

GET LOW

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1 EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT 1

From a distance and through the trees we see a raging hell fire engulfing a small two story house. It burns and burns.

Out of nowhere a man bursts through a second story window, lands hard and rolls to smother his burning clothes.

He crawls away and staggers up and for a moment looks as if he might run back into the flames. But the heat is unbearable. He runs toward us then past us through black shadows. We cannot see his face,

1A EXT. WINDOW - EARLY MORNING (WINTER 1930S) 1A

Glass in a weathered window glitters with early morning sun. A rock shatters one of the remaining glass panes!

2 EXT. YARD - EARLY MORNING/CONTINUOUS 2

The rock thrower, TOM (10) is hightailing it away from an isolated Appalachian SHACK as the door bangs open, a shotgun barrel appears, and a chicken comes SQUAWKING out from under the porch!

Thinking he's sure to be shot, Tom runs into the old barn!

3 INT. BUSH'S BARN - EARLY MORNING/CONTINUOUS 3

Panting in terror, Tom is hunkered down in strips of light, trying to see through the cracks. There is a loud SNORT and the huge face of some kind of beast suddenly appears at his shoulder.

Tom jumps, panicked, just as a SHADOWY FIGURE creeps into the barn and levels a glinting shotgun at him!

Tom freezes, bends over, and throws up!

When Tom looks up, a ray of light reveals the half face of a fierce gray bearded man, FELIX BUSH. He is holding out a handkerchief to the boy. Shaking hard, Tom hesitates then takes it and wipes his mouth.

Bush pushes open the door and gives Tom a sad look that the boy will never forget before waving him away.

4 EXT. BUSH'S BARN - MORNING 4

Looking back over his shoulder, Tom runs for the road. Two of his BUDDIES are already kicking up dust.

BUSH (72) steps into the sun and watches the boy run off with a look of muted anger, sadness, and something much deeper.

5 INT. BUSH'S BARN - DAY 5

Bush enters the barn to check on his companion. MULE is older than Bush in mule years and just as gray. He wears an old mule blanket everywhere to keep out the cold. He fidgets nervously from all the excitement. Bush comforts him.

BUSH
Just a boy, that's all.

6 SERIES: 6 *

7 Bush rips down an old faded sign at the road and posts a 7
fresh one: '**No Damn Trespassing/Beware of Mule**'. Bush checks
the road in both directions. All clear for now.

8 Bush splits firewood with powerful cleaving strokes. Mule 8
dozes in the shade. Bush sees a Model-T approach and turn
into his road, right past his new sign. He glances at his
shotgun leaning against the shack.

The Model-T comes to a shaky stop. A MAN climbs out, sees
Bush swinging the axe and approaches with trepidation.

HORTON
Mornin', sir.

BUSH
Hard life if you can't read..

HORTON
Pardon? I'm uh, Reverend Gus
Horton, sir, how you doing?

Bush stops his swing and turns and stares coldly at Horton.

BUSH
Don't need saving, preacher.

HORTON

Uh, well, Mr. Wiley Starke has passed on, sir. His funeral is tomorrow and I thought you might want to know since..

BUSH

(softly)
What got him?

HORTON

Just got old, sir.

BUSH

Yeah, well..

Bush returns to chopping wood.

Feeling awkward, Horton hesitates, starts for his car, stops.

HORTON

Mr. Starke told me that you and him ran away from home when you were 6 years old. Is that true?

BUSH

I talked him into it.

Bush doesn't turn, just keeps chopping.

HORTON

Well.. anyway.. I.. alright..

Horton shrugs, get in his car, and leaves.

Bush strikes the log hard and a cleaved piece goes flying.

9

EXT. CEMETERY - EVENING

9

The loneliness of the empty cemetery is broken by Wiley Starke's fresh grave. The mounded earth is covered with beautiful flowers and wreathes, a loving send off from his family and friends. As we pan past the flowers and cards..

.. we realize that the cemetery is not quite empty.

Hunkered down nearby, Bush is as still as a gravestone, staring at the last resting place of his old friend.

As Bush gets up to leave he stops abruptly and stands frozen, staring at a pot of YELLOW FLOWERS on a distant grave. Now he turns and walks quickly away in the opposite direction.

10 INT. BUSH'S SHACK - NIGHT 10

Rain drums hard on the tin roof as Bush, soaked to the bone and shaking with chills, rummages through an old hat box by lamp light: Letters, news clippings and keepsakes. He finds what he's looking for: A PICTURE of a BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WOMAN. She smiles at us from happier days. Realizing that he is raging with a serious fever, he tries to stand up only to collapse back on the bed.

11 OMIT 11/12/13 11

14 EXT. BUSH'S SHACK - NIGHT 14

Wrapped in his quilt and carrying the oil lamp, Bush moves slowly toward the barn. But he is so wracked with fever he has to stop. It stuns him that he can't go on. He never thought anything could stop him. Stuck in the rain with the shaking lamp sizzling, he stares into the forever darkness, the muscles in his jaw rippling in the pale light.

BUSH

Well hell..

15 INT. BUSH'S BARN - NIGHT 15

Somehow he has made it. Sopping wet and shivering, Bush is in bad shape and knows it.

Mule sees Bush and grunts anxiously as he rises.

Bush blindly pours Mule some feed and the poor old thing snatches his first meal in days.

Bush tries to think through the fever. He stumbles back to the door and swings it wide open so Mule can get out if Bush doesn't make it. Satisfied, he comes back and drops hard onto a pile of hay near Mule.

BUSH

Always thought you'd go first..

White as cotton, Bush stares into the lamp that is running out of oil, the light fading fast to darkness. Thoughts tumble through his mind, troubling him, stirring the dark waters of memory.

16 EXT. BUSH'S BARN - MORNING 16

PAN across the stillness of the foothills to the barn. The door is still swung wide open.

Back from the brink of death, Bush emerges into the blinding sunlight. Mule is dozing in his favorite spot. He swings his big gray head over at Bush.

BUSH

Ahh, don't look so disappointed.

17 Omitted 17 *

18 EXT. BUSH'S BARN - MORNING 18 *

Mule watches Bush heave a creaky old wagon out from behind the barn. Mule climbs up on all fours. Bush gets a set of reins and walks toward him. Mule starts to take a stroll, knowing what the reins mean.

BUSH

You better not.

Mule looks back, sees an apple in Bush's hand, and stops.

BUSH

And coffee when we get there.

19 EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY 19

Old wheels creak and moan. Bush and Mule ease up Main street with the cart. PEOPLE try to catch a glimpse of the infamous recluse.

Mule comes to a wearied stop, breathing hard. Bush climbs off the cart and walks Mule, ignoring the eyes upon him.

20 INT. CHAPEL - DAY 20

Reverend Horton, stoking the wood stove, hears FOOTSTEPS.

HORTON

Buddy?

But as he turns he sees Bush silently looking around.

HORTON

Oh! Hello..

Horton comes to Bush but Bush ignores him and keeps critically looking around.

HORTON

What can I do for you, sir?

Suddenly BUDDY and KATHRYN ROBINSON (20's) enter from the vestibule with their new BABY. In their own world, and not realizing that there is anyone in the chapel, Kathryn picks some lint from Buddy's jacket. He catches her fingers and kisses them.

Bush is transfixed by the loving moment.

BUSH

I can wait.

Buddy and Kathryn see Horton and double-take Bush. Buddy nods to Horton and he and Kathryn step back into the vestibule to give Bush and Horton privacy.

HORTON

It's alright, have a seat.

Bush sits down uneasily in a pew. Horton sits down in the pew in front of him and twists around to face him. The wintry light from the near window washes over them.

HORTON

What's on your mind, sir?

BUSH

Bout time for me to get low.

HORTON

Get what?

BUSH

Down to business

Bush reaches into his overalls and puts a balled-up wad of MONEY on the pew. Horton's eyes bulge.

BUSH

Need a funeral.

Horton looks up from the money.

HORTON
For who?

BUSH
Me.

Buddy peers around from the vestibule, listening, curious as hell, until Kathryn pulls him back.

HORTON
For you?
(off Bush's impatient nod)
You want to buy a funeral for you?

BUSH
Am I not talking right?

HORTON
No, yes, I'm sorry. Are you sick
sir?

BUSH
Everybody dies.

HORTON
True, but..

BUSH
I don't take care of my bones it
won't get done, will it?

HORTON
All right, I see. Well the church
can help you get your affairs in
order, arrange a service..

Horton glances at the strange wad of money again.

BUSH
What would you say?

HORTON
About what?

BUSH
Me.

HORTON
A eulogy? I.. don't know. What do
you want me to say?

BUSH

Say what you'd say right now to my face.

HORTON

Well. I uh, I don't know much about you, Mr. Bush. I mean, I've heard stories but..

BUSH

What stories?

Bush leans in and stares into Horton. It feels like everything in the world stops dead.

Buddy peeks in again, this time Kathryn peeks too.

HORTON

Just stories..
(off Bush's intense look)
..you know, people talking.

BUSH

What kind of stories? Say one.

HORTON

Sir.. my mother used to say that gossip is the devil's radio..
(unfortunate aside)
..not that she didn't play that radio at full volume now and then, bless her heart, but..
(back to business)
..what matters when you come to the end of your life is that you're ready for the next one. Have you made peace with God, sir?

BUSH

I paid.

Horton has no idea what Bush means. He looks at the money, back at Bush.

HORTON

Well.. you can't buy forgiveness, Mr. Bush. It's free. But you do have to ask for it.

BUSH

Nothing in *this* world is free, preacher.

Bush abruptly grabs his money and starts out. His hand bangs into the pew and the money FALLS.

Buddy stares wild-eyed at the big wad of money then drops back into the vestibule.

Bush storms past Buddy, Kathryn and the baby like a hot wind.

20A EXT. CHURCH - DAY

20A

Bush heads off down the road on his wagon. Horton, Buddy, and Kathryn appear at the door and watch him go.

HORTON

That was, uh, different.

KATHRYN

I heard such awful things about him when I was a kid.

HORTON

My mother probably told you some of them.

Kathryn goes back into the church with Horton who is cooing at the baby. Buddy lingers, staring at Bush, thinking..

21 EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

21

Bush's wagon loaded with bags of feed and supplies, sits in front of the Diner.

Bush is holding a big tin cup of coffee for Mule who is drinking it and loving it.

Tom (the kid who threw the rock) comes from behind the diner with a full garbage can to empty into the big trash barrels on the back of an old pick-up truck. He sees Bush and freezes.

Bush looks up and stares at him.

The diner door snaps open and BONNIE (30's), Tom's mother, steps out. She sees Tom and Bush staring at each other.

BONNIE

What are you doing, son?

Now Tom is scared to death that Bush is going to tell on him. Bonnie doesn't like this staring match at all.

BONNIE

Empty those cans in your daddy's
truck and get back in here. Now.

Finally Bush drops his gaze and lets Tom off the hook. Relieved, Tom heaves the can up into the truck. Bonnie hesitates then goes back into the diner just as...

..CARL (30s), his sidekick, GARY, and two other MEN come across the street toward the diner. Gary sees Mule slurping coffee from the big tin cup.

GARY

Look at that. A mule drinking
coffee!

CARL

Finally found somebody that likes
Bonnie's coffee.

As they move past, they see Bush standing there..

WORKER

Ya'll better hush, that's old Bush.

Carl eyes him. Gary and the others throw curious glances as they head into the diner. Carl stops.

CARL

Hey..
(no response)
I'm talking to you..

Carl picks up a handful of gravel, tosses some over nonchalantly in Bush's direction. Bush ignores it.

CARL

We know about you. You stay out of
this diner. There's women and
children here and we don't want you
around them.

Bush stands to mount up, never turning around.

CARL

You better hear me. I see you here
again, I'll.. Hey! Hey!

Hearing the hollering, Tom looks up from the pick-up.

Carl throws a stone, harder this time to get Bush's attention.

But the rock misses Bush and hits Mule, startling him. Old instincts kick in and he has a VIOLENT FIT.

CARL

Shit..

Carl moves up to try and calm him..

..as Bush tries to ease Mule down the cart hitch grinds a GASH in Mule's hind-quarter. Mule whinnies painfully, slowly surrendering.

As Carl steps up, Bush yanks the BRAKE HANDLE off the cart and hits Carl in the chest. Air explodes from Carl as he gasps with pain. Before he can move, Bush hits him again in the same place. Carl wants to hit back but he has no air. Lightning quick, Bush steps back and hits Carl again in the exact same place.

Carl falls like a bag of bones. He looks up and sees Bush towering over him with a terrible bottled up darkness in him. It has all happened so fast it feels like an awful dream to Carl.

TOM

Daddy!

Wild with fear, Bonnie and Tom run toward Bush.

BONNIE

Stop it!! Get away!

Gary, the Worker burst from the diner but see the brake handle in Bush's hand and slow down.

Bush comes to himself, sees everyone staring, sees Carl in tears, and now Tom and Bonnie, trying to get him away..

Gary and the others slowly move toward Bush. More patrons step out from the diner.

Buddy races up, sees Mule bleeding, and eyes Bush as he grabs the reins and leads Mule down Main street, still holding the brake handle.

CARL

(gasping)

I'll kill him!

Bonnie shushes him softly as Carl moans in pain.

Tom stares after Bush, mirroring his father's hatred.

22 OMITTED 22 *

23 INT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY 23 *

An EMPTY CASKET, awaits its passenger in a small but serviceable funeral hall. Through the office door, FRANK QUINN sits at his desk, his head completely buried behind a paper that he shakes hard every few seconds. His feet are up on the desk revealing a pair of lovely burgundy silk socks.

24 INT. FUNERAL HOME/OFFICE - SAME 24

Frank's hand slips the flask next to his coffee cup into a drawer when he HEARS the front door open. But his face remains hidden as Buddy enters. Buddy is troubled by the fight.

BUDDY

Frank?

(off Frank's grunt)

There was a fight. It was..

FRANK

..let me guess. Hmm. Carl?

BUDDY

Well yeah but this time it was with that old man Bush.

FRANK

Old man?

(distantly hopeful)

Is there a body?

BUDDY

No, the old man did the beating. Never seen anything like it.

FRANK

Social event of the year and I missed it.

Frank lowers the paper so just his eyes appear. He has no southern accent and doesn't look small town.

FRANK
 Read the paper today?
 (off Buddy's no)
 Something strange is happening in
 the world right now.

BUDDY
 What?

FRANK
 People are dying in bunches.
 (off Buddy's look)
 Everywhere. But here.

He puts the paper down and studies his socks.

FRANK
 I wonder what the odds are of a
 funeral home going broke? I mean
 you have a business everybody on
 earth needs, you can't make that
 work, it's got to be you right? And
 yet.. I don't know.. what do you do
 when people won't die?

BUDDY
 Well..

FRANK
 One thing about Chicago, people
 know how to die; they drown, get
 run over, shot, whatever it takes.

BUDDY
 We get it done down here, we're
 just not in a hurry about it.

FRANK
 It's them or us.

Frank sighs and stares forlornly out at a casket.

BUDDY
 (quietly)
 I might know someone who is looking
 for a funeral.

Frank's eyes crawl over to him.

30 EXT./INT. FRONTAGE ROAD/FRANK'S CAR - DAY 30

The Quinn Funeral Home Packard Hearse makes it way down the road. Frank drives as Buddy searches ahead.

FRANK
How much did he have?

BUDDY
It was all wadded up.

FRANK
Ooo, *hermit money*. That's good.

Buddy sees Bush's signs.

BUDDY
There it is..

31 INT/EXT. FRANK'S CAR/FRONTAGE ROAD - DAY 31

They stop at Bush's sign: "No Damn Trespassing." Frank squints up at the old shack and doesn't like what he sees at all. Buddy opens his door but Frank doesn't.

BUDDY
What are you doing?

FRANK
You've been wanting a shot at sales..

BUDDY
But..

FRANK
As of right now, you're on commission.
(off Buddy's look)
Remember; foot in the door, establish trust, and drop the hammer.

Buddy hesitates, crawls out, and eyes the shack.

BUDDY
I'd feel better if you'd go too.

FRANK

No doubt but if you don't do this
by yourself, you won't know if
you're any good. And you'll never
be any good if you don't know you
are. Go get him!

32 EXT. BUSH'S SHACK - DAY

32

As Buddy uneasily approaches the shack, he feels the beautiful stillness and mystery of the place. He KNOCKS timidly on the door, pressing an ear to listen.

BUDDY

Hello?

Nothing. He shoots a look back to the hearse - miles away, and knocks a little louder. Nothing. He inches to the window and peeks in one of the remaining glass panes then starts to slide away..

CLICK.

Buddy spins and discovers Bush standing on the ground behind him, his shotgun barrel pointed between Buddy's eyes.

BUSH

Want to see in my house, do you?

BOOM! Bush blows away several windowpanes and re-aims at Buddy's head.

BUSH

How's it look?

Buddy closes his eyes, his last words are for his wife..

BUDDY

Oh, Katie..

It makes Bush peek out from behind the barrel.

BUSH

You was at the church with your
wife and baby.

Buddy opens his eyes and can't believe he is still alive.

BUDDY

Yes, sir.

BUSH
What the hell you doing here?

BUDDY
I can't remember.

BUSH
What?

They stand there while Buddy thinks..

BUDDY
Oh yeah, I heard.. you wanted a funeral.

BUSH
Funeral?

BUSH
Yes sir. I work at uh.. I work at..
(tries to think of it)
..Quinn Funeral Home. I thought I could help you.

Bush glances at his blown out window: 'Damn'. He lowers his gun, walks up onto the porch.

BUSH
You like rabbit?

BUDDY
What?

Bush goes inside.

Buddy looks desperately back at the hearse but can't see Frank. He doesn't know whether to run for it or not.

33

INT. BUSH'S SHACK - DAY

33

The shack is spare as a monk's chamber but has wonderful HAND MADE FURNITURE in it.

BUSH
Sit down.

There is only chair at the table so Buddy dumps the glass off a small stool under the window and sits down low. The wonder of not being dead makes him look at everything with new eyes.

On a window sill he sees a beautiful little CARVED MULE emerging from a block of wood.

Bush is at the stove tending to a iron skillet of rabbit pieces covered with bacon and white gravy.

BUSH

It's how you put things together, see? Some things go, some things never will. Indians said that everything spoke to them. That's how they made medicine and knew what to eat. Things talked to them clear as we talk. You believe that?

BUDDY

I.. I don't know, sir.

BUSH

If you don't listen you won't hear nothing.

Bush puts the big skillet on the table and sits down.

Buddy is so low he can look under the table and sees how the table legs run right into the top without screws or nails.

BUDDY

Did you make this furniture, sir? Never seen any like it. Can't even tell what's holding it up.

BUSH

Magic.

Buddy looks up. Bush is dead serious. The word lingers. Finally..

BUDDY

Alright. Well. Sir, if you do want to plan for a funeral service, which I hope will be a long long time away, we'd treat you with respect and offer a good..

BUSH

What'd everybody say about what happened in town?

BUDDY

I don't..

BUSH

That crazy old son of a bitch tried to beat a man to death for no reason? That it?

Buddy is caught off guard by Bush's lucid candor and finds himself automatically responding differently to him.

BUDDY

There's two sides to every story.

As Bush puts some rabbit on Buddy's old yellowed plate..

BUSH

People say that. But they don't mean it. They think what they think and they don't want to know anything else.

BUDDY

Yes, sir, but I think people are so scared of what they don't know that they make things up to feel better about it.

BUSH

Like life after dying. Heaven.

BUDDY

(thinks)

I hope that part's true, don't you?

(beat)

But I don't think we know the actual truth about much of anything. I know I don't. I'm just guessing most of the time.

Bush gives Buddy a closer look and motions for him to try the rabbit. Fearing the worst, Buddy bends into the steam, takes a cautious bites and mutters with shocked surprise..

BUDDY

Lord, that's good..

BUSH

You boys been coming out here to throw rocks through my window for 20-30 years.

BUDDY

I never..

BUSH

Ya'll know lots of stories about me?

BUDDY
 (squirms)
 Yes, sir, I guess, but..

BUSH
 Tell one.

BUDDY
 I'd rather not.

Bush eases forward, his eyes slit. The old Bush is back.

BUSH
 I rather you did.

BUDDY
 (startled/leans back)
 Well. When I was kid I heard you
 killed some men in a fist fight.

BUSH
 Is that all?

Bush leans back stone-faced.

In the silence, Buddy looks over again at the wondrous carving of the mule on the window sill, at the big ears and long face that are being born from the rough block. It makes him smile. But when he glances back, Bush is staring a hole through him.

BUSH
 What's your name again?

BUDDY
 Buddy Robinson, sir.

BUSH
 Well, if I need you -- I know where
 you are.

It sounds almost like a threat. It shorts Buddy out. He stops eating and realizes that Bush has taken another turn and that he's been dismissed.

34 EXT. BUSH'S SHACK - DAY

34

Buddy heads to the hearse, glancing back over his shoulder. As he recalls his encounter, he stops, looking back at the shack. The old legend has gotten deep under his skin.

35 OMITTED 35

35A EXT. BUSH'S LAND/FIELD 35A

The morning sun breaks over the mountains.

36 EXT. BUSH'S SHACK - MORNING 36

Bush is on the porch, straining boiled herbs, grass, and bark into a jar. There is something not right with him and he knows it. While the medicine cools he looks out across the mountain and draws a deep breath.

37 EXT. FUNERAL HOME - MORNING 37

A well crafted live-in home doubling as a funeral parlor. A sign, 'QUINN FUNERAL HOME', hangs from the porch.

FRANK (O.S.)

Oh yes Ma'am, I do respect your wishes but you see..

38 INT. FUNERAL HOME/FRANK'S OFFICE - SAME 38

Frank is looking a little hung over. Buddy walks in. Frank points at the phone and rolls his blood shot eyes.

FRANK

..state law requires.. No ma'am, we can't bury him under the house..

There is a loud KNOCK at the door. Buddy goes to get it.

39 EXT. FUNERAL HOME/FRONT DOOR - DAY 39

Buddy swings the door open. Bush is standing there. Buddy leans back unconsciously, not knowing what to expect.

FRANK (O.S.)

Well just for argument's sake, Ma'am, how would we get the casket under the house? No casket?

BUDDY

(to Bush)

Would you like to come in, sir?

Bush stares suspiciously into the room then back at Buddy.

FRANK (O.S.)

But you have to have a container of
some kind, Ma'am for decency and
uh, sanitation.

Bush enters the Funeral Home. As Buddy starts to close the door, Bush catches it.

BUSH

Leave it.

40

INT. FUNERAL HOME - CONTINUOUS

40

Frank is still on the phone and pouring himself a drink from the flask into his coffee cup in the drawer.

FRANK

Yes, Ma'am, but there's lots of
natural things that aren't decent.
(listens, eyes widen)
He did what?! Good God. No, Ma'am,
I didn't know that about your
husband. Well, yeah now I
understand why you want him under
the house but still..

The phone goes dead. FRANK sighs as Bush walks in.

BUDDY

Frank Quinn, Mr. Bush.

Frank takes a quick swallow from his cup to fortify himself, then jumps up, smiling, and goes to Bush with his hand out.

FRANK

Come in, come in, pleasure. Coffee?

As Bush shakes Frank's hand, he stares into him, taking everything in, his bloodshot eyes, the wrinkled shirt beneath his suit, his breath. Frank feels downright naked.

BUSH

You from anywhere?

FRANK

A little bit of everywhere, I
guess. Get him a chair, Buddy!

Buddy stands behind the waiting chair.

Bush scrapes up a different chair. Frank goes behind the desk. Buddy pulls up a chair.

Bush reaches into his coat and pulls out the wad of hermit money and lays it on the desk. Frank does something phenomenal. He ignores the money.

FRANK

How can we help you, sir?

Bush gives Buddy a look, then looks back at Frank who steadfastly refuses to look at the ball of money.

BUSH

I'm after a funeral.

FRANK

Boy, are you in luck.
(getting up)
Follow me.

41 INT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY

41

Frank and Buddy stand with Bush in a room dedicated to sales. Three caskets are lined up for display. All tanks.

Bush steps up to a cheap cloth covered box, bangs it with his knuckles, and scowls. Frank points to a wooden casket.

FRANK

Solid pecan, steel handles..

Bush eyes it, repulsed.

BUDDY

Mr. Bush is an amazing carpenter.

BUSH

Forget the box. What else?

FRANK

Whatever you want, flowers..

BUSH

No.

FRANK

Burial plot..

BUSH

Got it.

FRANK
A service?

BUSH
Party.

FRANK
A what?

BUSH
A party.

BUDDY
What kind of party?

BUSH
Funeral party.

Stumped for once in his life, Frank looks at Buddy. Then years of honed instincts surge back to life.

FRANK
We can do that.

42 INT. FUNERAL HOME/OFFICE - DAY

42

As they come back into the office..

BUSH
And I want to be there.

Frank goes behind his desk. Buddy and Bush start to sit..

FRANK
You will be, I guarantee it.

BUSH
I want to be there *now*.

BUDDY
You want to be at your funeral..
party.. *alive?*
(off Bush's nod)
But.. it's not a funeral if you're
not, you know, deceased..

FRANK
Hold on now, it's a detail, we can
look at it.

BUDDY
Pretty big detail.

Frank cuts Buddy a look then smiles at Bush.

FRANK

So you'd like to have a funeral party while you're alive so you can go?

BUSH

Yes or no?

FRANK

Yes.

Buddy is lost.

FRANK

Buddy, get some paper. We need to make of list of who Mr. Bush wants to invite..

As Buddy starts to get up.

BUSH

Sit down.

Buddy sits right down.

BUSH

I want everybody to come who's got a story to tell about me.

FRANK

Say again.

BUDDY

That probably covers 4 counties..

Bush shoots him a look. Frank shoots him a look. Buddy thinks about how great an outdoor life would be.

BUSH

Then I want 4 counties worth of people at the party.

FRANK

Well, sir, the thing is, how would you get people to come and tell stories about you that I'm guessing might get them, you know.. shot?

Bush scoops up the ball of money and heads out. Now *all* Frank can see is the money, leaving.

FRANK

You know what, you go ahead, don't worry about it, we'll think of something. A couple of ideas just came to me.

BUDDY

Like what?

43

EXT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY

43

As Bush starts out the open door, he nearly bumps into Buddy's wife, Kathryn, and MATTIE DARROW. Mattie is carrying Kathryn and Buddy's baby boy.

Frank sees Mattie and flicks his hair back nervously and quickly brushes his teeth with his finger as..

..Bush gives Mattie a glance and tries to be invisible.

MATTIE

Felix?!

Feigning deafness, Bush walks on. Sensing something, Kathryn takes the baby so Mattie can go after him.

MATTIE

Felix! Say hello to me!

Frank, eyes wide with surprise, mouths, "Felix?".

Bush's shoulder hunch then fall as he turns. He looks into her, taking everything in. When he speaks his eyes and voice are soft.

BUSH

Hey Mattie.

Buddy comes out, surprised to see Mattie and Bush together. Frank walks up behind him and scowls. Kathryn steers them back inside to give Mattie privacy.

BUSH

Heard you moved off.

MATTIE

I've been back a while.

BUSH

(looking away)
Well.

MATTIE
How are you?

BUSH
You look like you always did.

He abruptly rips himself away and is gone.

44 INT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY

44

Buddy and Frank are peeking out the window. They see Mattie standing alone as Bush walks away.

FRANK
How would *she* know *him*?

KATHRYN (O.S.)
It's none of our business.

FRANK
So? We got to know.

Kathryn shakes her head and goes back outside. FRANK has another look at Mattie then lets the curtain fall back.

FRANK
See the size of that thing?

BUDDY
What?

FRANK
What do you mean, what? Goddamn ball of money! He wants a party with pink balloons on his ears, we're gonna give it to him.

BUDDY
But..

FRANK
I sold 26 of the ugliest cars ever made one December, in Chicago, with wind blowing so hard up my ass I was farting snow flakes in July so don't tell me we can't do this.

BUDDY
But..

FRANK

That's the last "but" I want to hear out of you. You're a salesman now, sell!

FRANK

(looking out again)
She called him Felix.

45

EXT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY

45

Kathryn rocks the baby in a carriage. Mattie is beside her.

MATTIE

A thousand years ago he was the most interesting man I'd ever met.

KATHRYN

Get out of here.

MATTIE

He was. And I don't mean just the way he looked.

KATHRYN

I hope not.

MATTIE

Oh no, listen, he was beautiful.

KATHRYN

Are you serious?

MATTIE

(sighs/thinks)

Most people are just laid out nice and simple, you know? You always know what they're thinking and where you are with them. But he was this.. big old cave that went deeper and deeper. You'd never get to the end of him.

KATHRYN

Good Lord, you had a crush on him!

MATTIE

All the girls did. I know he's something wild that crawls out of the hills once in a while and gets into trouble now but there's *still* nobody like him.

46 EXT. BUSH'S BARN - MORNING

46

Bush comes out of the barn. Frank and Buddy are there.

FRANK

We have a plan. All we need is a little bit of your time.

BUSH

What for?

BUDDY

Seeing it is better than hearing about it.

Bush looks at the hearse, back at Buddy and Frank.

BUSH

How much is it gonna cost?

FRANK

(to Buddy)

Did you say anything about money?

(touches his own chest)

I didn't say anything about money.

(to Bush)

If we can't get you what you want you don't owe us anything.

47 INT. HEARSE - DAY

47

Frank, Buddy, and Bush ride in the front seat of the hearse. They are together but in very different worlds. They don't even look at each other when they talk.

Buddy is lost in serious thought.

Frank is preoccupied about the deal and driving too fast.

Bush is scrunched up to the door. He is going much faster than he is used to going. He kinda likes it and kinda doesn't.

BUSH

It moves, don't it?

FRANK

(distracted)

This is nothing.

BUSH
Fancy car for the dead.

FRANK
Didn't buy it for them.

BUDDY
(out of nowhere)
We say that funerals are "For the Living" but we forget what that means sometimes, I guess.
(to Bush but almost to himself)
I was thinking about your funeral party before I went to sleep last night and I think I understand it a little now. When I was a kid, my folks were killed in a bad car wreck and the people at the funeral home... they did the impossible as far as I was concerned. I don't know what I would've done without them. And I remember wishing that my mother and daddy were there to see how beautiful they made everything.

Frank is hearing this for the first time and is shocked. Bush glances softly at Buddy then looks out the side window at the world rushing by too fast. All at once he gives in to it.

48 EXT. TOWN STREET - DAY 48

The hearse pulls up on main street. Frank, Buddy, and Bush get out and head toward Feldman's Clothing Store.

48A INT. FELDMAN'S CLOTHING STORE- DAY 48A

Frank and Buddy enter the store and find MR. FELDMAN and a PHOTOGRAPHER setting up a large camera and backdrop. As they turn to show Bush what is happening they see him go by the window outside.

FRANK
Where's he going?

49 OMIT 49

50 INT. TOLLERUDE'S BARBER SHOP - DAY

50

A barber's drape falls over BUSH who is seated in a chair.

Frank and Buddy rush in. The barber, an anxious Mr. Tollerude, pumps Bush's chair upward.

FRANK

(to Bush)

I wish you wouldn't do that yet.

Bush gives him the hairy eyeball then speaks to Mr. Tollerude, a clear threat.

BUSH

Don't leave me naked.

FRANK

Mr. Bush, you can get all the hairs cut you want after we take your picture, I'll pay for it.

Mr. Tollerude doesn't know whether to cut or not.

BUSH

Why you want my picture made?

BUDDY

That's what we're trying to tell you. We're gonna run an ad in some papers about your party and put up posters of you.

BUSH

And you want me to look like this?

FRANK

Yes.

BUSH

Why?

FRANK

Why?

BUDDY

It's how people recognize you, sir.

FRANK

And you want as many people to come as possible so..

BUSH
So a crazy old nutter draws more.

FRANK
Basically. Don't you think?

BUSH
Do you ever say what you mean?

Bush rips the bib off as Tollerude whooshes him to the floor.

51 INT. FELDMAN'S CLOTHING STORE 51

Bush is seated in front of a backdrop painted with a bridge, a swan, and a pond. The Photographer is trying to tidy up Bush without offending him. As he walks back to camera, Bush roughs himself up and looks truly wild.

Buddy snickers. When the Photographer gets back to the camera, he cocks his head, what?!

FRANK
Take it.
(leans in to Buddy)
I'd go see that.

52 INT. TOLLERUDE'S BARBERSHOP - DAY 52

Mr. Tollerude, nervous as hell, brings Bush up from his reclining position and turns the chair to the mirror.

Bush studies his well trimmed hair and beard for a moment. It's impossible to tell what his thoughts are as he looks into his own eyes.

Buddy and Frank are in the mirror too, staring at him.

BUDDY
(genuinely surprised)
Damn. You look pretty good..

Bush suddenly gets up and nods at Frank.

BUSH
He's paying.

As Bush blows out the door, Mr. Tollerude leans against the chair with relief.

53 INT. FELDMAN'S CLOTHING STORE - DAY

53

Bush stands in front of a full length mirror. He has on a decent black suit, pinned to be hemmed, and a plain white shirt, open at the collar. It is a startling change. But we still can't tell what he is thinking.

Buddy is staring at him with honest disbelief.

Frank is quietly trying to get Mr. Feldman to lower the price for the suit. He looks over and double-takes Bush.

FRANK

Son of a bitch, it's almost worth it.

BUSH

(to Buddy)

What do you think?

BUDDY

I wouldn't know you, sir.

BUSH

Maybe the Devil won't either. Might work out.

(to Frank)

Where's the shoes?

FRANK

Well, normally people don't wear shoes in a casket so..

(off Bush's scowl)

..what are you, about a 10D?

54 INT. FELDMAN'S CLOTHING STORE - MOMENTS LATER

54

Buddy stands beside Frank who is still trying to get a deal on the clothes. Bush walks up with two pairs of pants and two new shirts, puts them on the counter, gives Frank a hard look, and walks away. Frank looks down at the clothes, over at Buddy.

FRANK

Pretty optimistic taking a change of clothes to the grave.

(calls over his shoulder)

How you set for underwear?

BUSH (O.S.)

Don't wear none.

FRANK
One question too many.

55 OMIT 55

56 INT. HEARSE - DAY 56

Everyone is back in the hearse. Something is eating at Frank.

FRANK
I don't mean to be nosey but uh..
how do you know Mattie?

BUSH
She's a peach.

Frank and Buddy cut Bush a look. He looks ahead.

BUSH
We had a go.

Frank nearly drives off the road.

57 INT. FUNERAL HOME/ FRANK'S ROOM - NIGHT 57

Late night Poker. Cigarette smoke drifts into the air. Frank, Carl, Rev. Horton, Mattie, and RAY, a banker, are at the table. Ray has the untouchable presence of someone privileged which appears to be driving Frank up a tree tonight. Horton gathers up his winnings.

HORTON
"The Lord loves a cheerful giver.."

MATTIE
Oh please.. you think the Lord's
taking sides in a poker game in a
funeral home?

Horton shrugs and points to the divine evidence.

FRANK
If He is, the Divine's cheating.

RAY
Exactly.

FRANK
Don't agree with me Ray, it makes
me doubt myself.

Ray sighs and studies his perfectly cut nails.

RAY

I would have turned down your loan
if you were my own dear mother,
Frank.

FRANK

You made my point and don't even
know it.

MATTIE

Jesus, would you two stop it!
You're worse than two old women..

Ray shrugs, sweetly blase. Frank tries to rein in his temper
for her. The loss of the hand is especially hard on Carl who
has only a couple of dollars left.

CARL

(to Frank)

What were you doing with that old
bastard in town today, anyway?

RAY

Oh yes. Buying him clothes, getting
him a haircut..on credit.

Frank shoots him a look.

HORTON

Took out ads in a bunch of papers
too, something about a party?

FRANK

God, I love small towns.

MATTIE

Who are you talking about?

RAY

That hermit, what's his name..

FRANK

(a knowing look at Mattie)
"Felix" Bush.

MATTIE

You're giving him a party?

FRANK

A funeral party.

MATTIE

Whatever you're drinking is not being good to you at all.

CARL

What the hell is a funeral party?

FRANK

Hey, the man wants to be at his own funeral. What can I say? I'd like to be at my funeral so I could tell my ex-wife to kiss my..

MATTIE

What makes you think she'd show up for you?

FRANK

Because, Dear, vultures are constitutionally unable to ignore the dead.

Mattie grins which delights Frank, no end.

Horton stops counting his money and stares at Frank.

HORTON

It's that big wad of money of his you're after.

There is a crack in Ray's disinterest that he tries to hide.

RAY

What money is that?

MATTIE

Felix has money?

Everyone is looking at Frank but he shuffles the cards.

HORTON

He came to see me, wanting a funeral, had a big old greasy ball of money. Talked like he thought he could buy his way to heaven with it.

RAY

(seriously)

How much has he got? Maybe he can.

Hearing that Bush wants or needs a real funeral Mattie is suddenly truly concerned.

MATTIE
Is he sick, Gus?

Horton shrugs. Frank notes the concern and doesn't like it.

Carl coughs and his ribs make him break out into a sweat.

CARL
I'll tell you one damn thing, ain't
nobody gonna go to a funeral for
that son of a bitch.

Mattie gives Carl a look

HORTON
Language..

FRANK
They might. He's inviting everyone
who has a story about him to come.
You could tell about him kicking
your ass, Carl.

Carl looks at Frank as if he wants to cold cock him.

RAY
Old man is going to ride the Weird
Train right into the ground, isn't
he?

FRANK
Wouldn't you like to know what
everybody says about you behind
your back, Ray?
(off his look)
Yeah, probably not.

HORTON
I already know way more about
people than I need to.

MATTIE
Or want to.

HORTON
Amen.

FRANK
Let's play some cards.

RAY

Oh for God's sake, face it Frank,
you're broke.

This is not about cards. It's a declaration meant to embarrass Frank in front of everyone. Frank feels their eyes on him as he starts to pull off his watch. Ray waves it off.

RAY

Please. I've won that 4 times
already.

FRANK

It's who has it last that counts.

CARL

Say what you want but if there
hadn't been anybody there the other
day he would've killed me. And I
guarantee you it wouldn't have been
his first time.

It sounds true and everyone is quiet except Mattie.

MATTIE

Everybody knows you started it.
(off his glare)
Don't look at me like that. I
remember when you were born. You
were the sweetest little boy. What
is wrong with you?

Momentarily shamed, Carl's face softens and we can see a better man there. He struggles to hold on to it but..

CARL

I made a mistake. But there's a
line.. and he crossed it.. and
everybody knows that too. Ya'll go
on and have a party with the devil
for his money but I'll dance on his
grave someday.

Carl snatches his few dollars up and heads out.

HORTON

You kind of hate to admit it when
it comes to Carl but he's got a
point. You don't know what Bush is
doing. What if he just wants to get
everybody in one place so he can
turn his shotgun on them?

MATTIE

He wouldn't..

HORTON

I looked in his eyes. The truth is nobody knows what he's capable of. Maybe even he doesn't know.

She looks into him. Frank starts to deal the cards.

RAY

Go ahead and lay your watch down, Frank. But I am going to keep it this time, alright, on principle.

FRANK

I got an idea. Let's try something different.

(to Ray)

The cards in your sock? Leave'em there.

Everyone freezes. Ray shakes his head.

RAY

What are you trying to pull now?

FRANK

You really think you're that good that nobody sees?

RAY

Sees what?

FRANK

You cheat at everything you do. Even at the bank, you loan people just enough to get'em deeper in so you can foreclose on them.

RAY

You are a pathetic man. And a goddamn..

FRANK

Am I? Then stand up and roll down your socks.

(a deep dark look)

Stand up or I'll stand you up.

Ray looks around the table and suddenly realizes that he is irreversibly exposed and alone. The sound of Frank's chair scraping the floor makes him jerk up.

He walks out, trying to find his old confident rhythm and failing. Everyone sits in uneasy silence.

58

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

58

Horton waves and walks out, leaving the door open. Frank walks Mattie to the door, helping with her coat, trying to work up his nerve to say..

FRANK

I'll walk you home.

MATTIE

No. Thank you.

FRANK

(hurt)

You sure?

(off her firm nod)

You're not going to play anymore,
are you?

MATTIE

Oh, I don't know. Thank you for
inviting me though.

FRANK

I'm sorry about the..we don't
always fight, okay, we do, but he's
had that coming for..

MATTIE

It's not that. I just..(trails off)

FRANK

You came because you don't know
what to do with yourself.

(off her look)

I slept on the same side of the bed
my *whole* life, right? But after my
wife left me, I switched sides,
just like that, and never been able
to go back.

MATTIE

When someone you love is gone, you
can pour everything, even a
lifetime of things into the place
where they were but it's still
always empty.

He sees that her thoughts are not with him at all but a million miles away. She hardly glances up when she says..

MATTIE

'Night.

He stares after her, wishing that she could see him the way he sees her.

59 OMIT 59

60 INT. BUSH'S SHACK - NIGHT 60

Dim lamp light glows. We see Bush sitting on the edge of the bed wiping the sweat from his face with a sheet. He looks up at the picture of the beautiful woman.

61 INT. BUDDY'S HOUSE - NIGHT 61

Buddy sits in the dark, rocking his son who is asleep. A small lamp casts a shadow across them. Kathryn comes in.

KATHRYN

I didn't hear him wake up.

BUDDY

He didn't.

KATHRYN

(kneeling down)

Everything's all right, hon.

BUDDY

I'm glad you don't know how quick it can change.

She gently kisses his arm and the baby's head. Buddy looks at her, haunted by the very possibility of their absence.

62 EXT. STREET - DAY 62

Mattie is standing on the sidewalk at Feldman's store with her coat collar pulled up against the cold, giving someone we can't see a bemused affectionate scolding.. *
*
*

MATTIE *
*

Good Lord. Have you completely lost your mind? *

(MORE) *

MATTIE (cont'd)

Straighten up for heaven's sake
before somebody throws a net over
you!

*
*
*

But she smiles in spite of herself, glances around to see if
anyone was watching and moves discretely on. As she does we
see that she was talking to a striking WANTED POSTER of a
wild man sitting in front of a pond, a swan, and a bridge.
The text reads:

*
*
*
*

MYSTERIOUS HERMIT OF CALEB COUNTY THROWS A FUNERAL PARTY!
EVERYONE IS INVITED. MUSIC! FOOD! STORIES! DANCING!

*

63 INT. WCGM RADIO STATION - NIGHT

63

*

A tiny PLACE, cramped with radio gear.

Buddy and Frank peer through a glass window into a small control booth. (We will cut back and forth between the glass)

Buddy is having misgivings about being here. But Frank gives the thumbs up to the young WCGM ANNOUNCER in the booth, a hopeful kid with a smooth voice and dreams of the big-time.

The Announcer hands Bush a set of headphones. Bush is wearing his new clothes and truly looks like a different man.

Bush is puzzled by the headset. The kid takes it and clamps it onto Bush's head. He starts to yank them off then hears a song playing inside his head and loves it. But now the announcer cuts the record off and Bush scowls.

ANNOUNCER

Friends, we have a treat for you today on WCGM. Our special guest is going to tell us about an event that everyone is talking about. And here he is, Mr. Felix Bush, the mysterious hermit of Caleb County! How are you today, sir?

BUSH

I am.

Bush is surprised by the sound of his own voice.

ANNOUNCER

So tell us, sir, exactly how did you come up with the idea of having a funeral party *before* you die?

BUSH

I dreamed it.

ANNOUNCER

Really?

BUSH

Why would I make that up?

Two seconds of dead air as the announcer finds his feet.

ANNOUNCER

Okay. Now I have to say that you don't look quite like you do on the posters.

BUSH

I got pruned.

ANNOUNCER

Well, you're a bit of a local legend, sir. I was a little nervous about our interview. I've heard some pretty wild stories..

BUSH

Like what?

ANNOUNCER

Well uh, just.. from what I understand, you want everyone who has a story about you to come and tell it. Is that right?

BUSH

You come and tell yours.

ANNOUNCER

Thank you. Now how long have you been living out there by yourself?

64

INT. MATTIE DARROW HOUSE - NIGHT/CONTINUOUS

64

*

Mattie is cutting the stems of some lovely yellow flowers and arranging them in a vase.

BUSH (O.S.)

40 some years.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

40 years with nobody to talk to?

BUSH (O.S.)

First 38 are the hardest.

Mattie grins.

65 INT. WCGM - CONTINUOUS

65

ANNOUNCER

But why would you do that, Mr.
Bush, shut yourself off like that?

Frank isn't happy with this but Buddy wants to hear.

BUSH

Come to the funeral and maybe
you'll find out.

ANNOUNCER

You heard it here on WCGM, folks,
find out the answer to the mystery
February 16..

BUSH

One more thing, boy.

FRANK and Buddy tense. What's this?

66 INT. DARROW HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

66

Mattie tenses at the sound in Bush's voice.

BUSH (O.S.)

Gonna be a drawing.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

What kind of drawing, sir?

BUSH

You buy a ticket for \$5.00 The day
of the funeral we draw names. Then
when I die, the winner gets my
place, 300 acres of timber that
hasn't been touched in 40 years.

Mattie accidentally cuts a bloom off of a flower.

67 INT. WCGM - SAME

67

Dead air. The kid, Frank, and Buddy are all staring at Bush.

ANNOUNCER

For 5 dollars?

BUSH

Send it to the Quinn Funeral Home.

Frank's eyes light up like fiery pinwheels and he almost yelps! Buddy looks oddly perplexed and sad.

ANNOUNCER

You heard him! If you want a chance to win 300 acres of virgin timber worth thousands and thousands of dollars, send 5 dollars along with your name and address to..

(off Frank waving and pointing to himself)

Frank Quinn at Quinn Funeral Home.

As the Announcer begins a song, Bush moves his head in time with the music. Frank and Buddy rush into the control booth.

FRANK

(to Bush)

I could almost kiss you on the mouth!

ANNOUNCER

I'll take a ticket.

BUDDY

You're betting on a man dying..

ANNOUNCER

I didn't mean it like..

FRANK

Hey, it's *his* idea!

They look at Bush who has taken off the headset and looking at it like he wants to take it home.

FRANK

It's what you want, right?

BUSH

(to Buddy)

Buy a ticket, son.

Mattie puts the vase of flowers on table with a group of family photographs. The picture beside the vase is the SAME PHOTOGRAPH of the beautiful woman that Bush has. Is it Mattie? It looks a little like her.

INSERT PHOTO: The BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WOMAN stares at us as we PULL BACK TO REVEAL that we are now looking at the identical photo tacked to Bush's wall.

69 OMIT 69

70 EXT. BUSH'S BARN - LATE DAY 70

Bush starts out of the barn, draws back, and peeks through the wall boards: A FIGURE approaches. He jerks..

REVEAL Mattie walking

BUSH
Mattie?

MATTIE
Felix?

Mattie enters, straining to see into the barn. Her eyes adjust to find him standing near Mule. She is startled and pleased by his new do.

MATTIE
Look at you. I wondered if you were still under that beard.

BUSH
Wasn't nowhere else to go.

MATTIE
I heard you on the radio.

BUSH
Well.

MATTIE
You've gotten downright chatty.

BUSH
I reckon so.

MATTIE
(glancing around)
This is nice. I drove by a few times after I got back but..

BUSH
You want to see it?

MATTIE

Do you want me to?

71 EXT. BUSH'S LAND - DAY 71

The first stop on the tour is a small fenced grave site near the shack. Three grave markers with names carved into them: KEEPER, CHARLIE, MAUDE. *

Bush is squatting down staring at the markers. Mattie stands close beside him. Since his attention is elsewhere she looks at him in an unguarded way. Her mind is full of questions, old and new. *

BUSH

You always know where you stand with a dog. Want to lay here with them someday if they'll have me. *

72 EXT. BUSH'S LAND - DAY/LATER 72

Mattie and Bush walks side by side through the last of the glimmering light and shadows beneath the trees. It is a chilly and Mattie's cheeks are flushed. She is enchanted by the place. Bush tries to hide how winded he is.. *

MATTIE

It really is beautiful. Probably looked like this everywhere a hundred years ago.

BUSH

You leave things alone, they know what to do.

MATTIE

Like you?

BUSH

No, Ma'am. I don't know what to do about anything much.

MATTIE

You've been alone a long time.

BUSH

Some people are more suited to it than others, I reckon.

MATTIE

That's funny cause I never thought
that it'd suit you. I knew you
wouldn't be like anybody else but..
no one to talk to, no one to.. be
with.. never.

He looks into her then looks away at something.

*

BUSH

How you sleeping these days, girl?

MATTIE

How am I what?

BUSH
You sleep good?

MATTIE
No, not lately. How'd you know?

He veers off the path and pulls up a plant and brings it back *
to her. *

BUSH
Chamomile, it's good when the *
nights get long. Helps you nod off. *

She takes it and smiles up at him.

BUSH
Want to go on a ways? *

MATTIE
Yes. *

BUSH
Would you stay for supper? *

MATTIE
I don't want to be any trouble. *

BUSH
A supper guest every 30-40 years is *
not much trouble, Girl. *

MATTIE
Alright then. *

He holds out his arm. *

BUSH
Better stay close, some big old *
wild cats been eating my chickens.. *

She looks around and takes his arm. *

BUSH
..or maybe it was me.. *

She snorts and slaps his arm but doesn't let go.. *

74 INT. BUSH'S SHACK - NIGHT

74 *

They enter the dark room together. Bush lights a lantern, gets a chair from a corner and holds it out for her. She sits and watches him check a cast iron pot on the warm stove and put a log on the fire. She notices the beautiful table.

MATTIE

You always were good with your hands.

He puts a glass of tea in front of her and sits down.

BUSH

You still play the piano?

MATTIE

I teach a few girls.

BUSH

I got a good feeling when you played. Remember that time you was playing and the lamp burned out? And you went right on in the dark? I hear that song sometimes at night.

She shrugs shyly and sips the tea. Seconds tick by.

MATTIE

Sure is quiet out here.

BUSH

(cocks his head)
What?

MATTIE

I said it's..
(stops/gets the joke)
I tried to write you at times but I didn't know what to say.

BUSH

Well. I heard you married.

MATTIE

He was a Doctor; a real good man. We lived in St. Louis for awhile. He died unexpectedly about a year ago. I came back here because.. I have no idea why.
(sips tea/thinks)
(MORE)

MATTIE (cont'd)

The list of people who are gone is getting longer and longer and sometimes I feel like all I'm doing is waiting for my name to come up.

BUSH

You have a tender heart, always did.

She gives him a curious look.

BUSH

You can't wait for anything, Mattie. Close your eyes, hold your breath.. stay in one spot your whole life, but you're still moving, like the world's moving under you. There's no waiting.

MATTIE

And there's no getting over some things either, is there?

BUSH

Reckon not, Little Bit.

MATTIE

Little Bit?! Oh my God, nobody's called me that in..

But suddenly she is lifted from the chair as if by strong ropes. She stares at the wall as she walks toward Bush's bed.

Bush is stricken and white. He would stop her if he could but it is too late.

She walks right up to the picture at the edge of the lamp light and stares into it as if it is a mirage that will disappear if she blinks.

Finally she whirls and looks at him, her face a tortured mask. A strangled sob escapes her.

He gets up and stands there staring at the floor.

Suddenly she is moving toward him and then past him and out the door. Her shadow merges with the darkness. Bush stands with his head down, staring into oblivion.

76 Omitted 76 *

78 INT. FUNERAL HOME/OFFICE - DAY 78 *

Buddy comes in frowning and lugging a heavy mail sack. What the hell? He looks up and sees more sacks dumped on the desk.

Frank is grinning and ripping open envelopes from the sacks and each one has 5 dollars in it! Buddy looks down and sees even more mail sacks on the floor!

FRANK
Jesus, kid!

BUDDY
Yeah! But, but it's not our money.

FRANK
Well yeah, no, but *some* of it's gonna be! We're putting this thing on!

Frank rips open two more envelopes and dollar bills rain down to the floor. He's beside himself. Buddy eyes him warily.

BUDDY
He should be here. I'm gonna go get him.

They lock eyes. Frank finally tosses him the hearse keys.

79 OMITTED 79

80 INT. FUNERAL HOME/OFFICE - DAY 80

Buddy, Frank, and Bush are staring reverently at the money stacked across the desk and the full paper sacks all around the desk. Bush eyes Buddy who is still quiet.

FRANK

I don't know exactly how much your land's worth but looks to me like you could get maybe 10 times that or more. I don't know what to do with it. I mean it's yours to do with what you want but I'm getting a little nervous about it. Never thought I'd see enough money to make me nervous. We should probably talk about the price for everything, the clothes, the ads, the food and drink for the party, the music.. our fee for everything, we'll be fair about that, I'm not worried about it.

Bush is looking at Buddy who is looking across the room.

BUSH

What do you think, boy?

Buddy jerks, looks at Frank, at Bush.

BUDDY

Money makes people do funny things.

Frank scowls.

BUDDY

I think you should probably put it in the bank, sir.

FRANK

No! Ray is not..

(off Bush's look)

I mean, if it was my money I'd put it in a bank out of town so everyone didn't know my business. This bank here, you can't trust, that's all I'm saying.

BUSH

Can I trust you?

FRANK

Every name, every dollar, is right there!

BUSH

Not what I asked.

FRANK

I've done a hell of a job for you.
I don't see why..

BUDDY

Mr. Bush, I didn't mean to imply..

BUSH

Hush.

FRANK

I've sold horses, cars, houses,
hell, pocket watches pinned to the
inside of my coat. I'm not ashamed
of it. I don't rob banks, don't
cheat at cards, and I sleep all
right the nights I sleep. What was
the question..?

BUSH

They goddamn..

He nods at the money and suddenly becomes the "other" Bush.

BUSH

Take out for the expenses you've
already had and give me the
receipts. As the bills come in for
things, give them to me and I'll
pay them. Put this money in a box
and the boy and I'll take it
someplace in the morning. Whatever
new comes in, keep it in the bottom
of one of them ugly caskets in
there 'till I come get it. After
the party, name a fair price for
what you've done and we'll settle
up.

(walking out)

I'll be at the car.

After he's gone, Frank and Buddy stare at each other.

FRANK

Is it just me or is he *extremely*
fucking articulate when he wants to
be?

BUDDY

I don't know who's selling who what
anymore.

FRANK

It's not clear, is it?

BUDDY

Not only that but something feels really wrong.

FRANK

Hold on. I told you that you were working on commission..

BUDDY

Yeah, but..

FRANK

So whatever our end of this is, you get a piece.

BUDDY

A piece?

FRANK

Half. It could help set you up, Buddy. So whatever feels wrong is gonna feel right pretty damn quick, okay? We just have to close it out. From here on, watch me, do what I do, and we'll be fine.

BUDDY

But..

FRANK

He wants you to go with him to take this money somewhere which means that it's you he trusts. And that's fine because I trust you too. Just don't trust him, okay?

BUDDY

I'm lost again.

FRANK

Look, that funny feeling you have.. I have it too. And it's not funny. So go along, be friendly, but that's it.

(beat)

There's a euphoria that comes with closing a deal, Buddy, and the bigger the deal, the higher you get. It's better than anything.

(MORE)

FRANK (cont'd)
 But the critical time is *just*
before it closes. It's like a
 witching hour and everything tries
 to come apart. We're not going to
 let that happen.

BUDDY
 All right.

FRANK
 Now go.
 (as Buddy starts out)
 You know.. I always wondered why
 you wanted to work here. I thought
 you could do a lot better.
 (off Buddy's look back)
 I didn't know about your folks, I'm
 really sorry.

BUDDY
 Thank you.

He goes on.

Frank turns and flips through a large stack of bills,
 hungrily entranced.

81 INT. BUDDY'S HOUSE/BEDROOM - NIGHT

81

Buddy's son is crying his heart out. Kathryn comes in
 unbuttoning her blouse, picks him up, sits down, slips her
 blouse off her shoulder, brings the boy to her breast and
 voila, his sorrow miraculously vanishes.

Buddy appears in the doorway, his eyes soft with love.

BUDDY
 I might have a crying fit coming on
 too.

KATHRYN
 Is that right?

BUDDY
 Feeling a little weepy.

KATHRYN
 You boys..

BUDDY
 (leans against door frame)
 I can maybe do something really
 good for us, Katy.

KATHRYN
You already have.

BUDDY
I mean, money wise.

KATHRYN
About Mr. Bush?

BUDDY
Yeah. I'm getting half of whatever
we make off of him.

KATHRYN
So why aren't you happy about it?

BUDDY
Didn't know I wasn't.
(off her look)
I was happy for a minute. And then
the whole thing of making a
carnival out of a person's death, I
don't know if it's right.

KATHRYN
Is it what he wants?

BUDDY
He says it is.

KATHRYN
You are *not* responsible for what
other people do, Buddy, just you.

BUDDY
You're right. You're always right.

KATHRYN
At least I am when I'm half naked.

BUDDY
Right.

82 INT. MATTIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

82

A very determined little GIRL is working her way through a song on the piano that is unrecognizable in this form, even to her.

Mattie sits just behind the girl with tears in her eyes, not really listening. On the table beside the piano is a stack of picture albums and old yellowed newspaper articles.

83 EXT/INT BUSH'S SHACK/HEARSE - MORNING 83

Sitting in the hearse outside of Bush's shack, Buddy watches Bush get in the car with his shotgun. There is a big wooden box of money on the seat between them. Bush props his shotgun against it.

BUDDY
Where to, sir?

BUSH
North.

BUDDY
(starting the hearse)
How far?

BUSH
Till I say, son.

Buddy gives him an uneasy look and pulls off down the tree-lined path.

84 EXT. ROAD - DAY 84

The hearse slips around the narrow road that cuts through miles of farm land lying fallow in the winter.

85 INT. HEARSE - DAY 85

Buddy looks out at the highway. He is driving slow. Bush is leaning against the money, thinking.

BUDDY
How much further now?

Bush waves him on. Buddy scowls then decides to get serious about this. He presses on the accelerator and the hearse takes off down the highway.

86 INT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY 86

Frank is hopelessly lost in a sea of envelopes. The phone is ringing off the hook, there are full sacks around him, and some Reporter is trying to take a picture through the front window. Frank scowls and lowers the blinds.

87 EXT. MATTIE'S HOUSE - DAY

87

Frank is at Mattie's door entranced by the troubled but beautiful piano music coming from inside. It stops abruptly when he knocks. In seconds, Mattie appears.

FRANK
Hey Mattie.

He looks almost boyish and bashful as he drinks her in.

FRANK
Was that you? It was really..

MATTIE
This is a surprise.

FRANK
Yeah, sorry.

He stands, loving the view, forgetting why he is here.

She waits it out as long as she can, not sure how she feels about this adoring look.

MATTIE
Was there something you..?

FRANK
Uh, yeah.. Help!

MATTIE
What?

FRANK
I'm up to my ears with this funeral and I thought, you know, we haven't had time to talk much lately so maybe you'd like to come over and rip open envelopes with me and ..

MATTIE
I'm sorry, I have lessons all afternoon. I have to get back in.

FRANK
Oh, okay, I just..

MATTIE
Sorry.

She slips back inside. Frank stares at the door.

88 INT. MATTIE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS 88

Mattie leans against the door with her eyes closed. There is no student at the piano.

89 OMITTED 89/90 89

91 EXT. CHURCH/SOUTHERN ILLINOIS - AFTERNOON 91

The hearse is parked in front of a beautiful white board church.

91A INT. HEARSE - AFTERNOON 91A

Close on Bush and Buddy.

BUSH
Don't say nothing.

BUDDY
To who?

BUSH
You can say "hi".

Bush gets out. Buddy sighs, mimes "Hi" and gets out.

92 INT. ILLINOIS CHURCH ENTRY - AFTERNOON 92

Buddy quietly creeps in through the front door, looks back over his shoulder, scowls, and enters the church.

93 He stops and looks around, awed by the beautifully serene 93 sanctuary.

Now he sees a tall BLACK MAN (70) come out of an office door behind the pulpit, walk up the aisle, glancing out the window at the driveway, and then at Buddy.

BUDDY
Hi.

CHARLIE
Hello.

Buddy is out of words that he is allowed to say. He glances at the door but Bush is not coming in.

BUDDY

Hi.

Charlie holds out his hand, Buddy shakes it.

CHARLIE

Are you sure you're in the right place? Not expecting a funeral.

Suddenly Bush steps into the church. Charlie squints over then stares at Bush with utter disbelief.

CHARLIE

Felix?!

BUSH

Hey, Charlie.

They shake hands, then hug. Buddy is blown away that Bush would hug anyone. Bush looks up at the church rafters.

BUSH

Still standing.

CHARLIE

Yes.

Charlie give Bush a look then holds out his hand to Buddy again.

CHARLIE

Reverend Charlie Jackson.

BUDDY

Hi!

BUSH

That's Buddy Robinson, he don't talk much.

CHARLIE

Someone better talk. A ghost pulls up in the driveway in a hearse, you expect a little bit of a story.

Bush, Buddy and Charlie, sit in pews near a lovely altar.

CHARLIE

My hearing is not what it was. It sounded like you said you want me to preach at your funeral party with you sitting there?

BUSH

Yes, sir.

CHARLIE

(shaking his head)

You know I've talked to God a lot about you over the years and he said he broke the mould when he made you. Said you were sure entertaining to watch but way too much trouble.

Buddy grins.

BUSH

Well.

CHARLIE

What would you want me to say at this funeral?

BUSH

Whatever you want to, Charlie.

CHARLIE

(to Buddy)

Could you give us a minute?

Buddy starts to get up.

BUSH

Sit still.

Buddy plops back down.

CHARLIE

What's the matter? You scared to be alone with me?

BUSH

He can hear what's said.

Buddy is surprised again. So is Charlie.

CHARLIE

All right. After you left here.. did you do the right thing?

Felix looks up at the beautifully crafted pulpit.

BUSH

I did.. what I thought was right.

CHARLIE

You confessed? Asked forgiveness?

Bush looks off and the muscles jump in his jaw.

CHARLIE

Did you tell her, Felix?

Charlie sighs, leans on his knees, and drops his head.

CHARLIE

You came a long way for nothing
then.

Bush's eyes jerk back to Charlie and they are hot.
Buddy tenses.

BUSH

You self-righteous..

CHARLIE

Don't you dare..

BUSH

I built my own jail and put *myself*
in it! And I stayed in it for 40
goddamn years! No wife, no kids, no
friends! That's not enough?

CHARLIE

You *know* it isn't.

BUSH

(tears welling up)
Well. Why don't you come and say
that then, Charlie? Hell, say it
all! I don't care.

CHARLIE

Not on your life.

The air is so heavy you can't breathe it. Bush suddenly gets up and leaves. Buddy starts to follow. Charlie puts his hand on him to stay. They sit in silence a moment.

CHARLIE

How much do you know about him?

BUDDY

Almost nothing, sir. I just work at the funeral home.

CHARLIE

Do you know he built this church?

BUDDY

No?!

(looking around)

How's a man like him make something like this? I mean, I know he's a good carpenter but this is..

CHARLIE

Magic?

(off Buddy's look)

Maybe it's the best of him, maybe he put his soul into it, I don't know.

BUDDY

What ya'll were talking about.. what did he do? Who was he supposed to tell?

CHARLIE

(thinks)

For him and God to know I guess. I wish I'd never been put between them, that's for sure.

(beat)

I will tell you that he showed up here half dead. I had just started preaching. Over the next 4 years we built this.

BUDDY

Are you coming to the funeral?

Charlie sighs and looks around.

94A Omitted

94A

95 INT. HEARSE/MOVING/PMP - NIGHT

95

Buddy and Bush are both lost in thought. Finally..

BUDDY

Can I ask you something?

BUSH
Do you have to?

BUDDY
Yes. What are we doing? Since the day you came into the funeral home, I don't think anything has happened that you didn't want to happen. I just don't know where it's going.

BUSH
There's a whole lot of things that you don't know. Like what a dog dreams. You can make up a story about him chasing rabbits but you don't know if there's rabbits in there or not. And he can't tell you, can he?

BUDDY
Not unless he's a very special dog.

They snort together.

BUSH
People don't say what they mean either so you don't really know any more about them than you do about that dog's dream.

BUDDY
But what..?

BUSH
(looking away)
That time you left my house I saw you stop and look back. You wanted to know what could make somebody like me.
(off Buddy's uneasy look)
Well here you are, son, here you are.

96

INT. FUNERAL HOME - EVENING

96

Frank is putting money into a casket. He checks his watch.

FRANK
(mutters)
Where are you..?

Lighting flashes and the lights suddenly go out.

97 EXT. OUTSIDE OF TOWN - NIGHT 97

The hearse creeps down the road

98 INT. HEARSE - NIGHT 98

Buddy looks tired. Bush is sitting up ramrod straight, thinking hard about something.

BUDDY

I better stop and tell Frank we're back. He's probably had 2 or 3 hissy fits by now.

(looks out at the rain)

Why don't you stay the night at the house and I'll take you home in the morning?

The simple kindness seems to short Bush out. Buddy doesn't notice, he's still looking ahead.

BUSH

Well, I... I ain't stayed with nobody in a.. in a long while.

BUDDY

It's fine if you want to.

Bush looks as if he might say yes but he NOTICES where the car is passing through and..

BUSH

Let me out.

BUDDY

What?

BUSH

Stop the car.

Bush starts to open the door. Buddy stops abruptly.

BUDDY

You can't walk. It's too far..

Bush climbs out with his shotgun.

BUSH

Put the money in a casket.

BUDDY

You might as well get back in, I'll follow you all the way.

BUSH

(snaps the gun closed)

Get the hell out of here, boy!

Buddy's eyes are defiant. Bush slams the door and walks away, crossing over a fence and out into a dark field.

BUDDY

Not responsible. Not responsible.
Shit.

He slams the steering wheel.

99 OMITTED 99

100 OMITTED 100

101 INT. FUNERAL HOME - NIGHT 101

Buddy is putting the money into the foot of a casket. A lit candelabra sits nearby. There is NOISE, like the muted sound of something breaking. Buddy jerks and listens.

BUDDY

Frank? Hello? Mr. Bush?

He stuffs the money into the casket, grabs the candelabra, comes back, seals the lid, and starts into the office.

102 EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT 102

Under the trees crooked rows of cold ghostly headstones glisten in the darkness. An old pocket lighter flares to reveal Bush staring at a pot of yellow flowers. He holds the lighter to a tombstone and brushes away the debris. It reads: MARY LEE STROUP B. 1874 D. 1894. THUNDER rolls.

Close on Bush's face as rain begins to fall..

BUSH

They keep talking about forgiveness.. ask Jesus for forgiveness.. I never did nothing to Him..

103 OMIT 103/104/105 103

106 INT. FUNERAL HOME - NIGHT 106

Frank enters with a flashlight. He sees that his desk and files have been ransacked. He rushes into the casket room. Several caskets have been thrown to the floor. He goes to the one where the money is, finds that it is sealed tight, and sighs with relief. Hearing something he whips the light around and sees Buddy on the floor.

107 INT. FUNERAL HOME - NIGHT/LATER 107

Frank examines a cut and bump on top of Buddy's head by flashlight and dabs it gently with a cloth. *

FRANK

The cut's not bad but how's the head? *

He moves his finger across Buddy's eyes. *

FRANK

Follow it.

He looks him over carefully. He's had experience.

FRANK

Dizzy? Double vision? Nauseous? *

(off Buddy's no) *

You'll be okay. Did you see who it was? *

BUDDY

No. I was putting the money in.. heard glass breaking.. locked up the casket quick and.. boom..

FRANK

You did good.

BUDDY

Doesn't *feel* good. *

108 INT. DARROW HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - LATER 108

Mattie sits beside a fire, knitting a baby blanket by an oil lamp. All at once the lights sputter on, the radio lights up, warms, and begins to PLAY, as a KNOCK at the door..

109 INT./EXT. FRONT DOOR/DARROW HOUSE - CONTINUOUS 109

Mattie pulls the door open. Bush is standing there soaking wet, breathing hard, holding his shotgun. She draws back reflexively. He looks into her.

BUSH
Please, Ma'am.

110 INT. DARROW HOUSE/BEDROOM - NIGHT 110

Bush stands with a towel around him, shivering.

Mattie opens a dresser drawer. Inside the drawer, is the carefully arranged tableau of a watch, a ring, a stethoscope, and some clothes. She hates to disturb the drawer but pulls out a pair of black pants and a white shirt, lays them on the bed, and walks out.

111 INT. DARROW HOME/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 111

Mattie steps from the kitchen with a steaming mug as Bush comes down the stairs in clothes that are too loose.

Still shivering, Bush steps uneasily in front of the fire. Mattie hands him the hot mug. He looks uneasily at the yellow flowers on the table nearby.

BUSH
Thank you.

MATTIE
What are you doing here?

Burned through, a log falls in the fire. Bush jerks oddly and moves away.

BUSH
Can I sit a minute?

She stares at him then nods at a chair. She keeps standing behind the other chair.

He bends over the mug and seems to lock up inside.

BUSH
You want to know why I have your
sister's picture on my wall?

MATTIE

I'm not stupid, Felix. No, I take that back. How long was it going on? She was already married when I met you. Were you just making up to me to get to her?

Bush is so still he looks like a gargoyle.

MATTIE

If you're not going to talk, leave.

BUSH

Can you help who you love?

Mattie's face tells us that she has asked herself that question many times.

BUSH

I've had 40 years to think about it and I still don't know.

MATTIE

I don't know either, so..

Slowly the gargoyle unfolds. His eyes drill into her.

BUSH

I want to tell you how it was. If you don't want me to, I'll go.

Mattie sighs from down deep in her shoes then comes around and sits down.

MATTIE

Don't lie to me. When did you take up with her?

BUSH

I came to see you and she was there, hanging clothes on the line with your mama.

Bush stares out the window so hard, Mattie turns to see what he is looking at..

BUSH

She turned around..
(as Mattie turns back)
..and.. I promise you that I did not know that I had a heart till right then.

Tears well up in Mattie's eyes.

BUSH

You were a fine fine girl. I didn't know why you wanted anything to do with me but I was gonna keep coming to see you 'till my luck ran out.

(beat)

And then I saw her.

MATTIE

She was married! And she wasn't just my sister, she was my best friend. We told each other *everything*. I can't.. how long did it go on?!

Bush's face is so white it looks like a death mask.

MATTIE

How long?

BUSH

It's still going on, Little Bit.

Mattie tries to absorb that. The truth and tragedy of it touches her in way that she is not prepared for. They sit there in silence. She suddenly wipes her face and scowls.

MATTIE

Did you have anything to do with her death?

The mug trembles. She sees it.

MATTIE

Tell me.

Like a fish jerked from the water, he mouth opens and closes, but nothing comes out.

MATTIE (CONT'D)

Felix!

(off his haunted silence)

Get out of my house! NOW!

Bush stands up quickly and starts for the door.

MATTIE

And go to hell!

BUSH

Been there.

He staggers, tries to catch himself but slides down against the wall.

Despite her anger, Mattie starts toward him.

112 INT. DARROW HOME/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT/MOMENTS LATER 112

Bush sits on the floor, pale as moonlight. Mattie is beside him with a stethoscope in her lap.

MATTIE

You need to see a doctor..

He raises his eyes to her but says nothing. They look into each other for a long moment.

MATTIE

Just tell me, Felix. Did you hurt Mary or not?

Bush stares into her then suddenly gets up, picks up his shotgun and goes out the door without a word.

113 INT. FUNERAL HOME/FRONT DOOR - NIGHT 113

Frank is putting the files back in the drawers when he hears a NOISE. He reaches into the drawer and turns with a pistol in his hand.

Bush is standing in the doorway with his shotgun.

FRANK

What the hell?!

Bush glances at the pistol, at the open drawers of the cabinet and desk.

BUSH

They get it?

FRANK

No. Buddy sealed it up in a casket. Took a crack on the head, but..

BUSH

(cold dark look)
Is he all right?

FRANK

Yeah.

BUSH
You sure?

FRANK
I was an army medic. He'll be fine.

But Bush is still dark.

FRANK
But you ought to take those clothes
back and get something in your
size.

BUSH
They get the whiskey?

114 INT. FUNERAL HOME/OFFICE - NIGHT/LATER

114

Frank sits with his feet on the desk. Bush sits across from
him. They each have a cup of whiskey.

FRANK
Brought the money back, huh?
(off Bush's absent nod)
Listen, I've been thinking.. What
if we had the party at your place?
People are going to want to see the
land they're getting so..

BUSH
Don't know.

FRANK
Well, think about it, we could..

BUSH
Don't know that I'm doing it.

FRANK
What?!

BUSH
Thinking to call it off.

FRANK
You can't!

BUSH
Damn well can if I want to.

FRANK
No no no, it's in motion!

BUSH

If I say no, it's no. Send the money back.

FRANK

You're killing me! I bought things, hired people.. promised money, everybody in town is hoping to..

BUSH

I care about this town as much as they care about me.

FRANK

It's what you said you wanted and I've busted my ass for you. So why don't you want it anymore? You owe me that.

BUSH

(long beat)

It was the end of the line, tell it all, get out of jail party. But I guess I ain't got the goddamn guts to open my own mouth and I can't get nobody to talk for me so the hell with it. And to hell with me.

Bush grabs his shotgun and goes. Frank sits, stunned.

115 INT. BUDDY'S HOUSE-EARLY MORNING

115

Buddy sits at the breakfast table, holding his son. He opens and closes his eyes, checking out his vision. Kathryn, at the stove, sees him out of the corner of her eye.

KATHRYN

Are you having trouble seeing? *

BUDDY

I see you're mad.

KATHRYN

I'm not mad. I'm concerned

She shoves the skillet off the burner and comes to him.

BUDDY

(squints up)

No, you're mad.

She tenderly touches his head. *

KATHRYN

If I could get my hands on whoever
did this, you'd see mad.

FRANK (O.S.)

Buddy! You up?!

Frank rushes in, lifts a phantom hat to Kathryn, scrapes up a
chair, pulls on the baby's toe, and looks at Buddy.

FRANK

Trouble.

BUDDY

What's the matter?

FRANK

Bush is pulling out.

BUDDY

What?

FRANK

What happened yesterday?

BUDDY

I told you, we went up to Illinois
and met a preacher.

FRANK

But what *happened*?

BUDDY

He asked the preacher to come to
the funeral. He said no.

FRANK

Son of a bitch, that's got to be..

(to Kathryn)

Sorry.

(to the baby)

Sorry. Where's the preacher?

BUDDY

It won't do you any good.

FRANK

Why not?

BUDDY

He knows something about Bush,
something bad, I think.

FRANK
What is it?

BUDDY
Wouldn't say but..

FRANK
Well if Bush wants him, by God,
Bush is gonna get him.

KATHRYN
(slams the skillet down)
You want eggs, Frank, or will the
skillet do?

FRANK
What? What's wrong?

KATHRYN
What's wrong? My husband has his
head bashed in and all you care
about is this party!

FRANK
It's not like that, Katie, this is
for all of us. You're like.. family
to me.. I..

KATHRYN
This is not how family acts!

FRANK
Well, I'm sorry. I've never had any
practice.
(gets up/to Buddy)
You okay? *

Buddy nods. Frank leaves. Buddy mutters to the baby.. *

BUDDY
Stay out of her way today, partner.

116 EXT. MATTIE'S HOUSE - MORNING

116

Mattie is on her knees trying to plant bulbs in the hard cold
ground. Her trowel barely gouges the earth. She stabs it
again and again into the ground.

MATTIE
Fool, it's too late for bulbs..

Suddenly she hurls the trowel as far as she can, then a handful of bulbs.. then her hat.

MATTIE

..too goddamn late..

117 INT. FUNERAL HOME/OFFICE - DAY 117

Buddy is surrounded by bags. He is copying down names onto raffle tickets and putting them in bin for the drawing. There is a MAN standing guard by the front door with a rifle.

118 INT. BUSH'S BARN - DAY 118

Mule stands with his ears back, upset. Bush, back in his old clothes, is angrily planing a board. The box of his casket minus the lid is on sawhorses behind him.

119 OMITTED 119

120 INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE/SOUTHERN ILLINOIS- LATE DAY 120

A blurred image becomes clear as a magnifying glass lowers to a page of a stamp collection book. Fingers fill an empty space with a prized addition. A LOUD KNOCKING startles him and the stamp is placed slightly crooked..

Reveal Charlie Jackson scowling at the crooked stamp. He gets up, does a double-take out the window. MORE LOUD KNOCKING.

121 INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE - LATE DAY 121

Charlie opens the door, sees Frank standing there. The hearse is parked outside.

FRANK

Reverend Jackson?

(Charlie looks at hearse)

Frank Quinn, Quinn funeral home.

CHARLIE

How'd you find me?

Frank just smiles, takes off his hat, and offers his hand. Charlie gives him a long look and reluctantly motions him in.

Frank enters, noting the clean simple home of man with an orderly mind. Charlie motions for Frank to sit down.

CHARLIE

I was going to play some dominos this afternoon. But something told me to stay home. I should have played dominos. Is he out there?

FRANK

Bush? No, sir.

CHARLIE

You sure?

FRANK

Pretty sure.

CHARLIE

Did you check the back?

Frank snorts, liking Charlie immediately.

FRANK

You told Bush that you wouldn't come to the funeral?

CHARLIE

If he got that, why are you here?

FRANK

To help you rethink it.

CHARLIE

I don't need any help.

FRANK

Have you rethought it?
 (off Charlie's look)
 So there is a need.
 (beat)

First off, Bush doesn't know I'm here.

*
 *
 *
 *

*

CHARLIE

I wouldn't be so sure about that.
(off Frank's look)
He's got a way of making people do
what he wants them to.

Frank squirms, knows it true.

CHARLIE

Is he really a hermit?

Frank whistles and takes Bush's poster out of his coat.
Charlie jerks at the picture of the wild man.

FRANK

He came to see me after he'd been
here, wants to call the party off.

*
*

CHARLIE

I don't care.

FRANK

Said he'd meant it to be a.. end of
the line, tell it all, get out of
jail funeral but that he didn't
have the guts to open his mouth and
he couldn't get anybody to talk for
him. You know anything about that
part?

(off Charlie's sigh)

At first he said he wanted
everybody to come who had a story
about him. But he didn't want to
hear their bullshit stories, did
he? Pardon my language. He wants to
tell one, doesn't he?

CHARLIE

About time.

FRANKFRANK

Whatever he did, it's been locked up in him for 40 years and he can't get it out.

(off Charlie's look)

I think he told you. You may be the only person he told. And now he wants you to tell it for him.

CHARLIE

Because he won't.

FRANK

Or can't.

CHARLIE

Or won't.

FRANK

Or can't.

(beat)

At least he wants the truth to come out, give him that.

CHARLIE

(long stare)

I'll think about it.

FRANK

Is there a boarding house around here?

CHARLIE

I said I'd think.

FRANK

Yeah but if you're not coming, I'm not going back. I made promises I can't keep to people I care about. This falls apart they won't blame Bush. Bank will take my business.. If I'm gonna have to start over *again*, might as well be from here.

Charlie scowls at him.

122 INT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY 122

Using a tool, Buddy unseals the casket to put the new money in it and discovers that the rest of the money is gone! He can't believe it. He yanks back the casket bed lining..

123 Omitted 123

126 INT. BUSH'S BARN - DAY 126

Bush is sanding the beautiful lid of his casket. It is leaning against the wall and sawdust is drifting down all over him. He suddenly stops, rubs the wood tenderly, muscles up the heavy top to put it on the box and staggers back. It's not the weight, something is wrong. Sweat pops out on his forehead. He forces himself to the casket and drops the top down hard, staggers back against the loft ladder, slides down to the ground, and stares at the casket. Is this it?

127 EXT. CROSS ROADS - DAY 127

The hearse sits on the side of the road. Road signs give the mileage to different destinations.

127A INT. HEARSE - DAY 127A

Frank is lying in the back of the hearse, his head propped up on an old suitcase. He sips from his flask and stares out the window, thinking.

128 INT. BUSH'S BARN - LATE DAY 128

Bush is still on the ground propped against the ladder. His eyes are closed and the fading light steals across his face that is as still as it can be. The sawdust makes him look almost wooden. A shadow crosses then comes closer.

Buddy is sure he is dead but Bush's eyes open.

BUDDY

What are you doing, sir?

BUSH

Getting a suntan.

Bush starts to get up then falls back against the ladder.

BUDDY
Are you stuck?

BUSH
You have no goddamn idea how right
you are, son.

Buddy moves to help him up but Bush waves him off.

BUSH
I'll sit here a minute.

Bush looks at the butterfly bandage on Buddy's head.

BUSH
We're a pair, ain't we?

BUDDY
Are you sick?

BUSH
Just going through the motions.

BUDDY
What does that mean?

BUSH
There's Alive and there's Dead.
And there's a worst place in
between them that I hope you never
know nothing about.
(darkening)
Do you know who hurt you?

BUDDY
No, sir.

BUSH
Sonsabitches.

BUDDY
It doesn't matter. Listen. Frank
went somewhere and the raffle money
is gone.

BUSH
You figure he took off with it?

BUDDY
I don't know. I don't want to think
that. But the money's not here and
I don't know where it is. He said
he'd call and he never did.

Buddy glances into the shadows and sees the casket looming on the sawhorses. He stares at it..

BUSH

Well.. what do you want to do?

Buddy looks back at Bush.

BUDDY

I don't..

(realizing just then)

I want to make this funeral for you
if you want it.

BUSH

(a long look)

Hell. Do it if you can.

(beat)

I guess for everyone like me,
there's one like you, son. I about
forgot that.

Buddy holds out his hand to help Bush up but Bush forces himself up on his own and walks out.

129 OMITTED 129

130 INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE/SOUTHERN ILLINOIS - EVENING 130

Charlie sits at his desk, staring blankly at his crooked stamp. Suddenly Fate in the form of Frank Quinn looms at the window. Charlie knows he is there but he won't look at him.

131 INT. BUDDY'S HOUSE/BEDROOM- DAWN 131

Buddy, Kathryn, and the baby are sleeping soundly. There is a SCRATCHING NOISE. Buddy sits up, grabs a baseball bat and falls back asleep. The scratching starts again. He opens his eyes, surprised to see the bat in his hand. He hears the scratching. He looks around, sees something at the window. He slides to the floor, crawls on his knees, and looks out.

Frank is standing there, scratching on the screen. Behind him is Charlie, looking very unhappy about standing in the near dark in a small southern town, scratching on a screen.

Buddy realizes what he is seeing and starts to smile.

132 EXT. BUDDY'S HOUSE - DAWN

132

Frank, Buddy, and Charlie are on the porch, watching the world come to life. Charlie looks as if he is hoping for some kind of sign from above.

BUDDY

I'm glad you decided to come, sir.

CHARLIE

Free will is not all that it's cracked up to be.

BUDDY

(at Frank)

Did you take the money out of the casket?

FRANK

Yeah.

BUDDY

Why didn't you tell me?!

FRANK

I forgot.

BUDDY

You forgot?! Where is it?

FRANK

In the hearse, under the floorboards.

Charlie remembers that Frank said he wasn't coming back and gives him a look. Buddy is giving Frank the same look.

FRANK

What? Nobody steals a hearse. Now all we got to do is take the Reverend here to Bush and..

BUDDY

I *forgot* to tell you, Mr. Bush already said he would do it.

FRANK

You're shittin' me?!

Charlie gets up and starts walking away..

CHARLIE

Where can I catch a train?

FRANK

You can't leave you just got here.

CHARLIE

Watch and learn.

FRANK

Hold on..

CHARLIE

Where's the station?

133 EXT - BUSH'S LAND/ROAD - MORNING 133

A tractor pulling a trailer with a big old honking generator on it, a truck loaded with equipment and workers for the big event rumbles down a dirt road. The Quinn Funeral home hearse completes the unlikely parade.

134 INT. BUSH'S SHACK - MORNING 134

Bush, dressed in his new suit, shirt, and shoes is a striking figure. The old hermit is gone. He looks into the mirror.

135 EXT. MATTIE'S HOUSE - MORNING 135

Horton hold the car door open for Kathryn who is holding the baby and looking back puzzled at Mattie's house. Finally she sighs and gets into the car.

135A INT. MATTIE'S HOUSE - MORNING 135A

Mattie stands staring out the window. She is not going.

136 EXT. BUSH'S LAND/FIELD - MORNING 136

At the top of a wide clearing, a truck with a Circus Ad on the door is being set up to become a stage.

The tractor and truck pull into the clearing and drive to the circus truck.

The hearse pulls in and parks. Frank, Buddy, and Charlie climb out of the hearse, look around, and stand frozen.

Trucks and cars are parked everywhere around the big clearing! Many PEOPLE have been here all night with fires, tents and lean-tos. Many MORE PEOPLE are arriving now.

CHARLIE
Expecting a crowd?

Frank and Buddy give each other a look.

FRANK
Honestly? We don't have a clue
about what's going to happen here.

SET-UP SEQUENCE:

The big old honking generator is unloaded. Holes are dug. 10 foot poles are slid from the truck and huge speaker horns are attached. Speaker poles are pulled up and set into holes.

Frank directs a gang of 6 KIDS who are selling raffle tickets making sure they know that he has his eyes on them.

A BAND arrives on the back of pick-up truck.

The Generator kicks on belching smoke everywhere. Frank is yelling Whoa Whoa! Disaster in the making.

*

136A	OMITTED	136A	
137	OMITTED	137	
138	OMITTED	138	*
138A	OMITTED	138A	*

139 OMIT 139 *

140 INT. BUSH'S SHACK - DAY 140

Bush stands staring out the checkerboard window. He sees Charlie approaching and opens the door for him. Charlie climbs the steps, appraises the shack, and stares at Bush.

CHARLIE
Pretty nice jail.

Charlie enters and looks around the little room.

BUSH
Why did you change your mind?

Charlie just looks at him, the unspoken words louder than any reason he could give.

BUSH
Thank you.

CHARLIE
How do you want to do this?

BUSH
I don't.

He gets a haunted look that catches Charlie off guard.

BUSH
I'm gonna try and tell it, Charlie,
I really am. But if I can't get it
done, would you do it? I want it
said. Please, sir.

Charlie sighs from down in his shoes and starts for the door.

BUSH
Tell'em the box is in the barn.

141 OMIT 141

142 EXT. BUSH'S LAND/BACK ROAD - DAY 142

Carl's truck is half hidden off the road. Carl, Gary and THEMAN get out of the truck.

*

Carl tucks an old .45 in the back of his pants. Gary and Theman grab three gas cans off the truck, give one to Carl, and clamber down a deep gully and start up the other side.

*
*

Tom peeks out from behind the big garbage barrels.

143 EXT. BUSH'S LAND/FIELD - DAY 143

The generator is working! And standing on the flat bed truck, which is now a stage, an ANNOUNCER introduces a hot blue grass group. The crowd is huge now and listens as the group kicks off a song.

Behind the stage Frank is collecting money from the boys who are selling the raffle tickets, making them turn their pockets inside out. The generator makes a strange noise, Frank eyeballs it, and it labors on.

Buddy walks up, nudges Frank, and nods out at the huge crowd. Can you believe this?! Charlie walks up and says something that we cannot hear.

144 INT. BUSH'S SHACK - DAY 144

Pacing the cage, Bush peeks out the window.

BUSH

You asked for it you old ornery
sonofabitch, now what are you gonna
do?

145 INT. BUSH'S BARN - DAY 145

Frank, Buddy, and Charlie enter the barn and see Mule hitched to the wagon. On the back of the wagon is a simple and rustically elegant casket with the initials FB carved into the center board. It sobers them all.

146 EXT. BUSH'S LAND/GULLY - DAY 146

Carl, Gary, and Theman hide and watch Frank, Buddy and Charlie walk Mule and the wagon away from the barn and down the road. Carl eyes Bush's shack and starts for it.

*

GARY

Hey, hey, where you going? He said
the woods..

CARL

Closer.

And he takes off.

THEMAN
He's crazy!

*

147 OMITTED 147

148 OMIT 148

149 EXT. BUSH'S LAND/FIELD - DAY 149

The bluegrass fiddle player nods to the others to quickly end the song. Now we see why. Frank, Buddy, and Charlie have brought the wagon with the coffin into the field. Everyone quiets, remembering why they are here. They park the wagon behind the hearse.

Frank and Charlie walk toward the stage. Buddy peels away. Frank calls after him to come with them to the stage but Buddy waves them away. He wants no part of that. He sees Kathryn and Horton threading their way through the crowd and moves toward them instead.

Frank and Charlie climb the makeshift stairs up to the stage. Charlie sits down on a folding chair while Frank goes to the big microphone and stares with satisfaction at the huge Depression-era Woodstock crowd.

FRANK
Good afternoon ladies and
gentlemen. I'm Frank Quinn of Quinn
Funeral Home. Welcome to the live
funeral party of Mr. Felix Bush!

People don't know whether to clap or not. Some do and the rest of them pick it up.

Buddy gets to Kathryn and hugs her and the baby.

BUDDY
Where's Mattie?

KATHRYN
She wouldn't come. I don't..

FRANK
I've done some things in my life,
but never this. Bet you haven't
either, bet no one has.

(MORE)

FRANK (cont'd)
 (winks back at Charlie)
 We try to make things predictable
 and safe but if we don't risk
 everything to get what we want, we
 don't want it enough.

150 OMIT 150

151 EXT. BUSH'S LAND/FIELD - CONTINUOUS 151

Frank finds Buddy in the crowd.

FRANK
 The person who made all of this
 happen for us doesn't like the
 spotlight but Buddy Robinson is the
 heart of Quinn Funeral Home and I'm
 proud to know him.

Buddy is embarrassed and moved. Kathryn's eyes soften.

152 EXT. BUSH'S SHACK - DAY 152

Carl is sloshing gasoline onto the back porch while Gary and
 Theman keep nervous watch at the far end of porch. Suddenly *
 Carl feels a shotgun's cold metal on his neck and the .45
 being ripped from his belt and thrown to the ground.

BUSH
 Sonsabitches.

Carl drops his can. The other men drop their cans but Gary
 starts to pull a pistol from his back pocket.

BUSH
 Go on, I'll paint the porch with
 his head.

CARL
 Don't do it!

Gary drops the pistol.

BUSH
 Now pick up them cans and keep
 pouring.

CARL
 What?

BUSH
You heard me.

The men cautiously pick up the cans..

BUSH
Pour it on your head. All of it.

The men look at each other. Bush cocks the other barrel of his shotgun.

THEMAN
I won't!

*
*

BUSH
Pour it or die, I don't care which.

The men hoist the cans and start to pour the gasoline over them. Burning and spitting they empty the cans. Suddenly Theman bolts, moaning and running blind with gas in his eyes. *

BUSH
I got two barrels, anybody else wants to rabbit, now's the time.

153

EXT. BUSH'S LAND/FIELD - DAY

153

FRANK
I know many of you have heard stories about Mr. Bush. But today I've been told that we're going to hear another kind of story, *his*.

A murmuring moves in a wave across the crowd as they see..

..Bush enters the field with his shotgun pointed at Carl and Gary's backs. They are drenched with gas and it is burning them through their clothes.

Buddy, Kathryn, and Horton see Bush.

Quinn and Charlie follow the crowd's eyes to Bush.

QUINN
Holy Mother of..

SHERIFF DEPUTIES beside the stage see Bush.

But everyone remains frozen, not knowing what has happened or what to do now. Is this the crazy Bush of the legends?

Buddy starts toward Bush. Kathryn tries to stop him but he pulls free and walks slowly toward Bush.

A shot rings out!

Carl and Gary hit the ground like dead men.

The crowd hunkers and scatters.

Horton steps in front of Kathryn and the baby. Buddy freezes.

Charlie rushes up beside Frank at the microphone.

Carl rolls up and turns to Bush and sees blood seeping out onto his shirt beneath his coat.

Bush whirls and sees..

..Carl's old 45 still smoking.

The gun is in Tom's small shaking hands..

CARL

Don't hurt him! It's my fault.
PLEASE, PLEASE..

Bush cracks his shotgun, walks slowly to the boy, gently takes the .45, empties the shells, and hands the gun back.

BUSH

A second chance is a precious
thing, son. Don't waste it.

The boy plops down, overwhelmed.

And suddenly everyone is in motion.

The Deputies run toward Bush. Frank and Charlie rush from the stage. Kathryn and Horton are going.

Buddy arrives at Bush first and sees the blood weeping onto his shirt.

BUDDY

Are you alright, sir?!

Without turning Bush glances at the Deputies.

BUSH

Tried to burn me out. Let the boy
be, he didn't mean nothing.

As the Deputies get a hold of Carl and Gary, Frank, Charlie, Kathryn and Horton arrive. Carl looks at Horton with pleading eyes and nods to Tom.

CARL

Help him, Gus, please..

Horton goes to the trembling boy and picks him up.

Bush suddenly walks into the trees without looking back.

153A INT. WCGM RADIO STATION - DAY 153A

The Announcer hangs up the phone on the wall, rushes to the turntable and lifts the tone arm from the record that is playing.

ANNOUNCER

Folks, I've just received word of a tragic turn of events at the Bush Funeral Party. It seems that Mr. Bush has been shot. I repeat, Mr. Felix Bush has been shot. There is no word of condition..

153B INT. MATTIE'S HOUSE - DAY 153B

The radio is playing but we don't know where Mattie is.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

When I know more I will let you know. I'm sure he would appreciate your prayers..

154 INT. BUSH'S SHACK - DAY 154

Bush stands at the mirror, his shirt unbuttoned and pulled back. The bullet caught the muscle just above his clavicle.

Buddy, Frank and Charlie rush in.

BUSH

Close the door.

Charlie slams the door. Frank examines the wound. Buddy stares in shock at the old roping burns scars on Bush's chest.

FRANK

Missed the bone. Got any alcohol and clean rags?

Bush nods at the cabinet. Charlie finds an amazing assortment of herbs and roots, alcohol and old sheets ripped into rags.

BUDDY

Why don't you sit down, sir?

BUSH

Boil some water and I'll tell you
how to make me a poultice.

Frank takes the rags and alcohol from Charlie

FRANK

This is gonna hurt.

BUSH

Don't sugar coat it.

155 EXT. BUSH'S LAND/FIELD - DAY 155

Everyone is standing around in shock.

156 EXT. BUSH'S SHACK - DAY 156

Kathryn waits anxiously near the porch with the baby.

157 EXT. BUSH'S LAND/FIELD - DAY 157

Horton steps up to the microphone. The shocked crowd turns to him. He closes his eyes and bows his head.

REVEREND HORTON

Lord, you say you move in
mysterious ways and we believe you
because we don't understand much of
anything. And so we come to you
today not seeking answers to what's
happened here but asking you to
help us open our hearts a little
more to each other and find some
forgiveness and understanding.

158 INT. BUSH'S SHACK - DAY 158

Frank has cleaned the wound. Buddy has made a poultice that Bush is pressing onto the wound as he hears the last of Horton's prayer over the loudspeakers.

BUSH

Pretty good prayer. Mighta been
wrong about that preacher.

CHARLIE

Why don't you lay down, Felix?

Bush thinks about it, sees a way out. For a second he looks like he might take it. Then he shakes his head, puts a rag over the poultice and pulls his shirt up.

BUSH
Let's go 'fore I lose my nerve.

BUDDY
Are you sure?

Bush scowls at the huge blood stain on his shirt. He looks at Frank's white shirt. Frank just stares at him. Bush keeps looking. Finally Frank sighs and starts loosening his tie.

159 EXT. BUSH'S LAND/FIELD - DAY 159

The bluegrass band sings a good hymn. The crowd is still stunned and talking, not knowing what to do.

160 INT. BUSH'S SHACK - DAY 160

Buddy gently helps Bush into his jacket, which has a bullet tear in it along the shoulder but Bush seems okay with it, to Frank's relief.

Frank is putting on an old faded shirt of Bush's. As Bush starts for the door, he comes up beside Charlie.

BUSH
You ain't nervous? All them white folks out there?

CHARLIE
There's white folks here?!

BUSH
Stick with me, you'll be all right.

CHARLIE
You're the one they're shooting at.

As Charlie opens the door, Bush stops, all his misgivings flooding in with the light. He looks at Buddy.

BUSH
Pretty interesting day so far, huh boy?

Bush straightens himself up and goes out the door.

161 EXT. BUSH'S LAND/FIELD - DAY 161

Charlie, Bush walk through the murmuring parting crowd toward the stage. Frank and Buddy are close behind. Buddy is looking for Kathryn. She spots him and moves toward the stage.

162 EXT. BUSH'S LAND/FIELD - DAY 162

Bush and Charlie go up the steps to the stage.

At the last second, Bush stares at the big microphone and stops, unable to go on.

Charlie gives him a look then goes on up to the microphone and looks out at the sea of white folks.

CHARLIE

I'm Reverend Charlie Jackson. Felix wants to continue with his funeral. And he's asked me to say a few words.

Just below the stage, Buddy and Frank are joined by Kathryn.

Charlie glances back at Bush, turns inward, searching for the words. Finally he holds his hands out, wide apart.

CHARLIE

We like to imagine that good and bad, right and wrong, are miles apart. But the truth is, very often they're..
 (brings his hand together
 and laces his fingers
 tightly)
 ..all tangled up with each other.

Bush raises his head and looks at Charlie's back.

CHARLIE

Some 40 years ago Felix Bush dropped into my life and then dropped out. In between he built the most beautiful sanctuary that I've ever seen. A lot of wonderful things happened in that church.

Suddenly Bush breaks away, moves up beside Charlie, and puts his hand on his shoulder.

BUSH

Thank you, Charlie. Thank you.

Charlie gives him a long look then steps away from the microphone and moves back to where Bush was standing.

Bush stares at the microphone, takes a breath, and walks up to it, and looks out over the huge crowd.

BUSH

Had to go clear to Illinois to find somebody that had anything good to say about me. Hell of a thing.

His voice booms out over the crowd, startling him. He looks down, sees Buddy, Kathryn, Frank and Horton.

He looks closer for someone most important but she is not there. The crowd murmurs. Finally..

BUSH

I'm not a smart man or a wise one.
I don't know what kind of man I am.
I was always restless, thought I'd see the world. But I didn't hardly go nowhere.. on purpose..

(beat)

Because.. because I did something that I was ashamed of. Something I couldn't ever fix.

(glances around)

Ya'll probably think you know what you'd do or what you wouldn't. And I wish you good luck with that. I really do.

(beat)

When I told Charlie what I'd done, he told me to confess to God and the law and to.. to someone else.. so I could get forgiveness. But I didn't want *forgiveness*.

(beat)

I needed to hold on to what I did.. to be sick from it every day of my life. So I never told nobody else.

He stops, not knowing how to go on. The crowd has quieted completely.

As as his eyes sweep over the sea of expectant faces, he suddenly SEES HER coming through the crowd.

Mattie's here. Seeing that Felix appears to alright, her face changes from conflicted concern to open unbridled hatred.

The look takes Bush's breath away. But he suddenly seems to accept it as his due and when he talks, it is only to her.

BUSH

I fell in love with a married lady.
And somehow she fell in love with
me. It was the only time that I
have been in love.

(gathers himself)

We made a plan to run off and start
a new life but she didn't show up
at the time that we said we'd meet.
I got a funny feeling and I went to
her house.

Buddy, Kathryn and Frank all see Mattie now, see Bush talking just to her.

BUSH

Her husband answered the door.

(beat)

He had blood on him.

For Mattie all of this is like window into the past being suddenly thrown open and she is haunted and mesmerized.

BUSH

I hit him pretty hard, knocked him
down. Can't remember going upstairs
but I remember I saw a hammer on
the steps and it had blood and hair
on it.

The crowd gasps. Mattie is trembling.

BUSH

I found her in the bedroom. She was
crawling across the floor.

(beat)

But before I could get to her and
help her up.. a kerosene lamp hit
the wall. And then her husband
jumped on my back. Funny what
happens sometimes when things go
wrong. It's like the clock stops
and you have all the time in the
world to think. I could see that
her husband had set the downstairs
on fire before he came up.

(beat)

(MORE)

BUSH (cont'd)
 And as I was slamming his head into
 the wall, trying to get shed of
 him, I could see clear as anything
 that it was all my fault. If I'd
 just never spoke to her..

(beat)

And as I was thinking about that, I
 saw that the lamp he threw had set
 the room we were in on fire too.

Bush forces himself to keep looking into Mattie.

BUSH

And then I realized that *I* was on
 fire. I tried to put myself out but
 I couldn't, everything was..

(beat)

I dropped him, turned around and
 saw her lying on the floor and
 called her name. She looked up at
 me..

(beat)

..and the next thing I knew, I was
 flying..

A loud roar of fire and crushing timbers..

163 EXT. BURNING HOUSE - NIGHT

163

A man on fire bursts through the second story window of a
 burning house. He lands hard and rolls across the yard to
 smother the flames.

With his clothes still smoking, he unbelievably tries to run
 back into the hell. But the fire is too hot and he cannot. He
 screams like a mad man and runs into the trees..

164 EXT. BUSH'S LAND/FIELD - DAY

164

The crowd is motionless. Nothing is moving. It is as if the
 whole world has stopped. Frank, Buddy, and Kathryn are
 frozen.

Bush and Mattie are looking into each other, one anguished
 soul to another.

BUSH

I don't know how I got out the
 window.

(beat)

(MORE)

BUSH (cont'd)

No matter how many times I play it in my mind, I can't remember jumping. I thought I killed him, but maybe he pushed me, I don't know...

(lost as ever..)

I swear to you, if I left her in there.. everything I know about myself is a lie. But that don't matter.

(beat)

I didn't get her out, Little Bit, I didn't. I'm sorry.

165 INT. BUSH'S SHACK - DAY

165

Bush sits on the edge his bed. His face is drawn and haunted. The door open and closes. He doesn't look up.

Mattie sits down beside him. Tears are streaming down her face. She lays her head gently on his shoulder.

MATTIE

Oh, Felix..

He sniffs her hair and tenderly touches it.

BUSH

Wonder if her hair would be white?

166 EXT. BUSH'S LAND/FIELD - END OF DAY/MONTAGE

166

A MAN chooses a winning raffle ticket from a wire cage.

A poor YOUNG COUPLE with SEVERAL CHILDREN win the raffle! The promise of a new and better life begins for them.

The big funeral party breaks up people wind their way home.

The big old honking generator coughs off.

Mule is lead back to the barn.

The equipment is disassembled and loaded back on the truck.

The microphone stands alone on the stage. He got it said.

167 EXT. BUSH'S SHACK - DAY

167

Buddy, Frank, Horton, Charlie, and Kathryn and the baby wait outside, giving Bush and Mattie time. Buddy takes the baby and holds it close.

Finally Mattie and Bush come out of the shack and walk down to the others. No one knows what to say. Finally..

BUDDY
How you doing, sir?

BUSH
Just fair, son.

HORTON
Carl said Ray paid them to set the fire. Paid them to break into the funeral home too.

FRANK
Can't stop pulling Aces out of his ass, can he?

HORTON
Spend his money on lawyers now. You know how thrifty they are.

Frank motions to Buddy and they go to Bush. Buddy is still holding the baby, Bush looks tenderly at Buddy and the baby.

BUSH
What's his name?

BUDDY
Larry, Lawrence, after my dad, sir.

BUSH
He ain't gonna throw rocks at me, is he?

BUDDY
Not if knows what's good for him.

BUSH
You boys did good. Real good. Let's settle up.

BUDDY
We don't have to do that now. You get some rest.

FRANK
(a look/ then)
Yeah. We'll come out tomorrow.

BUSH
Bring my shirt back, I just got it broke in.

Bush pulls Buddy aside. Frank stares over at them but can't hear what they are saying. He moves over beside Mattie.

FRANK
Are you alright, Mattie?

She looks up at Frank for a long moment, her face softening.

MATTIE
Oh, I don't know. I'm still moving,
I guess..

He doesn't know what that means but she has finally really looked at him and that's something he'll hold onto.

Kathryn comes and hugs Mattie as.. Bush and Buddy come back. Bush goes to Charlie.

Frank is staring at Buddy, looking for a clue as to what Bush said. Buddy gives him nothing,

BUSH
Thanks again for coming, Charlie.

CHARLIE
I'm proud of you.
(meaning it)
Thank you for my church.

BUSH
Did you ever get my bill?

HORTON
Can we get a ride our car's about 2
miles down the road.

Everyone piles into the hearse. There is no back seat so they all have to crawl in the back door and sit along the sides. It makes everyone smile. Mattie gives Bush one last fleeting embrace then climbs in. Bush looks in on them all for a long moment all then closes the door.

As the hearse moves out, he waves to Buddy who is looking out the back window. Buddy waves back.

BUSH
(to himself)
Look at that. My funeral and
everybody's in there but me.

The hearse pulls onto the road and drives away.

The place is suddenly quiet and beautiful. He looks down the road through the fading dust and sees a WOMAN walking slowly toward him. He squints, recognizes her, and his face fills with a timeless love.

168

EXT. BUSH'S LAND - DAY - TWO MONTHS LATER

168

It's a cold day beneath the spreading pecan tree. Mule stands hitched to the wagon. The three dog grave markers are frosted.

A fourth grave marker just like the others leans against the tree. It is freshly carved with: Felix Elijah Bush. A pot of fresh yellow flowers sit beside the marker.

Bush's beautiful handmade casket is inside his grave.

Frank, Mattie, Charlie, Buddy, Kathryn, and Horton stand beside the grave. Several MEN with shovels wait near the tree. Charlie's eulogy is more of a one-sided conversation which Bush would probably love.

CHARLIE

Well, Felix, this one's for real, I guess. I didn't actually see them put you in the box so..

Charlie glances over and notices "Charlie" on one of the dog's grave markers. He snorts and shakes his head.

CHARLIE

Wherever you are, you're probably giving someone a hard time or something wonderful and priceless just to confuse them. Not everything can be figured out, nor everybody. I wish you peace from the burdens of your mind and heart. I wish it for us all.

Mattie moves toward the edge of the grave. Frank puts a hand out to catch her should she should stumble. She stares down at the FB on the coffin, opens her hand, and lets the picture of her sister drift down onto the coffin.

169

EXT. HILLSIDE - LATER

169

Everyone moves away as the men fill in the grave. Buddy and Kathryn move up beside Frank and Mattie and Charlie. Buddy tosses the ball of hermit money to Frank.

BUDDY

A 50 on the outside, all ones
inside. Less than \$100.

FRANK

What?!

CHARLIE

I told you. Nobody listens to the
preacher.

Buddy pulls some papers from his coat.

BUDDY

The day of the party he told me
about the will he had in the secret
drawer of his table. He left the
raffle money to all of us.

Everyone is shocked, touched.

BUDDY

(to Frank)

But you have to pay for Mule's
upkeep for the rest of his life.

Charlie grins and Buddy flaps the papers at him.

BUDDY

And he set up a fund for the
upkeep of your church.

CHARLIE

What's the catch?

BUDDY

No catch, sir.

CHARLIE

Still don't get it, do you? With
Felix, there's always a catch.

BUDDY

Maybe he just knew you'd go crazy
wondering what it was.

They all laugh and move down the hillside. As the laughter
fades we see in their faces the impact that Felix Bush has
had upon them. Buddy feels the comfort of this odd but
growing family and stops and looks back at the grave and the
pot of yellow flowers. His curiosity about the fearsome old
man has not abated. Nor will it ever.