

BORDERLANDS

written by
craig houchin

 CHRIS MANGANO
MANGANOMOVIES&MEDIA
Office: 424-341-0110
Email: chris@chrismangano.com

Borderlands_5
craighouchin@me.com
818-331-0615
WGA # 1969536 (under the title Stonelands)
©2021

EXT. SOUTHERN ARIZONA DESERT - THE LAST MOMENTS OF LIGHT

All is dark but for a slim thread of blood-red light that clings to the horizon, separating the dark earth from the dark sky. The light bleeds. Turns pale. Then black.

EXT. RAVINE - NIGHT

Pitch black. Shuffling feet. Labored breathing. People are moving through the dark.

THE MILKY WAY arcs across the night sky -- and is blotted out by the dark shapes of MEN passing through frame.

FEET, half-a-dozen or more, march past. Their shoes wrapped in carpet moccasins to obscure their prints in the sand.

SEVEN LATINO MEN with heavy packs move in single-file. No lights. No voices.

The lead man picks a trail through the rocks and cactus. The rear man carries an AK-47.

ON THE HILLSIDE ABOVE THEM

A COYOTE pauses to watch the men pass. She cocks her ears and looks into the darkness ahead of them. Something is there. She is not the only predator out tonight.

THERMAL-VISION POV: Someone watches the men with a THERMAL RIFLE SCOPE. In this gray-toned image, the warm-blooded men appear as ghostly white shapes moving through the dark. The scope crosshairs touch on each man as they march toward us.

KYLE (late-20s) lowers his AR-15. He is dressed in desert camo, a tactical vest and a black balaclava over his face.

He turns to his partners, crouched in the brush a few feet away, and points at the approaching men.

DAN and HECTOR (also late-20s), armed and dressed like Kyle, nod and shoulder their rifles.

Hector is on-point. Focused. Dan is nervous. Twitchy.

The line of men moves closer. 10-yards. 5-yards.

THE THREE GUNMEN rise up, aim their rifles, and switch on blinding lights attached to their gun barrels!

HECTOR

POLICIA! EN EL PISO! AHORA! ABAJO!
ABAJO! ABAJO!

Kyle has the muzzle of his rifle against the Rear Man's head before he can raise the AK-47. The man drops it.

The other men drop to their knees and raise their hands. Light beams sweep across their faces.

HECTOR

DEJEN CAER TUS MOCHILAS!

The men drop their packs.

Kyle picks up the AK-47, tosses it aside, kneels behind AK-MAN and roughly zip-ties his hands behind his back, then moves to the next man.

AK-Man assesses the gunmen with a dark scowl. He sees no badges. No ID. These are not policemen. Two of the men, KYLE and HECTOR, are focused and dangerous.

But the third man, DAN, is jumpy. His muzzle light sweeps erratically from one kneeling man to the next. To the next.

AK-Man zeroes in on Dan. *The weak link.*

Kyle also notices Dan's behavior. Whistles sharply.

Dan jerks his aim to Kyle - then pulls up his muzzle.

Kyle gives him a hard 'get-your-shit-together' look and moves to tie the next man's hands.

Dan steadies himself. Wipes sweat from his eyes. Tries to focus -- and then sees AK-Man glaring at him. It unnerves him. He turns away.

Kyle ties another pair of hands and stands to move on, but stops when the man at his feet begins to sob.

CRYING MAN

Por favor. Por favor...

Kyle looks at the man, then at Hector - *'what the fuck?'*

HECTOR

SILENCIO!

But the man keeps sobbing.

HECTOR

SILENCIO!

Kyle swats the man's head and shouts in bad Spanish.

KYLE

SI-LEN-SEE-O!

CRYING MAN

No soy un gángster! No gángster!

AK-Man hisses threateningly.

AK-MAN

CALLATE!

Kyle turns his rifle on AK-Man.

KYLE

SHUT UP!

CRYING MAN

No gangster! No gangster!

And now the other packers join in, all pleading the same story: I'm not a gangster!

PACKERS

Sí! Sí! Yo también. No gangster! No gangster!

The gunmen are losing control. Dan steps back, jerking his rifle left and right. The packers point at AK-Man. 'He made us do it.'

PACKERS

Él nos obligó a hacerlo! No somos gángsteres!

AK-MAN

A la mierda! Fuck you! Fuck you!

HECTOR

CALLATE! CALLATE!

KYLE

SHUT UP! SHUT UP! SHUT UP!

It's pandemonium. The packers plead. AK-Man spits and curses. Light beams sweep back and forth across the chaos. Kyle and Hector shout and kick to shut them up. And Dan is coming apart. He steps back...back...back...

KYLE

SHUT UP! SHUT UP! SHUT THE FUCK UP!

Dan stumbles, trips, falls back into a cactus and... BANG!

The single shot rips through the dark like a shockwave. Everyone goes silent. No one moves.

And then Crying Man crumples face-first into the dirt.

Everyone turns to look --

And AK-Man springs up and runs right at Dan.

Dan raises his rifle as AK-Man leaps over him, kicking the gun away.

Kyle spins, shoulders his rifle, finds AK-Man in his crosshairs and drops him with three quick shots.

AND NOW PANIC! -- All of the Packers leap up and scatter.

HECTOR

Kyle!

Kyle turns back and, in a flash, he and Hector are back on the battlefield in full combat. One by one, with precise, controlled bursts, they cut down the fleeing men.

The last man falls and Kyle and Hector remain frozen in combat. Eyes to their scopes. Fingers on triggers. Smoke rising from hot muzzles. Brass catchers heavy with spent shells.

The gunmen lower their weapons, pull off their balaclavas, and look dazedly at the dead men scattered around them.

DAN

What the fuck? ... What the fuck?
What the fuck? What the...

KYLE

Shut up.

DAN

(softly)
...fuck.

Kyle and Dan are white, brothers. Hector is Mexican-American. And now that we see them, they look exactly like what they are: stupid amateurs. Stupid amateurs who have just fucked up really, really bad.

Kyle glances at Hector.

KYLE

Hector. You good?

Hector is not good, but he nods anyway.

KYLE

Check 'em.

Kyle and Hector move forward, toeing and prodding the bodies.

Hector finds a man slowly dragging himself through the sand. Three holes in the center of his back. Holes he put there. He tries to swallow, but can't.

HECTOR

He-- Here.

Kyle looks over.

The dying man claws at the dirt. Desperate to keep moving. Desperate to stay alive.

Hector and Kyle lower their rifles. Their lights point into the sand and spread an eerie ground light across the scene.

No one speaks as they watch the dying man slowly decay from crawling--to useless scratching--to not moving at all.

And then silence. The three gunmen take a long, silent look at the dead men around them. Kyle shakes his head.

KYLE

Well this just got fucked sideways.

He spins angrily to Dan, still sitting in the cactus.

KYLE

Goddammit, Dan! What the fuck did you do that for!?

DAN

I--I didn't mean to.

KYLE

Well that dudn't make it any fuckin better, now does it!? -- God-dammit!

He spins round to face the dark. To think.

Hector helps Dan up out of the cactus and they turn to Kyle-- still standing with his back to them. Muttering curses.

Dan watches Kyle silently, like a chastened child. Hector moves to the packs and starts rummaging through them.

DAN

So... what now?

KYLE

How the fuck should I know!?
 (he waves his arm across
 the dead men)
 A pile'a dead Mexicans wudn't part
 of my fuckin plan.

He shoots Dan an angry glance as he turns back to the dark.
 But then notices Hector looking through the packs.

KYLE

Whatta we got?

HECTOR

A lotta weed. Few bricks. Heroin
 maybe.

He holds up some baggies full of bluish pills.

HECTOR

And this looks like it could be
 Fentanyl. Got a dozen bags at
 least.

Their eyes meet for a brief moment of celebration - and then
 turn to the dead men.

Kyle takes a couple of steps into the dark. Stops. Thinks.
 Dan and Hector watch.

KYLE

We stick to the plan.
 (he glares at Dan)
 What's fuckin left of it. Now Let's
 pack this shit up and move out.

EXT. HILLSIDE - NIGHT

THREE DARK SHADOWS move slowly up the steep hillside,
 breathing heavily, straining under their loads.

Their boots are wrapped in carpet moccasins taken from the
 dead men. Hector carries two packs and leads the way up the
 slope. Dan follows with two more packs, limping and shuffling
 to ease the friction of cactus thorns in his ass. Kyle brings
 up the rear with two more packs - and the AK-47.

EXT. DIRT ROAD. MOVING - NIGHT

We chase three heavy truck tires dragging from a chain behind
 KYLE'S BLUE TRUCK. The tire sled kicks up dust and wipes out
 their tire tracks.

EXT. DIRT ROAD--PAVED ROAD INTERSECTION - NIGHT

Kyle's truck - A BLUE 4-DOOR PICKUP WITH A CAMPER SHELL - drives through the open gate and stops on the paved road.

Kyle and Hector get out, unhook the tire sled, jump back into the truck, and haul ass down the blacktop. Above them, the eastern sky is just beginning to show light.

INT. ROBERT'S BEDROOM - BEFORE DAWN

ROBERT MORRISON - 70s, lean, weathered, a rancher for nearly fifty years - lies awake in bed. Staring at the ceiling. Sifting through memories... *But enough of that.*

He gets out of bed and we see that he is alone. Crowded to one side. The other side of the bed is still crisply made. Off limits. Hallowed ground.

INT. ROBERT'S KITCHEN - BEFORE DAWN

The room is dark. Through the large picture window above the sink we see the first glow of light in the eastern sky.

Robert, now dressed in ranch clothes, sets TWO COFFEE MUGS on the counter. One is heavy and stained with use. A workman's mug. The other is delicate and flowery. He fills both with coffee and carries them away.

WE STAY ON THE PICTURE WINDOW as we listen to Robert walk out a door and close it behind him. And then...

We see Robert through the window. He carries the two cups of coffee across the yard toward a bench perched on an overlook.

EXT. ROBERT'S BENCH - BEFORE DAWN

Next to the bench, a small garden fence encloses a well-tended plot of earth where a simple stone cross stands in silhouette against the eastern sky.

Robert sets the flowered cup on a flat stone at the foot of the cross and we see the inscription on the crossbeam:

ELENA GABRIELA MORRISON

BELOVED WIFE

Robert sits on the bench, cradles his cup in his hands, and quietly watches the sunrise with his wife.

INT. ROBERT'S BARN - DAWN

Robert brushes his horse with long, soothing strokes. He whispers gently as he places the blanket. The saddle. The bridle. Horse and man have done this together for many years.

INT. ROBERT'S KITCHEN - DAWN

The room is empty and dark. THROUGH THE KITCHEN WINDOW, we see Robert on horseback. He rides to the front gate, lifts the latch and rides through.

EXT. ROBERT'S GATE - CONTINUOUS

Robert shuts the gate, drops the latch, and looks back at the house.

The kitchen window is empty. *She's not there. He knew that, of course, but had to look anyway.* He turns his horse.

INT. ROBERT'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

From that dark, empty window we watch Robert ride out.

EXT. ROBERT'S RANCH - MORNING

The land is vast, harsh, and beautiful. Stoney peaks, steep ravines, dry washes. In the distance, dwarfed by the landscape, Robert trots his horse.

EXT. ROBERT'S RANCH - DAY

PASTURE. Robert moves twenty or so cows from one pasture to the next. He closes the gate behind him. A HAWK, perched atop a fence post, watches.

WATER TROUGH. Robert removes a padlock from the spigot, turns the handle and water runs into the trough. As it fills, he takes a string of plastic gallon jugs from his saddle and fills them at the spigot.

WATER CACHE. Robert puts the jugs of water into a rough wooden box beneath a handmade, weathered, and shot-through sign that reads: AGUA. On a nearby hilltop, a COYOTE, rests in the shade of a bush and watches Robert work.

SANDY WASH. Robert follows cow-tracks down the wash. He stops, stands in his stirrups, looks around.

FURTHER DOWN THE WASH. The narrow canyon opens onto a sandy plain. A rusted four-strand barbed-wire fence blocks his way. You wouldn't know it, but this is the U.S./Mexico border.

Robert looks west down the fence line, then east. He checks the ground for tracks, then turns east and follows the fence.

EXT. ROBERT'S RANCH. BORDER FENCE - DAY

Robert rides a dirt road beside the barbed wire fence until he comes to a section that has been cut. It irritates him.

He looks south into Mexico and sees the three cows he has been trailing. He spurs his horse through the cut.

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

POV BINOCULARS: Somebody watches Robert trot into Mexico.

EXT. MEXICAN DESERT - DAY

Robert swings wide and comes up gently behind the three cows.

ROBERT

All right, ladies. Your Mexican vacation's over. Time to go home.

He herds the cows back into the U.S. and shoos them into the brush. He dismounts, pulls a spool of wire and tools from his saddle bag and starts to repair the fence.

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

POV BINOCULARS: The person on the hilltop watches him work.

EXT. ROBERT'S RANCH. BORDER FENCE - DAY

As Robert works on the fence, a cloud of dust in the distance announces a vehicle. Robert glances up, then keeps working.

An old beater pickup crests the rise, slows down, and crawls to a stop next to Robert.

Robert tips his hat against the trailing dust cloud. The driver, JACOB (70s) a Tohono-O'odham Native American, grins.

JACOB

Mornin. Brought you some dirt.

Robert spits, gives Jacob a surly smile, and returns to his work. Jacob cocks his head toward the hilltop.

JACOB

You got company on the hill.

ROBERT

Yeah. I know.

JACOB

They must be bored as hell, if they're watchin you fix this fence. I just got here and I'm already bored.

ROBERT

Nobody's keepin you.

JACOB

I know. I just get a kick outta watchin you try to hold back the flood. You oughta just put a gate there, with a "C'mon in" sign on it. This land's practically theirs now anyway.

Robert glares up at the unseen watcher on the hilltop.

ROBERT

That'll be the day.

JACOB

(chuckles)

Yeah. That's what we said when your people showed up.

Robert gives him a look, then nods at the lumber in the back of his truck.

ROBERT

What's all that for?

JACOB

Puttin in a wheelchair ramp for Ofelia. She's not gettin around so good no more.

Robert looks at Jacob, nods with understanding.

ROBERT

I'll give you a hand. Just let me know when.

JACOB

Eh. I seen you hammer. Besides,
it's summer. My grandson's got
nothin to do. He'll help.

ROBERT

Does he know that yet?

JACOB

He will when I get back with this
lumber.

ROBERT

Well, the offer still stands.

JACOB

I know.

Robert turns back to his work.

JACOB

So, you gonna sit in the parade?

ROBERT

Hadn't thought about it.

Jacob knows that's not true.

JACOB

Well, you ought to. Not many of us
left. Tom Bishop died, you know.

ROBERT

When?

JACOB

It was around the same time as
Elena. So, I didn't mention it.

Robert stares at the ground while his hands go back to work.

JACOB

So?

Robert tugs on the wire, doesn't answer.

JACOB

Elena'd make you do it.

Robert glances up and Jacob takes that as a 'yes.' He grins.

JACOB

All right then. I'll see you there.

He rolls away before Robert can protest.

LATER

The fence is repaired. Robert puts the wire and tools back into his saddle bag, then notices something on the ground.

A line of evenly-spaced depressions in the sand crossing the road and heading north. Footprints left by carpet shoes.

Robert glances up at the hilltop. He doesn't see anyone, but he knows they're there. He knows they're watching. *He also knows that he should just forget about those prints and go on about his business.*

He mounts. Follows the prints for a few steps, then stops and traces their line up the ravine. He thinks about it. He squints at the hilltop - then sets his jaw stubbornly and spurs his horse up the ravine.

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

THE POV BINOCULARS watch Robert ride up the ravine.

EXT. RAVINE - DAY

Robert follows the tracks through thick brush.

He rounds a bend in the wash and his horse balks and stamps nervously. Robert gives him a soothing whisper, pats his neck and urges him forward.

FURTHER ON

The brush is thicker and Robert's view is obscured. His horse becomes even more agitated.

Robert hears sounds up ahead. He pushes through the brush and sees... VULTURES SQUABBLING OVER A CORPSE.

He charges in and they fly off. He dismounts, throws rocks at the few who linger - and then turns to the carnage.

INT. BORDER PATROL SUV. MOVING - DAY

The driver is U.S. Border Patrol agent, AVA LEON (30s) Mexican-American. She works alone. Dark sunglasses hide her eyes. Her dark hair is pulled into a tight, regulation bun. An armored vest covers her chest. She is a fortress with a 'DO NOT FUCKING ENTER' sign on her front gate.

EXT. DIRT ROAD--PAVED ROAD INTERSECTION - DAY

AVA'S PATROL SUV tows a horse trailer. She turns off the blacktop onto the same dirt road where we saw Kyle's truck the night before. She glances at the abandoned tire sled as she turns in and drives through the open gate.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Ava's SUV and trailer, tiny white specs in the landscape, drive across the plateau, leaving a rising trail of dust behind them.

INT/EXT. AVA'S PATROL SUV - DAY

Ava spots the Sheriff's truck and empty ATV trailer parked in the road ahead.

She stops behind it and looks out at the ATV tracks heading off across the plain.

IN THE HORSE TRAILER

Ava backs her horse off the trailer. Tightens the saddle. Mounts and follows the ATV tracks.

EXT. DESERT PLAIN - DAY

Ava trots across the plain. Far ahead, she sees a lone man standing beside a horse. Waiting. She rides toward him.

EXT. RIDGE - DAY

Robert stands beside his horse, watching Ava ride up. The Sheriff's ATV is parked nearby. Ava reins-up.

AVA

Morning, sir.

ROBERT

You shut the gate?

Ava is confused. She doesn't remember a gate -- and then she does. And the look on her face answers the question. Robert sighs and mounts his horse.

ROBERT

Alright. Follow me.

He leads her down into the ravine.

EXT. RAVINE - DAY

Robert dismounts.

ROBERT

I'll tie the horse. Sheriff's
deputy's over that way.

Ava dismounts and heads through the brush. DEPUTY FREEMAN,
30s, greets her.

DEPUTY FREEMAN

Mornin. Deputy Freeman.

AVA

Agent Leon.

The Deputy smirks and leans in.

DEPUTY FREEMAN

He ask you about the gate?

Ava doesn't answer.

DEPUTY FREEMAN

(chuckles)
Yeah. Me too.

He leads her to the killing ground that he has cordoned off
with yellow police tape.

DEPUTY FREEMAN

His name's Robert Morrison. This is
his land. He found the bodies.
CID's still on their way out, so I
can't let you get close, but I can
show you around. -- Looks like we
got us a rip-off gone bad. Bad guys
killin bad guys. We got this one
here.

(points at the Crying Man)
Another one back over there.

(hooks a thumb toward AK-
Man)

And five more fanned out in the
brush over that way. Three of 'em
got their hands tied. Except for
this one here, all the others were
shot in the back. Musta been right
in the middle of it when things
went to shit.

(he glances at Ava
apologetically)
Excuse my language.

Ava's dark sunglasses just look at him - and the deputy gets the message that chivalry is unnecessary.

DEPUTY FREEMAN

So, anyhow. They all got sweat stains on their backs. So they musta been packin something. But whatever it was idn't here now.

Robert joins them, but hangs back. Ava looks at the scene: scattered food, hastily dumped from packs; water jugs; the broken cactus where Dan fell.

AVA

What happened there?

DEPUTY FREEMAN

Don't know. Got trampled in the stampede maybe.
(he grins)
Or maybe, one of our shooters fell into it and has an ass full of cactus right now.

He laughs and looks to Ava to join in, but she has already moved on and is looking down the wash toward Mexico. The deputy catches up with her.

AVA

Where'd they cross?

DEPUTY FREEMAN

Mr. Morrison tracked 'em.

Ava turns to Robert - still a bit embarrassed about the gate.

AVA

Do you mind showing me, sir?

Robert nods and turns toward the horses.

EXT. DIRT ROAD. MEXICAN BORDER - DAY

Robert and Ava ride out of the ravine onto the dirt road beside the border fence.

ROBERT

They cut that section there. I was fixin it when I saw the tracks.

Ava dismounts. Studies the tracks. Follows their line back into Mexico.

She marks the location on her GPS, then puts it away. She looks up and down the border fence, then up to the surrounding hilltops.

A glint catches her eye.

AVA

There's somebody up there.

ROBERT

Cartel spotter. He's been watchin
all mornin.

She pulls binoculars from her saddlebag. Scans the hilltop.

AVA

What's the best way up there?

ROBERT

He'll be gone before you get back
on your horse.

AVA

I'd still like to see it.

ROBERT

All right.

Robert turns his horse up the slope. Ava mounts and follows.

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

On a flat shelf near the summit, Ava and Robert find a hastily abandoned campsite. Trash: MRE wrappers. Food cans. Fuel canisters. Ava dismounts and looks around.

AVA

Looks like he's been here a while.

Robert says nothing. He pulls a trash bag from his saddlebag and starts picking up trash.

Ava walks to the summit and slowly pans the breath-taking view. She can see for miles in every direction.

The sheer space and beauty of it catches her off-guard. And for just a brief moment, the door to her tightly sealed fortress cracks open. She can't help it.

AVA

It's...beautiful.

Robert looks up at her - and Ava's fortress door snaps shut. She walks to her horse.

AVA

We can go back now.

EXT. RAVINE - DAY

The Crime Investigation team has arrived and is working the scene. Ava and Robert ride past without stopping. At the trailhead, Ava turns to Robert.

AVA

Thank you for your help, Mr. Morrison. -- I'll shut that gate on my way out.

Robert nods. Ava turns her horse up the slope and Robert watches her climb the steep hillside.

EXT. DESERT KINDER CARE. PLAYGROUND - DAY

Two boys (about 9-years-old) are fighting, rolling on the ground, grappling, punching.

INT. DESERT KINDER CARE - NIGHT

MARTIN, 9, one of the boys in the fight, sits in the hallway outside an open office door. He wears a tough scowl - but it's only there to hide the shame he feels. Beyond the open door is a small administrative office and another half-open door leading to a private office. Through that slice of open doorway, we see Ava and another woman standing on opposite sides of a desk.

IN THE OFFICE

Ava stands in a stiff military posture, feet apart, hands behind her back. DENISE TEAGUE, the facility administrator stands across the desk from her. Ava is terse and formal, as though facing her commanding officer. Denise is polite and concerned.

DENISE

This is the third fight he's had this month. And he's started all of them.

AVA

I'll talk to him.

DENISE

Well, that's good. I think you should. And I hope it helps. But -- I'm afraid we've reached our limit. Until Martin can control his temper -- we just can't have him here.

IN THE HALLWAY

MARTIN hears this, gets up from his chair and walks away.

IN THE OFFICE

This announcement is a gut punch to AVA. But she hides it.

AVA

I understand.

DENISE

Look, Ms. Leon. I know this is gonna be hard. What with the holiday weekend and all. So, you can bring Martin back next week. But you'll have to place him somewhere else after that. I can help with some recommendations, if you like.

Ava turns to leave. Denise stops her.

DENISE

Ms. Leon. I hope you'll forgive me, if I'm out of place but - well, when a child lashes out like this, there's just obviously something going on that needs...

Ava cuts her off.

AVA

Thank you. I'll take care of it.

She turns crisply and walks out of the office.

IN THE HALLWAY

Martin's chair is empty. She looks for him, and sees him standing by the exit door. She braces herself and begins the long walk toward him. Her service boots squeak on the polished floor. It is the only sound. When she reaches the door, they don't speak. She simply pushes it open and they pass silently into the night.

INT. AVA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ava looks in at Martin while he sleeps. His face is pinched and troubled.

It hurts her. There is anger in him. She sees it. And she feels guilty for it.

Her eyes drift away from Martin to a dark corner of the room, where they become snared by some even darker memory.
MATCH CUT TO...

EXT. ROBERT'S BENCH - NIGHT

Robert sits quietly, staring into the empty night.

INT. SHERIFF'S PATROL CAR. MOVING - MORNING

DEPUTY HARRELL, white, 40s, drives the car. His partner, DEPUTY VELASQUEZ, Latina, 27, rides shotgun.

Velasquez looks out her window and sees FOUR CAMO-CLAD MEN standing in the Walmart parking lot, casually holding SEMI-AUTOMATIC RIFLES.

DEPUTY VELASQUEZ

Rifles. Two-o'clock.

DEPUTY HARRELL

Now what the hell's that all about?

Harrell turns into the parking lot and drives toward the armed men - who don't seem at all bothered by the approaching Sheriff's car.

EXT. WALMART PARKING LOT - MORNING

The armed, camo-clad men stand casually beside an RV and four pickup trucks packed for camping.

ED BARTLETT (50s), white, the leader. TOM TAGGERT (50s), white with an impressive handle-bar mustache. WES HARDIN (30s), white, muscular, with a dark beard and an Afghan scarf around his throat. AL COX (30s), black lean, smiling.

In addition to holding a rifle and wearing a pistol belt, each man is dressed in a motley assortment of desert camo with chest rigs and other military-style add-ons. The only thing consistent in their uniforms is the military-inspired patch on their sleeves: **PATRIOTS UNITED BORDER WATCH.**

The patrol car eases to a stop a dozen yards away. The Patriots look up casually.

Harrell and Velasquez step out - also casual, but alert - their hands resting near their holstered pistols.

Ed steps forward with a smile and an outstretched hand.

ED

Mornin. Happy 4th.

Harrell holds up a hand to stop him.

DEPUTY HARRELL

You fellas mind puttin your weapons on the ground?

ED

Sure thing. Lay 'em down boys.

The men lay their rifles and pistols gently on the pavement.

Harrell steps toward Ed Bartlett while Velasquez moves into a standard flanking position. She sees the open back door of KYLE'S BLUE TRUCK and the booted feet of someone laying face-down in the backseat. She positions herself to also keep this unknown person in her field of vision.

DEPUTY HARRELL

Whatch'you boys up to?

ED

Pickin up provisions. We're down here for a 10-day tour to help keep an eye on the border.

DEPUTY HARRELL

That right?

ED

Yes, sir. My name's Ed. Ed Bartlett. This is my outfit.
(points at his patch)
Patriots United Border Watch. Outta Idaho. This is Tom Taggart. Wes Hardin. Al Cox. Got a coupl'a other boys in the store.

INSIDE KYLE'S TRUCK: Dan, his ass still full of thorns, lies on his stomach. He hears voices, looks up over the seat.

Cops! Shit! He ducks back.

DAN

(whispers)

Fuck. Fuck-fuck-fuck.

HARRELL steps closer to the PATRIOTS.

DEPUTY HARRELL

Mind if I see some I.D.?

ED

You bet.

Harrell collects the I.Ds. and hands them to Velasquez. She casually checks the photos against each man's face.

DEPUTY HARRELL

So what is it ya'll do, exactly?

ED

We're here to be extra eyes and ears for the Border Patrol. We're gonna be patrolling the wild lands out west of Nogales.

DEPUTY HARRELL

That's rough country.

ED

That's why we're goin there. Til the wall's built, we're it.

DEPUTY HARRELL

You picked a damn hot time'a year to do it.

ED

The enemy don't stop for the summer.

DEPUTY HARRELL

Idn't that the truth.

Velasquez turns to Dan.

DEPUTY VELASQUEZ

Sir.

Dan doesn't move.

ED

I been comin down here for six years. At least once a year. More if I can swing it.

DEPUTY VELASQUEZ

(to Dan. Louder)

Sir.

Bartlett turns - annoyed - but tries to keep it light.

ED

Dan!

Dan hesitates -- then pokes his head up.

DAN

Yeah?

ED

Pay attention. Give her your I.D.

Dan slides out of the truck. Ed watches him, perturbed.

IN FRONT OF THE STORE

Kyle and Hector push two loaded shopping carts through the automatic doors -- AND STOP DEAD when they see Dan shuffling toward the Sheriff's Deputy.

VELASQUEZ notes Dan's limp.

DEPUTY VELASQUEZ

You all right?

DAN

Yeah. I'm fine.

Velasquez looks at Dan's I.D., at his face, back to the I.D. *It takes for-fucking-ever.* But is really only 3-seconds. She hands the I.D. back to him.

DEPUTY VELASQUEZ

Thank you.

KYLE AND HECTOR breathe again and push the carts forward.

DAN shuffles back to the truck, his hands shaking so badly he can't get his I.D. back into his wallet.

VELASQUEZ returns I.Ds. to each man.

DEPUTY HARRELL

It's a helluva a hobby you got.

ED

We consider it a duty. And we're proud to do it. You a veteran?

DEPUTY HARRELL

Yes I am. Velasquez, too.

ED

So are we. Every one of us. I won't take a man who hasn't served. We're down here because we took an oath to protect this country - in uniform or out - and that oath still stands.

DEPUTY HARRELL

Amen to that. Not everybody around here appreciates what you men do. But I want you to know that I do. We need ya. So, thank you.

He shakes Ed's hand, and then shakes hands with each of the other men. Kyle and Hector roll up with the carts.

KYLE

Damn, boys. You in trouble already?

DEPUTY HARRELL

No trouble at all. We're proud to have you men here. Ya'll have a happy 4th. -- And good huntin!

Harrell and Velasquez return to their patrol car.

The Patriots pick up their rifles and pistols and begin to unload the shopping carts into the trucks.

Ed watches the deputies drive away - then turns his annoyed glare toward Dan - still lurking in the backseat of the blue pickup. He did not appreciate the man's attitude.

EXT. 4TH OF JULY PARADE STAGING AREA - MORNING

Boisterous. Busy. Chaotic. A marching band. Motorcycle cops. Cowboys on horses. A Boy Scout color guard. Clowns. Firemen. Firetrucks. All milling about, waiting to start.

Near the middle of the line, we find a semi-truck hooked to two flat-bed trailers that are festooned with American flags and red, white, and blue bunting.

Outward facing benches line the trailers on both sides. Signs divide the benches into sections by war. On the first trailer we see signs for: WW II. KOREA. VIETNAM. GRENADA. PANAMA. GULF WAR. The second trailer is devoted exclusively to AFGHANISTAN/IRAQ.

Veterans from 20s to 80s take their places on the trailers.

The WW II section is empty. One 86-year-old man, attended by his 20-something grandson, sits in the KOREA section. A few men in their 70s make their way into the Vietnam section.

JACOB has already staked out his spot behind the VIETNAM sign. He wears a well-worn cowboy hat, jeans and a bright red TOHONO O'ODHAM NATION T-shirt.

He spots Robert walking up to the trailer, wearing a clean, starchy version of his usual ranch wear. Jacob grins.

JACOB

Well, look at you.

ROBERT

Don't start.

JACOB

Wasn't gonna.

Robert steps onto the trailer and sits down. Jacob reaches into a small cooler between his feet and comes up with two cans of beer. Hands one to Robert.

ROBERT

Already?

JACOB

(shrugs)

It's already hot.

Jacob pops the tab and takes a sip. Then he and Robert turn to look at the Afghanistan/Iraq trailer filling up with vets, some missing limbs.

JACOB

Seems like every year there's more'a them and less of us.

ROBERT

Yep.

Jacob raises his beer to Robert.

JACOB

To still bein here.

Robert's not so sure that's worth toasting, but he taps his can against Jacob's anyway.

ACROSS THE PARKING LOT

AVA CHASES AFTER MARTIN, who is making a bee-line for the cowboys and horses that are staged just behind the Vet trailers.

The cowboys sit in their saddles, patiently waiting, or making last-minute adjustments to their straps.

Martin runs up to a towering horse and rider, startling both.

COWBOY

Whoa there.

MARTIN

Can I pet him?

COWBOY

Sure. Just go slow.

Martin reaches out and pets the horse's nose.

MARTIN

Mom, look. What's his name?

COWBOY

She's a lady. And her name's Maddie. You wanna feed her?

Martin nods. The cowboy gets down and pulls some apple slices from his saddle bag.

ON THE AFGHANISTAN/IRAQ TRAILER

A vet, DAVID (30s), with a prosthetic hand, checks names on a list as he situates people on the standing-room-only trailer. He glances up and spots AVA, standing by the horses. He hands his clipboard to a FEMALE VET next to him.

DAVID

Here. Take over for a minute.

He walks toward Ava.

AVA watches the horse eat apple slices out of Martin's hand. She smiles. David steps up behind her.

DAVID

Ava.

She turns, and a cornered, uneasy expression clouds her face.

DAVID

Long time. How've you been?

AVA

Good. Busy. You know.

DAVID

Yeah? Well good.

(he turns to Martin)

This must be Martin. Hey, there. My name's David. I'm a friend of your mom's.

They shake hands.

BY THE VET TRAILERS

A punctilious PARADE ORGANIZER moves down the line.

PARADE ORGANIZER

Five minutes! Fi-i-i-i-ve minutes!

Robert watches the organizer walk down the line toward the cowboys - and he spots AVA.

PARADE ORGANIZER

Five minutes! Five minutes!

COWBOY

Looks like we're fixin to get this thing movin. I better saddle up.

AVA

Thank you.

COWBOY

My pleasure. Ya'll enjoy the parade.

He puts the apples away and climbs into the saddle. Ava pulls Martin, trying to politely but quickly get away from David.

AVA

Well, I guess we better get out there and find a good spot.

DAVID

You wanna ride with us? Both of you. I can make room.

MARTIN

Can we!?

AVA

No. -- No, thank you. C'mon.

She pulls Martin away, but DAVID calls to her.

DAVID

Ava.

She turns, anxious, skittish. DAVID steps closer, but leaves a safe space between them. ROBERT watches them.

DAVID

I just want you to know, we're still here. Okay?
 (he grins)
 Still meet at the same old pizza place. I'd like to see you come back.

Ava opens her lips to speak, but shuts down that impulse. Nods curtly and drags Martin away. David watches her go.

ROBERT watches them both, and then feels suddenly embarrassed, like he's been reading somebody's diary.

EXT. PARADE ROUTE - DAY

As the parade rolls out onto the street, the parade organizer stands on the corner shouting out last minute instructions and showing everyone how to smile and wave properly.

PARADE ORGANIZER

Smile. Smile. Wave. Smile and wave.

JACOB AND ROBERT just look at him as they roll past.

IN THE CROWD

Ava drags Martin like they are being chased. Martin stumbles along, trying to keep up as he steals glances at the parade.

A loud cheer goes up behind them and Martin jerks his hand free to see what it's about. Ava stops and realizes she's panting, and has been practically running.

ON THE VET TRAILER

Jacob smiles and waves - sarcastically mimicking the organizer. Robert sits like a stone.

JACOB

C'mon. Smile. Wave.

ROBERT

Why the hell do you keep doin this every year?

JACOB

Just ornery, I guess. I like to keep remindin these folks that an O'odham man fought for them.

He smiles and waves, sits up proudly and straightens his TOHONO O'ODHAM NATION T-SHIRT. Robert chuckles. Jacob shrugs.

JACOB

Gotta have somethin to fight for. Else you might as well roll over and die.

PARADE MONTAGE

A Boy Scout color guard marches. A Police motorcycle crew weaves in slow formations. People eat. Drink. Shout. Laugh. Wave flags. Take pictures. A fire truck sprays water on the sweltering crowd. Kids fire back with water guns.

THE VET TRAILERS appear around a corner and the crowd cheers.

AVA AND MARTIN watch the trailers approach. Around her, people wave flags, place their hands over their hearts, or salute. Ava is reluctant to do any of that.

But as the faces of the vets come into focus, she changes her mind and raises her hand in salute. Martin copies her.

As the trailers roll past, she recognizes Robert sitting behind the VIETNAM sign. The man next to him, Jacob, smiles and waves. Robert just looks uncomfortable.

THE AFGHANISTAN/IRAQ TRAILER rolls by and Ava looks at the passing faces with unease. She sees David, waving to the crowd, and tips her head to hide her face as he passes.

EXT. PARADE GROUNDS. FOOD TRUCK ALLEY - DAY

Pressing crowds. Country music. A dance floor on the lawn. Somewhere nearby, a string of firecrackers pops-off. Robert and Jacob stand in a swirl of people, getting jostled and bumped. Robert looks a little overwhelmed, pulls Jacob aside.

ROBERT

This is a nuthouse. Let's get outta here.

JACOB

Hell no. I came for tacos and beer, and I will not be denied. Let's divide and conquer. You get the tacos. I'll get the beers.

He shoves off through the crowd, calling over his shoulder.

JACOB

Fire up a flare if you get lost.

He disappears into the crush of people. Robert glances around, spots a taco truck and heads for it.

EXT. TACO TRUCK - DAY

Robert aims for a line about 6-people-deep. But TWO TEENS skid in just ahead of him. He shrugs it off and settles in.

A moment later, the line moves and Robert quick-steps with it, lest someone else dive into the gap. He glances at the Hot Dog truck next door and sees Ava at the order window. Her son isn't with her, so he looks around and sees Martin sitting at a picnic table, playing some game on a cell phone.

AVA turns from the pickup window with two plates -- sees Robert and stops. Seeing him feels strangely awkward and out-of-place, like seeing your school principal anywhere but school. But then they nod politely and she moves on.

Robert glances round, killing time. He sees Ava talking with TWO MEN. Friends, he guesses. He turns elsewhere.

The line moves up again and Robert moves with it. He glances back at Ava and her friends -- only now it doesn't look so friendly.

The two men, TALL PRICK and SHORT PRICK, stand in Ava's way - swaying, grinning, and sloshing their beers.

ON AVA AND THE PRICKS

AVA tries to go around but Short Prick steps in front of her, pinches off a piece of hot dog bun, and pops it in his mouth.

AVA

Don't!

Her eyes flash with anger - then flick to Martin. He's busy with his game and hasn't seen any of this.

BUT ROBERT HAS. The line moves up. Robert doesn't.

AVA glares at the drunks, trying to hold her temper. She puts her head down and steps between them...

TALL PRICK

C'mon now, girl.

TALL PRICK snakes his arm around her waist and pulls her back -- And it's like he just stepped on a landmine...

Ava spins, punches a hot dog plate into Tall Prick's face and drives him back onto the ground.

The crowd scurries back. ROBERT rushes in.

SHORT PRICK bear hugs Ava from behind, pinning her arms.

Tall Prick staggers to his feet, blowing mustard and relish out his nose.

TALL PRICK

Fuckin bitch!

He lurches at Ava. But Robert grabs him by the collar and yanks him back. TALL PRICK turns and swings. Robert ducks.

AVA struggles against Short Prick's embrace.

Robert comes back at Tall Prick with a solid punch. A punch that, twenty years ago, would have meant something. Now, Tall Prick only rocks onto his heels, then charges viciously.

Ava wriggles her arm, levers it up and hammers her fist down into Short Prick's balls. *Oof!* He doubles up.

TALL PRICK swings wildly. Robert ducks and fades.

Ava frees an arm and throws her elbow back into Short Prick's nose. He lets her go, staggers back and Ava punches him in the throat. He drops to his knees, gasping.

Tall Prick swings and swings -- and finally clocks Robert in the head and puts him on his back.

But before Tall Prick can move in, Ava kicks in the back of his leg. He buckles, turns, swings. Ava ducks and comes up jabbing, hooking, moving like an MMA fighter, landing body blows and nose jabs.

BYSTANDERS kneel down to help Robert.

SHORT PRICK shakes off the TWO MEN trying to hold him, rushes Ava and bodyslams her into Tall Prick's arms. He wraps her in a choke hold and lifts her off her feet.

AVA draws up her legs and kicks out, catching Short Prick in the chest. He goes back down - and the TWO MEN sit on him.

Tall Prick staggers back but doesn't fall, and doesn't loosen his grip on Ava's throat. Her feet dangle and kick.

Robert, still on his back, sees Tall Prick choking Ava. He pushes away the people hovering over him, struggles up and charges in - just as Ava drives her elbow into Tall Prick's gut. He doubles over.

Her feet touch the ground. She stomps his foot and stabs her thumb back into his eye. Tall Prick yelps, drops Ava and stumbles back, right over Robert, knocking him back down.

And then Ava is on Tall Prick with a fury. Punching, kneeing, kicking. She drives him to the ground and goes down with him, burying him in an avalanche of vicious punches.

He's done. But Ava just keeps coming, hard and fast.

Robert watches, stunned by the fury. It doesn't even seem to be about Tall Prick anymore. *It's like she's punching someone else now. Trying to win some fight we know nothing about.*

Martin steps through the crowd, sees his mom beating the man.

Robert sees Martin's horrified expression and scrambles up, grabs Ava from behind and pulls her off. She wrenches away, swings at him - he ducks.

ROBERT

It's okay. It's okay. They're down.
They're down.

She stops. Recognizes him. Her chest heaves. She looks round at the shocked faces. At the dazed, groaning men on the ground. At her bloody fists. At Martin's frightened face.

And now she is horrified and ashamed. *She lost it. Lost control.* She rushes to Martin and quickly drags him away. Robert watches them go.

The small crowd breaks up. A few people stop to check on Robert. He nods and they move on.

And then, Jacob ambles up casually through the crowd with two cups of beer. He looks at Robert, rubbing his shoulder, at the Pricks sitting on the ground. He hands Robert a beer.

JACOB

You all right?

Robert nods.

JACOB

So, I guess we're not havin tacos.

Robert chuckles sorely, then winces.

EXT. DESERT - LATE AFTERNOON

Kyle and Hector rest in the shade of a scrawny bush. They've been here a while. Hector lays on his back, his hat over his face. Kyle idly scans the desert with binoculars, more out of boredom than any interest in spotting border-crossers.

Dan stands a few feet away, his pants around his ankles. With a small mirror in one hand and a hunting knife in the other, he inspects his inflamed ass.

DAN'S POV IN THE MIRROR: His ass is red and pimples with dozens of embedded thorns.

DAN

It didn't look good, Kyle. It's all red. And it really fuckin hurts.

He scrapes a pimple with his knife.

DAN

Ow! Shit! Goddammit! -- And stompin around this fuckin desert idn't helpin any! Why can't we go home?

Kyle, idly looking through the binoculars, answers blandly.

KYLE

Cuz we don't wanna go to prison for fuckin murder, Dan. That's why. Long as we're out here playin border patrol, nobody's gonna look at us. But if we go home early, somebody's gonna ask why. So just suck it up and shut up.

DAN

Well then one'a ya'll's gonna hafta help me get these fuckin thorns out.

KYLE

Nobody wants to touch at your ass.

DAN

But I'm hurtin, Kyle. It--It makes it so I can't do my job.

KYLE

Well that's no fuckin loss. If you'd done your job in the first place, we wouldn't have a string'a dead Mexicans hanging around our neck.

Dan frowns, turns to Hector.

DAN

Well how about you, Hector.

HECTOR

(from under his hat)

Nope.

DAN

Well goddammit! Fuck the both'a
you, then.

He resumes picking at his ass with the knife. Kyle's radio crackles and we hear Ed's voice.

ED (WALKIE-TALKIE)

Rover Two. Rover Two. This is
Eagle. Come in Rover Two.

KYLE

What the fuck does he want now?

Kyle keys the mic.

KYLE

Go for Rover Two.

ED (WALKIE-TALKIE)

Any contact?

Kyle shouts at the radio - without keying the mic.

KYLE

Now wouldn't I fuckin tell you if
we'd seen anything! You dumb
asshole.

He keys the mic.

KYLE

Nope. Nothin.

ED (WALKIE-TALKIE)

Nothin?

Kyle rolls his eyes. Doesn't answer.

ED (WALKIE-TALKIE)

(disappointed)

All right, then. Rover Two return
to base.

KYLE

(on radio)

Roger that.

(and now off radio)

And go fuck yourself, Eagle.

Kyle and Hector stand up and put on their packs.

DAN

Shit!

KYLE

What'd you do now?

DAN

I cut my myself, goddammit.

KYLE

You need to put that knife away
before you open up a vein and bleed
out.

DAN

Well, if I do, it'll be your fault.
And it'll be a helluva a lot more
trouble for you then, too.

KYLE

Not really. I'll just drop you in a
hole and be done with you.

DAN

Fuck you, Kyle.

KYLE

Yeah, I know.

Kyle and Hector walk off. Dan pulls up his pants, grabs up his pack and rifle and limps after them.

INT. ROBERT'S BARN - LATE AFTERNOON

Robert unsaddles his horse, wipes him down. Still sore from the fight, he rolls his aching shoulder and switches hands.

The horse's ears prick up at a sound. Robert notices and looks out into the yard.

A Border Patrol SUV rolls in and stops. Robert keeps brushing. But when no one gets out, he looks again -- and sees Ava hesitantly step out and look around. She heads for the house.

Robert calls to her.

ROBERT

In here.

Ava enters the barn, pulls off her sunglasses and approaches haltingly.

AVA

Mr. Morrison.

ROBERT

Agent Leon.

AVA

He's a beautiful horse.

ROBERT

Thank you. He's gettin a little old. But he can still get out and do a day's work. -- What can I do for you?

AVA

Well, sir. I, uh -- I wanted to apologize to you.

ROBERT

For what?

AVA

For the way I acted yesterday. I--I shouldn't have run-off the way I did.

ROBERT

You had your boy to think of. No need to apologize for that.

AVA

Yes, sir. But still. It wasn't right. I'm sorry.

ROBERT

Well all right, then. Apology accepted.

Ava nods. But Robert can see she's not finished.

ROBERT

Was there something else?

AVA

I, uh -- I also -- I wanted to thank you.

ROBERT

(chuckles)
For what? Gettin my ass kicked?

AVA

No sir. For standing up for me like you did.

ROBERT

Well, I don't know how much standin I did. I think I watched most of that fight from flat on my back.

Ava looks down nervously. Robert sees this hard for her - and he's not making it any easier.

ROBERT

But -- if I did anything to help ya, then I'm glad for it.

They stand silently for a moment.

AVA

Well, that's all I wanted to say. I'll let you get back to your work.

She puts on her sunglasses and walks away. Robert watches her. Then calls to her.

ROBERT

Agent Leon.

She turns.

ROBERT

Could I interest you a glass of cold lemonade?

Her knee-jerk reaction is to say "no," and she almost does -- but then something stops her.

AVA

Yes sir.

ROBERT

Good. Head on over to the porch. I'll be there in minute.

She nods and walks out as Robert puts his horse in the stall.

EXT. ROBERT'S FRONT PORCH - LATE AFTERNOON

The porch faces east and is fully shaded. Ava stands at the railing and looks out. The late afternoon light turns the landscape a soft rosy-orange. Robert comes onto the porch with two glasses of lemonade.

ROBERT

Here you go. Best in the West.

AVA

Thank you, sir.

ROBERT

Anything new with those men we found?

AVA

Not that I've heard. Sheriff's department is still investigating. But I don't think they have much to go on.

ROBERT

Yeah. That's the way it usually is out here. -- It's changed a lot in forty years. Used to be mostly migrants comin through. Hardly any drugs at all. And if you ran into a group of 'em, they mostly just wanted water.

(he smiles)

I remember one mornin, my wife and I woke up to find twenty of 'em right here in this yard - takin turns at the garden hose. -- Elena ended up cookin 'em breakfast.

Ava looks at him, a bit surprised. He shrugs.

ROBERT

It was a different time.

AVA

Your wife sounds like quite a woman.

ROBERT

She was.

Ava catches the 'was' - but doesn't ask.

AVA

I, uh... I saw you in the parade.
You served in Vietnam?

ROBERT

Mmm.

AVA

I'm sorry to say, I don't really know much about that war. Just that it happened. And that -- well, that folks back here weren't holding parades or saying 'thank you for your service' when you came home.

ROBERT

(chuckles)

No. That, too, was a different time. -- You were in Afghanistan?

AVA

Yes, sir. Army. Is it that obvious?

ROBERT

Little bit. Nobody says 'sir' anymore unless they've had it drilled into 'em for a couple years.

AVA

(embarrassed)

I guess so.

ROBERT

You can call me Robert.

AVA

Yes, sir. -- I mean... I'm Ava.

ROBERT

Nice to meet you, Ava.

He reaches out his hand. She hesitates, then takes it.

ROBERT

You know, I saw you at the parade, too. You and your boy were lookin at the horses. Looked like he had quite an interest.

AVA

More like an obsession. He's been after me to teach him to ride ever since I did my horse patrol training. I keep meaning to. It's just -- It's just hard to fit it all in sometimes.

ROBERT

I imagine it's not easy havin your job and raisin a boy on your own.

AVA

(defensive)
We make it work.

ROBERT

I can see that.

Ava glances at him, sees that he means it. She unwinds a bit.

ROBERT

You know -- I got horses here. You and your boy are welcome to come out and ride any time.

Ava is caught off guard by the offer.

AVA

Oh. Well, that's kind of you, sir but I wouldn't want to put you out.

ROBERT

You wouldn't. Fact, you'd be doin me a favor. My horse Bo's the only one that gets rode these days. I got my wife's horse and a young mare not gettin rode at all. They could use the exercise.

Robert can see that she is uneasy. Tempted but hesitant. She reminds him of a horse that's been mistreated. It wants the sugar in your hand. It's just afraid to get close.

ROBERT

You can think about it. Offer stands. If you want it.

He sips his lemonade and looks out across the valley. Ava does the same - and the two of them quietly watch the changing light.

EXT. PATRIOTS CAMP - SUNSET

AN AMERICAN FLAG slowly lowers on a flag pole... that is attached to Ed's RV.

The men salute while Al and Wes ceremoniously lower the flag, unclip it and fold it into a triangle. Ed is serious and patriotic. The others grin a little. They don't really share Ed's fervor for ceremony, but they don't mind playing along -- except for Kyle.

Ed notices Kyle standing aside with folded arms and a sour expression. It pisses him off. But now is not the time.

Wes proffers the folded flag to Ed. They salute. Ed hugs the flag to his chest, turns sharply and solemnly marches the flag up the steps into his RV.

EXT. PATRIOTS CAMP - NIGHT

The Patriots serve themselves from a pot of chili. Kyle takes his, sits down in a lawn chair by the fire and digs in.

The others stand by their chairs until Ed arrives. He stands across the fire and looks down at Kyle - like a father whose patience is wearing thin.

Kyle keeps eating - then feels Ed's eyes on him. He looks up with a mouthful, glances around at the others, then huffs and slowly stands.

Only then does Ed look away from him.

ED

Al, you wanna lead us?

AL

Sure. -- Lord. Thank you for this day. And for guidin our hearts and our hands to do your will. Thank you for this great country of ours, and for the strength you've given us to defend her. Thank you for givin us your only son to take away our sins. And thank you for this bounty that we are about to receive. In Christ's name. Amen.

Tom looks at his bowl, then whispers to Al.

TOM

Bounty?

Al shrugs and they all sit and dig into their chili. Dan eats standing - it hurts too much to sit.

Ed looks at Dan, standing behind the others. It annoys him. But before he can say anything...

AL

So, Ed. Where are all these border-jumpin Mexicans you was tellin us about?

TOM

Yeah. I thought your buddy at Border Patrol said we was gonna be knee deep in 'em out here. I haven't seen one but Hector since we got here.

The men laugh. Hector glances up, then goes back to eating.

ED

He said we might cross some out this way. You know how it is. They're always movin trails.

AL

I guess.

TOM

Sure would spice things up to run across at least a few of 'em.

WES

Well Mexicans or no Mexicans, I'd still rather be out here with you assholes than sittin at home.

AL

I hear that, brother.

They fist-bump.

AL

My sister wanted me to paint her apartment this week. I had to tell her, "Darlin. I'm sorry, but I gotta go serve my country." I think she hired a Mexican.

They all laugh.

TOM

That Mexican took your job.

AL

He can have it.

They laugh harder. Ed glances up at Dan.

ED

Dan. C'mon. Have a seat. Join us.

DAN

Oh, that's alright. I'm good.

ED

I didn't ask if you were good. I asked you to sit down and eat with us. We're all here together except for you.

Kyle glances across the fire at Ed, but bites his tongue.

DAN

Well, I'm here. I'm with ya.

ED

That's not what it looks like to me.

Dan glances at Kyle for support - but Kyle just locks his jaw and stares into the fire.

DAN

Well. I -- I can stand closer, if you want.

ED

It ain't about standin close or far, Dan. It's about your attitude. And you've had a pretty shitty one ever since you got here.

Kyle and Hector exchange a furtive glance.

ED

You gotta understand somethin, son. We are in hostile country. Surrounded by enemies. And if we're gonna survive, we gotta be on the same side. All of us. We work together.

(he glances at Kyle)

We pray together. We eat together. You understand?

DAN

Yeah. I-I understand.

ED

Then what's your problem?

KYLE

He dudn't have a fuckin problem,
Ed! Okay? Just leave'm alone.

ED

I wudn't talkin to you, Kyle. I was
talkin to your brother.

DAN

It's okay. I-I can sit.

KYLE

No you fuckin won't!

Dan stops. Kyle and Ed lock eyes across the fire. This is
between them now. They don't even look at Dan.

KYLE

He don't have to sit just cause you
tell him to.

ED

Take a seat, Dan.

KYLE

Stay where you are.

ED

This is my outfit. My rules. -- Now
sit!

KYLE

Stay!

ED

Dan!

KYLE

Don't you move!

Ed and Kyle leap up, their dinner plates flying -- Al and Wes
jump up with them, ready to step in.

ED

Goddammit, Dan! Sit your ass down!

KYLE

NO!

Dan vibrates between them. Ed and Kyle glare at one another
across the fire. Al tries to lighten the mood.

AL

Well, goddamn. Idn't this just like home.

WES

Little too much, if you ask me.

AL

How 'bout we all just sit down? Okay? -- Ed?

Ed glances at Al -- and slowly unclenches his fists.

AL

Kyle?

Kyle hasn't backed down an inch.

AL

Kyle. C'mon, man. Just chill it. We're all brothers here.

The fight is at a stalemate, so Ed makes the first move to win the peace. He steps back and turns stiffly to the others.

ED

I apologize for disruptin dinner.

He glances at Kyle - challenging him to follow his lead - and then sits down. Al and Wes sit down with him. Dan glances at Kyle for direction, but gets none, so he sits - with a quiet grimace as his ass hits the chair.

Kyle is the last one standing, still glaring at Ed. Al picks up his chili bowl, takes a bite -- and carries on as though nothing had happened.

AL

You know, I never did see the point'a fightin, unless you was gonna get to fuck after. I mean, why bother? Right?

A few chuckles. The men relax a bit.

AL

Did I ever tell ya'll about the time I had this crazy German bitch come at me with a knife, and we ended up screwing on the kitchen floor?

WES

Yeah. I heard that one.

Tom nods and shoves a bite into his mouth.

AL

Yeah? Well, fuck it. It's a good one, so I'm gonna tell it again.

The men groan as Al launches into his story.

And now, at last, Kyle slowly sits -- and he and Ed glare at each other across the fire.

INT. AVA'S SMALL CAR. DRIVING - MORNING

Martin looks out the windshield, anticipation and uncertainty shifting across his face. Ava drives and glances at him from the corner of her eye. She is as anxious as he is.

EXT. ROBERT'S HOUSE - MORNING

Robert steps onto the porch and watches Ava's car park near the barn. Ava and Martin get out, both a little skittish.

ROBERT

Mornin.

AVA

Good morning. -- Martin, this is Mr. Morrison.

ROBERT

Hi there, Martin. You can call me Robert, if you want.

Martin is shy and uneasy as he shakes Robert's hand.

ROBERT

I understand you came here to ride horses.

MARTIN

Yes, sir.

ROBERT

Well whaddy say we get to it, then.

Martin glances at Ava for the "okay." She nods. And he turns back to Robert with a smile.

INT. BARN - DAY

Robert opens a stall, leads out a young mare and ties her to the grooming post.

ROBERT

This is Bonita. She's gonna be your horse today, okay?

MARTIN

You mean I get to ride her?

ROBERT

In a little while. But first, you two gotta get to know each other.

He sets a stool next the horse.

ROBERT

Step up.

Martin steps onto the stool. Robert stands behind him. Ava watches.

ROBERT

Now. Rub your hand across her back.

(Martin does)

You feel that grit?

(Martin nods)

Horses like to get down and roll around in the dirt. So they pick up all kinds'a grit and burrs that can hurt 'em if you just throw a saddle on. So the first thing you're gonna do every time you ride is brush her down real good. You understand?

MARTIN

Yes, sir.

ROBERT

Here. Like this.

With his hand over Martin's, they brush a few strokes together. Then, he lets Martin do it on his own. Ava smiles.

ROBERT

That's it. Now put your other hand on her shoulder, so she can feel ya. She didn't know you and you don't know her. So this is get-to-know-you time.

(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

You wanna let her feel ya and smell ya, so she can see that you're an okay guy. Talk to her.

MARTIN

What... What do I say?

ROBERT

Introduce yourself. Tell her why you're here.

Martin speaks to her, a little self-consciously at first.

MARTIN

Hey, Bonita. Um -- I'm Martin.

Bonita turns her head, sniffs him. He grins.

EXT. ROUND PEN - DAY

Robert holds the gate, as Martin leads Bonita, now saddled, into the round pen. He shuts it and joins them in the center. Ava leans on the fence and watches.

ROBERT

You ready?

Martin nods nervously.

ROBERT

It's okay to be nervous. But once you get up there, you need to let her know she can trust you. You understand?

Martin nods. Robert kneels and offers his thigh.

ROBERT

Okay. Climb up.

Martin steps onto Robert's thigh and climbs into the saddle.

ROBERT

All right now. Hold your reins like this. That's it. Now give her a gentle squeeze with your legs.

Martin does and Bonita starts to walk. Martin smiles. Robert lets out the lead rope and stands in the center, slowly turning as Bonita walks round the ring. Ava smiles.

ROBERT

Good -- Good. Loosen up those reins
a bit. That's it. -- All right.
Let's turn her around.

Martin turns the horse and she walks around the ring in the
opposite direction.

ROBERT

Good. -- You ready to go a little
faster?

(Martin nods)

All right, give her just a little
kick.

Bonita steps into a gentle trot. Martin smiles wildly.

EXT. ROBERT'S FRONT PORCH - LATE AFTERNOON

Robert and Ava stand in the shade of the porch, watching
Martin feed carrots to Bonita at the round pen. She smiles.

AVA

Thank you for this. It's been
really good for him.

ROBERT

Been good for me, too.

Martin runs over.

MARTIN

Can I have some more carrots?

ROBERT

I think she's had enough for now.
She'll keep eatin till she pops.

AVA

We're gonna have to go soon anyway.

MARTIN

But I want to ride some more.

AVA

Martin. We can't take up Mr.
Morrison's whole day.

MARTIN

Please. Just a little longer?

Ava glances at Robert. He shrugs. Ava yields.

AVA

One more hour.

MARTIN

Yes!

(to Robert)

Can I ride again?

ROBERT

Let's do it.

Martin dashes back to the round pen. Robert steps off the porch, then stops and turns to Ava.

ROBERT

I uh -- I didn't wanna speak outta turn in front of Martin but -- Well, ya'll are welcome to stay as long as you like. I know it's a long drive out here, and -- Well, it'd be no bother if you wanted to stay the night. I got a spare room and plenty to eat. So...

He trails off with a shy nod - and Ava watches him walk back to the round pen.

EXT. ROBERT'S HOUSE - SUNSET

The sun is gone but the sky is still alight with color. Robert and Ava walk from the barn to the house while Martin hops excitedly around them.

EXT. ROBERT'S BACK PATIO - NIGHT

Ava and Martin sit at the picnic table, lit by a kerosene lantern. Robert turns from the grill with a plate of burgers, sets it on the table and they dig in.

INT. ROBERT'S GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

A small room with a double bed. Ava tucks in Martin. He's worn out but excited.

AVA

Did you have a good day?

MARTIN

Yeah. -- Did you?

She nods.

MARTIN

Can I ride some more tomorrow?

AVA

You'll have to ask Robert. But I imagine so.

Martin smiles -- then turns thoughtful.

MARTIN

I like Robert. -- Is that okay?

AVA

Yeah. Of course.

MARTIN

Do you like him?

Ava thinks about it.

AVA

Yeah.

MARTIN

Are we gonna get to see him again?

AVA

Well you're gonna see him tomorrow.

MARTIN

I know. But I mean after that. Are we gonna come back?

AVA

I don't know. Maybe. Let's see how it goes. Okay?

Martin nods. That's the best he's going to get from her, so he takes it. Ava kisses him and goes to the door.

MARTIN

Mom. -- I'm sorry about fightin. I'll try not to do it anymore.

Ava smiles - feeling touched and sad and guilty all at once.

AVA

Go to sleep. I'll be in in a little while.

She turns out the light.

INT. ROBERT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ava walks through the empty living room. No Robert.

THE KITCHEN is clean. The dishes are drying in the rack.
Still no Robert.

EXT. ROBERT'S FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Ava steps out, looks around - then sees Robert's dark shape sitting on his bench. She walks toward him.

EXT. ROBERT'S BENCH - NIGHT

Robert sits quietly. Ava approaches until she sees the cross. She stops and stands a respectful distance behind him. He hears her.

ROBERT

Hey.

AVA

Sorry. I didn't mean to intrude.

ROBERT

You're not. Have a seat.

Ava sits on the bench. Robert sees her glance at the cross.

ROBERT

My wife, Elena. She passed about five months ago.

AVA

I'm sorry.

Robert nods and looks out across the dark country, then up to the stars. He smiles wistfully.

ROBERT

She and I sat out here most every night for forty years. Old habits are just tough to break, I guess.

AVA

Well, I can see why. It's beautiful.

Robert looks at her. She said the same thing on the mountain the day they met.

ROBERT

Elena loved it.

AVA

What about you?

Robert smiles, but there is sadness in it.

ROBERT

Yeah. I spose I do, too. In a way. This was my father's ranch. I grew up here. And I went to Vietnam to get away from it. Or, from him anyways.

(he chuckles)

'Course, that turned out not to be such a good idea. -- After he died, it fell to me. I didn't want it. But Elena did. She never had anything growin up. I guess she liked the idea of havin somethin she could call her own. So we kept it. I don't know that I ever -- loved it like she did. But I loved her. And all the good memories we made here kinda crowded out the old ones. Now. It's all I got left of her.

AVA

You don't have any children?

ROBERT

We couldn't. -- What about you? You got family nearby?

Ava shakes her head - but there seems to be more, so Robert waits.

AVA

My parents -- Well. I pretty much grew up in foster homes. Different one every couple of years. And then I joined the army.

ROBERT

That must'a been hard.

AVA

We all got somethin, right?

ROBERT

Yeah. I spose we do.

AVA

It's funny though. After going through all those homes and all those parents, it was the army where I finally found a family. Found people I -- I could trust.

Ava stares into the dark.

ROBERT

Yeah. It can be that way sometimes.

AVA

What -- What was it like for you? Coming home?

ROBERT

Same as it was for a lot of guys, I guess. Hard at first. And then, if you're lucky, you find a way to live with it.

AVA

Did you ever -- do one of those talk groups or anything like that?

ROBERT

Sorta. We met in bars and got drunk.

It's meant as a joke - sort of - but Ava is serious. So Robert answers her.

ROBERT

No. I never did anything like that. They didn't really have that kinda thing then. I think we were just supposed to come home and shove it down. Like our daddies and our granddaddies did after their wars. Huh. Worked about as well, too. My father fought in the Pacific in World War two. My mom said he was good man before the war. But all I ever knew was an angry, mean-ass drunk. His father was, too. And so was I for awhile.

(he's silent, then grins)

That's how I met Jacob. He's that ugly fella that was sittin next to me on the trailer the other day. We didn't serve together but we came home around the same time. And we, in fact, did meet in a bar.

(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

And then we spent the next couple'a years tryin to see who could drink himself to death first. I came damn close to winnin that contest. But, by some grace or just dumb luck, I had an angel come into my life.

Ava glances at Elena's marker.

ROBERT

She's the one that got me home. At least, as close to home as I was ever gonna get.

They sit quietly for a moment.

ROBERT

How about you? How you doin?

AVA

Okay. I was going to this group thing for a while.

ROBERT

You don't go no more?

Ava shakes her head.

ROBERT

Was that the fella I saw you talkin to at the parade?

She nods.

AVA

He asked me to come back.

ROBERT

Are you?

Ava looks at the ground. Doesn't answer.

ROBERT

Well, everybody's gotta find what works for them. But if you don't mind just a little advice.

(she looks at him)

Don't try to do it alone.

Ava looks at him. Thoughtful. Silent. And then she turns to the night and they sit quietly together. Two tiny shadows on a bench, beneath a billion stars.

INT. ROBERT'S GUEST ROOM - MORNING

Ava wakes up, looks up at the ceiling. Smiles. And then she turns to Martin - but he's already gone.

INT. ROBERT'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Ava finds coffee and toast left for her on the counter.

INT. ROBERT'S BARN - MORNING

Martin watches Robert clean Bonita's hooves with a hoof pick.

ROBERT

See all this comin out? You don't want any that gunk stuck in there. If it looks like something you don't want to step on, then she dudn't either.

Ava walks into the barn, coffee and toast in hand.

AVA

Morning.

MARTIN

Mom! Robert's gonna take us on a trail ride!

ROBERT

I said you could ask.

MARTIN

Can we?

Ava looks at Robert. He nods.

AVA

Okay.

MARTIN

Yes!

Robert pulls him away.

ROBERT

All right, now. Let her finish her coffee. Let's you and me saddle these horses.

EXT. PATRIOTS CAMP - MORNING

The Patriots gather their gear and walk to their trucks. Tom, Wes, and Al go to Wes' truck. Kyle and Hector go to Kyle's.

TOM

All right, boys. Nuther day. Nuther dollar.

AL

You wish you was gettin' a dollar.

TOM

Fuck yeah, I do. At least then I'd be getting a Mexican's wage to hunt Mexicans.

He laughs at his own joke.

Kyle leans in the window of his truck and lays on the horn. Al jumps.

AL

Goddamn, Kyle.

KYLE

Dan!

DAN is in the bushes.

DAN

I'm pissin!

KYLE

Well, piss faster! We're leavin!

Dan shakes the last drops. Zips up and grabs his gear.

AT THE TRUCKS

Ed leans in Wes' window with a map.

ED

Why don't you take this section here and give it good once over.

WES

Roger that.

Ed turns to Kyle's truck and calls to him through the passenger window.

ED

Kyle.

But Kyle ignores him, guns the motor and pulls away - with Dan hanging out the backdoor...

DAN

Shit, Kyle!

...And leaves Ed in a spiteful cloud of dust.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

A TINY BLUE SPECK tears across the landscape, trailing a cloud of dust.

KYLE'S PICKUP bounces and fishtails down a dirt road.

INT. KYLE'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Dan, up on his knees and elbows in the backseat, bounces around like a crash dummy while Kyle and Hector laugh.

DAN

Goddammit, Kyle! Slow down!

Kyle guns it, glances into the rearview mirror at Dan and laughs.

HECTOR'S POV THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD: A CLOSED GATE right in front of them.

Hector shouts!

HECTOR

Kyle!

Kyle looks up. Hits the brakes. Dan flies into the front seat and...

EXT. CATTLE GATE - DAY

Kyle's truck slides to a stop just inches from the gate.

Kyle and Hector tumble out laughing and head to the back to get their packs and rifles. Dan rolls out cursing.

DAN

Fuck you, Kyle! You think that's funny?

KYLE

Yeah. I do.

DAN

Well I don't! I'm fuckin hurtin here, man. My ass is on fire. I gotta sleep on my stomach. And I've hardly sat down for five fuckin days.

KYLE

Wa-wa-wa. Get'ya battle rattle. Let's go.

Kyle and Hector head off, still chuckling. Kyle pushes the gate open and he and Hector walk through - leaving it open. Dan waddles after them.

DAN

You wouldn't be laughin if it was your ass full'a thorns.

KYLE

I wouldnt'a fallen in a damn cactus.

EXT. ROBERT'S RANCH - DAY

Robert, Martin, and Ava lope their horses along a dirt road. Martin rides Bonita by himself, but Robert holds her lead rope. Robert laughs at Martin's flapping arms.

ROBERT

Martin! Tuck your elbows. You look like you're about to take off.

They come over a rise in the road and see Kyle's pickup. Robert reins up and frowns at the open gate.

AVA

Whose truck is this?

ROBERT

Hunters probably.

AVA

What are they hunting this time of year?

Robert glances at her but doesn't answer. He stands in the stirrups and looks around.

ROBERT

Dudn't look like any cows got out. C'mon.

Robert leads them through the gate, then closes it. He gives Kyle's truck an angry glance, then turns and they ride down the road.

EXT. ROBERT'S RANCH. WATER CACHE - DAY

Robert reins up. Ava and Martin stop behind him.

Empty jugs litter the ground. The wooden cache box has been smashed, the AGUA sign twisted off.

AVA

That yours?

ROBERT

It was. Here.

He hands her Bonita's lead rope and gets off his horse. The ground is still wet. He picks up an empty jug. Then another. They've been slashed with knives. He gathers the empties, strings them together with twine from his saddle bag and ties them to his saddle.

EXT. ROBERT'S RANCH - DAY

Robert, Martin, and Ava ride along a ridge line. Robert spots men in the ravine below.

AVA

The hunters?

ROBERT

Nah. Just some clowns playing army.
Wait here.

He rides down the slope toward the three men.

IN THE RAVINE BOTTOM

Hector has his back turned, pissing. Dan holds his pants half down and argues with Kyle, so none of them has noticed Robert riding down the slope toward them.

DAN

I'm fuckin injured, Kyle. I don't see what's so hard about givin me a little help.

KYLE

'Cuz you always need help. I been carryin your sorry ass my whole life.

DAN

That ain't true! You take that
back! You...

ROBERT stops on the slope above them. With the morning sun at his back, his shadow falls across Dan's face and he looks up.

Kyle turns and finds himself looking up into the sun at a man on horseback, who seems to be 12-feet tall.

KYLE

(surly)
Who the fuck are you?

ROBERT

Name's Robert Morrison. This is my
land. Is that your blue truck a
couple miles back?

KYLE

I don't know. Is it a Ford?

Robert plays along.

ROBERT

Yeah.

KYLE

And you said it's blue? What kinda
blue?

And now Robert is done playing. He pins Kyle with a steady gaze and waits for him to answer the question.

AVA can tell the situation is getting tense. She eases her horse down the slope, keeping Martin behind her.

KYLE squints up at Robert. Sees his no-nonsense glare.

KYLE

Yeah. It's mine. So?

ROBERT

You left my gate open.

KYLE

What gate?

ROBERT

And you destroyed my water box.

KYLE

That wudn't us.

Robert just looks at him. Ava stops up the slope and a little to the side -- dividing the hunters attention.

AVA

Good morning. I'm Agent Leon with the U.S. Border Patrol.

The men look at her skeptically - but nervously.

AVA

It's my day off.

KYLE

Well we ain't done nothin. Fact, we're here workin with you. See.
(points at his arm patch)
Patriots United Bor...

ROBERT

I know what you are. I'd like you off my land.

KYLE

Well that seems pretty unfriendly, Mr. Morrison. Considerin we're down here doin you a fuckin favor. I mean, hell, it was probably Mexicans that left your gate open and fucked up your water. Not us.

Robert remains silent. Kyle squirms.

KYLE

Well fine, then. If that's the way you want it. We'll just let you deal with the fuckin illegals on your own. See how you do then.
(to Hector and Dan)
Get your shit.

The men shoulder their gear. Ava sees Dan limp.

AVA

What happened to you?

KYLE

Nothin. He's fine.

DAN

I fell in a cactus.

AVA

What kind?

DAN

I don't know. A pointy one.

AVA

Well some are more poisonous than others.

DAN

Poisonous!?

AVA

You should have it looked at. It can get infected.

Dan shoots Kyle and Hector a chastising glance.

DAN

You hear that.

KYLE

Shut up. Get your stuff.

They head up the slope and Robert and Ava turn their horses to watch them. Halfway up, Kyle turns and looks down at Robert. The sun now at his back. His dark face sneering.

KYLE

Hey, Mr. Morrison. Good luck protectin this place all by yourself. You're gonna need it.

Robert's steady gaze never waivers.

ROBERT

Close my gate when you leave.

Kyle bristles and takes a step toward Robert -- but Dan's hand stops him.

DAN

(softly)

Kyle. C'mon. Let's just go.

Kyle's dark eyes bore into Robert's. He throws off Dan's hand, turns and marches angrily up the slope.

EXT. CATTLE GATE - DAY

Hector throws open the gate and looks back.

HECTOR

That old man's one stoney son-of-a-bitch, ain't he?

KYLE

He ain't so much.

Kyle, the last one through, pulls the gate closed behind him. Dan and Hector stop and watch - surprised to see him doing it. Kyle sees them. Stops. And realizes that he is doing exactly what Robert told him to do.

KYLE

Goddammit! Fuck that old bastard.

He kicks the gate back open and stomps to his truck.

EXT. ROBERT'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Robert walks Ava to her car. Martin follows.

AVA

You're sure this won't be a problem?

ROBERT

Not at all. I got a big job for him tomorrow. I'll keep him busy.

AVA

Well. All right, then.
 (she kisses Martin)
 You be good and mind what Robert says. I'll stop by after my shift tomorrow to pick you up.

MARTIN

Come as late as you want.

She gives him a look, then smiles.

ROBERT

I'll have steaks on the grill.

Robert and Martin wave as she drives away.

INT. ROBERT'S GUEST ROOM - BEFORE DAWN

It's dark. We hear a knock. Robert opens the door...
 And a crack of light falls across Martin's sleeping face.

ROBERT

Rise and shine. Time to get goin.

He walks away as Martin groggily opens his eyes and squints into the light.

EXT. ELENA'S CROSS - DAWN

Looking over the shoulder of Elena's cross, we watch Robert and Martin trot their horses out of the yard.

EXT. BORDER PATROL STATION - DAWN

Ava walks to her Patrol SUV, sipping coffee and carrying a lunch box. She gets in and drives out of the parking lot.

EXT. JACOB'S HOUSE - MORNING

It's an aging but tidy house with a raised front porch, a corral, and a few small out-buildings.

The front door opens and Jacob rolls his wife, OFELIA (70s) in her wheelchair, onto the porch, bounces her down a couple of steps to the ground and rolls her to their old pickup.

JACOB

Gonna be able to do this by yourself after today.

OFELIA

Well, thank God for that, the way you bounce me around like a sack of feed.

JACOB

You didn't mind getting bounced around last night.

She stifles a giggle and swats his arm.

OFELIA

You watch yourself, old man or there won't be any more bouncin.

JACOB

Uh, huh.

He pushes her to the pickup, helps her from the chair into the driver's seat, then lifts her chair into the truck bed.

OFELIA

There's beer and soda and some sandwiches in the fridge. Try not to nail your hand to anything.

Jacob waggles his hands.

JACOB

No ma'am. I need both these hands
for squeezin you.

OFELIA

You're pushin it.

JACOB

I know.

She puckers her lips. He leans in the window and kisses her.

JACOB

You girls have fun.

She smiles and drives away. And as she drives out the gate,
she waves to Robert and Martin who are just riding in.

Robert pulls up next to Jacob, gets down.

ROBERT

Where's Ofelia off to?

JACOB

Over to Lucy's. Said she didn't
wanna listen to us hammer and cuss
all day.

ROBERT

Mmm. Smart. -- Martin. This is
Jacob.

Jacob and Martin shake hands.

JACOB

Nice to meet ya, Martin. Robert
feed ya this mornin?

MARTIN

Little bit.

JACOB

Well, my grandson's inside eatin
cereal. Go have some if you want.

Martin glances at Robert. He nods. Martin gets down and heads
for the house. Robert and Jacob walk to the lumber pile.

ROBERT

Speakin'a cussin. I know what
you're like when it comes to home
improvement. Maybe, with the boys
here today, you can ease off that a
little.

JACOB

I'll try. But I can't make any promises. I never built anythin yet that didn't take a fair amount'a cussin just to hold it together.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

AVA'S PATROL SUV is a tiny white speck in the vast landscape.

AVA DRIVES, keeping a watchful eye.

AVA STANDS ON A RIDGE, scanning the desert with binoculars.

AVA PICKS UP TRASH left by crossing migrants.

AVA EATS LUNCH IN HER SUV. Listens to music with ear buds. Keeps an eye on the desert.

AVA FOLLOWS FOOTPRINTS across a gully. Up a hillside into the brush. Then loses the trail. She stops, looks around, wipes her brow. Then starts the long walk back to her SUV.

EXT. JACOB'S HOUSE - DAY

Robert, Jacob, Martin, and Jacob's grandson, LUIS (11) work on the ramp. The rails are in place and they are starting to lay the planks.

Jacob measures and marks a board, and then, with a little guidance, lets Luis cut it with the power saw.

Robert lays a cut board on the rails and shows Martin how to drill pilot holes and screw it down.

INT. AVA'S PATROL SUV - DAY

Ava drives along a dirt road and spots the Patriots camp: a few tents and Ed's RV. She drives toward it.

EXT. PATRIOTS CAMP - DAY

Ava's SUV pulls into camp. She gets out, looks around. Ed steps out of the RV.

ED

Afternoon, officer. What can I do for you?

Ava notes the holstered gun on Ed's hip. So she keeps her hands on her belt, near her own gun.

AVA

I saw your camp. Just wanted to stop in and say hi. Looks like you've been here awhile.

ED

About a week.

AVA

Just camping?

ED

No ma'am. We're not here on vacation. We're out here helpin you keep an eye on the border.

AVA

That right?

ED

Yes ma'am. I got two teams out right now.

AVA

Seen anything?

ED

Not yet. Been pretty quiet. Boring really. But ya'll be the first to know, if we do.

AVA

Well, tell your people to be careful. We had a rip crew in this area not long ago. Killed seven men.

Ed shakes his head disgustedly.

ED

Dope smugglers, right?

AVA

We think so. Their packs were gone.

ED

Well, that right there is the very reason we're here. To help you stop that kind of illegal activity.

AVA

I see. Well - just tell your people to keep an eye out. And if they see anything, report it to Border Patrol. Don't try to stop anybody on your own.

ED

Yes, ma'am. I'll let 'em know.

AVA

Well thank you for your time.

ED

You bet.

Ed watches Ava walk to her SUV, then calls to her.

ED

Say. When was this killin you were talkin about?

AVA

About a week ago. Right before the 4th.

Ed thinks about this.

AVA

You know something about it?

ED

No. No, ma'am. I just wanna have my facts straight when I tell my crew.

Ava studies him for a beat.

AVA

Well, let us know if you see anything.

ED

Will do. You stay safe now.

AVA

Thank you. You too.

Ed watches her drive away, and then turns his thoughtful gaze out across the desert -- to Kyle.

EXT. JACOB'S HOUSE - DAY

Martin is setting a screw, concentrating, really trying to get it right - but he doesn't keep the drill speed up, so the screw catches in the wood, spins it, and pinches his fingers.

MARTIN

Ow! Shit!

He throws down the drill, grabs his finger -- and then angrily punches the wood again and again.

MARTIN

Stupid! Stupid!

Robert stops him. Jacob and Luis look at him.

Martin is angry. Embarrassed. Ashamed. He breaks away from Robert and runs off. Robert goes after him.

Luis looks at Jacob.

JACOB

He'll be all right. C'mon.

He puts an arm around him and leads him back to work.

BY THE CORRAL

Martin grips the fence like he's trying to tear it in half, flushed with anger and shame for losing his temper - after he promised Ava he wouldn't.

Robert stops a few feet behind him and quietly waits for Martin's anger to subside.

ROBERT

Your hand all right?

MARTIN

Yeah.

ROBERT

Can I see?

MARTIN

It's fine.

ROBERT

I need be sure. Will you let me have a look?

Martin reluctantly holds out his hand, but won't look at Robert.

Robert probes his hand. Martin winces.

ROBERT

Well, I think you should probably hold off punchin any more wood for a few days. But nothin's broke.

He tries to catch Martin's eyes. But he turns away.

ROBERT

You wanna come back to work? Or, you wanna stay over here a while?

Martin doesn't answer.

ROBERT

All right. You come on back when you're ready.

Robert walks back to the porch and returns to work.

EXT. JACOB'S CORRAL - DAY

MARTIN, still pouting, glances at Robert, Jacob and Luis - then turns away.

LATER -- MARTIN peels a flake of wood off the fence. Drops it. Peels another. He's bored.

LATER -- Martin sits with his back against the fence, pulling at weeds and watching the others work.

He stands. And then, quietly, haltingly he walks back to the porch.

Robert and the others barely take notice and just keep working. Robert places a board on the rails.

ROBERT

Hand me that drill.

Martin picks up the drill and hands it to him.

ROBERT

Hold that end.

Martin holds the board. Life goes on.

INT. AVA'S PATROL SUV. MOVING - DAY

Ava drives along a ridgeline. A flash of BLUE catches her eye. She stops. Steps out. Raises her binoculars.

BINOCULAR POV: KYLE'S BLUE PICK-UP is parked in a ravine bottom. She recognizes it from Robert's ranch.

INT. AVA'S PATROL SUV. MOVING - DAY

AVA'S POV THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD: She's following a fresh two-wheel track that brings her to KYLE'S TRUCK.

Ava stops about 20-feet back. Watches the truck for a moment. The cab and camper shell windows are tinted black. She can't see inside.

EXT. RAVINE - DAY

Ava gets out and stands behind her door with her hand on her pistol. She calls out.

AVA

Hello in the blue truck. -- Anybody there?

She waits. Her eyes scan the ridge lines above her, up the ravine, and back behind her.

She walks toward the truck, hand on her pistol.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Hector, Kyle and Dan walk up the slope, and as they come over the ridge, Hector sees a Border Patrol Agent next to their truck. He pulls Kyle down and all three of them hit the dirt.

HECTOR

(whispers)
Border Patrol.

They peek over and see...

THE BACK of a Border Patrol agent peering in the front windshield of their truck.

EXT. INTERCUT RAVINE AND RIDGELINE - DAY

AVA scans the interior of the truck through the windshield.

ON THE RIDGE

THE MEN watch her walk around the truck, peering in the windows.

HECTOR

That AK's in the back.

Kyle turns to Dan.

KYLE

Did you lock it?

DAN

I-I think so.

Kyle hates that answer. He looks through his scope.

SCOPE POV: The crosshairs line up on Ava's back and follow her as she walks around the truck. She rounds the truck hood and starts down the passenger side, and is now facing Kyle. He raises the scope to Ava's face -- and recognizes her.

KYLE

Shit.

HECTOR

What?

KYLE

It's that bitch who was with the old man. Morrison.

HECTOR

What?

Hector looks through his scope.

HECTOR

What the fuck is she doing here?

They watch Ava slowly inspect the truck.

KYLE'S SCOPE CROSSHAIRS line up on Ava's face.

AVA peers in the back window. It's too dark to see anything. She steps back and her eyes settle on the window handle. *She knows she shouldn't...*

KYLE watches her through the scope.

AVA lays her hand on the handle. Debates.

KYLE releases the safety on his rifle. CLICK. Dan turns at the sound, his fearful eyes bulging.

AVA takes a breath, turns the handle -- and it's locked. She exhales. Then shakes her head, remembering Robert's words:

AVA

Clowns playing army.

DAN looks at Kyle.

DAN

Told ya I locked it.

The men watch Ava get into her SUV and drive off.

HECTOR

What the fuck was that about? You think she knows somethin'?

KYLE

What could she know?

But his words are not convincing, even to him. He watches Ava's SUV drive away.

EXT. JACOB'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

The ramp is finished. Jacob and Robert open beers while Martin and Luis put the tools in the shed. Jacob tests the railing.

JACOB

Sturdy as a damn rock. I think Martin's cussin did the trick.

He and Robert share a smile and watch the boys work.

JACOB

That one's got a little damage, don't he?

ROBERT

Nothin that won't heal.

EXT. HORSE TRAIL - DUSK

Robert and Martin ride in silence. Martin is still feeling a little ashamed - and worried. He glances at Robert. Wants to say something but he's afraid to. But then -- he's more afraid not to.

MARTIN

Robert?

ROBERT

Mmm.

MARTIN

I'm--I'm sorry I got mad.

ROBERT

That's all right. It happens.

They ride quietly for a bit.

MARTIN

I -- I hope you don't hate me.

Robert turns to him.

ROBERT

Hate ya?

(he chuckles softly)

That'll be the day.

Martin is a little bit relieved - and a little bit confused.

MARTIN

What--What does that mean?

ROBERT

What?

MARTIN

"That'll be the day."

ROBERT

Oh, that's just an old expression.

Means, uh... Means that's never gonna happen.

(he looks at Martin)

I'm not ever gonna hate ya, son.

You can count on that.

Martin nods, relieved. And they ride the rest of the way home in easy silence.

EXT. ROCK OUTCROP - DUSK

Against the blood-red sky, Kyle, Hector, and Dan pull rocks and brush away from the hidden backpacks and load them into the truck. Kyle looks over his shoulder at the red sky. A hunted look in his eyes.

EXT. ROBERT'S HOUSE - THE LAST MOMENTS OF LIGHT

Ava's Patrol SUV pulls into the yard. She gets out, removes her ballistic vest and tosses it onto the seat.

Then unbuckles her gun belt, hangs it over her shoulder and heads for the house. Martin and Robert step out to greet her.

EXT. ROBERT'S PATIO - NIGHT

Robert collects the last of the dishes from the picnic table and blows out the lantern.

INT. ROBERT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Robert carries in the dishes. He sees Martin asleep on the couch and smiles.

IN THE KITCHEN -- Ava is washing dishes.

ROBERT

Martin's dead asleep. I think we wore him out today.

AVA

I think so. But he was happy.
(her voice turns
regretful)
I have't seen him like that for a
long time.

Robert sees the sadness in her eyes. He takes the next plate from her hand.

ROBERT

Here. You've done your part. I'll finish up. You go relax.

She starts to protest - but he cuts her off.

ROBERT

Ah. Go on now. Git.

She nods and walks out.

EXT. ROBERT'S FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

AVA sits in the dark at the far end of the porch. Robert steps to the screen door and looks out. He senses her unease and speaks from the doorway.

ROBERT

Can I get you anything?

Ava shakes her head. Her face is in shadow but he can tell that she is struggling with something. He waits at the door. Whatever it is, it'll be her move.

After a long silence, she speaks. Soft and hesitant.

AVA

Robert.

ROBERT

Mm.

AVA

You never asked me about Martin's father.

ROBERT

Figured you'd tell me, if you wanted to.

Ava struggles. Waiver. And then decides.

AVA

I want to.

Robert steps onto the porch and leans against the railing, giving Ava plenty of room. She is hesitant. He waits.

AVA

It was during my second deployment. I worked as a fueller at a forward operating base. We were prepping a convoy to go out in the morning and it was pretty late by the time we finished. My buddy had the early shift the next day, so I let him go while I finished up the paperwork. I was only alone for about ten minutes. I didn't even know he was there until -- he grabbed me. He got me from behind. With his arm around my throat, like a choke hold. He shoved me down over the desk, and started -- pulling my pants. I tried to fight him. But my feet weren't even touching the ground. And the more I fought, the more he tightened his arm. I was afraid he'd choke me out. So -- I quit fighting.

(she takes a breath)

When -- When it was over, I didn't move. I didn't look at him. I didn't say anything.

(MORE)

AVA (CONT'D)

I just laid there and waited for him to leave. I could hear him breathing. And then -- And then, I heard him -- crying. It was the craziest thing. After what he did, he was the one crying. That's when I looked at him. The only time I ever looked at him. I saw his name tape. And I recognized his face. I'd seen him around, but I didn't know him. He saw me looking at him, but he didn't do anything. He just walked out.

She flicks a glance at Robert - and his soft eyes are right there, waiting for her.

AVA

I'd heard about this kinda thing happening to other women. And I knew that most of them never reported it. They didn't want the trouble. I thought about doing the same. But I just -- I couldn't. I'd already given up once. I couldn't do it again. So the next morning, I went to my C.O. He tried to act concerned, but I could tell he was just annoyed. He didn't want to have to deal with it. But he said he'd look into it. But then -- everything changed that afternoon. That convoy we sent out got hit. Four soldiers were killed. And he was one of them. So just like that, he went from being a rapist to being a war hero. The C.O. told me to drop it. Even my -- my friends told me to forget about it. They said it wouldn't be right. To spoil his memory like that. Like I was the one doing something wrong. Like I betrayed him.

(she takes ragged breath)

By the time I realized I was pregnant, they'd already given his Purple Heart to his family. How are you supposed to tell a grieving mother that her son is a rapist? So that was the end of it. He was a dead hero. And I was just supposed to forget about the rest.

She stops and looks out into the dark.

AVA

I could've gotten an abortion. There were plenty of people who wanted me to. But I -- I just didn't want to think about it. About any of it. And then it was just too late. So they transferred me to a base back home and I served out my time. I was seven months pregnant when I discharged.

(she takes a deep breath)

The worst part -- The worst part was that I lost my family that day. Those soldiers were my brothers. I trusted them to have my back. That they'd be on my side. But they weren't. Not one of 'em.

She wipes her eyes and looks at Robert.

AVA

The way -- the way Martin came to me wasn't right. But from the moment I first saw him, I just -- There's no stain on him. He's pure and beautiful and I love him with my whole heart. He doesn't deserve this pain. My pain. But I don't know how to protect him from it.

Robert watches her. Her face in shadow, her hands tightly knotted in her lap. He eases into the chair beside her and gently places his hand over hers - and together, they face the darkness.

EXT. PATRIOTS CAMP - NIGHT

Ed, Wes, Tom, and Al are seated around the campfire when Kyle's pickup rolls into camp. They stand - rifles in hand.

Kyle, Hector, and Dan get out of the truck and notice the rifles as the four men fan out around them.

ED

You boys are late.

KYLE

Yeah. We, uh... We ran into a little trouble.

ED

What sorta trouble?

KYLE

(tries to chuckle)
Well, you know Dan. He wudn't
watchin where he was going and fell
into a damn cactus. Now he's all
stuck full'a thorns.

AL

Sounds painful.

DAN

(nervous)
Yeah. It is.

Ed's eyes stay on Kyle.

ED

When'd this happen, Dan?

DAN

Uh...

KYLE

Just a couple hours ago. That's why
we're late.

Kyle looks at the silent men facing him.

KYLE

We figured we oughta get Dan to a
hospital. So, we're gonna pack up.
And just head on home from there.

Ed and the others stand silent. Kyle nods to Hector and Dan
and they start toward their tent.

Ed levels his rifle at Kyle.

ED

Stay where you are.

Wes raises his rifle. Al and Tom half-heartedly raise theirs.

KYLE

Whoa! Whoa! What the fuck?

ED

Drop your gun belts. All'a ya.

KYLE

Wha-what are you doin, Ed?

Wes puts his rifle muzzle in Kyle's face.

WES

Guns down! Now!

KYLE

Shit, man. All right.

They unbuckle their pistol belts and let them drop.

Al and Tom exchange a nervous glance. This is starting to get out of hand.

KYLE

Okay. There. Now can somebody tell me what the fuck's going on?

ED

That's what I wanna know!

KYLE

What? I don't know what yer talkin about?

ED

I'm talkin about you! The three'a ya. How you been actin squirrelly this whole trip. Bein disrespectful. Whisperin. Keepin to yourselves.

KYLE

Well c'mon, Ed. That don't mean nothin. You know how it is out here? It's fuckin hot all day. The food sucks. The ground's hard at night. And -- well -- you're not always the easiest man to get along with. They all know it, too.

AL

He's got you there, Ed.

ED

Shut up.

Kyle throws up his hands.

KYLE

See what I mean. So we complain a little. It's natural. I can promise you, Ed. We haven't done a damn thing this whole trip but what you told us to. Swear to God.

ED

You leave God outta this! You don't get to use his name.

KYLE

All right. Sorry.

ED

Open your truck.

KYLE

What?

ED

Open your truck!

KYLE

C'mon, Ed. What kinda game we playin here?

ED

I'm not playin. Open it.

Kyle looks at Al and Tom.

KYLE

Are you guys really goin along with this bullshit?

TOM

Just show us there's nothin there and we'll be done.

AL

C'mon, man. Just do it.

KYLE

Huh. Some fine brothers you turned out to be. Thanks for the backup. I don't even know what the fuck you're lookin for.

WES

Stop talkin and open it.

Kyle surrenders.

KYLE

Fine.

He lifts the back window and lowers the tailgate. He glances at the stock of the AK-47 peeking out from under a blanket.

Ed steps forward, looks into the truck.

ED

Pull back that tarp.

Kyle glances at Hector and Dan, then pulls the tarp. And now they all see the backpacks.

AL

Well, shit. Whatchya got there, Kyle?

Ed sighs like a disappointed father.

ED

Drag 'em out.

Kyle nods to Hector to help him.

ED

Not you. Just you, Kyle.

Hector steps back. Kyle reaches in and - being careful to not reveal the AK-47 - drags the packs out onto the ground.

ED

What's in 'em?

KYLE

Now look, Ed...

ED

What's in the packs!?

KYLE

Weed. Mostly.

ED

What else?

KYLE

Not sure, exactly. Some pills and stuff.

ED

Goddamn you, Kyle.

KYLE

It ain't what you think, Ed. We found these. Okay? We found 'em buried under some brush.

(he turns to Hector and Dan)

Idn't that right?

HECTOR

That's right.

Dan nods.

ED

You found em?

KYLE

That's right. That's the god's
tru... that's the truth.

ED

When?

KYLE

It was just a coupl'a days after we
got here.

TOM

Why didn't you tell us about it?

KYLE

Cuz... Cuz we wanted to take it
home and sell it.
(he looks at Ed)
And we knew you wouldn't approve.

ED

You're right. I don't.

KYLE

Well there you go. That's why we
didn't tell ya.

ED

You know anything about some
Mexican's killed here last week?

Dan lowers his face. Wes spots it.

KYLE

No. We don't know nothin about
that.

ED

The Border Agent I talked to said
they was carrying packs. Only they
was never found.

Kyle is nervous.

KYLE

What Border Agent?

ED

Dudn't matter. What I want is the truth of how you come by these.

KYLE

I told you the truth. We found 'em. Now, sure these packs coulda belonged to them dead Mexicans. And maybe the fellas that killed 'em are the ones that hid the packs. But that don't change the fact that we found 'em. Just like I told you.

(he looks at each of them)

I mean -- C'mon now. This is like -- This is like findin money on the ground. You keep it, don't ya? And this. Right here. This could be a whole lotta fuckin money.

TOM

How much money?

ED

That don't matter!

TOM

It might.

KYLE

That's right. It oughta matter. I don't know for sure what's here -- but I know it's a helluva lot more money than any of us got right now.

Tom and Al glance at each other. Wes notices.

ED

We're not drug dealers, Kyle.

TOM

Well now hang on a minute, Ed. Maybe we oughta talk about this.

ED

There's nothin to talk about!

WES

I'm with you, Ed.

Ed steps up to Kyle. Pins him with a hard glare.

ED

You put those in Wes' truck. We're turnin 'em in tonight.

(MORE)

ED (CONT'D)

And that's the end of it. You give me any more trouble, and I'll turn you in with 'em.

No one moves. Wes, Tom, and Al keep their guns on Kyle, Dan, and Hector - but now, they also keep one eye on each other.

TOM

C'mon, Ed. Let's talk about this.

ED

NO!

TOM

Well, goddammit. You stubborn son-of-a-bitch. Drop your rifle!

Tom turns his rifle on Ed. Al turns his on Wes.

AL

Sorry, brother. We just wanna talk.

Hector picks up his pistol. Kyle slides out the AK and levels it at Ed. Dan stands paralyzed, hands raised.

Wes doesn't move. Keeps his rifle on Kyle. Glares at Al.

WES

You're makin a bad mistake --
brother.

AL

Goddammit, Tom. What are we doin here?

Ed hasn't moved. He still holds his rifle.

TOM

C'mon, Ed. Don't make this so damn hard. Put your gun down. Let's talk.

AL

How about we ALL put our guns down? This shit's gettin fuckin scary.

TOM

Ed?

ED

I told you already. There's nothin to talk about.

TOM

Aw, cut the righteous shit. I know you. I know the shit you've done. I did half of it with you. This ain't that different. And if we're just talkin about the weed, well that shit'll be legal all over in another year or two. We're just gettin' a chance to get in before the end, that's all. Now c'mon. Who's it gonna hurt?

ED

You want blood on your hands!?

AL

Aw, for fuck's sake, Ed. Who gives a rat's ass if a bunch'a Mexicans wanna shoot each other in the desert? It's got nothin to do with us.

Ed locks his eyes on Kyle.

ED

And what if it wasn't Mexicans doin the killin?

Tom and Al throw uncertain glances at Kyle.

TOM

Whaddya mean? What's he talkin about, Kyle?

ED

I'm gonna ask you straight out. Did you kill those Mexicans?

KYLE

Wha...? What!? That's a pretty fucked up question, Ed.

ED

Just answer it.

Kyle glances at the others, then faces Ed.

KYLE

No. Fuck no! Okay? And you're a fuckin asshole for even askin'.

AL

There. You see? Nobody's a killer here. So can we put these fuckin guns down before somethin happens.

Wes nods at the AK-47 in Kyle's hands.

WES

If he didn't kill them Mexicans, then how'd he got that AK.

Tom and Al glance at Kyle - then each other.

TOM

Kyle?

All eyes turn to Kyle. And right then, his mind just quits - leaving him with nothing but a blank, stupid grin.

SO... HE PULLS THE TRIGGER - and rips the night apart with GUNFIRE!

Al, Tom, and Ed go down in the spray of bullets. Wes' legs are cut out from under him and he drops to his knees.

Dan dives to the ground.

Wes raises his rifle. Hector FIRES. And Wes sprawls back into the fire, scattering lawn chairs and sending up sparks.

And just like that - it's over. Silence.

Dan lifts his face from the dirt.

Kyle and Hector move forward, guns pointed. Hector checks Al and Tom. They're dead. But Wes is alive, barely. His arm smolders in the fire.

Hector watches his accusing eyes glaze over and go still.

Kyle look down at Ed. Dead. He exhales.

EXT. PATRIOTS CAMP - NIGHT

Dan sits in the dirt, staring.

Hector packs the last of their tent and supplies into the truck and shuts the tailgate.

Kyle walks slowly through the camp, his eyes sweeping the ground for anything that shouldn't be left behind. He pauses over Wes. The fire has burned down to coals. Wes's arm is charred black.

Dan's drained, weary face looks up at Kyle.

DAN

What now?

KYLE

We go to the hospital.

He looks at the AK-47 in his hand.

KYLE

They'll think the cartel did this.
We can tell 'em we at the hospital
all night.

Dan nods. It doesn't even matter anymore.

HECTOR

What about that Border agent?

KYLE

What about her?

HECTOR

She talked to Ed. She saw our
truck. We don't know what she
knows.

DAN

What if she don't know nothin?

Hector looks into Kyle's eyes.

HECTOR

I've come too far to take that
chance now.

Kyle nods.

DAN

So what? So now we gotta kill her?
How many more we gotta kill, Kyle?

KYLE

As many as it takes! Hector's
right. We've come too far to stop
short now. We gotta get outta this
clean, or we don't get out at all.

DAN

Aw, man. Aw fuck, fuck, fuck. I
didn't want this. I didn't want any
of it. Not from the start.

KYLE

Well it's too fuckin late now.

Dan hangs his head. Kyle and Hector look at each other and silently seal their pact.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

KYLE'S TRUCK comes at us over a rise, wipes past - and we see down the hill behind it, Ed's RV engulfed in flames.

INT. KYLE'S PICKUP - NIGHT

Hector reads a GPS hand unit while Kyle drives.

HECTOR

Should be comin up on it.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

KYLE'S TRUCK slows. The headlights go out.

THE DARK GRILL peeks over a rise and stops. Kyle and Hector look out.

ROBERT'S HOUSE is just a couple-hundred yards down the road. Ava's Patrol SUV is parked in front. The moon throws a ghostly light over the house, barn, and corral.

KYLE AND HECTOR get out. Check their weapons. Lock magazines. Rack shells. Dan sits in the back seat, staring blankly.

KYLE

Dan. Let's go.

Dan slides out. Kyle shoves a rifle into his hands and starts down the road toward Robert's ranch. Hector falls in step and Dan reluctantly follows.

INT. ROBERT'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ava sits on the couch with Martin's head in her lap. She strokes his hair and watches him sleep. Robert stands in the kitchen doorway, quietly watching.

ROBERT

Want me to carry him to bed?

AVA

In a minute.

ROBERT

Take your time. I'll lock up.

EXT. ROBERT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

As the gunmen approach the house, they split off in three directions. Dan left. Hector right. Kyle down the middle.

INT. ROBERT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

IN THE KITCHEN -- Robert locks the half door and draws the curtains over the window.

IN THE DINING ROOM -- He locks the patio door, then heads down the hall toward the back of the house.

IN THE HALLWAY -- Robert passes his bedroom and we see into the dark room. Moonlight defines the OPEN WINDOW behind the curtains. And Hector's shadow moves across, just a step behind Robert.

ROBERT locks the back door.

EXT. AVA'S PATROL SUV - NIGHT

Kyle kneels, opens the driver's door.

INT/EXT. ROBERT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Robert returns to the living room.

ROBERT

Ready?

Ava nods. Robert picks up Martin and heads for the bedroom.

OUTSIDE AT THE FUSE BOX -- Hector kills the power.

IN THE LIVING ROOM -- The lights go out.

AVA

Robert?

ROBERT

Aw, probably just a fuse. Wait here.

He lays Martin on the couch. Opens a drawer, fishes out a flashlight, and walks down the hallway toward the back door.

OUTSIDE ROBERT'S OPEN WINDOW -- We peek over Hector's shoulder through a gap in the curtains and see Robert's flashlight move down the hallway. Hector follows him.

HECTOR stops at the back corner. Peeks around. Raises his rifle and waits for Robert to step out.

AVA'S PATROL SUV -- Kyle cuts the radio cable. Spots Ava's ballistic vest and grabs it.

IN THE LIVING ROOM -- Ava hears a sound, goes to the window. Sees someone running from her SUV.

AT THE BACK DOOR -- Robert opens the deadbolt.

HECTOR adjusts the rifle against his shoulder.

AVA steps into the hallway.

AVA

(whispers)

Robert!

He turns to her.

AVA

Somebody's out there.

Robert turns off his flashlight, re-locks the deadbolt and hurries up the hall. He peeks out the front window.

The door to Ava's SUV hangs open.

ROBERT

Could just be migrants lookin for somethin to steal.

AVA

They shut off the lights.

Robert looks at her. Glances at Martin asleep on the couch.

ROBERT

Call 9-1-1.

Ava goes to the phone. Robert goes down the hall to his room.

The phone is dead. Ava rushes to the couch, grabs her cell phone. No bars. She tries anyway. No connection.

She looks at her gun belt and walkie-talkie hanging on the hat rack next to the front door, goes to it, straps it on, then picks up Martin and carries him down the hallway, as she speaks into the radio.

AVA

Ten-Ten. All available agents.
Agent needs immediate assist. I
repeat. Agent needs immediate
assist.

She releases the mic key. No response.

IN ROBERT'S BEDROOM -- Robert stands at his gun safe, jamming shells into a PUMP-ACTION SHOTGUN. Ava carries Martin into the room.

AVA

Phone's dead. My cell doesn't have
a signal. And I can't through on
the radio.

ROBERT

No. You won't. Not out here.

He glances at her gun belt.

ROBERT

How many mags you got?

AVA

One loaded. Two spare.

ROBERT

Come here.

He leads her into THE BATHROOM, pulls aside the shower curtain on a heavy cast iron tub.

ROBERT

Get in.

AVA

No. If there's a fight, you're
gonna need me.

ROBERT

If there's a fight, you need to be
with Martin.

Shit. He's right. She steps into the tub with Martin, hunkers down. Martin wakes up.

MARTIN

Mom?

AVA

Shhh. It's okay, baby.
(to Robert)
What are you gonna do?

ROBERT

Keep 'em out, if I can. Kill 'em if
I can't.

He walks out, pockets a handful of shells from the safe and walks up the hallway, loading the shotgun.

IN THE LIVING ROOM -- A sound. He stops dead. Stares at the front door. There is quiet movement on the other side.

THE DOOR KNOB twists slightly. It's locked.

Robert loudly and threateningly racks a shell. The knob stops. Robert moves away from the door. Silence. Then...

TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT-TAT! -- The front door splinters apart with a burst from the AK-47.

ROBERT dives. AVA AND MARTIN jump. DAN turns. HECTOR rushes the back door.

ROBERT pops up, FIRES TWO BLASTS through the front door.

Then bulldozes the couch against the door - just as Kyle tries to kick it in. Robert hears him bounce off the door and fall back with a loud crash and a curse.

ROBERT FIRES ANOTHER BLAST through the door.

HECTOR KICKS IN THE BACK DOOR. ROBERT turns. FIRES. HECTOR twists away. The door jam explodes in a storm of splinters.

Robert kneels. Reloads. Looks at the back door, hanging on one hinge, moonlight spilling in.

JUST OUTSIDE THE DOOR -- HECTOR presses his back against the wall, breathes hard, listens to Robert reload.

KYLE'S dark shape limps off the front porch toward Ava's SUV.

ROBERT peeks out the front window. Sees Kyle scoot around the hood and drop down behind the front tire.

HECTOR retreats from the back door and around the corner.

DAN listens anxiously for some sign that Kyle and Hector are okay. He wants to call out - but stops. He steps toward the front of the house - but stops again.

He's torn between worrying about Kyle and incurring his wrath if he doesn't do what he told him to.

He makes a choice and creeps toward the front of the house.

KYLE sits with his back against the tire. He wears Ava's ballistic vest and grimaces as he pulls his bloody hand away from his buckshot ass.

DAN peeks around the front of the house. Sees Kyle's feet laying next to Ava's SUV.

DAN

(whispers)

Kyle... Kyle.

ROBERT freezes. Hears Dan's whisper.

KYLE hears Dan, leans around the bumper, and angrily waves him back.

DAN ducks back. *Shit. He knew it. If Kyle wasn't dead, he'd be mad.*

KYLE shakes his head.

KYLE

Fuckin Dan.

He glances around the bumper into the dark house, then leans against the tire, catches his breath -- and calls to Robert.

KYLE

Hey! Mr. Morrison! Did I hit you?

ROBERT listens, recognizes Kyle's voice. AVA does, too.

AT THE KITCHEN DOOR -- DAN'S SILHOUETTE crosses the curtains. The knob turns. Locked.

ROBERT looks toward the kitchen. Sees a shadow move away from the door toward the back of the house.

KYLE

You remember me, don't ya?

KYLE peeks around the bumper. Dan is gone. He rolls over, looks under the SUV. Sees Hector step around the back corner. Moving into position. He keeps talking.

KYLE

I sure will be hurt if you don't.

DAN moves down the side wall - toward the back patio. HECTOR slides along the back wall - also toward the back patio. Converging from opposite sides.

KYLE

Tell you what. I'll give you a little hint.

DAN AND HECTOR peek around corners at the same instant. See each other and duck back, startled. Then Hector whispers.

HECTOR

Dan?

Dan peeks. Hector waves him over. Thumbs toward the other side of the house.

HECTOR

Open window on the other side. Go.

Dan nods and takes off.

BEHIND THE SUV -- KYLE grins, enjoying his game.

KYLE

Now listen up close. Cuz this is gonna be a genuine, honest to God confession.

DAN moves across the back of the house, stops at the kicked-in back door, glances in.

HECTOR Looks at the PICNIC BENCH, then up at the GLASS DOORS.

KYLE crouches - ready to spring.

KYLE

You ready for it? -- I'm the one that left your mother-fuckin gate open, asshole!

HE jumps up. Aims the AK across the hood... BUT ROBERT WAS READY. FIRES FIRST. PUMPS. FIRES AGAIN.

PELLETS rip across the hood of the SUV. KYLE drops the AK. DUCKS BACK.

ROBERT hears a sound. Turns. Sees Dan leap across the open back door. HE FIRES, then runs toward the kitchen.

KYLE pokes the AK around the front bumper and fires blindly into the house. BULLETS AND FLYING GLASS fill the air behind Robert as he runs.

AND THEN THE BENCH CRASHES through the sliding-glass door right in front of him. He turns away, covers his face. FIRES blindly at the back patio. Dives into the kitchen, skids across the floor and crashes against the cabinets.

KYLE, bug-eyed, adrenaline pumping, breathing fast, pats himself for new wounds. Catches his breath. Grins crazily.

KYLE

Hoo-Wee! Mr. Morrison. That was fuckin close! But it looks like I'm still okay. How about you? Did we get ya that time? -- Mr. Morrison? You still there?

AVA listens anxiously for some sign that Robert is alive.

DAN slips around the corner toward Robert's bedroom window.

HECTOR peeks in the kicked-in back door. The hallway is empty. He eases in, stepping carefully and silently.

IN THE BATHTUB -- Ava listens for any sound. Hears nothing. She looks at Martin, puts her finger to her lips and stands. Martin grips her arm.

HECTOR passes Robert's bedroom and continues toward the living room.

AVA peels Martin's hand away, kisses it, steps out of the tub and draws her pistol. She peeks around the door into the bedroom, out into the hall. Empty. She glances back at Martin, motions for him to stay put, and then she's gone.

IN THE KITCHEN -- Robert digs a shell out of his pocket. His last. *Shit*. He goes to load it - but a spent shell is jammed in the over-heated ejection port.

IN THE HALLWAY -- Hector steps around the corner into the dining room just as...

AVA peeks out of the bedroom, missing Hector by a heartbeat. She looks at the kicked-in back door, goes toward it.

KYLE peeks around the front bumper. Then crawls to the rear, peeks around the back bumper. Sees DAN at the open window.

ROBERT works to clear the jammed shell. HECTOR hears. Steps forward. His boots crunch on broken glass. He stops.

ROBERT looks up at the sound. SO DOES AVA. She turns, moves up the hallway. She passes Robert's bedroom - and we see Dan's shadow on the curtains.

AVA steps carefully to avoid giving herself away.

BEHIND THE SUV -- KYLE watches Dan lean his rifle against the wall and crawl through the window. Kyle whispers to himself.

KYLE

Don't forget your rifle, dumbass.

And then Dan reaches out and takes his rifle. Kyle nods.

MARTIN hears movement in the bedroom. Scrunches down.

HECTOR nears the kitchen door.

MARTIN watches Dan's shadow move across the shower curtain.

ROBERT ejects the stuck shell. It skitters across the floor.

HECTOR sees it. Rushes in...

DAN yanks back the shower curtain, aims at Martin...

ROBERT racks his last shell... AVA lunges into the dining room. HECTOR aims at Robert. AVA FIRES... ROBERT FIRES...

HECTOR spins into the wall, and hits the floor - dead.

DAN jerks up his gun. Stares at Martin.

KYLE listens. He looks around the rear bumper, then crawls to the front. Looks into the house. *Who's dead? Who's alive?*

AVA keeps her gun on Hector, moves forward.

AVA

Robert?

ROBERT

I'm here.

She rushes in, kneels beside him.

AVA

You hit?

ROBERT

No.

KYLE calls out from behind the SUV.

KYLE

Hector!? -- Hector!?

ROBERT AND AVA look at the dead man across from them.
Then Robert glances around.

ROBERT

Martin?

Ava looks at him, then rushes out of the kitchen.

DAN drops Martin out the bathroom window.

DAN

Go. Run.

He watches Martin run into the barn through the back door.

KYLE sees Martin run into the barn.

Dan hangs his head. He's done. He notices the open toilet seat -- and smiles. He can sit there without hurting his ass. So he does. He lays his rifle across his knees, leans back and closes his eyes.

UNTIL AVA BURSTS INTO THE BATHROOM, sees the empty tub, and points her gun at Dan.

AVA

Martin! Where's Martin? Where's my son!?

KYLE hears shouting.

KYLE

Dan!?

DAN just looks at Ava. Sad and weary.

DAN

I'm sorry about all this.

And then - with no other intention than to draw Ava's fire - HE JERKS UP HIS RIFLE.

KYLE HEARS FOUR RAPID SHOTS - and knows his brother is dead. He grimly sets his jaw. Looks at the barn. And heads for it.

AVA screams.

AVA

Martin! Martin!

IN THE BARN -- Martin hears her, jumps up.

MARTIN

Mom!

AVA hears him, looks out the bathroom window. Sees Kyle running toward the front door of the barn.

AVA

Martin!

She rushes into the hallway, crashes into Robert and runs out the back door.

ROBERT

Ava!

Robert hastily snatches a fistful of shotgun shells from the cabinet and goes after her, loading as he runs.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

Kyle kicks open the front door. Martin dives into a stall.

EXT. YARD - NIGHT

Robert runs out of the house behind Ava. She runs to the back door of the barn, so he goes to the front.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

Kyle peers around the dark barn. Then moves down the breezeway, checking each stall...

AVA RUNS through the back door, sees Kyle - THEY FIRE TOGETHER. Kyle dives right. Ava left.

KYLE POPS UP. FIRES AGAIN, splintering wood above Ava's head.

ROBERT runs through the front door. Sees Kyle firing at Ava. Snaps the shotgun to his shoulder and FIRES - but too quickly. He misses.

The railing next to Kyle explodes. He ducks, swings the AK.

AND ROBERT crashes through the door of the tack room, just as the walls disintegrate in a burst of machine gun fire.

And then it's quiet. In the brief stillness everyone catches their breath. Ava and Robert are crouched on the left side of the barn, at opposite ends. Kyle and Martin are somewhere in stalls on the right.

The horses are agitated. Stamping. Neighing.

The barn is nearly pitch black. Ava, Martin, Robert, and Kyle can only reach out with their ears and listen for each other in between the ruckus of stamping, neighing horses.

AVA slaps in a new mag, looks through the slats.

MARTIN, too frightened to stay in one place, crawls into the next stall and curls up in the corner - unaware that he is now only one stall away from Kyle. Only Bonita, Martin's horse, stands between them.

KYLE doesn't want to stay where he last fired from, so he crawls into Bonita's stall, and the agitated horse stamps. Kyle shoves her, opens the gate and swats her ass. She bolts.

ROBERT hears the gate open, steps out of the tack room with the shotgun to his shoulder - but the panicked horse runs through his line of fire. Robert waits. The horse clears and Robert sees...

KYLE pointing the AK right at him. HE ducks back. Kyle FIRES. Bullets shatter the tack room walls until the AK clicks empty. Kyle tosses it, pulls his pistol.

BUT NOW AVA pops up on his right. FIRES. He turns to her.

AND NOW ROBERT steps out on his left. FIRES. FIRES. FIRES.

The railing next to Kyle explode. Splinters and pellets pepper his face and he falls back into the stall.

MARTIN jumps when Kyle hits the ground right next to him.

They are shocked to see each other. Martin tries to crawl away but Kyle reaches through the slats and pulls him back.

MARTIN

Mom!!

AVA leaps up.

AVA

Martin!

KYLE pulls Martin through the railing, shoves him down and steps on the back of his neck. Pinning his face in the dirt.

KYLE

It's okay, momma. I got him!

AVA stops, looks toward Kyle's voice, but he's deep in the stall, shrouded in darkness.

AVA

Martin?

MARTIN'S FACE is in the dirt, so he only manages a muffled...

MARTIN

Mhhrmmm!

KYLE presses down harder.

KYLE

Shut up.

Kyle takes a moment to catch his breath and study the battleground. He looks right, toward Ava's stall. Leans around a post for a clear view. The stall is dark. No sign.

He looks left, toward the tack room where Robert's hiding. Not sure if he's dead or alive -- until Robert calls to him.

ROBERT

Is the boy all right?

Kyle shakes his head, surprised and amused.

KYLE

Well goddamn, Mr. Morrison. You're fuckin hard to kill. -- The boy's fine. For now. I can't say about his future.

AVA

Don't hurt him! Please!

Kyle grits his teeth and presses down on Martin's neck.

KYLE

That depends on you, momma. You and Mr. Morrison. Ya'll just need to behave while we figure a way outta this mess.

ROBERT

We will. We just want the boy safe.

KYLE

Well, that's real touchin. But, to be honest, I'm really only interested in me getta outta this alive.

AVA and ROBERT don't like the sound of that. KYLE breathes. Thinks. Looks down at Martin.

KYLE

Hey Momma. -- Was it you that killed my brother?

What can she say? She says nothing. KYLE nods quietly.

KYLE

That's what I thought. -- That must mean you killed Hector. That right, Mr. Morrison?

ROBERT

I killed him. -- I killed your brother, too.

KYLE

Aw, c'mon now, Mr. Morrison. Don't be boastful. You don't get take all the credit.

(his eyes turn dark)

I'm sure little momma had something to do with it.

He looks down at Martin, squirming under his boot.

ROBERT

What do you want?

KYLE

(he chuckles)

I told ya. I wanna get outta this alive.

(he thinks about Dan)

I wanna go home.

ROBERT

We can work that out. I don't know you. I don't know your name. I don't know nothin about you. You can drive away. We won't call nobody till the mornin. I give you my word. Just give us the boy.

Ava crouches, moves forward, looking for a shot...

KYLE

(chuckles)

No deal, Mr. Morrison. A few bullets and this boy is all that's keepin me alive right now. I know little momma wants to shoot me. She wants it bad.

(chuckles)

And you tried yourself a few times.

(MORE)

KYLE (CONT'D)

No. It looks like we got ourselves in quite a little pickle here. I don't see no good way out for any of us.

ROBERT

It doesn't have to be that way.

Kyle's eyes flit regretfully over the bad choices, bad mistakes, and bad luck of the past week.

KYLE

No. -- But it is.

Ava moves to the end of her stall, and accidentally brushes against a lead rope hanging over the railing. The buckle scratches against the wood.

BANG! The dirt beside Martin's head explodes like a volcano.

Ava screams.

KYLE

I heard somebody moving around over there! Next one goes in his fuckin ear!

AVA

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Please, don't hurt him.

Kyle peeks around the post and sees Ava, faintly visible near the end of her stall.

KYLE

Then you keep still, or your gonna get your boy killed.

Kyle watches Ava step back into the shadows. Notes her position. Where to aim.

ROBERT eases back the shotgun lever, checks the chamber. Empty. He feels his pockets. Nothing. *Shit.*

KYLE

The way I see it. We only got a few options here. I could shoot the boy, and then shoot myself. But I'm not too excited about that one. You two could shoot each other. Or shoot yourselves. But I doubt that's likely. Or, maybe I get lucky and shoot the both'a you before you get me.

(MORE)

KYLE (CONT'D)

I'm kinda likin that one. But it's pretty long odds.

ROBERT

How about we try one where nobody dies? You could come out. Take your chances with prison. You haven't killed anybody yet.

KYLE

(laughs bitterly)

I wish that was true. ---- No. I'm afraid I don't see any other way outta this, Mr. Morrison. I don't want to go to prison and I don't want to die.

He shifts position to see around the post. To have a clear view of Ava's stall. A clear shot at Ava. He rests his arm across the railing and aims at her stall.

KYLE

So, I guess I'm just gonna have to kill ya'll. -- Might as well start with this boy.

AVA

No!

Ava rushes out. KYLE AIMS... BUT HEARS ROBERT step out and PUMP the empty shotgun loudly.

KYLE TURNS TO ROBERT. FIRES.

ROBERT FALLS... AVA rushes forward - FIRING into the dark stall. She hears a body slam against the back wall.

AVA

Martin!

MARTIN

Mom!

He crawls. She runs toward him.

KYLE groans. Tugs the stiff ballistic vest away from his throat. *It saved him but it still hurts like hell.* And then he sees Ava's dark shape, raises his pistol.

KYLE

Bitch!

AVA jerks sideways. Kyle FIRES. FIRES. FIRES.

Two bullets miss. But the last one rips through Ava's side, just above the hip. She twists, DROPS HER PISTOL, lands on one knee - and with an animal growl, springs forward into the stall, over Martin, and onto Kyle.

MARTIN crawls out of the stall. Stands, runs, stumbles, falls against the stalls on the other side. Robert's horse, Bo, neighs and stamps backward against the rear of his stall.

Martin sits up and hears, but can't see, Ava and Kyle fighting in the stall across from him. They crash against the railing, against the wall...

And then spill out into the breezeway. Rolling, punching, kicking. Savagely fighting for control of KYLE'S PISTOL.

BANG! A bullet smashes the wall next to Martin's head.

Ava grabs the hot barrel and twists the gun from Kyle's hand. But before she can turn it on him, Kyle knocks it free...

IT LANDS NEAR THE FRONT DOOR OF THE BARN.

And now they are back to punching and kicking. Ava knocks Kyle away from her. He rolls, looks up, sees AVA'S PISTOL, and lunges for it. But Ava yanks his legs and Kyle's hand clenches on dirt.

MARTIN backs away, terrified. He hears a groan behind him.

ROBERT

(barely a whisper)
Martin.

He turns. Sees Robert struggling to sit up.

KYLE rolls onto his back, kicks Ava in the chest and sends her flying. He turns to AVA'S PISTOL. Crawls for it. But Ava is on him again, this time slamming her fist into his bloody, buckshot ass. He howls.

MARTIN scoots across the floor to Robert. He's bloody, barely conscious. Robert nods at AVA'S GUN.

ROBERT

(croaks)
Gun. GUN.

Martin turns, sees the pistol glinting in the moonlight. Ava and Kyle's hands twist and struggle toward it.

KYLE punches Ava in the head, throws her off. She rolls onto her belly, pushes up -- but Kyle comes down on top of her.

Shoves her face into the dirt. One thick arm across the back of her neck, the other wriggling around her throat.

AVA tucks her chin to block Kyle from choking her. Then sinks her teeth into his arm. Slams her elbow into his ribs.

Kyle rolls off. They each jump to their feet and face each other like bloody boxers.

Ava moves, ducks, jabs. She punches his gut and her fist bounces off the ballistic vest. *Shit!*

She goes for his face. He blocks it. She kicks for his groin. He blocks it again. All she can do is keep weaving, dodging his punches, and looking for an opening.

ROBERT grips Martin's arm and croaks weakly.

ROBERT

Gun!

Martin looks at the fighters, grappling, punching, kicking.

He dives for the gun, then rolls back as Ava and Kyle's feet twist through frame like clumsy dancers kicking up dust.

Their feet step over the gun. Martin reaches in, grabs it, scurries back to Robert.

Kyle lands a punch. Ava staggers, recovers, and is just moving back in when...

Kyle pulls a knife and swings a backhand slash across her belly. Ava jumps back, and the blade slices through her shirt and flesh - just enough to draw blood.

He slashes at her again. Misses. And before he can bring the blade back for another slash, Ava grabs his wrist, punches the back of his hand, and the knife jolts loose.

And they are on each other again, grappling and punching. But they're worn out now. No grace or technique left. They are just swapping savage blows.

TWO STAGGERING SILHOUETTES backlit by the moonlight through the doorway.

ROBERT points the pistol at the two dark shapes, spinning, twisting, swapping places. His eyes are blurred. He can't tell which is which.

Martin watches him shift the pistol from one silhouette to the other.

Robert shakes his head to clear his vision. Picks a target. And Martin yells.

MARTIN

Mom!!

Ava pushes off from Kyle, turns to Martin.

AVA

Martin!

Robert has the gun pointed RIGHT AT HER - but when she yells, he shifts the pistol to Kyle's silhouette and FIRES. FIRES. FIRES. Dead center. Kyle falls - and lands RIGHT NEXT TO HIS GUN. Robert collapses.

Ava remembers the vest. Sees Kyle start to sit up. She scrambles for KYLE'S KNIFE.

KYLE sees his gun just two feet away. He reaches for it.

Ava sweeps up the KNIFE. KYLE turns to fire. AVA lunges... and drives the knife into Kyle's throat.

She rolls clear and watches Kyle gag and choke on the blade. He falls sideways, convulsing, growing weaker. He stops moving.

Ava and Martin look at each other. She crawls to him. Hugs him. -- Then sees Robert, lying lifeless. She goes to him. Checks his wound, his pulse.

AVA

No. No-no-no.

She starts CPR. And as we slowly back out of the barn we DISSOLVE TO...

EXT. YARD - NIGHT

ROBERT being dragged slowly through the dirt. Barely conscious. The sounds of Ava and Martin's labored breathing. DISSOLVE TO...

INT. AVA'S PATROL SUV. MOVING - NIGHT

ROBERT lies in the backseat, his eyes fluttering, drifting in and out. Ava's distant voice calls to him.

AVA

Robert! Robert!

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

THE TAIL LIGHTS of Ava's SUV dwindle into the darkness.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Ava opens her eyes and a nurse is there, standing over her.

NURSE

Feeling better this morning?

Ava tries to remember how she got here. *Martin! Where's Martin!?* --- And then she sees him sitting at the end of her bed. She reaches out, takes his hand and pulls him to her.

INT. HOSPITAL - AFTERNOON

Ava awakes and looks at Martin, curled up asleep in the chair next to her bed. A nurse is checking the monitor.

Ava's voice is a hoarse whisper.

AVA

The man... The man I came in with.

NURSE

Oh, don't you worry about him. He's a tough old bird. Your dad's gonna be just fine....

She keeps talking - but Ava has heard all she needs to and lets her head fall back onto the pillow.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Jacob sits in a chair by the window. He maneuvers the blade of his pocket knife to catch the sunlight and flashes it onto Robert's sleeping face.

The beam flashes over his eyes. They flutter. Open. Squint.

And Jacob quickly folds the knife and tucks it away.

JACOB

Well, hey there. Been wondering when you was gonna wake up.

Robert groans.

ROBERT

What are you doin here?

JACOB

Came to break you out. If you're ready?

ROBERT

Hell yes.

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

A nurse wheels Robert out of the hospital in a wheelchair. Jacob walks behind.

ROBERT

The truck is right there. Do I have to be in this thing?

NURSE

Hospital policy.

JACOB

Yeah, Robert. It's policy. Why don't you just be quiet and follow the rules for once.

Robert throws him a look.

INT. JACOB'S TRUCK. MOVING - DAY

Robert looks out the window, confused.

ROBERT

Where you goin'?

JACOB

I got orders. That's all I can say.

Robert turns to him with a suspicious scowl.

INT. JACOB'S TRUCK. MOVING - DAY

Jacob pulls to the curb in front of a house. Robert looks out - sees Ava and Martin walk out to greet them. He turns to Jacob. He shrugs.

JACOB

Orders.

INT. AVA'S HOUSE - DAY

Jacob helps Robert into the house. He is weak and is embarrassed for it. Ava and Martin lead them down the hall.

AVA

Bring him back here.

Jacob and Robert follow them into MARTIN'S ROOM. It still looks like a kid's room but has been modified a bit for Robert's convalescence.

MARTIN

Look! This is my room but you can use it till you get better.

ROBERT

I... I don't want to put ya'll out like this.

AVA

It's no trouble.

Jacob lowers Robert into a chair.

ROBERT

Well. I'll be outta here as quick as I can. I promise you.

MARTIN

(scoffs)

That'll be the day.

Robert looks at Martin. Ava and Jacob stifle grins. Martin grabs up his baseball glove and heads out the door.

MARTIN

C'mon Mom. I don't want to be late again. See you later, Grampa Robert.

Robert gives Ava a quizzical look. She shrugs apologetically.

AVA

He started sayin that while you were in the hospital. If it bothers you...

Robert looks down at his hands. He doesn't have the words. Jacob grins.

JACOB

Naw. It don't bother him.

Martin calls from down the hall.

MARTIN (O.S.)

Mom!

Ava backs out of the room.

AVA

We'll be back in a couple hours.
Jacob, you're welcome to stay for
dinner. We're having tacos.

JACOB

You talked me into it.

Robert sniffs and clears his throat - doing his best to shove
back tears. He glances up at Jacob.

ROBERT

Don't start.

Jacob smiles softly.

JACOB

Wasn't gonna.

EXT. ROBERT'S TRUCK - EVENING

WE'RE TIGHT ON THE TRUCK as it pulls into a parking space, so
we don't yet see where we are.

A TITLE APPEARS: THREE MONTHS LATER

Robert gets out with a cane. Walks around the truck to the
passenger side and opens the door.

Ava sits in the passenger seat. Hesitant. Anxious. Robert
offers his hand. She doesn't move.

ROBERT

Ava. These aren't the people that
turned their back on you. Give 'em
a chance.

She looks up at him.

EXT. PIZZA PARLOR - EVENING

Robert and Ava walk to the front door and enter.

INT. PIZZA PARLOR - EVENING

A private party room. Men and women, 20s to 40s, Veterans, sit around a large table, all looking at DAVID, the vet who talked to Ava at the parade. Ava sits beside him. Robert beside her.

DAVID

We have an old friend back with us tonight. This is Ava Leon. She was part of our group a few of years ago. We're glad she came back. She has something she'd like to share.

(he nods to Ava)

Whenever you're ready.

AVA looks at the faces around the table. They all quietly wait for her. She lowers her head, losing her nerve.

UNDER THE TABLE -- Robert squeezes her hand.

A YOUNG VET with burn scars on his face leans in, speaks softly.

YOUNG VET

It's okay, Ava. Whatever you got to say, we'll listen. We got your back.

She looks up at him. At the others. *They mean it.* She feels her courage returning. Not a lot. But maybe enough. She takes a breath and parts her lips to speak....

CUT TO BLACK

THE END