

Palookaville

Pilot Episode: The Pretenders

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. AMERICAN LEGION - NIGHT

CLOSE UP on the face of an African American MAN, covered in what is meant to be native African tribal paint. His closed eyes dart violently back and forth beneath their lids. The faint sound of drums grows gradually louder. Somewhere in the distance, the muffled screams of a man in agony. The drums grow louder and louder, until suddenly...

MAN'S VOICE (O.S)

Lu.

The drums stop. The eyes pop open, piercing, ferocious, intense.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You're up, buddy.

INT. AMERICAN LEGION - BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

TITLE: 1976

The man with the painted face emerges from behind a curtained doorway, dressed in a makeshift loincloth. In his clenched fist, a spear, which he thrusts rhythmically into the air above his head. This is LUTHER SMITH (30), known to a small handful of regional wrestling fans as CHIEF KONGO.

A ring announcer's voice pipes through a shoddy public address system.

RING ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

(plays over scene)

...his opponent, weighing in at two hundred forty five pounds, from the jungles of darkest Africa, the cannibal warrior, Chief Kongo!

We're in the dark banquet hall of a small American Legion Post, a room almost as big as a high school gymnasium, at the center of which stands a professional wrestling ring.

A few rows of folding chairs circle the ring, less than half of them filled with fans. The small crowd is made up mostly of working class guys, with a few kids here and there and maybe one or two old ladies sitting near ringside.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

In the ring, the RING ANNOUNCER stands beside a wrestler in a leather cowboy vest. This is DANNY "TOUGH" RUSSELL (30). Like most of the wrestlers we'll see, Russell is larger than the average man, with some muscle mass and a sizeable beer belly.

Luther puts on an affected show for the fans as he makes his way to the ring, scowling and glaring, threatening them with his spear. Most of them boo. A couple of them give him the finger.

Right near the ring, Luther stops, turning all of his attention to one particular face in the crowd: an 8-year-old BOY.

Luther stands before him a moment, licking his lips hungrily. He then raises the spear over his head and lets out what's meant to be a terrifying scream.

The boy immediately bursts into frightened tears, sending the crowd into another round of boos. The frightened boy hightails it towards the exit.

NEW ANGLE

Two wrestlers watch Luther's match from near the curtained doorway. One of them, WILLIE MUNROE (20s), is African American, and the other, YOUSEF "JOE" HAMADANI (30), is Persian.

WILLIE

This shit is degrading, man.

JOE

Leave him alone.

WILLIE

Martin Luther King dead in the ground, and this fool is dressing up like he's about to feed a white woman to King Kong.

The boy runs past them, no longer crying.

JOE

Gimme a hand with this, willya?

Joe sets a cartoonishly oversized purple turban atop his head and Willie helps him adjust it.

INT. AMERICAN LEGION - LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Another wrestler, MAD DOG CUTLER (20s), screams in genuine agony, as BUCK BUCHANAN (45), examines his shoulder. This is the same screaming we heard beneath the drums in the earlier scene.

Buck's a hefty man with a thick head of graying hair, matted with sweat around the ears. His match is over and now he wears a gray sweatshirt and jeans. He's probably too old to be wrestling.

The makeshift locker room is nothing but a men's restroom with a long urinal trough and no doors on the stalls. A couple of wooden benches have been set out for all of the WRESTLERS, who watch Cutler without much concern. Most of them are too exhausted to care.

The boy appears in the doorway. He's BOBBY BUCHANAN, Buck's son, and he's fascinated by the sight of his father in the middle of a crisis. There's no trace of his earlier tears.

BUCK
(without taking his eyes
off Cutler)
Can we get the doctor back here?

Buck's addressing HENRY DAVIS (55), the American Legion's representative, identified as such by his cotton sweater and official-looking legionnaire's hat.

DAVIS
He's gone home.

Buck looks up to him in stunned disbelief. How can they have a match with no doctor present?

DAVIS (CONT'D)
We sent him home after the
physicals.

BUCK
Jesus Christ, Hank. Is there a...a
first aid kit, at least? Can we
just get some ice?
(seeing Bobby)
Hey, bud, why don't you go get a
hot dog.

Off Bobby, leaving --

INT. AMERICAN LEGION - BANQUET HALL - CONTINUOUS

In the wrestling ring, Luther and Tough exchange a series of wild, unconvincing punches. After one of Luther's punches soars past his head, Tough wraps Luther up in his arms, lifts him slightly off his feet, and SLAMS him down onto the mat, knocking the wind out of him.

Luther rolls over, wheezing desperately for air.

ANGLE ON

Joe and Willie in the doorway, reacting to the match.

JOE

Ooh. That don't look good.

WILLIE

He got the wind knocked out of him.
You want to tell Buck?

Joe slips through the curtain.

RESUME ON

Luther, floundering on the mat. TOUGH plants a heavy kick into Luther's midsection. It's hard to tell just how real the kicks are.

INT. AMERICAN LEGION - LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joe enters. Buck is trying to pop Cutler's shoulder back into place.

JOE

Hey Buck. Luther's got the wind knocked out of him.

BUCK

Tell 'em I need ten more minutes.

JOE

He don't look good, man.

BUCK

Well, can he "not look good" for ten more minutes? We got our hands full back here.

Joe heads out.

INT. AMERICAN LEGION - BANQUET HALL - CONTINUOUS

Joe steps back through the curtain where Willie is standing. Looking towards the ring, he holds up the fingers on both hands to indicate ten more minutes.

ANGLE ON

The announcer, now seated at a ringside table. He spots Joe near the doorway and sees the signal, then shakes his head in disbelief. If this match goes another ten minutes, people are going to walk out. Oh well. He looks up to the REFEREE and gives him an obvious signal, two fingers near his nose.

ANGLE ON

The referee sees the signal and moves in close to the two wrestlers, rolling around on the mat.

REFEREE

(loudly)

Watch the rough stuff!

(quietly, to the
wrestlers)

Ten more minutes guys.

Exhaustion and the lack of oxygen are quickly turning Luther into a rag doll. TOUGH gets him into a headlock and makes a big show of tightening his grip. It's a move meant to let Luther rest, but to the fans, it's just boring.

A few boos ring out from the restless crowd. Some begin to chant, "Bor-ing."

TEENAGE WRESTLING FAN

You suck!

MUSTACHED WRESTLING FAN

Get back to Africa!

The booing is contagious. A plastic beer cup sails through the arena and smashes against the side of Luther's head. Suddenly, a full barrage of cups is raining down on the wrestlers from all direction, bouncing off their backs and shoulders and dousing them with beer.

ANGLE ON

The ring announcer, hammering on the bell to establish order.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGLE ON

Summoned by the commotion, Buck steps through the curtain beside Joe and Willie.

BUCK

Aw, Christ. Why'd you let 'em keep going?

JOE

You said ten more minutes, man.

BUCK

Next time ask somebody with a little more sense. Get 'em out of there.

Willie and Joe head towards the ring.

Off Buck, at the end of his rope --

CUT TO:

INT. AMERICAN LEGION - OFFICE - LATER

Henry Davis sits behind a perfectly ordered desk, while Buck stands, counting out a small sum of dollar bills. The two are alone in a private office.

BUCK

What the hell is this?

DAVIS

That's the gate, less doctor's fees, less commissioner's fees, the cost of chairs, and the PA system... We keep what we make from the concession stand. I'll count it for you again if you like.

BUCK

Well, I'm glad the doctor got his cut.

DAVIS

Buck --

BUCK

This won't cover the gas to get us back to Toledo.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DAVIS

It's the percentage we agreed upon.
You saw that crowd. There were
plenty of empty seats out there.

Buck knows that Henry's right. He stuffs the money into his
pocket.

BUCK

How many times have we come here?
We usually pack 'em in.

DAVIS

Well, it's a basketball town, and
the Fort Wayne varsity team had a
playoff game tonight. Lots of
folks probably went to that.

BUCK

So we got upstaged by the local
boys basketball game.

DAVIS

It was the girls team, actually,
but tell you the truth, it could
have been donkey basketball and I
think it would have gotten a better
draw.

(in a fatherly tone)

Buck, them crowds of yours been
gettin' smaller and smaller.
You're a promoter. Do some
promoting.

CUT TO:

EXT. AMERICAN LEGION - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Most of the fans have gone home. Except for the few cars
that brought the wrestlers, the parking lot is empty. Once
they load up, they know they'll be squeezed in tight for two
hours, so none of them is too eager to get in. Instead, they
lean against the cars or sit on the pavement in little
clusters, some of them smoking cigarettes. They're exhausted,
sore, and more than a little humiliated. Bobby sits on a
concrete wheel stop, examining Luther's spear.

Joe is talking to another wrestler, LARRY FOSTER (24).

(CONTINUED)

JOE
(handing him a pill)
Here, man. Take this, you won't get
so tired.

FOSTER
What is it?

JOE
B12.

FOSTER
It's a drug?

JOE
A vitamin.

FOSTER
What's it do?

JOE
(smiling, as if it's a
major secret)
It's what the Russians use.

FOSTER
(confused)
But what's it do?

Joe has no idea. It's the secret that appeals to him.

JOE
(nodding and grinning)
It's what the Russians use.

Buck has approached the group.

BUCK
Alright, fellas. Let's get the
hell out of here. We'll stop and
gas up before we get on the
turnpike.

TOUGH
Can we settle up before we're on
the road? I want to pick up a six
pack.

BUCK
I'm afraid I'm not gonna be able to
pay you til later this week.

CONTINUED: (2)

OTHER WRESTLERS

Shit. God-damn.

TOUGH

That's a rotten, shit thing to do, man.

BUCK

Like I said, I'll get you your money later in the week.

TOUGH

The hell you will.

BUCK

Hey, I'm giving you my word.

TOUGH

You gave us your word you wouldn't be giving us your goddamned word anymore. I'm sick of this bullshit.

BUCK

Tough? Take it easy, huh?

TOUGH

Don't tell me to take it easy--

Tough throws a heavy punch that lands flush on the side of Buck's face. The blow stuns the others into silence. They're all wide awake and on their feet now.

Buck doesn't respond. He's clearly dazed by the blow.

Tough hits him again.

The men stand around silently, waiting for Buck to fight back. He glares at Tough, but still -- deliberately -- he doesn't make a move.

Suddenly, the men are interrupted by the sound of someone crying.

It's Bobby. Unlike his earlier show in the banquet hall, this time the tears are genuine. He's terrified.

Every ounce of tense, violent energy in the scene quickly drains the away.

Buck picks the boy up into his arms and hugs him close.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BUCK

It's okay, buddy. Come on. It's
alright.

He carries Bobby to his car, and the men somberly load up to
leave.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

A car parked along the curb of a poorer residential area.
It's late and no one else is around.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

The driver, STEVEN, is a white man in his 50s. Beside him is
DONNA SMITH, a black woman in her 50s. Both are dressed up,
and it's clear from their body language that they've just
gone out for a date. Steven has his arm behind Donna's seat,
rubbing the back of her neck. He leans in, as if to kiss
her.

STEVEN

I can't remember. Am I supposed to
have music on for this?

DONNA

This is just fine.

He gives her one polite peck on the lips, but when he pulls
back, she yanks him by the lapel, bringing him back in for
another, deeper kiss.

They're making out heavily now, when a second car pulls into
the empty space directly in front of them and shuts off its
engine.

A little embarrassed by the prospect of being caught, they
stop for a moment to comport themselves. Neither expects this
to be anything but a momentary disruption, until Steven
notices the driver stepping out of the car in front of them.

STEVEN

(frightened)

Jesus.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

STEVEN'S POV

Luther, dressed now in street clothes but still in full make-up and carrying the spear, crosses between the two cars on his way towards his apartment. He throws a quick look into the car as he passes, then does a double take and changes direction, walking towards the passenger side.

DONNA
(embarrassed)
My lord.

STEVEN
Lock the door.

He quickly locks the driver side door, and when Donna doesn't follow his lead, he whips his hand over to lock hers.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
Stay calm. Everything's going to be fine.

DONNA
Don't be so sure.

Luther steps up to her side of the car.

DONNA (CONT'D)
(to Steven)
That's my son.

As Donna rolls down the window, Luther leans in to look inside the car. He's clearly angry, but speaks in a slow, measured tone that's meant to sound calm.

LUTHER
Mother. You need to say good night, get out of the car, and go inside.

DONNA
Luther, this is Steven. We were...
(she smells the beer on him)
--Luther, have you been drinking? --
We were having a very nice evening together and Steven was kind enough to bring me home.

Luther doesn't say a word.

DONNA (CONT'D)
Luther!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Luther extends his hand through the open window and across his mother. Steven can't hide his trepidation, but he shakes it.

LUTHER

(to Steven)

Thank you for bringing my mother home.

(to Donna)

Now say good night, get out of the car, and go inside.

Donna is fuming. Her evening's been ruined. She turns to Steven, trying not to sound flustered.

DONNA

Steven. I had a wonderful evening.

She gets out of the car and storms towards the apartment.

Steven grabs a paper bag that she's left on the seat.

STEVEN

(calling out after her)

Your dinner!

Donna doesn't even bother to look back.

DONNA

Well, get the doggie bag, Luther. I saved it for you anyway.

Luther takes the bag and shuts the car door.

LUTHER

You have a good night, sir.

(waiting for Steven to leave)

Go on, now.

Steven starts the car and pulls away.

CUT TO:

INT. LUTHER'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

It's a small two-bedroom apartment, just big enough for a grown man living with his mother. Modest, but neat. Luther has turned on their television, and sits, half-watching it, grazing from the doggie bag in his lap.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The layout of the apartment makes it necessary to cross through the living room when moving between the bedrooms and bathroom, and as he speaks, Donna races angrily back and forth, changing out of her date clothes and slamming doors behind her as she goes. Luther only raises his voice to be heard past the closed doors.

LUTHER

(almost to himself)

Delicious. I wouldn't mind learning how to make this myself, but I know I need to lose a few pounds. I start cooking this...forget it!

He pauses as if to give his mother a chance to reply.

LUTHER (CONT'D)

I don't mind the way I look right now, but I can feel that extra weight I'm carrying. I got tired tonight, way too easy. Maybe I'll start packing a salad for lunch. You know, it's that cafeteria food that gets me the most.

Donna's anger has finally reached its peak, and she opens the bathroom door to confront him.

DONNA

You do not control my life! You do not...

LUTHER

Mama.

He gets up and crosses over to her.

DONNA

Don't! You are not a baby anymore, Luther. You are a grown man and you need to start acting like one. Listen to me. I was having a nice time. I deserve that.

LUTHER

I don't like you carrying on in a car with some man ain't nobody ever even seen before.

DONNA

Carrying on?! That is what normal people do.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LUTHER

It's not what I do.

DONNA

What you do. What you do. Whatever it is that you do, I can't-- I cannot be the only woman in your life. Go out and find a woman if you need somebody to boss around.

Luther looks to the floor in shame. It's a conversation they've had before and one that he hates.

DONNA (CONT'D)

What?

LUTHER

(cowed)

It aint' so easy.

DONNA

It might be if you tried once in awhile.

LUTHER

I have tried.

DONNA

When have you ever tried?

LUTHER

When haven't I tried? I've tried at the bars, I've tried at church, I've tried at work. I'm sick to death of trying. Them women don't want me.

DONNA

Look at you!

Donna grabs him by the arm and pulls him into --

INT. LUTHER'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

DONNA

(showing him his face in the mirror)

A grown man, dressing up like it's Halloween.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DONNA (CONT'D)

How can you expect anybody to take you seriously? Luther, look at your face!

Luther hangs his head. She realizes that she's hurt him, and though she doesn't apologize, hurting him has doused her anger.

DONNA (CONT'D)

Oh, baby...

She walks out of the room.

Luther stares sullenly at his face in the mirror. Chief Kongo. After a moment, he takes a wash rag and begins scrubbing away the make-up.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUCHANAN HOUSE - NIGHT

It's a two-story house in a working class neighborhood, a row of identical houses with small yards, each separated by nothing more than a narrow driveway. A bicycle lies on its side near the front porch.

With Bobby's sleepy arms draped around his neck, Buck hugs his son tight and carries him from the car up into the house.

INT. BUCHANAN HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

A bedside lamp is on when buck enters the room. His wife, VAL (35) lies peacefully asleep on the bed, fully clothed and with a nursing textbook open beside her.

Careful not to wake her, he takes off his clothes and changes into a clean shirt that he takes from a dresser drawer.

Val stirs in the bed.

VAL

Hey.

BUCK

Get your studying done?

VAL

I'll have to do some more in the morning.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She sets the book on the bedside table. Buck leans in to kiss her and she rubs her hand gently against the side of his face, noticing for the first time the already sizeable shiner on his left eye.

VAL (CONT'D)

Oh. What happened here?

BUCK

Got in a fight.

He kisses her again.

VAL

That's gonna need ice.

BUCK

I'll get some.

VAL

Who were you wrestling?

BUCK

Hm. I didn't get this one in the ring. I got it in the parking lot.

VAL

Jesus, you were in an accident?

BUCK

(a small laugh)

I told you, I got in a fight.

VAL

With who?

BUCK

Tough Russell. We didn't make enough to pay everybody, and I guess he didn't like it too much.

VAL

He hit you?

BUCK

Twice.

VAL

What did you do?

BUCK

Nothing. Who could blame him?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

VAL

Buck!

BUCK

It's not that bad. Trust me, it wasn't much of a fight. He hit me a couple times and then --

He stops himself, but then realizes that the cat's coming out of the bag one way or another.

BUCK (CONT'D)

(ashamed)

Then Bobby started crying. That pretty much put an end to it.

This wakes her up. Val sits up in bed, angry.

BUCK (CONT'D)

It wasn't a big deal. He got a little scared is all.

Val gets out of bed and crosses to the dresser. She takes out her earrings and angrily goes through the motions of getting ready for bed.

BUCK (CONT'D)

He's gonna be alright.

She doesn't reply.

BUCK (CONT'D)

What do you want me to do?

VAL

You said he wouldn't see this kind of shit.

BUCK

He'll survive.

VAL

Is that what you said about Chris?

It's a cheap shot. They both know it.

BUCK

Bobby's not Chris.

VAL

They're both your sons, aren't they? Do you even know the last time you talked to Chris?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

He doesn't. It's been awhile.

VAL (CONT'D)

Exactly. I don't want that for Bobby.

BUCK

Whatever there is between Chris and me's about his mom, not about wrestling.

VAL

You gave me your word.

BUCK

Hey, what is this? What do you want me to do?

VAL

Quit, Buck. Plain and simple. I want you to quit.

BUCK

Honey, I can't just up and walk away. I got partners.

VAL

Sell them your half of the business.

BUCK

And do what? Take a factory job? You know how many guys are standing in the unemployment line looking for factory jobs right now. There ain't enough factories in Toledo to take 'em all in.

VAL

Then we'll move. Start over. I'll be able to get a nursing job anywhere. You can do something else.

BUCK

I don't know how to do anything else.

She realizes that she can't win.

VAL

So that's it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

He doesn't answer. She crawls beneath the covers and turns her back to him.

VAL (CONT'D)
I'll go to my mom's in the morning,
me and Bobby. I didn't marry the
wrestling business.

He doesn't know what else to say.

VAL (CONT'D)
Get some ice on your eye.

Off Buck, walking out of the room --

CUT TO:

EXT. TOLEDO STREET - THE NEXT MORNING

Downtown. Where the gin joints and the red light district rub shoulders with the center of commerce. A few cars head to work along the trash-scattered streets.

Suddenly, a LARGE MAN with a fu manchu mustache comes barreling around a corner like a freight train. This is MITCHELL COE (25), dressed in clownishly baggy coveralls and a longshoreman's cap.

He darts across the street, barely missing the fender of a passing car. The guy's running for his life.

He quickly ducks into a building, passing a sign that reads "Ohio Department of Corrections - D.B. JANKOWSKI, Supervising Parole Officer."

INT. PAROLE OFFICE

D.B. JANKOWSKI (46) sits behind a desk in a 3-piece JC Penny suit, dipping one half of a chocolate donut into a cup of coffee, holding a lit cigarette between his fingers as he does so.

Mitch comes barging into the office, out of breath.

JANKOWSKI
Somebody chasin' ya?

MITCH
I'm late. Sorry.

(CONTINUED)

JANKOWSKI

You're not late. Cutting it kinda close, though. You need to be careful about that. Give yourself some extra time to get places. That's what I do. You definitely oughta do it. Have a seat. You want a donut?

MITCH

No. No, thank you.

Mitch takes a seat across from Jankowski's desk. It's the first good look we get of him. He has platinum-blond hair and a physique that Michelangelo might have chiseled out of marble, but we don't see either here. (In fact, we won't see them for awhile.) The hair is still hidden by the cap and his muscles are disguised by the baggy coveralls. Even so, we can still tell that he's probably been the best-looking man in every room he's ever walked into.

JANKOWSKI

How's the job hunt going?

MITCH

Not so good. But I'm still looking.

JANKOWSKI

You look into the leads I gave you?

MITCH

Yeah. I'm not having much luck with factories.

JANKOWSKI

You try Jeep?

MITCH

They're not hiring.

JANKOWSKI

Toledo Scales?

MITCH

Somebody said they're moving the plant to Hamilton. I don't know.

JANKOWSKI

(laughing)

Bullshit. Every year somebody spreads that same rumor around.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JANKOWSKI (CONT'D)

It's like a joke I've heard so many times I can tell it by heart myself. Don't believe it.

MITCH

Somebody told me I might find work as a bouncer.

JANKOWSKI

Don't do that. Mitch. Okay? Stay the hell away from your clubs and your bars. Every single one of them places has a great big sign out front that says, "Trouble." Just stick with what I gave you. The place you're staying alright?

MITCH

You know. The walls are a little on the thin side.

JANKOWSKI

(laughing)

Trust me. You're lucky. I seen shitholes that make that one look like the Ritz.

He opens a manila file folder on his desk and scans the contents.

JANKOWSKI (CONT'D)

You talk to your family?

MITCH

Not yet.

JANKOWSKI

They come to see you on the inside?

MITCH

(shaking his head)

I wouldn't if I was them.

JANKOWSKI

Well, Rome's not the only thing that wasn't built in a day. Just keep your nose clean. You keeping your nose clean?

MITCH

Yeah.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Jankowski is now staring Mitch down, the friendly facade slipping slightly away. He's a lawman looking at a criminal.

JANKOWSKI
You ain't using any drugs?

There's a pause. Mitch is put off by the accusation.

MITCH
I don't do drugs.

Off Mitch, meaning every word...

CUT TO:

INT. BOARDING HOUSE/MOTEL - DAY

A series of EXTREME CLOSE UPS:

A small leather pouch unzipped and opened. A few clear vials within. Only a trained eye would know that they're steroids.

A needle, attached to a syringe and turned, locking it into place.

The syringe, filling with the contents of a single vial.

The needle, puncturing skin.

The plunger pressed.

ANGLE ON

A wide shot of Mitch, sitting with his back to us on the edge of a bed. He's still wearing the baggy clothes, but we can tell from the way he's hunched over that he's in the act of shooting up.

CUT TO:

INT. BUCHANAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Just out of bed, still groggy, Buck shuffles through house. He stops, suddenly taking note of how eerily quiet the house is.

BUCK
Shit.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He grabs the phone and dials a number. Val answers.

VAL (O.S.)
(on telephone)
Hello?

BUCK
You went to your mom's?

VAL (O.S.)
I don't see how that's a surprise,
Buck. I told you I was going to.

BUCK
Can we talk? Please?

VAL (O.S.)
Not right now. I'm off to class.

BUCK
I just need to sort some things
out. If I'm gonna sell my half,
I'll have to talk to Ed and Ruby.
And I'll have to let the wrestlers
know. I just --

VAL (O.S.)
Do what you have to do. You know
where I stand. If you still want
to talk I'll be here tonight.

BUCK
Val...

VAL (O.S.)
I have to go.

BUCK
I'm gonna try to talk to Chris
today.

VAL (O.S.)
Good.

She hangs up the phone. Buck slowly returns the receiver to the cradle.

He's a sad sight, alone in his kitchen in his white cotten briefs, his beer belly protruding from his shirt, his eye black, his hair a mess.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RUBY (PRE-LAP)

Buck Buchanan is still a household name. People look up to him. And not just around here.

CUT TO:

INT. BLOOM ENTERPRISES - OFFICE - DAY

RUBY BLOOM (40s), an attractive woman, sits on the edge of a desk in the small offices of Bloom Enterprises, a small conglomerate of local blue collar businesses, including the Toledo, Ohio based Midwest Wrestling Alliance. The wood paneled walls are decorated with certificates, a calendar, and a couple of photos of a younger Buck.

Although the business is nominally her husband's, this is unquestionably Ruby's turf.

In a chair across from her sits the neatly dressed ARTHUR SCHAEFER (30s), Director of Television Programming for WDHO, Northwest Ohio's ABC affiliate.

SCHAEFER

(reluctant)

He's got to be, what, fifty by now?

RUBY

Forty.

SCHAEFER

Forty doesn't exactly put my mind at ease. Can he still wrestle?

RUBY

You've seen the shows, Art. Seriously, how hard can it be?

SCHAEFER

Don't get me wrong. Please. I like Buck. Used to watch him all the time as a kid. But people watched wrestling back then, and right now, they just don't.

RUBY

They don't watch it because it's not on. Our show in Fort Wayne last night was sold out. Standing room only.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RUBY (CONT'D)

While we were turning people away, you were showing the late, late movie. How many people tuned in for that?

SCHAEFER

The numbers aren't great. I'm just not convinced they'd be better for a wrestling show.

RUBY

You could show Buck Buchanan toasting marshmallows and your numbers would double, and you know it.

SCHAEFER

Okay. But you're not talking about putting Buck on for the whole show. And I'm sorry for being blunt, but five minutes of Buck Buchanan doesn't make up for thirty minutes of...

RUBY

The rest of our roster is soft. I know. What we've got right now is good enough for right now. With Buck's name on the marquee, we can get the ball rolling. In another year -- maybe less -- we can replace the other guys.

SCHAEFER

(thinking)

Maybe. Have you talked to Buck about this.

RUBY

I can get Buck on board.

SCHAEFER

What about Ed?

Ruby has crossed the room, and now looks out the second-floor window.

RUBY'S POV

In a storage area beside the parking lot, Ruby's husband ED (70s) wanders among several barrels and totes, looking hopelessly confused.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RUBY

What about him?

EXT. BLOOM ENTERPRISES - CONTINUOUS

On the outside, Bloom Enterprises isn't much to look at: An old brick warehouse along the Maumee River, on the side of which, next to two large garage doors, hangs a sign that reads "Bloom Body Shop". By a smaller door is another sign reading "Bloom Enterprises".

Next to a large gravel parking lot is a messy storage area full of rusty barrels and supply totes that look like they haven't been moved since the war.

Ed squeezes through the tight spaces between the totes, inspecting every inch.

The slam of a car door and the scrape of footsteps on gravel announce Buck's arrival.

BUCK

You lose something?

ED

My mind, I think. Somewhere in all of this garbage, by God, there's a fifth of bourbon.

BUCK

Out here?

ED

Ruby won't let me drink in the office. So I hid it...very carefully. Now for the life of me I can't remember where I stashed the goddamned thing. Help me look.

Buck wades into the maze of junk.

ED (CONT'D)

The hell happened to your eye?

BUCK

Tough Russell took a poke at me. It's not as bad as it looks.

ED

I can't believe you let that fat bastard get a clean shot on you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BUCK

Two clean shots.

Buck finds a bottle.

BUCK (CONT'D)

This it?

Ed looks at the bottle, confused.

ED

What in the--? Mine was Jim Beam.

Who in the hell drinks this?

With his back turned to the office window, blocking Ruby's view, Ed opens the bottle, sniffs it, then takes a quick drink.

ED (CONT'D)

Take a snort?

Buck reaches over and takes the bottle.

ED (CONT'D)

Don't let Ruby see you.

Buck takes a quick pull on the bottle, then, handing it back, pulls a small envelope from his pocket and gives it to Ed.

BUCK

Here's the gate from Fort Wayne.

Ed can feel how light the envelope is.

ED

That doesn't feel like a good night.

Buck shakes his head.

BUCK

What if I was to say I wanted out?

ED

Is that what you're saying?

BUCK

Val left me, Ed. Says she doesn't want to be married to a wrestler.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ED

What the hell else are you gonna do?

BUCK

(shaking his head)

Val says she wants to move away. Start over. I don't know if it's that easy. But I'm tired of banging my head against the same wall and never learning a thing from it. You know I haven't talked to Chris in two years?

Ed takes another drink.

ED

You see this?

(indicating the warehouse)

This?

(and the storage area)

My little empire. A body shop, a paint company, two used car lots, a handful of rental properties -- and a wrestling promotion. That's what I got. Fifty years of my life. And Ruby runs all of it now. Except the wrestling. It's the only one I give a damn about, but that's just because it gives me the chance to bullshit with you every once in awhile. You're the only friend I got, Buck.

BUCK

She's leaving me, Ed.

ED

Yeah.

Ed puts his hand on Buck's shoulder. It's the closest the two men will ever get to a hug.

The two look to the office, where Ruby is saying good-bye to Schaefer.

ED (CONT'D)

Maybe Val will change her mind.

BUCK

I'm not so sure that I'll change mine.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Schaefer, walking towards the car, looks at the two men and waves. Ed waves back affably.

BUCK (CONT'D)
Who's that?

ED
Beats the hell out of me. Here.

He hands the envelope back to Buck.

ED (CONT'D)
You can give her this. She'll want to hear the news from you.

CUT TO:

INT. BLOOM ENTERPRISES - OFFICE

RUBY
You are not gonna pull this shit on me now.

Ruby is now seated at her desk. Buck sits in the chair across from her while Ed stands behind him, pouring a cup of coffee.

ED
Ruby.

RUBY
(to Ed)
Shut up!
(to Buck)
You are not the only person with an interest in this company.

BUCK
I just want you to buy me out. The company's still yours.

RUBY
This company isn't worth a thing without you and you know it. You've got an obligation to everybody here.

BUCK
My obligation's to my family. That's it.

(CONTINUED)

RUBY

But not the guys wrestling for you?
You've got a whole group of guys
counting on you to put food on
their tables. What about them?

BUCK

Don't give me that shit! Nobody in
this company's seen a nickel in
over a month. You see this?

He points to his black eye.

BUCK (CONT'D)

This is what I get when I gotta
tell 'em that we don't have the
money to pay 'em. Again. And I go
home and have to tell my kid that
we can't get new gym shoes because
I had to pay the electric bill this
month. Don't tell me about my
obligations.

She reaches into a lock box on a cabinet behind her desk,
taking out a thick stack of hundred dollar bills. She slides
the stack across the desk to Buck.

RUBY

Take this. Pay the guys what we owe
them. You keep the rest.

Buck takes the money.

RUBY (CONT'D)

I'm asking you, please, don't make
rash decisions that affect all of
us.

BUCK

I want out. That's the end of it.

RUBY

Just, think about it. Please.
I've got some big things in the
works for us, Buck. Just give it
time. We've already booked a show
for next weekend...

She snaps her fingers at Ed for a reminder.

CONTINUED: (2)

ED

Saint Catherine's of Alexandria's
Church.

RUBY

We'll make our money back.

ED

Churches always draw a big crowd.

RUBY

Will you think about it? We need
you.

Off Buck, torn...

CUT TO:

EXT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Willie Munroe sits on the curb in front of a grocery store sharing a bottle of soda with his 6-year-old daughter, VIOLET. They both scratch off instant lottery tickets, he with his thumbnail and she with a penny.

VIOLET

Can we get a kitten?

WILLIE

We gonna get two kittens.

VIOLET

Two kittens?

WILLIE

Yeah. You like that, huh?

He looks at her ticket.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

See, you gotta get three of these here... And a big old house. With a bedroom for you, and a special room just for all the toys you gonna have.

VIOLET

Oh, man!

WILLIE

"Oh, man" is right. And a car...
You think you'd like a convertible?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VIOLET

No. Just a car.

WILLIE

Alright, then, alright. Here. Let me see yours.

He takes her lottery ticket and scratches it off.

The store MANAGER comes out, alarmed and afraid.

MANAGER

I'm sorry, sir. We can't have you sitting out in front of the store like this. You're gonna have to move along.

Willie looks up at the manager. He's gotta be kidding, right? Apparently he's not.

WILLIE

Alright, then.

He takes another drink of the soda.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

I'll be back later for the deposit.

Willie picks Violet up, hoists her onto his shoulders and walks down the street.

VIOLET

Did we win?

WILLIE

Not this time, baby.

Off Violet and Willie walking down the street --

CUT TO:

INT. UNIVERSITY OF TOLEDO (GYMNASIUM) - DAY

BOOM. A face CRASHES down down hard onto an amateur wrestling mat.

We're in the big gymnasium at the University of Toledo, where a college dual meet is taking place. The place has the air of respectability. It's clean, organized, serious. The crowd is much larger than the earlier pro match at the American Legion Hall, and fans cheer on the athletic contest unfolding before them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Buck walks into the gym and takes a seat in the stands, looking uncomfortable and out of place.

He scans the members of the home team, seated in a row near the mat, searching for a specific face. Failing to find it among the wrestlers, he looks around at the people seated in the stands.

On the mat, one of the wrestlers turns his opponent gracefully onto his back, and hooks him into a cradle.

The referee blows his whistle and slams his hand down onto the mat.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF TOLEDO GYM - MOMENTS LATER

The meet has ended and the fans and wrestlers are leaving the gym. A few officials lag behind.

Buck approaches one of the Toledo COACHES.

BUCK

Hey, coach.

COACH

Yeah?

BUCK

I'm looking for Chris Buchanan...I didn't see him with the team.

The coach suddenly recognizes Buck.

COACH

(star struck)

Buck Buchanan!

BUCK

Yeah. I'm looking for Chris.

COACH

(awkward)

Nobody told you?

BUCK

Told me what?

COACH

Man, you shouldn't have to hear it like this. Chris isn't on the team anymore. He lost his scholarship last fall. Jesus, I'm sorry.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BUCK

It's okay.

Buck is shocked by the news, but even more disappointed at not having heard it until now.

COACH

I really used to love watching you on TV as a kid. Buddy Rogers, Gorgeous George. Those were the days, huh?

BUCK

Right. You know where Chris is?

CUT TO:

INT. CHRIS'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

ON TELEVISION

A scene from a popular daytime soap opera. A glamorous couple are about to make love in the bedroom of a glamorous mansion.

ANGLE ON

KELLY, (19) and very cute, sitting on a tattered sofa watching the soap opera, spellbound.

The apartment is small, bare, and dirty. Walking in behind her from one of the other rooms comes CHRIS BUCHANAN, 20, dressed in only a pair of white cotton briefs and looking like he just woke up. He's handsome and clean cut; athletic, without being overly defined.

He comes up behind her and cups her breasts in his hands.

CHRIS

Guess who?

She swats his hands away.

KELLY

Stop it. I'm watching this.

He looks up briefly and sees that she's watching a soap opera. It gets him excited. He jumps across the room and turns the volume all the way down.

KELLY (CONT'D)

Chris! I'm watching this.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Chris is back behind her now, his head on her shoulder, watching the screen.

CHRIS

You know it's better this way.

She knows what's coming and doesn't mind so much.

KELLY

(giggling)

You always do this during the good parts.

CHRIS

Shh. Get serious.

Watching the television, Chris's face changes and he gets into character.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

(in character,
improvising)

You say you don't love me. You say you don't love me, but I don't care. I can't live without you.

He nudges Kelly.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

(out of character)

Go, go, go. It's your turn.

Kelly tries getting into character. She's nowhere near as good as Chris.

KELLY

(in character)

I'll never love you, Tom. You're just...mean.

CHRIS

(in character)

You don't mean that, April --

KELLY

(out of character,
interrupting him)

Her name is Julia.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ANGLE ON

The television, the man grips the woman by the arms. His lips move out of sync with Chris's dialogue, but the effect is convincing.

CHRIS

(in character, correcting himself)

-- Julia. I know how you really feel. Maybe you don't say it with your words, but you say it with your heart.

As the on screen actor goes in for a kiss,

ANGLE ON

Chris planting a series of kisses on Kelly's neck. She lets out a giggle.

KELLY

You're really good at this.

CHRIS

Julia. Julia.

He keeps kissing her and tries sneaking his hand into her shorts.

KELLY

Oh, hey, your dad called.

This stops him dead in his tracks.

CHRIS

He said he was my dad?

KELLY

Yeah. I told him you were asleep but that he could probably call back later.

Chris gets up and walks soberly towards the kitchen. He's suddenly quite angry.

CHRIS

I don't mind you staying here in the day, but you know what? Don't answer my phone anymore.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Off Chris, walking out of the room --

CUT TO:

INT. BOARDING HOUSE/MOTEL - DAY

A finger dials a number on a rotary phone.

Mitch sits on the edge of his bed, holding the phone in his lap.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
(on telephone)
Human resources.

MITCH
Hi. My name's Mitchell Coe. I got your number from D.B. Jankowski. He said you guys might have some openings and I was wondering if I could come in and fill out an application. I'm a hard worker, and I'm really -- I really need a job.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
D.B. Jankowski?

Mitch hesitates.

MITCH
From the Department of Corrections.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
I'm afraid we don't have any openings right now.

MITCH
Would it be okay if I filled out an application anyway?

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
We don't keep applications on file.

MITCH
Okay. Thanks anyway.

He hangs up the phone. Through the thin walls comes the distinct sound of a couple fighting.

Mitch starts to dial another number, then stops. He takes a deep breath then dials again.

(CONTINUED)

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
(on telephone)
Hello?

MITCH
Jim?

JIM (O.S.)
(on telephone, shocked)
Mitch?

MITCH
Yeah.

JIM (O.S.)
Are you...you're out?

MITCH
Yeah. I'm in Toledo.

JIM (O.S.)
It's so good to hear your voice.
Are you okay?

The fighting next door escalates. There's a crash.

MITCH
I'm trying to be. I'd like to see
you. You think that'd be alright?

There's a long pause long enough to be an answer.

JIM (O.S.)
I can't see you, Mitch. I hate
that I even have to say that.

MITCH
No, no, that's okay.

JIM (O.S.)
You're my brother and I love you.
I just --

MITCH
You don't have to explain anything,
Jim. I just wanted to...let you
know I'm alive, I guess.

JIM (O.S.)
I wish it was different.

CONTINUED: (2)

MITCH

Me too. Take care of yourself.

He hangs up the phone, crushed. The fighting next door gets even louder. It sounds like a man beating a woman to death.

CUT TO:

INT. TOLEDO SCALE PLANT - DAY

A sign on the wall identifies this as the Toledo Scale factory. Several shots of the factory show that production has come to a temporary halt. The assembly line isn't moving, although several units still remain in mid-production. Lunch boxes on tables, jackets draped over the backs of chairs-- tell-tale signs that there are people around here somewhere.

JAY SEXTON(V.O.)

Let's say I'm managing the Tigers,
and I've got Rozema on the mound.

SMART-ASSED COWORKER (V.O.)

Fidrych!

JAY SEXTON (V.O.)

Maybe when you're managing the
Tigers, but me, I'm going with
Rozema. Okay. That's my ace. That's
the very best I've got. But even
Rozema, he gets eighty, ninety
pitches, I gotta start warming up
my bullpen.

INT. TOLEDO SCALE PLANT - MEETING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The Toledo Scale workers sit in rows of folding chairs.
Among them is Luther.

JAY SEXTON, 45, the plant manager, is standing at the front
of the large meeting room, addressing the company's assembled
workforce.

JAY SEXTON

A good manager, he's gotta look at
the circumstances of the game and
make adjustments.

ANGRY COWORKER

So you're warming up the bullpen,
is that it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAY SEXTON

I didn't say that. You guys are my ace, you know that. But we have to look at circumstances, too. And, when we have to, we make some adjustments.

ANGRY COWORKER

Like moving the plant to Hamilton.

JAY SEXTON

I don't know where you heard that, but, no, we are not moving the plant to Hamilton or any other damned place. This is Toledo Scale. Got that? Toledo. But right now, we've got inventory that doesn't meet the demands of the market.

This sets off a murmur from the workers. Sexton talks through it.

INT. TOLEDO SCALES CAFETERIA - MOMENTS LATER

Sexton's speech continues over a shot of Luther's face, surrounded by the faces of various COWORKERS, all of them staring straight past the camera, to the list of workers whose jobs are in jeopardy.

JAY SEXTON (V.O.)

And as of the first, we're going to be cutting back production. This won't affect everybody -- now hold on, I don't like this either, believe me. We've got a list of who's going to be affected. We're gonna offer classes to help with your resumés. We're gonna have a job fair. I promise you, if there was any other way...

As Sexton's speech continues, the people around Luther spot their names on the list -- their worst fear. They're crushed, angry. Some of them are crying. They turn away and new faces step in to take their spots, but Luther remains, catatonic, unable to process what's happening to him.

NEW ANGLE

Luther, from behind, staring at the list. The others have all moved away and he stands there alone. A BUZZER sounds, snapping him out of his trance.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He turns around, lost and confused. On a nearby table, he sees his lunch, a homemade salad. He grabs it and shuffles away.

CUT TO:

INT. PIED PIPER - DAY

It's a biker bar on the wrong side of town. MOUSE and BLONDIE, two big, mean-looking bikers with "Outlaws" jackets, are drinking at the end of the bar and talking to SCOOTER (30), the tattooed bartender. The place is otherwise empty.

MOUSE

Five Gs doesn't just slip through the sofa cushions, Scooter. That's some serious money.

SCOOTER

I know where it is, man. There's a guy I got selling for me in the projects. I kinda think he might be using as much as he sells.

BLONDIE

Him or you?

SCOOTER

(angry)

Hey, man! You need to watch your mouth.

MOUSE

Business is business. Why don't you, me and Blondie go have us a talk with this guy.

SCOOTER

That ain't necessary. I can take care of it.

BLONDIE

Shit.

MOUSE

If you're gonna do something, you need to do it soon. 'Cause believe me, it's gonna get taken care of one way or another.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The door opens. The three look up as a customer enters. It's Mitch. This is exactly the kind of place he should stay away from.

SCOOTER

I said I'll take care of it.

Scooter comes down to Mitch's end of the bar.

MITCH

You the owner?

SCOOTER

Naw, that's Red. He don't usually show up on Mondays. Can I help you with something?

MITCH

You hiring?

SCOOTER

We don't need bartenders.

MITCH

I can bar back, too. Bounce if you need it.

The two Outlaws walk past to leave, staring daggers as they do.

SCOOTER

Don't need any bar backs or bouncers, neither.

Scooter sizes Mitch up.

SCOOTER (CONT'D)

You been inside?

MITCH

Mansfield. Two years.

Scooter pours a couple of beers, one for himself and one for Mitch.

SCOOTER

(a toast)

For time served.

MITCH

Amen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Mitch reluctantly drinks the beer. He knows he should get the hell out this place.

SCOOTER

Where else have you tried?

MITCH

Factories, mostly. Jeep, Owens.

SCOOTER

Nobody's hiring.

MITCH

That's what they say.

SCOOTER

I might have something for you...something private. If you're interested.

Mitch takes in his meaning.

MITCH

No way, man. Thank you, but I'm not doing any kind of stick up jobs. Nothing like that. I'm on the straight and narrow.

SCOOTER

It's nothing like that at all. See, some asshole I know owes me a little money. I'm gonna pay him a visit and have a word with him. It'd be a whole lot easier with somebody like you tagging along.

Mitch really doesn't like where this is going.

SCOOTER (CONT'D)

All you'd have to do is stand there, man, looking like a bulldozer. Easy money. Take it or leave it, it's up to you.

Off Mitch, knowing a bad idea a mile away --

CUT TO:

EXT. TOUGH RUSSELL'S FARM - DAY

In a rural area along the highway just outside city limits, Tough Russell's farm doubles as a tourist trap.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Between the house and barn stand several tall cages housing a variety of animals. Lions, tigers, wolves, bears; all of them predators.

A small group of tourists presses against one of the cages, enthralled by the unique spectacle within.

Leaving his car parked near the road, Buck approaches the cage in question, parting the crowd for a better look.

ANGLE ON

Tough, inside the cage, wrestling a full-grown tiger.

The tiger lets out a vicious roar, but Tough pushes it around with ease. For the first time, we're seeing just how powerful he is.

Tough throws the cat onto its back like a rodeo steer, then raises his arm victoriously to appease the crowd. The few people applaud.

EXT. TOUGH RUSSELL'S FARM - MOMENTS LATER

Tough has been shaking hands with the last of the spectators as Buck approaches. Tough sees him, but goes on with his work. Grabbing two large buckets full of raw meat, he walks around the cages to feed the different animals.

BUCK

How do you train 'em like that?

TOUGH

(cold)

You can't train 'im. He'd rip your throat out in a heartbeat.

BUCK

Yeah? But not yours, huh?

TOUGH

He respects me. You got some business here, Buck?

BUCK

I just wanted to settle the score.

TOUGH sets down the buckets of meat and the two men face off like gunfighters in a western.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

There's a long, tense beat. The hungry animals growl in their cages.

Finally, Buck reaches into his pocket and pulls out a wad of cash. He counts out several bills, and offers them to TOUGH.

BUCK (CONT'D)

That's Fort Wayne, the Sports Arena, and the Armory show. The last two as a headliner.

The tension's died off. TOUGH wipes his hands on his jeans and takes the money, counting it quickly before stuffing it into his front pocket.

Tough goes back to feeding the animals.

TOUGH

Twice a day I have to feed these guys. That's a hundred dollars a week I'm spending on food. Out of my pocket. When people come, like today, I get some donations. Once in awhile a farmer'll haul in a dead cow or a horse or something, instead of taking it to the rendering plant. But these animals -- that tiger in there -- they don't know what I gotta do to feed 'em. They just know they're hungry.

Tough throws the last scrap of meat into the animals.

TOUGH (CONT'D)

I don't know what you gotta do to make money, Buck. I just know when I'm hungry.

He turns and starts walking towards the house.

BUCK

Tough?

Tough stops and looks.

BUCK (CONT'D)

Don't you ever put your hands on me in front of my kid again.

Tough continues on into the house.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Off Buck --

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - EVENING

A beat up work van rolls slowly through a rough neighborhood. Dilapidated buildings, boarded up windows, storefronts covered in spray paint. Scooter's at the wheel, with Mitch riding shotgun.

INT/EXT - SCOOTER'S VAN

SCOOTER

Don't go waving your wallet around here, son. Somebody might just take it from you.

Hostile faces stare at them as they pass.

SCOOTER (CONT'D)

Lotsa folks won't come down here cause it's supposed to be a bad neighborhood. Who the hell are they kidding? This whole damned town's gone to shit. Anything good about it packed up and left a long time ago. All they left behind is the tombstones.

EXT. HOUSING PROJECTS - NIGHT

The van pulls up to the curb and parks.

INT. SCOOTER'S VAN

SCOOTER

(indicating a housing project across the street)

That's it. Number One-sixteen. Real simple, alright? I'm gonna go in. You stand here.

MITCH

I stay in the van?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SCOOTER

No, you don't stay in the fucking van. Stand outside the van. Let 'em get a good look at you. Okay? You wait out here for ten minutes, exactly. Then you come in. One-sixteen. Got it?

MITCH

Shouldn't I come in with you? It doesn't --

SCOOTER

Just stick to the plan, okay?. It ain't that hard. Here. You can use this if you want.

Scooter pops the glove box. There's a revolver inside.

MITCH

(with just a touch of
panic)

You said this was on the level,
man.

SCOOTER

You don't want to use it, don't use it. I'm just inclined to think it's a good idea.

Mitch looks nervously across the street.

SCOOTER (CONT'D)

Ten minutes. Easy money, brother.

They get out of the van.

Off Mitch, taking a deep breath, scared --

CUT TO:

EXT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE - PARKING LOT - EVENING

Live cattle bump nervously about as they're unloaded from the back of a truck.

We're in the parking lot of a slaughterhouse outside of the city. A shift change is in progress and workers make their way into the building from their cars.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Chris gets out of his car, dressed for work. He crosses the parking lot lost in thought, when he's startled by the sound of his father's voice.

BUCK
I tried calling you.

Buck is leaning against his car. He's been waiting.

CHRIS
Don't.

He continues walking towards the slaughterhouse gate. Buck follows.

BUCK
I thought maybe we could talk.

CHRIS
We've got nothing to say.

BUCK
So you quit school to work in a slaughterhouse?

CHRIS
Screw you.

Buck slows down, letting Chris walk away from him.

BUCK
I'm done wrestling.

It's a shock to hear him say this. Chris stops and turns around.

BUCK (CONT'D)
I'm gonna let the guys know tonight. Val's gonna leave if I don't.

CHRIS
Good. Good for you.

Buck has come close again.

BUCK
I know I done wrong by you. And your mom. I wanted to say I'm sorry.

This sends Chris into a rage.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CHRIS

No, you don't get to say you're sorry. You don't get to just come on back like it's all okay. Fuck you! Fuck you!

Chris pulls back to punch him, but checks himself. He's nearly crying. Buck doesn't even flinch.

BUCK

You can't hit me hard enough to make me stop loving you.

Chris turns and walks through the gate.

Off Buck, alone in the parking lot --

CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSING PROJECT - EVENING

Mitch takes into position by the door of the parked work van.

Across the street, Scooter knocks on the door of number one-sixteen. A shadow flashes across the window, peering out. A moment later the door opens.

There's a brief discussion, then Scooter goes inside, the door closing behind him.

Mitch lets out an uneasy sigh.

The shadow reappears in the window, joined quickly by a second. Checking him out. They close the curtains completely.

MITCH

(to himself)

Shit.

A police siren in the distance. It fades down the street.

A few PEOPLE lurking around the block eye him suspiciously. What the hell is he doing here?

There's no movement from one-sixteen.

Mitch checks his watch. Eight minutes have passed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MITCH'S POV

One-sixteen remains eerily still. The entire neighborhood seems frozen into place.

ANGLE ON MITCH

The camera pushes in on him in slow motion, staring at the window. Every sound is amplified: The wind in the trees, his breathing, his heartbeat drumming in his ears.

It's time.

ANGLE ON THE APARTMENT

The camera holds for a very long time on apartment one-sixteen. The moment seems to last an eternity.

ANGLE ON THE VAN

Mitch is gone.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

The camera leads Mitch, jogging down the street, leaving the work van far behind him.

Muffled gunshots ring out in the distance and Mitch's jog turns into a desperate run that leads him past the camera.

CUT TO:

EXT. WILLIE'S HOUSE - EVENING

BEEP BEEP. A pair of friendly blasts from a car horn announce Luther, behind the wheel of his car, waiting in Willie's driveway.

Willie emerges from his house, dressed for working out. He waves to one of his neighbors.

WILLIE

How you doin', Miss Maddy?

Willie gets into the car.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Hey, brother.

LUTHER

Hey.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They pull out of the driveway, past several garbage bags piled up on the curb.

WILLIE

I'll be goddamned. That trash still ain't been picked up. Ain't no wonder nobody wants to live on this street anymore.

Luther drives off without saying a word.

I/E LUTHER'S CAR/STREETS

WILLIE

I call the city, they say call sanitation. I call sanitation, they say call the city. Back and forth, back and forth. Same thing when it snows. They send a plow down every goddamned street in the city but this one.

Luther isn't joining the conversation.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

I guess you ain't feeling too sociable, huh?

Willie suddenly notices how hard Luther's fighting to hold it together.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Say, man. Say, what's wrong?

Luther breaks into tears.

CUT TO:

EXT. PALOOKAVILLE - NIGHT

It's a dingy brick building in an old industrial part of town. The building might have been a warehouse once or a factory. Now, a small, crude sign above the door reads "PALOOKAVILLE GYM".

INT. PALOOKAVILLE - OFFICE

It's half-office, half-equipment room. The desk where Buck sits is hemmed in by a clutter of dumbbells, leather medicine balls, rolls of athletic tape and high stacks of cardboard boxes.

Old photographs, yellowed newspaper clippings and a pair of dust-covered championship belts decorate the walls. The only source of light is from a little window that looks out on the general training area.

Buck rifles through the desk drawers, sorting through a mess of old papers and office supplies he's never used. Whatever it is he's looking for, he'll never find it buried in this junk.

He stops looking and leans back in the chair.

This is it, the end of a career. He wishes he could enjoy it.

The sound of voices drifts in from the training area. He listens in.

WILLIE

You're gonna push through this, man. That job ain't who you are. No job is. You're not a piece in a machine. You're a man. The world don't stop turning just cause some factory says so.

LUTHER

I know.

WILLIE

They can take your job, brother. They can take your home and everything you got -- but they can't stop you from being a man. You're the only one who can let that happen.

Buck peers through the window.

BUCK'S POV

Willie and Luther sit side-by-side on a wrestling mat.

INT. PALOOKAVILLE - TRAINING AREA

Willie is lecturing Luther. Giving him a pep talk. Luther seems a bit better.

WILLIE
What your mom say about it?

LUTHER
I ain't told her yet. I know she only gonna push me to move on back to Georgia and be with her people.

WILLIE
Is that what you gonna do?

BUCK (O.C.)
He's gonna wrestle.

They look up. Buck has finally come out from the office.

BUCK (CONT'D)
He's a wrestler, ain't he?

Some of the other wrestlers have begun to trickle in.

BUCK (CONT'D)
I've got pay for you guys tonight -- that goes for everybody -- and we're booked for Saturday at St. Catherine's of Alexandria church.

WILLIE
My man Buck! Making good on his word.

Some of the other wrestlers have started to trickle in. Buck offers Luther his hand and helps him to his feet.

BUCK
Well come on. Let's get to work.

The wrestlers start warming up.

Off Buck, in his element --

CUT TO:

INT. VALERIE'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Bobby has his face pressed to the ground, peering beneath the sofa. A cat whips its tail back and forth as Bobby's hand reaches out.

NEW ANGLE

Val sits in a chair, studying from a textbook. In a chair beside her is DOLLY (50s), her mother. It's a cozy suburban home.

DOLLY

He'll scratch you, Bobby! He doesn't like being teased.

VAL

He's just playing with him.

DOLLY

Well, he doesn't like being played with.

VAL

Bobby, why don't you go upstairs and brush your teeth. It's past your bedtime.

BOBBY

I can stay up later than this.

VAL

Go.

Bobby goes reluctantly up the stairs. Val is trying to study but her mother won't quit talking.

DOLLY

He's bullheaded.

VAL

He's an eight-year-old.

DOLLY

Well, this'll do him good. This is gonna do both of you a lot of good. I never liked Buck. I told you I didn't like him.

VAL

Mom.

(CONTINUED)

DOLLY
He's an abuser.

VAL
He is not an abuser.

DOLLY
Your father was an abuser, so don't
tell me. I know the type.

VAL
Buck is a hell of a lot of things,
but he isn't daddy, so just stop
that right now.

DOLLY
Buck was a bastard.

VAL
He still is. Don't get ahead of
yourself.

A rap on the door gets their attention.

I/E. VALERIE'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Val opens the door to find Buck, standing forlorn in the
darkness.

BUCK
Hey.

VAL
Hey.

BUCK
Can we talk?

VAL
Whatever you have to say, you can
say it right here.

BUCK
(to Dolly)
Evening, Dolores. Don't you worry.
I'm just gonna stay right out here
on the porch.

Behind Val we see Dolly shuffling out of the room.

(CONTINUED)

BUCK (CONT'D)
(screwing up his nose)
What the hell is she cooking in
there?

VAL
Cabbage. Bobby wouldn't touch it.

BUCK
You alright?

VAL
Good.

BUCK
Bobby?

VAL
Yeah.

BUCK
Good.

A quiet beat while Buck gathers his thoughts.

BUCK (CONT'D)
It looks like I have a knack for
screwing up the good things in my
life. I guess I'll screw up a few
more before it's all said and done.
It seems to be the one thing I'm
good at.

It sounds like an apology. Val is crying.

BUCK (CONT'D)
Anyway.

Buck bends over to pick up a cardboard box near his feet.

BUCK (CONT'D)
Bobby left some school books. And
I put some more of your stuff in
there. I figured you'd need it.

He opens the door to hand her the box.

BUCK (CONT'D)
You've always been good to me, Val.
I wish like hell I deserved it.

With no more goodbye than that, he turns and walks away.

(CONTINUED)

PALOOKAVILLE "Pilot - The Pretenders"
CONTINUED: (2)

57.

END OF SHOW

