

GONE TO GROUND

Episode 1 - "VDL"

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EXT. DESERT VIADUCT - DAWN

A boom lift rises through the last blue of night.

CARLOS VEGA, late forties, compact and sleepless, steps from the basket onto thirty feet of unfinished viaduct. Rebar runs ahead of him in a rust-colored grid. Beyond it, yucca and open desert.

He checks snap ties as he walks. A concrete convoy is due at noon. Two hundred yards of cement. After that, whatever is wrong becomes permanent.

A quarter mile ahead, the SURVEY TEAM drives stakes along the alignment.

Carlos's phone BUZZES.

ON THE SCREEN - a DESERT TORTOISE craning its neck toward the camera.

Carlos keys his radio.

CARLOS

How many?

RAYMOND (V.O.)

Twenty. Maybe twenty-five.

Carlos closes his eyes.

He kicks a half-full water bottle from the deck.

It drops thirty feet and lands without drama in the sand.

CARLOS

Get video. Geotag everything.

RAYMOND (V.O.)

Copy.

CARLOS

Then send your guys home.

A beat.

RAYMOND (V.O.)

One more you need to see.

Another image arrives.

The flat underside of a tortoise. Four legs splayed helplessly. Along the shell: a strip of ALUMINUM fixed with two small rivets.

CLOSE ON A BARCODE AND CHINESE CHARACTERS.

INT. CALIFORNIA SENATE CHAMBER - MORNING

A vote board glows above the chamber. The BULLET TRAIN REAUTHORIZATION has the numbers.

SENATOR RITTENHOUSE, sixties, expensive and damp, sits at his desk with the expectant air of a man waiting to be congratulated.

At the rear entrance, TASHA WILLIAMS, early forties, enters in heels and a dark suit. Carlos's tortoise footage is already open on her phone.

A FLOOR AIDE reaches her at speed.

FLOOR AIDE

Speaker's office says habitat hold.

Tasha crosses to Rittenhouse and puts the phone where he can see it.

TASHA

Tortoises on the alignment. Tagged.
Video's out.

RITTENHOUSE

How many?

TASHA

Enough.

A PAGE hurries a folded note toward the SPEAKER. He reads it. Checks his phone.

The gavel comes down twice.

SPEAKER

The matter is held over until eight
a.m. tomorrow.

The chamber erupts around them.

RITTENHOUSE

You told me the alignment was
clean.

TASHA

It was clean yesterday.

Rittenhouse holds her look. Neither says Jones's name.

RITTENHOUSE

Don't let him get away with this.

INT. EAST VALLEY HIGH - PATEL'S AP ECON CLASS - AFTERNOON

Post-lunch narcosis.

One boy sleeps with his head against the wall, mouth open.
Phones glow under desks.

At the front, MR. PATEL, fifties, strokes a large mustache
sitting between two massive dimples.

ENRIQUE, seventeen, long-limbed and permanently amused,
raises a hand with counterfeit sincerity.

ENRIQUE

Hold up. It's called a hostile
takeover?

PATEL

That is what I said, Mr. Navarro.

ENRIQUE

But if they don't want you to take
them over--

PATEL

That would account for the
hostility.

A few laughs.

PATEL turns toward a photograph of himself ringing a stock
exchange bell years ago.

PATEL

When I was with Halcyon Partners--

The class begins putting away notebooks. Enrique sits back,
pleased with himself.

JAVIER JIMENEZ, seventeen, does not look at Patel.

He sits beside the only window in the room with a straight
line of sight across the street.

Through chain link and heat shimmer: GAITHER MIDDLE SCHOOL.

On the rear bleachers, ALEX JIMENEZ, thirteen, sits between
BETO and AUGUSTO, sharing a bag of chips.

Beside Javier, GIO draws a human jaw with astonishing
precision. He is seventeen, almost Javier's double at first
glance, except Gio wears a mop and Javier is high and tight.
A quiet seems to have settled permanently around Gio.

Javier watches the middle school.

Two older boys cross the Gaither quad.

ITCHY wears a pristine cap with the sticker still on the bill. His smile is bright, vacant, practiced.

SCRATCHY follows in a hooded sweatshirt, hands deep in his pockets, expression tired enough to look dangerous.

Itchy takes the bleachers two at a time.

He sits beside Alex without asking. Reaches into Alex's chips. Throws an arm over his shoulder -- easy street love.

Alex stiffens - then lets the arm stay.

Javier leans closer to the glass.

Itchy talks. We cannot hear the words, only see their effect. Alex laughs once. Beto and Augusto look down at their phones.

Scratchy stands below the bleachers and scans the quad.

The lunch bell rings.

Itchy gets up. Below the camera line, his hands flash three letters: S - R - V.

Alex gives him the dap.

PATEL (O.S.)
Mr. Jimenez.

Javier turns.

PATEL
Would you like to explain why
economies of scale encourage
consolidation?

Javier glances at the board.

JAVIER
Fixed costs spread across more
units. Marginal cost drops.
Competitors either sell or die.

PATEL
You see? Some of us can look out a
window and listen at the same time.

Enrique looks toward the middle school.

ENRIQUE
What can I say, Wi-Fi sucks in our
building.

The bell RINGS.

Students rise. Javier stays at the window until Alex
disappears behind the middle school gym.

PATEL
Mr. Jimenez. Stay.

Enrique stops too.

PATEL
Not you. The world needs you
somewhere else.

ENRIQUE
Finally somebody says it.

Enrique leaves. Gio closes his sketchbook, tucks it under
one arm and heads into the hall. Javier follows.

INT. PATEL'S CLASSROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The room empties. Patel opens a plastic container and offers
Javier a samosa.

Javier takes one because refusing would take longer.

PATEL
You completed this course last
year.

JAVIER
Your room has a better view.

PATEL
I am not a window.

JAVIER
You got the mustache for it.

Patel smiles despite himself.

PATEL
You have enough credits to graduate
in June. More than enough. Your
counselor says you have not
submitted a single final college
application.

JAVIER
I'm doing the scholarship stuff.

PATEL
Scholarship stuff is not an
application. It is how you avoid an
application while appearing
responsible.

Javier looks toward the window again.

PATEL
Your brother has a mother. He has a
school. He has a police officer
with a very theatrical program.

JAVIER
He has me.

PATEL
Yes. That is the problem.

Javier's look hardens. Patel lowers the line.

PATEL
Look out for Javier first. Your
family will survive without you.

JAVIER
You don't know my family.

PATEL
No. I know young men who make
themselves indispensable so they
never have to leave.

Javier sets the uneaten samosa on the desk.

PATEL
Take it. You can disagree and eat
at the same time.

Javier takes it.

INT. EAST VALLEY HIGH - HALLWAY / STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

Students flood the corridor.

Javier, Gio and RAFFA move with the current. Raffa is
movie-star good-looking and, like Javier, could have
graduated by now.

RAFFA
Relax. He tags three walls, gets
caught on the fourth, Mendez brings
in los veteranos, and one of them
tells Alex Papi's gonna put salt on
his ass. Maybe some Tapatío.

JAVIER
That's your plan.

Raffa plants his arm over Javier's shoulders.

RAFFA
Then you take him to Walmart for
new chones. Whole thing over by
spring.

Javier isn't laughing.

RAFFA
He's thirteen.

JAVIER
Those two mopes been working him
since August.

RAFFA
All thirteen-year-olds are stupid.
My sister belongs in a cage.

They reach the main office. Raffa pushes through the door.

RAFFA
I'll tell Mendez to save him an
aisle seat.

Raffa disappears.

Gio works his jaw side to side.

GIO
Only double-hinged joint in the
body.

JAVIER
What is?

GIO
Jaw. Mine mostly goes up and down.
Still clicks, though.

He clicks it for Javier.

A knot of freshmen blocks the hall. Gio slips through
without breaking stride. Javier follows him through.

Gio continues to wander down the hallway toward the
abandoned end where kids go to vape and pee when the
bathrooms are closed. At a trophy case, Gio stops. Old team
photographs. Names under glass. Generations of kids who got
to leave.

Javier heads toward the double doors to leave, then turns back.

JAVIER
Spring's coming faster than you
think.

Gio looks over.

JAVIER
Needles sisters'll change the
locks. Put your shit on the curb.

GIO
Emancipated.

He gives the word a private little smile.

EXT. STUDY HALL - ABANDONED LOT ABOVE DOGTOWN - LATER

A vacant lot on a rise above the dry basin.

Two abandoned ORANGE CORDUROY COUCHES face Dogtown. Between them, a wooden TELEPHONE CABLE SPOOL lies on its side as a table.

Five pairs of shoes rest on it. A small liberty.

On Javier's phone, the group chat is named STUDY HALL.

No books are visible anywhere.

Enrique sprawls across one couch. Chuey eats hot chips. Sergio has the back off an old portable speaker and is touching wires together. Raffa arrives late with a stack of misdirected school mail.

RAFFA
You guys smell like ass.

He daps down the row, then takes a cold slice of pizza from the cable spool.

Gio arrives and pulls up a milk crate. He takes a school burrito from his backpack and unwraps it. He puts both feet on the cable spool. The soles are dirty enough to make this feel illegal. Raffa follows.

Across the basin, tents and patched structures of DOGTOWN shimmer in the heat. A woman in work clothes leads a little girl toward the boulevard. ORAL-B, forties, crosses another direction brushing his teeth.

Sergio touches two wires. The speaker SHRIEKS. Everyone flinches except Gio.

SERGIO

There.

JAVIER

There what?

SERGIO

Found the bad wire.

Raffa opens an envelope.

RAFFA

Somebody named Jazmine Acosta got perfect attendance in 2009. The district's been mailing it to the office once a semester for fourteen years.

CHUEY

Maybe she died.

ENRIQUE

Then she still ain't missed a day.

A LITTLE GIRL in a school uniform emerges from one of the tents and crosses the basin with her mother. The mother checks her watch, hurries her along.

Javier watches Oral-B push a shopping cart with an air conditioner balanced inside, toothbrush still in his mouth.

ENRIQUE

Patel's skeleton needs a name.

GIO

McRibbs.

Enrique points at him.

ENRIQUE

There it is.

No one moves. Traffic hums below. The boys eat, argue, waste time.

INT. PACOIMA ABATTOIR - KILL FLOOR - LATE AFTERNOON

Steam. Stainless steel. Hooks moving overhead.

IMELDA JIMENEZ, late forties, works a boning knife along a hanging cut of meat. Her back catches. She waits for the line to hide it.

Beside her, MARTA falls behind. The FOREMAN taps his clipboard and points to the clock.

FOREMAN
Marta. Again.

MARTA
The line sped up.

FOREMAN
The line doesn't have a timecard.

Imelda reaches over and takes two of Marta's cuts without being asked.

FOREMAN
That's not your station.

IMELDA
Now it is.

He steps closer. His Spanish is managerial and careful.

FOREMAN
She misses quota, the minutes come off.

IMELDA
Then the line is stealing minutes.
Dock the line.

A few workers hear. Nobody looks over.

Imelda's phone vibrates in a clear plastic sleeve beneath her apron.

ON SCREEN: JAVIER - Dinner? You coming home?

She types with blood-stiff gloves.

ON SCREEN: DOUBLE. NOODLES IN FREEZER. CHECK ALEX.

MARTA
Your boys eat frozen food every night because of me.

IMELDA
My boys eat. Keep cutting.

The foreman watches from the end of the line.

Imelda pockets the phone and takes the next cut.

EXT. VAN NUYS BOULEVARD / THE SHOE - AFTER SCHOOL

Javier walks past emptied storefronts and the places that survived them: MANTRAP NAILS, a windowless bar, a Salvadoran restaurant, DEEZ CUTZ.

VALLEY SAVINGS rises behind them, ten abandoned stories with strange steel arches on the roof like luggage handles.

LESLIE appears on Javier's phone by FaceTime. Seventeen, disciplined, pretty without arranging herself for the camera.

LESLIE
Check your calendar. Next month.
Lupe's board meet-and-greet.

JAVIER
I don't know what a board is.

LESLIE
Rich people sitting down. You
standing up. Scholarship happens.

JAVIER
Sounds natural.

LESLIE
She came out of the Gardens, Javi.
She gets it.

Ahead, DOLORES wrestles a stainless pushcart over a broken curb. A wheel skews sideways.

Before Javier reaches her, DELILAH - a polished flatbed tow truck - eases to the curb.

BETZAIDA TORRES climbs down. Early thirties. Broad through the chest, close-cropped hair, work shirt buttoned clean. No wasted movement.

She crouches by the wheel. The weld is old, ugly and hers.

BETZAIDA
You broke my weld.

DOLORES
Your weld broke itself.

BETZAIDA
Metal don't break itself. People
load five hundred pounds of ice on
one side.

DOLORES
People buy from the sunny side.

BETZAIDA
You break this axle again, I'm
charging storage.

DOLORES
You been threatening storage ten
years.

BETZAIDA
Interest been running.

Dolores gives Javier a paper cup of shaved ice without
asking whether he wants one.

DOLORES
For the accountant.

JAVIER
I'm not an accountant.

BETZAIDA
Then quit opening my mail.

Betzaida works the wheel straight and locks it with a
practiced kick.

BETZAIDA
They fix the elevator?

Dolores looks at her.

BETZAIDA
Right.

DOLORES
Six floors is good for the heart.

BETZAIDA
Not when you push that refrigerator
up it.

DOLORES
I pull going up. Push going down.
I'm not stupid.

Betzaida tests the wheel again, then wipes grease on her
pants.

BETZAIDA
I'll come Saturday. Put a real axle
under it.

DOLORES
You said that last Saturday.

BETZAIDA
Last Saturday you weren't blocking
traffic.

Betzaida's phone CHIRPS. A CHP dispatch.

DISPATCH (V.O.)
Mission, 10-54. Northbound
four-oh-five, south of Victory.
Ambulance en route.

Betzaida opens Delilah's passenger door.

BETZAIDA
Ponerse las pilas, Javi.

Javier waves at Leslie's screen.

BETZAIDA
Later for lovergirl.

LESLIE
I heard that.

Betzaida gets in.

INT. DELILAH - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

The cab is immaculate.

Javier opens a stack of Mission Tow mail from the console.
Insurance premium. Bank statement.

BETZAIDA
Lester usually leaves those closed.

JAVIER
Lester thinks APR is a radio
station.

He scans the statement.

JAVIER
You're running payroll off your
personal card again.

BETZAIDA
Front-wheel drive on this hook.
Clip inside the bushings.

JAVIER
Ninety-day receivables are killing
you.

BETZAIDA
You hear me?

JAVIER
I hear you avoiding me.

BETZAIDA
Good. Multitask.

She checks her mirror.

A BERGOSIAN TOW TRUCK appears two lanes over.

BETZAIDA
Fat Man's moving on it.

She signals, changes lanes, takes the opening from him without looking over.

BETZAIDA
Cocksucker ain't stepping in front.

EXT. 405 FREEWAY - HIT-AND-RUN SCENE - EARLY EVENING

Traffic pinches around a wall of emergency vehicles.

The Land Rover sits crushed against the K-rail. Passenger doors gone. Front suspension collapsed. It kneels on the asphalt.

Delilah threads past a BERGOSIAN rig and reaches the scene first.

A CHP MOTOR OFFICER sees Betzaida and waves her through.

MOTOR OFFICER
Need the two right lanes in eight minutes.

BETZAIDA
Give me six.

She jumps down, surveys the angle, the debris, the missing suspension.

Jones, bloodless and furious, is rolled toward an ambulance. A PARAMEDIC holds gauze to a shallow cut near his hairline. Jones keeps his eyes on the Land Rover.

Betzaida walks the length of the wreck once. She sees the missing passenger doors, the crushed suspension, the long black transfer along the median.

BETZAIDA
Bike hit him?

MOTOR OFFICER
Box truck. Kept going.

BETZAIDA
Box truck didn't panic.

MOTOR OFFICER
You writing the report now?

BETZAIDA
No. Just saving you embarrassment
later.

She directs Javier under the front end.

BETZAIDA
Inside the control arm. Not the tie
rod.

JAVIER
I know.

BETZAIDA
Then surprise me.

Javier crawls in with the chain. Broken safety glass grinds
beneath his shoulder.

The wipers scrape uselessly across the cracked windshield.

Javier studies the hood: long compression wrinkles running
with the body, not across it.

He looks down the scrape along the K-rail. One hundred yards
of black paint and pulverized metal.

Not a sideswipe. A sustained shove.

BETZAIDA
Javi.

He clips the chain correctly.

JAVIER
Ready.

Betzaida works the controls. Delilah takes the weight. The
first lift pulls the Land Rover crooked.

BETZAIDA
Stop.

She drops it six inches, walks around, shortens one chain
and resets the angle.

MOTOR OFFICER
Four minutes.

BETZAIDA
Then quit talking to me.

The second lift brings the wreck square.

Javier opens the driver's door to put the transmission in neutral.

The interior is immaculate. No blood. Airbags still folded in the wheel and dash.

The burner blinks in the cup holder.

ON SCREEN: VDL PACKAGE DELIVERED.

Javier picks it up, glances toward the ambulance, then opens the glove compartment to put it away.

The Walther's muzzle points at his chest.

He freezes.

The Motor Officer shouts over traffic.

MOTOR OFFICER
We moving or decorating?

Javier places the burner beside the gun and closes the glove compartment.

JAVIER
Neutral.

Betzaida rolls the wreck onto the bed.

As the ambulance doors close, Jones looks through the rear windows at his Land Rover leaving in the opposite direction.

INT. AMBULANCE - MOVING - MOMENTS LATER

The paramedic shines a light in Jones's eyes.

PARAMEDIC
Follow the pen.

Jones follows it while dialing with his other hand.

DANA (V.O.)
Yeah.

JONES
My vehicle went to Mission Tow.
Panorama City.

DANA (V.O.)
You okay?

JONES

There's a phone in the cup holder.
Get it before the owner inventories
the car.

DANA (V.O.)

What owner?

JONES

Betzaida Torres. Do not bring
police into it. Do not touch the
gun unless you have to.

The paramedic takes the phone gently from Jones's hand.

PARAMEDIC

No calls until we clear your neck.

Jones looks at him.

PARAMEDIC

Hospital rule.

JONES

Then clear it.

INT. DELILAH - TOWING THE LAND ROVER - NIGHT

The wreck fills the rear window, black metal riding high
under the amber beacon.

Javier watches it in the mirror.

BETZAIDA

You gonna marry it?

JAVIER

Box truck kept him against the rail
a hundred yards.

BETZAIDA

Maybe he owed the box truck money.

JAVIER

People swerve on impact. Driver
held the line.

Betzaida checks the mirror once.

BETZAIDA

Passenger side opened like that and
no blood.

JAVIER

No airbags.

BETZAIDA
So somebody wanted the car dead,
not him.

JAVIER
Or wanted him scared.

BETZAIDA
You applying to colleges or
homicide now?

JAVIER
Leslie put another board thing on
my calendar.

Javier opens the insurance envelope again.

BETZAIDA
And that ain't your mail.

JAVIER
It's my payroll when you miss it.

BETZAIDA
I haven't missed payroll.

JAVIER
You moved it to your card. That's
missing it with interest.

Betzaida drives a block in silence.

BETZAIDA
You keep one thing alive, people
start calling it yours.

JAVIER
Mission is yours.

BETZAIDA
Then let me worry about it.

JAVIER
You don't.

BETZAIDA
I worry driving. Looks like work.

She turns into the yard.

EXT. MISSION TOW YARD - NIGHT

Delilah backs through the gate into a dirt lot filled with
damaged and impounded cars.

At the center sits THE BOX, a hardened trailer with thick Plexiglass and a solid-core door.

Betzaida drops the Land Rover exactly where she wants it, rear to the fence, driver's side visible from the Box.

LESTER, wiry and grease-dark, starts toward it with a clipboard.

BETZAIDA
Not that one. Investigative hold.
Photograph all four corners before
you breathe on it.

LESTER
It's missing one corner.

BETZAIDA
Then three. You know how numbers
work.

A CUSTOMER at the window pounds the Plexiglass.

CUSTOMER
You people stole my car.

BETZAIDA
We stole it with a city contract
and a police officer watching.
Makes us terrible criminals.

CUSTOMER
I got cash.

BETZAIDA
Then the sign with the hours should
be easy to read.

CUSTOMER
My insulin's in there.

Betzaida changes immediately.

BETZAIDA
Which car?

CUSTOMER
Silver Accord.

BETZAIDA
Lester, escort. He opens the door,
you stand where the camera sees
both hands. Medication only.

The customer stops pounding. Lester takes him.

A Bergosian driver leans from his truck outside the gate.

BERGOSIAN DRIVER
CHP said split call.

BETZAIDA
CHP said clear lanes. You watched
me do it.

BERGOSIAN DRIVER
Kristops is gonna call.

BETZAIDA
Tell him use a phone with the big
buttons.

The driver leaves.

Javier checks the Land Rover's registration.

GEORGE JONES. An address in Beverly Hills.

He watches Betzaida juggle the customer, the radio and a
ringing office line.

He almost tells her about the glove compartment.

She catches him staring.

BETZAIDA
Put it on the sheet or quit looking
at it.

Javier looks at the tow inventory form.

JAVIER
You ever see a P-thirty-eight in a
glovebox?

Betzaida stops entering the tow.

BETZAIDA
You ever decide when to mention a
gun?

JAVIER
It was pointed at me. Took a
second.

BETZAIDA
Then you closed it.

JAVIER
Yeah.

BETZAIDA

Good. Put it on the sheet.

Javier writes under PERSONAL PROPERTY: FIREARM IN GLOVE COMPARTMENT. CELL PHONE IN CUP HOLDER.

Betzaida reads over his shoulder.

BETZAIDA

Secured in vehicle. No make, no serial until we photograph.

JAVIER

Why not?

BETZAIDA

Because if it disappears, I want the report to say I knew there was a gun. I don't want it to say I handled the murder weapon.

Javier crosses out the specifics and writes: ITEMS SECURED IN VEHICLE.

INT. IMELDA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A small apartment carrying too many lives.

Rebelde plays muted on the television. A laundry cart holds folded towels beside the door. Medical bills sit in a red-letter stack.

Imelda stirs oxtail stock into instant noodles while speaking rapid Spanish into her phone.

IMELDA

(into phone)

No. If she worked the hours, you pay the hours. I don't care what he wrote--

Javier enters, kisses her cheek, starts sorting mail without being asked.

IMELDA

You smell like freeway.

JAVIER

Freeway smells like brakes. I smell like money.

IMELDA

Then put some on the table.

He removes two red notices and puts them in his backpack.

Imelda sees.

IMELDA
Those are mine.

JAVIER
They're addressed to the house.

IMELDA
My back, my bill.

JAVIER
My mailbox.

She gives him a look. He keeps the bills. This argument has happened before and ended the same way.

The microwave BEEPS.

Alex comes in, late, trailing anger. One pant leg is down now.

IMELDA
Donde estabas?

Alex drops his backpack on a chair.

ALEX
Around.

IMELDA
No text. Nada. I worry too much.

She reaches for his chin. He jerks away.

ALEX
What?

The word carries enough contempt to stop the room.

Javier steps close.

JAVIER
Grosero. Apologize.

Alex looks at him, not Imelda.

Imelda cuts between them with a dish towel.

IMELDA
Noodles tonight. Posole tomorrow.
Real dinner.

ALEX
You said posole yesterday.

IMELDA
Yesterday I was lying. Tomorrow I
have hominy.

Alex almost smiles. Imelda sees it and does not claim the
victory.

She removes her apron and grabs her coat.

JAVIER
You're going back?

IMELDA
Marta's girl got sick.

JAVIER
You already did ten.

IMELDA
Then six more makes sixteen. See?
All that school is helping.

JAVIER
Your doctor said no doubles.

IMELDA
My doctor has a chair.

JAVIER
Ma.

IMELDA
And health insurance.

She kisses Alex's head despite his resistance. At the door,
she points to Javier's backpack.

IMELDA
Put those bills back.

Javier does not move.

IMELDA
Tomorrow.

She gives Javier a look that says DO NOT MAKE THIS WORSE,
and leaves.

The screen door bounces twice.

Javier points at Alex's pant leg.

JAVIER
Not showing off the ankle now.

ALEX

Fuck you.

Alex disappears into the bedroom.

Javier divides noodles into two bowls and sets them on the coffee table.

Alex returns in a clean Primitive T-shirt and new Vans. He wipes an invisible speck from one shoe.

Javier notices.

JAVIER

Those new?

ALEX

No.

JAVIER

I got eyes.

ALEX

Congratulations.

Alex plays Candy Crush. Doesn't touch the noodles.

JAVIER

Those guys at lunch. Not Beto and Augusto.

ALEX

Here we go.

JAVIER

They're recruiting. They score points bringing you in.

ALEX

Sounds like somebody watched Blood In Blood Out again.

JAVIER

All that down-for-the-barrio shit--I get it, Alex. The homies know how to sell you feeling like you count.

ALEX

I count.

Javier breathes through it.

JAVIER

They did this experiment. Finland
or someplace. Drop a frog in
boiling water, it jumps out. Put it
in room-temperature water and heat
it slow--

ALEX

--frog never notices. Ends up
boiling.

JAVIER

Exactly.

ALEX

Except frogs jump out. Google it.

Javier has no answer.

Alex stands.

ALEX

Sucks to be a frog. You done?

Javier looks toward the framed photograph beside the door:
JAVIER, ALEX and YANIRA under a mango tree. Yanira
gap-toothed, one hand hidden behind her back.

JAVIER

You're wearing Ma out.

Alex takes his backpack and leaves.

Flaco, the dog, emerges from the bedroom and looks at
Javier's bowl.

JAVIER

Every fool for themselves tonight,
Flaco.

INT. CITY GYM - LOCKER ROOM - MORNING

A routine precise enough to be superstition.

COUNCILMAN JESSE DELATORRE, fifties, finishes at the sink.
Same locker. Same bay. Same gray morning.

A PLUMBER in blue coveralls works beneath a touchless
faucet.

Delatorre goes to the showers.

When he returns, the plumber is gone.

His combination lock faces the wrong direction.

Delatorre stops.

He works the dial. Opens the locker.

Wallet. Watch. Shirt.

A legal-size envelope falls forward.

Inside: surveillance photographs of his college-age son
buying pills. Charging documents. POSSESSION WITH INTENT.

Delatorre sits on the bench in a towel.

He looks up at the ceiling as though asking it how much this
will cost.

EXT. CITY GYM - MORNING

Delatorre's driver holds open the rear door of a city sedan.

Jones is already inside.

A butterfly bandage closes the cut at his hairline. He holds
his neck a degree too straight.

Delatorre sees both before he gets in.

INT. DELATORRE'S CITY CAR - MOVING - MORNING

The divider rises as the car enters freeway traffic.

DELATORRE

False imprisonment is a felony.

JONES

So is possession with intent.

Jones reaches for the envelope. The motion catches somewhere
in his shoulder; he continues as though it did not. He lays
the photographs on the seat between them.

JONES

Second offense. No diversion. Three
years minimum.

DELATORRE

He's a sophomore at USC.

JONES

Corcoran doesn't award transfer
credit.

DELATORRE

What do you want?

JONES

Same thing you do. Make the people
feeding your son's habit disappear.

JONES

Denker Park is an open-air
pharmacy. Your son knows all five
crews by first name. The supply
sits across the street in Roscoe
Gardens.

DELATORRE

My son had a football injury.
Doctor gave him pills.

JONES

Then the doctor introduced him.
Denker retained him.

DELATORRE

It's public housing. You can't take
it down.

JONES

The HUD mortgage could have been
prepaid five years ago. You blocked
it twice.

Delatorre looks over.

DELATORRE

Westside money wanted the housing
kept east.

JONES

And you obliged. Don't confuse
corruption with restraint because
you did it for liberals.

Delatorre turns toward the window.

JONES

The tenant association has to
approve the move-out terms.
Unanimously.

DELATORRE

There's an old woman been there
since the place opened. Dolores.
She'll fight every comma.

JONES

Won't be an issue.

Delatorre studies him.

JONES

Picture the Gardens gone. In their place, the Los Angeles terminus of a bullet train to Las Vegas.

DELATORRE

You're a fuckin' nut.

JONES

Stop pretending you don't want it. You remove the Gardens, you become the man who cleaned up drugs in the Valley. State office. Congress, maybe.

The car passes a woman applying mascara in the next lane.

DELATORRE

And my son?

JONES

You don't know that I can help him. That's the only honest thing anyone will tell you today.

DELATORRE

You think I haven't had people come at me before? Variances. Liquor licenses. Somebody's cousin needs a job.

JONES

And you think those were tests because no one ever gave you a real one.

DELATORRE

You don't know me.

JONES

You go to the same gym at five every morning because you like one hour where nobody asks you for anything. You take the diamond lane downtown and spend the saved twelve minutes reading state polling. You blocked the Gardens twice, then complained privately that the district would never change.

Delatorre's eyes move to the driver, then the raised divider.

JONES

You have wanted a larger life for twenty years. I am not asking you to betray yourself. I'm asking you to stop pretending.

Jones taps the divider. The driver moves toward the Alvarado exit.

JONES

A development plan will reach your office this afternoon.

DELATORRE

You pull this again, I open a RICO file.

The car stops at the curb.

Jones opens the door and steps out carefully enough for Delatorre to notice.

Delatorre remains with the photographs and the first image of himself cutting a ribbon.

EXT. DESERT CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Concrete trucks idle on the access road, then turn around one by one.

Workers load tools into pickups.

Raymond shows Carlos the aluminum tag sealed in an evidence bag.

RAYMOND

Imported makes it better or worse?

CARLOS

Natural tortoise stops the job.
Imported tortoise means somebody stopped it.

RAYMOND

Maybe somebody rescued them.

CARLOS

Then they rescued twenty-five of them onto a survey line the morning before a pour.

A WORKER climbs into his truck.

WORKER

We paid today?

Carlos looks toward the halted convoy.

CARLOS
Today.

WORKER
Tomorrow?

CARLOS
Don't spend tomorrow yet.

The worker nods.

Carlos's phone rings. TASHA.

CARLOS
You get the video?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. CAPITOL SERVICE HALLWAY - DAY

Tasha walks alone now, jacket over one arm.

TASHA
I got six copies and a Senator
asking whether turtles vote.

CARLOS
Tortoises.

TASHA
I know what they are, Carlos.

CARLOS
You called them turtles at the
groundbreaking.

TASHA
At the groundbreaking I called
Rittenhouse a visionary. It was a
ceremonial day.

She softens half a degree.

TASHA
The tag real?

CARLOS
Riveted to the shell. Raymond's got
geotags and originals. Concrete got
turned around. Sixty men went home.

TASHA
Keep the originals offline. Don't
forward anything. Don't say China
to anybody with a microphone.

CARLOS
My guys want to know when they come
back.

TASHA
Tell them tomorrow.

CARLOS
Is it tomorrow?

TASHA
It's what they can live with
tonight.

She ends the call.

Carlos watches the last concrete truck leave.

EXT. EAST VALLEY / WALK TO MISSION TOW - AFTERNOON

Javier and Gio walk side by side.

Gio carries a portfolio under one arm. Javier carries both
their silence.

A city bus passes with an ad for a private university
wrapped across its side. Javier watches it go. Gio watches
Javier.

JAVIER
You fill out the county packet?

GIO
Filed it yesterday.

JAVIER
Needles sister help?

GIO
Told me to wait till my birthday.

JAVIER
So you filed anyway.

GIO
Yeah.

JAVIER
Dinner Thursday. Ma's catching up
on Rebelde.

Gio walks another few steps.

GIO
Will there be enough?

Javier looks at him, but Gio is watching traffic.

JAVIER
There's always enough.

GIO
What episode?

JAVIER
She got three backed up. Roberta
still mad at Diego.

GIO
Diego deserves it.

JAVIER
That's what Ma says.

Gio nods once and keeps walking beside him.

EXT. MISSION TOW YARD - CONTINUOUS

A WOMAN at the Plexiglass window argues about storage fees.

Inside the Box, Betzaida has an insurance agent on speaker
while entering payments with one hand.

INSURANCE AGENT
(V.O.)
The umbrella is required under the
municipal contract.

BETZAIDA
War with Russia is in the
exclusions. Why am I paying for
China?

Javier reaches for the policy.

Betzaida raises one finger without looking at him. Wait.

BETZAIDA
(into phone)
No, Letty. Don't explain umbrella
to me again. Explain four hundred
eighty dollars.

Gio steps inside ahead of Javier, sets his portfolio beside
the desk.

Betzaida points at the carton on the counter.

BETZAIDA
Food. Before Lester finds it.

Gio takes one taco and folds the foil closed around the rest.

BETZAIDA
You too, emancipated. Take two. I'm
not inventorying dinner.

He takes a second.

INT. THE BOX - LATER

Gio is gone. One neatly folded square of foil remains in the trash.

The television runs silent news. Javier works a twelve-key calculator over piles of invoices, receipts and handwritten tow sheets.

Through the window, the Land Rover sits under harsh afternoon light.

Javier builds columns on a legal pad: RECEIVABLES. PAYROLL. INSURANCE. PERSONAL CREDIT.

A black Mercedes tears into the yard and stops in a cloud of dust.

EXT. MISSION TOW YARD - CONTINUOUS

DANA BOOTH, late twenties, steps out wearing expensive glasses that try too hard. A blue stress ball works continuously in his right hand.

DANA
You Javier?

JAVIER
How about you start with your name.
Visiting team goes first.

Dana resets his smile.

DANA
Dana Booth. Four-oh-five puts me in
a mood. Westside's bad enough, but
I hate coming to the Valley. No
offense.

JAVIER
None available.

Dana points toward the Land Rover.

DANA
You towed my boss's car. He left a
phone inside.

JAVIER
How's your boss?

DANA
Fine. Couple stitches from the
airbags. Bad headache.

Javier looks at the Land Rover. The airbags remain visibly
packed inside.

JAVIER
Which hospital?

DANA
What?

JAVIER
We need a release from the
registered owner. Hospital can fax
it.

DANA
He's already out.

JAVIER
Fast stitches.

DANA
Concierge medicine.

JAVIER
Airbags still in the car.

Dana glances toward the wreck. Just once.

DANA
Side curtain got him.

JAVIER
Those are still there too.

The stress ball stops for the first time. Then resumes.

JAVIER
Vehicle's on investigative hold.

DANA
I don't need the vehicle. Just the
phone.

JAVIER
Owner can authorize release.

DANA
He's getting on a plane for New
York.

JAVIER
Right now.

DANA
Right now.

JAVIER
So he sent you from the Westside to
the Valley during rush hour before
boarding a red-eye.

Dana squeezes the ball harder.

DANA
Look, I understand I'm asking you
to bend a rule. My boss keeps
everything on that phone. Travel,
access codes, client contacts. If I
don't bring it back, my day gets
much longer.

JAVIER
Sounds like it started long.

He opens his wallet. Two hundred-dollar bills.

DANA
For the trouble.

JAVIER
I'd lose my job.

DANA
You own the place.

JAVIER
Betzaida owns it.

DANA
You're doing the books.

That lands. Dana knows more than a man retrieving a phone
should.

JAVIER
Who told you that?

Dana puts the money away.

DANA
I'll wait for Betzaida. She knows
me.

JAVIER
She's on a plane to New York.

Dana looks at him.

A little of the charm leaves.

DANA
Didn't realize you had such a wide
service area. Guess I'll cancel
Triple A.

He gets in the Mercedes and reverses hard out of the yard.

Javier watches until the car disappears.

INT. LAND ROVER / THE BOX - MOMENTS LATER

Javier opens the Land Rover's glove compartment.

The burner wakes beneath his hand. A notification starts to
expand: VDL PACKAGE-- His attention goes to the Walther
beside it.

He removes the gun carefully, finger outside the trigger
guard, then takes the phone by its edges without reading the
rest. He is watching the gate, checking whether Dana has
returned.

He carries both items into the Box.

Betzaida enters from the yard with a cardboard carton of
food.

BETZAIDA
Stress Ball come by?

JAVIER
Said Jones got stitches from the
airbags.

BETZAIDA
Airbags didn't go.

JAVIER
No blood either. He knew I do the
books.

Betzaida stops.

BETZAIDA
He say my name?

JAVIER
Like he knew you.

BETZAIDA
Everybody knows the name on the
gate. Doesn't make them family.

Javier opens the safe and shows her the burner and Walther.

Betzaida puts the carton down.

BETZAIDA
I said secure the vehicle. I didn't
say leave a loaded gun where Lester
can go looking for jumper cables.

JAVIER
I was waiting for you.

BETZAIDA
Good. Now photograph. Log. Lock.

Javier reaches for the phone.

BETZAIDA
Edges.

He adjusts his grip.

Javier places the burner and gun on a clean tow inventory
sheet. Betzaida holds a ruler beside the Walther.

Javier photographs both.

CAMERA VIEW - the full message is sharp and readable:

VDL PACKAGE SET TO OPEN 2130

The shutter CLICKS.

Javier lowers the camera immediately and writes:

1 BLACK CELLULAR DEVICE.

1 WALTHER P38, LOADED.

BETZAIDA
Serial.

He turns the gun enough to read it.

JAVIER
You want the ammunition count?

BETZAIDA
I want you to stop touching it.

She bags the gun, puts both items in the safe, closes it and spins the dial.

JAVIER
We calling CHP?

BETZAIDA
Vehicle's already on hold.
Detective asks, we produce the inventory.

JAVIER
Loaded gun in a wreck feels like something you call about.

BETZAIDA
You call and say loaded gun, ten uniforms come practice being afraid in my yard. Then they forget why they're here and somebody ends up on the ground.

JAVIER
So we wait.

BETZAIDA
We follow the paper. Paper asks, we answer.

Javier looks at the closed safe.

JAVIER
George Jones.

BETZAIDA
That's his name or two first names hiding together?

JAVIER
Beverly Hills address.

BETZAIDA
Then he can afford to wait for business hours.

She picks up the carton and finds only one taco left.

BETZAIDA
Emancipated can eat.

JAVIER
You told him two.

BETZAIDA
Now don't get curious.

JAVIER
I don't get curious.

Betzaida looks at the legal pad covered in Mission's finances.

BETZAIDA
You get invasive.

The scanner on the shelf erupts in overlapping voices.

DISPATCH (V.O.)
All Valley units, structural
failure reported Van der Lipp Dam.
Repeat, possible structural
failure--

Javier turns toward the safe.

DISPATCH (V.O.)
Water entering the dry basin south
of Roscoe. Multiple vehicles,
possible entrapments--

Betzaida is already moving.

She grabs Delilah's keys and the heavy flashlight beneath the counter.

BETZAIDA
You coming or planning to stare at
that box all night?

Javier follows.

INT. DELILAH - MOVING THROUGH THE SHOE - NIGHT

Helicopters circle ahead. Sirens move in every direction.

Two Bergosian rigs appear behind them.

Betzaida checks the mirror.

BETZAIDA
Aw, hell no.

She accelerates through a yellow light.

The scanner continues.

DISPATCH (V.O.)
 Failure appears limited to the
 southern sluice. Water moving
 toward the hazard abatement area
 occupied by an encampment--

JAVIER
 VDL.

Betzaida glances over.

BETZAIDA
 What?

JAVIER
 The phone. It said VDL.

BETZAIDA
 Said what about it?

JAVIER
 Package delivered.

She looks back to the road.

BETZAIDA
 Then don't build a church around
 three letters.

A LAPD unit blows through the intersection ahead.

EXT. DOGTOWN FLOOD - STAGING AREA - NIGHT

Brown water spreads across the basin, reflecting emergency
 strobes.

Tents sag, lift, collapse. Plywood walls move whole for a
 few feet before breaking apart. A shopping cart spins slowly
 in the current.

Fire crews are still establishing command. Police unroll
 tape from the back of a cruiser.

A CHP officer waves Delilah toward a blocked fire lane.

CHP OFFICER
 Can you pull that van clear?

BETZAIDA
 Already did.

She angles Delilah, drops the bed and threads a line beneath
 a disabled city van.

A Bergosian truck noses toward the same lane.

BETZAIDA
 (to Bergosian driver)
 Back out.

BERGOSIAN DRIVER
 They called all available.

BETZAIDA
 You are available somewhere else.

She winches the van clear, creating access for an engine.

A FIREFIGHTER points toward a half-submerged sedan twenty yards out. A wet CALICO CAT crouches on its roof, flattened against the rotating amber light reflected in the water.

FIREFIGHTER
 Owner says nobody inside. Cat's
 refusing evacuation.

BETZAIDA
 Finally, someone making sense.

She frees the line from the van and throws Javier a second hook. Together they wade it to the sedan. Betzaida clips the rear tow eye by feel beneath the water.

The cat hisses at Javier.

JAVIER
 It's grateful.

BETZAIDA
 That's how you read people too?

She winches the sedan onto higher pavement. The cat leaps from the roof, runs straight through Delilah's open passenger door and disappears into the cab.

Betzaida watches it go.

BETZAIDA
 Fine. We're invoicing somebody.

Javier sees people still moving inside the flood.

He climbs down.

BETZAIDA
 Javi.

He turns, expecting an order to stay.

Betzaida points across the water with her flashlight.

BETZAIDA
Current's cutting left of the power
pole. Don't walk straight into it.

Javier nods and enters.

EXT. DOGTOWN FLOODWATER - CONTINUOUS

Cold brown water reaches Javier's knees, then waist.

Debris bumps his legs. A plastic drawer. A milk crate. A child's shoe.

He tests each step before committing his weight.

Two MEN struggle with a soaked mattress held above their heads like a roof. A TEENAGER pushes a shopping cart containing a microwave, a blanket and three live chickens.

A plywood wall drifts toward them. Javier catches its edge and shoves it past before it pins the cart.

TEENAGER
My charger fell out.

JAVIER
Leave it.

TEENAGER
Phone's dead.

JAVIER
Then it won't miss you. Go.

The teenager keeps pushing. The chickens remain calmer than everybody else.

Ahead, ORAL-B carries a red cooler on one shoulder. With his other hand he holds a LITTLE GIRL with a long braid.

She follows exactly where he steps.

Javier raises his voice.

JAVIER
You need help?

Oral-B looks at him, then at the girl.

ORAL-B
She don't.

He keeps moving.

The girl never lets go.

Javier watches them reach higher ground.

A WOMAN'S VOICE curses nearby.

An ELDERLY WOMAN wades after her possessions, stuffing soaked photographs, clothing and kitchen utensils into a black trash bag.

JAVIER
Ma'am, you have to go.

ELDERLY WOMAN
Chinga tu madre.

She grabs a floating shoe.

JAVIER
Water's still coming.

ELDERLY WOMAN
Then help me find the other one.

The current pushes her sideways. Javier catches her elbow. She jerks free.

ELDERLY WOMAN
Don't touch me.

JAVIER
None of this is worth drowning for.

ELDERLY WOMAN
Easy for you. None of it yours.

She reaches for a framed photograph floating face down.

Javier grabs the trash bag in one hand and hooks his other arm under hers.

ELDERLY WOMAN
Suelrame! Pendejo--

She hits him with the wet shoe.

JAVIER
You can hit me on dry land.

He drags and carries her toward the far side.

She fights him every step.

EXT. FAR SIDE OF DOGTOWN / BUS STAGING - CONTINUOUS

Javier reaches a retaining wall above the waterline.

VOLUNTEERS take the elderly woman from him. One wears a reflective vest too clean for the scene.

The woman clutches her trash bag.

ELDERLY WOMAN

My pan. I had a pan.

No one listens.

Javier sees a BUS behind the wall. Engine running. Doors open.

Then another.

Beyond them, in a parking lot shielded from the flood by the retaining wall: at least a DOZEN BUSES lined in rows.

Not arriving.

Waiting.

Several are already loaded. Drivers sit behind their wheels. Coordinators with printed lists move residents into lines.

A folding table has been set with bottled water, wristbands and preprinted forms. Boxes are labeled by bus number. No city seal. No Red Cross. No agency name.

A coordinator checks a woman against a list before letting her board. Another writes DOGTOWN - NORTH QUADRANT across a clipboard as though the flood had neighborhoods before it had water.

The operation is calm, practiced, ahead of the emergency around it.

Javier looks back across the water.

Fire command is still raising its canopy. A cop is only now stringing tape. News crews are running cables toward the basin.

A bus closes its doors.

Javier approaches a uniformed OFFICER standing ankle-deep at the wall.

JAVIER

Where are they taking everybody?

OFFICER

Who?

Javier points.

The officer turns and sees the buses for the first time.

OFFICER
Those aren't ours.

He keys his shoulder radio.

OFFICER
Command, who authorized private
transport on the west lot?

Only static and overlapping traffic.

OFFICER
(into radio)
Command, I have approximately
twelve coaches loading evacuees.
Need agency and destination.

A BUS DRIVER closes his door. The officer steps in front of
the bus.

OFFICER
Where are you taking them?

The driver points to a laminated route card taped beside the
wheel. It lists only a number: 7B.

BUS DRIVER
I'm told follow the lead coach.

OFFICER
Told by who?

BUS DRIVER
Dispatch.

OFFICER
Whose dispatch?

The driver closes the window.

The elderly woman's trash bag splits open.

Her possessions spill across the wet pavement: two shoes
that do not match, a dented pot, family photographs, a
child's plastic comb.

The line moves around them.

Javier crouches to help.

A coordinator takes the woman by the arm and guides her
toward a bus.

JAVIER
Wait. Her stuff--

COORDINATOR
We have to load now.

JAVIER
Where?

COORDINATOR
Shelter.

JAVIER
Which shelter?

The coordinator is already moving.

JAVIER
Who are you with?

COORDINATOR
Sir, either help people board or
clear the lane.

The woman looks back at Javier as she is carried with the line.

The officer is still trying to reach command. A coordinator removes a printed sign from the folding table and drops it into a plastic bin before Javier can read it.

Another bus pulls away.

EXT. DOGTOWN FLOOD - CONTINUOUS

Javier wades back into the basin until the water reaches his chest.

Behind him, Dogtown comes apart piece by piece.

Across the water, one bus turns onto the boulevard. Another closes its doors.

At the staging area, Betzaida stands beside Delilah, small against the emergency lights. The calico cat sits upright in the passenger seat, staring through the windshield as if this had been the plan.

Betzaida sees Javier looking but cannot see what he sees.

She whistles once, sharp enough to cross the water. Javier hears it and does not move.

Javier looks toward fire command.

Back to the buses.

Back to the lights.

Back to the buses.

A final door folds shut.

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF EPISODE