

"AMERICANA"

James Grayford  
1626 North Wilcox Avenue  
#482  
Los Angeles, CA 90028  
323.807.8599  
jamesgrayford@mac.com

INT. KMTL RADIO STATION -- NIGHT

A rock song fades out as an ENGINEER's hand slides a control down on a state of the art board. We RACK FOCUS, see a backlit man in the deejay booth. This is STEVE "*THE SAVAGE*" RHODES, late 30's.

STEVE

That, my friends, is great rock 'n roll. And this, is the last you'll hear of it. On any radio station in Los Angeles anyway.

Various L.E.D. lights blink on and off. Steve's cigarette burns in an ashtray. He pours some Jack Daniels over ice, adds a splash of coke.

STEVE

We're about an eight ball from spinning our 1/2 ton wheels, chewing tobacco and tippin' our Stetsons to a purdy lady, 'cause this station's pulling into Schafer City. But they can't make The Savage play country. Not without a fight. I'm gonna leave you with one more, then turn you over to The Doctor. They'll never take the Savage alive!

Steve flips a switch, plays some rock 'n roll. The Engineer clicks the intercom button, presses a typed sheet against the glass partition.

ENGINEER

You seen the new play lists?

STEVE

(turning away)  
The Savage don't do playlists.

ENGINEER

That'll change once the Longhorns show up.

STEVE

Don't bet on it.

His sunglasses reflect the Los Angeles Skyline. A clear, beautiful night. Pitch black with bright lights twinkling with the stars. Alluring, seductive. Steve exhales smoke.

INT. TRENDY CLUB -- NIGHT

Slick, cool, hip. HOT WAITRESSES serve BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE drinks. You've got balls or bank, come on in. You lack either, don't bother. Steve sits at a booth facing the entrance. Impatient, he looks at his watch. Through the door walks KENNY, 30's, rough covered in trendy clothes. Steve's song fades out and the deejay comes on.

THE DOCTOR (O.S.)

The Doctor's in the house and he's gonna fix what ails you.

Steve rises, shakes hands with Kenny.

INT. TRENDY CLUB - MEN'S ROOM -- NIGHT

A BATHROOM VALET, 60's, sits on a stool holding a basket for tips. Spread upon the counter are various colognes, towels, combs, each in its own display bowl. A snorting echoes.

The toilet flushes and Steve exits a stall, gives the Valet a mischievous grin, slips on his shades, wipes his nose in the mirror before walking out.

EXT. PCH -- NIGHT

Late. Light traffic. We HEAR a distant engine suddenly grow VERY LOUD as a Black Corvette ROARS past.

INT. STEVE'S CORVETTE -- NIGHT

KENNY

You sure this's gonna be cool?

STEVE

I practically built their station.

Steve downshifts, speeds up, yells over the engine, smiles.

STEVE

Screw 'em.

EXT. MALIBU HOUSE -- NIGHT

Steve's Vette pulls into a driveway full of sports cars and high end automobiles. He and Kenny get out as Steve tosses a VALET the keys. They approach the door and a WELL DRESSED SECURITY MAN.

SECURITY MAN

Steve, don't do this to me, man.

Smirking, Steve keeps walking, Kenny right behind.

STEVE  
 Invitation musta got lost in the  
 mail.

SECURITY MAN  
 C'mon, Steve, please....

Reluctantly, the Security Man lets them pass. Kenny laughs,  
 pats Steve's back.

INT. MALIBU HOUSE -- NIGHT

The KMTL Farewell party. Rock 'N Roll decorations, casket  
 with ice and beer, bottles of Jack Daniels. EX-STATION OWNER  
 AND HIS WIFE, 60's, STATION EMPLOYEES, RECORDING INDUSTRY  
 TYPES, WAITRESSES, BARTENDERS, even ROCK STARS groove to the  
 music and party vibe.

Steve and Kenny pass a MODEL and her TWO MODEL FRIENDS. Steve  
 takes a sip from the Model's drink.

STEVE  
 (moving away)  
 Thanks, baby.

MODEL #3  
 Who was that?

MODEL #1  
 The Savage.

Model #2 steps forward, watches Steve.

MODEL #3  
 The Deejay?

Model #1 nods, chews on her straw.

INT. MALIBU HOUSE - CASKET -- NIGHT

Steve approaches the casket and the Station Owner with his  
 Wife. They're not happy to see him. Steve grabs a cup of ice  
 from the casket, fills it with Jack.

STATION OWNER  
 Honey, remind me to fire our Security  
 Company.

STEVE  
 Hey, how's it goin'?

STATION OWNER'S WIFE  
 Climb in, we'll shut the top.

STEVE

This is a great house. Bet you were glad to get her off the streets.

He winks, walks away.

STATION OWNER

Will you at least consider suicide?

Steve doesn't turn around, merely raises his glass.

INT. MALIBU HOUSE - BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Steve enters the bathroom. TOMMY LEE, 30's, sleeve tattoos, long hair, earrings, a drummer, stands whizzing in the toilet.

TOMMY LEE

Steve?!?

STEVE

Relax, this'll just take a second.

Steve pours the bindle on the basin.

STEVE

Want a bump?

TOMMY LEE

No! Now, get the fuck out!

EXT. MALIBU HOUSE - DECK -- NIGHT

Kenny and the Models sit at a table overlooking the ocean.

KENNY

Have you heard the new call letters?  
It's supposed to be *Kettle*, but  
everyone's calling it-

INT. MALIBU HOUSE - BATHROOM -- NIGHT

STEVE

Cattle. You believe that? K-cattle.

TOMMY LEE

Why you got it out for Country, man?  
It's the father of Rock 'N Roll.

STEVE

Look, with KMTL gone, your band has  
absolutely zero radio support. Which  
means you Schnooks haveta play year  
round or flyer the Rainbow.

Tommy Lee flushes, turns around.

TOMMY LEE

Don't talk to me about playing.  
Playing takes passion and discipline.  
You had either you'd do less of that  
shit, maybe even pick up a guitar.

STEVE

Hey, there's always The Crossroads.

TOMMY LEE

You gotta have a soul first, Steve.

Tommy Lee exits.

EXT. STEVE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

No question about it, this is a beautiful house. A dream house. Clean, spacious. And it's Steve's. You can tell 'cause his Vette's on the lawn.

INT. STEVE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Steve digs through the closet, pulls out a guitar case. He sets it on the table, opens it up. Jesus, look at this - a National Guitar. Metal. Must be what, 30 years old?

THE DOCTOR (O.S.)

That was it folks, the swan song. In the words of a friend of mine, the operation was a success but the patient died. Starting in about 60 seconds, the inland invasion continues with KKTL, your Country Connection.

Steve smiles, runs a hand along the guitar's neck. Like a long lost friend. A first love. He sits down, strums a few notes, tunes it a little.

He begins playing - a blues song, a country song! Steve pauses, smiles. Then, catching his reflection in the metal, bounces the guitar off the wall, breaking the neck.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. STEVE'S HOUSE -- MORNING

The song Steve played continues as we follow a trail of clothes through the house, hear a shower running, enter the bathroom, see a beer can on the sink. An empty sals over the shower, lands in front of us. A moment later, Steve slides the door and grabs the other can. We hear it open.

INT. RADIO STATION - BOOTH -- DAY

Steve sets up his regimen. Ashtray. Smokes. Jack. Soda.

In the background, partitions separate office cubicles. A cowboy hat appears just above the top, makes its way around a corner, heads for the booth. This is the KKTL STATION MANAGER, 40's, southern, a bit of a paunch. Country but by no means a hick. Smart, educated, shrewd. Not the kind you get off the wrong foot with. He sits on Steve's desk.

KKTL STATION MANAGER

We wanna tell you how glad we are to have Los Angeles' number one radio personality on our show.

STEVE

So, to translate, you just wanna tell me how sorry you are you won't pay out my contract.

KKTL STATION MANAGER

We got us a way of doing things around here. First...

He reaches over Steve, removes the Jack.

KKTL STATION MANAGER

...you don't drink on the job. Second, we got songs we like to play.

STEVE

I don't do playlists.

KKTL STATION MANAGER

You do now, son.

The Station Manager pushes off the desk, heads for the door, turns around.

KKTL STATION MANAGER

You decide you know better, I'm sure the parent company'd have no problem accepting your resignation.

He closes the door, slips over to the Engineer.

STEVE

Alright, you fuck.

Steve slides out of the chair and beneath the console.

INT. RADIO STATION - BOOTH -- DAY

Beneath the console, Steve pulls off a cover, lowers some wires, sifts through them. He stands, removes an MP3 player and hooks it up.

ENGINEER

Steve? C'mon man.....

Steve clicks a switch, turns him off. Steve slips back into his chair, speaks into the microphone as he sets the Playlist on fire.

STEVE

Good afternoon, folks, you got *The Savage* busting through your frequency.

INT. JON LYNN'S OFFICE -- DAY

Entertainment Manager. Large office. Photos on the wall show JON LYNN, late 30's, clean cut, nice suit, professional, with his WIFE and daughter SADIE, 4, another with Rick Dees, a shot with Howard Stern, one with hey, is that the President?

Jon sits behind his large, glass desk. The radio plays. He's listening to the station as he works on a document.

STEVE (O.S.)

You know, I was out last night, hanging with some rock 'n roll friends. And I had a real *SHITTY-*

Jon stops writing.

STEVE (O.S.)

- time 'cause the former owner and his *ASSHOLE* wife insisted on playing this new country music station.

Jon exhales, leans back, stares at a picture of himself with Steve, both smiling, wearing sarongs, posing in front of a Sushi bar. His SECRETARY flies into the room. He shakes his head.

INT. KKTL RADIO STATION - BOOTH -- DAY

The Station Manager appears, starts reaming the Engineer.

ENGINEER

He's done an override. See.

He wiggles the switches, the controls. Nothing.

STEVE

Well, I got my own reasons, but Father  
or no Father *I HATE COUNTRY MUSIC!*

The Station Manager tries the door. Steve clicks on the MP3 player, feeds squealing guitars, hardcore rock 'n roll over the air waves. The sound coarses through the Engineer's headphones. He rips them off. In the background, Employees appear above their partitions. The level's deafening.

STEVE

THEY'LL NEVER TAKE THE SAVAGE ALIVE!!  
HA-HA-HA...HA-HA-HA...

He spins around in his chair. Around, around, around...

EXT. LOS ANGELES STATION MANAGER'S OFFICE -- DAY

We TRACK along the hallway, staring right at the wall, approach a closed door, hear yelling. Suddenly, Steve exits, slams the door behind him.

STEVE

And the thunder rolls.

He walks away.

EXT. LOS ANGELES RADIO STATION - PARKING STRUCTURE -- DAY

Steve's Black Corvette peels out onto the road, speeds away.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - DAY TO NIGHT

The sun goes down. City lights come on.

INT. STEVE'S CORVETTE -- NIGHT

Steve drives and uses his cell. Model #2 rides shotgun.

INT. JON LYNN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

The phone's ringing. The clock reads 11:15 PM. Jon's wife rolls over, nudges him. He answers the phone.

STEVE (O.S.)

Did you hear the show?

JON

Yeah, I heard it.

INT. STEVE'S CORVETTE -- NIGHT

STEVE

I need a career planning session.  
Grab a Sarong and meet me at Sushi.

JON

It's past eleven.

STEVE

Shit, gimme 45, I gotta hook up with  
my guy.

Steve tosses the Model the phone, does a U-Turn.

INT. JON LYNN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Jon swings his feet out of the bed.

SADIE (O.S.)

Daddy?

Jon looks up. Sadie stands in the doorway with a teddy bear.

INT. SUSHI BAR -- NIGHT

Jon's alone at a table. Steve enters the bar with Model #2.  
He reaches into his pocket, slips something into her hand.

STEVE

I need a minute.

She heads for the bathroom. Steve sits down at Jon's table.

STEVE

How's the kid?

JON

Back to sleep.

STEVE

Oops.

Steve motions for a Waitress.

JON

Steve, this was fun ten years ago.

The Waitress arrives.

STEVE

Whiskey Coke. Vodka Collins. And,  
ah, fuck him.

The Waitress walks away.

JON

The FCC's gonna fine you. We'll be lucky if they don't jack your license. By the way, you look like hell.

STEVE

That was great, can you do my Dad?

JON

I'm worried about you, Steve. You screwed up New York so bad - you can never go back. And if getting ostracized from the number one market wasn't enough, you just blew out number two.

STEVE

I've always been an asshole, Jon. Were you too busy counting the money to notice?

JON

Don't give me that Savage bullshit, 'cause that's all it is. You wanna role play, do it on the air. I know you too well.

STEVE

You don't know shit about me.

JON

Whenever you feel you've achieved something, you self-destruct and its not until we get you up a notch that you settle down.

STEVE

It's called ambition.

JON

It's called denial. You're running, Steve. From what I don't know, but the rush to get to the top was anything but ambitious. You're good at your job -

STEVE

I'm the best.

JON

But it's obvious you don't like it.  
(MORE)

JON (CONT'D)

And sometimes I wonder if you even like yourself.

This hits Steve. Sparks his vulnerability.

JON

I've never seen you happy, Steve.

Steve's walls come down. He glances at Jon.

JON

Was there ever a time when you walked into the booth, looked around and thought, "wow, this is wonderful"?

A memory hits Steve. He smiles.

STEVE

The old days. Spinning vinyl.

JON

You were what? 17? 18?

STEVE

16.

JON

And that was Country.

STEVE

I can't, Jon. Country brings back....

JON

Well, you can't keep playing Rock.

The Waitress returns with Steve's order.

JON

There's gotta be some lifestyle, between the two, some place that'll give you peace. But only you can find it. Not The Savage. Steve.

STEVE

Look, I know I've been kinda, stumbling....

JON

*Kinda* stumbling?

STEVE

I'm not altogether happy, I'll give you that, and I know there's people who have it together but I don't know how to get to where they are. I don't like being an asshole. But it's, it's...

Steve sees Model #2 approach. She mouths, "Savage", shudders. Steve smiles, exhales deeply, fills back up with himself.

STEVE

..it's what people want from me. You gotta admit, things are much more interesting with The Savage around. The day does go by a lot faster.

Steve laughs, takes a deep swig of his whiskey coke.

JON

Maybe it's time to grow up.

Steve chews on the ice, glares back at Jon.

STEVE

You know, why don't you loosen up, huh? You don't wanna represent The Savage, hit the fucking road.

Model #2 slides in next to Steve, sets a hand on his chest.

STEVE

Now, where do we go from here? How about Chicago, would they be interested in having me back?

JON

I'd have to make a call.

STEVE

Good.

JON

But I won't until you clean up.

STEVE

Fine, I'll call Chicago myself.

JON

You're gonna have to.

(stands, removes wallet)

The damage is done, Steve. Get your shit together, we'll talk about the future.

He sets some money on the table.

JON

Mark my words, you're gonna struggle  
your way down 'til you find out what  
you want. Or who you are.

EXT. SUSHI BAR -- NIGHT

Jon exits out the front. Steve knocks on the window. He holds  
up his drink, nudges the Model. She lifts her shirt, presses  
her breasts against the glass. Steve lets out a wail.

STEVE

They'll never take The Savage alive!

The Model laughs. But watching Jon walk away, Steve knows  
he's lost a friend.

EXT. CHICAGO - ESTABLISHING -- MORNING

Sears tower. Soldier Field. Wrigley Field. A good market.

STEVE (O.S.)

I haven't been up this early since  
doin' the Swedish Twins at Liberty  
Hall! Talk about duos.

KFRS STATION MANAGER (O.S.)

You haven't changed a bit.

INT. KFRS-AM RADIO -- DAY

Steve and the KFRS STATION MANAGER, 50's, light beard, casual  
suit, walk down the hall. They pass a water cooler.

KFRS STATION MANAGER

I think you'll appreciate this.

He points to a bolt and arm attaching the cooler's base to  
the wall.

KFRS STATION MANAGER

You left me in quite a lurch, Steve.

STEVE

I was older then. I'm younger than  
that now.

KFRS STATION MANAGER

How long you in town for?

STEVE

That depends on you. I need a job.

KFRS STATION MANAGER

Well, I have an opening. But -

STEVE

Hey, who says you can't go home again, huh? It's great to be back where it all began. Look, if it's okay, I'd like to lay off the whole "Savage" thing. I mean, if you need my notoriety, of course I'll do it, but I'd rather just keep a low profile -

KFRS STATION MANAGER

Slow down a bit, Steve. Slow down. It's not an "on air" position.

STEVE

What kind of position is it?

INT. KFRS-AM RADIO - BOOTH -- DAY

The DJ's DARRELL OTT, 40's, dorky, got the hair sweep working, various squeaky toys, obnoxious laugh, over the top.

DARRELL OTT

Are we having fun yet? Huh? Huh?  
Don't get me started!  
(squeezes plastic  
duck)

Wanna welcome our new employee, give us a wave there Steve-O.

We RACK FOCUS to Steve's reflection. He's working the Engineer board, gives a wave, forces a smile.

INT. KFRS-AM RADIO -- NIGHT

A time clock punches 8PM on Steve's time card. He slips it back into a slot with his name on it. Nearby is a schedule with his name penciled in as *Engineer* and Darrell's as *Disc Jockey* for the 10 AM shift.

Steve glances over a shoulder, sees Darrell walking away. He takes a drag from his cigarette, smiles.

INT. LOCAL BAR -- NIGHT

Steve and Darrell finish a shot.

DARRELL OTT

No more.

STEVE

Ah, come on, I'm getting you started.

DARRELL OTT

I drink anymore, I'll never punch  
the clock....

Steve motions for two more.

EXT. HIGHWAY -- NIGHT

.....slowly, we begin to focus, make out flashing lights.  
Red and blue. Two Cop cars. One Firetruck. An Ambulance.  
Darrell's car and another are mangled.

A moment later, the screen slowly goes out of focus, blurry  
until we can't make out a thing.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Through the glass WE SEE Darrell in a hospital bed. Tubes,  
monitors, incessant beeping. His WIFE and TWO KIDS stand by  
him. Steve's reflection appears in the window. He sees what  
he's done.

INT. HALLWAY BY STATION MANAGER'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

We TRACK along the hallway, staring right at the wall,  
approach an open door. The Station Manager's sitting at the  
desk. Steve steps up. Bandage above an eye. Small cuts. Arm  
in a sling. The Station Manager slowly rises from his chair,  
walks over to the door, closes it on Steve.

INT. JON LYNN'S KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Steve's voice on the answering machine.

STEVE (O.S.)

Pick up, man. Please?

EXT. KFRS-AM RADIO - PARKING LOT -- NIGHT

Steve's at a pay phone.

STEVE

I was wondering if maybe we could  
just put the business part aside..

INT. JON LYNN'S KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Sadie holds her teddy bear, stares up at the phone.

STEVE (O.S.)

I could use a, I could use a friend.

EXT. KFRS-AM RADIO - PARKING LOT -- NIGHT

STEVE

You there? Jon...

Steve hangs up the phone, steps out of frame.

EXT. KFRS-AM RADIO - PARKING LOT -- NIGHT

Steve gets into his car, pulls out of the lot. He drives down the barren road. The wind begins to whistle. And Steve disappears into a blooming white screen as the sound runs the length of the radio dial, ending in static, white noise...

FADE OUT:

EXT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

A Tractor Trailer ROARS through frame, revealing the Roadhouse Cafe. Cool place to eat, drink, shoot pool. In the heartland. Where you raise a family. Or find yourself.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

Coffee brews. Food sizzles. Radio plays. TV with the sound off. Locals. Plaid. Stetsons. Cowboy boots. Folks eat at the counter and at booths lined long the parking lot windows. KRISTY, 20's, a waitress, stands by one of the booths, chatting with a customer.

Among the folks at the counter are ED, 30's, beard, barrel chest, big arms, WILLIE, 30's, average size, weathered Peterbuilt baseball cap and MIKE, 30's, thin, wiry.

Sitting at the middle stool of the counter is BOOKER, 40's, slicked back hair, his 300 pounds surrounded by a suit, a napkin stuck in his collar.

An order bell rings. A waitress, JESSIE WALDEN, 29, shoulder length brown hair, down to earth good looks, no make up, lifts an order from the pick up window, turns to face us.

She walks the length of the counter, comes 'round the corner and delivers the plate to the last booth. Steve looks up. He's grown a beard, looks tired.

JESSIE

Can I getcha anything else?

Steve shakes his head, smiles.

JESSIE

It ain't to your liking you let me know and I'll fix you something myself, alright?

She winks at him.

JESSIE

Alright, then.

He watches her leave. She finds her way back around the corner, gives a PATRON a coffee refill. Willie perks up, puts a hand on Mike's arm. He listens as the song finishes and LYLE, the DJ, comes on.

WILLIE

This is it.

Mike glances over at Booker who clears his throat, sets down his utensils. Listens.

LYLE (O.S.)

The folks here at KNDP want to ask you to check out the prices at Booker's General Store. You need, uh...

Willie and Mike elbow each other. Steve's eating slows as he notices everyone's listening. The whole place has stopped.

LYLE (O.S.)

You need anything, get on over to Booker's and he'll take care of you.

A song begins. Booker cracks his neck joint, returns to his food. Frustrated, Willie goes back to his plate. Mike stares at Ed, who's still perked up.

ED

Ain't over.

Willie glances at him.

ED

Listen up boys. It ain't over.

Sure enough, we hear some talk over the song. The mic's on.

LYLE (O.S.)

...I know. I can never get it right. And it's only Booker's. You know why?

(MORE)

LYLE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 'Cause every time I say his name, I  
 see that huge ass waddling around  
 looking for a ten penny nail. Then I  
 just lose it! Ha, ha, ha...

Booker throws his utensils down.

LYLE (O.S.)  
 What? I can't hear you. Speak up you  
 goose. SPEAK UP! What? Oh,  
 shiiiiimy....

Booker yanks the napkin from his neck, tosses it on his plate.

JESSIE  
 Booker, you leave him alone. Booker.

Booker heads for the door. Ed follows, as does Mike and a  
 bunch of locals. Willie turns, sees Steve.

WILLIE  
 Come on, fella'...you don't wanna  
 miss this.

Steve stares at him. Willie lifts him up. Steve sets some  
 money down, follows Willie and the others.

EXT. ROADHOUSE CAFE - PARKING LOT -- DAY

Cars and trucks peel out onto the street, all following  
 Booker's Cadillac. Steve's Vette's the last. Weathered, worse  
 for wear. But running.

EXT. KNDP RADIO STATION -- DAY

Painted on an old stucco wall is the KNDP logo. Faded, been  
 there a while. A large drawing of a record needle set upon  
 an album. The call letters are drawn from top to bottom on  
 the needle.

A speaker plays a song broadcast by the station. Suddenly,  
 the door bursts open and out flies Lyle, 30's, thinning hair,  
 a little belly. Not a fighter.

BOOKER  
 C'mon, boy, I got me a ten penny  
 nail for you.

Booker pulls off his jacket, tosses it to Mike. Lyle scampers  
 back along the gravel.

ED  
 Don't take that from him.



BOOKER

You gonna get yourself some then.

THADDEUS

I'll make it up to you, Booker, you know I will.

BOOKER

How you gonna do that without Lyle?

Booker rushes forward, reaches over Thaddeus, grabs Lyle, tries to throw punches.

STEVE (O.S.)

Hey, you're still listening to KNDP. We at KNDP wanna tell you about Booker's General Store. Most people think of a General Store as a place to buy a hammer, maybe an axe. But Booker's is more than that.

The fight dies down. Everyone's surprised about what's happening. No one more than Thaddeus, but he's going with it. Tries to hide his shock.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

Jessie pours coffee for a TRUCKER. She hears the ad, turns to Kristy who gives her a "*how 'bout that*" look.

INT. KNDP BOOTH -- DAY

Carefully, Steve sets the needle down on the record.

EXT. KNDP RADIO STATION -- DAY

Everyone listens. Thaddeus motions for Booker's jacket. Booker grabs it, walks away. The crowd disperses. Thaddeus turns to Lyle.

THADDEUS

You're on the night shift, son. You can grab your things tomorrow. Now, off with you.

Thaddeus and Cal head for the door, Lyle for his car.

CAL

Who's on the mic?

THADDEUS

Let's find out.

INT. KNNDP BOOTH -- DAY

Thaddeus and Cal stare at the empty booth. We hear a door open. They turn around, Steve's stepping out the back.

THADDEUS  
Hey, hold it right there.

Steve stops, faces them.

STEVE  
Look, don't call the cops. I'm  
leaving.

Thaddeus puts a hand out for Cal to stay where he is, slowly walks toward Steve.

THADDEUS  
Leaving? Son, you weren't *invited*.

STEVE  
I was just trying to help, that's  
all. Fill some dead air, y'know.

THADDEUS  
You've done this before.

STEVE  
Yeah, a little.

THADDEUS  
Anywhere in particular?

Thaddeus' stands near him. Checks out his clothes. Weathered but clean. His hands. Brittle, could use some soap. The eyes. Some pain. But clear. Guy needs a break.

STEVE  
All over. Started when I was fifteen.  
Worked my way up.

THADDEUS  
You working now?

STEVE  
I'm in transition.

THADDEUS  
Uh, huh... I've owned this station  
nearly forty years.

STEVE  
It's a great place. I love the booth.

THADDEUS

You interested in spending some time  
in there? Just 'til things calm down.  
You being in transition and all, it  
might fill the dead air.

STEVE

I don't want to take anyone's job.

THADDEUS

Well, Lyle's sort of *extended* family  
so he's gonna do some graveyard 'til  
he's figured it out.

(calling out)

Cal?!?

CAL

Yes, sir.

THADDEUS

(to Steve)

Didn't get your name.

STEVE

Steve. Steven Rhodes.

They shake hands.

THADDEUS

Thaddeus Walden.

Steve nods his head.

THADDEUS

Cal, show Steven here the lay of the  
land.

Thaddeus walks away. Cal stands there checking out Steve.

CAL

You can exhale now.

Steve laughs. Cal doesn't. He heads down the hallway. Steve  
follows.

INT. KNDP BOOTH -- DAY

Steve eases into the chair. Glances at everything like its  
the first time he's been in a booth.

CAL

You really done this before?

STEVE

Yeah.

Steve flicks the mic switch off. It clicks back on. He clicks it off. It stays off. Cal smiles at him, speaks through the intercom.

CAL

You gotta be careful of that.

STEVE

So I heard. I was at the Roadhouse.

CAL

Ten seconds.

Cal does the countdown, Steve hits the mic, smiles.

INT. ROADHOUSE - BAR AREA -- NIGHT

Kristy sets down steak dinners in front of both Cal and Steve. They begin dressing them.

STEVE

So this the center of town?

Cal looks at Steve like he's being an asshole.

CAL

Oh, yeah. You gotta make reservations months in advance just to get a seat at the counter.

STEVE

That's not what I meant.

CAL

Hurry up and finish and I'll take you cow tipping. Shoot, I just remembered, tonight's my Uncle's turn to take my Cousin out.

(glances around)

They should be here.

STEVE

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be rude.

CAL

Well, you were.

Cal continues eating. Steve sits back. It's happening again.

STEVE

I'm gonna get this and head home.

CAL  
 (doesn't look up)  
 Drive fast.

Steve rises, walks away.

INT. ROADHOUSE - REGISTER -- NIGHT

Kristy approaches Steve but stops to help a Customer. Jessie grabs the check from his hand and rings it up

JESSIE  
 Cash or charge, sir?

Steve hands her his credit card, driver's license. She looks at it.

JESSIE  
 Oh - Happy Birthday. Show it to the bartender he'll give you a pitcher.

STEVE  
 I don't drink much anymore.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE - BAR AREA -- NIGHT

Behind Cal, Jessie hands Steve his card and receipt.

JESSIE  
 Have a nice evening.

Steve turns to leave.

JESSIE  
 Hey...

Steve glances at Cal.

JESSIE  
 You okay?

He nods, exits.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE - BAR AREA - TABLES -- NIGHT

Jessie approaches Cal, bumps him in the head with a tray.

CAL  
 Ouch!

JESSIE  
 Oh, I'm sorry. I must've been thinking about how you let that fellow buy your dinner on *his* birthday.

And she's off. Cal picks up his utensils but can't eat.

EXT. ROADHOUSE CAFE - PARKING LOT -- NIGHT

Steve approaches his Vette. Cal exits.

CAL

Hey. Why don't you come back in,  
finish your steak?

STEVE

I really can't. They tell me the  
motel closes early.

CAL

Look, I'm sorry. Folks blowing through  
here can be real assholes.

STEVE

(getting in car)  
It's okay, I used to be one.

CAL

Happy Birthday.

STEVE

See you tomorrow.

EXT. LOCAL HOTEL -- NIGHT

Steve stands in the lobby.

INT. LOCAL HOTEL - CHECK IN -- NIGHT

Steve speaks with the MOTEL OWNER, 60's. Behind the Owner's  
a door leading to a living room. An old black and white plays  
a snow filled screen. Rabbit ear antenna.

MOTEL OWNER

There's a phone, but no long distance.  
You need to do that, use the booth.

The Motel Owner walks him to the exit.

MOTEL OWNER

We don't do wake up calls and I close  
the office at 9 PM sharp so don't  
lose the key or you're sleeping under  
the big sky. Me and the Mrs don't  
like being woke in the middle of the  
night so do your entertaining  
someplace else.

Steve steps outside. The Owner hands him the room key.

STEVE

Thank -

The door slams shut.

STEVE

You.

INT. STEVE'S MOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

The simple bare necessities. Bed, lamp, dresser, tv, mirror. Steve sets his bag on the bed.

INT. STEVE'S MOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Steve pulls the shower curtain aside, sees a spider by the drain. Using the paper shower mat, he scoops up the little guy and drops him out the bathroom window.

INT. STEVE'S MOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Steve's asleep. Seems rather peaceful.

EXT. LOCAL MOTEL -- NIGHT

Steve's Vette's parked in front of his room. Suddenly, the headlights start flashing and the car alarm goes off.

INT. STEVE'S MOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Through the shades we see the flashing lights. Steve sits up, disoriented.

EXT. STEVE'S MOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Steve opens the door, his eyes go wide. On top of his Vette, right on top, stands THE COLT. A horse! Steve clicks off the alarm, glances around.

STEVE

(loud whisper)

Get off my car.

The Colt lifts its head up and down, stares at Steve almost in challenge. Steve takes a step toward the car. The Colt lowers its head, steps forward onto the hood, moving toward Steve. The alarm and lights go off again.

INT. STEVE'S MOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Steve rushes back inside, slams the door shut, puts his back against it. Whines a bit, scared. There's a banging on the other side.

STEVE  
 (high pitched, panic)  
 What do you want! What do you want!

The banging becomes more intense.

BURLY MAN (O.S.)  
 Turn off your car alarm!

STEVE  
 What?!?

BURLY MAN (O.S.)  
 Turn off your goddamn car alarm!

Steve opens the door. The Colt's gone. But standing in the doorway is a BURLY MAN, 40's, messed up hair, pissed off expression. A COUPLE OTHER FOLKS stand to the side. No one's happy to be up at 4 AM. Steve glances around in disbelief.

EXT. STEVE'S MOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Steve steps out with his car keys. Beeps the alarm off. The other guests return to their rooms. Steve approaches his car, checks the roof, windshield, hood. Nothing. No hoof prints.

He turns around. His door's shut. Locked. Glances at the Front Desk. Dark. He has to sleep in the car.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LOCAL MOTEL -- MORNING

One of the OTHER GUESTS exit their room and head to their car. It's parked next to Steve's.

EXT. STEVE'S MOTEL ROOM -- MORNING

Steve's head rests against the driver's side window. His eyes blink. As the other car pulls out, we see the Motel Owner inside. Steve's door opens.

INT. LOCAL HOTEL - CHECK IN -- MORNING

The Owner sets a key on the desk. Gives a disapproving look.

EXT. STEVE'S MOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM -- MORNING

The window's steamed up. We can make out a form in the shower as the Spider crawls across the outside glass.

EXT. KNNDP RADIO STATION -- DAY

Steve pulls into the parking lot. Lyle exits the front with a cardboard box.

STEVE  
(getting out)  
How's it going?

LYLE  
You tell me.

STEVE  
The oddest thing happened last night.

INT. KNNDP RADIO STATION - THADDEUS' OFFICE -- DAY

Sitting at his desk, Thaddeus hears conversation in the parking lot. He splits the shades, sees Lyle and Steve, then lets the shades fall back into place.

EXT. KNNDP RADIO STATION -- DAY

LYLE  
Tell it on the air.

STEVE  
You think?

LYLE  
Heck, yeah. Bond with the locals.  
Slick guy like you knows the drill.

Steve extends his hand.

STEVE  
Hey, thanks. Thanks alot.

Lyle nods, walks away.

LYLE  
Folks around here got a great sense  
of humor

STEVE  
(motions to station)  
I'll keep the seat warm 'til you  
come back.

LYLE  
Yeah, you do that.

INT. KNNDP BOOTH -- DAY

Steve passes Cal, gives a wave, enters the booth. HARRIS TRACKER, 40's, the morning DJ, finishes up his show.

HARRIS  
...after which the capable hands  
of...

STEVE  
(whisper)  
Steven Rhodes.

HARRIS  
...Steven Rhodes...will lead you  
through the day. See you in the  
morning.

Harris puts on a record, removes the headphones and rises.

HARRIS  
Harris Tracker. Pleasure's mine.

They shake hands.

HARRIS  
Gotta get home before my wife runs  
out of firewood. She keeps forgetting  
she's pregnant.

Harris grabs his jacket, rushes out of the booth.

INT. KNNDP BOOTH -- DAY

Steve lifts the needle at song's end.

STEVE  
Good afternoon, everyone, I'm Steve  
Rhodes.

INT. LYLE'S CAR -- DAY

Lyle's driving, enjoying the broadcast.

STEVE (O.S.)  
You know, the funniest thing happened  
to me last night.

INT. ROADHOUSE -- DAY

Business as usual. Patrons, Jessie, Kristy.

STEVE (O.S.)  
I'm sound asleep when all of sudden,  
my car alarm goes off.

Lyle strolls into the cafe, takes a seat at the counter,  
nods to the regulars, exhales with confidence.

INT. KNNDP - CAL'S BOARD -- DAY

Cal's smiling, enjoying the story.

STEVE (O.S.)  
Lights flashing, walls shaking.

INT. KNNDP RADIO STATION - THADDEUS' OFFICE -- DAY

Thaddeus as well, works and listens.

STEVE (O.S.)  
So, I open the door, and what do I  
see on top of my car?

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

Kristy fills Lyle's coffee mug.

STEVE (O.S.)  
A horse.

Everything stops. All conversation. All movement.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

Kristy drops a coffee pot. It shatters.

STEVE (O.S.)  
Or, as a friend kindly informed me,  
a *Colt*.

Jessie turns, stares directly at Lyle. His confidence  
evaporates into guilty remorse.

STEVE (O.S.)  
I guess it's been running wild for  
years, but its on my darn car.

INT. KNNDP - CAL'S BOARD -- DAY

Cal gives Steve the "cut" motion, knocks on the glass.

STEVE (O.S.)  
It comes at me so I lock myself in  
my hotel room, only to have the  
neighbors bang on my door.

INT. KNNDP BOOTH -- DAY

STEVE

Yeah, Cal, just like that. And what happens when I open it? It's gone.

INT. KNNDP RADIO STATION - THADDEUS' OFFICE -- DAY

Thaddeus is gone, too. His chair squeaks as it slowly spins.

STEVE (O.S.)

So I'm wondering...

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

Everyone's still in shock. Kristy cleans up the spill. Through the window we see Jessie berating Lyle.

STEVE (O.S.)

...should I order some coffee and cherry pie 'cause its starting to feel like Twin Peaks to me.

A Trucker lifts his fork but stops, glances at it. Cherry pie. Coffee in a mug next to the plate.

INT. KNNDP BOOTH -- DAY

Steve sets the needle on a record. Cal rushes into the booth.

CAL

Come with me. Now!

EXT. KNNDP - BACK -- DAY

Cal leads Steve around the building.

STEVE

What's the problem?

CAL

What's the problem? You were capping on The Colt. The Untamed Colt! You don't cross a county line and take pot shots at their folklore!

STEVE

Folklore?!?

CAL

A lot of people around here hold The Untamed Colt in high regard. And those that don't WILL once an outsider rides it bareback over the radio!

STEVE

But I saw it!

Cal revs up for another go 'round when the back door flies open. Thaddeus stands very imposing, very unhappy. Steve glances at Cal then back at Thaddeus, reluctantly walks around the corner.

CAL

Where he comes from, they don't have Untamed Colts. Much less fables. You gonna fire him?

THADDEUS

You kiddin' me? I wanna see what that boy's made of.

EXT. ROADHOUSE CAFE - PARKING LOT -- DAY

An egg lands on Steve's Vette. It's a mess. All sorts of food, some dirt, you name it.

A bus pulls up to the side of the road and stops. BRENNA WALDEN, 11, exits and walks toward the entrance. Not your typical country girl. Overalls. Combat boots. Ponytails.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE - BAR AREA -- DAY

Steve shoots pool. By himself. Jessie approaches, sets down a soda in a coke glass.

STEVE

Thank you.

JESSIE

Sure you don't want something stronger? Drown your sorrows a bit?

Steve shakes his head 'no'. Behind them, Brenna enters the Roadhouse.

JESSIE

You heading back to California?

Steve looks at her like, "how the hell....?"

JESSIE

License plate.

STEVE

Oh. No, I'm not leaving. I'm sticking this out.

As Jessie exits, Brenna walks into the pool room, sets her bag down on a table, picks up a cue.

BRENNA

Wanna bet?

STEVE

Now, why you wanna spoil a good game of pool by betting?

BRENNA

(shrugs)

Win money.

Jessie stops and turns. Leans against the pillar as Steve starts racking the balls. His back's to Jessie.

STEVE

Lemme tell you something, kiddo. Money ain't all its cracked up to be. Trust me, I've had it.

BRENNA

Really?

STEVE

Oh, yeah. After you've bought all your toys, after you've paid off the dream house, it doesn't mean a thing if you don't have someone to come home to. I mean, if someone took your family away but gave you all the money in the world, would that make you happy?

BRENNA

I guess not.

Jessie smiles, steps into the cafe area.

STEVE

See what I'm saying? Go ahead and break. I'll be right back.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

Steve comes around the corner.

STEVE

Hey.

Jessie sets down some plates, wipes her hands on a towel.

STEVE

Are her parents around? I should check to make sure its cool for her to be in there with me.

JESSIE

I'll cover you.

STEVE

Think they'd mind if I bought her a soda?

JESSIE

I think it'd be okay.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE - BAR AREA -- DAY

Steve lines up a shot.

STEVE

Is there any truth to it? This Colt?

BRENNA

I've never seen it.

Jessie hands Brenna the soda.

BRENNA

Thanks, mom.

Brenna sips through a straw. Steve turns around.

JESSIE

Take it easy on Steve, you hear? He's had a rough day.

BRENNA

Oh-kaaay...

Jessie winks at him, walks away.

EXT. ROADHOUSE CAFE - PARKING LOT -- DAY

As Steve pulls up to the road, Cal pulls in. He stops and they speak through their windows.

CAL

Come back tomorrow.

Steve doesn't get it.

CAL

You want your job back?

STEVE

Yeah.

CAL

Then come back tomorrow.

STEVE

Should I talk to Thaddeus?

CAL

Steve, if it ain't broke, don't fix it, okay?

Cal puts his truck into gear.

STEVE

Hey? I owe you one.

Cal waves and pulls away.

INT. KNNDP BOOTH -- DAY

Steve announces a song.

STEVE

...playing right here on KNNDP.

Steve winks at Cal.

EXT. KNNDP RADIO STATION -- DAY

Jessie pulls up in a station wagon. Brenna rides shotgun. They park next to Steve's Vette, still covered in food.

BRENNA

Why hasn't he taken it off?

JESSIE

He wants the town to know he's sorry.

She moves to get out, so does Brenna. But Jessie quickly leans back in to check herself in the rearview. Brenna catches her. Makes fun.

JESSIE

You're walking home.

BRENNA

But maaaaaaa.

JESSIE

(getting out)  
Go. Grab your bike.

As Jessie walks to the front entrance, Brenna shrugs, pulls her bike out of the back of the car. It has saddle stirrups on the pedals and a horse's head on the front.

INT. KNNDP BOOTH -- DAY

Steve sees Jessie walk down the hall. He perks up. A moment later, Thaddeus turns the corner, greets her with a kiss, hands her a bunch of envelopes. Jessie heads to Cal, gives him an envelope, exchanges words, heads into the booth.

JESSIE

I respect what you did. It's not often Brenna sees a man, much less a stranger, eat a little crow yet retain his dignity. Here.

She hands him an envelope.

JESSIE

That's for the last couple days. Are you skipping town?

STEVE

No.

JESSIE

Good. Then you won't mind meeting Brenna and me at the County Fair this Saturday.

STEVE

Sure.

She turns. He checks her out.

JESSIE

Oh-

(abruptly turns around)

My father's the boss here. Also owns the Roadhouse.

(leans in, whispers)

So you might wanna stop staring at my ass every time I walk by, okay?

Steve nods. She exits the booth, leaves the building.

CAL

Just be sure. She's got a lot going on. Be sure.

EXT. COUNTRY FAIR - ESTABLISHING -- DAY

A huge tent in the middle, a bunch of wooden corrals, and a fence circling the whole thing. In the parking lot, BOYS and GIRLS sit on the back of trucks and muscle cars.

Steve's Vette pulls in. Still dirty with food. He parks between a couple trucks, gets out. Leather jacket, shades. He locks his car, walks away. A second later, a cow patty slaps against the windshield.

EXT. COUNTY FAIR - VARIOUS AREAS -- DAY

Steve walks through the fair. Nervous. Chewing gum. Out of his element. All around him are wranglers, boots, belt buckles, cowboy hats.

This is a real County Fair. Animals abound. Huge cows. Guys competing in a pig chase. Dunking booth. Auctioneer. Home cooking. Apple pie contest. Stage with a band and an awesome fiddle player. Oh - and a rodeo.

Steve looks around. Removes his shades. Doesn't see Jessie. Until the CROWD parts and there she is. A down to earth woman with a heart and soul. Steve slides his sunglasses back on. Turns to leave. Too late.

JESSIE

Hey! Steven.

He turns back around as she approaches.

JESSIE

Trying to sneak out, eh?

STEVE

No, I -

JESSIE

(taking his arm)

Come on....

They start walking.

JESSIE

This must be a first for you.

STEVE

You think so, huh?

JESSIE

Sure. Nervous. Out of your element.  
*Speechless.*

She cranes her neck out to him, laughs.

EXT. COUNTY FAIR - RODEO -- DAY

Steve and Jessie pass the rodeo's wooden fence.

STEVE

Hey, uh, I appreciate you doing this.  
You know, showing me around, giving  
me a little juice with the locals.  
Thanks.

JESSIE

It's hard to stand by, watch someone  
down on their luck get kicked.

Standing by the fence are Ed, Willie and Mike from the  
Roadhouse. Willie sees Jessie and Steve, tips off Ed and  
Mike. They push off the fence, approach Steve and Jessie.

STEVE

So has this Colt thing cooled down?

JESSIE

Ha! You kidding me? Far from it. But  
you got character. You'll survive.

Steve wavers.

JESSIE

Give yourself a break, okay? Trust  
yourself a little bit.

Steve stares at her. Not entirely convinced. Ed, Willie and  
Mike reach them.

WILLIE

Look, fellas, it's the Highwayman.

ED

Word has it you got a thing for  
horses.

STEVE

That's the word, huh?

MIKE

We're able to oblige that affinity.

STEVE

Yeah? How?

EXT. COUNTY FAIR - RODEO -- DAY

We CRANE UP a wooden fence. Ed and Mike lower Steve onto a Bronco. Willie's on the ground, calming the horse with a hand through the fence. The horse bobs it's head, winnies.

WILLIE

Easy there, Lightning Bolt.

STEVE

Lightning Bolt? His name's Lightning Bolt?

ED

Here's where you put your grip. Raise your other arm up like this. Try not to fight it or you'll break your back.

STEVE

Isn't there a Bunny Hill for this?

MIKE

Try and hang on 'til he's away from the fence so you don't crack your skull open.

ED

And if he throws ya', high tail it outta there so he doesn't kick your ribs in.

Steve glances over a shoulder, sees Jessie leaning against the fence. She smiles, gives him a thumbs up. Timidly, Steve raises his right hand.

A bell rings and the gate swings open. Steve has one arm up in a ridiculous stance, the other holding on for dear life. Lightning Bolt steps into the ring, merely walks around.

The crowd watches as Steve takes a pony ride. The timer reaches eight seconds and a bell rings. RODEO CLOWNS rush out and hold Lightning Bolt as Steve dismounts. He waves to the crowd and they applaud.

He walks toward the fence. Ed, Willie and Mike have a smile at his expense, but he's a sport about it. He reaches Jessie who claps for him.

JESSIE

Hey, you did eight seconds!  
 (places cowboy hat on  
 his head)  
 He's a regular Lane Frost!

She waves to Ed, Willie and Mike, moves away with Steve.

EXT. COUNTY FAIR - ANTIQUE SHOW -- DAY

Jessie and Steve pass an AUCTIONEER, barking at 110 MPH.

STEVE

I think I bought a used car from  
that guy.

EXT. COUNTY FAIR - BARBECUE LINE -- DAY

Ribs and steaks sizzle on the grill. Giant pots boil corn on the cob, a long row of tables with food on them. On one side, CUSTOMERS. On the other, WOMEN OF ALL AGES scoop and serve. Among them, Brenna and Mrs. Dale, 50's. Brenna looks up, sees Jessie and Steve.

BRENNA

Mom.....  
(walks around tables)  
...you're late, mom.

Brenna unties the apron, tosses it to Jessie, grabs Steve's hand, pulls him off.

BRENNA

Come on!

STEVE

What's the rush?

BRENNA

We gotta get a cow!

STEVE

We gotta get a cow?

Jessie watches them go, puts on the apron. She takes Brenna's place, starts scooping for the Customers. Mrs. Dale gives her a scorching look. Jessie's a bit hurt by it, but gathers herself and offers the next Customer a smile as she places some corn on his plate.

EXT. COUNTY FAIR - COWS -- DAY

There's a long line of stools in front of cows. With Steve on the end. Everyone's milking as fast as they can. The cows don't seem to mind. A bell rings and everyone stops, rises. A JUDGE walks along, checks the buckets, slaps a blue ribbon on Steve's shirt.

The Judge pours the milk in a bottle.

STEVE  
We get to keep the milk? Rock 'n  
Roll!

He shakes hands with the Judge, gives Brenna the bottle.

EXT. COUNTY FAIR - PATTY TOSS -- DAY

TRISHA CASEY, 11, stands with her FATHER, late 30's. He's showing her how to toss a patty. It lands near a marker flag. Trisha jumps up and down. We RACK FOCUS to Brenna. She glances at Steve, picks up a patty, tosses it. It breaks apart in mid-air.

STEVE  
Sweetie, lemme help you.

Steve checks out the choices.

STEVE  
You need a good one. Not too firm,  
not too.....

BRENNA  
Runny?

STEVE  
Yeah.

He grabs one, stands behind her, sets her up. She glances at Trisha, turns back to Steve. They give it a good arc. It stays in one piece, lands just past the marker flag.

She turns. Trisha and her Father are gone.

EXT. COUNTY FAIR - FERRIS WHEEL -- DAY

Steve and Brenna ride the Ferris Wheel. Brenna leans into Steve, drags his arm around her. Steve sees Jessie down below. She waves.

STEVE  
There's your mom.

Brenna smiles, holds up the milk bottle.

BRENNA  
We won, Mom! We won!

EXT. COUNTY FAIR - FERRIS WHEEL - BOTTOM -- DAY

Steve and Brenna get off the ride.

BRENNA  
We won the milking.

JESSIE  
Well, how 'bout that?

BRENNA  
And Steve taught me how to patty  
toss.

STEVE  
Figure'd it may come in handy if the  
Roadhouse needed another cook.

Jessie hits him in the shoulder.

JESSIE  
Nice hat.

EXT. COUNTY FAIR - FOOD LINE -- DAY

Brenna, Jessie and Steve go through the food line.

BRENNA  
So you don't have things like this  
in Los Angeles?

STEVE  
Well, they do, but they call them  
fundraisers. Serve Tofu. Some Bran.

BRENNA  
Tofu?

Jessie pushes her along. Steve extends his plate to Mrs.  
Dale. She slaps some beans on it and they splash up on his  
shirt. Steve turns to Jessie. She leads him away.

JESSIE  
Ex-Mother in law.

EXT. COUNTY FAIR - SEATING AREA -- DAY

Brenna rushes up ahead, sits with Thaddeus. Steve sees the  
table and pauses. At the head sits Thaddeus. To his left,  
Cal, Harris, Harris' Wife and Harris, Jr, 11. To Thaddeus'  
right an open space, Brenna, an open space and Lyle.

JESSIE  
It's gonna be okay. Just be yourself.

STEVE  
I'm not too good at that.

JESSIE

C'mon....

She nudges him forward, takes a seat next to her father. Steve sits between Brenna and Lyle. Lyle stands up, give him room to get in. As Mrs. Dale sits between Harris Jr. and Lyle, Thaddeus addresses the table.

THADDEUS

Let's join hands.

Thaddeus takes both Jessie's and Cal's hand, bows his head.

THADDEUS

Lord, thank you for bringing these friends and family together and for keeping us healthy-

Jessie's brow furrows as Thaddeus squeezes her hand.

THADDEUS

- and let us remember the greatest gift is that of family.

They release hands. Except for Brenna. She holds Steve's. He thinks it's funny but she keeps a straight face.

JESSIE

Dad, I saw a really nice print dress that would look great on Brenna.

Brenna releases Steve's hand, sits straight up.

STEVE

(softly to Lyle)  
You really got me with that Colt thing.

LYLE

I know, I'm sorry. I was angry.

THADDEUS

Heard you did some rodeo, Steven.

The table laughs.

HARRIS

Best pony ride this side of the Mississippi.

STEVE

I'm just happy to be alive.

HARRIS JR.

You get that hat at the Bluegrass Festival?

He smirks. Harris' Wife smacks his head.

STEVE

Yeah, I was up front, picking with Del McCourey.

LYLE

You a Bluegrass fan?

MRS. DALE

He don't know Bluegrass.

STEVE

Yes, ma'am I do.

HARRIS' WIFE

You get Bluegrass in Los Angeles?

STEVE

Not often. But I used to listen to it when I was growing up.

MRS. DALE

And where exactly was that?

THADDEUS

Hey, hey, hey. We're not here to grill the boy. Have some decorum.

STEVE

How 'bout you, Brenna? You a Bluegrass fan?

BRENNA

I like all kinds of music. Mama says I gotta keep an open mind.

JESSIE

Someone's got a talent show coming up. What song you gonna play?

BRENNA

(looking down)

Me and Trisha haven't decided.

JESSIE

(hugs her)

You're gonna be fine.

(to Steve)

Stagefright.

HARRIS JR  
Trisha's hot.

Brenna's stung by the remark. Harris leans over the table.

HARRIS  
Son.

As Harris, Jr cowers, Harris' Wife sets her fork down, drops her head, puts a hand on Harris' shoulder.

HARRIS  
Honey?

She relaxes.

HARRIS' WIFE  
I swear he's got a dirt bike in there.

LYLE  
Is Steve gonna join us tonight?

JESSIE  
I don't know. Is Steve gonna join us tonight?

STEVE  
What's tonight?

THADDEUS  
Sadly, Steven, some of your city's customs have seeped their way into the heartland.

INT. A FRAME BAR -- NIGHT

A LARGE GIRL stands against the wall with a microphone. Doing her best to karaoke Whitesnake's "HERE I GO AGAIN". Steve, Jessie, Lyle, Cal, Harris and Harris' Wife enter.

STEVE  
I don't believe this.

JESSIE  
You know, just 'cause we live in the country doesn't mean we only listen to country.

They all sit down.

CAL  
Okay, Steve, these are the rules. Everyone has to sing.

JESSIE  
But you don't pick your own song.

HARRIS' WIFE  
Who's going first?

INT. A FRAME BAR -- NIGHT

Steve's doing "WALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN". He's getting some help from the audience on the "whoa-whoa". Steve really sucks, misses some lines. But he's sticking it out. He finishes, steps over to the KARAOKE MASTER.

STEVE  
Now I know what the two drink minimum's for.

KARAOKE MASTER  
Yeah...  
(taking mic)  
...the audience.

INT. A FRAME BAR - JESSIE'S TABLE -- NIGHT

Steve returns to his chair.

STEVE  
(to Jessie)  
You couldn't give me a Stones song?

Jessie smiles. Harris hands Steve the book.

HARRIS  
You're turn. Pick for Jess.

Steve grabs the book, scans the songs. Looks up and smiles at her.

EXT. A FRAME BAR -- NIGHT

The group disbands, heads for their vehicles. Jessie walks Steve to his car.

STEVE  
You're an extraordinary person, Jess.  
And you've done a great job with Brenna. Being a single mom must be hell. I take my hat off to you.

He takes the hat off, puts it back on Jessie.

JESSIE

Being a single mom's just scheduling  
and sacrifice. Throwing your life  
into the wind, *that* must be hell.

STEVE

Thanks for taking care of me. I'd be  
crucified if it weren't for you.

JESSIE

Tarred and feathered. Remember, we're  
hicks.

Steve stops dead in his tracks. His car's been washed. The  
window's been replaced as well.

JESSIE

(puts the hat back on  
his head)  
Drive safe.

She walks away. Steve watches her.

STEVE (O.S.)

...they ask, "Steve, you talk so  
highly about Booker's General Store,  
what do you know about it?".

Steve gets in his Vette and pulls out.

INT. KNNDP BOOTH -- DAY

STEVE

And I tell 'em, "never been". All I  
know is what I hear.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

Booker's at his middle stool. Enjoys his lunch and his ad.

STEVE (O.S.)

And as clear as you're hearing me,  
it's all good. It's all good in  
Booker's neighborhood.

The sound starts to fritz a bit, like a loose wire. Kristy  
passes behind Jessie, whispers, laughs softly.

KRISTY

It's all good in Booker's  
neighborhood?

JESSIE

Kristy, give that speaker a jiggle  
will you?

Jessie gives Booker a refill. Kristy reaches for the speaker.

INT. KNNDP BOOTH -- DAY

A record plays but the sound's fritzing. Steve rises, steps from the booth.

INT. KNNDP - CAL'S BOARD -- DAY

Thaddeus walks down the hall. Cal's standing by the board.

THADDEUS

We're in another dust bowl, Cal.

Cal glances down at Steve who's on his back under the console. His hands are in a mish mash of wires, wires, wires. He slides out, remains on the floor.

THADDEUS

Can you fix it?

STEVE

Yeah, I can get it going.  
(Cal helps him up)  
Sooner or later you're gonna need a  
new board.

Thaddeus glances around, moves both Steve and Cal into the booth, closes the door behind him. We can't hear the dialogue, but Thaddeus addresses them sternly before exiting.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

Steve and Cal eat at a booth.

STEVE

What the hell was that all about?

CAL

He likes to keep his business private.  
That's all. Forget it.

Brenna enters, slams the door. She's pissed. Heads into the pool area.

JESSIE

Brenna! Brenna you come back here!

She follows Brenna into the pool room, drops to one knee, listens to her, gives her a big hug.

She kisses her face, sweeps the hair from her face and stands.

Less upset, Brenna exits past Steve. He waves, she waves back and walks out the front door, continues toward the road. Jessie steps up to their table.

JESSIE

You boys alright?

CAL

Are you alright?

STEVE

(pointing at Brenna)

Is *she* alright?

Jessie sits next to Cal.

JESSIE

She and Trisha were supposed to play at the Talent Show. Trisha balked and Brenna, well she's got stage fright, she doesn't want to go on alone.

STEVE

Why'd the other girl pull out?

JESSIE

Brenna beat her at a foot race in gym. She's fast.

Cal nods.

JESSIE

That's it. Just young girl stuff. I tell you, if her father weren't such a louse I'd call him down here.

STEVE

Why don't you? It'd probably be good for her.

JESSIE

No, he'd just disappoint her. He's got some personal issues he needs to straighten out. He's welcome to visit whenever he likes. And he does. I made it clear, he cleans up his act, there's nothing I'd want more than for him to be in her life full time. No questions asked.

Jessie rises, returns to work.

INT. CAL'S TRUCK -- DAY

Cal drives, Steve's shotgun.

STEVE

I love your ride. Love it. It's just  
so.....cool.

CAL

This is a truck. You, my transplanted  
friend, have a Corvette. A Black.  
Corvette.

Up ahead, they see Brenna walking.

STEVE

Slow it down a sec, would ya'?  
(laughs)  
You know, in L.A. you go to jail for  
what I'm about to say.

Steve speaks to Brenna through the window. She keeps walking.

STEVE

Hey, can we give you a ride?

BRENNA

Did I ask for a darn ride?

Steve turns to Cal.

STEVE

What do you think?

CAL

Sometimes you gotta take the bull by  
the horns.

The truck stops. Steve gets out. The truck takes off. Steve  
turns to Brenna, holds up his hands. She smiles.

INT. CAL'S TRUCK -- DAY

Cal drives away, stares in the rear view mirror. He's doing  
the right thing, but we get a hint of sadness. *He* wants to  
be there for *her*.

EXT. BRIDGE -- DAY

Brenna and Steve are specks.

STEVE

What kinda song were you gonna do?

BRENNA

Shania Twain. But Trisha signed up without me so I gotta do something else.

STEVE

Anything in mind?

BRENNA

I wanna do something different. Something *really* different.

STEVE

Oh, yeah?

BRENNA

Oh, yeah.

STEVE

I think I might know something really different.

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE -- EVENING

Single floor structure. Faded paint. Gravel driveway. Mailbox on the road out front. Forest out back. Jessie's station wagon pulls in.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE-- EVENING

Jessie enters carrying grocery bags, kicks the door closed behind her. We hear guitars, laughter. Jessie kinda grins, enters the kitchen, sets the bags down, looks out the window into the backyard.

She loses her smile. Steve's sitting on the picnic table with Brenna. Each holds a guitar as he teaches her.

INT. BRENNA'S ROOM -- EVENING

Brenna sits on her bed. Not happy. Overhears Steve and Jessie.

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - BACKYARD -- EVENING

Jessie and Steve stand by the picnic table. She's angry, tries to keep her voice down.

JESSIE

How dare you! How dare you use my daughter to get into my life.

STEVE

Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!

JESSIE

I will not whoa!

STEVE

You just whoa. Don't insult this.  
Don't insult her. I'm not here for  
you.

Jessie laughs, turns.

STEVE

I will admit I was attracted to you  
at first-

JESSIE

And now you're not.

STEVE

Don't confuse the issue. The issue  
right now is Brenna. She needed some  
help and I wanted to give it to her.  
No strings attached.

JESSIE

You have to admit - it's a little  
convenient.

STEVE

Convenient? Let me tell you about  
convenient. When I was her age, I  
picked up a guitar and all I got was  
ridicule. Look at me now, I'm a loser.

JESSIE

You're not a loser.

STEVE

I am. I blew every opportunity that  
came my way. I'm not gonna let that  
happen to her. Now if being there  
for that kid means I can't court  
you, then that's the way it is. So  
if you doubt my intention, then you  
ask me to leave. Right now.

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE -- ROAD -- EVENING

We HEAR Steve's footsteps before he enters frame. He has  
absolutely no idea which way to go. Walks out of frame. A  
few seconds later, he passes through frame again, heads the  
other way.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN -- EVENING

Jessie stands alone. Still upset. A little confused. Hand on forehead. Hears Brenna crying.

JESSIE

Oh, swell...

EXT. KNNDP - BACK -- DAY

Steve sits out back having a smoke. Thaddeus exits, takes a seat next to him.

THADDEUS

I promised my daughter I wouldn't,  
but you got an extra one of those?

Steve hands him a cigarette, lights it for him.

THADDEUS

You know, rolling into a small town ain't like rolling into a city. You roll into a city, you got a mess of folks who don't know each other, runnin' around trying to get things they never had or don't need. You roll into a small town, not only are most folks set in their ways, but there's a history you ain't privy to. You stay long enough, you get privy, but it takes time. Now, my daughter has her needs plus those of my granddaughter. She means well, but sometimes, they get confused. It's very honorable to reach out to Brenna. Just remember, behind those combat boots and the tough veneer's a little girl.

STEVE

I hear you.

THADDEUS

I know you do. You pay those fines for cussing in Los Angeles?

Steve looks up at him.

THADDEUS

I may own a small station, but I am in the radio business.

(MORE)

THADDEUS (CONT'D)

I know all about your exploits, Mr. Savage. And I'm worldly enough to recognize a man who's finally making sense of himself. This may not be New York or Los Angeles, but you're doing a great job, son. I'm proud to have you with us.

(putting out cigarette)

You should stop smoking.

Thaddeus pats Steve on the shoulder, re-enters the station.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

Steve has band aids on the fingers of his left hand. He reads the paper while having lunch. Jessie sits down opposite him. He lowers the paper.

JESSIE

Haven't played in a while, huh? I hear you're quite the band leader. So what's with all the mystery, huh? I got all these mothers asking me what's going on and I don't even know the song they're playing.

STEVE

(holds up cup)

Can I get a refill?

JESSIE

(standing)

I don't like you anymore.

STEVE

But do you like me any less?

She smirks, walks away. A young girl's voice sings Shania Twain's "MAN, I FEEL LIKE A WOMAN".

EXT. BRENNNA'S SCHOOL - ESTABLISHING -- NIGHT

PARENTS and STUDENTS stream in from the parking lot. A Leader Board announces the Talent Show.

INT. BRENNNA'S SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM -- NIGHT

The place is full. On stage, Trisha's in tails and top hat, finishing the song. The MC steps out from the wings.

Jessie sits between Thaddeus and Cal.

JESSIE

Here we go, they're up next.

THADDEUS

Just relax, darlin'.

JESSIE

I can't relax.

MC (O.S.)

Brenna Walden.

INT. BRENNA'S SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM - STAGE -- NIGHT

Its dark. In silhouette, a BAND OF ELEVEN YEAR OLDS at DRUMS, PIANO, HORN, and a slightly overweight BASSIST. A spotlight shines on Brenna. There's some dry ice, a bale of hay, the front of an old dodge.

The band starts playing "JOE'S GARAGE" by Frank Zappa. Steve watches from the wings. Holding a microphone, he does the voice of The Central Scrutinizer.

STEVE

We take you now to a garage in Canoga Park.

Brenna steps up to sing. She's self-conscious, looks down.

BRENNA

It wasn't very large, there was just enough room to jam the drums in the corner over by the dodge, it was a '54 with a smashed up door and a cheesy little amp.

STEVE

(whisper)

Look up! Look at the audience.

INT. BRENNA'S SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM -- NIGHT

Thaddeus takes it all in. Cal snickers.

CAL

I'll go start the car.

Jessie and Thaddeus give him a mean look. He cowers back into his chair.

INT. BRENNNA'S SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM - STAGE -- NIGHT

BRENNNA

...with a sign on the front said  
fender champ and a second hand guitar,  
it was a stratocaster with a whammy  
bar....

She plays the guitar riffs, misses a couple notes, gets discouraged, when out from the wings of the stage walks Steve. He stands at the mic next to her, she smiles.

BRENNNA & STEVE

We could jam at Joe's Garage, his  
mama was screamin' "turn it down"...

INT. BRENNNA'S SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM - STAGE -- NIGHT

Steve and Brenna continue the song. They're having a ball. The Bassist steps up to the mic.

BASSIST

I guess you only get one chance in  
life to sing a song that goes like-

They do the big stadium finish.

INT. BRENNNA'S SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM -- NIGHT

The song's over. Expecting applause, Steve lifts Brenna high in the air. The audience gives a smattering of applause. The MC's speechless. Thaddeus a bit confused. Jessie offers up a slow, wise-ass clapping of hands.

EXT. BRENNNA'S SCHOOL -- NIGHT

The PARENTS and STUDENTS pile out.

Brenna, Jessie, Thaddeus and Steve exit. Brenna stops, sees Trisha, still in the tuxedo, holding a trophy. But more so, Harris Jr. flirts with her. Brenna drops her head.

JESSIE

Let's go, honey.

Brenna walks ahead.

STEVE

This is so unfair. That Trisha kid  
practically gave the Judge a lapdance.  
Who do I talk to? 'Cause I'm ready  
to kick some ass.

Jessie kisses him on the cheek, whispers in his ear.

JESSIE

It's not the prize. It's the boy.

Steve glances over, sees Harris, Jr. with Trisha, gets it, turns back to Jessie. She nods, walks away. Cal steps up.

CAL

C'mon, lemme show you something.

EXT. WOODS -- NIGHT

Cal leads Steve up a hill.

STEVE

I hope there's an oxygen tent up here 'cause I'm pushing forty and still a smoker.

CAL

Quit bitchin'.

STEVE

Am I ever gonna hear this Colt folklore? 'Cause I think I'm having a heart attack.

CAL

Not tonight.

STEVE

What's that noise? You got a refinery up here?

CAL

Shut up! Geez....

EXT. RIDGE -- NIGHT

They come out of the woods, see a ridge overlooking a huge body of water. And the noise Steve heard - waterfall. Cal sits near the edge. Steve's quite taken, sits next to him. Cal hands him a beer.

CAL

Pretty, ain't it? Out over there, into the woods a few hundred yards? Jessie's house.

STEVE

No shit?

CAL

No shit.

(MORE)

CAL (CONT'D)

Growing up, you take things like this for granted. But there is a history. My two best friends lost their innocence up here.

STEVE

It's the place to lose it. I lost mine in a basement outside Dallas.

CAL

No shit?

STEVE

No shit. It's not something I'm proud of. How 'bout you?

CAL

Ah...I ain't much of a ladies man.

They stare at the waterfall.

STEVE

Now I know why you never left.

CAL

Like I said, there's always been one reason and another.

We PAN from the waterfall to the ridge leading to Jessie's house.

INT. BRENNNA'S ROOM -- NIGHT

We see the reason and another. Jessie tucks in Brenna, gives her a kiss good-night.

INT. THADDEUS' CAR -- DAY

Jessie drives. Thaddeus rides in the passenger seat. A couple suitcases in the back. Thaddeus glances at the speedometer.

THADDEUS

The whole concept of driving to a medical center, is to *reach* the medical center.

JESSIE

Dad....

THADDEUS

Getting into an accident, well that'd be like packing a lunch on the way to a restaurant.

JESSIE

Dad....

THADDEUS

I just think you might want to slow down a bit.

Jessie slows down.

THADDEUS

Thanks, darlin'. So who's watching Brenna?

JESSIE

Her new best friend.

THADDEUS

Ah..... You didn't tell him why we're going?

JESSIE

I lied, Dad, okay?

THADDEUS

Isn't tonight-?

Jessie starts laughing, nods.

THADDEUS

Why do you have it out for that boy?

JESSIE

He's been doing too good. Figured this'd be the test to stop him.

THADDEUS

(laughing)

They're gonna eat him up.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Brenna opens the door, two SCHOOLFRIENDS enter carrying sleeping bags and knapsacks. They drop the sleeping bags on the floor. Rush onto the couch. Steve picks up the bags.

STEVE

Keep the firelane clear.

He tosses the bags into Brenna's room, enters the kitchen.

INT. MEDICAL CENTER - DIAGNOSIS ROOM -- DAY

Machines slowly move forward, x-rays flash, MEDICAL PERSONNEL stand by in white suits and head gear.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Half a dozen 11 year old SCHOOLGIRLS rush around the living room. The television blasts MTV, the radio blasts something else. A chip bowl flies through frame. Steve enters the front door, wearing a pink apron, yellow plastic gloves, carrying a garbage can.

STEVE

Hey-hey-hey! Keep the chips in the bowl. Okay? Chips in the bowl!

One of the Girls turns, knocks a bottle of soda over, steps back and crunches the chips. Steve throws some napkins on the spill, picks up the bottle, carries it into the kitchen.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Steve leans against the sink. Hyperventilating.

STEVE

Oh, my god...oh, my god...oh, my god...

Brenna steps in.

BRENNA

You okay, Steve?

He waves her off. The phone rings. He reaches over, picks it up.

STEVE

Walden residence, Steve The Slave speaking.

INT. JESSIE & THADDEUS' HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Jessie stands with the phone. In the background, Thaddeus tips a BELLBOY, carries the luggage the rest of the way in.

JESSIE

Hey, slugger, how goes it?

STEVE

Do all these parents expect their kids back alive?

JESSIE

Put Brenna on.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Steve holds the phone out. Brenna takes it.

BRENNA  
 Okay, mom.....okay, mom.....OH-KAY  
 MOM.....okay.  
 (to Steve)  
 You wanna say goodbye?

He waves her off.

BRENNA  
 I love you, too. See you tomorrow.

INT. JESSIE & THADDEUS' HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Jessie hangs up.

THADDEUS  
 He still alive?

Jessie smiles, walks past him.

THADDEUS  
*They* still alive?

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Steve's doing dishes. Schoolgirl #1 enters.

SCHOOLGIRL #1  
 Hey, Steve? Why are boys-

STEVE  
 (turning abruptly)  
 No!

She stops.

STEVE  
 No questions about boys.

SCHOOLGIRL #2 (O.S.)  
 Watch out!

Steve glances up, sees the popcorn bowl spill. Two of the Schoolgirls start dancing on it and soon its a rush for all.

STEVE  
 No questions about boys...Until that carpet's clean!

Schoolgirl #1's eyes light up. She darts from the kitchen.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Steve sits at the table. Finishes his glass of soda. A Schoolgirl pours more into it.

SCHOOLGIRL #3  
So why do they do that?

STEVE  
Trust me. They don't mean to hurt you. They just haven't figured a way to communicate with you so a little jab in the arm and a dash around the corner, that's their way of saying, "Hey, baby..".

A collective "ahhhh...." from the group. In the background, Four Schoolgirls clean the living room. A Fifth enters the front with an empty garbage can, holds the door for a Sixth on her way out with two full garbage bags.

SCHOOLGIRL #4 (O.S.)  
Quesadilla's up!

Steve lifts his arms as a couple more Schoolgirls set a place mat, silverware and plate in front of him.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Sleeping bags and Schoolgirls everywhere. Mud masks and hair up on everyone. Even Steve, sitting in the recliner.

SCHOOLGIRL #5  
Why do some boys pretend they don't like you then get hell bent for leather when you hang with another?

Thunder hits. The lights go out. The Girls scream.

STEVE  
Relax, relax. Brenna show me where the candles are.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Candles illuminate the room. He begins strumming Jimmy Rogers' "IN THE JAILHOUSE NOW".

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Schoolgirls dance in the candlelight as Steve plays.

INT. BRENNNA'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Steve tucks in Brenna. Kisses her forehead. Turns off the lamp near her bed. Tiptoes over bodies.

SCHOOLGIRL #5  
Ouch!

STEVE  
Sorry.

He exits the hallway.

SCHOOLGIRL #4  
He's cool.

Brenna smiles.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Steve blows the last candle out.

INT. MEDICAL CENTER - DOCTOR'S OFFICE -- DAY

Thaddeus and Jessie sit across from a DOCTOR, 50's.

DOCTOR  
I wish I had better news. It's not in remission. And, quite honestly, with every professional theory, the time frame's been exceeded. There's no medical explanation as to why.

Thaddeus keeps his composure. He's a man of honor, principle, but the news is not what he was hoping for. He's not allowing himself to break down. Jessie places a hand over his.

EXT. FREEWAY -- DAY

Thaddeus drives. He's having a hard time containing his emotions. Pulling over to the shoulder, he breaks down, leans on the wheel. His chest heaves. Jessie comforts him, opens her door and switches seats. As they stand outside, he embraces her, holds her tightly.

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE -- DAY

Thaddeus pulls up and parks. Steve's car's gone.

INT. THADDEUS' CAR -- DAY

Jessie exhales.

JESSIE

Dad, I don't want to go in there. I don't want to go in there 'cause I'm afraid he's failed.

THADDEUS

Go inside, Jess. Go on.

JESSIE

You know it's gonna be a mess. It always is after one of these. Like a cyclone hit it.

THADDEUS

Jess. Go inside.

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE -- DAY

Jessie gets out of the car and approaches the front door. She takes a deep breath, opens the door.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Spotless. Like there was no slumber party.

INT. BRENNNA'S ROOM -- DAY

The door creaks open. Immaculate.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN -- DAY

Jessie stands by the sink. No dishes to wash or put away. She hears a car pull up on the gravel and park. A moment later, Brenna passes by the window riding The Colt then enters the back door on Steve's shoulders.

Jessie does a double take as Steve sets her down.

BRENNNA

Hey, mom, hey, mom....everybody liked Steve so much, they want to have slumber night here every week. Can we? Can we? Can we?

Jessie shakes herself out, finally comprehends the question.

JESSIE

What? No way! Absolutely not.

BRENNNA

But maaaaaaaaaaaa-

JESSIE

If it's okay with the other parents,  
maybe Steve could accompany you girls.  
(glances at Steve)  
Every. Single. Week.

Steve goes pale. Brenna turns to him. Expectant eyes.

STEVE

I'll have to get back to you on that.

Jessie turns to the window. Brenna retires to her room.

STEVE

So how'd it go?

Jessie glances at him.

STEVE

The testing. How'd it go?

JESSIE

Oh...fine. He's gonna live to be 50  
easy.

STEVE

But he's past fifty.

JESSIE

See. He's doing better already.

Jessie exhales.

JESSIE

Can you give me a minute? I just  
saw....I need a minute.

STEVE

I gotta get going. Hey, thanks for  
letting me hang with Brenna and her  
friends. At first I thought I was  
gonna have a homicide on my hands  
but it turned out to be really fun.

JESSIE

Great. I'm glad.

Steve exits.

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - BACK DOOR -- DAY

As Steve walks away, Jessie leans against the window, stares  
at it intensely.

INT. KNDP BOOTH -- DAY

Steve's at the mic. "IN THE JAILHOUSE NOW" finishes.

STEVE

That was, of course, Jimmy Rogers  
and I'm dedicating it to the Rhodes  
Scholars. You ladies know who you  
are. Up next, Sam Phillips from a  
couple years back.

He sets the needle down on a romantic song, "You're Gonna  
Help Yourself".

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

Jessie turns around, bumping into Kristy and knocking both  
their orders to the ground.

EXT. SCENIC OVERLOOK -- DAY

Steve and Brenna play guitar. He shows her different chord  
positions, she follows his lead.

EXT. BRENNNA'S SCHOOL -- DAY

After school. Kids moving toward the buses. Harris Jr. walks  
with Trisha. We rack focus to Brenna. She's thinking as she  
pulls out her pig tails.

INT. KNDP - CAL'S BOARD -- EVENING

Steve and Cal fix the board. Until sparks fly.

EXT. KNDP RADIO STATION -- EVENING

The lights go out. The song slows down, drops to 33 rpm, 16  
rpm, then speeds back up as the lights come back on.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE - BAR AREA -- DAY

Steve and Brenna shoot pool. Jessie leans against the doorjam,  
watches the two of them play. Brenna's hair's down.

EXT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- AFTERNOON

Steve and Cal put a bike rack on Steve's Vette.

STEVE

Just drill a hole in it.

CAL

I can't.

Steve stares at him.

STEVE

It's just a car.

CAL

It's a Vette, okay? I'm not putting a hole in a Corvette. I'll figure something out.

Jessie exits with a couple beers. Cal takes his.

STEVE

No, thanks.

(to Cal)

Cal, please, just drill the hole.

CAL

Ya' ask me again I'm taking my tools and going home. Got it? Now give me a second and I'll figure something out...

Jessie back peddles, laughs at them, heads inside.

INT. KNDP RADIO STATION - THADDEUS' OFFICE -- DAY

Thaddeus glances out his window. Sees Steve sitting out by his Vette. The rig's attached with suction cups and bungees.

EXT. KNDP RADIO STATION -- AFTERNOON

Time's passed. Shadows grow. Steve's still waiting.

EXT. KNDP RADIO STATION -- DUSK

Steve's car's gone.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- NIGHT

Jessie wipes down the counter as Steve parks and enters.

STEVE

Hey, Jess. Has Brenna been by?

Jessie looks up at him.

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Steve's Vette pulls in. A sedan's out front.

JESSIE

How odd. That's my mother in law's car.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Jessie and Steve enter. There's guitar playing, laughter as Brenna sings JOE'S GARAGE. Steve heads for the door. Jessie listens, her face fills with realization.

JESSIE  
Steve.....Steve wait.

Steve opens the door. Sitting in his chair, playing his guitar is CHARLIE DALE, 29, Brenna's father.

CHARLIE  
Howdy. You must be Joe.

Brenna stands, opens the door all the way.

BRENNA  
Oh, God. I forgot. I'm so sorry....

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Steve walks to his car. Jessie closes the door. Steve turns, glances in the living room window, sees Charlie sitting with Brenna, stand up as Jessie approaches, give her a hug, a kiss on the cheek. Steve gets in his car and drives away.

INT. KNDP BOOTH -- DAY

Steve sits at the mic. Catatonic. Smoking. A moment later, he sees Brenna walk by, then Jessie and then Charlie. Cal rises, gives Charlie a big smile, a hug. Charlie turns to Steve, waves. Steve smiles, waves back. Brenna, Jessie and Charlie head down the hall toward the office. Cal sits down.

CAL  
(to Steve)  
You okay?

Steve flips him off. Thaddeus comes 'round the corner, followed by Charlie, Brenna and Jessie. Jessie and Brenna wave goodbye as Thaddeus and Charlie enter the booth. Thaddeus hands Steve a CD

THADDEUS  
We're gonna do a little unscheduled promotional Q&A. I'm assuming this is familiar territory.

STEVE  
Sure, sure.

Thaddeus exits. Charlie takes a seat, Steve cues up the CD. Steve goes right into the CD without announcement.

CHARLIE  
You're from Los Angeles.

STEVE  
That's the rumor.

CHARLIE  
No, I mean, I've heard your show.  
Used to have quite a bit of salt in  
your pecker.

STEVE  
Let's just get through this, okay?

Steve hits the mic button.

STEVE  
That's a little taste from Doc Rogers'  
upcoming release featuring some....

Cal strums in the window.

STEVE  
....guitar....from local hero Charlie  
Dale. Charlie, why don't you tell us  
a little bit about the sessions.

EXT. KNDP RADIO STATION -- DAY

Brenna and Jessie sit on the car, listen to the speaker.

CHARLIE (O.S.)  
There's not a lot to tell, really.  
Doc produces his own stuff, he's a  
pro, knows what he wants.

STEVE (O.S.)  
Uh, huh. What was it about your  
playing that set you apart from the  
vast talent pool out in Disneyland?

INT. KNDP BOOTH -- DAY

CHARLIE  
Ah, I just knew 'em socially. Hung  
out with the bassist when I was doing  
studio work in Nashville. I'm not  
the best picker out there. Luckily,  
I was in Los Angeles at the time. I  
kinda bet I'd have a financial  
blessing and I did. Gotta support  
the young one, you know.

STEVE  
Yeah, I do know.

EXT. KNNDP RADIO STATION -- DAY

JESSIE  
And....they're off....

INT. KNNDP BOOTH -- DAY

CHARLIE  
You're from Los Angeles, aren't you?

STEVE  
Yeah, I outgrew it.

CHARLIE  
Way I heard, L.A. spit you out.

STEVE  
You in town to do some parenting or  
is this one of those Hard Core  
Troubadour things?

CHARLIE  
If parenting means having my daughter  
unlearn the teachings of a musical  
hack, then yes, I'm here to parent.

STEVE  
I wondered how many nights I'd tuck  
her in before you turn up sober and  
kick me to the curb.

CHARLIE  
I'll kick you to the curb right now,  
you don't watch it.

STEVE  
Just don't hit me with your drinkin'  
hand.

Charlie stands, motions for Steve to get up. Steve exhales

STEVE  
I'm not doing this.

Steve removes his headphones.

STEVE  
They love you, Charlie. And I'm not  
what's keeping you from loving 'em  
back.

Steve exits the booth, heads out the back.

EXT. KNNDP RADIO STATION -- DAY

BRENNA  
Who won, mama?

JESSIE  
That's just it, sweetie. No one wins.

Jessie slides off the car.

JESSIE  
C'mon, Brenna. You're going to  
Grandma's and I'm going to work.

BRENNA  
What about Daddy?

JESSIE  
He needs some time to think.

They get in the car and drive off as Charlie exits the station. Jessie waves out the window.

EXT. KNNDP - BACK -- DAY

Steve sits on the steps. Thaddeus walks outside, takes a place next to him.

STEVE  
Just don't yell at me, okay? I'll go  
but just don't yell at me.

THADDEUS  
I'm not gonna yell at you son. Hook  
me up with a square.

STEVE  
My dad used to yell at me all the  
time. He'd see my guitar and...

Steve gives him a cigarette. Lights it.

THADDEUS  
Listen, I'm not too fond of Charlie,  
the marriage, the divorce. But he is  
Brenna's father. On the rare occasion  
he shows up, I try to get through to  
him. Despite what you're feeling,  
some good mighta come of this. I  
think you finally dented his armor.  
You know, I am a religious man.

(MORE)

THADDEUS (CONT'D)

I have faith someday, the prodigal  
son in law will return.

Thaddeus sets a hand on Steve's shoulder, stands.

THADDEUS

Take the rest of the day off. I'll  
call in Lyle to clean up.

(laughs as he enters)

Don't hit me with your drinking hand.  
You got some Castanets on you, boy.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- AFTERNOON

It's pretty crowded. The counter's full. From a serving tray,  
Jessie sets a drink down in front of Charlie. Very, very  
slowly, we TRACK with her as she walks the length of the  
counter, sets the other drink in front of Steve.

STEVE

I had no place saying those things.  
I'm sorry.

JESSIE

Don't tell me. Tell him.

Charlie glances down at the counter, sees Jessie speaking  
with Steve. He downs his drink. Holds it up.

CHARLIE

Jessie?!?

Jessie pushes off, takes his empty glass, passes by Steve.

JESSIE

I'll be right back.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- AFTERNOON

Charlie holds his drink. Looks up at Jessie.

CHARLIE

I flew off the handle. I'm sorry.

JESSIE

Don't tell me. Tell him.

Steve glances down at the counter, sees Jessie speaking with  
Charlie. He downs his drink. Holds it up.

STEVE

Jessie?!?

Jessie pushes off.

JESSIE  
I'll be right back.

Charlie watches as Jessie takes Steve's empty glass.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- NIGHT

A drink lands in front of Charlie. Steve waves. A drink lands in front of Steve. Charlie waves. Ice lands in a rocks glass. Charlie waves. Jack splashes into a glass. Steve waves. Coke fills up the rest of the glass. Charlie waves. A register opens. A register closes.

A series of dissolves shows CUSTOMERS come and go. With each phase, Charlie and Steve move one stool closer to the middle until they're finally sitting next to each other.

CHARLIE  
I know I don't participate as much  
as I should. I mean to, but...

STEVE  
Hey, it's none of my business.  
Believe me, the shit I used to pull,  
I'm lucky to live in a town like  
this. You know, I nearly got tarred  
and feathered.

CHARLIE  
Yeah, I heard about that. The Colt.

STEVE  
The *Untamed* Colt.

Jessie comes around the corner. Stops. Checks them out.

JESSIE  
I don't know if it's such a good  
idea, you two pal'n up like this.

She heads back into the bar area.

STEVE  
Charlie, I want a family. But not  
bad enough to stand in the way of  
somebody else's. I'm working real  
hard these days at being a good man.

CHARLIE  
Yeah, well, I don't really have any  
ground to stand on. I just got bent.  
It's my own doing.

STEVE

Let me give you a piece of advice:  
get your shit together 'cause sooner  
or later, fate'll get it together  
for you. And I know what I'm talking  
about. Trust me.

Charlie raises his glass for a toast. Steve reaches for his glass, puts a hand around it, slides it away. Charlie watches him stand up.

STEVE

I used to be really unhappy. I hid  
in a bottle for years 'cause it made  
me feel better. Guys like you and  
me, we gotta put the plug in sometime.

CHARLIE

But how do you know it's time?

STEVE

All I know, Charlie...all I know is,  
you learn to trust yourself.

Charlie nods, downs his drink and winks at Steve. Steve takes a step to the door. Stops.

STEVE

Brenna's a great kid.

CHARLIE

Ain't she, though?

Steve exits. Charlie walks to the end of the bar, puts a song on the jukebox, returns to his stool, grabs Steve's drink. In the background, Steve pushes the Vette in reverse, turns it, then rolls it forward out of frame.

Jessie returns.

JESSIE

Where's Steve?

CHARLIE

Took off. He's a good man. I approve.

Jessie cleans up the bar.

JESSIE

I wish you'd stop trying to replace  
yourself and take some responsibility.

CHARLIE

I was complimenting you.

JESSIE  
I don't want compliments.

CHARLIE  
Okay, Jess, what then?

JESSIE  
An acknowledgement.

CHARLIE  
An acknowledgement?

Jessie dumps some shot glasses into the sink.

JESSIE  
I want you to acknowledge what you're doing. I want you to say to me, once and for all, that playing, traveling and partying is more important than being a father to Brenna. Right now. Say it. Once and for all. See, you can't even admit it to yourself.

CHARLIE  
I'm not going through this again.

JESSIE  
Say it!

CHARLIE  
(changing subject)  
How are you doing? Are you okay?

JESSIE  
How am I doing? I'm in pain, Charlie. I'm in pain every day. And I'll stay in pain until I find someone whom I know, in my heart, loves my little girl as much as I do.

Charlie gets off his stool.

JESSIE  
(upset, regret)  
No, don't use this as a reason to leave again. Don't make me feel guilty.

CHARLIE  
I'll send some money for Brenna.

JESSIE  
She doesn't need money. She needs a father.

Charlie's reached the door.

CHARLIE

I'm not there yet. I'm sorry.

He exits.

EXT. ROADHOUSE CAFE - PARKING LOT -- NIGHT

Charlie sits in his Mother's car. A photo of he, Jessie and a newborn Brenna hangs from the rear view mirror. Inside, Jessie stands behind the counter.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- NIGHT

Jessie watches him drive away. Yanks the jukebox plug. The song becomes acoustic, lamenting. It fades out.

EXT. ROAD -- NIGHT

Steve's pushing his Vette down the road. Cal drives by, sees him sweating, tired. He slows down, backs his truck up and speaks with Steve as he rolls in reverse.

CAL

What's wrong?

STEVE

Nothing's wrong. Bad things happen when you're too drunk to drive.

CAL

So where you pushin' it?

STEVE

Home, you hick. It's only a few miles.

CAL

Yeah....the other way!

Steve looks around, pauses.

STEVE

Shit. You're right.

CAL

I was just on my way to rile you up. I'm heading for a poker game with a couple good ole boys. You rile-able?

STEVE

What about my car?

Cal smiles.

EXT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- NIGHT

Jessie pulls up to the road. Cal's truck flies by towing Steve's Vette.

INT. CAL'S TRUCK -- NIGHT

Cal drives. Steve's looking out his window.

STEVE  
Was she alone?

CAL  
Couldn't tell.

STEVE  
So, the two friends on the ridge...

Cal nods.

STEVE  
He's your best friend.

CAL  
In high school. He was my best friend  
in high school.  
(melodramatic)  
Until he stole my girl.

STEVE  
Oh, shit! You're kidding me?!?

CAL  
Yeah, I am.

Cal breaks out in laughter. Slaps his leg.

CAL  
I gotcha, didn't I?

EXT. DIRT ROAD TURN OFF - NIGHT

Cal's laughter echoes as they veer off, kicking up dust along a dirt road. An old sign reads "Copperhead Road".

EXT. DILLINGER'S GIN JOINT -- NIGHT

Backwoods gin joint. Wooden house. Bunch of trucks, muscle cars, police cruiser. Pond to the left. Cal's truck parks near the front. He and Steve get out.

STEVE  
What the hell is this place?

CAL  
Gin joint.

STEVE  
What?

CAL  
A gin joint. Legend has it Dillinger  
drank here once.

They ascend the squeaky stairs.

INT. DILLINGER'S GIN JOINT -- NIGHT

Card tables, a couple pool tables, self-serve bar, floor refrigerator, jukebox, Moosehead on the wall, a Bear. A COUPLE LOCALS sit in the back, a COP dances with a GIRL. TWO MEN shoot pool. Another's slumped over on a table.

Sitting at a poker table are Ed, Willie, Mike and a LOCAL. Cal and Steve enter.

CAL  
You play cards?

STEVE  
I used to cheat at cards.

CAL  
Were you good at it?

STEVE  
I got caught by a drummer!

The Local throws his cards down, rises from the table.

CAL  
(motions toward table)  
You in?

STEVE  
You go ahead.

CAL  
Oh, I'm gonna. I'm gonna.

As Cal sits down, the Local walks over to the dancing couple. They separate. The Local and the Cop shake hands before the Local leaves with her.

Steve pushes off the bar, walks over to the pool table. He starts racking the balls up. The Cop steps up, lifts a pool cue from the felt.

STEVE  
Officer.

COP  
Watcha wanna play for?

STEVE  
I don't gamble.

COP  
(throwing cue on table)  
Then I don't play!

EXT. DILLINGER'S GIN JOINT -- NIGHT

Steve sits outside smoking a cigarette. There's a loud commotion inside. A moment later, Cal exits, slowly descends the stairs.

STEVE  
We outta here?

CAL  
You sober enough to drive?

Cal opens the passenger side door. As Steve stands, Ed exits the front.

STEVE  
To drive your truck? Sure!

ED  
It ain't his truck.

Cal closes the door, walks over with the pink slip. Hands it to Ed at the top of the stairs. Ed goes inside and Cal turns to Steve.

STEVE  
I'm not playing, Cal.

CAL  
I seem to remember someone saying  
the words "I owe you one".

STEVE  
Life was so much easier when I was  
selfish.

INT. DILLINGER'S GIN JOINT -- NIGHT

Cal and Steve enter.

STEVE

What about tomorrow?

CAL

We'll throw on FREEBIRD. Sleep in shifts.

ED

Get off the bus, little girl, it's time to go to school.

STEVE

(to Cal)

You're telling me about The Colt.

Steve walks toward the table.

CAL

You got it.

Steve sits down, takes his cards. We start swirling around the table as round after round after round plays. The pots rise, the pots fall, but through it all, Steve and Ed keep their eyes on each other.

The Locals pull up chairs. Even the Cop takes a serious interest, perching The Drunk on the table and bringing his chair over. The pot is huge. Both Ed and Steve are out of money. Ed has Cal's title and his Harley keys.

ED

Can you match that?

Steve throws in his American Express Platinum card.

EXT. DILLINGER'S GIN JOINT -- NIGHT

Another loud commotion.

FADE OUT:

EXT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

Mrs. Dale pulls into the cafe parking lot.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

Jessie and Kristy put dishes away under the counter. Mrs. Dale sets an envelope on the counter. It's full of cash.

MRS. DALE

Charlie said to give this to you.  
It's for Brenna.

JESSIE

(taking it, dismissive)

I know who its for, Mrs. Dale. Thank you very much. When you speak with Charlie tell him its much appreciated.

Mrs. Dale exits. Jessie slaps the envelope down.

JESSIE

He's just killing that little girl.

Jessie sees the Vette pass Mrs. Dale. She perks up, watches, waits.....as Ed squeezes out of the car. He closes the door, heads on inside, takes a seat at the counter.

ED

What's with the radio?

KRISTY

(handing him menu)

Station went dark again.

EXT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

Jessie steps outside, checks out the car, goes back inside. She accosts Ed who points to the car.

INT. KNDP - CAL'S BOARD -- DAY

Steve and Cal are under the board.

CAL

So much for sleepin' in shifts.

STEVE

Is there any new wire around here?

CAL

The closet. Everything's in there.

STEVE

You never told me about The Colt.

CAL

I didn't?

STEVE

No. You didn't.

CAL

Well-

JESSIE (O.S.)

Ahem.

Steve and Cal turn to each other. Whisper.

CAL

Did you go straight home?

STEVE

Hell, yes, I went straight home. Did you go straight home?

CAL

I came straight here.

STEVE

Then who's she pissed at?

A kick.

STEVE

Ouch!

Steve stands up. Jessie's on fire.

JESSIE

How dare you lose your car in a poker game?!? How dare you?!? What, you think just 'cause I was a stupid 17 year old who supported a musician and his daughter that I'm gonna be your taxi driver now? I may have downplayed being a single working mom but it's hell! And I'd appreciate you -

Steve turns to Cal.

STEVE

I'm gonna go get that wire.  
(to Jessie)  
You look great, by the way.

Steve moves down the hall, turns a corner.

JESSIE

He and Charlie are exactly alike.  
Two peas in a pod.  
(to Steve)  
You should runaway and join the circus!

CAL

He didn't gamble away his car.

JESSIE

What?

CAL  
He didn't gamble away his car.

JESSIE  
No, don't tell me that.

CAL  
I made him win my truck back, then he traded me his Vette for it. He went home and *I* lost it to Ed.

JESSIE  
Cal, how could you? What are you gonna do for transportation?

CAL  
(holds up keys)  
I won Ed's Harley two hands later. He's gonna want it back. To a guy like Ed, someone else ridin' his Harley's like someone else ridin' his woman. He's gonna paint that Vette for me, you watch.

JESSIE  
(re: Steve)  
Did I just stick my boot in my mouth?

CAL  
Oh - yeah! Completely.

INT. KNDP HALLWAY -- DAY

The closet door's open. Jessie comes around the corner.

JESSIE  
I am so sorry.

Steve holds a bunch of old 97 rpm records.

STEVE  
These are 97's! You know how cool these are?

JESSIE  
They're my father's.

STEVE  
What are they doing in a closet?

JESSIE  
They went bad, Steve. Look.

She pulls one out. Mildew, etc, has grown on it.

STEVE  
You have any castor oil?

JESSIE  
Yeah.

STEVE  
You got any shammies?

JESSIE  
Should do.

INT. THADDEUS' HOUSE -- NIGHT

A shiny 97 spins on an antique victrola. The sound is scratchy, but the music, a Robert Johnson song, is nothing less than heritage.

Brenna sleeps in Thaddeus' lap as he gently rocks back and forth in his chair. Steve sits deep in the couch, his head resting back.

Jessie steps into the room, folds a dish rag. She leans against the wall. Steve turns his head. They share a smile.

INT. BOWLING ALLEY -- NIGHT

All but one pin falls down.

The ball appears on the tray. Jessie picks it up. She's wearing a team shirt with "KNDP - Needle Drop" insignia on the front and the record/needle logo on the back. Cal's there, as well as Lyle and Harris.

Jessie rolls a gutter ball. Returns to the bench. Lyle gets up to take his turn.

LYLE  
He's a good, man.

HARRIS  
And that's coming from Charlie's brother, no less.

JESSIE  
You can't be too sure about these things.

CAL  
Brenna loves him. They get along great.

HARRIS

Even Thaddeus gets a kick out of him.

LYLE

I never thought I'd like some dude from the left coast. No, way.

Lyle rolls his ball.

CAL

Harris, you mind buying another pitcher?

Harris takes the money, walks away. Cal turns to Jess.

CAL

Lay off him, okay? Lay off the tests. Quit trying to trip him up. You're embarrassing yourself.

JESSIE

Is it that obvious?

CAL

You should tell him.  
(softly)  
If you ain't gonna be my girl, you could do a lot worse than being his.

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Cal's freshly painted Vette pulls up dark and silent. They watch Steve and Brenna in the living room.

JESSIE

She's teaching him how to two step. He gave Brenna money to buy the tickets. She's excited. Nothing surprises me, though. I got that little tomboy daughter of mine's number. You can bet on that. I just wish I could get her out of the combat boots.

Through the window, we see Steve tell Brenna its time for bed. He picks her up, carries her into the hall, turn into her room.

JESSIE

Thank you, Cal.

She kisses him on the cheek. Gets out. Cal watches her walk around the back of the house. He's full of melancholy.

CAL  
 (to himself)  
 Don't be sad.  
 (puts it into gear)  
 You got a Vette.

He pulls out.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Jessie enters. Hears Steve tucking Brenna into bed. The kitchen's spotless. The kettle's on, a tea bag in a cup.

Steve exits Brenna's room. Closes the door. Sees Jessie. He puts his finger to his lips. She turns off the kettle.

They whisper.

JESSIE  
 We need to talk.

Steve exhales. Not again. As Steve speaks, Jessie sets down her purse, removes her jacket, slowly moves toward him.

STEVE  
 Jessie, I don't want anything from you. I'll cop to the fact that, yeah, I think you'd make a great girlfriend, but you don't want that from me. And that's fine. I dig Brenna, she's a great kid. So do me a favor, don't mess that up for me. She's your kid, I respect that, just -

Steve watches as she unbuttons the bowling shirt, reaches for his face, kisses him.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE - BAR AREA -- NIGHT

A SINGER and BAND are on the stage. Everyone's two stepping. Steve and Jessie sit at a table with the rest of the KNDF folks, Thaddeus, Harris, his wife and son, Lyle, a couple others. Missing is Brenna.

JESSIE  
 C'mon, let's dance.

STEVE  
 I don't know how to two step.

JESSIE  
 I'll teach you.

STEVE

I don't want to right now. You go ahead, I'll wait for Brenna.

HARRIS' WIFE

Oh, my Lord!

Harris Jr. stops dancing with Trisha. In walks Brenna, hair down, in a white dress and shoes. For an eleven year old, she looks very, very pretty. Like a girl. Like her mom.

Steve rises. Walks over to her, takes her hand. They start two stepping. Its a bit syrupy, but for Jessie, it's a dream come true. Her daughter, her man. Happy.

Trish bobs between Brenna and Harris, Jr's amazement at Brenna. Trisha stomps off past the KNNDP table. Jessie watches, then turns and sees Harris, Jr. alone. She stands, starts dancing with him, twirls over to Steve and Brenna. Makes a switch.

They're dancing. Having a ball. The floor starts to clear, the patrons start clapping. Until Steve's face shows concern. Jessie's nose starts to bleed, and her vision begins to blur.

EXT. ROADHOUSE CAFE - PARKING LOT -- NIGHT

It's sprinkling.

Steve closes the passenger door on Jessie. She holds a handkerchief to her nose. Thaddeus puts a hand on Steve's shoulder.

THADDEUS

Go on and run Jess home. I'll take care of Brenna.

Steve nods. Walks around to the driver's side.

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Steve's truck is in front of the house. Thaddeus pulls in and parks. He and Brenna walk around to the back. It's raining harder.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Brenna enters. We slowly follow her as she walks down the hallway, sees Steve and Jessie on the couch. Jessie's crying.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Brenna stops in the doorway. Thaddeus stands back.

BRENNA

You told him? You told him, didn't you?!?

Jessie sits up.

JESSIE

Brenna, it's okay. He should know.

BRENNA

But he passed the tests! Now, he's gonna leave like all the others!

She bolts past Thaddeus and out the door. Steve flies off the couch, goes after her.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Thaddeus peers out the kitchen window. Sees Brenna and Steve disappear into the woods. He turns to Jessie.

EXT. WOODS BY JESSIE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

A foot race. And remember, Brenna can run. Steve's trying to catch up, but he is pushing forty and a smoker. He calls to her, but her mind's on one thing.....

EXT. CLEARING BY CLIFF -- NIGHT

We see the waterfall from the other side now. There's a ridge and a clearing between it and the woods. We make out Brenna and her white dress as she emerges from the trees. Steve appears behind her, realizes where she's headed.

He grabs hold of her, brings her to the ground, holds her, wipes her hair from her face. It's still raining.

BRENNA

I don't wanna grow up alone! I'm afraid I'll grow up alone!

Suddenly, we hear thumping. A rhythmic thumping. Like horse hooves. Brenna and Steve turn toward the trees. The Untamed Colt appears from the woods, galloping straight toward us.

The Colt jumps, lands on the other side and leaps off the cliff into the open air. It's image disintegrates.

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - BACK DOOR -- NIGHT

The first strings of "MY BACK PAGES" begin. *"I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now"*.

Thaddeus and Jessie greet Steve and Brenna as they enter the back. The door closes....

BEGIN MONTAGE:

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - BACK DOOR -- DAY

...then opens as Brenna rushes out, followed by Jessie. Steve flies out after them, carrying a small snake.

INT. BOWLING ALLEY -- NIGHT

Steve rolls a gutter ball.

INT. KNDP BOOTH -- DAY

Steve works the mic, Cal works the board.

INT. HOSPITAL -- DAY

Harris holds his Wife as she breaths deeply. She's in labor.

INT. DILLINGER'S GIN JOINT -- NIGHT

Cal jumps up, fists in the air.

INT. MEDICAL CENTER - DIAGNOSIS ROOM -- DAY

Jessie gets scanned again. Steve, Brenna and Thaddeus gaze through an observation window.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Steve opens the door. Harris, Jr. stands on the porch. Suit, slick hair. He smiles as Brenna, hair up, another dress, walks out. Steve follows. Jessie pulls him back, kisses his cheek then closes the door behind them.

INT. BOWLING ALLEY -- NIGHT

Jessie rolls a strike. Does a dance for the team.

EXT. PASTURE -- NIGHT

Cal and Steve tip over a cow.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Jessie's hunched over the toilet. Rises, looks into the mirror. Bags under eyes, fatigue, pale skin. Not well.

INT. HOSPITAL -- DAY

A NURSE hands Harris and his Wife their NEWBORN BABY.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Steve and Jessie slow dance in the living room. Brenna watches from her mother's normal place in the hallway.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE -- DAY

Steve removes a training bra out of a paper bag. Jessie grabs it from him. Brenna dashes from the room in tears.

INT. BOWLING ALLEY -- NIGHT

Steve throws another gutter ball.

INT. DILLINGER'S GIN JOINT -- NIGHT

Steve watches Thaddeus shoot the eight ball in the corner pocket. The Cop and a Fireman pay them each ten bucks.

EXT. CAMPFIRE BY LAKE -- NIGHT

Brenna and Steve play guitars by the fire. Friends and family join in song.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Brenna sneaks up to Steve who's fallen asleep on the couch. Puts lipstick on his face.

EXT. MAIN STREET -- DAY

A Fourth Of July parade. Brenna, Steve and Jessie watch Veterans march by, among them Ed and Thaddeus. Mike and Willie offer a salute.

EXT. BRENNNA'S SCHOOL -- DAY

Brenna sees Harris, Jr. walking with Trisha.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

Brenna rushes into the cafe, burrows herself into Jessie, cries uncontrollably.

INT. KNDP BOOTH -- MORNING

Harris works the mic. He has his daughter in the booth with him. She starts screaming. Cal pulls his headset off.

INT. KNDP RADIO STATION - THADDEUS' OFFICE -- MORNING

Thaddeus glances up at the speaker.

INT. BOOKER'S GENERAL STORE -- DAY

Jessie pays for her prescription.

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE -- DAY

Steve digs a new hole for the mailbox pole. Fixing things like the man of the house. Jessie walks out, watches. He turns to her, she motions for him to continue working like her personal Chippendale.

EXT. RIDGE -- NIGHT

A blanket's spread upon the grass. Brenna leans back into Jessie. Jessie leans back into Steve, caresses Jessie's head, gazes off at the waterfall.

A shooting star crosses the sky.

END MONTAGE:

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - BACK DOOR -- DAY

A birthday barbecue. Steve's barbecue. Steve's behind the grill, the radio station crew, plus the new Harris addition, sit at the table, play in the background.

Harris, Jr and Brenna swing from a far away tree.

HARRIS JR.

I strayed, Brenna. I strayed. I just want you to forgive me.

BRENNA

Well, I don't know Harris. Its not something you just turn on and off.

HARRIS JR.

Will you think about it at least?

BRENNA

I'll think about thinking about it.

She rises and walks toward the table. Steve looks up from the barbecue. Brenna gives him a subtle thumbs up. Steve winks at her.

JESSIE

(whisper)  
She tell him no?

STEVE

She told him she'd think about it.  
Boy's gotta be in pain.

(MORE)

STEVE (CONT'D)  
 (places chicken on  
 plate)  
 But that's what you get when you  
 mess with our girl.

JESSIE  
 (smiling)  
 That's right.

She walks away.

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - FRONT -- DAY

A white rental car rolls toward us, parks in the driveway. The door opens and a professionally dressed man gets out and walks to the door. Knocks. It's Jon Lynn, Steve's manager.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN -- DAY

Brenna leads Jon through the kitchen. Through the screen door, Jon sees a cake with a bunch of candles on it. The crowd finishes singing happy birthday.

JON  
 (to himself)  
 Well, alright Steve.

Jessie looks up, squints at the door.

JESSIE  
 Brenna? Who you got with you, honey?

TIME CUT:

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - BACK DOOR -- DAY

Jon's taken his jacket off, sits next to Lyle.

HARRIS  
 Steve tell you what a great bowler  
 he is?

JON  
 He didn't tell me he took up bowling.

CAL  
 Steve tell you about his sixth sense  
 when it comes to directions?

JON  
 Didn't get that either.

LYLE

Steve tell you how he stole my job?

The crowd turns on Lyle, throws napkins, straws. He even draws fire from Thaddeus.

LYLE

It was a joke. A joke. C'mon, I didn't bring up The Colt did I?

Folks start disbursing, picking up plates. Harris grabs the baby. Harris' Wife give Jessie a hug.

HARRIS' WIFE

Thanks, honey.  
(to Steve)  
Happy birthday.

LYLE

What? It's over? Did I just "over" the party?

Steve gives her a hug, shakes Harris's hand, kisses the baby. He squats down to Harris, Jr.

STEVE

You hang in there big guy.

He nods. They exit.

BRENNA

(to Jon)  
Can you stay awhile? We're gonna play.

JON

Play? Play what?

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Steve and Brenna play a country song. Jon watches with pride, joy. Jessie knows something up.

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - FRONT -- NIGHT

Steve and Jon step out front.

STEVE

So how'd you track me down, huh?

JON

You're on the radio, Steve.  
(MORE)

JON (CONT'D)

People hear, they talk, next thing you know, I get a phone call. Listen, it was great to see you. Happy Birthday.

He hugs Steve.

JON

You look great. And they're good people. Congratulations.

Jon opens his car door.

JON

Tell me, after Los Angeles, where did you go?

Steve doesn't look away, but wherever it was, it's not a pleasant memory.

STEVE

I thought you came all this way for my birthday.

JON

It doesn't matter why I came. You got a good thing here.

STEVE

Jon.

Jon wrestles with it. Truly doesn't want to tell him.

JON

Alright. They want you.

STEVE

Who wants you?

JON

KDRM. They've been listening to tapes of your stuff and I got a call. Apparently they're assembling the best they can get. Calling 'em "The Dream Team". Hence, the call sign. They're offering 80% of your rate for a probationary period. And they want to see you right away.

Steve exhales.

JON

Be a big step toward rebuilding your career. If that's what you wanted.

Jon gets in the car.

STEVE

80%, huh?

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Through the screen door, we see Jon drive off. Steve waves, turns and enters the house. Brenna's standing there. Defiant, upset. He knows she heard. As he tries to say something, she shuts down, briskly walks away.

She enters her room, slams the door. Jessie steps from the kitchen, points at the door, looks questionably to Steve. He glances back out the window at the driveway, the road.

EXT. LOCAL MOTEL -- NIGHT

Steve's truck is parked in front of his room.

INT. STEVE'S MOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Steve's spider crawls along the floor.

INT. STEVE'S MOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Steve sleeps on his bed. Suddenly, outside, his truck headlights turn on. And his horn honks. Steve wakes up. He pulls himself out of bed, throws on his robe. Carefully opens the door, expects The Colt.

EXT. STEVE'S MOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Brenna's by the driver's side door. Her bike lays on the ground. She rushes forward, throws herself into Steve, hugs him with all her heart then releases. She steps back, picks up her bike and rides away.

Steve steps out after her, but she's gone. He turns around, sees his Motel door's closed, climbs in the back of his truck.

EXT. LOS ANGELES - ESTABLISHING -- DAY

We're back. Greeaaaaaaattttt.....

INT. STEVE'S HOUSE -- DAY

Steve enters the house, drops his bags. He walks around, sits on the couch. His guitar's still against the wall, still broken. He kneels down, picks it up with care.

JON (V.O.)

Steve, this is Dean Townsend and Jim Hamilton.

INT. KDRM RADIO STATION - CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY

Glass all around. Large table. Deep seats. Steve and Jon stand on one side of the table. Across from them are Dean Townsend, 40's, and Jim Hamilton, 40's.

JON

Dean's the CEO of KDRM and Jim's the Station Manager.

STEVE

(shaking hands)

Pleased to meet you, gentlemen.

They all take their seats.

DEAN

You've quite a reputation, Mr. Rhodes. You care to expound on it?

STEVE

The best I can do is say I was in a bad way. But I'm very much looking forward to being part of "The Dream Team".

JIM

So you're comfortable with the tryout?

JON

Probationary period.

Steve holds off Jon.

STEVE

It's the only way to go enter this with any sense of integrity. Whether or not I can find my bliss here at KDRM, whether or not KDRM'll find bliss with me, well, that, gentlemen, is what this next month's all about.

DEAN

And the money?

Jon attempts to interject.

STEVE

The money's fine.

INT. KDRM RADIO STATION - OUTSIDE CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY

Steve and Jon exit the glass door.

JON

You know Steve, my job is to protect  
your interests, sometimes play bad  
cop against your good cop.

STEVE

And you're great at that.

They reach an elevator. Steve pushes the button.

INT. KDRM RADIO STATION - ENGINEER'S CONSOLE -- DAY

Dean Townsend and Jim Hamilton stand behind the KMTL Engineer  
from the beginning as he works the console. Steve's in the  
booth.

DEAN

(to Jim)

Think he's still got it? That edge?

The Engineer flicks a switch.

ENGINEER

Good to see you again, Savage. You  
remember me? I'm in focus now, right?

STEVE

Ah, man, are you gonna make me bitch  
slap you on live radio?

The Engineer chuckles.

JIM

(to Dean)

I think he'll be fine.

STEVE

You got a playlist for me?

The Engineer looks at Jim and Dean. Jim leans forward to  
the mic, nods for the Engineer to go live.

JIM

Play what you like, Steve.

Jim motions to Dean and they exit.

STEVE

Hey, I'm sorry I was such an asshole.

KMTL ENGINEER

You were never an asshole. To me,  
anyway.

Steve checks out the console.

STEVE

(to himself)

What Thaddeus would give for one of  
these babies...

INT. STEVE'S HOUSE -- SUNSET

Steve pulls out his cellphone - a big, fat zero of messages  
and calls. He loosens his tie, walks out to the patio.

EXT. STEVE'S HOUSE - PATIO -- SUNSET

Steve gazes over Los Angeles. Its gorgeous. But like he  
told Brenna, its nothing if you've no one to come home to.  
He's very much alone.

INT. TRENDY CLUB -- NIGHT

Steve enters. Everyone's still there, like time stood still.  
Kenny's at a table, waves Steve over.

KENNY

My man! Am I ever glad to see you!

They hug. Kenny slips a bindle in Steve's jacket. They slide  
back into the booth.

KENNY

Where've you been?

STEVE

Working. Up north.

As Kenny introduces him to a couple MODELS, the sound starts  
to mute and things slow down. A Waitress swings by, Kenny  
orders for him, smiles, laughs.

Things never change - the establishment, the people, those  
CUSTOMERS on the dance floor, that DEEJAY, the PATRONS at  
the bar.

Steve glances at the entrance. Sees the door open and catches  
Jessie's reflection in the glass. But a COUPLE enter. He  
glances at the table top, sees Brenna hug him at the Motel.

Suddenly, he's pulled out of the vision by Kenny. The  
Waitress returns with the drinks. Everyone else raises a  
glass in the air.

KENNY  
Return of the Savage.

We're on the bubble. Just hanging there. Want him to stand up and walk the hell out. But he grabs the glass.

STEVE  
To me!!!

They explode in laughter, cheers, clink glasses and chug. Kenny throws an arm around him, leans in close.

KENNY  
Check your pocket. Go into the men's room and check your pocket, man.

He releases Steve, grabs his drink, gives a wink and a smile.

EXT. TRENDY CLUB -- NIGHT

Through the glass, the table's empty, all are gone. Reflected in the glass stands Steve, phone to ear. He listens to the call ringing.

KENNY (O.S.)  
Steve!! C'mon, man...

Steve turns, the car's pulled up front. Kenny and the girls climb in. Reluctantly, Steve closes the phone.

INT. AL & ED'S AUTOSOUND -- DAY

The truck's been painted, shiny new rims, wheels Armour-All'd. Man, it's hot. Steve and a STEREO TECH sit inside.

INT. AL & ED'S AUTOSOUND - STEVE'S TRUCK -- DAY

STEREO TECH  
USB slot's here. Phone bluetooth's through the speakers which can compete with anything the Foo Fighters throw down. Oh - and you got radio, too.

He flips a switch. KDRM comes on. An ad for the jocks, specifically "*Return Of The Savage*" plays. Steve smiles, glances at the guy.

STEREO TECH  
Yeah. I'm a fan. Glad you're back. We should party some time...

EXT. STEVE'S HOUSE -- DAY

Steve's truck is parked. On the lawn.

BRENNA (O.S.)

How loud?

STEVE (O.S.)

Loud. I think your Grandfather'd want me to drive it into KNDP, hard line the station through it.

BRENNA (O.S.)

I'm sure even my Mom'd pay to see that.

INT. STEVE'S HOUSE -- DAY

Steve stands outside, we're inside.

STEVE (O.S.)

You should come hear it. You and your mom should come out to Los Angeles. To hear it.

There's a beat.

BRENNA (O.S.)

Yeah. Look, I should get going.

STEVE

Sure. Sure.....hey, can -

Click. She's gone.

EXT. STEVE'S HOUSE - PATIO -- DAY

Steve lowers the phone. Stares out at Hollywood. His for the taking. But he's not sure he wants it.

INT. TRENDY CLUB -- NIGHT

Kenny enters. Steve's in a booth, rises. They shake, Kenny slips a bindle to Steve, winks.

STEVE

I got a big day tomorrow.

Steve shakes his hand again, returns the bindle.

KENNY

You go Bill W on me?

STEVE

(walking away)  
Something like that.

KENNY  
You still owe me for last time.

STEVE  
(exiting)  
Not anymore.

Kenny opens his palm. The bindle and some money. He glances up as Steve disappears outside.

INT. JON LYNN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Jon's in bed with his wife. The phone rings. Jon sighs....

INT. DINER -- NIGHT

Jon and Steve sit at a table.

STEVE  
You know...I spent so much time  
worried I'd be a loser I never  
realized I was one. Until I met  
that kid.

JON  
Once it goes to escrow, it's over.

STEVE  
It's been over a long time, Jon.

A WAITRESS swings by, sets down the check. Jon watches Steve pick it up, pay the bill. Shakes his head, laughs.

JON  
That town should open a clinic for  
troubled souls.

Steve rises.

STEVE  
Don't forget the tip.

INT. KDRM RADIO STATION - OUTSIDE CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY

Dean and Jim approach the conference room. Only Jon's at the table.

INT. KDRM RADIO STATION - CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY

Dean and Jim step inside. Jon rises.

JIM  
Where's Steve?

JON

I think you oughta sit down.

INT. STEVE'S HOUSE -- DAY

The house is empty.

INT. KDRM RADIO STATION - CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY

JIM

Is this a money ploy?

JON

I'm afraid not.

DEAN

'Cause we can talk about that. We're not opposed to making Steve more comfortable, financially.

EXT. MUSIC SHOP -- DAY

Steve and the Engineer finish tying a cover protecting the load in the back of his truck. Steve extends his hand.

STEVE

Thanks.

ENGINEER

Take care of yourself.

Steve winks at him, climbs in the truck.

INT. KDRM RADIO STATION - CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY

JON

My client fulfilled his agreement for the one month interim. And he asked me to assure you the radio station staff was top notch. He's just going in another direction.

DEAN

And what might that be?

JON

(smiling)  
North!

EXT. BRIDGE -- DAY

Steve's hands pat the steering wheel as a song plays. He's happy. We PULL AWAY as the truck moves on and on and on....

EXT. KDRM RADIO STATION - OUTSIDE CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY

Jon exits the conference room.

JON

Steve, Steve, Steve....

Jon passes out of frame. In the office, Dean and Jim are going nuts, arguing, throwing shit on the table.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

Jessie pours some coffee for Booker. The rest of the regulars are at the counter, the booth. There's no radio. Jessie doesn't look so good. She's starting to fade.

MIKE

Jessie, what's with the silent treatment?

The speakers fritz.

LYLE (O.S.)

Testing, testing. How's that?

MIKE

It's fine just play some damn music.

BOOKER

Music? How 'bout plugging my General-

LYLE (O.S.)

The folks here at KNDP want to ask you to check out the prices at Booker's General Store. You need, uh...

The whole place moans. They know what's coming.

LYLE (O.S.)

You need anything, just get on over to Booker's and he'll take care of you. Booker, if you're out there, I'm trying, buddy. Its only your ads. I don't know, its, I see your name, and....

INT. KNDP RADIO STATION - THADDEUS' OFFICE -- DAY

Thaddeus thumps his head on his desk as Lyle starts laughing.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

Booker hands Jessie his utensils, his napkin.

JESSIE  
Just don't kill him.

He gets up. As do the others. They file out.

EXT. KNDP RADIO STATION - THADDEUS' OFFICE -- DAY

Through the window, we see Booker and Lyle going at it. Thaddeus closes the shades, sighs, heads out to break it up.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

Jessie leans against the counter. Reads the paper.

EXT. BRENNNA'S SCHOOL -- DAY

We're tracking along Steve's truck. The back's empty. No cover, no load. Steve sits on the front. A bell rings and the Students rush out.

Trisha exits with Brenna. Followed by Harris, Jr. He carries both their books. Steve laughs. They walk down the stairs. Harris, Jr's the first to see Steve.

HARRIS JR.  
Hey, Bren?

Brenna stops, turns to Harris, Jr. He motions with his head. Brenna turns around. Sees Steve.

STEVE  
You said you wanted to hear the stereo  
in the truck, right?

He pushes off the truck, walks up to her and hugs her.

EXT. BRENNNA'S SCHOOL - ESTABLISHING -- DAY

The truck pulls out. Steve, Brenna and Trish in front. Harris, Jr. in back.

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE -- EVENING

Jessie pulls up, sees Steve's truck in the driveway. Brenna looks out the window, jumps up and down. The front door opens. Steve and Brenna walk outside.

Jessie parks, gets out of the car, walks toward him. Steve reaches her. He gently puts his arms around her...

STEVE  
I missed you.

JESSIE

Yeah, I figured you would...

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

There's a large table in the middle of the room. It's Steve's welcome back dinner. The regulars surround the table with a special place for Harris' baby.

Everyone starts into conversation. Steve pulls out a chair for Jessie. She sits, squeezes his arm. He moves over, starts to carve the meat. Thaddeus rises.

THADDEUS

Have a seat there boy. I'm still head of the family.

STEVE

Yes, sir.

THADDEUS

And fortunately for you, old Lyle just erred himself back to the night shift.

Lyle's got a black eye.

LYLE

I did it on purpose.

Moans of "yeah, right".

LYLE

I did!

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Later. Steve and Brenna do the dishes. Jessie brings another stack and sets them on the counter.

STEVE

You worked all day. Get out of here.

She holds her hands up, exits. Steve turns to Brenna.

STEVE

How's she doing?

BRENNA

She's doing fine.

Steve stares at her. Knows she's lying. Brenna looks down.

INT. BRENNNA'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Steve tucks Brenna in.

STEVE

Whaddaya say, tomorrow night, the  
three of us do some Karaoke?

BRENNNA

Can we go bowling instead?

STEVE

Only if you drive.

BRENNNA

Really?!?!

STEVE

(nodding head "yes")  
No. But we can go bowling.

She pouts. He stands turns off the light and closes the door.  
He pauses, laughs.

BRENNNA (O.S.)

It's not funny.

He walks away.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - JESSIE'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Steve enters the bedroom. Jessie's in bed. Asleep. He adjusts  
the covers on her, notices she's wearing a negligee. Black.  
For him. She forgot to remove the price tag. He pulls it  
off, kisses her forehead. Tucks her in.

INT. KNNDP - CAL'S BOARD -- DAY

Cal, Steve and Thaddeus gaze at the newly installed board.

STEVE

Pretty cool, huh?

THADDEUS

This don't mean you can take liberties  
with my daughter. Hell, I guess a  
couple weekends at the cabin'd make  
us square.

He smiles at him, walks away.

STEVE

Can you handle it?

CAL

You know what they say, "walk like  
you know where you're going".

He rubs his hands together and sits down.

INT. KNDP RADIO STATION - THADDEUS' OFFICE -- DAY

Thaddeus sits at his desk.

STEVE (O.S.)

Sorry about the delay, folks, we  
were just discussing the quality  
service you find whenever you walk  
into Booker's General Store. And in  
honor of that we're sending this out  
to Booker.

Steve throws on Queen's "FAT BOTTOM GIRLS". Thaddeus stands  
up, angry.

STEVE (O.S.)

Relax, Thaddeus, we're just joshing  
you.

INT. KNDP - CAL'S BOARD -- DAY

Cal speaks into the mic.

CAL

We're not on the air, yet.

INT. KNDP RADIO STATION - THADDEUS' OFFICE -- DAY

Thaddeus sits back down.

THADDEUS

(softly, to himself)  
Disneyland wiseacre.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- AFTERNOON

Kristy, Jessie and Harris' Wife work the afternoon rush.  
Only, Kristy and Harris' Wife are really working. Jessie's  
slow, keeps rubbing her temple. She stands by a booth, trying  
to take an order.

JESSIE

I'm sorry, can you give that to me  
again?

BOOTH PATRON

Country Fried Steak, mashed potatoes,  
green beans and a Miller Lite.

She rubs her head again. Kristy turns to Harris' Wife, walks over to Jessie, pulls her aside.

KRISTY

Jess, why don't you sit down for a minute. Go into the bar, just take a breather.

She removes the pad and pen from Jessie, turns to help the Booth Patron. Jessie walks away.

BOOTH PATRON

She gonna be alright?

KRISTY

She'll be fine.

Jessie stumbles, leans into a COUNTER PATRON. Everything stops.

JESSIE

I'm fine. I'm fine. I just can't hold my liquor like I used to.

Harris' Wife and Kristy smile. Jessie continues into the bar area.

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Both cars in the driveway. No activity.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Flowers on the coffee table. Steve and Brenna on the couch. Waiting. Waiting. Waiting. Brenna gets up, knocks on the bathroom door.

BRENNA

Mooooooooooooooooooooo!

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Jessie's crouched over the toilet. Bathrobe. Wet hair.

JESSIE

Just a minute, Bren.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Brenna plops down next to Steve, drags his arm around her.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Jessie checks herself in the mirror. Knows what she's looking at. Starts to cry. Takes a few deep breaths.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Brenna and Steve are still sitting on the couch. Steve looks at his watch. Gets up. Knocks on the door.

STEVE

Jess? You okay?

JESSIE (O.S.)

I'm fine. I've had a tough week at work. Why don't you take Brenna bowling?

STEVE

I don't want her to kick my ass, that's your job. Listen, we'll just have a nice, easy time at home.

JESSIE

No, I'm serious, Steve. You two got a lot of catching up to do. I could use a night by myself. You know?

STEVE

Open the door.

JESSIE

No.

STEVE

Open the door or we're not going.

Reluctantly, Jessie cracks it. Steve can barely see her.

STEVE

Hey, beautiful.

JESSIE

I look horrible.

STEVE

Hey, enough. I'll go but I need you to tell me something. Tell me you love me.

JESSIE

I love you.

STEVE

I love you, too. C'mere.

She opens the door just enough for him to kiss her. Brenna rolls over on the couch, dives beneath the cushions.

BRENNA

Gross!

STEVE

(to Brenna)

C'mon, little one, you're driving.

BRENNA

Really?!?

STEVE

Yeah.

BRENNA

Really?!?

STEVE

No.

They exit the door.

STEVE (O.S.)

Tell me about The Colt.

BRENNA (O.S.)

No.

STEVE (O.S.)

Tell me about The Colt.

BRENNA (O.S.)

Nuh-uh.

INT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Jessie hears the door close. Slides down the wall, starts to cry.

EXT. THADDEUS' HOUSE -- NIGHT

Jessie pulls into his driveway. He's already at the door.

INT. THADDEUS' HOUSE -- NIGHT

A '97 goes round and round. Music floats out of the speaker, finds Jessie curled up into Thaddeus like the little girl she used to be. Wants daddy. He knows she's in pain.

JESSIE

Tell me about mama again.

THADDEUS

Oh, your mama's the most beautiful Colt in heaven. Running across the range with flowers in her mane and a song in her heart. She's very, very happy. Looking down on her beautiful daughter, her beautiful granddaughter. Yeah, she's at peace, Jessie. She's at peace.

INT. BOWLING ALLEY -- NIGHT

Brenna's kicking Steve's ass.

STEVE

You don't let me win, I'm going back to Los Angeles.

BRENNA

You can't go back until I tell you about The Colt.

She punches him in the arm.

INT. THADDEUS' HOUSE -- NIGHT

JESSIE

I'm so tired, Daddy. I'm so tired of having to dose myself just to get through the day, waking up at night wondering if Brenna's gonna be alright.

THADDEUS

Brenna's gonna be fine, sweetheart. Everyone's in love with her. Just like they are with you. Steve's a good man.

JESSIE

I'm gonna go to sleep, Daddy. Listening to this, in your arms.

THADDEUS

Sure, darling. Sure. You go on and I'll hold you. You've had it hard far too long. Go on, Jess, you go on. Everything'll be fine. It'll be fine.

He caresses her hair as she settles in, drifts off. The record continues to play, reaches the end, starts to skip.

EXT. MAIN STREET -- DAY

Everything's shut down. No Cars.

EXT. DILLINGER'S GIN JOINT -- DAY

Nothing. No movement.

EXT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

Closed.

INT. KNNDP BOOTH -- DAY

Vacant. Quiet.

INT. KNNDP RADIO STATION - OUTSIDE THADDEUS' OFFICE -- DAY

We TRACK along the hallway, staring right at the wall, approach the open door.

EXT. GRAVEYARD -- DAY

The casket's being lowered. The whole town's in black, in addition to Jon, his wife, his daughter. Thaddeus throws the first scoop of dirt, Brenna, Steve, Cal, etc.

STEVE

When I started working in radio, my goal was to get as far from my family as possible. With Jess, I thought I'd finally made it home.

Steve and Cal step away.

STEVE

Is this what you meant when you told me to be sure?

CAL

If it's any consolation, I didn't make it past the slumber party.

He and Steve share a smile.

EXT. GRAVEYARD -- RIDGE -- DAY

We're looking down at the funeral. Slowly, WE TRACK BACK, reveal the legs of The Colt. We continue TRACKING BACK, reveal the legs of a small horse - The Philly.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

A buffet's set up in the pool area. Brenna and Mrs. Dale make their way through the line. Harris' family is right behind them.

The Mourners drift about the cafe. Steve and Cal stand at the counter near the jukebox. Jon, Jon's Wife and Sadie sit at counter stools.

EXT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

A Towncar pulls in. Charlie gets out, followed by ANOTHER MAN, 40's, athletic, fit. Charlie's hair is a lot shorter. Both wear suits.

INT. ROADHOUSE CAFE -- DAY

Steve sees Charlie and the Other Man enter the cafe. They're met by Brenna and Mrs. Dale. He drops down to one knee, hugs Brenna.

STEVE

Nice of him to make it.

CAL

He was on tour, Steve. Give him a break. He came as soon as he got the message.

STEVE

Who's the other guy? His dealer?

CAL

His *sponsor*.

Steve turns to him.

CAL

He's clean. And sober.

Thaddeus approaches Charlie. It's very emotional for everyone. Charlie stands, shakes Thaddeus' hand, introduces his sponsor. Thaddeus searches the room, sees Steve down the counter. He excuses himself, starts making his way through the room toward Cal and Steve.

STEVE

Where does this leave me, Cal?

CAL

Sometimes you haveta ride the horse in the direction its going.

EXT. ROADHOUSE -- DAY

Thaddeus and Steve walk through the parking lot. The Roadhouse is a fair distance behind them. They're both smoking cigarettes.

Thaddeus is in contemplation. Steve's keeping up, nervous like a kid waiting to find out if the principal's gonna expel him or not.

Thaddeus stops, turns to Steve. This isn't easy for him.

THADDEUS

We need to ask one question: What would Jessie want?

Steve's trumped. We see it in Steve's eyes. He knows what Jessie wanted. What Jessie said. Glances at the Roadhouse. Back at Thaddeus.

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - FRONT -- DAY

Steve's truck is parked next to Charlie's Towncar.

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE - BACK YARD -- AFTERNOON

Brenna and Steve sit on the picnic table, the same way they did when he first started teaching her guitar.

BRENNA

Are you leaving?

STEVE

Brenna, I grew up alone. I didn't have much of anything except anger and a bad attitude. I spent my life searching for something that'd make me happy. And I didn't find it until I met you. You gave me the courage to trust myself and to be a better man, a good man. That's something I haven't always been. But you made me want to. Now, part of being a good man, means knowing the difference between right and wrong and doing the right thing even though it'll break your heart.

BRENNA

You can't leave. You can't leave 'cause you don't know about The Colt.

STEVE

Oh, I know about The Colt, alright. You bet I do. The Colt's what brought me to you. The Colt brings what we most fear and makes us choose between grasping onto the reigns or letting them go forever. And when I saw you, I grabbed on and I'm gonna hold on. Forever. Even though I may just be a needle drop in your life, I'm gonna hold on to what you gave me forever. And I need you to be strong, I need you to push me out of the nest and make sure I have the courage to do what you've helped me do *here*, out *there*. And I need you to give your Father a chance to be your Father.

BRENNA

I want you to be my Father.

STEVE

Brenna, I could never be your Father. 'Cause I'm your best friend. And I wouldn't trade that for all the money in the world. I want you to do me a favor. I want you to hold something for me, take care of it.

He opens the case, takes out the National Guitar. Sets it on their laps so they're facing the metal body.

STEVE

Whenever you're nervous about playing, I want you to look at this. I want you to see the person I've grown to love and believe in. You do that, I'll always be with you.

She stands on the picnic table seat. He holds her, kisses her face. He walks away, around the house.

EXT. JESSIE'S HOUSE -- AFTERNOON

Charlie and Brenna stand inside the house by the window. Steve gets in his truck, pulls to the edge of the road. As he drives past the mailbox and down the street, we slowly  
CRANE UP.

The Colt strolls into frame, and grazes on the lawn. A moment later, The Philly enters from the other side, begins grazing.

FADE OUT: