



by Daniel Knauf

TEASER

FADE IN:

INT. RANCH HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAWN

RICO CRUZ, mid-30s, been-there-done-that street-handsome with strong features and intense dark-brown eyes. He lies in bed staring at the ceiling, totally at peace.

CRUZ (V.O.)  
This is why we draw breath. The  
clean, cold light of a new day.  
The tart scent of dew on freshly  
cut grass. A warm bed...

He turns toward someone OS.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
... a beautiful wife.

JOLIE CRUZ, early-30s, effortlessly exquisite. Angelic in sleep. Cruz reaches for her. Hesitates, unwilling to break the moment. Then Jolie opens her cornflower blue eyes. A sleepy smile.

JOLIE  
'morning, Rico.

They kiss, passion growing.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAWN

CLOSE ON FRYING PAN as eggs are cracked over simmering *chilaquiles*. Morning BIRD-SONG tiptoes over the pleasant static rising from the pan.

CRUZ (V.O.)  
Fresh tortillas, salsa, *huevos*.  
Breakfast for two. In bed, I  
think.

CRUZ - stands at the range, cloaked in a white terry-cloth robe. He takes a sip of black coffee. OS, a soft NICKERING. He gazes out the window.

HIS POV - Low chaparral, stables, a split-rail training ring. A gorgeous dapple-grey MARE, soft steam curling from her nostrils as she grazes. She raises her head, shudders off the cold and looks at us with big wise brown eyes.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
 This is a blessed thing. This is a  
 simple life.

CRUZ - completely blissed out.

ALEX  
 What the hell are you doing here?

He turns. Oh, shit.

ALEJANDRA "ALEX" CRUZ - 15 years old, wears a tartan Catholic girls-school uniform, a navy blue beret and an expression of white-hot pubescent outrage.

CRUZ - busted, a pained expression on his face.

CRUZ (V.O.)  
 Unfortunately, this is *not* my life.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. RANCH HOUSE - DAWN

Cruz hustles out the front door in his skivvies, his clothes and shoes bundled against his stomach. In hot pursuit, Alex brandishes the frying-pan, SHOUTS:

ALEX  
 Stay away from us or we call the  
 cops!

Rattled, Cruz stuffs his clothes through the drivers-side window of a battered tow-truck, the door marked *NoHo Rod & Customs*. He tugs at a length of hanger-wire looped around the handle, holding the door shut.

CRUZ  
 (muttering)  
 Damn it...

ALEX  
 We'll get a restraining order!  
 They'll throw you back in jail  
 where you belong!

CRUZ  
 (mustering dignity)  
 Now... now, see here, young lady.  
 I'm still your father--

*Oh shit!* He barely manages to dodge the HURLED FRYING PAN as it SLAMS the door of the truck, spattering a nasty swath of *chilaquiles*.

ALEX - glares at him through narrowed eyes, snarls:

ALEX  
Not anymore, you sonofabitch.

Jolie steps out in her nightgown. She places a calming hand on her daughter's shoulder. Alex turns, furious...

ALEX  
How *could* you?!

... and storms back into the house. Jolie gives Rico a helpless look.

Cruz - Deadpans her. FREEZE FRAME. A SUPER slides into frame with a SCREECH OF RUBBER. BANG!

SUPER: *ENRICO CRUZ*

CRUZ (V.O.)  
My name is Rico Cruz and *this* is my  
life.

CRASH CUT TO:

EXT. LANKERSHIM BLVD. - DAY

WAR'S "LOW RIDER" struts over a DRIVE-BY SEQUENCE PANNING small, colorful storefronts at the ass-end of The Valley: *mariscos* joints, liquor stores, dive bars and strip-malls.

CRUZ (V.O.)  
Lankershim. Saticoy. Sherman Way.  
Vanowen. This is where I live.  
This is Los Angeles.

CRUZ - behind the wheel of his tow-truck, leisurely checking out his world.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
Note, if you will, the absence of  
white-sand beaches, of red carpet  
runways and beautiful starlets.

HIS POV - LATINOS shopping, waiting at bus-stops, hanging out in front of Sherwin-Williams for day-work, drying cars at the hand-wash, then...

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
Oh wait! There's a palm tree!

THE MUSIC BREAKS and a HEAVENLY CHOIR SINGS A DRAWN CHORD as we SLOWLY PASS a tall, stately PALM TREE. It takes a second to notice the ANTENNA GRID camouflaged by PLASTIC FRONDS.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
Sorry. Just a cell tower.

CONTINUE "LOW RIDER" as we glide by pocket auto-shops with names like *Vern's Auto-Body*, *Fajardo's Tires*, *Nacho's Auto Upholstery*, and *Armando's Wheel & Tires*.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
Everybody thinks they're some kind of an expert on L.A. cuz they've seen about three percent of it on TV. Hell, you'd have to live here, like, twenty years to even *begin* to get a clue. But that doesn't stop them from trashing the place. Like Gertrude Stein. You know what she said?

CUT TO:

A GRIM STILL - of Gertrude Stein. Woof.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
"There is no there, there."

BACK TO:

CRUZ - behind the wheel of his tow-truck, looking out the windshield with no small amount of pride and pleasure.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
Okay, okay. She was talking about Oakland. But everybody *thinks* she was talking about Los Angeles. Which proves my point. Most people don't know crap about my hometown. There's loads of there, here! For instance...

HIS SIDE-VIEW MIRROR - A brown Crown Vic maintains a prudent distance behind him.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
... there's that joker in the Crown  
Vic who's been tailing me on-and-  
off for the last three weeks.  
Who's *he* working for?

A musing grin traces Cruz's lips. He answers ALOUD:

CRUZ  
Ahh, sweet mysteries of life.

END TEASER

ACT 1

EXT. NOHO ROD & CUSTOM - DAY

Cruz swings his tow-truck past a chain-link fence into the front lot. Rusting, sun-bleached parts-cars are parked fender-to-fender, bumper-to-bumper.

INT. NOHO ROD & CUSTOM - SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Well organized, clean where it needs to be. Spare parts line the walls along with old license-plates and local memorabilia. LOS LOBOS PLAYS on the boom-box. A freshly-painted, yellow 1970 PLYMOUTH ROADRUNNER dominates the bay.

Cruz saunters in, jacket slung over his shoulder, a dreamy I-got-righteously-laid smile on his face.

CRUZ

*Chuy, mi hermano!*

CHUY VILLASENOR - Mid-30s, rough looking, built like a fire-plug, lies prone on a creeper. He gives Cruz a look, then TURNS UP THE RADIO and scoots under the Plymouth.

Cruz shrugs, continues past and glances affably into the cramped uphostery shop.

NILES CARTLAND - A hulking Brit 6'4", 290, sits behind an industrial sewing machine fabricating vinyl seat-covers. Ex-S.A.S., military tatts on his bulging forearms.

CRUZ

Hey Niles.

Niles gives him a furtive glance, CRANKS UP THE MACHINE to drown out any possible conversation. Cruz looks troubled. Something's definitely up.

INT. NOHO ROD & CUSTOM - BUSINESS OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

MARISA PEREZ, smart, sharp, mid-20s, hair drawn back in a ponytail, touch-keys entries into a computer. Two pit-bulls, PICO and SEPULVEDA, are curled up in a big ratty doggy-bed in one corner.

Cruz enters, spreads his arms wide.

CRUZ

Pi-coooh. Sep-pulvedaaahh...

The dogs don't budge. Sepulveda WHIMPERS. One of Pico's ears twitches. Cruz turns to Marisa.

CRUZ (CONT'D)  
Okay. What'd I do?

She looks pointedly toward the small inner-office. Through the window, beyond dirty blinds, a burly man in his mid-50s sits in front of Rico's desk.

CRUZ  
Zarian.

INT. NOHO ROD & CUSTOM - INNER-OFFICE

JERRY ZARIAN, Brylcreem hair, five o'clock shadow by nine AM. Sears necktie, short-sleeve polyester dress-shirt, Pall Malls in the front pocket.

Cruz breezes in. Not a care in the world. As he takes a seat behind his desk, ONE LONG SENTENCE, NO COMMAS:

CRUZ  
Hey Jer how you doing I'm real  
sorry about the rent but I'm having  
some trouble at the bank you know  
how it is all the voice-mail and  
it's impossible to get a live human  
being on the horn but I'll get it  
all squared away next week at the  
latest, hokay?

Zarian gives him Madame Tussaud--not a twitch, not a blink. He clutches the arms of the chair in a white-knuckled grip.

CRUZ  
Jer...?

Jerry Zarian, Terror of the North Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, suddenly breaks into BIG FAT BLUBBERING SOBS.

ZARIAN  
You gotta help me find my daughter.

FREEZE FRAME - on Zarian, face contorted like a jellyfish.

CRUZ (V.O.)  
I know what you're thinking. What  
the hell is up with this guy asking  
an auto-mechanic to skip-trace his  
daughter?  
(beat)  
Here's the Cliff Notes--



SERIES OF SHOTS: Lightning fast, RAMPED and UNDERCRANKED like motherfuckers, each separated by POPS.

THE POLICE ACADEMY - a room full of CADETS, right hands raised.

CRUZ - his crisp blues, swearing the oath.

CRUZ (V.O.)  
I used to be a cop.

CRUZ - teeth bared, behind the wheel in a HIGH-SPEED CHASE.

SLAPPING CUFFS - on one guy.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
A really good cop.

SLAPPING CUFFS - on another. And another.

TACKLING - a GANG-BANGER in a weeded lot.

SMACK - with the baton.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
Got my gold shield in record time.  
Ran my own elite crew out of Narco.

CRUZ - in PLAINCLOTHES, shaking the CHIEF'S HAND.

DETECTIVE'S BADGE - in a leather wallet.

BOOM - a door is BASHED IN.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
God, we were beautiful.

CRUZ - SHOUTING, gun drawn. Running point with his CREW.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
Reeled in the little fish, chewed em up and spit em back out on the street...

A DOZEN PERPS - face down on the sidewalk, hands bound with plastic cuffs.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
... chumming for the sharks running quantity.

NEAT STACKS - PAN OVER bagged CRYSTAL METH. WEAPONS. CASH.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
 And the biggest shark of all was a  
 Great White named Todd Sellars.

KA-JIIIIICK - A well-dressed dude with a \$200 Vito Esposito haircut and a pair of butt-ugly Prada shades getting in an ASTON MARTIN DB9 COUPE.

KA-JIIIIICK - CLOSER. He tips the valet a Benjamin.

KA-JIIIIICK - CLOSER. A nice 3/4 PROFILE as he checks for traffic. SUPER slides into frame with a SCREECH. BANG!

SUPER: *TODD SELLARS*

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
 This guy was a real piece of work.  
 We used to call him Crankenstein.

MEXICAN MAFIA - JERKY PAN RIGHT across their sullen faces, arms crossed, looking bad.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
 Ran ice from Oxnard to H.B. through  
 a loose coalition of La Eme, psycho  
 bikers and hardcore skinheads.

BIKERS - PAN LEFT. Scowling, mean bastards. Hard meat, dirty hair, tattoos and leather.

SKINHEADS - PAN RIGHT. Surf-Nazis, lean frames inked with swastikas, three sevens, W.A.R. and white power.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
 Oh, we wanted him, but the squid  
 had ink. We zigged, he zagged. I  
 put two of my best dogs on him,  
 Guitierrez and Frost.

A DOOR IS OPENED - TWO DETECTIVES in ties and NARCO WINDBREAKERS stand on a front porch holding up a SEARCH WARRANT. SUPERS slide into frame. BOOM. BOOM. BOOM.

SUPER: *GUITERREZ*

SUPER: *FROST*

SUPER: *SEARCH WARRANT*

SELLARS - TIME-LAPSE as he lounges on his sofa in a silk robe, watching TV while, in the BG, Frost, Guitierrez and HALF A DOZEN NARCS tear his place apart.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
Eighteen months, and all they had  
to show for it was a file full of  
wasted search warrants and three  
missing-presumed-dead informants.

CLOSE ON SELLARS - eyes on the TV, a thin smile on his face.  
Cheeky fucker.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
They finally came to the brilliant  
conclusion that if they couldn't  
nail him clean...

EVIDENCE ROOM - the door is JIMMIED OPEN.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
... they'd settle on nailing him  
dirty.

A CARDBOARD BOX - Frost slices it open while Guterrez stuffs  
FAT BAGGIES OF METH in his pockets.

TODD SELLARS - behind the wheel of his DB9, bored as hell, a  
SUPERMODEL riding shotgun. Frost leans into the driver's  
window, chewing on a toothpick.

FROST  
Mind if we take a look in the  
trunk?

DB9 TRUNK - POPS open, empty but for THREE BAGS OF CRYSTAL  
METH placed dead center.

ANGLE UP FROM INSIDE THE TRUNK - Guterrez and Frost flank  
Sellars, staring down at camera. Sellars is the only one who  
looks surprised.

BOOM. HANDCUFFS - CRACK, SNAP, slapped on the wrists.

BOOM. FINGERPRINTS - ROLLED on a CARD labelled "SELLARS,  
TODD ROBERT."

BOOM. MUGSHOTS. Sellars wincing against the BRIGHT FLASH.  
Front. Profile. FREEZE with the CLANG of a CELL-DOOR  
SLAMMING SHUT, the SLIDING CLACK of a DEAD-BOLT DRIVEN HOME.

CRUZ (V.O.)  
And everybody lived happily ever  
after. The End. Right?  
(beat)  
Yeah. Right.

COURTHOUSE STEPS - PRESS crushing in to get a quote from a diminutive but impeccably dressed NORMAN FABREAU as he leads his client, Todd Sellars, into court.

FREEZE FRAME. SUPER slams into frame:

SUPER: *NORMAN FABREAU, ESQ.*

CRUZ (V.O.)

Norman Fabreau Esquire, Superstar Attorney at Law. This is the guy every doped-up movie star, wife-beating pro athlete, and white collar scumbag in L.A. County has filed between R for "Rock" and H for "Hard Place."

TIGHT ON SURVEILLANCE VIDEO - 2 FPS, BLACK AND WHITE, DATE AND TIME-STAMPED. The Evidence Room. There's FROST wrenching open the box. There's GUITERREZ jamming baggies of crank in his pockets.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)

The plant-job on Sellars was strictly amateur-hour. And that video meant we were in for a Category-Five-Rodney-King-meets-Rampart-Scandal media crapfest.

DARKENED COURTROOM - Fabreau doing an MOS narration of the video. A FAST, RAMPED PAN to Todd Sellars, seated at the defense table sporting a \$5,000 Armani suit and a smug smile.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)

Frost and Guterrez were small-fry. It was an election-year and the incumbents were hungry for bacon with bars on its collar. Somebody to make an example of.

Sellars slowly turns and we spin a WILD RAMPED CRANE SWING to

CRUZ - seated in the gallery behind the prosecution table, jaw slack. He's toast and he knows it.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)

Enter me. The boys upstairs expected me to roll over on my crew. I stood up. They didn't like that.

*A redux of what we saw go down for Sellars:*

*BOOM!* HANDCUFFS - CRACK, SNAP, slapped on the wrists.

*BOOM!* FINGERPRINTS - ROLLED on a CARD labelled "CRUZ, ENRICO TOMAS."

*BOOM!* MUGSHOTS. Cruz wincing against the BRIGHT FLASH. Front. Profile. FREEZE and a LIST is SUPERED LEFT-FRAME, each accompanied by a handy CHECK-BOX:

SUPER (LIST): CONSPIRACY  
EVIDENCE TAMPERING  
OBSTRUCTION OF JUSTICE  
PERJURY

Each box is CHECKED OFF WITH AN "X" as Cruz runs them off:

CRUZ (CONT'D)  
Conspiracy. Evidence Tampering.  
Obstruction of Justice. Perjury.  
Bye-bye, Rico. Seven inside, three-  
and-a-half served for good  
behavior.

The CLANG of a CELL-DOOR SLAMMING SHUT, the SLIDING CLACK of a DEAD-BOLT DRIVEN HOME.

BACK TO:

INT. NOHO ROD & CUSTOM - OFFICE

FREEZE FRAME of JERRY ZARIAN, face red, tears rolling down his fat cheeks. UNFREEZE and he continues BAWLING:

ZARIAN  
Please, Cruz. Ya gotta help me  
find my little girl. She's just a  
baby!

CRUZ  
You file a report with Missing  
Persons?

ZARIAN  
I did that but those bums don't do  
nothin. They say she run away.

CRUZ  
Maybe she did.

ZARIAN  
Not my little angel, no way! She  
been kidnapped or something by  
some... some *freak* maybe.

He pales, trembling, eyes wide as he imagines all the nasty possibilities. His face crumples in despair.

ZARIAN

I'll do anything, Cruz. Money don't matter. I just want my baby girl back!

CRUZ

Jer. I can't help you.

ZARIAN

But I heard--

CRUZ

I don't care what you heard. I'm not a cop anymore. I don't do investigations.

ZARIAN

What about Mickey? You caught that creep he had stealin from the till.

CRUZ

Mickey's a friend.

ZARIAN

(stung)  
So what am I?

CRUZ

You're my landlord.

There's no fighting that one. You can almost hear the squeak as the wheels turn in Zarian's head then, *bingo!* Plan B!

ZARIAN

Forget about the rent.

CRUZ

What?

ZARIAN

You owe me August, right? Forget it. And I'll throw in September, you bring back my Gina.

Cruz slowly shakes his head, opens his mouth to frame an apologetic but firm "no" when...

MARISA (O.S.)

What about October?



MARISA

Espinoza. Total sweetheart. Works at Braun BankComm. They handle every ATM transaction on the West Coast. She's been sober for eight-and-a-half months. Isn't that great?

FREEZE FRAME as Marisa gives him a bright smile and a SUPER slams into frame:

SUPER: *MARISA PEREZ*

SUPER: *SOBER 4 YEARS, 220 DAYS*

Cruz just stares at her.

CRUZ

You do understand that what we're doing here is a flagrant violation of not only the CCR, but the terms of my parole?

Marisa hands him a photograph.

INSERT: A FORMAL PORTRAIT - from an Armenian Daddy/Daughter dance. Larry is bursting with pride, his belly straining his rented cumberbund. GINA ZARIAN is pretty, long black hair, a shy smile on her face.

MARISA

Gina's the one on the right.

Cruz hands the photo back to her and walks out into

INT. NOHO ROD & CUSTOM - SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Marisa follows Cruz. Chuy works under the hood of the Plymouth. Niles fits the new upholstery inside the passenger compartment.

MARISA

We are 60 days late on our bills. We're a week late on payroll and if something doesn't come in between now and Friday, Blue Cross is going to cancel our ass.

CRUZ

C'mon, Marisa--



MARISA

No, you c'mon. You got over  
seventy-thou tied up in that stupid  
Roadrunner--

CRUZ

It's a Hemi! I'm gonna clean up on  
that thing!

MARISA

Chuy...?

CHUY

(shrugs)

We'll clear thirty. Forty, tops.

Cruz looks at him, betrayed. *Et tu, Chuy?* Marisa almost  
feels sorry for him.

MARISA

I know. It was a rustbucket. It  
called out to you. "Bring me back,  
Rico. Make me new." But these  
spec restos are killing us.

CRUZ

Last one landed in Mopar Monthly.  
Got us some primo PR.

MARISA

Primo PR don't pay the rent, baby.

NILES

She does have a point, mate--

CRUZ

Did I ask you?

(to Chuy)

Did I ask him if she had a point?

They all stare silently at him until he throws up his hands  
in frustration.

CRUZ

Okay, fine. Great! What'm I  
supposed to do?

Marisa, Chuy and Niles all look at each other, wondering  
which one is going to have the courage to speak up first.

CHUY

Maybe...

CRUZ

*What?!*

Chuy squirms, looking for back-up. Finding none. He forges ahead.

CHUY

Maybe you should moonlight a little bit, you know... call Fabreau?

Cruz stares at Chuy. He *couldn't* have heard him right.

CRUZ

Norman Fabreau.

NILES

Esquire.

Cruz shoots him a toxic look.

CRUZ

Are you crazy?  
(to the others)  
Are you all completely insane?  
That sawed-off little swamp-rat  
wrecked my whole life!

CHUY

(shrugs)  
He needs an investigator--

MARISA

--and he's real sorry.

CRUZ

What're you--  
(realizing)  
You *talked* to him. He's been here.  
Behind my back. After everything  
I've done for you guys...

He looks at each one in turn. Finally, he snatches the photo of Gina Zarian from Marisa and STORMS OUT.

Marisa, Chuy and Niles stand very still as the TOW-TRUCK FIRES UP O.S. and ROARS AWAY. Finally:

MARISA

You guys hungry?

CHUY

Chinese would be good.

INT. FABREAU, EPSTEIN, COLLIER OFFICES - DAY

Chopsticks plunge into a paper box of garlic shrimp, pluck a fat prawn and pop it into the waiting, greedy mouth of Norman Fabreau, Esq.

When he's trying to be charming, Norm falls back on a thick CAJUN ACCENT he actually lost in his second year at Harvard Law. And right now, he's trying to be very, very charming.

FABREAU

Now now, *mon ami*, you are very much overreacting, no?

INT. CRUZ'S TOW-TRUCK (INTERCUT)

Parked on a suburban street, Cruz sits behind the wheel talking to Fabreau on his Nokia.

CRUZ

Don't you give me that *mon ami* crap, you shyster.

FABREAU

Come, now. You know I've always had nothing but the utmost respect for your prodigious investigative skills. You were the best, Rico. There is no reason why it should not still be so.

CRUZ

Yeah? How about this? *I can't get an investigator's license.* I'm a convicted felon--

FABREAU

--and for that, I am most sincerely contrite.

CRUZ

Yeah sure. I saw you cryin a river on Court TV.

FABREAU

Forget the license, Enrico. We can do this under the table--

CRUZ

--and put my ass in the wringer with the IRS? No thanks. The word is "forget it."

FABREAU  
That's two words.

CRUZ  
Yeah? You wanna hear another two  
words?! *Fu--*

INT. FAVREAU, EPSTEIN, COLLIER OFFICES

Favreau's eyebrows shoot up when he hears the expletive, an amused smile tracing his lips.

INT. CRUZ'S TOW-TRUCK

Cruz snaps his cell closed. Takes a deep, calming breath and checks

HIS SIDE VIEW - The mysterious Crown Vic is parked half-a-block down the street in the shade of some trees.

EXT. HOOVER HIGH SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

A LONG SHOT of the front entrance, SLIGHT CAMERA SHAKE. A DODGER GAME plays on a RADIO O.S.

INT. CROWN VICTORIA - CONTINUOUS

FRANK DITKO, 40s, a balding butterball, pencil moustache, cheap suit, is hunched behind the wheel of the Vic, peering through a CAMERA WITH A MONSTER LENS.

A SOFT DING as the door swings open and Cruz slides into the passenger seat. Shuts the door.

CRUZ  
Who's winning?

Ditko fumbles in his jacket, pulls out a can of pepper-spray. Cruz wrenches it from his hand and tosses it out the window, grabs Ditko's collar, snaps the RADIO OFF.

CRUZ  
You been following me.

DITKO  
You--you're crazy!

Cruz notices a HANDHELD POLICE SCANNER hooked up to a pocket recorder on the dash. Punches the "PLAY" button.

CRUZ  
 (on recorder)  
 --and put my ass in the wringer  
 with the IRS? No thanks, chump.  
 The word is "forget it."

FABREAU  
 (on recorder)  
 That's two words--

Cruz punches "STOP." Unplugs the scanner, picks it up.

CRUZ  
 Ooh. You gotta cell-phone mod on  
 this thing. That's *highly* illegal.

DITKO  
 (makes a grab)  
 Gimme that--

Cruz shoves the scanner inside his overalls, gives Ditko a  
 HARD SHAKE.

CRUZ  
 Who you working for, genius?  
 Fabreau?

DITKO  
 Leggoa me--

CRUZ  
 You heard the conversation. He's  
 looking for a new investigator.  
 Think about that, Sherlock. Why  
 would he need me when he's got you?  
 You wanna know why? Because you  
*blow*. I made you three weeks ago.  
 Frank Wayne Ditko. PI License  
 number 677892. 43 years old.  
 Divorced. No kids. You got a  
 french bulldog named Mandy.

Brow furrowed, Ditko thinks about it. Realizes Cruz is  
 right.

DITKO  
 That sonovabitch...

Cruz lets him go, gets out of the car, SLAMS the door. He  
 leans into the open window, holding up Ditko's scanner.

CRUZ

Tell you what, Paunch. I see you again, I'm gonna report this little toy of yours to the FCC and the State. Get your license yanked and a big fat fine, how about that?

Ditko STARTS THE ENGINE, finds half-an-ounce of petulant courage, MUTTERS:

DITKO

Yeah, I'm shakin. My word against a crooked ex-cop.

Cruz heaves a sigh, shakes his head sadly.

CRUZ

You know what? You're probably right.

(shrugs)

I guess then I'll just have to shoot your dog and burn down your house. 3711 Walker Drive. Reseda, right?

Ditko's eyes widen in fear. He throws the car into gear and ROARS away from the sidewalk.

EXT. HOOVER HIGH SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

Cruz watches him go, a thin smile on his face.

CRUZ (V.O.)

I was just kidding about the dog.

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2

INT. HOOVER HIGH SCHOOL - MAIN HALLWAY

Cruz leans against the counter of the attendance office. A pretty girl, NORINE FELIKIAN, 17, steps up to the counter.

CRUZ  
Norine Felikian?

She gives him a shy nod.

CRUZ  
I'm looking for your friend, Gina.

NORINE  
Who are you?

CRUZ  
Friend of the family. They're all very worried.

Norine gives Cruz one of those rolling smirks only pretty 17 year-olds can pull off. She starts to walk away.

CRUZ  
Norine, if you know something, please tell me. Gina could be in real trouble.

NORINE  
She's fine.

Cruz places a hand on her shoulder.

CRUZ  
Norine--

She gives him a look, then turns toward the attendance office. He glances over.

HIS POV - TWO MIDDLE-AGED FEMALE CLERKS eye him suspiciously.

CRUZ - removes his hand from Norine's shoulder, gives her an apologetic smile and pulls a business card.

CRUZ  
If anything comes to mind. If you hear from her, whatever.  
(hands her the card)  
That's my number. I'd appreciate it if you'd give me a call.

INSERT: BUSINESS CARD - NoHo Rod & Custom. Enrico Cruz - Proprietor. Address. Telephone numbers.

Cruz watches her walk away. As soon as she gets to a litter basket, she gives him a pointed look and tosses the card in the trash, continues down the hallway.

INT. HOOVER HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

As Cruz approaches his truck, his cell-phone RINGS. He pulls it from his pocket, checks the incoming number.

CRUZ

Jolie?

INT. JOLIE'S RANCH - STABLE (INTERCUT)

A FEMALE VET and Jolie's lead trainer, XAVIER, 50, Mexican, wrestle the dapple-gray MARE we saw earlier as it STOMPS and rears and WHINNIES in its stall. Jolie, disheveled, tries to speak into the phone over the RACKET.

JOLIE

Rico--

CRUZ

(alarmed)

What's wrong? What's going on?

JOLIE

It's Flannery. She's foaling and--

XAVIER

(shouts)

*Missie Cruz!*

JOLIE

One second!

(back to phone)

She's foaling and we've got some complications. Nothing major, but--

XAVIER

*Missie!*

JOLIE

I said *one second!*

(back to phone)

I need you to pick Alex up at school.

CRUZ

Oh, *man*--



JOLIE  
You think you're the first person I  
called?

CRUZ  
Can't she get a ride from one of  
her friends?

JOLIE  
No. It's too late. Just--

CRUZ  
But I'm driving the tow-truck! You  
know how she gets!

JOLIE  
I know. I know, I know, I know,  
but--

The mare STOMPS and kicks up a shit-fit.

JOLIE  
I don't have time for this, Rico.  
Just get her.

She hangs up.

EXT. HOOVER HIGH SCHOOL

Cruz looks at his phone. Shit. And just when things  
couldn't get worse, a DEEP VOICE behind him SPITS:

VOICE (O.S.)  
Hey vato!

Cruz turns just in time to catch a PUNCH IN THE FACE.

Cruz SLAMS into the door of his tow-truck, begins sliding  
down. ARA, a hulking Armenian kid, 20, in a wife-beater,  
sporting Armenian Power gang-tatts, hauls him up.

Behind Ara, FOUR MORE HARD CASES, 17 to 22, all members of  
the Armenian Power street-gang.

ARA  
Whatchu got with Norine?

CRUZ  
(dazed)  
Norine? I don't know--

Ara savagely JABS the head of a BASEBALL BAT into Cruz's  
belly. Cruz doubles over. Ara pulls him up by his hair.

ARA  
 Maybe you don't understand English  
 so good. But I don't know no  
 Messican, so I'll give it another  
 shot, okay? What you--

He SMACKS Cruz's head into the passenger window.

ARA  
 --got--  
 (SMACK)  
 --with--  
 (SMACK)  
 --Norine!

SMACK! Cruz is seeing double, BLOOD pouring from his nose.

NORINE (O.S.)  
 (in Armenian)  
 What the hell're you doin?

Norine steps up, SLAPS Ara across the face, snatches away his baseball bat and proceeds to CUSS THEM ALL OUT in SNARLING ARMENIAN mixed with a few words of English: "FIVE-OH," "COP," "IDIOT." Finally:

NORINE  
 Apologize!

The gangsters glance nervously at each other like a bunch of errant six-year-olds. Norine takes a step forward, brandishing the bat.

NORINE  
 Tell him you're sorry!

Ara shuffles his feet, eyes downcast.

NORINE  
 Tell him!

ARA  
 Sorry...

The other bangers MUTTER HALF-ASSED APOLOGIES.

NORINE  
 Now get outta here!

They start away. Norine turns her attention to Cruz.

NORINE  
 You okay?

CRUZ  
Yeah. I guess. What the hell was  
that all about?

NORINE  
Ara don't like Mexicans so much.  
Especially ones who talk to me.

Cruz pinches his nose, tilts his head back.

CRUZ  
Boyfriend?

NORINE  
(nods)  
He can be sweet.

Cruz warily looks down the street. The gang has congregated  
around a lowered black Beemo M-3.

CRUZ  
I'll remember that next time he  
asks me to the prom.

Norine bites back a smile.

NORINE  
You better go. I told him you're a  
cop. You keep talkin nice to me,  
though, he'll kill you anyway.

CRUZ  
Thanks.

He opens the door of his truck, starts to get in. She  
impulsively grabs his wrist, throws a nervous glance down the  
street at the A.P. gang.

NORINE  
Listen. She really is okay. Gina.

CRUZ  
How do you know?

NORINE  
She's with someone.

CRUZ  
What? She got a thing with  
somebody? A boyfriend?

Norine doesn't answer.

CRUZ  
 Norine, if you know, please tell  
 me. People are worried. Her  
 father thinks she's dead--

NORINE  
 No! You can't tell her Dad! He'll  
 go crazy on her ass.

CRUZ  
 Okay okay, I promise. I won't say  
 a word to the old man. Just tell  
 me who she's with.

Norine considers. Can she trust him? Finally:

NORINE  
 Rudy Milka.

CRUZ  
 (thinking)  
 Milka...  
 (remembers)  
 Any relation to Sonny Milka?

SMASH CUT TO:

SERIES OF SHOTS: LIGHTNING FAST, crammed into about FOUR  
 SECONDS of PSYCHO SPEED METAL. All kinds of VOODOO SHIT:

A MUSCLED TORSO - totally ripped, glistening with sweat,  
 cluttered with badass ink. Skulls and bones and emblazoned  
 with the words MARA SALVATRUCHA.

HEROIN - bubbling in a teaspoon.

A RUSTY MACHETE - CHOPPING down with a THUNK.

A VOTIVE CANDLE - decorated with the Virgin of Guadalupe,  
 suddenly splattered with ARTERIAL SPRAY

A SCREAMING SKINHEAD - eyes bugged out, blackletter tatt  
 inked on the forehead: MS-13

SUPER: SONNY MILKA

BACK TO:

EXT. HOOVER HIGH SCHOOL

Norine nods.

NORINE

I think they're cousins.

Cruz just stares at her. His CELL PURRS. He pulls it out, checks the number and winces.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. CRUZ'S TOW-TRUCK - MOVING - DAY

Cruz HAULS ASS up a winding road, swabbing the blood off his face with a wad of Taco-Bell napkins moistened with a bottle of flat orange Fanta.

CRUZ (V.O.)

Sonny Milka was a notorious bad-ass with the MS-13 gang. Salvadoran refugees--a lot of them with guerilla training care of Fidel and a taste for civilian blood. These guys made the 18th Street Crips look like Teletubbies. There was no love lost between MS-13 and the Armenian Power boys, and if Gina Zarian was caught in the middle, she was one of two things: Dead, or soon-to-be-dead.

The Nokia RINGS. Cruz fumbles, drops the bottle on the floor, snatches up the phone, checks the incoming number.

CRUZ

Yeah what you got?

INT. PARKER CENTER - DETECTIVE BUREAU (INTERCUT)

SGT. TOMMY DAVIS, 40s, heavysset African American, sits at a workstation on his desk in Bunco Division.

DAVIS

Good news. Rudy Milka is not Sonny's cousin.

CRUZ

(relieved)  
Great.

DAVIS

He's his kid brother.

Cruz closes his eyes. This just keeps getting better.

DAVIS (CONT'D)  
Eighteen years old, five-nine,  
Hundred and forty-three pounds.  
Got a mugshot. You want me to fax  
his sheet to the shop?

CRUZ  
Yeah. Priors?

DAVIS  
Lots of juvie stuff. GTA. Assault  
with Intent. Concealed weapons.  
Got picked up for a drive-by, but  
they cut him loose. This was all  
before he was fifteen.

CRUZ  
What about since then?

Davis takes a look at the monitor.

DAVIS  
Nothin. He's either clean or  
lucky...

ON THE MONITOR - RUDY MILKA is skinny, raw and tough-looking.  
Bristling with attitude for the camera.

DAVIS (CONT'D)  
... my vote's for lucky.

CRUZ  
Current address?

DAVIS  
Already checked that out. He moved  
three months ago. No forwarding  
address.

CRUZ  
You call his P.O.?

DAVIS  
Boy don't got a P.O. He's not on  
parole. Record expunged, free as a  
bird. So when do I get that tune-  
up?

CRUZ  
Come by Saturday. Now listen.  
Check out the CRASH files on MS-13.  
See if they got a crib or  
something.

DAVIS

Man, I must be crazy. You're gonna get me suspended.

CRUZ

I'll throw in an oil change.

Cruz snaps his phone shut.

EXT. OUR LADY OF DIVINE GRACE ACADEMY - DAY

CLOSE ON - Alex Cruz, her face a stone mask, eyes cold. Hold for a long beat, then:

ALEX

You're late.

WIDER - A deserted lunch area. Alex sits on a picnic table in her natty uniform. Cruz stands in front of her in his rumpled mechanics overalls.

CRUZ

I'm sorry, Babe. I got hung up.

Alex looks at him with the same detached disdain she might regard a urine specimen.

ALEX

Babe?

She looks at Cruz's tow-truck parked in the empty lot.

ALEX

At least there's nobody around to see me get in that stupid truck.

She shoulders her backpack, slides off the table, walks out of frame. Cruz watches her, dejected.

SUPER: *PRIVATE SCHOOL TUITION:* \$ 22,500.00

SUPER: *UNIFORM, BOOKS, SUPPLIES:* \$ 1,864.50

SUPER: *FOOTING HALF THE BILL FOR  
YOUR OWN CHILD'S ESTRANGEMENT:* PRICELESS

INT. CRUZ'S TOW-TRUCK - MOVING - MOMENTS LATER

Father and daughter. Silence. She sits as far away from him as she can, gazes out the passenger window, listlessly watching the passing scenery.

CRUZ

Alex...

She turns, gives him a look that would freeze blood.

ALEX

What.

He struggles, knowing that anything he says will be DOA. Suddenly, his cell RINGS. Thank God. He flips it open.

CRUZ

Yeah.

INT. PARKER CENTER - DETECTIVE BUREAU (INTERCUT)

Davis at his desk, a sour look on his face as he chews something.

DAVIS

You ever try that nicotine gum?  
Man, it's like chewing a damn  
cigarette butt.

CRUZ

(impatient)  
Tommy, I'm having a real bad day--

DAVIS

Okay, okay. 2412 Fortuna Circle.  
Up near Elysian Park.

Cruz writes the address down on a napkin with the nub of a pencil.

CRUZ

Got it. 2412. Thanks, man.

DAVIS

But you better move fast.

CRUZ

What do you mean?

DAVIS

Tac-Squad's up there right now  
getting ready to breach the place.

CRUZ

Who's the O.I.C.?

DAVIS

Ruttledge.



Cruz winces as we abruptly

SMASH CUT TO:

FAKE CREDIT SEQUENCE

VINTAGE SEVENTIES, Starsky-and-Hutch style. Big theme featuring a fat bass, lots of horns.

GRAPHIC POPS - of a TOUGH-LOOKING CHICK with a BLONDE MULLET in a BLACK TAC UNIFORM:

BUSTING - down doors.

FIRING - her weapon.

MAIMING - perps with karate-kicks and elbow-jabs.

SUPER: *BRENDA RUTTLEDGE*

SUPER: *S.W.A.T. CHICK*

BACK TO:

INT. CRUZ'S TOW-TRUCK

A pained expression on Cruz's face.

CRUZ

Aww, Jeez.

He snaps the phone shut, steps on the accelerator and turns to get on the freeway.

ALEX

What're you doing?

CRUZ

I gotta deal with something.

EXT. FORTUNA CIRCLE - DAY

A neighborhood tucked between the Harbor Freeway and Dodger Stadium, seedy, narrow clap-board houses piled up steep hills like a tombstones. A MOBILE COMMAND CENTER at the bottom of the street--SWAT-TRUCK, A COUPLE OF BLACK-AND-WHITES.

BRENDA RUTTLEDGE, S.W.A.T. CHICK, is surrounded by a TEAM OF HULKING COPS in full Tac-gear, armed with MP-5s. She frames the deployment plan, spitting machine-gun cop-patois:

RUTTLEDGE

Water and Power cuts the juice. We  
breach on my mark--hit the windows.  
Flash-bangs in front, boke in the  
back--

CRUZ (O.S.)

Brenda.

She turns, sees Cruz. Surprise almost eclipses disgust.

RUTTLEDGE

Enrico Cruz. What the hell're you  
doing here?

CRUZ

Is Rudy Milka in there?

RUTTLEDGE

How'd you get inside my perimeter?

CRUZ

There's a girl with him. She's a  
minor. You might be dealing with a  
hostage situation.

She stares at him. Takes in the mechanics overalls.

RUTTLEDGE

What're you, now? Pumpin gas?  
They send you in to clean our  
windshields?

The other cops CHUCKLE. Cruz bites back his anger.

CRUZ

You gotta stand down, Ruttlege.  
Call in a negotiator--

RUTTLEDGE

Cooper. Jackson.

TWO VERY BIG GUYS step forward, grab Cruz and haul him away.

END OF ACT 2

ACT 3

INT. CRUZ'S TOW-TRUCK - DAY

Alex watches as the two gorillas escort her father past the barricades. A UNIFORM holds up the yellow tape and they shove him toward his truck.

Furious, Cruz gets in the truck, SLAMS the door. He takes a few deep breaths to quell his rage. Alex deadpans him.

ALEX  
I have homework.

Cruz gives her a murderous look. He starts the truck, rams it into gear and cranks a SCREECHING u-turn.

EXT. FIRE ACCESS ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

The tow-truck ROARS up, SLIDES to a lurching stop.

INT. CRUZ'S TOW-TRUCK

Cruz fiddles with the scanner he took from Ditko, adjusts the squelch and taps the LAPD TAC frequency, picks up CHATTER:

ALEX  
I'm gonna call Mom.

CRUZ  
(preoccupied)  
This'll only take a second.

Cruz looks out his windshield.

HIS POV - The access road runs about 100 yards above and behind the gang crib, offering a clear view of the sagging two-story clap-board hugging the side of the steep hill.

CRUZ  
Stay in the truck.

ALEX  
Where're you going?

CRUZ  
I really don't have time to discuss this.

ALEX  
So. What else is new?

CRUZ  
 (rushed)  
 Okay okay, fine. I have to see if  
 somebody's in that house, all  
 right? Is that all right?

ALEX  
 Who?

CRUZ  
 It doesn't matter! A girl--

ALEX  
 You gotta girlfriend?

CRUZ  
 No. She's not my girlfriend.  
 She's just a kid and I gotta make  
 sure she's safe.

Alex gives him an incredulous look.

ALEX  
 Of course she's safe...  
 (nods toward the house)  
 ... she's, like, surrounded by a  
 million cops.

Cruz follows her gaze.

HIS POV - as S.W.A.T. MONKEYS take positions at the front and  
 rear of the house.

CRUZ  
 Oh crap...

RUTTLEDGE  
 (on radio)  
 W.P., W.P., pull the plug. Go go  
 go go!

Shape-charges take out the front door with A MUFFLED BOOM.  
 Cops at the back FIRE TEAR-GAS through the windows. Cops  
 charge in. SMOKE pours out the windows. PISTOL POPS  
 answered by bursts of AUTOMATIC FIRE.

CRUZ  
 Get down.

Alex is riveted to the action unfolding down the hill. Cruz  
 pushes her down.

CRUZ

*Down!*

CONTINUOUS FIRE. Cruz turns toward the house.

HIS POV - The rotting lattice panels shielding the foundation at the side of the house splinter from the inside.

SONNY MILKA - erupts from the shadows under the house. Coughing, wheezing, he scrabbles up the hill in a crouching lope, holding cover under low shrubs.

CRUZ - hunkers down in his seat.

ALEX

What's happening--

CRUZ

(crouching down)

Shut up.

EXT. FIRE ACCESS ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Milka makes it up to the road, begins a full, hard sprint past Cruz's truck. Cruz SHOVES open his door, SLAMMING Milka flat in the face. He goes down.

Cruz leaps out as Sonny claws for a stainless steel BULLDOG SNUB-NOSE .44 tucked in his waistband.

Before he can draw aim, Cruz body-slams him, pinning his gun-hand to the ground. Milka squeezes off a round that TAKES OUT CRUZ'S FRONT TIRE.

ALEX (O.S.)

*Daddy!*

She stares at him from the open drivers-side door.

CRUZ

*Stay in the truck!*

Milka squirms and kicks underneath him. Cruz ices him with TWO HARD PUNCHES IN THE MOUTH. Sonny goes rag-doll.

Cruz wrests the revolver away, stands and places a foot across Milka's neck, points the gun at his face, cocks the hammer. BREATHING HARD:

CRUZ

Is Gina in the house?

MILKA

Who?

DISTANT SIRENS coming up the hill.

CRUZ

Gina Zarian.

MILKA

Are you a cop?

CRUZ

Do I look like a cop?

Milka SPITS at him.

Cruz FIRES a shot that kicks up dirt half an inch from Milka's right ear. A MUTED SCREAM from Alex inside the car.

CRUZ

(to Alex)

It's okay, babe.

(to Milka)

Talk.

MILKA

She just some Armo bitch wit my brother, man. You gonna let me go?

CRUZ

Where is she?

MILKA

I dunno. Wit him. I ain't seen Rudy in two months, man.

The SIRENS ARE CLOSER. Cruz sighs, snaps open the cylinder on the magnum, unloads it, then hurls the pistol down into the canyon.

The first of the POLICE UNITS rounds the corner. Ruttledge leaps out, one hand on her sidearm. Cruz raises his hands.

CRUZ

It's okay. Everything's okay.

She sees who Cruz has pinned under his boot, motions for a PAIR OF UNIFORMS, who begin handcuffing and searching Milka. She looks in the truck, sees Alex.

RUTTLEDGE

(gently)

What's your name, sweetie?

CRUZ  
Her name's Alejandra. She's my  
daughter. She's fine.

RUTTLEDGE  
You okay?

Cruz runs his thumb over the bullet hole in the sidewall of  
his FLAT TIRE.

CRUZ  
I said she's fine.

Ruttledge helps Alex down from the truck.

RUTTLEDGE  
You need a ride?

ALEX  
(fighting tears)  
I just wanna go home.

Ruttledge gives Cruz an accusatory look, slowly shakes her  
head in disgust. She taps one of the Uniforms. Alex  
accompanies the cop down the road toward his cruiser.

Cruz watches, dejected, depressed. World's Worst Dad Ever.

RUTTLEDGE  
(smug)  
You want me to radio a tow-truck?

Cruz looks at her. Sees the smirk. If she was a man, he'd  
be on his way back inside for assaulting a police officer.

CRUZ  
No thanks. I got one.

EXT. ADAMS HILL - ZARIAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Cruz pulls up out front, looks out his passenger window at

THE FRONT YARD - A stuccoed bungalow behind a patchy lawn.  
Dead center, a large cement fountain featuring a cheesy  
statue of Aphrodite.

CRUZ (V.O.)  
In the last seven-and-a-half hours,  
I'd been beaten up, head-banged,  
humiliated, spat at and had a tire  
shot out. All for three months  
rent. I had some questions for  
Zarian...

Cruz, exhausted, stares at the fountain.

HIS POV - Aphrodite cradles one of her cement breasts, sending a steady stream of water from her nipple into the fountain.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
 ... for starters, what the hell is  
 it with Armenians and statues?

EXT. ZARIAN'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Cruz presses the DOOR BELL. After a moment, the door opens behind him, CLUNKS against the chain. Jerry Zarian's wife, ANOUSH, late-40s, regards Cruz uneasily from behind the chained door.

CRUZ  
 Mrs. Zarian?

She nods.

CRUZ  
 Is your husband at home?

ANOUSH  
 No.

CRUZ  
 He hired me to find your daughter,  
 Gina--

ANOUSH  
 Did you find her?

CRUZ  
 No, but I...  
 (discomfited)  
 Maybe we could discuss this inside?

The door SHUTS. For a moment, Cruz thinks he's been dismissed. He's just about to go when the door opens. Anoush is short, plump. She has trouble with direct eye-contact.

ANOUSH  
 Come in.

INT. ZARIAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Tea is poured. The room is dimly lit, decorated with an odd mix of cheap Levitz and genuine antiques.



CRUZ

Can you think of any reason why  
your daughter might've run away?

Anoush shakes her head.

ANOUSH

She did not run away. She was  
taken from us.

CRUZ

Did you know she had a boyfriend?

ANOUSH

There is no boyfriend.

This is getting nowhere. Cruz notices something, looks at  
HER WRIST - An ANGRY BRUISE that could only be made by the  
grip of a large man.

CRUZ

How did she get along with you and  
her father?

ANOUSH

She loves us very much. She is a  
good girl.

CRUZ

No arguments?

ANOUSH

(shakes her head)  
She is a good girl.

Anoush notices he's staring at her bruised wrist, tugs down  
the sleeve of her sweater.

CRUZ

Did your husband do that?

She dismisses his question with a nervous smile. Picks up  
the teapot, moves to refill his cup.

ANOUSH

He'll be home soon. His English is  
better than me.

Cruz takes her free hand, pushes up the sleeve, again  
revealing her swollen wrist. Their eyes meet.

CRUZ  
Did he hit her? Did he hit Gina?

She averts her eyes, pulls away.

ANOUSH  
You should go.

CRUZ  
I know people who can help--

ANOUSH  
(firm)  
Go. Please.

Cruz looks at her. There's nothing he can do for her, not unless she wants him to.

CUT TO:

EXT. NOHO ROD & CUSTOM - YARD - NIGHT

Exhausted, dejected, Cruz pulls his flat tire from the back of the tow-truck.

INT. NOHO ROD & CUSTOM - SHOP

Cruz rolls up the door, steps inside. He FLIPS ON THE LIGHTS and sees something--something that inspires a measure of spirit to his dead eyes.

THE ROADRUNNER - It's finished. Gleaming chrome and a fresh coat of stock I-Am-Curious-Yellow paint under a dozen layers of clearcoat. Black racing stripes. Better than new.

CRUZ - glides the back of his hand over the fender, savoring the smooth perfection of the finish. A quiet smile.

He takes a seat behind the wheel, drawing a deep whiff of the new vinyl and carpet. Heaven. Places a hand on the Hurst pistol-grip, finds neutral.

FIRES her up. The shop is filled with the SWEET THUNDER OF A MOPAR 440 HEMI.

Cruz flips a switch.

"AIR GRABBER" HOOD - Its distinctive hidden scoop flips up. The pitch of the BIG ENGINE'S LOW BURBLE RISES A NOTCH as it takes a deep breath of fresh air.

CRUZ - REVVES the engine. Wow. He smiles, SWITCHES OFF THE IGNITION. For a long moment, the silence is broken only by the TICKING OF THE COOLING HEMI.

Cruz gets out of the car, carefully shuts the door.

FABREAU (O.S.)  
That is one *jolie* ride, no?

FABREAU - leans against the fender of a silver Bentley Continental coupe parked in the yard, arms crossed, regarding the Plymouth with an expression of naked admiration.

CRUZ - It's hard to hang on to anger when someone is sincerely impressed with your work. Cruz looks at the car.

CRUZ  
Yeah. It is that.

FABREAU  
You very much upset my wife's brother. I told him you would not shoot his dog. Did I lie?

CRUZ  
No.

FABREAU  
He tries very hard. But he is not skilled. Not like you.

CRUZ  
I'm retired.

FABREAU  
And yet you still do the investigations, no? There is the Zarian girl.

CRUZ  
That's not an investigation. It's a favor for a friend.

Fabreau, arms crossed, gives him a somber nod. Nods toward the Roadrunner.

FABREAU  
I have a client who collects such cars. How much would you want?

CRUZ  
How much do I want? Seventy-five. How much is it worth...?

Cruz shrugs.

FABREAU

Less?

CRUZ

Much less.

FABREAU

If my client was to pay you, say, eighty thousand cash. Would that make him a friend?

Cruz locks eyes with Fabreau. Thinks about it for a long time. Makes a decision.

CRUZ

Okay, here's the way it's gonna be. No scumbags. You got a good person in a bad situation, fine. You send me somebody dirty, I turn up something incriminating, it goes straight to the D.A.

FABREAU

I understand.

CRUZ

They buy one of my restos up front. Cash. I come up with something, doesn't pass the smell test? That's it. I'm Done. They just bought a car. No refunds.

Fabreau considers it. Steps up to Cruz and holds out his hand. Cruz shakes it. Fabreau nods, starts out, then turns. Points a thumb at his Bentley.

FABREAU

You like...?

CRUZ

(shrugs)

There's words that don't go together. You know, Military Intelligence, Postal Service...  
(nods toward the Bentley)  
... British Engineering.

Fabreau raises his eyebrows in surprise. Laughs and shakes his head. Cruz watches him drive away. His cell-phone RINGS. He checks the number, answers.

CRUZ

Hey.

INT. BOWLING ALLEY - NIGHT (INTERCUT)

Marisa wears a pink team shirt, her name embroidered on the front, the team logo, "THE HAIR-PINS" on the back. In the BG, her team-mates roll against "ROSY'S THORNS."

MARISA

Where were you?

CRUZ

Out of range, I guess.

MARISA

I left three messages.

CRUZ

Okay okay. I'm sorry. What?

MARISA

Maria called. You know, my friend works at the ATM place?

CRUZ

Sober eight-and-a-half months.

MARISA

Yeah. They gotta charge on Gina Zarian's card. Union Station. AmTrak.

CRUZ

Tickets. Where to?

MARISA

I dunno. As far as you can go for a hundred and thirty-six bucks.

CRUZ

When?

MARISA

Over an hour ago. You better get down there. Fast.

Did someone say "fast?" Cruz looks at the Roadrunner. A slow grin.

END OF ACT 3

ACT 4

EXT. ALAMEDA STREET - NIGHT

The Roadrunner BLASTS past us.

CRUZ (V.O.)

It's sixteen-point-nine-one miles  
from my shop to Union Station. A  
little over twenty-two minutes if  
you catch green lights all the way,  
but then...

INT. ROADRUNNER - MOVING

Engine HOWLING, a savage grin on his face, Cruz slams around  
the Hurst pistol-grip, heel-toes it like a pro.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)

... green lights are for pussies.

EXT. ALAMEDA STREET - CONTINUOUS

The Roadrunner POWER-SLIDES a wicked SCREECHING left against  
a stale yellow light. A few motorists HONK.

EXT. UNION STATION - NIGHT

Cruz pulls up to the curb in a passenger loading zone, gets  
out of the car. In the BG, floodlights illuminate the unique  
Mediterranean/Deco architecture of the train station.

INT. UNION STATION - MOMENTS LATER

DOLLY parallel with Cruz as he walks quickly through the main  
terminal, scanning the huge hall. He stops, staring at

GINA ZARIAN - shares a bench with RUDY MILKA, eyes closed,  
head tucked against his shoulder, his arm curled protectively  
around her. This is a timeless tableau: Two kids, very  
alone, very much in love.

CRUZ - pauses for a moment, reading it. Touched by it.  
Finally:

CRUZ

Gina Zarian.

Her eyes flutter open. She looks up at Cruz. Shrinks  
against Rudy.

GINA  
Who are you?

CRUZ  
I'm a friend of your Dad's.

The lovers share a look.

CRUZ  
You need to come home.

GINA  
No.

CRUZ  
Gina--

RUDY  
She said no.

Cruz looks at Rudy.

CRUZ  
I talked to the man at the counter.  
You got tickets to Williams  
Junction, Arizona.

RUDY  
I got an uncle out there fixes  
helicopters. He gonna give me a  
job and teach me.

GINA  
We're gonna get married.

CRUZ  
You're a minor.

GINA  
I turn eighteen next month.

CRUZ  
Fine. Wait until you turn  
eighteen, then you can do anything  
you want.

Cruz reaches for her. She violently SLAPS his hand away.

GINA  
No!  
(quietly, decisively)  
No. You don't what it's like with  
him. He's crazy mean.

CRUZ  
Your father?

GINA  
Yeah. My father. Your *friend*.

Her eyes sparkle with angry tears. Cruz softens.

CRUZ  
He's not my friend, Gina. And I think I got a pretty good idea what he's about. We can deal with that. But first, you gotta come home.

She's not buying, arms crossed tightly. She looks away. Cruz addresses Rudy.

CRUZ  
C'mon, Rudy. Think. You get on that train, I call the cops. They'll pick you up, send her home. You go to jail.

GINA  
No way. He's not kidnapping me. I'm with him cuz I wanna be.

CRUZ  
That doesn't matter. You're a minor. He's not. He's transporting you across State Lines. That's Federal time.

The two kids stare at him, scared. Cruz gives them hard eyes.

CRUZ (V.O.)  
It was all B.S. of course. Feds don't stake out train-stations for runaways, and even if they did, they'd never bother to file charges. But Rudy and Gina didn't know that. Which made me feel exactly two-feet tall. Then again, she was a minor, he was no boy scout, and I had a job to do.

Over the PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM:

P.A.  
Southwest Chief departing for Chicago Illinois. Passengers proceed to Track 5.



Rudy and Gina look at each other.

GINA  
Go.

RUDY  
No.

Rudy pulls away from her and stands, pulls Cruz aside. He's a skinny kid, half-a-head shorter than Cruz.

RUDY  
Mister, I never had nothin. This girl... she the only one in the world I ever know who sees me this way. That's all I want. That's all I want to take care of her.

Rudy Milka's eyes brim with tears.

RUDY  
Please...

Cruz meets his gaze, expression impossible to read.

CUT TO:

INT. ZARIAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A TELEPHONE RINGS. It's picked up by Jerry Zarian.

ZARIAN  
Hello.

EXT. UNION STATION (INTERCUT)

Cruz leans against the fender of the Roadrunner, speaking into his cell-phone.

CRUZ  
It's me. Cruz.

ZARIAN  
Did you find her?

CRUZ  
Yeah, I think I got a line on her.

ZARIAN  
Where is she?

CRUZ

Not on the phone. I need you to meet me at Dodger Stadium. Lot 43. Got that?

Zarian writes it down.

ZARIAN

Lot 43. Now?

CRUZ

Yeah, Jer. Now.

Cruz folds his phone shut. A TRAIN WHISTLE BLOWS. He looks up at the stars. A warm wind tugs at his greasy overalls.

CRUZ (V.O.)

It was time to call an old friend.

INT. HARMONY HOUSE - OFFICE - NIGHT

Simple, lots of kids' drawings on the walls, photos. THERESA SANCHEZ, mid-30s, picks up the RINGING PHONE.

THERESA

Harmony House...

CRUZ (V.O.)

Theresa Sanchez, AKA "Mother Theresa." Runs a women's shelter in Thousand Oaks.

INT. ZARIAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Theresa, seated on the sofa, deep in an intense conversation with Anoush Zarian, holding both her hands.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)

We agreed to meet at Zarian's. At first, there were the denials, then the tears, then the terrible stories...

CRUZ - standing in the doorway, leaning against the threshold, dark eyes filled with compassion.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)

... the kind of stories that make you ashamed to be a man.

CRASH CUT TO:

EXT. DODGER STADIUM - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Zarian stands by his car, his note in his hand, staring blankly at one of the parking signs, the number 42 painted on a big baseball.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
 By the time Jerry Zarian finally figured out there was no Lot 43 at Dodger Stadium, his wife had decided to press charges.

CRASH CUT TO:

EXT. ZARIAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

RED AND BLUE LIGHTS rake the front yard as Jerry Zarian is CUFFED and shoved into the back of a cruiser.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
 So much for free rent...

Zarian presses his face against the window, mouthing curses. SWING AROUND and we see the OBJECT OF HIS FURY:

CRUZ - arms crossed, leaning against his tow-truck.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
 Before she left with Rudy on the train, I made Gina promise to call her mother...

CUT TO:

INT. TRAIN - PASSENGER CAR - NIGHT

Gina stares out the window into the blackness rushing by. Rudy gives her a squeeze. She flashes him a nervous smile and they both gaze out.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
 If they got married, she'd tell her where they were. After that, who knows? Maybe it would work. Maybe it wouldn't. But after all she and her Mom had gone through in that house, she deserved a shot, and who was I to screw it up?

BACK TO:

EXT. ZARIAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Anoush Zarian and Theresa load a small suitcase into the back of a Theresa's Passat. Mrs. Zarian shyly smiles thanks. Cruz returns it with a slow nod.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
I had exactly fifteen seconds to  
bask in my nobility...

His CELL-PHONE RINGS. Cruz looks at the number, closes his eyes. Bows his head, utterly resigned.

CUT TO:

INT. RANCH HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jolie and Cruz, hot in the middle of a SCREAMING MATCH:

JOLIE  
What were you thinking about?! How  
could you take her into a situation  
like that?!

CRUZ  
We were a hundred yards away. I  
had no idea it would go down the  
way it did. If I'd even had the  
slightest idea that--

JOLIE  
(interrupts)  
I know that. I know it wasn't  
deliberate. You just don't *get it!*

CRUZ  
Get what?

JOLIE  
You are a magnet for these things,  
Rico. Everywhere you go, bad  
things happen. And I can't have  
it. Not with Alex. I was  
depending on you. That's where I  
screwed up! That's where I *always*  
screw up!

CRUZ  
It wasn't your fault.

JOLIE  
It was a shoot out. That man had a  
gun. He shot your tire.

CRUZ  
I had it under control.

JOLIE  
She was in the truck, Rico.

No answer for that. He drops his eyes.

CRUZ  
I'm sorry.

Jolie looks away. "I'm sorry" just doesn't cut it.

CRUZ  
She's okay? I mean, emotionally?

JOLIE  
She been on the phone all afternoon  
telling her friends about it. By  
tomorrow it'll be like something  
cool she saw on TV.

CRUZ  
(impressed)  
Yeah, she's tough--

JOLIE  
No. Don't. You don't get to have  
an opinion about what she is or  
isn't. You screwed up. She  
could've been killed.

CRUZ  
It won't happen again.

JOLIE  
No. It won't.

There's something in her tone that gives Cruz pause.

CRUZ  
What're you saying?

Jolie draws herself up. This is hard.

JOLIE  
I'm saying maybe you shouldn't keep  
coming around here. I'm saying  
there's a reason we got divorced.  
I'm saying...

She wracks her mind for the right word or words that will define their relationship, the way it needs to be. Realizes she already used them.

JOLIE  
... we're divorced.

She's right. Cruz can't argue with her. No matter how hard he tries, he just keeps screwing up. He slowly nods.

CRUZ  
Yeah. You're right.

JOLIE  
I'm sorry.

CRUZ  
Me, too.

Cruz averts his eyes, starts out. Jolie touches his arm.

JOLIE  
I really am sorry.

Cruz attempts a smile. Fails miserably. She kisses the corner of his mouth. Their eyes meet. So much history. So much shared pain.

She kisses him again.

He returns it.

They embrace, passion growing.

Still locked in the kiss, Cruz blindly sweeps a napkin holder, plastic salt and pepper shakers off the table, lifts her onto it. They MOAN, begin clawing at each other's clothes.

CUT TO:

INT. RANCH HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAWN

Cruz lies in bed staring at the ceiling, face totally at peace.

CRUZ (V.O.)  
This is why we draw breath. This  
is my life...

Jolie stirs, snuggles close to him, makes a contented little noise and continues sleeping.

CRUZ (V.O.; CONT'D)  
It's a complicated life. But  
sometimes it's very simple. All  
things considered, it's the only  
one I got. Things could be  
worse...

Alex Cruz CALLS FROM DOWNSTAIRS:

ALEX (O.S.)  
*Mother? Whose car is that out in  
the driveway?*

Cruz winces and we're

OUT