

EXT. AN ITALIAN NEIGHBORHOOD, NYC -- AFTERNOON

In front of a modest brownstone, with a painted, plaster Virgin Mary in the small front yard, is a small stretch of the original slate stone sidewalk, heaved upwards by a tree.

ON SCREEN:

"Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn, 1974"

Two large vehicles, a factory-perfect 1970 Bel-Air and a rusty 1963 Chevy pickup, each with "Funeral" stickers affixed to the windshield, slow to a stop and face each other hood-to-hood in front of the sidewalk.

Two sets of people get out, dressed in black.

Group One: Roy, a hard-of-hearing, large, late 60s German-Irish man with a quick temper. His wife, Lena, a very small sixty-something Italian woman, whose funeral formal wear was first worn more than a generation ago, circa 1948. And Fran, Roy's small, younger sister, Lena's best friend since childhood. Fran is mute and communicates with pad and pencil, which hang from her neck.

The older ones: Roy, Lena, and Fran stand their ground, while the younger ones (Group Two): 25-year-old Owen "Dell" Delaney and his 3-year-old son, Roddy, have to come more than halfway, stopping just short of the protrusive stone. The raised section of sidewalk, now dividing the two sets of grim-looking people, appears to be the point of impact between two worlds: the young and the old.

Dell looks down at the upturned rock.

Roy tunes his hearing aid, which whistles with every adjustment. He looks at Dell for some kind of sign, appraising him with his eyes.

Beat.

Dell lifts his eyes to Lena's face.

DELL  
(to Lena)  
I have her things.  
(pause)  
I can send some back to you, if you'd  
like...

Roy grimaces. Dell looks back at the walk for a moment.

Beat.

DELL (CONT'D)

I have to get back, get things closed up... Could you look after Roddy, while I'm gone? I'll be a week, week and half tops.

LENA

Yes, of course, we'll take him.

DELL

Need to get back for him, before the rodeo circuit starts up again.

The old peoples' faces harden at the mention of the rodeo circuit. Roy's anger mounts.

Lena, who's been clutching her rosary beads and a kleenex, puts them in her pocket and takes a single step forward.

Lena extends an arm toward Roddy.

Dell reaches down quick, lifts the boy up, drawing him into a bear hug. He sways with Roddy in his arms.

DELL (CONT'D)

Buddy, I'll be back before you miss me.

The boy clings, but is too well-mannered to object, when Dell puts him back down on the sidewalk.

With the palm of his large hand, Dell gently cups the back of the boy's head and guides him toward Lena.

Roddy's familiar with his grandmother and acknowledges her with a quick, weak smile.

Although unusually stoic for his age, the boy knows this is a hand-off and you see him becoming anxious.

Lena turns toward Fran, indicating with a shoulder lift, tilted toward the car, for Fran to get the stereoscope.

Fran retrieves the stereoscope and a small box from the back seat of the car. She hands them to Lena, who in turn bends and hands them to the boy.

Roddy, familiar with the toy, lights up a little and readies the stereoscope for viewing. Fran wants to help and comes to the boy.

She holds the small box filled with stereoscope cards, while Roddy looks inside at the collection of historic people and places.

RODDY  
 (to the cards)  
 You guys in there?

Fran pantomimes sleeping to Roddy. They are sleeping.

Roddy, diverted by the stereoscope, is led up the walk by Fran.

Dell watches him go.

Roy spies a flask in Dell's jacket pocket. He jabs it with a finger and the bottle resonates with a small metallic sound.

ROY  
 Was this involved?

Dell meets Roy's eyes. Takes a step toward him.

DELL  
 Never, I never drink when driving,  
 Roy. Not today, not that day...

Jerks his head toward Roddy.

DELL (CONT'D)  
 Not around him.

Roy's face registers doubt and disdain.

DELL (CONT'D)  
 Can't say I won't when I get back to  
 the hotel...

Dell's speech is clipped, his face hard with grief:

DELL (CONT'D)  
 We were happy, Roy, before the  
 accident... and not everybody has  
 that.  
 (pause)  
 Now, I've got Roddy. It's enough.

Dell turns once more to look at Roddy.

DELL (CONT'D)  
 Roddy, dad'll be back right quick...

Flashes two hands, all ten fingers extended.

DELL (CONT'D)  
 These many days, I'm back.

Roddy's face drops and he struggles to return Dell's smile.

Dell turns his back on them, gets in the car, and takes off without looking back.

Roy stuffs a cigar into his mouth. Clamps down. Lights it. Tips himself backwards and forwards on his shoes, toe to heel, toe to heel, rocking, as he works the cigar with his mouth, puffing.

Beat.

Roy's gaze is fixed on the place where Dell's pickup just disappeared from. Still looking at that spot, in an aside to Lena:

ROY

Think he was drinking?

LENA

No, Roy, I don't.

ROY

What makes you so Goddamn sure?

Roy steps back on the sidewalk, hands in pocket and looks skyward, over Lena's head.

ROY (CONT'D)

She's in college. Got a scholarship.  
Next thing, tosses it all. Rides  
off with *him*. Now, she's dead.

(pause)

Now, there's the boy.

FADE OUT:

INT. CHEVY BEL-AIR -- MORNING

The Bel-Air is parked in front of the brownstone.

Roddy sits on a pillow, so that he can see over the dash, while Lena struggles to buckle him into the bench seat in front. The extra padding makes it a job, but Roddy scarcely notices, preoccupied with a map of the Bronx Zoo.

Fran slides a hand puppet, a white, woolly lamb, around Roddy's right ear. The puppet does a little dance in front of Roddy's face.

RODDY

(adult-like)

Not NOW, Mr. Skunk. I'm readin'.

Roddy looks back at the map, running his finger from image to image.

Roy, visible in the side view mirror, shuts the trunk and pauses by the side of the car.

Fran rolls down the window, hands Roy a note. It reads: "If we're going, let's get going."

Roy takes a last look at the brownstone. His face shows a trace of bitterness, resigned, he opens the car door.

RODDY (CONT'D)

(to Lena)

When's dad coming?

Lena's face twitches.

LENA

Oh, Roddy, he's really busy taking care of business on the ranch. Why don't you see if you can find the gum in my purse.

RODDY

When is dad coming back to get *me*?

LENA

First chance he can. It just takes some time getting that business done.

Fran hands Roddy the stereoscope.

Roy settles into the driver's seat with a moan. Roddy shows Roy the map of the zoo, his finger on the "Monkey House."

RODDY

(to Roy)

Here's where we're going.

Roy looks at it intently, nodding in agreement.

ROY

(magnanimous)

Thanks for finding that. Saves me the work.

Roddy sits back satisfied.

Lena suppresses a grin. Quickly, her mood darkens. She turns and stares out the passenger window at a garden in front of the brownstone.

LENA

Jesus, Roy.

Roy, serious, exchanges a look with Fran in the rear view mirror. Fran's returning glance gives him benediction.

LENA (CONT'D)

Roy. I don't know.

Roy sighs. Pulls a hat from the door pocket, puts it on.

ROY

Look at him, Lena. *Look at him.* At least let's give him a safe start.

She waves her hand at Roy...

LENA

Go, just go!

Roy makes a disapproving click with his mouth and then starts the car and puts it into gear.

As they drive away, a real estate sign reading: "Sale Pending" is revealed in the front yard.

FADE OUT:

ON SCREEN:

"Chicago, 1979. Five years later."

INT. KITCHEN -- EVENING

Roy, Lena, Fran and a much bigger, 8-year-old Roddy are all equally spaced around a small, round table, with pretty plastic table cloth. The women are in dusters, covered by robes, hair tightly wrapped in curlers under scarves, and ready for bed. Cigarettes dangle from Lena and Fran's mouths and the kitchen is smoke-filled, like a gambling den.

A portrait of the Virgin Mary is on the wall and the "Blessed Mother's" gaze is on Fran and Lena's hi-ball glasses, which are next to the poker set box and chips. A large, stuffed dog, named Emmet, sits on a fifth chair near the kitchen door, wearing Roy's fedora.

Roy pours a brew, Roddy sips from a mug of rootbeer. Roddy is a smaller version of the old people, especially in his mannerisms.

The boy has a coin bank on his end of the table, within reach. The stereoscope is also nearby and his hand goes to it often. He wears a long underwear top, chinos, a cowboy hat and bandanna.

Fran deals.

LENA

Tell Auntie Fran what's new in the stereoscope today, love.

Roy laughs to himself.

Fran nods her head enthusiastically.

Fran notices Roy's small pile of chips and points her thumb in the chips direction, for Lena and Roddy's benefit.

LENA (CONT'D)

Poor Papa. Here, Roy, I'll sell you  
some more chips. Go ahead, Roddy,  
we're listenin'.

ROY

(childlike, to boy)

Whaaaaa! I don't have any more chips!  
Whaaaaa!

LENA

Quiet now, Roy. We want to hear  
Roddy.

Fran slides Roy a note. It reads: "Stifle yourself."

Roy mopes.

Lena slides Roy some of her chips.

Fran hits Roy with a new card, after he sweeps his fingers  
dispiritedly on the table cloth (card-playing signal).

Roy's spirits improve.

ROY

Well, tell me son. Did Houdini ever  
escape the "Water Torture Tank?"

Roddy looks into the stereoscope.

INSERT OF STEREOSCOPE PICTURE: a stage with Houdini's water  
tank, but no Houdini.

RODDY

Yeah. He's...OUT! I knew he'd get  
out.

Houdini sits next to Roy at the table, in a turn-of-the-  
century one-piece swim suit, soaking wet.

Houdini looks at his cards, big pile of chips.

Roy sets his cards down on the table, contentedly.

ROY

I call.

Houdini extracts a face card from his swim suit.

HOUDINI

You're bringing it all back to me,  
Roy. Used to play with "Unthan, the  
Legless Wonder." Had a bad attitude  
when he was losin', and like you,  
losing is what he did best.

Fran lays down her cards, Houdini chokes and lets his cards scatter to the table. He picks up Roy's cigar out of the ash tray, whacks off the ash, and takes a couple of puffs on it.

RODDY

Hey, does this win anything?

Roy sobers up immediately.

ROY

Oh, Jesus wept!

Roy smashes his hands down on the table. He gently grabs Roddy's hand and places it face up on the table. Winces.

ROY (CONT'D)

The boy doesn't even have anything,  
just enough to beat me.

LENA

(beams)

The boy's a natural-born *talent*.

Houdini, looking satisfied, takes an additional puff, places the shrinking cigar back in the ashtray.

Roy sits back irked, while the boy scoops up the chips and slides them across the table to Fran. Fran counts out the requisite nickels, sliding them back to Roddy. Grinning at Roy, he drops them one at a time into his bank.

Returning Roddy's grin with a sneer...

ROY

You'd think just percentages-wise I  
could catch a break...

(pause)

If you look at the odds...

LENA

Roy, come down off the cross, for  
cripes sake.

Lena flashes her own, winning hand triumphantly at Roy, out of Roddy's view, and then places it face down on the table.

Roy smashes the much-reduced cigar back in his face.

ROY

(dejected)

Every time. Every time, can't catch  
a break.

Roy leans back.



ROY (CONT'D)  
Every single time.

Lena taps the table impatiently with her hand. And Fran, without thinking, taps Mr. Skunk on the table, in solidarity.

Roy fixes his gaze on the puppet. Then Fran.

Fran realizes the abuse Mr. Skunk is taking, looks at Roddy sadly, and smooths the fake lamb wool with her free hand.

Roddy laughs.

EXT. SUBURBAN CHICAGO HOUSE -- MORNING

Fran ushers Roddy out the front door as he puts his backpack on. They go down the steps, across the footpath and turn onto the sidewalk in front of their neighbor's house, kitty-corner to the library.

The neighbor is watering her lawn and sees Fran and Roddy. She walks across the grass toward them, while continuing to water, sending waves across the yard.

NEIGHBOR  
(to Roddy, brightly)  
Must be first day of school?

Roddy stops to respond, but with her arm behind Roddy's back, Fran tries to lead him forward. She nods yes to the neighbor.

NEIGHBOR (CONT'D)  
What are you, about third grade?

RODDY  
No, fourth. I might get to play basketball this year.

NEIGHBOR  
Oh, yeah? Get any practicing in? I don't see you out much.

Fran crosses in front of Roddy, inserting herself between the neighbor and the child. She smiles graciously at the woman next door, but looks to her watch, indicating the time, and pushes ahead with the boy.

The neighbor, retreating some, takes a step backwards with the hose...

Roddy, over his shoulder...

RODDY  
 (to neighbor)  
 Not so much practice, but I think  
 I'm gonna be a natural.

FADE OUT:

INT. BACK PORCH -- NIGHT

The kitchen is long and narrow, originally opening onto a back porch, which has since been enclosed and serves as Roddy's bedroom.

A small, neatly-made bed is at the center of the space and a stereoscope lay on top of the bed.

Most notable among the boy's possessions are the array of stereoscope cards and old encyclopedias. It can not be overstated how many stereoscope cards there are, depicting scenes from an old-fashioned world.

"Wild Bill" Hickok squats down near the bed, his haunches resting on the back of his boots. He holds a lasso and ties the honda knot.

BILL HICKOK  
 Looks like you've been railroaded,  
 permanently, to life here at Shady  
 Acres.

RODDY  
 'Til my dad gets back.

LENA (O.S.)  
 (to Roy)  
 What is it, what's wrong?

BILL HICKOK  
 Takin' his time, your old man is.

ROY (O.S.)  
 (to Lena)  
 It's nothin'! Just get winded when  
 I stand too fast.

RODDY  
 I can hardly remember what he looked  
 like. Luckily, I know where there's  
 a picture.

Roddy pulls it out, from inside his shirt.

Wild Bill tilts his head toward Roy and Lena, now seen through the doorway.

BILL HICKOK  
 Fran's ok with you packin' that  
 around?

Roddy nods. He's careful to keep the photo from the old  
 peoples' view.

LENA (O.S.)  
 (to Roy)  
 I told you to leave the lawn. No,  
 you've gotta mow it all at one time.

Roddy looks down at the picture, then up at Hickok.

RODDY  
 Looks something like you.

Bill Hickok looks at the photo.

INSERT: PHOTO

BILL HICKOK  
 He do don't he.

Seen through the doorway. Fran walks by and gives Roy a  
 sock on the arm, in support of Nel. Roy exaggerates his  
 injury, offended.

Roddy takes the photo back, keeping it in front of him, away  
 from anyone else's sight.

BILL HICKOK (CONT'D)  
 He *is* a handsome bronco buster...  
 flat-like, though. Only one  
 dimension.

RODDY  
 Yeah, he needs some di-men-sion-a-  
 lizing, too.

Roddy traces his father's outline, his hat and face in the  
 photograph. It is flat, disappointingly one-dimensional.

Roddy looks to the encyclopedias, focusing on "The  
 Encyclopedia of Universal Knowledge; Volume XVII Salamander-  
 Stiles."

As he looks at this volume, a hole emerges, in the book,  
 allowing for a view inside to the section titled:  
 "Stereoscope," with an illustration next to the heading.

The light clicks off in the kitchen and it is dark and quiet.

Roddy places the stereoscope under the cot and hangs his  
 head over the bed's edge.

To him it seems that the lenses of the stereoscope are aglow with just a bit of light illuminating the subject, "Jack Dempsey," in the glass, although the stereocard itself is dark. The glass lenses appear magical.

Roddy gets up, opens the porch door, walks into the kitchen, turns out the light, and heads out the other kitchen door.

INT. KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

Fran enters the kitchen and turns on the light. Roddy reenters, unnoticed, as Fran turns on a burner at the stove.

She shakes a cigarette from its packet, places it in her mouth, Mr. Skunk's head peering out of her apron pocket, and lights the cigarette on the flame. Fran takes a deep hit, eyes closed. When she opens her eyes and exhales, she is startled to see Roddy, which in turn makes her cough, violently.

Roddy walks to the stove and turns off the gas.

Still coughing, Fran looks at him, wanting to know what he's doing. Asks with a thrust up chin and a questioning look.

RODDY

Nobody remembers to lock the damn door.

Fran grins, while Roddy walks to the kitchen table and sits down. Fran follows, while Roddy gets the photo out of his shirt and lays it face up on the table. Fran sees it. When Roddy looks up, Fran tilts her head toward the cake on the kitchen countertop. He nods yes and she fixes him a slice.

Roddy eats.

She smiles and points to a spot on the photo.

INSERT: FRANS FINGER, pointing to a small detail in the snapshot's background. Hung on a fence, a partially obscured banner reads, faintly: "Pendleton Ro..." .

RODDY (CONT'D)

(beaming)

Yeah, I do look like him, don't I.

INT. KITCHEN -- AFTERNOON

Lena is at the stove, wrestling with muffins, pan in, pan out, mixing batter in a bowl, and taking muffins from hot tin to cooling rack.

On the table is a cardboard box, originally for Pabst Blue Ribbon beer bottles, now housing the solar system. The front of the box has been cut away and painted rubber and styrofoam balls suspend from the top by dental floss.

In nine different colors, Fran charts the planets' elliptical revolutions around the sun on the back of the box.

Roddy is holding up a miniature globe of earth as Roy ties it to the top of the box.

A larger red ball, hangs in the center, representing the sun.

ROY

You know every three hundred and sixty-five days the earth circles around the sun.

RODDY

Can we hang up a moon for earth?

ROY

Ah, hell, what with?

RODDY

Be cool if Mars could have its three moons, too. We could use malt balls.

ROY

Cripes! I was hoping to finish this while I still had bowel function.

LENA

Roy! What's wrong with you?

Roddy bats at the tiny globe, catches it, turns it around, and looks at its map.

RODDY

(matter-of-fact)

Where do you think my dad could be?

A very uncomfortable silence envelops the room.

Lena looks at the others. Fran holds up a note, hidden from Roddy's view, with a colored "?" written on it.

LENA

I Don't know, Roddy, it's been such a long, long time. We kinda lost touch.

RODDY

(incredulous)

Why would he lose touch with me?

Lena, Roy, and Fran all exchange nervous looks.

LENA

It was a terrible time. Back then,  
a terrible time after your mother  
died. Nobody meant to lose touch.

RODDY

He was a rodeo rider, right? I  
remember the horses, him riding  
steers...

ROY

(to himself)  
Yeah, all hat, no cattle.

Lena hisses at Roy, who looks down at his ridiculously short  
cuticles. He tries to bite more off his middle finger.

Fran searches one of her robe pockets, finds the peppermint  
candy, and hands it to Roddy with Mr. Skunk.

"Wild Bill" Hickok appears. Tilts head in Fran's direction.

BILL HICKOK

Notice these people want to stick  
something in your mouth whenever you  
mention dear old dad's whereabouts.

Roddy picks up the stereoscope and looks through it.

RODDY

Yeah, I noticed.

FADE OUT:

EXT. RESIDENTIAL CHICAGO NEIGHBORHOOD -- AFTERNOON

Roy chews on his cigar as he walks home with newly developed  
photos.

As Roy opens the picture envelope, he reaches into his shirt  
pocket for his eye glass case. No glasses. He makes a click  
with his mouth in annoyance. He squints to see the  
photographs.

INSERT: blurry photos.

Extending his arms to see it, Roy is finally able to make  
out a photograph of Dell. He shuffles through the rest of  
the snapshots and stops abruptly, when he realizes that all  
of the photos are slightly different takes on the same  
picture. Cigar droops. Twenty-four photos of a photo.

ROY

Dell.

INT. KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

Roy enters the kitchen with the pictures and his cigar. He sees Roddy at the table with the stereoscope.

ROY  
(to Roddy, disturbed)  
What are you doin' with these?

Roy puts the photos on the table and spreads them out.

RODDY  
I'm making dad...

Roddy taps the photo.

RODDY (CONT'D)  
Into a 3d card.

ROY  
What?

RODDY  
I need to get two pictures at the right slant so I can make a talking stereoscope card of my dad.

The cigar bounces up and down as he listens to this explanation.

ROY  
Here Roddy, you're confusing two things. What d'ya call it? Stereosis? Stereopsis? That's when you show each eye a slightly different shot of the same subject, each taken from a just, slightly different perspective... Then, see your brain puts the two together, as one, and it appears to have depth...

RODDY  
I photographed the photo from two different angles and I used your telephoto lens to get in really close to him.

Roy sighs and slides down into a chair at the kitchen table.

ROY  
... what you got here, is the exact same perspective, just twice. Changing the sizes a little, of the same picture, won't get you depth...

Roy can see Roddy's already busy at work. A few shots from Roy's perspective: Roddy cuts, pastes, and fashions two photos, differing sizes instead of perspectives of the same image. He's doing his best to approximate a stereoscope card.

Roddy sticks his finished card into the stereoscope and takes a look.

INSERT OF RODDY'S STEREOSCOPE VIEW: No 3d effect. Flat. Two enlarged pictures of Dell, emphasize through their enlargement and cropping, the once small banner in the background: "Pendleton Ro..." now perfectly legible.

Roddy stares for a long beat, his lips move silently, then, slowly lowers the stereoscope to the table, perplexed.

ROY (CONT'D)

Not so good, huh?

Roddy sits silent, gazing off. He looks in the stereoscope again.

ROY (CONT'D)

It's alright. You don't have to worry if somethin' doesn't come out perfect you know. All efforts count.

Roy walks over to Emmet and looks back at Roddy.

ROY (CONT'D)

Didn't know you had that picture.

Roddy stops gazing off. Flashes back to Roy, quick on-and-off smile.

Roy grabs his fedora off Emmet and heads out the kitchen door.

Seen through the kitchen window, Roy stops in the front yard to gaze into the street. Look of concern on his face.

Roddy picks up the stereoscope and imagines that he sees "Wild Bill" Hickock, Houdini in a coffin, "Stereoscope Dell," and Egyptologist Howard Carter, discoverer of King Tut's tomb, all sitting around his grandparents' kitchen table.

WILD BILL

I was in Pendleton once. Got a hitch in my get-go from a night in a roach motel there.

STEREOSCOPE DELL

Roddy's lookin' for "rodeo-land" Pendleton, not the flophouse of your nightmares.



HOWARD CARTER

Well now boys this is where an  
educated man has the edge.

Houdini swings open the coffin lid.

Howard's lips continue to move, but his words are spoken by Houdini, as the illusionist steals and transmits Howard's voice and Howard is rendered mute.

HOUDINI CHANNELING HOWARD

The educated man knows, when it's  
information he seeks, his local public  
library, your tax dollars at work,  
is at his convenient disposal.

"Stereoscope Dell" shuts the coffin lid. "Wild Bill" and Howard fall silent, serious.

STEREOSCOPE DELL

Howard Carter's right, Roddy. You  
could find something at the library.  
Something useful.

Houdini opens the coffin lid again, producing a phone book that he thumbs through.

Fran enters the kitchen with a bag of groceries. She sets the bag down, and notes Roddy's preoccupation.

Roddy jumps from the chair, nearly knocking it over, still clutching the stereoscope with both hands.

RODDY

(to Fran)

Pendleton. The ranch is in PENDLETON!

Fran turns to Roddy, a mix of joy and fear in her face and knowingly nods yes.

Beat.

Roddy runs to the kitchen door, past Fran, who makes no attempt to stop him.

RODDY (CONT'D)

I'm going across the street, to the  
library. I'll be right back.

Roddy disappears, door slams. Fran watches him leave the house, unattended, from the kitchen window.

INT. LIBRARY -- DAY

Roddy sits behind a table stacked with open phone books.

On top are the "White Pages" for Pendleton, Oregon--open to the page with Dell's name and phone number: "Delaney, Owen.....(514)284-5308." Underneath, Pendleton, South Carolina, open to Dell's name and the same phone number, followed by Pendleton, Indiana and so on.

A slow-moving, elderly librarian presents another phone book to the boy, hefting it onto the table with considerable effort.

LIBRARIAN

I'd say Mr. Delaney's looking to be found...

It's a Chicago area phone book.

RODDY

He's in this one, too?

The librarian compares the phone numbers in the various books.

LIBRARIAN

It's him alright. It's Mr. Owen Delaney everywhere you check.

The librarian looks up from the phone book. The boy is gone.

EXT. LIBRARY -- CONTINUOUS

Roddy is excited beyond measure. He runs out of the library and spots a phone booth across the street. He searches his pockets frantically for change. He can barely count it.

The only thing between Roddy and the telephone is the parking lot and he tears through it as fast as he reasonably can, while still watching for cars. He pauses at the sidewalk, with the phone booth on the opposite side of the street. He looks right and then left. No cars. He takes just a second to look inside the stereoscope, to give his father a message.

RODDY

(to dad's stereocard)

I found you! I've got the number.

Then he runs into the street, before his eyes have left the stereoscope. A car has just rounded the corner and strikes him.

FADE OUT:

INT. PHONE BOOTH -- NIGHT

Roy fumbles nervously in his pocket for some change, like the boy did.

ROY  
 (to himself)  
 Dell... Christ, almighty. Ah-right,  
 here we go... Dell, listen...

Dials.

ROY (CONT'D)  
 ...this is Roy...

Dell picks up.

ROY (CONT'D)  
 Dell...

Dell recognizes Roy's voice at first word.

DELL  
 Where is he?

ROY  
 Been an accident. Need some blood  
 fast. Somethin' about his is hard  
 to match, and I thought...  
 (terse)  
 thought it might be your blood...

FADE OUT:

INT. HOSPITAL CAFETERIA -- NIGHT

Roy sits alone at a table. His half-finished dinner pushed to the side on a tray. Exhausted, elbow on table, Roy's head rests in hand.

Dell suddenly comes into view above Roy's head, casting a shadow.

Roy looks up.

Dell's no longer a cowboy, but a police officer. The patch on one of the short sleeves of his sheriff's uniform reads Pendleton, Oregon. On his arm, two pieces of medical tape secure a large piece of gauze. Dell's older than five years would have naturally aged him. More mature and dead serious.

DELL  
 Five years I've asked myself why  
 you'd take my boy? Why do it to  
*him*? Give me a reason to keep you  
 out of prison?

Roy sits back in his chair, eyes dropping to the table.

ROY  
 (no bullshit)  
 Couldn't risk it Dell. I had one go  
 with you. You know where that ended.  
 You were a rodeo rider for Christ  
 sake.

Roy meets Dell's eyes.

ROY (CONT'D)  
 What the hell kind of life was that  
 gonna be for *your* child?

DELL  
 A life with his father...

ROY  
 Fran and I had a father. Traveled a  
 lot. Left us here and there. Could  
 be a long time gettin' back. Last  
 time, Fran was maybe eleven. I'd  
 been asked to sleep out back. Didn't  
 see her all week. She never spoke  
 again. Took her East, where we met  
 Lena. I worked every kind of job.

Roy leans forward on his elbows, says softly:

ROY (CONT'D)  
 I asked Fran one time why she didn't  
 speak just to me? She wrote: "there  
 aren't any words."

Dell leans down to Roy.

DELL  
 Not that kind of man, Roy.

ROY  
 Right, but the kind of man that had  
 Trigger saddled up for the rodeo,  
 three-year-old or no.

Dell stands bolt upright, clenches fists.

DELL  
 Roy, you son-of-a-bitch...

ROY  
 (matter-of-fact)  
 It's not that I didn't think you'd  
 catch up. Not that I didn't think  
 this day would get here, though my  
 luck, I'd need to invite it. But I  
 bought some time, he was safe with  
 us. Happy.

(MORE)

ROY (CONT'D)

I know I cost you and I know I cost him. I was ready to pay that and any other price. Prison, Dell?

Roy reaches into his pocket and slaps a quarter on the table, slides it toward Dell.

ROY (CONT'D)

Make the call. I did what I had to do.

Dell leans down to Roy.

DELL

(quiet enunciation)

You...had...no...right.

Dell walks away. Roy watches him cross the cafeteria. The first doubt surfaces on Roy's face. He leans back in his chair, hands in his pockets.

INT. RODDY'S BACK PORCH BEDROOM -- MORNING

Roddy lies in bed, propped up by a mountain of pillows, carefully arranged under his head and the large cast on his leg.

Crowded around him on the porch are the old people and his father, forming two isolated groups again.

Dell sits on the edge of Roddy's bed, rigid. He faces Roddy, his back to the old people in a show of anger, as the guilty seniors stand submissively at the foot of the bed.

Dell's badge is pinned to Roddy's pajama top. The boy has everybody he wants in the room. He's not taking in Dell's silence, or the old people's fear.

Fran takes a step forward, offering coffee on a tray.

Dell is courteous, but he doesn't look at her or take the coffee.

DELL

No thank you, Fran.

Fran walks to the bookshelf, adds the coffee tray to the boy's from breakfast, laden with breakfast remains.

RODDY

How did you guys find dad?

ROY

Roddy, there are things that have to be explained to you.

Dell puts a hand up, silences Roy.

Roddy, sensing the dissension, hurries on...

RODDY

Well, anyway, now dad knows where I am.

Dell gets up, turns to face Roddy, but his eyes land on the picture of his wife above Roddy's bed and linger there. Slowly, he looks to Roddy, who flashes Dell a look of trust and hope.

Beat.

Dell straightens up and turns to face Roy.

DELL

Roddy and I need some time to talk...

Roy gives Dell an immediate nod of agreement and shepherds Lena and Fran out of the room, but painfully stepping away, knowing that they are no longer guardians.

Dell takes a seat next to Roddy on the bed.

DELL (CONT'D)

You and I have lost a lot of time. My own folks, your other grandparents died young. Time's somethin' you can't get back.

Dell searches the boy's face to see if he has a hint of what has gone on.

DELL (CONT'D)

(slowly)

I know how much you're gonna like the ranch. Oregon's a great place for a boy. Your uncle Ned and I work the ranch that was your grandparents', with Ned buyin' up every little piece he can around it. When I'm not in town...

Dell taps the badge.

DELL (CONT'D)

(slowly)

I work the place. You've gotten so big. We could sure use your help.

RODDY

And I have my own... *horse*?

DELL

(aping Roddy)

Yeah, you have your own, *horse*...  
that horse has been a long time  
waiting for you. Hell of a long  
time.

Roddy starts to cry. Dell hugs him.

DELL (CONT'D)

Tell me what it is?

He holds the boy.

RODDY

I want to go with you, help you with  
the ranch. But I've been taking  
care of these old people, all their  
lives, since they were old. They  
won't be okay without me.

DELL

They'd be fine.

RODDY

Well, Fran, you know... you have to  
be real careful with. Nobody but me  
reads her notes every time. The  
other thing is, I keep 'em happy.

Dell puts a hand through Roddy's hair.

DELL

I know you do.

RODDY

Is the ranch big, dad?

DELL

Five hundred acres, mostly cattle.  
Ned and I built a new place nearer  
to town. Some forest, but mostly  
meadow for grazing. Ned keeps some  
Appaloosa, plenty of room for them  
to run. Your grandparents' old  
homestead is at the north end...

RODDY

Well, couldn't *these* grandparents  
live in that?

As if he'd taken a shot to the gut, Dell stands abruptly.  
He walks to the window, rests his hands and arms on the sill,  
stares out.

Beat.

Dell trying for a firm tone.

DELL

Son...

RODDY

Dad, I'm all they care about that's left. I don't think they could help themselves. They're not sad like they used to be, but for a long time they were only sad.

Dell continues to look out window.

DELL

We've all had plenty of sad.

Beat.

Dell stands up again.

DELL (CONT'D)

Son, I...

RODDY

(firm, like Dell)

It's too late, dad, we can't do it. We can't take me from them. You know what it's like, dad, and I know and it's too hard.

Dell gives Roddy a long look.

Beat.

Fran quietly re-enters the bedroom, checking on the boy. Dell notes the communication and intimacy they have when Fran and Roddy make eye contact. He returns to the bed with Roddy.

Dell hears the restrained shuffle of two more sets of feet in the doorway. Keeps his gaze on Roddy.

DELL

(reasoning out loud)

This one doesn't think you people can function independently. He don't know you as well as I do. His preference is to have you within walking distance. I think you can guess my preferences, but, concentrating on the boy here, you three could take the old place. Watch him after school 'til I get home from town.



Fran steps forward to face both Lena and Roy, thrusting her picture forward for them to view, with a finger on Pendleton. She then taps her own chest, acknowledging her complicity.

Lena gasps.

LENA

Oh, Fran!

Roy takes the picture from Fran. Removing his glasses from his shirt pocket, he looks at the photo closely. Hands it back.

Roy looks at Fran and then brings her to him in a hug.

Dell stands and turns to face Roy.

DELL

Let me finish. You watch him and all Umatilla County will be watching you... Ranch hands, deputies, shopkeepers, *me*, and his uncle Ned, an unforgiving son-of-a-bitch, whose path you'll want to side-step.

ROY

Side-steppin' we've got down, Dell. It was a sad past, I know now I made sadder and sorrier. That you offer to let this boy have us still...

Roy's voice breaks. Puts a hand to his eyes.

DELL

Help me get this boy home. Could you all do that?

Roy straightens and stands tall. Nods head at Dell.

ROY

We can do that, Dell. We're pleased to do that.