

CHRISTMAS IN VEGAS

By
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ST. LOUIS, CHRISTMAS, 1972

FADE IN:

CU - A fork that's heaped high with indistinguishable mush rises from a full pot on a stove and enters a woman's greasy, slobbering mouth.

INT. MIKE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

MIKE, a big, athletic 12 year old with long flowing hair stares out the high windows of a tall condominium building. In the distance, past the Cathedral, he can see the St. Louis Gateway Arch shining with white Christmas lights. Snow has fluffed up on the ledge outside and some has stuck in broad swipes to the glass.

INT. KITCHEN - SAME

Unpacked moving boxes cram the kitchen and living room.

The woman, NANCY, Michael's mother, leans over the stove shoveling the grub in her mouth. She was once pretty, a model, but now is puffy, pasty-white and aging. And drunker than shit. She's naked but for dark panty hose, her white stomach folding over the waste band, her big, floppy, blue-veined breasts wagging over the pot of grub.

Her swollen eyes are red from tears. Her pasty face shines all greasy from tears and the slobbered mush. She fills a tall glass with vodka and gulps a quarter of it.

Unsteady, rocking, she shoves away a few things on the counter top, then somehow climbs up on it. She crouches over the sink, sticks a finger down her throat and vomits.

She turns on the water to wash the vomit down the sink, and swipes on the disposal. She wipes her mouth, her hand shaking slowly as it slabbers across her puffy lips.

Nancy remembers the disposal and swipes it back off, then stumbles down from the counter. She gulps some more vodka, stands there a moment, rocking, then curls up on the tile floor and passes out.

[Noises of a party drift over the last of this, then fade away.]

INT. MIKE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Michael now wears a heavy brown leather jacket like one a mountain man trapper might wear. His room is also crammed with unpacked moving boxes. He stuffs two paperbacks in his pockets and leaves.

In the kitchen, Michael yanks the faucet off which Nancy left running. He crouches down to her back.

CU - runny shit packs his mom's panty hose.

Michael finds her wallet and empties it of four 20s. He steps over his mom and leaves the apartment, closing the door silently behind him.

INT. CONDO BUILDING HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

It's plush, rich and silent. Mike jets to the elevator.

[Faint noises of the party play over this.]

INT. CONDO BUILDING LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

The elevator dings open, stirring a feeble, old night man from a half sleep as he's planted in front of a small black and white TV.

MIKE

Merry Christmas!

NIGHT MAN

Me-Merry Christmas sir...

Michael strolls past a 25 foot tall, white flocked Christmas tree and leaves the building.

Outside, the weather is dry and bitterly cold. Snow covers the ground, but has been shoveled off the walkways. Mike instantly zips up his coat, then heads down the wide street called Lindell Blvd., silent and still, the traffic lights beating yellow rhythmically. Michael's breaths are big white puffs.

[The faint noises of the party play over the last of this.]

INT. COUNTRY CLUB BALLROOM - EARLIER THE SAME NIGHT

The Christmas party's loud and bustling with mostly older, wealthy types. Black waiters in crisp white uniforms and gloves bring drinks and hors d'oeuvre on trays, bowing slightly as guests make their selections.

Nancy plays a Christmas song on the piano, accompanied by a small band.

She's good, but gives off an obvious fake gayety, trying to get the party moving, which really doesn't need her help at all.

Nearby, Michael sips wine and stands with his GRANDMOTHER, the kindest, most content woman anyone's ever met. She loves Michael very much, is very proud of him and knows he's going to be something someday, though he's not always so sure himself. She's introducing Michael to three men:

GRANDMOTHER

...the Governor of Missouri, Judge Candelario, and Mayor Cervantes, the mayor of St. Louis.

INT. PARTY - LATER

Nancy has joined the group with the three politicians.

MAYOR CERVANTES

Your mother tells us you have straight A's.

MIKE

A pluses.

He sips from his wine. Nancy whispers in the Mayor's ear.

NANCY

Silly you. He's not my son. He's my cousin.

MAYOR CERVANTES

(whispers)
Sorry?

NANCY

(whispers)
I'll tell you later.

GOVERNOR

Where's he going to school?

GRANDMOTHER

(of course)
St. Louis U. High

MAYOR CERVANTES

Best school in the state! The three of us are alums of that school, did you know that?

Cuts short a sip of wine:

MIKE

Yes sir, my Grandfather told me.

EXT. LINDELL BLVD. - NIGHT

Michael walks quickly down the big, empty street.

INT. BALLROOM - BAR - PARTY

Michael hands over his empty wine glass to the bartender while a big bellied man wags a cigarette.

MIKE

Red wine please.

MAN

Now wait a sec. You and your sisters are Conigliaris, but it's your mom who's the daughter of your Grandpa?

Michael nods while sipping his wine.

MAN

Hale, where's your dad?

MIKE

Hell, I dunno.

MAN

Hale, don't matter guess. Y'got the right name. I bet I'll be selling you the cranes in a few years!

MIKE

Oh, I dunno about that.

MAN

Hale, I betchya I will, I betchya I will.

EXT. BIG CONSTRUCTION SITE - DOWNTOWN ST. LOUIS - NIGHT

Mike hikes past a big sign:

"THE NEW ST. LOUIS CONVENTION CENTER ARCHITECT: SO & SO
GENERAL CONTRACTOR: CONIGLIARI CONSTRUCTION CO., INC."

Snow covers the Conigliari trucks and cranes that rest under the erected beams.

INT. BALLROOM - FOYER - PARTY

MR. CONIGLIARI himself, with Mike's Grandmother holding his arm, slowly red carpet through doors held by frosty breathed waiters to a new Cadillac, it's doors held open by quivering

black lads. Mike, Nancy, Mike's two little sisters, follow their Grandparents, along with cousins and other relatives.

THE PAID HELP

Good night Mr. Conigliari. Merry
Christmas Mr. Conigliari. Happy 1973
sir. Happy New Year Mr. Conigliari.

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS STATION - NIGHT

Mike passes young black guys throwing craps against the wall.

INT. BUS STATION - TICKET COUNTER - CONTINUOUS

MIKE

Merry Christmas. How much for a ticket
to San Jose?

TICKET SELLER

(drunk)
San Jose? Californee?

MIKE

Yeah.

TICKET SELLER

Roun' trip?

MIKE

One way.

TICKET SELLER

Eighty eight dolla.

MIKE

(shattered)
...oh... How much to San Francisco?

TICKET SELLER

Roun' trip?

MIKE

No. One way.

TICKET SELLER

That beeeee...ninety sick dolla.

MIKE

...shit...

Mike kind of shuffles around now.

TICKET SELLER

Santy Barby eighty two?

Mike shakes his head.

TICKET SELLER
How 'bout Los Angless seventy fi'?

MIKE
Really?!

TICKET SELLER
(pleased with himself)
Leave...in...eight minute.

MIKE
Ok. One ticket to Los Angeles please.

Mike hands over the four twenties.

INT. CONDO HALLWAY - EARLIER THAT NIGHT (AFTER THE PARTY)

When the elevator opens Nancy, Mike and the little girls file out all smiles and giggles.

NANCY
(painfully fake)
Such a wonderful party! But you always put on such wonderful parties! We had the most wonderful time!

GRANDPARENTS(O.S.)
Thank you honey.

As soon as the elevator closes, the stupid, fake smile on Nancy's face vanishes. They all walk silently and separately down the hall.

INT. CONDO - CONTINUOUS

Nancy, Mike and the girls enter silently. The girls scoot to their room. Mike immediately enters his room and closes the door. In the kitchen, Nancy reaches under the sink and takes out the vodka.

INT. MIKE'S ROOM - (EARLIER SHOT, PAGE 1)

Mike sits at his window and stares at the Gateway Arch.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS (ON I-44 WEST) - NIGHT

Mike stares out the window watching St. Louis shrink in the distance.

FLASHBACK - SAN JOSE - SEPTEMBER, 1971

INT. HOUSE - MORNING

The family's just moved in to yet another new house. Moving boxes are piled everywhere.

Mike bounds down the stairs, led by a gorgeous German Shepherd named SULTAN, followed by the eldest of his three sisters, LOUISE, who's pretty but has big, frizzy hair like Carol King.

In the kitchen, Nancy's just gotten off the floor, is putting on an old blouse and cleaning up her mess of the night before. First thing is the vodka bottle right back under the sink. There's other stuff on the counter, like a half-eaten tub of margarine sitting out all night and spoiled with particles of the mush, and the mush itself, cold now, still in the pan on the burner, the grease congealed solid and white.

The two little sisters run in and out, grabbing apples from the fridge.

At the front door Louise quickly scoots out.

MIKE

Let's go!

Nancy comes out.

NANCY

Excited about your new school?

MIKE

No.

Nancy goes to fix his collar but Mike backs off and swats her hand away. Mike holds Sultan while the other girls scoot out the door.

MIKE

You can't go with us Sultan. Sorry big boy. You have to stay here.

Sultan jumps all over Mike as he tries to get out the door, ordering him to "stay." When Mike finally gets out, Sultan whines and paws at the door. Nancy returns to the kitchen.

EXT. HOUSE - SUBDIVISION - CONTINUOUS

They've moved into a crisp, new subdivision of San Jose. Lawns are neat. Trees still young and tiny. Sidewalks always sprayed fresh clean.

Mike and the girls reach the bus stop where other kids wait and check them out. Two buses arrive.

MIKE

(to younger sisters)

That one's yours. This is ours.

Mike and Louise board the bus for Junior High. Inside, the back is owned by the toughs: scraggly hair, jeans jackets, unlit cigarettes bouncing in their lips.

Mike and Louise take middle seats as the bus chugs to the next stop and the driver shoves open the door.

RENE gets on. He's a slim boy, pretty instead of handsome. Then his twin sister MONI, cute, still with a boy's figure. Then their older (14) sister STELLA. Stella is the babe of the school, 9th grade princess, with huge milkers all the boys (and girls) always talk about.

Mike's stunned for a second when he sees her. When she looks his way, he instantly glances out the window, terribly shy. Stella notices Mike right off, and she too glances away.

EXT. JUNIOR HIGH CAFETERIA - DAY

Stella and her group always congregate at a wall outside on break. Farther off, Mike and Louise stand by themselves eating a snack. Louise is simply a shy, lost, nervous little soul, someone too afraid to look left, right, or even straight ahead.

MONI

I am so in love with that new guy.

RENE

They never talk. Maybe they're stuck up.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Mike enters and immediately spots Stella sitting in the far back corner. Mike jumps on a seat on the opposite side, near the door. Stella glances at him, then keeps her eyes away.

EXT. CLASSROOM - LATER

The kids stream out, Mike among the first. Stella follows, watching Mike walk ahead of her. Guys passing occasionally say "Hi Stella." One guy says "Hi milkers, I mean Stella."

INT. SCHOOL BUS - LATE AFTERNOON

Rene gets out of his seat and sits in front of Mike and Louise.

RENE

Hi.

MIKE

Hey.

RENE

Y'play football?

Mike nods.

RENE

We play after school in the park
next to my house. Just tag.

Mike nods again.

RENE

Why don't you come out?

LOUISE

OK!

Mike looks to her.

MIKE

Yeah, ok.

RENE

Ok.

Rene stalls for a little bit, then goes back to his sisters.

RENE

They said ok.

MONI

What's his name?!

RENE

I forgot to ask. She has really clear
skin.

AT MIKE AND LOUISE -- Louise hangs her head, afraid of her
older brother. Mike glances at Stella, then looks away.

MIKE

It's ok.

Louise sighs, relieved.

LOUISE

He's really gorgeous.

EXT. PARK - AFTERNOON

About 10 guys play football on a field marked with shirts
while the girls sit on the sideline.

MONI

Your brother is soooooo cute!

LOUISE

So's yours!

"You're So Vain" plays on the radio.

LOUISE

Hey you know what I heard I heard
this song's about Warren Beatty.

STELLA, MONI

Really?!

LOUISE

He was going out with Carly Simon
and they, y'know, he dumped her and
she wrote a song about it.

MONI

He's such a fox.

ANGLE - football game. Mike lines up. On the snap he cuts over the middle, catches a pass, jukes a few kids and sprints for a touchdown.

Sultan bounds from Louise and races to Mike. Mike and Sultan juke each other, then Mike tackles him and they roll around a bit. Up until now Sultan's the only friend Mike's ever had.

ANGLE - opposing team, walking back down their side of the field:

KID

Man that guy's fast.

Mike races back to the girls with Sultan.

MIKE

I told you to watch Sultan!

STELLA

You're really good.

MIKE

(shyly)

Thanks.

(to Louise, mean)

Watch 'im.

Mike sprints back to the guys waiting in the end zone to kick off.

MONI

Did he have a girlfriend at your old neighborhood?

LOUISE

He's never had a girlfriend.

ANGLE - ON THE FIELD:

RENE

Louise is really pretty.

MIKE

She's ok.

RENE

You like Stella or Moni?

Mike shrugs.

RENE

I know who you like.

Rene tosses him the ball to kick off.

MIKE

(angry)

I don't like anybody!

(shouts to field)

21 ZIP!

Mike furiously creams the ball way over the other team's heads; the guys have to turn and sprint after it.

RENE

(sprinting and laughing)

Geesus nice kick!!

EXT. SUBDIVISION STREETS - NIGHT

Mike and Louise walk home. Louise walks with her arms wrapped around herself and her eyes down, focused on her feet.

LOUISE

Did he say anything about me?

MIKE

Yeah. He said you were good looking.

LOUISE

He did not.

MIKE

He said it, when we were playing.

LOUISE

He could get anyone he wanted. He
wouldn't like me.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT - DINNER TIME

Nancy leans over the stove shoveling her clumpy, dripping
mush in her mouth from a hot pot. As usual, she's naked except
for sheer panty hose covering her haunches.

The two little girls set the table. Mike makes Sultan's
dinner. Everyone works around Nancy who keeps methodically
stuffing her face, every once in a while gulping the vodka,
which she still believes the kids think is water.

Mike even reaches in, around Nancy for a few spoonfuls of
tasty grease from her pot to sprinkle on Sultan's dinner.
Nancy barely notices the intrusion. Mike places Sultan's
bowl near the door to the backyard. Sultan is very subdued
at these times when Nancy's drinking. He eats very quietly.

Now Louise comes in and everyone variously sits around the
table as Mike takes a big pot from the stove (that was next
to Nancy's pot) and puts it in the center of the table, and
then sits at the head. He takes his food first, then leaves
the rest for his sisters. Louise takes hers last.

Everyone eats quietly. Louise always keeps her head down and
once in a while peeks in fear at Nancy. Mike eats quietly
and quickly.

The food's so bland and bad all the kids frequently pour
salt all over it. They eat a salted layer, then salt the
next bland layer, then eat that, and so on.

Every once in a while a quiet sob comes out of Nancy.

But all we really hear is the quiet clinks of silverware,
Sultan snuffling in his bowl, sometimes the grease sizzling
in Nancy's pot when she forks in a chunk of margarine. By
this time, Nancy's belly is swollen like a pregnant woman's,
and hangs over her panty hose waist band. After a long, thick,
but common quiet, Nancy slurs, without looking up from the
pot:

NANCY

Have a good day at school?

MIKE

Ok.

NANCY

Getting all A's?

MIKE

Yeah.

NANCY

(to herself)

That's something at least...your
father...did...

Nancy turns directly to Louise:

NANCY

Are you getting pubic hair yet?

LOUISE

Leave me alone.

NANCY

No I won't leave you ALONE! You get
pubic hair that'll be the end of it
I tell you!! Have you been kishing
boys?

LOUISE

Leave me alone.

NANCY

Have you been kissing boys?!

LOUISE

No.

NANCY

I hear you've been kishing boys that's
the end of it I tell you you're outta
here straight out the olllllllll door.

Nancy returns to her pot of mush. She takes a gulp of vodka.

NANCY

(mostly to herself)

I married your father 'cause the
priest said even if he TOUCHED me I
had to marry 'im ...'an look at what
he leaves me, four lousy brats ...
just four stinkin' ungrateful brats...

MIKE

Shut your face.

NANCY

No you shut your face.

MIKE

Shut your fuckin' face.

NANCY

You shut your fuckin' face. An' don't use language like that.

MIKE

Just shut your fuckin' face.

Nancy returns to her mush and sobs loudly now.

NANCY

You're just like your father.

Mike ignores her and keeps salting and eating. The others quietly salt and eat, but calmly, since this kind of thing is a nightly event. Sultan, however, eats with his tail between his legs.

NANCY

(to herself)

You're all jus' lousy brats, good for nothin' cowards like your father. Look at this place it's a pig sty! You're just messy, lousy brats...Get outta here.

MIKE

Shut up.

Nancy stumbles to the sink and suddenly FLINGS A BASKET OF DIRTY SILVERWARE IN THE AIR. It flies all over, clanging on the counter tops, on the stove, on the floor. One or two utensils even land on the table. The two little girls scam out of the kitchen instantly.

MIKE

KNOCK IT OFF!!

Mike jumps up and takes Sultan outside with his bowl.

NANCY

I SAID GET OUTTA HERE!!

Louise scoots around the table to escape the kitchen and Nancy swats the back of her head as she goes by.

LOUISE

LEAVE ME ALONE! LEAVE ME ALONE!

Mike comes back in once Sultan's safely outside.

MIKE

KNOCK IT OFF!!

He sits back down at his plate.

NANCY

Get outta here.

MIKE

Shut your fuckin' face.

Mike's too big for her to hit now. She sobs. Grease runs down her chin. Her whitey breasts are greasy, and shine in the low light.

She takes her empty glass to the cupboard under the sink, stepping on some utensils, clinking them, fills the glass with vodka while crouched down, then returns to the grub and shovels some more in her mouth.

Mike eats quietly.

NANCY

Why don't you just leave?

MIKE

I haven't finished yet.

He eats slowly and quietly, obstinately, until he finishes his plate. He finishes his drink very slowly. Then slowly stands and leaves the kitchen.

NANCY

You're just like your father.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Nancy has passed out on the floor. Mike comes in, turns off the electric burner, then the open oven which Nancy uses for heat, steps over her, goes out to the back yard and brings Sultan back in, both stepping back over Nancy.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Louise comes down, peeks in, sees Nancy's out, then takes some food still sitting on the table and hungrily wolfs it down, glancing to her mom every other second to see if she's waking up.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

The two little girls enter and find Nancy's still out cold. Each starts silently clearing the table, saving the food for leftovers, rinsing the plates and putting them in the dishwasher, picking up all the silverware laying around, always of course forced to step over Nancy as they move about.

One wipes the table. The other runs the water and disposal, glancing back at Nancy to see if it's waking her, though it doesn't even bring a stir.

They even wipe down the stove top. One starts the dishwasher. It churns and rumbles quietly. Both little girls silently leave a sparkling and neat kitchen and let Nancy sleep on the floor.

INT. LOUISE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Louise studies her growing breasts in the mirror. The Carpenters or another popular group from the time plays on the radio.

INT. LITTLE GIRLS' ROOM - NIGHT

The little sisters sleep in twin beds.

INT. MIKE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Michael does homework at a grand, dark stained desk. Sultan sleeps near the bed. Over this:

TV

Marichal from the stretch...Clemente
SMACKS a line drive to right center
and that's gonna bring in Oliver for
yet another Pirate run...

Mike glances at the TV, then returns to his homework.

INT. KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

Nancy is still lying on the floor, only now shit has packed her panty hose and even seeped onto the floor.

The two little girls, already dressed prettily for school, wipe up the shit with paper towels, and race back and forth to the nearest bathroom to flush it all down the toilet.

EXT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Mike bolts out with some of the first students from the class. Stella walks quickly and catches up to him.

STELLA

Hi Mike.

MIKE

Hey.

STELLA

You got a hundred on the test, and
the extra point question.

MIKE

Yeah...

STELLA
That's pretty good.

MIKE
Yeah...
(stumbling)
How'd you do?

STELLA
I got a hundred, but not the extra
point.

MIKE
Oh. That's good.

Stella smiles at him, but Mike can't think of anything more to say. They walk a little in awkward silence until they reach another corridor.

MIKE
Well, I go this way. See ya later.

STELLA
Ok.

EXT. PARK - TWILIGHT

The guys are finishing up the game. Mike as always scores another TD, and they all trot back to the girls on the sideline. Everyone's been hanging around together for a couple of months now, and are all comfortable and relaxed with each other, although Mike's still awkward when it comes to Stella.

Mike lays down on the grass with Sultan who's nibbling furiously on his back hip bones. Mike swats him lightly on his nose.

MIKE
Don't scratch it Sultan! No!

Rene whispers in Louise's ear. At first she's shocked, but then gets up with him and they walk off to be alone. Stella watches and mmmhmmms.

MONI
What's the matter with Sultan?

MIKE
I don't know, y'know? He's getting
some sort of rash or something but
he keeps scratching it and it only
makes it worse.

Mike inspects the rash closely, lovingly, soothing Sultan.

MONI

It's kinda gross.

MIKE

Yeah...but I think it's only a little rash.

MONI

Wanta come over and watch TV later?
"Terror at 50,000 Feet" is on again.

MIKE

Oh I got a biology test tomorrow.

STELLA

Yeah, we got a test tomorrow. We'd like to see your house sometime. We're always over at ours.

MIKE

Yeah, well, y'know, my mom teaches a lot an' she can't have a bunch a noise around.

STELLA

We won't make any noise we'll just watch TV.

MONI

She can't teach all night!

MIKE

Well, she practices a lot too.

MONI

The TV isn't in the piano room, is it?

MIKE

(lying)
Yeah, it is.

STELLA

But you said you have a TV in your room.

MIKE

Well, it's just a little TV. Yours is much better.

STELLA

But y'said yours is a 19 inch and color?

MIKE
(brushing off)
Believe me guys...it's...sometime
we'll go over to our house...

Rene and Louise return and Louise is literally glowing. We've never seen her smile before but now her smile is as big and pretty as a spring morning. She's almost crying with joy. She whispers in Stella's ear and Stella immediately SCREAMS.

STELLA
Rene asked Louise to go steady!

Moni screams! All the guys kid them and make jokes about babies and stuff.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Rene and Mike make their way down the counter line selecting snacks:

RENE
Why don't you ask Stella to go steady?

Mike just shakes his head.

RENE
She wants to go steady with you.

Mike shakes his head again.

INT. MIKE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Mike rubs ointment on Sultan's rash, which is getting worse. Virtually all the hair on the hip bones is nibbled away. Mike soothes Sultan as he rubs it in. There's a knock at his door.

MIKE
Ok.

Louise creeps in, very afraid.

LOUISE
Why don't you ask Stella to go steady?

MIKE
Shut your face and get outta here!

Mike draws back his fist. Louise turns and starts to run away, but Mike SOCKS her good and hard in the middle of her back.

Louise scrams back to her room, and Mike slams the door. He goes back to Sultan who's got his ears down in fear.

MIKE

It's ok Sultan it's not your fault
you're a good boy.

EXT. SCHOOL HALLWAYS - DAY

Mike, Rene and Louise walk between bells.

RENE

She said she likes you.

LOUISE

Every guy's after her even Acosta's
after her.

MIKE

You shut up!

RENE

Don't talk to her like that!

Mike turns on him, furious.

RENE

I know you can cream me but don't
talk to her like that.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

All the kids cram in the buses to go home. Mike, Louise and Rene sit in one. Outside, they see Stella walking up with a big man on campus type, a beautiful youth, the one in school all the girls think is a fox. They watch Stella say bye and board the bus.

She sits near Rene and Louise. Mike looks vacantly out a window under all the yelping of the kids in the bus.

Stella whispers in Louise's ear:

STELLA

Did he see?

LOUISE

(whispering in her
ear)

Oh, he saw.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Mike washes Sultan's rash with medicated shampoo in the tub, soothing him the whole time and telling him he's being such a good boy. He finishes, fluffs Sultan with a towel, then lets him shake and sprint out the bathroom.

Over all this we hear clanging of pots or something and screaming from downstairs.

Mike goes downstairs to find Nancy, drunk, gripping Louise by the hair and slapping her while Louise tries to tear her mom's hand off her hair.

NANCY

Don't you stay out late one more night you slutty brat!!

LOUISE

Get off me!!

MIKE

KNOCK IT OFF!

Mike shoves his mom. Louise breaks free and runs out the door screaming.

NANCY

Get outta this house don't you even think about coming back here!

MIKE

Shut up!

NANCY

Don't you hit me!

MIKE

Shut up you stupid cunt.

NANCY

Don't use that word that's a horrible word.

MIKE

We need more ointment.

NANCY

Get your own goddamn ointment that dog's just spreading filthy germs all over my house!

MIKE

Shut up!

NANCY

No you shut up!

MIKE

Get that fuckin' ointment.

He turns to stomp back upstairs.

NANCY

Get your own damn ointment I'm not getting any more ointment for that mangy dog!

MIKE

(over shoulder)
You jus' get it.

INT. MIKE'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Mike turns the corner to find his little sister Michelle at his door. She turns, terrified.

MICHELLE

I was just knocking I was just knocking!!

Mike moves on her. She cowers away, curls away from him, against the wall. Mike POUNDS her in her back one two three times.

MICHAEL

Don't you ever go in my room!

Michelle scoots away and down the stairs, and Mike goes in his room, closing the door solidly behind him.

EXT. SCHOOL BUS STOP - AFTERNOON

All the kids get off the bus in front of Mike's house. Rene whispers in Mike's ear:

RENE

Go on . . . go on . . .

Stella and the other girls are waiting a little ways down the sidewalk. Mike sighs.

MIKE

You ask her.

RENE

(excited)
OK!

Rene scampers off to the girls and talks to Stella. When Moni hears what he's saying, she screams "NOOOOO" and leaves in a huff down the street.

Mike watches Stella nod, gleefully and shyly. Rene scampers back to Mike.

RENE

She said yes.

MIKE

Ok.

Mike turns and walks into his house. Rene walks up to Stella, and shrugs.

RENE

He said ok.

They walk down the street towards their house.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - MORNING

The bus pulls up to Stella's stop and the kids get on. Rene sits next to Louise, putting his arm around her.

STELLA

Hi.

She sits next to him, the first time they've sat together.

MIKE

Hi.

Moni sits across from them looking sad and dejected.

Mike and Stella sit quietly while other kids on the bus gab all around them. Mike thinks he should say something, but can't think of anything to say. Stella smiles shyly. They ride in silence.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - LATER

Mike and Stella still sit in silence as the bus pulls up to the school. All the kids get off, Mike following Stella.

Outside, Mike and Stella walk with Rene, Louise and other friends onto campus. Mike can loosen up now; he gabs with some of the other kids. They reach a corner of a corridor.

MIKE

(to Stella)

Ok, see you later.

STELLA

Ok.

Mike walks off to homeroom.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Mike sits in his same seat far away from Stella.

EXT. CLASSROOM - LATER

Mike comes out of the class with other kids and keeps on walking. Stella follows him from a distance, not hurt exactly, but simply wondering if she should catch up or not.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - AFTERNOON

Mike and Stella sit together silently behind Rene and Louise, who are kissing. The bus pulls up to Mike's stop, and Mike gets up.

MIKE

Ok, see you guys later.

Louise stays with Rene.

RENE

Ok.

Mike walks off the bus and up the lawn to his house.

IN THE BUS:

RENE

Has he kissed you?

Stella shakes her head, more confused than anything.

RENE

Has he said anything to you?

She shakes her head again.

LOUISE

He's just really shy.

STELLA

He talks with everybody else.

RENE

He must really like you.

Stella smiles.

MONI

He doesn't like you.

RENE

Shut up Moni! (To Stella) He likes you, I'm sure of it.

STELLA

(to Louise)

Has he said anything?

LOUISE

He only shouts at us.

EXT. SUBDIVISION STREETS - WEEKEND AFTERNOON

Mike rides his bike home wearing a muddy football uniform. Sultan trots behind him. To Mike's sudden panic, Stella rides a bike coming up the opposite direction. They stop.

MIKE

Hey.

STELLA

How was practice?

MIKE

Ok. What're you doin'?

STELLA

Just ridin' around.

MIKE

Oh. Ok, well see ya later.

Mike pedals past her to his house.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - SCHOOL PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

Mike sits in a seat but has let another kid sit next to him. Rene and Louise board. Rene looks at the kid next to Mike, then at Mike.

RENE

(to kid)

That seat's saved.

KID

Oh!

MIKE

It's ok.

RENE

That's Stella's seat.

Mike stands and whispers in Rene's ear.

MIKE

When you see Stella tell her I don't want to go steady with her anymore, OK.

RENE

I'm not gonna do that!

MIKE

Jus' do it will you! I don't want to anymore.

RENE

Mike . . ?

MIKE

Just do it.

Rene shakes his head and joins Louise on a seat. Stella boards and looks to Mike, wondering what's going on. Mike glances at her, then looks out the window. She stands there a second as other kids push past her, then walks past Mike and sits behind Rene.

Rene leans back and whispers Mike's message in her ear. All she does is nod.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - LATER

Stella's looking out the window as the bus drives suburban streets. She cries slightly and once in a while wipes the tears with a hand.

Mike stares out the window. By now he's sitting by himself. When the bus pulls up to his stop he gets off and walks into his house.

END FLASHBACK

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - DRIVING HWY. 40 - MORNING (PRESENT - '72)

BILLY (O.S.)

Yew wan some whiskey?

Mike was reading the boy's book he took with him when he ran away, In Our Time, by Hemingway. He looks up to see some kind of psycho cowboy, about 25, stretched out on the seats in front of him. Billy's obviously on the dole, but offering a small bottle of JD.

BILLY

Huh? Huh?

MIKE

Uh, no thanks.

BILLY

I knows you's jus' a kid but y'gonna be a kid forever? Li' they say, puts hair on your chest, if y'know what I mean.

Mike takes a tiny sip. He hacks a little and coughs, and a little of the stuff even spits out his mouth. But he recovers, and forcing himself, he tries another sip, burning his throat again.

BILLY

Breakfast a champions right?

Billy takes another long, sweet gulp.

BILLY

Ahhhhhhh y'know Kenny Stabler the great ol' QB for Oakland well I read some wheh, he says, he wakes up an' for breakfast he has a beer an' a cigarette. Can you believe that? Ev'ry mornin'. Lives in Alabam y'know. But who'd ever wanta live in Oakland?! Go on, have some more.

Mike takes a better sip.

MIKE

That's rough stuff.

BILLY

'Cause it's good fer ya. Nuttin' worth a shit comes easy, ri', y'work fer it work fer it work fer it an' JD's a 30 mile desert work out best fuckin' whiskey in the world worth evvvvvery leeeetle drop!

He fishes out some Red Man and rolls a cig.

BILLY

Smoke?

MIKE

Nah, no thanks man.

BILLY

It's real good fer ya.

MIKE

I play sports.

BILLY

Hear ya. Hear ya. Kenny Stablowski plays sports, but I hear ya. Wheh ya headed kid?

MIKE

Y'don't have to call me kid y'know.

BILLY
Okaaaaaaaaay...
(smiles)
Wouldn't wanta git y'all riled.

Then Billy spots a fiver laying on the bus aisle next to an empty Wild Turkey bottle, and under a dangling, unconscious hand.

BILLY
Shish.

Billy creeps up the two rows and snags it, then scoots back to his seat, pocketing the bill.

BILLY
Tis the season ho ho ho. Nig's that fuckin' dumb he deserves to lose it. So what yer name kid?

MIKE
Michael.

BILLY
Michael what?

MIKE
Why?

BILLY
'Cause I'm the gawd damn fuckin' FBI that's why. Miiiiine's Billy. Billy Lafayette. S'posed to be French, but I'm A-1 prime USDA. Fuck like a Frenchy though ha ha ha ha!

MIKE
(standing)
I hafta use the restroom.

BILLY
G'head, I won't charge ya.

Mike clacks open the plastic door but finds the toilet's piss splashed and stuffed with shit and paper.

BILLY
Ha ha ha ha ha I pissed in worse ooooowhooh!

MIKE
I was gonna take a shit.

BILLY
G'head. Be a man.

MIKE

I'll wait.

BILLY

Sheeeeit. Don't be jus' a kid, be a
maaaaaaan. Y'a man? Y'fuck pussy?

MIKE

Shut up.

BILLY

Y'gotta girlfriend? I betchya don't
even know what a girl's fer.

MIKE

I gotta girlfriend.

BILLY

Well, maybe you do. Whew! Those
niiiiice little 12 year ol' asses
an' those niiiiice leetle uppity teets.
Oh man, I git a boner jus' thinkin'
'bout it can't even think about it .
. . Best damn poontang's in Vegas
tho', best there is. Y'ever been
t'Vegas? That's the greatest place
in the whole fuckin' world y'ever
been there?

Mike shakes no.

BILLY

Oh maaaaaan y'gotta go to Vegas
it's the greatest place an y'wanna
know why it's greatest place 'cause
it's based on two things man, two
things, only, an' that's money an
sex. Money and sex man, an' they
don't bullshit 'bout it neither.
Those are the only two basics to
huuuuumans, an' man in Vegas, it's
just all out there. Y'know all money
is is jus' modern man's claws and
fangs, y'know. That's what he uses
in this society of ours to git food
an' shelter an' wimin. Right? An'
y'know in other towns, y'know,
everywhere else, these dumb fuckin'
idiots are all phony kinda doin'
things in a roundabout way, goin'
fer these basics but actin' all
preachy nice an' I'm such a good
Christian American when what they're
really doin' is clawin' and fightin'

(MORE)

BILLY (CONT'D)

to fuck and git a whollllllllle lotta jack. But Vegas man! What a goooooood honest town. Hookers are unbelievable un . . . be . . . lieve . . . a . . . ble. An' cheap! Y'gotta pay fer it one way or another ri' but they're the fuckin' best deal around. Ain't much real in the world y'know, y'know, I coulda gone in the army, I was drafted y'know, an' I ain't no pussy, no way, I won't back down to nobody, see, y'hear me, but that's some other fucker's fight, shit, li' I'm gonna go somewhere million miles 'way an' fight a bunch a nips, shit, I'll tell ya, that's sap city man, getting' yer nuts blown off fer some fat fuck in some office heh . . . Yeahhhh, I got outta it, got a phony medical report, y'know, 350, 'cause it's shit fuckin' phony, phony fightin' man. I do my own fightin', y'know? It's bullshit like this fuckin' country's all bullshit 'cept, except, we got this onnnnnne little oasis a truth jus' sittin' there an' that's Las Vegas man. The RAW truth man. The raw fuckin' truth. Man, y'gotta see Caesars Palace. It's the most beautiful place on earth man the greatest fuckin' most beautiful place on earth. It's got these great fountains, jus' HUUUUUUUUUGE fountains, an' it's all bluuuuuuuuue. Man it's gorgeous.

Billy takes a long swig of JD and a long drag of his cig. He extracts a folded, worn, postcard of Caesars Palace with the fountains.

BILLY

I keep it wit me to remin' me of all the good that's possible in this fucked world.

INT. OKLAHOMA BUS STOP - BATHROOM DAY

CU - There's a lock on the stall door.

Mike punches it and it bumps back open to him. Inside, the TP's the little square sheets everyone hates.

MIKE

Shit.

He takes a mess of them and carefully covers the seat. He sits, his gaze taking in the scratched scrawls on the toilet door, and then falling on a bum in the next stall snoring and muttering, laying in the thick, dried coat of piss caking the floor. His bum's face is covered with sores and scabs.

Mike shrugs and stands.

BILLY (O.S.)

Y'don't even have yer pubes yet!

Billy's peeking through the slits of the door.

MIKE

Get the fuck outta here!

BILLY

I tol' y'was jus' a kid y'jus' a kid!

MIKE

Get outta here y'faggot!

BILLY

Hey I ain't no fuckin' fag man there's no way I could be called a fag there's plenty a muff all over knows that!

EXT. OKLAHOMA BUS STOP - DAY

Michael and Billy sit against the far wall in solitude. Billy takes out a joint.

MIKE

Is that pot?

Billy offers a hit. Mike shrugs no.

BILLY

It's good fer ya...reeeeal good... well, maybe y'ain't old 'nough.

MIKE

I'm old enough. It's just that I play baseball and football. I'm not gonna smoke.

BILLY

This ain't smokin' pubeless it's space walkin'.

MIKE

Shut up.

BILLY

Yeahhhhhh... I apologize. Y'know Michael, the world fucks y'in the ass every day, olllllllll day long. An' it ain't no girl's sweet little tongue neither. It's a big mandingo dick. It makes y'hard, an' mean. Or, it kills ya. That mandingo dick rips you're a-hole, jus' tears it apart, then it rips apart your guts like some nigger black grenade in there, and then it finally reaches your heart, your heart man, an' jus' beats the fuck outta it, jus' beats an' beats and cuts it up and lets it drip out yer ripped up a-hole. Drip. Drip. Drip. I got no heart Mikey. I was once like you. But nos more. But I do apologize. I do. Don' worry 'bout it. You'll be fuckin poontang soon 'nough, an' I'll bet yll'have all y'can wrestle. Y'got urges? Y'look at a chick's ass an' can't stop lookin'? Jus' gotta grab it an' hold on ferever?

MIKE

I guess. I don't know.

BILLY

Y'have a wet dream yet?

MIKE

A wet dream?

BILLY

(chuckles)

Y'd know'd it if y'had it.

MIKE

What is it?

BILLY

Y'll fi' out.

MIKE

Y'wanna tell me?

BILLY

It's when y'cum in yer sleep. Y'know. Ejaculate. It's a sign a manhood or somethin', poooooberty.

MIKE

In your sleep? Why? I mean...

BILLY

It's nature dude. Li' when a girl drops her blood. Evil, messy, foul business that is. But it jus' nature.

MIKE

Does it hurt?

BILLY

A wet dream?! Y'kiddin?!

MIKE

No. When the girl drops her blood.

BILLY

Dunno. Never asked. Fuck not our problem... Yer girl in San Jose?

MIKE

Yeah.

BILLY

That who yer runnin' way to?

MIKE

I'm not runnin' away!

BILLY

I ain't heat man.

MIKE

No kiddin.

Billy chuckles, tokes long on the joint.

MIKE

I've never even seen pot.

BILLY

How old r'ya?

MIKE

Thirteen.

BILLY

Shit. I started smokin' when I was ten.

Two cowboys are suddenly in front of them. They're about the size and age of Billy. One motions for a toke.

BILLY

Who do I look li' the fuckin' United Way?

The two cowboys look at each other.

BIG COWBOY

What the fuck y'say?

Billy stands. Mike's shocked at this sudden change of events, but stands too.

BILLY

Git the fuuuuuuuck outta heh...

The cowpokes themselves seem more shocked than anything, but it's slowly dawning on them either they're walking away humiliated, or they're fighting.

But Billy doesn't even wait for their move. Quicker than lightning he upper cuts the bigger cowboy with his right, then smashes the nose of the other with his left. He swings again at the bigger guy but the guy ducks and swings at Billy but Billy blocks it.

The other cowboy clips Billy's ear. Mike charges and tackles him, both landing hard on an ice patch. Mike wails on the guy's head. He's insane, a madman, but smaller than the cowboy. The cowboy throws Mike off, quickly stands and goes for Mike.

Billy rips a huge Bowie knife from his jacket and slashes his guy's cheek. The cowboy instantly grabs his face and backs away.

BIG COWBOY

He's gotta knife!

Mike's cowboy was just going to swing at Mike, but then spins. Billy grips his wrist and cuts through his jacket all the way down in the guy's bicep.

COWBOY

Fuckin' A!

They both back away.

BILLY

Now y'gittin' the fuck outta heh?!

BIG COWBOY

...yeah... We're goin' I got no problem fightin' but you're insane. There's nuttin' t'prove with you, fightin' a psycho...

BILLY

Git fuck oudaheh 'fore I cut you's 'gin!

They back away, holding their cuts, then turn and walk slowly away.

COWBOY
(over shoulder)
Fuckin' jus' asked fer a friendly
toke!

Mike and Billy watch them walk away, looking at each other's cuts.

BILLY
Thanks fer helpin' out. Y'didn't
really hafta, but thanks anyway.

MIKE
Why didn't you jus' give 'em some?!
Shit!

BILLY
You insane? Give nobody nuttin!
Fuggettit. Slap my hands like the
nigs in football!

Mike shrugs, high ten's Billy.

FLASHBACK - SAN JOSE

EXT. SUBDIVISION STREETS - DAY

Mike rides his bike while Sultan happily lopes along side. They glide past a two story house both know very well. Behind a big, black gate a rumbling evil attacks and barks at the gate. The gate violently quakes.

Sultan's ears fall flat and pink, and his tail curls tightly under his legs. Mike gets off the bike and holds Sultan, pointing him to the gate.

MIKE
Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid.
Y'can take 'im. You can take that
fucker.

EXT. SUBDIVISION STREETS - DAY

Mike rides the bike as Sultan trots along.

It's just a gorgeous Saturday. Sprinklers hiss faintly. Sidewalks and driveways steam in the sun after being sprayed clean. Kids play on lawns. Teenagers work on engines. Dads mow lawns.

EXT. EXPRESSWAY - LATER

Mike and Sultan travel on the side as trucks and cars clamor by. Sultan jumps and cowers sometimes when louder trucks scream past them.

EXT. FREEWAY - LATER

Now Sultan is genuinely terrified by the screaming, clamoring vehicles as he and Mike race down the breakdown lane.

MIKE
(shouting)
It's OK Sultan! C'mon!

EXT. SAN JOSE DOWNTOWN (BARRIO) STREETS - LATER

Now Mike and Sultan travel a very poor and rough section of San Jose. Tough Mexican teenagers watch them as they go by.

INT. VET CLINIC - LATER

Under the clamor of yapping dogs and tweeting birds and hissing cats, Mike talks with the nurse at the window, holding Sultan with a leash.

MIKE
It's free, right?

NURSE
Yes, but we do accept donations.

MIKE
Thanks.

Mike finds a seat and lets Sultan sniff some of the other dogs. Sultan's a little nervous, but Mike soothes him.

INT. VET'S EXAMINATION ROOM - LATER

The VET finishes examining Sultan's rash. Mike shows him a tube of ointment.

MIKE
I've been using this.

VET
Mmmhmm. Well, it's nothing really serious. It looks worse than it is.
(writes a prescription)
I'm going to prescribe an ointment called Panalog. Let's see if that works. It also tastes bad, so he'll stop biting the area.

INT. CLINIC'S PHARMACY - LATER

MIKE

21.95?!

PHARMACIST'S ASSISTANT

(nodding)

We got to charge for the medications.
Can't afford to otherwise.

MIKE

For how much? I can get a smaller
size.

PHARMACIST'S ASSISTANT

That's the one ounce.

She pokes down an aisle, comes back with a tube the size of
toothpaste.

PHARMACIST'S ASSISTANT

It's the smallest size they make. I
know. Prescription medications are
expensive.

EXT. STREETS AND FREEWAYS - AFTERNOON

MIKE AND SULTAN WHEEL BACK THROUGH THE BARRIO.

BACK ON THE FREEWAY.

BACK THROUGH THE SUBDIVISION.

INT. MIKE'S ROOM - LATER

Mike takes his savings book from is desk, tearing back out
of his room, Sultan happily racing along with him.

EXT. SUBDIVISION STREETS - LATER

Mike and Sultan whiz along the streets.

INT. BANK - LATER

Outside, Mike locks his bike, then comes in with Sultan but
the guard immediately stops them.

GUARD

The dog has to stay outside.

Mike rolls his eyes, takes Sultan outside and tells him to
stay. Sultan stays and watches Mike the entire time he goes
in the bank and withdraws some money. When Mike comes out
Sultan jumps all over him.

EXT. STREETS AND FREEWAYS - LATE AFTERNOON

MIKE AND SULTAN SCAMPER ALONG THE FREEWAY AGAIN.

MIKE AND SULTAN THROUGH THE BARRIO STREETS AGAIN.

INT. CLINIC'S PHARMACY - LATER

PHARMACIST'S ASSISTANT
We can't dispense prescription
medications to minors. You have to
be 18 or older.

MIKE
But he needs the ointment!

PHARMACIST'S ASSISTANT
Just have your mom or dad come in.

MIKE
I don't have a mom or dad.

PHARMACIST'S ASSISTANT
You must have a relative or guardian
or someone who's over 18.

INT. VET'S EXAMINATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mike knocks on the door then opens it to find the vet
examining a cat on the table as a little Mexican girl and
her mom watch.

VET
Don't just barge in here what do you
want?!

The vet puts the cat in the mother's arms and goes to Mike.

MIKE
They won't give me the ointment.
They say I have to be 18.

VET
That's right. Just have your parents--

MIKE
I don't have any parents, my guardian
hates Sultan and won't do a thing
for him, and he really needs the
ointment. I got the money.

Mike shows him. The doctor frowns, smiles slightly to Mike,
then turns to the woman with the cat.

VET

Excuse me one minute.

INT. PHARMACY - LATER

VET

I'm authorizing that you can fill
the prescription to this boy.

The pharmacist's assistant stalls.

VET

It's ok.

PHARMACIST'S ASSISTANT

Certainly doctor.

MIKE

Thanks.

VET

Just understand one thing young man--
I'm only giving it to you because
It's a mild medication. It's against
our policy to give prescription
medications to minors. It's not
illegal or anything, but just don't
spread it around.

EXT. SUBDIVISION STREETS - DUSK

Mike and Sultan ride past the two story house with the black gate, only now the gate is wide open. A monstrous, black German shepherd named MAX stands on the lawn like a some sort of a statue of a black lion. He immediately growls and gnarls a deep evil at Sultan. Max is so huge and muscular he looks like he lifts weights every day. He's also got only a stub of a tail which he lost to a car tire when he was a puppy.

Mike immediately drops his bike and holds Sultan. Sultan's trembling awfully.

MIKE

You can take 'im Sultan! You can
take him! Don't be afraid. You can
take 'im! Go get 'im boy! Go get
'im!

Sultan musters all the courage he's got and sprints to Max. They CRASH on the lawn, fangs FLASHING in the bright sun.

But now next to Sultan Mike can see how big Max is, at least twice Sultan's size. Max quickly overpowers Sultan, flips him on his back and jaws his neck.

Sultan whines sickly with high pitched yelps.

Mike sprints and tackles Max off Sultan, whacks him in the jaw and slams a fist in his side. Max squirms free and scampers up the lawn to his house, his tail stub bouncing.

Sultan sprints down the street wildly. Mike chases him.

MIKE
SULTAN! SULTAN!

Sultan stops, panting furiously, his tongue hanging long and loose. Mike races up to him and holds him.

MIKE
Y'ok boy?! Y'ok?!

Mike checks him out, then hugs him again.

MIKE
It's ok...it's ok...

EXT. MIKE'S HOUSE - LAWN - DUSK

Mike rubs ointment soothingly on Sultan's rash. Sultan lays in the grass totally exhausted.

MIKE
He's a big guy huh Sultan? Man, real big guy. We got 'im. Maybe it wasn't fair, but you and me got him, right?

END FLASHBACK

INT. GREYHOUND BUS (HWY. 40, TEXAS) - LATE NIGHT (PRESENT)

Billy deals black jack to Mike in the back seats.

BILLY
Hey man y'don't hafta keep any secrets
heh.

Mike stands on his fourteen.

MIKE
I'm goin' back to my mom's geesus
fuck!

BILLY
Now you played that perfect. Y'never
hit a fourteen against a six.

Billy turns over a five hole.

BILLY

Uh oh. (10) Well it jus' didn't work out that time. I mean, I got the ten but my hole card was a ball buster. But y'know what the name of the game is..?

MIKE

Gambling.

BILLY

Ri', an' sometimes the cards jus' don't fall yer way no matter how good y'are, and that's the time to walk man. It's as plain as an ass' ass yer a runway.

MIKE

Geesus will you jus' leave it? Believe what y'want I don't give a flyin' fuck.

BILLY

Now this is a real interestin' situation here. Real interestin'... 12 against a 2. Lotta players will hit that, an' I see their reasonin' 'Cause the 2's a real dangerous card, but y'know I've tried both ways an' I've jus' reached the conclusion that it don't work. I mean, ev'ry time I hit my 12 I git the fuckin' 10 an' take the dealer's bust, y'know?

MIKE

Stay.

BILLY

Ok...2...12... (8) Oh well, there y'go y'see that 2's real dangerous. That's jus' a bad situation to be in.

MIKE

If you're so good at black jack why y'ridin' a bus?

Billy stops dealing, looks hurt.

BILLY

I'm not tellin' ya from the sperience a success sonny. It's called goin' on tilt. Ok? It's the sperience of "don't." Y'know? Don't.

(MORE)

BILLY (CONT'D)

Don't chase bad cards. Don't borrah fer gamblin'. Y'know, like God commandin' from the knowledge of failure. Don't kill, 'cause God has killed. Don't steal, 'cause God has stolen the fuckin' world. Don't fornicate 'cause he has fornicated up the human race. Got me? Comprendes sonny?

MIKE

I don't believe in god. I'm an atheist. I'm a member of the atheistic faith.

BILLY

Sheeeeeeeeit--y'ain't old 'nough to know God from you're a-hole.

MIKE

Fuck you--I can decide for myself.

BILLY

Ooooooh don't get oll riled now. I dun wanna get hurt.

They fall to silence. Billy collects the cards and pockets them. He shifts back to his seats in front of Michael in a huff. He sips his JD. Mike holds out his hand for a drink.

BILLY

He says "Don't drink" neither.

MIKE

Sure isn't much you can do, huh?

BILLY

Well you DO fornicate ha ha ha ha ha ha
ha oooooooooooooowoooooooooooooooooooo!

Billy hands over the bottle and Mike takes a small sip.

BUS DRIVER (O.S.)

Amarillo. 15 minute stop.

BILLY

Well Mikey y'know what I'm sorry
t'say but this is wher I leave ya.

Mike, saddened, hands back the bottle.

BILLY

End a the line for ol' Billy boy got
me some friends in ol' Amarilee to
scare up. Got me a leetle girl too
if y'know what I mean?

INT. AMARILLO STOP - LATE NIGHT

While others head for the food line:

BILLY

Takin' 'nother shit? Well, I gotta
take a piss.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mike then Billy enter as a bum staggers out.

BILLY

'Cuse me PAL!

As the door closes Billy NELSONS Mike and SLAMS him against
the wall, instantly pressing the Bowie knife at Mike's neck,
pressing the edge finely into his skin. Mike struggles, but
it's no dice. He's not scared exactly, mostly shaken.

BILLY

Sorry 'bout this kid but I'll help
myself to your dough.

Mike tries to squirm free. Billy grips his neck with his
left and slams Mike's head into the tile wall. He brings the
edge of the blade to Mike's smooth, pink cheek.

BILLY

Keep tryin' kid an' y'won' be pretty
boy nos more.

MIKE

You fuckin' asshole.

BILLY

Give me the dough. You're lucky I'm
not cuttin' ya an' takin' it myself.
Now!

Mike fishes for his money.

BILLY

Learnin' a good lessin' heh don't
trust a fuckin' soul. THREE
FUCKIN' BUCKS?!

MIKE

That's all I got.

BILLY

Empty your pockets.

Mike empties his pockets sending change and keys to the floor.

BILLY

Sheeeeit. Take off yer shoes.

MIKE

I only got three bucks you fucker!

BILLY

NOW!

Billy shoves Mike down to his shoes. Mike removes one shoe, keeping his foot off the soaked floor, and dumps air. Billy points the knife on him. Mike puts on the first shoe, removes the second and dumps more air.

BILLY

Shit. I ain't gonna search yer
underwears. An' I ain't gonna take
yer last 3 bucks. Yer lucky heh kid.
I li' ya. You're a gamer. Sure,
hunderd bucks. But not yer last three.
That's not ri'. Take care a yerself.

Billy scoots out the bathroom.

Mike quickly ties his shoes, picks up the change and keys.

Then he spots the CAESARS PALACE POSTCARD on the floor. He grabs it, jams it in his pocket, like "HA--got you fucker." He kicks open the stall door.

INT. AMARILLO STOP - SNACK BAR

Mike eyeballs the cashier who's busy ringing up the register, then pockets two small packets of Oreos and keeps one out, and heads down the line.

CASHIER

25 cents.

Mike stares at the lady innocently and pays the quarter.

FLASHBACK - SAN JOSE - FALL, '72

EXT. JUNIOR HIGH - BUS PICK UP - LATE AFTERNOON

All the kids clamor and laugh and scream towards the busses to home. Mike muscled past a tough burn out named JIMBO.

Jimbo pulls Mike back by his long hair but Mike shoves him.

JIMBO

You fucker!

Jimbo tries to shove Mike away from the door but Mike won't budge and climbs in, trying to ignore him.

Mike plops in the seats near his regular gang--Rene, Stella, Louise, etc. Jimbo storms up and GRIPS Mike's shirt:

JIMBO

YOU AND ME FUCKER AFTER THE RIDE YOU
AND ME YOU PUSSY CUNT ASSHOLE!

He SHOVES Mike back in the seat and rambles to the back.

STELLA

What was THAT all about?!

Mike is honestly afraid and tries to hide it, but does a poor job, and simply shakes his head.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - LATER

The gang rides silently, an awkwardness hanging over them. Mike stares out the window, refusing to look behind to the loud, cackling stoner back. Every once in a while they can pick up a phrase like "going to pound that pussy," and the like. Finally, Rene leans over the seat to Mike:

RENE

If you're gonna fight Jimbo you'd
better watch out 'cause he fights
dirty--goes for the nards a lot.

Mike nods.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - LATER

Mike still stares out the window. His friends avoid looking at him.

EXT. BUS STOP - CONIGLIARI HOUSE - DUSK

Though it's not their stop, Stella, Moni and Rene get off. Mike doesn't look back, thinking there isn't really going to be any fight.

But Rene takes his books from his arm. Mike glances to Stella, afraid of getting his ass kicked in front of her.

Jimbo jumps out, followed by his rowdy friends. Mike's actually shocked he's there.

JIMBO

OK YOU PUSSY CUNT--

He roundhouses Mike to the temple. It fazes Mike just for a second.

That wipes out any fear.

Mike EXPLODES. He SWINGS furiously, ferociously on Jimbo.

Jimbo's meaner, a tough kid who smokes dope, drinks, gets in fights every so often, while Mike's always been a loner, a good student. But he's big and athletic and in a rage.

These two 12 year olds swing wildly, miss a lot, hit a few, and suddenly, during the course of the fight, Mike knows he can take this fucker.

BAM--in Jimbo's head and Mike takes him down on the concrete. All the kids surround them SHOUTING and SQUEALING.

Mike POUNDS the back of Jimbo's scraggly head. He likes beating the shit out of him. He POUNDS and POUNDS and SWINGS madly.

Mike abruptly gets off Jimbo and lets him stand.

ANGLE - The Conigliari door opens and Mike's little sisters and Sultan sprint to the circle of cheering kids.

Mike and Jimbo circle each other, try a few roundhouses, but don't connect. Jimbo clearly knows he's in a mess he didn't expect. Mike looks like he's on top of the world.

Jimbo kicks at Mike's nuts but barely connects. Mike attacks and knocks Jimbo to the sidewalk again and pounds the back of his head.

Mike's little sisters cry. Sultan lunges and yaps at Jimbo but Rene holds him back.

Mike again let's Jimbo up, as if to ask him if he's had enough. Jimbo again kicks at his nuts but Mike dodges it and SMASHES his fist in Jimbo's nose, stopping him cold.

JIMBO

You broke my nose you broke my nose!

STELLA

HAD ENOUGH JIMBO!! HAD ENOUGH!!

Jimbo holds his nose. Other kids shout at him like "he beat the shit outta you," "you're done."

Jimbo holds his nose.

JIMBO

You broke my nose.

MIKE

Had enough?

RAYMOND, Jimbo's tough friend, leads Jimbo away.

RAYMOND

C'mon man. C'mon. Let's go.

They slowly walk down the street. Jimbo holds his nose which is red splashed and already swollen. The autumn dusk darkens.

Stella LEAPS like a cheerleader. Mike is quiet. He looks bigger now, much more his own man.

STELLA

That was great! You were great! You beat the hell outta that asshole!

All the kids are raucous and joyous and happy. Mike crouches down and holds Sultan.

Raymond and Jimbo walk down the street, and Raymond shouts over his shoulder:

RAYMOND

GOOD FIGHT MIKE!

Mike stands with pride.

RENE

That was cool a him.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - MORNING

The gang talks and listens to the radio. All the chatter revolves around the fight. Mike quietly listens to his friends.

At a stop all the toughs get on and the bus falls silent. Jimbo's not among them. Usually loud and aggressive, these bad kids are quiet, and talk quietly among themselves as they take their normal spots in the back. All look at Mike as they pass him. Mike doesn't look away, but doesn't look directly at them either. And the toughs only glance at him.

EXT. SCHOOL - WALKWAYS - DAY

Mike walks to class in the middle of all the commotion. It's obvious some of the kids notice him and are talking about him.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Mike enters the class he has with Stella and waves to her and smiles. She smiles at him.

Again, some of the kids obviously notice him and look upon him with respect.

EXT. WALKWAYS - DAY

Mike walks the chaotic walkway. The big man on campus Acosta approaches and stops him.

ACOSTA

I heard you beat the shit outta Jimbo.

MIKE

We got into a fight.

ACOSTA

Good job. That guy's an asshole.

Acosta moves on.

EXT. CAFETERIA - DAY (SNACK BREAK)

Mike and his friends talk at their normal spot.

STELLA

(joyously)

Everybody's talking about it!

Rene motions to Jimbo's gang standing across the break area. The toughs keep looking over at Mike and are obviously talking about him.

RENE

Y'think they're gonna do something?

The kids stand nervously together. Three of Jimbo's gang, including Raymond, break from the others and walk toward the kids. Mike and his friends tense up.

RAYMOND

We jus' wanted to say that you fought a fair fight. It was a good fight man. We're not gonna do any shit.

All of Mike's friends are visibly relieved.

RAYMOND

You fought fair and beat the shit outta him. He deserved it anyway.

MIKE

How is he?

RAYMOND

You broke his nose man! He's gotta splint.

Stella claps and squeals with pride.

STELLA

His head's all probably black and
blue too!

RAYMOND

(smiles)
Yeah, probably.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DUSK

All the kids are gabbing happily. Rene and Louise sit arm
and arm, and kiss every once in a while.

Mike and Stella don't sit together, but they talk gaily and
are very relaxed. Clearly, they're still in love, or whatever
it is at that age. Mike's much more relaxed and confident
with her, and it's evident that it's only a matter of time
before they get together again.

The bus lurches around the corner to Mike's house.

RENE

Hey! Y'guys moving?!

Everyone stares at the FOR SALE sign planted in the lawn.
They stare at it in shocked silence. Mike and Louise are
used to moving; they instantly realize the ramifications of
the sign. Louise starts to weep.

STELLA

(to Mike)
You can't move away!

INT. CONIGLIARI HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Mike storms in with Louise right behind. Mike heads for the
kitchen but Louise races up the stairs crying her eyes out.

In the kitchen Mike finds Nancy at the table with the two
little girls. Nancy's sober and dressed nicely; when she's
sober, she appears to be just a normal woman and mother,
like any other.

MIKE

We're not fuckin' movin'!

NANCY

We have to. We're losing the house.
I know you're too young to
understand, but we can't make the
payments. We're going to lose the
house if we don't sell it. We're
moving to St. Louis.

MIKE

We're not movin' to St. Louis!

NANCY

I can't make it here. Grandpa's going to get us a place in St. Louis.

Louise comes in crying a river.

LOUISE

I hate St. Louis! You always do this!

NANCY

YOU shut up.

LOUISE

Jus' when we start making friends and everything's going good you always move us. Even Mike's getting some friends.

MIKE

Will you shut up?

LOUISE

He is getting friends and everybody likes him and he's even getting a girlfriend!

Nancy reacts to that.

MIKE

Geesus Louise will you shut up?!

NANCY

(to Louise)

You're half the problem you're half the reason why we're moving.

LOUISE

I am not! It's jus' because you never work and you . . .

Louise can't say "drink," in fact nobody can and nobody ever has. The little girls cry.

NANCY

Now you shut up you. We're moving to St. Louis and that's final.

Louise runs out the kitchen bawling.

LOUISE

We can't move we can't move I'm NOT moving!

MIKE

If Grandpa's getting a place in St. Louis he can get this place.

NANCY

I can't make it here. It's too hard. California's too hard. We're going back to St. Louis, to Grandma and Grandpa, and everything will be fine. I'm going to get a piano job at one of the hotels. Grandpa's name is already famous there. And it's just gonna go up from there. It'll be wonderful. And you're going to go to the best school in St. Louis. Grandpa's already enrolled you in St. Louis U. High.

MIKE

I'm not going there it's an all-boys school!

NANCY

It's an all-white school. There's none of the riff raff and the Mexicans and the blacks and all those kinds. It's final. You start after Christmas vacation.

MIKE

I'm not going to that fuckin' school.

NANCY

And you better not use language like that around your Grandpa he'll box your ears I'll tell you. He won't stand for it.

MIKE

You listen to me: I'm not movin' to fuckin' St. Louis and I'm not going to that fuckin' school.

Mike storms out the kitchen.

NANCY

(to girls)

You go to your room now.

The girls, still crying, leave.

Nancy sits alone there for a few moments. She appears forlorn and spent. She looks down at the kitchen table surface. Her eyes fall to her hands. She spreads them on the kitchen table. They're getting older.

She looks around the kitchen. It's clean, neat, spotless, still. Silent as cave. Nothing stirs, nothing makes a sound. Except for her glance, she hardly moves herself.

Suddenly, outside, Sultan scratches at the door. Without getting up, Nancy leans over, slides it open, lets him in, shuts it.

Sultan wags his tail, snuffles his snout in her lap. She snuggles him a little, pets him, scratches behind his ears. Done, he takes off, bounding upstairs for Mike's room, wagging his tail the whole time.

Nancy slowly stands. She takes a step towards the sink cabinet, where she keeps the vodka, but stops. She kinda veers to the living room, and sits at the baby grand piano, and starts to play. She starts with Beethoven's Fur Elise, her warm up piece.

As she demonstrated in the party scene, where she was the entertainment for her parent's Christmas party, she plays the piano wonderfully. The Fur Elise is of course a quiet, lovely composition. She plays it delicately, from memory, without even thinking about it, actually. This is her natural talent.

Nancy finishes Fur Elise, launches right into a more contemporary piano piece, like the Theme from Love Story.

INT. RENE & STELLA HOUSE - NIGHT

Louise cries miserably in Rene's arms. Stella and Moni are crying too.

STELLA

Where's Mike?

LOUISE

I don't know. He would never cry.

INT. MIKE'S ROOM - SAME

Mike paces in his room as Sultan watches him. Sultan suddenly lunges to nibble his rash. Mike swats him.

MIKE

Don't bite it! Geesus!

INT. LIVING ROOM -- LATER

CU -- A page from a photo album. There's an old photo, about ten years old, of Nancy, who looks much younger and prettier, a tiny baby in her arms, and another small baby in a stroller.

Next to that photo is another, just as old, of Nancy in a hospital bed, posing with her newborn baby, along with her handsome, rakish husband, the man who will abandon her and the children four years later.

Over all this, we've been hearing Nancy play and sing a pop tune, like "Alphie."

WIDEN TO -- Show Nancy at the piano, only now she's got a glass of vodka, almost drained, on the piano. The photo album sits open in the stand, where sheet music usually is placed.

It's like she's singing the song to the photos in the album.

It's clear this is not the first tall glass of vodka she's had in the last hour. She cries as she sings. Her mascara rivulets down her cheeks, which are otherwise shiny and wet.

Remarkably, her playing is still perfect. But her voice is terribly slurred and maudlin, weepy.

Mike and Sultan come silently down the stairs, passing to the kitchen, noting Nancy playing and drinking, thinking nothing of it.

In the kitchen, Mike takes dog biscuits down from the cupboard, and remembers the following:

INT. PIANO STUDIO OF ANOTHER HOUSE -- NIGHT

It's late in the night. Mike and Nancy both sit at the baby grand piano in the studio of a different house, fighting each other. Mike is much younger, maybe seven, and dressed for bed.

Nancy is drunk, even back then, at this younger age, and sips from a tall glass of vodka. Mike is too young to understand all that. All he knows is that he hates his mom.

NANCY

Do your chords Michael.

Little Michael simply stares forward, refusing to acknowledge her.

NANCY

It doesn't look good that the children
of the piano teacher don't even know
how to play the piano.

Little Michael keeps his eyes meanly forward. Nancy sets down her drink, tries to put his hands on the keys, but Mike pulls away.

NANCY

Why don't you wanta learn how to
play the piano?

Little Mike just keeps his eyes forward.

NANCY

Tell me.

Little Mike still refuses to acknowledge her.

NANCY

Michael, tell me.

Nothing. Nancy stares at him a long time. Her head, her eyes,
absently sway a little. After a long time of staring at him,
and he refusing to acknowledge her:

NANCY

Ok Michael, if you tell me you can
go to bed, and you don't have to
practice.

MICHAEL

'Cause you'll win then.

NANCY

Oh, is that it then? Fine. Go to
your room.

Little Mike scoots out of the studio. Nancy takes her drink
to the kitchen, where a pot of her usual mush has been left
simmering on the stove, and the oven has been left open,
burning for heat.

An open bottle of Kamchatka sits on the counter top. Nancy
fills her glass, chugs some, and shovels some of the mush in
her mouth. She sobs quietly, and mumbles to herself. Some of
the mush falls out of her mouth, back in the pot.

NANCY

(mumbling)

...he's turning out just like you,
you loser, you good for nothing,
lazy, loser, bum...

Angle at the kitchen entrance, where Little Mike lays on the
floor, peeking around the wall, spying on his Mom.

BACK IN '72 SCENE -- Mike gives a dog biscuit to Sultan.
They quietly go back upstairs, passing Nancy, who's still
singing the song, not even looking at her this time.

END FLASHBACK

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - AMARILLO STOP - NIGHT

Mike sits in the back seats eating his stolen Oreos and looking out to the city of Amarillo. As the bus chugs out, he watches a sexy 16 year old girl stumble down the aisle and plop in the chairs in front of him. She's disgusted about something, angry, and jerkily lights a cigarette.

The girl--MARIE--exhales a long stream of smoke and glances back at Mike, who's watching her. She gives Mike the evil eye and turns away.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - DRIVING - NIGHT

Mike's bumped awake by the rambling bus. It's quiet except for an occasional snore or cough, and of course the constant rumble of the bus.

Mike peeks to the girl Marie who's stretched out on the seats in front of him and sleeping soundly against the hard, dull silver window frame. She's hardened, but pretty and sexy. Her long legs stretch over the seats, and her mini skirt is hunched up showing all of her thighs and a glint of her white panties.

Mike looks at her legs for a while but gets nervous and goes back to sleep.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS (NEW MEXICO) - MORNING

Mike reads CALL OF THE WILD, the other paper back he took with him. He drops it, stares out to the desert. There's a pink sunrise and every once in a while a clump of snow on the desert floor.

Marie bumps awake and immediately grooooooans. Then she goes for a cig, fingers in the soft pack, but is out.

MARIE

Shit.

She crumbles the pack, then leans against the side of the bus, stretching on the seat. She studies her broken nails, but her eyes seem vacant and sorrowful. She sits up.

MARIE

Excuse me, can I bum a cig?

MIKE

Me? I don't have any cigarettes.
Sorry.

MARIE

Thanks anyway.

Mike goes back to his book. Marie watches the cactuses whip along the highway outside. They ramble like that for a while, Marie deep in thought, Mike trying to concentrate on the book. Finally:

MARIE

Hey, whatchya readin?

MIKE

Uh "Call of the Wild."

MARIE

"Call a the Wild?" What's that about?

MIKE

Um, it's about this big heroic dog in Alaska.

MARIE

Sounds dumb.

MIKE

No no it's really good.

MARIE

I haven't read a book in ages. Laaaaaast book I read was "That Was Then, This Is Now." Y'ever read that?

MIKE

Yeah. It's pretty good.

MARIE

It was great man. It changed my--I ran away from home then. I was only 14.

MIKE

Oh yeah?

MARIE

Yeah.

MIKE

How old 're you now?

MARIE

17.

MIKE

Oh. Uh, y'still...uh...y'never went back?

MARIE

Oh yeah. I went back. Well, my mom came an' got me.

MIKE

How far'd y'get?

MARIE

I went to my boyfriend's.

Marie suddenly stands and sits next to Michael, forcing him to make room.

MARIE

It's nice and warm back here.

She unzips her jacket, showing a tight sweater.

MIKE

The heater's right here.

MARIE

I'm not botherin' you am I? Go on an' read.

MIKE

No, no, it's ok.

MARIE

So where y'headed?

MIKE

San Jose.

MARIE

(humming)

Do you know the way to San Jose I'm gonna find some peace of mind in San Jose... That's far.

MIKE

Where you headed?

MARIE

Albuquerque.

They're quiet, looking at each other. Mike gets nervous and looks away.

MARIE

(stretching)

These seats are shit. Aren't they?
My back's killin' me.

MIKE

They're ok I guess.

MARIE

Isn't your back killing you?

MIKE

No--it's ok.

MARIE

Man mine's killin'. Would you--I mean, y'don't hafta, but would you give me a little back rub? Jus' a little, ok? Y'don't hafta if you don't want.

MIKE

A back rub?

MARIE

Yeah. Jus' a little one. I mean, if y'don't mind.

She takes off her jacket and lays it on the third seat, scooting closer to Mike.

MARIE

It's ok you don't mind?

MIKE

Uh . . . sure.

She turns her back. He begins to rub it lightly.

MARIE

Oh perfect 'cause my back's jus' killing me.

MIKE

Where does it hurt?

MARIE

Oh jus' all over. Could you rub a little harder?

MIKE

I didn't wanta hurt you.

MARIE

You won't hurt me. Harder, ok?

Mike kind of awkwardly kneads her back.

MARIE

So you live in San Jose.

MIKE

Yeah.

MARIE

California's cool.

(singing)

It never rains in California, but
girl don't they warn ya, it pours,
maaaan it pours. Must be cool to
live in California.

MIKE

Yeah, it's the greatest.

MARIE

Lotta free love in California.

MIKE

I guess.

MARIE

I have a little baby.

MICHAEL

A baby?

MARIE

Uh huh. A little six month old baby.
I had to leave him with my mom in
Amarillo.

MIKE

Where's your husband?

MARIE

(chuckles)

My ol' man split loooooong time ago.
I had t'leave 'im with my mom.

MIKE

That was the same guy you ran away
to?

MARIE

(laughs)

No no. Different guy. But that's why
my breasts are so big, y'know?

MIKE

Um . . .

MARIE

I mean, that's why I mention it.

MIKE

Your, uh, y'know, get big when you have a baby?

MARIE

For the milk, y'know? That's why you guys call 'em milkers.

Marie turns around to Mike and plants his hands right on her breasts. She grabs his crotch and massages it.

FLASHBACK - YOUNG MICHAEL

YOUNG MIKE (O.S.)

How come it feels better down there?

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Here Mike is about 9 years old. He's shirtless, sitting up in bed in a smaller bedroom in yet another, different house than which we've seen.

His mother Nancy lies next to him, under the covers, slightly drunk. She massages his chest and lower stomach, just above his crotch. There's a baseball game on the TV.

NANCY

I dunno. Sexier I guess.

END FLASHBACK

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - BACK TO SCENE

MARIE

How much money y'got?

MIKE

Why?

MARIE

Hmmmmmmmm. Keep rubbin' 'em jus' like that.

She leans onto him and kisses his ear, and whispers:

MARIE

My name's Marie an' I really wanta get it on with you. What's your name?

MIKE

Michael.

MARIE

Y'wanna get it on Michael? I really wanta get it on.

MIKE

Here?

MARIE

Nobody'll know. They're all dead already. We can do it, ok?

MIKE

Well...

MARIE

Ok. I really wanna do it you wanna do it?

MIKE

Um, yeah, sure...

MARIE

Ok. It's jus' gonna cost a little money. Ok?

MIKE

A little money?

MARIE

How much y'got?

MIKE

I don't got any.

MARIE

C'mon, I really wanta get it on with you, but it's gonna cost 20 dollars, ok?

MIKE

I don't got 20 dollars.

MARIE

C'mon hon don't you wanta get it on with me? Keep rubbin' my tits ok?

MIKE

I don't got any money.

MARIE

How much y'got?

MIKE

I got three bucks.

MARIE

C'mon Michael. I'll do it for 10.
I'll give you head for 10 dollars.

Mike doesn't seem to know what that is.

MIKE

I'm sorry but I only got 3 bucks.

MARIE

You really only got 3 bucks?

MIKE

Yeah.

Marie pouts. She takes her hand off Mike's crotch and gently but definitely removes his hands from her breasts.

MARIE

Really . . . ?

MIKE

Yeah.

She plops back in the seat, sighs, rolls her eyes.

MARIE

(singing)

Mother Mary comes to me, speaking
words of wisdom, let it be... Well...

She puts her jacket back on while Mike watches her.

MARIE

Well, it was real nice meeting you
Michael.

She stands. Michael can only stammer out:

MIKE

Nice meeting you!

Mike watches her and her short mini skirt bump down the aisle, pass a few empty seats, then sit next to a long haired dude staring out the window. We can kind of make out: "...'cuse me...cigarette?"

Mike sits up, stretches his neck for a better look. He can see her light up, then talk with the guy. Mike can now see the guy has a beard and mustache.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - ALBUQUERQUE STOP - EARLY AFTERNOON

Mike watches Marie slowly follow other passengers off, followed by the hairy guy.

He watches them drop off the bus, then walk to the station, both smoking. They suddenly part from the other passengers and walk arm and arm around the side of the station and vanish.

Mike keeps watching then SPRINTS off the bus.

He trots around the stop to spy on Marie, but she and the guy have vanished.

INT. ALBUQUERQUE STOP - FOOD LINE

CU - A tuna sandwich slips in Mike's jacket pocket.

Mike goes down the counter and pays 25 cents for Oreos.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - SUNSET

Mike watches the purple Petrified Forest. The sunset is wintry, yellow, with a special desert clarity.

EXT. FLAGSTAFF STOP - LATE NIGHT

The bus rests at the dark and silent stop. Mike walks away from the bus. He looks at the bright, glistening ceiling of brilliant stars and inhales a deep breath of clean, cold, quiet, piney air.

EXT. FLAGSTAFF MOUNTAINS - CONTINUOUS

Mike scrambles up a snowy trail between quiet pines.

EXT. FLAGSTAFF MOUNTAINS - CONTINUOUS

Behind quick, white breaths he scampers out into a clearing quieted by the snow. Down the slope he can see the bus simmering next to the tiny, yellow station.

He looks up to the satin of the sky and like the Indian priests before him marvels at all the worlds up there.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - MORNING

RADIO

A new Gallup poll says the man Americans most admire is President Richard Nixon, for the second year in a row. Number 2 is the Reverend Billy Graham, followed by the just deceased President Harry Truman, Henry Kissinger, Senator Edward Kennedy, then Alabama Governor George Wallace, Vice President Spiro Agnew...

They ride a long while in silence, heading north up the freeway. Again, after a long while:

LOUISE
This is the way to San Francisco.

NANCY
I told you to shut up.

LOUISE
No. Why are we going to San Francisco?

NANCY
Now you listen you and don't give me any back talk. We're going to the airport and you're going to St. Louis.

LOUISE
St. Louis?!

NANCY
I'm putting you on a plane to St. Louis. Grandpa will be waiting for you.

LOUISE
We're not even moving yet!

NANCY
You're going ahead of us.

LOUISE
What did I do?!

NANCY
I know your game you're going to do something to stop us from moving.

LOUISE
I am not I am not!

NANCY
You shut up I'm not falling for any of your games.

LOUISE
(pleading)
I don't got any games.

NANCY
You're probably into drugs and All that kind of stuff--

LOUISE
I am not!

NANCY

And sex you're probably having sex...

LOUISE

Gawd I am not!

NANCY

You're going to St. Louis and that's that. When you get there, Grandpa will be waiting. He's going to take you to live in a home for girls like you.

LOUISE

(bawling)

I didn't DO anything!!

NANCY

We can't have you in the house anymore. You cause too many problems. Everyone agrees. Michael, the girls. I've told Grandma and Grandpa all about you. And you better watch yourself there. They won't stand for any of your shenanigans, I tell you.

Louise weeps, looking out the window.

After a while:

NANCY

(to herself)

My biggest mistake was to have kids.

Louise keeps weeping, and after another period of silence:

LOUISE

I didn't even get to say goodbye to Rene and Stella and Moni . . .

NANCY

You can write them a letter.

Again, they ride in silence, Louise cowering away from Nancy, almost hugging the door. Tears simply stream down her cheeks.

LOUISE

What about all my stuff?

NANCY

You don't need much where you're going. They have beds. Grandpa's going to buy you some new clothes, why I don't know you certainly don't deserve them.

Louise keeps weeping miserably as they ride towards the airport.

INT. SFO GARAGE - LATER

They get out of the car. Nancy stalks around the car to Louise and grips her wrist but Louise yanks it free.

LOUISE
(bawling)
I'm not going!

Nancy grips her wrist like a vise, swats her in the head, and tugs her to the airport.

NANCY
Yes you are! And don't cause a scene
or I'll tell Grandpa all about it.

Nancy tugs Louise through the garage. Louise doesn't fight, but lets herself get tugged along, resigned. They cross the street and enter the terminal. Louise yanks her hand free.

LOUISE
Let go of me I don't want you touching
me!

Nancy just grips her harder and pulls her to the gate.

They reach the ticket taker. The poor woman's taken aback by the crying child. She quickly checks them in and hands Nancy the boarding pass.

Nancy pulls Louise to the seats, makes her sit down, then sits one seat away. Louise keeps crying. She cries in her hands, and moans.

NANCY
(whispering)
Stop crying you're making a scene.
It's just like you to make a scene
in public. And you wonder why I'm
sending you away.

Louise keeps crying. Fed up, Nancy stands.

NANCY
You stay here. I've already told the
guards all about you, so don't try
anything.

Nancy goes to the ticket counter, talks with her fake, cheery smile to the ticket taker. The woman comes back with Nancy to Louise.

NANCY
You can board now.

TICKET TAKER
(trying to be
professionally
cheerful)
Hi. We're ready to seat you now.
I'll take you to the plane.

Louise rises and walks down the boarding tunnel.

TICKET TAKER
Your Grandfather's meeting you at
the gate in St. Louis?

Louise nods.

INT. SFO TERMINAL - LATER

Nancy watches the plane back away from the gate, making sure Louise is still on it. When she's sure Louise is gone, Nancy turns and leaves.

EXT. CONIGLIARI HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Rene knocks on the door. After a while Mike opens it.

RENE
Is Louise here?

MIKE
No man.

Mike comes out, with Sultan following him.

MIKE
She's in St. Louis.

RENE
St. Louis?!!

MIKE
Yeah. My mom took her to the airport
this morning.

RENE
Why?

MIKE
Dunno man. Kicked her outta the house
I guess. She just came back and said
she's in St. Louis.

RENE

Why? What did she do?

MIKE

Dunno man.

Rene stands there in front of Mike totally lost, shaking his head. Tears fill his eyes.

RENE

I don't understand.

All Mike can do is shrug.

EXT. CONIGLIARI HOUSE - NIGHT - RAINING

In a pouring rain Mike rides his bike up the vacant driveway wearing a soaked, muddy football uniform. The house is dark.

INT. GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Mike strips out of his uniform, pulling pads from the pants, and shoves it all in the washer. He sticks his head in the door to the house.

MIKE

Sultan!

Standing there naked but for his jock strap, Mike's pinkish youth is shocking. It's easy to forget, but he really is just a boy.

He whips through the living room and kitchen, through a maze of moving boxes stacked everywhere.

MIKE

Sultan!

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

Mike showers, humming "American Pie."

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Mike, bright and buffed clean, eats leftovers as he hears the car pull up outside. He hears the clap clap clap of footsteps, then the front door opening. Mike hops to the foyer.

MIKE

Sultan!

Nancy and the little girls tip toe in with shopping bags. The girls hide behind their mother.

MIKE

Where's Sultan?

NANCY

Michael now I have something to tell you.

Mike knows the tone in her voice. The little girls race to their room.

NANCY

Don't be mad but we took Sultan to the pound.

MIKE

No!

NANCY

Don't overreact.

MIKE

(menacing)

NO!

NANCY

He couldn't come with us to St. Louis.

MIKE

YOU AND ME ARE GOING RIGHT NOW AN' GET HIM BACK! NOW!

NANCY

Now you know the new place doesn't allow pets.

MIKE

WE'RE GOING NOW!

NANCY

And he was sick and filthy.

MIKE

He was not!

NANCY

They put him to sleep. He was sick, even the pound people said so.

Mike is stunned. His face REDDENS with fury, he clenches his fists, and he wants to kill her.

NANCY

(scared)

And don't you hit me that would be just like you to hit a woman that would make you feel real big hitting a woman.

MIKE

SHUT UP!! SHUT UP!!

He KICKS and SLAMS over boxes, knocks lamps off tables, a picture off the wall, and runs upstairs POUNDING the steps with his bare feet, to his room.

MIKE (O.S.)

NO ONE GOES IN THIS ROOM!!

He SLAMS his door so hard the entire house SHIVERS.

INT. MICHAEL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Mike lays on his bed staring up at the ceiling, almost crying.

But he . . . will . . . not . . . cry . . . he won't he won't . . . he . . . will . . . not . . . cry.

He gets off the bed, leans on some moving boxes at the window, and watches the heavy rain stream down outside.

EXT. STELLA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

It's been raining, but it's now stopped, leaving the ground wet and trees dripping, and a very silent stillness surrounding the homes.

Mike goes around the side and knocks on Stella's window. Stella opens the curtain, shocked and overjoyed to see him.

MIKE

Hey.

STELLA

Wait a second.

Mike returns to the front of the house and soon Stella comes rushing out, putting on a coat. They stop and face each other.

STELLA

Hi.

MIKE

Hey. Look, I just wanted to say that I'm sorry for being a bad boyfriend.

STELLA
(overjoyed)
Oh . . .

She falls in his arms and hugs him tightly. After hesitating, Mike hugs her tightly also. Stella looks up at him, crying with happiness.

MIKE
You're crying.

STELLA
(wiping tears)
It's ok.

MIKE
I never wanted to break up with you.
And, I l...loved you all the time,
from the second I saw you.

Stella buries her face in his chest, crying hard.

STELLA
Me too. From the second I saw you.

Stella looks up to him, then kisses him on the lips. When they break, Mike looks at her shyly.

MIKE
I've never kissed a girl before.

STELLA
(smiles)
It's ok. You're a good kisser.

Mike leads her to the dark park next to her house. They stop near some trees glistening from the street lamps, and Mike paces a little in front of her.

MIKE
Listen, I wanted to tell you
something. My mom drinks a lot. Could
you tell?

Stella very seriously shakes her head no.

MIKE
I thought everyone knew.

STELLA
No. Nobody's ever said anything.

MIKE
I've never told anybody. Anybody.
(MORE)

MIKE (CONT'D)

And...that's it. It's embarrassing. Things are just messed up. I see your family, your mom and dad, and, well, we're not the Partridge family.

STELLA

Nobody is, Mike.

MIKE

Some are. Or they're close. She would hit Louise a lot.

STELLA

What did she do?

MIKE

I dunno.

STELLA

My dad said there was something going on in your family, and it was probably because you didn't have a father.

MIKE

(shaking his head)

We've never had a dad. He left when I was like four. I don't even know what it's like to have a dad. That's no big deal.

STELLA

Well maybe it is a big deal.

MIKE

Nah. When I was younger, a little kid, I guess, I was just embarrassed, y'know, at baseball games and stuff, not having a dad. But it's no big deal. Anyway, that's it. I've never told anybody, and don't tell anyone, ok?

STELLA

I won't.

MIKE

Not even Rene, or anybody.

STELLA

Ok.

Stella goes to him and hugs him, and they kiss again.

STELLA

Is she, um, drinking right now?

MIKE

Probably. Actually, probably not. She's pulled a fast one. We're moving tomorrow, not next month.

STELLA

Tomorrow?!

Mike nods.

STELLA

You're supposed to move after Christmas!

MIKE

She pulled a fast one. She told us tonight. We're flying tomorrow.

STELLA

But we were gonna do a party for you, and...are you gonna even say goodbye to Rene and Moni and everybody?

MIKE

I'm supposed to say goodbye at the bus stop tomorrow.

STELLA

What about school? All our finals?

MIKE

She's talked to the school and they're just gonna give me the grades I have now, and transfer 'em to the new school. I guess it's ok with them.

STELLA

You're just going? Tomorrow? Forever?

MIKE

There's a big party my Grandparents throw every year, and she wants to go. She says she can get a piano job from it.

They hug tightly.

STELLA

It just doesn't seem real.

They hug tightly for a while. Then Stella takes Mike's hands and places them on her breasts. Mike looks shocked at her.

STELLA

(giggles)

Look at you. I want you to.

They kiss again as Mike feels her breasts.

STELLA

Oh Mike, I wanted to do this ever since I saw you.

They kiss and make out and feel each other's bodies.

STELLA

We can't go all the way ok. I'm not ready for that.

MIKE

Ok.

STELLA

But when the time comes I want it to be you.

She hugs him for dear life.

STELLA

Oh God Michael how are we ever going to?! You're going away! You're going away forever!

MIKE

No. Not forever. We'll go to college together.

STELLA

Ok!

MIKE

We'll write all the time, and we'll pick a college together.

STELLA

Yes! And maybe you can come out in the summer.

MIKE

Yeah!

STELLA

You can stay in Rene's room. And Louise can come to the same college.

(MORE)

STELLA (CONT'D)

We'll all go to the same college and room together! We'll all be together again. And we'll be older, and we can do what we want.

MIKE

That's what we'll do! Ok. It's settled.

EXT. STELLA'S BUS STOP - MORNING

Mike and Stella hug tightly as all the other kids board the bus and say goodbye to Mike. Finally, Stella has to go too. She hugs Mike one more time, then turns and climbs in the bus.

Mike has to turn away because tears are bursting from his eyes. He doesn't want the other kids to see, and tries to fight them, but he simply can't stop them. As the bus chugs away he goes to a private area in the park and tries to stop crying.

INT. CAB - LATER

The moving truck heads off, towing their car. Nancy sits in the front of the cab, Mike in back with his little sisters. He watches his house and the neighborhood as they drive away.

END FLASHBACK

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - NIGHT

Mike stares out the window to big, bright Los Angeles. As the bus turns city street corners, he stares at bums laying against the piss triangles on the walls, bums drunk and yelling at other bums, all the dump that is Skid Row LA.

The bus enters the station, chugging past the sign "WELCOME TO LOS ANGELES," while the exhaust coughs all over the sign.

INT. LA BUS STATION - NIGHT

Mike descends from his warm home of the last four days, filing with the rest of the passengers into the station like a bunch of prisoners.

Inside, it's smelly and loud and packed with aimless commotion. All the country's poor and hopeless seem to be crammed in here. Kids like Michael, flower children, along with raggy, foul bums wander around, stuff plastic chairs watching TV for 25 cents, or lay against the walls.

INT. TICKET DESK - LATER

MIKE

How much for a ticket to San Jose?

CLERK

Nine dollars.

Mike leaves the desk and wanders through the scary life forms, some eyeing him as fresh runaway meat.

EXT. LA BUS STATION - NIGHT

Mike stands on the sidewalk. LA is mountains of steal, much bigger than San Jose, even St. Louis. Near, on the street, there's pawn shops, taco stands, "BAIL BONDS," eyes staring from dark doorways . . .

INT. LA BUS STATION - NIGHT

Mike approaches a white bum with big, fresh scabs on his face.

MIKE

Got a dollar for a poor kid?

BUM

Whatchya sellin'?

MIKE

Nothin'. I'm askin' y'for a dollar, or anything.

BUM

Suck my dick asswipe or get lost.

Mike wanders away, then scoots by SECURITY rousting a drunk sleeping against the wall.

INT. LA BUS STATION - NIGHT

Mike sits in a chair, staring blankly, wondering what the hell to do. Behind him, on the wall, there's a poster of Wilt Chamberlain dunking the ball for the Lakers.

INT. LA BUS STATION - PIN BALL MACHINES - NIGHT

Mike sneaks down the line of machines, sticking his grimy fingers in the coin returns, but finds zip. They've all been cleaned out long ago by many, many kids.

INT. LA BUS STATION - LATE NIGHT

Mike sleeps in one of the hard plastic chairs.

INT. LA BUS STATION - BATHROOM - MORNING

Mike takes a piss while a couple of old derelicts eye him. One creeps up to him.

DERELICT
How ya doin' kid?

MIKE
Get lost asshole.

DERELICT
Ya hungry?

Finishing pissing:

MIKE
Get lost.

Mike storms out the bathroom.

INT. LA BUS STATION - CAFETERIA - DAY

Mike peeks at the security guard sitting over the food line, watching every little move. He looks Mike's way, and Mike quickly backs out of the cafeteria.

INT. LA BUS STATION - AFTERNOON

Mike sits in a chair. Entire loss and futility cloud his face. He takes out the Caesars postcard and holds it with a kid's pure hope.

INT. LA BUS STATION - EVENING

A tall, skinny, Superfly kind of dude named LEROY sits next to Mike.

LEROY
Where youse headed kid?

MIKE
San Jose.

LEROY
Oh yeah? Family's up there huh?

MIKE
...a yep...

LEROY
Y'need money kid?

MIKE
I don't need no money.

LEROY

Yeah you do.

MIKE

I don't need none alright?

LEROY

Nuttin' to be worry 'bout kid all I's know is you be here for two days an' y'ain't goin' nowheres. That's no problem, huh? Look kid, between you an' me I work this area an' I see lotta kids li' you an' I's get em some dough. That's oll. Nuttin' big 'bout it.

MIKE

Give me six bucks then.

LEROY

(laughs head off)

Ohhhhh ho I can git you mo' than Six bucks man I can git you's lot mo' 'n six bucks. Y'come wit me an' I'll git you lot more'n six bucks.

MIKE

Doin' what?

LEROY

Y'come work fo' me I gots lotta kids li' you. You do a little work and I'll git y'some dough.

MIKE

Forget it man.

LEROY

Reeeeeal easy shit man lotta kids work with me. Helps 'em out y'know?

MIKE

No thanks alright?

LEROY

My name's L'roy an' I wan you's t'think 'bout it alright man? It's real easy work man an' y'll git some money an' b'able t'git outta hehhhhh. Soun' nice? Soun' ni', don't it? Y'jus' think 'bout it an' I'll be 'round if you change your mind, alright? Y'jus come lookin' for Leeeeeroy an' you'll find me. Deal man?

MIKE

Deal.

Leroy gets up on yellow platform shoes.

LEROY

Y'look li' a good kid an' I wanna help y'out ok but y'know y'gotta do some work fo' it an' I'll help y'out that's ways. Ok? Y'help me an' I help you. Ok?

MIKE

Ok.

LEROY

See ya latah keep the power man.

INT. LA BUS STATION - NIGHT

Alone, starving and filthy, Mike hunts all around the travelers looking for the slightest opening to lift something.

INT. LA BUS STATION - PIN BALL MACHINES - NIGHT

Mike squeezes the coin returns but already knows he's gonna find jack. A mouse nosed old cripple who works the newspaper stand watches him.

INT. LA BUS STATION - MIDNIGHT

Mike starves in the a plastic chair. A white, tough 18 year old named TONY suddenly plops down next to him.

TONY

Hey kid I heard you were talkin' with Leroy a while.

MIKE

So.

TONY

Hey man he's a good guy that's all. Y'know he helps people out that's all. That's all I wanted t'say.

MIKE

Fine.

TONY

Where y'headed?

Mike takes out "Call of the Wild," trying to sign him off.

MIKE

Up north.

TONY

Listen kid y'ain't so special. Ok?
I mean lotta kids come through here
an' we help 'em out, ok? Get 'em
some dough, get 'em a pad, some grass,
whatever. Leroy's a cool dude man
an' he's willin' to help ya. He helps
lotta guys like you.

MIKE

Yeah, for what?

TONY

Well, whadaya do?

MIKE

Forget it man.

TONY

All I'm sayin' is is Leroy's a real
cool dude an' he can help y'out.
Y'ain't gonna be the first he helped
out and y'ain't gonna be the last.

MIKE

He send you over here?

TONY

I work with Leroy ok an' we're jus'
here t'help, y'know, like an agency,
like a govment agency, y'know?

MIKE

Ok an' what if I do go work with
Leroy whatta I gotta do?

TONY

Well, y'know, let Leroy explain all
that stuff. I wanta let him tell ya.
I jus' work for him, y'know? Y'wanna
go talk to him? He's around. Y'wanna
go talk with him?

MIKE

No thanks man.

TONY

He'll talk with you man. Let's go
talk with 'im. Can't hurt t'talk,
right?

MIKE

No thanks I'll pass man.

TONY

Well listen kid things get rough you
come talk with us, ok? My name's
Tony. Stony Tony. And we'll be around.
Ok? See ya later.

MIKE

Yeah.

Tony disappears into the shuffling mass. Mike puts his book back in his pocket and meanders about, then reaches the news rack which the old cripple is closing by pulling down the metal gate. Mike goes to help, hoping for some dough out of it.

MIKE

Here let me get that!

The cripple is really just a small, very jittery old wrinkled man with cerebral palsy. His old, trembling hands are black from newspaper ink.

AL

Eh eh thanks sonny.

Mike slams home the gate. Al locks it after several shaky tries at slipping the lock through the bars.

MIKE

No problem. Hey, y'got any money to
help out man? I'm real broke.

AL

Um um um well I don't know...

MIKE

Jus' anything man. I'm hurtin'.

AL

Well um gees I really don't but a
you shouldn't y'know be hangin' 'round
heeeeeere y'know. Um I work with a
this church a a near here an' an' we
can get you um a meal an' an' a
showeeeeere would that be ok?

MIKE

Well...

AL

You um really a shouldn't be a a
hangin' 'round heeeeeere, y'know?

MIKE

Well, yeah. Ok. Where is it?

Al stumbles to the exit.

AL

Um it's a a a this way um jus' couple blocks a a down Broadwaaaaaaay.

They slowly struggle out the door.

EXT. LA BUS STATION - MIDNIGHT

AL

Ah I saws you talkin' to a that kid.

MIKE

Yeah.

AL

An' a well a you should jus' stay way of 'em a y'know? They a no good, y'know?

MIKE

Uh huh. What's this church about man?

They reach the corner and wait for the light.

AL

Well um y'know they a help out, for a free, y'know . . . but . . .

The light turns and they start across Broadway.

AL

. . . but . . . um I could a give you a some money, a y'know, um um you a let me jack y'off an' an' I'll a give you ten dollahs.

Michael stops in the middle of the street.

MIKE

What you say?

AL

(honestly hopeful)
A a y'know you I'll jack y'off an' I'll give you ten dollahs.

MIKE

Oh man fuck you man.

Mike just turns right around there and leaves Al twitching in the middle of Broadway.

INT. LA BUS STATION - LATE NIGHT

Mike mopes around, eyeing luggage and hand bags, but then plops in a chair.

MIKE (O.S.)

I know I'm an atheist. I've said it, and stick by it, because you're so fucked. But if you're up there, get me outta this. Jus' get me outta this. I'll believe in you an' everything, an' do what everyone says you should do, if you jus' get me outta this...somethin'...show me somethin'...

EXT. LA BUS STATION - LATE NIGHT

LONG SHOT - Tony lounges against the wall, toking a cig with his finger and thumb. The wall is bright and dirty white; the reflecting glares of passing headlights bounce around like prison search lights. Mike reaches him and they talk. Tony nods. With a sharp finger he flicks the cigarette quickly in the street.

TONY (O.S.)

Oh man don' worry man it's real easy shit I done it fuck tons a times it's a good deal man you're doin' the right thing.

EXT. 6TH STREET - CONTINUOUS

LONG SHOT - Mike and Tony dodge trash and bums down 6th.

TONY (O.S.)

Yeah! Yeah! Shit it's practically all chicks man rich old chicks wantin' young boys y'know? Y'know, maybe a few guys--

MIKE (O.S.)

Hey man NO guys!

They climb into a crumbling, boarded up brick flop house.

TONY (O.S.)

Yeah! Yeah man! No fags man it's all cunt man trust me. Leroy'll set y'up nice.

INT. ROOM - LATE NIGHT

Mike and Tony stand before Leroy, who's drippy and stoned on a chewed up couch, passing a needle to one of two sweet 12 year old girls in panties who are also numbly sprawled on the couch.

LEROY

(slow)

Oh man what you 'fraid a man it's no
hassle jus' take off your pants man.

In a corner another kid slaps a poor, helpless mongrel, and yells at him.

LEROY

...jus' take 'em off...

(to girl)

...baby help Mikey with his pants...

The wigged out girl jumps up, stumbles to Mike as Leroy unbuckles his own pants.

LEROY

She'll do you nice man she's goooooood.
She'll show you.

Tony holds out a doobie.

TONY

This'll help ya Mikey.

The girl fumbles stupidly for Mike's pants. And the kid now is going with a STICK to the dog.

TONY

G'head.

LEROY

Y'ever done a guy Mikey..? Y'mi'
hafta fo' this kin' a dough.

TONY

Jus' t'start y'know, like a test.
(offering doobie)
Go on.

Mike shakes his head. And the kid SMACKS the cowering dog with the stick. The girl struggles with Mike's belt.

LEROY

...is ok Mikey jus' go wit it man
let it hang out...trust me man...

Leroy now feels himself in his open crotch, and he takes the other girls head down to it. And the asshole kid HITS the whimpering dog AGAIN.

Mike SMACKS the girl off his pants. LEAPS to the kid and grabs the stick.

MIKE
STOP IT FUCKER!!

He CRACKS the stoned kid with the stick, knocking him back.

Tony moves to him.

LEROY
Oh man.

Mike swings for Tony.

MIKE
GET AWAY FROM ME!!

TONY
Hey jus' calm down!

MIKE
GET AWAY!!

Mike reaches for the dog's collar to take him out of there but the dog snarls at him with fierce fangs. Mike backs away from the dog, shocked.

The flat eared dog snaps and yaps at him. The kid moves to Mike, and Tony moves to him.

LEROY
Oh sheeeeeeeeit Mikey...

TONY
It's ok!

MIKE
(swinging stick)
GET AWAY FROM ME!!

He sprints to the door, swinging the stick, keeping them away.

TONY
You fuckin' asshole!

LEROY
Fuck 'im, fuuuuuuuck 'im. Get outta
heh you bad man you a mistake get
outta hehhhhh.

Michael escapes out the door.

LEROY

You a loser kid you a wrong thing
man!!

EXT. FLOP HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Mike SMASHES out the door. Cackling things warm themselves at a sidewalk fire. Mike sprints down 6th, holding the stick.

INT. LA BUS STATION - NIGHT

Mike sits in the plastic chairs next to a fat woman and her little kids. Suddenly, one of the kids sprints away and the woman chases after him, leaving her hand bag on the chair with a ticket sticking out of it.

Mike instantly grabs the ticket and stuffs it in his pocket. He pauses for a moment, acting cool and normal, then casually gets up and quickly walks away.

INT. LA BUS STATION - BATHROOM

In a stall Mike opens the ticket then slams the door with his open palm in fierce joy.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - MORNING

Mike shows the ticket to the driver and is waved on. He again sits in the back seats, ready to MOVE, bouncing in the seats like a little kid.

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS - MORNING

It plows up the 101 north out of LA.

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS - LATER (DAY)

The bus drives up the beautiful coast on the 101.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - DAY

The bus pulls in the Santa Barbara stop.

DRIVER (O.S.)

Santa Barbara. 15 minutes.

Mike watches the bus driver jump down the steps.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - 15 MINUTES LATER

The bus driver far up in front climbs in his seat. Mike watches him, but the driver's forgetting to check tickets.

He closes the doors, and starts backing out, and Mike SLAPS the back of the seat in front of him.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - AFTERNOON

Mike smiles quietly at the familiar Northern California green hills and eucalyptus trees.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - SALINAS STOP - AFTERNOON

Mike fakes sleeping in the seats. The bus driver taps his shoulders.

BUS DRIVER
Excuse me. Excuse me.

Mike fakes like he's waking up.

BUS DRIVER
Ticket please.

Mike fishes out the ticket.

BUS DRIVER
(incredulous)
This is only good for Santa Barbara!

MIKE
No way, it's s'posed to be to San Jose.

BUS DRIVER
Well this ticket's only good for Santa Barbara. You're going to have to get off the bus.

Mike gets up. The bus driver follows him down the aisle.

MIKE
Aw gees there must be some mix up y'know I'm s'posed to be going to San Jose.

BUS DRIVER
You'll have to work that out with the ticket agent, but I can't let you on the bus no more.

Mike leaps off the bus.

INT. SALINAS STOP - TICKET WINDOW - CONTINUOUS

He sprints to the ticket window.

MIKE

How much to San Jose?

TICKET AGENT

Two fifty.

MIKE

Great! Here!

He throws his \$3 on the counter.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - MOMENTS LATER

Mike LEAPS back in the bus just as the driver was closing the doors. He shows him the ticket.

BUS DRIVER

Yeah, well, y'should've paid for Santa Barbara to Salinas, but, ok.

Mike heads to his back seats but they're taken by a young couple. He sits in the middle of the bus, at a window.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS ON 101 - DUSK

Mike sees the highway sign: "CAPITOL EXPRESSWAY ½ MILE."

He sprints to the driver.

MIKE

Hey excuse me can you let me off at the Capitol Expressway it's real close to my house and I can jus' walk there?

BUS DRIVER

Well, we're not supposed to stop, but . . . ok.

EXT. CAPITOL EXPRESSWAY AT 101 - DUSK

The bus lumbers back on 101 leaving Mike to stand on the side of the Expressway and look at the moist hills he used to look at from his old window a few weeks earlier, but a lifetime away.

EXT. CAPITOL EXPRESSWAY - DUSK

Mike walks in a slight drizzle, passing new subdivisions. Everything is very dark green and moist. The hills are full of dark green, wild grass. The trunks and branches of the oaks are wet and blacker.

EXT. SUBDIVISION STREET AT CAPITOL - DUSK

Mike, dripping now with his long hair matted, turns off Capitol and walks towards his subdivision.

EXT. OLD CONIGLIARI HOUSE - DUSK

The house looks strange. It has a stranger's car in the driveway and a toy wagon on the porch. The lights are on. The yard is the same. The house the same. But it's not his home any more and he can't go inside. Mike walks away from the house.

EXT. STELLA'S HOUSE - DUSK

Mike raps on Stella's window.

MIKE
(whispering)
Stella? Stella?

There's no response. He raps again.

MIKE
Stella?

Suddenly MRS. DELANEY (Stella's mom) rips open the curtains.

MRS. DELANEY
MICHAEL!

MIKE
Mrs. Delaney! Now don't you do
anything I jus' wanna see Stella.

MRS. DELANEY
Your mother's been calling everyday!
Your Grandparents too!

MIKE
Big deal! Where's Stella?

MRS. DELANEY
She's out roller skating. Come in
everybody's worried sick over you!

MIKE
Not a chance! Don't try anything!

Mike backs away and walks quickly around the house. Mrs. Delaney comes racing out the front door.

MRS. DELANEY
Michael! Michael!! Wait a minute!

MIKE

Stay away from me don't try anything!

MRS. DELANEY

You look like a ragamuffin! Please, come inside. Take a shower. I'll fix you something to eat.

MIKE

When is she coming back?

MRS. DELANEY

Pretty soon. She's due back any minute. Come inside. You can wait for her inside.

MIKE

Sorry Mrs. Delaney LATER!

MRS. DELANEY

Wait! Michael! Please!! I won't tell anybody you were here! It'll be our secret!

Mike was beginning to race to the park, but then stops and turns to her.

MRS. DELANEY

Please. Stella would so like to see you...

MIKE

Promise? Do you promise?

MRS. DELANEY

Yes, I promise.

MIKE

You won't tell my mom or anything? I'm trusting you.

MRS. DELANEY

I won't tell anybody. I promise.

Mike tentatively approaches her.

MRS. DELANEY

You have to take a shower. And I'll wash your clothes. Before they get back.

INT. SHOWER -- LATER

Michael vigorously scrubs his hair.

INT. DELANEY KITCHEN -- LATER

Michael sits at the kitchen table, wrapped in a blanket, his hair still wet. Mrs. Delaney brings him a sandwich. He POUNCES on it and devours it, almost violently.

MRS. DELANEY

(laughing)

I'll make you another... So, why did you run away?

MIKE

Well, y'know. I'm going to Las Vegas!

MRS. DELANEY

Las Vegas? Have you ever been to Las Vegas?

MIKE

No, but it's the greatest town. It's like a gold mining town.

He scrambles through his mountain man jacket that's piled on the chair, pulls out the Caesars Palace postcard.

MIKE

This is Caesars Palace. Isn't it great?!

MRS. DELANEY

I've been there. Don't you care that your mother and Grandparents are worried sick over you?

MIKE

No. Yeah, my Grandma. I'll write her.

Mrs. Delaney brings him another sandwich just as there's a knock at the door. Michael rushes and opens it.

Two cops face him.

COP

That's 'im.

Mike spins to sprint away, but the cops immediately grab him.

COP

Now hold on big fella!

Mike tries to whack him and squirm away, but the cops easily secure him, tackle him to the floor, and cuff him.

MRS. DELANEY

You have to go with them Michael.

COP

I'm gonna say this once Mikey and you're gonna get it straight the first time y'got me? You aren't givin' us any trouble. We're taking you down to juvee hall and tomorrow you're gettin' on a plane back to your Grandpa. Ma'am, do you have his clothes?

MIKE

I at least wanta see Stella!

MRS. DELANEY

I'll tell Stella you were here. You have to go back to your mother. You belong with your mother.

EXT. DELANEY HOUSE -- LATER

The cop pushes Mike's head down and shoves him in the back of the patrol car. Right away Mike tries to get his way out, but finds there's no handles on the doors. The cops get in the car, and pull down the street.

A car approaches the opposite way. In it is Stella's dad, Rene, Moni, and Stella in the back, with the Big Man on Campus guy Acosta, sitting next to her.

Mike locks eyes with Stella as their cars pass each other. Stella looks shocked to see him, then suddenly embarrassed. Mike rips around and sits alone in the back of the cop car, leaning against the door so he doesn't sit on his cuffed hands.

INT. DELANEY KITCHEN -- LATER

Mrs. Delaney finds the Caesars Palace post card under her kitchen table, picks it up, and tosses it in the trash under the sink.

INT. JUVENILE HALL JAIL CELL - NIGHT

Mike lays on the lower cot, still wearing his leather jacket, and playing with an ORANGE WRIST BAND that I.d.s him as a non-violent prisoner.

Suddenly he fishes in his pockets. He takes out his two paperbacks. He keeps fishing around, checks all his pants pockets, then gives up looking for the Caesars postcard.

MIKE

Shit.

INT. JUVEE HALL - PUBLIC AREA - NIGHT

Mike wanders to the TV room that's occupied by a bunch of Mexican, black and white scrawny little tough kids he doesn't get along with. On the TV a News Break flashes, and a photo of Roberto Clemente fills the screen:

TV

A plane carrying baseball star Roberto Clemente has crashed in the Atlantic Ocean.

Michael watches the TV in shock.

EXT. ST. LOUIS HIGHWAY - ABOUT A MONTH LATER - DAY

Mike rides his bike along the highway. The day is gray and terribly frigid, cloudy and drab. Mike wears the old leather mountain man jacket that survived the adventure across the South and West United States.

EXT. HOME FOR PROBLEM GIRLS - DAY

Mike and Louise walk from the large house to the brown and gray grounds. The trees are bare, and icy frost makes the grass crunch under their steps. Up at the house several teenage girls lounge around and smoke.

Mike and Louise stop where they can be alone. Louise takes out cigarettes and lights one. She is very jittery and lost and nervous, as she was at the start of the story.

MIKE

When'd you start smoking?

LOUISE

It's ok. Why are you here?

MIKE

They said you tried to kill yourself.

LOUISE

How'd you find out?

MIKE

Well obviously they're gonna call us.

LOUISE

They told Grandma and Grandpa?

Mike nods.

LOUISE

Well, they say anything?

MIKE

They just shook their heads. Y'know. They don't say much. Somethin' like "what are they gonna do with you." Mama said it was just like you to pull a stunt like that. Anyway, they're not gonna take you outta here.

Louise wraps herself in her arms and nods quickly.

MIKE

What's it like here?

LOUISE

It's ok. I don't know the other people. I don't talk to them much.

MIKE

Do you have classes?

LOUISE

Yeah.

Louise slowly paces around, looking at the ground.

LOUISE

Mama said you said I should be kicked out too.

MIKE

Are you crazy? It was a surprise to all of us.

LOUISE

Really?

MIKE

Yeah. She jus' came home an' said you were in St. Louis. You shoulda seen Rene he practically cried.

LOUISE

(brightens)
He did?

MIKE

You shoulda seen him. He came over looking for you that day an' I told him an' he almost cried.

Louise smiles, but slowly her smile fades away.

LOUISE
Well, that's all over.

 MIKE
No it's not.

 LOUISE
Yeah it is.

 MIKE
No. We're supposed to go to college
together. Me an' Stella talked about
it.

 LOUISE
That won't happen. It's over. That's
not gonna last. They'll find other
people--

 MIKE
Shut up.

Louise slowly walks around, arms wrapped around herself again,
smoking, shaking her head.

 LOUISE
That's just a dream that's never
gonna come true.

Mike paces, and after a while:

 MIKE
I know.

They're quiet for awhile. Then Louise says without looking
at him:

 LOUISE
I've been talking to our father.

 MIKE
How'd you find him?

 LOUISE
Talked to his parents. Our
Grandparents. They're still in St.
Louis. But he's in Pennsylvania.
We've got a whole side of the family
we don't even know about.

 MIKE
What'd he say?

LOUISE

Not much. He's got another wife and two kids. Our half sister and brother. Do you want to talk with him?

MIKE

No waaaaaaaay.

LOUISE

He wants to talk with you.

MIKE

I'm not having anything to do with that guy. Is he gonna take you in?

LOUISE

No.

Louise puts out her cigarette and lights another. Her hands shake when she lights the cigarette.

MIKE

Geesus Louise will you stop smoking?

LOUISE

You can't order me around anymore.

Mike suddenly grips her wrist, takes the cigarette from her fingers and flings it away.

LOUISE

I'm jus' gonna smoke when you're gone!

MIKE

Don't do it. Ok? Jus' don't do it. Even when I'm gone.

Louise backs away a little, going to her own little world.

LOUISE

Or what? Y'gonna pound me?

MIKE

I don't hit girls anymore.

He paces around her a little bit.

MIKE

Listen, did ya do anything, something I don't know about?

LOUISE

No.

MIKE

Why did she kick you out?

LOUISE

(vacantly)

I don't know. I don't know.

Tears fill her eyes, and she fishes for another cigarette.

EXT. ST. LOUIS HIGHWAY -- LATER

Mike rides his bike along the highway as dusk falls. The cars are stuck in rush hour traffic. Mike passes them as he peddles along the breakdown lane.

EXT. ST. LOUIS PUBLIC LIBRARY -- NIGHT

Mike wheels up to a bike rack in front of the large, old library.

INT. ST. LOUIS PUBLIC LIBRARY -- MOMENTS LATER

Mike looks through a card catalogue, writes down a call number.

INT. ST. LOUIS PUBLIC LIBRARY -- MOMENTS LATER

Mike searches through the tall stacks, finds a large, old picture book.

INT. ST. LOUIS PUBLIC LIBRARY -- MOMENTS LATER

Mike plops down in the far, remote corner of the library, sitting on the floor, and opens the book.

It's a picture book of Las Vegas. He turns through the pages of old photos of Vegas over the years, as it's been built up.

Finally he finds a color one of Caesars Palace, of the blue fountains, which resembles Billy's postcard he'd lost.

Mike clears his throat loudly, coughs several times, as he TEARS THE PAGE out of the book, quickly folding it and shoving it in his jacket pocket.

EXT. ST. LOUIS HIGHWAY -- NIGHT

Mike peddles his bike in the break down lane. Flakes of snow have started to fall.

EXT. NEW SUBDIVISION HOUSE -- NIGHT

Mike wheels up to their new house in St. Louis' suburbs. But now it's late, and the snow has started to stick to the brown grass.

Mike opens the garage door, parks his bike along the wall. Nancy's car is gone.

INT. NEW SUBDIVISION HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

Mike rips through the house. Moving boxes still line the walls. Some items like plates have been unpacked, lay in stacks on the floor.

He passes the living room, where his two littlest sisters watch the Brady Bunch on TV. He doesn't say anything to them.

He goes down to the basement.

In the basement, Mike enters his room. The door was closed. He closes it behind him, flips on the light.

There are all his things: his bed, his old wood desk.

Mike takes a wood box from a drawer in the desk. Inside, he's placed the orange juvee hall wrist band. Underneath are Willie Mays and Willie McCovey SF Giants baseball cards.

He takes out the picture of Caesars Palace, unfolds it, looks at it for a short moment. Then he folds it again, neatly, and places it in the box.

Removing his leather jacket, he sits at his desk. An algebra text book was laying open. He picks up where he left off on his homework, writing equations on his homework paper.

THE END