

BITCH

by

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FADE IN:

INT. POLICE CRUISER - DAY

Officer DEBRA DEW (40s) coarse features, nose broken more than once, sits behind the wheel. She puts her hat on and reaches to the rack for the shotgun.

She slips a shell into the magazine -- chambering it with a quick shuck of the slide.

TITLE OVER

Oxford, Mississippi
1996

EXT. TOWN SQUARE/STREET - DAY

Debra -- muscular and ungainly -- distinctly unfeminine, squeezes out of the cruiser, shotgun in hand.

SAM DOSS (50s) a police captain in a white shirt, stands next to a telephone pole. Debra lumbers up to him.

Sam gives her a subdued smile.

SAM

You the one got the job, huh?
I thought you's on vacation.

DEBRA

Shit naw. Not no more.

She looks around at the dozens of DUFFERS assembled to watch the free show.

DEBRA

You ought to be charging admission
to all these folks, Sam.

SAM

Aw hell. I reckon the whole
town's heard about it. We got
it blocked on Jackson and
down Ninth.

DEBRA

Both ways?

SAM

Yep. The chief don't want
us to do nothing rash. There
he is, right up on the corner.
Three guesses who it is.

Debra looks. A thin black youth with no shirt and a baggy pair of camouflage pants stands in the center of the street, brandishing a very big knife. His name's MOZELL.

A ring of POLICE OFFICERS encircle Mozell, none of them too close. Debra shakes her head.

DEBRA

Why don't they put that poor bastard in the pen and just leave him in there?

SAM

I don't know. You want to go talk to him?

DEBRA

What'd he do this time?

SAM

Been cuttin' at cars comin' down the street. Hollerin' a bunch of crazy old shit.

Debra hands over her shotgun and hat to Sam. She goes on up the street and faces Mozell.

DEBRA

How you doin' today, Mozell?

Tears fall from the boy's eyes. He rubs snot from his nose with the back of his hand.

MOZELL

Stay back, Miss Debra. Don't come no closer. They been messin' me over again. Said I tried to cornhole James Louis's goat.

Debra glances around at the faces behind Mozell. She watches them, one eye on the knife.

DEBRA

Folks need to get back to work, Mozell. You got the whole street stopped here. Why don't you put that knife down and we'll go over here in the shade and talk about it. You don't want Butch on you, do you?

MOZELL

I don't care if they bring him. He'll be dead if they do.

It's hot there under the sun and on the black asphalt of the street. All the people watching makes Debra uneasy. Sweat beads on her face and grows under her arms.

It's relatively quiet. Other than the low hum of police cars idling and the traffic signal control box clicking on the corner there isn't much noise.

DEBRA

Mozell, you listen to me. If Butch gets on you he ain't gonna turn you loose. So why don't you just put that butcher knife down and save everybody a lot of trouble? You don't want to get shot, do you?

Something clicks in the young man's head at these words, for the expression on his face changes and he lowers his stance and spreads his feet a little more.

Debra sees how red his eyes are.

MOZELL

Go on and shoot me, police officer. Miss big bad police officer.

His eyes narrow and he gives Debra a mean grin.

MOZELL

Come on -- cunt cracker -- think you're so bad with your big gun. Show me your tits; I'll cut 'em off.

She backs up; turns around and walks back down to Sam.

SAM

Well?

DEBRA

Turn the damn dog loose on him.

Sam waves up a cruiser. The car pulls beside Sam. In the backseat, Butch -- a big black German Shepard.

The HANDLER gets out, opens the back door and fastens the dog to a chain leash and brings him out on the road.

Mozell stands all alone, crouching a bit, holding the knife out point first.

HANDLER

Y'all ready?

SAM

Let him go.

The Handler slips the leash. The dog runs low and fast --
 He leaps and bites Mozell's free hand, ripping the flesh --
 Mozell swings the knife in a wide arc and sinks it into the
 dog's ribs --

The dog whines, once, and then falls to the pavement --

Mozell pulls the knife free. Smiles at Debra. Motions with
 the torn, bloody hand.

MOZELL

Come on, homegirl. Shoot me.

He stumbles toward Debra. In a clear, sad voice he says:

MOZELL

Shoot me.

He drops the knife and reaches into his waistband as if
 reaching for a gun --

Debra takes the shotgun from Sam --

She BLOWS a hole in Mozell's chest --

Mozell flies backward, landing on the sidewalk --

People on the sidelines -- amazed -- in shock -- like fans
 at football --

Mozell bleeds, a dark stream inching away from his body,
 both hands empty --

EXT. DEBRA'S HOUSE - DAY

Old unpainted house nestled in the woods, tin roof rusted to
 a mottling of gray and brown.

Debra emerges from the front door. She steps to the end of
 the porch, where a tub full of car parts rest.

TITLE OVER

Two years later

She yawns, unzips her jeans, turns and pees into an old
 tractor tire holding grass and weeds.

Looks out across what some might call a yard: junked cars and cardboard boxes full of hay and scrubby chickens.

A chain hoist hangs from a limb in a big tree. Engine blocks and hubcaps sprawled around in the dirt.

INT. DEBRA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Debra goes to the stove. Her hands shake. She grabs a coffeepot, takes off the lid. Mold on the grounds inside.

She takes out the strainer and knocks it against the garbage can. Opens the fridge to see a dried hunk of cheese, some rancid bacon and a can of evaporated milk.

A fist raps on the front door.

EXT. DEBRA'S HOUSE - DAY

EUSTACE LONG (30s) in an expensive suit, bangs on the door. Door opens. Debra steps outside.

EUSTACE

You're behind on your mortgage payments, Debra Dew.

DEBRA

Shit, Eustace, again.

EUSTACE

Gonna have to start court action to repossess your home here.

DEBRA

Now how long we been friends?

Eustace takes a smoke from his jacket; fires it up.

EUSTACE

Don't drag our friendship into it. This is business. You don't even have a job for God's sake.

DEBRA

I will get a damn job.

EUSTACE

Oh yeah. Where?

FRONT YARD

Eustace follows Debra to the big tree. Debra works on the hoist's bendix.

DEBRA

I'll go back to fixing cars.
All I got to do is put my sign
back out front.

EUSTACE

How come you quit before?
This is what you were doing
when you got fired from the
police damn near two year ago.

DEBRA

Hell. I couldn't get people
to pay me.

EUSTACE

People still owe you money?

DEBRA

Hell yeah. Sorry bastards.

EUSTACE

How much?

DEBRA

You mean for everything? Or just
the labor?

EUSTACE

Everything.

Debra thinks about it for a little bit. She scratches the
side of her jaw.

DEBRA

About three thousand dollars.

EUSTACE

You're shittin' me.

DEBRA

They always gonna pay you next
week, you know. And next week
don't ever roll around.

Debra fans a fly circling her face.

EUSTACE

So why you wanna get back into it?

DEBRA

'Cause. There's money in it.

EUSTACE

Not if they don't pay you.

DEBRA

I'm gonna do things different
this time.

EUSTACE

Sorry.

DEBRA

Somebody brings a car in here,
they're gonna hand me the keys.

EUSTACE

The bank doesn't give one iota --

DEBRA

Wait, wait now. I'll figure up
the cost to fix the car. If they
don't have the money when it's
time to pay, they won't get
their car back.

EUSTACE

Why didn't you do that before?

DEBRA

Shit. Everybody's got a sob
story, you know, and they're your
friends. This time it'll be
different. Tell the bank.

EUSTACE

Too little too late. They want
their five thousand dollars. Now.

DEBRA

They'll get their money.
Just buy me some time.

EUSTACE

I can't afford to buy much.

DEBRA

A month.

Eustace drags on his cigarette and lets the smoke trail out
through his nose. Tosses the butt in the yard.

EUSTACE

Five days.

INT. VFW CLUB - NIGHT

A personal check lies in the center of a table with greenbacks crumpled in piles and low mounds of quarters.

Debra at the table, holding a hand of cards, a blue chip in front of her, along with two red ones and a white one.

She holds two pair, jacks and eights, all different suits, and a three.

WAYNE (O.S.)

What about you, Debra Dew?

Debra glances over at WAYNE (40s) who holds the deck in his hand, leaning back in his wooden chair.

A small cloud of smoke hovers over the table.

DEBRA

I'm thinkin' on it.

WAYNE

Well don't think all night.
Some of us got to work tomorrow.

TOLLIVER (50s) holding a hand, sits next to Wayne. Tolliver drums some fingers on the table, impatient.

TOLLIVER

(to Debra)

Bet's to you.

DEBRA

I know it.

JIMMY (30s) cards in hand, sits across from Debra.

JIMMY

We gonna play or what?

Sam Doss, in his white police captain's shirt, beer in hand, enters the room, and pulls up a chair to watch.

Tolliver gives out a long sigh, picks up a half pint of whiskey and takes a small nip. Clears his throat.

TOLLIVER

What time is it, Sam?

Sam lifts his wrist and looks at his watch.

SAM

Five till twelve.

WAYNE
Shit, I need to go after
this hand.

JIMMY
I should've done gone.

WAYNE
Come on, Debra, shit.

Everybody stares at Debra, waiting. She takes a few more seconds. Then:

DEBRA
I'm out.

Debra drops her cards on the table. Pushes back her chair.

TOLLIVER
'Bout goddamned time. Bet's
to you, Jimmy.

EXT. VFW CLUB - NIGHT

Debra stands on the porch, smoking. Sam, sipping on his beer, comes out.

They stand in silence. The trees, full of dark leaves, wave gently over the cars and trucks parked in the high grass.

DEBRA
You got a beer? I done run
clean out.

SAM
There's some in the cooler.
Help yourself.

Debra walks to the bed of Sam's truck. She lifts the lid on the cooler.

The others emerge from the club and go to their cars.

DEBRA
See y'all later.

JIMMY
Go easy, Debra Dew.

DEBRA
Holler at me when you're ready
to lose some money.

They all climb in their cars and leave. Debra, beer in hand, steps up on the porch beside Sam, the yard silent again, the cars going down the road.

DEBRA
Thanks for the beer.

SAM
Aw you're welcome. How much'd you lose?

DEBRA
Broke even.

SAM
Never gonna win five thousand dollars breaking even.

DEBRA
How'd you know I needed five thousand dollars?

SAM
Eustace.

DEBRA
I'll play better, next time.

SAM
You're unlucky. When you're unlucky it don't matter much what you do.

DEBRA
My luck's bound to change.

SAM
Even if it does, which I doubt, you'll never save your house sitting at this low stakes table.

DEBRA
I'll connect, then play some high stakes in Memphis.

SAM
You ain't no poker player.

DEBRA
Then what am I?

SAM
A cop.

DEBRA

Oh no now -- not according to the Oxford P.D. I'm just someone who uses excessive force -- exercises poor judgement. Besides, I can't hold onto the past.

SAM

No, but the past will hold onto you.

DEBRA

Then I'm really fucked.

SAM

Not if you go see Buster Hazelwood.

This name almost makes Debra choke on her beer. She coughs:

DEBRA

I don't want nothing to do with that State Line Mob.

SAM

Buster's not that bad a fella.

DEBRA

Come on now. He killed Rusty Larson.

SAM

That's bullshit. Just a rumor.

DEBRA

Then how'd Rusty die?

SAM

Heart attack.

DEBRA

Heart attack my butt.

SAM

Buster's got a ton of greenbacks, and he loves to spread it around.

DEBRA

That's because his fingers are dirty and he wants somebody to lick 'em.

SAM

What he wants is to hire you.

DEBRA
Hire me? To do what? Run some
shine?

SAM
Nothing like that now.

DEBRA
Peddle dope?

SAM
This here is strictly legitimate.

INT. DEBRA'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

Debra checks her reflection in the mirror. Turns on water
in the sink and runs a brush under it.

She runs the brush through her graying hair

BEDROOM

Small closet in the corner. Debra, hair brushed, rips off
her blouse and throws it on the floor. She pulls a clean
white blouse off the hanger, pulls it on and buttons it up.

Debra eases a .38 revolver from the closet. Opens the
cylinder, checks the six chambers.

EXT. WHITE IRIS CLUB - DAY

Crude, off-white block building on the side of the highway.

INT. WHITE IRIS CLUB - BUSTER'S OFFICE - DAY

BUSTER HAZELWOOD (40s) one black lens in his eyeglasses,
innocent grin, kicks back behind his desk.

Before the desk stands NOONY VECK, a long-haired country man
in his sixties.

BUSTER
Listen, you gray-haired scumbag,
and listen good. Do as you're
told or I'm gonna take your kid
out in the swamp and cut his
sweet little head off.

NOONY
But Ted's a friend, Buster.

BUSTER

Ted. That fuckin' Ted. That bastard. You ought to whip his ass just on general principle. That piss poor motherfucker.

Buster rises, moves to the Noony.

BUSTER

Did he ever invite you over to his private bass lake when they were jerking those ten-pound lunkers out of there?

NOONY

Naw.

BUSTER

Hell naw. Fuck him.

Buster slaps Noony. A sound like a pistol shot, his hand suddenly exploding on Noony's cheek, the hair flying around his head as his face is slapped sideways.

Noony clutches his face, trembling. Buster raises one finger and puts it in his face.

BUSTER

You work for me, not Ted.

INT. WHITE IRIS CLUB - BAR - DAY

Debra enters the empty, dimly lit club.

At the bar stands LUTIE MCVEY (30s) a slight man, his canary yellow hair greased into ducktails.

Lutie sips from a glass full of bourbon. He eyes Debra as she strolls up to the bar.

The door to Buster's office opens and Noony, wiping blood from his mouth, stumbles out.

Buster appears in the doorway of his office, examining the palm of his hand. He motions to Debra.

BUSTER

Come on in, woman.

Buster disappears inside his office. Debra moves for the door, but Lutie blocks her.

LUTIE

I'll have to frisk you.

Debra pulls out her piece and shows it, not pointing. Lutie puts his hands up and takes a step back.

LUTIE

Buster.

Buster steps behind Lutie to look at Debra's gun.

BUSTER

(to Debra)

Put the pistol away. We're all friends here.

BUSTER'S OFFICE

Buster kicks back behind his desk.

BUSTER

(to Debra)

Have a chair.

Debra puts her gun away as she settles into a chair across from Buster. Lutie closes the door and moves next to Debra.

BUSTER

Lutie, you know what I can't hardly figure out?

LUTIE

What's that, boss?

BUSTER

Why they fired this woman for shootin' some jungle bunny.

LUTIE

I heard that nigger was crazier than a shithouse rat.

BUSTER

So what if that boy didn't have a gun on him. Thirty year ago the governor would've thrown her a party.

LUTIE

It's a new day.

BUSTER

Ain't that the fuckin' truth.

(to Debra)

You were just doin' your job.

DEBRA
Speaking of jobs, Mr. Hazelwood,
Sam says you might have one for me.

BUSTER
(to Lutie)
See there: she wants to get
right down to it. I like that.

LUTIE
Admirable.

BUSTER
Well, Debra Dew, Sam says
you're good at finding missing
persons.

DEBRA
Who's missing?

BUSTER
My fiancé. Disappeared three
days ago.

LUTIE
With twenty thousand bucks
of Buster's dough.

BUSTER
I want her back.

DEBRA
Or the money?

BUSTER
No, I just want her back. I
love her. Love, it's a bitch.

A pause. Deb considers this offer.

BUSTER
Find her, Debra. Bring
her back.

DEBRA
What happens to her when I do?

BUSTER
Nothin'. I won't touch her.
Swear it. She's too young to
be out on her own.

DEBRA
How young?

BUSTER
Seventeen.

Debra considers this offer.

BUSTER
I'll pay you six grand, three
now, three when you find her,
plus expenses.

DEBRA
Should've said that in the
first place.

Buster tosses Debra a roll of money. Debra examines it.

DEBRA
I'll need a picture.

Buster rises, walks over to Debra and extends his hand.

BUSTER
Lutie can get you all the
pictures you want.

They shake on it. Debra walks to the door, opens it and
then turns around to ask:

DEBRA
What's her name?

BUSTER
Ruby Lee.

INT. BANK - DAY

Debra drops the roll of money on a desk.

DEBRA
Three thousand. I want a receipt.

Behind the desk, Eustace scarfs a BBQ sandwich. He wipes
his mouth with a bib, talking with his mouth full.

EUSTACE
Damn, woman, what'd you get
yourself into?

DEBRA
Ain't sure yet.

EUSTACE
Need that other two by Friday.

DEBRA
You'll have it.

EXT. POLICE BARRACKS - DAY

Debra pulls her car in among the black-and-whites.

INT. POLICE BARRACKS - DAY

Officer CULLY SYMES (50s) (black) pours a cup of coffee as Debra knocks on the open door.

DEBRA
What's up, Cully?

CULLY
Hey, stranger. 'Bout time
you got out and about.

Cully gives Debra a hard handshake and pats her on the shoulder a couple of times.

CULLY
Coffee?

DEBRA
I got time for a cup, I guess.

Cully pours her a cup.

DEBRA
Thanks, Cully.

They settle in some chairs near each other. Debra pulls a tall ash can close and lights up.

Cully looks down into his coffee for a moment; then back up.

CULLY
How you doin'?

DEBRA
Aw, I'm all right. They keepin'
y'all busy?

CULLY
Aw yeah. Yeah, it's been pretty
busy. We had a bad one on 55 the
other day, tractor trailer and
a van full of retarded kids.

Cully takes a sip of coffee and crosses his legs, wincing.

CULLY

It was awful. Poor little kids.
Bad enough to be born like that
and then have a damn truck run
over you. It's a dirty business.

DEBRA

Glad you brought up business.
Need your help on something.

CULLY

Anything I can do.

DEBRA

I'm lookin' for this runaway.
Name's Ruby Lee. She's...

CULLY

She's a hot ticket is what
she is.

DEBRA

You know her?

CULLY

She's engaged to Buster
Hazelwood. Damn if that don't
tell you something.

DEBRA

I need to find her.

They sit for bit, listening to chatter on the radio.

CULLY

What do you want with little
old Ruby Lee?

DEBRA

Job. I was hired to track
her down by an interested party.

CULLY

You mean Buster.

DEBRA

He's interested, yeah.

CULLY

This job don't smell so good.

DEBRA
Only smells like one thing to me.

CULLY
What?

DEBRA
Money.

CULLY
Ask her mama and daddy. They
might know where she run off to.

DEBRA
Where do they live?

INT. DEBRA'S CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Debra behind the wheel, cruising along about forty and looking at fields of cotton under the bright hot sun.

She crosses a river bridge, looking down to the right.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

A car nosed into a stand of cane at the top of the bank, a man and woman struggling against the hood.

INT. DEBRA'S CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Debra slams on the brakes, shoves the car up in reverse, squalling a tire and going back across the bridge.

She pulls off down a little dirt road beside the bridge, deeply rutted, dust rolling over and through the car.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

She pulls up beside the man and woman. Leaves the car running and gets out.

The woman, ALMA LEE (30s) cries. The man, NOAH LEE (70s) just stands there, weaving unsteadily.

Noah wears a ripped shirt and cutoff jeans. Beer cans scatter the ground.

DEBRA
What's goin' on here?

ALMA
He's botherin' me.

Alma, hair knotted and tangled, her bare feet dusty, wobbles toward Debra. She sees Alma's rotten teeth.

Noah yells at Debra:

NOAH
This ain't none of your damned
business! This between me and her!

Noah puts one hand on the car to steady himself.

DEBRA
You best watch your mouth, mister.

Alma comes up beside Debra. Debra catches one little whiff of Alma that almost takes her breath away.

ALMA
He's botherin' me.

Alma stumbles and almost falls. She grabs Debra by the arm but Debra pushes her away. Noah shouts and slurs:

NOAH
I ain't bothered nobody! I was
mindin' my own business! You
goddamned whore!

DEBRA
All right. That's enough of
that. I'm lookin' for Ruby Lee.

ALMA
She's mine.

Alma lifts a finger, pointing to Noah.

ALMA
And his. But he'd never help
me feed her and he comes around
botherin' me all the time.
I want his ass arrested.

Noah moves toward a cooler next to the car.

DEBRA
(to Noah)
Stay right where you are.
You hear me? Don't make
a move.

NOAH
I ain't goin' nowhere.

Noah continues toward the cooler. Debra takes four steps and pushes Noah hard against the fender.

DEBRA
I said freeze. You know what
freeze means?

Noah glares at Debra with drunken intensity. Debra takes him by the arm, turns him around and wrenches it up.

Noah struggles against Debra. Debra lays the muzzle of her revolver into the soft place behind the lobe of his ear.

Debra's hand quakes as she whispers through gritted teeth:

DEBRA
Where's Ruby?

NOAH
How the hell I supposed to know?

DEBRA
This can go easy or this can
go hard. Don't matter to me.

ALMA (O.S.)
Don't shoot him.

Debra turns. Alma cries, covering her face with her hands.

ALMA
I know where Ruby at.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Laid out straight for miles, Debra driving the car through hills of pine trees.

EXT. JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI - DAY

Debra drives, sweeping through masses of cars and hotels and signs, weaving in and out.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Sun walks across the sky, shading gullies filled with kudzu.

Debra cruises past cotton growing, rusted irrigators on their wheels spraying water over the sunburned rows and past deserted silos with warped conical roofs.

Fields of tall corn, tasseled tops swaying in the wind, old barns where black cows chew cuds.

EXT. BILOXI, MISSISSIPPI - DAY

Debra cruises past a long white sign: WELCOME TO BILOXI.

Gulls move in the air and walk along the white sand. Coke cans and used condoms and cigarette butts litter the beach.

Cars move up and down the black highway and past hotels and shell shops set back from the road.

Seafood restaurants, bars, strip joints.

The sea laps slowly onto the slimy sand.

EXT. SKYWAY MOTEL - DAY

Debra, bleary-eyed and ragged, stands outside a sleazy motel by the beach, talking on a pay phone:

DEBRA
I've got a pretty good lead,
Buster. Biloxi. I'm at the
Skyway Motel. Will do.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Debra strolls down a long street by the beach.

EXT. FANTASY TRAILER PARK - DAY

She arrives at the front door of an RV parked among several abandoned trailers. Pretty pickup in the yard.

A thin squeaking emanates from the RV. She moves around to the end of the RV where a narrow screened door is cranked open near the roof.

The RV shakes very gently, and some man moans inside:

MAN
Oh God, baby, oh fuck, baby.

Debra walks off to one corner of the yard, but she can still hear it, the grunting and the panting.

After a while the RV ceases shaking. Moments later, a man emerges, an old guy dressed like a cowboy.

The man gets in the truck and spins out. Debra waits. Then she approaches the RV -- but stops when another truck drives up the street and pulls in and parks beside the RV.

A man gets out. They call him DK. He's six foot three and weighs damn near three hundred pounds.

DK goes over and knocks hard on the RV's door. He opens the door and goes in. He pulls the door closed behind him.

In less than a minute, there's yelling and things falling apart and what sounds like a body hitting the floor.

Then it's quiet. DK steps out of the door, holding some money in his hand.

He crams the money deep in his pocket, gets into the truck and takes off.

Debra goes over to the step and pushes open the door.

INT. RV - DAY

REENA (20s) (black) pretty in a scary kind of way, lies on the floor in a red gown.

She pushes herself with one hand, trying to get up. She sees Debra.

DEBRA
I'm looking for Ruby Lee.

Reena hangs her head back down.

Debra helps her get up to her knees, then up on one leg, and Reena's fingers dig into Debra's arm for support.

EXT. RV - YARD - DAY

Debra leads her over to a picnic table; helps her sit down.

There's a splotch of color on Reena's cheek and a knot grows under her left eye.

Reena puts her elbows up on the table and leans over it with her head hanging down.

She raises her face long enough to say:

REENA
Ruby don't live here no more.

DEBRA
Know where I can find her?

Reena looks Debra over.

REENA
Be a sweetheart and get me my
cigarettes and matches out of
the bedroom. If you don't mind.

Debra gets up.

INT. RV - BEDROOM - DAY

Debra enters. The covers are mussed up. Glasses and beer bottles scattered around.

Snubs of thinly rolled joints lie in an ashtray.

REENA (O.S.)

Bring me one of them roaches too.

EXT. RV - DAY

Debra brings everything out to her.

REENA

Thanks.

Reena hangs the roach in her mouth, scratches a match and holds the wavering tip of fire to the joint and lights up.

She takes three hits, offers it to Debra, who shakes her head: no.

So Reena sucks it down, then drops it on the ground and blows out a big cloud of smoke.

A faded picture of an anguished Jesus, wearing a crown of thorns, hangs on the inside of the RV's open door.

REENA

I feel sorry for Jesus. He went through a lot to save sinners like me.

Reena puts a cigarette in her mouth. Debra lights it.

REENA

That cross he had to carry was heavy. You reckon he cried for all the pain they put him through?

DEBRA

I doubt it.

REENA

Makes me wanna cry. Depresses the shit out of me.

DEBRA

Ruby...

REENA

I told that girl. I said: you're on the run from somethin'.

DEBRA

What'd she say?

REENA

"I ain't on the run from nothin'." I said: Tell the truth. Something after you, girl. Somebody.

DEBRA

I'm not after her. I want to help her.

Reena stares at the picture of Jesus on the door.

REENA

I wish I could've been there to help Jesus that day.

Debra pulls out her wallet, slips Reena a twenty.

REENA

I would've given my blood, all of it, gladly, to help Jesus.

Debra hands her another twenty.

EXT. LOVE CAGE - NIGHT

Little brick shack with the cutout of a woman in black silhouette rising from the roof. Packed parking lot.

Debra stands near the entrance, looking through barred windows at the play of blinking lights inside.

Music pounds. Debra opens the door and smoke rolls out as if the Love Cage is on fire.

INT. LOVE CAGE - NIGHT

The music is thunderous, distorted. Debra's eyes shoot to the stage: lit up, a young woman with white hair and wide hips shakes her bare breasts at the men gathered around her.

Smoke hangs heavy. Bar off to the right, shadowy figures drinking and talking.

Debra stands by the door for a few moments, eyes searching.

The young woman on the stage prances, naked except for panties, where bills poke out in little clusters.

Men in chairs at the edge of the stage, packed in two deep, yell at her and she leans over as one or another half stand to put more bills in her panties.

BAR

Debra bellies up. BARTENDER comes over.

DEBRA

Beer.

Bartender serves the beer. Debra tries to pay him.

BARTENDER

Ladies night. Drinks are free.

A young SAILOR in dress whites sits down on the stool next to Debra, almost at her elbow.

Debra glances at the Sailor. Resumes scanning the joint.

The Sailor leans over and gropes her leg. Debra sighs.

DEBRA

Get your hand off my leg.

The Sailor removes his hand.

SAILOR

I didn't mean nothin' by it.

Sailor signals the Bartender, who brings the Sailor a shot of whiskey.

SAILOR

I wasn't raised to go in places like this.

DEBRA

Me neither.

SAILOR

But here we are, in one.

Sailor knocks back his shot.

SAILOR

I don't know where the sun
might find me tomorrow.
I just hope it's not a place
as dark as this one.

The Sailor leans over and gropes her leg again. Debra sighs inwardly.

BARTENDER (O.S.)

Hey, Ruby Lee.

Debra turns and sees RUBY LEE (17) for the first time in person. Ruby's beauty combines a vulnerable innocence with an intense sexual allure and she has a shy way of smiling that breaks Debra's heart.

Ruby sits down on the other side of Debra.

BARTENDER

(to Ruby)

What you up to tonight?

Debra, preoccupied with Ruby's shy smile, searches for a cigarette in her blouse pocket.

She finally finds one. She turns it over in her hand a few times, sticks the tip in her mouth and sparks the filter.

She smokes it for a moment, takes it out, spits, looks at it and then stubs it out in the ashtray.

Ruby smiles her shy little smile at the Bartender as the Sailor caresses Debra's thigh.

Debra glares at the Sailor: Get your hand off my leg or I'm gonna have to knock the shit out of you.

The Sailor takes the hint, disappears. Debra spins around just as DK -- Reena's gargantuan, sadistic pimp -- squeezes himself in between Debra and Ruby.

DK

(to Ruby)

You workin' here now?

Ruby shakes her head side to side. Looks away.

RUBY

No.

DK

Why don't you let me buy
you a drink?

RUBY

No thank you. I'm fixin'
to leave.

He picks up his wrist and holds it close to his eyes, mock surprise showing on his face.

DK

Go? Why fuck, baby, it ain't
but eight thirty. What's
your big hurry?

RUBY

I ain't in no hurry. I'm
ready to go is all.

He takes a sip of his drink, digs into his pocket.

DK

All you sluts are alike.
Long as a man's spending
money you'll talk to him.

RUBY

Why don't you just leave me
alone, DK?

DK

Why don't you just suck my
dick? I'll give you fifty
bucks, but you got to swallow.

Silence for a few moments.

DK

I got fifty dollars right here.

He pulls out a roll of money.

DK

We'll just go out to my car
and you can do it in the
parking lot.

He puts the money on the bar while she stares at him.

RUBY

You better quit. You better
stop talking to me like that.

He puts his hand on her shoulder and moves close. She can
see that he's drunk, smelling the whiskey on his breath, his
eyes tinged red.

She turns to pull back from him but he's strong.

DK

What you gonna do about it?

His fingers move toward her breasts.

Another hand slides over from behind Ruby and locks onto the one that's touching her.

DK squeezes his eyes shut and shows his teeth and drops his drink. Ice and whiskey spill across the dented wood.

Ruby moves out from under it as the hand lifts from her shoulder and she turns to see Debra standing there.

Debra crushes DK's hand in hers. DK's knees go out from under him; he shakes his head and grits his teeth, trying to form some words.

The music stops.

Debra leans in, squeezing the hand. DK, on his knees now, can't say anything at all.

DK keeps shaking his head. Tears pouch, leaking out between pinched eyelids.

Bones break in his hand, tiny cracklings, and the ends of his fingers turning purple.

A dark stain spreads on the front of his tan slacks as he wets himself.

Still Debra squeezes, bending lower, going lower and lower until DK's stretched out on the floor with his hand extended, as if Debra is in the act of helping him up.

People go out the door in twos and threes, the door shutting behind them. Some of the lights go on in the room.

Debra turns him loose. DK, still crying, holds the broken hand with the unbroken one.

He gets up on his knees with the Waitress helping him and wiping his face sometimes with the unbroken hand.

On his feet, the Waitress pops her gum as she helps him toward the door.

DK looks back at Debra and it seems suddenly he has one thing on his mind: murder.

Debra touches Ruby on the shoulder, just the lightest pressure on that little bone just under the skin.

DEBRA

You all right?

RUBY

Yeah.

DEBRA
Nothing hurt?

RUBY
Just my feelings, ma'am.

INT. DEBRA'S CAR (MOVING) NIGHT

Debra drives with one hand on the wheel. Ruby sits on the passenger side, taking little sidelong glances at her.

DEBRA
Some people don't have no manners

RUBY
Thanks for taking up for me, ma'am.

DEBRA
Anytime, Ruby.

Debra looks out the window. Nothing but empty parking lots and dark windows, lights from a few gas stations.

DEBRA
Dead as a hammer this time of night.

RUBY
You don't know me. Why'd you do it?

DEBRA
I don't know. Why're you hanging out in a strip joint?

RUBY
Ladies night. Free drinks.

DEBRA
Nothing more expensive than a free drink, darlin'.

Ruby looks at the dark road stretching ahead of them.

RUBY
Where we headed?

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Debra and Ruby sit in a booth with plates of eggs and sausages and biscuits and cups of coffee.

DEBRA

You from around here?

Ruby works on her eggs. Smears jelly on a biscuit.

RUBY

No, ma'am.

DEBRA

Stop calling me ma'am. I ain't
but forty one.

RUBY

Yes, ma'am. I mean Debra.

DEBRA

How old are you?

RUBY

Seventeen. I'll be eighteen in
December.

DEBRA

So you're not out of school yet.

RUBY

I don't go to school. Ain't in
a long time.

DEBRA

How long you been in Biloxi?

RUBY

Three, four days.

DEBRA

Where're you staying?

RUBY

I sort of been staying with this
colored gal I met, in her trailer,
not no more though.

Ruby eats, sips coffee. Debra takes a few seconds to
answer, nibbling on bacon.

Debra dusts her hands together to show that she's through.
Debra sips a little more coffee, signals to a Waitress.

DEBRA

Check.

She pulls out her billfold.

DEBRA
Need a place to stay tonight?

RUBY
Got a place in mind?

DEBRA
Might have. Hotel, little ways
out of town, but I could give
you a ride back in the morning.

Ruby hesitates. The Waitress comes over with the check.

DEBRA
Strictly up to you.

Debra glances at the check and then pulls out a five and a
one and puts them under the salt shaker.

DEBRA
You ready?

RUBY
How much is my part?

Ruby reaches for the check. Debra closes her hand over it,
picks up Ruby's hand and shakes it.

DEBRA
On me.

INT. SKYWAY MOTEL - ROOM - NIGHT

Debra and Ruby enter a room that's half in darkness. Debra
steps to a table and turns on a lamp.

A big bed and a low table with a television on it, a
bathroom and open closet at the back.

Ruby kicks off her shoes and crawls onto the bed with her
purse. She closes her eyes. Debra watches her fall asleep.

EXT. SKYWAY MOTEL - NIGHT

Ice bucket in hand, Debra wanders down to an ice machine,
and quickly moves past it to a pay phone on the wall.

She grabs the receiver, drops coins into it. Waits.

DEBRA
Eustace. Tomorrow afternoon.
The whole nut. Don't worry.
I'm in Biloxi. Skyway Motel.

INT. SKYWAY MOTEL - ROOM - NIGHT

Debra enters the room with a full ice bucket. Ruby stands beside the bed, rubbing her eyes.

Debra sets the bucket on the table. She moves to Ruby and hands her a key.

DEBRA

Sleep as late as you want to.
I'm right down the hall. Room 17.

Ruby steps back, tears leaking from her eyes and her eyes swimming in those tears.

DEBRA

You in some kind of trouble?

RUBY

I'm gonna have a baby.

Silence drifts into the room.

DEBRA

When?

RUBY

I don't know. I just found out
a few days ago.

DEBRA

You know who the daddy is?

RUBY

I only been with one man.

DEBRA

Does he know?

RUBY

No, he don't know.

DEBRA

Why'd you leave him?

RUBY

I had to.

DEBRA

Why?

Ruby covers her mouth, nauseous. She vomits, chunks of pink matter shooting out between her fingers.

BATHROOM

Debra rushes her inside. Ruby goes to her knees on the tile floor next to the commode.

Debra holds Ruby's hair away from her face while she throws up, retching up her stomach contents into the bowl of water.

Ruby turns her face up to Debra with goblets of half-digested things on her lips, her eyes full of tears.

RUBY

He raped me.

DEBRA

Who?

Ruby heaves and trembles. Debra pulls some toilet paper off the roll and wipes Ruby's mouth.

RUBY

His name's Buster Hazelwood.

Ruby spits strings of mucus into the cloudy water. She leans back on her bottom and right leg, resting, waiting to see if it's going to come up again.

Ruby gasps for pockets of air. Debra reaches out to comfort her, stroking her arm.

ROOM

Debra takes Ruby to the couch. Debra holds her, rocking her and calming her.

RUBY

He, Buster -- he's old enough
to be my daddy. Lives in Tula.
Wanted me to marry him. I said no.

DEBRA

That when he, when he...?

RUBY

Yes, ma'am -- Debra. I run off.
Now I'm just tryin' to find a job.

DEBRA

Well, you can't stay in Biloxi.

RUBY

Why? You think Buster knows
I'm down here?

Debra wraps Ruby in her arms.

DEBRA
He might, he just might.

RUBY
I hate him. I wish he was dead.

DEBRA
Give him some time.

Ruby presses her head against Debra's shoulder.

DEBRA
Ready to get some sleep?

RUBY
You know anything about babies?

DEBRA
All I know is their mamas
need their rest.

INT. SKYWAY MOTEL - ROOM 17 - NIGHT

Debra sits on the bed, head in her hands. Phone rings.

She answers:

DEBRA
Hello.

EUSTACE (V.O.)
Debra, Eustace.

DEBRA
It's late.

EUSTACE (V.O.)
Sorry, but I was just wondering.

DEBRA
Wondering what?

EUSTACE (V.O.)
Are you paying the balance in cash
or check?

Debra takes a moment.

DEBRA
Ain't made up my mind yet.

EUSTACE (V.O.)
How's the beaches down there?

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Waves roll in high breakers, lapping onto the beach in dark green swells.

Ruby sits in a recliner. She watches children play in the sand. Debra strolls up.

RUBY
It's gonna be a girl.

DEBRA
How do you know?

RUBY
There was this old woman told my mamaw once that if a woman showed her naked belly to the full moon, after she done caught, it'd be a girl.

DEBRA
That what you did?

RUBY
Laid one night with the full moon on my naked belly.

DEBRA
Do you want a girl?

RUBY
(shaking her head yes)
Boys move away, soon as they get big enough.

DEBRA
Girls don't stick around neither.

RUBY
This one will.

DEBRA
We can't stick around. Not here.

RUBY
Where we headed?

DEBRA
I'll know when we get there.

RUBY
This ain't your problem.

Ruby rises.

DEBRA
Pack your stuff, meet me in
in my room.

INT. SKYWAY MOTEL - ROOM 17 - DAY

Debra throws socks and underwear into the suitcase on her bed. Knock on the door. She opens it.

Buster stands in the doorway, grinning ear to ear, Lutie and Noony looming behind him.

BUSTER
Surprise.

Debra, stunned, just stands there, staring at them.

BUSTER
You don't like surprises?

She shakes it off.

DEBRA
No, no, come on in.

They all enter. Debra closes the door.

DEBRA
Sit down, have a chair.

BUSTER
Thanks.

Buster pulls up a chair. Noony stands behind him. Lutie lights a smoke.

DEBRA
Been in Biloxi long?

LUTIE
Long enough.

Buster notices the open suitcase on the bed.

BUSTER
Checking out?

DEBRA
I don't wanna waste your money.

BUSTER
Where's Ruby?

DEBRA
She was here, but caught a
flight, west.

Knock on the door puts a firm pause in their back and forth.
Another couple of knocks.

BUSTER
(to Debra)
Ain't you gonna answer it?

Debra waits till there's another knock. She moves to the door, wedges it open: a Mexican MAID speaks Spanish:

MAID
Good morning. Is it too early?

BUSTER (O.S.)
Si. Hasta luego.

The Maid leaves. Debra closes the door, turns to Buster.

BUSTER
Are you still looking?

DEBRA
I'm unlucky. When you're
unlucky, it don't matter
how hard you look.

LUTIE
I heard laziness called bad
luck so much maybe it is.

Buster stands.

BUSTER
This woman is anything but lazy.

DEBRA
I can get your money back.
When I get home.

BUSTER
Keep it. Stay on the job.
Your luck's bound to change.

Debra's hands tremble as she closes the suitcase.

BUSTER
 You got the shakes, woman.
 Need a drink?

DEBRA
 I don't need your wise cracks,
 and I don't need your money.

BUSTER
 Excuse me all over the place.

DEBRA
 I missed her. She caught a
 flight west, this girl.

BUSTER
 Where to?

DEBRA
 I got along fine before this
 job. If you got something to
 ask, just ask it.

LUTIE
 He's asking it.

BUSTER
 (to Debra)
 Where?

DEBRA
 Las Vegas.

NOONY
 California?

DEBRA
 Nevada. Y'all wanna go to
 the airport, ask the ticket girl?

BUSTER
 Let's do her.

EXT. SKYWAY MOTEL - DAY

Debra emerges from the front door. Buster and Lutie follow.
 Buster stops Debra with a gentle hand on the shoulder.

BUSTER
 Shit, Debra, I'm sorry.

Debra turns to Buster.

BUSTER

You missed her and you feel bad. Sorry I made fun of it.

DEBRA

You'll get your three thousand back. Lutie can take it from here.

BUSTER

Nobody quits me. You started this and by God you'll end it. Besides, Lutie couldn't find his own butt if it had a bell on it.

Buster pats Debra on the back. Debra watches Buster, Noony and Lutie walk to a shiny Lincoln, climb in and drive away.

INT. SKYWAY MOTEL - LOBBY - DAY

Debra enters, bumping into Ruby, who swings her purse.

RUBY

I went to your room.

Debra grabs Ruby's arm, whisking her away.

INT. SKYWAY MOTEL - ROOM 17 - DAY

Debra nudges Ruby into the room.

RUBY

What's wrong?

Debra shuts the door. Goes to the bed, closes her suitcase.

DEBRA

Buster Hazelwood hired someone to find you.

RUBY

How do you know that?

DEBRA

I'm the one he hired.

Ruby turns to run. Debra snatches her by one arm. Ruby gnashes at Debra as Debra wrestles her to the bed.

DEBRA

I'm off the job now. I'm going to help you.

Debra grips her wrists. Ruby wilts, sobbing.

DEBRA
 Buster's in town. I bought
 us time -- but we have to move.

INT. DEBRA'S CAR (MOVING) DAY

Debra at the wheel. Ruby, beside her, stares out the window, wiping the tears from her face.

DEBRA
 There's twenty thousand dollars...

RUBY
 I didn't steal it.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Debra and Ruby get out of the car, which is parked beside the pumps. They enter the store.

A second later, a truck pulls up. DK, murder still in his eyes, cast on his left arm, pistol in his right, climbs out of the truck.

INT. GAS STATION - DAY

Debra and Ruby enter and go up to the counter, where the STORE CLERK, a young man, plays solitaire.

DEBRA
 Need to fill it up.

Debra pulls out some money. She hands the Store Clerk some cash just as DK approaches the glass door.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Buster's shiny Lincoln pulls up, beside Debra's car. Lutie and Noony get out. Lutie carries a shotgun.

INT. GAS STATION - DAY

DK opens the front door, aiming for Debra. Lutie steps up to the door, also aiming for Debra.

Lutie shucks the pump. Aims. DK veers into Lutie's site. Lutie BLOWS off DK's scalp.

The Store Clerk ducks behind the counter.

Debra draws her gun, bobbles and drops it, pushing Ruby away as DK flops inside.

DK
 Aaaaaaaaahhhhhhh!

Blood and meat and hair flow inside everywhere with him.

DK

Hhhhhhhhhwwwwwwaaaahhhh!

It sticks to the walls, to the cigarettes in the rack over the counter, to the oven that holds the fried chicken. DK flops down the detergent aisle.

DK

Waaaaaaaaaaaaah!

Debra and Ruby just stand there as DK flops around like a fish. Debra reaches down for her gun, but DK flops on top of it.

DK

Haaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhh!

Debra looks outside: Lutie enters, aiming the shotgun --

Debra grabs Ruby's hand and pulls her out the back door.

DK flops over a bunch of Moon Pies, directly in the path of Lutie, who trips and falls.

DK

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

EXT. REAR OF STORE - DAY

Debra and Ruby run across grass littered with Styrofoam cups, beer cans and shredded pieces of truck tires.

They start to run around the store. Noony meets them.

Debra throws a left to his nose and a right to his throat. He goes down strangling, his eyes enormous, blood running down his shirt. He cries, silently.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

A tractor trailer changes gears, air horn BLARING. A car passes it.

Debra and Ruby run across the highway and down into the high grass of the median.

Breathing hard, Debra and Ruby stop and sit down on the side of a hill. Deb hangs her head between her arms and knees.

Ruby clenches her purse. An air horn BLARES on the road above them.

Debra looks up at the moving face of an older man watching her from his high cab. Cars keep passing them.

RUBY

What about your car?

DEBRA

Gonna have to ditch it.

Another horn BLARES at them on the road and keeps BLOWING, the rush of tires on pavement, fading away down the line.

They turn to see Noony, propped up across the highway, his face swollen, blinded by blood.

A truck GRINDS way off. Debra looks at Noony and watches him wait until the truck is too close.

He limps directly into the path of it. NOISE and blood flies and the truck goes past, SKIDDING.

There's only Noony, broken and bleeding, in the road, his eyes cold, staring.

Far away down the country in front of the dead man, the road curves into the distance of a pale green mass that lies at the edge of a light blue sky.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

Debra and Ruby come down a hill that grows black with night, on a dusty road. House lights wink through the trees as they walk by. Ruby swings her purse in her hand.

They stop to rest on a narrow bridge and sit down on a timber studded with nails.

Below them, a creek runs over snapped pilings and faintly gleaming rocks.

RUBY

I'm thirsty.

DEBRA

Don't go down there.

RUBY

Why not?

DEBRA

Snakes.

Ruby sits hugging her knees and watching the specks of stars in the sky above them.

All of it so still and unmoving, the stars so bright. They listen to the night things calling in the ditches and out past the stands of cane that rise from the river bottom.

Debra looks at Ruby's purse.

DEBRA

How you set for money?

Ruby crosses her legs inside her skirt and opens the clasp of her purse. She rummages through a few things and finds two dollar bills and pulls them out.

DEBRA

Might need it later.

Ruby folds them and folds them again and undoes the top button of her blouse and slides the left cup of her bra aside, tucks them in there and buttons the blouse.

Debra pushes herself up from the tarred wood. She lifts Ruby by one hand. They walk across the bridge and out onto the dusty gravel again.

Cows watch their progress from a quiet pasture like cows made of stone. The moon comes out.

EXT. ROADWAY - NIGHT

They walk past a building set well back from the road and see a dark cross set into wood high up near the gable.

They stop. There's a light somewhere inside, a yellow beam that shines through stained glass windows.

DRIVEWAY

Debra leads Ruby down a neat drive covered with pea gravel.

PARKING LOT

Empty. There's light on a pole at the back and a low wire fence and outcroppings of polished stones inside it.

A whirling dance of insects hang around the pole. The light hums with a low, steady drone and it casts a gauzy veil over everything. Crickets sound from the dark woods back there.

Debra and Ruby go cautiously into the lot, their steps loud in the gravel. The west wall lies in shadow and there's a brick border for flowers near the entrance.

They walk closer and see a coil of garden hose in the damp grass and where it ends, a faucet protruding from a corner of the foundation.

Debra goes over to it and turns it on. She picks up the end of the hose and hands it to Ruby, who drinks and drinks.

Ruby hands it to Deb, who takes a sip.

A growling. Debra turns her head to see a speckled knot of hair and bones -- a huge dog -- its head hung low between its shoulder blades standing thirty feet away.

It moves closer and odd CLANKING moves with it. Ruby backs away, ready to take off. Debra stops her with one arm.

Debra lets the hose drop from her hand and faces the dog.

It seems propped up on its legs and a bit of drool swings from its jaw.

The canines are bared in a bloody muzzle and its eyes are sick. Another ragged growl escapes it and it seems hard-pressed to draw each breath.

Its front right paw is caught in a rusty trap, nearly severed and the dog tries to hold it aloft as it comes toward them, half whining, maybe for help.

Debra and Ruby back toward the front porch and step onto it, a decorative iron column on each corner, leaves and vines hammered and painted, cool beneath their hands.

The dog moves closer. Debra turns to the double doors, the dark wood and the heavy brass knob.

She twists the knob on the left door. It opens and Debra moves Ruby quickly inside.

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Debra slams the door shut. The dog whines and then there is nothing but the slight RATTLE of metal against the gravel as the chain and trap are dragged away.

They listen for a while but can't hear anything else. They step away from the door, moving reluctantly, uneasy in a stranger's home.

The carpeted hallway whisper beneath their shoes and long polished benches of wood shine faintly in the half gloom.

They walk slowly, touching the dark brown pine. The ceiling points upward with long beams and Jesus in a robe with a beard and long hair, seated on a stone.

The walls are lined with stained-glass windows, beaded chips of glass in blue and red and gold, and at the front sits a table holding bowls of polished metal.

There are other paintings of Jesus, people and children gathered about him.

In all of the paintings he wears a look of sorrow. There is no sound in the vast room at all.

A small stage is beyond the table and on it stands a dark wooden platform.

Debra opens a little side gate with a click and then goes up the two steps to stand in front of the rows of benches and Ruby facing her.

A Bible lies open before Debra, bound in leather, the pages so thin. She riffles through them.

DEBRA

It's a church for rich folks.

The sound of her voice reverberates in the room, echoing quietly off the walls.

She steps away from the book and goes back down the steps, out through the gate and leads Ruby around the rail.

There's a door set into the rear wall. Debra opens it.

KITCHEN/CAFETERIA

Only a dim light burns over a stove. Rows of long tables and metal folding chairs shoulder to shoulder.

Wall switch beside the door. Debra flips it up.

The lights in the ceiling flicker for a moment and then come on strong, a bright glare that shows dishes racked beside a sink, a white refrigerator and a telephone.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Sam picks up a ringing phone.

SAM

Yes, I'll accept the charges.

INT. CHURCH - KITCHEN/CAFETERIA - NIGHT

Debra paces, phone to her ear, while Ruby waits.

INTERCUT DURING CONVERSATION

DEBRA
Sam, I need your help.

SAM
Where in the hell are you?

Debra looks up at the lights humming in the ceiling.

DEBRA
In a church north of Biloxi.

SAM
Then you best say a damn prayer --
because your ass is grass.

DEBRA
There's more to this deal than
I figured.

SAM
Buster's beside himself; says
you double crossed him.

DEBRA
I didn't have a choice now.

Ruby sets her purse on the counter and opens the fridge door to see milk in cartons, covered dishes with casseroles and fried chicken, sliced ham.

SAM
You are fixin' to lose everything.
Your house, your life. Done lost
your car. Lutie McVey's got it.

DEBRA
Can you come and get us?

SAM
Too hot, Debra Dew, you are just
too damn hot right now.

Ruby finds a plate and fork in one of the cabinets and a loaf of bread in a corner of the counter.

DEBRA
You -- you're the one told me
take this job.

SAM
I didn't tell you to run off
with Buster Hazelwood's woman.

DEBRA
Ruby ain't his woman.

Ruby heaps the plate with food and pours a glass of milk.

SAM
Whatever Ruby is, he wants
her back.

DEBRA
No dice.

SAM
Think about who you're involved
with here. Buster killed Rusty
Larson for a helluva lot less.

DEBRA
You said that was a heart attack.

SAM
Never mind what I said.

DEBRA
Wire me some money then.

SAM
Can't.

DEBRA
Why?

SAM
Buster's watching.

DEBRA
Then I'm dead. If you don't
help me, I am a dead person.

SAM
Hold on. Can you make it
to Batesville?

DEBRA
That's a hike.

Ruby sits down at one of the long tables and eats.

SAM

Make the hike. Head on over to my place, on Cole's Point. Y'all can lay low there till I figure something out.

DEBRA

Are you gonna be there?

SAM

Nope, but you know where I keep the key.

DEBRA

I don't know. Batesville, on foot. That'll take forever.

SAM

It's the best I can do. Good luck, Debra Dew.

Sam hangs up. Debra hangs up. She pours herself a glass of milk. She rummages through the cabinets and finds some fresh doughnuts in a cardboard box.

She gets three of them and sits down across from Ruby and eats one, licking the icing from her fingers.

DEBRA

How's the chicken?

RUBY

Dry.

DEBRA

We're going to Batesville.

RUBY

I heard.

Ruby wipes crumbs from the table with her hand.

DEBRA

Sam's got a house on the lake we can stay at.

RUBY

How do you know this Sam?

DEBRA

I used to -- I was a cop -- in Oxford. On the force, with Sam.

Ruby opens her purse and finds a mangled pack of cigarettes and book of matches.

RUBY

Guess I'll have to see a doctor,
about the baby.

DEBRA

That make you nervous?

RUBY

Never been to one before.
Heard people talk about it,
how the doctor examines you.

She lights the cigarette and waves the match out and drops it into her purse.

RUBY

I never been examined before.

Ruby pulls out another chair to prop her feet on and stretches out, blowing smoke lazily at the ceiling, thumping ashes into the chicken bones on her plate.

Debra waits a few seconds before saying:

DEBRA

Are you ready? Have you give
much thought on your options?

RUBY

What's there to think about?

DEBRA

You don't' have to keep it, the
baby. Under the circumstances,
it'd be understandable. Understand?

RUBY

Not hardly.

DEBRA

Buster, he, what happened. The
circumstances. You could get -- it's
a heavy cross to carry, that's all.

CHURCH

Debra and Ruby exit the kitchen and enter the big room again and walk up the hallway. Ruby stops.

Jesus gazes down upon them with his painted eyes. Ruby looks at the table and the empty bowls.

Ruby turns and goes back down the quiet aisle to the table and reaches inside her blouse for the folded money tucked into her bra.

She unfolds the money, puts one bill in a bowl, the other one back in her bra.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

Debra and Ruby walk along a rough road lined with barbed wire and thickets of blackberries.

They hear something coming and see a white pickup heading their way.

The truck slows and they watch it come. They move to the side of road as the truck pulls up beside them.

The driver of the truck, a DRUNK in his forties, weaves behind the seat a little and turns up a Busch tallboy.

From behind the wheel, the Drunk studies these two females carefully. He opens his mouth and lets out an enormous belch, then throws the can out into the road.

His face looks as if somebody has been ahold of it with a hatchet in years past. He speaks very slowly and he can hardly speak at all:

DRUNK
Y'all want a ride?

INT. TRUCK (MOVING) NIGHT

The Drunk drives, his eyes dark and rimmed with redness. Hate burns there, meanness ingrained by alcohol, impotent.

Debra, squeezed up between him and Ruby, plants her feet on on the hump.

DRUNK
(to Debra)
See my face?

Debra looks at the hideous scar tissue on his face.

DEBRA
I see it.

DRUNK
I went through a windshield at four o'clock one morning and I don't give a fuck.

He opens the glove box and pulls out a Remington twelve-gauge shell and shows it to them.

DRUNK
Y'all see this?

DEBRA
We see it.

DRUNK
I don't give a fuck who it is.
He can't stand up to this.
That's double-ought buckshot.
You believe me?

DEBRA
I believe you.

DRUNK
I don't let no sumbitch slap me.
A sumbitch slaps me better look
out. You know it?

DEBRA
I think I do.

DRUNK
'Cause I'm fixin' to kill him.

DEBRA
Best think twice about that now.

DRUNK
I ain't scared of the sumbitch.
and never have been. And I'll
whip his ass if he fucks with me.
Again. If he ever. Fucks.
With me. Again.

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD

They turn onto a dirt road, the entrance to it overhung with great leaning trees and vines. They go down the road past posted signs and stop on a wooden bridge.

EXT. BRIDGE - NIGHT

The Drunk gets out. Staggeres to the edge of the bridge.

Debra and Ruby slide out of the open driver's side door; they stretch their cramped legs.

The Drunk pisses into the water twelve feet below, holding a beer can straight upside down against his mouth.

The Drunk wavers on the precipice of the single two-by-eight that forms the border of the bridge and then, standing with his arms waving, drops his beer and falls --

He catches himself by his arms and chin, hanging on the wood. Debra goes to him and grabs the back of his shirt.

Then she reaches lower and catches his belt and heaves up on it. He claws at the boards, his chest, half-emerged, his eyes wild and his hands slapping hard at the wood.

He comes shaking and panting onto the bridge. Lays his feet hanging out over the empty air for but a moment.

He gets up and takes three fast steps and slams Debra against the truck.

DRUNK

I'll slap your face.

DEBRA

I ain't done nothin' to you.

DRUNK

I went through a windshield at four o'clock one morning and I don't five a fuck.

DEBRA

Turn me loose.

The hands clamped on her are hard and unyielding.

DRUNK

I think I'll throw your ass off in there -- see how you like it.

She hits him. Lays him out with one lick. He doesn't even groan. He falls over on his back, arms outspread like a witness for Christ stricken with the blood.

EXT. BLACKTOP - NIGHT

Debra and Ruby trudge along, climbing a hill where distant fields lie spread below them and the yard lights of houses are spots of blue.

Red moving tails of cars creep along a far-off highway with only a hint of noise.

Two cars pass them.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

They make their way down a road where the pavement is lumpy with patches of hot mix. Along the edges tall grass grows.

They walk up and over a hill. A lake off to the right in a deep hollow dotted with white forms: sleeping cows.

The moon is a hanging ball on the surface of the water.

They see light touch the roadside grasses and grow in intensity, a motor running.

They step to the edge of the grass. A car passes them, a man's face in the window, watching.

The car slows down and goes up the road fifty feet more and then stops.

The brake light shines red. The car backs toward them.

INT. CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

JOE (50s) in a velour shirt, drives. Debra sits in between Joe and Ruby, who hangs an arm out the window.

JOE
Where y'all headed?

DEBRA
Batesville.

JOE
You're a long ways from there.
What, your car tore up?

DEBRA
We don't have a car.

JOE
Broke, huh? Sister, I been there.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Joe cruises past a brick house. CURT (50s) sits on the front porch. He's unshaven, his hair wild, clothes rumpled from sleeping in them.

Joe stops. Yells to Curt:

JOE
What say, Curt?

Curt comes down the steps, freshly open beer in hand, and strolls up to the car.

CURT
Hey, Joe. You ain't fixin' to go to town are you?

JOE
Taking these two to Batesville.

CURT
Let me ride with y'all.

JOE
I don't know.

Curt goes around the other side.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Curt slides into the backseat.

JOE
(to Curt)
You got any money? I ain't gonna buy your beer all night long. Don't start no shit and expect me to finish it.

CURT
I got a check I can cash.

Curt slams the door and sits there, ready for takeoff.

CURT
(to Debra and Ruby)
Where y'all from?

JOE
(to Curt)
Let's see it.

CURT
What?

JOE
Sumbitch, if you ain't got no money you ain't goin' with us.

Curt pulls out an envelope, waves it around.

CURT
It's a government check.

Joe puts in the car in gear, drives on.

JOE
What're you doin' with a
government check? What're
you drawin' from the government?

CURT
Aw, it's Mama's. I always
cash hers for her.

JOE
How much is it?

CURT
A hundred and thirty dollars.

JOE
Your mama draws a hundred and
thirty dollars? A month?

CURT
Yeah. Plus, she draws social
security and welfare too.

JOE
What's she doin' let you have it?

CURT
She don't know I got it.

INT. CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

Joe drinks a beer behind the wheel; beside him sit Debra and Ruby. Curt smokes and drinks beer in the backseat.

JOE
(to Curt)
Where's Robert these days?

CURT
Still in jail, I reckon. I
heard you got into it with
Willie Russell the other night.

JOE
Naw. He kept fuckin' with me
and I just slapped the shit out
of him was all. Run his mouth off.
You know how he is.

Joe does an impression of the shit-faced Willie Russell.

JOE
 "I went through a windshield at
 four o'clock one morning and
 I don't give a fuck."

Curt laughs. Debra and Ruby look at each other, knowing.

CURT
 Robert says he's a queer.

JOE
 I don't believe he's a queer.
 I just think he's too fucked up
 for anybody to have him.

INT. CAR (MOVING) NIGHT

Debra and Ruby watch the passing scenery: tar paper shacks
 and shabby mobile homes, yards full of junked autos and
 stacked firewood.

Joe, driving, has a beer buzz, as does Curt, who pops the
 top on another can, foam spurting.

CURT
 I had a cousin one time like
 to lost his dick. Zipped it
 up in his zipper. You know
 how you'll do that when you're
 little.

JOE
 Oh, hell yes. It'll just about
 make you shit yourself.

CURT
 He was grown though. Got infected.
 His dick like to rotted off.

DEBRA
 What they'd do?

CURT
 Skin graft. Took some skin off
 his leg and sewed it on his dick.

Joe leans back and sips his beer and crosses his legs, gives
 off a little shiver.

JOE
 Off his leg? Don't look like
 that'd work.

CURT
It worked alright.

JOE
I don't believe I'd want no
skin off my leg on my dick.

CURT
You would if they was fixin' to
amputate it.

JOE
They could amputate mine right
now for all the good it does me.

EXT. GRAVEL ROAD - NIGHT

Joe drives and turns at a crossroads.

CURT (V.O.)
Thought we was going to Batesville?

DEBRA (V.O.)
This ain't the way?

JOE (V.O.)
Just taking a little detour.

CURT (V.O.)
It's the long way 'round.

JOE (V.O.)
I have to stop and see Henry.
See if he's got any work for me
this week.

CURT (V.O.)
Shit, if I had your money, I'd
throw mine away.

EXT. HENRY'S PLACE - NIGHT

Joe pulls into a short driveway and up to a brick home.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

Joe kills the motor, turns around to Curt.

JOE
You goin' in?

CURT
Naw. I'll just sit out here.

JOE
Suit yourself.

Joe gets out and shuts the door. Debra and Ruby watch him. He goes up the steps and knocks on the screen door and sticks his head inside.

JOE
Henry? Hey, Henry.

Somebody answers and Joe steps inside.

EXT. HENRY'S PLACE - NIGHT

Curt sits on the hood of the car, waiting. Debra and Ruby wait in the front seat.

A white pickup truck comes around the curve and it starts slowing as it nears the house.

Debra and Curt turn to watch it come. It slows down gradually and stops beside the driveway, fifty yards away.

The driver, WILLIE RUSSELL -- the DRUNK Debra knocked out just a few hours ago -- screams strangled curses as he drags something up from the floorboards.

CURT
Willie Russell. Holy shit.

Willie, blood between his eyes, aims a rifle at them.

CURT
Goddamn!

Curt throws one leg off the hood --

Smoke erupts. Two CONCUSSIONS back to back send hot lead flying. Curt labors with his hands, a cartoon character slipping and losing traction in the loose gravel.

Curt falls and covers his head. Another SHOT goes over his back and slams into the house.

Debra gets behind the wheel of the car. Willie jumps out of the truck, pistol in hand.

Debra cranks the engine, shoves it in gear, and backs into a field beside the house, winding the wheel in panic, looking out the window, Ruby hanging onto the dashboard.

Willie runs up the driveway, trying to shorten the range.

The car roars out, skids and almost goes into a ditch on the other side.

Willie stops and opens up with the little .25, TOWTOWTOW, TOWTOWTOWTOW!

Two small medallions of paint leap off the hood. As Debra pulls the car away, Willie throws the little gun after it.

INT. CAR (MOVING) DAY

Debra drives, pedal to the metal, while Ruby holds onto the door handle. Debra checks the rearview:

REARVIEW MIRROR

A police cruiser pulls out onto the narrow road, following. SIREN comes on.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

The cruiser swings out behind them and comes alongside. The DEPUTY motions toward the ditch with his finger.

Cruiser speeds up and turns crossways in the road ahead of them, and the car comes to a stop this side of it.

The Deputy comes out with his hand on his gun. He's young with thin arms. The widest part of him is the belt and gun around his waist.

Debra puts it in reverse and hits the gas. She leans out the window looking backwards and gets it up to around forty.

She slams on the brakes and the cruiser shoots past, slews sideways in the road with the tires BARKING.

Debra gets out. Deputy marches up, furious, shouting:

DEPUTY
Turn around!

Debra turns and puts her hands on the hood.

DEPUTY
Hands behind your back.

She does it. The Deputy comes close with cuffs in his hand.

She catches him by the neck and pushes him against the hood of the car and gets the pistol away from him.

All the while the boy's eyes watch her with a deep and mad rage. Debra tosses the gun underhanded, lightly, sees it land in clumps of sage grass on the other side of the ditch.

Debra climbs in the car and leaves him. He jumps into the dark ditch, searching for his gun.

INT. CAR (MOVING) DAY

Debra drives while Ruby looks out at the rough old highway, the morning sun stretching past timber and big yards with wrecked cars parked in orderly rows.

Debra lets off the gas and slows the car, checking the rearview mirror, shifting down into second, checking the gauge: almost on empty.

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD

A weathered sign leans on a post, a crooked red arrow pointing toward BUFORD'S COLD BEER DANCING POOL.

EXT. BUFORD'S SALOON - DAY

Hidden in a thicket of loblolly pine; on the front porch sits a washing machine, several chairs.

Debra eases to a stop against one of the peeled logs in the empty dirt lot.

INT. CAR - DAY

Debra opens the door. Pauses to speak to Ruby:

DEBRA
Sit tight, pork chop.

RUBY
A complete stranger ain't
gonna give you no money.

DEBRA
Won't hurt to ask.

Debra smiles and gets out of the car.

EXT. BUFORD'S SALOON - DAY

Debra crosses the yard with its litter of bottle caps and cigarette butts and steps up on the porch.

She tries the door. The knob turns in her hand. She looks back at Ruby, who watches her. She steps inside.

INT. BUFORD'S SALOON - DAY

Dimly lit by sunlight coming through dirty windows. Chairs turned upside down on tables. Floor swept clean.

She walks to the bar and stands listening. No sound. Even the ceiling fans are still.

Ranked bottles at the back of the bar hold a muted gleam.

DEBRA

Hello? Anybody home?

A monkey climbs up on the bar ten feet away and sits silently, baring its teeth at her.

Debra steps away a few steps, sizing the monkey up: nearly two feet tall, dark hair, a long tail. Long yellow canines dulled by tobacco juice.

It grimaces and hisses at her. Then leaps on Debra, biting her left hand. Fear rises up in her throat.

The monkey claws at her, the little fingers clutching at her clothes. Debra manages to get her right hand around its throat and it makes a dreadful noise, crying like a child.

The tail curls around her forearm and grips it tight. She pulls her mangled fingers free and blood splatters.

She slams the monkey against the dark wood of the bar, the furry body twisting and writhing at the end of her arm, teeth bared in a fiendish grin, wailing and screeching.

She slams it again. The monkey shakes its head and shits on her. She gags and throws it down and staggers back, looking down at her hand.

Deep lacerations, the fingers torn, vein and muscle.

The monkey lies on the floor, blinking up at Debra. It passes a fist over its face and rolls over, crawling away.

Debra pants, seeing her harried reflection look back at her from the mirror behind the bar.

She steps back there and takes a fifth of whiskey down. Blood drips down her middle finger.

She spots the cash register. She slams it. Drawers roll open with a ring. All empty.

She spots something underneath the register.

She drenches it good. Ruby, outside, hands Debra a rag and she wraps the whole thing up.

Debra sits there, thinking everything over. She finds a cigarette in her pocket and gets it lit.

RUBY

If you want to go home, I'll understand.

DEBRA

No home to go home to. Besides, I started something.

Debra pulls the rusty .22 from the seat.

DEBRA

And by God I'm gonna end it.

INT. CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

Debra's eyes ride a sleepy town's streets. She's looking for a vulnerable spot. She counts people, on the prowl.

Ruby sits beside the window, tense. She hands Debra a black stocking.

RUBY

Do you have to do this?

DEBRA

Need gas. Running on fumes here.

Debra focuses on the view: A sewing shop: Owner closes and locks the door.

Liquor store. Two big men behind the counter; three customers. One looks at the passing car.

Debra eyes the other side of the street. Second liquor store, two heavyweights behind the counter.

Furniture store, closed.

A small lighted market -- the sign reads: Open 24 hours.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Debra pulls over and parks.

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Debra, wired and alert, strolls along, bunched up stocking in hand. Pedestrians. She passes a rundown pawn shop.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

She jaywalks across, stops, pulls the stocking over her head, and enters the market.

INT. MARKET - NIGHT

Debra bursts in, drawing her gun.

DEBRA
Nobody move!

A KOREAN MAN stares at her from behind the counter. On a ladder, stocking shelves, is his SON.

Debra registers a look of surprise. She quickly recovers.

DEBRA
(to Korean man)
Gimme the money.

He stares at Debra and doesn't budge.

DEBRA
(to the Son)
You speak English?

SON
Fuck you.

DEBRA
Fuck yourself. Climb down
and open this register.

The Son looks to his father who nods approvingly. The Son climbs down cautiously and moves toward the cash register.

The Son slowly empties the register, stacks of bills, as Debra moves closer holding the gun on him.

The Son just looks at Debra with contempt. Debra points the gun at the Son's forehead and cocks the hammer back.

DEBRA
Hurry it up now.

The cylinder opens and bullets spill to the counter and onto the floor - CLACK! CLACK! CLACK!

Debra tries to pick one up from the counter and reload. She gives up, grabs most of the bills and steps back fast.

Debra backs quickly to the door, and she's gone.

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Debra pulls the stocking from her head as she runs back to the car -- knocking over a garbage can.

DEBRA

Shit!

She picks up the garbage can and sets it up straight. Casually strolls back to the car, whistling.

EXT. GAS STATION - NIGHT

Debra pumps gas. She locks it down at a slow flow and watches the numbers rolling on the pump.

She inspects the clean bandage on her hand as Ruby gets out of the car and leans on the fender.

RUBY

What's Preparation H?

DEBRA

Ointment for hemorrhoids.

RUBY

What's a hemorrhoid?

DEBRA

Bumps on your buttohole.
Why'd you ask me that?

RUBY

Saw it on TV. You wouldn't believe the stuff they sell on there.

DEBRA

Yeah I would.

RUBY

I watched this show on elephants. A herd of 'em can tear a forest apart, eating the leaves, and they stay pregnant a long time. They all stick together, in general.

DEBRA

Unlike some I know.

RUBY

If you could be any animal, what would you be?

DEBRA

A bird. I always wanted to fly.

RUBY

I'd want to be an elephant.

EXT. ASPHALT ROAD - DAY

Debra turns off the highway onto an asphalt road. Signs advertise boat rentals and lots for sale, a state park with symbols for camping and boating.

EXT. LAKE HOUSE - NIGHT

Car arrives at a house with tall windows, cypress siding, a high-peaked roof; past the corner, the lake rippling.

INT. CAR - DAY

Deb opens the door. Ruby sits rigid.

EXT. LAKE HOUSE - DAY

Debra gets out, stands in front of the car. She moves to the front door, lifts a jade plant and picks up a key.

She turns and waves the key at Ruby, who watches from inside the car. Ruby steps out, shuts the door and walks up beside the fender and stops.

Debra motions to Ruby.

DEBRA

Well? You comin' or what?

RUBY

You sure it's all right?

Debra walks over to Ruby and gently takes one of her hands.

INT. LAKE HOUSE - DAY

Debra and Ruby enter the home: clean pine floors, stone fireplace, stuffed animal heads and fish hang on the walls.

Big kitchen. Butcher block table under a rack of copper pans and utensils.

EXT. LAKE HOUSE - DECK - DAY

Debra pushes one side of the double glass doors, and steps outside. Ruby follows Debra across the deck, to the rail.

Debra points down into a cove where there's a wooden dock.

A boat drifts on a rope, a big shiny thing with a big outboard motor.

DEBRA

You want to go for a ride?

RUBY

I don't know. The water looks kindly deep.

DEBRA

There's life jackets. I won't let you drown.

RUBY

Well. Maybe after a while.

DEBRA

How about a nice hot bath?

RUBY

Bath sounds good.

DEBRA

We can take a ride later.

They watch the water move under the wind, and the limbs of the big old pines swaying in the breeze.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ruby deep in the tub, beer in hand, stretched out, a mass of fragrant bubbles almost spilling over the side.

She leans back in the warm water and lifts the beer, tilting a long cool drink down her throat.

She sits the bottle on the floor, empty.

DEBRA (O.S.)

You okay in there?

RUBY

I don't like talking through doors.

Debra enters, holding an ice cold bottle of beer. Ruby sits up. Debra rests the beer on the edge of the tub.

Debra puts the lid down on the commode and takes a seat.

DEBRA

I laid out some clothes for you.
In there on the bed. Jeans
and whatnot. A little big though.

Ruby takes the beer. She leans back; sips on the beer,
spreading her toes underneath the faucet.

Debra crosses her legs and she sits with her hands in her
lap, casting furtive glances at Ruby's bare, wet feet.

RUBY

Why don't you work for the police
no more?

DEBRA

Got fired, for killing this boy.
Chief said it was excessive.

RUBY

You ever think about that boy?

DEBRA

I only think about the four
seconds when I thought he was
trying to kill me.

RUBY

No. Do you ever think about him,
you know, as a person?

DEBRA

It don't matter at this point what
I think. He's dead.

Debra rises, steps out. Ruby slumps back down in the water
and looks at the tile wall in front of her.

EXT. LAKE HOUSE - DECK - NIGHT

By lamplight, Debra and Ruby sit across from each other,
eating big juicy steaks, baked potatoes.

Ruby wears a clean, extra-large T-shirt and jeans. Debra,
all cleaned up, pours beer into glasses.

She hold Ruby's glass to hers, and they lean forward and
clink them softly, the lamp light shining on their faces.

EXT. LAKE HOUSE - DECK - NIGHT

Debra sits, smoking a cigarette, sipping a beer. Door
slides open.

She looks over her shoulder to see Ruby closing it.

DEBRA
Thought maybe you'd went to bed.

RUBY
I'll probably take a bath first.

DEBRA
Another one?

RUBY
Makes me feel not so nervous.

DEBRA
Pull up a chair. I was just
sitting here watching it get dark.

Ruby pulls up a chair and sits across from her. Debra
pushes the pack of smokes and the lighter across the table.

Ruby shakes one loose from the pack and lights it.

DEBRA
Saw a shooting star a while ago.

Ruby looks up at the starry sky.

RUBY
Did you make a wish?

Debra shakes her head side to side.

DEBRA
My wishes never come true.

Silence as they smoke, sharing an ashtray.

RUBY
You got pretty hair.

DEBRA
It always looks awful. I can't
do nothin' with it.

RUBY
Just needs a trim is all.

Ruby's hand comes out and touches the ends of Debra's hair.
Deb turns her face a bit and nervously takes a sip of beer.

RUBY
I could trim it if you want me to.

The hand lingers for a moment. Debra pulls it back, reluctant. Ruby moves close and looks into Debra's eyes.

RUBY
Tell me something, Debra.

DEBRA
What's that?

RUBY
Do you have a boyfriend?

Debra shakes her head -- no -- peeling the label from the bottle, little fritters of paper falling to the deck.

DEBRA
I had a date with this boy one time. We'd been swimming, went in this beer joint to get some ribs and I sat down on this chair -- farted in my wet swimming suit. You could hear it all over the room.

Debra wipes her nose. They sit in silence. Then:

RUBY
Are you happy by yourself?

DEBRA
I'm used to it. That don't mean I like it. I can come and go when I get ready, and don't nobody say nothing to me.

Debra turns her face away from Ruby and looks out over the black void beyond them.

DEBRA
I really don't worry about it.

INT. LAKE HOUSE - HALL - NIGHT

Ruby comes naked from the bathroom with the ends of her hair wet, rubbing at herself with a towel. Debra stands at the bedroom door, unbuttoning her blouse.

Ruby clutches the towel to her breasts, and then, slowly, pulls it down with her hands and lets Debra look.

Debra tries to avoid it. She turns her head and tries not to look at her. But Ruby drops the towel on the floor and moves toward her.

Ruby takes Debra's hand and places it on her nipple. Debra moans, opens Ruby's mouth and kisses her.

INT. LAKE HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Faint night sounds float in on a breeze through the open window, the creaking of the big boat at its mooring and the chill of the night air on their skins.

INT. LAKE HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Dawn finds Debra cradling Ruby next to her and her sleeping with her mouth open just the tiniest bit.

Soft snoring fills the room where light just begins to wash through the blinds.

INT. LAKE HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Debra, dressed, enters to find Ruby, in just the extra-large T-shirt, fixing breakfast and humming some happy little tune while she moves around the stove. She winks at Debra.

Debra sits at the counter, gazing at the way Ruby smiles her shy little smile. Ruby walks over, pours coffee.

DEBRA

Come with me.

RUBY

Where?

DEBRA

North. We can make something together up there. You, me, the baby.

RUBY

Think we can get away with it?

DEBRA

Won't know that till we try.

RUBY

You ain't afraid of Buster?

DEBRA

There's only one thing I'm afraid of.

RUBY

What's that?

DEBRA
You not going with me.

EXT. LAKE - DAY

Bright day in the sun. Debra steers the twenty-foot boat, hull slapping the water. She smiles at Ruby, who huddles on a seat beside her, arms crossed over her stomach.

Debra guides the boat to open water, and as sheets of white spray plane out, she looks back at the figure of the house growing smaller and smaller.

Debra lets off the throttle, gliding into a shaded stand of cypresses, pulling up close to a sandy bank. Debra throws an anchor over the side.

COVE

Ruby swims back and forth while Debra fishes from a lawn chair in the sand.

Ruby comes wading out of the water and leans into the boat and reaches for a towel.

She moves to sit on a quilt beside Debra, rubbing the towel over her hair, drying her legs and arms.

DEBRA
You want a lemonade?

RUBY
You bring any?

DEBRA
I always do, don't I?

Debra reaches into a cooler by her side, pulls out a can and hands it to Ruby. They sit in silence for few moments.

RUBY
Where's all the fish today?

DEBRA
I don't know. They ain't here.

INT. LAKE HOUSE - DAY

Debra slides open the veranda door and enters, followed by Ruby. Sam stands in the kitchen, eating a sandwich.

SAM
Hey, Debra Dew.

Debra and Ruby stand still. Sam swallows the sandwich and steps closer, offering his hand to Ruby.

SAM
(to Debra)
Don't I rate an introduction?

DEBRA
Sam, this is Ruby. Ruby, Sam.

Ruby studies Sam's hand, suspicious.

Sam slaps Debra on the back.

SAM
Y'all comfortable.

Sam ogles Ruby, every inch of her shape, talking to Debra:

SAM
Buster wants me to bring her back.

DEBRA
You working for Buster now?

SAM
Depends.

DEBRA
On what?

SAM
That little business of twenty thousand dollars.

DEBRA
She didn't steal it.

SAM
You are a blind woman, Debra.

DEBRA
I can always see the truth.

Sam produces a tattered receipt.

SAM
According to this, which I found in her purse back there, she deposited twenty grand in the Biloxi Bank. See the truth now?

Sam flicks the receipt, snapping his fingers, winking.

SAM

Because, it'd be strange, if,
you know, the two weren't
connected. Let's go get that
money so we can all be friends.

Sam grabs Ruby by the arm.

Debra doubles her fist and drives it hard into Sam's face.
It puts him down. He scrambles for Ruby.

Two little BARKS of gunfire, bright flashes of light. Debra
spins around. Ruby holds the .22, barrel smoking.

Debra looks down at Sam, two dark holes in his face, one in
his cheek, one in his chin. Bleeding. Ruby drops the gun.

They both look down at what she's done. Debra kneels next
to Sam. Cradles his head.

DEBRA

You killed him.

RUBY

Not like you never done it before.

EXT. LAKE - NIGHT

Debra drives the boat, running lights off, far out on the
lake, her fingers on the wheel, slick with blood.

Lake gets rough, boat rocks on the chop. She tries not to
look at the body on the deck, cinder block chained around
its waist.

She reaches to the switch and kills the motor.

Sudden silence registers sharply. Blackness surrounds her.

She reaches down, opens two valves. Water rushes in.

She slides down over the side of the boat, carefully, into
the black water.

Boat lists, sinking. Debra kicks her feet, swimming,
pulling hard against the waves.

INT. LAKE HOUSE - NIGHT

Debra slides the deck door open, soaking wet, enters.

DEBRA

Ruby?

She moves around, shivering, shaking off the lake water.

DEBRA

Ruby.

BATHROOM

She opens the door. Nothing.

BEDROOM

She enters. Nothing. But the drawers are pulled open.

Searches the closet. Kicking things around.

EXT. LAKE HOUSE - NIGHT

Debra moves down the steps, past Sam's truck.

DEBRA

Ruby?

The dry wind whistles past her as she stands in the driveway. Stunned. The car. Gone.

EXT. LAKE HOUSE - DECK - DAY

Debra sits on the edge, watching dawn light the lake with pale streaks in the sky, birds flying from tree to tree.

DEBRA (V.O.)

For a minute there I got the big picture.

YOUNG MAN (V.O.)

Is that right?

DEBRA (V.O.)

You back off from anything and get the big picture, you can figure most things out.

INT. WELL HOUSE - DAY

Debra and a young man, TOMMY, sit on overturned buckets in the small cramped space, overhead light on, door open.

TITLE OVER

Clarksville, Tennessee
Three years later

She works on a pipe with a screwdriver.

TOMMY
What were you holdin'?

DEBRA
Two pair, jacks and eights. All
I had to do was fold and go home.

TOMMY
Did you?

DEBRA
I'd been losing all night,
off and on. My luck wasn't
gonna change.

She taps the pipe.

DEBRA
Dropped my cards on the table
and pushed my chair back.
I'm out I said.

TOMMY
Smart.

DEBRA
Still, I hated to fold.

Debra drops the screwdriver.

DEBRA
She's tore up.

TOMMY
Yep. Long time now.

DEBRA
Need a new contact switch.

TOMMY
What's that cost?

DEBRA
Fifteen bucks.

EXT. YARD - DAY

Debra crawls from the little brick building on her hands and
knees, followed by Tommy.

They stand, slapping the dust from their hands. Behind
them, an old house on a patch of dirt.

Debra strolls forward to an old stone well. She looks down into it. Tommy steps beside her.

DEBRA
Headin' into town. Keep
an eye on things.

Debra slaps Tommy on the back and strolls past a hand printed cardboard sign planted by the road:

Greer's Auto Repair: I fix anything.

INT. PARTS STORE - DAY

WARREN (30s) at the counter hands Debra a small box. She pulls out the contact switch.

She opens and closes it, looking at the shiny points.

DEBRA
That's it, Warren.

WARREN
Good. That's the last one we got.

DEBRA
Your Chevy still poppin'
freeze plugs?

WARREN
No, but it's blowin' power
valves.

DEBRA
You put that 383 bore kit back
in there?

WARREN
Yeah, it's practically a big
block now.

DEBRA
You mill the heads?

WARREN
No.

DEBRA
Stock manifold?

WARREN
Yeah, I didn't feel like messin'
with them headers.

EXT. COUNTRY STORE - DAY

Debra pulls a car into the dirt lot. Several black children sit around the storefront on crates and drink boxes.

INT. COUNTRY STORE - DAY

Debra enters. Opens the door of the drink box and peers into the darkness and gets a little green glass Coke.

She moves to a rack of cakes and bread midway down the floor. She gets a Moon Pie and carries it to the counter.

DEBRA

Hey Junior.

A cloth curtain parts in the back. JUNIOR (80s) (black) comes through on a pair of crutches.

JUNIOR

Hey, Debra. Hold on. I'm slow today.

Junior makes his progress in a series of steps and starts, hitching himself along by degrees.

He gets to the counter and takes the crutches from under his arms and leans them against the wall.

He grips the counter and eases himself onto a high stool behind the register.

JUNIOR

Whew. What else for you, Deb?

DEBRA

Let me have a pack of Camels.

Junior reaches high and props himself with one arm to the cigarettes and then starts punching buttons on the register.

JUNIOR

Four and a half dollars.

Debra pays him. MARY WILSON (50s) a good-looking woman in a dark blue dress, enters.

MARY

(to Debra)

Why hey, Ms. Greer. Junior.

Junior nods at Mary.

DEBRA

Mary. How you been?

Mary pulls a little cigarette holder from her pocket, and taps one on the pack.

MARY

Pretty good.

JUNIOR

(to Mary)

Church let out?

MARY

Yeah.

(glances at her watch)

I just stopped to get some milk
and bread 'fore I went home.

Debra glances at Junior. He's busy reading a comic book.

Debra looks at Mary. Mary smiles at her. Debra moves for the door.

MARY

Bye, Debra. Don't be a stranger.
You hear?

DEBRA

Bye, Mary. Junior.

INT. DEBRA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Debra pulls a couple of pillows together and lays her head back against the headboard. Closes her eyes.

A small breeze drifts into the room from an open window. After a few moments, a soft knocking on the screen door and a timid voice calls her name:

MARY (O.S.)

Debra?

Debra opens her eyes.

DEBRA

Come on in.

Debra gets up and makes her way to the hall.

HALL

Mary opens the screen door, grocery sack in her hand. Debra grins at her.

BEDROOM

Debra sits on the edge of the bed.

DEBRA
Shut the door.

Sound of door shutting, then Mary's footsteps come down the hall. Mary leans in the doorway, smiling.

MARY
You don't mind me coming
over, do you?

DEBRA
I'm glad to see you. I'm
always glad to see you, Mary.

Mary sits next to her. Mary picks up Debra's hand and holds it. Mary leans over clumsily and kisses Debra on the lips.

DEBRA
What about your car?

MARY
What about it?

DEBRA
What if somebody drives by
and sees your car?

MARY
I'll say you're tuning it up
for me.

Mary gets up and shuts the door. She undresses slowly in front of Debra, smiling the whole time.

Naked, Mary moves to Debra and helps her remove her clothes, carefully, her eyes looking into Debra's.

BEDROOM - LATER

They lie naked together. Debra rubs Mary's shoulder, scratching her back.

MARY
You sure are a secret person.

DEBRA
I like secrets.

MARY
You'd be surprised the way
people talk about you.

DEBRA

Yeah?

MARY

The mysterious Debbie Greer.

DEBRA

She ain't so mysterious.

MARY

I've known her for three years,
and I still don't know where
she comes from.

DEBRA

A place.

MARY

Was she ever married?

DEBRA

Not that she can remember.

MARY

That's good.

LIVING ROOM

Mary's dressed, picking up empty bottles and old newspapers.
She picks up a broom, sweeps the floor.

MARY

You need you a maid.

DEBRA (O.S.)

You interested in the job?

BEDROOM

Debra pulls on her jeans. Mary moves into the doorway,
winking at her.

MARY

Maybe part time.

DEBRA

You're hired.

MARY

I'm fixing to go to town.
What you want to eat?

DEBRA

I got stuff to eat.

Mary enters the room.

MARY

Oh yeah. Chili and beef stew.
You can't live on that.

DEBRA

I've lived on a lot worse.
The main thing I need to do
is fix my well.

MARY

What would it take to fix it?

DEBRA

Just some water. I bought
the part already.

MARY

How much would it take?

DEBRA

About five gallons.

Mary leaves the room.

MARY (O.S.)

I'll be back later with your
water.

EXT. DEBRA'S HOUSE - DAY

Debra walks out on the porch. Waves to Mary as she backs
down the driveway in her car. Sits down in a rocking chair.

The sun drops down through the trees on the other side of
the road. Bats wing their way through the darkening air.

Heat lightening flares in the distance.

INT. DEBRA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Debra lies on her bed, in her underwear, listening to the
rain whisper on the roof, dripping down the sides.

The wind hushes, the curtains stand still as if something
stands outside them.

Then it's gone. The wind picks up. Screen rattles.

She rises, reaches underneath the mattress.

LUTIE (O.S.)

It ain't there, Debra Dew.

Debra turns. Lutie McVey stands in the doorway.

DEBRA
Hello, Lutie.

LUTIE
I'm so glad I found you.

DEBRA
I owe you something?

LUTIE
Not me.

DEBRA
Who?

LUTIE
One guess.

DEBRA
What's Buster want?

LUTIE
Maybe he's got something good
for you.

DEBRA
Try again.

LUTIE
Did Buster ever steer you wrong?

DEBRA
When he hired me.

LUTIE
That was a square deal.

DEBRA
Alright then. Am I gonna be sad
at the end of this ride?

LUTIE
The man just wants to see you.

DEBRA
You put it that way, what can
I do?

LUTIE
Only way to put it.

DEBRA
Where?

LUTIE
Memphis.

DEBRA
When?

LUTIE
Now. Grab your britches.

INT. CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Debra smokes in the passenger seat.

LUTIE (O.S.)
You'll like Memphis.

DEBRA
I been there.

Lutie, one hand on the wheel, hums a rockabilly tune.

LUTIE
You remember where you were when
Elvis died?

DEBRA
Riding along Highway 20.

LUTIE
Course you know. Everybody knows
where they were when Elvis died. It
was like Jesus Christ, wasn't it?

DEBRA
Pretty much.

LUTIE
You ever see him anywhere?

DEBRA
Who? Elvis? Or Jesus?

LUTIE
Elvis.

DEBRA
No. I never did.

EXT. BUSTER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

They drive up a blacktopped driveway to a house designed like a Swiss chalet: big dormers, split shingles, massive columns of rough wood on the porch.

INT. BUSTER'S HOUSE - DAY

Lutie follows Debra into a room with high, vaulted ceilings, enclosed beams and a massive river stone fireplace.

BUSTER (O.S.)

Glad to see you again.

Debra turns. Buster, in a loud leisure suit, closes a glass gun cabinet filled with an arsenal of firearms.

BUSTER

I always wondered if you missed me.

Buster sweeps an arm around the elegant room.

BUSTER

Not bad for the son of a sharecropper.

DEBRA

Must've set you back a pretty penny.

BUSTER

Can't take it with you.

Debra scans the room, the walls, the ceiling.

DEBRA

That why I'm here, to admire it?

BUSTER

Not exactly. I need your help.

DEBRA

Sounds familiar.

Buster leads her to a bar stocked with lots of liquor.

BUSTER

How do you like it?

DEBRA

The way you like it.

BUSTER

You like it straight.

Buster pours two straight whiskeys.

BUSTER

There's a jewelry store, downtown
Memphis. I want what's inside.
(hands glass to Debra)
Diamonds.

DEBRA

Can't take it with you. I say
buy 'em.

BUSTER

I don't have to buy 'em, not
when I can get you to steal
'em for me.

DEBRA

Get yourself a professional.

BUSTER

You knocked over that gook
store like nobody's business.
That's professional enough for me.
Lutie gonna do the heavy lifting.

Ruby, in a tight black dress, vulnerable innocence still
intact and even more sexually alluring, enters the room.

BUSTER

You remember Ruby, don't you?

Debra turns. Ruby smiles her shy little smile.

DEBRA

Biloxi.

Ruby sidles up next to Buster. Buster shows off her
enormous diamond and sapphire ring.

BUSTER

We got hitched. Big wedding.

DEBRA

Guess my invitation got lost
in the mail.

BUSTER

You didn't leave a forwarding
address.

DEBRA

You still found me.

BUSTER
Tweren't easy.

Ruby sparks a smoke.

BUSTER
(to Debra)
And how's the mechanic business?

DEBRA
Slow. Times are tough.

BUSTER
They ain't got nothing on me.

DEBRA
I don't need to go 'round
robbin' stores though.

BUSTER
You need to rob this one,
'cause, if you don't...

DEBRA
You're gonna kill me.

BUSTER
Woman, you are one hard person to
reason with. No, I'm gonna get
the law to drag that lake -- the one
Sam's at the bottom of.

Buster downs his drink. Ruby pours him another.

BUSTER
That'll be a murder charge, 'cause
that there's a fuckin' murder.

Debra hangs a thumb at Ruby.

DEBRA
She shot him, not me.

RUBY
(to Debra)
Your gun, your bullets.

Buster tosses his drink in Ruby's face. She steps back,
whiskey dripping from her chin, aghast, humiliated.

BUSTER
You fell down on the job, Debra.
Don't you remember?

DEBRA

I also remember Lutie here
killing that asshole at the
gas station.

Buster pulls Ruby closes as she wipes her wet face.

BUSTER

You remember that, Lutie?

LUTIE

I've got a bad memory.

BUSTER

Shit. That's okay. A bad memory
can be good luck sometimes.
Me, I'm cursed: I remember
everything -- like you owing me
something, Debra Dew.

Debra glances at Ruby.

BUSTER

Ruby's a liar. If the truth
could get her out trouble, she'd
still lie. Not like your gal in
Clarksville.

(to Lutie)

What's her name?

LUTIE

Mary.

BUSTER

Hate to see something happen
to someone so honest, like Mary.

Debra knocks back her shot, sets the glass down.

DEBRA

Love, it's a bitch.

BUSTER

So's payback.

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

Lutie and Debra stand over a table, where the blueprint of
store is spread out.

LUTIE

Called Gregory's. About two
blocks from downtown.

DEBRA
How do we go in?

LUTIE
Front door, out the back,
to an alley. That's where
the car'll be parked.

DEBRA
Security?

LUTIE
Zero.

DEBRA
The alarm?

Ruby enters, drink hand. Gazes at the blueprint. Smiles.

LUTIE
Gonna let that alarm sound
It'll take the law at least
three minutes to get there.
That's all the time we need.

DEBRA
Gonna need a driver.

Lutie nods at Ruby. Ruby gives Debra a knowing wink.

DEBRA
(to Lutie)
You're shitting me.

LUTIE
Buster says she won't rattle
and she knows her way around
an automobile.

Lutie pulls up a golf bag. Opens it. Inside, a shotgun.
He slides it out, inspects it, and returns it to the bag.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Debra sits on the commode, peeing. Ruby enters, shutting
the door behind her.

RUBY
I had to come back, Debra.
What else could I do?

Debra finishes, rises, zips up and flushes the toilet.

DEBRA
Told me the truth.

RUBY
You wouldn't have helped me.

DEBRA
All that hogwash about the
full moon on your naked belly and
the elephants sticking together.

RUBY
I've missed you. We can be
together again, after this job.

Debra moves past her, pushing the door open.

DEBRA
Let's just leave it back
back at the lake.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Debra and Lutie wait by the curb, dressed casually, in golf hats and sunglasses. Debra carries the golf bag.

Ruby pulls up to the curb in a late model Buick. She gets out, opens the trunk. Debra puts the golf bag in.

INT. BUICK (MOVING) - DAY

Ruby drives. Lutie beside her. Debra in the backseat. Travelling through Memphis. Crowded as hell.

Ruby pulls over and stops. Lutie gives Ruby a thumbs up.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Lutie and Debra climb out. Debra takes the golf bag from the trunk. Ruby drives away.

Lutie and Debra walk down the street, taking long strides. They arrive in front of a small store: "Gregory's."

LUTIE
(singing softly)
Drop kick me, Jesus, through
the goalpost of life.

INT. GREGORY'S - DAY

Posh jewelry store. Carpeted. Very quiet.

Lutie and Debra burst in. Debra pulls the shotgun from the golf bag. Lutie slips out a small sledge hammer.

The STORE MANAGER rushes up to Lutie:

STORE MANAGER
What on earth...

Lutie brings the hammer down on the Store Manager's head, ending his protest in mid-sentence.

From the golf bag, Lutie whips out a pair of thick rubber gloves, goggles and a leather bag.

SHOWROOM

Lutie, goggles on, leather bag hanging from his neck, goes right to the U-shaped glass counter. SMASH! SMASH! SMASH!

Alarm SOUNDS, a steady, vibrating, ear-shattering RING.

The hammer goes up and down. Glass flies everywhere.

CUSTOMERS, shocked into silence, frozen in their places.

Debra watches, holding the shotgun on the Customers.

Lutie moves along the counter, SMASHING as he moves, and snatching up diamond jewelry from amongst the broken glass.

He works his way half-way around the counter. Comes down the home stretch, picking up rings, scooping up watches filling up his sack.

Debra heads toward the back door, covering the Customers, who seem thankful to be out of range of the flying glass.

Lutie SMASHES the last remaining section of glass.

Debra checks her wrist watch. She shouts:

DEBRA
Time!

Lutie races across the showroom, heading for the back door.

Lutie runs through. Debra follows.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

Lutie and Debra dash to the Buick. Ruby has the engine running. She grins.

Lutie and Debra throw everything into the trunk and slam it shut. Soon as they do -- Ruby peels out -- SQUEALING a patch of rubber.

Debra and Lutie watch the Buick disappear around the corner.

LUTIE

Buster -- you double-crossing...

A police car enters the alley from the opposite end, heading right toward Debra and Lutie.

They run. Car stops. COPS get out, shielded by the car doors. They FIRE a warning SHOT into the air.

Lutie and Debra keep running. The Cops give chase on foot.

PARKING LOT

Lutie and Debra cut across, heading for a second alley.

SECOND ALLEY

Lutie and Debra come running. They turn a corner and run headlong into the pursuing Cops.

COP #1

(gun extended)

Halt!

Lutie pulls a pistol from his pants and the Cop BLOWS a hole in his chest.

Lutie flies backward, landing in some trash cans. Debra moves to a fence. SIRENS surround her.

Debra climbs up the fence, dropping over the other side.

YARD

Runs across a manicured lawn. Climbs another, lower fence.

ALLEY

She lands in an alley, then ducks back into another yard.

BACKYARD

Small, hedged-in trash can area. She picks up a sweatshirt off a clothesline, putting it on over her shirt as she continues on.

BOULEVARD

Debra approaches. Near a bus stop. She looks: a bus is a block away. She stands at the bench, looks toward Gregory's about five blocks down: the confusion.

The bus arrives. Somebody gets off. Debra gets on. The doors whoosh closed.

INT. BUS (MOVING) - DAY

As it starts, Debra takes change from her pocket.

EXT. BOULEVARD - DAY

The bus pulls away, moving toward Gregory's and the activity in front of the jewelry store. SIRENS BLARING.

INT. BUS (MOVING) - DAY

Debra sits down, picks up a newspaper.

She looks out the window at a police car passing the bus, the bus stopping in the traffic.

An ambulance moves past the bus, SIREN SCREAMING.

Debra watches, newspaper in her hands. Her hands shake. The bus starts up. The shaking grows more intense.

She puts down the paper. Her hands grab the seat to steady herself. She looks out.

The bus continues on. Away from the scene.

EXT. BUSTER'S HOUSE - DAY

Debra walks up the blacktop, past the Lincoln, looking over both shoulders.

Debra mounts the porch. The door's open. Lights are on.

INT. BUSTER'S HOUSE - DAY

Debra enters. Silence. She walks into the room on quiet feet. Blood on the walls. Holes in the wall.

Shattered bottles and mirror. Splintered wood sticks out from the front of the bar.

Debra moves to the bar. She peers behind it and sees Buster on the floor, one bloodied sleeve, part of his bloody head and one twisted leg.

She digs around in Buster's pockets and fishes out some keys. Cracks gun cabinet, takes a .38.

EXT. HIGHWAY 7 - NIGHT

Debra drives the Lincoln down the rural two-lane, kingdoms of kudzu on both sides.

INT. LINCOLN (MOVING) - NIGHT

She smokes, one hand on the wheel, window down, engine humming, dash lights glowing with a pale luminescence.

She tosses the butt. Rolls up the window. Pushes her foot down hard.

Eats up road -- trees and houses shoot by, blurred bullets of images -- zooming past vehicles --

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD

Then -- all of the sudden -- the road is empty.

Up ahead, just beyond a rise, the pulse of lights fade and glow in the night air.

Over the crest: the shiny bulk of a gas tanker in the middle of the road like a beached whale.

A FARMER stands beside the open door of his truck, watching, chattering on a CB radio, flashlight in hand.

Debra pulls up. The Farmer drops the radio and trots around the Lincoln, up to Debra.

INT. LINCOLN - NIGHT

Debra rolls down the window, reacting to the withering odor of petroleum fumes, eyes watering.

The Farmer leans in.

FARMER

It's bad. Driver's pinned. You smell it?

DEBRA

Yeah, I smell it.

FARMER

There's a car under it and somebody's in it, but there ain't nothing left of him. Or her.

DEBRA
I'm going down there.

Debra takes the Farmer's flashlight.

FARMER
They's gas all over everything.
It ruptured when it rolled.

Debra drives away, the Farmer jogging beside her:

FARMER
You ought to wait. Firetrucks
is comin'.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

The tanker, on its side, rests on its tractor tires. Debra drives up and parks across the road.

She climbs out, shining the flashlight over the scene --

The car underneath the rear of the tanker is barely recognizable -- unless you count the Buick emblem nestled next to one of the blown tractor tires -- Ruby's car.

A mass of crushed metal no higher than Debra's knee.

Shattered glass and diamond jewelry lie in the road, sparkling.

Debra looks to see if she can view Ruby inside the crushed Buick. She can't. She hears moaning and turns around.

The truck DRIVER, a young man, trapped in the cab. Debra moves closer, shining the flashlight inside the cab.

The Driver's face is covered with blood, his head back in the seat, his Adam apple protruding.

A white broken bone sticks out like a jagged stick from the swelling flesh of one ankle wedged in the door.

One arm hangs by his side. His left arm. A wedding ring on his finger and the hand drenched in blood.

The Driver turns his face and looks at Debra. His ear hangs by one little piece of meat, where blood swells and seeps.

The Driver sees the .38 tucked into the front of her jeans.

In a clear voice, the Driver says:

DRIVER
Please, shoot me.

SIRENS wail and blare in the distance, approaching --

DRIVER
Shoot me. Please. Do it.

The reek of gasoline makes Debra dizzy and sick.

She staggers down the side of the tanker to the rear, where gasoline flows from a hole -- all over the road.

The smell almost puts Debra on her knees. Then she sees it: smudge pots.

Down the road, hard to see, a blinking barricade stands, some kind of road construction.

Baby flames smoke in their pots --

Fumes drift toward the flames --

Debra spins and runs back to the Driver in the cab --

The Driver screams:

DRIVER
Shoot me for God's sake!

Debra draws the .38 and aims at the Driver's head. Finger on the trigger. She pauses.

The Driver screams again -- with every bit of air left in his lungs:

DRIVER
Shoot me oh God put me out
of it!

The whole world BLOWS UP orange and black like Halloween --

The road lights up bright as daylight --

FADE OUT.

THE END