

"BOYS WILL BE MEN"

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FADE IN:

INT. APARTMENT KITCHEN - DAY

From behind, we see CHAD WILCOMB, twenty-something indie print journalist, who stands in sometime-father clutter at the counter and struggles to extract caffeine from an overworked machine. CHUCKY, his six-year-old, sits at a table in the foreground, twirling his spoon in a bowlful of soggy cereal.

CHUCKY

Can Mommy come live with us
again?

Chad's shoulders sag.

CHAD

Chucky, we've been over this
a million times in the last
three years. NO, Mommy's not
going to live with us
anymore!

Chucky frowns into the bowl.

CHUCKY

I don't like two homes, and
Missus Sherwatter—she smells
funny. Mommy has day-care;
she doesn't need no
babysitter at night.

Chad turns almost around, folding his arms.

CHAD

"Any."

CHUCKIE

Huh?

CHAD

'Any'-'Any babysitter.'
Daddy and Mommy have
different jobs; that's all.
Sometimes Daddy has to work
late or go away. Finish your
Sugar Bombs. I gotta drop
you and get to the office.

Chad swipes his keys off the counter. The wall phone
rings.

Chad answers.

CHAD

'Lo?

His ex-wife LANA speaks. Chucky listens intently.

LANA (O.S.)

(muffled)

Hi, dear. Glad I caught you.
Don't forget Chucky's
appointment with Doctor
DiPassini at four; I'm pretty
sure he has a cavity. All
that sugar weekend mornings,
no doubt.

CHAD

(pauses, under
his breath)

Shit...

(longer pause)

I forgot. Look, can you
cover it? I've got a full
day today.

LANA (O.S.)

(angry, muffled)

GodDAMN it, Chad! I've run
through almost all of my sick
leave as it is.

(pauses, sighs)

Listen. Did Chucky bring up
getting back together again?

Behind a subdued Chad, Chucky cranes to overhear.

CHAD

(lowers voice)

Yeah. He said something this morning.

LANA

Did you talk to him about it, Chad?

CHAD

Yeah. Sorta.

LANA (O.S.)

(muffled sighs)

Do you every really hear that kid?

Chad's body English shows the struggle between embarrassment and anger.

CHAD

(mumbles)

Gotta go. 'Bye.

Chad parks the handset gingerly.

CHAD (V.O.)

A woman with three names—I should have known better.

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - DAY

TIM IRELAND, Editor-in-Chief of the free weekly, *Sacramento News & Views*, relaxes, his chair propped against the wall behind his desk and his head cradled in his laced fingers. Chad sits slouched in front of him, then props his feet on the desk and leans back himself.

CHAD

Okay. So, Charlie Don Morton, doomed local murderer-rapist, wants to give me and our little lefty rag an exclusive before he's put to sleep at San Quentin in three months. That about it?

TIM

Not entirely; two conditions.

CHAD

Oh?

TIM

One: He wants the piece to be first person—you know, 'Charlie Don Speaks.' Your ruminations and purple prose on sidebars only.

CHAD

And two?

TIM

He wants you there, as a media witness.

Chad starts, then smirks into his best "Ted Baxter" impression.

CHAD

Won't giving a convicted killer an 'open forum' besmirch our journalistic integrity?

TIM

Listen, wise-ass. This is a no-brainer, a coup, if we can pull it off. Set your longer stuff aside. I've already gotten the Department of Correction's new guidelines. You work on whatever phone calls to the prison you'll need and a visitation request. I'll work on getting you in at the curtain.

CHAD

Why me?

TIM

What I get from his mother's
letter is he saw your piece
on the temple bombers and
decided you were 'fair.'

(grins)

Go figure. Maybe he used to
be a 'subscriber.'

Chad stares past Tim, tapping his chin. Tim lands his
chair hard and rolls onto his elbows, the index fingers
of his clasped hands aimed like guns.

TIM

Chad. Get on it.

INT. OFFICE CUBICLE - NIGHT

We see Chad from above. He pushes away from his desk,
the surface of which resembles a small trailer park
after a tornado. He slumps back in his office chair,
holding a piece of paper up in his line of sight

CHAD

The facts...

He taps the paper with a pencil as he ticks them off to
himself.

CHAD (V.O.)

Who? Charles Donald Morton.
What? Four hundred twenty-
seventh of six hundred
sentenced to die in
California since 1978.
Where? One of five hundred
seventy eight men and seven
women on 'The Row' at San
Quentin. When? Convicted
November, Nineteen Eight-
eight for the murder and
mutilation of a North
Highlands prostitute,
Christmas, Nineteen Eighty-
seven.

Chad lays the paper down and reaches for a cassette recorder on the desk.

CLOSEUP: CHAD'S MOUTH:

CHAD

Behold, the man.

He punches the 'Play' button. Rustling and clicking introduces a recorded telephone conversation.

CHAD (O.S.)

(muffled)

Go ahead—it's all yours.

CHARLIE

(exhales,
matter-of-fact)

Not too much to it, really...

UNDER VOICE OVERS:

A still of a plain, earnest late-Fifties couple with an infant in front of a run-down, ex-urban bungalow.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

(muffled)

...Born and raised in
Antelope, California...

A still of a blowsy, exhausted woman, determined to give the slightly vacant six-year-old in the pointed hat at her side her best shot at a proper birthday party.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

(muffled)

...Only child. Just me and
the ol' lady after my old man
hit the bricks when I was
three...

A still of a trio of Seventies-style adolescent metal-heads, doing the macho lounge around the open hood of a "work-in-progress" beater.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
(muffled)
...Hung with a couple guys in
high school. Few highs, no
real trouble to speak of...

A prom still of mullet-haired Charlie and a bemused,
Aqua-Net girl. Him: powder-blue, rented tuxedo; Her:
homemade taffeta gown and wrist corsage.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
(muffled—takes a
drag, chuckles)
...Back-seat romance or two.
Rhonda Jean broke my heart,
but nobody steady...

An overexposed still of an animated Charlie in cap and
gown, holding a diploma like a dagger.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
(muffled)
...Barely escaped high
school. Had a short fling
with community college...

A still of stiffly-posed day laborers at a construction
site.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
(muffled)
Slew of low-wage jobs—week
here, month there. Not
exactly the mate magnet...

A series of stills of Charlie and a pancake-and-paint-
faced hooker, mugging and touching lewdly inside a
'three-for-a-quarter' photo booth.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
(muffled)
Found the women when I could.
Payin' for it was least
complicated. Lane was
special; she laughed a lot...
(swallows hard)

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OFFICE CUBICLE - NIGHT

Chad stares at the recorder, his chin on his crossed arms near it.

CHAD (O.S.)

(muffled)

So, you knew her?

CHARLIE (O.S.)

(muffled)

Yeah, kinda regular. Bought a whole weekend that...last time. Kind of a present to myself...

CLOSEUP OF TAPE REELS TURNING IN CASSETTE WINDOW:

Silence on the line, punctuated only by static and random line noise.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

(muffled-coughs)

You know the rest; the trial, the appeals. Gave 'em up after a while—could only take so much bad advice.

(pauses)

I'm sorry she died. I'm sorry I done it. That's about it.

CLOSEUP OF FINGER PUNCHING 'STOP' BUTTON.

INT. DEATH ROW INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Chad drops into a poorly-padded steel armchair in the depressing 'Sea-Foam' and gray Block B interview room. The GUARD pushes the prison-issue paper and pencil along the see-through Formica tabletop and goes to parade-rest in the corner. Chad drums his fingers on the table and inventories the room.

CHAD'S P.O.V.:

To his left, the guard, an unblinking Sphinx in brown-and-khaki twill.

CHAD (V.O.)

No overt physical or emotional abuse. No stand-out 'turning point'—too old for Judas Priest, the Trench-coat Mafia, or any other trendy crackpot theory.

Pan right to a framed photo of Governor Gray Davis, all teeth and albino coif.

CHAD. (V.O.)

No white sheets or swastikas; No 'Up the System.' Hell—not even a joiner.

Pan right across the bars of the prisoners' entrance to a framed, black-and-white "VISITOR'S RULES"; we flash back and forth between the whole and the stark, bold "NO" at each articulation.

CHAD (V.O.)

No addictions other than nicotine. Drug of choice—fermented.

Pan up to center ceiling, fixing on the garish light from the single fixture.

CHAD (V.O.)

No priors. No protestations of innocence. No Kafkaesque 'Death Row Chronicles.' Genuine remorse.

A distant clang, approaching footsteps, and playing shadows jerk us down to peer into the gloom behind the bars directly ahead.

CHAD (V.O.)

Well, 'hotshot.' Your Pulitzer rides on the answer to one question: 'Why?'

From behind Chad, we see in silhouette a second GUARD appear, holding a slight figure above the elbow--CHARLIE DON MORTON, slight, sandy-haired and nondescript. He signals, the bars slide open, and he drags Charlie Don into the light. He looks down at Chad, who's frozen in surprise at the doomed man's denim ordinariness.

CHAD (V.O.)

Too bad for him they didn't
have to pick him out of a
lineup.

A hint of a smile crosses Charlie's face as the guard loosens the waist chains on his wrist manacles.

CHARLIE

You Wilcomb?

Charlie extends his right hand as far as he's capable. We see Chad lurch to his feet and pump his hand self-consciously until Charlie sits.

CHAD

Uh--yeah. Nice to meet you.

Charlie fishes his smokes out of his shirt pocket with practiced difficulty and drops them and his lighter in the table.

CHAD

What's the most memorable
thing about life on E-Block?

Charlie stares impassively at Chad in silence.

CHAD (V.O.)

Jeezus! Great ice-breaker,
Wilcomb!

CHARLIE

The smell. Like nothing out
in the world.

Eyes fixed on Chad, Charlie taps the pack and raises his eyebrows. Chad shakes his head and pushes the ashtray within reach. Charlie lights up and exhales deeply. Smoke coils up around his face.

CHAD
(nervously)
Those things will kill you,
you know.

Charlie throws his head back and roars; Chad grows edgier.

CHARLIE
So will potassium chloride!

Chad pauses to regroup by poising the pencil over the blank sheet of paper.

CHAD
What's your opinion of lethal injection as a method of execution?

CHARLIE
Too clinical. But, that's the point, ain't it? One of the guys on the Row says the jurors who sentence us should be required to beat us to death with clubs.

Chad paradiddles the pencil impatiently, avoiding Charlie's steady gaze.

CHAD
Right. Look, Charlie—I don't usually do business this way. This environment doesn't exactly lend itself to frank discussion. And, you pretty much covered four of the 'Five Double-Yous' over the phone. What do YOU want to talk about?

CHARLIE
How old are you?

CHAD
Twenty-nine. But what—

CHARLIE

Same as me when I done it.
Brothers or sisters?

CHAD

Nope. Just me.

CHARLIE

'Chad' your real name, or
short for somethin'?

CHAD

(sheepish)
'Charles David Wilcomb,
Junior.'

CHARLIE

Me, too—'Charles Donald
Morton, Junior.'

Charlie rotates a thumbnail under his front tooth.

CHARLIE

He around much?

CHAD

Who?

CHARLIE

Your old man.

CHAD

Not really—outside salesman.

CHARLIE

Divorced?

CHAD

My parents? No, but might as
well be.

(reflects)

Dad was on the road and
Mom...Mom started seeing Jack
Daniels.

CHARLIE

Hm. Mine just split. Left me 'n' the bills to the old lady. Ma cut the knot, remarried her two jobs. He called a couple times—birthdays, I think. Didn't say much, even then...

Charlie trails off, then scratches his head and snickers.

CHAD

What's funny?

CHARLIE

Weird thought.

(drags, exhales)

'Home-schooled.' Always makes me think of George Carlin and 'jumbo shrimp.'

CHAD

How's that?

CHARLIE

The whole concept. Parents get pissed 'cause teachers say it ain't their job to teach values, so they yank 'em home—assuming the values are there, or worth a damn. I didn't learn shit, either place—leastways, anythin' I found useful.

Charlie leans onto his elbows and bores in on Chad, whose face flushes.

CHARLIE

Here's how I figure it: From the get-go, there's no open connection. You're an obstacle, not a support. He goes, you take over as her biggest problem. Only thing ties you together is conflict. Forget emotional nourishment. You got a question, a problem? 'Ask your teacher.' 'Go see the counselor.' Talk to the reverend.'

Charlie pauses and tents his fingers; Chad agonizes.

CHARLIE

It's like we're all particles with opposin' charges. Jiggle. Bump. Deflect. Repeat. After a while, you live inside yourself all the time. 'Ask nothin'; expect nothin'.' Conversation becomes a car alarm—either annoys people or scares 'em off. Problem is...the need never dies.

Chad struggles but finds no words. The guard steps forward.

GUARD

Time.

Charlie plants his palms on the table and pushes up.

CHARLIE

Well, Hell. At least they gave us their names, huh? Got any family of your own?

CHAD

(stammers)

Divorced three years. Got a son, Chucky.

Charlie stands and absorbs the guard's roughness as he reattaches the manacles. He turns while being led out.

CHARLIE
You didn't ask me.

CHAD
Huh? What?

CHARLIE
Why I did it.

CHAD
Fair enough. Why?

CHARLIE
I told her I loved her. She
laughed.

CLOSEUP:

Chad's face freezes, his mouth open. Dual silhouettes and bar shadows play across his face. We hear the door clang shut, creating echos.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Chad slips in, kicks the door shut, drops his keys on the table and fumbles for the ringing phone.

CHARLES, SR. (O.S.)
(muffled)
Chad?

Chad's body sags into the wall.

CHAD
H'lo, Dad.

CHARLES, SR. (O.S.)
(muffled)
Just finished my last call,
headed for a client dinner.
Wanted to see how everything
was. How's work?

CHAD

(clipped)

Swamped. Doing a piece on a
guy on Death Row.

CHARLES, SR. (O.S.)

(muffled)

How's my favorite grandson?

CHAD

The one you haven't talked to
in a year? He's great--so am
I. Thanks for asking.

Chucky cries out in his sleep from the second bedroom.
Chad turns; worry seeps through his angry face.

CHARLES, SR. (O.S.)

(muffled)

Is that Chucky? Is he
crying?

CHAD

'Let him cry.' Never hurt
me, did it, Dad?

CHARLES, SR. (O.S.)

(muffled)

Son, I don't know why you
have to be this way. Maybe
if you and Lana had stayed
together--

CLOSEUP:

Faded, black-and-white snapshot of a somber, preschool-
age Chad, sitting in front of his distant-looking
parents.

CHAD

(explodes)

Like you and Mom? Sterling
example--Ozzie an' friggin'
Harriet!

A beat. Chad rolls his eyes and tips the earpiece slightly away from his head. From the earpiece comes muffled sniffing.

CHARLES, SR. (O.S.)
 (muffled-hurriedly)
 Um. Oh--there's my date.
 Well, gotta dash. Take care,
 Son. 'Bye.

Chad bangs down the handset and slaps his hands to his face and rubs it roughly.

CHAD (V.O.)
 Why am I always waiting to
 hear three words he's
 probably never used in the
 same sentence, his whole
 life?

INT. SAN QUENTIN EXECUTION CHAMBER - NIGHT

CHAD'S P.O.V.:

The room: Dark-shellacked risers in an "L" shape, on either side of the exterior entrance, with a like-finished stand-up desk between them. Bare eggshell walls throughout and black, *faux* marble linoleum. The metal, converted gas chamber is painted 'Sea Green' and has five sealed windows shrouded by interior eggshell curtains.

He surveys the others in the witness area.

CHAD (V.O.)
 Okay--seventeen in the media
 pool and 'twelve reputable
 citizens.' Where are
 Charlie's people? No family,
 no friends, no clergy.

CLOSEUP:

Chad's hand covers his mouth.

CHAD (V.O.)

Dear God--Did he not ask his
parents to come, or did they
turn him down?

PULL BACK:

The center window's curtains part. Through it we see
Charlie lying strapped to a padded gurney.

PAN UP:

We see Charlie fidget from above, his left arm by his
side. An attendant affixes and adjusts the second of
two intravenous lines in his extended right arm. We
linger on the lines lying across his wrist

CHAD'S P.O.V.:

Through the standing witnesses, at the other end of the
long room the warden stands by a wall phone. He watches
the wall clock move to 12:01 AM, and confirms it on his
wristwatch. He nods in the direction of the rear of the
chamber.

CHAD (V.O.)

Dean Carter is right. The
only way to make this less
personal would be to bomb him
from thirty thousand feet.

Through the window, Charlie raises his head and searches
for Chad in the darkened room. He meets his eyes and
mouths a short phrase several times, until he is pulled
into unconsciousness.

CLOSEUP:

Chad's mouth moves silently

CHAD

'Love me'?

INT. APARTMENT KITCHEN - NIGHT

Chad slips through the archway into the kitchen, drops his briefcase and reads the Post-It note he takes off the coffeemaker.

CHAD (V.O.)

'Chad: Left after Chucky
asleep. Emergency. Sorry.
Mrs. Sherwatter.'

Chad shrugs. We hear muffled cries off-screen. Chad darts into:

INT. APARTMENT BEDROOM - NIGHT

From above, we watch a restless Chucky moan and fidget, his left arm at his side and his right wrist hanging off the bed, entangled in the cord of the table lamp. Chad enters and freezes.

CHAD'S P.O.V.:

Chucky bolts upright, wide-eyed, and thrusts out his arms.

CHUCKY

Love me, Daddy!

PULL BACK:

Chad drops onto the bed and gathers Chucky into a tight, rocking embrace. Tears come to them both.

CHAD

It's okay. Daddy loves you.
Daddy will *always* love you.

CLOSEUP:

Chad's hand pulls the cordless phone **from the nightstand** up to his face, his thumb dialing.

PULL BACK:

He stands, waiting for a pickup. Chucky is wedged between his arm and neck, peacefully asleep.

LANA (O.S.)
(muffled, drowsy)
Huh-lo?

CHAD
Lana? It's Chad. Can we talk--soon?

LANA (O.S.)
(muffled, wide-awake)
Is this about Chucky?

CHAD
Mostly. Maybe us, too.
(pauses, exhales)
I did love you, you know.

Chad hits the "Flash" button and speed-dials Tim.

CHAD
Tim? Chad. Listen--

TIM (O.S.)
(muffled, sleepy)
Jeezus, Chad. What time is it?

CHAD
I'm going to take some time-starting now.

TIM (O.S.)
(muffled)
Wha'--

FADE OUT.

THE END