

A REASON FOR EVERYTHING

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. MARSH ALONG MISSISSIPPI RIVER - NIGHT (APRIL 1963)

Two men in wading boots walk in a marsh in Iowa next to the Mississippi River. Each has a burlap bag and flashlight in one hand and a three-pronged frog gig in the other.

NICK VANMEER (36) is somber, gruff-speaking, tall, and solidly built, with close-cropped hair. LUKE VANMEER (34) is also solidly built, but not as tall as his brother nor as gruff. They scan the ground and walk slowly as they speak.

LUKE

We can get the warehouse near the marina for almost nothing.

NICK

You still on that houseboat building kick?

Nick thrusts his gig forward and brings up an impaled frog.

NICK

Hey look, my third frog and you've got, let's see if I'm counting this right, zero?

LUKE

C'mon, Nick, you want to be a prison guard the rest of your life?

Nick puts his frog in his bag and they resume walking.

NICK

What I want has nothing to do with anything. Maybe you and Arletta don't plan to start a family, but I have three kids. I'm not quitting my job at the prison and you can't quit your job at the factory.

LUKE

It's Mia now. You haven't met her. I gave my notice at the factory yesterday.

NICK

Oh, Jesus, Luke! You think you got the world all figured out because you attended a whole semester of college? If you're so smart, why'd they kick you out?

LUKE

I got kicked out because the dean didn't have a sense of humor. Why bring up ancient history like that?

NICK

If you ever grow up, I won't.

LUKE

Damn! I don't know why I wanted to work with a jerk like you, anyway.

Nick impales another frog and puts it in his bag.

NICK

I may be a jerk, but I'm definitely better than you at giggling frogs.

LUKE

Yeah, you're a mighty frog slayer.

A frog is at Luke's feet, looking up at him. Luke furtively glances at Nick ahead of him. Nick is not looking back. Luke nudges the frog with his foot and it hops away.

EXT. IOWA STATE PENITENTIARY - DAY

Nick and another guard, CHRIS LANSING (25), are seen from a distance walking across the prison yard inside 40-foot limestone walls. The scene zooms in on them.

CHRIS

So shit-for-brains Phelps thinks I know an untraceable poison and I'd tell an inmate what it is, so I say, "Just take a spoon full of butterfly piss and put it in hot coffee, totally untraceable." Say, Nick, are you listening?

NICK

Yeah, butterfly piss in coffee is untraceable.

CHRIS

What's eating you?

NICK

Nothing. What's eating you?

They arrive at a metal entrance door to a one-story, windowless brick cell house. Nick rings the buzzer.

INT. CELL HOUSE ONE - DAY

A guard, GABE GROVE(22), opens the door. Nick and Chris enter. Another guard, WALT ENOCHSON (50), sits at the desk, a key pouch in front of him with two large brass keys. A rotary dial phone is on the desk. Gabe removes his pouch.

Cell House One is like a small jail, with five one-man cells, four unoccupied, and a shower cell. Walt writes in a logbook.

WALT

One of you can get overtime next shift. Mercer is still out with a bad back.

Nick and Chris put on the key pouches. Chris goes to a cell.

NICK

I don't want to spend more time with Ludmill, but I could use the overtime.

WALT

The governor refused Ludmill's stay of execution.

NICK

How'd he take it?

GABE

He hasn't said a thing.

CHRIS

I can see why.

Nick goes next to Chris and sees LUDMILL (35) secured on the bed, on his back with his mouth taped shut. The night guards join them. Ludmill makes grunting noises.

NICK

The warden wouldn't like this.

WALT

Hell, Weller will never know.

GABE

Think this creep needs two guards each shift with just him in here?

NICK

No. He talks tough, but when his time comes, he'll be begging for mercy like the little girls he raped and murdered.

GABE

He was starting on Jennifer Meylor
when we taped his mouth shut.

Chris lets out the night guards. Nick sits at the desk and
shuffles cards. Chris sits down and Nick deals. They play
cards as they talk.

CHRIS

Do we let him up or not?

NICK

No, I can't stand hearing him talk
about Jennifer Meylor.

CHRIS

Yeah. Raping 12-year-olds is bad
enough but raping a 9-year-old is
just plain unacceptable.

NICK

Goddamn it! Why do we tape his
mouth if we're going to talk about
this shit? Was that remark supposed
to be funny?

CHRIS

No. Guard jokes aren't really
funny. It's why nobody but other
guards can stand us.

NICK

Even we can't stand us. My 11-year-
old's name is Jennifer. When her
name comes out of that pile of shit
in there, I want to rip his head
off!

CHRIS

Enough on that subject. We should
talk about something happy, but
guards only know how to talk about
the prison.

NICK

Speak for yourself.

CHRIS

Who do you have for friends, other
than guards and relatives?

NICK

I know we drift away from high school friends when we become guards. That happens just as much with other jobs.

CHRIS

I don't think so. Ever talk about the prison with Emily?

NICK

Hell no! What would I say? Guess what, sweetheart, I left an inmate chained with his mouth taped shut so he couldn't talk about raping little girls. How'd your day go?

INT. JENNIFER'S BEDROOM - DAY

EMILY VANMEER (35) enters as JENNIFER VANMEER (11), puts on her skirt.

EMILY

Hurry up, Jennifer. Next time, be ready when Ray and Matt leave.

JENNIFER

I know why Dad's been so grouchy. It's 'cause he works on death row.

Jennifer goes to her bed and looks under it, then stands and heads to the door.

EMILY

Who told you that?

JENNIFER

Betty. My shoes must be downstairs.

EMILY

Who told Betty that?

JENNIFER

Her dad works at the prison. Betty heard her mom and dad talking.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jennifer runs down the stairs. Emily follows at a walk. The doorbell rings. Jennifer rushes to open the door. MELODY SANFORD (14) is at the door, holding a book.

JENNIFER

Hi, Melody.

MELODY

Hi, Jennifer. Here's the book I told you about. It's pretty good.

JENNIFER

Great, thanks.

Jennifer takes the book and Melody enters.

MELODY

Hello, Mrs. Vanmeer. Is Ray here?

EMILY

Ray and Matt already left. We don't have time to visit right now.

MELODY

Bye, Mrs. Vanmeer. Bye, Jennifer.

JENNIFER

Bye, Melody. Thanks again.

Melody leaves. Jennifer closes the door, looks under the couch, brings her shoes out and begins putting them on.

JENNIFER

Melody really came to see Ray. Ray is too dense to know how she feels.

EMILY

They're just friends. They've been neighbors their whole lives.

JENNIFER

(sarcastic)

Yeah right, Mom. Melody just wants to be friends with Ray.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

RAY VANMEER (14) and MATT VANMEER (10) walk down the sidewalk. They hear shouting.

KURT (O.S.)

Ray! Wait up!

MARK (14) and KURT (14) come up to Ray and Matt.

MARK

Hey, Flea Fart, scram!

MATT

Aunt Rosiland says you can't call me that anymore.

MARK

(high pitched, mocking)
Aunt Rosiland says you can't call me that anymore.

RAY

Go on Matt. I need to talk to Mark and Kurt about something we're doing after school.

Matt walks away with an angry expression.

MARK

I got the cigarettes, one for each of us. I already hid them at the Winley place and matches too. Did you get the beer, Ray?

RAY

Yeah. We'll have to share. I only got one can. Getting three would be too risky.

MARK

Yeah. Uncle Nick would put you in his prison if he found out.

RAY

He'd do something a lot worse than that. What are you bringing, Kurt?

KURT

Potato chips.

RAY

Yeah right, potato chips.

KURT

They're really great potato chips. Each one is crisp and golden brown.

MARK

You're weird, Kurt.

KURT

No. You're weird, Mark.

MATT (O.S.)

You're all weird.

Matt comes out from behind a tree and runs off.

MARK

Flea Fart! You better not tell!

KURT

Yeah, we'll string you up, you
dirty varmint!

INT. CAR - MOVING - DAY

LEONA CONROY (60) is driving a car, alone. She hears her husband's voice over the CB.

FRED (V.O.)

Professor Plum to Miss Scarlet.

Leona picks up her CB mike and speaks.

LEONA

Miss Scarlet to Professor Plum. My
ETA is about half an hour. Did you
make the salad?

INT. CONROY KITCHEN - DAY

FRED CONROY (65), chops vegetables, puts them in a large bowl and speaks through the CB hands-free mike on the table.

FRED

I'm doing that as we speak.

LEONA (V.O.)

No anchovies. Only you like them.

FRED

Don't worry. I'm preparing the
salad in accordance to your
exacting standards.

LEONA (V.O.)

We should have an hour before Lisa
and Lawrence arrive with their
families. We'll have some fun.

FRED

Whatever do you mean by fun?

LEONA (V.O.)

FCC rules prohibit describing that
kind of fun on the air.

FRED
My God, woman! You'll wear an old
man out!

INT. CAR - MOVING - DAY

Leona laughs.

LEONA
Wear you out? It's the other way
around, Fred. Oh my God! Smoke!

Smoke billows out from under the front seat, rapidly
obscuring Leona's vision completely.

EXT. TWO-LANE HIGHWAY - DAY

Leona's car spins and slides sideways down the road, driver's
side forward. An oncoming semi slams into the car and pushes
it down the road. The scene lingers on the mangled car.
Lightning flashes, thunder rumbles and rain pours down.

EXT. WINLEY BARN - DAY

Ray, Mark and Kurt run toward a dilapidated barn through
pouring rain.

INT. WINLEY BARN - DAY

The three drenched boys enter a barn strewn with junk and
cobwebs. Ray drags a car hood into an open area, then breaks
up slats of wood torn from a stall.

RAY
Mark, make sure your hands are dry
before you get the matches.

KURT
You're starting a fire in here?

MARK
We have to dry our clothes.

RAY
Don't worry, Kurt. We won't burn
the place down.

EXT. WINLEY BARN - NIGHT

The barn is engulfed in flames. Firefighters spray the barn. The three boys sit on the running board of a fire truck, wearing blankets and looking forlorn. The rain has stopped.

KURT
Somebody should go in there and see
if our clothes are dry now.

MARK
Shut up, Kurt.

KURT
No, you shut up, Mark.

INT. LEEPORT COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE LOBBY - NIGHT

The three boys, still wearing blankets, sit on a wood bench. SHERIFF FINN (50) and MARK'S FATHER (40) come through a door. Mark's father, looking furious, walks by the boys. A forlorn Mark gets up and walks behind his father.

INT. LEEPORT COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE LOBBY - NIGHT

Ray still sits on the bench. Kurt heads to the door to the outside, followed by KURT'S MOTHER (40), who is weeping, and KURT'S FATHER (45), who looks more exasperated than angry.

INT. LEEPORT COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE LOBBY - NIGHT

Ray sits alone, staring at the floor. He looks up as Nick enters, then looks back down. Nick glares at Ray and walks to a counter, where he speaks to the female RECEPTIONIST (25).

NICK
I'm Nick Vanmeer, here for my son.

RECEPTIONIST
I'll tell Sheriff Finn you're here.

The receptionist goes through a door. Fred enters from outside. He speaks to Nick, mistaking him for a deputy.

FRED
I'm here to see the Leepport
Sheriff.

NICK
So am I.

FRED
Have Carsted and Alden been
arrested?

NICK

I don't know those people.

Fred speaks frantically and loudly, almost a shout.

FRED

They're the spoiled pricks my wife flunked after they set off a smoke bomb in her chemistry class! Then their asshole parents made a big fuss with the school board!

NICK

Sir, I don't work here.

FRED

Don't you see? It had to be them! Those monsters killed Leona! They killed my wife!

NICK

Sir, I'm not a deputy. This is a prison guard uniform. I don't know anything about your wife or those people you're talking about.

Fred sits on the bench at the other end from Ray. He speaks less loudly, but still with a frantic tone.

FRED

Leona was retired. We didn't need the money. She did it as a favor, finishing the school year as the substitute chemistry teacher, driving two hours each way to this godforsaken shithole town.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM A - NIGHT

Sheriff Finn talks to the receptionist in a whisper that can't be heard by the two other people in the room.

A deputy sits at one end of the table, smoking a cigarette. VICTOR ALDEN (18) sits at the center of the table, staring down, his hands stuffed in his blue and gold letter jacket.

FINN

Tell Vanmeer I'll be out when I can. I have something more serious than the barn fire to deal with.

The receptionist departs, closing the door. Finn goes to the table and stands across from Alden. Finn lights a cigarette.

FINN

It's over, Alden. Your pal told us he tried to talk you out of it but you had it in for Mrs. Conroy.

ALDEN

That's a lie!

FINN

Carsted shared the blame when you set off a smoke bomb, but you had to make another smoke bomb for revenge. Now a teacher's dead and Carsted doesn't want to go to prison for something you did.

Finn leans toward Alden, smoke coming out of his mouth.

FINN

You're 18 now. You'll go to that big scary prison you grew up seeing on the hill. Carsted's testimony will put you there.

Alden is in tears as he answers emotionally.

ALDEN

It was Reggie's idea! He couldn't let it drop! But nobody thought anybody would die! We thought it would go off before she got out of the parking lot. I don't know why it didn't. It was an accident!

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM B - NIGHT

Finn faces REGINALD CARSTED (18), who sits at an identical table, in an identical interrogation room, wearing an identical letter jacket.

Carsted has a cocky demeanor. A different deputy is at the table, smoking a cigarette.

FINN

Your pal is ready to testify that you forced him into it.

CARSTED

I figured Victor would cave in. Look, nobody wanted that bitch teacher to die, but you can't blame us for being mad. You know what an F in Chemistry does to a GPA?

INT. RAY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ray lies on his bed, on his belly. Nick repeatedly strikes him with his belt, using full force. Heavy sobbing is punctuated in three-second intervals with sharp cracks of leather on skin and cries of pain.

INT. MATT'S ROOM - NIGHT

Matt is curled up in a fetal position, his thumb in his mouth. He hears the muffled sound of the beating.

INT. JENNIFER'S ROOM - NIGHT

Jennifer is crying. Her arms cover her ears. She hears the muffled sound of the beating and then it stops.

INT. NICK AND EMILY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Emily is sitting up in bed. The light is on. Nick enters and starts undressing.

EMILY
(sarcastic)
Isn't that nice? You spent a little
time with your son.

NICK
He burned down a damn barn, Emily!
We're lucky nobody is pressing
charges.

Nick sits on the bed to take off his shoes.

EMILY
He's your son, not one of your
inmates.

NICK
And I'm making sure he never is an
inmate.

INT. RAY'S ROOM - DAY

Ray lies on his side, on his bed, idly twirling around a tiny toy boat. He's fully dressed, lying on top of the made bed. Matt enters. Ray yells.

RAY
Hey! Stay the hell out of my room!

MATT

I can't find Snickers. Have you seen him?

RAY

No, I haven't seen your damn rat!

MATT

He's not a rat. He's a hamster.

RAY

He'll be a dead hamster if I see him in here 'cause I'll squish him! Now get out or I'll squish you!

EXT. GALLOWES - DAY

Ludmill, walks up the stairs in full restraints, with Nick on one side and CAPT. HENRY GRUNDY (45) on the other. Ludmill does not resist, but Nick and Henry each hold an arm and move him along.

CHAPLAIN VANCE (50) is behind them. WARDEN WELLER (50) and A DOCTOR (40), in a white coat, with a stethoscope and Sheriff Finn are on the platform.

LUDMILL

God, no. Oh please, no. Oh Jesus.

Ludmill is positioned in front of Weller.

WELLER

Arnold Ludmill, you have been convicted of murder in the first degree and sentenced to hang by the neck until dead. Do you have any final words?

LUDMILL

Oh God, please don't. Please.

Nick and Henry position the still pleading Ludmill at the noose. Nick puts a black hood over his head. Henry secures the noose. Nick and Henry step back. Weller nods to Finn, who pulls the lever. Ludmill drops.

INT. MATT'S ROOM - DAY

Matt sits on the bed, crying, a dead hamster in his hands. Jennifer is next to him with an arm across Matt's shoulders. Ray stands at the open door.

RAY
Is he dead?

MATT
Get the hell out of my room!

RAY
Hey, I didn't do it. I really
didn't mean what I said yesterday.

MATT
Get out of here! Get out!

Jennifer stands and goes to Ray.

RAY
Jennifer, I didn't do anything.

Jennifer gently pushes Ray out of the room.

JENNIFER
I know, Ray. Just leave him alone
right now, OK?

Jennifer closes the door. Ray talks to the door.

RAY
But I didn't do anything to
Snickers.

INT. NICK AND EMILY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Nick, in uniform, is at the upstairs bedroom window watching Matt, Jennifer and Melody dig a hole with trowels. Emily goes to Nick. They embrace and continue to hold each other.

EXT. VANMEER YARD - DAY

Matt, Jennifer and Melody are on their knees. Matt picks up a stick match box, the cover open, showing a dead hamster.

Ray walks up. Ray and Matt look at each other. Matt gives a slight nod, indicating Ray is welcome to stay. Matt closes the cover on the stick match box and places the box in the hole. Ray squats down and helps Matt push dirt into the hole.

INT. CELL HOUSE THREE - DAY

At the Lieutenant's desk of a general population cell house, third shift guards SGT TED KROGER (30), Gabe and another guard take off key pouches as first shift guards - Nick, LT. BILL BRAUN (35), and two others, put them on.

TED

Our wayward sergeant returns. How was death row, Nick?

NICK

I don't want to ever talk about that place or even think about it.

INT. CELL HOUSE THREE - TOP TIER - DAY

Nick looks down from the fourth (top) tier to Lt. Braun's desk on the ground floor. Braun hangs up a phone and shouts.

BRAUN

Count's clear!

Nick pulls levers to his right and left, allowing inmates to open doors on two ranges facing the lieutenant's desk. Nick pulls two more levers, releasing inmates in ranges facing the wall where the cell house door is.

Braun opens the cell house door with a large brass key. The top tier becomes crowded with inmates headed to stairs. Nick looks down. A stream of inmates leaves the cell house.

INT. CELL HOUSE THREE - TOP TIER - LATER

Nick looks at the bottom floor where inmates have finished exiting. Braun closes and locks the cell house door. An inmate, MOSE LAFLEUR (65), approaches Nick, pushing a mop and bucket on coasters.

LAFLEUR

Long way down, ain't it, Boss?

NICK

New here, aren't you? Who are you?

LAFLEUR

Mose Lafleur. Oh, Boss! I'm thinking how that sounded! Didn't mean nothing by it, honest! I'm real sorry, Boss!

NICK

I'll take your word for it. Another thing, Lafleur, I can tell you spent time in a southern prison. We don't say "Boss" here.

LAFLEUR

Sorry, just a habit, Boss.

Lafleur walks away. An inmate, NORTH (45), pushes a cart with clean towels close to Nick. North folds towels as he talks.

NORTH

Don't worry about old Mose, Sarge.
You don't have to watch your back
with him.

NICK

I watch my back with everyone,
including you, North.

NORTH

Well, that hurts my feelings.

NICK

You'll get over it.

North pulls out a cigarette and lights it.

NORTH

Things would go a lot better in
here if you quit feeding us crap.

NICK

The state had to cut costs. We eat
the same stuff, better than most
taxpayers would want you to eat.

NORTH

You only have five meals a week
here, but filling up with beans,
and potatoes every day and not much
else. That's not good.

NICK

I'm not the chaplain. Talk to him.

NORTH

Forget it. I'll just serve my time.
I get out in two months.

NICK

Going to stay out this time?

NORTH

I'll try. Stayed out three years
last time.

NICK

What will you do for a living?

NORTH

I was a thief before I started shaving. I'm like you. We're stuck with our careers.

NICK

If I wanted to change jobs, I could. Nothing is stopping me.

NORTH

Don't fool yourself, Sarge.

INT. COUNTY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Fred, LISA HANSON (30) and LAWRENCE CONROY (27) greet COUNTY ATTORNEY BERGESON (70), a gray-haired man in a rumpled suit who shows all of his 70 years of age.

FRED

Mr. Bergeson, my son Lawrence and my daughter, Lisa Hanson.

Hands are shaken.

BERGESON

You all have my sympathies. Please sit down.

They all sit.

BERGESON

The two boys learned they were tricked into ratting each other off. They're best pals again and share a lawyer, Orson Gasco.

LISA

Does that mean you can't use their confessions?

BERGESON

Their confessions are admissible. They're both 18, legally adults for our purposes. Trickery is accepted police strategy.

FRED

Why do I sense a big qualifying 'however' coming?

BERGESON

The young men are from wealthy families and Gasco is quite a high-powered attorney.

LISA

Please don't say that makes a difference.

BERGESON

I'd like to say it doesn't, but that would be a lie. Gasco could make a case that the boys were just being boys, a bit of mischief by two good-looking and well-dressed young men and, yes, that makes a difference in a jury trial. To prevent a conviction, it takes just one determined juror who thinks a lifetime of remorse is sufficient punishment for good-looking, well-dressed young men.

FRED

They told the sheriff, "Nobody wanted that bitch teacher to die, but you can't blame us for being mad. You know what an F in Chemistry does to a GPA?" Will a jury think that's remorse?

BERGESON

There won't be a jury. I've reached a plea bargain with Gasco. I wanted to hold out for serious jail time and a felony on their records, but Gasco wouldn't go for that.

LAWRENCE

Who gives a shit what Gasco goes for?

BERGESON

They'll plead guilty to criminal mischief, reimburse the insurance companies and each serve 400 hours of community service at the Leepport Community Center.

LAWRENCE

That is not acceptable.

BERGESON

It has to be acceptable. It's done.

FRED

Tell me Bergeson, did they pay you off or do you just kiss the asses of rich people for free?

BERGESON

Mr. Conroy, that is uncalled for.

INT. FRED'S BEDROOM - DAY (MAY 1963)

Fred looks at a photo album. Lisa sits down next to him on the bed.

LISA

Dad, I wish you'd come with us back to California.

FRED

Your mother looked forward to my retirement so much. Finally, the big-shot physicist and author could stop travelling around the world and spend time at home with her.

LISA

Mom understood you had to travel.

FRED

Did you understand your daddy being away so much?

LISA

We had good times. Remember the six weeks in Australia?

FRED

That was twenty years ago.

LISA

Some memories last forever.

INT. FRED'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (DREAM)

Fred, lying in bed, opens his eyes. Leona is sitting up.

LEONA

What's the matter, Fred?

FRED

Leona?

Fred reaches out to Leona but her arm crumbles under his grasp. In a matter of seconds, she dissolves into dust.

INT. FRED'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (DREAM ENDS)

Fred opens his eyes, covers his face with his hands and sobs.

INT. FRED'S KITCHEN - DAY

Fred is at the sink, wearing a lab coat and plastic gloves. The counter is cluttered with bottles, utensils and an audio tape recorder. A microphone is at head level, the wire wrapped around a dish towel rack. Fred pours a bag of ice into the sink, nestles a stainless steel bowl in the ice and speaks into the mike as he works.

FRED

Lawrence, Lisa, I trust you've followed my written instructions and are listening without the presence of anyone else. I see no reason for anyone else to hear this or even know about it.

Fred tips two bottles so that small streams of liquid, one clear and one pale yellow, go into the bowl.

FRED

By now, you know what I've done. Please understand. I feel compelled to impose consequences on those responsible for your mother's death. I'm ready to face my own consequences, but I can't face causing pain to you two for years.

Fred puts the bottles on the counter and slowly rotates the now steaming bowl of liquid back and forth in the ice.

FRED

Accept my loss and get through your grief. Don't attempt to visit, write, phone or communicate in any way. Think of me as dead. In truth, the man you loved no longer exists.

Fred chokes up and stops rotating the bowl. He gets his emotions under control and resumes speaking as he gently places wood shavings in the bowl.

FRED

While I'm alive, I won't see you, read your letters or take your phone calls. Please respect this decision, for everybody's sake.

Fred lifts saturated wood shavings from the bowl and places them on a cloth. He wraps the mixture in the cloth and shapes it into a block.

Fred takes the block to the stove and dips one end, then the other, into a pot of melted paraffin.

INT. CAFE - DAY

Emily and her sister, ROSILAND (37), are in a crowded cafe.

ROSILAND
There's still a booth left.

Fred cuts in front of the sisters and sits in the booth. The sisters, visibly annoyed, go to a table and sit down.

EMILY
Rosiland, was Phil harsh with Mark after the fire?

ROSILAND
Of course. I'm sure Nick was harsh with Ray, too.

EMILY
Yes, a lot harsher than our parents ever were.

ROSILAND
We had no brothers. Boys need a firmer hand than girls do.

EMILY
I don't know. Maybe you're right.
(beat)
That man who cut in front of us sure is enjoying the view.

Rosiland turns to look at Fred who is staring out the window.

EXT. SUMNER STREET - DAY

Carsted and Alden walk from the Leeport Community Center to Carsted's 1957 Chevy.

ALDEN
It's my turn to buy lunch, so I pick the place.

CARSTED
You always pick the same crappy place.

They get into the Chevy, Carsted on the driver's side. An explosion flips the car onto its top. The wreckage is engulfed in flames.

Fred comes out of the cafe and approaches the fire. He inhales deeply, taking in the acrid aroma of burning flesh.

Others exit the café, most staying on the sidewalk. Emily walks toward Fred, getting a few feet from him before Rosiland grabs Emily's arm.

ROSILAND

Emily! Get away from there!

Fred turns his head toward Emily. The two make brief eye contact, Emily clearly distressed and Fred expressionless. Fred turns back to gaze at the flames.

INT. DECORATIVE CAN COMPANY - DAY

Emily and EDNA (30) take decorative two-gallon pails from a conveyor belt, put plastic bags on each and stack them inside each other. There is a background rhythmic clang of metal sheets bent around metal bottoms, forming cans to fill with caramel corn.

EMILY

I won't need to testify. He didn't try to hide what he did.

Emily takes a stack of 10 cans and puts them in a cardboard box, then puts a stack of 10 lids in the box.

EDNA

Hard to imagine a college teacher doing something like that.

EMILY

Yes, it is.

Emily sets the box on a pallet, completing it. She shouts.

EMILY

Jim! Pallet!

JIM (30) drives up on a fork truck.

JIM

Emily, if you ask me, the rich brats got what they deserved.

EDNA

Jim, you don't blow people up because of a high school prank.

JIM

Some prank! A woman died!

INT. JAIL VISITING ROOM - DAY (JUNE 1963)

OLIVER HELMAN (25) is on one side of a wire screen partition. Fred, in denim, sits down on the other side.

HELMAN

Mr. Conroy, I'm Oliver Helman. I've been appointed to defend you. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me.

FRED

They threatened to take away privileges if I didn't. The state insists on a trial before I hang.

HELMAN

If the jury recommends leniency, we can avoid the death penalty. Your daughter and son will be character witnesses.

FRED

No. I don't want them to testify.

HELMAN

Lisa is hurt you won't see her.

FRED

Listen carefully, Mr. Helman. Never talk to me about my family! Never!

Helman pauses a moment, disconcerted.

HELMAN

You need to sign a waiver of the right to be tried within 90 days.

FRED

No. I want tried within 90 days. That's my right.

HELMAN

That's always waived in a capital case, Fred. May I call you Fred?

FRED

You may call me Dr. Conroy.

HELMAN

Dr. Conroy, we need time to prepare and we need a change of venue.

FRED

I don't want a change of venue. I won't waive my right to a speedy trial. I don't want anyone testifying on my behalf. Now, please excuse me. I'm eager to get back to my game of chess.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY (SEPTEMBER 1963)

Fred and his attorney stand. The courtroom is packed.

JUDGE

This has been a sad trial. I'm saddened by the deaths of two young men, saddened that a man who earned admiration as a renowned professor of physics now deserves contempt, but I have no remorse for what I now must do. Fred Conroy, I sentence you to hang by the neck until dead. Court is adjourned.

Fred and Helman take their seats.

HELMAN

Dr. Conroy, I know you don't want an appeal, but it's mandatory in a capital case.

FRED

Write it up, then. Don't bore me with the details.

EXT. LEEPORT COUNTY JAIL - DAY (DECEMBER 1963)

Lisa and EDGAR (30), LISA'S DAUGHTER (8) and LISA'S SON (6) go to the entrance of the single-story Leepport County Jail. Snow falls. There is a Christmas wreath on the jail entrance.

INT. FRED'S CELL - DAY

Fred sits at a small table with a tiny traveling chess set, a box with a hole for each square. He moves a white pegged piece, then turns the set around to play black. A DEPUTY (40) walks up to the cell.

DEPUTY

Conroy, your daughter is here with her family.

Fred plays a black piece, then turns the chess set around.

FRED
What did I tell you about visitors?

DEPUTY
They came a long way.

FRED
Do you play chess, Deputy?

DEPUTY
Conroy, it's Christmas.

FRED
What's that have to do with chess?

DEPUTY
What should I tell your daughter?

Fred does not respond. The deputy leaves. A look of agony comes over Fred's face. He slides to the floor and lies there. Fred puts his arm in his mouth and bites down. Blood drips down his cheek.

EXT. LEEPORT COUNTY JAIL - DAY (MARCH 1964)

It's raining. Helman, carrying an umbrella, walks to the entrance of the jail, which has a shamrock on the door.

INT. FRED'S CELL - DAY

Helman goes up to Fred's cell. Fred is on his bed, reading Principia Mathematica - Vol. 3. Fred never looks up.

FRED
Mr. Helman, visitors are not allowed back here. Better leave before they find you.

HELMAN
Dr. Conroy, your appeal lost. We have other strategies to pursue but I need your permission to do more.

FRED
You've done all you can for me.
Good-bye, Mr. Helman.

HELMAN
Do you want to die, Fred?

FRED
The state wants me to die and I respect the state's wishes.

INT. WARDEN WELLER'S OFFICE - DAY (APRIL 1964)

Weller is seated. Nick stands in front of the desk.

NICK

You wanted to see me, sir?

WELLER

We reopen Cell House One Monday when Fred Conroy arrives from county jail. He isn't high risk. There will only be one guard per shift. The top-ranking guard will be a day shift sergeant, you.

NICK

I've already had an assignment in Cell House One, so unless I agree to it, you can't put me there.

WELLER

The employee handbook is here on my desk. Show me where it says that.

NICK

It's not written, but it's a rule.

WELLER

If it's not written, it's not a rule. There is a rule against chaining an inmate to his bed, but we don't need to get into that, do we, Sergeant? You are dismissed.

INT. CELL HOUSE ONE - DAY

Nick wipes a chair. Fred plays chess with himself.

FRED

What will you do tomorrow to keep busy, Sgt. Vanmeer?

(long beat)

You look familiar. Have we met?

NICK

At the sheriff's office after your wife died. I was picking up my son.

FRED

I hope your son wasn't in trouble.

NICK

Look, forget I mentioned my son. We never talk about my family here! Never! Got that?

FRED

Certainly. I don't want to discuss my family, either.

NICK

I don't want to discuss anything with you, period.

FRED

Perhaps that's best.

Fred returns to his game. Nick continues wiping the chair.

INT. VANMEER LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Nick is in his recliner. Emily is in a stuffed chair. Ray, Melody and Jennifer are on the couch. Matt is on his belly, on the floor. All watch TV. Emily stands during a commercial.

EMILY

Anybody want popcorn?

The kids respond affirmatively. Nick stands up and heads toward the stairs.

NICK

I don't want any. I'm turning in.

EMILY

Nick, it's eight o'clock.

NICK

I can tell time, Emily.

MELODY

Good-night, Mr. Vanmeer.

NICK

Night.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Ray and Melody walk across the yard, holding hands.

MELODY

Is your dad in a bad mood?

They walk onto Melody's porch.

RAY

Yeah. I don't know why. I don't want to talk about Dad's bad mood.

MELODY

What do you want to talk about?

RAY

I don't want to talk at all.

They kiss. The kiss lasts until the porch light comes on.

EXT. EXERCISE PEN - DAY

Fred, without restraints, paces a 25-foot by 5-foot pen topped with barbed wire. At one end, there is a gate and a wood bench outside the gate. The restraints are lying on the bench. Nick stands near the bench.

NICK

Time's up.

FRED

It hasn't been 20 minutes yet.

NICK

The 20 minutes are up when I say they are. If you don't like that, we can end these exercise sessions.

Fred goes up to the gate where Nick is waiting with a belly chain. Nick threads the chain through Fred's belt loops.

FRED

Excuse me. I failed to realize the march of time yields to your authority as a state official.

NICK

Do I detect a bit of sarcasm?

Nick threads a pair of handcuffs through a brass rectangle at the end of the belly chain.

FRED

Certainly not. Who am I to ridicule a person who's reached the pinnacle of a career in inmate management?

NICK

I didn't think so.

Nick clamps the cuffs down on Fred's wrists. Fred winces.

FRED
A bit tight, aren't they?

NICK
Don't want them falling off, do we?

Nick secures the leg irons on Fred and opens the gate.

FRED
All right, Sergeant Vanmeer, sir. I bow to your superior authority and your superior intellect.

EXT. PRISON YARD - DAY

Nick and Fred walk toward the cell house.

NICK
I do not have a superior intellect, but I'm not a killer.

FRED
Aren't you a combat veteran?

NICK
How the hell did you know that?

FRED
And didn't you participate in the hanging last year, escorting the condemned man to the gallows, Arnold Ludmill, I believe?

NICK
That was an execution of a disgusting monster, not murder.

FRED
I didn't say it was murder. The point you were making is that you are not a killer. That's not true.

NICK
You do know the difference between murder and executing a child killer, don't you?

FRED
I understand society's need to make a distinction. In ancient cultures, the family of a victim enforced justice. Society now prefers a more cold-blooded approach.

NICK

Our approach is one of law and that is superior to vigilante justice.

FRED

Vigilante justice has sometimes been the only justice available. For example, in the 1850s, the San Francisco Committee of Vigilance -

NICK

This is not the lawless West of the gold rush era!

FRED

I'm impressed that you understand the reference to the San Francisco Committee of Vigilance. You must watch a lot of Westerns.

NICK

Yes, and I read historical novels. You blew up two 18-year-old boys who made a terrible mistake! That's not superior behavior.

INT. CELL HOUSE ONE - DAY

Nick and Fred enter the cell house and head to the shower.

FRED

You call them boys, but soldiers learn to kill each other at that age. They had no remorse. The state did not impose justice so I had to.

Nick locks Fred in the shower cell and starts removing restraints. Fred starts removing clothes.

NICK

You think soldiers serving their country are murderers?

FRED

Nations need to convince soldiers that killing enemies makes them heroes, not psychopaths, but the distinction, although necessary, is artificial. Aside from animals like Ludmill, the willingness to kill, the ability to do that, is not much different psychologically whether or not the killing is sanctioned.

NICK

So you're saying you're innocent,
you didn't deserve to be convicted?

FRED

I'm not saying that at all.
Sometimes an individual pays a
price to do what's right and
society demands a sacrifice to
maintain order. The universe
doesn't impose some cosmic force of
righteousness where good intentions
and order remain in perfect and
painless balance.

NICK

Professor, I've never done this
before, talked with an inmate about
crime and morality. I don't plan to
ever do it again. I'll just say one
more thing. You eggheads twist
things, make them so complicated
they become anything you want.

FRED

You want simple, Sergeant? Here's
as simple as it gets. The two
assholes who killed my wife are
dead and I'm glad.

INT. SHIFT CHANGE ROOM - DAY

Henry addresses the first shift guards.

HENRY

We need a cell extraction in Cell
House Three. Freeman Forsythe
refuses a disciplinary transfer.
Vanmeer, Grove, Haske, Lansing,
Maskers, you're the team.

NICK

Actually, I have other plans this
morning, Captain.

There is laughter from other guards, but not from Henry.

HENRY

Shut up, Nick. Everybody else head
to your posts. First count will be
late clearing this morning.

Nick, Chris, Gabe, IRWIN HASKE (25) and FLOYD MASKERS (30)
gather around Henry. Other guards head to their posts.

HENRY

Nick, you're the control. It's your team. Benton will stay over with Conroy until you're finished.

NICK

Gabe, Irwin, you'll be on the shields. Chris, Floyd, you'll have clubs and cuffs. Forsythe is a serious inmate, but if we follow training, we can handle him.

MASKERS

He's a badass coon, is what he is.

HENRY

Maskers, go relieve Benton and tell him to join us in Cell House Three.

MASKERS

C'mon, Captain, it's just us here.

HENRY

I'm not having a debate, Maskers!

Maskers leaves and the others walk to the armory part of the shift change room while Henry speaks to them.

HENRY

Guys, we deal with enough crap without creating more problems.

Nick holds Henry up. They talk out of earshot of others.

NICK

Henry, you think Benton will be any different than Maskers?

HENRY

He better be.

INT. CELL HOUSE THREE - DAY

FREEMAN FORSYTHE (30) is muscular, shirtless and black. All guards and other staff at the prison are white. Two-thirds of the inmates (and 95 percent of Iowans) are white.

Forsythe pours cooking oil on the floor. He pours the oil on his hands, throws the bottle on the floor and rubs oil over his torso as he speaks in a hyper-excited manner.

FORSYTHE

Come on screws! The floor's slick!
I'm slick! Let's do it!

Lt. Braun holds a big brass key in the cell door. Gabe holds a riot shield and stands just beyond Braun. Nick is behind Gabe with his left hand on Gabe's left shoulder.

Nick's right hand is on the left shoulder of Irwin, who stands to Nick's right and holds a riot shield. Chris and JACK BENTON (25) stand behind Nick and Irwin with billy clubs. Henry stands to the right and behind the others.

NICK

Let's go!

Braun slides the cell door open as he moves right, out of Gabe's way. Gabe moves forward. Forsythe rams into Gabe's shield with full force. Nick, Chris and Benton pile up single-file from behind into Gabe.

Together they're barely able to move Forsythe and make room for Irwin to slip into the cell on their right. Everyone loses balance on the slippery floor and they fall in a pile. Forsythe repeatedly punches Benton in the face.

Chris clubs Forsythe's right elbow, eliciting a scream of pain. Nick, holding Forsythe's broken arm, and Irwin, holding the other arm, move the arms together behind Forsythe's back for cuffing, the process obviously excruciating for Forsythe.

Chris moves to cuff Forsythe. Benton, his face battered, rams the end of his club into Forsythe's mouth, breaking teeth.

BENTON

Goddamn nigger!

INT. CELL HOUSE THREE - LATER

Gabe and Irwin escort a cuffed Forsythe. Braun lets them out the cell house door. Nick, Henry, Chris and Benton are at the lieutenant's desk. Henry examines Benton's face.

HENRY

You'll live. Chris, take Jack to the infirmary. I'll be over later.

CHRIS

Let the asshole take himself to the infirmary! He had no reason to -

NICK

Whoa! Stop right there, Chris!

HENRY

Nick, I'll take Jack. You get this one under control.

Nick guides Chris around the end of a range to an area that cannot be overheard by inmates. They speak in a low volume to be sure, but are animated in their discussion.

CHRIS

So Benton smashes Forsythe in the face, calls him a nigger and I get my ass chewed.

NICK

I'm not chewing your ass. Right now, Capt. Grundy is asking Benton whether he wants to continue to work at this job, knowing he can never ever again use that kind of language to an inmate.

CHRIS

Can he smash an inmate in the mouth when he is no longer a threat?

NICK

That was in the heat of the struggle. You can't always stop exactly when you should.

CHRIS

Benton screwed up and you know it.

NICK

I'll tell you what I know! You challenged another guard where inmates could hear! Never ever do that again!

CHRIS

This sure seems like an ass chewing.

NICK

OK, it's an ass chewing! You need to decide whether you want to work here yourself!

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Nick, in uniform, looks out his window and sees Ray, Melody, Jennifer and Matt playing badminton in the back yard. The kids are having a good time, laughing and roughhousing.

INT. CELL HOUSE ONE - DAY

Nick polishes brass keys. Fred plays chess with himself.

FRED

Think those keys got any tarnish on them since yesterday, Sgt. Vanmeer?

NICK

It beats staring off into space.

FRED

The others spend their shifts playing solitaire.

(beat)

Excuse me. I didn't mean to be a tattler.

NICK

This cell house isn't like the other cell houses. No one cares that guards play solitaire in here. I don't even know how. I doubt it's more fun than polishing keys.

FRED

How about playing chess? Would that be more fun than polishing keys?

Nick takes two chairs to the front of the cell, sets one against the bars and sits on the other, facing the cell. Fred moves a chair to the bars and sets the chess set on the other side of the bars, on the chair next to Nick.

FRED

I have to warn you. I play well.

NICK

I have to warn you. I read a book about chess once.

The buzzer sounds. Nick goes to the door and lets in Chaplain Vance and Henry.

CHAPLAIN

I'd like to talk to Dr. Conroy.

Nick and the Chaplain go to Fred's cell. Henry stands back.

FRED

I didn't request a chaplain.

CHAPLAIN

I'd like to talk to you in your cell, Dr. Conroy.

FRED

That's not wise. I'm a vicious killer, you know.

CHAPLAIN

I'll take my chances.

FRED

Just tell me the date and get the hell out of here!

CHAPLAIN

July 9th at 10 a.m., in 78 days.

Nick lets the Chaplain and Henry out and returns to Fred's cell. Fred sits on his bed, his back to the wall.

FRED

Sergeant, I believe there was tarnish on those keys after all.

Nick returns to his desk and resumes polishing keys.

INT. VANMEER DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Nick, Emily, Ray, Matt and Jennifer eat supper.

MATT

So I got the part of Sneezy.

Emily glances at Nick who silently eats his supper, oblivious to the discussion, which becomes low-volume background.

JENNIFER (O.S.)

Why not Dopey? You'd be a perfect Dopey, Matt.

RAY (O.S.)

And you'd be a perfect wicked queen, Jennifer.

JENNIFER (O.S.)

Ray, you'd be a perfect ugly toad.

RAY (O.S.)

There's no ugly toad in Snow White.

JENNIFER (O.S.)
Well they need one if you're ever
in a Snow White play.

INT. CELL HOUSE ONE - DAY

Nick, seated in front of Fred's cell, and Fred in his cell
play chess on the tiny chess set. Fred makes a move.

NICK
I suppose this is a chance to learn
answers to the great mysteries of
life from a college professor.

FRED
For example?

NICK
If a tree falls in a forest and
there's no one there to hear it,
does it make a sound?

FRED
As great mysteries go, that one is
overrated. The answer depends on
whether you define sound as a
neurological phenomenon or as
vibrations in the air.

NICK
Which definition is correct?

FRED
Either is valid, but you need to
decide which to use in order to
answer the question and when you
decide, the answer is obvious and
not particularly profound.

NICK
You sure take the fun out of being
uneducated and stupid.

Nick makes a move.

FRED
You're uneducated but not stupid.
They are not the same thing, and by
the way -

Fred makes a move.

FRED
Checkmate.

INT. CELL HOUSE ONE - DAY (MAY 1964)

Benton, with a bruised face, opens the door. Nick enters.

BENTON
Morning, Nick.

NICK
Morning, Jack. How was your shift?

BENTON
Squashed a big bug about midnight,
not much excitement after that.

Benton writes in the logbook as Nick puts on his key pouch.

BENTON
6:56 a.m. Sergeant Nicholas Vanmeer
in cell house to relieve Officer
Jack Benton. Shift report given and
keys turned over.

They go to the door, which Nick unlocks.

NICK
The bug incident, that's your shift
report?

BENTON
That was my shift report. Have some
fun in Cell House One.

NICK
Yeah, I'll do that.

Nick locks the door behind Benton, sits down at his desk and writes in the logbook. Fred is sitting on his bed. Nick takes a clipboard from the wall and puts a count form on it.

FRED
Morning, Sergeant.

NICK
Morning, Professor. Ready for
morning count?

FRED
Ready and eager.

NICK

Let's see, one inmate in Cell House
One. That appears to match the
roster.

Nick makes a mark on the form, hangs the clipboard on the
wall, puts the rotary phone receiver to his ear and dials a
single digit.

NICK

Captain Grundy, the count in Cell
House One is clear.

(beat)

Yes sir.

Nick hangs up.

FRED

It didn't appear you checked other
cells during your count.

NICK

You think we'll get an extra inmate
in here without us knowing it?

FRED

You never know unless you look.

NICK

I guess I'm just lax at my job.

Fred sets his chess set on the food slot.

FRED

Speaking of lax at your job, you
want to finish the game?

Nick pulls two chairs to the bars, sets the chess set on one
and sits on the other.

NICK

Let's start a new one. I think I've
lost this one.

They set up the board for a new game.

NICK

You have quite a collection of
books in there.

FRED

You mentioned that you once read a
book.

NICK

It might surprise you to know that I've read more than one.

FRED

Oh yes, historical novels, right? What other kinds of books do you read, Nick?

NICK

Science fiction,
(short beat)
Fred.

FRED

We don't have to do the first name thing, Sarge.

NICK

Under the circumstances, it's ridiculous not to.

FRED

Still, it would be easier for you to keep things formal.

Nick moves a piece.

NICK

That's not possible here, Fred. Strange, you worrying about me.

FRED

I know this place is hard on more than just me. By the way, Benton is a bit of an asshole.

NICK

You must have a misperception of Officer Benton since employees of this facility are never assholes, but I'm willing to hear what your misperception is.

Fred moves a piece.

FRED

He thinks the situation here is funny. He deludes himself that he has a sense of humor.

NICK

Officer Benton will be transferring.

FRED
Thanks, Nick.

NICK
Don't thank me. It's Benton's decision.

FRED
Yeah, sure. When you were a child, did you want to be a prison guard?

NICK
You probably haven't rubbed elbows much with people without college degrees. Most of us work at the place that was hiring when we were looking for work.

FRED
Why didn't you go to college? Couldn't your folks afford to help with college?
(beat)
Sorry, I forgot, first on the list of things we don't talk about -- our families.

NICK
I quit high school my senior year, joined the Army and got to Europe just in time for the Battle of the Bulge. That's all I'll say about that part of my life.

EXT. PRISON YARD - DAY

Fred paces in the exercise pen. Nick walks over to Henry who is watching inmates on the yard.

NICK
Say, Henry, it would be a good idea for Benton to transfer to another post. He isn't the type for Cell House One.

HENRY
Or anywhere else. Nobody wants to work with him. Do you want to make a formal complaint?

NICK
No. I don't.

HENRY

OK. We'll find someone on third shift who meets your high standards. You're a pain in the ass, Nick. When are you going to take your lieutenant's exam?

NICK

Maybe never. If Weller keeps putting me in Cell House One, I'll find another job.

HENRY

Face it, Nick. You're as institutionalized as I am.

Nick looks where Henry is staring. Across the yard, ROLAND MCKINNEY (45), an exceptionally thin inmate, sits on a wood bench writing in a notebook. Nick's question and Henry's response are off screen background to the view of McKinney.

NICK (O.S.)

Damn! Is that Roland McKinney? Has he been sick or something?

HENRY (O.S.)

He refuses to eat until the meals are better.

NICK

Yeah, we could use more lobster.

HENRY

Weller doesn't think it's funny. He might order McKinney force-fed.

The view returns to McKinney. Two inmates, VOLE (35) and POOLE (25) say something to McKinney, inaudible from where Nick and Henry are. McKinney nods. The inmates pat McKinney on the back as they walk away.

NICK (O.S.)

(chuckling)

We keep telling inmates that if they don't like the food, they don't have to eat it. Damn if somebody didn't take our advice.

INT. VANMEER KITCHEN - DAY

Nick, in uniform, sits at the table and eats cereal. Ray, wearing pajamas, enters.

RAY

Dad, why are you wearing your uniform? Today's your day off.

NICK

They asked me to work overtime.

Ray sits down next to Nick.

RAY

Will you still come to my track meet this afternoon? I'm in three events.

NICK

Of course. I get off at my regular time, an hour before your meet. Will Melody be there?

RAY

She's the anchor for the freshman girls' relay team.

NICK

She's a nice girl, Ray.

RAY

I know.

Nick stands and reaches for his bowl. Ray gets it first.

RAY

I'll get that, Dad.

Ray takes Nick's bowl and coffee cup to the sink and comes back for the box of cereal. Nick speaks from the doorway.

NICK

Good-bye, Ray.

RAY

See you later, Dad.

INT. CELL HOUSE ONE - DAY

Nick and Fred play chess.

NICK

I see most of your books are non-fiction. Read much fiction?

Fred moves a piece quickly followed by a move by Nick.

FRED

I share your taste for historical novels but not for science fiction. Most science fiction is mystic, not scientific. A student once asked me to read a short story he wrote. I couldn't get into it because I find the idea of time travel absurd.

Fred moves a chess piece.

FRED

That's mate in three moves.

NICK

How?

FRED

Figure it out.

Fred goes to the bed and sits, his legs up on the bed and his back against the wall. Nick stares at the chessboard until the phone rings. Nick answers the phone.

NICK

Sgt. Vanmeer speaking.

(beat)

No, I don't want more overtime. I have plans. You'll find somebody.

Nick hangs up and sits silently a moment.

NICK

Fred?

FRED

I'm still here, Nick.

NICK

Why's time travel absurd? TV probably seemed absurd before it was invented.

FRED

We wouldn't need to wait for time travel to be invented to find out about it. A person from the future would come tell us.

NICK

Maybe people from the future are careful not to change the present.

FRED

If a person went back a thousand years, even a trivial impact would expand over centuries altering the genetic makeup that defines us. The inventor of the time machine would not exist in order to go back to prevent his existence.

NICK

I don't think it would be that easy to change the future.

FRED

We can't control or predict our effect on the future, but we change the future whether we want to or not. In that story I mentioned, somebody went back a thousand years and fathered a child whose line continued to the present.

NICK

A few descendants wouldn't make much difference.

FRED

If somebody's line lasted a thousand years, he'd have millions of descendants.

NICK

I don't see how that could be.

FRED

Not much of a mathematician, are you? Let's say a person's line is just at replacement level, which is certainly a conservative estimate over a thousand years. That's two children, four grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren and so forth.

NICK

That's doubling the population each generation.

FRED

We're not amoebas. A couple needs two children and the children would need mates and have a total of four children to maintain the same number, and so forth.

Fred walks to the bars.

FRED

There would be 40 generations in a thousand years, figuring an average of 25 years each generation. You know what number you get starting with one and doubling it 40 times?

NICK

I'm sure I'm about to find out.

Fred raises 10 fingers, one at a time as he counts.

FRED

2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, 256, 512, 1,024. That's 10 generations.

Fred puts his hands down.

FRED

For 20 generations we multiply 1,024 by 1,024 to get over a million. For 30 generations we have over a billion at 40 generations we have over a trillion.

NICK

There aren't a trillion people on Earth.

FRED

Right. Lines would converge, fairly quickly when there wasn't much travel. They were probably rather inbred hundreds of years ago, but eventually genetic material would spread throughout the world.

NICK

The time traveler would provide only a tiny fraction of genetic material, one among millions.

FRED

You just don't get it. Even if the time traveler didn't have a child, his presence would change history. All you do, taking the last parking space, cutting cards in a poker game, changes the world forever.

NICK

OK, tell me how you change the world forever by cutting cards.

FRED

There's no point. Most people can't accept a chaotic universe. They need to think the future is controlled by some higher power.

The door buzzer sounds. Nick lets Henry in.

NICK

Find somebody for next shift?

HENRY

I'll talk to you in a minute.

Henry goes to Fred's cell.

HENRY

Mr. Conroy, your daughter and her family are here to visit.

FRED

How many times do I have to tell you idiots? No visitors! What is so goddamn hard about this concept?

Henry and Nick walk to the back of the cell house.

HENRY

Everybody turned down the overtime.

NICK

So am I.

HENRY

You know how it works. If no one else volunteers, the one covering the post remains until relieved.

NICK

This is supposed be my day off.

HENRY

Sorry. I'll get somebody in early from third shift, but you have to work at least another half shift.

INT. CELL HOUSE ONE - NIGHT

Fred is asleep in his cell. Nick opens the cell house door. JOSH LONDON (20) enters.

NICK
Who are you?

JOSH
Josh London, here to relieve you.

NICK
How long have you worked here?

JOSH
A month. Don't worry. I won't screw
up your cell house, Sergeant.

They go to the desk. Nick takes off his pouch.

NICK
I won't worry. After 12 hours on my
day off, I'd be happy to have my
old Aunt Della relieving me.

Josh motions toward Fred's cell as he puts on the key pouch.

JOSH
Can he be trusted?

NICK
You're a guard. He's an inmate. Why
are you talking about trust?

JOSH
So none of the inmates can earn our
trust?

NICK
Damn, you are new! You don't judge
them. You treat them fairly but no
matter how harmless an inmate may
seem, you assume he'll slit your
throat if he gets a chance.

JOSH
If you say so.

Nick and Josh go toward the door.

FRED
I'll try to refrain from slitting
his throat, Sarge.

NICK
I'd appreciate it, Fred.

EXT. PRISON PARKING LOT - DUSK

Nick walks to his car. Lisa, Edgar and two children approach.

LISA
Sir, are you Sgt. Vanmeer?

NICK
Yes.

LISA
I'm Fred Conroy's daughter. You
work in his cell house, don't you?

NICK
I don't know who told you that,
ma'am. Work assignments are not
supposed to be public knowledge.

LISA
Could you tell my father it's
important that I talk to him?

NICK
Ma'am, we're not allowed to talk to
families of inmates. You need to
discuss this with the warden.

Nick walks away. Lisa, starting to cry, follows.

LISA
The warden was no help. Please, can
you just give my father a message?

NICK
Sorry, ma'am.

Lisa gets in front of Nick and shouts.

LISA
For God's sake! Can't you
understand? I just want to see my
dad!

Edgar goes to Lisa and holds her as she weeps. They block
Nick from getting to the driver's side car door.

EDGAR
It's no good, honey. He doesn't
care about you or your dad.

NICK
Excuse me. I'd like to get to my
car.

EDGAR

What makes a person want to be a prison guard, Mr. Vanmeer? Do you like putting chains on people and locking them in cages? Does that give you a sense of power?

Nick gets in the car on the passenger's side. Nick drives past the Hansons as Lisa sobs in Edgar's arms and the others stare silently at the departing car.

EXT. VANMEER YARD - DAY (JUNE 1964)

Ray secures a Thermos onto his bike. Matt puts a grocery sack in the handlebar basket of his bike. Melody walks up.

MELODY

Ray, where are you going?

MATT

We're going to meet Mark and Kurt.

MELODY

Then what?

MATT

It's a secret.

MELODY

Ooh! A secret!

RAY

Shut up, Matt. It's just guy stuff, Melody.

MELODY

Ooh! Guy stuff!

EXT. LEEPORNT MARINA - DAY

Mark sits on the dock. Kurt rides up on a bike, then sits down next to Mark.

KURT

Isn't Ray here, yet?

MARK

Does it look like he's here, Kurt?

KURT

It sure is nice of Ray's Uncle Luke to let us use the boat.

MARK

You think he'd let a bunch of kids take his boat? He doesn't know.

KURT

Really? I thought Ray was kind of scared of his father.

MARK

Ray is terrified of Uncle Nick, but I talked him into taking the boat.

KURT

How'd you do that?

MARK

I sort of blackmailed him into it. Remember that thing in fifth grade?

KURT

Jesus, Mark, you're a real jerk!

Ray and Matt ride up on bikes.

MARK

Why the hell is Flea Fart here?

RAY

We take him or have him tell.

MARK

Damn, Ray! You gonna let Cousin Dipstick get away with that?

KURT

C'mon, Mark, the more the merrier. Let's set out on the great Mississippi in our mighty ship.

MARK

It's an aluminum boat, Kurt.

KURT

That's what I said, a mighty ship.

EXT. BOAT ON THE RIVER - DAY

Kurt and Mark are on the front bench of a three-bench boat. Ray and Matt are on the rear bench. After leaving the Marina, Ray gives the outboard motor full throttle.

They pass under a bridge with a black superstructure, then Ray throttles down. Kurt and Mark turn to face Ray and Matt.

MARK

If you're done showing off your seafaring skills, Captain Ray, you need to deal with a crew member guilty of being a Flea Fart on the high seas.

KURT

Aye, me mateys. We'll batten him to the hatches, jib him to the mizzle mast and hoist him on the starboard lanyard.

RAY

Kurt, is that supposed to be pirate talk or gibberish?

KURT

Curse ye, ye landlubber. It be pirate gibberish.

MARK

Captain Ray, we need to keelhaul the black-hearted Flea Fart.

RAY

What's keelhauling?

KURT

That be when ye bind the scurvy rascal by his ankles and haul him under the ship to the other side. Then we'll brand him on the cheek and cut out his tongue and put it in his stew.

Ray and Kurt laugh. Mark and Matt stare at each other malevolently.

RAY

Everybody hold on! Captain Ray will now demonstrate more of his seafaring skills.

Ray gives the boat full throttle. They shoot over the wake of a barge. The boat turns to go back over, but too soon. The boat is swamped and sinks.

INT. DECORATIVE CAN COMPANY - DAY

Emily and Edna stack cans. They hear a scream. Emily runs to where NINA (50) is at the machine that forms the metal.

Nina holds up her left hand which is missing two fingers.
Emily wraps her hands around Nina's wrist, applying pressure.

EMILY
We'll get help, Nina. Stay calm.

Emily shouts at the other workers gathering around.

EMILY
Jim, call an ambulance! Edna, get a
towel!

INT. DECORATIVE CAN COMPANY - LATER

Two paramedics secure Nina to a gurney as Emily and Edna talk to her. Nina's hand is wrapped in a bloody towel. Emily's blouse is blood-stained. Other workers stand back and watch.

NINA
Thank you, Emily.

EMILY
You'll be fine, Nina.

EDNA
Nina. We'll see you soon.

Nina and the paramedics depart with the gurney.

EDNA
Emily, thank goodness you kept your
head.

EMILY
Now that it's over, I'm feeling
kind of shaky. Could you go to the
hospital to stay with Nina?

EDNA
Sure, Emily. Maybe you should see
if Nick can get off early.

INT. CELL HOUSE ONE - DAY

Nick lets Henry into the cell house.

HENRY
Nick, there was an accident at the
can factory. Emily's fine but she's
shaken up and wants you to come get
her at work. I'll babysit Professor
Death until shift change.

EXT. HOUSE BY THE RIVER - DAY

A house elevated by lumber beams is next to the river. Boys' clothes are on a clothesline. The four boys, wearing blankets, sit at a table on the deck.

KURT

Here we are, wearing blankets again. What's that called, Deejay view?

MARK

Deejay voo.

EDITH KASTNER (50) brings a tray of bowls of soup and glasses of milk. She puts food in front of the boys.

EDITH

Ray, your Uncle Luke is on his way to take you all back to your bikes.

RAY

Thank you, Mrs. Kastner. Did Uncle Luke sound mad?

EDITH

He was concerned. He asked whether anybody was hurt. I told him you were all fine.

She goes back into the house. The boys begin eating, except Ray who just stirs his soup.

KURT

Will your uncle tell the police?

RAY

No. I just hope he doesn't tell Dad.

MARK

Of course he'll tell Uncle Nick! You sank his boat! I'm not sorry for you. "Hey everybody, watch Captain Ray show his seafaring skills."

MATT

Will Dad whip us, Ray?

RAY

Not you, Matt. I'll take the blame.

Ray stops stirring his soup and crosses his arms.

RAY

The worst part is making Dad so mad
that he'll want to hurt me again
that much.

KASTNER'S KITCHEN - DAY

The four boys stand by the table in underpants as GLEN
KASTNER (55) sets a basket of clothes on the table.

GLEN

Here you go, boys.

Luke is by the door. Glen walks over to him.

LUKE

I sure thank you, Mr. Kastner.

GLEN

My pleasure. Call me Glen. It's a
shame about your boat.

LUKE

It's time to buy a new one, anyway.

Ray walks up to Luke as the other three boys sort through
their clothes. Glen walks away.

RAY

Uncle Luke, I'm really sorry.
Please, don't tell Dad.

LUKE

I won't tell him. You will.

RAY

I'll pay you back some day. It
won't be soon but I promise, I'll
pay you back, please Uncle Luke.

LUKE

This isn't about money, Ray. It's
about responsibility.

Ray, looking forlorn, returns to the table and gets his
jeans.

INT. VANMEER LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ray and Matt enter. Jennifer lies on the couch, reading a
magazine.

RAY
Jennifer, is Dad home?

JENNIFER
Dad and Mom are in their room. Mom
saw an accident at work. It was all
bloody and icky.

Ray walks upstairs. Jennifer follows.

JENNIFER
Don't go to their room. Mom feels
bad.

RAY
I need to talk to Dad.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Ray and Jennifer stop in front of the bedroom door.

JENNIFER
They don't want to be disturbed.
Maybe they're having sex.

RAY
Jennifer! Don't talk like that!

JENNIFER
Why? That's what married people do.
They have sex.

RAY
I thought you said Mom felt bad.

JENNIFER
Does that mean they can't have sex?

RAY
(shouting)
Shut up about Mom and Dad having
sex!

Ray and Jennifer look at the door, mortified. Nick angrily
opens the door.

NICK
Pipe down! Your mother is resting!

Nick closes the door. Ray and Jennifer stare at it.

INT. EXT. VANMEER HOUSE - DAY

Luke drives up in his pickup with a boat on a trailer, a better boat than his old one. It has an inboard motor, steering wheel and front bucket seats. Ray comes out of the house to greet Luke as Luke gets out of the pickup.

RAY

Oh, wow! Look at that boat!

LUKE

She's a beauty, isn't she?

RAY

Sure is!

LUKE

Ray, you did tell your dad about the boat, didn't you?

RAY

Well, I was going to but Mom was upset about the accident at work and Dad didn't want to be bothered.

LUKE

Damn it, Ray!

A car pulls into the driveway. Nick gets out.

NICK

You must be doing real good with your business to be able to afford a new boat like that.

LUKE

I'm up to my eyeballs in debt, but my bank wants to loan me even more.

NICK

Remind me to get my money out of that bank.

RAY

Dad, I have something to tell you.

NICK

What is it?

LUKE

No, Ray. I'll tell him. I'm taking you all fishing next Saturday. I'd bring Charlotte so you could meet her, but she hates fishing.

NICK

So do Emily and Jennifer. It'll have to be just the guys. You staying for supper?

LUKE

No thanks. I'm having dinner with Charlotte.

NICK

See you Saturday, then.

Nick goes into the house.

RAY

Thanks, Uncle Luke.

LUKE

This will cost you your first-born child. On second thought, keep it. Kids are a headache, especially when they're 15.

RAY

I really am sorry about your boat.

LUKE

I know, Ray.

Ray hugs Luke, holding on tightly.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

In the bedroom Emily is taking photos of items, one at a time on a white cloth on the vanity.

An easel has a placard with bold lettering across the top - LEEPPOINT SUPERMARKET and an unfinished painting of a shopper. There is a pile of grocery items on the bed. Nick enters.

NICK

What's going on?

EMILY

I'm creating a supermarket ad. If they like it, I'll get their account as a graphic designer.

NICK

What the hell are you talking about? Will you stop doing that and talk to me?

EMILY

I don't have time to chat. I need to get this done before tomorrow.

NICK

I'm not chatting. Do you have time for a hobby like this?

Emily replaces a can of green beans with a can of peas.

EMILY

It's not a hobby. I'll need to set up a studio in the rec room and I'll need to buy some equipment.

NICK

Will making ads for a supermarket pay for all of that?

EMILY

I'll need more than one account, of course. It'll be awhile before I make a profit. I'll need to buy equipment from savings to start out.

NICK

We can't afford to gamble our retirement money. Besides, with your job at the factory and what you do around here, you don't have the time for something like this.

EMILY

I quit my job at the can company.

NICK

You what? Emily, stop doing that, please!

Emily sighs, puts down her camera and faces Nick.

EMILY

Sorry, Nick. I just didn't want you to get the idea that you had a say in my decision.

NICK

I'm your husband and I don't have a say?

EMILY

Not really. I just couldn't work another day at that place.

NICK
Was it because of the accident?

EMILY
That's part of it, but not really.
I just know that if I don't do
something different with my life
now, I never will.

NICK
You're as crazy as Luke.

EMILY
Why do you say Luke is crazy? He's
keeping busy and even hired part-
time help.

NICK
Who knows whether that will last?
He's investing all he has and going
deep into debt on an idea that
could fizzle after a few boats.

EMILY
He won't starve and we won't
either, as long as you can make
supper. I'm busy.

NICK
What?

Emily pushes Nick out the door as she talks to him.

EMILY
I'm sure you can make supper. I
have total confidence in you.

Nick stares back into the room as Emily closes the door in
his face. Nick walks away, shaking his head in bewilderment.

EXT. EXERCISE PEN - DAY

Fred paces the exercise pen. Nick walks alongside Fred,
outside the pen.

FRED
Six guys play poker every Sunday. A
cut is offered each deal but seldom
taken. Harry has some bad hands and
cuts the cards to change his luck.

NICK
So, did Harry's luck change?

FRED

I'm not superstitious. To me, the word luck means the product of random chance, not a force that works toward a specific result. In my hypothetical narrative, Harry continues to have bad hands because he cut the cards.

NICK

So he lost big and killed himself?

FRED

No, it wasn't high stakes. He just got bored and went home early.

NICK

And found his wife in bed with another man?

FRED

No. On his way home he was in front of a car with Rick and Lucy in it. Harry slowed them up and caused them to miss a green light.

NICK

And they ended up in the path of a train?

FRED

No. You assume a change has to quickly have a dramatic impact to affect the world, but events surrounding us are reactions to prior events, consisting primarily of mundane details.

NICK

You're losing me here, Fred. Looks like a storm is coming.

Thunder is heard in the distance. Nick and Fred walk to the gate. Fred speaks as Nick starts putting on restraints.

FRED

Rick and Lucy go home, make love and Lucy conceives a child, all of which would have happened two minutes earlier if they weren't slowed up by Harry.

NICK

What is the significance of that?

FRED
Sperm continually moves around in the body. If conception is delayed even a second, a different sperm will fertilize the egg.

NICK
So?

FRED
I give up, Nick. You're hopeless.

INT. CELL HOUSE ONE - DAY

Nick and Fred enter the cell house amid lightning flashes.

FRED
For argument's sake, let's say a child's gender was changed. Do you think you might have married if your wife was never born?

Nick locks Fred in the shower cell.

NICK
Possibly.

Nick starts removing restraints.

FRED
Isn't it possible you'd marry somebody who would have married some other man if not you, possibly a man who would otherwise marry someone else, and isn't it possible that a male born in place of your wife would create a similar chain reaction because of his existence and all these changes would result in changes in what children were born and not born?

Fred starts putting his clothes in the laundry bag.

NICK
I suppose.

FRED
The changes in the patterns of lives would be enormous in one generation and over future generations the changes would grow at an exponential rate.

NICK

Your scenario seems a bit contrived.

FRED

It's totally contrived. It's fiction, but it illustrates my point that the effects of any action expand over time.

INT. CELL HOUSE ONE - LATER

Nick and Henry talk. They hear the shower in the background.

HENRY

We're taking McKinney to the infirmary to force-feed him, but he won't cooperate. I'd like you to lead a shield team.

NICK

A shield team? You can't be serious! He's maybe 90 pounds!

HENRY

We don't expect real resistance, but we need to follow protocol.

NICK

The protocol is a crock of shit, but I follow orders, Captain. Why talk like I have a choice in this?

HENRY

This will be before we clear first count next shift, so this would be overtime and you do have a choice.

Fred turns off the shower.

NICK

Let me think about it while I walk you to the door.

They walk to the door, which Nick opens.

NICK

OK, I thought about it all the way to the door. The answer is hell no.

HENRY

Can't say I blame you. This
McKinney thing is a real problem.

Nick walks to the shower cell, where Fred is getting dressed.

FRED

Because Harry went home early, he
felt better than usual on Monday --

NICK

I'll take your word. Harry's life
changed. I don't need to hear more.

FRED

Then I suppose you don't want to
hear about Herman, either?

NICK

Who's Herman?

FRED

Another poker player. Because of
Harry's cut, Herman won money,
nothing huge but it put him in the
mood to celebrate --

Nick responds impatiently as he puts restraints on Fred.

NICK

Fred, please forget I asked who
Herman was.

FRED

My point is, the effects of any
action aren't linear. They spread
out and gain momentum.

NICK

Maybe there's nothing wrong with
your logic but I can't accept a
universe ruled by random
circumstances.

FRED

Do you believe in predestination?

NICK

No. I think we make the world a
little better or a little worse by
our actions.

FRED

And which will you do, Nick?

NICK

I don't know, Fred. I really don't.

INT. SHIFT CHANGE ROOM - DAY

Henry talks to guards gathered around him at the start of the first shift.

HENRY

As most of you have heard, McKinney died of heart failure yesterday during a cell extraction. The shield team used minimum force. The death was not, I repeat, not the shield team's fault. Some reporters will be sniffing around. Under absolutely no circumstances will any of you talk to any reporter about this. Now, last week, I chewed some ass because civilians overheard guards at a bar telling Skinny McKinney jokes. That absolutely ends now. If I hear about that happening, there will be more than an ass chewing, I promise. Be professional, guys.

INT. VANMEER LIVING ROOM - DAY

Nick is in his recliner, reading a newspaper. Jennifer sits on an arm of the chair and puts an arm around his shoulders.

JENNIFER

Dad, how come you always take your uniform off after work? Betty's dad doesn't do that.

NICK

I just feel more comfortable out of uniform.

JENNIFER

Is that really the reason?

NICK

(angry)

Yes, that's what I said! It's really the reason!

JENNIFER

Just asking. Don't get mad.

Jennifer goes to the couch and sits as Matt and Ray enter.

NICK
Ray, why isn't the lawn mowed?

RAY
I'll get to it.

NICK
You had all week! Matt, did the barbershops all go out of business? I told you to get a haircut. You look ridiculous. You trying to be like those British mopheads? What are they called, the Cockroaches?

Matt's hair, not quite touching his collar, wouldn't be considered long by today's standards.

MATT
The Beatles. Gee, Dad, how old are you, a hundred?

Nick stands up, furious.

NICK
How would you like to see what this hundred-year-old man can do?

RAY
C'mon, Dad, it was a joke.

NICK
It wasn't funny. Another thing that won't be funny, Matt, you not getting to the barbershop before it closes. Ray, mow the lawn, now!

INT. VANMEER KITCHEN - DAY

Emily is at the table, slicing peeled apples for a pie. Nick gets a can of beer from the refrigerator, punches two holes in the can and sits at the table.

EMILY
What the hell is wrong with you?

NICK
Nothing is wrong with me.

EMILY
You're working death row again, with that professor, aren't you?

NICK

Yes.

Nick takes an apple slice from a bowl and eats it.

EMILY

You said they couldn't put you there again.

NICK

I was wrong. It won't be like last time. That guy drove me crazy, talking about molesting children.

EMILY

If you're short tempered with the kids, I can't imagine how you are with that professor.

NICK

We're perfectly civil to each other. It's hard to explain. At work, I can take it a day at a time, but when I'm at home, I can't get it out of my head.

Nick reaches for an apple slice, but Emily moves the bowl.

EMILY

Oh great, so you take it out on your family?

NICK

In a way I do, but being rude to Fred wouldn't make me any easier to get along with at home.

EMILY

Fred?

NICK

Yes, Fred.

EMILY

How can you even stand being around a person like that?

Nick laughs, an unpleasant laugh.

NICK

My God, Emily! Did I forget to tell you I work in a prison? Who do you think I'm around all day?

EMILY

Well, not murderers. You only worked that one time before on death row.

NICK

Most killers don't hang and they aren't always the worst criminals.

Ray enters the kitchen through the back door.

RAY

Dad, there's no gas for the mower.

NICK

We'll get some after supper.

RAY

It'll be dark after supper.

NICK

You'll mow the lawn in the morning.

RAY

We'll be fishing in the morning.

NICK

Luke, Matt and I will be fishing. You'll be mowing the lawn.

RAY

Let's just get gas now.

NICK

I'm not going to argue, Ray.

RAY

But Dad --

NICK

Not another word!

Ray glares at Nick.

NICK

Wipe that look off your face, young man, right now!

INT. NICK AND EMILY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Nick, in pajamas, sits on the bed trimming his toenails. Emily, wearing a nightgown, is at the vanity, brushing her hair. They're both angry.

EMILY

This is not about Ray. It's about you, about everybody having to walk on eggshells because of your damn job! What is so awful about it?

NICK

Not a damn thing! Fred and I play chess all day and talk philosophy! Soon, we'll put a rope around his neck and drop him through a hole so his spine snaps! Then I'll go back to Cell House Three!

EMILY

And what is that like?

Nick speaks more calmly.

NICK

Mostly it's routine and boring.

EMILY

What's it like when it's not routine?

NICK

You really don't want to know.

EMILY

Don't treat me like a child, Nick.

Nick paces as he speaks, again with anger.

NICK

OK, you want treated like an adult? Here's an adult bedtime story! Ten years ago inmates would throw bowls of shit and piss on guards, including me! It became quite a fad! An inmate would get five days in isolation but it was worth it to be a hero. It was destroying our authority! What finally stopped it were accidents that weren't really accidents! Inmates escorted in restraints to the isolation cell house would trip going down stairs to the lower yard! I was in on a couple of those escorts and after that, everybody lived miserably ever after! The end!

Emily speaks calmly as she gets into bed.

EMILY

Go on Nick.

Nick responds with less anger and some surprise.

NICK

What do you mean "go on?" Isn't that enough for you?

EMILY

You said that was 10 years ago. What's your job like now, other than routine?

Nick continues, the anger drained from his voice.

NICK

A few months ago a young inmate in orientation, which is part of Cell House Three, was facing 25 years for manslaughter and talked to me as long as I had time to listen. He said he was depressed and scared, like I'm some damned counselor or chaplain or something. This guy gave hints that he might kill himself. What I felt like telling him was "That might be your best option, kid. Just don't do it on my shift." But, of course, I didn't tell him that. Then there's the time we had to take Ned Cranston to the infirmary. Ned is one of those he-she things. He, she, it put a seltzer tablet bottle in an unusual place. The bottle was a glass tube with the open end up inside Ned and the suction kept Ned from pulling it back out. And then there's Terry the Torch. There are a lot of jokes going around about Terry. A year ago, he wrapped himself in toilet paper and lit himself on fire. He survived but was horribly burned. Terry the Torch jokes are only funny to prison guards but we only talk to each other anyway. The worst part of all this, Emily, is that it doesn't bother me, none of it. That's what I do. That's who I am, and I don't mind who I am.

Nick turns off the light and gets into bed.

NICK

At least most of the time I don't mind who I am, but sometimes I look at you and look at the kids and pray silently "Please, dear God, don't let them ever find out who I really am."

The two lie in silence for a moment.

NICK

You said you wanted to know about my job.

EMILY

Give me a little time. That's a lot to soak in all at once.

NICK

You shouldn't ask to know about things you don't want to know about.

Emily turns toward Nick and puts her hand on his chest.

EMILY

Nick, you should quit that job. That's not who you are, not really.

Nick turns onto his side, away from Emily.

NICK

Good night, Emily.

INT. VANMEER KITCHEN - BEFORE DAWN

Emily is frying bacon. Luke enters.

EMILY

Morning, Luke. Get a cup of coffee. Nick will be down soon.

Luke goes up behind Emily, puts his arms around her waist and kisses her on the cheek.

LUKE

Let's sneak off to Paris before Nick comes downstairs.

EMILY

I'd love to go to Paris with you, Luke, but I have a PTA meeting tonight.

Luke goes to pour coffee.

LUKE

Darn PTA. A man can't even have a passionate affair with his brother's wife without that meddling organization getting in the way.

Nick enters.

NICK

Who's getting in whose way?

Luke sits down. Nick pours coffee.

EMILY

Luke invited me to run off to Paris with him, but I have a PTA meeting.

Nick sits down.

NICK

You're not his type, Emily. You're beyond your teens in age and in IQ.

LUKE

Hey! Don't talk about Charlotte that way.

NICK

How long will Charlotte last? Three months, four? Some example you set for your nephews, always showing up with a girl younger and dumber than the one before.

LUKE

Cut the big brother lecture, will you? Speaking of my nephews, where are they?

NICK

Ray can't go and Matt won't go without him.

LUKE

Wasn't Ray looking forward to this?

NICK

He has to mow the lawn. He had all week to mow it, but he waits until last night and there's no gas.

LUKE
Give the kid a break. He's only 15.

NICK
I know he's 15. We've been keeping track. Please don't tell me how to raise my son.

LUKE
Sorry for caring. I thought I was family.

NICK
Yeah, everybody loves good ol' Uncle Luke. He's fun. He never tells anybody what they have to do or what they can't do. OK, I'll be the mean guy who makes rules and enforces them, but I'd appreciate you staying the hell out of it when I try to maintain discipline!

Luke stands.

LUKE
This is a bad day for fishing.

NICK
Sit down and eat your damn breakfast!

LUKE
I don't think so.

Emily brings a plate with eggs and toast. She pushes Luke toward the chair and sets the plate on the table.

EMILY
Come on, Luke. Nick's just been wound up, working on death row.

Luke sits back down.

LUKE
I didn't think you'd do that again.

NICK
I didn't think I would either, but Weller thought different.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVER - ON BOAT - DAY

Nick and Luke are fishing.

LUKE

The shop will operate like a regular production line. The primary market will be from Davenport to St. Louis. Besides selling boats, we'll eventually have a fleet of rentals.

NICK

So you want me to work for you?

LUKE

No. I want you to be my partner. Building houseboats was the only good thing Dad ever taught us. The one you and I built by ourselves before you went into the Army was the best time I've ever had. If you want to wait to see how things work out for me or how Emily's business turns out, fine. Join me any time as a partner.

NICK

I got one!

Nick works a fish that puts up a struggle. As Nick brings it in, there's a pull on Luke's line. Luke's fish puts up even more of a fight. They both land their fish and compare them.

LUKE

Hey, mine's bigger than yours.

NICK

You are just talking about fish, aren't you?

LUKE

Whatever.

They laugh. They bait their hooks.

NICK

It's great how you get along with the kids. Sometimes I envy you.

LUKE

The kids think I'm fun, but they adore you, especially Ray. Your approval means the world to him.

They cast their lines.

NICK

My approval isn't important to Jennifer and Matt?

LUKE

Of course, but it's important for Ray like breathing is important. Jennifer takes your approval for granted and Matt is not firstborn. A firstborn son's identity is wrapped up with that of his father.

NICK

You learn all that psychology stuff in one semester of college?

LUKE

I was thinking about majoring in psychology just because Dad thought it was a stupid thing to study.

NICK

Stupid reason to pick a major.

LUKE

I don't need a degree in psychology to know that when you get home, you need to tell Ray you love him.

NICK

That's not something guys say to sons. Dad never said that to us.

LUKE

Christ, Nick! Don't use Dad as an example of what a father should be!

NICK

Isn't it about time you grew up and got over your less-than-perfect childhood? Dad worked hard to feed a family and kept working hard until he died.

LUKE

I won't feel guilty because my existence was inconvenient for him.

NICK

You don't need to feel guilty. Just have some forgiveness.

LUKE
He didn't think he needed
forgiveness.

They fish silently for a moment.

NICK
Too bad you didn't get to know Dad
after you were grown. You'd see a
whole new side of him.

LUKE
You're saying he changed when he
got older?

NICK
No. He believed in disciplining his
kids, but he always got along well
with adults.

LUKE
Yeah, people always tell me what a
good man he was. I just nod my head
and agree. I don't want to do that
with you, Nick, nod my head and say
Dad was a good man.

EXT. MARINA - DAY

Nick and Luke winch the boat onto a trailer. Glen walks up.

GLEN
Hi, Luke. Get a new boat?

LUKE
Uh, yeah. It's new. Glen Kastner,
this is my brother Nick.

Nick and Glen shake hands.

GLEN
His brother? Are you the father of
Luke's nephew Ray?

NICK
Yeah. You know Ray?

GLEN
I'm the one who fished him and his
pals out of the river.

INT. LUKE'S MOVING PICKUP - DAY

Luke is driving. Nick is a passenger.

LUKE
He didn't lie. He was going to tell you, but I stopped him.

NICK
You stopped him?

LUKE
You were too upset to deal with Ray right then.

NICK
Who the hell are you to say what I can deal with? They're not your kids. If you can't understand that, stay away from them!

LUKE
I know they're your kids, but I'm begging you, Nick! Don't be Dad!

EXT./INT. LUKE'S PICKUP - DAY

The pickup pulls into the drive. Nick gets out and shuts the door.

LUKE
Nick!

Nick looks back through the open window.

LUKE
That day in the deer blind. I would have really done it if you hadn't stopped me.

EXT. MELODY'S BACKYARD - DAY

Ray and Melody play croquet. Matt, now with short hair, runs up.

MATT
Ray, Dad's looking for you. He's really, really mad. He found out you sunk Uncle Luke's boat.

RAY
Shit!

MELODY

Ray, don't talk like that! You sunk your uncle's boat?

RAY

Yeah, but Uncle Luke isn't mad anymore.

MATT

Dad sure is. You won't tell Dad I was with you, will you, Ray?

RAY

No, I won't tell. Go, get out of here!

Matt leaves.

MELODY

How'd you sink your uncle's boat?

RAY

What damn difference does it make? It's done and Dad won't drop it!

MELODY

You can't blame your dad for being mad about something like that.

RAY

Whose side are you on? I don't need a goddamned lecture from you! I've got enough parents.

MELODY

Maybe you have one too many girlfriends.

RAY

Maybe I do, bitch.

MELODY

Ray Vanmeer, get out of my yard!

Ray turns and starts walking away.

RAY

I'm going.

MELODY

And don't ever come back!

EXT. VANMEER YARD - DAY

Ray approaches the house and stops. He stares at the house for a long moment. Then goes to his bike and rides away.

EXT. MELODY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Nick stands outside Melody's front door. Melody is at the door, talking to Nick.

MELODY

No, Mr. Vanmeer. He left here hours ago. I haven't seen him since then.

EXT. MARK'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Nick stands outside Mark's front door. Mark is at the door, talking to Nick.

MARK

No, Uncle Nick. I haven't seen him.

EXT. KURT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Nick stands outside Kurt's front door. Kurt is at the door, talking to Nick.

KURT

No, sir. Haven't seen him all day.

EXT. LUKE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Nick is at Luke's door.

NICK

May I come in?

INT. LUKE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Luke steps aside and gestures for Nick to enter. Nick enters.

NICK

Have you seen Ray?

LUKE

Ray's gone? Was this before or after you demonstrated your fatherly love?

NICK

Matt went over to tell him I knew about the boat and he needed to come home. He took off on his bike.

LUKE

Hmm. How strange. Whatever could have made him do that?

NICK

Have you seen him or not?

LUKE

No, I haven't.

NICK

Mind if I look around?

LUKE

Nick, I have not seen him!

NICK

I have a right to not trust your word on that. You and Ray kept the truth from me about the boat.

LUKE

Get out of my house, now!

INT. RAY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nick, wearing pajamas, enters and turns on the light. Nick stares at the empty bed a long moment. Then he walks to Ray's dresser and picks up a standing framed photo.

In the photo, Ray, in a baseball uniform, is grinning broadly and showing Nick a small trophy of a boy holding a baseball bat, poised to swing. Nick's hand is on Ray's shoulder.

Nick looks at the photo. On the dresser are four small trophies, including the one in the photo. Nick touches the one that is in the photo.

INT. NICK AND EMILY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nick enters. Emily is sitting up in bed. She looks at Nick expectantly. He shakes his head. He turns off the light and gets into bed.

EMILY

We need to call Sheriff Finn.

NICK
 We're not calling Sheriff Finn.
 He'll be back when he gets hungry.

EMILY
 What if he doesn't? What if he got
 on a freight train or went
 hitchhiking?

NICK
 He'll be back. We're not calling
 the sheriff.

INT. NICK AND EMILY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (DARK)

Nick hears Luke's voice as he sleeps.

LUKE (V.O.)
 I'm begging you, Nick! Don't be
 Dad!

INT. NICK AND LUKE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (DREAM FLASHBACK)

NICK (13) and LUKE (11) wear nightshirts. HANS VANMEER (35)
 holds a razor strop. Luke starts to cry.

LUKE
 (blubbering)
 Dad, please, we're sorry. We'll be
 good, we promise.

HANS
 Christ, Luke! You're pathetic! Get
 yourselves ready!

While Hans speaks, Nick puts an arm on Luke's shoulder and
 guides him to bed. They lie down on their two beds, on their
 bellies and pull their nightshirts up above their waists.

They look into each other's eyes. Luke sobs heavily. Tears
 stream silently from Nick's eyes.

HANS
 You boys have it better than I did.
 The first of every month, Papa got
 paid and got drunk and then whipped
 me, not because of anything I did.
 It was just what Papa did when he
 got drunk. I always have a reason
 when I whip you. Don't I, Luke?

LUKE
Yes, sir.

HANS
Don't I, Nick?

NICK
Yes, sir.

There is a sharp crack of leather on skin and Luke screams. After a dozen strokes, Hans gets into position over Nick, who now sobs in earnest. Hans swings the strop.

INT. NICK AND EMILY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (BACK TO PRESENT)

Nick sits up in bed, wide-eyed.

INT. VANMEER KITCHEN - DAY

Emily sits at the table, peeling apples. Jennifer and Matt stand at the table kneading dough together.

JENNIFER
Mom, I'm worried about Ray.

EMILY
Don't be. He'll be fine.

JENNIFER
Isn't Dad worried about Ray?

EMILY
No. He is not.

Jennifer walks toward the door to the living room.

EMILY
Jennifer. Don't bother your father.

INT. VANMEER LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jennifer enters the living room and walks up beside Nick, who sits in his chair, looking at the Sunday paper. Nick doesn't appear to notice Jennifer staring at him. Finally, Jennifer speaks.

JENNIFER
Are you going to buy Mom new shoes?

NICK
What are you talking about?

JENNIFER

You're looking at a big ad for women's shoes.

(beat)

You didn't even know what you were looking at, did you?

NICK

(angry and loud)

Can't I have a little damn peace in my own home on my day off?

Jennifer glares at Nick, looking both angry and hurt. She runs up the stairs.

INT. NICK AND EMILY'S ROOM - DAY

Nick finishes getting dressed in his uniform. Emily speaks from bed.

EMILY

Is Ray home yet?

NICK

No. Not yet.

EMILY

And you're going to work?

NICK

Yes. I'm going to work.

EMILY

Well, I'm calling the sheriff.

NICK

No you are not.

EMILY

Oh, really? I don't have your permission, Nick?

NICK

Don't call the sheriff, Emily. We solve our own problems.

EMILY

You're solving the problem by going to work?

Nick leaves the room without responding.

INT. VANMEER KITCHEN - DAY

Emily is making coffee as Jennifer and Matt enter from the living room.

JENNIFER

Mom, we have to do something about Ray.

MATT

Yeah, Mom.

EMILY

You're right. I'll call the sheriff.

Emily heads toward the living room but stops when she hears the back door opening. Ray enters the kitchen. He doesn't talk or even look at anybody. He goes to the refrigerator and opens it. Emily goes to Ray and embraces him.

Emily continues to hold Ray as Jennifer cuts a large piece of pie for Ray, a quarter of the entire pie. After Jennifer puts the piece of pie on the table, Ray breaks free of Emily and sits at the table.

Ray begins eating the pie hungrily. Matt sets a glass of milk in front of Ray. Ray chugs down half of the glass of milk and then resumes eating pie.

INT. CELL HOUSE ONE - DAY

Fred and Nick play chess.

FRED

Checkmate. Not much of a game.

(beat)

If you don't want to tell me what's wrong, I'll just read and you can go polish keys.

NICK

It's a family thing. We have a rule against talking about family, remember?

FRED

It's not really a rule, just something we agreed on when we first met, but if you want to talk about your family, I don't mind.

Nick stands up.

NICK
I do mind. I don't want to talk
about my family. I might as well go
polish keys now.

The door buzzer sounds. Nick lets in Henry.

NICK
Can I make my call?

HENRY
Yeah. You'll have privacy in my
office. I'll stay 'til you're back.

NICK
Thanks, Henry.

HENRY
We're short on the yard. You can
stop at the dining hall and pick up
your lunch trays on the way back.

Nick takes off his key pouch and Henry puts it on.

Henry
Everything all right at home, Nick?

NICK
Nothing I can't handle.

INT. HENRY'S OFFICE/VANMEER LIVING ROOM - DAY

Nick speaks on the phone from Henry's office and Ray speaks
on the phone from the Vanmeer living room.

INTERCUT PHONE AS NECESSARY

NICK
Ray?

RAY
I'm home now.

NICK
Where the hell were you? Your
mother was worried half to death!

RAY
Yeah. She's the only one who would
worry about me.

NICK

Don't be smart! You're already in for it, worse than you've ever had it before!

RAY

I guess I better shut up then.

Ray hangs up the phone. Nick slams down his phone.

INT. RAY'S ROOM - DAY

Ray picks up the photo of him and Nick from the dresser. He puts it in his dresser drawer. He sits down on his bed with his arms crossed and a scowl on his face.

INT. DINING HALL - DAY

A hundred inmates eat lunch in the dining hall while another 50 stand in the serving line. Nick goes to the head of the line and speaks to one of the servers as Benton walks up.

NICK

Two trays.

BENTON

You getting your own trays for Cell House One now, Vanmeer?

NICK

I decided to take a stroll. So, you're on first shift now, Benton?

BENTON

There was an opening here. I came to see that the slop we serve to these animals meets the state's high slop standards.

NICK

Yeah, right.

Nick carries two trays of food. Each contains two unidentifiable semi-solid items of food, one brown and one green. There is also a slice of white bread on each tray.

Six inmates with arms crossed, including Forsythe, block the dining hall door. Forsythe is missing front teeth.

NICK

Out of the way, Forsythe!

Walt Enochson sticks the barrel of his gas gun out of a slit in the gas cage. The gas cage is a steel box elevated 10 feet from the dining hall floor. Steep stairs, almost a ladder, go from the floor to the locked door of the gas cage.

WALT

Forsythe! Out of the way or I gas you!

Vole and Poole, each holding one of Benton's arms, move Benton out into the middle of the floor. Poole carries a zip gun made from plumbing pipe.

VOLE

You shoot and we shoot Benton.

NICK

No, you won't. You've only got one shot with that zip gun.

Mose Lafluer walks into view carrying another zip gun.

LAFLEUR

Boss, we got two zip guns. We can use one to make a point.

Forsythe goes up to Nick, his face inches from Nick's. With both hands, Forsythe slaps both trays to the floor simultaneously, then wipes his hands on Nick's shirt. Nick doesn't flinch. Forsythe looks toward the gas cage.

FORSYTHE

You! Come down from there! Bring your gas gun and all your shells!

NICK

Don't do it, Walt!

Benton, whose hands are being tied behind his back with an electric cord, speaks frantically.

BENTON

Vanmeer, shut up! They'll kill us!

FORSYTHE

Order your friend to come out of the gas cage or I kill you.

NICK

Order him?

FORSYTHE

You're a sergeant, aren't you? You outrank him.

NICK

I'm a hostage. A hostage has no rank.

FORSYTHE

(to Poole and Vole)

Kill Benton. Don't waste a shell on him. Strangle him.

WALT

Wait! I'm coming out!

As Walt comes out of the gas cage, Forsythe motions to another inmate who opens the dining hall door. Forsythe speaks loudly to all the inmates in the dining hall. Lafluer hands his zip gun to Forsythe.

FORSYTHE

Everybody who wants out, get out!

Inmates start pouring out of the dining hall as Walt comes down to the floor. Walt's hands are tied behind his back with electric cord. All but 20 inmates leave the dining hall.

FORSYTHE

Vanmeer, you go too. Tell Weller to come negotiate in one hour.

NICK

That's not going to happen.

FORSYTHE

Then your friends die.

INT. PRISON ARMORY - DAY

Henry, Nick, Irwin, Chris, Josh and Gabe get pump action shotguns from a rack. They wear vests and black helmets.

HENRY

Nick, put a deer slug in the chamber. I'll explain why in a minute. The rest will be number 6 shot, like everybody else has.

Henry signals for everyone to listen, then speaks loudly.

HENRY

OK, Nick, tell us what happened.

NICK

During first lunch line, 20 inmates, two with zip guns, took Benton, Enochson and me hostage. The inmates got fancy with the zip guns. They have elastic triggers, not plungers. Otherwise, they're standard zip guns, made with plumbing pipe the right size for a four-ten shell. They also have a gas gun and a dozen shells. They sent me out to relay demands that can't be met and threatened to kill the other hostages.

JOSH

Shouldn't we wear gas masks?

HENRY

No, they limit visibility too much. The inmates won't get more than one gas shell fired. We can handle it. The gas gun is not a major concern. Zip guns are. We will head to the north side of the dining hall, where Lt. Braun and nine guards with cuffs and batons are waiting.

NICK

Batons? Is that anything like clubs, Henry?

HENRY

The powers that be in Des Moines want us to say baton, which is french for stick. It makes us suave and sophisticated.

CHRIS

Yeah, that's us, suave and sophisticated.

HENRY

We enter a door into the caged storage area. In case you haven't noticed, that's a chain link fence room with a steel mesh door. Once we enter with lethal force, we press our assault no matter what. Is that clear?

There are nods and murmurs of assent.

HENRY

The mesh door will be locked by a padlock that holds a sliding bolt in place. The padlock can't be reached from our side but two inches of bolt are exposed. That's the reason for the deer slug. We believe a shotgun blast will take out the bolt.

NICK

You believe?

HENRY

We're certain it will, unless it doesn't. Good enough, Nick?

NICK

Good enough.

HENRY

We pile through and start knocking the legs out from under them. You all know what that means. We shoot the concrete floor and shot will ricochet into their legs. If you can put down somebody with a zip gun, that has priority.

IRWIN

Even if he's near a hostage?

HENRY

Especially if he's near a hostage. If you have a problem with that, you can give your shotgun to somebody else.

IRWIN

No sir, no problem.

CHRIS

Damn, Captain, is it that easy to get out of this?

HENRY

Shut up, Lansing. Let's go.

EXT. BEHIND DINING HALL - DAY

Henry leads his team at a jog to where Lt. Braun and nine other guards with batons are waiting. Henry lines the shotgun team along the wall.

Henry stands in front of the door, Nick beside him. Braun goes to the door, inserts a key and opens it. Nick goes through the door, followed by the others with shotguns.

INT. DINING HALL - DAY

Nick runs to the mesh door and blows the bolt off. As the mesh door swings open, Vole levels a gas gun at Nick and fires. Wadding strikes Nick's chest. Tear gas sprays him.

Nick, coughing and staggering, goes left and pumps another shell into his shotgun chamber. Forsythe with a zip gun, maneuvers the still bound Benton between himself and Nick. Forsythe levels his zip gun at Nick.

Nick blasts a spray of shot off the concrete, into the legs of Benton and Forsythe. The zip gun goes off, sending a slug into the wall.

Benton and Forsythe fall forward, screaming in pain. Benton's face is slammed into the floor by Forsythe falling on him, breaking Benton's nose.

Other shotguns go off. Nick keeps moving and coughing and comes to a cluster of standing inmates. He shoots, spraying the legs of inmates who scream and fall to the floor.

The assault team stops in a spread-out pattern. Others in the room are on the floor, some writhing in pain.

Walt is on the floor, uninjured, hands bound behind him, an unfired zip gun by his side. Henry shouts.

HENRY
Bring 'em in, Bill!

Braun's team enters. Two each go to Benton and Walt.

BENTON
Vanmeer, you bastard! You shot me!

INT. CELL HOUSE THREE - NIGHT

Nick arrives at the bottom of the stairs and approaches the desk of LT. ART LADD (45).

NICK
The top tier has all been fed and tucked in for the night.

ART

You look awful. Why'd you stay
after that shot with tear gas?

NICK

I thought a shower and a fresh
uniform would fix me right up.

ART

It didn't. I've never seen eyes
that red.

NICK

My head's ready to explode and I'm
seeing double. I need to rest my
eyes before I drive home.

ART

Lie down in A-6. It's empty.

INT. CELL A-6 - NIGHT

Nick is on his side on a bare mattress, facing the wall, eyes
open.

DISSOLVE TO

EXT. DEER STAND - DAY (FLASHBACK)

NICK (17), LUKE (15) and Hans are on a wood platform built
onto a large tree. Luke is between Hans and Nick.

Nick silently points. In the distance, a buck walks into a
meadow. Hans puts his hand on Luke's shoulder and whispers.

HANS

Luke, time to get your first buck.

Luke gets into a prone position. He aims. Luke takes the gun
from his shoulder and shakes his head. Hans glares at Luke,
then shoulders his gun and shoots.

HANS

What the hell is wrong with you?

LUKE

I just couldn't do it.

HANS

What are you, a pansy?

LUKE
I'd rather be a pansy than be like
you.

HANS
What did you say?

NICK
Dad, he didn't mean it. Luke, tell
Dad you're sorry.

LUKE
I'm sorry, Dad.

HANS
You'll be sorrier tonight.

NICK
Dad, he said he was sorry!

HANS
Isn't that nice? You want to
protect your brother. You want to
take his punishment, Nick?

Nick and Luke make brief eye contact. Nick looks away.

NICK
No.

HANS
I didn't think so.

Hans goes to the ladder, consisting of boards nailed to the
side of the tree. He goes down a few rungs and stops.

HANS
It's a long time till bedtime,
Luke. You have all day to think
about what happens when you don't
show me respect.

Hans goes down the ladder and walks toward the dead buck,
pulling his hunting knife from a sheath on his belt. Luke
shoulders his gun.

EXT. LUKE'S POV - DAY

The crosshairs of Luke's scope are on Hans.

BACK TO:

EXT. DEER STAND - DAY

Nick grabs the barrel of Luke's rifle and pulls up. Nick speaks emphatically but in a whisper.

NICK

Luke, what are you doing?

Luke lets go of the gun, moves back and sits against the tree, his arms crossed and head down.

INT. NICK AND LUKE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Nick at 17 is on his side, staring forward, a blanket up to his shoulders. Behind Nick, Hans brings down the strop in three-second intervals, beating an unseen Luke.

INT. CELL A-6 - NIGHT (BACK TO PRESENT)

Henry is behind Nick, holding a metal cup and a pill.

HENRY

Nick.

Nick is startled. He rolls onto his back.

NICK

What?

HENRY

Feeling any better?

NICK

Not really.

HENRY

Here, take this.

Nick sits up and takes the pill and cup from Henry.

NICK

What is this?

HENRY

It's best you not know and best you not remember taking it. I promised Nurse Nose-in-the-air all kinds of sexual favors to get that.

NICK

I appreciate your sacrifice.

Nick swallows the pill and water.

HENRY
I punched you off the clock, less
explaining if some bigwig comes in.

NICK
No problem.

HENRY
You did all right today, Nick.

NICK
Benton doesn't think so.

HENRY
You might have saved his life.

NICK
I saved my own life.

HENRY
Anyway, you did all right.

INT. CELL HOUSE THREE - DAY

Braun and Chris put on key pouches. Nick comes from the cell.

BRAUN
How you feeling, Nick?

NICK
Embarrassed. I didn't mean to sleep
here overnight.

BRAUN
No need to be embarrassed. I know
you punched out last night.

Henry walks through the open cell house door.

HENRY
Hey, Nick, how's your head?

NICK
My headache's gone.

HENRY
Good. You can work your regular
Cell House One assignment.

INT. VANMEER LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ray is asleep on the couch. The phone rings. Ray answers it.

RAY

Hello.

(beat)

Are you all right, Dad?

Jennifer, wearing pajamas, approaches Ray.

RAY

Good. OK.

JENNIFER

Is that Dad? Is he all right?

RAY

Yes. Tell Mom to come to the phone.

Jennifer leaves. Ray speaks into the phone.

RAY

Dad, I'm glad you're OK and I understand what you have to do.

Ray puts the phone down, giving no time for a response. He sits on the couch with arms wrapped tightly around a pillow.

INT. CELL HOUSE ONE - DAY

Fred and Nick play chess.

FRED

Checkmate. Again, not much of a game. You bothered by what happened yesterday or is something else bugging you?

NICK

I was just thinking we are what we're taught to be. Even if we never mean to be our fathers, that's what we'll be.

FRED

I didn't know you were lazy.

NICK

Lazy?

FRED

Yes, mentally lazy. If you don't like how you are, change it. Blaming your parents is just an easy excuse.

NICK

Well, Mr. Ph.D., you may be able to change yourself to whatever you want, but us lesser humans don't know how to be anything other than what we learn to be.

FRED

That's bullshit.

NICK

Let's change the subject.

FRED

To what?

NICK

You've travelled all over the world. Where's your favorite place on earth?

FRED

Australia. You should visit there. You'd like it. Funny, going as far as you can on the planet to feel at home. You've heard the expression, "digging to China." Whoever came up with that was an idiot. If you dug through the earth in a straight line, you'd come up in the southern hemisphere, closer to Australia than to China.

NICK

I started to dig a hole to China or Australia or wherever once, in my back yard. I was 11. I knew I couldn't dig to the other side of the world but I wanted to dig as far as I could. The funny thing is, before I got caught, I didn't think about getting into trouble.

FRED

A psychiatrist would say that subconsciously you were trying to get into trouble to get attention.

NICK

There's no way, subconsciously or not, I wanted that kind of attention.

Nick puts a count form on the clipboard and marks it.

NICK

I don't know how to explain it other than that in some ways I wasn't a very bright child.

(beat)

Waiting for the sarcastic remark.

Nick puts the count form on the wall and sits back down.

FRED

I'll pass on the sarcasm. Believe it or not, I can relate to exactly what you're saying. I spent my early childhood in a dream world. I couldn't change that about myself no matter how hard I tried. I was about 10 when I outgrew that. It wasn't something I had control over, just something I outgrew.

NICK

I was older than that when I still didn't think about consequences. There was an added ordeal to the hole-digging. I had to explain why I dug the hole. I had no reason other than I felt like it but Dad demanded a real reason. I didn't understand why you had to have a reason for everything you do.

FRED

Do you understand now?

NICK

I suppose that's part of being an adult, having a reason for everything. OK, your turn. How'd you get along with your old man?

A pained look comes across Fred's face.

NICK

Sorry. That's none of my business.

FRED

Dad died in a car accident when I was 13. Mom died six years later. I never got a good explanation of what she died of - a broken heart, I suppose.

NICK

Your father died in a car accident?

FRED
Surprised there were cars then?

NICK
Well, uh, yeah, kind of.

FRED
We called it a motor buggy, the first in the county. We weren't rich, but Dad had to be the first one to have any new contraption. He travelled around six counties selling spices and flavorings.

(beat)
He was a good man. Mom was a good woman. They were real Christians, not the kind who spout Bible passages to show off.

NICK
Is that why you're so bitter about religion, because their faith couldn't protect them?

FRED
Don't try to analyze me, Nick. You're not good at it.

INT. FRED'S CHILDHOOD HOME - EVENING (FLASHBACK)

Fred continues to speak as a voice over to the muted scene from his childhood. GEORGE CONROY (40) and WILMA CONROY (40) are on the sofa, watching FRED (13), who is sitting on the floor, reading to them from the book "Treasure Island."

FRED
It was just the three of us living at the vineyard. That's how we described ourselves, vineyard owners, but we didn't make much money from it. Mostly Dad was a salesman. We had less than two acres of grapes and Mom had a huge vegetable garden. My parents only had high school educations but they made good use of that. We read to each other every night -- fiction, non-fiction, current events, history, everything.

EXT. VEGETABLE GARDEN - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Fred at 13, BOY 1 (15), BOY 2 (13) and BOY 3 (11) come up to PACO (10) who is picking chili peppers and putting them in a basket. Paco first smiles, then looks frightened.

Fred continues his voice over to the muted scene.

FRED (V.O.)

Just a few weeks before Dad died,
my friends and I came across little
Paco getting chili peppers in Mom's
garden. Paco had permission to pick
whatever he wanted, but my friends
decided to torment him anyway.

Boy 1 gives orders to the others. Boy 2 and Boy 3 grab Paco. Fred reluctantly joins in. Boy 1 stuffs peppers into Paco's mouth.

FRED (V.O.)

They wanted to find out how many
hot peppers a little wetback could
eat. They -- We held him and
stuffed peppers into his mouth. I
knew it was wrong, but I was 13 and
did what my friends did.

George comes running up to the boys, yelling. Paco runs off. George talks to Fred's three friends in anger and they walk off, looking contrite.

FRED (V.O.)

Dad came yelling. We let Paco go
and he ran off bawling. Dad told my
friends to leave and not come back.

George walks toward the house with an angry expression. His son walks behind him, looking down at the ground.

FRED (V.O.)

As I walked to the house with Dad,
I wondered what horrible thing he
was going to do to me.

INT. CELLHOUSE ONE - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

Fred leans his head back and fixes his stare at a point above his head on the bars.

FRED

Before we went into the house, Dad said, "Fred, today for the first time in my life, I'm ashamed that you're my son."

(beat)

That was it, my only punishment, but hearing those words was worse than anything else could possibly be. They're still in my head.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Nick enters. Jennifer runs into Nick's arms. Matt holds back uncertainly a moment, then joins Jennifer in hugging Nick. Emily comes through the doorway, staying back, arms crossed.

NICK

Where's Ray?

EMILY

In his room, waiting for you. Nick, we need to talk.

Nick untangles himself from the kids and walks past Emily.

NICK

Later. I need to see Ray first.

EMILY

Nick, please --

INT. RAY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Ray sits on his bed, staring at the floor. He looks up as Nick enters, then back down. Nick closes the door, walks to Ray's desk and picks up the baseball trophy. He holds the trophy, staring at it for a long moment.

NICK

Your grandfather was strict when I was growing up. Your Uncle Luke thought he was just plain mean, but I accepted him being strict and respected him until just after my 17th birthday.

Nick puts the trophy down, walks to the bed and sits next to Ray. Ray looks at Nick out of the corner of his eye. Nick stares forward as he speaks.

NICK

He promised to take us to Chicago to see Ernest Tubb on my birthday, but then said the show was sold out and we weren't going to Chicago. I was disappointed but figured it was just one of those things. A few days later, I found out the concert wasn't sold out.

(beat)

It's hard to explain how hard this was for me. I felt betrayed. I thought someone so demanding, so unforgiving of the smallest mistake had no right not being perfect himself. I was angry at Dad for that lie until I left home and joined the Army. Even when I was angry, I wanted so much for Dad to be proud of me. He never said he was proud of me.

Nick puts an arm across Ray's shoulders and looks at Ray.

NICK

Ray, you make me proud all the time. You've got a good heart and you put all of your effort into everything you do. Don't get any ideas about me being perfect. I'm not perfect. You're not perfect either, but you're as close to perfect as a father could hope for.

A single tear flows down Ray's cheek.

NICK

You deserve to get a break for one mistake, even a big mistake.

(beat)

I love you, Ray.

RAY

I love you too, Dad.

Nick kisses Ray on the forehead, then pulls Ray's head against his chest and holds him tightly. Ray smiles.

INT. VISITING AREA CHANGE ROOM - DAY

Nick escorts Fred in restraints into a room adjacent to the visiting room. Nick begins removing the restraints.

FRED

OK, enough mystery. What's up?

NICK

Your daughter and her family are waiting in the visiting room. We made special arrangements for them to come outside regular hours. No one else is in there.

FRED

Jesus, Nick! Just when I was beginning to think there might be a brain in that uneducated head of yours, you pull a stunt like this! I don't want any visitors.

NICK

I don't care what you want. You're visiting Lisa and her family and tomorrow Lawrence will be here with his family.

FRED

What'll you do, throw me in there?

NICK

Damn you, Fred! You're the most stubborn and selfish physics professor I know!

FRED

Selfish? I'm doing this for them!

NICK

Bullshit.

Fred stares at Nick, the self-confidence draining from Fred's expression. Fred reaches for the doorknob, hesitantly and even a bit fearfully. He opens the door to the visiting room.

INT. VISITING ROOM - DAY

Lisa, Edgar and two children are at a table. As Fred enters the room, Lisa rushes into Fred's arms, tears streaming down her face. The children join in a group hug and then so does Edgar. Nick watches from the other side of the doorway.

INT. RAY'S ROOM - DAY

Ray puts the photo of Nick and him back on the dresser.

EXT. MELODY'S YARD - DAY

Ray walks up to Melody who is watering flower bushes.

RAY
Melody, can I talk to you?

MELODY
Not if you talk to me like you did
the other day.

RAY
No, I promise. I'm sorry.

MELODY
What you called me, you can never
call me that again.

RAY
No, I won't.

MELODY
I mean it, Ray. You can't ever use
that word, even if you get mad.

RAY
No, never ever. I promise.

MELODY
Not even if I do this.

Melody turns the hose on Ray. They wrestle for the hose,
laughing and getting soaked.

EXT. MARINA - DAY (JULY 1964)

Luke has his arm draped around CHARLOTTE, 25. They stand on
the small lower deck of a 35-foot houseboat.

The area above the enclosed part of the houseboat is an open
deck with seating and a cooking grill.

Luke greets the arriving guests. Nick, Emily, Ray, Melody,
Jennifer and Matt.

LUKE
Welcome to the Flying Duchess, the
first rental boat for Vanmeer
Custom Houseboats, the first of
what will become a fleet of
thousands of boats.

JENNIFER
Thousands of boats?

LUKE
Maybe even millions.

RAY
Maybe billions.

LUKE
Maybe billions, but trillions would
be too many.

RAY
Yeah, that would be too many.

INT. CAPTAIN'S CABIN - DAY

Luke is at the boat's steering wheel. He motions for Matt to take the wheel. Matt steps up on a box Luke places at the wheel for him and Luke puts his hand on Matt's shoulder. Matt is thrilled as he steers the boat.

EXT. UPPER DECK - DAY

Nick places steaks on the grill from a platter held by Jennifer. Ray and Melody make a salad together. Emily and Charlotte are seated, holding drinks and talking to each other.

EXT. UPPER DECK - NIGHT

The boat is anchored among boats in a bay of the river. Everyone watches as fireworks light up the sky.

On the Flying Duchess upper deck, Nick and Emily stand behind the others and kiss, a long lingering kiss that is silhouetted against the fireworks display.

INT. CELL HOUSE ONE - DAY

Fred and Nick play chess. Nick makes a move.

NICK
That's mate in five.

Fred stares at the chess board and speaks with surprise.

FRED

Well so it is. I apparently taught you how to play chess. You might as well have the chess set. I've decided to give up the game.

(beat)

Go ahead, take it.

Nick holds the chess set a moment before speaking.

NICK

You were right about me not having to be my father. I can choose to be someone else. I might have figured that out myself eventually, but not until my life went down the wrong path.

FRED

As much as I hate admitting to receiving wisdom from a high school dropout, you were right to make me see my family one last time.

NICK

The wisdom of high school dropouts is underrated.

FRED

If I could spare my family pain, I would undo what I did, but the two young men had no remorse so I feel justified in taking their lives.

NICK

I hope you don't expect me to agree with you on that.

FRED

I don't expect it and I don't want it. What I want you to understand is that I also accept the justice of what the state must do and I hope you're able to accept the justice of it, too. OK, Nick?

NICK

No, not OK, Fred. You can blow that justice bullshit out your ass.

The door buzzer sounds.

FRED
There's the next shift. I'll see
you tomorrow.

Nick stares at the floor without responding.

FRED
I will see you tomorrow, won't I
Nick?

NICK
Is it important for you that I be
here tomorrow, Fred?

FRED
Soon, nothing will be important for
me. What's important is that you
understand you need to do your job.
You accept that, don't you?

The buzzer sounds again.

NICK
What do you want me to say, Fred?
It's a shitty goddamn job!

FRED
Oh, I don't know. It's not a bad
job for a high school dropout.

The buzzer sounds and doesn't stop. Nick shouts.

NICK
Hey! Lay off, asshole! I'm coming!

The buzzer stops. Nick stands and walks toward the door. Nick
stops and turns back toward Fred.

NICK
I'll see you tomorrow, Fred.

FRED
Thanks, Nick.

EXT. GALLOWS - DAY

Fred, with Nick and Henry on each side, followed by Weller,
arrive on the gallows platform. Sheriff Finn and a doctor are
waiting. Weller positions himself in front of Fred.

WELLER

Fred Conroy, you have been convicted of two counts of murder in the first degree and sentenced to hang by the neck until dead. Do you have any final words before the sentence is carried out?

FRED

I'm sorry for the pain I've caused my family. I'm grateful for the compassion shown to me. I'm at peace and accept the justice of what must be done.

Nick and Henry position Fred in front of the noose. Nick and Fred's eyes meet. Nick puts a black hood on Fred. Henry secures the noose around Fred's neck.

Nick and Henry step back. Weller nods to the sheriff who pulls a lever. Fred drops below the platform floor.

EXT. PRISON PARKING LOT - DAY

Nick walks toward his car. Henry hurries to catch up.

HENRY

Hey, Nick, wait up!

Nick turns, takes off his badge and offers it to Henry.

NICK

I'm done, Henry. Here's my badge.

HENRY

Don't decide this now. You need to take time to think about it.

NICK

I'm not coming back! Take it!

HENRY

You can keep your badge, whether you come back or not.

NICK

I don't want it!

HENRY

Keep it.

Nick puts his badge in his pants pocket and walks away as Henry shouts after him.

HENRY

Nick, you're a prison guard! That's what you do! That's who you are!

INT./EXT CAR STOPPED AT INTERSECTION - DAY

Nick is in his car, stopped at a stop sign. There is no oncoming traffic, but Nick remains stopped and looks around.

Four 8-year-old boys, wearing cowboy hats, move around, taking cover behind trash cans and hedges, shooting each other with cap guns. Nick gets out and walks toward the boys.

Three of the four boys run away, but a fourth stares at the approaching Nick, looking frightened but not running away. Nick hands his badge to the boy, then goes to the car, gets in and drives off as the boy watches in bewilderment.

INT. VANMEER LIVING ROOM - DAY

Nick enters and Emily goes to him. She hugs him. Nick appears stiff. After a few seconds, he pulls away.

NICK

I need to get out of my uniform.

Nick turns and walks away. Emily looks hurt and confused.

EMILY

Nick?

INT. NICK AND EMILY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Emily follows Nick into the room. Nick starts unbuttoning his shirt. Emily puts her hand on Nick's arm.

EMILY

Nick, please don't shut me out, not now, not again.

Nick turns toward Emily. They embrace. They hold each other tightly as Nick sobs uncontrollably.

EXT. VANMEER CUSTOM HOUSEBOATS - DAY (DECEMBER 1967)

A building with 100 feet of frontage, has a sign across the top "Vanmeer Brothers Custom Houseboats."

Nick and Luke walk out the office door toward Nick's car. There is snow on the ground.

NICK

Why don't you come by the house to say goodbye to Emily and the kids?

LUKE

We did that goodbye stuff last night. Geez, Nick, you'll be gone four weeks, not four years. Oh, tell Emily thanks for the art work for our flyers. It's really good.

NICK

I'm not thanking her. She didn't even give us a discount.

LUKE

See, that's what happens when you let 'em out of the kitchen.

They stop at the car door and continue to talk.

NICK

Everybody would have loved for you to come along. You could have even brought Rachel if you could stay in separate rooms.

LUKE

It's Gina now. I wouldn't mind coming by myself, but you and I can't both be gone at the same time, especially not in winter when we're so backed up with orders.

NICK

Next time we'll go somewhere this side of the equator in the summer. Going down under in the summer doesn't make sense.

LUKE

Why Australia?

NICK

It's just a place I want to see with the whole family and this might be the last chance to take this long of a family vacation. If I try to keep Ray away from Melody again for four weeks, I'll have a rebellion on my hands. They're a bit too obsessed with each other for high school seniors.

LUKE

You don't need to worry about Ray and Melody. Those two are really good for each other.

NICK

So my bachelor brother is not only an expert on kids, he's an expert on romantic relationships?

LUKE

And don't you forget it.

Nick gets in the car and speaks through the open window.

NICK

Luke, I know you had no choice in the matter, but thanks for being my brother.

LUKE

Hey, no worries, mate.

NICK

No worries

Nick drives away as Luke watches.

FADE OUT.

THE END