

Halcyon Days
An original script

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FADE IN

EXT. INTERSTATE 90, SOUTH DAKOTA/MINNESOTA BORDER --
AFTERNOON

A new model SUV cruises down the nearly empty interstate, passing cars that it approaches.

It passes the 'Welcome to Sioux Falls' sign, pulls to the side of the road.

The driver, QUINN MERRILL, mid-30's, pulls a map across the steering wheel. He tosses the map back onto the passenger seat, turns the radio up, and swearing, turns back onto the road.

EXT. HWY 29/81, SOUTH DAKOTA -- AFTERNOON

The SUV passes field upon field of yellow grass and easy plains. Farmhouses are few and far between, and little breaks the monotony of the road.

Quinn passes a bright, chipper sign filled with Rotary and Lion Clubs' signs that says "Welcome to Watertown, South Dakota's rising star!"

Quinn SNORTS as he sees it, reaches over to the passenger seat and pulls on a baseball cap, keeping the rim low over his face. He slows the car down to the speed limit as he drives through the historic downtown.

Under one of the eaves of a storefront is a Sheriff's deputy, DAVE RYAN, his hat pulled low, face shadowed. He watches the SUV pull by, the soft khaki of his uniform a ripple in its tinted windows.

As the SUV clears the downtown and picks up speed, Dave shakes his head and turns towards the sheriff's office.

EXT. THE MERRILL FARM -- LATE AFTERNOON

Quinn sits at the top of the driveway, staring down at a large, sprawling farm.

A wide, three-story house sits at the end of the drive, with fading white paint and peeling trim, a leaning picket fence around its brown and dry front grass. Behind it, an even more lackluster barn waits, its red paint faded to pink, its doors bolted shut.

Along the drive runs a split rail fence, some of its rails missing, others falling to the ground. The drive itself is rutted, with potholes large enough to sink a tire. The fields around it are rampant with weeds, except for the back acres, distantly visible.

The tilted mailbox declares, in childish letters, that this is THE MERRILL'S. Quinn wipes his face, taken aback by the state of the house, before shifting the truck into gear and heading down the drive.

EXT. MERRILL'S FRONT PORCH -- CONTINUOUS

As the sound of the TRUCK'S ENGINE approaches, GRACE NOLAN steps out of the screen door, wiping her hands on her faded shorts. She watches the truck approach.

She is in her mid-30's as well, a dark blonde, almost pretty, but years of hard work and worry have worn her down, removed the sparkle she must have had when she was younger and replacing it with a tired, timid uncertainty.

As the truck parks, she goes to the porch stairs, stopping at the top.

Quinn TURNS OFF the engine, opens the door, steps out, opens the back door, pulls out a cheap duffel bag, a laptop bag and a very expensive camera bag. He comes to the stairs, nods.

QUINN

Grace.

He starts up the stairs. Grace, stunned, moves aside to let him by.

GRACE

Wha--

He opens the door with his toe as Grace takes a small step back.

QUINN

Talk much, Grace?

INT. MERRILL'S FRONT HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

QUINN

Or just read the manual ... Jesus Christ.

He stops in the room, frozen, as the door slams behind him. The house is split in the middle by a long hallway. To the right is a closed doorway and then a stairway. To the left is the parlor.

Quinn stares through the doorway. The room is dim, the corners shadowy. The furniture is heavy. The wallpaper is oppressive. There are framed black and white photos on every surface, on the walls. Children, horses, landscapes.

QUINN (CONT'D)

It's a shrine.

Grace comes in, softly closes the door.

GRACE
Your father wanted it exactly the way it was.

QUINN
He would.

Quinn's heads up the stairs, feet clumping noisily. Grace, wincing at the noise, follows him up.

INT. QUINN'S BEDROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Quinn stands in the middle of his old bedroom as Grace walks in.

GRACE
You've been gone a long time.

QUINN
Obviously.

He looks around at the floral comforter, the perfume bottles on the dresser, the lace curtains.

GRACE
It's my room, now. Your father thought -

QUINN
Right. Is there somewhere I can put my stuff? Just for a little while?

GRACE
A little while?

QUINN
Christ, Grace, can I stay here or not?

GRACE
Of course you can. It's half yours now, isn't it?

QUINN
Guess it is.

She moves out of the doorway.

GRACE
You can use your father's room.

Quinn flinches back, but he recovers quickly.

QUINN
Fine.

He leaves the room, and Grace trails after him down the hall.

INT. MR. MERRILL'S BEDROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Quinn is unpacking his bag in a bright, cozy room, standing out like a sore thumb, his demeanor too aggressive, too tense. Grace enters behind him.

GRACE
You missed the funeral.

QUINN
I know.

He doesn't turn around, instead unzips the camera bag, from which he pulls out a very expensive digital Nikon and lens, and begins examining them.

GRACE
Where have you been?

QUINN
Around.

Grace nods, watches him closely.

GRACE
You take pictures with that thing?

QUINN
Yeah. Is um - is he here?

GRACE
(nodding)
Napping. He'll be up in a bit.

QUINN
I should see him.

He finally turns around to Grace, who blocks the door, guarding the house from Quinn.

GRACE
He has therapy right after he wakes up. You can see him at supper.

QUINN
Fine.

GRACE
Supper is at six. Make sure you wash.

She leaves. Quinn, with an irritated sigh, puts the camera carefully in its bag, then collapses on the bed.

INT. MR. MERRILL'S BEDROOM -- LATER

Quinn comes in from the adjacent bathroom, towel wrapped around his waist. From the depths of his duffel, a cell phone RINGS.

He curses, rushes to the duffel, finds the phone and flips it open.

QUINN

Hello ... Hey, Mike. ... I'm in South Dakota. ... Yeah, I got those pics over to the paper before I left.

...I can resend, I guess...

(he sits down, pulls out his laptop)

Hey, same old, same old. ... I don't know how long I'm here. ... Turkey? There's a war in Turkey? ... Really? Yeah, yeah, ... What's the toll? ... 200 people? Jesus.

(he bangs the laptop)

Yeah, Mike, hey there's no internet out here ... South Dakota...we're lucky the cells work...Yeah, I can send 'em snail mail, no problems...

Grace comes in behind him, with a young man, 17-year-old CONNOR MERRILL. He resembles Quinn in height and coloring. Connor has a soft, slightly out-of-focused smile that is nonetheless genuine and sweet, he walks with a slight shuffle, and one side of his face is slightly relaxed, as if the muscles don't work as well and when he speaks, it is slightly slurred, slow and with the utmost concentration as he struggles to find and pronounce the words. One arm is drawn up against his chest slightly. He has all the signs of mild retardation and cerebral palsy (mixed).

QUINN (CONT'D)

Yeah, yeah Mike. I don't think I can--

He looks up, sees Grace.

QUINN (CONT'D)

... Thanks. Yeah ... You too. Bye.

He hangs up.

GRACE

He heard your truck. He wanted to see who came to visit.

Quinn nods, keeping the bed between him and his son as he grabs a robe and shoves his arms into the sleeves.

CONNOR

Hel-lo, Quinn.

Connor walks over, holds out his hand for Quinn to shake. Quinn takes it, holding the robe together with the other. The towel he had on falls to his feet.

QUINN

Hey, Connor.

CONNOR

(Still shaking hand)

It's nice to meet you.

QUINN

It's nice to meet you, too.

Connor drops Quinn's hand, curiosity satisfied.

CONNOR

I'm going to wash for supper now,
Mom.

He heads for the door. As he passes Grace, she reaches up to ruffle his hair.

GRACE

Make sure you -

CONNOR

I know, I know. Under my nails and
behind my ears

He leaves.

QUINN

Way to spring that on me.

GRACE

I figured you could deal with it.

She closes the door.

QUINN

You gonna tell him I'm his dad?

GRACE

How long are you here for?

QUINN

(letting the subject
change go by)

As long as it takes to sort everything
out.

GRACE

And why'd you even bother? You think
a few weeks are going to make up for
17 years?

QUINN
 There were other reasons to come
 back --

GRACE
 You're father's will?

QUINN
 Yeah.

GRACE
 You were worried you'd lose a place
 you haven't set foot on since high
 school?

QUINN
 The land and the house are half mine.
 As long as I came back. 'Least, that's
 what the lawyer said.

GRACE
 So, ten acres and a barn? That
 brought you back?

QUINN
 One of the reasons, yeah.

GRACE
 (with a certain hauteur)
 Supper is almost ready. We usually
 dress.

Grace hands him his clothes from the nearby chair. As the door closes behind her, Quinn starts to get dressed.

INT. MERRILL'S KITCHEN -- LATER

This room shows Grace's stamp more than any other room in the house. A large, round table with six chairs around it is at one end, a door to the mud room at the other.

Connor sits at the table, carefully arranging his napkin on his lap. He then turns to the silverware, making sure that each piece is exactly one inch from the edge of the table. His tongue sticks out slightly as he concentrates, and occasionally his limbs tremble.

Grace prepares the last of the meal.

Connor moves to his plate, carefully lining it up between his silverware. As he does this, he begins to HUM "The Anvil Chorus."

Quinn enters in the middle of this. He goes to the head of the table. Connor STOPS HUMMING.

GRACE
That's your father's chair.

He shrugs, moves away. Connor HUMMS again. Quinn goes to the next chair, touches it. The HUMMING STOPS.

GRACE (CONT'D)
That's Dave's chair.

QUINN
Who's Dave?

GRACE
Dave Ryan -- from school?

QUINN
Right.

He moves away, and the HUMMING resumes.

QUINN (CONT'D)
He come over to dinner often?

He touches the next chair, watching Connor. Connor STOPS HUMMING.

GRACE
Every Sunday, after mass. That's my chair.

Exasperated, Quinn moves away. The HUMMING resumes.

QUINN
Where can I sit?

Grace looks up from pouring the gravy.

GRACE
He'll let you know.

Sighing, Quinn moves to the next chair. The HUMMING STOPS when he touches it. He moves to the last one as the HUMMING resumes. He sits down, and the HUMMING STOPS.

QUINN
Jesus. Grace, there aren't any chairs left.

GRACE
Maybe he doesn't like you.

She brings the gravy over to the table.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Or maybe you could just ask him.

Quinn stands up, and the HUMMING starts again.

QUINN
I can't ask him, he's humming.

Grace just looks at him.

Quinn pulls out the chair he just vacated, not sharing Grace's amusement.

QUINN (CONT'D)
Connor, do you mind if I sit here?

Connor, grinning, shakes his head. Quinn, disgruntled, sits, Connor keeps HUMMING. With a quick smile at Connor, Grace sits in her chair. Quinn starts to serve.

CONNOR
Uh-oh.

GRACE
We say grace.

Quinn freezes, serving spoon in air, then replaces it.

QUINN
Right. Sorry.

The all fold hands, Quinn looking uncomfortable, as Connor leads the prayer.

CONNOR
Rub-a-dub-dub-here-comes-the-grub-
Yea-God.

Connor grins, and Quinn, despite himself, lets out a little laugh. Even Grace smiles as she begins to pass the salad.

QUINN
This is very good.

GRACE
Thank you.

Silence falls again.

GRACE (CONT'D)
You never told us what you do.

QUINN
I take pictures.

CONNOR
I draw pictures.

GRACE
Very good ones, too.
(to Quinn)
What kind of pictures? Portraits?

CONNOR

No, horses.

Grace smiles, laughs a little. Quinn chuckles. Silence descends.

GRACE

So what kind of photography do you do?

QUINN

I point the camera.

GRACE

At what?

Quinn puts his fork down, focuses intently on Grace.

QUINN

At war. I cover war.

Grace backs into her chair a little, and Connor stares.

GRACE

Oh.

(after a moment)

That must be interesting.

QUINN

It has its moments.

GRACE

You must see quite a bit of the world.

QUINN

Not the bits that anybody else wants to go to.

He grabs another piece of bread from across the table, smears it with butter.

CONNOR

You should ask.

QUINN

What?

CONNOR

To pass the bread.

Confused, Quinn looks at Grace.

GRACE

Instead of reaching across the table.

QUINN

Sorry.

CONNOR
You're very rude.

GRACE
Connor.

Quinn breathes deeply, clearly annoyed.

QUINN
Sorry.

CONNOR
It's ok. Didn't you learn manners?

GRACE
Connor, stop.

QUINN
I guess I forgot.

CONNOR
My gram'pa taught me manners.

QUINN
Yeah, well, he tried to teach me.

Connor, confused, turns to Quinn.

CONNOR
How did Gram'pa teach you?

Grace stands up, making her plates clatter, distracting both Connor and Quinn.

GRACE
Dessert?

INT. THE MERRILL'S BARN -- EARLY EVENING

Quinn stands in the middle of the barn, dressed in his normal khakis and shirt, his loafers sinking into the mud of the floor. The afternoon sun sends shafts of light through the cracks in the boards of the roof and walls. The stalls list, and it is apparent that the barn has not seen use in at least a decade.

Quinn takes a step towards the tack room, GROANS in disgust as his shoe comes off in the muck. Behind him, Connor peeks his head around the door of the barn, GIGGLES. Quinn jumps, puts his foot squarely in the muck, unprotected by the shoe. Connor LAUGHS.

QUINN
Aw, Jesus Christ.

He looks at Connor, who is still LAUGHING.

QUINN (CONT'D)
Yeah, funny. Thanks.

CONNOR
Where's your boots?

QUINN
Sorry?

Connor smiles, comes closer into the barn. Quinn blinks as he realizes that Connor is taller than him.

CONNOR
Don't be sorry. Wear boots.
(he wrinkles his nose)
And jeans.

Quinn nods, getting uncomfortable -- almost panicked -- that he is alone with his son. He backs away, towards his shoe.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
Don't you know how to wear boots?

QUINN
Of course I know how to wear boots.

He pulls his shoes out of the mud, and, attempting to balance on one foot, pulls off his sock. After a moments deliberation, he puts the shoe on, holding the filthy sock with two fingers. Connor, climbing on top of an old sawhorse with a rotting saddle on it, grins at Quinn.

CONNOR
Are we gonna get horses?

QUINN
What?

CONNOR
Horses. I had a colt, but Gram'pa
sold him.

Connor saddens for a moment, but it passes and he smiles another brilliant smile.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
His name was Frisk.

Quinn rolls his sock into a ball.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
Did you ever have a horse?

QUINN
Once. Awhile ago.

CONNOR
 Mine was an Apalichilan.

QUINN
 Appalachian.

Quinn corrects Connor unthinkingly as he lifts an old buckle off the wall leading to the tack room.

CONNOR
 What's that?

He jumps off the sawhorse -- which he has been pretending to ride -- and goes to Quinn.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
 Can I see it?

He reaches up, but Quinn pulls it away.

QUINN
 No.

CONNOR
 Why not?

QUINN
 'Cause I said no.

Connor looks at Quinn, hurt in his eyes. He reaches for it again, Quinn pulls it further away.

CONNOR
 Please? I won't hurt it -

Connor loses his balance slightly, and Quinn catches him, steadying him. As soon as Connor is righted, Quinn steps back.

Unnerved, he drops the buckle in the ground and strides out of the barn, leaving Connor alone. Connor picks the buckle up, staring after Quinn in hurt and puzzlement.

INT. MR. MERRILL'S BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Grace nudges the door open, a large laundry basket in her hands. She puts it down, picks up Quinn's clothes he has left on the floor.

She turns to the bed, pulling off the comforter, not seeing the half open duffel on the foot of the bed. It falls off, spilling out a manilla envelope, as well as a thick traveler's wallet, a first-class return plane ticket out of Chicago and a passport, as well as a few hundred in cash. Grace looks at the ticket and the cash.

GRACE

Jesus.

She picks up the manilla envelope, turning it over, then carefully opens the envelope and pours out its contents.

Glossy pictures spill, showing unmitigated violence, caught real and raw and unfiltered. Bodies torn open, decapitated, emaciated. Widows screaming in something beyond grief, children mute with despair, soldiers callous and tired. The dead, the dying, the raped, the refugees.

Grace, with trembling fingers, pushes the photos around, eyes tearing.

Quinn comes in, filthy sock in his hand.

QUINN

There you are, I left Connor in the barn--

He sees what she's looking at, walks over, gathers everything, puts them away.

Grace, slightly embarrassed, goes back to stripping the bed.

GRACE

Why are you here, Quinn?

QUINN

Nostalgia for my lost days of boyhood doesn't do it for you?

GRACE

Not really, no.

Quinn zips up the bag, throws it in a corner.

QUINN

Do you know how much this place is worth?

GRACE

I have an idea.

QUINN

It's worth more in someone else's hands than mine.

GRACE

Quinn --

QUINN

Every acre has to be turned, just to pay the property taxes.

GRACE
You can't sell this place.

Grace rips the sheets off the bed and puts them in the basket, pulling clean ones down from the closet.

QUINN
I can't stay and run it, Grace.

GRACE
Just go away again. Leave it to me and Connor.

QUINN
The lawyers -- Dad's lawyers -- they got a hold of me after he died. Explained a few things.

GRACE
I'm sure that they thought they were well-informed.

QUINN
There's no money, Grace. You think I wanted to come back?

GRACE
I had hoped that maybe there were other considerations.

Quinn grabs one end of the sheet, forcing her to look at him, then helps her finish laying it down.

QUINN
It's sell it or eviction. The bank owns more of this land than we do.

Grace breathes in, quickly, then bends over to tuck in the sheet.

QUINN (CONT'D)
You didn't know?

GRACE
They owned this house, your parents --

QUINN
Hospital bills, almost two decades without a single cash crop -- where do you think the money came from?

GRACE
Your father never even mentioned --

QUINN
 (jokingly)
 If we had a nickel for all the things
 my father never mentioned ...

He smiles, expecting her to as well.

GRACE
 Was that supposed to be funny?

QUINN
 Jesus, cut me a little slack ...

GRACE
 There's no slack left, Quinn.

She throws the last pillow on the bed, goes to pick up the laundry basket but Quinn gets it first, holding it from her, teasingly.

QUINN
 I was joking, Grace ...

GRACE
 It's my life. It's your son's life.
 It's not a joke.

Grace grabs the basket from him.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 Do what you want, Quinn. You always
 did, anyway, right?

QUINN
 I have an appraiser coming out at
 nine tomorrow.

GRACE
 Of course you do. Were you planning
 on telling me or were you just hoping
 I'd figure it out all on my own?

Grace gives him a bitter smile, then leaves, slamming the door behind her.

EXT. THE MERRILL FARM -- MORNING

Quinn and THE APPRAISER stand out front of the house. Behind them, Connor and Grace head to Grace's beat up truck. Grace watches Quinn and the Appraiser closely, but the words that reach her are too faint to make out.

The Appraiser smiles, shakes Quinn's hand. He helps her into the car, waving, watches her leave the driveway. When she is too far away to see, he flips her off, then goes into the house, frustration evident in the way he walks.

Grace waves, hiding a smile at Quinn's displeasure, as she drives out the lane.

INT. MR. MERRILL'S STUDY -- AFTERNOON

Quinn sits behind Mr. Merrill's desk, sorting through files. Behind him, a safe is swung open. His computer, digital camera and printer are set up on the desk, too hard and shiny in the room.

Quinn idly flips through the bills, his forehead creasing.

Grace enters, softly, with a glass of juice.

QUINN

You're back.

GRACE

Yes.

QUINN

Connor get to school ok?

GRACE

Learning those life skills.

QUINN

(awkwardly)

Will he get better?

GRACE

He is better. His teacher thinks he can get a job next year.

QUINN

Really?

He puts the papers down, and Grace hands him the juice.

GRACE

Yeah. It'd be good for him, I think.

QUINN

You always have to drive him?

GRACE

The only decent school is in Sioux Falls, and they don't run buses out this far.

QUINN

You have to go back to pick him up?

GRACE

No, another mom does the afternoon run.

Quinn nods, looks back down at the papers, sighs.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Is it really bad?

QUINN

Worse then I thought.

GRACE

I had no idea things had gotten so out of control.

QUINN

He sold a lot of land.

GRACE

He was renting out what he could, but he stopped growing crops the year you left. The heart just left him.

QUINN

I see that, too.

GRACE

He wouldn't sell the last 20 acres. Said that -

QUINN

That was what his grandfather started with. Yeah, he used to say that all the time.

GRACE

It'll be a shame to see it go.

QUINN

20 acres isn't viable. It can't sustain a farm.

GRACE

The rents on it--

He stands, closes one folder, grabs another out of the safe.

QUINN

Aren't enough. Even if we did turn it, they'd barely pay the taxes, and only then if every inch is producing and the market doesn't bottom out.

GRACE

It's still good land.

QUINN

It looks good. But he didn't have it tested, so who knows what's under the surface.

GRACE

It's a good farm.

Quinn puts the new folder on the desk, sits, starts sorting through it.

QUINN

It was, once.

GRACE

It could be again, I think, if someone cared for it.

QUINN

(gently)

No, it couldn't. 20 acres wasn't enough 100 years ago.

GRACE

It's enough to try.

QUINN

The days of the small farmer are dead and gone, and you know it. They can't compete.

GRACE

You just don't want to.

Quinn organizes the papers, stacking them up in folders, throwing some away.

QUINN

You're right. I don't.

GRACE

It's the only place Connor knows --

QUINN

Connor --

(he holds up some papers)

You can't stay here and afford all this. Speech therapy, physical therapy, therapy therapy.

GRACE

What do you expect, Quinn? He needs all those things --

QUINN

I'm not saying he doesn't. I'm saying it's expensive, and Dad's gone. There's no insurance.

Grace looks out the window, distressed.

GRACE

I can get insurance.

QUINN

For a kid with cerebral palsy?

GRACE

There's programs. Groups.

Quinn gets up, moves closer to her.

QUINN

Grace, in six months you won't be able to afford his prescriptions, much less any therapy.

GRACE

We'll figure something out. Connor stays in school for almost six hours a day now, I can get a job.

QUINN

I've been here less than a week and even I can tell he wears you out.

GRACE

I could do it, if I had to.

QUINN

That's what I'm saying, Grace. You don't have to.

GRACE

We were getting along just fine before.

Quinn takes a step towards the window, intent on Grace.

QUINN

Dad had health insurance. Plus his pension, plus the money I sent every month.

GRACE

And the rents on the back acres.

QUINN

And the rents. And he still wasn't paying every bill.

GRACE
He never told me.

QUINN
If we sell, it'll be a nice little chunk for you. Buy a smaller place, close to Connor's school. Or move to where there's a better school.

GRACE
Leave Watertown?

He studies Grace for a moment, goes back to the safe, pulls out some more papers, gets back to the desk, sighs.

QUINN
If we hadn't -- if we hadn't had Connor, honestly, Grace, would you have stayed?

GRACE
I had Connor. You left me with him.

QUINN
Yes, but what if --

GRACE
There hasn't been time to speculate on the what-if's.

QUINN
God, there are so many places in this world that are better than this.

GRACE
Like where -- like those places where you take your pictures? That's better than this?

QUINN
At least something happens there.

GRACE
Connor happened here. That's something.

He sits down, plops the papers down in front of him. Grace, watching him, comes closer.

GRACE (CONT'D)
What's wrong?

QUINN
It's the incident report.

GRACE
The what?

She looks over his shoulder, unthinkingly putting her hand on his arm.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Oh.

Spread out on the desk in front of him are pictures of a car accident.

INSERT

The first is of a 1984 Dodge Ram Charger, on its side, its front smashed in, glass shattered.

BACK TO SCENE

GRACE

We don't need to look at these.

QUINN

I'd forgotten how -

GRACE

Don't -

Grace closes the folder.

QUINN

Do you remember?

GRACE

Not much.

QUINN

That's a blessing. I hear the screaming --

He goes to the window, opens it.

QUINN (CONT'D)

The appraiser says there's a lot of work needs to be done around here.

GRACE

Yes. There was never time ...

QUINN

So I figured I might as well get some of it done, since I'm here.

GRACE

Yeah? That'd be nice. Dave tries, but he doesn't have much free time.

QUINN

I figure I'll paint the barn, maybe. Fix the fence.

He turns from the window, faces Grace.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Appraiser says it'll be easier to
sell that way.

GRACE

Right. Easier to sell. You're an
ass, Quinn Merrill, do you know that?

Grace walks out.

Sighing, Quinn goes to the desk, gathers up the folders and
puts them in the safe.

They don't want to lie flat, riding up against something.
Quinn pulls them out, digs into the back of the safe, pulls
out a worn leather camera bag, its leather strap frayed and
taped in places.

He holds it, gingerly, then unsnaps the lid and pulls out an
older Nikon, in pristine condition. The film reads 16/24
used.

He stares at it a moment, then puts it back in the case,
puts the folders in the safe, the camera on top of them, and
slams the safe shut.

INT. MERRILL'S FRONT HALLWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

Quinn pulls on his jacket as he opens the front door. Behind
him, Grace comes down the stairs.

GRACE

Where are you going?

QUINN

Out.

GRACE

Why?

She moves into the warm evening light, unaware of how it
softens her face, highlights her hair.

QUINN

I need some boots, jeans. Maybe a
drink. Definitely some tools, all
the ones here are in a sad state.

GRACE

You be careful.

QUINN

Of anyone in particular?

Grace looks away.

GRACE
 Maybe I should go -

QUINN
 No, I will. Connor'll be back soon
 anyway. It'd be better if you're
 here to watch him.

He leaves, and shuts the door firmly behind him.

GRACE
 When have I not watched him?

EXT. DOWNTOWN WATERTOWN -- AFTERNOON

Quinn's SUV pulls into an empty slot in front of a hardware store that sits with a long line of shops along the town's main street. He gets out, a little self-conscious, then squares his shoulders and heads into the hardware store.

INT. HARDWARE STORE -- MOMENTS LATER

The store is dim. A teenage girl sits behind the counter, reading a magazine. She looks up as the door swings shut and rings a small bell.

SHOPGIRL
 Afternoon.

QUINN
 Hey.

Quinn walks down an aisle, pulling out a list from his pocket. Around a corner comes SVEN GUSTAFSEN, an older, wizened man.

SVEN
 Need some help, mister?

QUINN
 Sven.

He comes forward, hand outstretched. Sven looks up, focuses on Quinn's face, automatically takes Quinn's hand.

SVEN
 I'm sorry son, I'm not sure I --

He stops, and recognition crosses his face. Quinn lets his hand drop. Sven claps Quinn on the shoulder.

SVEN (CONT'D)
 It's good to see you, Quinn. Good to
 have you back in town.

QUINN
 It's good to see you, Mr. Gustafsen.

SVEN

Sven's fine, son. Don't work for me anymore.

Quinn smiles again, and Sven takes the list from his hand.

SVEN (CONT'D)

Whatcha got here?

(he reads the list)

Building up the farm? Coming back for a spell?

QUINN

Tryin' to get it ready to sell, Mr. Gust - Sven.

Sven absorbs that, nods, disappointed.

SVEN

Can't fault you there. Farmin' ain't the life it was.

QUINN

No, sir.

SVEN

Well, let's get you set up.

Quinn shrugs, runs his hand along a shelf.

EXT. DOWNTOWN WATERTOWN -- LATER

Quinn comes out of the store with a number of bags and pockets his wallet. He unlocks the car with his controller, the BLEEP loud, and then opens the back door and throws the bag in, closes it, and starts to open the front door.

PETER

Look who waltzed back in town.

Quinn leans his head against the window before he turns around to face PETER, dressed in jeans and boots and cowboy hat.

QUINN

Just picking up a few things, is all. How you doin', Peter?

Peter walks a little closer, followed by two or three of his BUDDIES. Peter LAUGHS, a sound with a mean edge.

PETER

Oh, we're just fine.

His two buddies move to the sides, effectively caging Quinn in.

QUINN

I can see that. Bulk'd up a bit,
yeah?

The street gets darker as the sun sets. Quinn moves back a step, so that his back is firm against the truck. The street is empty.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Peter, if you're mad about your sister --

Peter throws a punch, Quinn dodges, comes up and gets Peter in the stomach while Peter's two buddies move in.

Quinn stands up, gets one man in the chin, kicks out and gets the third man in the groin, stumbles back, away from the truck, to regroup.

QUINN (CONT'D)

I can understand --

Whip fast, he catches one buddy in the face with a quick, hard punch, but as he turns to face down Peter the third guy comes up behind him and holds Quinn's arms down.

The second guy helps secure Quinn, forces him to his knees. Quinn's mouth is bleeding, but he is still smiling as Peter walks towards him. Peter is breathing hard, holding his stomach.

PETER

You upped and left her with an idiot
for a baby.

Peter pulls Quinn head back, punches him hard in the face. Quinn falls sideways, is pulled upright by Peter's buddies.

PETER (CONT'D)

Then serve her with divorce papers
two years later.

He punches Quinn again. Quinn bends over.

PETER (CONT'D)

She may forgive you, but I don't.
You watch yourself around here.

Another punch, this one landing on Quinn's chest. His air whistles out, and he lands on all fours on the cement.

PETER (CONT'D)

You're a coward and more of a fool
than I thought.

Peter kicks him, hard, in the gut, and Quinn flips over.

PETER (CONT'D)

You took everything Grace coulda
been --

The three surround Quinn as he tries to get back on his feet.

PETER (CONT'D)

And not nothing was ever taken from
you --

DAVE

That's enough now, boys. You've had
your fun.

Quinn crawls to the curb, sits up, spits blood.

QUINN

That's right, party's over.

Dave, a tall, rangy, red-headed man the same age as Quinn, stands under a street light. He is wearing a Sheriff's Deputy uniform, one hand resting lightly -- but not without threat -- on his pistol. He keeps his eyes on Peter and his buddies.

Peter and his buddies, after a moment, stand down.

PETER

You hurt her again, Merrill, and
I'll kill you.

DAVE

Now, Peter. You say that one more
time and I'll have to take it
seriously.

Peter glares at Quinn, then he and his buddies walk away.

DAVE (CONT'D)

I'll drive you home.

Dave helps Quinn to his feet, then supports him to the car.

QUINN

Thanks for stepping in. Didn't really
expect you to.

DAVE

Grace called me up, worried about
you. Made me promise I'd see you
home safe.

Quinn collapses against the passenger seat of the Sheriff's car, groans.

QUINN

Great.

INT. MERRILL'S KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Quinn sits under the overhead light in the kitchen as Grace cleans his face. He is shirtless, his chest wrapped in bandages. Next to him, on the table, is the town's newspaper. Quinn's high school yearbook photo stares up at them, and under it are the words "Town's Prodigal Son Returns," followed by a brief, gossipy article. From across the table, Dave watches as he drinks his beer. Occasionally Quinn HISSES as Grace cleans a deep cut.

QUINN

I ought to thank you, Dave.

DAVE

Grace called. I did her a favor.

Grace puts a butterfly bandage on a cut under Quinn's eyes, starts to pack up her supplies.

QUINN

That's quite a medicine cabinet you've got.

GRACE

It has its uses. You should sleep sitting up. Those ribs could be cracked.

She leaves.

QUINN

It's been a while, Dave. How've you been?

Dave finishes his beer in one long gulp, then gets up and heads to the door. As he passes Quinn, he pauses.

DAVE

Let's get this clear. I don't like you much, but I'm fond of Grace, and she wants you safe.

Dave takes a step towards Quinn, leans in a bit.

DAVE (CONT'D)

But we ain't even close to friends.

He pulls back, goes to the door.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Just so we're clear.

Dave leaves, heading after Grace. Quinn groans and rubs his forehead.

INT. MERRILL'S BATHROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Grace puts the last of her medical supplies away in a very well-stocked medicine closet. Dave comes in behind her, rubs her shoulders gently. Grace leans against him, then smiles and turns around, wrapping her arms around his neck and snuggling for a second.

DAVE
I don't like him here.

GRACE
He has the right.

Dave pulls away slightly.

DAVE
Man don't have a right to a single thing.

GRACE
He was young.

DAVE
So were you.

GRACE
He's here now, isn't he?

DAVE
Don't think you can change him, Grace, turn him into some husband/father figure. He wasn't then, and he isn't now.

GRACE
You should go.

She closes the closet door, back stiff.

DAVE
Sweetheart, come on.

GRACE
Please. It's been a long day. Go home.

DAVE
You call if things -- if you need anything.

Grace touches his cheek, smiles.

GRACE
You're sweet. Now go home.

Dave puts his hat on, touches the brim.

DAVE

Yes, Ma'am.

He leaves as Grace gives him a small smile.

EXT. THE MERRILL FARM -- NIGHT

The house is dark, the moon almost set. From down the road, a truck's ENGINE revs. It rushes into sight, squeals down the driveway. Loud country music BLARES from the cab, and the men in it are WHOOPING AND HOLLERING, SHOOTING off guns into the air. Lights go on in the house. The truck speeds away as Quinn comes running down the stairs, holding his ribs. Behind him, Grace comes out.

GRACE

Come inside, Quinn. Come on.

Quinn watches the red lights fade, then turns back towards the house. From inside, a loud HOWL is heard.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Oh, God. Connor.

(loudly)

Connor, it's OK, sweetie.

The HOWLS continue as Quinn struggles up the steps and inside the house.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

Quinn comes up the stairs just in time to see a lamp come flying through Connor's bedroom door. He pauses, catches his breath, limps to the door, dodges a book.

INT. CONNOR'S BEDROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

GRACE

Connor, no, Connor, stop it.

Connor is off the bed, in a corner, screaming and throwing a tantrum. Grace is attempting to calm him. Connor kicks out, gets her in the shoulder, she falls backwards.

QUINN

Jesus.

Grace looks up, sees him in the doorway, gestures him away.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Grace --

GRACE

Strangers make it worse. Go.

Shaking his head, Quinn starts to go.

CONNOR

Noooooo!

Connor throws out his hand, hitting Grace in the face. Grace falls back, hand to her mouth, then struggles to get stand and get back to Connor.

Quinn stops her with a hand on her shoulder, then grabs a blanket off the bed and wraps Connor it, avoiding elbows and knees, working Connor around until Quinn is sitting up against the wall and Connor, wrapped in a blanket, is between his legs. Connor is now MOANING, a solid thrumming sound, and rocking. Grace stands up.

QUINN

What do I do now?

GRACE

Rock. Sing. He -- um -- He likes
Puff.

QUINN

As in the dragon?

Grace nods. Blood trickles from her lip.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Go, see to your lip. I think I have
him.

Grace backs out of the room as Quinn, clumsily, begins to HUM *Puff the Magic Dragon*. Slowly, Connor relaxes against him and his moaning ceases, becomes quiet breathing.

After a little while, the humming quiets, and Quinn's eyes drift close as well.

INT. CONNOR'S BEDROOM -- LATER

Grace comes in, holding gauze to her lip, sees the two asleep and watches for a minute before walking over and gently waking Quinn.

QUINN

Hey.

GRACE

Hey. Let's get him in bed.

QUINN

Don't think I can by myself.

GRACE

He'll help.

Connor smiles, sleepily, as Grace pushes his hair off his face. The two of them carefully finagle Connor into his bed.

There is a soft THUNK as something he had clutched in his hand falls out, but neither notice until Connor starts to FUSS. Grace pauses, looks around.

GRACE (CONT'D)

He had something in his hand --

Quinn looks around, sees a gleam, picks it up as Connor's small WHINES get louder. Quinn looks at what he is holding in his hand.

GRACE (CONT'D)

What is it?

QUINN

Its my - um - my buckle. The one I won that summer. He cleaned it ...

Quinn stands and carefully puts the buckle in Connor's hand and wraps his son's fingers around it. Connor's whimpers cease, and he sinks back into sleep.

They quietly back out of the room, Grace turns off the light. In the doorway, they turn and stare out each other. Quinn touches the cut on her lip.

GRACE

You give him that buckle?

QUINN

No.

(pause)

No.

Quinn looks at Connor for a moment, then back at Grace.

QUINN (CONT'D)

The bleeding stopped?

GRACE

Yes, thanks.

QUINN

Good.

His finger moves from her lip to her cheek, then his whole hand cups it.

GRACE

I need to sleep.

QUINN

Yeah.

GRACE

So do you.

She removes his hand, gently.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Good night, Quinn.

She leaves the doorway, and Quinn watches her go.

INT. MERRILL'S KITCHEN -- MORNING

Grace, HUMMING softly, makes eggs at the stove while Connor watches the bacon in the microwave go round. He seems unaffected by his midnight spell, though there is a cut on his cheek. Dave stands at a counter, buttering toast.

DAVE
And you didn't call right away?

GRACE
It was three in the morning -- It wasn't that big of a deal.

DAVE
I imagine Connor worked himself up.

Grace glances at Connor, smiles. Her lip is swollen, the cut looking worse in the daylight.

GRACE
He was startled. It's not his fault.

DAVE
I know.

He SIGHS, puts the knife down.

DAVE (CONT'D)
You know, Quinn's idea to sell this place would give you enough money to put Connor -

GRACE
Don't even say it.

DAVE
It's not that bad an idea.

Grace turns the fire off from under the skillet, scrapes the eggs onto a plate just as the microwave beeps. Placing the plate of eggs on the table, she moves to the microwave. Connor, grinning with delight, takes his place at the table.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Grace -

GRACE
We aren't going to discuss it. Not now. Not ever.

She puts the bacon on the table, goes back for pepper. As she passes him, he grabs her hand, touches the cut on her lip.

DAVE

I'm just sayin', you can't do this much longer.

Quinn enters, shirtless, smiles at Grace, gives Dave a stiff nod, sits down in the chair he sat in the day before, getting a grin from Connor.

QUINN

Do what? Morning, Connor.

CONNOR

Mornin', Quinn.

GRACE

Nothing.

Quinn nods, serves himself as Grace sits down.

QUINN

Good to see you, Dave.

DAVE

Heard you had a little ruckus last night.

QUINN

Yeah, a little.

GRACE

It was Peter. Drunk, again, and being stupid.

QUINN

That's the problem with in-laws --

He trails off as Dave and Grace stare at him, offended.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Sorry.

DAVE

I'll talk to him. He's a little -- upset.

QUINN

I'll say.

He reaches for the bacon, winces.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Think you can give me a ride to pick up my truck?

DAVE

Yeah.

Quinn nods, serves himself some bacon, starts to eat.

CONNOR

Grace, Quinn!

Quinn looks at Grace.

QUINN

Yup, there she is - oh, oh. Right.

The four bend their heads in the morning sunlight.

EXT. DOWNTOWN WATERTOWN -- LATER

Quinn and Dave drive down the downtown strip to Quinn's car. The police radio is on, SPITTING OUT STATIC and quick snippets of code.

DAVE

I want to thank you.

QUINN

For what?

DAVE

Grace says you helped out with Connor last night. That was -- good of you.

Quinn smiles sardonically, stares out his window.

QUINN

This town hasn't changed at all.

DAVE

That's what some of us like about it.

Quinn nods in agreement, stares out the window again.

QUINN

I've pissed you off again, haven't I?

DAVE

No.

QUINN

Yes I have, I can tell. Your ears get red --

Dave pulls in front of the hardware store, brakes hard.

DAVE
I've pretty much been furious with
you for 17 years, so no, Quinn, you
haven't pissed me off *again*.

Quinn starts to open the door.

DAVE (CONT'D)
One more thing, Quinn.

QUINN
Yes?

DAVE
You get Grace's hopes up, you try to
use her to salve your ego, I'll hurt
you.

QUINN
Same old honorable Dave.

He claps his hand on Dave's shoulder, opens the door, starts
to get out, then stops.

QUINN (CONT'D)
You come after me, Dave, you better
bring that gun.

He gets out, shuts the door, heads to his car.

INT. THE MERRILL'S BARN -- MOMENTS LATER

Quinn's truck PULLS UP, turns off. Car doors SLAM.

He comes in, sets the box down on a rickety tool bench, starts
looking around the barn for something.

GRACE
Whatcha' doing?

QUINN
Looking for the postholer -- I know
he had one.

He steps out of the stall he was searching, meeting Grace at
the table.

GRACE
Check the basement. He put a lot of
stuff down there, once we stopped
using the barn.

QUINN
I will, thanks--

He goes quiet as Grace touches his cheek, tracing the fading
bruise.

GRACE

Peter's crazy. He's my brother, and I love him -- but he has a little too much of my dad in him.

QUINN

That's an understatement.

GRACE

I'm sorry he did this to you.

QUINN

Thanks.

Grace nods, leans back against the door of a stall and tilts her head to look at him.

GRACE

I know so little about you -- about what you've been doing...

QUINN

Yeah, well, it wasn't very exciting.

GRACE

I can't get used to -- that you have this past that I'm not in.

This stills him, but he doesn't turn around, and the silence settles in as the dust motes catch and glint in the light.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I guess I thought you'd be living this life with a Grace-shaped hole in it. Silly of me, really.

QUINN

Grace --

GRACE

I have to take Connor into town for a bit. We'll be back.

She leaves the barn. As her footsteps fade, Quinn breathes out like a man rescued from drowning.

INT. MERRILL'S BASEMENT -- MOMENTS LATER

Quinn flips on the light at the top of the stairs, looks down in the dim with disgust.

He gingerly steps down the stairs, flipping on a second light at the bottom.

The basement is as large as the house's footprint, shadowed and cobwebbed and cool. To one side is a partitioned room, shelves lining it's outside walls.

Leaning against it are a variety of shovels, rakes, snow shovels, bags of sand. Standing out is the postholer.

QUINN

There you are.

He grabs the postholer, stops at the door to the small room.

He gently pushes it open, revealing a darkroom in disrepair. Clothesline, half rotted, hangs against the walls, and the vats and chemicals are dried out and crusted with dirt. The red light is broken, and light filters through the small windows near the ceiling.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Well, Goddamn.

INT. MERRILL'S KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

Quinn comes in, wiping dust and cobwebs off his shoulders, and picks up the kitchen phone, leaning the postholer against the wall. He dials the phone, quickly, as if afraid he will lose his nerve.

QUINN

Hey. Sven? ... Yeah, I got some stuff I need you to order for me? ... Got a pen?

INT. NOLAN HOUSE -- AFTERNOON

MARY NOLAN, a gray-haired little woman with lines of bitter care in her face, is in her kitchen with Grace and Connor. Here, Connor seems subdued, not frightened but not at ease, either. The house is spotless, but everything is old and worn and a little shabby.

MARY

You were with that speech person again?

GRACE

Three times a week, Momma. Just like it has been for years.

MARY

(with an uneasy glance at Connor)

He talks just fine, for how he is.

GRACE

He enjoys it, and it helps him.

Mary sniffs, hands Grace a glass of iced tea.

MARY

Only so much help for him. Rest is foolish pride.

GRACE

We all know your opinion on it, Momma.

CONNOR

Can I play outside, Mom?

GRACE

Sure you can, honey. Backyard only, though, 'kay?

CONNOR

Yes, Mom.

Connor slips out of chair, skirts past Mary, and heads out the back door.

MARY

Heard Quinn was back at your place.

GRACE

Yes, ma'am.

MARY

Heard he plans on selling.

GRACE

We're discussing it.

MARY

Well, that sounds real couple-like. You back in his bed?

Grace face reddens, and her hand tightens on the glass.

GRACE

If I was, it wouldn't concern you.

MARY

Best thing for you, sell that place.

GRACE

I don't want to sell it.

MARY

Get enough money to put Connor somewhere nice --

GRACE

I am not putting Connor anywhere.

MARY

He could be with other people like him. It'd be better for him, anyway.

Grace is visibly upset, straining to keep her voice calm.

GRACE
It actually wouldn't. He functions
will enough --

MARY
Not well enough to ever move out on
his own. What's he gonna do if
something happens to you?

The front door SLAMS shut. Peter, sober for once, swaggers
into the room and straight to the fridge for a beer.

PETER
Sis.

GRACE
Peter.

PETER
Nice of you to come by.

GRACE
Well, since you didn't stop to say
hello last night, I thought a visit
was owed.

Peter reddens, then slams the fridge's door closed.

PETER
That was Bobbie and them boys.

GRACE
In your truck?

PETER
They borrow it, sometimes.

GRACE
It upset Connor. Terribly.

PETER
That's a shame.

Grace stares at Peter, who looks mildly embarrassed.

MARY
He said he wasn't there. That's
enough.

GRACE
What about when him and his buddies
beat Quinn in the street?

She glares at Peter.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Or was that just Bobbie and them boys, too?

PETER

Why are you defending him? Getting beats just the beginning --

GRACE

Of what? What are you going to do next? He's Connor's father --

MARY

Where he's been then? All these years?

GRACE

17 years is a long time to hate someone. It's too long.

Peter gives a derisive laugh, finishes his beer, opens the fridge door to get another.

MARY

He ruined you, and then he ruined your baby.

GRACE

Oh, mamma, he didn't ruin me. And Connor -- it was an accident --

PETER

An accident. Everything was accidental with him.

GRACE

Just as much me, then. I was there when the car turned over. And I was definitely there when Connor --

MARY

Stop it, Grace.

Grace closes her mouth into a tight line as Peter comes back to the table but doesn't sit.

PETER

So everything's fine and dandy at the Merrill place? No hard feelings?

GRACE

That's between Quinn and I.

MARY

We're your flesh and blood. That man can't be put before your flesh and blood.

GRACE
 Momma, I'm not--

PETER
 Him gettin' you pregnant and having
 a child that's not right in the head,
 that killed our father -

GRACE
 Drinking in the middle of the day
 killed our father, Pete.

MARY
 How dare you.

GRACE
 How dare I? How dare I, momma?

Mary reaches over, grabs Grace's hand.

MARY
 For seventeen years. Seventeen years
 you've looked after that poor boy --

GRACE
 He's my son. And he's a wonderful --

PETER
 Now it's Quinn's turn.

There is moment of silence, as Grace looks in horror at her
 mother and her brother.

GRACE
 What are you saying?

MARY
 It's only fair --

GRACE
 Are you saying I should leave my
 little boy -- my little boy who just
 lost his grandfather --

PETER
 He won't even notice your gone,
 Gracie. He's a fuckin' idjit, ain't
 he?

GRACE
 I'm leaving.

She gets up, only to be restrained by Mary's hand on her
 arm.

MARY

You listen to me, missy. That boy out there doesn't have to be your burden anymore --

GRACE

He is not a burden, momma. How could you ever think that?

Grace pulls her hand away, and goes to the backdoor, calling Connor in.

PETER

Quinn Merrill left you with that. You don't want --

GRACE

(taking Connor's hand
and leaving the
kitchen)

I don't want anything except this.

Grace leaves, soothing Connor as they walk.

MARY

I'll pray for her tonight. It's all we can do.

Mary gingerly gets up from the table, and walks out of the kitchen. Peter watches her go as he finishes off his beer.

EXT. THE MERRILL'S BARN -- LATER

Quinn, shirtless in the hot, humid air, works on the fence around the corral with a postholer. Sitting under a tree, watching him, is Connor. In the barnyard are the remnants of the old, rotten fence.

QUINN

Where's your mom?

CONNOR

Kitchen. She's making brownies. She makes brownies when she's upset.

QUINN

Did something happen?

CONNOR

We went to Gamma's house.

Quinn snorts softly.

QUINN

Yeah, well, that'd upset her.

Grace brings out a plate of sandwiches and some lemonade. She sets it down by Connor, sits with him. Quinn finishes and comes over.

QUINN (CONT'D)

If we get anymore "Little House" I think I'll have to run screaming.

Grace hands him a sandwich. Quinn sits down next to her.

CONNOR

He made a fence.

GRACE

Yes, he did.

QUINN

Well, he will. Should be finished in a few days, give or take. Then I can start on the barn.

Grace hands him a glass.

GRACE

Let me know if you need help.

QUINN

Might, once I have to start putting the posts in. It's a two man job, really.

CONNOR

I can help.

Quinn doesn't answer, and after a moment, Grace ruffles Connor's hair.

GRACE

I know you can, honey.

She turns to Quinn.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Didn't you say you wanted to paint the house and barn?

QUINN

Yeah.

GRACE

Connor and I can do that.

QUINN

If you two want to ...

Connor nods, excitedly.

QUINN (CONT'D)

OK, then. I got paint in the barn.

CONNOR

I'll get it.

He scrambles up, awkward and clumsy, then walks towards the barn, limping slightly.

QUINN

He doesn't even know what he's looking for.

GRACE

He knows what paint comes in. Might get the wrong color, but worse things have happened.

QUINN

He's amazing, Grace. You did an amazing job with him.

GRACE

I didn't do it. He's just good.

QUINN

Even when he does this?

He touches the cut on her lip.

GRACE

It's hard for him, you know? New things, loud things -- they scare him and he reacts the only way he can.

QUINN

Will you tell him? That he's my -- that I'm his --

GRACE

It would hurt him when you left. He doesn't understand people leaving.

QUINN

Well, then. I guess that's my answer.

GRACE

If I knew more about you -- it would be easier if I knew you, I guess.

Quinn looks out over the farm, silent for a minute.

QUINN

Connor said you went to see your mom.

GRACE

Yeah.

QUINN

She still think I'm going to hell?

GRACE

She kinda wishes you were already there.

Quinn gives a short laugh.

QUINN

Guess I can understand that.

GRACE

Yeah.

QUINN

You're OK, though? She wasn't too -

GRACE

She was fine.

QUINN

OK.

The look at each other for a moment.

QUINN (CONT'D)

I thought about you, every day. I'd take a picture, and while it developed, I'd think I'd see you in it.

GRACE

Quinn --

QUINN

As if you were there, you know? With me. But you weren't.

Their gaze locks for a brief second, then Grace looks away. Quinn leans back, stares up into the tree.

GRACE

Probably better I wasn't.

QUINN

Yeah.

Connor comes over the rise, a gallon of paint in either hand.

CONNOR

Hey, guys -- I got paint.

Grace rolls over, sits up, smiles at Connor.

GRACE

You sure did.

(she turns to Quinn)

I should chip in -- all this stuff,
it has to be expensive --

QUINN

You don't owe me. I can afford it,
for now. You don't owe me anything.

Grace nods, then looks away, as Connor drops a paint bucket, giggling as it rolls down the slight slope to the fence.

GRACE

Connor -- here, give me those.

She gets up, followed by Quinn.

QUINN

Let me help you get 'em to the porch.

INT. MERRILL'S KITCHEN -- EVENING

Grace and Quinn are doing the dishes, the music PLAYING SOFTLY out of an ancient radio on the sink. Grace is dressed up.

QUINN

You look nice.

GRACE

Thanks.

Quinn hands Grace a soapy dish, and Grace rinses it, puts it in the drainer.

QUINN

Connor go to sleep OK?

GRACE

Quick and easy.

They wash the dishes, swaying in time to the song.

QUINN

What time is your date?

GRACE

Soon.

The song FADES, and a new one comes on, Roy Orbison's "BROWN-EYED GIRL." Quinn stops, reaches out, brings Grace into his arms, and the two dance.

He spins her, brings her close.

QUINN

This was our song.

GRACE

Yeah.

QUINN

I even tried to learn the guitar, so
I could play it for you.

Grace, laughing, swings out again.

GRACE

'Tried' being the operative word.

QUINN

Shush, you.

He brings her back, spinning her so that she ends up tucked into his side, his arms around her waist.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Another spin?

GRACE

One more.

He spins her out, brings her back, then dips with her. Their bodies meet on every angle, leg, hips, chest. Their breath is hard, ragged, their lips too close for comfort. The song continues to play.

QUINN

I want to kiss you.

GRACE

That would complicate things.

Quinn leans closer, so close that their foreheads touch.

QUINN

You want me to kiss you.

GRACE

Maybe I do.

She reaches up, touches his face, then drops her hand to his shoulder and -- gently -- pushes him away.

They stand looking at each other, breathing hard. Grace reaches over and turns off the radio, just as Dave enters the kitchen. He takes in the scene.

Grace recovers first, comes over and stands by Dave, leaving Quinn in the middle of the kitchen, alone.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Hi, sweetie.

DAVE

You ready?

QUINN

You bet she is.

GRACE

You're OK, watching Connor?

QUINN

He's sleeping, we'll be fine.

GRACE

Let me get my purse.

She leaves, and after a moment Dave follows.

INT. CASEY JONES BAR AND GRILL -- NIGHT

Grace and Dave enter a large, dimly lit room decorated in a Country Western theme that has left good taste behind. A long bar runs along a wall, wood and plank, with stools in front of it, and behind it are shelves of liquor. The clientele are in worn-in jeans, boots, a few Cowboy hats are around.

Dave goes to the bar to get drinks while Grace greets a group of men and women sitting at a booth.

CARRIE

Lookie who came out for a drink.

The tone is friendly, but CARRIE WILLIAMS' is already on the far side of one too many.

Dave comes over, hands Grace a beer, shakes hands with a few of the men.

MAN

Good to see you, man.

CARRIE

Gracie--I heard a rumor Mighty Quinn is back in town.

GRACE

He is.

CARRIE

Mmm. Quinn. Hero of Watertown High.

GRACE

That was quite some time ago, Carrie.

CARRIE

Girl remembers a man who looks like that.

Dave looks at Grace, and Grace looks away, uncomfortable.

GIRL 1
Has he changed much?

GRACE
Other than being 30-something instead
of 18? Yeah, a little.

Alan Jackson's "CHATTOHOOCHEE RIVER" comes on the radio and the girls holler, interrupting Carrie. Carrie grabs Grace, drags her out onto the dance floor.

CARRIE
Come on, we used to love this song.

Laughing, Grace lines up with the rest of the group, and the begin a decent line dance.

INT. CASEY JONES BAR AND GRILL -- LATER

Grace and Dave sit at a table slightly off the dance floor, where a few people are badly slow-dancing. Both are drinking beer, and a few empties litter the table. Grace is laughing, more relaxed than she's been in days.

DAVE
How you holdin' up, babe? Really.

Grace takes a drink from her beer, watching the couples dance.

GRACE
Okay.

DAVE
Really?

Before Grace can answer, a very drunk Carrie comes over, giggling, and scoots up on the stool with Grace.

CARRIE
I wanna know, is he still gorgeous?

GRACE
Who?

CARRIE
Quinn, silly.

GRACE
Well, I--

CARRIE
God, everyone in school wanted him.

Grace smiles, somewhat uncomfortable. Carrie looks blearily into her drink.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

'Course, he only had eyes for you.
Much like our Sheriff here.

DAVE

Not the Sheriff, Carrie.

CARRIE

Oh, but you will be. You're with our
Grace, aren't you?

GRACE

Carrie, shush.

CARRIE

And our Grace doesn't marry deputies.

Carrie grins, clearly thinking herself witty.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

Or second-string quarterbacks, either.

GRACE

That's enough, Carrie.

CARRIE

Our Grace has been waiting for the
mighty Quinn, hasn't she?

GRACE

(to Dave)

Dance with me.

She grabs Dave, pulls him onto the dance floor, leaving Carrie at the table. The SONG CHANGES, to one a little faster and they swing into a proficient two-step.

As Dave turns her, she sees Peter and his buddies come in, head to a corner table. Peter sees her, says something to his buddies. They LAUGH.

She losses track of the steps, stumbles. Makes up her mind about something.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Excuse me for a sec.

Leaving a bewildered Dave behind, she heads to Peter's table. He looks up, smug, when he sees her coming.

PETER

Grace.

GRACE

Peter.

PETER

You coming over to apologize?

GRACE

No.

She smiles, but her hands are trembling.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I came over to tell you to stay away from the house, Peter. Or at least, stay away when you're drunk.

PETER

Don't you go being a fool, Gracie.

GRACE

Just keep off my land.

She walks away, gets halfway across the bar when:

PETER

It ain't even your land, you weren't even a good enough whore to get the old man to sign the deed.

Grace freezes, but Dave takes three quick steps to her side, checks to make sure she's all right, then crosses to Peter's table. Peter stands.

DAVE

You watch your mouth.

PETER

I just saying what's true out of worry for my sister's soul.

Grace, watching from the middle of the room, walks closer, aware of the people staring.

DAVE

From what I hear, all she's got to worry about are some fool rednecks waking up her son in the middle of the night.

Dave meets Peter's gaze calmly, Grace lays a warning hand on Dave's arm.

PETER

Well, now, I think what she's got to worry about is the bastard out at her house, but that ain't nothing but my opinion.

GRACE

Don't you dare think you have the right to an opinion about my life. Don't you dare.

PETER

I'm looking out for you, Gracie.

GRACE

Where were you when the barn almost fell down? Or when the power went out last winter?

PETER

Now, Gracie, I know things have been strained --

GRACE

Don't. Just don't, Pete.

PETER

Now, Gracie--

GRACE

For Christ's sake, Peter. No one's called me Gracie for over a decade.

DAVE

Grace --

Peter and Grace stare at each other. Peter backs down, lowering his gaze slightly.

GRACE

He's come back to do what's right. You just leave him be.

PETER

You're more of a fool than he is, if you think he has an inkling of what's right.

GRACE

Go to hell, *Petey*.

Grace turns and walks, swiftly, outside.

EXT. CASEY JONES BAR AND GRILL -- MOMENTS LATER

Grace walks swiftly towards the car -- Dave almost has to run to catch up.

DAVE

Grace, wait up.

Grace stops at the car, turns around.

GRACE
I'm sorry about this.

DAVE
It wasn't your fault.

GRACE
It kinda was.

DAVE
Ok, it kinda was.

Grace sighs, shakes her head.

GRACE
I used to think that someday I'd
bring Connor over and my family would
just fall in love with him.

DAVE
Honey --

GRACE
And then me. You know. That all the
things that were said would just go
away.

DAVE
That woulda been nice.

Grace leans against the car, looks up at the stars.

GRACE
Carrie's full of shit, you know.

Dave nods, not quite believing.

GRACE (CONT'D)
You're too good for me, if anything.

DAVE
Don't, babe. It's all right.

He watches the door as Peter and his buddies come out of the bar, get into their pick-up, and peel out of the lot.

Dave puts his arm around her, pulls her close, kisses the top of her head.

GRACE
I can hear you thinking, Dave Ryan.
Out with it.

DAVE
No, nothing.

He kisses her, firmly.

DAVE (CONT'D)
You know how I feel about you?

GRACE
Yeah, I know.

DAVE
Nothing changes that.

GRACE
Dave --

He pushes her hair behind her ear, strokes her cheek.

DAVE
I mean, he's Connor's dad. I can see
how that --

GRACE
Dave, please. There is nothing --

DAVE
There's something, Grace. There's
always been something there.

GRACE
Now you're just making things up to
suit yourself.

DAVE
Bullshit. That's bullshit and you
know it. Some part of you's been
hanging onto to some part of him.

He takes off his hat, thumps it against his thigh.

GRACE
If you want out of this, Dave, just
say so.

DAVE
Don't turn this on me. I don't want
out. Some part of you came alive
when Quinn showed up.

GRACE
Now you are just being --

DAVE
Don't lie to me. Don't lie to
yourself.

Grace pulls away, stops short when Dave holds her arm, forcing
her to face him.

GRACE

You were there, every time I needed anything. I know that.

DAVE

And every time, you wished I was him.

GRACE

Maybe at first, maybe, but I--

DAVE

To this day, Grace, you kiss me and you wish you were kissing him.

(Grace gasps, shakes
her head)

Why haven't we gotten married?

GRACE

Don't do this, please.

DAVE

Because you refuse.

GRACE

Connor --

DAVE

Is a convenient excuse. Christ, Grace --

He hits his hat on the car's hood, leans away from her.

DAVE (CONT'D)

You haven't married me because I'm not him. I know it.

GRACE

That's not true.

DAVE

I like to believe you love me --

GRACE

Dave, please, you know --

DAVE

I don't know.

GRACE

You should know. What do you want me to do? You want to get married? Let's get married. Right now.

DAVE

So every time you close your eyes I can wonder if you're seeing his face?

A new crowd of people exit the bar, some yelling good-nights. Dave raises his hand in good-bye, but Grace remains still, arms around her stomach.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Sweetheart, I'm not blaming you. But part of you went missing when he left.

GRACE
I wasn't missing him.

DAVE
Now that's a lie.

He looks up at the stars, then back at Grace.

GRACE
What do you want me to do? Kick him out?

DAVE
No. I just want you to decide.

GRACE
So what are you saying?

DAVE
I'm not saying it's over.

GRACE
Just broken?

DAVE
Maybe a little broken.

Grace steps away, brushing Dave's supplicating hands away.

DAVE (CONT'D)
If I don't do this, I'll always just be second-string to Quinn Merrill.

GRACE
If I ever made you feel like that, I am so sorry --

DAVE
I knew what I was getting into. I knew what he was to you. Is to you.

GRACE
I don't know if he's anything to me.

Dave nods, looks around. They are both subdued, wrung out.

DAVE

You call me if you need me. 'Til then, I think I'll keep scarce, let you make up your mind.

GRACE

My minds made up --

DAVE

No, it hasn't. Not all the way.

He kisses her again, lingeringly, regretfully.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Let me take you home.

INT. MR. MERRILL'S STUDY -- DAWN--DAYS LATER

Quinn comes into the dim study, goes to the safe. He pauses a moment, unsure, then dials the combination and opens it.

He pulls out the Nikon, stares at it, then after a moment strings the camera around his neck, quietly closing the safe as he leaves.

EXT. THE MERRILL FARM -- DAWN

Quinn comes out on the porch, coffee steaming in his hand. In the other he holds a camera. The bruises on his face have faded slightly, and he moves as if his ribs have healed. Behind him, the barn has been primed and new wood shows around the framing, and the fence leading to the main house has been repaired, weeds cleared.

Quinn is more relaxed, tanned and wearing jeans and a t-shirt, a pair of heavy work boots. He grabs a battered white cowboy hat from a hook and heads down the driveway, stopping midway to put his coffee on a fence post, then lights a cigarette and brings the camera up to frame the house.

He looks at the house through his viewfinder, and checks readings on his light meter. Around him, the early morning grey starts to give way to the sun.

He puts out the cigarette in the ground, holds the camera up, and slowly, starts to take pictures of the house. After a moment, he turns, and snaps pictures of the barns, the fields.

GRACE

What are you doing?

Quinn starts, turns to Grace, smiling.

QUINN

Taking some pictures.

GRACE
Of the barn?

QUINN
For the realtors. Easier to sell
that way.

Grace's face falls, slightly, then she holds up a thermos.

GRACE
I brought you some more coffee.

QUINN
Thanks.

Grace nods, starts to head back up to the house.

QUINN (CONT'D)
You going into town today?

Grace turns around, comes back a step or two. Quinn snaps
her picture.

GRACE
Stop that. Yes, I am.

QUINN
You gonna see Dave?

GRACE
No, just the grocery store, post
office.

QUINN
Dave hasn't been around much lately.

GRACE
He's busy. It's not that unusual.

QUINN
Still --

GRACE
Dave and I are fine.

QUINN
Really?

GRACE
Really.

Quinn nods, not believing, takes another picture of the house.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Now, do you want to come into town
with me?

QUINN
Too much work to do.

GRACE
You can't hide out here forever.

QUINN
I'm not hiding.

GRACE
Fine. You can watch Connor.

QUINN
He doesn't have therapy today?

GRACE
No, it's the third Saturday. He has every third Saturday free.

Silence falls for a moment.

QUINN
You use Dad's old room? In the basement?

GRACE
No, not really. Why?

Quinn lets the camera roll in his hands, staring out into the distance.

QUINN
Thought I'd use it as a dark room again. For while I'm here.

GRACE
He'd like that. It's -- that's nice.

QUINN
It won't take long to set-up. Could you pick up a few supplies for me in town?

GRACE
Yeah, I'll pick up whatever you need. I don't know if they'll have all the chemicals --

QUINN
Sven will have it all. I ordered it all, a few days ago. Thought it might--well I thought I might want to have a darkroom.

GRACE
Thought you were all digital, all the time?

She looks up at him and Quinn leans in, slightly. Grace doesn't move. The silence deepens, then Quinn pulls away, abruptly.

QUINN
Times change.

GRACE
Right.

QUINN
Don't worry about rushing back.

GRACE
Rushing back?

QUINN
Maybe take the day off. I can watch Connor.

GRACE
Really.

QUINN
Yup.

He picks up his camera and mug, and starts to walk towards the barn. Grace watches him walk away, an early morning breeze blowing her hair across her face.

EXT. BACK 20 OF MERRILL FARM -- AFTERNOON

Quinn stands in the middle of a fallow field, camera slung over his neck, hands on his hip, looking over the landscape. Behind him Connor sits on the ground, eating a slightly mushed peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

QUINN
That good, Con'?

CONNOR
Yeah.

QUINN
Good.

Quinn takes up his camera, finds a shot, takes it. His cell phone rings.

CONNOR
Can we go back soon?

QUINN
(distracted)
Getting tired, buddy?

CONNOR

Yeah.

QUINN

A little bit longer.

(he picks up the phone)

Yeah?...Hey, Mike ...no, no it'll be
awhile...yeah...I know, I know Mike,
a freelancer who turns down work is
a freelancer who doesn't work but I --

Connor wonders a little ways away while Quinn talks.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Look, man, I gotta go. I'll let you
know when I can get back on the
list...yeah, I know it's not
good...yeah, as soon as I know....Bye.

He looks for Connor sees him crouched down, inspecting a
anthill. Quinn swings his camera up, snaps a shot. Connor
looks up, grins, and Quinn snaps another shot.

QUINN (CONT'D)

One more shot.

Quinn brings the camera up, focusing on Connor. After a
moment he brings the camera down.

QUINN (CONT'D)

You want to take it?

CONNOR

Really?

QUINN

Sure. Come here, kiddo.

He holds the camera out to Connor, who takes it, a little
clumsy.

QUINN (CONT'D)

My dad taught me how to take pictures
on this camera, when I was a little
younger than you.

Quinn shows Connor where the buttons are.

CONNOR

It must be really old.

QUINN

Yeah. Yeah, it is.

He guides the camera to Connor's face, standing in front of
him.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Now, find something you like,
something that you want to be able
to see every day, or something you
don't want to change, and hit the
button--

Connor takes the picture, of Quinn, staring at Connor.

The camera rewinds.

QUINN (CONT'D)

All right, let's go home.

With a whoop, Connor starts off in a limping, loping run
towards the house. Chuckling, Quinn follows.

INT. MERRILL'S KITCHEN -- AFTERNOON

Quinn and Connor come in, panting, as Grace is putting away
groceries.

QUINN

Need help?

GRACE

No. Almost done. Something chasing
you guys?

CONNOR

We raced.
(he grins)
I won.

QUINN

No, he didn't.
(he looks at Connor)
No, you didn't.

CONNOR

Did too.

With another quick grin, Connor heads out of the room.

GRACE

Hey, where are you going?

CONNOR

TV.

GRACE

Ah, right. Don't sit too close.

Connor rushes out, leaving Quinn and Grace alone.

GRACE (CONT'D)

You two seem like you had a nice time.

QUINN

I guess.

Quinn carefully takes the camera off his neck, takes the film out.

Grace seems about to say something, thinks better of it, and puts the last of the groceries away, folds the paper bags, puts them under the counter. Quinn puts the film down on the counter, turning it over and spinning it.

GRACE

I got that stuff you wanted.

QUINN

Thanks. What do I owe you?

GRACE

Nothing. Really.

Quinn smiles his thanks, continues to spin the film.

GRACE (CONT'D)

You gonna set it up tonight?

QUINN

How much time before dinner?

GRACE

Couple hours.

QUINN

(as he leaves)

I'll get it done now.

He leans over, kisses her cheek, grabs his bag, and heads into the hallway. Grace watches him go, hand on her cheek.

GRACE

Oh. Oh, my.

INT. MERRILL'S BASEMENT -- LATER

Quinn has cleaned up the small room under the basement. The four small windows have been covered with black cloth, and taped securely. A shiny new lock secures the door, a padlock hanging open. A clothesline runs from one side of the room and back again, clothespins waiting.

Quinn works at the vats of chemicals, bringing the image to the paper. Staring at it, he carefully hangs it on the line.

INSERT

Black and white photo of a 40 something man, who resembles Quinn, staring into the camera. Behind him is the barn, freshly painted, and a few horses.

BACK TO SCENE

He slowly gets a rhythm of developing, and soon pictures almost fill the clothesline.

INSERT

1. A 16-year-old Quinn stares at the camera, arm around 16-year-old Grace. They are laughing, sharing a joke with whoever is holding the camera.
2. Quinn on horseback.
3. Grace on a rodeo fence, banners in the background.
4. Quinn, Grace and Quinn's father carefully posed in front of the rodeo corral, Quinn holding up a large belt buckle--the same from the barn--in a triumphant pose.

BACK TO SCENE

Quinn stares at one of the pictures as it develops. Slowly, the picture takes form:

INSERT

1. One of present-day Grace, a small smile on her face, as she walks down the path from the house.
2. One of Connor, staring at the ant hill.
3. Quinn, staring just to the left of the camera, eyes soft, almost sad.

BACK TO SCENE

Quinn stares at them intently, making sure that it develops true as he hangs them on the line. A soft knock on the door interrupts him.

QUINN

Come in.

GRACE

Dinner's almost done. How are you doing?

Quinn invites her in with a flourish, smiling.

QUINN
Just about done. Few more things to
do, but...

Grace claps her hands.

GRACE
It looks great.

She sees the pictures, goes to them, looks closely at the
older ones.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Oh, Quinn. Where'd you find this
film?

QUINN
In the camera.
(off her look)
In Dad's safe.

Grace touches the one of her on the fence.

GRACE
I remember this day.

QUINN
It was a good day.

She touches the picture, than moves down, sees the one of
Connor and the ant hill.

GRACE
He looks happy.

Quinn comes behind her.

QUINN
Yeah. I thought that myself.

Grace moves a little further down to the one of her, walking
down from the house. Then the one of Quinn. She stares at
it for a moment, a little sad.

QUINN (CONT'D)
What is it?

GRACE
Nothing. You're an amazing
photographer, Quinn.

QUINN
Connor took that one.

Grace turns to him.

GRACE
Really?

QUINN
Yeah.

GRACE
He's a natural, then.

She touches the photo.

QUINN
You can have them, when they dry.
Put some of this generation on these
walls.

Grace nods, a little overwhelmed.

GRACE
You have a lock on the door, right?
Connor can sometimes ..

QUINN
Both inside and out.

Grace nods.

QUINN (CONT'D)
So, dinner?

She smiles, takes one more look at the picture of her, then of Quinn, and leaves. Quinn follows, taking care to lock the door behind him.

EXT. THE MERRILL FARM -- DAY

Connor and Grace are painting the front porch of the house. A third is already finished, a bright, shiny white. Beyond them, the lower half of the barn is finished. From the driveway Dave's car pulls in, parks. Grace puts down her brush and walks over.

DAVE
Sorry to bother you.

GRACE
It's no bother. What's up?

Dave gets out of his car, looks around.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Have you been busy?

DAVE
Yeah, maybe. Quinn around?

GRACE

Dave?

Dave looks at her, and his face softens perceptibly.

DAVE

Quinn called me up earlier, asked if I could come up after work and help him put a fence up.

GRACE

He's behind the barn, putting posts in.

DAVE

Thanks.

He turns to leave, comes back.

GRACE

Yes?

DAVE

I've missed you.

GRACE

Yeah.

He puts his hat on.

DAVE

I'll go talk to Quinn.

He walks away, and Grace goes back to the porch.

EXT. THE MERRILL'S BARN -- MOMENTS LATER

Quinn holds a fence post with one hand, supports it with his legs, hammers it down. It wobbles a little, and the hammer misses.

QUINN

Fuck me.

DAVE

Works better with two people.

Quinn looks up, sets the hammer down by the post, offers Dave his hand. Dave takes it, after a beat.

QUINN

Nice to see you, Deputy.

DAVE

Dave's fine, Quinn.

He shows Quinn his other hand. In it are two beers.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Made a little detour by your cooler.

Quinn takes a beer from him, sits down on the dirt.

QUINN

You gonna sit?

DAVE

No. Not yet, anyway.

Quinn drinks, stares out over the fields.

QUINN

Got to dig about a half mile of holes,
then post 'em. Then put up some rails.

DAVE

An honest days work.

QUINN

'Preciate the help.

DAVE

It's my pleasure.

The formalities are strained, and after a moment Quinn puts his beer aside and heads to the postholer. Dave follows.

EXT. THE MERRILL BARN -- LATER AROUND DUSK

Dave and Quinn, now both shirtless, are working on another hole. There are quite a number already finished, a nice straight line leading to the barn. Both men are sweating.

QUINN

So, I figure, we get this one done,
and we call it a day.

DAVE

I can come back out tomorrow, all
day. That should just about finish
it.

Quinn nods, digs the edge of the postholer into the ground and drinks from the water bottle on the ground next to him.

QUINN

Thanks.

DAVE

Yeah.

QUINN

Not that I'm looking a gift horse in
the mouth, but why did you agree to
help?

DAVE
Your sparkling personality. It won
me over.

Quinn chuckles, offers the bottle to Dave.

QUINN
Seriously.

Dave drinks, looks at the house.

DAVE
You see all the bandages she's got
in that closet?

QUINN
Yeah.

DAVE
That started 'cause Connor use to
fall a lot, or hurt himself when he
had a fit.

Quinn nods.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Now it's for her. 'Cause Connor's-- I
know he don't mean to, but --

QUINN
He hurts her.

DAVE
Yep. When he starts flailing around.
She has to stop him, no mind to
herself.

QUINN
I saw him -- I could barely handle
him. He's bigger than me.

DAVE
Yeah. He's never gonna be much more
than a 6-year-old, and it gets harder
and harder every year for her.

QUINN
And you think selling this place
will help her?

DAVE
I think selling this place will give
her a nest egg, enough money to hire
help.

QUINN
Or put Connor away.

Dave takes another long swallow of water, hands the bottle back to Quinn. Quinn doesn't take it.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Do you think she'll let you send Connor away?

DAVE

I'm not saying that's the way it has to go. But it may.

QUINN

She'd never let it happen. It would kill Connor.

DAVE

Since when are you the expert on Connor?

Quinn looks at Dave, the earlier friendliness gone.

QUINN

It's getting dark.

DAVE

Yeah.

QUINN

I should head in.

Dave waits for a second, expecting an invitation. Quinn says nothing.

DAVE

Fine. I'll come by tomorrow. 8?

QUINN

Sure.

EXT. MERRILL'S FRONT PORCH -- LATER

Quinn walks up to the house as Dave gets in his car. There is an older American sedan parked in front of the house. Quinn gives it a quizzical look as he heads in.

INT. MERRILL'S KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

Mary sits at the table across from Connor as Grace bustles around the kitchen getting dinner ready. Every time Mary looks directly at Connor, she winces.

MARY

So when Pete told me what you'd said to him at the bar, of course I didn't believe him.

GRACE

Momma.

MARY

Quinn'll drag you down with him,
sure as I am sitting here.

GRACE

Momma, please.

MARY

It took me days just to get the energy
to get out of bed after hearing that
Dave had broken it off. I lit a candle
for you, you know.

GRACE

Thanks, momma.

MARY

I know you never wanted any advice
from me, Grace, but if I were you --

Quinn comes in from behind Mary, gives Grace a quick smile.

QUINN

Mrs. Nolan. What a pleasant surprise.

Mary stands up, disapproval in every line of her body.

MARY

Quinn. Pete told me you were back in
town.

QUINN

I'm sure he did. Still lives with
you, does he?

Grace hides a smile and turns to the stove.

MARY

Only 'till work picks up again.

CONNOR

Gamma came for dinner.

QUINN

Yep, she sure did.

CONNOR

And Mom said a bad word.

QUINN

(with a smile)
I'm sure she did.

Above Mary's head, Grace and Quinn exchange an amused glance.

MARY

I don't know if I'll be staying for dinner, Connor dear. I'm sure your mom and dad would rather be alone.

GRACE

Mom.

CONNOR

My dad?

MARY

You haven't told the boy?

CONNOR

Told me what?

Quinn holds out his hand to Connor.

QUINN

Come on, buddy. Let's go downstairs. I'll show your granddad's old dark room?

CONNOR

What's a dark room?

QUINN

Why don't you come with me and see?

Connor grins, wriggles out of his chair, already forgetting his earlier questions. Quinn gives Grace a sympathetic look before he and Connor disappear out the door.

GRACE

What the hell did you do that for?

MARY

Don't curse, dear.

GRACE

Momma, I swear, why do you do this? You know I haven't told Connor. You knew it would upset him.

MARY

He should know. A boy should know his father.

Grace bites down hard on her lip, turns back to the stove, then furious, slams the spoon down and turns to her mother.

GRACE

You're right, he should. But I am his mother, and I decide when to tell him, not you.

MARY

Gracie, you obviously are distraught --

GRACE

Distraught? I was distraught when I was 16 and pregnant and you called me a whore.

MARY

That was a difficult time --

GRACE

And I was distraught when my child was diagnosed with cerebral palsy and 'mild' mental retardation and you told me it was a punishment for my sin.

MARY

As it was, Grace --

GRACE

And I was distraught when you refused to let me back into your home --though why, I admit, I would want to be back in that repressed, judgmental hell I don't know --

MARY

That is enough, Grace.

GRACE

And I had to move in with my in-laws, who hated me but at least not as much as you did.

MARY

I said that will be quite enough, Grace.

GRACE

It is not enough. I could stand here for a year and I still could not tell you how *distraught* I have been.

MARY

And what is your point, then?

GRACE

I am not distraught anymore, momma. I am so angry I just want to rip things apart so badly that no one can put them back together.

Grace leans against the table, breathing hard. Mary quickly gathers her things.

MARY

I can see you are in no mood to talk,
so I'll be going.

Grace reaches out and grabs Mary's hand, holds it tight.

GRACE

I need you to hear me, mother, really
hear. Are you listening to me?

Graces waits until Mary reluctantly nods.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I'm angry at Quinn. He did terrible
things out of stupidity and youth
and a callow selfishness.

MARY

Well, I'm glad you can see some sort
of reason --

GRACE

And I'm mad at God, 'cause I want to
know what being can demand worship
and then cause so much pain.

MARY

Watch your mouth--

GRACE

But I am furious at you, momma. You
did things to be cruel. To prove you
were right and I was wrong.

MARY

Honestly, Grace, where do you get
these ideas --

GRACE

You never helped me. You never even
offered. You just judged.

INT. STAIRS -- CONTINUOUS

Quinn stands in the stairwell, listening to the muted
conversation above him. Behind him Connor plays with the
camera.

GRACE (O.S.)

When he left, I needed you. And I
need you now, Momma. I need to talk
to somebody --

INT. MERRILL'S KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

Grace is trying very hard not to cry. Mary looks uncomfortable
and offended, and pulls her hand out of Grace's grip.

MARY

You made choices, Grace. They were wrong. I just don't see what you want from me.

Grace looks down at her hand, still stretched on the table.

GRACE

I know you don't, Momma.

MARY

Do you feel better now?

Grace smiles, regretfully.

GRACE

No, momma. But it's no matter.

MARY

You were always so sensitive, Grace. You always needed so much.

GRACE

I didn't need much more than most.

MARY

I had your father and your brother to look after, I never knew what to do with you.

A realization there, for Grace. A recognition of the backwards, stunted love.

GRACE

I know, momma.

MARY

I'll pray for you.

Mary picks up her purse, and quietly leaves.

GRACE

Thank you, momma.

Grace sits down at the table and puts her head in her arms. As the front door CLOSES, Quinn enters with Connor.

QUINN

Hey, buddy, why don't you go watch TV?

CONNOR

Is Mom all right?

QUINN

She's fine. I promise. Go on.

Connor stands for a moment, then runs and hugs Grace, who holds him tight for a second.

GRACE
Go on, kiddo. I'm fine.

Connor reluctantly lets her go and heads to the den. After a moment, TV SOUNDS are heard. Quinn gently closes the door to the hallway, kneels in front of Grace.

QUINN
Your mother hasn't changed a bit.

Grace chuckles weakly.

GRACE
She's a piece of work. Normally I have more warning before she shows up --

QUINN
She just popped in, huh?

Grace nods, sniffles.

GRACE
She was so happy when you left. It just proved her so right.

QUINN
I'm sorry.

GRACE
God, sometimes I hate you so much, Quinn. All these years, and I just --

She stops, wipes her checks, walks to the stove.

QUINN
Dinner's fine.

She ignores him, starts opening drawers, then the fridge, moving a little faster than necessary, getting a little frantic.

QUINN (CONT'D)
Grace?

He steps in front of her, she sidesteps him

QUINN (CONT'D)
Gracie, what are you looking for?

She ignores him, re-opening the same drawers. Quinn watches for a moment, than stops her by holding her arms so that they are facing each other.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Gracie. Honey. Come on. What do you need?

GRACE

The slotted spoon. I-I just had it and now its gone. It's gone.

She starts to cry.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I had it and now it's gone. Just like that.

QUINN

Gracie, I'll find it.

He cups her face in his hands.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Gracie, don't cry. Honey. Please. I'll find it.

GRACE

Why'd you leave me, Quinn? God, it hurt when you weren't there. I just waited for you. I just waited for so long --

Quinn gently draws Grace close, tentative, unsure of what she might do. She stiffens, for a moment, then as he gently strokes her hair she collapses into him.

QUINN

Shh, sweetie, shh. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

INT. CONNOR'S BEDROOM -- LATER

Connor is getting into bed, and a composed Grace is helping him. Quinn is picking up the day's debris of toy's and clothing. Connor keeps patting her face.

CONNOR

Smile, mom.

GRACE

Oh, sweetheart. Mom's a little tired tonight.

CONNOR

Why?

GRACE

Just a long day. But you --
(she tickles him)
-- you were perfect.

Quinn has finished and sits on the bed.

QUINN
Hey, buddy. Since Mom's had such a
long day, could I read you your story?

Connor bites his lip, staring at Quinn as he ponders. Grace watches, a little worried, but after a moment Connor nods.

QUINN (CONT'D)
Great. Kiss Mom good-night, then.

GRACE
Come here, kiddo.

Connor kisses Grace good-night, then settles back into his pillows. Hesitantly, Grace goes to the door, then pauses for a moment, and watches Quinn open up a battered kid's adventure novel and begin to read. The two boys look up at her, and grin matching grins.

CONNOR AND QUINN
Good-night, Mom.

GRACE
Good-night, guys.

She turns and leaves the room.

INT. MR. MERRILL'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

The bedroom is dark when the door opens, revealing Grace's silhouette in the door. She moves into the room, closing the door behind her, and crosses the room to turn on the bedside lamp.

Quinn is stretched out on the bed, asleep, snoring softly. She looks at him for a moment, then sees some of his proofs on the lowboy. She picks them up, not shocked when the pictures are bloody. While she looks, Quinn wakes up, slowly.

QUINN
Hey.

GRACE
(waving the pictures)
You bring so much blood with you.

QUINN
Grace?

She puts the pictures down, crossed to his bedside, sits next to him.

GRACE
I was just -- wondering, I guess.
Thinking.

Quinn tries to sit up, then groans, lays back down.

GRACE (CONT'D)

You OK?

QUINN

Overdid the postholer, I guess.

Grace hesitates, then reaches out and begins to massage his shoulder. Quinn groans in pleasure.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Where did you learn to do this?

GRACE

Connor's therapy. Part of CP is muscle spasms, so ... turn over, I'll do your back.

He rolls over, and she continues to work.

QUINN

Did you hate me for long?

GRACE

Oh, yes. Years.

QUINN

Why'd you stop?

GRACE

I got tired.

Quinn tries to roll over, but she doesn't let him.

QUINN

I hated myself. I don't know if it's any consolation, but -- I hated myself intensely.

GRACE

Why'd you go?

QUINN

I don't know.

GRACE

Why'd you come back?

QUINN

To see you. To see Connor. Without my Dad here, it was -- safer.

Her hands still, then resume.

QUINN (CONT'D)

I've never tried to excuse myself.

GRACE

I know.

QUINN

I'm a selfish man, Grace. I like things easy.

Grace traces the muscles of his back--the massage now an exploration of his body.

GRACE

I think you've convinced yourself of that.

QUINN

Don't make me the outlaw with a heart of gold.

GRACE

I don't have to, Quinn.

He rolls over, away from her fingers.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I heard what your father said to you that night. I was there.

QUINN

You were out cold.

GRACE

I heard the end. I saw the papers, later.

(she reaches out,
runs her fingers
through his hair)

He said horrible things to you.

QUINN

True, though.

GRACE

You were seventeen.

He grabs her hand, pulls it away, she tangles their fingers together.

QUINN

I didn't--

GRACE

You were seventeen.

Quinn reaches up, touches her face.

QUINN

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, Gracie. If I could go back --

GRACE

I wish I had gone with you, sometimes. I never told anyone you asked me. I was so sure you'd come back in a few months.

Quinn shakes his head.

GRACE (CONT'D)

It keeps going through my mind, what could have been, if I had just said yes --

QUINN

It wouldn't have been this life. It's a good life, Gracie.

Grace shakes her head, curls into Quinn, so that her head is on his heart. Quinn carefully strokes her hair.

GRACE

I wish we had had the chance to try.

QUINN

So do I.

He kisses the top of her head, gently.

INT. MR. MERRILL'S BEDROOM -- LATER

Grace sits cross legged on the bed, Quinn half sits against the pillows, eating chocolate ice cream out of the carton.

GRACE

I basically moved in after you left. Dad died, and Mom was -- and your father was so good to me.

QUINN

Eventually.

GRACE

After awhile he started to remember the girl that practically lived here when we were kids.

QUINN

But he was terrible to you.

GRACE

He loved Connor, with all his heart.

QUINN
If you say so.

GRACE
He was a good man. A decent man. He
loved you, Quinn.

Quinn looks at her, disbelieving, then shrugs.

QUINN
So long as he was good to you. And
Connor. That's something.

Grace eats ice cream, looks out the still dark window.

GRACE
I used to wish I lived here, you
know. It was so warm, so homey. And
then your Mom got sick --

Self-consciously, she takes another spoonful of ice cream,
embarrassed. Quinn stares at her, face half hidden in shadow.

QUINN
Half of my Dad left when Mom did.
The house just froze, after. You
were the only thing left that was
warm.

GRACE
That was almost poetry, Quinn Merrill.

Quinn leans forward, wipes chocolate ice cream off her lips
with his thumb.

QUINN
Almost?

Grace licks the ice cream off his thumb, playful, teasing.

GRACE
Almost.

With a LAUGH, Quinn flips her over, kisses her. They sink
into the pillows, Grace's GIGGLE fading into a soft MOAN.

INT. MR. MERRILL'S BEDROOM -- LATER

Grace and Quinn doze in each others arms. Outside, a cock
CROWS, and Grace awakes. The dark grey of pre-dawn is lifting,
and she goes to the window, looks out.

Behind her Quinn wakes, comes behind her.

QUINN
Dawn, huh?

GRACE

A new day.

She turns to him, very slowly.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I want you to kiss me.

Quinn's breath catches, and he leans closer, so that their foreheads touch.

QUINN

I want to kiss you.

Grace smiles, as the sun comes up behind her and Quinn leans down, kissing her gently, softly, then raising his head to look in her eyes.

GRACE

Are we looking back, or forward?
Making up or making new?

QUINN

We just are, I think.

He kisses her, and the kiss deepens as they move, away from the window and towards the bed.

INT. MR. MERRILL'S BEDROOM -- MORNING

Quinn and Grace are curled up under the sheets. Quinn wakes first, then looks at Grace laying beside him. He smiles, traces her cheek, then carefully moves away from her, getting out of bed and pulling on a pair of sweatpants, then quietly leaving the room.

INT. MERRILL'S KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

Connor and Dave are eating breakfast at the table when Quinn enters. He stops, takes in the scene -- the spilled cereal and milk, Connor still in his PJ's, and Dave, in civilian clothes.

QUINN

We overslept.

Dave nods, points to the coffee pot, stiff and angry. Connor seems agitated.

DAVE

There's coffee, and I got Connor here some food, so no harm done.

QUINN

Right.

Quinn moves to the cupboard, gets a cup, then gets some coffee as Grace enters, in her bathrobe. She pauses in the doorway, sees Dave, the mess, Connor, and Quinn, pulls her bathrobe tighter.

GRACE
Dave made coffee?

QUINN
Yeah, uh-huh.

Grace walks over, takes the cup from Quinn, breathes in, and sits at the table.

DAVE
Grace can't take the morning without coffee.

QUINN
Right.

He pours another cup, sits down as well. Connor slurps his cereal.

GRACE
Well, this is stimulating. I'm going to get dressed.

She walks to the door, stops.

GRACE (CONT'D)
No pissing contests in the kitchen, ok?

Grace leaves.

CONNOR
Good morning, Quinn.

QUINN
Good morning, Connor.

Connor smiles, reaches for the cereal box.

DAVE
Whoa, there. Let me help.

Dave pours more cereal into the bowl, while Quinn watches.

DAVE (CONT'D)
He's a little upset. He's used to a routine. Doesn't like it changed.

QUINN
I know.

DAVE

Sure you do.

Connor grins as Dave pours his milk into his cereal bowl.

DAVE (CONT'D)

What do you want to do today, Connor?

CONNOR

Paint the shutters.

QUINN

What color?

CONNOR

Green!

Connor is so triumphant, so happy, the Quinn and Dave both laugh.

DAVE

Green it is.

EXT. THE MERRILL'S BARN -- AFTERNOON

Dave and Quinn are putting the fence up, both working hard. The fence is about two-thirds done, straight and even.

Every time Quinn slams the hammer down, Dave does it harder, louder. The tension builds until:

QUINN

What the fuck is your problem, man?

DAVE

How long 'til I get to clean up your mess, again?

QUINN

What?

DAVE

I'm just asking, so I can schedule it. It takes about six months to put Grace back together, so I need to know.

QUINN

Fuck off.

He drops his gloves, the hammer and heads to the cooler by the lone tree. Dave follows, furious, grabs his shoulders, turns Quinn to face him.

DAVE

I raised your son. I held your wife when the divorce papers came and she couldn't stop crying.

QUINN

Don't do this, man.

DAVE

Helped her get him into the right schools, see the right doctors.

QUINN

You're a saint.

Dave punches Quinn. Hard, right to the chin. Quinn staggers back.

DAVE

What did you ever do to deserve her? She waited for you, held her head up high when people laughed at her --

QUINN

Dave, don't do this --

Dave closes the distance between them, and rams Quinn back against the fence, his face red.

DAVE

You'll leave eventually, something will spook you and you'll run.

He shoves Quinn, hard, against the rail, steps back. Quinn staggers for a second, keeps himself upright by holding onto the fence.

DAVE (CONT'D)

And I wouldn't cry at the sight of your back, either.

QUINN

You done?

He's holding his ribs, but standing on his own two feet. Dave looks tempted to hit him again, but turns away instead.

DAVE

Why is she still all tied up with you?

Quinn looks away, then, limping slightly, grabs his gloves and the hammer, heads towards the post they were working on.

DAVE (CONT'D)

God damn it, Quinn. Why'd you even come back here?

Quinn can't face him, lowers his head against the fence post.

QUINN

The day Connor was born, Da' and I
got in a fight. Over this fence.

He kicks it, the post stands firm.

QUINN (CONT'D)

I told him I'd do it when the ground
was softer. Spring was late, the
ground was frozen...

He takes a ragged breath.

DAVE

(sardonically, knowing
it isn't the reason)
You came back to fix a fence?

QUINN

Yeah, Dave, that's the reason.

DAVE

Don't get snide with me, you shit.
Don't you dare.

QUINN

Fuck you, Dave, why the fuck do you
care?

He turns to face Dave, the violence that had simmered down
springing back up.

DAVE

I want you to do something, Quinn.
Show me something, tell me something
that makes me think maybe you're a
salvageable human being.

QUINN

What if I'm not, Dave? What if I'm
just a stupid, worthless piece of
shit?

He moves in, too close.

QUINN (CONT'D)

What are you going to do then?

DAVE

You know, I don't really give a fuck--

Dave steps even closer, face to face.

DAVE (CONT'D)
But what are you gonna do when you
break her heart, again.

QUINN
I got no answers.

DAVE
Grace didn't put her life on hold
for you, even if that's what it looks
like.

Quinn nods, stares out into the pasture.

DAVE (CONT'D)
She stayed here for Connor, and your
old man. And maybe, a little bit,
for me.
(he takes a small
step back)
But not for you.

QUINN
Yeah. Okay.

The two men stare out in silence, then Dave sighs.

DAVE
Quinn, there ain't no shame in me to
back out for a man who's gonna do
right for her. But I'll be damned
if I'll see her broken by you, again.

Quinn can't answer, he stares at the house, swallows hard.

DAVE (CONT'D)
So what is it you want here?

QUINN
I want to get this fence finished
before sundown.

Dave stares out him a second, then starts back towards the house.

INT. MERRILL'S FRONT HALLWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

Dave enters the hallway, almost runs into Grace coming down the stairs.

DAVE
Do you love him?

Grace looks at Dave.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Do you?

GRACE
I love the idea of him. I don't know
the real thing yet.

DAVE
Did sleeping with him help?

GRACE
You can go straight to hell for that.

Dave looks at her, then nods, shoves his hands in his pockets.

DAVE
Sorry. I just wasn't expecting you
to --

GRACE
To what? Now who's lying? What did
you think was going to happen?

DAVE
I don't know.

GRACE
Dave -- do you want a promise? A
certain answer? I can't give it to
you. I don't know.

DAVE
But you're glad he's here.

GRACE
Yes.

DAVE
And you realize he'll never stay.

Grace looks away, and there is an uncomfortable silence that
stretches for a moment.

GRACE
I can always hope.

DAVE
Yeah. I guess we both can.

He is very serious.

DAVE (CONT'D)
If this is what you want, and it
makes you happy, I can learn to live
with it.

GRACE
Dave, I--

DAVE

Just make sure you're doing it for today's reasons. Not yesterdays.

GRACE

You're a good man, Dave Ryan.

DAVE

He's going to leave, and I'll still be here.

Grace pushes her hair off her face, blinking back the beginnings of tears.

GRACE

I know.

Dave nods, touches her face in something like regret. She smiles up at him. Behind Grace, Connor comes down the stairs.

CONNOR

What's going on?

DAVE

Not a thing, buddy.
(to Grace)
I'm gonna go.

GRACE

Yeah.

CONNOR

You leaving?

DAVE

Yep, kiddo. But I'll be back.

With a last look at Grace he heads out.

INT. MERRILL'S KITCHEN -- LATER

Connor and Grace are at the table, working on coloring books, when Quinn comes in, dusty and sweaty.

QUINN

Dave come up here earlier?

GRACE

Yeah.

They exchange a look, Grace manages a smile.

He goes to the sink, washes off the worst of the grime, and walks to Grace and gives her quick kiss. Connor giggles.

QUINN

What's so funny?

CONNOR
Nothing.

QUINN
Nothin'?

Connor shakes his head while Grace waves a flyer in front of Quinn.

GRACE
So, Connor and I found this in the paper today - look at this --

She hands Quinn the flyer.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Doesn't that look fun?

QUINN
The county fair?

GRACE
Let's go. Tonight.

QUINN
What?

Grace is almost more excited than Connor.

GRACE
Oh, please, all three of us. It'll be fun.

QUINN
You want to go to the county fair?

GRACE
Well, Connor and I do.

Quinn smiles, resigned.

QUINN
Well, I don't know. That might take some convincing --

GRACE
Oh, I can convince you. That's not a problem.

She stands up, wraps her hand around Quinn's neck, kisses him hard. Connor laughs.

QUINN
Looks like we're going to the county fair.

Connor grins.

EXT. COUNTY FAIR -- EVENING

Quinn, Grace, and Connor are walking down the midway of the county fair. There are rides, and carnies, and popcorn and cotton candy stands.

At the end of the midway are the 4-H stands and the livestock corrals, and the stadium -- where the rodeo has been held all day -- is slightly beyond that. Connor is blissfully eating cotton candy while counting his tickets. He turns to the group.

CONNOR

I'm going on the ferry wheel again.

QUINN

Have fun.

Connor heads off to the ferris wheel and Grace and Quinn follow. Grace grabs Quinn's hand as they approach the railing, waving to Connor.

GRACE

Are you having fun?

QUINN

Yeah.

GRACE

You took me here, that summer.

QUINN

I was riding, that day.

GRACE

You won, that day.

Quinn smiles.

QUINN

It was a good day, I'll admit that.

GRACE

That was an amazing summer.

Quinn nods, waves to Connor, who is waiting in line, then looks at Grace.

QUINN

So I was thinking about not selling.

The sudden change in subject catches Grace unawares.

QUINN (CONT'D)

The house, at least. Still no use for the land.

(MORE)

QUINN (CONT'D)
 Realtor can get a decent prize.
 Give you a cushion, for awhile. So
 you can stay there.

Grace nods, watches Connor.

GRACE
 And you? Will you stay there?

Quinn smiles at that, a little sad.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 Well?

QUINN
 I don't know about that.

He looks at Grace, who waits for his answer.

QUINN (CONT'D)
 But at least it would be someplace
 to come back to.

GRACE
 Is that what it would be? A place
 you'd leave?

Grace turns away, waving at Connor as he boards the ride.

QUINN
 You could come with me.

GRACE
 With Connor?

QUINN
 Most places. If we can't, we can
 hire help. Someone to watch him.

Behind them, Connor drifts by, laughing hysterically.

GRACE
 He loves that ride. Always has. When
 he was three, he tried to jump off.

She watches Connor reach the top of the ride.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 Slid right between the rails. Thought
 he was Superman. I had a death grip
 on the back of his shirt -- that's
 all I had him by.

QUINN
 That must have been terrifying.

GRACE

He had no fear of falling. None.
He's afraid of so many other things.
New places. New things.

(she watches him for
a moment)

I couldn't pull him from what he
knows, no matter how much I may want
to.

Connor SCREAMS with glee as the ferris wheel goes around.

QUINN

No one could love him like you, Grace.

GRACE

I couldn't leave him.

QUINN

You wouldn't be leaving him for long.
Just little trips.

GRACE

To war zones?

QUINN

To wherever.

Connor is nearing the end of the ride.

QUINN (CONT'D)

I'd like to tell him that I'm his
dad. I'd like him to know that,
regardless of what else happens.

Before Grace can answer, Connor comes running up, grinning.

CONNOR

I'm out of tickets, Mom.

Grace smiles, holds out her hands.

GRACE

Then we're done, Connor. Sorry.

Crestfallen, Connor sighs, and the group starts to walk
towards the parking lot. As they walk, some people give Connor
odd looks, others of sympathy. Quinn is noticeably affected
by them.

QUINN

Are they always like that?

GRACE

They don't know him.

Quinn smiles at her, takes her hand, but she pulls hers away after a moment.

EXT. COUNTY FAIR -- CONTINUOUS

Dave watches Quinn, Grace and Connor walk away from where he is standing near one of the restrooms. Carrie walks out, puts her arms around his waist, surprising him.

CARRIE
Sure was nice idea, the fair.

DAVE
Yeah.

CARRIE
I love the ride that goes round 'n'
round --

DAVE
They all go round 'n' round, Carrie.

Carrie comes around to face him, smiling.

CARRIE
Yeah, I guess.
(pause)
You OK?

DAVE
Fine.

CARRIE
You don't seem fine.

She looks at him intently.

CARRIE (CONT'D)
You're all hung up on her, aren't
you?

DAVE
Come off it, Carrie.

CARRIE
Have been for 20 years. Why didn't
you marry her years ago?

DAVE
'Cause I knew he'd be back.

CARRIE
Well, were you saving her for him?
You're not even gonna fight for her?

Dave wheels away, starts to walk down the midway. Carrie follows.

CARRIE (CONT'D)

What? Don't you think you'd win?

DAVE

It's not a contest. Not a question of winning. She's not a prize.

CARRIE

Dave, as a friend -- she may not be a prize, but it's definitely a contest.

Dave stops, faces Carrie.

DAVE

I knew he'd be back. And I knew she'd want him. Better a break-up than a divorce, right?

CARRIE

So that's it?

DAVE

Everything goes round 'n' round, Carrie. Everything.

Carrie smiles at him, then reaches up and kisses his check.

CARRIE

You are a good man, Dave Ryan. Foolish, but good.

EXT. THE MERRILL FARM -- NIGHT

Quinn's car pulls into the drive, and he gets out, stares at the padlock, broken and crumpled, hanging from the open gates. A second later, Grace comes up behind him.

QUINN

That's not good.

Grace shakes her head, goes back to the car, pulls it through while Quinn closes the gates behind her, then gets in the car.

Slowly, the car winds down the drive, and as its headlights hit the house, Quinn comes barreling out, before the car even stops.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Those bastards. Motherfuckers.

The house, almost completely finished that afternoon, is now covered in black spray paint, graffiti tags that say "Coward" and various other epithets. A few windows on the first floor have been broken. Grace gets out of the car, stares at the destruction.

GRACE
You go out and get them, Quinn.

QUINN
Grace--

GRACE
And you keep them away from here.

QUINN
Grace, just get in the house and call Dave.

GRACE
Quinn, God damnit, we're your family. You need to fix it. You keep them away from here, and you fix it.

Connor starts to make guttural WHIMPERS as he sees his shutter, torn off the house, broken on the ground.

With a CRY, Connor rushes out of the car to the shutter, bursting into tears.

CONNOR
Momma, my shutters--

Grace rushes to calm him, as something shifts in Quinn. Something ferocious and paternal.

Connor, sobbing, fights Grace a bit. In a few long strides, Quinn comes over to Connor, turns him round to face him.

QUINN
Con, look at me. Con. Connor.

After a moment Connor looks.

QUINN (CONT'D)
We'll fix them, I promise.

CONNOR
We can't fix 'em. They're broked.

QUINN
We'll fix 'em so's they're better, 'cause we'll do it together.

He pulls the still teary boy close, and comforts him.

CONNOR
But what if they break it again?

QUINN
There not gonna break it again.

CONNOR
But how do you know?

QUINN
Connor-

CONNOR
What if they come again?

QUINN
They're not going to come again.

CONNOR
How do you know?

GRACE
'Cause Quinn's going to make sure
they don't.

Quinn meets Grace's gaze over Connor's head.

CONNOR
(still crying)
Why?

GRACE
'Cause we're family. And you take
care of family.

Connor shakes his head, confused, looks at Grace.

GRACE (CONT'D)
He's your dad, Connor.

Connor's gaze rivets back to Quinn. The tears have stopped.
He gives Quinn a small smile.

CONNOR
Hi.

Quinn covers half a sob with a chuckle, pulls Connor in close.
Over his head, to Grace, he mouths:

QUINN
Thank you.

Quinn pulls Connor back, cups his face.

QUINN (CONT'D)
You run inside and watch your momma,
'kay?

Connor nods, heads up to the stairs.

QUINN (CONT'D)
(to Grace)
You go in and call Dave.

He kisses her, hard, then runs back to the car and takes off.

Connor watches the car drive off, doesn't resist as Grace hugs him close.

CONNOR
Is he coming back?

GRACE
Yeah, Con. He's coming back.

Grace kisses his forehead, smooths his hair, looks out after the fading brake lights of the car.

The taillights disappear.

EXT. CASEY JONES BAR AND GRILL -- LATER

Quinn's SUV skids to a stop outside the bar. He gets out, slams the door shut behind him, scans the lot for Peter's truck.

It's there.

Quinn heads into the bar.

INT. CASEY JONES BAR AND GRILL -- MOMENTS LATER

A large crowd, most of the town, celebrating their wins at the Fair.

Peter sits in his booth with his buddies.

Quinn comes in, sees Peter, heads straight to him.

QUINN
You and me got business outside.

Peter smirks, leans back.

PETER
I ain't got nothing to say.

QUINN
You had plenty to say when you sprayed it all over my house.
(he scans the buddies)
Which one of you is it that thinks 'fuck' is spelled F U K?

A small titter from the crowd, which is noticing the stand off.

PETER

Whatever happened up at your place
was divine retribution and ain't
nothing to do with me.

He goes to drink his beer, but before he can get it to his mouth Quinn has reached across the table, grabbed Peter's shirt, and dragged him over, dumping on the floor.

QUINN

You gonna come outside with me?

Peter scrambles to his feet as his buddies pile out of the booth. Quinn glances at them.

QUINN (CONT'D)

You tell your friends to back off.

PETER

Fuck off, Merrill.

The Buddies move in.

With a quick, vicious stab Quinn punches one in the throat, then spins and kicks another in the chest.

Peter goes to grab him, Quinn ducks, stands, and punches the third in the face. As Peter staggers to his feet, wiping blood from his head, Quinn steps back. The crowd gets bigger, some restraining the Buddies.

QUINN

You only got a beating in once 'cause
I figured I had it coming.

PETER

Fuck you, Merrill.

Peter rushes him again, hitting Quinn hard in the chest. Quinn stumbles backwards, regroups, dodges one blow, takes another in the chin.

Peter presses his advantage, but Quinn shakes it off, meets Peter's first blow with a block, then ducks the next, comes in with a fist to Peter's belly, then another to the face.

Peter staggers back and Quinn follows, hitting him, hard, in the gut, the ribs, then one hard punch to the cheek. Peter goes to his knees.

Quinn leans down, grabs Peter by the shirt and throws him down on the table, leaning in close.

QUINN

You want to hate me? Fine.

PETER

You're a goddamned fool--

QUINN

But you fuck with my family, and
 nine kinds of hell is gonna hit you--
 and if you or any of your buddies
 here lay a finger on Grace or my
 boy, 'less it's to help her cross
 the street --

Quinn pulls Peter up off the table, slams him back down.
 His buddies are up again, watching, wary. The crowd watches.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Well, there ain't nowhere in the
 world I won't find you.

PETER

(pushing Quinn off,
 standing)

I don't know who the hell you think
 you are--

QUINN

This includes your boys, too. And
 your mother. Keep your poison to
 yourselves.

PETER

You don't get to tell me how to act
 in this town, Merrill. You don't got
 no right.

QUINN

Yeah, I do. I got every right.

Quinn picks his hat up off the floor, nods to the crowd, and
 heads out. Peter, with a shout, rushes Quinn's back. As
 Quinn turns, Peter sucker punches him.

Quinn staggers backwards. Peter pushes in closer. His
 Buddies are held back by the crowd.

As Peter rushes in towards Quinn, Quinn steadies himself,
 and when Peter gets close enough, Quinn grabs him, throws
 him against the wall, slams Peter's head against a table,
 then knees him, hard, in the gut.

Peter hits the floor, curled up, MOANING.

Quinn leans over him.

QUINN (CONT'D)

You touch my son, or the mother of
 my son, or so much as a blade of

(MORE)

QUINN (CONT'D)
 grass on the land they live, and so
 help me God, I'll kill you.

Quinn picks up his hat from the ground.

QUINN (CONT'D)
 I hope we're clear.

He puts his hat on his head and leaves.

INT. MERRILL'S KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

Grace is sitting at the kitchen table, hands fisted, as Dave paces. His radio CRACKLES, but he ignores it.

DAVE
 You told him?

GRACE
 We told him.

DAVE
 Jesus. He's ok?

Grace shrugs, exhausted.

GRACE
 He's sleeping, now. So.

She looks up sees Quinn standing in the doorway, dried blood on his face, one hand on his side.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 Oh, my God. Quinn--

She helps him to a chair, takes off his hat, looks at the still bleeding gash on his forehead.

DAVE
 Jesus H Christ.

QUINN
 I'm afraid I may have made a little
 mess for you to clean up, Deputy.

GRACE
 You're hurt.

QUINN
 I'll mend.

GRACE
 Don't move.

Grace leaves the room. Dave studies him.

DAVE
What happened?

QUINN
I ran into a wall.

Dave nods. Quinn winces as he settles into a chair.

Dave's radio CHATTERS. Dave looks at it, then Quinn.

DAVE
That 'cause of you?

QUINN
Maybe that mess I was talking about.

DAVE
When you ran into that wall?

QUINN
It was a stubborn wall.
(he groans)
With friends.

The radio CHATTERS again as Grace comes back in with first aid supplies.

INT. MERRILL'S KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

Grace finishes bandaging Quinn's ribs--again.

QUINN
Thanks.

She nods.

QUINN (CONT'D)
I mean it. Thanks for this, thanks for telling--

GRACE
Don't, Quinn. I don't know if that made anything better.

QUINN
Grace--

He pulls her closer, but she resists, getting up instead and gathering the first aid debris.

GRACE
Don't *placate* me. Goddamnit, Quinn, this not knowing if you're staying or leaving-- I can't take it--Connor can't take it.

QUINN

Grace--

GRACE

No. You need to decide. You need to decide soon. We're not some dollhouse family you can pick up when it suits you.

She leaves the room. Quinn stares after her, then stands, stiffly.

INT. CONNOR'S BEDROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Connor is asleep, though his face shows signs of recent tears. Quinn watches from his doorway, then comes in, sitting on the bed.

He reaches over, takes one of Connor's hands in his own. The belt buckle is gripped tight in the other.

Quinn traces the bucking bronco on it with his finger.

QUINN

The day I won this was the best day of my life, little man.

He speak softly, to himself, not wanting to wake Connor.

QUINN (CONT'D)

I used to think so because I won that, and your momma looked so pretty in the stands when I got it.

He stops, breathes in a little shakily.

QUINN (CONT'D)

And maybe because my da' looked so proud.

He pushes Connor's damp hair off his face. At the touch, Connor sighs with contentment and smiles a little, still asleep.

QUINN (CONT'D)

But now I know it was the best day of my life 'cause that was the day your momma and I made you.

He leans down, and kisses Connor's forehead, then very quietly leaves the room.

EXT. THE MERRILL FARM -- EVENING

A horn honks, followed by another. As Grace comes out to the porch, and Connor follows, a long line of cars comes down the drive.

Quinn, still in his pajamas, comes out, pushes Connor back inside. In his hands is an old but well cared for shotgun.

GRACE
(re: the shotgun)
What's that for?

QUINN
Well - I

GRACE
These are friends, Quinn. See --
there's Dave.
(waving)
Dave!

She goes off the porch to meet Dave, and Quinn puts the safety on. Connor comes out.

Connor is wearing Quinn's old belt buckle. Upside down. There is a moment of awkwardness, then Quinn cuffs him and brings him in for a hug.

Sven hollers from a passing truck:

SVEN
Heard you need a few hands out here.

He surveys the graffitied house.

SVEN (CONT'D)
Can't say I like your paint job much.

Quinn is taken aback for a moment, then bursts out laughing. Behind him, Carrie and others unload trucks filled with tools and paint. Dave comes up.

QUINN
How did - why --

DAVE
It's a small town. You're a part of it.

SVEN
Plus, Grace fries up a mean chicken.

DAVE
And some came 'cause I pulled a favor or two.

Quinn comes down from the porch.

SERIES OF SHOTS

A. A group painting the barn

- B. A group trying to get a fence post up. It falls, splashing everyone with mud.
- C. A group filling in the driveway.
- D. Grace feeding people, laughing in the kitchen.
- E. Sven cackling as a young woman walks by.
- F. Quinn and Connor working on a shutter.

EXT. THE MERRILL FARM -- EVENING

The last trucks pull out of the driveway, people waving good-bye. Quinn stands by the gate, getting ready to close it. Dave's car leaves last. Already a great deal of the damage has been repaired.

DAVE
We'll be back tomorrow.

QUINN
Thanks, Dave.

DAVE
You bet.

Grace and Connor come down the drive.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Night.

GRACE
Night!

Dave pulls out. As Quinn closes the gate, Grace and Connor join him. Quinn slings an arm around both. They head back down the drive.

QUINN
So this is family bonding, huh?

GRACE
Shush.

QUINN
No, it's fun. Scintillating.

GRACE
If you're going to be this way --

She tries to pull away, Quinn doesn't let her go.

QUINN
I'm kidding. Honest. This is nice.

GRACE
It's killing you.

QUINN
No. No, not at all. Now, if I had to
do it again this decade --

Grace laughs, and Connor joins her.

QUINN (CONT'D)
So Connor, you OK?

CONNOR
I'm OK.

GRACE
And you understand?

CONNOR
Quinn's my dad. That's good. I like
Quinn.

He looks puzzled for a second.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
Do I call you Dad?

QUINN
If you want to.

CONNOR
'Kay.

GRACE
And you're really OK?

CONNOR
I'm OK.

GRACE
Really, sweetie?

CONNOR
I'm OK.

GRACE
OK.

CONNOR
Can I go watch TV?

QUINN
If your sure you're O-

CONNOR
I'm OK!

Quinn releases him, and Connor runs off to the house. Quinn pulls Grace in closer, and she leans her head against his chest, both still looking at the darkening sky.

QUINN

If there was a switch I could flick,
and this place was enough ...

GRACE

I know.

QUINN

Or one to make you not miss it --

GRACE

I've been searching for that switch
myself.

For the first time, they look at each other. Quinn leans down, so they are forehead to forehead.

GRACE (CONT'D)

There hasn't been enough time. I
barely got you back ...

QUINN

Shhh, Gracie, come on, babe ...

GRACE

I was content without you, those
last couple of years. Why does it
hurt so much now?

Quinn cups her face, wipes the tears, kisses her cheeks, her lips, her tears, comforting as he can. She leans against him, and he wraps his arms around her, holding her close, holding her tight.

QUINN

We got two summers. More than some.

She pulls away, a small smile on her lips, still in his arms.

GRACE

Yes, we did.

They smile at each other, wrapped in each other for another second.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Today was a good day, Quinn.

Quinn stays quiet a minute, then smiles.

QUINN

Yeah.

EXT. MERRILL'S FRONT PORCH -- MORNING

Quinn stands on the porch, watching as cars come back up the drive. People wave and he waves back. As they park, Grace offers coffee and chats, Connor follows behind her with a stack of cups.

Dave comes up the steps, sees Quinn, heads over to him.

DAVE
Morning.

QUINN
Morning. Get some coffee?

DAVE
Yeah.

QUINN
You awake?

DAVE
Not really, no.

Quinn takes a sip of his coffee, winces as it hits his cut lip.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Pete tried to press charges 'gainst you. Assault.

QUINN
Did he?

DAVE
Well, not so much him as Mary.

Quinn snorts.

QUINN
Course she did. What happened?

DAVE
We think it's a case of mistaken identity.

QUINN
How so?

DAVE
Apparently five people saw you at the hardware store, during the time of the attack.

QUINN
The hardware --

DAVE

Yeah.

The two men stare at each other, then Quinn grins.

QUINN

Yeah, I was there. Buying ...

DAVE

Wrenches.

QUINN

Wrenches. Right.

Dave nods, and Quinn smiles, stares out at the people in the yard.

DAVE

This farm -- it's a good place.

QUINN

Yeah, for a money pit. Every time Grace turns on a light I feel my wallet get lighter.

From the yard, Grace LAUGHS at something Connor is doing. Dave watches Quinn watch her.

DAVE

She's not a woman you leave and come back too, Quinn. You stay with her, or you don't.

Quinn looks up, watches Dave for a second, then nods, slowly, in understanding.

QUINN

She'd wait for me.

DAVE

And hate you for it.

QUINN

Do you think two people can live with someone who is everything they aren't?

DAVE

It's more a question of whether or not they'll still be themselves, in the end. If they even still like themselves.

Dave looks out into the yard as laughter carries to them.

QUINN

She makes me better.

Dave nods.

EXT. MERRILL'S YARD -- MOMENTS LATER

The outside of the Merrill farm is a study of activity. Quinn stands at the corner, on his cell phone. He doesn't see Grace heading towards the house, an empty tray in her hands.

QUINN

I don't know if I can...Yeah, I know I need the work, look, Mike...I've been busy...Yeah, I'm serious about the change...Look, when do I have to fly out? ... three days?

(he sees Grace)

I'll call you back. I said, I'll call you back.

GRACE

Hey.

QUINN

Hey.

The smile at each other, somewhat awkwardly.

GRACE

Work?

QUINN

Trying to be.

GRACE

Sounds like you may not have a job to go back to, soon.

QUINN

It's not a big deal.

GRACE

Do you want to go back to it?

A moment of honest thought.

QUINN

I don't know.

Grace nods, heads towards the door. As Grace steps by him, he brings up the camera, snaps a shot. Grace turns, hand on the door, face questioning, and he snaps another.

GRACE

What was that for?

QUINN

You looked pretty.

Grace smiles, pleased, and runs her hand down her shirt.

CONNOR
Hey, Qui--Da'!

Quinn looks over, then with a quick smile and wink, heads down towards Connor, who holds a rebuilt shutter.

QUINN
Whatcha' got there, Con?

CONNOR
Our better shutter!

Quinn laughs.

EXT. THE MERRILL FARM -- CONTINUOUS

Quinn heads down the porch steps, towards Connor, who is standing by the window the shutter belongs on. Dave and a few others hang about.

QUINN
You ready, Connor?

CONNOR
Green!

Quinn smiles at Connor's outburst.

QUINN
That it is.

Together they get the shutter up. Dave holds it in place while Quinn guides Connor's hands with screw and screwgun.

They finish step back. Quinn rest his arm about Connor's shoulders.

QUINN (CONT'D)
There you go, Con.

CONNOR
Better shutter.

QUINN
You bet.

With a shout, Connor runs towards Grace, who has been watching, excitedly babbling about his shutter.

A few people murmur sympathetically behind Quinn, but he ignores it, bringing up his camera and snapping a few shots of Connor running, then of Sven and a young boy fitting a post into the corral's fence.

Quinn wanders away, towards the barn. He turns, once, and takes a quick shot of Dave, leaning against the fence, hat tipped back, talking to a small child, then turns back towards the barn, continuing to take candid pictures of the people as they work, laugh, rest.

INT. MERRILL'S KITCHEN -- LATER

The kitchen is flooded with people, chatter, food and warmth. Quinn moves through them, saying hello, shaking hands. Children run through, followed by a shrieking mother.

MOTHER

Shoes, kids! Get those shoes off right now.

Quinn dodges out of the way, smiling, gets a plate and some food. Dave and Connor are right behind them.

Grace comes into the kitchen, laughing, and Quinn snags her around the waist.

QUINN

Hey, pretty lady. Dance with me.

GRACE

Not now, Quinn.

QUINN

Sometime tonight.

GRACE

That's a promise.

QUINN

Can I be the only man on your dance card?

GRACE

Are you sure you want to be?

Quinn ignores the loaded question and gives her a quick kiss, lets her go. She disappears into the crowd.

Connor cuts in front of Quinn, begins loading his plate with food.

QUINN

Hey. Hungry?

CONNOR

Yep.

EXT. THE MERRILL FARM -- EVENING

A crowd has gathered around a cleared area, with musicians at one end and some dancers in the middle. A grinning Connor

claps time with Sven, while Dave and another girl two-step around the circle. Grace stands slightly off to the edge, laughing, and Quinn, standing on the fence, takes pictures. The song changes, and Dave takes Grace's hand. The two begin to dance, and after a moment, Quinn takes their picture as well.

He takes a few more, through to the end of the song, then hops down from the post and starts to put the camera away. Grace comes up behind him.

GRACE

Dance with me.

Quinn turns, screwing the lens cap on.

QUINN

Thought you were dancing with Dave.

GRACE

I was. But I did say I was saving my dance card for you.

QUINN

Dave's a much better dancer.

GRACE

Might be. Still want to dance with you.

Quinn smiles, holds the camera out.

GRACE (CONT'D)

The summer, sir, isn't over yet.
Dance with me.

Grace takes the camera, then his hands, leads him to the floor -- handing the camera off to Sven. Quinn takes her in his arms and starts a decent - if rusty - waltz.

INT. MERRILL'S KITCHEN -- LATER

Grace is putting the last of the leftovers in the fridge as sounds of people leaving filter through the window. Quinn comes in from the hall, smiling.

QUINN

Connor's down and out.

GRACE

He was tired.

She smiles at him as a truck door closes and Dave's voice comes in through the open window.

QUINN

It was quite a day, wasn't it?

Grace nods, closes the fridge, goes to the sink. Quinn goes to her, starts to help with the dishes. Outside, Sven cackles, answered by Dave's low chuckle.

QUINN (CONT'D)
He's a good man.

GRACE
Sven? Yeah --

QUINN
Not Sven, and you know it.

He takes the dish from her hand, meets her eyes.

GRACE
Yeah, he is.

Grace nods, lets go of the dish, turns back to the sink.

QUINN
Grace --

She stares out the window, not with longing, or regret, but with nostalgia.

GRACE
You decide to take that job, you say
good-bye first.

QUINN
I will.

Quinn nods, tucks a stray lock of her hair behind her ear.

GRACE
And Connor and I--we'd like it if
you bought yourself a round trip
ticket.

He says nothing. Grace nods, finishes washing her dish, hands it to Quinn, leaves the room.

INT. MR. MERRILL'S STUDY -- MORNING

Quinn sits, on the phone to his editor. He looks harassed and frustrated. He goes to the window, opens it all the way, and lights a cigarette, half in and half out.

QUINN
Yeah, I know I missed Turkey ... I
know ... Look, I appreciate you taking
this chance ...

He hears footsteps in the hall, flicks the cigarette out the window, waves the air out frantically, when Grace steps in.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Hold on --

(he cups his hand
over the receiver)

Editor -- I'll be a minute.

(back into phone)

Look, I know. ... Yup. ... Yup. ...

Honestly, I'm just tired. ... OK.

... OK, I'll see you then. Bye.

He hangs up the phone, rolls his eyes, kisses Grace.

Grace gestures to the cell phone Quinn still holds.

GRACE

So you're leaving.

QUINN

It's that or unemployment.

GRACE

Going off to war, then?

QUINN

No. No, I'm tired of that. Some
fashion shoot.

(clumsy)

Moneys better. Not as much traveling--

GRACE

The land?

QUINN

Faxing the papers over this afternoon.

GRACE

So--

QUINN

Some farming company. Family owned,
buying the back 15 'cause it butts
up against their own--

GRACE

A good price?

QUINN

Enough. To keep the house.

(he looks out at the
barn)

Maybe buy Connor a horse.

Grace reaches across the room, touches his heart, then his
cheek. He grabs her hand, grips it tight.

GRACE

When are you going, then?

QUINN

Soon. I have to be set up in a few days, I need to get there--

GRACE

Today? Tomorrow?

QUINN

Tomorrow, I think.

GRACE

Will it hurt less, the more we say good bye?

QUINN

Yeah. I'm sure of it.

They smile at each other, and Quinn takes her fingers, kisses them tenderly.

EXT. MERRILL'S FRONT PORCH -- MORNING

Quinn loads the last of his stuff in the back of the SUV. Grace watches.

QUINN

Where's Connor?

GRACE

I told him to come say good bye. He-- doesn't really understand--

QUINN

Gracie--

He touches her cheek, grabs the old Nikon from the front seat. He hands it to her.

QUINN (CONT'D)

I was gonna--he should have that. It's almost a heirloom, by now. You really can't stay?

They stare at each other for a moment, then he kisses her cheek, gently.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Good-bye, Grace.

She hugs him, tightly.

GRACE

You come back.

QUINN

I will.

He lets her go, gets in the car, starts it, begins to turn around.

Connor bursts out of the front door, suitcase in hand. Clothes flutter out along the edges.

CONNOR

Da'!

He runs towards the SUV, which brakes. Grace tries to grab him but Connor breaks free, running to Quinn as he gets out of the truck.

QUINN

Connor--

GRACE

Connor, what are you doing?

(re:suitcase)

What is this?

Connor stares at the two of them, confused. Not sure what he has done wrong.

CONNOR

I wanted to go--I wanted to go with

Da'.

Quinn's calm exterior cracks, and he grabs Connor close. Above Connor's head Quinn meets Grace's gaze. They stare at each other.

He reaches out his hand. She takes it.

FADE OUT