EV1

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EXT. HIGHWAY - ZZYZX, CALIFORNIA - DAY

ALAN COCCONI (37), a gawky loner, walks up a trench at the side of the highway. His clothes are covered in dirt and dry desert grass. Through his cracked wire aviator glasses, he watches as police cars disappear into the horizon, westward.

He dusts himself off and limps to a blue EMERGENCY CALL BOX down the road, near a wilting cactus. Each of Alan's footstep lands with a dry crunch. He stops halfway and turns to look behind him. He squints his eyes and wipes his brow.

Beneath the burning sun: a vast, wild expanse in every direction, a single highway down the center. Alan whistles.

FADE TO:

EXT. HOLLYWOOD FOREVER CEMETERY - SAME

CHYRON: **July 2003**

GWEN SONG (33) an Asian-American firecracker, whose fire is very nearly snuffed out, stands at a portable podium that looks like it might blow away.

She's watched by a motley crowd of mourners dressed in solemn black attire. A light drizzle falls.

Gwen scans a speech thats been messily scrawled onto a crumpled piece of notebook paper. She looks up.

GWEN
First time I saw an EV1 ad, it was 1996, and I was gunning to write for Rolling Stone's music beat. We all know how that turned out.

The funeral attendees offer a somber laugh.

GWEN (CONT'D)
EV1 gave me something I didn't know I needed. It sold me on a dream we fought hard for, each and every one of us...

She glances down at her scrawled speech to find her next line, then crumples the paper and shoves it in her pocket.

GWEN (CONT'D)
General Motors killed that dream.

She scans the crowd searching for someone.

Her eyes find KEN BAKER (62) - the oldest man in the crowd, with graying brown hair and a wrinkled shirt. He cranes his head, looking for someone, then checks his watch, worried.

GWEN (CONT'D)
We're here today to memorialize what this car meant to us, the tireless hours dedicated to its life, the journey that showed us a new way forward...the fortitude of innovation when carried in the hands of those who have the courage to hope. What we chased was far from fantasy. To EV1.

Static-riddled bagpipes play from a shitty green boombox. A twenty-something man stands next to Gwen. He kicks it with his foot. The bagpipes get clearer...for better or worse.

Gwen clears the stage and walks into the crowd, accepting compassionate gestures from everyone she passes. She stops beside Ken and turns to face the podium, where the twenty-something now stands, struggling to find his speech on him.

GWEN (CONT'D)
Any word from Alan?

KEN
Of all days, you'd think he'd--

-Ken's phone VIBRATES loudly. He pulls it from his pocket: a silver Motorola razor. They squint at the caller ID.

CALIFORNIA

Gwen smirks.

GWEN
Good timing, I'll give him that.

Concerned, Ken walks to a nearby tree, distancing himself from the group of mourners. He watches Gwen make a zipping gesture over her lips. She nods her head to the left.

Ken follows her nod to a female corporate exec and two police officers. They stride across the cemetery, towards Ken.

Panicked, he opens his phone, turns his back to his pursuers.

KEN
For the love of god, Alan, tell me you didn't do it.

END OF TEASER

EXT. YELLOW HOUSE - ROYAL OAK, MICHIGAN - MORNING

CHYRON: **15 YEARS EARLIER**

A modest two-story home with faded yellow siding sits on a lawn that could use a haircut. In front of it, a BROWN 1982 CHEVROLET CHEVETTE is parked, license plate: "GREEN3R."

A tow truck pulls up beside it.

KEN (O.S.)
That's it, baby.

INT. BEDROOM INSIDE YELLOW HOUSE - SAME

Brownish-orange carpeting gives way to a queen-sized bed where KEN BAKER (same guy from the funeral, now 47 and overweight), straddles his wife VALERIE (40).

They're doing the deed. Ken breathes hard.

Hardly concealed beneath their comforter, Ken's hanging stomach rocks back and forth as Valerie's eyes wander around the room. His lips move to her neck, but her eyes stay fixed on the ceiling. She's only half-there.

A knock at the door interrupts them.

BOY (O.S.)
Daaad?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Ken and Val's 4ft 8in eager-to-please son MATTHEW BAKER (10) looks up at the closed wooden door, clad in blue pajamas with red Voltron action figures all over them.

Matthew knocks again. No response. He rushes into:

INT. MATTHEW’S BEDROOM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

He climbs onto the toy chest that sits under the window and looks out of it, more stressed now.

MATTHEW
Daaaad!

INT. BEDROOM - SAME

Ken reaches his hand under the comforter, desperate to stimulate his wife...to no avail.

VALERIE
(exasperated)
Let's call it.

Ken glances up out the window behind their bed. Outside, a tow truck operator fixes a BOOT onto his Chevrolet Chevette.

MATTHEW (O.S.)
Daaaad!

KEN
Jesus fu--

INT. FOYER - MINUTES LATER

Ken closes the house's front door behind him, holding a a piece of paper from the DMV. He wears loose shorts and a t-shirt that's been pulled on backwards.

KEN
I don’t believe it.

In the hall, clutter blocks the space: an overflowing laundry hamper, two backpacks, a messy shoe bin, and a big stack of miscellaneous books. Ken's impervious to it.

He scans the paper in his hand: *5 unpaid parking tickets*.

Valerie breezes past him, plucks it from his hands.

VALERIE
My fault. I'll take care of it.

KEN
Val, do we need to talk about this?

Valerie evades the question, heads into the:

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Four stools at a formica counter. Valerie opens a drawer and shoves the DMV notice inside, reaches for a pot of coffee.

Ken shuffles in, but stops in his tracks when he sees his daughter KIRA BAKER (14), a high school freshman with dark, pin-straight hair and eyeliner too dark for her eyes.

She sits on the counter, reading *The Communist Manifesto.*

KEN
New reading material?

Kira shrugs. An untouched pop tart sits on a paper towel beside her.

VALERIE
Kira, would it kill you to use a chair?

KIRA
Those chairs are elitist.
(to her dad)
What happened to your car?

Ken shoves a pile of papers titled “Clean Emissions Proposal” into his brown briefcase.

KEN
Ask your mother.

VALERIE
(scowling)
Really, Ken?

KEN
How am I gonna get to work?

Valerie grabs two brown lunch bags from the fridge and whirls around the kitchen grabbing a pair of glasses, her book bag, her purse, and keys.

VALERIE
If I'm taking you, you better get moving.

Matthew walks in, now dressed in a sweater and jeans, hair perfectly combed, backpack on. He wields a permission slip.

MATTHEW
Mom, can you sign this?

Val reaches for it, glances over it, signs. Ken rushes out of the room. Kira looks out the window, hops off the counter.

KIRA
Bus is here.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - MORNING

Rock music plays from the radio of a blue 1980 Honda Civic headed towards the skyscrapers of Detroit.

Ken Baker sits in the driver's seat, in a suit coat, collared white shirt and ill-fitting khaki slacks. Valerie rides passenger. Both look unhappy to be here.

Ken reaches for the radio to lower the volume. The digital clock on the dash reads 8:37am.

They hit a pot hole. The car groans in its recovery.

KEN
Why do you drive this shitty import?

VALERIE
I like it.

KEN
Rides like a bad Cadillac.

VALERIE
Well it's the car you got today.

KEN
I can't seem to figure out why.

Valerie looks out the window. Ken softens.

KEN (CONT'D)
(softer)
How'd you get all those tickets? And in my car?...I'm a little lost here.

Valerie withholds for a moment...but thinks better of it.

VALERIE
Misread a parking sign.

KEN
While you were driving my car?

VALERIE
Marcus was using mine that week.

KEN
When?

VALERIE
The week you were in California.

KEN
Oh. Where were you?

Valerie shifts uncomfortably, evading reply.

VALERIE
I'll pay the tickets tonight.

KEN
I can probably catch the 5:30 train.

VALERIE
I'll pick you up.

KEN
(sarcastic)
Marcus won't need your car?

VALERIE
He's a kid, Ken. Cut him some slack.

KEN
Oh come on, Val, why do you treat him like a charity case? He's 17! I wasn't a kid at his age.

VALERIE
I was.

Silence. A large, gray cube-shaped building comes into view.

INT. CAR - WARREN RESIDENTIAL STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Ken pulls into the dreary parking lot of the gray cube-shaped building. The blue GM letters hang over the front door. This is General Motors Warren, where Ken works.

The car screeches as Ken brings the car to a halt.

INT. CAR - FRONT OF THE GM WARREN LOT - CONTINUOUS

Both Ken and Val sit back as the car hums in park.

KEN
You see Kira’s reading Marx again?

VALERIE
I think it's good for her.

KEN
I bet you do.

Ken watches his wife with gentle curiosity.

He reaches his hand out to touch her shoulder. She places an assuring hand on his and looks at him. He leans in to kiss her good bye but she turns an his lips land on her cheek.

Flustered, Valerie combs her hair behind her ears with her hands, then reaches for the door handle.

KEN (CONT'D)
Listen, honey, I know it's been tough since your dad...If there's anything--

Valerie nods, dismissing the conversation.

VALERIE
-I'll pick you up at six.

Snubbed, Ken exits the car, briefcase in tow. Valerie walks around to the driver's side and gets in. She pulls away.

Ken trudges toward the building with militant rhythm.

INT. GENERAL MOTORS, WARREN OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Ken walks into an office filled with gray cubicles.

A low murmur fills the air. Men in collared shirts talk on corded office phones. Fluorescent lights on the white paneled ceilings let out a low level buzz.

The only detail that sets this office apart from any other 1980s-style workplace is a window overlooking a factory of workers manufacturing General Motors cars.

Ken passes the window and glances out of it longingly.

His secretary, TERRY (64), a mix of Betty White and Joan Rivers, beelines for him. Her distinct bravado is carried well by her New Jersey accent and bleach blonde bob.

TERRY
Ken, your 9:30 canceled.

KEN
Who was it?

TERRY
Brian Nowac.

Ken moves in the direction of his desk, some eighty feet away. Terry follows at his side.

KEN
Why'd he cancel?

TERRY
No-go on the Clean Emissions initiative.

KEN
(grumbling)
Runkle.
(beat)
What's next on the schedule, Terry?

Terry looks down at her clipboard.

TERRY
New employee onboarding, 11am.
Other than that, nada.

They pass a table where day-old powdered donuts sit on a tray, half picked over. "Happy 10 years, Jerry!" reads a nearby card. Ken glances at the table and grabs a donut, biting into it as he walks through the bullpen.

KEN
I still gotta finish the report...

Ken gets to his cubicle and dusts the donut powder off of his hands, contemplating.

Terry raises a brow, tilts her head, confused.

TERRY
I thought they shot down your proposal--

KEN
-Couldn’t hurt.

Terry nods sympathetically. She's seen Ken grovel more than once over the past year, with nothing to show for it.

TERRY
Sure thing, boss.

Terry leaves Ken at the entrance to his cubicle.

A laminated name plate tacked on it reads **Ken Baker, Operations Manager, Environmental Division.**

Ken sets his briefcase on his drab melamine desk. An excited new hire DEAN (25) approaches, accompanied by STEW (32).

DEAN
Ken Baker?

KEN BAKER
That's me.

Dean extends his hand. Ken shakes it.

DEAN
Pleasure to meet you, sir. It's my first day. I gotta say, what an honor to work for you. The Electrovette program? Genius.

STEW
Er, sorry, Sir.

Stew pulls Dean away by the arm. The two walk away.

STEW (CONT'D)
(whispering to Dean)
Rule number one, Dean, we don't talk about the Electrovette.

Ken closes his eyes for longer than a blink, letting the moment slide off him. He removes his suit jacket and tosses it down near his briefcase.

He presses a button on the rectangular monitor beside his cube-shaped word processor. It blinks to life with a groan. A very small section of a long loading bar fills.

Frustrated, Ken leans over his cubicle where his heavy-set colleague JERRY JONES (47), a Ned Schneebly type, sits wearing a clunky headset.

JERRY JONES
No, Walter, we promised Nevada 10 units by Wednesday. I dunno know where you got the number 30.

Noticing Ken, Jerry pulls off an ear of his headset.

KEN
Did you ever get a response on the request for new processors?

JERRY JONES
(mouthing)
Low priority.

He puts the ear of his headset back on. He's upset in a way that only a truly Midwestern American can be.

JERRY JONES (CONT'D)
Walter, my hands are tied. And for the life of me, I can't find a single file accounting for those 20 other units. I'm very sorry but, I've gotta ask, have your folks triple checked the order?

Ken glances back to the loading bar on his processor. Not yet half way full. He drums his fingers on his desk and sighs, wasting in his idle.

Then, deciding, he pulls the "Clean Emissions Proposal" from his briefcase, flips to the fifth page and pauses on an empty section titled "Why Now?" He grabs a voice recorder, brings the recorder to his mouth. Clicks record.

KEN
Regulatory safeguards demanding lower carbon output--No.

Ken clicks a button, reverses the sound, deletes it.

KEN (CONT'D)
GM's fiscal commitment to the betterment of the world needs no ad-buy with something as environmentally-promising as the Clean Emissions--

Ken hangs his head.

He rewinds the recording and deletes it again. He sets the recorder down on his desk a little harder than he intends.

He leans forward, placing his elbows on his desk and his head in his hands. Tries to rally.

KEN (CONT'D)
(groaning)
Come onnn.

Ken flips through the manuscript, reading what he's written.

QUICK MONTAGE OF KEN AT HIS CUBICLE:

- Ken sits back in his chair, leans into the recorder.

- Ken says "Since the 1970s..."

- Ken says "In the global economy..."

- Ken says "Not all programs show benefits off the bat."

- Click, rewind, delete.

- Click, rewind, delete.

- Ken says "By decreasing total emissions by even 1 percent"

- Click, rewind, delete.

- Jerry stands up in his adjacent cubicle, stretches his arms, and itches his belly. Ken looks over to Jerry for inspiration, and...finds none.

- Ken brings the recorder to his mouth again, but exhales this time, and sets it down.

END MONTAGE.

KEN
Damnit.

A phone rings from a distant corner. Ken glances in its direction, spots the window overlooking the GM factory floor. A beacon of hope. Ken's eyes light up. He walks toward it.

CUT TO:

INT. PRINTING ROOM - SAME

Terry wrestles with a file cabinet open, trying to open it.

Across the room, the fax machine BEEPS. Groaning tones follow as a communication prints from it. The ink on it half-faded.

Bolded at the top: **MEMO FOR KEN BAKER.**

BACK TO:

INT. GENERAL MOTORS, WARREN OFFICE - TEN MINUTES LATER

Jerry folds a piece of paper into an airplane and shoots it over the wall of cubicle, into Ken's.

JERRY JONES
Thinkin' I'll go to Tampa again for my vacation this year.

No response. Jerry stands to find Ken’s cubicle empty. He peers across the office. Sees him at the window overlooking the GM factory floor, walks to the the window beside Ken.

JERRY
Slow morning?

Ken looks over at Jerry, noticing him for the first time.

KEN
Slow year.

JERRY
Any word on Clean Emissions?

KEN
They shot it down.

JERRY
Bastards.

He means it, but the swear word doesn't feel right in his Midwestern accent.

JERRY (CONT’D)
Gosh, Ken, I'm sorry. I know you've been workin' on it awhile.

Ken holds up the report in his hands, which has been flipped to a page titled "Why Now."

KEN
Still am.

Jerry reads the heading.

JERRY
Grappling with the why. Huh.

KEN
It's not that I don't know the why, Jerr. I don't know how to say it in a way that makes it matter *to them*.

Jerry nods. The two share silence, both watching as a car on the factory floor beneath them gets disassembled for parts.

KEN (CONT’D)
You ever wonder what we're still doin' here?

Jerry shrugs.

JERRY
Figure, what else would I be doing?

Ken nods politely, but his eyes can't conceal disappointment.

JERRY (CONT'D)
Rumors of layoffs at the other plants.

KEN
I heard.

JERRY
Think we're next?

Ken looks down at his feet.

KEN
We've been here forever. Maybe it's time for something new.

JERRY
You don't mean that. Sure, this place isn't top of the line...but it's enough. We've got insurance. Retirement. It's not nothing.

KEN
What about outside of this? I mean, what was the dream for you?

Jerry chuckles awkwardly and shuffles his feet.

JERRY
(sheepish)
I guess when I started I wanted to figure out a way to make the Corvair lighter. That thing was 1,000 pounds. Figured it would never hit market with all that dead weight.

Ken looks up, moved for the first time in the conversation.

KEN
That right there. That's the stuff I wanted to be working on. What happened to us?

Jerry looks out at the factory floor for a beat.

JERRY
I don't think we were ever gonna be able to change things. Just took the long way to learnin' that.

Ken holds up the manuscript.

KEN
Better get back to this.

Jerry leaves him to it. As he walks away:

JERRY
If there's anyone who can finish it, it's you, Ken.

INT. GM WARREN BREAK ROOM - LATER THAT MORNING

Ken fills a paper Dixie cup at the office water cooler.

Dean appears beside him, waiting for his turn to fill a cup.

Dean's cup is a mug with 1984 U.S. Presidential candidate Walter Mondale making a thumbs up. The slogan "America Needs a Change" adorns the mug. Ken glances at it.

KEN
I voted for Mondale, too.

Dean grins, excited.

DEAN
Coulda guessed that. You're a green guy! My kinda man, Ken.

Ken cringes. Dean's a little too buddy-buddy with him. Ken steps back. Dean fills his mug at the water cooler.

DEAN (CONT'D)
I've read about your work.
(lowered voice)
I'm an environmentalist, too.
Between you and me, I came here to do something like...
(turns to a whisper)
Electrovette.

A pregnant pause as Ken weighs Dean's naïveté.

KEN
I hate to break it to you Dean, but you came to the wrong place.

Ken heads back through:

INT. GENERAL MOTORS, WARREN OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Dean follows Ken to his cubicle.

DEAN
What do you mean?

Terry rushes over to Ken.

TERRY
Ken! You'll never believe who just faxed for you..Roger Smith!

Ken straightens uncomfortably.

KEN
(disbelief)
No.

TERRY
He did. Wasn't sure what he was askin' at first. Fax is a dinosaur. Only half the memo sent. Anyways, I called the headquarters. Said he wants you at the downtown office in an hour. Sounds important!

Ken glances down at his watch. He looks at his computer where the blinking cursor on his unfinished report taunts him.

Ken runs a hand through his hair, thinking.

KEN
Did you drive to the office today?

TERRY
Sure did. Marty just bought us a Buick Regal and you wouldn't *believe* the amount of compliments.

KEN
Can you drive me to headquarters?

TERRY
You know I'm good for it, Ken.

Terry hobbles back towards her desk to grab her keys.

Ken scrambles at his desk, shoving the unfinished Clean Emissions papers into his briefcase.

KEN
(under his breath)
Shit.

DEAN
What do you think it's about?

Ken grabs a pen from a cup on his desk, puts it in his shirt pocket. A SMALL BLUE INK DOT bleeds into the fabric.

KEN
I haven't been called in since Electro--in a while.

DEAN
You worried?

Ken picks up his briefcase and looks at Dean for a moment, thinking. He turns back to Jerry, who has fallen asleep in the chair of his own cubicle.

KEN
Jerr?

Jerry wakes with a jolt.

KEN (CONT'D)
Jerr, do you mind giving Dean a run down on what we do here?

JERRY
Sure thing.

Dean's face falls with defeat.

EXT. GENERAL MOTORS HQ - ONE HOUR LATER

Standing in front of the imposing glass building, Ken watches his reflection in the mirrored doors. He tightens his tie and smooths his shirt. The small blue ink stain grows.

Ken inhales sharply, reaching for the door handle.

INT. GENERAL MOTORS HQ - RECEPTION - MINUTES LATER

MIMI DELUCA (25) a ditzy type with permed bright red hair sits behind a state-of-the-art reception desk. It's a rounded cubicle, made with real oak. The wall behind her is emblazoned with the blue "GM" logo.

She chomps a wad of hot pink bubblegum, clacking away on an IBM Terminal Keyboard.

She glances up at Ken for a brief second, but returns her focus to her computer screen. He stands awkwardly, waiting for her aid. She points her finger down the hall.

MIMI
Accounting's that way.

KEN
What? No. Uh, I'm here for an 11am with Roger Smith.

That gets Mimi's attention. Mimi scans Ken up and down, blows a bubble with her gum until it pops with a judgey smack.

She flips through a series of memos, returns her gaze to Ken.

MIMI
Is this about the ROI deliverables? Because if so, I'm authorized to inform you, we don't have them yet.

Ken glances down at the nameplate and takes a new approach.

KEN
Mimi? It's Mimi isn't it?

MIMI
Yep!

KEN
I'm not an accountant. Thing is,
(slightly more hushed)
I don't know why he called me here.

MIMI
Sorry sir, could you repeat that?

KEN
(projecting louder)
I don't know why I've been called here.

DON RUNKLE (45), a polished Ivy-Leaguer in a loud way, enters the cushy reception space, looks up from a pile of papers.

He spots Ken and smirks.

DON
Well if it isn't Ken Baker. Don't worry, Meem. He's with me.

Mimi is eager to please Don. She sits up straighter.

MIMI
Sure thing, Mr. Runkle!

DON
Now Mimi, what have I told you about that? Call me Don.

Mimi giggles. Don looks to his papers and walks off, gaining distance from Ken who doesn't know if he should follow.

DON (CONT'D)
Come along, Ken.

Ken stifles an eye roll and reluctantly trudges down the hall after Don.

INT. GENERAL MOTORS HQ - CONFERENCE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Don sits at a long wooden table.

Ken mills his way to the chair across from Don's and sits. awkward and out of place. Ken leans forward uncomfortably, conscious of how his body weight affects the chair. Don watches Ken with pity.

On the table, an empty glass ashtray rests between them.

KEN
Is this about the Clean Emissions initiative? Because I--

Don holds up a hand.

DON
-Not quite.

Don squints at Ken's white shirt. The blue ink stain grows larger in Ken's shirt pocket. Don gestures to it.

DON (CONT'D)
Looks like you got something.

Ken looks down and sees the growing stain, frowns, books it to the door.

KEN
If Roger comes, can you let him know I've gone to the bathroom?

DON
(amused)
Don't worry, Ken.
(MORE)

DON (CONT'D)
This isn't half as bad as the time you got zinc oxide all over the GM flag. Now that was a mess.

Ken opens the door and heads out into the:

INT. GM HEADQUARTERS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Ken races down the hall. He pulls off his suit coat and pulls the exploded blue pen from his shirt pocket.

He spots the men's bathroom, pushes into it.

INT. GM HEADQUARTERS BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ken latches the door shut. His brown shoes squeak on the tiled floors of the multi-stalled bathroom.

He throws the pen in the trash and feverishly removes his shirt. His white undershirt beneath it is also stained.

KEN
Goddamnit!

Ken looks around him. He bends to ensure there are no shoes under any of the stalls. Alone, he pulls off his undershirt.

He drives the heel of his hand into the soap dispenser, pushing it profusely. But his force is too great. The plastic cover falls off the base and clambers to the ground.

Ken tries to re-afix the plastic cover but it falls again.

He gives up and returns to scrubbing, holds his shirts under the faucet until the water runs clear. He grabs his shirts from the sink and holds them under the hand dryer.

He maneuvers them at various angles for better drying.

Someone knocks at the door. Ken snaps his head up.

KEN (CONT'D)
One minute!

Ken forces his still-damp shirts over his head, a faint blue stain still present on each. He sighs, disappointed, looking in the mirror one last time then opens the bathroom door to:

ROGER SMITH (64), a slight man whose command is somehow more Don Corleone than Mark Zuckerberg.

ROGER
You fall in, son?

KEN
Er, I was--

ROGER
-I'm just messing with you.

Ken extends his arm to shake Roger's hand. Roger shakes it vigorously. Though older, he's got a gregarious pep to him.

ROGER (CONT'D)
Don said I'd find you here. Let's chat, shall we?

INT. GM HEADQUARTERS MEETING ROOM - A LITTLE LATER

Roger withdraws a cigar from his pocket, lights it, and takes two puffs. He exhales slowly.

He opens his mouth to speak, but Ken interjects.

KEN
I wonder if I could speak briefly on the Clean Emissions Act, Roger? I get that there's some hesitation but if I could just--

Roger holds up a hand.

ROGER
-We'll get to that.

Roger examines his cigar, letting ash fall onto the table. He sweeps it off with his hand and leans back in his chair.

ROGER (CONT'D)
More pressing matter...and you might've heard talk already, internally. Company's in a precarious position right now. Numbers down. People buying imports. We've gotta make some changes.

Ken bites his lip, pensive.

ROGER (CONT'D)
I know this is hard to hear, but by the end of today, half of your colleagues will be clearing out their desks.

Roger slides Ken a list of names. Ken picks it up, reads it.

KEN
(quietly)
Jesus.

Ken folds the lists in his hands and strokes the fold of the paper with his pointer finger and thumb.

KEN (CONT'D)
So that's it? Should I pack my things?

Roger laughs.

ROGER
We got something else in store for you, Ken. Something I think you might be very interested in.

Roger slides a packet to Ken.

The top page is titled "THE SUNRAYCER."

KEN
This again?

ROGER
Page four.

Ken flips open the packet and opens to a black and white diagram of a hovercraft-shaped vehicle.

ROGER (CONT'D)
We're trying something.
(beat)
Ken, a year ago, my secretary, for God knows what reason, passed me a press release that Australia was hosting a solar car challenge. Didn't strike me as a project for GM, but I thought, you know, what the hay? We'd just secured the SoCal skunkworks, and I was feeling lucky.

Roger gestures at the packet again.

ROGER (CONT'D)
Page five.

Ken flips it to the fifth page.

A black and white photo of the Howard Hughes aircraft center stands idyllic and grand, amid palm trees.

ROGER (CONT'D)
You been to the Howard Hughes center?

Ken nods.

KEN
There last October, for race prep.

ROGER
Take it you met David Velasquez, then?

KEN
Sure did.

ROGER
Last March, it was his second month on the job and we send him this invite to the solar challenge. Really, it's any engineer's dream...but business people, you know, we're a little bit more finicky. Risk-averse. Some more than others. You follow? So, I knew David's response would clue me in to how he steers. Plus, stakes were low. Worst case, he sees the invite and respectfully declines.

Roger stares into space for a while, takes another drag from his cigar, ash falling onto the table below him.

ROGER (CONT'D)
I'll tell ya, when he got it, HA! Ambitious bastard nearly came in his pants. We couldn't get him off our backs about it. And when he brought in this boy genius to show us the prototype, obviously we had to register for the thing--

DON
-I mean, we didn't have to...but from an investment standpoint it was--

Roger eyes Don with annoyance. Don quiets.

ROGER
-Ken, by the time you joined the program, a lot of the finer details had been hammered out. But my god, if you walked into the shit show it was in March...Of course, that's where David had to prove he was worth something.

FADE TO:

EXT. HOWARD HUGHES AIRCRAFT CENTER - ONE YEAR EARLIER

A bicycle halts. A white-Reebok-sneakered foot flicks down the kickstand and rests the weight of the bike on it.

ROGER (O.S.)
David knows enough, but where he really rates is finding the people who know more than enough. And motivating them to succeed.

The Reebok shoes take slow, evenly paced steps down a neatly landscaped sidewalk. The PEDESTRIAN enters:

INT. HOWARD HUGHES AIRCRAFT CENTER - CONTINUOUS

The pedestrian's arms swing as he walks, his face out of view. His long brown hair needs a cut. He sports pleated denim cargo shorts, which hang loosely from his narrow body.

ROGER (O.S.)
But motivating an engineer is like luring a squirrel with a nutcracker. Most of the time, they figure they can crack the nuts on their own.

The pedestrian walks down a hall of people dressed in corporate attire. The suits pause to glance at him judgmentally. Secretaries smooth their skirts, intrigued.

At the end of the hall, he pushes through a door into:

INT. HOWARD HUGHES AIRCRAFT CENTER - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The figure REVEALED: It's Alan Cocconi (our gawky loner from the desert, 22 now, practically a kid). He dons the same dorky wire-frame aviator glasses.

ALAN
I'm not doing it.

Across the room, half-Latino progressive DAVID VELASQUEZ (42) grins at his desk. Various clean-energy car designs of the past are thumbtacked to the wall behind him.

DAVID
Alan, hear me out--

ALAN
-It's not even an airplane.

DAVID
It's better.

Alan folds his arms across his chest. He walks to David's desk and sits on the edge of it beside him. They stare at various aircraft designs that have been pinned to the wall.

ALAN
It's kid stuff, David. We can do better than this.

DAVID
2000 miles in 5 days, by the power of the sun, Alan.

Alan shrugs. He pulls out a yoyo from his pocket and toys with it absentmindedly.

ALAN
When do they need it by?

DAVID
November.

Alan laughs. David gives him a stare that can only mean he's not kidding. Alan sobers up.

ALAN
Eight months?

DAVID
Still think it sounds easy?

Alan pauses for a second thinking, then yanks his yoyo towards his hand, shoves it deep in the pocket of his shorts.

ALAN
What about once we make it? This gonna be another one of those GM programs that titanics at the prototype?

DAVID
Since when did you care about practical applications? It's half a year of funded research...Jus think of the motor on this thing...we're gonna need something supernatural.

Alan stands, patters his hands on the desk, then walks to the door, reaches for the knob, and looks back to David.

ALAN
I'll think about it.

DAVID
(yelling after him)
Don't think too hard!

INT. SMILEY'S COFFEE SHOP - HOURS LATER

Behind the counter of a bustling coffee shop, two punkish twenty-somethings RICKY and HANNAH prepare drinks.

Cups clink, the espresso machine whines, but somewhere near, faint rock music plays.

Squished between the counter and several crates of milk cartons, a passionate, focused GWEN SONG (19) (the funeral speaker) sits pretzel style on the ground. She holds a Grundig Portable Radio and gnaws on a red vine candy rope.

Ricky doesn't look up from the milk steamer.

RICKY
(to Hannah)
You wanna get her this time?

Hannah rolls her eyes and walks to the left end of the back counter, squats down.

HANNAH
Coming back to work anytime soon?

GWEN
Shh, they're about to name the contest winner.

Hannah waits, checking her watch. A customer rings the bell, looking over the counter, determined to order.

HANNAH
(mouthing to the customer)
She's on her period.

Embarrassed, the client backs off, folds his arms, and busies himself examining the pastries behind the display case.

RADIO ANNOUNCER
And that was "When Doves Cry" by Prince. You're listening to KROQ-FM, Southern California's one-stop-shop for Rock and Roll. And look at the time. Here's the moment you cool cats have been waiting for. The lucky winner getting two tickets to the Blackhearts concert this weekend is...Norma Goldstein! Norma, come collect your--

Gwen cuts the radio.

GWEN
-Damnit!

Gwen stands and loads milk cartons from the crates into the fridge without missing a beat, a red vine hanging out the corner of her mouth.

She yanks it out, chewing on the bit she ripped off.

She deposits the remaining vine in the pocket of her oversized denim jacket, which hangs over a UCLA t-shirt.

A Smiley's Coffee hat rests atop the mop of dense dark brown hair she's highlighted blonde. Eclectic, loud. That's Gwen.

GWEN (CONT'D)
It's not fair, Hannah. I've entered every contest for a year now, and I've never been picked.

HANNAH
Yeah, you and, like, thousands of other people.

GWEN
I'm never gonna write for Rolling Stone if I can't even make it to a rock concert before spring semester ends. I'm totally terminal!

The customer clears his throat, a bit annoyed.

ANNOYED CUSTOMER
I'm ready to order.

Gwen resumes her position at the cash register.

GWEN
What'll it be?

ANNOYED CUSTOMER
Coffee.

GWEN
Black?

ANNOYED CUSTOMER
Mhm.

GWEN
You sure?

ANNOYED CUSTOMER
That's it.

GWEN
Because we can add a splash of milk for next to nothin'. And the flavors, have you seen the flavors? I designed the board. Do you like it?

ANNOYED CUSTOMER
Just black.

Gwen stares at him, pauses.

GWEN
Really? I pegged you for a latte guy.

The annoyed customer holds up a five dollar bill and places it in the tip jar.

ANNOYED CUSTOMER
Please.

Gwen grins, amused. She pours him a coffee and hands it over.

GWEN
Have a Smiley day.

The annoyed customer walks to a nearby table with his mug.

HANNAH
You have to stop doing that.

Gwen smirks.

GWEN
Doing what?

A woman steps up to the register this time, impossibly short, with wiry hair that's been hair-sprayed into a static quaff. She squints her eyes at the menu.

Gwen's eyes move past her customer and stop on ALAN COCCONI, a regular stationed near the window.

Gwen perks up. She grabs a rag from a hook on the counter and a bottle of spray.

GWEN (CONT'D)
(to Hannah)
Gonna circulate. Ring her up?

Hannah follows Gwen's gaze to Alan's table, grins.

HANNAH
Fine, but you're on toilets at close!

Gwen takes to the tables. She cleans one behind Alan, looking over his shoulder to see what he's reading.

A cup of un-sipped black coffee sits idle on the table before him. He turns a page, reading intently, then sets the book down and sits back frustrated, exhaling sharply.

This is Gwen's opportunity. She grabs a Rolling Stone magazine from an empty table and exchanges it for Alan's book, then takes a seat across from him.

Alan looks up at her, disturbed but not surprised.

ALAN
Gwen.

GWEN
Alan.

Alan opens the magazine with an exaggerated reluctance. The two settle into their reading materials in silence, until:

GWEN (CONT'D)
Are you gonna ask me how I'm doing?

ALAN
Can I have my book back?

GWEN
Great, fine! I'm doing wonderful! It's not like Joan Jet won't die before I make it to a Blackhearts concert!

Alan holds out his hand.

ALAN
The book, please.

GWEN
Aw, c'mon. That's perfectly good material you got there.

Alan looks at the article before him.

ALAN
(reading aloud)
"Why Bon Jovi doesn't "do it" on the road."

Gwen relents, hands him his book back, pointing to a mechanism on one of the pages.

GWEN
My dad made one like this.

ALAN
The inverter? You know auto?

GWEN
Some. What's it to you?

ALAN
I've been asked to work on a solar powered car.

GWEN
Neat.

ALAN
Could be.

GWEN
Could be?

ALAN
I haven't decided about it.

GWEN
Why?

ALAN
I don't like wasting my time on nowhere projects.

GWEN
Nowhere projects don't go on races.

ALAN
You ever heard of the Edsel?

GWEN
Of course I have. Who hasn't?

ALAN
The Edsel raced.

GWEN
Touché.
(beat)
I think you should stop being afraid.

ALAN
I'm not afraid.

GWEN
You said it's a nowhere project. If you made something good, it wouldn't go nowhere. You're scared.

ALAN
Please, I can handle an inverter. It'll be tricky. There's gotta be a way to reconfigure the batteries...

Gwen stands, pleased.

GWEN
You're too cocky for your own good.

Alan doesn't look up from his book.

ALAN
How's that?

Gwen grabs her rag and cleaning spray and leaves the table.

ALAN (CONT'D)
Gwen?

Alan looks up. Gwen's gone. He turns around to see her engaging another customer. He scoops his bag, heads for:

EXT. SIDEWALK - SMILEY'S COFFEE SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Alan dials a number on a payphone, waits.

ALAN
I'm calling for David Velasquez.
Tell him it's Alan.

FADE TO:

INT. HOWARD HUGHES AIRLINE HANGAR - DAY

The bones of old airplanes lay around an expansive Hughes aircraft hanger. One of the outer walls of the hangar has been completely raised, like a garage door.

At a broad workshop table near the open wall, Alan Cocconi examines a giant car battery with engineers PAUL (45), and JANET (39). Paul paces. Janet frowns.

JANET
Gonna weigh too much. I'm telling you.

ALAN
It's the only way we'll hold enough solar to make it through low light periods. What are we using on the panels?

PAUL
Silicon.

Alan frowns. He leans on the worktable. He doesn't look up from the battery.

ALAN
Light. But not light enough.

Alan's eyes travel off, he's deep in thought.

ALAN (CONT'D)
The braking is an energy suck.

Alan pushes himself off the table and heads for the open garage door.

JANET
Where are you going?

ALAN
Out.

David Valesquez walks in carrying a box of Krispy Kremes.

Alan passes him on his way out.

DAVID
(pleased)
Alan, you made it.

Alan offers a curt wave of the hand.

David walks to the work table and sets the donuts down for Janet and Paul.

PAUL
He always like that, David?

David opens the box and grabs a donut for himself.

DAVID
You get used to it.

SUNRAYCER DEVELOPMENT MONTAGE

Over "Sweet Child o' Mine" by Taken by Trees:

MAY 1987...Alan Cocconi tinkers at an inverter in the garage of his modest house. An electric spark bursts from it. Alan takes off his goggles and sucks on his burnt finger.

JULY 1987...Janet and Paul unbox shipped parts from big wooden crates. They gesture towards various parts, laying out sheets of curved metal, piles of wire.

AUGUST 1987...David, Alan, and Paul stand outside the window of the wind tunnel at the California Institute of Technology.

Two different shaped vehicles race down the track. One is shaped like an alien hovercraft. The other like a syringe.

SEPTEMBER 1987...The Sunraycer prototype (they went with the hovercraft model) sits on a runway outside the Howard Hughes hangar. Sunlight shines on the solar panels, and Paul and Janet read numbers on a telemetry device.

Alan slides out from underneath the car and looks at them. They shake their heads no. Alan frowns.

OCTOBER 1987...Alan slides out from underneath the Sunraycer prototype, an evolved version of the alien hovercraft. Two exterior fins now protrude from its side. Paul and Janet read off their telemetry device and give Alan a thumbs up.

Alan jumps up in victory, pumping his fist in the air. He high fives Paul and Janet, then saunters to David, excited to report on the latest success. That's when he notices David is accompanied by someone. KEN BAKER. Alan frowns.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. HOWARD HUGHES BASE - DAY

Alan eyes Ken suspiciously. Ken folds his arms awkwardly, out of place but not quite capable of finding a different stance.

DAVID
Battery discharging properly?

ALAN
Finally.

Alan reaches for a rag in his pocket and wipes his hand on it, before tossing it over his shoulder.

DAVID
GM wants to test some new designs for the back-up models. We're early anyways. They asked Ken to help us.

Ken extends his hand to Alan who looks down at it.

ALAN
Oh. I would but...my hands. Been working all day.

Ken pulls his hand back.

KEN
Sure. No, I get it.

DAVID
Ken, here, led one of GM's earlier electric projects.

ALAN
You did Electrovette?

Ken looks down at his shoes. Alan nods his head to the side, directing David into a sidebar.

ALAN (CONT'D)
(to David)
Why don't you tell the big wigs we got this thing handled?

KEN
Alan, you're taking this car to Australia in one month. I don't expect you to agree with my suggestions. But I do think I'll have some helpful insights.
(MORE)

KEN (CONT'D)
Better me than a corporateer coming out to run the show.

ALAN
Who says you're any different from those guys? We don't need suggestions. The car's done.

KEN
Then how come you only got battery flow nailed down today? Isn't it a bit late for that?

Alan shakes his head, incredulous.

ALAN
It's a conversion. We're drawing it from the deceleration. Every time this thing slows, it's feeding energy into the motor. So we needed an inverter. And it took me weeks to get it small enough--

KEN
(stunned)
-Capturing kinetic and converting it into electrical?...Huh.

Alan holds his hands up and walks around himself in a sort of performative strut.

ALAN
Next question.

Ken looks at David impressed.

DAVID
I told you. He gets it.

KEN
What material are we using on the solar panels?

Alan examines Ken, curious, testing.

ALAN
What do you think we shoulda used?

KEN
Well, you probably used Silicon. Which is light, sure. But if you really wanted to have fun with it, there's Gallium Arsenide.
(MORE)

KEN (CONT'D)
Way more efficient. Of course, that's pricy...but GM's riding this hard.

Alan cocks his head, squinting his eyes at Ken, entertaining the prospect of their collaboration.

ALAN
You about to co-opt this thing?

KEN
No, but iteration's important.

Alan laughs in Ken's face.

ALAN
Years of failed EVs under your belt. Sure you know all about that.

Alan walks off.

ALAN (CONT'D)
I'll be seeing you around, then.

Paul and Janet trail behind him. They shake Ken's hand in passing. Ken walks toward the Sunraycer prototype.

David follows.

Alone with David, Ken can speak candidly.

KEN
If that car wasn't so damn beautiful, I'd call that kid an overweening prick. What is he, 23?

DAVID
When you have parents like his--

KEN
-Big oil?

DAVID
Switzerland's Cern Lab. Two of the best nuclear physicists in the world.

KEN
That how you know him? His parents?

DAVID
I took Alan under my wing when he was in school. He did some intern work for me.
(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)
He's kinda...he prefers to work alone. The loner type. Brilliant though.

Ken shuffles his feet, looks down at them.

KEN
You think this thing'll win?

DAVID
Hope so. A lot's riding on it. And then there's whatever happens after. Maybe a promotion in it...

David's thoughts trail off. The promotion comment triggers something in Ken. His eyes search the horizon for answers.

KEN
Can I ask you something, David?

Ken puts his hands in his pocket, watches a plane streak through the sky.

KEN (CONT'D)
What's the point of research that doesn't go anywhere?

David pauses for awhile, then looks at Ken.

DAVID
I like to think the important stuff finds a place.

EXT. AIRPORT - DARWIN, AUSTRALIA - DAY

NOVEMBER 1987 - 18 HOURS UNTIL RACE

High-pitched whirring. An airplane touches down.

INT. AIRPORT - SAME

Ken, Alan, Paul, and Janet walk with their bags, looking sleep-deprived. David walks ahead of their group, leading them in a way that makes him look like their tour guide.

Alan wears chunky black headphones and baggy denim shorts. Ken's collared shirt has a mustard stain, and it's poorly tucked into his ill-fitting khaki pants.

Paul and Janet sport windbreakers, t-shirts, and Levi jeans.

Ken catches up with David as they walk through the airport.

KEN
I need coffee.

DAVID
Didn't you sleep on the plane?

KEN
I can't when I'm stressed like this. Did you say the driver already landed?

David checks his watch.

DAVID
Lewis won't be here for another 4 hours.

KEN
And the back-ups arrived?

DAVID
Yesterday. All that's left is setting up the telemetry van and double checking the inverter.

KEN
You looked at the weather recently?

Alan pulls his headphones around his neck, walking between David and Ken. He yawns.

ALAN
Last I checked, mostly sunny.

Ken retrieves notes and a pen from his shirt pocket. He pulls the cap off the pen with his mouth, wipes sweat from his forehead, and adds a note for himself.

They burst out the doors of the airport. Thunder cracks.

Rain pours down overhead.

INT. WAREHOUSE - EARLY EVENING

12 HOURS UNTIL RACE

The Sunraycer hangs suspended, two feet from the ground. Janet and Paul sit in a telemetry truck next to it. It's a 1982 Chevrolet Trans Van Motorhome, but the inside has been modestly renovated to fit their mission.

Janet and Paul adjust gadgets on the car's front dash.

Alan holds a solar panel to the only edge of the Sunraycer that isn't already fitted with solar paneling.

Ken watches him.

KEN
We're not doing that.

Alan grabs a hammer from a tool box.

KEN (CONT'D)
What does that give us? Thirty more minutes a day?

ALAN
You have a better solution?

KEN
We don't even know if the storm will keep on.

ALAN
We don't know it won't. More paneling improves our odds of making it through heavy cloud cover.

Ken shakes his head no.

KEN
You'd be increasing the drag.

ALAN
Oh, come on! It's low enough as it is!

Alan throws the hammer across the warehouse floor.

It slams into a stray solar panel that rests against one of the warehouse walls, shattering it. Janet and Paul look up from their van. Janet emerges to stage an intervention.

KEN
And what if we hit headwinds? This thing's gonna have to go a lot slower!

Alan walks to the hammer. Ken rushes past him, picks it up, and keeps it from him.

KEN (CONT'D)
You're not touching the hammer until we have a way forward.

JANET
Guys?

ALAN
He's thinking about this all wrong!

KEN
Paneling in the ninth hour’s nuts. What happens when we run into a situation we haven't tested for?

ALAN
This storm's not clearing in the first 24 hours. That's all tailwind.

Alan paces, angry. Ken pauses eyes scan the floor, finding the pile of shattered solar panels. He picks up a big piece and holds it up to the car.

Alan watches him.

KEN
Can you make them retractable?

Alan pauses, considers. Nods.

KEN (CONT’D)
How long will that take?

ALAN
All told, seven, eight hours.

Ken sighs, exhausted. He rubs his eyes, then heads for a cooler and withdraws a salami sandwich. Takes a bite.

KEN
(still chewing)
Janet, get Lewis in here. Paul?!

Paul pops his head out of the telemetry truck.

KEN (CONT’D)
I'm gonna need new numbers.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - EARLY MORNING

1 HOUR UNTIL RACE

The team rolls the Sunraycer toward a track, leading to "Stuart Highway." 24 other solar vehicles make a similar journey toward the starting line along adjacent side roads.

David walks beside Ken. Alan runs up behind them.

ALAN
Bossman, I gotta run back to the warehouse. Lewis forgot his walkie.

David nods and keeps walking, puts an arm around Ken's shoulder. Ken's face is white as a ghost.

DAVID
You ready, hermano?

Ken vomits.

10, EXT. RURAL CAR LOT - DARWIN, AUSTRALIA - MORNING 10,

A flat road leads out of a gray lot, in the middle of coastal wetland. Ken watches from outside the telemetry van, standing beside his team members. The world around them seems to fade. All he can see is the Sunraycer.

ANNOUNCER
Racers, start your engines.

Heart beat pounding slowly, echoing.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1!

A horn blows, tires roll.

A flash of the Sunraycer plunging through the darkness.

INT. GM HEADQUARTERS - MEETING ROOM - 1988

Roger Smith, Don Runkle, and Ken Baker sit at the long conference table where their chat began some twenty minutes earlier. Ken stares down at a sketch of the Sunraycer prototype. The one he worked on.

ROGER
Win, lose, whatever was gonna happen, we saw it as a litmus test for David. Maybe draw in good press with the environmental angle. But the world's changing, Ken. The Sunraycer got folks talking about GM. If we lead the race for EVs--

KEN
-All due respect, sir, we tried that with Electrovette.

Mimi pops her head in the door.

MIMI
Roger, your 11:30 is here.

ROGER
Don, take care of it.

Don leaves the room, following Mimi down the hall. The door closes with a click. Silence falls upon Roger and Ken.

He takes a long puff from his cigar. Holds his breath.

ROGER (CONT'D)
Electrovette...

Roger exhales smoke into the air, watches it dissipate.

ROGER (CONT'D)
Had its issues. But you know what, it paved the way for Sunraycer, which gave us proof of concept. Real market demand. Between us, I'll be retired in two years. I have a legacy to think about.

Roger presses his index finger to the picture of the Sunraycer in Ken's packet, redirecting Ken's gaze to it.

ROGER (CONT'D)
Turning this into a commercial success might just be it.

KEN
But that could take a decade. What if it can't get off the ground?

ROGER
I get your hesitation. Believe me, I do. But the truth is, Ken, in this business, there's not a lot of room for it.

KEN
So it's this or what? I choose this program or hop on board a sinking ship?

Roger takes a final puff from his cigar and snuffs it out in a glass ashtray.

ROGER
Well, there's always quitting. But I don't peg you much for a quitter.

Roger winks and heads for the door. He pauses, turns back.

ROGER (CONT'D)
Oh, and Ken? First meeting's Wednesday. Need an answer by then.

Roger exits.

Ken stares at the ashy butt of the snuffed out cigar and drums his fingers on the conference table.

The analog clock on the wall ticks.

INT. GM HEADQUARTERS HALLWAY

Ken follows the EXIT signs that hang from the ceiling, until he gets to the elevators. He gets inside:

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

Ken presses the button to close the doors, but before they do, Don and Roger appear and get in the elevator with him.

ROGER
Going down?

Ken nods.

INT. ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

The men ride in silence. Ken coughs to fill it.

The elevator opens into:

INT. GM HEADQUARTERS ENTRY LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

ROGER
How 'bout lunch, gentlemen? On me.

Don Runkle checks his watch.

DON
So long as I'm back by 2:30.
(beat)
Ken, you driving?

Ken hangs his head. The three men exit the building into:

EXT. GENERAL MOTORS HEADQUARTERS PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

KEN
Actually, my car is--I didn't drive today. And I promised my wife I'd take care of this thing...

Don hardly conceals his amusement at Ken's misfortune.

Roger puts a hand on Ken's shoulder.

ROGER
The missus keeping you busy? A word to the wise, Ken, keep her happy.

Ken nods like a child who's just been scolded.

ROGER (CONT'D)
Where about's you parked, Don?

DON
All the way to the left, aisle E.

Don lingers near Ken, waits until Roger's 10 feet away.

DON (CONT'D)
Leave the lunches to the big guns, Kenny. I know you got a lot to think about.

Don smirks, gloating, then walks off after Roger.

Moments later, Ken watches Roger and Don pass in Don's 1987 Cadillac Allanté.

KEN
(under his breath)
Kiss ass.

Ken walks to the payphone on the outside of the building. He grabs two quarters from his pockets and puts them in, then dials a number. It rings.

ROBOTIC OPERATOR VOICE
You've reached the Royal Oak Community Library. If you're calling with a--

Ken presses a button before the operator can speak through menu options. The answering machine beeps.

KEN
Hey. I'm calling for Val. This is Ken.
(MORE)

KEN (CONT'D)
I know you said you'd pick me up from the office today, but I'm actually at headquarters right now. So, I'll probably end up catching a train or...have Terry give me a ride from here. See you at home.

Ken hangs up the phone and stares at it, dejected.

JERRY JONES (O.S.)
You need a ride somewhere?

Ken turns his head, happily surprised to see his coworker standing to his left, leaning against the building. Jerry holds a cardboard box filled with desk trinkets.

KEN
Jerry? Yeah that'd be great. What are you doing here?

Ken glances down at the box in Jerry's hands.

JERRY
They, uh, terminated my position. Budget cuts, I guess. You too?

Ken looks down guiltily, shoves his hands in his pockets as the two start walking towards the lot of cars.

KEN
No, actually, they asked me to oversee a new EV program.

JERRY
Jeez. Someone oughtta talk to the guy signing off on all this. Seems like a lotta change...and for what?

KEN
They mentioned the Sunraycer...

Jerry pulls the handle of his gray 1984 Chevrolet Citation.

FADE TO:

EXT. AUSTRALIAN OUTBACK - EARLY EVENING

The sun shines bright over the white Sunraycer, as it drives down a highway in the golden orange Australian outback.

It's nearing sunset.

The vehicle drives past a rusted yellow sign that reads "Oodnadata, Home to Dead Man's Poo, Population: 204."

Ten feet behind it: the motorhome-turned-telemetry van.

INT. TELEMETRY VAN - OODNADATA, AUSTRALIA - SAME

Ken sits in the passenger seat on a plaid, velveteen seat cushion. The fuzzy orange floor carpet inside the car contrasts the chunky electronics attached to the walls.

A narrow aisle down the center allows room for one person to move down it at any given time. David stands there, starting at a dark computer screen with a crude depiction of a sun and the temperature read 72 degrees in green lettering.

Janet drives the car. Paul and Alan are situated in the seats nearest the front. They glance down at a complex dashboard with meters of every kind.

Ken holds up his walkie talkie.

KEN
Lewis, this is Ken. We're planning to do a maintenance stop here in Oodnadata. Over.

LEWIS (O.S.)
(via walkie)
Roger that. Over.

ALAN
We're wasting daylight. We could push it 'til the next town.

KEN
In 80 miles? The headwinds will be way worse by then. We're losing energy fast as is.

JANET
I'm with Ken.

ALAN
Paul?

PAUL
I gotta piss anyways. And my legs are cramping.

DAVID
Looks like this place has a phone. I'll get the latest.

The Sunraycer and telemetry truck pull over near the only building for what appears to be miles.

A white sign with red lettering reads "Roadhouse Oodnadatta." Multiple letters are fading and the sign itself is crooked.

Dark brown, warped wooden steps lead up to the door of the roadhouse, where DARJEELING (55) stands with a toothpick in his mouth and a gun on his belt holster.

He eyes the crew.

David walks to the remote payphone and places a call.

Paul walks up to the roadhouse. Looks at Darjeeling.

PAUL
Bathroom?

Darjeeling grunts, nods his head back gesturing toward the general direction of the bathroom. Lets him pass.

Outside the Sunraycer, Alan retracts the paneling on the back of the car, where Ken had him make the solar additions.

ALAN
You were right to suggest retractable.

Ken tries to hide his gladness.

KEN
Hm. Good.

David walks over to them.

DAVID
Only two other racers have made it past the mountains. They're still about an hour behind us. I think we could win this thing.

Alan bends over to check the tires.

ALAN
Tires could use some pressure.

He walks back to the van and retrieves a tire pump.

Lewis the driver emerges from the Sunraycer - a lean guy with curly blonde hair, matted with sweat. He wears an all white driving suit. His helmet is under his arm.

LEWIS
We got a problem, guys. Something pierced the canopy. It's getting real hot in there.

Paul checks a knob inside the Sunraycer.

PAUL
Shit.

JANET
We'll need at least one more hour working off the solar we've got. Can you hold it one more hour?

Just then, a SOLAR-POWERED CAR zooms past, followed by their own team's telemetry van.

ALAN
Which team was that?

KEN
Everyone, back to the van!

Alan speedily finishes inflating a tire.

They run to the van. Lewis boards the Sunraycer.

INT. TELEMETRY VAN - OODNADATA, AUSTRALIA

Ken rubs his face, stressed.

Notes are furiously scribbled on a clipboard before him.

Alan sits beside Ken, peering down at them.

KEN
Drag's still too high.

Alan looks out the window and sees Darjeeling hock a loogie, staring at the two cars as they get on their way.

This gives him an idea. He grins.

ALAN
We gotta remove the battery.

Everyone turns to him like he's nuts.

David speaks into the walkie talkie.

DAVID
Lewis?

LEWIS (O.S.)
Ten four.

DAVID
Don’t go yet. There’s one last thing.

INT. JERRY'S CHEVROLET CITATION - DAY

Jerry drives through Ken's neighborhood.

Residential houses, nice paved roads, and mowed lawns can be seen through the windows. Quintessential suburbia.

A pair of red dice hang from the car's rearview mirror.

They clack together.

KEN
I was just as tired as the rest of them. But when you're that deep in it, you're in it. You know? Run into problems, you're thinking "anything to bridge the gap between today and tomorrow." I never did that kind of thing for GM before.

JERRY
Did you like it?

Jerry glances at him expectantly.

Ken thinks in silence for a long moment.

KEN
It felt...new. I haven't gone in on a project like that since...community college.

JERRY
And ya shouldn't have to. You and me, Ken, we're getting too old for that kinda thing. We had some great times at GM, but at some point...time to move on.

Ken nods slowly. He sees his house, points to it.

KEN
It's this one.

Jerry pulls over.

JERRY
Course. Was it three years ago Linda and I came for Thanksgiving?

KEN
God, has it been that long since--

JERRY
-The divorce? Yeah. Honestly, Ken, it was the best thing for me.

Jerry sounds like a man trying to console himself.

JERRY (CONT'D)
Maybe we start lookin' at new jobs together next week?

KEN
(somber)
Yeah, maybe it's time.

Ken opens the car door and gets out. He turns back to Jerry.

KEN (CONT'D)
I'm sorry about your job, Jerry. Thanks for the ride.

Jerry reaches in his pocket and tosses Ken a tiny "Hot Wheels" version of the Electrovette.

JERRY
Found it in my desk when I was cleaning it out.
(laughing)
Can't believe you convinced marketing we needed these! That was great.

Ken looks down at the relic of his past, puts it in his pocket.

JERRY (CONT'D)
(serious now)
I really was rooting for it.

KEN
Me too, Jerry.

Ken closes the car door. Jerry drives away.

INT. KEN'S HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Ken closes his front door and takes off his shoes.

He walks to:

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Kira sits at the kitchen island reading The Communist Manifesto. She doesn't look up at her father.

KIRA
You're home early.

KEN
Why are you?

KIRA
Bus dropped me off ten minutes ago. Mattie's at soccer practice.

Ken takes a seat at the island with a pronounced plop.

KEN
Right.

Kira glances up from her reading.

KIRA
Are you having an affair?

KEN
Excuse me?

KIRA
How come your shirt's all fucked?

KEN
Language.
(beat)
My pen started bleeding...

KIRA
I think Mom's having an affair.

Ken shifts uncomfortably. He's not totally stunned.

KEN
What makes you say that?

Kira withdraws a paper that had been marking a page of her book and slides it across the table toward her dad.

KIRA
Five different tickets at the same parking spot? She left your car overnight somewhere.
(MORE)

KIRA (CONT'D)
The week grandma watched us. That's the only explanation that makes sense.

KEN
Grandma watched you guys. Right.

Kira rolls her eyes and stands from her chair.

Ken studies the paper, reading it more closely. On it: a list of all the tickets his wife accumulated in his car, along with a phone number for payment.

KEN (CONT'D)
Where'd you get this?

Kira exits the kitchen with her book.

KIRA
Mom hid it in her lingerie drawer.
(beat)
I don't even wanna know why she thinks you wouldn't find it there.

Ken sees a phone number on the paper and walks to the phone.

KIRA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(sarcastic)
School was great! Thanks for asking!

KEN
(shouting out to her)
I love my daughter Kira so much! She is very cool and not at all critical of her well-meaning father!

The distant sound of Kira's laugh. Rooms away, her bedroom door closes shut.

Ken exhales a long sigh.

KEN (CONT'D)
I can't win.

He dials the number. Holds the phone to his ear.

KEN (CONT'D)
I'm calling about a Brown Chevrolet Chevette with the license plate G-R-E-E-N-3-R.
(beat)
(MORE)

KEN (CONT'D)
Yes, can you tell me where I got the tickets? I'm trying to jog my--

Ken grabs a post-it pad and pad from a nearby junk drawer, scribbles down an address. He writes the words "Holy Name Cathedral, 55th Grand Ave." He underlines it.

KEN (CONT'D)
Thanks. How long is it gonna take to get the boot off my car?

Ken looks out the window to confirm that the yellow boot is still on it.

KEN (CONT'D)
I'll pay now.

INT. MASTER BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ken brushes his teeth, spits into the sink, then continues brushing. Valerie walks into the bathroom. She wears pajamas and grabs a jar of moisturizer from her separate counter.

She unscrews it, takes some, and daubs it on her cheeks and forehead. She sets down the jar and rubs it in.

VALERIE
Kira said you got home early from work.

KEN
Er, yeah. Weird day.

VALERIE
Weird how?

Ken spits again, rinses his mouth with water, and holds his toothbrush underneath the faucet. Wipes his mouth on a towel.

KEN
They want me to take on a new EV program.

Valerie stops moisturizing and walks to her husband, placing both hands on his arms.

VALERIE
Honey, that's great! That's amazing!

Valerie watches his face. He's not smiling.

VALERIE (CONT'D)
Isn't that great?

Ken grabs his floss and plucks it between his teeth, thinking. He stops.

KEN
I'm not gonna take it.

Valerie's smile fades. She wipes stray toothpaste from Ken's cheek and washes her hand off in his sink.

VALERIE
So sure?

KEN
I've gone down this road before. All they want is to debut a huge program, make a bunch of promises they can't keep, and shoot it down because the science isn't working fast enough. They did it with Electrovette and they'll do it with this one.

Valerie returns to her counter. She absentmindedly runs a finger along its surface, stopping at a prescription bottle of sleeping pills.

She reaches for it, takes out a pill, and tosses it back.

Ken averts his gaze as Valerie's medicates.

VALERIE
You know, sometimes, I wonder about you...

KEN
Hm?

VALERIE
The Sunraycer was exciting.

KEN
Yeah. And it was *contained*. An experiment I could actually finish.

Valerie frowns, filling up a cup with water from the sink. She takes a sip.

VALERIE
Are we boring, Ken?

Ken's brow furrows.

KEN
What? No.

Ken walks to her, pulls her into an embrace.

KEN (CONT'D)
We're passionate people. We have...children. We have...goals.

But it seems like Ken is trying to convince himself.

VALERIE
There used to be so many possibilities. Don't you ever want to do something that exhilarates you?

Ken places his hand around her waist and moves her dark hair to one side of her neck, kissing her bare shoulder.

KEN
You exhilarate me.

Valerie pulls away, spoiling any possibility for intimacy.

She untangles herself from Ken, disappointed, wipes her counter with a stray towel, and turns off the light on her side of the bathroom.

VALERIE
Probably for the best anyways. You not taking that job. The library's doing this whole summer program thing and it's gonna be longer hours. Better we're not both adjusting to that kinda thing, huh?

She exits to the bedroom. Ken just stands there, frozen.

FADE TO:

INT. CHEVROLET CHEVETTE - MORNING

Ken drives on the expressway, in his Chevrolet Chevette, in silence. The Hot Wheels version of the Electrovette hangs from his car mirror now. Ken looks at absentmindedly.

INT. GENERAL MOTORS, WARREN TRANSMISSION OPERATIONS - MORNING

Ken gets into the office. It's half empty. Depressing.

Eyes follow Ken as he walks his usual path.

He passes the same table with the two-day old powdered donuts and the "Happy 10 Years, Jerry" card sits.

Terry walks up behind Ken, following him to his cubicle.

TERRY
(whispering)
Didja hear the news, boss?

Ken turns to her, confused.

KEN
What's that?

TERRY
Jerry...

Ken looks at Terry concerned.

She touches her mouth with her hand.

TERRY (CONT'D)
Oh god. I'm so sorry, Ken.

Ken sits, steadies himself with a hand on his desk.

TERRY (CONT'D)
Jerry died yesterday night. Massive heart attack.

Terry keeps talking but Ken can't hear her. A high-pitched ringing in his ears blurs the world around him.

He turns on his word processor and sees the loading bar. But outside the boxy shape, everything blurs.

Terry places a hand on his shoulder.

TERRY (CONT'D)
Ken?

Ken snaps his head to face her, jolted from a trance.

TERRY (CONT'D)
What happened at headquarters yesterday?

Ken forces a smile.

KEN
Made a mistake on one of the old program memos. Roger wanted me to clarify.

Terry looks disappointed.

TERRY
Guess it wasn't so big a deal, huh.
(beat)
Well, I'm here for you Ken. I know you and Jerry were pals.

Ken offers Terry a forced smile. She leaves him.

Ken stares at his reflection in the dark loading screen of his computer. The loading bar fills so slowly.

The tick of a nearby clock is amplified.

Ken rises from his chair and heads out.

Terry intercepts his path.

TERRY (CONT'D)
Boss, branch is requesting a meeting at 11. Jerry's accounts need coverage.
(slightly quieter)
So will the other 20 who got cut.

Ken keeps walking. Terry keeps up.

KEN
What's that new guy's name?

TERRY
Dean?

KEN
He still here?

TERRY
Yeah.

KEN
Yeah, go ahead and put him on the accounts.

TERRY
But Ken, Jerry was ten years in. That's a lot of learning for a new recruit.

KEN
Eh, he'll be fine.

Terry and other workers in the office watch as Ken leaves.

He pushes on the door to the outside world, sunlight engulfing his silhouette.

INT. GM HEADQUARTERS ENTRY LOBBY - LATER THAT MORNING

Mimi Deluca types away at her IBM computer behind the big oak desk, just as she did the day before. Today, wears a seafoam green dress, her permed hair pulled up into a ponytail.

She looks up at Ken who stands catatonic at the coffee station in the lobby. Above the coffee station, a framed black and white photo of the first GM office hangs.

Ken just stares at it.

Mimi clears her throat. Ken doesn't respond.

Mimi clears her throat again. Again, Ken doesn't respond.

Mimi stands, smooths her dress, and walks over to Ken.

She reaches for a styrofoam coffee cup.

MIMI
Did you want some coffee?

Ken doesn't remove his eyes from the photo.

MIMI (CONT'D)
Sir?

Ken looks at her, noticing her presence for the first time.

KEN
It's Ken.

MIMI
Did you want some coffee?

KEN
No. Thanks.

Mimi awkwardly sets down the styrofoam cup and returns to her place behind the desk. Ken looks down the hallway leading to the individual offices.

He walks toward them.

MIMI
Uh, sir, you can't...

Ken keeps walking.

INT. GM HEADQUARTERS, DON'S OFFICE - TEN MINUTES LATER

Ken sits back in a chair, before an ornate mahogany desk. A gold name plate labeled "Don Runkle" rests on top of it.

Don Runkle enters swiftly, closes his door, walks behind his desk and remains standing. He feigns cheeriness with a smile that's more Cheshire Cat than it is pleasant.

DON
Ken. Hi. Busy morning. I'm surprised you're back so soon. Thought you might take until tomorrow.

Ken pulls the Hot Wheels Electrovette from Jerry out of his pocket and places it on the desk, not looking up at Don.

KEN
To do what?

DON
I've watched the way you've tried to ascend the ranks here. And, Ken, I find it...brave, really, given your educational experience and background. Most of the guys around here run in a different kind of circle if you catch my drift.

Don looks down at Ken's hand, which pulls the Hot Wheels car back, then lets it push forward a few inches.

DON (CONT'D)
I think we both know that meeting yesterday was a pity present.

KEN
Huh. That what it was?

DON
I'll tell Roger you'd like to keep your Op Management role at the ole Warren branch. Makes sense you'd want to stay there...it's what you know.

Ken's focus remains on the tiny car.

KEN
Do you like who you are?

Don looks down at his watch evasive. Feigns pleasantry.

DON
Quite the question for 9am on a Tuesday.

Ken pulls back the tiny hot wheels car again. This time it thrusts forward, nearly falling into the trash bin beside the desk. But Ken catches it before it falls in. He stands, meeting Don's eyes.

KEN
I'm taking the job, Runkle.

Don's cocky smile fades to dismay.

DON
Excuse me?

KEN
EV1. I'm in. Are there some papers I need to sign?

EXT. ROADHOUSE - LATE DAY

A ham radio sits on the steps of Oodnadata's Roadhouse.

Big boots step towards it, the wood creaks. Darjeeling leans the radio's antenna until it catches the right frequency.

RADIO ANNOUNCER
And in a shocking outcome, General Motors' wins the race with a three hour lead. That's right. You heard it here first, folks. Sunraycer is the winner of Australia's first ever cross-continental Solar Challenge!

Darjeeling grins, nearly toothless.

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF PILOT.

Credits roll over "Walk the Night" by Retrospaction.