

BUCHANAN COUNTY

Written by

Sophia Colby

scolby@oberlin.edu
925-784-7094

EXT. BUCHANAN COUNTY, VIRGINIA - PRESENT

A couple of lonely roads wind alongside rivers through the Appalachian mountains on the border of Virginia, Kentucky, and West Virginia. A few thousand people live here and that number dwindles every year.

On these roads are a couple fast food places frequented by truckers.

Several small churches--mostly Baptist.

A gigantic multi-story wal-mart, the escalators inside of which are the most exciting thing in a fifty mile radius.

But mostly just abandoned coal mines and breathtaking wilderness.

In front of crumbling mobile homes and trailers always in the process of either recovering from or sustaining flood damage, a Trump sign in every yard. He is no longer president at this point. Everything and everyone here is just barely holding together.

EXT. HURLEY HIGH SCHOOL

A sprawling mass of brick rectangles. The front entrance is painted with a giant Confederate battle flag.

The school's mascot, a cartoon Confederate soldier, is proudly displayed on a sign that reads "Hurley High School: Home of the Rebels."

INT. HURLEY HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

Everyone speaks in a central/south-central Appalachian accent/dialect.

A calculus class in an institutional, bare classroom. A TEACHER uses a dirty chalkboard to lecture to rows of bored STUDENTS. Every single person here is white. No one looks like they belong in a Hollywood movie. Most don't want to.

Among the students is CONNOR (about 19)--reserved and tightly wound. Always wears long sleeves. He plays his accent down when he feels he can get away with it.

Sitting directly in front of Connor is SILAS (about 19)--effortless in a classic Americana way. Perhaps uncannily so. A football player. Plays his accent up.

Connor can't stop staring at the back of Silas' head, entirely dissociated from the lesson.

TEACHER

Connor, come give it a shot.

The teacher has a problem written up on the board that Connor is supposed to solve. He doesn't process this.

The class laughs lightly at him as he continues to stare. The laughing intensifies the longer he is unable to snap out of his trance.

SILAS

(turning around;
sympathetic)

Connor.

Connor immediately looks away, scared and ashamed. He stands abruptly, his chair squeaking against the floor.

He heads to the board and solves the equation without a thought, then all but runs back to his desk and hides his head in his arms.

The teacher calms the class down. Silas turns to glance at Connor again, but Connor is determinedly pretending not to exist.

INT. CLASSROOM - LATER

Students pack up and funnel out of the math class. Silas gives it another shot, good-humored:

SILAS

Have I seen you at the lake?

Connor ignores him, focusing on packing up. This isn't mean-spirited--he's afraid.

SILAS (CONT'D)

Math don't make a single bit of sense to me.

Connor spills the contents of his backpack in his desperation. He tries to pick up his things but his hands shake too much.

SILAS (CONT'D)

I'm not gonna bite you--

CONNOR

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

SILAS
(privately)
...Well that's a right shame.

Silas picks up Connor's stuff and gives it to him. Lingers for a second.

Connor takes his stuff and books it out of the classroom.

Silas remains, both confused and oddly charmed.

EXT. LAKE - SUNRISE

A calm, secluded lake in the lush wooded mountains. A cloudless, warm day. The natural beauty is staggering.

Connor perches on a rocky outcropping doing some fishing. He works the bait onto the line and casts it out deftly. He knows what he's doing, though his heart isn't in it.

Silas does his own fishing some distance away on the shore, equally competent, finding real joy. As always, Connor is transfixed by him, though he tries hard not to be, and hopes to be ignored.

Silas glances at him, secure in the knowledge that Connor is always staring. Connor glances away quickly. Silas smiles to himself.

Abruptly, Silas sets aside his fishing rod and takes a running jump into the water. It's cold, exhilarating.

SILAS
Hey!

Connor almost drops his fishing rod in his nervousness.

SILAS (CONT'D)
Swim with me.

Connor pretends not to hear. Silas swims over and splashes his legs. This almost makes Connor smile.

SILAS (CONT'D)
What is your problem anyway?

CONNOR
...It would kinda take a while to explain.

He didn't mean it as a joke but Silas laughs in a good-natured way, which comforts Connor.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
(almost daring to try to
match his energy)
What's... yours?

SILAS
(laughs)
I don't have a problem.

CONNOR
Too bad.

A small shared smile.

SILAS
Come on, jump.

CONNOR
You're kidding--

SILAS
It's deep--

CONNOR
I'll hit my head--

SILAS
(really trying it)
I'll catch you--

CONNOR
(strongly)
No.

SILAS
...Suit yourself.

CONNOR
...You could come up.

Silas climbs up the rocks and sits next to Connor.

He got in over his head and doesn't know what to actually say now. He tries a few times but can't.

Now that Connor could be openly staring, he again can barely tear his eyes from the water.

Silas takes Connor's hand very gently.

Several charged moments. Neither moves a muscle.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
I'm a guy.

SILAS
I noticed.

Several beats.

CONNOR
Haven't you heard you're going to
hell?

Silas again laughs. It might be nervous, ridiculing, or it might be a genuine dark sense of humor.

Connor waits for an answer. Silas doesn't have one.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
Thanks.

SILAS
For--?

CONNOR
For noticing.

SILAS
You're welcome.

They look out over the water and Connor squeezes his hand.

In a series of shots, their relationship deepens and grows over their last several months of high school:

EXT. HURLEY HIGH SCHOOL - FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

Game day-- Silas leads the Hurley High ""Rebels"" FOOTBALL TEAM, a group of several boys who are nominally Silas' close friends, as they run out onto the field, holding the Confederate flag. The energy of the space is for once exuberant rather than exhausted, resentful, nervous.

Silas scores a touchdown, the winning point.

The assembled crowd goes wild. Silas' teammates lift him onto their shoulders. Silas' eyes go straight to Connor, who cheers in the stands, looking genuinely proud, even adoring.

INT. HURLEY HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

Sitting next to each other in calculus now, Connor's sleeve rides up a bit and Silas notices what is definitely a scar from a small knife on his wrist.

Connor yanks his sleeve down right away, horrified. He knows Silas knows and that he won't buy the usual false explanations.

Connor once again ashamedly runs off with the rest of the students as soon as class is over, leaving Silas reeling--

But after several moments Connor runs right back inside and hugs Silas hard. Silas receives it, relieved and scared at once.

INT. HURLEY HIGH SCHOOL - GYM - NIGHT

Silas stands on a stage in a suit that doesn't fit him, getting crowned prom king.

He dances with the PROM QUEEN, enjoying himself well enough.

He then leaves her as soon as the song is over. She's sad to see him go.

He and Connor spend the rest of the night gluttonously eating and drinking from the refreshments table, talking and laughing.

EXT. LAKE - NIGHT

An innocent but heartfelt first kiss, still in their prom outfits. They share equal enthusiasm for it.

INT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Bordering on poverty but just missing it. Full of real love and a sense of comfort and coziness.

Connor and Silas sit at the counter of a well-used kitchen, working on homework. Connor helps Silas from time to time.

SILAS' MOM--(late 30s, noticeably young), warm but strong and shares Silas' innate spark--pours three glasses of iced sweet tea from a pitcher. She smiles at Connor as she sets his glass in front of him.

EXT. HURLEY HIGH SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

Students wait for the bus home. Silas hangs out with the football team, roughhousing and joking around.

Silas notices Connor sitting by himself and gives him a bro nod to welcome him over to the group.

Connor comes over, is appreciative of Silas' effort but remains withdrawn and cautious.

A football player shoves Connor, directly on the line between playful and bullying, and Connor pretends not to be affected.

Silas assumes the best of his teammate and laughingly shoves him back with no anger or hurt behind it.

INT. CONNOR'S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - NIGHT

A small room with no decorations or clutter--Connor has been ready for some time to leave in one way or another.

He neatly places a bunch of things into a bag, for once not nervous at all, as indistinct shouting--a man's voice and a woman's voice--drifts through the walls.

He tries his bedroom door. It's locked and barricaded from the outside and won't open.

He digs his nails into the rusty hinges to try to rip them off. It doesn't work.

He opens his second-story window. The drop to the grass below won't kill him, but there's no way he won't get seriously hurt.

Another glance at the door. The shouting grows yet more agitated. Ominous heavy footsteps.

He grits his teeth and jumps out.

EXT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - NIGHT

There's a vegetable garden outside as well as several chickens roaming around.

Connor knocks, having just jumped out his window and badly hurt himself. His knees are bloody and he can barely stand.

Silas opens the door. His mom joins him in hugging and fussing over Connor.

INT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

After a few weeks - Connor sits on a stool, bruised but decently recovered. Silas comes in with their final report cards, which were mailed.

They open up the envelopes. Silas fails to disguise his disappointment in himself. Connor likewise fails to disguise his self-satisfaction.

Silas takes Connor's report card and tapes it to his own family's fridge, proud of him.

INT. HURLEY HIGH SCHOOL - GYM - DAY

A class of about forty seniors--including Connor and Silas--in red and blue gowns toss graduation caps in front of a painting of the Confederate flag on the gym wall, smiling for cameras.

Connor takes a seat off to the side, watching families socialize, watching Silas.

Silas easily, happily talks to a wide array of people from his mom to his teammates to his teachers, who all group up around him to congratulate him. Silas excuses himself from this.

Silas joins Connor. They elbow each other affectionately.

SILAS

Well?

CONNOR

Well what?

SILAS

...What next?

They smile.

EXT. HURLEY HIGH SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

Still in their graduation gowns, Connor and Silas play around in the parking lot, balancing on the concrete. Silas is finding Connor's suggestions funny.

CONNOR

Richmond... Louisville... Atlanta,
can you imagine--?

Silas is suddenly laughing at rather than laughing with.

CONNOR (CONT'D)

I'd love to see Atlanta.

SILAS

You would.

CONNOR

...Um?

SILAS

I'd like to take a moment to remind
you that you're a hillbilly--

CONNOR

You're the only one who seems to
think so.

SILAS

(deeply felt)

Course you are. Course.

CONNOR

Atlanta is in Appalachia--

SILAS

Please--

CONNOR

Okay the foothills--

SILAS

(derogatory)

Foothills--

CONNOR

My family's lived in the same 50
miles since 1643.

SILAS

Right.

CONNOR

Ain't it supposed to change--?

SILAS

You ain't talking about change,
you're talking about just avoiding
your problems--

CONNOR

Yeah I'M avoiding my problems,
that's what I'M doing.

SILAS

I thought you liked living with us?

CONNOR

(shamed)

I really appreciate--

SILAS
But do you LIKE it?

Connor feels the back of his own neck. Definitely a bit sunburned.

CONNOR
Don't it feel like wasting a chance?

SILAS
Are you really serious?

CONNOR
I don't know...

SILAS
It's damn expensive--

CONNOR
But there's work out there--

SILAS
We can't leave.
(a little desperate)
You can't leave.

Connor picks up on the panic and briefly squeezes Silas' shoulder to comfort him.

CONNOR
I won't leave you.

INT. STORE - DAY - MONTHS LATER

Connor works as a cashier in a seedy gas station convenience store, still in Buchanan County. The florescent lighting is harsh and cold, and one light just above him flickers. It bothers him.

A WOMAN comes up to the counter, listening to music on headphones as she scrolls through her phone.

CONNOR
Did you find everything okay?

She doesn't acknowledge him. He rings her up.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
Cash or card?

She doesn't acknowledge him, puts her card into the machine. Connor hands her the receipt and her bagged items.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
Have a nice day.

She goes. A MAN approaches.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
You find everything okay?

The man motions for a pack of cigarettes. Connor grabs them and rings him up.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
Cash or--?

The man dumps an entire pocket's worth of loose change on the counter.

Connor looks up at him for a moment, incredulous, then quickly counts out the total, gives him his receipt.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
Have a nice day.

Man goes. Connor stares at the flickering light like he wants to murder it.

INT. STORE - EVENING - LATER

In the back, Connor clocks out and then scans a schedule calendar pinned to the wall, searching for shifts that haven't yet been claimed.

He and Silas' names appear on the schedule, Silas for night shifts and Connor for day shifts, but not frequently, just two of several dozen employees in desperate need of work.

Connor flips through the pages and can't find an extra free shift for weeks.

EXT. HOUSE FOR SALE - SUNSET

Connor walks back home from work along a road with lush green woods on either side. It's still unbelievably, breathtakingly beautiful out here. He notices a little house by the side of the road, modest but in good shape, well cared for.

A moving van is parked out front. A couple with a young son load boxes into it from the house. Connor pauses to watch enviously for a moment.

The FATHER of this family scoops the SON up into his arms and surveys the truck.

FATHER
Hope we'll have space for all this
in Richmond...

Connor moves along.

EXT. WOODS - SUNSET

Silas--wearing camo--crouches in the bushes, confidently aiming a hunting rifle at a squirrel.

He exhales, at peace for a second, and takes the shot.

INT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - KITCHEN - EVENING

Silas and his mom cook together. Silas chops garlic and onions with a sure hand and passes the cutting board to his mom.

Silas' mom throws the aromatics into a pot with some oil. They sizzle. She adds stock, carrots, potatoes, the squirrel meat.

Silas grabs ground cayenne pepper off the shelf and dumps a good amount into the pot. He considers adding more. She laughingly confiscates the spice from him and smooths his hair down.

Connor unlocks the front door. Silas runs to him.

CONNOR
It smells so good in here--

Silas drags him off.

INT. SILAS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

A small room with two twin beds. Silas' side is cluttered, packed with trophies and accolades. Connor's is still totally bare.

Silas drags Connor inside, then lifts him by the waist and spins him around once before setting him down and kissing his cheek. It cheers Connor up a little.

SILAS
How was work?

CONNOR
The damn light still won't stop
buzzing--

SILAS

I'll take a look, I bet I can fix it--

CONNOR

Might take an electrician. Do you think I'd know if I went crazy or would it just happen?

SILAS

(innocent)

Can I make your day any better?

(not)

Surely there's something I can do for you.

Connor rolls his eyes and kisses Silas.

All at once: footsteps, Silas shoves Connor away hard enough for him to fall back on a bed, Silas' mom comes in.

SILAS' MOM

I'm gonna head to work, just help yourselves when you're hungry--

SILAS

(effortless)

Okay, thanks.

She leaves them be.

Silas extends a hand to help Connor up, too sorry to cheapen it by saying so.

Connor is not in the mood for this today and stands up himself.

INT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - NIGHT

After dinner. Silas and Connor sit on the couch, watching a movie. Silas is enjoying it.

CONNOR

You're gonna be late.

SILAS

I got time.

CONNOR

You don't.

SILAS

I walk fast.

Neither moves. Connor starts quietly repeating words and lines after the movie actors, in the actors' accents. Silas tries to ignore it but can't.

SILAS (CONT'D)
Would you shut up with that?

CONNOR
Do I embarrass you?

SILAS
It don't have nothing to do with you. I can't concentrate.

CONNOR
Okay.

SILAS
Your accent is beautiful. It's a part of you and I don't--

CONNOR
It just *happened* to me, how does that make it part of me? ...I bet in Richmond everybody goes to college at our age, probably don't even leave their city but they get their own space--

SILAS
This ain't Richmond--

CONNOR
So if anything it's weird that you DON'T want some privacy.

SILAS
Didn't say that.

Connor listens hopefully.

SILAS (CONT'D)
Never said that...

Silas continues thinking about it. Connor shuts up.

SILAS (CONT'D)
(not cruel)
Anything else?

CONNOR
No.

Silas gets up and leaves for work.

INT. STORE - NIGHT

Silas finishes checking out a customer. He eyes the flickering light.

He gets up on the counter and takes a closer look at it.

He messes with the bulb, unscrewing and re-screwing it. As he finishes, it electrically shocks him. He winces and pulls his hand back.

But the light stops flickering. Silas smiles.

INT. STORE - SUNRISE

Silas clocks out blearily, having just worked through the night.

He scans the schedule in the same way Connor did, flipping through page after page of no empty shifts.

EXT. HOUSE FOR SALE - SUNRISE

Walking home, Silas passes the house of the young couple, who are now moved out. A sign in the yard--for sale.

Silas deliberates, then takes a look at one of the flyers attached to the sign.

He folds it up neatly and puts it in his pocket before continuing on his way.

INT. HOUSE FOR SALE - DAY

Silas and Connor walk through the house. Silas has been here before, is excited and mostly focused on Connor's reactions.

Connor looks around, trying to be the partner he thinks Silas deserves.

They come upon the kitchen. Silas messes with the stove.

SILAS

Look, it's gas.

Connor smiles as convincingly as he can.

SILAS (CONT'D)

Just imagine. Us. Dinner party hosts. Sophistication. Get together.

(MORE)

SILAS (CONT'D)
(pronouncing phonetically)
Hors d'oeuvres.

CONNOR
(pronouncing the French
way)
Who are we inviting for hors
d'oeuvres?

SILAS
I think the team would enjoy it if
they opened their minds.

Connor laughs halfheartedly, just an acknowledgment that
Silas made a joke. They meander into a spare bedroom.

SILAS (CONT'D)
My cousins could stay for Christmas
and stuff, you'd love them. Or um.
You never know. Extra space. Real
nice.

They wind up in the master bedroom. Silas takes Connor's hand
confidently.

CONNOR
(gently)
How are we supposed to afford this?

SILAS
You like it--?

CONNOR
Well it's-- Course I think it's. A
nice house.

SILAS
I like it too.

CONNOR
Darling. We are broke--

SILAS
At the moment, but--

CONNOR
Do you plan on winning the lottery?

Silas laughs at himself.

INT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - NIGHT

On a bulky desktop straight out of 2006 located in some central living area, Silas does an internet search for Richmond VA jobs. The search takes a minute to load. Silas is patient with it.

Skimming the job listings, he has the sinking feeling that Connor was right about some things.

CONNOR (O.S.)
(calling from some other
part of the house)
Silas.

Silas glances at the time on the computer. He's going to be late for work.

SILAS
Thank you.

CONNOR (O.S.)
Course.

He jumps up and heads out the door without closing his tabs.

INT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - BATHROOM - DAY

Connor sits on the floor, hyperventilating and shaking, scratching his nails over his arms hard. He wants badly to stop, is working hard to resist himself.

All at once he can't hold out any longer, shakily pulls out a pocketknife, flips the blade open--

EXT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - CONTINUOUS

Silas takes a seat on the floor just outside the bathroom door, apparently unmoved, in reality unequipped to even understand what he's feeling, let alone express it.

SILAS
(is he alive?)
Connor...?

An awful silence.

CONNOR (O.S.)
(through the door)
It was never supposed to be your
problem. You were never supposed to
know.

Silas is relieved.

SILAS

...It won't always be this way.

Silas waits for a response. Connor has nothing to say.

Silas leans his head against the door.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

A one room church packed with people sitting in creaky wooden pews. Silas spaces out, sitting somewhere in the back with his mom on one side and Connor on the other. Connor pays too much attention, looking pale as he stays as close to Silas as he dares. Silas' mom reacts much like Connor.

The PASTOR gives an abridged reading from Corinthians 6:12-6:20, New International Version:

PASTOR

"I have the right to do anything,"
you say--but not everything is
beneficial. By his power God raised
the Lord from the dead, and he will
raise us also. Flee from sexual
immorality. All other sins a person
commits are outside the body, but
whoever sins sexually, sins against
their own body. Do you not know
that your bodies are temples of the
Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom
you have received from God? You are
not your own; you were bought at a
price. Therefore honor God with
your bodies.

Connor absently clutches his wrists for further security.
Silas' mom worries at a necklace of the cross.

INT. CHURCH - LATER

Another moment of uncharacteristic levity and uplift as
people get up and mingle with each other after the service.

Connor shoves his way past people-- Silas watches him go with
some concern but knows Connor will open up only when he's
ready.

INT. CHURCH - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Connor kneels and retches into the toilet.

INT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

People continue to mingle.

Silas leads a game of hide and seek with a bunch of kids and tweens, some of which are his cousins and second cousins. They all adore him. He closes his eyes and starts counting down. They all gleefully scatter. The pastor watches, endeared.

PASTOR
(interrupting)
You're pretty good with them.

SILAS
Oh, it's fun.

PASTOR
Some of them don't come from the most stable environments unfortunately. What you're doing means a lot... If you're interested, we got the daycare program here.

SILAS
(thrilled)
Can Connor do it also?

PASTOR
Despite your good influence...
Connor seems to be struggling right now?

Silas pretends not to know what he means.

[This is the thing that Silas could do, cutting to him interacting with these kids who are already pretty hopeless and like Connor yearning to get out as soon as possible]

EXT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Connor leans against the wall, more collected. Silas stands next to him.

SILAS
Nobody takes it completely literal
you know, even folks who want to.

CONNOR
You wouldn't make someone so
special just to punish them.

Silas speechless. Connor checks his surroundings and quickly kisses Silas' hand. He manages a smile. They head back inside.

INT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - SILAS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Feeling relatively safe from the late hour, something like 2AM, Silas and Connor kiss intensely. Silas boldly lets his hand drift down.

Connor draws back, more confused what Silas is trying than anything. Silas respects the gesture and lets go of him.

Connor realizes and smiles.

SILAS
You alright?

CONNOR
Uh, yeah. You don't have to.
(clarifying)
Sex.
(further clarifying)
You're supposed to want it, or
reject it, but you don't have to
feel anything about it.

SILAS
...I don't want it if you're
uncomfortable with it.

This is again confusing to Connor. But he likes how Silas is looking at him.

SILAS (CONT'D)
I didn't mean to pressure you, I'm
sorry. We can stop.

CONNOR
No, go ahead.

SILAS
Only if you want to, I mean it.

Connor smiles and resumes the kiss.

INT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - MORNING

Silas' mom sits at the computer with a cup of coffee. She sees the job posting board Silas left open.

He comes through the front door, back from work.

SILAS' MOM
Why didn't you tell me?

Silas freezes, mortified, not sure what she found.

SILAS' MOM (CONT'D)
I just would've liked to have been told directly.

SILAS
...I don't want you to see me different.

SILAS' MOM
Sweetie. I mean. Course I'd rather you not, I'd rather nobody bother with this. I really thought you ain't the type--

SILAS
There ain't no type. Okay Connor's the type but ain't nothing wrong with that neither--

SILAS' MOM
It is what it is. Times are changing.

SILAS
Really?

SILAS' MOM
Yeah. I won't pretend I never thought about it myself.

SILAS
...What?

SILAS' MOM
Everybody's doing it these days. Don't think I could forgive myself though. I trust you. Do what you gotta do. But they ain't your friends out there. And you better call me, and you better come home for holidays--

SILAS
What are we talking about, ma?

He checks out the computer. The job listings.

SILAS (CONT'D)
Right, no, agreed, that was
Connor's idea--

SILAS' MOM
Oh. Too bad. I'll miss him.

Silas is touched.

SILAS
Connor was looking at it because we
were thinking about saving for that
house down the way.

SILAS' MOM
He was thinking about it?

SILAS
Yeah.

SILAS' MOM
Just like him to slip away. Well
you tell him he ain't gonna leave
MY house without a proper goodbye.

She sees through him better than he sees himself.

SILAS' MOM (CONT'D)
Come here sweetie.

Silas hugs her. She strokes his hair again. He still won't
betray any feeling at all.

SILAS' MOM (CONT'D)
You're gonna miss your friend?

Silas nods.

SILAS' MOM (CONT'D)
But he'll be back in no time,
right?

He nods.

INT. SILAS' BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Alone for a moment, Silas shuts the door and studies himself.
His clothes are too nice looking for his tastes.

Maybe too much "the type." He rumples himself up on purpose and then hurries out the door.

INT. STORE - DAY

Connor works the register. He is once again gazing at the now fixed light, unreadable.

Silas bursts through the door and goes to the counter.

Again, Silas can't figure out what to say. He has an intensity that is hard to look directly at, but Connor does now.

CONNOR
Thanks for fixing it.

SILAS
What? No problem.

CONNOR
...You wanna buy something, or...?

Silas grabs a sweet tea from a fridge and sets it on the checkout counter.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
(a joke)
You find everything okay?

They both smile with some degree of bitterness.

Silas looks around, stalling. The store is empty save for one other employee.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
Just tell me where the body is and
I'll see what I can do--

SILAS
To have a life here that you're
okay with we have to get money and
there's no money here.

Connor pays attention. This is too good to be true. Silas doesn't back down.

Connor tosses his name tag aside, locks up the till and turns off the register. He hops over the counter, stealing the sweet tea as he goes out the door.

EXT. HOUSE FOR SALE - CONTINUOUS

Connor and Silas walk back home, Connor uncharacteristically exuberant and Silas uncharacteristically somber. They pass the stolen tea back and forth. Connor doesn't even look at their potential future home as they pass it, while Silas gives it a longing glance.

CONNOR

--a billion museums, there's natural history, non-natural history, I think there's three art museums or something like that, and one of them has Vincent Van Gogh paintings, and the James river goes right through the middle, it's gorgeous in photos, like glass, and there's theaters, stages, wouldn't that be cool, to see a play with real actors, real musicians, and there's buses, bus stops, the Virginia capitol building, marble columns and shit, like some George Washington shit--

Silas stopped walking at some point in the middle of all this. Connor turns back and goes to him, embarrassed.

SILAS

I bet they don't have a good lake.

Silas briefly, partially reveals a bit of sadness. Connor is very concerned, never having seen Silas like this before. He touches Silas gently but at arm's length, deniable enough for a public space.

SILAS (CONT'D)

I don't want to.

CONNOR

(empathizing)

It's a lot of change--

SILAS

I just always grew up thinking that. That I was gonna. Get married in that church, and send my kids to Hurley, and teach my son to shoot in those woods and I can't--

CONNOR

It's okay--

SILAS
I can't just go--

CONNOR
Look at me.

Silas does.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
You can stay for now. Visit me real
real soon. And little by little it
won't even feel like a difference
anymore.

SILAS
And it'll be over in no time.

Silas takes a few breaths. They start walking alongside each other again.

INT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - EVENING

Silas' mom presents a going away apple stack cake. Connor smiles at her with genuine, deep gratitude.

INT. SILAS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

A clock somewhere reads 4AM. Connor's bag is packed and resting next to the door.

Connor is sleeping soundly. Silas is awake, apprehensive.

Silas slides out of his own bed and into Connor's. Connor puts an arm around him and Silas settles in.

SILAS
...Connor?

CONNOR
Mm?

SILAS
I have a question.

CONNOR
(annoyed)
Si.

SILAS
It's really important.

Connor wakes up to listen.

SILAS (CONT'D)
Would you still love me if I was a
worm?

Connor hits him with a pillow. Silas cracks up.

SILAS (CONT'D)
(serious)
Okay but would you?

CONNOR
...What is the correct answer--?

SILAS
The answer is yes--

CONNOR
But you would be incapable of
complex thought.

SILAS
Why would you say that to me?

CONNOR
You asked.

Beat.

They laugh together. Connor pulls him closer. Silas accepts
it happily, is more at peace.

EXT. BUCHANAN COUNTY - DAWN

A pickup truck owned by some builders/house contractors idles
on the side of the road as a few men fill it with wood and
other materials. Connor helps them load up.

When the workers are done, they hop in the cargo bed.

Connor hesitates for just the span of a breath, taking in his
world anew. Beautiful and barren. He crosses himself and
briefly closes his eyes, maybe praying.

And then he hops onto the truck. It pulls into the road and
off he finally goes.

EXT. BUCHANAN COUNTY - CONTINUOUS

The scenery goes by. Mountains and trees. Connor hugs his bag
and smiles, closing his eyes in the sunshine.

EXT. RICHMOND, VIRGINIA - DAY

Connor jumps off the back of the truck in downtown Richmond. His traveling companions wave a good natured farewell to him and continue on their way.

He looks around, the world spinning. People, cars, movement, light, energy. He's too overwhelmed to do anything but stand there.

A pedestrian jostles him, snapping him out of it. People file around him, ignore him.

He slowly grins, then takes off running down the streets like a madman, going nowhere in particular, happy to be doing so. He takes it all in:

--Street performers who have a nice groove going drumming on a collection of buckets. Onlookers barely stop to notice. Connor gives them a dollar.

--Blocks upon blocks of tall and skinny colonial style brick houses. Everything is faded, gritty, warm. Literally warm, no trees in sight. For better or worse, feels like a place that was once important in history.

--An involved crosswalk signal system which Connor ignores out of force of habit, leading to him almost getting hit by a couple of cars.

--The Virginia capitol building in the distance.

--A ballet company with posters advertising some show or another. Connor finds this especially interesting.

EXT. MALL - DAY

At a more conservative walking pace, Connor meanders through an outdoor/uncovered shopping mall that caters to the upper-middle class, to white people. It's busy.

As he wanders through, he notices two men--husbands--having a rest, giving their two young children a snack. They look classy, wholly respectable. Connor watches, inspired.

The two men notice Connor. He smiles tentatively. They quickly look him over and then turn back to their business.

Connor checks himself. He looks scuzzy.

INT. CLOTHING STORE - CONTINUOUS

Connor meanders into a store that has the same aesthetic as the couple did. He picks up a shirt that's similar to what they were wearing and checks the price.

80 dollars. Connor gently places the shirt back on the rack, smoothing over any possible indentations his fingers may have left.

EXT. MALL - CONTINUOUS

Connor is tired of walking, and the mall rest areas are full. He finds a CHAIN COFFEE SHOP. Through their front window, lots of empty couches and tables.

INT. CHAIN COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Customers write in expensive leather notebooks about being sad, grow their professional networks, and otherwise act like the main character.

Connor collects himself and goes to the counter, but struggles to make sense of the menu.

ALE (Spanish short for Alejandro/a: "AH-ley") (early 20s, Latino, any pronouns) works at one register--there is a second, not being used. They exude influencer energy. Long hair trendily clipped up, with full face makeup looks. Has a flippant sense of humor and a bad hangover, always. (This mall is not full of out queer people--just the two lowkey ones from before, and Ale, who really sticks out also as the only person of color.)

ALE

Hey, what can I get started for you?

Connor is totally stuck, again staring. It's not a totally respectful stare this time.

ALE (CONT'D)

(an in-joke)

Iced coffee?

Connor looks at them, confused.

As an explanation and another in-joke, Ale lets their wrist go limp. Connor is more confused.

ALE (CONT'D)

Okay...

Connor continues to be stuck. Ale is patient for a while although also put off, then glances behind Connor to check on the line.

ALE (CONT'D)
You want some water?

CONNOR
(accent comes out)
That'd be--

He shuts up before he can mess up more.

ALE
Ice in that?

A sign next to the register--"Help wanted, \$14 an hour, full time with benefits."

CONNOR
Is this real? Can I talk to your manager--?

ALE
What if I'M the manager? Did you think of that?
(beat)
I'll grab her.

Ale heads to the back.

INT. CONNOR'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Connor checks out his new place, an old studio apartment about as big as a closet, unfurnished, dirty. The one window looks out onto a highway. Traffic noises drift in. The sounds of an ambulance.

Connor sits on the floor in the corner. He digs through his bag and finds a photo of Silas--the one taken during graduation day in the gym with the flag background--which he carefully props up against the wall.

He lays down on the floor and puts his bag under his head, stares at the photo of Silas until he can't keep his eyes open anymore.

INT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - SILAS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Silas stares at the empty bed. He doesn't sleep.

INT. CHAIN COFFEE SHOP - BATHROOM - DAWN

Connor puts on his uniform apron and nametag and checks his appearance in the mirror. Ale does the same. Unsatisfied, Ale takes out a lipstick and touches up. Connor's distaste and second-hand embarrassment is especially obvious.

Ale knows full well what he's thinking but chooses to ignore it.

CONNOR

Why do you make yourself look like
a woman?

ALE

(serene)

Why do YOU make yourself look like
you just hopped off a pickup truck
from fuckall, Kentucky?

CONNOR

It's a Brokeback homage...

ALE

Oh. I'm genderfluid.

CONNOR

Why are you making things harder
for yourself?

ALE

Beauty is simply my burden to bear.

CONNOR

But actually.

ALE

Have you tried a niacinamide serum?

CONNOR

What?

ALE

For your skin barrier.

CONNOR

What?

ALE

It's damaged.

Connor pretends not to let this affect him. Ale goes.

Connor slowly touches his face, inspecting his pores. His skin barrier probably IS damaged, whatever that means. He stops himself and follows Ale out.

INT. CHAIN COFFEE SHOP - BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Before opening. Ale and Connor "count in" two register tills, under the supervision of a MANAGER. This is the process of going through each bill and coin type and writing down how many of each there are, plus what they total up to.

Connor is tearing through this task with confidence, silently counting and then multiplying to arrive at his totals. Ale counts out loud by increments (20, 40, 60...) and has to start over once or twice. Again, he's hungover.

The manager comes and signs off on Connor's count and he takes his till to a register when Ale is only partway through. A weird type of comeuppance, but still.

Ale glances at Connor, a bit annoyed to be outshined on a first day. They count faster.

INT. CHAIN COFFEE SHOP - AFTERNOON

Connor is getting the hang of making drinks. Manager taps him to let him go on break.

INT. CHAIN COFFEE SHOP - BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Connor passes Ale, also on break, who takes a suspicious drink out of a small, opaque "water" bottle as they scroll through their beauty/skincare social media.

CONNOR

Is there a payphone anywhere?

ALE

(laughs)

Probably not--

Connor leaves through the back entrance.

ALE (CONT'D)

Why--?

EXT. MALL - CONTINUOUS

Connor looks around for phones. He is still markedly less put together than those around him and tries not to be noticed.

He finds a payphone actually in plain sight that people simply have no cause to notice or remember. He runs to it, shoving coins in, dialing a number.

SILAS (O.S.)
Hello--?

CONNOR
Silas.

Connor falls against the payphone with relief.

SILAS
Is it everything you dreamed it'd be?

CONNOR
(not quite)
I found a job that's fourteen an hour, eight hours every single day.

SILAS
That's great. This'll go even faster. And I took some of your shifts at the store.

At about this point, Ale comes out from the store, intending to offer their cell phone to Connor. Connor is too immersed in the conversation to notice.

CONNOR
Is your mom there?

SILAS
No--

CONNOR
I met a real homosexual. At the job. And I saw two others who were married I think.

Ale doesn't want to be generous if Connor is about to say something awful. They lurk to see where this will go.

SILAS
I am the only homosexual in the world as far as you oughta be concerned--

CONNOR
(laughs)
Relax, he ain't my--
(serious)
(MORE)

CONNOR (CONT'D)
Didn't know you thought of yourself
that way.

SILAS
Neither did I.

CONNOR
(quick check over his
shoulder)
I do. Think of myself as... as gay.

He is not struck down where he stands. God and the mall
patrons do not seem to presently care about Connor's drama.
He smiles briefly.

SILAS
...You don't have to label yourself
anything though.

CONNOR
But I do. I label myself gay.

SILAS
...What do you want me to say?

Connor's joy fades a bit. He is suddenly reminded of the
approaching time limit--on the payphone and on his break.

CONNOR
Si I gotta--

SILAS
Wait wait.

CONNOR
What?

SILAS
Would you love me if I was a tree?

CONNOR
Everything before when I met you
was like being unconscious.

The time runs out. Connor has no more change. He hangs up the
phone.

He notices Ale.

ALE
You can just use mine.

Connor has mixed feelings about this intrusion.

CONNOR
My break's probably over.

He heads back inside.

INT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - DAY

Silas hangs up the phone, a landline. His smile falls as he stands around in the empty house.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Silas enters to an array of excited shouts from the handful of kids hanging out in the church. They scribble on coloring book pages of Jesus.

He sits down with them and helps them with their art.

INT. CHAIN COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Connor and Ale weave around each other, having mastered the dexterous task of making ten coffees at once by now.

Connor notices Ale has a small tattoo somewhere. It's not of anything meaningful.

CONNOR
...You have a tattoo.

ALE
Mhm.

CONNOR
Did you get it somewhere?

ALE
It's a stick and poke from a girl I met at a bar in Carytown.

They continue making drinks for a while.

ALE (CONT'D)
I wouldn't have said that if I knew you actually just hopped off a pickup truck from Kentucky.

CONNOR
I'm from Virginia.

ALE
Me too.

Doesn't compute with Connor. Ale is subtly frustrated. Connor notices.

CONNOR

I don't have anything against anyone. Transvestites, Hispanics. Jews. Anyone.

ALE

On behalf of the transvestite Hispanic community, mazel tov.

An impasse. Connor knows he's being made fun of but doesn't know why. He busies himself in his work. Ale follows suit.

EXT. MALL - MORNING

The next day - Connor goes to use the payphone. He notices a stack of quarters discreetly set on top of it. He's too desperate not to take them.

--cut to Silas doing something--

INT. CHAIN COFFEE SHOP - BATHROOM - DAY

Ale touches up makeup. Connor comes in and checks that his nametag is on straight. Ale pays more attention than usual to him, intent on patching things up.

ALE

...Good morning.

CONNOR

Good morning.

This is going great so far.

ALE

Do you have... fun?

CONNOR

Fun?

ALE

Yeah.

CONNOR

...Should I? Do you?

ALE

Do I...?

CONNOR
Have fun.

ALE
(thinks about it)
No.

CONNOR
Okay. Right. And that's normal,
right?

ALE
No...

CONNOR
Is there a difference between fun
and being distracted? Nevermind.

ALE
You gotta get out of the store.

Connor nods agreement.

EXT. RICHMOND - EVENING

Ale and Connor step up to order some empanadas from a food truck.

EMPANADA SELLER
Que te traigo señor?

ALE
Ummm. I'm sorry--?

EMPANADA SELLER
What can I get you?

EXT. RICHMOND - LATER

Ale and Connor leisurely wander around eating the empanadas,
taking in the sights.

ALE
Good, right?

Connor agrees.

ALE (CONT'D)
Well what brings you here?

CONNOR
It's not home.

ALE

So true.

Connor pauses.

CONNOR

I'm actually gay.

ALE

Really? No--

CONNOR

Yeah, it's actually really fun to say that, and my-- Silas is gonna come too someday...

They walk past the ballet. Connor gets distracted. Something about the softness and strength of the male dancers in the posters.

ALE

Do you like ballet?

CONNOR

Don't know, never seen it.

ALE

We could. I know the usher.

Connor thinks this is silly but also feels a tiny bit of hope.

INT. THEATER - NIGHT

As the curtains come up, an usher with a rainbow flag pin rushes them into some empty seats.

EXT. ALLEY - LATER

Somebody tossed out an old rug. It sits on top of the garbage. Connor and Ale walk past after the show.

Connor doubles back and inspects it closer.

He and Ale lift it and take it with them.

INT. CONNOR'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Connor and Ale roll the rug out.

Connor looks at his space, not totally bare at last.

might cut this->[

Ale lays down on the rug to test it. They spot the photo.

ALE

Oh Jesus.

CONNOR

Do you wanna see him?

Connor points Silas out in the photo.

ALE

He's very hot, care to explain the background?

CONNOR

It was a school thing, it's tacky, I know.

Rafe inspects it closer. Slightly laughs.

ALE

Tacky is not quite... Wow.
Definitely do not let anyone see this.]

--cut to Silas doing something?--

INT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

A large, luxurious, trendy Richmond house probably in the fan district. But with so many LGBT people inside and so dark that it's difficult to move, let alone see everyone. Music blasts.

Ale comes through the entrance, Connor trailing them. The crowd pauses to look at Ale, one of several minor community celebrities in attendance. Ale smiles in acknowledgment and takes Connor through the house.

They reach a guy pouring drinks, TYLER (20s white cis male, with perfect skin). They don't have to ask for something to be poured for them.

TYLER

Ale, congrats on ten K--

ALE

Thank you Tyler--

TYLER
(a nasty, subtle dig)
While being on the St. Ives PR
list. Remarkable.

Humiliation. There is no comeback that could possibly save
Ale's dignity.

TYLER (CONT'D)
I have some extra Augustinus Bader
you could cover.

ALE
(that's really not nice of
him)
That's really nice of you.

TYLER
I just love helping small creators
and uplifting POC voices.
(at Connor)
Who's this?

ALE
Connor-- Excuse me.

Ale throws their drink back then slips into the crowd,
falling into the arms of some guy.

Connor watches the dancing, the drinking, the flirting.
Someone is dressed all in leather with six inch heels.
Someone smokes. A group of three all hold each other's hands.
His world expands.

TYLER
Connor. Can I get you anything?

It takes Connor a few seconds to realize he's being
addressed.

CONNOR
I can't pay for it?

TYLER
(he's weird)
You're adorable.

Tyler pours him something. Connor deliberates for a second,
then drinks it.

INT. HOUSE PARTY - LATER

Connor sits on a couch with Tyler and his posse including FRIEND 1, FRIEND 2 (also 20s white guys), regaling them with tales of Buchanan County. They're laughing, buzzed but not drunk. This is the largest taste of fitting in Connor's ever had.

TYLER'S FRIEND 1

Ew, are you serious--?

CONNOR

Yeah, they painted it on the doors of the school, every time you go in or out it's right in your face--

TYLER'S FRIEND 2

Holy shit--

CONNOR

So trashy, right?

Laughter.

TYLER'S FRIEND 1

Did you actually, like, live in trailers and shoot squirrels--?

TYLER'S FRIEND 2

Oh my god you can't ask that--

TYLER

Course he didn't. Did you?

CONNOR

Not me personally--

TYLER

See.

TYLER'S FRIEND 2

You're vegan, right?

CONNOR

No.

TYLER'S FRIEND 2

(louder, assuming he
misheard)

You're vegan, right?

CONNOR

It's hard to find vegan options--

TYLER
Yeah well that's Virginia for you.

Is it?

TYLER (CONT'D)
When I'm done at VCU Arts, I'm
going to New York to be a designer.

CONNOR
Wow, that'll be amazing.

Connor's earnestness is disarming to Tyler, a sudden breath of air in the toxic mess. It doesn't mean anything beyond this tipsy moment, but Tyler thinks about Connor with him in New York.

TYLER'S FRIEND 1
Why didn't you just tell your
parents you wanted to transfer high
schools or something?

CONNOR
For one thing I didn't wanna get
locked in my room.

He meant it as relatable humor but it is not.

TYLER
(heartfelt)
...Are your parents, like,
homophobic?

The assembled group looks at him with an infuriating, well-meaning pity.

CONNOR
Are yours not?

The group looks among themselves.

TYLER'S FRIEND 1
They come around eventually.

Connor is long past wanting them to come around. He's on a whole different planet from them coming around. He gets up, looking for Ale.

He wades through bodies. It's too dark and dense to possibly pick one person out from the crowd.

Connor sits on a different couch, disoriented.

After a few moments, Tyler sits down next to him. Connor manages a small smile, enjoying having been followed, still open to being friends. Tyler smiles back.

Tyler scoots a little closer. Connor is not aware enough of Tyler's intentions to be uncomfortable.

Tyler grabs Connor's shoulder and goes right in for a kiss. Connor immediately cringes and pushes him off.

TYLER

...Hick.

Tyler lingers for a moment, watching it hurt. Then walks off.

Connor sits there. He is upset that this word upsets him.

INT. HOUSE PARTY - LATER

It's late. Connor sits alone on the couch, sipping something, drunkenly people watching. A somewhat slower song plays, a more romantic mood set. People sway together. It's packed and yet he's more alone than he was in the woods of Grundy.

Ale crashes down next to him, also drunk. This conversation is needlessly loud.

ALE

There you are. They talked to you--

CONNOR

They suck--

ALE

I've been trying for five fucking years-- Is that... prosecco?

Connor looks at his drink. He doesn't know or care. Ale takes it and drinks.

ALE (CONT'D)

What, you don't want smack and an orgy? Not even like Molly?

CONNOR

Who?

ALE

Drugs.

CONNOR
Probably not.
(immediately
reconsidering)
Well--

ALE
I wasn't offering MY drugs, get
your own drugs. Respectfully.

CONNOR
(prompted by the
hypersexual party
ambience)
Do you WANT sex?

ALE
Not with you--

CONNOR
No, in general. I mean, it's fine.
But you actively seek out sex?

ALE
Yes?

CONNOR
Why?

ALE
Are you asexual?

CONNOR
What?

ALE
Like, asexual.

CONNOR
A sexual what? I don't think so.

ALE
Cool.

CONNOR
I want you to know that your skin
is dewier than his.

Touched, Ale pulls him to his feet and they dance (more
accurately, stagger) platonically.

ALE
What if I left now?

CONNOR

We can--

ALE

Shh. I would do pilates. I would enjoy the consistency of overnight oats. I would enroll in community college for hospitality management...

(cries)

I'd have one of those stupid travel blogs where it's just pictures of my boyfriend leading me across scenic vistas by the hand, like the held hands are in the shot and it captures a sense of spontaneity and movement?

CONNOR

(himself emotional)

Yeah. Yeah...

ALE

That shit's so fake--

CONNOR

It's SO fake--

ALE

They probably hate each other--

CONNOR

(cries)

They're gonna break up--

ALE

Oh no, why--?

CONNOR

One is expecting the other to always follow, even though the other is the most special and important person with his own goals and dreams-- And he just can't have it on his conscience anymore that he's holding the most beautiful person back from reaching his full potential--

ALE

(comforting)

Connor we made them up, they can stay together.

CONNOR

Really?

ALE

They'll always be together.
Shooting candids in national parks.

CONNOR

Okay...

Another round of shots gets poured. They both wordlessly agree on going over and having another one.

INT. ALE'S APARTMENT - DAY

An apartment not too different from Connor's, but cluttered and decorated in a maximalist, colorful, extravagant fashion. Animal print rugs, sequined curtains, gilded mirrors, floral wallpaper.

Connor wakes up on Ale's velvet couch, horrifically hungover. He squints against the sunlight and shoves a tasseled pillow over his face.

INT. ALE'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Connor stumbles in, finding Ale about to throw up into the toilet. He kneels next to them and holds their hair back. They spare him a grateful and pained look.

ALE

Is he in the living room?

CONNOR

Hm?

Ale's face falls, but they're not surprised. They throw up.

INT. ALE'S APARTMENT - LATER

Ale sits delicately on the couch next to Connor, passing him a plate of scrambled eggs.

ALE

Tap water and a Xanax is really
like... the healthy equivalent of
red bull and a cigarette.

Connor doesn't know what to say, has concerns.

ALE (CONT'D)
 Sorry. People don't really stay for
 this part.

CONNOR
 I think you would like him.

ALE
 Who? Boyfriend?

Connor chuckles despite his condition. Ale smiles,
 understanding.

CONNOR
 He's Silas. *I'm* Boyfriend.

They eat.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
 Social media seems awful.

ALE
 I'm good at it.

CONNOR
 Does it pay--?

ALE
 In moisturizer.

CONNOR
 ...Let's not do this ever again
 please.

Ale nods.

INT. CONNOR'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Connor continues to gaze at the photo of Silas as he lays on
 his rug going to sleep. It's still loving but just a touch
 less reverent, a touch less dogmatic. He rolls onto his back
 and closes his eyes.

INT. ALE'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ale is curled into a ball in their bathtub, shaking and
 hyperventilating, having stayed up too late in a state of
 panic and depression and withdrawal.

They don't want to do this-- but they get to their feet,
 slipping a little and catching themselves on the sink.

They open the medicine cabinet and find a bottle of pills.
They pop more than they should.

They lay back down in the bath, letting oblivion at last wash over them.

ALE

Thank god... thank god... thank
god...

They shut their eyes. The shaking stops.

INT. CHAIN COFFEE SHOP - BACK ROOM - MORNING

Connor counts in his till on his own. It's not much fun without Ale to compete against. Connor finds himself waiting for them hopefully.

INT. CHAIN COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Connor stands at the register--the same lack of human contact as the other register job:

CONNOR

What can I get started for you?

The customer orders in as few words as possible, pays silently, leaves without ever looking at him.

CONNOR (CONT'D)

What can I get started for you?

Etc.

INT. CHAIN COFFEE SHOP - AFTERNOON

Ale finally comes in, in horrible shape. They stagger behind the counter, struggling to even stand up straight.

Manager castigates them and sends them out. Connor watches, distressed.

EXT. MALL - EVENING

Connor dials the payphone. He waits. No response.

He dials again. He waits breathlessly.

SILAS' MOM

Hello?

CONNOR
Hi. It's Connor.

SILAS' MOM
Sweetie, how are you? Remind me,
what is it that you do out there?

CONNOR
Mostly I work a register.

SILAS' MOM
Oh...

CONNOR
It's good to hear your voice.

SILAS' MOM
You too. Everyone misses you loads
round here. Si sure does.

CONNOR
I miss him too.

SILAS' MOM
He's out right now but I'm happy to
pass your message along.

CONNOR
...I didn't really have anything in
particular to talk about.

SILAS' MOM
Well okay.

Awkward silence.

CONNOR
I should probably let you go.

SILAS' MOM
I'm gonna send you some jam we
made, alright? Have a good evening
sweetie.

CONNOR
You as well ma'am.

He hangs up.

INT. ALE'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Ale is curled up on the couch, motionless as if in shock. Clutter and now also garbage everywhere. Connor lets himself in the front door, which is unlocked.

Connor takes everything in and understands.

ALE

Is there a chance I could convince you to bring me some smokes?

CONNOR

I'm sure I brought you the next best thing.

This intrigues Ale enough to turn to him. Connor opens a bar of chocolate. Ale rolls their eyes.

CONNOR (CONT'D)

So you don't want it? More for me then.

Ale goes back to being far away and lost.

Connor glances away, troubled, then wraps up the chocolate again and sits near Ale.

CONNOR (CONT'D)

Can I ask you a question? Do you want a blanket?

ALE

I guess. Something tells me that's not the question.

Connor tosses a blanket over them.

ALE (CONT'D)

Look, I don't know, everyone expects me to have a speech but I don't know shit. I never wanted to be a princess, I never played with dolls, I know I'm not a man, I don't feel like a woman, I don't feel like anything. The depression slightly lets up in the women's clearance section of Walmart and I'm figuring it out, that's all I got for you.

CONNOR

Oh.

ALE
That was also not the question?

CONNOR
No, but, that's cool.

Ale nods.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
Why did you start in the first place?

ALE
I like to feel good.

CONNOR
But you... don't.

ALE
It's freedom-- from your own shitty personality.

CONNOR
But--

ALE
Why'd you start cutting yourself?

Connor is flustered and ashamed for a moment, yanking his sleeves down, but collects himself.

CONNOR
It's the only thing strong enough to distract me from what I'm feeling when I do it. How'd you know?

ALE
You're not subtle. Haven't you heard? Knifing your wrists is not very good for your health. Just stop. Simply no longer do it. All better now--

CONNOR
Okay, god--

ALE
You're an addict too.

This is hurtful to Connor because he recognizes it's true.

Ale looks at him intensely, regretfully, somewhat indecipherably.

Connor exits. He leaves the chocolate on a piece of furniture on his way out though.

INT. CONNOR'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Connor fiddles with his pocket knife, just staring at it, thinking.

EXT. MALL - DAY

At the payphone. Connor dials it.

SILAS
Hey!

CONNOR
I caught you.

SILAS
Glad you did. Man I've been missing you.

His voice makes Connor emotional.

SILAS (CONT'D)
Hello?

CONNOR
I am a fucking Appalachian.

A sound of Silas perhaps dropping something or knocking something over in shock.

SILAS
What happened? Are you alright?

Connor laughs. Silas laughs too.

CONNOR
I'm gonna get a tattoo.

SILAS
What?

CONNOR
(tiny bit flirty)
Yeah, what should I get?

SILAS
You're asking me? I know, a map of--

CONNOR
I am not getting a map of Grundy
Virginia--

SILAS
It'd look so cool--

CONNOR
(lightly)
Dumbass, I was gonna put your name.

Silas is speechless.

INT. CHAIN COFFEE SHOP - BACK ROOM - DAY

Connor rests and has some water. Manager comes in and closes the door. Connor doesn't know how respectful to be.

MANAGER
I just want to let you know I
appreciate all the hard work you've
been putting in.

He fidgets.

MANAGER (CONT'D)
Are you aware of our tuition
reimbursement program?

CONNOR
I ain't-- I'm not-- I ain't in
college.

MANAGER
You should consider it. You have a
good head on your shoulders.

CONNOR
Ale is a hard worker, he's--
they're just going through a hard
time--

MANAGER
Ale was drinking at work--

CONNOR
But without the paycheck--

MANAGER
I'd lose MY job if I looked the
other way again.

Connor continues to fidget.

MANAGER (CONT'D)
But with Ale gone. We'll have to
train some new people. I'd love to
have you do that as assistant
manager.

He is happy about the validation and terrified of this job
being the greatest thing he'll ever do.

CONNOR
...Can I think about it?

MANAGER
Of course.

INT. CONNOR'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Connor's apartment now includes a twin mattress on top of the
rug, and a blanket on top of the mattress. He wakes up to a
car horn.

Just as he settles back in, the horn honks again. He sits up.
Whoever is honking just leans on the horn.

He knows who it is, smiles, throws on some clothes and heads
outside.

EXT. CONNOR'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Ale is pulled up to the curb in something humorously liberal--
a prius, a smartcar, a civic, something hybrid--with a
rainbow sticker on the bumper.

Connor laughs and goes up to them.

CONNOR
You're gonna wake up the whole
block-- what are you doing here?

ALE
It's your day off, right? What do
you wanna do?

CONNOR
Sleep in?

ALE
Boooo. Boring. I'll drive you
anywhere you want.

This is deeply appealing to Connor. Ale sees it, opens the
passenger door.

CONNOR

Anywhere?

ALE

Well. You might need to help pay
for gas.

CONNOR

Anywhere anywhere?

ALE

Within the continental U.S..

A bunch of exciting possibilities flash through Connor's
mind. He sets them aside and hops in the car.

CONNOR

Grundy.

ALE

Bless you?

CONNOR

Grundy Virginia.

ALE

(surprised)

Sure.

Rafe pulls into the street.

INT. ALE'S CAR / EXT. BUCHANAN COUNTY - DAY

Ale's car tears across the rural highways.

CONNOR

You don't need to subject yourself
to Buchanan County for me. It's
okay.

ALE

Um... I don't trust myself to be
alone right now.

EXT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - EVENING

Ale is still fully driving at ten or twenty miles per hour
down the road. (On Connor's behalf, not intoxicated.) Ale
notices Silas, charming as ever, waiting in the front yard
with a huge smile on his face. Ale can't help but smile too.

Connor throws open his door and dives out without waiting for the car to stop. He stumblingly runs to Silas.

Silas tackles Connor to the ground in an exuberant embrace. They kiss.

Ale smiles harder, carefully navigates the chickens and the patches of garden as they find a place to park.

Connor winces and laughs, sprawled out on the dirt in Silas' arms.

CONNOR

This is the welcome I get from you?

SILAS

You said soon. You said it'd be over soon.

Ale unobtrusively comes over to them.

CONNOR

(embracing the accent)

Did I say that? There's so much to do--I got promoted...

SILAS

When will we have enough saved?

CONNOR

If you're in a rush you can come over and it'll go faster.

SILAS

Well. You're here now.

Silas finally notices Ale, scrambles away from Connor like Connor has the plague, realizes too late this was his second strike.

CONNOR

They're my friend.

Silas squeezes Connor's arm as an apology and takes Ale in, confused, worried, grateful. He stands, somehow finding dignity, and gives Ale's hand a firm shake.

SILAS

Silas.

ALE

I've heard so much about you, I'm Ale.

Silas drops his hand, helps Connor stand up, fusses over him.

Ale touches his own palm, absently replaying that little moment.

SILAS

I am never letting you out of my sight AGAIN Connor Gabriel-- Look at y'all, so skinny, what do they feed folks out there?

ALE

Thanks, um, the key is clean macronutrients.

Silas gives Connor a pitying look. He holds the front door open and Connor goes inside. Ale hesitates.

SILAS

Come in.

Ale does.

INT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - KITCHEN - LATER

Silas pulls out all the stops. Skillet cornbread. Chow chow. Soup beans. Fresh ramps. Chicken. Cayenne pepper.

At some point Connor and Ale drift in, pick up an onion. Silas promptly confiscates it.

SILAS

Absolutely not, y'all make yourselves comfortable.

CONNOR

Is your mom working?

SILAS

She'll be back by ten.

INT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - CONTINUOUS

Ale and Connor sit on the couch, halfway watching a rerun of some old show on TV, waiting. Connor feels the smallness of the space.

CONNOR

(abruptly)
I'm sorry.

ALE

What?

CONNOR

I can take the couch if you want? I don't know.

ALE

I was gonna get a hotel room.

CONNOR

Right.

ALE

You guys need whatever shred of privacy you have.

Connor gets sort of flustered.

CONNOR

Isn't he amazing? Do you like him?

ALE

Has anyone ever *disliked* him?

CONNOR

Not to my knowledge.

ALE

(quietly)

That's a little concerning.

CONNOR

Yeah.

Ale takes a deep breath of all the smells coming from the kitchen.

ALE

He and my abuela would really vibe.

Connor and Ale both begin to repeat after the actor on TV under their breath. They stop and look at each other.

Ale busies himself with his phone. But there isn't service, and there isn't wireless internet.

CONNOR

Do you think he'd want wifi?

INT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - KITCHEN - LATER

Having nowhere to eat that properly fits three people plus the feast that Silas has made, they take a seat on the floor of the kitchen and pass dishes around.

Ale is slightly hesitant. Connor notices.

CONNOR

I don't know what you've heard but--

SILAS

Oh, you think I fixed squirrel or something--

(the audacity of expecting
this treat)

For YOU? Nah.

CONNOR

They put snail slime on their face.

ALE

It's a hydrating K-beauty staple
Connor--

SILAS

Gross, I wanna try.

Ale takes a bite of food. He stares at Silas with renewed interest.

ALE

It's seasoned. You seasoned it.
This is food with seasoning. This
is well-seasoned food.

Ale has unwittingly won Silas over now. Connor silently suffers from the spice level.

Connor looks between the two of them as they lock eyes for just a second too long. He understands exactly what is going on more than they do.

SILAS

Try the chicken.

ALE

It's all great, thank you--

SILAS

It's fresh, I just killed it two
days ago.

This again throws Ale for a loop.

SILAS (CONT'D)
You just chop fast, not too bad.
Bet you could do it.

ALE
(oddly flattered)
Think so?

CONNOR
I can't. I throw up...

He ruined the vibe. They continue eating quietly.

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT

A slightly seedy little motel in Grundy. Ale pulls into the parking lot.

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

An accordingly seedy little room with a desk, a chair, a bed.

Ale sits at the desk and unloads a bag full of makeup, brushes, skincare products, lights and tripods.

He tries to check his phone. Still no service. He tries to connect to the wifi. It's broken--his phone says he's connected but nothing loads.

He lets out a breath. Relieved.

With nothing else to do, he crawls in bed and falls soundly asleep.

INT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - SILAS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Silas sits on his bed watching Connor change out of his shirt. He discreetly tries to clock the state of Connor's wrists.

Connor glances over and knows Silas is looking. He smiles.

On Connor's wrist--the tattoo of Silas' name is small compared to a bunch of decorative ornamentation of plants and such, covering up a bunch though not all of the damage done. He's not confident enough to cover up everything yet and it's not like the scars are invisible, but they're not the first thing to grab attention about that patch of skin anymore.

CONNOR
Also, um.

He takes out his pocket knife and gives it to Silas.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
Please put this somewhere I'll
never find it.

Silas nods speechlessly, immediately putting it down, too uncomfortable to hold it.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
I mean I'll probably just end up
getting a new one. But--

SILAS
You'll never see it again.

Connor likewise speechlessly grateful.

Silas pulls up his own short sleeve. Connor's name is on his shoulder, just out of sight.

Connor sits next to him and touches the ink.

CONNOR
(worried)
You're stuck with me forever now.

SILAS
I hope so.

Connor tucks his head against Silas' shoulder. He closes his eyes, distraught.

CONNOR
What about Charleston? It's so
close. It's not even the foothills.

SILAS
Are you still on this...?

Connor knows it's a lost cause.

CONNOR
I love you.

SILAS
I love you too.

EXT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - MORNING

Ale and Silas stand out back, by the woods, drinking coffee.

SILAS
I can wake him up I guess.

ALE
I wanna know. I wanna know if I
could kill a chicken.

SILAS
I need the rest of my chickens.

ALE
Understandable.

SILAS
You ever shoot though?

Ale doesn't understand him. Silas briefly heads inside and comes back with a locked storage case. He opens it. It's his rifle. He passes it to Ale before Ale can realize what's happening.

ALE
Shit, is this loaded?

SILAS
(laughs)
You can find out--

ALE
Don't fuck with me right now--

SILAS
Nah, it's empty, of course.

Silas watches Ale with interest as he is morbidly fascinated by the thing.

SILAS (CONT'D)
Connor taught me first.

Ale puts it down in the case, listens.

SILAS (CONT'D)
It's usually a thing your dad
teaches you and um... Connor's dad
taught him. And Connor taught me.
But he probably told you that?

Ale nods. Silas knows he's lying.

EXT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - DAY

Connor hacks away at a pile of firewood. He's already getting sunburned again. His hair is messy. He's somehow more in his natural habitat even if he feels extremely constricted. He gazes at the rainbow bumper sticker on Ale's car as he chops the wood. He sweats, breathing hard, growing nauseous.

Ale runs outside with the intention of slathering Connor with sunscreen--

Connor nods in the direction of Ale's car.

CONNOR
You have to cover it.

ALE
The car?

CONNOR
Ideally.

Ale realizes he means the sticker.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
Just tape over it. You don't want
someone to slash your tires.

ALE
Would that really happen?

CONNOR
...I'm not feeling well.

ALE
Let's get you some water--

CONNOR
I'm just gonna walk for a bit. Can
you tell him?

Connor meanders off.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Silas and Ale crouch in the bushes, side by side. Silas has his gun at the ready.

Ale gasps. A group of deer in the distance.

Silas looks at him, ready to give him this chance.

ALE
They're beautiful.

SILAS
I know.
(beat)
It'll only feel a second of pain.
It lived a good life out here.
Free. In its home... As it should
be, right?

ALE
...Yeah.

Silas aims, guides Ale's hand over the trigger.

Ale squeezes his eyes shut, hesitates, pulls. He flinches at the noise.

He opens his eyes slowly. A deer lies dead. The rest took off.

SILAS
Doing alright?

ALE
I'm fine.

He takes deep breaths, listens to the birds, enjoys the nature. For the first time in a while, they are actually fine.

ALE (CONT'D)
I can't believe I never noticed...

SILAS
You weren't meant to.

He stands, flips the safety latch and straps the rifle to his back.

SILAS (CONT'D)
Usually when outsiders find our
mountains they blow the tops off
them... When you go back, you tell
your friends you hated it, you say
"only stupid poor people out
there." Don't want nobody coming
over, figuring out what all is left
here to take. You understand?

Ale does.

INT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - EVENING

Connor lays in his bed, troubled. Ale checks on him.

CONNOR

Does it mean that I hate myself if
I choose to be this first?

ALE

You can't actually separate it.

Silas comes in. Ale leaves them alone.

INT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - EVENING

Ale sits on the couch, waiting. They don't reach for their phone.

Connor and Silas' voices, a bit muffled through the wall, rise and fall.

CONNOR

The economy here is ruined, it's
ruined, please just face it--

SILAS

Okay it's ruined but that doesn't
mean it can't--

CONNOR

You wanna wait until they put the
coal back in the ground for you--?

SILAS

People like you have to stay if
it's ever going to get better--

CONNOR

I ain't sacrificing our safety for
it to get better for these people!
They sure as hell have destroyed
any chance of it ever getting
better for us! None of this stupid
perfect hillbilly act is gonna
matter when they find out you wanna
fuck men--!

SILAS

You could go home to a penthouse
apartment and you'd still be white
trash and until you learn to take
pride in it--

CONNOR

Do you understand you will never be
welcome in this house again!

SILAS

(wants to believe but
doesn't)

That's not true--

CONNOR

So you won't mind if I just tell
people then--

SILAS

Go ahead, I'm not ashamed--

CONNOR

Maybe I will--

SILAS

They're good people--

CONNOR

Never said they weren't. Maybe I'll
actually--

SILAS

Please do. Didn't think you were so
shallow--

CONNOR

Sorry I want us to stand a chance
in life--

SILAS

All I ever wanted was a life here
with you--

CONNOR

This ain't life, it's survival--

SILAS

I'm sorry that it feels that way to
you--

CONNOR

FEELS that way-- it IS, and fine if
you wanna pick that but don't lie
to yourself--

Ale gets up and goes.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

A typical Sunday church service. Silas goes to sit toward the back. Connor indicates a very visible spot in the front, in the middle. Silas takes a shaky breath and sits with him there.

The service proceeds as usual. They listen to the sermon, kneel, sing. All with a certain zeal, searching desperately for their places in this meaning.

At the last moment, they share an intense look, then Connor kisses Silas. Silas freezes in terror, then accepts it as the room silently stares.

INT. SILAS' FAMILY HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Connor lingers in the entryway.

SILAS' MOM
How you been, hon?

She starts immediately fixing something to eat, but her hands shake.

CONNOR
I'm not hungry.

She continues anyway for a bit, then glances at him. She stops.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
How are you doing?

She nervously laughs.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
With Silas being gay.

She seems not to hear him, turning back to cooking.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
(repeats)
Silas is gay.

She stops. She waits for more but it doesn't come.

SILAS' MOM
He's a child.

Several beats. She falls back against the counter.

SILAS' MOM (CONT'D)
Were you two-- in my house?

Connor doesn't know what to tell her.

SILAS' MOM (CONT'D)
I wish your folks had been better,
I do.

He takes a few steps over to comfort her.

SILAS' MOM (CONT'D)
Please don't come round here again.

CONNOR
You'll go to his wedding, you'll
hold his child, hell you'll be at
his side when he's elected
president or something, and it
still won't be enough to make him
forget if you mess this next part
up. Thanks for everything.

He takes it in one last time, then goes.

EXT. LAKE - NIGHT

Connor sits on his old rock gazing into middle distance.
Silas joins him.

For several seconds neither breaks the silence. Neither wants
to cross this line.

SILAS
I guess it's over?

CONNOR
It has been, though.

Silas shoves Connor into the dark water. He comes up coughing
and gasping for air.

Silas tries to walk off but Connor drags him under by the
ankles.

They briefly struggle to alternately shove each other under
and keep each other afloat.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
Hate me if you have to, but don't
waste your life--

SILAS

CONNOR (CONT'D)

We are hardly the most hated individuals in Appalachia and if you took your head out your ass for two seconds maybe you'd realize-- you know there's something called police brutality. Have you even seen a crime--?

--If they're smart they'll get out and they won't look back--

Please. I'll commit one just for you, would you like that?

Freezing, they both swim to shore. They trek through the woods side by side, not looking at each other, not touching, ignoring the other's cold.

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Silas sits at the table in Ale's room. Ale sits at the foot of the bed. He was in the middle of shooting some makeup photos. Silas has no response to this. Ale knows more or less what happened. Total silence.

Silas stares at a small collection of alcohol Ale brought.

ALE

(not necessarily offering)
Do you drink?

SILAS

No.

ALE

What's your secret?

Silas grabs a bottle with vengeance, then takes a delicate sip and struggles to swallow.

SILAS

Taste buds.

Silas' second attempt at having a drink is more successful. He passes the bottle to Ale, who fights himself, loses, also takes a swig.

SILAS (CONT'D)

How did your folks take it?

ALE

You have to choose--between yourself and others--I hope you disappoint others.

SILAS
I hope you disappoint others too.

ALE
(touched)
I do.
(beat)
I disappoint myself also.

Silas sits beside Ale on the bed.

SILAS
Think you'll visit?

ALE
Think you'll want me to?

Silas doesn't know. Gently, he takes Ale's hands and leans back. He closes his eyes, a certain type of release washing over him, but not peace.

ALE (CONT'D)
What are you doing?
(sensing)
Some gay people are promiscuous
lonely drug addicts but so are the
interesting straight people.

That was meant to be a little funny but Silas is in no mood to acknowledge it.

ALE (CONT'D)
Come here.

Ale pulls him to the headboard and lays down with him. Silas continues to be in a state of slowly simmering panic.

SILAS
There's gonna be a renaissance.

ALE
Okay--?

SILAS
Do you believe me?

Small beat. They stare at each other. Silas' conviction in this moment is impossible to argue with.

ALE
I do.

Silas slowly reaches out-- Ale gives a little smile to let him know it's okay-- and Silas just brushes his thumb across their cheek and then lets them go.

INT. MOTEL - DAWN

In the shower in Ale's room, Silas hugs his knees and cries as the water rolls down his back.

He's unrestrained, but not inconsolable. There's a safety to it. It's out there, it's on the surface now.

Eventually he shuts the water off. He reaches into his pants pocket for Connor's knife and carefully wraps it in toilet paper and places it in the trash can.

EXT. MOTEL - MORNING

Lush woodland surrounds a parking lot. Connor waits near Ale's car with his bags, having walked over.

He watches Ale and Silas come out the motel door together. He's not surprised. Silas looks right back at him, defiant.

Ale looks at Silas. Silas notices and gives them the barest hint of a smile. Ale goes and waits in the car.

Silas and Connor try to find something to say to each other. But all the words have already been said. Silas kisses Connor's hand and walks off down the road.

Connor watches him leave for a while, then takes a few hurried steps to follow him, then stops himself.

CONNOR

If you change your mind...

SILAS

Back at you.

CONNOR

Are you gonna be okay?

SILAS

Are you?

They let go, go their separate ways.

Connor notices a deer in the distance in the woods. It stares at him, intense and frightened. He takes a step toward it. It runs off.

INT. ALE'S CAR - DAY

Connor hops in the passenger seat.

Ale lingers, hand on the steering wheel. He adjusts the air conditioning, the radio.

CONNOR

I just wanted to set him free.

Ale pulls out of the parking lot, into the street before speaking.

ALE

I know.

They glance at each other. They can't find it in themselves to be mad at each other.

CONNOR

He'd take good care of you.

ALE

Probably. Where are we going?

CONNOR

Don't know if it matters really.

Ale nods.

EXT. BUCHANAN COUNTY, VIRGINIA - CONTINUOUS

They drive, Ale lost in thought, Connor looking at everything with nostalgia now, through the lens of his memories of Silas:

--Past the house that is still for sale.

--Past the high school.

--Past the wal-mart.

--Past Silas' family home.

--Past the church.

--Past the convenience store they used to work at.

--Past empty coal mines.

--Past Connor's former house: Connor motions to Ale to slow down. They pause to look at his second-story window. It disappears into the rear view mirror.