

LOW ROAD

Written by

Jas Lonquist

310/927-4349
Jas@writtenbyjas.com

FADE IN:

EXT. EAST SAN JOSE STREETS - DAY - 1995

Run down store fronts. Used car lots. Taquerias. A gold 1951 Buick LOWRIDER slowly cruises past a "NO CRUISING" sign.

The car's mirror-finish glistens in the sun.

Dayton hubcap spinners whirl like golden roulette wheels.

The license plate reads "14CARAT."

INT. 14CARAT - DAY

The proud driver is CARLOS, 22, a handsome Latino, his face alive with excitement. RUDY, 26, rougher, rides shotgun.

RUDY

Turn here.

CARLOS

Okay, check this out.

Carlos taps the turn signal - a gold-plated dagger - and downshifts with a skull-shaped stick. Grinning, he turns the steering wheel, a thick chain.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

A fine ride, eh? And *firme* suspension. Watch this.

Carlos hits some switches.

EXT. EAST SAN JOSE STREETS - DAY

Carlos cruises "dropped on the side" - the front left wheel a foot off the ground.

INT. 14CARAT - DAY

Rudy clutches the dashboard.

RUDY

Cut it out. This car is too noticeable already.

CARLOS

That's the way to roll - noticeable, man, noticeable!

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

Carlos and Rudy get out of the car. Carlos whips out a handkerchief and polishes the finish.

CARLOS
See this paint job? Custom. Check
out the hydros.

Carlos proudly opens the trunk. Rudy looks inside.

CARLOS (CONT'D)
Four pumps, four dumps, and double
whammies!

Rudy slams the trunk. He holds two SAWED-OFF SHOTGUNS. He tosses one to Carlos.

RUDY
I still say she's too noticeable.

Smiling happily, Carlos pulls on a ski mask.

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

14CARAT squeals around a corner, six POLICE CARS in hot pursuit, SIRENS screaming.

INT. 14CARAT - DAY

Rudy drives. Carlos, rocking with pain, holds his bleeding thigh, the shotgun across his lap.

RUDY
(glances over)
You ain't that bad.

CARLOS
Why'd you shoot the guy? You
didn't have to!

RUDY
We need to lay low for awhile.
Where's your money from last time?
The locker?

Carlos painfully nods.

RUDY (CONT'D)
And the key?

CARLOS
It's hid.

RUDY
Where?

CARLOS
Where I hid it.

Rudy grabs the shotgun and rams it into Carlos' wounded thigh. Carlos SCREAMS in pain.

RUDY
WHERE?

CARLOS
What are you doing, *vato*? It's...
it's buried. Buried by Elaine's
shed. I'll get it when this is
over.

Rudy points the gun at Carlos' head.

RUDY
It's over now, *ese*. Get out.

Carlos stares at him, disbelieving.

CARLOS
Don't joke with me.

Rudy jabs Carlos hard with the gun.

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

Carlos tumbles from the racing car. The police cars brake hard, swerving to avoid his rolling body. As the cars squeal to a stop, OFFICERS leap out, SHOUTING, guns drawn.

Carlos, battered and bloody, lurches to his knees, hands raised in surrender.

The police slam him to back the pavement and cuff him. Carlos painfully turns his face toward his car.

Sun glints on the gold paint as it speeds away.

INT. ARBOLEDA APARTMENT - CRAMPED KITCHEN - DAY

INSERT TITLE - "TWELVE YEARS LATER"

EDUARDO ARBOLEDA (EDDIE), 16, pours over the classified ads. He's good-looking, athletic, smart. But life hasn't been easy. He's guarded, braced for the next blow.

Next to him, devouring her breakfast, is MAGDALENA ARBOLEDA (MAGGIE), 14. She's a rebel, growing into her looks and out of her plaid school uniform. She's in a WHEELCHAIR loudly decorated *a la* adolescent girl.

EDDIE

Speed it up. If I'm late I'll get detention and miss track sign-ups.

Eddie leaves. Maggie hollers after him.

MAGGIE

You're not the boss of me, loser!

ROSARIA (MOM) rushes in, musters a tired smile. She peels off her coat revealing an embarrassing waitress uniform - puffy sleeves, ruffles, what a Bavarian hooker might wear to a pancake house. She's Latina, 36, pretty, but too thin. Unlike her kids, she has a strong Hispanic accent.

ROSARIA

Sorry I'm late. Where's Eddie?

MAGGIE

Goofing off. He never helps.

ROSARIA

Call him, *por favor*.

Maggie wheels to the doorway.

MAGGIE

EDDIE! MOM SAYS GET YOUR STANK LAZY BUTT OUT HERE OR SHE'LL KILL YOU WITH HER BARE HANDS!

(off Rosaria's frown)

I added some stuff.

Eddie returns carrying a pair of battered sneakers. He painstakingly repairs the sole of one shoe with duct tape.

ROSARIA

Any cars in the paper today?

EDDIE

I need more money. If I could just get a job after school--

ROSARIA
I need you to take Maggie on the
bus after school.

MAGGIE
(with scorn)
All aboard the shame train!

ROSARIA
I've asked you not to call it that.
A lot of people ride the bus.
Decent, hard-working people.

MAGGIE
Hard work smells bad.

EDDIE
Hey, Mom, track starts today. The
coach says--

ROSARIA
Let me get changed first.

Rosaria leaves. Maggie picks up a cookie sheet, studies her reflection. She pulls her school uniform from her shoulders and admires the result.

MAGGIE
Flirtatious, yet fun.

EDDIE
It looks lame. Besides, you have a
dress code.

MAGGIE
There's nothing wrong with bare
shoulders. Everyone has them.

EDDIE
Everyone has a bare butt, too, but
they don't go around with it
hanging out.

Maggie picks up the cornflakes box, aims it at Eddie, and slaps the bottom. Flakes shower over him. Rosaria returns, now in a sweater and jeans.

ROSARIA
Maggie, stop it!

MAGGIE
Eddie called me lame.

EDDIE

I did not!

ROSARIA

Just cut it out! Stop teasing!
Start eating! Stop... just stop!

Eddie and Maggie exchange looks, guilty. Eddie pours a cup of coffee, hands it to Rosaria.

MAGGIE

So! How was work?

ROSARIA

Okay, I guess. I just thought tips would be better on the night shift.

MAGGIE

Mom, a little advice? Want more tips, show more...

She tugs on the front of her school uniform and points meaningfully to her bosom. Rosaria slams down her coffee.

ROSARIA

(scandalized)

Magdalena!

EXT. ARBOLEDA APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Rosaria, Eddie, and Maggie walk and roll out the door of a run-down multiplex. Each carries a book bag.

ROSARIA

And that reminds me - Mr. Dutch called. He said you were using filthy language at HandiCans.

MAGGIE'

Not, well... I used 'powerful' words. Like in modern poems.

EDDIE

And public toilets.

ROSARIA

You're a lovely girl, why do you hide behind ugly words?

MAGGIE

I hate that place! No wonder I can't stop myself from using powerful language.

ROSARIA

You can't stop yourself. In life, you choose. You can take the high road or you can take the low road. But they don't end up in the same place.

MAGGIE

I can't take any road! I'm the only teenager in the world who has to go to an 'after-school program.'

EDDIE

Mom, about track--

ROSARIA

(to Magdalena)

Please just try. Be responsible like your brother. He'll pick you up right after school.

MAGGIE

So much for independent living!

Rosaria hands Eddie a piece of paper.

ROSARIA

After you drop Maggie off, get groceries, okay? Here's the list. Then you can go play track.

EDDIE

Mom, you can't just show up when you want. You have to be there for the entire practice.

ROSARIA

The coach will understand *familia* comes first. And this is how it has to be until I finish school.

A battered Volvo, belching smoke, pulls up to the curb.

ROSARIA (CONT'D)

Here. For the groceries.

She hands him some coupons - vouchers from a charity food bank. Embarrassed, Eddie quickly crams them in his pocket. He opens the car door.

ROSARIA (CONT'D)

Eduardo?
(vulnerable)
Gracias, Mijo.

Eddie nods, resigned, and ducks into the car.

INT. THE VOLVO - DAY

The driver, VU, 16, Vietnamese, cheerful, a likable nerd, holds a Pop Tart in his mouth as they pull out into traffic.

VU
(around pop tart)
Diyufinicac?

EDDIE
Did I finish what?

JAMES, 16, African American, laid back, reads a science fiction magazine and drinks from a bucket-sized Big Gulp.

JAMES
Calc. That's due today? Dude.

James pulls a crumpled paper from his backpack and works rapidly, solving complex problems with ease.

EXT. BUSY STREET CORNER - DAY

Vu's car stops at a red light in the left turn lane. A red BMW convertible pulls up behind and is quickly enveloped in noxious smoke from Vu's faulty exhaust.

In the convertible, ROB POLANSKI, 16, scowls and fans the air. DANYA PARISH, 16, head-to-toe flawless, coughs.

INT. VU'S CAR - DAY

Vu watches in the rear view mirror.

VU
Yeah, Rob Polanski, eat my exhaust.

EDDIE
What'd he ever do to earn that sweet ride? Or a babe like her?

JAMES
Dude has money. Money gets car.
Car gets woman.

VU
(wistfully)
I have a car. Maybe you missed a step.

EXT. BUSY STREET CORNER - DAY

The light turns green. Vu's car belches smoke and dies, blocking the left turn lane. HORNS immediately blare.

INT. VU'S CAR - DAY

Vu frantically tries to start it. Nothing.

JAMES
Not again!

EXT. BUSY STREET CORNER - DAY

Eddie and James jump out to push Vu's car, but the light changes to yellow.

Behind them, in the convertible, Rob slams his hand on the HORN. Danya covers her ears and glares at him.

ROB
Move that pile of crap!

The light turns red. Traffic flows. James shrugs and resumes his calc. Eddie leans on the fender, studies Danya.

INT. ROB'S CAR - DAY

Danya notices Eddie eyeing her. She smiles slightly.

ROB
What's he staring at?

DANYA
If you don't want people staring,
quit honking the horn.

EXT. BUSY STREET CORNER - DAY

The light turns green. Eddie and James brace to push.

EDDIE
On three. One, two...

Eddie and James strain against the car.

The duct tape repair on Eddie's shoe rips loose as he pushes. His other shoe gets tangled in the tape and he stumbles.

When Vu's car rolls to the curb, Eddie crashes face-first on the street. Rob's convertible races toward him.

Still tangled, Eddie scrambles aside. The convertible veers, spraying Eddie with gravel. He crawls to the curb.

Eddie angrily rips the duct tape from his shoe, then fights to free his hands from the sticky mess.

JAMES

Dude, you okay?

EDDIE

Yes. But I'm not taking detention.
Not for this.

Eddie leaps up and bounces lightly on his feet.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

It's what, two miles?

VU

You have eleven minutes.

JAMES

I got your books. Later.

Eddie takes off running, totally focused. He runs efficiently, with perfect form. His measured breathing merges with the thump of CHICANO RAP.

Eddie's ripped sneakers slam the pavement.

He runs past the taquerias.

Through an alley. Over a garbage can. Toward a run-down *mercado*.

The OWNER, in a white apron, sees Eddie coming. He quickly grabs a can of JUMEX and slaps it into Eddie's hand as he runs past.

Still running, Eddie shakes the juice twice, pounds it down, and tosses the can in a recycle bin.

The store owner grins as Eddie disappears around a corner.

Eddie runs across railroad tracks, past a construction area with a sign announcing a Silicon Valley high-rise.

Eddie races toward the school parking lot.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - DAY

Eddie slows to a walk, panting. Danya and Rob pass him in the convertible.

DANYA
(calls to Eddie)
Wow! Hope you're out for track.

Breathing hard, Eddie grins at her.

ROB
Did you run that fast across the border?

Eddie whips angrily toward Rob. The convertible roars away.

INT. PRISON - DAY

Carlos, older now, and rougher, punches numbers on a pay phone. Two other PRISONERS wait in line behind him.

CARLOS
Elaine! Good news. They're raisin' me up early.

INT. ELAINE'S KITCHEN - DAY

ELAINE, 30s, clutches the phone. She's on edge, jumpy.

ELAINE
They're letting you out already?

A five-year old BOY pulls on her arm, nagging for attention. She drags him to the window, looks out.

EXT. ELAINE'S HOUSE - DAY

KIDS play and SCREAM by a battered SHED in the backyard. The roof is caved in and moldy.

INT. PRISON - DAY

The two prisoners in line are growing impatient.

CARLOS
Already? It's been twelve years.
Lucky I got good behavior. Listen--

PRISONER 1
Give it up. We're waiting.

CARLOS
My cars in the shed, right? Good.
(darkly)
What about that *cayado*, Rudy?

INT. ELAINE'S KITCHEN - DAY

Elaine bites her lip.

ELAINE
Rudy? I haven't seen him. Not for
about...

She nervously looks at the five-year old.

ELAINE (CONT'D)
...five years now.

The other kids rush noisily into the kitchen.

ELAINE (CONT'D)
Someone's at the door. Gotta go.

She hangs up, full of dread.

EXT. ELAINE'S HOUSE - BACK YARD - DAY

Elaine, carrying a notebook, picks her way to the shed. The yard is riddled with HOLES - evidence of Rudy's search for the key. Broken spades and shovels rust among the weeds.

INT. SHED - DAY

The door creaks open. Sunlight pierces the dusty air and falls on a large object covered by a stained, torn tarp.

Elaine drags the tarp away. Gold flakes whirl through the air like dime store glitter.

The license plate still reads "14CARAT." But the car is in terrible shape. Paint has crackled and flaked revealing dirty, orange primer. One door is crumpled. The hood is bowed. The spinners are covered in rust.

Elaine props her notebook on the hood and writes.

ELAINE
'Buick sedan. Gold.'

She brushes lightly at the hideous orange primer.

ELAINE (CONT'D)
Or what's that one? Umber.

INT. 14CARAT - DAY

Elaine turns the key in the ignition. Nothing.

ELAINE
(writes)
'Runs good.'

She glances up.

A St. Christopher statue stares accusingly from the dash.

ELAINE (CONT'D)
I'll get it tuned up!
(quickly writes)
'Priced to sell. Owner moving.'

EXT. SCHOOL - TRACK FIELD - DAY

The TRACK TEAM jogs around the track. Eddie, James, and Vu trudge past the field toward the parking lot. Vu plays a video game, feverishly working buttons.

JAMES
(re: the video game)
Watch out. On your six.

COACH KESEY, 40s, a bulldog, sprints up to them.

COACH KESEY
ARBOLEDA! Why aren't you suited
up?

EDDIE
I can't stay, Coach.

COACH KESEY
Whaddya mean you 'can't stay?'

EDDIE
I got a family thing. My sister--

COACH KESEY
You kids today are so lazy it's
disgusting.