

THIEVES HIGHWAY

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FADE IN:

Title Card: Sulphur, Oklahoma.

EXT. CHARLIE'S RANCH - CORRAL - DAY

A herd of cows parts as FRANK BENNETT 40s, strides through the dust parting the dusty, muddy throng.

Frank carries an aluminum folder, for notes and a pen. He's confident in the pack of cows, his smacks a heifer on the rump without looking back, this is his world.

He pauses checking an ear-tag. Then continues to the fence, where he rests the aluminum note pad, he marks it up.

FRANK BENNETT

Just south of 200, with the new arrivals.

Leaning against the gate, CHARLIE, a bow-legged rancher who carries a respiration machine on his hip and an oxygen tube in his nose. A man who has spent his life outdoors.

CHARLIE

Well, it ain't no bear or lion or pack of wolves. I'm tellin' ya, Frank, you oughtta have a look 'round these parts. Things just ain't adding up in the books.

Frank wears blue jeans, a Carhartt jacket, and a tan shirt underneath that identifies him as a livestock officer.

He studies the brands on Charlie's herd.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

You expect a few critters to go missing, a maverick here or there, but this is systematic. At night mostly.

(beat)

No one wants to ride picket after dark. Hell, I wouldn't for what I pay.

FRANK BENNETT

(not distracted from his main task - the cows)

Where'd you pick up these new ones?

Charlie sucks in his lower lip and holds onto his belt buckle.

CHARLIE

You ain't sayin' I'd rustle steer
is ya, Frank? I bought 'em fair and
square off a fella in Cherokee
County, Kansas.

Frank grins as the sun bears down on his hat. He doesn't mind
needling Charlie a little.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Frank, I'm telling you-

FRANK BENNETT

Yeah. You're telling me plenty.
Have you checked the boundary-line
for range-remnants?

Charlie nods scratches his receding hairline.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)

You know, Charlie, you don't have
to call me out here every time you
need an inspection. There's a self-
inspect system online now -

CHARLIE

Ain't many like us left. Out there
in the weather. I raise steer the
way they did a hundred years ago.
Honest hard-work. That ought to
mean something. It ain't nothing.
It's not just meat, it's a whole
lot more than that.

Frank continues with the inspection.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Anyhow, I didn't call you, we
wouldn't get to shoot the shit, now
would we?

EXT. CHARLIE'S RANCH - DRIVEWAY - AFTERNOON

Frank matches Charlie's slower pace as they move down a long
dirt driveway to the officer's truck.

CHARLIE

I wasn't the original owner of this
ranch, Frank. Inherited it from a
fella, George Fletcher.

FRANK BENNETT

Thats news to me, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Your father knew him. Didn't like the old man, not many people did. Can't say anyone still alive other than me know how it comes to be.

Charlie pauses looking out over his land.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Rustlers, Outlaw Chickasaw, rode onto the property one night. Any other night it would have been fine, George woulda seen 'em off. But this night, the Old Man's in Fort Gibson for business. Just his wife and son here, well the rustlers see an opportunity and make off with his livestock, almost 400 head of cattle. After they killed Mary Fletcher and her boy.

FRANK BENNETT

You don't say.

CHARLIE

George buried his little family out back, fixed hand-cut elm markers, still there if you look for 'em. Came by my place the next morning, asked me to look after the ranch, if he didn't never come back I could take on the deed.

Charlie walks again, lost in thought for a moment.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

He was gone over five years. It was December 1967. By then I was running the place pretty well, my own head of livestock, wife and young ones. Anyways, Fletcher was just out here one morning, standing where you are now. Said I should keep the ranch, said he'd lost his appetite for it. That was the last time I saw of him.

They arrive at Frank's truck, Frank climbs behind the wheel, Charlie looks in through the window.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Way he framed it he'd set out and hunted down each of those that paid visit to his place.

(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Tracked them as a group across the border, then individually after they split, all the way into Ciudad Juárez. Told me he'd hung each one of them at gunpoint. Tossed a rope over a branch and watched as the fight was squeezed outta them.

FRANK BENNETT

That so?

CHARLIE

Fletcher didn't ask anyone for help, just did what had to be done. When it was done, so was he.

FRANK BENNETT

Don't go getting any ideas, Charlie.

CHARLIE

The fight left me so long ago, don't even recall how it tastes.

Frank gazes down at the respirator and knows Charlie might not be around much longer.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Just want to enter my house justified, Frank. That's all.

Frank nods respectfully, as Charlie steps away from the truck. He pulls off down a back country road.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - BEND - LATER

Frank drives some time before he comes around a corner. There's a big lot with junk cars and broken trailers scattered around desert bushes.

At the far-end, there's an old dilapidated barn with a TRUCK AND TRAILER pulled up to its entrance.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

He keeps driving a distance and then eases on the breaks. Once again, he gazes in the side mirror.

The barn sits a ways back. Something doesn't seem right to Frank.

He surveys the area, checks for anyone who might be watching. There's a hill in the distance that might be a good vantage point.

EXT. TOP OF THE HILL - SOON AFTER

Frank is parked on the hill and now out of the vehicle with a pair of binoculars.

He leans against a tree and takes observation of the barn.

BINOCULARS POV: A large I-beam extends from the hauling vehicle into the old structure - a reefer.

He lowers the eyeglass, reacting.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK - MOMENTS LATER

Frank holds his cell phone to his ear, gaze still on the reefer trailer below.

FRANK BENNETT

As far as you know, is there anyone cutting beef in Murray County?

MEAT INSPECTOR (O.S.)

Murray County? There isn't a slaughterhouse in that region besides G-Bar.

FRANK BENNETT

That's what I thought.

Now his thoughts are on his next move.

MEAT INSPECTOR (O.S.)

Why do you ask?

FRANK BENNETT

No reason.

Frank sets the phone down before anymore questions can be asked. He reaches for a thermos and pours a cup of black coffee.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK - LATE AFTERNOON

The sun begins to dip down over the wooded horizon as Frank continues to watch from his truck. He pours the last sip from the thermos into his cup.

There's no sign of activity at the barn. Frank makes a decision and puts his truck in drive.

Just then, he sees something on the horizon: a cloud of dust moves towards the barn from across the plain.

EXT. TOP OF THE HILL - MOMENTS LATER

Frank once again gazes through the binoculars.

BINOCULARS POV: An OLD MAN on a horse and his TWO ADULT SONS drive five head of cattle towards a fence at the edge of the suspicious property.

The younger of the two sons hops off his horse, takes wire cutters out of his pocket, and cuts the fence. As he holds it open, the old man and his older son drives the cows through and towards the barn.

The young man starts to re-wire the fence as if they were never there.

As the steer vanish into the dark entrance, the old man dismounts from his horse and moves towards the trailer. Frank watches close as he soon emerges with a BOLT GUN.

Frank lowers the binoculars. He knows what's about to happen.

He takes a LEVER-ACTION RIFLE from the truck, checking the chamber.

INT. BARN - MOMENTS LATER

The old man holds the gun to one of the cow's heads, who is busy eating some grain, and pulls the trigger.

THE ANIMAL SLUMPS FACE DOWN INTO THE DIRT.

Meanwhile, the son starts a chainsaw to carve it up.

FRANK BENNETT (O.S.)

Hold it.

Frank comes around the trailer into the cavernous space, rifle-in-hand ready.

The old man spits out a mouthful of tobacco juice.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)

Put it down.

OLD MAN
Excuse me, mister.

FRANK BENNETT
(eyes the machine blade)
I'm a livestock officer for the
State of Oklahoma.

He competes with the sound of the chainsaw as the younger of the two rustlers hasn't shown any sign of shutting it off.

OLD MAN
Can't a man butcher his own beef in
peace?

Frank takes a quick glance at the remaining cows. He recognizes the brand on their sides.

FRANK BENNETT
Your own, huh? That looks like the
Stinson brand to me.

The son makes a slight gesture with the saw, readying it for action. This isn't lost on Frank.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
Cut that saw or I'll put a bullet
in it. And I've been known to miss.

The old man turns his head and soon the chainsaw's buzz comes to an end. The silence left over is just as tense.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
I want you to call that other son
of yours.

There is a crunch sound.

Frank turns to see a very large man, the SECOND SON.

Who now lunges for Frank.

Frank kicks him between the legs, dropping him, then backhands him with the rifle stock, dropping him.

The large man starts to lift himself.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
Stay down, boy.

The second son, ignores and starts to stand.

Frank kicks him hard in the head, dropping him cold.

OLD MAN

Now listen here. You ain't got no right to hurt my boy like that.

FRANK BENNETT

(to First son)

I asked you to put it down, I won't ask again.

Frank is not raising the rifle, but it's in his hands. There's something about his stillness that unnerves the men.

They look at their unconscious relative and then to Frank.

OLD MAN

I been doin' this for forty years 'round these parts.

FRANK BENNETT

Well, I don't know what's happened the last 39 but that stops today.

He slowly digs out his cuffs with his other hand.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)

You've got the right to remain silent.

Frank tosses them to the younger of the two.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)

Put them on.

Dad drops the bolt-gun, son drops the saw fetching the cuffs.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)

Anything you say may be held against you in a court of law.

The old man spits again, this time on the toe of Frank's boot.

OLD MAN

One day, you won't be so lucky. You'll be out on the range, all lonesome. And someone just like me will get you.

FRANK BENNETT

You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford one...

As he goes on with the Miranda rights.

EXT. FRANK'S TRAILER HOME - NIGHT

Frank's truck is parked outside a double wide on the outskirts of a small rural Oklahoma town.

He wipes his feet and closes the screen door behind him.

INT. FRANK'S TRAILER HOME - CONTINUOUS

The fridge door has only one picture on it: Frank maybe ten or twelve years before with a brunette WOMAN, possibly his wife. Frank opens the refrigerator to reveal barren shelves except for some lunch meat and a root beer. Frank grabs the package of turkey.

Frank takes a belly holstered PISTOL and lays it on the counter.

He opens a cabinet and takes out a bag of bread with a couple slices left but as he takes them out, Frank sees they've got mold all over, he tosses them.

There are some framed rodeo photographs. A belt buckle in a frame. Some ribbons, decades old and dust covered.

INT. STEAKHOUSE - NIGHT

Frank sits in a booth, we cannot see the rest of the restaurant, he chose it that way. He looks down at his boot. The spit stain is still there, now dried. Carole the waitress drops off his Steak and potato.

CAROLE THE WAITRESS

(we don't see her face)

Anything else I can get for you,
hun?

FRANK BENNETT

No, that about does it. Thank you
Carole.

A woman his age, SYLVIA, passes, turning back. She studies Frank from behind for a little while before she says anything.

SYLVIA

That can't be you, Frank Bennett.

Her voice is enough to flood his mind with memories.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)
I thought they told you never to
come back in here.

Frank looks back, but we remain in the booth, blind to the
outside world.

FRANK BENNETT
Sylvia?

SYLVIA
I didn't think you'd recognize my
face, least of all remember my
name.

FRANK BENNETT
Would you like to join me?

SYLVIA
Do you mind?

FRANK BENNETT
I'll get the waitress.

We see her now, Sylvia's blond hair falls loose on her
shoulders. She's Frank's age but still as pretty as he
remembered. Sporting a Carhartt jacket and work clothes.

SYLVIA
It's ok, I've got a take-out order
coming.

FRANK BENNETT
You've barely aged a day.

SYLVIA
Now the Frank I remember was
honest... to a fault.

She smiles. Struck by his looks.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)
Frank Bennett,
(liking the sound of his
name)
I wondered if I'd see you here. You
ever get that, like a sixth sense?

FRANK BENNETT
I'm familiar with it.

SYLVIA
I heard about Hannah, I'm sorry, I
really am.

FRANK BENNETT

Thank you.

SYLVIA

We start out with so many dreams,
struggle, and then just like that.
It just doesn't seem right.

FRANK BENNETT

I thought you left town, got
married. You back visiting?

SYLVIA

Dad got ill, needed someone to help
on the ranch, and my marriage,
well, I have an ex-husband with a
much younger wife.

Weighing his words thoughtfully.

FRANK BENNETT

I'm sorry to hear about your dad.
Still got the spread out past 288?

SYLVIA

Exit at the truck stop. Old place
is a little overgrown, but me and
pa are whipping it back into shape.

The Waitress places a paper bag on the table.

WAITRESS

Here's your order Ma'am, anything
else.

SYLVIA

I'm good, thank you.

Frank watches the Waitress then looks back at Sylvia. She
hasn't taken her eyes off him.

FRANK BENNETT

You're back for good, or?

SYLVIA

My dad needs me. He had no sons,
bless him, he never complained. Now
that privilege falls on me.
(beat)
He liked you.

FRANK BENNETT

Please pass along my best.

SYLVIA
I'm still surprised they let you in here.

FRANK BENNETT
New owners.

SYLVIA
They don't have your mugshot on the wall somewhere?

FRANK BENNETT
I hope not. I'm a cop.

SYLVIA
What?

FRANK BENNETT
Well, to be specific, I'm a livestock officer.

SYLVIA
A cow cop?

He grins.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)
(chuckles)
Fightin' Frankie... a policeman.

FRANK BENNETT
No one's called me that in a while.

Sylvia laughs to herself, then looks at her jacket.

SYLVIA
Look at me, still in my ranch clothes.

FRANK BENNETT
You look great.

SYLVIA
So do you.

She takes a moment to study this older Frank. She takes the receipt off the bag, grabs a pen. Hands her number to Frank.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)
I don't usually do this. Running into you like this, my sixth sense and all. In case you're curious.

FRANK BENNETT
(smiling gently)
I'll call you.

She wants more but it's not time yet.

SYLVIA
Try not to get in any fights.

FRANK BENNETT
I'm not the same guy.

SYLVIA
That's too bad.
(beat)
I kinda liked that guy.

Frank smiles gently, they don't need to talk.

FRANK BENNETT
It's good to see you, Sylvia.

She smiles, now it's time to leave.

SYLVIA
You too, Frank.

She stands and leaves, smiling as she does.

Frank smiles to himself, then looks out the window.

We push in on Frank - he might be able to rejoin the human race after all.

EXT. FRANK'S TRAILER HOME - NIGHT

Frank sits outside his home in a weathered lawn chair. An old country tune drifts out from the trailer's open door. He looks out at the dark night, alone with his thoughts and memories.

EXT. LIVESTOCK SALE - LOADING ZONE - DAY

Off a sign: Southern Oklahoma Livestock Auction.

A series of shots show trucks and trailers pulling up with their stock.

Cows are unloaded and moved into pens by the YARD CREW. One of these cowboys pushes a stubborn cow along with a paddle, coaxing it out of the trailer.

Another of the yard crew spreads glue on a yellow sticker. He moves around a pen of four cows who run from him as he comes towards them. He suddenly slaps the sticker on one brown and white animal.

YARD CREW

Steer.

A member of his team makes note on a document that #606 is a steer. The man with the stickers dodges another cow as it comes at him.

INT. LIVESTOCK SALE - AUCTION ARENA - CONTINUOUS

The tiered stands are full of BUYERS and some SPECTATORS.

One of the yard crew motions for the next cow to be led in. He slips behind a safety door as the gate opens and the animal comes through. Its weight, 1308 pounds, shows up on a digital scale above next to the price per pound for the animal in cents.

The AUCTIONEER speaks from his box, facing the audience.

AUCTIONEER

Now, look at that fine Hereford.
Never seen one so fine in my life.

Two yard crew workers keep the animal in the middle for the audience to see.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)

Gonna start with a 65, 65... uh can
I hear a 70... 70...

A BIDDER in the front row raises a white paper, signaling his bid.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)

70 right there. Now, 75... anyone?
75.

A bored woman, the AUCTIONEER'S ASSISTANT, keeps track of the bids on a computer.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)

80, 80? 85?

His eyes dance around the various men who have bid on this animal.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)

A SECOND BIDDER raises his hand.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)

85, 85?

No one bids. The Hereford sells and is led out of the auction space. The total price for the sale flashes on the screen.

EXT. LIVESTOCK SALE - LINE OF TRUCKS - MOMENTS LATER

Frank and BILL PETERSON, a brand inspector, walk side by side down a line of fifteen to twenty trucks, all waiting their turns to unload cattle.

BILL PETERSON

Gonna be a long one.

FRANK BENNETT

I'd say.

BILL PETERSON

Wager a midnight breakfast we won't be outta here till after 10.

FRANK BENNETT

Oh no. We'll be done by 8 and no later.

BILL PETERSON

Feelin' ambitious today, eh? Or is it just anxious to be home sweet home?

He doesn't want to think about being home alone.

FRANK BENNETT

There's nothing like getting the job done.

BILL PETERSON

Call it a bet, partner.

EXT. LIVESTOCK SALE - LOADING ZONE - LATER

Bill sorts through inspection paperwork in a desk drawer under a small shed to keep off the sun while Frank watches BUCHANAN, one of the sellers, drop the gate on his trailer. He and one of the yard crew push four head out into the inspection pen.

Bill steps up on a platform to see the animals better while Frank slips through the gate to get a closer look.

BUCHANAN

Mornin'.

He hands the paperwork over to Frank who gives it a quick look.

FRANK BENNETT

Good morning.

BUCHANAN

Name's Buchanan.

FRANK BENNETT

(scanning the information)

I see that.

Frank puts his finger on where the brand is displayed on these papers and then hands them up to Bill.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)

That's Bill Peterson, brand inspector. I'm Frank.

Frank proceeds to circle the pen, observing the breeding age stock Buchanan has brought.

BUCHANAN

You fellas sure do have some fine weather, don't ya?

BILL PETERSON

Guess it's still a little cold up in Wyoming?

BUCHANAN

Yeah, mister. Had us a couple inches just last week.

Buchanan studies the emblem on Frank's tan shirt. It makes him nervous.

FRANK BENNETT

You and these heifers are long way from home.

BUCHANAN

Yes, mister. Heard the prices down this way's better than what we got up North.

Peterson slips a pair of CLIPPERS from his pocket, trimming back cow hair, he looks close at the brand on one.

BUCHANAN (CONT'D)
(trying to change
subjects)
Where's a good place to git some
grub 'round here? Haven't eaten
since-

BILL PETERSON
Frank, this one ain't healed and
peeled.

Frank throws a side glance at Buchanan to see how he reacts
to this comment and checks a couple more of the stock.

FRANK BENNETT
Neither are these.

BUCHANAN
Sure they ain't. I just got them
before I come down here.

Frank's look at his partner says it all.

FRANK BENNETT
(moving out of the pen)
I'm afraid you're going to have to
haul them back to Wyoming, sir.

BUCHANAN
What the hell you talkin' about,
mister?

Buchanan follows Frank out the gate, getting close moves
close to the livestock officer as he retrieves the paperwork
from Bill. The brand inspector stays close, ready to back up
his partner.

FRANK BENNETT
You know as well as I do. You can't
sell stock with fresh brands on 'em
in Wyoming, you can't here neither.

He offers the paperwork back to Buchanan who doesn't even
look at it.

BUCHANAN
I drove damn near a thousand miles.

FRANK BENNETT
And that doesn't make much sense to
me unless you were in a hurry to
get away from something.

BUCHANAN
You son of a bitch.

Frank squares himself for a fight if one's going to come his way.

FRANK BENNETT
Now, just a moment ago you were being respectful.

BILL PETERSON
I might even say friendly.

Buchanan sneers at both of them.

BUCHANAN
Where I come from, we'd call this bad manners. And that ain't somethin' we tolerate.

FRANK BENNETT
Well, then I suggest you load up your stock and get back there.
(beat)
If we catch you selling to a "pinhooker" your cows will become criminal evidence, am I clear?

Frank holds up the papers, thinking he just might keep them. Buchanan lingers a moment then snatches the papers out of Frank's hand.

He departs towards his cattle trailer, shouting at one of the yard crew as he does.

BUCHANAN
Boy, help me get this beef back in my trailer. I'll take 'em somewhere where I can git what they's worth.

Bill pats Frank on the back.

BILL PETERSON
Well, I'd say that was a promising start to the day.

INT. LIVESTOCK SALE - AN HOUR LATER

Bill and Frank walk down one of the alleys, checking the pens of cattle.

MACK WARNER(60) a solemn old school cattleman leans against a fence, watching the auction.

MACK WARNER

Frank.

FRANK BENNETT

How's the sale so far?

MACK WARNER

Better than last week so that's something. Saw Rick brought 20 head of blacks.

(humorless)

He said he would've brought more but sixteen come up missing.

FRANK BENNETT

Sounds like a trailer load.

MACK WARNER

Paid twenty five thousand for my Massey Ferguson tractor, hoodlum steals that vehicle he's gonna have to let it go for twenty five hundred. He steals my cattle, he'll get exactly what they're worth. Just ain't fair.

BILL PETERSON

And a trailer load of second degree felonies when he gets caught, and we will catch him.

MACK WARNER

I know the man's factory closed down, or some other thing. I'm as conscientious as the next fellah. But that cows my factory.

(beat)

You lose the price of the cow sure, but it's the five years you put into her. Get her born, get her raised, get her bred and get her new calf. You got that five years invested in her, and she's just starting to make that investment pay off, when they up and steal her. It ain't right, Frank.

FRANK BENNETT

We're doing what we can, Mack.

MACK WARNER

They'll avoid highways, least until they leave the state. Or so I heard.

Frank doesn't like to hear ny of this and from Warner's mouth he knows it's true.

FRANK BENNETT
Thanks for the tip.

MACK WARNER
I know every cow I own just like
most men know their children.
(Back to the auction)
Be seein' you, Frank.

INT. LIVESTOCK SALE - OFFICE - HOURS LATER

Frank shuffles through paperwork. A clock on the wall reads 5:16. Bill comes back in.

BILL PETERSON
I never seen you push a pencil so
fast.

FRANK BENNETT
Bill, you buying my breakfast
sounds just fine right now.

BILL PETERSON
You just don't like to lose.

He shrugs that off and holds out a sale form out to his partner.

FRANK BENNETT
Run these papers up to register and
save me the walk.

A SALES PERSON in her 30s peaks her head in through the door.

SALES PERSON
I'll take 'em. And here's five
more.

She takes the document from Bill and hands him a stack of paperwork.

BILL PETERSON
Looks like we'll be stuck here a
might longer.

He slaps them on Frank's desk and the livestock officer doesn't waste a second as he starts on the verification papers.

BILL PETERSON (CONT'D)
There's nothing open around here
but Dairy Queen.

FRANK BENNETT
Remember that little place off
highway 7, near Davis, by the old
Johansen spread. Should be open
late.

BILL PETERSON
It'll be sun-up by the time we eat.

FRANK BENNETT
The scenic route.

BILL PETERSON
It's the middle of nowhere.

He slams a stamp with his seal of approval on the top
document.

EXT. HIGHWAY 7 - NIGHT

Bill's truck follows Frank's through the wide open country,
lit only by their headlights.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Frank gazes at the trees that line the road and the immense
blackness beyond them where the road drops down into nothing.

A flash in his mirror distracts his attention. Coming up
behind Bill is a semi with a cattle trailer. It nearly pushes
his friend off the road as they both draw near the edge to
let the massive vehicle pass on this narrow highway.

Frank watches its lights disappear through a cloud of dust
into the darkness ahead.

EXT. DINER - NIGHT

Their trucks are parked outside a small diner off the highway
with a half-lit open sign.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

They sit across from each other in the mostly vacant
restaurant. The only other patron is JONES, a black-haired
man with a well-trimmed dark mustache.

He looks like a truck driver from the cap on his head but there's something about his demeanor that hints of more. Frank catches his eye for a moment as the man takes a bite.

There's a familiarity between them, not like they've met before, but like they've come from the same place.

BILL PETERSON

So I got good news and bad news.
And since you hadn't ordered yet,
I'll tell you the good first.
Jane's pregnant.

FRANK BENNETT

Look at you. Is that three?

BILL PETERSON

Four.

FRANK BENNETT

Four... soon enough you'll have a
herd of your own.

BILL PETERSON

I might have to auction one or two.

Frank's gaze moves out the window where beyond their own vehicles he notices a semi-truck. It could be the one from earlier.

BILL PETERSON (CONT'D)

They are expensive little things.

He's hinting to something but can tell Frank isn't hearing him.

BILL PETERSON (CONT'D)

So that brings me to the bad.

FRANK BENNETT

You've discovered your true calling
as a rodeo clown.

BILL PETERSON

Close. But not exactly.

Frank can now tell he has something serious to say.

BILL PETERSON (CONT'D)

I'm out, Frank. Putting my notice
in at the end of this week.

FRANK BENNETT

Moving?

BILL PETERSON
 If I have to... it's not enough,
 Frank. Twenty-seven thousand a year
 and four mouths to feed. Soon to be
 five.

Frank knows this story all to well.

FRANK BENNETT
 You forgot to count yourself.

BILL PETERSON
 Sometimes I do, when it gets hard.

FRANK BENNETT
 I'm sorry, Bill. I didn't know it'd
 come to that.

BILL PETERSON
 It's different for you, Frank.
 You're on your own now.

As Bill goes on, Frank watches Jones get up, abandoning a half-finished country fried steak. He also doesn't leave a tip.

BILL PETERSON (CONT'D)
 God forbid the government pays us a
 living wage. I guess they just
 don't care anymore.

Out the window, Jones makes his way past their trucks towards that semi. Frank watches him and the waitress in the reflection of the glass as she checks to see if he left her any money. She doesn't seem surprised that he didn't.

BILL PETERSON (CONT'D)
 They're too busy chasing drug
 dealers and jihadis to give a good
 goddamn about a bunch of rustlers.
 Hell, most of the country doesn't
 know stealing cattle is still a
 thing.

She flips open her order pad. Her name tag reads PEGGY.

FRANK BENNETT
 That fellow forget to pay his tab?

PEGGY
 Happens all the time.

FRANK BENNETT

He hasn't left yet. If you want
your money, I'll go get it.

PEGGY

(nervous)

He passes through here every other
week. I'll get it on his next load.

(beat)

Ready, gentleman?

FRANK BENNETT

Just coffee for me. Thanks, ma'am.

He glances as the lights on the truck shine through the
windows as Jones makes his turn out of the lot.

BILL PETERSON

I thought you were starving.

He can see that Frank's lost his appetite.

PEGGY

How about you, hun?

Bill grabs the menus and hands them over.

BILL PETERSON

You're right, Frank. We better hit
the road.

PEGGY

Suit yourselves. I'm about to ready
to close up anyhow. Want those
coffees to go?

BILL PETERSON

Why not? You're earning that tip,
aren't ya?

PEGGY

Yes, Sir.

Frank considers her words as she leaves.

Bill watches him.

BILL PETERSON

What?

FRANK BENNETT

Two places you learn to answer like
that. Military and...

BILL PETERSON
Honor camp, or prison. What do you think?

Frank looks back at his partner, knowing this is their last time on a job together.

FRANK BENNETT
I don't mind hanging around while you eat.

BILL PETERSON
Jane'll have some leftovers for me back at the house.

They're quiet for a while.

FRANK BENNETT
I thought about it too.

It takes Bill a minute to know what he means.

BILL PETERSON
Quitting? That's hard to believe you desperado.

FRANK BENNETT
I don't mind it, being out there in the country, on my own. But it's no good when I come home.

BILL PETERSON
It's hard to find a woman who'll take that kind of life.

FRANK BENNETT
Yeah. Finding more than one in a lifetime is next to impossible.

BILL PETERSON
Who knows. Maybe you'll get lucky.

Frank finishes his coffee and thinks of Sylvia. He pulls out his phone and sees he has no service.

BILL PETERSON (CONT'D)
This is on me.

Bill takes ten dollars out of his wallet.

FRANK BENNETT
No. You got five mouths to feed.

BILL PETERSON

Let me buy my partner one last cup
of joe, alright?

Frank doesn't resist any further. He notices a phone on the far wall as Peggy comes back with the two coffees.

FRANK BENNETT

Does that line still work?

PEGGY

Phone company's still charging me
every month so it better.

She collects the bill.

PEGGY (CONT'D)

I'll get your change.

BILL PETERSON

(standing)

Keep it.

PEGGY

Be careful on those roads.

She smiles, polite, and moves off.

FRANK BENNETT

(standing)

You get rolling. I'm going to make
a call.

BILL PETERSON

I'm in no hurry, pard.

Bill collects his coffee and heads towards the door as Frank makes his way to the landline at the end of the counter. He takes out that receipt with Sylvia's number on it. It's creased like it's lived in his pocket for a few days. He dials the numbers slow, anxious. He waits for her to pick up, heart heavy as it rings four times.

SYLVIA (O.S.)

Hello. You've reached Sylvia. I
must be busy doing something but
leave me a message and I promise to
get back to you as soon as I can.

He thinks about hanging up, pulling the phone away from his ear, but as he hears the beep he brings it back.

FRANK BENNETT

Sylvia... it's Frank. Frank Bennett from the other night. I don't know what you're doing the next couple days but if you're free, say tomorrow night, it would be great to see you again..

He isn't sure what else to say.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)

I hope your dad's doing alright. Oh and my number's four eight zero, five nine three, nine zero five nine.

He puts the phone back. This was a big step for him.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Frank watches the white line of the road come in and out of his headlights. Bill is still behind him but there's someone else too. As the driver passes, he sees it's another truck with a cattle trailer. It roars by at nearly the same speed as the other.

Frank steps on the gas. He checks the side mirror as Bill starts to fall back and then picks up speed to catch up.

EXT. HIGHWAY 288 INTERSECTION - NIGHT

The truck's tail lights descend down a dirt road as it turns off the highway. Frank pulls off the shoulder, not far behind. He stops and watches the semi go until he hears Bill pull up next to him. They both roll down their windows.

BILL PETERSON

I can tell you're already gonna miss me.

Frank looks back to see if there's any sign of the truck left. There isn't.

FRANK BENNETT

Did you see those cattle trailers?

BILL PETERSON

The one just now, yeah.

FRANK BENNETT

How about the one that nearly ran us off the road a ways back?

Bill laughs to himself.

BILL PETERSON

So?

FRANK BENNETT

What do you suppose they're doin'
this time of night?

BILL PETERSON

Coming back from the sale maybe.
Just like us.

Frank isn't buying it. He feels something is wrong.

BILL PETERSON (CONT'D)

What is it, Frank?

FRANK BENNETT

(under his breath)
Load 'em in the dark.

He stares into all the blackness that waits down that dirt road, a daunting unknown. He checks his cell phone again: no service.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)

This is your turn, isn't it?

He nods his head towards a highway sign aimed the opposite direction as that truck.

BILL PETERSON

I know that look in your eye.

He's right. Frank has made his decision to follow them.

FRANK BENNETT

Get home to your wife and kids,
Bill. I'll let you know in the
morning.

BILL PETERSON

Lead the way, partner.
(shifts into drive)
They're all asleep anyway.

He grins, excited for one last adventure.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - EARLY MORNING

Their tires bump along an uneven dirt-road lined with fence on both sides. The distant hills are barely visible from the rising sun.

INT. FRANK'S TRUCK - DAY

As he drives up over a hill, Frank spots several trucks ahead. He quickly slows down and checks the mirror to confirm that Bill follows his lead. His foot pumps the brake as they slow and creep towards what's ahead.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - VANTAGE POINT - DAY

Frank eases his truck to the side of the road and kills the engine.

Frank considers his options then palms the LEVER ACTION RIFLE.

He opens the door, quiet, and shuts it the same way.

EXT. SIDE OF THE ROAD OVERLOOKING PASTURE - CONTINUOUS

Bill, who has repeated these steps, meets him on the edge of the fence by the road.

They can now see three semi trucks, the dark shapes of cattle moving in and out of the light into a SOLAR-POWERED WIRE-CORRAL.

TWO MEN ON HORSEBACK ride in to meet the trucks, bringing in four more cattle. They dismount quickly, removing saddles and tack.

The new head are driven up a ramp into one of the trucks by the silhouettes of the men doing this more almost at a run. One of those men closes the trailer door, locking in the full load.

Frank and Bill watch as their attention turns to loading the second truck.

BILL PETERSON

(low voice)

I'd call this quite an operation.

Frank reveals his binoculars. He gazes through and makes out what he can.

BILL PETERSON (CONT'D)
You sure this ain't kosher?

FRANK BENNETT
There ain't a big outfit this side
of the Ozarks.

Bill regards the three trucks again.

BILL PETERSON
Pick off a cow here, a couple
there.

FRANK BENNETT
Or sixteen head of Rick's best?

BILL PETERSON
Scavenging what they could till
they had enough and the time was
right.
(beat)
Tonight. Aren't we lucky?

Frank nods to his partner, checks the surroundings, then
looks back through the glass.

BILL PETERSON (CONT'D)
Don't see them heating up running
irons. So they must've re-branded
'em already.

FRANK BENNETT
Or they're taking them someplace
where they won't have to.

Frank hands Bill the binoculars, taking his cell phone out of
his pocket. CLOSE ON the screen: still no service.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
How's your service?

BILL PETERSON
Lost it a while back.
(Sees Jones)
There's a fifth hand.

Bill's POV of the rustlers as one of them directs the others.

BILL PETERSON (CONT'D)
I'd say he's calling the shots.
(lowers the glass)
Radio?

FRANK BENNETT
Out of range.

They get quiet again, watching the rustlers work.

EXT. LOADING AREA - DAY

A SOLAR PANEL, BATTERY AND CHARGER UNIT, attached by clips to a portable fence. A rustler, THAD (20s, wiry, agricultural college dropout), dismantles it and packs it away.

The three trucks are lined up in a row with men herding the last of the cattle up the ramps.

Of the rustlers, there is: Thad, KURT (30s, ruggedly handsome, a man of faith gone awry), FAT PHILLIP (50s, over compensates with comedic self deprecation), and HARRIS (40s, speckled beard, he's big, linebacker big). The fifth man is out of sight.

Harris curry combs his horse, his great size at odds with how caring he is with his horse. Kurt has already put his away, and now works cows into the trailer.

THE RUSTLERS MOVE WITH PURPOSE, THEY WHISPER, ALL BUSINESS.

Thad packs away the electric fence and closes the door on the second truck as Kurt struggles to coax the last of the herd into the third. Fat Phillip giggles at him while leaning on the back of the truck.

KURT
Get to heating-up that running-
iron, Thad.
(to Phillip)
Man shall not live by bread alone,
Philip, but you should try.

FAT PHILLIP
Very charming, Kurtis. I see why
Margaret likes you.

Phillip helps herd cows into the trailer.

KURT
We shoulda brought her instead.
(to Harris)
Harris! Why did we bring this tub
of lard?

HARRIS
(combing his horse)
He's good for morale.

THAD
He could eat this heifer faster
than I can load it.

Thad now helps them herd the stubborn cows up the ramp.

KURT
(to Thad)
If you hadn't been late, we'd
already be on the road.

Thad looks hurt.

THAD
Late, huh? Which of you geniuses
can spot a cow that's bred and know
the difference between weight by
mass. You need me, and you know it.

Frank watches their conversation, lying low in the desert
brush within ear shot.

KURT
(to Thad quietly)
Watch your mouth, that's a warning.
Now, go warm-up the running-irons.

Thad pauses his ego hurt.

THAD
I've showed you how to spot the
difference between a 1200 pounder
and a 1500 pounder. Figure one
dollar and fifty eight cents a
pound. Times that by a hundred
head, thats a forty thousand dollar
difference. Cut four ways, thats
ten grand extra per run that I
earned each one of you.

Harris leaves his horse and approaches.

HARRIS
Let the him alone, Kurt.

KURT
And you, just get that pony loaded.

HARRIS
When I've finished currying her.

Kurt knows better than to push the giant Harris.

Thad smiles, moves towards the cab of the second truck. He re-emerges carrying the camping stove and a metal hook - a "RUNNING IRON" for altering brands.

CUT TO:

Bill watches as Thad gets the re-branding gear-sorted.

BILL PETERSON
We got more than probable cause
now.

Frank nods, resigning himself to the moment.

FRANK BENNETT
The way I see it, we have one
choice or another. Get somewhere we
can call this in and wait for 'em
out by the highway-

BILL PETERSON
They might be gone by then.

FRANK BENNETT
Might be.

BILL PETERSON
Or?

FRANK BENNETT
We take them now.

Bill looks off at the three trucks as cattle are driven up the ramps.

BILL PETERSON
I'd say a week from now when I'm
sitting on my ass behind some
fucking desk I'd be sorry as hell
if we didn't.

Frank accepts this answer. He checks his rifle.

FRANK BENNETT
You carrying?

BILL PETERSON
I wasn't planning on re-enacting
the O.K. Corral when I left this
morning.

Frank reaches back for his concealed pistol. Handing it to his partner.

BILL PETERSON (CONT'D)
Well, partner, I guess it's our
turn in the barrel.

The two livestock Agents set-off towards the rustlers.

CUT TO:

Butt-hurt, Kurt smarts after being reprimanded by Harris.

KURT
(Whisper)
Seriously, if you weren't my uncle,
I'd left you sleeping on the couch.

FAT PHILLIP
(whisper)
I been stealing beef since you was
in britches. And who was it made
friends with Jones? Huh?
(thoughtful)
This is a good haul, Kurt, good
money for you and Peg. A start-
over.

Kurt looks at his uncle Philip, nods, and pats his shoulder.

Bill moves to cover against the rear end of the first truck
and spies on Kurt and Fat Phillip.

KURT
(whisper)
You're right. Now, make yourself
useful. Get my chew from the cab.

FAT PHILLIP
(whisper)
I'll give you something to chew on.

Fat Phillip waddles towards the truck cab. Finally, Kurt gets
the cow into the trailer and breathes a sigh of relief.

Harris gently load his pony.

CUT TO:

As Phillip opens the driver's side door and takes a deep
breath, ready to haul his weight inside, the cold metal of
Bill's sidearm presses against his skull.

BILL PETERSON
No sounds.

Phillip gives the inspector a slow-nod.

BILL PETERSON (CONT'D)
(whispers)
You understand English, good.

He changes positions, keeping gun on the man's head.

BILL PETERSON (CONT'D)
They all in back?

Another nod from Phillip.

BILL PETERSON (CONT'D)
Move. Slow.

CUT TO:

Kurt shuts the door on the back of the second truck.

THAD
(whisper)
What about those doggies? Don't
tell me we stole 'em for nothing.

A few CATTLE mingle around the outskirts of the corral.

KURT
(whisper)
What happens if we get stopped at a
weigh station? Two-axle trailer can
haul 80,000 pounds. Didn't teach
you that at agricultural college
did they?

Kurt slams the level door and locks up.

KURT (CONT'D)
The trucks are full and we're late.
Let's roll.

THAD
What about fixing the brands?

Big Harris approaches, he's gentle with Thad.

HARRIS
Pack it away, we'll do it down the
road.

FRANK BENNETT (O.S.)
Hold it. Oklahoma Livestock Agents!

Frank comes around the third truck, rifle at his side. He studies each perpetrator.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)

No sudden moves.

He moves around behind Harris.

HARRIS

(calm)

Where'd you come from, cowboy?

FRANK BENNETT

I want to see hands in the air.
Anyone reaches and I won't
hesitate.

HARRIS

Last time I checked and there
wasn't anything illegal about a man
transporting his own stock.

FRANK BENNETT

Your stock, huh? You got about five
different brands here?

Kurt leaps down from the back of the third truck. Frank aims at him, ready for him to make a move.

THAD

(to Kurt)

Told you we should have rebranded
them.

Harris shakes his head, angry at the rookie for this incriminating statement.

KURT

(to Thad)

You shut the Hell up!

(to Frank)

And you, I want to see some
identification. There ain't a cop
within fifty miles a here.

Phillip appears around the corner with Bill.

THAD

Now there's two of 'em.

FAT PHILLIP

I'm sorry, **Kurt**. It was dark and I
didn't-

KURT

No one says another word. You hear me?

Frank unzips his vest and reveals his Agents shield.

FRANK BENNETT

I'm a Special Agent with the Department of Agriculture.

THAD

Agriculture...

FRANK BENNETT

(to Kurt)

I'm guessing this isn't your first time getting arrested, Kurt.

Kurt smiles with menace looking at Fat Phillip (who yelled his name.)

KURT

Oh, you know it ain't my first rodeo.

FRANK BENNETT

Then I expect you to set a good example. Now, everyone line up hands against this truck and spread 'em. You're under arrest for rustling cows.

Bill counts rustlers as they follow Frank's orders. Behind him, not he or anyone else notices as the passenger side door to the first truck opens slow and quiet.

BILL PETERSON

Frank. We're missing one-

A bright burst emanates from behind Bill along with the roar of MACHINE GUN FIRE. His chest is ripped apart by several rounds and Phillip is splattered with his blood.

Frank fires back at the shooter but Harris swings his a ham-hock of a fist, back-handing the officer off balance.

Suddenly, the loud blare of a truck horn overwhelms all else. The rustlers all know what this means and clear out, sliding beneath the trucks, hiding behind the wheel wells. The shooter from the first truck opens up again, this time with Frank as his target.

Vicious bullet hits all over the trucks and around Frank.

Frank stumbles off away from the trucks into the darkness, using the corral as cover as bullets shred through a couple animals, dusting the ground on Frank's trail until he is out of sight.

HUGE DUST CLOUDS and debris mark the path of these bullets as Frank soon vanishes out of the light.

CLOSE ON the ground covered with casings as Jones steps down from the first truck. It's the black haired, black mustached truck driver from the diner. He changes magazines on a THOMPSON machine gun.

Harris crawls out from cover and grabs Frank's pistol out of Bill Petersons dead hand and steps over to the first slaughtered cow. He sees nothing in the black expanse.

JONES

Kurt.

Kurt is shocked by the gunfire, he glares at Jones who is clearly in command. He knows better than to question his boss openly.

Harris stands, looking down at Phillip who leans against the second truck, looking down at Bill's torn up body. He's shaking.

HARRIS

You hit, Phillip?

Phillip shakes his head but it isn't clear if he meant to or not.

Thad now approaches the dead Agent.

THAD

That was a machine-gun, man.

Kurt moves to search Bill's pockets.

KURT

Follow me, and let the dead bury
their own dead. Matthew 8:22.

THAD

What does that mean?

Kurt empties and pockets notes from Bill's wallet and tosses it.

KURT

It means that out here there is no law except what comes out of the barrel of a gun.

Kurt looks to Jones.

KURT (CONT'D)

It won't take all five of us too long to smoke him out?

Jones considers it but knows better.

JONES

Or we could be out looking till morning. That's what he wants.

KURT

So we just let him go?

JONES

No. We go.

Jones doesn't like to be doubted.

JONES (CONT'D)

We'll be in Plano, Texas by the time he calls the cavalry.

KURT

Yes, sir. How about the body?

JONES

Let the coyotes eat.

Jones gazes at the road, their exit.

JONES (CONT'D)

They didn't walk here.

KURT

I'll handle it.

Jones says nothing. He stows the weapon back into the truck and climbs behind the wheel.

EXT. LOADING AREA - DAY - MINUTES LATER

The truck lights move off down the dirt road, leaving the scene of the crime. The crunch of boots grows louder as someone draws near. A flashlight sparks to life, the beam searching the bloody ground for the body left behind. It stops on discovery.

Frank looks down on his partner, his friend, face down in the dirt. Checks his vitals, attempts CPR, realizes the futility of it, wiping Bill's face clean.

He's filled with so many things: remorse and rage foremost.

His gaze moves out to where the two trucks have stopped for a moment. They're doing some business along the road. Frank checks his phone: no service, 40 percent battery.

The trucks start moving again and he knows he must too. He bends down and searches Bill's pockets just as Thad did. The phone is gone. He does find his discarded wallet and in it a picture of Jane and their three kids. He takes off Bill's jacket and covers his friend's face.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Frank sets a pace. He knows that sitting still won't do any good and he must find some way to catch up to these killers.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - VANTAGE POINT - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

He returns to where they left the trucks, turning his flashlight back on. He and Bill's vehicles haven't left but their tires are all slashed and flat. He knows now that's what the rustlers stopped for.

Next, he opens up the driver's side door of his truck. The radio is smashed up.

Frank takes a deep breath, he reaches under the seat and grabs some RIFLE CARTRIDGES, reloading.

CUT TO:

He peers through Jim's window: same story. They've disabled communication even if he was in range. He starts running again.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY - LATER

Frank slows down, moving at a jog instead of a run. He checks his phone. With no service, the battery is draining fast, now 28 percent. He switches it to airplane mode and keeps moving.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY - TOP OF HILL

Frank crests a hill, his jog slows to a walk. He shakes off the exhaustion as he hears the sound of a truck, a pick-up rolling down the road coming his way.

On guard and cautious, Frank lowers his rifle holding it at his side, hiding it from the driver's view as he waves the truck to a stop.

AKSEL, an old rancher in his 60s, rolls down the window and leans out to get a better look at Frank.

AKSEL

I ain't taking on passengers.

FRANK BENNETT

You see three trucks go by?

AKSEL

No, sir.

(beat)

I heard 'em though.

He grins, a set of yellowish teeth.

FRANK BENNETT

I need a ride? It's important.

AKSEL

Well, Mama told me not to pick up strangers but she been dead for nearly fifty years.

He grins again. Frank has no time for jokes.

FRANK BENNETT

I'm a livestock officer. Those trucks are full of stolen cows... driven by rustlers. I need to get back to the highway and contact the authorities as soon as possible.

AKSEL

Rustlers, huh? I heard they'll still hang a man for that in Texas.

Frank remains cautious as he's not sure what side this stranger's on.

FRANK BENNETT

Can you help me or not?

AKSEL

Say you're going to the highway?
Well, Officer. I'm a headin' the
other direction.

FRANK BENNETT

Did you hear what in said?

AKSEL

I sure did. And I heard a rat-atat-
tat 'bout a half hour ago too.
Waited till I didn't hear no more
and figured I'd come on down for a
look-see.

He tips the old hat on his head up, revealing only a few
strands of hair.

AKSEL (CONT'D)

Sometimes when things go pop in the
desert, there's a few valuable
things left behind.

FRANK BENNETT

All you'll find is my partner. He's
dead.

AKSEL

My condolences.

Aksel watches as Frank thinks about commandeering the vehicle
and then takes a different approach.

FRANK BENNETT

Look, mister. I don't have much
time. They're getting away and your
truck'll get me where I need to go
a lot faster than these legs.

Aksel considers it. The truck moves and Frank thinks he's
about to drive off. Desperate, he reveals the rifle, the
wheels start to turn. Aksel whips around and brings that
passenger door right up to where Frank waits.

AKSEL

I take you as far as the highway
and no further.

Frank opens the door as a couple empty beer cans fall out
into the dirt.

Aksel takes note of the rifle.

AKSEL (CONT'D)
Pardon the mess.

INT. AKSEL'S TRUCK - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Aksel glances over at Frank out of the corner of his eye, uneasy.

AKSEL
You didn't use that rifle to flag me down.

FRANK BENNETT
Would you have stopped?

AKSEL
Hell no.

He's in no hurry as his truck rattles on the primitive road.

AKSEL (CONT'D)
My friends call me Aksel. But I ain't got any friends no more so call me whatever you want, pilgrim.

Frank takes his phone out, turns off airplane mode, and checks for service again: nothing.

FRANK BENNETT
Do you get any service out here?

AKSEL
Service?

He glances over and sees Frank holding the device.

AKSEL (CONT'D)
Oh.
(laughs)
I'm off that grid thing.

Frank keeps the phone on as the battery ticks down again, anxious for some way to reach out.

AKSEL (CONT'D)
Don't much care for no authority tellin' me what I can and can't do neither.

He grins at Frank who can't take his mind off Bill and the killers. The officer notices the magnum revolver tucked under Aksel's seat.

FRANK BENNETT

Do you know anyone who lives around here named Harris? Or Jones?

AKSEL

Can't say I do. People 'round here mostly mind to their own business.

FRANK BENNETT

Even if their business is taken what isn't theirs?

Aksel shrugs and continues driving.

EXT. HIGHWAY 288 INTERSECTION - DAY

Aksel's truck comes to an abrupt stop at that highway road, breaks squealing as it does.

INT. AKSEL'S TRUCK - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Frank looks at his phone one more time: still nothing. Battery at 13 percent. He puts it back in his pocket.

FRANK BENNETT

There's a diner just up the road. Can you take me there? It's about one mi-

AKSEL

I said the highway and no further. You're on your own from here on, pilgrim.

Once more, Frank thinks about taking the truck to do what he needs to do. He glances down at Aksel's weapon and the old man sees him do it.

FRANK BENNETT

Thank you for the ride.

He starts to get out. Aksel is grateful he didn't try for it.

AKSEL

You ain't lyin' about your friend that got 'imself shot back there?

FRANK BENNETT

Go see for yourself. Or take me to that diner.

Aksel whips the truck around before Frank can barely get the door shut. The officer watches the old hunk of metal disappear back down the dirt road. A moment later, he's running again down the highway, rifle in hand.

EXT. DINER - DAY

As Frank approaches the diner, worn down and out of breath, he takes note that there aren't any vehicles outside. The CLOSED sign hangs in the door, too.

He pounds on the glass door. The sign displaying the hours, 6am to 2am, rattles but after several seconds, there is no sign of activity. He eyes that phone inside and wants to break in to get to it but hears something, a faint sound coming from out back. He moves around the building.

EXT. DINER - APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

As Frank suspected, there's a small apartment attached to the back of the diner. The sound of a TV playing loud inside escapes into the desert. He moves to the door, knocks hard, waits.

No answer. He checks his phone: one bar of service. He starts punching numbers on the screen when a notification distracts him: NEW VOICEMAIL. The contact is Sylvia. He decides to ignore it when the door of the apartment opens up.

Peggy, the waitress, looks out, wary. She's dressed down in cut off shorts and a baggy T-shirt, still pretty in a beat up kind of way.

PEGGY

If you want more coffee, you'll
have to come back in the-

FRANK BENNETT

Ma'am, I need to use your phone
again. The one in the diner.

She hears the urgency in his voice and sees the rifle.

PEGGY

You break down or something?

FRANK BENNETT

I need to call the police.

He moves towards the door and she half closes it.

PEGGY

What for? I don't know you.

He directs her attention to the shield on his shirt.

FRANK BENNETT

A man's been killed and some cattle
rustled just east of here. Now, if
you won't let me use it, I'll have
no choice but to break in.

PEGGY

I got a phone in here. Come on in.

FRANK BENNETT

Thanks.

He moves forward again.

PEGGY

Sure.

(opens the door, steps
aside)

Phone's in the hall by bathroom.

Frank moves past her.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM

Frank hurries through a messy living room, TV blaring some
commercial and into the hall. She follows close behind.

PEGGY

Thirsty?

No answer.

INT. APARTMENT - HALLWAY

He finds the phone just where she said it would be, an old
rotary landline. He picks up and starts to dial.

PEGGY (O.S.)

Where's your truck? Don't tell me
it got stolen too.

He tries to concentrate.

PEGGY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You run all the way here? Bet you
could use a glass of water.

On the last digit, he hears a click and it isn't in the ear piece. He looks down the hall. Peggy stands there with a pump action shotgun. It's aimed at his guts.

PEGGY (CONT'D)

Hang it up and drop that carbine.

Frank doesn't want to but he has one more number to dial and no choice.

FRANK BENNETT

Ma'am, I don't want any trouble.
I'm not here to hurt-

PEGGY

I said hang it up or you'll be the one hurtin'. I won't repeat myself to you or any other man.

(beat)

I've done killed before and I will again, so help me.

For the first time, it occurs to him that this woman might not be only defending herself. He puts the phone down and lets go.

PEGGY (CONT'D)

Now the rifle throw it over my way.

Frank tosses the rifle, Peggy slides it further away with her foot.

PEGGY (CONT'D)

Pick the phone back up.

(beat)

PICK it up!

He has no idea now what she has in mind. He follows her orders, studying how steady she holds the gun: steady enough to be dangerous.

PEGGY (CONT'D)

Now, dial this number.

(beat)

Nine two eight.

His fingers start to turn the dial.

PEGGY (CONT'D)

Five five one. Thirty-five, twenty-eight.

He keeps dialing, gazing side to side for a way out.

PEGGY (CONT'D)
That too fast for you?

He watches her as he turns the last number, wondering who is about to pick up and he has a pretty good guess.

FRANK BENNETT
It's ringing.

It rings three times and on the fourth, a voice answers.

KURT (O.S.)
I told you not to be calling while
we're on the road.

PEGGY
Tell him it's Peggy.

FRANK BENNETT
It's Peggy.

KURT (O.S.)
What?

PEGGY
Tell him I need to speak to Jones.

FRANK BENNETT
She needs to speak to Jones.

KURT (O.S.)
Who the fuck is this?

She can hear him all the way down at the end of the hall.

PEGGY
Kurt! It's Peggy for god's sake.
Tell Jones to call me. Now!

Having let the shotgun down while she lost her temper, Peggy makes sure it's aimed at Frank's belly again.

FRANK BENNETT
The line went dead.

PEGGY
Hang it up.

Frank slowly puts the phone back.

PEGGY (CONT'D)
He'll call back.

The seconds pass with painful tension.

FRANK BENNETT
I am thirsty.

PEGGY
Too bad.

The phone rings. He picks up. It's quiet on the other side but he can hear the hum of a truck.

FRANK BENNETT
Jones?

PEGGY
Tell him who you are.

FRANK BENNETT
My name is Frank Bennett. I'm a livestock officer. You're traveling with...

PEGGY
...Tell him where you are!

FRANK BENNETT
I'm in Peggy's hallway.

PEGGY
Tell him what Peggy's doing.

FRANK BENNETT
She's pointing a shotgun at me.

He wants to make her eat it.

PEGGY
Now ask him if he wants me to kill you.

He takes a deep breath before he does.

FRANK BENNETT
Do you want her to kill me?

It's still quiet on the other end of the line other than the hum of that truck.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
He didn't say yes.

PEGGY
He didn't say no either.

Her finger trembles a little over that trigger.

PEGGY (CONT'D)
Ask him how far they've got.

FRANK BENNETT
How far are you?

It's quiet a few seconds longer.

JONES (O.S.)
Tell her we're coming back.

He knows this is a death sentence.

FRANK BENNETT
They're coming back.

The line goes dead. He sets the phone down. She licks her dry lips.

PEGGY
Now rip the line out of the wall.
'case you get the jump on me.

Frank grabs hold of the phone line and rips it loose from the fake wood paneling.

BOOM!!!

The phone and section of wall are blasted.

Frank steps back.

She smiles, nervous and excited.

PEGGY (CONT'D)
Just wanted to know what it felt like.

She racks the action, ejecting the spent shell and loading a fresh one.

FRANK BENNETT
You won't get away with this.
Whether it's me or someone else,
you'll be arrested. If you're
lucky. Worse if you're not.

PEGGY
Worse, huh? Tell that to your cop
friend they wasted... Yeah, they
came by here on their way out, said
you might be coming.

Frank clenches his jaw, knowing he should have been more careful.

FRANK BENNETT

Well, they were right. And they
made his wife a widow. The baby in
her belly'll be a bastard too.

This hits home a little with Peggy. For a moment, her
humanity shows through but she swallows it like a shot of
rye.

PEGGY

Empty your pockets.

Frank reaches down.

PEGGY (CONT'D)

I see your hand make for that gun
and you won't have one no more.

He reaches into his pockets and pulls the phone out. Peggy
smiles, confirming her suspicions.

FRANK BENNETT

It's dead.

PEGGY

Follow me. To the kitchen.

She backs up, slow. He takes careful steps in her direction.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN

She moves into the kitchen, one step at a time, and Frank
after her. She comes around to the side.

PEGGY

Put that phone in the drain.

She motions with the gun towards the sink.

FRANK BENNETT

Let me listen to something first.

PEGGY

I thought you said it was dead.

FRANK BENNETT

I figured it would be by now.

PEGGY

I don't trust anyone who wears a badge. Drop it in the drain!

He's getting her agitated, watching the shotgun move around aimlessly when she loses control of her emotions.

FRANK BENNETT

Is Kurt your husband? No, he never asked you, did he?

PEGGY

You don't get to make small talk with me, mister. Now do what I told you.

FRANK BENNETT

If you were about to die and he'd left you a message, wouldn't you want to hear it?

PEGGY

Don't you talk about him.

FRANK BENNETT

He helped you get on your feet after you did your time, right? You don't owe him anything.

Peggy is processing this.

PEGGY

You don't know anything about me.

FRANK BENNETT

"Yes sir, no sir." Only place that get's drilled in, is the military, or the state pen.

PEGGY

You're so smart you know what kind of person that makes me. Now dial that phone.

Her sweaty palms have made the shotgun handle wet. Frank looks down at the phone, knowing she might shoot him anytime. He taps the voicemail from Sylvia and puts it on speaker.

SYLVIA (O.S.)

Hey Frank. I was hoping you'd call.

Peggy looks at the phone, nervous, not sure whether to let him listen to it or blow the phone right out of his hand.

Frank closes his eyes a moment as he continues to hear Sylvia's voice.

SYLVIA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Tomorrow night's free and I can
leave dad for a couple-

PEGGY
I swear to Christ, I'll pull this
trigger-

FRANK BENNETT
Alright!

SYLVIA (O.S.)
Just give me a call in the morning.
Goodnight.

PEGGY
Is that your wife or something?

FRANK BENNETT
My wife's dead.

He sees another flash of something in Peggy's eyes.

PEGGY
Don't expect me to feel sorry for
you. Now, for the last time, put
that phone in the sink.

Frank looks at her.

FRANK BENNETT
You said you'd killed before?

PEGGY
I worked like a dog for everything
I own and if you don't drop that
phone I may kill again.

Frank follows her command, hating to let go of his only communication with the outside world. It drops in the drain as he makes a quick survey of possible weapons: knives, heavy objects, etc. There isn't much.

PEGGY (CONT'D)
Turn on the disposal.

He watches as she moves around a small kitchen table.

PEGGY (CONT'D)
The switch is on the wall.

She feels nervous with his eyes on her. He sees where the switch is. There's two one of them. He reaches for the one furthest away.

PEGGY (CONT'D)

No! The one on the right.

That told him what he needed to know. He hits the disposal switch. The grinding noise of the phone getting chopped up fills the room. His hand lingers a moment and then goes for the second switch.

As he hoped, the kitchen light goes out; the TV glow from the living room all there is to see by. He kicks the table, flipping it at her: the shotgun goes off, splintering the table.

Peggy falls back. She pumps it for another shot when Frank's boot knocks the barrel to the floor. He punches her in the side of the head hard enough to put out her lights out.

He takes a single breath and retrieves the shotgun from her loose fingers. He checks the chamber and waits for her to get up. She doesn't. He thinks about making sure she never will. He decides not to.

Back to the sink, he shuts off the ever-grinding noise of the disposal. As soon as the motor goes quiet, he reaches into the drain but all he pulls out are pieces. Once again, he has no way to communicate with the authorities.

He scans the kitchen again for something to tie her up with. Nothing.

INT. APARTMENT - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Frank rips the rest of the phone line out of the useless machine.

Then retrieves his lever-rifle, shotgun under his arm.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN

He flips Peggy over as she starts to regain consciousness and starts to bind her wrists. She struggles so he bangs her face into the linoleum floor. She's back out. He finishes with the knot.

EXT. APARTMENT - CARPORT

Frank comes out the apartment door and comes around the side of the building, discovering a carport and an old sedan parked there. He glances through the window: the keys are in the ignition.

Feeling lucky, he climbs in and turns the starter. There isn't a sound. He pops the hood latch, gets out, and opens it. There's no engine. He slams the hood shut.

EXT. DINER - DAY

Frank returns again to the diner entrance. He's about to smash the glass with the butt of the shotgun when he hears trucks approaching down the highway.

EXT. DINER - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

The three trucks pull off the road in front of the diner. The rustlers exit their vehicles.

INT. THIRD TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Fat Phillip doesn't budge. He's still wiping the blood off his face with an oily rag.

KURT

You comin'?

FAT PHILLIP

I seen enough blood this trip.

KURT

Suit yourself.

He hurries off as Phillip lowers the sun visor to see how he looks.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN

Peggy struggles on the ground as the sound of the door opening and men charging into the apartment overwhelm the sound of another TV commercial.

The light comes on. Kurt looks down at his girlfriend.

KURT

Peg!

He rushes to untie her. Thad comes in, trips over the table. Harris is next. He studies the situation, followed by Jones who doesn't look surprised at all, the THOMPSON cradled in his grasp.

PEGGY

The son of a bitch punched me,
Kurt. Look at my face.

Her nose is broken but she's crying because she's angry.

KURT

I'll get him for this, honey, so
help me Lord, I swear I'll make him
pay.

Kurt tenderly wipes her hair out of her eyes, kissing her gently. She touches his face. He takes out a napkin, dabbing the blood from her face.

KURT (CONT'D)

(to Peggy)

Hold this in place, I'll get you
some ice.

(to Jones)

Why didn't you just tell her to
kill him?

Kurt get's ice from behind the counter for Peggy.

JONES

Never ask a woman to do a man's
job.

THAD

Man, we gotta scatter. I'm sure he
called the cops by now.

PEGGY

No fucking way he did. I killed the
phone, I ain't stupid.

(to Jones)

I would have killed him too, if
you'd said so.

Jones ignores her - not lost on Peggy, who starts to fume.

They're all shouting over the loud TV. Harris holds up a piece of the broken phone from the counter where Frank left it. He shows Jones.

HARRIS

He ain't using this phone.

KURT
Not a bad for a woman, huh?

Kurt finds the cafe first-aid kit.

Peggy washes the blood off her face at the faucet, drying with a dishcloth.

THAD
(loudest)
You think he took her car?

PEGGY
It doesn't run.

Kurt gently puts a band-aid across Peggy's nose.

THAD
I'll go see if it's still there.

KURT
She already said it doesn't fucking run.

THAD
Don't appreciate the way you're talking to me.

Kurt spins grabbing Thad by the neck.

KURT
How do you want me to talk to you?

Jones lets out of BURST from the machine gun at the television. It sparks and busts apart. The bullets couldn't have been more than a foot from where Thad and Kurt are froze in motion.

Peggy comes to life, she lunges at Jones, Kurt holds her back.

PEGGY
What the fuck do you think you're doing? You shoot my place up? I worked myself to the bone to build this. You'll pay for that!

KURT
(whisper)
Calm down Peggy.

PEGGY

Tell me to calm down again! Look at my face, this is because of his stupid ass plan. He's going to buy me a new TV.

KURT

He'll buy you a new TV, won't you Jones?

Jones watches Peggy - *does he want to kill her or marry her?*

The room goes still. Harris is the only one with guts enough to say anything.

HARRIS

What now, sir?

Jones thinks, in no hurry to answer, watching Peggy.

KURT

I'm sorry Thad, I shouldn't ought to treat you that way.

THAD

No harm, we're all stressed out.

EXT. APARTMENT - CARPORT - CONTINUOUS

Frank sees a couple of the men through the kitchen window.

He stows his rifle up and out of the way on the cross beam.

Spots an open toolbox by the broken down sedan and snatches a screwdriver and heads for where they've parked the trucks.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

JONES

He's still close.

HARRIS

We can get him this time. He won't get away-

JONES

Wrong.

No one likes to hear this from Jones.

JONES (CONT'D)

He has no phone. He has no truck.
He has no way out of here except to
walk and it will take him several
hours to get to the next town. If
we leave now and fast, we can be in
Amarillo by then.

EXT. DINER - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Frank approaches the back of the third truck shotgun in hand.
He looks around the side, cautious. Fat Phillip yawns in the
reflection of the side mirror. Frank stabs the inside of the
back tire.

INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

HARRIS

Worst case, we dump the stock and
lose the tr-

JONES

We sell the stock. No matter what.

Harris nods. Jones will not be distracted from his mission.

KURT

What about Peg?

JONES

She rides...

Kurt helps his lady to her feet.

JONES (CONT'D)

With me.

(to Kurt)

I need you to make sure that truck
get's where it's intended.

Kurt wants to argue but what's the point.

JONES (CONT'D)

It's been some sort of day so far,
but I know I can rely on you to get
the job done, Kurt.

EXT. DINER - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Frank circles the same truck on the driver's side. He locates the side door on the trailer, opens the latch shotgun still in hand, and climbs in.

INT. THIRD TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Phillip glances over at the driver's side mirror, thinks he heard something. There's no movement. The door opens and he jumps, startled. Kurt lifts himself up into the seat.

FAT PHILLIP
Scared the shit out of me, Kurt. If
I didn't know better, I'd a thought
you were that dead cop.

Kurt puts the truck in gear, anxious to leave.

KURT
He ain't.

FAT PHILLIP
Ain't what?

KURT
Dearly departed.

The truck moves as Kurt wants to waste no time.

FAT PHILLIP
Well, where'd he go?

EXT. DINER - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The trucks pull back onto the highway. The screwdriver lies on the dusty ground.

INT. THIRD TRUCK - CATTLE TRAILER - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Frank is squeezed in with the livestock. The cows moving back and forth. He struggles to not get stepped on or crushed.

EXT. HIGHWAY 288 - DAY

CLOSE ON the back tire as it starts to go flat.

INT. THIRD TRUCK - CATTLE TRAILER - DAY

Frank dodges one of the cows as it comes towards him.

INT. THIRD TRUCK - DAY

Kurt drives, coming up around a bend.

FAT PHILLIP
You're a helluva conversationalist,
Kurt.

KURT
Yeah? You want to switch places
with Peggy?

FAT PHILLIP
No thanks. Margaret might be my
favorite ex-con waitress but-

KURT
Ease up on the ex-con part, you
know how she feels about it.

FAT PHILLIP
She knows I don't care none about
that. But Jones is worse than you.
Quiet and crazy.

Kurt feels the flat now. He glances in the mirror, hoping its
a road condition.

KURT
Goddamn it.

He slows the truck down.

INT. THIRD TRUCK - CATTLE TRAILER - DAY

Frank feels the truck coming to a stop as more cows shift
around him.

INT. SECOND TRUCK - DAY

Hair metal blasts through the truck speakers as Thad drives.
Harris gazes out the window. He hears nothing but his own
thoughts. But then the faint sound of the HAM radio catches
his attention.

HARRIS
Turn it off.

Thad doesn't know what he means. Harris punches buttons until the music goes dead.

KURT (O.S.)
This is Willie, I repeat. Do you
hear me?

Harris picks up his speaking device.

HARRIS
Waylon, reading you.

INT. THIRD TRUCK - DAY

They've come to a full stop now.

KURT
Looks like we've got a flat. It'll
probably take fifteen, maybe twenty
to fix it.
(beat)
If Phil doesn't sit on his ass.

HARRIS (O.S.)
You hearing this, Johnny?

INT. FIRST TRUCK - DAY

Jones continues to drive. He looks like he doesn't hear and doesn't care.

KURT (O.S.)
We must have picked up a nail back
at the diner, Johnny, won't take me
long.

Peggy wants to pick up the radio and answer but she knows better. The blood on her nose is almost dried.

PEGGY
That's convenient.

JONES
(monotone)
You left a couple letters off that
word.

INT. SECOND TRUCK - DAY

The frustration in Harris grows as he continues to wait for a response from Jones.

HARRIS

Do you want us to turn back and
help them or keep going, Johnny?

INT. FIRST TRUCK - DAY

Jones is going through the scenarios. He finally picks up the speaker.

JONES

Make sure they get back on the
road. I'm not stopping.

He puts the speaker away. Peg wants to reach out and say something to Kurt. She holds back.

HARRIS (O.S.)

Willie, this is Waylon.

INT. SECOND TRUCK - DAY

Thad starts to slow their rig.

HARRIS

We're coming back to you as soon as
we find a place to turn around.

INT. FIRST TRUCK - DAY

KURT

It'll be done by then.

He tosses the radio on the dash and takes a revolver from beneath the seat, pushing it into his belt. Phillip notices where some of Bill's blood also stained his shirt.

FAT PHILLIP

I can't tell if this ketchup or-

KURT

(to Phillip)

What the fuck are you doing still
sitting there? Get the jack.

FAT PHILLIP

I never seen anyone killed before.

Kurt drops out of the cab.

KURT
Whining about it ain't going to
change nothing.

INT. SECOND TRUCK - DAY

Harris searches for a place to turn around as Thad continues to drive.

HARRIS
Damn Ozark roads.

THAD
(anxious, fidgety)
You think it's him?

HARRIS
Who?

He looks at his driver whose face twitches in fear.

HARRIS (CONT'D)
I can only hope.

He gazes back at the road, practically salivating at the opportunity to take care of this menace.

HARRIS (CONT'D)
Slow down. Up there.

Thad sees the spot. He turns the music back on to ease his nerves. Harris makes sure he has one in the chamber.

INT. THIRD TRUCK - CATTLE TRAILER - DAY

Frank listens to the men working on the tire outside.

KURT (O.S.)
Get that rim wet.

EXT. HIGHWAY 288 - DAY

Kurt finishes cranking the jack.

FAT PHILLIP
That's what she said.

He sprays diesel from a bottle onto the tire rim.

KURT
(looking around)
We have to keep moving. Right now
we're sitting ducks.

FAT PHILLIP
I know that, Kurt.

KURT
For the wages of sin is death. You
have to earn your place at the
table.

FAT PHILLIP
Hey. I've never let you down
before. Not once.

Kurt seems affected by this.

KURT
(tone changing)
I'm sorry, Phillip. Seeing what he
did to Peggy... The adrenaline is
getting to me. Let me do that.

He takes the crowbar from Phillip's other hand. He starts to
loosen the tire to pull it off. They're too busy with this
action to notice the side-trailer door come open.

Frank doesn't waste a moment. He steps out, shotgun ready.
The rustlers react, frozen in motion.

FRANK BENNETT
Drop the bar. Put your hands on the
truck.

Kurt thinks about it. He pulls the bar out from where it's
pried. But suddenly, he flings the metal at Frank and reaches
for the revolver in his belt.

Frank goes down on his shoulder to dodge the crowbar and
pulls the trigger twice, BOOM, BOOM. The blasts send Kurt
backwards head over heels into the dirt, ragged-holes all
over his body. He's trying to catch his breath as he slides
across the ground.

Phillip is backing away into the road, sprayed with blood
once again as Frank gets to his feet, pumping a fresh round.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
Don't move.

The fat man listens. Frank moves towards the dying rustler.
He kicks Kurt's fallen pistol under the truck.

KURT
(to Phillip)
Tell Peg I love her.

Phillip is too scared to even nod. Kurt struggles to take another breath for more words.

KURT (CONT'D)
(to Frank, barely audible)
And that I tried my best to kill
the son of a bitch that laid a
finger on her...

FRANK BENNETT
I'll tell her you'd still be alive
if you hadn't.

Kurt thinks about that for a second before he dies.

FAT PHILLIP
Don't shoot me, mister. I didn't do
nothin'.

FRANK BENNETT
Nothing, huh?

He gazes up over at the side door of the trailer, still half open as one of the cows sticks his nose out into the day air.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
Get over there and let those cows
out.

FAT PHILLIP
Are you crazy?

FRANK BENNETT
I'm not going to tell you twice.

INT. SECOND TRUCK - DAY

Harris shuts off the music again and from his expression, it's clear to Thad that it should stay off. He picks up the radio speaker.

HARRIS
Willie. This is Waylon. What's your
mile marker?

EXT. HIGHWAY 288 - DAY

Phillip coaxes the cows out and is almost trampled as the herd starts to scramble out of their confinement.

HARRIS (O.S.)
Come in Willie.

Frank can't hear the transmission over the scraping of metal and the mooing of the cattle.

INT. SECOND TRUCK - DAY

Harris puts the speaker back in its place.

THAD
Maybe they're just about done. They
can't hear the radio.

Harris says nothing.

EXT. HIGHWAY 288 - DAY

Cows scatter onto the road. Phillip watches, astonished as Frank keeps the barrel aimed at him.

FAT PHILLIP
Where are you taking them?

FRANK BENNETT
We're letting them go... free
range.

Phillip watches their money drift away as the cattle continue to stream out of the trailer. They start to congregate near the back.

Frank points the shotgun in the air and pulls the trigger once again. The blast scatters the animals down the highway in both directions.

INT. SECOND TRUCK - DAY

Thad comes up on a bend where he suddenly sees cows coming around the corner.

HARRIS
The hell...

He slams on the breaks. Just stopping short of the loose herd.

HARRIS (CONT'D)
Cut the engine.

Thad follows orders. More cows come around the corner.

THAD
He's released the cattle.

Harris reaches for the door handle.

HARRIS
No offense, but I move quicker on
my own.

THAD
I'll stay here. Protect this load.

HARRIS
Fill your hand, boy.

Thad reaches for his weapon. Harris leaves.

Thad looks around, loses his nerve and follows Harris.

EXT. HIGHWAY 288 - DAY

The cattle trailer is nearly empty.

FAT PHILLIP
What now?

FRANK BENNETT
You're going to answer some
questions.

Phillip turns his head side to side, scared to do so.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
Where's he headed?

He can't say.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
Jones. Where's he taking the stock?

Phillip knew what he meant but he still can't say anything.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
It's over now. You might as well
help yourself.

FAT PHILLIP
It ain't ever over for Jones. He's-

A bullet cuts off his sentence. The first ricochets off the trailer right by Frank's skull.

A second shot hits metal, shattered copper and lead splinters Frank's upper thigh. Phillip takes off running.

As he moves for cover, the shotgun's wooden stock is shattered by **a third bullet**, jerked from Frank's hand.

EXT. HIGHWAY 288 - DOWN THE ROAD - DAY

Harris, the shooter, watches from behind a boulder on the side of the mountain road as Frank pulls himself beneath the third truck. Thad peaks out from the big rock too, watching Phillip sprint away.

THAD
Phil! Get back here.

HARRIS
Shut the fuck up.

He pulls Thad down. Harris observes the third truck, thinking of ways to get Frank out in the open.

HARRIS (CONT'D)
You get in that cab and drive off.
I'll nail that bastard as soon as
he's in the open.

THAD
I ain't goin' out there.

HARRIS
I'll cover you.

Thad doesn't move. Harris grabs the thin rail of a man pushes him out in the road. Thad has no choice but to move as fast as he can for the driver's side door.

EXT. HIGHWAY 288 - UNDER THE TRUCK - DAY

Frank winces as he quickly inspects the wound on his thigh. He hears Thad coming. He looks back at the broken shotgun and crawls to where he kicked Kurt's revolver. He picks it up, confirms there's a round in the chamber and takes aim.

EXT. HIGHWAY 288 - DAY

Thad steps up onto the rail to climb in.

BOOM.

He shrieks as his hand touches the handle. CLOSE ON his right foot, the front part of his tennis shoe cut through with a bullet and full of blood.

He manages to pull himself up into the cab, continuing to scream in pain.

EXT. HIGHWAY 288 - DOWN THE ROAD - DAY

Harris watches Thad climb the rest of the way in but nothing else happens. He can hear his partner whimpering.

THAD
I've been shot, Harris!

HARRIS
Thad! Move it.

THAD
My toe's been blown off!

INT. THIRD TRUCK - DAY

Thad trembles as he searches for the keys.

THAD
There's no keys!

He's hyperventilating.

EXT. HIGHWAY 288 - UNDER THE TRUCK - DAY

Frank is glad to hear it, knowing they're still in Kurt's pocket.

HARRIS (O.S.)
Put it in neutral.

The officer knows he's about to be trapped.

EXT. HIGHWAY 288 - DOWN THE ROAD - DAY

Harris prepares himself for the charge.

INT. THIRD TRUCK - DAY

Thad takes off the emergency break and throws the truck in neutral.

EXT. HIGHWAY 288 - UNDER THE TRUCK - DAY

It starts to roll, coming off the jack.

EXT. HIGHWAY 288 - DOWN THE ROAD - DAY

Harris comes out from cover.

EXT. HIGHWAY 288 - UNDER THE TRUCK - DAY

Frank has no choice. He rolls out on the far side, away from the highway.

EXT. HIGHWAY 288 - DAY

The truck tires pass just as Frank rolls out of the way. He stops himself before going over the ledge, down one of those steep southern ditches. He starts to recover but it's too late as Harris approaches and has him at gunpoint.

INT. THIRD TRUCK - DAY

Thad pulls the e-break and painfully slows the truck to a stop.

EXT. HIGHWAY 288 - DAY

Harris takes a step closer, making sure he has a clean shot at the cause of all their troubles.

HARRIS

If it was up to me, you'd be dead
beside your partner.

He's about to pull the trigger when the sound of another truck catches his attention. There's a vehicle coming down the road.

HARRIS (CONT'D)

Lose it.

He motions for Frank to toss Kurt's pistol. He complies, tossing the firearm just out of reach, as he recognizes the pick-up truck that comes in sight.

Aksel pulls up in line with Harris, who doesn't even think about taking his aim off Frank.

AKSEL
Howdy, fellas. Got into some trouble on the road?

HARRIS
(gazes back on Frank)
Nothing we can't handle.

AKSEL
Well... looks to me like you need some assistance.

When Harris turns back to the driver, he sees Aksel pointing the heavy revolver in his direction.

HARRIS
This is none of your business, grandpa.

A couple shots dent the roof of Aksel's truck (Thad fires from the cab.)

It distracts him long enough for Harris to redirect his aim up at Aksel. That gives Frank the time he needs to throw his body at the shooter.

**The following is a desperate - non-Hollywood fight.*

Frank knocks Harris off balance and they fall into the road, Harris' gun slides away. Frank thumps Harris several times, Harris knocks him away, parrying the punches. A trained fighter he follows up with a flurry of very well aimed punches, he dazes Frank, breaking his nose.

Harris drops onto Frank, they struggle, but Harris is choking Frank.

Frank is struggling, he reaches for the dropped handgun, he points it, and pulls the trigger, click, click, click. WHAT THE? Frank then slaps it against Harris' hard head, twice a third time: knocks Harris away, Frank is gasping for breath. Harris walks to where his gun dropped and picks it up...

BOOM.

Aksel has shot, Harris. A Magnum round through and through.

PING, PING, POP.

Thad is firing at Aksel from the truck.

Frank scrambles for the gun and goes for cover beside Aksel.

FRANK BENNETT
(to Aksel)
Thank you.

Thad frantically fires at Aksel and Frank. Frank aims around the fender ~ putting a round through the semi's windshield and the shooting stops.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
Throw that gun out the window.

There's no movement but he can hear Thad, still whimpering from his wound.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
You want to die like your friends?

Seconds later, the gun flies out the window into the bed of Aksel's ride.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
Aksel! You alright?

AKSEL
Did I kill that man?

FRANK BENNETT
You saved my life.

He reaches down to help Aksel to his feet.

AKSEL
Figured you was full of shit but I went back and found that friend of yours all chewed up and spit out.
(beat)
You sure picked a hell of a fight.

Frank limps over to the truck, careful. The door's half-open. He nudges it the rest of the way to get a good look at the wounded rustler, ready to shoot him again.

Aksel peers in beside him.

FRANK BENNETT
Keep your eyes on him.

Aksel gladly shows Thad his Magnum.

Frank moves back to where Kurt's body has been left behind.

AKSEL

I drove past a fat man haulin' ass.
He with these fellas?

CLOSE ON Kurt's pocket as Frank retrieves the truck keys.

FRANK BENNETT

He won't get far.

AKSEL

(laughs to himself)
Sure won't.

Frank hobbles back.

AKSEL (CONT'D)

Where you goin' now?

FRANK BENNETT

Hey.
(gets Thad's attention)
Where's your rig?

Thad just whines in response.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)

I said, where's your rig?

AKSEL

I'd wager it's somewhere 'round
that corner.

Frank looks at the direction the assailants came from.

FRANK BENNETT

Can you drive it?

AKSEL

Not one that big. Ole Betsy here's
about all I can handle.

FRANK BENNETT

(back to Thad)
How about you?

THAD

I can't drive shit. You blew my
goddamn toes off.

Thad is on the verge of tears.

FRANK BENNETT
Get down from there.

EXT. HIGHWAY 288 - AROUND THE BEND - DAY

Aksel has driven them over to the second truck. Frank motions for Thad to climb up into the cab. It's slow going, his foot a bloody mess now.

FRANK BENNETT
Move over.

Thad pulls himself over to the passenger seat.

AKSEL
Ever driven an 18 wheeler?

FRANK BENNETT
Once upon a time.

Aksel helps Frank get up into the cab.

AKSEL
In the army I'm a guessin'.

Frank doesn't say anything. He keeps a close eye on Thad.

FRANK BENNETT
Hand me that.

Aksel retrieves the shotgun from the back of his pick up and hands it over to Frank, who pumps a fresh shell into the chamber and lays it across his lap in Thad's direction.

AKSEL
Need anything else, partner?

Frank does not like to ask for help and the last time he accepted some, it got his friend killed.

AKSEL (CONT'D)
I can follow behind ya.

Frank thinks about his plan.

FRANK BENNETT
If you don't mind... go on ahead to that diner down the road. There's a phone inside. Bust through that door and call the state police.

Aksel looks hesitant at the sound of the law.

Thad looks at him with daggers.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
You don't have to hang around. Just
make the call.

AKSEL
You got it, pilgrim.

Aksel helps him shut the door.

INT. SECOND TRUCK - DAY

Frank drives with one hand and keeps the other on the shotgun but Thad is no current threat, convalescing from losing half his foot.

FRANK BENNETT
That thing work?

Thad doesn't answer.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
Call Jones. Now.

Thad reaches for the speaker and presses the button to speak.

THAD
Johnny... this is Waylon.

FRANK BENNETT
The Highwaymen. Clever.

The line is quiet as usual.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
Tell him which direction we're
headed.

Thad brings the speaker back to his lips.

INT. FIRST TRUCK - DAY

Peggy's eyes are glued to the radio. Jones hasn't taken his eyes off the road.

THAD (O.S.)
We're headed east.

This news breaks his concentration. He motions permission for Peggy to reply. She snatches their microphone.

PEGGY
What the hell's going on, Thad?

JONES
No names!

She cowers.

INT. SECOND TRUCK DAY

PEGGY (O.S.)
Where are you? Is Willie back on
the road?

FRANK BENNETT
Tell her no.

THAD
No.

FRANK BENNETT
Tell her I'm driving now.

INT. FIRST TRUCK - DAY

THAD (O.S.)
He's got the truck. The cop.

Peggy panics.

INT. SECOND TRUCK - DAY

PEGGY (O.S.)
Where's Kurt?

FRANK BENNETT
Tell her I shot him.

THAD
He... he killed Kurt.

INT. FIRST TRUCK - DAY

Peggy loses it.

PEGGY
I'm going to kill you and painful
slow, you stinking blue-bellied pig-
fucker. You hear me?!

Jones swerves as he pries the mic away from Peggy. She bangs on the window and the dash, hysterical.

Then brooding.

INT. SECOND TRUCK - DAY

Frank waits patiently for a response.

JONES (O.S.)
Harris?

FRANK BENNETT
Tell him.

THAD
He's... he got-

Thad passes out, leaning against the door. Frank leans over and takes the speaker.

FRANK BENNETT
Is that you, Jones?

No answer.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
I'm guessing Harris was the big
fella?

INT. FIRST TRUCK - DAY

Peggy has gone into catatonic mode, her cheeks soaked with tears. Jones is deadpan as usual, thinking.

FRANK BENNETT (O.S.)
You won't be seeing him again.

JONES
What do you want?

INT. SECOND TRUCK - DAY

Frank eases off the pedal a little as his thigh wound sends a streak of pain through the rest of his body.

FRANK BENNETT
No, Jones. I want to know what you
want? I'm guessing you're headed
for Texas. No brand state, right?

INT. FIRST TRUCK - DAY

FRANK BENNETT (O.S.)
Fifty, sixty head a truck. That
makes about a hundred or hundred
and fifty thousand a load.

Jones listens.

FRANK BENNETT (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Except it didn't quite work out the
way you wanted...

INT. SECOND TRUCK - DAY

FRANK BENNETT
Your first load's drifting all over
Highway 288. And your second's
moving the other direction.

Thad starts to wake back up. Frank steadies the wheel as he
puts his other hand back on the shotgun, driving as steady as
he can while still holding the radio.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
So what's it going to be, Jones?
I've already called it in to Texas
Highway Patrol.

INT. FIRST TRUCK - DAY

Jones clenches his jaw, a rare sign of expression.

FRANK BENNETT (O.S.)
You might make it there but you're
not going to get past any weigh
station and you know it. So you've
got one choice or another as I see
it.
(beat)
Ditch your load now and do your
best to hideout like a goddamn rat.
Or come get the cattle I took from
you. And finish the job.

INT. SECOND TRUCK - DAY

FRANK BENNETT
I'll be waiting at the diner.

Frank drops the mic to the floor board. He has nothing else to say.

THAD
(half-conscious)
You're stupid. He'll never come back.

Frank drives, hedging his bets.

INT. FIRST TRUCK - DAY

Jones calmly places the speaker back on its hook.

PEGGY
We have to go back, Jones.

He keeps driving.

PEGGY (CONT'D)
Did you hear me? We don't have a choice now, we have to go back and kill that-

JONES
I told you to be quiet. I'm thinking.

PEGGY
While you're thinking he's back there setting us up.

JONES
We stick to the plan.

Peggy sneers at the lead rustler.

PEGGY
I did my time.
(beat)
They knew me and three other inmates had our kids taken by CCS, put us on work detail at the welfare medical center. Digging graves for children. Little unmarked wood-boxes for the trash of mankind too broke to afford a proper burial. They knew it would affect us the most. It did. Two girls tried to commit suicide, one succeeded. She was the lucky one.
(beat)
I'm not going back to the jug.

JONES

You won't.

PEGGY

I will if that cop is alive.

JONES

He's bluffing. We're carrying no
hire signage, we don't need to
stop.

Peggy leans back, breathing out.

PEGGY

I seen you watch me. There's
nothing I'd ever do to hurt Kurt,
but now...

Peggy leans over gently, she places her hand on his thigh.

Her mouth to his ear, letting him feel her breath.

PEGGY (CONT'D)

You're a man, the only one that
don't think small and meaningless
thoughts. You're a real man.

(beat)

I don't want to be alone, Jones.

Jones tries to focus on the road.

She grabs the THOMPSON machine-gun resting between them. He
reaches to stop her whilst trying to keep the truck on the
road. She aims it at him, fumbling to make sure it's ready to
shoot if she needs to.

PEGGY (CONT'D)

Turn this truck around. Don't think
I won't use this thing.

Jones looks at her, stone-faced.

JONES

Use your brain. Feelings will get
you killed.

PEGGY

Did you hear what he did to my
Kurt?

Her face crinkles up with sadness. Jones shakes his head
hesitating.

She fires a BURST PAST HIM, blowing out the drivers side window and hitting the door above his thigh.

Wind whips through the now open window debris into Jones eyes, he get's control of the truck.

Peggy watches him, jaw clenched.

PEGGY (CONT'D)

Turn around. Now.

(beat)

Don't any of you got what it takes,
which is why you're all out
stealing cattle in the middle of
the night.

He gazes back at the road and watches for a place to change directions.

EXT. HIGHWAY 288 - DAY

A coyote picks at Fat Phillip's carcass, the second truck approaches in the distance.

INT. SECOND TRUCK - DAY

Frank honks the horn and the coyote flees into the desert. He steers to miss Phillip's body though it appears he's already been hit once, maybe twice.

A "ding" sound draws Frank's attention back to Thad. He realizes there's something in his pocket that made the sound.

FRANK BENNETT

Empty your pockets.

Thad behaves as if even the slightest movement is excruciating. He slowly takes the phone out of his pocket.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)

That's Bill's, isn't it?

Thad doesn't answer.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)

Read me the text.

Thad fiddles with the phone.

THAD

(reading)

Where are you, honey?

(MORE)

THAD (CONT'D)

I thought you'd be home by now.
(sets the phone down)
Yeah, right bitch.

Frank lets go of the wheel just for a moment and bashes Thad in the face with the shotgun muzzle, smacking Thad's head against the window and leaving a perfect bloody ring the exact shape of the shotgun barrel on his forehead.

He regains control of the vehicle as Thad has a new wound to tend to and whine about.

FRANK BENNETT

Say that again and I'll blow your
brains out the window.

Thad throws a hateful look Frank's way.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)

He was trying to send something to
her. What does it say?

Thad reluctantly looks at the phone again.

THAD

(sappy voice)
I love you, baby girl. Kiss the
kids for me.
(laughs)
Baby girl...

FRANK BENNETT

Send it!

Thad fiddles with the phone again.

THAD

Done.

FRANK BENNETT

Now dial 911.

Frank moves the shotgun to aim at Thad's other foot, just to remind him. Thad starts to tap the phone but Frank starts thinking, begins to reconsider.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)

Stop.

THAD

You want me to call 'em or what?

FRANK BENNETT

Put it on the dash.

A moment later, Thad tosses the cell phone on the dashboard as requested. Frank has other plans now.

EXT. DINER - DAY

Aksel waits by his truck as Frank pulls up to the familiar diner where this all began.

Frank looks at the shattered window beside the door - (Aksel broke in and called the cops.)

Frank climbs out and goes around to drag the wounded Thad out. Where Aksel waits.

AKSEL
(as Frank climbs down)
Done as you ordered, pilgrim.

FRANK BENNETT
You didn't happen to run into that
fat man on your way here, did you?

Thad slumps out, gasping on the ground.

Aksel again reveals his lonely gums.

AKSEL
Want me to tie him up?

He reaches into his pick-up bed and shows Frank an arm-full of rope.

FRANK BENNETT
In a minute.

This inspires Frank to survey the contents of bed, full of odds and ends.

AKSEL
If you're lookin' for his pistol, I
picked it up already.

He taps his side where the new firearm resides.

AKSEL (CONT'D)
I don't see so good now so I prefer
one of these.

Aksel lifts out an old WINCHESTER PUMP SHOTGUN.

He leans on the truck-bed to talk business.

AKSEL (CONT'D)

Speaking of beef... that one who thinks he's Rambo slaughtered a couple head when he was killing your friend. Wouldn't mind if one of those goes missing, would ya? Before it spoils. Might feed me and mine for a month.

(beat)

As I sees it, the illegal part's already been done.

Frank chooses not to answer, he finds SOME ZIP-TIES, THEN LOOKS AT AKSEL, he hands Aksel the ties.

FRANK BENNETT

Use these to secure him and take your truck around back.

AKSEL

Less conspicuous?

FRANK BENNETT

They don't know about you. Yet.

Aksel climbs into his truck and starts the engine.

EXT. DINER GARAGE/OUT BACK - CONTINUOUS

Frank walks to the garage at the back.

Reaches up and retrieves his LEVER-ACTION as Aksel parks nearby.

INT. DINER - DAY

Frank sits in a booth.

Behind him Thad is zip-cuffed to a radiator by the window. The Winchester rests on the table and Kurt's pistol sits on the seat next to the livestock officer.

As the sun crests the horizon, Jones' truck pulls into the parking lot.

Frank can see Jones and Peggy inside looking out at him as they come to a stop.

INT. FIRST TRUCK - DAWN

Peggy looks past Jones at the diner.

PEGGY

That murderin' cocksucker is gonna die.

Jones observes the woman, still calm as a cucumber. He looks down at his gun in her hands.

JONES

If you hand that over I could take care of it for you right now. He's just a sitting duck behind the glass.

PEGGY

Shoot my whole place up, wouldn't you? That's my livelihood.

JONES

What we'll get from this truck and the other is more than you'll ever make in that dump.

She knows it's true but she doesn't care for it being said that way.

PEGGY

That dump's all I got left now. Anyhow, I don't trust ya not to mow me down with it.

Jones neither confirms or denies her fears.

PEGGY (CONT'D)

Get out.

INT. DINER - DAWN

The door opens and Jones steps in. He moves slow to the counter while Frank watches him.

Peggy steps in a moment later, the Thompson heavy in her hands but she's ready to use it.

Jones makes sure he's clear of the target.

PEGGY

Stand up, you ever-loving piece of piss. Stand up so I can shoot you.

Frank doesn't budge. There's another sound, a slight noise of movement from the kitchen.

AKSEL (O.S.)
I wouldn't, Peg.

He's standing in the kitchen door with the shotgun.

PEGGY
Aksel, what are you doing here?

AKSEL
Lets just say I ain't come for
bacon and eggs.

PEGGY
Swear to Christ I'll kill you too.

FRANK BENNETT
You can't get both of us.

Her attention turns back to the officer.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
And as far as I'm concerned, you're
just an accessory at this point.
That's a light sentence.

PEGGY
(on the verge of tears
again)
You killed Kurt.

FRANK BENNETT
He killed himself. And that's what
you're about to do.

He can see her mind bouncing back and forth between the
rational decision and the emotional one.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
He had a chance to live, just like
you.

Peggy shakes. She wants to shoot him so bad for what he did
to Kurt but she knows it will be the end of her.

PEGGY
I shoulda shot you before.
(under her breath)
You've ruined me.

She knows Kurt would still be alive if she had and the weight
of that realization brings the gun down then slides it across
the counter, where it stops. Jones takes a slight step in its
direction.

FRANK BENNETT
Sit down. Over here.

THAD
He called the cops. They're on the-

Frank quells the angry burst as he slams the Winchester against Thad's head, crumpling him against the radiator.

THAD (CONT'D)
Was that necessary?

Frank swings the lever action back to bare one handed, then lowers it, placing it on the table again.

In the commotion, Jones checks his six and finds Aksel's shotgun aimed at the center of his back.

Thad is cringing and slobbering against the window.

FRANK BENNETT
I didn't call it in.

Jones eyes the phone on the wall at the other side of the diner.

JONES
Why not?

FRANK BENNETT
I thought we might be able to sort this out. Just the two of us.

Jones doesn't trust him but he smiles slightly and makes his way over to the booth.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
Peggy. Make us some of that coffee.

She's shaking, still in shock from all of this, but she puts herself together enough to move behind the counter.

Aksel keeps close tabs on the woman.

Jones sits down, ignores Thad cuffed to the heater.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
Along Came Jones. But you're no Gary Cooper.

JONES
That was before your time.

FRANK BENNETT

All my dad watched was Westerns.

JONES

That explains why you're so righteous. But I wonder if you're not too stupid to recognize an opportunity get rich.

FRANK BENNETT

Is that what this is all about, getting rich?

JONES

If you're smart there's a cut in it for you. It's not millions, but enough for a new home, a fresh start.

FRANK BENNETT

I like my conscious clear.

JONES

You think you're better than me?

FRANK BENNETT

I don't know you.

JONES

Three or four more of these runs, I'll buy me my own spread, a legit outfit, I've got myself a pocket picked out.

FRANK BENNETT

And one day someone rustles some of your herd?

Jones leans forwards.

JONES

I'd kill them dead, bury them where they fell. No one would ever know.

FRANK BENNETT

You believe in frontier justice?

JONES

I believe in the golden rule, whoever has the gold rules.

Jones and Frank share a look.

JONES (CONT'D)
I'm getting out of here.

FRANK BENNETT
Not with these two.

JONES
It's hard to find good help. Harris was good but I guess it wasn't enough.

FRANK BENNETT
He made bad life choices.

JONES
You married, got a family?

Frank doesn't answer.

JONES (CONT'D)
Didn't think so, family man would have gone home, not risked his life in the middle of nowhere chasing after beef that's covered by any good insurance policy.

FRANK BENNETT
It's a job.

JONES
We have that in common.

Frank listens.

JONES (CONT'D)
There aren't many options for men like us.

FRANK BENNETT
I have a decent life.

JONES
Decent?
(a rare smile)
Is that what you call this?

Frank thinks about it.

FRANK BENNETT
It's honest.

Peggy moves past Aksel with two cups of coffee. She sets them down in front of the men. Jones takes hold of his.

JONES
That's honorable. And old
fashioned.

Frank takes one hand off the rifle to drink the black coffee.

Peggy returns to the counter top, standing near the Thompson machine-gun, she glances at it from her peripheral.

Jones eyes flick to Frank's rifle, Frank catches this. Daring him.

Jones smiles, lifts his coffee, blowing it gently, before sipping it - it's still too hot.

JONES (CONT'D)
The righteous always say they're
looking for righteousness, but what
they're really looking for is
order.

Frank sips his coffee.

Jones smiles, his disposition darkening.

JONES (CONT'D)
Evil has an order to it, too.
Sometimes disorder is the path of
the right...

Jones suddenly flings his coffee at Frank's face. The officer moves out of the way but the scalding liquid still splashes against his shoulder and neck.

Peggy lunges and grabs the Thompson, moving into the room, she fires a burst at Frank.

BULLETS RAKE the windows and wall, tattooing the furniture and shattering glass and plastic...

Behind the booth, in the line of fire - Thad is hit several times, BLOOD SPATTERS the wallpaper.

He slumps, face first into the radiator hanging dead from his zip-tied wrists...

Frank is ducked down, as the table is torn to pieces, splinters fill the air.

Aksel fires the old SHOTGUN, blasting Peggy in the shoulder, she SCREAMS ~ the inertia of the buckshot wound swings her body around, knocking her left hand free like a boom-sail...

The Thompson in her right hand pans towards Aksel and she FIRES AGAIN...

Aksel drops for cover, as the wall EXPLODES IN BULLET-HITS - wall-paper and plaster-board cratered and wrecked.

Aksel has fallen to the ground backwards, dust and debris showered over him.

Peggy stands bleeding, dropping the heavy Thompson to the diner floor.

She looks at the multiple bloody holes in her shirt over her right shoulder.

PEGGY

You shot me!

Jones spills out of the booth across the linoleum, grabbing the discarded Thompson machine-gun.

He lunges for the wounded Peggy and grabbing her from behind, his arm tight around her neck. Using her as cover, the Thompson under her arm.

Frank crawls around behind the booth to where Thad's corpse hangs limp.

Jones backs towards the exit and empties the Thompson magazine into the booth where Frank is hiding.

Dragging Peggy, Jones BLASTS the booth relentlessly - showering sparks and wood particles.

Aksel leans out and fires the shotgun again.

Peggy is hit dead center, knocking Jones to the ground.

From the ground: Jones swings the Thompson towards Aksel and fires, the bolt closes with an empty metallic clunk.

Aksel leans out and levels the big dark muzzle of the shotgun on Jones.

Jones throws the Thompson at Aksel, pushing Peggy away.

He crawls backwards in shock.

The smoke clears and...

...CLUNK-CLICK...

...less than three feet away now...

Frank levers the action on the Winchester rifle, shouldered and aimed at Jones' face.

FRANK BENNETT

Try to run and I'll kill you.

Jones is caught dead to rights and knows it.

AKSEL

You alright?

Frank's neck is red and swollen but he's focused with a passion we haven't seen before.

Aksel looks down at Peggy's lifeless body.

AKSEL (CONT'D)

I wasn't aiming to hit her... Never shot a woman, not sure I like it.

Jones is thinking of his next move.

FRANK BENNETT

Aksel. How much more of that lariat rope you got?

AKSEL

Depends on what got in mind.

FRANK BENNETT

Justice, the old way.

Jones is starting to believe he really didn't call the cops.

EXT. DINER - APARTMENT - MORNING

Aksel finishes backing up under a tall tree in the dusty lot and gets out.

Frank throws a pair of hand-cuffs on the dirt in front of Jones.

FRANK BENNETT

Put them on, good and tight.

Jones realizing Frank is deadly serious, does as he's told.

Frank joins him at the truck, not taking his rifle off Jones.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)

(to Aksel)

Give me that scattergun.

Taking it, Frank slots a fresh cartridge into the chamber, exchanging hands, he moves around Jones.

Leans the lever-rifle against the diner.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
I'll need more rope.

Aksel digs and finds more rope in the truck-bed.

JONES
Didn't you swear some kind of oath?
To uphold the law and-

FRANK BENNETT
On my honor, I will never betray my
integrity, my character or the
public trust. I will always have
the courage to hold myself and
others accountable for our actions.

Aksel tosses one end of the rope over the tree-limb that now hangs over Jones. He ties that side off to a hitch-post.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)
Make sure it's set real good.

Aksel grips the end of the rope and cautiously lifts his feet, letting the rope support his full weight.

AKSEL
It'll about do it.

Aksel then climbs into the bed and begins to tie-up the noose-end.

FRANK BENNETT
Step up.

Frank gestures for Jones to climb up into the bed.

JONES
I'd prefer a bullet.

FRANK BENNETT
Who says you have a choice? You
didn't give Bill one.

JONES
Just call the cops, alright? I
won't try to get away. I promise.

Aksel makes good progress on the noose.

FRANK BENNETT

Try me again and so help me I'll
end it with a bullet. Now get up
there!

Jones steps up on the tire and into the truck.

JONES

You don't want to do this, think of
yourself...

FRANK BENNETT

Too late for that.
(to Aksel)
Put it round his neck.

Aksel slips the noose over Jones' head. The veteran wants to
make a move but knows he'll get killed.

JONES

(to Aksel)
Why you doin' me this way, brother?
This man's making you an accessory.

He thinks there might still be a way out of this.

AKSEL

(quietly to Jones)
You killed this man's partner, he
thinks killing you will make that
pain easier to bear?

JONES

That's what this is about?

AKSEL

(to Frank)
What now?

FRANK BENNETT

Make sure it's good and tight.

Aksel pulls the noose painfully tight.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)

(to Aksel)
You have some slaughtered beef to
collect.

Aksel jumps out, and barely lands on his two feet. He hobbles
over and climbs into the driver's seat.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)

Aksel... I'm going to forget you exist.

(beat)

Don't give me reason to remember.

Aksel understands.

AKSEL

Fellah, I just gots to say I haven't had this much fun in a long-time.

He shuts the door and waits for Frank's order.

JONES

(struggling to talk)

You have to call the cops.

FRANK BENNETT

You'll get 8-10 with a plea bargain. The man you killed had a family. 8-10 doesn't cut it.

JONES

This isn't honorable.

FRANK BENNETT

Yeah. But it is honest.

JONES

I'll see you in Hell.

FRANK BENNETT

That's not a part of my plan.

The range detective nods his head and Aksel hits the gas. Jones' slides and tries to adjust his footing as the truck drives away...

Finally he runs out of truck and he steps out into space...

...The rope snaps tight...

...His cowboy boots swing inches off the red-iron-rich Penistaja soil...

The noose pulls tight ~ it does not break his neck instantly. Jones grits his teeth angrily as he chokes to death.

His hands pulling at the cuffs desperately.

His legs kicking.

Jones swings violently from side to side, making a gurgling choking sound.

Frank watches, as stone-faced as the killer himself.

Frank looks out over the dirty prairie and onto the Johansen Ranch in the distance.

Frank studies the JOHANSEN RANCH SIGN above the gate across the way.

Jones is going purple, his eyes about to pop out of their sockets.

Jones is spinning slowly as the hemp-rope naturally untangles itself under pressure, he sees Frank, then desert, then Frank, then desert, etc.,

Frank aims the shotgun at the tree branch and pulls the trigger.

BOOM!

The rope snaps and Jones falls to the ground in a violent dust cloud, just enough life left in him to make a painful groan.

Jones gasps for breath.

Frank cycles the shotgun, reloading.

He stands over Jones looking down.

The sound of sirens in the far distance breaking the silence.

Frank glances back over his shoulder towards the highway.

THREE STATE PATROL CARS have exited and make their way towards the diner.

Frank squats, removing the rope from Jones neck.

FRANK BENNETT (CONT'D)

I'll enter my house justified and
not you or anyone else is going to
stop that.

EXT/INT. TRUCK JOHANSEN RANCH - MORNING - A DAY OR SO LATER

The JOHANSEN RANCH gate sign arched over the driveway.

Frank sits in his truck cab, a colorful bunch of flowers beside him.

He's sporting a band-aid on his forehead.

He isn't wearing a badge.

A tractor passes, kicking up a cloud of red dust.

Climbing out of the truck.

The dust clears to reveal.

Sylvia standing outside of her ranch-house, looking wondrous.

Frank smiles, on seeing her, he closes the truck door.

Then realizes he's forgotten the flowers, distracted by her.

She catches this and giggles.

Frank crosses the street to her with the flowers in hand.

They go inside the ranch house.

The door closes on us.

CUT TO BLACK: