

THE OLD MAN AND THE BABY

"Blessed are the meek:
for they shall inherit the earth."

-Matthew 5:5

"Sometimes I feel like my only friend
is the city I live in, the City of Angels.
Lonely as I am, together we cry."

-Anthony Kiedis

OVER AN ESTABLISHING SHOT OF DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES:

As seen from the Griffith Park Observatory, panning across the ultimate urban sprawl from the glittering downtown cityscape to the Pacific.

We hear the SHRIEKING WAIL of one pissed off SIX MONTH OLD BOY. Distant, but powerful enough to elevate the heart rate of anyone unfortunate to be within earshot.

Los Angeles County has roughly 10 million residents. You get the impression this baby's waking every one of them.

INT. AL MEEKS' APARTMENT - NIGHT

Streetlight spill illuminates a cramped two bedroom. Yellowed LA TIMES and dirty t-shirts decorate the space.

The CAMERA DRIFTS OVER the room. Careful not to trip over the empty bottles of BUD and JAMESON littering our path.

PAST A BOMBER JACKET draped over the arm of a couch doubling as a bed. Patches from classic rock tours of yesteryear cover the leather...The Allman Brothers Band. The Who...Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band.

Past the FRAMED SCHOOL PICTURE of an 8 year old boy circa 1976. Beside it, a smaller black and white portrait of a YOUNG MARINE and his BLUSHING BRIDE in 1967.

The baby's cry grows louder as we push towards A MAN OF 68 sprawled over a LA-Z-BOY, one leg reclined while a heavier leg dangles to the floor. A tumbler rests in his hand alongside a handle of Glenlivet in his lap.

This is AL MEEKS, his face weathered from years of hard living. His eyelids flutter, crow's feet crinkling like an infant being woken from a nap.

The cry reaches FEVER PITCH like a human teakettle.

Al's eyes SNAP open. BLOODSHOT. JAUNDICED.

AL
Goddamnit.

The LA-Z-BOY footrest snaps down.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

KELLEIGH (pronounced *Kel-lee*), 36, African-American, paces with her fussy BABY, 5 months, shushing softly in his ear to no avail. Beneath the desperation in her sleepless brown eyes is a luminous woman, slightly unkempt in nurse's scrubs.

KELLEIGH

(shushing)

It's OK. It's OK. Mommy loves you.
Daddy loves you. It's OK.

A quiver trembles the baby's voice. He draws a deep breath, then unleashes a terror scream to contradict Mommy's assurance of things being OK.

Windows passive aggressively SLAM. Loud SHUSHES rain down upon the open air corridor of the apartment complex.

Al's door flies open. The knob CRASHES into the wall, startling Kelleigh and royally pissing off the kid.

AL

Not this shit again.

KELLEIGH

My son is teething.

AL

Your son needs to sack up.

KELLEIGH

He's six months old.

The baby keeps on crying.

AL

And I don't understand why that has to be our problem every damn night of the week. Go inside.

KELLEIGH

I've told you. My husband spends all day with him and I'm trying to get him a little sleep. Too bad you don't sleep as heavy as you drink.

Al scoffs. His sheepish grin let's us know he's buzzed.

AL

I'm not blaming your kid for crying.
I'm blaming you for making us listen
to it when you should be keeping him
indoors like a good mother.

Kelleigh switches from defense to offense. Pissed.

KELLEIGH

How dare you call my parenting
skills into question?

AL

Parenting skills?

KELLEIGH

If you wake my husband, you
shitfaced old bastard---

Kelleigh's door opens, revealing her husband COLTON, 34, Caucasian, bookish, exhausted and non-confrontationally wearing horn-rimmed glasses.

COLTON

Is there a problem, sir?

Al peers past Colton into their apartment.

AL

Yeah. She promised me a husband I
should be afraid of. Is he in there?

Colton pushes his glasses to his bridge.

COLTON

Maybe it's best for Sage to come inside.

Kelleigh shoots her husband a death glare. Colton takes the baby from his wife. Instantly, the crying STOPS. Father and baby head inside.

Kelleigh turns to Al, grinning smugly.

AL

Now, those are parenting skills.

KELLEIGH

Do you have kids?

AL

Just one.

KELLEIGH

Poor bastard.

She slams the door, whipping Al's billowy hair back.

INT. AL MEEKS' APARTMENT - NIGHT

Inside his place, Al leans against the wall, absorbing what she said. Visibly distraught as he rubs his eyes.

CUT TO:

FILING CABINET

Al sits at a desk piled in a decade's worth of receipts.

He fingers through a folder. Stops. Pulls out a LEASE AGREEMENT.

INT. OFFICE - DAWN

Al hits PRINT on his beat-up HP Pavilion desktop.

Eyes the cluster of Polaroids on his wall. A younger, tipsier Al getting chummy with various rock icons.

Elton John. Neil Young. Pete Townshend. The prime space on the wall is reserved for Young Al draping Bruce Springsteen's telecaster around a 10 year old boy's neck. Bruce himself poses with them. A FRAMED 8x11 PIC.

BEEP. BEEP. The paper reload light blinks.

Al checks the tray. Empty. Sifts through scratch paper on the floor. Slides a flyer promoting the lunch buffet at Crazy Girls into the printer.

The printer roars. Al takes a slow sip of whiskey, impressed by his own resourcefulness.

First light breaks over the City of Angels.

CUT TO:

INT. AL MEEKS' MASTER BATHROOM - DAY

Hair combed, stubble gone. Al straightens a bowtie to round out his short sleeve shirt and suspenders.

Picks up his mint green blazer. Notices an Alaska shaped stain on the breast.

AL

Ah hell.

Al looks over his reflection. Not pleased with his ensemble. Self-conscious, he palm covers the BIG RED ONE tattoo on his forearm.

PRELAP:

KNOCK. KNOCK.

EXT. DOORWAY OF APARTMENT - DAY

Decked in his patchwork bomber jacket, Al stands in a doorway, clipboard under his arm. An INTIMIDATING GENTLEMAN answers a reinforced steel security door, puffing his chest to obscure Al's view.

AL

Howdy there. Al Meeks, 208. How are you sleeping?

INTIMIDATING GENTLEMAN

I don't live here.

Standing on his tiptoes, Al glimpses RINCON, 40s, a fatass Tony Montana wannabe vegging out on a chaise lounge with a couple scantily clad, STRINGY LADIES.

AL

What about the master of the house? Is he sleeping?

INTIMIDATING GENTLEMAN

He ain't in and he don't sleep.

AL

Me neither. Whaddayasay we fix that?

INTIMIDATING GENTLEMAN'S POV

Al presents a clipboard. On it, rests a PETITION reading:

IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLE 5.1a OF OUR LEASE AGREEMENT...

EXT. THREE CLUBS - DAY

A retrofitted dive on Santa Monica and Vine. The kind of place where Warren Zevon used to drink.

INT. THREE CLUBS - DAY

A jukebox spins Zevon's "Desperados Under the Eaves".

The interior's been hermetically sealed since 1965 with it's vinyl booths and amber lamps.

Posters on the walls advertise AMATEUR BURLESQUE every Monday night. To Al's credit, he drinks here every day.

Al bellies up to the leather padded bar. The hand of a well-manicured bartender freshens up his tumbler making a ring atop Al's signature filled petition filled.

REBECCA, 40s, Asian-American, a failed singer turned successful bartender whom you can tell from her peasant top wishes she'd been born in the same era as Al, glosses over the petition. Irritated.

REBECCA

You signed my name?

AL

You weren't home.

Rebecca shakes her head, towel drying a copper mug.

AL

You're siding with them? So these transplant hipster shits living out some gentrified fantasy where they pretend LA's Manhattan will take a look at this list and feel a little less welcome. At the very least, they'll keep their screaming baby inside and I'll get to sleep in peace again.

Rebecca knocks the bar for Al to drink. Tosses it back.

REBECCA

You know, the only reason I pour you drinks is to stop your constant vomit of chatter.

Al turns the glass over on the bar, wiping his mouth.

AL

And I tip well.

She smiles, charmed.

REBECCA

Like hell you do.

AL

Whose fault is that? I keep
offering the best screw of your
life and you keep turning me down.

Rebecca scoops up the glass. Washes it.

REBECCA

I have a policy against sleeping
with customers. Especially assholes
who talk like Jimmy Buffett.

Al cracks up.

REBECCA

Seriously though. You're an asshole.

AL

How so?

REBECCA

You're treating a young couple
trying to raise a baby like
they're running a crack house in
your building.

AL

Someone does run a crack house in
my building. And they're much
better neighbors.

REBECCA

You expect me to laugh at what a
smartass iconoclast you are like
you're Harvey Milk or something,
but, no, I won't give you the
satisfaction. It wasn't that long
ago that my little nightmares were
waking me every three hours and
neighbors would passive
aggressively gripe to my landlord.

AL

You have kids?

REBECCA

Yes. That's what we talk about
when we're not talking about you.

Al shakes his glass. *Drinky-drinky.*

Rebecca yanks it from his hand. Fills it with water.
Might as well be poison to Al.

AL
You're right, Beck.

She stops. Genuinely surprised.

REBECCA
Really? You're agreeing with me?

AL
No. I just like the foxy look you
get when you think you're right.

REBECCA
Cross my name off the list.

AL
Don't I get points for showing you?

Rebecca storms off. Al watches her walk away.

REBECCA
Get your ass out of my bar,
Al...And stop staring at mine.

INT. BUILDING MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY

PATRICIA, 40s, appearance Californian and accent
nondescript European, leans on the edge of her desk,
reading through the signature laden petition.

PATRICIA
You really went all out here,
didn't you, Al?

Al stands in the corner, hands clasped at the wrist.

AL
They're a yuppie little hipster
family in a starter apartment.
They'll be gone before that kid's
first birthday party.

Patricia flips over the page, disgusted at the strip club
flyer Al used as scratch paper.

AL
Wanna grab lunch? I know just the
place.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX LOBBY - GOWER - DAY

A STARVING STUDENTS MOVING TRUCK is parked curbside, ramp out. Movers dolly Pottery Barn merch into the trailer.

Heading to the door carrying a grocery bag, Al stops. Colton supervises the movers, holding an oversized rocking horse under his arm.

In navy scrubs, Kelleigh pops out from behind the truck, COOING to her baby, strapped to her body in a carrier.

Al turns the key, rushing into---

THE LOBBY

Balancing the grocery bag, Al hustles to the elevator. Elbowing the buttons, Al impatiently shuffles.

BING. The doors slide. He steps in. Finger over the DOOR CLOSE button when---

KELLEIGH (O.S.)
Hold it, please!

Nervous, Al pushes the button. The doors close when---

KELLEIGH'S ARM blocks their path, forcing them open. Eyes still on her baby, Kelleigh's all smiles.

KELLEIGH
Thank you so much. That was so---

She lifts her head to see Al. All kindness abandons her. Al grins sheepishly.

KELLEIGH
Should've taken the stairs.

The elevator doors seal them in together.

AL
How do you like wearing that
oversized banana hammock?

Kelleigh fixates on her honey pigmented, pale eyed baby. Coaxing a giggle. Tickling his little cheek. The little guy teethes on her Reagan-UCLA Medical Center credential.

AL
(off her credential)
Starting the shift or wrapping it up?

Kelleigh ignores him.

AL

Looks like you guys are picking up stakes.

KELLEIGH

You suck at playing dumb.

Caught. Al switches from charming to defensive remorse.

AL

Look. I just wanted you to follow the same rules of the leasing agreement as the rest of us. No one ever said you had to move.

KELLEIGH

We're not raising our child where he isn't welcome.

AL

You could at least stay to the end of the month. You paid for that, at least.

KELLEIGH

We're eating this month's rent so we can be out by the weekend. That's how badly we want to be away from you.

AL

You already found another place?

KELLEIGH

My husband's uncle lives in Brentwood. We'll stay with them until we find a more kid-friendly place. It's closer to work so you actually did me a favor.

AL

See? Everybody wins.

Kelleigh rolls her eyes. Silence.

They stare ahead. The elevator creaks. Slowly climbing.

KELLEIGH

You live alone? Right, Al?

Al nods.

KELLEIGH

Did you ever think that's because you're a miserable piece of shit pretending to be everyone's friend?

The elevator door opens. Kelleigh and the baby step out.

AL
Everybody around here's gonna miss you guys.

The elevator door closes in front of Al. He just stands there. A grin slowly crossing his face.

INT. AL MEEKS' APARTMENT - DAY

Steam rises off a microwaved Marie Callender meal. Al saws the meat with a fork, blowing on it before taking a bite. A Budweiser longneck completes his balanced lunch.

Through the wall, a shrill SQUEAL catches Al's ear.

The baby GIGGLES. Voices muffled through the wall.

KELLEIGH (O.S.)
(baby voiced)
Is Daddy funny? Daddy's funny, isn't he?

COLTON (O.S.)
(Muppet voiced)
Don't go, Mommy.

Baby loses his shit, cracking up hysterically. The noise bleeds through the front door. Al shovels down another bite of microwave chicken. Heads to the door.

Chewing, Al checks the peephole.

THROUGH THE PEEPHOLE

The door swung open, Kelleigh steps out carrying a messenger bag over her shoulder, dressed to save lives.

Colton stands there, smiling baby in his arms. Drool gleams on the baby's chin.

Al backhand wipes his own chin. Yeesh.

KELLEIGH
(to Colton)
I'll meet you at your uncle's place
after work. I pumped enough for three
feedings in case I pick up an extra
shift again.
(to Baby)
Bye baby. I love you. Bye bye, baby.

She pecks Colton's lips. Kisses baby where his jawline meets his jelly roll neck. He GIGGLES uncontrollably.

BACK ON AL

Al takes all this in. Sadness creeping into every wrinkle on his face. Swigs his beer.

Walks to his vinyl collection. Pulls an album.
THE ALLMAN BROTHERS: LIVE AT FILLMORE EAST.

Those adorable baby noises are killing Al.

PRELAP:

A throbbing bassline rumbles the floor speakers in Al's deluxe Hi-Fi sound system. The album's closing track "Whipping Post" thumps through the needle.

INT. AL MEEKS' APARTMENT - LATER

Empties litter the end table beside Al's La-Z-Boy. He's drinking straight from a bottle of Jack.

Duane Allman and Dickey Betts' dueling guitars perfectly underscore whatever inner demons Al's trying to exorcise.

Al writhes and sings along, reminiscent of John Belushi's Joe Cocker impression. Slurring Gregg Allman's lyrics.

AL
(singing)
*Sometimes I feel... Sometimes I
feel... like I've been tied to the
whipping post.*

Sets his bottle down on top of the speaker. The subwoofer BUMPS. The whiskey wiggles.

A face melting guitar solo BLARES. Al's fingers dance over the imaginary fret, lost in the rock 'n' roll.

Behind him, WHISKEY UNDULATES INTO A TEMPEST, sliding atop the speakers.

The high registry guitar WAIL gives way to a SCREECH.

The needle slides across the grooves, diamond cutting a seismographic jagged line across the record.

CASHIINNNKKKK!!! The whiskey glass SHATTERS.

AL
What the fu---

Before Al can finish turning around, the ground seemingly rises to his knees. The old man stumbles, trying to keep his feet as a LAMP guillotines toward him.

Al hits the deck, rolling. The bulb BURSTS as it hits the hardwood, inches from Al's dome.

It's happening.

THE EARTHQUAKE THAT EVERY CALIFORNIAN KNOWS IS COMING, BUT PRAYS NEVER DOES...*It's happening.*

The Jack Daniels bottle HURDLES to the ground. Al juts back the other direction.

Al tries to reach his base, looking up as picture frames flake off the wall.

He's trembling against the floor like popcorn in a pan. For the first time ever, we see fear in Al's eyes. A situation he can't bullshit his way out of.

Al clings to the leg of an oversized oak table, pulling himself under it as a---

CLEAR CHANNEL BILLBOARD cleaves his bedroom from his living room/kitchenette.

The phrase "IS YOUR FAMILY PREPARED?" taunts Al on the glorified scaffolding.

Al wraps his arms around his head, balling himself up in the fetal position as the whole room rumbles for---

TEN INTERMINABLE SECONDS.

His breathing quickens. Doors swing open.

The wall to floor mirror above the table shatters.

Shards carpetbomb Al's dinner table. Bouncing against the floor, baptizing Al in broken glass. Al yells, scratched.

AL
(muttering)
Please God. Please God. Not yet.

THE TEMBLOR REACHES FEVER PITCH. The La-Z-Boy CRASHES INTO Al's table, having slid across the room. Sprinklers are tripped, raining precious freshwater over the space.

And just like that...*The shaking stops.* The building sways. Still pulsing.

The screech of twisted metal as the building settles.

Al crawls out from his table. Peeks his head into his office as---

THE CEILING OPENS UP in the adjacent room.

A STAIRMASTER crashes from above, cracking through the center of his office and smashing into the lower unit.

AL
Sonuvabitch!

Al leaps back under the table.

The earth stands still. Sprinklers keep pissing precious water over his apartment. Al's ears prick up.

Above the distant car alarms, moaning victims...

A DESPERATE, SCROTUM TIGHTENING SCREAM.

The baby...

Al's face falls.

AL
ANYBODY?!?

Al rises, cautious. Treads lightly. Not trusting the ground beneath his feet as the floorboards creak.

He steps into---

THE HALLWAY

AL
Jesus Christ.

We turnaround to reveal---

Three quarters of the four story apartment complex REDUCED TO RUBBLE. The hallway from when he first argued with the baby's mother is in RUINS.

Frozen, Al absorbs the carnage. In the distance... *CHOPPER ROTORS, first responder SIRENS, CRIES for help.*

But only one cry matters.

Al follows the sob of a terrified infant. Ventures inside-

KELLEIGH AND COLTON'S APARTMENT

His footsteps soft as if walking on eggshells. The living room/kitchenette are bare from the family's move out. That didn't stop their wall from collapsing completely.

The CRY GROWS LOUDER. Coming from the bedroom.

Crossing the threshold, Al stops at what he sees.

COLTON'S OUTSTRETCHED ARMS. Lifeless beneath concrete slabs with twisted rebar and splintered plywood.

The baby cries louder, but is nowhere in sight.

Al checks Colton's pulse. Nothing. He's gone. No sign of Kelleigh. Must still be working at the hospital.

AL

Hey...

(trying to recall
Kelleigh's name)

Neighbor girl? You here?

The baby kicks his sobbing up double-time.

Al scans the room. His eyes trace where Colton's hands are pointing...the space beneath an armoire.

There lies THE BABY, completely unharmed. Clutching a teddy bear blanket for comfort. Terrified beyond belief.

Al reaches for the baby, sliding him free. Looking him over for wounds. He's safe, but sobbing uncontrollably.

AL

Anybody?!? HEELLLLLP!??!

(waits)

This kid's scared shitless here.

No response.

Al's hand rests on baby's stomach, rocking him gently.

AL

No, no, no.

The baby takes no comfort in this. Tears cooling his fiery red apple cheeks.

Al brushes the tears from his face. As his hand recoils, the baby snatches his finger. Gripping tightly.

INSTANTLY, THE CRYING STOPS.

Al looks down. His fingertip reddens as baby's knuckles whiten around it. His eyes meet the baby's. A stare down.

His face pleading: *Don't let go. Don't let go.*

Al starts to pull away, but the baby's grip tightens.

AL
I can't. I'm sorry.

The baby's piercing green eyes plead to Al.

AL
Ah, what the hell?

The aging man scoops the child in his arms.

In quick succession, Al snags one of Kelleigh's business cards. The diaper bag. Formula from the fridge.

Baby in tow, Al heads for the door. Stops. Turns back to Colton's dead hands. Checks his wedding band. Al slides the ring off Colton's finger and onto his own pinky.

INT. AL MEEKS' APARTMENT - DUSK

The day's last light shrouds the room in silhouette. Sprinklers drip. Pots and pans are full of potable water.

Electric lantern lighting the way, Al rummages through his closet. Baby pinned under his arm, tiny legs dangling. He props the kid up against his diaper bag.

Al tosses the closet's contents. Searching.

Behind him, baby's lip quivers. Fussing. Cries starting.

Al turns back. SHUSHING to no avail. He scoops the baby in his arms. That does it. *The baby mellows.*

Like defusing an IED, Al cautiously sets down the baby. This time, the kid starts crying instantly.

Al ignores him, returns to his rummaging. Tosses aside wrecked shoeboxes and dated suits to uncover---

AL'S EARTHQUAKE KIT...

10 GALLONS OF ARROWHEAD WATER. TWO WEEKS' SUPPLY OF CHUNKY SOUP. MAGLITES.

The cries veer toward tantrum, breaking Al's concentration. He opens a lockbox revealing a .45 Magnum and an apocalyptic supply of ammo.

More importantly, a BOOMBOX.

Al pulls the radio out amid the baby's shrieks. He hovers over the baby, staring him down. Downright pissed.

AL
Why? Why? WHYYYYY all the goddamn crying?

The baby just AAAAHS.

AL
What a chickenshit answer. A lot of people's daddies died today. You see them bawlin' like little pudwhacks?

Baby HOWLS. APOPLECTIC. Al stands up, bouncing with the baby like his mother did in the first scene. It calms him a little.

AL
Please God...Jesus...Allah, Buddha, whatever demigod's watching over you, please shut this kid's mouth!

The laugh becomes a GIGGLE.

AL
That's funny?!?

Baby CHUCKLES again. His little hand HONKS Al's nose. The old man has no choice but to laugh along at his victory.

AL
Well, 50 million Elvis fans can't be wrong.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Above the moonlit courtyard, Al cautiously emerges from his apartment. A carrier supports the baby, sleeping to the rhythm of Al's racing heart.

Sirens echo on the breeze. Al is more focused on the creaking floor beneath every step. He reaches a clearing. He gazes towards the scrap heap that was once Rebecca's Apartment.