

LI'L PAL HEAVEN

by

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FADE IN:

DOG COLLAR

The COLLAR is weathered, as if sitting in the sun for 20 years, the leather curled and faded, the DOG TAGS dulled and discolored with specks of rust.

PULLBACK to reveal...

A RUBBER BONE, A TENNIS BALL, PLASTIC FLOWERS

All sun-bleached and cracked. They sit with the DOG COLLAR in a FADED DOG BOWL.

RISING to reveal ...

HEADSTONE

The inscription reads:

"HAPPY
1962 - 1974
WE MISS YOU GIRL
LIFE WON'T BE THE SAME"

MOVING down the line, past other HEADSTONES, different sizes, different shapes, statuary, pyramids...

SLOWLY ACCELERATING, HEADSTONES flashing past, SLOWLY RISING.

RISING OVER THE HEADSTONES, SLOWING DOWN, FLOATING, revealing...

EXT. LI'L PAL HEAVEN PET CEMETERY -- DAY

A HILLSIDE of GRAVES stretching out below. A 50'S-MODERNE RANCH-STYLE HOUSE squats in the near-distance. Beyond it, in the valley below, A SPRAWLING CITY lies in the far-distance. Everything SHIMMERING in the mid-day heat.

INSERT - "LI'L PAL HEAVEN PET CEMETERY, BAKERSFIELD 1988"

The SUN beats down on the parched landscape -- dry, yellow, bleached brown, a few dead, leafless trees, a broken bench, a dried-up fountain.

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We begin MOVING toward the HOUSE, floating, like a spirit, 3 feet off the ground, suspended by the heat, the silence, and a whispering breeze -- weaving around the taller HEADSTONES, arcing over others, closing on the HOUSE...

The HOUSE is run-down, the garage door is open, its contents spilling out onto the driveway -- old TV's, coffee machines, all manner of domestic conveniences, all broken down, and piled up in what appears to be a small appliance graveyard.

The GARAGE is strangely cave-like -- TV's are stacked and line the walls creating a primitive tunnel that leads back into the darkness.

Zeroing in on an OLD ELECTRIC GUITAR propped up in front of the JUNK. STOPPING at the GUITAR, floating, motionless, silent. Then, seemingly on its own, the GUITAR FALLS over, clattering to the ground accompanied by the odd harmonics of its traumatized strings...

CUT TO:

NIGHT

Everything as before -- the GUITAR on the ground, the JUNK, the SILENCE -- a single bulb dangles from the ceiling near the front of the garage, its feeble yellow glow almost lost in the moonlight, which blankets the area in cool gray...

MOVEMENT at the BACK of the CAVE. A LIGHT FLICKERS. A CIGARETTE GLOWS from the back of the cave. A VOICE from the darkness...

HERTEL

You ever see "Woodstock"? (Pause)
"Woodstock". The movie. Everybody was there, Hendrix ... at the end, what's his name, the guy you'd think was a spaz if he wasn't a big star... I forget right now. That guy with no front teeth -- everybody.

HERTEL slowly emerges from the darkness of the cave. He wears dusty Levi's and a janitor's shirt, a tangle of keys swing from his belt.

HERTEL

(Continuing, picking up the guitar)
Remember the "Who"? Remember that part?
Peter Townsend and the "Who"? "I'd like
to help you son but you're too young to
vote" -- Summertime Blues. Remember now?

CUT TO:

GRAVEYARD NIGHT -- HERTEL in the distance, his voice far away.

HERTEL

(Continuing)

And he was wearing like this white jump
suit type thing, doing these big
windmilling moves...

HERTEL

(Demonstrating on the guitar)

Kept banging the guitar on the ground, and
running up to the amp and getting all this
weird feedback and shit. And there was
the other guy that just kept singing and
showing off his stomach muscles and
swinging his microphone around and
throwing it up in the air and catching it
like that's real hard and requires a great
deal of musical talent and stuff...

(As if to explain)

Hand-eye coordination. And then at the
end. Of the song, the guitar guy takes
and throws his guitar out in the audience,
everybody's screaming, and so he takes it
by the neck and just heaves it out there.
Remember now?

CUT TO:

HERTEL

He stares expectantly into the BLACKNESS, nodding, as if
listening intently.

HERTEL

(Bows his head, holding his hair out of the way to expose the scalp).
See that? Sucker caught me right there -- out cold for a day and a night, took 30 stitches to close it up. (Pause) Nobody ever thought about that...

He stops abruptly, tilting his head as if he'd heard a voice.

HERTEL

(Looking back over this shoulder into the darkness of the cave)
What?

BLACK OUT

The SOUNDS of JUNK being moved -- shuffling, clanking.

A RECTANGLE of LIGHT appears as a PAINT CAN is moved revealing ...

HERTEL -- He moves another PAINT CAN revealing...

INT. GARAGE -- DAY

HERTEL searches through a mountain of JUNK, moving PAINT CANS, BOXES. He finds what he's looking for -- an old HIGH SCHOOL YEAR BOOK. He blows the dust off of it, sits down on a BIG SUITCASE and begins thumbing through it. Flipping pages, not recognizing anybody.

INSERT YEAR BOOK -- SENIORS

Happy shining faces stare out at HERTEL.

CUT TO:

HERTEL

(Staring blankly at the page)
That was us.

He flips through several pages, finding something. He smiles and takes out his Swiss Army Knife, pulls out the scissors, and begins carefully cutting a PICTURE out of the page. At the last snip, it flutters to the ground, eluding his grasp.

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He reaches down to pick it up and notices what he's sitting on, a LARGE SUITCASE. He stands and looks at it thoughtfully, then kneels down beside it and pops open the two latches.

CUT TO:

CAR TRUNK OPENING

EXT. CAR -- DAY

DALE stands looking into the TRUNK of a '79 THUNDERBIRD LANDAU-- broken tail-light and rear-bumper missing.

He is very well dressed, three-piece suit, but something about him is slightly off -- perhaps the tie is a little too wide or loud, the shoes don't go with the rest. He pulls an expensive-looking leather BRIEFCASE out of the TRUNK and removes it from its protective clear plastic BAG. SLAMS the trunk.

EXT. BACKYARD -- DAY

HERTEL stands in the middle of the yard, next to an empty fountain wearing a glitzy ACCORDION.

HERTEL

Found this in there (the garage). Forgot we had it... (Stops abruptly, listens for something. Nothing.) Thought it was a sewing machine at first. Had some sewing to do. Hem up some pants. I'm shrinking. Very misleading. Just a box to look at. Dirty, unprepossessing.

HERTEL

Who'd think something like this (the accordion) was inside.

EXT. FRONT DOOR -- DAY

DALE stands at the FRONT DOOR waiting patiently -- takes a deep breath, rubs a smudge off his BRIEFCASE, then squares his shoulders and KNOCKS again.

EXT. BACKYARD -- DAY

HERTEL

(Continuing with the ACCORDION)

It was mom's. She didn't like playing it that much. She mainly just wanted something to keep between her and dad. She played it before I was born. I remember it though, the sound. I was just a speck at the time, floating around in there, with the sound of accordion music, from the bottom of a pool.

EXT. FRONT DOOR -- DAY

DALE stands at the FRONT DOOR waiting -- sucks his teeth, checks his watch, presses the DOORBELL.

EXT. BACKYARD -- DAY

HERTEL

(Continuing)

All the classics, "Lady of Spain", "Peg O' My Heart", (singing) "this old man, he played one ... (humming as he tries to pick out the melody, finally giving up) give a dog a bone, this old man went rolling home" ... (trailing off) That one.

EXT. FRONT DOOR -- DAY

DALE stands at the FRONT DOOR. He starts to knock but stops, hearing something... ACCORDION.

EXT. BACKYARD -- DAY

HERTEL stands serenading the cemetery, badly, randomly picking out notes on the keyboard accompanied by loud dissonant chords.

HERTEL

(Finishing up one song)

That was "Feelings", And now for your listening pleasure, "Little Nash Rambler".

HERTEL
(Resumes playing)
All the hits, all the time... Any
requests?

DALE (O.S.)
Excuse me...

DALE stands at the GATE. HERTEL doesn't hear. He continues
playing in a musical reverie.

DALE
Excuse me...

HERTEL
(Singing along)
Beep beep! Beep beep! His horn went beep
beep beep!

DALE
HEY!

HERTEL turns, startled. He stands looking at DALE.

HERTEL
(Pause) Now that's a good way to get shot.
Sneaking around... You are very lucky I
was wearing this (the accordion). This
probably saved your life.

DALE
Yeah (dismissing). You the janitor?

HERTEL
Security.

DALE
(Entering, looking around, appraising)
Yeah, I can see how you'd need that around
here.

HERTEL
(Taking off the accordion)
This's part of my job description too.
I'm what you call a factotum, I provide a
wide variety of services here, security,

sanitation, physical plant, recreation coordinator, ombudsman ...

DALE

This was the pet cemetery though right?

HERTEL

Yeah, you could look at it that way.

DALE

Then I'm looking for a Mr. Daggett.

HERTEL

(Pause staring at him)

Who?

DALE

Mr. Daggett, Hertel Daggett.

HERTEL

Junior or senior?

DALE

I don't know, probably senior.

HERTEL

(Pointing into the distance)

Out there.

DALE

Out on the grounds?

HERTEL

I'm not sure, it would depend on your philosophical viewpoint.

DALE

Lemme give you a data-point. I might be your boss pretty soon, ok, that's bottom line. And I do not suffer fools easily, that's another bottom line, so I don't appreciate your wasting my time and dicking me around like this when I'm trying to conduct some important business transactions, OK. So, with that in mind, where, specifically is he?

CUT TO:

HEADSTONE -- "HERTEL DAGGETT"

EXT. CEMETERY -- DAY

HERTEL and DALE stand next to an enormous PYRAMID. The HOUSE is in the distance.

DALE

(Staring uncomprehendingly)

So he's dead then?

HERTEL

In the traditional sense.

DALE

Shit. When'd he die?

HERTEL

September. Almost all of it.

DALE

Sonovabitch, sonovagoddamnitch...

HERTEL

It's OK, you don't need to feel too bad, I mean he had a pretty good life, except for the very last part there, but you know viewed as a whole it was...living.

DALE

Now they'll get it through probate -- I'll tell you something man, there is a lesson in this. Never, NEVER, hesitate, about anything. Strike while the iron is hot. When you have a thought, act, don't reflect, ACT. This whole idea came to me like ... a long time ago. But did I act, did I make it happen? Fuck no. I farted around, saving up to buy this shit (the suit and briefcase). If I acted when I first thought it up, I'd be set for life right now. Set for goddamn life! Set for my sorry pointless piece a shit life.

Spent, despondent, DALE sits down on a HEADSTONE.

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HERTEL

(Pulling weeds from the base of the
PYRAMID)

Yeah, that's how I got this job. I
thought about it, and I acted. Made this
whole thing happen.

(Showing the top of his head)

Ya see this?

DALE

But the sonovabitch is dead.

HERTEL

(Resumes weeding)

Yeah. For the foreseeable future.

DALE

(Snapping out of it, pointing at the
grave)

Is that legal?

HERTEL

(Puzzled)

Well, sure, I mean, what they gonna do?

DALE

No, for a human person to be buried in a
pet cemetery like this?

HERTEL

Oh, well I don't think the little dead
animals care. Although we used to
separate the dogs from the cats. Dogs
over on the East (pointing), cats over on
the West. But we no longer implement that
policy.

DALE

Sonovabitch.

HERTEL

(Continues weeding)

You know, it used to be that back like in
the olden days, like in the sixties, in
the regular, you know, non-pet cemeteries,
they'd bury black people -- which they
called Negroes at that time -- in a

separate part of a cemetery from where they'd bury the white people. I'm sure there was a plethora of social forces at work there. Maybe they didn't want the white bones getting mixed in with the black bones, in case there was like a earthquake or some other earth movement like a volcano or nuclear bombs or something, or maybe, they didn't want all the black and white souls getting mixed up during the rapture and Ascension, and everybody floating up to heaven at once, with big long lines, like Disneyland, snaking around the clouds. Be a real logistical nightmare,

(Exits with an armload of weeds)

I mean what you gonna do? Take a number?

EXT. CEMETERY -- TRACKING

HERTEL heads toward the HOUSE with his armload of weeds.

DALE

(Catching up to HERTEL)

Wait a minute... there's a Hertel junior right?

HERTEL

Affirmative.

DALE

(Stumbling over the uneven ground)

Is he still alive?

HERTEL

In the traditional sense.

DALE

How do I connect with him?

HERTEL

(Stops at a garbage can)

What do you want to do that for?

DALE

Look numbnuts, just answer the question. I'm trying to establish my career before somebody else dies. Now where's Junior?

HERTEL

(Pushing the weeds into the can)
Here. Me.

DALE

Thank-you, now was that so... (trails off)

DALE pauses gathering his wits, then smiles warmly, and begins a painstakingly rehearsed sales pitch, marching confidently up to HERTEL, energetically shaking his hand.

DALE

Pleased to meet you Hertel, my name is Dale Meadows, and I'd like to ask you a question, just one question. Hertel. Would you like financial independence? The freedom to do whatever you want, wherever you want, anytime you want? Doesn't that sound like a wonderful way of life? Hertel.

HERTEL

(Heaving the garbage can into the back of a WHEEL-LESS PICKUP TRUCK up on blocks)
Well, yeah, sure, but I pretty much already have that...

DALE

If you could have anything you wanted, and don't think about how much it costs, what would it be?

HERTEL

(Dusting himself off, thinks)
Peace on earth, good will toward man?

DALE

(Pause) No I meant more normal things, car, boat, airplane...

HERTEL

Oh normal things, OK. A Jeep. With a roll bar.

DALE

Great! That's a great choice.

(Writing in a notepad, HERTEL watches)
What else?

HERTEL

A dog. To ride around in the back of the jeep.

DALE

(Noting it down) Perfect, OK...

HERTEL

And I'd like to get married again. Same one as before. If that's OK?

DALE

Mmmm Hmmm (writing). How about a yacht?
Would you like a yacht?

HERTEL

Yeah, I've always wanted to water ski.

DALE

How 'bout an airplane?

HERTEL

Sure, a Beechcraft Bonanza, V-Tail.

DALE

What about a summer mansion? Want a mansion somewhere?

HERTEL

Aw hell, put me down for one of those too.

DALE

Ok... (reviewing his notes) A jeep, dog, wife, yacht, airplane, and mansion. Now it looks like you want a lot of things Hertel, how do think you can get these things, how do you think you can achieve these goals?

HERTEL

Well, I don't want to be a pig about it,
I'd settle for the dog.

DALE

I'll make you a promise, Hertel. I'll
help you get the things you want. And you
know Hertel, I am very much like you. I
too want things for myself. I too have
goals, just like you do. Together, I
believe we can meet this challenge and
achieve these goals. Would you like to
know how?

HERTEL looks at him for a moment, rolls a TIRE off of a
broken-down LA-Z-BOY RECLINER, brushes it off.

HERTEL

(Sitting down, getting comfortable)
Fire away.

DALE

Now, look out there (into the cemetery)
and imagine -- you are the heir to the
estate aren't you?

HERTEL

Yeah, I'm responsible for all of this now.

DALE

Well then imagine out there to the West, a
Sears. Out to the East, a Neiman-Marcus.
In the middle, a Macy's, a multi-cinema, a
full spectrum of retail opportunities.
Hertel, may I be honest with you?

HERTEL

Sure.

DALE

I represent a group of foreign
investors... Japanese, Arabs -- good
Arabs, pro-American -- who are interested
in developing commercial properties as
investment vehicles. Our projections
indicate that you, as a full but limited
partner, would gross, let me emphasize

that, gross, at the very least, a million dollars. Now these investors are willing to commit substantial financial backing to this project, provided they get some kind of show of good faith from you. (Opening his briefcase) I have some papers here I'd like to show you...

HERTEL

I watch TV you know, I've seen the shows.

DALE

What?

HERTEL

The real estate shows, "Making A Fortune Through Foreclosures", " The Millionaire Maker", I watch'm all, know the lingo -- use O-P-M, Other People's Money, to buy from motivated sellers, all that stuff. Did you actually take the seminar or just buy the books and tapes and stuff?

DALE

I took the actual seminar. But you get the books and tapes too, it's a package deal.

HERTEL

By and large, the Born Again Christian shows have better production values, but I prefer the real estate shows. They're basically the same, they just preach a different gospel. Each one has a guy with an 800-number, selling a plan with workbooks, and cassette tapes, explaining step by step, what to do, to make everything all better again. And people talking about how they were total losers with no money, and then they got into real estate and now they're losers with lots of money. Or some killer possessed by Satan, who gets born again in prison, and now he's a killer only he's got Jesus in his heart. One guy holds up a crutch, another guy holds up a deed, but it's all the

same, it's all about redemption, and I'm sorry, but it ain't for sale.

DALE

(Pause) The property?

HERTEL

That's right. It's not for sale.

DALE

Did I mention the million dollar part to you?

HERTEL

Yeah. You did.

DALE

Oh. (Pause) I encourage you to think about this, 'cause this is, you know, like the opportunity of a lifetime.

HERTEL

Oh, one of those again. You'd be surprised how many of those you can pass up and still get by.

DALE

You can't afford to let this one get past you.

HERTEL

I'll risk it.

DALE

You don't know what you're dealing with man. I got the inside information on this. You think I come here from out of nowhere, not knowing shit?

HERTEL

I don't know where you come from.

DALE

Golden Empire Development Corporation. Where there's a bunch a rich fuckers wearing shitass suits like this, and carrying shitass briefcases like this,

standing around a big map, up on the wall, talking about this place, this place right here. About how there's a new subdivision going up two miles over that way. Two schools just to the south. You thought you were safe out here, but you ain't. It's coming this way man, like a fucking amoeba. And you don't figure into their equation, not yet anyway. But you work with me on this, and we can both get a piece of the pie. We can ream them assholes before they ream us. It's up to you, but let me give you a data-point Hoss, there's forces at work in this universe here, that you and me ain't part of. And you don't watch out and get smart, you'll get squashed like a fucking bug!

HERTEL has been sitting quietly, and has been blown away by DALE's onslaught. Speechless, nodding his head.

HERTEL

(Pause) That musta been one helluva good seminar you took. And, you know, I appreciate your enthusiasm, but I'm still not interested. And technically, amoebas don't fuck. They aren't that far along biologically. They use asexual reproduction. So you might want to remember that for next time.

CUT TO:

WORKBOOK -- "Motivating Your Seller": a flow-chart of numbered steps and inspirational buzzwords that have been circled, underlined, highlighted, and coffee-stained. Someone has clearly been diligently using this book.

The PAGE flips.

INT. TRAILER -- DAY

DALE sits in his shorts at the dinette, and digs through a shoebox of CASSETTE TAPES. His SUIT is hanging neatly by the door, his BRIEFCASE, back in its protective plastic bag, sits on the table where he works. The walls of the trailer are

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covered with homemade signs with MOTIVATIONAL SLOGANS -- "When the going gets tough...", etc. He finds the cassette, puts it in the player, and hits play. He listens for the white noise and then, satisfied, turns to the WORKBOOK, pencil and highlighter poised... the TAPE begins, thin, tinny...

TAPE (FILTERED)

Amoebas don't fuck... and this is a very important point...

DALE looks at the CASSETTE player, disbelieving.

TAPE (FILTERED)

Many people don't know this, but it is a key to success in real estate, and in life...

DALE hits STOP, and thinks for a moment. He then rewinds, hits PLAY, listens for the white noise, and leans in closer to the CASSETTE player. The TAPE begins...

TAPE (FILTERED)

Achievement makes luck, and this is a very important point. Many people don't know this, but it is a key to success in real estate, and in life. Achievement makes luck...

DALE listens for a moment, recalibrating, then starts following along in his WORKBOOK as the TAPE drones on. One final glance at the CASSETTE player as he works.

INT. CAR -- AFTERNOON

DALE sits reviewing some papers. He's back in his SUIT.

DALE

(Shoving his papers into his briefcase)
Amoebas don't fuck.

He climbs out of the car.

EXT. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT -- AFTERNOON

DALE walks up the steps.

CUT TO:

CRIMSON SUNSET

The SUN melts into the HORIZON, the sprawling CITY lights glittering in the distance.

DISSOLVE

LAVA LAMP

GLOWING RED ORBS billowing, rising, falling, and rising again.

EXT. HERTEL'S CAVE -- NIGHT

HERTEL sits on a LADDER, staring intently at the LAVA. Nodding his head occasionally as if listening.

HERTEL

It's important to stay in touch with your roots.

CUT TO:

CEMETERY

HERTEL is in a glowing circle of LAVA LIGHT in the middle distance, framed by the silhouettes of HEADSTONES. The sprawling city glitters on the horizon.

HERTEL

(Continuing, his voice far away)

These guys are very useful for this. Lava Lamp. Reminds us of what we used to watch back when we were all still dinosaurs. Before TV.

In the distance, a pair of HEADLIGHTS turn off the highway and head up the dirt road leading to the HOUSE.

HERTEL

(Continuing, absorbed)

This is what we used to watch. Volcanoes.

INT. PATROL CAR

BOUNCING down the DIRT ROAD, the HEADLIGHTS arcing and sweeping over DEAD TREES and BUSHES, the RADIO crackles with POLICE CHATTER.

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EXT. CEMETERY

The HEADLIGHTS approaching in the distance.

HERTEL

(Continuing)

We didn't understand'm though. Dinosaur
brain is very small, functional, simple...

EXT. PRIMORDIAL WORLD

HERTEL stands at the top of a LADDER, eye-to-eye with a group of DINOSAURS watching an ERUPTING VOLCANO, the LAVA rolling toward them -- There is a grainy, scratchy quality to the image, as if it were a 16mm educational film from an earlier time.

HERTEL

(Lovingly scratching the MASSIVE SNOOUT of
a TYRANOSAURUS)

You couldn't comprehend what was happening
could you, could you, no you couldn't, a
course you couldn't -- the earth was
melting, coming out of itself, spilling
over itself, burying itself.

The BRONTOSAURUS nuzzles HERTEL for attention. He cups his hand under its chin, gently raising the BRONTOSAURUS' barrel-sized head to eye-level.

HERTEL

(Looking into its eyes)

You stand there watching this, you don't
know what the hell's going on. It's just
pretty lights, isn't it, isn't it? Yeah.
Hypnotic.

The BRONTOSAURUS blinks. The LAVA engulfs the HOUSE.

CUT TO:

HEADLIGHTS

The HEADLIGHTS go out, the engine stops, the door opens.

CUT TO:

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MOVING -- A GLOVED HAND adjusts the MACE CANISTER, the AUTOMATIC PISTOL rides motionlessly on the hip, the GLOSSY BOOTS crushing the gravel underfoot with each step, approaching the front door, pushing it open. HERTEL'S VOICE can be heard, echoing in the darkness.

HERTEL (O.S.)
(Distant)

And then it's on top of you, burning you alive and smothering you all at the same time.

INT. DAGGETT HOUSE -- NIGHT

DEPUTY'S POV...

MOVING through the HOUSE, the FLASHLIGHT BEAM sweeps over the darkened interior. It's immaculate, homey and inviting in stark contrast to the exterior.

HERTEL (O.S.)
(Closer)

That's why it's important for us to look at these things, reactivate the old dinosaur thought patterns, remind us how easy it is not to understand, and what happens to you when you don't.

A woman's voice calls out.

DEPUTY

Hertel?

INT. KITCHEN

The DEPUTY enters the kitchen, still searching with the flashlight. She has a very professional demeanor.

DEPUTY

Hertel?

EXT. BACKYARD -- NIGHT

Deserted except for a LAVA LAMP gently roiling at the mouth of the CAVE, the FLASHLIGHT is visible inside the house. She flips on the PORCH LIGHT.

DEPUTY
(Opening the back door)
Hertel! You out here?

She comes out into the backyard and continues her search at yellow-alert.

CUT TO:

HERTEL -- He watches her silently, unblinking, then fades further into the darkness, disappearing.

DEPUTY
Hertel?

She shines the light into the cave -- nothing. She looks off into the cemetery. Cups her hands around her mouth, yelling.

DEPUTY
Hertel!

HERTEL
(From the darkness)
I'm right here Kaye, you don't gotta yell.

Startled, KAYE instinctively crouches into firing position, reaching for her pistol. Then stops, realizing it's HERTEL.

KAYE
Now that's a good way to get shot.

HERTEL
Oh. Why, you working tonight?

KAYE
No. Yeah. I'm on duty. I'm at lunch right now.

HERTEL
Code seven huh?

KAYE
Yeah. You know your phone's been disconnected?

HERTEL

(Emerging from the darkness)
You come all the way out here to tell me
that? You been trying to call me?

KAYE

Well, I just been trying to get a hold of
you for the past coupla days.

HERTEL

(Laughs in delight)
'Cause hell, I can have'm hook up the
phone if you been trying to call me.

KAYE

(Overlapping)
I needed to talk to you about some
things...

HERTEL

(Unable to stop himself)
I miss you...

A long silence, the words hanging in the air. KAYE doesn't
acknowledge it.

KAYE

I heard that your dad passed away.

HERTEL

(Pause) You mean he died. Yes he did.
Hell I knew that a long time ago Kaye, I
hope you didn't come all the way out here
just to tell me that old news.

KAYE

Why didn't you tell me? When it happened.

HERTEL

Phone was disconnected.

KAYE

Oh. (Pause) I'm sorry about your dad. I
was sorry to hear about that. You
could've called me though, told me about
it. It's not like I'm a different person
or something.

HERTEL

I just figured you had a new life and stuff, and didn't want to be bothered with the old one.

KAYE

(Pause) How you been?

HERTEL

(Distracting himself)

Good. Whole place to myself, now. Just me and 40 acres of dead pets. Trying to get it organized...

(Throwing junk into a garbage can)

Get into a positive cash-flow situation. Start watering again. Goddamn county rezoned us for commercial, can't get water at agricultural rates, can't afford to water out there anymore.

KAYE

(Looking in a dried up fountain)

Yeah, it looks kind of, desiccated.

HERTEL

Used to be... verdant, an arboreal dell, a veritable oasis, grass that thick, trees, little fountains -- hell you remember it, first time we did it was right over there.

KAYE

(Beat) Better cut the weeds back thirty feet from the house in case a grass fire comes through here. Or worse, a fire inspector, you don't want to get cited and fined. I couldn't help you on that. You got a spark arrestor on that little Cushman you drive around?

HERTEL

It was so perfect here once, green, cool. Look at it now...

CUT TO:

CEMETERY

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HERTEL and KAYE engulfed in darkness, and dwarfed by an enormous PYRAMID in the foreground. Their voices far away.

HERTEL

(Continuing)

A goddamn wasteland. Who'd want to bury their beloved pets in a desert like that.

KAYE

(Pause) When was the last time you had, you know ... a customer?

CUT TO:

HERTEL

Been a while. Not since Reagan. Things really fell off around here after him.

KAYE

Well, you know, it's a whole different thing now, people are operating under a different set of priorities.

HERTEL

I'm looking into Telemarketing, I think that's the way to go for today's contemporary lifestyles.

HERTEL

(Taking junk out of the garbage can)
I gotta get all this stuff squared away first though. But I can't seem to throw anything away.

HERTEL begins moving some old TV's, restacking them.

KAYE

Why don't you just have somebody else do it for you. Just pay somebody to come in and clear it all out?

HERTEL

Nah, there's a lot of important stuff in here, I wouldn't trust anybody else picking through it.

KAYE

I don't see why you just don't sell the place...

HERTEL stops dead in his tracks.

KAYE

Keep all the important stuff, but just sell the place, get a little apple orchard up in Tehachapi. You could get a lot of money for it. I bet.

HERTEL looks at her.

KAYE

(Pause) I mean you were always talking about growing apples up in Tehachapi, it's something to think about...

HERTEL

There's nothing to think about, it's not an option -- is this what you came here for? Is career counseling part of your job too?

KAYE

I just wanted to make sure you were OK.

HERTEL

(indicating his surroundings)
Well, as you can see for yourself.

EXT. CEMETERY

HERTEL stands on a ladder replacing bulbs in an overhead string of CHRISTMAS lights. KAYE holds the flashlight.

KAYE

(Eating a banana)
Who were you talking to out here?

HERTEL

When?

KAYE

When I first got here. Coming through the house. Heard you out here talking. About

dinosaurs. Phone's disconnected. Who were you talking to? Yourself?

HERTEL

(Shaking a bulb, listening)

No...

KAYE

Then who were you talking to?

HERTEL

Who the hell you think? I was talking to all the little dead pets out there that nobody talks to anymore.

KAYE

(Looking around her at the HEADSTONES)
Still doing that huh?

HERTEL

Yeah. Still. It's my heritage.

KAYE

People ever stop by out here?

HERTEL

(Moving to the next bulb)

Who specifically?

KAYE

I don't know, friends and stuff I guess, I don't know just people.

HERTEL

Why you asking? Is there somebody who's come out here that I should talk to?

KAYE

How should I know?

HERTEL

What're you getting at? What is this line of questioning about?

KAYE

It's not a line of questioning. Look, you live out here alone, I just want to know

if people ever come out here, so that if you fall off a ladder and break something, that you don't lay on the ground for like a month turning into ant food. Now if nobody comes around, I can have a deputy drive by once in a while.

HERTEL

(Screwing in a bulb)

I'm not some retard, I got things under control out here.

KAYE

Goddammit I did not call you a retard.

The LIGHTS come on, illuminating them in warm CHRISTMAS LIGHT.

HERTEL

It was an implicit underlying assumption.

KAYE

Horseshit. You are not a retard.

HERTEL

Ok, brain damaged, get technical.

KAYE

There's nothing wrong with you.

HERTEL

Why'd you leave me then?

KAYE

(Pause) You did the leaving part.

HERTEL

(Confused) I did?

KAYE

Yes. You did.

HERTEL

You sure that was me?

KAYE

Yes, we were before the brain damage, we were history by then.

HERTEL

You just said I wasn't brain damaged.

KAYE flashes over, but contains it, goes into professional mode.

KAYE

(Tossing away her banana peel)
I gotta get going...

CUT TO:

TRACKING:

HERTEL follows KAYE out of the CEMETERY.

HERTEL

(Continuing)

That's right. We were before. We were history. Ok? I remember now.

KAYE

(Professional)

You really should have your phone hooked up again, no frills, you don't need call-waiting or anything like that, just basic Lifeline Service, 911 -- it's just good common sense, you're alone out here...

HERTEL

I'm not alone. Not in the classical sense.

KAYE

(Stops, confronting)

You still smelling things?

HERTEL

No, not anymore. That's gone. I smell things like a normal person now.

KAYE

(Softening)

Well, that's what you are.

HERTEL

(Unable to stop himself)

'Cause you know, when you can smell everything, like that, when it's all coming in on you so strong like that all the time, so intense, immediate, you just can't concentrate. End up you don't do anything but run around all day smelling things, like a dog. And you know, people, they'll characterize this as erratic behavior.

KAYE

Yeah, and you don't do that anymore.

HERTEL

But to a dog, just seeing something, touching it, it's not enough, it's just a shadow of something until you've gotten close, smelled it, and then it's right there, you're part of it, nothing is really real until you breathe it in. I miss that. The smells. Water, the smell...

(breathing deeply, searching for a word)
Willful. Everything, a rock, just a normal, rock... bored. People, their smell-face, a face more... them, than their normal, see-face. Lies, hate, everything, a smell. Smell-rhymes, poems, only with smells not words -- that's why dogs hang their heads out the car windows like they do, smell-rhymes, dogs are great poetry lovers you know. Most people don't know that. The smell of you...

(the words lodge in his throat)

I miss being a dog.

KAYE

I don't think it's a good idea you living alone out here like this. When your dad was here to take care of you it was a different thing...

HERTEL

Goddammit! There's nothing wrong with me!
I don't need to be goddamn taken care of!

KAYE

I really think you should sell the estate.

HERTEL

(Pause) Estate? Is that part of your
working vocabulary now? Estate?

KAYE

What, it's a very common word...

HERTEL

How'd he find you?

KAYE

Who?

HERTEL

Who the hell you think? Dale Meadows, Mr.
Amoeba. How'd he find you?

KAYE

(Pause) It's a matter of public record.
You just go down to the county building,
go up to the 4th floor, and look it up.
So he did, and he found me. You know
legally, I was supposed to be informed
about this.

HERTEL holds out his hands as if for handcuffs.

KAYE

(Ignoring it)

You should have called me, when he died
...

HERTEL

To tell you that you're a beneficiary.

KAYE

Yeah. Partly. But mainly out of basic
human regard. I liked your dad. And I'm
pleased that he remembered me, in this
way.

HERTEL

It still ain't for sale.

KAYE

This isn't like some, you know, unilateral decision you get to make.

HERTEL

I'm the executor ...

KAYE

It's not your call, there are other parties involved here. From my perspective five million is serious folding money.

HERTEL

It's five million now huh?

KAYE

It's freedom. It's a decision that you, me, and your mom are gonna make together.

HERTEL

Gonna be kind of hard to have a quorum then, mom's dead.

KAYE

Oh she is not, and I wish you'd stop saying that. Doesn't matter what you and your dad say. She's alive and been living in Sacramento for like 20 years.

HERTEL

Fine, destroy the old man's fiction.

KAYE

We all factor into this equation, we all have a percentage of this...

HERTEL

I will not allow these sacred grounds to be dug up, paved over, or otherwise desecrated for stylish leather apparel, dollar-a-scoop ice cream, multi-cinemas, and big cookies with raisins in'm. Things are buried out there. Precious things.

Things that were loved -- not the way we do it with each other, with exclusions, and unlessees, and contingencies -- but unconditionally loved, cherished, things. There is an obligation that we have to the things we have loved. An obligation that I cannot abjure. Do you understand that?

KAYE

(Suddenly looking around)
Where's Yappy?

HERTEL

(Pause) Died.

KAYE

(Pause) Ok... (Sinking down, sitting on an old TV) Ok... (putting her face in her hands, softly crying)

CUT TO:

HERTEL -- FROZEN, STARING, every atom of his being screaming out to comfort her, instinctively creeping forward like a dog to an extended hand.

HERTEL

Right after Dad. Yappy, just kind of ... well you know how dogs are, very emotional, they take these things personally...

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY -- DAY

A DOG sits, staring expectantly at a closed door, pants hanging on the doorknob. HERTEL stands at the end of the HALL looking down at the dog, observing.

HERTEL

Dog has one of the most precisely logical minds to be found in nature.

(Approaching the door)

I mean, the room is still full of the man, only he's not there, to be seen, anymore.

HERTEL pushes the door open, framing them in blinding daylight.

INT. DAD'S BEDROOM -- DAY

The room is bright and cold, floor shiny, bed neatly made. Hertel sits on the edge of the bed, perched, child-like, his feet not quite reaching the ground.

HERTEL

Every morning he'd be there staring at the door, waiting. I'd drag him away, but he'd just go back, wait for Dad.

CUT TO:

DOG -- MOTIONLESS, STARING... BLINKS

HERTEL

(Tenderly)

He's dead ya dumb Sonovabitch. He's dead, he ain't coming back.

CUT TO:

HERTEL, standing beside KAYE, his arm outstretched, his hand inches from her bowed head, her face still buried in her hands.

HERTEL

Death doesn't make any sense to a dog...

(Reaching out to touch her)

He has no appreciation of it...

(Pause, catching himself)

Like we do.

(Folding his arms, moving away)

He doesn't know it's coming for him too.

If he did, he'd just say, "what is this shit", "who's in charge here", "what's the point"?

KAYE

(Drying her eyes)

I don't know.

HERTEL

(Handing KAYE a Kleenex)

Me either. (Pause, unable to look at her)
I beat that dog. Beat him with a garden
hose. I feel very bad about that. That
was not ... kind.

KAYE

(Looks at him, pause, absolving) Yeah.

HERTEL

Never stopped waiting for Dad though.
Died on Valentine's Day. Sort of a one-
two punch for me, first Dad, then Yappy,
kind of a double whammy, all of a sudden
I'm alone out here. That's why I can't
seem to let go of any of this stuff.

KAYE

(Stands, blowing her nose)

How'd he die?

HERTEL

He was old. He died. Happens sometimes
when you're old. It's a recurring
phenomenon. In fact it usually works out
that way.

KAYE

(Adjusting her BELT)

Yeah I'm familiar with the process.

(Looks at him)

I'm sorry about your dad.

HERTEL kind of shrugs and nods.

KAYE

Where is he? I'd like to go put down some
flowers or something.

CUT TO:

PYRAMID

The inscription reads:

"YAPPY

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A LOGICAL DOG"

EXT. CEMETERY

HERTEL and KAYE standing at the PYRAMID. KAYE looks on in confusion.

KAYE

But... where's your...

HERTEL

This is Yappy (the Pyramid). Dad's right there (pointing).

KAYE looks over at the MODEST GRAVE beside the PYRAMID.

KAYE

(Beat) Is that ...

HERTEL

Yes, it's legal.

CUT TO:

TRACKING

KAYE and HERTEL walk back toward the house.

KAYE

Why didn't you tell me?

HERTEL

Sure, I call up and what's-his-name answers, and I say, "would you mind telling Kaye that the puppy we got back when we were married, got old and died?" Kinda loses something in the translation, don't you think?

KAYE

Shoulda called anyway, he was my dog too.

HERTEL

He was all that was left of, you know, us... then.

KAYE

Save it for a radio talk show, I'm not getting into this with you.

HERTEL

It's all gone now. The El Camino too. We never shoulda sold that El Camino!

KAYE

It was an oil-burning piece a junk.

HERTEL

You used to love me you know, very much. Back then.

KAYE

Yeah I did. (Beat) Then.

HERTEL

It was a Romeo and Juliet type a deal. Only we didn't die. Not exactly. Not both of us.

KAYE

We grew apart, it happens.

HERTEL

Maybe we shrank apart, there's always that possibility.

KAYE

It doesn't matter. Time moves in one direction, you can't piss in the same river twice. I made a new life for myself, and you haven't. That's not my fault, so stop trying to rub my nose in your life, ok? I'm sorry for how things ended up. But they did anyway.

They have reached the house.

A police radio hisses and crackles, a voice calls out some unintelligible codes. KAYE listens attentively.

KAYE

(Checking her watch)

I should get that.

HERTEL

What does it mean?

KAYE

Same old thing, something bad happening somewhere.

(Starting to leave, stops)

This isn't over you know.

HERTEL

What isn't.

KAYE

The house thing.

He looks at the house.

HERTEL

Can't sleep in there (the house) anymore.

CUT TO:

INT. DAD'S BEDROOM -- DAY

The room is bright, empty, and cold.

CUT TO:

INT. CAVE -- NIGHT

HERTEL and KAYE framed in its mouth.

HERTEL

Sleep out here now, in there (the cave). Working under the house the other day, trying to move the TV cable from Dad's old room, to out here. Got all these TV's out here, nothing wrong with'm, just no cable. Figure I'll set up a splitter box or a multiplexer or something, have a cable feed to all of'm, be kinda neat. But I hit my head on a piece of plumber's bracketing when I was crawling around under there...

CUT TO:

FINGERS -- they are bloody...

EXT. HOUSE -- DAY

HERTEL kneeling on the ground and wearing a TOOLBELT, staring at his bloody fingers, blood trickling down his forehead. He reaches up to feel the top of his head.

HERTEL

See right there, see what it did to me...

KAYE (O.S.)

That's not what it's from.

HERTEL

(Stops, looks up) It's not?

CUT TO:

EXT. BACK PORCH -- NIGHT

HERTEL stands in front of KAYE, showing her the top of his head.

KAYE

No. That's from something else remember?

HERTEL

(Thinking) Oh, yeah, that's right, ok.

INT. PATROL CAR -- NIGHT

KAYE gets in the CAR, clears the call on the radio, starts the engine, grips the steering wheel, begins blinking -- fighting it, a tear rolls down her cheek, she wipes her nose, and then goes off like a volcano...

KAYE

(Pounding the wheel in sobbing
frustration)

Shit...fuck...sonovabitch...goddamn...

A FLASHLIGHT shines in her face.

HERTEL

(Holding flashlight, looking in the
window)

You ok?

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KAYE

(Startled, embarrassed, covering)
Yeah, 'course I am, what does it look
like. Just sad about Yappy is all. I'm
fine.

(Putting it in gear, driving off)
Get a phone.

EXT. DRIVEWAY -- NIGHT

HERTEL watches her drive away. He waves to the receding tail-
lights.

HERTEL
(Calling)

Drive careful.

He looks out on the amoeboid city lights sparkling in the
distance.

HERTEL
Like I say, we used to separate the dogs
from the cats...

CUT TO:

DOG -- SITTING, STARING...

HERTEL (O.S.)
(Continuing)
Dogs on the East...cats on the West.

CUT TO:

CAT -- SITTING, STARING...

EXT. CEMETERY -- NIGHT

HERTEL walks among the graves under the CHRISTMAS LIGHTS.
Each GRAVE has a PET sitting and watching HERTEL.

HERTEL
(Continuing)
Which is very symbolic, 'cause you know
facing North, the dogs would be on the
right and the cats on the left. So we got

like a whole Dexter-sinister type thing
going here -- unless you're an Egyptian.

He bends down to pet a CAT.

HERTEL

(Continuing)

For them, cats were good luck.

(Moving to another grave)

But this being western civilization, it
doesn't really matter what the Egyptians
thought, and they're long gone anyway.

(Bending down to pet a DOG)

I mean they're here, but they're gone, I'm
speaking of the classical Egyptians, like
with Pharaohs and pyramids and stuff, this
is the historical context I'm referring
to.

CUT TO:

LONG SHOT -- CEMETERY

HERTEL is alone among the graves, he stands at the PYRAMID

HERTEL

The Egyptians had their shit together man!
I mean they're extinct, and all they got
left is like some rags and some ruins, but
they had their shit together.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP -- HERTEL

HERTEL

Interesting that I should bring up the
Egyptians, here, in these surroundings, in
your presence.

PULLBACK to reveal...

EXT. CAVE

HERTEL stands at the mouth of the CAVE, framed in its
blackness, lit only by the single bulb that dangles over the
opening.

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HERTEL

(Slowly retreating into the CAVE)
You know what the Egyptian gods used to
ask people after they died but before
they'd take'm across the river into the
land of the dead? Know what they'd ask'm?

(Disappearing into the shadows)

"Were you kind to animals?" That's what
they'd ask every dead person before they'd
finally let'm die for the last time, "were
you kind to animals?"

(Pause, voice from the darkness)

I have always tried, to be kind.

MUSIC -- the distant, distorted, music box sound of an ICE
CREAM TRUCK.

EXT. CEMETERY -- DAY

A weather-beaten ICE CREAM TRUCK turns off the distant highway
and heads up the driveway trailing a plume of dust.

INT. ICE CREAM TRUCK

The DRIVER smokes a cigarette, stares blankly ahead at the
dirt road and turns up the volume of the MUSIC BOX.

HERTEL comes into view, smiling and waving as the DRIVER pulls
up in front of the HOUSE.

EXT. ICE CREAM TRUCK

HERTEL stands at the window of the TRUCK, looking in, like a
ten-year old.

HERTEL

Whatcha recommend today Mister Frostie,
Drumstick or Fifty-Fifty Bar?

MR. FROSTIE

(Thinks for a minute, takes a thoughtful
drag on his cigarette) Fifty-Fifty's too
non-committal, doesn't know what it wants
to be. I'd recommend the Igloo bar.
(Flicking his cigarette away, beat)
It is what it is.

EXT. ICE CREAM TRUCK

Both men sit on the ground in the shade of the TRUCK eating Igloo Bars, staring straight ahead, silent.

HERTEL

(Long Pause) Excellent suggestion.

MR. FROSTIE

(Longer Pause) Yeah.

HERTEL finishes his Igloo Bar, putting the stick in his pocket.

HERTEL

(Long Pause) So how many you bring today?

INT. ICE CREAM TRUCK -- BACK DOORS

HERTEL stands framed in the open doors, looking in on MR. FROSTIE who is digging through one of the FREEZERS.

MR. FROSTIE

Only three. Two dogs and a cat. (Pulling out a BLACK GARBAGE BAG) This is the cat. I think. Coulda been a small dog. (Handing it to HERTEL) Kinda hard to tell sometimes. (Opening another FREEZER) I got the dogs in here (begins digging). I like to keep 'm separated.

HERTEL

(Hefting the bag) A reasonable policy.

EXT. CEMETERY -- DAY

HERTEL and MR. FROSTIE are busy digging small graves for the THREE BLACK GARBAGE BAGS, which sit in a row beside a hand-lettered SIGN reading "LOST AND FOUND".

HERTEL

(Watching MR. FROSTIE dig) Lemme trade you (holding out his shovel). That one's got a cracked blade.

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They exchange SHOVELS without a word and continue silently digging.

EXT. CEMETERY -- GRAVE SITE

HERTEL and MR. FROSTIE stand over the three small open graves. HERTEL solemnly moves from grave to grave, lowering a BLACK PLASTIC BAG into each. He then stands opposite MR. FROSTIE and bows his head. Silence.

MR. FROSTIE

Merciful and Loving God, receive these tiny friends who soil our carpets yet give us unconditional love. Who now find themselves in your presence due to their complete ignorance of both inertia and the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ that brings them life everlasting. You see them now naked, broken, torn, flattened by a driver's momentary inattention, poor hand-eye coordination, or simple indifference: may they be precious in Your loving sight.

Great and Everlasting Father, You knew their last moments, full of fear and confusion: the sanctuary of the gutter and the safety of the sidewalk beckoning, salvation in sight but not in reach, darting pointlessly to and fro, from certain death to certain death, or frozen by their own futile instinct in the path of the great, looming mystery that roars like the rushing wind and crushes them remorselessly beneath steel-belted radial angels of death. O blessed Redeemer, grant them comfort and peace in Your ever expanding procession.

Lord High King of Heaven, would that You will grant us, the waiting, the condemned, that same loving comfort and peace, when we pass from life to mere matter and find ourselves before You as they: naked, broken, torn, from a lifetime of darting pointlessly or frozen in fear, ignorant

and rejecting of the sanctuary and
salvation that is ours, for the mere
asking.

(Snowballing)

And now may this prayer, here softly
spoken, muted and muffled by this veil of
flesh and clay, resound throughout the
planets, galaxies, and parallel universes,
so that every molecule and atom in Your
Creation's wake rings with our
unconditional love!!...

CUT TO:

EXT. HILLSIDE -- EXTREME LONG SHOT

HERTEL and MR. FROSTIE stand at the gravesite in the far
distance: tiny, dwarfed by the expanse of cemetery and dusty
desert scrub.

MR. FROSTIE

(Continuing, shouting to the Heavens,
faint and far away)

AAAMMEEENNNN!!!!

CUT TO:

EXT. CEMETERY -- GRAVE SITE

HERTEL stands quietly, takes a satisfied breath, nodding his
head.

MR. FROSTIE

(Beat, lighting up a cigarette)
Ok, we can cover'm up now.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP -- POPCICLE STICK

It is gently lowered to the ground and pushed into the soft
earth, like a tiny HEADSTONE. A SHADOW passes over it.

PULL BACK to reveal...

EXT. CEMETERY/"LOST AND FOUND" GRAVE SITE -- LATE AFTERNOON

MR. FROSTIE is smoothing the dirt on one of the fresh graves with the SHOVEL as HERTEL places POPCICLE STICK HEAD STONES at each grave.

MR. FROSTIE

(Patting down the last grave)

Ok with you I keep this (the SHOVEL)? I don't like picking'm up with my hands too much. Seems kinda disrespectful, and then ya got the whole hygiene thing too.

HERTEL looks up at him... Looks beyond the three new graves, toward the ranks and rows of POPCICLE STICK HEADSTONES that cover the hillside beyond.

MUSIC -- the distant, distorted, music box sound of an ICE CREAM TRUCK.

HERTEL

Sure. You can have that one.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. CEMETERY -- NIGHT

The HOUSE is in the middle distance, DARK. The only LIGHT is over the GARAGE/CAVE. The shimmering lights of the sprawling CITY are in the far distance. HERTEL emerges from the CAVE and stands for a moment looking out into the CEMETERY. Then turns and disappears into the blackness of the CAVE. The LIGHT GOES OUT. The MUSIC fades away.

EXT. CEMETERY -- DAY

The HOUSE is in the middle distance. There is activity in the GARAGE/CAVE.

CUT TO:

SPOOL of WIRE rigged between two folding chairs. It occasionally spins and squeaks, unreeling wire that disappears into the darkness of the CAVE.

EXT. CAVE

There is MOVEMENT within the MOUNTAIN of JUNK that forms the CAVE, as if a giant rat were scrambling around inside. An old TV teeters and falls off the JUNK and smashes on the GROUND.

HERTEL pokes his head out of the newly formed opening, looks down at the smashed TV, blinks, then disappears back into the JUNK.

CUT TO:

LA-Z-BOY RECLINER

The CAVE is visible in the background. HERTEL applies one last piece of duct tape to the ragged RECLINER and then wrestles it toward the CAVE.

INT. CAVE

The TV's embedded in the walls of the CAVE, and extending deep into its bowels, flicker and flash to life, all tuned to the same channel.

CUT TO:

TV SCREEN -- GODZILLA

The screen is dirty, the image fuzzy, the sound tinny as GODZILLA goes about his business of picking up buses, walking through power lines, and pounding Tokyo accompanied by the venerable, unmistakable Godzilla SOUND.

CUT TO:

HERTEL

He sits in the LA-Z-BOY calmly watching GODZILLA.

HERTEL

Can't blame him for this really. Sound asleep for a coupla million years, then we start shooting off atom bombs, wake'm up, piss'm off. Very inaccurate though, historically.

INT. CAR -- AFTERNOON

KAYE drives, she's in civvies, a bright girly SUN-DRESS, and is accompanied by a MATURE WOMAN, ANITA. Both are silent as they turn off the highway onto the DIRT ROAD leading up to the HOUSE.

EXT. PRIMORDIAL WORLD -- AFTERNOON

HERTEL sits in his LA-Z-BOY surrounded by a group of DINOSAURS, fuzzy as if on black-and-white TV.

HERTEL

(Continuing from the LA-Z-BOY)

You didn't sound like that at all, didya?
You sounded more like...

A STEGOSAURUS puts its TINY HEAD on HERTEL's lap for a pat.

HERTEL

Well you know, each one of you sounds
different, just like we do, but the sounds
you made, it was like... gospel singing.

GOSPEL SINGING -- GODZILLA and the other DINOSAURS rear their heads back to bellow and out comes gospel singing, swelling, rising.

HERTEL

(Looking up at the gospel singing
DINOSAURS)

Yeah. Like that. That's why it gets to
us the way it does. We remember it, way
down in our dinosaur brain, what's left of
it.

EXT. FRONT DOOR

KAYE and ANITA stand at the FRONT DOOR waiting.

ANITA

(Hearing something)

What's that? Singing?

KAYE

(Not hearing)

Probably just the wind.

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KAYE presses the doorbell again.

KAYE
Is it weird being here?

ANITA
No more than anyplace else.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP -- HERTEL

HERTEL
Interesting effect.

PULLBACK to reveal...

HERTEL fully reclined in the LA-Z-BOY, laying on his back,
looking up at the silent TV'S

HERTEL
(Continuing)
One time, in Boy Scouts -- which is where
I learned my survival skills -- we all
went up to Tehachapi, up a canyon there,
Sand Canyon, to see some pictographs, cave
paintings...

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP -- HERTEL

HERTEL
(Continuing)
Indian cave paintings. And camp out and
stuff too, the usual...

PULLBACK to reveal...

INT. PAINTED CAVE

HERTEL lays on his back in the same position, but on the
GROUND now, looking up.

HERTEL

(Continuing)

Kinda neat, lay on your back, look up at these pictures. Not realistic, more representational I think...

CUT TO:

HERTEL'S POV -- CAVE PAINTINGS

HERTEL (OS)

Outline of a HAND, SUNBURST pattern, COIL.

CUT TO:

HERTEL

(Continuing)

Tried to figure 'm out, all together, what they said, like on those beer bottle caps with the little puzzle on the inside, like that.

INT. HERTEL'S CAVE

On the LA-Z-BOY, in the same position.

HERTEL

(Looking up at the TV's)

Never could figure them out though. Wasn't the Indian's fault. I mean these were not savages. Looking at the pictures you could tell. They were not savages. They knew what they were saying, we just couldn't understand it.

EXT. HOUSE -- SIDE

FOLLOWING -- KAYE and ANITA, walk around the side of the HOUSE, HERTEL's voice can be heard in the distance. The BACKYARD comes into view. They stop as HERTEL emerges from the CAVE and walks away from them toward the GRAVES.

HERTEL

(Continuing)

Just like with Godzilla here...

They silently watch as HERTEL approaches a large DISH ANTENNAE.

HERTEL

(Looking into the sky, among the graves)
Right now he's going off into outer space,
gonna zip outa the solar system, galaxy,
all to hell and gone, bouncing off pulsars
and stuff. Coupla thousand light-years
from now, some Boy Scouts on Andromeda, be
sitting around trying to figure this out.
Good luck!

He stops as he sees KAYE and ANITA standing at the side of the HOUSE.

KAYE

Hi Hertel.

He looks at them, sullen, embarrassed, angry.

HERTEL

(Walking back to the house)
It's customary to knock.

KAYE

We've been doing that. Been leaning on
the bell out front.

HERTEL

It's disconnected.

KAYE

Yeah, we figured that out after a while.
Heard you back here, so we came back.

HERTEL

You coulda yelled, announced your
presence. But you didn't do that did you.
You sneak back here, watch me for a while,
observe, get some ammo. To support your
case.

KAYE

You were right in the middle of saying
something, I didn't want to interrupt.

HERTEL
(Pointing at ANITA)
Who's that? A Realtor?

KAYE
Hertel...

HERTEL
Piss off lady, it ain't for sale, so get
outa here ...

KAYE
Hertel... It's your mom.

A long silence as HERTEL and ANITA look at each other.

HERTEL
Hi mom. Heard you were dead.

ANITA
I heard you were.

HERTEL
Nope. Not in the classical sense.

ANITA
Yeah. Me either.

HERTEL
Boy, we got a lot in common then. Both
being alive and everything.

ANITA
(Taking a deep breath)
He told me you were dead, he called me,
told me about the accident, I woulda come
down to see you, but he told me that you
died, it was too late, it was all over.

HERTEL
Yeah, well that's Dad then isn't it.
Something he doesn't like, he just says
it's dead. Less work that way. He told
me you were dead too. (Pause) You look
different.

ANITA

Well (puzzled) it's been twenty-something years.

HERTEL

Mmmmm ...

(looking at her thoughtfully, appraising)
That must be it then. Congratulations on not being dead.

ANITA

(Unsure how to respond)

Thank you.

HERTEL

You're welcome. So, what brings you down this way? You come to pay your respects to Dad?

CUT TO:

CEMETERY -- PYRAMID

HERTEL, ANITA, and KAYE are in the middle distance, framed by the PYRAMID and DAD's HEADSTONE, their voices far away.

HERTEL

He's right out there next to the little pyramid thingey (pointing)...

ANITA

No ... I came down for something else.

HERTEL

And what would that be?

ANITA

Oh, a couple different things. See you, how you're doing, take care of some ... business matters.

HERTEL

Well...

(looking down on his person)
as you can see, I'm doing ok.

ANITA

Yeah, I'm very pleased to see that, son.
I'm glad to see that you're doing so well.

HERTEL

Well now we got that out of the way...what
business you here on?

ANITA

Oh ... couple a different things...

HERTEL

Like what specifically ...

KAYE

I had her come down. We've been talking
to a lawyer, about the estate situation,
ok.

HERTEL

Boy you know mom, there's always a party
pooper isn't there? Isn't there?

ANITA

Yeah ... I guess.

KAYE

We don't appreciate your cat and mouse
routine, this isn't easy for her...

HERTEL

Hell I was just starting to enjoy this.
You still think I'm seven years old mom,
you don't think I can see through your
bullshit now?

KAYE

Look, this is counter productive...

HERTEL

Oh, are you taking control of the
situation now? You on duty or something?
What you been telling her Kaye? What's
she been telling you mom?

KAYE

I explained the situation.

HERTEL

And what is the situation? That I got all my brains blown out, and all you gotta do is smile at me and nod and tell me you believe my stories, and I'll sign the papers like a good little retard? Well I got news for you buzzards...both of you!

KAYE

(Cop mode, authoritative)

Hey shut the fuck up!

(Beat, softly to no one in particular)

Excuse me.

Silence for a moment.

HERTEL

I guess this concludes the heart-warming reunion part of our program.

(Begins picking up the SMASHED TV)

Who else was there?

KAYE

Where?

HERTEL

At the lawyer's, where the hell you think? Can't you keep a train of thought?

KAYE

Yes I can. It was just us. And the lawyer.

HERTEL

What about that little dick-weed, Amoeba?

KAYE

Dale was there if that's who you're referring to.

HERTEL

Still recognized him from my description though didn't you?

ANITA

He's a very nice young man, very helpful...

HERTEL

I shoulda shot that sonovabitch! Shoulda popped him when he snuck in the goddamn gate!

KAYE

Don't talk like that Hertel...

HERTEL

Goddamn accordion!

KAYE

They can put you away for talking like that.

HERTEL

(Pause) It was a rhetorical statement.

KAYE

Nevertheless. Don't talk like that, about killing people. Sets a bad precedent.

HERTEL

(Throwing broken TV parts in a BARREL)
So what'd he say?

KAYE

The lawyer said... that we should look at this place like it's a dollar bill -- if you tear it into three pieces it won't be worth a dollar anymore. It's only worth a dollar if it's all one thing, if it's all connected.

HERTEL

(Pause, thoughtfully)

A dollar. Hell it was worth five million a couple days ago. You know this kind of depreciation indicates an extremely volatile real estate market, you two should steer clear of this one...

ANITA

(Overlapping)

Oh, it's worth a lot more than a dollar...

KAYE waves ANITA off.

KAYE

He also said we can play hard-ball if we want -- carve the place up, sell off our two pieces, or just have you judged and sell the whole thing, we have options.

HERTEL

Options.

KAYE

Yeah. Wouldn't be as cost-effective as cooperating, but the bottom line is, we don't need your consent. We can force the sale of the property. It's two against one.

HERTEL

(Looking at Anita)

I guess you're the swing vote huh?

KAYE

She's a beneficiary, just like you, just like me, it's the three of us, together, that can make this work.

ANTIA

I'm sorry, son ... but 10 million dollars is a lot of money...

HERTEL

(Snorts and laughs)

Ten million now? Like the man says, there's one born every minute. Why can't people stay dead anymore, even if it is just pretend.

KAYE

This's the best for you in the long run, we're thinking about you too.

HERTEL

Isn't it grand how your deep, abiding love and concern for me has blossomed of late? I'm glad it works out so well for you too-- in a fiscal sense. I guess that should serve as inspiration to others.

KAYE

You shouldn't be living all alone like
this...

HERTEL

I'm not goddamn alone! I love my goddamn
life! I don't need anybody, nobody needs
me. I am at peace!

KAYE

Hertel...

HERTEL

Who am I hurting out here? Huh? Tell me,
who am I hurting out here living alone
with a bunch of dead pets? Am I
compromising national security, depleting
the ozone layer, what? Goddammit what
happens to me!

KAYE & ANITA

(Unison)

You'll be rich...

HERTEL

What happens to them? (The pets)

CUT TO:

CEMETERY -- HERTEL, ANITA, and KAYE are in the middle
distance, their voices far away, framed by HEADSTONES and
PETS.

KAYE

They can stay right where they are.
They're fine. We'd have to move your dad
though. It's a state law, you can't build
things on, you know, human...

CUT TO:

ANITA

ANITA

Remains.

KAYE

(Pause) There are larger issues at work here. It's not just us, we're not the only ones involved in this. I mean I'll be honest with you, I would like financial independence, the freedom to do whatever I want, wherever I want, anytime I want. But there's more to it than just our own personal goals that we want to achieve. There's a bigger view.

HERTEL

That's what I'm talking about.

KAYE

But I'm talking about jobs and stuff. The construction, the people to work in the stores, build the houses around here, the schools, the whole town is growing this way...

HERTEL

Like an Amoeba.

KAYE

And you're standing in the way of...things, growth, prosperity, progress, all that stuff...

HERTEL

I can't go out there, that's all.

KAYE

You go out there every day Hertel, you go to the store, you go to the movies ...

HERTEL

But I don't goddamn live out there! There is no life out there, there is no living, there is only... survival.

(Looks at ANITA)

Mom, did I show you this?

CUT TO:

FINGERS -- they are bloody...

CUT TO:

EXT. MEKONG DELTA LANDING ZONE -- DAY

WOUNDED GI's being loaded into a hovering UH-1 HUEY MEDEVAC. The LZ is hot -- shouting, bullets, and Helicopters fill the air.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP -- HERTEL

He is strapped in a LITTER, his face is bloody, his head wrapped in muddy, soaked bandages, only one eye is visible, staring blankly at his bloody fingers, jostled and jarred as he is carried toward the waiting Helicopter.

HERTEL

(Dazed, shouting over the noise)

It was friendly, one of ours, proximity fuse, 100 feet, BLAM!

KAYE (O.S.)

(Shouting over the noise)

Hertel...

HERTEL

Like little tiny darts, millions of 'm...

KAYE (O.S.)

(Shouting over the noise)

Honey...

HERTEL

Went right through the top of my helmet, top of my head, right here. See?

CUT TO:

LITTER BEARER -- KAYE in a bright, girly SUN-DRESS. Shouting over the noise, struggling with the load and the uneven ground.

KAYE

That wasn't you!

HERTEL

(Looking at her, drawn from his thoughts)
What?

KAYE

(Lifting him toward the MEDEVAC and the
waiting AIRCREW)
It wasn't you.

HERTEL

(Being hoisted into the HELICOPTER)
It wasn't?

KAYE steps back as the AIRCREW pulls him into the MEDEVAC with
a bunch of other WOUNDED.

KAYE

No!

HERTEL

I thought it was me.

KAYE

It wasn't you, you were never here.

HERTEL

(Shouting over the ROAR of the HELICOPTER)
But I remember it...

(Clutching the CREW CHIEF, an OLDER MAN)
I remember you!

(Clutching the arm of another WOUNDED GI)
And I remember you! I remember your face!

KAYE

(Calling up to the MEDEVAC as it lifts
off)
That wasn't you!

The ROAR of the HELICOPTER begins to fade. KAYE stands framed
in the MEDEVAC DOOR, growing smaller as the HELICOPTER rears
up and away, bracing herself against the ROTOR DOWNWASH, her
bright, girly SUN-DRESS whipping in the wind.

HERTEL lets go of the WOUNDED GI and CREW CHIEF and sinks back
into the LITTER. He pulls the bloody bandages from his head

HERTEL
(Long pause)

Oh. Ok.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACKYARD -- DAY

HERTEL kneels in front of ANITA, showing her the top of his head. ANITA is quietly crying.

HERTEL
(Lowering his hands, straightening up)
Ok.

ANITA
Let's go. I want to go, let's go.

KAYE
Ok.

HERTEL
Aren't you gonna stay here mom? I mean
it's our house.

ANITA
No, I got a room down at the Red Lion.
I'm tired, drove all the way down from
Sacramento this morning, down I-5 -- hate
that drive, boring, hot ... I just want
to go back to my hotel.

HERTEL
Why don't you stay here, I mean, it's
clean inside. I clean it everyday...

CUT TO:

INT. DAD'S BEDROOM -- DAY

HERTEL mops the FLOOR around the neatly made bed in the
bright, cold room.

EXT. BACKYARD -- DAY

HERTEL

(Continuing)

I just don't live in there. Live out here. It's nice inside though, you should stay here, I never get to talk, to people. Anymore. Only an occasional Amoeba.

ANITA looks at him for a long moment.

ANITA

I gotta go.

KAYE

(Pause) We gotta go Hertel.

(Taking ANITA by the arm, going out)

We'll come back, talk to you later ok?

(Pause) Ok?

HERTEL

(Drawn from his thoughts)

What?

KAYE

We'll be back later, ok?

HERTEL

Ok. I'll be out here.

EXT. CEMETERY -- DUSK

HERTEL sits motionless in the middle distance. A CAR drives down the driveway, leaving a plume of dust, then turns onto the highway, and disappears behind the PYRAMID in the foreground.

DISSOLVE

PYRAMID SHAPE -- softer looking

PULLBACK to reveal...

SLEEPING BAG draped over two folding chairs forming a simple tent.

May 2024

EXT. BACKYARD -- DAY

The garage is quiet. There is a movement inside the SLEEPING BAG TENT.

INT. CAR -- DAY

ANITA drives up the dirt road leading to the HOUSE.

EXT. FRONT DOOR

ANITA walks to the front door, starts to knock, but stops, knowing it's useless. She walks around the side of the HOUSE.

EXT. BACKYARD

ANITA (O.S.)

Hertel?

(Tentatively enters from the side. Stops.

Hertel? You back here?

Silence. Another MOVEMENT beneath the SLEEPING BAG TENT. She slowly approaches it.

ANITA

Hertel, you in there? (Pause) Is this a little fort? I remember how you used to make these all the time. Your little forts. Make up a story about nuclear war and then crawl into your fort, fallout shelter, whatever you called it. Take some little plastic army men with you, and some toy dinosaurs. Start the world over again. You remember that? (Pause) I do.

HERTEL (O.S.)

Good for you then.

CUT TO:

ROOF

HERTEL stands on the roof with a can of Mastic and putty knife. He looks down on ANITA who stands below.

ANITA

(Startled, looking up at him).
Oh. I thought you were in there.

HERTEL

That's a perfectly reasonable
assumption...

(Climbing down the ladder)

I mean, this place is only forty acres,
where else would I be? But sitting under
a sleeping bag, pretending it's a fallout
shelter, and playing with dinosaurs?

(Knocking himself in the head)

Of course.

ANITA

Last time I saw you, you were doing stuff
like that. I see the fort, and I fall
into old thought patterns.

HERTEL

The last time you saw me was yesterday.

ANITA

(Pause) That didn't count. I had a lot of
things going on then, I saw a ghost, I
didn't see you, not really.

HERTEL

Yeah, but you saw enough though didn't ya.
Enough to where you'd think I'd be
crawling around under a goddamn sleeping
bag like some kinda moron. Feel it (the
sleeping bag). It was wet. I washed it.
Yappy used to sleep on it, it smelled like
dog, so I washed it, put it here to dry.

He pulls the sleeping bag off the chairs, revealing an
oscillating fan placed inside to help drying. He turns it off
and shakes out the sleeping bag.

He stops, looks at ANITA for a long, uncomfortable moment,
then buries his face in the sleeping bag and sinks to his
knees.

ANITA is FROZEN, STARING, totally at a loss, confused: every long-dormant maternal atom of her being imploring her to comfort him. Instinctively creeping toward him.

ANITA

Well... Um... I'm sorry, I didn't mean to dredge anything up, trigger anything, I know this must be hard for you, seeing me...

HERTEL

(Looking up from the sleeping bag)
Shit. Still smells like dog.

ANITA

I'm trying to apologize to you ...

HERTEL

Why, you didn't do it (the bag). Did you?

ANITA

(Rising above it)
I want to apologize to you about how things went yesterday...

HERTEL

Save your breath lady, you don't owe me anything. We're just two people that used to live in the same place once upon a time. It's true, I got some things that belong to you -- 23 of your chromosomes -- but I'm sorry, I'm using 'em, you can't have 'em back. Now I don't know what else is on your agenda, but I don't feel like interfacing today.

(Begins folding the sleeping bag)
I got a lot of work to do around here.

ANITA

I'm sorry we came in on you like we did, our minds made up, seeing nothing but dollar signs.

HERTEL

That's what made this country great.

ANITA

When Kaye called, said you were still alive, I felt, I don't know, how do you feel...numb. Before I came down here, I convinced myself that seeing you would be like ... something else. I didn't expect it to be like ... what it was.

HERTEL

What'd you expect?

ANITA

(Pause) I expected you to be worse.

HERTEL

You mean like, to find me on all fours, barking like a dog?

(On all fours folding the sleeping bag).
Grrrrr. (Barks)

She laughs, HERTEL smiles, continues his dog impression, goes over to a TV, lifts his leg on it. ANITA laughs again.

HERTEL

(Stands, his smile gone)

There, now you happy? You got what you need? So you can go ahead, steal this place. You guys got a kennel picked out for me yet?

ANITA

(Embarrassed, angry)

That was not fair.

HERTEL

Oh, are we talking fair now, is fair all of a sudden important? Where you been for the last 20 years lady. Where's Kaye been for the last seven? Who took care of that old man?

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY -- DAY

HERTEL carries a LUNCH TRAY, he pushes the door to DAD'S ROOM open and goes inside.

May 2024

HERTEL

Who took care of me?

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DAY

A YOUNG BOY sits on the floor looking at a GLITTERING ACCORDION. He senses something, reaches up to touch the top of his head, looks at his BLOODY FINGERS.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACKYARD

HERTEL

(Continuing)

Wasn't you. Wasn't her. Shit no, you two buzzards only show up when there's something to pick over, acting real hurt and put out, cause I didn't call you first thing and tell you, "hey, the old man died, and left you a one third share of 40 dried-up, burnt-out acres fulla little dead pets". You think it was an act of generosity on his part, his way of saying that everything's ok from the grave? All is forgiven? It was a joke! It was his one last swipe at you, both of you. Only it was supposed to stay worthless. So I guess the joke's on him, huh mom? Fair's fair.

ANITA

(Pause) Are you done?

HERTEL

No... (Thinks) Yeah.

ANITA

I came back here today 'cause I wanted you to know that I've reevaluated the situation, and ... I'm not going to go along with selling the estate. So, you can stay here, you know as long as you want now, nothing's gonna happen,

nothing's gonna change. I called Kaye
this morning, told her to count me out.

No response. HERTEL just looks at her.

ANITA

I didn't want to hurt you, again.

HERTEL

(Pause) Oh, is this where I'm supposed to
respond now? What would you prefer? Me
to fall down at your feet, hugging you by
the knees and blubbering about what a
wonderful, generous, compassionate person
you are for not stealing what doesn't
belong to you in the first place? Or
would you prefer something more dignified?

ANITA

Goddammit, stop being smart with me boy!
You think you got me on the run don't you?
That you can keep being a smart ass,
tripping me up, putting words in my mouth,
lay your bullshit guilt-trip on me, play
the martyr, the abandoned little boy.
Well fuck you, you little shit!

HERTEL

(Laughs) So ... how's things in
Sacramento?

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

ANITA looks around the KITCHEN. HERTEL fills a tea kettle at
the sink.

ANITA

Definite time-warp going here. You guys
didn't change a thing.

HERTEL

(Putting the KETTLE on the STOVE)
Stove's new. So's the Fridge.

ANITA

Not very. They haven't painted anything Harvest Gold or Avocado Green since the Carter administration.

HERTEL

(Looking at the STOVE)

That's a relief.

ANITA

(Pause) Where is he anyway?

HERTEL

Who?

ANITA

Your dad.

HERTEL

Out there. With the rest of'm.

She steps into the DOORWAY, and looks out at the panorama of PET HEADSTONES and MONUMENTS that cover the HILLSIDE.

ANITA

(Scanning the cemetery)

Can you be more specific?

HERTEL

(Rummaging in a CUPBOARD)

See the pyramid thingey out there?

ANITA

Yeah.

HERTEL

Dad's the first one to the left.

ANITA

Oh, ok. (Beat) Is that...

HERTEL

Yes. It's legal.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DAY

ACCORDION MUSIC -- ANITA steps into view wearing the ACCORDION. She plays "This Old Man, He Played One". We follow her as she wanders through the HOUSE -- a definite time capsule.

ANITA

(Calling out)

He was a lot older than me, you knew that didn't you?

HERTEL

(From the KITCHEN)

Yeah. In round numbers.

ANITA

I was only seventeen. He was fifty, and some change. Told me he was thirty-nine. How the hell would I know the difference? Thirty-nine, forty-nine, fifty-nine, all the same to me -- over 21, that was my frame of reference.

INT. HALLWAY

A DISTANT TEA KETTLE whistles and stops.

ANITA

(Continuing)

Besides, this was after Bacall married Bogart so the whole thing had a certain... cachet. He ever tell you how we met?

HERTEL

(From the KITCHEN)

Nope. Just said you met in Bakersfield.

ANITA

(Pushing a door open)

Yeah, the Christmas parade.

INT. PINK BATHROOM

ANITA

(Looking inside, continuing)

I was a majorette, the little white boots
with the tassel in the front, hat, baton -
- the whole shot.

(Moves on)

INT. HALLWAY

ANITA

(Continuing)

Marched next to his Cadillac. He was the
grand Marshall you know. He just stared
at me the whole parade.

(Pushing another door open)

He waved at everybody like he was supposed
to, but he never took his eyes off me.

INT. YELLOW SEWING ROOM

Perfectly preserved -- a sewing machine sits by the window, an
unfinished dress still in its jaws, the chair pushed out, as
if someone had just left, a size 6 sewing mannequin beside it.

ANITA

(Looking inside, continuing)

Of course, I was flattered as hell, a man
of such stature in the community showing
an interest.

HERTEL

(From KITCHEN)

Stature?

ANITA

(Moving on)

I was from Boron, I was easily impressed.

INT. HALLWAY

ANITA

(Continuing, pushing another door open)

He had his teeth and he didn't blow his
nose with his thumb.

INT. DAD'S BEDROOM

Clean, tidy, cold.

ANITA

(Looking inside, continuing)

So anyway, he starts flying out to the desert all the time, to see me, in his own personal airplane, a Beechcraft Bonanza, V-tail. Take me out flying, fly us over to Palmdale for dinner, things like that.

(Moving on)

Flew me over here to see this place once.

INT. HALLWAY

ANITA

(Pushing a door open)

It was beautiful out here back then, trees, grass, water.

INT. PINK BEDROOM (HER'S)

Completely empty, but definitely a woman's room.

ANITA

(Looking inside)

I was a desert rat, it was green, that was enough for me.

(Entering)

Then for my eighteenth birthday, he flew us to Vegas and we got married. And then he sold the airplane.

INT. KITCHEN

HERTEL sits at the TABLE with a PITCHER of ICE TEA and some sweating GLASSES. He stares out the window into the CEMETERY.

ANITA

(Stepping into the doorway)

What's the pyramid for?

HERTEL

Yappy.

ANITA

Oh. (Pause) So anyway I'm living out here, in this place, with him, which is why I got this thing... (the accordion) For all the good it did.

ANITA

(Taking off the ACCORDION)

Turn around and I'm twenty-nine, living with a little boy and an old man, and I can't breathe anymore -- asthma, from all the grass and trees -- and nothing is like I thought it would be, and so I just left.

(Sitting at the TABLE)

My dad left us when I was little, so I guess it's a genetic thing. Anyway it was nothing personal. Nothing against you.

HERTEL

(Pause) Sugar here if you want it.

HERTEL puts a couple of spoonfuls in his GLASS and stirs.
ANITA does likewise.

ANITA

How'd he die anyway?

HERTEL

Heartworm.

ANITA

Your father?

HERTEL

No, for hell's sake, Yappy.

ANITA

Oh. (Tasting) That's too bad.

(Putting more sugar in her GLASS)
How'd your father die then?

HERTEL

Well...he died of a broken heart mom.

ANITA

Oh give me a break...

HERTEL

Took him, you know, like 20 years, but he did, he died of a broken heart.

ANITA

Bullshit.

HERTEL

I'm not saying there weren't complications -- emphysema, kidney failure, liver disease, I mean these were certainly contributing factors. But primarily it was a circulatory problem... you. I used to wait outside the door, to your room. I mean the room was still full of you, you just weren't there to be seen, anymore.

CUT TO:

INT. PINK BEDROOM (HER'S)

A YOUNG BOY sits on the floor, framed in the doorway looking in at a GLITTERING ACCORDION. HERTEL stands looking down on the BOY.

HERTEL

(Tenderly, to the BOY)

She's dead, ya dumb sonovabitch, she's dead, she ain't coming back.

CUT TO:

BOY -- MOTIONLESS, STARING... BLINKS

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN

HERTEL sits drawing a SMILING ("KOOL-AID") FACE on the sweating PITCHER with his fingertip.

A lull. ANITA looks at him tenderly, reaches out to put her hand on his shoulder. He wipes off the pitcher and moves away, unaware.

HERTEL

(Getting ICE from the FRIDGE)
Every Christmas he'd get drunk, talk about you. Rest of the year you were dead of course. But when he got drunk at Christmas, you got... resurrected as it were.

ANITA

What'd he say?

HERTEL

The basics, happiest ten years of his life, stuff like that. About how if you'd been killed in a car crash or something, or like kidnapped from a parking lot by some serial killer and murdered and dumped in a ditch, about how he could've understood that, since that woulda been an act of God. But for you to just... leave, like you did. It just seemed very... intentional to him, he could never understand that. All in all it made for a very unique holiday experience.

ANITA

How would me being killed by some psycho be an act of God any more than me leaving on my own be an act of God?

HERTEL

Let's not bring God into the discussion Mom, I'm just telling you what he thought, let's not muddy up the issue with religion -- didn't know you were into that shit.

ANITA

Yeah well kiddo, there's a lot of things about me you don't know.

HERTEL

I hear that.

ANITA

I was, you know, born again. Right after I left here. This was before they even called'm "born agains". Didn't use the

generic term back then, just called'm what they were, Four Square Baptist, Pentecostal -- that's what I was, Pentecostal. Really got into it. Spoke in tongues, you know, roll my eyes back, faint, let other people catch me. I mean why do it at all if you're not going to go all the way? It really helped me. But, after a while, I kind of drifted away from Jesus, got into real estate.

HERTEL

(Pause, thoughtfully)

Good career move.

CUT TO:

GOLF BALL ON THE TEE -- SWHOOSH-CLAK

EXT. BACKYARD -- AFTERNOON

HERTEL stands in follow-through position. They both watch the BALL arc over the CEMETERY and disappear in the FIELD beyond.

ANITA

Get another ten yards on that if you move your left foot back.

HERTEL looks at her.

CUT TO:

GOLF BALL IN TALL DRY GRASS

VOICES in the distance

RISING ABOVE THE GRASS to reveal...

EXT. FIELD BEYOND CEMETERY -- AFTERNOON

In the DISTANCE, HERTEL and ANITA approach in a CUSHMAN UTILITY CART (HERTEL's version of a GOLF CART). They drive through the CEMETERY and into the FIELD, bouncing as they approach. ANITA looks around for the BALL as they drive, HERTEL looks straight ahead driving toward the BALL.

ANITA

(Continuing)

Own a coupla apartment complexes, the Kon
Tiki and the Kahuna -- won that one in a
poker game... dumb sonovabitch thought he
could bluff me. A miniature golf course -
- Golfateria, coffee shop --
Meet'n'Mingle, bunch a things.

HERTEL stops the CUSHMAN a few feet in front of the BALL.

ANITA

(Continuing)

Net worth of maybe, I don't know, couple
million, something like that, depending on
stock prices...

HERTEL walks straight to the BALL, picks it up.

ANITA

How'd you know it was there?

HERTEL

(Beat) This is where it always lands.

SWHOOSH-CLACK

EXT. BACKYARD -- AFTERNOON

ANITA stands in post-swing position. HERTEL watches as the
BALL arcs over the CEMETERY and disappears into the distance.

ANITA

(Watching the BALL's flight)

Kaye said you can hear what animals say.

HERTEL

Oh she's fulla shit.

INT. CUSHMAN CART

HERTEL and ANITA driving/bouncing through the CEMETERY

HERTEL

(Continuing)

I mean I still love her and everything,
but she's fulla shit. Animals don't talk
to me, I'm not some goddamn schizo.

ANITA

No, she didn't say that, she just said ...

EXT. FIELD BEYOND CEMETERY

HERTEL and ANITA climb out of the CUSHMAN.

HERTEL

(Continuing)

I told her that I know how they think.
It's an entirely different concept.

ANITA

Oh.

HERTEL

And it's not like it's an unusual thing
either. It's just that everybody forgot
how to do it is all.

They split up, searching for the BALL.

HERTEL

(Continuing, searching)

You know, back when we were cavemen, we
all understood how animals thought. It
was crucial to our survival. We could
think like a Mastodon, so we could track'm
down and kill'm and eat'm.

(Picking up the BALL)

CUT TO:

GOLF BALL ON THE TEE, FEET IN POSITION, DRIVER HOVERING

The LEFT FOOT SLIDES back an INCH or so.

HERTEL (O.S.)

But then, you know, something happened, on
a global scale, and we forgot.

SWHOOSH-CLAK

INT. CUSHMAN CART

HERTEL and ANITA driving/bouncing through the FIELD heading for HERTEL's usual GOLF BALL LANDING SPOT.

HERTEL

(Continuing)

The Mastodon had a very logical mind, very intelligent animal, dry self-deprecating sense of humor.

ANITA

If they had so much going for them, how come they're extinct?

HERTEL

They were too goddamn big. The world favors smaller things, they present a smaller target. And besides, I think it's premature to act superior to a species just because it's extinct and you're not. Yet.

(Stopping the CART, climbs out)

And let me tell ya something, they never thought it was gonna end either.

GOLF BALL IN TALL DRY GRASS

HERTEL and ANITA are visible through the GRASS a good distance away. HERTEL looks around his FEET for the GOLF BALL.

ANITA

Told ya you'd get another ten yards.

HERTEL

(Looking around)

Yeah. But now I don't know where to find it.

(Sniffing the air)

And I can't smell them anymore.

ANITA

(Looks at him, not following)

Oh.

SOUND -- JET TAKEOFF.

CLOSE-UP -- DALE

He cranes his neck, watching a LEAR JET fly over on take off.

DALE

Yeah, that's my Gulfstream 4, niner-three-zulu. I'd take you up in it today, but I'm loaning it to some people for charity purposes.

SLOWLY PULLING BACK to REVEAL... DALE in his BUSINESS SUIT.

DALE (CONTINUING)

They're taking some... eyeballs down to... Argentina. Buncha blind kids down there, need the eyeballs. G-4's the only thing fast enough to get down there before the eyeballs go bad.

A weak, scratchy moan from below.

DALE (CONTINUING)

(As if responding) They got'm on ice and everything, but they still gotta get'm down there fast.

SLOWLY PULLING BACK to REVEAL... DALE standing behind a WHEELCHAIR.

DALE (CONTINUING)

Good write-off for tax purposes too. Taxes are just eating me alive this year...

SLOWLY PULLING BACK to REVEAL... OLDER WOMAN in WHEELCHAIR.

She is wrapped in a blanket and severely stricken -- paralyzed, head lolling, trying to look up at DALE.

DALE (CONTINUING)

(Watching another plane take off) Gonna be a good year though...

Another WEAK SCRATCHY MOAN. SLOWLY MOVING IN...

DALE (CONTINUING)

Yeah, gotta a lotta projects going. Big projects, really big projects. Lotta challenges, lotta goals. This next project goes through, I'll be able to get another G4, so when one of'm is busy taking eyeballs to people, I can still take you up for a ride. And that'll be nice. Won't be long now. Sure wish Dad coulda seen all this.

Another WEAK SCRATCHY MOAN. SLOWLY MOVING IN...

DALE (CONTINUING)

Yeah, me too Mom. (Pause) Me too.

EXT. BACKYARD -- LATE AFTERNOON

HERTEL and ANITA sit on CHAISE LOUNGES under a tattered UMBRELLA and quietly sip BEERS. ANITA has her shoes off.

HERTEL

(Pause, takes a swig)

We all used to remember ya know.

(Stands, finishing his can)

And the memories are still in there.

(Tossing it out in the yard)

It's like these TV's here, every show that's ever been on'm is still in there, vibrating, in the wires, way down deep, in the atoms, the echoes, of what went on before. Only we can't see'm.

ANITA

I don't remember hunting dinosaurs.

HERTEL

(Touching his head)

That's because you don't have the same things floating around in here that I do.

Silence. HERTEL rummages through JUNK, looking for something. ANITA watches him, framing a question.

ANITA

Why'd he shoot you?

HERTEL

(Pulling a RIFLE out of the JUNK)
Who told you that?

ANITA

Kaye.

He shakes the RIFLE, an ancient DAISY RED-RIDER BB-GUN,
listening to see if it's loaded.

HERTEL

(Cocking it)

She doesn't know. She wasn't there.

Aims at his BEER CAN, fires... PLINK.

ANITA

Still got that old Daisy huh?

HERTEL

(Cocking it)

Yeah.

Aims and fires...PLINK.

HERTEL

It wasn't like he shot me, pulled out his
Luger and physically shot me.

(Cocking it)

Wasn't like that at all.

Aims and fires...PLINK.

ANITA

So it was an accident then?

HERTEL

(Thinks, laughs to himself)

Yeah, it was an act a God... something he
could understand.

(Cocking it)

Get his arms around.

Aims and fires...PLINK.

ANITA

When he called, to tell me that you died,
he said you shot yourself.

HERTEL

Well, I'm sure from his perspective,
that's probably true...

(Cocking it)

Why the interest all of a sudden?

ANITA

Morbid curiosity?

HERTEL

(Cracks up laughing)

Here, your turn.

He offers ANITA the BB-GUN. She takes it, tosses her empty
BEER CAN, leans back in the CHAISE LOUNGE, aims and fires...
PLINK. She cocks it again, aims, fires...PLINK.

ANITA

(Cocking it)

Man, this is the life.

HERTEL watches her shoot. It's clear who taught him how.

HERTEL

Christmas time. Me and Kaye had been
divorced for, a while. Come up here for
the week, you know, see Mark and Glen,
everybody's back in town for Christmas.
Gave dad a coupla videotapes, "The
Searchers" with John Wayne, and "Forbidden
Planet". Watch him get drunk, listen to
him talk about you. Again. New Year's
Eve, he's out here shooting off his Luger
at midnight. And I'm telling him, to
point off to the north, but he just keeps
pointing it straight up into the air and
shooting...

EXT. BACKYARD -- NIGHT

HERTEL stands shivering, hands in his pockets, breath
condensing to steam in the chilly air.

May 2024

HERTEL

(Continuing)

You know, Happy New Year...

(Putting his fingers in his ears)

GUNSHOT -- POP and ECHO

HERTEL

Wishing somebody dead...

GUNSHOT -- POP and ECHO

HERTEL

Wishing cancer on somebody else...

GUNSHOT -- POP and ECHO

HERTEL

And I'm telling him it's against the law
to discharge a firearm in the city
limits...

(Addressing someone OFF SCREEN)

Which it is. But he just keeps saying
that this is an un-incorporated area out
here, nobody gives a shit what we do.

EXT. BACKYARD -- LATE AFTERNOON

ANITA sits watching him, the BB-GUN propped against the CHAISE
LOUNGE.

HERTEL

(Continuing)

And then, one of those bullets, one of
those wishes he sent into the sky, fell
down on me.

He senses something, reaches up to touch the top of his head,
looks at his FINGERS.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACKYARD -- NIGHT

HERTEL sitting on the ground, dazed, staring at his bloody
fingers, blood trickling down his forehead. He reaches up to
feel the top of his head.

May 2024

EXT. CEMETERY -- NIGHT

HERTEL sits in the distance on the ground in a CIRCLE of light.

The FLASHING LIGHTS of an AMBULANCE turn off the highway and head up the dirt road leading to the HOUSE.

EXT. BACKYARD -- AFTERNOON

HERTEL stands in front of ANITA, showing her the top of his head.

HERTEL

See that? People never think about that, they put something out there, send something off into the air, and never think about where it'll fall.

He turns away, walking to the WHEEL-LESS PICKUP TRUCK

HERTEL

They got most of it out ok.
(Looking in the TRUCK BED)
Except some little tiny slivers. Of metal. So small you can't even see'm, but they're in there, specks, floating around -- that's why I remember so much.

He pulls a RUSTY COFFEE CAN out of the TRUCK. The COFFEE can is filled with nested SMALLER CANS. He pulls the CANS apart as he talks, tossing them into the YARD.

HERTEL

The sounds, the smells. Cause all the brains are still in there. All of us, each brain built on top of an older brain:
(Tossing the LARGEST CAN)
man-brain...

(Tossing a SMALLER CAN with each brain)
monkey-brain, dog, turtle, lizard, snake.

(Crossing back to ANITA)
All the way back to the beginning of time, back to when we were all just a buncha... amoebas floating around eating each other all day. And I remember it all, because I got the slivers in here, touching things,

connecting things. Things that aren't connected in the rest of you, anymore.

ANITA

Why, what happened to us?

HERTEL

(Picking up the RIFLE)

It's academic. The point is, you're disconnected, and you forgot everything.

(Cocking it)

What the difference how it happened?

CUT TO:

COFFEE CAN

HERTEL stands in the distance beside ANITA. He aims, fires...
PLINK.

ANITA

The difference is, I want to know. How'd we get disconnected?

HERTEL

(Cocking it)

You gotta promise to keep an open mind.

ANITA

(Unsure) Ok.

HERTEL

(Confidentially)

Did you know that the earth's magnetic poles have reversed? That the north pole is actually a magnetic south pole, and that the south pole is actually the magnetic north pole?

ANITA

No. But I don't watch the news much, so I didn't hear about that.

HERTEL

Happened like eight thousand years ago Mom.

ANITA

Well how the hell was I supposed to know that then?

HERTEL

It's a well known scientific fact. Turns out a comet went whizzing past us back then, flipped the earth's magnetic field over, reversed our magnetic polarity.

ANITA

Oh. Is that good?

HERTEL

Think about it mom, four billion years of evolution, on this planet. And then the poles switch. It was like going from DC to AC, only we're not wired for it, so we forgot things, forgot who we were, couldn't recognize each other 'cause the circuitry was all messed up. Started hearing voices, but we didn't recognize'm. Thought they were gods, demons, shit like that. Started killing each other because the voices told us to -- original sin. Only it wasn't our fault, it was just... physics.

CUT TO:

SOUP CAN

HERTEL stands in the distance, aims, fires... PLINK.

ANITA

Interesting theory.

HERTEL

It's not a theory, history documents this.
(Cocks it)

War, agriculture, religion, civilization--
8,000 years ago. What a coincidence huh?

AIMS, fires...PLINK

ANITA

Yeah.

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HERTEL

It used to be we were all one thing. Not anymore. We're different from the rest of the animals now, but not for the reasons most people think. Like that we use tools.

That's the classic scientific distinction, you know, "man is the only tool user in the animal kingdom". Ever seen a sea otter clobber a abalone with a rock, so he could smash'm up and eat'm? That's a stone tool he's using, same as we did a million or so years ago, so there goes that argument.

ANITA

We believe in God and stuff, we have immortal souls, that's the difference between us and them.

HERTEL

Sounds like you didn't drift that far away from Jesus after all.

ANITA

Maybe not.

HERTEL walks downrange to set up the CANS

HERTEL

You think we got a corner on that market? Let me tell you something mom, there are species out there that are much more spiritual than we are. Monkeys are very religious animals, believe in all kinds of spooks, this helps explain their erratic behavior...

HERTEL casually reaches down into the TALL GRASS and picks up a SNAKE by the base of its head, it starts RATTLING and writhing)

HERTEL

(Gesturing with the SNAKE)
Snakes too, very orthodox.

HERTEL winds up and nonchalantly hurls the SNAKE into the distant WEEDS.

ANITA
(Lost in thought)

Oh.

HERTEL
And that comet's coming back you know.
Pretty soon. It'll make the magnetic
poles flip over again. And we'll forget
everything we've learned since the last
time. We'll be a bunch of cavemen again,
standing around in three-piece suits,
looking at all these machines that we
don't understand anymore

(Looking at the TV's).

This's why it's important to maintain your
survival skills. To where they're
instinct again.

ANITA
Well what makes us different then? If
they've got God and they've got tools,
then what's left to make us different from
the other animals?

HERTEL
(Laughs in disbelief)
You don't know?

ANITA
No I don't.

HERTEL
(Cocks it)
Well for hell's sake mom ... money.

AIMS, fires...PLINK

CUT TO:

TV SCREEN -- QVC

The BREATHLESS ANNOUNCER rhapsodizes about some worthless
piece of jewelry spinning slowly on the turntable next to the

LEGEND listing QVC PRICE, RETAIL PRICE, NUMBER and TIME REMAINING, and the 800-NUMBER to call.

INT. MOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

The TV is on (QVC), so are all the lights. ANITA sleeps peacefully amid the light and noise.

EXT. MOTEL -- NIGHT

The entire WING is dark, except for ONE ROOM, the only LIGHT in a matrix of dark, sleeping rooms.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. BACKYARD -- NIGHT

The HOUSE is DARK, except for the LIGHT over the BACK DOOR -- MOTHS fluttering and flailing, drawn to it. It is the only LIGHT in a field of black.

DISSOLVE:

EXT. CEMETERY -- NIGHT

The HOUSE sits in the middle distance, a halo of light on the BACKDOOR. The shimmering lights of the sprawling CITY stretch out in the distance. HERTEL emerges from the CAVE. He carries a sleeping bag under his arm. He stands for a moment in the mouth of the CAVE, looking out into the CEMETERY. He then walks over to the BACKDOOR and goes inside. The PORCH LIGHT is switched off plunging the entire estate into darkness. A LIGHT is turned on INSIDE the HOUSE, followed by another light deeper within. The HOUSE begins to light-up from within as HERTEL moves through it.

INT. SUPERMARKET CHECKOUT -- DAY

HERTEL and ANITA push a shopping CART full of BARBECUE ITEMS up to the counter. HERTEL begins unloading the cart.

CHECKER

(Smiling at HERTEL, starts ringing up)
Hey Hertel, how are you?

HERTEL

Pretty good Karen, how's your back?

CHECKER

(Indicating her abdominal support)
They got us wearing these girdles things
now. They help a little, but I think
they're mainly just so we can't sue'm.

HERTEL

They look good though, like you're getting
ready to go bull riding or something.

The CHECKER laughs.

HERTEL

(Introducing)

This is my Mom, Anita.

The CHECKER looks at ANITA blankly for a moment.

HERTEL

She's not dead yet, that was premature.

ANITA

(Laughs, punching him in the arm)
Oh, will you stop doing that...

EXT. SUPERMARKET PARKING LOT -- AFTERNOON

HERTEL and ANITA walk through the parking lot with their
SHOPPING CART. The PARKING LOT shimmers in the mid-day heat.

ANITA

(Continuing)

Forgot how hot this goddamn town was.

HERTEL passes a dusty '73 EL CAMINO, the DRIVER, an OLDER MAN,
sits quietly smoking a cigarette, listening to a BASEBALL
GAME.

HERTEL

(To the DRIVER)

Nice El Camino.

The EL CAMINO DRIVER, smiles and nods a silent acknowledgement
as they walk past, approaching HERTEL's FADED 53' CHEVY
PICKUP.

ANITA
(Putting on her sunglasses)
Seems like you know a lot of people.

HERTEL
(Seeing something, slowing down)
Yeah...

He stops, looking at a CAR sitting in the BROILING PARKING LOT. He goes over to it, looks inside.

INT. CAR

The windows are rolled up. A DOG sits on the back seat panting. HERTEL looks inside at the DOG. The DOG looks at HERTEL, pants, weakly wags its tail. HERTEL points to the front seat, the DOG jumps into the driver's seat. HERTEL exits the FRAME.

ANITA (O.S.)
What are you doing?

SMASH -- CAR WINDOW SHATTERS

HERTEL reaches inside, rolling down what's left of the WINDOW.

HERTEL
(To the DOG)
That's better. Watch out for the glass...

ANITA
Come on...
(Pulling him away)
Come on...

The DOG looks out, framed in the CAR WINDOW.

CUT TO:

DALE -- FRAMED in a CAR WINDOW, looking out.

EXT. FRONT DRIVE, HERTEL'S HOUSE -- LATE AFTERNOON

DALE's '79 THUNDERBIRD LANDAU sits in the FRONT DRIVE next to ANITA's RENT-A-CAR. HERTEL's PICKUP is visible in the distance approaching on the highway.

INT. DALE'S '79 Thunderbird LANDAU

DALE watches as HERTEL and ANITA turn off the highway and head up the dirt road toward the house. He flicks away his cigarette and climbs out as they pull in.

INT. KITCHEN

HERTEL puts away groceries as DALE works on an immovable ANITA.

DALE

(Continuing)

You know, I can understand him not responding to logic, I mean he's got an excuse, he's got a bullet in his head.

HERTEL

(Putting something in the FRIDGE)

I highly recommend it, everybody should have one.

DALE

(To ANITA)

I mean, you're gonna pass up a deal like this so he can sit out here and talk to himself? He doesn't need forty acres for that. You can talk to yourself on one acre, you can talk to yourself in a room, in a goddamn car.

ANITA

A very persuasive argument.

HERTEL

(Pulling a package out of the FRIDGE)

Dale, will you join us for some turkey dogs?

DALE

(As if shooing away a fly)

No, thanks.

(To ANITA)

HERTEL

We got regular weenies too.

(Pulling another package out of the
FRIDGE)
In case you have more traditional values.
Grey poupon mustard for that gourmet touch
a class.

DALE
Don't fuck with me.

HERTEL rises to his feet, ominously. DALE blinks, but doesn't
move.

HERTEL
It can be dangerous to talk to a man like
that. Especially when he's holding a pack
a turkey weenies in his hand.

ANITA cracks up laughing.

HERTEL
(Gesturing with the WEENIES)
And I gotta warn ya, these got a hair
trigger on'm. And I wouldn't miss from
this range.

DALE
You think you're real funny don'tcha?

HERTEL
(Picking up the BRIQUETTES)
Lighten up man, you lost, it ain't the end
of the world.
(Carrying the BAG out the BACK DOOR)
We're extending the olive branch here,
have a turkey dog for hell's sake.

EXT. BACKYARD -- SUNSET

HERTEL comes out BACK DOOR followed by ANITA.

DALE
(Standing in the doorway)
You won't think it's too funny when they
kick your ass outa here, when you're
living in your car, eating outa
dumpsters...

HERTEL

(Pulling a HIBACHI out of the JUNK)
There's worse ways to live. Much worse.

DALE

(Exploding)

LISTEN TO ME! (Pause) You are making a serious tactical error here. You are blowing it lady.

HERTEL

Now look, you can be civilized and join us for turkey dogs, or you can piss off.

DALE

This is an investment opportunity that cannot, repeat, cannot be ignored!

HERTEL

It's not for sale. We've decided ...

DALE

You don't get it do you? The big picture. It's been decided! (Pause) I wouldn't be so quick to write me off as a loser if I was you.

ANITA

Really.

DALE

Yeah.

(Focusing on ANITA)

Why is it, do you think that this place got rezoned for mixed commercial and residential?

ANITA

(Beat) I don't know.

DALE

You think that happened by magic? That nobody was behind it? Why do you think the water rates went up to where he couldn't afford to water out there anymore, had to let everything die?

HERTEL watches ANITA.

DALE

(Knowing he has her)

How come this place hasn't paid its property taxes for like nine years, and nobody's said anything about it? Didn't know that did ya?

HERTEL watches their dance, fascinated. Silence.

DALE

There are elements at work here that you don't seem to be aware of. It could be that some people plan to pick this place up when it goes on the auction block as a delinquent property. They got it all worked out between'm. Pay the eighteen-thousand, three-hundred and forty-four dollars in back taxes, plus a coupla hundred-K extra to make it look like a legitimate bid, and get it free and clear. And then scrape it off, and put a shopping mall here. It could be that there is a very large scale development planned for this area and this dried up graveyard happens to sit in the middle of it. It could be that that's the case.

ANITA

Did you know this place was in tax default?

HERTEL

No.

ANITA

Don't you read your mail?

HERTEL

Ain't addressed to me it's addressed to Dad, it's a federal offense to open somebody else's mail, even a dead man's. Besides, we got more important things to worry about, first we gotta get the place green, then we can worry about the taxes.

ANITA

You can't do that...

HERTEL

What the hell they gonna do? We own this place, and their chickenshit rules can't change that, this's America.

ANITA

It doesn't work like that. You don't just own something once and it's yours forever. You gotta buy that right every year.

HERTEL

Well then we gotta change the system, 'cause that's horseshit.

DALE

(Indicating HERTEL)

This is what you're dealing with here, this is what you're passing this deal up for. (Pause) Things are in motion. We got one chance to steal this place out from under those rich fuckers. The only decision we got to make, is to screw, or get screwed.

ANITA

Who's we?

DALE

(Pause) What do you mean?

ANITA

I don't see how you figure into the equation.

DALE

Well ... I got ... the inside information.

ANITA

(Pause) You just gave me that.

DALE stands staring at ANITA, two sharks sizing each other up. HERTEL watches.

ANITA

Guys like you make me laugh. You take some bullshit real estate class where they feed you a bunch of fairy tales about buying property with no money down, and about checking the papers for obituaries and divorce announcements so you can find motivated sellers and other such crap. And you guys just eat it up. You come crawling out, thinking you're experts, screwing up deals for legitimate developers, like me, trying to get something for nothing...

DALE

What about you lady? Story I hear is you bailed out of this situation a long time ago. What brings you back here? Your son getting married didn't bring you back, him getting shot in the head didn't bring you back, the old man dying didn't bring you back. So tell me, what brings you back? Who else wants something for nothing?
(Pause) Have a nice day.

DALE turns and silently exits. HERTEL watches ANITA who watches DALE leave. Silence. NIGHT HAS FALLEN.

HERTEL doesn't take his eyes off ANITA. She is thinking, she doesn't look at him when she talks.

ANITA

(Preoccupied)

Don't worry about the taxes. I'm very liquid right now, I can cover it for us.

HERTEL

That'd be nice Mom, thanks. I'll pay you back.

ANITA

(Turning on the BACK PORCH LIGHT)

Forget it. It's the least I can do.

HERTEL

Uh huh.

HERTEL looks at her, he smells something.

HERTEL

You smell that?

ANITA

(Sniffing, not smelling anything)
What?

HERTEL

(Pause, looking at her)
Nothing.

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP -- HERTEL

He turns, looking out into the CEMETERY.

HERTEL

You smell it. You recognize it. You know that smell, you know what she's gonna do. Unmistakable. Goes way back. Before we were pets, before we were domesticated even, back when we were all still wild. Before we lived in trees and houses, we lived in burrows, caves, dens. Packs of us, keeping each other warm, breathing each other's air, the feel of the earth, cool, safe, holding us close, protecting us.

PULLING BACK...

ANITA is in the background standing under the PORCH LIGHT watching HERTEL.

HERTEL

(Crossing to a SHOVEL, picking it up)
It can't anymore. Not in the current business climate. You know, you been there. Hiding in a hole, silent, trying not to breathe in the smell of something bigger than you, knowing it's out there, waiting-- the claws, the teeth. They don't give a shit. Can't reason with'm.

They mark us you know, teeth. Identify us, uniquely.

CUT TO:

ANITA'S POV

HERTEL stands at the edge of the yard, his back to her, gesturing, talking, his voice distant, muffled -- a private conversation.

HERTEL

(Continuing)

What's left after everything else is dust? Teeth. All kinds, (Urgently) man-teeth, dog-teeth, amoeba-teeth -- them too, it's the concept.

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP -- HERTEL

HERTEL

(Continuing)

Teeth that can chew through anything, skin, muscle, bone, trust, love, souls. The hard little pieces of us that can survive anything, fire, time -- everything but neglect. The hard little pieces of us we use to tear life apart, consume it, survive. We're none of us innocent, it's something we all got in common, as animals. Life feeds on itself, now, then, forever.

ANITA stands silent, motionless, watching him.

HERTEL

It's not a moral issue, not in the traditional sense; you do what you gotta do that's all. To survive. I hope you'll understand. Why I have to do this. (Turning away from the CEMETERY, pause) Don't judge me.

He looks back at ANITA, she looks at him...

May 2024

FADE TO BLACK

CUT TO:

TIRE

PULLBACK to reveal...

CUSHMAN UTILITY CART

There is movement behind the CART, hidden from view. A SWIRL of DUST...

LATERAL MOVE -- GROUND LEVEL

A SHALLOW GRAVE is revealed behind the CUSHMAN. We can't see inside, it's ringed in dirt. All we can see is SCOOPS of DIRT arcing out of it: fast, frenzied, as if some enormous rodent, were burrowing to the center of the earth in a panic to escape. The DIGGING is accompanied by a SOUND -- part gasping from the effort, part choking on the dust, part sobbing.

A metallic CRACK. Pause. A SHOVEL with the blade broken off is tossed out of the GRAVE, landing in the foreground. The DIGGING resumes.

DISSOLVE

CLOSE UP -- POPCICLE STICK

It is held between two fingers, dirty and caked in dried-blood. A SMALL HEART is drawn on the STICK -- the left half, the right have, then a large, open crack down the middle -- a BROKEN HEART. The POPSICLE is gently lowered to the ground and pushed into the soft earth, like a tiny HEADSTONE. A SHADOW passes over it.

PULL BACK to reveal...

EXT. CEMETERY/"LOST AND FOUND" GRAVE SITE -- LATE AFTERNOON

The BROKEN-HEARTED HEADSTONE is flanked by rows of POPCICLE HEADSTONES. The CEMETERY and HOUSE are visible in the DISTANCE. The afternoon wind has picked up, dust blows across the rows of TINY HEADSTONES.

May 2024

INT. PATROL CAR -- NIGHT

KAYE DRIVES up the DIRT ROAD toward the HOUSE which is completely DARK.

EXT. HOUSE, FRONT DRIVE -- NIGHT

The PATROL CAR pulls up beside HERTEL'S PICKUP.

EXT. FIELD BEYOND THE CEMETERY -- NIGHT

In the distance, a flashlight beam flashes around inside the darkened house. We hear KAYE call out, her voice thin, distant, carried on the breeze.

KAYE

Hertel?

KAYE emerges from the darkened HOUSE. She stands in the doorway, shining her flashlight, looking into the backyard and garage.

KAYE

(Flipping on the porch light)

Anita?

She stands in a SMALL CIRCLE of LIGHT at the distant BACK DOOR.

SOMETHING STIRS in the FOREGROUND. A PRONE FIGURE rises from the DARKNESS and FILLS the FRAME.

EXT. BACK YARD -- NIGHT

KAYE steps off the PORCH and wanders around, looking for signs of life. Nudges the hibachi with her foot. She goes back into the CAVE.

KAYE

(Disappearing into the darkness)

Hertel? You asleep back there?

(Emerging from the cave)

Where the hell is everybody?

She spots the BB-GUN, picks it up, shakes it (silent, empty).

HERTEL (O.S.)

I'm here.

Startled, KAYE instinctively crouches into firing position with the RIFLE. Then stops, realizing it's HERTEL.

He is covered with dirt, his face, his hair, his clothes. Like a caveman in ceremonial ash. He carries a shovel with the blade broken off. His hands are bloody and caked with dirt. He is shaken, in a trance. He stands at the edge of the light.

KAYE

(Letting the adrenaline fade)

I'm gonna tie a fucking bell on you one of these days.

HERTEL stands motionless watching her.

HERTEL

(Not really hearing her)

Yeah.

He looks out into the cemetery. She looks him over.

KAYE

What happened to you? You look like something the cat coughed up.

(Pause, no response)

What were you doing out there?

HERTEL

Working.

KAYE

Getting the place fixed up and ready for business?

HERTEL

(Nods)

Business.

KAYE

(Pause, looking around)

Well, I hope it picks up for you. I'm glad you get to stay out here, you know, situated, the way you are.

(Putting the RIFLE down)
You know I can force the sale of this place. If I wanted to play hardball I could do that. You won't miss the money, shit no, you got what you want (the cemetery). Anita's already worth a couple million, she won't miss it. But it would make a big fucking difference to me.

HERTEL

(Drawn from his trance)

What?

KAYE

Goddammit will you...

(She stops, noticing something)

What happened to your hands?

He looks at his hands, they are bloody.

HERTEL

Oh. (Pause) Shovel broke. Had to take the blade, scrape out the dirt. Got some blisters I guess.

KAYE

Shoulda just got another shovel. (Beat)
Look, I want something from you,
acknowledge my sacrifice...

HERTEL

Didn't seem right to stop in the middle of everything.

(Looking back into the cemetery)

Dirt was very soft, dry. Like digging through air. I could almost see through it -- the rocks, the roots, the bones. Dad, Yappy, all of 'm. The whole thing built on nothing but bones. The dead can save us you know, they can free us, they can even protect us from the living sometimes. They're good listeners.

KAYE

(Pause, looking at him)

Where's Anita?

HERTEL

Who?

KAYE

Anita, your mom.

HERTEL

Oh. I never call her that, didn't make the connection.

KAYE

(Vague suspicion)

Where is she?

HERTEL

Went downtown this morning to pay some taxes. We were delinquent you know.

KAYE

(Watching him)

No I didn't know that.

HERTEL

We don't have to pay her back though. She said it was the least she could do. She was liquid.

KAYE

Well, that's nice of her.

HERTEL

Got the phone connected again.

KAYE

Good, glad to hear it.

HERTEL

Thought she'd be back by now. I guess she had some other business to take care of.
(Pause) That's how it smelled anyway.

ANITA (O.S.)

Why are all the lights out?

ANITA stands at the BACK DOOR, dressed for business, carrying a briefcase.

ANITA

(Flipping on the KITCHEN LIGHTS)
Sorry I took so long, I had to make a
coupla stops and...

(Seeing HERTEL covered with dirt)
What happened?

KAYE

(Stretches her neck, releasing the
tension)
He broke his shovel.

ANITA

(Surprised to see her there)
Oh... hi...

HERTEL

Pay the taxes?

ANITA

Yeah, that's all, it's all taken care of.

HERTEL

That's good.

(To KAYE)

They were gonna steal this place from
under us because of those taxes.

ANITA

Yes they were, they certainly were...

HERTEL

But we beat'm at their own game.

(Looking back at ANITA, fixing on her)
Didn't we mom?

ANITA

Yeah, we did, but we can't lose sight of
the fact that...

HERTEL

Now we can get this place going again, get
it into a growth mode...

KAYE

(Resigned)

Yeah, there's millions of dogs and cats running around out there, and they're dying every day, they gotta go somewhere.

EXT. CEMETERY

HERTEL, ANITA, and KAYE are in the middle distance, gathered in the LIGHT of the HOUSE their voices faraway, thin. The SPRAWLING CITY glitters to the horizon.

HERTEL

(Pointing into the Cemetery)

That's the future out there Mom...

PULLBACK/PAN to reveal...

The CITY is even closer, the lights almost encircling.

ANITA

I know it looks like we won, but the truth of it is that I only bought us some time. I mean, look around, the street lights going up, the sewer lines -- there is a plan here. And we're in the middle of it. And if we don't do something, we are gonna be surrounded, swallowed up, and absorbed.

EXT. BACKYARD

HERTEL

Well maybe we can swallow them up first, two can play at this game you know, we could expand.

KAYE

Sell franchises.

HERTEL

Yeah, the small family business created civilization, there's no limit to our potential now that we're all working together on this. (Beat) We are working together on this aren't we mom?

ANITA

Well yeah, of course we are, we're family. But I know how these guys operate. They'll get this place one way or another. Property taxes, assessments for the street lights and sewers, estate taxes, they'll bleed us dry. They're gonna build a shopping mall here no matter what we do.

HERTEL

Then we'll just call the Action News Team, tell'm how they're gonna build a shopping mall on top of a bunch a dead pets -- they love this kind of shit. Might even make the networks. Nobody'll come to a graveyard shopping mall...

ANITA

People forget, people don't care. A big shiny place full of things they want, they won't care what it's built on. (Beat) We've got to sell this place, while we still can.

HERTEL looks at her, through her, like air, to see the roots, the rocks, the bones -- his instincts, his sense of smell, confirmed.

HERTEL

Uh huh.

KAYE

(Brightening)

I thought we weren't gonna sell?

ANITA

We have to be realistic about this. We'll have to sell it off a piece at a time anyway just to pay the taxes.

HERTEL

Realistic.

ANITA

Yes, the best we can do is get as much out of'm as we can, milk'm for all they're worth.

KAYE

So we're selling it then?

ANITA

We got a chance to score big here. We owe that to ourselves. You can live wherever you want to. You can take all this stuff with you if you want...

HERTEL

Could I live in Sacramento do you think?

ANITA

Well... you can live anywhere you want to. You'll be rich. Both of you.

KAYE

(Getting with the program)

You could even buy another pet cemetery if you wanted.

HERTEL

Could I come up and live with you mom?

ANITA

Possible, we can see about that.

HERTEL

You got a garage?

ANITA

Or you can buy that apple farm up in Tehachapi, or wherever. Like I said, you can live wherever you want to.

KAYE

I'm gonna move to Vermont or someplace like that or Australia...

Clapping, slow, deliberate.

CUT TO:

DALE

(Drunk, standing at the gate)
You know I'm wondering how you're gonna
tell'm. I'm curious as to how the rest of
this fairy tale is gonna come out.

HERTEL

Me too.

ANITA

He threatened me today.

DALE

Bullshit. I just said I was gonna blow
your fucking head off!

KAYE

(Officially)

Stand away from the fence please.

DALE

I say that to all my friends, it's a
figure a speech...

KAYE

Step this way please, keep your hands away
from your body.

DALE enters, hands raised mockingly over his head. He wears a
janitor's uniform, the name tag reads, "Dale", the back reads
"Golden Empire Development", an empty key ring on his belt.

DALE

Hey lighten up Do-right, I ain't armed.
Not with a gun anyway. I got something
better than that. Knowledge is power,
ain't that right Anita? The inside
information?

KAYE

(Approaching DALE)

Turn around please.

DALE

Why don't you tell'm where you went Anita.

KAYE

She paid the taxes, now turn around...

DALE

That was this morning. She's leaving out the best part, tell'm about this afternoon.

ANITA

Technically he's trespassing...

DALE

Tell'm where you were this afternoon -- ask her where she was this afternoon...

KAYE

(Forcefully pushing him around)

Turn around ...

DALE

Take it easy Butch...

KAYE begins patting him down.

DALE

What is this shit? What're you giving me this attitude for? That woman's hosing you guys...

ANITA

He's a bug, pissed and full of poison, trying to turn us against each other...

DALE

I was just along for the ride, maybe pick up some scraps, but you actually own a piece of this hole. If I was you I'd be bouncing that baton a your's off the bitch's head.

KAYE

You want a piece of this baton?

(Laying it against his temple)

Is that what you want? 'Cause you're gonna get it, if you keep it up.

DALE

She's fucking you over! Doesn't that piss you off?

KAYE

That's it...

Taking out her handcuffs, twisting his hand behind his back.

DALE

Tell'm where you went this afternoon Anita...

ANITA

He's gonna make all kinds of allegations...

DALE

I'll tell'm then...

ANITA

He's gonna make it sound like I did something wrong...

DALE

Golden Empire Development Corporation...

Everything stops.

DALE

An equal opportunity employer (laughs).
Wanna guess what she was doing there?
Besides getting me fired...
(Looks at his empty key ring, reliving it)
Take my fuckin' keys I don't give a shit!
(Chipper)
You wanna guess what she was doing?
(Pause) Don't wanna guess? Meeting with
her new partners. "Rolling Hills Estates-
- a planned community", which she owns a
lot of now. Giving new meaning to the
word, "mother". (Singing) M is for the
million things she gave me... O is for
the... other things she gave me...

DALE flops down on a stack of tires, sinking into the hole, like a bug on its back, laughing, kicking his arms and legs.

May 2024

DALE

Wheeeee... I'm a bug. Help.

KAYE stares at ANITA in confusion. HERTEL looks at ANITA, fascinated, as if observing some rare life form. DALE nods off.

KAYE

You sold it? (Pissed) What about us, we're supposed to be in the loop on this.

ANITA

You are in the loop, this is it, this is the loop.

She takes some documents out of her bag and hands one to KAYE who begins leafing through it.

ANITA

(Continuing)

In this kind of situation you've got to strike while the iron is hot. I paid the taxes and their whole house of cards fell down. They were in disarray. We were in a strategically superior position, I had maximum bargaining leverage, so I had to exercise it, you know, while I could. I had an obligation to do that.

(Looking at HERTEL)

For us. And I got you a much better price than you ever coulda gotten for yourself.

HERTEL

I didn't have a price.

ANITA

Well I'm sorry, but somebody's got to be the grownup here. I'm investing my share in the Rolling Hills project, and a lot of my own money too.

KAYE

Can I invest in Rolling Hills too?

KAYE stands looking at the CONTRACT. HERTEL looks at her.

ANITA

You can talk to them. This is not a simple transaction. A deal like this has gotta be nursed along, nurtured like a little baby until it's strong enough to stand on its own.

She offers the other document to HERTEL. He takes it and stands looking at her.

ANITA

I hope you can appreciate the difficult position I was in. I mean this was not an easy move to make, knowing how it could all be interpreted. Actually, misinterpreted. I tried calling but your goddamn phone is disconnected...

HERTEL

I had it hooked up again.

ANITA

Maybe I dialed the wrong number then, I don't know. You know it isn't me... It isn't even them, it's everything. We can't stop it, it can't stop itself. People gotta live somewhere.

DALE

(Blubbering to himself on the tires)
They can take them keys and shove'm up their ass for all I care...

ANITA

(Looking at HERTEL)
Look, it was nothing personal, it was nothing to do with you. It's just... business, survival. Bottom line that's all it is, survival. We eat them, or they eat us, simple as that.

DALE

(Nodding off to sleep)
Rich fuckers!

HERTEL

You can't help yourself can you?

ANITA

You're set for life now. You know that don't you.

HERTEL

It's instinct. Just like with me.

ANITA

Are you listening?

HERTEL

What are you gonna tell'm?

ANITA

(Pause) Tell who?

HERTEL

The Egyptians.

ANITA

There's no Egyptians involved, not even Japanese, this deal is 100% American.

HERTEL

When they ask you the question, what are you gonna tell them?

ANITA

(Pause, looking at KAYE)

I don't know the question.

HERTEL

(Exploding)

Were you kind!

He smashes a TV with the shovel handle. ANITA freezes. KAYE goes to yellow alert, hand on her pistol. DALE wakes with a start.

DALE

(Groggily looking on)

Hey, hey, hey...

KAYE

Hertel...

HERTEL

(Smashing things, working toward ANITA)
Were you kind! Were you!

KAYE

(Drawing her pistol)
Drop the shovel! Drop it now!

HERTEL

There is no right!

KAYE

(Pointing her gun at him)
Drop it goddammit!

HERTEL

There is no wrong!

KAYE

I'll blow your head off!

HERTEL

(Closing on ANITA, trapping her)
Just predator! And prey!

KAYE

Don't make me!

HERTEL

There is no good!

ANITA

(Overlapping)
Shoot him... shoot him...

KAYE

Goddammit don't make me!

HERTEL

(Raising the shovel like a spear)
There is no evil! There is only...

ANITA

Shoot him! Shoot him goddammit! SHOOT
HIM!

HERTEL

Survival...

He drops the shovel and hugs her tightly -- the first time anyone has actually touched.

GUNSHOT

KAYE stands with her PISTOL pointed in the air. Silence. ANITA stands in HERTEL'S tight embrace, uncomprehending. HERTEL looks at KAYE.

HERTEL

Shouldn't shoot in the air like that, you never know where it'll fall.

CUT TO:

HEADSTONE -- "HERTEL DAGGETT"

CHINK -- A spent, free-falling bullet knocks a chip off the HEADSTONE, which sits beside an EMPTY GRAVE.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACKYARD

KAYE sags, lowering her GUN, sinking down, sitting on a TV, shaken.

KAYE

I gotta quit this job.

DALE

(Drifting back to sleep)
Dysfunctional...dysfunctional...

HERTEL releases ANITA, stands with his hands on her shoulders.

HERTEL

(Looking in her eyes)
I moved him.

ANITA

(Long pause)
Who?

HERTEL

Dad. I dug him up and moved him. Then dug another hole out there and buried him again.

ANITA

Ok.

HERTEL

Wind blew this afternoon, you'll never find him now. And you can't dig him up and move him to another cemetery if you don't know where he is.

ANITA

It's a pet cemetery, it doesn't count. Has to be a human cemetery for the law to apply...

HERTEL

It's both. I took care of that so I could bury dad out there. Told you it was legal. You can't build a shopping mall here now. Can't build on human remains. State law. So it's all worthless again. It's nothing personal, it's just survival. You have your instincts, I have mine. I knew you were gonna do something like this Mom.

ANITA

Really.

HERTEL

Told ya I know how animals think.

CUT TO:

DOG -- MOTIONLESS, STARING... BLINKS

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP -- HERTEL

HERTEL

End up, me and my Boy Scout Troop, we
camped out in that cave, under the Indian
pictographs.

PULL BACK to reveal...

EXT. BACKYARD -- NIGHT

HERTEL stands in the CEMETERY among the graves under the
CHRISTMAS LIGHTS. The GRAVES stretch out and disappear into
the darkness, each one with a PET sitting and watching him,
DINOSAURS and VOLCANOS in the distance.

HERTEL

(Continuing)

Built a campfire, had a weenie roast,
marshmallows too, told ghost stories, sang
songs, "this old man, he played one ...".
(Pause) First time I felt like I was part
of something, part of a whole.

He stands near a backpack and a sleeping bag, the SPRAWLING
CITY glitters behind him to the horizon.

HERTEL

(Continuing, filling his CANTEEN)

And so we were going to sleep, and we
looked up at those cave paintings one last
time, to try and figure'm out one last
time before we went to sleep...

CUT TO:

HERTEL'S POV -- An OLDER MAN (CREW CHIEF, EL CAMINO DRIVER)
stands leaning against the PYRAMID, quietly smoking a
cigarette, listening as HERTEL talks, nodding his head in
resigned agreement ("yup, that's the way it is").

HERTEL

(Continuing)

And they were gone. The campfire, the
smoke, it was all black up there.

He turns his back on the CEMETERY and faces the BECKONING
CITY.

HERTEL

(Continuing)

There was nothing there anymore, just
nothing, but black.

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP -- HERTEL

HERTEL

And now you'd never know... that they
weren't savages.

He turns away from the BECKONING CITY, toward the BLACKNESS
beyond the CEMETERY, putting on his BACKPACK, picking up his
gear...

HERTEL

(Walking through the EMPTY CEMETERY)
You'd never know...
(Disappearing into the BLACKNESS)
You'd never know...

FADE OUT

END