

LOVE LIES BLEEDING

An original screenplay by

Brian Strasmann

OVER BLACK SCREEN:

DUKE (V.O.)

It's late afternoon... And the shadows are growing across a rich green lawn...

FADE IN:

On DUKE and AMBER, a pair of love birds in their twenties. Amber has been crying and Duke holds her tight to his chest.

DUKE (CONT'D)

In the dream, we got a big old house, and its real quiet and there's a sprinkler on the lawn. And I'm swingin' in a hammock, just drifting off on a Sunday afternoon.

AMBER

And me, what am I doing?

DUKE

You're sitting nearby, drinking the coolest, sweetest, ice cold glass of limeade.

As Duke talks on, CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal the inside of a cramped and dreary apartment.

It's been torn to shreds.

DUKE (CONT'D)

Not that powdered shit they sell in cans. Real limeade. Squeezed fresh. With real sugar, and loaded with ice cubes. And we got us a little boy between us. And he's rocking in a cradle. And he's just about the most special little baby the world's ever seen.

They've been robbed and are waiting for the police.

DUKE (CONT'D)

And we got no where to go. And it's sunny with big old puffy clouds. And we're just sitting there. And we're talking about silly things. We're talking about good times gone by, and good times to come...

CREDITS ROLL:

IN SLOW-MOTION, a COUNTY SHERIFF'S CAR pulls into the nest of a low rent APARTMENT COMPLEX. It's red and blue lights dance over

FACES OF TENANTS

Latinos, Blacks, Elderly, Young Families, Teenagers, Children-- drawn out of the two story wood framed box of paint peeled communal balconies-- faces; hardened by the indifference the men in blue show this section of Round Rock, California.

Round Rock. A town split by a transport highway. Wedged between valley walls at the southern tip of the Sierra Nevadas and pimped by huge sandstone boulders.

Immutable winds funnel through that valley. Hard berms of soiled snow line the dusty apartment courtyard.

DUKE

explains as a FREIGHT TRAIN passes by behind the apartment building, drowning out his words.

He points to his apartment door where the hinges have been battered out by a hammer.

The Deputies listen politely, taking down the info to file at the County Sheriff's Office in distant Palmdale. Where it will sit alongside thousands of other petty larceny reports.

NEW ANGLE - LATER

The Deputies drive away. The red and blue lights receding into the darkness...

DUKE

watches them go, features chiseled by frustration.

EXT. DAY LABOR LOT - MORNING

Duke, standing in a group of thirty men. Eighty five percent of them are Latino. Above their heads, a

BILLBOARD SIGN

announces Round Rock as the "*Gateway to the Sierras.*" It displays a montage of activities available sixty miles up the highway at some distant recreation area.

A contractor's truck pulls in the lot, the men swarm it, hands raised. Four men jump in back.

EXT. DAY LABOR LOT - LATER

Another contractor's truck pulls in. DRIVER calls out.

DRIVER

I need painters, six an hour!

Duke manages to scramble into the rear of the truck.

EXT. A BUILDING SITE - DAY

The developed land sits at the edge of the moon-like boulder strewn hills. It's some kind of strip mall.

The wind howls through the just framed buildings.

DUKE

is inside a more finished section. He is staring at a disassembled paint sprayer and tries to fit tubes and pieces together without a clue.

CONTRACTOR

How's it going there?

Contractor can see Duke doesn't know what to do.

CONTRACTOR (CONT'D)

Ever use a paint sprayer?

DUKE

I can learn.

CONTRACTOR

Well... look...

DUKE

I can learn just about anything.

CONTRACTOR

Manuel!

A Latino man comes over. Contractor speaks to him in Spanish. The Latino begins to assemble the paint sprayer.

CONTRACTOR (TO DUKE)
Listen, I'm gonna put you over on
clean up...

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE BUILDING SITE - LATER THAT DAY

Duke, wearing a white paper mask, lifts shovels full of construction debris into a dumpster. The wind blows dust and sand in stinging needles as Duke works on.

CUT TO:

EXT. PEE WEE MIGHTY MART - DAY

Just off the highway. Bigger than a Seven Eleven, far smaller than a supermarket. Gas pumps out front. Windows lined with advertised specials. Dreary.

INT. PEE WEE MIGHTY MART - DAY

FINGERS fly over an older ten key register system.

A digital readout adds prices up.

A LOCAL WOMAN with three children, two crying, the other constantly trying to climb out of a cart, fishes in her purse, pulling out FOOD STAMPS.

She hands the single dollar issues one by one to

AMBER

who works as a checker in the small store.

WOMAN
That's eighteen... nineteen...
(to her boy)
Jason, you sit down right now!

A BELL sounds as a vehicle pulls into the pump area out in front of the store.

It's a black Escalante, pulling a thirty foot LineCraft speed boat. A family of four pour from within. Mom, Dad, kids, stopping off en route to the recreation area up the highway.

BACK TO SCENE - ON AMBER AND LOCAL WOMAN

No more currency can be found the old purse.

LOCAL WOMAN
Can you take this off?

She pulls a HEAD OF LETTUCE from within a pile of JUNK FOOD, her eyes averted in shame.

ESCALANTE FAMILY

Enters, Kids squabbling over an urgent need of fast food snacks. Dad peels two twenties from a wad of cash, hands one to each of the kids.

INT. PEE WEE MINI MART - BREAK ROOM - DAY

Amber shares the small break room with janitorial supplies. She's got a shoe off and is massaging her foot. A cup cake with a single candle stuck in it sits near the time punch clock before her.

A Store Manager knocks on the open door.

STORE MANAGER
Break's ten minutes only.

CUT TO:

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - EVENING

Duke, exhausted, walks up to the building The SOUNDS of RAP MUSIC swell.

Duke walks past the source:

A corner apartment where a group of LATINO GANG BANGERS hang out front drinking beer from quart sized bottles. Two PIT BULL DOGS bark viciously, tied on short chains. There are probably a half dozen Bangers in all, aging from around thirteen to twenty two.

As Duke eases past the dogs, he notices something in a pile of junk along the side of the building.

GANG BANGER #1
What are you looking at, motherfucker?

DUKE
My fiancée's bicycle.

There's a beat up mountain bike leaning against a wall. The Gang Bangers chuckle and speak to one another in Spanish.

DUKE (CONT'D)
Came out of our apartment.

GANG BANGER #1
No, way man, I found it out
behind the K Mart. You say it's
yours?

DUKE
Belongs to my fiancée.

GANG BANGER #1
Take it, my friend.

Gang Banger shrugs, as if to say, "no problem."

Duke walks over to the bike. He has to get pretty close to those snarling Pit Bulls. He tries to ignore them. He sees the bike is secured by a heavy chain and lock.

DUKE
It's locked.

GANG BANGER #1
Aw man, anyone got the key?

GANG BANGER #2
Cholo's got it. He went down to
Barstow, man.

GANG BANGER #1
(to Duke)
Sorry, man...

He smiles, and the group laughs at Duke's expense.

DUKE
Okay now, look. It ain't funny
you were in our place again, you
ought to learn to respect the folks
living near you.

That challenge wipes the smiles off the Gang Bangers faces.

INT. DUKE AND AMBER'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Still in her checker's outfit, Amber is putting fruit magnets back onto the refrigerator and singing Sheryl Crow's "Swear" to herself as she cleans up.

Duke comes in bleeding from the back of his head. One of his eyes is closed, and his lip is bloody.

AMBER
Duke? Oh baby! What happened!?

 DUKE
Ain't much.

 AMBER
You went down there, didn't you.
You stopped when you should've
gone right by.

She starts probing the wound in the back of his head.

 DUKE
There's right, Princess. And
there's right.

 AMBER
There's reason.

 DUKE
Maybe so. Maybe so. Got beer?

 AMBER
Oh God, Duke, there's glass in
it. Hold still...

She rushes to the kitchen, rustles around in a drawer,
locates a pair of tweezers, hurries back.

 AMBER
Hold still..

She tries to get a piece of beer bottle out of the back of
Duke's head. It hurts like hell. Duke only winces.

 AMBER
Oh, shit! It keeps breaking...
Hold still... Oh, there!

She pulls out an inch long sliver.

 AMBER
God, Duke.

Duke takes a beer out of the refrigerator.

 AMBER (CONT'D)
It looks pretty bad.

Duke settles into a chair.

 AMBER (CONT'D)

You pick up work?

DUKE

Half day.

AMBER

They need you back?

Duke shakes his head. Takes a slug of generic beer.

AMBER

They called. About the rent.

DUKE

Did you tell them we were robbed again?

AMBER

He still has to pay the bank, Duke. That's what he said.

DUKE

Think I don't know that? Think I forgot somehow!?

AMBER

Don't yell at me Duke. I can't stand it when you yell at me.

DUKE

Well... damn. Man's gotta yell sometime.

AMBER

Only not at me, huh?

DUKE

Sure Princess. I'm sorry.

Duke rests the beer against his bloody lip.

AMBER

Duke, you're still bleeding back there.

(beat)

I hardly used that old bicycle anyway.

DUKE

That's not the point, Princess.

AMBER

You gotta steer clear of those

meth heads, Duke. They cut up my friend Susan. Buried her up in the hills.

DUKE

You don't know that, Princess.

O.S. The sounds of NEARBY NEIGHBORS have been building, some kind of horrific argument. Duke's eyes squeeze as he begins to yell at the walls.

DUKE

I wish they could just...

(builds to a yell)

STOP ARGUING FOR ONE NIGHT!!!

The O.S. words aimed within the neighboring unit, now turn outward, things like "shut the fuck up and mind your own business."

Duke shuts his eyes, controlling his temper. Amber helps him onto the bed. Crawls up beside him.

AMBER

Duke?

DUKE

Yeah?

AMBER

You never wished me happy birthday.

DUKE

Aw honey, I know. Things have been so... Aw, happy birthday.

She turns away from him.

DUKE

Come on Princess.

Amber is crying lightly.

DUKE

Come on, don't look away from me. I can stand a lot of things, but I can't stand that.

Amber won't be consoled.

DUKE

Look at me, honey.

AMBER

No.

DUKE

Look at me, Princess.

She turns back to him.

DUKE

We are gonna have that house,
with a hammock and all the rest.
We're gonna have that time together.
Good time.

AMBER

How, Duke? Tell me how that will
ever happen.

The wind rattles the windows. O.S. The TRAIN rumbles
through. Duke gathers his thoughts until it passes.

DUKE

It's hard to say sometimes,
isn't it. I feel like I'm
strangling all the time, like
I'm caught up in something and
I can't get out. I'm no good
anymore. Can't seem to find
a job, I feel like a I'm
standing on the bank of a
river and if I could just
find a way across, things
would be good again. Or if I
could just find a boat I'd sail
us both down it with all the
other boats out there...

(beat)

Then I wake up, you know and I
look at you. And I remember how
much I love you. And I want us
to be happy, Princess. And safe.
More than anything in this world.

AMBER

When I see that fire in your eyes, I
believe we will be. Some day.

DUKE

Here.

Duke sits up, digs under the bed, and pulls a small paper bag out from under there.

DUKE (CONT'D)
It's your birthday present, love.

AMBER
You did remember!

The grief is wiped away, her face lightens with the delight of a small child.

AMBER
What is it?

DUKE
Well now, you gotta guess.

AMBER
Oh come on, Duke. I can't stand not knowing.

DUKE
Go ahead then.

Amber opens it. Inside is a small gold heart shape on a matching bracelet.

AMBER
Duke!

DUKE
Go on, try it on.

AMBER
It's beautiful!

DUKE
Happy birthday.

She starts putting it on, then freezes in the midst. Duke's seen that look before.

DUKE
You don't have to look at me like that.

AMBER
Duke, we're broke.

DUKE

It was my mother's. The only thing
my old man ever gave her besides the
back of his hand.

She looks into his eyes as she fastens it on her wrist.

AMBER

Oh Duke. Oh lover, come here.

DUKE

I'm here.

She goes to him, snuggles up into his shoulder. They fall
back onto the bed, staring through a cracked window at the
trees blowing in a hard wind.

AMBER

There are times I swear, Duke.
Times it all goes away.

She settles deeper into his arms.

AMBER (CONT'D)

Tell me the dream again...

DUKE

It's... afternoon... And the
shadows are grown three quarters
of the way across a green lawn...

CUT TO:

EXT. PALMDALE - NIGHT

A 57 CORVETTE ROARS off the ramp of a highway ramp and into
Palmdale, a high desert sprawl just off that final tip of
Sierra topography.

INT. CORVETTE - SAME

SAM POLLEN drives. He's in his early forties. Thin boned,
but mean and hard as iron. A toothpick is perched on his
lip. His thinning hair is slicked back.

Bluesy rock plays on his stereo.

Beside Pollen is his partner, EDDIE, who loads a pair of
Sig Sauer .45 automatic pistols. Eddie's near the same
age, meat and potato bred, all two hundred fifty pounds him
of him.

EXT. TOOTER'S DRIVE IN - NIGHT

The parking lot filled with all kinds of custom painted cars and their owners, showing off to one another. Engines rev, guys ogle girls, girls titter and ogle right back.

Pollen parks and climbs out. He slides four sticks of "Big Red" sugarless gum into his mouth. Manages to work both the gum and toothpick simultaneously.

A WAITRESS in a short skirt and tight halter top, which covers the ample bosom required for employment at Tooters, approaches as they climb out.

POLLEN

(nods courteously)

Darlin', would you find the largest plate of fries you can carry and set em' on that fifty seven Vette?

WAITRESS

You want chili cheese with that?

POLLEN

Is the chili good here?

WAITRESS

I dunno. I guess.

POLLEN

Eddie? How's that ulcer?

EDDIE

Like a fuckin' scab that keeps getting torn open.

POLLEN (TO WAITRESS)

Ketchup'll do.

Pollen and Eddie walk toward the rear of Tooter's.

INT. TOOTER'S - BACK KITCHEN - SAME

Pollen walks past back kitchen staff and heads toward a freezer door where a huge leather and denim clad guy just off a Harley stands guard. He nods at Pollen and Eddie.

POLLEN

Evenin' Virgil.

Virgil throws open the freezer door.

INT. WALK IN FREEZER - CONTINUOUS

Two more of those Harley Guys are stand inside, wearing down coats. A third man clad only in boxer shorts who's left leg is shackled to a pipe in the floor starts yammering like a Chihuahua when he sees Pollen.

FREEZING MAN/BERNIE
Pollen. Jesus. God.

Pollen pulls up a chair, straddles it backwards. Peers into BERNIE'S eyes. Bernie is a local drug courier, proud and cocky when he's high, scared and nervous when he's coming down. Like now.

POLLEN
You put me in good company.

BERNIE
It's close. I can get it back.

POLLEN
Is that right?

BERNIE
I'm freezin' my nuts off here.

POLLEN
I imagine that's the truth. We had a guy in here once, he fell asleep. Woke up and couldn't feel his nuts. Tried to mess with 'em and they cracked right off.

BERNIE
Pollen we go back.

POLLEN
You keep talking about things that mean nothing to me. Where's the fuckin' money?

BERNIE
Okay, look. Listen. It wasn't my fault, I did like you said, only next thing you know, these punk ass Bangers, they got guns coming out of the woodwork. They ripped me!

Pollen studies Bernie's face, like a champion poker player considering a play.

POLLEN
Give me your hands.

BERNIE
My hands?

POLLEN
Give me your hands.

Bernie tentatively holds out his hands. Pollen takes them, looks them over.

He nods, and the two Harley Dudes grip each and slam them down on a butcher block in the center of the room.

BERNIE
Yaaahhh! Hey! Pollen! Hey!!!

POLLEN
Which one.

BERNIE
Don't do it! I swear I'm tellin'
you the truth!

Pollen gently fingers Bernie's hair just above the ear. Rubs it like he would a puppy's.

POLLEN
Shh... calm down now. Which one.

Pollen looks over an assortment of knives, then lifts a two pound meat cleaver.

BERNIE
I don't know what you mean...

POLLEN
Right? Or left.

BERNIE
Pollen. I'm telling you the fucking
truth!

POLLEN
Left? Or right?

BERNIE
Pollen!--

POLLEN

-- Right?

BERNIE

Shit! Right! NO LEFT!

Pollen brings down the cleaver.

But he twists it as it comes down and POUNDS the flesh of Bernie's left hand just behind the knuckle.

The blunt side doesn't cut, but it crushes bone and splits skin.

Bernie HOWLS mindlessly in pain.

BERNIE

I'm telling you the truth!

POLLEN

(smiles at Eddie)

You know something? I think I believe him.

Pollen grabs that crushed hand, and SQUEEZES... Bernie nearly passes out from the pain.

BERNIE

Oh my God, oh my God...

POLLEN

Now... Where the fuck are these Gang Bangers?...

CUT TO:

EXT. ROUND ROCK - DAY

The wind, blowing so hard the street signs are flapping like flags.

EXT. BUILDING SITE - DAY

Duke carries a load of lumber on his back.

His shirt's off and he's got a kerchief across his face to breathe through the blowing sand. A Semper Fi tattoo bleeds heavy sweat on his bicep.

EXT. BUILDING SITE - EVENING

Duke standing in the line of others waiting for their cash payment.

A FOREMAN counts out bills into Duke's hands. Duke walks off, then stops.

DUKE
Excuse me?

FOREMAN
Yeah?

DUKE
I put ten hours in. This is pay
for eight.

FOREMAN
It's a day rate. See anyone else
complaining?

Duke studies the faces of the other laborers. Most are Latino. Most keep their heads down.

He looks back at the Foreman, and his face twists ever so slightly with a dark rising violence. It gives the Foreman pause, and he loses his demeaning attitude.

But a moment later, as if catching himself, Duke turns away.

EXT. PEE WEE MIGHTY MART - EVENING

Amber exits. Tucks her head down against the wind.

EXT. ROUND ROCK MALL - EVENING

Amber walks along the outdoor shops-- a short cut to the bus stop. Many of the stores are closed because they can't compete with the all encompassing inventory of the anchor tenant K MART.

INT. K MART - EVENING

Amber walks past rows of always perfect MERCHANDISE.

SNACK BAR

Amber speaks with a tired looking K MART EMPLOYEE.

AMBER
Do you have limeade?

INT. K MART - ELECTRONICS SECTION

Amber watches the end of a movie on a big screen TV,
sipping on a lemonade.

EXT. K MART - TIRE AND PATIO STORE - LATER

Detached and across the parking lot from the main store.

Finishing her lemonade, Amber hums softly as she sits on an
outdoor swing chair in front of the patio shop. She
watches the cars, filled with people, hurrying in and out
of the mall parking lot in a river of consumer and
consuming interest.

A store EMPLOYEE surprises her from behind.

EMPLOYEE
You can have it for zero percent
financing until March.

Amber rises like a child caught stealing.

AMBER
Just thinking about it.

EXT. BUS STOP - EVENING

On the West side of the parking lot, Amber runs up and
bangs on a municipal bus just pulling away.

It stops at her insistence and Amber climbs on.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - EVENING

Amber walks past a group of KIDS playing soccer on the hard
gravel ground.

INT. DUKE'S & AMBER'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Amber walks in on two of the Gang Bangers, rummaging through the apartment.

AMBER
Hey! Hey!

Caught, the young kids kind of laugh and exchange Spanish banter as they start out.

AMBER
You sons of bitches get out
of here!

One of them shoves her out of the way.

AMBER
I see you, I know you.

BANGER #1
Get the fuck out of my face.

She tries to grab at the smaller one and he SLAPS Amber hard. She falls, lands with her skirt hiked up.

Banger #1 sees that flash of leg, and considers a darker action for a beat. Banger #2 reaches past him and rips the bracelet, Amber's birthday present, from her wrist.

BANGER #2 (SUBTITLED)
Let's go...

Amber tries to rise and Banger #1 kicks her in the stomach and then follows his partner out.

Amber tries to stand. The wind has been knocked out of her. She gets up, pulls her skirt down, steps unsteadily toward the kitchen, then looks back at the couch, as if unsure for a moment which way to go.

And then she starts to shake.

A cry rises from deep within her soul.

She collapses against the stove, curls her knees up against her chest, shaking, and crying softly.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

A police car pulls slowly off the property. Red and blue lights washing the wind kissed walls.

INT. DUKE'S & AMBER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The lights spill inside and fall on Duke's face, frustration driven ever deeper into his features.

DUKE
White Trash...

Across the room, Amber, stares out the window at a well lit BILLBOARD which displays a family overjoyed to be inside an upscale furniture mart.

DUKE (CONT'D)
Just a joke on the TV...

Amber's face is pale. She's curled up in short flannel boxers and a tank top.

CLOSER - ON DUKE as his hands slowly crush the police report. It drops to the floor. And then Duke rises.

AMBER
Duke?...

DUKE
Stay here, Princess...

EXT. ROUND ROCK - TRUCK STOP - NIGHT

Just off the highway, a HUGE area where trucks pause before heading up over the pass. Duke's green Chevy cruises into the parking lot.

INT. TRUCK STOP DINER - NIGHT

Duke at the diner counter, conferring with a HEFTY MAN in a trucker's cap.

EXT. TRUCK STOP - NIGHT

The heavy trucks seem alive with the tremendous vibration of their diesel engines.

Duke trails the Hefty Man into the metal valleys.

EXT. EDGE OF PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The Hefty Man opens a small metal case on the floor of his old Dodge van. In that case is a used S&W REVOLVER.

HEFTY MAN

Listen Duke, you know what you're doing?

Duke picks up the pistol, checks the chamber.

HEFTY MAN (CONT'D)

You're in love with this girl?

(beat)

'Cause you better be, my friend.
Better think smart.

Duke's eyes rise, and meet those of the hefty man. He seems as if he's about to speak, as if he's about to expound on the depths of what he feels.

Instead he slaps the chamber closed. In his haunted stare is an answer.

He knows exactly what he is doing.

He tosses Hefty Man the keys to his car. Takes the pistol and walks away into the maze of parked trucks.

INT. A MUNICIPAL BUS - NIGHT

Duke stands within the crowded bus, somehow belittled by the ADVERTISEMENTS lining the ceiling panels of the bus.

Pale faced under the harsh bus lights, Duke peruses these ads with unblinking eyes.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

Pollen's Corvette is parked. Pollen is on the hood, eating a burrito.

POLLEN

How many?

Bernie is with him. Dressed. His hand all bandaged up.

BERNIE

Five. Maybe six.

POLLEN
What kind of guns did you see?

BERNIE
Cap guns. Cheap shit.

POLLEN
Eddie?

EDDIE

is at the trunk, loading a shotgun.

EDDIE
All set.

He tosses a shotgun to Pollen, who slides it under his coat, as he does-- WE SEE a SHINY GOLD BADGE, an authentic DRUG ENFORCEMENT AGENCY identifying badge.

Though they obviously stray across the lines they enforce, Pollen and Eddie are undercover DEA agents.

Pollen shoots a dark glance at Bernie.

POLLEN
Stay in the car.

INT. GANG BANGER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

RAP MUSIC POUNDS. It's a mess. As few as three and as many as seven young men live in this pig sty. The sink is full of messy dishes and fast food trash. Empty beer bottles line every flat surface. A pornographic video tape is playing on the television and three of the Bangers are watching it, taking turns taking bong hits.

A couple heavy set LATINA GIRLFRIENDS, crammed into the U shaped dining area, play cards between tequila shots.

They are all out of it, settling in for a night of drugs and party.

They hardly notice as Eddie and Pollen come inside. Then, only because Pollen shuts off the music.

POLLEN
God, if there was a thing I'd do away with in the world, it'd be this pounding shit they excuse as music now days.

The stoned Gang Bangers are frozen-- and probably wondering if someone spiked the bong with some PCP. What other reason could there be for two bad assed looking, armed white men entering their nest?

The least stoned of the group, makes a move. Pollen draws a bead on him with his Sig Sauer.

POLLEN

Uh uh. Don't. Ladies?

He gestures toward the Latina groupies.

POLLEN

Come on in and join the slumber party.

(beat)

Eddie?

While Pollen's had their attention, Eddie's checked out the rest of the rooms.

EDDIE

Clear.

Pollen looks over the frozen Gang Bangers.

POLLEN

Okay Vatos. This can go one of two ways. Fast, so you'll be back to enriching your mind via the video revolution, or slow, which I won't enjoy, and I guarantee you won't.

(beat)

Imagine, that when you look into my eyes, trying to guess how full of shit I am, that you're looking into the eyes of the Devil himself. You may as well believe that now. Otherwise I fucking promise. You will soon. And you will believe that you've stolen from the Devil...

(beat)

And that this night, he's come to call.

(beat)

And he's very pissed off...

EXT. ROUND ROCK - BUS STOP - NIGHT

Duke steps off the bus. Eyes driven like those of an old dog who's scared to come home, but must.

INT. GANG BANGER'S APARTMENT - BACK TO SCENE

Pollen is still talking.

POLLEN
Where is the money you ripped?

Pollen removes his DEA Badge and pockets it before them.

LATINA GIRLFRIEND #1
Puto Vendeho...

Pollen smiles at her, then brings his pistol hard and fast under her jaw, dislocating it.

POLLEN
There's one in any crowd. And
every situation demands a certain
demonstration...

He kicks Latina Girlfriend #1 once, then brings the pistol down again on the back of her head. She's down and out before she can even cry out.

POLLEN
Thank you for volunteering.
(re: the pistol)
Now, this wasn't designed as a club.
I'm going to demonstrate this next on
another volunteer if someone doesn't
start speaking something I can
understand.

He puts the gun to the nearest Banger #3, a sneering teen age rail of muscle.

POLLEN
Who's your lieutenant?

Banger #3's eyes flick toward one of the other Bangers, a guy with a tattoo of the Virgin Mother Mary being screwed by a Donkey on his chest.

Pollen steps over before him.

POLLEN
(in Spanish)
Am I speaking to the man?

Banger #1, nods. Very easily, holding both hands where Pollen can see them, reaches toward a duffle on a shelf and slides it out, sets it before Pollen.

BANGER #1/DONKEY BOY
Take your fucking money.

POLLEN
That's the idea. But I also want to play an old game I call "choose." It dates to an Arabic form of justice--

Mid sentence, he pistol whips Banger #2 who's eyes wandered.

POLLEN (CONT'D)
-- Pay attention. I'm trying to educate your dumb bilingual ass.

Eddie checks out the duffle. Nods.

POLLEN (CONT'D)
Now, who wants to play?

He gestures toward Donkey Boy.

POLLEN
What? Sure you can.
(beat)
Just hold out your hands.

DONKEY BOY
Fuck you!

POLLEN
I generally bend toward the hetero persuasion. Do it.

EDDIE
Pollen, we don't got time for this.

POLLEN
Not now Eddie...

And that's all it takes. The third Banger, with the cat like reflexes of the child that he is, uses this lone moment of lapse in Pollen's attention to draw out a cheap, nickel plated .22 and fires it.

Eddie takes the slug in an arm and hardly feels it, pulls the shotgun down in a hard arc discharging it as he goes-- BOOM!

Banger #3 launches backwards onto the television set, chest torn open by the double ought shot.

As the remaining Bangers bring out guns from nowhere...

Pollen-- in a surreal, slo-mo moment-- shuts his eyes, and in that moment comes a brief reflection of pity for what's about to happen...

And as the remaining Girlfriend SCREAMS... WE

CUT TO:

OUTSIDE

The train whistle SCREAMS... As it RUMBLES past the apartment complex...

A hundred tons of metal, obliterating the SOUNDS OF GUNSHOTS...

THE CORNER APARTMENT - NEW ANGLE

As FLASHES of light erupt. Glass SHATTERS... Bullets and shot spray through the thin walls, the light within spills out like liquid laser beams in a show.

CUT TO:

TRAIN

leaving FRAME... Railroad crossings rise... And Duke appears, hustling across the tracks, toward the apartment complex. Once again silent.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - MOMENTS LATER

Duke walks up toward the Banger's unit. He pulls out that pistol he bought, and with agitated purpose, crosses himself, says a silent prayer, and walks boldly

IN THROUGH THE DOOR

There, Duke sees a blood bath.

Eddie's been shot four times. He's soiled himself and stares into oblivion. Banger #3 is dead beneath the television set which is still playing that porno tape. Moans of ecstasy are a bizarre audio contributor to the slaughter. Banger #1 and #2 are dead from similar wounds, as is Latina Girlfriend #2.

A bad scene. Blood everywhere. Still spilling.

Duke panics and starts to back out. But sees:

AMBER'S BIRTHDAY BRACELET

on one of the Latina Girls' wrist. Duke slides his revolver into his pants and pulls it from her. That's when he sees

DUFFLE BAG

thrown to the floor. A couple bands of one hundred dollar bills poking out from under it.

Mesmerized, Duke approaches it. Turns it over. Sees probably at least ONE HUNDRED BUNDLES.

He stares at it for the longest time. Then his mind segue ways from astonishment, and into auto pilot mode. He starts shoving the money into the duffle. That only takes a few moments. Then he starts out.

And hears:

POLLEN

Don't. Move.

Pollen looks dead, probably should be. But he's one of those bastards who don't die easily. That wound must have nicked an artery because there is blood all over one of his shoulders and arm. He is as pale as a deadman, but still raises his Sig and aims at Duke.

Pollen pulls the trigger: "CLICK." The hammer falls upon an empty chamber.

Duke, his heart just skipped a beat.

In the surreal reflection of the flickering TV set, Pollen does in fact look like the devil this moment.

Albeit, a wounded one. A moment later Pollen passes out.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Amber is applying cherry red nail candy to her nails as Duke comes in. Carrying the duffle.

DUKE

Pack.

AMBER

Darlin', what do you think?

She shows off her nails for Duke.

DUKE

Pack.

And he hands her the gold charm. It's presence makes her immediately uneasy.

There's still blood on it.

AMBER

Duke?

DUKE

Road clothes, Princess. But nice, things you don't want to leave. 'cause we ain't coming back.

He holds open the bag. Amber's jaw drops at the stacks of cash inside.

EXT. USED CAR LOT - NIGHT

Duke counts out seventeen one hundred dollar bills to the USED CAR SALESMAN.

EXT. USED CAR LOT - NIGHT

Duke and Amber drive off the lot in a 71 Pontiac GTO. Flame orange.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The GTO roars down the highway, passing a sign that says
NEEDLES - 43 MILES

EXT. NEEDLES - NIGHT

Another dusty, wind tattered town, devoid of significance save for it being the nexus of highway 10 and the 111. Local Parker Air Base keeps the town running. The strip is a series of crappy hotels, fast food joints and one brand spanking new super market.

The GTO comes to Needles' main Y and heads east.

INT. GTO - DRIVING - NIGHT

Amber is counting bills, quietly whispering the numbers.

Duke mows through Del Taco's finest: The "Pounder" 1 pound burrito." He eats like he's been starving.

DUKE

You ought to eat something, Princess.

AMBER

Shh. Don't trip me up.

She continues a few moments more.

AMBER (CONT'D)

That's another hundred. There's a hundred in each stack. And I count--

DUKE

-- Eighteen stacks... Plus what we dipped into for the car.

Duke offers the bag of fast food to her.

AMBER

I'm not hungry Duke, I'm scared.

She zips the duffle up. Tucks it under the seat. Troubled, Amber stares ahead at the long flat plain which ascends to high chaparral. A soulless full moon illuminates the desert.

DUKE

Ought to eat something anyway.

AMBER

Why'd you do it, Duke?

DUKE

Cause every man has a moment in his life when he has to choose. If he chooses right, then it's a moment of glory, if he chooses wrong, then it's a moment of regret that will stay with him the rest of his life. It came to me, Amber, and I decided it was something meant for the two of us. I can't begin to know for certain what's right and what's wrong in a situation like this, but I'm choosing to believe you and I deserve a little bit of luck for a change...

He looks over at her, and then back out at the highway.

DUKE (CONT'D)

There's nothing to be scared of Princess. There's two ways to take money without having to worry about it.

AMBER

What are those?

DUKE

First one's done by rich folks all the time. That's done by messin' with your tax returns. It's okay 'cause the government's so corrupt anyway. The other and best way, is taking something from people who stole it in the first place.

(beat)

What we got on this seat in between us is part of an unexplainable and impossible series of events. I know it's frightening. Sometimes, you got to face your worst fear before you go on...

EXT. ROUND ROCK - APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

County Sherrif's cars, ambulances, onlookers. Even for the complex, this is a big night.

POLLEN

is on a gurney, hooked up to an IV line.

Amidst the Deputies and others, TWO DEA Agents HENDRICKS, and GAULT slide in for a private chat. They are hulking, weathered men. And they are not happy.

POLLEN

Gentleman, it's not good.

GAULT

Eddie has certainly looked better.

Pollen's eyes darken over the comment.

POLLEN

Why don't we concentrate on how we're going to get that cash back into the evidence lockup. Otherwise come Monday morning, this little bonus we so cleverly orchestrated, is going to blow up in our collective faces.

HENDRICKS

That's three days from now.

POLLEN

Thank you. Any more pointless assessments to contribute?

GAULT

These fuckers we planned to rip the drugs from, ripped your courier?

HENDRICKS

Who's the Lone Ranger? How'd he happen along?

POLLEN

That is the first half of the two hundred thousand dollar question.

GAULT

What's the second half?

POLLEN
Where the maggot's burrowed to.

EXT. HIGHWAY 111 - NIGHT

The GTO cruises out of another small town's limits.

EXT. HIGHWAY 111 - DAY BREAK

It's a sparkling morning of blue skies and huge puffy clouds.