

The Rabbit in Me

by

Julie Rogers and Bart Bryars

an adaptation of the memoir

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by

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FADE IN:

EXT. EXIT/IN ROCK CLUB - DAY

A cold snap whips silver garland on the façade. 'Tis the Season on Nashville's Rock Block. TRAFFIC rumbles past on Elliston.

MUSIC UP

A progressive funk remix style.

FEMALE LEAD (O.C.)
Rockin' around the Christmas tree,
At the Christmas party hop.
Mistletoe hung where you can see,
Every couple tries to stop.

CLOSE ON EXT. EXIT/IN MARQUIS

18 - THE FEELS
Rockin' Jolly Xmas Jam

FEMALE LEAD (O.C.)
Rockin' around the Christmas tree,
Let the Christmas spirit ring.
Later we'll have some pumpkin pie,
And we'll do some caroling.

Christmas oddities line the roads from Elliston to Honky Tonk Highway.

FEMALE LEAD (O.C.)
You will get a sentimental feeling
when you hear--
Voices singing, let's be jolly,
Deck the halls with boughs of holly.

INT. EXIT/IN ROCK CLUB - DAY

A sound check in progress. JEN BRYARS (46, white) continues singing, BART BRYARS (63, white) on lead guitar. MARC ALLEN (46, white) plays keyboard while DANN SHERRILL (69, white) is on drums and ROGER PATENAUDE (29, white), on bass.

JEN
Rockin' around the Christmas tree,
Have a Happy Holiday.
Everyone dancin' merrily
In the new, old-fashioned way...

The hot-stop finish. Bart turns to the other band members.

BART
And after that charity opener, the
mayor will pass around the hat and say
a few words before we're on.

JEN
Up here? Where are we?

Bart checks the venue on his cell phone.

BART

Let's see...backstage. The Bums do their set before ours. So we changeover and then come back for our slot after the mayor, after their opener.

ROGER

That means redundant line checks.

BART

Looks like it, yeah. That's what they want.

(to SOUND ENGINEER)

We good, Sonny?

SOUND ENGINEER (SONNY MIZE) gives Bart a thumbs up.

Bart's phone PINGS. He checks it. All band members pack up while Bart reads the text. He frowns.

DANN

What time's load-in?

JEN

Between four and six.

Jen gathers her tote bag, looks at Bart.

JEN

What's up?

BART

It's the hospital. Skippy's on the fritz again.

(unplugs guitar)

You take the car, I'll walk.

(kisses her)

Meet you back here, five or so.

EXT. ASCENSION ST. THOMAS MIDTOWN HOSPITAL - DAY

Bart walks along the sidewalk by 20th Avenue toward the entrance.

INT. ASCENSION ST. THOMAS MIDTOWN HOSPITAL - DAY

He heads through the medical plaza toward a coffee bar.

INT. THE PROVERBIAL CUP COFFEE - DAY - INTERCUT

BARISTA takes Bart's order. He walks to the end of the bar and makes a phone call while he waits.

INT. NURSES' STATION - DAY

NURSE

(on phone)

Mr. Bryars. He's been asking for you all morning.

BART

Bad day?

NURSE
Not a good one.

INT. THE PROVERBIAL CUP COFFEE - DAY

BARISTA
Bart?

Barista serves up two coffees labeled BART and SKIPPY. Skippy's has a solid lid with a straw. Bart pockets his phone, gathers the coffees.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Bart quietly pushes the door open. A shriveled and miserable old man on oxygen, SKIPPY (82, white) greets Bart with a pained smile.

SKIPPY
You came.

BART
With cinnamon lattes.

Bart adjusts the overbed table in front of Skippy and sets the coffees on top. Notices the restraints.

BART
What's this?

SKIPPY
They say I won't leave my dick
alone when I sleep.

A urostomy pouch with telltale dark urine hangs on the bed rail.

BART
Well? Don't you?

SKIPPY
Sleep? No.

Bart undoes the release buckle on Skippy's right hand.

BART
Hand on the table.

Skippy immediately goes for the coffee, straw wagging around his lips. Bart rights the straw for him, takes his own coffee, and sits.

SKIPPY
(sipping)
M-mm. That's good.
(beat)
You got a minute?

BART
A few, yes. We go on at seven.

SKIPPY
Full house?

BART

Sold out.

Skippy smiles.

SKIPPY

Ah.

(beat)

Well, I wanted to go back to the beginning again.

A tall order. Bart thinks about it.

BART

Okay. Which part?

SKIPPY

When you ran.

An even bigger ask. Bart sips his coffee.

OVER BLACK (BEGIN FLASHBACK)

GUITAR RIFF, a hammered-on melody. R.E.M. meets Black Sabbath.

EXT. MUSKEGON LAKE - DAY

SUPER: December 17, 1985

An ice fishing hole inside a tent shanty with cam-straps flapping. Snowing, working up a squall.

INT. BASEMENT BEDROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON

A pull-off and slide on a shiny new 1984 Fender Stratocaster.

BART BRYARS (24, white), a towheaded Cajun, body of an ice hockey goalie sans the height. He docks the Fender on a deluxe guitar stand.

The room, a songwriter's wet dream: a Fender Mustang bass, Ludwig drum set, Tascam 4-track tape machine, mics, stands, and cables.

Bart loads a VHS tape labeled MICHIGAN SNUFF into a 13" Panasonic TV/VCR combo. Clicks remote to PLAY. Lights up a smoke and watches.

ON SCREEN

A silly film. ICE FISHERMAN heaves an augur out of lakeside shelf ice. PERP approaches from behind, 9mm pistol drawn. SHOOTS.

The fisherman falls through the ice, bobs up, scrabbles for the edge. Perp tries to pilfer the augur from him and falls in too.

INT. BASEMENT BEDROOM - DAY

Bart STOPS the video, REWINDS. Switches to the Mustang bass.

THUMPING on a Mustang bass guitar. Bart PLAYS the video again.

EXT. MUSKEGON LAKE - DAY - INTERCUT

A tent shanty perched on the ice.

INT. TENT SHANTY - DAY

FIGURE in parka drills with an ice augur.

INT. BASEMENT BEDROOM - DAY

Bart packs a suitcase. Tosses in a shoebox of labeled cassettes: NUKE ATTACK, SANDINISTAS. Hangs a US Coast Guard uniform over a door.

PANASONIC TV - ON SCREEN

WEATHER REPORT, a winter storm. Bart SWITCHES OFF TV, docks the bass guitar. Takes one last look around the room before cutting the light.

INT. TENT SHANTY - DAY

FIGURE bores out fishing holes in a square. Cuts a 28" hole-to-hole square opening with an ice saw. Chips at the edges with a spud bar.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Bart's close-cropped whitey 'fro and chops, now Vantablack. He smears Vaseline around his eyebrows and dyes them using Q-tips.

INT. TENT SHANTY - DAY

FIGURE pours Jim Beam down the hole. Lays the bottle by a tackle box.

CLOSE ON

A sacrificial slice of a thumb on the augur. Blood drips around the ice-fishing hole.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Black-headed Bart shrugs on a parka, tacks a note on the fridge:

NIKKI! GONE FISHING

EXT. TENT SHANTY - DAY

FIGURE slowly backs out of the shanty.

CLOSE ON

An undertaking, retracing a set of snow boot tracks *walking backward*. FIGURE totters, goes on.

We see his face now, black-headed Bart. Sweating. He continues backing in his boot tracks toward lakeside woods.

Black dye drips off his face onto the snow. He sees it. Frowns. Turns and hightails it toward the woods.

EXT. 1981 FORD F-150 - MOVING - DAY

Pulls to one side of Muskegon Bus Terminal.

CLOSE ON

Bumper sticker: GO AHEAD, MAKE MY DAY

Snowing harder. Bart gets out of the truck, retrieves his suitcase from the bed. Gives a thumbs-up to the driver.

INT. BUS TERMINAL - DAY

SECURITY GUARD patrols the tarmac. Parka hood up, aviator shades on-- Bart averts his gaze and stoops to check his suitcase.

ANGLE ON

The terminal wall behind Bart, a green-and-white JUST SAY NO poster.

The security guard moves on, and Bart straightens.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - PARKED - DAY

Bart chooses an aisle seat.

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS - MOVING - DAY

Nor'easter in the works. The 1982 bus pulls out of the terminal.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - MOVING - DAY

The parka hood stays up, aviator shades on. Bart slides down in his seat and pretends to sleep.

PROFILE, he's eyes-wide-awake and terribly alert. *How did this get so fucked up, anyway?* He stares straight ahead, remembering.

EXT. RYERSON CITY BALLPARK, MUSKEGON - DAY

SUPER: Six Months Earlier

An open field, aluminum bleachers adjacent to a diamond. A softball game setting up, players in Coastie ball caps.

1981 Ford F-150 with GO AHEAD, MAKE MY DAY bumper sticker pulls in behind a 1982 yellow CADILLAC parked on the street.

EXT. 1981 FORD F-150 - PARKED - DAY

Bart and co-worker FRANKIE (27, white), dressed to play softball, pile out of the pickup with gloves and gear.

MAN walks a German Shepherd down the sidewalk.

EXT. CADILLAC - PARKED - DAY

ZEB LIPKA (54, white), gets out. His GIRLFRIEND (32, Latino), sits shotgun in the Cadillac. Bart stops.

BART

Hey, Zeb.

ZEB

Hey and howdy-do.

Frankie stops to say "hi" to Zeb's girl.

BART
(to Zeb)
It's in the glove compartment.

Zeb glances back at the pickup.

ZEB
Sure. Okay, man.

BART
Just leave the dough in the Wendy's
cup on the floorboard and lock up.

Bart and Frankie head out to the diamond.

FRANKIE
How can an old fart afford a ride
like that, huh?

BART
He owns a bar.

FRANKIE
(spits)
I'm talking about the girl.

ZEB
Hey, Bart! I don't see it!

Forty feet behind them, Zeb stands by the pickup, passenger door open.

BART
The glove compartment, dude! It's
in the glove!

ZEB
It's not in here, man! Come back
and show me!

BART
Shit.
(to Frankie)
Go on, I'll catch up.

FRANKIE
And you're doing this for--?

BART
I told you, I need a new sound
mixer.

Bart walks back to the pickup. Zeb's rifling through the glove box.

ZEB
Okay--oh.

BART
Now you see it?

Two oncoming UNMARKED CARS on the street SCREECH to a halt. Four NARCS pile out, guns trained on Bart.

The man walking the German Shepherd spins and draws his gun. Zeb's girlfriend jumps out of the Cadillac, gun drawn.

NARC
Get your hands up, motherfucker!
Don't move!

Bart's hands are already raised, softball mitt included.

BART
I--should I put this down?

OLDER BART (V.O., PRE-LAP)
That was it, all over in a matter
of five seconds.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

Skippy sips his coffee, glassy eyes fixed on Bart.

SKIPPY
Go on.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY (BEGIN FLASHBACK)

Bart sits across the table from a NARC. *Not* the first question.

NARC
Where'd you get the cocaine?

BART
I-I told you, man. You got the wrong
guy. I'm Coast Guard, and we don't
fuck with drugs.

Narc lunges at him, inches from Bart's face.

NARC
Look, asshole. We know what you
did, you know what you did, and you
are going down. Twenty years
minimum. Read my lips: you won't
see the waterway or the bulkhead or
the fucking daylight again. Ever.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL - BOOKING

The strip search. Bart stands nude in a well-lighted, empty room. GUARD faces him.

GUARD
Marion Bart Bryars. Step up to the
red line.

Bart complies, haltingly, through all of it.

GUARD

Open your mouth. Stick out your tongue and move it side to side. Up and down.

(beat)

Wipe your hands over yours ears one at a time like this.

(demonstrates)

Bend forward and shake out your hair with your fingers.

(beat)

Both hands on your head now, and stand up. Hands in front, wiggle your fingers.

(beat)

Reach down and lift your nut sack.

(beat)

Drop it. Turn around. Pick up your right foot and wiggle your toes.

Now, left foot.

(beat)

Bend over, grab your ass with both hands, and spread your cheeks. Give me two good coughs.

(beat)

Alright. Stand up and turn around. Shut your eyes and your mouth.

Guard sprays Bart with aerosol permethrin. He tries not to flinch.

GUARD

Grab your bedroll and your spit bag, put on those orange issues, and wait over there.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL - NIGHT

Easily one hundred years old, repainted fecal brown many times. Truckstop bathroom vibes.

EXT. CELL

Four-prisoner capacity, TWO BLACK INMATES, ONE WHITE on their bunks.

GUARD unlocks the cell and Bart goes inside. He looks around.

The digs, a twelve-by-twelve foot cubicle with a metal card table in the center. Two steel bunk beds bolted to the walls.

Threadbare sheets, jail issue wool blankets. Flimsy, flame-retardant vinyl mattresses. No pillows. A shitty communal toilet.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

BART

I could see why they deloused me.

SKIPPY

(sipping coffee)

Yeah.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL CELL - DAY (BEGIN FLASHBACK)

Bart shaves. The "mirror": a dull steel plate welded above the toilet. The three other inmates play cards at the center table.

JAILER unlocks cell.

JAILER
Let's go, GQ.

Jailer escorts Bart, handcuffed, down the hallway.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL - OFFICE - DAY

A changing room. Suited up in his USCG Tropical Blue Long Uniform, Bart frets with the auxiliary belt. It's now too big.

Bart tops it off with a starched Garrison cap. Jailer smirks.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY COURTROOM - DAY

Bart, handcuffed, stands beside the BAILIFF in front of the judge's bench. PROSECUTOR SAM TAGLIONI (41, white) stands at a table behind Bart with a glare that could raise blisters.

Bart glances over his shoulder, catches Taglioni's hostile stare. Turns quickly back toward the bench.

JUDGE
Considering the serious nature of the offenses, I hereby set the defendant's bail at seventy-five thousand dollars.

Judge BANGS GAVEL.

INT. JAIL PAY PHONE - NIGHT - INTERCUT

Bart's desperate--in orange issues again and talking with his girl, NIKKI COLLINS (20, white). She's looking at his note on the fridge.

NIKKI
You need to call your folks right now, Bart.

BART
I don't know, babe. This is--

NIKKI
You know they'd do anything to help you.

BART
No. They can't--I'll work this out.

EXT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL - DAY

1980 FORD ESCORT pulls into Visitor Parking. Nikki, a Midwest co-ed with a spiky mullet, jumps out. Bart walks out in civvies.

NIKKI
You did it!

They hug, kiss, and laugh.

NIKKI
You smell like shit.

No news to him. Bart's a bundle of nerves, but free for now.

INT. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Bart sits in a chair and waits.

TOM BARTOSZ (37), a thin man dressed for trial in a three-piece suit, walks into the office. Bart stands. When he shakes Bartosz's hand, we see the attorney has a prosthetic left eye.

BARTOSZ
Mr. Bryars. Have a seat.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

Skippy sets his coffee on the overbed table and scratches his nose.

BART
My co-worker, Frankie, knew Tom Bartosz. He was a defense attorney out of Grand Haven who handled a lot of drug crimes.

Skippy fidgets with his straw.

SKIPPY
The one with that screwy eye.

BART
(nods)
I explained that the US Coast Guard handles maritime law enforcement, and I was card-carrying proof.

INT. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - DAY (BEGIN FLASHBACK)

Bart talks eagerly while Bartosz takes notes. Bart pulls out his Coast Guard Miranda Rights card and slides it across the desk.

OLDER BART (V.O., POST-LAP)
I don't think he believed me when I told him I was a wildcat, that I was conducting an undercover investigation on a cocaine ring all on my own, though.

Bartosz stops taking notes and listens, pen pressed to his lips.

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS - MOVING - NIGHT

Rolls into New Orleans Bus Station in the wee hours. A big and gaudy NOLA Christmas with blend-in events and freedom. Safety in numbers.

INT. PUBLIC RESTROOM - NIGHT

At the lavatory, Bart flushes the cut on his thumb with water. Shakes it dry. Reapplies the same gauze.

EXT. LOYOLA STREET - NIGHT

Bart joins the stroll of lights toward Bourbon Street. After all, he may not get to see this again.

EXT. STORE WINDOW - NIGHT

Bart lowers his aviator shades just enough to note the season's toys: Cabbage Patch Dolls and Transformers.

MALE WINDOW SHOPPER (O.C.)
They're sold out, I checked already.

Bart quickly replaces his sunglasses as he turns toward the voice.

BART
(to shopper)
Good to know.

EXT. SLIDELL BRICK HOME - SUNRISE

A starter home in suburban sprawl. Bart KNOCKS on the front door.

A delay. Bart glances around, removes his shades. BRENT BRYARS (25, white), a taller, brunette version of Bart, opens the door. Hiccup: he doesn't recognize black-headed Bart. Then he does.

BRENT
Shit man, what'd you do to your...

Brent throws an arm around Bart and pulls him inside.

INT. SLIDELL BRICK HOME - SUNRISE

BRENT
Suzie! Look who's here!

SUZIE BRYARS (24, white) is a well-tanned, big-curls brunette with a soft heart. She spies Bart's injury off the bat.

SUZIE
Oh, Bart. What on earth did you do to your hand? Here, come in and eat some eggs.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Brent, Suzie, and Bart eat breakfast at a Formica dining table. Bart has tidy-white bandage on his thumb.

BRENT
You need to call Mama, you know. She'll worry.

BART
I did, a couple of days ago.

BRENT
She knows you got here alright?

BART
No, not yet.

SUZIE
How long do you think they'll keep
looking for you, Bart?

BART
Seven years. Give or take.

SUZIE
Seven?!

BART
(chewing)
I looked it up. That's about how long
it takes after a person just up and
disappears, you know, for the courts
to declare them legally dead.

SUZIE
You don't say.

BART
If someone vanishes in a debatable
situation, like a tornado or a storm--

BRENT
Or an accident--

BART
(nodding)
It can be even sooner. They call it
Proximate Peril.

Suzie lays down her fork.

BART
I-I won't stay here that long,
though. I'll find my own place.

BRENT
You'll need a new identity too.

SUZIE
But if they think he's dead--

BRENT
They'll come looking for him, anyhow.

Bart hangs his head.

BART
I'm so sorry.

SUZIE
You mean--they won't just assume
he's dead?

BRENT

Either way, you gotta call Mama.

BART

I thought we could, you know, see what they do first. If a judge declares me legally dead, they'll stop looking for me eventually.

(beat, to Brent)

Won't they?

SUZIE

And how exactly does that happen?

BRENT

Don't count on it.

BART

Shit.

SUZIE

Wait. I know! We could have a funeral for him.

BRENT

And Suzie can sing "How Great Thou Art." Jesus Christ, you two.

(to Bart)

Call Mama.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING - INTERCUT

Bart talks on a wall phone beside the kitchen counter.

BART

Hey, Mom.

INT. SUBURBAN RANCH-STYLE HOME - DEN - MORNING

DIANNE BRYARS (44) pecks on an electric typewriter at a card table. A TV BLASTS in the background. Dianne radiates consummate Southern hospitality and kindness. She presses a TRIMLINE receiver to her ear.

DIANNE

Honey, are you there?

(to the room)

Oh--hey, turn that down, please.

It's Bart.

BART

I'm at Brent's for now.

Dianne is visibly relieved.

DIANNE

If you need anything at all, you know--

BART

I'm so sorry, Mom.

DIANNE

Let's don't worry about that, okay, dear? It's Christmas, and you're home.

INT. SLIDELL BRICK HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Bart checks the window. Outside he sees a CAR backing up. He drops the curtain and ducks behind the window casing.

OLDER BART (V.O., PRE-LAP)
Brent was right, though. The
paranoia and panic of being hunted
down was crazy-making.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

SKIPPY
(dryly)
You don't say.

He's one to talk. Bart watches him struggle to slurp his coffee.

BART
Brent and Suzie lived on this dead-end
road where the bridge was washed out.
Whenever I heard an engine, and when I
saw a car or truck turn around...

INT. SLIDELL BRICK HOME - LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY (BEGIN FLASHBACK)

Bart dashes into the room, climbs on top of the dryer, and crawls through a ceiling hatch into the attic.

INT. ATTIC - DAY

Bart lies on blankets, ear to the floor, shotgun at the ready.

OLDER BART (V.O.)
Sometimes I'd stay there for hours.

EXT. ST. ROCH CEMETERY - NIGHT

Hundreds of weathered, above-ground crypts. Bart walks with EDDIE BERT (42, white), a redneck with a perpetual toothpick in his mouth. Eddie uses a pen light, not the best choice.

OLDER BART (V.O.)
My cousin, Eddie Bert, said he
wanted to show me the ropes.

Among many rows of above-ground crypts, Eddie stops.

EDDIE
Well, pshaw. I saw it here a couple
weeks ago. Let's see--oh, yeah.

He shines the penlight toward a smaller headstone. Bart squints to read the inscription: NATHAN THOMPSON.

EDDIE
Little bugger died before he got
into the system.

BART
No Social?

EDDIE

Nope.

OLDER BART (V.O.)

He saw the kid's obituary and went to the health department pretending to be his dad.

Eddie pulls an envelope from his pants' waistband.

EDDIE

Your new birth certificate.

When Bart starts to open it, Eddie stops him.

EDDIE

Not out here, it's bad luck. Come on.

They walk away.

EDDIE

You're now Nathan Thompson. You'll need to mail yourself a letter, apply for a library card.

BART

Okay.

EDDIE

You getting your own place?

BART

When I can, yeah.

EDDIE

Good enough. Once you sign up for utilities and all, you'll have proof of residence. Use your bill to apply for Social Security. You got that?

BART

I think so.

EDDIE

Fine. Cause you're gonna have to do it all over again at some point.

EXT. JOB SITE - DAY

Bart, wearing a hard hat and aviator shades, hauls scraps toward a burn pile. His black 'do has grown out blond.

BART (V.O., POST-LAP)

I'll be looking over my shoulder the rest of my life, won't I?

A POLICE CAR drives by. Bart turns away and continues working. A furtive glance confirms the cruiser is gone.

EDDIE (V.O., POST-LAP)

You might, kid. Yep, you just might.

EXT. SLIDELL BRICK HOME - EVENING

Bart, hard hat in hand, walks down the road toward the front yard.

The entire property is now fenced front to back. When Bart approaches the gate, three Chow Chows, a Doberman Pinscher, and a Saarloos Wolfdog rush the fence, BARKING.

BART (V.O., POST-LAP)
Brent installed a chain-link fence
and got several large dogs.

EDDIE (V.O., POST-LAP)
That so? Remind me to call ahead
before I drop by next time.

Bart opens the gate and pets the dogs. They tag along after him as he walks toward the front door.

CAR approaches on the street. The dogs rush the fence again, BARKING.

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING - INTERCUT

Dogs continue BARKING outside. Bart sits on a bar stool, talking on a wall phone to Nikki, hard hat on the counter.

INT. BATHROOM - EVENING

Nikki's in the bathtub.

NIKKI
God, I miss you.

BART
Me too.

NIKKI
I have four days next month. Come
see you?

BART
Maybe after I move into my own place.

NIKKI
Shit, Bart. When's that gonna be?

INT. DEN - EVENING

Brent and Suzie are glued to a national TV news update, the space shuttle Challenger explosion. Bart walks in.

BART
When did that happen?

SUZIE
After you left for work.

BART
How?

Brent turns up TV VOLUME with a remote.

BRENT

Just listen, maybe they'll tell us.

Bart continues watching the footage in dismay.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

BART

The Challenger explosion got the world's attention for a day or so.

Skippy remembers this part.

SKIPPY

Oh, yeah--

BART

Including The State of Michigan, Coast Guard Intelligence, and some bounty hunters out of Detroit looking for me.

SKIPPY

A reprieve?

BART

If you could call it that. The bounty hunters that showed up at my parents' house had another thing coming, though.

EXT. SUBURBAN RANCH-STYLE HOME - DAY (BEGIN FLASHBACK)

THREE BOUNTY HUNTERS creep into the yard, guns drawn. MARION BRYARS (46, white), a high school "scoring demon" and halfback, takes a baseball bat after them.

Bounty hunters back away, hands raised. They make a run for their VAN with Marion on their heels.

MARION

Get the fuck off my property!

Van PEELS away. Marion grabs the lid off a nearby trash can and throws it after the vehicle with the force of a forward pass.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Bart and Brent stand at the counter.

BART

Mobile's only a couple of hours away, you know.

Brent looks down.

BRENT

Yeah.

BART

I gotta move.

EXT. MOBILE HOME PARK - MOBILE HOME - DAY

Bart and Brent cart boxes from Brent's PICKUP into a ratty trailer. Brent hugs Bart, gets in his truck, and drives away.

EXT. NORTH SHORE SQUARE MALL - MORNING

Bart walks across the parking lot.

 OLDER BART (V.O.)
 A new mall across the street had just opened, and I got two jobs there, selling music and framing art. I was jazzed.

INT. NORTH SHORE SQUARE MALL - PHONE BOOTH - DAY - INTERCUT

Bart talks on a pay phone.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE ON Nikki on a desk phone.

 NIKKI
 That's fantastic! So I can come see you now?

 BART
 Sure.

 NIKKI
 Nathan?
 (giggles)
 Really?

 BART
 Right.

 NIKKI
 That'll take some getting used to.

Bart laughs, and they continue (inaudible) conversation.

INT. CAMELOT MUSIC - DAY

Bart walks back in and starts stacking merchandise on the shelves.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

 SKIPPY
 This was when?

 BART
 Four months later. I was happy, if you can believe it.

INT. OFFICE - DAY (BEGIN FLASHBACK)

PULL BACK:

The receiver RATTLES in the carriage as Nikki hangs up. She's sitting in an interrogation room and trying very hard not to cry.

The NARC who questioned Bart pushes a pen and pad across the table.

NARC

Write down everything he told you.

INT. DECK THE WALLS - NIGHT

Bart wipes down a work counter and watches TWO MEN in suits loiter outside the store. FEMALE COWORKER organizes prints in a case nearby.

FEMALE COWORKER

I'm hungry. Want something from Mrs. Field's?

BART

(watching men)
A fruit bar?

Bart fishes a couple of dollars out of his wallet, hands them to her.

FEMALE COWORKER

God, you're killing me. You know they have these huge--oh, never mind.

Female coworker grabs her purse from under the register.

FEMALE COWORKER

Back in a few.

She walks out into the mall. The men in suits amble inside the store, pretending to shop. Bart edges his way toward the back of the store.

Yep, they're feds. Bart bolts toward a storeroom in back.

INT. STOREROOM - NIGHT

No back door. He could lock himself in the BATHROOM, but for how long? Only one way to do this. Bart takes a deep breath and walks back out.

BART

Can I help you with anything?

The two men walk right up to Bart.

MAN ONE

Bart Bryars?

Bart feigns confusion.

BART

Sorry, who?

Neither man answers. Bart swallows. Sweat beads on his forehead.

BART

I'm Nathan Thompson.

MAN TWO

Can we see some ID?

Bart looks around for a distraction, customers, anything. The store's hopelessly empty. But he's defiant enough to play this game.

BART
Could I see some ID?

Man One fishes out a US Federal Marshal badge, holds it up.

BART
Okay. Sure.

Bart hands over his wallet to Man Two and waits while both men rifle through bits and pieces of identification.

BART
What's this about, anyway?

Female coworker returns with the goodies and stashes her purse under the register. She looks on curiously.

Man Two carefully slides each ID card back in its slot and hands the wallet back to Bart. *Okay, then.* Bart sticks the wallet in his back pocket and is about to--

MAN ONE
He's good.

So, that means--? The men exchange glances. An inside joke.

MAN TWO
But not good enough.
(beat)
Bart Bryars, you're under arrest.

Bart's co-worker freaks out and bursts into tears as the two federal marshals handcuff Bart. They march him toward the front of the store.

FEMALE COWORKER
Nathan? What's going on?

BART
Call my brother, okay?

INT. LOUIS ARMSTRONG NEW ORLEANS INT'L AIRPORT - NIGHT

A typical high-traffic day. Bart, front-shackled for transport, has a coat draped over his handcuffs, two federal marshals flanking him. They walk the concourse--and no one pays attention.

OLDER BART (V.O.)
The whole process, including the commercial flight to Michigan, was equally surreal. No one seemed to notice the guy holding an overcoat in front of his dick in April.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL - BOOKING - NIGHT

The strip search again. Bart stands nude in a well-lighted, empty room. GUARD faces him.

GUARD

Step up to the red line.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL CELL - DAY

Bart, dressed in orange issues, shaves using the same dull steel plate welded above the toilet as a mirror.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY COURTROOM - DAY

Wearing a suit and handcuffed, Bart stands beside the BAILIFF in front of the judge's bench.

JUDGE

Considering the serious nature of the offenses and the defendant's flight risk history, I hereby reset bail to one-point-five million dollars.

INT. SUBURBAN RANCH-STYLE HOME - DEN - NIGHT - INTERCUT

Marion and Dianne Bryars are on an '80s conference call, each on a separate TRIMLINE phone.

OPERATOR (O.C.)

Will you accept a collect call from Muskegon County Jail?

DIANNE

Yes, yes we will.

MARION

Yes.

INT. JAIL PAY PHONE - NIGHT

Bart's going away for a while, and he knows it. His depth of despair shows in the way he stoops while he talks.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL - ISOLATION CONFINEMENT CELL - NIGHT

A six-by-nine concrete hell. No window. The single horizon, a tightly enclosed catwalk beyond the bars.

Bart sits on his bunk, head in hands, a non-ashed smoke in his right.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

SKIPPY

Hold the phone. They put you in solitary?

BART

The space of my entire existence.
All alone in there with my
failures, twenty-four-seven.

ISOLATION CONFINEMENT CELL - DAY (BEGIN FLASHBACK)

Bart stands on the edge of his bunk, a noose made from bedsheets around his neck. He raises on tip-toe. Loops the other end around a cell bar above him. Ties a secure knot.

Bart paces his cell as he reads *War and Peace*.

BART (V.O.)
Most of them are good, too. Stories that
broaden my view of the world, its
history, and the human condition.

Bart reaches page 1290 in *War and Peace* and sees that the last six pages--The End--are *ripped out!*

Bart stands at the front of his cell holding *War and Peace* and waiting for the book cart.

He talks to the book cart woman and thumbs through a magazine.

END MONTAGE

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

Bart chuckles and looks down. Skippy follows his gaze.

BART
Those magazines gave me another idea...

ISOLATION CONFINEMENT CELL - DAY (BEGIN FLASHBACK)

Bart's busy tearing pages out of magazines and gluing down the letters with toothpaste.

CLOSE ON

Ransom art: BaRt! WE are waTchiNg you. YoU taLk, yOu Die!

INT. MUSKEGON SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Bart is foot-chained to a desk leg. MUSKEGON SHERIFF (50, white) sits across from him, Bart's artwork in hand.

MUSKEGON SHERIFF
Son, I've been doing this a long
time. Do you think I'm stupid?

BART
No, sir.

Sheriff tosses a stack of crummy magazines on the desk.

MUSKEGON SHERIFF
Go ahead. Look at those.

Bart does as told, including the ones he defaced.

MUSKEGON SHERIFF
I've got a good mind to put another
charge on you for reporting a false
crime, you dumb son of a bitch. You
know our cameras are on you twenty-
four-seven, right?

BART
Yes, sir.

MUSKEGON SHERIFF

Take some advice from me, son. You're already in deep shit enough. You've got too much rabbit in you, you understand?

Bart's not sure he does.

MUSKEGON SHERIFF

You like to run, run, run, like a goddamn rabbit. I've seen what happens to rabbits like you, and it's not good.

Bart looks down.

MUSKEGON SHERIFF

You ain't going nowhere for a long time, so get used to it. You need to calm the fuck down.

BART

Okay.

MUSKEGON SHERIFF

You're an asshole dope dealer and an even a dumber convict. Now go back to your hole, you shit-for-brains.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL - THE HOLE - DAY

SUPER: FOUR MONTHS LATER

An array of three cells twelve feet tall. JAILER escorts Bart into his new digs and locks him inside. Bart looks around.

Small, cement, and crappy--but a blessed catwalk in front. Bart can't see his block mate (DAMARIUS, 27, Black), but he hears him TALKING.

DAMARIUS (O.C.)

Yo, fish. What you in fo?

BART

Running coke. You?

DAMARIUS (O.C.)

I'm a paper killer.

BART

Huh?

DAMARIUS (O.C.)

I kills for hire.

Bart sits on his bunk. *This could get interesting.*

BART

Who'd you kill?

DAMARIUS (O.C.)
Nobody. Not this time.

Or confusing.

BART
What'd they charge you with, then?

DAMARIUS (O.C.)
Stupid shit.
(beat)
They say I hit a lick on a gamblin' house
and popped two niggas on the way out.

BART
Did you?

DAMARIUS (O.C.)
Fuck, man--what I just be sayin'? Fuck, no.

TIME CUT:

Bart sits on his bunk and writes a letter.

BART (V.O.)
Dear Mom, the hit man next door
named Damarius just explained to me
how insulted he is to be publicly
accused of a low-level crime. Sure,
he's killed over a dozen people in
Detroit alone, but they were all
professionally done, he said.

Bart crumples up the letter and stuffs it under his mattress.

TIME CUT:

Bart, another letter in the works, walks to the front of his cell. A
JAILER escorts an INMATE (17, white), down the catwalk toward the
shower. He shuffles along, head down, toting state-issued toiletries.

BART (V.O.)
The next day they placed a young white
kid in the hole named Steven. He's
seventeen years old, Mom. He slept the
first day or so until Damarius...

Bart paces his cell with the unfinished letter and listens.

DAMARIUS (O.C., PRE-LAP)
Yo, fish. What you in fo?

STEVEN (O.C.)
(sniveling)
Robbery.

DAMARIUS (O.C.)
Fuck. You out in a minute. What you
bitchin' fo?

STEVEN (O.C.)
We-we messed her up.

Bart stops pacing, looks at his letter.

BART (V.O.)

Turns out, Steven was in a gang tripping on LSD that attempted to rob an old woman who lived alone. They beat her into a coma and, a few days later he got news that his charges had been upgraded to murder. He'd just gone from doing a year or two to life.

INT. CATWALK - DAY

JAILER escorts STEVEN, still sniveling, in full transport restraints past Bart's cell in the opposite direction.

TIME CUT:

Bart reads on his bunk, a letter in the works tucked inside the book.

INT. CATWALK - DAY

Jailer escorts a veritable giant past Bart's cell, another INMATE (30, Black). Bart slowly closes his book.

OLDER BART (V.O.)

Then in came Willie.

(beat)

Willie Fucking Nelson.

DAMARIUS (O.C.)

'ey, Willie? What you in fo this time?

INT. CATWALK - NIGHT

Two strands from ripped bedsheets drop out on the floor in front of Bart's cell--from either side, Damarius and Willie.

WILLIE (O.C.)

I tellin' you, man. I know downtown like the back of my hand. We get us over to the docks and Gilligan here can steal a boat and take us out on the lake.

DAMARIUS (O.C.)

Then what?

Bart fishes for Damarius's strand and nabs it.

WILLIE (O.C.)

Then we split up in the woods and run, you know, to each his own.

Bart ties the strand around a candy bar and drops it through the bars.

BART

Clear.

A delicate operation. A series of short tugs ensure the candy bar reaches its destination.

Bart goes back to his bunk and continues sketching out a city map on a small piece of paper.

DAMARIUS (O.C.)
No shit? An' how far is that?

BART
Looks like about six blocks.

WILLIE (O.C.)
That's right. It's so close, I can smell the water from here. We go down that alley behind Pine and--

DAMARIUS (O.C.)
No, fuck no. That's the wrong way.

WILLIE (O.C.)
Hey! What did I tell you? The back of my hand. Don't you listen to him, Gilligan.
(beat)
You about done with that kite?

BART
Almost.

WILLIE (O.C.)
Shoot it over then, and I'll get us outta here.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL - GENERAL POPULATION CELL - DAY

SUPER: THREE MONTHS LATER

Six hundred glorious square feet shared with FOURTEEN INMATES. Eight bunks on three walls, bars facing a catwalk on the fourth.

A 27" TV is mounted in a box by the bars, a metal table in the center. Skinny windows. Same toilet situation.

Bart's the only white guy, demanding a survival of the fittest. While some inmates watch TV and others play Spades, Bart jogs laps around the table. He drops to the floor for a set of push-ups.

OLDER BART (V.O.)
I was so happy about having space, I wasn't complaining.

"Ain't Nothing Like The Real Thing, Baby" (Marvin Gaye, Tammi Terrell) PLAYS, a Burger King TV commercial.

Three INMATES playing cards SING ALONG LOUDLY with the commercial.

TIME CUT:

Bart reads on his bunk. Several inmates are transfixed on the daytime soap GENERAL HOSPITAL. Others play cards.

KEYS JANGLE outside the cell door. Bart looks up as the door flies open. Willie Nelson sticks his head inside.

WILLIE

Yo, Gilligan! Let's go, let's go!

Bart jumps up, grabs his deck shoes, and takes off down the hallway after Willie. Damarius runs ahead of them.

Bart rounds the corner at the end of the hallway and freezes.

ELEVATOR ANTEROOM - DAY

A SECURITY CAMERA is trained on the anteroom.

Willie fumbles with a mess of keys, trying them one-by-one in the elevator's lock. Damarius looks on. *If only they knew which key.*

The camera rotates--*toward Bart.* He jerks out of sight.

DAMARIUS (O.C.)

Hurry up, muthafucka! Here, let me try.

Bart carefully slips on one shoe, then the other. Scopes the hallway behind him. He takes off down the hallway.

ELEVATOR ANTEROOM - DAY

Damarius gives up and runs off with the keys.

HALLWAY - DAY

Bart freezes. *Which way?* He takes off running again.

DAMARIUS (O.C.)

Come on out all you muthafuckas, you free!

Cell doors CLANG behind Bart. Feet THUDDING. He takes off down the next hallway, glancing over his shoulder.

Bart SLAMS into an open cell door. Sees stars. Recovers, takes off.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL - GENERAL POPULATION CELL - DAY

Nobody but Bart took the bait. His cellmates poke their heads just past the open cell door.

Bart runs inside, yanks off his deck shoes, and tosses them under his bunk. Dives in, faces the wall, pulls up the covers. Listens.

HALLWAY - DAY

MAYHEM. Damarius runs to the next cell on the row and pops the door. Inmates crowd into the hallway. Some SHOUT and run back toward the anteroom. Others take off toward the stairwells. SIRENS.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL - GENERAL POPULATION CELL - DAY

A couple of card players climb onto the table, trying to see outside.

INMATE ONE

Shit man, a bunch of muthafuckin' police just pull up out there!

INMATE TWO
It's the fucking goon squad!

Bart closes his eyes and pretends to be asleep. BOOTS MARCHING down the catwalk. BATON THUDS. SCREAMS.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Bart sits handcuffed to a restraint bar at the table. There's a blunt force bruise on his face.

OLDER BART (V.O.)
A couple of hours later, they began taking us down to central booking one at a time.

In walks the Muskegon Sheriff, of course. He doesn't sit.

MUSKEGON SHERIFF
So. Here we are again, Br'er Rabbit. Nice shiner you got there.

Bart looks at him, but he doesn't reply.

MUSKEGON SHERIFF
Did you leave your cell at any time this afternoon?

BART
No, sir.

MUSKEGON SHERIFF
Several inmates say they saw you leave.

BART
They're lying.

MUSKEGON SHERIFF
We checked the security cams.

Oh, shit. Bart waits for it...

MUSKEGON SHERIFF
Didn't see you, but I'm thinking I ought to go ahead and charge you with an attempted escape and tack on another five years.
(beat)
You're one dumb son-of-a-bitch, you know that?

Bart doesn't answer. The sheriff walks to the door.

MUSKEGON SHERIFF
I'll give you one more chance to kill that rabbit, you hear me?

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL - GENERAL POPULATION CELL - DAY

Bart's reading on his bunk.

OLDER BART (V.O., PRE-LAP)
Then Steven joined our cell.

A smiling Steven gives Bart a fist bump.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

Skippy taps the overbed table and smiles ruefully.

SKIPPY
I saw that one coming.

BART
(nodding)
Yet another example of our small world of
rotating prison recidivism.
(beat)
Steven was naive and scared, so he
latched onto me for a few days.

GENERAL POPULATION CELL - DAY (BEGIN FLASHBACK)

Inmates around the card table SING the refrain from "Oh Sheila" by
Ready for the World.

Steven joins Bart's exercise routine. He's got a ways to go with his
flaccid trot around the card table after Bart, monkey-see-monkey-do.

TIME CUT:

Mail call. A cute, brunette FEMALE JAILER (29, Latino) stands on the
catwalk handing mail through the bars and talking to Steven. Other
inmates hang out near the front to chat her up too.

Bart's got a letter. He returns to his bunk and opens it.

Female jailer moves on. Steven strains to see her as long as he can.

STEVEN
(to Bart)
You see the way she's making me, huh?

BART
(reading)
We all love her twice a week, kiddo.

Steven looks confused. He has a letter too.

BART
You going to read that?

STEVEN
Oh. Yeah.

Steven opens the letter. Bart continues reading his own. Several other
inmates have mail today as well.

OLDER BART (V.O.)
Normally its the quietest part of the week.

Steven's eyes grow wide as he reads his letter. He pulls out something very small and starts dancing around and waving the mail.

INMATE
Yo, fish. Keep it down. We tryin'
to read in here.

STEVEN
Fuck me. Hey, guys! You know what
this is?

Steven keeps dancing around. Pretty soon everyone's watching.

STEVEN
I got a letter from Officer Cherry.

INMATE TWO
You trippin'. The mail bitch?

Steven stops dancing and reads the letter to the room.

STEVEN
I can't wait to meet up with you. I
like it kinky, I just get wet thinking
about you. Here's a little reminder...

Steven tosses the letter on the floor, stretches the item no one can see under his nose and sniffs it, then holds it overhead again.

STEVEN
Look at this!

Steven starts dancing around the room again.

INMATE
What he got there?

INMATE TWO
Looks like pussy hair.

Steven circles the room again, waving the glorious evidence.

STEVEN
See? She wants to fuck me!

Low SNIGGERING from a couple of inmates grows into full blown HOOTING and HOLLERING within seconds. A few more moments of glory before...

INMATE
Muthafucka, that's my pubic hair!

That inmate collapses back on his bunk in laughter.

INMATE TWO
He mail that to you, white boy!

Steven, crestfallen, stops dancing and looks around the room. Inmates roar with LAUGHTER. Bart smiles and shakes his head.

INMATE
How's my pube smellin', bitch?

INMATE TWO

Like that sweet-ass jail soap?

Bart uncaps a jail-approved marker and starts another letter.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL - DAY ROOM - DAY

FIFTEEN INMATES seated in chairs in a semi-circle. A PASTOR and his ASSISTANT work the crowd.

BART (V.O.)

Dear Mom, I signed up for Bible study once a week, anything to get out of the cell for a few minutes. Steven comes along when he feels like it.

The assistant passes out religious tracts while the pastor preaches.

Under the gall of fluorescent tube lighting, the tracts look like comic books. Steven thumbs through his and tucks it under his thigh.

The pastor prays with one of the inmates, stroking the inmate's neck.

BART (V.O.)

They spend a lot of time bashing Catholics and other denominations and massaging prisoners in the name of Jesus. Probably not the best idea to mention I grew up Catholic, either, because nitpicking the finer points of theology ultimately has no meaning behind bars. But if it could get me out, I'd pretty much worship a bologna sandwich.

Steven pulls out his tract and starts making a paper airplane.

BART

(under his breath)
Have you ever read the Bible?

STEVEN

(attentively folding airplane)
Nope. You?

BART

Twice. In isolation.

Inmates stand. It's over.

BART (V.O.)

I know one thing for sure now, Mom. God isn't in here.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL - GENERAL POPULATION CELL - DAY

Bart continues writing his letter. A JAILER walks down the catwalk and stops at the cell.

JAILER

Bryars, come with me.

Huh?

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY COURTROOM - DAY

Bart shuffles into the court in orange issues and full transport restraints. He's escorted to a bench behind the PROSECUTOR'S table and seated beside two more INMATES.

Behind them, FOUR SHERIFF'S DEPUTIES escort Willie Nelson into court. He glares at Bart and finally sits down at the defendant's table.

TWO ATTORNEYS walk past the first row to their respective sides.

Bart whispers to the other two inmates.

BART
What's this?

INMATE
Shit if I know.

BAILIFF
All Rise!

Bart stands and looks around. A skeleton crew. JUDGE MITCHELL RUNYAN (58, white) comes in from chambers and takes the bench.

BAILIFF
The Honorable Mitchell Runyan presiding.
Hearing is now in session. Be seated.

Bart sits before Willie does. He watches Willie shift in his chair.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

Skippy scratches his nose and listens.

BART
Only one thing made sense. We'd just been hauled in as bluff witnesses because they were charging Willie with an attempted escape.

Skippy nods. A lucid moment.

BART
Up to that point, they hadn't asked me for a formal statement. They wanted Willie to assume we'd testify against him if it went to trial.

SKIPPY
And get him to, what's it--?

Bart nods.

BART
Plea out. I'd just unwittingly gone from being a rabbit to being a rat.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY (BEGIN FLASHBACK)

Bart, still in orange issues, walks into the room. He's beaming.

His parents and younger brother, PEPPER (11, white), are there.

Smiles turn into tears. Bart and his parents group hug and cry for a bit. Pepper, nervous, stands aside. Bart extends his hand--

BART
Hey, buddy...

--and Pepper finally gives him a bear hug.

TIME CUT:

The four sit at the table, talking.

DIANNE
We've got some good news for you.

BART
Really?

MARION
Yeah, we think so. It looks like I can get some help from our prosecutor in Mobile, maybe even the State Attorney General.
(beat)
If you're willing to turn in those contacts of yours, you know.

Another rat? Bart sits back.

DIANNE
It could get you out sooner--

MARION
Now, let's don't go making promises we don't know about.

BART
They want me to snitch?

MARION
That's right.

BART
Oh. I don't know, Dad.

MARION
It'd get you transferred closer to us.
(beat)
Better prison conditions, you know.

DIANNE
And a shorter sentence.

MARION

I wish you'd stop saying that,
Dianne. Getting his hopes up.

Dianne ignores him. It's all about her son.

DIANNE

I know for a fact a letter to the
right judge about your cooperation
will shorten your sentence.

(to Marion)

The D.A. told me so.

MARION

(dismissive)

Well, anyway--this attorney you got up
here? I don't know, son. That asshole
won't even look me in the eye.

BART

(pointing at his eye)

You know, I think he has only--

MARION

I think you should trust our
resources at home instead.

A tough call. Rattling had consequences, like *Willie-fucking-Nelson*.

BART

Let me think about it, okay?

TIME CUT:

Bart, his parents, and Pepper group hug at the door and cry again.

INT. GENERAL POPULATION CELL - DAY

Bart opens a shoe box on his bunk, running shoes for the rabbit.

INT. BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

Scutter basketball on a half court. Bart runs around the perimeter of
the court in his new running shoes.

OLDER BART (V.O.)

My parents drove over a thousand
miles to visit me that day. They
also met with my presentence
investigator, who wouldn't look
them in they eye, either.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL - GENERAL POPULATION CELL - NIGHT

Chow time. The food line winds around the card game table to a pass-
through door at the front. Inmates eat from plastic meal trays on
their bunks or at the card table.

Bart sets a half-eaten tray aside.

STEVEN

Hey, you gonna eat that?

Bart hands him the tray.

BART

Knock yourself out.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Bart sits across the table from two men in suits.

SPECIAL AGENT HICKS

I'm D.E.A. Special Agent Trey Hicks, and this is my partner Special Agent John Turner. We work in the southern district of Alabama, which includes Mobile.

BART

Okay.

SPECIAL AGENT TURNER

We're here because your parents contacted the D.A.'s office there and expressed that you have some information you'd like to volunteer concerning illegal drug activity in our jurisdiction. Is that correct?

BART

Yes. But these guys are connected way up, I mean--that's really why I ran after I got busted in the first place. They'll come after me if I flip. Do you think you can get me into witness protection?

SPECIAL AGENT HICKS

Sure. We can do that, and more--if what you have is worth it.

BART

If you can get me out of here, I could work undercover for you. I completed F.B.I. firearms training in the Coast Guard, you know--I'm trained for stuff like this.

SPECIAL AGENT TURNER

Good to hear, but let's not get ahead of ourselves. We can arrange a number of things, depending on what kind of information you have.

SPECIAL AGENT HICKS

Why don't we start with what you know and we'll see what we can do, maybe even get you out of here?

More than Bart ever imagined at this point.

BART
For real? That'd be great!

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL - GENERAL POPULATION CELL - DAY

Bart sits on his bunk and writes another letter.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL - LAW LIBRARY - DAY

Bart pulls a codified legal volume from the shelf and sits at a table.

BART (V.O.)
Dear Mom, it does sound promising.
But before I jump for joy, I'm
going to review Michigan's state-
recommended sentencing guidelines.

He thumbs through and finds the dot plot graph and traces two columns with his index fingers. His fingers follow the ratings for OFFENSE SEVERITY: DELIVERY OF COCAINE and PRIOR ARRESTS OR CONVICTIONS: NONE.

He traces his index fingers up the column to his RECOMMENDED SENTENCE: 12-24 MONTHS. Bart stares at the book in delighted disbelief.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

HAROLD BUDNY (32, white), Bart's presentence investigator in a polyester suit. He fills in a bubble answer sheet as he talks.

BART (V.O.)
This man, Harold Budny, is tasked with
creating the report that recommends my
judicial punishment. That report will go
to the sentencing judge.

BUDNY
Raised by both parents?

BART
Yes.

BUDNY
Any siblings?

BART
Yes, six.

BUDNY
Prior convictions?

BART
None.

Budny stops and looks up at Bart. *Like he believes that.*

BUDNY
Arrests?

BART
None.

Budny doesn't believe that, either.

BUDNY
You're telling me you never distributed
cocaine before now? Not even once?

BART
Never.

Budny grudgingly fills in the bubble, tosses the file in his satchel, snaps it shut, and stands. Mumbles something inaudible and walks out.

INT. GENERAL POPULATION CELL - DAY

Bart continues writing his letter.

BART (V.O.)
The whole interview lasted maybe
ten minutes.

Bart wads up the letter, takes it to the urinal, and flushes it.

INT. MOBILE REGIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

Typical daytime traffic. Bart's dressed in civvies and front-shackled, a coat draped over the handcuffs. His hair's grown into a short mullet. TWO FEDERAL MARSHALS flank him. People are looking.

BART (V.O.)
Dear Mom, they're flying me commercially
again to a grand jury in Mobile. For some
reason people are staring this time.

EXT. AIRPORT RESTROOM - DAY

A federal marshal escorts Bart into the public restroom.

INT. AIRPORT RESTROOM - DAY

Bart goes to the lavatory to wash his hands. Looks in the mirror. His face is gecko green.

INT. FEDERAL COURTROOM - DAY

Sprawling, '60s-era courtroom with high ceilings. Three tiers of jury seats and 24 jurors. A raised podium up front with a witness box.

Bart sits in the witness box while a FEMALE PROSECUTOR paces the floor. US ATTORNEY JEFF SESSIONS (40) stands by a wall and observes.

FEMALE PROSECUTOR
Mr. Bryars, explain to the jury how
you distributed to your buyer, and
how he paid you.

BART
Yes, ma'am. I'd deliver two ounces at a
time in paper lunch bags, and he'd pay me
in cash.

FEMALE PROSECUTOR
How much did he pay you for each
delivery?

BART
Four thousand dollars.

FEMALE PROSECUTOR
And how often was that?

BART
Once a week at first. Then he
wanted more, so two or three times
a week was pretty normal.

FEMALE PROSECUTOR
And how long did you sell to this buyer?

BART
Four months.

FEMALE PROSECUTOR continues questioning Bart before the jury. Jeff Sessions listens to his testimony.

INT. US ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Marion and Dianne Bryars meet with Jeff Sessions in his office, a friendly but intense conversation.

BART (V.O.)
I knew you were trying to take this to
the federal level, Mom, but I had no idea
who Jeff Sessions was.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

SKIPPY
(surprised)
Really? None?

BART
Not a clue. I knew I had to agree
to be charged a *second* time, and at
the federal level.

INT. GENERAL POPULATION CELL - DAY (BEGIN FLASHBACK)

Bart reads an report titled MUSKEGON COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT. *Not good.*

BART
Shit.

INMATE playing cards glances over at Bart.

INMATE
What up with that?

BART
Nothing helpful.

KEYS JANGLE outside the cell door. A JAILER unlocks it.

JAILER

You got a visitor, Bryars.

Bart folds the report, puts it back in the envelope.

INT. GENERAL VISITATION - DAY

A designated no-contact area where inmates and visitors are physically separated by glass partitions.

Bart sits across from Frankie, his former Coast Guard co-worker. They pick up their conference phones.

FRANKIE

How you holding up?

BART

I'm fucked, Frankie.

FRANKIE

Yup, I'd say so. With Sluggo, anyways. He claims he got frostbite on his nuts after we dove in the lake out there looking around for your body, you know.

A pile-on of trouble, amusing though it may be.

BART

You're shittin' me.

Frankie grins.

FRANKIE

He got over it, obviously. Sent you some cigarette money.

Bart hangs his head.

FRANKIE

Hey. What's eatin' you, man?

BART

I just got my presentence report.

FRANKIE

Oh? What'd it say?

Bart takes a breath.

BART

Well, you know--the stuff about my family was pretty tame.

FRANKIE

Yup.

BART

And Chief's evaluation..."reliable and responsible, but not a barn-burner?"

Frankie chuckles.

BART

I mean, what the hell is that?
Let's ride around and hassle the
nice family of four in their twenty-
three foot Chris-Craft?

(gestures)

A "courtesy" boarding inspection
with lights and siren?

FRANKIE

Yup.

BART

It doesn't stop there. According to
the prosecutor, I'm a major cocaine
supplier with no respect for the
courts or any remorse for my
crimes. In fact, he says I smirked
at him in court.

FRANKIE

(laughing)

Well, didja?

BART

What do you think?

BART

Let's see if I can remember the
rest. "The defendant had a normal
childhood and possesses above-
average intelligence. He has family
and community support. He pled
guilty to selling and distributing
a large amount of cocaine in the
Muskegon area, and claims to have
been involved in the business for
only a four-month period, which is
highly unlikely."

Frankie's gawking. *How does Bart remember all that?*

BART

"Considering all the factors
gleaned for this investigation,
although his severity versus prior
record scores him in the twelve-to
twenty-four-month range, it is
recommended that defendant Marion
Bart Bryars receive a lengthy
prison sentence."

FRANKIE

That's an unquestionable shitload
of brass tacks. How did you--?

BART

I read it, like fifteen times.

FRANKIE

Okay, then. So, what's next?

BART

Two sentencing hearings. One for the drug distribution charges, and one for absconding bond.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY COURTROOM - DAY

The courtroom is nearly empty. Taglioni is seated, waiting. He thumbs through a folder and chats with his ASSISTANT.

Across the aisle, Tom Bartosz sits incommunicado beside Bart and stares blankly. His hands rest on top of his briefcase, dead weight. He doesn't look alive and busy with his job like Sam Taglioni.

Bart wears a purple shirt and tie, hair now a medium-length mullet.

TWO SHERIFFS DEPUTIES sit on the spectator bench behind Bart.

DEPUTY ONE

(muttering)

What's with this guy?

DEPUTY TWO

Mama needs to show him how to dress.

BAILIFF stands at parade-rest to the left of the bench.

JUDGE CLARENCE BONES (46, white) enters from chambers and approaches the bench. Everyone stands.

BAILIFF

All rise! The Honorable Clarence Bones is presiding. Court is now in session. Please be seated.

JUDGE BONES

Alright, before the court today we have docket number 85-CR-0463(J.G.), in which the defendant, Marion Bart Bryars, has pled guilty to three separate actions of delivering less than fifty grams of a mixture containing cocaine, M.C.L. 333.7401 and 2A4, and two counts of conspiracy to deliver cocaine, M.S.A. 14.15 (7401) and 2A4. All five original charges were for more than fifty, but less than 225 grams of cocaine, and carry a mandatory minimum sentence of ten to twenty years. As a result of the defendant pleading guilty to the lesser charges, the penalties now carry zero to twenty years.

(beat)

So, it is now completely at my discretion and no longer a mandatory ten- to twenty-year sentence.

(beat)

Now, before the court imposes the sentence, I'll give the prosecution a chance to address the court and the defense attorney, the same. I'll lastly give the defendant an opportunity to address the court as well. Let's start with the prosecution. Mr. Taglioni?

Prosecutor Taglioni stands. He punctuates every sentence with his fickle finger of fate.

TAGLIONI

Yes, Your Honor. As our office has examined these charges, we cannot help but continue to note that the defendant put a large amount of a very dangerous drug on our streets without pause over a four-month period. He was indicted early in this operation while his number of sales were doubling and tripling every week.

(pointing at Bart)

The people of Muskegon believe he deserves to serve the maximum sentence, and that's what we're requesting.

JUDGE BONES

Mr. Bartosz?

Attorney Bartosz stands.

BARTOSZ

Your Honor, I'd like to remind the court that this young man has no prior record. I believe the likelihood of him repeating this activity ever again is highly remote. His employment history with the U.S. Coast Guard is commendable before his misstep into this enterprise. He also has cooperated with federal law enforcement agencies and testified against his suppliers in court in his hometown of Mobile, Alabama. For these reasons, the defense requests leniency when sentencing this young man.

JUDGE BONES

Defendant Bryars?

Bart stands.

BART

Your Honor, I'm very sorry for all this. I now understand more completely about the damages I caused, and I obviously didn't realize the serious nature of this crime at the time, or I'd never taken part in it. I don't use drugs, and I don't intend to. I only delivered cocaine for four months, start to finish.

In retrospect, I'd like the opportunity to help put away more suppliers like the ones I just did. And I ask for the mercy of this court.

Bart takes a seat. Judge Bones holds up a stack of letters.

JUDGE BONES

Mr. Bryars, in all my years on this bench, I've never received such a voluminous amount of letters written on behalf of a defendant. There must be over fifty here, quite an impressive lineup. A chief of police, a county D.A., U.S. Marshals, a federal prosecutor. I even received a call from a congressman.

(beat)

But I can't consider only who you were before these crimes. You harmed a great many people in our local community with your crimes. And beyond that activity, you ran. You went on the lam from my court and hid out on the Gulf Coast.

(beat)

For that reason, I am significantly departing outside the state's sentencing guidelines, which by law, I can.

Judge Bones nods at the bailiff.

BAILIFF

All rise!

JUDGE BONES

It is therefore the determination of this court that you, Marion Bart Bryars, be remanded to the custody of the Michigan Department of Corrections for a period of eight to twenty years. That is all.

Judge Bones BANGS his gavel.

INT. SUBURBAN RANCH-STYLE HOME - DEN - NIGHT - INTERCUT

OPERATOR (O.C.)

Will you accept a collect call from Muskegon County Jail?

Marion and Dianne talk to Bart on their TRIMLINE phones.

DIANNE

Yes, yes we will.

MARION

Yes.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL - PAY PHONE - NIGHT

The crappiest of news. They all talk and cry.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

Skippy hates this part. His lower lip trembles.

BART

The second hearing didn't go any better. Between "Hanging Judge" Clarence Bones and a court-appointed attorney I'd just met, the kick-your-ass determination of that ruling was that I, Marion Bart Bryars, should not have run. Because I did, I was staring down a consecutive term and up to four more years. I'd be fifty years old before I was free.

EXT. MICHIGAN COUNTY JAIL TRANSPORT VAN - AFTERNOON - PARKED
(BEGIN FLASHBACK)

Bart is one of a TEN-INMATE CHAIN GANG in transport restraints. They board, flanked by FOUR GUARDS. He takes a last look at the local jail.

OLDER BART (V.O., POST-LAP)

So I was off to the real deal, the infamous Jackson State Penitentiary, the largest walled prison in the world.

The chain gang loaded, the transport van drives away.

EXT. JACKSON PENITENTIARY SALLY PORT - EVENING

Buckled down tight with concertina wire, guard towers, walls beaten down by 150 years of Michigan winters.

The transport van pulls in after the first gate slides open and stops.

INT. CELL BLOCK EIGHT - NIGHT

Bart's new home, a block of 800 cells, five stories high. An atrium with bolted-down metal dining tables and chairs in the middle.

An open ceiling with broken windows. PIGEONS and BIRDS flutter in the rafters. Filled to the brim with INMATES. LOUD.

INT. BART'S CELL - NIGHT

Another six-by-nine shitty cell three stories up. Bart looks across the atrium toward a cell two levels down from his.

Willie Fucking Nelson. Bart quickly steps back out of view.

A RAT skitters across the floor behind him and under his bunk.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Bart sits at a metal desk in a room with other INMATES. Each inmate has a bubble answer sheet and a No. 2 pencil. GUARDS flank the room.

BART (V.O.)

Dear Mom, I just spent a couple of afternoons in psychiatric evaluations. The whole thing is quite bizarre, if not downright creepy.

A PROCTOR wearing a suit walks in, sits at a desk, and TURNS ON a cassette player. A MALE VOICE booms with the expressionless cadence of a third-grade hygiene lesson.

MALE VOICE

I...am...a...good...person.

Bart glances at the inmate to his left. He can almost see how he's answering. *Then again, better not.*

BART (V.O.)

The taped voice asks a question, followed by three minutes of silence, giving everyone ample time to ponder their answer: always, often, sometimes, and never.

MALE VOICE

I...want...to kill...my...father.

INT. CELL BLOCK EIGHT - MORNING

Bart stands at his cell door.

GUARD (O.C.)

Open Floor Three, East Side!

Bart's cell door opens with the rest.

BART (V.O.)

I don't have any writing supplies in here, so I'm doing this in my head. Chow time is a well-oiled operation that takes a couple of hours. Three times a day.

The entire floor--EIGHTY INMATES--walk down to the atrium.

CUT TO:

INT. ATRIUM - MORNING

Plastic food trays on large pallets stacked six feet high. Bart's working on some scrambled eggs and minding his own business.

PULL BACK

He's seated at a table with THREE WHITE INMATES. The atrium defines segregation. BLACKS sit with their own. LATINOS. ASIANS.

ON BART

Something white lands on his food. He looks around, looks up.

He shows his tray to a GUARD stationed near his table.

BART

Can I have another tray, sir? One of those birds up there just shat on mine.

We see the guard answer him, and it's not a yes.

BART (V.O.)

You see, everybody calls those birds the Jackson Air Force for a reason. They look down on us and say "bombs away, you shitheads."

EXT. JACKSON YARD - DAY

Bart files outside with OTHER INMATES into a crowded recreation yard. Dirty snow over cement. He heads toward a pay phone line.

Twenty pay phones in a row. The lines are long. His inches forward.

Bart spies Willie Nelson just before Willie vanishes into the crowd.

BART (V.O.)

At intake they told me I had a flag in my jacket, a written warning not to house me and Willie together. Yet there he is, all six-fucking-ten-serial-raping inches of him. I'm a sitting duck in here, Mom.

Bart steps out of line and heads toward the opposite side of the yard.

Shotgun REPORTS, BOOM-BOOM-BOOM. Buckshot kicks up snow less than twenty-five yards away. Bart scrambles over to the fence.

LOUD SPEAKER

No congregating! Break it up!

Bart white-knuckles the fence. Glances at an INMATE beside him.

BART

Shit! What was that?

INMATE

See those homies?

A clump of TWENTY INMATES in the yard next door casually disperse like it's a stroll down the promenade. Bart nods.

INMATE

That's Seven Block. Where the real muthafuckas at, you know. Life without. They hang around too tight and too large, po-lice bust 'em up like that. Gotta stay spreaded out.

Bart looks up at the GUARDS in the tower, shotguns still combat ready.

BART

No kidding.

INT. BART'S CELL - MORNING

Bart reads on his bunk. NOISE across the atrium. He stands and looks.

Willie's waving his arms through his cell bars and YELLING.

TWO GUARDS walk up. Willie's got a small milk carton in one hand.

WILLIE

I fuck every one of ya! Every last muthafucka, you come on! Come at me now, see what I got, huh, you pussy-ass screw!

Willie flings something brown in the guards' faces.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

SKIPPY

(grimacing)

That wasn't morning coffee.

BART

Or chocolate milk.

(beat)

You've heard the expression 'saved by the bell'? I was. Willie went into Ad Seg.

INT. CELL BLOCK EIGHT - MORNING (BEGIN FLASHBACK)

CHEERS and UPROAR on the entire cell block, GYMNASIUM LOUD. A GOON SQUAD rushes Willie's cell and pepper-sprays him. Bart watches in alarm as they take big Willie down with baton blows.

INT. PRISON TRANSPORT BUS - MORNING - MOVING

A modified school bus with bench seats. Metal grills over the windows.

OLDER BART (V.O., POST-LAP)

Three weeks later, I transferred to Kinross.

NINE HANDCUFFED PRISONERS with Bart sit side-by-side, feet cuffed to the floor. FOUR GUARDS ride inside a cockpit cage in front.

Bart stares between window grills at the snow-covered countryside.

EXT. PRISON TRANSPORT BUS - AFTERNOON - MOVING

Kinross Correctional Facility. The prison bus pulls past double-tall concertina-wire at the security gate. Through a sally port. Continues past multiple rows of old barracks. Administrative buildings. Finally, up to a huge and windowless sheet-metal building.

INT. BART'S CUBICLE - AFTERNOON

A GUARD escorts Bart to a four-inmate cubicle with bunk beds on either side and double-tier lockers at one end. Bart looks around his new digs. No bars, no cells. *Freedom a rabbit can love so much, wide open.*

All around this open-air cubicle are twenty-four more just like it.

His CELLIES: RICO (27, Latino), WILL (35, white), and TEX (29, white).

OLDER BART (V.O.)

My new cellies were Rico, a Puerto Rican thief, Will, a small white dude walking down the last five on an eighteen-year bit for murder, and Tex, a countrified dope-dealer from the Lone Star State.

Rico, Will, and Tex chitchat with Bart while he puts away his duffle.

OLDER BART (V.O.)

None of them were from Michigan, and they all liked to talk.

LATER

Curfew and lights out. The pole-barn is pitch-black inside. Tex and Will saw Z's, Rico rearranges his mattress, and Bart flip-flops.

INT. ADJACENT CUBICLE

A small INMATE slips out of bed, something dangling from his hand.

Another INMATE snores on his bunk. The side of his head suddenly EXPLODES, a bloody mess. THWOP, THWOP, THWOP.

INT. BART'S CUBICLE

INMATE (O.C.) SCREAMS. Bart sits straight up, followed by Will and Tex. Rico walks over to the edge of their cubicle.

The entire unit's tube lights CLICK on in sections, an UPROAR in the making. Bart's section CLICKS on. He sees:

INT. ADJACENT CUBICLE

INMATE lying and MOANING on his bunk, blood gushing from his head over his eye socket. FOUR GUARDS run past. Bart stands by Rico and watches. Tex joins them. Will hangs out on his bunk.

BART

What just happened?

RICO

Dude got a lock-in-a-sock.

BART

A what?

WILL

Combo lock in a sock.
(slingshot swing)
David and Goliath.

BART

You're kidding me.

WILL

Nope.

TEX

Looks like they smashed him up good.

INT. KINROSS MESS HALL - NOON

Bart, Tex, Will, and Rico sit at a table eating from food trays.

One table over, OLD BIKER INMATE eats alone.

Bart watches the biker meticulously maneuver red Jell-O onto a soup spoon, a feat requiring way more time than normal.

RICO

Janx, he hear something about that dude that got slocked last night.

TEX

That so? Do tell.

Bart's attention is divided between the latest news and the biker.

RICO

Janx says he ran up a gambling debt with the ragheads, they had it out for him. One guy waits until he's asleep and whack him on the head.

BART

Just like that?

RICO

Lock-in-a-sock.

TEX

Upside the head.

WILL

I heard they smashed in his skull bones around his eye, you know. They had to fuse 'em, screws and pins, brain bleed, nasty stuff.

TEX

Leaky brains? Shit. That's fucked up.

Bart's still mystified by the quivering Jell-O show--now almost to the biker's mouth--before the gelatin slips off and plops onto his plate. He starts the process all over again.

RICO

He'll get out soon, anyways.

BART

Really?

TEX

I thought he wuz a lifer.

WILL

Nope. Fifteen to twenty-five.

TEX
Oh, well. Guess they'll transfer him out, then.

RICO
Nah, man. That's what I'm telling you. This dude, he sues the D.O.C., don't you get it?

BART
He can do that?

WILL
Shit, yeah. Where you been?

Bart glances over at the Jell-O operation again.

RICO
We're talking--what's that word?

TEX
Massive.

RICO
Jes! Massive money, and he settle out of court for less time, maybe even skip the last five or so.

BART
Years? For real?

TEX
Yup. This prison, shitty and all, is legally responsible for your safety and well-being.

The Jell-O is almost in the hangar. It drops again.

TEX
(to Bart)
Are you even listening to me?

WILL
(about biker inmate)
Dude's probably on Thorazine.

BART
What's that?

WILL
A psychotropic. Slows him down.
(watching biker inmate)
Like that.

TEX
He gets pretty jacked up otherwise.

Bart's dumfounded. *The biker-zombie guy?*

BART
That so?

RICO

Fuck yeah, man. That dude over there,
he's your lock-in-a-sock funeral.

TEX

We ain't shittin' you, Bama.
(beat)
Thorazine, your D.O.C. guardian
angels at work.

INT. BART'S CUBICLE - DAY

Bart sits on his bunk and writes a letter.

BART (V.O.)

Dear Mom, Rico just gave me an
idea, maybe the best one yet.

EXT. KINROSS YARD - DAY

Bart and Rico walk around the recreation yard.

BART (V.O.)

I'm going to enlist him to help me
think up a way to get hurt, and--

INMATE limps past clutching his side, growing dark with blood.

BART (V.O.)

It has to be an injury serious
enough to cost the D.O.C. some real
money and an amount significant
enough to bargain for my freedom.
And the D.O.C. has to be one-
hundred-percent liable.

INT. BART'S CUBICLE - DAY

Bart and Rico play cards and talk.

BART (V.O.)

We kick around scenarios for days
because I have one condition: it
has to be something I can do by
myself. If I've learned anything,
the only way not to get ratted
out is D-I-Y. After all, I sold
cocaine to one customer, and he
was one too many.

INT. KINROSS PRISON SHOWER STALL - DAY

A bar of soap drops on the concrete.

BART (V.O., PRE-LAP)

Slip and fall, maybe?

INT. BART'S CUBICLE - DAY

RICO

Not unless you plan to go loco.

An alarming idea.

BART
You mean--brain damage?

Rico looks at Bart over his card hand.

RICO
Fuck yeah, man. Massive injury,
massive money, get it?

EXT. KINROSS MESS HALL - MORNING

Light snow. Bart and Rico walk along the roadway leading from mess hall toward their pole-barn. A passing car HONKS, followed by the steady BEEP-BEEP-BEEP of an approaching PRISON VAN.

Bart and Rico step into snow piles recently banked off the roadway. The van drives past, kicking up dirty snow.

RICO
You freaking kidding me? How fucked
up is this, huh? In the real world
you have sidewalks, no?

BART
It's like they actually want us--

Eureka. They both look at each other and start laughing.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. KINROSS MESS HALL - MORNING

Snowing harder. The plan's in full swing. Bart and Rico walk along the same stretch from mess hall toward the pole-barn. We hear the BEEP-BEEP-BEEP of an approaching PRISON VAN.

Bart, Rico, and other INMATES move to either side of the roadway to allow the van through. Some go left, Bart and Rico go right.

The van inches by. Bart waits--and pratfalls under the rear axle, extending his right leg under the tire. The rear wheel rolls over his leg with a THWOMP. Bart collapses under the sheer weight.

UPROAR, inmates SCREAMING and HOLLERING, BEATING the sides of the van with their fists. Van stops.

Rico bends over Bart.

RICO
You did it, man! Just lay here,
they're coming.

INMATE (O.C.)
Shit, they just ran over that fucka.
Damn, that nigga gonna get paid, yeah?

LAUGHTER.

EXT. AMBULANCE - DAY

TWO ARMED GUARDS move Bart, wearing a cervical collar and handcuffed to a backboard stretcher, into an ambulance.

Rico loiters, monitoring the operation.

ARMED GUARD
(to Rico)
Move it on out, Pinto.

Rico shrugs and walks away.

INT. PRISON HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Bart raises the head of his hospital bed for a look at his knee.

BART (V.O.)
Dear Mom, There's a nine-inch bruise the width of a tire across the top, and it swelled a lot. You can see the tread too, like a Roadrunner cartoon. They didn't take any X-rays, and all I got for pain was Tylenol.

INT. KINROSS GYM UNIT - DAY

Bart's in a wheelchair. He rolls into a gymnasium crowded with bunk beds, one hundred INMATES in all.

BART (V.O.)
I'm trying not to buy into a bad feeling about this, Mom, but the first thing I noticed was a lack of documentation. And I guess this is D.O.C.'s idea for rehab.

LATER - LIGHTS OUT

Bart lies wide-awake listening to COMMOTION, CAT CALLS in the gym.

BART (V.O.)
It's places like these where I fully expect to get slocked.

INT. US ATTORNEY'S OFFICE - DAY

Marion and Dianne Bryars meet with Jeff Sessions in his office. Dianne lifts a Confederate Flag from a keepsake box, pointing out various features of the Stars and Bars to Sessions.

INT. PRISON PAY PHONE - DAY - INTERCUT

Bart talks on the phone to his brother, Brent.

INT. SLIDELL BRICK HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Brent's eating ice cream.

BRENT
Mama said they met with Sessions.

BART

Again?

BRENT

(smacking)

You know. She spun a yarn about Antebellum times, gave him a flag, they worked out a deal.

BART

Let me guess. I plead guilty, and he petitions for a concurrent federal sentence.

EXT. PRISON TRANSPORT VAN - MOVING - MORNING

Transport drives outbound past the KINROSS CORRECTIONAL FACILITY sign.

Through one of the van's windows, we see Bart is aboard.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

SKIPPY

(fidgeting)

Good God, where were you off to next?

BART

Alabama. To testify for the Feds.

Skippy tugs at his oxygen line. Fidgety.

BART

Should I skip to the part where I find out what my bunk mate's in for?

SKIPPY

Let's do.

TERRA HAUTE - EXT. BART'S CELL - EVENING (BEGIN FLASHBACK)

Bart goes inside just after a WHITE INMATE (40) arriving with another chain gang. The inmate is covered in tats, Aryan Nation SS Lightning bolts on his neck. He quickly tosses his bedroll on the bottom bunk.

CUT TO:

Bart climbs onto the top bunk while the Aryan unpacks and talks.

ARYAN INMATE

Extortion and an accident, you know.

He hands Bart a book and stretches out to read his own.

Bart opens the book, *The World According to Garp*, and begins to read.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

BART

Turns out he'd kidnapped someone's girl from a rival motorcycle gang and "inadvertently" buried her alive.

Skippy's eyes widen.

SKIPPY
One of those.

BART
Yep. Life without.
(beat)
More coffee?

SKIPPY
Better not.

BART
Suit yourself.
(beat)
So, I'd survived an evening with a
homicidal Aryan and was feeling
pretty all-important.

EXT. MOBILE CITY JAIL - DAY (BEGIN FLASHBACK)

A sunny day in Mobile with Mardi Gras in full swing. Gaudy floats and buffoonery crowd Main Street. The parade marches past the historic Mobile City Jail, a decrepit Romanesque display of justice.

INT. MOBILE CITY JAIL CELL - DAY

A depressing dump of a jail, a cell shared with NINE INMATES. Bart, on tiptoe, can only see the top third of the parade through the windows.

EXT. TOMMIE'S TERMINAL - DAY

A family style diner on the waterfront in Mobile.

INT. TOMMIE'S TERMINAL DINER - DAY

Marion Bryars takes a chair across from ROY FLOYS (46, white), a high school football rival. An exchange that's prickly in some places.

ROY
How goes it there, Nat?

MARION
Well, tomorrow's the big day.

WAITRESS comes over.

WAITRESS
Hi, Roy. Marion. You want your usual?

MARION
Yes'm. But hold the creamer today, please.

WAITRESS
Sure, gotcha.

She flips his coffee mug, pours coffee straight-up, tops off Roy's.

ROY
What's this? Old GI acting up again?

MARION
I've had some distress, yeah.

Roy regards him with a mixture of disdain and pity.

ROY
You seen Bart yet?

MARION
Last weekend. Dianne, the week before. I already told you that.

ROY
That's right. How's he holding up?

MARION
He's still hopeful.

ROY
Well, he should be. I talked to my buddy Howie again for you. And Mel up there in Montgomery.

MARION
Mel Jones?

ROY
That's right. U.S. Marshal.

MARION
Really? How long's he been up there?

ROY
Since eighty-one, I think.

MARION
Well, shit.

Waitress returns with plates: eggs, biscuits, bacon, the fixings.

WAITRESS
Here you go. Anything else? Tabasco?

ROY
Not for him.

MARION
Oh hell, no.

Both men dive into their food.

ROY
Good thing is, Mel says the Feds got minimum lockups all over the country and he'll vouch for your boy to keep him close by, no farther north than Montgomery. Maybe even over there in that low-security camp they got at Eglin Air Force Base. Either way, he says he'll put in a good word for him.

MARION
He said that?

Marion chews and listens.

ROY
(nods)
They're good for it, trust me. Mel
and Howie, they're the ones who
ultimately decide where he'll go.

MARION
And it's one of those two places
for sure?

Roy grins. *Dicey.*

ROY
You know I can't exactly tell you
that. Security and all.

EXT. JOHN CAMPBELL US FEDERAL COURTHOUSE - DAY

A Renaissance Revival colossus since 1935. Usual traffic out front.

INT. JOHN CAMPBELL US FEDERAL COURTHOUSE - DAY

GUARDS escort Bart, dressed in a suit and shuffling along in full-restraint leg and belly chains.

Marion, Dianne, and a group of RELATIVES congregate by the courtroom. As Bart approaches, YOUNG FEMALE RELATIVE bursts into tears. Dianne takes her hand and starts crying too.

BART
It's okay y'all, don't worry.

Bart shuffles past them into the courtroom.

EXT. FCI TEXARKANA - DAY

A huge complex with guard towers, concertina wire, and an electric fence. White stucco with a Spanish-tile roof.

A PRISON TRANSPORT VAN rolls past the entrance sign, rumbles along to the first gate at sally port, and stops.

SALLY PORT - LAST GATE - DAY

The chain gang including Bart disembarks the van. FIVE ARMED GUARDS with shotguns are stationed around the van.

OLDER BART (V.O.)
Roy Floys was full of shit. I wasn't on
my way to minimum lockup at all.

INT. FCI TEXARKANA - F UNIT - BART'S CELL - DAY

A six-by-nine cell designed to house one prisoner. A bunk bed and a metal locker. Small desk and chair. Toilet and sink. An open-door policy, though. Also inside is an unassuming CELLIE (35, white).

When Bart enters the cell, the cellie stands and offers his hand to shake. Bart does likewise--with some trepidation.

Bart sits on his bunk, his cellie, in the chair. They talk.

BART (V.O.)
 Dear Mom, Federal lockup is much more neat and tidy than county or state. I may just survive. Tim's an international yacht thief walking down the last half of a six-year sentence.

LATER

Bart's writing another letter.

BART (V.O.)
 For years he broke into yachts, changed their identifiers, and ferried them down to South America for resale. He says he was undone by a snitch like the rest of us. The Feds call him the 'Hot Yachter' and just hired him to advise them on catching boat thieves. Maybe I could do something like that--

Bart wads up the letter and tosses it in the toilet.

INT. FCI TEXARKANA - BAND ROOM - DAY

Bart checks out the Band Room. A rag-tag group of FOUR INMATES attempt a soulful rendition of Albert King's "Born Under a Bad Sign."

The lead guitarist, MALTE DOLLINGER (28, white), is a six-foot-seven, lanky German with a meticulously trimmed mustache. He riffs on a dazzling white Stratocaster.

He holds up a fist, and the playing drops off. He nods at Bart.

MALTE
 (to band)
 Shall we pick up here tomorrow?

The other inmates talk among themselves, tidy up, and walk out.

Malte extends his hand to shake.

MALTE
 Malte Dollinger. Do you play?

BART
 Yes, I do. Bart Bryars. Nice piece.

MALTE
 Oh, she does alright. No playbill here, we do a bit of this and that. Care to join up?

Astonished by Malte's congeniality, Bart follows him into the hallway.

BART
 I-I'd enjoy that.

MALTE

Come by my house later for coffee?
To tell me your story, you know.

Another new freedom; a lot to take in.

BART

I-I can do that?

MALTE

You're in F Unit, aren't you?

Bart and Malte continue talking as they walk down the hallway.

INT. F UNIT - MALTE'S CELL - DAY

Bart walks up to an open cell. Malte stands and offers him his chair. He remains standing until Bart sits, then sits on his bunk opposite Bart while they talk.

BART (V.O.)

You'd like Malte, Mom. He's from Germany, very old-school manners--and obsessed with American blues. You know, B.B. King, Muddy Waters, Buddy Guy.

TIME CUT:

Malte serves coffee in Styrofoam cups while they continue talking.

BART (V.O.)

He's fluent in seven languages, but still learning how to play guitar.

Malte pulls out the Stratocaster from underneath his bunk and hands it to Bart, who plays free-form while they talk.

BART (V.O.)

I told him my music story, how I started out on drums after my tone-deaf and rhythmically-challenged dad brought home that three-piece trap-set when I was eleven. Remember?

EXT. SUBURBAN RANCH-STYLE HOME GARAGE - DAY

BEGIN MONTAGE

Twelve-year-old Bart practices a SNARE ROLL and CRASH in a garage.

BART (V.O.)

And how I decided after starting out on drums that girls didn't pay attention to guys who sat?

Two guitars docked in front of Bart's drum set. Thirteen-year-old Bart RIFFS on a Dreadnought acoustic guitar.

Bart sits curbside and practices on a Yamaha acoustic guitar. A NEIGHBORHOOD DRIFTER with *Sling Blade* vibes sits alongside and listens. Lights a cigarette, offers one to Bart.

BART (V.O.)
 And about our first band, Captain
 Schmedley and the Deadly Medley?

A deadly-afroed-medley plays in a garage, Bart on lead guitar.

END MONTAGE

INT. F UNIT - MALTE'S CELL - DAY

MALTE
 Did you play blues?

Bart chuckles.

BART
 More like Led Zeppelin and Aerosmith.

MALTE
 Ah--

Bart segues into another improvisational solo.

MALTE
 Did you write your own stuff?

Did he ever. Bart smiles.

BART
 Oh, I thought so. Mostly songs about
 frogs and mosquitoes and getting stoned.
 Dumb shit.
 (beat)
 Not for the band, though.

MALTE
 Where did you play?

BART
 Pep rallies, skating rinks, parties...

MALTE
 Oi--

BART
 And eventually, covers at a rock-and-roll
 joint called The Sahara Club.

MALTE
 You're good. Did you study at the university?

BART
 You mean--college?

MALTE
 Yes.

BART
 I dropped out.

Bart stops playing.

MALTE

Could you show me how to do that?

INT. F UNIT - BART'S CELL - DAY

A wadded letter goes flying toward the toilet and misses.

INT. FCI TEXARKANA - ELECTRONIC SHOP - DAY

A ten-by-twelve foot room with raised counters along both sides.

The morning check-in includes FIVE INMATES besides Bart. TOPPER, a bespectacled native Alaskan Aleutian (31), supervises.

Bart dismantles a small radio, feeling his way along. Topper stops by--

TOPPER

You got to rotate it out here, see?

--before moving down the line. Bart continues working.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

Skippy looks relaxed. Sleepy, even. Bart checks the time on his phone.

BART

Eight-to-four, five days a week, under the watchful eye of an Alaskan named Topper. At twelve cents an hour.

SKIPPY

(brightening)

That's when it started, though. Right?

BART

I needed a monotony buster.

INT. BAND ROOM - DAY

Bart plays drums with stripped-out tuning lugs and busted heads jury-rigged with duct tape. Everything in here is held together by shoestrings or bubblegum.

Topper's Fender Jazz bass is nice enough, but he butchers the poly-rhythms in "Down on the Corner."

OLDER BART (V.O.)

Topper was in for murder, so I couldn't just casually inform him that he sucked, you know?

TIME CUT:

Bart shows Topper the ropes. He plays better--it's just that obvious.

INT. BAND ROOM - DOOR - DAY

An OLD INMATE (77, white) peers through the bottom half of a window in the door. Bart can just see the top of his head.

EXT. BAND ROOM - DOOR - DAY

Old inmate stares through the window a moment longer. Shuffles away.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Bart totes the Stratocaster as he and Malte walk and talk.

BART
How many bands are in here?

BEGIN MONTAGE

A rotating group of prison-proud musicians in the band room:

A BIKER BAND with iron-pumped arms and tats.

MALTE (V.O., POST-LAP)
Oh, a dozen or more.

A JAZZ BAND, sax and trumpet included.

THE METALHEADS, with vertical fretboards and whiplash.

ALL-BLACK SOUL, six a cappella singers.

THE COUNTRY-WESTERN GROUP authenticated by trucker ball caps.

MEXICAN MARIACHI with castanets, guitarrón, and an accordion.

NATIVE AMERICANS wearing wide bandannas and emulating Motley Crue.

END MONTAGE

INT. BAND ROOM - DAY

Bart's playing Malte's Stratocaster. Malte's on keyboard. TWELVE (26, Black), breaks out amazing funky bass. RIGOBERTO PUENTES-LEAL (30, Cuban), matches his tempo on drums.

OLDER BART (V.O.)
Our band changed. Sometimes for
better, sometimes for worse.

DAVE KASSEL (30, white), a clean-shaven version of Malte, straps on a tattered Fender bass. Guitar 101 with Bart, a private lesson.

DAVE
It's only got four strings, right?
How hard can it be?

He plays an erratic riff, noticeably off-key. Strikes a pose.

EXT. BAND ROOM - DAY

Bart recognizes the tiny old eavesdropper shuffling along the hallway. He catches up with him and offers an arm.

BART
Help you, sir?

The old man grins at him and takes his arm.

OLD INMATE
You're from bayou country.

BART
South Alabama, yes sir.

They start upstairs at the end of the hallway, a tedious process.

OLD INMATE
I heard you back there. You're very good, kid. Keep it up.

BART
Thank you, sir.

OLD INMATE
You play bridge?

BART
Uh--no sir, I don't know how.

OLD INMATE
My bridge partner just got released.

So easy to be jealous.

BART
Lucky him.

OLD INMATE
Not so much. He did twenty.
(beat)
I could teach you.

BART
It's a pretty complicated game, isn't it?

OLD INMATE
Don't worry, son. You'll be a pro by the time you get out.

INT. FCI TEXARKANA - MESS HALL - MORNING

Bart stands in line for chow. Someone taps him on the shoulder, somebody much bigger.

INMATE (O.C.)
What the fuck you doing in here, man?

Bart spins, braced for anything. It's--JAY CARTER (25, white)--an old friend from Mobile? Jay's six-eight, a giant of a guy. He sports a Travolta Welcome-Back-Kotter do.

BART
Homeboy Jay! What the fuck?

They shake hands.

INT. TV ROOM - DAY

A 32" TV mounted in box on the wall. Bart, Jay, and other INMATES jaw and laugh as they watch Pee-wee's Playhouse.

BART (V.O.)
Dear Mom, you remember Jay from
Mobile? He's in here with me, but
more importantly, he's in charge of
the TV Room schedule.

INT. FCI TEXARKANA - BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

Short guys' basketball with streetball brutality and wild plays. Bart's on a team with NATIVE AMERICAN INMATES. Jay referees.

BART (V.O.)
Jay formed this five-nine and under
basketball league. It's a real
hoot, but it's bloody.

Bart comes down from blocking a double curl holding his head, a cut over his right eye.

TIME CUT:

Bart's back with stitches for the next game. Jay meets him at the baseline, takes him aside.

JAY
Okay, four fouls by halftime or you
ain't playing second half, hear me?

BART
Sure thing.

Bart jogs onto the court.

TIME CUT:

The basketball game's cracking as Jay transports Bart off the court using a fireman's carry.

INT. OPERATING ROOM - DAY

Bart's under. ORTHOPEDIC SURGEON makes a small incision in his right knee with a scalpel.

BART (V.O.)
Yep, the same knee I threw under
the bus back in Michigan.

INT. FCI TEXARKANA ELECTRONIC SHOP - DAY

Bart stumps in, knee ACE-wrapped and on crutches. Topper's handing out work orders to other inmates.

TOPPER
Welcome back to hell.

Bart grins and sits at his station, now outfitted with a typewriter.

Bart feeds a sheet of paper into the typewriter. Rows of Sanka and packs of cigarette are neatly lined up at his station.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

BART

I typed up lawsuits and appeals in exchange for Sanka and cheap smokes.

SKIPPY

Where'd you learn how to do that?

BART

The prison law library.

(beat)

And Malte's cellie happened to be Vincent Yerberg. Remember? The disgraced Texas Supreme Court justice serving time for bribery?

Skippy thinks a moment. Why yes, he does.

SKIPPY

(smiling)

Oh, yeah.

INT. F UNIT - BART'S CELL - DAY

VINCENT YERBERG (45, white) sits at the desk with the paperwork.

VINCENT

I think you need to base your appeal on Wharton's Rule.

BART

What's that?

VINCENT

It prohibits the prosecution of two persons in conspiracy with each other.

(beat)

You, and your buyer. The rationale is, the crime cannot occur without a conspiracy, so conspiracy cannot be a separate crime in this instance. It's part of the main or substantive crime.

BART

So--you mean the conspiracy charges don't count?

VINCENT

If two or more people agree to commit a crime that can only be done by that number of people, they cannot be charged with conspiracy.

BART

Wow. Tell that to Judge Bones.

Vincent chuckles and continues reading the casework.

VINCENT

Now, your assigned appellate attorney--

BART

Cherry Chesney.

VINCENT

Yes. She's only dealing with half your problem in Michigan. An appeal that you received double enhancement of your sentence due to absconding, that your sentencing should 'shock the conscience' of the court is--well, it's reaching.

BART

I'm fucked, then.

Vincent smiles sympathetically.

VINCENT

Don't get me wrong, it could still work. Meanwhile, here's something else you can do.

Vincent flips through the forms.

VINCENT

You can proceed *in pro se* and file your own lawsuit against the Michigan Department of Corrections about your little accident up there.

BART

Really?

Vincent glances at Bart's knee, the crutches.

VINCENT

After this? You bet. Request your surgical files and images, they'll serve as supporting exhibits.

EXT. FCI TEXARKANA - RECREATION BUILDING - NIGHT

A card table near the rec checkout window. Bart plays bridge with the old inmate who hangs out at the band room and two other INMATES.

TIME CUT:

The bridge game's over. The old inmate walks away with other INMATES. Bart, on one crutch, stacks chairs against the wall. Jay walks up.

JAY

(lowered voice)

Spud, you know who that is, right?

BART

Nope, didn't ask.

JAY

That's the Godfather!

BART
Holy shit! Really?

Bart watches the old inmate shuffle away.

OLDER BART (V.O.)
The New Orleans Godfather, the man
who ran the Deep South.

INT. F UNIT - BART'S CELL - NIGHT

Bart reads a letter on his bunk and wipes tears from his eyes.

BART (V.O.)
Life goes on, doesn't it, Mom? I got your
letter that Grandpa and great-Gran are
gone. And I'm still stuck in here.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Dianne, Marion, Pepper, Suzie, Brent, and MOURNERS gather graveside. A
PRIEST officiates the ceremony and reads from the Bible.

PRIEST
There is a time for everything, a season
for every matter under the heavens.

MONTAGE - VARIOUS

The takedown at Ryerson City Ballpark. Bart's hands are raised,
softball mitt included.

PRIEST (V.O.)
A time to be born and a time to die.

Bart watches a GUARD and a NURSE ATTENDANT transport the Godfather on
a gurney toward a prison van.

PRIEST (V.O.)
A time to plant and a time to uproot,

A sacrificial slice of a thumb on the augur. Blood drips around the
ice-fishing hole.

PRIEST (V.O.)
A time to kill and a time to heal,

DECK THE WALLS female co-worker bursts into tears as two federal
marshals march Bart, handcuffed, out of the store.

PRIEST (V.O.)
A time to weep and a time to laugh,

Bart and Jay laughing at *Pee-wee's Playhouse* cartoons in the TV room.

PRIEST (V.O.)
A time to mourn and a time to dance,

Steven dances around the gen-pop cell in Muskegon waving his mail.

PRIEST (V.O.)

A time to embrace and a time to refrain,

Bart and his parents group hug while Pepper, nervous, stands aside.

PRIEST (V.O.)

A time to be silent and a time to speak,

Bart pleads for the mercy of the court before Judge Bones.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Dianne Bryars holds Pepper's hand and weeps.

PRIEST

I have seen a burden laid on the human race. Everything is made beautiful in its time, for He has set eternity in man's heart; yet no one can fathom what He does from beginning to end.

END MONTAGE

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

BART

I was unable to be there for any of them because of my own stupidity.

SKIPPY

(tearful)

No. You were never stupid.
Desperate, maybe. Not stupid.

INT. FCI TEXARKANA - BART'S NEW CELL - DAY (BEGIN FLASHBACK)

Shock and awe. Bart, Dave, and Jay walk inside a spacious new cell and drop their duffels. Bart's no longer on crutches.

OLDER BART (V.O.)

A brand new unit opened up at FCI Texarkana, and Dave, Jay, and I applied to be cellies. It smelled like a new house and it was fucking amazing.

TIME CUT:

Settled in, snug as a bug in a rug. Malte stops by and gawks.

MALTE

Totally rad, man.

JAY

Ain't it, though?

MALTE

Hold that thought, I think I need to go reapply.

They laugh and shake hands. Malte sits at the table with Jay and Dave.

BART (V.O.)
 Things are looking up, Mom. Besides
 being on a songwriting tear--

Bart pulls a new Telecaster out of his locker.

MALTE
 What the fuck, man?

BART (V.O.)
 The electric guitar I ordered a
 couple of months ago finally
 arrived, and our band's preparing a
 big show to stage my originals.

Bart plays a lively riff.

JAY
 He's gonna knock 'em dead.

Bart stops playing.

BART
 I'm--not so sure about that.
 (to Malte)
 Maybe we ought to stick to covers
 this time around?

DAVE
 Bullshit. I liked "White Meat."

Malte starts laughing.

MALTE
 Which got you both the broom.

Bart hangs his head. Not one of his finer moments.

INT. PRISON AUDITORIUM - DAY

Bart, Dave, and DRUMMER jam on a platform stage. In the audience, a handful of INMATES are bored.

CHAINSAW, a buff and tatted biker inmate, strolls onstage and takes a broom to Bart's feet, Apollo Theater style.

INT. FCI TEXARKANA - NEW CELL - DAY

JAY
 I missed that one somehow. Who was it?

DAVE
 That biker asshole, Chainsaw.

MALTE
 Who can't play worth shit himself.

DAVE
 We've got too many fucking bands,
 that's what's wrong.

MALTE
Maybe, maybe not.

They all look at Malte.

MALTE
You just--need to play for everyone.

BART
Come again?

MALTE
Think about it. The Blacks. What do they like?

DAVE
They like Twelve.

BART
Funky bass.

MALTE
That's right. The Brownies?

BART
Percussion.

JAY
Salsa.

DAVE
Well, shit. I think he may be onto something--

BART
What about white guys?

DAVE
Like the fuckin' Chainsaw.

JAY
Metal?

MALTE
Solos.

BART
Guitar solos?

MALTE
(nodding)
Lead guitar. Step on your fuzz pedal and rock on, man. They'll love you.

JAY
Jimi Hendrix.

DAVE
Eddie Van Halen.

INT. FCI TEXARKANA - DAY

Bart makes rounds posting chroma-screaming flyers: the TV ROOM, RECREATION CHECK-OUT, BAND ROOM, ELECTRONIC SHOP, MESS HALL.

CLOSE ON FLYERS

Magazine ransom art again: FrEE sHOW! FreE PoPcORN and COkES. royAL cOMMAND PeRfoRMaNcE aS SEeN on TV. BaNNeD iN 88 cOuNTRIEs. YOU WoN't bELiEve youR EaRS.

INT. FCI TEXARKANA - AUDITORIUM BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Frenetic tuning, rigging, and repairing.

Something's amiss with Rigoberto's single conga. He rips off a piece of duct tape with his teeth.

GINO RAGUSA, the drummer, and TWO LATINO INMATES help Rigoberto with the repair, all chattering away in Spanish.

RIGOBERTO
¿Verás? Sostén esto para mí. Allí.

Malte checks his Casio speaker connections. Twelve, his bass amp.

The band is outfitted in prison-issue khakis and T's.

Bart sports camo pants and a temporary tattoo (PEACE) on this right arm. He peers between the curtains.

INT. FCI TEXARKANA - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Showtime. Self-segregated INMATES sit by race in folding chairs, tenuously unified by free popcorn and Cokes. Stare-downs, whispering. The tension is palpable.

TWO GUARDS flanking the entrance door alternately speak into their walkie-talkies.

INT. FCI TEXARKANA - AUDITORIUM BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

BART
Shit.

He closes the curtains. Dons a pair of Ray-Bans, and checks in.

BART
Ready?

INT. FCI TEXARKANA - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

The curtains open to SILENCE. Bart walks up to a mic and swallows. He can pick out his friends--and mortal enemies--in seconds. Jay. Dave. Topper. Vincent. Chainsaw.

BART
Dudes! Thanks for coming out. All these songs we're gonna play are brand new. We wrote them together. We, uh, hope you like 'em.

Bart turns from the mic and gives the (inaudible) countdown.

Twelve takes center stage with a loud and nasty BASS FUNK RIFF SOLO, quickly joined by Gino's THUNDERING DOWNBEAT.

BLACK INMATES in the audience stand slowly--*an exodus or a riot?*-- and they jive!

Rigoberto adds in AFRO-CUBAN STYLE CONGA. His Latino percussion team adds CLAVES and MARACAS.

LATINO INMATES perk up, leave their seats, and salsa.

Bart jams to the intro a few more seconds before joining center stage. Stomps on the fuzz box, rips into a rock-and-roll solo Hendrix style.

WHITE INMATES jump up, YELL, and pump their fists in the air.

Bart takes the mic and sings.

BART

Her lips are cherry red like a
sixty-five mustang, I'm gonna fill
her up with my high octane, Sleek
and low like a Corvette Stingray,

MONTAGE - VARIOUS

Bart (V.O.) continues SINGING "She's My Muscle Car."

INMATE KITCHEN WORKER ONE rinses a gallon jug of bleach.

Bart tosses a half-empty packet of cigarettes into a trash can inside his cell. He proudly marks a wall calendar's date with an X. He and Jay high-five, and Bart walks out.

Same bleach jug sits on the floor inside a broom closet.

INMATE KITCHEN WORKER TWO loads a large tray of biscuits in the prison kitchen oven. He curls a small pinch of biscuit dough into his palm.

Dave fishes out Bart's cigarettes from the trash, lights up, stashes the half-pack under his own mattress.

Same bleach jug sits on the floor inside a broom closet beside two crushed 6 oz. grapefruit cans.

INMATE KITCHEN WORKER TWO stops by and drops the pinch of biscuit dough into the bleach jug. Shuts the door.

Bart's on a running jag, round and round and round the track.

INMATE KITCHEN WORKER ONE stops by, switches out his mop, adds another 6 oz. peel-top can of grapefruit juice to the jug. Shuts the door.

Jay marks Day Four without smoking on the wall calendar. Another high-five for Bart.

Bart ducks in the broom closet and pours some nasty-looking hooch into four Cremora containers. Replaces the jug and shuts the door.

A block of Velveeta sits on a card table in the TV ROOM.

Bart, Malte, Dave, Jay, and a several other INMATES watch music videos on TV and drink from their Cremora containers.

LOUD SPEAKER (V.O.)

Count time.

Attention! Bart, Malte, Dave, and Jay stand up at once, teetering drunk. They lean into each other to remain upright for the count.

END MONTAGE

INT. FCI TEXARKANA AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

The band winds down their first number to an auditorium full of jive moves and APPLAUSE.

BART

She's my muscle car,
She keeps her motor clean,
She's my muscle car,
My supercharger queen,
She's my muscle car,
She keeps her motor clean,
She's my muscle car,
My supercharger queen.

INT. BART'S NEW CELL - DAY

Bart sits at the desk drawing custom cartoon cards with Magic Markers and colored pencils: Snoopy, Garfield, and Ziggy.

Malte stops by. He's jazzed.

MALTE

Did you hear yet?

BART

Hear what?

MALTE

Chainsaw told Jay. We stopped a riot last night.

Bart puts his pencil down.

BART

You're shittin' me.

MALTE

I am not. Bikers and Muslims.
They'd planned a fight, and our show killed it.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

BART

You see, Malte had just handed me an idea about songwriting that changed everything.

SKIPPY

From that day forward.

BART

Yes.

INT. AUDITORIUM - NIGHT (BEGIN FLASHBACK)

INMATES of all colors jam to the music. On stage, Bart and his band have managed to rig some cheap, but effective lighting effects.

OLDER BART (V.O.)

We continued playing the same music two concerts a month. And I was giving some serious thought about pursuing a life of music.

INT. FCI TEXARKANA - HALLWAY - DAY

Vincent sweeps using a lobby broom and standing dust pan. Bart approaches with a document and an ear-to-ear grin.

BART

I won! I won my fucking appeal!

Vincent parks his broom in the dust pan.

VINCENT

Here, let me see.

Vincent reads the letter and chuckles.

VINCENT

I've never known this to work before, but it looks like it will.

Bart is beside himself with joy.

BART

Holy shit!

Laughing and high-fives. Bart takes the letter back from Vincent and dances down the hallway. Vincent smiles, but there's some well-versed misgiving in his eyes.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

BART

The ruling stated that the amount of time I received for my crimes from both Muskegon judges shocked the conscience of the court. I had no priors and a spotless prison record.

INT. FCI TEXARKANA - PAY PHONE - DAY - INTERCUT (BEGIN FLASHBACK)

Bart's parents join his excited conversation from their TRIMLINE phones in their den.

OLDER BART (V.O.)
 I'd very likely be given time served.
 The same held true for my federal
 sentence under Rule 35, which allowed
 these two sentences to be served
 concurrently. I'd been locked up for
 three years now, and freedom was
 finally in sight.

INT. BAND ROOM - DAY

Bart, Malte, Gino, Rigoberto, and Twelve jam their sets.

OLDER BART (V.O.)
 For the next few months, I floated.

EXT. TRACK - DAY

Bart running 'round and 'round. He's thinner and his hair, longer.

INT. ELECTRONIC SHOP - DAY

Bart types a document, hand-drawn greeting cards in progress nearby.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Vincent sweeps as usual. Bart approaches with a document, troubled.

BART
 I got this today.

Vincent parks his broom in the dust pan.

VINCENT
 Here, let me see.

Vincent reads the letter.

VINCENT
Un-fucking believable.

BART
 Ain't it?

VINCENT
 So--the Muskegon prosecutor--

BART
 Sam *fucking* Taglioni.

VINCENT
 Nice ring to it, by the way.
 (reading)
 He's suing the department of
 corrections over who's going to
 foot the bill to transport you?

BART
 That's right. And it looks like
 he's appealing my appeal, too.

Vincent looks up, considering it for a moment.

VINCENT
 Yep. He can do that.

BART
 Fuck. This Taglioni bullshit could
 keep me in here until I'm eighty.

VINCENT
 (reading)
 Yes, it could.

INT. BART'S NEW CELL - DAY

Bart sits on his bunk re-reading the notice from Muskegon, as if that could make it go away. He lays it aside and starts another letter.

EXT. FCI TEXARKANA - MORNING

BART (V.O.)
 Dear Mom, I gotta do something.

Bart and Malte shuffle in a chain gang toward the sally-port exit. They pass Jay and Dave in the hallway just outside MESS HALL.

BART (V.O.)
 FDC Oakdale is looking for inmates to
 populate their newly rebuilt prison,
 you know, the one the boatlift Cubans
 burned down last year. Malte and I
 applied. We have to say goodbye to Jay
 and Dave, though.

INT. FDC OAKDALE RECEIVING - DAY

Bart stands in line in the receiving office. He looks around. It's new, it's shiny--just as promised. An arrival kit plops onto the receiving desk as he steps up.

FEMALE CLERK (23, white) with a big '80s do and too much makeup looks out at him. She smacks Dubble Bubble and has a thick Cajun accent.

FEMALE CLERK
 Your personal effects will be here
 for you to pick up tomorrow. It has
 to be checked for contraband. And
 that guitar ain't allowed.

Bart can just see the neck of his guitar case in the pile of luggage.

BART
 Wait, what?

FEMALE CLERK
 So just write down an address on
 this form where you want it sent,
 and we'll take the postage out of
 your commissary account.

BART

Look, I just bought that guitar a few months ago. From y'all! This is the B.O.P., right?

FEMALE CLERK

Well yeah, boo. Technically. This is a new facility, though. No musical instruments allowed with new inmates. Them's the rules.

BART

But I'm not a new inmate. I-I've been locked up by y'all for some time now. And I paid a twenty-five percent handling fee to the BOP to get this guitar. A hundred fucking dollars!

FEMALE CLERK

Well, there's nothing I can do about that. Sorry.

BART

This is crazy! I'll file a lawsuit as soon as I get to my cell. You can't do this.

FEMALE CLERK

Tell you what. I'll put it in our overflow closet back here and hold it for you for a few days. I ain't supposed to, but I will. Now, you're holding up the line. Next inmate, step forward!

INT. FDC OAKDALE - ELECTRONIC SHOP - DAY

Bart's new (old) work assignment, typing up work orders. His co-workers are LEBANESE INMATES. To one side he crafts a letter.

BART (V.O.)

Dear Mom, I filed a formal grievance with intent to sue, and that got some attention. Within a week, not only did I get back my guitar--I got a peace offering. A battery-powered mini-amp.

INT. FDC OAKDALE - RECREATION BUILDING - DAY

Bart jams with his Telecaster and mini-amp with THADDEUS "T-FUNK" JACKSON (27, Black), a gifted bass guitarist who plays a Doublecut 4 plastic guitar. T-Funk cuts a complicated lick while Bart listens.

BART (V.O.)

My new friend, T-Funk, likes to jam on new songs. I've never played with a bass player of his caliber. He's traveled on George Clinton's and Parliament's Atomic Dog World Tour where he shared the stage with funk idols like Bernie Worrell and Garry Shider.

INT. FDC OAKDALE - ELECTRONIC SHOP - DAY

Bart types at his station and crafts letters to home on the side.

BART (V.O.)

I know you're keeping track of all this, Mom. I've been in prison four years now, two of them with an overturned sentence. I just got word that the Muskegon prosecutor's appeal of my appeal--the one contending I'm not their responsibility to transport--has finally been denied at the State Supreme Court level. They just sent for me, in fact.

EXT. FDC OAKDALE - BASEBALL DIAMOND - DAY

Bart and T-Funk watch a prison softball game from the bleachers. A heated competition brews on an adjacent soccer field, the MEDELLIN COLUMBIAN SQUAD vs. the ASIAN SQUAD.

BART (V.O.)

While I've been waiting on the appeal of my appeal, though, some of my friends got cushy work assignments.

INT. FDC OAKDALE - CLASSROOM - DAY

Malte directs a CREW on installing a flight simulator.

BART (V.O.)

Malte started a flight school and volunteered to pay for an honest-to-God flight simulator.

TIME CUT:

Malte passes out written exams to several STUDENT INMATES.

BART (V.O.)

All of his classroom instruction is somehow accredited, and he says he's going to let them keep the simulator when he gets released.

INT. FDC OAKDALE - ELECTRONIC SHOP - DAY

Bart types at his station. Colorful illustrations of Cent A. Pede, Waldo Worm, and Beula Butterfly lay beside his typewriter. A book cover illustration exploding with color: *The Tales of Ittybittyville*.

BART (V.O.)

I'm still at my day job typing up work orders, appeals, grievances, and lawsuits for the general population. I hope you like my illustrations for your children's book.

EXT. FDC OAKDALE - BASEBALL DIAMOND - DAY

Bart and T-Funk look on curiously as a COLUMBIAN INMATE sprints around the backstop toward the dugout. He grabs a baseball bat and darts back onto the soccer field.

T-FUNK
Jesus, not again.

BART (V.O.)
 Another friend opted for the soccer commissioner, a huge deal. He's in charge of maintaining the whole prison league with five Columbian teams alone.

COLUMBIAN INMATE chases REFEREE across the field with a baseball bat.

BART (V.O.)
 It's really the only real violence I've seen at Oakdale, Mom. I promise.

EXT. OAKDALE SALLY PORT - DAY

Another chain-gang transport. Bart steps into a large PRISON VAN.

INT. MUSKEGON COURTHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY

Bart arrives in transport chains. He has long mullet, wears a white shirt, pants, and tie. CHERRY CHESNEY(34, white) walks up to meet him.

MS. CHESNEY
 A pleasure to finally meet you, Mr. Bryars. You look nice today.

BART
 Thank you for your hard work.

MS. CHESNEY
 Let's hope it pays off.

BART
 And in we go.

INT. MUSKEGON COURTROOM - DAY

The courtroom is nearly empty. Prosecutor Sam Taglioni chats with the BAILIFF. When Taglioni sees Bart, he abruptly ends the conversation. The elephant's in the room. Bart doesn't look away this time.

Bart takes a seat on the defense side next to Chesney.

Bailiff stands at parade-rest to the left of the bench.

Judge Bones enters from chambers. Everyone stands.

BAILIFF
 All rise! The Honorable Clarence Bones is presiding. Hearing is now in session. Please be seated.

JUDGE BONES
 Today's hearing is for docket number 85-CR-0463(J.G.), in which the defendant, Marion Bart Bryars, pled guilty to three separate actions of delivering less than fifty grams of a mixture containing cocaine, M.C.L.

333.7401 and 2A4, and two counts of conspiracy to deliver cocaine, M.S.A. 14.15 (7401) and 2A4. All five original charges were for more than fifty, but less than 225 grams of cocaine, and carry a mandatory minimum sentence of ten to twenty years.

(beat)

Ms. Chesney? You have the floor.

MS. CHESNEY

Your Honor, I'd like to remind the court that this young man has no record prior to his first sentence. He cooperated with federal law enforcement agencies and testified against his suppliers. His prison behavior record over the past four years is spotless. For these reasons, the defense requests leniency when resentencing Mr. Bryars.

Cherry Chesney returns to her seat.

JUDGE BONES

Mr. Taglioni?

Bart looks on with pure hatred as Sam Taglioni stands to present.

TIME CUT:

Judge Bones nods at the bailiff.

BAILIFF

All rise!

JUDGE BONES

When considering this appeal and all the constituents involved, I am more confident than ever in the original determination of this court. Marion Bart Bryars, you will continue to be remanded to the custody of the Michigan Department of Corrections for a period of six to twenty years.

Judge Bones BANGS his gavel.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY JAIL CELL - DAY

GUARD escorts Bart, in orange issues, back to his holding cell.

BART (V.O.)

A deep and unnatural hatred for Sam Taglioni and Judge Bones surges through me, Mom. In the last four years I've learned that I do hate really well. And I hate that. I hate that I hate so well.

EXT. FDC OAKDALE - RUNNING TRACK - DAY

It's raining bullets. Bart runs hard, pounding hatred on the track.

INT. FDC OAKDALE - RECREATION BUILDING - DAY

SUPER: SIX WEEKS LATER

T-Funk's set up to jam. Bart walks in with his Telecaster, the mini-amp, and a document. He hands the letter to T-Funk.

T-FUNK
(reading)
Shit, man. June 1991? You ain't
fuckin' with me, are ya?

BART
My new out date. One year.

They both start laughing. A high five. T-Funk rereads the document.

T-FUNK
(poker face)
They ain't fuckin' with you, are they?

BART
Believe me, I'm still wondering how
that happened. I'm eligible for
work release *right now*.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

BART
My new out date was June 1991.
After a stopover at bird-shit-
fucking-Jackson, I'd serve out a
year in some minimum security camp
in the Upper Peninsula.

SKIPPY
Did you ever figure that one out?

Bart holds up a finger.

BART
I will.

INT. FDC OAKDALE - TV ROOM - DAY (BEGIN FLASHBACK)

Malte, T-Funk, and several other INMATES have a send-off party for Bart. It's not without emotion.

BART
I'm sure gonna miss you guys.

EXT. JACKSON PENITENTIARY - SALLY PORT - EVENING

PRISON TRANSPORT VAN pulls in after the first gate slides open and stops. Two more gates ahead.

EXT. PRISON VAN - PARKED

Bart exits the van with the chain gang.

INT. JACKSON PENITENTIARY - CELL BLOCK EIGHT - NIGHT

Same block, 800 cells. Five stories high. An atrium, bolted-down metal dining tables and chairs. Same broken windows, same PIGEONS (Jackson Air Force) in the rafters. Filled to the brim with INMATES. LOUD.

INT. JACKSON PENITENTIARY - BART'S CELL

Same six-by-nine shitty cell on four stories up.

INT. JACKSON PENITENTIARY - CLASSROOM - DAY

Bart sits at a standard metal desk in a room filled with other seated INMATES. The room is flanked by GUARDS. All inmates have bubble answer sheets and No. 2 pencils.

Suited PROCTOR walks in. Sits at a desk, TURNS ON a cassette player.

 OLDER BART (V.O.)
 It seemed dumb to go through all
 that stuff again.

INT. JACKSON PENITENTIARY - BART'S CELL - MORNING

Chow time. Bart puts on his prison-issue flip-flops and waits at his cell door.

INT. JACKSON PENITENTIARY - CELL BLOCK EIGHT - LEVEL FOUR - MORNING

The entire deck of cell doors on Bart's level SLIDE open all at once. All except his.

INT. JACKSON PENITENTIARY - BART'S CELL - MORNING

Bart looks up and down at the bars in dismay. Steps in closer. INMATES on either side of him step out onto the catwalk.

INT. JACKSON PENITENTIARY - CELL BLOCK EIGHT - LEVEL FOUR - MORNING

The entire deck of cell doors on this level SLIDE closed at once. The INMATES begin walking in line down the catwalk past Bart's cell. Bart talks to them through the bars.

 BART
 Hey, my door malfunctioned. Can you
 send a guard up?

INMATES continue walking by, mostly ignoring him.

 BART
 Hey, hey!

Bart can see INMATES from his level sitting down in the atrium with their trays already.

BART
 (louder)
 Hey! I need an officer up here! Help!

Bart yanks off one of his flip-flops and starts RAKING it across the bars while he continues YELLING.

BART
 Officer! Up here! Help!

GUARD lunges out of nowhere, mug up to the bars.

GUARD
 Shut the fuck up, you fucking
 shithead! That's a goddamn ticket
 for you, you piece of shit!

INT. JACKSON PENITENTIARY - THE HOLE - DAY

Back to solitary. Bart sits on his bunk and reviews his ticket.

BART (V.O.)
 For that disorderly conduct, Mom, I
 got ninety days tacked onto my out
 date. And just when I think it
 can't get any worse...

CLOSE ON TICKET

The release date (according to the ticket) is June 1992.

BART
 That's fucking *ninety-two*.

Bart stares at the ticket in disbelief. *How did that happen?*

INT. JACKSON PENITENTIARY - PAY PHONE - DAY - INTERCUT

Bart talks with his mom, Dianne.

INT. SUBURBAN RANCH-STYLE HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Dianne rifles through documentation on her kitchen counter.

BART
 Does yours say ninety-one or ninety-two?

DIANNE
 (still rifling)
 It's ninety-one, honey. I remember
 that much.

Bart hangs his head and squeezes back tears.

DIANNE
 Bart. Bart, listen to me. We'll get
 through this, okay? Just like we
 did the rest, hon. Just like we did
 the rest.

Dianne locates the document and continues talking to him.

BART (V.O.)

You called Lansing about it, and as it turns out, 1991 was an M.D.O.C. typo by an unspecified secretary. I've just based my whole decision about leaving a safer federal system in Louisiana for a state system in Michigan one year too soon. A whole extra year for a fucking typo.

EXT. MICHIGAN DEPT OF CORRECTIONS PRISON VAN - MOVING - DAY - INTERCUT

Rolls along a winding and hilly rural logging road in Upper Peninsula.

EXT. WALL - THE LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR MONASTERY - DAY

Dianne's on a kneeler facing the visitation booth. She talks to a NUN.

BART (V.O.)

When you hit a particularly low point one time, Mom, you told me you visited a nun at The Little Sisters of the Poor.

INT. MICHIGAN DEPT OF CORRECTIONS PRISON VAN - MOVING - DAY

CLOSE ON Bart, riding in standard prison issues *unshackled* with NINE INMATES. Bart takes in the sign, CAMP OJIBWAY MDOC. The van rolls past rows of WW2 army barracks bordered by a ten feet of cyclone fence.

EXT. WALL - THE LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR MONASTERY - DAY

The nun talks to Dianne.

BART (V.O.)

After you told her about me, the nun said that perhaps God was sitting me down in one place for a while so I could discover who I was.

INT. CAMP OJIBWAY - WOODSHOP - DAY

A few standard workbenches in the middle of the room. FIVE inmates work on projects like custom jewelry boxes and clocks.

Bart comes in, safety goggles in hand. Walks around bundles of wood scraps piled near the door. Looks.

The shop's equipped with a table saw, a routing table, a bandsaw, drill-press, planer, scroll saw, and lathe.

An INMATE WHINES a board through a planer. Ear-splitting. He shifts the Skoal in his lower lip. Kills the planer, raises his goggles. It's Tex! He's confused.

TEX

Bama?

BART

Hey!

They bro hug.

TEX
Ain't you out yet with the knee, man?
(looking)
You know, the fucking bus?

Bart chuckles.

BART
It wasn't massive enough.

TEX
Jesus.
(laughing, spits)
Well, shit. Ain't that the way.

BART
(about the board)
That's smooth.

Tex blows off the sawdust and holds it up.

TEX
Cherry. Come from that pallet over there.

He points to two crappy pallets leaning against the wall.

BART
What? For real?

TEX
Yep.
(pointing, bundles by door)
We toss the pine and scrap wood by the
main gate. She's piling up on us today.

He puts the board back on the planer.

TEX
Hey, why don't you run a bundle out there?
When you get back, I'll show you around.

EXT. CAMP OJIBWAY - MAIN GATE - DAY

Bart carries a bundle under each arm toward a large wood pile near the gate. Sets down one, hurls the other on top. Picks up the other bundle and--he sees the front gate is *open*.

Un-fucking believeable. Bart looks around. No guards on point, nothing. *He could just--*

EXT. WALL - THE LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR MONASTERY - DAY

The nun talks to Dianne.

BART (V.O.)
You said she mentioned it's hard to
decide what to do sometimes. You know,
Mom, I think she might have a point.

EXT. CAMP OJIBWAY - MAIN GATE - DAY

Bart stares through the open gate across the parking lot toward the woods, the great beyond. *He could just--*

Bart closes his eyes, takes a deep breath. A NOISE. He opens his eyes.

A RABBIT darts through the main gate and runs along the edge of the hurricane fence. Bart follows it with his eyes. He tosses the second bundle on top, turns, and walks back toward the woodshop.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - EVENING (END FLASHBACK)

Skippy has drifted off, a disappointing finale. Bart regards him quietly for a moment, the man he hates to hate. A NURSE walks in.

NURSE
(loudly)
Time for your P.M. meds, Mr. Taglioni...

Skippy startles, but doesn't waken. The nurse turns to Bart.

BART
I'm heading out.

NURSE
I'll let you finish up here then,
Mr. Bryars.

Bart nods, and she leaves. He stands, watching Taglioni sleep.

INT. MUSKEGON COUNTY COURTROOM - DAY (BEGIN FLASHBACK MONTAGE)

Taglioni stands at a table behind Bart (in USCG blues) with a glare that could raise blisters.

Taglioni delivers his opening statement and points at Bart (in purple shirt and tie) with his fickle finger of fate.

When Taglioni sees Bart (in white shirt, black tie), he abruptly ends his conversation with the bailiff.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - EVENING (END FLASHBACK MONTAGE)

Bart tosses the cups in a trash can and lingers bedside for a moment.

CLOSE ON

Skippy's hospital bracelet reads: Taglioni, Samuel.

Bart reinstates Skippy's right-hand restraint and walks out.

EXT. ASCENSION ST. THOMAS MIDTOWN HOSPITAL - EVENING

Twinkling Christmas lights and Jen meet Bart streetside. He's surprised to see her here.

BART
Hey?

He walks out into the frosty air and hugs her.

JEN
It's a nice night for a walk.

BART
Sure is.

They stroll arm-in-arm.

JEN
How is he?

BART
Iffy. Locked up without a key.

JEN
No.

She stops and faces Bart.

JEN
He does not deserve your pity.
After what he did to you?

BART
Some people might say he was simply
doing his job.

They continue walking arm-in-arm.

JEN
No. You cannot convince me that man
ever served justice.

BART
Funny thing about it, hon. Last
time I looked, she was still
wearing a blindfold.

Jen gooses him.

JEN
You.

BART
We have a good life, you know?

Bart looks up. Jen follows. It's snowing...in freakin' Nashville.

BART
Well, how about that?

They continue down Elliston.

EXT. SIGMA PHI OMEGA FRAT HOUSE - NIGHT (BEGIN FLASHBACK)

A mid-nineties keg party in full swing. COLLEGE CO-EDS hang out on the front porch drinking from red SOLO cups or making out.

INT. SIGMA PHI OMEGA FRAT HOUSE - NIGHT

Packed, standing room only.

INT. SIGMA PHI OMEGA FRAT HOUSE - BALLROOM - NIGHT

A large clubbing area with high ceilings and a stage. Three mic stands are draped in pink and blue feather boas. Tube lights.

Par-64 can and vertigo lights cast over the dance floor, a CROWD.

On stage, a neon lip backdrop over sequin drapes. Neon palm trees. A spinning overhead disco ball. A BAND is cued to start.

LEAD GUITAR PLAYER in stage costume with parachute pants and platinum spiked hair stands with his back toward the audience.

An attractive blonde female lead singer, JENNIFER PRICE [BRYARS] (21, white), takes the mic and sings the intro: Madonna's "Like a Prayer."

JENNIFER
Life is a mystery,
Everyone must stand alone...

Sorority girls standing four-deep along the stage SING with her.

JENNIFER
I hear you call my name
And it feels like home...

LEAD GUITAR
One, two, three, four...

Lead guitar player turns. He's wearing gold-rimmed Elvis sunglasses and--*it's Bart!*

BART
(playing, singing in unison)
When you call my name, it's like a little
prayer, I'm down on my knees, I wanna
take you there, In the midnight hour, I
can feel your power, Just like a prayer,
you know I'll take you there...

And the party goes on.

POSTSCRIPT WITH STILLS

MUSIC UP: CRY HARD, CRY FAST

Bart Bryars was released from Camp Lehman on July 6, 1992.

He bought a houseboat with \$40,000 from his personal injury lawsuit against the Michigan Department of Corrections.

Bart's houseboat was destroyed during hurricane Erin in 1995.

Bart later married Jennifer Price, who ended up joining his band as the lead female vocalist.

Pepper Bryars worked as a journalist and congressional aide before serving as a presidential appointee in the Defense Department. He was twice awarded the Office of the Secretary of Defense Award for Exceptional Public Service.

Malte Dollinger owns Swiss Aviation Group AG Airline in Switzerland and has chartered flights for the British band, Iron Maiden.

"Homeboy" Jay Carter is a career car salesman in Mobile, Alabama.

Thaddeus "T-Funk" Jackson is the producer of All Funk Radio Show, an all-Black party band in Dallas.

Bart and Jen's band, Read My Lips, performed note-for-note covers of classic '80s hits along the southeastern seaboard.

Tragic Kingdom followed suit as a tribute band with shows staged for festivals and college town events.

Sunday Night Social showcased Bart's original rock songs in several notable New York nightclubs including Kenny's Castaways, Sullivan Hall, and The Bitter End.

Sugar Beat, a funk band, performed in smaller venues around Manhattan and Brooklyn like Rockwood Music Hall, The Bowery Electric, and Arlene's Grocery.

Bart currently plays lead guitar with The Feels, a Nashville-based band that incorporates jazz, blues, rock, funk, and progressive.

Bart also wrote two full-length musicals and the libretto to an opera while living and performing in New York City.

All of his bands produced albums, singles, videos, and soundtracks.

FADE OUT