

Barnaby of Mulch (A Tall Tale)

an original screenplay by

John M. Broadhead

John M. Broadhead
630 Bryn Mawr Dr NE
505-999-8551
JBReflectionFilms@gmail.com

Images, Black and White, vintage. Slices of life in a small, 1930s Texas town. Farms, tractors

BEN, introduced by voice only, has a hint of Texan twang in his dialect. But he speaks intelligently.

BEN [V/O]

Change was happening. Harvest was over, so all those far-off tractor noises were quieting down, and the smell of manure wasn't so bad anymore. But a new smell was replacing it, and a new sound; a clankin' and pumping could be heard, signaling the opening of Mulch's new oil rig.

EXT. 1933 TOWN OF MULCH/MAIN STREET - DAY

Stylized BLACK AND WHITE footage plays; storybook history.

Behind the main town square, a tall OIL RIG is operating. A crowd of fascinated citizens are gathered around, watching.

BEN [V/O]

With every gallon being drawn up from way deep down in the ground, the good citizens, who'd been hit hard by the Depression, knew the well-being of their town was being restored drip by drip, dollar by dollar. And the good man they had to thank for this, the hero responsible for putting food on their tables for generations to come, was...

The people look around, back and forth, seeing nobody.

The camera WHIPS around, revealing a small figure running.

BEN [V/O] (CONT'D)

...Well, at that moment, Barnaby Willis, God Bless him, was a'running away from the full might of the Able County Sheriff's Department.

BARNABY WILLIS, middle aged and lean but healthy, sprints up the street in just his britches. In one hand he has a pistol; in the other a bottle of booze. A herd of officers pursue.

BEN [V/O] (CONT'D)

You see, Mr. Willis was many things, in addition to entrepreneur and town savior.

(MORE)

BEN [V/O] (CONT'D)
He'd masterminded a high-profile
coach heist, run bootlegging
shenanigans during prohibition, and
had a vague but probably nasty
involvement with the Chicago Mafia.

Barnaby continues to run, carefree and drunk, smiling.

Nearing the oil rig, his shoes slop through oily mud. He
hastily slips them off and continues running barefoot.

BEN [V/O] (CONT'D)
We don't know which deed it was that
finally got him caught, or what went
through his mind. But he was never
one to shy away from a crowd of
adoring spectators.

He spots a massive BANNER above the crowd, with his name
painted across it. Barnaby stops in front of the spectators
and smiles, composes himself and prepares to speak...

BEN [V/O] (CONT'D)
And that's how they got him.

All the police open fire. Without a word, he's shot dead.
Policemen close in, as the body falls to the ground.

A little GIRL turns away from the gasping crowd, inquisitively
looking at Barnaby's SHOES. She picks them up.

INT. TIRE SHOP/GARAGE - DAY

It's modern day. A small tire shop in the same town.

BEN [25], thin but energetic, bright and excitable. He's
telling his story to SAM [26], muscular build (if a little
pudgy), friendly but not as bright.

Some PAPERS, a half-written manuscript, are in Ben's hands.
Sam is bent down, in the act of putting a wheel on a car.

SAM
That's the end?

BEN
Yeah. Lights go down. Everyone bows.
Hopefully there'll be some applause.

SAM
He just...ran into town and got shot.

BEN
That's what really happened.

SAM

Why's he just wearin' underwear?

BEN

That's supposedly what really happened too. I gotta stick to facts, ya know.

SAM

It's not very dramatic that way.

BEN

No...

SAM

He doesn't seem very heroic.

BEN

Hmmm...

SAM

Maybe instead, at the end he gets away, hops in a truck with his sweetheart, and leaves town forever.

BEN

No...That's not...

Sam is having some trouble setting the tire on a set of inverted LUG NUTS. His hands are between tire and brake.

CRASH. The car comes off the jack.

SAM

Oh boy. Son of a bitch. Ben, I just tore my finger off.

Ben's eyes widen. Then he starts as if to say something... He's cut off by his own VOICEOVER, accompanied by scene cut.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY

A sign by the side of the road reads "WELCOME TO MULCH."

BEN [V/O]

Mulch hasn't changed much since that fateful day eighty years ago, when Barnaby Willis died. I'll admit it still isn't much to look at.

Down the rough, broken asphalt of the old highway, a PICKUP TRUCK full of construction materials rattles.

As the truck hits a bump, the tools jerk in the truck bed. A single NAIL bounces out, landing on the road.

BEN [V/O] (CONT'D)

But it's my town, and it'll always
be my town. That is, unless something
both unforeseeable and dramatic
happens. The kinda thing that would
make a good story.

A shiny dark grey Jaguar approaches speedily. Racing down
the road toward town, one of its tires picks up the nail.

EXT. TIRE SHOP - DAY

The SIGN over the shop reads: "JIM'S TIRE AND AUTO REPAIR."

A car pulls up to the shop, and a very old woman, MAE DANIELS,
very slowly clambers out and totters toward the door.

INT. TIRE SHOP/OFFICE - DAY

The DOOR BELL makes a clanky "ding," announcing Mae's arrival.

JIM [60] is standing behind the counter. Salt-and-pepper
hair, lightly whiskered face with a rugged, experienced look.

JIM

Looking just as spritely as ever!

MAE

Oh, Jim. How are my hips looking?
I'm working on my figure.

JIM

Just like an hourglass.

MAE

Would you sweep me off my feet and
dance with me into the sunset?

JIM

Let me see. I'll be out of here at
five. Will you still be free then?

MAE

If I'm still alive by five!

JIM

What are you needing, Mae?

Ben pokes his head in through the door from the garage.

BEN

Pssh. Psssh.

JIM

Ben, what's "pssh" supposed to mean?

BEN
Sam tore his finger off.

JIM
What? 'Scuse me, Mae.

Jim, real concern on his face, runs back into the garage.
Mae immediately sees the SCRIPT in Ben's hand.

MAE
Is that the play?

BEN
Play? Oh, yeah! It's mostly...almost
done. Would you read it actually?

BEN [V/O]
Mrs. Daniels is the ultimate authority
on Barnaby Willis, because she's old
enough to remember. She was there...

EXT. 1933 MULCH MAIN STREET - DAY

B&W FLASHBACK, to the LITTLE GIRL picking up Barnaby's SHOES.

INT. TIRE SHOP/OFFICE - DAY

JIM [O.S.]
Ben! Come here, would you?

BEN
Right. There's a...finger. Here!

Ben sets the manuscript on the counter, and exits hastily.
Mae, her interest piqued, picks it up.

EXT. MULCH/MAIN STREET - DAY

Barnaby's SHOES sit on a pedestal outside the Town Hall.

Several WORKERS are lifting up a large sign reading
"CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION AND PERADE."

BEN [V/O]
'Course, I'm not just writing a script
about Barnaby Willis for the hell of
it. Our town hero is getting a play
in his honor for this year's
centennial, and I'm in charge. Well,
it's a week away and nothing's ready.

The MAYOR, a plump man, runs out, sees the misspelled sign
and starts gesturing wildly, yelling at the workers.

INT. TIRE SHOP/GARAGE - DAY

Ben walks back into the garage. Jim is holding a towel over Sam's hand. Sam seems calm.

JIM
Doesn't it hurt?

SAM
Sure.

JIM
You're not showing a whole lot of pain for someone whose finger is lying all by its lonesome in a puddle of blood. Ben! Hold this. Tight.

Ben takes the bloody rag. Jim hurries back to the office.

SAM
I'm still gonna make it tonight, Ben. I know the audition's important.

BEN
Don't think about the play right now! But, Sam, you really think the ending isn't good enough?

SAM
I'm no writer. I don't know.

BEN
Barnaby can't just leave town. Besides the historical facts, the story needs him to die at the end, in Mulch, where his heart and soul reside. Isn't that dramatic enough?

Blood spurts a little, as Ben gets distracted.

SAM
Watch the...blood...

BEN
Sorry.

EXT. TIRE SHOP - DAY

The JAGUAR from earlier pulls in to the shop's lot, FLAT TIRE flapping with every rotation.

INT. TIRE SHOP/OFFICE - DAY

Jim, a small bucket in his hand, is scooping ICE from a freezer. The DOOR BELL chimes.

JIM
Be right with you!

He exits the door to the garage, just as the front door opens.

In walks a STRANGER; a middle-aged man, dressed in somber tones, slightly balding, a distinguished look.

He looks back and forth. Taps his foot deliberately. He walks to the counter. Taps his fingers. Purses his lips.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

Jim returns with a small ICE BUCKET. Right away, he picks up the FINGER and drops it into the ice.

JIM
We've got to get Sam to the doctor's.
See if he can get this little guy
stitched on again.

BEN
They can do that?

Sam's eyes light up hopefully.

JIM
Sure they can. They do it all the
time. Come on, Sam. Ben, can you
manage the shop? No, that's an ass
of a question. I know you can't manage
the shop. Can you take Sam instead?

BEN
Let me get my truck.

Ben begins to stride quickly out of the garage.

SAM
At least I have nine more fingers.
That's really a lot to spare if you
stop and think about it.

Ben smiles to himself. His VOICEOVER picks up again.

BEN [V/O]
Sam's tougher than most people; I
found that out growing up with him.

Ben opens the door to go outside...

INT. WRECKED CAR, 1998 - EVENING

FLASHBACK to 1998.

A STATION WAGON is wrecked, the hood smoking. Two figures, obscured, lie slouched in the front seats.

YOUNG BEN, 9, sits alone in the rear seat. He's bruised, dazed and horrified. He lowers himself into a fetal position.

The door of the car begins to be pried. After a few screeches, the door finally bursts open.

YOUNG SAM, [10] leaps into the car. Earnestly, even forcibly, he tugs at the motionless Ben, finally dragging him out.

EXT. WRECKED CAR, 1998 - EVENING

Ben falls on the ground outside the burning car. Sam stands above him, wiping the sweat off his face.

A taller figure [JIM, unseen] appears behind Sam, and holds out his hand to Ben.

BEN [V/O]

The only family I remember, the only one that matters, is the family I became part of that day.

INT. TIRE SHOP GARAGE - DAY

Jim still holds the bloody towel to Sam's hand.

JIM

You know just before they died, I had to convince your mom and pa that the shop was gonna be a good environment for you.

SAM

It is, Jim!

JIM

And here you are, dropping cars on your fingers. But...you're more careful than that! Did you lift that car on the jack? Or...or was it Ben?

SAM

Don't be hard on Ben, Jim.

JIM

Don't be hard on...I guess I shouldn't talk. It's not my finger.

SAM

He's just thinking about a lot of other things.

Ben arrives with the truck and walks quickly into the garage.

BEN

I'm ready when you are.

INT. TIRE SHOP OFFICE - DAY

Mae is sitting, reading in the lobby. Chuckling, grinning.

The Stranger still stands near the counter. Watching Mae read, he opens his mouth, preparing to ask her something...

Jim enters.

JIM

Looks like it's just gonna be me today. So, sorry, who was here first?

The stranger, slowly, steps back and gestures to Mae.

Mae slowly stands and hobbles to the counter.

MAE

Jim, there's this gauge behind the steering wheel. Beside it is a picture of a fueling station.

JIM

That's your fuel gauge.

MAE

Well it gets lower the more I drive the car. But I haven't seen any leak.

JIM

You're running low on fuel. You'll need to go to a gas station.

MAE

The owner's manual says I only need a fluid change every three months.

Jim looks a little exasperated. Glances at the Stranger.

JIM

I will take a look and see what I can do! And you sir?

EXT. MULCH/MAIN STREET - DAY

The BANNER is being replaced, with the MAYOR overseeing. The text reads "CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION AND PARADE."

MAYOR

You got "parade" fixed but now it's
"centennial" that's wrong!

The mayor's secretary, ANN, a spirited and slightly neurotic girl in her mid-twenties, is standing beside him.

ANN

"Centennial's" right.

MAYOR

No, no, "centennial" has one "N."

ANN

"Celebration" only has one "L."

MAYOR

"Ceelbration?" I don't think so.
Take it down, try it again!

Ben's rickety old JALOPY drives through. Ben drives and Sam is in the passenger seat. The Mayor waves.

MAYOR (CONT'D)

Mister Ben!

BEN

Mister Mayor!

MAYOR

I'll be there tonight!

BEN

You mean the auditions?

MAYOR

Wouldn't miss them for the world.
I'm a big fan of your writing!

ANN

Hi Sam.

Sam waves to her with his damaged hand - then quickly withdraws it and waves with the other.

SAM

Hi, Ann.

BEN

Looks like you misspelled
"Celebration" on your banner.

Ben drives off. The Mayor huffs and puffs a little.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

Jim works alone on the cars.

Pours the contents of a GAS CAN into Mae's car.

Removes the Stranger's tire and begins to mend it.

INT. SHOP OFFICE - DAY

Mae is reading the manuscript. The STRANGER sits beside her. He casts a few cursory glances toward the reading material.

MAE

What brings you into town?

STRANGER

Me? The flat tire.

MAE

There's no highways through Mulch, so nobody just passes through. If someone ends up here, they mean to.

STRANGER

You've put me on the spot, then. I - I find myself retired, alone, with time to think, travel, make some old wrongs right. That's what I'm doing, I guess. Tying up all the loose ends.

MAE

Well, when I found myself retired and widowed, I decided to just sit my wrinkled butt down here until I died. That was twenty years ago and I'm still waiting. Once you're here, it's a hard place to get away from.

She turns back to reading.

STRANGER

What's that you're reading? A play?

INT. BEN'S CAR DRIVING - DAY

BEN

Five different police characters; we still need five costumes.

SAM

You could make it just one police character and borrow the sheriff's.

BEN
Just one police character?

SAM
He could be a really scary police character.

BEN
I was thinking about the set too. We can't do the whole show against a blank wall. But what the hell can we build in less than a week?

Sam is momentarily distracted.

SAM
That's funny. I can feel my finger itching, but it ain't there.

BEN
There's too many things I'm not ready for. Maybe the play's a bad idea.

SAM
Did you pass the Doc's place?

Ben stops the car.

BEN
I think I passed the Doc's place.

The car is in the middle of FARMLANDS outside of town.

Then the engine dies.

BEN (CONT'D)
Uh-oh. And...it's outta gas.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

Jim is waiting for the glue to set on the repaired tire. Meanwhile, he's on the SHOP PHONE.

JIM
He's a good worker; always has been. But he's only ever thinking about those stories. And that's fine, it's fine. He's just got to pick which world he wants to live in, and stay there. Eve, would you talk to him?

INT. SHOP OFFICE - DAY

The Stranger is now reading the manuscript, deeply absorbed.

Jim walks in.

JIM
You're both set.

Mae begins to stand up. The Stranger doesn't seem to hear.

JIM (CONT'D)
Sir.

STRANGER
Oh! Yes. Thank you.

The Stranger stands up and walks to the counter.

JIM
Fifteen for the tire. And Mae, don't
worry about a charge. It's just gas.

EXT. FARMS - DAY

In the afternoon sunlight, Ben and Sam are hurrying down the road, between farmlands. Ben is carrying the ice bucket.

SAM
The ice ain't melted yet, is it?

BEN
No. Finger's good as new.

SAM
I'm awfully sorry about all this.

BEN
Sorry about what?

SAM
Makin' you go all over town today.
Hey, is that Don?

He spots a TRACTOR not far away.

BEN
Don! Don! Hey Don!

Don [40s], African-American, drives the tractor toward them.

DON
Why if it isn't Ben and Sam. What
are you doing out here?

BEN
Sam's gotta get to the doctor's.

DON
 Doctor's? I suppose I could give
 you a lift. Only got room for one.

BEN
 Take him then. He's got to hurry.
 And the finger!

Sam climbs aboard the tractor, and Ben hands him the ice
 bucket. Don turns the tractor away.

DON
 Auditions still on for tonight, Ben?

BEN
 You bet they are!

DON
 I'm excited for it. I've never been
 in a play before!

Ben watches the tractor plow across the field. He smiles a
 little to himself and walks on.

BEN [V/O]
 Every day is a little bit of an
 adventure around here. But everything
 can't be easy or there'd be no good
 stories to tell. In the end, things
 always work themselves out.

Ben pauses. Looks at his watch.

BEN
 Shit!

He breaks into a sprint, diving into the farmlands and chasing
 the tractor towards town, shrinking to a vanishing point.

INT. 1930 BANK - DAY

Stylized, vintage B&W. A big city bank in the early 1930s.

A BANKER, face unseen, sits at a desk. Across from him stands
 Barnaby in a suit, orating and gesturing with wild passion.

BARNABY
 There's oil underneath Mulch, Mr.
 Banker, a whole lake of oil. Enough
 to keep the town running for another
 fifty years, to put food on the tables
 of hard-working men and women. It's
 a town in crisis with a dream of
 redemption!

(MORE)

BARNABY (CONT'D)

Mark my words, I'm building an oil rig, and I'm gonna be using the bank's money to do it. You won't sit there and tell me I can't take out a loan, because I'm not gonna let you sit there and tell me I can't take out a loan, see? Do you know who I am?

The Banker, none other than Sam, looks blankly at his finger.

INT. TOWN HALL/STAGE - NIGHT

It's a small auditorium. A makeshift set is compiled of chairs and a table. Sam, at the table, pokes at his BANDAGED finger.

MARK, a young man in the Barnaby outfit, has just finished the speech. Ben, sitting nearby, glances sharply at Sam.

BEN

Psssh!

Sam snaps to. He looks at the PAPERS in front of him.

SAM

Oh. Um... "WHO?"

MARK

I'm Barnaby Willis!

BEN

Thank you.

Mark relaxes. Ben takes a SCRIPT back from him.

MARK

Did I do alright?

BEN

You did...great. We'll have some details for you tomorrow.

MARK

Swell!

Mark stomps off the stage. Opening the door to leave the room, we can hear the HUBBUB gathering out in the hallway.

SAM

It's just one word. "Who." I'll remember it next time.

BEN

Eleven people all want the same part. Who else is here?

SAM

Last I looked...everyone was here.

INT. TOWN HALL/HALLWAY - NIGHT

The hallway is full of townspeople; at least twenty-five.

A bit stiffly, at the back of the line, enters the Stranger. He remains silent, but patient. Just in front of him stands FATHER BOB, the town's pastor, who turns to the Stranger.

FATHER BOB

Are you new in town?

STRANGER

Temporarily.

Sam appears at the doorway, calling out.

SAM

Is there anyone else auditioning to be Barnaby?

Everyone in the hallway raises their hands quickly, except for the Stranger, who just looks on, a little amused.

INT. 1930 BANK - DAY

The Bank sequence replays, but this time, with multiple people in the place of Barnaby. Their acting is generally stunted.

MAYOR

There's oil underneath Mulch, Mr. Banker, a whole lake of oil.

SHERIFF BRASHER

Enough oil to keep the town running for another fifty years.

MISSUS LEE

It's a town in crisis with a dream of redemption.

FATHER BOB

Do you know who I am?

SAM [AS BANKER]

WHO?

MAYOR

I'm Barnaby Willis!

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

Ben looks on, utterly exhausted.

BEN
Thanks Mr. Mayor.

MAYOR
I'm much happier with my second performance. I can give it a third if you think it's worth the try...

BEN
That won't be...I don't think it is.

MAYOR
Very well...

Exit Mayor. A moment of silence follows.

BEN
Maybe my writing's just bad.

SAM
Too late to change it now.

BEN
I can hear the words in my head. But now, it just doesn't sound right.

SAM
None of them can act very good.

BEN
You should audition, Sam.

SAM
Me?

BEN
Yeah! There's a lot of parts that don't even need to say much.

SAM
(blushing)
Ann's gonna be there.

BEN
Yeah...

SAM
If I tried to act I'd just make an idiot of myself. Maybe...maybe if Ann weren't gonna be there...

BEN
Alright. Who's left out there?

Sam goes to the door, opening it to find the Stranger.

STRANGER

Good evening.

Beat. Sam looks at him with instant dislike.

SAM

Um...who are you?

STRANGER

The name's Will. Here's my resumé.
I don't have any recent headshots.

Sam takes a PAPER the stranger offers.

BEN

And you're here to audition?

STRANGER [WILL]

If you're wrapped up for the night I
don't want to intrude...

BEN

No! There's still some parts.

SAM

Lots of parts...

Ben shows Will the stack of sides. Sam reads the resumé.

BEN

Here's the lines. In all honesty,
I'm having second thoughts about
some of the dialogue...

WILL

The dialogue is all fine. All fine.

SAM

"William McMasters." You've been a
real actor?

WILL

I've dabbled. Today I think I'd like
to read for the role of the Doctor.

BEN

Not...Barnaby?

WILL

I appreciate the Doctor's sensitivity.
And I won't need the sides, thanks.

Will paces up onto the stage.

SAM
 (whispering)
 I don't like him, Ben...

BEN
 Why, 'cuz he's a stranger?

SAM
 No...Some strangers are okay.

BEN
 Nevermind, Sam. Doctor scene!

SAM
 Oh, doctor scene...

Sam quickly shifts the chairs around to mimic a dentist office. He sits in the "patient's chair."

Will calmly paces up to the stage. For a few seconds he closes his eyes and breathes deeply.

INT. 1930 DOCTOR OFFICE - DAY

B&W, in a vintage doctor's room.

WILL, as the Doctor, sits above Sam, who is dressed as Barnaby. Will actively works at cleaning Sam's teeth.

WILL [AS DOCTOR]
 Barnaby, I can't advise you on conscientious matters. That's a job for a parson, or maybe a wife. But I can tell you what's best for you in the physical sense. Sure, it might benefit you to smoke less, ease off the bottle. But my present concern is you running the serious risk of catching a bullet. So it's my duty to advise you not to rob that bank.

Sam responds, his voice muffled by the "dentist's" hands.

SAM [AS BARNABY]
 Are you saying this as my doctor, or as my friend?

Will pulls back his hands.

WILL
 Pardon?

SAM
 Are you saying this as my doctor, or as my friend? *Is that the right line?*

WILL
 If you want my advice as a friend,
 you're not going to get it while...

Into the room walks DON, who interrupts the conversation.

DON
 Excuse me. I know I'm very late...oh!

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

DON
 I'm interrupting, aren't I?

Don enters by the stage. Will ignores him at first.

SAM
 Don! Look; I got my finger attached.
 Just need to wait and see if takes.

BEN
 Could you come back in a minute Don?

WILL [AS DOCTOR]
 No! It's good timing. Matter of fact,
 why don't you come in and join us.

DON
 Is this part of the audition?

Ben and Sam look at one another, and shrug. Ben nods to Don, who walks onto the stage and becomes part of the scene.

INT. 1930 DOCTOR OFFICE - DAY

The scene continues. Will ushers Don into the room.

WILL [AS DOCTOR]
 It's Don?

DON
 Yes. And you are?

WILL
 Doctor Ed. You know Barnaby?

Indicating Sam.

DON
 Barnaby Willis? Sure, by reputation.

BEN [O.S.]
 Hold on. The scene's only supposed
 to have two characters in it...

WILL
 He's right. You be the Doctor.
 I'll be Barnaby.

DON
 Oh. Alright.

Sam gets out of the chair and goes to join Ben. Will gets in the patient chair and seamlessly shifts character.

WILL [AS BARNABY]
 So Doctor, I'm hoping for your advice.

DON
 Is there a script with the lines?

Ben, out of place in this vintage world, runs him a script.

WILL [AS BARNABY]
 So as I was saying, Doctor Ed...

DON [AS DOCTOR]
 "Doctor Ed." Yes, that's me. On what can I advise you, "Barnaby?"

WILL
 A bank robbery.

DON
 A bank robbery?

WILL
 Well, I haven't done it yet.

Don lifts up the script, and begins to read off his line.

DON
 Barnaby, I can't advise you on conscientious matters. That's a job for a parson, or maybe a wife...

WILL
 Are you telling me this as my doctor, or as a friend?

Despite the interruption, Don goes on from the script.

DON
 If you want my advice as a friend, you're not going to get it while you're sitting in my office.

WILL
(going off-script)
 So let's leave and go someplace else!

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

Will abruptly stands, grabs two chairs and rearranges them. Don looks blankly at the script, then at Ben. Both shrug.

WILL

Sit with me, Doctor. It's a beautiful evenin' for fishing.

DON

Okay. I can't find this in the script.

WILL

Doesn't matter. I want your advice. As a friend.

They sit in the chairs.

EXT. 1930S LAKESIDE - NIGHT

Don and Will, as the Doctor and Barnaby, respectively, sit on the edge of the lake, fishing quietly.

DON [AS DOCTOR]

On whether you should rob a bank?
Hell no you shouldn't rob a bank.

WILL

I mean to rob the bank to pay for the oil rig, so the people don't all have to move away. I guess what I'm wondering is, can the ends justify the means?

Don becomes quite thoughtful.

DON

Huh. I don't think you can know. So, you're talkin' about robbing this bank, thinking it's gonna be okay because everything's gonna work out in the end. But what if everything doesn't? You could die. Maybe the rig don't work, maybe the town still dries up. You don't know. So sure, rob the bank. But when you do it, keep in mind that until you know how it all ends, you're not saving a town. You're just robbing a bank.

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

Will turns, looking at Ben and Sam, who are both awestruck.

WILL
You wrote that down, right?

DON
What? Oh no, that wasn't me as the character, that was just me talking.

WILL
It's just what the story needs. I think you fellows found your Doctor.

SAM
That looked like pretty good acting.

BEN
But...the script.

WILL
Scripts change all the time. It's your decision to make. I actually need to be going. Pardon me gentlemen.

BEN
Wait!

Ben follows Will out of the room.

DON
Did I get the part?

SAM
I think so.

EXT. TOWN HALL - NIGHT

Will walks out of the hall, and Ben follows, catching him just in front of the Shoe Monument.

BEN
Didn't you still want to audition?

WILL
I would, but I'm hoping to meet someone before its too late.

BEN
What about Barnaby?

WILL
What about Barnaby?

BEN
Can you play him?

Will stops in his tracks.

WILL

Sure, I could play him.

BEN

And could you do with Barnaby what you just did with the doctor?

WILL

What'd I just do with the doctor?

BEN

Make him seem like a real person. And make it a little more dramatic.

WILL

I could think about that.

Will smiles, pats Ben on the back and walks away.

BEN

What made you want to come tonight?

WILL

I asked an old lady what there was to do in town. This is what she suggested. And it's a good script.

Ben smiles widely.

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

It's a tiny Catholic Church, simply adorned. Father Bob is here, sweeping the floor between pews.

A KNOCK on the door interrupts. He walks down the aisle, unbolts the door, and opens it. It's Will.

FATHER BOB

Hello?

WILL

Good, I was hoping I'd catch you in.

FATHER

You're the gentleman from out of town. Are you here to rob the Church?

WILL

No! No...

FATHER

Then it's confession, isn't it? Always confession. It's very late...

WILL
It won't take long.

FATHER
Do you want the confessional or...

WILL
Face-to-face is alright.

Father Bob puts on his Stole, and sits in a pew, motioning for Will to do the same.

FATHER
How was your audition?

WILL
Oh, good, good.

FATHER
I thought I did fine. I get a lot of practice talking in front of people.

WILL
Yeah, I guess you do.

FATHER
Anyway, welcome to Mulch. I hope your stay is uneventful.

WILL
So far. So far. Bless me Father for I have sinned, my last confession was, oh, back in Philly. Twelve years?

FATHER
And this isn't gonna take long?

WILL
I...Dammit. I can't ask forgiveness before I do something, can I?

FATHER
No...Don't you remember how this works?... What are you aimin' to do?

WILL
I'm...I'm here because I'm gonna kill somebody.

Beat. Father Bob is perturbed.

WILL (CONT'D)
This is all secret, right?

FATHER

Yes, it's secret... Why are you gonna kill somebody?

WILL

Here's something that bothers me. It used to be alright, in the olden days, to end a man's life as a matter of honor, as a matter of vengeance. It seems to be frowned on nowadays.

FATHER

It is frowned on nowadays.

WILL

Is there a way - I'm not asking permission - but could it be less of a sin if...he deserves it?

FATHER

I can't say that it would. 'Course, I don't know your full situation...

WILL

Just...had to ask. Also, you don't know who this is, do you?

Will produces an old NEWSPAPER clipping. He holds it up.

FATHER

Who?

WILL

The young fella right there. Name's Chuck Hannigan, though he's changed his name. This was about thirty years ago. I know he's living here now.

FATHER

Don't recognize him, honestly.

WILL

Too bad. That's the fellow I'm here to kill. If I only knew what he looked like now...

He tucks the newspaper clipping back into his pocket.

WILL (CONT'D)

Anyway. I have lots of other sins I can confess. May I start with those?

EXT. SAM AND BEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ben's car rattles up his driveway. He runs into the house.

BEN [V/O]

If there's such a thing as providence
or divine intervention, it's that
Mr. McMasters showed up when he did,
to save the play.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ben sits at a table in front of stacks of paper, writing.
Sam walks in, sets a CUP of COFFEE in front of Ben. Ben drinks
it eagerly and keeps writing feverishly.

BEN [V/O]

Maybe somewhere there's a force of
nature that's aiming for everything
to come together, like somebody's
tellin' a big story and we're the
characters. I guess that's why,
somehow or another, everything really
does work itself out.

EXT. TIRE SHOP - MORNING

JIM

You look like shit.

Jim is standing at the door to the shop. Ben gets out of his
car, walking toward the door.

BEN

Writing. Had a late night.

JIM

Again?

BEN

Yessir!

Jim opens the door and lets Ben into the shop.

INT. SHOP OFFICE - MORNING

JIM

I told Sam to take the day off. Let
that finger heal.

BEN

I figured that when he wasn't awake
this morning. So just the two of us?

JIM

Just the two of us.

Ben goes straight for a MOP and BUCKET, and begins cleaning
the floor. Jim stands at the counter and sorts some files.

Awkward silence reigns. Jim forces a conversation.

JIM (CONT'D)

How were your play auditions?

BEN

Good! Nobody knew what they were doing at first, but everyone's real excited, which is good because the story's all about the spirit of the town and the people in it. I think I could be happy just doing these kinda things forever.

JIM

Here?

BEN

Yeah!

JIM

In Mulch?

BEN

Sure!

Ben goes on mopping happily. Skepticism and disappointment show on Jim's face. He begins to say something...

BEN (CONT'D)

You should come tonight!

JIM

Tonight, huh?

BEN

If you want to.

Ben becomes a little sheepish, offering this to his boss.

JIM

We'll see.

Jim goes to walk out into the garage. He stops at the door.

JIM (CONT'D)

Uh, Ben. I talked to someone yesterday I haven't spoken with in a while.

BEN

Yeah?

JIM

She's gonna be visiting town.

Ben looks up. Horror in his eyes.

BEN

Who?

JIM

Eve.

Ben's jaw drops.

BEN [V/O]

Eve. Eve.

EXT. 1999 MULCH/MAIN STREET - DAY

FLASHBACK. This is colorful, vignetted; over-sentimental. Music takes precedence over any dialogue.

YOUNG BEN, dressed for school, trots alone down an empty road. His nose is tilted steeply into a BOOK he's reading.

Another child, YOUNG EVE, approaches from the opposite direction. Walking alone, she's also absorbed in a book.

They get closer and closer without being aware of their surroundings, and then BUMP. They walk into each other.

Both drop their books and step back. As they pick up one another's books, they realize the books are the same: "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer."

As they hand the books back, they lock eyes and smile.

EXT. 1999 PARK - DAY

Young Ben and Eve sit on a PICNIC BLANKET.

Ben produces a PAPER, a poem he's written. Eve smiles.

She produces a paper of her own, a PICTURE she's drawn of the two of them together, looking at the stars.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Mirroring the picture in the previous scene, Ben and Eve, sit together looking at the stars. In their 20s now, Eve is spunky, attractive; driven, yet approachable.

They look at each other. Their hands join.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY

Ben and Eve drive together in Ben's car. Eve is reading a sheet of paper, and laughing.

Ben laughs with her, then tries to grab the paper.

The car BREAKS DOWN, the hood smoking. Ben rolls his eyes.

Outside of the car, Ben works under the hood while Eve is underneath the car, working from below.

Eve gets out from beneath the car. Ben cracks a joke. She slaps him with a grimy, greasy hand. Laughing, she smears her greasy hand on his shirt again.

He grabs her and, both covered in grime and grease, they kiss each other. And then they kiss again.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ben and Eve both sit on the bed. They are flipping through a short MANUSCRIPT. Eve holds up a DRAWING she's done.

EXT. SAM AND BEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ben is working on something. A SIGN.

He looks behind him. Eve is on the porch, working on something of her own.

INT. SAM AND BEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Eve works feverishly over what looks like a PORTFOLIO.

Ben runs into the room with a SIGN he's been working on. It's the "WELCOME TO MULCH" sign.

Eve turns her head. Smiles a little. Patronizing, almost. She turns back to her own work. Ben furrows his eyebrows.

EXT. MAILBOX - DAY

Eve looks through the mail. She receives an article that makes her jump up and down with excitement.

INT. TIRE SHOP/GARAGE - DAY

Eve runs into the shop garage. Ben is standing with Sam. Bubbling with excitement, she hands him the letter.

Ben reads it. Shock comes over his face. He lowers the letter from his face, slowly. Sam looks on with concern.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Eve puts the last of her LUGGAGE into a car. She turns to Ben one last time.

Their hands join, then fall apart from each other. She climbs into the car and drives away.

Ben turns to the SHOE monument, and looks at it alone.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY

Eve drives out, past the "WELCOME TO MULCH" sign, leaving.

FLASHBACK ENDS

INT. SHOP LOBBY - DAY

Jim is watching Ben's reverie from the door to the garage.

BEN

In the end, she couldn't choose me
if it meant choosing Mulch too. So
she chose to leave it, and me.

JIM

What's the matter with you?

BEN

Did I just say that out loud? Oh.
Yeah, I'm fine.

He returns to mopping. Jim shakes his head, leaves the room.

INT. SAM AND BEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Sam lays in his bed, fast asleep. A smile on his face.

As if by habit his eyes open, and he sits bolt upright, still smiling. He reaches for his WATCH, straps it on, stands up.

He walks into Ben's room, to the desk. Digs until he finds some OLD PHOTOS of Mulch, including the OIL RIG. He smiles.

EXT. SCRAP YARD - DAY

Sam has parked his TRUCK next to a large pile of scrap wood. Timber by timber, Sam is picking lumber out of the pile and stacking it in the back of his truck.

HANK [35] approaches and helps Sam with the stacking. Briefly Sam grimaces and adjusts the bandage on his finger.

EXT. SAM AND BEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Sam's truck rumbles into the yard.

Sam gets out, looks ruefully at the piles of wood. Scrunches his face a little. Looks at his WATCH...

A LITTLE LATER

Sam is hard at work, building something. Sawing, hammering, sanding... it's hard to tell what he's making.

He looks at his watch again. His eyes widen.

INT. SAM AND BEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Sam is standing in front of a mirror in the bathroom, splashing cold water on his face, rubbing water on his hair.

He puts on a nicer shirt and a jacket, something half-passable, at least. Then he looks in the mirror and smiles.

Some FLOWERS, mixed in with grass and weeds, sit on the kitchen table, haphazardly arranged. Sam grabs them.

EXT. SAM AND BEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Smiling and humming softly to himself, Sam stands in front of the house, holding the flowers close to his chest.

He sees his finger, bandaged, on the hand holding the flowers. He switches hands so the bandaged one is behind him.

He stands a few more moments. He looks at his watch again.

SAM

Well I guess I'm a *little* early...

Shrugging, he carefully lays down the flowers. Without changing clothes, he goes back to work on his construction.

A little time passes. He finishes what looks like a WALL.

Down the road past the house comes ANN on her bicycle. Sam sees her and smiles, his face beaming then turning red.

SAM (CONT'D)

Hey Ann!

ANN

Hi Sam. What are you working on?
Why are you all dressed up?

SAM

This is...this is my working clothes.

ANN

You didn't have to go to the shop?

SAM

I...I have the day off.

(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)

And when I saw you riding by just now, I thought, maybe...do you want...would you like...I can make lemonade. Would you like some lemonade?

INT. MULCH BAR - DAY

The bar is tiny, resembling a saloon more than anything.

HANK and DON are sitting in a corner table, with beers.

DON

Sorry to hear about your horse.

HANK

Spent all morning tearing town the pen and giving away the lumber. Sad to see it go.

DON

Drink to better times?

They drink.

Into the bar walks WILL. He goes straight to the bar.

HANK

What do you think about that fella?

DON

I don't know. What about him?

HANK

He just...hangs around town. Like he's waitin' for somebody. Stranger.

DON

Don't know. He seems to be alright. I talked to him at the play.

HANK

You're part of the play?

DON

You betcha!

HANK

I oughtta get over there and try it.

DON

Mister Ben does need more people. It'll do you good, too. It'll do the whole town some good.

Will downs his drink quickly, drops some cash on the counter. He looks over at the duo at the table and smiles amicably.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Will walks out of the bar.

Watching him from across the street, is Father Bob. He watches nervously until Will has shambled out of sight.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Sheriff Brasher is relaxing at his desk, speaking with old Mae, standing feebly across from him.

SHERIFF BRASHER

There's a raccoon terrorizing Miss Anderson, Old Corbel says somebody stole an apple from his orchard, I gotta pull Lance Aker's car outta the lake...but it won't take more than a few hours, then I'll be by to get your cat outta the tree again.

Father Bob walks into the room, nods respectfully.

MAE

Much obliged. Just, don't be too late now. Line dancing is at seven and I never miss that.

SHERIFF

No worries, Mae.

Mae nods and walks slowly out.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Father?

FATHER BOB

Sheriff, do you have a moment?

The Sheriff slowly, very slowly, cranes his head around to see a CLOCK hanging on the wall directly behind him.

SHERIFF

No.

FATHER

I just need to quickly ask if you ever knew a man named Chuck Hannigan.

The sheriff pauses.

SHERIFF

Chuck Hannigan...

FATHER

He might have lived here, in the '70s. Weren't you here back then?

SHERIFF

I've been here since back always. Don't know about any Chuck Hannigan. But if I did, what'd he do now?

FATHER

He's about to get murdered.

Beat.

SHERIFF

By who?

FATHER

I couldn't tell you that.

The Sheriff sits back. Breathes out deeply.

SHERIFF

Huh. Well, goddamn. Beg your pardon.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

Ben is working beneath a car in the garage.

Jim comes out and calls to him.

JIM

Ben. Go ahead and skedaddle when you're wrapped up. I know you have your play stuff tonight.

Ben pulls himself out from beneath the car.

BEN

I have a couple hours. If you don't mind, I'll stay. I might be having to buy a few extra things for the play, so I'm gonna need the paycheck.

Jim looks at him a minute longer.

JIM

If you say so.

Ben slides back under the truck.

JIM (CONT'D)

Hey Ben.

BEN

Yessir?

JIM

I'm gonna stop by tonight. See what it's all about.

Awe comes over Ben's face.

BEN

Really?

JIM

Yeah.

BEN

Well, I think you'll like it.

JIM

Go on. I'll add an hour to your time card tonight.

Jim's glance says "don't ask questions." So Ben stands up, hurries past him with a nod of gratitude.

EXT. MAE'S HOUSE - EVENING

Mae is sitting on her porch. She's watching as Sheriff Brasher leans a ladder against her tree in the front yard.

SHERIFF BRASHER

This tree?

MAE

That's always been his favorite tree.

The Sheriff awkwardly begins to climb up the ladder.

Mae turns her head. Ben's car is pulling up her driveway.

EXT. MAE'S HOUSE - EVENING

Ben is sitting across from Mae, manuscript in hand.

BEN

I'm making a few tiny little changes, and its not, strictly speaking, accurate to all the historical facts. So I wanted to ask you first.

MAE

Ask me? Why?

BEN

Because you're the expert.

MAE

Huh. If you say so.

BEN

I might be changing some of the characters to fit the actors better.

MAE

Makes sense.

BEN

And I was thinking that the end of the play, when Barnaby gets shot, isn't dramatic enough. Not that it wasn't dramatic for someone like you, when you saw it happen. But, you know, for an audience. So...

He sets the MANUSCRIPT in front of her.

MAE

A speech huh? But Barnaby didn't say anything when he died.

BEN

You just tell me if I'm changing too much. This is a first version, since Mr. McMasters hasn't read it yet.

She starts to read it. In the background, the Sheriff clumsily pushes through branches, looking for the cat.

SHERIFF

I don't think he's in this tree.

MAE

(distracted)

He's up there.

Ben watches Mae read. He's nervous.

MAE (CONT'D)

Hahaha!

BEN

What?

MAE

I wasn't expecting it to get so funny at the end!

Ben's face goes sullen.

BEN

It's not meant to be.

MAE

But... Oh, alright. It might need
some changin' then.

Behind them, the Sheriff falls out of the tree.

BEN

Didn't your cat die last month?

MAE

Oh. Oh my Lord, I forgot. Yes.

SHERIFF

Goddamn! Beg your pardon.

INT. BEN'S CAR DRIVING - DAY

The day is drawing to a close.

Ben is driving, with Will in the passenger seat. Ben is holding the script in his hand.

BEN

The end isn't good enough. I was
trying to make it more dramatic, but
it's silly.

Will takes the script from Ben.

WILL

Take it easy. Here. You focus on
the characters tonight. You and I
can figure out this speech afterwards.

EXT. SAM AND BEN'S HOUSE - EVENING

The car stops in the driveway. Ben and Will step out. Dimly-lit in the dusk light, a heap of lumber can be seen.

BEN

What's all this?

Ben approaches the house, then Sam stands up from where he's been sitting with Ann near the structure.

SAM

Ben!

BEN

Sam! And, Ann?

ANN

Hi Ben.

SAM

Since Jim gave me the day off, I wanted to use it productive.

BEN

Great. What'd you make this time?

WILL

It's Mulch.

Will is looking at the structure from a different perspective.

Ben comes to join him, followed by Sam and Eve. The creation is a miniature version of 1930s Mulch.

BEN

It's the set! Sam, you're a genius.

SAM

No, not a genius. Right when I finished it, I realized it would been easier to build it on the stage.

All four furrow their brows a little.

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

Nearly everyone from the previous night's audition, except for Father Bob, is gathered in the hall, sitting on chairs or standing. The Sheriff's arm is in a SLING now.

Sam and Ben sit at a table in the front. Will is off to the side reading the script. Ben breathes deeply, intimidated.

BEN

Hi everyone. Thanks for coming back. Let's get started.

The Mayor raises his hand.

MAYOR

Did you cast Barnaby already?

BEN

Yes we did.

MAYOR

Oh. Alright. Greatly looking forward to the performance.

The Mayor stands up and walks out.

BEN

Well then. Let's start with the supporting roles. Mark!

Mark stands up eagerly. His enthusiasm rubs off on Ben.

MARK

Yeah Ben?!

BEN

You're adventurous, love to dance, big on rodeos.

MARK

Won a silver belt at state last year!

BEN

Regular cowboy! The perfect fella to play Walt Smithers!

EXT. 1930S DESERT

Mark rides through the desert on a horse, whistling. He's dressed as WALT SMITHERS, picture of a high-plains cowboy.

BEN [V/O]

Fun-loving, soul-searching drifter of the American Southwest. Barnaby's first real friend, taught him the meaning of adventure and the value of living life to the fullest. That is, till he was shot dead in a duel.

Mark dismounts from his horse, draws a gun, a sly smile on his face - and is suddenly shot dead.

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

Mark is now standing on the stage, holding a script. Ben has moved on, pointing to the next seated person.

BEN

Sheriff Brasher! You might prefer a gruff exterior, but you've been Sheriff so long because you know you're doing a lot of good.

SHERIFF

Huh.

BEN

You're a dead-ringer for Carl Graves.

EXT. 1930'S MULCH MAIN STREET

The Sheriff stands on a CAMPAIGN PODIUM inscribed with his name: "Mayor Carl Graves," his fist pounding the air.

BEN [V/O]

Mayor of Mulch from 1928 till 1936.
Held his town together against all
odds through a depression. Never
did quite like Barnaby, but eventually
they were able to work together.

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

Ben now points to Missus Lee.

BEN

Missus Lee. Tough lady. Somehow you
have a hand in running over half the
businesses in town, and that's after
you raised six sons by yourself.

He thumbs through his script.

BEN (CONT'D)

Let's see. Hmm. There's not really
many roles for women in this.

MISSUS LEE

Boss Mike Doolickle.

BEN

What?

MISSUS LEE

Doolickle. The Mafia Boss from
Chicago. He's in the play right?

BEN

Yeah.

MISSUS LEE

I want to play him.

BEN

He's a man.

MISSUS LEE

Man, woman, bah.

INT. 1930S LAVISH OFFICE - NIGHT

Missus Lee is presented as mob boss Mike Doolickle, dressed in a tuxedo, with a giant cigar.

MISSUS LEE [V/O]

He ruled Chicago with an iron fist,
building himself a fortune pushing
rum everywhere from New York to New
Mexico. It was his money that funded
the salvation of the town of Mulch.

Missus Lee as Doolickle is shot dead by a newcomer...

BEN [V/O]

But he never knew that because he
was shot dead in 1932 by the bounty
hunter...Charlie Crawford.

This is HANK, as the bounty hunter, thoughtfully chewing on
a toothpick as he coolly shoots Doolickle.

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

BEN

Hired, as the rumor has it, by none
other than Barnaby Willis himself.

Will stands up behind him, steps onto the stage.

Ben scans the room. Disappointment. Still no Jim.

Ann is here, sitting in a chair in the corner. Ben looks at
her, then at Sam with surprise. Sam's face is a little red.

BEN (CONT'D)

Of course, the sweetest girl in the
town of Mulch, the one girl for whom
Barnaby ever fell in what he might
even call "love." Belle Andrews.

EXT. 1930S FOREST PARK - EVENING

Will, as Barnaby, and Ann in character as BELLE, take each
others' hands and walk together into the sunset.

BEN [V/O]

He'd have left everything behind for
her, even abandoned the town of Mulch.
But as it turned out, he died before
that ever wound up happenin'.

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

BEN

And that...that's everyone.

He looks up at the lineup of actors standing on the stage.

EXT. 1930S MULCH - DAY

Where the lineup of actors stood, now there is a lineup of their colorful, bizarre characters.

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

BEN

You all have your scripts. Take an hour to read, and then we'll start!

The actors disperse. Ann leaves Will's side. Within a moment, Sam strides with determination to Will.

SAM

Now, you just be careful, Mister Will, about how you act with Ann. Just...careful...Nothing funny, okay?

Will attempts to take him very seriously, and nods agreeably.

EXT. TOWN HALL - NIGHT

Scattered all around the outside of the town hall, the people are reading their lines. Some, especially Mark and Missus Lee, are very dramatically getting into character.

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

Sam has gone to a corner chair, where he's sitting with Ann, quietly talking her through the script.

Ben is sitting alone, watching Will pace with the script.

WILL

It's not bad. Not awful.

BEN

What should be different?

WILL

Well...most everything. The way I see it, Barnaby's survival instinct wouldn't let him waste time with a speech accepting his death, when he could still be running.

BEN

He's not accepting his death.

WILL

"I'm glad that, if it's gonna happen to me, it happens right here, and today of all days.

(MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)

It reminds me that through all the bad, there were quite a lot of moments of my life that weren't wasted. I've done something good." If that's not giving up, I don't know what is...

Ben seems a little defeated.

BEN

Think you can fix it?

WILL

Me? I could do my best to improvise in character, but I'm no writer...

Beat. Ben's face lights up.

BEN

It's the police officer.

WILL

Pardon?

BEN

Instead of having a whole crowd of policemen, it's just gotta be one.

Sam overhears from across the room.

SAM

Hey, that was what I said before!

Ben ignores him and goes on, enlightened.

BEN

See, you're Barnaby and you've been running for years, but now you're cornered. For some reason you stop running and face the fact that today's the day you die. But why is that?

Silently into the back of the room walks Jim. He sits down. Ben neither sees him nor hears him. Sam acknowledges him.

WILL

Exactly. Why?

BEN

Because it's the first time in years he's come face to face with...Officer Blake Blaine.

Beat.

WILL
Who's Blake Blaine?

BEN
A law officer. A prohi. *The prohi.*
The only one that matters to Barnaby,
anyway, because Barnaby knows -

WILL
Barnaby knows that the officer wants
revenge, for a deep and awful wrong
committed by Barnaby many years ago.

Ben and Will connect over this idea.

EXT. 1930S GHOST TOWN - DAY

Down the street, his face unseen, paces the solitary form of OFFICER BLAKE BLAINE, wrapped against the harsh weather, an intimidating figure. He follows a footprint trail.

WILL [V/O]
Relentlessly Officer Blaine has chased
Barnaby from coast to coast, town to
town. It's got nothin' to do with
his duty to the law. No, this is a
personal quest. And Blake Blaine
has vowed, with every morning prayer
and every evening's last breath,
that he's gonna get that son of a
bitch Barnaby Willis. He's vowed on
his father's body.

EXT. 1915 WESTERN TOWN - DAY

YOUNG BARNABY [20] raises a gun, pointing it carefully. BANG.
An older man across the street falls dead. Barnaby flees.

Another young MAN, his face unseen, runs to the dead body
and holds it close. He looks up, after the fleeing Barnaby.

WILL [V/O]
His father. Shot by Barnaby, years
before.

EXT. 1933 TOWN OF MULCH - DAY

We're back at the moment before Barnaby's death. Barnaby
stands in front of the crowd of people, in his underwear,
booze in one hand, a gun in the other.

He turns, looks past all the people.

The drunken glee fades from his face as he sees the lone
approaching figure of Blake Blaine.

WILL [V/O]

The fugitive hero looked at that relentless face, and he knew what it was comin' for. Nothin' else mattered.

Everything fades away except for those two figures, illuminated in an otherwise dark world.

WILL [V/O] (CONT'D)

Barnaby didn't wanna run. It didn't make sense anymore. At that moment, only one thing made sense to say.

Barnaby looks straight at Blake.

BARNABY

I'm sorry.

Blaine fires his gun. Barnaby goes down.

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

Ben and Will are tense with excitement.

Jim watches from the back of the room. There's a glint in his eye; recognition, pride, or fear - it's unclear which.

SAM

Jim's here.

Ben turns around. The tenseness leaves his face and he smiles.

BEN

You came!

JIM

I'm here. This all seems interesting. Are there any roles for me?

Ben smiles, and looks at Will.

EXT. 1933 TOWN OF MULCH - DAY

Barnaby has just fallen down, shot.

Blake Blaine looks up and uncovers his face. It's JIM'S.

EXT. MAE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Father Bob is standing outside Mae's door, knocking.

FATHER BOB

Missus Daniels? This is Father Bob.

He knocks again. No answer. He sighs.

INT. DANCING HALL - NIGHT

A large group of OCTOGENARIANS clatter their feet in a messy semblance of a line dance. Each one of them smiles or laughs.

Father Bob enters sheepishly. He spots Mae dancing.

FATHER BOB
Mae? Mae Daniels!

He tries calling over the music, and the old folks spot him.

OLD CORBEL
Father Bob!

OLD MISS ANDERSON
It is Father Bob!

FATHER BOB
Hello. Good to see you all.

OLD MISS ANDERSON
Why aren't you dancing?

FATHER BOB
I've got to talk to Missus Daniels...

The old people surround him and grab his hands, forcing him into the line. Awkwardly he finds himself dancing.

EXT. DANCING HALL - NIGHT

Old people file by him in a line, heading to their cars. Father Bob pants, wiping sweat off his forehead.

OLD CORBEL
It was good to see you Father. You should come by more often.

FATHER BOB
Haha, yes. Good to see you too...

Old Mae is the last out, walking slowly.

MAE
Nice of you to join us.

FATHER BOB
Missus Daniels! I actually came to talk to you. It shouldn't take long.

MAE
Well good, I don't have much time left after all! Walk with me.

She turns, slowly, to walk away. Father Bob follows.

EXT. MULCH ROAD - NIGHT

Down an empty street on the edge of town, Father Bob walks at an infuriatingly slow speed with Mae.

MAE

Ron used to tell me, "Mae, when I'm gone, you'd better move along and find yourself another man." But I'm a freedom-loving lady. I hate gettin' tied down. Only got stuck with him because of that one night he got lucky. But don't tell him that, in your talks with the heavenly folks.

FATHER BOB

I won't tell him.

MAE

Well get on with it. People only talk to me now to ask me about the old days. What are you gonna ask?

FATHER

There was a fellow lived here a long time ago, by the name Chuck Hannigan. It's important that I talk to him.

Beat. Mae's face darkens at the name.

MAE

Chuck Hannigan. Oh my lord, it's been a long time.

FATHER

You knew him? Er, know him?

MAE

Nobody's supposed to talk about him anymore. I shouldn't even be tellin' you, but hell with it, you're the priest. Chuck Hannigan was a mobster. Came into town for a few weeks one time in oh, '76, when the oil was still pumping. He was here for some oil deal that everyone knew not to ask about. Then he shot a man, another outsider. Chuck disappeared right away, but while he was here, he'd fallen in love. It wasn't with me. Though, if I'd been twenty years younger and single, let me tell you!

(MORE)

MAE (CONT'D)

But it was Beth Sires. That was his sweetheart. Good girl. He came back for her five years later. Different name, different clothes, different sorta man. But I knew it was Chuck.

Beat.

FATHER

And? Did he stay?

MAE

And that's the end of that story.
All you're getting from me, anyway.

The question lingers in Father Bob's eyes.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - MORNING

An ALARM goes off. But William is already awake.

He's staring, deeply, unblinking, at the old newspaper clipping, and the photo of Chuck Hannigan.

After a few moments, he hits the Alarm to turn it off.

He stands up, take a shirt out of his suitcase. There's a PISTOL stowed away in his belongings.

INT. MEETING HALL - MORNING

Hank and Don struggle to lift a large WALL, part of Sam's Mulch set, on the stage. Most of it is already put together.

HANK

You got it? Careful.

DON

Yeah I'm good. Lift your end.

HANK

Got it.

They set the piece down, look at it satisfactorily.

HANK (CONT'D)

Just two more days. You excited?

INT. BEN'S ROOM - MORNING

Ben's room is full of COSTUMES and PROPS. He is asleep at his desk, hand still holding a pen to a piece of paper.

Sam, LUNCHBOX in hand, walks past the door. He sees Ben.

SAM

Ben. Hey, Ben. You coming to work?

Ben is sound asleep. Sam frowns a little, and walks out.

INT. TIRE SHOP OFFICE - DAY

Jim is on the phone in the shop.

JIM

I'm not worried! You shouldn't be either. Probably just old business that's long done. Thanks for calling.

He hangs up. Looks down, an empty look on his face.

Then Sam walks in.

SAM

Morning Jim.

JIM

Morning.

SAM

Are you alright?

JIM

Hmm? Yeah, I'm fine.

SAM

Ben's still asleep. Did you give him the day off?

JIM

(obviously lying)
Yes. I did.

SAM

Oh. Good.

Sam heads out back, leaving Jim alone with his thoughts.

INT. SAM AND BEN'S HOME - DAY

Ben's PHONE rings. And rings again.

Ben jumps awake with a start.

BEN

Shit. Shit shit.

He grabs for his phone. Fumbles a little. Answers it.

BEN (CONT'D)

Jim? Jim I'm sorry. I'll be right there!

But it's a woman's voice that responds, softly.

EVE [O.S.]

Ben?

Ben freezes, wide awake now.

BEN

Hey, Eve.

EVE [O.S.]

You sound, um...did I wake you up?

BEN

No - yeah - but it's alright. I needed to be woken up anyway.

EVE [O.S.]

Not getting sleep? I heard you're writing a show for the centennial.

BEN

You heard that? It's nothing big, really. Jim must've told you.

EVE [O.S.]

Did he tell you I'm going to be there this weekend?

Ben fights off a silent panic attack.

BEN

This weekend? Tell me? No, he - yeah, he told me.

EVE [O.S.]

I'm looking forward to seeing it. The show.

BEN

It's gonna be...pretty good.

EVE [O.S.]

I'm not really surprised.

Beat.

BEN

What's bringing you back to Mulch? It's not like you like it here.

EVE [O.S.]
Can we talk about that when I'm there?

BEN
Yeah.

EVE [O.S.]
Okay. Looking forward to seeing you.
Bye.

The line clicks. Ben doesn't move.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

Sam is at the shop, fixated on something in the water tub.

SAM
Jim. Hey Jim. There's a rat.

A DEAD RAT is floating in the tub. Jim approaches from outside, where he has just finished opening the garage door.

JIM
Dead, or alive?

SAM
Dead.

JIM
You sure?

Sam pokes it with a stick.

SAM
Yeah.

Jim's head also peers over the edge of the tub.

JIM
Damn.

SAM
Do you think he had a family? How many kids can they have?

JIM
I don't know. Fifty. A hundred.

SAM
Think they're gonna miss him?

JIM
Nah.

Jim unceremoniously reaches into the tub and grabs the rat.

SAM
Should we bury it?

Jim glances at Sam, and hands him the rat.

SAM (CONT'D)
Oh. Okay.

Jim stands up, as Sam heads out behind the shop.

Jim grabs a TIRE and starts rolling it. But then he stops, looks at the ground. Thinks for a long moment.

JIM
Hey Sam!

SAM
Yeah?

JIM
I'm going out for a little while.

Behind the shop, Sam is digging dirt with his fingers.

SAM
That's okay. I'll have everything under control.

JIM
I know you will. I know you will.

Jim walks away to his TRUCK.

EXT. SAM AND BEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Jim's TRUCK rolls up to Ben's house. He gets out of his truck and walks up to the door. Knocks a few times; no response.

He turns and sees Ben's car sitting in the driveway.

INT. BEN'S CAR - DAY

Ben is curled, fetal position, in the back seat.

Jim knocks on the window. Ben seems to be at least half asleep, so Jim opens one of the rear doors.

JIM
You never miss work days.

BEN
Jim? I was trying to make it farther than getting in the car...

JIM
Feeling pretty bad?

BEN
A little tired.

JIM
Want some breakfast?

BEN
No. I'm good. I'll head to the shop.

JIM
Come on Ben. I'll get you some
breakfast.

Jim says this almost as a command. Ben nods reluctantly. So Jim offers Ben a hand, and pulls him out of his car.

EXT. JIM'S HOUSE - DAY

Jim's truck rumbles up to his house, a nicer, larger place than many others in town.

INT. JIM'S HOUSE - DAY

The interior is simple but highly tasteful. Old photos and classic decor line the walls. It doesn't feel like Mulch.

Jim finishes pouring some coffee, and brings it to Ben. A lengthy silence follows, as both eat and drink thoughtfully.

BEN
I've never been to your house before.

JIM
No. Not many have.

Beat.

BEN
She's gonna try and get me to leave
again isn't she?

JIM
That why you're so scared of her
coming back?

Ben nods, barely.

JIM (CONT'D)
She tried to convince you to come
with her before, didn't she?

Ben stops mid-mouthful and looks at him.

BEN

She didn't tell you that, did she?

JIM

We keep in touch, but no, she didn't tell me. I know she got you a job offer. Why didn't you go with her?

BEN

Leave?

JIM

Leave.

BEN

No.

Jim purses his lips, a fatherly frustration coming over him.

JIM

You don't get to stay here, Ben.

BEN

Sorry?

JIM

You know stories, so I'll put it this way: your story doesn't end with you in Mulch.

BEN

I'm not leaving, Jim. No sir. Where's this coming from all of a sudden?

JIM

All of a sudden? You've been wasting your time for years, boy!

BEN

How have I been wasting time?

JIM

If there's one thing you're good at - and it ain't working on cars - it's looking at people and knowing right away who they are. That's something I'm good at too. And I look at you; I don't see Sheriff Brasher, or Old Corbel, stuck in this sandy dirt-bowl because they wanna be. I see me. And somebody like me...last thing you need is to be stuck anyplace.

BEN

But you're part of this town too.
Same as everyone. Same as me.

Jim looks at him. Softens. Sighs.

JIM

Come here.

Jim stands and walks away from the kitchen. Ben follows and they go to a small study in the back. Jim opens the door.

INT. JIM'S STUDY - DAY

JIM

Not many people've been to my house.
Well, nobody at all's been in here.

The room is covered in memorabilia, artifacts of a life richly lived. Newspaper clippings, photos, trophies. An Airforce Uniform from the Vietnam war. Medals. A rifle. Several handguns. Collections from a number of different cultures.

Ben is struck with fascination.

BEN

You're not from Mulch, are you? Why'd
you never talk about all this?

JIM

No need. It's my life; I lived it.

He reaches for a drawer, pulls out an old PHOTO, picturing a YOUNG JIM alongside a gorgeous woman; BETH.

JIM (CONT'D)

If someone's meant for bigger things,
there's not many good reasons to
stick around here. I just happened
to have a reason good enough.

BEN

Your wife.

Jim snatches back the photo.

JIM

Come on.

Jim ushers Ben through the door and shuts it behind him.

INT. JIM'S HOUSE - DAY

Jim locks the door to his study.

BEN

But your wife's gone, for as long as I remember. If you hate it here, what's keeping you from leaving?

JIM

That's not your business, is it?

BEN

It is, because you're trying to get me to go, and I don't know why!

JIM

I'm trying to get you to see that there's more to the world, more to you, than goddamn shithole Mulch!

Beat.

BEN

I know there is. But I'm good at living in Mulch. Things work out here.

JIM

Go back to the shop. Sam's working by himself.

Ben steps back, lowers his eyes, walks out the front door.

Jim finishes his coffee.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The door of the church creaks. William walks in. Looks around, and finds a pew. He kneels for a while.

Father Bob is setting up the altar. He sighs to see Will, but after a few moments goes over to sit beside him, nervous.

FATHER

I'm...I'm trying to warn Chuck Hannigan. Thought I should tell you.

A quick flash of rage comes across Will's face.

FATHER (CONT'D)

I'm not going to mention you, but I need to tell him he's in danger. I'm really sorry. It's just the only thing I can do in good conscience.

WILL

Probably...The right thing to do.

Father Bob breathes a sigh of relief. Then Will snarls.

WILL (CONT'D)

You know who he is, then? And he is
alive, and he's here?

The priest freezes in his seat.

FATHER

I don't know! Nobody'll tell me.
And even if I did, I'm not gonna
help you kill a man, sir.

Will, instinctively, draws his PISTOL from his belt. Points
it at Father Bob's head.

WILL

He shot my father. My father! I spent
a decade of my life after that man,
and I'm not losing him now that I've
got him so close. You understand?

Will's eyes shift away. He realizes where he is, and what
he's doing. He blinks, lowers the gun, bows his head.

WILL (CONT'D)

Dammit. Father, I.....

He trails off. Then mutters as he crosses himself.

WILL (CONT'D)

Bless me Father, for I have sinned.
I pointed a gun at your head just
now, and for that I am heartily sorry.

EXT. TIRE SHOP - DAY

Ben, trudging, arrives at the tire shop.

INT. SHOP LOBBY - DAY

He's surprised to see a long line of customers standing at
the counter, waiting.

BEN

Hello. Be with you in just a minute.

Ben dives out into the garage.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

Ben walks out, and finds the garage empty.

BEN

Sam. Sam? You here?

He wanders around the back of the shop.

EXT. TIRE SHOP - DAY

Out back of the shop, he finds Sam sitting alone in the dirt. The DEAD RAT is beside him, and a small hole has been dug.

BEN

Sam?

Sam is dazed, deep in thought. Staring at the rat.

BEN (CONT'D)

Hey, Sam?

SAM

They say drowning is the worst way to die. The rat didn't do anything to deserve that. Do you think it's the worst way to die?

BEN

What are you talking about?

He spots Sam's hand. The bandage, and the FINGER with it, pulled loose and is laying on the ground.

BEN (CONT'D)

Shit Sam, your hand!

SAM

Doctor said it might not take. Guess I shoulda listened when he said not to go straining it, but I was just trying to bury the rat.

BEN

Do you think maybe they can sew it back on again?

SAM

Naw. Look at it.

The end of the finger is raw, dirty and messy. Sam tosses it in the hole. Pushes the rat in, and starts burying it.

BEN

No, what are you doing? We need to stop that bleeding!

Sam actually breaks down into sobs.

BEN (CONT'D)

It's gonna be okay, Sam.
(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

You said it yourself, you've got nine more, don't you?

SAM

It's not that, Ben. It's...it's my ring finger. Now I won't be able to ever get married, 'cuz where am I gonna wear the wedding ring?

Sam's sobs increase. Ben can't help but smile a little as he puts an arm around Sam.

EXT. MULCH/MAIN STREET - EVENING

The sun has almost set. A TAXI rolls down the street.

It comes to a halt in the town center. Out steps EVE.

She grabs her luggage, thanks the DRIVER. The cab leaves. Eve stands alone in the middle of the town.

She looks up and down the street. Breathes in heavily, looking for familiarity by smelling the air. But her reaction is both nostalgia and distaste. She scowls at the Shoe Monument.

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

Ben and the cast are gathered together. Now the SET is complete; a facade of the town built on the tiny stage.

Jim, seated, avoids eye contact with Ben. Sam is absent.

BEN

Well, the Centennial's tomorrow, which gives us just one more day to practice, but I have confidence in all of you to make Mulch proud. It's our first day with costumes and everything, so let's see it! Places!

Everyone scatters to get into their positions.

EXT. 1920S HIGH PLAINS

Will [Barnaby] and Mark [Walt Smithers] ride horses across the plains, carrying on a conversation.

MARK [AS WALT]

Adventure's in you, Barnaby. If the eyes are windows to the soul, I can see the adventure shinin' through.

WILL [AS BARNABY]
 I'm not a cowboy like you, Walt. But
 I know a little town not far from
 here, a little place called Mulch
 that's chock-full of adventure.

MARK
 Then, Mulch it is! Hyah!

He spurs his horse and they gallop off at full speed.

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

The "gallop" is, of course, merely Will and Mark bouncing up
 and down, moving forward, on a couple sticks.

MARK
 I'm sorry Ben. I know we're not
 getting real horses, but maybe
 something that don't feel like I'm
 bobbin' on a stripper pole in Vegas.

Ben rolls his eyes and jots down a note for himself.

Ann approaches Ben.

ANN
 Ben...have you seen Sam around?

BEN
 I told him he should stay home today.
 He had a rough day. With the...finger.

ANN
 Oh...

Ann bows her head, sadly.

Ben turns to her, a question in his eyes, but says nothing.

INT. 1930S SALOON - NIGHT

HANK, as Charlie Crawford the bounty hunter, sits at a table.

Will, as Barnaby, bursts into the saloon dramatically.

WILL [AS BARNABY]
 Charlie Crawford?

HANK [AS CHARLIE]
 Who's asking?

WILL
 A man with a handful of gold coins.
 (MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)

Are you listening? I hear you're
the best bounty hunter there is.

HANK

You ain't heard wrong. I'm listening.

WILL

I'm lookin' to rob a stagecoach owned
by the mob. There's liable to be
bloodshed. But they're bad, bad men
so I mean for it to be their blood.

HANK

You ain't never done a thing like
this before, have you? Are you sure
you want to set yourself down this
path, Mister Willis?

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

Hank pulls them out of the scene.

HANK

He shouldn't know Barnaby's name.

BEN

Huh?

WILL

Oh, he's right. He wouldn't know it.

BEN

He might know Barnaby by reputation.

WILL

Barnaby doesn't have much of a
reputation here, yet.

BEN

Well, just forget about the name
then. Don't say it.

HANK

So it might take me a while to
memorize it again, with that line
changing. Be back in a few minutes.

Hank paces off, script in hand, muttering the line.

BEN

Guess we'll skip this scene, then,
and come back later.

EXT. MAE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Eve walks up Mae's driveway, hands in her pockets. Reaching the door, she gives it a solid knock.

A few moments pass and Mae answers.

EVE

Hi Great-Grandma!

MAE

You little heartbreaking runaway.
Come in here so I can see what the
West Coast has done to you!

INT. MAE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mae and Eve sit at a table drinking coffee.

EVE

If I could stay longer than a couple
days, I would. It'll be nice to see
all the old places.

MAE

The fishing pond's dried up.

EVE

Oh...

MAE

But things are always changing. Just
as fast as we lose things, other
things come in to take their place.

EVE

What took my place when I left?
Anything good?

MAE

Some peace and quiet, that's what!
Hmm. Are you happy out there?

They laugh a little. Then, sadness appears in Mae's eyes.

MAE (CONT'D)

Are you happy out there?

EVE

I'm happy. It took me a while. At
first it makes you feel real small
and unimportant.

MAE

I never liked that feeling. Ron and I went all over, but we always came back here. We liked feeling safe.

EVE

And important?

MAE

I like to think I'm important here.

EVE

Well, hence all the stories.

MAE

Are you gonna watch the play?

EVE

Maybe.

MAE

I know. You wouldn't miss it.

There's a gleam in her eye, aimed at Eve. Eve dismisses it.

EVE

Oh Grammy. That's not why I'm here.

Mae smiles a little, winks, and sips her coffee.

EVE (CONT'D)

Is it alright if I borrow something from you?

INT. MAE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mae leads Eve into her room. She digs through an old closet.

MAE

Ah, here it is. I have so much of this old stuff, it gets hard to sort.

She pulls out a BOX full of NEWSPAPERS. Digs through for a moment more, and produces a single, folded CLIPPING.

MAE (CONT'D)

You won't be showing this to anyone, will you?

Eve sighs.

MAE (CONT'D)

No. I'm not gonna let you show him.

EVE

You told me about it first!

MAE

That was different! You needed to know the truth so you'd feel easier about leaving.

EVE

This is exactly the same thing.

MAE

Ben built his life on these stories!

EVE

That's even more of a reason. Jim agrees with me! I think Ben needs a push. Jim thinks so too.

MAE

Jim, huh? Well, for Jim, then.

She hands over the article. Eve smiles.

INT. 1930 DOCTOR OFFICE - DAY

Don, as the Doctor, sits over Will as Barnaby.

DON [AS DOCTOR]

Sure, rob the bank. But when you do it, keep in mind that until you know how it all ends, you're not saving a town. You're just robbing a bank.

Will, breaking character, responds from the dental chair.

WILL

Don, if you're going to convince me, you've got to say it with more vigor.

DON

What do you mean? What'd I do wrong?

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

Ben bursts into the scene.

BEN

Maybe, more like the time you said it the first time.

DON

That was different, fellas. That was me speaking my mind. Now it's in the script so I've memorized it.

BEN
 Could you pretend like you didn't?

DON
 Then I might forget it.

Jim comes up behind Ben, fully dressed as Blake Blaine.

JIM
 How do I look?

Will looks at him, gives him a thumbs-up.

EXT. 1930'S MULCH - NIGHT

Jim, as Blake Blaine, paces with determination down the street, a deadened look in his eye. Dust blows around him.

JIM [AS BLAKE]
 It's a dusty air that's blowin'
 through Mulch tonight. When I sniff
 it, I can smell the stench of Death
 on it, riding along the wind like an
 apocalyptic horseman. I know who
 he's comin' for, too. Barnaby. And
 I'm the weapon in Death's hand. He
 and I, we're gonna meet real soon.

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Will is watching, just off the side in his Barnaby costume.

ANN is in her BELLE COSTUME, standing beside him. On a cue, Will gives her a gentle prompt and she runs onstage.

ANN [AS BELLE]
 Hey Stranger! Mayor sent me down to
 welcome you to town. We don't see
 many strangers anymore.

JIM [AS BLAKE]
 Well, damned if I don't know who you
 are. You're Barnaby's sweetheart.

INT. 1930'S SHED - NIGHT

Jim, as Blake Blaine, paces up and down the room. In the corner of the room, tied to a chair, sits ANN, as Belle.

ANN [AS BELLE]
 No, Mister, I'm not telling you where
 Barnaby is. You mean to hurt him.

JIM [AS BLAKE]

Missy, I'm no ordinary officer of the law. The law left me behind long ago and moved on. But I'm still here, still living in the backwards, lawless world of Barnaby Willis. We've got to cut him loose, before he gets the whole world left behind with him.

ANN

What did he ever do to you?

JIM

That no-good sumbitch shot my father!

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Will, still watching from stage right, reaches into his pocket and produces a PACK of CIGARETTES. Putting one in his mouth, he strides out through a side door, accessible from backstage.

He nearly trips over SAM, who is sitting beside the door.

WILL

What the...

SAM

Sshhhh.

WILL

What are you doing? I thought your finger tore off and Ben told you to stay home.

SAM

Yeah, it did. And he did.

WILL

Is something the matter? I mean, aside from the finger?

SAM

Why would I tell you?

WILL

Hmm. You don't like me...

SAM

Not really.

Beat. Will sits beside Sam.

WILL

Do you ever stop and wish things were less complicated?

SAM

I always do that.

WILL

Mulch isn't complicated. We bring our own complications.

SAM

I don't like complications. Like things changing, like when people go away, or die. Like, wanting to get married but being scared.

WILL

Things are never as simple as we want them to be. All you and I can do, is what we feel in our guts.

SAM

Yeah?

WILL

My gut tells me very strongly what I need to do. And what you should do, is tell Miss Ann just how much you like her. You'll never regret it.

Sam looks up at Will, surprised. Will stands up.

WILL (CONT'D)

This is my entrance.

Will paces toward the stage.

INT. 1930'S SHED - NIGHT

Ann is still tied up. Jim stands over her, PROP GUN drawn.

JIM [AS BLAKE]

And if it's not Barnaby's blood that will be spilled in atonement, it'll be the blood of the people he loves!

Will, as Barnaby, bursts in through the door, his gun drawn.

WILL [AS BARNABY]

Blake Blaine! You let her go this instant. You want me, you've got me!

Will's gun is nothing more than a BLOCK of WOOD.

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

Will breaks character.

WILL

It...it doesn't feel like a gun.

BEN

Just as long as it looks like one.

WILL

Nothing about this resembles a firearm
in any way.

BEN

I only got one prop gun, and Jim's
gotta use it for when he shoots you.

WILL

I have a real pistol.

BEN

You have one? Bring it tomorrow!

WILL

I've got it right here!

Will pulls the pistol out from his overcoat.

BEN

Great! That does look better.

Will smiles and turns away. Ben turns to look for Ann.

BEN (CONT'D)

Ann! Would you be able to...Ann?
Where is she?

Will shrugs. Ann pokes her head from behind backstage.

ANN

Be right there.

Ben steps up to the stage, going back to find Ann.

BEN

Ann, the part where you're yelling
at Jim doesn't need to be quite so...

He sees Sam standing backstage with Ann. A light kiss is
being traded. Seeing Ben, they turn and their faces redden.

BEN (CONT'D)

Sam, you're supposed to be resting.

SAM

I, uh, wanted to see the set all put
together.

Ben looks back and forth at them.

BEN

Ann, why don't...why don't you take Sam home, make sure he cares for his hand. I guess the scene can wait.

ANN

Really?

SAM

Really Ben, I'm okay...

ANN

He said we should go. So let's!

Ann takes Sam's arm, and practically drags him out the door. Ben smiles wistfully. Looks at the script in his hand.

BEN

Guess we'll come back to it...

EXT. TOWN HALL - NIGHT

Ben stands in the darkness. He's alone, staring at the Shoe Monument, propping his head against it with his hand.

A party is heard across the street. Mark's voice rings out.

MARK [O.S.]

Ben! You've gotta come by before the beer runs out! Your loss if you don't!

Ben ignores him, or is simply oblivious.

Eve comes from the dark of the street. She walks next to him, propping her head on her own hand silently.

EVE

Why'd Grammy never clean the shoes before they put 'em in a monument?

Ben is startled to find Eve right beside him.

BEN

Eve! You can't scare people like that.

EVE

Obviously I can.

BEN

When did you get here?

EVE
Earlier today.

BEN
I didn't see you around anywhere.

EVE
Maybe it's me that didn't see you.

BEN
Maybe I didn't want you to.

EVE
Maybe I didn't want to see you either.

BEN
You came to see me right now.

EVE
I was just going for a walk.

BEN
You coulda walked on by if you wanted.

EVE
That would have been rude of me.

BEN
And you've never been rude before...

Eve stops playing. She scoffs a little, and starts to walk away. Ben turns to the shoes...then turns back to her.

BEN (CONT'D)
It's because the mud's the special part, not so much the shoes.

EVE
Did Grammy tell you that?

BEN
Well no, but think about it. The mud's mixed with the oil and, maybe, his blood too. That's why its special.

EVE
You're such a romantic.

BEN
'Least one of us is!

Eve starts to walk away again.

BEN (CONT'D)
I'm not angry with you anymore.

EVE

I never said you were!

BEN

But you think it.

EVE

No. You think it.

Eve turns back and starts to walk toward him.

BEN

If maybe, maybe I am a bit mad, don't you think I have a right to be?

EVE

You coulda come with me. You shoulda.

BEN

I knew you were gonna say something like that!

EVE

Nope. I'm done trying to talk you out of dying in Mulch.

BEN

It's not that I never want to see other places.

EVE

Yeah it is.

BEN

Maybe in a couple years, I'll be good enough as a writer to see what it's like living someplace else...

EVE

You're scared, you know that?

BEN

Scared of what?

EVE

You tell me.

She's getting closer and closer to him now. There is clear chemistry nearly boiling over between them.

BEN

I'm just trying to focus. One thing at a time. Right now, is the play.

EVE

The play'll be over in two days. And then what?

BEN

Then what?

They've locked eyes. In a natural but sudden turn of events, their stare turns into a kiss. They lock lips familiarly. After a moment, Ben pulls back.

BEN (CONT'D)

Ah, nope! You tried that before too.

EVE

Just give it a shot, Ben! California or not, even if it's not with me, just...step outside Mulch and see what it's like!

BEN

What do you have against Mulch?

EVE

Nothing. I love Mulch! I just don't want to live here.

BEN

Just because the average age is sixty doesn't mean the town's a dead end.

EVE

The highest living wage is twelve bucks an hour...

BEN

Thirteen, now.

EVE

The hamburger shop reopen?

BEN

Mayor gave himself a raise.

EVE

...Thirteen bucks an hour, the population's dropping, and the oil ran out twenty years ago!

BEN

The town always comes back! Last time it was Barnaby who saved it, and this time...This time maybe it'll be me.

Beat. Eve sighs.

EVE

Stories already saved Mulch. There's just not many people who know it.

Eve hands Ben the folded NEWSPAPER article from Mae.

BEN

What is this?

Eve changes the subject.

EVE

When's the play again?

BEN

Tomorrow.

EVE

I leave the next morning. So I'll be there. I'm looking forward to it.

Eve walks away, leaving Ben holding this article.

MARK runs up, out of the darkness, waving his arms.

MARK

Ben! Hey, you've gotta come see, there's a big ruckus at the bar. I'm a'tellin' everybody!

Ben clasps the newspaper closed.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

The bar is completely full of lively, costumed cast members. LANCE AKERS plays the piano. Mark runs to the door and shouts.

MARK

Ben! You've gotta come by before the beer runs out! Your loss if you don't!

Mark shrugs and heads back in.

Jim is sitting with Will at the bar, in costume, enjoying beers.

WILL

Do you folks do this every year?

JIM

There's a yearly celebration. Last year it was the Barnaby Barn Dance. But this is first play.

WILL

The enthusiasm...I worked in theater,
and I've never seen anything like
it.

JIM

It's a sight to behold.

WILL

In another life, maybe I could have
lived in a place like this.

A CHEER goes up. The MAYOR walks into the bar.

MAYOR

I'll never pass up a Barnaby party!

The Mayor's loud conversation makes the room even more
claustrophobic. Will leans in close to Jim.

WILL

Do you...do you smoke?

Will produces a pack of cigarettes, which Jim eyes lustfully.

JIM

Beth made me promise to quit. Of
course, that was twenty years ago
and she's dead.

He promptly stands up. Will follows him.

EXT. BAR - NIGHT

Will and Jim light cigarettes and look out into the street.

Not too far away, they can see Ben and Eve having their
conversation [from previous scene]. Jim watches this keenly.

WILL

Beth. That was your wife's name?

JIM

Yeah.

WILL

Beth. How do I know that name?

JIM

You have kids?

WILL

Never did get around to that. You?

JIM

No.

He continues watching Ben and Eve talk. They come together and have their kiss. Jim smiles.

JIM (CONT'D)

If I did, I'd want the best for them.

WILL

Sure.

Jim takes a long draw. Ben and Eve walk away from each other.

JIM

Ben can't do his best here. Not without Eve. He's a lot like us.

WILL

Like us?

JIM

We don't belong in Mulch. It's where we come to do a little bit of soul-searching before we move on to what comes next. For some of us, maybe it's just where we come to die.

Jim looks piercingly at Will, then throws his cigarette butt to the ground, and steps on it.

A voice calls out from inside the bar, and is joined by several other voices.

DRUNKEN VOICES [O.S.]

Chuck Hannigan. Chuck Hannigan!

Both Jim and Will, equally startled, whip their heads around. Will snarls, and drops his cigarette.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

It's chaos in the bar. Some people are laughing, others are arguing. The MAYOR is surrounded by a group of listeners.

Will strides to the middle of the room. He raises his shoulders to create an intimidating figure. Everyone ignores him for a moment until he opens his mouth with a demand.

WILL

Who said "Chuck Hannigan?"

Silence falls. Will is simmering, ferocious.

WILL (CONT'D)

Now, you were all just chatting loud a minute ago. I hope you didn't wear out your voice boxes right when I asked a question.

MAYOR

I was telling how someone asked me about Chuck Hannigan the other day. But Hannigan's made up; a tall tale.

SHERIFF BRASHER

And I was just tellin' the Mayor that I remember Chuck Hannigan. He was a real man, and it ain't right to be talking about him in public.

WILL

Why ain't it right?

SHERIFF BRASHER

Because there's some...intrigue surrounding that name right now.

MAYOR

So now we're protectin' a man from forty years ago, who wasn't real.

SHERIFF BRASHER

Aw, shut up. You're not old enough to know shit about this town.

Mark runs out the door.

MARK [O.S.]

Ben! Hey, you've gotta come see, there's a big ruckus at the bar...

MAYOR

If Chuck Hannigan was a real story, why didn't he show up in the papers?

WILL

He did!

Silence falls again. Will holds up his old NEWSPAPER. He opens it and starts to read.

WILL (CONT'D)

"April 2nd, 1976. For the first time in living memory, violent death struck in the heart of Mulch."

Ben runs up to the door, wide-eyed.

WILL (CONT'D)

"Residents reported the sound of gunshots around 7:00 in the morning. A body was found a few minutes later by Sheriff Hague. The deceased was identified as Bartholomew McMasters. The only witness was the victim's twelve year old son, William."

EXT. 1976 MULCH MAIN STREET - DAY

YOUNG WILL [12] is looking at the Shoe Monument.

He turns to look at his father, BARTHOLOMEW, who is putting some BAGS into a parked car nearby. They smile at each other.

As Will turns back to look at the shoes, a SHADOWY FIGURE comes from behind a building. A WHISTLE is heard, then a moment later two GUNSHOTS.

Will turns around quickly. His father slumps down behind the car, a GUN in his hand and a bullet wound in his side.

Will looks and sees CHUCK HANNIGAN, gun in hand. They share a momentary glance before Chuck runs away.

Will runs to his father's body and starts to sob.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

WILL

"McMasters had been in town to broker a new oil deal in case the well were to go dry. His killer was confirmed as Chuck Hannigan, whose last known residence was in Chicago. He is still at large."

Will lowers the paper. Everyone looks at him with wide eyes. Jim's head is downcast, and Will looks straight at him.

Father Bob, along with Mark, has joined Ben at the door.

WILL (CONT'D)

That's a hard fact, not a story.

MAYOR

Somebody musta taken the newspaper out of the archives, 'cuz I never heard about that.

SHERIFF BRASHER

Nevermind the newspaper. We've gotten by alright for years without talking about him. Let's not start now.

Will calms down, puts the paper in his pocket.

WILL

Anyway. I've got a play to get ready for. We all do! Sheriff, you've gotta work on your big speech scene!

Will, changing his mood, pats the Sheriff on the back.

WILL (CONT'D)

Drinks? Sheriff? Mayor, drinks?

Will stands at the bar. The room grows noisy and everyone gathers around him. The Sheriff is a little troubled.

Jim walks straight to Father Bob, who is dumbstruck. Jim takes him by the shoulder and pulls him outside.

EXT. BAR - NIGHT

A few steps from the door, Jim barks under his breath.

JIM

You'd best stop asking people about this Chuck fellow.

FATHER BOB

I've been asking about him so I can warn him...if he's in trouble.

JIM

Forget about it. Forget you ever heard his name.

Jim walks past briskly, off into the night.

Ben walks up beside Father Bob. He's speechless.

FATHER BOB

Did you know about all that?

Ben shakes his head, no.

FATHER BOB (CONT'D)

It's not right, keeping the town in the dark about somethin' like that. If someone got rid of that newspaper story...that's changin' the history of the town. It's not right.

Sheriff Brasher comes out, walks up to Father Bob, and pats him on the back, sympathizing.

Ben looks with concern at the newspaper he is holding.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Slowly, cautiously, Ben unfolds the newspaper.

The headline reads: "OIL RIG OPERATING, FINANCIER VANISHES."

BEN [V/O]

October 26th, 1933. Today marked the opening of the Oil Rig, signaling a change of direction for a town that was hit hard by the combined effects of the depression and the dust bowl. Financial partners Carl Graves, Michael Doolittle and Barnaby Willis are optimistic about profitability.

EXT. 1933 TOWN OF MULCH - DAY

The streets are quiet. The Oil Rig pumps away by itself, a few WORKERS gathered around it. The streets are muddy.

BEN [V/O]

An opening ceremony had been planned in the town square, but was canceled due to bad weather. The rig began working without incident. Controversy arose, however, when the IRS made a claim of tax fraud against Mr. Willis.

Two IRS AGENTS, flabby and pale, walk through the muddy streets. A little girl, MAE, watches them go by. She follows.

They arrive at a DOOR off the main road, then knock loudly.

BARNABY opens the door. He's in just his underwear, and he looks unhealthy; balding, pale, wandering eyes.

BEN [V/O] (CONT'D)

Barnaby was reported indisposed and highly intoxicated, belligerent when confronted.

Drunkenly, Barnaby takes off his SHOES, throwing them at the agents. Missing, the shoes fall in the mud. Barnaby shuts the door. The agents shrug.

EXT. 1933 TOWN OF MULCH - DAY

The next day. The agents knock at his door again, this time accompanied by two POLICEMEN.

BEN [V/O]

The next day, agents attempted to take Barnaby into custody, but he was found to have fled town.

The policemen kick down the door. The house is empty.

BEN [V/O] (CONT'D)

The IRS later determined Mister Willis guilty of defrauding the government of one hundred and four dollars. His whereabouts are unknown but he is not expected to return to Mulch.

Little Mae walks over and, curious, picks up the shoes.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ben stares at the newspaper. Stunned and speechless.

EXT. JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jim stumbles, hands in his pockets, through the streets. Reaching his house, he unlocks the door and walks inside.

INT. JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Walking into his kitchen, Jim's legs weaken...he holds himself up on the counter, breathing heavily. It's a panic attack.

INT. JIM'S STUDY - NIGHT

Jim sits down at his desk. He stares ahead in silence for a moment or two.

Opening the drawer, he pulls out an old NEWSPAPER ARTICLE of his own. The same article. Looks at the picture of himself. Looks at the photo of DEAD BARTHOLOMEW.

He sighs. Puts his head in his hands, wracked with guilt.

EXT. 1976 LAKE - DAY

YOUNG JIM [CHUCK HANNIGAN] puts his head in his hands, identical in posture.

He has a gun in his hand. He stares at it. Throws the gun into the lake.

INT. JIM'S STUDY - NIGHT

Then another photo catches Jim's eye. The PHOTO he'd showed Ben earlier, of YOUNG JIM standing beside his wife, BETH.

He smiles at it. Turns it over. On the back is inscribed: "BETH, AND CHUCK."

A MUSIC BOX sits on the desk, too. Jim looks at it, picks it up and winds it. Opens it.

MUSIC starts to softly play. A slow, sweet melody. Jim listens to it for a moment, looking at the old photo.

Then he stands up. Closes his eyes. Starts to slowly, awkwardly, waltz around the room. His hands reach out around an imaginary partner.

The music builds and starts to swell.

INT. 1976 DANCING HALL - NIGHT

In faint light, YOUNG JIM [CHUCK HANNIGAN] dances with BETH.

The dance goes on as the music grows in grandeur.

Jim and Beth kiss...

EXT. 1982 JIM'S HOUSE - DAY

Young Jim, now dressed differently, with different facial hair than his Chuck Hannigan persona, stands beside Beth. Together they look with pride at Jim's house.

Bags in hand, they walk from their parked TRUCK and, hand-in-hand, toward the house.

EXT. 1985 TIRE SHOP - DAY

Jim stands on a LADDER above the Tire Shop.

Beth waves at him from below. A small gathering of Townspeople are standing around, looking up at him.

Smiling widely, Jim pulls off a covering, revealing the "JIM'S AUTO AND TIRE REPAIR" sign.

Beth, along with the townspeople, cheers and claps.

INT. 1995 HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Jim, older, haggard, sits in a chair next to a hospital bed. Beth, much older looking and sick, is covered in IVs and breathing apparatuses.

Jim is holding her hand. Tears are welling up in his eyes.

Beth struggles to say something. Drowned out by the music, she succeeds in uttering words that make both of them laugh.

Beth coughs from the laughter. Jim grimaces. A tear falls.

EXT. 1995 MULCH CEMETERY - DAY

Jim stands among gravestones, staring emptily at one, marked "BETH SIRES-MAYFIELD."

After a little while, he walks away.

EXT. 1996 MULCH MAIN STREET - DAY

Jim walks idly through town, hands in his pockets.

Looks with complete disgust at the SHOE MONUMENT.

INT. 1996 TIRE SHOP - DAY

Jim sits idly at the counter. Taking care of some customers. Disinterest is in his face.

EXT. 1996 RURAL ROAD - DAY

The old "WELCOME TO MULCH" sign stands next to the road.

Jim sits next to it, his truck parked nearby.

Sullen, depressed, he stares at the sign. In a few moments, his stupor turns into anger, and he lashes out against the sign, beating it down with his hands, tearing it apart.

The destruction complete, he sits beside the road, puts his head in his hands and cries.

INT. JIM'S STUDY - NIGHT

The music box is slowing down. Jim is supporting himself against his desk, finished with his slow dance. Tears are in his eyes.

Then he pulls out another PHOTO.

It's a color PHOTO of Jim, Young Ben, and Young Sam, all standing together at the fishing pond. Jim smiles at it.

INT. 1998 TIRE SHOP - DAY

Sam, the young boy of ten, walks into the tire shop. Jim looks at this awkward youngster with humor in his eyes.

YOUNG SAM

Are you hiring people right now?

JIM

No I'm not. You're too young anyway.

YOUNG SAM

I can change a tire. I'm good at changing tires.

JIM

You're Fred's kid. How old are you?

YOUNG SAM

Ten.

JIM

What's your name again?

YOUNG SAM

Sam.

Sam stands on tiptoe to shake Jim's hand over the counter.

JIM

Your parents know you're here?

YOUNG SAM

They don't really care, so they don't know. But, I'd be a good worker!

Jim thinks about this for a moment.

JIM

Look...

A CRASH is heard outside.

Little Sam is the first out the door. Jim walks behind him.

EXT. 1998 TIRE SHOP - DAY

What he sees is a CAR crashed in front of the shop. The hood is smashed, smoking. Two figures slumped in the cab.

Sam, running around the car, trying to find a way in. First Sam knocks on the driver window, then the passenger.

There's no reaction. Then Sam notices YOUNG BEN laying in the back seat. He goes to try the door handle.

JIM

Hold on!

Jim darts back into the garage, at a pace faster, more motivated than we've seen from him before.

INT. 1998 GARAGE - DAY

Jim runs into the garage, grabs a CROWBAR. Sprints back out.

EXT. 1998 TIRE SHOP - DAY

Jim arrives back at the car.

JIM

Stand back.

Jim wedges the crowbar in the door. After a few moments it gives, and the door breaks open.

Sam dashes in, and pulls Young Ben out of the fiery wreck.

Both boys are laying on the ground, covered in burns; Jim looks at them. There's a new light, a smile in his eyes.

He holds out his hand.

INT. JIM'S STUDY - NIGHT

Jim smiles again at this photo.

The Music Box has wound down completely and gone silent.

Jim reaches for the Newspaper article about the murder. Crumples it in his hand, and throws it away.

There's a KNOCK on the door. A little nervous, Jim stands.

INT. JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Slowly, stiffly, with resolve and resignation spelled across his face, Jim walks to the front door.

There's another series of KNOCKS. With a deep breath, Jim opens the door...

It's Sam and Ann, standing hand-in-hand.

SAM

Hi Jim! I was hoping you'd be home.

JIM

Sam? Ann? Where did you two go off to all night, anyway?

SAM

Ann and I...

ANN

Sam and I are getting married!

SAM

We're getting married!

Ann holds up her finger. A small piece of WIRE is tied around it as a makeshift ring. Sam makes it a point to not hold up his own hand.

JIM

Well, heaven's shit! Let me pour you a drink, or two or three or four.

Jim ushers them inside, and shuts the door.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

Ben is standing, hands in his pockets, and staring at the WELCOME TO MULCH sign. Silence, and then his voiceover.

BEN [V/O]

It doesn't make for a very good story, the real history of Mulch. But if that's the case, why tell it in the first place?

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ben sits at his desk, head in his hands. He's scratching out what seems to be a new version of the script.

BEN [V/O]

If a real story is worth telling, it shouldn't need to be changed to something that never happened. Real life is always the best story.

EXT. MAE'S HOUSE - MORNING

Ben is sitting across from Mae on her porch, with cups of coffee set out between them.

MAE

You can't always tell things the way they really happened. If people feel like they're part of a fancy story, then they'll stick around to see how it ends.

BEN

Why that story? What was so important about making Barnaby a hero?

MAE

Oh...who remembers? It was a long time ago, and a lot's happened. But Mulch is still here, isn't it?

She drinks her coffee with pride.

Ben then holds up a new MANUSCRIPT, and sets it on the table.

BEN

I wish you'd told me the real story before. I've only had a few hours to write this new version, and it might not be very good.

Mae chokes on her coffee. Tries to talk, but keeps choking.

BEN (CONT'D)

Are...you alright?

Mae tries to stand up, but keeps choking. She falls over.

Ben rushes to her side. In his hurry, his coffee spills a little, splashing onto the SCRIPT on the table.

BEN (CONT'D)

Hey! Mae! Um...what do I do?

Eve, hearing the commotion, rushes to the porch.

EVE

Out of the way.

Eve grabs Mae and rolls her over, picking up her midsection so her head is nearer the grass.

After a few moments, Mae coughs up the coffee. Eve rolls her back over. Mae looks directly at Ben.

MAE

You leave the play just the way it is! What happened in 1933 doesn't matter; what matters is happening now. The story's never been about the real Barnaby Willis. It's about someone who everyone in Mulch can look at and say, "that's a story I want to be a part of."

EVE

And I didn't come back to town to see a boring play with a bad ending.

Ben nods, convinced.

EXT. MULCH/MAIN STREET - DAY

An array of tractors, trucks, and dressed-up cars rumbles down the street in a small parade.

The BANNER is hung high, with the words properly spelled.

Don's tractor is carrying Barnaby's SHOES on a platform.

The Mayor, the Sheriff, everyone important is here. In the back, driven by Eve, is Mae, waving.

EVE

Who are you wavin' to, Grammy?

MAE

Isn't that what they do in parades?

EVE

There's nobody to wave to! The whole town's in the parade.

INT. STAGE - DAY

Ben and Sam are scurrying back and forth, urgently getting everybody ready for the show. Most of the cast is here.

BEN

The top of the set is falling off, and we should probably tack that up so nobody gets crushed.

HANK

On it.

BEN

I want to talk to Missus Lee before we start. Has anyone seen her?

MARK

She's got a truckful of horses in the parade.

BEN

We're still short a newspaper prop and a few pairs of pants, shoes, shirts...costume stuff.

SAM

I can go buy a newspaper.

BEN

Here's some money. And on your way, grab any old-looking clothes you can find. Where's Ann?

SAM

She'll be here. I bet she's tired. We were all up pretty late. Did Jim tell you we're getting married?

Beat.

BEN

Getting married? You and Ann?

SAM

Yeah.

Ben just gives Sam a big hug.

BEN

Sam, you need to tell me these things when we're not in the middle of a play! Congratulations! When?

SAM

In a couple months probably. Ben, you gonna be okay with moving outta the house?

Ben freezes, not expecting this.

BEN

Moving outta the house?

SAM

Otherwise it'll be pretty crowded.

BEN

Oh, yeah. Of course, that was gonna need to happen...

SAM

I'll tell you more about it later. Newspaper, and costumes.

Sam darts off. Ben is a little dazed.

INT. TIRE SHOP OFFICE - DAY

Jim walks through the tire shop, slowly, looking around.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

As if for the last time, Jim runs his hand over some of the tires. Pats one of the machines.

EXT. TIRE SHOP - DAY

Walking outside, Jim looks up at the sign.

EXT. MULCH/MOTEL - DAY

Jim walks down a side street of Mulch. Everything here is deserted; loud MUSIC can be heard coming from main street.

He reaches the motel entrance. By the door, he waits.

A few moments pass, and then Will walks out the door. They share a brief, grave glance.

JIM

Will.

WILL

Jim.

JIM

Have a cigarette?

Will smiles a little, hands him one.

They light up, and smoke in silence for a while.

INT. STAGE - DAY

BEN

I'm sorry Mark, but we didn't get you any better horses.

MARK

I was worried about that, so I'm gonna just forget about the horses and do this...

Mark acts out a hilarious, rolling stroll.

BEN

Oh...whatever that is, you'll have to talk to Will about it too. Whenever Will gets here. And where's Jim?

DON

Mister Ben, I've lost my copy of the script.

BEN

Do you still need the script?

DON

Not necessarily, but I'd feel better.

BEN

I'll get everyone some new copies.

Ben turns to Hank.

BEN (CONT'D)

What about Lance? Is he gonna be able to do the piano?

HANK

He said he'd be here.

BEN

That was a good idea, Hank! What about the sound effects? Are the gunshots set up?

EXT. MULCH/MAIN STREET - DAY

Sam runs through the parade vehicles, all parked, with a newspaper in one hand and pants and shirts in the other.

He sees the Mayor's JACKET slung across a car. He grabs it.

SAM

Jacket...costumes, costumes,
costumes... Oh! Shoes.

He sees the famous Barnaby shoes, and grabs them.

INT. STAGE - DAY

Sheriff Brasher speaks with Ben.

SHERIFF

I was thinking maybe I could come
down here and watch the play, between
the scenes I'm in.

BEN

That's gonna be really distracting
for the audience.

SHERIFF

Well, it's important for me to keep
an eye out, in case there's trouble.

Ben spots Father Bob, who has quietly sat down in back.

BEN

Excuse me Sheriff.

Ben walks over to Father Bob.

BEN (CONT'D)

Say, Father. What was going on last
night? What was it Jim said to you?

FATHER BOB

I don't think I can say.

BEN

I'm a little worried. Jim's been
strange, especially last night.

FATHER

He was very clear that I not talk
about it anymore. It mighta been my
fault in the first place, because I
was askin' about it.

The priest is visibly upset. Ben backs away from him.

Sam comes into the room, armfuls of new costumes and props.

SAM

I've got all sorts of clothes, Ben.
And the newspaper.

BEN

Good! Everyone who's still needing
costumes, dig through this pile and
just...see what you can find.

Ben is holding a whole stack of SCRIPTS.

BEN (CONT'D)

Sam! Can you...hand out these scripts
to everyone, so they can brush up on
their lines.

He hands over the stack to Sam, then he looks at the one on
top; it's the COFFEE-STAINED SCRIPT from Mae's.

BEN (CONT'D)

Oh...except that one with the coffee
stain! That copy is the wrong version.

SAM

Except the top copy. Got it!

In walks the Mayor.

MAYOR

It's gettin' pretty hot outside! I
think most everyone's about ready to
wrap up the parade and move indoors.

BEN

In here?

MAYOR

Yep!

BEN

The play's still in two hours.

MAYOR

Oh. Well we're running on Mulch time.
Nothing's ever set in stone!

The Mayor walks back out of the room.

BEN

Damn. Let's get ready for places,
everyone!

SAM
Where's Jim and Will?

BEN
I don't know. I'm starting to worry.

Jim and Will walk in, laughing loudly in amiable conversation.

BEN (CONT'D)
Will, Jim! Thank God.

WILL
What, are we late?

BEN
No, not technically. But our start time just moved up. You need to get into costume.

JIM
Just be patient, Ben. This hangover's gonna take a while to wear off.

WILL
You're a damn lightweight.

JIM
I drank twice what you did!

EXT. TOWN HALL - DAY

The small mass of townspeople are flooding in from the street to the town hall.

INT. STAGE - DAY

The chairs are all filling up as the people noisily flood the seating area. Mae walks in, accompanied by Eve.

Eve spots Ben, who is nervously standing at the side of the stage. She walks toward him.

EVE
Is there anything I can do, Ben?

BEN
You want to help?

EVE
Of course I don't *want* to help. I'm just asking to spite you.

BEN
Right now...do your best to enjoy the show.

EVE

That I'll do my best, I can promise.

BEN

And...try to keep Mae from laughing,
or talking, or crying too loud...

EVE

No promises there.

Ben smiles, and turns to walk away. Eve catches his arm.

EVE (CONT'D)

Ben. How are you handling everything?

BEN

I'm thinking about it.

Ben smiles at her, and goes backstage.

INT. BACKSTAGE - DAY

Sam walks up to the bathroom door, and knocks.

SAM

Is it Jim in there?

JIM [O.S.]

Yep, it's me.

Sam slips a copy of the SCRIPT under the door.

SAM

Here's a script, so you have it.

JIM [O.S.]

Thanks!

Sam walks away.

Ben approaches and knocks now.

BEN

Is it Jim in there?

JIM [O.S.]

Yep, it's me.

BEN

Do you have a minute?

JIM [O.S.]

I'm naked, but sure.

BEN
I'll come back.

JIM [O.S.]
No, hold on.

Jim opens the door in his underwear, face-to-face with Ben.

JIM
I have all the time in the world.

Ben pauses for a moment. Hesitates, then begins.

BEN
I was thinking. You might be right.

JIM
Of course I'm right. Right about
what?

BEN
About me. Needing to see what it's
like outside of Mulch.

JIM
Really?

BEN
Just...wanted to tell you I've been
thinking about it anyway. And why
are you in such a good mood?

Jim is beaming at him. It seems like he doesn't have a care
in the world. He hugs Ben, which catches the latter off guard.

JIM
Because today is a good day. And I'm
going to give this play everything
I've got, be sure of that. Now why
are you standing around wasting time?

Ben smiles at him and runs off.

INT. ELSEWHERE BACKSTAGE - DAY

Sam is carrying the pile of scripts, passing them out one by
one as he finds the actors.

SAM
Mark, take a script. Hank, take a
script. Missus Lee, have a script.

MISSUS LEE
I don't need one. I know my lines!

SAM
Alright... Hey Will!

Sam catches up to Will, who is changing into costume.

SAM (CONT'D)
I found some shoes that might fit
you, and they match your costume.

WILL
Fine, fine.

Sam hands him Barnaby's SHOES.

WILL (CONT'D)
You're unusually cheery. You talked
to her last night?

Sam blushes.

WILL (CONT'D)
Good man, Sam. Good man.

Will bends down to put on the shoes. As he does so, the GUN
in his jacket slips out and falls to the ground.

WILL (CONT'D)
Whoop!

Sam jumps back from the gun. He drops the stack of scripts.

WILL (CONT'D)
It's not loaded. Haha.

SAM
Oh. Okay...

Will picks up the gun and puts it gently back in his jacket.

Together they pick up all the scripts on the floor. Sam takes
the one with the coffee stain and sets it on top of the pile.

BEN [O.S.]
Two minutes! Two minutes, everyone!

WILL
I should get going then!

Will walks away.

Sam sees something. In the pocket of Will's personal jacket,
slung across a chair, is a newspaper article. He can read
the title: "DEATH IN MULCH."

Struck by the title, he looks at it for a moment with concern.

Standing tall above Sam, Will strides back briefly.

WILL (CONT'D)

I'm sorry...were these scripts for us?

SAM

Oh, yeah...

Sam is distracted as Will grabs the top copy from the pile; the one with the coffee stain. Will walks away.

Sam reaches out for the newspaper. It's the article Will had read at the bar.

BEN [O.S.]

Places!

Sam darts away.

INT. AUDIENCE SPACE

The lights in the room go down. The audience quiets down.

Then the lights over the stage turn on, brightly illuminating the tiny version of Mulch.

Ben walks down to the audience and sits in a seat near the edge of the room.

A PIANO rings out a chord. LANCE AKERS is at the piano, playing in accompaniment to the performance.

INT. STAGE

Onto the stage walks Will, in Barnaby costume, wearing the Barnaby shoes.

WILL [AS BARNABY]

This - is my kinda town. Where else can a man, an outsider with no connections, hungry, faint from the heat, stride into town and find - instead of a cold shoulder and a whole lot of frowns - a welcoming hand, smiles all around? A warm meal and a cool glass of fresh milk. The people here - the people of Mulch, that is - they made me part of their family, without asking anything in return. And I intend to repay that welcome, even if it kills me.

INT. BACKSTAGE

Jim watches, listening keenly to the speech. He spots Ben out in the audience, and smiles to himself.

INT. STAGE

WILL [AS BARNABY]

But first, before I can settle myself down for a life of peace and quiet here, I have some unresolved business that needs attending!

He dashes offstage. The LIGHTS dim around him, and illuminate the other side of the stage, where MISSUS LEE is sitting in her Doolickle costume, a couple EXTRAS standing around.

MISSUS LEE [AS DOOLICKLE]

You've all managed to disappoint me even more than I expected. I send you all out to find one man. One! And you come back empty-handed. I don't want excuses; I want Barnaby Willis! I don't care how far west he's run.

EXT. TOWN HALL - DAY

Sam is outside, the only living thing out in town right now. He unfolds the newspaper article and reads it.

He quickly becomes troubled.

He stands up, leaving the newspaper on the ground. Wavers. Nervously fidgets with his missing finger.

SAM

Ow...

A gust of WIND comes by, taking the newspaper with it. Sam chases it away as it sweeps down the street.

INT. STAGE

MARK, in his Walt costume, holds up a prop gun. He's in a standoff with Hank, as Charlie.

MARK [AS WALT]

You nervous?

HANK [AS CHARLIE]

Who's nervous? I ain't.

MARK

Your hand's twitchin'. Wantin' to go for that gun.

HANK

My hand's steady.

MARK

Steady as your wife, your mother and your sister. That is to say, bouncin' left and right and all over the damn place!

Hank goes for his gun. Mark draws his quicker. But Hank dodges, lightning fast. Mark misses, and Hank fires.

Mark falls to the stage.

MARK [AS WALT]

Well, at least my last word was good...

Hank stands over him as Mark feigns death.

The lights go down for a moment.

When they come back up, it's Missus Lee on stage, sitting at her desk across from Will.

WILL [AS BARNABY]

Mike Doolickle. I shoulda known you were responsible for Walt's demise!

MISSUS LEE [AS DOOLICKLE]

I heard when he died, Walt was begging for his life.

WILL

That's a pile of steaming buffalo shit. The only way Walt Smithers would go down is laughing.

MISSUS LEE

As you wish. But since I finally got your attention, you're going to work for me again. One last job.

WILL

Maybe. What's the haul?

MISSUS LEE

I'm sending an armored coach carrying a small fortune for a whiskey deal. Escort that coach.

INT. AUDIENCE

Ben is sitting in the audience and watching. He's smiling.
Sam abruptly sits down next to him, panting.

BEN
Shhh!

SAM
Did you see this?

BEN
See what?

SAM
This newspaper article.

BEN
Be quiet. It's going perfectly!

SAM
Will was carrying it, and I think
it's about his dad getting killed.

Ben rolls his eyes.

BEN
Come on.

Ben stands, and Sam goes with him.

EXT. TOWN HALL - DAY

Ben and Sam stand outside, Sam holding the newspaper article.

BEN
He read it at the bar last night,
out in front of everyone. He was
just...really drunk. You were busy
getting yourself hitched.

SAM
Why would Will still have this? Do
you think he's holding a grudge?

BEN
I don't know, but it's none of our
business. You shouldn't have taken
this. I'm gonna go put it back, and
you can pretend you never read it.

Ben takes the article from Sam. As he does, he glances at
the picture. He freezes.

SAM

What?

Ben points to the picture of Chuck Hannigan.

BEN

That's Jim.

SAM

"Chuck Hannigan?"

BEN

No, it's Jim. I saw a picture of him with his wife, when he was young.

They both freeze and look at each other.

SAM

Ben. Oh...Ben.

They share a horrified glance.

INT. STAGE

Will sits with Ann, the set lit like a moonlit night.

ANN [AS BELLE]

And Pa's sayin' we're gonna have to pack up and move to greener pastures if this drought don't end soon.

WILL [AS BARNABY]

I hate to tell you there are no greener pastures. This whole country is in a world of hurt, and if Mulch doesn't right itself, I don't know what the people are gonna do.

ANN

You won't leave, will ya?

WILL

Not for a whole world of money, Belle. I love it here, and I love you.

They move in for a kiss...

Will looks down at his feet. A dark POOL is gathered around his shoes. Oil, and it's staining the Barnaby shoes.

WILL (CONT'D)

Well I never...

ANN

What is it?

INT. BACKSTAGE

Hank has a PUMP and a TUBE, and is slowly pumping a VAT of used engine oil, held by Jim, onto the stage.

INT. STAGE

WILL [AS BARNABY]
This ain't mud stickin' to my boots.

ANN [AS BELLE]
What is it then?

Will dips his finger in, smells the oil.

WILL
I'll be damned if this ain't oil!
Oil! Belle! You know what this means!

ANN
What does it mean?

WILL
It means neither you, your pa, not
anybody's gonna need to leave. This
town's gonna be a boomin' in a year!

This brings the audience to cheers.

The lights go down, Will and Ann go offstage.

INT. BACKSTAGE

WILL
Well done, Ann.

ANN
Well thanks!

Will grabs a TOWEL, and wipes excess oil off his shoes. He sits down in a corner and picks up the coffee-stained script.

In the background, a scene plays out between Sheriff Brasher (as "Mayor Carl Grave") and Don (as the "Doctor").

Will reads passively, but becomes more intent near the end.

WILL
This can't be right. He didn't tell
me he was changing the end...

He stands up, looks out into the audience where Ben was sitting. Ben's not there.

EXT. TOWN HALL - DAY

Ben and Sam are still talking earnestly.

SAM
He's here to kill Jim.

BEN
I don't think anyone else knows that
Jim and Chuck are the same person.

SAM
Will could figure it out if you did.

BEN
Will never saw the old photo of Jim.

Sam looks at the old Chuck photo again.

SAM
I would know, by looking at this.

BEN
What? You think that looks like Jim?

Eve emerges without warning.

EVE
What's up?

Ben and Sam both freeze.

SAM
Eve?

EVE
Sam! My God, I haven't gotten to see
you yet!

SAM
Why didn't you tell me you were
coming?

EVE
Nobody told you I was coming?

BEN
Nobody told you she was coming?

SAM
No. Did I miss some conversations?

INT. BACKSTAGE

Will is still flipping through pages of the script, muttering.

WILL
I can't believe it. This...this ending
changes everything.

Hearing the scene coming to a close, he stands to go onstage.

INT. STAGE

WILL [AS BARNABY]
Blake Blaine, you let her go this
instant. You want me, you've got me!

JIM [AS BLAKE]
Mister Willis! Twenty years too late.

WILL
Your father, that was nothing
personal. Just business. He was a
bad man who needed takin' down anyway.

JIM
I know, Mister Willis. I know. But
he was my father.

Behind him, Ann's character breaks free and stands up. She
picks up the chair and BREAKS it over Jim's head.

ANN
C'mon, Barnaby!

Barnaby and Ann dash off the stage.

EXT. TOWN HALL - DAY

EVE
The play's goin' really well, I think!

BEN
Yeah, uh, why aren't you in there
watching it?

EVE
I saw you two all whispery about
something and you came out here. I
needed to come say hi to Sam.

BEN
Can you give us a minute?

Ben pulls Sam aside, out of earshot.

SAM
Are you gonna tell her?

BEN

No I'm not gonna tell her! What's there to tell?

SAM

Tell her that Jim's in trouble!

BEN

And if we tell her, she'll tell Mae, and then the whole town's gonna know!

SAM

Maybe they should! Maybe you shouldn't keep them in the dark!

BEN

There's no reason they need to know about any of it.

SAM

I think you just don't want to stop the play. I understand. The play's important.

Beat.

BEN

It's not because of the play.

SAM

Okay.

Sam lowers his eyes. Ben becomes thoughtful.

EVE

Is something going wrong?

BEN

No...I just gotta talk to Jim.

SAM

You're gonna talk to Jim?

BEN

I'm gonna talk to Jim.

Ben walks quickly back inside. Sam shrugs at Eve.

INT. STAGE

WILL [AS BARNABY]

There's oil underneath Mulch, Mr. Banker, a whole lake of oil.

INT. BACKSTAGE

Will's speech continues as Jim watches from backstage.

Ben comes up to him, and whispers.

BEN

Can I talk to you for a sec, Jim?

JIM

But I really like this part. Good speech.

BEN

I think...I think you might be in trouble. We need to stop the show.

JIM

Stop the show? Now? We're almost through and it's going great!

BEN

I figured out you're Chuck Hannigan. And I'm worried that Will might be after you for revenge.

JIM

He is.

Beat.

BEN

You know?

JIM

I knew as soon as he came into town and made up that whole bit about Blake Blaine and his dead dad.

BEN

Jim...we need to get you out of Mulch. I'll get my truck and I can take you. Maybe if we drive out to the city, he'll lose your trail.

JIM

Ben...I'm not worried. That's what I told Old Mae, the Sheriff, Father Bob, who all tried to warn me already. Chuck Hannigan was a bad fellow. But he's long gone already.

WILL [AS BARNABY, O.S.]

I'm Barnaby Willis!

JIM
I better get ready. We're almost to
my big scene.

Jim prepares to go out on stage.

BEN
Jim...

JIM
Yeah Ben?

BEN
You're the best part of the play.

JIM
Haha.

Jim steps out.

INT. AUDIENCE

Ben sits down to keep watching.

Sam slides next to him.

SAM
Did you talk to him?

BEN
It's okay. He's known all along.

SAM
He has? And he didn't tell us?

INT. STAGE

A small crowd of extras is gathered around the Sheriff.

SHERIFF [AS MAYOR GRAVES]
You all know our little town hasn't
been faring too well, what with the
Depression and all. From the new
oil well, we can feel the well-being
of Mulch being restored drip by drip,
dollar by dollar. And the good man
we have to thank for this, the hero
responsible for the discovery which
will put food on our children's tables
for generations to come, is...

Everyone looks around for a few silent, awkward moments.

Will, as Barnaby, rushes onto the stage, in his underwear.
Laughter comes from the audience.

SHERIFF [AS MAYOR GRAVES] (CONT'D)
Well look! It's Barnaby Willis!

Will stops dead in his tracks. He looks at all the people.

WILL [AS BARNABY]
I'm not here to celebrate with you.

Deadened silence.

WILL
I don't deserve your praise, or your
thanks. Barnaby Willis isn't a hero;
he's a legend you made up, to pretend.

INT. AUDIENCE

Ben freezes in his seat, horrified.

SAM
What's he doing? This isn't the
line.

BEN
It's the wrong version. Which script
did you give him?

SAM
Script? Oh...

Ben stands up and rushes toward backstage, pushing past a few audience members.

Mae, watching, scowls heavily. She turns to Eve with an angry look in her eye.

INT. STAGE

WILL [AS BARNABY]
The truth is, I'm a far cry from the
colorful character you all adore. I
only put up a third of the money for
this rig, and I did that as a business
investment; no aim toward saving the
town. I'm no adventurer, in fact I'm
a coward. The bravest thing I ever
did was withhold a few hundred dollars
from the Internal Revenue Service,
and now I'm skipping town so they
won't catch me. So long, Mulch. I
won't be comin' back, but I hope
you'll at least tell stories that
make me seem better than I am.

Will walks off stage, looking dejected.

The whole audience is stunned, looking sad, depressed.

Jim steps onto stage.

JIM [AS BLAKE]
Barnaby! Barnaby Willis!

His prop gun drawn, he walks across stage.

JIM
Where is he?

INT. BACKSTAGE

Ben catches Will and pulls him aside earnestly.

BEN
That was the wrong version!

WILL
Huh?

BEN
That script wasn't supposed to get out! I shouldn't have written it.

WILL
I was wondering why you would change it to something so anticlimactic.

JIM [AS BLAKE, O.S.]
Did Barnaby run off?

BEN
Um...you need to save the play. We need to make Barnaby a hero again.

They stare at each other for a moment, panicking silently.

INT. STAGE

Will enters dramatically, striding straight toward Jim.

WILL [AS BARNABY]
That's right, Mister Blaine! You thought I'd run off and let you have your day of revenge and victory, watching me slide away into shame and ignominy! But no, sir, I have never run from danger before, and I sure as hell won't run now!

Jim plays along.

JIM [AS BLAKE]
 Oh yeah? You lookin' to make yourself
 a part of history now?

INT. AUDIENCE

Sam is confused. Ben sits next to him, satisfied. He nods confidently to Sam.

INT. STAGE

WILL [AS BARNABY]
 Mister Blaine, I'm already a part of
 history. You know who I am?

JIM [AS BLAKE]
 You're Barnaby...

WILL [AS BARNABY]
 I'm Barnaby Willis!

BANG. The sound effect sounds out as Jim mimics the gunshot.

Will falls over, mimicking death.

Silence falls over the room. Then Will WINKS at the audience. At this, they all erupt into applause.

Will leaps up, and makes room for the extras and Sheriff Brasher to take their bows.

Hank, Mark, Don, Missus Lee, all appear to take their bows.

INT. AUDIENCE

Sam turns to Ben.

SAM
 It's a lot different than we
 practiced.

BEN
 I think everything worked itself out
 in the end.

Mae, meanwhile, turns to Eve.

MAE
 I liked it. I didn't see the end
 coming, and I was there too.

EVE
 It wasn't bad. Not bad at all.

INT. STAGE

Finally, Jim takes his bow. The townspeople applaud loudly. Then Will bows. An eruption of applause for this small space.

Will takes Jim's hand. They look at each other.

WILL

So, Jim?

JIM

Let's get this done with.

They bow. Then right away disappear backstage.

INT. AUDIENCE

Ben and Sam are still clapping.

SAM

You did it, Ben!

BEN

It wasn't just me, Sam.

INT. BACKSTAGE

Ben and Sam run backstage, congratulating everybody.

BEN

Missus Lee, you were terrifying!
Hank! You were better than the
rehearsals. Don, I believed every
word of your speech tonight!

SAM

Where's Jim?

BEN

Anyone seen Jim?

DON

I don't know where he went...

SAM

What about Will?

BEN

Will's gone too?

Sam looks at the corner chair. Will's jacket is gone.

SAM

Hank, where did the prop guns go?

HANK

Will had 'em last I saw.

Near the bathroom, a chair with Jim's shirt draped over it. On the chair sits the PHOTO of Jim, with young Sam and Ben.

Ben picks up the photo. He turns it over. Written roughly on the back, the words: "THANKS FOR GIVING ME A REASON TO STAY IN MULCH."

Ben looks up. Panic in his eyes as he looks at Sam.

EXT. DESERTED FIELD - DAY

Jim's truck and Will's Jaguar drive, one after the other, into a deserted stretch of road.

They stop. The two men step out, still in their costumes.

JIM

This look like a good spot?

WILL

Yeah. As good as any.

JIM

We doing it the old way?

WILL

If it's good enough for you.

JIM

We better make it quick, before someone comes after us.

Will reaches into his jacket.

JIM (CONT'D)

You've got the extra gun, right? My old one's in a river somewhere.

Will pulls out two PISTOLS. Hands one to Jim. Jim checks the chamber and makes sure it's loaded.

They look at each other for a moment.

WILL

Maybe you could tell me honest: was my dad as bad as they say he was?

JIM

I wouldn't know. I never knew if I was killin' good or bad people. Didn't particularly like doin' it.

WILL

Well, we all have to do things
sometime that we don't want to.

Jim and Will square off back to back. Pause for a moment.
Jim looks at Will's car.

JIM

Your tire's holding air pretty well.

WILL

You fixed it up good. Fast, too.

They start pacing apart from each other.

WILL (CONT'D)

You're a decent fellow, Jim.

JIM

Thanks for the smokes.

They pace forward a set number of steps. And then they stop
at the same time.

In the blink of an eye, they turn around, raise the guns,
and fire.

BANG. Both guns go off at the same time.

Jim stares at Will. Will stares at Jim.

JIM (CONT'D)

Did I hit you?

WILL

GODDAMN. That hurts.

Will slumps to the ground. Blood is pouring from his chest.

JIM

Haha! Never been...never been shot
before?

Jim's laughter makes him cringe in pain. He too slumps to
the ground, blood oozing from a stomach wound.

WILL

No, I've been shot before. You never
get used to it though.

JIM

To be fair, I never got shot in the
vitals before.

WILL

Me neither.

JIM

It does have a sense of finality about it.

Both men sit slouched on the ground, about twenty yards apart.

WILL

This is about right.

JIM

What's about right?

WILL

Finally taking revenge. It's how I thought it'd be. I never expected it would be like it is in the stories.

JIM

Nah, nothing's ever quite like that. You pretty happy, though?

WILL

Yeah. I'm pretty happy now.

Beat.

JIM

You ever been to Flannigans?

WILL

In Chicago? Yeah, my old crew went there all the time, back in the day.

JIM

Do you know the song they sing in there? There was always someone with a fiddle, and if you didn't know the words, you got thrown out.

Will thinks for a moment. Then he breaks out softly singing.

WILL

Oh, when I was just a young boy, I longed to see the world. To sail around the sea in ships and see the sails unfurled. I went to seek my fortune on the far side of the hill - I've wandered far and wide, and of travel I've had my fill.

JIM

*Oh I've learned there's more to life
than to wander and to roam. Happiness
and peace of mind can best be found
at home. For money can't buy
happiness and money cannot bind, so
I'm goin' back tomorrow to the girl
I left behind.*

BOTH

*And it's home, boys, home. Home I'd
like to be, home for awhile in the
old country. Where the oak and the
ash and the bonnie rowan tree, are
all growin' greener in the old
country.*

Their singing gets more and more muffled.

Will is still wearing Barnaby's shoes. Blood mixes with the oil and the mud caked on the shoes. Will notices, and smiles.

EXT. DESERTED FIELD - DAY

Ben's truck rumbles up to the field. It stops near Jim and Will's vehicles.

Ben and Sam jump out, and run toward the two small, bleeding figures on the ground. Both are silent now.

BEN

No! No! Jim. Shit, Jim!

SAM

They did it. Why'd they go and do that? Why couldn't they just make up and be friends?

Jim opens an eye.

JIM

Huh? We did make up. We're friends.

SAM

I'm gonna go get the doctor.

JIM

No Sam, don't bother. Stick around.

BEN

Why'd you tell me everything was okay? You told me not to worry!

JIM

Why should you have to worry, Ben?

BEN

Did you have to go through with this?
Why like this, why now?

JIM

Why now? Honestly Ben, we'd have
done this a few days ago, if it
weren't for the play.

Ben and Sam are both in tears.

JIM (CONT'D)

Yeah. We had to see the play through.

Will opens his eyes now.

WILL

If anyone's heading back to town...I'd
be obliged if they could bring the
priest out here. I think I can
confess this now that I've done it.

SAM

I'll get Father Bob, and the doctor
too. You'll be alright, Jim!

Sam darts off, making for his truck.

JIM

It was a good play.

EXT. MULCH CEMETERY - DAY

Two caskets stand side by side. Two new headstones read
"James Mayfield" and "William McMasters."

Father Bob is reading, while the whole rest of the town is
gathered around.

Sam is in tears, with Ben holding him. Ann is also next to
Sam. Ben looks over at Eve. Their eyes meet.

Mae wipes her eyes.

Jim's headstone is right next to that of his wife, Beth.

When the ceremony is complete and the graves are filled in,
the people all go their separate ways.

Sam and Ben are left alone, standing side by side. Their
eyes are dry now, and they stare emptily at the headstones.

Mae hobbles up from behind, and stands next to them.

MAE

You know what Jim used to say?

Ben and Sam look at her.

MAE (CONT'D)

Used to say, "Mae, there ain't no way you're dying anytime soon. No ma'am, you can't do that, because you're a living legend." And I said to Jim, "Jim, you know I'm gonna have to go soon, because, look at me!" But he'd always say, "as long as this town's around, Mae Daniels will be around to keep it alive. She and Mulch are one and the same. So don't you dare die." And that's why I'm not dead.

Beat.

SAM

Did Jim really say that?

MAE

No. But it's something he would have said, don't you think?

BEN

Yeah, he would have.

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - DAY

The Mayor sits at his desk, with the Sheriff beside him. Several stacks of legal documents are in front of them.

Ben and Sam sit across the desk from them.

MAYOR

Jim's will was up-to-date. His saving's he divided up four ways, one part to each of you, and one part to Eve Haverson.

BEN

What about the fourth part?

MAYOR

To the restoration project of the township of Mulch.

SHERIFF

His house, he's left to Sam...

SAM
 His house? He left me his house?
 You mean, I won't need to live in my
 pa's trailer anymore?

SHERIFF
 ...Along with his tire shop.

SAM
 The shop...oh...

He sniffles, alternating between joy and sadness.

SAM (CONT'D)
 I've always...I've only...it's all
 I've ever wanted to run my own tire
 shop...Oh Jim...

SHERIFF
 As for you Ben...we actually...we
 received a notice from the estate of
 the late Mister William McMasters.

BEN
 Will?

SHERIFF
 He updated his will just a couple
 days ago. You were mentioned.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Eve stands next to a taxi cab. The trunk is open and her
 bags are inside.

Ben leans on the side of the cab.

BEN
 A little theater house in Chicago.
 I guess Will was doing plays, real
 plays, for years, and had a company
 of his own. Sounds like it's just a
 little, rundown place, but...

EVE
 This is just a little, rundown place.
 Look at what you pulled off here.

Ben smiles.

EVE (CONT'D)
 So you'll be going to check it out,
 right?

BEN

I need to take a look at it, anyway.

EVE

It's your first stop?

BEN

My first stop.

EVE

You know, California's on the way to Chicago.

Ben smiles at her. Then he does a double-take.

BEN

No it's not.

EVE

That depends how you look at it, and how you decide to route yourself.

BEN

There's just one way of looking at a map.

EVE

When did you start caring about facts?

She comes up to him and gives him a quick kiss on the cheek, then dives into the taxi cab.

The car drives off. Ben is left standing in the middle of the road. Alone.

He notices that the SHOES are missing from the monument. A realization comes slowly over him, and he laughs a little. He looks at his own SHOES; they are the right color.

He takes off his shoes and plants them in the monument, looking back and forth to ensure nobody is looking.

Whistling, he walks down the road, in his socks.

BEN [V/O]

I guess, if I had a part to play in the story of Mulch, that part's played out now. Barnaby's just as important as he ever was, however that story ends up being told. The details were never that important anyway.

EXT. TIRE SHOP - DAY

The sign above the Tire Shop still reads "JIM'S."

INT. SHOP OFFICE - DAY

Ben hugs both Sam and Ann, who are happily standing behind the counter at the shop.

BEN [V/O]

At any rate, now the town's got a brand-new story, with a new set of heroes. Already people are namin' their kids after Jim. At least that's Sam and Ann's plan, if it's a boy. Maybe if it's a girl it'll be Eve.

INT. BEN'S HOUSE - DAY

Ben packs up all his things in his room, clearing his desk.

BEN [V/O]

Eve...

He spots a PHOTO of himself with Eve, both a little younger.

EXT. TIRE SHOP - EVENING

Ben has his car packed, as he waves goodbye to Sam and Ann. He gets in the car and drives away.

BEN [V/O]

Now, there's a version of this story I could have told, where everything worked out. About how Jim and Will just shook hands and never killed each other. A story where Eve came back to Mulch and we settled down together in a little house by the dried-up fishing pond, telling Barnaby stories to our kids.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - EVENING

Ben's car drives out, past the "WELCOME TO MULCH" sign.

BEN

But would that be a story worth telling? When everything works out, and the story ends too perfectly...

The tire runs over a NAIL. The car screeches to a halt, brake lights on.

BEN (CONT'D)

Where would be the fun in that?

THE END