

NICKEL BOYS

Screenplay by

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Based on the novel by

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WHITE Production Draft  
Date 04.30.2023  
Registered WGA

Contact:  
Plan B Entertainment  


1 OMITTED

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2 OMITTED

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2A EXT. CURTIS HOME - YARD - FRENCHTOWN FL - 1958 - DAY (D1) 2A

ELWOOD (6-8ish) POV of the midday sky where the moon is visible against its blue hue. The underside of a lemon tree with lemons is also in view.

EVELYN (O.S.)  
(calling out)  
Elwood? Elwood! (louder) El!

He tilts his head toward the house, his arm outstretched in the same direction in the unruly tropical backyard of the family house.

HATTIE (O.S.)  
He's out back, looking like he fell out.

3 INT. CURTIS HOME - LIVING AREA - 1958 - NIGHT (N2) 3

SOUND of music playing.

ELWOOD's POV from where he's sitting on his mother's lap, is concentrated on a drop of condensation on a can of beer on the table before him. Lights reflect on and off the aluminum. A party is winding down. Cigarette butts in the ashtray.

His mother EVELYN (late 20s, slim, tired eyes) and his father PERCY (30s, fit and restless) play gin rummy with friends. A couple in the background is swaying in a boozy slow dance.

The dew drop begins to slide down the side of the beer can.

Percy throws a discarded card face down.

PERCY  
Knock knock.

He splays his hand on the table. Picks up the can of beer. Evelyn's unmatched cards are of equal value to his, she starts discarding them.

PERCY (CONT'D)  
Just gonna lay 'em all off?

He sets down the now empty can.

(CONTINUED)

ANOTHER ADULT VOICE (O.S.)  
She undercut ya.

PERCY  
You ain't lying. Damn Ev.

EVELYN (O.S.)  
Gin is gin... you know Percy can't  
count and drink at the same time.

Some chuckling from people O.S.

PERCY  
(yawning)  
Just go 'head and deal 'em.

His large hand slams down on the beer can, crushing it. Elwood's gaze jolts a little but holds on the can in its new form, then turns to look at Evelyn's hand, nails done but worn down, gripping a tumbler glass, swirling whiskey into a whirlpool at the bottom.

Someone sweeps up the cards and shuffles the deck.

EVELYN (O.S.)  
(chuckles)  
You too tiired Percy, after this  
next loss I'ma have to hear your  
mouth all the way to Cali.

PERCY  
She know she ain't even driving,  
already complaining about  
somethin'. What you need to do is  
put that boy to bed.

An older woman's hands start to tidy up and collect glasses.

EVELYN  
What you need to do is mind your  
business and get what's coming to  
ya. I'll clear it, Mama. Elwood,  
get down now.

Elwood gets down. Evelyn sets the tumbler on the table and starts to follows his grandmother HATTIE (50s, a hummingbird) out of the room.

PERCY (O.S.)  
(as she passes out the  
door)  
Come back and help me win, Evelyn.  
You hear?

3 CONTINUED: (2)

The women's voices can be faintly heard from the kitchen.

EVELYN (O.S.)  
I said I'd do the washing up, Mama.

HATTIE (O.S.)  
At least tell the child you're  
leaving.

4 INT. CURTIS HOME - LIVING AREA - 1958 - NIGHT (N3) 4

SOUND of Christmas music on a radio in the background. It's Christmas Eve.

ELWOOD POV from where he's lying on the floor, on a threadbare patterned carpet, looking up through the branches of a small spruce pine, moving to get a good view of Hattie. She hums along to "*Santa Claus is Comin' to Town*", having noticed that Elwood is watching her.

HATTIE  
(humming)  
He knows if you've been bad or  
good, so be good for goodness sake-

She 'accidentally' drops an ornament ball that falls through the branches and toward the POV. It just misses Elwood.

ELWOOD  
(startled)  
Nanna!

Hattie looks down and smiles and keeps humming.

HATTIE  
(humming)  
...you better not cry, you better  
not pout, I'm tellin' you why..

SOUND of her humming continues...

5 INT. CURTIS HOME - LIVING AREA - 1958 - DAY (D4) 5

...until overtaken by the SOUND of a roller coaster ride, children exclaiming. It's an ad on the radio for the "FunTown" amusement park.

RADIO AD (O.S.)  
This holiday season, try the Crazy  
Daisy! Strap into the Atomic Rocket  
for a Trip to the Moon!  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

4.  
5

CONTINUED:

RADIO AD (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Try your putting skills against Dad  
at Goofy Golf! A straight-As report  
card gets you in free, to Funtown!

Elwood POV, blurred, up close to black skin, his gaze pulling back a bit and focusing on the subtle pulsing of a blood vessel in Hattie's neck. She is looking off to the left and light softly outlines her cheek bone.

6 OMITTED

6

7 EXT. PARK PLAYGROUND - TALLAHASSEE FL - 1958 - DAY (D5) 7

ELWOOD POV from under a jungle gym in the park playground, on a GIRL (10) above, sticking her tongue way out and holding it there. OTHER KIDS, 5 or 6 of them, dart around playing tag.

She turns and looks down at him. Her eyes widen, then she turns back.

Elwood looks left toward the girl and then right toward a BOY (8) who holds open a loop on a dangling string. She paws it away playfully, then sticks out her tongue again.

He gently places the loop around the girl's tongue, and pulls it tight without hurting her. Elwood watches the boy then stick his tongue out and place a loop on the other end of the string around his own tongue, bringing his face and the girl's within a few inches of each other, tied together.

After a beat, Elwood turns in the direction of the boy, panning quickly across the boy's face- and then Elwood is up and running off into the brighter light of the playground.

8 INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - HOTEL RICHMOND - TALLAHASSEE - 8  
1958 - DAY (D6)

Elwood POV from where he's seated on a stool in a hotel kitchen that overlooks the dining room, reading a *Hardy Boys* mystery. SOUND of staff clanking around, pots and pans, cutlery, voices as the breakfast shift winds down and they prep for lunch.

PREP COOK (O.S.)  
Got to always look for the pearl.

Elwood looks over the top of the book, toward an older man, a PREP COOK (60s) sitting at the counter shucking oysters in a big bucket of ice.

(CONTINUED)

With weathered, scarred hands, he inserts the knife tip into the hinge of the oyster, and with a quick twist, opens it, then shucks the oyster's foot from the shell. He peeks under it (no pearl) then proffers it to Elwood.

Elwood leans back away from the oyster.

PREP COOK (CONT'D)  
What? You don't want it? You ever  
try an oyster? No?

Nearby a lanky DISH WASHER (20s) is rinsing and drying.

PREP COOK (CONT'D)  
(to dish washer; still  
holding the oyster)  
This boy never ate an oyster.

The dish washer turns and snatches it from the Prep Cook.

PREP COOK (CONT'D)  
(good-humoredly)  
Boyyy!

SOUND of a glass breaking somewhere. Elwood looks out into the dining room where there are several tables, one with a white family, and one with a white couple finishing breakfast.

PREP COOK (CONT'D)  
(slurping down an oyster  
himself)  
Mmmhmh! Bet he never ate something  
else neither. Taste like last  
night.

The men chuckle.

Elwood sees Hattie in the dining room in her hotel uniform, coming up from behind a table, placing large pieces of broken glass on a tray, then picking up a broom and sweeping the rug, a rug with the same pattern as the one in her living room at home.

Elwood returns his gaze to the Prep Cook who struggles with an unyielding oyster, and then slides it to the side.

Elwood POV from where he's lying on a hotel bed as a fresh white bedsheet is tossed in the air above and over him onto the bed.

Hattie (O.S.) hums as she goes around the bed tucking it in with Elwood beneath it. It grows tauter and tauter around him. Elwood stifles a giggle.

A heavier blanket or comforter is thrown over the sheet. Elwood giggles in the dark.

HATTIE (O.S.)  
(playing)  
Hmm. Coulda sworn I heard... Must  
be mice.

9 INT. CURTIS HOME - HATTIE'S BEDROOM - 1958 - NIGHT (N8) 9

Elwood POV as he pads down the dark upstairs hallway, turning a corner and peeking through the slit of the door and frame to Hattie's bedroom, slowly pushing it open.

He watches Hattie while she sleeps, drawing closer, fascinated by the shiny tip of a machete blade showing from under the top rear of her pillow. Elwood inches closer and closer. He seems to be checking her breathing.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
(softly)  
Nanna. (pause) Nanna. (pause, more  
loudly) Harriet!

Hattie springs awake in fear, yanking the big machete blade from under the pillow.

Elwood jolts and retreats, but his gaze remains fixed on Hattie as she sits upright on the bed.

Hattie realizes it's Elwood. Falls back, relieved.

HATTIE  
El...

She puts the machete down, pulls him into her arms.

HATTIE (CONT'D)  
Shhh... I ain't going nowhere,  
baby.

10A INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - HOTEL RICHMOND - 1958 - DAY (D9) 10A

Elwood POV of Hattie's strong hand steering an iron across the wrinkles in a cotton hotel pillowcase on an ironing board in the laundry room. Hotel towels and sheets are drying on lines and a large linen cart is already filled with pressed sheets.

As the steaming iron slowly passes back and forth across his gaze, Elwood is revealed in the reflection of the chrome base.

11 INT. CURTIS HOME - HALLWAY/BA THROOM - 1958 - EVENING (E9) 11

Elwood POV as he turns the corner in the hallway, drawn to the glow of yellow light from the slit of the nearly shut door of the bathroom.

He stands at the doorway and looks at Hattie submerged in a hot bath, leaning back relaxing with her face covered by a wet rag. His gaze pans to rest on the two islands of her upright knees in the milky, soapy water of the tub. They're worn from years of scrubbing floors. He looks back at her face covered with a wet rag, then back to her knees.

She makes a happy SIGH. A knee sinks into the water.

Elwood turns to leave, careful not to disturb her, his gaze slowly rotating to the right and out the door.

12 EXT. TALLAHASSEE STREET - SIDEWALK - 1965 - DAY (D10) 12

Elwood (POV) up at a store window full of stacked TVs just as the screens go blank to static, zap to a bar that stretches out then bounces back to a dot on each before going dark.

SOUND of the busy street and voices of women on the sidewalk behind Elwood.

WOMAN 1 (O.S.)  
(teasing, impressed)  
Hattie, don't you look "mod"!

WOMAN 2 (O.S.)  
Nobody gon' call her grandma!

SOUND of the women chuckling.

WOMAN 1 (O.S.)  
Still, I'd be glad to have a  
grandson carry my shopping.

(CONTINUED)

A BLACK EMPLOYEE is visible tinkering behind the TVs through the window, trying to fix the outage.

WOMAN 2 (O.S.)  
How'd you raise such a fine boy  
Hattie?

HATTIE (O.S.)  
Elwood didn't need much rightin'.  
Spends more time reading than  
anything else...

WOMAN 1 (O.S.)  
You hear what they did in Selma?

Rack focus of POV and Elwood (11-13ish) is reflected in the window holding his grandmother's shopping. To the right Hattie is reflected with two local WOMEN (60s, full-figured).

WOMAN 2 (O.S.)  
Mr. Parker tellin' us not to talk  
about political things on the  
clock. Said 'that don't got nothing  
to do with you all.'

HATTIE (O.S.)  
Hell if it don't.

The TVs suddenly light back up. On a screen at the center, REVEREND DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. is giving a speech to a large crowd from the State Capitol of Montgomery, AL. On the other TVs, images of Black joy, (archival) home movie footage of children living their lives with their families. The AUDIO comes in and out, something is still wrong with it.

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.  
...I know you are asking today,  
"How long will it take?" (Speak,  
sir)... Somebody's asking, "When  
will wounded justice..."

WOMAN 1 (O.S.)  
Long as we working I don't see how  
it makes a difference.

WOMAN 2 (O.S.)  
We work hard, too.

HATTIE (O.S.)  
Jim Crow ain't going to just slink  
off his wicked self.

In the window reflection, more Black people are visible walking up to watch the display.

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

...Somebody's asking, "When will  
the radiant star of hope be plunged  
against the nocturnal bosom of this  
lonely night, (Speak, speak, speak)  
plucked from weary souls with  
chains of fear and the manacles of  
death?

Through the store window, Elwood sees the WHITE STORE OWNER come running out of the back room, having noticed what's going on. He starts yelling at the Black employee, who then starts pulling out the plugs of the TVs. As the speech continues, one by one, the TVs zap off.

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. (CONT'D)

...(Yes, sir) How long? Not long,  
(Yes, sir) because no lie can live  
forever. (Yes, sir) How long? Not  
long, (All right. How long?)  
because-

White hands at the edge of the window are hurriedly pulling the cords that bring the curtains together across the window. Elwood's reflection comes back into focus, Hattie now standing beside him, stylish and very put-together.

Elwood POV standing in the living room, looking at his arm stretched out in front of him. He watches intently as his skin rises into goose pimples, the hairs at attention... then they recede and the hairs go flat. Elwood adjusts his arm to find the best angle for the show.

Elwood (15ish) POV from where he is seated in a city bus: his reflection is visible in half of the window frame as he leans his head against the glass, now a teen.

Through the window, the city sidewalk moves from left to right. As the bus stops at a traffic light, Elwood lifts his head, and turns to look out the window. His reflection disappears and he focuses on THREE BLACK TEENAGE BOYS walking merrily down the sidewalk. An OLDER WHITE COUPLE are walking in the opposite direction.

When they are about ten feet from each other, the boys hop off the sidewalk, letting the white couple pass. They hop back on the sidewalk after, as if this is totally routine.

Elwood looks backward toward the white couple walking on, as the bus continues down the road.

16

INT. MARCONI'S TOBACCO - FRENCHTOWN - 1966 - DAY (D13) 16

Sound of a radio playing in the background. Elwood POV from where he is standing by the magazine racks in Marconi's Tobacco Shop, reading a comic.

Up front, MR. MARCONI (50s, Italian) banters with his WIFE who is somewhere O.S. in the back, as he arranges his stock of cigars. The shop is otherwise simple, penny candies, newspapers, dry goods.

MRS. MARCONI (O.S.)  
Again with the cigar boxes, Mr.  
Marconi?

MR. MARCONI (O.S.)  
Cuban *puros* are embargoed, Mrs.  
Marconi, I have to do something to  
attract the eye. (approaching  
Elwood) Besides, order and  
packaging is important, it excites  
the happy part of the human brain.  
(to Elwood) Doesn't it?

Elwood turns to take in Mr. Marconi (squat, with a low pompadour and thin mustache) standing beside him.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
Sir?

MR. MARCONI  
Why you read through all of them  
like that, if you're going to buy  
them anyway?

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
Just making sure.

Marconi studies him a beat.

MR. MARCONI  
You need a job?

Elwood closes the *Journey into Mystery* that he's reading.

17 INT. LINCOLN H.S. CLASSROOM - TALLAHASSEE (1966) - DAY 17  
(D14)

Elwood POV of a few used, scattered pencils on the floor near his desk. It's the first day of the semester and a new teacher, MR. HILL, (late 20s, kind face above a bow tie, scar over an eye), walks the aisles, handing out black markers.

MR. HILL

The first order of business in my class will be to strike out all the bad words they left for you.

Beat.

MR. HILL (CONT'D)

September is the tutorial in the latest epithets of white youth, which like hemlines and haircuts vary from year to year, and are quite imaginative.

SOUND of a ruffling.

Elwood turns to the right, looking past the person sitting next to him, over to the textbook of his neighbor's neighbor, a BOY who is RUFFLING the edges of a second-hand text book from the white high school. A series of crude flip-book drawings animate a lynching: a stick figure with a black face is being lifted by two other stick figures into a noose. The boy ruffles it three times, then stops.

STUDENT (O.S.)

Mr. Hill, you a Freedom Rider?

Elwood looks at Mr. Hill.

MR. HILL

Yes, I am.

STUDENT (O.S.)

That how you got that scar over your eye?

Mr. Hill suddenly leans in- right in front of Elwood- to speak to the student who asked, the scar visible in CU. Elwood instinctively shudders backward.

MR. HILL

Nashville. White man slugged me with a tire iron.

(CONTINUED)

17

CONTINUED:

12.  
17

As he withdraws, he hands Elwood a black marker. Elwood watches Mr. Hill walk back to the front of the class, before looking down at the book before him: *American History*.

18

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18

18A

INT. CITY BUS - FRENCHTOWN - 1966 - DAY (D15)

18A

Elwood POV seated in the city bus, Hattie (O.S.) beside him, reading the *Selected Poems* of Gwendolyn Brooks. As Hattie's hand turns a page, Elwood sees a LITTLE GIRL slide herself feet first from under their seat forward into the space between his own shoes, all the way until her face is visible.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

Well, hello. Where'd you come from?

She smiles up at Elwood then starts sliding backward the way she came.

Elwood bends all the way forward and looks under his seat, watching the kid slide backwards under other seats, past the legs and shoes of passengers toward the back of the bus.

19

INT. MARCONI'S TOBACCO SHOP - 1966 - DAY (D16)

19

Elwood POV from a stool in Marconi's shop, as he looks up to see TWO WOMEN (30s, one Black, one white in curlers) browsing the single small aisle. Both are magnificently dressed in big-patterned dresses.

The white woman is closer to him and the Black woman is a bit further. They both lean in to take items on opposite sides of the aisle, creating a balletic synchronization. Both pause for a moment before returning to their upright browsing positions and moving on.

20

INT. CURTIS HOME - ELWOOD'S BEDROOM - 1966 - DAY (D17) 20

Elwood POV as he raises his left arm, rotating his shoulder, attempting to get the best angle to see the hair follicles stretching from out of his armpit.

His hand twists and pulls this newly discovered hair, then he moves in close to sniff his armpit, the image blurring. Then he leans back and reaches for another twist of the new hair under his arm.

21

EXT. FRENCHTOWN STREET - 1966 - DAY (D18)

21

Elwood POV on the curb of a street near Marconi's, waiting at a crosswalk for the light to change. He is looking down at the untied shoelaces of a LITTLE GIRL in a school dress, who is holding her MOTHER'S hand ahead of him. The bottom fabric of the little girl's dress is blowing in the wind.

As they start walking across the street, Elwood's shifts to an older GIRL, SIMONE, who walks on the other side of her sister. She's also wearing a dress and his gaze moves from her backside up to the back of her head.

As Elwood crosses the street behind them, the family walks faster than he does and pulls away. The older girl looks back over her shoulder, meeting Elwood's gaze, smiling flirtatiously at him.

22

INT. MARCONI'S TOBACCO SHOP - 1966 - DAY (D19)

22

Elwood POV from a short step-ladder near the magazine rack. He is popping his knuckles and stretching his fingers, rotating his wrist and flexing his hand while looking at the darkly grooved life lines in his palm.

On his lap is a pile of magazines. On top, LIFE magazine with young people his age on the cover, young men's ties straight black arrows in the whirl of violence. The curves of the women's perfect hairdos float against the squares of the protest signs. Open above them, his current preoccupation, is a Marvel comic book, *Silver Surfer*. He picks it back up and begins to read just as the bells above the door jingle and someone enters.

Elwood looks up to see Mr. Hill having a word with Mr. Marconi. Elwood watches as Mr. Hill approaches with a smile on his face, no bow-tie, plaid shirt open on his undershirt, hip sunglasses.

## MR. HILL

Hi Elwood. I came to see you.  
 (beat) Don't worry, good news.  
 You know the colored college just  
 south of Tallahassee- Melvin Griggs  
 Technical School? They've just  
 opened courses to high-achieving  
 high school students. I thought of  
 you right off the bat.

## ELWOOD (O.S.)

That sounds great, Mr. Hill. But I  
 don't know if we have the money for  
 classes like that.

(CONTINUED)

MR. HILL  
 That's the thing- they're free.

He hands Elwood a PAMPHLET from the college.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
 (looking at it)  
 They are?

MR. HILL  
 This fall at least, so word gets  
 out in the community.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
 (with barely contained  
 excitement)  
 I'll have to ask my grandmother-

MR. HILL  
 You do that, Elwood. And I can talk  
 to her, too if need be. Main thing  
 is, it's perfect for a young man  
 like you. You're the type of  
 student they came up with this for.

Elwood watches Mr. Hill walk out the door...

MR. HILL (CONT'D)  
 (over his shoulder)  
 Imagine a textbook with nothing to  
 cross out.

Elwood POV standing in a line-up of local Black TEEN BOYS against a wall along the sidewalk. He looks to his right and downward as the rubber tip of a cane taps the right, then left, pants pocket of the boy next to the boy next to him. Then it pokes into the stomach of the boy next to him.

Elwood's gaze remains fixed on the cane, moving along it and up to the hand and arm of the OLD WHITE MAN holding it, then to his face.

A white POLICE OFFICER is standing at an angle behind him, blurred in the background, arms crossed.

Elwood's gaze focuses on the cop's face before swinging down just in time to see the cane pushing into his own stomach. Elwood buckles slightly. The old man moves on to the next boy and Elwood watches as he presses his cane into stomach after stomach down the line.

22A

CONTINUED:

15.  
22A

On the last boy, Elwood's gaze moves from the stomach to the boy's face, across the old man's face and then to the cop, who stands there matter of factly, an orange soda pop with a straw in it in his hand, as if this were routine. Elwood's gaze holds there, as the other boys now scurry off. The cop meets his gaze with total ambivalence.

23A

OMITTED

23A

23

INT. CURTIS HOME - LIVING AREA - 1966 - DAY (D21)

23

The curtains are partly pulled. Elwood POV from the couch where he's lying looking up at the fan wobble on the ceiling as the light from a small black and white television flickers in the room. It bounces off a celebratory helium balloon on a long string that Elwood is tugging rhythmically to prevent contact with the fan blades. He's been at this game awhile.

SOUND of a NASA space rocket lifting off, with news commentary.

24

INT. LINCOLN H.S. - CLASSROOM - 1966 - DAY (D22)

24

Sound of someone RAPPING their knuckles on a desk, creating a rhythm that stops and starts seemingly without warning. The bell RINGS. Elwood's POV of his fellow classmates trickling into the classroom from recess.

At the front of the room, Mr. Hill is at a portable record player, studying the liner notes on the cover of an LP of Dr. King's 1962 *Mount Zion* speech, while he tries to drop the needle on the right place in the speech he wants to play. This act spontaneously syncs with the rapping on the desk, stopping and starting as Mr. Hill searches the record.

MR. HILL  
(muttering to himself)  
Side A, groove 3...

He drops the needle down here and there and Elwood gets just fragments of it, as the kids continue to enter, including where Dr. King starts to tell the story of his daughter longing to visit the amusement park in Atlanta: "Funtown".

(CONTINUED)

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.  
(from the LP recording)

We must believe in our souls that  
we are somebody, that we are  
significant, that we are worthful,  
and we must walk the street of life  
with this sense of dignity and this  
sense of somebody-ness.

Suddenly a PENCIL drops from the ceiling right onto the desk in front of Elwood. The rapping stops. Mildly startled, he looks to the right, where his CLASSMATE, the one rapping, looks back in amusement. Elwood looks to the water-stained ceiling above his desk, which has a patch of pencils stuck in it from being darted upward.

As students seat themselves in the classroom, Elwood looks to the front and finds Mr. Hill looking right at him. He smiles.

Elwood POV at a bus stop, looking across the street at a parked Lincoln with a freshly dry-cleaned suit on a hanger hung on the outside. Headlights streak across the suit as cars go by in different directions, making it dance with the breeze they make. Then it returns to rest.

Elwood POV looking down at the interlaced legs of two BROTHERS (teenagers) lying perpendicular to each other on the floor of a derelict classroom in an abandoned school. They're dressed well, wearing ties.

OLDER GUY (O.S.)  
We're breaking the chain reaction  
of evil.

Elwood turns and looks at an OLDER GUY standing beside him. He's tall, athletic, wearing a pressed shirt and a tie now loosened in his open collar. The outline of a slate blackboard is visible on the wall it was pried away from years ago.

OLDER GUY (CONT'D)  
Some of us went here when we were  
kids. Before other folks decided to  
paint our town red.

Elwood surveys the clusters of young people talking around  
the room. The mood is serious.

Two people are listening to static-y transistor radio.

RADIO NEWS (V.O.)  
"....so many arrests of Negro  
students that the Leon County  
Fairgrounds have become an overflow  
jail site for the protest that took  
place today..."

SOUND of sticks clacking behind Elwood. He turns and sees  
protest placards tossed in a pile on the ground, as more  
people arrive:

EQUAL TREATMENT UNDER THE LAW

NON-VIOLENCE IS OUR WATCHWORD

ARE YOU THE UGLY AMERICAN ??????

WE SHALL WIN BY LOVE

The Older Guy waves to some other teenagers trickling in from  
the protest.

OLDER GUY  
Mr. Hill said you might come. We're  
organizing bail, can we count on  
you Elwood?

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
Uh, yes. I can give half my  
paycheck.

OLDER GUY  
Glad you felt the need to stand up.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
I'll be back next week.

He moves off to greet the others. Elwood watches him, his  
gaze drifting to an OLDER GIRL (teen, pretty) in a striped  
sweater. She cocks her head at him approvingly.

28 EXT. SIDEWALK - TALLAHASSEE - 1966 - DAY (D24) 28

Elwood POV as he walks down the sidewalk. SOUND of a coin being kicked. He stops and sees a gleam a few feet away. He walks over, spying a bright copper penny, and bends to pick it up. When he notices it's "tails" he hesitates, then picks it up anyway. He flips it over, surprised to find the other side is tails, too. He turns it over again, and again. Tails.

28A INT. PHOTO BOOTH - TALLAHASSEE - 1966 - DAY 28A

Elwood POV seated in a photo booth. He looks down at his lap, then looks leftward to his hand resting on his leg. A teen girl's hand reaches over and puts her hand on his. They grasp each other's hands. Elwood looks up at Simone, the older girl who flirted with him on the street, who is smiling at him. She leans in for a kiss. FLASH! A photo is taken.

Elwood POV as Simone, now seated on his lap turns her head and looks back over her shoulder at him, gently leaning into him. FLASH! A photo is taken.

28B EXT. PHOTO BOOTH - TALLAHASSEE - 1966 - DAY 28B

Elwood POV (CLOSE ON) the strip of photos emerging from the automated slot just outside the photo booth.

28C CREATED ARCHIVAL STILLS 28C

Full screen. The series of photos of Elwood and Simone taken in the photo booth in various joyful, affectionate poses.

29 INT. CURTIS HOME - KITCHEN - 1966 - DAY (D25) 29

SOUND of a radio news station in the background.

Elwood POV at the kitchen table, staring at the Melvin Griggs pamphlet hanging from a magnet that is sliding very slowly down the front of the fridge.

To his left he can see Hattie talking to a friend on the phone in the adjoining room, her conversation competing slightly with the radio.

HATTIE

...I hope it's a good photograph of him at least? I'm not reading *The Register*, they haven't said one right thing about these protests.

(CONTINUED)

She's looking at *The Register* as she speaks. Elwood POV remains focused on the pamphlet succumbing to gravity.

HATTIE (CONT'D)  
 Has everyone in Leon County gone  
 crazy? Course I'm proud he was  
 there! Evelyn'd be proud, too. You  
 know that theater was showing *The*  
*Ugly American* and *Invaders from*  
*Mars*? Now ain't that something?

Elwood's gaze slowly leaves the descending pamphlet and tilts up to a decorative fridge magnet which doesn't move at all.

Hattie hangs up the phone.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
 Nanna, next time I want to do the  
 civil disobedience part.

She turns and looks at him.

HATTIE  
 I love you Elwood.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
 I love you, too, Nanna.

HATTIE  
 You hungry?

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
 No, I'm okay.

She smiles and crosses into the living room. SOUND of her changing the radio station from news to GOSPEL, "I Love the Lord, He Heard my Cry".

The kitchen light flickers a bit.

Sound of a radio in the background.

Elwood POV from the register in Marconi's. He sees two neighborhood boys, TITUS and PERLIE, sliding comics under their shirts.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
 Put it back.

The boys stiffen, turn, look at him.

ELWOOD (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
(evenly)  
Put it back.

Perlie's expression shifts from shocked to sinister. He smiles menacingly and nods with this-ain't-the-end-of-this certainty.

Mr. Marconi comes out, sizes up the situation. He tilts his head to indicate "that's enough", to Elwood.

The boys return the comics to the shelves and leave, smoldering as they pass by the register. They slam the door on their way out. The bells jingle loudly.

MR. MARCONI  
Look Elwood... kids take a comic or  
a candy today, their friends and  
parents spend money in the store  
for years.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
So... letting them steal is an  
investment?

MR. MARCONI  
Way I see it. (taps his temple)  
Immigrant perspective.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
Doesn't that diminish all of us?

MR. MARCONI  
Don't take it personal.

Elwood POV walking down the sidewalk in the commercial district of town, scanning the opposite side of the street.

He keeps turning to look back over his shoulder, then walks backward a beat, then continues turning right, 180 degrees then all 360 degrees. Anxious something's going to happen.

He peers forward and to the left, before recommitting to looking across the street to the right.

Elwood's gaze begins to slowly orient forward, looking up the street more and more, as he abruptly comes to a halt. A large ALLIGATOR lumbers out from an alleyway, crossing the street in the light of a street lamp, which flickers, goes dark, then comes back on with a buzzing sound. Elwood watches the gator as it lumbers off.

21.

32

INT. CURTIS HOME - LIVING AREA - 1966 - NIGHT (N26)

32

Elwood POV lying on the couch, as Hattie moves into view with a cloth bag of ice in hand. She peers down at him with a look of concern, moving his face from side to side.

HATTIE

Ok...shh now. Hold still. They got you good.

Her jawline tightens, she blinks back a tear, as she puts the bag of ice over one of his eyes.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

(muffled)

Ow.

The settling cubes sound like bones.

33

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NEAR TALLAHASSEE - 1966 - DAY - (D27) 33

Bright sun. Elwood POV walking down a country road, looking to hitch a ride. Two vehicles whiz past. As he walks on, he continues to glance back, thumb out.

A battered pickup truck with a giant, oversized cross in the back comes into view going the other way, trailing a rope of sparks as the weight of the cross forces the tow hitch to drag against the asphalt.

SOUND of some faint music approaching. He turns and sees an brilliant emerald '65 Chevy Impala.

It slows beside him and RODNEY (30s), stylish in a gray and purple pinstripe suit, leans toward the window.

RODNEY

Going North.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

(keeping up alongside)

Yes sir.

RODNEY

Where you headed?

ELWOOD (O.S.)

Melvin Griggs Technical College.

RODNEY

Never heard of that one.

The car stops, he opens the passenger door.

34

INT. CHEVY CAR - TALLAHASSEE - 1966 - DAY (D27)

34

The emerald vinyl seats squeak as Elwood slides inside. He shakes Elwood's hand, the rings on his fingers biting into Elwood's.

Elwood puts his satchel between his legs and looks over the space-age dashboard, all the pushbuttons sticking out of the silver detailing. Rodney taps at the radio.

RODNEY

This always gives me trouble. Can you find something else?

Elwood stabs at the buttons, pauses on a Gospel station, then decides instead on R&B. Rodney nods.

RODNEY (CONT'D)

Good, good. What's your name?

ELWOOD (O.S.)

Elwood Curtis, sir.

RODNEY

Sir? I like that. You like my wheels? Just got 'em. Headed up to New York to see my lady.

Elwood keeps his eyes down and periodically looks up through the windshield.

RODNEY (CONT'D)

You ain't but what, 15 by the look of you? And already a college boy?

ELWOOD (O.S.)

I'm almost 17, sir.

RODNEY

Still and all... young. (whistles)  
You making our race proud, boy.  
When I was your age, I worked at a catfish factory.

The radio plays on. Elwood turns his head and looks out the right side window as the landscape passes by. He is partially visible in the side mirror.

Rodney turns up the radio, the deejay rattling off info for a Sunday swap meet. Then a "Funtown" commercial comes on and Elwood hums along.

RODNEY (CONT'D)

What's this?

(CONTINUED)

He exhales loudly and curses, running his hand over his conk. Elwood can see the red light of a prowler car spinning in the sideview mirror.

Rodney mutters and pulls over. Elwood pulls his satchel up onto his lap, unconsciously protecting himself.

RODNEY (CONT'D)  
Don't look back. Keep cool.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
Huh?

RODNEY  
You don't know me, do you?

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
No. I mean, we just met.

The cop car parks a few yards behind them. The WHITE DEPUTY (30s) puts his left hand on his holster and walks up. He takes off his sunglasses and puts them in his chest pocket.

RODNEY  
I'll tell him that.

Elwood looks at his feet and begins toying nervously with the leather tie on his satchel, wrapping it around his finger.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
What do you mean?

RODNEY  
Shh. Let me handle this.

Elwood watches as the deputy raps on Rodney's window and motions for him to roll it down. Only the deputy's uniform, utility belt, and holstered revolver are visible now.

A meaty white hand reaches in and twists Rodney by the ear, pulling him toward the utility belt's buckle.

DEPUTY (O.S.)  
Well looky here. First thing I  
thought when they said to keep an  
eye out for an emerald turquoise  
Impala: only a spook'd steal that.

Elwood POV, his gaze so still with a dead humming silence that it feels less like an establishing of an empty room.

His hand comes into view with a tremor, a thin black string wound around his ring finger, palm facing him, the rest of his fingers curled into a fist. He stretches the ring finger, accentuating the tightness of the string. Hattie's voice is audible in snatches, from somewhere in the house, on the phone.

HATTIE (O.S.)  
 (on a phone, distraught)  
 I am telling you Sergeant, he  
 didn't know the man. (pause) He was  
 walking. The man pulled up and  
 offered him a ride. He was heading  
 off to college. Melvin Griggs  
 Technical College. (pause) You can  
 call- (interrupted) I have the  
 acceptance letter right-  
 (interrupted). He just got in the  
 wrong car! Why would he- Sergeant,  
 he's smart enough to know that  
 would be risking throwing his life  
 away!

He pulls the string tighter with his other hand, then loosens it, then wraps it all the way to the tip of his finger, even tighter, making the skin bulge and go pale.

Pain: the only sensation that overrides fear in the face of incalculable loss.

Elwood continues to look at his finger, trying to bend it, trying to bring the pad of his fingertip to the palm.

Elwood POV walking down the hallway to the kitchen in his pajamas. The radio is on, tuned to GOSPEL music, but the signal is spotty so there is static interference.

HATTIE (O.S.)  
 (loudly calling; not the  
 first time)  
 Elwood!

Elwood slows his pace and peeks around the corner to see his grandmother in the midst of a ballet of disoriented disbelief. Standing in the middle of the cabinet area of their kitchen, mid-turn, Hattie rotates 180 degrees, and walks over to a row of cabinets on her left. She bends down to open one-

HATTIE (CONT'D)  
 Elwood!

-stopping abruptly as she begins, the cabinet opening only about four inches. She closes the cabinet, stands straight up, and walks over to the opposite side of the kitchen to search another. She doesn't know what to do with her hands.

HATTIE (CONT'D)  
El-wood!

In an eerie way, it seems like she is looking for him in the cabinets.

Most of the cabinets and drawers in the kitchen are open to some extent. She crosses to the fridge, distracted, no idea what she's doing, losing the order of operations....

37 INT. CURTIS HOME - ELWOOD'S BEDROOM - 1966 - DAY (D30) 37

Elwood POV lying on the bed under the covers looking toward the window, which seems unusually far away, as if the room was just slightly... stretching.

Sunlight moves across the room as the earth turns.

HATTIE (O.S.)  
(calling from downstairs)  
Mr. Hill is by, he wants to see you  
before you go!

MR. HILL (O.S.)  
(calling out)  
Elwood?

38 EXT. PARK - TALLAHASSEE - 1966 - DAY (D31) 38

Elwood POV sitting on a bench. He stares down at his own body, slumped with despair. He sees his shadow at an angle on the ground. The shadow disappears slowly - the light flattens as clouds pass overhead - and then his shadow reappears as the sun remerges.

39 OMITTED 39

40 INT. CURTIS HOME - DINING AREA - 1966 - EVENING (E32) 40

Sound of a radio playing Gospel in the background.

Elwood POV as he turns the corner hallway and walks toward the dining area.

Hattie's at the dining table, her back toward him, putting out a large, lopsided, heavily icing-ed cake, made by a person clearly demented with grief.

HATTIE

(talking to herself)

Act above your station and you will pay. Act above your station and you will pay. White lady accused my daddy. Big, cheerful daddy, walking to his second job. I'd just waved to you across the street, going home from school. Said you didn't get outta her way.

She pulls out a large knife and cuts into it, cutting very large, generous pieces.

HATTIE (CONT'D)

Two days later, still waiting to see the judge. Hanged in your cell. God the judge that day. Lord!

Elwood approaches her slowly.

HATTIE (CONT'D)

I ain't take more than my portion! White man teach me never to ask for more crumbs than he wants to give. Nope, I paid. My daddy paid. My Monty paid. Paid protecting others from paying. Percy paid when he came back. Army don't protect you here, Percy. Why? Your portion is pain.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

Nanna-

She doesn't appear to hear him.

HATTIE

(shaking her head, loud)

Not Elwood, Lord.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

Nanna, I'll be back soon.

HATTIE

(focusing; gesturing)

Yeah? Look what Mr. Hill brought you.

(CONTINUED)

Mr. Hill has left the LP of Dr. King's 1962 *Mount Zion* speech on the table for him.

HATTIE (CONT'D)  
Ain't that nice? ... Sit down, have  
some cake with Nanna.

She pushes a plate with a large piece toward him.

41 INT. POLICE CAR - RURAL ROAD - FLORIDA - 1966 - DAY (D33) 41

Elwood POV of a passing Florida landscape, out the backseat window of a moving Department of Corrections police car. Light SOUND of a sawing, as through leather.

Elwood turns to glance back into the car from where he's seated behind a white Department of Corrections POLICE OFFICER (40s): a good old boy who's eating some greasy fried chicken as he drives. A wire cage divider separates the cop from the back seat. Elwood's gaze drifts back out the window. Light SOUND of sawing continues.

Elwood turns from the window and looks back into the car again. There are two other teenage boys in the back. WHITE BOY 1 (eyes punched purple; lips scabbed) is next to him in the middle back seat, and WHITE BOY 2 (freckles, crewcut red hair) sits behind the passenger side. The two white boys ignore him.

The police officer glances in the rearview mirror.

POLICE OFFICER  
This a repeat for you, young man?

WHITE BOY 1  
I'm "recalcitrant".

Elwood looks over at the boys.

WHITE BOY 2  
Wassat?

He's holding what looks like a serrated SHARK TOOTH, and he's been sawing at the back of the front passenger seat.

WHITE BOY 1  
Hell if I'm gonna explain it to  
you.

Elwood stifles a grim laugh and looks up at the rearview. The officer glances at him in the mirror, rolls a chicken bone around in his mouth, then chuck's it out the window.

POLICE OFFICER  
You two are sitting next to a  
bonafide car thief.

The white boys try not to be impressed.

The officer pulls off the road into a ditch. As the car hits a BUMP, Elwood's leg touches White Boy 1's next to his. He sees the white boy jerk his leg away, as if electro-shocked.

The officer licks his fingers clean, opens the door and gets out. Elwood's gaze follows him as he walks around the front of the car to the other side to take a piss.

SOUND of a RIPPING. Elwood's gaze moves to White Boy 2 and fixates on the deep slash he's carved into the back of the front seat with the shark tooth.

42 INT. ADULT ELWOOD'S APARTMENT - NYC - 2018 - DAY (D-FF1) 42

Brightly colored ground penetrating radar (GPR) images of unmarked graves where bodies have been buried and discovered with this technology are up on a computer screen. SOUND of a mouse click and the image changes. Someone [ADULT ELWOOD] is on a computer looking at these. Click, it changes again.

43 INT. POLICE CAR - NICKEL ACADEMY - MARIANNA FL - 1966 - 43  
DAY (D33)

Elwood POV from the back seat of the car as it pulls into the Nickel Academy school grounds.

POLICE OFFICER  
Look lively back there. Welcome to  
the famous Nickel Academy.

Not what Elwood imagined. The place is lush green and dotted with buildings of red brick. It's a perversion of the college he was intended for.

The police car drives up the road to the main administration building with an American flag and a statue, passing a field where some white boys are scrimmaging and yelping.

WHITE BOY 1  
(pleased)  
All right.

(CONTINUED)

The car stops outside the building and the officer gets out. Elwood watches as he opens the side door. The white boys scooch out. Elwood starts to follow.

POLICE OFFICER

Not yet.

He shuts the door. Elwood observes him hand off the white boys to a white male school official in a uniform.

The officer gets back in the car and drives Elwood further up the hill to the other side of the school: same basic look, but fewer athletic facilities and there are more buildings purposed for labor. A cement block works, a smokehouse, a laundry, and a small lone sugar cube of a building known as the WHITE HOUSE, with rust stains like vines falling across its white walls. It's the only building with a patch of uncut grass encircling it. They pull into a Nickel parking lot.

Elwood POV from where he's seated in the intake room. It's a stark contrast to the well-maintained outside: run-down, cracked paint, water stained ceilings. The walls are scuffed and scratched. A COMMANDING MALE VOICE is carrying loudly.

SPENCER (O.S.)

When Trevor Nickel passed the baton to the current Director Hardee, he devised four ranks of behavior here: start as a Grub, work your way up to Explorer, then Pioneer, and finally, Ace.

Elwood looks around at the eleven other Black boys, as MAYNARD SPENCER (50s) writes "Ace" on the chalkboard next to the other ranks. Spencer is a white man with bits of silver in his cropped black hair. He wears a fastidious dark blue Nickel uniform with every crease sharp enough to cut, and a large ring of keys on his belt.

Spencer turns around, his COLD STEEL EYES now visible under thick eyebrows. Elwood notices the boys are restless, shifting in their seats, not knowing what to expect.

SPENCER (CONT'D)

Earn merits for acting right, and you move on up the ladder.

(MORE)

SPENCER (CONT'D)

Achieve the highest rank of Ace,  
and then you graduate and go home  
to your families. (If they'll have  
you, but that's between y'all.)  
(beat) An Ace listens to the house  
men and his house father, he does  
his work without shirking or  
malingering, and he applies himself  
to his studies. An Ace does not  
roughhouse, he does not cuss, he  
does not blaspheme and carry on. He  
works to reform himself from  
sunrise to sunset. (beat) It's up  
to you how much time you spend with  
us. We don't mess around here with  
idiots. If you mess up, we have a  
place for you, and you will not  
like it. I'll see to it personally.

He touches the enormous key ring on his belt, and the corners  
of his mouth twitch into a smile. He points to a smaller,  
rabbit-faced boy, COREY.

SPENCER (CONT'D)

Tell them, Corey, since you've come  
back for a second taste of Nickel.

COREY

(stuttering VERY badly)

Yes s-s-s-sir.

SPENCER

Why don't you stand up.

COREY

(standing makes it worse)

You d-d-d-d-d-do-don'-

SPENCER

(nodding)

That's right.

COREY

(starting again)

You sh-sh-shouldn't s-s-s-s-s-s-st-  
step over the line, in here.

Without looking at him, Spencer gestures for Corey to sit  
back down. Then he looks at each boy in turn, takes notes in  
his head, and walks out of the room.

The ring of keys on his belt jangles as he walks off down the  
hall, like spurs in a western. It's his signature sound.  
Elwood POV looks at the list on the board.

45 INT. ADULT ELWOOD'S APARTMENT - NYC - 2018 - NIGHT (N-FF2) 45

More GPR images of unmarked graves and their contents on Adult Elwood's computer screen. Just enough SOUND of keyboard and mouse clicking to signal he's been calling up these images online, then searching out more information about a horrific discovery and the start of an exhumation of graves at the Nickel Academy in Marianna, FL.

From somewhere else in the apartment, his wife MILLIE calls out in a loving tone.

MILLIE (O.S.)  
Hey, babe? You all right? When you  
going to give that computer a  
break?

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
A few more minutes. You go on ahead  
and start without me.

46 OMITTED

46

47 INT. NICKEL ACADEMY - DORMITORY - 1966 - DAY (D33) 47

Elwood POV standing in the dorm room, staring at the floor.

BLAKELEY (O.S.)  
That's you over there.

BLAKELEY (60s, white hair, mirthful eyes, a drinker) is the House Father of Elwood's assigned dorm.

Blakeley gestures toward an empty bed beside two boys, DESMOND (round head, chubby) and a LANKIER BOY. Elwood looks up in their direction. Three rows of beds stretch over the blue linoleum, each row with ten beds, each bed with a small trunk at the foot of it.

All the boys in the room wear a school uniform: denim pants, gray work shirts which are threadbare, and brown brogues they must keep polished.

BLAKELEY (CONT'D)  
Desmond, show him the ropes.

DESMOND  
Yes sir, Mr. Blakeley.

(CONTINUED)

BLAKELEY

(to Elwood)

You know when to say yes sir- which  
is always- you'll be okay.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

Yes sir.

BLAKELEY

(to Desmond)

Don't think I won't be watching  
you.

Blakeley leaves.

Elwood looks around. Each boy in the dorm takes Elwood's measure, some of them conferring quietly with their buddies and others filing away their appraisals for later.

A large boy, GRIFF, looks like a 30-year old man, but Elwood knows that's impossible because they let you out when you turn 20. Griff walks past another boy, CHICKIE PETE, who has a bald spot, like he's been pulling his own hair out, and smacks him in the back of the head. He continues to his bunk while staring at Elwood.

Desmond and the lanky boy return to their Negro League baseball cards. Elwood moves toward his bunk.

SILENT. Institutional-style footage of an old reform school for boys, Deep South. The Black boys are well-dressed and the classroom is orderly. The "ideal" setting for learning.

SOUND of showers, boys' voices. Elwood POV moving from the line-up for the showers into place in front of a tile wall. Blakeley is beside him.

BLAKELEY

You get two minutes.

Elwood turns his head over his shoulder, his gaze roving and slightly out of focus as he turns from the tile wall he is facing, to the boys to the rear of him. Everyone's naked.

BLAKELEY (CONT'D)

You won't want more.

Blakeley turns the water on. It's freezing.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
(shivering, heavy  
breathing)  
Svvv, ahhh...

The blurry shapes of naked boys comes into focus. There are more than 5, and 3 of them have long scars on their backs. Others have lumpy lines of scars that look like burn marks.

He's about to start soaping himself when a hand reaches out and snatches his soap. Elwood follows the retracting hand, his gaze moving up to the face of the SHOWER BOY.

BLAKELEY (O.S.)  
Give him back his soap!

Another SHOWER BOY 2 tries to take the soap from the first thief. As he turns his back to Elwood, he displays scars like scribbles, which causes Elwood to jump back.

The boys tussle over his soap now, and Elwood watches in awe.

BLAKELEY (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
(somewhere in the  
background)  
Knock it off now!

Elwood POV walking in between some buildings. His gaze is fixed on the back of the head of the boy just in front of him, Chickie Pete, the boy with the bald spot, then he shifts focus to the two other boys ahead of him.

The SOUND of an engine approaching, muffled voices of boys under it, causes Elwood to look back over his shoulder. He's amazed by the sight of a TRACTOR BOY (young teen) driving an old tractor that pulls a wooden trailer full of boys returning from hard work in the fields. Tractor Boy looks serene in his big seat, his charges filthy and sluggish with fatigue as they jump out.

Elwood keeps walking, then turns around again to look over his shoulder... There are still, impossibly, boys hopping out of the back of the trailer.

52

ARCHIVAL IMAGE

52

SILENT. A black and white still image of boys from the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys in Florida (the actual Nickel).

CUT TO:

CU, somewhat blurred, of one of the boy's faces.

CUT TO:

CU, blurred, of another boy's eyes, filling the entire frame.

CUT TO:

ECU, blurred, of the iris of the one of the boy's eyes...

52A

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

52A

Time-lapse footage from the inside of a railway boxcar, a flat Florida landscape passes by. The changing sky and changing landscapes as the train heads North fade to night, then back to the light of morning.

*Cue music.*

53

EXT. NICKEL ACADEMY - GROUNDS - 1966 - DAY (D35)

53

Elwood POV outside a building on the Black side of campus, tracking an object in the sky falling toward earth in the distance.

Elwood's gaze follows the object, which we can now make out is a football, as it heads toward a small group of WHITE BOYS, on the white side of the Nickel campus down the hill in a grassy field. The SOUND of the boys playing "500" aka Jackpot Football starts when they come into view, jockeying to catch it.

A sturdy black-haired boy, JAIME (Mexican, darker than the other boys) runs faster than anyone else and catches it triumphantly.

Just then Spencer appears, walking over to the sideline of the field with a big black man, EARL (40s, brick house).

As Jaime trots back to the other side of the field with the ball to take up his position as the new thrower, Spencer sends Earl from the sideline out to intercept him on the field. They have a word.

(CONTINUED)

The white boys GROAN as Jaime turns toward them and shrugs. He kicks the football straight up into the sky with all his might before walking off the field.

JAIME

Jackpot.

Elwood's gaze tilts upward to watch the ball as it streaks upward and carries over to...

54

INT. NICKEL ACADEMY - DINING HALL - 1966 - MORNING (D35B) 54

...Elwood's POV of an orange rolling around on his tray as he walks through the mess hall with a bowl of lumpy oatmeal.

The mess hall is loud and rowdy, full of boys serving up their morning round of nonsense.

He finds an empty seat at one of the long tables. When he nears, an OLDER BOY AT DINING HALL slaps his hand "saved!" on the bench.

The next table over is filled with younger kids but when Elwood puts his tray down they look at him like he's crazy.

YOUNG BOY AT DINING HALL  
Big kids aren't allowed to sit at  
the little kids' table.

Elwood lowers his eyes and moves off. He sits down quickly at the next free spot he sees, and to head off rebuke doesn't make eye contact. He just looks at the bowl before him, picks up his spoon and starts to wolf his oatmeal.

CUT TO:

SOMEONE ELSE'S POV of ELWOOD digging dedicatedly into a bowl of oatmeal with a spoon.

At the table behind Elwood, their backs to him, a few GROWN MEN are interspersed among the boys, wearing the same Nickel uniform.

TURNER (O.S.)  
You eat that oatmeal like your mama  
made it.

ELWOOD  
(looking up, prickly)  
What?

We are looking at Elwood for the first time, from someone else's POV.

(CONTINUED)

TURNER (O.S.)

I ain't never seen someone eat this food like that- like they liked it.

ELWOOD

(a beat; considered response)

Dumped a lot of cinnamon in it.

TURNER (O.S.)

(a beat; also considered)

I'm Turner.

Confirmed. We are in Turner's POV and are seeing Elwood clearly for the first time. He carries himself upright, no trace of slouch, vigilant, taking the measure...

ELWOOD

I'm Elwood. (beat) From Tallahassee. Frenchtown.

GRIFF (O.S.)

(mimicking; sissy voice)

Frenchtown.

Elwood turns.

CUT TO:

We're back in Elwood's POV. There are three of them: GRIFF, broad chested and hunched like a brown bear, the kid who looked so mature in the dorm. BLACK MIKE, wiry, restless. He sits on his hands to keep them from flying off. And a kid with a patchy mustache and bulldog face.

The seats between are empty: everyone else knows better.

TURNER

I don't know why you so loud, you know they got their eye on you this week.

Griff makes a BARKING noise at Turner. The other two boys laugh and also start barking.

Turner (16) peels his own orange, ignoring them til they get bored and turn back to their 'morning meeting'.

TURNER (CONT'D)

I'm from Houston myself. That's a real city. None of this country shit y'all got up here.

(CONTINUED)

The mess hall is loud with the rumble and roil of juvenile activity, but this boy bobs in his own pocket of calm.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
(tipping his head toward  
the bullies)  
Thanks for that.

Turner gets up, picking up his tray.

TURNER  
I didn't do shit.

Elwood POV looking at a couple of dusty, dried up terrariums and an aquarium, long abandoned, the water cloudy. Elwood focuses briefly on the gravel at the bottom, greenish with algae, fish scales, dead bits of plants, a cat's eye marble and other debris, then he shifts focus through the glass to out the window behind the aquarium, abstracting into the sky.

He's startled when someone (O.S.) throws a balled up piece of paper into the aquarium and it slowly unfurls in the water.

Elwood POV, turning from the pillow case that smells like vinegar, up to the ceiling of the dormitory room where water marks seem to contract and expand like a colony of jellyfish. Paint rinds hang like tendrils from the ceiling.

Outside, katydids and crickets screech in waves, soft then loud, back and forth.

Suddenly a roaring SOUND commences. It comes from outside, a forbidding mechanical and- torrential- rush, with no clue to its origin.

BLACK MIKE (O.S.)  
(from across the room)  
Iccceeee creammm.

He strikes a match, which illuminates him briefly in a ghoulish way. Another boy strikes a match on a bunk the other side of the room.

Then another boy follows suit, also in a screechy voice.

BLACK BOY 1 (O.S.)  
Iicccccee cccrrrreeeeeamm.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
 (anxious)  
 What is that?

Another match is struck elsewhere in the room.

BLACK BOY 2 (O.S.)  
 I scrrreeeeeamm.

A few boys snicker.

Elwood turns to look across the beds, but the sooty windows make the dorm room dim as the matches die out.

57 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

57

Full-screen. *The Defiant Ones*, opening scene of the film including original credits. Sidney Poitier sings "Long gone... ain't he lucky... Long gone... to Kentucky" a cappella...

58 OMITTED

58

59 INT. NICKEL ACADEMY - CLASSROOM - 1966 - DAY (D36) 59

Elwood POV from the third row of a crammed eight-row arrangement, staring at the back of the teacher MR. GOODALL (white, 60s) with tortoise shell glasses and white hair. He's facing the blackboard, explaining basic addition.

SOUND of Griff and his cronies playing cards, snickering, O.S. at the back of the classroom.

MR. GOODALL (O.S.)  
 (oblivious)  
 ...and On Tuesday, he made 50  
 dollars. Finally, on Wednesday, he  
 made 100 dollars. How much has he  
 made so far?

The posters on the walls feature bespectacled owls hooting out the alphabet next to bright drawings of elementary nouns: house, cat, barn. Little kid stuff.

One boy is reading a wrinkled Marvel comic. He glances at Elwood, shrugs and turns the page. Desmond is asleep on a desk, his neck at a painful angle.

A heavy burping kid next to Elwood starts a dumb game of tug-of-war with the math primer they have to share.

At the board Mr. Goodall has drawn the equation.

MR. GOODALL (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
...carry the one. You carry the  
one, see.

He makes a little arrow on the chalkboard illustrating the process. Elwood gives up the primer.

TURNER (O.S.)  
Not what you expected?

Elwood turns around at the sound of Turner's voice, finding him a couple rows behind on the other side of the classroom, diligently folding a paper on his desk. Turner ignores him, as if he never asked the question.

Elwood looks back toward the chalk board.

MR. GOODALL (O.S.)  
(at the board)  
And we get 300.

A paper airplane (thrown by Turner) glides gently by him. Elwood watches as it floats briefly suspended in the air.

Elwood POV from inside a bathroom stall through the gap between the stall door and frame of Black Mike shoving Corey, the stutterer, into a corner, back to the walls. Black Mike squeezes Corey's face cheeks together with one hand while Corey breathes hard. He lets go and takes a step back. Corey, barely gathering himself, takes a step forward as Black Mike shoves Corey back against the wall. He falls to his knees and Black Mike steps forward, hands on his crotch, intentions clear.

Elwood jets out of the stall and steps between them.

ELWOOD  
Eh!

Black Mike spins around and slugs him, knocking him back against the sink. Elwood rolls over, falls, a copper penny flying from his shirt pocket as he flails his arm out and knocks open the stall door he came out of.

Just then Desmond opens the door to the bathroom, sees what's happening-

DESMOND  
Oh shit!

(CONTINUED)

-and runs off.

DESMOND (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
(racing down the hall)  
Fight ! Fight !

Black Mike grimaces and looks down at Elwood.

LONNIE (O.S.)  
Damn Mike, why'd you have to hit  
him so hard. Shit.

Blakeley enters. He takes in the situation and also looks down at Elwood who is groaning.

BLAKELEY  
Ain't you the new boy?

BLACK MIKE (O.S.)  
His fault. He started it.

BLAKELEY  
Nuh-uh, I don't care who's at  
fault, who started it, or why.

Elwood looks up to the moving ceiling as Blakeley drags him out of the bathroom. In the corner of his eye he sees Black Mike bend to pick up the penny that flew from his pocket.

BLACK MIKE  
(looking at it, surprised)  
Hey-

BLAKELEY  
(to all of them)  
Mr. Spencer will take this up.

Elwood sees the boys look at each other.

LONNIE (O.S.)  
(upset)  
Spencer? Shit. Now you done it.

SILENT. Consecutive images of actual exhumed student graves and some of their contents: marbles, buttons, pennies, belt buckles, a comb.

62

EXT. CITRUS GROVE - NICKEL PLANTATIONS - 1966 - DAY (D38) 62

Elwood POV walking through a grove on a work detail behind Desmond, who turns to swiftly check if Elwood's there.

They walk between rows of trees, Elwood looking right and left at the SOUND of boys' voices all around him. There are harvest baskets with oranges beside every tree.

From somewhere up ahead in the grove, a loud TARZAN yell. An orange is tossed from tree to tree by unseen boys.

Elwood searches the leafy branches as they catch up to the work gang, then sees the boys picking oranges and tossing them into the baskets on the ground.

He sees FOUR MEN ON STILTS striding through the groves, moving like strange beasts, checking on the thoroughness of the work. One pauses at a tree, peaks into the upper branches, then continues on.

Elwood walks toward the approaching stilt men. He sees one of the boys scramble back to a tree, reaching up for a lone orange that was missed.

The stilt men pass by above Elwood.

STILT MAN (O.S.)  
(calling out)  
Don't bruise 'em!

DESMOND  
(trying unsuccessfully to  
get his attention)  
Boss! Boss!

Desmond turns to Elwood.

DESMOND (CONT'D)  
Okay El, start with the ones on the  
bottom, and fill the basket by the  
trees. Take 'em to the truck down  
at the end of the row. That's it.

He walks off. An orange thuds on the ground near Elwood.

JAIME (O.S.)  
(cursing to himself)  
*Cabrón-* !

Elwood watches it roll to a halt. He turns around and looks over to see Jaime, the same boy Spencer pulled from the football field, peeking out through the branches. He looks at Elwood, friendly.

(CONTINUED)

JAIME (CONT'D)  
*Cuidado, chico.*

63

INT. NICKEL ACADEMY - DORMITORY - 1966- NIGHT (N38) 63

Elwood POV as he awakens in his bunk to the SOUND of tires grinding gravel outside, car doors opening, feet thumping up the stairs.

The men's flashlights dance. Earl, the large black man who helped Spencer on the football field, and a couple of WHITE MEN search the bunks. They make sure to get the right boys by shining flashlights in their faces.

Others peek out from under their sheets as they grab Black Mike, Corey and then Elwood, and lead them from the room.

64

EXT. NICKEL ACADEMY - "WHITE HOUSE" - 1966 - NIGHT (N38) 64

Elwood POV as the boys follow Earl in the darkness along a pathway toward the white rust-stained sugar cube building Elwood noticed when he first arrived at Nickel.

Off to the side a figure is leaning against a parked Cadillac Eldorado convertible, unnoticed in the darkness until his cigar tip glows briefly orange-red. Shortly thereafter the boys hear the SOUND of keys JANGLING as he draws near them.

Spencer walks through the boys on the path, pauses at the door in the darkness to find the key on his enormous key ring, and opens the two padlocks.

65

INT. "WHITE HOUSE" - 1966 - NIGHT [CONTINUOUS] (N38) 65

Elwood POV as they enter. The stench is fierce. Urine, feces and fear are soaked into the concrete and they all react to it as they enter. A naked bulb buzzes on in the hallway.

Spencer and Earl lead them to a room at the front of the building, where a line of bolted-together chairs waits, and a table. The sitting room faces the beating room, where Elwood sees a wooden barn pommel with a rail behind it.

Spencer and Earl take Black Mike in first.

SPENCER  
Thought you'd be done after the  
last time.

They shut the door.

(CONTINUED)

EARL (O.S.)  
Piss himself again.

The roar SOUND begins. Elwood's chair vibrates with the energy. Some sort of machine is loud enough to cover Black Mike's screams and the smack of the strap on his body. Elwood closes his eyes and tries to count. The SCREEN goes BLACK.

COREY (O.S.)  
(terrified)  
I'm-a hold on and be s-s-s-s-s-s-s-t-  
I'm-a hold on and be st-st-still.

SOUND of Corey sobbing as they drag Black Mike out.

EARL (O.S.)  
Shut up, punk.

They take Corey.

SPENCER (O.S.)  
Alright Corey, c'mon.

Elwood opens his eyes and sees a Bible on the table.

INT. "WHITE HOUSE" - BEATING ROOM - 1966 - NIGHT [CONT] 66  
(N38)

Elwood POV, there it is: the gigantic industrial fan that is the source of the ROARING sound that travels all over campus. As he is brought closer to the pommel he can see fresh splatter on the concrete block wall where the fan has whipped blood in its gusting. And there's a weird thing with the acoustics, where the fan covers the screams outside, but right next to him, Elwood can hear Spencer's instructions perfectly.

SPENCER  
Elwood Curtis.

The tone of his voice is chillingly amused, as if he's putting Elwood onto a ride at an amusement park.

SPENCER (CONT'D)  
Hold on to the rail and don't let  
go. Shhhh. Don't make a sound.  
(pause) You'll get more.

Elwood bends over the pommel and grips the rail, his focus on the concrete blocks which he can now make out are each stamped N I C K E L. The beating starts, and with it the ROARING SOUND of the FunTown roller coaster ride, children exclaiming. Elwood's POV freezes into a STILL.

67

ARCHIVAL IMAGES

67

A slow series of up to ten pairs of STILL portraits, which change (though not always synced) with the SOUND of each blow of the whip. Child. Adult. Child. Adult. We gradually realize that we're looking at portraits of children followed immediately by their portraits as adults.

HATTIE (V.O.)  
Elwood honey, blink.

68

INT. NICKEL ACADEMY - INFIRMARY - 1966 - DAY (D39)

68

Elwood POV lying on his stomach in an infirmary bed as his eyes flutter open, his focus blurred as he looks down at his fingers dangling over the side of the bed.

He GROANS in pain.

NURSE SCARLETT (O.S.  
(reading from the Bible;  
Romans 8)

...who shall separate us from the  
love of Christ? Shall tribulation,  
or distress, or persecution, or  
famine, or nakedness, or peril, or  
sword?

SOUND of her turning a page.

NURSE SCARLETT (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
As it is written, For thy sake we  
are killed all the day long; we are  
accounted as sheep for the  
slaughter.

Elwood turns his head in the other direction. He now sees the NURSE SCARLETT (white, 40s) across the simple ward in partial silhouette, her back turned to him. She wears a starched white uniform, white shoes and stockings, and has a red bouffant. She's seated at a bedside behind a partly drawn curtain, reading the Bible to a WHITE BOY in the infirmary. Elwood can just make out a bandage covering the boy's head and most of his face.

NURSE SCARLETT (CONT'D)  
Nay, in all these things we are  
more than conquerors through Him  
that loved us.

The boy never says anything, never moves. Nurse Scarlett reaches out to take his limp hand. SOUND of her turning a page.

(CONTINUED)

## NURSE SCARLETT (CONT'D)

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature... shall be able to separate us from the love of God...

69 EXT. NICKEL FIELD - COMMUNITY SERVICE VAN - 1966 - DAY 69  
(D40)

From the front passenger seat of the van as it drives across a grassy field, Turner's POV looking in the side view mirror at himself as he blows a large Bazooka bubble.

An open white hand reaches across and SMACKS Turner, playfully popping the bubble but also making contact with Turner's mouth.

Turner turns and looks at HARPER (early 20s), a lanky white boy with greasy blond hair who sits beside him behind the wheel of the white "Community Service" van. Harper makes a "pop" sound with his lips and smiles at him.

70 OMITTED 70

70A ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE - 1960S 70A

SILENT. In the front yard of a suburban home with a white picket fence, two young Black brothers play. One helps launch the other into a back flip.

71 EXT. NICKEL - COMMUNITY SERVICE VAN - 1966 - DAY (D40) 71

Turner POV from the passenger seat of the van as it moves through campus. Up ahead he sees Jaime sitting at a picnic table outside a small wooden building beside a grassy corral, waiting. Anxious.

Jaimie meets Turner's gaze, holding it a beat, then averts his eyes, as if ashamed.

As the van passes, Turner sees a boy exiting the building. A WHITE GUARD with a suspiciously heavy arm gripped around the boy's shoulder has a word with him before he releases him.

46.  
71

CONTINUED:

The boy's head is lowered and he walks away quickly but with an awkward, pained, gait. From the back, Turner can discern the bald spot of CHICKIE PETE.

SOUND of Harper sucking his teeth, Turner turns to find him shaking his head disapprovingly.

HARPER

Sat down to dinner at that guard's house once. Roast beef. His wife made an angel food cake. I was in the scouts with his sons. He taught us how to make a fire.

The van continues on, Turner turns away from Harper and looks back out the window, disturbed.

72 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

72

TBD

73 EXT. MARIANNA FL - BACK ALLEY - 1966 - DAY (D41)

73

Turner POV as he's getting into the passenger seat of the van when the BUTCHER (50s), a porky white man whose apron is a palimpsest of stains, passes a smeared envelope of cash through the driver's side window to Harper.

Turner watches as the Butcher SLAPS the roof too hard, and backs away from the van into an open doorway.

HARPER

That don't bode well. I can't help it if we don't got every can of beans he asked for.

Harper opens the envelope.

TURNER (O.S.)

Fiver?

He takes a ten from the wad of bills then folds the dirty envelope in half and snaps a rubber band around it.

HARPER

Ten for stress. I got my draft notice this morning. You're lucky to be in Nickel.

He tosses it in the glove compartment with a whole stack.

(CONTINUED)

TURNER (O.S.)  
Gonna miss your girl.

HARPER  
(nods)  
We got molasses back there? BBQ  
joint's next.

INT. NICKEL ACADEMY - INFIRMARY - 1966 - DAY (D42)

Elwood POV lying on his stomach on the bed. He can hear Nurse Scarlett coming, her shoes squeaking on the linoleum tiles and her uniform making a scratching sound.

Her white shoes and panty-hosed legs walk back forth, as she collects bedpans and brings clean ones to the few other patients on the ward.

Elwood peers over the edge of his bed and looks down at his bedpan harboring feces in a pond of urine.

Her white shoes finally appear beside his bed. She slides a clean bedpan next to the full one with her foot, then turns and walks away without collecting Elwood's waste.

EXT. NICKEL ACADEMY - GROUNDS - 1966 - DAY (D43)

SOUND of a lawnmower, louder and louder as it approaches.

Turner POV as he walks along a path that winds through the campus. On the grass alongside him, a WHITE BOY pushes a hand mower into frame, keeping pace, messing with him. The noise is deafening.

An older Black woman walks past them, demeanor downcast. Turner throws a look over his shoulder at the woman: she's an unusual sight. The motor cuts off abruptly as it hits a fallen branch. The woman pauses, as if struck by a thought, and turns: it's HATTIE. She walks back to Turner.

HATTIE  
Young man, do you know a student  
named Elwood Curtis?

TURNER (O.S.)  
Yessum, I do.

The white boy yanks at the pull cord to restart the mower, revving the motor each time.

HATTIE

(distraught)

They told me that he... (mower) I  
just want... (mower) Would you  
please...

She pulls a MANILA ENVELOPE from her bag-

Just then the motor catches a constant hum. Hattie pauses to compose herself. Turner looks past Hattie at the white boy who is jeering in his disruptive power.

Turner returns his gaze to Hattie and nods yes as the white boy loses interest and goes off mowing.

TURNER (O.S.)

Yes ma'am.

HATTIE

I've come all this way... it's a  
crime to keep me from him, a crime.  
(beat) I don't know what kind of  
place this is, I don't understand  
why they can't let me see him.

TURNER (O.S.)

I'm sorry, ma'am.

HATTIE

(beat) )

Thank you young man, thank you.  
What is your name?

TURNER (O.S.)

Turner, ma'am.

HATTIE

Nice to know I can count on  
somebody round here, Turner.

She gives him the manila envelope.

HATTIE (CONT'D)

When's the last time you had family  
visit, Turner?

This is perhaps the last question Turner expected. As the lawn mower ROARS past again, the scar tissue suturing the wound of his parentless childhood opens for a brief moment, his quick wit and charisma lost to the unexpected surge of emotion.

TURNER (O.S.)  
(looking down)  
...They... well, my kin, my  
parents, I mean my ma, she...

Hattie peers into him, as only a grandmother can,  
understanding instantly the implications of his hesitancy.

HATTIE  
Well I came all this way. I can't  
hug Elwood, so you'll have to do.

Hattie steps forward and embraces Turner, pulling him in close and tight. The SOUND of the lawn mower has trailed off in the background. Turner's gaze is fixed on the space between her ear and neck. They separate after some time.

HATTIE (CONT'D)  
What are they feeding you all in  
here? I know you can muster a  
better hug than that.

Turner laughs.

HATTIE (CONT'D)  
I'll expect it the next time,  
Turner. The world needs strong  
young men like you.

She turns and walks off toward a bus stop down the hill,  
Turner's gaze following her.

SOUND of someone whistling, cheerful and fluttering.

Elwood POV, still lying on his stomach, opens his eyes and sees an old wooden polio wheelchair with a boy in it get pushed clackety-clack past his bed by Nurse Scarlett. The boy's whistling is interrupted by deep sighs and groans.

Nurse Scarlett walks past again going the other direction, pulling a pack of menthol cigarettes from her uniform pocket.

TURNER (O.S.)  
How you making out here, hero?

Elwood turns over slowly, painfully, to see Turner now in a wheelchair by the bed opposite him. A new pair of denim dungarees hang over the back of a chair.

TURNER (CONT'D)

There's four ways out of Nickel and  
you were almost awarded one for  
"ineffective heroism".

ELWOOD (O.S.)

What are the other ways?

TURNER

(enumerating)

Serve your time (or age out). Court  
might intervene (if you believe in  
miracles). You could die (they  
could kill you). You could run.

Elwood turns away to brood. He sees DOCTOR COOKE (white, 30s) walk past, go to a glass case of bottles and boxes of medicine, unlock it, and reach for the big bucket of aspirin. Then he walks down the row of beds to a white boy who's moaning. He pulls a thermometer from the boy's mouth, glances at it, drops 2 aspirin in the kid's palm and exits through a white curtain.

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

How you like that witch doctor.

Turner rolls up to Elwood, clackety-clack in the wheelchair.

TURNER (CONT'D)

Come in here with your damn head  
cut off and he'd give you aspirin.

Elwood laughs, but it hurts.

TURNER (CONT'D)

Come in here, head cut off, both  
legs, both arms cut off, and that  
witch doctor would be like, 'You  
want one tablet, or two?'

ELWOOD (O.S.)

(half laughing)

How'd you get in here?

TURNER

Ate some soap powder, an hour of  
stomach ache for a whole day off.  
Or two. I know how to sell it. Got  
some more powder hidden in my sock,  
too. Thought I'd take me a  
vacation.

(CONTINUED)

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
 Aren't you worried they'll know  
 you're faking it? Whistling happy  
 like that?

TURNER  
 I ain't faking- that soap powder is  
 awful. But it's me choosing, not  
 anyone else.

He coaxes the stuck wheels of the chair and huffs away as Dr. Cooke comes over on his rounds.

DR. COOKE  
 Turner, you again? I told you not  
 to eat the food!

TURNER  
 What else am I supposed to eat,  
 Mister Cooke?

Cooke gives him an aspirin.

DR. COOKE  
 Doctor.

He looks at Elwood.

DR. COOKE (CONT'D)  
 Yeah, they got you good.

He walks off, exiting. SOUND of a radio being turned on somewhere behind it, unexpectedly tuned to classical music.

Elwood shifts painfully around in the bed.

CUT TO:

TURNER POV as he glimpses the blood on Elwood's sheets. He stifles a gasp.

Elwood turns swiftly to look at him, just as Turner looks away, pretending not to have seen.

The invalid boy behind the curtain suddenly makes a HEAVY SIGH and Elwood and Turner startle.

ELWOOD  
 Go look. See who it is. Ask what's wrong with him.

TURNER (O.S.)  
 I ain't asking nobody shit.

(CONTINUED)

ELWOOD  
Scared?

TURNER (O.S.)  
Damn, you don't know. Pop back  
there for a look, maybe you have to  
trade places with him. Like in a  
ghost story.

Elwood laughs at him. Turner starts to wheel himself over to pull back the curtain, when they suddenly hear Spencer's JANGLING keys and his voice.

SPENCER (O.S.)  
(from down the ward)  
Where's Dr. Cooke? I need to talk  
with him.

Turner watches Elwood curl into a ball on the bed, sweating, covering himself completely with a sheet.

ELWOOD  
(quietly)  
Do they do it like that to  
everybody?

TURNER (O.S.)  
(quietly; confessing)  
I never been sent down to the White  
House. I got smacked across the  
face for smoking once.

ELWOOD  
I have a lawyer. He can do  
something.

TURNER (O.S.)  
You already got off lucky.

ELWOOD  
How?

TURNER (O.S.)  
Sometimes they throw you in Hell. A  
sweatbox up in the eaves below that  
tar roof. Sweat your soul outta  
you.

ELWOOD  
Huh.

TURNER (O.S.)  
Sometimes they take you and we  
never see your ass again.

ELWOOD  
What?

TURNER (O.S.)  
Your family asks the school what  
happened and they say you ran away.  
I'll show you sometime, show you  
something that's not in books,  
where it is. Boot Hill.

Elwood takes this in.

CUT TO:

Elwood's POV.

TURNER (CONT'D)  
Problem is Elwood, you didn't know  
how it works. You wanted to do some  
Lone Ranger shit- run up and save a  
boy. Mike and them punked out Corey  
a long time ago. They play rough.  
That's how they do.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
I saw his face, he was scared.

TURNER  
You don't know what makes him tick.  
You won't know what makes anybody  
tick. I used to think out there is  
out there, and once you're in here,  
you're in here. But now that I been  
out and I been brought back, I  
know. In here and out there are the  
same, but in here no one has to act  
fake anymore.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
If everyone looks the other way,  
then everybody's in on it. If I  
look the other way, I'm as  
implicated as the rest.

Turner is silent.

ELWOOD (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
It's not how it's supposed to be.

TURNER  
Don't nobody care about s'posed to.  
The fix has always been in- game's  
rigged.

(CONTINUED)

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
 That's what I'm telling you.  
 It's not like the old days. We can  
 stand up for ourselves.

TURNER  
 That shit barely works out there-  
 what do you think it's going to do  
 in here?

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
 You say that because there's no one  
 out there sticking up for you.  
 I got my grandmother, I got a  
 lawyer.

Turner is cut to the quick- a flash of pain, even jealousy.  
 Any intent he had to give Elwood the manila envelope from  
 Hattie, dissolves. He rolls clickety-clack across the room,  
 dodging obstacles as he speaks about them.

TURNER  
 (deliberately hurtful)  
 Yeah? How long it been since you  
 heard from them? You got to watch  
 how people act, what they do, and  
 then you got to figure out how to  
 get around them like an obstacle  
 course. If you want to walk out of  
 here.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
 Graduate.

Turner spins the wheelchair in a circle-

TURNER  
 Walk out of here. You think you can  
 do that? Watch and think and plan?  
 Cuz nobody else is going to get you  
 out- not your grandma, not your  
 lawyer. Just you.

- then pulls back the curtain around the invalid boy. Both  
 Turner and Elwood are surprised to see the bed is empty.

SILENT. A Black man runs a shell game on the surface of a  
 makeshift table set up on a city sidewalk, luring a small  
 crowd of gamblers and onlookers.

78

INT. NICKEL ACADEMY - STAIRWELL - 1966 - DAY (D44)

78

Elwood POV walking up the stairs at Nickel. He's about eight steps from the landing and a turn to the next staircase when Griff appears coming down the stairs above, hugging close to the railing. He passes Elwood, moving through him- hard- with his huge shoulder.

He body-checks Elwood, who is spun 180 degrees. Elwood grabs the rail and stops in his place, and watches Griff continue down the stairs.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
I'm not scared of you.

Just before he turns the corner, Griff looks back and SMILES, giving him a nod of respect. Then he disappears from sight.

79

EXT. NICKEL ACADEMY - BEHIND A BUILDING - 1966 - DAY (D45) 79

Elwood POV, seated on the grass, leaning against a wall, legs splayed on the ground, left arm resting on his thigh, right hand weaving a gauze bandage around the fingers of his left hand, twisting them into a weird shape, then pulling it taut.

80

INT. NICKEL ACADEMY - SMALL GYMNASIUM - 1966 - DAY (D46) 80

Turner POV looking up into the raised boxing ring from his position standing on the ground beside it. Two or three other boys also look on. Turner's gaze is centered and absently focused on Griff sparring with Black Mike. He's quick and lithe but he's getting clobbered by Griff.

Turner's gaze focuses on Black Mike's back and shoulder as it presses against the ropes of the ring, moving forward and back. Each time he presses against the rope, there's a little impression left in his shoulder. Black Mike takes a pummeling, wavers and sinks on his ass.

Griff spits out the mouthpiece and bellows, raising a gloved hand. He gestures to Turner, waving him in.

GRIFF  
You know you miss it.

TURNER (O.S.)  
(shaking his head)  
Oh no, all you Griff.

Griff climbs out through the ropes, unspent energy to spare as the others unlace his gloves.

(CONTINUED)

He feints a punch right at Turner's face. Turner dodges it insanely fast. Griff smirks. Uh-huh.

Elwood POV waiting with a group of boys as the old tractor that will haul them out to the fields in the wooden trailer backs up toward them. Blakeley is lecturing them.

BLAKELEY

Boys, you gotta toughen up. Spider bite, busted ankle, what's next? The count's been off. We can't have those inspectors coming out here thinking that y'all are lazy or that I'm not working you hard enough.

TURNER (O.S.)

(calling out)

Mr. Blakeley. Mr. Blakeley, sir!

Elwood turns with Blakeley to see Turner approaching.

TURNER (CONT'D)

Elwood's been reassigned.

BLAKELEY

Reassigned by who?

TURNER

Harper. Mr. Harper sir. We're short of hands.

He points to the Community Service van behind him. Harper is waving to Blakeley from outside the driver's side.

BLAKELEY

Well we're short of hands too, son.

TURNER

Can we take him, sir ?

BLAKELEY

(sighing; to Elwood)

You keep your nose clean.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

Yessir.

Elwood follows Turner. They approach the white van from behind. A large BLOOM OF RUST is visible on the front fender.

CUT TO:

Turner's POV as he turns around and walks backward, registering that Elwood is walking with difficulty from the beating he got. In the background, behind Elwood and interspersed among the waiting group of boys, are some GROWN MEN wearing the Nickel uniform.

INT. COMMUNITY SERVICE VAN - NICKEL ACADEMY - 1966 - DAY 82  
[CONTINUOUS] (D47)

Elwood POV as they climb into the van's front seat bench, Elwood beside the window, Turner in the middle, Harper at the wheel. Harper looks over at Elwood as he pulls out.

HARPER

Turner here says you can keep your mouth shut, and that you're not a math dummy.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

What are we doing?

Elwood looks over his shoulder at the back of the van: boxes of NOTEBOOKS, pencils, erasers, toothpaste and etc. All issued by the GOVERNMENT OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA.

TURNER

It's taking things and making sure they end up where they're supposed to end up in the end.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

Uh-huh.

TURNER

Sometimes the State gives us more than we strictly need. So we pass it on.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

For a fee?

TURNER

"Community Service".

Elwood nods, leans back in his seat, as Harper drives through the campus grounds.

Harper fiddles the radio dial to a staticky country station.

(CONTINUED)

HARPER

It used to be worse in the old days, from what my aunt says. But the State cracked down and now we only lay off the south campus stuff.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

You mean the Negro students' stuff.

HARPER

We had this good ole boy who used to run Nickel, Roberts, who would've sold the air you breathe if he could've. Now that was a crook!

Elwood looks out the window. Conscious of Turner eyeing him.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

It had to end up somewhere.

TURNER

Beats the fields. If you ask me.

It's Elwood's first trip out in the free world since arrival. The air is cool in his lungs and everything outside the window dazzles, as they drive away from the Nickel campus.

HARPER

Beats getting mangled in a machine.

Elwood POV walking down a paved walk, following an alligator at a distance as it takes and turn and lumbers toward the intake building.

Elwood's gaze is steady on the reptile, but he is also looking around for another witness as the alligator's TAIL disappears inside the building.

SPENCER'S VOICE is audible coming from within as Elwood approaches and stops to peek in from outside. He can only see a bit of the INTAKE ROOM, but can make out the designations on the chalkboard: Grub, Explorer, Pioneer, Ace. Spencer is giving the talk to a new crop of Nickel boys.

SPENCER (O.S.)

...you boys are in charge of everything.

(MORE)

83

CONTINUED:

59.  
83

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

Make the concrete blocks in all  
 these buildings you see here, lay  
 the bricks, take care of all this  
 grass. The State's increased our  
 acreage, and we'll have you  
 planting more citrus groves next.  
 Work keeps you level. (beat) And  
 oranges are good for you.

Elwood POV looks for the alligator. It seems long gone. But when Elwood looks down at his feet, he finds it standing right beside him.

84

OMITTED

84

85

INT. NICKEL ACADEMY - REC ROOM - 1966 - DAY (D49)

85

Elwood POV writing in a NOTEBOOK he got from the back of the Community Van. We get a glimpse of some dates, a list as Elwood's gaze shifts to Black Mike crossing his field of vision toward Turner.

CUT TO:

Turner POV reading a dilapidated comic book. A shadow creeps over the page. He looks up to see Black Mike standing there, deliberately blocking his light. He flips Elwood's penny.

TURNER (O.S.)  
 (sarcastic)  
 Bad penny?

Black Mike bucks at Turner, but Turner doesn't flinch. Black Mike guffaws and walks away. Turner scans the room. A chess set with the missing pieces replaced by some handmade from soap; stuffing dribbling from the couches and armchairs; initials and epithets gouged into tables.

His gaze lands on Elwood, who hasn't noticed anything and is busily writing in a notebook.

Turner returns to his comic, turns the page.

85A

INT. NICKEL ACADEMY - DORMITORY - 1966 - DAY (D49)

85A

Elwood POV from where he's seated on a bed, of Turner walking a line of tiles on the dorm floor, trying to keep his balance like it's a sobriety test. Jaime is also hanging out with them.

(CONTINUED)

85A

CONTINUED:

60.  
85A

TURNER  
(mimicking Blakeley)  
"Keep your nose clean."

Elwood and Jaime laugh. Turner adjusts an imaginary tie.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
I can smell it on him in the  
morning. Whoo...

TURNER  
(in Spanish)  
*Borracho.*

JAIME  
(nodding)  
Enough reasons to drink here.

TURNER  
You think he went here?

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
Huh?

TURNER  
They say his name's in the  
sweatbox.

86

OMITTED

86

86A

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE - 1960S - [DELIBERATELY REPEATED]

86A

SILENT. In the front yard of a suburban home with a white  
picket fence, two young Black brothers play. One helps launch  
the other into a back flip.

87

OMITTED

87

87A

INT. NICKEL ACADEMY - REC ROOM - 1966 - DAY (D49)

87A

Two boys are playing ping pong in the rec room when a small  
lizard suddenly runs across the table.

The lizard crawls up the pants of a boy.

88

EXT. NICKEL - GROUNDS - 1966 - LATE AFTERNOON (D50)

88

Elwood POV sitting beside Turner on a lawn on the campus grounds. They're just, sitting. SOUND of wind in the leaves. Birds. Sun dappling. A breath of peace.

TURNER (O.S.)

My Aunt Mavis made sure I had nice clothes for school and three meals. A guy at the Houston airport started seeing her. He taught me how to box. The day I put myself between Aunt Mavis and his fist, he took me out for ice cream. "Bring this boy the biggest sundae you got." Every bite was like another sock in the mouth.

ELWOOD

I guess I wouldn't want them to visit, either. (pause) What about your real father?

A GROUP OF FIVE BOYS spills out of the gymnasium. Boxers in training, their hands still taped, they're supposed to go for a run through campus. Instead, fooling around, they throw some light punches and one BOY splashes water on a few of them. They begin to chase the boy, who veers towards Elwood and Turner.

All the boys are now charging toward them at full speed. Turner starts to back up in alarm, Elwood tries to pull him down as the boy being chased, then the other boys in pursuit run right at them.

TURNER (O.S.)

(shouting)

Hey hey! Look out!

CUT TO:

Turner's POV, panicking as he looks past Elwood at the boys charging. At the last moment Turner leans back and looks up as two boys hurdle over them- and in that split second they are not boys but two GROWN MEN in Nickel uniforms- and continue their horseplay out of frame.

CUT TO:

Elwood's POV as Turner leaps to his feet.

(CONTINUED)

TURNER (CONT'D)  
(completely freaking out)  
Jackasses! They know I hate that  
shit! Fuck y'all! Fuck!

Elwood reaches out and touches him. Turner whips his head around to look at Elwood, tears in his eyes.

89 OMITTED

89

89A ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE - 1960S

89A

A television commercial promoting Florida, the "Sunshine State" - happy white people frolicking on beaches, water skiing, reeling in big fish, drinking orange juice.

90 EXT. HARDEE HOUSE - PORCH - MARIANNA - 1966 - DAY (D51) 90

Turner's POV as he and Elwood paint the weathered, faded grey floorboards of a long porch than runs along the back of a big pink house with white trim and pillars.

A sparkling blue swimming pool floats in a lush green lawn surrounded by banana trees, palms and a few pool umbrellas. An American flag sighs on a pole attached to the house.

A canvas tarp with painting supplies lies nearby.

A voluptuous white woman, MRS. HARDEE (30s, beehive), wearing Jackie sunglasses and a patterned yellow dress walks toward them with two glasses of iced orange juice on a platter.

MRS. HARDEE  
(approaching)  
This is so exciting.

She offers the boys the orange juice.

TURNER (O.S.)  
Thank you, Mrs. Hardee, don't mind  
if I do.

ELWOOD  
Much obliged, ma'am.

MRS. HARDEE  
My great-grandfather built this  
place 106 years ago. My husband  
proposed to me right there.

(CONTINUED)

She points, then spots a bug on her shoulder and flicks it off.

MRS. HARDEE (CONT'D)  
You boys are so nice to help us out  
here.

She turns to go, then pauses.

MRS. HARDEE (CONT'D)  
Oh, almost forgot, I have a box of  
books to donate to the Nickel  
library.

ELWOOD  
We can help you with that.

MRS. HARDEE  
The box is in the garage-

She points to a garage near the house.

MRS. HARDEE (CONT'D)  
It's Trollope and Austen and  
Dickens and people with names like  
that. (singsong) Ta-ta!

They watch her saunter back to the house, past a few BICYCLES  
and a dusty tire pump leaning against the wall of the porch,  
then return to their painting.

ELWOOD  
My grandma once lent me out for ten  
cents to give Mrs. Lamont's  
outhouse a new coat.

TURNER (O.S.)  
Used to be worse around here. When  
you graduated you didn't go back to  
your family, you had parole and  
they sold your monkey ass to people  
in the town. You had to work off  
your debt.

ELWOOD  
Debt from what?

CUT TO:

Elwood's POV.

TURNER  
I never thought about it that way.

(CONTINUED)

Elwood shakes a new can of "Dixie White", pries it open and stirs.

TURNER (CONT'D)

El, don't go too fast. This can be a three-day job we play it right. We till the garden and fix up her house, she may even adopt our black asses.

Elwood laughs.

TURNER (CONT'D)

Well not you, you got family. I'd yessum her for a chance out of Nickel.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

That ain't no freedom. Director Hardee and his wife ain't supposed to use us like we're slaves.

TURNER

All those guys on the school board have us do chores. Sometimes it's favors, sometimes it's for real money.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

It's against the law.

TURNER

The law's one thing. You can march and wave signs around and change a law if you convince enough white people. I saw the college kids in Tampa with their nice shirts and ties sitting at the Woolworth's. I had to work, but they were out protesting. And it happened, they opened that counter. But I didn't have the money to eat there either way. Gotta change the economics of all this, too.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

My grandma got me that lawyer, man. Make a move there, first.

TURNER

The courts play both the white and the black. They move us around when they ready.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
We have to be knights. Checkmate.

TURNER  
How many people done that, El? Only  
four ways outta Nickel.

Just then Harper appears, jogging across the lawn.

TURNER (CONT'D)  
A hour late. Fly still open.

Elwood laughs.

91 INT. NICKEL - BARN - STALL/HIDING PLACE - 1966 - DAY (D52) 91

Faint SOUND of a ball game.

Elwood's POV, reading one of Mrs. Hardee's donated books in Turner's secret hiding place in a stall of the school's dilapidated horse barn. Light streams down through the slats. Turner's made a nest on the dirt floor among crates of industrial scrubbing powder, a pillow, and an army blanket. He's got a transistor radio ear plug in his ear, listening to a ball game.

TURNER  
What's it about?

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
A British mother is trying to marry  
off her oldest daughter to keep  
their estate and title.

TURNER  
No one wants to marry her? She  
ugly?

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
She's described as having a  
handsome face.

TURNER  
Damn.

Pause.

TURNER (CONT'D)  
I know my mother loved me. She just  
loved liquor more.

Elwood looks over the top of his book at Turner.

92 OMITTED

92

92A ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

92A

*TBD, two children playing.*

93 EXT. HARDEE HOUSE - POOL - 1966 - DAY (D53)

93

Turner's POV from underwater as he swims in the Hardee's pool. Through the surface he sees Mrs. Hardee sitting in a *chaise longue* in a one-piece bathing suit, a floppy sun hat, and the Jackie sunglasses. She is cooling her neck with a paper fan. Elwood dips a foot in to check the temperature.

MRS. HARDEE (O.S.)  
 (very faintly audible)  
 Use the steps down here at the  
 shallow end if you can't swim like  
 your friend. Take your dungarees  
 off.

TURNER POV tracks Elwood as he gets up and walks to the shallow end. A beat, and Turner sees Mrs. Hardee quickly get up and walk across and out of FRAME, distressed.

Elwood sits on the edge, his legs floating to the surface. Turner can see them from under the water. The scars on the back are raised into a terrible maze. He reaches out underwater, to touch one.

94 INT. NICKEL ACADEMY - DORMITORY - 1966 - DAY (D54)

94

Turner's POV as Blakeley, tipsy, enters the dorm room with the monthly mail call. The boys are sitting on their beds, trading Negro League baseball cards, playing rummy. Elwood's writing in his notebook.

BLAKELEY  
 (Army style)  
 Desmond! Chickie Pete! Elwood!

Turner sees Elwood look up from his notebook and go to get an envelope. Chickie Pete with his bald spot gets there before him. Elwood's just about to take the envelope from Blakeley when the house man snatches it back. Faint SOUND of a flask sloshing somewhere in his pockets.

(CONTINUED)

BLAKELEY (CONT'D)  
 (alcohol on his breath)  
 Ain't seen you much lately Elwood.  
 You keepin' your nose clean?

ELWOOD  
 Yes sir, Mr. Blakeley.

BLAKELEY  
 (unexpectedly quotes Dr.  
 King)  
 "You may have grand designs and  
 great dreams for yourself, but if  
 God has decided that your lot is  
 sweeping streets, work that broom  
 like Michelangelo painted ceilings,  
 attack that gutter the way  
 Beethoven attacked his Ninth  
 Symphony. Be a bush if you can't be  
 a tree. If you can't be a highway,  
 just be a trail. If you can't be a  
 sun, be a star. Be the best of  
 whatever you are."

He hands him the envelope and walks off.

Elwood looks at the envelope and his whole face lights up. He tears it open and sinks onto his bunk already reading it. Some newspaper articles are included, an account of a Dr. King speech, and a color spread on the SPACE RACE. He starts to read the letter and his face clouds over.

TURNER (O.S.)  
 (tentative; guilty)  
 Grandma ok?

ELWOOD  
 She says she visited and they  
 wouldn't let her see me. (reading)  
 "He's sick and can't have no  
 visitors." "What's wrong with him?"  
 "How the hell should I know, lady?"  
 (freaking out completely) How can  
 they do that! Sick? I'm sick?! Look  
 what they did to me!

96

EXT. NICKEL - BOOT HILL - 1966 - DAY (D55)

96

Elwood's POV as Turner leads him to the iron rings used to restrain boys to two trees on Boot Hill. Elwood moves closer, drawn by some discernible movement on them. There are ANTS crawling in and around and on the iron.

TURNER

Bones'd break before they come  
loose.

Beat.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

They've grown into the heart of the  
wood.

97

INT. NICKEL - BARN - STALL/HIDING PLACE - 1966 - DAY (D56) 97

Turner POV. He and Elwood are hanging out in the secret hiding place in the stall of the old horse barn.

ELWOOD

My mother's watch.

TURNER (O.S.)

A deck of marked cards.

ELWOOD

Percy's purple heart. Well, he  
threw it away. Feels like I lost  
it, though.

TURNER (O.S.)

My big toenail.

Beat.

ELWOOD

That's all you got?

TURNER (O.S.)

(joking)

Really got nothing left to lose,  
ha.

ELWOOD

Makes you one dangerous mothaf-

GRIFF (O.S.)

-Yes, sir. (confused) Sir?

They freeze. SOUND of people entering the barn, talking.

(CONTINUED)

SPENCER (O.S.)  
 ...good sportsmanship means  
 sometimes letting the other team  
 win.

CUT TO:

Elwood POV as he and Turner look through the gaps between the wooden boards of the stall. Griff and Spencer are visible standing in the barn.

SPENCER (CONT'D)  
 Sometimes.

GRIFF  
 (not getting it)  
 I suppose that's right, Mr.  
 Spencer.

SPENCER  
 Griff, are you receiving me  
 clearly? You gotta take a dive in  
 the third round.

GRIFF  
 You mean- throw the fight? Lose?  
 Sir.

SPENCER  
 Third round. Am I getting through  
 to you? You got that now?

GRIFF  
 Yessir, Mr. Spencer.

SPENCER  
 All right then. You know you can  
 beat him. That'll have to be  
 enough...

Spencer herds Griff out of the barn.

SPENCER (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 ...spirit of the Season of Giving,  
 Griff.

Turner looks at Elwood.

TURNER  
 Ain't that some shit?

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
 Don't people bet on this-

(CONTINUED)

TURNER

(angry)

Every year. That match tides us  
through a whole 365 days of  
humiliations.

98

INT. NICKEL ACADEMY - CLASSROOM - 1966 - DAY (D57)

98

Elwood POV as he watches an ANT march along the window sill.

He looks out the window, through the trees, to the campus statue that some kids are painting white, and beyond to the pristine buildings of the white boys' side of campus.

98A

OMITTED

98A

98B

OMITTED

98B

99

OMITTED

99

100

INT. NICKEL - SMALL GYMNASIUM - BOXING MATCH - 1966 - 100  
NIGHT (N58)

The roar of the crowd in the gym where the fight is already underway. SOUND of the bell ending round "1".

From where he's seated in a row of chairs, Elwood's POV of SPENCER across the ring on the other side as he stands up and points into the crowd. Elwood turns to look where Spencer's pointing: to the lone pale(r) face of JAIME on the Black boys' side in the bleachers. In the row of chairs behind Spencer, Harper jumps out of his seat and bounds up into the bleachers.

The black boys HOLLER at Harper, as Jaime, shrugging resignedly, is hauled over to the white boys' side.

The student body is crammed into small bleachers on all sides of the ring and below them two rows of chairs are ringside, with some kids squatting on the floor. White boys are on one side and Black boys on the other.

Elwood catches a glimpse of EARL at the table ringside with the trip-gong and the round number card displaying "2". BLAKELEY is seated with him at the table in front of a mic. The white REFEREE (30s) is talking with them. The two boxers are sweating and toweling on stools in their corners.

The bell is RUNG. The fight resumes, round "2".

Elwood's POV follows Jamie's move to the white side of the bleachers, the white boys clapping Jaime hard on the back, welcoming him as one of their own.

The white boys start up a STOMPING with their feet on the bleachers, which is picked up on by the Black boys, the thunder bouncing off the walls as BIG CHET (white, huge) and GRIFF collide and joust in the ring.

Through the out-of-focus legs and feet of the gladiators, Elwood's POV searches the faces on the white side, entranced by the froth and fury of their hate and enthusiasm.

WHITE BOY 3  
(yelling out)  
Send him to the undertaker, Big Chet!

Smug and sure, Spencer takes a swig from a silver flask he pulls from his jacket and surveys the crowd. His face settles into a focused scowl.

CUT TO:

Turner's POV turning away from Elwood's profile, seated on chair beside him, toward the invigorated faces of the Black boys behind them. The combustion of this moment plays out in their hollers, their sky-pumped fists, the collective torrent of energy contorting their physical movements and gestures into a wild kinesthesia.

ELWOOD  
Damn... (pause) look at Griff strut.

TURNER (O.S.)  
If I got all this respect... when's the next time fools who hate and fear you are going to treat you like Harry Belafonte?

SOUND of thuds and thumps as gloves meet bodies, skin on sweating skin.

CUT TO:

Abstracted CU of boys hollering.

CUT TO:

(CONTINUED)

CU of a boy with his neighbor in a headlock, jumping up and down.

CUT TO:

Abstracted CU of a boy's eyes full of haptic passion.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
Do you think he'll knock him down?

CUT TO:

Abstracted CU of a boy's knees moving up and down like a crank shaft.

CUT TO:

CU of a boy's face suspended in a sublime hope.

ELWOOD (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Turner, that's a hundred dollar bill!

CUT TO:

Turner's wider angle POV, as he turns away from the crowd of rowdy boys to Elwood, who meets his gaze.

TURNER (O.S.)  
Yep. Fat cats from all three counties. Stakes get higher every year.

CUT TO:

Elwood's POV catches, as he turns away from Turner and spies across the ring and through the legs and bodies clashing in a blur, the tail end of a bet being placed in the fat cat section: a well-dressed white man hands a \$100 bill to a neighboring patron. SPENCER, DIRECTOR HARDEE and MRS. HARDEE are beside them with a few Nickel staff.

TURNER (CONT'D)  
Cracker looks like Frankenstein.  
Square head, long arms. Look at those arms, man. Those things are pistons. Smoked hams.

Through the ropes, Elwood watches Spencer's line of spectators across from them, their white faces cool and composed with excitement, relishing the bloodsport.

SOUNDS of the fight. The crowd bellows and jeers.

(CONTINUED)

Elwood sees another White man lean over and whisper something into his neighbor's ear, prompting him to reaching into the breast pocket of his blazer and pull out a wad of cash, which he immediately passes to the whispering man, who passes it to the man beside him, who passes it then to the man who accepted the \$100 bill earlier.

TURNER (CONT'D)  
Man, he's dancing and ducking... Go  
right at it! Stick, stick, stick  
and move'em.

SHOUTS from directly behind them:

BLACK BOY 3 (O.S.)  
Griff's having ribs for dinner!

SHOUTS in response:

WHITE BOY 4 (O.S.)  
C'mon Chet, spray that blood!

WHITE BOY 5 (O.S.)  
Knock those white teeth outta that  
black boy's mouth!

SOUND of the bell. The two boys slink over to their respective corners. Elwood turns his attention away from the fat cats to Earl, who flips the round number card to "3", before reaching in his pocket, pulling out a wad of cash, beginning to count.

Elwood's gaze returns to Spencer, who is lighting a cigar, as if he just closed the business deal of the century.

TURNER (O.S.)  
Third round. This is it.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
Earl too, huh.

TURNER  
This is it El.

CUT TO:

Turner's POV turning away from Elwood to look at the split crowd of black boys and white boys directly behind Earl, the line separating the two halves invisible, an interface none the less between two fates, two statuses of citizen.

CUT TO:

(CONTINUED)

CU of a white boy mouthing "get that nigger" in slow motion and silently.

CUT TO:

CU of a Black boy with both his hands pressing his face in from each side, distressed at the uncertain outcome of the final round.

CUT TO:

CU of a white boy with his head tilted, his hand raised over his head, pulling on something invisible, miming hanging himself.

SOUNDS of boxing and the crowd's roar.

CUT TO:

CU of a Black boy's face partly obscured by his hands in a clasped position, almost praying, his gaze almost glazed over in a petrified worry.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
Damn. You don't think... Griff  
could knock out Big Chet by  
accident?

CUT TO:

Turner's POV in a wider shot of the half Black half white sections, turns to Elwood who again meets his gaze.

CUT TO:

Elwood's POV turns to Spencer, whose attention on the fight appears the height of stoicism. His face menacing without effort, his eyes tracking the movements of the fighters as an apex predator would.

TURNER  
Jab! Jab! Roll that shoulder. Left,  
left hook, Griff!

Director Hardee hands someone a cigar. Mrs. Hardee takes one and everyone watches her blow smoke. Elwood turns back to the ring, where ringside Black Mike hangs on the ropes.

BLACK BOY 3 (O.S.)  
Big Chet's gonna be toothless as my  
granny!

(CONTINUED)

CHICKIE PETE  
Witchdoctor give him the whole  
bucket of aspirin and he'll still  
have a headache!

WHITE BOY 3 (O.S.)  
Send him to the undertaker!

BLACK MIKE  
(screaming at Big Chet)  
You knock-kneed piece of shit!

The Referee kicks their hands away.

TURNER  
He's making it look good for sure.

Elwood turns and looks again across the brown worn floor of the ring, through the blurred waltzing limbs of the boxers, to Spencer and his patrons. Spencer's expression is clouding, his cigar dangling out of his mouth, peevish.

TURNER (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
He's putting a hurt on that white  
boy at least before he goes down,  
makes me feel all right.

Elwood shakes his head. He looks at Jaime, sitting calmly beside a stoic and controlled Harper. Jamie looks back at Elwood. A line of BLOOD starts slowly leaking from one of Jaime's nostrils.

Suddenly the white side rises to their feet, the Black side following suit, as the steady increase of raw THUDS from the ring rises to the level of a rhythmic smashing.

COREY  
(stuttering)  
KKKkkk's gonna be crying under  
their hoods all week!

Elwood's POV is still fixed on Spencer, the noise ramps as a temporal threshold is crossed.

TURNER  
(expecting Griff to throw)  
He's about to go. He's about to  
fall.

Big Chet hauls off and squashes Griff's nose. The Black boys GROAN. But Griff doesn't drop.

Elwood's gaze leaves Spencer to whip over to the fat cats who are visibly concerned. They lean forward to look periodically at Spencer who stares at the fighters with a steaming rage.

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

Now.

But instead, Griff hits Big Chet hard with some body blows. Chet stumbles backward, his feet partly obscuring Elwood's view of Spencer. A steady increase in thuds has crept into the soundscape: the SOUND of fist against wood, emanating from the left of Elwood.

Elwood turns to look at Turner whose intensity is a strangled pain. He looks down to see Turner punching the back of the chair in front of them, alternating slowly: left... right... left... right... left. His knuckles are bruised and dotted with blood.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

... Turner-

A smashing, left... right... left... right... left...

The Black boys ROAR.

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

...Turner!

The SOUND of the fight, the crowd, their cheers, their stomps, the wet-leather pops of contact, all zero to a distant atmospheric drone, a unified hum pushed into the background, creating a sound vacuum around Elwood and Turner. Finally hearing his name, Turner turns and looks at Elwood.

CUT TO:

Turner's POV as he stares back at his puzzled, concerned friend. He looks down at his knuckles. A HOLLOW BELL rings somewhere - the final bell. Turner fixes unflinchingly on Elwood's face. The SOUND of the match and crowd comes ROARING back.

ELWOOD (CONT'D)

(almost completely drowned  
out; lips moving)

This, isn't the fight.

A beat. Turner nods almost imperceptibly, then turns back to the fight to see both boxers leaning exhaustedly in their corners, then looks at Elwood again who is also now looking in that direction.

(CONTINUED)

ELWOOD (CONT'D)  
(alarmed)  
Damn.

Turner looks at Spencer, malevolent fury on his face. One of the white men, red-faced, reaches over and grabs his arm, barking something at him. Griff, as if suddenly realizing, lumbers across the ring to the Referee, who consults with the table man. The noise of the crowd drowns out his words.

Black Mike jumps in the ring to support Griff.

The Referee heads back to the center of the ring, grabbing Griff's wrist to lead him, where he's joined by Big Chet. He takes Griff's arm and thrusts it up into the air.

Griff panics, breaks away from his friends and jumps down into the crowd, trying to move toward Spencer. It's no use, the Black boys are clearing the stands and swarming their champion. They smother and lift him.

GRIFF  
(screaming to Spencer)  
I thought it was still the second!  
I thought it was the second!

He's still screaming as the Black boys carry him out, CHEERING and WHOOPING. Griff is looking back over his shoulder at Spencer, tears pouring from his swollen eyes.

FADE UP SOUND of:

Adult Elwood humming *White Christmas* along with a radio.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
(humming only)  
I'm, I'm dream-ing, dreaming of a  
white, white Christmas. Just like  
the ones I used to know-wo...

101 INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - HARLEM - 1968 - NIGHT (N-FF3) 101

... continuing over into Adult Elwood's (18) POV into the large industrial sink of a Harlem NY restaurant kitchen. One of his hands is underwater holding a plate up, and the other is washing it in a circular motion. The radio is on a shelf above him. Bustling restaurant kitchen SOUNDS all around him.

101

CONTINUED:

78.  
101

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
(humming only)  
...Honey, it's where the treetops,  
treetops glisten Little bitty,  
little bitty, little bitty  
children, they'll try to listen...

He pauses to watch rainbows form on the surface of large soapsud bubbles.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
(humming only)  
...To hear, hear for the sleigh  
bells that are ringing in the snow-  
wo-wo.

102

EXT. NICKEL ACADEMY - GROUNDS - 1966 - DUSK (D59)

102

Elwood POV watching some Black boys sitting on each other's shoulders circling a tall tree, garlanding Christmas tinsel and colored lights around it, in a slow, impressive spiral moving down the widening girth of the tree.

103

OMITTED

103

104

OMITTED

104

105

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE - 1960S

105

Color 8mm home movie footage (47 sec) of a Christmas morning, Black boys opening packages under a tree. Baseball gloves, red sweaters or socks, bowties, boxes of tin army men... They are boys from a nice house in a nice neighborhood where it's quiet at night and nightmare-less.

ASTRONAUT (V.O.)  
(Apollo 8, December 24th  
1968, orbiting the moon)  
I hope that all of you back on  
Earth can see what we mean when we  
say it's a rather foreboding  
horizon. A rather stark and  
unappetizing looking place. We're  
now going over one of our future  
landing sites selected in this  
smooth region called The Sea of  
Tranquility.  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

105

CONTINUED:

79.  
105

## ASTRONAUT (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Smooth to make it easy for the initial landing attempt, in order to preclude having to dodge mountains. Now you can see the long shadows of the lunar sunrise.

SOUND of the static and crackles of the transmission from Apollo 8, no voices, continues over into...

106

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - HARLEM - 1968 - NIGHT (N-FF3) 106

... and combines with the ever fainter background SOUNDS of a busy kitchen around Adult Elwood POV. His hands are underwater in a deep sink, watching one bubble in particular that has grown in size and stands above the others. He moves in a bit closer for a concentrated view of its curve.

The sound of silence and static of the lunar broadcast continues for 10 seconds.

107

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE - 1968

107

The Apollo 8 live feed orbiting the moon. The audio continues through the three astronauts taking turns reading Genesis.

## ASTRONAUTS (O.S.)

- In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

- And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

- And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

107

CONTINUED:

80.  
107

## ASTRONAUTS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

And the evening and the morning  
were the second day.

- And God said, Let the waters  
under the heavens be gathered  
together unto one place, and let  
the dry land appear: and it was so.  
And God called the dry land Earth,  
and the gathering together of the  
waters called He the Seas: and God  
saw that it was good.

- And so from the crew of Apollo 8,  
we close with good night, good  
luck, Merry Christmas, and God  
bless all of you, all of you on the  
good Earth.

The broadcast ends, the Apollo 8 color roll jiggles into  
place:

WAITER (O.S.)  
Saved 1968.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
Ain't no saving 1968.

108

EXT. NICKEL ACADEMY - GROUNDS - 1966 - DAY (D60)

108

Turner's POV from a distance, of the torso of an enormous red  
and white papier-mâché Santa Claus, with outstretched arms  
and mittened hands, lying at the foot of a large oak tree.  
Head nowhere in sight.

109

EXT. NICKEL ACADEMY - GROUNDS - 1966 - NIGHT (N60)

109

Elwood POV standing near the base of a large tree waiting for  
something. He watches five boys walking in the darkness  
toward him down the large main drive of Nickel. In the  
background, three white boys equipped with flashlights are  
walking toward their side of campus. SOUND of distant voices  
fading in the night, some excitement before a general quiet  
falls across the campus.

Then there's a WHOOPING as the Christmas lights decorating  
the campus are turned on. Elwood moves forward from the tree  
to get a better view and catches a glimpse of Turner, who is  
there with him.

TURNER (O.S.)  
The first Christmas here is the  
hardest.

(CONTINUED)

Green, red and white bulbs sketch a route of holiday cheer along the trees and the campus buildings. Far off in the dark, the big Santa - with his papier-mâché head now on - is lit up and glowing.

The sublime moment is interrupted by the Community Service van pulling up behind Elwood, headlights on. Harper is behind the wheel and looks at Turner, together with Elwood again, as he cruises by slowly on his way out of campus. A Santa hat is on his head.

110 EXT. NICKEL ACADEMY - GROUNDS - 1967 - DAY (D61) 110

Elwood POV from where he's seated at an empty picnic table he's staked out under a tree. Families are gathering at two or three other tables on this warm winter afternoon. It's a visiting day.

Elwood sees Hattie before she sees him. She looks years older, walking slowly toward the area. She's thinner, her collar bones trace a line across her green dress.

When she spots Elwood she halts briefly as Elwood gets up, and then hurriedly sits down across from him.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
Nanna.

They look at each other close, but she finds she can't hold his gaze.

COREY (O.S.)  
(no stutter)  
Can we squeeze in with y'all?

Elwood looks up at Corey, but before he can answer, his MOTHER (20s), heavily made-up, hair teased 60s-style and manicured, smiles insecurely and sits down. They are LOUD and HAPPY beside Hattie, who is church-quiet.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
It's been a long wait for some good news.

Hattie nods, coughs (nervously).

HATTIE  
Lyndon Johnson's carrying on  
President Kennedy's civil rights  
bill. And if that good old boy is  
doing right, you know things is  
changing. Be a whole different  
thing when you come home, Elwood.  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HATTIE (CONT'D)

You pick up right where you left off, with no more hassle.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

Huh, yeah.

HATTIE

I'm sure Melvin Briggs will have you. And those books you were reading ain't gone nowhere.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

Hmm.

HATTIE

I've been taking less work and spending more time at the church. And I told the trash men to be careful with that big truck, the way they block the road and so early in the morning, when you can really hear everyone get out of bed. Well not everybody. The house across the way burned down. Burned a whole day straight. The smoke was something awful.

Corey's mother is jittery, looking at herself in a compact.

COREY

You look b-beautiful, mama.

She tucks the compact away, shakes her head, then smiles unconvincingly.

Elwood reaches across the table and takes Hattie's hands. Her fingers tremble, he stills them.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

Nanna, what is it? What's wrong?

A beat.

HATTIE

El, he's gone. Mr. Andrews, you know, our lawyer who's so optimistic about your appeal- I went downtown to see him, I took the bus. I had paid him \$200 which wasn't enough.

(MORE)

HATTIE (CONT'D)

But he was so adamant persuasive with Mr. Marconi that he and his wife kicked in another \$100, and then that was all right.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

You mean he's gone... he didn't... after all this time...

HATTIE

The landlord was showing the office to a dentist. When I asked for Mr. Andrews they just looked through me like I wasn't there neither. He picked up stakes to Atlanta without a word.

Elwood's attention ebbs with his spirit... his gaze drifts... Hattie becomes blurry.

HATTIE (CONT'D)

He took that \$300. And he *knows*, he said, what we got on our hands is a "classic miscarriage of justice". I know we hoped to have you out of here by now and I think...

ELWOOD (O.S.)

It's okay, Nanna.

HATTIE (O.S.)

I let you down, El.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

I'm okay Nanna. I'm hanging in there.

HATTIE (O.S.)

You got any friends? How about Turner?

ELWOOD (O.S.)

(taken aback)

Turner? How d'you-

HATTIE

(oblivious)

I didn't know how I was gonna get you that package, that day-

Elwood's gaze slowly fixates on the pulsing of the blood vessel in his grandmother's neck.

HATTIE (CONT'D)  
(oblivious)  
-and there he was. I like him, he's  
polite, looked me in the eye. That  
was a real kindness...

111 EXT. NICKEL ACADEMY - GROUNDS - 1967 - DAY (D61) 111

Turner POV standing near a seated Elwood, watching as Elwood twists an oak leaf and pulls the leafy parts off bit by bit.

TURNER (O.S.)  
I'm sorry, El. I don't know why I  
didn't give you that letter. I  
guess I was...

ELWOOD  
It's okay, Turner. Doesn't matter  
now anyway.

He contemplates what remains of the leaf, the skeleton and stem. Four sections torn away. A fifth section of leaf is still there clinging to the stem, in the deafening silence.

Then Elwood turns his head and looks up at Turner.

CUT TO:

Elwood POV looking up at Turner's sorrowful face.

112 INT. WIDOWER APARTMENT - NEW YORK - 1975 - DAY (D-FF4) 112

Adult Elwood POV looking down through an empty bed frame at the faded ghostly outline of a leaf, formed from being pressed a very long time against the floor.

The bed starts to rise, as if levitating. Adult Elwood looks up to see his colleague LARRY (20s, burly, Black) wearing a jumpsuit that says Horizon Movers, picking up that side of the bed frame. Adult Elwood picks up his side and they move it from the bedroom, turning it sideways so it will fit through the door.

LARRY  
Elwood this might be solid brass,  
man. (beat) I got dibs on this.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
(shushing him)  
Shh... somebody died.

(CONTINUED)

112

CONTINUED:

85.  
112

LARRY

In this bed?

On their way through the apartment, they pass a WIDOWER (70s), bewildered with grief. A YOUNG WOMAN, presumably his daughter, takes him by the arm and tugs him gently out of their way. She resembles a younger Hattie.

WIDOWER

(softly; directly to Adult  
Elwood as he passes)

But where will we rest?

Adult Elwood looks back at them as he walks with the bed frame, not seeing their faces again.

113

OMITTED

113

114

OMITTED

114

115

EXT. STREET [UNDER PORTICO] - MARIANNA - 1967 - DAY (D62) 115

Elwood POV is under a portico, looking up at himself and Turner in the reflective surface of its underside.

ELWOOD

We can walk around?

TURNER

We don't got to make a scene, but  
yeah. Don't look scared.

The white people of Marianna are eyeing them as they pass to and fro on the sidewalk, trying to account for the two unescorted Black boys in their state-issued uniforms but dismissing the thought that it's beyond their control.

ELWOOD

It's weird being out here.

TURNER

Wait until you're out-out.

Turner looks around.

ELWOOD

How would you do it?

TURNER

(understanding the  
question immediately)  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

TURNER (CONT'D)

Well I wouldn't run into the swamp,  
hide in there until the coast is  
clear and hitch somewhere West or  
North. That's how they get you. And  
you can't wash no scent off, that's  
only in movies.

Beat.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

... so what would you do?

TURNER

So I'd head out here into the free  
world, snatch clothes from a wash  
line. Head South, because they  
ain't expecting it. Put as many  
miles between me and the dogs as I  
can, tire them out. The trick is  
not doing what they know you going  
to do.

ELWOOD (O.S.)

Yeah, well why wouldn't they know  
you trying not to do what they  
think you going to-

Turner throws his arm around Elwood, pulling him closer, and looks up into the reflective surface above them.

TURNER

-and don't take no one with you.  
Not one of those dummies. They'll  
take you down with them.

ELWOOD

(smiling)

Hmm.

TURNER

(smiling)

Gotta go it alone.

Elwood chuckles and they walk off, emerging from under the portico into the sun.

115A EXT. MAIN STREET SIDEWALK - MARIANNA - 1967 - DAY (D62) 115A

Turner's POV walking with Elwood, sees Elwood's demeanor change as he suddenly notices something on the other side of the street. He darts into the road, moving through the traffic diagonally across the street. A car HONKS at him.

(CONTINUED)

TURNER (O.S.)  
(panicking)  
Elwood! What-

He follows and sees the NOTEBOOK fall out of Elwood's jacket into the road.

CUT TO:

Elwood'S POV rushing, maneuvering around the cars, toward something on the opposite sidewalk. A few HONKS, as then he slows down and stops abruptly at the sight of DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. being abruptly picked up by a white man in a suit and tie and carried off. He's a cardboard cut-out.

CUT TO:

Turner's POV of Elwood looking amazed and confounded as he catches up to him.

TURNER (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
What happened to not making a  
scene? You think Rev'rend King's  
out here in Mariana opening  
supermarkets?

He holds out the notebook, which Elwood practically grabs from him as Turner pulls Elwood along the sidewalk.

TURNER (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Why you got to carry that around?  
Anyone'd think you a student.

ELWOOD  
I've been writing everything down.

TURNER (O.S.)  
Everything what?

ELWOOD  
Our 'community service' (beat) The deliveries, the pay-offs, the yard work, the chores. The names of everybody and the dates.

TURNER (O.S.)  
Why would you do a thing like that?

ELWOOD  
You told me. No one else can get me out of here, just me.

(CONTINUED)

TURNER (O.S.)  
Nobody ever listens to me, why you  
got to start?

ELWOOD  
It's not an obstacle course,  
Turner. You can't go around it, you  
have to go through it. Walk with  
your head up no matter what they  
throw at you.

CUT TO:

Elwood's POV of Turner.

TURNER  
I get it, you mad and need to get  
it off your chest, that's cool, but-

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
-I'm telling you. There's a fifth  
way out: Get. Rid. Of. Nickel.

TURNER  
They put us in the goddamn ground!

Turner jabs at Elwood. SOUND of a HONKING car HORN.

TURNER (CONT'D)  
They going to take you out back,  
and bury your ass. God! Then take  
me out back, too. Elwood I vouched  
for you man, the hell is wrong with  
you?!

He watches Turner furiously walk off, then follows him. SOUND of two loud, quick HONKED HORN blasts. The street noise increases.

A WHITE WOMAN pushing a pram down the sidewalk toward them gets visibly panicked and pulls the pram cover over her baby. The HORN is insistent.

Turner and Elwood split up to walk around the carriage, Turner ahead on one side, Elwood slightly behind on the other. Harper pulls up on the other side of the road. He's the one HONKING the horn, gesticulating urgently for them to come back and get in.

Turner's POV, standing over a chessboard, as he holds out first one clenched fist then another to Turner.

(CONTINUED)

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
This, or this?

Turner tilts his head up, looks at Elwood, then looks back down at Elwood's balled fists.

Turner abruptly grabs one of Elwood's fists and PUNCHES him with it. Elwood staggers backwards, stunned, his hands drop the chess pieces he was holding. They are both black knights.

117 INT. LIVING AREA - TENEMENT APARTMENT - NYC - 1975 - DUSK 117  
(D-FF5)

Adult Elwood (25) POV of a TV screen in the living area of a tenement apartment. The local NYC station is playing the sequence of images of 1970s New York landmarks at night that opens the "Million Dollar Movie" of the week.

SOUNDS of the big city outside. It's a wintry day, the radiator is CLANKING. Faint SOUND, almost an hallucination, of a woman's voice calling out "Elwood! Elwood!"

DENISE (O.S.)  
(entering)  
You hear me outside?

His girlfriend DENISE (20s, Black) enters the apartment and crosses his eye-line, going into the kitchen with the paper bags of groceries she's carrying.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
What?

He gets up and turns down the volume.

DENISE  
This rat ran across my feet and I screamed. That was me.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
Denise. Hathor. Scared of a little ole rodent.

DENISE  
Sh-, was big as a dog. (beat)  
Barked like one too.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
Maybe it was a dog.

ADULT ELWOOD uncrinkles a flyer from a laundromat.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 Found one, a '67 Econoline. Needs a  
 new finish, but the guys on 125th  
 owe me one. I can supplement the  
 Horizon shifts with my own jobs.  
 Weekends too. And bring on Larry.

Beat.

DENISE  
 You think you can really count on  
 him?

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
 Larry bellyaching about this child  
 support is about as dependable as  
 US Steel. If there is one thing  
 he'll do, it's work.

Beat.

DENISE  
 That's great El. It's really  
 happening. What'll you call it?

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
 Not sure yet, something easy to  
 find in the Yellow Pages.

She comes over with a steaming hot cocoa and kneads the spot  
 on his back where it hurts.

DENISE  
 There's some rum in that. I got us  
 some sandwiches, too.

She reaches for the TV trays next to the couch.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
 Baby, I'll get it.

DENISE  
 But your back?

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
 Just keep those hands ready.

He puts the trays together.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 Whoever invented these deserves a  
 Nobel prize. Now if they can just  
 work on this-

(CONTINUED)

117

CONTINUED: (2)

91.  
117

*The Defiant Ones* is playing on the TV.

DENISE  
Oh it already started.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
"You're married to me, now - here's  
the ring."

DENISE  
What?

118

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

118

Full-screen. *The Defiant Ones*: two escaped convicts, Sidney Poitier and Tony Curtis, are bound together and arguing. Poitier suggests the exact opposite of what Turner proposed to Elwood about escape.

SIDNEY POITIER  
(on the TV)  
You're married to me, all right,  
joker, and here's the ring. But I  
ain't goin' South on no honeymoon  
now.

He's holding up the chains that bind him to Tony Curtis.

DENISE (O.S.)  
You should watch what you say, El.  
(beat) I'd marry Sidney Poitier.

119

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE - 1970S

119

Color footage of Black boys playing chess in Washington Square Park NYC in the 1970s.

120

INT. COMMUNITY SERVICE VAN - GROUNDS - NICKEL - 1967 - 120  
NIGHT (N64)

Elwood's POV from the front seat of the Community Service van as they drive along a gravel road through fog on the Nickel Grounds. Harper pulls up to a padlocked storehouse. Turner gets out and walks away.

HARPER (O.S.)  
Where's he going?

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
(calling after him)  
Turner!...

(CONTINUED)

He ignores Elwood.

ELWOOD (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Turner! (yelling) You have the key?

Turner keeps walking. Harper gets out the driver's side, steps up on the floor of the van to lean on the top.

HARPER  
(sharply)  
Turner! Get your nig- (restarts)  
get your ass back over here. You  
have the key or not? I'm tired of  
your shit.

Turner comes back, looking straight at Elwood only and SMACKS the key on the dashboard, then turns on his heel and stalks off.

HARPER (CONT'D)  
(muttering in disbelief)  
Goddamn baby. Waste of time, man.  
Head full of stump water.

Elwood takes in Harper's fury.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
Give him a break.

HARPER  
(whipping his head around  
to him)  
What are you, his girlfriend?

Turner POV awakening to the ROAR of the White House fan. He looks over to Elwood's bed across the room, and it's empty.

He walks across the room, looks under the bed, catching a glimpse of the legs of someone who is sliding out and climbing up to the top on the other side. Turner steps back and sees a GROWN MAN climbing into Elwood's bed. After a beat, the man rolls off the other side of the bed, crawling back under, and Elwood, from the opposite side, climbs up and replaces him.

TURNER (O.S.)  
(shocked)  
El... (beat) Elwood.

Turner looks into the wide-awake, alert face of Elwood on the bed, but receives no reciprocal acknowledgement.

(CONTINUED)

121

CONTINUED:

93.  
121

Elwood seems to take a half-second nap, eyes closing in repose, then he pops awake and rolls off the bed and under it again. No sooner does he disappear than the Grown Man rolls up from the other side and takes his place.

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

(afraid)

Elwood? Elwood?

The Grown Man does not appear to see him. Turner slowly backs away and gets a wider view of the room, and realizes that this surreal rotation choreography is happening in EVERY bed with boys and men spanning all ages.

122

OMITTED

122

123

INT. BAR - NEW YORK - 1988 - DAY (D-FF6)

123

Adult Elwood (38) POV seated on a stool watching a TV above the bar that's showing the end of the NY Marathon. A steady stream of sinewy runners is finishing. TV camera crews in small vehicles trail them, white cops on motorcycles.

The spectators lining the course are all types of people: Black, white, Puerto Rican, rich, poor, etc. They stand pressed against the blue wooden police barriers, some on the shoulders of daddies or boyfriends. SOUND of wolf whistles, air horns, ghetto blasters.

SOUND of other people in the bar cheering them on, laughing.

A man [ADULT CHICKIE PETE] enters somewhere behind Adult Elwood and ambles to the far end of the bar, in Adult Elwood's peripheral vision. He leans over to ask the BARTENDER (20s, white, pumped) a question, and gets a negative shake of the head. Deflated, ADULT CHICKIE PETE glances in Adult Elwood's direction.

ADULT CHICKIE PETE

(surprised)

Hey... (moving closer) Hey, man!

Adult Elwood turns his head slowly away from the TV to take the full measure of the man moving toward him, on crackhead alert. The man is wearing a green Jets sweatshirt and red track pants a size too big - borrowed.

ADULT CHICKIE PETE (CONT'D)

(grinning)

Hey man! Long time, long time! How ya been!

(CONTINUED)

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
(guarded; trying to place  
him)

Aight.

ADULT CHICKIE PETE  
It's me, man, Pete Evans... Chickie  
Pete. How you doing?

Bingo.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
Chickie Pete. You look good.

He has that too-raw thing people have when they just get out of a clinic. Adult Chickie Pete slaps him five.

ADULT CHICKIE PETE  
Damn. Shit man. Been ages! Beer? On  
me?

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
(shifting to stand)  
I got an early morning-

ADULT CHICKIE PETE  
Naw naw man, you gotta let me buy  
you a beer.

Before Adult Elwood can respond, he signals the bartender, holds up two fingers.

Adult Elwood's POV sweeps the bar. Among the regular patrons (5), there are two boys (aged 8 & 10) and a man in running gear with marathon race bibs on, as if they took a detour from the course and are now watching their fellow runners finish on the TV.

He follows their gaze back to the TV screen. Only the stragglers are coming in now, half-walking or stumbling across the finish line, not so much running the course as running deep into their own character. A few have people waiting to wrap them in thermal foil blankets, most don't.

The bartender placing pints on coasters in front of them brings Adult Elwood's focus back to Adult Chickie Pete, who's been talking.

ADULT CHICKIE PETE (CONT'D)  
...I mighta played professional, if  
things had been different.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
You think so?

ADULT CHICKIE PETE  
(smacks his lips)  
For sure, man, I used to...

Adult Chickie Pete gently brings his hands up in a playing motion, closes his eyes, tilts his head back and sways to an imaginary TRUMPET solo. He looks truly majestic, a radiating smile between lip movements. SOUND of a trumpet playing.

Adult Elwood glances to see if the bartender has noticed the horn. It stops as Adult Chickie Pete drops his now shaking hands to the bar, pops his knuckles, and nostalgically sways his head as the dream disappears back into the never-was.

ADULT CHICKIE PETE (CONT'D)  
... I coulda been in a funk band,  
an orch-est-ra! Ha. Haydn, Bach  
Vivaldi, backing up Miles... A  
doctor inventing shit that saves  
lives. I got ideas man. Nickel.  
Damn. You know, I still remember  
the periodic table of elements.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
(fascinated)  
Huh?

ADULT CHICKIE PETE  
It's how I got started cooking.  
You know one brotha dreamed that  
whole thing up. Dmitri Mendeleev or  
some shit. Ha. (beat) He also made  
that Russian vodka 40 proof. I'm  
not thankful for those times. That  
was a long time ago. My hands man.

He holds up two crabbed fingers. These are not the same inspired hands of a moment ago.

ADULT CHICKIE PETE (CONT'D)  
I just spent 30 days drying out.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
Oh...

ADULT CHICKIE PETE  
It's okay I can handle it now. I  
always drank. Then it was like the  
more I tried to settle down, the  
more I got blotto every night.  
Couldn't sleep in the dark. Still  
can't sleep in the dark.  
(MORE)

## ADULT CHICKIE PETE (CONT'D)

Last May I got into it with this guy, the judge says either jail or a program, no choice at all there. I'm living with my sister in Harlem. She's letting me stay while I figure out my next move. I've always liked it up there. But shit man, you know Chickie Pete gon' be alright. If it's one thing Nickel taught me, it's how not to die. Ha. (beat) What you up to?

## ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)

I got a moving company, trucks, employees.

## ADULT CHICKIE PETE

My man! Moving on up! You got a lady?

## ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)

No. I mean, I did, but it didn't work out. "Denise." She said I had a lotta work to do on myself.

## ADULT CHICKIE PETE

I hear you, I hear you. Hard to find somebody who could understand.

## ADULT ELWOOD

Yeah, I'm still looking for the "one". Maybe some day.

Adult Chickie Pete orders another beer, outpacing him as the bartender serves two underage BLONDE CO-EDs first.

## ADULT CHICKIE PETE

You seen any of the guys? I've ran into some over the years. Black Mike's a crook, Nelson's strung out, Desmond lost an arm in 'Nam. Yeah. You got out in '67?

Beat.

## ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)

(incredulous)

You don't remember?

## ADULT CHICKIE PETE

Remember what?

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
(sore now)  
You really don't remember?

ADULT CHICKIE PETE  
What? Shit, I remember what they did to Griff. Sshhitt. What they did to me. (beat) When they stuffed that kid in the big dryer. (dark chuckle to himself) And the one they made eat a lightbulb, ha. You know what I remember?! The effing ghost... man, slipping on skin, flesh, whatever the hell it was in the shower. Yeah. What else you want me to remember?

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
(gate firmly shut)  
-Nothing. Time served. And they kicked me out. (beat) I went up to Atlanta and then trained it going north. You know, been here since '68. Twenty years.

He drains his glass. All this time he's taken it as a given that he was a Nickel legend.

ADULT CHICKIE PETE  
Yeah, that's nice. Everybody's welcomed here... what happened to that kid you used to hang around with all the time?

Beat.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
Which kid?

ADULT CHICKIE PETE  
The kid, you know- y'all thought that hiding place was so secret.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
Hmm.

ADULT CHICKIE PETE  
Gotta take a leak, it'll come back to me.

He goes off to the bathroom, makes a remark to the coeds at a table. They laugh at him when he goes into the men's room.

An ambulance goes by outside and in the dark mirror behind the liquor, Adult Elwood has a blurred vision of himself, and WE SEE HIM for the first time as well, outlined in a bright red, a shimmering aura that marks him. The entire bar lights up with the fluttering of blue and red.

He sweeps up a napkin and, one handed, quickly rolling it into a thin tortilla, kneading it over in his palm with intense pressure- is suddenly mad that an idiot like Chickie Pete is still breathing and his friend isn't.

Adult Chickie Pete claps him on the shoulder. He turns.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
I got to go, man.

ADULT CHICKIE PETE  
No no, I hear you, me too. (pause)  
I don't want to ask. But if you're looking for a hand, I could use the job. I'm sleeping on a couch.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
Right.

ADULT CHICKIE PETE  
You have a card?

Adult Elwood pulls out his wallet, opens it and glances at his ACE Movers business card: Mr. Elwood Curtis, President. Then snaps it shut before Adult Chickie Pete sees it.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
Not on me.

ADULT CHICKIE PETE  
I can handle the work, is what I'm putting out there.

He writes up his sister's phone number on a red bar napkin.

ADULT CHICKIE PETE (CONT'D)  
You ring me up- for the old days.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
I will.

Adult Elwood looks at Adult Chickie Pete as he leaves, sees the familiar shape of his bald spot on the back of his head. He considers whether to mention the bar tab, then reaches into his wallet, and slaps a \$20 on the bar.

123

CONTINUED: (6)

99.  
123

As he turns back toward the closing door, he sees an ALLIGATOR TAIL slipping out. He walks out after it, tossing the red napkin.

124

OMITTED

124

125

INT. NICKEL - INTAKE BUILDING - 1967 - DAY (D66)

125

Turner POV of the boys lining up in the basement of the intake building, getting fresh uniforms from Nickel staff under the oversight of Blakeley, who is unusually sober.

BLAKELEY

You boys mess up, it's your ass.  
You know Mr. Spencer will have it  
in for you if he catches your shirt  
untucked or your dirty drawers  
hanging out of a footlocker.

Turner scans a wall of open cubbyholes with the old clothes of boys when they first arrived.

Blakeley walks past handing out a few shoe rags.

BLAKELEY (CONT'D)

They do this inspection shit, we  
counting on you. Spit-shine 'em  
good.

126

EXT. NICKEL ACADEMY - GROUNDS - 1967 - DAY (D66)

126

Turner POV as he walks around the outside of a building that's being painted. SOUND of a paint can falling from the scaffolding behind him, accompanied by boys' voices.

Still walking, he does a 180 degree turn to look behind him. Strangely there's no one there.

He turns back around and almost immediately THREE IDENTICAL BLACK BOYS come around the corner of the building toward him, covered in Dixie White paint. The boys don't appear to see him. He freezes and stares at them as they pass by.

127

INT. ADULT ELWOOD'S APARTMENT - NY - 2018 - DAY (D-FF7) 127

Adult Elwood's POV of an image on a computer screen:

A color newspaper photograph in the local Marianna newspaper of a VERY OLD WHITE MAN, leaning on a cane on his porch.

(CONTINUED)

The headline reads: "Good Citizen of the Year". The man is decrepit but Spencer's cold steel eyes are unmistakable.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
They're asking people to come forward.

SOUND of a mouse click.

CUT TO:

A group of Nickel Boys, in spotless, pressed, regular clothes (not uniforms), hanging out together on the porch of a large Southern home with white columns.

MILLIE  
Babe, you found all this?

SOUND of a mouse click.

CUT TO:

A group of Nickel Boys in uniform, doing manual labor.

ADULT ELWOOD (O.S.)  
They're digging. I'm digging.

SOUND of a mouse click.

CUT TO:

A GPR image, bright pulsing colors of blue, green and pink, of GRAVES found in the grounds of Nickel Academy.

Turner's POV as he hauls a bucket of tools out of the back of the Community Service van and brings them to Harper, who is snappily dressed and leaning against the side of the truck, striking a match and lighting a cigarette like he's James Dean. Turner bends to set the bucket down beside Harper's feet when there's a BRIGHT FLASH and click.

Turner straightens and turns to see a State Government WHITE PHOTOGRAPHER, face obscured behind a Crown Graphic camera and its distinct bellows, step forward, snapping another. Turner moves his hand up to his face in reflex. The flash bulb is blinding. Harper coolly smokes, and it's suddenly clear he's been striking a pose.

129

INT. NICKEL ACADEMY - DINING HALL - 1967 - DAY (D66)

129

Turner's POV seated at a table in the spick and span dining hall, newly decorated by placards with messages of inspiration and encouragement. The boys are looking smart with fresh haircuts, uniforms, belts and gleaming shoes, elated by the kind of meal they never get: fried chicken, yellow corn cobs, mashed potatoes, steaming rolls and bright red apples on their trays.

DESMOND

(shoveling food)

Ain't eaten like this since I don't know when. (grabbing another roll)  
They should inspect this place all the time.

BLACK MIKE

Nobody talking now. Eat.

They're all digging in- plates being scraped, forks pinging the metal trays. Turner's food is untouched before him, as he surveys the circus. For him, it's an abomination.

Blakeley enters through the cafeteria door and stops with a large tray stacked with small round cardboard containers.

Half of the dining hall reorients to this sight.

BOYS

(all at once)

ICE CREAM!!!!!!

A chorus of "hoorays!" Some boys jump out of their seats, others look manically at their peers to confirm reality.

BLAKELEY

Keep it down! You want them to think this is some kind of circus we're running here? (muttering)  
Y'all act like you never had ice cream before.

They haven't. At Nickel. But the bribe does its job and Nickel appears like a joyful place.

Turner, nauseated by the ruse, looks across the dining hall and finds Elwood, like a mirror, likewise sickened and returning his gaze. Turner shakes his head at the tragedy.

CUT TO:

Elwood's POV, meeting Turner's gaze and shaking his head with the same sense of tragedy.

(CONTINUED)

He is sitting with boys half his age, finding the sight of them digging into the ice cream with little wooden paddles unbearable.

Elwood gets up. Across the room, Turner is watching him like a hawk. When Elwood gets up, Turner does, too.

CUT TO:

Turner's POV, as he swiftly follows Elwood.

TURNER (O.S.)  
What you gonna do? (beat) Elwood...

Elwood keeps walking, doesn't turn around as Turner pursues.

TURNER (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
What you gonna do?

Elwood keeps walking.

TURNER (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
What you think they going to do?  
You think they going to put your  
picture on the cover of Life  
magazine?

Elwood keeps walking.

TURNER (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
You think anyone cares what's going  
on at Nickel?

Elwood keeps walking.

TURNER (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
This is just one place. There are  
Nickels all over this country.

Elwood spins on him now.

ELWOOD  
How long we got to keep murdering  
ourselves?!

Turner takes a step back, shocked.

ELWOOD (CONT'D)  
-It's on me Turner. I got this.

130 EXT. NICKEL ACADEMY - GROUNDS - 1967 - DAY (D66) 130

Turner POV from a distance, of a wandering Black boy in ragged, soiled clothes stumbling down from Boot Hill. From the distance the figure is hard to make out. Turner turns and begins walking away but stops and looks back. The boy is standing still, looking straight up to the sky.

130A OMITTED 130A

131 EXT. NICKEL - FIELD - BLEACHERS - 1967 - DAY (D66) 131

Elwood POV from up on a scaffold next to the bleachers on the field, which are turned upward on their side, repairing and painting planks with some of the other boys. He hammers down hard on a nail three times, forcing it flush against the new plank of wood. The contrast is sharp between it and the old splintery one below.

At the SOUND of cars turning onto the Nickel campus, he turns his head quickly. A 100 nails bounce off the stands below.

DESMOND (O.S.)  
(sucking his teeth)  
What the hell.

Elwood looks down at Desmond working below, dodging the rain of nails from the box he's knocked over.

Elwood now clocks THREE INSPECTORS walking up the cement path, pointing at this or that. They pass the White House without a glance, pass a basketball court where some white boys are playing, pass a makeshift baseball diamond, approaching the football end of the field.

The portly one looks like Jackie Gleason, and the tall one like JFK: white teeth, tan and the haircut. The man in the middle is practically a human mouse. They wear hats, but their jackets are off and their short sleeve shirts and clipped black ties make them look more NASA than G-men.

They're escorted by JAIME. Elwood starts to reorient to the thought:

*Maybe it's possible.*

CUT TO:

Turner's POV from a scaffold near the set of bleachers directly across the field from the ones Elwood is repairing. He also spots that the Inspectors are escorted by Jaime.

(CONTINUED)

He looks across to Elwood and sees Elwood realize the opportunity: *maybe it's possible.*

TURNER (O.S.)  
(to himself)  
Elwood.

He sees Elwood descend the scaffold ladder. Sees him step around Black Mike who is awkwardly setting a new pine plank into place. Sees that Elwood has the right angle for the interception and is on the move. He's fifty yards away, when-

CUT TO:

Elwood's POV as he moves forward, focused on intercepting the inspectors, when-

HARPER (O.S.)  
Hey Elwood.

Elwood doesn't register the voice as directed to him. He's ten yards away now. Focused on JFK in the center.

HARPER (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Elwood!

Elwood stops in his tracks, turning to see Harper.

HARPER (CONT'D)  
Hold on a minute, Elwood.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
What is it Mr. Harper?

Elwood watches the men walk past a few yards behind Harper.

HARPER  
I need you to head up to the farms and find Mr. Gladwell. Those men from the State aren't heading up there today. They're going to send some other experts for that. You find him and tell him he can relax.

Elwood turns to where Harper points, up a dirt road that leads to the farms.

ELWOOD  
(talking too fast)  
I like the bleacher repair. We still need to paint, too. Can one of the little kids go?  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ELWOOD (CONT'D)  
 I don't even know what Mr. Gladwell  
 looks like, Mr. Harper, sir. Sir,  
 I'd rather work on the bleachers.

HARPER  
 (pissed)  
 Acting crazy today, all of you.  
 He's got a straw hat and a farmer  
 tan. You do what I asked you to do,  
 and on Friday it's back to usual.

He stalks off.

TURNER (O.S.)  
 I'll do it.

Elwood turns. Turner runs up beside him.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
 (exasperated)  
 What, Turner. What?

TURNER  
 That notebook you got in your  
 pocket. I'll get it to them, I'll  
 do it. Look at you, you look sick.

Elwood hesitates. A deep tremor runs through him. He looks at Turner.

TURNER (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 I can slip it in their car window  
 when they're not looking. They  
 won't even see.

CUT TO:

Turner's POV. Elwood tries to contain his emotion, reaches in his back pocket and gives Turner the notebook, all his anguished hope in this moment. Then he turns, and runs. Turner watches as Elwood runs towards the dirt road up to the fields, toward the horizon.

Turner POV from inside the Nickel Community Service van, watching the three Inspectors and Hardee lean into each other now that the State inspection is complete- conversing, laughing, almost merging as they take their leave...

JFK, who is holding his hat, flicks it so it rolls up on his arm and onto his head. The men all laugh: a well-oiled, surreally choreographed, impenetrable Good Ole Boy machine.

(CONTINUED)

TURNER (O.S.)  
(to himself)  
Goddam... C'mon. Now or never.

132A EXT. CURTIS HOME - FRENCHTOWN - 1967 - DAY (D-FF8) 132A

Adult Elwood (17) POV as his hand KNOCKS on the front door. SOUND of footsteps within slowly approaching.

Hattie cracks opens the door, peeks out through the gap where the door is chained. She quickly pulls the door shut. SOUND of her sliding the chain off.

A beat.

She opens the door wide now. She stands there, looking at him. Her eyes well, she starts to tremble with emotion.

133 EXT. NICKEL ACADEMY - BOOT HILL - 1967 - DAY (D66) 133

Elwood POV, walking, taking the long way back on the trail that circumnavigates Boot Hill. Then he steps off the path and walks through. Past the iron links embedded in the tree trunks. He is slow with his steps...

Postponing the inevitable consequences ahead, he starts whistling the Gospel song "*I Love the Lord, He Heard my Cry*" to give himself courage.

A breeze rustles through Boot Hill, swaying tree branches. In the distance ahead some fallen leaves spiral upward briefly in a wind eddy.

134 INT. NICKEL ACADEMY - SCHOOL HALLWAY - 1967 - DAY (D66) 134

Scene is B/W.

Turner POV walking down a school hallway when he encounters the skinny, frail MULE. It stands there with a long piece of straw in its mouth.

It looks at Turner, chewing the straw.

Unsure it's really there, Turner moves toward it and strokes the animal, then moves closer and grasps its mane, slowly twisting it to be sure it's real.

The mule looks at him, as if he's done something wrong.

135 INT. NICKEL ACADEMY - DORMITORY - 1967 - DUSK (D66) 135

Turner POV, in the middle of a card game. Other boys are hanging out.

JAIME (O.S.)  
(arriving)  
*Compas-*

Turner turns as Jaime enters, having run from the white side of campus.

JAIME (CONT'D)  
They will take him tonight.

TURNER (O.S.)  
Who? Elwood? Shit! I told him this would happen!

He springs to his feet and goes to Desmond and Mike.

TURNER (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
(alarmed)  
I didn't hear nobody out for ice cream? When did they get him?

The other boys look at him, grim.

BLACK MIKE  
They got him right after lunch.

TURNER (O.S.)  
Where is he?

Mike points upward.

DESMOND  
Sweatbox.

He also points upward.

TURNER (O.S.)  
He's been in there all day?

Turner slowly looks up to the ceiling, except there is no ceiling... only a pitch dark sky, like he's looking up into the heart of the universe. There is the seed of a faint SOUND... a human-engine screaming... and everything in the room begins subtly vibrating.

136 INT. NICKEL - ATTIC SWEAT BOX - 1967 - DUSK (D66) 136

Elwood POV in darkness inside the sweatbox in the attic above the dorm. The vibration increases gradually with the SOUND of the human-engine SCREAM escalating and transforms into a deeper ROAR... like the SOUND of a passenger jet falling in a death spiral... keening and careening toward Earth...

137 OMITTED 137

137A OMITTED 137A

138 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE 138

Mules and men, toppling, uprooting a colossal Southern tree.

139 INT. NICKEL ACADEMY - SWEAT BOX - 1967 - NIGHT (N66) 139

Elwood's POV in the darkness of the sweat box, claustrophobic, roving along the walls. SOUND of the door to the stairwell in the attic scraping against the floor. Faint footsteps outside. A shadow on the wall moves as a figure outside blocks the little light coming into the space. Elwood shifts, as if bracing himself. The bolt slides.

Light enters the darkness. There's a slim silhouette in the doorway that backs away from the initial stench.

CUT TO:

Turner's POV as Elwood's head emerges from the sweat box. He leans, like his head is too heavy for his neck, against the doorframe.

In the dim light, Turner glimpses the graffiti etched in the walls over the years. The desperate scratching and markings of blind creatures trying to see into themselves in the dark.

TURNER (O.S.)  
(whispering)  
They're going to take you out back  
tomorrow.

ELWOOD  
Yeah.

Like Turner is talking about someone else.

(CONTINUED)

TURNER (O.S.)  
 (whispering)  
 We got to get, man.

Elwood looks at him now, digesting the "we".

ELWOOD  
 Blakeley.

TURNER (O.S.)  
 (whispering)  
 C'mon.

Turner's hand reaches out and pulls Elwood up.

140 INT. NICKEL - HALLWAY - 1967 - NIGHT (N66)

140

Turner's POV watching Elwood painfully try to put his arm into the sleeve of the shirt that he arrived in Nickel at, his dehydrated body stiff and weak from the confinement.

141 INT. NICKEL - ANOTHER HALLWAY - 1967 - NIGHT (N66)

141

Elwood's POV of Turner creeping in front of him, also dressed in his regular clothes.

Turner moves stealthily past a warm light coming through the glazed panels in the door of an office. The voices of Spencer, Blakeley, Earl are recognizable among others. An OS poker game is going on in there. SOUND of cards being shuffled, chips moved around.

BLAKELEY (V.O.)  
 How you always know?

SPENCER (V.O.)  
 Well I don't know, do I? You play  
 the hand you're dealt. It's a  
 lesson Blakeley. I learnt a long  
 time ago.

BLAKELEY (V.O.)  
 (suspicious)  
 Well you sure get dealt queens  
 often. And aces.

EARL (V.O.)  
 They gonna shut us down?

Turner peeps in.

(CONTINUED)

SPENCER (V.O.)  
 I'll be god-damned if Tallahassee  
 tells me what to do. (to Earl) Open  
 the window, it's hot.

SOUND of a chair being pushed back. Turner ducks down as  
 Earl's shadow crosses the glazed window, then crosses back.

BLAKELEY (V.O.)  
 Move the button, let's go.

EARL (V.O.)  
 C'mon lady luck.

SPENCER (V.O.)  
 Didn't she leave you for another  
 man?

EARL (V.O.)  
 Shit's not funny guys, I ain't seen  
 my kids in six months.

BLAKELEY (V.O.)  
 Sounds lucky to me.

Laughter.

SPENCER (V.O.)  
 (resumes poker)  
 It is, it is. I call.

Elwood follows Turner past the door and around the corner.  
 Sound of the their voices fades, grows distant.

BLAKELEY (V.O.)  
 Call.

EARL (V.O.)  
 Raise, ten.

SPENCER (V.O.)  
 Call.

BLAKELEY  
 Fold. (meaning the queen) And there  
 she is. Careful Earl.

ELWOOD (V.O.)  
 (whispering; close)  
 Turner, why?

143

EXT. HARDEE HOUSE - 1967 - NIGHT (N66)

143

Turner's POV, moving swiftly along the edge of the swimming pool in the back yard of the Hardee house, glancing back at Elwood. Moonlight creates a silky reflection on the pool water.

TURNER (V.O.)

(whispering)

Shit- they been running around like bugs, all these lowlifes. Spencer. Hardee. Jaime heard them talking about taking you out back. That was it. Tonight or not at all.

The lights are on in the house, the Hardees have guests for dinner.

ELWOOD (V.O.)

(whispering)

Why you coming with me?

TURNER (V.O.)

(whispering)

They snatch you up in a hot minute, dumb as you are.

The matching BICYCLES are still there leaning on the porch.

CUT TO:

Elwood's POV as Turner gets on a bike and slowly pedals off, looking back over his shoulder.

ELWOOD (V.O.)

(whispering)

How long you been planning this?

TURNER (V.O.)

(whispering)

No outfoxing the dogs once they on your trail. Most you can do is get far away as you can. Put miles between you and them.

CUT TO:

Turner's POV of Elwood struggling to get on the other bike, finally getting going.

ELWOOD (V.O.)

(whispering)

Tallahassee?

(CONTINUED)

TURNER (V.O.)  
(whispering)  
Yeah, good. We can jump a train,  
and then those dogs going to need  
wings to catch us.

ELWOOD (V.O.)  
(whispering)  
They were going to kill me and bury  
me out there?

TURNER (V.O.)  
(whispering)  
Sure as shit.

144 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NEAR MARIANNA - DAWN INTO DAY (D67) 144

Elwood's POV as they ride, Turner's ahead setting the pace.

ELWOOD (V.O.)  
(whispering)  
You got me out.

TURNER (V.O.)  
(whispering)  
Yup.

TURNER (V.O.)  
(whispering)  
Can you ride it? We got to get far  
by sun up.

ELWOOD (V.O.)  
(whispering)  
I can do it.

The sky is growing lighter in the East. The road is desolate  
until the SOUND of a vehicle comes up behind them fast.

ELWOOD (O.S.)  
(calling out)  
Car.

They bike on. A red pick-up overtakes them and passes.

CUT TO:

Turner's POV, watching the car drive off as its lights fade  
away. He looks back at Elwood who grins and doubles down.  
He's sturdy, impressive, as the sun starts to come up.

144A EXT. DIRT ROAD - CANES FIELDS - MORNING (D67)

144A

Elwood's POV of Turner riding in front of him on a dirt road through the cane fields now, for awhile, this glorious sunny morning. Turner looks back smiling at Elwood, he laughs, joyful at the distance they've put between themselves and Nickel.

Turner rides some more, glances back again, but this time his expression changes.

CUT TO:

Turner's POV, he's looking at Elwood who is smiling, pushing hard, elated and looking straight at him. Behind Elwood he sees the Community Service Van flying toward them, closing in, headlights on, a cloud of dust in its wake.

CUT TO:

Elwood's POV of Turner veering his bike off the roadside, dropping it and sprinting. Turner throws a look back at Elwood.

TURNER  
(yelling)  
El! Follow me!

144B EXT. FURROWED CANE FIELD - MORNING [CONTINUOUS] (D67) 144B

Turner's POV running into a field of scorched cane, blackened earth furrows, looking back to see Elwood pull his bike to the side of the road, drop it and run as the Community Van bears down. One of the scars on his legs has re-opened and bled through his pants as the van pulls over to a roaring stop behind him and both doors fly open.

CUT TO:

Elwood's POV running across the furrows toward the woods beyond. SOUND of rifle shots.

CUT TO:

Turner's POV as he turns to see Harper chasing fast, carrying a RIFLE. The Nickel Guard remains by the van.

TURNER (O.S.)  
Faster! We got it! Run zig zag El,  
run zig zag!

Elwood pants, his mouth agape.

(CONTINUED)

144B CONTINUED:

114.  
144B

Turner zigs-

The first rifle shot misses.

Turner zags- He looks back, Harper is holding his rifle like his daddy taught him. HARPER LOOKS RIGHT AT HIM, MEETING HIS GAZE. Then he smirks, and shifts the rifle barrel toward Elwood.

TURNER (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
(anguished yell)  
No!!

Turner turns and stumbles, almost falling, just barely regaining his footing. BOOM! SOUND of a dull, distanced rifle shot. Turner doesn't look back, he runs.

CUT TO:

Elwood's POV from where he is lying on the ground looking at the landscape beyond his outstretched arm, like he did in his backyard when he was a little boy. Elwood turns to look up at the sky and Harper walks into FRAME with his rifle slung across his shoulders.

CUT TO:

Turner's POV, as he glances back instinctively, and sees Harper standing over Elwood with his rifle pointed down. He turns back around and runs for the woods. SOUND of two more muffled, distant rifle shots.

*Cue music: Ethiopiques, Tezata*

*The music ramps up until 8 seconds into the track, when it is at full volume, yet still ramping internally. Turner's breathing and footfalls as he runs overlay the track, with music continuing over whole movement that follows...*

145 OMITTED

145

145A ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

145A

Archival footage of a prison escape and pursuit. White men in uniform find a hat, gather their bloodhounds, mount horses, and begin a chase. Bloodhounds run through a swampy forest.

145B EXT. RURAL LANDSCAPE - FLORIDA - DUSK (D67)

145B

Turner POV as he runs through a grassy landscape at dusk.

(CONTINUED)

145B CONTINUED: 115.  
145B

Various shots as he keeps running.

145C ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE 145C

The prison escape chase scene continues... white men on horses galloping through wooded swampland, bloodhounds now onto a scent. Two 60s era military planes flying in formation. A bloodhound dog barking up a tree at the escapee-a black man who swats down at the dog.

146 OMITTED 146

147 EXT. RURAL LANDSCAPE - FLORIDA - NIGHT (N67) 147

Turner POV running, through the darkness, through the night, slowing down then starting up again... running straight out of himself.

148 OMITTED 148

149 OMITTED 149

150 MONTAGE - TURNER'S STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS 150

A rapid series of (mainly) archival images (3 min duration):

A150 ARCHIVAL A150

NASA booster cameras of a space shuttle.

B150 CREATED ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE B150

Faded 16mm B/W footage of Turner as preteen.

C150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE C150

B&W time-lapse MRI brain imaging scans.

D150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE D150

A Black woman stepping backward and gracefully stumbling over a picnic item on the ground.

- E150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE E150  
A disembodied black arm rapidly feeding license plates into an industrial license plate machine.
- F150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE F150  
Empty seats in an electric chair death penalty viewing room.
- G150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE G150  
A Black woman and shirtless Black man outside at a park lake, spontaneously moving in sync.
- H150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE H150  
A shirtless young Black boy and Black man (same as in previous) heartily shaking hands.
- I150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE I150  
A grandmother's gestural movement in a dimly lit kitchen.
- J150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE J150  
NASA booster cameras of a space shuttle.
- K150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE K150  
Electron microscope images of cells splitting, multiplying, consumed by others, alternating with the sequence of Black children below:
- L150 CREATED ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE L150  
A 10-image sequence (10x1 sec) CUs of Black children's eyes as they look straight into CAMERA, radiant, then look away, alternating with the above sequence of cells splitting.
- M150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE M150  
Institutional-style footage of an old reform school for boys, Deep South. The boys are well-dressed and the classroom is orderly. It appears like the ideal setting for learning.

N150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE N150  
A large displacement, as if by large dozers, of red-hued earth.

X150 CREATED ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE X150  
Black boys digging a pit that might be a grave. Red-hued earth.

O150 ARCHIVAL STILL O150  
1970 Fun Town ad: still of a Black family on a rollercoaster ride, with a radio jingle (interrupting Ethiopiques briefly) clearly aimed at Black families now.

P150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE P150  
Exterior, a big blinking bowling alley sign.

Q150 CREATED STILL Q150  
Elwood's birth certificate.

R150 CREATED STILL R150  
Elwood's school report card, straight-As.

S150 CREATED STILL S150  
Adult Elwood's social security card.

T150 OMITTED T150

U150 CREATED STILL U150  
The back of a photograph with 'Elwood, 11 years old, Christmas' handwritten by Hattie on it.

V150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE V150  
Christmas morning, Black boys opening packages under a tree. Baseball gloves, red sweaters or socks, bowties, boxes of tin army men... Boys from a nice house in a nice neighborhood...

W150 EXT. CURTIS HOME - FRENCHTOWN FL - 1967 -DAY (D-FF8) W150

[Continuation of Scene 132A.]

Hattie has opened her front door, eyes welling, trembling, she backs slowly away, shaking her head, unravelling, fending off the news that is implied by the arrival of - we now realize, TURNER, at her front door... that Elwood is dead.

Y150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE Y150

Interior of a railway boxcar: time-lapse of the monumental figure standing framed in the doorway of the outside, passing landscape.

Z150 CREATED ARCHIVAL Z150

The front page of *The Register*, a photo of Elwood protesting with Black youths outside the Tallahassee movie theatre playing *The Ugly American* and *Invaders from Mars*. Posters are visible from the films *What's New Pussycat?* and *The Greatest Story Ever Told*.

AA150 CREATED ARCHIVAL STILL AA150

The photo taken by the State photographer of Turner bending down in front of Harper in a framing designed to make him look subservient.

BB150 CREATED ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE (VIGNETTES) BB150

INT. ADULT ELWOOD'S APARTMENT - 2002 - NYC

POV through a camcorder of ADULT TURNER (52) sitting on a couch with a remote, flipping channels looking for a game. His wife Millie (OC) is looking through a new digital camcorder, trying it out.

INT. ADULT ELWOOD'S APARTMENT - 2002 - NYC

POV through a camcorder of ADULT TURNER (52) sleeping in bed. He awakens to find Millie filming him, she laughs.

Adult Turner takes the camcorder and pulls her close, lovingly, as they look into the monitor at themselves.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ADULT TURNER  
 (laughing)  
 What do you see?

MILLIE  
 (laughing)  
 Two beautiful beings.

ADULT TURNER  
 I love you, Millie.

MILLIE  
 (laughing)  
 Turner-

He aims the camera at both of them: heads together on the pillow, and his wife Millie (late 40s) comes into view, they are smiling together.

CC150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

CC150

That moment of stillness just before a massive mudslide. Then the mudslide starts.

DD150 CREATED ARCHIVAL STILL

DD150

The death notice for HARRIET JOHNSON (Hattie) in the Frenchtown newspaper. No photo.

*"Harriet Johnson (80) transitioned peacefully on December 25, 1998, surrounded by her family in Frenchtown, FL. A participant, with her husband Montgomery Johnson, in the Tallahassee Bus Boycotts of the 1960s. Beloved mother of Evelyn Curtis and mother-in-law to Percy Curtis, pre-deceased by her only grandchild Elwood Curtis. Memorial donations may be made in Hattie's name to the Children's Defense Fund, Washington DC."*

EE150 CREATED ARCHIVAL STILL

EE150

Still of the young woman from the stairwell scene with Horizon Movers, who resembles a younger Hattie, at the precise moment Adult Elwood (Turner) sees her.

FF150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

FF150

A glass-bottom boat in a Florida lake.

120.

- GG150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE GG150  
A young Black man and woman swimming underwater in the same Florida lake, holding up a sign that says "Paradise" and smiling for the camera.
- HH150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE HH150  
A Black man in a swimsuit diving off a board into a Hampton Hotel pool in Florida, his family posed on lounge chairs watching and smiling.
- II150 ARCHIVAL STILL II150  
Still of a white hotel owner dumping bleach into a pool where a Black family is swimming.
- JJ150 ARCHIVAL STILLS JJ150  
Rapid series of stills from the Dozier School for Boys forensic report documenting unearthed items - belt buckle, marbles, buttons, penny, watch, etc.
- KK150 CREATED ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE KK150  
Created archival footage of the Nickel White House freshly painted and pristine.
- LL150 CREATED ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE LL150  
Time-lapse footage from the bottom of a freshly dug grave, looking up toward the night sky passing overhead.
- MM150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE MM150  
Wide shot of Florida orange groves.
- NN150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE NN150  
Oranges moving on an industrial conveyor belt.
- OO150 CREATED ARCHIVAL STILL OO150  
Promo photo of Spencer with a young Black Nickel boy on his shoulders, showcasing his fatherly benevolence.

- PP150 ARCHIVAL STILL PP150  
An illustrated postcard of a black boy being used as a bait to lure an alligator toward a white hunter with a rifle.
- QQ150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE OR STILLS QQ150  
GPR images: actual bones and graves found in the ground at the Dozier School for Boys.
- RR150 CREATED STILLS RR150  
Family photo of Elwood with Hattie, his mother Evelyn, his father Percy.  
CU Evelyn, CU Percy, CU Hattie, CU Elwood from the same image.
- SS150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE SS150  
A helicopter searching a devastated landscape after a mudslide.
- TT150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE TT150  
A person being rescued by another person during a natural disaster.  
*Music begins fading out, a light breathing becomes AUDIBLE.*
- UU150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE UU150  
NASA booster cameras of a space shuttle.
- VV150 OMITTED VV150
- WW150 ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE WW150  
A grandmotherly woman, hugging her two children at either side of her, smiling into camera.
- GO TO BLACK.
- MILLIE (V.O.)  
Turner, what are you going to do?  
Are you really going to go?

YY150 EXT. NICKEL GROUNDS - 1967 - DAY

YY150

Turner POV looking up at a beautiful canopy of trees in the morning sunlight. Elwood enters frame above him and peers down and laughs. He walks around the top of what's clearly an open grave. He smiles and throws out his hand. Turner's hand comes up to meet his, and he clasps it tight to pull Turner out.

GO TO BLACK.

**Cue music:**

Sidney Poitier, singing *Lost John / Long Gone* acapella.

As credits roll, transition to another song.