

EDDINGTON

By

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- A COVID-19 Western -

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

A highly composed tableau: a vast canvas of stark DESERT, sparsely ornamented by a pitiful circuitry of lights (belonging to lonely houses, stores, and a few roaming cars).

Off-screen we hear a hoarse, aggressive voice:

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

There it is!

The source steps into frame. It is a BLACK MAN (late 40s) in clothes that haven't been changed in weeks, perhaps months. His eyes are manic. He speaks directly to us. This is LODGE.

LODGE

Ever'body and their little box. And I know who set 'em there. They think it's theirs and they did it, like ever'thin here is *from* them and theirs to keep. This is the sign--

He CLAPS suddenly/fiercely, as if to seize our attention.

LODGE (CONT'D)

(quickly)

This is the sign and the damnation and in three years I own every little box! You don't bilieve me? Come work for me and see! I WILL MAKE YOU FIFTY MILLION DOLLARS AND I WILL OWN EVERY BOX!

EXT. DESERT/PLAZA - NIGHT

Another tableau. We are now closer to the circuitry of lights - close enough to make out the dwellings. It is TEN SQUARE BLOCKS OF GLOWING STORES, all illuminated by cool streetlights. The surrounding desert is pocked by isolated adobe homes. Lodge, once again, is front and center.

LODGE

More boxes! Soon *I'LL* be the one inside, and will *YOU've* humbled yerself prostrate to me and Lord God Almighty when you got the chance?? Answer yerself that. Would you work for me? Or is God's words but shit to you? *Answer yer godless rotten self just that!*

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Yet another tableau. A lamp-lit street lined with local shops (including a movie theater, closed until further notice). Centered in the composition is the SHERIFF'S OFFICE. Inside, a black trainee (MICHAEL) sits at a desk, masked, streaming cartoons on a laptop. Lodge addresses us in FG, crazed as ever.

LODGE

I see yer guts and I see the rot and I see no skin! The skin hides the filth! If I promised you sixty million dollars in seven days, would THEN you listen? All you need is to quit yer arrogance and work for me. The money is comin here. I seen it. There's devils that can get you rich in two minutes if you just knowed what they wanted. MY EYES HAVE X-RAYS!

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

An empty street. A STRETCH LIMO sits idle, engine humming. The back door opens and MARK ZUCKERBERG steps out, eyes glowing subtly in the dark. He holds a map and looks about, scrutinizing the potential spoils. This is the only tableau in the sequence that will NOT feature Lodge; it's presumably from his POV.

LODGE

Just last week I saw one a the King Demons, he was HERE, lookin at them boxes, thinkin thinkin. He had his map and his people and he was tellin 'em the boxes he wanted. I'M the one that knows, the one that saw, with the vision entrusted by GOD to see, and in two years it is HIM that will buy them from ME! *Think about it!*

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

A fenced-off stretch of dead earth. A SIGN on the wire fence: "PRIVATE PROPERTY; DEVELOPMENT INCOMING". Lodge stands in front.

LODGE

You don't take me serious. But if I shown it to you, if I shown you how to make hundreds a millions a dollars in seven days, you'd come beggin on your knees! This is your interview! The path is not lighted! You got treasures to lose! *That makes you sick!*

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

A final tableau. Two neighboring houses glow in an otherwise vast vacuum of desert. Lodge stands before them. One is a very nice, large house.

LODGE

You will be learned yer true feelins and what they hide! Them that let themself get bamboozled will see!

Lodge walks off to the side and we PAN with him, away from the house, to alight on a tall HILL in the middle of the desert. At the top of the hill looms a blinking CELL PHONE TOWER. An old man, GIL, wearing two surgical masks, stands at the base of the tower with a leashed DOG at his side. In the BG are the HEADLIGHTS of an approaching car.

LODGE (CONT'D)

The Lord God will show His will to them
that look up with the pride a pigs,
and all the pigs will listen when it's too
late! The pigs and whores and liars
will burn forever when it's too late
and all their boxes will be dust! Here
comes one pig now!

Lodge leaves frame as the headlights reveal themselves to belong to a POLICE CRUISER. It pulls up to the base of the hill.

A TITLE APPEARS OVER THE PICTURE: LATE MAY, 2020

Gil and his dog approach the car.

Sheriff JOE CROSS (late 40s), an overweight man with friendly eyes, emerges from the cruiser, inciting the dog to bark. Joe retreats back into the vehicle.

GIL

Sorry there, she's harmless!

Gil leashes the dog. Joe comes back out.

GIL (CONT'D)

She's super friendly. She don't bite.

JOE

That's all right.

Gil gestures meekly to Joe's unmasked mouth.

GIL

Say, you wouldn't mind if we both
had on our masks?

JOE

We're good. Six feet.

GIL

...Yeah, sure. Fair 'nuff.

JOE

(gesturing)
You're the driver.

EXT. TOP OF THE HILL - MINUTES LATER

Gil leads Joe up the hill to the cell tower.

GIL

So I'm walkin Sammy on our route and I seen Mitchell's car up here with him on his wheelchair, and then Sammy goes barkin all a the sudden and I see flames go up at the bottom a the tower, and then they just kinda died out quick.

They arrive top of the hill. Joe, winded, pulls an INHALER out of his pocket and takes a puff (he's asthmatic).

To the side of the tower is a WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE VAN. At the base of the tower is a fire-mangled electric wheelchair, at the foot of which is a CHARRED CORPSE. The smell hits both of them. They cover their nose.

JOE

Mitchell live alone still?

GIL

Yeah, he got his crazy Youtube. He got a equally crazy brother up Tucumcari that comes out to check on 'im.

JOE

Stay put.

Joe walks over to the corpse (whose figure is incidentally similar to Joe's), shining his flashlight. Its hand grips a LIGHTER. A gasoline canister rests beside the lightly charred base of the high-speed cell tower. Ten feet away is a smartphone on a tripod plugged into a laptop on the ground. It's aimed toward the wheelchair.

GIL

(realization of death)

You think he coulda done it hisself?

Joe pulls out his smartphone and takes a photo of the corpse.

JOE

Is this tower 5G?

GIL

Oh! I think he mighta actually did a Youtube 'bout that.

Joe goes to the van and shines his flashlight. On the passenger seat: hand sanitizer and cold/sinus medication. Popping the trunk, he finds more wheelchair gear and, strangely, a pair of children's underwear.

JOE
Mitchell doesn't have kids, does he?

GIL
Uh - not that I rickaleck.

The SOUND of an approaching car. Joe looks off to see HEADLIGHTS in the distance. A POLICE CRUISER, its light-bar flashing.

GIL (CONT'D)
Oh, here they go.

JOE
You called someone else?

GIL
No sir. Just the Reservation police.

JOE
Why would you do that?

GIL
Just for if they needed a look.

JOE
Why? It's a Eddington police matter. You already called *me*.

GIL
Yeah, but, my property is on the county line here. Half of me's the Reservation, the other half is Eddin'ton. I even got papers that say.

JOE
That tower falls on *you*, you said.

GIL
Yeah, but the body...

Gil gestures to the body and then points to a red-painted rod in the ground five feet away, signifying the property line. The body is exactly aligned with it.

GIL (CONT'D)
That pole's the property line.

Joe is gobsmacked.

MOMENTS LATER

The cruiser mounts the hill and comes to an abrupt HALT twenty feet away, sending a wave of dust into Joe and Gil. The car bears a BIA insignia ("*Bureau of Indian Affairs*") and holds two officers.

The siren shuts off, and OFFICER LAKOTA (30s) steps out. He's a broad-shouldered mass of muscle. He wears a face mask. His partner (older) stays in the car.

LAKOTA
Didn't know this was a party!

JOE
Sorry Lakota, you're too late.

LAKOTA
(ignoring Joe)
Mr. Browne?

GIL
Yeah, hi there, I called you boys,
but now I'm not sure...

LAKOTA
Not sure about what?
(shines light at body)
That's a dead body, right?

Lakota starts toward the van. He looks disdainfully up at the tower, mumbling "tumor tower," and then eyes Joe, confused but amused.

LAKOTA (CONT'D)
What brings you to *our* neck, sheriff?

Lakota gets to the car. He shines a flashlight into it.

LAKOTA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
What's this? Kid clothes?
(then)
Shit!

Lakota has found a child's T-shirt. It bears the insignia for *White Bear Elementary School*.

LAKOTA (CONT'D)
(to his partner)
We got a shirt from our school!

Lakota shines his flashlight in Joe's face.

LAKOTA (CONT'D)
Take a hike, sheriff. This is a
Reservation incident.

JOE
No, Lakota, it's not.

GIL
'S both.

Lakota turns his light to Gil's face.

GIL (CONT'D)

The body's on the property line. This is Eddin'ton and the Reservation.

LAKOTA

The fuck's *that* s'posed to mean?

JOE

Means I got here first.

The OLDER OFFICER (50s), also Native American and double-masked, sticks his head out of the Reservation police car's passenger window.

OLDER OFFICER

What's happening??

MINUTES LATER

The Older Officer looks over PAPERS that explain (with images) that the house rests on both EDDINGTON and PACOAJE INDIAN RESERVATION soil. He looks up to face Lakota and Joe.

OLDER OFFICER (CONT'D)

All right, so there's no way of determining this. We're on the border, it's up for grabs.

JOE

Look: the tower was his obvious target, *that's* Eddington. The chair, where he plainly started, is *also* on the tower side, I was the first to arrive--

LAKOTA

You're not but one mile away!
The clothes belong to a
indigenous kid--

JOE (CONT'D)

We don't know that!

LAKOTA

THE KID'S FUCKIN INDIAN! That shirt's from OUR school and we got two kids missin since last year!

OLDER OFFICER

All right, shut up! We don't know what this is and the jurisdiction's mush, so there's two ways: We go by the book and wait for the machine to flip a coin, or we skip it and flip it ourself.

(to Joe)

What do you say?

JOE
 (not getting it)
 About what?

MINUTES LATER

The Older Officer carves a BIG SQUARE into the sand with a stick. The equivalent of a boxing ring. Lakota steps into it.

LAKOTA
 Mask first!

JOE
 Don't got one.

The Older Officer tosses him a surgical mask. It lands on the ground.

JOE (CONT'D)
 I got asthma. I can't breathe in it.

OLDER OFFICER
 Your breathing's liable to get even worse when you're in line for a ventilator.

Joe grudgingly picks it up and puts it on - under his nose. He steps into the square.

OLDER OFFICER (CONT'D)
 Okay: no scratching, no biting, no kicking. At any time you can tap out: that's a forfeit.

LAKOTA
 Don't pull my fuckin hair neither.

Lakota is referring to his queued ponytail.

OLDER OFFICER
 Okay: on three!
 (pause)
 One... two... thre--

Lakota moves swiftly toward Joe with the intent of knocking his head off. Joe reacts by RETREATING. He backs desperately out of the square and turns to storm off.

JOE
 Fuck you.

Joe speed-walks away. Humiliated.

LAKOTA
 C'mon, Sheriff! At least lemme earn it!

INT. JOE'S CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

Joe BLASTS past the development sign on the fenced off desert. Fuming, he shakes his head, boiling. He TURNS ON HIS CAMERA on his mounted PHONE. It's aimed at him. His attitude changes for the camera.

JOE

Hey guys, gals, what have ya. This is sheriff Joe Cross, droppin in from a nighttime near-MISS. Wrong jurisdiction if you ask the Reservation police. MISTAKEN jurisdiction - STOLEN jur--

STATIC hisses from the police radio.

VOICE ON RADIO (V.O.)

Dispatch. Just got called of a nuisance in town. Lodge again.

Joe picks up the radio.

JOE

I'll take it.

VOICE ON RADIO (V.O.)

Sheriff? You sure? It's at Garcia's.

Joe hesitates.

JOE

I'll take it.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Joe's car roars over a hill, passing a GREEN HIGHWAY SIGN for the town of *EDDINGTON, NM (Population: 3,135)*. The title "**EDDINGTON**" remains illuminated on the sign after the headlights pass it.

Beyond the sign holding our title: the ten-square-block collection of adobe shops.

The police cruiser continues toward this.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

A lonely sidewalk on "EDDINGTON STRIP," which is comprised of five square blocks of local stores (restaurants, a bar, a barbershop, a one-screen theater, etc). This is the business sector and essentially the heart of the town.

Two handsome TEENAGED BOYS stand by a fire hydrant. They are ERIC GARCIA (19), Latino, and BRIAN (18), white. They pass a joint back and forth, while Brian watches a TEEN GIRL pointing to progressive captions (accompanied by Don Toliver) on TikTok.

ERIC
Blonde sluts named Sarah think
they're Rosa Parks.

BRIAN
What would I DM her if I was goin to?

ERIC
Take a pic of you with me. Show that
you're a ally.

BRIAN
She'll proba'ly recognize you from
school.

JOE'S CAR peels up to the curb. Eric stubs out the joint as
Joe emerges.

ERIC
No mask, bro?

JOE
Nah, I'm good. "Bro."

As Joe walks past them, making his way toward the corner:

ERIC
Please maintain six feet, please!

EXT. BAR - CONTINUOUS

Joe rounds the corner to approach a saloon called *GARCIA'S*.
This is the only bar in town, as well as its social nucleus.

Standing outside the bar is *LODGE*, who pulls mercilessly at
the locked front door.

LODGE
This box is no temple! It is a joke
on you! I am the one inside! Your
lies are just screaming noise!

INT. GARCIA'S - SAME TIME

Standing behind the bar is *TED GARCIA* (50s), a handsome Hispanic
man wearing a KN-95. Beside him is his advisor *WARREN* (early
40s), a masked Hispanic man. Sitting at the bar is *PHIL* (60s), a
portly town council member. They are ignoring *Lodge*, who bangs
away in the BG.

TED
And then, but the spillover: two, three
hunnerd construction jobs, ongoin. And
the solar offset's a whole 'nother
development. That's big city money
comin HERE--

PHIL

Sure, but we let 'em build this - whatever it is, data complex - and they up and close it for whatever reason? We gotta eat that?

WARREN

Hell no! There's clawbacks on everythin. Gross receipt taxes, payback a property. Big Tech's already took over, Phil. Ain't no wishin it away. This is our shot at jumpin on the ship.

Joe, who has lingered outside the window through this, TAPS on the glass. Ted starts walking over, adding:

TED

We can count on your "yay" tomorrow?

Phil wavers. Ted gets to the window.

JOE

There a problem here?

TED

(re: Lodge)

Your eyes broke?

JOE

He's outside.

TED

I locked the door to *keep* him out. He's blockin the entrance.

JOE

Whose entrance? What're you even doin? I thought it's take-away drinks only.

TED

Those are town council members. That's essential business.

JOE

You can't just call whatever you want essential business. This is a bar, not fuckin Town Hall.

TED (CONT'D)

It's a council meetin wherever council people *congregate*. It's the Mayor's Office when I'm inside.

LODGE (O.S.)

You will have the lovin God beat into you! Your arrogance is His design!

JOE
 You got a payin customer bein
 locked out, wantin to make a
 purchase.

TED
 Payin?? With what?! He's
 insane! He stinks like shit!
 He needs to be locked up--

JOE
 He needs help! These are your streets!

TED
 What the fuck? They're YOUR streets! To
 make safe! And you never have a mask!

JOE
 That's 'cause I WON'T ever have a mask!
 I got asthma! I can't goddamn breathe!

While this argument has mounted, Lodge has managed to wiggle
 the door open. He is now inside.

PHIL (O.S.)
 Shit!! He don't have a mask!!

Joe instinctively runs inside and goes to Lodge, who is now
 reaching over the bar to grab a bottle. Phil and Warren have
 retreated to the corner.

LODGE
 Look, I fuckin paid! I paid!

Lodge is referring to a torn five dollar bill (stained brown
 with dry blood) that he slapped onto the counter.

Joe seizes Lodge by the arm and begins to forcibly usher him
 out. It is messy.

LODGE (CONT'D)
 I paid! GOD SEES THIS!

Lodge's struggle intensifies until he and Joe are on the ground.
 As they wrestle clumsily, Joe sees Eric behind the window,
 FILMING this on his phone. A goofy smile lights his face.

Joe gets up - his shoulder hurt - and DRAGS Lodge out.

TED
 (exasperated)
 THANK you.

JOE
 (almost in tears)
 Satisfied?

Lodge runs off. As he does so:

LODGE
 FUCK you, pigs! You'll SEE what I am!

Joe now trudges off, dusting his clothes, rubbing his twisted
 shoulder. He passes Eric, still wielding his phone.

JOE
 (with disdain)
 You get your little Instagram there?

ERIC
 (mockingly)
 Yeah, I got my little "Instagram."

INT. JOE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A framed photo portrait of a severe, uniformed SHERIFF (60s) sitting upright. This was RICHMOND. It is mounted onto the wall of a FOYER with an incense holder at its base and a miniature memorial garden (small plants) underneath. There is a candle burning beside the garden.

Off-screen we hear an older WOMAN rattling off statistics.

WOMAN (V.O.)
 And another simulation - Clade X -
 2018 - a pandemic modellin exercise by
 Jons Hopkins. Now how d'you simulate a
 pandemic 'fore the pandemic even
 happens? Ask yourself that. And ask
 yourself why it happens on May 15,
 2018 - exactly 666 days before the
 pandemic got declared.

The portrait is illuminated by APPROACHING HEADLIGHTS from outside. The off-screen sound of Joe's cruiser idling to a stop.

WOMAN (V.O.)
 Now how 'bout Tom Hanks, the first
 movie star to get the virus. He's in a
 movie called *The Inferno*, 'bout a
 billionaire obsessed with
 depopulation. What're the odds a that?

The front door opens and Joe trudges in. He walks to the **LIVING ROOM**, where the fold-out couch has been converted to a bed, taking up nearly all the space. One wall is dominated by HANDMADE DOLLS IN DIFFERENT OUTFITS and another with strange EMBROIDERY. If the art is on the amateurish side, it also functions as evidence of a teeming creative mind.

DAWN (70s), a stern woman in a nightgown (and the woman whose voice we've been hearing), sits on the fold-out mattress, RECORDING A YOUTUBE VIDEO OF HERSELF on her phone. A laptop is plugged into a printer, which holds a dense stack of paper.

DAWN
 And what're the odds that *that* movie
 comes out on Bill Gates' birthday?

Joe enters and she pauses the recording, frustrated.

DAWN (CONT'D)
What time is it??

JOE
You need to get your own computer, Dawn.

DAWN
Right. When you never used
this once...!

And you're out at godless
hours!

JOE (CONT'D)
When am I gonna use it? Pry
it from your hands...

JOE (CONT'D)
Out doin my job. Payin for the
house you're livin in.

DAWN
You think I don't *know* your job? I
know how it's *done*.

Joe hesitates, but leaves it.

INT. JOE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joe enters to find LOUISE (late 40s), a beautiful but worn woman, in bed, putting the finishing touches on a handmade RAG DOLL. (A Late Night interview plays on the TV). As with the living room, handmade dolls adorn one wall of the room.

Louise's eyes stray to Joe as he struggles to disrobe. She takes in the sight of her husband's body with barely concealed distaste.

LOUISE
Did it end up bein a body?

JOE
Was a mix-up. Wasn't my jurisdiction.

LOUISE
Weren't you gone a while, then?

JOE
Got another call straight after.
Just a nuisance at the bar.

Louise becomes alert - almost pale - at the mention of the bar.

LOUISE
With *Ted*?

JOE
No. Not with Ted. *Really*. Just the
millionaire again.

LOUISE
 ...You didn't tell mama?

 JOE
 Ha!

Joe awkwardly finishes undressing. He sees a NEW EMBROIDERY on the table. It's an image of a girl's back, standing in the corner of a room with one window, on the other side of which is an identical girl's back.

 JOE (CONT'D)
 What's this one about?

 LOUISE
 I dunno. Just a image I had.

 JOE
 ("I like it!")
 Weird!

It's clear that Joe doesn't know how to talk about it, but is eager to be supportive.

 LOUISE
 I sold two more a the new series.

 JOE
 What?! Incredible! Which ones?

 LOUISE
 The fireman and the doctor.

 JOE
 Incredible! Congratulations, Weez.
 That's great.

Joe sees a stack of printouts from the internet on the dresser. Blogs/articles with titles like "*A History Of The CRIMES Of The FEDERAL RESERVE. The Sinking Of The Titanic Was No Accident.*"

 JOE (CONT'D)
 Jesus. Can't she just email you?

 LOUISE
 She does, but then she checks my phone to see if I opened 'em.

 JOE
 That's why I said to put a passcode.

 LOUISE
 Some of what she sends is more real than others...

He climbs into bed, curls up to Louise. She subtly shifts over.

JOE

You remember the deal when she moved in? ... About it bein 'til April?

LOUISE

You remember there's still a pandemic?

JOE

I told you I'd set her up in a room nearby. If she was a invalid, that'd be one thing. You even said it feels like she's watchin you all the time.

LOUISE

I said it's like I'm bein watched all the time. Not just by her.

JOE

I understand it feels that way, rabbit, but I promise it's not. I promise.

He extends a peace offering of a kiss. She submits to the kiss, but not with great enthusiasm.

JOE (CONT'D)

(seductively)

Okay?

He tries again. She gives him a longer kiss to appease him. His hand reaches over to her breast.

LOUISE

Pudge...

JOE

(sensually)

Yes?

Frustrated, she plops her arms. Not in the mood.

JOE (CONT'D)

(pulls hand away)

Okay. Got it.

LOUISE

You just always pick the worst times.

JOE (CONT'D)

No, you're right. I'm sorry. G'night.

Joe turns around.

LOUISE

I'm sorry.

JOE (CONT'D)

Not at all. I'm sorry. G'night.

Joe discreetly goes to his phone. He starts scrolling through Facebook. First up, an article: "*Many Towns in NM Have Seen Zero Cases of Covid-19. So Why Are We Condemning Their Businesses to Death?*" Joe clicks "like".

Then a post: "*Eddington bisuneses are SUFFERING. Meanwile the town bar is doing just fine. Definetly not a conflict of intrest for our mayor!*" Joe 'likes.'

Finally a blog headline: "*19 NM Mayors Call For Businesses to Reopen ASAP. So Why Isn't Eddington's Mayor One of Them?*" Joe clicks on this to read.

INT. JOE'S BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING

Joe wakes groggily in an empty bed. Commotion from the kitchen blaers through the wall.

DAWN (O.S.)

They push the window tiny bit by tiny bit, 'til we think it's normal!

LOUISE (O.S.)

I know, mama!

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

You *don't* know! You accept it! They're gonna all be in Gitmo before you finally get it.

Joe deflates. Grabs an INHALER from his bedside table and takes a puff.

INT. KITCHEN - MINUTES LATER

Dawn stands at the sink, washing dishes. She lectures Louise, who sits at the table in her nightgown.

LOUISE

Mama, even that thing you sent me last week said the numbers ain't fake--

DAWN

The numbers...! The tests come up positive be it COVID or the common cold - except now you gave the government your DNA! And if it *is* COVID, then you better *pray*, 'cause *they're* suppressin treatments and you handed over every right you have! You think this is different from fluoride in the water? Only in industrial countries! Buildin up the iron in our bodies. Iron's what kills people!

LOUISE

I *did* read about the iron. That *is* scary.

DAWN

It IS goddamn scary! *Wake up!*

Joe enters.

JOE

Woke *me* up...

As Joe starts helping himself to breakfast, he sees an empty prescription bottle for "Haldol."

JOE (CONT'D)

You outta this?

Louise doesn't answer, which is a "yes." Dawn hands her the laptop.

DAWN

Read this all the way before you argue.

Louise grudgingly starts reading.

DAWN (CONT'D)

Where d'you think I'm gettin this stuff anyways? It ain't outta thin air. Daddy knew all these things.

Louise steels herself at the mention of "daddy." Dawn is sensitive to it.

DAWN (CONT'D)

What does *that* mean? Don't you dare. He knew *too* much about the corruption.

Louise reads, ignoring Dawn. Dawn looks to a recent EMBROIDERY (by Louise) hanging on the wall. After puzzling over it:

DAWN (CONT'D)

You know what you should do is a art piece about the hospital in Alamagordo, killin healthy patients to get the numbers up.

Joe sits with his plate, and opens his phone. He goes to *The New Mexican* website and scrolls to find an article about Ted Garcia signing his name on further mandates set forth by the governor.

DAWN (CONT'D)

You were at his bar last night?

Joe looks at Louise. "You told her?" He returns to his phone and tries to read in peace.

DAWN (CONT'D)

It was *his* complaint, right? He rings his little bell and you come runnin.

LOUISE

Mama...

Dawn walks to the framed photo of Richmond and replaces the burning candle which has almost melted to the base. (This flame never goes out; even when it's replaced, one must light a new candle before blowing out the old one.) Meanwhile, Joe takes Louise's hand under the table.

DAWN

That fact you can just stroll on over there...

(to Louise)

And you don't seem too perturbed by it. *Your* silence, *his* gain.

Louise and Joe focus on their breakfast. Dawn returns to the table. Silence. Then:

DAWN (CONT'D)

(to Louise)

Where even *is* your anger?

(then to Joe)

Where's YOURS?

LOUISE

Mama! Please!

INT. JOE'S CAR - MORNING

Joe drives past a ghostly line of shuttered storefronts. His mounted SMARTPHONE plays Tucker Carlson.

TUCKER CARLSON (O.S.)

Just so you know, we're coming to your house, seizing your children, and quote- "isolating them in a safe and dignified manner." Now that's not something that under *normal* circumstances officials casually *drop* during briefings. It's the kind of statement that might trigger violence. People don't respond well when you threaten to take their kids, but Ryan said it like it was no big deal, and that's how the media treated it! His threat didn't make headlines in any of the major newspapers in this country. That's the kind of moment we're in.

As this drones on, Joe note a couple things that make his blood boil...

Standing outside a closed shop (bearing the sign "*CLOSED FOR NOW! STAY SAFE!*") is a crazy man screaming "WHY ARE YOU CLOSED?!"

WHY?! WHY ARE YOU CLOSING YOUR DOORS TO THE PUBLIC?! WHAT *RIGHT* DO YOU HAVE?! BY WHAT *RIGHT* DO YOU *EXCLUDE* THE POPULATION?!"

In a window, a campaign sign: "*RE-ELECT MAYOR TED GARCIA, 2020*"

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

The Eddington sheriff's office is a large white space with a BARRED PRISON CELL in the back corner. One side of the room is devoted to several modest bookshelves (holding a few hundred books) and a sign above them: "*EDDINGTON LIBRARY.*" There is one tattered chair reserved for readers. An old masked man sits in it, reading a Tony Hillerman novel. On one wall: a framed photo of RICHMOND, Joe's deceased mentor and father-in-law, looms imposingly. (This is the same man memorialized in Joe's foyer.)

There are three desks. Joe's is empty. The others belong to MICHAEL (20), a young Black trainee (whose uniform reads "TRAINEE"), and GUY (30), a self-serious officer with swagger to spare (it was his voice on the radio). His uniform is pristine and he sits upright - threateningly so. Guy is sitting across from MR. KURTH (late 60s), an emotionally fraught man.

GUY
Yeah, but *again*, we don't police water rights. That ain't us. The drought is *always*, sir. This is New Mexico.

MR. KURTH
In the middle a'a drought?!
I got a 'pletely dead field! I'll hardly get one cut a oat this year, but the mayor's goddamn illegal tree gets all the water it needs??

Joe enters. He walks over to Michael's desk.

MR. KURTH (CONT'D)
Sheriff! You gotta do somethin...

JOE
Sorry Gene, I'm in and out. Guy's got you over there.

GUY
And I already informed him ten times!

Joe leans over Michael's shoulder.

JOE
Mikey, do me a favor. Can you get a different friend to buy one a Louise's dolls? I'll pay 'em straight back, plus fifty percent.

Michael goes to an AMATEUR WEBSITE featuring all of Louise's dolls and embroidery. They are priced at either \$40 or \$50.

MICHAEL
Yes can do. Which one?

JOE
One from the farmer series? Or just
one a the older ones. Doesn't matter.

Michael scrolls around. Guy notices, competitive.

GUY
What's he helpin you with, sheriff?

MICHAEL
Oh, and so you know: I brought this
back. Signin it back in.

Michael gestures to a PISTOL on his desk.

JOE
How'd you do?

Michael pulls up a TARGET SHEET bearing five bullet holes.

JOE (CONT'D)
That's at three hundred feet?

MICHAEL
Two hundred.

JOE
Keep practicin. You took out two,
though, right?

MICHAEL
Was gonna practice on the other
tomorrow. Didn't get a chance yet.

As Michael says that, Joe pins the target sheet onto the side-wall of Michael's desk (putting it on display), and then starts walking off.

JOE
Runnin to the market! We outta anythin?

EXT. GROCERY STORE/PHARMACY - MORNING

A line of six people has formed outside the grocery store entrance. Joe stands in the middle.

A customer emerges from the store and an OLD MAN, the next up in line, steps forward to enter - with no mask. The masked EMPLOYEE manning the front door gently stops the man.

EMPLOYEE
Mask mandatory.

OLD MAN
I can't breathe.

EMPLOYEE
I'm sorry, sir. We offer complimentary masks. 'S store policy.

OLD MAN
I can't breathe with it.

EMPLOYEE
Then I can't let you in. Store policy.

The Old Man tries to enter, anyway.

TED (O.S.)
Whoa! Fred!

Joe looks back to see that TED is at the back of the line.

FRED (O.S.)
Hey hey!

Joe looks forward to now see that the Employee has SEIZED the old man, FRED, by the arm. Joe, suddenly inspired to action, steps out of line.

<p>JOE HEY! What're we doin? You can't handle him like that. Get your hands off.</p>	<p>EMPLOYEE I'm sorry, Sheriff.</p>
--	---

JOE
Let 'im in.

EMPLOYEE
Sheriff, 's store policy.

JOE
'S not enforceable. Let 'im in.

<p>TED Damn it, Joe. There's a mandate.</p>	<p>JOE (CONT'D) And this man can't breathe in the mask. I can't neither. Let 'im in.</p>
---	--

A loaded beat. Fred steps inside. The employee doesn't know what to do.

TED
Fred! You need a mask!

Joe, triumphant, re-joins the line.

INT. GROCERY STORE/PHARMACY - MINUTES LATER

Joe, maskless, walks up to the pharmacy booth. The eyes of masked customers hang on him.

JOE
(to the pharmacist)
Just need a refill.

PHARMACIST
Hi sheriff. Name and date a birth.

Joe notices FRED being ushered out of the store by the masked OWNER, leaving behind his grocery cart. A few masked customers clap their approval. Joe turns back to the pharmacist.

JOE
Louise Bodkin. September 18, 1976.

PHARMACIST
Haloperidol?

Joe nods and the pharmacist goes off. The STORE OWNER steps up to Joe.

OWNER
'Scuse me, sheriff. I'm sure sorry,
but you need a mask if you're gonna
be in here.

Ted stands just behind him.

JOE
I'm good.

A middle-aged female customer pipes up:

CUSTOMER
We only reach herd immunity if you
wear a mask!

JOE
That ain't right, honey. That's not
what that means.

TED
Joe--

JOE
(correcting)
"Sheriff."

TED
80 percent a folks wear masks, the
number a deaths goes down to half.
These're plain facts.

JOE

All right: you got your little statistics that change ever' day to keep the cattle in line, but this is about choice--

TED

There's a state mandate.

JOE

Not enforceable!

TED (CONT'D)

It *is* enforceable! The governor and the Department a Health made it so.

JOE

Well, New Mexico State Police won't be citin people that don't wear 'em! *That's* the policy *they* made! We just fuckin did this dance last night, man.

Joe, feeling the eyes on him, grabs some nearby sewing needles and thread. Ignoring everyone, he sets them on the counter and pulls out his phone.

Continuing to ignore the attention, Joe scrolls through his Facebook timeline. He comes across the headline for a *LIGHTNING ARROW NEWS* article: "*BURNED CORPSE FOUND AT 5G TOWER. Investigation Underway.*" A photo of OFFICER LAKOTA is featured.

The pharmacist arrives with his prescription.

PHARMACIST

Here y'are, sheriff.

JOE

(adding needle and thread)
And these.

Joe then notices Fred's left-behind grocery cart, and adds:

JOE (CONT'D)

And whatever Fred was tryin to buy before you kicked him out!

The pharmacist rings him up. Painfully awkward.

JOE (CONT'D)

(to Ted, re: meds)
You know who these are for?
Remember my wife?

Ted just glares.

MOMENTS LATER

Joe walks out of the store, holding two bags. Fred is standing outside, extremely distraught. He is taking manic photos of the grocery store on his phone.

Joe walks up to him and hands him a bag of groceries.

FRED
What's this?

JOE
You have a nice day.

Fred is stunned. As Joe walks off toward his car:

FRED
Sheriff! Wait! A pitcher! A pitcher!

Fred runs up to Joe to take a PHOTO together. Joe smiles for the photo and then continues to his car.

FRED (CONT'D)
THANK you! THANK you, sheriff!
DECENCY!!! DECENCY!!!

INT. JOE'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Joe gets into his car and starts driving. He is fraught. Wavering between feelings of humiliation and pride.

His phone then DINGS with a notification. He has been tagged in a photo on Facebook. He opens it to see that it's a photo posted by FRED BROWN; the photo that was just taken. The caption: "*One DECENT man left in Eddington!!!! Thank you, sherrif!!!!*"

Joe smiles. He drives for a stretch - thinking, thinking, thinking - and then pulls over to the side of the road. He turns on the CAMERA of his dash-mounted phone, and begins recording.

JOE
Ladies, gentlemen, what have ya - this is Joe Cross, Sheriff a Eddington county, and FIRST off: allow me to SAY: I'm asthmatic. I cannot breathe in these masks. Second off: there is no COVID in Eddington. Yet a state mandate says I cannot shop for food without riskin a asthma *attack*. If you also cannot breathe and are concerned about the harm caused by constantly takin in your own C.O.2., I am here to announce that as sheriff I will not be enforcin the mask mandate...and in the next months I will *in fact* be runnin for Mayor! I served you as Sheriff for seven years and it'll be my honor to serve you as Mayor.

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)

Don't fall for the lies. It's time to reopen our businesses. COVID may be a problem, but it sure ain't our problem. And this destroyed economy and the casual robbery a'our freedoms is now everyone's problem. Thank you.

Joe stops recording. He then starts playing it back.

JOE (V.O.)

(playing on the phone)

Ladies, gentlemen, what have ya - this is Joe Cross, Sheriff a--

WE CUT TO:

EMAIL SUBJECT HEADING: "INVITATION: COUNCIL MEETING @ TUES, MAY 26, 2020 1:30PM - 3PM (MT)"

INSERT: A ZOOM LINK IN AN EMAIL BODY.

CUT TO:

ZOOM MEETING

A glitchy image of TED fills the screen. (To the side of the screen is a CHAT thread, which has citizens chiming in - mostly in confusion.)

TED (ON ZOOM)

This is a new economy we're in and we're already in the rear view. And cloud-computin - not just that, but telehealth, remote learnin, things that'll make things BETTER are *here* now, they're *it*, whether you wanna do your research or not--

A MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN cuts in, her image taking over the screen. This is PAULA.

PAULA (ON ZOOM)

And forfeittin 30 years a property taxes?! What is that?!

TED (ON ZOOM)

When it brings this level a investment?! Makin us grow, givin us a future?! Hell yes!

PAULA
 But who the heck is it?
 Facebook?! Google?! Goddamn
 Gmail?! He can't say! Or he That *is* Google.
 Won't say! But he wants a Yes
 from everyone here! *Look for*
who benefits!

TED (ON ZOOM) (CONT'D)
 We *all* benefit, Paula! Enough! This is
 not just about bringin in jobs, which
 this *does*. It's about solutions to
 this pandemic! And now I gotta call
 the question. You call it, Phil.

PHIL, whom we met at Ted's bar, now takes over.

PHIL (ON ZOOM)
 Okay, uh: item 50. Third readin a'a
 resolution -

PAULA (ON ZOOM)
 Excuse me??

PHIL (ON ZOOM)
 - approv'in a series a six industrial
 revenue bonds for the construction a'a
 proposed data campus in Eddin'ton.
 Council member Garcia moves approval,
 seconded by council member Ross--

PAULA (ON ZOOM)
 No, damn it, what is this? A
 question needs to get seconded and
 I am the agreed-upon Chairwoman--

VOICE (V.O.)
 By who?! Illegally!

PAULA (ON ZOOM) (CONT'D)
 And BEFORE we proceed, I
 wanna make sure that we're
 ALL present for our votes to
 be counted and that folks
 ain't gettin kicked outta the
 meetin like last time.

TED (ON ZOOM)
 If you disrupt the meetin,
 you *will* be removed off it,
 Paula. *Anyone* who disrupts!

PAULA (ON ZOOM) (CONT'D)
 It's only the Chairman that
 can remove people, Ted! You
 have no authority!

PHIL (ON ZOOM)
 Point a order!
 (slams gavel)
 (MORE)

PHIL (ON ZOOM) (CONT'D)
 Council members MUTE themself until
 it's their turn to speak, and I now
 call the question! Item 50--

PAULA	WARREN
Nuh-uh! That is NOT how this works! How this works is we all, ALL get a chance to speak! And you cannot just call the question without it bein seconded--	And you did! Second! <i>Second!</i>

PHIL	PAULA
The question was called and I got my second. Point a order!	Ted Garcia has turned off people's lights in the middle of a global health pandemic!

INT. WARREN'S HOUSE - SAME TIME

Warren sits at his laptop in his living room. His WIFE washes dishes in the other room. As Paula launches into a diatribe, Warren hesitates and then goes for his phone.

PAULA (ON ZOOM)
 And now we talkin about some big secret Tech deal? Ted: you got a NDA or some magic piece a paper that YOU signed? Good for you! What about us??

Warren TEXTS Phil: *"get her off"*

As he sends that, he receives a TEXT from Michael: *"just warning! I didnt know!"* Followed by a LINK. Warren opens it. It's Joe's announcement video.

PAULA (ON ZOOM) (CONT'D)
 You're makin decisions about what to do with OUR town and you can't say what, but you want us to vote Yes 'cause it means money?

INT. TED'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Ted sits at his desk, facing his computer. The zoom bangs on.

PAULA (ON ZOOM)
 For who? Money for you I got no doubt, straight in your pocket - but what about your constituents? What about their businesses? You don't wanna hear it! But every other year you go around beggin people for their votes--

Paula DISAPPEARS mid-sentence. She is replaced by a confused OLD MAN.

OLD MAN (ON ZOOM)
Where'd she go? Did she get kicked off??

Ted texts Warren "*thank you! finally!*", but immediately receives a TEXT in response. It is a LINK to Joe's announcement video, along with the text "*dont kill the msseenger.*" Ted mutes himself on zoom, pops an earpod into his ear, and listens. He gradually goes PALE. Meanwhile:

VOICE (V.O.)
Fuckin A! Right on!

PHIL (ON ZOOM)
Okay. You may now elect a chairman.

OLD MAN (ON ZOOM)
No they goddamn can't!!
'Cause the vice chair is here, so I take charge--

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

JOE ENTERS, full of energy. Guy and Michael both look to him expectantly. They were just watching his announcement while eating lunch.

GUY
Sheriff? Is this real?

JOE
We gotta make up for lost time.
(to Michael)
Michael: get goin on a sign. You got Photoshop, right?

MICHAEL
My uncle does, but I think it expired.

The PHONE starts ringing.

JOE
Un-expire it and then go to Kinko's in Taos. "Joe Cross for Mayor." Can either a you draw?

Joe has gone to a BLACKBOARD to write at the top "*SLOGAN IDEAS.*" His E looks like a Disney E.

MICHAEL
I can sorta do like stick cartoons.

JOE (CONT'D)
Draw me a man wearin a face mask but he's got X's for eyes 'cause he's dead.

Joe answers the phone. He MUTES it momentarily to tell Guy:

JOE (CONT'D)
 We gotta get goin on signatures.
 Get ourself on the ballot.

Guy nods, obviously not understanding. Joe UN-MUTES the phone:

JOE (CONT'D)
 Sheriff's office!

TED (V.O.) (PHONE)
 Joe, I'm outside your office.

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Joe steps out to find Ted around the corner, wearing a mask.

JOE
 Mister Mayor. Spreadin joy?

Ted takes a moment to form his words.

TED
 I just wanted to apologize...if I
 offended you this mornin, or last
 night--

JOE
 No apology needed. You didn't.

TED
 Okay. 'Cause if I *did*...then that
 might help me unnerstand.

JOE
 Unnerstand what?

Brief pause.

JOE (CONT'D)
 Look, Mayor: I been thinkin about
 runnin for a long time. It's not the
 least personal, and I honestly think
 you done a mostly okay job! I just got
 my own vision a what this town can be,
 and I know I'll regret not at least
attemptin to try an' *execute* that.

Beat.

TED
 Listen. We never talked about it. The
 whole...*whatnot*, before you was with
 her...

Ted fumbles for the words. Joe plays dumb.

TED (CONT'D)

Do we just have it out right here?

JOE

I got no idea what you're tryin to say. But this is not that.

TED

Okay. I think it is.

JOE

Well, you don't think too *good*, Mayor. But here's what *I* think. You know what you actually are. And *I* know what you actually are. So let's just show folks what the other man is, and let *them* decide. Sound fair?

TED

Joe--

JOE

My name is for my friends. I'm the *Sheriff*. And you're the Mayor. Until you're not.

Ted laughs to himself ("I tried") and starts walking away.

TED

You're makin a mistake.

JOE

Is that why you ran here all panicked?

TED

I ran here to save you.

JOE

(mock-touched)

I'm tearin up!

TED

You made a mistake.

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - DAY

Joe's car rolls up to the house.

He hops out - a pep in his step - and pulls a handmade "*Joe Cross for Mayor*" SIGN out of the trunk. Its slogan is "*I CAN'T BREATHE*" and features a cartoon of a dead man wearing a mask (with X's for eyes) on his back, clutching his throat.

He PLANTS the sign in front of the driveway.

INT. JOE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Joe steps in, now holding flowers and the pharmacy goods, to the sound of hysterics in the other room.

DAWN (O.S.)
Baby, he won't win. There's no chance.

You gotta know what you know, baby.

LOUISE (O.S.)
That's not what I'm scared about!

They said I can't have stress!

INT. KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Dawn is standing at the locked door to Joe's bedroom, speaking to it, trying to "soothe."

DAWN
So STOP the stress. You KNOW this man! You KNOW his colors!

Joe peers in, hiding behind the corner. He sees the laptop on the kitchen table. It's open to Joe's announcement video - posted on Facebook.

LOUISE (O.S.)
I can't slip again! I can't!

PLEASE don't start that again!

DAWN (CONT'D)
So goddamn DON'T.
I swear: that you can even BE with this man!

No! It's the mystery a my life! After the father I gave you! I swear--

LOUISE (O.S.)
OH, WHAT FUCKIN FATHER D'YOU THINK YOU GAVE ME???

Dawn is taken aback. Suddenly furious:

DAWN
EXCUSE ME?!

Joe enters now.

JOE
Weez?!

DAWN (CONT'D)
(fired up)
OH!

Dawn storms up to him and snatches the flowers from his hand.

DAWN (CONT'D)
A bouquet! Sheep's clothing!

She jams the flowers into the trash.

DAWN (CONT'D)

How DARE you?? Has she not endured far enough?? Have you not seen her drove deep enough into the floor??

LOUISE (O.S.)

Mama, stop it!

DAWN

Stop WHAT?!

(to the door)

You can't hit the alarm and then tell me stop! When do I protect MYself?!

(to Joe, seething)

And you still wear that badge?! Her father brought you up! He passed his torch to you! And how d'you thank him??

JOE

(going up to the door)
Louise?!... Lou?!

DAWN (CONT'D)

Here come the words! The words are next! Let them not in!

Joe leaves.

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Joe has rounded the house to go to the WINDOW of his bedroom. Louise is sitting near the window, but when she sees him, she rises to go to the corner and faces the wall.

JOE

Louise baby?

LOUISE

You say you want me better and then you make her worse! You're watchin for the tiniest slip-up and then you push me off a cliff.

JOE

I'm NOT watchin you, baby.

LOUISE

You're always just waitin for it to happen again! You don't let her ever forget.

JOE

How do I do that?

LOUISE

She can't even go outside!

JOE (CONT'D)

Try to stop sayin "her," baby. Try to say "me."

LOUISE
 (suddenly scared)
 What do you mean??

DAWN (O.S.)
*What goddamn worms are you puttin
 in her brain?!*

Joe turns to see Dawn is now outside, standing halfway between him and the front door.

DAWN (CONT'D)
You see what you done?? She was better!

Joe walks away, rounding the next corner to go to ANOTHER WINDOW nearer Louise. She stands beside it, turning away.

LOUISE
 Why would you do this to me?

JOE
 I'm doin for us. We're in a rut, baby.
 We're nowhere. I wanna lift us up.

LOUISE
 I was better. Now people are
 lookin *here*, they're waitin
 for me to lose it again.

JOE (CONT'D)
 No they're not.

LOUISE
 I don't want it with Ted. That's YOUR
 thing, and mama's. 'S not mine.

JOE
 I'm defendin you, rabbit.

Joe is drawing out a pill from the prescription bag.

LOUISE
 I can't let myself slip again...

JOE
 I know.

LOUISE
 She *knows* it wasn't Ted. She *knows*
 who it was.

INT. CAR (MOVING) - SAME TIME

DRIVER'S POV: We are on a road approaching Joe's house, but we slow down to observe Joe talking to the window and Dawn on the other side of the house, spying on the conversation.

We now reveal that ERIC is the driver. BRIAN sits passenger.

ERIC
These fuckin people, bro...

EXT. PARKING LOT - EVENING

A "party" at an isolated, outdoor parking lot (in the middle of the desert). Many young people from the surrounding small towns (late teens to early twenties) have gathered to smoke weed and drink beer. They mostly wear masks on their chins.

Brian and Eric enter the scene. As they do, they pass MICHAEL, who leans against his car with a beer. He watches the party from a slight distance.

ERIC
Tricycle pig. Two o'clock.

BRIAN
Is he like spying?

Eric calls out to Michael:

ERIC
Hey bro!

Michael waves.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Keepin the peace over here?

Michael, aware he's being teased, just gives a tight-lipped smile and nod.

ERIC (CONT'D)
("rock on" signal)
Hell yeah.

Eric and Brian continue on. Annoyed, Michael sips his beer.

LATER

Brian and Eric stand together, holding beers. Brian is ogling a PRETTY GIRL (18) standing with her friend, confidently holding court. She's holding the book *Women, Race and Class* by Angela Davis. (This is the girl from the Tik-Tok that Brian was watching when we first met him.)

BRIAN
I love her.

ERIC
I dunno, bro. She's woke as fuck.
In like a annoying way.

BRIAN
She can be as woke as she wants.

Brian has started looking something up on his phone. He finds the Wikipedia page for Angela Davis.

ERIC
(going off)
I'm gettin another beer.

BRIAN
Dude, you have to drive us
back.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Fuck you.

Eric walks off to a table with beers.

Brian works up the nerve to approach the girl. This is SARAH.

BRIAN
Oh shit, I love that book.

SARAH
Oh dope.

BRIAN
You know she was awarded the Lenin
Peace Prize by the Soviet Union?

No response.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
I'm Brian.

SARAH
Hi.

BRIAN
I know you're Sarah. You were like
a year above me, I think.

The girl's friend (TINA) speaks up.

TINA
(to Brian)
I'm Tina. I'm from Las Cruces.

BRIAN
(to Sarah)
It's weird to be gathering, right?
Feels like this'll be in the news
in a few days. Super-spreader...

SARAH
Yeah, six feet is super important.

Brian nods and then self-consciously takes a step back (in case she just gave him a hint).

BRIAN

You guys want a beer?

They sort of nod - not really.

Brian awkwardly recedes and heads over to the BEER TABLE.

We now shift our attention to MICHAEL, who watches Brian. From his POV, Brian gathers three beers and then turns around to see something that makes him FREEZE. Our POV pans over to the object of Brian's attention...

Eric is now conversing with Sarah. She looks reticent at first, but then Eric says something that provokes a LAUGH. We PAN back to Brian, who watches this with anger. After staring for a moment, he begins to walk over.

Michael looks very irritated.

We shift our attention to ERIC and SARAH as Brian approaches.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Hey dude.

ERIC

This is Tina apparently. Her uncle died a COVID last week.

TINA

(been waiting to talk)

Yeah, in Orlando. No pre-existin conditions AND he was always masked. People wearin masks still got a 70% chance a catchin it from COVID-positive people with no mask.

Brian has turned to look for Eric and Sarah, but they've distanced themselves as Eric shows Sarah funny memes that he saved on his phone. They LAUGH.

SARAH

Bernieeee, whyyyyy???

TINA (O.S.)

She's just tryna make her shit-ass boyfriend jealous.

Brian turns back to Tina.

BRIAN

She's got a boyfriend?

TINA

Sorta, not really. She dumped him after she got dragged for like a month on her socials 'cause he's a cop.

She gestures to MICHAEL, who is now staring daggers at Eric and Sarah.

BRIAN

Him??

TINA

Yeah. Michael. But she doesn't fuck with cops.

Brian is already looking this up. He's gone to Instagram.

BRIAN

What's his last name?

In the BG, Michael gets into his car and drives off.

MINUTES LATER

Brian and Tina are back with Sarah and Eric. Eric waxes cynical about the social justice sacred cows. Sarah looks impressed.

ERIC

Yeah, just seein all these white people - not like you, you guys are chill - but like so many privileged white kids suddenly cryin about "anti-racism"--

SARAH

No, totally, I know.

ERIC

It's just kinda like, what the fuck?

SARAH

Totally. I try to be super aware of the hypocrisy of me even TRYING to be like a fake activist.

ERIC

Good.

Brian looks irked.

BRIAN

But like, at the same time, not all white kids are all *that* privileged either. Like, there's different sortsa privilege. Like just the difference between race and, like, *class*.

Sarah and Eric look at him. He's skating close to thin ice.

ERIC

You drop your red cap back there, Bri?

BRIAN
 (laughs, embarrassed)
 Shut up! You know what I mean.

They all laugh, but Brian is clearly annoyed.

LATER

Eric and Brian are walking back to their car.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
 You have a nice time cock-blocking me?

ERIC
 Bro, what? We *both* took a shot.

BRIAN
 You *know* I like her. Makin me sound like a fuckin Trumper?? You know the shit with my parents.

EXT. TED'S HOUSE - PORCH - NIGHT

Ted sits on the porch with his advisor, Warren. Both masked.

WARREN
 I'm not worried about the sheriff. Just the shit with his wife - you can shut him right down.

TED
 Listen to me: I don't wanna go there.

ERIC'S CAR drives up and parks in the BG during the following:

WARREN
 So you *don't* go there. You just threaten. He doesn't want you goin there, either. You say "you don't touch this and I won't touch that."

TED
 Doesn't even matter She's already rung the alarm bell. Yellin "Big Tech."

And if it does get out there, we just say "yeah, and Tech means jobs."

WARREN (CONT'D)
 Not publicly. That's where we gotta keep it.

No. You can't say "jobs." Not when you're lockin everyone down.

ERIC has walked up to the porch.

TED
What is this? We stealin my car now?

ERIC
You said I could.

TED
I said what? Where the hell were you? Look how late it is.

ERIC
I told you. With Brian.

Eric enters the house.

TED
It's too fuckin late. It's quarantine, not playtime. You represent more than just you.

Eric, now in the kitchen, gathers the mail.

TED (CONT'D)
Wash your hands! COVID stays alive on paper for at least 5 days!

INT. ERIC'S ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Eric sits at his laptop. He's on reddit. The door opens. Eric closes his laptop and turns to see TED popping his head in.

TED
Where were you at?

ERIC
I told you. With Brian.

TED
Where with Brian?

ERIC
To a outside thing. We wore masks and stayed distanced. No one was there.

TED
You don't seem to get this.
What's the rule? No
gatherins.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Bro! We were distanced!

TED
(suddenly dark)
...What'd you just call me?

ERIC
I obviously meant dad. Or *Sir*.

Ted enters the room, closing the door behind him.

TED
Don't get confused. I'm not your
little pal.

ERIC
You think I'm confused about that?

Ted's eyes burn. He then notices a hand-written LETTER on Eric's desk.

TED
I know that's not homework.

ERIC
Yeah. 'Cause it's summer.

TED
Who's it for?

ERIC
(shrugs)
...Her birthday's this week.

TED
Where would you even send it? She
ain't dropped us any pins.

ERIC
Well, that must be why it's there
and not sent.

TED
You think you'd even *remember* her
birthday if she was here? You forgot
my birthday last month. She could be
dead in one of the hospital COVID
tents for all we know.

ERIC
(can't help it)
...She's a fuckin bitch.

TED
Yes, she is, and watch your mouth. When
someone dumps you, you say "good
riddance," not birthday wishes. A
person like that is a tumor. You cut it
off or it infects your whole life. And
you sure as hell don't cry when it
disappears on its own.
(getting heated)
And it's past midnight. I'm the one
forcin lockdown, and now I got this
gringo pig goin up against me--

ERIC
What does *that* mean?

TED
Look up from your phone! The sheriff
is runnin for mayor. And now my own
son?? Underminin my policies?

ERIC
I'm not even! I was masked! I was
distanced! Nobody even saw me!

TED
And I'm not your fuckin bro.

Eric just nods, exasperated.

TED (CONT'D)
Fuckin 1 AM. If anyone saw you out,
everythin I'm doin here is
contradicted. Don't be selfish. Think
about others. I love you.

Ted leaves, slamming the door. Eric flips off the door.

INT. BRIAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Brian lies in bed, scrolling through his Twitter timeline,
liking several meme posts in a row.

He then scrolls past a *Time* article: "*In a First, Twitter Adds
'Unsubstantiated' Warning to 2 of President Trump's Tweets.*"

He then arrives at a meme with two images. The first, captioned
"*My Plans,*" features young Macaulay Culkin smiling sweetly in
My Girl. The second, captioned "*2020,*" features a swarming
beehive. Brian LAUGHS. He LIKES and QUOTE TWEETS "*lol*".

He then scrolls to an ARTICLE that reads: "*Hundreds Demand
Justice In Minneapolis After Police Killing Of George Floyd*"

He scrolls past this, ignoring two more posts about Floyd's
murder, and then...

He arrives at a quote of the same article POSTED BY SARAH
with the text "*BLACK LIVES MATTER!!!!*"

Brian hangs on this. An idea seems to be kindling.

He LIKES the tweet.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Joe is slipping FLIERS under shop doors on Main Street.

INT. CROSS HOUSE - NIGHT

Joe comes home to a DARK, EMPTY HOUSE.

JOE

Lou?

He walks to his bedroom, whose door is shut. He tries turning the knob, but it's LOCKED.

JOE (CONT'D)

Rabbit?

Joe roams away from the door, confused.

JOE (CONT'D)

Dawn?!

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Joe is asleep on the fold-out couch. Warm morning light plays on his face.

The sound of a CAR idling to a stop outside. This WAKES Joe. He looks to the window to see Louise and Dawn returning.

The front door opens, and Dawn and Louise enter.

LOUISE

Oh, you're up.

DAWN

Back to sleep, Joe.

Louise walks past him, avoiding eye contact.

LOUISE

'S okay, pudge. Don't let us wake you.

JOE

What's okay?

She arrives at the bedroom and tries the knob, but it's locked. She looks confused.

DAWN

I got it.

Dawn walks up to the door and UNLOCKS it with a key.

JOE

You locked it?

DAWN

You forfeited your right to that bed yesterday.

Louise starts getting undressed. She is reading something on her phone. Joe walks to the doorway. Louise has her back to him.

JOE
You just gettin back?

LOUISE
She needed me to drive her.

JOE
To where?

LOUISE
Just a sorta concert thing in
Albuquerque. I needed to get out
anyways. I'm so tired.

Louise climbs into bed. Joe stares at her. Feeling his gaze,
she keeps her back to him.

LOUISE (CONT'D)
...I'm so tired.

Beat.

JOE
I love you.

LOUISE
Me too.

Joe goes back to the couch, climbs in, and pulls the LAPTOP from
the side table. He opens it to be faced with an endless lineup
of INTERNET TABS. Currently open is a BLOG about government
cover-ups and the strategic distraction of the pandemic. This
was written by "Vernon Jefferson Peak" (photo included).

Joe sighs and closes that tab, only to be faced with another
article: "*Is Hillary Already In Gitmo? (And Before You
Answer, Remember: She Has A Body Double)*". He closes that to
find another article about deaths connected to 5G, etc etc.

Joe now searches Google - the internet is in incognito mode -
for the "*open letter to NM governor*".

MINUTES LATER

Joe sits up, now wearing a strapped "posture corrector." The
laptop is propped on his lap, and he's looking at a word
document titled "*Open Letter to Governor Lujan Grisham (a
response to HER response to prior open letter)*."

Joe begins typing. He then STOPS, and pulls out his phone. He
starts recording dictation.

JOE
Dear Governor, I have read your
response to the open letter that was
signed by nine of our state's most...

Joe types "respectible" into Thesaurus.com. He is corrected with "did you mean respectable?" Yes he did. After gathering the results:

JOE (CONT'D)

...esteemed representatives, and even though the current Mayor of my town refused to sign *his* name, I hopen to retro-additively add *my* name to the letter, and to now give *my* response to *your* response.

EXT. ROAD - MORNING

Joe is jogging as his dictation continues in voice-over. Midway through the scene he will pass another jogger wearing a face mask. They both nod hello.

JOE (V.O.)

You say the letter quote-"*elides* the glarin fact that New Mexico's success in combatin the virus is due to the fact that the present administration -

INT. BATHROOM - MORNING

Through the next stretch of V.O., Joe struggles through sit-ups while the shower heats up...then vigorously scrubs himself in the shower...then trims his beard at the mirror.

JOE (V.O.)

- has taken strong steps to protect New Mexicans from the kinda proudly anti-scientific bluster and misjudgment encapsyulated in the letter"-unquote.

INT. JOE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Joe, new-and-improved, pops his head in. Louise, lying in bed with her back to Joe, is reading something on her phone. It's a block of text on a Reddit thread (with many words in emphatic CAPS). In the headline, the words "*Where We Go ONE, We Go ALL.*"

JOE

Let's have a night together. Just you and me.

No answer from Louise.

JOE (CONT'D)

Rabbit? Tonight? I'll cook.

LOUISE

(turning face in pillow)
Oh god, you'll cook...!

JOE

...7:30?

Silence from Louise's back, then:

LOUISE

Fine.

JOE

Yes??

(no answer from her)

Okay, tonight! 7:30!

He leaves with a spring in his step.

EXT. ANTIQUE/HARDWARE STORE - MORNING

Joe, in uniform, stands outside a closed HARDWARE STORE doubling as an ANTIQUE/SECONDHAND SHOP, talking to the owner. The front window features a racist LAWN JOCKEY welcoming visitors. Joe extends an "I CAN'T BREATHE" sign toward the owner.

JOE (V.O.)

Well, allow me to respond by repeatin a point made in the original letter, which actually made a heck a'a lot more sense than you made it sound...

The Owner shakes his head no.

EXT. GUN STORE - MORNING

Joe is hanging his sign in the window of a large gun store, watched by the owner.

JOE (V.O.)

The so-called "science" is disputed worldwide. No one can agree on anythin.

EXT. HOUSES - MORNING

Joe introduces himself (as a candidate) to DIFFERENT PEOPLE on their respective lawns. Always distanced.

JOE (V.O.)

Our president's takin hydrochloriquine many times daily and feels great, while others claim it to be Satanic poison or some other such nonsense.

One homeowner enthusiastically gives Joe his signature.

HOMEOWNER

GOOD for you, damn it!

INT. GROCERY STORE - MORNING

Joe is shopping for dinner recipes at the market. He selects the most expensive gourmet options.

As his groceries get rung up, he shakes hands with the masked cashier, and then introduces himself (as a mayoral candidate) to another masked worker.

JOE (V.O.)

New Mexico towns borderin Texas now have their residents runnin 'cross the border to patronize *their* businesses at the expense a'our own. Why?

Before leaving the store, he turns back to add:

JOE

I see you wearin 'em, but I will NOT police face masks. It's your right to do what you *believe* is right!

INT. JUANITA'S RESTAURANT - DAY

Joe is now talking to Paula, who owns the town's most popular restaurant, *Juanita's*. They are both masked. In the BG, a masked Latino Man hands take-away food to customers.

JOE (V.O.)

Beause you condemned our businesses to death in the name a what I see as a clear LACK a scientific honesty.

EXT. JUANITA'S COURTYARD - LATER

Joe sits with Paula at one of the tables in the lovely courtyard. They are deep in conversation; Paula spilling beans about the data center tax incentive resolution vote:

PAULA

I'm goddamn *sure* he's gettin kickbacks. No way possible he's not.

Joe is nodding, eyes wide.

PAULA (CONT'D)

And now we're savin some mystery company millions, maybe BILLIONS? Gettin Ted a new house? While us yokels can go kick rocks? And I'm s'posed to shut up??

INT. POLICE CAR (MOVING) - MORNING

Joe is now driving down a highway, continuing the speech by dictating aloud to the voice recorder on his phone. He passes a HIGHWAY SIGN that reads: "Taos - 23 Miles"

JOE

Masks, which've been declared useless
against the virus for-basically-ever,
are now legally required -

INT. KINKO'S (TAOS) - DAY

Joe is talking up the owner of a Kinko's (whose front door bears the notice: "*One Customer At A Time*") while Michael gathers a new set of signs. There are four different stacks. One reads "*KEEP BIG TECH OFF OUR LAND. No More Ted Garcia, No More Corruption.*" Another reads "*Dont let Eddington, NM become Facebook, NM.*" Another reads "*Keep TECH's Business Out Of YOUR Business.*" The last reads "*YOU ARE BEING MANIPULATED!*"

JOE (V.O.)

- but there's been a Radical Left ban
on the one single miracle cure we got,
simply 'cause our President has got
behind it? I'm sorry, ma'am, but I
don't know if I should laugh or cry.
And don't get me STARTED on the
discrimination against quote-unquote
non-essential businesses.

INT. POLICE CRUISER - DAY

Joe's car is parked outside the county courthouse. He is on his phone, reading over his draft in an unsent email. He then copies it and pastes it onto Facebook...

JOE (V.O.)

It is *my* opinion that *all* businesses
in this great country should be
celebrated as essential.

...and POSTS it.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Joe now stands on the steps of the county courthouse. Beside him is his new "*KEEP BIG TECH OFF OUR LAND. No More Ted Garcia, No More Corruption*" sign. He speaks into a karaoke microphone (which is plugged into a miniature amp) to a void of onlookers. Only Michael and Guy are present. Michael FILMS Joe on his phone while Guy finishing painting a big sign on the sidewalk.

JOE

And I mean *All* businesses. Not just
your Big Tech empires in the blue
counties that keep the gravy trains
runnin come election time. Who are you
responsible to, gov'nor? Us the people?
Or them? That's the question you and
Mayor Garcia needs to ask yourself...

Eric rides up on a bike, holding out his phone and filming Joe. He comes to a stop.

ERIC

Bro, who're you talkin to? There's no one here.

Michael hides his face from Eric, not wanting to be filmed.

JOE

And here - we got a Eddin'ton youngster.

ERIC

(to Michael)

Who you workin for, bro?

JOE

(continuing)

He hasn't entered the workforce yet, so he doesn't know what it's like to hear "you will DIE if you go back to work. Unless you work for Facebook!"

ERIC

Hey, tell 'em about the time you had to arrest your wife!

Eric rides off on his bike.

JOE

(rattled)

But folks...that *is* what they're sayin.

Joe, now feeling challenged and humiliated, suddenly addresses people that are not there (for the benefit of Michael's video):

JOE (CONT'D)

Pardon me, please.

(to Michael)

Pause! Delete that last shit.

Joe puts down the mic and runs to his car.

ERIC, meanwhile, is riding away. As he does, he notices on the street to his right: A SMALL GATHERING, including BRIAN and SARAH. Eric idles to a stop. Brian and Sarah are standing with six other kids (none Black), all touting signs and tepidly protesting.

PROTESTER

Black lives matter! Black lives matter!

Eric hesitates, compelled to approach the group, but then he notices behind him: JOE'S CRUISER pulls out of its parking space.

Now scared, Eric pedals away, fleeing the scene.

INT. JOE'S CRUISER (MOVING) - SAME TIME

Joe has started driving to follow Eric, who now races away in the near distance.

JOE

Oh yeah?

Two blocks ahead of Joe, Eric turns right.

JOE (CONT'D)

Oh yeah??

Joe accelerates and SWINGS RIGHT at the next street, clearly planning to catch up to Eric, but sees the assembly of protesters in his immediate way. He HITS THE BRAKES to avoid running into them.

JOE (CONT'D)

CHRIST!

PROTESTERS

BLACK LIVES MATTER!

Joe steps out of the car and walks toward the pitiful gathering. Brian holds up his phone and films Joe's approach.

JOE

What's goin on here, guys?

SCRAWNY KID

Hands up, don't shoot!

SARAH

We have a right to assembly!

JOE

Okay. What's the issue?

BRIAN

We're protesting George Floyd!

JOE

Why? What'd *he* do?

A scrawny kid yells:

SCRAWNY KID

Black Lives Matter!

JOE

(startled)

Okay! Jesus!

(starting to recede)

You know you need to file these?

County commission needs to sign off, I need to sign off. I'll look the other way 'cause I agree with that -

(points to BLM sign)

- but, for next time, you gotta file.

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)

If you kids need water or somethin,
let us know.

Joe goes back to his car, oblivious but unnerved. He drives back toward City Hall. We hear the Scrawny Kid: "*Enough is enough!*"

EXT. ALLEY - SAME TIME

Eric stands in an alley between two buildings. He is hiding from Joe, but also searching Instagram on his phone.

He finds that Sarah ACCEPTED HIS FRIEND REQUEST. He goes to her page.

Posts about George Floyd and *#blacklivesmatter* dominate her profile. One post is a memorial video of Floyd against a Muni Long song. Another is an advertisement for a free-to-download book, *The End of Policing*. Eric "likes" every post.

Eric then clicks on her STORIES. One story is a flyer for an EVENT that she is attending: "*Black Lives Matter Eddington.*" It was posted by "*black.lives.eddington.brian*".

INT. CITY HALL - SAME TIME

Guy is still painting a SIGN on the ground. Michael stands above him, taking a photo on his phone.

GUY

I don't need pictures, I need
help. 'S like you got no
purpose.

MICHAEL

You yelled when I *tried* to
help. And this is a progress
update. Sheriff asked.

Joe's car pulls up.

JOE

Michael, there's a 'ssembly round the
corner back there. If they don't got
a permit, can you disperse 'em?

GUY

I can go.

JOE

I asked Michael.

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Michael rounds the corner to find the protest, where Sarah is currently distracted by a TikTok she's found on her phone:

SARAH

Oh my GOD! They're shooting rubber
bullets! He was just walking home!

Michael slows down when he sees Sarah (not to mention that she's with Brian). Now nervous, he hesitates, then:

MICHAEL

Hey there.

Brian freezes, knowing Michael's connection to Sarah.

SARAH

You coming to join us?

Michael arrives.

MICHAEL

Sorry, but can you show me like a permit that says you can do this?

SARAH

We don't need police permission to protest police violence, Michael.

MICHAEL

I could need to disperse you, then.

SARAH

How you plan to do that? By force?
(then)

How do you feel about what happened, Michael? Not as a cop.

MICHAEL

...'S outragin. 'S a terrible incident.

SARAH

You're wearing a uniform of a system built on hundreds of years of institutionalized racism!

Michael hesitates. A lot is going on behind his eyes.

MICHAEL

Okay. Well. I still just gotta make sure. I'm just gonna...

Michael has gestured to the end of the block. He walks there and stands awkwardly. As he does so, Sarah turns to Brian:

SARAH

How many people did you invite?

BRIAN

More than this. It's still early.

Sarah rolls her eyes. "*It's not THAT early.*" Brian pulls up his video of the recent Joe interaction on TIKTOK.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Oh shit, we already got over 300 likes!

SARAH

Yeah, but that's also just like Not Enough. There's a protest at the Round House in Santa Fe. That's where the numbers start to count. Look:

Sarah has pulled up a video of the Santa Fe protest. She shows Brian.

SARAH (CONT'D)

And it can't just be today! It's good we're protesting, but like, it needs to be a daily practice and it needs to be widespread and systemic, the same way white supremacy is.

BRIAN

Yeah, I mean, I obviously agree with that.

Sarah pulls up a chart on her phone and shows it to Brian. Michael lingers uneasily in the BG.

SARAH

Here: these are the eight white identities. Right now you're white critical. MAYBE you're a white traitor, but not yet. The goal should be to become white abolitionist, which is "changing institutions, dismantling whiteness -

INT. BRIAN'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - EVENING

Brian sits at the dining table for dinner, explaining the eight white identities to his MOTHER and FATHER (both 60s).

BRIAN

- and not allowing whiteness to reassert itself." But we're all basically light-years away from that.

Long silence.

BRIAN'S FATHER

Are you fuckin retarded? You're white.

INT. CROSS HOUSE - EVENING

The clock on the wall, in the kitchen, reads **6:40**. Through the window, Joe's car is seen pulling up to the house. Joe runs in to hustle to the kitchen...

JOE
Lou?! Dawn?!

Silence.

Joe smiles, plops down the groceries and starts filling a pot with water.

INT. JOE'S KITCHEN - EVENING

Water boils on the stove while Joe, in a shirt and underwear, chops vegetables. A sauce pan has onions and garlic simmering. Joe's laptop, on the kitchen table, displays a ZOOM CALL WITH GUY.

JOE
It's a bad apple across the country, in Minneapolis. 'S nothin to do with us!

GUY (ON ZOOM)
This one's bigger! Fuckin riots already? Listen to this video:

Guy plays AUDIO off his phone:

PROTESTER (V.O.)
Indigenous nations gonna have resurgences and be buildin back up and tearin shit down! We gonna need treaty-buildin and a fuckin brick in both hands! Abolition, bro! I'm a fuckin communist, bro!

Joe's phone DINGS with a new FACEBOOK NOTIFICATION. He clicks on it to see a *NEW MEXICAN* article about him. Its headline: "*Small-Town Sheriff Runs for Mayor and Pens Open Letter to Governor.*"

Joe CLAPS with excitement.

GUY (ON ZOOM)
(reading phone)
Oh shit: it's started. Two cops killed at a protest in Portland.

INT. JOE'S BATHROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Joe stands bare-assed over the toilet (his pants around his ankles) while trimming his pubic hair with an electric trimmer. The laptop is turned to face the wall as they all keep talking. (A photo of Louise's father hangs over the toilet.)

GUY (V.O.)
Holy God! Lookit this! ANTIFA sendin masked militants into small towns - Texas, Missouri, North Carolina.
(MORE)

GUY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Settin fire to buildins, blowin people
 up! Snipin! Shootin bystanders! Read
 this shit! They just found a quote-
 "cache a explosives--

INT. BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER

Joe is now getting dressed in front of a mirror. He tries on two different shirts. His laptop is on the bed. Guy is currently giving a play-by-play of a video he's watching.

JOE
 What do you think, Mike? Not as police.

MICHAEL (ON ZOOM)
 I mean...it's complicated. I unnerstand
 the human aspect of it. Losin a loved
 one in that kinda manner...

The hallway has started to fill with smoke and the SMOKE ALARM goes off in the kitchen. Joe runs to attend to it.

GUY (ON ZOOM)
 Fuckin fentanyl in his system, too.

The clock reads: **7:02**

LATER

The clock now reads **7:28**

Joe has set the table (including flowers) and is now placing a hot bowl of freshly prepared pasta in the center. He looks expectantly out the window.

LATER

The clock now reads **9:33**

A half-empty wine bottle rests beside an empty one. A plate has been placed atop the pasta bowl to retain heat/freshness. Joe's laptop is now on the table and playing live Fox News coverage of the George Floyd protests. Joe is ASLEEP.

The SOUND of an approaching car is followed by HEADLIGHTS shining through the window, momentarily illuminating Joe, before continuing past and parking on the other side of the house. This WAKES Joe.

Outside laughter precedes the DOOR OPENING to reveal Dawn and Louise with THREE FRIENDS. Two men and a woman. Dawn sees Joe and doesn't miss a beat.

DAWN
 Aw shucks! Whadya know?!

NICOLETTE

Did you know: in 1919: the Federal District Court of Missouri pronounced white flour unfit to human consumption. Just like seed oils now.

DAWN

Yet people listen to Fauci and the CDC like their very breath depends on it.
(struck by a thought)
Wait. Who was born in 1919?

Vernon notices the wall of Louise's dolls. He walks along them, admiring.

VERNON

These are somethin.

DAWN

Those're all Lou! She been makin 'em just like that since she was ten.

VERNON

(to Louise)
You're a compulsive artist.

LOUISE

'S just a hobby.

DAWN

Ever'body needs one! The worst times a my life was when I fell outta function with my hobbies.

Vernon comes to an embroidery of a peculiar scene: a girl's back, sitting on grass. Cast over the girl is the imposing shadow of a man.

VERNON

You can call art-making a hobby, but it's higher than that. God speaking through you. You speaking back.

JOE

(eyes on Louise)
...I agree with that.

Vernon now comes to a photo of Richmond.

VERNON

This one gets a lotta real estate.

DAWN

That's Lou's father, Richmond. The original sheriff! Passed away seven years ago.

(MORE)

DAWN (CONT'D)
 (to Joe)
 You were with 'im.

Joe nods. A fraught memory.

NICOLETTE
 I'm sorry to hear that.

DAWN
 Heart just stopped in his chest. Who
 knows if he coulda actually made it...

JOE
 (coolly defensive)
 I do.

Vernon is watching this dynamic with curious eyes.

VERNON
 Generations of law enforcement.

Dawn rolls her eyes at that idea.

Vernon looks to Louise, whose head is down, as if in
 contemplation of the floor at her feet.

LATER

Will is currently recounting his life story with eerie calm.
 Everyone sits around, drinking coffee and eating pie.

WILL
 You got the Ninth Circle...then
 there's Octopus - that's an arm of
 the Vatican. As a child victim of
 mind control, I had to go through
 endless years of treatment. When my
 abuser died, my brain totally reset.

NICOLETTE
 They announced it as suicide, but
 he was *absolutely* murdered for not
 adequately programming him.

Louise and Dawn listen to this with horrified expressions.
 Joe looks more bemused.

JOE
 What *did* he do?

Will hesitates. Vernon steps in.

VERNON
 Will was one of many children who were
 kidnapped and taken to a secret hunting
 party in Northern California.
 (MORE)

VERNON (CONT'D)

A privately owned forest grove, where they were stripped nude, raped, hunted down...killed in just about every case.

JOE

This sounds like a whole *gang* a pedophiles. You were just talkin about one guy.

WILL

He's the one I got assigned to. It was his duty to kill me after, but he couldn't do it 'cause he was in love with me. He was the father of an actor you know. I don't dare say whose name -
 (points meaningfully to all the phones in the room)
 - but he has two Oscars. Three other movie stars' parents died that same week.

NICOLETTE

All confirmed Luciferians.

Louise, who has been listening with rapt attention, has started wagging her foot. The story has gotten her wired. Joe notices.

NICOLETTE (CONT'D)

We go to Brussels next. Our complaints are under review by the International Common Law Court of Justice.

Genuinely moved, Louise can't help herself:

LOUISE

It's evil. You gotta look at the kids first. To see how a society treats its people. Always it starts with kids.
 (to Will)
 What happened to you. And to so many others -

Vernon looks at her seriously. *Taking* her seriously.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

(to Nicolette)
 - and you! Little girls...

Dawn's eyes narrow.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Like what's happenin in -- I showed you the piece. In DC?

Louise goes to the laptop and pulls up an article.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

(reading)

The senators...there's senators and men in Congress - they enlist normal men or men on lower levels - but fathers! All fathers a little girls - just like *yours* was a father. Right?

Dawn leans forward now, hesitant. The word "father" jabs at her.

DAWN

Lou. Sometimes it's just to listen...

LOUISE

(finding the info)

And they invite 'em into their clubs and throw money at 'em and give 'em government jobs, and in return *the fathers give their daughters over - to do whatever they want with.*

Will sees Dawn trying to get a word in edge-wise. He assures her:

WILL

This is good. This is what it is.

LOUISE

(getting feverish,
finding new articles)

And everyone just thinks they went missin. These're the girls on the milk cartons!

(finds an article)

Look! This one!

DAWN

Lou...!

LOUISE

This girl was just fourteen years old. She was gave away to the Secretary a Defense, whose shoes - look: his red shoes are made from a baby - he's on tape braggin about it, you can *hear* the whole thing - and he made his daughter pregnant - *at thirteen!* - *he gave her hormones and he raped her - they always rape their fuckin kids - and he gave away her baby for another sacrifice!*

(tears in eyes)

And the mothers get silenced and if they interfere, they get disappeared! Like the wife a the Oregon governor - she went missin. Her body's missin, but ever'body knows! It's a system! Bohemian Grove! They bring their own daughters--

Dawn BURSTS out of her chair.

DAWN

OKAY!!

Dawn goes to the sink and loudly DROPS her cup and plate into the pile of dishes.

DAWN (CONT'D)

(addled, to the room)

I'm sorry. I feel offended for you people. You tell your stories, very personal things - it's hard enough! You don't need histrionics to compete with.

(to Louise)

I'm sorry! But you gotta see yourself! You need to be aware.

(to the room)

I'm sorry.

Dawn walks out of the room to her fold-out mattress.

DAWN (CONT'D)

I need to go to bed. I'm ruinin the night now. I'm sorry.

She gets into bed, turning her back to them.

DAWN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

Will and Nicolette and Vernon look uneasy. Louise is humiliated.

LOUISE

(to them)

I didn't mean to take over...

Will and Nicolette smile kindly at her and shake their head.
"Not at all. You did nothing wrong."

VERNON

(quietly to Louise)

Those things are real.

(louder, an announcement)

It's late!

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

FROM JOE'S POV: Louise sends off Vernon and the others. She hugs them goodbye.

Joe stands at the window, watching this.

INT. JOE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joe climbs into bed. Louise is lying down already. After a bout of silence:

JOE
Can I ask you...there's a question
I've had, ever since...

Louise doesn't turn to him.

JOE (CONT'D)
That baby. I'll never mention it
ever again.

Louise's eyes are blank.

JOE (CONT'D)
What possessed you?

LOUISE
...I was takin her to the police. I
thought she was lost.

Beat.

JOE
I did see the security footage.
After I picked you up.

LOUISE
After you arrested me.

JOE
(defensive)
Did I handcuff you? Did I take you
to jail? I just showed up. If I
didn't, it woulda been worse.

LOUISE
Yeah, you said.

JOE
But you don't agree.

Beat.

JOE (CONT'D)
You saw her with her father...

Louise keeps looking at the ceiling. She shakes her head.

LOUISE
No.

JOE

I saw, rabbit. You watched her dad go round the corner and you took her outta the carriage and you walked straight out.

Louise is silent.

JOE (CONT'D)

You can tell me. You know I'm on your side. Always. No matter what. I just wanna understand.

LOUISE

I thought she was lost. I was takin her to the police.

INT. JOE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Joe wakes up in an empty bed.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Joe, dressed in his uniform, steps out to find Dawn on the couch, watching a Youtube video providing evidence that COVID is a mandmade virus designed to eliminate 90% of the world population.

JOE

Do you know where she went?

Dawn ignores him.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

The stake for a SIGN is driven into the earth of a sidewalk by Guy. The sign reads: *"TOWN HALL TOMORROW! At Juanita's! 6 PM! Joe Cross For MAYOR! Free Food! Open forum! Lets get into it!"*

Over at the sheriff's office, Michael can be seen displaying the sign in the window.

EXT. JUANITA'S RESTAURANT - LATE MORNING

Joe stands outside Juanita's with his karaoke microphone. Beside him is the Town Hall sign. His phone is on a tripod, recording video. As he speaks, a stereo plays aspirational music. *To his side is a small queue of people waiting to order breakfast burritos (one person allowed inside at a time).*

JOE

Town Hall meetin, here, tonight, 6 pm. Free food. Free margaritas. Free Eddington - from tyranny! Here in the beautiful Juanita's courtyard.

The camera tracks to the left of Joe to frame up on the open entrance to the beautiful COURTYARD, in which Michael and Paula are assembling fold-up chairs, all facing a microphone.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Joe pushes his cart down an aisle, gathering platters and extra drinks for the Town Hall meeting. As he does so, he wears a bulky TOWN HALL SIGN, draped over his front and back.

Up ahead, he sees that a few people have congregated below the MOUNTED TV. Hushed outrage among them.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

The fuck're these fuckers doin'?

Joe approaches to investigate. It's NEWS footage of a BLACK PICKUP TRUCK driving into a city CHURCH, smashing down its doors at 80 MPH. This is followed by a PUNCHED-IN FREEZE-FRAME of the driver: it is a masked man dressed in black. "Antifa gear."

OTHER MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

They're drivin into churches!

Finally, footage of black-clad "protesters" lighting a SIGN OF FLAMES on a wall that reads "DEFUND PIGS".

MINUTES LATER

Joe is being rung up at the register. A CALL comes in from GUY. He takes it.

JOE

Y'ello?

GUY

It's here, sheriff! The riots are fuckin HERE!

JOE

Guy, relax. I saw 'em yesterday...

A CALL from "John - antique store" come in.

JOE (CONT'D)

Hold up.

Joe answers the new call.

JOE (CONT'D)

John--

ANTIQUÉ STORE OWNER (V.O.)

Where in the hell are you people?! All my goddamn windows smashed to hell and I can't get a fuckin--

INT. CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Joe is speeding from the market. Platters are stacked on the passenger seat. He's on speakerphone with Paula.

PAULA (V.O.)
We gotta cancel this!

JOE
Paula, it's nothin. We'll disperse it.

Joe NOTICES the gun store to his side. His campaign sign is no longer up. In fact, it's been replaced by another sign: *"The Future Is Knocking? Well, Ted Garcia Wants To Open The Door!"*

JOE (CONT'D)
Fuck. Our sign got took down at the...

As his head swivels, tracking as he overtakes the hardware store (while slowing down), someone JUMPS in front of his car, slamming on the hood.

Joe BRAKES and looks ahead to see:

A boy with an *"I CANT BREATHE"* sign. He runs past the cruiser to round the corner ahead.

JOE (CONT'D)
The hell?

PAULA (V.O.)
What's wrong?

Joe starts idling toward the corner.

JOE
A kid was carryin our sign.

Confused (and a little hopeful), Joe rounds the corner to now see a PROTEST of about forty young people (many holding signs of police brutality). ERIC stands at the front, holding a SIGN which he turns around to hide from Joe's view.

JOE (CONT'D)
Fuck. I gotta...

Joe gets out of the car and approaches the peaceful protest. In the BG, Paula's voice is heard: *"what is happenin?"* As Joe approaches, Eric hands his phone to a kid, instructing him to film the following interaction.

JOE (CONT'D)
Eric?
(to the others)
Hey guys.
(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)
 (to Eric again)
 What's goin on?

ERIC
 This is our right! We're exercisin our
 right! This is a PEACEFUL protest!

JOE
 Okay, uh. I told you already, though.
 You gotta file this with the county
 commission.

ERIC
 We're havin this argument right now
 on stolen land!!

JOE
 What?

ERIC
 We call for the defundin and
 abolition of the police state!

JOE
 What fuckin police state? You wanna
 see my budget??

An IRATE MIDDLE-AGED MAN in overalls steps out of the
 ANTIQUE/HARDWARE STORE down the block. One of its windows has
 been smashed.

ANTIQUÉ STORE OWNER
 Sheriff, LOOK at this! Look what
 they done!

A YOUNG PROTESTER yells at him.

YOUNG PROTESTER
*So don't put racist-ass lawn
 jockeys on your fuckin
 window, Nazi! Fuck you!*

ANTIQUÉ STORE OWNER (V.O.)
*Who's a Nazi?! I'M a Nazi?!
 You're the ones out here
 destroyin property!*

Joe now sees that two protestors have been training their
 smartphone cameras on Joe.

JOE
 Jesus.
 (walking away)
 Okay. Exercise your right! I'm
 respectin. As you were. As you are.
 (to John)
 ONE SECOND, JOHN!

Joe retreats to his car, starts rounding to the driver door, but then STOPS, goes to the "I CAN'T BREATHE" bumper sticker on his back bumper, tries to tear it off, fails, and then runs into the car to drive off.

Eric has taken his phone back from the kid who filmed all that. He immediately TEXTS the video to SARAH, accompanied by a solidarity fist emoji.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Joe arrives at the office. Guy, standing defensively in the back, is wearing RIOT GEAR. He is clearly in a panic. Michael sits at his desk.

JOE

Why aren't you out there?

GUY

I was! But they're filmin, and I didn't want movies a me doin somethin or not doin somethin--

The phone rings and Michael answers.

MICHAEL

Dispatch.

Joe rushes to his desk. He fetches his fancy sheriff's regalia (the one he saves for ceremonies). Affixed to its lapel is a series of small pins: U.S. flag, NRA, 'thin blue line," Blue Knights law enforcement motorcycle club pin, a 9/11 memorial pin, and an Israeli Civil Guard pin.

On the TV is coverage of a Santa Fe protest on the local news. Guy yells at the TV while Joe changes clothes in the corner.

TEEN GIRL (ON TV)

This happens constantly and so many people were not named because we don't have footage of them being murdered in front of us. We don't want to hate police. They are supposed to be here to protect us. But when we're seeing all these bad incidences, it is fueling the fire and everyone is trying to divide us and we need to come together and have a conversation about "why can't we ever talk about this?"

GUY

What footage? There's no footage 'cause it happens once a year!

We are fuckin protecting you!

Who's dividin who? We just fuckin woke up to this!

GUY (CONT'D)

Fuck you!

Guy changes the channel to Fox News, where Tucker is goin' at it:

TUCKER CARLSON (ON TV)

In San Jose, looters armed with crowbars stormed the highway and attacked vehicles, trying to pull drivers from their cars. In Portland Oregon, a man was beaten, apparently for daring to carry an American flag in public. He never released the flag...

Michael gets Joe's attention.

MICHAEL

Sheriff... I dunno.

Joe has turned to him, now wearing his regalia.

JOE

You dunno what?

MICHAEL

I dunno, nothin. Just - news article.

Joe storms to the computer, where a HEADLINE reads: "A New Photo Reveals Police Brutality In Eddington, NM."

JOE

What does that mean "police brutality"?

Michael has found a new POST FROM ERIC, which has gone semi-viral. It is the PHOTO, taken by Eric, of JOE WRESTLING LODGE (from the beginning of the movie). The caption reads: "We let Sheriff Cross disgrace the Badge. We about to let him disgrace the Mayors Office now too??!!"

JOE (CONT'D)

FUCK!

GUY

(looking over Joe's shoulder)
What the hell is this, Michael?

MICHAEL

What the hell is *what*?

GUY

Sheriff sent you out to kill this yesterday, so why's it ten times bigger *today*??

But *you're* the one that dealt with it and now it's so much worse. And meanwhile, what're they protestin? We ain't blind!

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

It's ten times bigger everywhere! It's spreadin everywhere!

The fuck does *that* mean?

GUY

(to Joe)

One question, sheriff: are you gettin those pictures he's takin? 'Cause he's took pictures a everythin we done.

Joe has looked up from this to see an IRATE WOMAN (50s) marching up to the station. She opens the door.

IRATE WOMAN

What the hell're you DOIN in here?? There's a riot happenin right in front a yer face!

TUCKER CARLSON (O.S.)

And in Chicago, protesters fought systemic racism by running through a Nike store, stealing shoes.

EXT. STREET - MINUTES LATER

Joe, looking officious in his regalia, walks down the street, approaching the protest two blocks away. The irate woman follows him. As does Michael.

JOE

(to Michael)

Okay, find pictures of the cops that've been killed so far in the protests. Make a sign--

As he gives these instructions, Paula bounds over to Joe.

PAULA

Sheriff!

JOE

Paula, I know. It's a total setup.

PAULA

What setup? That's you in the picture! That's the man on the street!

JOE (CONT'D)

I know. It's a fake.

PAULA

How can it possibly?!

JOE

Like a goddamn - I dunno, a whatever, DEEPFAKE! Please! I'm takin care of it--

PAULA (CONT'D)

I abhor violence, sheriff, I can't endorse this. I can't be the place for your rally.

It's not a rally, it's a Town Hall meetin.

Well, I'm not Town Hall! I can't endorse this!

JOE
You're NOT endorsin! I'm bein framed.

Joe is speeding ahead, appealing to Paula as he accelerates:

JOE (CONT'D)
I'll see you in ten minutes! It'll
be good! It'll be okay!

EXT. MAIN STREET - MINUTES LATER

Joe turns the corner onto Main Street to see...

The PROTEST has already gotten bigger. Lodge, coughing, is among the protesters, although they avoid him like the plague. Meanwhile, an OLD MAN is yelling at the protestors. Off to the side is a WOMAN (40s) with a rifle strapped across her chest.

WOMAN
Y'wanna fuck around and find out?!

One TEEN GIRL from the protest screams:

TEEN GIRL
*If you're not with us, and
you're not for Black Lives
Matter, then get the fuck
outta here!!!*

OLD MAN

(to the crowd)
*Then stop fuckin burning the
fuckin town down!!!*

The Old Man sees Joe walking past. He appeals to Joe:

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
Antifa is HERE, sheriff!
Who's stoppin this??

JOE
(walking past)
I know, Greg. Don't worry. We
got it.

OLD MAN
Got WHAT? You didn't get John!

Joe spots ERIC, holding his BIG SIGN. He now sees that it's a blown-up photo of Joe wrestling Lodge. Standing beside Eric is now Sarah. Joe instructs Michael to follow him, and then STOMPS toward the kids, pointing at the sign. Michael stops a bit short.

JOE
That's misrepresentation!

ERIC
What is it?

JOE
That's slander! It's libel. And it's
not true. I can arrest you.

ERIC

For what?

JOE

For disturbin the peace. Misleadin
the public. HE pulled ME down! You
saw *exactly* how it happened!

Sarah jumps in:

SARAH

This is an inconvenience for you, but
the man that got killed for no reason
can't ever be inconvenienced again!

We CUT AWAY for a moment to BRIAN, who is watching this from
a block away. He looks livid. His thunder stolen.

TEEN GIRL (O.S.)

And he was only the one that
got VIDEOTAPED! There are
thousands more!

OLD MAN (O.S.)

THIS IS SOROS!!

Back to inside the crowd, where Joe is being cowed into silence.

ERIC

Police violence in Eddington!
Police violence in Eddington!

A kid trains his phone on Eric as he chants this. Joe clocks
this, panicked. He tries to find Michael to bring him into this.

The owner of the antique store calls out to Joe.

ANTIQUA STORE OWNER

SHERIFF! WHY THE FUCK IS
NOBODY HERE?!

JOE

(calling out)
I'll be right there, John!

ANTIQUA STORE OWNER

Thousands a dollars a shit they took!

Joe addresses Eric:

JOE

Has your dad even told you why he's
got a problem with me?

ERIC

Asides from you takin his job?!

JOE

Okay: no: I'm exercisin my
Constitutional right to run for
office. Just like him when *he* ran.
(re: the sign)

But that's a hoax you're startin.

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)

That's a lie. Do you know who your dad *actually* is, Eric? Do you know what he's done?

ERIC

You mean to your wife?

JOE

Maybe I *do* mean to her, but I'm not talkin about her with you.

'Scuse me?? You don't know anything!

ERIC (CONT'D)

I know why you had to arrest her!

Yes I do! Everyone does!

JOE

What about *your* mother? Where'd *she* go? She didn't just disappear into thin air.

Eric goes pale. Then:

ERIC

Your wife is a fuckin crazy whore! Stealin babies?! Her batshit mom sendin crazy shit to my house my whole fuckin life! Maybe THAT had somethin to do with it!

Joe now sees that a girl is training their PHONE on Eric as he screams this! Joe SEIZES the phone, only to then realize that he's crossed the line.

JOE

I'm sorry, but just -

Joe looks into the camera and explains to potential viewers:

JOE (CONT'D)

I didn't take it. I'm givin it back. I just wanted to explain.

SARAH

That's assault! You grabbed her!

Joe gives the phone back to the girl.

JOE

You're seein I'm givin it back. I was kiddin.

OLD MAN (O.S.)

I SAW! HE GOT PROVOKED! THAT WERE IN HIS RIGHTS!

Joe is walking backwards now...

JOE

(to antique store owner)
I'M FIXIN THIS, JOHN! STAY PUT! I...

Joe RETREATS. He motions to Michael to stay here.

Meanwhile, Brian starts roaming toward the crowd. He awkwardly integrates, his eyes on Eric and Sarah. Sarah seems to be consoling Eric, who now storms off. Sarah follows him.

INT. JUANITA'S RESTAURANT - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Joe, drenched in sweat, enters through the back door of the kitchen. A Mexican woman, listlessly preparing food, eyes him as he walks through.

EXT. JUANITA'S RESTUARANT - COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

Joe stops in a corner, scoping out the courtyard. Panicked. Only eight people are in the audience. Paula is a nervous wreck, not sure what to do. Guy, still wearing riot gear, is eating nachos at the snack table. He has one hand on his holstered gun, paranoid.

Joe gets Guy's attention. Guy walks over.

JOE

I can't go out there.

GUY

Why? The protest? Or the turnout?

JOE

I can't do this.

Guy nods, "understanding." Not helpful.

EXT. JUANITA'S RESTAURANT - COURTYARD - MINUTES LATER

Joe now stands in front of the meagre crowd, lost. He picks up an unnecessary microphone.

JOE

Guys, gals... Thank you for bein here. Not sure if you saw what's happenin outside, but...we're not gonna let 'em distract from the *real* thing...

(snapping to)

So! Would I be runnin for mayor if this didn't happen? If our economy wasn't completely destroyed by a virus that the Chinese already eradicated? And if our whole town wasn't shut down to *die* 'cause our Mayor's got business in *lettin* it die? Which I got evidence for. Papers! Papers I'm workin with lawyers to make 'vailable, and when we do, you'll see he's got plans - actual and very real plans to replace every shop here. With server farms.

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)

You know what those are? You're sure about to! And while he's sellin you away and stuffin cash in his pockets, you're stuck inside your little adobe box with a diaper on your face.

Beat.

JOE (CONT'D)

Let's just open this up to a Q and A. If anyone got any...

Joe looks up. Nothing from the audience.

JOE (CONT'D)

C'mon, folks. This is it. Let's have it out.

Guy raises his hand with a rehearsed question. Only him.

JOE (CONT'D)

Okay, well...

(beat)

Look: all right: this ain't the turnout I hoped for. Obviously. I suddenly got this, whatever - brutality accusation! Whatnot. Which is rich! Anyone can see if they give it two second's ACTUAL... That night, the night in question, Lodge - known vagrant - you know who that is in the picture - he pulled *me* down. I hurt *my* shoulder that night. But people can just say whatever they want now.

Uncomfortable silence in the audience.

JOE (CONT'D)

So: these protests... And yes, it's a real thing, the imbalance in this country, what happened to that man - no matter what he mighta done - it's purely undefensible. Absolutely disgraceful conduct. You see videos like that, of incidents like that, and you think "first off: where was the command staff that was checkin this officer's record for a history a excessive force?" This event that happened: it didn't have to. But that's also what officers wear those cameras for! And that officer - the individual that committed that action - he is a very bad apple. Horrible bad. Evil. Cut 'im off the tree!

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)

But this crap on the other side?
Gatherin, lootin, scarin folks,
dividin...

Joe is starting to pace.

JOE (CONT'D)

And I'm not the problem here. If you believe that, you're just eatin outta the palm. You think the *police* are where the power is?? It's with the leadership. Leadership a this country! On down to the leadership a this community! Y'wanna talk brutality? You think *I'm* brutal? I kept this town safe for the better half a my life, but if *I* got any shame - truly? - it's in keepin quiet about somethin that *never* set right with me. About Ted Garcia. Our mayor. Because the man is...purely and simply...a predator.

(stops pacing, beat)

Ted Garcia...is a sexual predator.

(beat)

Okay?

People look around. Guy looks confused and a little panicked. But Joe just nods.

JOE (CONT'D)

Yes. All right?... And how do I know? Well, I *should* know. My wife? When she was sixteen years old? He gets her pregnant. Makes her pay for her own abortion. Turns his back. *Her* life's ruined. *His* just started. But it's a big secret. "Nobody say nothin." Can't endanger the golden boy's big special future. And for what? You just go ahead and vote him back in. You'll find out for what. Just look at his own wife. Which you can't, 'cause she's gone. Took off. People don't just - with a husband and child - you don't just jump ship like that unless the life you're leavin is well nigh unbearable. But that's none a my business. I can only speculate. Look to history. But what that man did to *my* wife: make no mistake: that's predator behavior.

(beat)

What's more: it's rape. Let's face it. Statutory. Ted Garcia. Let's call him what he is.

Joe nods, feeling some sort of momentum. The tiny audience is stunned.

JOE (CONT'D)

And we're gonna say it and we're gonna be sayin it over these next few days and weeks. Because that's what this election is about. So vote Joe Cross. Take back our community. Save our soul.

Joe looks both fired up and...unnerved. He steps off toward the back corner, where Guy is waiting.

GUY

...Good?

JOE

...Post it.

GUY

Okay. Yeah?

Joe looks at him, ambivalent but addled.

JOE

Don't make me think. Post it.

INT. JOE'S CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

Joe drives home, still wearing his regalia. He is clearly negotiating with himself: whether to be excited or worried?

He sees the protest marching down a residential street. Avoiding it, he takes a side street.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - SAME TIME

The crowd of young protestors continues marching down the street. Brian walks among them.

CROWD

(chanting)

NO JUSTICE! NO PEACE!

NO RACIST PO-LICE!

NO JUSTICE! NO PEACE!

NO RACIST PO-LICE!

Brian's phone VIBRATES with an incoming text. He checks it. It's from ERIC. He opens it to find a PHOTO OF ERIC KISSING SARAH in the car (she is clearly unaware of being photographed), with the attached text: "*wish you were heeere!!!*"

Brian's eyes harden with rage. He then notices recognizable landmarks in the background of the photo (visible outside the car window). He ZOOMS IN to the window, revealing the PARKING LOT that served as the party site earlier. Gears begin turning.

EXT. CROSS HOUSE - NIGHT

Joe's cruiser peels up to the house, its headlights shining onto the front door. The gear is put in park. The engine turned off. Joe sits, bracing himself.

JOE

Okay.

He opens the car door. As he begins to step out, the FRONT DOOR SWINGS OPEN AND LOUISE COMES RUNNING STRAIGHT AT HIM.

LOUISE

YOU FUCKIN BASTARD!

JOE

Baby! Wait a minute!

Dawn comes chasing after her. She carries a BIG DUFFEL BAG.

DAWN

Lou, he just texted! He's on his way!

Louise arrives at Joe and starts hitting him.

LOUISE

YOU BASTARD!

JOE

I'm sorry, I'M SORRY!

LOUISE

HOW COULD YOU?! HOW COULD YOU?!

JOE

Sweetie, he can't get away with it!

LOUISE

THEY'RE GONNA COME HERE!
THEY'RE GONNA FIND ME!

DAWN

Nobody's comin here, damn it!

Louise collapses into a heap, weeping. Joe bends down to comfort her. She throws his arm off.

LOUISE

NO!

DAWN (CONT'D)

Stay back, Joe! You're done!

JOE

I'll fix it--

LOUISE

YOU CAN'T!

DAWN

Enough now! This is good,
Weez. It's a good thing!

LOUISE (CONT'D)

They're gonna come here.
They're gonna dig it all up.

A PICKUP TRUCK appears in the distance.

DAWN
 Okay, look: he's here! Button
 it up now! He's here already!

JOE
 We can't let him get away
 with it, Lou! He can't just
 get away with it!

LOUISE
*You KNOW it wasn't him! Neither a you
 can admit it! The one that did it is
 burnin in fuckin HELL right now!*

The pickup truck arrives, kicking dust toward them. VERNON
 steps out, silhouetted by harsh headlights as he approaches.

DAWN
 Thank you! Thank you! Please! Take her!
 She needs to not be here right now.

Dawn helps Louise stand up and Louise goes to Vernon. Vernon
 looks to Joe, as if to ask *"Is this okay?"* Joe is too
 dumbfounded to respond. Vernon takes Louise in his arms and
 brings her to his car. He eases her into the passenger seat.
 (As she steps into the car, one of her handmade DOLLS falls
 from her pocket. She doesn't see it on the ground.) Vernon
 looks again to Joe.

DAWN (CONT'D)
 It's okay! Thank you! Please! Just
 get her away! Thank you!

JOE
 (to Vernon, helpless)
 I'm sorry.

Vernon takes this *"I'm sorry"* as permission. He walks to the big
 bag by Dawn's feet, picks it up, brings it to his car, climbs
 in, and DRIVES OFF. As he drives away, his TIRE rolls over the
 doll that fell from Louise's pocket, leaving a tire mark across
 its torso.

Joe and Dawn are left alone together.

DAWN
 The way you did it was repugnant,
 but tonight's the most you ever
 done for that girl in your life.

INT. CROSS HOUSE - SECONDS LATER

Dawn and Joe enter the house. Dawn points to the portrait of
 Richmond. It's been turned to face the wall.

DAWN
 Behold the result. Ten minutes
 after your little announcement.

Dawn turns the portrait around. Re-hangs it.

DAWN (CONT'D)
She went and hid the rest of 'em.

Joe goes into the LIVING ROOM. The dolls in Louise's collection have all been taken.

INT. JOE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Joe, stunned, takes two SLEEPING PILLS. Then he takes ANOTHER. He lies in bed. Closes his eyes. But then he hears outside:

DAWN (O.S.)
Shame on you!

Joe sits up to look out the window: Dawn is in the backyard, where she has discovered another photo of Louise's father, hidden in bushes.

DAWN (CONT'D)
(cleaning off the dirt)
Shame on you...

INT. CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

Brian drives his parents' car through the desert. A PODCAST (featuring a young woman's voice) plays on his stereo:

PODCAST VOICE
--and white progressives need to make it a daily practice for the rest of our lives to study our unconscious racisms in order to actually and TRULY effectuate anti-racist practices.

He rides up to the edge of a modest hill, which overlooks the isolated PARKING LOT where he and Eric met Sarah. He SHUTS OFF his headlights.

Eric's car is the only car parked on the lot.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Brian sneaks up on Eric's car, crouched down (to not be seen) as he speed-walks.

He arrives at the car, smartphone camera at the ready. He rises very slowly to peer into the back passenger window...

Inside, Eric and Sarah are having sex - Eric on top (wearing clothes, but his pants lowered to his thigh, exposing his buttocks), Sarah beneath him (still wearing a dress).

Brian looks heartbroken. After staring at this with dead eyes for a beat, he raises his phone and begins taking a VIDEO.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

A very stressed Michael stands outside, holding and aiming a rifle. He FIRES it at a target sheet 100 ft away. The first shot misses.

INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - MINUTES LATER

Michael enters his apartment, resting the rifle by the door. He goes to a wall and proudly PINS UP THE TARGET SHEET to be displayed. A bullet hole marks the target's head.

Michael steps back, pulls out his phone, and trains his phone-camera on the target sheet to take a photo. As he does this, he receives a MESSAGE REQUEST on Instagram.

After taking a photo, he opens Instagram. It's an obscured VIDEO MESSAGE from an unknown account. Michael opts to VIEW the video, revealing Brian's video of Sarah and Eric having sex.

Michael, heart in throat, stares at the video.

Tears in eyes, Michael goes to his contacts to find Sarah's number. He hesitates and calls her. No answer. It goes to her VOICEMAIL.

SARAH (V.O.)

Hey, you reached Sarah! Leave a message and I'll call you back.

Emotional, Michael opens his mouth to speak, but can't. He hangs up.

INT. JOE'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Joe is asleep - alone - in his bed. The sun is shining brilliantly outside. It's 4:16 PM.

His phone BUZZES with a text. Joe wakes up. Another BUZZ. Joe reaches for the phone.

His phone has dozens of texts from several outraged sources, all furious about the protest, property damage, etc.

One text is from GUY: *"You ok sheriff? Im so sorry. Cant imagine how your feeling"*

Joe TEXTS: *"Sorry why"*

Joe suddenly becomes anxious. He sits up. Opens Facebook.

MOMENTS LATER

Joe is watching a LOCAL NEWS CLIP featuring LOUISE being interviewed by a reporter.

LOUISE (ON VIDEO)
Unfortunately the sheriff's
recollection is not correct.

REPORTER (ON VIDEO)
You're saying what he said wasn't true?

LOUISE (ON VIDEO)
No. It wasn't and it couldn't be. I
am, in fact, medically not able to
have children.

Joe's stomach drops.

LOUISE (ON VIDEO) (CONT'D)
I did go to a specialist, round the
time a my husband's story, for a
procedure, but that was a
completely different issue.

REPORTER (ON VIDEO)
Why do you think your husband
might've made these claims?

Joe's eyes are dead.

LOUISE (ON VIDEO)
I can't say, but I felt I must in
good conscience--

DAWN (V.O.)
YOU DON'T DIRECT THIS CONVERSATION!

EXT. HOUSE - SAME TIME

Dawn is outside, pacing on the phone. She speaks through gritted teeth.

DAWN
Your husband did the one honorable
thing a his life last night and you
erased it. It wasn't just Nobody's
fault what happened to you and you
today failed yourSELF! You removed
accountability off a scoundrel!

Joe has stepped up to the back door to watch this.

DAWN (CONT'D)
Enough with the cryin! Shame on you!
Shame on your tears! You took your
own biggest life lesson in vain!

Joe gets a CALL from Guy. He answers.

JOE

Hi.

GUY (V.O.)

Sheriff, you okay?

No answer.

DAWN (O.S.)

Don't you DARE collapse! You think you're the only one suffered through that? You drug us all through HELL!

GUY (V.O.)

Got a noise complaint on the mayor's house. I guess he's doin a fundraiser.

JOE

Okay.

GUY (V.O.)

I just didn't know - is it too, uh - touchy? Do we leave it?

DAWN (O.S.)

Don't you utter his name! He sacrificed EVERYTHIN for his family! -- *What?? NO!*

Louise clearly said something that Dawn can't handle. She immediately HANGS UP, absolutely fraught. She looks stunned.

JOE

I'll go.

GUY (V.O.)

Oh, well, I can go, too! Just wanted your say-so --

JOE

I'm goin.

Joe hangs up.

INT. JOE'S CRUISER (MOVING) - LATE AFTERNOON

Joe drives down Main Street. It's very quiet. He drives past Ted's bar before passing the ANTIQUE STORE, whose shattered window has been boarded up.

EXT. TED'S HOUSE - EVENING

An outdoor PARTY at Ted's house. Several tables of food (each outfitted with an industrial tub of hand sanitizer) have been set up, and about 50 people are mingling (most of them wearing masks). Signs enforcing "6 FT APART" abound.

Joe pulls up to DOUBLE-PARK his car, leaving the gumball lights flaring. The red and blue flares streak across the party, disturbing the atmosphere.

Joe emerges, chest puffed, to walk through the party. Warren, manning a sign-in table, smiles at Joe. Behind him a FLAT-SCREEN TV plays the video of Louise calling Joe a liar on loop.

Joe finds Ted, across the lawn, and approaches.

JOE
(to Ted)
What're we celebratin here? The
collapse a'our economy?

Ted just stares at him.

JOE (CONT'D)
I'm here about a noise complaint.

TED
Not on rape charges?

Joe arrives. Beat.

TED (CONT'D)
The hell d'you fuckin want?

JOE
The noise. Can you not hear me over
it?

TED
The sun's still up. We're doin this
outside. We're doin it accordin to
state regulations--

JOE
Regulations *you're* enforcin.

TED
As would you if *you* were
mayor. As *should* you, as
sheriff--

JOE (CONT'D)
Regulations that are hostile
to *your* businesses!

TED
What is this now? Another campaign
stunt?

(re: onlookers)
(MORE)

TED (CONT'D)

How's this for a audience? Should I get more people for ya?

JOE

I'm here about the noise. Your neighbor complained--

TED

What neighbor?

(pointing)

That neighbor?! Whose dog barks all night EVERY night, and when I ask him to take it inside, he tells me to fuck myself? The neighbor who's presently *suing* me 'cause a my tree interferin with his view?

JOE

A tree you planted without consultin him! I know *all* this stuff. He was here thirty years before you shoved in and started throwin your weight around.

TED (CONT'D)

A la mierda! He gave me permission for the tree! He had no problem with it 'til the job was done! Then I get a call from a lawyer--

JOE

I don't give a shit about your fuckin tree shit! Turn your party down NOW!

TED

This is down. We're in the middle a nowhere.

JOE

Then you're goin to jail.

Beat. Ted turns sharply and walks toward the speaker system. Joe stays where he is.

Ted arrives at the speaker and turns OFF the music. A hush falls clumsily over the party.

Ted returns to face Joe. Confused partiers observe.

TED

What else?

JOE

That's it.

TED

No it's not. If you ever talk about my wife again--

JOE

What about *my* wife?

TED

You talk about my wife EVER again, I don't care what fuckin badge you got on, I'm gonna reach my arm so far down your throat I'm gonna grab your fat stomach and I'm gonna pull your guts outta your fat little face.

JOE

(playing unhurt)

Okay. That's a threat. Logged.

TED

Yeah, that's a threat--

Ted SLAPS Joe across the face.

TED (CONT'D)

So what's that?

Joe is stunned. Beat.

JOE

Are you--

Ted SLAPS him again.

TED

What's that? Log *that*. With your statutory piss.

A look of shock is plastered onto Joe's face. Everyone is silent. He stands motionless for a long time, blank-eyed, and then SMILES a tight-lipped smile.

JOE

Yeah.

TED

(smiles)

Yeah.

Joe stiffly turns around and starts toward his car. As he passes Warren:

JOE

You're a lawyer, aren't you?
Y'wouldn't call that assault?

Warren doesn't know what to say. As Joe keeps walking, he looks off to see ERIC standing at his window, watching him. SARAH sits on Eric's bed behind him.

Joe arrives at his CAR and opens the driver side door. He turns sharply back to Ted.

A sudden RUSH of purpose overtakes him - *to do what? Return to Ted?* He hesitates. That kills it. Still buzzing, he enters the cruiser and shuts the door.

Joe sits. Conflicted. Aware that everyone is staring at him. After a beat, he JAMS the key into the ignition and drives off.

INT. JOE'S CRUISER (MOVING) - NIGHT

Joe drives down Main Street, simmering with rage. He turns a corner to see a couple TEENS WITH SIGNS worriedly watching something inside Ted's bar. When they see Joe's cruiser, they run away, turning down an alley. One of them drops his police violence protest sign.

Now alert, Joe comes up on TED'S BAR. He sees that ONE OF THE WINDOWS HAS BEEN SMASHED.

Joe stops the car, unholsters his gun, and steps out. COUGHING is heard from within. Joe carefully approaches the bar.

INT. TED'S BAR - CONTINUOUS

LODGE, sweating and red-eyed, stands behind the bar. He COUGHS violently. It is extremely hoarse. More like a bark than a cough. He holds two bottles of liquor - vodka in one hand, whiskey in the other. His chin glistens with booze.

Joe has entered, gun poised. Lodge sees him, coughing.

LODGE

Who CARES?! You think I see that?!
I'm SICK!

Joe now PAUSES, suddenly aware of what this could be. Lodge swigs from a bottle.

LODGE (CONT'D)

Look!

Lodge swigs from the other bottle.

LODGE (CONT'D)

There's no difference!

He drinks from both again. Then smells both. It's hard to tell if he's scared or giddy:

LODGE (CONT'D)

They're the same! It's like nothin!
Like water! I taste only wicknedness!

JOE

All right, Lodge. Put it down.

LODGE
YOU called this plague!!

Lodge COUGHS and then squeezes his head. He SLAMS it against the counter.

LODGE (CONT'D)
My BRAIN!! I'm sick and no single
ONE a you cares! Nobody nobody
NOBODY fuckin CARES ABOUT ME!!!

That sends Lodge into a horrible fit of coughing.

JOE
(starting to retreat)
Okay, stay here! Put those down.

Joe leaves.

INT. JOE'S CAR - SECONDS LATER

Joe opens the door, digs into his glove compartment and finds a FACE MASK and then finds another. He straps one on, and then puts one over *that* one.

Joe then turns to see the one intact WINDOW OF THE ANTIQUE/HARDWARE STORE. On display is a FACE SHIELD.

SECONDS LATER

A BRICK is thrown through the WINDOW of the hardware store.

INT. TED'S BAR - SECONDS LATER

Joe enters, now wearing the two masks and a face shield. Lodge stands defiantly in front of the bar, holding a vodka bottle.

JOE
All right, Lodge. Let's come on out.
I just wanna help you.

LODGE
So come help me. Come save your box!

Joe starts edging toward Lodge, gun trained on his head.

LODGE (CONT'D)
You gonna shoot my head?

Joe stops.

JOE
Lodge. Just come out with me. Stop
escalatin this.

Lodge stays put. He COUGHS in Joe's direction.

JOE (CONT'D)

Don't.

He COUGHS in Joe's direction again.

JOE (CONT'D)

Don't DO that, Lodge.

He COUGHS again. And again.

Joe has had enough. He STRIDES FORWARD - eliciting an offensive barrage of coughing from Lodge - and he grabs a fistful of Lodge's shirt to start pulling him out. Lodge defensively SWINGS the vodka bottle onto Joe's head. The bottle SHATTERS.

Joe stumbles back, drenched in vodka. In a daze, he wipes the liquor from his eyes (the face shield getting in the way) and feels for his head. It's bleeding. Mesmerized, he looks at Lodge. They stare at each other, STUNNED.

LODGE

I didn't!

Joe SPRINGS for Lodge. He grabs Lodge's hair and furiously wrestles him to the ground. Lodge coughs uncontrollably. Joe turns his head away from the coughing, sucks in air from above, holds his breath, and wraps his hands around Lodge's throat. He begins to STRANGLE him.

Lodge reaches frantically for the BROKEN BOTTLE, which is just beyond his grasp. He finally grabs hold of it, and STABS Joe in the shoulder. It doesn't go very deep.

Joe seizes Lodge's hand, which holds the broken bottle. Lodge struggles, but Joe's strength is greater. He turns the jagged BLADES of the half-shattered bottle inward, and pushes them into Lodge's STOMACH. Lodge screams as Joe pushes the shards deeper into his gut. He then PUSHES. And PUSHES.

Lodge's hands flail, pushing Joe's face, his chin, his shoulder, his arms. Joe pulls the bottle out, and frantically stabs Lodge in the CHEST, in the JUGULAR, in the THROAT. He then stays on the throat. Stabbing. Stabbing. Stabbing. Lodge gurgles and resists, but Joe continues stabbing. *This is no longer self defense.* Joe doesn't stop stabbing until Lodge has ceased moving.

Joe bounces back and desperately scampers backwards. He then STOPS, twenty feet away from the body he just destroyed. Now motionless, he watches to make sure. Lodge is dead.

JOE

All right.

Joe steps forward to make certain.

SECONDS LATER

Joe, now shirtless, dispenses ten pumps of PURELL onto his palms. He then wipes it all over his face and neck. Then his forearms, then the back of his neck, etc.

Joe takes a bottle of ABSINTHE, swigs it, GARGLES and spits it out. He repeats.

INT. ANTIQUE/HARDWARE STORE - MINUTES LATER

Joe enters through the smashed window. He finds a SHOVEL. Then TRASH BAGS. Then CLEANING SOLUTION, BLEACH and a MOP. Then, finally, a DISPOSABLE PROTECTIVE COVERALL SAFETY SUIT.

EXT. BACK ALLEY - MINUTES LATER

The alley behind Ted's bar.

Joe, now basically wearing a Hazmat suit, pulls his car up.

MINUTES LATER

Joe DRAGS Lodge's corpse out the back of the bar. The trunk of his parked car is open and layered with trash bags.

INT. TED'S BAR - LATER

Joe mops up all the blood.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Joe, still wearing his Hazmat suit, furiously digs a HOLE in the ground.

LATER

Joe opens the back door of his car. Next to him: the GRAVE he just dug.

Joe, having dragged Lodge's body from the car, unceremoniously PUSHES it toward the grave. It rolls gracelessly in.

INT. TED'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

It's the end of the night.

GIANT WINDOWS and a WIDE SLIDING-GLASS DOOR distinguish one wall of the living room. They overlook a BACKYARD (littered with Dixie cups, paper plates, and a few unretired snack tables), and beyond the backyard: A TALL HILL.

Ted enters, now wearing exercise shorts and a T shirt. He plops down onto his recliner, holding a drink. He turns on the TV by remote.

He watches TV for a second, but then notices a PURSE on the coffee table. He stares for a moment.

TED

Eric?!

Off-screen, from his room:

ERIC (O.S.)

What?!

After a moment, Eric appears at the doorway.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Yes sir?

TED

We agreed nobody in the house.

ERIC

Yeah. I know.

(beat)

What?

TED

(re: purse)

So what's that?

ERIC

Am I supposed to recognize it?

TED

You think I didn't see you with that white girl?

ERIC

Uhh. Okay. I mean. But we were outside--

PING!

A BULLET zips through the sliding-glass door (preceded by a MUZZLE FLASH from the hill in the distance) and strikes the back of Ted's chair. A HOLE is blown out of Ted's chest. *He isn't dead.* He gurgles blood, screaming inaudibly. His eyes are monstrously wide.

Eric is frozen with terror.

Another bullet goes through the glass door, missing Eric. It hits the wall. This bullet SHATTERS the glass door.

Eric snaps out of his horrified trance. He RUNS for the exit.

Another shot is fired. The bullet STRIKES Eric in the back. He is blown to the floor, killed instantly.

The TV sounds continue.

ELEVATED POV (a scope's CROSS-HAIRS dead-center): a high angle view of the living room. The back of Ted's chair - motionless. Eric's corpse lying face-down, blood pooling beneath him.

EXT. HILL - SAME TIME

JOE rises from his perch, lifting a SCOPED RIFLE with him. He looks down to survey the stagnant, blood-spattered scene from his elevated perch. He still wears the coverall safety suit.

After a still moment, Joe starts down toward the house. With every step, there is a rattling sound - like a small metal ball bouncing against tin.

INT. TED'S LIVING ROOM - SECONDS LATER

Joe carefully walks through the obliterated sliding-glass door. He stands for a moment, observing the room.

He crosses the room, stepping over Eric's corpse, making sure to avoid stepping in Eric's expanding pool of blood. He peers down the HALL.

INT. TED'S ROOM - SECONDS LATER

Joe enters. The room is mostly empty, save for a bed and a desk.

Joe crosses to the closet, opens it. Many shirts are hung. There is a mess on the floor.

Joe goes to the desk and finds a WEDDING RING. Inside the ring, an inscription: *"To my precious Ted. I will always love you."* Joe POKETS the ring.

INT. LIVING ROOM - SECONDS LATER

Joe returns to the living room, pulling an AEROSOL CAN OF SPRAY PAINT out of his pocket. This is the source of the rattle.

Joe walks to a naked wall, shaking the can. He begins to SPRAY the wall, writing something. Then a thought occurs to him and he switches the can to his left hand - to disguise his handwriting.

As Joe continues spraying, we return our attention to Ted's corpse, continuing to bleed profusely. We return to Eric's corpse, pitiful in its arbitrary face-down position.

Joe has finished writing. He steps back to judge his work.

Spraypainted on the wall: *"NO JUSTICE NO PEACE"*

EXT. JOE'S SHED - NIGHT

Joe, in his underwear, stuffs his bloody sheriff's uniform and the safety suit into a BBQ grill. He squirts lighter fluid all over the clothes, strikes a match, and ignites the heap.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Joe enters the house, in his underwear. He STOPS when he sees Dawn waiting in the dark, illuminated by the glow of a laptop.

DAWN

She's not answerin. I left ten messages.

Joe just stands there, processing.

DAWN (CONT'D)

Why ain't you dressed?

JOE

...our clothes got contaminated.

Dawn just looks at him.

JOE (CONT'D)

Someone got sick. Protocol.

DAWN

Could they'a had the virus?

Joe starts walking.

JOE

No.

He is moving toward the bathroom.

DAWN

You ain't heard *any* from her?

JOE

No.

Joe enters the bathroom. Closes the door. The sound of the shower turning on.

DAWN

She's so goddamn selfish.

INT. JOE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Joe violently WAKES UP to the sound of a vibrating phone. Still no Louise.

He looks at the phone. It's been bombed with panicked texts and missed calls - from Guy, from Bob, from John, from Michael, etc.

Joe tries calling Louise. It rings once and then goes to her answering machine. A CALL FROM GUY comes in over this. Joe answers it on speakerphone.

JOE

Yeah.

EXT. TED'S HOUSE - MORNING

Joe's car pulls up to the front of Ted's house. Michael waits for him on the lawn. Brian waits far off to the side, looking terribly anxious. The Antique Store Owner is also waiting for Joe, very upset. Three other people (in their 60s) stand nervously behind him.

Joe emerges from the car, wearing a mask. His eyes are buzzing with nervousness.

ANTIQUÉ STORE OWNER

Sheriff, what's goin on?! How much longer you gonna sit right back?

Michael walks up to Joe.

MICHAEL

Hi sheriff.

Guy emerges to see Joe's mask.

GUY

(re: mask)

What's this about?

INT. TED'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Joe - now maskless - stands between the corpses of Ted and Eric. Guy stands behind Joe, taking in the room. (Michael is taking photographs of the other room.)

GUY

Like I had a crystal ball! This is what comes when you don't smash it down at the very *hint*!

Joe looks out the window to SEE...

LAKOTA is perched on the hill from which Joe fired the shots.

JOE

What the hell?

GUY

Yeah, guess who Michael called!

Speaking of Michael: he's entered from the other door.

MICHAEL

I had to.

JOE

Had to for *what?*

MICHAEL

'Cause - the hill. 'S Reservation land.

JOE

What do you mean?? This is Eddington.
(gesturing to Ted's corpse)
He's the *mayor* a Eddington!

MICHAEL

But the shells was on the hill. Where
the shooter shot from.

INSERT: A SIGN ON THE HILL announcing that this is the border between Eddington and the Reservation. Ted's house looms in the BG.

BACK TO THE GARCIA LIVING ROOM.

Lakota has descended the hill to enter through the back. He holds a ZIP-LOC BAG containing spent RIFLE CASINGS.

LAKOTA

Found three shell casings. How many
impacts?

This was directed at Michael, to whom he's clearly been talking. He all but ignores Joe.

MICHAEL

I think four? Or three if that one on
the floor's the same 't hit the chair.

GUY

(to Michael, incredulous)
Why don't you give 'im your fuckin
salary, too?

Lakota strolls over to the spray-painted sign. He notices the idiosyncrasy of the E.

LAKOTA

Gotta call in a handwritin expert.

JOE

How long'a you been here?

LAKOTA

Enough to'a found where your
shooter was. Footprints up there,
too. Took pictures.

Joe is frozen. Lakota is talking about the shoes Joe's
wearing right now.

GUY

(to Joe)

Def'nitely connected is another lootin
at Ted's bar. All smashed up. John's
store got broke into again, too.

Joe is stuck on the shoe thing.

MICHAEL

You okay, sheriff?

Joe snaps out of it. He sees the PURSE on the coffee table.
It bears a BLM pin.

JOE

What's that?

GUY

Wife's purse?

JOE

The wife's gone.

Lakota takes a photo of the purse on the coffee table. Michael
follows suit. Guy, wearing gloves, opens the bag. Searches it.
Finds the ID.

GUY

Sarah Allen.

Michael is frozen at the mention of Sarah. Joe takes the ID
and studies it.

JOE

She's the kid's age.

GUY

BLM pin, too.

Guy turns to see the OLD MAN peering in through the window.

GUY (CONT'D)

Hey! Away the goddamn window!

Behind them, BRIAN steps into the room. He sees Eric's corpse
and SCREAMS.

BRIAN
 (weeping)
Oh my God!

JOE
 What the fuck?

Guy gestures firmly to Michael, who rushes over to Brian and starts leading him out.

GUY
 Lock this shit off, damn it!

Michael and Brian leave. Lakota can't believe this mess.

JOE
 (dazed)
 ...forgot somethin in the car.

EXT. JOE'S CRUISER - MINUTES LATER

Joe is in the back seat, covertly removing his shoes, then covering them with newspaper. He hastily slips into old boots caked with dry mud.

Lakota emerges from the house in the BG and starts toward the car. Guy follows behind.

Joe steps out of the car, making it look like he was just searching for papers.

LAKOTA
 You find it?

JOE
 It's not here. I thought I remembered somethin...

LAKOTA
 Maybe you'll remember it later.

Michael roams over, having ejected Brian and sent him off.

JOE
 (to Lakota)
 Anyone on the Reservation that mighta done this?

GUY
 Yeah, BLM's basically *your* thing, too.

LAKOTA
 (ignoring that, smiling)
 Seein how no one on the Reservation's ever heard a your Mayor, I can only speculate. Anyone fightin with 'im in *this* town? Maybe in competition with 'im? Mighta had a reason?

Guy, speechless, is amazed at the gall. Joe, feigning casualness, turns from Lakota to address Michael:

JOE
 You hold the fort with our friends.
 (to Guy)
 Let's get Sarah Allen her purse back.

INT. JOE'S CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Joe drives, pulling out of Ted's property. Guy sits passenger. As they peel out, they pass Brian, who stands off the dirt road, his back turned stiffly to the vehicle. Joe notes him.

Guy looks to the rear view mirror to see Lakota's cruiser following behind. He boils.

GUY
 You should slam the brakes. Smash 'im through the windshield straight-back to his teepee.

Joe just drives, not amused. Guy, self-conscious, goes quiet. A moment later he turns to Joe, meaningfully:

GUY (CONT'D)
 Sheriff? I know there's nothin good about this, but I wanted to share with you: back at that house...I got a feelin a somethin - like a...
 (searching)
 Like a feelin like maybe the reason things're so bad...is so we can really, actually do our job. At the time when it's needed the most.

Joe remains silent. Guy keeps looking at him, sentimental.

GUY (CONT'D)
 I just wanted to share that feelin. 'Cause I almost got scared before, but now I think that's wrong.

Guy looks ahead, almost teary-eyed.

GUY (CONT'D)
 The right thing right now is to be excited. This is a *excitin* time. We're in History.

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - DAY

Joe and Guy stand on a PORCH. Joe looks back to see Lakota in his car, parked on the other side of the street, watching them.

The door opens to reveal a MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

Hello?

GUY

Is your daughter Sarah Allen?

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - INTERROGATION ROOM - AFTERNOON

Sarah sits in a small wooden room - wearing a mask. Opposite her sits Guy. They are six feet apart. A PHONE records video of this on a tripod. Joe paces behind Guy.

JOE

Okay, let's make this simple. Who in your life's got Far Left sympathies?

SARAH

(petrified)

...What about the Fifth Amendment?

JOE

Your boyfriend is dead with a hole in his back--!
Whatever this boy was to you: you're there yesterday, you're in his house, and later that night he's dead and his father's dead and your purse is in the room with their bodies.

SARAH (CONT'D)

He isn't my boyfriend!

SARAH (CONT'D)

(buzzing)

Well, but, then - what're you asking?

GUY

About Left sympathies!

SARAH

I have left sympathies!

GUY

Well, believe us, little girl: we got you on this list. You're our first stop.

SARAH (CONT'D)

What list?? What do you mean?

GUY

We seen your social media. The little donations you make? Antifa bail-outs? Aidin riots? You ain't done yourself any-all favors--

SARAH

I'm just trying to help! I don't *know* the people rioting. None of the protesters do!

GUY

(reading phone)

How's this quote, from you: "free your communities, arm yourselves against the oppressor!" Dismantle this, defund that! Preachin riots and lootin. Bein accessory to terrorism. That *is* terrorism, honey.

SARAH (CONT'D)

(now pleading to Joe)
Out of context, out of context! Not literal arms!

Terrorism? The looters and rioters are planted!

The gears are turning in Joe's head.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

The middle-aged woman - Sarah's mother - is waiting in the mostly empty sheriff's office. A sheepish Dwight keeps her company. She is a nervous wreck.

GUY (O.S.)

Correct!! By Sorros!

SARAH (O.S.)

No, by the G.O.P.! They're making it *look* like it's the protesters so that scared old white people won't complain when Martial Law happens!

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

(seething)

Why white people?! Always with the white!
Oh my *God*. Martial Law would be like fuckin *Christmas* right now!

THEY'RE SENDING FAKE PEOPLE IN TO *CAUSE* THE RIOTS AND THE VIOLENCE! IT'S ALL *PLANTED!*

This is all coming from behind the closed interrogation room door. The woman's eyes are locked on this. She then senses something outside. She turns to see: BRIAN standing on the street, looking in with concern. He averts his eyes.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - EVENING

Joe stands before TWO CAMERAS, manned by journalists, at the sheriff's office. He stands with Michael and Guy at his side. Guy nods along. LAKOTA watches from off-camera, bemused.

JOE

First and foremost, on behalf a the Eddington County Sheriff's Office: inexpressible condolences are sent to the family a Ted Garcia and his son Eric Garcia, who were gunned down in their home last night between the hours a'11 and midnight - both a them struck by cowardly sniper fire and both succumbing to their wounds several hours before they got discovered. I do believe we have sufficient *evidence* to believe that the perpetrator was a member - or *members* - of the ANTIFA terrorist group, usin the tragic recent events in Minneapolis as a wicked excuse to sow chaos. This was a organized attack meant to spread fear and panic and to damage our faith in the Second Amendment at a vulnerable time a national unrest.

INT. JOE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

JOE'S PRESS CONFERENCE CONTINUES ON TV.

Dawn is watching this on the couch. Eyes buzzing with worry.

JOE (ON TV)

(continuing)

Now, to the criminals that perpetrated this act: you will soon find out what justice looks like in Eddington County. You will find out. It will not be tolerated. And to the individuals plannin to take their criminal conduct outta the streets and into the neighborhoods: I would tell *them* that if you value your life, you should think twice, because the people a Eddington *like* guns, I encourage them to *own* guns, and they're gonna be in their homes tonight with their guns loaded. And if you try to break *into* their homes to steal, to set fires, to cause physical injury or death - I'm highly recommendin they blow you outta the house *with* their guns.

We cut to a News Anchor.

NEWS ANCHOR

Meanwhile, Albuquerque's new public safety department - designed to relieve stress on the city's police -

EXT. PRIVATE JET - NIGHT

A PRIVATE LUXURY PLANE COURSES WITH OMINOUS, SILENT PURPOSE OVER DESERT TERRAIN.

The news anchor's voice continues over this.

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)

- will deploy unarmed personnel made up of social workers, housing and homelessness specialists, and violence prevention coordinators.

INT. PRIVATE JET - CONTINUOUS

A gloriously decorated private plane. Everything - from the chairs to the carpet to the gilded mouldings on the ceiling - suggests obscene wealth.

The TV continues to play the same news here.

We are creeping down the aisle, on the backs of TWO SITTING MEN (one thin and one muscular). The plane is otherwise empty. The thin man is less visible because he's by the window, but we can see he has a neck tattoo. Both men wear HAWAIIAN SHIRTS, although this is only really made clear by the nearer man's VERY MUSCULAR, SUNBAKED ARM resting on the armrest. He sits upright and is COVERED IN TATTOOS. We creep in on the nearer, muscular man. A black, unapplied face mask dangles from his ear. We push in toward the mask before CUTTING HARD TO:

INT. JOE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

A haggard Joe sits on his bed, in his underwear, fingering Ted's wedding ring. He is studying a NOTEPAD. It reads...

SUSPECTS

Sarah - BLM, purse, ANTIFA

Teds assistant - black (BLM?)

Eric friend

John? - revenge for vandilizing?

Joe thinks about the next name before writing it...

Dawn

Joe thinks, and then rejects the idea. He adds:

Dawn - BAD IDEA. LIVES IN YOUR HOUSE

But his expression suggests he hasn't killed the idea.

INT. JOE'S KITCHEN - MINUTES LATER

Dawn, eyes baggy from lack of sleep (and sitting in the same spot as last night), looks up to a uniformed Joe emerging from his bedroom.

DAWN

Her phone's not ringin anymore and
I think Vernon blocked me.

Joe just stares.

DAWN (CONT'D)

Can you try her again? See if it
rings for you.

JOE

I've *been* tryin. It doesn't.

DAWN

So what's that mean?? Did she block
it? Or did somethin happen to her?
Did you pay the phone?

JOE

It's automatic.

DAWN

Maybe the card's expired.

JOE

It's the family plan. Just like yours.

DAWN

So what's that mean?? She *blocked* us??

Beat. Joe has a thought.

JOE

Tell me everything about Vernon.
How you met him. Where it started.

Dawn hesitates. She pulls up her laptop. She finds a BLOG belonging to "Vernon Jefferson Peak."

DAWN

He was posting on Facebook and
directin people to his blog.

She then opens one of her videos. It's called "*The Meaning of the Number 56. History Repeats Itself!!!*"

DAWN (CONT'D)

This is the video I did where he
first commented.

JOE

How'd you start communication?

DAWN

In the comments. Then he messaged me on Facebook.

JOE

Was Louise in your video? The one where he first reached out?

Dawn thinks about it. The answer is yes. Dawn's hand goes to her mouth as tears rush to her eyes. "*What have I done?*" The gears are turning in Joe's head. Dawn then notices something *behind* Joe. He turns to inquire...

JOE'S POV: A RESERVATION POLICE CAR is parked outside the neighbor's house.

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - MINUTES LATER

Joe emerges from the front door to see Lakota standing on the neighbor's porch, questioning him.

MINUTES LATER

Joe approaches Lakota's car as Lakota returns from the neighboring house.

JOE (CONT'D)

What's the big idea?

LAKOTA

Investigatin some murders. Yourself?

They arrive at each other.

JOE

Okay: this is *my* side. These are *my* people. You look into your own.

LAKOTA

You wanna come over and look into "my people", I invite you.

JOE (CONT'D)

Okay, don't run with the "my people," you know that's not what I meant. And just 'cause you invite *us* over, doesn't mean you're invited here.

LAKOTA

I don't need your fuckin invite. Someone fired a gun on *my* soil to kill two people.

(MORE)

LAKOTA (CONT'D)

If it's one a mine, that's one thing,
but if it's on *your* side, then that
person committed murder on
Reservation land and that *is* my
fuckin business.

JOE

(aggressive)

Then we might as well help
each other! What do you got?
Any leads?

LAKOTA (CONT'D)

Oh, we might as well HELP
now? Okay, great, sure:
leads? I might! How bout you?
Anyone convenient?

JOE

What does *that* mean? What's convenient?

LAKOTA

I mean what's your next move, sheriff?
For example: d'ya always go around in
muddy-ass work boots? 'Cause I go on
Facebook and suddenly you got on a
different pair in every picture.
What's your size?

A TEXT FROM GUY hits Joe's phone with a *DING!* Joe welcomes
the distraction. It reads: "*Coem to office! Kid with info*"

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - MORNING

Joe enters the office. Lakota not far behind him. The Antique
Store Owner sits in the corner. BRIAN, teary-eyed, sits at
Guy's desk.

GUY

Hey sheriff.

Guy walks over to Joe. He says covertly:

GUY (CONT'D)

Kid says he'll only talk to you. Been
avoidin eye contact like a junkie.

Joe looks to the Antique Owner.

ANTIQUA STORE OWNER

I ain't movin 'til somethin gets done.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Brian stands in a corner. Joe stands close, listening as
Brian struggles through a story.

BRIAN

Next mornin, after I sent the video
to - him, out there...

JOE
To Michael.

BRIAN
(nods)
The next mornin I went to Eric's house to see if, y'know, Sarah was there, if she slept over, whatever. But that's when I saw the police was there.

JOE
Do you *know* Michael?

BRIAN
He went to our school, two years ahead of us. He still goes to parties. When I saw him at the last party - he was the only non-kid, and he was starin at Eric AND Sarah like...I mean, it *looked* like he was gonna kill 'em!

That does it. Joe walks to the door. Brian becomes very defensive:

BRIAN (CONT'D)
(as Joe walks off)
But I obviously didn't actually think that! I never woulda ever sent the video if I coulda even imagined!

Joe opens the door and calls out to Guy:

JOE
Guy! Just you. Come over here.

We go to MICHAEL, whose eye are wide with paranoia. Guy walks over to Joe and enters the interrogation room. The door SLAMS SHUT and we remain with Michael. He looks over to Lakota, who looks back at him. Tense.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - SECONDS LATER

Guy, having just heard Brian's story, is very amped up.

GUY
(whispering)
We gotta get to his place NOW.
Before he can flush anythin.

BRIAN
Can I leave? Can you not do anythin with me here? If he knows it's me...!

GUY
He ain't doin shit to you, kid.
(to Joe)
(MORE)

GUY (CONT'D)

We do it now. Or else he gets ahead,
gets rid a evidence. Now or never.

JOE

But why would he do it? Why
would he do it?

GUY (CONT'D)

Why the hell WOULDN'T he do
it? You're givin him a
special kinda credit, man.

Guy leans in to WHISPER INTENSELY:

GUY (CONT'D)

He coulda been infiltratin this whole
time. Part a this whole anti-white
campaign. You do it from the *in*-side.
Kill off the white leaders, blame it on
the system while you *hide* in the system!

JOE

Ted wasn't white. He's Hispanic.

GUY

Blacks fuckin hate Hispanics, too!
All the other colors is just fake
minorities takin their chances away.
They hate 'em *more* than whites!

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - SECONDS LATER

Joe and Guy leave the interrogation room. They approach Michael.

JOE

Michael. Can I see your phone?

MICHAEL

What for?

JOE

You get sent a video recently?

MICHAEL

Like what?

JOE

Can I see your Instagram?

MICHAEL

I ain't checked that for a while.

JOE

Records show that this particular
message - sent to you - was "Seen."
Unless someone else had your phone?

MICHAEL

...I might not'a had it on me at one point.

JOE

Can I see it? With your permission?

Michael hands him his phone.

JOE (CONT'D)

Can you pull up your Instagram?

Michael hesitantly goes to Instagram. He hands his phone to Joe, who finds the message. Before he opens it:

JOE (CONT'D)

Okay, so this message was already opened. Yes? As you can see?

GUY

(looking over)

I witness that.

Joe holds it up for Lakota, who is more interested in Joe than the phone. Joe opens the message and the video.

MICHAEL

(re: the photo)

Is that the mayor's son? That's Eric?

JOE

You didn't think to show us this?

MICHAEL

I didn't know if it'd be helpful.

JOE

So you thought about it, but decided it wouldn't be?

GUY

(pointed)

That's him with your girl, right? Some cholo with your little white girlfriend?

MICHAEL

What? No. I hardly know her. We're not a thing.

JOE

Not anymore?

MICHAEL

Not never.

Guy walks away, roaming outside. Lakota is watching Michael's interrogation with intense skepticism.

JOE
How old is she?

MICHAEL
...I dunno. Like eighteen.

JOE
Like eighteen, but *Not*
eighteen?

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
I mean - even if she not:
when it started, barely, I
was still seventeen.

JOE
How old are you now?

MICHAEL
Nineteen, but my birthday's two
weeks ago, and she broke up before
I even started here.

JOE
So *she* ended it? But you didn't
stop wantin it?

MICHAEL
I did stop! We hardly even
started when I was seventeen!
We never even--

JOE (CONT'D)
So that video didn't bother
you?

MICHAEL
What do you mean?

JOE
You weren't bothered by the video?

MICHAEL
I was bothered. By the idea a
someone *TRYIN* to bother me.

GUY (O.S.)
Sheriff! Goddamn! Come out here!

Joe walks **OUTSIDE** to see Guy standing by Michael's car.

GUY (CONT'D)
C'mere. Look what's on the back seat.

MICHAEL
(realizing)
I was bringin it back!

Joe walks up to Michael's car, whose back window is open. A
RIFLE rests on the back seat.

GUY

What bullets was at the crime scene?

MICHAEL

I was takin it out for target practice! You knowed I had it! You told me to practice! Why would I ever use a gun that I know you know I got?? I ain't stupid!

(appealing to Joe)

Sheriff. Please. You gotta believe me. I don't know *what* this is. I waked up and heard about the murders just like you. I *did* get the video last night - two nights ago. I *did*. But that gun is there 'cause I didn't even think about it. You think I'd keep that shit there if I used it to kill somebody??

GUY (CONT'D)

Just a coincidence, right?!
Just the same gun with the same goddamn bullets!

Yes, you did, you did! Which is why you killed the KID in the picture! With the gun that uses the same bullets that fuckin shot 'em dead that's also in your fuckin car right now!

Joe, processing this, looks to Lakota, who looks pointedly back at him.

JOE

If you were returnin this, why is it still in your car?

MICHAEL

It was a busy day. I was goin to. I was thinkin about the murders. I forgot.

JOE

You forgot there was a gun in your car? That you hid?

MICHAEL

I put it under blankets so nobody would see it and steal it.

JOE

So you *didn't* forget it was there! You put blankets over it!

MICHAEL

Yeah! Before I drove over. My window's open, I *obviously* forgot!

JOE

...I think we need to search this vehicle, Michael.

MICHAEL

What do you mean??

JOE

Or I can get a warrant. Or you can let us search. Up to you.

Michael's eyes are bulging.

MICHAEL

Sheriff: I got nothin to hide. But I don't know what this is. All I did was go to bed and wake up.

JOE

Do we have permission from you?

MICHAEL

I got nothin to hide!

Joe has pulled out his phone and turned on the VOICE RECORDER.

JOE

Michael Ross: do I, sheriff Cross, have your consent to search your vehicle?

MICHAEL

...Okay, 'cause there's nothin. But I just - can it just be you and not Guy?

Guy's eyes widen with rage.

JOE

That's fine. I got your consent?

MICHAEL

...Ah'right. Yes.

Joe goes to the driver door. Opens it. Looks under the seat and in the center cubby. He then crosses to the passenger door, looking to Lakota, who watches Joe.

Joe opens the passenger seat and checks the glove compartment. He looks under the seat, covertly reaching into his pocket to pull out TED'S WEDDING RING. He carefully places it under the seat, out of immediate view.

Joe then goes to the back seat and searches the floor. He lifts the blanket off the RIFLE and turns to Guy.

JOE

This holds the same bullets.

(to Lakota)

You wanna look?

Lakota roams over and looks into the car, not seeming to buy it.

GUY

You lookin *under* the seats, too?

Lakota looks under the driver seat. Crosses over to the passenger seat, shaking his head in deprecation. He looks under the seat and PAUSES, eyebrow raised in surprise. He reaches under the seat to pull out the WEDDING RING. He reads the engraving and slowly, skeptically holds it up.

MICHAEL

What the fuck? I never seen that in all my life! That was not there.

Guy walks up to Lakota to look at the ring. He reads the engraving: "*To my precious Ted. I will always love you.*"

GUY

This is Ted Garcia's weddin ring!

JOE

(feigning shock)
What?!

MICHAEL

(genuinely shocked)
What?!

GUY

Lookit the engraving.

Lakota hands Joe the ring. He reads it. Looks nauseous.

GUY (CONT'D)

You know what that says, Mikey?

MICHAEL

That is not from me!

Lakota, again, seems more interested in Joe than the ring.

JOE

What do you think?

LAKOTA

What do you *want* me to think?

GUY

(to Joe, incredulous)
The fuck else d'we need to see??

Joe takes that energy and turns to Michael:

JOE

Michael: you're under arrest for the murders a Ted and Eric Garcia.

MICHAEL

What??? No! What is that?! That ain't mine! You know me, Sheriff!

GUY

'Cause you're a fuckin double agent!

MICHAEL

What about my call?! I get a call,
don't I?? I get one at LEAST, I
know that!

GUY

(doing a whiny voice)

"I get a call! I get, I get, I get!"

MICHAEL

Please, Sheriff! If I'm really
arrested, I need to call my uncle,
or my brother...

GUY

Call all the brothers you want. See
what good it does.

Joe has walked to his desk to pick up a CORDLESS PHONE. He walks it to Michael. This is now seen from LAKOTA'S POV. Joe's body language betrays that he knows he's being watched.

Michael takes the phone and moves to the corner of his cell. He turns his back to everyone and dials a number.

Joe goes to his desk and turns to stare at Michael's back. Feeling Lakota's eyes on him, Joe takes a wireless EARPOD (which transmits Michael's call) and covertly fits it into his ear. As he does so, we hear RINGING. The call goes to VOICEMAIL.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

You reached Jamie Ross. Leave
me a message and I'll get
back to you soon as can be.

MICHAEL

(to Joe)
If I leave a message, is that
my call?

Joe nods.

JOE

I'm sorry.

Michael hangs up. He calls again. Once again, as through Joe's earpod, we hear RINGING.

Lakota's eyes have traveled from Joe to the CHALKBOARD of slogan ideas. Lakota notices the style of the E. It matches the E in the spray-painted sign at Ted's. He HANGS on this. Joe can sense...

LAKOTA WALKS BRISKLY OFF. Joe's eyes go to him, alert.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)
 You reached Jamie Ross. Leave
 me a message and I'll be back
 to you soon as can be.

GUY
 He ain't pickin up, man. He
 must be at a peaceful
 protest.

Meanwhile, Lakota has gotten into his cruiser and DRIVES OFF.
 Joe abruptly STANDS UP. Guy looks over, confused. Joe is already
 off to his car.

INT. JOE'S CRUISER - MOMENTS LATER

Joe gets into his cruiser, earpod still in his ear. RINGING
 has re-commenced.

A few blocks ahead is Lakota's diminishing cruiser. Joe starts
 his car - headlights off - and ACCELERATES to catch up to
 Lakota.

The ringing persists. As it does, Joe calls Louise on
 speakerphone. It goes instantly to voicemail. He hangs up.

When Joe is a block and a half behind Lakota's car, he slows
 down to maintain a healthy distance.

As he does this, he notices: to his side, a block away, is
 the pathetic "City Hall" building. A VIGIL has assembled
 before it. WARREN stands at a microphone before the crowd.

WARREN

The meanin a'a candlelight vigil is
 different for everyone. When
 candles get lit one-by-one -

Joe, who has slowed down to take this in, now SPEEDS PAST.

INT. CITY HALL - CONTINUOUS

The vigil (in memory of Ted and Eric) is in progress. Most
 people haven't yet lit their candles, but the space is
 already warmly illuminated by the glow of the illuminatas.

Warren stands at the mic. He is instructing the crowd as they
 light their candles:

WARREN

- it is symbolic for spreadin a
 message a support from one person to
 another. As we are surrounded by
 darkness - a good man and his bright
 son, struck down before they could do
 their work towards *Real Progress* in
 this town - work that'll STILL be
 done, and we will see TO it that it's
 done, in their memory and their honor.

SARAH, shell-shocked and traumatized, stands among the crowd, looking dissociated.

WARREN (CONT'D)

We walk along a path no man has yet trodden. And we need leaders ready to walk the way a THIS path, not the streets a the past...

LATER

Brian, very nervous, walks up to the lectern (having handed PHIL his smartphone, discretely asking him to take video). *Brian's speech will earn an increasing amount of jeers and vitriol.*

BRIAN

Eric was my best friend... We coulda been *better* to each other, but he was. He was my best-best friend... And his dad beat the system! He was a Person a Color that beat the odds to become a Person a Power...and they got killed by that same system! Even the killer's a victim of it! And *I'm* a PART of it! I'm just another privileged white kid and my job is to sit down and LISTEN, which is what I plan to do after makin this speech, which I have NO right to make!

WOMAN (O.S.)

Oh Jesus -- ENOUGH!!!

BRIAN

Their murders got FRAMED on a true and *real* cause, and if you believe the lies, then you helped pull the trigger!

MAN (O.S)

FUCK THIS!
ANTIFA!!!

WOMAN (O.S.)

YOU'RE the lies!

Warren comes up to pull Brian away, but Brian seizes the mic:

BRIAN

THIS VIGIL IS HAPPENING ON STOLEN GROUND!!!

MINUTES LATER

Joe is still tailing LAKOTA, who arrives at the driveway to **JOE'S HOUSE**. Joe idles to a stop on the side of the approaching road, having a distant but clear view of his own property.

PHONE RINGING, as heard from Joe's EARPOD, starts again.

JOE'S POV: Lakota has parked his car in front of the house. He roams about, peering in through windows, and then seems to be caught by something. He circles to the front door to meet DAWN on the porch. Dawn, wearing her nightgown, looks distraught.

While Joe watches this with increasing alarm, the SOUND of Michael's UNCLE finally answering the phone invades the scene:

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Mike?

MICHAEL

Uncle Jamie--

UNCLE JAMIE (V.O.)

(brusquely)

I really can't be on the phone right now. Tina been sick and we been waitin on the doctor to call us back--

Whimpering sounds from Michael.

UNCLE JAMIE (V.O.)

Mike?... What's goin on?

MICHAEL (V.O.)

I been arrested.

UNCLE JAMIE (V.O.)

What the fuck?!

(more whimpering from Michael)

Arrested for what? Mike?

MICHAEL (V.O.)

They think I did it. They sayin I killed the mayor and his son. I think they planted shit. They planted his ring. It was in my car, but I never seen it before!

UNCLE JAMIE (V.O.)

The fuck?? What ring? Where are you? Did the cops you work with arrest you?

CRYING sounds from Michael, playing in Joe's ear.

UNCLE JAMIE (V.O.)

Mike, where are you?

In Joe's POV: Dawn is desperately telling Lakota a story. Lakota looks overwhelmed.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

I didn't do this, Uncle Jamie.

UNCLE JAMIE (V.O.)

Ah'right, don't say a word, y'unnerstand? Not to no one.

(MORE)

UNCLE JAMIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 No matter what they ask or what it's
 about. I'm callin a lawyer.

Joe, utterly guilt-stricken, looks like he's going to be sick. He looks down, continuing to listen. *What am I doing?*

MICHAEL (V.O.)
 I miss Mom and Dad.
 (more crying)
 I don't know why this is happenin
 to me... I want Mom and Dad.

Joe becomes desperate. Trying to think. He starts searching the car. He goes to the glove compartment, where he finds the DOLL that fell out of Louise's pocket and bears Vernon's tire mark. He hangs on this.

UNCLE JAMIE (V.O.)
 Mike... Son, listen to me--

DAWN (O.S.)
 JOE!!!

Joe looks up to see the jarring image of DAWN running toward him in a mad panic. Lakota is chasing after her.

DAWN (CONT'D)
 They took the car!

Joe steps out of the car to receive the hysterical Dawn. Lakota hangs slightly back to observe.

JOE
 (to Dawn)
 What's wrong?

DAWN (CONT'D)
Someone took the car. It had to be Louise! Who COULD'VE asides from her? She's got the keys!

JOE
 What do you mean? When?

LAKOTA
 (to Joe)
 You followin me? What you worried I'm gonna find?

DAWN
 (answering Joe)
I finally got myself to sleep - I was SLEEPIN! - and I woke up to the sound a the engine startin, and when I got outside the car was speedin away!

JOE
 (unable to focus)
 What do you mean?

DAWN

It was a speck in the background when I got outside! And all her things're gone! Her clothes! Her sewin stuff! She musta been inside with me asleep!!

Joe suddenly turns to Lakota. An IDEA madly brightens his face. Derangement illuminates his eyes.

JOE

Vernon did this.

LAKOTA

What the fuck?

JOE

He abducted my wife. Then he killed 'em.

LAKOTA

Your WIFE now?? Who the fuck is Vernon?

DAWN

(grave realization)
Oh my God. He DID, didn't he?!

JOE

(gaining in resolve)
Vernon brainwashed my wife. He knowed the angles on Michael, he coulda planted the ring--

DAWN

Who's Michael??

LAKOTA

A scared, innocent-lookin black kid this man just tossed in a jail cell!

STATIC HISSES FROM THE POLICE RADIO in Joe's car, and then GUY: "*Sheriff? Come in, sheriff!*"

JOE

He kidnapped my wife. I think he's a covert, high-level arm of Antifa. Manipulatin people. Preyin on their fears and trauma. And then he seduced my wife by killin the man she hated! *She went missin straight after the murders! After he woulda framed Michael! We have to let Michael out! We gotta let him out now!*

Lakota just stares at Joe, eyes buzzing with suspicion and disgust. THE CAR RADIO HISSES AGAIN.

GUY (V.O.)

Sheriff?!

Dawn, manic now, is in the grip of Joe's "theory." Hands cupped over her mouth.

DAWN
*Could she'a done it too, Joe?! She
 couldn't'a! What if she's part of it?!*

Joe's phone starts ringing in his hand. It's GUY.

LAKOTA
 Take that.

Joe obliges.

GUY (V.O.)
*Sheriff! Dumpster afire!! Someone
 got the suspect out!*

INT. JOE'S CAR (MOVING) - NIGHT

A now-frantic Joe drives past the VIGIL. (It has thinned out, but is still in progress.) Lakota, as usual, is on Joe's tail.

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Joe frantically parks, and runs breathlessly to the front door. The DUMPSTER next to the building has been set afire. It blazes intensely. GUY has been waiting for him outside, distraught.

GUY
*Sheriff! I wasn't even gone but two
 seconds!*

Joe runs past Guy and into the building.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Joe enters and rushes to Michael's cell, whose door has been opened (the key still in the lock). The cell is now EMPTY.

GUY
 I swear on God, sheriff. I warn't
 even gone one minute.

JOE
 You weren't supposed to be
 gone *at all!*

Put what out?! It's still
 goin!

GUY (CONT'D)
 I know, but the fire! I had
 to put it out!

I couldn't! It's too big!
 Plus, I needed you to see.

JOE
 See what?? That you left the fuckin
 - KEY?!

(MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)
 (searching for the extinguisher)
 Where the fuckin stinguisher at?

He tosses things around, looking for it.

GUY
 I used it all up, it warn't enough.

Lakota has arrived at the door, watching intensely.

GUY (CONT'D)
 The fuck d'you fuckin WANT, man?!

Joe's mind is racing.

JOE
 Lakota: you lock off both ends a
 the street.

LAKOTA
 'Scuse me?

JOE
 (to Guy)
 You: go look for 'im. I look, too.
 He musta ran.
 (to Lakota)
 You too! Let's work together!

Joe and Guy run to their respective cruisers. Lakota just watches, incredulous.

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Joe arrives at his cruiser. On the way, he sees BRIAN standing at the end of the street, anxiously watching from a distance (and gripping an unlit candle).

JOE
 BRIAN?!

Brian backs away. He has only seen the fire, but it has him worried. He FLEES.

INT. JOE'S CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

Joe jumps in, turns on the engine, and starts driving. As he does so, he sees Lakota opening the trunk of his car to fetch a FIRE EXTINGUISHER.

As Joe continues driving, he looks to his rear view mirror to see Lakota SNUFFING OUT THE FIRE with the extinguisher. Ahead of Joe, Guy's car has gone RACING.

Joe makes a turn and drives for a moment in fraught silence. His eyes are BUSY as they try to devise a plan.

In fact, for a moment, Joe looks hypnotized by panic. We hold on his CU for a while, during which he **TURNS** to drive down Main Street. As he does so, something gradually becomes apparent to him. His face goes ashen white and a semi-distant **GLOWING** (from an off-screen fire?) is subtly reflected in his pupils. The car **DECELERATES** as he takes in the following sight...

JOE'S POV: The words "**PIG ROAST NEXT**" have been WRITTEN IN FIRE in huge letters (seven feet tall) across the length of two storefronts.

Joe accelerates past, looking about with paranoid eyes. *Where are they? Who's doing this?*

He suddenly thinks he sees **SOMEONE ON THE ROOF** of a building and he **SLAMS** on the brakes. He ducks under the steering wheel. After a moment of inactivity, he rotates his head to look up. It's a little **ZOZOBRA** doll on a store's rooftop ("**White Supremacy**" written on its torso).

INT. MICHAEL'S APARTMENT - SAME TIME

The lights are off. Gumball lights flare outside the window, intermittently illuminating the ceiling in blue and red.

THE DOOR IS KICKED OPEN to reveal **GUY**, gun extended.

GUY

FREEZE!

Guy rushes from room to room, establishing that the apartment is empty. He notices the **TARGET SHEET** on Michael's wall.

Guy runs out to the **BALCONY** and goes to the **NEIGHBOR'S APARTMENT**. He **BANGS** on the door.

An **HISPANIC WOMAN** answers the door.

GUY (CONT'D)

IS HE HERE??

HISPANIC WOMAN

(terrified)

IS WHO HERE?!

Guy moves *past her, into the apartment*, to inspect it. He goes from room to room.

HISPANIC WOMAN (CONT'D)

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?!

He gets to the bathroom, where **SOMEONE** is in the **SHOWER**.

GUY
ANNOUNCE YERSELF!

HISPANIC MAN (O.S.)
QUE?!?!

Guy withdraws from the bathroom to move to the BACK TERRACE. He then JUMPS OVER TO THE **NEIGHBORING TERRACE** to look through the back window, which frames a kitchen where a SMALL FAMILY is having dinner. They see Guy and SCREAM.

GUY
WHERE IS HE?! TELL THE TRUTH!

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Guy returns to his car and SPEEDS OFF.

INT. GUY'S CRUISER (MOVING) - MOMENTS LATER

Guy drives, using his blinding TORCHLIGHT to illuminate dark alleys and to peer into black voids of desert. He's like a hellhound, determined to the point of possession.

He is driving up a HILL. Arriving at the TOP, he gains a panoramic view of the surrounding earth. He sees a lone-but-sizable FIRE BURNING in the desert. He ACCELERATES toward it.

INT. JOE'S CRUISER - MINUTES LATER

Joe - also using his torch to illuminate dark spaces, but notably less eager than Guy (he is mesmerized by confusion) - emerges from town to start down the **HIGHWAY**.

As he drives, he sees Guy's cruiser in the distance. It's parked off the side of the road, headlights illuminating Guy's back, which stands twenty feet ahead of his car.

Joe pulls off the highway and drives toward Guy's cruiser.

EXT. DESERT - CONTINUOUS

Joe pulls up to Guy's parked cruiser. He steps out of his car to see that Guy, now 30 ft ahead of his car, is standing with his arms extended, aiming his gun at a desperate and terrified MICHAEL (100 ft away), who stands alone in the desert. He seems scared to move.

MICHAEL
PLEASE!

GUY
DON'T FUCKIN MOVE!

A thin, tattooed MASKED MAN - wearing an ALL-BLACK OUTFIT - stands in the shallow arroyo, about two thirds of the way between Joe and the truck, training his SMARTPHONE CAMERA on the raging fire. His camera is aimed specifically at Joe.

Joe instinctively swings his gun upward and takes aim at the tattooed man. The man sees this and turns away to RUN. As he does so, his smartphone's FLASHLIGHT accidentally turns on.

Joe FIRES his gun at the fleeing man. Misses him. Joe now breaks into a sprint to pursue. His balance proves unreliable and his leg is in pain. He TWISTS his ankle, FALLS to his knees, and then AIMS his gun at the escaping man, who is bounding toward the truck.

Joe FIRES his gun, missing again. But the fleeing man trips, DROPPING HIS PHONE (visible because of the flashlight) and continues toward the TRUCK. Leaving the phone behind. He arrives at the truck and jumps into the passenger seat.

Joe rises and starts toward the truck, but the TRUCK ACCELERATES IN REVERSE, and then, once at a dirt road, swings out and speeds off to the right.

Joe stares for a minute and then realizes that he knows where the truck is headed (its road leads to an intersection that he can reach in half the time). Joe breaks into a painful SPRINT back to his cruiser.

INT. CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

Joe climbs into the car, turns on the engine and kicks the car into reverse. Careening away from the fire, Joe throws the car into drive and guns it. (Michael remains alone in the desert.)

Joe speeds up to the top of a HILL, which overlooks the road that the truck took. (It also overlooks the giant flaming sign, which we can now read: "NO JUSTICE NO PEACE".) Joe sees the TRUCK down below. He notes the truck's trajectory/speed, and then hits the gas.

Joe speeds down the other side of the hill, moving toward an INTERSECTION at the base. The converging road to the right is obscured by a cliff's base. Joe speeds up.

As Joe approaches the intersection, the glow of approaching headlights becomes faintly visible - their off-screen source blocked by the cliff base.

Joe's foot jams the gas pedal to the floor. The oncoming headlights (belonging to the unseen car) become BRIGHTER.

Joe drives straight into the intersection as the TRUCK APPEARS--

JOE'S CAR T-BONES THE TRUCK, demolishing its passenger side. Both cars slide to a halt amid broken glass and car debris in the middle of the intersection.

The Masked Men are momentarily stunned, the driver's head resting on the steering wheel and the passenger delirious. The passenger then snaps to, and sees Joe. Joe turns his HEADLIGHTS on, illuminating the Masked Passenger's face. His BLUE EYES glow ominously in the harsh headlights.

The Masked Man bends down for a moment, disappearing from view. He then rises to pull up a SEMI-AUTOMATIC ASSAULT RIFLE, and aims it at Joe. (The driver has lifted his head.)

Joe desperately throws the gear into REVERSE and steps on the gas. As he drives backwards, Joe DUCKS under the dashboard, just as the Masked Man FIRES THE MACHINE GUN AT JOE'S WINDSHIELD, shattering it to bits and destroying Joe's chair. The car's back smashes into a tree off the road, and the machine-gun fire continues, riddling the car with bullets (even the gumball lights atop the car are demolished). Joe, miraculously, has not been hit.

Joe, still bent down, throws the car into DRIVE, and steps on the gas again. The car speeds toward the truck's passenger side again, but the Masked Driver drives forward (clearing Joe's path just in time) and Joe's head RISES from under the steering wheel to SEE (too late) that he's driving himself off the road and over a hill.

Joe slams on the BRAKES, but this just causes skidding before the car sails over the hill, FALLING fifteen feet, LANDING on its nose at the base of a ditch, and FLIPPING PATHETICALLY onto its roof.

Joe, who wasn't strapped into his seat belt, lies upside-down in an gnarled heap on the car ceiling, which is now the floor. He hasn't been badly injured, but he's extremely banged up. The *ding-ding-ding* of the "door ajar" bell chirps.

Joe reaches painfully for the driver door, which is bent slightly inward. He tries to open it, but it's JAMMED.

Joe goes for the passenger door, which opens with a harsh CREAK. He crawls out in agony.

MINUTES LATER

Joe struggles to climb up the clay-like sand of the ditch. It's not easy.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

Joe arrives limping at the flaming sign. He walks to the shallow arroyo, where he finds the THIN MASKED MAN'S SMARTPHONE - its flashlight still beaming.

Joe picks up the phone, which is still recording VIDEO. Joe stops the video and sits down on the dirt. He goes to the PHOTO LIBRARY. There are many, many videos. Joe clicks on one.

It is a VIDEO of the muscular masked man - holding a BLM sign - igniting the dumpster fire outside the police station.

After finishing this, Joe goes to another VIDEO. It features the muscular masked man throwing a burning Bible into the farmhouse window.

Joe goes to the next VIDEO. It is from the POV of someone in the passenger seat of a truck, fixed at first on the black-clad muscular man at the steering wheel. He laughs as he accelerates and the camera now swings forward to face the windshield as the car speeds toward the front of a Louisiana CHURCH. The car smashes through the entrance, collapsing the wall. People congregating inside scream and panic.

Joe cycles through a few more videos, each featuring acts of domestic terrorism - throwing a molotov cocktail into a rural police station, exploding a fire truck...and finally: a video of another MASKED MAN IN ALL BLACK - thicker than the dead one - firing a SCOPED RIFLE (from the roof of a building) down at police officers.

Joe looks up from the phone, utterly defeated. His eyes are blank with dissociation.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

Joe walks limping through the night, gripping the masked man's smartphone in one hand and his gun in the other.

EXT. BRIAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

BRIAN, sneaking home, removes the screen from his bedroom window and tries to slide the window open from the outside. It won't budge. He tries again. No luck.

EXT. BRIAN'S HOUSE - MINUTES LATER

Brian stands before his front door, working up the nerve to enter. He reaches for the door. Hesitates. Then he opens it.

INT. BRIAN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Brian steps in to find that his MOTHER is standing in the hall, waiting for him. Behind her, Brian's father is seen in the kitchen, sitting at the table.

BRIAN

Hi mom.

BRIAN'S MOTHER

What are you doin? You just come in
and out as you please? Back from
your little protest?

BRIAN

We didn't do it today.

BRIAN'S FATHER

Oh, you're takin yourself a break?

Brian looks to his dad.

BRIAN

My friend got killed. I was at the
vigil.

BRIAN'S MOTHER

Oh, is that how you say it? Your
friend got killed?

BRIAN

*Yes! My best friend got murdered!
Why are you yellin at me??*

BRIAN'S MOTHER

Why am I YELLIN?? YOU killed
your best friend! YOU!

You goddamn BROUGHT this
here!

BRIAN (CONT'D)

*What?? How could you say
that??*

I didn't want this! I was
protesting police brutality!

BRIAN'S MOTHER

*Kill the boomers?? Abolish the
police?? You're a stupid little white
RUNT fightin for the REMOVAL a whites!
And you will be the FIRST to get
removed! Y'unnerstand? If it keeps
goin like this, we will be shot in our
very beds!*

BRIAN

They're the ones shootin people in
their beds! Can't you see??

Brian's Father has come into the hall.

BRIAN'S MOTHER
 Don't you DARE! Your little
 communist revolution is
 funded by the Dems and by
 child traffickin PEDOPHILES!
 You think you're fightin
 corruption?? You're a ARM for
 corruption!
 -- Oh my God, *Epstein?!*
 That's fuckin Clinton! Trump
 is the only one TALKIN about
 it! He's the only one workin
 to STOP it!
 PIZZAGATE! PIZZAGATE!
 ADRENOCHROME!

BRIAN (CONT'D)
 Oh, but innocent Trump - he's
 not doing ANYthing?
Pedophiles?? What about the
 thousand pictures of Trump
 with Epstein?!
 In *your* bubble! Only in your
 QAnon bubble!
 That was disproved!!

BRIAN'S FATHER
 ENOUGH!!!
 (to Brian)
 Real simple: You threw away the
 right to come in this house.

Brian's Mother hesitates at that.

BRIAN
 What do you mean??

BRIAN'S FATHER
 You will not make us into
 accomplices!

BRIAN (CONT'D)
I'M NOT AN ACCOMPLICE!

BRIAN'S FATHER
 PEOPLE ARE BEIN KILLED NOW! BECAUSE A
 YOU! BECAUSE A YOUR LITTLE PROTEST! AND
 YOU STILL WANNA HOLD UP YOUR LITTLE
 SIGN AND MARCH YOUR LITTLE MARCH??

As Brian's Father said that, he was pushing Brian out of the
 house - poking and prodding his chest with aggression. Brian
 is now on the front porch, tears in his eyes.

BRIAN'S FATHER (CONT'D)
 You drew a line in the sand.
 Get it? Not us. *You* did this.

BRIAN
 I'm just trying to do what I
 think's right--

BRIAN'S FATHER
*Well, We Don't Agree With You. GET
 IT?? We will NOT Get Fuckin Took
 Down By This.*

Brian's Father SLAMS the door in his face.

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Joe is walking toward his house, whose windows glow in the distance. He's still several hundred feet away. His uniform, covered in blood and dirt, leaves a floating trail of dust in his wake - as if he were steaming.

As he nears, he sees VERNON'S TRUCK in front of the house.

JOE'S POV: Illuminated by its headlights are Louise and Dawn and Joe, arguing as they did on Louise's final night. As if the memory is living before us.

The sound of a phone VIBRATING. He looks at his hand carrying the tattooed man's phone. It is not vibrating. He then pulls his smartphone out of his pocket. GUY is calling. He answers.

GUY (V.O.)
*Sheriff! Dumpster afire!! Someone
 got the suspect out!*

Joe hangs up, bewildered. He looks back to the house. The apparitions of Joe, Dawn and Louise are no longer there. Nor is Vernon's truck, although there is another CAR - a TAXI CAB - parked in its place.

Joe stops at the cab. A Latino man waits at the wheel. He nods respectfully to Joe, ignoring his insane appearance. Joe looks back without recognition.

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - BACK YARD - NIGHT

Joe, now SHIRTLESS, stuffs his uniform's shirt into a BBQ pit. He sets it afire.

His face illuminated by firelight, Joe looks ahead to see LOUISE in the kitchen, framed by the window, watching him with worried eyes.

INT. KITCHEN - SECONDS LATER

Joe, still shirtless, steps into the house. Outside the window, the crackling BBQ fire continues to blaze.

Louise stands defensively, wearing a long overcoat and holding two packed suitcases.

LOUISE
 I couldn't wait. If it's not safe.
 I can't stay here.

Joe is too stunned to find words right away.

LOUISE (CONT'D)
 What happened to you?
 (fearfully)
 Was that him?

He takes a step forward. Her weight transfers from the front of her feet to her heels. He feels it.

JOE
 I'm been punished.

Louise doesn't answer. Then:

LOUISE
 Was it Vernon?? Is it him?

Joe just stares back at her. She looks very scared.

LOUISE (CONT'D)
 What is he doin this for? Is she
 with him? Could she be doin it,
 too? And the boy you arrested? They
 let him escape?

Beat. Joe can't even think. He looks to her suitcases.

JOE
 That doesn't need to mean you're
 leavin. It can be you comin back.
 Everythin is different. There is no
 mayor now. You don't have to think ever
 about him again. We win by default.

Louise looks afraid.

JOE (CONT'D)
 Please. I love you. I love you with all
 my heart. So much. I'm runnin for you.
 (realizing that's pressure)
 I'm doin it for me, too. For - to -
 prove to us. To be somethin we can be
 proud of. I don't wanna just stay the
 same. I know you can't do that
 anymore. I know that. I learned it
 couldn't just be words anymore. Every
 marriage goes into crisis.

Louise, very nervous, glances to the WINDOW. Joe looks. He sees, in the distance, TRUCK HEADLIGHTS arriving at the top of a semi-distant hill. They then TURN OFF.

JOE (CONT'D)
 That's him?
 (back to Louise)
 His name's not even Vernon.
 (MORE)

JOE (CONT'D)

He's lyin to you. He doesn't love you. He wants to use you.

Louise doesn't seem to register any of this. She looks at him with an eerie lack of recognition. Joe's tone shifts. He sees he must change tactics.

JOE (CONT'D)

Stay with me. I love you. Tell him it's over. I'm not upset. It's *my* fault. But everythin really is changed now. We can be newylweds. We can. We win.

Joe starts to recede.

JOE (CONT'D)

I'll let you think about it. I'll go to the other room. It needs to be your choice if you stay. Do what feels right. I won't even talk to him if he comes. This is your choice.

Joe goes into a room that we have not yet seen. It is a storage room of sorts, but the wallpaper suggests that it was once a NURSERY. Boxes abound. In one corner is a BABY CRIB, which has been filled with boxes and papers, etc. Joe eases the door half-closed and stands in the semi-dark (some light spills in from the hall).

As Joe stands, waiting for Louise to choose to stay, he looks out the window. He looks up at the silhouette of the truck perched on the horizon line of the semi-distant hill.

As he stares, he sinks back into his thoughts. His eyes fog over, and then--

Harsh VIBRATION cuts through the silence. In his back pocket. He reaches to pull out the tattooed man's PHONE. A "Restricted Number" is calling.

Joe stares at the phone as it vibrates a third time. And a fourth. And a fifth. He ANSWERS it.

Holding the phone to his ear, Joe doesn't speak. Neither does the person on the other end. Not even breathing can be heard. The only distinguishable sounds: night insects (cicadas and crickets) and a rumbling, idle car engine.

After a beat, the other person hangs up.

Joe stiffly lowers the phone. And then: a brief FLASH on the crest of the hill, followed promptly by--

SMASH! The WINDOW SHATTERS.

A bullet whizzes by the top of Joe's head, striking the wall behind him. Stunned, Joe incredulously looks to the shattered window. Outside is dark night.

As Joe gawks stupidly, BLOOD dribbles into his eye, rendering half of his POV dark red.

Joe touches his temple to realize that BLOOD IS POURING DOWN HIS FACE. The bullet grazed the top of his head, causing a FLESH WOUND which is nonetheless bleeding profusely.

Another SHOT is fired from well beyond the window (its muzzleflash visible in the distance) and the bullet strikes the crib in the corner.

Now activated, Joe throws himself to the floor. He looks to the doorway to see: DAWN standing in the hallway as the door eases open. She is wearing the SAME OVERCOAT that Louise was just wearing. *Was that a hallucination? Was it Dawn the whole time?*

Joe starts manically CRAWLING on his belly toward the door, but then remembers something, crawls to the desk, reaches up to feel around. His hand finds his GUN. As he pulls it down, another BULLET strikes the desk.

Now clutching his gun, Joe climbs manically into a run. He goes to Dawn, who is frozen with shock, and TACKLES her to the ground. This happens just as a bullet hits the hallway wall, narrowly missing her.

Now that Dawn is on the ground, Joe starts scrambling on his belly. He gets onto ALL FOURS and crawls desperately down the hall, blood continuing to flow down his face.

JOE (CONT'D)
Stay down! Stay...!

Joe gets to the front door of the house...

EXT. JOE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

...and stumbles onto his feet and RUNS to the taxi cab, whose headlights are on and whose engine is humming. In the front seat is a NOW-DEAD DRIVER whose chest has been blown open by a bullet. The broadly-cracked windshield sports a bullet hole.

Joe pulls out the driver's corpse, spilling him to the ground, and jumps into the car. He throws the gear into drive and squeals out of the driveway. After driving past the house, three more reports are issued from the rifle in the distance. One round hits the roof of the car.

The next round (from a different source?) strikes the back TIRE. It BLOWS OUT, forcing Joe to swerve and collide head-on with a TREE.

Joe hesitates, looks at the REAR-VIEW MIRROR, which then reflects distant muzzleflash. The BACK WINDOW SHATTERS, followed by one more flash and the REAR-VIEW WINDOW EXPLODES.

Joe SWINGS OPEN the door, jumps out, FIRES his gun without discipline in the general direction of the gunshots, and runs to round the front of the car. Another distant gunshot is followed by the *plunk* of a bullet hitting the metal of the car body, just missing Joe.

Joe arrives at the front of the car, behind the tree, blocking the sniper's view. He crouches, trying to think. He looks left and right, neither of which are viable options. Blood is dribbling into his eye. He squints in pain, pressing his palm into the wound on his head.

He looks AHEAD. A long stretch of black desert, beyond which looms the TOWN, the circuitry of its streets glowing by illuminatas.

Quiet hesitation and then--

ANOTHER SHOT is heard, *definitely* from a new source, equally distant (to Joe's side). The bullet hits the hood of the car.

Joe BREAKS for the town, running through a dense field of bushes.

In the distance, the sound of TIRES spraying rocks as a car accelerates over gravel.

Joe reaches the end of a ridge and runs down a steep incline, careful to not fall - but not careful enough. He trips and tumble down a sandy hill, getting back to his feet at the base.

Joe runs limping through the desert, panting heavily, wheezing - half-blinded by the blood in his eye. He does this for a while, until--

His leg gets caught on a CACTUS. He SCREAMS. Joe pulls out the masked man's smartphone and turns on the FLASHLIGHT to reveal that he is standing at the beginning of a dense (and vast) cluster of cacti. He aims the flashlight at his leg: his THIGH is riddled with cactus thorns.

Joe retreats to run around the cacti. Just as he fully rounds the cactus field and resumes running straight ahead, the silhouette of a TRUCK appears atop the hill crest in the b.g.

Joe turns off the phone's flashlight, limping desperately.

The truck reverses a bit (to correct its trajectory) and then continues forward, its suspension jostling as it trundles messily down the incline.

The truck reaches the base of the hill and picks up immediate speed, its engine being pushed.

Joe looks back to see that the truck is accelerating mightily. It bounces brutally over the rough terrain, gaining ground.

A muzzleflash suddenly appears in the distance, to Joe's side. The bullet kicks up dust near Joe.

Suddenly the truck (behind Joe) BLASTS through a giant cactus bush, which explodes on impact, and the truck rides up onto the vast tangle of cacti. The tires get caught, riddled now with giant cactus thorns, and the truck finds itself suspended atop the cacti. The driver leans on the gas, but the tires spin impotently. The driver tries to go in reverse, but no luck. The tires, two of which have blown, roll hopelessly without traction. The truck is STUCK.

The HEADLIGHTS TURN ON, illuminating the cacti beneath the truck and the desert ahead. Joe, running away in the distance, is faintly visible.

The driver door opens (there is now no passenger), and a MUSCULAR MASKED MAN - wearing all black, like the thin man - leans out, propping himself up with one foot on the door's storage compartment. He hoists up a SEMI-AUTOMATIC ASSAULT RIFLE, takes aim, and fires a rapid succession of rounds at the fleeing figure of Joe. Orange muzzleflash strobes the desert.

Joe runs limping with total abandon (we track laterally with him). A hailstorm of bullets kick up dirt all around, chewing away at the surrounding earth. (Two more shots are also fired from the sniper to the side.) None of the rounds impact Joe. After a sustained onslaught, the bullets cease. Joe keeps running, panting, crying - nerves shredded. We hold on this desperate running for a prolonged beat.

The Masked Man, meanwhile, stands on the perch of his truck, looking down at the web of cacti surrounding him. Wrestling with whether or not to jump into it.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Brian ambles along the ghostly Main Street. He slows down at the street leading to the police station, which has been TAPED OFF. Nobody there.

Brian continues onward.

Brian arrive at a BENCH. He takes a pack of WIPES out of his pocket, and proceeds to wipe down one end of the bench.

Brian then lies down on the bench, resting his head on the end of the bench that he just sanitized.

Brian closes his eyes. Hold for a beat. A SOUND gets his attention. His eyes open. He sits up.

It's the sound of someone panting in the distance.

Brian turns in the direction of the sound. Moments later, at the end of the street, JOE LIMPS INTO VIEW, drenched in sweat. Half of his torso and pants are covered in the blood from his head wound, to which he holds one hand. He drags himself along the intersection, not noticing Brian. He continues out of view.

INT. PHARMACY - MOMENTS LATER

Joe arrives at the glass door of a pitiful pharmacy. He aims his gun and FIRES at the base of the glass. It shatters.

Joe limps through the demolished door, delirious. One side of his face is completely caked in blood. His eye sealed shut.

Seconds later, Joe - guzzling bottled water - finds RUBBING ALCOHOL, opens it, and pours it onto his head. He SCREAMS.

Joe then finds a NEEDLE and THREAD (and Neosporin). Goes to a standing mirror. He tilts his head toward the mirror and takes in his ugly head wound for the first time. He then raises the threaded needle to his head - preparing to stitch.

EXT. MAIN STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Brian is still alert on the bench.

A SHRILL WAIL OF AGONY emanates from within the pharmacy, reverberating powerfully. Brian, blood curdled, stands at frightened attention.

EXT. PHARMACY - MINUTES LATER

Joe - his head wound ineptly stitched up (truly ugly work) and glistening with Neosporin - swings out of the front door, looking both ways. Both sides of the street are empty.

Joe limps madly away. He has washed the blood off of his face, but his torso remains caked in blood.

Joe is moving swiftly toward a GUN SHOP whose door and windows have been BOARDED UP. As he limps across the street, MACHINE GUN MUZZLEFLASH flares faintly in the extreme distance (veiled by the darkness of the surrounding desert - from the south side), followed by a slightly delayed *tock-tock-tock-tock*, and then four bullets loudly chew the pavement. One bullet skips off the ground and *pings* into the body of a parked car.

Joe fires his gun twice in the direction of the muzzleflash as he runs. *His breathing is starting to strain. His asthma being triggered.*

Joe arrives at the gun shop and desperately pulls at the PLYWOOD covering the door. It takes a few harsh pulls, but Joe finally TEARS the plywood off, and lifts it to throw it away. But before he's able to throw, a bullet PEGS it, exploding a hole through the wood and knocking it dramatically out of Joe's hands.

Joe fires his gun at the source of the muzzleflash, turns the gun to the glass door and fires once - not quite shattering it - and pulls the trigger again, but the gun *clicks* - EMPTY. He kicks at the cracked glass door - folding the sheet out of its frame and into the shop - and he then ducks under the horizontal pull-handle to desperately enter.

INT. GUN SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Joe runs to the back of the store, where all of the LARGE RIFLES are displayed. He hastily pulls an AK-47 off the wall, trying to figure out what to do regarding ammunition.

He then moves to another gun, still gripping the AK.

EXT. STREET - MINUTES LATER

The street outside the gun shop. It's quiet. Empty. Wind blows.

Suddenly Joe emerges manically from the shattered door, holding a .338 NORMA MAGNUM MACHINE GUN. He has a full bandolier (ammunition belt) strung slash-style over his shoulder. Immediately upon exiting, Joe FIRES EXTREMELY LOUD ROUNDS into the black desert beyond the town - the source of the muzzleflash minutes ago. Joe then spins around to the other side of the street and indiscriminately FIRES MANIC ROUNDS in *that* direction.

Joe runs to the Main Street, where Brian's bench rests. Brian is now gone. An extremely paranoid Joe runs down the street, aiming the gun in every direction. He comes up on the INTERSECTION down the street of the police station. As he arrives, he aims his gun at the north side of the street (opposite the sheriff's office), having heard the CROW of a bird. Then--

LAKOTA (O.S.)

HEY!!

Startled by this, Joe FIRES THE MACHINE GUN, spinning around, riddling every storefront on the way with massive bullets...

INT. APARTMENT - SAME TIME

An apartment bedroom. Bullets shred the walls to ribbons.

A person - asleep in bed, his back turned to us - is struck by three bullets. He is blasted apart.

EXT. MAIN STREET - SAME TIME

Joe finishes spinning around, still firing the immense gun. Having turned 180 degrees, he fires unknowingly at Lakota. Two rounds HIT LAKOTA IN THE LEG - one in the ankle, blowing off his foot (which hangs by a visceral thread), and the other in his thigh.

Lakota hits the pavement, screaming.

JOE

OH MY GOD!

Joe runs to Lakota, horrified.

JOE (CONT'D)

No! Lakota! I'm sorry! I didn't!

As Joe arrives at Lakota, who is writhing in hysterical pain, two distant GUNSHOTS are heard, followed by one bullet hitting the pavement and then a second bullet striking the top of Lakota's crown, EXPLODING his head into a flap.

Joe spins to the source of the gunshot. He then sees a single, distant MUZZLEFLASH (again, from the darkness of the north side), followed by an echoey *whump*. A bullet impacts the muzzle of Joe's massive gun with a metallic *ting* (a blinding SPARK flashes), sending vibrations through Joe's body and almost knocking him to the ground.

Then: ANOTHER BULLET (from a different source) hits the wall beside Joe's head, kicking plaster into his eyes.

In panicked response, Joe FIRES HIS MACHINE GUN at the blackness of the desert, and RUNS in terrified retreat. Distant muzzleflashes (from one direction, then another) send returning fire: individual rounds that each come frighteningly close to hitting Joe, eating at the pavement and sidewalk.

Joe, arriving at the end of the street, swiftly rounds the corner - now safely out of sight. He leans against a building, catching his breath. Deranged. He looks down to see that his pant leg is covered in Lakota's BRAIN MATTER. He kicks it off.

Joe looks up. Takes stock. He's at the end of the business sector. To his left and right: the backs of the stores continue for a couple blocks either way (only on one side). Beyond the other side of the street, ahead of him: dark desert and a modest collection of semi-isolated houses.

Joe stands, searching the desert with manic eyes. Trying to devise a plan.

His eyes settle on a SMALL ADOBE HOUSE about 400 feet ahead. After a moment's deliberation, he MAKES A BREAK for it. The machine gun and bandolier RATTLE as he runs.

Joe arrives at the house and runs up the steps...

INT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The door SWINGS OPEN and Joe begins to enter, when --

A SHOTGUN BLAST explodes the doorframe into splinters. Excess shotgun-pellets pock Joe's face and arm. He drops the machine gun.

The shooter was a 65 YEAR OLD MAN. Seeing that Joe is the intruder, he immediately lowers his shotgun.

65 YEAR OLD MAN
Sheriff, I'm sorry!

But Joe, startled deeper into panic, has picked up his machine gun and runs desperately past the man. The giant gun, now held horizontally (extending the width of the room), drives into the old man as Joe runs. The old man is propelled brutally onto his back.

Joe cannot slow down for him.

JOE
I'm sorry, I'm sorry! You okay??

Joe gets to the front door, quickly PULLS IT OPEN -

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

- and he runs out onto the porch to rush down the porch steps. He TRIPS over his own foot and TUMBLES to the ground, dropping the gun. He then desperately CRAWLS to retrieve it.

Joe rises, aiming the gun. He scans desperately but carefully. *Where are they??*

Joe starts backpedaling, looking around, pointing the gun (which is obviously weighing on him) in all directions. He is now having an asthma attack.

Suddenly he SEES SOMEONE RUNNING in the distance - from behind one house to another. Joe laboriously aims the machine gun and FIRES at the running target, who disappears behind the next house. Joe doesn't cease firing. He riddles the house with bullets, continuing to fire in the presumed direction of the runner, UNTIL--

The gun CLICKS. He's fresh out of ammunition. Joe's eyes bulge and he THROWS the gun, now panicking. He looks around the desert, feeling utterly exposed.

Joe starts to retreat back toward the Main Street, eyes darting around (but mostly fixed to the house behind which the running figure disappeared).

Suddenly Joe hears distant RUNNING - boots against gravel - coming from the opposite side of Joe's attention. Joe TURNS, but before he can see the source of the running sound, A BULLET KICKS UP DUST AT HIS FEET. Joe staggers, looking up to see the MUSCULAR MASKED MAN running toward him, aiming a PISTOL.

Joe SCREAMS and the masked man fires another gunshot, again just *barely* missing Joe.

Suddenly TWO BULLETS impact the earth by the masked man's feet. He's being fired at by somebody in the distance (to his side). The Masked Man turns to his right, still running, to see the 65 YEAR OLD MAN on his PORCH, aiming a rifle. The Old Man fires one more missed shot before the Masked Man unloads his pistol in the direction of the man. Five bullets miss, hitting the porch, its balancing beams and roof, but one bullet STRIKES the Old Man - directly in his STOMACH. He SQUEALS HORRIBLY, doubling back.

The Masked Man, now closer to a paralyzed Joe (but still a couple hundred feet away), aims his gun and pulls the trigger - but it CLICKS. Empty.

The Masked Man drops the gun and swiftly reaches for his hip to PULL A HUNTING KNIFE.

Joe starts to stagger backwards.

JOE

No no no, wait wait wait...!

The Masked Man swings the knife upward, poised to stab. He arrives at a terrified Joe and SWIFTLY BRINGS THE KNIFE DOWN ONTO JOE'S HEAD - landing with a deep grunt from Joe. The blade lodges into the skull, not having gone very deep.

The Masked Man YANKS back the knife, brutally dislodging the blade, and he SWINGS IT BACK DOWN INTO JOE'S TEMPLE. The Masked Man releases the knife handle and lets Joe stumble backward, moaning stupidly like a lobotomized cow. He falls onto his back.

Suddenly a GUNSHOT is heard in the distance, and a BULLET hits a building just behind the Masked Man.

The Masked Man turns to see the source of the gunshot. It's BRIAN, standing beside the house that the figure hid behind, but now about a 100 ft in front of it. He looks terrified as he trains a PISTOL on the Masked Man while also training his smartphone camera on his aimed pistol (the video resembles a first-person shooter game). He FIRES again.

The bullet misses. The Masked Man wobbles into a defensive stance. Brian jogs forward, FIRING his gun again. And again. And again. (We see this from the POV of Brian's video.)

The Masked Man desperately reaches for his belt. Brian keeps firing his pistol over and over - HITTING THE MASKED MAN IN THE CHEST OF HIS BULLET-PROOF VEST, THEN IN THE KNEE, IN THE CROTCH, and finally IN THE FACE (which basically explodes). He lands on his back, DEAD.

Brian is afraid to accept that the man is dead. He fires the gun at the prostrate corpse three more times until the weapon has been emptied. (He is still recording everything on his phone.)

Brian limps over to the Masked Man's corpse to find that the top half of his face has truly been obliterated, but his mask somehow remains intact. It rests relatively cleanly on top of a puddle of brain and skull.

The masked man's neck, hands and forearms (all skin not obscured by black clothing) are covered in TATTOOS. Notable among them: the letters *NWO* crossed-out, and a Freemason symbol. Under the man's black over-shirt is a BULLET-PROOF VEST, and poking out from under that: a Hawaiian shirt.

Brian then remembers Joe! He lies on the pavement several feet away. The knife still lodged in his head.

BRIAN

Oh my God! Sheriff!

Brian runs over to him. Joe's mouth is agape and he is letting out a flat, protracted exhale. Brian leans down, putting his ear to his mouth. Joe's exhale sounds almost like the inside of an industrial freezer. Brian sits up to inspect his eyes. They are open but blank.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Sheriff! Oh my God! I saved you!

In the BG, gumball lights approach (accompanied by distant sirens).

EXT. AMBULANCE (MOVING) - NIGHT

Joe is in the back of an ambulance, joined by a PARAMEDIC who tends to his head wound. Joe wears a face mask (identical to the paramedic's).

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Joe is wheeled to the front of the extremely drab HOSPITAL. A white-coated GUARD (double-masked and wearing a face shield) stands at the front door. He reads Joe's temperature with a no-touch, infrared thermometer.

GUARD

One-oh-one!

(shaking head, shooing away)

Go 'round!

Joe is carted away.

FADE TO **BLACK**

Hold on black, then:

A **TIK-TOK VIDEO** BEGINS PLAYING. The aspect ratio PHONE-SHAPED.

It is a heavily edited video of BRIAN, now six months older, taking a road trip. It begins in JACKSONVILLE, FL, where he now seems to live - with a GIRLFRIEND (whom we haven't seen). The following footage comprises the video...

- Brian and girlfriend packing up their car with luggage.
- They drive across the state line (oncoming highway sign swings to selfie, wielded by girlfriend).
- They are stopped by the side of the highway to dance in falling snow.
- They kiss while sitting beside a desert fire at night. A heart emoji dances on the screen.
- Brian's phone gets an incoming call: his DAD. Brian ignores it and laughs.
- A TEXT on Brian's phone: Dad again. It reads "*please call your mother. please. she is devastated.*" A crying emoji dances over this.
- Driving, Brian and girlfriend cross the EDDINGTON county line.
- Brian drives past his parents' house, waving "goodbye" callously. He is obviously not stopping here.
- Now driving past a giant development in the process of being built in the middle of the desert. A server compound?
- Main Street. Most of the stores are now permanently shuttered. Brian steps out of his car. The ANTIQUE STORE OWNER (John) walks up to Brian to shake his hand. As his outfit makes apparent, he is the new sheriff.

ANTIQUÉ STORE OWNER/SHERIFF

(to camera)

This boy's a hero, you know that?

GIRLFRIEND (O.S.)

(from behind camera)

Oh I know!

- We zoom into the window of GARCIA'S SALOON to see that it is now manned by Warren and Michael, both of whom stare daggers at us.

Caption: "New Management!!!" Our camera swings up to a banner: "GRAND REOPENING." Dancing font appears below that: "RIP, Eric and Ted!"

- Brian walks up to the Mayor's Office. DAWN emerges to wheel out JOE, who is consigned to a wheelchair. He is now PARALYZED, mouth twisted into an unsightly contortion. Brian bends down to hug him.

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Now a wide, objective view of Brian being greeted by Dawn and Joe while his girlfriend films it. A SPEAKER outside plays Dawn's voice.

DAWN (V.O.)

Ever heard the name Jonas Salk?
Inventor a the polio vaccine? Jonas
Salk and Bill Gates: both born October
28, both *Scorpios!* The *stinger!* And
again, Elvis got the polio vaccine on
live TV October 28, 1956. *That's*
interestin 'cause it was 'zactly 42
weeks after his own birthday, it was
Jonas Salk's 42nd birthday, and again
it was Bill Gates' *first* birthday, who
now sits across the street from the
Space Needle in the 42nd state! 42!
And it's no accident that the Covid
vaccine went live in this nation on
December 14, the 42nd day of Bill
Gates' age. This is Gematria. Numbers
to words. 'S a science. And the word
vaccine? Equals 42. So again, on Jonas
Salk's 42nd birthday, on Bill Gates'
first birthday, 42 weeks after Elvis'
birthday -- and who remembers what age
Elvis died at?! 42!

Dawn, pushing Joe's wheelchair, leads Brian into the building. The girlfriend films a sign on the door: "*Mandates Will NOT Be Enforced*"

We shift to SOMEONE'S POV a small distance away, watching Dawn and Joe and Brian enter the building.

We reveal this to be MICHAEL's point-of-view. He stands at the entrance of *Garcia's*, wearing a *Garcia's* T-shirt. His eyes are hard. He is different.

Behind him, inside, Warren seems to be overseeing a small Town Council meeting at the counter. A modest shrine for Ted and Eric looms above the bar.

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Joe sits behind a large desk. Dawn sits beside him. Two framed news articles on the wall behind them (only attentive viewers will notice): "*Sheriff Joe Cross found Not Guilty on all counts in Eddington trial.*" "*Joe Cross launching initiative to combat 'lies' from powerful media outlets, names those he may sue.*"

Sitting opposite them is Brian. Behind him stands the girlfriend, who films their interaction on her phone.

DAWN

It's not comin, it's *here*. And we can either USE it to lift us up and join the world, OR we can watch helpless in the rear view while the Tech Boom bulldozes through. But I tell ya, if we do it right: it WILL improve things - telehealth, remote learnin - and with this deal? We're in the driver seat!

Brian nods for a while, and then turns to the girlfriend.

BRIAN

Was that too long? Will that fit?

GIRLFRIEND

It'll *just* fit.

DAWN

You're gonna post that by itself?

GIRLFRIEND

And we'll prob'ly cut in video from the protest and the attack, on account a the 6 month anniversary.

DAWN

And so what ya just filmed - that'll get millions a people?

BRIAN

Oh, well, the one of me savin the sheriff was a one-off. That got like 30 million.

GIRLFRIEND

But he's got hundreds a thousands a followers.

BRIAN

One video a few days back got 113,000 views.

DAWN

Golly!

BRIAN
Wanna go another one?

The girlfriend aims the phone and starts recording again.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Let's go back to your vaccine policies.

DAWN
Well, here's your first problem: the very people that *made* this virus, they're now givin you the cure.

Brian nods.

DAWN (CONT'D)
See, you're noddin, but d'you know what you agree with? We got no notion a what this potion'll do to us, but there's people - doctors, scientists - that say the vaccine in *your* blood is a *dormant virus* that waits in your system, mutates your DNA, and will suddenly make you *sick* when it's been long enough that you won't ever ask the question. And so when you GET the virus, the virus you injected into your own precious body that was HEALTHY before, you'll be sayin "*thank goodness I got that jab! It woulda been SO much worse!*"

Brian's phone, resting in the desk, starts VIBRATING. It's his MOM. He discreetly turns it over.

DAWN (CONT'D)
It's government-sanctioned, government-run population control on a mass, mass level. And it burdens my heart.

INT. RESTROOM - MINUTES LATER

Brian enters to go to the urinal. As he pees, he pulls out his phone and finds a VOICEMAIL from "Mom." He listens to it.

BRIAN'S MOM (V.O.)
Brian? Baby? We heard you're in town. Are you here, Brina? Please come back, Brian. We was wrong. We didn't see what you was doin. Please come home. We miss you, Brian. We're sorry. We know now. We're so proud a you and we just wanna be in your life. Your daddy can't get outta bed. He can't eat. *I* can't eat. Please come back to us, Brian. Please come back to your family, Brian.

EXT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

The end of the day.

Dawn wheels Joe out of the building and toward a WHEELCHAIR-ACCESSIBLE VAN.

EXT. DESERT - LATE AFTERNOON

Dawn drives the van up a dirt hill, arriving finally at a MASSIVE, LAVISH HOUSE - only 1/3 built (the rest still under construction). If it isn't yet a mansion, it certainly will be. A few masked workers are wrapping up a day's work.

Dawn's van parks in front of this, their new home.

INT. MASSIVE HOUSE - MINUTES LATER

The door opens and Dawn wheels Joe inside.

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

An extremely large, renovated kitchen. One unfinished wall is covered in tarp.

Dawn has positioned Joe in front of her laptop, which is displayed atop the kitchen island. They are watching Brian's TIK-TOK VIDEO in which she expounds upon the dangers of the vaccine. It already has over 3,000 likes.

DAWN (V.O.)

They wanna Build Back Better, ain't you heard? Plannin to knock the world population down from 8 billion to a manageable 500 mill. Get rid a the "Wasteful Eaters"! That's what they call you!

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Dawn feeds Joe his dinner, while intermittently taking bites of her own. A TV plays in the BG.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Seen from a respectful distance (at the end of a hall), Dawn helps Joe use the toilet. This is visible through the bathroom's open door.

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

Dawn is now giving Joe a bath. She recounts an anecdote from her day.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Joe, now in pajamas, sits in his wheelchair, a blanket draped over his lap. He is facing a 90 inch TV, which plays John Ford's *Young Mr Lincoln*.

Dawn sits on the couch, laptop propped on her lap. She's currently searching Reddit. She exits a thread about seed oils to browse another page.

After a moment, Dawn GASPS.

She has found an anti-government group - *THE KNIGHTHOOD* - whose mascot is ONE OF LOUISE'S DOLLS. It wears the group's UNIFORM and INSIGNIA.

After a long silence, Dawn starts desperately searching for more. She finally comes to an INVITATION TO A RALLY whose main image is, once again, Louise's doll. This is evidently the group's identifying image.

Dawn is audibly distraught. Joe, whose chair is turned away from her, tries to look over, but is unable to move his head.

LATER

Dawn sits with Joe at a desk. They are both watching a VIDEO on the laptop.

THE VIDEO: a RALLY taking place in a public park. On stage is VERNON, who wears a mask and speaks with a voice distorter. It is clear that it is him based on his TATTOOS. He makes an impassioned speech at a microphone, preaching with intense charisma. (Behind him is a GIANT, INFLATABLE VERSION OF ONE OF LOUISE'S DOLLS, as well as TWO GIANT EMBROIDERED SIGNS, also made by Louise. One reads "*This Is Not A Game*", featuring *guerilla attackers climbing a beaten-and-bloody Illuminati pyramid*, and the other reads "*Future Proves Past.*")

VERNON

And as a great man once said: evil is powerless if the good are unafraid. We are headed into the storm of all storms, my friends, and we must fight for our Authentic Freedom, and by God we must LIVE. We must fortify ourselves in Christ, and with the Holy Spirit as our shield and Christ as our sword - a sword we draw from the sheath of our forefathers' glory - may we JOIN Saint Michael and all his angels in defending God and sending Lucifer and his henchmen straight-right back to HELL where they belong!

The video cuts away to a few of the people sitting behind Vernon. One is Nicolette, whom we met earlier. Another is an obese man in a red bow-tie. The next is LOUISE. She looks totally different. She has several tattoos on her arms, one tattoo across her chest, and her hair is dyed. She is pregnant.

The video cuts away from Louise, and Dawn quickly rewinds it to PAUSE on Louise's image.

Joe and Dawn gaze upon this, utterly shocked. Their eyes well with tears. Dawn suddenly becomes overwhelmed and SLAMS the laptop shut. She makes an involuntary noise of distress.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dawn, now in her nightgown, places Joe into a king-size bed - with the assistance of hospital-grade equipment. He lies on his back.

Once he is tucked in, Dawn crosses to the other side of the bed and climbs into the same bed. She TURNS OFF THE LAMP - dropping the room into darkness, save for the eerie moonlight.

Dawn curls up next to Joe. She rests her head near his. She tenderly lays her hand on his chest.

Silence.

DAWN

G'night.