

STONELANDS

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STONELANDS_jm-1

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EXT. SOUTHERN ARIZONA DESERT - THE LAST MOMENTS OF LIGHT

The dark desert plain sweeps up into the western mountains to meet the night sky along a jagged borderline of blood-red light. In silent vigil, we watch that light slowly die - and leave us in darkness.

EXT. RAVINE - NIGHT

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

THE MILKY WAY SPLASHES OVERHEAD - but is quickly 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 MEXICAN MEN move in single-file. No lights. No voices. Six of them are packing 40-pound BALES OF MARIJUANA.

The lead man picks a trail through the rocks and cactus.

The rear man carries only an AK-47.

ON THE HILLSIDE ABOVE THEM

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

IN THE RAVINE

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

KYLE (late-20s) lowers his scoped AR-15. He is dressed in army surplus camo, a chest rig with ammo pouches, and a face-covering balaclava. He looks like a hodgepodge cross between a hillbilly hunter and a special forces commando.

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

DAN and HECTOR (mid-20s), dressed like Kyle, shoulder their rifles. Hector is on-point. Focused. Dan is nervous. Sweats.

KYLE'S POV: The Mexicans move toward us. 20-yards. 10-yards. They march past, almost close enough to touch. And as the last man passes...

THE THREE GUNMEN stand and aim their rifles!

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 Mexicans drop to their knees and raise their hands.

HECTOR

DEJA CAER TUS MOCHILAS!

The men drop their packs.

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

AK-Man submits, but studies the gunmen with a dark scowl.

They have no patches or badges. And then it hits him: these men are not arresting them. They are robbing them. This is a rip crew.

Two of the men, KYLE and HECTOR, are focused. Dangerous.

But the third man, DAN, is jumpy and nervous. He wipes sweat from his eyes and erratically jerks his aim from one kneeling man to the next. To the next. To the next.

AK-Man zeroes in on Dan.

Kyle also notices Dan's behavior. Whistles sharply.

Dan jerks his aim to Kyle and almost pulls the trigger - but recognizes him. Pulls up his muzzle.

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

Dan steadies himself. Wipes his eyes. Tries to focus -- then sees AK-Man looking at him. It unnerves him.

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.

CRYING MAN

Por favor...

HECTOR

SILENCIO!

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

KYLE

SY-LEN-SEE-O!

CRYING MAN

Por favor. No soy un gángster! No gángster!

AK-Man hisses threateningly at Crying Man.

AK-MAN

CALLATE, PUTO!

Kyle turns his rifle on AK-Man.

KYLE

SHUT UP!

Dan backs away. Jerks his rifle left and right.

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!

They point at AK-Man. 'He made us do it.'

PACKERS

Él nos obligó a hacerlo! No somos gánsteres!

AK-MAN

Que te jodan! Fuck you! Fuck you!

HECTOR

CALLATE! CALLATE!

KYLE

SHUT UP! SHUT UP!

It's pandemonium. The packers plead. AK-Man spits and curses. And Kyle and Hector shout and kick to shut them up.

Dan is coming apart. He wipes sweat from his eyes. Steps back... back... back...

KYLE

SHUT UP! SHUT UP! SHUT THE FUCK UP!

And Dan steps back into a cactus, tangles his feet, falls ass-first into the thorns and...

BAM! -- His rifle fires.

The single shot rips through the dark like a shockwave.

Everyone goes silent. No one moves. And then...

The Crying Man, with a startled look on his face - and a BLOODY HOLE in his chest - falls forward into the dirt.

Everyone turns to look and...

AK-Man springs up and runs right at Dan.

Dan raises his rifle. Fires wildly. But AK-Man is already past him, running into the dark.

Kyle shoulders his rifle, finds the ghostly white shape of AK-Man in his crosshairs and brings him down with three quick shots in the back.

AND NOW PANIC!

All of the Mexicans leap up and scatter.

HECTOR

Kyle!

Kyle turns. Sees the fleeing men and, in that instant, he and Hector are back on the battlefield in Afghanistan doing what they were trained to do: kill the enemy. One by one, with precise, surgical bursts, they cut down the fleeing men.

When the last man falls, Kyle and Hector remain frozen in combat. Eyes to their scopes. Fingers on triggers. Smoke rising from their hot muzzles.

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

Dan, still sitting in the cactus, stares in shock.

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: amateurs. Amateurs who just fucked up really bad.

Kyle glances at Hector.

KYLE

You good?

Hector is not good, but he nods anyway.

KYLE

Check 'em.

Kyle and Hector move among the bodies - toeing and poking with their rifles.

Hector finds a man dragging himself through the sand. Three holes in the center of his back. Holes he put there.

HECTOR

(his voice croaks)
He-- Here.

Kyle glances over.

KYLE

Use your knife.

Hector looks at Kyle with horror. Doesn't move.

Kyle frowns at him, pulls his own knife, kneels beside the dying man and presses the knife point against the man's back - but then stops. This moment is harder than he thought it would be.

He glances back, painfully aware that Hector and Dan are watching. He grips the knife. Presses it... but can't do it.

Angry and embarrassed, he sits back on his heels, won't look at Hector or Dan.

And for the next few minutes, the gunmen just silently watch the dying man try to crawl away, pathetically swimming his arms and legs in the dirt. Going nowhere. It's not quick but - eventually - the man stops moving.

Kyle stands. Looks at the dead man at his feet... and then - with an angry scowl - at all of the dead men.

KYLE

Well this just got fucked sideways.

He turns his scowl on Dan, who is clumsily trying to get up out of the cactus - but can't. He reaches up to Kyle.

DAN

Kyle. Gimme a hand.

Kyle just throws a seething glance at him and walks away.

Hector steps in, takes Dan's hand and pulls him up.

DAN

What's his fuckin problem?

Kyle explodes.

KYLE

YOU! You fuckin moron!

DAN

What'd I do?

KYLE

You fuckin shot him, Dan!

DAN

Not on purpose.

KYLE

That doesn't make it any fuckin better!

He turns away. Stalks back and forth. Punches the air.

KYLE

God-dammit! Fuck! Fuck! -- I had a plan! I had a good, goddamn fuckin plan! But you... You fuckin...!

He lurches at Dan. Hector steps between them. Kyle backs off. Stalks angrily. Then waves his arm across the dead men.

KYLE

Look at this shit! LOOK AT IT!
 (Dan looks up)
 This is you, Dan. You got that?
 This is all fuckin you!

DAN

No. No. It-it-it was that cactus,
 man... That-that fuckin cactus.

He looks at Hector for support, but finds none.

DAN

Hector...? C'mon, man. It's not my
 fault. The...the fuckin... The
 fuckin cactus. Okay? It's not...
 It's not my fault. It's not.

Kyle and Hector turn away. Dan looks at the dead men. Feels
 their weight settle over him. They stand apart. Silent.

HECTOR

(a little shaky)
 So what'a we do now?

Kyle isn't sure. He only had the one plan.

KYLE

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

HECTOR

Yes, sir.

Hector is relieved to have orders to follow and starts
 gathering the marijuana bales.

Kyle picks up the AK-47. Dan hangs his head.

DAN

I'm sorry, Kyle.

Kyle wrestles down his anger. Won't look at Dan.

KYLE

I know.

He walks away.

EXT. HILLSIDE ABOVE THE RAVINE - NIGHT

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

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

EXT. DIRT ROAD. MOVING - NIGHT

We chase three heavy truck tires being dragged on a chain behind KYLE'S TRUCK - A BLUE 4-DOOR PICKUP WITH A CAMPER SHELL. The tire sled kicks up a cloud of dust and wipes out their tire tracks.

EXT. INTERSECTION - NIGHT

Kyle's truck drives through an open cattle gate and stops at the end of the dirt road where it meets a two-lane blacktop.

Kyle gets out, unhooks the tire sled, gets back in, and hauls ass away from us. Above him, the eastern sky is just beginning to show light.

INT. ROBERT'S BEDROOM - BEFORE DAWN

ROBERT MORRISON - 71, lean, weathered, a rancher for nearly fifty years - lies awake in bed. He stares at the dark ceiling, sifting through memories...

But that's 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. Still half-an-hour before sunrise.

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

WE STAY ON THE PICTURE WINDOW and listen to Robert go 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. Then, with gentle movements, whispering and petting throughout, 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 dark and empty. THROUGH THE PICTURE 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 behind him and turns his horse to leave - then stops. He knows full well what he'll see if he turns around, but old habits die hard. He looks back at the kitchen window.

Yep. She's not there.

INT. ROBERT'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

From that empty window, we watch Robert ride out.

EXT. ROBERT'S RANCH - DAY

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

We follow Robert on his daily chores.

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

- WATER TANK. Robert removes a padlock from the spigot, turns the handle, and water runs into the tank. While the tank fills, Robert takes a string of plastic gallon jugs from his saddle and fills them.

- WATER CACHE. Robert gets off his horse, lifts the gallon jugs of water from his saddle and puts them in 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 through the wash. He stops, stands in his stirrups, looks around, continues on.

- FURTHER DOWN THE WASH. The narrow canyon opens onto a wide, sandy plain. A four-strand barbed-wire fence blocks his way. 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 along a dirt road beside the border fence until he comes to a section that has been cut. It irritates him.

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

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

POV BINOCULARS. Somebody watches Robert trot into Mexico.

EXT. MEXICAN DESERT - DAY

Robert swings wide around the cows and comes up behind them.

ROBERT

All right, ladies. Your Mexican vacation is over. Let's go.

He herds them 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

Robert has repaired the two bottom strands and is working on the third. In the distance, a cloud of dust announces a vehicle on the road coming toward him. Robert glances up, then continues his work.

Out of a swirl of dust, an old beater pickup, circa 1980s, crests a rise in the road, then 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. Glances up with a surly, but friendly look, and returns to work on the fence. 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.

(MORE)

JACOB (CONT'D)

(he grins)

You know, you oughta just save yourself the trouble and put a gate there, with a 'Welcome to America' 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)

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

Robert glances up. Jacob grins. Robert nods at the lumber in the back of Jacob's 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 stops, looks at Jacob.

ROBERT

Sorry to hear that. I'll give you a hand.

JACOB

(shrugs)

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

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. He's right. She would.

JACOB

(grins)
All right, then. I'll see you
there.

He rolls away before Robert can protest.

EXT. ROBERT'S RANCH. BORDER FENCE - DAY

The fence is mended and Robert is putting the wire and tools back into his saddle bag. He stops. 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 are there. Knows they are watching. He also knows that he should 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. And then sets his jaw defiantly and spurs his horse up the ravine.

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

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 limited. His horse becomes even more agitated.

And now Robert can now hear sounds up ahead. He pushes through the brush and sees...

Vultures squabbling over a corpse.

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

INT. BORDER PATROL SUV. MOVING - DAY

The driver is U.S. Border Patrol agent, AVA LEON, Mexican-American, 29. She works alone. Dark sunglasses hide her eyes. Her black 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. INTERSECTION - DAY

Ava's SUV, towing a horse trailer, turns off the blacktop onto the same dirt road where we saw Kyle's truck the night before. She passes the abandoned tire sled as she turns in and drives through the open gate.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Ava's SUV stops behind a Sheriff's Department truck with an empty ATV trailer.

INSIDE THE SUV

Ava looks out at the ATV tracks heading off across the plain.

IN THE HORSE TRAILER

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

EXT. DESERT PLAIN - DAY

Ava trots across the plain. Ahead of her, she spots a man standing beside a horse. Waiting. She rides toward him.

EXT. RIDGE ABOVE THE RAVINE - DAY

Robert stands beside his horse, watching Ava ride toward him. The Sheriff's ATV is parked nearby.

Ava reins-up in front of Robert.

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 Robert's question. He gives her an annoyed glance and mounts his horse.

ROBERT

Follow me.

He leads her down into the ravine.

EXT. RAVINE - DAY

Robert dismounts.

ROBERT

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

Ava dismounts and heads through the brush.

A little ways in, 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 locks down her business face, doesn't answer.

DEPUTY FREEMAN

(chuckles)

Yeah. Me too.

He leads her through the brush toward 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 here 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.

But Ava just looks at him. Her face and dark glasses impervious. The Deputy shrugs at his obviously misguided chivalry and continues.

DEPUTY FREEMAN

So, anyhow. These fellas all have sweat stains on their backs. So, I figure they were the mules. Fella over there wasn't carryin a pack. So he was probably the guard. Haven't found his weapon yet. Banditos took it, most likely.

Robert joins them, but hangs back. Ava looks down at the broken cactus where Dan fell.

AVA

What happened there?

DEPUTY FREEMAN

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

He chuckles 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. Ava follows.

EXT. DIRT ROAD. MEXICAN BORDER - DAY

Robert and Ava, on horseback, emerge from 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. Puts it away. 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. Ava dismounts and looks around. Trash: MRE wrappers. Food cans. Fuel canisters.

AVA

Looks like somebody's been living
here for a while.

Robert says nothing, just watches her look around.

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.

AVA

(softly)
It's beautiful.

This catches Robert's attention. He looks 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. Ava and Robert ride past without stopping.

At the trailhead leading up the ridge, Ava turns to Robert.

AVA

Thank you for your help, sir. --
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 are fighting, rolling on the ground, grappling, punching. A WOMAN reaches in to break it up.

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 hard scowl to hide the shame and regret he feels.

IN THE OFFICE BEHIND HIM

We see Ava, in uniform, talking with the DAY CARE WORKER who broke up the fight. Ava stands in a stiff military pose, feet apart, hands behind her back. Impenetrable. The day care worker is polite and sincere.

DAY CARE WORKER

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

AVA

I'll talk to him.

DAY CARE WORKER

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.

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

AVA is caught off-guard, but quickly covers it. She nods.

AVA

I understand.

DAY CARE WORKER

He can finish the week, but you should place him somewhere else after that. I can give you some recommendations, if you like.

Ava nods and turns to leave.

DAY CARE WORKER

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

(curt, but not impolite)
Thank you. Thank you for your time.

She turns crisply and walks out of the office.

IN THE HALLWAY

She looks for Martin and sees him standing by the exit. She starts the long walk toward him. Her service boots squeak on the polished floor. It is the only sound. When she reaches the end, she pushes open the door and she and Martin step out into night.

INT. AVA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ava stands outside Martin's bedroom, looking in at him while he sleeps. His face, even in sleep, is pinched and troubled. Ava feels responsible. She turns away.

EXT. AVA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

AVA'S EYES are tightly closed. She rolls her neck. Takes deep breaths. Struggles to unwind, to let go. She's dressed in a baggy t-shirt, gym shorts, and running shoes.

Her eyes open - and she bolts into an flat-out run - as fast and hard as she can - off the porch, across the yard, and down the empty street until she vanishes in the darkness. It is not exercise. Or even release. It's punishment.

EXT. ROBERT'S BENCH - NIGHT

Robert sits on the bench beside his wife's memorial. His face is empty. He simply looks out into the dark.

INT. SHERIFF'S PATROL CAR. MOVING - MORNING

DEPUTY HARRELL, white, 40s, drives. His partner, DEPUTY VELASQUEZ, female, 27, rides shotgun.

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

DEPUTY VELASQUEZ

(calmly)
Rifles. Two-o'clock.

DEPUTY HARRELL

Now what the hell's that all about?

Harrell steers the car 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 - DAY

The armed men casually stand in plain sight beside an RV and four heavy-duty 4x4 pickups packed for camping. The men are:

ED BARTLETT, white, 57, the leader. TOM TAGGERT, white, 56, with an impressive handle-bar mustache. WES HARDIN, white, 33, muscular, with a dark beard and an Afghan scarf around his throat. AL COX, black, 38, lean and wiry.

Each man holds an AR-15 at ease: muzzles down, trigger fingers pointed down the receivers. They are dressed in 'to each his own' hunting camo, some have chest rigs with extra ammo mags in the pockets. The only thing their 'uniforms' have in common is the military-styled **PATRIOTS UNITED BORDER WATCH** patch on their sleeves.

The patrol car eases to a stop about a dozen yards away and the men look up.

Harrell and Velasquez get out - casual but alert. Their hands resting on their holstered pistols.

Ed Bartlett, steps forward with an outstretched hand.

ED

Mornin. Happy 4th.

Harrell holds up a hand to stop him.

DEPUTY HARRELL

You fellas mind puttin your weapons down?

ED

Sure thing. Lay 'em down boys.

The men gently lay their rifles on the pavement.

As Harrell talks, Velasquez moves into a standard flanking position. She notices a pair of camo-clad legs and desert boots hanging out of the backseat of one of the trucks - A BLUE 4-DOOR PICKUP WITH A CAMPER SHELL - KYLE'S TRUCK. Someone is lying in the backseat. She positions herself to include him in her line of vision.

DEPUTY HARRELL

Whatch'you boys up to?

ED

Just 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.

INSIDE THE BLUE PICKUP

Dan, the gunman with cactus thorns in his ass, lies in the backseat. It is his legs the deputy saw hanging out. He hears the men talking. Opens his eyes. Raises up. Peeks over the seat.

Shit! Cops!

He quickly lies back.

DAN

(whispers)
Fuck. Fuck-fuck-fuck.

He draws his pistol. Grips it tight.

BACK ON HARRELL AND THE PATRIOTS

DEPUTY HARRELL

You got I.D.?

ED

Sure do.

Bartlett opens his wallet, hands over his I.D. Nods to the others do the same.

Harrell collects them, glances at them, hands them to Velasquez. She checks the photos against the men's faces.

DEPUTY HARRELL

So what is it you 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 are the wall.

DEPUTY HARRELL

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

ED

The enemy don't stop for the summer.

DEPUTY HARRELL

Ain't that the truth.

Velasquez finishes checking the I.D.s and 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 trying to keep it light.

ED

Dan!

Dan grips his gun. Hesitates. Then sits up. Tries to appear normal.

DAN

Yeah.

ED

Give her your I.D.

Dan doesn't move. Velasquez watches him. He lets his pistol slip onto the floor, then slides out of the truck.

IN FRONT OF THE STORE

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

ON DAN AND VELASQUEZ

Velasquez notes Dan's awkward limp.

DEPUTY VELASQUEZ

You all right?

DAN

Yeah. I'm fine.

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

DEPUTY VELASQUEZ

Thank you.

ON KYLE AND HECTOR

They breathe for the first time in several seconds, and then continue pushing the carts toward the others.

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

ON THE PATRIOTS

VELASQUEZ returns I.D.s to each of the men.

ED

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.

(MORE)

ED (CONT'D)

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 are doin. But I want you to know that I do. We need it. So, thank you.

He shakes Ed's hand, and then individually thanks each of the other men.

Kyle and Hector arrive.

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 luck huntin Mexicans.

Harrell and Velasquez return to their patrol car.

The men pick up their rifles, sling them over their shoulders, and start unloading the shopping carts into their trucks.

Ed watches the deputies drive away - then turns an 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. A convertible VIP car. Vintage firetrucks. All are 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 I. WW II. KOREA. VIETNAM. LEBANON/GRENADA. PANAMA. GULF WAR. The second trailer is devoted exclusively to IRAQ and AFGHANISTAN.

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

The WW I and WW II sections are empty. One 84-year-old man, attended by his 20-something grandson, sits in the KOREA section. A few men in their 60s and 70s make their way into the Vietnam section.

Jacob, the Tohono O'odham man we met while Robert repaired the fence, has already staked out his spot in the Vietnam section. 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. He's wearing a clean, starchy version of his usual ranch wear.

JACOB

(grins)

Well, look at you.

ROBERT

Don't start.

JACOB

Wasn't gonna.

Robert steps aboard and sits down next to Jacob. 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

Every year there's more'a them and less of us.

He raises his beer can 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 as he makes a bee-line for the cowboys and horses - staged just behind the Vet trailers.

Some of the cowboys sit in their saddles, patiently waiting. Others are making last-minute adjustments to their straps.

Martin runs right 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 leg.

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, pulls some apple slices from his saddle bag.

ON THE AFGHAN/IRAQ TRAILER

A vet, DAVID, 32, with a prosthetic left 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

Take over for a minute.

He walks toward Ava.

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

DAVID

Ava.

She turns and is surprised - and uneasy - to see him.

DAVID

Long time. How've you been?

AVA

Good. Busy. You know.

DAVID

Yeah? Well good.

(he glances at Martin)

This Martin?

(he reaches out his hand)

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

They shake hands.

BY THE VIETNAM TRAILER

A punctilious PARADE ORGANIZER moves down the line, calling out the five-minute warning.

PARADE ORGANIZER

Five minutes! Fi-i-i-i-ve minutes, everybody!

Robert watches the organizer walk down the line toward the horses, and spots AVA.

BY THE HORSES

The parade organizer walks past.

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 takes Martin's hand and pulls him away, trying to quickly extricate herself from David.

AVA

Well, I guess we better get out there and find us 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.

ROBERT watches Ava and David.

DAVID steps closer to Ava, but leaves a non-threatening space between them.

DAVID

I just want you to know, we're still here. Okay? Whenever you're ready.

(he grins)

We still meet at the pizza parlor every Wednesday. I'd like to see you come back.

Ava opens her lips to speak, then shuts down that impulse. Nods and drags Martin away.

David, concerned, watches her go.

ROBERT watches the scene from the trailer and suddenly feels embarrassed, like he's been caught reading somebody's diary.

EXT. 4TH OF JULY PARADE - 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.

PARADE ORGANIZER

Smile. Smile. Wave. Smile and wave.

Jacob and Robert just look at him as they roll past.

When their trailer turns out onto the street. The crowd cheers. Jacob smiles and waves - just like the parade organizer showed him.

Robert sits like a stone. Jacob elbows him.

JACOB

(mimicking the parade
organizer)
C'mon. Smile. Wave.

Robert looks at the crowd and manages an uncomfortable smile.

ROBERT

Why the hell do you keep doin this
every year?

JACOB

(grinning and waving)
Just ornery, I guess. I like to
keep reminding these fuckers that
an O'odham man fought for them.

He smiles at the crowd, sits up and proudly straightens his
TOHONO O'ODHAM NATION T-SHIRT. Robert chuckles.

JACOB

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

He grins and waves at the crowd.

EXT. 4TH OF JULY PARADE - DAY

PARADE MONTAGE: A big, noisy, patriotic, American
celebration. Boisterous crowds. Waving flags. VIPs in
convertibles. High School marching bands. Baton twirlers. Boy
Scouts. Police motorcycle formations. Clowns. Cowboys.

People eat. Drink. Shout. Laugh. Wave flags. Take pictures.

Kids push through a forest of adult legs to get to the front.

A toddler licks a melting ice cream cone - then cries when it
falls.

Another kid shows off some butt-crack while watching the
parade on his father's shoulders.

A fire truck sprays water on the sweltering crowd. Kids fire
back with water guns.

AVA AND MARTIN

Stand in the crowd. The Vet trailers roll past, flying a
large American flag from the cab of the semi-truck.

The crowd cheers loud and long.

Ava salutes. Martin watches her and does the same.

She recognizes Robert sitting on the trailer behind the VIETNAM sign. The man next to him, Jacob, is smiling and waving enthusiastically. Robert just looks awkward and uncomfortable.

EXT. PARADE GROUNDS. FOOD TRUCK ALLEY - DAY

Robert and Jacob stand in the midst of a swirl of people, getting jostled and bumped. They look a little overwhelmed. Jacob pulls Robert aside.

ROBERT

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

JACOB

Hell no. I came for beer and tacos, and that's what I aim to get. 'Sides, there's nothin to do at home but chores anyway. Let's divide and conquer. I'll get the beers. You get the tacos.

He shoves off through the crowd, calling back 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, heads for it.

EXT. TACO TRUCK - DAY

Robert heads for a line only 6-7 people deep, but two teens skid into line just ahead of him. He settles in for the wait.

The line moves forward and Robert steps up with it, lest someone else dive into the gap.

He glances to the front 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 across the lawn.

AVA leaves the pickup window with two plates - and then she sees Robert. It's awkward for a beat, like running into your school principal anywhere but school. But then they smile and nod politely and Ava moves on.

The line moves up and Robert moves with it. He glances after Ava...

And sees that she's been stopped by two DRUNK PRICKS.

TALL PRICK and SHORT PRICK sway, grin, and block her way.

TALL PRICK

C'mon don't be like that. Let me buy you a beer. You gotta have beer to go with those tacos.

Short Prick pinches some taco off her plate. Ava twists away and tries to get around them. They block her.

SHORT PRICK

What's your problem, darlin'?

ROBERT is focused on Ava and the Pricks. The line moves up. Robert doesn't. He steps out of line and goes toward Ava.

AVA is reaching a snapping point.

AVA

You better back off. I'm warning you.

TALL PRICK

Ho-ho. You hear that, man. She's warnin us.

Robert stands behind Ava.

ROBERT

Hi.

The drunks look up. Unimpressed.

ROBERT

She asked you to leave her alone.

TALL PRICK

(chuckles)
Who the fuck are you? Her gram-pa?

AVA

It's okay. I can handle this.

Robert's hard gaze never leaves TALL PRICK.

ROBERT

I'm sure you can. I'm just gonna wait while these boys let you pass.

TALL PRICK

(chuckles)

Look, old man. You better just step the fuck off, before I hafta knock you on your boney ass.

Robert pins the man with a hard look.

ROBERT

That'll be the day.

Tall Prick glares at Robert -- then takes a wild, drunken swing. Robert ducks and comes back with solid punch. Square in the mouth.

Twenty years ago this prick would be flat on his back. Today, he just rocks onto his heels - scowls and charges Robert.

AVA moves to help -- but Short Prick grabs her from behind. She reacts instantly and slams her fist down into Short Prick's groin. He crumples. She throws her elbow back, breaks his nose, turns, punches him in the throat, and he drops to his knees gasping.

TALL PRICK swings and misses wild haymakers at Robert - but then - one connects and, does indeed, put Robert on his ass.

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

SHORT PRICK wobbles to his feet, staggers up behind Ava and kicks her in the back - right into Tall Prick's arms. Tall Prick wraps her in a choke hold.

But Ava instantly shoves back, draws up her legs and kicks out, catching Short Prick in the chest. He goes down again.

Tall Prick stumbles back - but doesn't fall. He tightens his arm around her throat.

Robert, on his back, sees Tall Prick choking Ava. He struggles to his feet and charges in - just as Ava stomps Tall Prick's foot and stabs her thumb into his eye.

Tall Prick drops her and staggers back - right over Robert - knocking him back down.

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

Tall Prick is barely conscious but Ava keeps punching, hard and fast.

And then we realize, this isn't even about him anymore. She's punching someone else now. Trying to win some fight that we know nothing about.

Martin pushes through the crowd and sees his mom beating the man senseless.

Robert 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. She looks around at the shocked faces of the crowd. At the dazed, groaning men on the ground. At her bloody hands. At Martin - looking at her. Frightened.

And now she is embarrassed. Ashamed that she lost control.

She goes to Martin and hurries him away.

Robert watches her go.

As the little circle of spectators dissolves, Jacob walks up with two cups of beer.

He looks at the guys on ground. At the scattered tacos. At Robert, rubbing his jaw. He sighs.

JACOB

Guess we're not havin tacos.

Robert just looks at him.

INT. ROBERT'S BARN - LATE AFTERNOON

Robert unsaddles his horse, wipes him down, brushes him.

Still stiff from yesterday's fight, he has to stop, roll his aching shoulder, and switch 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 parks. Robert keeps brushing. Watching. But no one gets out.

And then, hesitantly, Ava steps out - in uniform but no body armor. She looks around, then heads for the house.

Robert calls to her.

ROBERT

In here.

Ava enters the barn. Pulls off her sunglasses. Approaches haltingly. Robert keeps brushing.

ROBERT

Afternoon.

AVA

Mr. Morrison.

She stands on the other side of the horse.

ROBERT

How can I help you?

AVA

Well, sir. I, uh... I just wanted to apologize to you. For the way I acted yesterday. I shouldn't have run-off the way I did.

ROBERT

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

AVA

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

ROBERT

All right, then. Apology accepted.

Ava nods. But she's not finished.

AVA

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

ROBERT

(chuckles)
For what? Gettin my ass kicked?

AVA

No sir. For standing up for me.

ROBERT

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

(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

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

They stand in awkward silence for a moment.

AVA

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

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

ROBERT

Agent Leon.
(Ava turns)
You got time for a glass of
lemonade?

Beneath her dark sunglasses, we see a tiny, guarded smile.

AVA

Yes, sir.

EXT. ROBERT'S PORCH - LATE AFTERNOON

The porch faces east and is fully shaded. Ava stands at the railing and looks out at the eastern mountains, just beginning to turn rosy-orange in the late afternoon light. Robert comes onto the porch with two glasses of lemonade, hands one to Ava.

ROBERT

Here you go.

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 usually the way it is
out here.

(he looks out at the
mountains)

It's changed a lot in forty years.

(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

Used to be mostly migrants comin through here. 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. -- My wife ended up cookin 'em breakfast.

Ava looks at him, a bit surprised.

ROBERT

It was a different time.

AVA

I guess so. Well 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

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

AVA

(embarrassed)
I guess so.

ROBERT

You can call me Robert.

AVA

Yes, sir. -- I mean...
(smiles awkwardly)
I'm Ava.

ROBERT

Nice to meet you, Ava.

He reaches out his hand. She takes it. They shake.

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 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 you do.

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

ROBERT

You know, I got horses here. You
and your boy would be welcome to
come out and ride any time.

Ava is caught off guard by the offer.

AVA

Oh. Well, that's very 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, is the only one the 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

Well, you can think about it. It's here if you want it.

He drops it, sips his lemonade and looks out across the valley. Ava relaxes. And they quietly and watch the changing colors on the eastern mountains.

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 knife in the other, he inspects his inflamed ass.

DAN

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

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

(still idly looking through the binoculars)
Cuz we don't wanna go to prison for fuckin murder, Dan. That's why.
(he lowers the binoculars)
Long as we're out here playin border patrol, nobody's gonna look at us.

(MORE)

KYLE (CONT'D)

But as soon as 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 look 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, Hector...?

HECTOR

(from under his hat)
Nope.

DAN

Well goddammit!

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

BARTLETT (WALKIE-TALKIE)

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

KYLE

What the fuck does he want now?
(keys the mic)
Go for Rover Two.

BARTLETT (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)

Nope. No contact.

BARTLETT (WALKIE-TALKIE)

Nothin?

Kyle rolls an irritated glance at the sky. Says nothing.

BARTLETT (WALKIE-TALKIE)

All right, then. Rover Two return to base.

KYLE

(on radio)

Roger that.

(off radio)

And fuck you, 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 it.

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.

EXT. PATRIOTS CAMP - SUNSET

An American flag slowly lowers on a flag pole attached to Ed's RV.

Ed, Wes, Dan, and Hector salute while Tom and Al lower the flag, unclip it, fold it.

Ed is sincere and patriotic. The others don't really share his fervor for ceremony, but don't mind playing along.

Except for Kyle. He wears an annoyed scowl through the whole ceremony and walks off as soon as the flag is folded.

Ed glances after him angrily - but now is not the time.

He accepts the folded flag from Tom. Salutes. Then turns crisply and marches it up the steps into his RV.

EXT. PATRIOTS CAMP - NIGHT

Dinnertime. The Patriots serve themselves from a pot of chili, then sit on lawn chairs around the campfire.

Ed and Wes are already seated. Kyle takes his seat directly across the fire from Ed and starts eating.

Dan stands behind his chair. It hurts too much to sit.

Al serves himself at the pot.

AL

(friendly ribbing)
So, Ed. Where are all these
Mexicans you were 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 I
got here.

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

ED

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

(MORE)

ED (CONT'D)

Besides, if catchin Mexicans was an exact science, they wouldn't need us, now would they?

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. My sister wanted me to paint her house this week. I had to tell her, "I'm sorry, honey but I gotta go serve my country."

(he chuckles)

I think she hired a Mexican to do it.

They laugh.

TOM

That Mexican took your job.

AL

And he can have it, too.

They laugh harder.

Ed notices Dan standing up by himself behind the others. It annoys him.

ED

Dan. Have a seat. Join us.

DAN

I'm all right.

ED

Well, I didn't ask if you were all right. 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 stays quiet.

DAN

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

ED

Dudn't look like it.

Dan glances at Kyle for support, but Kyle just bites his tongue and stares into the fire.

DAN

Well... I can stand closer.

ED

It ain't about bein close or far, Dan. It's your attitude. And you've had a pretty shitty one since you got here. So, I wanna know what your problem is?

KYLE

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

ED

Well I didn't know I was talkin to you, Kyle. Thought I was talkin to your brother.

DAN

I'll sit down. It's okay.

Dan moves to sit down.

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.

ED

Take a seat, Dan.

KYLE

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

ED

My outfit. My rules. - Dan. Sit down.

KYLE

Don't you fuckin move.

ED

Dan.

KYLE

Don't!

Ed leaps up. Kyle rises to match him.

ED

Goddammit, Dan! Sit your ass down!

KYLE

No!

Dan vibrates like a plucked string, not sure which way to go.

Kyle and Ed glare at each other across the fire. And then, Al chimes in casually to break the tension.

AL

You know, I like to sit down when I get the chance. Take a load off. Relax. Contemplate. What about you, Wes?

WES

Yeah. I guess. Standin's all right, too.

Ed glances at Al. Calms down.

ED

Fine. Suit yourself.

He sits down. Kyle sits. They resume eating and silently glare at each other across the fire -- as Al continues to pontificate on the healthful benefits sitting.

EXT. ROBERT'S HOUSE - MORNING

Robert steps onto the porch and watches Ava's car park near the barn. Ava and Martin get out. Robert greets them.

ROBERT

Mornin.

AVA

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

ROBERT

Hi there, Martin.

Martin is stiff and uneasy. He shakes hands with Robert.

ROBERT

I understand you came here to ride horses.

MARTIN

Yes, sir.

ROBERT

Well, whaddya say we get to it, then.

Martin glances at Ava, she nods.

MARTIN

Okay.

INT. BARN - DAY

Robert opens a stall, leads a horse out, and ties it to a grooming post.

ROBERT

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

MARTIN

(suppresses his smile)
You mean I get to ride her?

ROBERT

That's right. 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

Rub your hand on her back.

(Martin does)

You feel that dirt?

(Martin nods)

Horses like to get down and roll around, so they pick up all kind'a grit that can hurt 'em if you throw a saddle on 'em without brushin 'em off. So first thing you do every time you ride is brush her down real good. You understand?

MARTIN

Yes, sir.

ROBERT

Here.

(hands Martin a brush)

Like this.

With his hand over Martin's, they brush the horse a few strokes. Then Robert let's Martin do it on his own.

ROBERT

That's it. Now put your other hand up 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. You wanna let her feel ya and smell ya, and 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 brushes Bonita and speaks to her, a little self-consciously at first.

MARTIN

Hey, Bonita. My name's Martin. I never talked to a horse before, so I don't know what you want to hear. I also never rode a horse before. But I guess we're gonna do that today, too. I hope that's okay with you.

EXT. ROUND PEN - DAY

Robert holds the gate open as Martin leads Bonita to the middle of the pen. Robert shuts the gate and joins them. Ava watches from outside the fence.

ROBERT

You ready to get on?

Martin nods nervously.

ROBERT

It's okay to be nervous, son. But once you get up there, you need to show her she can trust you. Okay?

MARTIN

Okay.

Robert kneels and offers his thigh.

ROBERT

Climb up.

Martin steps onto Robert's thigh and climbs into the saddle. Robert holds the lead rope and gets him settled.

ROBERT

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

Martin does and Bonita starts to walk. Martin smiles. Robert lets out the lead rope so the horse can walk next to the rail. Robert stands in the center and slowly turns with Martin and the horse. Ava watches from the fence.

ROBERT

Good ... Good. Keep your heels down ... Loosen up those reins a bit. That's it ... All right, now. Let's turn her around and go the other way.

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

ROBERT

You ready to go a little faster?
(Martin nods)
Give her another squeeze with your legs.

Bonita steps into a gentle trot around the pen. Martin's smile grows bigger.

EXT. ROBERT'S PORCH - LATE AFTERNOON

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

AVA

Thank you. This has been really great for him.

ROBERT

It's been good for me, too.

Martin runs over.

MARTIN

Can I have some more carrots?

ROBERT

Oh, I think she's had enough for now. She'll keep eatin 'em 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 concedes.

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... ya'll are welcome to stay as long as you like. I know it's a long drive out here. I got plenty to eat, and I gotta spare room. 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 evening color.

Robert and Ava walk from the barn to the house - with Martin excitedly hopping around them.

EXT. ROBERT'S BACK PATIO - AFTER SUNSET

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. Smiling. Laughing.

INT. ROBERT'S GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

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

AVA

Did you have a good day?

MARTIN

Yeah. Did you?

AVA

I did.

MARTIN

You think I can I ride some more tomorrow?

AVA

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

Martin smiles - then turns thoughtful.

MARTIN

Is Robert... is he my grandpa?

AVA

(chuckles)

No. He's not related to us. He's just... He's just a nice man.

MARTIN

I like him.
(he glances at Ava)
Is that okay?

AVA

Yeah. Of course.

MARTIN

Do you like him?

Ava thinks about it.

AVA

Yeah. I do.

MARTIN

So, are we gonna get to see him
again?

AVA

Well, you're gonna see him
tomorrow.

MARTIN

I know. But I mean after tomorrow.
Are we gonna get to see him after
tomorrow?

AVA

I don't know. -- Maybe.

Martin thinks about this.

MARTIN

I'll try not to fight anymore.

Ava is touched. She smiles gently.

AVA

That's probably a good idea.
(they smile at each other)
Now go to sleep. I'll be in in a
little while.

She kisses him and goes to the door.

MARTIN

Mom.
(Ava turns)
Thanks for bringing us here.

She smiles and turns out the light.

INT. ROBERT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ava walks through the empty living room.

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

EXT. ROBERT'S 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 with his wife. In the background, Ava approaches but when 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

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

AVA

I'm sorry.

Robert nods.

ROBERT

We musta sat out here nearly every night for 40-years. Just a tough habit 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 glances at him questioningly, 'And you don't?'

Robert catches her look. He grins. She caught him.

ROBERT

I spose I do, too. In my way. This was my father's ranch. I grew up on it. And I went to Vietnam to get away from it.

(he smiles)

'Course, that turned out not to be such a good idea. When he died, it fell to me. At the time, Id'a sold it off for scrap. But Elena wanted it. So I kept it for her. I don't know that I ever... loved it like she did. But I made my peace with it. Now. It's all I got left of her.

AVA

You don't have any children?

ROBERT

(shakes his head)

We couldn't.

(they sit for a beat)

What about you? You got family nearby?

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

AVA

My parents... weren't really around. I pretty much grew up in foster homes. Different one every couple of years. And then I joined the army.

ROBERT

Must'a been hard.

AVA

(shrugs)

We all got somethin, right?

ROBERT

(smiles)

Yeah. I spose we do.

AVA

It's funny though. After all those homes and all those families. It was the army where I finally found people I thought I could trust.

ROBERT

Yeah. It can be that way sometimes.

Ava stares out into the night, her thoughts captured somewhere in the dark.

AVA

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

ROBERT

(takes a long breath)
Same as it was for a lot of guys, I guess. Hard at first. Then you get used to it.

AVA

Did you ever.... ever do one of those veteran talk groups, or anything like that?

ROBERT

(smiles ruefully)
Sorta. We met in bars and got drunk.

It's a joke - sort of. But Ava is serious. So he answers her.

ROBERT

No. They didn't really have things like that when we came back. I think we were just supposed to figure it out on our own. Like our daddies and our granddaddies did after their wars. Worked about as well, too. When my father came home, he was a bitter, mean-ass drunk. His father was, too. 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. We didn't serve together but we came home around the same time. And we did, in fact, 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 are quiet for a moment)

How about you? How you doin?

AVA

Okay. I was going to a veterans group 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 a little piece of advice...

(she looks at him)

All I'll say is... don't try to do it alone. Nobody does. Not on the battlefield. And not at home.

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. Rolls over and looks at the ceiling. She thinks about the things Robert said. And then she turns to look at Martin - but he's already gone.

INT. ROBERT'S KITCHEN - MORNING

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

INT. ROBERT'S BARN - MORNING

Robert is showing Martin how to clean out Bonita's hooves. He has her front hoof resting on his thigh and is scraping it with a hoof pick.

ROBERT

See all this comin out? You don't want all that gunk stuck in her hoof. 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. Robert looks up, smiles.

ROBERT

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 grins and nods.

AVA

Sure.

MARTIN

Yes!

Robert takes Martin's shoulder and pulls him away.

ROBERT

All right, now. Let her have her coffee. Let's you and me'll 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 pickup.

TOM

All right, boys. Let's get to it. Nuther day. Nuther dollar.

AL

You wish you was gettin' a dollar.

TOM

Damn straight. 'Cuz at least then I'd be getting a Mexican's wage to hunt Mexicans.

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

AL

Goddamn, Kyle.

KYLE

Dan!

IN THE BUSHES

DAN

I'm pissin!

KYLE

Well, Piss faster! Let's go!

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

AT THE TRUCKS

Ed leans in Wes' window with a map.

ED

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

WES

Roger that.

Ed turns with his map 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!

He leaves Ed in a spiteful cloud of dust.

The two trucks leave camp and turn in opposite directions.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

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

KYLE'S BLUE PICKUP hauls-ass down a dirt road, bouncing and fishtailing.

INT. KYLE'S TRUCK - DAY

Dan, up on his knees and elbows in the backseat to save his inflamed ass, bounces around like a crash dummy, while Kyle and Hector laugh their asses off.

DAN

Goddammit, Kyle! Slow down!

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

Hector shouts!

HECTOR

Kyle!

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD

We come over a rise and see a GATE right in front of us.

Kyle 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 get out laughing, and head to the back to gather their packs and rifles. Dan rolls out limping and cursing.

DAN

Fuck you, Kyle! Goddammit! 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 haven't sat down for five fuckin days.

KYLE

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

Kyle and Hector head off, still chuckling. Dan gathers his pack and rifle.

Kyle pushes the gate open and he and Hector walk through - leaving it open. Dan waddles after them to catch up.

DAN

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

KYLE

I wouldnt'a fallen in damn a cactus.

EXT. ROBERT'S RANCH - DAY

Robert, Martin, and Ava lope along a dirt road. Martin rides Bonita by himself, but Robert holds her lead rope. They are grinning and having fun. Robert laughs at Martin's flapping arms and legs.

ROBERT

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

EXT. CATTLE GATE - DAY

Robert, Martin, and Ava lope over the rise and see Kyle's blue pickup parked in the road ahead.

Robert reins up and the horses walk past the truck. He sees the open gate and frowns.

MARTIN

Whose truck is this?

ROBERT

Hunters probably.

(He stands in the stirrups
and looks around.)

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

Robert leads them through the gate, then reaches down from the saddle, closes it and latches 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, Martin, and Ava approach the water cache. Empty jugs litter the ground. The wooden cache box has been smashed: the sides kicked in, the lid twisted off.

AVA

Is that yours?

ROBERT

It was. Here.

He hands her Bonita's lead rope, gets off his horse and walks to the scattered water jugs. The ground is wet. He picks up an empty jug. Then another. They've been slashed with knives.

EXT. ROBERT'S RANCH - DAY

Robert, Martin, and Ava ride along a ridge line. Robert spots something in the ravine below. He stops, and sees....

Kyle, Hector, and Dan in the ravine bottom.

AVA

Hunters?

ROBERT

Nah. Just clowns playing army.
(he hands the lead rope to
Ava.)
Wait here.

He rides slowly down the slope toward the three men.

IN RAVINE BOTTOM

Hector is pissing. Dan has his pants down and is arguing 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 fuckin need help. And I'm tired'a carryin ya. I'm been doin it my whole goddamned life.

DAN

That ain't true.

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 right into the sun at a man on horseback who seems to be 12-feet tall.

KYLE

(surly)
Who are you?

ROBERT

Name's Robert Morrison. This is my land. Is that your blue pickup about a mile 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?

Now Robert's done playing. He pins Kyle with a steady gaze and waits for him to answer the question.

AVA watches from the ridge and 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. Why?

ROBERT

You left my gate open.

KYLE

What gate?

ROBERT

And you destroyed my water cache.

KYLE

That wudn't us.

Robert just looks at him. Ava stops her horse next Robert. She has her professional face on.

AVA

Good morning, gentlemen. My name's Agent Leon. I'm with the U.S. Border Patrol.

(off their skeptical glances)

It's my day off.

Kyle and Hector exchange a nervous glance.

KYLE

Well we ain't doin nothin illegal. Fact, we're workin with you. See here.

(points at his arm patch)

We're with Patriots United Bor...

ROBERT

I know what you are. I still want you off my land.

KYLE

Well now, that seems pretty unfriendly, Mr. Morrison. Considerin, we're down here doin you a favor. It was probably some fuckin Mexicans that left your gates open and fucked up your water.

Robert remains still and silent. Kyle buckles.

KYLE

Well fine, then. If that's the way
you want it. We'll just let
illegals run all over your place.
(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 glances reproachfully at Kyle and Hector as they turn to
leave. Then, Kyle stops and looks back at Robert.

KYLE

Tell me somethin, Mr. Morrison.
This is a big fuckin place you got.
You really think you can protect it
all by yourself?

Robert answers him with a look that could crack a stone.

ROBERT

Close my gate when you leave.

Kyle spits, then turns - and Robert watches them walk away.

EXT. ROBERT'S RANCH. GATE - DAY

Hector throws the gate open 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 him - surprised. Kyle sees them looking at him and realizes that he is doing exactly what Robert told him to.

KYLE

Goddammit! Fuck that old bastard.

He kicks the gate 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 project 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 work tomorrow to pick you up.

MARTIN

Come as late as you want.

She gives him a look, smiles.

ROBERT

I'll have steaks on the grill.

Ava gets into her car and Robert and Martin wave as she drives away.

EXT. 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. Let's go.

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

EXT. ROBERT'S BENCH - 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 SUV, carrying her ballistic vest and lunch box. She opens the door, sets her lunch box on the seat, then slips on her vest, tightens the straps, adjusts her gun belt.

AVA'S SUV drives out of the station and heads for the desert.

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, 70, in her wheelchair, onto the porch, and bounces her down a couple of steps to the ground.

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 leg.

OFELIA

You watch yourself, 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, and then puts the chair in the truck bed.

OFELIA

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

JACOB

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

OFELIA

You're pushin it.

JACOB

I know.

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

JACOB

You girls have fun.

She smiles and drives away.

As she drives out the gate, she waves to Robert and Martin who are just arriving on horseback.

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.
(he nods at Martin)
Martin. This is Jacob.

JACOB

Hey, Martin. Nice to meet ya.
(they shake hands)
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, we oughta try to ease off on that a little today.

JACOB

Well, I'll see what I can do. But I can't make any promises. I never built anythin that didn't take a fair amount'a cussin just to hold it together.

EXT. DESERT. AVA'S PATROL - DAY

A day in the life of a Border Patrol agent:

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

AVA DRIVES remote backroads, 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. But keeps an eye on the desert.

AVA FOLLOWS FOOTPRINTS across a gully, up a hillside - but loses the trail in the brush. 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 a power saw.

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

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Ava drives along a dirt road - spots the Patriots camp in the distance and drives toward it.

EXT. PATRIOTS CAMP - DAY

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

ED

Afternoon. What can I do for you?

Ava notes the holstered gun on Ed's hip. She keeps her hands on her belt, near her 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. I got two teams out right now.

AVA

Have they seen anything?

ED

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

AVA

Well, you wanna be careful out here. We had a rip crew in this area not long ago. Killed seven people.

ED

Mexicans?

Ava nods.

ED

Haulin dope probably. 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

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.

ED

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

AVA

Well, thank you for your time.

ED

You bet.

Ava walks to her SUV. Ed watches her for a moment, then calls after her.

ED

Agent. When was this incident you were talkin about?

AVA

It was about a week ago. Right before the 4th.

Ed thinks about this. Ava notices.

AVA

You know something about it?

ED

No. -- No. I just wanna have my facts straight when I tell my crew.

Ava studies him for a beat.

AVA

Well if you see anything, let us know.

ED

Will do. Thanks for stopping by.
You have a good day, and stay safe.

AVA

You too.

Ed ponders her information as he watches Ava get into her SUV and drive away.

EXT. JACOB'S HOUSE - DAY

Martin is setting a screw but doesn't keep the drill speed up, so the screw catches and spins the wood out of his hand.

He lashes out.

MARTIN

Shit!

Throws the screw gun, punches the wood, and storms off.
Robert goes after him.

Luis, surprised and uncertain how to react, turns to Jacob.

JACOB

Aww, don't mind him. He's just
addin a little cussin to help hold
things together.

LUIS

Can I add some.

JACOB

No. Get back to work.

BY THE CORRAL

Martin grips the fence with pent up anger and embarrassment.

Robert stops a dozen feet or so behind him, and just quietly stands there while Martin's anger and fierce grip on the fence slowly subside. He can't face Robert.

ROBERT

You're hand all right?

MARTIN

Yeah.

ROBERT

Can I see?

Martin hesitates, then holds out his hand. But still won't look at Robert.

Robert takes Martin's hand and gently probes the fingers and hand bones. Martin winces a little.

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 sight of Martin's face. But Martin won't look at him.

ROBERT

You wanna come back to work? Or you wanna stay over here for awhile?

Martin hangs his head. Doesn't answer.

ROBERT

Well, all right. You come on back when you're ready.

He walks back the porch and returns to work.

EXT. JACOB'S CORRAL - DAY

We watch Martin at the corral. Over a period of ten minutes or so, we see him calm down. Get bored. Then get interested again in what he others are doing.

- Martin steals a glance at Robert, Jacob and Luis.
- Martin looks around the yard. Out across the desert.
- Martin toes the dirt. Digs a shallow hole. Fills it in.
- Martin peels a flake of wood off the fence.
- Martin glances at the others again.
- Martin finds an old horse shoe nail in the dirt. Picks it up. Inspects it. Drops it.
- Martin watches Robert, Jacob, and Luis work. Then... he slowly walks back to the porch. The others barely take notice and carry on as though nothing happened.

Robert places a board.

ROBERT

Hand me that drill.

Martin hesitates - then picks up the drill and hands it to Robert.

ROBERT

Hold that end.

Martin holds the board in place while Robert drills. Life goes on.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Ava's SUV drives along a ridgeline. A flash of something BLUE catches her eye.

She stops. Steps out her door, glasses the glinting object with her binoculars and sees...

KYLE'S BLUE PICK-UP parked in a ravine bottom. She recognizes it from Robert's ranch. She gets back in her SUV and drives toward it.

INT. AVA'S SUV - DAY

POV THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD: We follow a fresh two-wheel track that brings us to KYLE'S BLUE TRUCK.

Ava stops. Watches the truck for a moment. The windows are heavily tinted. She can't see inside.

EXT. RAVINE - DAY

Ava gets out, stands behind her door with her hand on her pistol butt. 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, and eases her way around to look in through the windshield.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Hector, Kyle and Dan are walking uphill. As they reach the ridge, Hector spots Ava next to Kyle's truck, pulls Kyle down and all three of them hit the dirt.

HECTOR

Border Patrol. Checking out the truck.

Kyle, Hector, and Dan crawl to the ridgeline, peek over and see...

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

EXT. RAVINE AND RIDGELINE - DAY

AVA scans the interior of the truck as best she can through the windshield. It appears empty.

ON THE RIDGE

The men watch the Agent walk around the truck, peering in the dark 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 raises his rifle and looks through the scope.

SCOPE POV: The crosshairs line up on the Agent's back and follow her as she walks around the truck. The Agent comes around a corner of the truck and is now facing Kyle. He raises the scope to Ava's face.

KYLE

Shit.

HECTOR

What?

KYLE

It's that bitch we saw with the old man. Morrison.

HECTOR

What?

Hector sights 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.

IN THE RAVINE

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, but she puts her hand on it.

ON THE RIDGE

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

IN THE RAVINE

Ava takes a breath... and turns the handle. It's locked.

She let's out her breath - and feels silly now, remembering Robert's words.

AVA

(to herself)

Clowns playing army.

ON THE RIDGE

Kyle looks at Dan. Dan defends himself.

DAN

Told ya I locked it.

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

HECTOR

Think she knows anything?

Kyle looks at Hector - then turns and looks after Ava's receding SUV. He doesn't have an answer. And that scares the shit out of him.

EXT. JACOB'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

The ramp is finished. Jacob and Robert are on the porch, popping open beers. Martin and Luis are across the yard, putting tools and lumber 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 turn to watch the boys work.

JACOB

He's got a little damage, don't he?

Robert watches Martin.

ROBERT

Nothin that can't be healed.

They look at each, then sit back and watch the boys put away
the last of the tools.

EXT. HORSE TRAIL - DUSK

Robert and Martin ride home. Martin is quiet. Still
embarrassed. And also a little worried.

MARTIN

Robert?

ROBERT

Mmm.

MARTIN

I'm sorry I got mad.

ROBERT

That's all right. You didn't hurt
nothin.

They ride quietly for a bit.

MARTIN

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

Robert looks back at him.

ROBERT

Hate ya?
(he chuckles softly)
Well, that'll be the day.

Martin looks confused - not quite sure whether that answer is
good or bad.

MARTIN

What... What does that mean?

ROBERT

What?

MARTIN

That'll be the day.

ROBERT

Aw, that's just an old expression.
Means, uh... Means that's never
happen. I won't ever hate ya, son.

Martin suppresses a relieved smile and they ride the rest of the way home in easy silence.

EXT. ROCK OUTCROP - DUSK

Kyle, Hector, and Dan pull rocks and bushes away from their hidden marijuana packs and load them into their truck.

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

Ava's SUV pulls into the yard. She gets out, removes her ballistic vest and radio and tosses them onto the passenger seat. She unbuckles her gun belt, hangs it over her shoulder and heads for the house.

Martin and Robert step out to greet her.

INT. ROBERT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Robert walks in from the back patio, carrying dinner dishes. He sees Martin asleep on the couch, smiles and continues into...

THE KITCHEN

Ava washes dishes and sets them in the strainer. Robert sets his dirty dishes on the counter, and starts drying and putting away the clean ones.

ROBERT

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

AVA

He sure looked it. He also looked
like he had fun.

(MORE)

AVA (CONT'D)

(she pauses)

I know I've already said it a few times but - thank you. These past few days have been... well, they've been really good. For him and for me.

ROBERT

I'm glad.

They share a smile. Ava puts the last clean dish in the strainer, dries her hands, and reaches for a wet plate.

ROBERT

Nope. You did your job. This one's mine. You go sit down.

Robert keeps drying and putting away. Ava sits at the table and watches him work.

She twists the towel in her hands. Tightens it. Releases it. Tightens it again. She's got something to say but hasn't decided whether or not she's going to say it.

AVA

You, uh... You never asked me about Martin's father.

Robert continues drying a dish, puts it away.

ROBERT

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

Ava twists the towel - then lets it unwind.

AVA

I want to.

Robert turns to her. She looks up at him.

ROBERT

All right.

He lays the towel on the counter and sits down across from her. She looks down at the table. He waits.

AVA

I didn't... really know Martin's father. I'd seen him around the base. But I didn't know his name. Not until later. I was a fueller and we were prepping a convoy that was going out in the morning.

(MORE)

AVA (CONT'D)

It was pretty late when we finished. My buddy had guard duty first thing, so I let him rack out early while I finished up the paperwork. It didn't take long. I was only alone for about ten-minutes. I didn't hear him. I didn't even know he was there until he grabbed me. He got me from behind. Shoved me down over a desk. Pressed his arm on the back of my neck. And then he... he started jerking my pants. Pulling them down. I tried to fight. But my feet were barely touching the ground. I couldn't move. So then, I just wanted it to be over. So I quit. I quit fighting.

(she takes a slow,
regretful breath)

When he... When it was over, I didn't move. I didn't look at him. I just laid there and waited for him to leave. There was a clock on the desk, right in front of my face. I just laid there and watched the numbers change. And listened to him breathe. And then... And then I heard him - crying. That's when I looked at him. And he looked at me. That was the only time I ever saw his eyes. And then he just walked out.

(she gathers herself)

I'd heard about this kinda thing happening to women on other bases. I even knew a couple of them. And I knew that most of them never reported it. They didn't want the trouble. I thought about doin the same. But I just... I couldn't. I didn't want to quit again. So I went to my C.O. He acted concerned, but I could tell he was annoyed. He said he'd look into it. But everything changed once we got the word. Our convoy had been hit. Four soldiers were dead. And he was one of them. So just like that he went from being my rapist to being a war hero. After that, my C.O. told me to drop it. Even my friends told me to forget about it. They said it wouldn't be right.

(MORE)

AVA (CONT'D)

They acted like I was the one doing something wrong. Like I was betraying him, instead of the other way round.

(she bites back tears,
collects herself)

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

(pause)

I could'a had an abortion. But I just... I just couldn't think about it. About any of it. And then, it was just too late. My decision was made for me. They transferred me to a base back home I and served out my time. I was seven months pregnant when I discharged.

(she looks at Robert)

The way... The way Martin came to me. Wasn't right. But from the moment I saw him, I never regretted it. There's no stain on him. And I love him with my whole heart.

(she tightens the towel)

I can live with the rape. The worst part... The worst part was losing my friends. Those men. They were my brothers. My fam... my family. I trusted them. They were supposed to have my back.

They sit for a moment. Ava twists the towel. Robert reaches across the table and gently places his hand over hers - and she stops twisting.

EXT. PATRIOTS CAMP - NIGHT

Ed, Wes, Tom, and Al are seated around the campfire when Kyle's pickup rolls into camp. They all stand - each of them holding a rifle. Kyle, Hector, and Dan get out of the truck.

ED

You boys are late. Run into some trouble?

Kyle watches the four men slowly fan out around him.

KYLE

Dan fell into a cactus. We're gonna take him in to a hospital. Then head on home.

ED

When'd this happen, Dan?

DAN

Um...

KYLE

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

He looks at the men facing him. At the rifles in their hands.

KYLE

Real sorry to have to run out on you like this. But Dan's hurtin so...

He starts toward their tent. Ed levels his rifle at Kyle.

ED

Stay where you are.

Al, Wes, and Tom train their rifles on Dan and Hector.

KYLE

What the fuck's this?

ED

Drop those gun belts. All'a ya.

KYLE

What the hell are you talkin...

Wes steps forward, his rifle sights on Kyle's face.

WES

Guns down! Now!

KYLE

Shit, man. All right. Just... What the fuck?

Kyle, Hector, and Dan unbuckle their pistol belts and toss them forward.

ED

It's time you boys came clean about whatch you been up to.

KYLE

I don't know what the fuck you're talkin about, Ed?

ED

Don't lie to me! You boys been actin strange this whole trip. Whisperin. Keepin to yourselves. Somethin's goin on. And you're gonna tell me what it is. Right now.

KYLE

I... I don't know what to tell you. All we've done this whole fuckin week, is look for Mexicans all day and come back here at night. That's it.

ED

Open your truck.

KYLE

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

ED

It's not a game. Open it.

Kyle opens the camper shell, lowers the tailgate. He glances at the stock of the AK-47 peeking out from under a blanket.

Ed looks into the truck bed.

ED

Pull back that tarp.

Kyle glances at Hector and Dan, then pulls the tarp - careful to not disturb the blanket hiding the Ak-47.

Ed sees the stack of marijuana bales. He sighs.

ED

Drag 'em out.

Kyle nods to Hector to help him and Hector starts moving.

ED

Not you. Just you, Kyle.

Hector steps back. Kyle drags out the packs and piles them at the back of the truck.

ED

That's marijuana, ain't it?

KYLE

Now look, Ed. I don't know what you're thinkin. But we found these. Okay? We found 'em buried under some rocks and brush.

(he turns to Hector and Dan)

Idn't that right?

HECTOR

That's right.

Dan just nods.

ED

You found em?

KYLE

That's right.

ED

When?

KYLE

It was right 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 were right. I don't.

KYLE

Well there you go.

ED

Did you know there was seven Mexicans killed in a robbery here last week?

Dan lowers his face. Wes spots it.

KYLE

No. We don't know nothin about that.

ED

They was carrying packs just like these.

KYLE

I told you. We found these. Now, sure, they 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)

Now look. There's a lotta fuckin money here. Okay? So we didn't see any reason why it should rot in the desert. Or why some fuckin Mexicans ought'a get it instead'a us.

TOM

How much you talkin about?

ED

It don't matter.

KYLE

Them six bales could be worth about a million-fuckin-dollars. All right?

TOM

A million dollars.

AL

God-damn.

KYLE

See what I mean. You wouldnt'a fuckin left 'em in the desert either.

ED

We're not goddamned drug dealers, Kyle.

Tom and Al glance at each other. Wes notices.

TOM

Well now, Ed.

(he chuckles)

For a million dollars, maybe we oughta talk about this a little bit.

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

Put those in Wes' truck. We're
turnin 'em in tonight. And that's
the end of it.

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. We should at least talk
about this.

ED

NO!

TOM

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

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

AL

Sorry, Wes.

Hector picks up his pistol. Points it at Wes. Kyle slides out
the AK and levels it at Ed.

Wes glares at Al, lowers his rifle - but doesn't drop it.

WES

You're makin a bad mistake,
brother.

AL

We just wanna talk.

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

TOM

C'mon, you two. Don't make this so
fuckin hard. Let's all just put our
guns down and cool the fuck out so
we can talk about this.

ED

I already told you, there's nothin to talk about.

TOM

Aw, cut the righteous shit, Ed. I know you. I know the shit you've done. This ain't that different. Besides, in another year or so this shit's gonna be legal all over. We just got a chance to get in before the end, that's all. C'mon. Who's it gonna hurt?

ED

You want blood on your hands?

AL

Aw, for fucks 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?

Tom and Al throw uncertain glances at Kyle.

TOM

Whaddya mean?
(he glances at Kyle)
What's he talkin about?

ED

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

KYLE

That's a pretty fucked up question, Ed.

ED

Just answer it.

Kyle glances around. All eyes are on him. He faces Ed.

KYLE

Fuck. No. Okay? And you're a fuckin asshole to even ask me.

Al steps in to diffuse things - but he's still pretty shaky and uncertain.

AL

There. You see. Nobody's a killer here.

Wes notices Kyle's AK-47.

WES

Then where'd he get that rifle? Look at it. That's an AK. If he didn't kill those Mexicans, then how'd he get it?

Tom and Al glance at each other, then at Kyle.

TOM

Kyle?

Kyle chuckles nervously.

KYLE

Ya'll... Ya'll are just...

He's caught. He's got nothing left but a stupid smirk...

SO HE RAISES THE AK AND BLASTS AWAY.

Dan drops to his belly and covers his head.

Wes dives, rolls, and comes up shooting.

Hector runs for cover and fires back at Wes.

Al, Tom, and Ed go down in a spray of bullets from the AK, twitching off rounds as they fall.

Kyle swings the AK to Wes and BLASTS him backwards into the fire.

And then, it's all over except for the dying.

Kyle and Hector move slowly forward. Hector checks Al and Wes. They're dead. Tom is still breathing, barely. His eyes turn, look at Hector - then go still.

Kyle stands over Ed. He's still alive, gurgling blood. Looking up at Kyle with pure hatred.

Kyle pulls his knife. Kneels beside Ed and looks into his eyes - as he pushes the knife between his ribs into his heart. Ed stops gurgling.

Kyle pulls out the knife, wipes it on Ed. Stands up.

Dan raises his face from the dirt. Looks at the dead men. His voice is soft, frightened, childlike.

DAN

Can we go home now?

Kyle looks down at Dan, then out into the darkness.

KYLE

We got one more mess to clean up
first, little brother.

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

The headlights go out and the truck slows to a crawl.

THE NOSE OF KYLE'S TRUCK peeks over a rise and stops.

Kyle and Hector look out.

Down the road, about a hundred yards further on, is Robert's house. Ava's SUV is parked in front. The full moon throws a bright, ghostly light over the yard, barn, and corrals.

Kyle's truck silently backs down off the rise until it is out of sight.

AT THE TRUCK

Kyle, Hector, and Dan get out, stand in the middle of the road and check their weapons, lock magazines, rack shells.

Kyle carries the AK-47. He looks at Hector and Dan.

KYLE

Let's get this done.

Kyle and Hector start down the road but Dan hangs back. Kyle turns to him - sees a frightened, reluctant little boy looking back him.

DAN

Do we hafta...? I mean. What if she
don't know nuthin? What if she
just...

KYLE

I'm not willin to take that risk.
Are you?

Dan looks at the ground, stuck between two hells.

Kyle goes to him, grips the back of his neck, pulls him
close. Their foreheads touch - but it is not tender.

KYLE

You wanna go home don't ya?

Dan nods.

KYLE

Then this is how we fuckin do it.

He shoves him away. Looks at Hector. Hector replies with a
sharp nod and falls in step with Kyle. Dan reluctantly
follows.

And the three gunmen walk down the road toward Robert's
house.

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 them.
Ava looks up at him. They share a smile.

ROBERT

Want me to carry him to bed?

AVA

In a minute.

She looks back at Martin.

ROBERT

I'll lock up.

EXT. ROBERT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

As the gunmen near the house, they split off in three directions. Dan left. Hector right. Kyle straight down the middle toward Ava's SUV.

INT. ROBERT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Robert locks the patio door off the dining room, then heads down the hall toward the back of the house.

IN THE HALLWAY

Robert passes the open guest room door and we see into the dark room. Behind the drawn curtains, moonlight defines the window - and Hector's shadow moves across it, just a step behind Robert.

AT THE BACK DOOR

Robert twists the lock. The deadbolt slams into place.

EXT. AVA'S SUV - NIGHT

Kyle kneels beside the driver's door, opens it, reaches in with his knife and cuts the radio mic cable. He spots Ava's ballistic vest and grabs it.

INT/EXT. ROBERT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Robert returns to the living room.

ROBERT

Ready?

Ava nods. Robert picks up Martin, lays him over his shoulder.

OUTSIDE AT THE FUSE BOX

Hector opens the cover. Kills the power.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

The lights go out.

AVA

Robert?

ROBERT

Aw, probably just a fuse.

He lays Martin on the couch.

ROBERT

Wait here.

He goes to a drawer in the dining room hutch, fishes out a flashlight, turns it on and walks down the hallway toward the back door.

OUTSIDE THE GUEST ROOM WINDOW

OVER HECTOR'S SHOULDER, we peek through a narrow gap in the curtains and see Robert's flashlight move down the hallway. Hector moves with him.

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

IN THE LIVING ROOM

Ava sits in the dark beside Martin. She hears a sound in the front yard, goes to the window, peeks out, and sees...

Someone (Kyle) running away from her SUV.

She steps back from the window.

AT THE BACK DOOR

Robert opens the deadbolt...

Behind him, Ava whisper/shouts...

AVA

Robert!

Robert turns to her.

AVA

Somebody's out there.

Robert turns off his flashlight. Locks the deadbolt and hurries up the hall into...

THE LIVING ROOM.

He peeks out the 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. She's right. This could be something more. He 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.

Ava tries the phone. It's dead.

She rushes to the couch, grabs her cell phone from the end table. No bars. She tries anyway. No connection.

She looks at her gun belt, hanging on the hat rack.

She goes to it, straps it on.

IN ROBERT'S BEDROOM

Robert stands at his open 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.

ROBERT

No. 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

And pulls aside the shower curtain on a heavy cast iron tub.

ROBERT

Get in. Stay low.

She looks at him like, 'Hell no.'

AVA

If there's a fight, you're gonna need me.

ROBERT

I know. That's why you're stayin with Martin.

Shit. He's right. She doesn't like it. But he's right. She steps into the tub, hunkers down, hugs Martin close, and pulls her pistol.

Martin wakes up.

MARTIN

(groggy)
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 leaves her.

IN THE HALLWAY

Robert loads more shells into the shotgun as he walks into...

THE LIVING ROOM

He stops dead in mid-step. Stares at the front door. There is quiet movement on the other side.

Robert silently shoulders the shotgun.

THE DOOR KNOB twists slightly. It's locked.

Robert loudly and threateningly racks a shell - then moves away from the door.

The door knob stops moving. Silence. Then...

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

Robert dives to the floor, rolls, pops up, FIRES TWO BLASTS through the front door.

AVA AND MARTIN jump at the gun shots.

DAN turns toward the gunfire. Frightened. Anxious.

HECTOR rushes to the back door.

ROBERT bulldozes the couch against the front door, just as...

Someone outside (Kyle) kicks the front door - not expecting the couch - and we hear him fall backward onto the porch with a loud crash and curse...

Robert raises up and FIRES ANOTHER BLAST through the door - just as...

HECTOR KICKS OPEN THE BACK DOOR.

ROBERT turns and FIRES TWO BLASTS down the hallway.

But no one is there. The back door hangs on one hinge, moonlight spilling in through opening.

Robert ducks down. Reloads.

OUTSIDE THE BACK DOOR

HECTOR is pressed against the wall, breathing hard, listening to Robert reload.

KYLE limps off the front porch, holding his ass.

ROBERT peeks over the window sill - Sees Kyle scoot around the SUV and drop down behind the front tire.

HECTOR slides away from the back door and retreats around the corner, back to his side of the house.

ON DAN'S SIDE

DAN listens anxiously for some sign that his brother is okay. He wants to call to him - but stops himself. He steps toward the front of the house. But stops himself again. He's torn between worrying about his brother and incurring his brother's wrath if he doesn't do what he told him to do.

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

BEHIND THE SUV

KYLE sits against the tire. He's wearing Ava's ballistic vest. He grimaces, pulls his hand away from his ass and looks at the blood. Goddammit. Shot in the ass. He shakes his head.

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 and leans around the bumper - Sees Dan and angrily waves him back.

DAN steps back. Shit. He knew it. If Kyle wasn't dead, he'd be mad. And he was right.

KYLE shakes his head. Fuckin Dan. He glances around the bumper into the dark house, then leans back against the tire, catches his breath - and calls to Robert.

KYLE
Hey! Mr. Morrison! Did I hit you?

ROBERT listens, tries to place the voice.

AVA does the same.

IN THE KITCHEN

The door that opens onto Dan's side of the house is half-door/half-window. We see DAN'S SILHOUETTE stop at the door.

THE DOOR HANDLE turns...then hits the lock.

ROBERT hears the sound and looks toward the kitchen door. But then Kyle shouts again.

KYLE (V.O.)
You remember me, don't ya?

BEHIND THE SUV

Kyle peeks around the bumper. Dan is gone.

KYLE
I'll sure be hurt if you don't.

He rolls the other way and looks under the SUV. Sees Hector step around the corner to the back of the house. They are moving into position for the next assault.

Kyle keeps talking to buy time.

KYLE
Tell you what.

DAN moves down the side wall toward the back patio.

KYLE (V.O.)
I'll give you a hint.

HECTOR slides along the back wall toward the back patio.

ON BACK PATIO

DAN and **HECTOR** peek around opposite corners at the same instant. See each other - and almost fire.

Hector waves Dan over. Dan hustles across the patio and hugs the wall behind Hector.

HECTOR
(points, whispers)
Windows on the other side.

KYLE (V.O.)
And this is gonna be a genuine,
honest to God confession. Okay?

Dan nods and moves across the back of the house toward Hector's side. He stops at the kicked-in back door, glances in.

Hector turns to the back patio, spots the picnic bench, and the glass patio door.

KYLE (V.O.)
You ready for it?

He peeks around the bumper.

KYLE
I'm the one who left your mother-
fuckin gate open!

He raises the AK...

BUT ROBERT beats him to the draw. He rises up. FIRES at the front tire of the SUV. PUMPS AND FIRES AGAIN.

KYLE drops the AK. DUCKS BACK. Shotgun pellets kick up the dirt around him. THE FRONT TIRE blows out.

ROBERT turns to the backdoor - Sees Dan leap across the opening - FIRES a blast down the hallway, then runs for the dining room.

KYLE snatches up the AK, blindly pokes it around the front bumper and fires into the house.

IN LIVING ROOM

Bullets and flying glass fill the air behind Robert as he runs.

ON THE BACK PATIO

Hector throws the picnic bench through the sliding-glass door and...

THE BENCH crashes through the glass right in front of Robert. He spins away. **FIRES TWO QUICK BLASTS** at the patio. Then dives into the kitchen, slides across the floor, and crashes against the cabinets.

KYLE hastily checks himself, to see if he's been hit. His adrenaline pumps and he has a crazy grin on his face.

KYLE

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

AVA listens anxiously for some sign that Robert is still alive.

DAN peeks around the side of the house - then moves toward Robert's bedroom window.

HECTOR peeks in the broken back door - then steps in, and eases up the hallway, past Robert's room. Glass and splintered wood crunch under his boots.

AVA hears movement in the hallway.

AVA

(whispers to Martin)
I have to check on Robert.

Martin grips her arm. Shakes his head.

AVA

He needs me. Stay down. Stay quiet.

She peels herself away from Martin. Steps out of the tub. Peeks around the door. She glances back at Martin with her finger to her lips. Then raises her pistol and is gone.

IN THE KITCHEN

Robert digs one last shell out of his pocket. Shit. He goes to load it - but finds a spent shell jammed in the ejection port.

IN THE HALLWAY

Hector steps around the corner into the dining room just as...

AVA peeks out the bedroom door into the hallway. She misses seeing him by a mere second. She looks toward the back door, then steps into the hallway and moves toward it.

KYLE peeks around the bumper of the SUV - then crawls to the rear, peeks around the back bumper and sees DAN moving to a window.

HECTOR hears movement in the kitchen. He steps slowly through the dining room toward the kitchen. His boots crunch on broken glass.

ROBERT looks up. Works furiously to clear the jam.

AVA hears the sound, turns and moves up the hallway. She passes Robert's bedroom - and we see Dan's shadow on the window curtains.

AVA steps carefully to avoid giving herself away.

MARTIN hears the bedroom window slide open. He lays down in the tub. Terrified.

HECTOR nears the kitchen door - hears Robert working to dislodge the stuck shell.

KYLE watches Dan lean his rifle against the wall and crawl through the window.

KYLE

(whispers to himself)
Don't forget your rifle, dumbass.

And then, Dan reaches out and takes his rifle.

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

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

HECTOR sees it. Rushes forward...

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

ROBERT racks his last shell...

AVA lunges out of the hallway into the dining room - sees Hector turning his rifle on Robert - SHE FIRES - rapidly squeezing off five rounds, just as...

ROBERT lifts the shotgun and FIRES HIS LAST SHELL.

HECTOR, hit simultaneously from two directions, spins against the wall...

KYLE reacts to the gunshots, ducks back behind the SUV.

HECTOR slides down the wall and hits the floor. Dead.

DAN lifts his gun away from Martin. They stare at each other.

DAN

You gotta get outta here. C'mon.

He lays down his rifle and lifts Martin out of the tub onto the counter beneath the bathroom window. He shoves the window open and lowers Martin to the ground.

DAN

Hide in the barn, and don't come out. Go!

Dan watches Martin run into the barn.

KYLE sees Martin run to the barn.

DAN'S FACE is weary. He's done. He notices the open toilet seat and it occurs to him that he can sit there without hurting his ass. So he does - and enjoys the first good sit he's had since he fell in the cactus. He lays his rifle across his knees, leans back, closes his eyes and rests.

IN THE DINING ROOM

Ava keeps her gun on Hector and moves toward the kitchen.

AVA

Robert? Robert?

ROBERT

I'm all right.

She kneels beside him.

AVA

You're not hit?

ROBERT

No.

KYLE calls out from behind the SUV.

KYLE

Hector!? Hector!?

ROBERT AND AVA turn toward Kyle's voice. Robert glances around.

ROBERT

Where's Martin?

Ava looks at him, then rushes out of the kitchen. Robert struggles achingly to his feet and follows her.

KYLE steps out from behind the SUV.

KYLE

Dan!? Dan!?

Dan sits on the toilet and just smiles as he listens to Kyle call his name. He's not really here anymore. He's in a different place. A different time. He's playing hide and seek with his brother.

KYLE (O.S.)

Dan!?

Dan smiles. Kyle is looking for him - but he's a good hider. Kyle will never find him.

AVA rushes through bedroom into the bathroom...

And finds Dan sitting on the toilet with a faraway look. She points her gun, sees the empty tub.

AVA

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

Dan snaps back from his reverie and looks at Ava.

AVA

Where is he!?

KYLE hears Ava shouting.

DAN looks at Ava. The moment of peaceful reverie is past. Now there is only regret.

DAN

I'm sorry about all this.

And then - with no intention other than to draw Ava's fire - he snatches up his rifle, and Ava puts three bullets into his chest.

KYLE reacts to the shots. He knows his brother is dead. He grimly sets his jaw and heads for the barn.

AVA looks around Robert's room. Screams her son's name.

AVA

Martin! Martin!

IN THE BARN

Martin hears Ava and jumps up.

MARTIN

Mom!

AVA hears his voice, looks out the window and sees - Kyle running toward the front door of the barn.

AVA

Martin!

Ava rushes into the hallway, crashes into Robert and runs out the back door.

ROBERT

Ava!

Robert hastily snatches a couple of shotgun shells from the gun safe and goes after her, loading as he runs.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

Kyle kicks open the front door - Martin ducks to the right side of the barn and crawls into an empty stall.

Kyle moves toward him...

Ava runs through the back door, sees Kyle.

He dives right. Ava FIRES HER GUN EMPTY, then dives to the left side of the barn.

Kyle returns fire, splattering wood shards all around Ava.

Robert runs through the front door. Sees Kyle firing at Ava. Snaps the shotgun to his shoulder and FIRES - too quickly. He misses.

Kyle turns and FIRES at Robert.

Robert dives into the tack room on the left side of the barn, as the walls disintegrate around him.

As we look in the front door of the barn, Ava and Robert are on the left side of the barn, at opposite ends. Kyle and Martin are in stalls on the right side of the barn.

The horses are agitated. Stamping and kicking in their stalls. Robert and Ava's horses are in stalls on their side of the barn. Martin's horse is in a stall on his and Kyle's side of the barn.

Ava slaps in a full mag, twists and looks through the slats.

With only ambient moonlight to see by, the barn is mostly pitch black. So, 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.

Martin, too frightened to stay in one place, quietly crawls into the next empty 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. The agitated horse stamps, and kicks.

Kyle shoves her with his rifle, opens the gate latch and swats her ass. She bolts.

Robert hears the gate and steps out of the tack room with the shotgun at his shoulder - but the panicked horse runs through his line of fire. Robert waits. The horse clears and Robert sees...

Kyle has a dead bead right on him. He ducks back. Kyle fires. A single bullet shatters the tack room wall next to Robert's head.

And the AK clicks empty. Kyle tosses it, pulls his pistol...

On Kyle's right, Ava pops up FIRING...

On his left, Robert steps out, and FIRES HIS LAST SHELL.

The stall railings on both sides of him explode. Splinters dart into Kyle's face and he falls backward into the stall.

Martin jumps back when Kyle hits the ground next to him. Only the stall railing separates them.

They see each other.

Martin tries to crawl away - but Kyle reaches through the railing, grabs him, and pulls him through.

MARTIN

Mom!!

Ava stands up.

AVA

Martin!

Kyle backhands Martin to the ground, steps on his neck.

KYLE

I got your boy under my boot! And
I'm gonna put a bullet in his head
unless the both'a you come out now!

Ava 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

Mhhmmm!

Kyle presses down harder with his boot.

KYLE

Shut up. -- Step out now or I'll
put this boy's brains on the floor!

Ava steps out, pistol in hand.

Robert steps out holding his empty shotgun.

In the thin moonlight, Kyle can just make them out. He looks
left at Robert. Then right at Ava.

KYLE

Drop the guns.

Ava and Robert glance at each other.

Kyle fires into the ground! And the dirt beside Martin's head
explodes like a volcano.

Ava screams.

AVA

Martin!!

Robert steps forward.

KYLE

Next one goes in his ear. Drop your
fuckin guns!

Ava raises her hands.

AVA

Please. Please, don't hurt him. I'm putting the gun down.

KYLE

You too, old man.

ROBERT

All right. You ready for it.

Kyle turns to Robert.

Robert raises the empty shotgun to his shoulder. Kyle shoots.

Robert twists and falls.

Ava dives forward and fires into the dark stall. Four quick shots. She hears a body slam against the back wall and slide down.

AVA

Martin!

MARTIN

Mom!

She moves toward Martin.

Kyle groans. The ballistic vest saved him but it still hurts like hell. He sees Ava's shadow moving toward him, raises his pistol.

KYLE

Bitch!

Ava hears him, and jerks right - just as Kyle FIRES. FIRES. FIRES.

Two bullets miss. But the last one rips through Ava's left side, just above the hip. She twists, drops her gun, lands on one knee - and then springs forward, over Martin, onto Kyle.

AVA

Run!

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 wall, and then...

They spill out into the breezeway. Rolling, punching, kicking. Savagely fighting for control of KYLE'S PISTOL.

Ava slams Kyle's hand against the ground. The pistol fires and a bullet shatters the stall railing next to Martin's head. He rolls away.

Ava grabs the barrel and twists the gun from Kyle's hand. But before she can get a grip on it, Kyle knocks it free and...

IT LANDS NEAR THE FRONT DOOR OF THE BARN.

And now they are back to punching and rolling. Ava kicks Kyle away from her and he lands face first in the dirt - looks up and sees AVA'S PISTOL.

He lunges for it. Ava dives onto his legs, yanks him back, and Kyle's hand closes on dirt instead of the pistol.

Martin backs away, terrified. He hears a groan behind him.

ROBERT

(barely a whisper)
Martin.

Martin turns. Sees Robert.

Kyle rolls onto his back, kicks Ava in the chest and sends her flying. He crawls for the HER PISTOL.

But Ava is on him again, this time slamming her fist, again and again, into his bloody, buckshot ass. He howls.

Martin scoots across the floor to Robert. He has a bleeding bullet wound in his upper chest. He's barely conscious. He nods at AVA'S GUN.

ROBERT

(croaks)
Gun. GUN.

Martin turns and sees it glinting in the moonlight. Ava and Kyle's hands twist and struggle toward it.

Kyle punches Ava in the side of the head, she buckles, and he throws her off. She rolls onto her belly, starts to push up and...

Kyle comes down on top of her. Shoves her face into the dirt and wriggles his arm around her throat.

Ava tucks her chin to block Kyle from choking her out. Then sinks her teeth into his arm and draws blood.

Kyle kicks her away. They roll apart, jump to their feet, and face each other like bloody boxers.

Ava dances, ducks, jabs. She punches his gut and hits the ballistic vest. Shit!

Kyle swings and misses. Ava can't attack his body, so she goes for his face. Kyle blocks it. She kicks for his groin. He blocks it again.

They are evenly matched. All Ava can do is keep weaving, dodging his punches, and looking for an opening.

Robert struggles to sit up. Grips Martin's arm.

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.

They pass over the gun and Martin reaches in, grabs it, and rolls back to Robert.

Kyle lands another head punch. Ava staggers back, recovers, and is just moving back in when...

Kyle pulls his knife and swings a backhand slash across her belly. Ava jumps back and the blade just creases her skin enough to draw blood.

He slashes at her again. Misses again. But before Kyle can bring the knife back for another slash, Ava grabs his wrist, punches her fist against the back of his knife hand, and the knife jolts loose and hits the dirt.

And now Ava and Kyle are on each other, punching and kicking. They are worn out, all grace and technique are gone. They are just swapping punches now. Two staggering silhouettes backlit by the moonlight through the doorway.

Robert points the pistol at the two dark shapes spinning, twisting, fighting. His eyes are blurred. He can't tell which is which.

He shakes his head to clear his vision, shifts the pistol from one silhouette to the other.

Martin sees Robert struggling, shifting the pistol back and forth. He 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 turns the pistol to Kyle's silhouette and FIRES. FIRES. FIRES. Dead center. Kyle falls in the front doorway - 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 through Kyle's throat.

She rolls clear and watches Kyle gag and choke on the blade. He falls sideways, convulses... then stops moving.

Ava and Martin look at each other across Kyle's dead body. She crawls to him. Hugs him.

Then sees Robert, lying lifeless. She pries Martin loose and goes to Robert. Checks his pulse. His breathing.

AVA

No. No-no-no.

She starts CPR.

And as we slowly back away we DISSOLVE TO...

ROBERT being dragged through the dirt. He is barely conscious. Ava and Martin struggle to drag him from the barn and we DISSOLVE TO...

ROBERT lying in the backseat of the SUV, his eyes fluttering, drifting in and out of consciousness. Ava's distant, echoing voice calls his name. Keeps him conscious.

And then we watch the TAIL LIGHTS of Ava's SUV slowly dwindle away until they are swallowed up by the darkness.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Ava sits up in a hospital bed, holding Martin next to. Her face and hands are bandaged.

They wait for news about Robert.

And they wait.

And Wait.

And Wait. Martin is asleep in her arms.

And then Ava sees a nurse making the long walk toward her. She can't tell if the news is good or bad. And then the nurse is there, standing over her - smiling.

NURSE

Your dad's gonna be just fine...

An overwhelming flood of relief washes over Ava. AND THE SOUND DROPS OUT to a dull, inarticulate murmur. The nurse keeps talking, providing more details - but Ava has heard all she needs to. Robert will live.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Jacob sits in a chair by the window. He maneuvers his pocket knife to catch the sunlight coming through the window and reflect it onto....

Robert's sleeping face. The beam flashes over his closed eyes and they flutter. Then open. He squints.

And Jacob quickly folds the knife and tucks it away.

JACOB

Well, hey there. Been wondering when you was gonna wake up.

Robert squints. Groans. Then croaks hoarsely.

ROBERT

What time is it?

JACOB

Time to get outta here, if you're ready.

He clears his eyes and looks at Jacob.

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 Jacob a look. Jacob just grins.

INT. JACOB'S TRUCK. MOVING - DAY

Robert looks out the window, confused.

ROBERT

Where are you goin'?

JACOB

I got orders.

Robert turns to him with a suspicious scowl.

INT. JACOB'S TRUCK. MOVING - LATER

Jacob pulls to the curb in front of a house. Robert looks out and sees Ava and Martin walk out to greet them.

He turns to Jacob.

JACOB

(shrugs)
Told ya. Orders.

INT. AVA'S HOUSE - DAY

Jacob helps Robert walk into the house. Robert is embarrassed. Ava and Martin lead them down the hall.

AVA

Bring him back here.

Jacob helps 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. A twin bed. A chair. A reading lamp.

MARTIN

Look! This is my room but you can use it till you get better.

ROBERT

I... I don't want to be a bother to ya'll.

AVA

You're not.

Robert sits in the chair, still feeling awkward and out of place.

ROBERT

Well. I'll be outta here soon as I can. I promise.

MARTIN

(scoffs playfully)
That'll be the day.

Robert looks at Martin. Ava and Jacob stifle grins.

Martin picks up his ball glove and bat and tugs on Ava.

MARTIN

C'mon Mom. I'm gonna be late.
(he runs off, calls over
his shoulder)
See you later, Grampa Robert.

Robert gives Ava a quizzical look. She shrugs apologetically.

AVA

Sorry. He started sayin that while you were in the hospital. If it bothers you...

Robert lowers his face. Looks at his hands in his lap. He doesn't have the words. Jacob grins.

JACOB

Naw. It don't bother him.

He shares a smile with Ava.

MARTIN (O.S.)

Mom!

Ava heads down the hall, talking as she goes.

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.

She disappears around the corner and we hear the front door close. Robert sniffs, pushes back a tear, glances at Jacob.

ROBERT

Don't start.

JACOB

(softly)
Wasn't gonna.

EXT. ROBERT'S TRUCK - DAY

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

THE DRIVER'S DOOR opens and Robert gets out with a cane. We follow his hand on the cane as he walks around the truck to the passenger side and opens the door.

Ava sits in the passenger seat. She's hesitant. Anxious. Robert offers his hand. She doesn't move.

ROBERT

These aren't the people that turned
their back on you. They deserve a
chance to prove themselves.

Ava looks at him.

EXT. PIZZA PARLOR - DAY

Robert and Ava walk to the front door and enter.

INT. PIZZA PARLOR - DAY

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.

VET

We have an old friend with us tonight. This is Ava Leon. She was part of our group a couple of years ago. We're glad to have her back. She has something to share with us.
(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. And 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