

CHERRY

by

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Based on the novel CHERRY by Nico Walker

CHYRON -- PROLOGUE, 2007

A MALE VOICE with the soft lilt and tone of a mumble poet...

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

This movie is a work of fiction. These things didn't ever happen. These people didn't ever exist...

FADE IN:

EXT. CHERRY AND EMILY'S HOUSE - MORNING

DRONE SHOT OF CLEVELAND, OHIO--

FIND A RESIDENTIAL STREET: Two-story wood and brick homes. Small front yards. If not for the BLACK 70's SEDAN that screams "drug dealer" parked in the road, it would look like a Norman Rockwell painting...

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Emily and I live on a street of homes with front porches where we don't belong.

FIND ONE HOUSE IN PARTICULAR: A quintessential starter home, though it has seen some wear these past few years. The owner of the voice exits the side door-- let's call him CHERRY (23)...

CHERRY (V.O.)

But we're happy enough, though we're often sad because we feel like we're losing everything.

LAND ON CHERRY'S FACE: Brown guileless eyes peek out from dark hair, a certain resolve written in his visage. AND OFF THIS--

INSERT FLASHBACK: LIVING ROOM, DAY--

EMILY (23), big dark eyes and thrift store duds, SCREAMS from the bowels of unknowable pain.

CHERRY (V.O.)

Sometimes Emily gets to carrying on real loud and screaming at me about shit, like I can help it...

REVEAL Cherry hopping up and down beside her, like the floor was hot coals.

CHERRY

What the fuck is wrong with you? Are you fucking crazy? Why are you making all this noise like you're being murdered? Are you being murdered? Am I murdering you?

REVEAL Livinia, their dog, HOWLING. Emily SCREAMS LOUDER. Cherry freaks out more--

CHERRY (CONT'D)

The neighbors will think I'm murdering you. And they'll call the fucking police. And the police'll come over here and they'll see me, and they'll say, "This guy looks like the guy who's been doing all this shit." And then I'll go to fucking *prison*, and you'll feel terrible.

Emily stops crying now.

CHERRY (V.O.)

And sometimes she says--

EMILY

--I'm sorry.

CHERRY (V.O.)

And sometimes she doesn't say anything...

IN THE BATHROOM, ON ANOTHER DAY

Cherry shuts the medicine cabinet, FINDS Emily standing behind him in the mirror, nostrils flared.

CHERRY

(startled)

Jesus Christ...

CHERRY (V.O.)

Or sometimes she punches me in the neck...

IN THE KITCHEN, ON ANOTHER DAY

Cherry pours milk into his cereal when Emily suddenly PUNCHES him in the neck.

CHERRY

Ah!! Ahh shit! Baby, why'd you punch me in the neck?

Livinia licks the spilled milk.

CHERRY (V.O.)

And then she'll run upstairs and lock herself in the bathroom--

FOLLOW EMILY upstairs, where she slams the bathroom door.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 --and not come out for hours, while I'm
 crying my eyes out over her.

PAN DOWN TO FIND CHERRY, lying on the floor outside the bathroom door, sobbing hysterically.

HE SPEAKS ALOUD NOW, AS IF "TO US"--

CHERRY (TO US)
 I love her so much it feels like dying
 every time she does that. She's a beauty
 and I tell her all the time--

CHERRY (CONT'D)
 (calling, through the door)
 --You're a beauty, Em!

CHERRY (TO US) (CONT'D)
 I think she'd do anything for me.

BACK TO OUTSIDE THE HOUSE

Cherry gets into his Dodge and pulls out the driveway--

FOLLOWING HIM: THAT 70'S SEDAN, ALL BLACK WITH BLACKED-OUT WINDOWS. Cherry turns left on Cedar, the landscapes glimpsed through his windshield shifting to reveal--

QUICK CUTS OF A CITY PASSING BY: A pharmacy, an abandoned KFC, the movie theater, Wendy's, another pharmacy...

CHERRY (TO US)
 I'm twenty-three years old and I still
 don't understand what it is people do.

ON CHERRY, considering it all--

CHERRY (CONT'D)
 It's as if all this were built on nothing,
 and nothing were holding this together. And
 then I hear people talk and that just makes
 things worse.

EXT. HAMPSHIRE BLVD - MOMENTS LATER

Cherry gets out of the car on the picturesque street and walks down the sidewalk. DRONE SHOT of mature trees, pre-war apartment buildings--

CHERRY (TO US)
 Some of the apartments here have balconies.
 And the trees are nice.
 (MORE)

CHERRY (TO US) (CONT'D)

I don't understand them either, but I like them. I think I'd like them all...

CHERRY considers the trees, getting lost in thought. And it's here that we start to realize he may not be fully in his right mind. Maybe he's on something. Maybe he's just tortured by rumination. Maybe both. Finally, he settles on--

CHERRY (TO US) (CONT'D)

It'd have to be a pretty fucked up tree for me not to like it.

VFX: BEAUTIFUL IMAGES surrounding him begin to SATURATE WITH COLOR, one at a time: Some are obvious (the swaying trees, vibrant grass, overcast sunlight); some not so obvious (the abstract expressionism of dirt stained on a car, power lines criss-crossing like poetry, cracks in the pavement weaving a delicate tapestry).

CHERRY (TO US) (CONT'D)

It's not that I'm dumb to the beauty of things. I take all the beautiful things to heart, and they fuck my heart till I about die from it.

Cherry reaches the 70's Sedan. The tinted window slowly rolls down to REVEAL--

"BLACK" -- A WEST-SIDE DRUG DEALER WITH A BLACK HOLE FOR A FACE.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

I'll be quick. You know where you're going, right?

Black half nods.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

Just make the first left three times and you can't go wrong.

Black nods again.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

I'll meet you in the parking lot in two minutes, give or take.

MOMENTS LATER

Cherry walks calmly down the street now, low profile.

CHERRY (TO US)
 I'm in a baseball hat and a red scarf with
 a blue hoodie, white button down shirt,
 some jeans, white Adidas, nothing out of
 the ordinary...

He turns the corner and arrives at the main drag: coffee shops
 and restaurants and pharmacies and-- *banks*.

CHERRY (TO US) (CONT'D)
 --The scarf covers the lower half of my
 face. It's a little late for it to do any
 good; I've been at this awhile now, and
 it's no secret what my face looks like.

Arriving at a "CREDIT NONE" bank on the corner, Cherry pauses,
 exhales. Steadying himself...

CHERRY (CONT'D)
 The gun is in my waist. I pull the scarf
 up before I go--

HE ENTERS THE FOYER...

Cherry, scarf up, looks to a SECURITY CAMERA and we CUT TO--

VIDEO FOOTAGE OF CHERRY VIA THE CAMERA: VARIOUS DIFFERENT BANK-
 ROBBING CHERRYS-- all in different garb from different days, and
 all looking up at the lens.

BACK ON CHERRY as he opens the door, pulling his gun from his
 waistband--

CHERRY (TO US) (CONT'D)
 I'm through the door and I have my gun out
 so everyone can see...

INT. CREDIT NONE - CONTINUOUS

CHERRY
 NO ALARMS. I'M A WANTED MAN. THEY'LL KILL
 ME.

FREEZE-FRAME ON CHERRY, his face crazed. UNFREEZE--

CHERRY (TO US) (CONT'D)
 I have a lot of sadness in the face to make
 up for, so I have to act like I'm crazy or
 else people will think I'm a pussy.

The few patrons shudder with fear as Cherry approaches the YOUNG
 FEMALE TELLER.

CHERRY (TO US) (CONT'D)
 One thing about holding up banks is that
 you're mostly robbing women, so you don't
 ever want to be rude.

(then, to the teller)
 It's nothing personal. I'm sorry.

YOUNG FEMALE TELLER
 (nervous)
 That's okay.

CHERRY
 What's your name?

YOUNG FEMALE TELLER
 Vanessa.

CHERRY
 I'm sorry, Vanessa.

YOUNG FEMALE
 TELLER/VANESSA
 What's your name?

CHERRY
 You're funny, Vanessa.

As Vanessa quickly empties out cash drawers--

CHERRY (TO US) (CONT'D)
 About 80% of the time, so as long as you're
 not rude, the women don't mind when you
 hold up the bank; probably breaks up the
 monotony for them. Of course there are
 exceptions...

INSERT FLASHBACK: WESTSIDE CREDIT NONE

Cherry robs a WOMAN WHO LOOKS LIKE JANET RENO.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 Like there was this one lady on the
 Westside, looked like Janet Reno, wouldn't
 go above--

WOMAN WHO LOOKS LIKE JANET
 RENO
 --Eighteen hundred dollars.

Cherry stares at her, clearly not having it. She shrugs.

WOMAN WHO LOOKS LIKE JANET
 RENO (CONT'D)
 That's as high as I go.

CHERRY

You mean to tell me you'd see everybody
here dead before you come off another cent?

Janet stares at him, unmoved. Cherry shakes his head and takes the \$1800, depressed as all hell.

CHERRY (V.O.)

She actually thought the bank was right.
But this was a fanatic...

BACK TO CREDIT NONE

Vanessa places stacks of money on the counter.

CHERRY (TO US)

Usually it's very civilized.

Cherry takes the cash. He and Vanessa lock eyes as-- ALL THE PEOPLE IN THE BANK SINK INTO DARKNESS, as if Cherry and Vanessa are under a SPOTLIGHT on a theater stage.

CAMERA SPINS AROUND VANESSA TO LAND ON CHERRY'S FACE, as he takes her in...

CHERRY (TO US) (CONT'D)

I think maybe we're the same age. I could
be in love with her if things had been
different...

Then as Cherry disappears to darkness, WE TRANSITION OFF THE
BACK OF VANESSA'S HEAD TO--

INT. JESUIT COLLEGE, CLASSROOM - DAY

THE BACK OF ANOTHER YOUNG WOMAN, sitting in the front row of a
CLASSROOM...

CHYRON -- PART ONE: WHEN LIFE WAS BEGINNING I SAW YOU, 2002

CHERRY (V.O.)

When I first saw Emily, I was attending one
of the local universities, the one with the
Jesuits, a decent school...

The young woman, EMILY (at 18 years old), turns to look at us.
She wears a thin WHITE RIBBON around her neck...

REVERSE TO REVEAL Cherry (also 18), watching her through a mop
of strawberry-blond hair a few rows back. He has his iPod
headphones in, LISTENING TO THE SCORE OF THE FILM...

CHERRY (V.O.)

And I don't want to tell lies. The first thing I thought was, "I'd like to have sex with that girl."

A PROFESSOR, running an overhead projector near Cherry, approaches him. The MUSIC CUTS as the Professor yanks his headphones out--

PROFESSOR

Can we at least pretend to care?

Cherry stands, ignoring this Professor. Grabs his book-bag and walks down the riser stairs as--

CHERRY (TO US)

I shouldn't have even been there. Just my folks had enough money so it was expected...

As Cherry exits the classroom, a DIOPTER WIPES FRAME, TRANSPORTING HIM TO--

INT. CHERRY'S CHILDHOOD HOME, DINING ROOM - DAY

Where his MOM and DAD eat steak dinners. Cherry puts his book bag down to sit at the table with them.

VFX: Throughout the film, CHERRY'S DAD APPEARS AS A SHADOW OF A MAN-- as if he is present but not really. A cigarette dangles from his lips.

CHERRY'S MOM'S own lips are slightly overdrawn with lip liner--

CHERRY'S MOM

How is school?

CHERRY

Good. We're reading *The Canterbury Tales*.

CHERRY'S MOM

The Canterbury Tales! I'd have liked to have gone to college and read *The Canterbury Tales*. That sounds wonderful, *The Canterbury Tales!* I'd like to have read all the books and talked about them. But me and your Dad, we didn't get to do that...

CHERRY'S DAD

We had to work.

ON CHERRY, troubled by this, when his Mom reaches out and squeezes his hand, wanting desperately to know--

CHERRY'S MOM

Why aren't you happy, honey? You never seem happy...

Her eyes press him for an answer as she takes a long sip of her wine. Cherry just stares at her, as if a Greek tragedy were playing out before him and it's too much to bear. The lights in the dining room THEATRICALY DIM--

CHERRY (TO US)

And she was right. I wasn't happy. Problem was I didn't know why. I mean, I tried to be good. I didn't even eat meat--

INSERT: CHERRY'S PLATE. A bare veggie burger patty, baked potato and broccoli.

BACK ON a depressed Cherry--

CHERRY (TO US) (CONT'D)

All I could figure was the world was wrong and I was in it.

EXT. JESUIT COLLEGE - DAY

FOLLOW CHERRY (with headphones in, LISTENING TO THE SCORE AGAIN). He walks across the quad as--

The world around him seems to move at a SLIGHTLY MORE ELEVATED SPEED, as if he can't keep up.

A FOOT playfully kicks him in the ass. Cherry pulls the headphones out, the MUSIC ABRUPTLY CUTTING OFF. Turns around to find Emily laughing--

EMILY

I called your name like ten times.

CHERRY

(embarrassed)

My music's loud...

EMILY

I like your sweater.

CHERRY

I got it on Coventry.

EMILY

It's an old, sad bastard sweater.

Cherry doesn't know how to respond--

CHERRY (V.O.)

Her eyes were dark and merciful. Sometimes given to melancholy. Not entirely guileless.

EMILY

You're in my English class.

CHERRY

I know.

(then)

The class sucks.

EMILY

But you always go.

CHERRY (V.O.)

Her voice overtook me.

Cherry stands there like a deer in headlights. Emily smiles, thinking it's cute.

EMILY

Well. See ya.

She starts to head off, so he finds something to say--

CHERRY

Where're you from?

EMILY

Elba. New York.

CHERRY

What's that like?

EMILY

Same kind of lake, same kind of town, only a little shittier.

INSERT SCENE: CHERRY'S IMAGINING OF ELBA, NEW YORK--

Emily stares at us, lonely and depressed. Standing in front of a CARDBOARD POP-UP OF CRUDE CRAYON DRAWINGS: A city-scape of factories and bridges next to grey a lake. Black scribbles over the smoke stacks.

15A **BACK TO THE COLLEGE QUAD:** Cherry nods. He gets it.

15A

CHERRY

I have to work.

EMILY

You work?

CHERRY

At a shoe store. In the mall.

EMILY

That's impressive.

CHERRY

Really? I have no interest whatsoever in shoes.

CHERRY (V.O.)

Albeit, I had tried...

INSERT FLASHBACK: SHOE STORE

Cherry's BOSS stares at him incredulous. Everything in the store is GREY.

BOSS

This is a shoe store...

Cherry looks down at his flip flops. Then back to his boss.

CHERRY

I'm sorry. I won't let it happen again.

CHERRY (V.O.)

I was marked for failure. My last job was indicative of such...

INSERT ANOTHER FLASHBACK: FATOOK'S PIZZA, KITCHEN

A mom-and-pop pizza restaurant with red checkered table cloths.

CHERRY (V.O.)

I was helping make pizzas at Fatook's...

ON CHERRY in the kitchen, struggling with a stretched pizza dough, like it was alive and attacking him.

CHERRY (V.O.)

Old Man Fatook had a half a dozen daughters and granddaughters. And they all worked at the restaurant. I don't know if he had any grandsons, but if he did, none of them worked there.

QUICK POPS of SIX FATOOK DAUGHTERS and GRANDDAUGHTERS, aged 15-35, standing in front of various SUV's in the parking lot, like the intro of a reality TV show--

CHERRY (V.O.)
 All the granddaughters drove Escalades or
 Denalis or whatever. Some of the waiters
 dated them.

INSERT SCENE: BACK ALLEY

Cherry and a WAITER (25) take a smoke break--

WAITER
 She's always buyin' me shit at the mall.
 And she likes to take it in the ass.

Cherry, horrified, doesn't know what to say to this. So he looks
 up at the sky.

BACK TO THE KITCHEN

Cherry, still struggling with the pizza dough. Several Fatook
 girls watch him, smacking their gum.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 I had just started at Fatook's when the Old
 Man caught me trying to learn how to throw
 the dough in the air and all that.

A petite elderly man enters wearing a petite suit. This is OLD
 MAN FATOOK. He watches Cherry, less than amused.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 He had a slight frame and he wore a little
 grey suit so he looked like a puppet. I saw
 him and I thought, "Oh here comes a nice
 old man..."

OLD MAN FATOOK
 (to Cherry)
 Come on. Let me see you do it.

Cherry tries again, but he doesn't get much spin on it, and the
 dough comes down roughly in the same shape it was.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 There had been an all-encompassing sadness
 in its trajectory. I didn't have the magic.

Old Man Fatook goes nuts on Cherry--

OLD MAN FATOOK
 WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT, YOU COCKSUCKER?
 YOU'RE ALL WRONG, COCKSUCKER. DO IT AGAIN.
 THIS TIME, DO IT BETTER.

QUICK SHOTS:

-- Cherry tries it again, worse. The Fatook girls laugh.

OLD MAN FATOOK (CONT'D)
NO. FUCK. SHIT. NO NO NO. SHIT FUCK. DO IT
AGAIN, COCKSUCKER.

-- Cherry does it again, same. Fatook gyrates with disdain.

CHERRY (V.O.)
The Old Man started pantomiming a series of
motions so as to insinuate that I threw
like a queen.

-- Fatook does just that. Then he wheels around and--

OLD MAN FATOOK
WHAT THE FUCK IS THE MATTER WITH YOU? ARE
YOU A MAN OR WHAT? THROW IT HIGH. HIGH. SO
THEY CAN HEAR IT IN THE DINING ROOM.

CHERRY (V.O.)
I didn't understand what was happening...

BACK TO THE COLLEGE QUAD

CHERRY
I'm only making \$6 an hour.

EMILY
Still, any job is great...

A beat. They stand there awkwardly. Then Cherry blurts out--

CHERRY
I have a girlfriend from high school.

CHERRY (TO US) (CONT'D)
Why did I mention that?

EMILY
Really. That's sweet...

CHERRY
She goes to school in New Jersey.

EMILY
She got a name?

CHERRY
Madison. Kowalski.

He takes out his wallet and shows her MADISON'S SENIOR-YEAR PICTURE: She's laying in the grass with her head propped up in her hands.

EMILY
She's so pretty.

She hands the picture back, smiles--

EMILY (CONT'D)
Well, tell Madison I said hello...

And then she walks away.

ON CHERRY, collapsing inside, knowing he just shit the bed. Watches Emily traverse the quad, before glancing back down at Madison's photo, dismayed--

CHERRY (V.O.)
I really liked Emily, but I had already promised Madison that I'd take the Greyhound bus to visit her at school that weekend...

INT. WHATEVER COLLEGE UNIVERSITY, DORM ROOM - DAY

In a dorm room the size of a coffin, an uncomfortable Cherry watches Madison get ready to go out, looking in a mirror...

CHERRY (TO US)
She was staying in the dorms and her bed was small for two people, but at least her roommate had gone home because--

MADISON
--Her grandmother died.

CHERRY
That's too bad.

MADISON
Whatever. She was old.

Cherry watches through the mirror as Madison adjusts her boobs in her halter top, smiles at herself.

INSERT FLASHBACK: MADISON'S CAR, DAY

Where Madison is kissing Cherry in the passenger's seat.

CHERRY (V.O.)
Madison had cheated on me last year with Mark Miller. She said--

MADISON

--Mark would always force my head down when I was blowing him...

(she kisses Cherry)

And it made me realize how you never force my head down...

(she kisses Cherry more)

And I really appreciate that, you know?

Madison starts to go down on Cherry, who really considers what she just said. He talks to us, her head bobbing up and down--

CHERRY (TO US)

I mean it really fucked me up when I thought about it... Like how I used to think you were always supposed to be in love with the girl.

(beat)

I'd got a lot of bad advice. It was 2002. All indications were that things were coming to an end.

BACK TO MADISON'S DORM ROOM

Madison is finally ready. She starts to leave, without Cherry--

MADISON

(annoyed)

Let's go.

INT. WHATEVER COLLEGE UNIVERSITY, FRAT PARTY - NIGHT

Kids' party in a basement done out in plywood; beer pong and grinding bodies.

CHERRY (TO US, LOUDLY)

Madison took me to parties. They were mostly shit, though...

As Cherry moves through the crowd, no one talks to him--

CHERRY (TO US) (CONT'D)

The kids drank beer in a basement done out in plywood. Some kind of beer-pong sex dungeon, everything dismal as murder.

Cherry pours himself a beer from the keg as rap music blasts from a set of blown-out speakers.

CHERRY (V.O.)

They were playing a song that was popular then. It was a song about making all the females crawl on the floor and jizzing on all the females and stuff.

Cherry finds Madison-- She's sucking and licking her RED LOLLIPOP, yukking it up with a FRAT BOY, his hand on her waist. Cherry tries to inch his way in.

CHERRY (V.O.)

Random dudes knew Madison. She'd only been at this school a month, and they all knew her.

CUT TO Madison dancing on a coffee table. Beer SPRAYS over her.

CHERRY (V.O.)

It was on account of Madison could dance.

Kids start to crowd around Madison dancing. Her hair wet now, skin moist from the beer spraying.

ON CHERRY standing in the corner, drinking from his Solo cup...

CHERRY (V.O.)

And that was fine and whatever, just it got a little awkward when you were the one who was there at the party with the girl who was on top of the table fucking a ghost.

BACK TO MADISON, fucking the air. Her drenched clothes clinging to her body as she grinds. The crowd goes wild, boys touching her, leaving SMEARS OF RED where their hands slide across skin.

ON CHERRY, devastated. Watching like a cuckold ass. Having had enough, he turns, walking into--

INT. SHOE STORE - DAY

The entire shoe store is PAINTED GREY, INCLUDING THE SHOES.

CHERRY (TO US)

I went to work most days, in the afternoon, when I could have been doing better things, such as anything. I had a well-cultivated sense of shame, what kept me going...

SOME GUY walks into the store--

SOME GUY

I need a pair of white tennis shoes. All white. And none of the jazzy designs on them either. Nine and a half wide. I have a wide foot.

ON CHERRY, now in his uniform. He takes the request very seriously.

CHERRY

I'll do what I can, but most all the shoes
have the jazzy designs on them nowadays.

SOME GUY

Just do the best you can.

FOLLOW CHERRY until he disappears into the back room... then PAN
BACK OVER TO--

The Guy, sitting with a dejected Cherry. They are engulfed by
discarded shoes and grey tissue paper...

CHERRY (V.O.)

By the time it was over, there were boxes
everywhere. Tissue paper was everywhere.
The remnants of despair and hesitation...

SOME GUY

Well, sorry kid.

The Guy stands up to leave when--

CHERRY

Give me one more shot-- I have trouble
reading the boxes-- And I'm not so good
with colors--

The Guy considers Cherry.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

Please... I want to get this right. One
more shot. I need to get this right.

BACK ON THE GUY: He sighs, *okay*. And QUICK CUTS play out:

-- Cherry grabbing more boxes. His boss watches, dismayed.

CHERRY (V.O.)

I sensed an uneasiness in this customer...

-- The Guy trying another shoe, stepping tentatively through the
store.

CHERRY (V.O.)

I wanted to help him...

-- The Guy looking at another shoe in the mirror.

CHERRY (V.O.)

I wanted to make him happy...

-- The Guy looking at another shoe. He looks at it again. Cherry
waiting in breathless anticipation. Then the Guy looks up--

SOME GUY

Let me tell you something, kid... You're going places... You stuck to the sale... You're going places.

BINGO. Cherry's eyes sting with tears.

EXT. SHAKER SQUARE - DAY

The Shaker Heights RAPID TRAIN stops, Cherry getting off with headphones in, THE SCORE PLAYING.

CHERRY (V.O.)

After the ordeal, I needed a cigarette. So I went by the diner in Shaker Square...

EXT. DINER, SHAKER SQUARE - DAY

Three SHAKER KIDS, big sweatshirts, elaborate handshakes--

CHERRY (V.O.)

I bumped into some Shaker kids I knew and they asked for some of my Xanax.

CLOSE ON A PRESCRIPTION BOTTLE: It reads, "*Generic White Male, Xanax, For Anxiety, .5 Mg, etc.*" Cherry spills a few PILLS in his palm and hands them out.

CHERRY (V.O.)

And they offered me some ecstasy.

CLOSE ON CHERRY'S HAND: A PILL SMILEY FACE is slapped into his palm.

Cherry hesitates, then pops the ecstasy in his mouth.

SHAKER KID

We're going to a party at this girl Maggie's house--

EXT. MAGGIE'S HOUSE - DAY

A smiling Cherry gets out of the car in the upscale neighborhood.

CHERRY (V.O.)

--So I went with them.

He looks over at the bucolic WHITE COLONIAL bordered by a pristine WHITE PICKET FENCE.

VFX: FOLLOW CHERRY and the Shaker Kids up the drive, THE BRIGHTNESS OF THE WHITE starting to overpower everything else around him.

Cherry passes through the garden gate and to the wide flat yard where--

EMILY stands under a trellis. Her signature WHITE RIBBON tied around her neck. Cherry is floored as the rest of the world GOES COMPLETELY AWASH, he and Emily THE ONLY TWO BEINGS IN FULL COLOR.

EMILY

Whoa. Is that you?

CHERRY

Yes.

EMILY

You know Maggie?

CHERRY

Kind of.

EMILY

Small world, huh?

Cherry nods, feeling his pill now.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Holy shit! Your pupils are huge.

CHERRY

I'm on ecstasy.

EMILY

How is it?

CHERRY

It's pretty good. I'm sorry I don't have any more, I'd give you one.

EMILY

That's okay. I already turned some down. This weird guy offered me some. He said I should pop it in my butt.

CHERRY

(looking around, incensed)

Who was it? I'm gonna knock him down.

EMILY

Don't. He was just lonely. It could have happened to anyone.

CHERRY

It's kind of fucking disrespectful.

EMILY

That's just how some boys talk.

CHERRY

Who is this motherfucker?

EMILY

I don't know. He's not here anymore.
Please don't worry about it. I thought it
was funny. I didn't mean to upset you.

CHERRY

I'm sorry. It's just not right-- that
motherfucker talking to you like that--

She takes both his hands, her touch overwhelms him.

EMILY

Forget it.

CHERRY

I'm really glad you're here.

EMILY

Why's that?

CHERRY

Cuz I like you a lot.

EMILY

Shut up.

CHERRY

No, I really do.

EMILY

Hmmm...

CHERRY

What?

EMILY

I was just thinking...

CHERRY

... Yeah?

EMILY

I was just thinking that you're shady.

Cherry's rolling, he can't help but laugh. Which makes her
laugh. AND WE CUT TO--

INT. CHERRY'S DORM ROOM - EVENING

Cherry and Emily (ATTACHED TO THE DOLLY) slam into his wall, kissing.

CHERRY
Your lips taste amazing...

Then, as they pull each other's shirts off--

EMILY
What happened to Madison Kowalski?

CHERRY
She's cold-blooded.

They kiss even more. Then Cherry suddenly stops, gazing into her eyes. Smitten and genuine--

CHERRY (CONT'D)
I think I adore you...

Emily hesitates. Then turns her head away--

EMILY
Do whatever you want, man.

Cherry takes in her PROFILE against the wall, her eyes closed. He's suddenly overwhelmed by sadness.

CHERRY (V.O.)
Sometimes, I feel like I've already seen everything that's gonna happen... and it's a nightmare...

Emily realizes he has stopped. Opens her eyes--

EMILY
What?

Cherry looks so fragile, like he might even cry.

CHERRY
Nothing. Sorry, I...

Embarrassed, he goes in to kiss her. She stops him, gentle.

EMILY
It's okay... You don't ever have to be embarrassed about how you feel...

Cherry can see there are wells of compassion buried inside of her.

CHERRY
Why are you being so sweet to me?

EMILY
(shrugs, jokes)
I have a thing for weak guys...

She smiles. Then she kisses him. And he kisses her back.

CHERRY (V.O.)
And that's how you find the one to break
your heart.

DRONE SHOT OF A CEMETERY

Finding Cherry and Emily wandering among graves--

EXT. LAKE VIEW CEMETERY - DAY

Cherry and Emily stroll, a six-pack of Milwaukee's Best in tow--

EMILY
He was on the phone with her and I was
eavesdropping.

CHERRY
Why were you eavesdropping?

EMILY
(stops)
You're a jerk--

CHERRY
I'm sorry, I mean-- that must have been
awful.

They continue walking.

EMILY
I confronted him, and he tried to buy me
off. He said he would send me to volleyball
camp if I promised not to tell my mom.

CHERRY
Goddamn.

EMILY
I wanted to go to volleyball camp.

CHERRY
What did you do?

EMILY
I went to volleyball camp.
(beat)
And then I told my mom.

CHERRY
Your dad sounds like a dick...

Emily looks off, getting lost in thought--

EMILY
Sometimes I don't think love even exists.
It's just pheromones playing tricks on
people...

And with that, she wanders ahead. Cherry sips his beer, watching her as--

CHERRY (V.O.)
I knew that the girl could take my life if
she ever felt like it, yet all I could
think was that I never wanted her to come
to any harm.

Just then, Emily looks back at him.

CHERRY (V.O.)
And like an asshole I said--
(then, to Emily)
--I love you.

Emily stares dead at him, not saying anything for a very long time. Finally--

EMILY
Thank you.

CHERRY (V.O.)
After that she went back home for break.

INSERT FLASHBACK:

Sixteen year old Emily sitting on her bed in a room. Braces adorn her nervous smile. An unseen man enters, puts his hand to her face. Her smile fades as he strokes her chin...

EXT. STREET, OUTSIDE BANK - DAY

JAMES LIGHTFOOT (18) has one eye fixed on something we cannot see. His other eye is lazy.

CHERRY (V.O.)
You'll have friends. Usually it's nothing.
James Lightfoot was alright, though.
(MORE)

CHERRY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 He'd remember your birthday. Wouldn't ever
 start shit. Strictly a pacifist...

REVEAL Cherry standing next to James Lightfoot.

CHERRY
 Sorry about your car, James.

REVEAL James's car is ON FIRE in front of them. James sighs--

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
 It was a piece of shit.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 James Lightfoot lived at his mom's house...

INSERT FLASHBACK: JAMES LIGHTFOOT'S MOM'S HOUSE, EARLIER THAT DAY

A brown on brown oddity with a \$300 GTI parked in the driveway. James Lightfoot sits on the front stoop, waiting, drinking a Schlitz.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 But it had been a while since his mom lived
 at his mom's house...

INSERT: AWKWARD FAMILY PHOTOS FROM JAMES LIGHTFOOT'S MOM'S HOUSE

PANNING PAST A SERIES OF FRAMED PICTURES ON THE WALL...

CHERRY (TO US)
 Still it was done up like a family place.
 There were pictures on the wall that showed
 James growing up, year in and year out...

The photos tell the story of how James came to be alone in the world-- First a young James with his Mom, Dad and Big Brother; then an older James with his Mom and Brother; then an even older James with just his Brother...

CHERRY (TO US) (CONT'D)
 And the one eye, all the way back, fucking
 him up.

END ON A BABY PHOTO OF JAMES, the one eye fucking him up.

LATER, OUTSIDE THE HOUSE

Cherry walks up, arriving now. James Lightfoot gets up from the stoop as--

CHERRY (V.O.)
 He was probably my best friend. Since grade school...

CUT TO the two of them sitting inside the GTI. The engine sputters as James starts the ignition.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 And so he gave me a ride to the bank...

CUT TO JAMES DRIVING NOW

Cherry is riding shotgun. They travel a few houses, bullshitting with each other, as--

CHERRY (V.O.)
 The sun was shining on us that day. Roy also came...

They STOP so ROY (18) can climb into the backseat. He smokes a giant spliff...

CHERRY (V.O.)
 He painted houses, but he wasn't working. And James Lightfoot was yelling at Roy about his cousin Joe...

Now COUSIN JOE (20) also climbs into the backseat.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 ... because Joe kept saying--

COUSIN JOE
 --It's happening. Get over it.

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
 (to Roy)
 You need to talk him out of joining the Marines!

ROY
 He's joining the Marines.

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
 That's so messed up. Why? Just tell me why?

COUSIN JOE
 (shrugs)
 I don't want to do this for the rest of my life...

ON CHERRY, hearing that, clocking some smoke coming out the hood of the car. James continues to rant and rave--

JAMES LIGHTFOOT

But it's insane. Tell your cousin it's
insane--

ROY

(exhaling smoke)

He wants to do a thing, let him do a
thing...

JAMES LIGHTFOOT

No man, it's the obligation of your LOVE!
YOUR LOVE FOR YOUR COUSIN WHO WE ALL LOVE
SO MUCH!

MUTE JAMES LIGHTFOOT as he continues yelling in slo-motion.
Cherry watches--

CHERRY (V.O.)

I could only understand half of what he was
saying but I couldn't help noticing that he
looked helpless waving his arm around, and
that probably no one would ever listen to
him as long as he lived.

EXT. BANK - LATER

James throws open the hood of his car, smoke billowing out.

CHERRY (V.O.)

By the time we got to the Bank, James' car
was fucked...

ROY

This car is such a piece of shit...

JAMES LIGHTFOOT

It's not a piece of shit. Get me a cup of
water. It just needs a cup of water on the
engine block...

INT. THE BANK

Cherry stands at the back of a four-person line, nervous.

CHERRY (V.O.)

I had a problem with the bank. They made a
mistake and I was there to sort it out.

He looks down at his shoe-- there's a hole in it. He grimaces.

CHERRY (V.O.)

I realized I probably looked like my life
was more fucked up than it really was.

(MORE)

CHERRY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 (then psyching himself up)
 But I was in earnest. I had a receipt--

INSERT: DOWN ANGLE of the receipt.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 --and that was as good as the truth. I had
 their letter with me--

INSERT: DOWN ANGLE of the letter.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 --and I had the receipt--

BACK TO the receipt.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 --and I was going to have the mistake
 sorted out. This wasn't gonna be a problem.

VFX: Cherry, puts his best foot forward with THE TELLER, WHO IS
 A GREY SHADOW.

CHERRY
 You guys sent me this overdraft notice, but
 it isn't right. I paid this off already.

GREY TELLER
 This is a new overdraft.

CHERRY
 But that's impossible. I haven't made a
 withdrawal since the last deposit. I put a
 hundred and sixty dollars in.

GREY TELLER
 That deposit brought your balance up to ten
 dollars' credit, but there was an
 additional overdraft charge against your
 account that put you back in the negative.

CHERRY
 How could you charge me another overdraft
 charge after I'd paid it off?

GREY TELLER
 The deposit didn't clear in time.

CHERRY
 I paid it in cash. Right here.

GREY TELLER
 It didn't *clear*, sir.

CHERRY
It was fucking cash.

GREY TELLER
It. Didn't. Clear.

OFF CHERRY, hating her.

EXT. STREET, OUTSIDE BANK - DAY

The Bank's door swings open and Cherry comes out to find--
James Lightfoot's GTI is ON FIRE in the parking lot. James
watches it burn; Roy and Cousin Joe sit on the curb nearby.

COUSIN JOE
(to himself)
I don't want to do this for the rest of my
life...

And we are right back at the SAME MOMENT we previously
witnessed...

CHERRY
Sorry about your car, James.

James sighs.

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
It was a piece of shit.

He looks over at Cherry--

JAMES LIGHTFOOT (CONT'D)
Did you get your money back?

Cherry shakes his head, no.

CHERRY (V.O.)
So we walked back to James's mom's house...

MOMENTS LATER

The car, FULLY ENGULFED IN FLAMES NOW, burns in the background
as a FIRE TRUCK approaches...

Cherry, James, Roy and Joe have started their walk home when
James sighs, depressed. So Roy passes his spliff--

ROY
Here. It's Trainwreck.

James takes a hit. As he exhales, we shift into slo-motion...

CHERRY (V.O.)
And we felt like we were winning again...

INT. CHERRY'S DORM ROOM - DAY

Cherry lays in bed, LISTENING TO THE SCORE.

CHERRY (V.O.)
Emily finally got back from break and she
came by to see me...

Emily taps on the door, peeking in.

EMILY
Hey.

CHERRY
(sitting up)
Hey.

A beat.

EMILY
So did you miss me?

-- CUT TO Cherry and Emily tearing each other's clothes off.
Emily lays down on the bed in her underwear. Looks away as she
tells him--

EMILY (CONT'D)
Do whatever you need to do to cum.

ON CHERRY, saddened by this. He climbs on top of her, gently
kissing her.

CHERRY AND EMILY IN THE QUAD

INSERT: CHERRY'S IPOD. They listen to *Modest Mouse* on his
headphones.

CHERRY (V.O.)
She liked Modest Mouse and played *Night on
the Sun*.

CHERRY AND EMILY EAT AT THE SANDWICH SHOP

They argue with fervor.

CHERRY (V.O.)
We'd have wild arguments about different
things-- God, Oasis--

CHERRY AND EMILY READ FROM ZOO STORY

They sit on a stairwell outside their English classroom.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 She had me read two plays by Edward Albee.
 I thought he was a kinky motherfucker.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

CHERRY (V.O.)
 Then one day we were hooking up in the
 chapel at school...

FIND Cherry and Emily making out in a pew when Cherry stops--

CHERRY
 Doesn't that Jesus look like a man
 suffering an accident while setting up a
 basketball hoop?

PAN TO A STATUE OF JESUS: It really does look that way. Emily
 laughs. And Cherry laughs. And together they laugh...

... until the laughter dies down and Emily rests her head on
 Cherry's shoulder.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 Suddenly the world felt right.

And as they sit there in front of the altar, perfectly content--

CHERRY
 I feel lucky...

A beat and Emily blinks. Reflexively raises her head up off of
 him. And as she sits there, struck by a feeling she can't shake--

INT. CHERRY'S DORM ROOM - DAY

Emily lays in bed with Cherry, still strangely affected in the
 same way she had been in the chapel.

CHERRY
 We should do something this summer. Go to
 Mexico. Or climb Machu Picchu.

EMILY
 (beat)
 I'm leaving for good at the end of the
 semester.

CHERRY
 What?

EMILY

I really want to go to school in Canada...

Cherry sits up, incredulous--

CHERRY

Since... when?

EMILY

(shrugs)

Since... now. There's this school-- in Montreal...

CHERRY

In Montreal?

EMILY

Yes.

(long beat)

It's the Paris of Canada...

CHERRY

I know what it fucking is!

(beat)

You're kidding me, right?

EMILY

Why would I be kidding you?

They sit there for a long moment. Cherry reels as if someone had punched him in the gut.

CHERRY

So what-- that's it? We're breaking up?

EMILY

Well we can't exactly be together when we live in two different countries, so...

Cherry snaps--

CHERRY

What the fuck, Em?!

Emily gets up and puts on her pants--

EMILY

Jesus Christ, at least you could be mature about it...

Cherry watches in disbelief when--

Emily holds a beat at the door, guilty. Then she leaves--

DORM HALLWAY, CONTINUOUS

TRACKING EMILY. Cherry can be seen through the half open door--

CHERRY
What the absolute fuck!

Emily continues walking, letting a tear surface.

CHERRY (CONT'D)
Why would you fucking doing this?!

He throws a coffee mug into the wall.

CHERRY (CONT'D)
Fuck!!

As Emily exits frame, a concerned STUDENT pokes their head out of their room, sees Cherry slam his door shut--

CHERRY (V.O.)
FUCK!!!

INT. CHERRY'S DORM ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

HOLD ON A BROKEN AND HOLLOW CHERRY, sliding motionless to the floor. And as we SLOWLY PUSH IN ON HIS DEADENING EYES...

FADE TO BLACK.

CHYRON: 37 days later...**INT. FATHER WHOMEVER'S OFFICE - DAY**

ON CHERRY, physically and mentally altered. He sits across from a PRIEST with a mustache; nameplate on his desk reads "FATHER WHOMEVER"--

FATHER WHOMEVER
It's been 37 days since you've come to class.

CHERRY (V.O.)
I meant to drop out...

INSERT FLASHBACK: SUPER 8 FOOTAGE OF CHERRY OUTSIDE THE ART MUSEUM

He takes a Xanax; chugs from a Forty of OLD ENGLISH.

CHERRY (V.O.)
But I took one of my pills and drank a Forty of Old English and then fucked off at the Art Museum.

A SERIES OF CUTS: Cherry throwing Doritos to geese in the pond; taking a piss behind some bushes; passing out on a bench.

CHERRY (V.O.)
So I missed the deadline for dropping
classes and ended up having to fail out.

BACK TO FATHER WHOMEVER'S OFFICE

FATHER WHOMEVER
(considering Cherry)
Tell me, have you ever traveled outside the
United States?

CHERRY
My parents took me to Spain once.

Father Whomever smiles, delighted by this.

FATHER WHOMEVER
You're lucky. The only time I've ever been
overseas was to visit a military base. And
here you are so young and you've already
been to Spain!

Cherry doesn't respond.

FATHER WHOMEVER (CONT'D)
So, what are you going to do now that
you've failed out of school, son?

A beat. Cherry shrugs.

CHERRY
Probably mind my own goddamn business.

EXT. US ARMY RECRUITMENT OFFICE - DAY

Cherry gets off the bus outside a small storefront. A sign
reads, *BE ALL YOU CAN BE.*

Cherry hesitates, heads across the street to--

INT. RECRUITMENT OFFICE - LATER

Cherry sits across from a man in uniform: the nameplate on his
desk reads "*SERGEANT WHOMEVER*"--

SERGEANT WHOMEVER
So what makes a joker like you want to join
the Army?

FREEZE-FRAME ON WHOMEVER--

CHERRY (V.O.)
 The recruiter had a face like death and
 every other word out of his mouth was
joker...

**INSERT SCENE: CHERRY'S IMAGINING OF SERGEANT WHOMEVER OUT IN
 THE WORLD**

Whomever, in his Ford Bronco, waits for the light to change on
 Mayfield Road, slowly eating a Whopper. Finally, it turns green.
 The car behind him HONKS.

SERGEANT WHOMEVER
 (re: the driver behind him)
 Goddamn *joker...*

BACK TO THE RECRUITMENT OFFICE

CHERRY
 Well, I keep seeing on the news that kids
 are dying over there. Guys my age, from
 Cleveland, just trying to do something
 good. And here I am feeling sorry for
 myself 'cause I broke up with my girlfriend
 a few months ago...

Sergeant Whomever considers Cherry.

SERGEANT WHOMEVER
 I get it. You're searching for gold in the
 gutter. A sense of purpose.

CHERRY
 (beat, realizing)
 Yeah...

Another beat... and Sergeant Whomever smiles. REVEAL he has a
 GOLD TOOTH.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 Turns out my piss was clean, so he starts
 telling me things like--

A SERIES OF QUICK CUTS:

SERGEANT WHOMEVER
 My wife's Korean. / I drive a government
 car. / I got BAH and TRICARE.

As Sergeant Whomever keeps talking...

CHERRY (TO US)

I could tell he was excited. For a while he and his like were having a hard time getting enough kids to sign up. But there I was and I was too easy; I'd made his day. And if I'm honest that made me happy.

Whoever shakes Cherry's hand as we CUT TO--

THE NEXT DAY, IN THE RECRUITMENT OFFICE

ON A CONTRACT: Cherry signs.

CHERRY (V.O.)

By the next day I had signed the contract.

ON A BIBLE: Cherry, a hand on it, recites his oath.

CHERRY (V.O.)

And I was sworn in.

CUT TO FUTURE CHERRY, SHIVERING OUTSIDE SOMEWHERE, UNDER A GREY SKY

He's bundled up in an INDUSTRIAL JACKET.

FUTURE CHERRY

But I never told a soul about it. Not even my parents.

(beat)

I guess I was resolved to do a thing.

EXT. MURRAY HILL DUPLEX - PATIO - DAY

James Lightfoot and Roy drink beers on the patio. INSIDE: Cherry can be seen fucking around on a guitar as Cousin Joe flips through channels on a mute TV. A PHONE RINGS from the kitchen...

JAMES LIGHTFOOT

I can't believe you're letting him go!

ROY

There's not much I can do--

COUSIN JOE

(lighting a cigarette)

Just give it up man. It's done-- I'm leaving next week--

JAMES LIGHTFOOT

Why? Just give me one good reason why?

CHERRY

He doesn't want to do this for the rest of his life.

Everyone looks at Cherry.

JAMES LIGHTFOOT

What the fuck?! Since when do you care?

COUSIN JOE

Jesus, someone get the phone...

Cherry drops the guitar and goes to answer the phone--

CHERRY

Hello.

INTERCUT WITH: Emily in her dorm room--

EMILY

Hey, it's me.

Cherry is stunned silent.

EMILY (CONT'D)

You there?

CHERRY

Yeah-- yeah-- I'm here.

EMILY

I'm leaving tomorrow. For Montreal.

(off Cherry's silence)

Can we say goodbye?

CHERRY

(hesitates)

I have to work...

EMILY

Oh-- okay-- no worries then--

CHERRY

No-- no-- I want to say goodbye.

EXT. MURRAY HILL NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

A DRONE FOLLOWS CHERRY through Little Italy.

CHERRY (V.O.)

I had gotten fired from the shoe store and Roy got me a job at a restaurant...

INSERT FLASHBACK: TWO WEEKS AGO IN THE RESTAURANT

The OWNER wears a pork-pie hat. He slaps bill after bill into Cherry's hand.

CHERRY (V.O.)

The owner was a dick but not too bad and you could make money there.

OWNER

Clean up that fucking bathroom.

A WEEK AGO IN THE RESTAURANT

Cherry heads to the kitchen.

CHERRY (TO US)

And they had these Turkish guys working in the kitchen--

KITCHEN, CONTINUOUS: Cherry enters through the swinging door.

CHERRY (TO US) (CONT'D)

--They'd pull a knife on you over nothing.

He bumps into a Turkish guy, who pulls a pocket-knife, swears in Turkish. Cherry's eyes light with fear.

CHERRY (V.O.)

So you felt like you were really alive.

BACK TO PRESENT

Two Opera singers belt "Vis si D'arte, Vissi D'amore" from Tosca, Act 2. Cherry's behind a make-shift bar, looking uncomfortable in his black button-down...

CHERRY (V.O.)

The owner was throwing a party that day. And I got to serve drinks. I told Roy and Joe to come by so they could drink for free. I also asked Emily to stop in so we could say goodbye.

Cherry searches the crowd, anxious.

-- CUT TO Cherry sneaking a shot for himself. He searches the crowd again.

-- CUT TO Roy standing next to Cherry now. They discreetly down another shot. Cherry scans more faces in the crowd.

-- CUT TO Cousin Joe with Roy and Cherry now. Joe's talking to the owner.

COUSIN JOE
I leave for Parris Island on Sunday.

OWNER
Parris Island. That's the Marines, ain't it?

COUSIN JOE
Yeah.

OWNER
That's a good way to go to heaven.

CHERRY
(to Roy)
Have you seen Emily at all?

ROY
I don't know. She's probably somewhere.

CHERRY
Okay... that doesn't really help me but thanks.

ROY
Gosh, look who's on his period.

CHERRY
Man, what the fuck!

ROY
What?

CHERRY
(even more emphatic)
Man, what the fuck?! Who the hell is he?

Roy looks over his shoulder and sees what Cherry sees-- Emily entering with a GUY (mid 20's).

ROY
How should I know?

Cherry approaches Emily. She notices him for the first time--

EMILY
Hey...

CHERRY
Hey.

The Guy, BENJI, stands there, awkward.

EMILY

This is Benji. He's from Ghana. He goes to Case.

CHERRY

(nods)

What's up?

Benji flashes a smile and turns back to Emily.

BENJI

I know this great restaurant. It's called Mi Aldea. The food is so good there. I must take you sometime.

EMILY

Mmm. That sounds good.

Cherry, clearly drunk now, drags on his under-ashed cigarette, clocking Benji's hand on the small of Emily's back.

CHERRY (V.O.)

I gave Benji a real man handshake, like I was a real man, so he was forced to take his hand off her back...

Cherry seizes the opportunity. Drapes his own arm over Emily, kissing the top of her head.

BENJI

(to Emily)

Watch out. He has dropped his cigarette in your hoodie.

EMILY

Jesus Christ. Get it out, man! Get it out!

Cherry fishes it out.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Is it okay??

CHERRY

It's fine. Can we please talk somewhere?

EMILY

No.

CHERRY

Why?

EMILY

Because you're being a jerk...

CHERRY

Shhh. Listen to me. Nobody thinks the food at Mi Aldea is good. The only reason he wants to take you there is cuz they don't card and he wants to get you drunk.

EMILY

What is your problem! I came here to say goodbye.

COUSIN JOE

(coming over)

Want me to punch that guy in the dick?

CHERRY

Not yet.

(back to Emily)

You came here to say goodbye to me? *With* him--

EMILY

--I'm not *with* him--

CHERRY

--You think that's fair? You think that's fucking fair?

EMILY

Yes.

COUSIN JOE

Lemme punch him in the dick.

CHERRY

You know what, please punch him in the dick.

EMILY

I'm done with this...

Emily storms out, Cherry watching after her.

AN HOUR LATER

A dejected Cherry stands slumped behind the salad/bar in his stupid collared shirt.

OWNER

Hey man, can you do me a solid? I need you to look after one of my boys. He just got out of prison.

He points to TOMMY-- Big plastic eyeglasses, a grey bowl cut, a shiny red bowling jacket; talks animatedly.

OWNER (CONT'D)

Twenty years they put him in there. Twenty.
And he's a stand up guy.

REVEAL TOMMY, bullshitting with some other patrons at the bar--

CHERRY (V.O.)

Tommy was drunk as fuck and I was supposed
to make sure he didn't throw up on anybody.
He kept saying everybody was full of shit
and they're all a--

TOMMY

--BUNCH OF FAKES! You hear me?! All these
Cosa Nostra motherfuckers you see around
the neighborhood like to talk a big game.
But they don't have the balls... to put a
gun to the guy's head and BLOW HIS BRAINS
OUT.

CHERRY (V.O.)

And that's what he kept saying, the stuff
about brains. He'd start talking about--

QUICK CUTS OF--

TOMMY

This punk / And that peckerhead / And the
other turkey--

CHERRY (V.O.)

--and he'd finish up by saying that they
didn't have the balls to put a gun to the
guy's head and--

TOMMY

--BLOW HIS BRAINS OUT!

CHERRY (V.O.)

Then he got to asking me about what I did.

REVEAL Cherry, now cleaning behind the bar.

TOMMY

So what do you do, kid?

CHERRY

Not much. But I joined the Army, so I'm
hopeful. I leave for basic training in
three weeks.

TOMMY

Don't be a fool. Those people don't give a
shit about you.

CHERRY

I know.

TOMMY

So what are you thinking?

CHERRY

I just-- I didn't have any other ideas.

TOMMY

But do you have the balls... to put a gun
to a guy's head and BLOW HIS BRAINS OUT?

ON CHERRY--

CHERRY

I don't know.

TOMMY

AGGH! You'll be alright.

AN HOUR LATER

The restaurant is closed down now. Cherry pushes out the front door to find--

Tommy, standing alone on the sidewalk, swaying to and fro.

CHERRY

Tommy, you alright?

TOMMY

Yeah. What are you doing?

CHERRY

I'm all done. I'm about to walk home.

TOMMY

You need a ride? I'll give yaz a ride.

Tommy half-heartedly waves his keys towards a BLUE CHEVY ASTROVAN parked next to him.

MOMENTS LATER, IN THE VAN

Tommy looks to Cherry--

TOMMY

You ready?

Cherry nods. Tommy fires up the engine. Proceeds to hit the car in front of them. Then hits the car behind them too.

CHERRY (V.O.)
He looked like he was feeling real ill.

-- CUT TO SECONDS LATER: Tommy puking out his door. Violently.

-- CUT TO SECONDS LATER: Tommy with his head against the steering wheel.

TOMMY
Oh Jesus. Oh Jesus Jesus Jesus...

CHERRY
Bad news, Tommy. You threw up on your sleeve.

Tommy looks down at the sleeve of his shiny red bowling jacket.

TOMMY
Jesus Jesus Jesus...

CHERRY
Don't worry, Tommy. We can fix it.

Cherry uses a paper grocery bag to wipe the vomit off.

TOMMY
Those people don't give a fuck about you kid...

Cherry considers this as Tommy looks down at his sleeve again--

TOMMY (CONT'D)
Close enough for rock and roll.

CHERRY (V.O.)
We resumed the drive and Tommy ran over a curb for good measure.

INT. MURRAY HILL DUPLEX - CHERRY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cherry enters with a BAKERY BOX, stops when he sees Emily sitting on his mattress on the floor.

EMILY
Is it okay that I'm here?

Cherry's so happy he could cry. He offers her the box.

CHERRY
I was gonna bring these to you later.

Emily takes a muffin out.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

It was supposed to be a good-bye cake but they only had muffins ready. And there was supposed to be 12, but I had to give one to this guy Tommy because he needed to eat something.

Emily smiles. Then she starts to cry. Cherry has never seen her cry before.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

What's wrong...

For some reason, this makes her cry harder.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

Look, I'm sorry about earlier...

Cherry sits down next to her, starts talking to her as--

CHERRY (V.O.)

I told her how I knew she didn't mean anything by bringing Benji around, and that she was just a sweetheart who believed in diversity and developing countries--

EMILY

--No it's my fault. All of it. I'm fucking awful to you... when you've been nothing but good to me.

She searches his eyes for the first time, desperate and vulnerable in this moment.

EMILY (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry.

CHERRY

You don't ever need to be sorry with me.

She starts crying again. Cherry pulls her in tight, kissing her head.

CHERRY (V.O.)

It was a while before she stopped crying. And then we laughed...

-- CUT TO Emily and Cherry laughing about it.

CHERRY (V.O.)

And then we fucked around...

-- CUT TO Emily and Cherry fucking around.

CHERRY (V.O.)
And then we went to sleep.

-- CUT TO Emily sleeping, nestled into Cherry. He closes his eyes, happy.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. CHERRY'S BEDROOM - LATE MORNING

Hands intertwined. Cherry's chin on Emily's shoulder.

EMILY
I'm not gonna go to Montreal.

A long beat.

CHERRY
I joined the Army.

Emily sits up, floored by this--

EMILY
What? Why the fuck would you do that?

CHERRY
(shrugs)
I was sad, baby...

EMILY
So you joined the fucking *Army*?

Cherry nods. Emily shakes her head, unwilling to accept this.

EMILY (CONT'D)
You have to *un-list*...

CHERRY
I don't see that I can. I signed a contract.

Emily's winded, still trying to process it all.

CHERRY (CONT'D)
Maybe it'll be good... I'll go away. You can still go to your school in Montreal...

EMILY
But I don't wanna go to school in Montreal.

CHERRY
I thought you loved Montreal.

EMILY

I was only going to Montreal to get away from you. Because *I love you*.

ON CHERRY, an intimate understanding of this fucked up sentiment... and he's touched by it.

CHERRY

But school's important to you. You wanna finish, right?

(she nods)

And while you do that, I can do this. And when I come back, they'll pay for me to go to school...

But Emily just can't see the good in it. He appeals to her.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

I fucked up, Em. I failed out of school and this is how I can make it right. It's a couple years. A couple years in a lifetime together...

Cherry's eyes search Emily's now. He can't help but tell her--

CHERRY (CONT'D)

Really, I mean that. Like you're it for me...

Emily searches his eyes, too.

EMILY

I feel the same way...

And they kiss. And kiss more. Lost in each other and so happy. Until Emily pulls away--

EMILY (CONT'D)

Maybe we should get married.

Cherry just looks at her-- *seriously?*

EMILY (CONT'D)

I'm serious! It makes practical sense. You get paid more right? And I could be on your health insurance.

A beat. And Cherry smiles wide.

CHERRY (V.O.)

So we went down to the courthouse and we got married--

INT. SANDWICH SHOP - DAY

Emily and Cherry eat sandwiches, post-ceremony. Emily wears a white dress with flowers in her hair.

CHERRY (V.O.)
--and then we went to our favorite
restaurant to celebrate.

They LAUGH over whatever it is they're talking about. Truly happy and truly in love.

CHERRY (V.O.)
We knew in that moment we were the two most
beautiful things in the world.
(then, as they kiss)
Six billion people and no one had it on us.

DRONE SHOT OF AN ARMY BASE: FORT LEONARD, MISSOURI

CHERRY (V.O.)
But the days ran out...

CHYRON -- PART TWO: BASIC, 2003

CHERRY (V.O.)
...and I had to go basic training.

INT. FORT LEONARD BARBER SHOP - DAY

A RAZOR rolls across a full head of hair.

CHERRY (V.O.)
First, we got the haircut...

REVEAL CHERRY, the suction attachment violently sucking the locks straight off his scalp.

CHERRY (V.O.)
Next we got a hundred fucking shots...

INT. FORT LEONARD CLINIC - DAY

SPEED THROUGH shot after shot after shot jabbing into Cherry's arms, legs, and ass.

CHERRY (V.O.)
Then, I found out I was color-blind...

INT. FORT LEONARD EXAM ROOM - DAY

ON CHERRY, absorbing this news as a NURSE writes in his chart--

CHERRY
 That explains a lot.
 (then to the nurse,
 realizing)
 Wait, can I still be a medic?

NURSE
 (shrugs)
 You already know what color blood is.

INT. FORT LEONARD TRAINING HALL - DAY

THE RECRUITS are lined up. Cherry among them.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 There was a lot of standing in line, and
 our legs ached because we weren't used to
 it--

-- CUT TO Cherry shifting uncomfortably.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 They had us strip down to our underwear and
 duckwalk the circuit of a big room.

-- CUT TO the Recruits duckwalking in their underwear.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 The room smelled of balls, unwashed. And
 feet, ditto.

INT. FORT LEONARD EXAM ROOM 2 - DAY

Cherry, naked in a separate and smaller room now. Bent over. Ass
 cheeks spread...

CHERRY (V.O.)
 And there was a man whose job it was to
 check everybody's asshole--

ASSHOLE MAN
 (clicking off his flashlight)
 I'd say it looks okay.

INT. FORT LEONARD CLOTHING DISPATCH - DAY

A Soldier hands Cherry piles of clothes.

The guy next to Cherry, JIMINEZ (19) is trying on a CLASS A
 UNIFORM. He looks at himself in the mirror.

JIMINEZ

I'ma take my girl out to dinner in this when I get back. Imagine all them patches and medals on it...

FREEZE-FRAME on the earnest Jiminez, grinning with pride--

CHERRY (V.O.)

That's Jiminez. He had gotten his girl pregnant...

INSERT SCENE: CHERRY'S IMAGINING OF JIMINEZ BACK HOME IN EL PASO

Jiminez sits behind the wheel of a parked pick-up truck.

JIMINEZ

I love you so much, and I want this. I'll get a job, I'll take care of you both--

REVEAL HIS GIRL (18) in the passenger's seat, crying.

HIS GIRL

How??

JIMINEZ

We'll figure it out.

INT. FORT LEONARD CAFETERIA - DAY

Cherry and Jiminez sit with other recruits at long tables, like kids at a summer camp.

CHERRY (V.O.)

We had become friends on account of the fact we both wanted to be medics.

JIMINEZ

This food is shit.

CHERRY

Total shit.

DRILL SERGEANT COLE (O.S.)

Why don't you eat meat, Private?

REVEAL DRILL SERGEANT COLE (28) standing over Cherry and Jiminez.

CHERRY

Excuse me, Sergeant?

DRILL SERGEANT COLE

Are you rich?

CHERRY

Not especially.

DRILL SERGEANT COLE

I SAW A SHOW ON TV. IT SAID THAT PEOPLE WHO DON'T EAT MEAT HAVE WEAK MINDS. THEY ARE EASY TO BRAINWASH. THAT MEANS YOU ARE EASY TO BRAINWASH.

CHERRY

YES, DRILL SERGEANT!

DRILL SERGEANT COLE

THROW IT AWAY!

(off Cherry's look)

I WANT YOU TO GET UP, AND THROW THAT GOD DAMN VEGGIE BURGER AWAY. THEN I WANT YOU TO DO PUSH-UPS UNTIL YOU REACH MUSCLE FAILURE.

Cherry gets up and throws it away. Starts doing push ups.

CHERRY (V.O.)

I swear, if the outcomes of all wars were decided by push-ups and idle talk, America might never lose...

EXT. FORT LEONARD FIELD - DAY

Cherry runs, clearly on his last leg. A Drill Sergeant runs alongside him, yelling in his face--

DRILL SERGEANT DECO

DO YOU WANT TO DIE, YOU BEEF CURTAIN??!!
THERE ARE HAJIS BREATHING DOWN YOUR PISS
HOLE!!

CHERRY (V.O.)

There was a lot of yelling...

ON ANOTHER DAY, IN THE FIELD

Cherry's platoon in formation now. QUICK CUTS of Drill Sergeants shouting at various Recruits--

CHERRY (V.O.)

They called us names like--

DRILL SERGEANT COLE

--HIGH SPEED DICK WITH EARS!

CHERRY (V.O.)

Our hands were--

DRILL SERGEANT DECO
--DICK SKINNERS!

CHERRY (V.O.)
Our mouths were--

DRILL SERGEANT COLE
--COCK HOLSTERS!

CHERRY (V.O.)
The Drill Sergeants pretended to be real
angry all the time...

DRILL SERGEANT DECO (26) gets in a kid's face, all wild-eyed and
crazy for show--

DRILL SERGEANT DECO
Don't get too close, boy. I said back the
fuck off! I might wig out and snap your
neck!

CHERRY (V.O.)
PTSD they said...

INT. FORT LEONARD LATRINE - DAY

Cherry stands in line for the toilet.

CHERRY (V.O.)
Like this one time, Drill Sergeant Cole
punched me in the penis for no reason.

Drill Sergeant Cole walks by, punching him in the penis.

CHERRY
And Drill Sergeant Deco even choked a
kid...

EXT. FORT LEONARD FIELD - DAY

Recruits run a drill, dressed for role-play. Drill Sergeant Deco
chokes a kid who's dressed like an Iraqi Man.

CHERRY (O.S.)
Drill Sergeant Deco?

REVEAL a nervous Cherry watching, dressed like an Iraqi Woman
holding flowers. Deco keeps choking--

DRILL SERGEANT DECO
(strained)
Fuckin' haji...

The kid turning blue now--

CHERRY
That's Coppelson, Sarge...

The kid goes unconscious, his body falling to the ground. Cherry looks down at him, horrified...

CHERRY (V.O.)
It wasn't because of PTSD though. Deco hadn't ever been anywhere. He was full of shit.

EXT. FORT LEONARD FIELD - DAY

Cherry and the Recruits back in formation.

CHERRY (V.O.)
Some of the Drill Sergeants had actually seen Iraq. But they were full of shit too...

Drill Sergeant Cole steps forward, like he's telling a ghost story--

DRILL SERGEANT COLE
In Iraq there are children with grenades who try to sneak up on American soldiers so as to *blow them the fuck up*. I had to RUN OVER the hand grenade children with my truck. THIS IS WHY I AM SICK IN THE HEAD!

EXT. FORT LEONARD TRAINING STAIRS - DAY

Cherry and the Recruits run a drill, bounding down stairs with RUBBER M16S, shooting at various POP-UP TARGETS. As they "fire" they say--

CHERRY AND THE RECRUITS
BANG BANG. BANG. BANG BANG BANG.

CHERRY (V.O.)
I started to get a weird feeling like it was all just make believe...

DRILL SERGEANT COLE
HAJI ON THE LEFT!

CHERRY
BANG BANG.

DRILL SERGEANT COLE
HAJI ON THE RIGHT!

CHERRY
BANG BANG.

DRILL SERGEANT COLE
HAJI BEHIND!

CHERRY
BANG BANG.

CHERRY (V.O.)
That we were pretending to be soldiers...

PRELAP *The Army Song*--

81 **EXT. FORT LEONARD MAIN FIELD - DAY**

81

FOLLOW CHERRY singing *The Army Song* with the other Recruits as they march in a circle. FROM CHERRY'S POV: The other Recruits' uniforms suddenly look like OVER-SIZED COSTUMES.

CHERRY (V.O.)
The Drill Sergeants were just pretending to be Drill Sergeants...

The Drill Sergeants shout nonsense--

DRILL SERGEANT COLE
JABERWOCKY! JABERWOCKY! JABERWOCKY!

DRILL SERGEANT DECO
MISH MASH! MISH MASH! MISH MASH!

WIDE SHOT of TWO HUNDRED SOLDIERS marching chaotically now--

CHERRY (V.O.)
And the Army was pretending to be the Army.

All are singing the song on top of each other... until it builds to a maddening crescendo... THEN SILENCE.

INT. FORT LEONARD LATRINE - NIGHT

The steam-filled bathroom is seemingly empty, save for Cherry who exits one of the shower stalls in a towel.

CHERRY (V.O.)
The only way not to graduate basic was to try and kill yourself.

Cherry lathers up with shaving cream in a mirror. Unbeknownst to him, in the deep background, ANOTHER RECRUIT throws a rope over a pipe.

CHERRY (V.O.)
One kid tried to hang himself from the water pipe in the latrine...

The kid steps off a bench, hanging himself. Suddenly, a LOUD CRASH as the pipe breaks, the recruit crashing to the ground.

Cherry turns to see the kid lying there with the rope around his neck. Water sprays from the pipe--

CHERRY (V.O.)
He didn't die. But he didn't graduate either.

FADE TO BLACK.

PRELAP CHERRY
(whispering)
Can you hear me?

INT. FORT LEONARD HALLWAY - PAYPHONE - NIGHT

Cherry on the payphone in the middle of the night, whispering--

EMILY (OVER PHONE)
Yes, hi! Are you alright?

CHERRY
Yeah. I snuck out of the barracks.

EMILY (OVER PHONE)
But are you okay?

He closes his eyes, just reveling in hearing her.

CHERRY
I'm good now...

INT. FORT LEONARD MEDIC CLASSROOM - DAY

Cherry, Jiminez, and the medics-to-be crawl on the floor, surrounded by MANNEQUINS. A blown out speaker plays WAR NOISES.

DRILL SERGEANT MURPHY
HEADS DOWN! ASSES DOWN!!

CHERRY (V.O.)
When it was finally time for classroom instruction, there was a lot of fucking around with mannequins...

QUICK CUTS OF THE VARIOUS MANNEQUINS--

CHERRY (V.O.)
There were mannequins that were just trunks with heads. There were mannequins with rubber bones sticking out of their legs.
(MORE)

CHERRY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

There were mannequins that could squirt fake blood. There were even little baby mannequins with cherubim faces.

SERIES OF CUTS: Each time DRILL SERGEANT MURPHY (28) blows his WHISTLE, Cherry stops at the dummy he is closest to, pretends to treat the wounded patient--

DRILL SERGEANT MURPHY

BLOOD PRESSURE DROPPED TO SEVENTY OVER TWENTY / SUCKING CHEST WOUND / SEVERE FACIAL BURNS AROUND THE MOUTH AND NOSE!

CHERRY (V.O.)

I saved the lives of 47 dummies. And so I passed the class...

END ON CHERRY WITH THE OTHER MEDICS IN HIS CLASS: All posing, faux gang signs, next to their grotesques DUMMIES in front of a painted Iraq backdrop.

SNAP! As a PHOTO is captured--

EXT. FORT LEONARD MAIN FIELD - DAY

Recruits in the usual line-up. There is a palpable tension in the air today as DRILL SERGEANT MASTERS (28), a perfect honky if ever there was one, paces back and forth...

DRILL SERGEANT MASTERS

WARRIOR MEDICS, YOU WERE TOLD TO COME UP WITH A COMPANY CHEER. YOU WERE GIVEN A WEEK TO DO THIS. THIS IS WHAT IS CALLED A DEADLINE. AS OF NOW YOU HAVE MISSED THE DEADLINE...

(a tense beat)

NOW. SINCE YOU HAVE FAILED TO COME UP WITH A COMPANY CHEER, I HAVE TAKEN WHAT IS CALLED THE INITIATIVE AND COME UP WITH ONE FOR YOU. ONE WHICH YOU WILL HAVE TO LEARN.

CHERRY (V.O.)

And *this* is what he came up with--

Drill Sergeant Masters delivers an impassioned performance--

DRILL SERGEANT MASTERS

Warrior Medics in the fight!
On the double day and night!
We will beat out all the rest!
Charlie Company is the best!
Don't stop! Get it, get it!
Soldier on, Warrior Medic!
Don't stop! Get it, get it!

(MORE)

DRILL SERGEANT MASTERS

Wooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo-
 OoooooooooooooooooooooOooooooooo-
 OooooooooooooooooooooooooooooAAH!
 MAKE! Way! Here come the Warrior Medics!
 Oo! Ta-ah! Here come the Warrior Medics!
 MAKE! Way! Here come the Warrior Medics!
 Oo! Ta-ah! Here come the Warrior Medics!
 MAKE! Way! Here come the Warrior Medics!
 Oo! Ta-ah! Here come the Warrior Medics!

CHERRY (V.O.)

The refrain was to go on indefinitely, till we were signaled to stop.

-- CUT TO the Medics doing the Company Cheer.

CHERRY (V.O.)

And from that day on, whenever the company was called to attention, something that happened no less than a million times on any given day, the company cheer was to be recited in its entirety. No exceptions. To make matters worse, after a while it got to be expected that the guidon bearer would do the robot throughout the refrain.

-- CUT TO Cherry as the guidon bearer, doing the robot.

CHERRY (V.O.)

So don't ever join the fucking Army.

THE SOUND OF CHOPPERS TAKES US TO--

A FLEET OF BLACK HAWKS SWEEP OVER BURNING OIL FIELDS IN A DESERT WASTELAND. TWO JETS CREASE THE FRAME, COUNTERING...

CHYRON -- PART THREE: CHERRY

CHERRY (V.O.)

Unless you happen to have been in Iraq, you've never heard of where we were, so it doesn't matter...

FIND A CARAVAN OF HUMVEES crossing this great expanse--

INT. HUMVEE, DRIVING - DAY

Cherry and Jiminez sit in the back of a moving Humvee, clutching their medic bags, anxious. CHEETAH drives. No one is in the turret.

CHERRY (V.O.)

You were wide awake when you got on the ground outside the wire for the first time. You expected to get shot at any moment.

Cherry scans his sector--

HIS POV: miles of nothing surround. Just small mounds of dirt stretching to meet the horizon, reflecting a pinkish hue up into the sky...

CHERRY (V.O.)

Even if it was a spot you couldn't see anyone for miles, you were nevertheless sure that there was a haji out there who had been waiting all day just to shoot you.

The crackle of gunfire over the radio, followed by an urgent VOICE...

VOICE (OVER RADIO)

Attention on the net. Attention on the net. Troops in contact. Current location, Victor Sierra. 4 5 3, 1 3 2. Standby for SALUTE REPORT.

STAFF SERGEANT GREENE

(grabbing the radio)

X-RAY ONE SEVEN, this is PAPA ONE BRAVO. Roger, understand location 4 5 3, 1 3 2. Standing by.

(to Cheetah)

Get us in there...

Cherry and Jiminez share a look, nervous, as--

FROM OUTSIDE: The caravan of Humvees pick up speed--

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

Mayhem. Chaos. Smoke and fire.

We are in the middle of a brutal ambush. Five U.S. Humvee's are surrounded. Three ablaze. Insurgents in the hills surrounding.

A Soldier drags a KIA to one of the two functioning Humvees.

A wounded AMBUSH SERGEANT kneels at a radio, barking orders to his unit as he goes--

AMBUSH SERGEANT

(yelling)

Get that fucking gun operational! Troops on the left!

STAFF SERGEANT GREENE
 (OVER RADIO)
 Thirty seconds out.

AMBUSH SERGEANT
 (into radio)
 Roger, standby for signal.
 (to his men)
 Smoke out! Smoke out!

Soldiers start hurling canisters filled with white screen smoke into the dead zones.

REVEAL the QRF arriving, fanning out.

We race down the hill towards the QRF as the Gunners light up the hillside. We spilt the deafening fifty calcs on two arriving Humvees, just as soldiers disembark.

We land on Cherry, in vehicle four, panicked, adrenalized.

AMBUSH SERGEANT (OVER
 RADIO) (CONT'D)
 ...two wounded that I need immediate
 CASEVAC for. Five KIA.

STAFF SERGEANT GREENE
 (into radio)
 Roger, link up at smoke.
 (to Cherry and Jiminez)
 Get your shit, let's go.

Cherry and Jiminez nod, swallowing hard, taking in the insanity--

JIMINEZ
 Holy shit...

They grab their med bags and bail out of the vehicle, Cherry tripping, Greene dragging him to his feet.

STAFF SERGEANT GREENE
 Stay on me!

He leads Cherry and Jiminez through the lead vehicles. The fifty calcs are deafening. Cherry's hands are plastered to his ears. He looks like he just shit his pants.

As they break from the vehicles, Soldiers flood down the hill towards them. One of the Soldiers, leading a wounded comrade, screams at Cherry...

SOLDIER
 Medics up!! Medics up!!

Greene breaks into a run, Cherry and Jiminez plunge into the madness behind him, like two underweight freshman being thrown into the final minutes of the big game. GUNFIRE everywhere--

Cherry and Jiminez follow Greene into a defilade in the hillside, ducking as low as they possibly can. They wind their way past the first Humvee, an RPG exploding only feet away from them.

Cherry spots a bleeding soldier firing at the insurgents. He stops to help him.

CHERRY

You're wounded!

WOUNDED SOLDIER

No shit!

As he tries to treat the man's bleeding shoulder..

WOUNDED SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Get the fuck off me!

(points)

Up the hill! Up the hill!

STAFF SERGEANT GREENE

Doc! Doc!!

Cherry looks up to see Jiminez and Greene waiting for him, hunched under one of the functional Humvees. The fifty cal blaring.

Cherry runs to them. Greene knocks him to his knees.

STAFF SERGEANT GREENE (CONT'D)

Down! Down!

Greene crawls under the fifty cal dragging Cherry with him to cover. They land next to the Ambush Sergeant. Jiminez follows.

AMBUSH SERGEANT

(to Greene)

Two WIA's, lead Humvee.

STAFF SERGEANT GREENE

On it.

Greene breaks into a sprint towards the lead Humvee. Cherry and Jiminez lay there, completely overwhelmed.

AMBUSH SERGEANT

(to Cherry and Jiminez)

What the fuck are you doing??? Go!!! Go!!!

They scramble to their feet and sprint after Greene.

Cherry suddenly does a face plant. Looking back-- he's tripped over a blackened body, burnt to a crisp. Smoke still simmering from the seared flesh. Cherry's stunned, his brain unable to process what he's looking at. The sounds of the battle giving way to his breathing. Cherry is going "black"...

VOICE (O.C.)

Hey Man!

A hand grabs his shoulder. He looks, it's Jiminez.

JIMINEZ

Keep moving! Keep moving!

Cherry comes back. Slowly picks himself up, and follows Jiminez.

They finally arrive at the lead Humvee. There's two WOUNDED, SCREAMING SOLDIERS on the ground.

A more SEASONED MEDIC (24) is treating one of them. He barks at Cherry and Jiminez--

SEASONED MEDIC

THAT ONE-- GET HIS GUTS BACK IN!!

They look to the other wounded soldier, whose guts are spilling out.

Cherry, in shock, reaches for the Soldier's innards, and with his bare hands scoops them against his stomach. Jiminez applies the wrap. They then pull him onto the litter.

A Marine Chopper approaches in the distance. Greene and the Seasoned Medic lift the other litter, break into a run--

STAFF SERGEANT GREENE

(as he passes Cherry and
Jiminez)

Down the hill! GO.

Cherry and Jiminez follow, litter in hand.

APPROACHING THE LZ

Soldiers stream up the hill, past them, finally gaining control of the firefight. THE CHOPPER LANDS IN A SECURE LZ, HUMVEES SURROUNDING IT.

ARRIVING AT THE CHOPPER: Cherry and Jiminez wait to load the barely conscious soldier onto the CASEVAC.

CHERRY (V.O.)

In the dust, I could see the man's face...

The Soldier locks eyes with Cherry and TIME SLOWS FOR A MOMENT--

CHERRY (V.O.)

His eyes were wild and grieving. He was in his lizard brain. We locked eyes and I said--

CHERRY

(shouting)

--I GOT YOU!

CHERRY (V.O.)

I said it real loud so he could hear me over the helicopter. And then I was embarrassed because it was a stupid and melodramatic thing to have said.

Cherry gives one last look towards him as they load him on the chopper...

STAFF SERGEANT GREENE

(to Cherry)

Back up! Back up!!

He pulls Cherry away as the CASEVAC lifts into the air.

OFF CHERRY, forever changed--

EXT. FOB (FORWARD OPERATING BASE) - DAY

A DRONE SHOT SWEEPS OVER THE BASE...

FIND: Cherry and Jiminez, both still traumatized, traverse the base. Other people's BLOOD covers their uniforms...

CHERRY (V.O.)

Our Company was Delta. I was the medic assigned to Second Platoon. Jiminez was assigned to Third.

They walk past a soldier sucking shit from the "porta-shitters" through a long hose; another sleeping face-down, sunbathing in his underwear--

MOMENTS LATER, AT THE SHOWERS

Cherry and Jiminez stand naked in adjacent showers...

ON CHERRY: Quiet and still, watching red-tinged water rush down the drain, a melancholy taking hold when--

JIMINEZ (O.S.)
 Fuck. I can't get the blood outta my
 wedding ring...

ON JIMINEZ: Scrubbing at his knuckles--

CHERRY (V.O.)
 They told us not to wear our wedding rings,
 in the event they got caught on something.
 (beat)
 But Jiminez wore his anyway...

CLOSE ON THE GOLD RING: Jiminez's thumbnail scrapes at blood
 encrusted between small diamond chips.

INT. BARRACKS

A DRONE SHOT AS CHERRY AND JIMINEZ EXIT THE SHOWERS. THE DRONE
 SLOWLY CREEPS TOWARDS THE FRONT OF THE BARRACKS, REVEALING:
 VARIOUS SOLDIERS FUCKING AROUND, CHARGED WITH HEIGHTENED
 TESTOSTERONE--

CHERRY (V.O.)
 In the early days the infantry felt like
 they were ten feet tall and invincible.
 They were impatient to begin killing. They
 wanted to kill so bad. There was a
 profligate confidence in our firepower.
 There was a bullshit camaraderie.

INT. LIVING QUARTERS, CHERRY'S BUNK - DAY

Cherry's in his bunk, a collection of misfits are littered
 around the room...

CHERRY (V.O.)
 I went back to the room I stayed in.
 Bautista, Yuri, Lessing, Cheetah: they were
 there--

INSERT QUICK SHOTS OF EACH OF THEM: FOLLOWED BY DEATH
CERTIFICATES being typed up: Bautista, Yuri, Lessing-- place of
 birth, rank, cause of death, photo.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 Everyone but Arnold was there. He was on
 radio watch. Even though I was just
 arriving back, they had heard already...

LESSING
 Dude, what the fuck happened?

CHERRY (V.O.)
I didn't really know what the fuck had
happened but I started to tell them--

CHERRY
--You could see all the bones sticking out
of their bodies.

CHERRY (V.O.)
And then Arnold got back--

ARNOLD
--Hey--

ARNOLD enters, wearing thick, military-issued EYEGLASSES. QUICK
SHOTS of his DEATH CERTIFICATE typed up.

ARNOLD (CONT'D)
--I heard on the radio that the guys you
put on the helicopter are dead.

ON CHERRY, utterly devastated by this news.

MOMENTS LATER, IN THE LIVING QUARTERS

A concerned Cherry finds STAFF SERGEANT GREENE at his desk--

CHERRY
Sarge, is it true the guys we put on the
bird are dead?

STAFF SERGEANT GREENE
Who told you that?

CHERRY
Arnold said he heard on the net that they
were dead.

STAFF SERGEANT GREENE
Arnold's a fucking retard.

REVEAL Arnold is standing next to Cherry.

ARNOLD
I thought that was what I heard, Sarge.

STAFF SERGEANT GREENE
Shut up, Arnold.

FREEZE-FRAME on Greene--

CHERRY (V.O.)
Staff Sergeant Greene had been a line cook
and enlisted after September 11...

INSERT SCENE: CHERRY'S IMAGINING OF GREENE OUT IN THE WORLD

THE FOOTAGE IS PIXALATED, AS IF IT'S BEEN SHOT ON A TV SCREEN:

The South Tower falls. REVEAL Greene, draped in an apron, standing on a Brooklyn rooftop, crying as he watches. Other kitchen workers behind him.

CHERRY (V.O.)

They said he'd already killed 15 hajis. He was a hard motherfucker.

BACK TO THE LIVING QUARTERS

CHERRY

So they're not dead?

Greene considers Cherry, then--

STAFF SERGEANT GREENE

Quit worrying so much...

(beat)

You got your cherry popped today...

Not the answer Cherry was looking for...

LATER, IN THE BUNKS - NIGHT

The whole crew ponders the day's events. Bautista shrugs--

BAUTISTA

We took eight fucking casualties today.

YURI

Out of *eight hundred*.

CHEETAH

And we're here for a fucking year.

Cherry processes this--

CHERRY

A year's worth of fucking days.

(beat)

Do the math...

ARNOLD

We're fucked.

LESSING

(incredulous)

What did you guys think you were coming here to do?

A quiet realization settles over the group.

CHERRY
And he was right...

AN EXPLOSION!

U.S. TANKS FIRE IN SLOW MOTION...

CHERRY (V.O.)
Everything there was about dying.

REVEAL A CARAVAN OF HUMVEES ENTERING FRAME, ALSO IN SLOW MOTION. THEY ARE SHADOWED BY TWO BLACKHAWKS. They travel like a circus train across the horizon.

CHERRY (V.O.)
They even called the area we were stationed
in the Triangle of Death...

VARIOUS SHOTS OF THE HUMVEE TRAIN CROSSING THE TERRAIN IN EVERY DIRECTION....

CHERRY
And like idiots, we patrolled every inch of
it.

INT. HUMVEE, DRIVING - DAY

ON CHERRY, dust caked, blood caked, weary as he rides. He watches a similarly tired Jiminez fidget with his wedding ring--

CHERRY (V.O.)
I'm not gonna lie. Most days it felt like
we were just glorified scarecrows...

Cherry sighs, clearly missing Emily...

EXT. VILLAGE CHECKPOINT - ENTERING THE FOB ZONE

The Humvee stops at the checkpoint-- the vehicle swarmed by filthy IRAQI CHILDREN, mostly skinny shoeless boys.

IRAQI KIDS
MRE! MRE!

ARNOLD
Look, it's Pebbles...

Cherry finds the one GIRL among them (maybe 7 or maybe older and more malnourished). She has hair like a bird's nest and her dress is tattered like something out of the Flintstones.

JIMINEZ

She does look like Pebbles.

SERGEANT NORTH (23), who is sitting up front, hears this. He looks at the small girl begging. Just then, the Humvee starts up again--

SERGEANT NORTH

(to Cheetah)

Stop the vehicle.

CHEETAH (22, Somali) stops. North opens the door and holds out an MRE, gesturing to Pebbles.

SERGEANT NORTH (CONT'D)

Come here-- come here little Pebbles--

CHERRY (V.O.)

That's Sergeant North. He took over for Sergeant Greene after Greene got promoted. North didn't look like it, but he was also a killer...

INSERT SCENE: CHERRY'S IMAGINING OF NORTH OUT IN THE WORLD

WE'RE OUTSIDE A PONTIAC, SLAYER THRASHING OVER A BLOWN SUBWOOFER. We hear a struggle as North's date begs him to stop.

CHERRY (V.O.)

And he was from Idaho.

BACK TO THE HUMVEE

"Pebbles" hurries to North, reaching for the MRE. As soon as she arrives, North pulls the MRE out of her reach and SLAMS the up-armored door.

North laughs like an asshole. The Humvee starts up again.

Cherry watches Pebbles out the window, getting swallowed up by the dust in their wake.

PRELAP MUSIC--

EXT. BLUE SKY - DAY

FOUR FORBIDDING BLACK HAWKS charge across blue sky.

CHERRY (V.O.)

On Christmas Day, the Denver Mustang Cheerleaders arrived...

EXT. FOB, REC AREA - DAY

HIGH-KICKS breaking frame as a chopper hovers in the background. NUDE FISHNETS lace across thighs; KNEE-HIGH WHITE BOOTS kick up sand.

CHERRY (V.O.)

And they waved and bounced with their white teeth...

-- CUT TO DENVER MUSTANG CHEERLEADERS mid-routine. Bouncing in the middle of the desert. Waving and flashing their white teeth. Christmas Garland and lights strung around.

CHERRY (V.O.)

And the whole thing seemed kind of goddamn awful. Beautiful women with skin like expensive cream. It wasn't like they were going to fuck you...

-- SLOW MOTION on their hips as they dance. PANNING UP to their tanned chests and faces, eyes throwing amorous winks.

CHERRY (V.O.)

And that was what this was all about: you were supposed to want to fuck them, and they were supposed to not fuck you.

-- CUT TO SOLDIERS taking pictures with the Cheerleaders. Lessing squeezes between six of them, ogling their cleavage.

CHERRY (V.O.)

But I was okay with that...

-- PAN TO CHERRY standing off to the side with Jiminez.

CHERRY (V.O.)

I didn't even watch much porn, you know. And when I'd jerk off in the porta-shitters, I didn't think of other girls.

CUT TO CHERRY JERKING OFF IN A PORTA-SHITTER

CHERRY (V.O.)

I'm not ashamed of this. I tried to be good.

He closes his eyes and...

CUT TO Emily, wearing her white ribbon around her neck at Maggie's Party... except she's dressed only in her pink bra and underwear. She smiles at us, swinging.

PRELAP CHERRY

I miss you...

INT. LIVING QUARTERS - DAY

Cherry is on the phone, a couple soldiers waiting behind him.

CHERRY

I miss you so much.

INTERCUT WITH: Emily studying with classmates. Her phone rings.

EMILY

I miss you too! I have good news...

CHERRY

What?

EMILY

Your parents offered to help us get a starter home.

ON CHERRY, smiling. Imagining this new home with her.

EMILY (CONT'D)

You there... ?

CHERRY

Yeah. Yeah, I'm here... just happy is all.

SOLDIER IN LINE

(getting impatient)

Time!

CHERRY

Jesus Christ...

SOLDIER IN LINE

Get off the phone already--

CHERRY

(snaps)

--Gimme a minute!

(then, quietly to Emily)

I think about you everywhere I go...

SOLDIER IN LINE

(to Cherry)

Fuck you, new dick!

CHERRY

(to the Soldier)

Fuck you!

EMILY

What is it?

CHERRY

Nothing. I just... I can't wait to be there with you.

SERGEANT NORTH

(to Cherry)

TIME, PRIVATE!

CHERRY

Fuck!

SERGEANT NORTH

TIME. PRIVATE.

CHERRY

(beat)

I gotta go. I love you.

EMILY

I love you.

INT. IRAQI SCHOOLHOUSE - DAY

A LONG LINE of Iraqis wait to be treated at a U.S. pop-up clinic. There's pushing and shoving.

North oversees Cheetah, Lessing, Yuri and Bautista as they try to get the crowd in order. Stringing wire.

Arnold mans the gun of a bordering Humvee.

SERGEANT NORTH

Get their asses in line. Let's go!

An Iraqi man argues with Lessing...

LESSING

(speaking loud and slow)

You don't back up, we ain't gonna fucking help you. BACK UP!

YURI

(to Bautista)

This idiot isn't moving.

BAUTISTA

(to the Iraqi man)

I'm gonna fucking blast you, you don't get in line. GET IN LINE!

CHERRY (V.O.)

When we were sent out to "win the hearts and minds," we worked in pop-up clinics at various schools and town squares and what not. Medical Civil Action Programs they called them...

FIND Cherry, next to Jiminez, inspecting deep lacerations on an OLD HAJI's wrists. An INTERPRETER listens to the Haji, then tells Cherry--

INTERPRETER

He says they're from when he was Zip-tied a few days ago.

-- CUT TO Cherry washing the lacerations out.

-- CUT TO Cherry bandaging them with gauze when he notices the old man's hand has SWELLED UP.

CHERRY

(to Jiminez)

Jesus. Look at his hand.

JIMINEZ

You got any antibiotics?

CHERRY

No.

JIMINEZ

I'm out too...

-- CUT TO Cherry approaching the same Seasoned Medic who yelled at him to help get the guy's guts back in. The Medic is asleep.

CHERRY

'Scuse me, Sarge? Sarge?

He pops an eye open, annoyed.

-- CUT TO The Haji's swollen hand, shaking now.

CHERRY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

What do you think about this?

-- REVEAL Cherry and the Seasoned Medic with the old man.

SEASONED MEDIC

It's cellulitis.

CHERRY

We're out of antibiotics.

SEASONED MEDIC

So.

CHERRY

Well, what can I do for this guy?

SEASONED MEDIC

Nothing.

CHERRY

What should I tell him?

SEASONED MEDIC

Tell him to eat shit and die.

CHERRY (V.O.)

This was the kind of crap that happened.

The Seasoned Medic leaves. A concerned Cherry looks to the interpreter--

CHERRY

Tell him to go to a hospital and try and get some antibiotics from a doctor because I don't have any medicine.

DRONE SHOT OF OIL BURNING AT DUSK, CASTING ITS ORANGE GLOW

REVEAL a caravan of HUMVEES, riding past--

CHERRY(V.O.)

I went on a fuckload of patrols. Especially after First Platoon's medic got wounded. As in he was so fucked up, he wasn't coming back...

EXT. IRAQ TOWN - NIGHT

ON CHERRY, face painted, moving stealthily with first platoon down a dark alley.

CHERRY(V.O.)

I didn't like going out with First Platoon because they did night patrols and they were all tough guys and they weren't trying to lie about shit. They would say--

RODGERS

--I want to kill somebody--

CHERRY (V.O.)

--Really anybody if it came to it. It was that simple.

(MORE)

CHERRY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But when there wasn't anybody for them to kill, we'd just walk around. And when we got bored enough, we'd talk...

CLOVER

Hey Doc, you ever suck computer duster?

CHERRY (V.O.)

And they were all huffers...

Cherry shakes his head.

CLOVER

You ain't livin', brother.

CHERRY (V.O.)

Indeed I had done it. Just the week before...

INSERT FLASHBACK: BEHIND THE FOB, JUST THE WEEK BEFORE

Cherry and Bautista are crouched between two abutting tents.

Bautista slips a can of COMPUTER DUSTER from his bag, like a kid who's just swiped a candy bar--

BAUTISTA

You know what to do?

Cherry shakes his head, nervous but attempting not to show it.

BAUTISTA (CONT'D)

Like this--

Bautista sprays the can into a balled-up tee-shirt. Presses the shirt over his mouth, inhaling deep.

BAUTISTA (CONT'D)

Just like that.

Cherry hesitates, takes the can. He tries, but with markedly less ardor and intensity.

Bautista grabs the can back, having another go as--

CHERRY (V.O.)

Bautista huffed till he lost touch with his central nervous system. He swayed back and forth like a blind piano player...

CUT TO Cherry, fucked up and watching Bautista-- who has a stream of drool running from his lip and pooling in his lap. He sways back and forth, blindly playing the piano.

CHERRY (V.O.)

It was enough to make me not want to try again.

BACK WITH FIRST PLATOON

Rodgers and Clover fuck with Cherry--

RODGERS

You scared of getting hit, Doc?

REVEAL A DOG BARKING AT THE SOLDIERS.

CHERRY

I'd prefer not to get hit if I had any say in it.

CLOVER

I want to get hit cause I'd get free hunting and fishing licenses for life if I had a Purple Heart.

Cherry considers this.

RODGERS

What, you don't want a Purple Heart, Doc?

CHERRY

Not especially.

Rodgers scoffs at Cherry...

RODGERS

Fucking pussy...

A gunshot off camera. The dog cries in pain.

As Cherry rounds a corner, he spies the dog's motionless body laying in the square. Cherry closes his eyes, as if to try and escape...

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. BLACKHAWK

We are inside a Blackhawk, looking down over the Gunner at a line of Humvees stopped in the road. The lead Humvee, post IED, is engulfed in flames.

CHERRY

By January, Arnold had been assigned to another squad after they lost their gunner.

PILOT (O.S.)
Base this is YANKEE FOUR TWO, spot report follows over....

BASE (O.S.)
YANKEE FOUR TWO, this is base. Send spot report, over.

One survivor, engulfed in flames, runs away from the burning vehicle, before collapsing in the dirt. Other soldiers race to put him out...

PILOT (O.S.)
Observe one US Forces Humvee on fire. One friendly casualty, also on fire. Appears to be KIA...

CHERRY (V.O.)
Two days later he was dead.

ZOOM IN on the burning body.

BASE (O.S.)
Spot report received, YANKEE FOUR TWO.

CHERRY (V.O.)
They told us to pack up his stuff...

INT. FOB, CHERRY'S BUNK - DAY

Cherry and the others pack up Arnold's things, including his eyeglasses.

CHERRY (V.O.)
But it seemed pointless. He was dead as shit.

LATER

Cherry lays on his bunk with his headphones in. The others lay on their bunks too. One bed is empty. Cherry considers it--

CHERRY (V.O.)
Who needed it...

EXT. HUMVEE, LEAVING THE FOB CHECKPOINT - DAY

The HUMVEE TRAIN waits to exit. Cheetah in the driver's seat, North shotgun. Cherry and Jiminez in back, with Bautista now the gunner.

The kids swarm their Humvee. Cherry calls Pebbles over. He hands her an MRE. North watches him, hating his guts.

As the Humvee rolls away, Cherry watches Pebbles. She holds the MRE tight against her chest, running off with it as--

One of the shoeless boys punches her in the head, takes the MRE away from her.

North laughs--

SERGEANT NORTH

Look at that. You made her fucking day...

Cherry watches Pebbles. She lays in the dust, crying...

EXT. HUMVEE, DRIVING - MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

The Humvee train navigates a dirt road through a mountain pass. As the pass opens up, North picks up his radio--

NORTH

(into radio)

PAPA ONE BRAVO FOUR, this is PAPA ONE BRAVO SEVEN. Audible. We're gonna get off this line...

North clicks off the radio as Cherry watches them veer off the main road, onto caked dirt.

CHERRY

'Scuse me, Sergeant North...

SERGEANT NORTH

What is it, fuckstick?

CHERRY

I don't think we should try to drive through here. We oughta stay on the road.

SERGEANT NORTH

(with disdain)

Oh. Is that what you think, you fucking PFC wanna be a private?

CHERRY

(beat)

Yes. That's what I think, Sergeant.

SERGEANT NORTH

That road runs right through an "oh shit" zone. You want I should put all these men in danger 'cause you don't wanna save two minutes?

Cherry considers that, can't help but tell him--

CHERRY

It's just-- When I was out with First Platoon, we got four vehicles stuck in here trying to drive through this shit.

SERGEANT NORTH

Looks fine to me.

CHERRY

It ain't fine. It's all shit under the surface--

North turns around, looking at Cherry--

SERGEANT NORTH

Enough! Close your fucking man pleaser.
(then, to Cheetah)
Floor it, Cheetah.

MOMENTS LATER, OUTSIDE THE HUMVEE

Wheels spin in the mud as Cherry and company stand out in the open now, nervous and clutching weapons. A gunner scans the area, tense, as--

Sergeant North signals for the driver to stop. Kicks the tire.

SERGEANT NORTH

Motherfuck a whore!!
(yelling)
Cheetah, get up here and pull this goddamn POS out of the mud!

Cherry can't hold back--

CHERRY

You don't want to do that, Sarge. That's exactly what we did. You'll only make things harder for QRF when they get here. You need a Bradley with a tow cable.

SERGEANT NORTH

Shut the fuck up and watch your sector...

CHERRY

You need a Bradley--

SERGEANT NORTH

--Shut. The Fuck. Up.

MOMENTS LATER

TWO HUMVEES are stuck in the mud; even more soldiers baking in the sun.

SERGEANT NORTH

Shit!

(beat)

Shit! Shit! Shit!

Cherry watches from afar now, providing cover near to the THIRD TRUCK (the only truck not stuck in the mud). Jiminez, Lessing and Yuri are with him, weapons at the ready.

Bautista's inside the Third Truck on radio--

BAUTISTA

North says QRF can't get here for a few hours. He wants us to go back and get a Bradley with a tow cable.

CHERRY

(pissed)

No shit.

BAUTISTA

Now he's saying he wants you to get back down there and get on radio watch.

CHERRY

Tell him I said get fucked.

BAUTISTA

(skips a beat)

Really?

CHERRY

(yeah)

Tell him I said get fucked...

BAUTISTA (INTO RADIO)

Says he's coming, Sarge.

Cheetah approaches now--

CHEETAH

Come on guys, move out--

YURI

(to Cheetah)

What are you North's bottom?

CHEETAH

No, I don't want to spend the next 4 hours waitin' to get shot.

LESSING

Cheetah just loves America...

They laugh.

CHEETAH

I do! I'm fighting to be a member of this great country--

(then)

Not *this* great country-- I never want to come back to this fucking shit-hole sand-box ever again--

Jiminez gives Cherry a pat on the back as the others start getting in their Humvee--

JIMINEZ

Don't let North fuck with you too hard.

LESSING

Think he means don't let North *fuck you* too hard.

Yuri fires up the engine - Jiminez, Lessing, and Bautista also inside. The Humvee pulls away as--

MOMENTS LATER

North gets out of the Humvee as Cherry and Cheetah approach. Cherry climbs in, tension rising. He grabs the handset, clipping it to him, when--

BOOM! THIS IS THE LOUDEST EXPLOSION!

Cherry spins around in his seat-- And for one moment, there is an eerie sense of quiet. No sound at all... and it's another moment before Cherry knows if he's even alive... and then he realizes...

The Humvee with his friends has hit an IED and is now dust.

FOLLOW CHERRY, GETTING OUT OF HIS HUMVEE AND RUNNING STRAIGHT TOWARD THE CHAOS

North is heard shouting after him--

SERGEANT NORTH (O.S.)

Don't fucking run into it!

But a force beyond Cherry's control is sending him head-first INTO THE FIRE, overwhelmed by--

Body parts scattered on the ground. The imprint of a face melted to a window. All the faces are burned off, actually... there are no faces left. Cherry takes in each horror as TIME SLOWS--

CHERRY (V.O.)

The smell is something you already know.
It's coded in your blood. The smoke gets
into every pore and every gland, your mouth
full of it to where you may as well be
eating it.

A SERIES OF CUTS: Cherry, running back and forth from the
culvert to the burning Humvee, his helmet full with water... and
it's not occurring to him that this is useless, since everyone
is fucking dead already.

MOMENTS LATER

-- CUT TO other soldiers arriving now, joining in to help him,
using helmets, ammo cans, whatever.

LATER

The Captain arrives, taking the scene in, his eyes landing on--

CHERRY standing immobile where the fire once burned. He's
looking up at Bautista, who's on the platform under the turret--
A burned-up skull with empty sockets, teeth clenched.

The Captain approaches Cherry with gentle tact--

CAPTAIN

Private...

CHERRY

(beat)

That's Bautista. He was the gunner...

The Captain gives Cherry a look as if to say, *help me get him*.

And, together, they pick up Bautista's CORPSE-- Cherry has it by
the top half and the Captain has it by the legs. The black
muscle tissue is scalding, slick. Cherry lets go, his hands
searing--

CHERRY (CONT'D)

Shit my gloves are melting-- I'm sorry,
Captain--

--he rips the gloves off, hands trembling.

The Captain, acutely aware that Cherry is on the verge of
falling to pieces--

CAPTAIN

It's alright. Try hooking your arms
instead.

Cherry nods and they hoist the corpse up again, Cherry hooking his arms under Yuri's this time.

A SERIES OF CUTS: Cherry and the Captain carrying Bautista; Bautista set down in a body bag; Bautista zipped up inside-- Gone.

Cherry notices Cheetah watching, shaken.

CHERRY
That was Bautista...

CHEETAH
I think there's some more of him still in the truck.

TIGHT ON CHERRY, scraping a piece of Bautista off the seared seat. He doesn't know what to do, so he throws it in the water.

CUT TO CHERRY: Staring at Lessing's melted face stuck to the front windshield. He says to the Captain...

CHERRY
That one was Lessing...

Then he notices SOMETHING on the ground next to him. STAY ON CHERRY'S FACE as he considers it, his jaw tensing...

CHERRY (CONT'D)
(to the Captain)
This one's Jiminez.

REVEAL A LEFT HAND lying on the ground, severed from the rest of its body-- Jiminez's gold WEDDING RING still in place underneath.

LATER

SLANT BACK HUMVEES taking away the bodies now. Cherry stands there like a lost dog--

SERGEANT NORTH
Let's get back in the vehicle, Private.

CHERRY
(beat)
No.

SERGEANT NORTH
Come on, man.

CHERRY
I'm not getting back in the fucking vehicle.

SERGEANT NORTH

Look, I know you're upset. We're all upset.
But we need to get back to the FOB--

CHERRY

I'm not going anywhere with you.

North is caught off guard.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

How many times are you gonna ignore me when I try to tell you something you need to know? I don't tell you these things 'cause I like to hear myself talk. I tell you these things 'cause I want to help you! And now four guys got killed! Four guys who were my friends-- my friends are fucking dead--

Cherry is practically out of his mind now. He turns to walk away, North screaming after him--

STAFF SERGEANT NORTH

Where you going?

(Cherry ignores him)

None of it matters if you're dead too!

ON CHERRY

Blood-drenched, wind and sand whipping him. He stumbles off alone into the DESERT VOID. Before collapsing, exhausted, no longer making sense in the world--

INT. HUMVEE, DRIVING, ENTERING THE FOB CHECK POINT

A vacant Cherry rides, covered in blood and dust. Cheetah drives and Staff Sergeant North sits shotgun. It's SILENT now. A stark contrast to the hell they just left behind...

THE HUMVEE stops at the usual checkpoint. Pebbles is there. She reaches her hands out, calling to Cherry through the window.

PEBBLES

MRE-- MRE--

But Cherry keeps looking straight ahead.

CHERRY (V.O.)

Suddenly there was nothing interesting about it anymore...

INT. FOB, HOLDING SITE FOR WAR DEAD - DAY

Cherry sits alone. Motionless. Hollow inside. Gazing at FOUR COFFINS with American Flags draped over them.

CHERRY (V.O.)
... nothing at all.

PRELAP EMILY
Babe? Babe are you doing okay?

INT. FOB, LIVING QUARTERS - DAY

Cherry, on the phone. He's fucked up and Emily senses it.

CHERRY
Uh-huh.

INTERCUT WITH: Emily standing outside her classroom, concerned--

EMILY
Are you seeing bad things?

CHERRY
A little.

EMILY
Are... people getting killed? 'Cause I'm seeing on the news that people are getting killed.
(then, off his silence)
Hello... ?

CHERRY
(long beat)
I'm here.

Emily tears up, assuring him--

EMILY
Babe... you're gonna make it through this.
I have faith--

CHERRY
Tell me... more about you.

EMILY
(long beat)
Well, I got a job as a waitress at The Academy. It's close to the neighborhood I think we should settle on. You like those streets over by Larchmere, right?

Cherry presses his head into the wall, crying--

EMILY (OVER PHONE) (CONT'D)
Babe?

CHERRY
Uh-huh.

EMILY
You're sure you're okay?

CHERRY
(on the verge of tears)
Just missing you is all.

EMILY
Me too. I'll email you some photos. You can help me pick out a couch.

CHERRY
Okay, yeah, that would be great--

EMILY
Love y--

But he's hung up before she can get the words out. A beat, as he continues crying, cathartic... until slowly he stops. A moment as he catches his breath, bottling it up. A little more dead in the eyes--

GUNFIRE!

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Cherry and a squad of soldiers navigate heavy gunfire in a smoke filled alley--

CHERRY (V.O.)
Over the next ten months, I did 237 combat missions...

VOICE (O.S.)
(yelling)
Medic!!

Fearless, Cherry breaks into a run up the alley, bullets pinging the wall around him....

CHERRY (V.O.)
And every one of them should've killed me.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Cherry crawls through the dust to a SCREAMING SOLDIER with his leg blown off. Cherry applies a tourniquet.

Looks up to see a scared YOUNG MEDIC, a cherry, taking cover nearby. Shouts to him through the mayhem--

CHERRY
Slide me that litter!

The Young Medic, still in shock, does as he's told.

CHERRY (CONT'D)
Help me get him on!

The Young Medic stares at Cherry, afraid to come out. Cherry scrambles over to the Medic, making physical and visual contact. Pulling the kid out of the "black"...

CHERRY (CONT'D)
Let's go, move!

Jolted, the Young Medic scrambles out into the gunfire, helps Cherry load up the Screaming Soldier. Together they run the litter back out of the village to the landing CASEVAC.

ON CHERRY, as they run, taking in the anguished Soldier's face--

CHERRY (V.O.)
Truth was, I wasn't some hard
motherfucker...

REVERSE TO CHERRY'S POV: The Soldier no longer looks like a human being to him, but a MANNEQUIN instead (just like the ones Cherry worked with in training).

CHERRY (V.O.)
I was just some guy who couldn't give a
shit anymore. And just so happened not to
get shot.

They load the litter onto the chopper and the Young Medic bowls over, vomiting into the dust.

OFF CHERRY, no longer a cherry, running back into battle to get more wounded as if on auto-pilot, DISAPPEARING INTO THE SMOKE.

PRELAP DISCO MUSIC--

THROUGH THE SMOKE

Cherry emerges, blood no longer caked on his skin, his uniform no longer covered dust...

He walks alongside OTHER SOLDIERS. An unwilling participant in this dog and pony show as we REVEAL we are now in--

A GYMNASIUM: SMOKE MACHINES are on full blast as a DJ spins; MUSIC pounds from a subwoofer. HUNDREDS OF FAMILIES call out the names of newly returned loved ones; taking photos and videos...

CHYRON -- PART FOUR: HOME, 2005

Cherry's eyes scan the chaos through the smoke-- QUICK CUTS of children and wives and parents. He sees--

Emily with his parents (VFX: Cherry's dad is A GREY SHADOW AGAIN). Cherry's heart stops. He watches Emily, who is absolutely beaming. But Cherry can't seem to smile back.

SOLDIER'S VOICE (O.C.)

FORM UP!

CUT TO the soldiers lined up in ranks. It's quiet now.

COLONEL HIGHTOWER

(over microphone)

After Private First Class Jiminez was killed in action, this soldier went on to take care of his platoon as well, serving *three* platoons in total to complete more combat missions than any other medic in his battalion.

REVEAL CHERRY, standing next to HIGHTOWER (32). His mind is racing, his jaw tense--

CHERRY (V.O.)

I wanted to get the fuck out of there because I felt a panic attack coming on. Dry heaves and everything.

COLONEL HIGHTOWER

(over microphone)

--It is my honor to award you this medal of valor.

The crowd ERUPTS into applause. Hightower pins the medals on Cherry, snapping him back into reality--

COLONEL HIGHTOWER (CONT'D)

Congratulations, Specialist.

Cherry's Mom wipes away tears in the bleachers, her mascara smudging. Emily blows kisses. Cherry, struggling with it all.

CHERRY (V.O.)

I just didn't feel like I'd done anything to go running into gymnasiums about.

CUT TO THE SOLDIERS BACK IN FORMATION NOW: Hightower signals their DISMISSAL as they each begin moving towards the bleachers, searching the hoards of family members who rush out onto the gymnasium floor to reunite with their loved ones...

CHERRY (V.O.)

My one true accomplishment was not dying--
and really I had nothing to do with it.

Just then, Emily reaches Cherry, wrapping her arms around his body for the first time in an eternity, feeling the warmth of his face with her hands, searching his eyes as--

Cherry tears up, all of the emotion he has stuffed down for so long finally able to surface.

And as the two of them stand there, holding one another--

DRONE SHOT OF THE SAME CHARMING LITTLE HOUSE FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE FILM

CHERRY (V.O.)

When I got back to Ohio, we moved into our
new home...

EXT. CHERRY AND EMILY'S HOUSE - DAY

ON CHERRY, wearing his fatigues, taking in the house for the very first time... happier than he's ever been. He pulls Emily close to kiss her head.

INT. CHERRY AND EMILY'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Emily pours coffee into two thermoses.

CHERRY (V.O.)

I started taking night classes at a school
Emily was working at...

She hands a thermos to Cherry, who packs his backpack. As she kisses him goodbye--

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE UNDER CONSTRUCTION - DAY

Cherry works with a few other guys on a house.

CHERRY (V.O.)

And I got a job that paid \$8.00 an hour.
Roy's Cousin Joe helped me get it...

REVEAL ROY'S COUSIN JOE hammering next to Cherry.

CHERRY (V.O.)

No one there but Joe and I had ever had anything to do with murderers or anything like that.

REVEAL THE OTHER CONSTRUCTION WORKERS, young guys who have never had to look death in the eye, or put a gun to a guy's head and blow his brains out.

CHERRY (V.O.)

The world meant something else to them than it did to us.

One of them complains--

CONSTRUCTION WORKER

Shit. My fuckin' coffee's cold...

As he dumps it--

COUSIN JOE

(under breath)

Spoiled fucks.

VFX: ON AN ANGRY JOE, pummeling a nail with his hammer, the clouds above him suddenly growing DARK AND SINISTER--

CHERRY (V.O.)

After he got back, Joe had problems for a while...

INSERT FLASHBACK: JOE'S GIRLFRIEND'S CAR, DRIVING

Joe is drinking in the passenger seat; his girlfriend freaking out at the wheel. Cherry and Emily watch, uncomfortable, from the backseat.

JOE'S GIRLFRIEND

You're being a dick!

JOE

You're being a dick!

JOE'S GIRLFRIEND

All I did was ask you if you really need to keep drinking seeing as you're already shit faced!

JOE

AND I SAID I DID!

JOE'S GIRLFRIEND

AND I SAID: NO YOU DID NOT!!

Joe can't take it, he opens the door and jumps out of the moving car. His girlfriend screams. Cherry and Emily react, too.

SECONDS LATER, OUTSIDE THE CAR: Joe lies beat up in a ditch on the side of the road. Cherry helps him to his feet.

CHERRY (V.O.)
He wasn't the only one with problems...

INT. CHERRY AND EMILY'S HOUSE, VARIOUS

IN THE BEDROOM, NIGHT

Cherry wakes up SCREAMING. Emily is freaked out, trying to comfort him.

CHERRY (V.O.)
I didn't sleep. And when I did I dreamt of violence...

CUT TO Cherry crying into Emily's stomach. She rocks him like a child, her face wrought with concern.

IN THE BATHROOM, MORNING

Cherry stares at a BLOOD-FILLED TOILET, numb.

CHERRY (V.O.)
I shit blood, I farted blood...

He looks at himself in the mirror.

CHERRY (V.O.)
And then I craved sleep...

IN THE KITCHEN, ANOTHER MORNING

Cherry cooks eggs for breakfast, the smell of sulfur hitting him. Suddenly throws the entire egg carton at the wall.

CHERRY (V.O.)
Basically I was being a sad crazy fuck about the horrors I'd seen...

REVEAL Emily watching him from the doorway. She flinches as he throws the whole toaster against the wall now. Tears well in her eyes as--

CHERRY (TO US)
And I was making Emily miserable. And knowing that I was making her miserable made me more miserable...

IN THE BEDROOM, ANOTHER NIGHT

Now Emily sobs into Cherry's stomach, and he holds her.

CHERRY (TO US)
I wanted so badly to be better than this
for her.

IN THE BATHROOM, ANOTHER DAY, A FEW MONTHS LATER

Cherry, his hair longer now, straightens his tie, looking in the mirror-- Where his reflection appears slightly out of sync. A KNOCK on the door--

EMILY (O.S.)
Hurry-- we'll be late.

Cherry dumps some Xanax into his palm. Swallows them.

INT. THE PALACE THEATRE, BALCONY - NIGHT

Cherry and Emily, all dressed up for a special night out, settle into their seats before the show, sipping drinks.

EMILY
Thank you for thinking to do this...

But Cherry is lost somewhere in his own thoughts, stoned from the pills and alcohol...

CHERRY
Why are we the only ones dressed up?

Emily looks around. She hadn't noticed. She shrugs--

EMILY
I don't know.

CHERRY
(with increasing volume)
They're fucking middle-aged people with
money for chrissakes, and they can't even
bother to wear a fucking sports coat to a
fucking play?

A MAN WEARING KHAKI SHORTS and locating his row down below them looks up to the balcony, hearing Cherry.

Cherry locks eyes with the Man, calling--

CHERRY (CONT'D)

Yeah, I'm talking to you, dipshit. You who didn't have the decency to remove your LL Bean after you ran here from the fucking golf course.

MAN

(calling back up)
Dude, what's your problem?

EMILY

(to Cherry, quiet)
Babe...

CHERRY

(to the man)
You deserve vomit.

EMILY

(grabbing onto Cherry)
Okay, let's go--

CHERRY

(to everyone now)
All of you!
(then, to Emily)
I can't believe this is the life we fought for--

EMILY

--We're leaving.

CHERRY

WE'RE NOT FUCKING LEAVING.

Everyone goes quiet.

MOMENTS LATER, IN THE BATHROOM

Cherry stares in the mirror for a long moment-- His reflection even more out of sync now. He turns on the sink. Starts washing his hands.

CHERRY (V.O.)

I punched the bathroom mirror on accident when I was washing my hands...

CUT TO Cherry PUNCHING the mirror. The mirror crashes to the ground.

The lone other occupants are TWO KIDS (somewhere around the eighth grade and scared shitless). The older kid pulls the younger one away from Cherry, then they hurry out the door.

MOMENTS LATER, ON THE BALCONY

Cherry beelines to Emily.

CHERRY

We gotta go. I mean like we gotta go right fuckin' now.

He grabs onto her arm. Emily sees his hand is bleeding.

EMILY

Jesus Christ...

152A THE LOBBY

152A

Cherry leads Emily through a sea of people flooding into the open theater doors. He's like a salmon swimming upstream--

INT. CHERRY AND EMILY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Emily sits in bed, quietly crying.

CHERRY (V.O.)

We went home and I took a few more Xanax...

REVEAL Cherry sleeping next to her, his hand bandaged. An open Xanax bottle on his nightstand.

CUT TO Emily taking a Xanax now. She lays down next to Cherry.

CHERRY (V.O.)

That also happened to be the night James Lightfoot tried coming around to welcome me back. But he got arrested breaking into my house...

INSERT SCENE: CHERRY'S IMAGINING OF JAMES LIGHTFOOT GETTING ARRESTED

A strung-out James, who has taken a turn for the worse since Cherry left for Iraq, tries to wake a sleeping COUPLE.

CHERRY (V.O.)

Except it wasn't my house; he broke into the wrong house...

The Couple wakes up, freaking the fuck out at the sight of James. The husband GRABS A GUN from his nightstand drawer.

LATER, OUTSIDE THE HOUSE

James is frisked by TWO COPS.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 Since I left for Iraq, James had busted his
 knee up working for the highway department
 and got to using Oxycontin pretty hard...

The Cops find a BAGGIE OF PILLS on him, and a knife. James
 starts to cry.

INT. CHERRY AND EMILY'S KITCHEN - DAY

Cherry, Emily, and James eat dinner. Cherry looks anxious.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 After I bailed him out, he started hanging
 around a lot. My Xanax weren't doing shit
 anymore.

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
 (to Cherry)
 Dude, you okay?

Just then, Cherry starts hyperventilating.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 And James Lightfoot, having half a heart,
 offered to spot me some of his pills...

As James spills out some pills from his bottle of Oxycontin--

LATER, IN THE LIVING ROOM

Cherry sits on the couch watching TV with James and Emily.
 Peaceful. Stoned on Oxy.

EXT. SHITTY BANK - A COUPLE WEEKS LATER

Cherry and James, both high, get out of Cherry's Dodge.

CHERRY (V.O.)
 A few weeks later, James asked me to take
 him to the bank...

As they cross the parking lot to the bank, James lays out the
 plan for Cherry--

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
 So basically I'll sign some of my paychecks
 over to you so you can give me cash for
 them... because I can't have a bank
 account... because I'm in ChexSystems...
 and my credit is totally *fucked*.

INT. SHITTY BANK - DAY

Cherry stands at the TELLER'S window. James stands off to the side, trying to keep a low profile. The Teller looks down at the paychecks, annoyed--

TELLER

I can't cash these checks, sir.

CHERRY (V.O.)

It wasn't exactly a smash hit. The teller thought I was being a dick because I was high on Oxycontin and I wasn't hiding that I thought he was an asshole.

Cherry stares down the Teller.

CHERRY

You know what, you're an asshole. I'd like to speak to your manager.

CUT TO the manager and security guard escorting Cherry and James out of the bank--

CHERRY (CONT'D)

(into his cell phone)

I'm a war veteran and the teller and the manager at your Mayfield branch are treating me like I'm an undesirable and I don't know what I'm going to do about it yet, but it sure as fuck isn't right the way they treat people.

EXT. JAMES LIGHTFOOT'S MOM'S DRIVEWAY - DAY

Cherry and James get out of the car.

CHERRY (V.O.)

So I drove James back to his mom's house.

CHERRY

I'm sorry, James. It's really unfortunate how that all played out.

JAMES LIGHTFOOT

Yeah, well, thanks anyway.

James heads to the front door. But Cherry lingers in the driveway, considering it all--

CHERRY (V.O.)

Everything had changed and nothing had changed.

160A INT. CHERRY AND EMILY'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

160A

Cherry lays on the bed, stoned.

CHERRY (V.O.)

The problem was I really, really liked Oxy;
it made me feel a type of way so as I
wasn't about taking shit from anyone.

EMILY (O.S.)

What did you take?

REVEAL Emily standing over him, pissed. Cherry cracks a smile.

CHERRY

I'm not taking your shit.

Emily marches out, slamming the door. A beat. Then--

PRELAP CHERRY

My wife is ready to leave me...

INT. VETERAN'S HOSPITAL, DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Cherry sits across from DOCTOR WHOMEVER (50), who wears a corduroy jacket covered in cat fur; plaque on his desk reads, "DOCTOR WHOMEVER"...

As Doctor Whomever makes a very long note in Cherry's file--

CHERRY (V.O.)

I had promised Emily I would find a better
way of dealing with my war shit than taking
pills...

Doctor Whomever finally looks up--

DOCTOR WHOMEVER

And have you been experiencing suicidal
thoughts?

CHERRY

Sometimes. I think if I had just died in
Iraq she would be happier now. I mean of
course she would have been sad for awhile.
But ultimately her life would be better.

Doctor Whomever makes another very long note.

DOCTOR WHOMEVER

How long have you been back?

CHERRY

Eight months.

DOCTOR WHOMEVER
And have you been evaluated for PTSD
before?

CHERRY
Isn't that what we're doing here?

Doctor Whomever looks up at him. Says nothing. Finally--

CHERRY (CONT'D)
I've tried. But you guys keep transferring
my file because someone left and then the
new someone was still getting caught up.

Doctor Whomever writes again. Cherry watches, frustration
bubbling.

DOCTOR WHOMEVER
Are you currently taking any medications?

CHERRY
Xanax for anxiety. But they don't work
anymore...

DOCTOR WHOMEVER
And how's your pain level?

CHERRY
(confused)
You mean mental? Or physical?

DOCTOR WHOMEVER
Both.

CHERRY
Nine out of ten...

Doctor Whomever looks up at him, considering this. Then--

DOCTOR WHOMEVER
Have you ever heard of Oxycontin?

AND OFF CHERRY, staring back at him--

CHERRY (V.O.)
So I got more Oxy...

INT. CHERRY AND EMILY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Cherry lies on the bed again, stoned. A smile on his face.

CHERRY (V.O.)
Naturally Emily was pissed. She had
understandably reached her limit...

REVEAL Emily pacing next to him. She snaps--

EMILY

FINE!!

She snatches the pill bottle off the bedside table, shaking it in Cherry's face, slightly crazed.

EMILY (CONT'D)

These... are for me! Because I'm done taking your shit!

Emily dry swallows one of the pills, manic.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Because I would love a motherfucking break--

She starts waving her arms around, wild, indicating the den of depression around them--

EMILY (CONT'D)

From all... of this... SHIT!!

Cherry watches her, oddly unaffected.

AN HOUR LATER

FIND EMILY on the bed next to Cherry now, her pill having also kicked in. They both lay there, not taking shit from the world.

EMILY

I wish I never told you I was leaving.

Cherry looks over at her.

EMILY (CONT'D)

For Montreal.

A moment, both of them pondering this.

CHERRY

Remember how you used to wear a white ribbon around your neck?

Emily, remembering... She smiles.

EMILY

That was my jam.

CHERRY

Yeah. I liked that.

A long beat.

CHERRY (CONT'D)
I can't see that we'll ever get back to there.

EMILY
No.

They lie there some more.

EMILY (CONT'D)
But I'm okay with that.

She looks to Cherry again. He looks to her.

CHERRY
Yeah. Me too.

Then they look back up at the ceiling, at peace with everything in this moment...

CHERRY (V.O.)
And that's how we became addicts.

DRONE SHOT OF CHERRY AND EMILY'S PRETTY TREE-LINED STREET

The saturated sun shining down on their brilliant little house--

CHYRON -- PART FIVE: DOPE LIFE

CHERRY (V.O.)
The story of being a dope fiend is that you could kill yourself real slow and feel like a million dollars...

INT. CHERRY AND EMILY'S KITCHEN - MORNING

On Cherry cooking eggs, feeling like a million bucks. Emily bounds down the stairs. The house feels alive with an abundance of beautiful vibrancy.

EMILY
(re: the dog)
Can you walk Livinia today? I have to leave in like 10 minutes.

CHERRY
Yep.
(beat)
Scrambled or Sunny side up?

EMILY
Scrambled. On toast please.

CHERRY

Like a sandwich?

EMILY

Yeah, a sandwich. And this is the day I stay late, so you have to be there by 5 or I won't make it through class and the proff is still out.

CHERRY

Don't worry, babe, I gotchoo...

MOMENTS LATER

Emily rolls up a sleeve, her arm littered with track marks. She ties off with a white ribbon as Cherry maneuvers a needle into her vein.

As the heroin warms over her, pull back to REVEAL her egg sandwich on a paper towel next to their dope cooking paraphernalia.

Cherry touches her stoned face lovingly...

EMILY

Ok. I gotta go...

As she rises, Cherry now shoots up...

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Emily sits at a desk, slightly anxious. A student reads from a book.

CHERRY (V.O)

In the beginning, we were completely functioning addicts...

EMILY

Keep reading, Lia, I have to use the restroom...

The camera tracks with her as she exits, WIPING TO:

INT. CHERRY'S PICKUP TRUCK

As Emily gets in, Cherry is ready with a shot,

CHERRY

Hey babe...

He shoots her up.

EMILY
Thanks sweetie. Love you.

CHERRY
Love you too...

They kiss. Emily exits the car, WIPE TO:

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Emily walks back into the room, sits at her desk. The class continues...

CHERRY (V.O.)
But if we looked closely, there were
certainly cracks in the mirror...

EXT. BANK - DAY

Cherry tries the ATM, *"no funds."*

CHERRY (V.O.)
We were always broke...

He kicks the machine.

INT. CHERRY AND EMILY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Cherry and Emily watch TV on the couch with Livinia.

CHERRY (V.O.)
We got sick all the time...

He casually reaches over and lifts a little green garbage can to his face, vomits in it.

INT. CHERRY'S CHILDHOOD HOME, DINING ROOM - DAY

Cherry sits at the table with his Mom.

CHERRY
... somehow they deposited my last GI check
into the wrong account-- and the
application is due today-- and the fee is a
hundred dollars-- fucking robbery I know...

Cherry's Mom watches him, broken and hollow.

CHERRY (V.O.)
We stabbed our parents in the heart over
and over again...

EXT. SHAKER BOULEVARD HOUSE - DAY

Cherry walks up to a very nice house on a very nice street.

CHERRY (V.O.)
Our old friends stayed away...

Cherry pauses when he sees--

A Black 70's Sedan parked out front (the same Sedan from the film's opening).

CHERRY (V.O.)
And our new friends would eat the eyes out
of our head with a spoon...

The tinted window is halfway down, revealing a LARGE MAN WITH A FACE TATTOO behind the wheel.

CHERRY
(tentative)
Hey, Black...

A long moment, as this mammoth and mysterious figure stares at Cherry, slowly crunching Funyuns into his mouth, one at a time. He takes a sip from his Big Gulp.

BLACK
Don't get behind. I don't do credit...

The window goes up, and Black pulls away.

INT. SHAKER BOULEVARD HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Cherry, standing in the newly updated kitchen.

CHERRY
I know I owe you 160, but I only have 40--
If you could front me another 80, I've got
money from the GI Bill coming on Friday.

PILLS AND COKE
Flip that grilled cheese for me...

FREEZE-FRAME ON PILLS AND COKE (24)-- He wears dock-siders and a shirt with the collar up, cooking heroin at the Viking stove (along with a grilled cheese sandwich)--

CHERRY (V.O.)
If you didn't know better you'd have
thought he was Biff from *Back To The
Future*. But he wasn't, he was Pills and
Coke.

UNFREEZE. Cherry flips the grilled cheese with a spatula.

CHERRY

It looks done. You want me to put it on a plate?

Pills and Coke preps Cherry's shot, yelling out to the family room--

PILLS AND COKE

Shelly, come get your toasted cheese!

SHELLY (30) enters the kitchen. She's Pills and Coke's older sister and she has down syndrome. She looks at the needle.

SHELLY

What are you guys doing?

PILLS AND COKE

(re: the heroin)

Why, you wanna try some?

Pills and Coke laughs like this is very funny. Cherry just stands there, fucking depressed.

SHELLY

What is it?

PILLS AND COKE

It's candy.

Pills and Coke winks at Cherry-- like this is all a big fucking show for his benefit.

SHELLY

I like candy...

PILLS AND COKE

I know you like candy...

SHELLY

Can I try it?

PILLS AND COKE

No! Go watch your CSI and eat your goddamn toasted cheese!

As she leaves the room, dejected, Pills and Coke laughs--

CHERRY (V.O.)

Everyone we met was a fucker.

LATER, AT THE DOOR

Cherry, high now, is about to leave. He lingers in the doorway--

CHERRY

So...

Pills and Coke pretends to have no clue what he's getting at.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

...can you spot me that 80?

Pills and Coke exhales, like this is a big fucking decision.

PILLS AND COKE

Fine. But I need you to go see a guy on Buckeye. I need you to go see him and pick up something for Black.

CHERRY

(slightly concerned)

For Black?

PILLS AND COKE

Yep.

CHERRY

What am I picking up?

PILLS AND COKE

A safe. And don't ask what's in it.

CHERRY

What's in it?

PILLS AND COKE

You're a cunt-nugget.

CHERRY

Did you just call me a cunt-nugget?

Pills and Coke slams the door. Cherry, desperate now--

CHERRY (CONT'D)

(through the door)

Fine, I'll get Black's safe!

Pills and Coke opens the door, slaps some dope in Cherry's hand.

PILLS AND COKE

I'll text you the address.

Cherry starts to walk away when--

PILLS AND COKE (CONT'D)

Oh, and I need you to hang onto it for a while, too.

CHERRY

Wait, why--

But the door slams shut.

INT. CHERRY AND EMILY'S KITCHEN - DAY

ON THE SAFE, sitting on Cherry and Emily's kitchen table. Emily enters from work.

EMILY

What the fuck is this?

REVEAL Cherry cooking.

CHERRY

Pills and Coke asked me to watch a safe for him.

EMILY

That fucking guy? I hate that fucking guy!

CHERRY

I know. He fronted me, though. So it felt like the right thing to do.

EMILY

I do not like this...

CHERRY

Babe, there was nothing I could do; he was the only one holding.

EMILY

But admit, you find this cagey...

CHERRY

I had no choice.

He draws the heroin into the needle, and Emily rolls her sleeve up. She takes the needle from Cherry and shoots.

AN HOUR LATER

Emily and Cherry lie on the floor with the dog.

EMILY

This isn't doing shit for me.

CHERRY

Me neither.

EMILY

I told you that guy's a scumbag. Might as well've given us mashed fucking potatoes. And here you are risking your life watching his safe that probably has all the *good* shit in it.

A beat. Emily and Cherry look at each other, realizing...

AN HOUR LATER, JAMES LIGHTFOOT HAS HIS EAR TO THE SAFE

Testing numbers on the dial. REVEAL Cherry and Emily watching with anticipation.

JAMES LIGHTFOOT

I can't hear anything...

CHERRY AND JAMES PUSH THE SAFE OUT OF A SECOND STORY WINDOW

Emily is down below. She jumps back as it CRASHES to the ground.

CHERRY

(calling down to Emily)

Did it work?

JAMES AND EMILY STAND IN THE DRIVEWAY

Watch as Cherry drives past with the safe chained to the back of his truck.

BACK TO THE LIVING ROOM WHERE A CROWBAR WHACKS THE SAFE LOCK

The dog howls. Emily covers her ears. James lays on the couch. Cherry hacks the shit out of it until -- the door cracks open and DRUGS spill out.

They all look at each other, wide-eyed.

CHERRY (V.O.)

We mixed things up...

-- CUT TO the three of them doing lines of cocaine.

CHERRY (V.O.)

But not too much...

-- CUT TO them doing more cocaine.

CHERRY (V.O.)

And then we brought it home.

-- CUT TO them shooting up. They finally pass out.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. CHERRY AND EMILY'S LIVING ROOM - THE NEXT DAY

BANG! BANG! BANG!

CHERRY'S POV: Coming to from sleep... blinking... BANG! BANG!

Cherry sits up, tweaking and freaked out. He's not wearing any pants. It's dawn now, and he looks over at the front door where-- BANG! BANG! BANG!

EMILY (O.S.)
(freaked out)
It's the fucking police!

REVEAL Emily sitting up next to Cherry, equally tweaking. Wearing just her bra and a pair of shorts.

CHERRY
It's not the police...

Just then, through the door--

DEEP VOICE (O.S.)
IT'S THE POLICE. OPEN UP!

CHERRY
It's the fucking police!

More BANGING.

EMILY
They know about the safe--

CHERRY
I bet they followed me from Pills and
Coke's house--

Cherry's cell phone starts RINGING. Cherry looks at it, amazed--

CHERRY (CONT'D)
It's Pills and Coke calling...

EMILY
Don't! They're tapping his phone.

Cherry considers what to do as-- MORE BANGING. James lays motionless on the floor, sleeping through it all.

CHERRY
Shit. Shit-Shit-Shit.

MOMENTS LATER, IN THE BATHROOM

Emily and Cherry flush all the drugs down the toilet. MORE BANGING.

CHERRY

Listen to me, I want you to get on your knees with your hands behind your head like so--

He demonstrates. Emily gets on her knees--

CHERRY (CONT'D)

This way the cops won't shoot if they bust through the door.

Emily nods, freaked.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

Act normal. Just act like everything's normal.

MOMENTS LATER, STAIRWELL/LIVING ROOM

Cherry bounds down the stairs--

CHERRY

Act like you're not on drugs. Act like you love the police. Act like you love America so much it's retarded. But don't act like you're on drugs.

He reaches the door, straightens himself. Then calls outside--

CHERRY (CONT'D)

LET'S DO THIS NICE AND PEACEFUL!

Cherry opens the door to find-- Pills and Coke standing there, laughing.

PILLS AND COKE

You're a dumbass.

He laughs harder, at Cherry's expense.

PILLS AND COKE (CONT'D)

You look like you shit your pants.

Pills and Coke wanders inside. Stops cold when he sees Black's safe busted open on the floor, empty...

PILLS AND COKE (CONT'D)

Holy fuck-nuts...

MOMENTS LATER

Pills and Coke paces the room, mind racing.

PILLS AND COKE
 How much fucking shit was in there?
 (no answer)
 Tell me!!

EMILY
 A lot...?

Pills and Coke absorbs the blow.

PILLS AND COKE
 Fuck!!!

CHERRY
 You said you were the police...

Pills and Coke lunges at a pants-less Cherry, choking him.

PILLS AND COKE
 Fucking shit-fucker!!

Emily, still in her bra and shorts, pulls at Pills and Coke, panicking--

EMILY
 Stop! You're gonna kill him!

Pills and Coke does stop, looks right at her--

PILLS AND COKE
 Oh yeah? Well Black is gonna put on his motherfucking black mask...

EMILY
 What?

PILLS AND COKE
 His black mask.

EMILY
 What black mask?

PILLS AND COKE
 His *black* mask.

EMILY
 What are you talking about?

PILLS AND COKE
 His fucking black mask!

EMILY

Stop saying that!! I don't know what it means!!

PILLS AND COKE

HE'S GONNA PUT ON HIS BLACK MASK!

EMILY

(crying now)

Noooo...

Pills and Coke starts pacing again, manic now--

PILLS AND COKE

He's gonna kill us all!! He's gonna kill YOU and YOU--

(then, re: a sleeping James)

--and he's sure as fuck's gonna kill THAT CUNT-NUGGET! And then guess what? He's gonna fucking KILL ME for letting you goddamn reprobates watch his stupid fucking safe--

He walks right up onto the couch, out of his fucking mind--

PILLS AND COKE (CONT'D)

Unless one of you shitbags can give me a giant fucking shitwad of cash right now. RIGHT NOW! RIGHT NOW!!

Cherry and Emily stare up at him for a long moment. Then--

EMILY

We don't have any money. We don't even have dog food.

A beat, and Pills and Coke screams--

PILLS AND COKE

HE'S GONNA PUT ON HIS BLACK MASK!

CHERRY

Stop-- I have an idea...

Pills and Coke looks at him--

PILLS AND COKE

Talk.

CHERRY

I need you... to give me some cash.

Pills and Coke jumps off the couch at Cherry, attacking him--

PILLS AND COKE

FUCK YOU!!

CHERRY

(fighting him off)

Just a dollar...

James Lightfoot, just waking now--

JAMES LIGHTFOOT

... I got a dollar.

INT. THE BANK - DAY

Cherry, his hat pulled down low, stands in line at the SAME BANK where he brought the overdraft letter and receipt all those years ago. He holds A SINGLE DOLLAR BILL in his shaking hand.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

(calls out)

Next.

Cherry exhales, steeling himself, steps up to the window to see--

The same GREY TELLER who wouldn't accept his receipt in the overdraft confusion. But she doesn't recognize him. Instead, she just waits for him to tell her what he needs, like any other customer...

So Cherry places the dollar down on the counter. Slides it towards the Grey Teller, who looks at it--

Black marker is scrawled across the bill: *"This is a robbery. I have a gun."*

VFX: The Grey Teller looks back up at Cherry, the shadow falling away to reveal her frightened face. She turns to her drawer, and starts to pull out the cash...

...then places it on the counter. Cherry stares at it, stunned-- that was easier than he thought.

A beat and he nods. Takes the cash and goes.

INT. CHERRY AND EMILY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Cherry counts out the cash for Pills and Coke, who watches in disbelief. As Cherry hands it over--

PILLS AND COKE

(under breath)

Fuck me...

(beat)

Okay. We're square.

He walks to the door. Can't help but turn back, impressed--

PILLS AND COKE (CONT'D)

That was some John Wayne, balls-out shit.

He leaves. Emily stares at the leftover pile of cash.

EMILY

Whoa. That's a lotta fucking dope.

(beat)

We should celebrate.

INT. SANDWICH SHOP - DAY

Cherry and Emily order sandwiches...

CHERRY (V.O.)

And we went to our favorite restaurant.

They stand at the counter, paying-- Emily throws in two big cookies; Cherry makes a show of putting twenty dollars in the tip jar.

LATER, AT A TABLE

Cherry's cell phone rings.

CHERRY

Hello?

INTERCUT WITH: Cousin Joe sprawled out on his living room couch, phone tucked under his ear. A TV flickers, the news playing on low volume--

COUSIN JOE

Hey, it's Joe.

CHERRY

Joe?

COUSIN JOE

Roy's cousin, Joe.

CHERRY

What's up, Joe?

COUSIN JOE

Did-- uh-- you rob a bank today?

Cherry chokes on his cookie.

CHERRY

What?

COUSIN JOE

They've got a picture of a guy who looks a lot like you on the news and he robbed a bank.

Cherry grabs the food--

CHERRY

Oh man, that's so weird-- because that definitely wasn't me--
 (hushed, to Emily now)
 We gotta go!

INT. CHERRY AND EMILY'S LIVING ROOM - 15 MINUTES LATER

ON A COMPUTER SCREEN: A SURVEILLANCE PHOTO OF CHERRY.

REVEAL Cherry and Emily, staring at the screen, frozen.

CHERRY

I'm going to jail.

EMILY

(scanning the article)
 Nope. No. It says the suspect is six foot and has blue eyes.
 (phew)
 You're okay...

CHERRY

Look at the picture though, can you tell it's me?

She looks from the surveillance photo to Cherry, and back again. She closes the computer.

EMILY

Maybe you shouldn't leave the house for a while.

Cherry sighs.

CHERRY

I need to shoot up...

BLACK SCREEN. CHYRON: Three weeks later...

INT. US PRANK - DAY

Cherry, with a buzz-cut and a mustache, waits in line at the bank, overcome with dope sickness.

CHERRY (V.O.)

The essential problem of being hooked on
dope is that whenever you get flush, you
spend it on dope. Until the money's gone.
And then when the dope's gone, you get
sick.

Just then, he throws up in his shirt.

CHERRY (V.O.)

At which point you need to find more money.

A WOMAN IN LINE turns around, disturbed--

WOMAN IN LINE

Are you okay?

CHERRY

Just a sneeze.

WOMAN IN LINE

I think you're really sick...

CHERRY

No, no I'm fine... I just can't stop
sneezing--

He vomits into his shirt again. His mustache revealed to be a
FAKE as it is now starting to fall off.

CHERRY (V.O.)

I don't imagine that anyone goes in for
robbery if they are not in some kind of
desperation. With robbery it's a matter of
pure abasement...

JUMP TO Cherry sliding a note to the TELLER. She reads it and
looks at him, almost saddened. Starts emptying her drawer.

Cherry, ready to collapse, takes the cash off the counter and
stuffs it in his pocket. He stumbles towards the door.

CHERRY (V.O.)

And we were abased...

INT. CHERRY AND EMILY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Cherry sits on the couch, high and wearing a hockey mask.

EMILY

(entering)

Where were you?

Cherry slowly turns his head to look at her. She yanks the mask off, pissed--

EMILY (CONT'D)
It's Wednesday.

Cherry doesn't understand.

EMILY (CONT'D)
You were supposed to come down to school and meet me by five?

CHERRY
(realizing)
Shit, I was getting sick...

EMILY
Well now I'm sick! And I had to cancel my fucking class... because I shit my fucking pants!!

She whacks him in the face with a plastic bag containing her shit-in pants.

CHERRY
(mumbling)
I'm sorry, Em...

She snatches her kit out of the cupboard--

EMILY
It's just-- I'm trying to do something here, you know? I'm not just sitting at home on the couch enjoying my fucking high--

CHERRY
(mumbling again, under her)
I let you down...

EMILY
Because it would probably be really nice to just sit at home on the couch, enjoying my motherfucking high!!

She collapses down on the couch next to Cherry. Frantically trying to get her kit open. A pile of CASH on the table before them.

EMILY (CONT'D)
How much did you get?

CHERRY
A lot. Enough to get us by for the next... three or four months... at least.

Emily starts to cry. She can't steady her hand to prep her shot.

EMILY

I can't do it...

Cherry finally emerges from his stupor. Sits up.

CHERRY

I got you babe...

EMILY

I can't do it.

CHERRY

I got you.

And he preps her shot for her...

INT. HOSPITAL - EMERGENCY ROOM - NIGHT

The doors burst open, two paramedics race Emily on a gurney into the hospital. Emily's blue. A ventilator over her mouth.

PARAMEDIC

Female. 22. Agonal breathing, pinpoint pupils. Heart rate 141. BP 117 over 65.

A shattered Cherry running alongside.

CHERRY

Is she breathing?! Is she breathing?!

190C **RESUSCITATION ROOM**

190C

They hoist Emily from the gurney to an ED bed. Remove her top. Attach electrodes, an IV.

A NURSE questions Cherry.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

We were... asleep on the couch. When I woke up... her face was blue...

NURSE

How long was she unconscious?

CHERRY

I don't know...

NURSE

What did she take?

CHERRY

I...

NURSE

What did she take?

CHERRY

I...don't know...

A Doctor in the room shouts...

DOCTOR

2 milligrams of Narcan! Let's go! Let's go!

Cherry, tears flooding his eyes, watches helplessly through a window as the chaos in the room builds to a cacophony. He tries to enter the room...

CHERRY

Is she breathing?!

The Nurse intercepts him.

NURSE

Sir, I'm going to need you to go to the waiting room now.

CHERRY

(desperate, like a child)
No, please, let me stay...

NURSE

Sir.

CHERRY

Please, I'm begging you.

NURSE

Sir, there's nothing you can do here but get in the way.

CHERRY

(crying)
Please... please...

190D **WAITING ROOM**

190D

A devastated, ashen Cherry is slumped on the floor. His back against a wall. His eyes shallow...

NURSE

(to Cherry)
Come with me...

190F **HALLWAY**

190F

Cherry follows the nurse down a hallway.

NURSE (CONT'D)

She's very, very lucky. We brought her back to life, you understand? We brought her back to life...

Cherry stops dead in his tracks. Down the hall, a COUPLE in their mid-fifties -- Emily's parents. Working class Pennsylvania.

They are conversing with a doctor. When they see Cherry, they stop.

After a moment, Emily's STEP-FATHER angrily rushes down the hall towards Cherry.

Cherry backpedals, unsure what to do. Her Step-Father crashes into Cherry, knocking him to the ground.

EMILY'S STEP-FATHER

You piece of shit! You fucking piece of shit!

The Paramedics restrain him.

PARAMEDIC

Calm down!! Calm down!!

Cherry, stunned, on his ass, stares up. The Paramedics pull Emily's screaming, incensed Step-Father down the hallway. Emily's Mother approaches Cherry, heartbroken...

EMILY'S MOTHER

(pointing through the glass
at Emily)

Look at what you did to her. Look at my baby. I don't even recognize her no more...

CHERRY

I'm... sorry...

EMILY'S MOTHER

I know you got problems. I know you're broken. But you can't break her. Please don't break her.

CHERRY

I love her more than anything.

EMILY'S MOTHER

Then get up and walk away. You walk away right now. And leave her be. She doesn't deserve this...

CHERRY

I never wanted to hurt her...

EMILY'S MOTHER

Then be a man and walk away. Before you kill her...

CHERRY

I never...

EMILY'S MOTHER

Walk away!!

Cherry stares at her for some time. He's exhausted. Suffocated by guilt.

EMILY'S MOTHER (CONT'D)
 (snapping)
 WALK AWAY!!

He has no choice but to go. He turns and heads down the hallway. Stops, looks back. Is met by a cold stare.

CHERRY
 I'm sorry...

EMILY'S STEP-FATHER
 Get fucked...

He disappears out the door.

EXT. PARKING LOT - HOSPITAL

Cherry sits in his car. Lost. REVEAL a needle on the seat. He picks it up. Debates it. Numb, angry, he stabs himself in the thigh with it, over and over again. His pants soaking through with blood.

As Cherry loses his shit, we pan up and into a street light, dissolving...

EXT. GREYHOUND STATION - DAY - THREE WEEKS LATER

Cherry rests against his car, expectantly watching a bus unload. And then he sees her. And she sees him.

It's Emily. She slowly walks across the parking lot towards him. Stops. They stare at each other for some time.

Heartbroken, Cherry rebukes her...

CHERRY
 You need to go back.

EMILY
 No.

CHERRY
 Go back to rehab.

EMILY
 I don't want to be in rehab.
 (beat)
 I want to be with you.

CHERRY
 I'm not clean, Em.

EMILY
 I know.

CHERRY

Well... you can't stay here.

EMILY

That's not your decision to make.

CHERRY

It is.

EMILY

No, it isn't. I waited... almost two years for you to come back from that hell hole. Two years. And I've been with you through a *lot of fucked up shit*. And now I'm fucked up.

(beat)

And I don't want to do this alone...

CHERRY

I'm not good for you. I'm not good for anybody...

She crosses to him. Touches his face.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

I just want all that crap out of my head. I want it gone...

EMILY

It will. One day. It'll go quiet. It'll just stop...

A long beat. Emily kisses Cherry.

CHERRY

Please...

EMILY

I'm gonna get high, with or without you...

CHERRY

Don't do this to me...

EMILY

I'm gonna get high...

She kisses him again, passionately. He surrenders.

BLACK SCREEN. CHYRON: One month later...**INT. PILLS AND COKE'S CAR - DAY**

A coked-up Pills and Coke sits in the driver seat--

PILLS AND COKE

How in the fuck have you robbed all these goddamn banks and yet, somehow, in some fucking way, you still owe me a fuck ton of money?

Cherry, tying off in the passenger's seat, weighs the question... then, as he shoots up--

CHERRY

We shoot a lot of dope.

REVEAL they are parked across the street from a "SHITTY BANK." As Pills and Coke grabs Cherry's needle, whipping it out the window--

PILLS AND COKE

Well you need to shoot a lot less, motherfucker. Cuz when you owe me money, I owe Black money. And Black doesn't like being owed money...

But a high Cherry is assessing the bank. DISTORTED POV SHOTS of what he's clocking-- Windows on the bank (tinted); Doors (double); Sightline from Whole Foods (obstructed); Number of cars parked in back (presumably two employees).

As Cherry pulls a GUN from his waistband, grabbing a BOUQUET OF FLOWERS off the floor--

CHERRY

Meet me 'round the corner...

He opens the door to get out when--

PILLS AND COKE

Whoa, whoa, whoa. What the fuck are you talking about?

CHERRY

I told you I need a driver.

PILLS AND COKE

You did not tell me this.

CHERRY

When I called you this morning...

PILLS AND COKE

That's not what I heard. I'm not robbing a fucking bank!

CHERRY

You just said you owe Black money, right?

PILLS AND COKE

Yeah. Because you owe me money!

CHERRY

Well I can't be rolling up in my own car anymore.

PILLS AND COKE

Why the fuck not?

CHERRY

Cause I been at this too long. Cause the cops have a description...

(beat)

You want to pay Black back or not?

PILLS AND COKE

Fuck. We need to discuss terms.

CHERRY

The terms are I rob a fucking bank, you meet me around the corner, and then you pay Black back.

PILLS AND COKE

I don't like those terms.

Cherry slams the door, starts crossing the lot toward the bank in his flip flops. Pills and Coke yells out after him--

PILLS AND COKE (CONT'D)

I may or may not be there, motherfucker!

INT. SHITTY BANK - DAY

Cherry, holding the bouquet up high to block his face, assesses the scene-- ONE FEMALE TELLER and a MALE MANAGER talking with a customer. He gives the note to the teller, whose name-tag reads SHEINA. Sheina grabs a banded wad and tosses it on the counter--

CHERRY

Sheina, you're better than that.

SHEINA

That's a lotta money.

Cherry doesn't have time for this--

CHERRY

That's a fucking fifty banded to some ones.
That note says all the money in your
drawer.

Sheina glances to her bullshitting manager.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

He could give a fuck what's happening with
you right now.

Sheina glares at him, not wanting to do this. Cherry lifts his
jacket, letting her glimpse the gun. Left with no choice, she
begrudgingly empties her drawer.

Cherry watches her, his demeanor shifting to certain sadness.
Then, as he sweeps the cash off the counter--

CHERRY (CONT'D)

I'll flash my gun at the camera as I leave,
so he can't argue that you just gave the
money away.

SHEINA

What, is that supposed to make you a good
guy now?

Cherry absorbs the quip. Turns to leave... flashing his gun for
the camera as he goes.

EXT./INT. PILLS AND COKE'S CAR, A BLOCK AWAY

Cherry walks to the car, keeping a low profile. Gets in--

PILLS AND COKE

You know what terms we never discussed? The
ones where you're in *my car with me*, and
the motherfucking police shoot us! We never
discussed those fucking terms!

As Cherry lays down on the floor--

CHERRY

Just drive.

PILLS AND COKE

I want a 100% percent vig, bitch.

Pills and Coke starts driving away. A tired Cherry lays there on
the floor, watching trees pass by above--

CHERRY (V.O.)
 When you have tried to cheat life's
 suffering, it finds a way of catching back
 up with you...

INT. CHERRY AND EMILY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

The same tired Cherry enters the darkened house, cash stuffed in his hoodie pockets. Emily lays passed out on the chair, visibly frailer.

Cherry pulls a wooden box from the cupboard, hides the cash in it. Looks to Emily. Saddened...

MOMENTS LATER

Cherry carries Emily up the stairwell.

INT. PILLS AND COKE'S CAR - DAY

Pills and Coke sits behind the wheel, eyeing "CAPITALIST ONE."

CHERRY (V.O.)
 By mid-march I had robbed something like
 nine or ten banks.

From the passenger seat, Cherry delivers a pep talk to someone in the back--

CHERRY
 It's really not that interesting. The banks
 aren't ever gonna fight you over the cash.
 'Cause they don't care. It's like taking
 sand from the beach.

REVEAL James Lightfoot in the back, taking it all in, intense.

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
 But it's somebody's money.

CHERRY
 No, it's the bank's money.

James considers this, unsold.

CHERRY (CONT'D)
 Look, do you need the money or don't you
 need the money?

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
 Of course I need the money.

CHERRY

Okay. So I can get a lot more if I can hit all the tellers. But to hit all the tellers, I need you.

JAMES LIGHTFOOT

But if we're both pulling the robbery, why am I only getting 10%?

CHERRY

Because I'm the one carrying the gun and doing the talking. If you were carrying the gun and threatening the innocents, then it would be a different story.

JAMES LIGHTFOOT

Okay, then give me the gun...

CHERRY

(skips a beat)

No...

JAMES LIGHTFOOT

You just said if I--

CHERRY

I don't care what I said. It's the arrangement we discussed or nothing.

PILLS AND COKE

(to James)

Jesus. Quit being such a flaming pussy, dude...

As James considers--

INT. CAPITALIST ONE - DAY

Cherry storms into the bank wearing OPAQUE EYEGLASSES that have eyeballs painted on them. A MESSY WIG peeks out from under his hoodie. He fires off a couple shots into the ceiling--

CHERRY

NO ALARMS. I WANT EVERYBODY TO GIVE THIS MAN HERE YOUR MONEY--

He extends his arm, dramatically pointing to his left as we PAN TO FIND: no one is there.

Seconds later, Cherry sees James Lightfoot outside, running away past the bank windows.

A beat, and Cherry looks back at the terrified bank employees--

CHERRY (CONT'D)
(under his breath)

Fuck.

He leaves the bank.

SECONDS LATER, IN PILLS AND COKE'S CAR

Cherry jumps back in--

CHERRY

Go go go.

As they drive, Cherry narrows in on James in the backseat.

CHERRY (CONT'D)
What the fuck? That was embarrassing.

JAMES LIGHTFOOT

Sorry man.

PILLS AND COKE
That was fucking infamous.

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
I said I was sorry...

Pills and Coke pops a quaalude. Then another.

PILLS AND COKE
What do we do now?

CHERRY
I don't know.

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
How about we try again, but I drive, and you and Pills and Coke do the robbery?

PILLS AND COKE
Oh great. So now I gotta rob a bank cuz you're a pussy?

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
I'm not comfortable doing it.

Cherry looks at Pills and Coke.

CHERRY
Three, four times the money.

Pills and Coke considers as he drives. Sighs. Shakes his head.

PILLS AND COKE
 (to himself)
 Fucking coercion, man. It's coercion...

Finally--

PILLS AND COKE (CONT'D)
 Alright, but I want the gun--

CHERRY
 No. No.

Cherry hesitates. But Pills and Coke assures him--

PILLS AND COKE
 Holding a gun makes me feel safe.
 (beat)
 And you're a junkie motherfucker. With
 PTSD...

As Cherry Considers...

EXT. BANK FUCKS AMERICA

Cherry and Pills surreptitiously approach the bank. Cherry glances back at Pills, stops...

CHERRY
 Dude...

Pills' eyes are glazed. His face constipated. He's clearly feeling his quaaludes now

CHERRY (CONT'D)
 What's going on with you?

Pills stares back at him, shrugs.

CHERRY (CONT'D)
 Your eyes...are all fucking glazed.

PILLS AND COKE
 Prolly the Klonnie...

CHERRY
 What Klonnie?

PILLS AND COKE
 My nerves were shot..

CHERRY
 You took klonnie?

PILLS AND COKE

Just some...

Beat.

CHERRY

You good for this?

Pills and Coke hesitates, nods.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

Look at me. Are you good?

PILLS AND COKE

(staring at him)

I'm good...

INT. BANK FUCKS AMERICA - MOMENTS LATER

Cherry enters the bank with Pills and Coke, who is clearly feeling his quaaludes now--

PILLS AND COKE

EVERYONE GIVE YOUR MAN THIS MONEY...

He raises the gun to fire it into the ceiling but pulls the trigger while it is still en route upwards-- a bullet taking out the window to an interior office. The MANAGER ducks as the GLASS SHATTERS.

Pills and Coke reacts, delayed and slow--

PILLS AND COKE (CONT'D)

Sorry... sorry, man...

Cherry takes the gun and shoves the bag at Pills and Coke--

CHERRY

Just go get the goddamn cash--

Pills and Coke doesn't move. Cherry shoves him.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

Go get it!

Pills and Coke nods... then turns around and proceeds to amble right out of the bank.

Cherry closes his eyes for a moment, as if wishing himself away from here. Then he steels himself, starts sweeping cash off the counter and stuffing it in his pockets when--

He HEARS the door behind him BOLT SHUT, turns to see a red light activated...

CHERRY (CONT'D)
 (freaked)
 Who pushed the button?

Panicked, Cherry fires off three shots in the ceiling -- BAM!
 BAM! BAM! Patrons SCREAM and cower. He levels his gun at a
 teller--

CHERRY (CONT'D)
 WHO PUSHED THE FUCKING BUTTON?
 (a tense beat)
 WHO?!

A desperate Cherry aims down the line of tellers, one by one...
until he finds a guilty MANAGER, standing near the back. Cherry
 beelines to him, gun still aimed--

CHERRY (CONT'D)
 The fuck is the matter with you? You don't
 close a gunman in with innocent people. Are
 you fucking retarded?

The Manager backs away, stammering--

MANAGER
 The police will be here soon...

Cherry pins the Manager up against the wall now--

CHERRY
 Listen to me, whoever your boss is will
 fire your motherfucking ass. Open it. Now.

The Manager swallows, holding his ground when--

Cherry jams the gun into the Manager's head, ready to blow his
 fucking brains out--

CHERRY (CONT'D)
 ARE YOU FUCKING DEAF?! I SAID OPEN THE
 DOOR, BITCH, OR I WILL SHOOT YOU IN YOUR
 FUCKING FACE!

OFF THE MANAGER, trembling with terror--

EXT. PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Cherry, freaking the fuck out, runs from the bank as James
 Lightfoot pulls up in Pills and Coke's car--

INT. PILLS AND COKE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Cherry jumps into the back seat as James Lightfoot punches the
 gas.

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
 What happened?! Did you shoot somebody?

Cherry, sinking down low--

CHERRY
 No.

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
 (realizing)
 Where's Pills and Coke?

CHERRY
 He bailed.

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
 Jesus...

Cherry's mind races, fighting adrenaline. Then decides--

CHERRY
 We can't leave him, he'll rat us out for sure. You gotta turn around...

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
 No...

CHERRY
 James! We cannot leave him.

James, torn, turns the car around, slow-driving. Cherry watches, intense, as James scans out the window...

CHERRY (CONT'D)
 You see him?

Suddenly, a GUNSHOT--

CHERRY (CONT'D)
 What the fuck was that?

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
 (freaked)
 I don't like this. I don't like this...

Just then, James sees Pills and Coke ambling down a driveway. He slams on the brakes as Cherry pops open the door--

CHERRY
 Get in.

Pills and Coke, still high, stares at Cherry, slowly piecing together who he is.

CHERRY (CONT'D)
 (panicking)
 FUCK IS WRONG WITH YOU?

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
 GET IN THE CAR!

Pills and Coke barely gets in as James peels off.

MORE SIRENS.

CHERRY
 (to James)
 Make a left, then a right on Van Aken.

Cherry, looking back to check for cops--

CHERRY (CONT'D)
 Those people were so rude. The manager
 didn't even care if I killed everybody.
 Really reckless. Over pieces of fucking
 paper.

They ride in silence, the sirens finally getting further away.
 Then Pills and Coke sighs, saddened--

PILLS AND COKE
 Guys...

CHERRY
 What?

PILLS AND COKE
 Look...

Cherry turns, sees there's BLOOD all over Pills and Coke's shirt.

PILLS AND COKE (CONT'D)
 I think they shot me...

CHERRY
 Jesus Christ...

Cherry is back in Iraq, leaps into action. Jams the pillowcase into the gunshot wound, applying pressure.

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
 What the fuck...

CHERRY
 (to Pills)
 Keep talking to me, man. Look in my eyes.
 (MORE)

CHERRY (CONT'D)
 (to James)
 Go to the hospital on Green Road.

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
 We can't go to the hospital.

CHERRY
 Go to the fucking hospital!

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
 They'll arrest us!

PILLS AND COKE
 Take me to the hospital...

Cherry considers this...

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
 They'll arrest us...

Labored breathing from Pills and Coke.

PILLS AND COKE
 Take me...

Cherry eases the pressure off the pillowcase...

PILLS AND COKE (CONT'D)
 ...take...me...

...and then, the breathing stops.

A beat, as Cherry stares at Pills and Coke. James drives, helpless, quietly crying now--

Cherry finally checks Pills' pulse.

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
 Is he...

A long, silent beat as Cherry and James sit there. Then--

JAMES LIGHTFOOT (CONT'D)
 What do we do... ?

AND AS WE PUSH IN ON CHERRY, STILL STUNNED--

EXT. UNDERPASS - EAST CLEVELAND

CHERRY (V.O.)
 We didn't have a choice. We dumped his body in East Cleveland.

Cherry and James leave Pills' body on the side of the road.
Drive away...

A SLOW FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. PARK - DAY

A SIDEWAYS LAKE. REVERSE TO REVEAL, CHERRY, stoned on a bench,
lost in thought.

Emily, mid-high, sits on a picnic table, watching Livinia play
with another dog. She is even more deteriorated than the last
time we saw her.

WIFE (O.S.)

She yours?

REVEAL A COUPLE, about Cherry and Emily's age. Emily blinks, as
if taking a moment to realize what the woman is talking about...

EMILY

Yeah.

WIFE

I think our dog is in love with your dog.

EMILY

She's so cute.

HUSBAND

Your dog is fast...

BACK ON CHERRY, turns to see the back of Emily, talking to
someone off camera.

EMILY

She loves to run.

HUSBAND

So does ours. Hard to keep her on a leash
sometimes.

EMILY

What kind of dog is she?

AS CHERRY AMBLES UP THE HILL, HE FINDS EMILY TALKING TO NO ONE--

WIFE

Not sure. She's a rescue.

EMILY

Oh really? So is Livinia...

WIFE

Are you from around here?

EMILY

We're not too far. Near Shaker Square.

WIFE

We're right next door in Cleveland Heights...

HUSBAND

What do you do?

EMILY

I go to CSU. I'm a graduate assistant there.

BACK ON CHERRY, watching Emily hallucinate, engaging in the banality of a life that could have been...

She turns to Cherry, her face lighting up--

EMILY (CONT'D)

This is my husband. He goes to CSU, too.

Cherry stares back at Emily, heartbroken. SHIFT BACK TO EMILY'S POV: She proudly tells the Couple--

EMILY (CONT'D)

He's on the G.I. Bill. He was in the Army.

WIFE

Really? Jeff was a Marine. He's a cop now...

HUSBAND

Cleveland Heights PD.

EMILY

How do you like it?

HUSBAND

It's a job.

EMILY

Jobs are hard to come by these days.

Emily looks to Cherry. A beat, and he nods in agreement. Then wanting this to end, he tells her--

CHERRY

We should... probably get going...

EMILY

Yeah. I have a paper to write.

(then)

Maybe we can get the dogs together
sometime. See ya around--

GO WIDE: Cherry with Emily, alone in the park, walking away...

EXT. CHERRY AND EMILY'S HOUSE - DAY

Cherry holds Emily's arm, supporting her as they walk up.
Black's car is in the street.

EMILY

What does he want?

CHERRY

Go inside, baby.

EMILY

What does...

CHERRY

Go inside.

INT. BLACK'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

A depressed Cherry gets in the passenger's side of the 70's
Sedan. A bag on the seat between them.

A long beat, then --

CHERRY

Whatchoo buy...

Black opens the bag. Tilts it to Cherry, who nods, pretending to
care--

CHERRY (CONT'D)

It's cool...

BLACK

It is, right?

Another long beat.

CHERRY

I don't have your money.

(beat)

So if you need to shoot me, please drive me
somewhere else. 'Cause the neighbors.

BLACK
I'm not gonna shoot you.

ON CHERRY, almost disappointed.

BLACK (CONT'D)
I won't get my money back if I shoot you.

Now he's overcome with exhaustion...

CHERRY
I can't do this anymore.

BLACK
Sure you can.

CHERRY
I can't.

BLACK
You can.

Black lays his gun on the bag.

BLACK (CONT'D)
For your girl you can.

The threat is clear. A loaded moment as Cherry swallows that. Then looks at Black, studying the hole that is his face...

Finally--

CHERRY
You know the bank on Coventry?

Black nods.

CHERRY (CONT'D)
(beat)
I need to get right first...

Black considers, fronts him 2 grams--

BLACK
This'll make it six.

Cherry nods, taking the dope.

CHERRY
I'll be right out.

As Cherry gets out of the car--

INT. CHERRY AND EMILY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Cherry sits on the edge of the bed, watching Emily sleep. She looks as though she might be dead with track marks up and down both arms. Her skin almost a luminescent white.

She stirs. Cherry forcing a smile--

CHERRY
I just talked to Black.

EMILY
Oh yeah... ?

But something awful is building inside Cherry...

CHERRY
Guess what?

EMILY
Hmmm?

CHERRY
He's gonna drive for me. So I can pay him back.

Emily, made happy by this--

EMILY
Yeah?

Cherry nods, tears welling. Then--

CHERRY
Guess what else?

EMILY
Hmmm?

CHERRY
(beat)
He's got a new leather jacket...

Cherry's crying now. Gently stroking her arm.

EMILY
Did he front you?

Cherry nods again, losing the battle-- heaving sobs now.

Emily's eyes peer through slits, looking up at him, unaffected. She speaks in short breaths--

EMILY (CONT'D)

I'm so tired. Can you... get me a shot? I just want to sleep... I just want it... to be quiet...

ON CHERRY: shattered and heartbroken over this... until... he comes to a decision.

CHERRY

When I get back, babe. When I get back...

He gets himself together and stands, resolved to do a thing. Then leans over and softly kisses her head. Whispering--

CHERRY (CONT'D)

Love you.

EMILY

(beat)

Love... you too.

And off that, we GO BACK TO--

INT. CREDIT NONE - DAY

The same moment from the start of the film: Cherry and the teller, Vanessa, facing one another under the spotlight, the world around them lost to darkness. Until--

Cherry takes the cash, stuffing it in his pocket. He removes his baseball hat, looking back up at Vanessa... and smiles warmly--

CHERRY

I'd like you to do me a favor, Vanessa...

VANESSA

And what's that?

CHERRY

(beat)

I'd like you to press the alarm.

EXT. CREDIT NONE - MOMENTS LATER

THE ALARM BLARES. Cherry walks out of the bank, oddly serene. He walks over to Black's waiting Sedan and opens the back door. Tosses the money in and then closes it again... walking off down the street. A beat, and Black's Sedan pulls off.

ON CHERRY, looking around as he goes: The apartments with balconies; the trees-- the beautiful fucking trees...

CHERRY (V.O.)

The morning was overcast, but it was bright nonetheless-- a bright overcast morning. In just-spring...

The sounds of SIRENS rise from a few blocks away.

Cherry stops, getting down to his knees now...

CHERRY (V.O.)

This is the beauty of things fucking my heart. I wish I could lie down on the grass in the sun for a while. But it's a childish thing to wish for.

The SIRENS grow louder and Cherry pulls a syringe from his pocket...

CHERRY (V.O.)

But here come the sirens. Here come their fucking gangsters--

The SIRENS, deafening now, closing in on him. He shoots up, the sun shining down on his face...

CHERRY (V.O.)

The sirens screaming now, now turning--

Police cars approach from behind as Cherry falls back to the concrete, his head landing just next to the green grass. Feeling the rush of his high...

CHERRY (V.O.)

And I feel peaceful.

AND OFF CHERRY'S FACE--

DRONE SHOT OF A CAVALCADE OF POLICE CARS ON CEDAR ROAD

CHYRON -- PART SIX: THE COMEDOWN, 2007-2017

IN A POLICE STATION, THE COMMUNAL HOLDING AREA

A hallway. Screaming. We hear a nervous, unknown voice call from a cell...

VOICE (O.S.)

Guard? Guard??

As we travel to the holding area, we find: Cherry, among a few shocked inmates. He's coming down now, balled up in excruciating pain, his stomach cramping. Vomit all over the floor.

As he continues to scream...

ECHO TO BLACK.

FADE UP:

IN A PRISON HALLWAY

(NOTE: THRU THE FOLLOWING SCENES, THE CAMERA TRAVELS LEFT TO RIGHT.)

A hollowed out Cherry (**STILL 23**), now in uniform, is led to his cell through a crowded common area.

IN A PRISON CELL, NIGHT

An insomnia laden Cherry sits on his bunk, hunched against the wall, unable to sleep...

IN THE PRISON YARD

Cherry sits in the prison yard, bundled up in his INDUSTRIAL PRISON JACKET. Smoking a cigarette with headphones in, LISTENING TO THE FILM'S SCORE THAT HAS BEEN PLAYING.

He takes in the world around him when-- He pulls the headphones out, the MUSIC ABRUPTLY CUTTING OFF. THE CAMERA STOPPING.

A long beat, as he sits there, really hearing the quiet of the morning, reflecting on the choice he's made...

Then as the MUSIC and CAMERA start up again--

A SUPPORT MEETING

Cherry enters a support meeting for the first time. Awkwardly finds a seat...

IN THE LATRINE

(NOTE: CHERRY IS NOW 26)

Cherry, a little older, brushes his teeth at a row of sinks, sandwiched in-between the other inmates, a sense of normalcy to it all...

IN THE CAFETERIA

Cherry quietly eats at a long table with his CELLMATE and some others...

CHERRY'S CELLMATE
This food is shit.

CHERRY

It's alright...

IN THE PRISON YARD AGAIN

A healthier Cherry does sit ups...

IN A SUPPORT MEETING

Cherry listens to a Guidance Counselor in his drug support group...

AT THE EMAIL KIOSK

(NOTE: CHERRY IS NOW 29)

Cherry sits down, writes an email...

IN ANOTHER SUPPORT MEETING

Cherry shares his story...

AT THE PHONES

Cherry patiently waits in line for his turn to make a call...

IN THE COMMON AREA

Cherry watches a movie with the other inmates...

IN THE LATRINE

Cherry brushes his teeth again...

IN A PAROLE HEARING

(NOTE: CHERRY IS NOW 33)

Cherry, visibly more than a decade older, sits anxiously before the THREE MEMBERS OF THE PAROLE BOARD.

PAROLE COMMISSIONER

... These were serious crimes and you deserved to go to prison for the minimum 10 years. You have no prior history of criminal activity. You have complied with prison regulations and rules. You have programmed in an acceptable manner. Considering these factors, you are deemed low-risk to reoffend. Therefore, it is our vote to grant your parole effective immediately. This decision, although difficult, is fair and just...

THE CAMERA STOPS ON CHERRY as he smiles, tearing up...

IN CHERRY'S CELL AGAIN

(NOTE: THE CAMERA IS NO LONGER MOVING LEFT TO RIGHT)

Cherry reads alone on his bunk, clean shaven and with a fresh haircut.

GUARD (O.S.)
Hey, Cleveland--

Cherry looks to the GUARD standing in his cell door.

OFFICER
--You ready?

REVEAL Cherry has been reading on a bare mattress. The linens on his bed have been stripped and folded in a pile.

IN THE HALLWAY, MOMENTS LATER

Cherry follows the guard, passing by other convicts who watch him go.

OUTSIDE THE PRISON

Cherry is led outside where...

AN OLDER EMILY (NOW ALSO 33) stands, waiting. Clean and healthy.

Cherry looks at her... ready to try to begin again...

CUT TO BLACK.