

ATOMIC FALLS

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. ATOMIC FALLS - DAY

A picture perfect postcard of a South Texas town. The lawns are immaculate. The sidewalks are freshly poured and seem to shine. The storefronts display a bounty of perfect food and products. And in the distance a pristine waterfall feeds into a gentle stream that runs alongside Main Street.

The people are frozen in place. Plastic smiles on plastic faces. One of them topples over to reveal that she really *is* made of plastic.

Suddenly, the entire town shakes as a terrible earthquake strikes. An enormous Jell-O mold rises up like a jiggling Mount Vesuvius.

REVEAL that this is a model of a perfect town, being carried inside a branch of...

INT. REAL ESTATE AGENCY - DAY

...the Yellow Rose Real Estate Agency. 1951. The agent, EARL MCFARLAND, mid-40s, is seated at his desk. He spins around with the model and sets it next to a strawberry Jell-O mold on a plate.

His potential clients are the DAWSONS, an "aw shucks" wholesome nuclear family. Matching plaid shirts, jeans, and boots. Their son, OWEN JR, is five years old. He wears a cowboy hat and has a toy sixshooter on his hip.

His dad, OWEN DAWSON, looks at the model town like a kid on Christmas morning and MARGARET DAWSON, ever the obedient housewife, waits to speak until she's spoken to.

EARL

Owen! Margaret! I present to you...
(a flourish, as if he can
see it on a billboard)
Atomic Falls!

OWEN AND MARGARET

(together)
Atomic Falls.

OWEN JR.

(whispers the name in awe)
Atomic Falls.

EARL
The Town of the Future...today!

OWEN
That's incredible!

EARL
You've heard of atomic energy?

MARGARET
It's supposed to be cleaner than
coal and more efficient than oil.

EARL
Bingo! The South Texas Electric
Company is building the very first
nuclear powered city twenty miles
from here. And they're selling
commercial lots right on Main
Street. They even have a traffic
light.

OWEN JR.
Wow!

EARL
But these lots won't last. Leads
went out to every Yellow Rose
office in Texas and even parts of
Louisiana, Georgia, and Florida.

MARGARET
(too excited)
Florida! Our neighbors could be
from Florida?

EARL
And there are already half a dozen
businesses established on Main
Street.

Earl sets the fallen pieces of the model back up and then
uses a pencil to point out the different landmarks.

EARL (CONT'D)
There's Bunker's General Store. The
Atomic Falls Post Office. The Up
and Atom Grocery Store. The
Meltdown Ice Cream Parlor. The Out
of This World Diner. The
Oppenheimer Cinema. And right
there...that's where Dawson's
Hardware Store will welcome
customers with a smile.

OWEN
 (can't help smiling)
 Holy cow!
 (leans in for a closer
 look)
 Do you think there will be enough
 room for a paint department?

EARL
 You could have a paint department.
 A lumber yard out back. And over
 here...you could even repair lawn
 mowers.

OWEN
 (he can hardly believe
 this)
 That has always been my dream.

EARL
 I know, Owen. I know. But in Atomic
 Falls...it could be your reality.
 And right next door is the
 Sheriff's office. You can be sure
 it's the safest street in the whole
 state of Texas.

Almost on cue there is a knock on the door.

EARL (CONT'D)
 (feigning surprise)
 Speak of the devil!

The door opens and SHERIFF BEAU DAVIS walks in. 35 years old,
 a man's man, chiseled from granite with a smile that draws
 you in but a presence that demands respect.

Owen Jr stares at the *real* six shooter on the Sheriff's hip;
 he's just met a super hero.

SHERIFF DAVIS
 Am I interrupting?

EARL
 Owen. Margaret. I want you to meet
 someone.

SHERIFF DAVIS
 (sticks out his hand)
 Sheriff Beau Davis. Pleasure to
 meet you Mr and Mrs Dawson.

Sheriff Davis kneels down and looks into Owen Jr's eyes.

SHERIFF DAVIS (CONT'D)

Howdy, son.

Sheriff Davis removes Owen Jr's cheap felt Hopalong Cassidy hat and places his own black stetson hat on Owen Jr's head. The stetson swallows Owen Jr's head and covers his eyes.

SHERIFF DAVIS (CONT'D)

(laughing)

Maybe when you're a little older,
Owen Jr.

(puts his hat back on)

MARGARET

(smitten)

You know our names?

Tussling Owen Jr's hair.

SHERIFF DAVIS

I better. We're gonna be neighbors!

MARGARET

Well not yet, we're still on the
fence and...

Owen is overwhelmed with joy. Just too nice and too dumb for his own good.

OWEN

(cutting her off)

We'll take it!

Earl stands and enthusiastically shakes Owen's hand as Sheriff Davis looks on.

Owen puts an arm around Margaret and Owen Jr.

OWEN (CONT'D)

I feel like the luckiest man in the world. First this beautiful woman agreed to marry me. Then we had little Owen Junior. And now, we're moving to the city of the future. I can't wait to see what gifts the Good Lord has in store for us next. Thank you Mr. McFarland. Thank you for everything.

Earl just grins as the couple hugs and starts to exit the office.

SHERIFF DAVIS

Mr and Mrs Dawson, it would be my honor if you'd let me drive you on a little tour through Atomic Falls. You can ride in my cruiser.

OWEN JR.

(finding his voice)
Can we turn on the siren?

SHERIFF DAVIS

(kneels down to the boy,
serious)
I'd have to deputize you first.

OWEN JR.

(respectfully)
Of course.

Sheriff Davis pulls out a shiny metal badge and pins it on Owen Jr's shirt.

SHERIFF DAVIS

Come on, Deputy Dawson.

OWEN JR.

Hot dog!

MARGARET

(to Earl)
Now don't you go eating that Jell-O all in one sitting.

EARL

(a salesman's smile)
Were you reading my mind?

Margaret laughs.

EARL (CONT'D)

(Laughing along)
I will try to control myself.

They exit the office, headed towards a bright and shining future.

As soon as the door shuts, the smile drops from Earl's face. He looks at the Jell-O mold in disgust and drops it in the trash, plate and all.

He picks up the phone and pulls a black card out of his wallet. He squints at the card and dials a number.

EARL (CONT'D)

It's me. Yeah. They just left.

(beat)

They bought it.

(beat)

Yes, they're healthy. I promise, they'll be ideal subjects.

(beat)

A son. Five years old.

Earl fidgets with the model town, flicking people over, playing God.

EARL (CONT'D)

I don't care what you do with the waste. Just bury it.

(beat)

I don't know. In the cemetery. The dead won't care...Okay. Okay. I'll be in touch.

Earl hangs up the phone and sits back with a sigh. He reaches back and grabs a second model: The Atomic Falls Power Plant. Two plastic nuclear cooling towers rise up with real blinking red lights.

He pushes the power plant forward until it snaps together with the model of Atomic Falls; the cooling towers bookend the pristine waterfall and loom ominously over the little town.

EXT. MAIN STREET, ATOMIC FALLS - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE: "30 Years Later"

MAY 1981. Atomic Falls is a dreary South Texas town that has seen better days.

It is sweltering, even after dark. The fireflies struggle to lift off the ground as the humidity weighs down their wings. Everything seems to move slower in the heat. And the gentle stream is now polluted and frothy.

The high school football field is desolate as the sprinklers water the dying grass. The marquee reads "Home of the Fighting Isotopes: Never Forget the Class of 1976. Rest in Peace."

There is a single stop light at the edge of town. It cycles Green, Yellow, and Red to direct the completely vacant Main Street. And then cycles Green, Yellow, and Red to direct the desolate Front Street.

We can hear a scraping, shuffling sound. Something dragging along the pavement towards Main Street. The sound slows when the light turns Yellow. It stops when it turns Red. And then it begins again with the next Green light.

A weathered sign reads "Welcome to Atomic Falls, the Town of the Future...Today! Established 1951. Population 281."

Yellow, the scraping slows. Red, it stops. Green, it speeds up.

Suddenly a gnarled finger jabs at the sign. A long and brittle fingernail scratches around the "1", digging away at the paint as it adds a curve to the top and the bottom of the number until it reads "Population 282".

Green light, the unseen entity shuffles towards the town.

But we move on at a quicker pace, floating past Bunker's General Store where a space age rusted metal ball rotates creakily atop a half-dead neon sign.

Past The Atomic Falls post office, Zip Code 00244. And then past the Up and Atom grocery store where we trip the sensor and the automatic doors slide open.

We catch a glimpse of a startled teenager, JODY MILLER, standing behind the register. She stares out at an empty street before we whisk past...

...Dawson's Hardware Store...The Melt Down ice cream parlor...The Out of this World Diner where the special is always "Fission Chips."

The Oppenheimer Cinema advertises this week's film: *The Incredible Shrinking Woman*.

We finally slow down in front of the Atomic Falls Sheriff's Office. A long midcentury brick building, straight out of the 1950s.

INT. ATOMIC FALLS SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

A trio of antlers and a taxidermy fish decorate one of the wood paneled walls. There is a large green metal desk with a matching metal chair. A faded name plate reads SHERIFF DAVIS. Two wooden chairs face the desk. A framed picture of a woman with 1970s rodeo queen hair smiles up at...

SHERIFF BEAU DAVIS, now in his 60s. He sits at the desk cracking walnuts. The past 30 years have changed him.

He is tired. Heavy set. Worn out by life and by seeing people on their absolute worst days.

His red-rimmed eyes betray his nightly drinking and he struggles to get up out of his chair, so he sits and greets his visitors with a wave of the hand, except for when a woman enters. Then he stands, always a gentleman.

Across from SHERIFF DAVIS is OWEN DAWSON JR. The innocent boy we first met in 1951 is now a pale, sickly looking man with dust colored hair and premature crows feet around his eyes.

He is only thirty-five but it's a hard thirty-five. He carries the weight of the world on his shoulders and looks defeated. His black stetson hat sits on his knee.

SHERIFF DAVIS

Nut?

OWEN JR.

No. No thank you, Sheriff.

SHERIFF DAVIS

How's Annie?

OWEN JR.

Good.

(beat)

Well, as good as can be expected.

CUT TO:

INT. THE DAWSON HOUSE - NIGHT

ANNIE DAWSON, 35, nurses her new baby EMMETT in the bedroom she shares with Owen Jr.

It is a peaceful scene.

She suddenly jumps when she hears a *THUD* against the side of the house.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. ATOMIC FALLS SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Sheriff Davis chews a walnut.

SHERIFF DAVIS

Right.

(chewing)

Right.

(MORE)

SHERIFF DAVIS (CONT'D)
 (cracks another nut)
 And the new baby?

OWEN JR.
 He's growing.

Sheriff Davis hesitates, searches Owen's face and then finally he asks the important question.

SHERIFF DAVIS
 And Lily?

CUT BACK TO:

INT. THE DAWSON HOUSE - NIGHT

Annie sets baby Emmett down in his crib and creeps towards the living room. *THUD*!

Annie starts breathing faster as she turns the corner and sees her 8-year-old daughter LILY. Stringy hair, slack jawed, dead black eyes.

Lily doesn't know she's being watched as she lowers her head and runs full speed into the front door. *THUD*!

CUT BACK TO:

INT. ATOMIC FALLS SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Owen struggles to answer truthfully.

OWEN JR.
 She's fine. Just...fine.

SHERIFF DAVIS
 Helluva thing.

OWEN JR.
 That it is. That it certainly is.

SHERIFF DAVIS
 So why did you come to see me this evening, Owen?

OWEN JR.
 It's been a week.

SHERIFF DAVIS
 That's right. Found her out there in the woods a week ago tonight.

OWEN JR.

And she still isn't talking. Or eating. The social worker said it might take some time. But still...

SHERIFF DAVIS

Well. I don't know what to tell you, Owen. You got your daughter back. None of us expected that. I mean...

The gravity of the situation is hard to ignore.

SHERIFF DAVIS (CONT'D)

...after six years.

OWEN JR.

I know. I know. The thing is...

(beat)

We...had finally started to move on.

SHERIFF DAVIS

And I'm sure it has been quite a shock to you both. A new baby and all, but *this* is a miracle.

OWEN JR.

(unconvincing)

The Lord is good.

SHERIFF DAVIS

Yes he is.

(beat)

And sometimes, he can be a mean sonofabitch.

Sheriff Davis cracks another walnut. Pops the meat in his mouth. He looks at Owen Jr and Owen Jr is staring through him.

The Sheriff opens a drawer and pulls out a fifth of Jim Beam along with two small glasses. He pours a drink for himself, drains it, pours himself another, and without asking, one for Owen Jr. He slides the drink over to Owen.

SHERIFF DAVIS (CONT'D)

Looks like you need this.

Owen seems to see the drink for the first time. He reaches out for it.

OWEN JR.

Yes.

(beat)

Thank you, Sheriff.

Owen takes the drink and holds it but he just stares at the bourbon. He doesn't take a sip.

SHERIFF DAVIS

You know, your daddy helped found this town.

(looks sadly at the framed picture)

When the cancer took my Emma, your daddy slept on my couch. Didn't say a word, just listened. Watched me break every window in my house. Watched me act a fool. But he was there for me.

Sheriff Davis takes a deep breath. Confronting the past that he drinks away every night.

SHERIFF DAVIS (CONT'D)

And then the cancer took your momma. And six months later, it took your daddy. But he was never once angry or bitter. He looked at the life he had built for you and he said...this is more than enough. The good Lord has given me more than enough.

(sighs)

I try to be the man he *was* as I struggle with being the man that I *am*. But sometimes you have to cut your losses and accept the small mercies.

Sheriff Davis takes a healthy swallow from his own glass. He looks up to see the impact that his speech as had on Owen Jr. But Owen is in his own world.

OWEN JR.

You...you see it. Right?

SHERIFF DAVIS

I'm not sure I follow.

CUT TO:

EXT. ATOMIC FALLS CEMETERY - NIGHT

Sheriff Davis is on patrol. The sky is storming, thunder in the distance. A large oak tree is split down the middle and smoldering from a recent lighting strike.

OWEN JR. (V.O.)

Lily disappeared just after her eighth birthday. It's been six years.

Sheriff Davis hears someone or *something* moaning. His flashlight plays over tombstones.

OWEN JR. (V.O.)

But...that's not a fourteen-year-old girl you found wandering in the woods last week.

The Sheriff's flashlight captures LILY, covered in mud, her clothes are rotting off of her. She has a large gash over her right eye, caked in dried blood. She stares at the Sheriff and tries to talk but nothing comes out.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. ATOMIC FALLS SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Sheriff Davis takes a deep sigh. He wants to choose his words carefully.

SHERIFF DAVIS

Who knows where Lily has been. Chances are she was...abducted. Held captive. The hospital said she was malnourished. Heck, they even had trouble listening to her heart. We can't begin to imagine the living hell she's been through over the past six years.

(firm, almost like a warning)

Be happy you have your daughter back.

OWEN JR.

I am. I really am.

But it is obvious that he is not.

SHERIFF DAVIS

Then why are you causing trouble, Owen?

Owen doesn't want to push the Sheriff. He knows he's on thin ice.

OWEN JR.

Doesn't it strike you as a little peculiar that she still *looks* like she's only eight years old?

SHERIFF DAVIS

(starting to lose his temper))

I don't understand you! Most missing children stay missing or turn up dead. You've got your daughter back. Why isn't that enough?

He stops. Hesitates for a moment and then decides to say what's *really* on his mind.

SHERIFF DAVIS (CONT'D)

You know my brother-in-law took his life over this case.

OWEN JR.

(indignant)

Now that's not fair! You don't know--

SHERIFF DAVIS

(shouting over him)

I do know! But I kept it from you because I figured both you and Annie had suffered enough!

Silence. Owen is struggling with this revelation.

SHERIFF DAVIS (CONT'D)

(defeated)

Lucas left a note. I'll read it to you if you like.

OWEN JR.

I'd rather not hear--

SHERIFF DAVIS

You hounded him because he was the last person to see Lily alive. Reported seeing her wander off into the woods after she got off the school bus. He came forward that first night because he was trying to help. But you got desperate, grasping at straws, and you *accused* him--

OWEN JR.
 (cutting him off)
 I never accused him, I simply--

SHERIFF DAVIS
 (shouting over him)
 You accused him of having something to do with her disappearance! He never hurt no one. His only crime was being a little odd. Hell, you're a spooky one yourself but people give you a break because your daughter disappeared.

The honesty stings but the gloves are off.

SHERIFF DAVIS (CONT'D)
 But no one gave Lucas a break.
 (beat)
 They spray painted "pedophile" on his truck, they left threatening messages on his phone, kids threw bricks through his windows.

Sheriff Davis takes a breath. This is more talking than he's done in a decade. He takes a drink. Calms down a bit and stares through Owen. Remembering.

SHERIFF DAVIS (CONT'D)
 My sister left him. His kids started to question the character of the man they called their father. And so he sat in that house by himself. Out of work. In the dark. Broken glass on the floor. And then one night, he wrote me a note.

OWEN JR.
 Sheriff, I'm sorry I said anything.

He doesn't hear Owen. He has to finish the story. He pulls a well-worn note out of his desk drawer.

CUT TO:

INT. LUCAS MILLER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

LUCAS MILLER, mid-40s, sits in a dark house, surrounded by broken windows. He is crying and drinking vodka for courage as he scrawls out a note on a yellow pad.

SHERIFF DAVIS (V.O.)

(reading)

"I always liked Owen and Annie Dawson. Before their daughter disappeared, they had always been kind to me. But I can't keep living knowing what they think about me. What my children think about me. Tell my kids I'm sorry."

Lucas sets the pad on the floor and grabs up a shotgun from a rack on the wall. He opens the bathroom door to reveal that he has covered it in blue tarps to help with the mess.

He shuts the door and we can hear a single shot; the light from the blast flashes under the closed door.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. ATOMIC FALLS SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Owen looks down at his hands. He finally sees the drink that he's been holding and he shoots it back.

OWEN JR.

I thought...it was because Delores left him.

SHERIFF DAVIS

Well she wouldn't have left him if people didn't suspect he had something to do with *your* Lily disappearing into *those* woods.

Owen sits quietly. He's at a loss for what to say.

Sheriff Davis downs his own drink and gets up with a heavy sigh. He walks to the door behind Owen and opens it.

SHERIFF DAVIS (CONT'D)

(quietly, paternally)

It's time for us to both go home and have our dinners.

(beat)

You got your daughter back. She doesn't eat. She doesn't talk to you. She doesn't look like you expected her to look after six long years. But you've got her back. Isn't that enough?

There is a long pause but Owen doesn't get up to leave.

OWEN JR.
(choking on the words)
Crockett showed up this morning for
his breakfast.

Sheriff Davis turns white, has to hang on the door for
support.

SHERIFF DAVIS
Say that again.

Owen is shaky, he starts to tear up.

OWEN JR.
At first, I wasn't sure if it was
him. He was in bad shape. He sort
of limped all over the porch, but
he was still wagging his tail...

Sheriff Davis closes the door and leans against the desk. He
is perplexed.

SHERIFF DAVIS
That can't be. It's been ten years.
I saw him get hit by that mail
truck.

Owen looks up with desperate eyes.

OWEN JR.
I checked the tags. The ones we
left on him when we buried him. Had
my old phone number on them and
everything.

Sheriff Davis sits down and stares hard at Owen.

SHERIFF DAVIS
What is wrong with you, Owen?

OWEN JR.
Nothing.
(beat)
Everything?

SHERIFF DAVIS
You got a sick sense of humor. I
tell you that story about Lucas and
you come back with this *twisted*
joke?

OWEN JR.

It's not a joke, Sheriff. First Lily shows up, then my bird dog Crockett. I think I'm gonna need your help.

(beat)

I think this whole town is gonna need your help.

SHERIFF DAVIS

Get out.

OWEN JR.

I'm telling you the truth!

SHERIFF DAVIS

(stands, glowering)

Get out!

OWEN JR.

You have to believe me!

Sheriff Davis places his hand on the butt of his pistol.

SHERIFF DAVIS

(screaming)

Get out before I kill you!

Owen takes this threat seriously. His eyes dart to the pistol on the Sheriff's hip and he hesitates. He places his hat on his head and swiftly exits through the door.

Sheriff Davis sits back down in silence. He doesn't know what to make of this. Why would Owen say something so insane and insensitive?

Chalk it up to pressure.

The man is under a lot of pressure.

New baby. Missing daughter, presumed dead, appears out of nowhere.

He pours himself another tumbler of bourbon and takes a sip, nursing this one. He takes a moment to mull things over.

A knock at the door.

SHERIFF DAVIS (CONT'D)

(hollering)

That better by Jesus Christ himself or else you best go away!

JUNE (O.S.)
It's me Sheriff!

SHERIFF DAVIS
That doesn't sound like Jesus
Christ. That sounds like my
secretary.

JUNE (O.S.)
(correcting him)
Administrative Assistant!

SHERIFF DAVIS
(rolling his eyes, to
himself)
For Christ's sake.
(hollers out)
Come in, June!

Sheriff Davis struggles to his feet as JUNE, early 50s with a bouffant hairdo, opens the door and stares at Sheriff Davis.

SHERIFF DAVIS (CONT'D)
(sarcastic)
Can I help you?

June sits and stares at the glasses of bourbon and the half empty bottle.

SHERIFF DAVIS (CONT'D)
Now don't you start in on me about
my drinking. Not tonight. I'm in no
mood for it.

June leans over and takes his glass. She greedily drinks it down and slumps back in the chair.

SHERIFF DAVIS (CONT'D)
(shocked)
Well help yourself!
(sits, exasperated)
Woman, what is going on!?

June wipes her mouth with the back of her hand and takes a deep breath.

JUNE
It's your brother-in-law, Lucas.

SHERIFF DAVIS
What about him?

JUNE

Ace Thompson just saw him walking
down Main Street.

SHERIFF DAVIS

Say that again.

JUNE

He said he looked just fine from
the front. Ace even tipped his hat
and said "hello" before he
remembered...Lucas is dead. Then he
watched him walk on by and...

She can't finish.

SHERIFF DAVIS

And what?

JUNE

(swallows hard)

The back of his head was missing.

Sheriff Davis takes a long look at the bottle. He picks it
up, considers, and then hands it to June.

SHERIFF DAVIS

You best get rid of that and start
loading the rifles. Get all the
officers to report in immediately,
even the ones off duty.

June nods her head, comes back to her senses, and sits up
straight.

JUNE

Yes Sheriff. Right away.

June exits.

SHERIFF DAVIS

(hollers after her)

And while you're at it, call a
priest!

He stands. He pulls his pistol and snaps the cylinder open.
He checks that it is loaded, snaps it closed.

He looks down at the framed photo of his dead wife Emma.

SHERIFF DAVIS (CONT'D)

(talking to the picture)

Sorry Pumpkin. I'm gonna be late
for supper.

He puts on his black stetson hat, adjusts it just right, takes a deep breath, and walks with purpose out the door.

INT. UP AND ATOM GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

JODY MILLER, 18, a grocery store punk rock goddess. Dyed black hair, thick mascara, combat boots.

She stands behind the checkout counter flipping through a copy of Tiger Beat, adding mustaches to Brooke Shields and blacking out Scott Baio's teeth. A green apron covers her Ramones t-shirt.

Bubble gum pop starts playing on the piped in Muzak and she rolls her eyes.

She puts on a pair of orange headphones and presses play on her Walkman. Muffled heavy metal competes with the Muzak as she goes back to defacing the magazine with a sharpie.

Something trips the automatic doors but Jody barely notices. Just as the doors close, she turns around. But there's no one there.

She turns off the Walkman and listens. Then she leans to one side and looks around the cash register, peering down the nearest aisle.

JODY
(removing the head phones)
Hello?

Silence and then...shuffling.

JODY (CONT'D)
Can I help you find anything?

Shuffling stops. Maybe she's imagining things.

She's just about to turn her music back on when she hears it again.

Shuffle...shuffle.

JODY (CONT'D)
(more annoyed than scared)
Who's there?

Growling!

JODY (CONT'D)
Ok asshole! Get out of my store!

No response. Jody reaches behind her and grabs a broom. She holds it like a bat and starts to check the aisles.

Aisle 5. Household cleaners. No one.

Aisle 4. Cereal. Vacant.

Aisle 3. Canned foods. Empty.

Aisle 2. Frozen foods. One of the freezers is fogged up, like it's been recently opened and the handle is caked with mud.

Jody looks at the door, puzzled, when suddenly she hears a cacophony of glass breaking in the *next* aisle.

Her breathing becomes more rapid as she pumps herself up and then turns into Aisle 1. Beer and beverages.

At the far end there is a virtual lake of neon green Gatorade pooling under a dozen broken bottles.

Facing away from Jody is a MAN down on all fours, his head lowered as he slurps the Gatorade off the linoleum.

JODY (CONT'D)

(whispers)

This is why I stay away from acid.

The MAN is filthy, wearing a dark blue suit crusted in dirt. His head is hidden as he continues to slurp but he seems frustrated. He slams his fists on the ground.

Jody looks around.

Maybe she should run.

Maybe she should go get the Sheriff.

Maybe she can handle this herself and have one helluva story to tell her fellow punk rockers.

JODY (CONT'D)

Hey! You're gonna pay for those!

The MAN freezes. He lifts his head. The back of it has been blown away. We've found the Sheriff's brother-in-law LUCAS.

JODY (CONT'D)

What...are you?

LUCAS turns his face and grimaces at Jody through yellow teeth. His eyes are black but shine with recognition.

JODY (CONT'D)
 (stunned)
 Dad?

Suddenly Lucas lunges up and is running towards Jody. Her screams carry to...

EXT. PLAYGROUND - NIGHT

...the Atomic Falls Elementary School playground.

Two juvenile delinquents, BEN MILLER and TOMMY MUNFORD, both 15, are smoking a sad looking joint. They sit on the swings and stare at the distant lights of Main Street.

Far away on a hill, at the edge of town, red lights blink on two nuclear cooling towers. The waterfall that gave the town its name shimmers between the towers.

Jody can be heard screaming, but it's so faint that the boys don't register it.

TOMMY
 This town is dead man.

BEN
 As a doornail.

The swings creak as they pass the joint.

BEN (CONT'D)
 Hey, Tommy.
 (grins a happy grin, bad
 British accent)
 What we gonna do?

Tommy grins at Ben. He loves this. Starts shrugging his shoulders like the cartoon vultures in *The Jungle Book*.

TOMMY
 (a better British accent,
 he's been practicing)
 I don't know. Whatcha wanna do?

They both start to giggle. Tommy jumps off his swing and starts crawling around in the playground bark.

Every now and then he stops and looks up at Ben with wide eyes and a maniacal smile. Then he crawls around some more and then he stops. Looks up with wide eyes. Crazy smile.

Ben watches his absurd friend and takes a hit.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
Hey Ben. Guess what I am!

BEN
A pothead.

TOMMY
Besides that.

BEN
I don't know.

TOMMY
(grins, looks up with wide
eyes)
I'm a nightcrawler.

BEN
Man, that doesn't even make sense

TOMMY
(ignoring him)
It's night. And I'm crawling. I'm a
nightcrawler.

BEN
That might be too stupid to laugh
at.

TOMMY
(collapses, giggling)
There's no such thing.

Ben finally cracks a smile and shakes his head.

BEN
But seriously, what do you wanna
do?

TOMMY
Wanna go check out the Sadie
Hawkins dance?

BEN
No man, we spend enough time at
that school. I'm not going to
volunteer to go on the weekend.
Besides, they're probably playing
Neil Diamond or some shit.

TOMMY
You're just mad because no one
asked you.

BEN

So what? It's not like you got a date.

TOMMY

At least I got asked.

BEN

Jody doesn't count.

TOMMY

Why not?

BEN

Because she's my sister. Besides, she didn't really mean it. She was just being nice.

TOMMY

Then why is she working at the store tonight instead of going with someone else?

(doesn't wait for a response)

Because *I* was her only choice.

BEN

Then why didn't you say yes?

TOMMY

Because I had plans with you.

BEN

(scoffs)

Big plans.

Ben takes a last drag and tosses the roach.

BEN (CONT'D)

Man. This town *is* dead!

As if on cue, when he says "dead" Jody starts screaming again a few blocks away.

TOMMY

You hear that?

Ben stands. He is suddenly alert even though his eyes are incredibly bloodshot. He pulls a switchblade out from his pants pocket and flicks it open.

BEN

Come on. Let's check it out.

TOMMY
Can I hold the knife?

BEN
No.

TOMMY
Why not?

BEN
I don't want to end up in the
emergency room. Again.

TOMMY
It was only a few stitches.

The boys run off arguing as someone or *something* emerges from the woods and slowly shuffles towards the swings.

END OF PREVIEW

If you would like to read the entire screenplay, please email the author directly at bryanstarchman@gmail.com