

NO SHELTER

Written by

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EXT. STRIP MALL PARKING LOT - NIGHT - SIXTEEN YEARS AGO

Illuminated by a full moon and lamplight, RAIN beats down in heavy sheets on the asphalt. A dumpster behind a restaurant is surrounded by trash bags and cardboard boxes.

Muffled SCREAMS from an unseen baby are overpowered by the RUMBLE of distant thunder. A silent patrol car pulls up beside the dumpster, lights flashing.

INT. POLICE CAR - NIGHT

Officer DAN HAGAN, 30s, lowers his window an inch. The RAIN and baby's SCREAMS increase in volume. He clicks his police radio.

DAN

I'm about to investigate the call-in for the two-seven-one. I do hear a baby crying. I can't believe it. Over.

EXT. STRIP MALL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Dan exits the car, flashlight in hand. He tilts his head, listening intently. He walks to the dumpster, opens the lid, and clicks the flashlight on.

INT. DUMPSTER - NIGHT

Resting on a bag of trash, is a wailing INFANT.

EXT. STRIP MALL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Dan takes a step back from the dumpster.

DAN

Fuck me.

INT. HAGAN HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT - PRESENT DAY

LOVELL HAGAN, 16, dark-haired and somewhat Gothic, blows out lighted candles on a cake as his adoptive parents Dan and PAULA HAGAN, 50s, look on. Dan applauds when Lovell finishes.

DAN

Happy birthday, son.

LOVELL
Thanks, Dad.

DAN
This is a milestone. You don't turn
sixteen every day.

Lovell reaches for the knife, but Dan intercepts him. Dan cuts the cake into pieces. He offers a piece to Paula. Lovell looks at his wrist. There are multiple, crisscrossing scars.

PAULA
None for me. Besides, his sixteenth
birthday has technically passed.

Dan pauses cutting to give Paula a disapproving look. He serves Lovell a slice and then himself. They eat the cake.

DAN
Sixteen years ago today I was
blessed to find you --

PAULA
Screaming in a dumpster.

Lovell stops eating and looks down at his plate. Dan puts down his fork.

DAN
Paula. Come on. Not today.

LOVELL
It's okay, Dad. It's the truth.

DAN
It's only the start of the story.
You're a man now, Lovell, and I'm
proud to call you my son.

PAULA
I was only joking. Lighten up.
Anyway, you're old enough to work
now. Have you thought about it? A
part-time job builds character.

Lovell sits in silence.

DAN
That's true. He's been talking
about volunteering --

PAULA
There's no money in volunteering.

DAN
-- at the County Animal Shelter.

Paula snorts and pushes away from the table.

PAULA
Oh, well. That makes total sense,
actually. One stray dog taking care
of a pack of them.

DAN
That's not funny.

PAULA
Don't bring home fleas.

Paula leaves the table and the room. Dan looks at Lovell's
downturned head and takes a long breath.

DAN
Son, I think she's just a little
drunk. She doesn't mean that.

LOVELL
I wish that either of those things
were true.

INT. COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER - DOG GROOMING ROOM - DAY

Lovell washes KALIL, a male Alaskan Malamute, in a large,
stainless steel basin. BARKING is heard offscreen.

LOVELL
(to Kalil)
No wonder they keep you separated
from the others. You'd tear them
apart.

Lovell turns off the faucet, hangs up the sprayer, and grabs
a towel. He holds up the towel like a shield as Kalil shakes
himself dry, then rubs him dry with it.

LOVELL (CONT'D)
I don't blame you. I've been
reading up on your breed. You're
intelligent, with a strong prey
instinct -- and you don't like the
others.

Lovell takes a canine finger toothbrush, dips it in an open
container of dog toothpaste, lifts Kalil's lip, and runs his
finger along the gum-line.

LOVELL (CONT'D)

Look at these. You don't have the strongest bite, but maybe you don't need to. These canines are amazing.

NADINE (O.S.)

Are you geeking out over Kalil's teeth?

Lovell, startled, looks up to see NADINE, 17, leaning against the doorway, arms folded and smiling.

LOVELL

Nadine! How long have you been standing there?

NADINE

Long enough to have serious concerns about your mental health.

She saunters into the room and pets Kalil.

NADINE (CONT'D)

I hadn't really thought about the dogs' teeth. They are impressive.

LOVELL

They're amazing. Look.

She steps closer. He demonstrates with his finger as he brushes Kalil's teeth.

LOVELL (CONT'D)

Every tooth has a purpose. I love that. These front ones, these are the incisors. They're for scraping. The sharpest ones here are the canines. They're for tearing meat apart, obviously.

NADINE

Obviously. It's a good thing he likes you.

LOVELL

He's much more likely to attack his own kind than a person. Anyway, these here are the premolars, used to shred meat, and the molars back here are what they use to crush bone.

NADINE
We are literally in a building
filled with killing machines.

LOVELL
Maybe not the chihuahuas.

Nadine laughs. Lovell smiles and removes the toothbrush.

NADINE
Especially the chihuahuas!

Lovell laughs.

NADINE (CONT'D)
Did you just laugh for the first
time since I met you?

They lock eyes and smile.

LOVELL
Maybe.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL MACHINE SHOP - DAY

A dozen STUDENTS abuzz with activity work at typical workbenches and stations (mill, lathe, drill press, grinder, etc.). The SHOP TEACHER walks around behind the students, overlooking their projects.

Lovell is at a workbench near the back, molding clay.

SPENCER 17, muscular, confident and good looking, works the lathe at a station behind Lovell. ROB, 16, tall and skinny, and CARLO, broad-shouldered and wearing a continual frown, stand behind Spencer but stare at Lovell. Spencer stops the lathe to watch Lovell too.

SPENCER
(to Lovell's back)
Hagan.

Lovell continues working.

SPENCER (CONT'D)
Hagan!

Lovell remains focused on his work. Carlo pushes Lovell, who turns around but says nothing.

SPENCER (CONT'D)
What are you making?

Lovell takes a long time before he answers.

LOVELL
It wouldn't make sense.

ROB
Whoa. Bold.

SPENCER
Are you calling us stupid?

LOVELL
No.

Spencer, Rob, and Carlo slowly realize that Lovell isn't going to continue.

SPENCER
Come on. This is machine shop and you're working with clay. What the fuck?

LOVELL
I'm making a clay mold for something.

SPENCER
Holy shit, getting a straight answer from Edward Scissorhands here is like pulling teeth.

Lovell chuckles. Spencer glances toward the teacher, who is deeply engaged in supervising another student's work.

Spencer takes a step forward and grabs Lovell by the throat. Lovell puts a hand on Spencer's. Carlo and Rob move behind them to block the teacher's view.

SPENCER (CONT'D)
(whispering)
I wasn't trying to be funny. And I wasn't really that interested in your answer -- until now. Don't make me ask you again.

INT. COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER - DOG KENNEL ROOM - DAY -
FLASHBACK - ONE WEEK EARLIER

Lovell carries a leash past stainless steel cages lining both walls filled with barking dogs. He looks into Kalil's cage.

LOVELL
Kalil! Time for a walk.

He unbolts Kalil's cage and leashes him. Kalil snarls and lunges at one of the barking dogs.

EXT. STREET ACROSS FROM STRIP MALL - DAY

While Kalil meanders along the sidewalk, Lovell freezes and watches a scene unfold across the street -- Dan talks to Spencer, Rob, and Carlo and confiscates a paper bag from them.

As Dan watches the trio depart, he notices Lovell and waves to him. The trio observe Dan's gesture and all glare at Lovell.

INT. COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER - VISITING ROOM - DAY

Lovell unleashes Kalil and lies down on the floor. Kalil flops down and puts his head on Lovell's chest, tail wagging.

LOVELL

I wish I could take you home with me.

Lovell strokes Kalil's head.

LOVELL (CONT'D)

My mother wouldn't let that happen.

(beat)

Mother. If only. She thinks I'm like you. I wish I was more like you.

Lovell sits up and strokes Kalil's throat.

LOVELL (CONT'D)

You don't know your parents and you don't care. You don't take shit from anyone or need anyone. I just want to fly under the radar long enough to get out of this town and never look back. Maybe I can take you with me then.

Lovell gently pries Kalil's jaws apart and puts his own face into Kalil's mouth. He rubs his cheek against Kalil's teeth.

Nadine's face appears at the window in the door. She mocks prying apart her own jaws and knocks on the window with her forehead. Lovell laughs, stands, and opens the door. Kalil growls at Nadine.

LOVELL (CONT'D)
(to Kalil)
Stop that.

NADINE
Sorry to interrupt your dentistry session, but I need you to help me get the group dogs into the dog run for playtime.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL MACHINE SHOP - DAY - RETURN TO SCENE

Spencer has Lovell by the throat. Lovell's hand is on his. Carlo and Rob block the teacher's view.

LOVELL
I'm making a mold. Well, two, actually -- one for the maxilla, and one for the mandible.

Spencer releases his grip.

SPENCER
What?

LOVELL
The upper and lower jaws -- of a dog. I'm going to die-cast them both and hinge them together.

Carlo and Rob turn to face Lovell.

SPENCER
You're making a die-cast metal mold of a dog's jaw?

LOVELL
I'm going to try.

SPENCER
Not a gear clock, or a hammer, or a knife, or something even remotely normal. A dog's jaw. You really are a freak. If it wasn't for your father, we would have dropped your weird ass in the river ages ago.

LOVELL
I've already made a knife.

Carlo leans in and barks like an angry dog in Lovell's face.

EXT. COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER - DOG RUN - DAY

Nadine and Lovell herd a dozen dogs into the dog run. A pile of bowls and dog toys stands in the corner, beside a coiled hose attached to a spigot. Nadine beams at the sight of the dogs playing.

NADINE

I don't think I'll ever get tired of this. If reincarnation's a thing, I want to come back as one of these little guys.

LOVELL

This is a kill shelter, Nadine. They're not all going to make it.

NADINE

Don't remind me. I hate that part. I try to not think about it.

LOVELL

I try to not forget it.

Nadine turns and scrutinizes Lovell. Lovell looks at Nadine and doesn't break his gaze.

NADINE

You know what's interesting about you?

Lovell waits for her to continue. She laughs.

NADINE (CONT'D)

This thing exactly -- that you just did. You never seem to feel a need to fill a silence with words.

LOVELL

What should I say?

NADINE

I don't know. Does it bother you how many of these animals are euthanized?

LOVELL

It's not something I can change, so I accept it. They're unwanted.

Lovell walks to a pile of dog bowls and distributes them on the floor. Nadine uncoils the hose, turns the spigot, and fills the bowls with water.

NADINE

But they have value. And maybe they're dying only because not enough people know they're here.

LOVELL

Value is a human construct. The universe values nothing. All systems of measurement, including something as arbitrary as "value" exist only in the mind.

NADINE

Screw the universe. I'm not the universe. These animals, all creatures, have energy and spirit, and life force. I value that. You have value, Lovell.

LOVELL

Zero is also a value.

INT. COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER - EUTHANASIA ROOM - NIGHT

Filled trash bags line the wall. Lovell drags one out the door and comes back in seconds later. He drags out another.

He opens the a third trash bag and looks in it. A dead dog is inside. He pries open its mouth and stares at it. He closes the bag again and drags it out of the room.

INT. COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER - DOG KENNEL ROOM - NIGHT

Lovell walks to Kalil's cage. He presses his head against the cage and pets Kalil with his fingertips through the steel bars.

INT. COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER - RECEPTION - NIGHT

Nadine is behind the reception counter. Lovell enters.

NADINE

Hey there, Mister "life has no value."

LOVELL

Hey.

NADINE

No, you're not supposed to say "hey." You're supposed to say that you're sorry for being so insensitive for bringing up euthanasia when I was enjoying watching puppies play.

LOVELL

It sounds like you've mapped out my apology pretty well on your own.

NADINE

I accept your apology.

They both laugh. Lovell looks at his feet for a few seconds and then looks back at Nadine.

LOVELL

Can I ask you a personal question?

NADINE

Oooh, your very first personal question. Can I ask one first?

LOVELL

Okay.

NADINE

Why did you volunteer here?

LOVELL

I identify with the dogs. Do you have a boyfriend?

NADINE

Wait, is that your question?

LOVELL

Yes.

NADINE

Just thought you'd slip it right in there.

LOVELL

That's what she said. And yes.

Nadine laughs and Lovell smiles. They gaze at each other a moment.

NADINE

I'm sorry. Yes, I do. I've been going out with Spencer Kellog for about three months.

EXT. TREE-LINED STREET - NIGHT

Lovell walks along a poorly lit sidewalk. A stray cat crosses his path. Lovell freezes, then slowly removes a homemade knife from his jacket pocket and unsheathes it. The cat bolts away.

INT. HAGAN HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Dan and Paula eat dinner.

DAN

It's not his fault, Paula. You shouldn't hold him responsible for my choices.

PAULA

If it weren't for him, we would have had our own -- you said as much yourself.

An offscreen door OPENS and CLOSES.

PAULA (CONT'D)

He's always been so... detached. I don't trust him. And he's growing up weak -- and weird.

DAN

You don't think you had something to do with that?

PAULA

His genetics have nothing to do with mine.

DAN

You know that's not what I meant.

Lovell passes by in silence. Dan waves an arm at him.

PAULA

Speak of the devil.

DAN

Whoa, hey, flash! Get back here.

Lovell backtracks into the room.

LOVELL
Hey, Dad.

DAN
Are you hungry? How's the shelter?

LOVELL
No, thanks. They put down sixteen animals tonight.

Dan takes a pensive bite of his food.

DAN
Wow. I bet that's hard to process. I'm sorry, kiddo.

PAULA
It's not like it's Auschwitz.

Dan glares at Paula.

DAN
It's not like a walk in the park, either, Paula.

PAULA
What, are these creatures not out of their misery now? On to greener pastures, isn't that right, Lovell?

LOVELL
No.

PAULA
What do you mean, no?

LOVELL
They were put out of our misery, Paula, not theirs.

PAULA
I'd like to put you out of my misery.

LOVELL
Same.

Paula grabs a handful of food and hurls it into Lovell's face. Lovell lunges toward her and barks like an angry dog in her face. Paula recoils in shock. Dan slams his hand onto the table. They turn to look at Dan.

DAN
(whispering)
Help. I need help.

One hand is over his heart. He uses the other to brace himself against the table. His face is red.

DAN (CONT'D)
Call nine-one-one.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL MACHINE SHOP - DAY

Lovell is polishing the lower half of a die-cast metal dog's jaw. Spencer, Carlo, and Rob crowd around. Carlo sniffs at Lovell's shoulder and growls like a dog. Lovell sighs and turns to face them.

SPENCER
Hey, dog face. I heard you made two mistakes on Friday night.

Lovell says nothing.

SPENCER (CONT'D)
Nothing to say? Want to guess what they were?

Lovell turns back to his workstation, but Carlo whips him back around.

CARLO
What's your answer, dog face?

SPENCER
Still nothing. This dog needs obedience school. I'll give you a couple of hints. One involves asking out my girlfriend and the other involves putting your douchebag cop daddy in the hospital.

LOVELL
Neither of those things is true.

SPENCER
Well, they're close enough, asshole.

Spencer grabs Lovell by the throat.

SPENCER (CONT'D)
And they're both mistakes.

Lovell jams the very sharp teeth-side of the metal dog's jaw into Spencer's hand, and draws blood immediately. Spencer releases Lovell's throat and rubs his hand. Carlo and Rob are stunned.

SPENCER (CONT'D)
Mistake number three.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL BUS LOOP - DAY

Dozens of STUDENTS get on buses, walk to their cars, congregate and converse in clusters, generally mill about, etc. Lovell, sporting a backpack, walks toward Spencer, Carlo, and Rob.

The trio intercepts Lovell. They snarl, growl, and bark. Several students within earshot laugh or join in.

SPENCER
No teacher and no daddy, dog face.

Lovell starts to walk around them, but Spencer cuts him off. Nadine appears from the crowd.

SPENCER (CONT'D)
Nope.

NADINE
Spence, what are you doing?

SPENCER
Obedience training.

Carlo surprises Lovell with a headlock. Nadine pushes at Carlo, but he doesn't budge.

NADINE
Stop this, right now!

Lovell bites Carlo's forearm hard. Carlo winces in pain and releases him. Lovell sprints off. The trio exchange glances and pursue him.

EXT. STRIP MALL PARKING LOT - DAY

The trio has Lovell cornered behind a building. All four of them breathe heavily.

SPENCER
This is happening, bitch.

Spencer punches Lovell in the face. Lovell falls and hits the asphalt, backpack first, with a muffled CLANG.

Lovell rolls over and squirms off the backpack as Rob steps forward with a kick to the gut. Lovell swings the backpack by the strap and it makes another solid CLANG as it connects hard with Rob's cheek. Rob reels back and collapses on the ground.

Carlo grabs the backpack and yanks it away. Lovell pounces on Spencer and knocks him to ground. He locks his teeth onto Spencer's cheek, and bites down. Spencer screams.

CARLO

What the --

Carlo swings the backpack with a crushing THUD into Lovell's ribs that sends Lovell rolling off Spencer onto the ground. Spencer grabs Lovell by the throat and squeezes. Lovell's face reddens.

Lovell reaches behind him, pulls out his homemade knife. Spencer's eyes widen. Carlo sees the knife, grabs Lovell's wrist, and twists. The knife PINGS onto the ground.

SPENCER

Dog face is taking this to another level. Hold him down.

CARLO

Spence, I think we should stop.

SPENCER

Not yet.

Spencer wipes blood from his cheek and punches Lovell in the face.

SPENCER (CONT'D)

Hold him down, Carlo.

Carlo kneels on Lovell's shoulders from behind his head, pinning him to the ground. Lovell winces. Spencer picks up the knife.

CARLO

What are you going to do?

SPENCER

Turn this bitch into an art project.

Spencer turns Lovell's cheek to the side and carves the shape of a canine tooth on the side of his face. Lovell stares into Spencer's eyes.

SPENCER (CONT'D)

Let's turn the other cheek. We must have balance.

Spencer laughs, turns Lovell's face in the other direction, and carves the same shape on Lovell's opposite cheek.

SPENCER (CONT'D)

Ah, I messed up. Let's start over.

CARLO

No, Spence.

Spencer and Carlo look at each other for a moment. Rob stirs.

SPENCER

You're right. This project is garbage. Let's trash it.

Carlo waits. Rob gets up.

SPENCER (CONT'D)

Come on. Into the dumpster with him.

Carlo laughs. Lovell turns to see Rob's foot coming right for his face.

INT. CLOSED DUMPSTER - NIGHT

Pitch blackness. A GASP, followed by the RUSTLING of plastic bags. A COUGH, followed by SPITTING.

EXT. STRIP MALL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Lovell pops open the lid of the dumpster. He looks around, then crawls out, but slips and hits the ground with a grunt. He notices his knife and backpack on the asphalt in the moonlight. He gets up, walks over to them, and picks them up.

EXT. COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER - NIGHT

A flood light pops on as Lovell approaches the front door and peers inside. He steps back and examines his battered reflection in the glass.

He unslings his backpack and uses it to smash the glass. A chorus of BARKING erupts from inside the building.

INT. COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER - DOG KENNEL ROOM - NIGHT

Most of the cage doors are swung open. Lovell opens two more, as dogs excitedly jump and bark around the room. Lovell wades through them to open the door at the far end, and the dogs flood out.

EXT. COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER - DOG RUN - NIGHT

Lovell wades through the dozens of dogs to the gate at the edge of the run. He unlatches it and pushes it open.

INT. COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER - DOG KENNEL ROOM - NIGHT

Lovell enters and closes the door behind him, backpack in hand. He opens a cage door and Kalil steps out.

LOVELL

It's time.

Lovell removes the metal jaws from the backpack and kneels.

LOVELL (CONT'D)

I made you a present. The hinge
broke today, though.

He uses both hands to raises the jaws to one side of his face, in front of Kalil.

LOVELL (CONT'D)

They're sharper than yours.

Lovell stares into Kalil's eyes. Kalil growls low, then snaps at Lovell's face. Lovell snaps his head back and, with the metal jaws still in hand, blocks Kalil's forward movement by jamming the jaws into Kalil's throat. Kalil wails in pain.

LOVELL (CONT'D)

No. No, no, no.

The metal jaws fall to the floor with CLANGS that echo through the room. Kalil growls and lunges again. Lovell jams his wrist into Kalil's mouth. Kalil clamps down and draws blood.

LOVELL (CONT'D)

I'm honored.

Lovell holds Kalil's jaws clamped onto his wrist as he reaches into the backpack with his free hand. Lovell cries as he jabs the knife into Kalil's neck and pulls it back out. Blood sprays across Lovell's face as Kalil howls in pain.

Lovell grimaces as he stabs Kalil rapidly a dozen more times. His breathing slows as he sits with Kalil in a pool of Kalil's blood. He looks at his bloody wrist and smiles.

INT. SPENCER KELLOG'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Spencer sleeps in his bed. From outside his door comes a commotion of sounds -- muffled GRUNTS, BUMPS, a THUD, then silence. Spencer sits up and looks at the closed door.

SPENCER

Dad? Are you okay?

The door swings open. Lovell stands framed in the doorway, lit from behind. In each of his hands is one half of the die-cast metal jaws, dripping with blood.

On Lovell's head and back rests Kalil's blood-stained and dripping hide. Lovell wears no shirt, but his torso is sprayed and smeared with fresh blood.

Lovell steps toward Spencer.

THE END