The Salton Sea Pet Hotel

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Pecan Street Press
LUBBOCK • AUSTIN • FORT WORTH
SALTON SEA PET MOTEL

Episode One - Three

By Alan Nafzger
The opening scene is a sinister takedown. A massive ballsy heist. Minister, GIDEON BURNS, is watching the judging he follows a dog to the crating. He leisurely places an orange flag on a crate. Gideon Burns has a cell phone and he speaks a number, the number of the reserved grooming space. A thuggish man, JOHN GALLAGHER is drinking from a flask, has a phone and is writing them down on the “notes” page in the show catalogue. A rental truck is backed up to the loading dock. There are six thuggish SECURITY GUARDS positioned about the building. They are tattooed and clearly part of a gang, but people are preoccupied with their exhibits and don’t notice.

The doors to the loading dock are raised and two OTHER THUGS, in street clothes, exit with crates on casters. The crates coming off the loading dock contain a stuffed animal. The stuffed animal obscures something in the rear of the crate - smoke and tear gas canisters.

The security guards pull the pins on several smoke and teargas canisters. It’s about to be chaos.

Snowfall in Iowa in May is unusual, but far from unprecedented.

Sudden diesel engine noise and smoke dirty bus careens too close - sunlight glinting off the show and its wheels churning slush into the frame.

An ordinary farm-girl, MIRIAM HOGAN is 17, pretty, quietly unconventional, a strong sense of right and wrong, a touching bluntness that makes her vulnerable.

Miriam waits at this unofficial bus stop at the intersection of a highway and a muddy road surrounded by frozen cornfields. Miriam is traveling alone and she steadies herself against the wind.

Miriam’s drowning in an oversized man’s coat (once her father’s) and looks very out of place as she’s waiting on the bus.

The buses engine and breaks rearing with a whinny, shaking at its harness, hooves flying dangerously, as the DRIVER heaves on the reins to bring it to a halt. Miriam drags her well-worn suitcase through the mush on board the bus. The suitcase has casers but they don’t do much good in the mush.
EXT. ROAD, IOWA - DAY

The DRIVER points the bus to the West and accelerates.

INT. BUS - DAY

Inside the bus it’s nice and new and not unpleasant. For a homeless teenager, Miriam’s actually okay with it.

A FAMILY with a FAT DAUGHTER take up the space around Miriam, she squeezes into a window seat, they seem to be staring at her but again, Miriam’s okay with it.

Miriam hugs the giant coat round her, a cherished keepsake from her father, and turns to look out of the window, and a last glimpse of the fruitful and manicured land she has called home.

FLASHBACK: EXT. CHURCHYARD, IOWA - DAY (A FEW WEEKS EARLIER)

The winter is dying, the last snow has starting to fall.

Miriam wears her big “farm” coat, in the center of a small group of black-clad MOURNERS who stand by the graveside as earth is shoveled in on top of the coffin. Miriam isn’t properly dressed for a funeral but she is Iowa pragmatic. She’s without a family and practically penniless.

A PASTOR murmurs the benedictions, but Miriam does not cry, her face blocking out raging emotion.

EXT. IOWA LANDSCAPE - DAY

The bus continues its long journey through the rural landscape.

INT. BUS, IOWA TO CORNWALL - DAY

Back with Miriam on the bus as she shifts to try and block out the painful memory, hugging her coat around herself for comfort against being an orphan.

She turns to the window away from the other PASSENGERS, staring at the Iowa fields passing outside...

But the fat little girl reaches up to her mother and father and Miriam involuntarily watches them pick her up, another painful memory intruding.
FLASHBACK: EXT. PIG BARN HOGAN FARM, IOWA - DAY

Miriam is hosing down the hog pens. Miriam watches as her mother, MRS HOGAN, feeding the pigs. Mrs Hogan is in her 40s but old beyond her years and doesn’t look well. Mrs Hogan works in silence, at ease with one another, then Mrs Hogan looks at her daughter in concern. Miriam finishes and returns to her mother to help her.

MRS HOGAN
Miriam, sweetheart. You shouldn’t be out here on the farm every day. Why don’t you go into town?

MIRIAM
(warm, joking)
Why not? Most mothers don’t want their daughters in town.

But Mrs Hogan’s serious, even though she tries to say it lightly -

MRS HOGAN
You need to find a boy friend.

Miriam is obstinate and darts her MOTHER her a wryly humorous look.

MIRIAM
You manage well enough without a man.

MRS HOGAN
You should date Ned, love. You know in time he’ll marry you.

Miriam sits back on her heels, looks at her MOTHER, surprised.

MIRIAM
You always said that if I married I should love the man. Have you changed your mind?

Mrs Hogan puckers her lips, but not without humor, at being caught out. Miriam grins, these two are close.
MRS HOGAN
Of course I haven’t.

Miriam’s pleased.

MIRIAM
Well then.

But as Miriam puts her head down and walks to the farmhouse, Mrs Hogan’s show of strength evaporates, she’s worried for her daughter’s future. Mrs Hogan is dying of cancer. She’s not told her daughter.

EXT. FLASHBACK: CHURCHYARD, IOWA – DAY

A continuation of the burial scene, we come back in on Miriam’s face, remembering her mother. But the service is over, MOURNERS walking from the grave, leaving only Miriam.

A tall, loping farm boy, NED, who’s better dressed than your average farm boy moves to comfort her – and from across the churchyard, three GIRLS with ribbons in their hair have been slyly trying to catch his eye and flirt with him.

Ned ignores them, though he knows they’re there, only has eyes for Miriam.

NED
She was a fine woman.

Miriam nods briskly and goes. But there’s something other than condolence on Ned’s mind.

NED
I know that… maybe now is not the time, Miriam, bu-

MIRIAM
No Ned, it’s not.

Miriam keeps on walking, the VICAR watching her in worry, but Ned hurries after her.

NED
You need to think about what you’ll do.
If you and I should [marry]
MIRIAM
The farm isn’t worth anything. It belongs to the bank. I’m going to my aunt’s in California.
(beat)
It’s what my mother wanted.

NED
But! Miriam?

She’s walking away but she stops. He hesitates…

NED
You - you have my heart.

For a second she looks at him in painful, mute apology. The jealous girls are looking daggers and whisper behind their hands, judging our unconventional farm-girl.

MIRIAM
I’m sorry.

Miriam hates hurting him, fixes her eyes on the ground as she walks away.

EXT. ROAD - DAY 1
The bus careens through a bleaker, rockier mountain landscape.

INT. BUS - EVENING

Different PASSENGERS sit opposite Miriam now, still better dressed than she is, their blank eyes staring at her as though she has no right to be there.

Miriam turns to the window and outside the landscape has changed.

The sun is sinking in the sky as the bus rumbles through the Utah desert and there’s a hint of the distant mountains as the landscape gets wilder, bleaker, and - Miriam’s eyes close, taking her into DARK.

DRIVER (V.O.)
Los Angeles! All out!
EXT. THE LOS ANGELES BUS STATION - EVENING

Miriam blinks awake. The DRIVER opens the bus door and Miriam follows the other PASSENGERS out. We see that Los Angeles seems like a frontier town from the Wild West.

POLICEMEN; PROSTITUTES; ACTORS AND TEENAGE RUNAWAYS, toothless old HOMELESS MEN; DRUG ADDICTS, PROFESSIONAL THIEVES and CON-MEN; and young, smooth CHARMERS; all POOR, most ROUGH, spilling out of the bus station, drinking beer from bottles, snorting meth, smoking weed or shooting up. Fighting.

Rap music plays from somewhere.

It’s a long way from Iowa and Miriam is afraid, their eyes upon her as she steps around a MAN who’s unconscious on the ground, and looks to see that the other PASSENGERS have gone inside the building.

As Miriam hesitates to follow, unaccustomed to this crowd, a policeman, a hard-boiled DETECTIVE and four uniformed policeman, tackle a FUGITIVE getting off the bus.

They beat him a bit. The fugitive is bleeding and is quickly handcuffed. They throw him in the back of a police car.

The BUS DRIVER peers inside the open-back police car with interest as the detective straightens his tie...

BUS DRIVER
Fugitive, is he?

DETECTIVE
(yes)
Serial killer.

The detective goes inside. The fugitive sees Miriam peer at him, and speaks to her - making her recoil.

FUGITIVE
(to Miriam)
We’ll probably never see each other again...
Miriam decides the bus station can’t be worse than it is out here, so she heads inside. She looks at the map and the departures.

Miriam finds the bus driver.

MIRIAM
Can you tell me which bus goes to Salton Sea?

The bus driver points to a waiting bus.

BUS DRIVER
Mecca/Mexicali

She runs inside and climbs aboard the bus there. BUS DRIVER #2 is a bit shocked at the frightened girl who just jumped on his bus. He is getting off.

MIRIAM
Is this the bus to Mexicali?

BUS DRIVER #2
Yes.

MIRIAM
Salton Sea?

BUS DRIVER #2
This bus isn’t leaving for two hours.

MIRIAM
Okay.
(half beat)
Can I just wait here.

BUS DRIVER #2
I’m not supposed to but, yes.

MIRIAM
And can I just pay you?

Bus driver #2 looks at the riff-raff hanging around the station. Perhaps he has a young daughter himself.
BUS DRIVER #2
Yes. You’ll be okay here. I’ll take your money later.

INT. MECCA BUS STOP AND BAR – EVENING

Miriam enters the Mecca bus stop and bar, head down to avoid attention from what looks like a prison football team.

She moves into the shadows behind several other PASSENGERS from her bus. But she darts a glance at the deLonnquents and her eyes alight on – a roughly handsome man, JOEL GALLAGHER, 28.

Unlike everyone else, he seems alone, content with his own company, a bright impertinence and easy charm about him, but in the gloom a CHEAP LOOKING WOMAN moves close to him and runs a finger down his chest and whispers something suggestive in his ear.

Joel catches Miriam’s eye as the WOMAN rubs his thigh.

Miriam looks away, embarrassed and somehow ashamed as she bows her head and moves out of their eye line, then quickly moves towards the bus driver DRIVER who has now also come inside. Miriam looks at the list of departures.

MIRIAM
Can you tell me how far to Salton Sea?

The DRIVER looks at her in surprise. She elaborates...

MIRIAM
I’m going to the SALTON SEA MOTEL?

Frozen silence from the DRIVER #2. But a detective, KAVANAGH, also hears. With brusque derision...

DRIVER #2
Mexicali. We don’t stop at Salton Sea no more.

KAVANAGH
(brusque)
If it’s work you’re after, you won’t find it out there. And the tourist and water sports aren’t there anymore. Sure
as hell isn’t any fishing. For one thing, the scenery is straight out of a post-apocalyptic sci-fi movie. Decomposing algae. And summer temperatures 115 degrees in the shade - if you can find any shade.

MIRIAM
I’m expected. It’s my uncle’s motel.

KAVANAGH sneers a laugh of dark judgment.

KAVANAGH
Then you can tell your uncle, Kavanagh says hello.

KAVANAGH leaves the bar.

DRIVER #2 is alarmed by the reveal about her uncle, about to voice it but -

JOEL
What’s your name?

Joel is suddenly next to her and his presence scares DRIVER #2 off. As Miriam turns to look at him, his stare makes her self-conscious.

MIRIAM
Miriam.

JOEL
It’s rough out at Salton Sea, Miriam. Buses don’t stop there any more.

MIRIAM
Well that might be true, but that’s where I’m bound. (testy bravado)
It’s still America, right?

Joel studies her with curiosity, tests her -

JOEL
It’s just desert for eighty miles. Mostly criminals and meth-labs.
MIRIAM
I’m not afraid of either.

Something in her spirit interests him. He stares-

JOEL
What are you afraid of?

She tries to hold his clear gaze but can’t; blushes inexplicably and looks away in sudden confusion.

MIRIAM
Mostly?

JOEL
Yeah.

MIRIAM
Obnoxious men like you.

He's still looking, and she can feel it through her clothes. His look says that he can guess what would scare a woman and he’s worried that she’ll find it where she’s going.

But there’s a sudden commotion as a nasty fight breaks out between some DRINKERS, beer bottles flying and MEN flying backwards. Several try to break it up in vain.

BARTENDER
Hey, hey, hey!

Unseen, Joel takes a set of car keys off a table in the midst of the fight. Miriam steps back, noticing that Joel has vanished. She decides she’s better off outside and heads out.

A prostrate MAN is still on the ground as Miriam comes outside, surprised to notice Joel is quietly stealing the man’s Corvette.

As he drives it off, he meets her eye – her surprise – but he smiles and grazes a finger to his lips.

Before Miriam can react, the door busts open and one of the BRAWLERS flies backwards and nearly sends Miriam flying.
More of the fight is now spilling outside, the bartender is now also involved, and the bus driver #2 emerges to watch.

**MAN**
Someone stole my Corvette.

Miriam’s nerves are jangled, so she turns to the bus driver #2 -

**MIRIAM**
Will you take me to the Salton Sea Inn then or do I have to walk?

The bus driver looks at her. Bar tender breaks from the fight and suddenly pulls his pistol on the CROWD.

Joel is long gone. The bus driver looks at Miriam with a sigh.

**EXT. BUS, SALTON SEA INN - DAY 1**

The bus moves on and Miriam, alone inside, gazes out of the window into the interminable sun and sand.

Miriam looks out the window as the bus moves nearer the inn. There is a closed abandoned inn (not her uncle’s inn), making her jump, but still basically she sees nothing; no trees, only rusted out trailers, just the sun and the blacktop highway stretching on forever in the violence of the sun.

As we hold on Miriam, the sound bleeds out and the movement of the bus seems to change - it slows… The moment goes on forever.

A shout from the driver blows past her and Miriam looks out the other side of the bus. She’s exits the bus and is met with a blast of sun and heat that blinds her for a second.

The bus has pulled to a stand-still. Miriam is out, the driver is under the bus. He places her suitcase out on the side of the road. He points and calls…

**BUS DRIVER #2**
Motel’s over there, see?

Miriam makes out a shape of an unpainted motel - two stories with a big half-rusted and no longer working neon sign. There are two cars in the parking lot.
On Miriam’s frightened face; she can’t believe that’s it.

But the driver’s back in the bus, he engages the engine and begins again down the road. Miriam glances after him as if doubting her decision.

ANGLE out on the desert, looking back at Miriam as she drags her trunk towards the motel; something out there is watching her.

EXT. PARKING LOT, SALTON SEA MOTEL - NIGHT

The old motel has been converted into a pet hotel. The backside of the motel isn’t accessible as there is a wall obscuring it. Rooms 101 to 110 on the front side (down-stairs) are all converted indoor-outdoor dog runs. They seem empty. Thugs occupy rooms 111 to 120. The up-stairs room 201 to 220 seem unaltered hotel rooms like 111 to 120.

The parking lot is full of trash and broken glass, but Miriam pays no heed as she drags her suitcase under the formerly neon motel sign that creaks and groans above her, and toward the office.

The sign says “Salton Sea Motel” but there is a homemade “Pet” sign made out of spray paint and plywood between “Salton Sea” and “Motel”. It is very ratty looking and cheap, but that is the general idea. They don’t want a lot of customers and they don’t want anyone to stop. The Motel is occupied by a criminal gang.

Glancing towards the office, she jumps to see a FIGURE has come outside, a pistol extended in his hand and for a second it’s too surreal and she can’t understand.

But his face moves forward and is clear, puzzled but intrigued to see a pretty young woman. He puts up the pistol.

Miriam draws in breath, her courage failing her for a second.

    MIRIAM
    Are you Joshua Gallagher?

JOHN stares at her; a tall, once handsome man, 40s, who still has intense and brooding charisma despite his brutishness. John was once a hell of a man; now alcohol and the sun have seriously warped his good looks.
And we also see John’s POV back at her: a young and pretty girl, innocence, but courage, lost in the middle of a desert holding a coat and pulling a suitcase.

They are bright negatives of each other. Miriam is afraid of him.

MIRIAM
I'm... is my aunt here? Aunt Priscilla?
I'm her niece, Miriam Hogan.

He stares for a further long, beat enjoying his moment of control, having her to himself and toying with her.

He turns and enters the office.

JOHN
Priscilla? A fresh virgin’s here to see you.

Miriam is unnerved by the harsh words.

INT. OFFICE, SALTON SEA INN - DAY

Miriam follows and makes enter into a filthy, run-down motel; the office is a private male world of booze and neglect. The place is empty, and as the door shuts, Miriam steps back, increasingly afraid, unwise to take her eyes off him.

John sees her fear and likes it, trying to evaluate her, fascinated/suspicious. John is slightly intimidating. Aunt PRISCILLA (40s) comes from the manager’s apartment.

PRISCILLA
What is it, John? Only, I was -

Miriam turns as Aunt Priscilla enters, but Miriam would never have recognized her but for knowing that it’s her.

MIRIAM
Aunt Priscilla?

John watches Miriam, still trying to get the measure of her, as she in turn stares at her aunt.
Priscilla’s curls are gone and she’s tired and thin. Her once bright and clean clothes are a washed out pink and her jeans are worn and ripped; her eyes wondering to check on John, afraid of him, in thrall and seeking his approval.

And one bright outfit emphasizes her paleness, a tragic attempt to look pretty for her John. Yet beneath the sometimes feeble surface there’s a strength to Priscilla, a Machiavellian flare that’s glimpsed in flashes.

PRISCILLA
Miriam? Oh it’s not really you?

She moves to hug and look at her, watched by John, but Miriam is filled with emotion and terrible sadness, trying not to stare as Priscilla looks around.

PRISCILLA
But - is my sister with you?

JOHN
She’s dead. Girl wouldn’t be here otherwise.

PRISCILLA
Dead?!

MIRIAM
(glances at him)
A month ago. I called you never answered so I left a message on your machine. You didn’t hear it?

Miriam looks at John, guesses that he deleted the message and didn’t pass it on. Priscilla sits in grief.

PRISCILLA
Oh no. No.

MIRIAM
(wrong-footed, anxious)
She wanted me to come to you.
(beat)
I've nowhere else to go.
JOHN
She can’t stay here.

Priscilla is still reElonng.

But Miriam looks to John who is clearly to decide her fate. Priscilla becomes aware of this, and there’s a triangle of tension between them.

PRISCILLA
Of course she can. She’ll take care of the dogs for us?

But it’s clearly more a question that a statement.

PRISCILLA
Won’t you Miriam? She's good with animals, you can see it in her face... She’ll be no trouble.

Miriam’s eyes are still on John. He fixes her with a look.

JOHN
Depends on, what she knows?
(half beat)
But pigs ain’t dogs?

Priscilla stiffens - but Miriam doesn’t flinch or budge; just continues to look at John. She senses it’s an act designed to test her, expecting her to leave - instead, undramatically, she remains.

MIRIAM
I doubt you know about either.

His eyes are still upon her, and he doesn’t flinch. He just watches her with attraction.

Priscilla watches, unsure whether to protect Miriam from John’s annoyance or be threatened by the sexual signals John is sending toward Miriam.

Miriam looks down.

Her spirit has impressed John.
JOHN

Raised on a pig farm. In Iowa, you’re practically a boy.

Priscilla comes down on the side of feeling threatened, moves to John to assume ownership of him.

PRISCILLA

John, you-

JOHN

Shut up. This girl and I understand each other. Get some food inside her. Can’t you see she’s starved to death.

Miriam is surprised that it should be him and not her aunt to show this nurture. Priscilla bristles, doesn’t like it.

But Miriam’s clearly allowed to stay as John tosses Miriam’s suitcase on his back like it weighs nothing. He takes the key to room 201 and heads out of the office and upstairs; Miriam and Priscilla watching him go.

INT. KITCHEN, SALTON SEA MOTEL – DAY 1

The kitchen and managers apartment are spotless and clearly Priscilla’s female territory. Priscilla scurries to, putting bacon in a pan and cracks some eggs.

PRISCILLA

Don’t worry too much about your uncle John.
There’s no one around here who don’t respect him. He brings me movies, see?

Miriam looks where Priscilla motions, at a large collection of DVDs – but then Priscilla is suddenly alive the second that John enters. But he edges in, fascinated by Miriam, though he’s trying not to show it.

John sips on some orange juice and vodka and beckons Miriam to the table.

JOHN

Come over here.
Oblivious to Priscilla’s jealousy, Miriam with irritation moves to sit by him, and he carefully takes a slice of bread and butters it delicately for her.

He takes a gallon of orange juice and pours Miriam a tall glass. He takes hold of a bottle on the table.

JOHN
Vodka?

Miriam hesitates: no. A beat - then John laughs darkly to himself, should’ve guessed.

JOHN
Don’t drink, eh?

He swills his orange juice, sees her eye it with worry and hardens.

JOHN
Yeh, that’s right. I do.
(with dark regret)
I drink and drink.
(leans in close)
And sometimes, girlie, when I drink I talk, but if you ever get too nosy or open your trap about a single word I say I’ll break you in two.

John drinks. Priscilla’s eyes flit between John and Miriam as she sips her own orange juice. Miriam hears John loud and clear.

INT. HOTEL OFFICE – NIGHT

There is a small room full of security monitors. John is watching Miriam from a hidden camera or two in room 201.

Priscilla calls for John and the quickly turns that monitor off.

Priscilla sticks her head in the door but says nothing.

INT. ROOM 201 – NIGHT

It is typical road-side motel room. Dark, carpet worn, cheep art on the wall. Just a single mattress and thin blanket on it. There is a thin layer of dust on everything.
Miriam opens her suitcase, but she hears a coyote howling outside and nervously moves to the window. A few domesticated dogs answer the howl. She lifts the blinds to look out.

Miriam’s POV of the parking lot where, John runs out of the office with a shotgun this time. He fires it out into the darkness. The coyote stops howling and presumably runs away.

Miriam breathes relieved. Miriam hates it here. Miriam hears a dog bark and then another. A sudden decision - she leaves the room and is wondering around the inn.

Miriam walks out on the landing, barely daring to breathe, but all is silence. She tiptoes to the stairs, intent on exploring, but freezes as she hears a low and muffled cry. At first it sounds as though it could be pleasure, but then, unmistakably, it’s pain.

Miriam turns to stare down at the manager’s apartment, and John and Priscilla’s window blind isn’t entirely pulled, their shadows just visible through the window, her aunt’s view low, beseeching...

PRISCILLA (O.S.)
No, John. Please, I didn’t mean it -

JOHN (O.S.)
Then why’d you say it?

PRISCILLA
I know you love me. Please, you’re hurting me.

There is another moan, and low rumble of her uncle’s voice.

Miriam freezes, tears pricking in her eyes as her heart breaks for her aunt, her sense of justice is now galvanized.

Miriam hears more dogs barking; they seem to sense Priscilla is being hurt.

Miriam notices half the hotel is walled off and inaccessible.

Miriam looks towards the highway and freedom - she wants to go. But how can she leave her aunt to this?
With grim resignation, Miriam forces herself to tiptoe to her room. The door clicks shut.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. MIRIAM’S BEDROOM, SALTON SEA MOTEL – DAY 2

A bright sun shines, wind rattling the window as Miriam wakes, stiffening as she remembers where she is. She braces herself.

INT. LANDING, SALTON SEA MOTEL – EARLY MORNING 2

Miriam stands in the door to her room but the inn is quiet.

She takes her chance to look round the second floor, looking in the window on the second floor guest rooms, all dusty and unused. Miriam looks in John and Priscilla’s apartment.

And at the far end of the corridor, a door that won’t open. Miriam tries it again, but it’s locked. Through the blind she can see it leads to the back-side of the motel.

INT. PASSAGeway, SALTON SEA MOTEL – DAY 2

Miriam comes down the stairs, and the inn is still quiet, so she continues exploring, opening doors on various storerooms - messy with rags, towels and dog beds. Empty dog food sacks and old crates. Miriam looks in a refrigerator and finds more medicines than a veterinarian would need. In fact there are two refrigerators. She finds a veterinary surgical suite, dirty and unclean. Neglect everywhere.

She walks down to the rooms at the far end of the motel. She glances in the windows. There are tattooed men sleeping in three or four rooms. There is drug paraphernalia in plain view. There are empty plastic bags throughout the parking lot. There is a meth pipe that has been crushed by a car tire.

But as she glances out of the parking lot, she stops in shock at the view; the desert around them is vast and breathtaking.

EXT. PARKING LOT, SALTON SEA MOTEL – DAY 2
Miriam crosses out of the parking lot to the edge of the motel property. Only now can she see the saltwater lake. Around the back of the hotel there is a 12-foot wall.

Miriam backs off into the desert to see the second floor. There are kennel runs on the second floor walkway. There are doogie doors leading into the motel rooms. There are a few dogs outside doing their business or just looking out at the lake below.

There is a thug out on the second floor hosing down the runs. He sees Miriam and makes a phone call with his cell.

EXT. THE SALTON SEA - DAY 2

Miriam reaches water and we share her POV of the isolation; salt water and fish bone beach stretching out in all directions as far as the eye can see.

Pile worms everywhere. Fish eating pile worms. And birds eating fish. Millions of fish and birds come to the Salton Sea. We see birds like pelicans, cormorants, and herons thriving. There are two or three fishermen in boats.

Miriam notices that white sand isn’t sand, but the bones of millions of fish. She picks up a handful and looks closely at it.

Miriam picks up a piece of pumice and hurls it into the water. The stone bobs in the salty waves.

The sea is about bathtub temperature. Miriam walks past an old rusted playground into a man-made lagoon dug out in the 1950s to allow boats to launch. She undresses and takes one step into the water and sinks to her knees in the muck.

She enters the water next to a grime-encrusted buoy. Barnacles crunch underfoot. She wades out about 50 yards and it's still only knee-deep, and she keeps running into rocks with her shin. Algae shifts back and forth.

She tries the breaststroke but she learns that in hypersaline lakes, the parts of the body with greatest subcutaneous fat float higher than others. Her butt is bobbing like a life preserver and it pushes her head down. She switches to the sidestroke.
The rugged Santa Rosa Mountains climbing from the far shore.

There's a quiet, unbElonevably sublime beauty amid all the muck.

The sky above is cloudless and blue and we hear the sound of a distant motorboat.

For a moment, Miriam forgets herself. She shuts her eyes and tips her head back, listening to the silence - just the wind and distant motorboat; and she sucks in a big deep breath.

But as she opens her eyes she glimpses a dark silhouette flit on the shorElonne. Miriam stares, but it’s gone.

She turns towards the inn, alarmed to see the sun has risen, quickly and its rather frightening.

She hurries back to the hotel but as she walks along the beach, we share a POV... someone definitely watching her.

INT. FRONT BAR, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 2

Miriam returns, windswept and Priscilla enters and sees, laughs, a little too forced, perhaps slightly nervous.

PRISCILLA
Where else can you throw a rock in the water and it actually floats?

MIRIAM
Yeah, weird.

PRISCILLA
You’ve seen what castaways we are.

MIRIAM
A big, healthy lake with fish and birds in the middle of the desert. This could be a recreational paradise. You just need a little marketing.

PRISCILLA
And a lot of dough.
(half beat)
John don’t want this place to grow.
Miriam watches Priscilla cleaning the kitchen, remembering her cries in the night and wanting to help and save her somehow.

Priscilla turns - sees her look and adds.

PRISCILLA
Your uncle’s out.

Beat.

MIRIAM
Business okay?

PRISCILLA
(stiffens)
Your uncle doesn’t like folk staying. Lonely spot like this we could be murdered in our beds.

MIRIAM
Those guys down at the end. You know they’re drug addicts.

PRISCILLA
They do work for us.

MIRIAM
They live her for free?

PRISCILLA
Pretty much. John needs them.

MIRIAM
How do you make money?

PRISCILLA
People come from all around, thank you very much. They bring their dogs. Holidays when the people travel we’re full.

(bristles)
Now, we need to get cleaned up, can’t sit here all day.

Priscilla turns and heads outside. Miriam frowns, then follows.
Priscilla and Miriam put their backs into it as they move broken furniture, discarded towels and empty dog bags. They take plastic trash bags around the parking lot picking up trash, imposing a new female order.

Priscilla glances at Miriam from time to time, wondering how she might resume her questioning about the business, but as they finish she senses it, Priscilla smiles brightly.

PRISCILLA
So tell me, Miriam? Did you have a beau back there at home?

A beat - Miriam guesses this is Priscilla changing the subject.

MIRIAM
No.

PRISCILLA
Ooh, just you wait. Even hidden out here they’ll be along soon enough. A California man to stop you thinking straight. Then off you’ll go to church before you know it.

MIRIAM
I don’t know that I want to get marry.

PRISCILLA
Pah!

MIRIAM
... unless I really loved the man. It seems to me too many just make slaves of women.

Priscilla bristles as she pushes in the torn up cobbles, and purses her lips, won’t meet Miriam’s eye.
MIRIAM
I’d sooner do a man’s work.

PRISCILLA
You’ll change your mind, of course you will.

Priscilla smiles enticingly, hiding a rash concealed motivation.

PRISCILLA
Now your uncle says one of the guys, there’s blue jeans for sale. Really nice and goin’ cheap as well. You ought to go down there’n see what he’s got

But Miriam is uncomfortable as she turns away to carefully pick up discarded needles and syringes crushed under car tires.

MIRIAM
They’re stolen?

Priscilla was hoping for Miriam’s acceptance and collusión, and the girl’s judgment is the last thing she wanted. Priscilla flashes sudden hardness.

PRISCILLA
Now listen here, young missy, beggars can’t be choosers. Your uncle’s got another mouth to feed now so we can’t get all uppity.

MIRIAM
I’ll starve then, if it helps you.

Priscilla bites back knowing several things that Miriam doesn’t (Priscilla and John don’t own the pet hotel); there is an owner and he enjoys the profits from their illegal dog breeding business. Miriam isn’t aware. Priscilla stares, but then snaps.

PRISCILLA
Fine. You want that I wear these jean ‘til they fall right off my butt then? What do you care?
Priscilla turns inside leaving Miriam unsettled by her spontaneity.

INT. MIRIAM’S BEDROOM, SALTON SEA MOTEL - EVENING

Miriam is still troubled by her exchange with Priscilla as she enters and sits on the bed. Her father’s coat is lying on a chair and Miriam looks at it, and she has an idea.

She stands and roots through her suitcase for her two jeans, then lays them on the bed.

Neither is pristine, but one is clearly better than the other.

She also pulls out a brand new kitchen apron. Miriam holds it up.

INT. JOHN AND PRISCILLA’S BEDROOM, PET MOTEL - EVENING

Priscilla is standing in her kitchen, looking troubled. She looks up as Miriam enters, offering out “Wonder Woman Character Apron” to her, a little shyly.

MIRIAM
I brought this for you? If you wear it, you’ll look just like Wonder Woman.

Priscilla is moved as she takes it, assumes it is an act of peace and thanks.

As Priscilla holds the dress up in front of her for size, she squeezes Miriam’s hand tightly.

PRISCILLA
Thank you, sweetheart.

Miriam stands beside her, pleased for her acceptance.

PRISCILLA
I suppose you think me plain.

MIRIAM
No. Of course not.

Priscilla looks at her with love.
PRISCILLA
You must take care, Miriam, love. You’ve got to fit in round here. I’ve missed your mother all these years and having you here, it’s the next best thing.

(beat)
God, I hope you fit in.

Miriam smiles in gratitude.

MIRIAM
My dad. He found a couple’s dogs and they killed him, you surely know that? So I can’t put money in dog breeder’s pockets.

PRISCILLA
Aside from John, you’re my only family. I’d hate for any harm to come to you.

A smile freezes on Miriam’s lips; was that a threat?

INT. MIRIAM’S BEDROOM, SALTON SEA MOTEL – NIGHT 2

Miriam’s eyes jolt open. She assumes it was the dream that woke her, but then she hears a sound outside. Miriam gets up and moves to her window, staring out onto the dark desert. Nothing.

She’s about to return to bed when a movement in the moonlight catches her eye and she sees – two rental trucks, gliding ghostlike and silhouetted across the desert road towards the inn. The trucks are pull in at turtle speed and make no sound as they pull into the parking lot.

John steps from the shadows to nod silent greeting to the men as they jump down: thugs. There’s no question of their deference to him; John is in charge.

The thugs get busy at his command, deftly handing down plastic crates with dogs down to each other to unload them and as John helps he glances up.

Miriam steps back sharply and he doesn’t see her. She’s not shocked as she knows what they’re doing.
Now a rusty wheel is making a sound are heard on concrete downstairs. She moves to the door to listen, spying through the eyehole. She sees the harvest is brought into the locked door that she knows leads to the backside of the hotel.

Then she hears the thugs come back to the front-side of the hotel and slap a faint high-five. The thugs enter their rooms.

Miriam sits down unsteadily, shaking. She should have realized; either the dogs are stolen, or it’s a puppy mill. She’s sick to her stomach.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. MANAGER APARTMENT, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 3

Daylight pours down as Miriam comes down showing a lot of cleavage. Priscilla is there, looking guarded and defensive, perhaps suspecting Miriam saw the trucks last night.

PRISCILLA
Your uncle’s out. There’s bacon and eggs in a minute.

Miriam watches knowingly.

INT. KITCHEN, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 3

Miriam and Priscilla enter. A fry pan is heated. Priscilla puts on her Wonder Woman apron.

Through the window, Miriam can see the rental trucks, clear evidence from last night. But what should she do about it?

For now, the answer’s ‘nothing’ as she looks down at herself and her skinny body, she may as well at least eat.

Miriam glances out the window to check; no-one is there. But the inn is quiet and Miriam sits at the table.

But there is a sudden reflection in the kitchen window and Miriam spins to see Joel standing silently in the doorway to the hall, shamelessly watching her. He is looking down her half-open blouse.
For a second Miriam freezes, but not soon enough to hide that sexual attraction flared for both of them.

Joel steps away, suddenly ashamed of looking, and Miriam goes to the refrigerator to get some orange juice. Guilt and embarrassment kicking in. She buttons her blouse up.

But as we hold on her, there’s something more: sexual excitement.

INT. OFFICE, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 3

Joel sits, mixes a tiny amount of vodka and lot of orange juice, and Miriam, now cleanly dressed, glares at him as she crosses to the table. A long beat.

JOEL
You should be careful. A man might consider that an invitation and help himself.

Out of nowhere, Miriam slaps him, surprising them both - then half regrets it.

MIRIAM
It’s not on offer, and if you’re any kind of gentleman you’d know that.

JOEL
(holding his face)
Well, okay.

Joel shows a trace of humor and flirtation but Miriam’s not playing.

MIRIAM
And he wouldn’t help himself to the vodka either. My uncle’s a brutal man. He...

But as she reaches to swipe his orange juice, Joel catches her hand.

JOEL
I know the John -
(but he gently concedes)
but take my juice, if it makes you happy.

Miriam takes it, but looks at him - trying to make him out.

JOEL
I only came to check that you’re alright.

Secretly it pleases her and she softens, but he’ll need to work harder than that. She takes the vodka away, starts to clean.

MIRIAM
A car thief came to check on me. How romantic?

Now he bristles. For reasons he can’t quite grasp, he wants her good opinion and her judgment intensely vexes him.

JOEL
That’s all I am, is it? A common car thief?

MIRIAM
A man who can’t find honest work’s no man at all in my eyes.

Harsh. Joel’s about to let it go there IS no “honest work”, but decides against it.

JOEL
There isn’t any…
(half beat)
Actually, I’m a dog breeder. But if they leave the keys…

JOHN
What the hell do you want, Joel?

Miriam stiffens as John appears, wary or perhaps fearful. He glances between the two of them, then asks Joel…

JOHN
There’s trouble?
Miriam looks at Joel, taken aback: is he involved then? Joel glances at her, guesses she’ll judge him even more for being a breeder.

JOEL
Can’t I come’n see my own brother?

He’s right, as Miriam faintly pulls back. Joel sees this and regrets it.

John picks up the subtle excitement between them.

JOHN
Like my new help?

He smiles as Miriam reddens her discomfort at his claim to ownership, and, in a low voice to Joel.

JOHN
Get in here then, if you've come to talk to me.

Joel casually fills the orange juice with the vodka, taking his time on purpose as bravado to both Miriam and his brother, before sauntering after him into the office.

The door shuts. Miriam is defiant.

INT. OFFICE, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 3

John moves inside. He glowers at his brother, a real tension between them - bad blood.

Joel holds his eye for a long beat - but John breaks first -

JOHN
What do you want then?

A beat. Joel speaks quietly -

JOEL
There’s a new detective in Mecca, sent down from Sacramento.
JOHN
... who says he’ll hunt out every man
who’s breeding dogs. Think I don’t know
about it?

INT. OFFICE, SALTON SEA MOTEL – DAY 3

Miriam is listening at the door, but can’t make out Joel’s
muttered response; she presses her ear closer as, John, now
angry, speaks louder.

JOHN (O.S.)
...and how d’you expect me to do that,
eh? When someone’s squealin’.

JOEL (O.S.)
What d’you mean?

JOHN (O.S.)
(reluctant)
Special agents, people tailing us.
Buyers with chip readers. Someone’s
talking.

Muttering... Miriam can’t hear John’s next words... or Joel’s
response ...then she hears

JOHN (O.S.)
I need you to get me some trucks.

JOEL (O.S.)
And I’ve said ‘no’.

JOHN (O.S.)
So you wanna see me in prison then?
Your own brother!

A clatter from within, perhaps one of them shoved the other. But
Priscilla suddenly comes in and sees Miriam listening in.

PRISCILLA
Miriam! Get away from there!

Miriam ducks back guiltily as Priscilla glares fearfully. But
she braces herself to confront her aunt about the dog business.
MIRIAM
Aunt Priscilla.

PRISCILLA
No.

And she’s gone.

EXT. ROOM 101, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 3

A bitch is whelping in a box, Miriam is sitting watching but her eyes are trained on the door... she turns away sharply as Joel enters, trying to hide that she was watching for him, but she isn’t fast enough.

She glares reproach...

MIRIAM
You could have told me you’re his brother.

JOEL
(attempts light humour)
I thought you might have guessed it from my good looks.

Miriam’s still not game to be amused, feels threatened by Joel on every level. Not least because, as she glances at the door.

Priscilla is spying through the window, seems afraid of him. Joel’s serious as he moves to her.

JOEL
How long d’you plan to be here Miriam? Seems a waste, a good looking woman like you. Here?

MIRIAM
Oh, everyone seems to know more about what I need than I do.

He holds his hands up fair-enough. There’s a moment between them, a beat of understanding. Before she looks back to the bitch.
JOEL
I mean to say, you shouldn’t stay here. Listening at doors. There’s things going on you shouldn’t get caught up in.

MIRIAM
What, dog breeding?!
  (gestures to the bitch)
  Oh I worked that out, I’m not stupid, I -

But Joel steps moves to the door and closes it.

Joel glances round to check that no one is outside.

The closed door, his proximity is intimate and Miriam feels it.

JOEL
You are, if you tell any one.

MIRIAM
Well it’s illegal. And I know the lies folk tell themselves to make out it’s no crime, like why should they pay taxes to a government who takes half and controls everything.
  (half beat)
  The country, not just this area, is half starved. But that doesn’t make it legal.
  (beat)
  If I had somewhere else to go, I would and I’d take my aunt with me.

Joel speaks softly, warningly.

JOEL
Miriam, whatever it is you think you know, you mustn’t speak of it. Not if you want to stay safe.

MIRIAM
Says the car thief?
JOEL
You might be right there. It’ll probably be the death of me one day.

Miriam can’t help hoping not. But she looks down to hide her eyes. Joel reaches out and lifts her chin. She looks at him, says nothing.

JOEL
(re the whelping bitch)
She okay?
(yes)
Come out here a second.

He nods to the parking lot.

JOEL
Here, take this Camaro. I brought it for you.

Miriam looks at the beautiful car. Turns away.

MIRIAM
I don’t want it.

JOEL
Take it anyway. There might come a time you’d rather not be here, and if there is you’ll need a car.

MIRIAM
It’s stolen.

JOEL
Actually, it’s not. The guys went to prison and I bought it from him.

Miriam looks at him but still won’t take the keys.

A moment, then Joel looks disappointed; offers the keys of the Camaro to Miriam one last time - no response.

He puts the keys on the counter inside room 101.

He shrugs, gets in his car and drives away in his car.
Miriam watches until he’s out of sight.

Then Miriam turns to see John smoking outside the inn, watching her. Miriam shows a noticeable vulnerability, and throws John a haughty look.

And in response he drinks from a whiskey bottle. John seems angry about her confederation with Joel but more than that, something nastily sexual in the air - and jealous about his brother leaving a car for Miriam.

Miriam turns to head back into room 101, but Priscilla emerges, watching John, ever his shoulder.

We stay on John looking smug; with twenty miles of desert around them, he knows there’s nowhere to go and the car is an exit.

But Miriam isn’t bluffing, she enters room 101, and John’s “James Dean” crumbles. John walks over and finds the door locked.

    JOHN
    Miriam?

She keeps still inside, and in his face we see his fear as he glances to the desert beyond; there’s something there that scares him.

    JOHN
    Miriam!

Stay on his fear as Miriam ignores him. Priscilla watches from afar.

EXT. THE DESERT, SALTON SEA - DAY 3

Miriam paces back and forth in room 101. Occasionally, she reaches into the whelping box and sorts’ things out. She looks moody and angry, but it’s balanced with the joy of puppies.

EXT. SALTON SEA - EVENING 3

Miriam heads towards the lake, the sound of birds and the wind.
She takes a deep breath, enjoying the sense of freedom now that all the puppies are deElonvered. She’s calmer now as she walks steadily in the direction of the lake.

Miriam walks, angry, upset, no idea where she’s headed.

But a sudden shadow to the right and...

Miriam looks round sharply, just in time to see something dart away. She stops.

MIRIAM
Hello?

But it’s gone – could it be a coyote or a man?

Miriam stares and suddenly there it is again, and now she’s spooked, hurrying off (running) in a new direction and almost starting to run.

She’s run off the beach into the desert. The scenery around her has changed; it’s darker, dryer, stunted thorn trees, and Miriam stumbles forward and falls face first into a deathly landscape.

Suddenly she’s breathless to see a twisted human skeleton, still in the rags of clothes, sticking up out of the sand.

Miriam’s frozen in mute horror. She looks behind but the shadow (coyote/man) has gone. No matter, she’s too spooked to stay here now as even this beautiful landscape has betrayed her so she hurries back the way she came, towards the pet motel.

INT. ROOM 102, SALTON SEA MOTEL – EVENING

POV through a motel window of Miriam returning very troubled. It’s John, readying a second bitch to whelp. The light in room 102 is on and she looks inside and sees him, she’s surprised. He hesitates, and then – almost regretful.

JOHN
Want you working in here tonight.

John leaves for the office. We stay on Miriam worried at what this means.

INT. ROOM 102, SALTON SEA MOTEL – NIGHT 3
Miriam watches from the window as the rough male thugs stand drinking, play fighting and taking drugs in the parking lot.

On Miriam’s apprehension. She turns out the room light.

INT. ROOM 102, SALTON SEA MOTEL - NIGHT 3

Miriam gestures that she is hot. The bitch is panting as well. Miriam quietly opens the door. She turns on a small desk lamp and positions it so it’s not easily noticed from the parking lot. She doesn’t want the thugs to know she’s there.

In the parking lot, there is raucous laughter, crudeness, thick marijuana smoke: ugly, sweaty, dirty and loud, the all-male company curse and shout. Some drinking, more doping.

It’s John’s POV as he surveys his criminal gang, as though weighing up their characters to see who might be ratting.

These men are thugs, white trash. Tattooes, piercings, unshaven, hair a mess. Gangsta clothes. Anarchist symbols. They are never shown in this film without a drink, pill, smoke or syringe. Always altered. It looks like a hard-core prison gang. Many cough like they have TB or lung cancer. Teeth rotting. Pale skin and under nourished.

There’s HIRAM, a drug dealer, 30s, small, wiry, sees everything, bright as hell (although he feigns deference to John); ABE, old man; STEPHEN, burly; the TWINS skinny, nasty pieces of excrement; ELON, actually clean cut looking buy altered; TIMOTHY, filthy teen; BEEF TRUST who is thin (was fat before the meth addiction); AARON, with a stolen digital camera, he’s trying to take pictures of the moon and stars. He can’t figure out why it won’t work at night.

HIRAM
Hey dumb-ass. You need one of those things.

AARON
What?

HIRAM
Like a stand you put your camera on. It has three legs.
AARON
How the fuck do you know?

HIRAM
I seen a guy once. That’s why it’s blurry.
(half beat)
Set it down on the ground so its still.
(half beat)
Now take a picture.

Most everyone is clearly criminals of one sort or another.

Miriam is in the dark room and she watches both the bitch and
she watches John, tall and brutish, master of his domain and
making a show of it in front of his men.

John stands at the gate to the kennel run off of room 102. He’s
standing there half to protect Miriam, and half to show that she
belongs to him, in case any of the thugs who keep on glancing at
him get any ideas.

Finally, John leaves for the office.

Hiram perches at the gate, beadily eying Miriam as she whelps
the litter.

HIRAM
Have ya settled in Miriam?

Hiram seems more sober and polite than the rest.

HIRAM
Hiram. I’m Hiram.

Miriam half nods, manages the cautionary smile as she cleans up
a puppy.

Priscilla comes with a sandwich and something to drink.

MIRIAM
(to Priscilla)
I saw a dead man buried out in the
desert.
Priscilla looks at Hiram who moves away, scared of her/doesn’t like her. He may or might not have heard Miriam’s comments.

PRISCILLA
Back in the 1950s this was a pretty wild place. I’m sure some didn’t meet a happy end.
(half beat)
You shouldn’t go out there.

Miriam looks at Priscilla. Is it a threat, or worry for her welfare?

Timothy, a filthy teenage meth addict whistles at Priscilla and then nods toward John who is coming that way across the parking lot. Priscilla leaves.

Timothy clears out away from Miriam.

He sticks his head into the room 102 and he tells Miriam something; John nods to Miriam, showing off his ownership of her in front of the thugs.

JOHN
Check in on 103. She isn’t due for another two days, but she might be ready. But check will ya?

The thugs outside laugh at some lewd joke. Miriam hates the thugs, but especially John who she can see is ordering her around to make himself look big.

EXT. PARKING LOT, SALTON SEA MOTEL - NIGHT 3

Priscilla is sitting out in front of the office. Joel, drives in. Miriam notices Priscilla glances up and shows dislike of, or perhaps fear of Joel. Miriam heads inside.

As Miriam moves from 102 to 103, Joel looks as though he wishes she hadn’t seen him.

He leaves a car with Stephen, the Twins, Timothy and Aaron who emerge from inside the inn to take the keys.

Joel then drives off at speed.
Miriam averts her eyes as she nears the next room.

A naked man run out of his room out into the parking lot. He picks up a beer bottle that he’s left outside. He runs back into his room.

She looks out into the parking lot near room 103 and she surprises a young couple, BETH and WILLIAM, who are shadows in the parking lot, evidently in love and they have been making out leaning on the hood of a car.

   BETH
   I don’t care about money! I just want you.

William leaves the instant Miriam notices him. Beth begs Will and tries to pull him back.

Beth and Will start as they see Miriam. Will blurts out, defensively.

   WILLIAM
   We’ve business with John.

Miriam eyes them warily, surprised to see a young woman here.

   MIRIAM
   He’s inside.

   BETH
   Are you his wife?

Miriam stops and looks at Beth properly. We share her POV of an ordinary, honest-faced young woman, nice hair, healthy skin. Miriam’s reminded of the girls back home in Iowa and she’s glad for it, innocent and familiar. Might be a new friend.

   MIRIAM
   (softens)
   His niece.

Neither Miriam or Beth are what you would expected at the pet motel.

Beth quietly implores Will...
BETH
Will. Please, let’s go?

Will looks at her. But heads into the office instead with determination.

A moment, an odd beat, the women smile at each other. Then Miriam enters 103, leaving Beth in the parking lot.

Miriam checks the bitch. She’s lying in an empty whelping box without newspapers or bedding.

INT. OFFICE, SALTON SEA MOTEL - NIGHT 3

Hiram and John are at the desk as Will approaches.

WILLIAM
I’m - are you John Gallagher?

John turns to eye him with suspicion. John swigs from his whisky bottle but has no intention of offering some to Will or helping him broach a conversation, and Will is nervous.

WILLIAM
I - I work at LAX. Cargo. A major airline.

No response. He thinks this next will impress him.

WILLIAM
We’re bringing in some 50 or 60 dog for the dog show. Big time champions from the East Coast.


JOHN
What’s that to do with me?

Miriam comes to the office to collect some newspapers.

Miriam catches his eye. John looks away. Will’s confused.

WILLIAM
Well... I’m... I mean, I hoped.
JOHN
(suddenly sharp)
What did you hope?

John is threatening and close -

JOHN
You’d come and play a man’s game?

Will scared of him, so blurts it out -

WILLIAM
I know what time they’ll be coming in.
Back up a truck and I’ll bring whatever
crates out - split it fifty/fifty.

Hiram darts a glance at John, with hidden meaning, but John is
stoney-faced.

Miriam hesitates collecting the newspapers quickly, wants to hear the rest of this and John is now aware of her
to hear the rest of this and John is now aware of her watching/listening.

HIRAM
Can’t say no to that, eh, John?

JOHN
Isn’t up to you, Hiram.

Miriam glances round and she sees John slip out of the inn with Will, presumably to conclude their business outside, in private.

Miriam takes the newspapers into 103.

INT. PARKING LOT AND ROOM 102, SALTON SEA MOTEL - NIGHT 3

As she turns to room 102, Miriam finds most of the thugs inside.

There is a bitch in whelp so she charges right through them fearlessly.

They are drunk and high and singing along with a rap song.

THUGS
Sit down beside her like a spider, hi
there girl, you mighta
Heard of me before, see whore, you’re
the kind of girl that I’d assault
And rape then figure why not try not to
make your p-y wider?

Miriam’s frightened now, especially with four or five shirtless addicts and she tries to escape but they block her path; they push a thug onto her.

MIRIAM
Get off! Get off ME!

THUGS
F-k you with an umbrella, then open it up while the sh-s inside ya
I’m the kinda guy that’s mild but I might flip and get a little bit wilder”

Miriam fights hard, knees a thug in the balls and he yelps and crumples. She tries to pull herself free but another thug blocks her exit.

THUG
Don’t want an idiot, eh? So how about a real man to break you in?

Elon pushes her against the wall, tries to pull her pants down. He’s fiddling with his fly.

But a knife appears at his throat. John has returned.

JOHN
Get your hands off her.
(Elon freezes)
You need it said twice, Elon?

John is glowering with rage, utterly terrifying.

Elon backs off and Miriam frees herself.

John instantly lashing out at Elon and cutting his face – not badly but a thin cut appears across his cheek and Miriam recoils. Miriam watches the bitch and she’s frightened by the intrusion. She has a puppy still in the sack. Miriam removes the sack and towels off the puppy. Miriam is livid as she rubs the puppy. It is a few nervous beats before the puppy breathes.
John glares at Elon, still half of a mind to kill him - but instead he nods to Miriam in abrupt concern.

JOHN
You alright?

He jabs the knife at Elon.

JOHN
The puppy okay?

There is a long beat. The puppy doesn’t respond. Miriam persists reviving the puppy.

JOHN
Say sorry to the lady.

Elon glares but the knife moves closer. Elon can’t escape to the door.

Everyone is frozen, Miriam barely daring to breathe. But the puppy responds.

MIRIAM
He’s okay. Yes.

Suddenly we ANGLE on Timothy bursting in, breathless.

TIMOTHY
John?!
(sees him)
John? We’re going down! Abe and the twins’re busted! Digging through a dumpster.

John doesn’t voice it, but it’s clear from his face and tension that this is a total disaster, the very last thing he needs right now.

But his eyes and knife remain on Elon, his anger making him press the blade closer to Elon’s throat, who is now even more scared.

ELON
(forces it out)
I beg. Your pardon.

John gives Elon a last warning glare, then lowers the knife, turns his attention to Timothy.

TIMOTHY
The twins say Abe has ratted; we got to get it quick.

JOHN
Hiram, get the truck.

TIMOTHY
There’s animal control, state troopers and all up at the fast food place! They had a tip off, sure as hell.

John nods Elon and Cakey outside, instantly in command. To Priscilla...

JOHN
Get the food and water up.

Priscilla hurries out to the kitchen, and off Miriam’s look.

JOHN
You too.

MIRIAM
No. I won’t help.

JOHN
You’ll come – or give you over to Elon.

The threat is clear. Miriam has no choice.

Elon runs to his private car and lights out toward the north.

EXT. PARKING LOT, SALTON SEA MOTEL - NIGHT 3

A motley collection of the thug’s van’s and a small moving truck are being positioned. A 18-wheeler with a trailer pulls up. It backs to be loaded. The trailer doors are opened; ramps are run up to the back.
Priscilla moves to the passageway.

PRISCILLA
Here. Help me.
(off Miriam’s look)
Don’t you give us a hard time about
something you don’t understand.
(softens her look)
We gotta look empty.

Miriam slowly obliges and follows Priscilla through the once locked door. All the thugs, Priscilla and Miriam and John run through the door to the backside of the motel. They grab dollies and carts that are propositioned. Inside each room on the back side is a dog and a crate. Outside in the run, there is a water bucket and a food bowl.

The thugs gather and crate the dogs; they tote them off to the vehicles in the front. The van’s are filled the leave out.

The small 15-foot moving truck is filled with crates and leaves.

John gets a call on the phone. The authorities are leaving the Fast food place.

John nods to two thugs. They seem to understand. They drive from the pet motel north toward Mecca.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

One car stops in the highway the other continues but slams on the brakes. Turns. The cars slam into each other. It is a major wreck but both men walk away from it. They lean against the wrecked cars waiting on the police. As the police near them, one thug slugs the other in the face, knocks him down and bloodies his nose.

We see about eight police cars pull up with their lights on. We see the one of the thugs pointing out into the desert.

THUG
He ran into us then ran out into the desert. He’s high or something. This is our car. This was his.
The two wrecked cars are in the middle of the highway. Traffic is directed to the shoulder and an ambulance arrives.

The raid on the pet hotel is delayed.

INT. OFFICE, SALTON SEA MOTEL - NIGHT 3

Miriam and Priscilla place all the dog food bowls inside the room out of view. They dump the water in each run.

John glances uneasily at Miriam, knows that she’s a risk. He shows her a pistol he has on his person.

JOHN

   Right.
   (to Miriam re the pistol)
   Don’t you make a sound.

Priscilla and Miriam get into the diesel and it moves off to the south. The tractor/trailer narrowly escape.

John remains to greet the single detectives car that arrives. They shake hands. John shows him the runs in the front of the hotel. He takes the detective inside the office and shows him the paperwork. The detective leaves back toward the staged wreck. There is now a helicopter with a spotlight searching the desert.

EXT. ROAD, SECOND HOTEL - NIGHT 3

The desert glistens in the moonlight, as the 18-wheeler moves stealthily towards a second abandoned hotel. From the highway it looks vacated, but inside there are dogs already housed there. It’s a second puppy mill.

There is an old ballroom that has been converted to an exercise yard and shelter for dogs and crates.

EXT. SECOND ABANDONED HOTEL - DAWN - DAY 4

The silent party moves down the dirt roads to the hotel. A caretaker comes out to greet them.

THUG

   Something happen?
PRISCILLA
We’re here aren’t we?

Miriam is last to step onto the sand, and for a second, she stops — staring at the wreck of a resort. In a way, bombed out buildings can be beautiful.

Priscilla acts as a lookout, across the desert and back towards the highway, while the thugs exercise the dogs. The dog’s crates aren’t taken off the vehicles, the dogs are allowed into the yard for a short time and then placed back in their crate.

They might be there an hour and they might be there a week. And they remain mobile.

The women watch the road and parking lot as all the rest of the men work with the dogs.

AARON
Zephania didn’t show.

HIRAM
Told him not to.

Aaron is surprised, but he glances at Hiram as he carries on walking the dogs.

AARON
I thought he might be squealing. But looks as though it wasn’t him.

Aaron shifts, uncomfortable, but has to say it —

AARON
It’s Abe, no word, nothing.

Hiram, Aaron and Timothy exchange looks.

AARON
John will want you to drag him out of his bed later then.

Priscilla watches the road. Miriam has begin helping to exercise the dogs.
Miriam’s tense, glancing around. It’s taking forever and she’s fearful that they’ll all be caught. And she can see a problem with a small dog, the dog is panicked by the larger dogs around it. The larger dogs might harm her. She walks over and consoles the tiny dog. She picks the frightened dog up calmly.

Lights on the road slow and the car might pull in.

PRISCILLA
Car.

The thugs stop with the dogs and pull out pistols, rifles, knives, pipes and one produces a cross bow. The car lights approach and stop. It’s John.

JOHN
Hot damn, boys!
(half beat)
Come and get it.

John has ten large pizzas and an ice chest of beer. The thugs fetch it back to the ballroom. Dogs are running around and everyone is having pizza, except Miriam. Miriam is still exercises the dogs.

John is sitting with his thugs and is now watching her, impressed despite himself, as Miriam babies the less sociable dogs.

She catches John’s look and suddenly seems aware of what she’s doing, his approval of it, and she catches herself and stops, wishing she hadn’t helped.

But John digs down into the ice chest and brings out a single soda. He brings it to Miriam. He holds it out to her, and nods, re her help with the dogs.

JOHN
Here. For you.

Miriam looks but doesn’t take it; Priscilla hides her jealousy.

MIRIAM
Give it to my Aunt.

As she walks off, Priscilla takes it, glad that Miriam’s gone.
But John watches Miriam feEIonng rebuffed, trying to fathom her. Miriam hides in a hotel room fearing she will be raped. John is looking for her and can’t find her.

EXT. ABANDONED HOTEL & PET HOTEL – NOON – DAY 4

The thugs are asleep on tables. Under tables. In their vans. In the bed of trucks. They all wake up. The thugs look around in anxiety at the growing daylight, which might betray them.

Slowly, van by van, they are returns to the pet motel.

But suddenly John puts an arm out to keep people quiet. A police cruiser pulls thought the parking lot. The stop’s to complete a report. There is a long long beat.

We’re tight on his John’ face as he watches, then beckons them quickly to hide and arm themselves.

The thugs silently do as he says, hiding with their weapons and just in time as the patrolman turns in the parking lot.

The thugs clasp their weapons tighter, ready to use them, and Miriam anticipates violence. We share her POV of the police car as Miriam shifts forward, weighing up whether to call out to them. We’re with John as he finds her and he sees this, and in a second his knife is at her throat - his arms wound round her body, holding her to him tightly.

Focus on the policeman as he pulls out on to the highway.

    JOHN
    See? You do get down in the dirt with us.

It’s clearly what he wants, to bring Miriam down to his own level - and she is grateful to move away.

Priscilla glances at Miriam, worried again at John’s sexual interest in her as they all start to load the dogs into the vans.

The 18-wheeler remains empty at the abandoned hotel.
INT. MIRIAM’S BEDROOM, SALTON SEA MOTEL - NIGHT 4

Miriam lies in bed, but can’t sleep. But then the distant sound of cars outside and she lifts her head to listen. Miriam moves to the window in her underwear and lifts the blind in time to see...

JOHN (OUTSIDE)
Well Abe? Gonna tell us where you’ve been?

Miriam’s furtive POV of Hiram and Elon dragging red-headed ABE from a car, wrists and ankles bound.

ABE
I ain’t bin nowhere John!

JOHN
That’s why we had to drive all round the southern California looking for you?

ABE
I was sick! That’s all! I was sick!

But the thugs manhandle him inside, and John nods to Hiram and Elon that they can go, done for the night.

Elon skulk away, but Miriam sees Hiram narrow his eyes at John for a second and hesitate, and then he also goes.

John and Abe are inside. Miriam hears a creak in the upstairs corridor and is about to step back from her window, when she suddenly glimpses someone standing just beyond the parking lot.

Thinking he’s unseen, he steps quietly forward into the shadow of the inn, towards the door. Miriam tries to make sense of it.

INT. UPSTAIRS LANDING, SALTON SEA MOTEL - NIGHT 4

The murmur of voices from the office area downstairs as Miriam sneaks out onto the landing. No one is there so she...

INT. STAIRWELL/PASSAGeway, SALTON SEA MOTEL - NIGHT 4
... creeps slowly down the stairs, wincing at their creak and groan, freezing now and then for fear of being caught.

She moves to the office door, presses her eye to a crack and can just see John, pacing up and down, but no one else.

    ABE (O.S.)
    I swear on my mother’s grave, I ain’t no snitch John!

    JOHN
    So how’d they know we was here, eh?

John lunges forward, out of sight, and ABE cries out, been hit.

    JOHN
    I sent Zephania to Las Vegas last night ‘cause I thought it was him, so there ain’t many choices left.

Abe mumbles something that Miriam can’t hear. She strains to listen, but a creak on the stairs behind her makes her turn. She is shocked to see a man’s figure slowly creeping down. Could it be Joel?

Miriam had assumed (because of the car) he was at the pet motel with John and ABE... but maybe she’s wrong. Or is somebody else here too?

A second before he sees her, Miriam darts into a storeroom...

INT. STOREROOM, SALTON SEA MOTEL – NIGHT 4

...pulling the door to.

Through the crack she glimpses the dark figure step down the passageway but with terror sees that he’s heading in here.

Miriam throws herself down to hide behind a palate of dog food just in time, as the door opens and the figure slips inside.

From her hiding place she can see his feet as he waits at the door peering out a crack to watch the passageway.
Miriam’s frozen, and in a most uncomfortable position, certain that she’ll have to move and then he’ll hear her, certain he can hear her pounding heart.

As she tries to calm herself and keep very still, she strains to hear the muffled voices in the office, but is it two or three men there? Miriam can’t tell.

The clock in office reads, 3 am. A moment, then the door to the office is heard opening followed by John’s footsteps.

And a coded ‘knock, knock, knock’ on the storeroom door.

Miriam cranes to peer up over the dog food, and we share her POV of John glimpsed in the doorway, but the figure still can’t be seen as he’s obscured and has his back to her.

John speaks in a low growl, shakes his head, confused.

JOHN
I half bEloneve him. But, it’s up to you.

The figure mutters something back unheard and John goes silent.

Then protests, doesn’t want to do what he’s been told...

JOHN
I’ve known the man a long time. He’s got a wife and children. He really knows hounds.

The man hisses something, and John nods but is reluctant.

JOHN
Alright. I heard you. I’ll fucking do it.

Miriam has a horrible sense that John has just been told to kill Abe but she holds her breath as John goes - his footsteps are heard moving back to the office and the door shutting.

The unseen man is still in the room with Miriam, but he starts to step slowly out of the supply room.

When Miriam bumps something that resonates.
Miriam freezes, certain he must find her, scrunching herself down as small as she can to hide and barely breathing.

Slowly, torturously, her glimpsed POV of the man’s feet as they step closer. She shrinks back further, can’t bear it.

But then the cat shoots out from somewhere in the room.

The figure accepts that the cat was what he heard and vanishes.

For a long beat she can’t bear to move, but as she waits.

The sound in the office, a horrible choking, lynching sound. Miriam is horrified but dare not move.

Miriam tiptoes to the door and listens—nothing. Slowly she opens it a crack; the passageway beyond is now clear.

INT. PASSAGeway, SALTON SEA MOTEL - NIGHT 4

Miriam slips out—no one there. She listens again at the door to the office but all is now silent, sounds like they’ve gone.

Gaining courage, she the door open a fraction, then glimpses rope dangling from the chair.

The office seeming empty, she’s about to push the door fully open when someone grabs her from behind.

Miriam struggles, would cry out, but a hand is over her mouth—she struggles, panic rising, but as she twists herself round to see her captor it’s—Aunt Priscilla, who’s surprisingly strong, but Miriam sees, with shock, that she’s been punched in the face.

Priscilla tightly holds her hand over Miriam’s mouth, shaking her head with terror, ‘don’t speak, don’t move’.

While they wait like that, there is the sound of one man’s footsteps in the office.

Miriam stops struggling, realizing Priscilla just saved her.

Priscilla makes urgently eye contact with her, finger to lips, mouthing ‘Shhhhh. Shhhhhhh.’
With her finger still on her lips, she silently pulls Miriam back along the corridor, taking her away upstairs to safety.

**EXT. PARKING LOT, SALTON SEA MOTEL - NIGHT 4**

John looks sick and emotionally strained as he finishes dragging something heavy outside, then lets it fall.

The ‘something’ is Abe and he gasps for air horribly, struggles in vain, half dead on the asphalt, a purple bruise around his neck from the choking.

A beat as John tries to contain his own surge of sickness, guilt and regret. But a sound beside him, and a shadow in his peripheral vision as the figure joins him from the inn.

John stiffens, doesn’t turn, doesn’t trust himself to, had enough tonight and he is almost on the verge of mutiny.

John, with a shovel, drags Abe out into the desert.

**INT. MANAGER’S APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Miriam and Priscilla hear a single gunshot out in the desert.

PRISCILLA
Coyotes. John hates them.
(Miriam doesn’t buy it)
Really. They carted off one of his favourite dogs once.

**INT. MIRIAM’S BEDROOM, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 5**

Light on Miriam’s face as she opens her eyes. Then last night’s events come crashing back in on her. She looks outside; there’s again nothing but sunlight and desert.

**INT. PASSAGeway/OFFICE, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 5**

Miriam’s moving about quietly to have a look for any evidence of what happened...

**INT. OFFICE, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 5**
The rope is gone, the office now clear and clean. Miriam glances behind her, then looks around, but there’s nothing to be seen, no sign of what went on last night. Priscilla suddenly passes the doorway.

MIRIAM
Aunt Priscilla

INT. KITCHEN, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 5

Miriam follows her into the kitchen.

MIRIAM
Please wait...

Miriam stops dead and jolts to see John sitting there, shoveling into his face a huge breakfast.

JOHN
Your aunt’s cooked breakfast. Sit down.

Miriam is frozen but Priscilla smiles like nothing’s the matter.

PRISCILLA
We saved some sausage for you.

Priscilla’s face is still a mess, but both ignore it as John pulls out a chair for Miriam to sit by him, almost like he needs her there, and nervously she does. Miriam stares as Priscilla cooks happily, and John eats as though he’s just a preacher about to preach a sermon.

INT. KITCHEN, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 5

The sun is bright, and John is starting his car. Priscilla is cleaning her kitchen again. Miriam joins her at a table.

PRISCILLA
Here sweetheart, take the other end.

Miriam obliges, but now that John is safely out of earshot.

MIRIAM
Aunt Priscilla, please, I need to talk to you.
Priscilla is leading, moving the table where she wants it.

PRISCILLA
That’s right, just here.

The table is put down.

MIRIAM
They brought a man in here last night.

PRISCILLA
(derision)
Miriam!

MIRIAM
I know they had him in there and I saw the rope. I think that my uncle

PRISCILLA
Do you need me, John?

Priscilla speaks loudly to shut Miriam up, looking at the doorway where John is standing and she has no idea how much he heard. John fixes her with a look, then shakes his head to Priscilla.

JOHN
I won’t be gone for long.
(for Miriam’s benefit)
Not so as you’d miss me.

Priscilla is flustered and wants to be away from Miriam. John stares at Miriam; we stay on her, worried at whether or not he heard what she said, as he turns and goes.

INT. KITCHEN, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 5

Priscilla cleaning, trying to hide in it as Miriam joins her.

PRISCILLA
Grate needs raking out there please.

MIRIAM
I was hiding in the storeroom. A man came and he hid in there and I think that they shot a man called Abe. I...
PRISCILLA
You must have had a dream and got confused.

MIRIAM
I didn't dream your face.

Priscilla touches her injured face.

PRISCILLA
Oh this! I did it to myself. I tripped up stairs.
(half beat)
You saw me do it!

Miriam stares at her, trying to understand her aunt’s denial. She looks at Priscilla shrewdly; then turns purposefully and walks away, leaving Priscilla nervous.

INT. PASSAGeway, SALTON SEA MOTel - DAY 5

Miriam has put on her sun hat, and as Priscilla appears, her mouth drops open in panic to see Miriam heading out the door.

PRISCILLA
Miriam?! Where you going?

EXT. PARKING LOT, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 5

Miriam strides away, Priscilla hurrying after her.

MIRIAM
(stops)
We have to tell someone...

PRISCILLA
Tell them what? There’s nothing to tell 'cept what you dreamt...
(grabs Miriam, shakes her)
Don’t you come here making trouble for me girl...
MIRIAM
I’m trying to save you! Can’t you see that? I don’t understand what kind of hold he has on you.
(half beat)
I know that you’re afraid of him, but...

PRISCILLA
(blurts)
Of course I am!
(lets Miriam go)
And so should you be. But at least I’ve got your uncle to protect me...

Miriam reacts; John’s who she thought they were talking about. Priscilla doesn’t want to talk about it but has no choice if she’s to stop Miriam doing something rash.

PRISCILLA
It’s the other man. The one who hid. He tells your uncle what to do.
(beat, quietly mumbles)
It’s him who hit me.

Miriam is horrified, moves close to her, and almost a whisper.

MIRIAM
Who is he?

Priscilla turns away; Miriam catches her.

PRISCILLA
No! He’d kill me!

Miriam lets go a moment while she thinks. Priscilla eyes her, hoping that she’s done enough to stop Miriam from going.

MIRIAM
We have to put an end to this. I’ll tell them that you’re not involved.

And Miriam goes. Priscilla stiffens with stabbing fear...

PRISCILLA
Miriam? You’re not going to the sheriff!
Miriam ignores her but goes into room 101. Priscilla is rEloneved, but Miriam then exits and climbs into the Camaro.

PRISCILLA
We feed you don't we? I'll send your uncle after you. I'll send him out to fetch you back.

Miriam heads North on the highway.

EXT. ROAD TO MECCA - DAY 5

Miriam’s Camero is badass and stylish; she ought to be giddy but she’s tired and afraid as she approaches Mecca. Now she’s close enough to see the town her resolve weakens in the face of the task before her and for a second she stops.

EXT. MAIN STREET, MECCA - DAY 5

If the Salton Sea was the Wild West, then Mecca is the first stop on the road toward law and order. Miriam stares as she drives, no idea what to do now she’s here. The place is deserted, except for the fast food place. Miriam has no choice. She heads towards it.

INT. FAST FOOD PLACE, MECCA - DAY 5

A smattering of OLD TIMERS sit drinking coffee as Miriam enters hesitantly, self conscious as they stare at her. Miriam blushes, knows that they must think she’s a prostitute and her nerve nearly fails her.

Will and Beth are in a booth at the fast food place and Miriam glances at them. It’s the couple from the inn last night.

If for no other reason than to be away from their stare, she sharply turns to the fast food counter, asking quietly.

MIRIAM
Excuse me? Can you tell me where the sheriff’s office is?

EMPLOYEE
(eyes her, wily)
The sheriff, eh? Why, what you done?

Miriam blushes, tormented. But the employee looks around the restaurant.

EMPLOYEE
Aah... Well a sheriff’s deputy eats here every morning.

The employee nods to the parking lot. Miriam sits and waits.

Miriam is shocked to see that Elon from the pet motel is the sheriff’s deputy. Elon’s turning towards her, but by the time he enters - she’s gone.

EXT. FAST FOOD PARKING LOT, MECCA - DAY 5

Miriam bolts out of the fast food place, snatching a frightened glance behind her in case Elon is following. She looks around in panic, and then we share her POV of the “Rattle Snake Salvation” church at the top of the hill, a small rectory near to it, which seems to offer the hope of salvation. Miriam hurries to the Camaro and drive towards the church, glancing into her rear view mirror to check that Elon isn’t following.

INT. RATTLESNAKE SALVATION CHURCH - DAY 5

Miriam enters the church, but it’s deserted. Just the light from stained glass windows casting an eerie green glow, making it look as though it’s underwater. There is a glass case at the front of the church. It’s filled with rattlesnakes. As Miriam moves near it, they begin their song.

Miriam turns to exit and they stop rattling, but she reacts to see someone behind her.

GIDEON BURNS
I have more out back, if you would like to see them.

MIRIAM
No, that’s okay.

GIDEON BURNS
I’m Gideon Burns, the pastor here.
Gideon Burns is eerie and charismatic and he speaks with soft intensity. Burns holds out his handshake. Miriam’s rElo nef is palpable.

MIRIAM  
Miriam Hogan, sir.

He nods, scrutinizing her.

GIDEON BURNS  
Do we need to talk, Miriam?

But a WOMAN appears behind him, exasperated, interrupting.

NAOMI  
Pastor Burns? We can’t leave the doors to the sanctuary open to just anyone to walk in.

GIDEON BURNS  
My sister Naomi, Miriam Hogan.

NAOMI (40) plain, and slightly manic, rElongiously dressed.

GIDEON BURNS  
And Beth. Who helps us minister the poor.

Miriam’s rElo nef is cut short to see that the young woman from the pet motel last night (and just from the fast food place).

Beth eyes Miriam warily (anxious to find her talking to the pastor), and she pointedly signals Miriam with her eyes.

BETH  
I’m pleased to meet you.

Miriam’s face falls, wrong-footed but…

GIDEON BURNS  
Naomi. Miriam wishes to speak with me so perhaps you and Beth might…
But Miriam has seen Beth glance sharply at her, fearing what she might reveal that she’s been out to the pet motel and she loses confidence, scared to speak in front of someone she knows is dealing with her uncle.

MIRIAM
(interrupts)
Oh! No. I – didn’t – I was just...

But she shakes her head, can’t quite find a lie. Naomi eyes her, shrewd.

NAOMI
You’re here to see the snakes, Miriam?

Miriam glances at Beth again, but has no choice but to tell them. She’s ashamed as she looks down and confesses.

MIRIAM
Animals, they always fascinate me. My uncle owns the Fast and Easy Pet Motel.

Burns and Naomi exchange looks; nearly everybody else, they know about the pet motel but are surprised there is a girl there.

GIDEON BURNS
Well there are the snakes but also God’s word.

Miriam looks at him, hoping this is true. But...

MRS TRELAWN
Pastor Burns?

A tired, ragged wife, 50s has entered and Miriam loses her moment as Burns turns to speak quietly to her. Naomi watches the woman, but remains more interested in Miriam.

NAOMI
The pet motel? You’re working there?

BURNS turns back to them, interrupts, Mrs. Trelawn’s still waiting.
GIDEON BURNS
Naomi, Mrs Trelawn has need of me. Her husband Abe didn't come home last night.

NAOMI
Over-dosed somewhere?

Miriam looks sick at the mention of Abe’s name and disappearance. Burns turns to her.

GIDEON BURNS
I hope we'll see you Sunday, Miriam?

NAOMI
Hear him preach. Come see the show. He’s very good. You won’t regret it.

Naomi follows Burns and Mrs Trelawn out. Miriam’s still reeling, but Beth misses it and quietly justifies.

BETH
Thank you for not saying anything. I mean, it's not like it's so wrong rescuing a few dogs on the side.
(smiles)
It isn’t like Will’s stealing them. They hate being show dogs in a crate all day.

Now Miriam looks at her - John obviously agreed to Will’s proposal then. Beth’s hopeful...

BETH
We’re getting married.

Miriam processes this.

BETH
I have to go.

Beth smiles parting, heads out. Miriam, puts these new connections together. She needs a plan.

EXT. DESERT ROAD, MECCA TOWARDS SALTON SEA - DAY 5
The desert stretches out, bleak and desolate as Miriam drives on. She heads towards the pet motel.

EXT. DESERT ROAD, MECCA TOWARDS SALTON SEA - DAY 5

Joel pulls next to Miriam and he signals for her to pull over. Miriam doesn’t and she instead pulls a radical turn down a dirt road. Joel slows, backs up and then follows her down the dirt road. Miriam runs the car off the dirt road at a hairpin turn.

MIRIAM
Oh no. No.

Miriam steadies herself against the wheel and frowns, looking behind her. Joel arrives. Without a word he opens the door of her Camaro. Miriam exits and Joel gets in.

MIRIAM
Get me out of here! Please!

He shakes his head. Miriam stands there helpless. Joel drives the car out of the sand onto the dirt road. He points it toward the highway.

JOEL
What are you doing?

MIRIAM
You gave me the car.

He contemplates her and hesitates, and Miriam shows fear.

MIRIAM
Just get out.

He grins. Guesses she’s had enough. He exits the Camaro.

JOEL
Here.

As Miriam gets in the car, Joel grabs her. Both are intensely aware of the physical touch; for both a deep unspoken sexual attraction flares again.
JOEL
I didn’t take you for a reckless driver.

MIRIAM
I’m not sure that I should listen to you.

JOEL
I’m not wrong about us. Am I?

MIRIAM
You’re wrong.

JOEL
I thought I just saved you?

MIRIAM
Ran me off the highway is more like it! Road rage, trying to scare me.

But she’s very attracted to him. She hides it with bravado.

MIRIAM
I know that you were there last night... (direct challenge)
and I think that a man was murdered?

Miriam is daring him to admit it. Miriam mentally compares Joel’s shoes to the shoes of the mysterious figure from the pet in. The shoes are similar but different.

Joel says nothing, wrestling with his fear of her judgment of him. He knows someone was murdered and knows that he did nothing to stop it and he doesn’t want to admit that.

Miriam is still waiting, so he tries to sidestep it.

JOEL
And murder would be wrong then, would it?

MIRIAM
Of course it’s wrong!

FeElongng a twinge of defensiveness about his own life.
JOEL
And what if the government tells you to do it? If you’re a soldier and you go to fight in a war?

Miriam scoffs, engages the transmission, not interested in getting drawn in his story. Joel holds the car door open.

JOEL
They tell you to kill plenty then...

Miriam turns away, impatient, Joel persists.

JOEL
We killed 150,000 people in Iraq. So when it suits the president, and a death penalty when it doesn’t.

MIRIAM
So that’s your excuse, then, is it? You went to war so now you can do what you like? With no morals and no conscience?

JOEL
Miriam? There’s things here you don’t understand. You’ve been in town. You didn’t talk to anyone did you?

All too confusing. He stops but she moves the car about a foot.

JOEL
So where are you going now then? (guesses)
Salton City, is it? If you ratted them out you don’t need to go there.

MIRIAM
It’s none of your business.

JOEL
A sheriff’s car drove past here a half an hour ago headed south, and I’d guess he was going to the pet motel.

Miriam hesitates, frowns, doesn’t want to give herself away.
JOEL
Go. You’ll see.

After a beat, Miriam begrudgingly puts the Camaro in park. She turns to Joel.

JOEL
And when you see I’ve told the truth, do me a favour? Don’t say that you’ve seen me. Please Miriam.

Miriam is deeply bewildered; afraid of what he means, and what it is he’s done. She makes no promises. As she drives away he calls.

JOEL
Don’t say anything.

She does glances back at him.

JOEL
I’ll come and find you soon.

Miriam stares. Perhaps that’s what she’s afraid of.

EXT. PARKING LOT, SALTON SEA MOTEL – DAY 5

It’s pouring down sun and Priscilla darts into the parking lot as Miriam returns.

PRISCILLA
(big panic)
A sheriff’s deputy is out here and he’s got some detective from Sacramento! Did you call them, Miriam?

Miriam’s expression clearly says ‘no’ but she remains in the Camaro. She remains in case she must escape. But she’s still trying to decide what to do, confused by Elon and Beth and Joel when

The now uniformed sheriff’s deputy, Elon, walks up to the car.

ELON
You girl. What’s your business here?
Miriam hesitates as she eyes Elon, but the detective is behind him.

KAVANAGH
Says she’s Gallagher’s niece.

He fixes her with a cold glare, glances at the sun-soaked desert, then nods them both out of the car.

INT. PASSAGeway, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 5

Elon approaches the locked door and turns to the women as if to judge their reaction.

ELON
(to Priscilla)
You want to tell me now what’s behind this door?
(half beat)
You look a little worried.

It’s all a show for the detective’s benefit.

KAVANAGH
This place’s a synonym for shit.
Addicts, illegal dogs, thievery and you’re all organized.

Priscilla glances at Miriam, fearful she might talk.

BASSATT simply nods to KAVANAGH to get on with it, and he picks up a heavy iron bar and turns to head upstairs.

Miriam realizes what they’re doing and mutters –

MIRIAM
Oh no. No...

INT. PASSAGeway, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 5

Miriam and Priscilla watch the men as they hold the crow bar.

They and ram it hard against the lock in the door. Again. Again. Until with a CRACK! It breaks and the door to the backside of the kennel flies open on ... nothing.
Except a rope that Miriam jolts to recognize is the one that made the noose. Priscilla looks fearfully at her, realizing she’s recognized it.

Elon is inscrutable, but Kavanagh, sees only empty kennel runs and isn’t happy.

KAVANAGH
Damn it! Who tipped him off that I was coming?!

Miriam’s wondering the same thing, remembering Joel’s unconcern that the Elon was headed here.

PRISCILLA
I don’t know what you mean, I...

ELON
You girl. What do you know about the dogs?

Priscilla freezes with fear; Miriam swallows – waivers – undecided what to do. For now she fudges...

MIRIAM
Nothing, sir. I only came a few days ago. As far as I know we’re broke. Those guys that live down there they got little or no money. Hardly any canine boarders. I don’t know what you’re doing here.

PRISCILLA
Wastin’ the taxpayers money is what they’re doing.

Elon winks at Priscilla. He moves to turn away but...

ELON
What about the your uncle’s brother Joel? Do you know where he is?

Miriam’s shaken by the question, wasn’t expecting to be asked about Joel. She hesitates, struggling with conflicting fears.
and desires. But then she makes a choice and shakes her head no.

MIRIAM
I’ve never met him.

Elon feigns anger, pretends that he’s thwarted.

ELON
You can tell John Gallagher that I won’t rest until I see him locked up.
He has my word on that.

Elon turns and moves to leave, followed by Kavanagh and then Priscilla and Miriam.

We stay on Miriam shocked and sickened by what she’s just done; lied to the law to defend criminals. California has broken her moral compass.

EXT. PARKING LOT, SALTON SEA MOTEL – DAY 5

The police cars with Elon and Kavanagh ride away, but we’re on John as he emerges from his hiding place in one of the rooms. Priscilla already relaying the good news.

Miriam joins them outside, and Priscilla beams and slips her arm around Miriam’s waist.

PRISCILLA
Thank you Miriam. You’re my little angel. ‘Cause my Johney, he’s a good man, see.

John gives her a dark smile.

JOHN
You’re one of us now, Miriam.

John’ pleased about it, he’s bringing her down from her judgment and onto his own level.

JOHN
One of us.
Priscilla walks inside the office with John, but we’re on Miriam who is horrified that she’s one of them.

FADE TO BLACK

- end of episode one -

EXT. WHELPING BOX - ROOM 102 - NIGHT 6

New newspapers on the bottom of a whelping box. The puppies have grow in their first day of life. Miriam looks on admiring them.

PRISCILLA
Miriam!

Miriam looks up. Priscilla is in the doorway; she nods her to come out of the room quickly.

EXT. PARKING LOT, SALTON SEA MOTEL - NIGHT 6

Two small vans cruise into the parking lot and stop.

John steps towards them as Miriam emerges, tired, from the inn to help.

Timothy, Cakey and Beef Trust jump down and Hiram and Aaron appear behind John, all of them removing a forbidden crates of dogs, bringing them down the line into the inn.

Priscilla (her black eye clear) is near the door beside Miriam, who now plays her part in mute obedience, seemingly having accepted that she’s part of the operation, even though her drawn face says she isn’t happy about it.

John hands Miriam a box of cold pizza. Miriam hands it directly to Priscilla.

John broods as he watches Miriam, then suddenly raises his hand...

JOHN
Shhhhht!

Everyone freezes to listen - as a car far down the highway slowly moves toward them.
The thugs pull their pistols, awaiting his command. But the car passes - and everyone breathes again, John motioning them to resume their work.

With the vans empty, Cakey, Beef Trust and Timothy jump back aboard, and everyone but Miriam follows John back into the vans.

Miriam watches as the vans go back out of the parking lot for another load of dogs.

Miriam notices a movement out in the shadows, a figure moving swiftly. Miriam stiffens but it's gone. She hurries back into the motel room.

INT. SURGICAL SUITE, SALTON SEA MOTEL - NIGHT 6

Priscilla has a puppy and is vaccinating him.

Miriam enters, her eyes teary from crying.

PRISCILLA
Here. Can you hold this puppy?

Miriam takes the puppy and Priscilla injects the puppy.

MIRIAM
What’s this?

PRISCILLA
Five way.
(re vaccination)
Six and Eight weeks.

Priscilla gestures to vaccine vials on the counter. There are syringes and a health record for each puppy.

Priscilla peels the sticker off the vile and places it on the health record sheet. She looks at the date on the calendar and writes it beside the sticker.

There is a litter of puppies in a pen.

PRISCILLA
Got it?

Miriam takes a puppy from the pen and nods.
PRISCILLA
Vaccinate ‘em. when you’re done.
(nods, re puppies)
We’re in the office.

The cat comes into the room.

INT. OFFICE, SALTON SEA MOTEL - NIGHT 6

John’s shrewd POV of Timothy as he tells him, Aaron and Hiram about a puppy smuggling run. John is tense...

JOHN
The retail rescue people were on you then?

TIMOTHY
(shakes his head, isn’t worried)
For a while. They been working the internet hard. Making appointments to buy puppies and then following us out here.

HIRAM
/agrees, not too concerned/
They’re getting hungry. They can’t catch, train and sell strays. Their business model is flawed. They need pure breed dogs and I don’t think using the government to steal them isn’t working out for them.

AARON
Just what breeder can they can catch these days. I can’t find a breeder; those dogs aren’t well hid.

John glances up as he sees that Miriam’s slipped into the room. We share his POV of her, continuing to the thugs in a low voice as she rummages behind the bar for a dog leash.

JOHN
What’s Kavanagh doing?
TIMOTHY
Elon said he’s hanging around dog shows.

JOHN
Finger on the trigger.

But Aaron is anxious, shakes his head to John.

AARON
But he came straight out here, the minute he arrived in town, so someone’s talking!

We intercut the glances between John and Miriam as she finds the leash but dallies, listening.

AARON
Thank goodness for Elon warning us.

John pauses for Miriam to leave and reluctantly she heads out.

JOHN
Don’t talk in front of the girl.

Aaron is cowed.

INT. SURGICAL SUITE, SALTON SEA MOTEL - MORNING - DAY 7

Miriam enters, Priscilla been busy in her absence, and there’s twenty or so puppies now that need shots.

As Miriam gets busy, John appears. Priscilla smiles at him, but John is eyeing Miriam.

JOHN
Like to hear me talk, do you?

Miriam looks at him - unsure if he’s threatening her or flirting. Priscilla is distracted herding puppies, working.

PRISCILLA
Hmm... what’s that, John?
John ignores her, but moves very close to Miriam and looks her in the face as he takes a puppy. John doesn’t have the gentlest hands making Miriam and the puppy uncomfortable.

Priscilla’s eyes are on the rowdy puppies.

PRISCILLA
They’re wild; can you help me?

But John has gone, and the door slams as he exits.

Priscilla bites back a sigh.

Miriam glances through the window to see John walking from the inn into the desert.

Miriam stiffens when she sees Joel appear, standing in the desert, thinking he’s unseen, waiting for his brother.

John hands him a bottle of whisky in thanks or appeasement.

Priscilla has a new puppy and is playing with the puppy before handing him to Miriam for a shot.

She huffs a bit of annoyance.

PRISCILLA
Tsk! Stinky puppies!
(explains to Miriam)
If you’ll take the puppies, I’ll wash this pen out.

Miriam steps forward to take a crate full of puppies.

MIRIAM
Tomorrow, I’m going to church, Aunt Priscilla.

Priscilla looks at her fearfully.

MIRIAM
It’s Sunday. You surely can’t keep me from that?

Priscilla wants to, but reluctantly concedes.
PRISCILLA
Just don't forget that you're involved now.

Miriam lifts the crate and leaves.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DESERT - DAY 7

A bright sun hangs over the desert as Miriam highways it up to Mecca. The drive feels oppressive and matches her mood. She drives barely aware of traffic or any distance, lost in misery.

EXT. THE MECCA CHURCH - DAY 7

She sits in the parking lot a long while. The church bells seem to call her, and she exits the Camaro. She is suddenly anxious to attend the service, in very great need of moral guidance.

We hear the CONGREGATION singing as Miriam nears.

CONGREGATION (V.O.)
Safely through another week
God has brought us on our way;
Let us now a blessing seek,

INT. MECCA CHURCH - DAY 7

Half the PEOPLE of Mecca are poor, hungry, thin, the CHILDREN filthy (even on Sunday), all of them desperate for deliverance and a good show.

In spite of this, the mood inside the church is inspiring, full of frail hope and sincerity, the people’s eyes tilted up towards the pastor and the snakes. Christ on his cross comes in a distant third.

Gideon Burns, magnetic on his stage, the brave Christian decorations somehow tender and heartening.

CONGREGATION
Waiting in His courts today:
Day of all the week the best,
Emblem of eternal rest.

As Miriam slips in at the back, a few people look around but she’s shy, knows no one. But as she enters a pew at the back
and takes a hymnbook, she glimpses detective Kavanagh from episode one.

And worse, sees the uniformed Elon, and she ducks her head, suddenly wondering if she’s done the wrong thing in coming.

CONGREGATION AND MIRIAM
Mercies multiplied each hour
Through the week our praise demand;

But we ANGLE on Beth, near the front with Will, and she’s seen Miriam and smiles.

Miriam can’t help smiling back rElonеf at a friendly face, and Naomi turns to see who Beth’s smiling at and eyes Miriam.

CONGREGATION
Guarded by almighty power,
Fed and guided by His hand,

Naomi nods Miriam to join them, making it clear that she insists.

CONGREGATION
How ungrateful we have been
In repaying love with sin!

Miriam is surprised to be included so does as she is told, joining them in their pew and Naomi takes her hand and squeezes it encouragingly, keeping hold of it throughout the rest of the hymn even though her eyes are fixed to her brother, Burns.

CONGREGATION
While we pray for pard'ning grace
Through the dear Redeemer's name,
Show Thy reconciled face,
Look not on our sin and shame.
From our worldly cares set free,
May we rest this day in Thee!

Hymn over, everyone sits for Gideon Burns’s sermon.

GIDEON BURNS
And these signs shall follow them that bEloneve: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new
tongues. They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. (Mark 16:17-18)

(half beat)

Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. (Luke 10:19)

(half beat)

Friend, you feel that you are lost in a dark wilderness.

Miriam feels this last acutely. But she looks down at her hand being squeezed, such a kind gesture after everything she's been through and it almost makes her cry. Next to her Naomi seems to sense the emotions Miriam’s going through.

GIDEON BURNS

But I tell you this. If you will put your trust in your pastor and Jesus, and in nature, then He will lead you to green pastures and your suffering will have an end. ‘I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy’. That is His pledge to us. With submission and modesty, He will save you.

Miriam lifts her eyes to the cross. Naomi watches her.

Burns moves to the glass box of snakes. He slowly reaches inside.

EXT. CHURCH, MECCA - DAY 7

EVERYBODY filling out of the church, Miriam watches them; Naomi and Burns the focus of the CROWD, worshippers flocking to talk to them.

Will and Beth appear beside Miriam...

WILLIAM

Hello again. Enjoy the service?
MIRIAM
Yes, I did. My heart is still racing.

BETH
Will’s off work today.
(worried)
To LAX tomorrow.

Miriam nods, Oh. Gets it. Will pulls Beth to him affectionately, nods surreptitiously to Burns and Naomi.

WILLIAM
So you’d better go get that wedding dress ‘cause you’ll need it next week.

Beth smiles and Will steals a kiss, Miriam averting her eyes.

Kavanagh and Elon are exiting the church and Miriam ducks her head to avoid Elon seeing her, but Burns approaches.

GIDEON BURNS
I’m very glad you joined us, Miriam.
We’re hoping that you might.

The ‘we’ refers to Naomi who’s behind him, evidently shares the sentiment. Miriam smiles, a little bashful.

GIDEON BURNS
Perhaps you’d like to help us?

He gestures to the church. Miriam’s pleased to be asked.

EXT. CHURCH YARD - DAY 7

Naomi and Miriam have set up a table and a few benches, the POOR forming a quiet queue before it, but the door to the vicarage opens and Beth emerges, carrying a stack of paper plates, Burns behind her, straining to carry ten huge pizzas which he sets onto the table. There is also a familiar ice chest full of bottled water.

Burns smiles blissfully at Miriam and the poor members of his church who are focused on the free pizza.
Miriam watches as a HOMELESS MAN grabs Burns’s hand in gratitude, and bobs his head in respect. Burns catches Miriam’s eye as he smiles kindly to the MAN then withdraws his hand.

Beth begins handing out the pizza to the grateful poor and Miriam and Naomi pour lemonade, but Miriam is intrigued and fascinated by brother and sister - Naomi and Burns.

Naomi sees her look, and nods.

   NAOMI
   Without our church the poor’d starve to death.

   MIRIAM
   Don’t they have food stamps?

   NAOMI
   The government don't care if they live or die. It’s better that we help them.

Miriam wonders at the cost.

   MIRIAM
   You feed them every day?

   NAOMI
   My brother does. He has more Priscilla. I’d rather garden and maintain the church.

Miriam looks at the flowerbed and Naomi seeing in her a kindred spirit.

As Naomi turns to go back inside, Miriam notices Timothy in the food queue, his plate held out, and she tenses up to see one of the thugs.

Burns catches her look of worry, and considers it. He moves away from the table to her.

   GIDEON BURNS
   But? I think perhaps you didn't come today only for the service alone, Miriam?
Miriam looks at him, her hesitation given it away...

GIDEON BURNS
Come. There’s nothing that confiding cannot help.

Miriam can’t deny it. She needs to talk to someone.

INT. BURNS’S OFFICE, CHURCH HOUSE, MECCA - DAY 7

The vicarage has an air of peace. Walls of books line Burns’s office and fresh flowers in a jug as Miriam glances at a expensive art on the wall.

But really she’s distracted by a building she sees out the window. It is a barn a healthy distance from the church and vicarage. There is an air of mystery. There is a cross on the door but why wasn’t it built nearer? Burns moves beside her, nodding to the building she’s looking at.

GIDEON BURNS
That’s where we keep the snakes.

Inside the barn was see a pit lined with painted wood planks. It’s deep and we don’t see the bottom.

BACK to the preacher’s office. Burns shows her three or four rElongious icons. Miriam doesn’t know but the icons are worth 100s of thousands of dollars.

GIDEON BURNS
The oldest icons depicting the saint as a horseman killing the dragon date to the 12th century. Georgian, Russian but also Greek icons.
(half beat)
Here the saint is depicted in the style of a Roman cavalryman in the tradition of the "Thracian Heros".
(half beat)
In the Russian tradition, the saint is mostly shown on a white horse, facing right. The princess is usually not included.
(half beat)
Some icons show St. George killing the dragon on foot. Another motif shows George on horseback with the youth of Mytilene sitting behind him.

Miriam stares at the art. Burns smiles kindly, gestures her to sit. The big soft armchair seems to envelop her.

He takes another chair.

GIDEON BURNS
What did you want to share with me, Miriam?

MIRIAM
I... I don’t know if I should.

Beat.

GIDEON BURNS
Miriam, the dog breeding at the Salton Sea Inn is widely known. And mostly...
(sighs, regretful)
It’s tolerated. We elect socialist; I don’t support that system, but the people need dogs to rEloneve them from this suffering.
(half beat)
They’re grateful to your uncle for supplying them with pets.

Miriam considers this. A beat, and then, small.

MIRIAM
I told a lie. To that detective.

Burns digests this for a second to make sense of it.

GIDEON BURNS
He came about your uncle's livelyhood?

MIRIAM
I said that I knew nothing. I lied - to save...

She falters, doesn’t want to admit who she was saving.
GIDEON BURNS
...your aunt, of course you did.

Miriam doesn’t correct him, that she lied to save Joel too.

MIRIAM
You're right that it's my aunt who worries me. Every night I’m frightened that he'll...

GIDEON BURNS
Don't be afraid, Miriam.

Miriam summons her courage.

MIRIAM
Pastor Burns, the other night, I think my uncle killed a man.

She can see he doubts her, so she redoubles her efforts.

MIRIAM
I was hiding and I heard a noise - like choking. His name was Abe. His wife was asking for him, last time that I came to Mecca, so you know he's missing.

GIDEON BURNS
(lying)
His wife has gone to join him in another town. He sent for her...

MIRIAM
He can't have done! My uncle killed him.

NAOMI
Did you see a body?

Miriam spins round, Naomi’s there behind her, in the doorway. Miriam shrugs, shakes her head, miserable, as Naomi moves in, and remains standing.
MIRIAM
No. I heard it though. And I can't bear it on my conscience.

Naomi and Burns meet eyes. To Miriam...

GIDEON BURNS
Miriam, we've been -
(hesitates to say it)
Observing your uncle’s dealings for some time. We’re working with the government to try to gain some evidence of his crimes.

MIRIAM
Some are corrupt.

GIDEON BURNS
Yes, the ones who can be trusted anyway.
(regret)
Many profit handsomely themselves, or else are in collusion.

MIRIAM
Then... what should I do?

NAOMI
(to Burns)
She should take care for her own skin’s what she should do! Who knows what John Gallagher's capable of?

Miriam is slightly surprised by Naomi’s sharpness - evidently worried for her. But Miriam has more...

MIRIAM
My aunt says there's someone else above my uncle who tells him what to do.

Both of them turn to look at her in surprise.

MIRIAM
He was hiding in the inn the night that Abe was murdered.
NAOMI
Did you see him?

MIRIAM
Only his feet.

Naomi looks at Burns.

NAOMI
Someone else above him? Could it be Kavanagh? Or perhaps his brother Joel.

Miriam reddens at this last, and is suddenly worried.

MIRIAM
You won't say anything, will you? He'd kill me if he knew I’d talked.

NAOMI
Of course we won’t. And you should keep yourself well out of it.

GIDEON BURNS
(interrupts)
Perhaps Miriam might be our ears and eyes? (to Miriam)
Given that you’re living there? (to Naomi)
She could help us to investigate her uncle?

Naomi glares at Burns - evidently disagrees. But Miriam makes no objection.

EXT. CHURCHYARD, MECCA CHURCH - DAY 7

Miriam exits the vicarage with Naomi and we share her POV of detective Kavanagh walking up to Elon, in the street beyond and exchanging quiet words with him.

MIRIAM
Do you really think that it could be that detective?

NAOMI
(quiet to Miriam)
I think my brother has been hasty. 
You’re just a girl, it isn’t right that 
you should risk getting involved.

MIRIAM
I’d like to help.

Naomi half nods, smiles tightly, very well then. Naomi watches 
as Miriam goes.

INT. KITCHEN, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 7

POV through the surgical suite door; Priscilla is rubbing a 
puppy with a towel. She places him in a small box with a towel. 
Priscilla is tutting over the poor tiny puppy.

Miriam turns to the ‘surgical table’; there is a bitch tied 
down, cut open and John is roughly pulling a puppy out of her 
uterus. Priscilla takes a second puppy.

Miriam steps in.

MIRIAM
What’s going on?

No one answers.

MIRIAM
A C-Section?
(half beat)
You’re a...
(veterinarian)
Is this legal?

John chuckles and hands a third puppy to Miriam. Miriam 
hesitates but takes a towel and then the puppy.

Priscilla puts her puppy down into the box just as John hands 
her another puppy. Miriam looking at the puppy and looking at 
the bitch.

PRISCILLA
Sure are tiny.

JOHN
Not that first one.
As Miriam puts her puppy down, Miriam smiles towards John. She’ll take the next one.

JOHN
Niece, would you like the next?

He looks at her. Miriam nods. Hiram has arrived and hears this...

John hands Miriam a puppy instead of Priscilla.

HIRAM
She's a good girl, eh, John.

John looks at Miriam again, showing off in front of Hiram.

JOHN
Now she knows who's boss, perhaps.

He nods curtly to Miriam that he’ll have the eggs. Miriam puts a pan over the fire, but Hiram intercepts her -

HIRAM
I've a letter for ye, Miriam, from Iowa. Mail just stopped out 'ere.
(quiet, sly smile to her)
They come in spite of him...

Miriam’s unsure of his ‘joke’ and attempted complicity with her but she takes the letter and puts it in the pocket. She is quickly ready for the next puppy.

John nods Hiram over, Miriam watching as John mutters to him all the while pulling puppies out of the open bitch.

As Hiram leans in listening.

John says something that we don’t hear, and Miriam is more interested in eavesdropping on them than her letter, which she opens without looking, her eyes still on them.

Hiram is surprised and worried. That’s the end of the puppies. John starts stitching up the bitch.
HIRAM
But I didn’t think we’d do another one so soon?

Priscilla is suddenly beside Miriam.

PRISCILLA
Oh, who’s it from, Miriam?

John looks up at Miriam, and she hurriedly lowers her gaze to the letter.

MIRIAM
Ned. A boy from home.

She darts a glance at John again, but his and Hiram’s muttering is too low to hear.

PRISCILLA
Ned? A lover?

For a moment, it makes Miriam sad—

MIRIAM
He would be, if I wanted.

As the thought finally penetrates, she looks at the letter with a sudden rush of emotion, as a FLASH IMAGE breaks in—

EXT. CORN FIELD, NED’S FARM, IOWA – DAY

Sunlight. Golden wheat. NED, on a tractor; he’s strong and wholesome and blond and handsome. She ought to return to Iowa, but “ought” is a funny worthless word.

NED
Marry me, Miriam.

INT. KITCHEN, SALTON SEA MOTEL – DAY 7

Miriam’s POV of John right in her face, snapping her from her daydream.

JOHN
Where’s my damn breakfast?
He takes the letter from Miriam’s hands and glances at it, scanning to see who it’s from and check it’s not a threat. He chucks it aside.

Miriam hurriedly takes the eggs and moves to the frying pan. The pan’s now hot, and Miriam breaks the eggs in.

But Hiram is behind John in worry.

HIRAM
But I thought ye said we couldn’t do another ’til the Spring.

John flares as he turns to Hiram.

JOHN
It don’t matter what I said! I’m sayin’ something else now!

John grabs Hiram by the throat, and Miriam turns in fear, leaving her cooking. Priscilla jumps in between the men.

PRISCILLA
John, no, please!

John is large enough and tense enough to snap Hiram’s neck, but Priscilla’s beseeching gaze, finally makes him release his savage grip.

Hiram steps back gasping, afraid and actually surprised at this attack on him.

PRISCILLA
Hiram, get out.

Hiram glares at John and John won’t look at him.

PRISCILLA
(to Hiram)
Just go. Go.

Hiram glances at her, deElonberating, then turns and leaves.

Miriam exhales rElonelf, turns back to the fire but...
JOHN
Don’t you ever do that to me again!

John hits Priscilla.

Now Miriam gets between them.

MIRIAM
Stop it! Leave her alone.

Miriam helps Priscilla leave, but inexplicably it’s Priscilla who turns on her, and wildly pushes her away.

PRISCILLA
Stay out of it. You don’t understand him.

Miriam recoils in confusion, and John stops, suddenly spent and deflates in self-loathing as Priscilla struggles return to him. Priscilla starts to comfort him, as though he’s the one who’s injured. Priscilla’s nose is bleeding.

PRISCILLA
There now. Here.

She cradles him, strokes his head, and he clings to her like a boy as he struggles not to sob.

PRISCILLA
You’ll be alright. I’m here. I’m here.

Miriam stares in utter confusion at the scene before her for a long beat; how can love and violence co-exist like this?

But smoke from the pan of burning eggs brings Miriam out of her trance.

John pulls himself together under Priscilla’s caress.

JOHN
I’ve gotta talk to him.

Miriam barely breathes in case she finds out who ‘he’ is.

PRISCILLA
(sudden fear)
Oh no John. Not ‘over there’? You can’t! You know what he might do!

JOHN  
(spoaked but) 
He won’t.  
(bitter) 
We’re useful to him.

But Priscilla’s fear doesn’t abate, and even John looks tense.

PRISCILLA 
Please don’t. John?

But he crosses the kitchen and strides out, leaving the back door open after him.

Only now does Priscilla show Miriam any pain, but she doesn’t want any discussion with Miriam, so she exits to the kitchen and locks herself in the bathroom.

Miriam exhales, assessing what just happened. Through the window John drives north. It might be now or never.

Miriam rips off her apron, starts her Camaro and follows him.

EXT. COURTYARD, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DUSK 7

The sun is sinking as Miriam slips out after John. She drives across the parking lot, waits until he’s gone a safe distance.

We INTERCUT between them, with John’s POV now as he drives toward Mecca, darkly brooding and distracted.

Miriam waits until he’s almost over the skyline and disappearing, then she drives after him.

EXT. ROAD TO MECCA - DAY 7

When they reach Mecca. John disappears. Miriam has been too cautious.

Miriam panics and speeds about town, looking down each cross street. She drives and drives.
John turns west towards the church, not seeing Miriam in the distance behind, looking like a little dark dot against the brown stretch of moor.

She stops, spooked. The town is totally closed for the night.

But then she fixes her determination.

She drives until she runs out of gasoline, right in the middle of an intersection.

She waits not long. All at once, car lights come toward her from all four directions. The four vehicles stop and the drivers get out and approach the stalled out Camaro.

A face leers out at her, mouth twisted in a smile that isn’t friendly - Cakey. Miriam swallows, turns to her left - but coming that way is Elon, looking even more threatening.

Turning to her right she finds Hiram there, his face also unsmiling as he stares at her and Miriam stiffens fear. She’s alone and vulnerable in a small town at night, the sexual threat hangs in the air and Miriam’s on the verge of bolting.

JOEL
It's alright. I'll take care of her.

Miriam spins to see Joel standing close behind her, dirty and unkempt, the other three now staring at him impossible to interpret.

But what does ‘take care’ mean? And was he with the thugs or has he followed to protect her? Impossible to say.

But the other three have melted back into their vehicles and as she stares at Joel. Miriam tries not to show Joel the attraction she feels. But now she’s on her own with him.

EXT. MECCA - NIGHT 7

The night is silent. Miriam is standing in the road with Joel. He’s edgier than she’s seen him, glancing around.
JOEL
What're you doing, miles away out here at night? They'd've raped you here in the street.

Miriam’s flustered to be with him, her attraction to him flaring and she covers it with bravado.

MIRIAM
They'd’ve had to kill me first!

JOEL
I’m sure they’d be quite happy either way. Dead or alive.

Miriam bristles, fairly sure that is what the others think. But she notices his sleeve and hands.

JOEL
Come on let’s go get you some gas.

MIRIAM
You've blood on you.

Joel looks - sees she’s right. No explanation, he wipes it on his breeches, and stalks off as though he’s rankled with her. Miriam follows him in her Camaro.

EXT. DESERT TRAVEL TRAILER NEAR MECCA - NIGHT 7

Miriam follows Joel towards it, clearly where he’s living. Joel turns on the AC and it vibrates to life, Miriam standing there, unsure what to do. Joel moves into the trailer. Miriam takes a big whiff.

MIRIAM
Puppies. You having puppies?

JOEL
How do you know?

MIRIAM
It smells like puppies.

Joel reveals a bitch and litter of several puppies in a whelping box under the fold up table.
JOEL
I always say there's two things a woman should do by instinct - and whelping puppies is one of 'em.

Miriam sees half a meal prepared out on the counter.

MIRIAM
Cook your own dinner?

JOEL
Who said anything about cooking?

She sits and thinks and then begins to prepare the food.

MIRIAM
Beautiful litter.

JOEL
You’re right. Five generations of work.

MIRIAM
You bred the entire pedigree?

JOEL
Both sides.

MIRIAM
Where is the sire?

JOEL
He lives in the trailer next door.

INT. JOEL’S TRAILER - NIGHT 7 - LATER

The meal is on the table. The bitch wants outside. Joel lets her out. He leaves the door open so she can return.

For a moment there is silence, each of them eating their meal. Joel and Miriam self-conscious at the sense that they’re playing house together.

MIRIAM
Why are you living out here? I thought you had a house?
JOEL
I'll tell you if you tell me what you were doing in Mecca at night?

Miriam doesn’t answer. He thought as much. He glances to the door then seems to make the decision to relax. He sits.

JOEL
You should leave John and your aunt and come and look after me, you know.

MIRIAM
Pfft! Live in here with you. Elbow to elbow and a dog whelping under the table?

He laughs.

JOEL
Women are always mean to me. Even my mom.

The bitch enters the trailer again and disappears under the table.

Joel looks at Miriam but doesn’t quibble.

He tastes the food first and nods approval, starts to wolf it down. Miriam picks at hers, not really interested in it, but damned if she’s going to let him think she cooked it just for him.

MIRIAM
How long since your mother died?

JOEL
Eleven years this Christmas. Pete Wilson executed my dad when I was six. He killed a man in a robbery.

Miriam listens, Joel oblivious as he eats.
JOEL
He left his savings to a Mexican woman, but my mother stood by that man all her life.

Miriam listens to this, pondering it, but says nothing.

JOEL
When he was gone she turned religious. I couldn't stand it, so I cleared out into the Army, soon as I could, went off to war.

MIRIAM
I suppose I should be grateful that my parents were so good to me.

JOEL
There's only you?

MIRIAM
My father died when I was four.
(beat, pointed)
Stumbled onto a puppy mill. They killed him.

JOEL
So how is my brother? And the inn. Did the detective arrest him yet?

She fixes him with a look.

MIRIAM
You know he didn't, 'cause you've seen your brother since.

Joel didn't know she knew that, one up for Miriam. He's finished his food, leaves the plate to one side.

MIRIAM
In fact, the detective was asking about you. But I said I hadn't seen you.

JOEL
Ah, you can do as you're told then!
MIRIAM
It seemed less trouble at the time. But seeing as I didn’t tell them anything, you can tell me what you've got to hide.

Joel stands, stretching his legs.

Miriam also stands, a little confrontational. Joel nods outside towards the neighbors.

EXT. JOEL’S TRAILER - NIGHT 7 - LATER

Miriam and Joel walk the neighborhood. Here are perhaps twenty travel trailers on tiny lots; each is surrounded by a short white picket fence. There is an elaborate and tall cactus garden in front of each fence (to hide the dogs). Joel has a five-gallon bucket of dog food.

Joel has pulled some old broken-down cars in front of a few trailers. Joel owns the long row of trailers and no one lives in them, but his dogs. It’s a rather ingenious set up. It doesn’t look like a dog kennel. It looks like very low-income housing.

As they walk, Joel pours a healthy amount of dog food over each fence. Miriam says nothing but she examines the dogs closely as they stroll by each trailer.

Joel looks at her, but says nothing. It emboldens her, and she straightens, looking challengingly at him.

MIRIAM
I know that there’s another man who gives my uncle orders. Is it you?

Joel is surprised. But for now he files this new information, more interested in what Miriam thinks of him.

JOEL
What do you think?

He’s standing closer to her now, something vaguely threatening in it, but Miriam looks at him defiantly.
MIRIAM
I think that there’s no tenderness in you. You're rude. You have a cruel streak. And you're a thief who stands for everything I despise.

A beat.

JOEL
And yet here we are.

MIRIAM
I don’t like you.

Joel pulls her suddenly towards him, almost nose to nose, whispers in her ear.

JOEL
Come to market with me to Los Angeles. Come help me Delonver some puppies.

Joel reaches the end of a long row of trailers and empties the last of the dog food.

He leans close to Miriam, hot breath on her neck but his lips don’t touch her skin, even though he can tell she yearns for it.

MIRIAM
What, and get caught with you?

He’s still at her neck, fingers in the back of her hair.

JOEL
What’s wrong? Don't you like excitement?

He reaches out a finger, and traces it down the neckline of her blouse.

Miriam can’t answer, doesn’t stop him even though she knows she should, burning with desire for him. His touch is thrilling and forbidden; not sentimental or respectful as a kiss would be, but rudely sexual.

JOEL
Come. Come to town.
He loops his finger in her neckline and tugs as he’s taking her blouse off. Still she doesn’t stop him, it’s in his power, and now his hand slides further down until it’s almost on her breast. Miriam pulls free just in time. She’s flushing.

MIRIAM
Los Angeles? With a man who's...

JOEL
What?

He pulls her back to him defensively, her face now an inch from his own - half threatening, perhaps cruel.

JOEL
What am I, Miriam?

She’s suddenly fearful, he’s hurting her. Joel realises, and lets her go. He doesn’t meet her eye.

JOEL
(changing the subject)
Come on. I'll get you some gas.

EXT. MECCA - NIGHT 7

Joel’s car arrives at Miriam’s Camaro. He fills the gas tank from a red portable gas tank.

Joel hugs Miriam, her arms around him, closer then they need to be, the wind raking back her hair.

Joel helps Miriam into her car.

JOEL
I’ll come by the inn at ten. Meet me at the road, will ya?

She looks away.

MIRIAM
I won't be there.

Joel watches as she drives away. She doesn’t look back at him.
INT. KITCHEN, SALTON SEA MOTEL - MORNING 8

Sudden noise and brightness. Priscilla busy in the kitchen as Miriam enters from the passageway.

Her POV of John asleep at the kitchen table, an empty bottle on its side beneath his arm. Only while he’s sleeping does he look at all at peace.

Priscilla drapes a blanket around him, and pushes another under his head in concern.

    PRISCILLA
    He was drinking half the night. He couldn’t sleep.
    (she nods to Miriam)
    Come on. We can get things done.

She heads out briskly into the courtyard.

EXT. STABLES, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 8

Priscilla fills a bucket with dog food and hands it to Miriam with a nod to the kennel.

    PRISCILLA
    They’re gonna be hungry.

    MIRIAM
    Is my uncle planning something?

Priscilla ‘doesn’t hear’ her, changes the subject.

    PRISCILLA
    I was worried where you’d got to last night.

Beat.

    MIRIAM
    I ran out of gas in Mecca. Joel Gallagher helped me out.

Priscilla stiffens, partly because she hears Miriam’s interest in her voice. She’s jumpy, very wary of this.
PRISCILLA
Joel Gallagher, eh?

MIRIAM
I was stranded and he was kind enough to...
    (off Priscilla’s look)
Why do you dislike him so much?

PRISCILLA
Never said I did.

MIRIAM
You’re scared of him then.

PRISCILLA
Well if that’s what turns you on...

But John is suddenly howling from the kitchen in his sleep. Priscilla’s love for him is clear.

PRISCILLA
He has bad dreams.
    (she hurries back to the office)
When you’ve done, can you hose down the runs?

EXT. STREAM, DESERT NEAR SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 8

Miriam takes a water hose and hoses down all the runs.

But her mind is miles away, and fleetingly she touches her neck again, daydreaming about Joel.

INT. KITCHEN, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 8

Priscilla tends to John, who’s shivering and sobbing in his sleep, tormented by some terrible guilt or memory.

Priscilla sponges his forehead and smoothes his hair, humming in a soft, low voice to him as though he were a child.

EXT. PARKING LOT, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 8

Miriam finishes and she heads to the inn.
INT. KITCHEN, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 8

Miriam heads back in but.

MIRIAM
Aunt Priscilla, I’m going to Los…

PRISCILLA
(cowed)
This is Pastor Burns. The Preacher at a Mecca church. My niece Miriam.

Burns feigns faint recognition as he turns to Miriam.

GIDEON BURNS
I bEloneve you came to my sermon last week, Miriam?

MIRIAM
Yes, sir. I did.

A beat.

GIDEON BURNS
I just pulled into the parking lot to make a call and I heard an awful screaming.

Priscilla tenses but he lays his hand on John’s arm, concerned.

PRISCILLA
I’ve told Mr Burns we’re alright. We don’t need nothing.

Burns looks at Miriam, as though she is his real reason for coming here today.

GIDEON BURNS
And you Miriam? Do you need anything?

Priscilla signals a warning look.

MIRIAM
No. Thank you, sir.

Burns nods.
As he exits, Priscilla looks anxious. Miriam watches Burns go.

EXT. DESERT OUTSIDE SALTON SEA MOTEL – EVENING

A low wind blows across the moors in the failing light.

INT. KITCHEN, SALTON SEA MOTEL – NIGHT 8

Priscilla and Miriam sit.

PRISCILLA
It’s not his fault, you know. He’s being pushed too hard. Scared half senseless.

She pours herself another generous whisky from the bottle beside him, then strokes John’s head again.

Miriam glances at her, tries to sound casual.

MIRIAM
By who?

Priscilla looks up but doesn’t answer. She smiles at Miriam, and moves to stroke her face.

PRISCILLA
Oh, sometimes Miriam, you look so much like your father.

Miriam feels a sudden rush of emotion.

MIRIAM
Do I?

PRISCILLA
You don’t remember him, I suppose? Only what your mother told you.

MIRIAM
I know that he was kind and good. I wish he was still here.
Priscilla looks at her a moment with what seems a tinge of sadness, but, perhaps because she’s a bit drunk, she sighs and shakes her head with tiredness.

PRISCILLA
Oh! I’m off to bed. You going too?

MIRIAM
No. Not yet.

Miriam’s slightly dampened by the reference to her father, and disappointed that Priscilla didn’t say more.

But Priscilla is oblivious, smiles her love as she passes John.

PRISCILLA
He’ll sleep now ‘til the morning.

She kisses his head like a loving mother, then moves into the bedroom.

Miriam waits until she sees the light go out.

INT. OFFICE, SALTON SEA MOTEL - NIGHT 8

Miriam edges to the office and - eyes on John in case he wakes, slowly opens a drawer.

Miriam slips quietly in and looks around. The office seems like the only hiding place, so she moves behind the desk to search.

She glimpses something stuffed behind some bottles and she reaches out and draws out a sheaf of scrolled up papers.

Miriam straightens, starts to untie the string around them - it’s definitely the maps and charts and floor plans of a Los Vegas Convention Center.

JOHN
Who's there?

John is suddenly rocking in the doorway, holding the frame to steady himself, a mad look in his jaundice and bloodshot eyes, his voice a strained, hoarse, fearful whisper. He is so drunk he can hardly stand. John is dying of alcohol poisoning and liver failure.
But although Miriam quickly puts the papers under the counter to hide it, John’s eyes are focused somewhere in the middle distance and not on her at all.

Miriam edges out into the room. The door’s still blocked. But suddenly John swings out at her.

JOHN
Put that knife down!

Miriam leaps back in fear.

MIRIAM
Uncle John?! It’s me, Miriam.

He freezes at her voice, but still seems not to see her.

JOHN
Miriam? Where’ve they gone?

MIRIAM
There’s no-one here. Just me.

He waits as though he’s listening to something she can’t hear. Then he deflates with relief and sinks into a chair.

JOHN
Dreams. Just dreams. Fetch me some brandy.

She almost protests but checks herself; in this mood it’s possible that she’ll learn something.

She goes behind the counter and brings out a whisky bottle. She hands it to him and he drinks deeply with satisfaction.

JOHN
Aah. It started crystal clear ‘till they kept in a barrel, for almost seven years. They poured it in a bottle, and packed in a truck, set it on shelf, ‘till I gave him 30 bucks.

He laughs, Miriam struggling to understand what he means.
JOHN
It’s a man’s game, girl. I’ll tell you that. I've killed a man with one shot, Miriam. Tear gassed him. But when I drink I see him. Face staring at me, back of his head splashed all over a Borzoi. Brains hanging off him in ribbons.

MIRIAM
(softly, almost a whisper)
I don’t understand you?

He takes her hand and we share her POV of his big, calloused hand and her small one laid inside it. He sets the scene.

As he speaks we see the heist from episode one completed.

JOHN
First you pick out the dogs you want. They’ll sell you a catalogue. And you mark their crates. Map it all out. You get the guys in security guard uniforms and tear gas the place. Usher everyone out of the grooming area. And you cart them off. Best breeders. They have dog shows to pick out the dogs good enough to produce the next generation. That’s why we have such good dogs. Healthy, beautiful

MIRIAM
You did that in Las Vegas?

JOHN
Hahha. You know about that?

MIRIAM
What happened?

JOHN
It was flawless and this guy pulls out a gun. Not a cop or anything… and he pointed it at me. So, I had to shot him. Beautiful Borzoi though. Hard to place the puppies. Most of these
dumbasses are ‘what the fuck is that dog’?

Miriam’s numb with the awful truth of what he did.

MIRIAM
You did that in Vegas?!

JOHN
Stole those dogs and murdered those people. What three people?

Miriam backs away.

JOHN
Monster, am I? You judge me!
(catches her arm)
You, who don’t even know the half of it! ‘Spose you think you’re to good for me?!

MIRIAM
I am too good. And if your conscience didn’t trouble you, you wouldn’t have such nightmares!
(wrenches away from him)
You’ll go to prison for this.

JOHN
Maybe I’ll just die.

MIRIAM
Maybe it will be a violent death.

JOHN
What, like your father?

MIRIAM
My father was a good man. It was people like you who killed him!

JOHN
(right in her face)
Your father was a dog breeder himself!
Miriam recoils, Priscilla is awake in the doorway also hearing this -

JOHN
It was the law what killed him. They tried to seize his dogs and he resisted.

MIRIAM
That isn’t true!

JOHN
You tell her, Priscilla. Tell the fool girl who her precious father was.

Miriam’s face falls as she turns to Priscilla - but her aunt won’t meet her eye. Her silence says it all.

Miriam is devastated. Her whole sense of identity is shattered.

John is drunk but feeling guilty to have hurt her.

JOHN
So don’t you judge me. You’re just the same as us.

On Miriam - the bottom fallen out of her world.

DARKNESS

EXT. DESERT - DAY 9

Low in the desert, fast moving clouds, the weather volatile.

We hold on SALTON SEA MOTEL, silent and unremarkable and isolated.

INT. MIRIAM’S ROOM, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 9

On Miriam, dull and listless in the bed. She turns and eyes her reflection in the battered mirror with dislike.

Her aunt is heard knocking.

PRISCILLA (O.S.)
Miriam? Come have some breakfast.
Miriam ignores her. She turns away from the mirror. She seems broken.

EXT. DESERT OUTSIDE SALTON SEA MOTEL – DAY 9

Miriam walks through the parking lot and then down the road North a piece. She shows a bit of defiance and tons of self-loathing. Soon, the desert stretches out around her. She heads for the road.

EXT. ROAD, NEAR SALTON SEA MOTEL – DAY 9

Miriam walks the road where Joel told her to wait. She is lost in her thoughts. A long beat of her waiting.

But suddenly, there he is. Joel. Driving towards her in his car/truck. The way to drown out all her thoughts and feelings, to lose herself and stop existing.

Miriam’s face flames colour as he rides up with a grin, pleased to see her, raising his whip in a sign of welcome.

JOEL
You came!

He holds out his hand to her.

Miriam doesn’t take it, dark as she climbs in beside him. Joel is deflated.

JOEL
Well. That's not the greeting I was hoping for!

Miriam simply sits in the passenger seat. A puppy whimpers. Miriam turns and looks in the back at the puppies. She’s careful not to smile too obviously.

JOEL
Terriers.

(half beat)
So what's the matter with you? I thought I'd ride to Los Angeles with a pretty girl beside me but you’ve about
as salty as that lake. What's happened at inn?

MIRIAM
Nothing any different.

JOEL
Ah, I know. You’ve been thinking of me so hard you couldn’t sleep?

MIRIAM
Yes, I thought about you once. I wondered who would go to prison first, you or your brother.

A beat. Reluctantly she gives voice to it.

MIRIAM
Last night, he drank himself into a stupor.
(hesitates)
He told me that he steals dogs and murders people.

Clearly he already knew that and it worries her. He nods.

JOEL
Ah. So what will you do? Will you tell the law?

MIRIAM
I’ve not decided. I have my aunt to think of.
(testing him)
Anyway I can’t tell you, you’re in it with him. I haven't noticed you deny it yet.

He registers her judgement.

JOEL
If that's what you think then why are you here?

She glances at him, but admits a dark truth that she hates herself for.
MIRIAM
For the sake of your ego, Joel Gallagher.

He’s pleased and surprised that she’s admitted it. But Miriam hates herself even more as she acknowledges.

MIRIAM
And perhaps because I am no better. My father wasn't perfect or maybe not even decent. He may have been a violent man. Your brother told me.

Joel considers this as the vehicle presses on.

JOEL
So that’s what’s put you in this mood?

MIRIAM
(yes)
Thanks to your brother, I feel that everything’s been a lie.

JOEL
Well that’s alright. Be whoever you want then. I can’t be Joel Gallagher today, not if the law’s about, so we’ll play a game. You can be anyone you want, as long as it’s not dreary. And as long as you start smiling.

He nudges her. And nudges her again. And Miriam can’t help it, concedes a smile, her mood beginning to thaw under his charm.

Joel’s pleased, that’s much more like it.

The vehicle speed on across the desert. In the back there is a crate or two full of puppies but also a change of clothes.

MIRIAM
I’m going to change clothes. Don’t look.
Miriam changes right behind Joel as he drives. He watches the road but peaks a bit in the mirror. She changes into boy clothes and puts her hair up in a baseball cap.

He startles when a boy shyly appears beside him. He realises it’s Miriam of course - but she’s wearing one of his shirts she got from the back of the, her hair tucked inside his cap to look short, his breeches on her bottom half. She looks cute as all get out.

There’s a brave rebelliousness to her, but shyness as well, she needs him to go along with it.

MIRIAM
If I can be anyone today, I’ll be a boy.

He’s amused and challenged, likes her spirit.

JOEL
I like it.

Miriam is rEloneved. The adrenaline of dressing up is turning her former angst to a reckless determination to lose herself and just have fun for one day. She throws the dress she was wearing into the back of the wagon.

EXT. ROAD TOWARDS LOS ANGELES - DAY 9

Miriam and Joel look like peas in a pod as they rumble across the desert in the vehicle.

As they reach the suburbs, and then the city proper.

They’re easy in each other’s company, and as Miriam looks out over the big city, Joel points things out to her, loves this flashing beautiful cityscape.

He darts sly glances at her; she’s even prettier dressed as a boy and it’s clear he likes her.

Miriam sees him look and lets him. Giving in to freedom.

We’re WIDE on them now, riding the vehicle across great city that seem to go on forever.
The air is full of electricity.

PUPPY MONTAGUE

Miriam and Joel arrive at a feed and pet supply store. Joel is friends with the owner/manager. They put the puppies in an exercise pen. Joel uses his phone to text the new owners. Miriam plays with the puppies and the puppies of other breeders who are meeting clients at the store. In the end, Miriam falls for another breeder’s exotic Puli.

Couples come to buy a puppy; they are testing their relationship with a puppy, before having a baby of their own. Families, with kids, come for a puppy. Awkward guys come buy a puppy cause they can’t find a girlfriend. They are all over-joyed to find a purebred puppy. The government with the help of the animal rights groups have made the dogs rare and expensive. Still, the buyers are more than happy to shell out the money.

Joel negotiates a deal. Miriam takes possession of the puppy, registration papers and all. There are dozens of dog beds and leashes and bowls back at the Pet Motel, but they buy new everything. Doggie raincoat and life-jackets for swimming.

END PUPPY MONTAGUE

EXT. BEACH AREA, LOS ANGELES – DUSK 9

The streets of Hermosa Beach are busy with color, life and music; surfers doing their best, ice cream, tee shirts, eating at a sidewalk café, shopping market stalls. Joel, Miriam and the Puli. Miriam thinks she sees a movie star (cameo) in a car who notices the puppy and waves approval.

EXT. BEACH AREA BAR, LOS ANGELES – DUSK 9

Joel charms the female (also from Iowa) at the door and she lets the dog in the bar. On the bar’s patio, Joel is beside Miriam, handing her a drink. She peers at it.

MIRIAM
What is it?

JOEL
Daiquiri.
He’s amused by her hesitation.

JOEL
Why? Don’t you drink?

She looks at him with challenge - and then drinks it down, maintaining eye contact with him over the brim of the cup in challenge, huge bravado.

Joel laughs. Reacts to the look on her face at the weird/horrible headache (brain freeze) when she grabs her temples in pain.

He drinks his own beer thirstily and squeezes her hand, the touch making her melt.

EXT. ROAD BACK TO SALTON SEA - NIGHT

The vehicle with Joel and Miriam heads home, Miriam with the puppy on her lap. She’s in love... maybe it’s the puppy and maybe it’s Joel.

JOEL
Better get you back. Your aunt and uncle will be shitting bricks and calling you a snitch.

MIRIAM
Don’t want to go back there.

Miriam looks at him, then kisses the puppy.

They pass a hotel and Joel makes an extreme maneuver to stop.

JOEL
Come on, Miriam. I’ve money for a room.

Miriam refuses and hugs the puppy more tightly.

JOEL
God, you’re hard as flint!

Miriam bristles, stung by this.
JOEL
Fine, I’ll marry you if it makes you feel better! It’s not often I have money enough for a ring.

MIRIAM
You bought me a car.

JOEL
And a dog.

MIRIAM
Yes, you did. A rare exotic too. Thank you. I appreciate it but I just…

But he’s offended and insulted her, and she’s barbwire…

MIRIAM
How many wives do you have then?

Joel doesn’t understand how this has suddenly gone so wrong, so makes it up, suddenly self-destructive -

JOEL
Six or seven, scattered over California. I don’t count the ones over in Nevada and the one in Mexico.

MIRIAM
That’s wives enough for any two men.

JOEL
Miriam? Don’t let’s fight.

He kisses her, and pulls her out of the vehicle still kissing her. She has the puppy in her arms.

MIRIAM
I suppose you think I’ll go to bed with you ‘cause all I’m an orphan.

JOEL
Of course not.

He reaches out to stroke her face, and she calms.
Stroking turns to gentle caressing; he pulls her wet hair out from her hat and starts to play with it, stroking her neck with the tips of his fingers.

Miriam feels his touch acutely and reacts to it - wanting it although it pains her - trying to resist as he moves closer, breath on her face as he whispers.

MIRIAM
I wish that I could stay with you, and then forget it by tomorrow, as I’m sure you would. But I can’t.

Miriam can’t bear the irony; she is in love and painfully tempted.

JOEL
Can you pretend that you’re in love with me? You can keep doing that can’t you?

MIRIAM
Keep?

JOEL
Well today.

MIRIAM
Today doesn’t exist.

JOEL
You made it up?

He’s touching her and she’s giving in to it.

MIRIAM
I didn’t look for this.

JOEL
And you don’t want it.

MIRIAM
No. I don’t.

But in contradiction to her words, she suddenly reaches out and finally, for the first time, kisses him with abandon.
We hold on them kissing like their lives depend on it.

INT. HOTEL, LOS ANGELES - NIGHT 9

Joel leads Miriam (with puppy) by the hand into the inn; her hair’s now down her back and several CUSTOMERS stare at the couple and look disapproving. Miriam steps back, shyly.

Joel pays and holding her hand and leads her up to the room.

As Joel shuts the door, it will have to do. She puts the puppy on the floor. He pulls her close to him, strokes back her hair and looks at her with sincerity.

Joel
You’re different, Miriam.

She tries to read his face, wants to believe him as he continues to stroke her hair.

In response, Miriam reaches up and kisses him with tenderness and passion - doesn’t even care any more, she just wants him.

He pushes his body against her, pinning her against the wall.

They hold each other’s faces as they kiss, then he starts to take her shirt off. She pauses, making him stop for a second in surprise and smile.

JOEL
What?

She runs her hands all over his now bare chest, kissing it as though his skin could feed her.

But she hasn’t answered, so after a few more seconds caressing him she stops and looks up into his face, questioningly.

MIRIAM
Can you get my dogs bed please?

Joel smiles in surprise and desire.

JOEL
Sure.
He takes a step toward the door.

MIRIAM
You really want me?

She sees his surprise at her deep, assertive passion - expected her to acquiesce, be passive, give in as though for his sake. And perhaps deep down he doesn’t think much of himself and can’t bEloneve she cares for him.

Miriam falls to kissing and touching him again.

MIRIAM
I do. I do.

JOEL
But your dog need his bed?

MIRIAM
Please?

He kisses her once more and leaves the room to fetch the dog bed.

INT. RECEPTION, THE FLEECE INN, LAUNCESTON - NIGHT 9

Joel goes downstairs to his vehicle. A police cruiser drives through the parking lot. They are scanning licensee plates.

That’s a hit. Questioning out in Riverside County.

Sir, can we see some I.D.

Joel’s face goes blank. He throws the keys and the dog bed into the floor board of the vehicle.

He takes a long hard defeated breath.

INT. BEDROOM, FLEECE INN, LAUNCESTON - NIGHT 9

Miriam waits, anticipating pleasure.

She moves to the window, looks outside through the dirty panes. The night is bright and she sees PEOPLE walking and driving. She
looks at the puppy... spoiled a bit and uncomfortable on the floor.

Miriam looks in the mirror at her shirt and breeches, and laughs inwardly, suddenly they feel inappropriate for what she’s about to do.

Unsure what to do with herself - and a glance at the bed suggests it would be too forward to arrange herself on that.

She sits in a chair, and idly watches as a moth flutters against the window pane, trying to get to the light.

The sound of the door, and Miriam turns excitedly but it's a knock across the hall.

EXT. MAIN STREET, LAUNCESTON - NIGHT 9

Miriam clutches her puppy as she steps out, confused and humiliated, into the busy city streets. There’s no sign of Joel. Wide on her, a lonely figure and her puppy, heading down the street.

She doesn’t know where to go or what to do. She walks the puppy around eight or ten blocks, until the puppy becomes tired.

She gets into the Joel’s vehicle and finds the dog bed and keys on the floor. She locks the vehicle door and returns to the room.

She puts the dog bed on the floor but brings the puppy up to the bed. They are soon fast asleep.

The next morning, Joel has not returned.

INT. L.A. COUNTY JAIL - MORNING

Joel is incarcerated.

INT. MECCA CHURCH - DAY

Miriam pulls up to the church, driving Joel’s vehicle.

Miriam walks to the church. Naomi is working in the flower garden. Miriam is something of a zombie.
Miriam turns as Naomi walks over. Miriam is relieved.

NAOMI

Whatever’s happened to you?

MIRIAM

I’m such a fool!

Naomi can only hold Miriam as she starts to cry.

Naomi steers Miriam along the path towards the church.

Miriam is grateful for Naomi’s friendship but hesitates to tell her out of shame and guilt.

MIRIAM

I can’t. You’ll think me very stupid.

NAOMI

I won’t. You’re anything but stupid, Miriam.

Miriam looks at Naomi’s steady, stable expression. A mother figure perhaps.

MIRIAM

I went to Los Angeles with a man. But he left me in a hotel room. He made sure that I’d have him then he left me.

Naomi waits, but guesses shrewdly with disapproval.

NAOMI

So this was Joel Gallagher?
Miriam winces.

**NAOMI**
Well, you do have his truck. That’s a good thing. And you have his dog.

**MIRIAM**
He’s my dog.

Naomi guessing only compounds her self-disgust and humiliation, and Miriam is distressed at her emotions as she admits, partly to herself, with shock

**MIRIAM**
I care for him!

**NAOMI**
(studies her)
Love’s a curse to far too many women.
To fear nothing, and desire nothing,
that’s what it is to be free, Miriam.

Miriam looks at Naomi, wondering at her.

**MIRIAM**
Was there never anyone you cared for? You never married?

Naomi smiles enigmatically -

**NAOMI**
It wasn’t God’s path for me.

Naomi has a slight air of superiority. Miriam considers this.

**NAOMI**
There’s my brother’s mission.

As Naomi nods up ahead we share Miriam’s POV of Burns standing that the church’s step, waiting.

**NAOMI**
We’ll drop you back.
NAOMI
Mr Burns. Can we use the sanctuary?

But Burns ignores her, continues to appraise Miriam.

Miriam is self-conscious, assumes he’s judging her, looks down.

MIRIAM
I’m sure you’re disappointed in me. I’m disappointed in myself.

Miriam hesitates, looking at Burns, but after a second he takes the cue and turns away.

MIRIAM
Thank you.

Pastor Burns is turned away, but we now see that actually he’s intrigued and excited by this new Miriam. He pretends to leave but he remain hidden to listen.

NAOMI
You followed your desires and they were thwarted. Would you feel differently if he had stayed to carry out the act?

Miriam is embarrassed by her frankness. And feels guilty because she’s right. She’d feel different.

MIRIAM
I suppose I should be grateful that he left. I’m frightened that I’ll end up like my aunt.

(suddenly emphatic)
I don’t want to be like all those other girls, either.

NAOMI
How old are you, Miriam Hogan?

MIRIAM
Seventeen.

NAOMI
You’re just a puppy. You’ll come through your little crisis. You have no
MIRIAM
Okay.

NAOMI
You will forget him and you will learn
the things that really matter.

Naomi seems slightly annoyed with her. Miriam tries to bEloneve her. She remembers what the bigger stakes at play here are.

MIRIAM
Naomi, I found out that my uncle is a
dog breeder and he steals dogs and he’s
murdered people.

Naomi imperceptibly stiffens, as does Burns listening in. Miriam thinks she doesn’t bEloneve her.

MIRIAM
He was drunk last night. He told me
everything.

A beat. Naomi and Burns gasp.

NAOMI
So the John talks when he’s drunk?

MIRIAM
Which is about all the time.

Naomi tries to sound casual.

NAOMI
Have you told anyone else?

MIRIAM
Joel knows.
(chagrin)
He knew already.

A beat. Burns and Naomi shroud their eyes and reactions.
MIRIAM
So will you tell the sheriff?

NAOMI
Pastor Devey and I spent last evening with the sheriff and detectives from Sacramento.

Naomi hears her tone of voice - this is something important. Miriam looks sharply at Naomi. As Naomi continues her words are more for Burns’s information than Miriam’s.

NAOMI
(concealed regret)
They have confirmed the Governor is sending down a taskforce. There will be increased scrutiny that will be very hard to break. The dog breeding will cease. No more smuggling.

Miriam’s frozen. It’s a bombshell.

MIRIAM
(pleased)
Then... my uncle will be caught? And the others in his gang?

NAOMI
The buying and selling WILL end.

Miriam is motionless and without expression.

NAOMI
You do believe that capitalism is evil don’t you, Miriam?

Miriam pauses but shakes her head in agreement. Her nod’s not entirely sincere.

Miriam is rEloneved. Naomi doesn’t show it but it’s bitter news for the brother and sister. Their world is over. Naomi sits back in her seat, and looks toward where her brother is hiding.

INT. OFFICE, SALTON SEA MOTEL - NIGHT 9

John checks and loads pistols, tension etched on his face.
Priscilla hovering in the doorway, scared...

PRISCILLA
John?

He moves to a cabinet, grabs another huge bottle of whisky.

PRISCILLA
Don’t do it, John.

JOHN
(turns)
Well what d’you want me to do?!

He clearly doesn’t want to do it either.

JOHN
Want me to tell him I won’t? Want me to say no to him?

Priscilla recoils, frightened by the very idea. Her fear just makes him all the more desperate.

JOHN
D’you want me to say you said so?

PRISCILLA
No.

John is frozen, bracing himself. Priscilla is still shows nervous tension.

PRISCILLA
Not Los Angeles. It’s too close. People they’ll be looking for their dogs.

JOHN
Haa! And the DNA.

He flinches. Then lifts the bottle in sorrow and memorial, downs his whisky, but the taste is bitter.

INT. PASSAGEWAY, SALTON SEA MOTEL – NIGHT 9

JOHN is studying the floor plan of the Los Angeles Convention Center. Road maps and schedules are laid out across a table, but looks up as Priscilla enters.
John heads out with two pistols. Priscilla hurries after him.

PRISCILLA
Well, maybe you could say there was too much security?

John stops. He glances into the front bar, not wanting whoever’s in there to hear.

He looks at Priscilla to stress how ridiculous a suggestion this is. Priscilla sees his look.

PRISCILLA
(feeble, desperate)
Couldn’t you say that, Johney?

JOHN
He says he needs the genetics.

PRISCILLA
He doesn’t. He has thousands of dogs.

JOHN
Still.

John softens towards her.

JOHN
This is the last dog show. The last.

But we catch his face as he heads into the front bar, and we can see that he doesn’t even entirely believe that himself.

INT. OFFICE, SALTON SEA MOTEL – NIGHT 9

Hiram is wearing gloves. He is loading teargas canisters and smoke bombs into dog crates. He places a stuffed animal to conceal them. Ironically, for misdirection, the outside of the crates are nearly covered with animal rights stickers – ASPCA, Humane Society, PETA, rescue and others.

John enters and holds Hiram’s eye for a second: fear? Resentment? Apprehension?
Hiram finishes loading the crates and grabs some weapons by the outside door – takes some.

JOHN
It’s gonna happen.

Priscilla watches them load the crates in worry.

EXT. DESERT/SALTON SEA MOTEL – NIGHT 9

The hulking form of the Pet Motel is silhouetted a little way off against the inky night sky.

Looking like a boy again, Miriam arrives at the inn.

Miriam exits her car and walks with the new puppy up to her room on the second floor. She situates the puppy, bed, food, water and the goes down stairs to check on the two litters of puppies in rooms 101 and 102.

But someone suddenly grabs her from behind.

She struggles, wrenches round to see John, with Hiram behind him. But John is utterly shocked to see that it’s her (he’d mistaken her for a boy).

But then his eyes move to Joel’s car that she arrived in.

And he takes another look at the boy clothes she’s in. He suspects sex.

JOHN
Where have you been?

Miriam reddens as she sees he thinks she’s been having sex.

MIRIAM
It’s not your business where I’ve been.

HIRAM
Maybe she’s been talking?

Miriam seizes on this instead.
MIRIAM
I have and I’ve told everyone about you.

JOHN
Oh you can’t hurt me, Miriam.

MIRIAM
You’re a murderer and a dog thief.

JOHN
You think you know it all don’t you?
You don’t know nothing.

He grabs her - half to shake her, half desirous of her.

JOHN
You want to wear man’s clothes? And a baseball cap? Then do man’s work.
You’re coming with us.

He grabs her and drags her towards the waiting moving truck.

INT. BURNS AND NAOMI’S CAR - EARLY MORNING - NIGHT 9

The car is parked outside the Los Angeles Convention Center. It is silent. RVs litter the parking lot. There exercise pens are set up. There are grooming tables outside various RVs. Obviously there will be a dog show in the morning. A few people are walking their dogs.

Naomi looks at Burns but seems to not have come to any sort of resolution what to do.

NAOMI
Someone’s a rat. We need to leave.
We’ll just move on.

Burns says nothing. He is plotting how to move his dogs across the country or he is raging with hate at an unknown narc. Naomi looks at him astutely. Then with rElonf...

NAOMI
Perhaps it’s for the best.
For a long beat, Burns doesn’t answer. Still scheming. Something else on his mind (the heist) and as she studies him. Her read of him worries her.

**GIDEON BURNS**

There’s still this, tomorrow.

Burns bangs on the inside of the car, signaling he feels betrayed.

It isn’t the answer Naomi wanted.

**NAOMI**

Don’t worry, brother, I know what to do.

Naomi reaches over and fiddles with his fly and her head disappear into Burns’s lap.

**GIDEON BURNS**

Incest is best.

Pastor Burns leans his head back on the head rest.

FADE TO BLACK

- end of episode two -

**EXT. LAX CARGO BUILDING – NIGHT – DAY 9**

Miriam is tied in the back of a white van. She can see out the front of the van. She can see the back of Hiram and John’s heads. She can see a loading dock and can hear commercial jets overhead. She can see a security guard/cargo clerk walking toward them. It’s Will.

**WILL**

I shut off the surveillance.

**JOHN**

Good.
WILL
There they are. I couldn’t find one on the list. The one you wanted from Alaska. Something happened.

Will points to about a dozen dog crates all sizes neatly stacked on the dock.

JOHN
One? That’s not bad.
(half beat)
Where are their owners? Wouldn’t they be waiting right there are the desk?

WILL
They’re over there.

Will points to a different airline’s cargo building. We see a a crowd of people standing outside, police cars, TSA vehicles, reporters with remote broadcasting vans. It is a major news story.

WILL
The dogs all came in yesterday and last night.

JOHN
But they’re here now.
(half beat)
How’d you do that?

WILL
‘cause I’m smart that way.

Will holds out his airline I.D. You just drive up to the plane and unload them.

JOHN
Well, let’s get em and I’ll be out of your hair.

John backs up to the dock in the van.

John opens the back of the van and Will notices the girl tied up.
WILL
Having a little fun tonight huh?

JOHN
You might say that.

Miriam looks up and Will sees how it is. He freezes and takes a step backward.

MIRIAM
No, don’t!

Hiram (behind Will) takes out a huge knife and stab him in the back there on the dock.

Hiram searches his pockets for keys and such. He takes Will’s ID from around his neck and puts it in his pocket.

JOHN
What you want with that?

HIRAM
Are you kidding? You know how much gold and silver and diamond come through here?

JOHN
That’s right; it might come in handy.

John and Hiram put him in a huge XX-large (Great Dane) size dog crate and load him on the van with the other dogs.

Miriam is paralyzed in fear. Hopelessness.

EXT. LOS ANGELES CONVENTION CENTER - MORNING - DAY 10

Typical dog show morning – bathing, grooming, exercising. Judges arriving in a van from the airport or hotel. Mom’s briefing their kids what to do in the ring. Professional handlers with million dollar rigs and 30 dogs and two assistants.

Miriam’s POV of the parking lot. She’s tied in the cab of the white van, her cheek scratched and an eye blackened from being thrown in, her hands are tied to the door with rope. As she moves she winces at the sudden pain in her ribs and wrists from its tightness of the ropes.
She turns to see Hiram’s ugly back sitting up front as they bring the van to a stop in the parking lot.

Miriam strains to see out the front window.

She sees Timothy, Elon and Aaron standing at a convention center door smoking. They are dressed like security guards.

A large moving van pulls up and backs up to the loading dock. Also a yellow and a blue van pull up to the loading docks.

John comes from the convention center walking toward the van. In his hands he has a paper with notes and he reviews it as he walks. He nears the van and he folds the paper and places it in a pocket.

John opens the van’s door, and we see his POV of her.

He takes a knife like he might cut her throat.

    JOHN
    Get out.

But John cuts the ropes.

    JOHN
    It's your turn next.

Miriam reacts with horror as John pulls her closer.

    JOHN
    Think you’re better than me, don’t you? Well you’ll help us now or I’ll kill you and put you in that crate.

    MIRIAM
    You’re mad!

He shakes her and hits her in the face again.

    JOHN
    Here, we’re taking the crates from the yellow van inside. Come with Hiram and me and do your part.
Hiram also exits the white van. They load the dog crates onto a dolly and roll it toward the convention center.

Miriam hesitates but John shows her one of his pistols.

INT. LOS ANGELES CONVENTION CENTER - DAY 10

Miriam stumbles as she goes, John beside her, all business, holding her arm with one hand and each with a crate in the other.

They place the crates in various locations, as instructed by John.
Miriam looks at the beautiful dogs, especially corded adult Puli, but her attention is drawn by Pastor Burns and Naomi who are sitting ringside watching.

She stares but John grabs her arm and they head back to the van.

EXT. LOS ANGELES CONVENTION CENTER - DAY 10

John ties Miriam in the van again and leaves. Miriam tries to free herself.

Will is still alive inside the crate.

WILL
Help! Help me?

MIRIAM
I can’t. I’m tied up.
(half beat)
Just hang in there.

No sound from the crate.

MIRIAM
Are you hurt bad?

No sound from the crate.

Miriam kicks the crate.

MIRIAM
Will! Will!
No sound from the crate.

Miriam has a view through the front of the van. Her POV is the loading dock and exit from the grooming area.

Time passes.

Suddenly there is a commotion and Miriam looks out. From Miriam’s POV. Tear gas/smoke and people are emerging from the grooming area door. The people are coughing and running to their cars, the dogs on the leads are jumping and trying to run. They are barking and panicked.

From the other entrance Miriam sees Pastor Burns and Naomi exit and get into their car and drive away.

There is a long beat. There are two or three muffled gun shots, from inside the building. There are screaming and people in the parking lot are ducking behind cars. Many in the parking lot do a u-turn and put as much distance as they can.

It’s like the Allstate mayhem commercials on television. And it’s not wrong to compare John and his gang to the character Mr. White from the Reservoir Dogs film. Actor Dean Winters would make a great John.

Suddenly, Aaron runs out of the grooming area door and takes off his tear gas mask. He pitches it into the moving van parked at the loading dock. He guns the moving van and it rockets out of the parking lot.

Stealth no longer an issue, the other thugs run like madmen across the parking lot, howling and frenzied in their success.

There is a FAT LADY with a fast dog in the path of the moving van. She sees she’s about to be hit so she releases the lead. The dog escapes injury but Aaron runs over the fat lady in the parking lot only feet from Miriam. Of course, Miriam is terrified.

Miriam’s scream is muffled by the van, but still (despite the commotion in the parking lot) people hear it and look around for it.

The air is full of panic and crying.
John calmly walks out of the chaos toward the van where Miriam is tied. He has tears in his eyes and it appears he wasn’t wearing a mask. John sees that the fat lady’s body is blocking the van’s exit from the parking spot. John drags her body out of the way, four feet. Miriam watches John in horrified fascination. John drives away.

Police cars respond but the thugs have placed spike strips in the strategic locations. The police cars enter the convention center parking lot and their tires are flattened. The thugs leave out a single exit and make a clean getaway.

EXT. STREETS OF LOS ANGELES – DAY 10

There is a violent car chase and shot out, it would be included here. It’s a bloody awful business and it might be nice to see some of the thugs (Beef Trust and Stephen) in squirming agony in the back of vans, bleeding profusely.

EXT. NEARBY LOS ANGELES ALLEY – DAY 10

We hear police and fire and ambulance sirens in the distance. The thugs move the dogs from the moving van into smaller vans (including the one Miriam is tied in) and even into the beds of several small pickup trucks (and covered with a tarp).

John in the white van observes the transfer from a block or two away. A thug in the back of the moving van holds up 2 fingers. John backs up to the moving van.

They move the XX-large crate with Will in it into the moving van. They move two dog crates into the white van.

The thugs then burn the moving van.

Everyone drives back to the Salton Sea, like it was everyday business. Beef Trust and is shot

EXT. THIRD OLD RESORT – DAY 10

A third abandoned resort at the Salton Sea has been fenced with “no trespassing” signs every twenty yards. Once inside the resort we see it’s a third place to house dogs. They unload the dogs. The rooms on the back side have been converted to dog runs.
There is a rough looking guy there to take care of the dogs. We see his bed, solar panels, TV and make shift kitchen.

EXT. SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 10

Beef Trust and Stephen and hauled into their rooms to die. Everyone gets high.

INT. CELL, LOS ANGELES JAIL - DAY 10

Joel is brought from his tank into an interrogation room. The door opens and Kavanagh, with a detective, walks in. Joel is the informant.

JOEL
Come on, Kavanagh! I’ve been here all weekend?

Kavanagh is straight over in his face and he’s very wound up.

JOEL
I can’t help you if I’m locked up.

DETECTIVE
Who says you are helping us?

JOEL
I’ve told you everything I know from the very start.

KAVANAGH
You told us he wanted a big truck.

DETECTIVE
And you got him a stolen truck.

JOEL
All this over a stolen truck?

KAVANAGH
That white truck ran over and killed a 56 year old woman about two-and-a-half hours ago.
JOEL
I’m sorry but that’s the price for information.
(beat)
I have to be “in” the gang to “inform” you, right?

DETECTIVE
We can charge you with murder.

JOEL
(genuinely confused)
What?

DETECTIVE
(heavy sarcasm)
Oh you know nothing of it. Of course you don’t.

KAVANAGH
This morning your brother took down an entire dog show.

JOEL
You know I didn’t do it then, ‘cause I’ve been locked up here!

DETECTIVE
We know it was your brother’s work and we know that you’re involved.

Beat. Joel shrugs a laugh, leaning backwards.

JOEL
It seems to me you don’t know dick ‘cause why are you asking me?

DETECTIVE
It isn’t just a stolen truck we’ve got on you. We’ve found three ladies who swears you sold them puppies.

JOEL
What was wrong with them?
KAVANAGH
Nothing, but your not a registered dog breeder.

JOEL
Come on, if you register then you have to give them your address. If you give them your address the professional rescue people come around with their law enforcement friends to seize your dogs.

DETECTIVE
It’s a felony.

JOEL
So what? Everything is a felony.
(half beat)
It’s just another thing you don’t like that you’ve managed to make illegal.
(half beat)
Seizing them has become a cottage industry and you guys are the organized crime.

DETECTIVE
And when we find your dogs, were gonna seize them to. You better make a deal. Who’s feeding them when you’re in here anyway? You being incarcerated is reason enough for animal abuse charges. We can take them.

JOEL
Go fuck yourself!

KAVANAGH
So you’ve got a choice to make. You can turn give us evidence against your brother.

Beat.

DETECTIVE
Or you can pay the price for both of you - and go down alone.
Joel can see they’re serious. The detectives know they now control him.

INT. MIRIAM’S BEDROOM, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 10

There is a noise and Miriam opens her eyes, disorientated.

Her bleary POV of Priscilla sitting on the bed beside her, almost in silhouette against the light coming sneaking in through the curtains.

Priscilla gently washes Miriam’s wounds with a sponge and bowl of water. Priscilla wears the nice new dress.

Both women’s eyes are red, swollen and puffy from crying as Priscilla ventures a timid smile.

PRISCILLA
Welcome back. Had me worried for a while there.

Miriam’s memory suddenly returns - and she jolts to find herself back in her room and scans the room for her Puli puppy. She doesn’t find the puppy and runs to the window.

MIRIAM
Where is he?!

PRISCILLA
He’s down in #104. What breed is he?

MIRIAM
Puli.

PRISCILLA
Oh, I’m not familiar...

Miriam spins back around and Priscilla flinches. Miriam’s strength and courage start to return.

MIRIAM
You know what happened? What they did?

Priscilla twists her hands in worry, her eyes begging dumbly for forgiveness.
Miriam changes clothes.

PRISCILLA
(trying not to anger her)
Miriam, sweetheart, you need to rest.

But Miriam grabs a dress and starts to pull it on (the breeches and shirt of Joel’s lie abandoned on a chair nearby.) Her anger makes her cruel looking as she glares at Priscilla.

MIRIAM
While you sat here, wishing him home safe, your husband was out stealing and killing. He betrayed a man he made a deal with! And they killed him.

Priscilla’s warning finger for silence comes too late as John pulls the door open, gun in hand, wired with fear.

JOHN
Did you see anything?

Sudden stillness, Priscilla frozen, nervy, fearful.

PRISCILLA
No. Did you?

Miriam glares, half hate, half fear as...

MIRIAM
I hope that it’s the law come for you.

John ignores Miriam, enters and moves to the window. Filthy and unwashed, the cut above his eye, a physically ill, he looks a mess.

He peak around the curtain and strains to see and hear.

JOHN
It’s not the law I’m watching for. Get downstairs. Both of you.

Priscilla cowers out of the room and out to the landing. Miriam is delayed buttoning up her blouse.

INT. ROOM, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 10
Miriam walks out but John catches her from behind, and thrusts her against the wall, near the door. There is a clear bruised and cut face.

John takes her chin and holds it, looking into her face as though she were a mirror as he gently touches her bruise and scratches with huge fingers. He tries to be dEloncate; not possible.

Miriam stares in loathing and disgust as he bends his face and brings his lips to hover for an instant near Miriam’s. Is it sexual? Or some strange bonding of what they went through together? Miriam shudders, unable to pull her face away but closes her eyes to block it out.

Priscilla watches from the landing but lets it go, perhaps she half understands it. Perhaps she is fatigued by Miriam and John.

When Miriam opens her eyes, John has released her and is shambling down the stairs, his heavy footsteps echoing through the empty inn. Miriam has no idea what to make of it.

INT. MANAGER’S APARTMENT, SALTON SEA MOTEL – DAY 10

The manager’s apartment door is locked, where it hasn’t been before, the window curtains and blinds are closed.

The room lit by cheap low watt bulbs which now turns the movie dark. Priscilla watches as John paces back and forth, squeezing his gun, nervous.

John moves restlessly to peer through a gap in the curtains and blinds, which allows a chink of dusty light to penetrate the gloom from outside. Miriam is there; she stands watching.

JOHN
He’ll come. He’s bound to come.

PRISCILLA
We need to make a run for it, John.

JOHN
And what if he’s out there waiting for us?
He knows the party’s over and he’ll want to be damn sure there’s no-one left alive.

PRISCILLA
Well we can’t just sit here, can we? Rats in a trap?

JOHN
I ain’t goin’ on that highway!

Priscilla moves to him to calm him, watched by Miriam.

PRISCILLA
(to John)
We can get across to Mexico. Or we can go to Texas.

(John isn’t convinced)
But if we wait, the law will be here.

but John hears something –

JOHN
Shhh!

John lifts his hand for quiet and Priscilla freezes to listen.

A scratching sound can indeed be heard on the window pane. Tap, tap, tap, like four fingers of a claw-like hand, tapping lightly and secretively to get in.

Miriam’s unnerved by it too, but Priscilla steps back in fear, her frightened breath and the ever ticking clock in the hall the only other sounds.

John cocks his gun. He edges silently to the window.

Miriam looks from the window to John and Priscilla; if it’s the law she should cry out and alert them, but what if it isn’t…? She’s now almost as afraid of ‘the tapping’ as John and Priscilla are.

John suddenly springs forward, tears the curtains apart, light floods in, and they see the startled face of Hiram.
JOHN
You damn fool! You want a bullet in your face?

Priscilla goes to open the locked door to Hiram while John pulls the curtains closed again, plunging the room into gloom again.

Hiram enters, nodding obediently to the women and Priscilla locks the door again behind him.

HIRAM
Missus. Miriam.
(to John)
I come to tell ye, the law ain’t coming for you, John. I mean, they know it’s ye but this detective’s by the book. Elon told me to tell you. He’s waiting on his evidence.
(half beat)
And he told me to tell you to get a new phone.

Priscilla is relieved by this at least, and, to John.

PRISCILLA
So we could get going when the goin’s good.

Hiram smiles at her, yes.

HIRAM
Now’s your chance.

They look hopefully at John. But he’s steely and silent -

HIRAM
So, if ye tell me where my dogs are, I’ll takin’ them off your hands.
(to Priscilla)
...with some of that pizza, if ye got some left, missus, I ain’t had any since yesterday -

But John cocks the gun at HIRAM - Miriam tensing.
JOHN
If my finger slips, you’ll lose your I.Q., just like old Abe did in the end.

Miriam reacts, first time she’s heard John acknowledge that Abe is dead. But HIRAM is upset and confused.

HIRAM
What ya doing John? I come this way to tell ya.

JOHN
So why weren’t you just strolling to my door and knocking, ‘stead of scratching at the window like a robber in the night?

HIRAM
For the same reason you locked yourself in here. I don’t want killed.

JOHN
Or maybe this is all a trick –
    (he nods outside)
    and you’ve got someone outside with you, and you’ll let him in to put a bullet in my brain.

Priscilla’s hand flutters to her throat, and she goes to the window and peaks out in fear.

John never takes his eyes off Hiram.

JOHN
Priscilla. Get the man his pizza. And check that kitchen window, make sure we ain’t got no company.

But John’s eyes remain fixed on Hiram.

Priscilla goes to the fridge and brings about a two day old slice of cold pizza.

EXT. LOS ANGELES CONVENTION CENTER – DAY 10
There is a forensic evidence team going over the entire crime scene. There are literally two dozen detectives interviewing witnesses. Other detectives are reviewing the security tapes.

INT. MANAGER’S APARTMENT, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 10

Miriam eyes the door from the kitchen to the outside.

MIRIAM
I’m going to check on my puppy.

And before Miriam can stop her, she slips out of the apartment.

INT. CELL, LAUNCESTON JAIL - DAY 10

Joel’s still in the interrogation room. Kavanagh marches directly in.

KAVANAGH
Well, Gallagher? Have you thought about it?

JOEL
I didn’t need to.

Kavanagh smirks, thinks he’s won.

JOEL
Whatever he might have done, John is my blood. So you can lock me up but I won’t rat on him.

Kavanagh sulks. Turns to march away -

JOEL
What I can give you -
(Kavanagh turns back)
-is someone else. Above my brother.

Kavanagh blows out through his nostrils - doesn’t bEloneve him.

JOEL
What? You think some alcoholic like my brother has the brains organize
something like this? Pretty high opinion of him if you ask me.

KAVANAGH
(insists)
John Gallagher is the leader of this racket -

JOEL
So where’s his dogs then? ‘Cause every time you turn up at his business, you can’t lay your hands on a single dog.

KAVANAGH
I have a theory about that.

JOEL
What?

KAVANAGH
It’s a decoy. The dogs aren’t at the boarding kennel. He’s go them off somewhere else.

JOEL
Listen, if you take my brother down there’ll be another sucker to fill his shoes and you’ll be nowhere nearer to the dogs than where you started.

KAVANAGH
What’s his name then? This ‘King of Puppy Smugglers’?

JOEL
You let me out, I’ll get the name -

KAVANAGH
Ha!

JOEL
John’ll tell me, if he knows it’s that or prison. But when you’ve got him, the deal is me and John go free. We’re informants only.
Kavanagh goes to walk away again, Joel pushes –

JOEL
You searched and found nothing. You probably got his phone tapped. No, if you’d any proof on John you’d be down there arresting him.

KAVANAGH
We have time. He’ll mess up.

JOEL
I’m offering you a save of face and keep your job. Weren’t you sent down here to clean this up?

KAVANAGH
The Governor wants this done.

JOEL
So do it right.

Kavanagh doesn’t like it but he knows Joel’s right.

KAVANAGH
If you don’t give me the boss (brother or not), you’re going to prison.

Kavanagh opens the door and gestures him out.

INT. KITCHEN, SALTON SEA MOTEL – DAY 10

Miriam is playing with her puppy in room 104. Priscilla brings a bowl of puppy chow.

PRISCILLA
Kibble, eggs, duck and cottage cheese. Pro-biotics.

Miriam stops playing with the puppy. Miriam stands, shuts the door and moves in close to Priscilla. The puppy chows down.

MIRIAM
Aunt Priscilla, you and I must get the law. They killed at least two people.
Whatever once my uncle may have been to you, he is devil now.

PRISCILLA
(interrupts, viciously)
He is my husband. And you won’t talk of him like that.

Priscilla clutches the bread knife in her hand.

MIRIAM
Then you will to go prison with him, well not with him. You will be separated by about a couple hundred miles. They won’t admire your loyalty, they’ll punish it.

Priscilla fixes her with a look - defiant, grand and proud.

PRISCILLA
So be it then. 
(laughs bitterly)
You wouldn’t understand it, would you? Maybe when you’ve got a man yourself you’ll know that.

Priscilla picks up the empty bowl, glares at Miriam and she turns to go. But she turns.

PRISCILLA
And Miriam? You needn’t think he’ll let you leave. 
(threat)
He’ll kill you if you try to.

Priscilla intends to force her niece into obedience, but Miriam holds her position.

MIRIAM
I’m not afraid of him.

PRISCILLA
Come and eat with us.

INT. KITCHEN, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 10
Priscilla finds John on his own sitting at the table. He swigs from his whisky bottle. Miriam joins them. Priscilla looks around worried.

PRISCILLA
Where’s Hiram gone?

Miriam walks through the apartment uneasily, but there’s no sign of a body and they would have heard the gun if he’d been shot. Miriam also checks the office and the front counter. She looks outside.

John drinks, brooding.

JOHN
He came to take the dogs himself. He thought he could force it.

PRISCILLA
So has he gone then?
(Envious)
Made a run for it?

John doesn’t answer. Priscilla decides it’s better not to ask. Miriam’s worried but knows she wouldn’t get the truth if she asked. John turns from the bottle to Priscilla -

JOHN
I’ve changed my mind. We’ll go to Texas. Leave tonight.

Priscilla moves to him in rElonef.

PRISCILLA
Oh thank god! Thank you John!

He’s pleased to make her happy, turns to her with unexpected tenderness, and strokes her face.

JOHN
I’ll see that swine in hell before I’m beaten. You’ll live in a mansion and drive a new car.
(half beat)
Maybe I’ll start going to church.
Priscilla smiles her love at him.

Miriam wonders at it as they kiss. She tries to sound casual -

    MIRIAM
    If we’re driving to Texas tonight then
    my aunt and I should rest. We’ll do no
    good just sitting here.

John considers. Then cursorily nods Miriam off upstairs.

    JOHN
    Your aunt here needs to pack.

Miriam glances at her aunt, but nothing to be done. She exits.

Priscilla glances after her suspiciously.

INT. LANDING, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 10

Miriam reaches the landing, heading to her room, but notices
Priscilla coming up the stairs behind her, hostility on her face
that warns Miriam not to try to argue. Miriam goes...

INT. MIRIAM’S BEDROOM, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 10

...into her room and shuts the door. But instantly she hears the a
padlock slide into the hasp.

Miriam grabs and rattles the door handle to no avail. She is
locked in.

    MIRIAM
    Aunt Priscilla?!

She bangs on the door.

INT. LANDING, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 10

    MIRIAM (O.S.)
    Aunt Priscilla?! Can you let me out?

Priscilla holds the keys in her hand.

INT. MIRIAM’S BEDROOM, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 10
PRISCILLA (O.S.)
Just to see no harm comes to you.

MIRIAM
Can I have my puppy?

PRISCILLA (O.S.)
He’s downstairs. I’ll take care of him.

MIRIAM
Are you sure?

PRISCILLA (O.S.)
We’re family.

Miriam is dissatisfied.
EXT. HIGHWAY / NEAR SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 10

Joel rides in the back of an unmarked police car across the desert. He looks in the front of the car at Kavanagh and another detective.

SALTON SEA MOTEL is ahead is coming into view.

JOEL
Hold up here.

KAVANAGH
(heavy sarcasm)
Problem, is there?

Joel gestures - they’re the problem, obviously.

JOEL
If he sees the two of you, he’ll think I’ve turned informer. You need to let me out here.

The police car stops on the side of the road.

Kavanagh glares; he really hates Joel. Joel gets out of the car and walks the last mile. The police car pulls a u-turn and heads back North.

INT. BACK BAR, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 10
Priscilla has been kept in abject poverty. On her hands and knees, she is digging under the bed pulling out some very meager shoes. She boxes a small microwave and a clock. She takes the telephone, bedding, two dresses, two jeans, two blouses, a belt, a deck of cards, a houseplant and a dishtowel. Nothing is new or even looks new. It appears that she hasn’t bought anything in ten years.

John returns from his patrol of the inn and Priscilla smiles up at him, holds out a tiny, glass figurine trinket.

PRISCILLA
I remember when you gave me this.

John softens as he gently takes it and we share his POV of it. It is a delicately figure of a dog. He’s regretful.

JOHN
Before ‘he’ had his hooks in us.

Priscilla understands his sadness. She melts in love for him, about to speak when John stiffens, thinks he hears a sound. John is paranoid but on the other hand Burnss is a genuine threat.

Both listen, but there’s silence. Then a gust of wind rattles the window and he relaxes, assumes that’s what he heard.

John hands her back the trinket...

JOEL (O.S.)
John! Let me in!

John cocks his gun as Joel bangs loudly again.

EXT. PARKING LOT, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 10

Joel is banging on the doors, the office and the manager’s apartment door.

JOEL
It’s me. Joel.

INT. KITCHEN, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 10

John moves into the kitchen, tense and wired.
JOHN
Get out of here. There’s gonna be trouble.

INTER-CUT THEM:

Joel glances nervously behind him to where KAVANAGH and the detective left him on the highway. He looks at his vehicle in the parking lot.

JOEL
(urgent, low voice)
You need to tell me who he is, John. Whoever’s got you by the balls.

John starts in fear to hear that Joel even knows about the gang-leader.

JOEL
They’re coming for you if you don’t tell me.

JOHN
Who? Who’s coming for me? What’re you saying?

In anger and fear, John fires high at the door to drive him away. John has lost all control.

Joel only just leaps away in time, shocked at his brother.

JOEL
Christ’s sake. You don’t deserve my bloody help, if that’s the thanks I get! I loaned you those damn trucks to stop you whining like a girl and look at where it’s got me! I’ve been in jail all bloody weekend.

JOHN
So now you’ve come to save yourself by ratting on me you sneaky bastard!

Joel turns to look at his vehicle and then up at Miriam’s room on the second floor.
JOHN
There’s no-one that I’m working for. You hear me? It’s all been me and no-one else and you say different you’re dead, brother or not!

JOEL
(sarcastic)
Good. Thanks, John.

He nods reassurance to the John as he might be peeking out of one of the windows. Then her gestures he’s going round the side of the inn.

He walks up the stairs to Miriam’s room and finds her locked inside.

INT. MIRIAM’S BEDROOM, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 10

Miriam’s at her window, strained to hear the row, but she steps back from the window just as Joel bangs on the padlock and she looks out to see Joel standing directly below her porch.

Miriam
Can you get me out of here?

I can break this window. Why didn’t you already?

MIRIAM
John has losts it. I’d have shot me.

Miriam stares in hurt resentment.

JOEL
He might. But...

EXT. PARKING LOT, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 10

Joel is exasperated, doesn’t understand what’s going on here. He looks at the window.

JOEL
Just unlock it and open it.
Miriam looks toward the office fearful if she escapes. She does open the window.

JOEL
Come out.

MIRIAM
He’s got a gun and Priscilla said...

Miriam steps back, lets him enter through the window.

Joel looks worn, eyes hollow as though he hasn't slept, still in the clothes from the trip to Los Angeles last night. He doesn't smile.

INT. MIRIAM’S BEDROOM, SALTON SEA MOTEL – DAY 10

Joel climbs inside, but remembers where he left her.

JOEL
I owe you an apology. I deserted you last night.

Miriam wants to pretend she doesn’t care, but her vulnerability is too raw and her pain shows, as...

MIRIAM
Where did you go?

But now he can see her properly, he sees her face and reacts..

JOEL
Who locked you up here?

He strokes the scratch that runs from her forehead to her chin, a bruise on her cheek beside it. Miriam pulls away.

MIRIAM
Who do you think?

JOEL
You were with them? At the dog show?

MIRIAM
(yes, obviously)
So where were you?

Joel hears her reproach. He reaches out and takes her hand, pulls her to him, trying to explain and reconnect.

**JOEL**
I’ve been in jail. Kavanagh caught me when I went downstairs. The dog bed. I wish I could have spared you this.

**MIRIAM**
(pulls away, suspicious)
They let you out though.

**JOEL**
They want me to turn in my my brother -
(Miriam looks hopeful)
I’ve told them that I won’t. But if I bring them in the man John answers to we might get out of this.

Miriam digests this, pretending that the thought of Joel in prison doesn’t bother her. And that she isn’t interested to know.

**MIRIAM**
So? Who is he?

Joel looks slightly desperate.

**JOEL**
I was hoping you’d tell me.

Not such a great plan then; Miriam’s not so impressed.

**JOEL**
It was you who told me there’s someone else. You must know who he is?

**MIRIAM**
I don’t know any more than you do. I saw his feet once in that storeroom down there. And your brother thinks he’s coming here to kill him which is why the inn’s all closed.
Joel deflates. But then he’s tender to her.

JOEL
(sadness, rhetorical)
How are you caught up in this?

He moves to her and strokes her face with affection, but she pulls away, too proud.

MIRIAM
Don’t waste your sympathy on me. I can look after myself.

JOEL
You should be safe in Iowa.

Miriam pulls away, hurt.

MIRIAM
That’s not my life anymore.

JOEL
I hope it is, one day. When this is over I hope you'll marry a farmer and spend your days without a care.

Miriam hears only rejection. As he reaches towards her she shakes him off, utterly hurt and emotionally confused by him, trying not to cry.

MIRIAM
(holding on to this)
All I know is that your brother needs to be in a cell for what he's done.

A sudden gulf.

JOEL
And all I know, is that I have to save him.

Miriam sees, as he does, what this means; there’s a million unsaid things between them, but they want completely different things.
Joel looks at her. Miriam is too hurt and turns away. There’s nothing more to say. Joel looks about and takes his keys off Miriam’s table. Joel disappears out of the window.

EXT. PARKING LOT, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 10

Joel goes to his car and drives off to the North.

INT. MIRIAM’S BEDROOM, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 10

Miriam’s POV as Joel drives off across the desert. He’s smaller and smaller, until he’s gone.

She looks back at her room with resolution, snatches up her suite case and throws it out the window.

Then she climbs out after it; if Joel can do it, so can she.

EXT. PARKING LOT, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 10

Miriam goes down the stairs to her puppy in 104. She takes the puppy to the Camaro. She constantly is glancing towards the office to check that she’s not seen. We watch from the parking lot as the Camaro reaches the highway and is free.

EXT. MECCA CHURCH - DAY 10

ANGLE on Beth by in a church pew, sobbing over Will’s death, Naomi is with her. There is a spattering of people there to mourn. There isn’t a coffin yet, but it’s a prayer meeting.

Also remember that Beef Trust and Stephen are dead as well.

BETH
Will... Oh Will.

NAOMI
He’s gone, Beth...

BETH sobs.

BETH
He did that for me. So we could marry. It’s my fault that he’s dead!

Burns takes out a snake and handles it.
Beth stops wailing and looks up.

GIDEON BURNS
Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

ANGLE on Joel as he arrives at the church, quickly taking in the scene before him.

AARON is sitting in the church. He is the only gang member at the church who Joel can appeal to.

Burns is at the front of the church, charming the snakes and quoting scripture.

JOEL
Aaron. I need to talk to you.

AARON looks alarmed to see Joel, fearing he’s about to give him away as one of the smugglers. He scoots over in the pew to get way and so that what Joel’s saying cannot be heard by them over the preaching, singing and chanting.

AARON
Leave me alone.
(in panic)
I don’t even know you.

AARON tries to get up and get away but Joel grabs him.

JOEL
Do you know who John takes orders from?

AARON
What?!

JOEL
(grabs him again)
Don’t make me ask in front of them.
(Aaron stops)
I know you’re in it with my brother.
Who’s the man in charge?

AARON
For God’s sake, I’m a Christian!

But Naomi’s turned and sees Joel; she marches back to that pew and there is a quiet confrontation and slides over next to him. Joel inhales and we can tell from his expression perhaps Naomi wears a rather lot of perfume.

NAOMI
Come to see your handiwork, have you?

JOEL
What? I didn’t do this.

But Kavanagh and the detective are sitting in the back and on the far side of the church.

KAVANAGH
(sarcasm)
This one says he’s gonna lead us to the ‘real’ ringleader!

Burns also steps up, waving a snake in Joel’s face.

JOEL
(annoyed)
Which is what I’m doing.

NAOMI
(derision)
You think we’re stupid? Everybody’s known for years what you Gallaghers’ve been up to. Trying to put the blame on poor Aaron!

Joel looks over the detectives. They smirk at him. Joel races out of the church. Burns takes the snakes back to the front of the church.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY 10

Miriam drives her Camaro. The town of Mecca is just up the road.
EXT. VICARAGE - DAY 10

Miriam drives to the vicarage and exits her car. She knocks on the door.

MIRIAM
Pastor Burns? Naomi?

But no-one answers.

INT. SNAKE SALVATION CHURCH - DAY 10

The church is empty; the green-tinged light from the stained glass windows tints Miriam’s skin as she enters, making her look as though she’s underwater.

MIRIAM
Pastor Burns?

But her voice echoes into the stillness - no-one’s there either.

INT. MANAGER’S APARTMENT, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 10

Priscilla is sitting waiting, doubting they will ever leave.

She gets up when she hears a faint sound elsewhere at the inn and suddenly she’s scared.

PRISCILLA
(hoarse whisper)
John?

Priscilla stands. But from the passageway there’s a breeze as someone enters.

She’s hopeful and suddenly she’s petrified.

EXT. MECCA/JOEL’S TRAILER - DAY 10

Miriam drives across the town toward Joel’s trailers.

Miriam knocks on Joel’s trailer. She opens the door and the mother dog runs out to the water. She drinks profusely. Miriam checks on the health of the puppies. They seem to be flourishing. The mother returns from the long hard drink of water. Miriam puts some food out for the mother.
We follow Miriam as she takes the five-gallon bucket and feeds the other dogs.

She finds a trailer with a litter of eight week old puppies and she hands her puli over the fence.

Play friendly now.

Miriam drives back to the Salton Sea Inn.

INT. SALTON SEA PET IN – DAY 10

The office is still and quiet as Miriam parks her car.

The office is still locked. And the vehicles seem to be there still. John and Priscilla might not have left yet.

Miriam tiptoes forward and peers in through a window – nothing. She gently tries the kitchen door but to her surprise, it swings open revealing an empty kitchen. Miriam hesitates on the threshold. Something isn’t right. Priscilla is never far from this place.

Miriam slowly edges in. The only light is coming in through the open door, which points to a pile of paper plates on the table.

The silence feels oppressive and unnatural, Miriam’s own movements seem to resonate too loudly and she’s afraid to go on.

But she forces herself into the darkness of rest of the apartment.

Miriam edges along. She glances in the office which is in blackness but nothing stirs.

In the living room, Miriam see’s Priscilla’s abandoned packing – cardboard boxes. There’s no-one here.

Miriam tiptoes toward the bedroom, glancing behind her, spooked.

She thinks she hears a sound and stops, tense and fearful. But – nothing. Not even the ever ticking clock breaks the silence. Miriam turns a corner into the bedroom. John is sprawled out, face down in a pool of fresh red blood – his eyes startled and still open.
Miriam stares, hardly believing her eyes. Multiple livid bullet wounds are in his back – he’s unmoving and clearly dead.

Miriam isn’t entirely terrified.

Every impulse is to turn and flee, but she fights it, straining into the gloom to check if her aunt isn’t there.

The silence is terrifying, but her eyes go deeper into the bedroom. As Miriam strains to scan the room, all is still and silent, but then she catches sight of someone sitting on the floor the other side of the bed and she freezes.

MIRIAM
(barely a whisper)
Aunt Priscilla?

But the figure doesn’t move and Miriam moves in further to find her aunt sitting on the floor as though she’d tried to hide. Her posture is unnatural, legs splayed, and her eyes open and glassy, her dress stained red with blood and punctured with a single bullet wound in the chest.

MIRIAM
Oh no, no.

Miriam sinks to her knees, but she’s paralysed with terror, straining in the silence in case the murderer is still here.

EXT. PARKING LOT, SALTON SEA MOTEL - DAY 10

Miriam sits with the bodies and contemplates it all.

She hears a distant knocking and then a very slight “let me out.”

Miriam leaves the bedroom to investigate. In a locked storage room she finds Hiram.

HIRAM
What the hell has happened here?

Miriam stares at him, her face pale.
Miriam leads him to the bodies in the bedroom.

HIRAM
I didn’t do it. I bin locked in.

MIRIAM
I know.

HIRAM
He put me there, John. You was there. She went to get me some Pizza and then he locked me in.

Miriam doesn’t argue.

MIRIAM
I know that there’s a man John took his orders from. Do you know his name?

HIRAM shakes his head again, first he knew of this.

MIRIAM
And you didn’t hear the murderer?

HIRAM
I heard a man’s voice. And four gun shots.

MIRIAM
Who was it? Did you know the voice?

HIRAM shakes his head, still shocked.

HIRAM
I don’t know nothing ‘bout no other man.

MIRIAM
Joel Gallagher did.

He looks at Miriam - shakes his head.
HIRAM
This is no place for a girl.

MIRIAM
I’m leaving.

HIRAM
Me too.
(half beat)
Mind if I get these keys?

HIRAM reaches into John’ pocket and pulls out his keys.

HIRAM
I’m gonna get some of the dogs and go.
(half beat)
Just my fair share

Hiram runs out to the passage to the back of the hotel.

INT. VICARAGE - DAY 10

Wide shot of the vicarage, Burns standing at the door, as the MAGISTRATE accompanies Miriam towards him.

The two MEN exchange a few unheard words, NAOMI now behind Burns at the door as she listens in.

Then the MAGISTRATE nods goodbye, and goes.

Burns steps back to allow Miriam inside.

INT. HALLWAY, VICARAGE - DAY 10

Miriam follows Burns in.

MIRIAM
I’m sorry to impose on you.

The sound of scraping as something’s hastily moved in another room and Miriam stops at the odd sound.

NAOMI appears in a doorway.

NAOMI
We’re sorry for your loss.
Miriam offers a thin smile.

GIDEON BURNS
We’re glad you came here, Miriam.

Burns beckons her through into his parlor. Miriam is vaguely aware of a tenseness to their body language that creates the sense of having caught them in the middle of something private or secret.

INT. Burns’S PARLOUR AND OFFICE, VICARAGE - DAY 10

Burns ushers Miriam in -

GIDEON BURNS
Please sit. You’ve had a terrible shock.

Miriam’s POV of the cold room, no fire in the grate this time.

Burns watches her.

NAOMI enters, holds out a plate of food and a drink.

NAOMI
Here.
(re the drink)
It will help you to sleep.

Miriam takes them. Sits. She drinks, watched by NAOMI.

MIRIAM
What will happen to my aunt?

GIDEON BURNS
They will both be brought here to be buried.

NAOMI
You’ve no idea who the murderer may be?

Miriam doesn't. She finishes the drink. NAOMI takes the glass and exits.
The magistrate belongs he is a local man as he travelled to and from the inn in stealth, possibly in the silence of the night when you and your aunt were sleeping.

For Miriam it’s a horrible thought. She looks away.

He intends to question every man within ten miles, so the net will close around the murderer and if he delays leaving long he will be caught.

NAOMI’s in the doorway again, wants him –

Partor Burns?

Naomi nods him out and Burns excuses himself, leaving the door ajar.

Miriam puts her plate down. Something isn’t right here but her head’s already starting to fog. She stands and edges to where she can see through the crack in the door.

Miriam’s POV of Naomi and Burns muttering quietly, then NAOMI is clearly telling Burns off, arguing with him, though he remains serene and won’t be drawn.

Miriam sees that the art has been packed and is resting on the office floor. She didn’t notice on her way in.

Something sickens in Miriam’s stomach as it dawns on her why they might be leaving. Also half the books in the office are missing and there are cardboard boxes stacked in the hallway.

She steps back suddenly, turns to look back into the room.

As the low voices continue, Miriam looks at the empty walls.

Miriam is uncomfortable. The room no longer feels welcoming.

Her eyes alight on the area beyond the slightly open double doors at the end. Burns’s desk can be glimpsed in the shadows.
Miriam knows she shouldn’t but she moves towards the double doors. Burns still isn’t coming. Miriam moves inside to stand before Burns’s desk.

A second as she hesitates. The desk drawer is slightly ajar.

She looks at it a moment, then slowly starts to ease it open.

She glances up to check that Burns isn’t coming, then looks down again to see the drawer now completely open and right before her is Burns’s bank/brokerage statement. She picks it up and there is well over a million dollars.

Miriam flashes back to the church service and passing the collection plate, the can’t have been more than 7 dollars in the plate. Miriam also flashes back to Los Angeles pet supply place where Joel collected 1000s for the puppies they sold.

Also under the bank statement is Will’s Airport security ID, still on its lanyard.

The gang-leader is Burns.

But he’s suddenly in the double doors and Miriam (just in time) shuts the drawer with guilt and flushes. Burns returns.

Burns looks at her, and then indicates her plate back in the first half of the room.

GIDEON BURNS
You've hardly eaten.

Miriam tries to hide her fear as she moves away from the desk.

MIRIAM
I'm - not hungry.

He considers her then steps back, and sinks in the armchair.

Miriam moves cautiously back to the front half of the room where he sits. A long beat of silence as he ponders.

GIDEON BURNS
It’s a pity for us all that the barred room proves the pedlar Hiram innocent.
He would have been a scapegoat and saved us all a great deal of trouble.

MIRIAM
I... don't understand you?

He smiles knowingly, knows she does.

GIDEON BURNS
There’s no longer any need for pretence between us, Miriam. We can be frank now. You know that it was I who killed your uncle and your aunt.

On Miriam horrified. Afraid.

But then suddenly a wave of tiredness. NAOMI is now in the doorway too.

NAOMI
That's right. You sleep now.

INT. JOEL’S TRAILERS - DAY 10

Joel is outside his trailers. He has a 5 gallon bucket of food. But as he dumps the food over the fence, he notices there is still food. Joel scratches his head as he realizes someone has come by to feed them.

He walks the line of trailers... he stops at the trailer with the puppies. He notices the black Puli in with the other puppies.

Joel smiles and we see a sense of accomplishment cross his face.

Hiram arrives in a van full of dogs.

HIRAM
I’m sorry, Joel. He’s gone. He’s shot. He’s dead, Joel.

Joel flinches the bad news. Joel reels.

HIRAM
Mrs Gallagher too.
JOEL
And Miriam?

HIRAM
She’s safe. She’s with Pastor Burns.

Joel’s relieved.

JOEL
Who killed ‘em?

HIRAM’s sorry, wishes he could help.

HIRAM
I would’ve saved him if I could, Joel. He was my friend, all’s said and done.

JOEL
There must be something that you heard? Or saw? He’d have to come right past you in that storeroom.

HIRAM hesitates, and Joel sees it -

JOEL
What?

HIRAM
(reluctant)
I didn’t like to say before, in ‘case he thought me daft. But there’s a tiny crack and after I heard - well, Mrs Gallagher screamin’, I put my eye to it.

JOEL
And?

HIRAM
I see this person dressed in black.

But now HIRAM’s in the moment, remembering.

HIRAM
And I smell this... perfume.
A second—now Joel’s got it—

JOEL
A man in black. And a woman’s perfume?

I didn’t see a woman.

But his shock grows as he suddenly remembers that Miriam is with Pastor Burns and Naomi.

JOEL
But you smelled her.

Joel enters the trailer and collects a pistol.

EXT. OUT BACK OF THE PARSONAGE — DAY 10

Pastor Burns and Naomi have Miriam (unconscious) in a wheelbarrow and they are charting her toward the strange building in the back.

As they get within about 50 yards of the building the desert changes there are now strange rock formations, perfect for snakes to hide under. It’s impossible to approach the building without passing near one. Frankly, if you fear snakes, it’s better than any fence or security system.

They stop the wheelbarrow just before entering the rattlesnake redoubt. Naomi watches her dispassionately as the wheelbarrow stops.

Burns steps around to the front of the wheelbarrow, leans over.

GIDEON BURNS
Miriam?

NAOMI
(to Miriam)
Wake up.

Miriam wakes and recoils to see she’s in the middle of the desert with only the church and preachers house.

MIRIAM
Where am I?
NAOMI
You’re in the desert.

Burns pulls her from the wheelbarrow, and she recoils at his closeness. Naomi flares a fang of jealousy.

GIDEON BURNS
You needn’t fear. I’ve not the inclination to have you.

Naomi has got behind the wheelbarrow, and is ready to take it back to the parsonage. Burns has rope to tie Miriam’s hands.

Miriam looks at Naomi in betrayal and disbelief.

MIRIAM
How could you? You knew what he was doing. Or you helped him!

NAOMI
Of course I did.
(to Burns)
I’ll go finish packing.

Burns ushers Miriam towards the building, careful she doesn’t fall. She’s been drugged and is shaky.

GIDEON BURNS
Come. I promised you I’d show you my snakes, I think.

Behind them, Naomi turns the wheelbarrow carts it away. She passes out through the rock formations, rattlesnakes sounding off.

INT. JOEL’S TRAILERS - DAY 10

Joel rushes out of his trailer. Slamming the door startles the nursing mother dog under the table.

JOEL
(agitated)
It’s Burns. He’s the murderer.
Hiram, you saw him.
(half beat)
You going with me?
HIRAM
Uh, I gotta get these dogs up to Oregon, to my brothers.

JOEL
Miriam Hogan’s with him now and she’s in danger.

HIRAM
I ain’t got no profession or skill. Just these dogs.

Joel’s had enough.

He jumps in his vehicle and races away. He breaks every traffic law on his way to the church.

EXT. RATTLESNAKE REDOUBT - DAY 10

The sun is sinking in the sky as Burns nudges Miriam before him toward the building. As Burns and Miriam navigate through the maze we hear rattlesnakes rattling.

Miriam’s silent, tense and terrified, glancing back at Naomi and the church, hoping for an opportunity to run. Burns is aware of this and utterly in control.

MIRIAM
I thought a man of God was meant to give up worldly goods not kill for them.

Burns smiles, interested in her rhetoric and reproach.

GIDEON BURNS
The bounty from the dogs was used to feed the poor.

Miriam’s unimpressed.

MIRIAM
I saw your bank account. You’re a fraud.
GIDEON BURNS
It was you who said your uncle talks when he is drunk. You told me I should kill him.

MIRIAM
I told you you should bring the law on him!

GIDEON BURNS
Well, I’m something bigger than the law. I’m the word.

MIRIAM
You are so full of shit.

GIDEON BURNS
Don’t blame the messenger.

MIRIAM
The message was for John to kill! My aunt was innocent!

GIDEON BURNS
Your aunt was with your uncle as surely as if she’d killed those people on her own. Come, Miriam Hogan, you cannot be as naive as that.

MIRIAM
You’re no messenger. You think you are God and life and death are yours to give and take.

GIDEON BURNS
I like that I revolt you. There is a dash of fire about you that the women of the bible possessed.

MIRIAM
And yet you would have killed me too, if I’d been at the inn.

GIDEON BURNS
No. We’d still be here.
Miriam is uneasy at this. But he nods her towards the building, where a reptilian shaped cross is fixed to the door. Reluctantly she walks through the rattlesnake.

INT. BUILDING - DAY 10

Inside the building, not much more than a barn, is a pit. It is at least 10 feet deep. It would be easy to fall in. In fact at the bottom there are at least 10 or 12 human skeletons and perhaps 50 rattlesnakes. Burns drinks it in.

Around the outside of the building are countless cages of rats. He is breeding rats to feed the snakes.

GIDEON BURNS
I was born with a gift, Miriam Hogan.
They won’t bite me.

And clearly Burns’s in his element, looking down into the pit.

GIDEON BURNS
Just walking though the maze, you would have died without my guidance.

Miriam watches him.

MIRIAM
You aren’t a man of God.

GIDEON BURNS
You are right. I thought to find it in the Christian church. But, it’s built on lies and hate and self-righteousness and its followers are like sheep, unquestioning and stupid. Christ is just a puppet, created by man himself. But the old pagan barbarism is honest, clean and entertaining.

Burns looks at Miriam, vulnerable and in his power.

GIDEON BURNS
The Druids understood human sacrifice. One soul for many.
It’s impossible to escape the thought that Miriam is to be his sacrifice. Her eyes search the desert in the fading light, but there is no-one to save her. She’s alone with a madman. Her hands are tied.

INT. VICARAGE KITCHEN – DAY 10

NAOMI is still boxing their valuables – packing them in a cardboard boxes.

CLICK.

    JOEL
    Where’s Miriam Hogan?

Joel is standing beside her, holding a pistol to her head.

EXT. BUILDING – DAY 10

Burns guides Miriam to the edge. Miriam gasps in horror as she suddenly realizes they’re human bones.

    MIRIAM
    No. No.

Burns catches hold of Miriam as she tries to scramble back away from the pit, but as she does see two figures walking though the desert toward them.

    MIRIAM
    Oh god.

    GIDEON BURNS
    Ah Miriam, you’ve been so sure of right and wrong but perhaps it hides some deeper fear of who you really are? (trying to make her see)
    Which means, if you realize that then you can be free.

    MIRIAM
    And who are you, really? You hide behind the cross and people trust you, but everything about you is a lie.
Miriam has exposed the heart of Burns and he’s ready to show his hand.

GIDEON BURNS
Come with me, Miriam. I’ll show you Miami and New York. Naomi won’t mind.

GIDEON BURNS
You'll learn to reject the man-made laws force fed to you as a child, and I'll teach you how to live, as men and women have not lived for four thousand years.

MIRIAM
There's not a thing that you could teach me.

GIDEON BURNS
But I have already. I've taught you that you have been wrong.

He moves to touch her heart, intense, convincing.

GIDEON BURNS
You will forget this lake, and the desert, and your tears on the road from Mecca. If only you will trust in here.

Burns’s mesmeric and convincing. Miriam looks where he touches her.

EXT. RATTLESNAKE REDoubt - DAY 10

Joel pushes Naomi roughly before him, his pistol to her back.

As they walk though the maze, we hear the snakes rattling. On the left and then the right and then the left again.

But she taunts him.

NAOMI
Your brother used to shake and shout with the Holy Spirit. Front row, baby. Give us his last dime. And his dogs
suffered for it. He was nothing but a fool for my brother’s preaching.

Joel tightens his grip on her, and shoves the gun in harder.

JOEL
Shut up.

NAOMI
It was his pride that kept us safe. The more notorious we made him, the happier he was.

JOEL
You didn’t know him. You made him suffer.

NAOMI
I bet you’ll beg even more than he did at the end. And that stupid girl can watch you die, if she isn’t already in a dozen pieces.

Joel jabs the gun into her again. He’s struggling not to kill her; he might need her to bargain with Burns. Naomi seems to be enjoying her power over him.

They stop in the middle of the rattlesnake maze.

JOEL
(calls)
Burns?!

INT. BUILDING - DAY 10

Burns and Miriam look up at the sound of Joel’s voice.

JOEL (O.S.)
Burns? Get your ass out here.

Miriam moves away from Burns’s hand.

MIRIAM
Joel?
Burns looks out the door but moves behind the wall for protection and we share his POV.

Joel, with Naomi before him a shield, gun to her head, as he slowly walks toward the building. Snakes rattling as they walk.

Joel’s still some distance away, but he stops as he hears Miriam’s voice and works out where she and Burns are.

Naomi’s is enraged to hear Miriam’s voice. Miriam is clearly a threat to her and her brother’s sexual relationship.

NAOMI
You should’ve killed her. Do it now.

Joel knocks Naomi down to her knees, pistol still to her head as he yells.

JOEL
Miriam? Are you hurt?

INTER-CUT them as Miriam stays still, looking at Burns.

MIRIAM
I’m not hurt.

Burns watches Miriam, thinks she’s in his power.

Joel’s agitated. Doesn’t know what to do. He calls again.

JOEL
I know you killed my brother, Burns. And I’m all about justice. So now I’ve got your sister.

NAOMI
He won’t shoot me. He hasn’t got the courage.

On Burns and his POV as he looks at Naomi and calmly considers his options, but he’s still more interested in Miriam and whether he’s persuaded her.

Hanna struggles to get up. Joel knocks her back down. Snakes rattle even more.
NAOMI
He’ll kill you both and feed you to the snakes.

Joel presses the gun into the side of her head.

JOEL
I’ll make a deal with you. Send Miriam out and I’ll let your sister go. Both of you can leave unharmed. No law.

GIDEON BURNS
Miriam and I are engaged in negotiations. We are about to reach an understanding.

It’s said as much for Miriam’s benefit, a question to her.

The tension is showing in Joel’s face. He rubs his face, doesn’t know what to do. Naomi also looks tense for the first time, questioning her brother’s loyalty.

NAOMI
Gideon? Kill her. Do it.

Joel strains to see inside. We share his POV as he peers inside the door. He can’t see much.

Burns is still intense with Miriam but she looks at him and, with courage, laughs at him.

MIRIAM
You’re a fool. You can’t think I would go with you. I pity you.

Though Burns barely moves, he feels the rejection and humiliation acutely. He thought he might have turned her.

He reaches to his ankle and produces a small pistol. Miriam freezes. Burns’s face is very hard and it seems that he will shoot her.

Miriam is afraid, but calls...

MIRIAM
Joel, he’s got a gun.
The stakes are increasing. Joel’s sweating in the hot sun.

    JOEL
    Burns? I’m going to let your sister go.
    But first send Miriam out to me.

Burns stares at Miriam and she watches him intensely, still unsure if she’s about to be shot or pushed in to the pit.

On Joel, getting no answer. He’s stressed.

    JOEL
    Burns? Did you hear me?

Burns holds the gun, still dealing with Miriam’s rejection. But finally he takes his eyes off Miriam and turns to look out the window.

Joel stands tall with Naomi on her knees.

BANG!

A bullet flies too near for comfort and he jerks down behind Naomi. Naomi sneers contempt.

    NAOMI
    You don’t think you can beat him, do you? You’re just as dumb as your brother.

Joel curses silently. And weighs it up. He calls –

    JOEL
    Burns? I’m letting Naomi go. I want you to send Miriam out.

Joel isn’t sure if this is the right move. But slowly he releases his grip and NAOMI stands up, scrambling up towards her brother with a look of triumph on her face.

But Burns hasn’t been watching. He pops out into the door and fires wildly. He shots his sister in the gut. It might not be fatal but she falls on her face and is set upon by four or five snakes. She will die screaming in half an hour.
Joel is left without cover. Burns is struck with grief.

Joel hops from rock to rock until he reaches the building. Burns fires wildly as Joel moves; he misses. Joel puts his back to the outside wall.

And now they are talking to each other through the wall.

JOEL
Burns? Naomi’s gonna die if you don’t get her to a hospital. Send Miriam out and well go get help.

NAOMI
Gideon? Shoot him through the wall. Quickly!

Joel moves. Sudden gunfire rounds directed at Joel from Burns. It’s too close, Joel moves to a window and aims a shot or two toward Burns.

NAOMI
Gideon...

Joel hears her cry with horror. Peers around to see if he’s hit Burns. He only sees Burns has moved to grab Miriam and use her as a shield.

Burns turns to Miriam as though it’s her fault.

GIDEON BURNS
My sister’s dead.

We stay on Burns, digesting this and what it means, looking at Miriam. She fears that now he’ll surely kill her.

JOEL (O.S.)
(calls)
Miriam is an innocent in this. I’ll take her place but let her go.

Burns hears Joel’s offer.

GIDEON BURNS
Eye for an eye?
JOEL
Kill me instead. That would be biblical, right?

Off of Joel’s offer, Burns speaks with quiet sadness to Miriam.

GIDEON BURNS
Now he’s half killed my sister he’d sacrifice himself for you. I should take this offer?

MIRIAM
You know you can’t escape from here. You’re not special. You’re just a man.

Burns barely reacts, but it hurts him deeply.

GIDEON BURNS
You’re probably right. But one of us must die here first.

Miriam stiffens - he holds the gun out. This is the moment. She waits. Burns is still pointing the gun.

GIDEON BURNS
Who do you choose? Yourself? Joel Gallagher? Or me?

Not what Miriam was expecting at all.

MIRIAM
What do you mean?

GIDEON BURNS
There is no law here with us now. No moral codes either. There’s you, and I, and him.

Miriam watches her wrestling with it.

Burns suddenly turns and fires at the wall where he is guessing Joel is. Joel’s shot in the arm, cries out, recoils behind the wall. Miriam hears his cry, and the urgency intensifies as Burns turns back.
MIRIAM
You.
(defiant)
You must die.

Burns smiles, impressed, proud of Miriam.

GIDEON BURNS
Joel? She’s not a sheep.

Miriam stares, unsure what he’ll do with her answer.

Burns maintains eye contact with her and slowly edges toward the door. His eyes are still trained on Miriam until he nears the door.

Joel is clutching the gunshot wound in his arm as he looks around the corner to see Burns’s dark form appears in the door. Burns walks a foot outside the door and spreads his arms open wide, like Christ on the Cross. He is making himself a target for Joel, the gun hanging limp in one hand.

Joel peeks around the corner of the building but hesitates. He is confused by what Burns’s doing, wants to check it isn’t a trick.

JOEL
Miriam?

Miriam is incredulously watching Burns who doesn’t turn towards Joel, but keeps his eyes fixed on the church and parsonage in the far distance; we see a hint of a smile on his lips.

Miriam, with her hands tied in front of her, pulls Burns back into the building and almost into the pit.

BANG!

Joel fires at were Devey was. Missing of course. She’s pulled him out of the way.

For a second, Burns is perfectly still, balanced on the ledge, he drops the pistol but grabs Miriam, He’s about to pull her with him into the pit.
But Joel runs into the building. He sees the two about to fall into the pit. The snakes are rattling and there isn’t any prey in the bottom of the pit… yet.

Miriam watches as Burns closes his eyes.

Then he falls lifelessly through the air.

Joel grabs Miriam’s free arm and prevents him from pulling her in. Burns loses his grip or he loses the will to pull her in.

We watch from Joel’s POV as Burns falls the ten feet into the pit. He smashes into the floor and is bitten by 10 snakes.

On Miriam, resolute and certain that his death was justice, despite her helping it along.

All that’s left is the sound of the snakes rattling.

INT. JOEL’S TRAILER - DAY 11

Extreme long shot. Ned, from Iowa, pulls up and questions Joel. Joel points to the tiny trailer with eight-week-old puppies.

Ned’s blonde shock of hair even blonder now, his plain farm-boy health looks are clearly out of place. Everyone in this film has flawed appearance, except Miriam. She is a visual match for Ned. They both look to be Iowa farm kids.

Ned finds Miriam playing with the puppies. She is laying down and laughing as the puppies play “king of the hill” on top of her. Her Puli is winning.

She sits up and is ready to listen to Ned. He can’t articulate anything, but his eyes are full of love for her and he twists his baseball cap in his hands like a young boy.

Ned settles nervously into the yard and plays with the puppies rather than talk to Miriam. It’s sweet but not really what Miriam wants.

Joel’s face forms a watery smile but tears don’t flow. He walks inside and checks on the mother dog and puppies under his table.

INT. MECCA CHURCH - DAY 12
There is a small gathering of townspeople around two cheap open coffins.

There is a new preacher and the glass container (where the snakes were) is still there, but it is empty.

One coffin contains John Gallagher, the other, Priscilla Gallagher. Peaceful in death. Their appearance is improved. The mortician has covered all their scars and imperfections. They had looked both very rough. We can’t see the alcoholism, sin and torment are now gone.

Miriam is the only relation. She steps up and places a posy in her aunt’s coffin, along with the glass figurine that Priscilla loved. Miriam steps back, joining Ned in the front row. He squeezes her hand.

As a CHURCH FUNCTIONARY steps forward to fasten lids on the coffins, TWO WOMEN behind Miriam, mutter in a quiet voice, as if not to be overheard.

   WOMAN #1
   His brother isn’t here, I see.

   WOMAN #2
   The man is godless, are you really surprised?

Miriam glances sideways at them, says nothing.

EXT. JOEL’S ROW OF TRAILERS - DAY 12

Joel’s POV as he stands in front of his trailer looking down the long row of trailers.

Apparently, Miriam has moved into the trailer where the puppies are. Ned’s truck is parked down there. Ned has her suitcase and it loading it into his truck. Miriam hands him a dog bed and some of the puppy’s equipment.

Miriam brings out the puppy and everything is set for them to leave. Ned pulls a u-turn in the street and they head back to Joel’s trailer.

INT. NED’S TRUCK - DAY 12
NED
Your farm’s been taken over by new folks already. But my mother says that you can to come and live with us.

Beat.

NED
But, mom says we should get married before the end of summer?

MIRIAM
And you’re okay with that?

NED
Sure. Of course.

MIRIAM
How many acres does your family have?

He glances at Miriam then looks at Joel with an uncomfortable look. Miriam looks worried she won’t know what to say to Joel, but she’s going to say good-bye before leaving for Iowa.

Ned’s truck stops.

NED
Just, tell him you’re going home.

MIRIAM
I’ll talk to him.

Ned’s pleasantly oblivious, smiling as Miriam exits the truck.

EXT. JOEL’S TRAILER – DAY 12

Joel stands in front of his trailer, for once a little bashful, his arm still bound with a bandage on his gun shot wound.

Miriam considers him with new objectivity as she approaches.

MIRIAM
You didn’t come to the funeral.

JOEL
(shrugs)
I said goodbye in my own way.
She nods. Aware of Ned’s open truck window.

Miriam takes a step down the walk away from Ned. Joel walks with her. They reach the next trailer.

MIRIAM
This the sire of those puppies.

JOEL
Yep.

MIRIAM
I’m going home, Joel.

Of course he knew but it’s still a shock, although he tries to hide it.

MIRIAM
I’m just a simple farm girl.

JOEL
Well go on then.

Miriam glances at Ned’s truck and in the silence Joel’s ashamed of his bitterness.

MIRIAM
You’re harsh today.

JOEL
As soon as you’re out of sight, I’ll probably start beating these dogs.

MIRIAM
Don’t joke like that.

But he’s given himself away. Miriam’s curious...

MIRIAM
You know what’s wrong, you don’t have anything to love.

JOEL
The dogs.
MIRIAM
They all look really nice. Whatever they say about you, they can’t say your dogs don’t eat well.

Showing vulnerability and emotions is hard for him. For a moment, he braves meeting her eye, hoping she’ll respond.

MIRIAM
What will you do?

Not the response he wanted - he hoped she might talk love. And the fact that she didn’t tells him there’s no hope. A moment, then he covers with a shrug.

JOEL
Same as always.

Beat. It pains him but he has to risk it.

JOEL
There’s a dog show, in San Diego. If you weren’t going back home...

MIRIAM
I’d go with you but...

JOEL
God damn it Miriam, that’s no life for anyone! Living in a trailer park...

MIRIAM
Even if you own all the trailers...

And smuggling puppies into Los Angeles. Someday I’ll pay a hell of a price.

MIRIAM
(simply, with acceptance)
I can’t survive you, Joel. And it’s a pity.

He looks at her with regret - realizing it’s over then.

JOEL
(black humour)
They'll probably get me in the end.
Castrate me along with the dogs.

Joel suddenly takes her face in his hands and kisses it and now she sees that he’s laughing in exasperation at her.

JOEL
When you’re old, you’ll remember that.
‘He stole trucks’, you’ll say to yourself, and he didn’t really care for me; and if it wasn’t for the dogs I’d be there with him now.

Miriam smiles genuinely, but tells him, softly.

MIRIAM
It’s not the dogs. I just want a home.

There’s nothing else to say. Miriam smiles at Joel and returns to Ned’s truck.

Miriam enters. She shuts the door and watches through the small window a Ned accelerates fairly quickly to get out of there. He wants to get away before he loses the girl.

Joel watches her drive away to Iowa.

But, the truck makes about 100 yards down the street before we see the brake lights. It stops. Miriam gets out she throws the dog bed and other items out on the ground. She gets the suitcase and the puppy out.

She stacks the dog bed and items on the suitcase and begins rolling it toward Joel’s trailer.

Ned doesn’t accelerate away, so she turns to wave at him.

Then he accelerates down the street.

- the end -