIGHT

Tim and Tracey ride over the spike strip into MEXICO.

Armed guards with assault weapons patrol the area, which is
dimly lit with flood lights.

Tracey inspects the scene and looks to be holding back a
panic attack. He remains somewhat composed but unravels once
they pass security.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - NIGHT

Tracey tries to drive but is overcome with anxiety. He pulls
over and shuts off the car. He sweats profusely and wipes
his face with his clammy hands.

TIM

You alright?

TRACEY

Yeah...yeah, I'm sorry.

TIM

You afraid of guns or something?

TRACEY

No...it's just...the border...I haven't crossed a border since I've been back from Spain. I didn't think it'd be that tough.

TIM

Well you did it and survived.

TRACEY

No...there's something I never told you. I've been trying to tell you-- but you won't let me fucking talk!

TIM

I'm sorry, man. The floor is yours.

Tracey is shaking. He tries to collect himself but can't.

TRACEY

When I was in Madrid, I went to a party...was big...Most people left early on to hit the discos, but I stuck around 'til late night...I was fucked up...did a bit of everything. I got up to use the bathroom, and I could hear some noise coming from a back bedroom. I walked over and peeked inside. Some guy was really giving it to this unconscious chick while three or four other guys were cheering. Then they started taking turns--I mean, she wasn't exactly able to object. I was just watching, had no fucking clue what was going on. Then one of the guys sees me standing there, winks, and calls me over. I was so trashed, and she was so hot. So without even thinking, I hopped on and gave it to her for a good minute before I realized what in the hell was going on. It hit me like a fuckin' train. So I pulled out and took off running...

TIM

Are you serious?

Tracey sweats profusely. He wipes his face with his shirt.

TRACEY

...We gang-raped that girl, and I don't even know who she was.

TIM

Holy shit. You go to the cops?

Tracey shakes his head.

TIM (CONT'D)

Did she?

TRACEY

I don't fucking know.

TIM

And you're a fucking journalist, for christ's sake! You're supposed to uncover this shit.

TRACEY

I know...I know...I can't stop thinking about it. Every time I close my eyes, I see her face. I don't feel like a human being. I don't know how I'll ever be able to write truth. I'm a god-damn scum bag...Let's just keep moving...

He wipes away some more tears.

TRACEY (CONT'D)

...I can't drive right now. Can you take the wheel?

Tim nods. The two exit the car and switch seats.

Tim struggles to start the car; Tracey reaches over him and starts it. Tim jerks the car forward with the headlights off. Tracey reaches over and turns those on as well.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - NIGHT

Tim drives a desolate Mexican highway. He comes across a major divide in the road.

TIM

Which direction?

TRACEY

How the hell should I know?

Tracey is wrapped in as close to the fetal position as his seatbelt will allow.

TIM

I can't believe we jumped into this thing without a map.

He squints and stares ahead. They're approaching the divide.

TRACEY

When in doubt, it's best to go right.

TIM

Is that like a Zen travel tip?

They arrive. Tim selects the exit to the left.

LATER

They pass through a small town.

TIM

I think we should find a hotel before we get too far into the desert. I don't want to trifle with this sun once it comes up.

Tracey doesn't respond.

EXT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Tim pulls into a hotel in CHIHUAHUA and parks.

INT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Tim approaches the counter; Tracey shuffles behind. A BEAUTIFUL MEXICAN GIRL, 20, awaits their business.

TIM

(smiles)
Buenas noches.

MEXICAN GIRL

(smiles back)
Buenas.

Tracey arrives.

TRACEY
(in Spanish)
We'd like a room please.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Tim enters the room. He sits on a bed and rubs his face as though he's trying to figure out why he's there. But he smiles despite the confusion.

Tracey lumbers into the room. He stumbles to the other bed, kicks off his shoes, and slides under the covers.

TRACEY
Kill that light, would ya?

TIM
Sure thing, boss.

Tim shuts off the lights. He looks into the darkness of the room, then to the light of the hallway.

TIM (CONT'D)
Hey, you're not your dad, you know.

He walks out the door.

INT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Tim flirts with the Girl at the main desk, who reciprocates with equal energy. He looks happy. She points at a foldout map and looks to be giving him directions.

EXT. CHIHUAHUA TOWN CENTER - NIGHT

Tim wanders into the zocalo, or town center, and sits on a bench. He watches a BEAUTIFUL MEXICAN WOMAN, 25, listening to a MARIACHI BAND playing a song about longing for home. She looks to be moved by the song.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Tim is woken by the frantic movements of his Friend, hard at work packing his bags.

TIM
You're killin' me, man.

TRACEY

I gotta go...we gotta go...we gotta hit the road, man...we should go.

TIM

Go back to sleep.

TRACEY

No, we gotta move...we gotta go.

TIM

Go where?

TRACEY

South...east...southeast.

TIM

Okay, okay, but can we at least sleep a few more hours?

TRACEY

The car's moving in fifteen with or without you.

TIM

Not if you want me to drive it it's not.

TRACEY

Okay, you got forty-five minutes and then we hit the road. Okay?

TIM

Fine.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - DAY

Tim drives. Tracey has more vitality than the night before. He studies a Mexican road map while gulping a beer.

TIM

I really wish you wouldn't do that.

TRACEY

What? It's not illegal here.

TIM

Still I'd rather not call any unnecessary attention to ourselves.

TRACEY

Whatever, you'll loosen up.

He takes another big swig. Tim gives him a look.

TIM

What exactly is our plan, tough
guy?

TRACEY

I say we head down the center of
Mexico, through Chihuahua and
Guanajuato, and then west to the
coast...relax in a little beach
town, find a few señoritas...

TIM

And what's our plan for cash?

TRACEY

I got us covered.

TIM

You mean, your mom's got us
covered. What happens if she gets
hit by a bus?

TRACEY

Then we'll get jobs teaching
English or something. I know a few
guys who did it in Peru. It'll be
cake.

TIM

Where we heading right now?

TRACEY

South.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - NIGHT

Tim drives. Tracey sleeps with a beer still in his hand. He
snores loudly. One snore is so loud, it wakes him.

TRACEY

Whoa, we just hit something?

Tim laughs.

INT. TAQUERIA - NIGHT

Tim and Tracey eat.

Tracey is visibly drunk and stares awkwardly at a PRETTY GIRL, 22, sitting at a nearby table with THREE MEDIUM-SIZED MALES her age. Tracey's eyes carry great sadness.

The Males in the party glare back at him.

TIM

You need to take it easy, man.

Tracey shakes his empty beer bottle at the WAITER. Tim gives Tracey a dirty look. Tracey gets up and walks to the

BATHROOM

Tracey washes his hands. He takes a profound look at himself in the mirror. He puts his hand to it to meet its reflection. He sighs deeply.

Tracey exits the men's room and enters a

HALLWAY

just as the Pretty Girl exits the ladies' room nearby. Tracey cuts her off and pins her against the wall.

TRACEY

(in slurred Spanish)

I'm sorry...I'm sorry...

The Girl struggles to get away, but Tracey is too strong. She slaps his face. Her Friends see this and come running to her aid.

The first man grabs Tracey by his shirt, and the guy directly behind throws a punch over his friend's shoulder and lands it on Tracey's confused face.

Tim comes to Tracey's rescue and unleashes a massive blow to the face of the man who hit Tracey, but is blind-sided by the third guy.

The Three Amigos continue to stomp on Tim and Tracey, who curl in defensive positions on the ground.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - NIGHT

Tim drives as he and Tracey writhe in pain. Both are bloody and bruised.

TIM

What the fuck is wrong with you?

TRACEY

Her hair smelled so nice--

TIM

Are you even listening to me? What the fuck is wrong with you?

TRACEY

It's too late...It's too late...

Flashing lights approach from behind. Tim checks the rear-view mirror and sees the police advancing. He smashes the steering wheel with his fist.

LATER

Tim has pulled over. A TOUGH MEXICAN COP, 30, approaches.

The Cop stands tall above Tim and speaks in rapid Spanish, paying no respect to the distinct possibility that the two gringos do not speak his language.

Tim and Tracey, however, respond in Spanish. The Cop shines a light inside the car.

TOUGH COP

Why are you bleeding?

TRACEY

We got into an accident earlier--

TOUGH COP

Your car looks fine.

TRACEY

Oh, it wasn't in *this* car--

TOUGH COP

Whose car is *this*?

Tracey raises his hand.

TRACEY

Mine, officer.

TOUGH COP

Show me your license and registration.

Tracey grabs some documents out of the glovebox and hands them over. The Cop examines them briefly.

TOUGH COP (CONT'D)
And who's Diane Morretti?

TRACEY
The car's in my mother's name--

TOUGH COP
Show me your visas and car import permit.

TIM
We don't have visas--

TRACEY
Or a permit.

The Officer hands the documents back to Tracey.

TOUGH COP
I need you to follow me.

INT. CHIHUAHUA HOLDING CENTER - DAY

Tracey wakes up from his slumber on top of a wooden bench in the holding center. A number of other criminals sit on benches in the same cell. Tim paces the floor.

TRACEY
Oh god, what happened yesterday?

TIM
We got our asses kicked.

TRACEY
Whose fault was it?

Tim gives him a look.

TRACEY (CONT'D)
Why are we locked up?

TIM
Driving without permits. I told you we needed permits.

TRACEY
Hey, don't blame me, you were driving.

TIM
You're right. This is both of our fault.

(MORE)

TIM (CONT'D)

Yours for being a fucking idiot and mine for believing in you.

TRACEY

Don't worry, I'll get us out of here asap.

TIM

How? You gonna threaten to write a piece illuminating us as political prisoners?

A Cop approaches the pen and calls Tracey over. They converse as Tim studies the other prisoners; nothing but broken spirits staring into their own respective worlds.

Tracey's conversation concludes, and he returns to Tim.

TRACEY

Okay, he said they'd let us outta here today for two grand each--

TIM

Two-fucking-grand? There goes the last of my album money.

TRACEY

It's okay. I can have my mom wire the cash as soon as they let me call her.

TIM

And what about the car?

TRACEY

Car's gone, man, but he said we could at least get our bags back.

TIM

I can't believe I listened to you.

TRACEY

Hey, it's my fucking car alright!

EXT. CHIHUAHUA HOLDING CENTER - NIGHT

Tim and Tracey stand outside the holding center. Tim has his duffel bag over his shoulder, and Tracey carries a large backpack.

Both look to be losing confidence. Tim takes a quick look around, then digs into his bag, pulls out his knife, and quickly puts it in his front pocket.

TRACEY
C'mon, let's get a hotel.

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Tim and Tracey wander in search of a hotel.

TRACEY
My uncle's well versed in
international law. He's going to
search for any loopholes to get us
the car back...Hey, you remember
when I balled Flor Ramirez in the
back seat of that thing senior
year? The memories...

Tim takes a look around.

TIM
You see anyplace yet?

Tracey shakes his head.

TRACEY
What I wouldn't give for a good
burger.

They pass a PIMP, 27, arguing with a PROSTITUTE, 20, in front
of a dark alley. The argument escalates, and the Pimp slaps
the Prostitute in the face.

Tim approaches them. Tracey follows behind.

TRACEY (CONT'D)
What are you doing? Let's go.

The Pimp lets the Prostitute go when he sees potential
customers. She wanders away.

PIMP
(in broken English)
Hey, you guys want have good time?

Tim doesn't respond. The Pimp turns to Tracey.

PIMP (CONT'D)
My friend, you want get a fuck?

TRACEY
No thanks, hombre. Tim, let's go.

The Pimp turns to Tim.

PIMP
What, you no have dick, man?

TIM
What'd you just say?

PIMP
(smiles)
I say, you no have dick or
something, man.

Tim grabs the Pimp and pushes him deep into the alley. He pins the Pimp against a wall and unleashes a violent, and seemingly insatiable, assault against him. Tim works the Pimp's entire body, each blow seems to further enrage him.

Tracey tries to intervene, but Tim elbows him in the nose. Tracey staggers back and almost trips over a garbage can.

Tim continues to beat the nearly unconscious Pimp. Tim holds him against the wall with his left arm and reaches into his pocket with his right. He grabs the knife and flips open the blade, which reflects the street light in the distance.

Tracey sees the shimmering blade.

TRACEY
What are you doing? This is
fucking nuts--

TIM
You're the one who said you could
kill. Well here's your fucking
death--

TRACEY
No!

Tim pulls his arm back to strike but stops once it's hit its apex. He looks into the Pimp's dull eyes for a long moment and smiles--but the smile soon fades, and Tim lets go of his shirt.

Tim retracts the blade of the knife, wipes its surface of his fingerprints with his shirt, and dumps it in a metal garbage can, making a loud CLANG. Tracey jumps when he hears it.

TRACEY (CONT'D)
(frantic)
Yo, we gotta get outta here.
Someone's gonna call the cops.

He grabs Tim, snapping him out of a trance, and the two run out of the alley and onto the

STREET

They run halfway down the block and stop. Both are panting.

TRACEY

We gotta get outta town, man.
Let's hit the bus station. We
gotta play it cool though...Cool.

Tim nods. They stroll around the next corner.

EXT. BUS STATION - NIGHT

Tracey and Tim exit a cab and enter the nearly vacant bus station. They walk to a darkened corner and sit on the floor.

TRACEY

Tijuana? Let's get back to the
States--

Tim continues to stare at the floor.

TIM

No...

He breaks his gaze from the floor and looks straight ahead.

TIM (CONT'D)

...Margo made her own decisions...
I'm going to continue south alone.
Don't try to contact me--

He searches for more words but loses them as he looks at his bewildered Friend. Tracey seems lost at first but soon smiles.

TRACEY

I understand.

He pats Tim on the back.

EXT. BUS STATION - NIGHT

Tim hands his bag to a MALE BUS EMPLOYEE, who tags it, and slides it in the storage compartment under the bus. Tim stops before entering the bus and looks at Tracey, still inside the bus station. They both smile and wave.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

Tim enters the bus and sits at a window seat. He opens the closed shade and gazes out the window.

EXT. BUS - NIGHT

The bus pulls away from the station. An electronic marquee in the windshield is lit with the name: "OAXACA."

INT. BUS - NIGHT

Tim gazes through the window at the vast Mexican countryside. The moon is just bright enough to display the fields and mountains in the distance. Tim smiles and rests his head.

SAMANTHA TAYLOR (V.O.)

Well, Tim, we thank you again for coming on the show today. I know you've been busy recently with more than just your music. We at the studio would like to congratulate you on the recent birth of your second daughter.

RETURN TO THE AWAKEN NETWORK'S INTERVIEW WITH TIM

ON THE SCREEN:

TIM

Thank you. My life is full of love. It's a wonderful time for me to be alive.

SAMANTHA TAYLOR

Should we expect anything new from you in the coming months?

TIM

(smiles)

That's not for me to decide.

INT. TRACEY'S HOUSE - NIGHT - RETURN TO PRESENT DAY

Tracey sits in his dark living room. A fire in the fireplace provides the only light. He has the unopened package in his lap. He reaches into his pocket, pulls out a pen knife, and cuts into the package.

He looks over his shoulder to see if anyone is watching, then opens the lids. Inside is a handwritten letter, a typed manuscript, and several pictures. Tracey goes for the manuscript first.

INSERT - THE MANUSCRIPT

"A Noble Truth"

By Tim Pastoria and Tracey Morretti

BACK TO THE LIVING ROOM

Tracey thumbs through it then grabs the letter; he reads it.

TIM (V.O.)

It's been a long time, friend. I regret never having thanked you for getting me out of Buffalo. I didn't know how bad I was doing; it could have been far worse. The years may have passed, but I never forgot about the book we meant to write together. I had some time off after recording my last album. I started typing one day and didn't stop until I finished this manuscript. I thought I'd discovered its angle while on our trip, but it took me until my first girl, Nayeli, was born to understand...

Tracey holds up a picture of Tim with his WIFE and NAYELI all smiling in front of their house in Oaxaca.

TIM (V.O.)

...We were the story--you and me. I held a mirror to myself; you'll see the reflection in these pages. I did the same for you--at least what I knew of you. It's all in there: the drugs, your kid, the rape. You once held with such conviction the idea that truth could change the world. Why don't you start with yourself. This is the only copy of the manuscript that exists. I've deleted the files from my computer. It's up to you and the publishing world whether it ever sees print. Rick was right, man--life is for the living. It's not too late.

(MORE)

TIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I'll support whatever decision you make. I hope you're well. Cheers, mate. Your friend, Tim.

Tracey thumbs through the manuscript again. He looks at the pictures of his family on the mantle just above the roaring fire, then at the opened laptop computer on the table next to him, whose screen has the article on Gage Pharmaceuticals.

He stares into the fire, then at the flammable pages of the manuscript. He thinks for a moment, then throws the box knife in a metal garbage can near his chair, making a loud CLANG.

EXT. TRACEY'S CONVERTIBLE - SUNSET - FLASHBACK TO ROAD TRIP

Tracey drives in the direction of the setting sun with Tim in the passenger seat. They're both looking straight ahead.

FADE OUT.