

THE HOUSELESS

By

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A BLACK SCREEN

As white lines FADE UP. One by one:

"Passion.
It lies in all of us. Sleeping... waiting...
and though unwanted, unbidden,
it will stir...
open its jaws
and howl -- "

The voice of a YOUNG MAN, HOWLING. Like a wolf. A SECOND
YOUNG MAN's voice joins in the howl. And a THRID.

YOUNG MEN (O.S.)
AWOOOO --

VROOM. A car. Revving at top speed. Kills the wolf call.
Tires SCREECH... along the first note of an everlasting HONK.

" -- Without passion, we'd be truly dead."

- Joss Whedon

FADE IN:

EXT. GEORGIA - JEKYLL ISLAND - BEACH - DAY

Scarlet wings span across a pastel horizon. A NORTHERN
CARDINAL sails along the Live Oak tree-pigmented shoreline.

EXT. JEKYLL ISLAND - FOREST - DAY

The Cardinal reaches a magnolia expanse. Pink and white
petals flutter like confetti in the breeze.

EXT. RADIUM SPRINGS - DAY

Stone pathways and lush foliage surround turquoise waters.
The Crimson Bird dips its claws and soars --

EXT. PROVIDENCE CANYON - DAY

Birdy dances amidst vast gorges and sunset-kissed cliffs.

EXT. ATLANTA - STREET - NIGHT

Bleak, mundane. The Cardinal swoops down and alights on --

EXT. ELEANOR'S FAMILY HOME - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Telephone wires. A dimly lit bulb reveals a perfectly mowed
lawn. Beyond the basement window, a shadow catches its eyes --

INT. ELEANOR'S FAMILY HOME - BASEMENT ROOM - NIGHT

On a rickety desk, a mid-2010s laptop shuffles pictures of '70s folk-rock legends: Mick Fleetwood bangs the drums. Bob Dylan blows the harmonica. Simon & Garfunkel. Neil Young --

SMASH! A short, chewed lead pencil bumps into the screen.

ELEANOR (12) -- long and messy hair, ripped jeans, dirty shirt -- jumps. *Oh no, Neil.* She plucks her thumb over the accidental pencil mark. A quick wipe. Then resumes sketching.

And...that's...it! Pencil drops. Eleanor flashes a satisfied smile at her masterpiece.

The DRAWING: a stick figure phallus.

Sharp teeth first, she RIIIPS adhesive tape off the roll. And sticks the 'penis' to her groin. Over jeans.

Her eyes fire up. All set. She heads to --

A well-worn drum kit. Harmonica in the neck rack. Drumsticks in hands. CLACK, CLACK. 3-4!

Eleanor's wild abandon results in a Fleetwood Mac-esque song.

The door BANGS open.

ELEANOR'S MOTHER (40s) -- '50s style housedress, immaculately combed hair, Jesus on her chest -- invades the sanctuary.

ELEANOR'S MOTHER

What do you think you're doing?

Eleanor rises, crumples the penis drawing.

Girl feigns innocence. Mother pretends she saw nothing.

ELEANOR'S MOTHER

Upstairs, now. It's way past your bedtime. And brush your hair. It looks like a bird nest.

The fed up Mother stomps off.

Eleanor eyes the ground. *Her poor wrinkled penis...*

Scissors fly off the desk in her trembling hand. Blades aim for her jugular --

SNIP.

BASEMENT STAIRS

Eleanor trudges up to the top. All of her hair below her earlobes is gone. Now, it's short and crooked --

Daughter and impatient, tea-sipping Mother come face to face.

Mother's eyes widen. *A headdress carnage.*

ELEANOR'S MOTHER

Eleanor!

ELEANOR

I didn't find any birds.

Mother: too shocked for words.

From a cocoon named Eleanor emerges a butterfly.

ELEANOR/AARON

Aaron. My name is Aaron.

Aaron beelines to his room. A smile blooms on his freed face.

EXT. ATLANTA - MARTA STATION - DAY

IN THE PRESENT

AARON (20s), same 'I don't give a shit' look, with the addition of a scruffy beard. He channels Simon and Garfunkel at the harmonica. An upside-down hat lies at his feet.

People move through the dull concrete station. Ignore him. Aaron's enthusiasm dwindles.

An ELDERLY MAN (80s) stops. Listens. Aaron's eyes brighten. The edges of a smile peek behind his harmonica.

The Man leans closer. With a fleeting gesture, he indicates Aaron to play louder.

Aaron does... at the Man's ear --

Elderly jumps. Shoots the Musician a dark look. Shuffles to the station.

Wind pushes against the entrance doors. The frail Man struggles to counter it. Aaron offers a hand.

AARON

Here. These doors are like trying to wrangle a kid to church, right?

Elderly waves milk-warm appreciation.

AARON

Sorry about your ear by the way.
For playing too loud or whatever.

A fake understanding smile from Elderly.

ELDERLY MAN

Bye-bye.

Aaron's polite smile covers a subtle SIGH. He stares at the few meager coins in his upside-down hat --

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

Shoulders in a slouch, Aaron wanders. He compares prices of every item versus the few coins in hand.

Screw it. Aaron straightens. Soft drinks, cookies, chips, candy... fly off the shelves. And cluster up in his arms.

Arched back, Aaron holds his tower of goodies under his chin. Then drops everything on the --

COUNTER

The CASHIER (18) oozes a 'I don't wanna be here' attitude. She gawks at the pile of items, scans one.

AARON

Don't scan. Air castle. Ya know?

The Cashier: Pissed? Confused? A bit of both?

AARON

I'll put it back.

CASHIER

Don't bother.

AARON

Thank you. Apologies.

Aaron exits the same way he entered -- empty-handed.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Aaron squats to pee.

Taking the trash out, a KITCHEN ASSISTANT surprises him.

Aaron stuffs a crumpled tissue in his underwear. Pulls up jeans. Rushes off.

ASSISTANT

Hey! Hey!

Aaron hunkers behind a dumpster, spies on the Assistant.

No seeing Aaron, the Assistant plods back inside. Aaron waits a few ticks. All clear. He goes on mission --

With practiced moves, he lifts the trash bag without dumpster diving for it.

Aaron RIIIPS into the bag. Restaurant scraps overflow. *Oh my yummy.* A feast. He eats with hungry abandon.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - NIGHT

Perched atop the roof, Birdy sings along music echoing from --

INT. GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

A HANGING BANNER: "School's Out Talent Show - 2015"

YOUNG ETHAN'S (11) warm, open voice cradles the microphone. On stage with sparkling eyes, he sings a folk song in the style of Neil Young.

His fingers drift along the strings of his acoustic guitar with disconcerting ease.

Folding chairs occupied by over a hundred Parents. Amongst them: ETHAN'S DAD and MOM (40s), with smiles so big they nearly eclipse their proud eyes.

Young Ethan grins back --

EXT. ATLANTA - PARK - DAY

IN THE PRESENT

Baggy clothes drape ETHAN'S (20s) tall, skeletal frame.

Atop a hill, high above the trees, Ethan plucks an acoustic guitar. He croons a folk-rock song from the Seventies. His now-matured voice is reminiscent of a male version of Stevie Nicks: haunting, powerful, soulful.

Ethan's Parents (50s), lounge on the grass nearby. They watch their Son serenade the disappearing sun with pride.

But when they steal a glance at each other, that pride dies in a slap of unsettled sadness.

INT./EXT. ATLANTA - STREETS - CAR, TRAVELING - DAY

The fiery sunset casts long shadows across the city streets.

Ethan's Parents' car glides through downtown: bustling businesses, convenience stores, sleek condominiums...

Mom stares out vacantly, taps her nails against the window. Dad clenches the steering wheel, knuckles turning white.

From the backseat, Ethan observes their strange behavior.

ETHAN

You guys okay?

Nothing. *Maybe they can use some levity?*

ETHAN

My performance was so bad you're punishing me with the silent treatment?

ETHAN'S MOM

No, baby. You were great.

ETHAN

Okay? Then...?

The car halts next to a seemingly ordinary condo.

Ethan, desperate for answers. Mom and Dad, desperate not to answer... Finally --

ETHAN'S DAD

We won't be able to make it next week.

ETHAN

That's it? Shit, you scared me. It's fine. I've already told you, you don't have to come every week.

ETHAN'S DAD

No. No, this was --

Mom stifles a distressed gasp. She reaches for Ethan's hand. He yanks away from her touch.

ETHAN

What the fuck is going on?

Dad hands him a check.

INSERT - THE CHECK

In the amount of \$100,000.

BACK

ETHAN

Uh... I don't -- Whose is this?

ETHAN'S DAD

Your inheritance. From grandma's estate. It should be enough for you to carry on.

ETHAN

But grandma died last year. Wasn't she... not rich?

ETHAN'S MOM

You think we should have given it to you then? We saw your search history. I still don't want to give you that money.

ETHAN

Then don't. I mean, why now?
(a sickening fear)
Wait, are you -- Is Mom dying?

Mom shakes: no. Ethan turns to his Dad with the same unbearable question.

ETHAN'S DAD

Oh lose the innocent face, willya?
You know darn well we're not the ones dying.

Ethan recoils. Gut punched. A writhed chuckle becomes his only refuge.

ETHAN

Dad, come on. I'm getting help here. I'm --

ETHAN'S MOM

How many demerits do you have left before they kick you out of this place, too? One, right?

ETHAN

Only 'cause they overload the plate! Like, it's nowhere near a normal portion!

ETHAN'S DAD

And there you go again, proving our point.

ETHAN

So what, so you're just... You just what?

ETHAN'S DAD

We love you. We always will --

ETHAN

Wait. Wait, don't say "but."

ETHAN'S DAD

But --

ETHAN

Why would you say "but?" Why would you say "but?!"

ETHAN'S MOM

Ethan.

ETHAN

I try. I try, okay? I'm trying.

ETHAN'S DAD

You say that. Then you shed more layers we add on our shoulders.

ETHAN

That's bullshit. I'm getting fat. I'm eating. I won't get kicked out. Dad, I promise. I won't get kicked out. Mom. Mom...

A silent denial from both Parents.

ETHAN'S DAD

Maybe it's not forever. Okay? You know, if you ever have an illumination... But we're done with the involuntary commitments. We're done with court ordered force-feeding. We're --

ETHAN

Done with me.

That, they don't deny.

ETHAN

Okay.

His tensed, shaky grip releases the check into the abyss of his guitar's soundhole.

Car door opens. Feet meet concrete. Car door closes. Then --

That dreadful, surreal VROOM.

Wheels spin away, vanish under Ethan's gaze.

Left on the sidewalk, he turns to the red door behind him. A golden sign reads: "STEIGER EATING DISORDER CLINIC".

INT. STEIGER EATING DISORDER CLINIC - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A large, impersonal institutional room.

Ethan at a table with his Group:

- MAKENZIE (30s), overweight.
- COURTNEY (20s), underweight.
- LAURA (20s), near healthy weight. The most cheery.
- HEIDI (30s), the group's counselor. Healthy.

Makenzie and Laura take bites. Ethan and Courtney gape at their plates.

COURTNEY

A king's feast. Again.

Ethan has lost the drive to speak, but his eyebrows agree.

HEIDI

No talking about food at the table.
Ethan, what was the song you were
playing earlier?

A despondent shrug is the only answer Ethan manages to give.

LAURA

I say, your music's a better cure
than all the blah-blah-blah in the
post meal sessions. You soothe my
soul. No offense, Heidi.

Courtney snorts a laugh.

HEIDI

All right, Miss Courtney and Mister
Musician. Let's pick up the forks.

Legs taping under the table, Ethan picks up his fork.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Aaron: another ravenous bite -- *Oh no, no, no.* Nauseated, he
bends backward. A last ditch effort to keep the food down --

In a SPLASH, the feast returns over the garbage bag.

Aaron wipes his mouth. Rubs his red, watery eyes. Leans
against the brick wall.

He pets his harmonica as a kitten before *folking* it up --

AARON

(singing)

*JAMMING IN A STINKY ALLEY. ONLY MY
PALS, SMELLY PISS AND FULL-ON VOMIT
TO KEEP ME COMPANY. OH, GARBAGE
JUICE, TELL ME. OH, GARBAGE JUICE,
TELL ME. WHY DO YOU HATE ME? YEAH,
G-J, WHY DO YOU HATE ME?*

Instrumental break.

INT. STEIGER EATING DISORDER CLINIC - ETHAN'S ROOM

Ugly. Industrial white cinder block. Twin bed and a dresser.

Restless feet tramping from door to wall. From wall to door.

Short, anguished breaths.

Ethan clenches his sunken belly. His nails pierce his skin to
blood in a desperate attempt to rip out "fat."

His eyes fixate on the dresser, then turn cold --

HALLWAY

Patient rooms on each side.

Backpack on, Ethan tiptoes to the main door.

LAURA

Ethan?

Startled, he swings to Laura who shows concern.

LAURA

We heard gunshots today. Cops found two bodies on the 2nd... Might be a killer on the loose.

A blank stare at Laura. *Can't care about that.*

LAURA

But you wouldn't mind crossing his path, would ya?

Unspeakable hurt overflows in Ethan's eyes.

Laura goes to hug him. His arms stay flat against his sides.

ETHAN

Take care. Don't make me mad.

LAURA

You're making me mad. Let me get Heidi for you. Okay? Before you do anything stupid.

He nods.

She heads to her mission. *That was easy... too easy? Shit.*
She turns around --

The entrance door finishes closing on its own. He's gone.

EXT. ATLANTA - DOWNTOWN STREET - NIGHT

A car HONKS and swerves to avoid Ethan. The intersection light is well green for the car. Well red for the Runaway.

Ethan carries on. Emotion-free. Zombie walk.

The echo of a distant PIANO drifts into the night air.
Igniting Ethan's lifeless eyes --

INT. KAYLA'S FAMILY HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sunlight streams through white lace curtains. Bathing an endless hardwood floor, a grand piano, and unpacked boxes.

YOUNG COLE (5) plays a simple melody on the piano. His small fingers stretch to hit each note.

The SIBLINGS' MOTHER (30s) cradles YOUNG KAYLA (7) on her lap. Her ill-tired, emerald eyes sparkle as she guides her daughter's hands on the acoustic guitar.

Painted on the guitar's body: a RED BIRD CLUTCHING A GOLDEN THREAD IN ITS BEAK.

PETER (late 30s) stands in the hallway. From afar, he scrutinizes Young Kayla.

Young Cole plays the final note. *Hurray!* He turns to Mom who embraces him warmly. *Now, what did daddy think? Is he proud of me? Is he looking?*

He's not. Peter's eyes still linger on Young Kayla. Her tiny fingers. Her candid beam. Her lips. *Such soft lips...*

INT. LUIS' PUB - NIGHT

IN THE PRESENT

Piano and guitar duo KAYLA and COLE (20s) perform a Seventies Joni Mitchell tune.

Cole's fingers dance on the piano keys, lost in the music.

Kayla strums a plain, unpainted, acoustic guitar by rote. Her mind is a billion miles away.

In this cozy, tiny, laid-back space, the few Customers drink and chat. Indifferent to the show.

THROUGH THE WINDOW

EXT. LUIS' PUB - SAME TIME

Warm neon colors reflect on the pavement.

Ethan, rapt on Cole and Kayla.

INTERCUT - INSIDE/OUTSIDE THE PUB

A moving piano solo by Cole.

Ethan's fingers envelop the door handle -- then back off.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Aaron, still plopped against the wall. His eyes flutter in a fight to stay open.

Dangling from his relaxed lips, his harmonica snorts him awake. He clutches it like a teddy bear, surrenders to sleep.

INT. MARTA STATION - NIGHT

Fluorescent lights cast a sickly glow on the gray walls. A few People transit.

Ethan strums his guitar, sings softly.

Instruments strapped to their backs, Cole and Kayla enter. Ethan's voice reaches Cole's ears. In instant awe, Cole's hand aim for his wallet --

The RUMBLE of an approaching train. Louder and louder. Kayla pulls on her Brother's arm.

KAYLA
Move your ass!

The Siblings run down the escalators and disappear from Ethan's sight.

EXT. STEAKHOUSE - DAY

Sun beats down on the busy sidewalk.

Aaron bolts from the downtown restaurant onto the --

STREET

Aaron beats it. He dodges people, glances over his shoulder.

The RESTAURANT OWNER chases him. Getting closer and closer --

Aaron sprints.

AARON
I'm sorry! So very sorry!

Winded, the Owner slows, throws his hands up in defeat.

EXT. MARTA STATION - DAY

A voice *weaving magic* coasts Aaron to a stop --

Ethan performs near the entrance --

The Owner catches up. He manhandles Aaron by the back of the shirt, chokes him, lays him out at Ethan's feet. With a knee to his spine, the Owner immobilizes Aaron. And dials 9-1-1.

AARON
 (to Ethan)
 Hey, guitar man. You're amazing.
 Dude, that voice.

RESTAURANT OWNER
 (phone)
 Yeah, I caught a steak thief. I'm
 at --

The Owner reconnoiters to get his bearings.

<p>AARON (to Ethan) Ya houseless or naturally lanky? Sorry, don't wanna be rude. I was so hungry. I play too. Harmonica. And drums.</p>	<p>RESTAURANT OWNER (phone) Marta Station.</p>
--	--

Ethan falls for Aaron's charm.

ETHAN
 (to Owner)
 How much?

AARON
 Naturally lanky, thank you so much.

RESTAURANT OWNER
 Thirty bucks and his ass is still
 mine 'til the cops get here.

AARON
 Please. I would've come back to
 pay. Cross my heart.

RESTAURANT OWNER
 Hmm. And hope to die?

AARON
 Come on. Don't you have any
 sympathy for people who got kicked
 out of their house for wanting a
 gorgeous penis?

A beat.

RESTAURANT OWNER

No.

AARON

(to Ethan)

Thanks. Keep playing so I can go to the slammer with a beautiful memory of your voice.

Ethan grabs at the Owner's phone. They wrestle over it. The Owner maintains his grip.

RESTAURANT OWNER

Leggo. What the hell!

The Owner loses balance and falls off Aaron.

ETHAN

Run!

Aaron wastes no time. He's up and away.

RESTAURANT OWNER

HEY!!!

Threatened by the Owner, Ethan passes him and trails Aaron.

Aaron disappears into thin air --

A hand latches onto Ethan's wrist, yanks him into an --

ALLEY

Aaron drags Ethan behind a dumpster. He stretches his neck to check if the coast is clear.

The Owner stops on the street at the alleyway intersection.

ETHAN

Is he gone?

Aaron shoves a hand over Ethan's mouth and pulls his head behind the sheltering garbage container.

They wait in tense silence.

Ethan teeters, dizzy. He reaches out for support and accidentally slams the metal dumpster -- HOLLOW METALLIC ECHO.

Shit. Are they caught? Aaron steadies Ethan, then glances up the alley. The steak merchant is gone.

Ethan jerks his arm from Aaron's grasp.

AARON

Well, excuse the shit out of my sweet fingertips. Looks like you can use a juicy Rib Eye too, Mister Wobbly.

ETHAN

I'm fine.

AARON

You sure?

ETHAN

Is it true? About your parents?

Aaron locks eyes on Ethan's empathetic gaze.

AARON

Wanna hear my baby Bobby D.?

Aaron switches to dead serious. SNAPS his fingers.

AARON

Neil Young. I've been wracking my brain trying to figure out which rock star you remind me of. Definitely Neil Young.

ETHAN

Yeah?

AARON

Yeah! But young. The young Young, you know?

ETHAN

(tickled)
Mm-hmm.

AARON

Man, let's get some grub then play some shit together.

Ethan panics and bolts.

ETHAN

Can't. Sorry. I gotta go.

AARON

Hey, what about Bobby D.?

ETHAN

Good luck.

Aaron plays a melody at the harmonica.

The beautiful tune spurs Ethan to slow down. He turns around, gazes back at Aaron's gleam --

EXT. MARTA STATION - DAY

The newly-met Musicians busk with a newfound enthusiasm. Aaron's catchy harmonica solos and Ethan's pristine pitch attract a Crowd.

Their upside down hat fills with coins and a few bills.

INT. DINER - DAY

Fifties-style. Neon and chrome. Tuck and roll upholstery.

Aaron devours a burger. Ethan sips water after every tiny bite. His legs shake under the table.

AARON

Duh. We've been playing all day and I don't know your name. Aaron.

ETHAN

Ethan.

AARON

Ethan. Great name.

ETHAN

Yours too.

AARON

It was my choice. I've got spectacular taste, don't I?

Ethan shakes his head at Aaron's irresistible charm.

AARON

So what's your story, scarecrow? Have a cool job? A lover? Still living with mommy and daddy?

ETHAN

Yeah, I don't know you well enough to answer any of that.

AARON

Fair's fair. You're a wise one.

Ethan dwells on his plate, rises.

ETHAN
Be right back.

Aaron throws him a *fucking irresistible* smile. Ethan leans into his ear, hushes... Then --

AARON
We totally have the same address!

Ethan chuckles *en route* the men's room.

LATER

Aaron eats like it was his last meal. Licks his fingertips.

Ethan wipes his mouth. Sits back like all is normal.

ETHAN
I like the Old Skool vibe of this place.

AARON
Right? You have no idea what I'd give to travel back to the Fifties, up to the Nineties.

Not that Ethan wants to address Aaron's transition, but...

ETHAN
Really?

AARON
Oh yeah. Great mentality back then. No, I meant for the --

ETHAN
Yeah, the music.

AARON
Man, I swear, you and I --

He wields a fry.

AARON
See, I'm like the revered french fry: sweet, salty, gosh-darn juicy. Crisp on the outside. I'm doing fine by myself. I can rally. I can rally hard.

A ketchup bottle flies off the table into Aaron's hand.

AARON

But squirt this bittersweet mixture
of crushed tomato on me, and...

Fries get slathered, disappear under a ketchup ocean.

AARON

POW!

Ethan jumps. Customers turn toward the fuss. Lost in self-satisfaction, Aaron pays it no mind.

AARON

The missing ingredient: red. The
color of passion. An open wound
that blares, "Not a second to lose.
The world is ours to conquer!"
That's you, Ethan.

ETHAN

Hmm. "A bittersweet mixture of
crushed tomatoes."

AARON

I mean, you're shy, but when you
sing and play that sweet guitar...
there's fire in your eyes.

ETHAN

And we conquer the world with what?
Swords and horses?

AARON

It's a freaking metaphor, all
right? So what do you say?

ETHAN

About...?

AARON

A band, Wobbly. You and I.

ETHAN

(laughs)
You're crazy.

EXT. STREET - DAY

As they amble down a quiet downtown street, a WHITE VAN
catches Aaron's eye --

An open driver's side window. No one at the wheel. No prying
eyes around...

He opens the door. *Bingo!* Keys in the ignition.

ETHAN
What are you doing?

Aaron snoops in the back of the van.

AARON
Hop in.

ETHAN
No!

AARON
You have to look at this.

Ethan hops in. *Is there a body in there?*

As soon as Ethan lands, Aaron leaps into the drivers seat and fires up the van. He BURNS RUBBER, peels off at high speed.

Pedestrians scurry out of the way. Drivers HONK and SHOUT.

RICKY (45) -- thin, bald, covered in grim tattoos -- exists a nearby restaurant. He spots the speeding van. His van. His already dark and bloodshot eyes take on an even darker gaze.

INT./EXT. ATLANTA - STREETS - VAN, TRAVELING - CONTINUOUS

Ethan holds on for dear life.

ETHAN
You stole it!

AARON
Look in the back.

Ethan shoots an angry glare at him.

AARON
Just look.

A completely empty space is all Ethan sees.

ETHAN
What? There's nothing.

AARON
Exactly. My drums will fit in there. They're still at my parents'. Heck, they better be.

ETHAN

We're not doing this. Take it back.
I'm not doing this.

AARON

Easy on that brittle heart. It was
abandoned. A gift from Dog.

ETHAN

You mean "God?"

AARON

Not a believer.

ETHAN

... Whatever. Sounds like Dog wants
us locked up.

AARON

So what? Free food and housing.

ETHAN

I can't believe we just did that.

CLUNK. The door lock switches engage under Ethan's eyes.

ETHAN

Holy sh-- you're kidnapping me!

AARON

Girl, no. It's what parents do for
safety.

ETHAN

Aaah! Well then thanks Stockholm. I
feel much safer now.

AARON

I'm not kidnapping you. If you
wanna leave, say the word.

ETHAN

I say the word. Okay? Let me out.

AARON

Nah, see, I don't think you really
want out.

ETHAN

This is real, isn't it? You're
gonna tie me up in a red barn. Play
me creepy lullabies at the
harmonica with that crazy banana
smile, and... tear my cloth--

AARON

Dude!

Van pulls over. Doors unlock.

AARON

I'm not restraining you, see? You
can go rockin' in the free world.

The Neil Young reference amuses Ethan who tries to stay mad.

ETHAN

Are you gonna take the van back?

AARON

Let's call her Van Morrison.

Ethan bites his lip to hold back laughter.

AARON

You wanna laugh.

ETHAN

(chuckles)
I don't.

Aaron gawks at him. His amused look seesaws to dejected.

AARON

No point keeping it now.

ETHAN

Good luck. Don't get caught. Or get
caught. Whichever you want.

Ethan gathers belongings, hops out.

AARON

Oh well. I thought I stumbled upon
my missing harmony. Goodbye, Ethan.

Aaron drives off.

Ethan, perplexed. He looks at his "fat" self, then at an
approaching car. One foot lifts from the ground, heads toward
a certain death. But the other foot resists --

INT./EXT. ATLANTA - STREETS - VAN, TRAVELING - CONTINUOUS

Ethan plucks chords in the back.

ETHAN

The Houseless.

A flash of appreciation on Aaron's face.

AARON
That just tickled the shit out of
my dreamed-up nuts.

Aaron SCREECHES the van onto an interstate on ramp.

Ethan falls to his side. He crawls to the passenger seat,
buckles up.

AARON
We're The Houseless, bitch. Heck,
we will rise and howl at the moon
like freaking wolves.

ETHAN
Already regretting my decision.

AARON
You won't regret any decision when
you and I fill the world's ears
with good old folk and transcend
their goldang souls.

Ethan blinks, speechless.

AARON
Do you realize? Baby Bobby D. and
young Neil Young are inside Van
Morrison.

Ethan ponders on it for a second, then bursts out laughing.

ETHAN
What?!

AARON
Picture it. You're picturing it?

ETHAN
It's like you want me to say the
word.

AARON
No, no, please don't.

Something. Behind that humorous tone. A hidden truth in both
their smirks. *Please don't go.*

EXT. AARON'S FAMILY HOME - DAY

Same dull street in the same dull middle-class neighborhood.

INT./EXT. VAN - DAY

Aaron parks in front of the well-maintained house.

AARON
All right, you're up.

ETHAN
Up for what?

AARON
I can't go in, remember? Plus,
Mom's probably in there reading
Hemingway while simmering squash
soup like a freaking horror movie.

ETHAN
No. Forget it, I'm not --

AARON
You blessed the band. That's
sacred. No turning back.

ETHAN
I didn't bless getting involved
with your mom. What do I say, "Hi,
can I have the drums I know you
have in your basement?"

AARON
Shit. Didn't think that through.

ETHAN
Yeah no shit.

Aaron takes a closer look at Ethan's body.

AARON
You can fit.

ETHAN
Fit where?

AARON
Basement window.

ETHAN
Are you insane? I'm not sneaking
into your parents' house.

EXT. AARON'S FAMILY HOME - BASEMENT WINDOW - DAY

Ethan slides open the window then sneaks inside to --

INT. AARON'S FAMILY HOME - BASEMENT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Untouched for years. A deep layer of dust on everything.

Ethan steps on a cymbal. A REVERBERATING CLANG. He squeezes the cymbal to silence it.

Ethan neither sees nor hears anyone. *Phew.*

Door number one or door number two? Ethan tries one: stairs. He closes it cat burglar-like. The other door: to the garage.

He props a dictionary against this door.

EXT. AARON'S FAMILY HOME - DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Aaron backs the van, opens the back doors.

Ethan slides the garage door up. It CREAKS.

AARON
Right on, young Young.

ETHAN
(guilty)
I'm a criminal.

Ethan makes a few trips through the garage with the drum kit.

Aaron loads it.

INT. AARON'S FAMILY HOME - BASEMENT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

One cymbal left. Ethan bobbles it. The tripod BANGS the door frame. The cymbal lands on the floor with a CLANG.

Footsteps upstairs.

AARON'S MOM (O.S.)
Jerry, is that you? Jerry?

Ethan freezes. In a deep voice,

ETHAN
Yeah... h-honey. It's me.

AARON'S MOM (O.S.)
You haven't called me honey in years. How sweet.

Her footsteps move away.

AT THE VAN

Aaron stifles laughter.

Ethan delivers the cymbal.

Aaron's Mom pops up behind them.

Ethan drops the cymbal and freezes.

The cymbal RESONATES and turns on the ground for what seems like an eternity.

Shocked, Mom gapes open-mouthed at her former daughter.

Aaron stares, all innocent-like.

The cymbal finally comes to rest.

AARON

Mom, I --

AARON'S MOM

I made soup.

AARON

... We just had lunch.

AARON'S MOM

You did? What did you get?

AARON

I -- No. We're not doing this.

Aaron tosses the cymbal in, mounts the van. Ethan follows.

Mom casts a helpless gaze as the van SQUEALS away.

INT./EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - VAN, TRAVELING - CONTINUOUS

Aaron drives. Not like him to be so quiet.

ETHAN

Shit, are you okay? I'm so sorry.

AARON

Nah, man, it's all good. We left before she turned on the waterworks. They're just an act.

Ethan probes his face for the unspoken. Aaron looks back, busted for holding out. Aaron moves on,

AARON
Mission accomplished, Double O
Seven. We got everything. Thanks.

ETHAN
The kit does look badass.

AARON
Right?

Aaron grins, genuine. Ethan grins back. He's off the hook.

INT. CONDOS - ALLEY - VAN, PARKED - NIGHT

Aaron hugs and kisses the drums. Reunited at last.

AARON
Daddy's so glad to have his babies
back. Dang, I could purr louder
than the purringest cat on Earth.

ETHAN
Seriously, who talks like that?

Aaron searches the drums.

AARON
You got my drumsticks, right?

ETHAN
Yeah, they were on the... they're
on the shelf. In your room. Shit.

Aaron HISSES at him like a mad cat.

ETHAN
Should we go back?

Aaron's look: are you out of your frickin' mind?

ETHAN
It's fine. We'll go to the music
store tomorrow and --

AARON
I don't get it. How come you have
money but live in the subway?

ETHAN
I had a place. I took off.

AARON

Man, you're so twisted. Who wants to willingly be houseless?

ETHAN

It doesn't sound like your mom kicked you out either.

AARON

She did. And I also kind of robbed them to pay for testosterone therapy then blew away on the wind.

ETHAN

You might not have a penis but you sure got balls.

AARON

Hang on to your hat, Fleetwood Mac. I'm on a waiting list. My penis is coming, and it's gonna be the greatest dick of all time.

Ethan strums.

ETHAN

(singing)

GREATEST DICK. GREATEST DICK OF ALL-TIME. ALL-TIME.

Aaron joins the jam. He beats the skins with his hands and vocalizes drumbeats,

AARON

Tu-du-du-du-dum.

ETHAN

Yeah!

Big laughs.

INT./EXT. STREET - VAN, PARKING - DAY

Aaron fails at fitting the van in a short space.

ETHAN

You ever parallel parked before?

AARON

Billions of times.

He surrenders, double parks and hits the hazard flashers.

ETHAN

I'll baby-sit Morrison. How much?

Aaron shrugs. Ethan slips him a 20 dollar bill.

AARON

You might wanna think about switching to an electric guitar. Rock 'n' Folk, you know?

ETHAN

Don't have enough cash on me.

AARON

Put it on the plastic.

ETHAN

Hmm. Trying to think. Why would I not hand you my credit card?

AARON

I'm not some greedy pirate. I have a heart of gold.

Aaron slams the door and tears for --

INT. MUSIC STORE - DAY

Small and dusty. Instruments concentrated in a few rows.

Cole, in a store T-shirt, approaches a TEEN CUSTOMER (16) who plays an electric keyboard.

COLE

You're good.

Aaron snoops around, plays instruments at random.

COLE

Interested in taking it home?

TEEN CUSTOMER

Yeah... I mean, maybe.

COLE

(downlow)

I saw it 30 percent off on Amazon last week. Bet you can still get that deal.

The STORE MANAGER (40s) overhears Cole.

STORE MANAGER

Cole!

Cole and Aaron both jump. Aaron stops messing with instruments, finds drumsticks.

COLE

(to Teen)

B-R-B.

Cole joins the manager.

EXT. MUSIC STORE - DAY

Cole smokes at the bus stop. He scrolls his phone down the "ATL Now" social media page.



IN THE VAN


Eyes closed, Ethan feels the gap between his ribs.


EXT. MUSIC STORE - SAME TIME


Cole catches the van's flashing hazard lights in the corner of his eye. He glances the van and back to the phone.

INSERT - PHONE

 STOLEN VEHICLE ALERT - PLEASE SHARE 

 Stolen Vehicle: White Ford Transit Van

 Date of Theft: August 9, 2023

 Time of Theft: 1:25 PM

 Last Seen: Midtown Atlanta Area

 License Plate: GA KER621

Attention Atlanta Community,

Please keep an eye out for this vehicle. If you see it or have any information about its whereabouts, please do not approach it and immediately contact Atlanta Police Department's Stolen Vehicles Division at (404) 555-6526.

#AtlantaStolenVan #CommunityAlert #HelpFindOurVan

[Attached photo of the stolen white van]

BACK

Cole double takes the van, compares the license plate number.

COLE
 (phone)
 I'm calling about the stolen white
 van. Plate: KE --

Aaron exits the store. He panics, scans for witnesses. No one. He lays a hand over Cole's mouth. Hangs up the phone.

INT./EXT. STREET - VAN, DOUBLE PARKED - CONTINUOUS

BANG. The rear doors. Ethan startles. He crawls back, unlocks the doors to find --

Aaron, holding Cole hostage. Then pushing him into the van.

ETHAN
 What the hell?

COLE
 (muffled)
 Yeah, what the hell? Help me. Help!

AARON
 Hey! Listen for a sec. Listen. No yelling, all right? No yelling. I'm a nice human being.

Cole nods and Aaron removes his hand. Ethan trembles.

ETHAN
 Aaron, what the fuck? I can't believe you pulled this shit again.

COLE
 "Again?" What does he mean "again?"

AARON
 He was dropping a dime on us about Morrison.

COLE
 No, no, I don't even know Morrison.

ETHAN
 The van.

COLE

Please. I swear I won't say a word.
I'm just a piano player working at
a music store, okay? I'm --

AARON

You play the piano?

ETHAN

Okay, what's with you? You think
you're so unlovable that you have
to kidnap, then ask? I should have
stopped you the first time.

COLE

What first time!?

AARON

Shut up. Both of you. I'm not
kidnapping anyone.
(to Ethan)
I'm not threatening him.
(to Cole)
I'm not threatening you, man. Okay?

COLE

You fucking shoveled me into the
back of a stolen van!

AARON

It was abandoned when we found it.
We just wanna start a band. But
whatever, Piano man. Call the cops
if you will. Spit on our spirits.

Cole calms on sight of the drums and guitar.

COLE

Drums and an acoustic guitar...
That's your band?

Aaron brandishes his harmonica, points it at Cole. Cole jumps
and raises his hands, convinced it's a gun.

AARON

And a harmonica!

Aaron blows a few bars before Ethan rips the harmonica from
his lips. Aaron shoots Ethan the stink eye.

AARON

We're still gearing up.

ETHAN

Right. What instruments should we steal next?

COLE

You steal from the store?

ETHAN

No, steaks and parents --
(to Aaron)
Wait, did you?

AARON

I did not steal from the store.

Aaron produces a receipt he waves in their faces.

AARON

C'mon. Cut me some slack. You know it's not like that.

ETHAN

I don't know shit. Good-jail.

Ethan opens the back doors, ready to leave.

AARON

Please. You can't leave now. That voice --

(to Cole)

I swear, Snitch, you gotta hear this soulful stick sing. It's special. I'm not b-s-ing you.

Cole shakes off a feeling of déjà vu.

COLE

Could I?

Ethan stares at Cole in disbelief.

LATER

Ethan performs in the style of Neil Young.

Aaron retrieves the harmonica from Ethan's pocket, joins in. The last verse of Ethan's song echoes in the van.

For a moment, Cole blinks at Ethan. Utter silence.

COLE

It was you. The other night. Marta Station, right?

Ethan remembers too.

ETHAN

And you were at the pub.

Cole nods. An unspoken understanding of each other. An open door to their vulnerable, musical souls.

COLE

Fuck it. I'm in.

Ethan's face turns into an interrogation point. Aaron doesn't bother asking "why?" He squeaks overjoyed.

AARON

Awesome! We need 12-volt adapter cables. They sell 'em in the store?

EXT. ATLANTA - UNDERPASS - DAY

Kayla spray paints a beautiful cityscape mural to cover GRAFFITI: "Suck my dick."

Her cellphone BUZZES. Caller ID: Peter. She swipes 'Ignore'.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

A pre-war in a poor Atlanta neighborhood.

INT. COLE'S AND KAYLA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Ethan and Aaron follow Cole into the two-bedroom apartment. Just the basics. Sparse. Undecorated.

Cole points to the bathroom.

COLE

Clean towels above the dryer.

Aaron pushes past Ethan.

AARON

First dibs.

He SLAMS the door behind him.

COLE

Don't steal anything.

AARON (O.S.)
What's to steal? Soap? A Loofah?
I'm not a kleptomaniac.

ETHAN
You do know what your affliction is
called.

AARON (O.S.)
Shower running. Can't hear you.

ETHAN
(to Cole)
He's actually a nice guy.

AARON (O.S.)
Thanks, Ethan. I think you're a
swell guy, too.

INT. COLE'S AND KAYLA'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Cole scrambles eggs. Ethan panics at the sight.

COLE
How long have you known each other?

ETHAN
Forty-eight hours.

Cole laughs at what he assumes is a joke.

COLE
You're funny. I like you.

BATHROOM

Ethan showers.

HIS POV: blurry. Green spots pop in and out.

Ethan climbs from the shower, wobbles. He lies on the floor.

KITCHEN

Coffee, eggs, and toast all around.

Aaron is in heaven.

Ethan washes every tiny swallow with sips of dark coffee and
water. He eyes the bathroom, but Cole heads him off.

COLE

Be right back. Got an important mission to accomplish.

Cole locks the door behind him. Ethan fidgets, shakes legs.

AARON

Girl, you're shaking. What's the dark matter?

ETHAN

Nothing. Coffee I guess. I'll just get some air.

BALCONY

Ethan paces.

Through the window, a wall mural draws his attention --

KAYLA'S BEDROOM

Ethan steps closer. Cole notices, swings open the door a bit.

The mural covers every square inch of wall.

COLE

My sister. She's a street artist. I can't even draw a stick man.

Ethan spots an electric guitar propped against the wall.

ETHAN

Electric guitar, too?

COLE

Bass, acoustic, electric, name it.

The front door opens and shuts. Kayla strides up to them.

KAYLA

What are you creeps doing in my room? Go through my panty drawer yet?

AARON

Hello!

Kayla throws him a cagy gaze.

COLE

They're a band. We're a band.

KAYLA
You joined a band without me,
asshole?

COLE
It's the guy from the subway I --

KAYLA
You kept yapping about.

AARON
He did?

Cagy gaze Take 2.

ETHAN
(to Kayla)
I like what you've done with your
room.

AARON
Butt smoocher.

Strike 3. Aaron learns his place.

AARON
If I may, we could use a badass
bassist.

COLE
Let's be honest, Kay. We were never
gonna strike rich with our
instrumental covers.

KAYLA
Since when do you care about money?

COLE
I don't.

KAYLA
Then?

COLE
I hate sales, all right? It makes
me sick. Just because a store is
filled with pretty instruments,
doesn't make it any less of a
manipulative business.

KAYLA
O-M-G. You quit?

COLE

No, I'm not dumb. I know we got
rent and bills to pay...

(mumbles)

I got fired.

KAYLA

What the fuck, Cole! Again?

Uncomfortable with the heated conversation, Ethan and Aaron
attempt sneaking out.

Kayla sighs in resignation. She points her chin at Aaron.

KAYLA

This cock-a-hoop plays too?

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - PARKING LOT - DAY

Instruments plugged into the van through the adapters.

Drums set up outside.

Aaron kicks drums. Cole on the keys. Ethan plays Kayla's
electric guitar.

She spray paints a mural of the Group on the van as they
play. Passersby gather and enjoy the mini Art/Music fest.

LATER

The Group admires Kayla's mural. TEXT: "The Houseless" over
their portraits.

INT./EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - PARKING LOT - VAN - NIGHT

Aaron sleeps. Ethan performs an examination: checks the
diameter of his arms, feels ribs and pelvic bones.

Nearby, a cat fight. Feral TOMCATS HISS and GROWL.

Ethan ignores it until it rises to a fevered pitch. He opens
the back doors.

One of the Cats WHIMPERS after the other delivers a nasty
scratch to its nose. The loser gallops away.

The winning Cat leaps in the van, hides under the dashboard.

Ethan GASPS.

AARON
 (sleep talking)
 The frogs are near.

ETHAN
 The frogs?

Ethan climbs to the front. Aaron grabs him by the waist. He pulls Ethan to his side.

AARON
 Don't let the frogs get me, Wobbly.

Ethan chokes a laugh. Aaron hugs him like a teddy bear. He gives up and settles next to Aaron.

INT. COLE'S AND KAYLA'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Cellphone between ear and shoulder, Cole slurps cereal milk.

COLE
 (phone)
 Hold on. Kayla. Dad for you.

KAYLA (O.S.)
 (Spanish, subtitled)
 I don't speak English.

COLE
 (phone)
 She's late for work, Dad. I'm not your messenger boy, okay?
 (listens)
 I don't know. She's always been a savage. I'm doing great, by the way. Thank you so much for asking.

INT. VAN - SAME TIME

Cat snuggled at their feet, Aaron awakens. He realizes he hugs Ethan -- who wakes, too.

AARON
 Why are you on my side of the lavish bed?

ETHAN
 Hey, I'm the victim here.

AARON
 Is that a cat?

ETHAN

Awww, he stayed! Hi, sweetie. You slept with us? Yes, you did! Oh, yes you did.

AARON

Since when do you know that cat?

ETHAN

Since your frog attack.

AARON

My frog attack? What frog attack?

Ethan chuckles.

AARON

What frog attack? Tell me.

Ethan shrugs.

AARON

Fine.

Aaron removes a notebook and a short, chewed lead pencil from his pocket. He flips to a page with scribbled song lyrics.

ETHAN

You're writing about me in a journal? Right in front of me?

AARON

Right. "Ethan is a mean, mean man. Man, such a mean, mean man."

ETHAN

You're seriously writing that? Let me see.

He grabs the notebook, but Aaron plays Keep-Away. Ethan tilts his head, perplexed.

AARON

It's a song I've been working on.

ETHAN

I didn't know you wrote songs.

AARON

I didn't know you could hide a frog attack from me.

ETHAN

Come on. Let me read it?

Now it's Aaron's turn to be sold by Ethan's charm.

AARON
I hate that face.

He hands him the notebook. Ethan drinks in every scribble.

ETHAN
Hey, Mr. Tambourine Man. Play a
song for me.

Aaron: almost moved by their share wisdom for song quotes.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - PARKING LOT - DAY

They bang out Aaron's song. Kayla joins on the bass.

ETHAN
(singing)
NOWHERE, NO END. THE DAY IS NOW --

They're way off. On different tempos. A cacophony.

KAYLA
This sounds amazing. Let's add some
honking clarinets and max out the
distortion just to be in the clear.

ETHAN
We just need practice.

KAYLA
I don't know, guys. Thanks for
asking me but I don't feel it.

COLE
Of course you don't.

KAYLA
What's that supposed to mean?

COLE
You've been playing like there's a
broomstick up your ass.

KAYLA
Exsqueeze me!?

AARON
C'mon, The Houseless. Enthusiasm.
Confidence. Big smiles.

COLE

I hate to agree with the psycho but
he's got a point.

KAYLA

O-M-G. You can't call him that.

COLE

No! Not because he's a (trans) --
The guy fucking kidnap--
(sighs)
Never mind.

Awkward silence.

The feral cat, now Frog Attack, wanders close to the van.

ETHAN

Frog Attack! You up for a show?

Frog Attack dashes away.

AARON

Follow my lead, all right?

Aaron beats the measure with his drumsticks but GASPS,

AARON

Cows. Guys. Frogs, cats... Cows!

KAYLA

He's ready for the rubber room at
Casa Del Wackos.

ETHAN

Aaron, you all right?

AARON

Screw that. Shucks, we suck. What
are we doing?

Aaron unplugs the instruments and packs the van.

ETHAN

What are *you* doing?

They stare at each other, completely lost while Aaron tosses
equipment in the van.

KAYLA

Greatest fucking band in history
you found there, Cole. Get your
umbrella ready for the golden rain.

EXT. GEORGIA - FARM FIELD - DAY

An empty expanse save a few cows grazing in the distance.

The Band exits the van, scans the pastoral landscape.

ETHAN
There's nothing here.

AARON
Just wait and see, Wobbly.

Aaron plugs the bass guitar and the keyboard into the van.

COLE
This best be legit.

AARON
It's the oasis of band practice,
you urban-bound morons. Come on,
Ethan. Three, four --

ETHAN
(sighs)
Three-four. One-two-three-four.

They lean into Aaron's song.

ETHAN
(singing)
THE DAY IS NOW AND WE DON'T --
(not it)
AND WE DON'T --

Ethan stops, unsatisfied. He hums various progressions. Cole observes and fingers the progressions on the keyboard.

COLE
How about this?
(hums with chords)
Mm-hmm Mm-hmm-hmm...

Ethan tries it out on his guitar.

ETHAN
*THE DAY IS NOW AND WE DON'T KNOW
HOW. ROADS SURE ARE BUMPY, BUT
THAT'S THE WAY TO BE...*

All smiles. They hacked it out.

ETHAN
Ready? Three-Four!

The Band rips into the song -- in harmonious sync.

The cows waddle closer. And closer.

AARON
Cows love music.

A cow brushes past Ethan. He SQUEALS, both scared and amused. Cole and Kayla chuckle.

The Band continues to rehearse among its newfound audience.

INT. LUIS' PUB - NIGHT

About 30 Customers are nested in the homey atmosphere. Pint glasses clink in time with the music that fills the air.

STAGE

On the acoustic guitar, Ethan's fingers weave a melodic intro. His voice strives to the microphone --

ETHAN
(singing)
*NOWHERE, NO END. THE DAY IS NOW AND
WE DON'T KNOW HOW. ROADS SURE ARE
BUMPY, BUT THAT'S THE WAY TO BE.
WHEN YOU'RE NOWHERE, NO END...*

The tender intimacy in his voice captures the Customers.

Light and even drumbeat from Aaron. Cole's fingers fly across the piano. Kayla strums a steady bass line.

ETHAN
*NOWHERE, NO END. DANCING OUT WITH
ALL SORTS OF STRANGERS. NOWHERE, NO
END. DANCING OUT WITH OUR OWN
DANGER. SO MANY BRIGHT NIGHTS ON
OUR DARKEST DAYS. YET, THAT'S THE
LIFE WE CHOSE TO GET. AND WE'RE
NOWHERE, NO END. WE ARE NOWHERE, NO
END.*

Aaron performs a poignant harmonica solo.

EXT. LUIS' PUB - SAME TIME

The van in front.

RICKY shuffles past it, stops dead in his tracks. He reads the license plate, then notices the graffiti.

RICKY
What the --

INT. LUIS' PUB - CONTINUOUS

Luis' eyes sparkle his approval at Cole and Kayla as more and more People pour into the pub.

Customers drop money in the hat on the stage.

ETHAN
(singing)
*SLEEPING TIGHT IN A HOUSELESS VAN.
WE ARE NOWHERE, NO END...*

Music surges with life. An electrifying crescendo. Ethan's husky, soulful voice rises above the fray.

ETHAN
*OH, WE ARE NOWHERE, NO END. NO, WE
ARE NOWHERE, NO END. NO, NO, NO.
OH, WE'RE SLEEPING TIGHT IN A
HOUSELESS VAN...*

Eyes closed in rapture, Ethan holds the last note with raw, passionate intensity.

Wild applause erupt from the Crowd. The Houseless' eyes with pride as they wind down with an alleviating outro.

ETHAN
*ROADS SURE ARE BUMPY, BUT THAT'S
THE WAY TO BE. WHEN YOU'RE NOWHERE,
NO END.*

Cheers and applause. The Band basks in a satisfied glow.

EXT. LUIS' PUB - CONTINUOUS

Luis exits a nearby store, looking mad and exhausted.

INT. LUIS' PUB - CONTINUOUS

The full donation hat between them, The Houseless chug beers and celebrate at a table. Customers pass to congratulate them with pats on the back, handshakes, small talk. Luis too.

LUIS
Guys, I gotta say -- great stuff.

KAYLA
Better than our usual instrumental
shit, right?

LUIS
(to Ethan)
Great vocals you got there, pal.

ETHAN
Thanks.

Ethan's joy doesn't last long. He guiltily stares at his
nearly empty pint of beer. Then eyes at the resting room --
Ricky blasts into the pub.

RICKY
Does someone got the van parked
outside? The painted van.

Kayla raises her hand.

KAYLA
Here. Why?

Ethan, Aaron, and Cole silently signal her to shut up. A
confused Kayla searches for answers in their eyes.

Luis notes the faces of frightened Customers. He eavesdrops
the conversation between Ricky and the Band.

RICKY
What the fuck did you do to my van?

KAYLA
What's he talking about?

COLE
They stole the van.

Kayla: too shocked for words.

RICKY
I had a white van. White.

ETHAN
It was me. I stole it. Alone. No
one else's involved.

AARON
What are you doing?

ETHAN
(to Ricky)
Can we talk privately?

Ricky follows Ethan to the back door.

AARON
Ethan.

ETHAN
I got this, Aaron.

EXT. LUIS' PUB - BACK ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Ethan and Ricky square off.

ETHAN
How much?

RICKY
How much what?

ETHAN
You know... so you let us be.

RICKY
You wanna pay me off? With what?
Crappy songs?

ETHAN
I swear, this is all a big mistake.
My friend, he's --

RICKY
Shut your bullshitter mouth, will
ya. I don't wanna hear it.

Ricky composes 9-1-1.

ETHAN
I have a hundred thousand dollars.

Ricky scoffs: nice try.

ETHAN
I inherited a lot of money. It can
be all yours in a week or so. As
soon as I make the arrangements
with the bank.

Ricky lowers his phone.

ETHAN

You know the police won't pay to fix the graffiti. I bet with 100 K you can buy a brand new white van.

RICKY

Or maybe I just shoot you and your friends with my Glock nine and take back what's mine.

Ricky pushes up on Ethan. Ethan backs up, frightened.

RICKY

Gimme your wallet.

Ricky goes for the wallet in Ethan's back pocket.

ETHAN

All right, hold on. I'll get it.

Ethan hands it over. Ricky swipes a credit card, reads it.

RICKY

Better not be screwing with me, Ethan Emerson. Hope there's a high limit on this.

Ricky tosses the wallet back.

RICKY

You got a driver licence?

ETHAN

Want my wallet back?

RICKY

No. You meet me behind the MVD in ten days. 2 pm. With the cash. No funny money. I count. Then we go in, sign the papers. New plate for you. We make it official.

He fires a finger gun at Ethan, and leaves.

STREET IN FRONT

The Band loads instruments when Luis runs after them.

LUIS

Cole, Kayla. Hold up.

Cole and Kayla hold an unheard conversation with Luis.

AARON

Where's that dipstick? What did you say?

ETHAN

Don't worry about it.

AARON

Dude, I have to know if you made a deal with the devil because of me.

ETHAN

It's all good. Morrison's staying with us. Satisfied?

The conversation with Luis heats up.

LUIS

No. I run a quiet place. Can't have this kinda shit in here.

Done, Luis stomps inside. Cole and Kayla join the rest.

KAYLA

It's early. Maybe you can ruin somebody else's life today.

COLE

Kayla, c'mon.

AARON

What happened?

KAYLA

Duh. Take a guess. Luis was our friend. He trusted us. Before you barged into our lives.

ETHAN

I'm so sorry.

AARON

Don't apologize. This is all on me.
(to Cole and Kayla)
You'll find other gigs. Ethan's what makes the band rock. Not me.

ETHAN

Stop it. You put it together. Not in an up and up way. Still...

KAYLA

Unbefrickinlievable.

Cole casts a look of admiration at Ethan and Aaron.

COLE

Forget they're outlaws for a second. Tell me this hasn't been the best time of your life.

KAYLA

You three should get a room.

COLE

Bromance, Sistah.

Kayla has a sour look for them. Her phone buzzes.

INSERT: TEXT MESSAGE

From: Peter

Do I still have a daughter? Got big news for you. I'll come by your place first thing in the morning.

BACK

Kayla swallows hard, puts her phone away in a hurry.

KAYLA

So, who's feeling camping?

Cole and Ethan frown. Aaron gasps, jumps in place like a 4-year-old who's been offered candy.

EXT. CHATTAHOOCHEE NATIONAL FOREST - TRAIL - NIGHT

Pitch-black sky. Pure white stars.

The Houseless hike under countless trees.

Kayla, way ahead of them.

Cole carries a cooler and a small pan. Tags still hanging.

A huge smile stretches on Aaron's face. His yellow teeth shine as white as the stars.

His guitar strapped to his back, Ethan's heart pounds heavily between his ears. He paints softly.

MOUNTAIN TOP - DAY

Verdurous mountains unfold endlessly under the morning mist. Pink and greyish-blue clouds float across rays of sunshine.

Standing atop the tallest rock, Aaron admires the scenery.

Cole holds a pan at arm's length over a fire: crispy bacon and toast.

Near the bacon smell, Kayla lies on a blanket. Leaves cast their shadows on her face, dancing in the soft breeze.

A staring contest between the threatening food and Ethan as Cole pours juicy bacon onto cheap paper plates.

COLE
Breakfast, you lazies.

Aaron jumps off his royal rock.

Ethan stands to get away but nearly faints. The guitar drops, and CRACKS! Ethan steps on the neck by mistake.

AARON
Oh shit. Can it be fixed?

ETHAN
Some things are too broken to be fixed.

COLE
Special bond with that guit'?

ETHAN
No.

AARON
It's fine. We'll get you a new one.

ETHAN
You mean "steal."

Kayla places Ethan's guitar into the fire.

KAYLA
A fitting end. A blaze of glory. A true rock star's Viking funeral.

Ethan GASPS. He reaches to save the guitar. Heat and flames drive him back.

COLE
She had a great run. No tears, my man. No tears.

Ethan plops down, breaks into fits of wild laughter.

KAYLA
Why are you laughing?
(to Aaron)
Why is he laughing?

Aaron shrugs: clueless.

Cole gets in Kayla's face.

COLE
Congratulations! You broke our
friend.

ETHAN
There's a fucking \$100,000 check
inside. You geniuses burned 100 K.

KAYLA
He's kidding, right? Stop messing
with us.

ETHAN
I was buying the van with that
money. Now, it's either jail or
murdered.

COLE
Kayla, look what the fuck you did.

AARON
You said you weren't in danger.

ETHAN
I wasn't.

Cole blows on the flames. Fans with his hands. Not working.

COLE
Shit. Shit!

Quick exhale. *Do it.* Arm into the flames. He yells in pain,
but emerges with the burning guitar. Sleeve on fire.

Her jacket as an oven mitt, Kayla captures the guitar and
smothers the flames.

Cole panics, still on fire.

Aaron tackles him, rolls him on the ground.

Kayla thrusts her hand into the soundhole. Nothing but ashes
left. She smashes the guitar. Embers drift in the air.

KAYLA
Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!

Flames finally dead, Cole stops rolling. Catches his breath. His eyes throw daggers at Kayla.

COLE
Thanks for the help, Sis!

INT./EXT. GEORGIA - RURAL ROAD - VAN, TRAVELING - DAY

The van weaves through the lane, hemmed in by towering trees.

Sitting shotgun, Ethan's fingers trace the outline of his wrist, moving upward until they meet a barrier of "fat" that prevents them from touching.

At the wheel, Aaron steals a sidelong glance at Ethan, unsettled by his odd behavior but remains silent.

In the back, Cole scowls as he examines his burn.

Kayla dismisses yet another call from Peter... then Cole's phone rings with the same caller. But Kayla's beseeching expression takes him aback. His angst dissolves into genuine concern. He ignores the call.

INT. COLE'S AND KAYLA'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Ethan's restless steps echo through the room as he clutches Cole's phone to his ear.

AUTOMATED MESSAGE (V.O.)
The number you have reached is no longer in service.

Ethan's breathe shallows. Fear creeps in. He dials a different number with fleeting fingers.

AUTOMATED MESSAGE (V.O.)
The number you have reached is no longer in service.

His face contorts with anguish. He crafts a façade of calm and composure as he returns Cole's phone.

COLE
Who'd you call?

ETHAN
My parents. They're busy.

AARON
That's right. They can write
another check.

ETHAN
Not an option.

AARON
Why? Try them later.

ETHAN
I said, "not an option."

AARON
We could rob my parents again.
(nervous laugh)
Kidding.
(a thought)
Be back in five.

Before they know it, Aaron is gone.

COLE
He up to something shady?

Ethan replies with a look: definitely.

LATER

The Band mopes around the table when Aaron returns with
lottery tickets, singing cheery a la Back Street Boys.

AARON
AARON IS BACK, ALL RIGHT.

KAYLA
And this fool plays folk?

Aaron scratches the tickets.

AARON
Oh my Dog. Oh my Dog. Oh my Dog.

KAYLA
What's he sayin'?

ETHAN
What, Aaron? What is it?

AARON
Oh. My. Dog!

COLE
We won?

AARON

Now we only need a hundred thousand
and four frickin' dollars.

ETHAN

What a shocker. Where did the four
dollars come from anyway?

AARON

Your wallet.

Ethan bites his lip to stop himself from saying something he
will later regret.

AARON

You're all sitting here with your
jaws on the floor. At least, I
tried something.

(points)

I'm not the one who set fire to our
hopes and dreams. Maybe our lives.

COLE

Chill, drama queen.

KAYLA

(snaps finger)

Keys.

Aaron has "confusion" written all over his face.

KAYLA

Keys to the fucking van you stole.

COLE

Where are you going?

As Aaron tosses her the keys, Cole SLAMS Kayla's hand against
the table.

KAYLA

Ow! What the fuck?

COLE

Sorry. I was aiming for the keys.

KAYLA

Why are you such a jerk? Gimme the
keys.

COLE

What are you gonna do?

KAYLA
Gimme the keys, Cole.

Kayla tries to grab his hand, but Cole waves it away. As a last resort, she jumps over his back.

Cole heads to the entrance, unfazed. Kayla hanging onto him.

BUILDING'S HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Cole drops Kayla off his back. He shuts the door behind them, his eyes scanning her with suspicion.

COLE
What are you up to?

KAYLA
Why do you care so much?

COLE
Why do I care? Why don't you care?
You don't care about anything or
anyone but yourself.

KAYLA
How can you say that? I'm trying to
save everyone's butts here.

COLE
No. You're just trying to save
face. Because Kayla is so proud.
And Kayla is so tough. And badass.
Kayla would never burn 100 K. No,
Kayla doesn't make mistakes.

KAYLA
Shut up.

COLE
If you could've made a 100 K appear
in one night, you would've. A long
time ago. So we wouldn't have to
work shitty jobs because loving
music ain't paying for shit.

KAYLA
Talk for yourself. I like my job.

COLE
Whatever your psychotic plan is,
don't do it.

KAYLA
It's not a psychotic plan.

COLE
Then what is it?

KAYLA
It's none of your business! Why do you need to know everything?

COLE
"Everything?" Try nothing. I've spent the last month covering for you with dad. Making up excuses. Lying my ass off because you won't return his calls. I don't even know why and when did you ever thank me? Huh? That's right, never.

KAYLA
Thank you.

COLE
Shut up, you don't mean it.

Kayla stares at him with guilty eyes. Goes to hug him. Dubious at first, Cole welcomes her in his arms.

From his relaxed hand, Kayla steals the keys.

KAYLA
I'm sorry.

She runs downstairs.

COLE
Kayla!

Kayla passes the building's main door.

INT. COLE'S AND KAYLA'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

The echo of the fight resonates in the room.

COLE (O.S.)
You sneaky bitch. I should have known. Warmest regards!

Aaron and Ethan listen, uneasy.

AARON
I thought I've always wanted siblings.

Cole barges in, brings a cigarette to his lips.

ETHAN
Are you okay?

COLE
Stupendous.

Cole heads to the balcony. His infuriated fingers struggle to flicker the lighter.

Inspired, Aaron writes it down in his notebook:

AARON
(mumbles)
"Stupendous."

Ethan gives him a look: read the room.

AARON
(singing)
*OH, STUPENDOUS. I AM FIRST-RATE
STUPENDOUS.*

A smirk from Aaron turns into an exchange of genuine smiles once their eyes meet. The kind of smile intended to reassure a loved one when everything hurts behind the mask.

INT./EXT. KAYLA'S FAMILY HOME - VAN, PARKED - DAY

The van in front of a multimillion dollar mansion nestled in acres of woods.

Kayla steels herself. A firm grip of the steering wheel. She sucks a deep breath and exits for the --

MAHOGANY FRONT DOOR

Kayla rings the fancy doorbell. CHIMES inside.

PETER (50s) appears. Great surprise on his face.

PETER
Kayla. Look at you. It's been such
a long time. Come in, come in.

Kayla, torn. She holds her phone firmly as she enters --

INT. KAYLA'S FAMILY HOME - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Kayla does not stray far from the door. A quick escape.

PETER

Want something to drink? I've been trying to reach you all week. I've got big news for you. I'm...

KAYLA

I just came to get Mom's guitar.

PETER

Oh... okay. I was going to empty your closet on Sunday. Good timing.

Kayla takes timid steps toward her old room.

PETER

Try not to make too much noise. My wife's sleeping.

KAYLA

You got married again?

PETER

Life moves on.

KAYLA

I thought you didn't like women.

Awkward silence broken only by ticks of a pricey, antique grandfather's clock.

KAYLA'S BEDROOM

Bare. No furnishings. Nothing but a new coat of yellow paint.

Kayla trembles a bit as she takes in her former space.

She flings open the closet. Bags filled with old clothes. She rummages through them.

Her fingers brush against soft, varnished wood. There it is. The red bird. Golden thread in its beak. Painted on her Mom's acoustic. She lifts the instrument with precious care --

THUD. The guitar's body hits the hardwood floor. But Kayla doesn't realize. Her eyes, frozen on what lies underneath --

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. FAMILY HOME - KAYLA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Fit for a Disney princess. Canopied bed. Lux to the max.

Young Kayla on her bed.

Peter's giant shadow slinks from the room.

Young Cole peers in from the doorway.

PETER

What are you doing here?

COLE

Bathroom.

PETER

Go.

Cole glances at Kayla before he vanishes.

Dead eyes staring into nothingness, Kayla wraps her white nightgown around her knees. Fresh blood stains the bottom.

END FLASHBACK

KAYLA'S NIGHTGOWN

Blood from long ago dried at the bottom.

Peter tiptoes in.

PETER

You find it?

Kayla jumps. She shoves the nightgown back into the bag.

PETER

The guitar, you found it?

KAYLA

Yeah. Yes.

PETER

Need anything else?

KAYLA

One hundred thousand dollars.

PETER

(scoffs)

A hundred thousand dollars? Are you demented?

KAYLA

How's business? Hundred K is a drop in the bucket for a millionaire.

(MORE)

KAYLA (CONT'D)
An upstanding pillar of the
community. Country club member.

PETER
I can't.

KAYLA
Sure you can. Just like a single
whisper can disrupt the silence.

Pin drop silence.

EXT. COLE'S AND KAYLA'S APARTMENT - BALCONY - NIGHT

Smokes pop in and out Cole's hand. His feet eat the concrete.

COLE
What is she doing? Why isn't she
back yet? Where is she?

AARON
I'm sure she's fine, bro.

Cole pushes him against the brick wall.

COLE
If something happened to her, I'll
end you.

The van swings into the alley.

ETHAN
Guys.

Cole releases Aaron. They watch Kayla get out of the van.

KAYLA'S ROOM

Kayla carefully lies her mother's guitar on her bed. Cole
follows, stares at the red bird in shock.

COLE
Is that Mom's guitar?

She ignores him, grabs her other acoustic.

KITCHEN

Kayla bestows the guitar on Ethan.

KAYLA

Peace offering. We score the money
in a few days. If anyone asks
questions, I will strangle them and
bury the body in a shallow grave.
Understood?

Cole carries his mother's guitar back, waves it.

COLE

You went to Dad's place?

KAYLA

Are you hard of hearing?

COLE

Did he tell you? You guys made up?

Kayla puts a finger to lips and SHUSHES.

KAYLA

Sweet dreams.

Their mother's guitar flies off Cole's hands as Kayla grabs
it back and locks herself in her room.

COLE

Kay...

AARON

Something wrong?

COLE

Mind your own business, man.

Cole heads off to his room as well.

A beat. Ethan and Aaron stand still, clueless.

AARON

(to a gone Cole)

Well, we're gonna head out.

Ethan's eyes land on Cole's phone, left unguarded on the
table. A sharp pang of anguish courses back through him.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - PARKING LOT - VAN, PARKED - NIGHT

Aaron strides to the van. The sound of CRYING inside.

INT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

Backpack as a pillow, sweater for a blanket, Ethan sobs.

AARON (O.S.)

Ethan?

Ethan pulls up the sweater over his face as Aaron climbs in.

AARON

What happened?

Ethan tries to stop crying but can't.

AARON

Hey... Do you -- you gonna push me
away if I hug you?

Aaron: helpless look as Ethan muffles sobs with the sweater.

AARON

I'll just hug you, all right?

Aaron spoons him.

AARON

It's okay. Cry it out. You'll pee
less tomorrow.

Ethan's sobs rise in intensity. He farts after a big sob.

ETHAN

Ooh.

Aaron farts in solidarity. Now, they laugh.

INT. COLE'S AND KAYLA'S APARTMENT - KAYLA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Kayla lies awake in bed. Mom's guitar nested in her arms.

KNOCK. KNOCK.

KAYLA

Fuck off.

Cole enters anyway.

As if talking to an old, deaf and confused patient,

KAYLA

Excuse-me, Sir. You've got the
wrong room.

Cole plays it out,

COLE

No, this is Dr. Mean Bitch's
office, yes? I have an appointment.

His shadow gets bigger on the wall as he approaches the bed.

Kayla blinks at the dark shade. Cole lies next to her.

A long contemplative silence.

COLE

Remember the noisy bunk beds we had
in the old apartment before Dad
struck it rich? You, on the top.
Me, on the bottom. Mom would tuck
us in. Then she would sit on the
floor with that guitar... sing Joni
Mitchell songs 'til we fell asleep.

The tiniest nod from Kayla.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - PARKING LOT - VAN, PARKED - DAY

Aaron blows harmonica on the roof of the van.

Guitar in one hand, rubbing sleep from his eyes with the
other, Ethan leaps from Morrison.

AARON

Hey, handsome. Did I wake you?
Sorry. Inspiration struck. A bolt
in the chest. Lyrics like
butterflies in my head. Melodious
whispers at the tip of my fingers.

ETHAN

How did you know I always dreamed
of waking up to a serenade by a man
in his underwear?

Aaron fires a nasty look at him.

AARON

Get your insolence and guitar here.

Ethan struggles to pull himself to the van roof. Aaron helps.

As they sit under the sunrise, Aaron loses himself in Ethan's
iridescent gaze.

ETHAN

Is that your new song? "The Sound of Silence?" Love it.

AARON

Fuck you.

Ethan smirks.

Aaron plays his new folk-rock masterpiece. Ethan, rapt. His eyes on Aaron's opened notebook, he strums along.

ETHAN

Wait. At the what? "Quad--?"

AARON

Quadrivium. Like at crossroads.

Ethan's eyes widen.

AARON

Shut it. My mom used to read me old shi-- poetry.

ETHAN

Quadrivium. All right. The cows are gonna love this.

AARON

I miss when you were all shy and afraid like a fawn on the highway.

ETHAN

No, you don't.

AARON

Now you're just a rude, fart machine.

Friendly chuckles. They pick the song right up.

INT. COLE'S AND KAYLA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

On a laptop, Kayla scours the internet.

Cole works the phone he now hangs up. Ethan and Aaron wait for the latest verdict.

COLE

That's the last pub within a hundred miles. No dice. They already have a house band.

KAYLA

We're still waiting on a few call backs.

LATER

A chaotic and emotional feast is underway. Crumbs scattered everywhere. They gorge on chips, PB&Js, and pie. All except Ethan, who takes small sips of water.

As Kayla notices her phone's near-dead battery, it RINGS.

The room goes silent. They stare at her with bated breath.

Kayla scrambles for a charger, fumbling but succeeding just in time to answer.

Huddled around, their eyes filled with anticipation. They wait for her response.

Kayla hangs up... then grins.

INT./EXT. GEORGIA - RURAL ROAD - VAN, TRAVELING - DAY

A narrow, near deserted two-lane. The van looks like a small dot moving through emptiness.

Cole's fingers dance on the wheel -- his substitute keyboard.

The Others jam in the back.

EXT. VILLAGE - MAIN STREET - NIGHT

The limited infrastructure consists of outdated and dilapidated buildings.

The van glides solo on the unpaved main drag.

INT./EXT. VILLAGE - VAN, TRAVELING - CONTINUOUS

Kayla, Ethan, and Aaron fight to peer out the window.

EXT. GRITTY BAR - STREET IN FRONT - NIGHT

The Band stretches their legs, gives the pub the once over: Crumbling façade. Dirty-opaque windows.

Yet, they smile in excitement. Set out for --

INT. GRITTY BAR - NIGHT

Cramped, dimly-lit. Tables at the back are pushed against each other to free up space. The drum kit still fits tight.

The customers: a few Gen-Xers, nursing beers with empty eyes.

The Houseless exchange sparkly eyes as they silently synch the start of the show --

Kayla gives the first strums. A descending, slightly distorted, bass line sequence.

Ethan swivels the electric guitar resting against his hip. He rifts a mournful melody.

Aaron's drumbeat creates a sense of momentum.

ETHAN

(singing)

*BAREFOOT ON THE TRACKS. SHARP ROCKS
PIERCE THROUGH YOUR COLD SELF.
EMPTINESS CRIES OUT. LEAVE HER
STARE IN A HURRY...*

A Gen-Xer at the bar closes his eyes. The haunting vibe of some folk-rock classics draws a wistful smile on his face.

ETHAN

*QUIVERING IN THE DUSK. STRUMMING
THE SAME LINES TO YOUR DUST.
REDEMPTION BECKONS. THEN PACK YOUR
SOUL AWAY FROM DARKNESS LAND...*

COLE AND KAYLA

(back vocals)

DARKNESS LAND...

THE HOUSELESS

*YOU'RE AT THE QUADRIVIUM,
VULNERABLE. HEAR THE ACOUSTICS OF
WAVES HUM. AND BEFORE YOU DERAIL,
BEFORE YOU FAIL. HEAR THE RHYTHM OF
YOUR HEART'S DRUM...*

Instrumental break --

Ethan and Kayla: a bass/guitar face off.

Cole plays along Kayla's bass line at the keys.

Aaron: a few haunting touches at the harmonica. And a feather-light touch spread over the cymbals --

ETHAN

*BAREFOOT ON THE GRASS. BREATHING
EASY IN SUMMER LAND. FLYING FREE AT
LAST. FREE FROM YOUR CARNAGE OF
MEMORIES...*

COLE AND KAYLA

(back vocals)

MEMORIES...

THE HOUSELESS

*YOU'RE AT THE QUADRIVIUM,
VULNERABLE. HEAR THE ACOUSTICS OF
WAVES HUM. AND BEFORE YOU DERAIL,
BEFORE YOU FAIL. HEAR THE RHYTHM OF
YOUR HEART'S DRUM...*

Music builds up to an ominous, yet heartfelt, crescendo.

Aaron can't stop smiling. His head sways along.

ETHAN

*I'M AT THE QUADRIVIUM, VULNERABLE.
I HEAR THE ACOUSTICS OF WAVES HUM.
OH, COME ON, BEFORE I DERAIL.
BEFORE I FAIL. GOTTA HEAR THE
RHYTHM OF MY HEART'S DRUM...*

Instruments slowly turn into soft whispers, allowing Ethan's warm and vulnerable voice to envelop the room for the outro.

ETHAN

*MY HEART'S DRUM. YOUR HEART'S DRUM.
OUR HEARTS' DRUM.*

COLE AND KAYLA

(back vocals)

HEART'S DRUM...

Music fades. Customers break out into applause. The Houseless chuckle, dumbfounded.

LATER

A dusty table. The Houseless' tip jar overflows with crumpled bills and loose change.

The impressed Gen-Xer approaches.

GEN-XER

That was amazing.

THE HOUSELESS

(overlap)

Thanks. Thank you.

GEN-XER

Where are you guys from? I can't believe you just played for free. Don't you have a manager?

ETHAN

No, we're just starting off.

COLE

We're from Atlanta.

GEN-XER

Really, the Big City? I got a buddy who owns a show bar on Peachtree West. Maybe I could give him a call for you.

The Houseless share a look. They exchange numbers, shake hands. Gen-Xer leaves.

AARON

What did I tell you, Brittle?
Transcending their goldang souls.

A big plate of nachos lands on their table.

Ethan: terrified.

COLE

Dude, they don't bite. Have a bite.

Ethan takes a teensy bite. Lowers his head. Hides teary eyes.

Aaron leans into his ear.

AARON

What's wrong?

ETHAN

Just tired.

His restless legs push back his chair. Dark, dirt marks trace the chair's trajectory on the beer-stained floor.

Ethan leaves the table to Aaron's worried look.

COLE

(to Aaron)

Dude, that was epic. Got any other songs in store for the big stage?

AARON
Wasn't that one good enough?

COLE
Yeah, no, sure, man. I mean -- we
might need more though, no?

KAYLA
I might have something.

Cole stifles a chuckle.

KAYLA
What's your problem?

COLE
It takes heart to write songs.

KAYLA
Takes heart to beat up the kids who
bullied you in elementary school.
Remember that?

COLE
You beat up everyone in elementary
school. Including a hemophiliac.

KAYLA
How was I supposed to know? I'm
sure he's still alive.

COLE
(mumbles)
Never came back to school...

PUB MEN'S ROOM

Ethan stumbles out of a stall, wipes vomit from his mouth.
Green spots swim across his blurry vision. He holds the sink,
sinks to his knees.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT - NIGHT

The Band loads parts of the drum kit in the van.

They cross back the street to the pub --

THUMP. Ethan collapses.

AARON
Whoa, hey!

Ethan's bony finger points at the stars.

ETHAN

How many stages are there to
conquer in this world?

Aaron and Cole take it as a dramatic gag and lie next to him.

AARON

We can subtract two from the list.

ETHAN

Three. The cow field was our
biggest stage.

AARON

Stop moo-cking me with the cows.

The full-moon. So big. Bright. With a calm shade of orange.

ETHAN

AWOOOOO!

AARON

What are you doing?

ETHAN

Howling to the moon. Like a
freaking wolf.

They look at each other with a knowing air. Aaron grins.

ETHAN AND AARON

AWOOOOO!

Cole joins in.

ETHAN, AARON, COLE

AWOOOOO! AWOOOOO!

A car SPEEDS toward them.

KAYLA

Hey. Move it. Car!

Aaron and Cole leap to the sidewalk.

Ethan remains.

The car VROOMS carelessly, Ethan unnoticed.

AARON

Ethan! Ethan, move!

AARON

Jim or Janis' star wink at you up there? Grant you early access to the 27 Club?

ETHAN

It was a rush, that's all.

AARON

You sure? It's just -- you know, like, you've got this...

ETHAN

This what?

AARON

Like this bright light in your eyes. Until there's some sort of power outage. And then it's "Hello, darkness my old friend." Ya know?

ETHAN

Wow. What a poetic insult.

AARON

It's not an insult.

ETHAN

Yeah I don't know about that.

AARON

Ethan, fuck. It's not an insult. I'm worried about you.

ETHAN

Why? 'Cause I'm not chasing rainbows and living in a dreamland like you? Sorry I'm not 4 anymore.

AARON

I'm not 4 either. You can talk to me. That's all I'm saying. But whatever. Never mind. You're obviously so wonderfully fine.

ETHAN

Yeah. Good night.

AARON

Yeah. Likewise. 'Night, 'night.

Ethan turns. Instant regret. His hand blindly searches the ground for Aaron's.

ETHAN

I'm sorry.

Aaron takes a second to attune to the mood's shift --

A gentle squeeze of Ethan's palm. Fingers brush. Hearts pump desire. Soft, deep breathing.

Aaron's chin slowly emerges over Ethan neck.

Ethan feels the breeze, shivers. His chin rises. An invisible thread turns him around, guiding his lips to meet Aaron's.

Ethan surrenders, lies on his back.

Aaron sweeps an arm over, locking his wrists and elbows on the floor to create a warm shield over Ethan's upper body.

They kiss. Lips like magnets. They kiss. And kiss again --

Aaron opens his eyes. Back to square one. Ethan's back faces him. His palm rests open on the ground, waiting for Aaron to accept his apology.

A daydream that hurts more than expected. Still, Aaron squeezes Ethan's hand.

A slight smile appears on Ethan's relieved face.

Both let their eyelids fall over their sight for the night.

EXT. KAYLA'S FAMILY HOME - FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

Peter hands Kayla a zippered bag stuffed with cash.

They panic when Peter's wife, AUDREY (30s), joins them. Kayla hides the bag of money behind her back.

Audrey is very pregnant. Kayla staggers, mortified. She cannot get away fast enough.

EXT. MOTOR VEHICLE DIVISION - BACK ALLEY - DAY

Empty. Quiet.

The Band meets Ricky as scheduled. He reads their faces, contempt in his eyes.

RICKY

(to Ethan)

Blew your cover. Didn't you, rich prick?

KAYLA
Shut up and take the money.

She throws the bag at Ricky. He catches it.

COLE
(hushed)
Kayla!

Ricky levels her with a hateful look. She gives it right back. He counts the cash as the Band waits, holding their breath --

ZIP. Ricky closes the bag, hands Ethan the credit card.

AARON
Pretty stupid to leave a vehicle on a downtown street with a door open and keys in the ignition?

RICKY
I had chemo that day. Pulled over to puke in a toilet 'cause I like clean streets.

AARON
I'm so, so sorry, sir. I --

RICKY
You little assholes definitely need a lesson in morals and ethics, but I couldn't afford my next cycle. Now I can. So, don't beat yourself up... too much.

The Band can only stand there, put in their place.

Ricky lurks the building.

RICKY
Shall we?

ETHAN
I don't actually have a licence. Kayla's going to be the owner if that's all right.

RICKY
That wasn't our deal.

KAYLA
How does that impact you? You got the money, don't you?

Ricky's nostrils widen as he tries to prevent an outburst.

INT. VAN - DAY

Cole hands out beers to the gang.

COLE

Here's to the new van owner. May she never use its powers to run me over.

KAYLA

Aww, why not?

The joke hits a nerve with Aaron and Ethan.

Frog Attack jumps into Ethan's lap, breaking the tension. Ethan pets him affectionately.

ETHAN

Hey, Frog Attack. How ya doing?

AARON

That's his name?

ETHAN

Christian name Frog, family name Attack.

AARON

You're killing me. What is that? Where the fuck does it come from?

Ethan shrugs, smug.

AARON

You're just never gonna tell me, are you?

An 'I'm innocent' shrug from Ethan.

Kayla peers into an empty beer bottle. Cole notices.

COLE

Kayla...

She smiles him off.

KAYLA

It's funny. Awesome name for a cat.

Cole doesn't buy her fake amusement.

COLE

Didn't you say you wrote a song?

AARON

New song! New song!

Kayla pushes a notepad app from her phone on Cole's chest.

After an exaggerated painful scream, he reads... *Fuck*. That got him. His believed-to-be grieved chest pops open.

COLE

God, what are you doing to me?

Cole hands Kayla her phone back, leaps out the van.

Ethan and Aaron are desperate to read, but restrain themselves from asking.

INT. SHOW BAR - NIGHT

Far bigger and fancier than their previous ones.

A hundred customers chat, drinks in hand, while an Other Band finishes its set to polite applause.

The Houseless take the stage and waste no time --

Cole's slow-tempo keyboard riff sets a melancholic tone.

Bass and drums groove along. Keyboard uplifts.

Ethan adds texture with the electric guitar and enthralls the Crowd with his emotive, pristine-pitch voice.

ETHAN

(singing)

EMERALD MOONS SWIVELED TO ETHEREAL.
WE BEGGED FOR HER GOLDEN THREAD.
SHE SANG HER SWAN SONG TO OUR DROWN
MOONS. WE BEGGED HER EMERALDS, BUT
SHE SAID, "OH, MY TREASURES, HUM
ALONG..."

Cole and Kayla perform eerie "ooh-ooh, ah-ahh" back vocals.

ETHAN

LILT AND GAMBOL DAYS ARE GONE. I
FRET THE WOODEN SONGBIRD. BIRD TOOK
FLIGHT, RED WINGS HIGH, OUT OF
SIGHT. OH, AND WE HUMMED, LEFT AND
RIGHT. 'BEGGED FOR HER GOLDEN
THREAD. FOR HER GOLDEN THREAD...

Music builds to a climax. Ethan reaches a powerful crescendo.

ETHAN

*LILT AND GAMBOL DAYS ARE GONE. OH,
LITTLE BROTHER, SHE SANG HER SWAN
SONG. WE HUMMED ALONG, DEAD HANDS
IN THE STORM. THEN WENT OUT LOOKING
FOR HER GOLDEN THREAD. OH, WE KEPT
LOOKING FOR HER GOLDEN THREAD...*

Cole and kayla play with a never seen before vulnerability --

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

OVERLAP: The Houseless' song.

A street lamp glimmers in a huge puddle.

SPLOSH, SPLOSH. Four tiny feet, in high-top sneakers, dart into the flood. Water SPLASHES their late-2000s rags. But Young Cole and Kayla don't mind; his face, already soaked with tears and snot. Her eyes, frozen in shock.

ETHAN (O.S.)

(singing)

*TIME ESCAPES US, STILL WE'RE
LONGING FOR...*

Hand in hand, the Siblings race for their lives.

ETHAN (O.S.)

*FOR HER ETHEREAL... FOR HER
ETHEREAL.*

In the distance, a red neon "H" crowns a lone building. Perched atop the letter, a Northern Cardinal.

ETHAN (O.S.)

*I PICTURE HER GUARDING ALL
SHATTERED YOUTHS. WITH HER GOLDEN
THREAD. WITH HER GOLDEN THREAD. OOH
OOH, OHH, OH-OHH...*

The Red Bird takes flight, and trails the Siblings.

END FLASHBACK

LUIS' PUB

Drums and keys accompany Kayla and Ethan's groovy, uplifting riffs at the bass and electric guitar.

ETHAN	COLE AND KAYLA
(singing)	(back vocals)
<i>LILT AND GAMBOL DAYS ARE</i>	<i>BIRD TOOK FLIGHT, RED WINGS</i>
<i>GONE. LILT AND GAMBOL DAYS</i>	<i>HIGH, OUT OF SIGHT. BIRD TOOK</i>
<i>ARE GONE. OHH, OHH, OH-OHH...</i>	<i>FLIGHT, RED WINGS HIGH, OUT</i>
<i>SHE SAID, "HUM ALONG". HUM</i>	<i>OF SIGHT...</i>
<i>ALONG...</i>	

Instruments drop, one by one. Until only the piano remains.

ETHAN
LILT AND GAMBOL DAYS ARE GONE.

Crowd cheers and applause. But another song awaits for them.

Aaron tears into a syncopated, catchy drumbeat.

The Crowd senses the magic, CLAPS along.

Ethan plays a single strum on the electric guitar that lingers in the air...

Then a second strum.

ETHAN
(singing)
I SAID, "CROSS MY HEART, YEAH, I'M
ALL RIGHT." I SAID, "CROSS MY
HEART, AND HOPE TO DIE..."

Tension builds. Two consecutive, intoxicating strums.

ETHAN
YOU SAID, "LIAR, LIAR, PANTS ON
FIRE." YOU SAID, "OH, WHAT A
STUPENDOUS LIAR YOU ARE..."

Bass seeps into the dance. Cole rocks a tuneful melody.

ETHAN
ONWARDS AND UPWARDS, KEEP
MISLEADING US. ONWARDS AND UPWARDS,
KEEP HIDING YOUR PLUSH...

THE HOUSELESS
I'M FIRST-RATE STUPENDOUS!

Cole turns it up to eleven with a catchy melody at the keys.

THE HOUSELESS
I'M FIRST-RATE STUPENDOUS!

A harmonious, joyful abandonment from all the instruments.

THE HOUSELESS
I'M FIRST-RATE STUPENDOUS!

The keyboard, electric guitar, and bass fade out, leaving only the drums playing.

Aaron breaks into a solo that echoes Mick Fleetwood's style.

The Crowd's feet tap the ground. Hands CLAP along Aaron's increasing and decreasing rhythm.

AARON
 (yells)
 Aaaaaaah!

BONG. Music stops.

Only for a beat...

ETHAN
*ONWARDS AND UPWARDS, STOP
 MISLEADING US. ONWARDS AND UPWARDS,
 STOP HIDING YOUR PLUSH...*
 (to Crowd)
 Sing it! I'M --

CROWD
FIRST-RATE STUPENDOUS!

Ethan's electric guitar pours its heart out in a solo.

He leaps onto the Crowd, arms outstretched. Adrenaline surges through him as Strangers grasp at his clothes, pulling him in all directions --

ETHAN'S POV: Green spots all around. Before darkness.

The Crowd hesitates, unsure of what to do with his limp body. Some look to the stage for guidance. But the band is too far away to see.

Panic spreads.

HIPSTER
 He's not moving. Hey!

DRUNK
 What?

RETRO CLOTHES
 (shouts to Band)
 Hey. Your lead's not moving.

Aaron, Cole, and Kayla don't hear him. More People shout.

CROWD
He's not moving!

Closest to the Crowd, Kayla picks it up.

FREAKED SPECTATOR
He's dead!

The Audience GASPS in horror.

Music dies.

Aaron's drumsticks CLATTER against the stage. He stares blankly ahead as Cole and Kayla work with the panicked crowd to surf Ethan back on the stage.

They lift the motionless body, rush --

BACKSTAGE

They lay Ethan down. Kayla struggles to find a pulse.

AARON
Anything?

An Employee joins in.

EMPLOYEE
Ambulance's on its way.

KAYLA
I can't feel anything.

With no hesitation, the Employee kneels next to Ethan, checks for a pulse.

Aaron roams around, shallow breathing.

Cole catches the subtle concern on the Employee's face.

EMPLOYEE
He hit his head or something?

COLE
No one saw anything.
(to Aaron)
Is he sick? On drugs?

KAYLA
"On drugs?" What are you, a boomer?

COLE
Fuck off. You know what I mean.

A guilty, helpless shrug from Aaron as he watches Ethan's frail, motionless body.

For the first time, Kayla has a soft look for Aaron.

AARON

Is he -- Is he okay? Is he breathing? He's breathing, right?

EMPLOYEE

Yeah. I don't know. It's weak. I think. 'Can't really tell if it's my own pulse or his.

AARON

Wha-- What do you mean? You don't know? Is he not breathing? Should we pump his heart? If he's not breathing? Should we -- Right? We should -- Fucking do something!

COLE

Aaron. Ambulance's coming, all right? He'll be okay.

AARON

Does he look okay to you? Genius there can't even tell if he's breathing. He could be dead for all we know. So he's pretty much not fucking okay, Cole. Pretty much not fucking okay at all!

Ethan's eyes flutter open.

Aaron's tensed shoulders drop. He fights the earthquake in his knees to get to Ethan.

AARON

Ethan.

COLE

Holy shit, man. What happened?

ETHAN

I'm fine.

Wozy, Ethan rises.

EMPLOYEE

Easy. Stay down. Help's coming.

Ethan glares at the Employee: Who the F are you?

The WAILING of an ambulance pierces through the air.

Ethan jolts up, anticipating the worst.

ETHAN

Is that for me?

KAYLA

What, the ambulance? Well yeah --

ETHAN

No. I don't need it.

AARON

What are you talking about?

ETHAN

I just hit my head, all right? I'm fine now, so let's go.

EMPLOYEE

You really should wait.

(fires at Aaron)

Get a check up by a real medical genius.

ETHAN

I don't need a fucking check up.

EMPLOYEE

Sweet, another nice one.

COLE

(to Ethan)

Is it a money thing? I'll pay for the ambulance, I don't care.

ETHAN

I said I was fine! I'm going.

AARON

Why are you so pissed off?

ETHAN

You are pissing me off!

The ambulance arrives, casting a surreal glow over the place.

Ethan sways unsteadily as he races towards the backdoor. Aaron is by his side in an instant.

Cole and Kayla exchange a resigned gaze with the employee.

COLE
Thank you. Sorry. You did great.
Sorry... broken artists. Ya know?

KAYLA
(to Cole)
Ya done lubing her ass? Come on.

COLE
Eww. What?

And they're gone.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Appealing, modest and packed.

A breadbasket with unsalted crackers lies in the middle of the Band's table. Cole picks up a pack, reads --

COLE
Ugh. Unsalted crackers?

KAYLA
(deeply meaning it)
You're an unsalted cracker.

Cole frowns at the seriousness in her voice --

Four orders of bloody steaks and juicy fries come in hot.

AARON
(to the Waitress)
Thank you!

They all chow down, except for Ethan. He takes his usual small bites and washes them down with water.

Ethan spies the bathroom door. Lots of traffic in and out.

AARON
You' sure you're okay? Feeling dizzy? It's too crowded here. We should have ordered takeout. It's just... you know, stress and all. Makes me crave meat and fat fries.

ETHAN
You must have been stressed out a shitload of times since you met me, then.

AARON
I said, "stress and all."

Ethan spots a pile of napkins on a server tray a few tables away. *Phew. An escape.*

AARON
We should've insisted more for the hospital.

COLE
What were we supposed to do, shovel him in the ambulance by force? Oh wait. Yeah, I can see you do that.

AARON
What if his heart stops again?

COLE
His heart didn't stop.

AARON
Well we'll never know, will we?

All shut up as Ethan returns to the table with a load of extra napkins.

ETHAN
Do you think there was a manager in the crowd?

COLE
Don't worry about that, man. We'll get another chance.

All eat in an awkward silence.

Ethan bites then spits it in a napkin. He pushes the napkin into his pocket.

Aaron drops his fork. He bends under the table to pick it up.

A napkin full of spit food lies at Ethan's feet.

Aaron spies Ethan's pocket full of soiled napkins. He sits back, calls the Waitress.

WAITRESS
What for ya?

AARON
I dropped my --

Out of the corner of his eye, Aaron notes Ethan's leg shakes and nervous fidgets. He freezes. Waitress still waiting.

COLE
(to Waitress)
He needs another fork.

The Waitress shakes her head and leaves on task.

Aaron jumps up and bullets from the restaurant.

ETHAN
Aaron?

Ethan rises to follow him. Cole stops him.

COLE
Mellow out, Sprout. I'll go.

EXT. RESTAURANT - ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Beaten down, Aaron leans against a brick wall.

COLE (O.S.)
Aaron?

Aaron wipes his melted face and meets Cole, acting casual.

AARON
Hey. Came out to fart, too?

COLE
Oh. I thought you were --

AARON
Old street habit. Keep forgetting
bathrooms are a thing.

COLE
Ha. Damn...

They head back in. Cole, clueless. Aaron, broken in silence.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Kayla ignores another call from Peter.

ETHAN
I know you and Cole are close and
all, but you know... you can talk
to me if you want. Someone outside
the family mess --

Kayla chokes a laugh.

KAYLA
You're asking *me* how I'm doing?
Dude.

Cole and Aaron sit back, interrupting the promising exchange.

Ethan immediately notices Aaron's red, puffy eyes. He attempts eye contact, but Aaron looks away.

INT. VAN - NIGHT

Ethan and Aaron get ready to sleep. Thick silence.

ETHAN
What happened?

AARON
It's fine. I just hit my head.

ETHAN
What? When? Under the table?

AARON
Isn't that what you say when you want me to piss off?

ETHAN
No...? You want me to piss off?

AARON
I don't want you to piss off. But you want me to want you to piss off. So, I'll piss off.

Ethan's gaze freezes in confusion.

AARON
Nevermind. Goodnight.

Ethan softens, vulnerable.

AARON
What?

Ethan kisses him. Aaron senses an agenda to confuse the situation. But the kiss is heart-shattering. Aaron kisses him back in a quivering exhale.

AARON
Why did you spit up the cow?

Ethan's eyes swivel left and right into Aaron's gaze, confused once again.

AARON
Empty your pockets.

ETHAN
Why?

Aaron turns out Ethan's pockets. Only his wallet falls out.

AARON
You threw them away.

ETHAN
What are you on about?

AARON
The \$30 steak you spit in fucking napkins.

ETHAN
It was too dry, so --

AARON
You think I'm a nincompoop.

ETHAN
You're the one treating me like I'm a nincompoop.

AARON
We're all nincompoops and we all poop, so just talk to me. Please.

Ethan looks like a cornered animal.

AARON
You didn't hit your head, did you?

The dam holding his ocean of pain about to burst, Ethan shakes: no.

AARON
Which is it exactly? Drug addiction? Withdrawal? Anorexia? Throat cancer?

ETHAN
Anorexia... and bulimia.

AARON
Why didn't you tell me?

ETHAN

So you wouldn't have stolen the one thing I'm glad you stole?

AARON

What's that? The van?

Another muted "no" from Ethan. Aaron doesn't dig, moves on.

AARON

There must be some kind of therapy. A shrink?

ETHAN

Oh, I know. I know them all. Psychologists, psychiatrists, doctors, nurses, nutritionists.

AARON

Nothing worked? Why?

ETHAN

Ask my parents. I'm a lost cause.

AARON

I'm not buying that. When's the last time you ate for real?

ETHAN

I try so fucking hard, I swear.

AARON

All right, come on. We're getting you something.

ETHAN

No.

AARON

You're gonna faint again if you don't eat something.

ETHAN

It's not your problem.

AARON

Except it is. I'm the one who's gonna be there, freaking out.

ETHAN

You won't. You can go your own way.

Ethan exits Morrison.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Ethan flees but falters. Aaron runs after him, grips him.

ETHAN

Lemme go.

AARON

We're going to Cole's and Kayla's,
and you're eating.

ETHAN

No. Let me go.

AARON

Sure, ya gonna go real' far with
that newborn foal walk.

ETHAN

Fuck you! Let go of me, you
asshole.

AARON

Yeah, I'm the asshole. Whatever.

ETHAN

Let me go.

AARON

Not happening.

As they approach Cole's and Kayla's apartment, Aaron lets his guard down. Ethan sees an opportunity and dashes away.

AARON

Ethan!

Aaron chases him down. Ethan slips under a car. Aaron runs past, stops to search for any sign of him.

AARON

And you tell me you "try so fucking
hard?"

Under the car, Ethan listens.

AARON

Know what, you don't want my help,
I'm gone. I'm gone, you hear that?

Aaron mounts the van and drives off. Ethan peers at it.

The van SCREECHES to a halt. Ethan's backpack and guitar fly out the window.

AARON

You tell Kayla I'll give Morrison
back after I get rid of my drums.

There. Another set of tires spin away from Ethan. *Leave.*

LATER

Ethan lies in fetal position near the parking lot fence. Frog
Attack arrives and rests against his back.

ETHAN

Aaron?

Ethan turns to see it's just the cat. He pets it.

ETHAN

Help me. Help me.

Ethan hugs Frog Attack a bit too tight for its taste. It
wriggles from Ethan's grasp and ambles away.

A broken beer bottle shard glints on the ground. *Winks.*

INT./EXT. ATLANTA - STREETS - VAN, TRAVELING - SAME TIME

The van stops for a red.

Aaron: an intense look at nothing.

The traffic light reflects red on Aaron's troubled face. Now
green. Aaron, mesmerized. Drivers behind HONK.

Aaron kinda snaps out of it, his eyes fixed on the road.

YELLOW TRAFFIC LIGHT

The van moves, beats the red. Cars behind miss it. Drivers
shout insults, shoot The Finger. But Aaron doesn't notice...

AARON'S MOM (V.O.)

Eleanor, where are you going? Let
me explain, please. Come back.

AARON'S DAD (V.O.)

Eleanor Lake, get your ass back
inside that house, right now.
You're not going to run away. You
hear me, girly?

An abrupt, SQUEALING U-turn. The van passes ticked off
Drivers still waiting for green.

ANGRY DRIVER
You gotta be kidding me. Are you
kidding me?!

Angry fires The Finger at Aaron.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - PARKING LOT - SAME TIME

Ethan hovers the shard over his wrist. He can't look at his wrist and can't look away. New suicide plan: He holds the glass to his jugular.

The van turns into the parking lot. Aaron gets out.

Ethan secrets the glass behind his back.

AARON
Aren't you gonna run?

Moments pass as they gaze at each other from a distance.

AARON
What's behind your back?

ETHAN
Why are you back?

Aaron tries to get closer.

AARON
I tried so fucking hard, too, you
know? I tried so fucking hard to
leave. I can't do it.

Ethan reveals the shard, points it towards Aaron.

AARON
Woah. Put that down. What, you
wanna kill me, now?

Ethan squeezes the glass so hard that it cuts through his palm. Blood drips on the ground.

AARON
Hey, put that down.

ETHAN
Let me go.

AARON
What do you mean, I'm not even
touching you -- Hey. Stop it,
you're hurting yourself.

Aaron gets closer, and closer.

ETHAN
I said, "let me go!"

Ethan moves the shard against his own jugular.

AARON
Ethan. Fuck. What are you doing?
Stop it. Just put that down, and
we'll talk. Okay? Please. Please,
just put it down.

ETHAN
There's nothing -- ! Nothing left
to say. I'm done. Get it? I'm done.
I'm done. I'm so fucking done!

Aaron's face contorts with sickening anticipation.

The bloody glass TINKLES on pavement.

INT. COLE AND KAYLA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Kayla opens the door, blinks at --

Shirtless Aaron supports Ethan. His dirty t-shirt wrapped
around Ethan's bleeding hand.

KITCHEN

Sink water flows over Ethan's hand. Aaron cleans it.

KAYLA
What happened? Did you get mugged?

ETHAN
(to Aaron)
I can do it.

AARON
Don't start.

Kayla hands them a washcloth.

KAYLA
Here.

AARON
Thanks.

Aaron applies pressure on Ethan's wound.

Kayla pulls out a chair for Ethan. Aaron lowers him to it.

ETHAN
I know how to sit.

AARON
Great. Me, too.

Ethan leans his unwounded hand to replace Aaron's on the 'applying pressure' duty. But Aaron gently grabs it with his free hand.

AARON
I got you.

The warm hold Aaron has over his unharmed hand soothes him. He subtly brushes Aaron's fingers with his. Tension defuses on Aaron's side as well.

Cole bounces out of the bathroom.

COLE
Hey, guys. Miss me already?

Kayla comes in and out of the bathroom with a first aid kit.

Cole analyzes the somber room for a beat.

COLE
What's going on? Holy shit, man,
what happened to your hand?

Kayla helps bandage Ethan's wound.

ETHAN
Thanks. I'm sorry.

KAYLA
Why? It's not like it's your fault.

ETHAN
Yeah, it is.

AARON
No, it's not.
(to the Siblings)
Could we borrow some food?

COLE
How big are your stomachs? We just
ate a huge dinner.

AARON
He spat it all out.

COLE
(nervous laugh)
He what?

AARON
Anorexia.

Kayla lays yogurt and cookies on the table.

COLE
Isn't that a girl thing? Like
ballerinas?

KAYLA
Shut up, Cole.

Ethan flips the box of cookies. Reads the nutrition label.

AARON
You need this.

ETHAN
I can't.

Aaron swipes a cookie.

AARON
Look.
(bites)
Mmmm! Tasty.

ETHAN
You think you can just say "yummy"
and convince me?

AARON
Can't fault me for trying to help.

ETHAN
Too bad it's not the Fifties,
right? Back then, you could bring
me to the nearest hospital and say,
"Hi, my friend is crazy. Will you
give him a lobotomy?" And they'd
say: "Sure. Have a seat. We'll get
the mallet and ice pick ready."

AARON
Shut it and eat the darn cookie!

KAYLA
I don't think yelling at him is
gonna --

AARON

I know I'm no therapist. I'm just pissed. I mean, look at him. We're Crosby, Stills, Nash & Gone.

COLE

Crosby, Stills & Nash. Pretty solid, too.

Kayla gives him a look.

COLE

What, I'm just saying.

KAYLA

Well don't be saying.

COLE

Hey, obviously I'm not talking about us. We sing like we're choking on whistles. We'd be Helplessly Hoping, all right.

Ethan smiles at the reference. *Aaron must be so jolly about that one...*

But Aaron's eyes don't meet his. He's temporarily out of order. His mind racing for miracle words to fix Ethan.

ETHAN

I'm sure you'd be great. The three of you. Perhaps better off.

AARON

Oh shut the fuck up. Shut up!

KAYLA

Wow. You really are all testosterone, aren't you?

COLE

Nah, I think he's all heart.

AARON

(to Ethan)

I wasn't talking to *you* you. I'm talking to *other* you.

ETHAN

Right. Darkness My Old Friend.

AARON

Right.

COLE
... I need a smoke.

Cole pulls a cigarette. Kayla opens her hand. He flips her one as they head to the balcony.

Ethan rises to follow.

AARON
You sit that skinny ass down and eat the stupid, darn, fucking cookie! And the yogurt, too.

ETHAN
You should stop getting mad like that. I'm gonna fall in love.

AARON
Is this a joke to you?

ETHAN
I wish.

Ethan eats a spoon of yogurt. Aaron, stunned.

BALCONY

Cole and Kayla drag on their smokes.

COLE
What's going on with dad? How did you get the money? The man has a multi-million dollar business and wouldn't even buy new backpacks for high school.

KAYLA
Who said I got the money from him?

COLE
Then who? You have a connection with the mob? A loan shark? What's the current Vig?

KAYLA
How can you say that without busting a gut.

Cole holds his face serious.

KAYLA
C'mon. You think I live a double life?

(MORE)

KAYLA (CONT'D)

Sucking the Godfather's dick and transporting China White in a false pregnant belly for the Mafia?

COLE

Will you rip that plaster off your phony smile already? You're not fooling anyone.

Kayla shrugs.

KAYLA

Did you meet his whore?

COLE

You mean dad's wife?

KAYLA

The difference being...?

COLE

That's why you've been acting up? C'mon, Kay. Mom's been gone for 15 years.

KAYLA

She's knocked up. You know that?

COLE

Dad wanted to tell you himself. We'll have a little sister. It's awesome.

Kayla's knees flinch for a second. A *girl*... But she doubles that plaster up for a broad phony smile. And strikes again.

KAYLA

I see you too, jerk. You're like her bird story. Perched high up, pretending to watch over the world. But I bet you're real' cozy in the empty sky.

COLE

What is it, huh? What is it that I'm so obviously oblivious about?

KAYLA

Don't break your forehead trying to speak Aaronese.

(firing back Cole's words)

You're not fooling anyone.

She flips the smoke over the railing and huffs off. Cole breathes through a looming tantrum.

KITCHEN

Ethan's legs shake under the table as he finishes the yogurt.

AARON

No sudden trip to the bathroom?

Ethan shakes: no.

ETHAN

I was in a treatment center before I met you. I think maybe... maybe I should go back.

AARON

(mumbles)

Did he hear a goodbye.

ETHAN

Hmm?

AARON

Helplessly Hoping.

(sad chuckles)

"Gasping at glimpses of gentle true spirit, he runs, wishing he could fly. Only to trip at the sound of goodbye."

There it is again. That exchange of tender smiles to cover the heartaches. The end of The Houseless. The end of them.

INT. VAN - NIGHT

Worry on his face, Aaron watches Ethan sleep. He maneuvers a finger under Ethan's nostrils to check for breath... then dozes off. His hand slips and crushes Ethan's nose.

Ethan springs awake, GASPS. Aaron jumps.

AARON

Sorry. Just checking.

Ethan slides Aaron's hand over his chest so Aaron can feel his heartbeat. Relieved, Aaron closes eyes.

They fall asleep, holding hands on Ethan's chest.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - PARKING LOT - DAY

Ethan says goodbye to Cole and Kayla.

AARON

I'll be right back with Morrison.

KAYLA

No rush.

Ethan hands Kayla the guitar back.

KAYLA

You' kidding? I wouldn't wanna be trapped anywhere guitar-less. You keep it... 'til you get better.

Ethan nods, moved. Cole throws his arms around him.

COLE

Oh, man. You take care, all right?

Aaron waits further back, looks at the wall: too painful.

INT./EXT. ATLANTA - STREETS - VAN, TRAVELING - DAY

Aaron behind the wheel while Ethan rides shotgun.

ETHAN

It was a dream.

AARON

What was?

ETHAN

Frog Attack. You were talking in your sleep.

AARON

(giggles)

Okay. I'm not as angry anymore about you not calling him Cat Stevens.

ETHAN

Cat Stevens! I should've.

INT./EXT. STEIGER EATING DISORDER CLINIC - VAN - CONTINUOUS

The van parks.

AARON
So, this is it?

Too painful to look at each other.

ETHAN
Yep. Thank you for -- all.

Ethan, out of the van. Aaron freezes for a second.

EXT. STEIGER EATING DISORDER CLINIC - CONTINUOUS

Aaron gets off the van, meets Ethan on the sidewalk.

AARON
Hold on.

Aaron moves to make eye contact. Ethan looks at his shoes.

AARON
Ethan.

Aaron takes his hand. Ethan looks at their intertwined hands, moves closer to Aaron.

Heat rises as they try to resist it.

Ethan lifts his head, brushes Aaron's cheek with his cheek. Their lips almost touch.

AARON
Don't kiss me. I won't let you go.

ETHAN
I know.

Ethan steps back.

But Aaron grips his hand.

He pulls Ethan's against him, envelops his lips with a hurting passion. An unending kiss for all the kisses they've withheld and will have to withhold.

AARON
Add real sunshine to that smile,
willya?

ETHAN
I wish you a merry penis.

AARON
 And happy new balls.
 (knowing air)
 Good things come to those who wait.

They hold a last look then Ethan turns away.

Aaron's exhale shallows as if his heart dropped to his feet.
 He waits for Ethan to be buzzed in. And returns to the van.

INT. STEIGER EATING DISORDER CLINIC - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Anxious, Makenzie paces.

COURTNEY (O.S.)
 Why is the schedule changing? We
 eat at six. We always eat at six.

HEIDI (O.S.)
 Because sometimes life happens and
 flexibility is required. And what
 do we want for you here?

Ethan faces Makenzie who continues to pace.

MAKENZIE
 They gave your room to somebody who
 got kicked out. Lucky you.

COURTNEY (O.S.)
 I don't give a shit about normal,
 everyday life. I'm not eating your
 stupid meal 15 minutes later.

Courtney fumes to her room. She spots Ethan.

COURTNEY
 Oh my God, Ethan!

She knocks on the door to Laura's room.

COURTNEY
 Laura. Ethan's here.

Laura gapes at Ethan, jolted.

LAURA
 You're alive.

A guilty Ethan sustains her gaze. She breaks eye contact,
 retreats into her room.

HEIDI
Welcome back, Ethan.

ETHAN
Hi.

HEIDI
Elsa, then dinner?

Ethan nods, uneasy.

He crosses the hallway, stops in front of Laura's room. They lean into another staring contest --

ETHAN
I'm sorry.

Anger slowly washes off Laura's face. Ethan opens his arms.

ETHAN
Can we...?

She hugs him.

LAURA
Where have you been?

Ethan's attempt at answering comes out in a little squeak. He whimpers, holds onto her.

INT. NURSE'S OFFICE - DAY

Warm. Cozy. A couple of healthy green plants.

ELSA (35) files reports at her desk when Ethan knocks gently on the partially open door.

ELSA
Hey, Ethan. Come in.

Elsa taps on a chair, invites him to sit. She picks up a child-size cuff to take his blood pressure.

The machine strangles his frail upper arm. Beeps. Deflates.

Elsa notes his vitals.

ELSA
You' feeling dizzy?

Silence.

Elsa gives him an understanding smile.

ELSA

Legs up right after dinner to pop that pressure up, okay? We'll take it again in two hours.

Now to the scale.

ELSA

No hardware tools taped to your legs this time?

Ethan shakes: no.

ELSA

All right. Step on.

Ethan steps on the scale backward, eyes shut close.

INT. COLE'S ROOM - DAY

Cole plays a moving piano composition on his keyboard.

Kayla stops at his door, caught off guard by a wave of sadness. As Cole tries to look at her, she leaves for --

THE BALCONY

Neighbors watching, but it's too late to turn back. Right here, right now, Kayla loses a lifetime of self-control.

She is back, running from that hospital as a child. Except this time, she has no hand to hold onto. And she can't stifle any of her wails.

Cole tiptoes to her.

COLE

Kayla Palmer, are you --

KAYLA

This is stupid. I can't stop. What's happening to me?

COLE

Maybe the Ethan thing brought --

KAYLA

Shut up. It's not a real question. I want to make it stop. Slug me or whatever. Make it stop. Please.

COLE

Can't. You opened the faucet.

KAYLA

Well not on purpose! C'mon, be useful once in your miserable life and help me out here. How do I stop?

COLE

You don't. You gotta let it out, whatever it is. Say it out loud. Then it's out.

KAYLA

That's your answer? Really? Just say it out loud? Just tell you, right here, on the balcony that --

Her legs can't hold her any longer. Cole squats beside her.

COLE

Breathe. Just breathe.

KAYLA

Your room was next to mine. For years -- I thought you saw it once. Oh god Cole, I've been such a jerk. You were so little. You couldn't have known. It's not your fault.

The world rushes into Cole. Color drains from his face. He leans over the railing, retches.

COLE

I went to the bathroom.

They glare into nothingness before their eyes meet.

COLE

That fucking bastard. I'll kill him. I swear, I'll kill him. I'm sorry I didn't know. I'm sorry.

Kayla reaches for him. Cole holds her tight.

INT. STEIGER EATING DISORDER CLINIC - DINING HALL - NIGHT

The Group faces their plates and individual challenges.

HEIDI

Bon appétit.

Everyone -- except Courtney -- takes a bite.

HEIDI

Courtney?

COURTNEY

I told you, I'm not eating. Dinner is supposed to be at six.

HEIDI

You're drinking Boosts instead?

COURTNEY

No.

HEIDI

You only have a demerit left.

COURTNEY

I can count.

Courtney leaves to lock herself in her bedroom.

Ethan struggles with the sight of food on his plate. Laura smiles encouragement at him.

He takes a second bite.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Aaron, van-less and love-sick, pilgrims along the fast-way.

EXT. AARON'S FAMILY HOME - NIGHT

Aaron knocks, drained and sweaty.

His dumbstruck DAD opens.

INT. AARON'S FAMILY HOME - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Aaron and his parents sip coffee in embarrassed silence.

AARON'S MOM

What happened?

Aaron shrugs.

AARON'S MOM

Where's your friend?

AARON

Gone.

AARON'S DAD

That's good, right? Your mother said he was a con artist.

AARON

A con artist? Hardly. No.

AARON'S DAD

You keep hanging out with the wrong people, Eleanor. No wonder you came up with those ideas about yourself.

AARON

What did you just say to me?

Aaron stands to leave.

AARON'S MOM

Aaron. It's Aaron, right? Please, sit down. We were so worried when you left.

AARON

I remember it being said you couldn't look at me anymore.

AARON'S MOM

We needed some time to deal with the... the thing you wanted.

AARON

The thing? What thing? The penis? There, I said it. The penis! Oops, just said it again.

AARON'S MOM

Okay, don't get worked up on us again. Just explain yourself so we can help you.

AARON

Help me with what? Exorcize the testosterone away? I'm perfectly happy with who I am, so can't you just stretch and be happy for me?

AARON'S MOM

(sincere)
You're happy?

AARON

Yeah! I mean, a little heartbroken, but it has nothing to do with --

AARON'S MOM
Sweetie, is that why you're here?
Your first heartbreak.

Hardly holding it back,

AARON
I, uh... I don't know.

INT. COLE'S AND KAYLA'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Cole and Kayla on the floor with a near empty pan of brownies between them. A half full Baggie of Pot lies nearby.

Kayla struggles to eat the brownie she holds.

KAYLA
I ate too many.

COLE
(mocking Aaron)
Shut it and eat the darn, stupid
brownie!

They Pot Giggle, completely wasted.

KAYLA
Poor Aaron. So in love.
(then)
You're a great brother, Cole.

COLE
Am I in some parallel Universe? A
compliment? From your mouth?

KAYLA
Fat chance.

COLE
Shoulda known. Leopards don't
change their spots.

Kayla springs up.

COLE
Don't move so fast.

KAYLA
Let's go.

COLE
Where?

INT. ATLANTA POLICE STATION - NIGHT

A DETECTIVE (50s) takes a statement from Cole and Kayla. They are still very high.

KAYLA
Yes, very tragic.

Cole and Kayla suppress laughs to the point of physical pain.

DETECTIVE
M'am.

KAYLA
Anywho, his next victim's baking in
wifey's oven. As we speak.

Cole and Kayla burst into laughter.

DETECTIVE
This is a serious accusation.
I can't take a statement from a
person under the influence. I'll
take it when you return. Sober.

KAYLA
Think I could do this when I'm
straight? No way. I won't.

COLE
She will. She will. It's okay, Kay.

KAYLA
(chuckle)
"Okay, Kay."

The Detective waves to Officer Doyle.

DETECTIVE
Before you leave, we are required
to search you for illegal drugs.

Officer Doyle signals them to stand.

In a bad Irish accent,

KAYLA
Faith and begorrah, an Irishman.
Erin go bragh.

Doyle body searches Cole, flips his pockets.

COLE
Won't find a thing. We baked it
all. Ate it all.

KAYLA
Delicious brownies.

COLE
So tasty.

KAYLA
Sooooo tasty.

OFFICER DOYLE
(to Cole)
Will you please stay still. I have
better things to do.

COLE
Like what? It's dead quiet in here.

OFFICER DOYLE
Like write my report on the man we
suspect killed his wife before
committing suicide.

KAYLA
I mean... the reverse would be
rather surprising.

Cole loses it. Hysterical laughter. Can't stay sill.

COLE
Isn't she so bright tonight?

Doyle gives up, switches target. A body search of Kayla. The
siblings' laughter trails off.

COLE
C'mon. Don't grope her. There's
nothing on her.

KAYLA
I hope you run out of green beer on
Saint Paddy's day, Doyle.

INT. STEIGER EATING DISORDER CLINIC - COMMON ROOM - NIGHT

Heidi leads a Group Session.

HEIDI
Any thoughts to share about dinner?

ETHAN

I feel like a big fat pig.

COURTNEY

Are you an imposter? Who the hell is this that's opening up?

HEIDI

Okay, enough. If you're not gonna take this seriously --

COURTNEY

I'm scared the voice will never stop. I want to scream back at it.

ETHAN

Me, too.

MAKENZIE

I wanna scream at it, too.

LAURA

Yeah! Fuck the voice.

HEIDI

Is that where this session's going? You all want to scream?

They trade knowing looks of supportive acknowledgement.

EXT. STEIGER EATING DISORDER CLINIC - NIGHT

The Group's SCREAMS echo on the boulevard and fade into --

EXT. TALLULAH GEORGE - TALLULAH FALLS - DAY

The promise of a new day rides on the red-orange sunrise. Autumn-colored trees pigment the majestic canyon.

A Northern Cardinal flies across the two miles long river and waterfalls. The Niagara of the South.

EXT. ATLANTA - STREET - VAN, TRAVELING - DAY

The Northern Cardinal hovers above Van Morrison as the vehicle makes a right turn to the --

EXT. ATLANTA POLICE STATION - DAY

Off the van, the siblings head to the entrance.

Kayla freezes at the door. She snatches Cole's arm and looks for courage in his eyes. He gladly gives it.

She pushes the door open.

EXT. STEIGER EATING DISORDER CLINIC - BALCONY - DAY

The Red Bird lands on telephone wires across the balcony and watches over --

Ethan tunes his guitar. A piece of paper rustles inside.

INSERT - PAGE FROM AARON'S NOTEBOOK

Scribbled song lyrics and a header: "In D minor XXX"

EXT. AARON'S FAMILY HOME - BALCONY - SAME TIME

On harmonica, Aaron plays the song inside Ethan's guitar.

Mom arrives, startles him.

AARON

Oh God. You scared me.

AARON'S MOM

I'm sorry. Go on. It's nice.

Aaron hesitates for a beat, then starts again.

EXT. STEIGER EATING DISORDER CLINIC - BALCONY - SAME TIME

Ethan strums the chords. Laura tiptoes beside him and lies down, all ears.

LAURA

Thanks for soothing my soul before breakfast.

Ethan chuckles softly, his wistful eyes on Aaron's sheet.

ETHAN

(singing)

FOR ALL THESE YEARS I WALKED ALONE.
MUSIC IN MY GREY HEART, DISOWNED. I
FOUND THE SUN WITHIN YOUR CHORDS.
THOUGH YOU'RE TOO FAR GONE, DELVING
YOUR BONES. FROM VIBRANT RIFFS TO
EMPTINESS, YOU'RE CHASING LIFE AS
YOU'RE CHASING DEATH.

Courtney, stock-still against the door frame. Rainy eyes.

ETHAN

*FROM VIBRANT RIFFS TO EMPTINESS, I
WON'T HOLD YOU AT THE NEXT SUNSET.
FROM VIBRANT RIFFS TO EMPTINESS, I
WON'T HOLD YOU AT THE NEXT SUNSET.*

Ethan strums the outro. Eyes on the sunrise.

EXT. AARON'S PARENTS HOUSE - BALCONY - SAME TIME

OVERLAP: Ethan's GUITAR.

Aaron accompanies on harmonica. Eyes on the same sunrise.

Like a shooting star, the Northern Cardinal soars away, en route to the endless sky.

EXT. GEORGIA - FARM FIELD - DAY

COLE'S PHONE CAM FOOTAGE

Post practice. Aaron climbs up on the roof of the van, happily looking at the unbothered, grazing cows ahead.

AARON

Dear cows. Thank you for supporting
local talent. Y'all are amazing.
Please, remember us.

Picture shakes along with Cole's laughter as he films Ethan and Kayla cracking up.

FADE OUT.

THE END