

LOUISIANA STING

by

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EXT. DALLAS - CITY - NIGHT

A glittering tapestry of lights, skyscrapers cast long shadows over the streets below. The hustle and bustle of traffic and pedestrians.

INT. CITY - APARTMENT - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Cracked concrete walls, peeled paint. A flickering bulb suspended from the ceiling the only light source. Decrepit doors line both sides, some displaying makeshift repairs.

FOOTSTEPS ascend a stairwell, pristine shoes on CREAKING wood.

Two silhouettes emerge, FBI Agent LARSEN (40's) strides confidently, a seasoned veteran. His demeanor composed and determined.

Walking alongside him is FBI Agent JESSICA (23) a trainee on her first gig. Eager yet slightly nervous, a mix of excitement and apprehension.

Sounds emanate beyond each door as they pass - indistinct chatter, a blaring television, spouses arguing.

Ahead, a petty DRUG DEALER raises his hoodie and scampers away.

The Agent's arrive at unit 103.

LARSEN

This place look like a Covid mask factory to you?

Jessica blushes.

JESSICA

Negative, sir.

Larsen nods encouragingly, motioning for her to take the lead.

LARSEN

You got this.

KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK

A nervous shout bellows from within.

DEVIN (O.S.)

Who is it?

JESSICA

Devin Bryant? F B I, open the door please.

A ruckus inside, CLINK, CLANK.

DEVIN (O.S.)
Just a sec. I'm...getting dressed.

KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK

LARSEN
Open up.

The door jolts ajar with a CLANG, stopped by a security chain. DEVIN (20's) wiry, agitated, appears through the narrow gap.

DEVIN
Sup?

Glances at their badges.

JESSICA
My names Jessica, this is my partner,
Agent Larsen. We're from the F B I
financial fraud division. We want to
talk to you about your online
business.

Devin shakes his head 'no'.

LARSEN
Mister Bryant, we have a search
warrant --

Devin SLAMS the door shut. Larsen forcefully thrusts it ajar with his shoulder, CLANG.

Jessica crouches, peers inside, catches a glimpse of a shadow darting past a wall. The sound of a window pane SCRAPING up.

JESSICA
He's doing a runner!

Larsen takes a step back, draws his pistol. Kicks open the door, SMASH.

INT. APARTMENT - UNIT 103 - NIGHT

A desk cluttered with computers, laptops and cellphones. An E-commerce photo-shoot in progress with Covid 19 masks on a table. This guy has been scamming millions taking fake bulk orders.

They enter cautiously, guns aimed. The window is half open, Devin's escape foiled by its stiff wooden frame.

LARSEN

Devin?

A subtle HISSS from the kitchen. They approach, wincing from the overpowering smell of leaking gas.

INT. APARTMENT - UNIT 103 - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Devin, trembling, stands by an open stove brandishing a Zippo lighter, thumb at the ready.

The Agent's slowly enter, Glock's raised.

JESSICA

Put it down, Devin.

DEVIN

You aint taking me.

Larsen lowers his weapon.

LARSEN

You're not under arrest, we just have a search warrant.

Devin begins to sob. Larsen gestures for him to calm down, stifling gas permeates the air, HISSSSS.

LARSEN

We just have a search warrant.

Jessica aims rigidly.

JESSICA

Drop it! I won't ask you again.

Devin's eyes glaze over.

DEVIN

Then don't.

Extends his arm toward her, FLICKS it on.

LARSEN

No!

Larsen unloads his clip, BANG-BANG-BANG-BANG-BANG.

Devin's bullet riddled body staggers backward, CRASHES into the sink. The unlit Zippo slips from his grasp.

Jessica exhales, thanks Larsen with a nod.

LARSEN

Shut it off.

Jessica squats before the stove, covers her mouth with the front of her clothing.

Jars and utensils TOPPLE to the floor, generating a spark. The fumes ignite, FWOOSH, enveloping her in a fierce blaze. She SCREAMS.

LARSEN

Jessica!!

Drops to the floor, thrashing and rolling in a desperate attempt to extinguish the flames.

Larsen rips a tablecloth from a dining table, frantically attempts to smother the fire as she WAILS in agony.

With sheer determination, he drags her twitching, smoldering body out of the room, his forearm ablaze.

INT. APARTMENT - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Kneels on the floor, cradles her burnt cranium. Flames CRACKLE, smoke billows out through the open doorway.

Doors creak ajar, a few residents step out, startled by the commotion.

LARSEN

Call 9 1 1!

(pause)

Stay with me, Jess.

He hovers his singed fingers over her melted face and now bald skull, unsure of where to touch her.

LARSEN

Stay with me!!

FADE TO:

EXT. NEW ORLEANS - FOREST HIGHWAY - DAY

A vast wilderness blankets the landscape, stretching endlessly under the Louisiana sun. A desolate road cuts through its midst.

Parked by the curb is a weathered Cadillac, its purple paint faded and windows dusty. Within, a lone figure slumped in the driver's seat, sleeping.

Blackbirds TWITTER, red maple trees sway gracefully in the afternoon breeze.

INT. FOREST HIGHWAY - CAR - DAY

Larsen jerks awake with a GASP, his breath heavy and ragged. Unshaven, unkempt, wearing drab civilian clothing.

With trembling fingers, he struggles to push the door open, finally managing to swing it wide.

Steps out onto the dusty road, unsteady on his feet.

EXT. FOREST HIGHWAY - CAR - DAY

Walks to the rear of the vehicle, unlocks the trunk. It CREAKS open.

Reaches in and unlatches a weathered briefcase. Opens it.

LARSEN'S POV

A roll of cash.

Something wrapped in black cloth.

A folded up Louisiana sightseeing map.

Lifts it out, unfurls it.

Faded colors depict the state's diverse landscape, with rivers winding through lush greenery and dotted towns.

A single location is circled in pen with a scrawled note: "Riverside Tavern, ask for Maria"

BACK TO SCENE

Pockets the money, then takes the cloth. Unwraps it to reveal a revolver.

Smith and Wesson, one round in the chamber, safety on. Serial numbers filed off, completely untraceable.

INT. FOREST HIGHWAY - CAR - DAY

Sinks back into the driver's seat. Slides the map into the glove box, stuffs the briefcase on the passenger side floor.

Glances at the fuel gauge - less than 10 percent.

With a sputter, the Cadillac's ignition ROARS to life. Shifts it into gear and resumes his journey south.

EXT. FOREST HIGHWAY - CAR - DAY (TRAVELING)

A solitary car cruises down the deserted highway, the road stretching out endlessly ahead.

'Ride On' by 'AC/DC' plays on the radio.

Cruising.

An armada of Harley Davidson's approach.

Their staggered formation tightens as Larsen passes by their leather clad forms, engines GURGLING.

Cruising.

The stifling Louisiana sun beats down.

Larsen overtakes a plodding trailer truck, its cargo of livestock fuss about in their cages, yearning to be set free.

INT. FOREST HIGHWAY - CAR - DAY (TRAVELING)

Cruising.

The music gradually dissolves into STATIC. Stations fade in and out, struggling for reception.

PREACHER (ON RADIO)

...and they asked Jesus, when we die,
how can it be said, that we live
again? Brethren, the flesh is weak,
but your soul is eternal...

PROLONGED STATIC

Switches if off, click.

Cruising.

In the distance, a blurry shape begins to materialize on the horizon.

EXT. FOREST HIGHWAY - GAS STATION - DAY

A corrugated iron shack adorned with faded and rusted signage. Partially concealed under a tarpaulin, a World War Two helicopter rests behind a back fence. A single gas pump, itself a vintage relic.

Larsen pulls in, suspension SQUEAKS in protest over uneven ground.

He parks, kicking up a cloud of dust. Kills the ignition.

With a CREAK, the door swings open, breaking the eerie silence.

Steps out.

Ascends a rickety wooden patio, toward the dark void beyond the shack's open doorway. A wind chime TINKLES.

INT. FOREST HIGHWAY — GAS STATION — DAY

Dim fluorescent lights, a weathered linoleum floor. Shelves stocked with dusty provisions. An antique cash register sits atop a scarred counter-top beside a small tube TV blaring a soap opera.

LARSEN

Hello?

ED (O.S.)

Awrite!

EXT. FOREST HIGHWAY — GAS STATION — DAY

Larsen whirls, startled. ED (60's) shabby, rugged, stands by the Cadillac wiping down a carburetor with a rag.

ED

What can I do ya for?

Flashes a gap-toothed grin as Larsen approaches.

LARSEN

Just the gas.

ED

Pump's a no go. Tanker doesn't show up 'til next week.

Larsen's expression tightens, runs a hand through his hair with an exasperated sigh.

ED

Quit worryin'.

Ed hefts a gas canister and begins to refuel manually. Larsen takes a step back, covers his mouth and nose.

ED

Y'get used to it sooner or later.

(pouring)

A yank are ya? What brings ya to N'awlins?

LARSEN

Uh, work. In Salt Creek.

ED

F'true? That's forty kays away. Ya got buckley's of makin' it tonight, what with the storms and all.

Distant THUNDER erupts, almost punctuating his words.

Sets down the empty can with a CLANG.

ED
 Lets call it sixty bucks.

Larsen slips him a glistening 100 dollar bill.

LARSEN
 Keep the change.

Ed eagerly follows him as he settles into the car.

INT. FOREST HIGHWAY – GAS STATION – CAR – DAY

The engine THROTTLES to life, Ed leans his elbows on the windowsill with a satisfied grin.

ED
 Tell ya what, Roadway Inn's about ten clicks up yonder.

He points a grease stained finger toward the landscape.

ED
 They'll put ya up for the night.

Ed looks at the briefcase.

ED
 Then ya can mosey on in to Salt Creek in the mornin' all spruced up, aye?

LARSEN
 I'll be fine, thanks anyway.

ED
 Well aint that dandy.

Storms off in a huff.

ED
 Head on out there, see if ya don't get caught up.
 (mumbling)
 No skin off my nose.

With a sigh, Larsen lurches the car back onto the highway with a resounding VROOM.

INT. FOREST HIGHWAY – CAR (TRAVELING)

He accelerates, steals a glance into the rear-view mirror.

Ed stands rigid, his stance statuesque, watching him drive away with a blank stare.

Larsen frowns, a hint of unease across his face.

EXT. FOREST HIGHWAY - CAR - NIGHT (TRAVELING)

The Cadillac hurtles down the road, the only traveler amidst the darkness.

Thunder and lightning streak across the sky, illuminating the path ahead.

Patchy rain intensifies, swelling into a downpour, drumming against the windshield with increasing ferocity.

INT. FOREST HIGHWAY - CAR - NIGHT (TRAVELING)

Bright lights emerge from the blackness, gradually growing in luminescence.

An imposing supermarket freight truck looms into view, its size dominating the night as it ROARS past.

Larsen strains his eyes through the pivoting windshield wipers, a rhythmic SWISH-SWISH cuts through the pounding rain.

Catches sight of the faint glow of a neon sign, a beacon of civilization in the darkness ahead.

EXT. FOREST HIGHWAY - ROADWAY INN - NIGHT

A quaint two-story facade with a decorative veranda. Potted plants hanging from chains on the second-floor balcony sway in the wind.

A Volkswagen adorned with confetti and graffiti occupies the empty bitumen parking lot, devoid of any designated spaces.

Larsen pulls in and parks. Headlights dim.

INT. ROADWAY INN - CAR - NIGHT

Switches off the engine. His gaze sweeps over the exterior, obscured by the relentless rain battering the windshield.

Sees the flimsy steel fire escape balcony clinging to the buildings side, noting its location as a potential escape route.

Steps out, recoiling from the deluge, hastens his pace toward the entrance.

INT. ROADWAY INN – LOBBY - NIGHT

A chandelier casts a dim glow over pale wallpaper and worn carpet with a faded diamond pattern. The muted pattering of drizzle on the tin roof.

Ahead, there's a reception desk, to the left, a rickety staircase.

An amorous NEWLY-WED COUPLE (20's) wrapped in each other's embrace, ascend it drunkenly, giggling.

Seated at reception is MAUDE (50's), a large well-spoken lady adorned with bulbous jewelry and gaudy makeup, casually filing her nails.

As Larsen approaches, she examines him from head to toe.

MAUDE

Well hello. And how many are we accommodating?

LARSEN

Myself. Just tonight.

She slides a clipboard across the desk, absentmindedly playing with her earring.

MAUDE

Some light reading, then your autograph at the bottom.

Larsen glances through a list of arbitrary rules: no loud music, no smoking, checkout at 10 am.

His cellphone vibrates in his pocket. Slips it out.

RING-RING

LARSEN

Excuse me, I have to...my daughter.

Turns around for privacy, presses it to his ear

LARSEN

(hushed)

I'm working.

(pause)

On the top shelf, next to the coffee.

(pause)

No, don't stand on anything. Please just...eat something else until I get back, ok?

(pause)

Good girl.

END CALL

Maude smirks.

MAUDE
She sounds like a bundle of joy.

Larsen returns his attention to the clipboard. Reaches for a pen attached to a string that barely has enough length to reach the page.

Pauses at the entry requiring his signature.

MAUDE
What's the matter sweetheart,
forgotten your name?

Flustered, Larsen scribbles "John Doe" and slides it back to her.

Maude quickly glances left and right, leans forward in her squeaking chair.

MAUDE
(whispering)
On a secret mission, hmm?

Then bellows at the top of her lungs.

MAUDE
Rupert?!

Maude's husband, RUPERT (50's) pops his head up from behind the counter holding a screwdriver. A small fellow, sweating profusely behind circular-rimmed glasses.

MAUDE
Attend to the gentleman's bags now.

LARSEN
I can manage.

Maude selects an over-sized room key from a wall rack, its jingling echoes in the quiet lobby. Presses it into Larsen's palm with a knowing look.

MAUDE
Room seven. Top of the stairs, end of
the hall. It's a stone's throw from
mine should you...need anything?

He accepts the key, but Maude's grip remains firm.

Tugging unsuccessfully, he resorts to using brute force to snatch it away. Maude responds with the best seductive smile her age can muster.

Larsen frowns, trudges up the staircase to his room.

MAUDE (O.S.)
 (to Rupert)
 Fix that hinge, or I'll fix you!

INT. ROADWAY INN – UPSTAIRS – NIGHT

A garishly decorated corridor lined with numbered doors on both sides. Sporadic flashes of THUNDER cast eerie shadows against the walls.

A rhythmic, muted thud resonates from the newly-weds room as he walks toward it, passionate MOANS grow louder.

Ahead, a figure lurks in the dark, his ear pressed against a wall, listening intently.

A flash of lightning briefly illuminates him, revealing BILLY (20's) Maude and Rupert's son. Lanky, a bit simple, wielding a dustpan and broom.

He straightens up, then sheepishly sweeps an already clean floor as Larsen continues down the hallway.

BILLY
 Evenin' Mister...

Billy retreats into a nearby storage room and swiftly locks the door, CLICK, disappearing from sight.

Larsen spots the fire escape door, confirming it leads to the balcony he saw earlier.

INT. ROADWAY INN – ROOM 7 – NIGHT

Tattered curtains, a sunken-spring bed next to a tacky side table. In the top drawer, a pristine Gideon's Bible.

Adorning the peeling wallpapered walls is a framed painting of a bayou. A solitary window offers a sweeping view of the mundane car park outside.

Larsen sets down the suitcase. Looks up at a ceiling mounted smoke detector.

Then systematically searches the room, unplugging each electrical device, TV, lamp, mini-fridge.

Sits on the bed, equips his cellphone.

RING-RING

RING-RING

LARSEN

It's me.

(pause)

Crashing in a hotel, be there tomorrow. You all set?

(pause)

Talk soon.

END CALL

Headlights beam in through the window as a large van pulls in outside - a 90's Ford Econoline with tinted glass. Larsen shields his eyes, closes the blinds.

Slumps onto the bed, exhausted.

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE

- Darkness.

- Silence.

- A white light, the size of a pinhead.

- Glowing brighter as we accelerate toward it.

- And brighter.

- The sound of crackling FLAMES intensifies.

- And brighter, closer.

- Abruptly, the whites of two eyes.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. ROADWAY INN - ROOM 7 - DAY

Larsen awakens in a cold sweat, breathing heavy as he fumbles for his cellphone. It's 11:39 AM, realizes he's overslept.

INT. ROADWAY INN - LOBBY - DAY

Larsen proceeds to check out, carefully navigating around Rupert who stands precariously on a step-ladder replacing a bulb on the chandelier.

MAUDE

Welcome back to the land of the living.

She stretches out her hand for payment, Larsen begrudgingly pays for an extra night.

MAUDE
I trust you had a pleasant stay?

LARSEN
Unforgettable.

EXT. ROADWAY INN - CAR PARK - DAY

Larsen passes by Billy who is tossing garbage into a dumpster.

BILLY
Dere watchin' you...

Larsen halts.

LARSEN
Who?

Billy looks down.

BILLY
Bet I know where you got dem shoes.

Larsen relents, slips him some cash from his pocket.

BILLY
(pointing)
Dem fella's, in the van.

The newly-wed's Volkswagen is gone, but the Ford from last night remains.

Larsen approaches, peers inside the vehicle. Empty.

He turns.

LARSEN
There's no one h --

Billy has vanished.

Larsen looks up at the overlooking hotel windows, but sees nothing.

BILLY (O.S.)
Life is a bowl of gumbo.

LARSEN
Life...what?

Larsen curses himself for being conned out of cash.

INT. ROADWAY INN - ROOM 3 - DAY

ACE (20's) sprawls across a patchwork sofa, posture relaxed and carefree.

A skinny, mute redneck, he's folding an A4 photocopy of the guest register into a paper plane.

His brother, COOTER (30's) obese and unkempt, stands by the window, his bulk partly obscured by half-drawn curtains.

He peaks out, watching as Larsen's Cadillac drives out of the car park.

Presses a cellphone to his ear.

COOTER
It's him, for sure.
(pause)
Yep, Ed saw the briefcase.
(pause)
Will do, boss.

END CALL

Ace tosses his paper plane into the air, watching with satisfaction as it gracefully floats airborne.

EXT. SALT CREEK - CAR - DAY (TRAVELING)

Larsen cruises along the road, approaching the town ahead.

The outlines of the parish emerge, colorful rooftops and unique architecture jut up into the horizon.

Passes by a frail wooden sign by the curb: "Welcome to Salt Creek - Laissez les bons temps rouler"

He screeches to a halt at a rail crossing devoid of any warning signs, a freight train barrels past him, horn BLARING.

Idles impatiently, watching the endless stream of shipping containers and grain silos CHUG past.

The tracks finally clear. Larsen drives at a leisurely pace along a double-wide dirt road, engine humming, searching for Riverside Tavern.

TOWNSFOLK bustle about, engrossed in their daily routines. His gaze catches various landmarks along the way.

A post office, its weathered exterior accompanied by an American flag and an empty park-bench.

A grocery store with a boarded-up window, a neon 'Open' sign visible behind the bars of its caged security entrance.

Rounding a corner, a church steeple rises solemnly. White weather-board walls contrasting with its vibrant stained glass windows.

As Larsen continues, he suddenly veers off, parking in front of a pub.

EXT. SALT CREEK - RIVERSIDE TAVERN - DAY

A balconied brick building with floor-to-ceiling wooden shutters swung open. Garlands of leafy vines hang on the railings above 'a la carte' dining tables and chairs.

Above the door, a cursive font declares its establishment in 1891. A notice scrawled on a chalkboard reads: "Open seven days a week unless we're hungover"

INT. RIVERSIDE TAVERN - DAY

Poker machines, framed paintings, an empty jazz stage with fairy lights. Rustic lanterns hang from wooden beams in the ceiling. Along one wall, hundreds of thumb-tacked one-dollar bills, each from a different country.

Larsen steps inside, his gaze warily drawn to a large open hearth fireplace. Though unlit, it unsettles him.

He stands still, gaze fixed.

A loud CRACK startles him; it's just two PATRON'S playing billiards.

Tending the bar is BARRY (50's) rugged, handlebar mustache and tattoos, arranging beer glasses on a shelf, back turned.

Above his hulking broad shoulders, a pair of taxidermied bull horns are mounted on the wall.

Larsen chooses a stool and sits down. Across from him, MAX (70's) clad in a frayed suit and tie, casually sips on his 20th beer as if it were nothing.

Completely indifferent to Larsen's presence, engrossed in a wiener dog race playing live on TV.

LARSEN
(to Barry)
Looking for Maria.

Barry's back remains to Larsen as he dries another glass.

BARRY
Yeah?
(wiping)
And who might you be?

LARSEN
I'm here to talk to her, not you.

Barry SLAMS the glass down and whirls around, chest puffed up as he steps forward.

Larsen remains unmoved, more due to fatigue than bravado.

Max is fixated on the race, more concerned with whether 'Cosmic Rumble' will overtake 'Swift Fancy' to earn first place than any impending bar brawl.

A door to the left CREAKS open, MARIA (30's) emerges from a side office. She appears composed, with a no-nonsense demeanor.

MARIA
Baz, simmer down.

She gestures for Larsen to enter.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Business. Give us fifteen.

Barry complies like a trained rottweiler, resumes his task.

INT. RIVERSIDE TAVERN - OFFICE - DAY

Steel filing cabinets, bookshelves, a cork-board tacked with paraphernalia and post-it notes.

Maria is seated at a cluttered desk, papers piled high around a computer and scattered stationery. A rotating ceiling fan HUMS above them.

MARIA
Take a seat.

Larsen settles into a lounge chair opposite her. She examines him closely.

MARIA
You're one day late.

LARSEN
Car trouble.

She swivels in her chair, slides open a drawer.

MARIA
You said you can fix my problem.

Retrieves a Polaroid photo of her husband, FRANK (40's) a burly, brutish man, and places it down. It's been removed from a frame and cropped with scissors.

MARIA
Address is on the back.

Larsen takes it, flips it over. A neatly written message reads: "1367 L'Eglise Street, Bayou Ridge"

LARSEN
What do you want done?

Maria twirls her fingers through shoulder-length hair, brushed forward to hide a facial bruise.

MARIA
I won't bore you with what he's done to me.
(pause)
I want him to disappear.

Larsen slips the photo into his jacket pocket.

LARSEN
Disappear? So you want him out of this parish, or...you know?

MARIA
I...I want to hurt him.

LARSEN
Do you want him hurt or do you want him dead? I have to know, Maria. Big difference.

She reclines, lost in thought.

MARIA
Every day I ask myself, do I still love him?
(pause)
My sister says that's just learned helplessness. Reckons I should do it myself.

She retrieves a pack of cigarettes.

Lights one up, takes a deep inhale. The tiny flame causes Larsen to flinch.

Jessica SCREAMS, an ethereal echo.

Maria expels a volley of smoke from her lungs, he's visibly anxious, heart rate accelerating.

MARIA
Yeah, I know, quitting is on my to do list.
(pause)
Want me to stop?

Larsen takes deep, meditative breaths, his brow beads with sweat as he struggles to calm himself.

LARSEN

No.

Stares at the burning ember, a perfect circle, radiating a pulsating glow.

LARSEN

Gradual exposure, they call it.
(exhales)
Let's cut to the chase.

Maria taps some ash into an ashtray, her fingers clatter over a keyboard.

MARIA

Half now, as discussed.

Presses 'Enter'.

MARIA

The other half when he's staring at a morgue ceiling.

Maria scrutinizes him, concerned with his capacity to complete the job.

LARSEN

It's nothing.
(pause)
I can still pull a trigger.

The droning ceiling fan spins above them, filling the room with a monotonous HUM.

INT. SALT CREEK - STREET - CAR - DAY

Larsen huddles in the Cadillac, determination etched on his face. Carefully places Frank's photo in an evidence satchel.

Unbuttons a cuff-link on his shirt wrist to reveal a miniature microphone inside. Raises it to his lips.

EXT. SALT CREEK - STREET - DAY

Rustic buildings bathed in the warm glow of the afternoon sun.

FBI Agent HURLEY (30's) professional with a reckless edge, discreetly mingles outside the Tavern wearing a concealed ear-piece, awaiting instructions.

Casually waves 'Hello' at two passing GIRLS.

LARSEN (V.O.)
Stand down, Hurley.

He quickly scans his surroundings before replying.

HURLEY
Let's make a move. We got her for
conspiracy to commit.

LARSEN (V.O.)
It's not enough.

INT. SALT CREEK - STREET - CAR - DAY

Larsen latches his seatbelt, click.

HURLEY (V.O.)
O'Hara's gonna be pissed.

LARSEN
I'll handle that.
(pause)
Maintain surveillance on the sister.
Check in with you later.

HURLEY (V.O.)
Copy that.

Kicks in the ignition, the Car ROARS to life.

Drives out of Salt Creek toward Maria's marital home on the outskirts of town.

Thunder RUMBLES ominously overhead, signaling the approach of another storm.

INT. SALT CREEK - RIVERSIDE TAVERN - OFFICE - DAY

Maria paces anxiously, her cellphone CHIMES. Swipes to a text message on an encrypted app.

USER328 (TEXT)
Tonight, ten P M.

MARIA (TEXT)
Not that simple.

USER328 (TEXT)
He's always drunk after Euchre,
you'll have the advantage.

MARIA (TEXT)
I'm scared.

USER328 (TEXT)

Everything's going to be ok. Aim and squeeze, just like I showed you.

EXT. FOREST - CAR - NIGHT

Amidst towering trees, Larsen is discreetly parked behind shrubbery about 100 meters from the front of Maria's house.

Positioned directly facing the dirt driveway leading up to its silhouetted exterior and sprawling front porch.

From his vantage point, he has a clear view of the adjoining highway from both directions; perfect spot for a stakeout.

The property is expansive, spanning twenty acres. Trees of varying heights line an uneven perimeter fence, the nearest neighbor half a mile away.

EXT. FOREST - HOUSE - NIGHT

A charming two-story Creole cottage elevated on brick pilings, twin chimneys ascend from its pitched roof.

Through an upper floor window, Maria's silhouette moves about inside the dimly lit home.

Alone, no sign of Frank.

She shuts the blinds, a bath towel slung over her shoulder.

INT. FOREST - CAR - NIGHT

Larsen, on his cellphone, nestles in the driver's seat, making the most of the limited comfort it provides.

LARSEN

What did you get up to today?

Outside, rain pelts down relentlessly, the darkened heavens above pulsate with lightning.

LARSEN (CONT'D)

How's your sleep? Any nightmares?

(pause)

Too much screen time will do that. Your eyes will become square if --

(pause)

I know you're not a baby.

(pause)

Sorry.

RING-RING

Incoming call from: O'HARA

Larsen's superior at the FBI, a tough and authoritative woman in her 50's. Driven by success, prioritizing results over empathy.

LARSEN
Have to go.
(pause)
Work.

Larsen swipes the screen.

LARSEN
Ma'am --

O'HARA (ON PHONE)
What happened, Larsen?

LARSEN
She pulled an E T F on me. It'll take one day for the funds to clear.

O'HARA (ON PHONE)
What possessed you to give her an account number?

LARSEN
She asked.

O'HARA (ON PHONE)
The agreement was cash.

LARSEN
Had to play along.

O'HARA (ON PHONE)
She onto you?

LARSEN
I don't think so.

O'HARA (ON PHONE)
Don't make me wade through encryption and obfuscation tracing a payment. We need something tangible, admissible.

LARSEN
Twenty four hours. I have eyes on her.

O'HARA (ON PHONE)
Don't fuck up, Larsen.

He massages the skin graft on his forearm.

LARSEN
Yes, Ma'am.

END CALL

Content with the solitude and the rhythmic rain on the roof, Larsen succumbs to exhaustion, slips into a deep sleep.

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE

- Darkness.
- Silence.
- A white light, the size of a pinhead.
- Glowing brighter as we accelerate toward it.
- And brighter.
- The sound of crackling FLAMES intensifies.
- And brighter, closer.
- Abruptly, the whites of two eyes.
- Jessica SCREAMS.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

Larsen awakens, gasping for air. Takes a moment to steady his breathing.

Hands shaking, he reaches for his cellphone. Swipes it on.

EXT. SALT CREEK - STREET - NIGHT

A Mardi Gras parade winds its way through the parish. Floats adorned with intricate designs, the rhythmic BEAT of drums.

Neon signs illuminate bars and cafes overflowing with patrons, JAZZ music drifts from open doorways. The aroma of Cajun cuisine wafts from street vendors and restaurants.

Revelers in elaborate costumes dance and mingle along the sidewalks. Beads and trinkets are tossed into the air, a kaleidoscope of color against the backdrop of the night sky.

INT. SALT CREEK - JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

Plush velvet curtains grace the walls, ambient lights cast a warm glow on tables adorned with crimson tablecloths, each set with flickering candles.

Vintage leather booths line the perimeter. A 5-piece swing band BOOGIE on stage, adding to the sultry atmosphere.

Hurley sits alone, his presence discreet, sipping an Abita Amber.

RING-RING

Incoming call from: Larsen

Plugs one ear with his finger, projects his voice over a raucous brass band BLARING in the street.

HURLEY

Hey.

LARSEN (ON PHONE)

What's the latest on Frank?

Revelers CHEER and dance as the procession parades past outside the window.

HURLEY

O'Hara wants to bring him in.
Protective custody. □

LARSEN (ON PHONE)

It's better he knows nothing. What do you have on his assets?

HURLEY

Looked into Riverside Tavern, pulled the land owners title deed from the archives.

(takes a sip)

Frank doesn't just own the pub, he owns land. Eighty hectares, all inherited. Runs a few business's in the French quarter, all looks above board.

INT. FOREST - CAR - NIGHT

Larsen's eyes remain fixed on the house. Shadows dance across the windows, obscuring any glimpse of activity inside.

HURLEY (ON PHONE)

He croaks, she's in for a big payday.

Larsen sighs.

LARSEN

True love, at its finest.

HURLEY (ON PHONE)

Where are you?

LARSEN

At the house. You?

INT. SALT CREEK - JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

Hurley raises his cellphone camera toward a group of young GIRLS sipping Sazerac's and gorging on king-cake.

Among them is GABRIELA (20's) Maria's unbetrothed sister, exuding confidence with a sharp wit.

HURLEY
Maintaining surveillance.

LARSEN (ON PHONE)
Pfft.

He adjusts the phones angle, revealing the Mardi Gras parade outside.

HURLEY
Here they don't hide the crazies,
they parade them down the street.

INT. FOREST - CAR - NIGHT

Larsen's attention is caught by approaching headlights on the highway, VROOM; it's just a passing car.

LARSEN
Still believe the sisters a co
conspirator?

HURLEY (ON PHONE)
Maria's been messaging someone. Don't
know who yet.

INT. SALT CREEK - JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

Gabriela dances, moving with sensual grace, body swaying rhythmically to the music.

HURLEY
Did she ask to see the gun?

LARSEN (ON PHONE)
No need. Thinks I'm the real deal.

Takes another swig.

HURLEY
You should be here, man.

INT. FOREST - CAR - NIGHT

LARSEN
Not my scene.

HURLEY (ON PHONE)
What happened wasn't your fault.

LARSEN
Don't start.

HURLEY (ON PHONE)
Did you see the article I sent?

LARSEN
I know how combustion works.

HURLEY (ON PHONE)
It's like I said, danger is real,
fear is an illusion.

LARSEN
Don't play therapist. If you want to
educate me, explain what gumbo is.

HURLEY (ON PHONE)
Huh?

LARSEN
Life is a bowl of gumbo.

HURLEY (ON PHONE)
Been mixing with the locals?

LARSEN
Could say that.

HURLEY (ON PHONE)
Life is, you know, unexpected. Never
know what's bubbling beneath the
surface.

INT. SALT CREEK - JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

The band grinds to a halt, the music crescendos with brushed CYMBALS and trilling SAXOPHONE. PATRON'S erupt into WHOOPS, a cacophony of clapping hands.

LARSEN (ON PHONE)
Got it, I think. Touch base tomorrow.

HURLEY
Copy that.

END CALL

Gabriela abruptly shouts with joy, removes a small plastic baby figurine from her king-cake and holds it aloft.

Her eyes dart around the room until they lock onto Hurley's. Her friends giggle and playfully urge her forward.

She makes her way over to his table. He hesitates, showing reluctance.

HURLEY
Good fortune?

GABRIELA
Something like that.

Tucks his cellphone into a jacket pocket. Gabriela perches herself on his lap.

GABRIELA
Who was that?

HURLEY
Um, the wife. Told me to keep it in my pants.

She feigns disappointment.

GABRIELA
Awww.

TRUMPETER (O.S.)
How y'all doin' tonight? This one's for all the lovebirds in the house.□

Raises her glass for a toast. Hurley follows suit, playing it cool, resisting the urge to whisk her away.

GABRIELA
To monogamy.

CLINK

INT. FOREST - CAR - NIGHT (LATER)

Larsen snoozes, the rhythmic sound of rain having lulled him into a light slumber. Thunder and lightning CRACK the sky.

A pickup truck saunters past. Turns into the driveway, headlights illuminate a padlocked wrought iron gate.

Larsen groans awake.

Frank emerges from the idling vehicle, a bit tipsy. Strolls over and unlatches it. Rusty hinges CREAK open.

Settles back into the truck and ascends the muddied path toward the house, oblivious to Larsen's watchful eye hidden in the darkness.

EXT. FOREST - HOUSE - NIGHT

Parks, steps out.

Strides up the patio steps, footsteps muffled by the rain-soaked earth.

Disappears inside, closing the door softly behind him.

INT. FOREST - CAR - NIGHT

Larsen remains vigilant, senses heightened as he continues to observe.

A muzzle flash illuminates an upper floor window, BANG, Larsen flinches.

Deep undercover with no badge or sidearm, he reaches for the hitman revolver. Leaps out, sprints toward the house.

EXT. FOREST - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Edging closer, criss-crossing between aging tree trunks.

A herd of cows graze on the wet grass, their forms barely visible in the dim moonlight. One of them watches Larsen inquisitively with glazed eyes as he rushes past.

EXT. FOREST - HOUSE - NIGHT

Navigates around Maria's 80's model Mercedes Benz beside Frank's pickup, rushes up the banistered patio steps.

Deafening THUNDER reverberates across the sky, rain PUMMELS. A single light emanates from within the upstairs bedroom.

It flickers off, plunging the house into darkness.

Larsen kicks open the front door, SMASH, wood SPLINTERS, glass SHATTERS.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

He enters, gun drawn.

To the left, the silhouette of a kitchen area.

The grille and an array of electrical appliances scattered on the bench-top taunt him.

Slams his back against a wall, breaths labored and erratic.

LARSEN

Maria Talbot? Agent Larsen, F B I.

To the right, a staircase leads upward into darkness.

He moves toward it.

Somewhere above, an item TOPPLES off a shelf. Then, a fleeting shadow of movement.

Larsen halts, pistol trained upward. The unknown object CLATTERS across the floor before finally coming to a stop.

LARSEN
Miss Talbot? I'm coming up.

Larsen ascends cautiously, gun at the ready. Aged wood CREAKS under his weight with each step.

LARSEN
Frank? Mister Talbot, are you ok?

INT. HOUSE - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Larsen arrives on the second floor. Ahead, about half way down, the closed bathroom door is on his left.

At the end, the master bedroom door awaits, slightly ajar.

He creeps forward, footsteps muffled by the carpeted floor. The subtle TRICKLE of a flowing faucet.

LARSEN
Maria?

INT. HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Larsen bursts inside, gun raised. The room lies vacant.

A gilded mirror above a marble sink, tiled walls and a polished oak floor. All bathed in a crystal chandelier.

Hot steam billows from the sink, thickening as water flows.

Larsen exhales; it's just moisture. Reaches his arm through the foggy void, switches it off with a metallic SQUEAK.

Silence falls like a heavy blanket.

INT. HOUSE - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Advances toward the bedroom. Thunder ERUPTS, accompanied by a blinding flash of light that spills into the corridor.

LARSEN
Maria, lower the weapon.
(pause)
It's self defense. I understand, ok?

Softly pushes the door open.

INT. HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Pitch black darkness. The silhouette of a king-size bed draped in silk blankets, surrounded by intricately carved bedside tables and elegant dressers.

Then, an extended volley of THUNDER lights up the boudoir like a macabre theater stage.

Maria sits upright in bed, eyes wide open in a haunting stare, a bullet hole in her forehead. Blood is spattered on an elaborately framed painting that hangs above her.

Larsen gasps.

FRANK (O.S.)
Hello sunshine.

He whirls, THUMP - is knocked unconscious, collapses to the floor.

Frank appears from the shadows, latex gloved-hands clutching the Beretta pistol that shot her. Stands over him, peering down.

With a chilling calmness, he crouches and retrieves the revolver from Larsen's grip.

FRANK
I'll take that.

Replaces it with the murder weapon, curling fingers around the handle and onto the trigger.

FRANK
This ones yours.

Stands, walks to the bed. Flicks on a side lamp, a dull orange glow fills the room.

Then, lifts Maria's flaccid wrist and positions the revolver in her hand.

Equips his cellphone.

RING-RING

RING-RING

DISPATCHER (ON PHONE)
9 1 1, what is your emergency?

FRANK
Someone's in me house...send help!

Sets speaker mode, places it on the dresser.

DISPATCHER (ON PHONE)
What address are you at sir?

FRANK
1367 L'Eglise Street, Bayou Ridge.
Hurry would'ya!

Frank drags Larsen into a slumped sitting position, his back against the wall, directly within range of Maria's cadaver.

DISPATCHER (ON PHONE)
Ok, help is on the way. Where is the person now?

FRANK
I dunno!

Larsen groans awake, dazed, disoriented.

DISPATCHER (ON PHONE)
Stay calm. Officers are en route. Is there anywhere safe you can get to in the meantime?

FRANK
I'm in the bathroom.

Frank returns to Maria's side.

DISPATCHER (ON PHONE)
Stay where you are, lock any doors or windows.

Lifts her hand and aims the gun at Larsen, weak and unmoving.

LARSEN
No...stop --

Presses a finger against the trigger.

BANG

The bullet tears through Larsen's torso, jolting him backward, blood spatters the wall. He slumps motionless.

FRANK
He shot her.

DISPATCHER (ON PHONE)
Sir?

FRANK
My missus, he...

DISPATCHER (ON PHONE)
Stay on the line --

Frank hangs up.

END CALL

Readjusts the aim and pulls the trigger again, only to be met with the hollow CLICK of an empty chamber.

FRANK
Darnit!

The wail of approaching SIRENS pierces the air. Frank whirls, rushes to the window.

FRANK'S POV

Red and blue lights oscillate on the horizon, a blur against the canopy of forest.

BACK TO SCENE

Slips off the gloves. Then stoops before the dresser mirror, trying on a 'sad' face.

INT. HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT (LATER)

The SNAP and WHIR of a forensic camera. PERKINS (40's) bookish and socially awkward, meticulously documents the scene.

Dressed in a jumpsuit, he steps carefully around chalk marks inscribed on the floor, bullet casings within.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Parked Police cars illuminate the wet ground with flashing lights, casting an eerie glow.

A team of OFFICER'S move about, questioning concerned NEIGHBOURS, while others secure the perimeter.

An Ambulance sits nearby, rear double-doors wide open. Two PARAMEDIC'S maneuver Maria's stretchered body inside.

The doors SLAM shut.

INT. HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Officer GARY (50's) enters. Somewhat cunning and morally flexible, willing to bend the rules to secure an arrest.

Accompanying him is Officer TIM (20's) a fresh-faced and eager recruit, a hint of naivety in his eyes - a wannabe Detective, working his way up.

Tim struggles to maintain composure, hides his discomfort with a forced cough.

Gary senses his unease.

GARY
What's wrong?

Tim hesitates.

TIM
Nothing, sir.

Gary gives him a reassuring thump on the shoulder.

GARY
Toughen up.
(pause)
Perkins, out.

PERKINS
I'm done, anyways.

Perkins exits the room carrying evidence bags, demeanor subdued.

Gary stands inside the open door frame, surveys the carnage with a practiced eye.

GARY
So, the assailant has entered from here...

Tim listens solemnly.

GARY (CONT'D)
...the vic, who's been awoken by his presence, has retrieved a gun from the bedside drawer.

Gary walks over to the blood-soaked bed.

GARY
She's popped him once, from here. The perp has then returned fire, shootin' her in the head.

Moves to the wall where Larsen was slumped.

GARY
At this point, the husband, who was showerin' at the time, has heard the commotion, entered...and knocked him unconscious.

Tim squats on the bloodied floor, inspects the bullet hole in the wall.

Looks up at Gary.

TIM
Why is the trajectory so low?

GARY
We're done here, Sherlock.

Gary exits.

Tim rises, ponders for a moment. Then follows.

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE

- Darkness.
- Silence.
- A white light, the size of a pinhead.
- Glowing brighter as we accelerate toward it.
- And brighter.
- The sound of crackling FLAMES intensifies.
- And brighter, closer.
- Abruptly, the whites of two eyes.
- Jessica SCREAMS.
- Her mangled corpse inside a zipped-up body bag.

END DREAM SEQUENCE.

EXT. HOUSE - AMBULANCE - NIGHT

Larsen gasps awake, scans his surroundings frantically, breath rasping. Realizes he's lying on a stretcher.

A Paramedic, SANDY (20's) compassionate, diligent, tends to his wound.

SANDY
Lay back now, I got you.

Larsen groans, senses slowly returning as Sandy wraps a bandage around his shoulder, moving aside the scissored fabric of his shirt.

SANDY
What's your name?

He watches her, dazed.

LARSEN
L-larsen...

SANDY
I'm Sandy. You're gonna be ok,
Larsen.

She equips a penlight.

SANDY
What's the last thing you remember?

Shines it into his pupils.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

- A close-up of Maria's lit cigarette, circular tip glowing brightly.

- Flames CRACKLE.

END FLASHBACK

Larsen jolts upright, attempts to get off the stretcher. She gently pushes him back down.

SANDY
Steady now, champ.
(pause)
Take it easy.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Tim interrogates Frank, skepticism in the Officer's posture.

TIM
Mister Talbot, we recovered a Smith
and Wesson revolver, model sixty six
if my knowledge serves. Who owns that
firearm?

Frank feigns distress, dabbing his eyes as if wiping away tears.

FRANK
(sniffling)
Never seen it before.

TIM
Yet it was in a table drawer next to
your marital bed.

FRANK
I'm not really in the mood for a
yarn, Timmy.

A vehicle approaches, headlights glaring, Frank's attention shifts.

It pulls in, skids to a stop in a spray of mud. It's the same van from the Roadway Inn.

Cooter steps out. Ace remains inside, resting his arms on the steering wheel. Chilling to a cassette tape of Heavy Metal playing on the stereo.

TIM
Sir, you said you were showering, yet
you were fully clothed. Your hair --

FRANK
You accusin' me of somethin', baw?

Cooter strolls over, stands in between them. Gives Tim an intimidating stare. Ace cranks up the volume.

COOTER
Ya'll let the man grieve.

Tim backs off.

Turns and walks away.

TIM (O.S.)
We'll pick this up later, Frank.

Frank and Cooter huddle closer.

COOTER
(whispering)
He ain't dead, boss.

Frank seethes.

FRANK
That pea shooter only had one slug.
I'll handle it.

EXT. HOUSE - AMBULANCE - NIGHT

Gary strides toward Sandy, Larsen recoils.

GARY
Why didn't ya tell us he was
conscious?

Motions Sandy aside and grapples at her patient.

Larsen resists. In the struggle, he rips out his cuff-link microphone and presses it into her hand.

She instinctively closes her fingers around it as he's yanked out of the stretcher.

Gary frisks him, overzealous and aggressive.

SANDY
Ease up, Tim already checked him
over.

Gary persists, patting, pressing. Larsen grimaces.

Sandy shoots him a pointed look, a gleam of dishonesty in her eyes.

SANDY
He's clean.

Gary begrudgingly concludes the pat-down. Unfastens JINGLING handcuffs from his utility belt.

GARY
Hands behind your back.

Larsen's arms contort, blood seeps from the gauze.

GARY
Wrists together.

Sandy edges closer.

SANDY
From the front! Unless you want to be
transporting a corpse.

Gary halts, slightly annoyed, and abides. Slaps them on, CLICK.

GARY
You're under arrest for murder, d'ya
understand that?

LARSEN
N-no...

SANDY
He's clearly unfit for interview,
Sir.

Proceeds to drag his prisoner away.

GARY
Patchin' up a class A felon, just
like that?

Sandy remains stoic.

SANDY
(quoting)
No one is good, no, not one --

GARY
Don't evangelize me, Sandra.

Gary marches Larsen to his waiting Police car, reading him his rights obligatorily along the way.

SANDY (O.S.)
Keep an eye on the dressing! I'll be
down the station tomorrow to check on
him!

EXT. HOUSE - POLICE CAR - NIGHT

Tim stands waiting as Gary and Larsen approach.

Larsen watches the young Officer despairingly as Gary shoves him in the back seat.

GARY
I'm takin' him.

SLAMS the door shut, then gestures toward the shrubbery 100 meters away.

GARY
You're impoundin' the car.

TIM
Says who?

GARY
Says me.

Gary settles behind the wheel, ignites the engine, VROOM.

The Cop car cruises past Frank and Cooter, who share a whispered conversation. They exchange knowing smirks as Larsen passes by.

Ace, seated in the van, offers Gary a playful salute.

EXT. FOREST - CAR - NIGHT

Tim, on his cellphone, strides over to the Cadillac. Clearly peeved at being relegated such a mundane task.

TIM
Hey Chad, we need a tow at 1367
L'Eglise street, Bayou Ridge.
(pause)
(MORE)

TIM (cont'd)
 No, no, evidence collection.
 (pause)
 Appreciate it. Wait, can you give me
 a ride after?
 (pause)
 I'll be here.

END CALL

He conducts a brief inspection of the vehicle, noting color, model, year of manufacture.

Slips on a pair of forensic gloves. With a CREAK, he opens the trunk. Empty.

Carefully opens the passenger side door. Crouching in the long grass, retrieves a briefcase from the footwell.

Sets it on the passenger seat, CLICKS it open: A Louisiana sightseeing map and a black cloth.

Closes it.

Pops open the glove box, the tray unfolds to reveal a cellphone.

Tim takes it, stands up. Glances at the screen to find 3 missed calls, all from the same number.

Tim ponders; he's supposed to stick to procedure. The allure of playing detective is too strong.

Looks around cautiously to ensure nobody is watching. Slips out a notepad, pen at the ready, and dials the number from his own phone.

RING-RING

RING-RING

HURLEY (ON PHONE)
 Agent Hurley.

Tim hesitates.

HURLEY (ON PHONE)
 Hello?

TIM
 Agent, did you say?

HURLEY (ON PHONE)
 Who is this?

TIM
 I'm...it's the Sheriffs office.

HURLEY (ON PHONE)

Ah-huh.

(perplexed)

How can I help you, Officer?

TIM

We've arrested a suspect, identified himself as Larsen.

HURLEY (ON PHONE)

Huh?

TIM

He's being taken in for questioning.

HURLEY (ON PHONE)

On what charge?

TIM

Murder.

HURLEY (ON PHONE)

That doesn't make any...who's the victim?

TIM

I can't discuss that over the phone.

HURLEY (ON PHONE)

Which precinct? What's your evidence?

TIM

I'm not at liberty to --

HURLEY (ON PHONE)

Listen, kid. You're caught in the cross hairs of a covert federal investigation.

TIM

That may be so, but --

HURLEY (ON PHONE)

Tell me where he is. Right now.

EXT. FOREST HIGHWAY - NIGHT

A solitary Police car cruises down a deserted road, its headlights piercing through the mist.

Rainfall shrinks to a drizzle, the once rumbling thunder abates.

INT. FOREST HIGHWAY - POLICE CAR - NIGHT (TRAVELING)

Gary tightens his grip on the steering wheel, his other hand clasps a cellphone to his ear.

Larsen languishes in the backseat, behind the steel mesh barrier that separates them.

GARY
 Claims he's a Fed.
 (pause)
 No badge, no I D. Nothin' from Tim.
 (pause)
 Wanna wait til' Perkins gives the
 Caddy a once over?
 (pause)
 See ya soon.

Ahead, the Police Station emerges on the horizon, an unimpressive brick building next to a water tower.

Larsen sits forward.

LARSEN
 Call the field office...ask for
 O'Hara.

GARY
 Hush.

LARSEN
 The number is --

GARY
 I said shut your trap!

Gary pulls a sharp left, tyres SCREECH, veering off the highway and onto a dirt trail leading into the forest.

INT. FOREST - POLICE CAR - NIGHT (TRAVELING)

Dense woodland closes in around them, swallowing the road in darkness. Twisted branches claw at the windows, casting shadows that dance menacingly across Larsen's face.

Struggling to remain conscious, his voice barely a whisper in the oppressive silence.

LARSEN
 Where are you taking me?

Gary's only response is a chilling smile, illuminated by the faint glow of dashboard lights.

The car lurches over uneven terrain, navigating deeper into the foreboding woods. Larsen's heart pounds with dread.

Headlights cut through thick fog that blankets a clearing, casting eerie silhouettes on towering trees.

EXT. FOREST - CAMP SITE - NIGHT

A small picnic hut, its roof providing scant protection from the elements. Strewn about is a discarded pillow, an empty cooler, and the remnants of a once roaring campfire.

Lit up by headlights now, as the Police car pulls in and parks.

INT. FOREST - CAMP SITE - POLICE CAR - NIGHT

Gary kills the engine. The ominous silence broken only by the HOOT of owls and the RUSTLE of leaves in the wind.

Powers off his cellphone, places it on the dashboard.

GARY

Sit tight.

Steps out, strolls away.

A moment.

Larsen struggles with the locked door-handle, JIGGLING it fruitlessly.

His breaths hurried gasps now as he lies on his back in the cramped space, tries to kick out the window with both feet, THUMP, THUMP, THUMP.

Drained of energy, he gives up, defeated.

EXT. FOREST - CAMP SITE - NIGHT

Gary crouches by the extinguished campfire. Equips a lighter, flicks it on.

With a steady hand, he ignites some twigs nestled beneath the charred logs, coaxing it back to life, FWOOSH.

INT. FOREST - CAMP SITE - POLICE CAR - NIGHT

Larsen averts his gaze, eyes darting nervously away from the growing blaze.

Flames CRACKLE.

EXT. FOREST - CAMP SITE - NIGHT

In the distance, the headlights of an approaching vehicle slice through the dark. Gary straightens up.

The vehicle skids to a halt.

As the driver steps out, Larsen squints through the window, trying to make out a silhouette as it draws nearer.

It's Frank, armed with a shotgun, exuding menace.

He stoops to meet Larsen at eye level.

FRANK
Hello Sunshine.

SHATTERS the window with the butt of his weapon - Larsen recoils, shards rain down.

FRANK
Get 'im out.

Gary wrenches open the door, hauls Larsen out.

With a forceful jab of his gun, Frank prods Larsen forward toward the campfire. Gary strides alongside them.

LARSEN
I'm an undercover Fed, we were
investigating --

FRANK
You're about as sharp as a bowling
ball, aren't ya? I've been eyeing
that bitch for months. Every call,
every text.
(pause)
You're a cheap hit man. Real cheap.

Larsen shakes his head; you've got it all wrong. Frank scans their surroundings, his expression calculating.

Turns to Gary.

FRANK
Here's the scenario. He kicked out
the window, bailed, and bolted for
the trees.

With feigned sympathy, Frank places a comforting arm around Gary's shoulders.

FRANK
Ya had to put him down. It was dark,
your aim was a lil' high.

LARSEN
No ones going to believe that.

Frank belts him with the shotgun, CRUNCH. Larsen drops to his knees, grimacing. Fresh blood seeps through the shoulder gauze.

FRANK
Your arms buggered, but ya legs still
work.

Larsen attempts to rise, plants one foot on the ground.

FRANK
Can't have a murderer runnin' around
the parish willy nilly, can we?

LARSEN
Gary...it was him.

FRANK
(to Gary)
Take out ya piece.

He obeys, retrieving a pistol from his holster.

FRANK
Kill 'im.

Gary chuckles nervously.

GARY
Thought we were just gonna rough him
up.

Larsen closes his eyes, breathing ragged and heavy.

LARSEN
I'm with the Bureau, killing me won't
solve anything.

Gary hesitates.

FRANK
Don't go disloyal on me now, Gaz.

LARSEN
You're a Cop, use your head!

GARY
I dunno, Frank. He should get a bench
and all.

FRANK
No ones gonna miss this dog, he's not
even from around here. Ya saw what he
did!

GARY
Won't bring her back, Frank.

Shot, handcuffed and battered, Larsen can only listen as his
captors argue behind him.

Emotions teetering between self-preservation and resigned acceptance; maybe he deserves death for burning Jessica alive.

GARY

I can't.

Frank cocks his shotgun, KA-CHINK, presses the barrel into Gary's ear.

FRANK

You do 'im, or I do you.

Gary whimpers, hand trembling, takes aim at the back of Larsen's skull.

His finger hovers over the trigger.

GARY

(to Larsen)

I'm real sorry.

Blinding white light pierces through the trees. Frank and Gary startle, shielding their eyes.

The VROOM of an approaching vehicle, rumbling along the dirt track toward them.

Emerging from the road, a black SUV appears, SCREECHING to a stop.

Hurley springs out, draws his handgun.

HURLEY

Federal Agent, drop your weapons!

Gary aims back, leveling his gun at Hurley. Sees the badge on his lanyard.

GARY

Frank?

Frank casually lowers the shotgun, steps forward.

FRANK

Easy now --

HURLEY

Don't move!

FRANK

Fed or not, I own this parish.

HURLEY

You don't own him. Lose the twelve gauge.

Gary maintains his aim, eyes darting between Frank and Hurley.

GARY
This here's an escapee.

Hurley focuses his Glock on Gary.

HURLEY
Drop it! Now!

Frank shoots, Hurley dodges out of the way, KABOOM - the SUV takes the blast, glass SHATTERS, metal CRACKS.

Then scurries behind his pickup, out of sight. Gary stands frozen, bewildered.

Hurley completes his roll, drops to a kneeling stance and unloads, BANG-BANG-BANG-BANG-BANG.

Gary's twitching body dances like a marionette with each bullet hit - then collapses to the ground.

Frank pops up, aims at Hurley who quickly takes cover behind Gary's Police car - KABOOM, the windscreen SHATTERS, a tyre deflates, PSSSTTT.

Larsen, cowering on his knees, sees Gary's discarded gun. Hobbles toward it.

Halts before the campfire, heart racing, anxiety creeping. The weapon awaits, tantalizingly close.

Flames CRACKLE. Hurley stays crouched behind the Cop car, scanning for Frank.

HURLEY
Take it, man!

He can't. Larsen reverses course, scrambles toward the picnic hut. Frank rises, takes aim.

HURLEY
Get down!

Larsen finds safety behind a pillar, KABOOM - it SHATTERS in a shower of burning timber, he flinches.

Hurley approximates Frank's position and fires blindly, BANG-BANG.

EXT. FOREST - CAMP SITE - TRUCK - NIGHT

Frank hunkers down, back against a mud-soaked tyre, BANG-BANG-BANG - shrapnel ERUPTS, glass SHATTERS.

HURLEY (O.S.)
Drop the weapon! Step out with your
hands up!

FRANK
Alright, alright, ya got me!

EXT. FOREST - CAMP SITE - PICNIC HUT - NIGHT

As Hurley cautiously closes in, Larsen peeks out from behind the pillar.

LARSEN
Drivers side, he's reloading!

EXT. FOREST - CAMP SITE - TRUCK - NIGHT

Frank, still crouched, releases one hand from his grip on the shotgun, reaches for the passenger side door-handle.

FRANK
I'm comin' out!

EXT. FOREST - CAMP SITE - NIGHT

Hurley advances, his aim steady. Frank jumps inside the drivers seat.

HURLEY
Hands where I can see them!!

Flicks on the headlights, Hurley recoils. A muzzle flash erupts, KABOOM - he drops to the ground.

EXT. FOREST - CAMP SITE - NIGHT

The pickup GROWLS to life, Frank shifts into reverse.

Hurley, flat on his back, tilts up and unleashes at the retreating vehicle, BANG-BANG.

It careens backward, mud and debris fly as Frank spins the truck 180 degrees in a chaotic frenzy.

BANG-BANG-BANG

Click, click - he's out.

The pickup straightens, then vanishes down the dirt track into darkness, VROOOOM.

Hurley moans weakly, ejects the empty clip. Fingers quivering, searching for another.

Larsen approaches, stepping around Gary's lifeless body sprawled face down.

HURLEY

Proceed to...extraction, O'Hara's en route.

He coughs, blood trickles from his lips. Larsen crouches, tugs on his handcuffs, unable to cradle him.

HURLEY

Alexandria airfield...one hour.

Larsen's frantic gaze darts around the encroaching forest. With a trembling finger, Hurley gestures weakly, his voice strained.

HURLEY

East...follow the tracks.

Falls back, strength waning. A river of crimson pools from the shotgun blast to his chest.

LARSEN

You did good, pal.

Turns to look at Gary.

LARSEN

Dirty cop.

Hurley grabs Larsen's shirt, pulls him closer, eye to eye.

HURLEY

Gabriela's clean.

(urgently)

Maria's been messaging --

Lets go, slumps.

LARSEN

Hurley.

(pause)

Hurley!!

Silence descends, save for the subtle CRACKLE of cinder.

Larsen fumbles inside Hurley's clothing for another clip.

Finding none, he retrieves his cellphone. Unusable, ruptured by a stray pellet. Stuffs it in his front pocket anyway.

Larsen shifts his attention to the glinting key-chain on Gary's blood smeared utility belt. Makes his way over to the fallen Officer.

Drops to his knees beside him, fumbling to unlatch it.

GARY

Hold me.

Larsen gasps.

GARY

(sobbing)

I don't wanna die alone.

A moment.

Larsen sinks to a seated position, offers a hesitant hand, constrained by the restraints around his wrists.

Gary's weak grip finds solace in Larsen's touch, tears stream down his face.

Larsen gazes upward, taking in the moon's serene glow against the backdrop of jagged trees.

He savors the calm, if only for a moment, a semblance of peace in the tranquility of the night sky.

EXT. FOREST – NIGHT

Tangled vines and shrubs create a labyrinthine maze. Towering cypress trees draped in Spanish moss loom overhead, their gnarled roots protruding from the damp earth.

Muddied FOOTSTEPS echo through the undergrowth, disturbing the nocturnal chorus of insects and unseen wildlife.

Three silhouettes emerge from the shadows.

Cooter strides purposefully, accompanied by a muscular DOG on a leash. His grip tightens on a flashlight, its beam wavering erratically as he navigates the terrain.

Beside him, Ace walks with silent determination, his hand caressing the hilt of a serrated combat knife tucked into his chest harness.

Bringing up the rear, Frank moves with calculated precision, a scoped sniper rifle slung over his shoulder.

FRANK

Over there.

EXT. FOREST – CAMP SITE – NIGHT

Larsen, huddled beside Gary's corpse, awkwardly stuffs the key-chain in his front pocket. Rifles inside his clothing, finds the Zippo lighter.

Closes his eyes, takes a breath, then retrieves it. Clutches it tight in his trembling hand.

OVER BLACK

- Jessica SCREAMS.

- Flames CRACKLE.

BACK TO SCENE

The GROWL of a rabid animal, muffled voices.

His eyelids flicker open. Flashes of torchlight, approaching fast. No time to unlock the cuffs, rises to his feet and sprints into the woodland.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Larsen races through the trees, dodging thick stumps and ducking under low-hanging branches with each frantic step.

The unleashed mongrel BARKS furiously, pursuing its prey.

COOTER (O.S.)
Get 'im, girl!

Twigs SNAP underfoot, clawing shrubbery tears at his skin and clothing.

Behind him, the trio follow - hurried footsteps SQUELCH through the muddy ground.

A gunshot pierces the air, POP, a bullet whizzes past him, sending green leaves fluttering like confetti - Larsen flinches, pushing forward.

Then, the rhythmic POUNDING of kata-drums. Steadily growing louder.

EXT. FOREST - VODOO CEREMONY - NIGHT

Around fifty RITUALISTS are gathered, bodies moving in sync with the pulsating percussion. They sway and writhe, caught up in a trance-like state.

The scent of rum and elixirs which the participants sip from bottles, tambourines SHAKE in time with the drums.

Larsen slips into the crowd, blending in with the dancers.

Navigates through the throng, senses heightened, searching for a hiding place.

Drums BEATING, tambourines SHAKING.

The search party cautiously approach, scanning the crowd for any sign of their prey.

The hound, overwhelmed by the multitude of human scents, BARKS wildly, trying to pinpoint its target.

COOTER
Easy girl...easy.

Frank gestures to Cooter and Ace, directing them left and right.

FRANK
I'll take the middle, let's flush 'im out.

Amidst the fervent CHANTING and dancing, Larsen conceals himself behind a tree. Coins inserted into the trunk jab into his spine, he winces.

A Voodoo PRIESTESS (60's) draped in a white cloak adorned with beads and wearing a ceremonial headdress, materializes before him.

As her piercing gaze meets Larsen's, she speaks with an otherworldly authority.

PRIESTESS
The flames that haunt you.

Larsen is transfixed.

PRIESTESS (CONT'D)
These fires of suffering that burn bright.

She retrieves a coin from her waist sash and inserts it into the bark, joining the myriad of others within.

Drums BEATING.

Time slows down.

PRIESTESS
Now, they become the light of your consciousness.

Crackling FLAMES grow louder, enveloping Larsen's senses.

- Jessica SCREAMS, an ethereal echo.

Tambourines SHAKING.

A knife hurtles through the air, WHOOSH - slams into the tree above Larsen's head, THUNK.

Startled, he breaks into a desperate sprint toward the forest, heart pounding with each step.

PRIESTESS (O.S.)
 Watch them burn bright, Mister
 Larsen.

The search party barrels past her.

FRANK
 Outta the way!

Ace retrieves the knife, slips it back into his harness. The Priestess stands serenely, watching them as they vanish into the jungle.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Larsen's desperate flight through the tangled undergrowth continues. The steady TRICKLE of water reaches his ears, he dashes toward it.

The forest morphs into a rugged landscape, the ground uneven and rocky.

Comes to an abrupt stop at the edge of a ravine.

EXT. FOREST - WATERFALL - NIGHT

He peaks over the edge, eyes scanning the winding bayou below. The stream flows steadily, its surface shimmering as if beckoning him to safety.

Another gunshot rings out, POP, strikes the granite beside him, CRACK - he recoils. Hunkers down behind a jutting rock formation, breaths shallow and rapid.

Squelching FOOTSTEPS approach, beams of probing torchlight. Panicking now, knows he can't go back. Takes a deep breath and leaps over the edge.

EXT. FOREST - BAYOU - NIGHT

SPLASHES into the brack-water below. The rapids sweep him downstream, hands bound, twisting and thrashing.

EXT. FOREST - WATERFALL - NIGHT

Frank and his cohorts arrive, their figures silhouetted against the moonlit sky.

Cooter tightens his grip on the leash, calming the GROWLING hound beside him. Ace stands at the edge, pointing below.

FRANK
 I got 'im.

Equips his sniper rifle, peers down the scope.

EXT. FOREST - BAYOU - NIGHT

Larsen rises to the surface, spitting and gasping for air.

EXT. FOREST - WATERFALL - NIGHT

Frank stabilizes his aim, expression steely and determined. Centers the cross-hair on Larsen.

BANG

The bullet narrowly misses it's target, Larsen disappearing into a labyrinth of intertwining waterways.

Frank reloads, eyes fixed on the intricate maze of rivers sprawling in every direction.

COOTER

There's nothin' out east. His goose is cooked.

FRANK

Yeah there is. The airstrip.

Cooter scoffs.

COOTER

No way he'll make dat on foot.

Ace gestures with sign-language, seeking permission to continue the pursuit alone.

Cooter looks to Frank for approval. He nods.

FRANK

(to Ace)

Don't miss this time.

Ace responds with a sardonic sign-language retort: 'Look who's talking'.

FRANK

Ay?

COOTER

Nuttin boss.

Cooter tosses his cellphone, Ace catches it mid-air. Looks at it with disdain like its a weight encumbrance.

COOTER

Stay in touch, bruh.

Stuffs it in his harness, then begins a careful, methodical descent.

EXT. FOREST - BAYOU - NIGHT

Rippling water and dense vegetation line its banks. Larsen emerges, wading closer to the marshy shore.

Finally reaching it, he collapses. Breath ragged and labored, he coughs and splutters, expelling his lungs.

With trembling fingers, slips the key-chain out of his drenched front pocket. Unlocks his restraints.

With a satisfying CLICK, the handcuffs fall away. Relief washes over him.

Massaging bruised wrists, he casts a wary glance around, straining his ears to detect any signs of pursuit.

A moment.

Then crouches by the riverbank. Sets down the tiny handcuffs key on the ground.

Takes out Hurley's busted cellphone, begins to carefully disassemble it. As the pieces fall apart, he extracts the battery. Sets it aside.

Next, he arranges a circle of rocks on the ground about 20 centimeters in diameter.

Finds a calm spot along the riverbank, cups his hands and scoops up some water.

Carries it to the center of the rocks, carefully pours it in to create a small pool. Hurriedly repeats the process a few more times until it's full to the brim.

Rips a piece of fabric from his shirt, floats it on the surface of the water.

Takes the handcuffs key and rubs it against the battery to magnetize it. Flips it over, scraping, rubbing.

A RUSTLE of leaves jolts him to a stop, senses alert.

An ALLIGATOR of monstrous proportions prowls forward, a behemoth of scales and sinew, its menacing gaze locks onto its prey.

Larsen's heart pounds, breaths shallow as he meets the creature's cold stare.

For a tense moment, time hangs suspended.

LARSEN
 (hushed, to himself)
 Just passing through, big guy.

Then, with a flick of its tail, the beast retreats, vanishing into the murky depths of the river.

Larsen, shaken but unscathed, resumes. Places the key gently on the floating fabric.

As it aligns itself with the Earth's magnetic field, Larsen notes its north and south trajectories.

Looks up at the sun. Determining the approximate direction of east, he rises. Rushes into the woodland.

EXT. FOREST - CAMP SITE - NIGHT

Perkins gently places a bloodstained FBI badge inside an evidence bag. Behind him, Officers move about, inspecting the scene.

Sandy stretchers a wrapped cadaver to her Ambulance. She halts, allowing Tim to inspect it.

He lifts the covering. Studies Hurley's expressionless face.

SANDY

What's on your mind, Tim?

A moment.

TIM

We just spoke.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Frank and Cooter observe from their concealed position behind bushes, their figures barely discernible.

COOTER

Timmy's got his sleuth hat on.

Crouching low, he gives the dog a reassuring pat.

FRANK

If he keeps diggin', we're bugged.
And keep your eye-balls on her, too.

Cooter sniggers.

FRANK

Hands off 'til I say otherwise.

COOTER

Yes boss.

EXT. FOREST — CAMP SITE — NIGHT

Tim crouches amidst the blood and bullet casings, analyzing the web of muddy tyre tracks that snake through the dirt around him. Signals Perkins with a quick finger-snap.

TIM

Perkins.

Perkins strides over.

TIM

This overlap. Here. Look at the groove spacing and angle of the lug cuts.

(pause)

We've got a third vehicle.

His eyes catch it.

PERKINS

Yes. We do.

Sets down his kit-box, opens a bottle of liquid casting compound. Takes a measuring cup, pours it into a mixing container.

Tim stands. Sees Sandy gesturing to him for a private chat. He nods, walks to her.

SANDY

Can I talk to you, off the record?

TIM

That depends on the content.

SANDY

Our perp, he's an Agent too, isn't he?

TIM

How'd you draw that conclusion?

SANDY

A hunch.

TIM

C'mon, Sandy.

She glances around nervously.

SANDY

He gave me something.

TIM

Did he? What was it?

Perkins, noticing their exchange, stares at them.

SANDY
(hushed)
Not here.

EXT. FOREST – NIGHT

Frank and Cooter leave the scene, moving stealthily through the undergrowth. Frank takes out his cellphone and initiates a video call to Ace.

RING-RING

RING-RING

RING-RING

FRANK
A status update from your dopey brother would be a welcome development right about now.

No answer.

END CALL

COOTER
It don't madda, boss. He's probly already knifed 'im.

FRANK
I don't want this Yankee flyin' off into the proverbial sunset.

Makes another call.

RING-RING

FRANK
Ed, need a favor.

EXT. FOREST – RAILROAD TRACK – DAY

The first light of dawn filters through dense foliage, casting hues of amber and gold.

Larsen bursts into a clearing surrounded by towering trees. Before him, a line of weathered railroad sleepers protrude from the earth, stretching out endlessly into the distance.

Scans the horizon for Alexandria Airfield, seeking out any landmarks or structures.

No hangars.

No control towers.

No planes in the airspace above.

Just an endless expanse of railroad, vanishing into the horizon like a pathway to infinity.

His inner voice urges him forward; east, follow the tracks.

EXT. SALT CREEK – TALBOT HOMESTEAD – DAY

A scene of rustic elegance nestled on the edge of the parish. Tall oak trees stand sentinel around the perimeter.

Elegant horses roam freely on the grounds, a GARDENER tends to the flowerbeds, carefully removing any weeds that dare to intrude upon the vibrant blooms.

A soft wind kicks up dust on a brown dirt tennis court, its nets sagging from disuse over the years.

EXT. TALBOT HOMESTEAD – GAZEBO – DAY

Tucked away among the foliage, a picturesque retreat with intricate lattice work and graceful arches providing shade and shelter.

Frank sits with HELEN (70's) his mother, sipping tea in the dappled sunlight. She exudes a quiet majesty, her silver hair catching the light as she moves.

HELEN

I liked her, Frank.

FRANK

So did I. At the beginnin'

HELEN

I try to grieve. But when I close my eyes, all I see is your Father.

Frank begins to fidget uncomfortably.

HELEN

Endlessly toiling. Missing birthdays, Christmas's.

Her eyes drift to the ring on her finger, a silent reminder of years gone by.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Anniversaries.

FRANK

She tried to take it all away from us, Mum.

Helen takes another sip, her expression thoughtful.

HELEN
So, who is he?

FRANK
Some outsider, a drifter maybe.

Helen turns to face him, searching for honesty.

FRANK
Might be an F B I Agent.

HELEN
I see.
(pause)
Well, how are you to know that?
You're a loving husband merely
protecting your home from an
intruder.

She watches the sunrise, thoughts turning inward.

HELEN
And what of Maria's suitor?

FRANK
He won't do nothin', too gutless.

Cooter appears wearing a pilot headset, expectantly awaiting Frank's approach.

Helen reclines, her gaze distant.

HELEN
Finish what you started, Frank. We
shall reckon with it in the next
life.

Frank rises, presses a kiss to her forehead.

Strides over to Cooter.

FRANK
Anythin' on Ace?

Cooter shakes his head 'no'.

FRANK
He'll turn up. Always does.

EXT. FOREST - RAILROAD TRACK - DAY

Larsen trudges along the train line, his exhausted steps echo in the desolation.

The tracks begin to vibrate, he halts.

Turns to face a RUMBLING freight train hurtling toward him from behind - a massive steel serpent snaking its way along the tracks.

A locomotive leads the charge, pulling a succession of 30 shipping containers and empty flatbeds. The last two carriages carry grain, 'Silo A' and 'Silo B'.

As it races alongside Larsen, he quickens his pace.

Desperation sets in as he attempts to climb aboard. Grasps at the sides of the passing containers - but they slip away.

Wincing with each failed attempt, its relentless forward motion mocking his efforts.

Then, a glimmer of hope. It banks to the right, slowing to navigate a curve in the track.

The carriages GROAN and SCREECH in protest, creating a brief window of opportunity.

Summoning all his strength and agility, Larsen lunges toward the nearest flatbed carriage - his fingers grip the side railing.

For a moment, it seems as though he might miss his mark, but with a final surge of effort, he manages to haul himself aboard.

EXT. FOREST - FREIGHT TRAIN - DAY (TRAVELING)

Lands flat on his back with a THUD, panting heavily, adrenaline coursing through his veins.

It picks up speed once more. Its massive form casting a long shadow over the rugged landscape.

The steady rhythm of the trains GYRATING wheels fills the air, punctuated by the WHISTLE of wind.

With a determined grunt, Larsen stands upright. Surveys his surroundings, eyes scanning the length of the train.

Larsen heads toward the locomotive, traversing the swaying carriages. Metal CREAKS and GRINDS.

Hoisting himself onto the roof of a rusted container, his gaze sweeps across the horizon in search of the airfield.

In the distance, he spots the silhouette of an elliptical hangar and a towering radar tower - beckoning like beacons of hope.

There's a Y in the track head. Left leads toward the hangar
- right, away from it.

THE LOCOMOTIVE

Inside, the driver, EARL (50's) spots Larsen clambering
toward him in a rear-view mirror. Brings a receiver to his
mouth, flicks a button on a control panel.

EARL
Unit 3 reporting.

An intercom CRACKLES with white noise.

DISPATCHER (ON RADIO)
This is control, go ahead unit 3. How
are ya, Earl?

EARL
Good. Yeah, erm...got an unexpected
passenger back here.

DISPATCHER (ON RADIO)
Copy that. Do you require assistance?

A presence silently approaches, casting a growing shadow
over the back of Earl's chair. He whirls, wide eyed in
terror.

It's Ace, pressing a finger to his lips, gesturing for
silence. Calmly unsheaths his knife.

With a SPLAT, blood sprays across the dusty windscreen. The
severed receiver drops to the floor.

DISPATCHER (ON RADIO)
Come in, unit 3.
(pause)
Earl?

Ace pushes the slumped corpse aside, THUD. Then yanks the
switch lever, SQUEAK, altering it's course.

EXT. FOREST - FREIGHT TRAIN - DAY (TRAVELING)

The train lurches right, Larsen falters - tumbles perilously
close to the container edge, manages to catch himself.

Catches his breath, looks ahead.

Ace emerges from the locomotive, ascends its roof, then
sprints toward him.

Larsen urgently reverses course, descends from the container
onto the flatbed below, THUNK.

Dashes along it, approaching more containers. Scales them awkwardly, moving up and down towards the two rear silos.

Ace follows, mirroring Larsen's movements - but faster, more agile.

The train veers away from the airfield, fading from view in the distance. Couplings SQUEAK and GRIND.

Reaching the final two carriages, Larsen leaps onto Silo A. Turns to face Ace - approaching fast.

With no choice, Larsen moves toward Silo B. Last carriage, end of the line.

He halts. The hatch on 'A' is wide open, there's a gaping hole midway along the top, cover-plate unlatched.

Takes a breath, then sprints - leaps over the opening. But misjudges the distance and plummets inside. Grabs a railing on the way down, CLANG, heart pounding in his chest.

Larsen dangles precariously inside the empty silo, struggling to maintain his grip. Stifling grain residue fills the air around him.

Strength waning, legs flailing, he fights to pull himself up.

Larsen manages to climb out, collapses on the other side, gasping for clean air. Ace arrives, strolls casually toward him.

As Ace pauses to assess the obstacle before him, Larsen whirls and leaps onto Silo B.

The radar tower shrinks from view as he staggers along it, nearly stumbling over the closed hatch halfway across.

Ace soars over the open shaft, vaults onto 'B' to join him, CLANG.

Trapped, Larsen and Ace face off. The freight train lurches and sways, too fast for either of them to jump off.

Ace advances, brandishing his knife. Larsen dodges each lightning-fast jab, but a wide slash rips across his chest, drawing blood.

He stumbles backward, falls onto his back, THUNK, pain searing. Ace straightens up, expression cold as he kisses the serrated blade - a silent promise of his demise.

Realizing that Ace is standing directly on top of the closed cover-plate, Larsen kicks the release mechanism with all his strength.

Metal CLANGS, it opens instantly - Ace drops into the empty silo with a heavy THUD.

Larsen crawls toward the edge, stares down into its depths.

Ace lies motionless at the bottom, broken body contorted at ghastly unnatural angles. Dead eyes stare blankly back at Larsen.

The SCREECHING train rounds another bend, carriages SHAKE and GRIND.

Larsen clings to a side ladder, awkwardly climbs down the tubular silo, wincing from his injuries with each agonizing rung step.

Hanging off the side now, Larsen takes a deep breath, braces himself, and prepares to jump.

The ground below speeds past in a blur as he launches himself off the silo, cascading through the shrubbery below.

He finally comes to a rest in a sprawled heap on the ground, body aching and bruised.

With a groan, he picks himself up. Begins to hobble toward the airfield.

EXT. SALT CREEK - POLICE STATION - DAY

Brown brick walls weathered by time, retro-fitted with bold Police signage. An American flag flutters in the wind, vivid against the backdrop of the sunlit sky.

INT. POLICE STATION - FORENSICS LAB - DAY

Sleek metal counter-tops hold trays of fingerprint cards, slides, magnifying glasses.

Perkins sits at his computer. On the screen, a database algorithm compares the scanned tyre tread pattern with thousands of entries.

He's sifting through a series of potential matches, each with a percentage of similarity. Tim hovers behind him, breaking his concentration.

TIM

I'll be in and out in no time.

PERKINS

Can't do it, Tim. Not our case anymore.

TIM

What are you trying to hide?

He whirls, insulted at the implication.

PERKINS
Nothing. Fed's have blocked access.

Tim wrestles for a key-card on Perkins utility belt, they scuffle. Unlatches it, snatches it away.

PERKINS
I'm going to file a complaint.

TIM
Always to the rule book. You gonna be a milksop forever?

Tim strides toward a steel security door.

TIM
I'm gonna get some closure for Gary's family. They deserve answers.

Swipes it open, BEEP. It GROANS ajar, Tim enters.

PERKINS
A liaison team are flying in, anyways. Be here within the hour.

TIM (O.S.)
Ten minutes.

INT. POLICE STATION – EVIDENCE ROOM – DAY

Shelves lined with boxes, bags and assorted items, each labeled meticulously and stacked with precision.

Tim selects one container, places it on a nearby table. Lifts the lid, plunges his hands inside.

Speed-reads through a stack of documentation: Coroner's report, ballistics report, toxicology report.

Perkin's FOOTSTEPS approach, getting closer

Plastic sheathing squelches under sweating fingertips, rifling through: Wood fragments, carpet fibers, hair, soil, dirt.

Pauses on a satchel containing a blood-stained USB drive.

And closer.

The door swings open, CLANG, Tim discreetly pockets it.

PERKINS
Tim.

TIM
One more minute.

Continues rifling.

PERKINS
Phone call.

TIM
Take a message.

Perkins steps up to him.

PERKINS
It's Gabriela.
(pause)
Don't be laggin', she sounds pressed.

Tim nods, leaves. Perkins replaces the lid, sets the box back on the shelf.

EXT. AIRFIELD - SMALL HANGAR - DAY

A dusty dirt airstrip cuts through the landscape, leading toward a weather-beaten hangar.

Once vibrant paint now faded and peeling, it's twin doors tower over Larsen as he wearily approaches.

INT. AIRFIELD - SMALL HANGAR - DAY

Cluttered and disorganized, galvalum sheeted walls adorned with crates, fuel barrels and boxes piled on palettes. A conveyor belt spans the interior, a few packages rest atop it.

Larsen steps inside, shafts of sunlight pierce through gaps in the roof.

A small airplane is parked in one corner. Tinkering inside a compartment on its fuselage is ALAIN (50'S) meticulous, a touch adventurous, wearing a half-tucked pilot's shirt with frayed epaulette shoulder pieces.

LARSEN (O.S.)
Alexandria airfield?

The repair is almost to Federal Aviation specification, just a few more revolutions of his spanner.

ALAIN
(exerting)
Ah cane't, wrong hangar. We only do the mail here.

Larsen stumbles, items TOPPLE from a nearby shelf. Alain looks up.

ALAIN
Soc au' lait, its you!

Steps back, instinctively reaches for the handset on a land-line telephone.

ALAIN
You're headline news.

LARSEN
It's all b-bullshit, I'm an...
undercover Fed.

Alain eyes him skeptically, cleaning his grease-stained fingers with a rag.

LARSEN
My handlers waiting for me in a
cessna...Alexandria Airfield --

Larsen collapses, Alain quickly moves to support him.

ALAIN
Looka.
(pointing)
Hangars up there.

Larsen peers through the rear window-pane. Outside, a long bitumen landing strip stretches into the distance, leading to a pristine white hangar at the top.

Alain walks to the plane, unlocks the cabin door.

ALAIN
Hop in. I'll taxi ya up there.

Larsen, battered and weary, climbs onto the foot ladder, slumps into the passenger seat. Alain straps him in, CLICK.

ALAIN
Back in a hot minute.

Then scurries to the entrance, sliding the doors fully open to accommodate the planes wingspan.

Returns to the cockpit.

Larsen, slouched beside him, is barely conscious. Alain gently shakes him, urging him to stay awake.

ALAIN
Don't make dodo on me.

The engine WHINES, tri-propeller blades spin at full force. Performs a quick scan of the instrument panel, checking wing flap positions, Ng levels, engine idle.

ALAIN
Sho' don't look like no killer.

Larsen scoffs.

LARSEN
I feel like one.

ALAIN
Ah, guilt is always hungry. Don't let
it eat ya up.

Pre-flight check complete, the plane taxis forward, VROOM, approaching the open, inviting twin doors.

ALAIN
Y'know, this whole area used to be
private property.

Sunlight seeps in, embracing Larsen with the long-awaited promise of freedom.

ALAIN (CONT'D)
Til' the government bought it all up,
back in nineteen hundred or so --

A RICOCHET pierces the air, POP - the windscreen SHATTERS, Alain's skull explodes, brains and teeth spray across the interior, Larsen flinches.

Frantically tries to unlatch his seat belt. With no pilot, the plane veers chaotically.

With a CLICK, he's free. Fumbles at the door latch, swings it open and drops to the concrete floor below, THUD.

Another sniper bullet tears through his now-empty seat, POP. Fibers spray into the air like confetti.

Larsen scurries for cover. The plane exits, trajectory lopsided, SMASHES off a wing on its way out.

The aircraft continues its wild path, careens into a radar tower - metal CRUMPLES, glass SHATTERS.

Larsen presses his back against a wall, peaks cautiously outside, searching for the shooter.

EXT. AIRFIELD - SMALL HANGAR - HELICOPTER - DAY (TRAVELING)

Gas station Ed's World War II helicopter hovers ominously.

Frank leans outside aiming his sniper rifle, feet dangling above the dual rocket-launchers attached to its landing gear.

FRANK
Hello sunshine.

Amidst the deafening ROAR of rotor blades, Frank shouts to Cooter sitting at the controls - visibly enraged at the news of Ace's discovered corpse.

FRANK
Take her down, I'm goin' in on foot.

COOTER
No boss.

Frank turns to face him, shocked by the insolence.

COOTER
We blow da fuckin' place.

Thumbs open the fire-control mechanism on the joystick. Frank seizes his arm.

FRANK
We do 'im face to face.
(pause)
For Ace.

After some contemplation, Cooter nods. With a push of the yoke, descends to the ground.

Frank hops out, enveloped in a swirling cloud of dust.

FRANK
Keep 'im inside!

Strides forward, rifle raised, fixed on his cornered prey.

Cooter ascends, gliding toward the hangar roof, engine ROARING.

INT. SALT CREEK - POLICE STATION - DAY

Cluttered cubicles, bulletin boards with wanted posters and crime scene photos.

Tim sits at his desk, brow furrowed in a heated cellphone conversation.

TIM
Calm down.
(pause)
I'll get down there when I can.

END CALL

Swivels in his chair, pondering.

Perkins pokes his head over the partition, Tim startles.

PERKINS
Everythin' ok?

TIM
Gabriela.
(pause)
Hooked up with our vic at a jazz
club, apparently.

PERKINS
Oh?

TIM
Not too keen on coming forward.

PERKINS
What does she know?

Tim shrugs.

TIM
Ask me again when I get a statement.
(pause)
What's up?

PERKINS
Sandy's in interview room three.

TIM
She's early.

Rises from his seat.

PERKINS
What's this about, anyways?

Advances toward the interrogation area, Perkins follows.

TIM
She's got information relating --

Quickly sidesteps, blocking Tim's path.

PERKINS
We're off this one.

TIM
You need to back up.

He doesn't.

PERKINS
What the heck are you doing?

Tim grabs his shirt, SLAMS him against the wall, Perkins gasps.

TIM
My civic duty.

Lets go, walks away.

TIM (O.S.)
When you're done being a pushover,
maybe you'll understand.

Perkins composes himself, straightening ruffled clothing.

INT. POLICE STATION – INTERVIEW ROOM – DAY

Windowless walls painted in a dull shade of beige. The harsh glare of a fluorescent light overhead.

Tim and Sandy exchange tense glances, seated opposite each other around a worn wooden table. She looks up at a ceiling mounted security camera.

TIM
It's on, but nobody's watching.
(pause)
Trust me.

With a hesitant nod, Sandy hands him Larsen's cuff-link microphone.

INT. SALT CREEK – POLICE STATION – DAY

Perkins huddles in his cubicle, eyes glued to a monitor.

ON COMPUTER SCREEN

Grainy CCTV shows Tim carefully examining it.

PERKINS (V.O.)
What have you get there?

Tim produces the USB drive from his pocket, compares the two items.

PERKINS (V.O.)
You little pincher.

INT. POLICE STATION – INTERVIEW ROOM – DAY

SANDY
Whats that?

Tim drags a laptop towards him, plugs the drive in.

TIM
Hopefully, the audio feed from that.

With a mouse-click, Tim opens a folder. Clicks on the file, a dialog box opens requesting a password.

TIM
Well that complicates things.

The door swings open, CLANG - Tim whirls. Perkins enters, looks at them both.

Awkward silence.

PERKINS
Need a hand?

Tim nods gratefully. Perkins pulls up a chair and commandeers the computer.

Starts typing furiously, running various decryption algorithms and password cracking software.

PERKINS
I'm in.

ON LAPTOP SCREEN

An audio waveform pulses, resembling rolling hills with peaks and valleys stretching from left to right.

PERKINS (V.O.)
We need to visualize the audio stream...

BACK TO SCENE

PERKINS (CONT'D)
...then look for modulation.

Presses 'play'. Mild STATIC fills the room, everyone listens intently:

MARIA (ON RECORDING)
Take a seat.

- Mild STATIC.

MARIA (ON RECORDING)
You're one day late.

LARSEN (ON RECORDING)
Car trouble.

Perkins presses 'pause'.

PERKINS
Let's get precise. I've got time stamps here.

TIM
Wednesday the seventeenth, late evening.

SANDY
Emergency call came in at twelve oh eight.

Tim concurs.

TIM
Between that and one hour prior.

Perkins scrolls through the recording.

Presses 'play'.

- Heavy STATIC.

He frowns.

ON LAPTOP SCREEN

Clicks open an equalizer, adjusts the sliders with expert precision.

- Mild STATIC

BACK TO SCENE

Tim and Sandy exchange expectant glances.

- A door SMASHES open.

- Mild STATIC.

- A water tap SQUEAKS.

LARSEN (ON RECORDING)
Maria, lower the weapon.
(pause)
It's self defense. I understand, ok?

- Mild STATIC.

FRANK (ON RECORDING)
Hello sunshine.

- THUMP

- Mild STATIC.

FRANK (ON RECORDING)
I'll take that.

- Mild STATIC.

FRANK (ON RECORDING)
This ones yours.

Perkins presses 'pause', looks at Tim.

PERKINS
That what you looking for?

Tim nods slowly, processing the revelation, affirming Larsen's innocence and Frank's guilt.

A radio CRACKLES to life somewhere outside the room.

DISPATCHER (ON RADIO)
Attention all units, code twenty two
at Alexandria Esler airfield.

Tim stands.

TIM
That'll be them.

Draws his pistol, slides the chamber, KA-CHINK. Sandy trails behind him as he exits.

TIM
Stay close.

Perkins watches them leave.

DISPATCHER (ON RADIO)
Shots fired, situation unclear,
unable to confirm the number of
individuals involved. Proceed with
caution, await further updates.

Tim stops, turns around.

TIM
Perkins.

PERKINS
Yes?

TIM
Appreciate it.

PERKINS

Be on scene soon to sift through the mess.

INT. FOREST - CESSNA JET - DAY (TRAVELING)

Pristine elegance, white surfaces gleam under soft lighting, seating plush and comfortable.

The PILOT (30's) occupies the cockpit, focused on the controls as it soars through the sky.

In the back, O'Hara reclines, cellphone to her ear as the landscape unfolds below.

O'HARA

We've received confirmation. One down, one unaccounted for.

(pause)

Larsen.

(pause)

He's never undergone a psych eval, why?

O'Hara's expression turns somber as she absorbs information about Larsen's pyrophobia condition.

O'HARA

I see.

(pause)

Affirmative, I'll keep you updated.

END CALL

She stoops behind the Pilot's seat.

PILOT

Do we proceed to the alternate?

O'Hara ponders.

PILOT

Ma'am?

O'HARA

Negative. Circle around one more time.

He adjusts the flight-stick.

PILOT

Pushing our luck with the fuel gauge.

Sets the plane into a wide circle, VROOM.

INT. AIRFIELD - SMALL HANGAR - DAY

Larsen seeks refuge amidst the scattered clutter as Frank closes in. Above, the helicopter hovers menacingly, rotor blades CHOPPING through the air.

He crouches behind a partially stacked palette, rummages through Alain's discarded toolbox.

Lifts out a spanner, sizes it up as a potential weapon; a close quarters take-down would be unwise.

Then, his eyes catch sight of a fuel barrel on a shelf - a sniper bullet has pierced it, causing gasoline to trickle out onto the conveyor belt below.

Ahead, Frank steps inside through the twin doors, rifle aimed.

Navigates around the detached plane wing crumpled on the floor. Scanning for his quarry through a maze of palette stacks.

FRANK (O.S.)
Where y'at, Yankee.

Larsen remains hidden at the rear. He tosses the spanner in Frank's direction toward the front of the conveyor, CLANG.

Frank whirls, takes a shot, BANG.

Continues scanning.

Larsen kneels at the conveyors control panel, presses the 'start' button. With a HUM, it starts to run.

The static puddle atop it now forms a long trail of gas as it moves along the belt - toward the hangar entrance, spilling onto the floor in Frank's vicinity.

Larsen hunkers down, out of sight. The stifling smell of petrol fills the air.

Slips out Gary's Zippo lighter, fingers quivering. Holds it at arms length, stares at it.

He wants to thumb it on, but he's petrified. The conveyor HUMS, gasoline continues its pungent trail.

Ethereal sounds begin to swell, drums BEATING.

Larsen clenches his eyes shut.

Tambourines SHAKING.

Flicks it on, FWOOSH.

OVER BLACK

- Flames CRACKLE.

- Jessica SCREAMS.

- Larsen's heart-beat, BADOOM-BADOOM-BADOOM

- Time slows down.

- BADOOM

- BADOOM

- BADOOM

- Then, a cacophony of overlapping voices invade his senses from all directions:

ED (V.O.)

Ya get used to it, sooner or later.

MAUDE (V.O.)

On a secret mission, hmm?

- Maude CACKLES.

MARIA (V.O.)

...learned helplessness...

HURLEY (V.O.)

Fear is an illusion.

ALAIN (V.O.)

Guilt is always hungry. Don't let it eat ya up.

PRIESTESS (V.O.)

The flames that haunt you...

- Drums BEATING.

PRIESTESS (V.O.)

...the light of your consciousness.

- Tambourines SHAKING.

PRIESTESS (V.O.)

Watch them burn bright.

BACK TO SCENE

Larsen opens his eyes to the dancing flame of the lighter, fire curls and flickers seductively.

Tosses it onto the conveyor, the gas ignites, FWOOSH - a trail of flame screams down its path. Frank finds Larsen, takes aim and fingers the trigger.

FRANK

Gotcha.

The puddle on the floor near Frank's feet erupts into a fireball, FWOOSH, setting him ablaze.

He SCREAMS, drops the rifle, writhes on the ground. Larsen strides over, watching with an eerie calmness. □

Flickering orange dances on his pupils.

FRANK

Help me!!

Frank scrambles toward a fire extinguisher on the wall, stumbling chaotically.

Larsen turns, walks away.

The boxed palettes start to burn as the fire spreads. Frank disappears behind a wall of flame - he SCREAMS.

Larsen continues toward the rear exit door, the entire interior ablaze now.

As flames dance around him, he strolls through the fire with an almost trance-like serenity, reaches out to open the door as if impervious to the inferno's touch.

EXT. AIRFIELD - SMALL HANGAR - DAY

Strolls outside. A catastrophic explosion rocks the hangar, KABOOM, but Larsen doesn't flinch.

Cooter swivels the chopper to target him, a victorious smirk across his face. Aims the twin cannons.

Before he can press 'fire' the billowing firestorm bursts upward through the hangar ceiling, consuming the helicopter.

Cooter's SCREAMS are quickly silenced by a spectacular secondary explosion in the air, KABOOM.

The burning, mangled aircraft floats gracefully downward, rotor blades slowing - drops into the twisted and burning metal below with a deafening CRUNCH.

Larsen walks toward the main hangar waiting on the horizon, oblivious to the chaos and destruction behind him.

EXT. AIRFIELD — RUNWAY — DAY

As he continues his solitary march along the bitumen path, the WAIL of emergency sirens pierces the air.

Turns to see a Police car speeding toward him, followed closely by a Fire Truck and Ambulance, lights flashing.

They veer off, heading toward the smoldering hangar. But the Cop car stays on course toward Larsen.

EXT. AIRFIELD — LARGE HANGAR — DAY

Approaching the entrance, he strains to see inside. It's quiet, no signs of people or activity.

Looks up, no planes in the sky.

POP, his leg ruptures, blood sprays. He collapses, clutching his thigh in agony, blood seeps.

Turns to look in the direction of the shot.

Frank limps along the runway toward him, clothes blackened, skin charred. He reloads, the empty shell casing pirouettes through the air.

Larsen rises weakly to a sitting position on the tarmac. Groaning in pain, clutching the wound, fingers drenched red.

Sees the Police car - getting closer. Frank closes in, rifle raised for the final kill.

The Cop car SCREECHES to a halt before the two men. Tim steps out, draws his pistol.

TIM

Put it down, Frank. It's over.

Silence, save for the quiet whistle of wind through exposed gun barrels.

Frank eases off just a touch, his defiance palpable.

FRANK

Says who, baw?

Tim steps forward, aim unwavering.

TIM

Says me.

Wrenches the weapon from Frank's singed hands.

TIM

We know what you did, Frank.

Frank's expression hardens. Tim walks to Larsen, helps him stand.

FRANK

And I know what you did, user three
two eight.

(pause)

Did ya love her? Or was it the cash?

TIM

Why can't it be both?

Tim hands the sniper rifle to Larsen. He takes it, checks the chamber, then levels it at Frank.

Frank is aghast.

FRANK

Easy now --

Tim turns away.

LARSEN

Goodbye sunshine.

BANG

Frank's body crumples to the bitumen in a cloud of red mist.

Blood pools under his contorted corpse, dead eyes wide open in shock. Larsen tosses the rifle.

TIM

You ok?

Larsen falters, Tim supports him.

LARSEN

Relatively.

They look up, a Cessna jet appears in the sky with a ROAR.

It banks gracefully, descending toward the landing strip.

LARSEN

Sorry about Maria, but it doesn't
alter our agreement.

TIM

It's a bit more complicated now --

LARSEN

She takes out Frank while I'm keeping
an eye on things, I walk in, confirm
her self defense story, and you
lovebirds pay up.

TIM
Larsen --

LARSEN
I held up my end of the deal.

The jet touches down on the runway with a THUD, hurtling toward them.

TIM
Listen to me, Maria's alive.

LARSEN
What?

TIM
She's in a coma.

Larsen grapples with disbelief, struggling to make sense of the revelation.

TIM
Doctors say there's a ten percent chance she'll survive.

Larsen looks past Tim's shoulder, an Ambulance is speeding toward them.

EXT. AIRFIELD — RUNWAY — DAY

The plane SKIDS to a halt in a cloud of dust. O'Hara emerges, her gaze steely, hand resting on her holster, poised for action. The Pilot follows closely behind.

O'HARA
Stay here.

He complies, taking up a defensive stance, gripping a machine-gun.

EXT. AIRFIELD — LARGE HANGAR — DAY

O'Hara is walking toward them, her approach relentless.

LARSEN
If O'Hara finds out your Maria's toyboy, she'll come knocking.

TIM
I can't access funds while --

LARSEN
Find a way.

She draws closer.

TIM
I need time.

And closer.

LARSEN
Seven days. Don't make me come back here.

The Ambulance SCREECHES to a stop.

TIM
New Orleans is in your blood now,
Larsen. It will never leave you.

O'Hara arrives, calming her holster stance.

O'HARA
Agent.

LARSEN
Ma'am.

She looks at Franks corpse, then at the destroyed hangar in the distance.

O'HARA
One hell of a mess, Larsen.

TIM
Miss O'Hara, the Sheriff's office will furnish you with a full report in due time.

O'HARA
Thank you, Officer. I'll take it from here.

Sandy rushes toward Larsen pushing a stretcher, kit-box around her shoulder. Motions for Tim to stand aside.

SANDY
I've got you.

Lays him down. Quickly assesses the bullet wounds entry and exit points.

SANDY
The Lord's got a hedge of protection around you.

Cleans it, applies pressure to staunch the bleeding. Then carefully wraps a dressing around his thigh.

SANDY
Two bullet wounds in two days.
(MORE)

SANDY (cont'd)
 (wrapping)
 Where are you going to get shot
 tomorrow?

His pained expression almost forms a smile. O'Hara, ever efficient, wants to get things rolling.

O'HARA
 Is he fit to fly?

Sandy swiftly wheels him toward the open double-doors of her Ambulance parked a few meters away.

SANDY (O.S.)
 He'll be in the sky before you know
 it.

EXT. AIRFIELD — LARGE HANGAR — AMBULANCE - DAY

Larsen lies still on the stretcher, condition stabilized, as Sandy meticulously stitches the wound closed.

He gestures to her cellphone, silently requesting permission to make a call.

LARSEN
 May I?

She smiles, hands it to him.

SANDY
 Need to check on Tim. Be right back.

Then leaves to give him privacy.

RING-RING

RING-RING

LARSEN
 Hi princess.
 (pause)
 I'm fine, I was off the grid for a
 while. I'm coming home.
 (pause)
 Now.

EXT. AIRFIELD — SMALL HANGAR - DAY (LATER)

White smoke billows from the extinguished structure, an armada of emergency vehicles remain on scene, spraying foam.

Parish LOCALS gather at the edge of their fields, watching from a distance, murmuring amongst themselves.

Overhead, a TV news helicopter hovers, capturing footage for its next headline

EXT. AIRFIELD — RUNWAY — CESSNA JET — DAY

The Pilot REVS up the engines, preparing for takeoff.

O'HARA
Ready for a serious debrief?

LARSEN
Yes, Ma'am.

O'Hara boards the plane. Larsen, all patched up, hobbles behind her.

Tim and Sandy stand together, watching their departure.

Larsen stops, turns around. Gives Sandy a thumbs up, then glares at Tim expectantly; seven days.

The two watch as the jet taxis down the runway.

The aircraft gains altitude, VROOM.

Then evaporates into the infinite blue sky.

INT. DALLAS — LARSEN'S HOUSE — STUDY — NIGHT (2 WEEKS LATER)

Cheap wallpaper barely visible behind a chaotic array of whiteboards, thumb-tacked photos and newspaper clippings.

Larsen sits at a computer, cellphone to his ear, conversing with CLIENT (50's), a disgruntled businessman.

CLIENT (ON PHONE)
I don't want it to be messy. Not at the office.

LARSEN
No problem. Let's talk renumeration.

CLIENT (ON PHONE)
I can get you ten percent of what the shares are worth.

LARSEN
Twenty.
(pause)
I understand that.

Utensils CRASH to the floor in the next room. Larsen stands.

LARSEN
My offer expires in twenty four hours. Make a decision.

END CALL

INT. LARSEN'S HOUSE — BEDROOM — NIGHT

Medical equipment arranged haphazardly, a monitor BEEPS, hand-drawn charts adorn the walls - a ghastly makeshift hospital ward.

Jessica lies sprawled in bed, encased from head to toe in a burn compression suit, only her bloodshot eyes visible. Her right leg has been amputated below the knee, four fingers on her left hand missing.

Larsen enters.

LARSEN

What's wrong princess, you need something?

Crouches on the floor to pick up a food tray, sets it on a pink child's dresser.

JESSICA

Y-you're going to get caught.

Navigates around a rickety wheelchair, sits on the edge of her blanket.

LARSEN

This ones a sure bet, I promise. Then we'll have enough to travel abroad. They can work miracles, even get you prosthetics.

Jessica sobs weakly.

LARSEN

It'll take some time, but it'll be worth it.

JESSICA

Please...don't do this.

Runs his hand lovingly across her cheek, his touch gentle.

LARSEN

Then you'll be as beautiful as ever, Jess.

JESSICA

That's why you ch-chose me.

LARSEN

You were assigned, I --

Outside, the SCREECH of car tyres. Doors SLAM, indistinct CHATTER.

Larsen stands up, moves to the window. Peers through half-drawn curtains.

LARSEN'S POV

In the street below, an armored vehicle parked next to a black SUV.

A SWAT TEAM, clad in body armor, converge on the house from all directions, flashlight-mounted machine-guns illuminate the darkness as they prepare to breach.

O'Hara emerges from the SUV, search warrant in hand. Their eyes meet.

JESSICA (O.S.)
We both swore an oath, Larsen.

BACK TO SCENE

Turns to face Jessica, realizing she sold him out.

KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK

JESSICA
(crying)
I'm sorry.

INT. DALLAS - STREET - SUV - NIGHT (TRAVELING)

Larsen idles in the back seat, handcuffed and drowsy. At the front, DRIVER (30's) maneuvers through plodding traffic.

Beside him, O'Hara sits with a somber expression, bathed in the dim glow of dashboard lights, gaze fixed on the congestion ahead.

O'HARA
We'll do what we can for Jess.

Her eyes flicker to the rear-view mirror.

O'HARA
Maria's not going to make it.

INT. NEW ORLEANS - HOSPITAL WARD - NIGHT

Maria lays in bed surrounded by droning computer equipment, a tube is inserted into her mouth. An electrocardiogram machine emits a steady hum - BEEP, BEEP, BEEP.

O'HARA (V.O.)
 Unfortunately, Gabriela has agreed to
 terminate life support.

Gabriela observes through a window, horizontal shadows from half-drawn venetian blinds creep across her solemn face.

INT. HOSPITAL - PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Rows of vehicles neatly parked, concrete pillars line the space. Emergency vehicles occupy their designated spots.

Tim parks his Police car in an open space, turns off the ignition. Before he can collect a flower bouquet from the passenger seat, a SWAT TEAM surround him.

SWAT#1 leaps onto the bonnet, aims a machine-gun at his face. Tim raises his hands in surrender, the jig is up.

INT. HOSPITAL - CONSULTATION ROOM - NIGHT

Walls adorned with framed certificates and medical diagrams. Shelves neatly stacked with books, files and equipment.

O'HARA (V.O.)
 She's pregnant.

A cluster of DOCTOR'S huddle around a computer, fixated on an ultrasound feed.

O'HARA (V.O.)
 Doctors are proceeding with the
 birth.

On the screen, Tim and Maria's child, in perfect health.

INT. DALLAS - STREET - SUV - NIGHT (TRAVELING)

O'Hara focuses her attention on the road ahead.

O'HARA
 Last to die clause, kid inherits
 every cent.

Larsen's gaze drifts out of the window.

LARSEN
 Life is a bowl of gumbo.

INT. NEW ORLEANS - CHURCH - NIGHT

Golden light filters through stained glass windows. At the altar, a cloth draped elegantly adorned with flickering candles.

The rhythmic hum of an electrocardiogram machine punctuates the sacred silence.

BEEP, BEEP, BEEP

Then, a voodoo ambiance swells, beating DRUMS reverberate through the hallowed space.

Tambourines join in, their rhythmic SHAKING adding to the hypnotic cadence.

In the center of the altar, Gabriela's baby figurine rests, a symbol of innocence and hope amidst the solemnity.

- Drums BEATING

- Tambourines SHAKING.

CUT TO BLACK.