

THE CROWDED ROOM

"SAVIOR"

Written by

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Based on The Minds of Billy Milligan

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EPISODE ONE
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TEASER

INT. TIMES SQUARE SUBWAY PLATFORM - BENCH - MANHATTAN - 1978 *

FRAMES of A YOUNG MAN sitting on the green wooden bench just *
as the DOWNTOWN EXPRESS TRAIN hurls past on the center track, *
blocking the platform from view. *

Windows whip past, snatched glimpses of lives separated from *
each other by cars of steel, so close but never slowing down, *
never once touching, and then the train is gone. *

The YOUNG MAN and YOUNG WOMAN --- there must have always been *
two of them --- sit waiting for the local. *

CLOSER *

The girl is slim and black, wearing wire rimmed glasses, *
short afro, and a Jimmy Cliff t-shirt. Everything about her *
is coiled and her eyes are as hard as shined onyx, always on *
the lookout. This is ADALANA ATKINS (19). *

Squeezed between Adalana and the chipping arm of the bench is *
BILLY MILLIGAN (18). Wearing Lee Jeans, red velour pullover, *
and Pro Keds. Billy is dark haired, lanky, body always *
folding forward over a baleful, wounded gaze. *

He holds a paper bag in two hands on his lap. *

BILLY *
You cool? *

ADALANA *
Sure. *

Billy opens the top of the paper bag slightly, peaks in. *
Subway neon rim lights a jet black revolver. *

ADALANA (CONT'D) *
Don't keep looking at it. Jesus. *

Billy crushes the top of the bag closed again. *

BILLY *
Sorry. *

Adalana just nods back at him, protective. *

ADALANA *
It's cool. *

The truth is Billy doesn't look cool, he looks nervous, not *
entirely able to keep still or to settle his hands. *

ADALANA (CONT'D)

Hey, Billy, you don't have to do
this, you know that, right?

Billy looks up into her eyes and that anchors him. Whatever
the specifics of this relationship, these two are close,
connected.

BILLY

We're doing it.

Adalana smiles, gratitude visible, despite her hard shell.

BILLY (CONT'D)

He's not going to hurt anyone ever
again.

Billy tries hard to look convinced as the train ROARS into
the station, shaking the world and we WIPE FRAME TO...

EXT. TIMES SQUARE - DUSK - WIDE ANGLE

How it used to be. M&M's, Disney, and family dining still
years away. Here honking traffic inches downtown, more than
half yellow cabs. A Coca-Cola sign of actual bulbs flickers
on. We are in the few hours of dark before Broadway's
marquees carve out a nightly window of civility, men now
infesting the streets, scurrying amidst porn movies and strip
joints under a cover of dusk like furtive shadows.

EXT. 42ND STREET - NEW STRAND BOOKSTORE - DUSK

The air is cooling off fast, the gutters packed thick with
brown leaves in front of the giant bookstore. Billy and
Adalana stand together looking into the window, feigning
interest in Fools Die by Mario Puzo or the new Michener.

Billy still clutches that paper bag in his hand.

ADALANA

I got him. Six o'clock.

Adalana is watching the reflection of an Off Track Betting
storefront in the book store window. Real spy stuff.

BILLY

Where?

Billy starts to turn.

ADALANA

Don't turn around!

Adalana is forceful and quiet, a stern whisper. *

ADALANA (CONT'D) *

Use the reflection. He's just
coming out. *

BILLY *

I missed him. *

ADALANA *

I know the way he goes. We need to
head him off. Come on. *

Adalana starts walking briskly down the block. Billy catches
his reflection in the window. The way the light hits the
glass Billy has multiplied, not just once but endlessly,
fading ghosts crowding backwards into the distance. *

Billy stares at this trick of the light, powerfully drawn in
by this imaginary safety in numbers behind the glass. *

Then he checks the weight of his bag and follows Adalana. *

EXT. SEVENTH AVENUE - MINUTES LATER *

Dusky sky is bleeding purple into black. Billy is crouched
behind the side of a stoop, out of sight, pressed close to
the smooth brownstone as Adalana peeks out down the block. *

ADALANA *

He's coming. *

Adalana drops into a crouch next to Billy. She's breathing
fast. The streetlights are coming on, one by one. *

ADALANA (CONT'D) *

Go ahead. *

Billy takes the gun out of the bag. It's too shiny and too
black in the buzzing neon, like a toy. He stares at it. *

BILLY *

Jesus. *

ADALANA *

What? *

BILLY *

I think my heart's about to bust
through my chest. *

She squeezes his free hand with hers tightly. *

That's when a FIGURE in a baggy overcoat and hat walks past them, Billy and Adalana safe, unseen in their hiding place. *

ADALANA *

I drop him, you shoot him. But close. So he can see. *

Billy nods. He looks anything but sure. He might even protest, have second thoughts, but Adalana is already moving. *

She is behind the man, touches his shoulder. The rest happens fast. As he turns she grabs his arm, pulls him in, dancer-like, then with practiced efficiency elbows his throat and sweeps his leg, bringing him down face first on the pavement. *

ADALANA (CONT'D) *

Come on! *

Billy hasn't moved, standing frozen. Now he closes the gap between them, pointing the gun downward at the same time. *

Adalana grabs the dazed man and flips him over so he is face up on the sidewalk. He stares up and although we do not see his face, Billy does and reels with confusion. *

Billy feels a quick bracing fear. He looks at Adalana but her eyes are moving around the street, assessing the situation. *

BILLY *

I don't understand. *

ADALANA *

Just shoot him Billy. *

Billy is so scared he feels numb, the tingling and tightening of his scalp, his blunt heartbeat the only signs he is alive. *

ADALANA (OVER) (CONT'D) *

Shoot him. *

The man takes advantage of Billy's apparent confusion and scrambles into a run, racing away down the darkening block. *

ADALANA (CONT'D) *

He's getting away! *

Adalana grabs the gun from Billy and FIRES after the fleeing man, then WAILS in wet-eyed frustration as rounds the corner. *

She begins SHOOTING wildly, spinning like a lethal top, as (OVER) people SCREAM. Billy ducks behind a metal trash can. *

BILLY *

Addy stop! *

He can't see her from his hiding place but he can hear SHOT after SHOT until the gun is empty, trigger clicking, making hollow sounds now. Then only silence.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Addy?

Billy rises carefully. Adalana has fled, nowhere in sight, spent gun laying on the sidewalk. Billy lifts it, turns it over, still warm, in his hand.

(OVER) SIRENS are coming, growing louder. Billy looks up from the gun at weeping and angry faces staring back at him.

Billy takes off running.

EXT. PLAYLAND ARCADE - BACK ALLEY - NIGHT

This concrete alley cycles light to dark in the flashing spill of the illuminated arcade sign. Billy is crouched, his back against the wall, scared, trying to catch his breath.

BILLY

Shit, shit, shit.

He is still clutching the gun in his lap. (OVER) SIRENS grow loud and the red and white of bubble lights sweep past the mouth of the alley, briefly painting him in light.

VOICE (OVER)

What in the hell?

Billy looks up. A hulking FIGURE emerges from the shadows. This is REGAN SOLOVITCH (36), short and thick, very strong.

BILLY

Regan.

Recognizing this squat behemoth provides Billy no relief. On the contrary, Billy looks even more frightened. Regan steps into the light. His eyes are flashing of rage.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Adalana ran.

It was all Billy could think to say. Regan just begins walking towards him, saying nothing, ominous.

BILLY (CONT'D)

We were only--. Her stepfather--.

Billy frowns, his sudden memory of his confusion at the start of the attack cutting through his own fear.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Regan, it doesn't make any sense.

Regan's immense shadow falls over Billy.

BILLY (CONT'D)

How could we both have the same--

Regan reaches down, grabs the gun from Billy's hand.

REGAN

Stupid, stupid boy.

Regan is practically spitting. He has a detectable accent, something slavic. Billy looks up, his eyes spilling tears.

BILLY

I'm sorry.

REGAN

So what? Sorry means nothing.

(OVER) The WARBLE of growing SIRENS.

REGAN (CONT'D)

You are, how they say, in all worlds of shit.

Regan swings the pistol hard against the side of Billy's head and with a metal to bone CRACK the screen goes BLACK.

END TEASER

ACT I

EXT. PINE BUSH - NEW YORK - CAR - 1969

A BOY sits alone in the passenger seat, staring through his reflection on the half open window as autumn trees roll past.

This is BILLY MILLIGAN (11), looking more than anxious, maybe even terrified. He glances at the driver but we don't see his face, just the tight grip of strong rough hands on the wheel.

A white clapboard barn fills the windshield as the car slows to a stop. A farmhouse sits nearby, windows dark.

The driver's door swings open, SLAMS with a jarring thud.

MAN'S VOICE (OVER)

Come on.

Something predatory beneath the sweetness of the man's TONE, like salt in honey. Billy glances up at the rear view mirror.

Another BOY (DAVID, 11) sits in the back seat. These two are clearly twins. David shakes his head. *Don't*.

A firefly has drifted into the car. Billy stares at it, its small light visible even in dusk and so late in the season.

Billy reaches out, grabs it in his fist. He watches it blink in its cave of tucked thumb and forefinger. Feels its tiny buzzing as it bumps against his closed hand.

MAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Let's move along now.

Billy turns to look at David in the back.

DAVID

You should stay here.

Billy just shakes his head. He opens the passenger door and steps out onto the gravel driveway. Billy looks from the farmhouse to the barn where A MAN stands in the open doorway, little more than a SILHOUETTE of shadow in the closing dark.

MAN'S VOICE

Over here.

Billy hesitates.

MAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Do you want to make your mom angry?

The man's voice has the sharp cut of adult's reproach. Then it softens, that dank sweetness again.

MAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

I just want to show you something.

Billy opens his hand and watches the firefly spiral up into the sky, blinking ecstatically at freedom. He starts walking.

MAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

That's my boy.

Billy stops, stares down at his feet. That rough hand comes down and rests on the boy's shoulder, tender and firm.

MAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

I want you to look at me.

Billy is looking down, begins to cry, tears spilling soundlessly from his cheeks, drops darkening the gravel.

MAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

None of that.

A husky quality to the voice now. That hand trembling slightly as it squeezes Billy's shoulder.

ADULT BILLY (OVER)

Can I stop now?

INT. OFFICE - DAY - 1979

A well appointed office. Formal but not overly so. Sun streams in through slatted blinds, cutting streaks of light. *

Billy sits in a chair, hair institutionally short. He is wearing a grey jumpsuit and the watchfulness is rimmed by a recent hardness. *

ADULT BILLY

I was under the impression you wanted to talk about Adalana? *

Facing him across the room is RYA KOWARSKI (30's), grey jacket and skirt, pinned up red hair, sharp, forensic eyes. *

RYA KOWARSKI

Do you know where she is, Billy? *

Billy shakes his head, not the first time he's been asked. *

*

ADULT BILLY

Like I told the police, no. Not since, you know, on the street.

*
*
*

RYA KOWARSKI

Well the police can't find her either. So I'm hoping this interview will help me get to know you better. Before the trial.

*
*
*
*

A CHYRON READS: DAY 1

Billy still has that slight jitter, now lights a Kent and smokes with commitment, like pulling water through a straw.

RYA KOWARSKI (CONT'D)

So stopping wouldn't be the best idea.

Hard to tell what this setting actually is. A prison? A hospital? Whatever the circumstance, there are stakes to this conversation, exactly what they are we do not yet know.

ADULT BILLY

What would be the best idea?

RYA KOWARSKI

To continue.

Billy watches his curling smoke reveal previously unseen geometries of light in the air between them.

RYA KOWARSKI (CONT'D)

So what happened then?

ADULT BILLY

David happened. He saved me.

EXT. PINE BUSH - NEW YORK - BARN - 1969

Billy stands looking up at the man whose face we cannot see. That rough hand caresses his cheek.

MAN'S VOICE

You're a good boy.

The hand slides down Billy's arm, wraps around his small hand, enveloping it completely.

MAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Come on.

The Man tugs Billy towards the open doors.

DAVID (OVER)
No. I want to see.

Billy looks up. David is standing a few feet away, staring at the faceless man.

DAVID (CONT'D)
I want to see what's in the barn.

Confusion on Billy's face, hesitation as the man pauses.

DAVID (CONT'D)
I'll do whatever you want. I won't even cry.

The man's hand twitches on Billy's shoulder.

DAVID (CONT'D)
I won't tell mom. Neither of us will.

MAN'S VOICE (OVER)
Don't start with that bullshit.

Billy is starting to cry again.

DAVID
Don't cry, okay Bill.

And with that David crosses, takes the man's hand from Billy and puts it on his own shoulder instead.

Billy watches as the man leads David through the open barn doors, only their backs visible.

David turns back to look at Billy, then vanishes inside as the man pulls the doors closed behind them.

Billy leans back against the weathered siding of the barn and slides to the ground, weeping now in earnest.

HIGH ANGLE

The closing dark is dotted with fireflies, moving above this small crying boy like a storm of stars.

RYA KOWARSKI
That was when you met him? That fall?

INT. OFFICE - DAY - 1979

Billy drinks a glass of cold water.

RYA KOWARSKI

More?

Billy shakes his head.

ADULT BILLY

It was over the summer. You know,
the early part when school's
already back in.

RYA KOWARSKI

(helpful)
After Labor Day.

ADULT BILLY

Yeah. He seemed like just what the
doctor ordered. Funny, huh?

She shakes her head, eyes sad.

RYA KOWARSKI

Not really, no.

Billy lights a fresh smoke, takes a long drag.

ADULT BILLY

No. I guess not.

EXT. PINE BUSH CENTRAL SCHOOL - DAY - 1969

A large facility set on a small grassy campus. Pine Bush is ninety miles west of Manhattan. Half suburbs, half pure country. This school serves K-12, teens sharing the parking lot with parents dropping off younger kids. Everywhere are Frisbees and tie-dye and the badges of rebellion that possessed the fashion and spirit of the late sixties.

ADULT BILLY (OVER)

I was already pretty anti-social.
Boat loads of weird.

FIND Billy walking, head down, staring at the ground. Army surplus backpack hangs from his shoulders, his hair is shorter than in the previous scene. In the almost biological clumping of students that is grade school, Billy remains uniquely apart, attracted to and by no one as he heads inside the building.

ADULT BILLY (CONT'D)

Sad and moody turn out not to be
popularity incentives in sixth
grade.

INT. PINE BUSH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - LATER - 1969

A TEACHER stands at the board. Billy sits staring out the open window where trees sway as if moved by water.

TEACHER
Inherited characteristics. Whose theory was that?

A few hands go up. The Teacher looks around.

TEACHER (CONT'D)
Billy.

Billy looks up, startled, anxious, as if in trouble.

BILLY
What?

A few kids SNICKER. The Teacher HUSHES them, turns back to Billy, gentle.

TEACHER
I was asking about inherited characteristics. Whose theory was that?

Billy just stares, frozen.

TEACHER (CONT'D)
You know, like being--

OTHER KID
Like being a *freak*.

The teacher turns on the offending kid (DOUG ELLIOT, blond, lanky).

TEACHER
(sharp)
Shut it Mr. Elliot.

Doug Elliot just smirks. The teacher directs his attention to Billy again, voice kind.

TEACHER (CONT'D)
Billy--

BILLY
I don't know.

TEACHER
Sure you do, Bill--

BILLY
 (too loud)
 I don't know. I don't know! Leave
 me alone!

His explosion gets a surprised reaction around the room. The teacher takes a beat, then nods sadly.

TEACHER
 Okay. No problem. Anyone else. Ms.
 Shelly...?

INT. PINE BUSH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - AFTERNOON - 1969

The day is ending. Kids heading home. Billy opens his locker. Not a sticker or sign. Just a void of plain gray steel.

Billy feels a shadow fall on him. He turns to face Doug Elliot, the taunting kid from his class.

Billy flinches visibly.

DOUG ELLIOT
 Hey man, relax. Everything's cool.

Billy just looks at him, anxious.

DOUG ELLIOT (CONT'D)
 I think I kind of sucked back there
 in science. I just wanted to say
 sorry.

Billy stares warily. Doug extends his hand.

DOUG ELLIOT (CONT'D)
 My dad says you're never too much
 of a man to apologize. So I'm
 apologizing, okay?

The moment lasts. Then Billy extends his hand and Doug pumps it ceremonially.

BILLY
 Okay.

DOUG ELLIOT
 (looking past him)
 Man you need some decorations for
 your locker.

Billy nods, not used to the attention, not sure how to respond.

BILLY

I'm getting some stickers. Wacky Packs. I just don't have them yet.

DOUG ELLIOT

Cool. I love those. Gleam, right? What are you up to?

Billy frowns.

BILLY

What do you mean?

DOUG ELLIOT

What are you doing right now? I'm going to check out the bake sale on the roof.

Billy just stares at him.

DOUG ELLIOT (CONT'D)

You want to come?

Billy blinks twice. He can't really remember any other kid who has ever before invited him anywhere.

BILLY

With you?

DOUG ELLIOT

Yes with me. Come on kimosabe.

And with that Doug puts his arm around Billy's shoulders. Billy can't believe the feel of it. They head off together down the long school hallway.

EXT. PINE BUSH SCHOOL - ROOF - 1969

*

An overhead mesh keeps balls from flying over the edge. A banner reads WELCOME BACK BAKE SALE. Long folding cafeteria tables have been set up on the basketball courts. Arrayed upon them are all manner of baked goods in cellophane bags.

Billy and Doug Elliot survey a table of tiny transparent bundles of chocolate chip cookies selling for 5 cents.

DOUG ELLIOT

Should we get some?

BILLY

Sure. I mean I guess.

Doug digs into his pockets, then screws up his face.

DOUG ELLIOT

I forgot my money in my locker. We can go down and get it. Unless you have any on you.

Billy digs into his pocket. Comes out with a dollar.

DOUG ELLIOT (CONT'D)

Wow.

BILLY

I get my allowance today for the whole week. We could get change.

DOUG ELLIOT

I'll pay you back.

Billy looks wary but Doug's already moving closer to the table. A couple of other kids from their class have appeared.

DOUG ELLIOT (CONT'D)

Don't worry. It's cool.

He extends his hand to Billy. The other kids are watching now too. Billy smiles, hesitates, then hands over the dollar.

BILLY

Just use ten cents okay.

But Doug has given the buck to one of the older kids working the table, starts handing out small cookie bags to the other kids who dig in instantly, spilling crumbs.

DOUG ELLIOT

Don't worry, like I said I'll pay you back.

Doug is still smiling at Billy but something has changed in his eyes, the pleasure there growing hard, cruel.

Doug looks down at two bags of cookies in his hands, presumably one for Billy and one for him, shoves them both into his pockets.

DOUG ELLIOT (CONT'D)

Payback!

And with that Doug punches Billy, hard, in the arm and walks off, the other kids LAUGHING.

Billy stares after him, trying to take in what just happened, shame rising, face flushing, squeezing back tears of betrayal.

Billy sweeps the table with his arm, cookies and cakes there falling onto the roof top. A beat. Then he doubles down, stomping on the bags of pastries, grinding them to the roof.

TEACHER (OVER)
What the hell is wrong with you,
Milligan?

A TEACHER is coming across the roof towards him, pissed. Billy just bows his head, finally crying in earnest.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OUTER OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON - 1969

Billy sits in one of several wooden chairs that ring the walls of the small room, falling in place, mortified.

The door to the inner office swings open and Doug Elliot emerges followed by his taller chunkier ADULT double (DOUG'S FATHER, 30'S).

Doug's father steers his son by the shoulders, positioning him before Billy. He frowns; Billy isn't quite what he expected. He seems on the verge of asking Billy if he's okay, instead addresses Doug who is now staring at the floor.

DAD ELLIOT
Say it.

DOUG ELLIOT
I'm sorry.

DAD ELLIOT
Look at him.

Doug looks up at Billy, eyes ringed red with rage.

DOUG ELLIOT
I'm sorry. I'll pay you back.

Dad Elliot pushes his Doug towards the exit. As they reach the door, Doug looks back at Billy.

DOUG ELLIOT (CONT'D)
(mouthing)
Asshole.

PRINCIPAL (OVER)
Billy, can you come in now please?

Billy looks up at the Principal (GREER, 40's, white, bespectacled, suit) now filling his office door.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Billy is sitting on a short bench against the wall. Behind his desk is Principal Greer and sitting in a chair near Billy is MR. JONES (white, late 30s, long hair, jeans).

PRINCIPAL

You know Mr. Jones, right Billy?

JONES

I had Billy for algebra last year
isn't that right, Bill?

Billy just nods. Any rage and betrayal have given way to a buzzing, humiliated numbness.

PRINCIPAL

Mr. Jones is also our guidance
counselor for Middle School.

Billy just nods again.

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

We tried to reach your mother but
we keep getting no answer.

Somehow the invocation of his mother hammers home how much trouble he knows he's in and, simultaneously, a strong need to defend her, even though she hasn't been attacked.

BILLY

Our machine's broken. She says it's
not worth fixing. She does
afternoons at the hospital.

The words spill out in a rush. The Principal nods.

PRINCIPAL

And since your dad....

His voice trails off, although the shared silence clearly stands in for any discussion of his father's absence.

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

That's why Mr. Jones is here. This
is not an ideal way to start off
sixth grade.

Billy knows he should say something but that mute numbness has settled over him again.

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

Clearly what Mr. Elliot did is not
acceptable.

(MORE)

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

But neither is throwing a tantrum like that. A lot of the other children worked very hard on those baked goods.

Principal Greer stops. Once more he seems to expect Billy to respond. Billy just continues to stare at his sneakers.

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

(finally, at a loss)

And they were for the school.

That's when Mr. Jones across puts his hand on Billy's leg.

JONES

It's okay.

Jones squeezes Billy gently just above the knee.

JONES (CONT'D)

Do you have something to say, Billy?

Billy is staring at Jones' hand, thumb stroking his jeans.

PRINCIPAL

I'd like you and Mr. Jones to get together once a week. Just to talk.

Billy looks up at Jones who is smiling at him over damp, lingering eyes. Billy stands up abruptly.

BILLY

Can I go home?

The Principal nods, hands Billy a yellow sheet of paper.

PRINCIPAL

And give this to your mother.

HIGH ANGLE on Billy, clutching the yellow slip, so small as he walks between these two men and out the door.

EXT. PINE BUSH - NEW YORK - EVENING - 1969

Billy walks home alone, head down.

INT. BILLY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT - 1969

A Kent burns in a glass ash tray as CANDY GLENNON (early 30's, waist length hair, dancer-like movements) makes a second peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

BILLY
Salisbury Steak.

CANDY
Terrifying. I'll get two. Now I've
got to go get dressed for work.

She is beautiful, smells of the warm spring evening and
cigarettes, exotic and evasive as he pads after her.

INT. CANDY'S BEDROOM - EVENING - CONTINUOUS - 1969

Billy stands in the doorway as Candy strips down to bra and
panties, about to light a fresh cigarette.

BILLY
Mom!

CANDY
Right. Sorry.

She puts the smoke in her mouth and lets Billy use the zippo
on the table to -- after a couple of sparks -- light it.

Candy inhales deeply, then blows the smoke straight into
Billy's face, he LAUGHS.

BILLY
Can't you not go tonight?

Candy has pulled on tight jeans, a denim shirt and a fringed
leather vest. She is tying her long hair back in a pony tail.

CANDY
You know I have to work baby.

BILLY
I don't like staying here alone.

CANDY
You're perfectly fine, honey.
(beat)
Where's David?

BILLY
Not here. Maybe at Dad's.

Candy nods.

CANDY
Well I'm sure he'll be home soon.

He follows her into the kitchen.

CANDY (CONT'D)
 You've got the list of numbers. You
 call me if you get scared.

BILLY
 Why can't I go with you?

CANDY
 You know you can't-

BILLY
 Please mom. Just this one time.
 Please. I'm begging you.

She looks at him, this child of hers who, to her mind, has
 got more heart than this world deserves. Her own breaks.

BILLY (CONT'D)
 Please mom. Just this one time.

She just looks at him.

BILLY (CONT'D)
 Please.

A long beat. Then she shakes her head. Billy grins.

INT. THUNDERBIRD - DRIVING - NIGHT - 1969

An old convertible, top closed, radio knobs gone, just
 squared metal spikes. Billy sits in the front seat, no seat
 belt, hand out the window, palm riding the late summer winds.

He's on an adventure now. He finds something in his pocket
 with his free hand. It's that slip of yellow paper from the
 principal's office. He'd forgotten all about it.

He reads: STUDENT DISCIPLINARY ACTION SLIP. He holds it out
 the window, watching it flap before he lets it go whipping
 away.

CANDY
 What was that?

BILLY
 Nothing.

CANDY
 Well whatever it was don't litter.

BILLY
 I know.

The car pulls into a sparsely populated parking lot. A small log cabin boasting neon beer signs in the windows and a larger one of the roof that reads: COUNTRY CABIN.

INT. COUNTRY CABIN BAR - NIGHT - 1969

One large room, bar at one end, juke box at the other. A pool and foosball table in the center, long benches flanking long wooden tables and small booths against the walls.

Candy ENTERS to see her boss behind the bar, pouring kamikazes for a few early patrons. MARIO (40's, ex college baseball player good looks, third wife) looks up at Candy.

MARIO

Thought you fell into a well. Your shift starts at--. Oh no. Uh uh.

Mario has spotted Billy coming up the steps and into the bar behind his mother.

MARIO (CONT'D)

No way. The kid can't come in here. It's state law. I could get shut down. We've been over this.

BILLY

Hi Mario.

MARIO

Hey Billy. Candy I'm serious.

Candy just raises a finger to Mario -- one second -- then leads Billy to a booth at the back.

She takes a box out of her bag: a well used Batman and Robin Colorforms set which she sets down in front of him.

CANDY

Play.

Billy looks up at her, his face creasing to familiar worry lines. She smooths his forehead with her thumb.

BILLY

But Mario said-

CANDY

Let me handle it.

Candy digs into her bag for a dime, puts the coin on the table in front of him. It gleams.

CANDY (CONT'D)
 Count to sixty then go put your
 song on. You know which one, right?

Billy nods. Candy ruffles his hair approvingly. Then she heads towards Mario, still glaring from behind the bar.

As Billy begins counting silently to sixty, lips moving slightly, he opens the Colorforms set.

On a glossy background, plastic cut-outs of Batman and Joker, Robin and Penguin have stuck together, fused into a confused pile-up where it's hard to tell the heroes from the villains.

Finally finished counting, Billy grabs that dime and crosses to the Wurlitzer, moving bubbles and colored neon tubes somehow to him both glamorous and adult.

Billy looks up to see his mother and Mario behind the bar, ARGUING.

CANDY (CONT'D)
 It's a one time thing.

MARIO
 Every time is a one time thing. I'm
 sincerely sorry Ted turned out to
 be the same Dick he always was-

Billy deposits the dime, presses the number and letter combination he knows by heart, watches the machine select his record, drop the 45 on the spinning platter, heavy needle gliding and lowering into place with mechanical conviction.

The speaker issues the serenading FIRST CHORDS of Hey Jude as Billy looks up at his mother and Mario once again.

MARIO (CONT'D)
 They take my license, it's going to
 be no good for any of us the....

But truth is, the fight has already gone out of Mario's voice. And hearing McCartney's piano seals the deal.

MARIO (CONT'D)
 Oh come on Candy.

CANDY
 What? I shouldn't let him play the
 juke box now? It's not my fault you
 two have the same favorite song.

Mario shakes his head.

MARIO
You're a piece of work Candy.

CANDY
Takes one to know one.

Mario looks over to the boy.

MARIO
How you doin' Bill?

BILLY
Hi Mario.

MARIO
Get him a coke and a burger or
something. Kid's thin as a reed.

CANDY
It's the last time. I promise.

MARIO
Sure.

Mario heads through the stained plywood saloon doors to the
keg room as Candy flashes Billy a winning smile.

BILLY'S COLORFORMS - A LITTLE LATER

A two dimensional drama plays out in front of the bat signal,
villains falling to the caped crusader and boy wonder.

Billy takes the last bite of his burger, chases it with coke-
stained crushed ice at the bottom of his soda glass.

It's not so much a sound that makes Billy look up from his
toy but the sudden silence that swallows the room.

WIDER

The bar is a little more crowded now, picking up steam for
the evening. Coming through the front door are two young MEN
and two you WOMEN (20's), all TALKING LOUDLY, all Black.

This is upstate New York. But in 1969 it might as well be a
thousand miles from the interracial dreams of the city.

Every pair of eyes in the place goes to them, voices hush or
quiet altogether. Even the jukebox finishes its last
selection, piling on in the sudden onslaught of silence.

If the young men and women notice their cool welcome, they
choose to ignore it, move towards the bar. They are loud,
maybe a little high, and happy.

Billy watches their easy fluidity with envy. He sees his mother smile across the bar at them over guarded eyes. In the uncharacteristic silence, their conversation is easy to hear.

CANDY

How you all doing? What can I get you folks?

YOUNG MAN

Couple pitchers of Bud please ma'am.

The other three youths have moved to a back table not far from where Billy is sitting. One of them (DALLAS, 20, MUSCULAR, HANDSOME, PEACE SIGN FADE), notices Billy staring at him and smiles. Billy looks away fast.

DALLAS

(calling out)

Hey little man. How's it hanging?

Billy looks up, wary that somehow this is another of life's endless traps, is instead met with a wide, sincere smile.

DALLAS (CONT'D)

(crossing)

What you got there?

BILLY

Color-forms.

DALLAS

Yeah? Which ones?

(looks down)

Batman. Cool. They only did three franchised ones from DC and Batman's the best.

BILLY

Yeah. Bob Kane.

DALLAS

Right. He's the best artist they have. And he created him too.

VOICE (OVER)

Hey there.

Billy looks up. A couple of TEEN BOYS and their GIRLFRIENDS have appeared as if by magic from across the bar. John Deere caps. Thick fake smiles. Predictably: CHIP and ROLAND.

CHIP

Where you boys from?

Dallas returns the smile, equally false.

DALLAS
We just having a beer.

CHIP
That so?

Dallas locks eyes with Chip.

DALLAS
Look man, we don't want no trouble.

CHIP
That so?

Chip's smile is frozen. Dallas has seen those eyes before, time and time again. Blind to anything but hate.

CANDY (OVER)
Billy come on up here please.

Billy looks up to see Candy staring at him behind the bar.

DALLAS
(darkening)
Best listen to your mama, son.

CHIP
Nobody told you could talk to him.

DALLAS
Nobody told me I had to ask for permission.

CANDY
(terse)
Right now.

Billy inches out of the booth, past the boys who are now clearly facing each other off, eyes locked.

When Chip throws the head butt at Dallas, it's almost too fast to see. One second Dallas is facing Chip and the next Dallas's nose is exploding, blood spraying across Billy's face, into his mouth and eyes, Dallas sliding across the floor.

CHIP
(grinning)
You hard headed as every other ni-

Dallas actually launches, getting his hand around Chip's throat and slamming him into the table in one fast movement.

Dallas's friend is across the bar, grabbing a pool cue, taking Roland down at the knees. But before Billy can see any more, he is being dragged away by Candy who is wiping his face with rag pulling him behind the bar. She shoves him through those plywood doors to the keg room.

CANDY

You stay put. Hear me?

Billy sits on the floor, face smeared with blood, back against the kegs as (OVER) the sounds of the fight continue.

ADULT BILLY (OVER)

Sometimes I think the blood that night marked me.

EXT. COUNTRY CABIN - PARKING LOT - NIGHT - 1969

Swept by the red and blue lights of the squad cars. Only the Black youths are led out in cuffs by two WHITE COPS.

RYA KOWARSKI (OVER)

What do you mean?

INT. OFFICE - DAY - 1979

Billy stares at her so hard he might be looking through her.

ADULT BILLY

From ancient Judaism to Shakespeare, blood, especially blood spilled in violence, has magical powers. It can ward off evil or it can summon it.

RYA KOWARSKI

Is that what you think? That what happened to you was your fault.

Billy says nothing.

RYA KOWARSKI (CONT'D)

Billy-

ADULT BILLY

I mean everything that came after can't just be a coincidence.

She just looks at him, surprised, even moved, by his pain.

INT. COUNTRY CABIN BAR - KEG ROOM - NIGHT - 1969

Billy sits alone, bubble lights outside raking his face.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. SUNRISE - WALKER VALLEY - 1969

The sun rises over the rolling green hills, summer grass wet with dew and sparkling.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

A MAN (MARLIN CHALMERS, 35) sits at his kitchen table, drinking coffee, strong, kind eyes. He finishes, rinses out his cup and heads towards the open door, vanishing into the rectangle of daylight.

INT. JEEP WRANGLER - DRIVING - 1969

Marlin, soft top down, wind in his hair, pulls off the highway and drives towards a large metal security gate.

EXT. OSSINING YOUTH DETENTION FACILITY - MORNING - 1969

Towering cement walls topped with barbed wire. Block shaped buildings, thickly grated, impenetrable windows.

Marlin's jeep clears the guard booth with an exchange of nods and the gate slides closed behind him.

EXT. OSSINING - YARD - CONTINUOUS

Blacktop. Hoops on one end, weights on the other. The yard is thick with BOYS, mostly Black, many shirtless, as they lift, mill or race up and down the court.

Marlin walks a fenced corridor on the perimeter of the yard past a morning game of hoops. The play is heavy on contact, fast and rough. Most of the kids pay him little attention, the few that do simply offer understated nods of respect.

INT. OSSINING - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Institutional yellow. Marlin walks down the hall past coworkers, mostly Black, who nod to him as well.

He comes to a door marked INTAKE ONE. He checks his watch, pulls keys from his pocket and unlocks the door knob.

INT. OSSINING - INTAKE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Small. A long interview table. A bureau against the wall with a coffee station which Marlin flicks on. Marlin sits on one side of the with table, examines a file that has been left there for him. (OVER) A KNOCK. The door swings open.

A burley Black AIDE (JOE, 40's) ENTERS from the hallway, looks like he could wrestle down a full grown bear. He is escorting a slim Black teen who might as well be made of pipe cleaners. This is Marlin's morning intake, MICHEAL FORBES (16).

MARLIN
Hey. I'm Marlin.

The kid just looks at him, wary.

MARLIN (CONT'D)
You know, like the fish.

The kid says nothing.

MARLIN (CONT'D)
Sit down. Go on. We're good, Joe.

Joe nods philosophically and then EXITS.

MARLIN (CONT'D)
Seriously. I don't bite.
(off the folder)
Micheal.

The kid sizes him up. Then he sits down across the table.

MARLIN (CONT'D)
Coffee?

Micheal seems surprised.

MICHEAL
For real? Sure.

Marlin fills two white styrofoam cups.

MARLIN
Milk and sugar?

MICHEAL
Just sugar. Strong and Black like me.

Though the kid says it with attitude, it's more bravado than anything else. Not that this kid isn't hard. He's just young.

MARLIN

Look, I'm a Senior Counselor here, Micheal. I'm going to manage your intake. Now the first thing I'm going to tell you is that you can trust me. I know you think that's bullshit and that's okay. The second thing is if you've got anything you shouldn't, weapons, drugs, anything you've managed to hide and didn't surrender you can give it to me now. No harm no foul. No consequences. They find it on you after you leave this room, I can't make any promises.

Marlin's voice is strong, calm, and though he's said those words before he clearly means them. Micheal sizes him up.

MICHEAL

Nah, man. I got nothing.

Marlin nods, neither convinced or unconvinced. Looks down at the file again.

MARLIN

Breaking and entering.

MICHEAL

My grandmother locked me out her house man. I was supposed to be living there. How you get arrested for breaking into your own house?

Marlin says nothing, continues reading.

MARLIN

Wow, your birthday was yesterday. You missed juvy by a day.

MICHEAL

I don't need juvy. Fuck that.

Marlin turns to really look across the desk, concerned by what he sees.

MARLIN

So here's the thing Micheal Forbes. You can try and sound all hard. But this isn't juvy. It's rough in here. And you're younger than everyone else and you're too small. And too small gets tested just like too big.

Marlin reads the flicker of anxiety in the boy's eyes.

MARLIN (CONT'D)

So you need a friend. I can be that friend. I can watch out. Fact is looking at this file you don't belong in here kid.

MICHEAL

(tough)
Sure I do.

MARLIN

Whatever you say kid. But follow the rules. Don't get pulled into shit you can avoid. You and me, we'll try to make sure you do your six months and get you out of here in one piece. Got me?

Marlin nods. The moment lasts.

MARLIN (CONT'D)

(shouting)
Done here Joe!

The door swings open and Joe fills the doorframe. But Micheal Forbes looks over his shoulder, looks back at Marlin.

MARLIN (CONT'D)

(frowning)
Give us another sec.

Joe nods, steps back out.

MARLIN (CONT'D)

What's up?

Micheal Forbes reaches up and pulls a single razor blade with masking tape over the edges from between teeth and upper gum.

MICHEAL

Guy on my block taught me.

Marlin nods. He opens his palm.

MICHEAL (CONT'D)

You know. What you said. About watching out. Not that I need it.

He deposits the blade in Marlin's hand.

MARLIN

Good now Joe!

Joe comes back in through the door and this time Micheal Forbes is already rising to exit.

Marlin turns the blade over in his hand, a small victory. He begins logging the contraband.

EXT. OSSINING - STAFF LUNCH COMMON - LATER

A grassy field adjacent to the yard. The staff take lunches here on picnic tables painted enamel green.

Marlin sits over Burger King with two co-workers. ONITRA (31, Black) and HANK (42, white).

ONITRA
Might make it all the way.

HANK
Pigs might fly.

MARLIN
We're due.

HANK
Ever think that's why they call 'em the Miracle Mets. 'Cause that's what it takes for them to win.

MARLIN
What's going on?

Marlin is looking across the yard as a small force of UNIFORMED GUARDS cross the black top.

The kids on the court scatter, until the Guards close on three boys, grabbing them roughly despite SHOUTED PROTESTS.

One of the apprehended kids is smaller than the rest. Wiry. Micheal Forbes.

MARLIN (CONT'D)
(rising)
What the fuck?

INT. OSSINING - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Marlin is walking down the hall, wiping any residual catsup from his mouth, making sure his shirt is spot free.

Marlin stops at a door marked WARDEN and KNOCKS.

WARDEN (OVER)

Come!

INT. WARDEN'S OFFICE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Well-appointed. Sports trophies. The room is thick with cigarette smoke. Behind a heavy metal desk sits WARDEN REED (white, 60'S, parted Grecian Formula hair). On his desk are bits of contraband, joints, smack, that small taped blade.

MARLIN

(off the contraband)

What's going on?

The Warden looks at Marlin incuriously.

WARDEN

You tell me.

MARLIN

The new intake. Forbes. He just got rounded up on the contraband raid.

The Warden gestures to the taped blade.

WARDEN

His razor, right?

MARLIN

Yeah. But I got it during intake. Gave him the one time immunity.

WARDEN

Sorry Marl, we changed that policy. Discontinued.

(beat)

Oh, you were off yesterday. Sorry about that.

Marlin just looks at him incredulously.

MARLIN

You're kidding right?

WARDEN

I look like I'm kidding?

MARLIN

Jim, he's green. We need to get him out, not keep him longer. The older ones will eat him for lunch.

WARDEN

Yeah well, precedent and all, you know how it goes.

MARLIN

He trusted me.

The Warden leans back, no quarter in his stare.

MARLIN (CONT'D)

(realizing)

You didn't tell me on purpose.

WARDEN

Maybe now we can dispense with the idea your shit don't stink.

Whatever this beef is between the two, it's long standing.

MARLIN

Don't take it out on the kid.

WARDEN

Life's a bitch, huh Marlin?

That's when there is a KNOCK at the door. The Warden BUZZES and two Guards ENTER escorting three KIDS with hands zip-tied in front of them. The smallest is Micheal Forbes.

WARDEN (CONT'D)

So gentlemen we seem to have some rules violations.

Forbes looks up, locks eyes with Marlin.

WARDEN (CONT'D)

This will add some extra time to your stay. I guess you must like it here, huh?

MARLIN

(mouthing)

I'm sorry.

The boy holds his eyes a beat longer, then just looks down and away.

WARDEN

Now let me impart to all of you why we all follow the rules....

Marlin looks at the boy, lost to him forever.

INT. MARLIN'S CAR - DUSK - DRIVING

Marlin drives. *Spinning Wheel* by Blood Sweat and Tears plays on the AM radio. Much as he tries, he can't shake the frustration of the day.

Marlin pulls open the glove compartment. Looks at a pack of smokes there. Decides better of it, SLAMS the glove compartment closed.

When he looks back up he sees two police cruisers blocking the highway, bubble lights spinning, the bent hoods and rising steam of a two car accident beyond.

A standing COP waves Marlin off, towards the exit.

Marlin pulls off the highway. He stops, looks around, then opens the glove compartment again, this time pulls out a map.

Marlin unfolds and flips the creased multi-color rectangle expertly into a tall hand held rectangle.

He reads the map a beat, drops it on the passenger seat, puts the car into drive when a neon sign flickers on across the road. The sign reads: COUNTRY CABIN.

INT. COUNTRY CABIN BAR - DUSK

Mario is sweeping up the signs of last night's fight. Candy washes glasses behind the bar. Still an air of sadness hangs over the room as Marlin ENTERS, takes a stool.

Candy looks up at him. Something kind in his eyes, the odd downturned smile that seems both tolerant and amused. She smiles, not entirely practiced at it herself these days.

CANDY

Get you something?

MARLIN

Why not? What do you recommend?

CANDY

We do a hell of a kamikaze.

That smile of Marlin's cracks into a grin.

MARLIN

Not since college. I'll take a beer. Miller if you've got it on tap.

CANDY

That we do.

She pours a tall glass and he slides a single across the table. She returns three quarters.

MARLIN

(sipping)

Good.

CANDY

Helps to keep it colder than they tell you to by about ten degrees.

MARLIN

Tricks of the trade?

CANDY

Something like that.

This time her smile is spontaneous. His too as he finishes the beer, wipes away the foam mustache.

MARLIN

How about another? Care to join me?

RYA KOWARSKI (OVER)

You don't really know any of that happened though.

INT. OFFICE - DAY - 1979

Billy looks at Rya.

RYA KOWARSKI

Not really.

ADULT BILLY

No. Not *exactly*. There's a difference.

RYA KOWARSKI

How so?

ADULT BILLY

Some things you know because you were there. Others because you've read them. But there are other things you know because you've been told the story a thousand times. You know them as well as if you lived them yourself.

RYA KOWARSKI

Your mother. She's the one who told you?

ADULT BILLY

Both of them. All the time growing up. They told me and David...

He lets his voice trail off.

RYA KOWARSKI

It's okay Billy.

ADULT BILLY

It's just... it still makes me sad thinking about him. I really miss him.

RYA KOWARSKI

Where is David now?

Billy just stares at her, then just shakes his head. Rya looks like she's going to press, but then seems to think better of it. She just nods empathetically.

RYA KOWARSKI (CONT'D)

Well whatever the circumstances, I'm sorry, loss sucks.

ADULT BILLY

That your professional opinion?

Rya nods, smiles softly.

RYA KOWARSKI

Something like that.

ADULT BILLY

You don't know what it was like with me and David. We weren't just identical on the outside. We were inseparable.

She nods compassionately.

RYA KOWARSKI

No two losses are exactly the same. But none are entirely different. And that *is* my professional opinion.

Billy nods, feels the truth of this.

RYA KOWARSKI (CONT'D)
So tell me what happened then?

ADULT BILLY
They talked and talked all night
until mom's shift was over.

INT. COUNTRY CABIN BAR - NIGHT - 1969

Late. The bar is empty. Candy sits with Marlin at the bar now, each drinking a beer, smoking, easy talk and smiles.

ADULT BILLY
Whatever it was they said exactly,
it's how people fall in love.

INT. BILLY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - 1969

Billy is asleep on the couch under a stolen airline blanket. Candy has just ENTERED, lifts him up...

INT. BILLY'S HOUSE - BILLY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Candy helps Billy climb into the top bunk.

BILLY
(half waking)
Is David home?

She glances down to the lower bunk, nods.

CANDY
Snug as a bug in a rug.

Billy smiles as she kisses him, then drifts back to sleep.

INT. CANDY'S ROOM - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Candy strips down to her bra and panties. Lights a smoke and stands in the mirror. Sucks in her stomach. Tries to see her own butt. Not twenty anymore. But she figures: not half bad.

A small figure fills the doorway. Billy. She smiles at him, pulling on an old over sized t-shirt, maybe Billy's father's.

CANDY
What's up? Can't sleep?

He just nods.

BILLY
I don't like being alone.

CANDY
But you've got David.

BILLY
Please, mom.

A beat. Then she smiles.

CANDY
Okay. But not every night.

But he's already scrambling into her bed, his head on the pillow, relief like a warm tide washing him right to sleep.

ADULT BILLY (OVER)
The thing is, dad going left us vulnerable. If you could see it all backwards, if you knew at the beginning what we knew at the end, maybe we would have seen it coming.

Candy goes and sits next to him, stares at her son, puts out her smoke and kisses his head.

ADULT BILLY (OVER) (CONT'D)
I guess mom hoped Marlin would save us. She was perpetually disappointed, I think, always looking for someone to fix things. Always looking for someone to make life turn out like she'd expected.

INT. OFFICE - DAY - 1979

Afternoon light makes the smoky beams of sun visible.

ADULT BILLY
We needed a savior, someone who'd keep the monsters out, and mom figured Marlin was the man for the job. I guess we both did....

RYA KOWARSKI
But...?

ADULT BILLY
But the truth is we didn't stand a chance.

Billy takes a long drag.

ADULT BILLY
The monsters were already there.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. SQUIBB PARK - DAY - 1969

A school trip in progress. Billy's class occupies swings, slides and see saws, race around rubber jigsaw mats. A few teachers sit, supervising from afar. The September breeze smuggles in the first hints of autumn.

Billy sits alone on a cement rail that circumscribes the playground eating a PB&J and watching the other kids play.

KID'S VOICE (OVER)

Hey.

Billy looks up. Standing in front of him is a GIRL (10), small even for her age, black skin, black hair.

JOY

I'm Joy. I'm new.

BILLY

I'm Billy. I saw you the first day.

JOY

Yeah. We moved here from the city.
My dad's got a new job.

BILLY

I don't have a dad anymore. My mom works though. She's got two jobs.

Joy nods philosophically. She sits down across from him on the curving cement edge, begins toying with a giant branch that must have fallen from one of the overhead trees.

BILLY (CONT'D)

You want some of my sandwich?

JOY

No thanks. I've got my own.

She digs into the top pocket of her overalls and comes out with a ball of compressed Wonder Bread and yellow cheese squeezed into cellophane. She begins unwrapping it.

JOY (CONT'D)

My dad's a technician at IBM in Kingston. What's your mom?

BILLY

She's a nurse. Also she works in a bar at night sometimes.

JOY

Wow. That's cool. I went to a bar once. I had to stay outside. My mom was getting my dad. She was pissed.

BILLY

(expert)

That happens a lot in bars.

Joy nods at this imparted wisdom.

BILLY (CONT'D)

The other night there was a fight. I saw it.

Joy's eyes go wide.

JOY

Seriously?

BILLY

Yeah. Some people came in. They just wanted to drink. But they were like you.

Joy frowns.

JOY

What do you mean?

BILLY

They were Negroes.

JOY

What did you just call me?

All the warmth has retreated from Joy's eyes. In place there is now only suspicion and fear.

BILLY

I mean. Negro people. I mean black skinned people.

JOY

You prejudice?

BILLY

What? No? I just said neg-. I mean black. I-

JOY

You call me a nig?

BILLY

No.

Joy's fear has changed to something else. Rage. Small as she might be, she stands up and lifts that fallen branch, swings it, and hits Billy hard in the side of the face.

Billy falls forward, catching himself on the concrete with his hands, sandwich hitting the ground, his cheek red.

Billy looks up from one knee.

But Joy swings again, hard, knocking him flat. Billy is crying now and so is Joy as she hits him a third time.

From the ground Billy can see the other kids staring as Joy goes for a third strike. But the teachers finally arrive, taking the branch from Joy, face streaming tears, and gathering up Billy who can barely catch his breath.

BILLY (CONT'D)

(between sobs)

I'm sorry. I didn't mean it. I'm sorry.

Billy watches as one of the teachers comforts Joy.

MAN'S VOICE (OVER)

This isn't the 1950's.

EXT. PINE BUSH SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

The school day is over. The last of the older kids are heading home. The field trip buses are parked out front.

MAN'S VOICE (OVER)

You think I won't call the ACLU down on your ass?

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Billy sits, once more flanked by the Principal and Mr. Jones. New to the party are Joy and her father.

ALBERT LEE (30's), tall, handsome, with the hard eyes of a Black man in a white school district.

PRINCIPAL

There's no need to shout, Mr. Lee.

ALBERT

You want to tell me how to talk
now, that it?

Principal Greer squirms uncomfortably.

PRINCIPAL

No. Of course not.

ALBERT

You heard what this boy called my
child.

JONES

Billy, can you tell us what
happened?

Billy is just staring at the floor.

ALBERT

Joy already told me. You believe
this white boy over her.

PRINCIPAL

That's not what I mean, Mr. Lee.
I'd just like to hear Billy's side
of the story. That's all. She did,
after all, hit him.

ALBERT

Lucky she didn't knock his head
clean off.

PRINCIPAL

Billy, please....

But Billy is still fixed on the floor, confused, full of
shame and entirely shut down. The Principal SIGHS.

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

Billy, we've tried your mother at
home and at the emergency contact
at the hospital. Given that she did
not respond to our last yellow slip
regarding your behavior we're going
to have no choice but to suspend-

(OVER) A KNOCK.

All look up curiously as the door swings open revealing a MAN
who is a stranger to all of them.

Marlin ENTERS, respectful but confident, closes the door
behind him, smiles his easy smile.

He looks right at Billy.

MARLIN

Hi Bill. My name's Marlin. I'm a friend of your mom's.

Marlin surveys the adults in the room. Then he looks at the Principal.

MARLIN (CONT'D)

Candy --- that's Bill's mom-- she's got your message at the Nurse's Station. There was a bus crash on Route 17. Sounds pretty bad. She said she's going to get here soon as she can. She knows I work nearby so she asked me to swing by, maybe see if I can help out.

Marlin shakes the hands of the three men, none of whom are sure how to react, leans with his back against the door.

MARLIN (CONT'D)

So, may I ask, what's going on?

ALBERT

You're not the boy's father.

Somehow in all of this, this is what gets Billy's heart to move his tongue. The words come out like an explosion.

BILLY

I don't have a father.

Everybody, even Albert, is taken aback.

PRINCIPAL

Look, we are open to this being a misunderstanding-

ALBERT

Ain't no misunderstanding-

PRINCIPAL

Mr. Lee, please.

(to Marlin)

But we do need to hear Billy's side of the story if he has one. We take race relations seriously here.

Marlin shoots him a skeptical look.

MARLIN

That so?

JONES

And you know our Billy has been in trouble before.

Jones reaches out, puts his hand on Billy's back. Marlin frowns, not at all sure he likes the look of it.

JONES (CONT'D)

We know he's a good boy. But his mother hasn't responded to the school's overtures.

Billy glances up for a second, catches Marlin's eyes, then lowers his head again.

MARLIN

Well down where I work we talk a lot about conflict resolution and the most important thing is letting folks speak their piece.

ALBERT

Yeah. Where's that? White and Company?

Marlin just smiles at the dig.

MARLIN

Down at Sing-Sing.

That takes them all by surprise.

ALBERT

You work at the pen? My cousin's a social worker at Men's Vocational.

MARLIN

John Lee?

ALBERT

Know him?

MARLIN

Well enough to say 'hey'. Not much more.

ALBERT

You a guard?

MARLIN

Counselor. Juvy.

ALBERT

Kids, huh?

By Albert's expression he knows that population can be tougher than adults, nods with respect.

MARLIN
Mind if I say hey to your girl?

ALBERT
Joy say hello to the man.

Joy just looks up at him.

MARLIN
You okay kiddo?

She nods.

MARLIN (CONT'D)
Billy hurt you?

A beat.

MARLIN (CONT'D)
It's okay. Whatever you have to say
is okay sweetheart.

Finally she just shakes her head.

MARLIN (CONT'D)
Did he scare you?

She looks from Billy to her father then to Marlin. Then she nods. Marlin looks over at Billy.

MARLIN (CONT'D)
How's that Bill? You don't look
very scary.

Billy just looks up at him.

MARLIN (CONT'D)
Did you wear a mask? Did you grow
fangs? Did you roar?

Marlin ROARS. Billy's eyes widen. Even Joy lets out a small titter. This guy really has a way with kids.

BILLY
(small)
It was an accident.

MARLIN
Go on. It's okay.

BILLY

I was trying to be friends and I wanted to be polite and I was worried I said the wrong word so I kept trying different words but I just wanted to be friends and then she started hitting me and she kept hitting me and I didn't know what to do and I'm sorry.

Billy is crying again as he finally looks up at Joy.

BILLY (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry.

Joy crosses her arms and looks away. If she were a cartoon she would make a hurumph sound. Marlin looks up at Albert.

MARLIN

You think maybe it was a misunderstanding?

Marlin looks at Albert. Albert takes a beat, then gestures to the Principal and Mr. Jones.

ALBERT

I figure these two liberals, they just they scared of a lawsuit.

Marlin says nothing, though his lips make the smallest smile.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

Yeah. We okay. Shit happens.

That's when the door swings open to reveal a breathless Candy, still in scrubs, looking like she ran the whole way.

CANDY

Oh my God. I'm sorry. Is everything okay? What's going on?

All just look up at her. Marlin offers an easy smile.

MARLIN

Nothing to see here ma'am. Everything's just fine.

She just looks at all of them. Not sure what to say.

EXT. COBBLE STONE INN - NIGHT

A long red clapboard restaurant on the side of the highway, not a cobblestone in sight. (OVER) The opening chords of Hey Jude fill the night air.

INT. COBBLE STONE INN - NIGHT

The WAITRESS replaces the empty ribbed plastic pitcher of beer with a fresh one as Billy returns from the juke box.

Candy and Marlin at a table covered by a red and white checkered cloth. All three dig into a pizza and SING along with the Beatles. The portrait of sudden found family. All together now.

INT. MARLIN'S CAR - NIGHT

Candy is in the passenger seat, buzzed and warm from the beer, window open, smoking, enjoying the night air.

Marlin is in the driver's seat. Billy sits on his lap, man working the gas and brake, boy managing the wheel.

Billy is in heaven as he steers. Marlin puts his hand on Billy's shoulder.

PUSH IN on a funny light in Marlin's eyes.

Billy frowns. He starts to move.

Marlin grips Billy's shoulder a little more firmly, holds him in place.

MARLIN

Watch the road. Keep steering.

Billy nods, does what he's told, gently moving the wheel.

INT. CANDY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Candy and Marlin are in her bed having sex, moonlight through the curtain-less windows making everything stark.

Candy straddles him, facing the headboard. For Candy the sex is like water to a deep thirst.

REVERSE

Billy is standing in the door, eyes wide, frightened at what he's seeing as Candy climaxes.

Billy turns and slips away back to his room.

Hearing something, Marlin looks up at where the boy once stood, still a little breathless, expression hard to read.

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. BILLY'S BEDROOM - MORNING - 1969

Morning streams in through open windows. Billy sits up and drops out of bed. He appraises the mop of hair on the pillow of the lower bunk, much like his own but longer, more unkept.

BILLY
David. Wake up.

He shakes David awake.

DAVID
(sitting up)
What?

BILLY
Mom had a guy over.

David just nods, swings his legs off the bed.

BILLY (CONT'D)
How was dad's?

DAVID
It was okay. We went to the drive
in Ellenville.

BILLY
What did you see.

DAVID
(frowning)
Bambi.

BILLY
How was it?

DAVID
Boring. Except for the part where
there's a fire which was
terrifying. Also his mom gets
killed.

BILLY
Jesus. What a review.

DAVID
Right.

Both boys begin to get dressed as they continue talking, the easy familiarity of family.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Dad asked about you a bunch of
times.

Billy looks at him.

DAVID (CONT'D)
He really misses you.

Billy looks away to hide the rush of water in his eyes.

DAVID (CONT'D)
He's got to go to London again. But
he said when he gets back he's
going to try asking mom if you can
come over again.

BILLY
She's only going to say no.

DAVID
Yeah. But you know dad. He'll keep
asking. I wouldn't be surprised if
one day he doesn't just come over
here and kidnaps you.

BILLY
I wish.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Candy is at the stove making bacon. And sitting at the table
is Marlin. Billy and David exchange a look but say nothing.

CANDY
(turning)
Well look who's up early. Come on.
Let's have some breakfast.

David is already heading for the door. Marlin looks over his
newspaper, smiles at Billy.

MARLIN
You want to sit down?

BILLY
No. Don't want to be late.

MARLIN
(mock stern)
Don't make me come back to that
Principal's office, okay young man?

Marlin's smile is easy. Billy just nods. But being here with the two of them makes him self-conscious.

He heads after David.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - MORNING - RIDING

Billy and David sit together in a seat as the new day whizzes by, sunlight flaring the windows.

TAUNTING KID

Billy, hear you got beat up by a girl.

DAVID

Hear you choked on your own cock.

Billy and David slide down into their seats and melt into barely silenced GIGGLES.

INT. MATH CLASS - DAY

On the board the writing says SUBSTITUTE TEACHER: MR. JONES. Jones is handing out a mimeographed problem sheet.

JONES

How you doing there Bill?

Billy just nods. Another kid shoots Billy a sidelong look.

KID

Teacher's pet.

JONES

That's enough.

Jones walks back to his desk. The kid who taunted Billy makes a long, wet smooching sound.

INT. MATH CLASS - LATER

Kids are handing in their problem sheets and heading for the door. Billy deposits his on the stack, starts for the hall.

JONES

Bill, hang back a minute will you?

The rest of the kids spill out, leaving only Billy and Jones. Jones gently closes the door.

Jones pulls a chair behind to the other side of his desk to face his. Then he sits, taps the empty seat across from him.

JONES (CONT'D)
Come on. Take a load off.

The room is gathering shadows as the day wanes, here on the dark side of the school building.

Billy hesitates, then sits. They are barely inches apart. Jones looks in Billy's eyes. Intense.

JONES (CONT'D)
You're a sweet kid, Billy.
Sensitive. I can tell that.

Billy just looks at him.

JONES (CONT'D)
Wouldn't you say that's true?

BILLY
I guess. I don't know.

JONES
I think you are. I think you feel
things deeply. Very deeply.

Jones reaches across, touches Billy's chest firm.

JONES (CONT'D)
In here.

Billy doesn't know what to say. Jones lets his hand rest on Billy's chest a beat longer, then takes it back.

JONES (CONT'D)
Your dad's not around, huh Bill?

Billy just shakes his head.

JONES (CONT'D)
And your mom works a lot. Two jobs.
Seems to me you need a friend.
Someone to talk to. Someone who
thinks you're special. I see you
Bill. I think you're special. You
don't have to feel so alone.

Jones reaches across, strokes Billy's cheek with his knuckles.

JONES (CONT'D)

I don't want to hurt you son. I
want to help you. If something's-

That's when the lights come on, banishing the dark that had quietly gathered in the room. Marlin stands in the doorway.

MARLIN

What's going on here exactly?

Jones moves his hand away from Billy, fast but not quite fast enough to look innocent.

JONES

We were just talking.

Marlin looks at the man and the two lock eyes. The moment lasts. Hard to tell where this is going to lead.

MARLIN

(finally)

The boy's mother asked me to pick
him up. Let's go Bill.

Billy stands. Grabs his book bag and heads out the door.

INT. WRANGLER - LATE AFTERNOON - SCHOOL PARKING LOT/DRIVING

Billy climbs into the front seat. David is already in the back, waiting for them.

DAVID

I got worried when you didn't come
out. I called dad but he didn't
answer.

Billy just nods. The car pulls out of the lot and they begin driving towards the highway.

MARLIN

You okay Bill?

Billy just nods. He feels deeply embarrassed, like he has done something terrible and wrong.

MARLIN (CONT'D)

What were you doing back there?

BILLY

Nothing.

Billy glances up at David.

MARLIN

Did he touch you? You can tell me.

Billy doesn't know what to say. He just shakes his head.

MARLIN (CONT'D)

I'm thinking of proposing to your mom. I think she'd like that. Don't you Bill.

They keep driving.

MARLIN (CONT'D)

Truth is I think she's having trouble making ends meet. She's having trouble what with both jobs.

Marlin is staring straight forward. Billy can see sweat is now dampening his temples, making a fine dripping sheen.

MARLIN (CONT'D)

Truth is I'm not even sure how she could keep you, you know? But I'd be willing to help her out. But you and me, we got to make a pact. A secret. Can we do that?

BILLY

Sure.

The car pulls into a driveway. A familiar house and barn. The one we saw in the opening.

EXT. MARLIN'S HOUSE - DUSK - HIGH ANGLE

The car pulls to a stop.

INT. MARLIN'S CAR - DUSK

That's when Marlin simply reaches across and puts his hand on Billy's crotch.

MARLIN

We're going to do something. You're going to like it. And it's going to be our secret.

Marlin removes his hand and he EXITS the car.

MARLIN

Come on.

Billy sits alone in the car. We are back where we began, in the closing dusk, the floating fireflies.

Billy glances up at the rear view mirror. David shakes his head. *Don't.*

HIGH ANGLE as Billy crosses the dusk from the car to the barn where Marlin stands waiting, little more than a SILHOUETTE of shadow in the closing dark.

INT. OFFICE - DAY - 1979

Rya nodding, holding on to a professional's distance.

RYA KOWARSKI

How long after did he marry your mom?

ADULT BILLY

A few months. That Spring.

RYA KOWARSKI

And he kept it up?

ADULT BILLY

Why stop. Easy access right. One stop shopping at home.

RYA KOWARSKI

And your mom?

ADULT BILLY

She never knew. Doesn't to this day.

RYA KOWARSKI

They're still together?

ADULT BILLY

Marital bliss.

Billy manages a humorless smile.

RYA KOWARSKI

And it was always David?

*

Billy just nods.

*

ADULT BILLY

He got in between it every time. He was my savior. Until...

*

Billy smiles sadly.

RYA KOWARSKI *
Until when? *

She holds his eyes a long beat, challenging. *

RYA KOWARSKI *
What happened to David, Billy? *

ADULT BILLY *
What does it matter? I thought we *
were here to talk about-- *

RYA KOWARSKI *
Where's Adalana? *

ADULT BILLY *
Like I told the police, I don't-- *

RYA KOWARSKI *
She's not the first person close to *
you to disappear is she? *

Billy just stares at Rya, didn't see this coming. *

RYA KOWARSKI *
What happened to both of them? *
Where did they go? *

Billy just looks down at the floor. *

BLACK SCREEN

END OF EPISODE