FADE IN:

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - LATE AFTERNOON
Out of FOCUS - A haphazard display of objects move about. As we come into focus, we see --

ANTS swarm over the carcass of a lizard. They pick and pull, rip away bits of flesh.

As haphazard as they seemed in the beginning, the more organized they appear now. Hundreds are really one, so many they cause the screen to go --

BLACK

INT. TONY'S HOUSE/DARKENED ROOM
In the darkness, raspy, labored breathing. Sensuous sounds erupt into a passionate guttural groan of desire. Or is it?

A hard SLAP and a frightened YELP conveys otherwise.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - SAME
A FOOT CRASHES down on the parade of ants.
The perpetrators are masked by a low lying sun that dangles against a desert landscape. Yellow beams of light cascade across the sand to settle on --

TONY BARNES (12) leads the way. Beautiful without knowing it, fiery without showing it, a boy on the verge of being a man.

INT. TONY'S HOUSE/DARKENED ROOM - SAME
A glimmer of light, a hint of shapes. A blur of movement. Furious noises now. Someone struggles to get away.

A HAND rises, clenches into a bloody fist, descends. SMACK!

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - SAME
Next to, but not equal to Tony, is WILLIE WALLACE (13), a dark-skinned kid who never saw eye to eye with his mother, and it shows.

WILLIE
I told the fucker I'd kill him if he ever fuckin' fucked around with me again. Sumbitch pissed me off.

TONY
You can't go around killin' people, man. We ain't gonna be juvies forever. Killin' people is right up there with armed robbery and shit.

MOUSE (O.S.)
Screw that! Willie's right.
Before there was a name for ADHD, there was MIKE 'MOUSE' BURNS (10), the youngest of the group.

MOUSE
You should have busted him up right then and there, Willie, I would of.

WILLIE/JESUS
Shut up, Mouse!
JESUS SNYDER (12), Mexican/Cherokee, rushes up from behind and smacks Mouse on the back of his head. Native long black locks, laid back but unpredictable, a bull in a china shop.

MOUSE
Jesus, Jesus, why'd you do that?
JESUS
'HEY-SOOS', puta! Get it right. And shut the fuck up.

MOUSE
Jesus, 'hey-soos', what's the difference? You're in America now, say it right!

JESUS
It's like Tony said, cavron! Armed robbery and shit! You got to use your head!

Jesus thrusts Mouse to the ground. The others push forward, kick at the dirt along the way.

MOUSE
I'm gonna get a big stick and whomp you with it, 'hey-soos'!

INT. TONY'S HOUSE/DARKENED ROOM - SAME
CRACK! THUMP! The beatdown continues. A WOMAN crawls on the floor, face matted with her blood soaked blonde hair. A heavy worker's BOOT SLAMS into her ribs.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - SAME
Mouse laughs as he flicks an ant away with his finger.
A hand with black nail polish, appears in front of his face. He takes it, is helped to his feet by --

Gun-grey piercings in her nose, ears, left eye-brow, deep mascara, black lipstick. ANNABELLE 'BELLE' DURANTE (14), a raven haired, Goth-girl who is, when all the tough exterior is stripped away, a vision of exquisite beauty.

BELLE
Ya gotta learn to pull yourself up, Mousey.

She dusts off Mouse's backside.
BELLE
As for him, throw in a couple of curse words, you know, like, shit, fuck, dick weed...
(louder)
... asshole!
Willie walks backwards, eyeballs the two.
WILLIE
Who she talkin' about? Bitch, who you talkin' about?

Belle drags Mouse by hand as they march up to Willie. Mouse has to look up at her, his doe-like gaze gives away his adoration for the girl.

MOUSE
My Dad won't let me swear. But I swear, if I could swear, Belle, Willie would be ...

Mouse collides with Willie's gut.

INT. TONY'S HOUSE/DARKENED ROOM - SAME
A MAN, face unseen, pulls the woman by her hair, lifts her head up. Takes aim. CRUNCH!

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - SAME
WILLIE
Willie would be what?
Willie towers over Mouse. Belle pushes Mouse aside, is almost nose to nose with Willie. Mouse slinks behind Belle.

BELLE
You need to learn some manners.
Belle squints past Willie --
Tony has stopped ahead, wary, hands on slender hips.
WILLIE
And you need to learn your place, Belle. Why you always followin' us? Why ain't you watchin' your kids?
(re: Mouse)
Watchin' her kids...
BELLE
They're not my kids, ass-hole!
She shoves him, but it's like pushing up against the 'Michelin Man'. Willie is amused.

WILLIE
You like feelin' up on me? Feelin' my big muscles...

Willie flexes his so-called guns. Belle chuckles.
BELLE
You know what my Dad told me?
WILLIE
Why should I care what your Dad told you? What'd your Dad tell you?

BELLE
He says the best way to get a boy's attention...

Belle leans in and WHAM! Grabs a handful of Willie's crotch!
BELLE
Is to take hold of these little fuckers! How's that 'feel'?

INT. TONY'S HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - SAME
The woman crawls to a door, pushes it open and is engulfed in sunlight. The haze blocks our view of her as she pauses --

The top of a whiskey bottle juts out of a brown bag. The woman cradles it to her bosom as she slithers out the door.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - SAME
Willie is immobilized, a weak ass shriek escapes his lips. He tries to drop to his knees, but Belle's vice-like grip holds him up. He is bent over, face to face with Belle.

BELLE
You need to respect women, Willie.
WILLIE
You ain't no woman! Get off! Let. Go. My. Nuts!

She squeezes tighter. Willie winces, raises his hand for a slap. Belle releases him and cringes, prepared for the worst.

Someone grabs Willie's arm from behind.
Willie turns, vehement, as Tony gazes down. A rattlesnake is less disconcerting.

TONY
Don't hit girls, man. ‘Specially Belle.

A hint of a smile crosses Belle's soft lips.
Willie snatches his hand out of Tony's grip.
WILLIE
When'd you get all high and mighty?
They square off -- then freeze at the HORN BLAST of a train.
MOUSE (O.C.)
Train!
In the distance, a train barrels down the tracks.
Mouse searches the ground, finds a few rocks.
MOUSE
It's an Amtrack! Come on!
Everyone runs around, pick up rocks off the ground, head to --

EMBANKMENT
They climb to the other side and hide as --
The train looms closer, LOUDER.
Their heads pop over the embankment like groundhogs. As soon as the train is even with them, they rise as one and chug rocks, HOOPIN' and HOLLERIN' --

THUMP! THUMP! on the top of the train!
TRAIN ENGINE
The TRAIN CONDUCTOR SLAMS on the BRAKES
EMBANKMENT
The kids all duck down behind the embankment -- except Mouse.
Mouse charges over and down the hill, a shrill WAR-CRY escapes his lips --

Tony and Willie exchange glances. Willie stares --
WILLIE
What the fuck is he doin'?
(re: Tony)
What is he doin'?
TONY
Mouse!
Mouse runs up to the slowing train, sees --
A scared OLD LADY peers out the window, looks directly at -Mouse, as he grins, winds up, hurls a stone --

SMASHES the window, GLASS FLIES everywhere! The rock hits the woman on the forehead.

The train comes to a complete stop.
Tony rises from his perch, Belle and the others follow suit.
WILLIE
You fuckin' idiot!
Mouse turns to his friends, his face a mask of pure, nonsensical, devious ...joy.

Tony grabs Belle's hand, turns to run --

Jesus has already darted away, a good twenty yard head start.
Mouse LAUGHS as he walks towards the hill, still eyeing --
The Old Lady, now being attended to by other PASSENGERS, some pointing at --

Mouse hops up and down at the top of the embankment, revels in the excitement. He turns, wags his posterior, then runs!

EXT. OUTSKIRTS LUBBOCK - DUSK
A SIGN reads: LUBBOCK, TX: Pop: 199,927 Census: 2001
SIRENS can be heard in the distance as the kids walk at a brisk pace. Willie and Jesus lead the way, Mouse in the middle and --

Belle and Tony bring up the rear. Slightly taller than Tony, she glances down at her hand in his, then brings her gaze to his face.

TONY
Cops gonna be lookin' for a group.
BELLE
Maybe we should split up?
Mouse can't hide his enthusiasm.
MOUSE
Wasn't that cool? I thought her head was gonna explode!

JESUS
Something is wrong with you, homes.
MOUSE
Nothin' wrong with me.
JESUS
Sick fucker, man.
MOUSE
I ain't sick!
WILLIE
Sick ain't the word, you little shit. Tony, we should split up.

Willie and Jesus head towards the town. Tony tugs at Belle's hand and they head in the opposite direction. Mouse hesitates, then follows Willie and Jesus.

WILLIE
Where the hell you goin'? You're not with us. He's not with us.

MOUSE
Oh, come on, Willie, my house is that way, anyway.

WILLIE
Fuck. Fine. Alright. But you need to shut the fuck up.

Willie regards Tony and Belle as they quietly walk away.
WILLIE
I ain't forgot you, Belle. You neither, $T$.

Without looking back, they both throw up middle fingers.
Mouse chuckles. Jesus smacks him on the head again.
WILLIE/JESUS
Shut the fuck up!
Mouse does. But, under his breath --

MOUSE
One day, I'm gonna be bigger than both of you...

He trails behind the two mean boys, glances back as --
Tony and Belle disappear over a hill.

EXT. BACK ROAD - EARLY EVENING
The sun resembles an atomic blast on the horizon. Spread throughout, vast rows of brown dirt, cultivated farmland.

Tony and Belle, still hand in hand, walk on the side of the road. Well, Tony walks, Belle floats.

BELLE
You really gonna kick Willie's ass?
TONY
I guess.
BELLE
For me?

TONY
Yeah, sure.
She squeezes his arm.
BELLE
Can't wait for you to get to junior high this year. All the girls are going crazy.

TONY
Crazy for what?
BELLE
Geez, Tony, you're the hottest sixth grader on the planet, they all want to practice on you!

TONY
Practice what?
A devilish grin crosses Belle's lips. They stop for a beat, she pulls him to her, mouth open, tongue engaging.

Tony yanks away, wipes his lips.
TONY
What the hell was that?
BELLE
A french kiss.
TONY
I thought you were from Abilene?
An obnoxious laugh from Belle.
BELLE
It's how French girls kiss, silly.
Tony nods, bewildered, but intrigued. He leans in for more. This time Belle pulls back, tugs at his arm and moseys on.

BELLE
Hey, I'm just saying, all the other girls want to practice. Wait til they ask you for oil sex.

TONY
Oil sex? What's that?
BELLE
Not sure. I think they grease you up with olive oil or something.

TONY
You ever have oil sex?
BELLE
I've never had any sex.
TONY
But I thought ...
BELLE
Thought what?
TONY
Willie said ...
BELLE
Willie's a lying sack of shit! Don't ever listen to him. I'm a virgin, and I'm gonna stay a virgin until I find the right guy. An honest guy.

TONY
Okay.
They get quiet as they continue their stroll.
TONY
But, he's my best friend.
BELLE
He's bad news, okay? You'd be better off finding another friend.

Tony nods, squints his eyes in thought. Belle watches him out the corner of her eye. Totally smitten.

BELLE
Willie ...is the epitome of bad news.

TONY
I don't even know what that means.
BELLE
It means if you wanna be an honest guy, don't hang with Willie. You wanna be an honest guy right?

TONY
I guess.
BELLE
You wanna be my boyfriend?

Tony contemplates, his sincerity apparent.
TONY
I would ...love ...to be your boyfriend.

Belle explodes with a radiant smile. The smile fades as Tony stops dead in his tracks.

PLAYGROUND
A single lamp post FLICKERS ON and illuminates the darkened grounds. Various insects are drawn to the light. The SQUEAK of rusted chains permeate the otherwise quiet surroundings.

A WOMAN rocks gently on a swing set, her sandy blond hair covers her bowed head.

Tony releases Belle's hand and goes to the woman.
Belle quickens her pace, but slows down as they get closer. Tony's head tilts in curiosity.

TONY
Mom?

The woman turns her head slowly to reveal JEAN BARNES (30's), lip busted, right eye swollen shut, blood vessel popped in the left eye, nose gushes like a faucet. She's fucked up.

JEAN
Baby? How you doin', baby?
Tony kneels down beside her, puts his hand on her knee to stop the swing. The CREAKING ceases. Save for the crickets, all is silent.

JEAN
Forgive him, baby, for he knoweth not what he does.

Jean raises the paper bag with a forty-ounce to her swollen lips, painfully has her fill.

Belle's eyes glisten with tears.
BELLE
Call the cops.
Tony wipes away the hair from his mother's face, a sad mass of broken flesh and soul. His face a mask of fury, Tony glances towards the house.

JEAN
He's sleeping. You don't want to wake him when he's sleeping.

She takes another swig.
BELLE (O.C.)
Call the cops, Tony.
Tony rises, heads towards --
An ominous modular home sits alone in the background.
TONY
Go home, Belle.
Belle trails after him.
BELLE
Tony! Wait ...
Tony turns and faces her.
TONY
Go home!
Belle exhales a guttural SOB. Tony's hardened face is betrayed by helpless eyes. They stand there for a beat, and she knows what's next. He turns and heads to the house.

Jean stares up at Belle, takes another gulp of the forty ounce, a weak, sad, grin crosses her lips.

Belle, face flooded, pivots and runs into the darkness.

INT. TONY'S HOUSE - NIGHT
The house is dimly lit, cluttered, even in the darkness. Dust motes reflect off the limited lighting.

Laid back on a recliner, JOE BARNES (30's) snores, his pot belly protrudes and stretches a worn out wife beater T-shirt, an open bottle of Jack Daniels between his legs.

Face in shadow, Tony is immobile. We move down his body to -His left hand, a Glock 9mm. His right, snub-nosed .357. We move back up as --

A tear rolls down Tony's cheek as he silently weeps.

JOE
adjusts himself in the chair, eyes closed.
The Glock lands on his belly, awakens him with a start. He sees the gun there, lifts it by the butt between his thumb and forefinger, holds it to his face, then looks past it.

JOE
Hey, son. What're you ...
BLAM.....BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!
The bullets from the . 357 riddle Joe Barnes with gaping holes, his body to convulses in a rhythmic shindig.

Joe's glossed over eyes try to fathom what had just occurred. His bloody spittle chokes him as he opens his mouth to speak.

BLAM! A final bullet pierces his forehead.
Silence, as we move over to the
KITCHEN
A sliver of light illuminates a
CALENDAR - August 2001.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - NIGHT
Jean brings the bottle to her lips, chugs the rest of her forty ounce down, tosses it onto the ground.

JEAN
For you are dust ...and to dust you shall return.

She wraps her arms around the chains of the swing, pushes off, HUMS a lullaby as the rusted metal CREAKS --

INT. PRISON CELL - DAY

CREAK! -- CHA-CHUNK!
Eyes snap open to the sound. Move out to reveal --
Tony -- a weathered twenty-five, sits up on his cot. Stripped down to the waist, muscles ripped tight, self-inflicted prison TATS, tape-worm like scars along his back.

