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A Ballad of Dixie Rae Blackwater and Other Tales

Jessica Wimmer

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THE BALLAD OF DIXIE RAE BLACKWATER

AND OTHER TALES

by

Jessica Wimmer

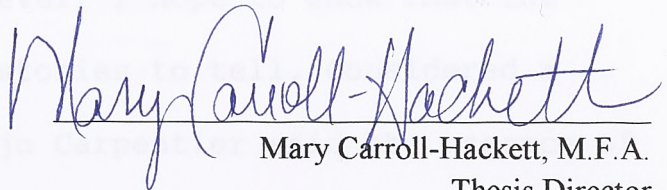
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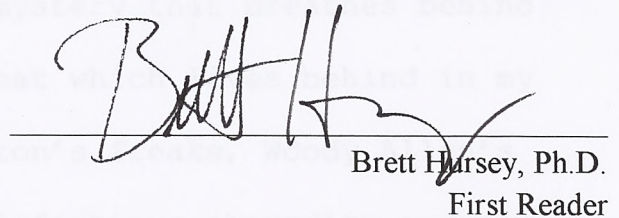
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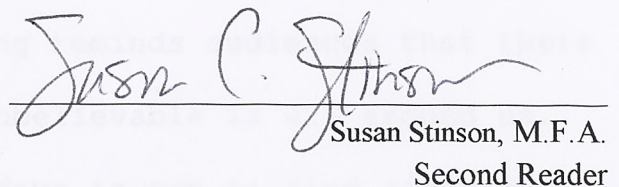
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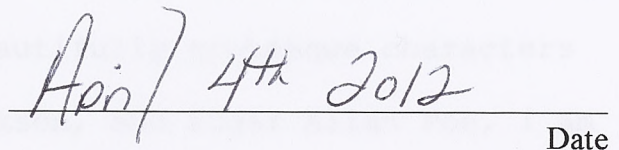
Department of English and Modern Languages

April 2012


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Jessica Wimmer. THE BALLAD OF DIXIE RAE BLACKWATER AND OTHER TALES. (Under the direction of Mary Carroll-Hackett.) Department of English and Modern Languages. April 2012.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the ways people cope with being labeled an outsider. As a result of this purpose, themes such as cultural identity, mystical curiosity, and self-empowerment are also explored. *The Ballad of Dixie Rae Blackwater and Other Tales* is made up of six screenplays that feature characters who, whether they realize or not, are disconnected from society and its norms, and therefore are pushed into the background. However, I hope to show that the overlooked often have the best stories to tell. Considered a magical realism forefather, Alejo Carpentier said the essence of magical realism is "to seize the mystery that breathes behind things," and I strive to expose that which lives behind in my writing. I am inspired by Tim Burton's freaks, Woody Allen's neurotics, and Charlie Kaufman's infectious absurdity and never-ending possibilities. Their writing reminds audiences that there is no black and white, that the unbelievable is all around us. That mystery is what Alberta Bluedove is out to find after a childhood of being the odd girl out in my screenplay *The Bluedove Girl*. And through the beautifully grotesque characters of Flannery O'Connor, Shirley Jackson, and Edgar Allan Poe, I am

reminded that the most interesting human thoughts and experiences can happen in the quietest of moments. In *Barnabus and the Gnome*, Barnabus makes a garden gnome his son as an effect of the loneliness he feels from having no one to walk by him in the universe. My title screenplay *The Ballad of Dixie Rae Blackwater* features a woman, Dixie, who knows what it's like to be overlooked, and she recognizes a young man on the verge of uprooting the peace with which he's been blessed. Dixie does a little cleverly-guided storytelling to prevent him from choosing to go down a road he'll end up alone on, and she thankfully succeeds. Though they are flawed, all of these characters are strong, and their determination to chase what "breathes behind things" helps them find their way. These characters are my kin, and they are who I work to put on paper. Each is on a journey to carve out his or her home in the universe. With these characters by my side, I hope to carve my own.

Acknowledgments

Dedicated to all the oddballs, and to Conrad Burton for relentlessly supporting this one.

Special thanks to my childhood friends, Susan Blum, Brett
Stacy, and my fellow workshop companions for their help and
encouragement throughout this process. And thank you to everyone who
helped me figure out who I am. Without which, I would not have
had these stories on paper.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank Mary Carroll-Hackett, Susan Stinson, Brett Hursey, and my fellow workshop companions for their help and guidance throughout this process. And thank you to everyone who helped me figure out who I am. Without which, I would not have put these stories on paper.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Ballad of Dixie Rae Blackwater.....	1
The Man in the Pork Pie Hat.....	14
Shade.....	38
Barnabus and the Gnome.....	66
The Bluedove Girl.....	85
A Day in the Life of Roger Ramone.....	108

The Ballad of Dixie Rae Blackwater
and Other Tales

By

Jessica Wimmer

DIXIE
THE BALLAD OF DIXIE RAE BLACKWATER

EXT. RURAL ROADSIDE - DAY

A thin woman, DIXIE (22), stands by the roadside. Fiery hair caught in the wind, she makes eye contact, throws up her hand like she needs a ride.

A rusty Chevy pulls off the side of the road just in front of her.

Dixie picks up a shoebox and trash bag, walks toward the car.

INT. CAR

REECE (19) sits behind the wheel of the car, reaches over and opens the passenger door for Dixie. She ducks her head down to see him.

REECE
Where you trying to go?

She shrugs, tucks her hair behind her ear.

DIXIE
As far as you'll take me.

His hand motions for her to get in. She stuffs the trash bag into the back seat. He moves a few things to make room.

REECE
You can sit that shoebox back there.

DIXIE
I can hold it.

She gets in the car, shoebox on her lap, slams the door shut.

Reece pulls back onto the road, doesn't fail to notice how short her shorts are. Dixie catches him, smiles.

He whips his attention back to the road.

REECE
What's your name?

She eyes him up and down.

DIXIE

Dixie. Yours? *Dixie is held that
against you. They look like the*

REECE *who just care about*

Reece.

DIXIE *like he's embarrassed.*

Where you headed, Reece?

He shakes his head. *Reece. Just say too much.*

REECE *bit of envy.*

Don't really know to be honest.

He clears *throat.* Just trying to get away.

Dixie looks nervous. *REECE*

DIXIE *he has. gotta be a*

Tryin' to get away from what?

He LAUGHS. *DIXIE*

REECE *the scenery.*

Oh, no. Nothing like that. Just got

She opens *mouth.* mad at my folks. Had to get away *station.*

from home for a while. Just been

driving. *DIXIE*

Relieved, she nods. *Can you stop up there? I gotta pee.*

DIXIE

That them?

She points to a photograph strapped to his visor of him in cap and gown between happy parents. *spot. Dixie jumps out,
goes into the ladies bathroom on the side of the store.*

REECE

INT. CAR Yeah. That was probably the last

day they were happy with me.

Reece eyes the truck log and smokes, cleans up some of the

Dixie turns to him a little. *finds some gas, puts stick in his mouth. He smooths his*

DIXIE *hair and shirt, and her return. She gets back in the*

What makes you say that?

REECE

Well, I was supposed to go to a big

college, get a good job. But I

She smiles *at him.* started having a little too much

fun, and now I'm just helping a guy

fix AC units for not a lot of

money. Parents are real proud.

She looks out the window, excited.

DIXIE

They look too nice to hold that
against you. They look like the
kind of parents who just care about
you.

He smiles, shakes his head like he's embarrassed.

REECE

They are nice. Just nag too much.

She glances him over with a bit of envy.

He clears his THROAT.

REECE

What about you? You got all your
stuff in a garbage bag. Gotta be a
story there.

DIXIE

(coy)

Just out enjoying the scenery.

She notices that they're approaching a gas station.

DIXIE

Can you stop up there? I gotta pee.

REECE

Yeah. No problem.

EXT. RURAL GAS STATION

Reece pulls the car into a parking spot. Dixie jumps out,
goes into the trashy bathroom on the side of the store.

INT. CAR

Reece eyes the trash bag and shoebox, cleans up some of the
trash in his floorboard. He rifles through his console,
finds some gum, puts a stick in his mouth. He smooths his
hair and shirt, anticipates her return. She gets back in the
car.

DIXIE

Better.

She smiles.

REECE

You good?

She looks out the window, excited.

DIXIE
Yeah. Let's drive.

He CRANKS the car.

INT. CAR - LITTLE LATER

Dixie watches the trees go by as Reece drives. They pass a church and see a gathering of people exiting.

REECE
Nice day for the Easter service.

Dixie stares ahead, looks like her thoughts traveled far away.

DIXIE
My daddy was a preacher. My granddaddy, too.

REECE
Oh, yeah? That must've been nice.

DIXIE
My daddy hit me sometimes.

Reece looks like he just swallowed a quarter.

DIXIE
My granddaddy wasn't very nice either. Would throw chairs at my granny if she even looked at him the wrong way.

She breaks her stare and looks over at him.

DIXIE
And then one day she caught him messing with me when I was little, and he knocked her out so hard she never woke up.

Reece's eyes look surprised.

Dixie places her hand on her necklace as if it has meaning to her.

REECE
I'm sorry to hear that.

He looks uncomfortable, like he doesn't enjoy her company anymore.

DIXIE

Those things happen sometimes.

He nods.

INT. CAR - DOWN THE ROAD

Dixie watches Reece walk out of a small diner carrying to-go boxes and cups. He munches on a french fry.

She spots a MOTHER (30s) and FATHER (30s) swinging their LITTLE GIRL (4) by the hands between them as they walk out of the diner.

Dixie looks sad. She snaps out of it when Reece opens the car door and gets in.

He hands the food over to Dixie who opens the bags on top of the shoebox in her lap.

DIXIE

Thanks. I just didn't feel like going inside.

REECE

It's all right.

DIXIE

Did your parents ever do stuff like that with you?

She points back towards the parents.

He looks out the window at them, then back to Dixie.

REECE

Yeah, when I was little. Why?

She smiles, sad, and shakes her head. She gives him a peck on the cheek, as if to turn over a new leaf in the conversation, runs her fingers through his hair.

He looks taken aback, but in a great way. He sits a little straighter, CRANKS the car.

Dixie eyes an ATTRACTIVE MAN (30s) walking through the parking lot.

DIXIE

(almost purring)

Hope he's going our way.

Reece looks at the man, then back to Dixie like she punched him in the stomach.

REECE

That's your type?

She smiles.

DIXIE

I've had a lot of types.

He nods, pulls onto the road.

REECE

Had a lot of boyfriends?

DIXIE

Yeah.

She puts a french fry in her mouth, looks out the window.

REECE

I've only had one real girlfriend.

Dixie turns to him.

DIXIE

What happened?

REECE

Just gave me that same bull about growing up, getting a real life. She was nice, though. And pretty.

He looks to see if Dixie's jealous. She isn't.

REECE

Why so many boyfriends? A girl that looks like you probably has the pick of the litter. You still haven't found that right one?

She picks at a cheeseburger in a to-go box.

DIXIE

(nonchalant)

Well, my first boyfriend started hitting me when I was fourteen, and I already got enough of that from my daddy, so I had to get rid of him.

She wipes her mouth.

DIXIE

And then my second and third left me after I got pregnant.

Reece gets that swallowed quarter look again.

REECE

You've got kids?

She looks down.

DIXIE

No.

He looks sorry he asked, sips his drink. She takes a deep breath.

DIXIE

My fourth went to jail. Fifth hit me. Sixth ran away with my TV. Seventh ran away with my mama.

Reece stares straight ahead, waits for it to be over.

DIXIE

And then the eighth started hittin' me, too. Put me in the hospital for a week almost.

She wipes her hands, turns to face him.

DIXIE

I would've been real happy with a boy like you.

Reece looks at her, smiles, flattered. His confidence perks back up.

REECE

Really?

DIXIE

Yeah. You're nice.

REECE

(hesitant)

Do you have a guy now?

Dixie spots a pawn shop through the windshield.

DIXIE

Pull in right there!

Surprised, Reece hits the breaks, whips the car into a spot in front of the shop.

Dixie goes inside with the shoebox.

Reece watches her through the shop's window. He eyes her up and down, then eyes the trash bag again. He lays his head back on the headrest, grins like she's the most exciting thing that's happened in a while.

Dixie returns.

DIXIE

Sorry. Needed some money.

Reece looks down at the shoebox she sits between them.

REECE

Oh. Did you sell what was in the box?

She looks surprised. He continues to drive.

DIXIE

Oh, God, no. My wedding ring.

Reece looks like she slapped him.

REECE

You're married?

DIXIE

Kinda.

REECE

Kinda?

DIXIE

Yeah.

He swallows that information.

REECE

So, what's in the box?

Dixie looks at the box.

DIXIE

A parting gift.

REECE

From home?

DIXIE

If that's what you wanna call it.

REECE

Where is home?

DIXIE

Where is your home, Reece?

REECE

I still live with my parents.
Embarrassing, but we've got a real
pretty farm and it's nice and
quiet. Good meal every night.

She nods like she suspected as much.

REECE

Your turn.

Dixie SIGHS.

DIXIE

When my mama and daddy were
together we lived in a trailer out
in Georgia 'til it burned down.
Then we went and lived with my
grandparents until I was about
thirteen, but that's when my granny
died and we moved again. For a
while I lived with different
boyfriends because I couldn't be
around my daddy.

Reece grips the steering wheel tighter.

DIXIE

And for about the past year I've
lived with my husband.

She catches herself.

DIXIE

Well, ex-husband.

A police car's lights and SIRENS come up a little ways
behind them. Dixie looks back, nervous.

DIXIE

Go!

Reece looks scared, unsure.

REECE

What?

DIXIE

Trust me. Hit the gas!

REECE

I --

DIXIE

-- Reece, you don't wanna pull over. I'm serious.

Reece speeds up, jerks the wheel into a side street at the last minute.

He cuts his lights off. Dixie ducks in the seat.

The car passes them without stopping. Reece grabs his chest.

DIXIE

Not us, I guess.

REECE

(flustered)

What the hell was that about?

DIXIE

I thought they were trying to pull us over.

REECE

Pull us over for what?

He looks over at her. She looks down at the box.

REECE

What? Did you steal something?

She shakes her head.

DIXIE

Reece, you're a nice boy, so I'm gonna tell you something.

She pauses. Reece gestures for her to spit it out.

DIXIE

My husband got a little too friendly with a girl I worked with. I told him last night I wasn't having it anymore.

She takes a deep breath.

DIXIE

We got to fighting and he said he wouldn't have to go to anybody else if I was worth anything.

Reece looks away.

DIXIE

So when he went to sleep, I shot him. Put my favorite couch pillow over his head and shot right through it four times, just to be sure.

He whips his head toward her.

REECE

Bullshit.

Offended, she puts her hand on the box.

DIXIE

I've got proof.

He sits for a moment, then flings his car door open, gets out, SLAMS it behind him.

EXT. ROADSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Upset, Reece paces in front of the car.

Dixie opens the passenger door, gets out, stands behind the door.

DIXIE

You asked what was in it.

REECE

No. I don't wanna hear anymore stories about how your daddy and your granddaddy were mean, or how your boyfriends are crazy. No more stories about killing your husband and whatever you've got in that box. No more stories about your crazy life. Who tells a person all this stuff right after meeting him?

She looks straight at him, rests her arms on the door, her head on her arms.

DIXIE
 Not everybody's life is like yours,
 Reece. What do you suspect your
 mama's cookin' for dinner tonight?

He sits on the hood of the car, his back to her.

She stares into him, controlled, methodical.

REECE
 I'm not driving you any further.

She cocks her head to one side.

DIXIE
 But it's getting dark soon. Can't
 you at least drive me to a motel?

He looks down at the ground for a few seconds, hops up and
 walks back around to his door.

REECE
 Get in the car.

Dixie obeys.

INT. CAR - LITTLE LATER

Reece and Dixie ride, silent.

He enters a motel parking lot, pulls up to the motel's
 office, waits for her to get out. She grins.

DIXIE
 (nonchalant)
 Well, thanks for the ride. It's
 been fun.

He LAUGHS like she must be joking.

She gets out, pulls the trash bag out from the back seat,
 ducks down to look at Reece.

DIXIE
 Hey.

He looks at her.

Her eyes get serious.

DIXIE
 (insistent)
 Go home.

She smiles, shuts the door, walks into the motel's office.

Reece looks down at the shoebox she left in the passenger seat. Hesitant, he lifts the lid with one finger.

Nothing but shoes in the box. *START*

He looks confused, then spots the photo of his parents, looks toward the office door, shakes his head like he's not sure what just happened.

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT

The car pulls out of the lot the way it came.

Excited, she pulls him *THE END* *Cheryl follows.*

THOMAS
out in back, voice.
 She pats him on the back as he enters the house.

INT. DINING ROOM

Thomas, his mother, FATHER (50s), and Catherine sit around the table. They all look jolly and proper, a sight Norman Rockwell would be proud of.

FATHER
 What day exactly are you leaving, son?

Finished with his meal, Thomas pushes his plate away.

THOMAS
 First thing Friday morning. I start work on Monday.

MOTHER
(to Catherine)
 We are just so proud of Thomas. Right out of law school, he gets the perfect job.

Catherine forces a smile.

MOTHER
 I just wish you didn't have to move away.

FATHER
 Oh, but he'll be rolling in the big bucks now, won't you, Tom?

THE MAN IN THE PORK PIE HAT

EXT. THOMAS'S PARENTS' HOME - NIGHT

THOMAS (30) and his girlfriend, CATHERINE (30), stroll up to the front door. Thomas rings the DOORBELL.

Elated, his MOTHER (50s) opens it.

MOTHER

He's here!

Excited, she pulls him inside. Catherine follows.

MOTHER

Get in here, sugar.

She pats him on the back as he enters the house.

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MOTHER

I just wish you didn't have to move away.

FATHER

Oh, but he'll be rolling in the big bucks now, won't you, Tom?

Thomas LAUGHS, nods with confidence.

THOMAS

Yes, sir. No stopping me now, Mama.
I'm at the steering wheel.

His mother pats under her eyes with her napkin, smiles. She stands to gather the plates when Catherine stops her.

CATHERINE

Oh, let me.

Catherine gathers a few plates.

INT. KITCHEN

Catherine sits the plates down on the counter. Thomas comes in, wraps his arms around her waist.

THOMAS

Everything okay?

She smiles, turns around to meet his face.

CATHERINE

I'm just anxious.

THOMAS

Anxious? About moving? I thought
you were excited.

CATHERINE

I am. I just wish we didn't have to
move even farther from my parents
and my job.

THOMAS

(confidently)

Catherine, it's only an hour away.
It's gonna be great. Look, we're
getting a new place. I've got a
great new job. We've got everything
in the palm of our hands right now.
I've got it all under control.

She looks at him like she's used to his sales pitches.

THOMAS

Come on. This is me. I never fail.

He kisses her on the forehead as she leans into him.

EXT. OLD APARTMENT BUILDING - A COUPLE DAYS LATER

Thomas and Catherine each carry a box up to the charming, old building. As they approach, they scan the building from top to bottom where their eyes meet VIOLA JONES (80s), the kookiest little old woman ever, waiting for them at the entrance. She holds a dead, stuffed cat close to her side.

THOMAS

Ms. Jones?

With a blank expression, she gestures for them to follow her into the building. Thomas catches the door as she lets it swing back after she enters.

INT. STAIRCASE

Viola pulls herself up the stairs on her frail legs, her dead cat in hand.

Thomas and Catherine follow her up, eyeing the cat. At the top of the staircase they come to a door.

Viola takes a key from her pocket, holds it up in front of them, unlocks the door as if it needed demonstration.

Thomas and Catherine give each other an unsure look, then follow Viola in.

INT. APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

The three enter the well-kept apartment. Thomas sets the boxes down. Viola stands in the doorway scratching the cat under its chin. Her expression remains cold.

THOMAS

Well, thank you, Ms. Jones.

VIOLA

(sharp)

Viola.

Thomas nods. Catherine forces an uncomfortable smile.

THOMAS

Right. Thank you, Viola. Everything looks good.

Staring at him, she hands over the key. He takes it like he's afraid to touch her, his eyes moving from the cat back to her hand.

She holds her finger to the air like she's scolding it, then exits. Relieved, Thomas shuts and locks the door.

The couple looks around at the new place, uncertain, as if some of Viola rubbed off on it.

INT. APARTMENT - LATER THAT DAY

Furniture now in place, Thomas escorts TWO MOVERS (30s) to the door.

Catherine wipes down a counter in the kitchen.

THOMAS
(to movers)
Thanks.

He gives them a semi-polite wave as they leave, closes the door behind them, sits on the couch, admires his new throne.

He then grabs the back of his neck as though something hit him. He looks behind him and the couch, finds nothing.

CATHERINE
Are you okay?

THOMAS
Yeah. Fine.

He looks around the room; finds nothing.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Thomas walks down the hall toward the bedroom. He passes the bathroom and sees the light on.

He sticks his head in, then looks behind him down the hall, confused. He cuts the light off and shuts the door to the bathroom.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Thomas shoots up, turns the lamp on, looks around the room like something startled him. Catherine wakes, rolls over.

CATHERINE
What is it?

He settles back into bed.

THOMAS
Nothing. Go back to sleep.

CATHERINE
Are you sure?

THOMAS
Yeah. Everything's fine.

He cuts the lamp off. Catherine cuddles up next to him.

INT. APARTMENT KITCHEN - NEXT MORNING

Thomas butters toast as Catherine walks in.

CATHERINE
(sarcastic)
Ready to make the commute to work.

She smooths her outfit.

THOMAS
Great. Hey, um, try not to leave
lights on when you're not using
them. Just runs the bill up.

She eyes him, curious.

CATHERINE
I didn't leave any lights on.

THOMAS
The bathroom light last night.

CATHERINE
I didn't do that. You must have.

Thomas thinks about it, shrugs.

THOMAS
Maybe I did. Have a good day,
sweetie.

CATHERINE
You too. See ya.

She kisses him, exits.

He then hears a toilet FLUSH. He stops, looks in the noise's
direction.

All is quiet, so he continues to prepare breakfast until he
hears WATER RUNNING.

He takes a knife out of a drawer, approaches.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

He inches down the hallway toward the bathroom.

He sees the light is on under the door. He hits his fist in a THUD on the outside of the door, stands back and readies himself.

It doesn't open.

He flings the door inward, revealing a short, robust THEODORE (70). They SCREAM.

Thomas holds the knife up.

THOMAS

Who are you?

Theodore stands at the sink with a towel in hand. The robust man looks at the knife, then tips his pork pie hat at Thomas, extends his flamboyant hand. He owns a twangier-than-thou drawl and a dismissive disposition.

THEODORE

You may call me Theodore Davis
Carver the Fourth.

Thomas looks at Theodore's hand, shakes it, unsure.

THOMAS

Thomas Potter.

THEODORE

Well, Thomas, I'm glad we've made
introductions.

Theodore dries his hands and hangs the towel up. He pulls his suspenders up on his shoulders and exits the bathroom with his chin up in the air, pushing by a confused Thomas.

INT. APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Theodore struts into the living room, lowers himself like he's a delicacy onto the couch, opens a magazine.

Thomas follows him in, still gripping the knife.

THOMAS

Excuse me?

Theodore looks up.

THOMAS

You're in my apartment.

Theodore looks at his surroundings.

THEODORE

Am not.

Thomas lowers the knife and steps in further.

THOMAS

Actually, you are. I just took over this apartment a couple days ago.

He gives Theodore a condescending look.

THOMAS

Was this your old apartment?

Theodore grins at him.

THEODORE

Indeed it was.

Thomas speaks to him like he's a senile old man.

THOMAS

Have you not spoken with Ms. Jones -- Viola -- about the change, sir?

THEODORE

Nope.

Thomas grabs his cell phone off the coffee table, keeps his focus on Theodore.

THOMAS

I'm gonna get Ms. Jones on the phone. One moment.

He takes his phone out of the room.

INT. STAIRCASE - A LITTLE LATER

Thomas climbs the stairs ahead of creepy Viola, who clutches a stiff poodle like it's a football.

THOMAS

I apologize for you having to come over, but I want this straightened out today.

She glares.

He opens his door at the top of the stairs.

INT. APARTMENT

He shows her in. Her eyes look from side-to-side while she strokes the dead poodle.

Thomas walks down the hall.

THOMAS (O.S.)

Theodore!

He walks back in to a grumpy Viola. She cuts her eyes at him.

THOMAS

He was here. Theodore Davis Carver
the Fourth. He said he was your
last tenant.

A ball of poodle hair falls to the ground; Thomas's eyes focus in on it.

Viola shrugs.

VIOLA

No Theodore now.

She squints her eyes at the air like she's mad at it, turns and leaves on her wobbly legs. Catherine enters.

CATHERINE

Hey.

THOMAS

How was work?

CATHERINE

Fine. What was Viola doing here?

THOMAS

Some past tenant came in the
apartment today. An older guy.
Confused. He must have figured it
out and went on home. Just keep
everything locked, okay?

She ponders.

CATHERINE

That's strange.

She sits a couple grocery bags down on the counter, notices a full ashtray, picks it up.

CATHERINE

Thomas, when did you start smoking again?

He walks over to her, curious.

THOMAS

I didn't.

She holds the ashtray up to him.

CATHERINE

(irritated)

What's this?

He looks confused.

THOMAS

It must have already been here when we moved in.

She stares him down.

THOMAS

I'm not lying.

She sets the ashtray down, wraps her arms around Thomas.

CATHERINE

Sweetie, if you're a little turned upside down with the new job and moving, you can talk to me. You don't have to smoke.

He pulls back a little.

THOMAS

Catherine, I'm fine. I'm not stressed. Everything's perfect. I wasn't smoking, I swear.

He helps her put the groceries away.

She eyes him like she isn't sure.

INT. APARTMENT - NEXT DAY - MORNING

Adjusting his tie, a well-dressed Thomas strolls into the kitchen, pours himself a cup of coffee.

Hurried, Catherine runs in, grabs her purse.

CATHERINE

He grips Good luck today.

He wraps his arm around her, kisses her.

THOMAS

He wraps Thanks. See you when you get home.

She exits.

He checks his watch, takes a sip, turns to see Theodore standing beside him. He dribbles coffee down the front of his shirt and tie.

THEODORE

Can I get a cup?

THOMAS

How did you get in here?

Theodore shrugs.

THEODORE

I live here.

Theodore grins, smug.

THOMAS

You do not live here! I don't know how you're getting in, but this is breaking and entering. Look, I understand you may be confused about the changes, so I'm trying to handle this gently, but if I find you in my home again, I'm calling the police.

Thomas turns an offended Theodore around and pushes him out the front door.

He looks down at his wet shirt.

INT. THOMAS'S CAR - LATER THAT MORNIGN

In a new wardrobe, Thomas sits in traffic. He rests his elbow by the window, his cheek on his fist.

He stares at the clock.

INSERT - CLOCK

The car's clock reads 9:06.

BACK TO THOMAS

He grips the steering wheel, takes a deep BREATH.

He looks into the rear mirror and spots a happy-as-can-be Theodore sitting in the backseat.

He whips around to find the backseat empty.

Thomas stares back ahead, confused.

INT. APARTMENT - THAT EVENING

Exhausted, he walks in to see an unhappy Catherine sitting on the couch.

CATHERINE

(stern)

Thomas.

THOMAS

Hey.

CATHERINE

Why was this in our bedroom?

He shrugs when she holds up a tube of lipstick.

THOMAS

Don't you wear lipstick?

CATHERINE

Well, yeah, but this red really isn't my color. Who's color might it be?

He looks surprised.

THOMAS

Catherine, now you know that isn't what you're thinking. Maybe it was already in a corner somewhere and we didn't notice it.

CATHERINE

Something isn't right with you lately. I don't think it was a good idea for me to move here. Things just feel shaky now.

He walks over, puts his hands on her shoulders.

THOMAS

(flustered)

Everything is fine. We're
adjusting. It's normal.

She doesn't look convinced.

THOMAS

I have everything under control.
Got everything in the palms of our
hands, remember?

She glares at him.

THOMAS

I am in control. All the plates are
still spinning, I promise.
Everything is fine.

He runs his hands through his hair like he's stressed.

She watches him walk away to the bedroom.

INT. STAIRCASE - THAT NIGHT

Deep in thought, Thomas sits outside his apartment door.
Theodore walks up the steps toward him, GROANS when Thomas
looks up.

THEODORE

You again.

Thomas smirks, watches as Theodore approaches his door.

THOMAS

Excuse me. That's my door.
Obviously there's something you're
not understanding, Mr. Carver. I
told you I'd be calling the police.

Theodore gives him an eye roll and a flick-of-the-wrist hand
gesture.

THEODORE

You go right ahead. They'll tell
you you've lost your mind. I live
here.

THOMAS

Your stuff wasn't even here when I
moved in.

THEODORE

Malarkey.

Theodore takes his stylish jacket off, drapes it over his arm.

Thomas gives him a quizzical look.

THOMAS

Is there some other apartment in the building you live in now? Or someone to look after you?

THEODORE

I live right here, and I can look after myself.

Thomas stands, points a finger at Theodore.

THOMAS

You don't live here!

Theodore stands taller in defiance.

THEODORE

I most certainly do!

Thomas steps closer to his opponent.

THOMAS

According to who?

Theodore steps closer, pokes his chest out, raises his chin.

THEODORE

Theodore Davis Carver the Fourth.

Thomas steps closer.

THOMAS

Since when?

THEODORE

Nineteen forty-three.

Thomas looks skeptical, tries to do the math in his head.

THEODORE

Oh, you nitwit.

Theodore fades from view under his pork pie hat. Awed, Thomas backs up. Theodore's hat lifts and hits Thomas in the face. Theodore appears before him again, placing the hat back on his head before crossing his arms.

THEODORE

Get it now, Doubting Thomas?

Thomas stares at him in disbelief.

Theodore puts his hand on his hip, pops the hip out.

THEODORE

I'm dead, you dummy.

Thomas backs up further, silent.

Theodore shakes his head.

THEODORE

Good grief.

Theodore throws him a dismissive flick of the wrist and moseys back down the stairs.

Thomas lowers himself into a seated position on the floor, his eyes fixed on his new roommate. He stares in awe.

INT. BEDROOM - A LITTLE LATER

A slip of paper in hand, Thomas paces while on the phone.

THOMAS

Ms. Jones -- Viola -- this is Thomas Potter. I need you to call me back immediately. I've got a pest problem we need to discuss.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Almost in a daze, Thomas walks over to the couch where Catherine sits with her laptop.

CATHERINE

You okay?

He sits down beside her, nods.

CATHERINE

Do you want me to get you any--

THOMAS

--I don't need anything.

She looks deflated, focuses back on her computer.

Thomas looks worried.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Thomas turns on the lamp, looks around.

After a double take, he spots a content Theodore sitting in a chair across the room.

Thomas shakes Catherine awake.

THOMAS
Catherine, look.

She sits up. Her eyes follow Thomas's pointing.

CATHERINE
What?

THOMAS
The chair.

CATHERINE
I know. I told you I hate that ugly chair.

Theodore nods like he agrees with her.

Thomas looks confused, worried.

THOMAS
You don't see what's in it?

She looks again.

CATHERINE
Honey, nothing's there.

Thomas rubs his eyes and forehead. Catherine sits up, gets closer to him.

CATHERINE
What's going on?

A little courage builds in his expression.

THOMAS
Catherine, I think I might be losing it.

She rubs his arm.

CATHERINE
You're not losing it. I'm sorry about before. I shouldn't have automatically accused you.

She rests her chin on his shoulder.

CATHERINE

I'm sure there are a lot of little things left in this old apartment.

Theodore smiles.

CATHERINE

And I'm sorry for doubting you in these last few days, too. I know you have everything under control, darling. You always do.

She looks as though her words are just for his benefit.

CATHERINE

It's gonna be okay. I promise. We're adjusting, right?

Thomas nods as Catherine rubs his back.

CATHERINE

Okay. Let's get some sleep.

She lowers herself back under the covers, turns away. Thomas sits in bed, arms folded.

He glares across the room at a jolly Theodore, who stares back at him from a chair at the end of the bed.

THEODORE

Fine. Go to sleep. Those little baggies under your eyes look hideous.

He stands and struts out of the room, smug.

Thomas lowers himself until he can only be seen from the eyes up under the covers, his gaze fixed where Theodore exited. Moving his arm only, he reaches over and turns out the lamp.

INT. HALLWAY - MORNING

Cracking the door, Thomas peers out into the hallway from his bedroom.

Hesitant, he opens the door and surveys the hall: no Theodore. He looks only halfway comforted.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Thomas enters, looks around: still no ghost. He looks in the fridge, stops, stares out at the room, suspicious.

INT. THOMAS'S OFFICE - LATER THAT DAY

He sits behind his desk at work, stares straight ahead, his palms on the desk in front of him. As fast as he can, he whirls his chair around to catch sight of what is behind him: nothing. His hands fall into his lap, defeated.

A RECEPTIONIST (30s) enters.

RECEPTIONIST

Mr. Potter, your girlfriend is on line two. She says she's been trying to get in touch with you.

Thomas's eyes remain focused on the nothing he aimed to capture.

RECEPTIONIST

Sir? Do you need me to show you how to use the different lines?

He wheels his chair back around, gives the receptionist a tired look.

The receptionist tries to smooth over the awkwardness with a fake smile, turns and exits.

Thomas picks up the phone.

CATHERINE (V.O.)

Thomas? Hey. I was just calling to let you know I'm gonna have dinner with my mom tonight, okay?

He nods.

CATHERINE (V.O.)

Thomas?

THOMAS

Yeah. That's fine.

He rubs his eyes.

CATHERINE (V.O.)

Okay. Love you.

THOMAS

Love you.

He hangs up the phone.

INT. APARTMENT - THAT NIGHT

His temple resting on his fist, Thomas sleeps on the couch until he hears KEYS in the door.

He looks over to see Catherine walk in with a to-go box. She walks over and kisses his cheek, sits down beside him.

CATHERINE

Brought you some dessert.

He smiles.

THOMAS

Thanks.

CATHERINE

Mom says hey.

Thomas YAWNS.

CATHERINE

I'm gonna go change.

She walks back to the bedroom. Thomas gets up and takes the to-go box over to the kitchen.

Angry, Catherine walks back out toward him, a dress in hand.

CATHERINE

(angry)

Enough.

THOMAS

What?

CATHERINE

Enough of you playing dumb with me. I believed you about the smoking and the lipstick. I've tried to be patient with how distant you've been lately because I knew you were under pressure, but now I find some other woman's clothes on my bed?

He looks at the dress, shocked.

She throws it at him.

THOMAS

Cath --

CATHERINE

-- You haven't gone shopping for me once since we've been together, and this dress isn't even close to my size, so I know some other woman has been here. You can't lie about this. Something really is going on, isn't it?

He looks at the floor.

THOMAS

Catherine, I have to tell you something.

She braces herself. He takes a breath.

THOMAS

There's a ghost in our apartment.

She SCOFFS.

CATHERINE

That's how you're gonna cover this up? That's the response you expect me to believe?

THOMAS

(desperate)

It's the truth, Catherine, I swear.

CATHERINE

I really tried to be supportive of you and your big, new, perfect life, but this isn't exactly what I call adjusting. I'm gonna go stay with my parents.

She grabs her purse, exits.

He shakes his head, looks around the apartment.

MONTAGE - LONELY THOMAS

-- INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY -- Thomas sits on the couch, looks at a picture of him and Catherine from when they were happy.

-- INT. THOMAS'S OFFICE - DAY -- He sits behind his desk, phone to his ear. The line RINGS and RINGS.

-- INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT -- Thomas sits up in bed, alone, staring at the opposite wall.

-- EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY -- He sits on a bench, watches a COUPLE (20s) enter the building together.

INT. APARTMENT - DAYS LATER

Thomas sits on the couch, alone and worn down. He stares at the floor.

THEODORE (O.S.)

Why so blue?

Thomas turns around, startled. Theodore stands there, hands on his hips, a cheeky look in his bright blue eyes. Thomas's face tenses.

THOMAS

I'm not doing this anymore.

THEODORE

I beg your pardon?

Thomas stands, faces him.

THOMAS

(defiantly)

I'm not doing this. Since you showed up, my life has been pulled out from under me.

Theodore gives him a sarcastic shocked look.

THOMAS

This is my home now. I'm not leaving. Catherine is going to come back, and we're going to be happy here. That's what's going to happen because I say it is, and I'm in control.

THEODORE

(mocking)

Oh, that's what's going to happen because he says it is.

Theodore SCOFFS.

THEODORE

You're not as mighty as you think, grasshopper.

Thomas walks over, picks up the phone.

THOMAS

I am, actually. I'm calling the police. Somehow, I'm getting you out of here.

Theodore walks up to Thomas.

THEODORE

Did you ever stop and think that maybe it's for your own good?

Thomas looks confused.

THOMAS

What?

THEODORE

You can't control everything, little boy. There are far bigger fish in the pond, if you know what I mean.

Thomas shakes his head like he doesn't get it.

THOMAS

I'm calling the police.

Theodore stomps his foot, playful.

THEODORE

Oh, come on. Let me stay.

Theodore bats his eyelashes.

THOMAS

No chance.

Theodore sulks.

THEODORE

How could you just throw little ol' me out on the streets?

THOMAS

You're not even alive.

THEODORE

Oh, I'm more alive than you are. Boy, you're about as entertaining as a Presbyterian church, you know that? Open your eyes. See the rest of the pond.

Thomas shakes his head, lowers it from exhaustion, like he's been broken in.

THOMAS

I need my home back. I need my girlfriend back. I need my sleep. I need to feel like myself again. Please? Why are you doing this to my life?

His eyes beg for a break.

Theodore fidgets with the photograph of Catherine, looks off into the distance, melodramatic.

THEODORE

You're not the only one who wants things the way they used to be.

He runs his hand over the photograph.

THEODORE

I had a nice wife, Norma. She died a few years after me. This was our apartment, our very first home together.

Theodore looks around the room. His eyes tear up.

THEODORE

(quivering)

We shared some of our happiest memories here.

Thomas's face softens.

THEODORE

I thought that after she died, her spirit would come rest here with me again, and we'd be together always.

He looks up at Thomas.

THEODORE

I can't leave here, friend. What if she comes back, and I'm not here to welcome her?

Theodore's eyes are consumed with sadness.

Thomas's hesitation fades, his shoulders drop. He thinks a minute, shrugs.

THOMAS

Okay.

Theodore looks surprised.

THEODORE

Okay?

THOMAS

I'm done with all this. Maybe Catherine was right; this place isn't right for me. This new life isn't working out so well for me either. I'm gonna leave. I'm gonna go back home with Catherine.

Theodore looks hopeful.

THEODORE

Oh, I wouldn't want to run you out of your home or anything.

THOMAS

No, I get it. I have a woman I love as well, and I'd feel the same way. You should be here for Norma. I know she'll come back.

Theodore CLAPS, giddy.

THEODORE

You just have no idea how decent this is of you, Tom.

Thomas halfway hugs him back, unsure of how to hug a ghost.

THOMAS

It's all right. I'm going to -- uh -- I'm going to go for a walk and figure some stuff out. When I get back I'll start packing my things. You stay here. Wait for Norma.

Theodore nods, holds his pork pie hat to his chest.

THEODORE

For my sweet Norma.

Thomas smiles, grabs his jacket, exits the apartment.

Theodore flings the photograph of Catherine down on the couch, EXHALES. BETTY (70s), LUCILLE (70s), and MURIEL (80s) appear. They sit around the room sipping whiskey sours. They are drop-dead gorgeous, mouths painted red, in fashionable vintage attire head to manicured toe.

LUCILLE

Oh, you are just terrible.

Theodore CHUCKLES, takes a drink from Muriel.

THEODORE

Oh, hush you ol' Jezebel. Like I'm going to live with some twenty-something lawyer that thinks he owns the world. That'll be the day. At least it only took a couple weeks this time.

LUCILLE

I just can't believe he thought you ever had a wife, you ol' bird.

She slaps his arm, playful. The group LAUGHS.

They turn on MUSIC from another era, dance around the room.

EXT. STREET CORNER

Thomas waits to cross the street. His phone up to his ear, he looks up at his apartment, smiles.

THOMAS

Catherine? I'm sorry.

THE END

SHADE

EXT. OTHELIA'S HOUSE - MORNING

An impatient, jittery CORNELIUS (30s) marches up to Othelia's large, old house. He KNOCKS on the red door three quick times.

INT. OTHELIA'S BEDROOM

OTHELIA (30s) rises in bed, hair askew. She looks around, hears the KNOCKING again.

She rolls her eyes, throws the covers off.

EXT. FRONT PORCH

In a dark robe, Othelia jerks the front door open. Beside the door is a sign that reads MADAME OTHELIA'S.

She glances around behind Cornelius.

OTHELIA

What is it, Cornelius?

CORNELIUS

(desperate)

I just woke up on the wrong side of everything today, Miss Othelia. I've got all kinds of thoughts running around. I need a reading bad today.

OTHELIA

Sweetie, it's Tuesday. Can't you wait 'til our Thursday session like usual?

He shakes his head.

CORNELIUS

Oh, I don't think so, Miss Othelia. I don't think so.

She ingests the conviction in his eyes, SIGHS.

OTHELIA

Come on in.

She ushers him in, closes the door.

INT. PARLOR

Tall shelves line the parlor walls, filled with books and mystical artifacts. Othelia directs Cornelius to the couch, pulls a chair up and sits in front of him, holds out her hands.

He looks down at them.

CORNELIUS

Aren't we gonna go to the reading room, Miss Othelia?

OTHELIA

(impatient)

No, no. I can do it right here. Give me your hands.

He places his hands in hers. She closes her eyes.

OTHELIA

All right. I see you being very anxious, very out of control.

Cornelius sits on the edge of his seat.

CORNELIUS

Yes.

OTHELIA

And you're in search of guidance. You're looking for a sign.

CORNELIUS

Yes, ma'am.

OTHELIA

I'm seeing people coming up and hugging you. They're congratulating you.

CORNELIUS

Pardon?

OTHELIA

Cornelius, honey, I sense that you're about to do something truly heroic.

He looks confused.

CORNELIUS

Heroic? Me?

She opens her eyes.

OTHELIA

Yep. I see you doing something very heroic soon and everyone's gonna sing your praises. How about that?

He looks confused.

CORNELIUS

Well, that sounds peculiar.

She stands, gesture for him to get up.

OTHELIA

Well, that's what I see, but you're not gonna do it in here. Just go on out and keep your eyes peeled, okay, hon?

He looks hopeful. She ushers him toward the front door.

CORNELIUS

(insistent)

Oh, yes, Miss Othelia. Thank you very much. I will be the biggest hero, Miss Othelia. I'll rise to it.

She smiles, nods, SLAMS the door after he exits, rolls her eyes.

INT. KITCHEN

Othelia strolls into the room, takes a glass out of the cabinet.

Her cheeky roommate, HENRY (mid 20s), sits at the table with his breakfast.

OTHELIA

Morning, Henry.

HENRY

(playful)

And who was that?

OTHELIA

Ol' Cornelius.

HENRY

I thought it was Tuesday.

She fills her glass at the sink.

OTHELIA

He's having a spell.

He nods like he's heard this before.

AGATHA (O.S.)

Knock, knock!

In comes a grandiose, colorful, larger-than-life AGATHA (50s) with groceries. She doesn't walk; she sashays.

Henry and Othelia jump up to help put them away.

OTHELIA

Thank you, Mama.

AGATHA

You are welcome, baby.

HENRY

Othelia, why do you make your own mother do your grocery shopping?

AGATHA

Oh, Othelia feels that being seen in town doing everyday things breaks the mystery.

Othelia glances at Henry.

OTHELIA

Bad for business.

Teasing, Henry rolls his eyes.

Agatha throws an empty bag in the trash.

AGATHA

Honey, I gotta get going to my prayer meeting. You call me later, all right?

They exchange a cheek kiss.

OTHELIA

Okay, Mama. I'll talk to you later.

HENRY

Bye, Agatha.

Agatha exits.

HENRY

Prayer meeting?

Othelia CHUCKLES.

OTHELIA

She just goes to laugh at people who think they know God because they read a book.

Henry rubs his neck.

OTHELIA

Still hurt?

HENRY

Probably a crick.

OTHELIA

Ya know, I guarantee you I've got a book in there with a concoction to cure it.

He CHUCKLES.

OTHELIA

Seriously. A little abra cadabra and you're fixed.

He shakes his head.

HENRY

You really believe in that stuff?

OTHELIA

Stuff? I make my livin' off that stuff.

He puts his dishes in the sink, leans on the counter.

HENRY

Yeah, but you really buy into all the psychic whatever and your books about I don't even know what?

OTHELIA

Oh, I don't know. As far as the readings, people wanna hear something uplifting, and I consider it my public service to give it to them. I don't tell them anything bad. I just make something up I know they wanna hear. It's kinda fun.

He gives her a look like he doesn't believe her.

OTHELIA

It is. Plus, it makes me
feel...special. Different, ya know?
Like I'm somebody important.

She wipes the counter down.

OTHELIA

And I like reading the books and
trying little things. It never
works; just kinda excites you, ya
know? Plus, you see Mama. Kinda
hard to work a desk job when you
were raised by an eccentric. She
used to dabble in it, too, when I
was little.

She throws a rag in the sink, twirls her long hair into a
bun on top of her head.

HENRY

Really?

Othelia nods.

OTHELIA

She says to be mediocre in a world
of possibilities is to insult your
creator.

HENRY

(teasing)

Well, you ought to be careful.
Might reach out and bite you one
day.

OTHELIA

Honey, I've been doing this going
on four years. I think I've got the
hang of it by now.

She smiles, shakes her head.

Henry takes his coffee cup, struts out of the room.

INT. PARLOR - LATE AFTERNOON

Othelia reads on the couch until a KNOCK rattles the front
door.

She opens it to see a tall, charming SULLIVAN GREY (30s).

Othelia spots the suitcase beside him on the porch.

OTHELIA

Oh, honey, I don't have any rooms open. My spare is being rented already.

SULLIVAN

I'm not here for a room.

He extends his hand.

SULLIVAN

Sullivan Grey.

She shakes his hand.

OTHELIA

Othelia Duncan.

SULLIVAN

How do you do, Othelia? Mind if I have a lucrative discussion with you today?

She looks skeptical.

OTHELIA

What 'cha selling, Mr. Grey?

He smiles.

SULLIVAN

It'll only take a few minutes. I could really use a kind Samaritan willing to let me practice right now.

She steps aside, lets him in.

He sits his suitcase on her coffee table, lowers himself onto her couch as he pops the case open.

She takes a seat across the room.

OTHELIA

Don't see much door-to-door selling anymore.

His face is sharp, cunning.

SULLIVAN

I like being able to come into a house. More personable that way.

OTHELIA

What have you got for me?

He takes a box out of his case, a coffee machine out of the box.

OTHELIA

Coffee makers? I can get one of those at the store.

SULLIVAN

Miss Duncan--is it Miss?

OTHELIA

(flirtatious)

It is.

SULLIVAN

Miss Duncan, this here is a top-of-the-line piece of equipment backed with my personal guarantee. You can't get that in a store.

She rolls her eyes.

OTHELIA

All right. Go on.

SULLIVAN

Miss Duncan, may I ask what you do for a living?

OTHELIA

I dabble in a few different things. I do psychic readings, teach a channeling class. I sell some books and artifacts as I feel people need them.

SULLIVAN

I see. Well, you sound like a busy woman, and what else would suit a busy woman but a good cup of coffee in the morning?

She LAUGHS.

OTHELIA

Is that what you think about when you're trying to go to sleep at night?

SULLIVAN

Beg your pardon?

OTHELIA

Do you think about all the possible jobs for a person to have and how that makes this machine perfect for them?

His eyes fixated on her, he grins, sly.

SULLIVAN

I don't sleep much.

A little flirtatious, she smiles, stands.

OTHELIA

I'm gonna get us something to drink, Mr. Grey.

He watches her walk away.

INT. PARLOR - LATER THAT EVENING

Othelia sits beside Sullivan on the couch, her feet drawn up under her. They face one another, LAUGHING.

SULLIVAN

Heroic, you say? Is that the best you got?

OTHELIA

(jokingly offended)

What?

SULLIVAN

You claim to be all-knowing and all you tell me is I'm gonna do something heroic. How many legs you pull with that?

OTHELIA

Oh, people know it's all for play. It's just fun.

SULLIVAN

I see.

OTHELIA

It makes me stand out, ya know? I like that.

Henry comes down the stairs, enters the parlor. He looks surprised to see Sullivan.

OTHELIA

Henry, this is Mr. Sullivan Grey.

The men nod at one another.

HENRY

Nice to meet you, Mr. Grey. Um, I'm gonna go out for a bit.

OTHELIA

Okay.

He winks at her, leaves.

SULLIVAN

Who is that?

OTHELIA

He's renting a room from me for a while. Been down here for about a month to write a book. Keeps me company, though. He's originally from somewhere up North. Where are you from?

SULLIVAN

All over. I'm staying at that little red bed and breakfast down your street.

He looks toward the staircase.

SULLIVAN

Hey, you mind if I use your restroom?

OTHELIA

Oh, sure. Up those stairs at the end of the hall.

He excuses himself.

Othelia looks around, puts the coffee machine box back in the suitcase.

She observes the rest of its contents, unravels a cloth holding several knives.

Uncomfortable, she rolls the cloth back up, notices a clear bag of zip ties in the case's pocket. A toilet flushes O.S..

SULLIVAN (O.S.)

This is a mighty big place for you to be here practically alone.

She sits back, tries to act nonchalant.

Sullivan comes back down the stairs to the parlor, leans on the door frame.

OTHELIA

(nervous)

People are always in and out. A lot of folks drop by.

She stands, tries to play it cool.

OTHELIA

Ya know, Mr. Grey, I've got a busy day tomorrow. I think I'm gonna call it a night a little early.

Hands in his pockets, he approaches her.

SULLIVAN

We were having such a nice conversation.

OTHELIA

I'm just getting kinda tired.

He gets closer.

SULLIVAN

Well, I don't know anybody around here. If I go back to my room, I'm just gonna sit there. Be nice to have the company.

Othelia looks uncomfortable by his proximity.

SULLIVAN

At least a little longer. What do you say?

She picks up their glasses from the table.

OTHELIA

I'm gonna get us a refill.

He smiles as she exits.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Othelia carries the glasses with a worried look.

She passes a room, stops, turns around, enters.

INT. READING ROOM

She flips on the light. The room has a mystical theme. A table with tarot cards spread out on it sits in the center of the room.

She goes to a bookshelf, scans until she finds the right one, takes it out, grabs a couple dark jars beside it.

INT. KITCHEN

Othelia rushes in, sits the glasses on the counter, scrambles through the pages of the book.

INSERT - A small jar sits beside the glasses.

The label reads "NIGHTSHADE."

INT. PARLOR

Othelia comes back in, hands Sullivan his glass. He sips.

She eyes the suitcase, keeps her distance.

OTHELIA

You wouldn't happen to sell
anything else, would you, Mr.
Sullivan?

He shakes his head.

SULLIVAN

Just coffee makers. That's all I've
got.

She nods.

SULLIVAN

Something else you need?

She shakes her head.

OTHELIA

Just asking.

She stays close to the front door.

He walks over to a book shelf.

SULLIVAN

Tell me about these books you have.

Othelia fidgets.

OTHELIA

Well, there's a little bit of everything there. Portals and spells. Things we don't think about.

SULLIVAN

You read all these?

She shakes her head.

OTHELIA

Hard to keep up. I read a little as the job calls for it.

He clears his THROAT, rubs his eyes.

SULLIVAN

Othelia, I think I may have to excuse myself after all.

Her expression says, "Oh?"

SULLIVAN

I'm feeling a little tired myself all of a sudden.

He picks up his suitcase, moves for the door.

SULLIVAN

Think I'm gonna go lie down. It was nice meeting you.

She opens the door.

OTHELIA

Nice meeting you.

She closes the door behind him, locks it.

EXT. OTHELIA'S FRONT PORCH - NEXT DAY

Henry rocks in a chair on the porch while Othelia sits on her knees a few feet away. She uses a hand shovel to tend to the flowers by her steps.

HENRY

Nice looking man that was here last night.

She doesn't look up.

HENRY

Wouldn't mind getting to know him
myself.

OTHELIA

He's just passing through. No
reason to get attached.

He looks out at the large tree in the front yard.

HENRY

Good thing you have this shade or
we'd be roasting out here.

She wipes her brow.

OTHELIA

Those trees are all over down here.

Henry looks up to the sky, uses his hand as a visor.

HENRY

The South's full of shade. Shade
between you and the sun, shade
between you and your sins.

Othelia jerks her hand up, throws down the shovel. Blood
pools in her palm.

Henry jumps up, hands her a rag. She uses it to put pressure
on her palm.

A CAR pulls in the driveway.

Agatha walks up toward the porch.

AGATHA

Y'all know what's going on down
there? There's two police cars at
Martha's bed and breakfast.

Othelia raises her head, looks concerned.

Agatha notices her hand.

AGATHA

Honey! What happened? You got blood
all over your hands.

OTHELIA

Sliced it on that shovel. It's not
as bad as it looks.

AGATHA

Let's get it cleaned up.

She shoos Othelia and Henry inside.

Othelia's gaze lingers down the street before she heads in.

INT. OTHELIA'S BEDROOM - THAT EVENING

With a bandaged hand, Othelia sits on her bed, flips through a book.

Henry passes the doorway from the hall.

OTHELIA

Henry?

He enters, leans against her bureau.

OTHELIA

I need to tell you something. But you can't tell anyone.

He shrugs.

HENRY

Okay.

OTHELIA

The man that was here last night was a salesman. He was trying to sell me a coffee machine.

Henry's look says "Go on."

OTHELIA

He went to the bathroom. And I started looking through his case, being nosy. And I found some things that made me think he wasn't who I thought.

HENRY

Like what?

OTHELIA

Knives. Ties. Things you could kill somebody with.

Henry LAUGHS.

HENRY

What?

OTHELIA

I'm serious. I got a gut feeling,
and I wanted him to leave. I went
to the kitchen to refill his drink,
and I put a little something in it.

Henry's eyes widen.

HENRY

You didn't put that mess in it.

OTHELIA

I did.

He stands a little straighter, crosses his arms.

OTHELIA

Then he said he wasn't feeling so
good and he left. He was staying
down there at Martha's.

Henry's facial expression does the math.

HENRY

You didn't!

OTHELIA

I think I did.

He rushes to the bed, sits down beside her.

OTHELIA

I only meant to put just enough to
distract him, make him wanna leave
and go to sleep.

HENRY

I didn't know you were messing with
serious stuff. I thought those jars
were for decoration. I told you. I
told you all this voodoo was gonna
bite you. You might have bulldozed
over the line with this one.

He rubs his temples.

HENRY

Okay. Well, you don't know that's
why the cops were there. They
could have been there for any
reason.

Henry looks up OTHELIA
 Mama called Martha. It was him.
 They found him dead in his bed.

She stares at the floor.

OTHELIA
 I bit the apple.

Henry shrugs HENRY
 There's no proof this was you.
 Anything could have happened to
 him. You don't need to work
 yourself up about this until you
 have facts. Keep your mouth shut
 until then.

Othelia's eyes look worried.

INT. OTHELIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

In the dark, Othelia jerks awake, cuts on a lamp.

She looks around the room like something startled her.

With no sign of anything, she cuts off the lamp, gets back
 under the covers.

EXT. STREET - NEXT DAY

Tired, deep and thought, Othelia drives. Her black car runs
 fine until she tries to brake for a stop sign down the hill.

She stomps on the brake, but the car doesn't slow. Frantic,
 she grips the wheel tighter, keeps stomping.

Feet away from the stop sign, the brakes kick in. She stops.

INT. PORCH - MORNING OTHELIA
 What in Hell?

She look down at her feet for an obstruction. Not finding
 one, she looks around in confusion.

EXT. FRONT PORCH

Henry sits on the front steps, writes on a notepad.

Othelia pulls up, walks up to him.

OTHELIA
 Have you ever had any trouble with
 the brakes in that car?

Henry looks up.

HENRY

No. Why?

OTHELIA

I think they got stuck on me or something on the way home.

He shrugs.

HENRY

What do you think it is?

OTHELIA

(sarcastic)

Thou hast forsaken me.

She walks into the house.

Henry looks like the words resonate with him.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Othelia gets in bed, fixes her pillows, smooths her covers.

She looks up when a shadow walks by the doorway.

OTHELIA

Henry? I didn't hear you get home.

She looks to the doorway.

OTHELIA

Henry?

She gets up, looks down the hall: no one.

INT. FOYER - MORNING

Tired, Othelia descends the stairs and notices the front door open.

Confused, she closes and locks it.

INT. HENRY'S BEDROOM

Henry TYPES on a typewriter at his desk.

Othelia KNOCKS on the door frame, pops her head in.

OTHELIA

Did you leave the front door open?

He looks up.

HENRY

I don't think so.

She considers.

HENRY

Why?

OTHELIA

Something's not right. The bad feeling isn't going away. I've been seeing things. I feel like someone's watching me.

HENRY

Nothing's in the paper. I haven't heard much around town.

She shakes her head.

OTHELIA

Even Cornelius hasn't come by. You could set your clock by that man. Everything's just off this week.

Henry leans back in his chair.

HENRY

What's the deal with Cornelius? Why's he always so desperate for your readings?

OTHELIA

There's about a hundred stories I could tell you about him. He lives alone now that his parents have passed. Stays to himself until he gets nervous about the whole world and comes over here. He's just lonely. Kinda started losing his mind somewhere along the way.

HENRY

Sad.

OTHELIA

Let me know if he shows. I've got another reading to do today.

HENRY

You're still gonna do that?

She looks taken off guard.

OTHELIA

Yeah. Why?

HENRY

If you feel like this stuff bit you, why would you keep putting your hand out?

She processes.

INT. READING ROOM - LATER THAT DAY

LIBBY (40s) sits at the table, gazes at the tarot cards.

Othelia sits across from her. She looks like something's bothering her, but picks up the cards, shuffles them.

LIBBY

Actually, Othelia, I really came here to ask you something.

Othelia looks up.

OTHELIA

Go ahead.

LIBBY

Why'd you do it?

Stunned, Othelia stops shuffling, looks up.

OTHELIA

Do what?

LIBBY

Start doing the psychic thing? How'd you get into it?

Othelia EXHALES, stops to think.

OTHELIA

I just didn't want to settle for normal, I guess. Why?

Libby leans in, smiles.

LIBBY

Well, I was actually thinking about maybe trying it myself. Ya know, make a little extra money here and there.

Othelia looks upset.

OTHELIA

No.

Libby leans back.

LIBBY

No?

OTHELIA

Don't get into this kinda thing,
Libby. It's not something you just
pick up.

Libby looks offended.

LIBBY

Othelia, if you're worried about me
taking customers, I was only gonna
do it here and --

OTHELIA

-- Don't do it, Libby.

She stands.

OTHELIA

Neither of us have any business
doing this.

Confused, Libby stands.

OTHELIA

Go on home. Don't think about this
anymore.

LIBBY

Othelia --

OTHELIA

-- I'm serious. Go on. Don't think
about it.

Libby SCOFFS, walks out of the room.

Othelia looks concerned, puts the cards in a box.

As she puts the box on a shelf, a glass bowl falls off past
her head, SHATTERS on the ground.

Othelia looks down at all the pieces.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Othelia splashes water on her face at the sink, stands up, sees Sullivan behind her in the mirror.

She spins around to see no one.

She checks behind her shower curtain, looks each way out the doorframe.

INT. PARLOR - NIGHT

Determined, Othelia burns sage, wafts it into the corners of the room.

She stops, looks around the room, seems nervous.

INT. BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING

She jerks awake, sits up, rubs her eyes.

She looks to one side of the room, sees Sullivan sitting in a chair. He smirks at her.

She jumps up from the bed. When she turns around, the chair is empty.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Distressed, she runs in, vomits in the toilet.

Glass CRASHES O.S.. She looks up.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

She takes a couple steps back in her bedroom, sees a lamp shattered on the floor, stares at it a few seconds, rushes out.

MONTAGE - EXORCISING

-- INT. PARLOR - Frantic, she burns more sage around the room.

-- INT. BEDROOM - She shews the sage around.

-- INT. BATHROOM - Vomits again.

-- INT. PARLOR - She flips through books.

-- EXT. PORCH -- Stares down the street.

-- INT. BATHROOM - Runs her fingers over the cut in her palm.

-- INT. KITCHEN - Vomits in the sink.

-- INT. HALLWAY - Burns sage.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Sick, Othelia lies in the fetal position on the floor by the toilet.

A door SLAMS O.S.. She perks up.

INT. FOYER - CONTINUOUS

She runs down the stairs, focused on the front door.

OTHELIA

Henry?

She looks out the curtain on the door.

OTHELIA

Hen--

She turns around to see Sullivan leaning against the entrance into the parlor.

She freezes, backs up. He stares through her.

She looks at the floor.

OTHELIA

I bit the apple.

She CRIES.

OTHELIA

I know. Just please give me some peace.

She rubs her eyes. The lights go out. All is still. The outside light illuminates her.

OTHELIA

(frantic)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry!

Othelia messes with the light switch until the light comes back on. Sullivan is gone.

She leans against the wall, wipes her face.

She runs into the parlor, grabs a stack of books, opens the front door, throws them out.

MONTAGE - EXORCISING PART II

-- INT. READING ROOM - Frantic, she boxes up her books, artifacts, etc.

-- EXT. PORCH - She shoves all the boxes down the steps, rips her MADAME OTHELIA sign off the house.

-- INT. KITCHEN - She pours the contents of jars down the sink.

-- EXT. PORCH - Othelia tosses out her tarot cards. They flutter through the air, fall to the ground.

INT. PARLOR - NEXT MORNING

The room is quiet. She sits on the couch, hands in her lap, staring straight forward. The front door opens, SLAMS.

Henry enters the parlor.

HENRY

(joking)

Having a yard sale?

She looks at him.

HENRY

All the stuff in the yard.

Aware she's upset, he sits with her. She leans on him.

OTHELIA

I killed him.

HENRY

You don't know that.

OTHELIA

I did. He's after me.

The look on Henry's face says she might be right. The phone RINGS. They both sit up, look at it.

INT. AGATHA'S PARLOR - LATER THAT DAY

Othelia and Henry look at the front page of the paper as Agatha stands off to the side.

OTHELIA

Oh my God.

INSERT - FRONT PAGE OF NEWSPAPER

A picture of Cornelius is printed on the page. The headline reads "LOCAL MAN KILLS TRAVELER."

BACK TO SCENE

AGATHA

Paper says he bludgeoned him.

Henry and Othelia look shocked.

AGATHA

He was always a little nuts. He told the police he was doing a public service or something.

OTHELIA

Oh my God.

Henry scans the paper's article.

HENRY

Says Cornelius saw a suspicious stranger lurking around homes in the area, so he followed him back to Martha's. Said he had a bad feeling about the man, and a voice told him he needed to rise up.

AGATHA

He thinks he's a hero.

Othelia lowers herself onto a chair, covers her face.

OTHELIA

Shit, Cornelius.

She runs her fingers over the cut in her palm.

EXT. AGATHA'S FRONT PORCH

Agatha sits down beside Othelia.

OTHELIA

It was me.

Agatha glances over at her, curious.

AGATHA

You what?

OTHELIA

Cornelius came to see me a few mornings ago. I was tired and didn't want to fool with him, so I just spit something out about how he was gonna do something heroic.

Agatha looks concerned, turns to Othelia.

AGATHA

You already know that wasn't the right thing to do with someone like him. But, it also isn't your fault. Cornelius was a walking time bomb. He was bound to snap one day.

Othelia looks off, doesn't face her mother.

OTHELIA

That's not all. The man he killed, Sullivan, he's been following me.

AGATHA

Following you? Honey, he's dead.

Othelia turns to her.

OTHELIA

He was at my house the other night. And Cornelius is right; there was something not right about him. He had something up his sleeve.

Agatha gestures for her to divulge more.

OTHELIA

I needed him out of the house. He scared me, so I poisoned him. I thought I was only giving him just enough to make him sick, though. But I really pissed him off good 'cause I haven't gotten a minute of peace since.

Agatha looks a little irritated.

AGATHA

Since when did you get this high horse?

Othelia looks confused.

AGATHA

Messing with peoples' lives like
you somebody big.

OTHELIA

You said to be mediocre in a world
full of possibilites is to insult
your creator.

Agatha stares straight at her.

AGATHA

That doesn't mean you try to be the
creator.

Othelia's expression swallows the comment. She looks away
like she's ashamed.

Her mother scoots closer, pats her on the knee.

AGATHA

Wash your hands clean.

Agatha gets up, goes inside.

Othelia sits there with her thoughts.

INT. BATHROOM - DAYS LATER

Othelia rinses her hands. Henry enters.

HENRY

Hey.

She looks up.

OTHELIA

Hey. All packed?

HENRY

Yep. You?

OTHELIA

Yeah. Just got done loading the car
up.

HENRY

Ready to be leaving?

She dries her hands.

OTHELIA

Definitely time. Need to turn over
a new leaf, ya know? You excited to
go home?

HENRY

Yeah. Think I've got plenty of
material from this place.

He grins.

She LAUGHS.

OTHELIA

Yeah. Me too.

He hugs her.

HENRY

I'll be in touch, okay?

She nods.

He exits.

EXT. OTHELIA'S DRIVEWAY

Henry backs out of the driveway as Othelia smiles and waves
him off.

She puts a final bag in her packed car, takes a bite of an
apple, turns for one last look at the house.

The house seems to stare back down at her.

She gets in her car, pitches the apple out into the yard,
backs out.

As she passes by the house, a light upstairs turns on.

THE END

BARNABUS AND THE GNOME

INT. BARNABUS'S BEDROOM - MORNING

BARNABUS BROWN (33) sits in bed, fingers interlaced in his lap. He stares straight ahead. The alarm clock beside him turns to 7:00 and BEEPS.

He turns it off, puts his feet on the floor, puts on his glasses, stands up.

MONTAGE - BARNABUS'S ROUTINE

-- INT. KITCHEN -- Barnabus crafts a peanut butter and honey sandwich with precision.

-- INT. BATHROOM -- Focusing on the mirror, he buttons his shirt from top to bottom, methodical and rhythmic.

-- EXT. BARNABUS'S HOME -- He steps out of his small home, locks the door, descends the porch steps. He walks to the sidewalk, looks both ways, pushes off with one foot. The wheels on his shoes take him down the sidewalk, lunchbox in hand. His mailbox reads BARNABUS BROWN.

INT. WHEELIE SHOES FACTORY

FACTORY CO-WORKERS (various ages) assemble shoes at their stations.

Barnabus walks to his station, puts his lunchbox under his work table, sits.

He unloads various shoe parts out of their containers as his boss, VICK (50s), walks by.

VICK

Hey Chester, go dig up a broom and clear out this walk way, will ya?

Vick doesn't wait for an answer, keeps walking.

BARNABUS

(to himself)

Barnabus. My name is Barnabus.

He watches Vick walk away.

EXT. EATING AREA - LATER THAT DAY

The workers eat at picnic tables behind the factory.

Barnabus sits on a bench several yards away eating his sandwich. He hears his co-workers LAUGH, looks over at them, then back at his sandwich. He takes a bite.

INT. BARNABUS'S HOME - EVENING

Barnabus walks in, waves at an old picture on the wall of a younger him surrounded by his parents and younger brother.

He pours himself a glass of milk, sits at the kitchen counter. The silence seems loud as he looks around the room, then at his answering machine: no messages.

MONTAGE - ANOTHER LONELY NIGHT

-- INT. KITCHEN - EVENING -- Silent, Barnabus sits at the counter, works on a large puzzle by himself.

-- INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING -- With great care, he dusts the framed family photo. Hand in pocket, he steps back, stares.

-- INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING -- Before closing the curtains, he notices a family playing in the yard across the street. His eyes seem to sigh.

-- INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT -- He buttons his pajama shirt, methodical, rhythmic.

-- INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT -- In bed, he pulls a photo album out of the nightstand drawer. The album reveals old photos of his family. None of the photos look recent; all are at least ten years old. He closes it, sets it on the nightstand, turns off the lamp. The alarm clock reads 8:40.

INT. BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING

Barnabus sits in bed, waiting. The alarm clock BEEPS. He shuts it off, places his feet on the ground, puts on his glasses, stands.

EXT. BARNABUS'S HOME

He exits the house, locks the door, descends the steps.

He reaches the sidewalk, looks both ways, rolls away with lunchbox in hand.

INT. WHEELIE SHOES FACTORY

Barnabus sits at his station, assembles wheelie shoes like the world depends on it.

Vick walks by.

VICK

Chester, grab a rag and wipe down
that window over there.

Barnabus looks up, watches as Vick walks away, silent.

EXT. EATING AREA - LATER THAT DAY

As the workers eat at their picnic tables, Barnabus eats
alone on his bench.

He admires the clouds, the bench, and homes across the way.

He lowers his sandwich from his mouth, sits up straighter,
looks curiously into a nearby yard. He puts his sandwich
down and gets up.

EXT. NEIGHBORING YARD

He walks into the yard, zeroed in on an object behind a bush
that pokes out of the ground.

Head tilted, he stares at the object a few seconds, squats,
pushes away dirt to pull the other half of the object above
ground.

He pulls out a smiling gnome, about a foot tall, that
resembles a little boy.

Barnabus looks to each side of him.

INT. BARNABUS'S HOME - LATER THAT DAY

Excited, he enters his home, lawn gnome in hand, shuts the
door behind him.

BARNABUS

(to the gnome)

Well, this is it. Home sweet home.

He sits the gnome down on the counter, wets a washcloth,
wipes down the gnome with pride.

BARNABUS

Can't forget behind the ears. This
is very important.

He folds the washcloth and places it beside the sink, puts
his hands in his back pockets, looks at the gnome.

BARNABUS

Oh, you must be hungry!

He looks through his refrigerator and cabinets. He removes apple sauce and empties some into a small bowl.

BARNABUS

We'll get groceries soon. I wasn't expecting you.

The gnome doesn't seem too offended.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

In the corner of the room, he makes a bed out of a box and quilt for the gnome. He places the gnome in, pats him on the head.

BARNABUS

First night in a new place is always a little scary, but I'll be right here, okay?

He pulls the quilt up around the gnome's shoulders.

He walks over to his bed, cuts out the light.

INT. BEDROOM - MIDDLE OF NIGHT

In the darkness, the alarm clock reads 3:28. Barnabus turns on the lamp, sits up, rubs his eyes.

He gets out of bed, picks up the gnome, bounces it in his arms.

BARNABUS

There, there; I know. Sometimes I can't sleep either.

He takes a book off the shelf, sits on the bed, gnome in lap, opens the book, YAWNS.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

The alarm clock reads 7:00 and BEEPS. A tired Barnabus wakes, rubs his eyes, looks at the clock.

He sits up, looks over at the gnome, tiptoes out of the room.

EXT. MS. HENRY'S HOME - LATER THAT MORNING

Barnabus stands outside his neighbor's home with his young gnome. He KNOCKS and waits.

MS. HENRY (50s), with a face like Tammy Faye Baker, opens the door, confused. She looks behind and to the sides of Barnabus.

BARNABUS

Good morning, Ms. Henry.

MS. HENRY

Uh, good morning, Mr. Brown.

BARNABUS

Oh, please call me Barnabus.

Ms. Henry looks down at the gnome, squints.

MS. HENRY

Is there something I can do for you?

BARNABUS

Well, yes there is. I have to be at work soon and as you can see I'm in urgent need for a sitter.

He looks at his gnome, proud. Ms. Henry's expression tries to add the pieces.

MS. HENRY

A sitter?

Barnabus looks as though he doesn't understand the question. He lifts his little gnome higher.

MS. HENRY

You want me to watch that?

BARNABUS

Only until four o'clock. I'll pay you fifty dollars a day. I could use the help the rest of the week if you're interested.

Her eyebrows raise. She looks back at the gnome, smiles, artificial.

MS. HENRY

I'd be happy to.

Barnabus hands the gnome over with care.

She looks at it like one looks at an ugly baby in the grocery store.

BARNABUS

I'll be back a bit after four.

Ms. Henry nods, goes to shut the door. Barnabus stops the door with his hand.

BARNABUS

He doesn't like carrots, not at all.

MS. HENRY

No carrots; got it.

Barnabus waves at his gnome, a bit reluctant.

BARNABUS

See you later, buddy.

She SLAMS the door. He stands there for a brief moment, shakes his head like a guilty parent, walks away.

INT. WHEELIE SHOES FACTORY - LATER THAT DAY

Shoe parts strewn out in front of him, Barnabus works with a little extra pep.

INT. CHILDREN'S STORE

Barnabus browses for the perfect stroller on his lunch break.

EXT. MS. HENRY'S HOME

Ms. Henry hands over the gnome as Barnabus gives her cash. She snatches it from his hand.

BARNABUS

Thank you very much. I'm sure he had a big day.

She fakes a smile, shuts the door.

Barnabus leaves, happy to be reunited.

INT. FACTORY RESTROOM - NEXT DAY

Barnabus washes his hands at a sink.

JIM (40s) exits a stall and washes his hands beside Barnabus.

BARNABUS

Hey, Jim.

Jim looks at him like he's never seen him before.

JIM

Hey.

A tired Barnabus splashes water onto his face, dries it off with a paper towel.

JIM

Tough day?

BARNABUS

Up all night with the little one.

Wouldn't stop crying.

Jim smiles, nods.

JIM

I've been there. How old?

Proud Barnabus shows Jim a picture of the gnome on his cell phone.

BARNABUS

Terrible twos.

Jim looks at Barnabus like he's crazy, nods just to play along.

EXT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - LATER THAT DAY

With his new stroller, Barnabus pushes his gnome into the doctor's office.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

He strolls his gnome in, walks up to the desk, peers over at the RECEPTIONIST (30s). She looks up.

RECEPTIONIST

Can I help you?

BARNABUS

It's my son's first time here. He has an appointment under Brown.

She hands him a clipboard and pen.

RECEPTIONIST

I'm just gonna need you to fill this out front and back.

BARNABUS

Of course.

He pushes the stroller over to a seated area, works on the paperwork.

An OLD MAN (70s) sits nearby, eyes Barnabus and his gnome.

INT. EXAM ROOM

DR. HOLBROOK (60s) enters, sits on a stool by a counter, scans the information sheet. He looks up at Barnabus, then the gnome.

DR. HOLBROOK

Barnabus?

BARNABUS

Yes?

DR. HOLBROOK

What's this about?

BARNABUS

My son needs a check up. Any vaccinations or vitamins you think he needs, I want to take care of those things today.

Dr. Holbrook doesn't look sure what to think.

DR. HOLBROOK

You want me to examine this?

He points to the gnome.

BARNABUS

That's correct. He's getting big fast.

The doctor stares a few seconds.

DR. HOLBROOK

Barnabus, this is a lawn gnome.

Barnabus looks offended, pulls the gnome in closer.

BARNABUS

Dr. Holbrook, my understanding is that you help people here. My son needs a check up.

DR. HOLBROOK

If this was a person I'd be happy to care for him, but this is...ceramic.

Barnabus stands, smooths the paper on the seat.

BARNABUS

I think we'll be getting him a new doctor.

The doctor takes out a pen out of his pocket, grabs a small notepad off the counter, writes something down.

DR. HOLBROOK

Now wait. Hold on a minute. Is everything okay, son?

Barnabus appears puzzled.

BARNABUS

How do you mean?

DR. HOLBROOK

You've been coming here for years, Barnabus. You can talk to me. I know things have been rough since the fire. I'm sure these past ten years --

BARNABUS

-- Dr. Holbrook, I just want to make sure my little one is okay. I didn't come here for conversation.

Dr. Holbrook chooses his next words, jots something down on a notepad.

DR. HOLBROOK

Barnabus, perhaps there is a different doctor you should see. I'm gonna write down her information here, and I think maybe she could give you the kind of help you need.

He rips a slip of paper off the pad, hands it over.

Barnabus takes it, looks at the number.

BARNABUS

Thank you.

He looks back at the doctor with a smug expression and exits.

Dr. Holbrook watches him leave, concerned.

EXT. BARNABUS'S HOME - NIGHT

CRICKETS CHIRP as Barnabus storms out of his front door and over to Ms. Henry's house.

He BANGS on her door, paces until she answers. She opens the door, timid until she sees who it is.

BARNABUS

You didn't feed him!

She squints her eyes.

BARNABUS

He's starving! Why didn't you feed him?

She folds her arms, rests against the door frame.

MS. HENRY

His mouth doesn't open.

Barnabus tilts his head toward her.

BARNABUS

What do you mean his mouth doesn't open?

MS. HENRY

His mouth doesn't open because he's a gnome.

Barnabus looks skeptical.

BARNABUS

Excuse me?

She rolls her eyes.

MS. HENRY

A gnome. You know, a gnome you find in people's yards or gardens. A decoration.

He looks vulnerable, hurt.

Ms. Henry steps out, shakes her head like she thinks he's nuts, watches him stomp off.

INT. KITCHEN

An agitated Barnabus makes a bottle. The gnome sits on a stool at the counter.

Photographs of the gnome hang on the wall.

BARNABUS

I should have known better. We'll
fix this tomorrow. Don't you worry.
I know just what to do.

He tests the milk's temperature on his wrist.

BARNABUS

I will never leave you, and you
will never leave me.

He pushes the bottle over to the gnome, smiles.

INT. CHILD CARE FACILITY - NEXT DAY

Kind, well-meaning AMELIA (late 20s) walks with Barnabus down a hallway, pointing out the facility's positive services. Barnabus pushes a stroller, a blanket pulled up around the gnome.

AMELIA

I'm glad you came by, Mr. Brown.
How did you hear about us?

BARNABUS

My co-worker, Jim, says his
children go here and like it very
much.

She nods.

AMELIA

Yes, the Stuarts. We love them.
Since we keep a six-to-one ratio
between our staff and kids, we have
great relationships. We try to
provide lots of attention and fun
for each kid.

BARNABUS

Excellent. I think this will be a
good match.

AMELIA

Oh, wonderful! How old is this
little one?

She bends down in front of the stroller. Barnabus lifts the blanket, revealing the gnome.

She stands up straight, stares at Barnabus, confused. He stares back.

AMELIA

Curious, I don't understand.

Barnabus leans over, checks the stroller's contents.

BARNABUS

gnome. You don't understand what?

She seems uncomfortable.

AMELIA

(timid)

Well, it's just that...this is a daycare for kids. And you have here a...I'm not sure how to supervise a garden gnome.

He raises his eyebrows.

BARNABUS

How dare you.

He covers the gnome back up, turns the stroller around, marches out.

Amelia watches, upset.

AMELIA

Sir...Mr. Brown, I really didn't mean --

Doors slam O.S..

INT. WHEELIE SHOES FACTORY - DAYS LATER

The gnome sits in a playpen in exhausted Barnabus's work station. Barnabus is busy at work when Vick walks over to him.

VICK

Uh, Chest --

BARNABUS

-- My name is Barnabus.

Behind him, a few workers watch to see what happens.

VICK

Barnabus, we need to talk in my office.

Vick puts his hands in his pockets, jerks his head toward the office.

Curious, Barnabus puts the shoe down, gets up.

INT. VICK'S OFFICE

Vick sits behind his desk. Barnabus sits opposite him. The gnome sits in a chair behind Barnabus.

VICK

Mr. Brown, I've recently seen some changes in you that concern me.

BARNABUS

I know; I apologize. I've been trying to find suitable daycare. I just had no other option but to bring him today.

Vick appears caught off guard.

VICK

That isn't quite what I meant.

He scratches the back of his head, smoothes his hair.

VICK

Mr. Brown, I've been noticing some behavior from you that concerns other employees, and it just isn't very productive in the work place.

Barnabus's expression turns to worried.

BARNABUS

Such as?

VICK

Well, you've been late a couple mornings, and yesterday you came back from lunch a little late.

BARNABUS

I understand, sir. With kids, if it's not one thing, it's another, right?

Barnabus holds up a picture of Vick's children from the desk, sits it back down.

BARNABUS

I'm really trying to get the hang
of it. It's just very new to me.
I'll get better.

Vick sits back in his chair.

VICK

That's what I wanted to talk to you
about.

BARNABUS

I'm sorry?

VICK

Getting better. Mr. Brown, are ya
seeing -- um -- any kind of doctor?

Barnabus looks back at his gnome.

BARNABUS

As a matter of fact, I've been
looking for a suitable doctor for
him all week.

VICK

Not for him. I'm talking about you.

BARNABUS

I see a physician annually. I'm in
good health, sir. My assembly
fingers are still nimble.

Vick rubs his forehead.

VICK

Barnabus, I'm gonna be honest with
you.

He sits his elbows on the desk, leans in.

VICK

I'm thinking you might need to talk
to someone. That kind of doctor.

Barnabus looks curious.

BARNABUS

For what, sir?

Jim notices from a few stations over. He looks concerned as
Barnabus pulls himself up, runs to the bathroom.

VICK

You're bringing a ceramic elf to work. You're talking to it. I've seen you try to feed it. These things aren't what I'd call healthy. What's going on lately? Let's get to the bottom of this, Barnabus. You're my best assembler.

Barnabus's expression turns cold. He pushes his seat back, stands.

He picks up his gnome and exits without looking back.

INT. WHEELIE SHOES FACTORY

Hurt and irritated, Barnabus carries his gnome back to his station. He places the gnome on his work table, sits back in his chair, interlaces his fingers between his knees.

He looks down at the floor, takes a deep BREATH.

BARNABUS

I know, son.

He nods, rubs his eyes.

BARNABUS

I know.

He collects himself, takes out shoes parts. He works with little passion.

A DISTRACTED CO-WORKER (30s) pushes a dolly stacked with boxes by Barnabus's station. As he passes, a box knocks over the gnome.

As the gnome CRASHES against the ground, several chunks of it break off.

Barnabus stands, stares at the gnome, falls to his knees.

DISTRACTED CO-WORKER

Sorry about that, man. I'll get a broom when I come back through.

The co-worker pushes the boxes away.

Mouth open, Barnabus shakes his head in turmoil. He puts his hands over his eyes, shakes harder.

Jim notices from a few stations over. He looks concerned as Barnabus pulls himself up, runs to the bathroom.

INT. FACTORY RESTROOM

Barnabus runs into the restroom, VOMITS in a trashcan. Tears and sweat run down his face as he trembles.

He pushes the large trashcan in front of the door, slides down onto the floor. He buries his head between his knees, SOBS. Jim KNOCKS on the door O.S..

JIM

Barnabus?

Barnabus covers the back of his head with his hands.

JIM

Barnabus, let me in. Let's talk.

BARNABUS

Go away.

JIM

Come on --

BARNABUS

(through tears)

-- My mom, my dad, my brother, my son.

He shakes his head.

BARNABUS

I have no one.

Barnabus slides onto his side in the fetal position, covers his face.

MONTAGE - MOURNING

-- EXT. CHILDHOOD HOME - EVENING -- A sad nostalgia on his face, he sits on the curb across from a charred, long-forgotten structure of a house.

-- INT. BARNABUS'S LIVING ROOM - DAY -- Curtains drawn, he sits on his couch in silence. His phone RINGS. He gets up, unplugs the phone, sits back down on the couch in the same position.

-- INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT -- Time to box up the gnome's belongings: a blanket, bottle, book. He drops the items in one at a time.

-- INT. BEDROOM - MORNING -- He sits on the edge of his bed, sees the stroller in the corner of the room, takes it by the handle, drags it out.

-- EXT. BARNABUS'S BACKYARD -- He opens the back door, sits the stroller outside, gives it a last look, shuts the door.

EXT. BARNABUS'S FRONT PORCH - LATER THAT DAY

Barnabus sits on the porch's steps, hands crossed in his lap. He stares at his shoes. A CAR pulls in the driveway O.S.; its door SLAMS.

AMELIA

(timid)

Mr. Brown? Do you mind if I sit?

He looks up to see Amelia's worried eyes, nods his head. She sits a couple feet away from him, sets a small bag down beside her feet.

AMELIA

I tried to call you. I got your information off the paperwork you filled out at the daycare.

He doesn't speak.

AMELIA

Mr. Brown, I --

BARNABUS

-- Barnabus.

She looks relieved.

AMELIA

Barnabus, I've been trying to get a hold of you to talk about what happened the other day. I just feel terrible. I...I was caught a little off guard. But, I mean who am I to judge? My family is about the most unorthodox group of people you could ever meet.

She looks at Barnabus for a sign.

AMELIA

My mother's so obsessed with taxidermy we have more dead creatures in our house than live ones. She has two gutted geese named Jack and Jill.

She LAUGHS.

AMELIA

I bet your family isn't as odd as mine.

BARNABUS

I don't have any living family.

She purses her lips, looks down.

AMELIA

I just wanted to say that I'm really sorry that my reaction the other day was not as professional as it should have been.

She looks away, looks back, hesitant.

AMELIA

Mr. Stuart, Jim, came by and explained some things to me, and I wanted to tell you that --

BARNABUS

-- It was just a gnome. It wasn't real.

Unsure, she scrambles for what to say next. He looks at her.

BARNABUS

I stole it out of somebody's yard.

AMELIA

(hesitant)

Why?

He ponders.

BARNABUS

I just needed...something, I guess.

She nods, collects the pieces of the conversation.

BARNABUS

I'm sorry if I alarmed you. Things have been...difficult for me for a while...since my family passed away.

AMELIA

Barnabus?

He turns his head to her.

Her face holds the innocence of a child.

THE WIDOW GIRL

AMELIA

Are you okay?

He thinks about it, shrugs. When the silence grows uncomfortable, she gets an idea.

AMELIA

Would you want to do something together some time?

Barnabus looks like he doesn't remember how to answer that question. He nods, kind of smiles.

BARNABUS

What's that?

He points to the bag at her feet.

AMELIA

Oh! I brought you something.

She gives him the bag.

He opens it to find a little gnome. His face lights up.

AMELIA

For company.

He sets the gnome down in the yard, joins Amelia back on the steps.

She grins at him.

He returns it.

THE END

THE BLUEDOVE GIRL

INT. BLUEDOVE KITCHEN - DUSK

A small chicken SQUAWKS and flaps her wings in self-defense around the room. In a large dress-up hat, ALBERTA BLUEDOVE (10) attempts to catch it, like it's playing a game with her. What the kitchen lacks in glamor it makes up for in warmth. Alberta's MOTHER (30s) places a cage on the table.

MOTHER

All right, Alberta. That's enough observation. Take her back out.

Alberta scoops the chicken up and places it in the cage. She eyes the bird with curiosity and sticks her fingers through the bars for comfort.

ALBERTA

It's not nice keeping them cooped up all the time. Why can't we just let them fly around like they want to?

Her mother washes a dish at the sink. She looks back at Alberta like she's proud she asked.

MOTHER

Because we need them. We can't let things we need just wander away.

ALBERTA

Oh, they'll come back. They know where we live.

Alberta's mother smiles, dries her hands on her dress.

MOTHER

Well, just for safekeeping, how about you put that cage on the back porch so Daddy can put her in the coop when he comes down?

Alberta picks up the cage, opens a door at the back of the kitchen, sits the cage outside the door, dusts off her hands.

MOTHER

Did you know one night a year somewhere in the Carolinas it rains apple cores?

Attention caught, Alberta looks up.

ALBERTA

Cores?

MOTHER

Just the cores, with old, wood clothespins stuck in them. I lived there when I was growing up. These little old women live in this tall, creepy house on a hill. The cores only rain on them and nobody else ever sees it happening.

Her mother stirs a pot on the stove.

ALBERTA

Why not the whole apple?

MOTHER

Shouldn't you be asking why are apple cores raining out of the sky?

ALBERTA

Why does it happen?

Her mother smiles, pleased.

MOTHER

Couldn't tell you.

She puts a lid on the pot.

MOTHER

But, these women there can sense the one night is coming. So they get out of bed at midnight, go stand outside, and just like clockwork the apple cores come.

Alberta looks stumped.

MOTHER

They stand out in their yard with buckets and bags and whatever they can find, and they gather up as many as they can. They figure the cores must come for good reason, so they have to put them to use.

ALBERTA

What do they do with them?

MOTHER

That I don't exactly know. But,
it's very mysterious. The women
seem to be getting younger, not
older.

Wide-eyed, Alberta sits on her knees in a chair at the
kitchen table. She leans in as her mother wipes off the
table in front of her.

ALBERTA

What else do you know?

MOTHER

Know about what?

ALBERTA

What happens in other places.

Her mother throws the rag in the sink, hands her three
plates.

MOTHER

Set those out. Your daddy will be
down in a minute.

She obeys.

Her mother checks the pot, stirs its contents, grips her
forehead like her head hurts.

MOTHER

Well, out in California they have
stars that talk.

Alberta deals out the plates, confused.

MOTHER

Your daddy once saw a man in
Montana turn into a thousand
spiders when these kids tried to
rob him outside a grocery store.

Her mother sits a basket of bread in the table's center.

ALBERTA

I'm gonna go to all those places.
I'm gonna see what they do with the
apple cores. I'll sit in the trees
so they never see me.

Her mother LAUGHS, arranges silverware next to the plates.

MOTHER

Alberta Bluedove: detective
explorer.

Alberta nods, pleased.

Her mother picks up a bowl of plums, walks into a pantry
O.S. behind Alberta.

A small spider crawls across Alberta's chair. She scoots
over a bit and looks around, like she's not sure if she
should kill it.

A THUD is heard from the pantry, along with a BOWL SPINNING.
Alberta looks to see plums rolling out of the pantry.

She walks over, looks in at the pantry's floor, disturbed.

ALBERTA

Daddy!

EXT. GRAVEYARD - A FEW DAYS LATER

A VIOLINIST (20) plays as a small crowd walks away from a
coffin, breaking off into clumps.

HUBERT BLUEDOVE (late 30s) stares at the casket. His suit
looks like it's held him through a variety of occasions. His
face is long with agony. A PREACHER (40s) pats him on the
back.

PREACHER

We'll see you all at the house,
Hubert.

The preacher dismisses himself. Hubert squats, head in
hands. Alberta stands beside him, unsure. She turns to let
him be alone, but he grabs her hand.

HUBERT

Stay.

He covers his eyes. Silent, Alberta places a hand on his
shoulder. She looks around for an answer.

A sign on the graveyard's gate reads "PINES GRAVEYARD: A
FINAL RESTING PLACE." Alberta looks at it as though a trip
to the zoo was taken away. Her father CRIES.

INT. ALBERTA'S BEDROOM - DAY - EIGHT YEARS LATER

A pretty ALBERTA (18) hops over shoes, books, travel
magazines on her floor.

She looks in the mirror, zips her dress, hurried. Posters of faraway places cover her walls.

She takes a ribbon out of a drawer, ties her hair up with it, runs out of the room.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM

Alberta takes a man's jeans out of a laundry basket on the washing machine. She turns them upside down, shakes them. Coins fall out of the pockets, CLINKING on the machine.

She runs them off with one finger into her other hand, counting.

ALBERTA

Fifty, seventy-five, eighty,
ninety...

INT. ALBERTA'S BEDROOM

She runs in, drops to her knees. She slides a large glass jug filled with bills and change out from under her bed and drops the coins in. Reaching over onto a nightstand, she grabs a hymnal, pulls an alarm clock over to her to check the time, springs up.

EXT. PINES GRAVEYARD

Alberta runs through the large graveyard, slowing as she reaches a funeral site. A crowd gathers.

Alberta stands off to the side, smooths her hair, realizes she only has one earring in, slides it in her pocket. A WOMAN (50s) places a hand on Alberta's arm.

WOMAN

Thank you for being here, honey.
Sing us a pretty one.

Alberta nods, smiles.

ALBERTA

I'll try.

The woman walks away as the graveyard's sign catches Alberta's eye again.

The preacher, now older, taps Alberta on the shoulder with his Bible, jerks his thumb toward the crowd. She turns.

PREACHER

We're gonna start over here, okay?

Alberta smiles for him. She walks away with him toward the gathering.

She falls in line with the rest of the onlookers, crosses her hands in front of her petite frame. The preacher opens his Bible.

PREACHER

Let's begin with a prayer.

Alberta lifts her eyes to see a BOY (13) comforting a WIDOW (40s), his mother. He meets Alberta's stare, she darts her eyes back to her shoes.

PREACHER

Dear Heavenly Father...

EXT. GRAVEYARD - AFTER FUNERAL

As the group leaves the funeral site, the preacher gives Alberta an envelope by the coffin.

PREACHER

Nice job today. See you Sunday.

She lifts her palm to him.

ALBERTA

See you Sunday.

She tucks the envelope in her hymnal, walks by a headstone reading "ODESSA BLUEDOVE." She bends over and kisses the top of it as she passes.

She approaches the farthest side of the graveyard. Hubert Bluedove is about a foot in to digging a grave. Alberta sits on a headstone several feet away.

HUBERT

There she is. How'd it go?

ALBERTA

Mrs. Johnson told me I could have sang something a little more traditional.

Hubert LAUGHS, wipes his forehead with his arm.

ALBERTA

What are you planning on for the day?

HUBERT

Just digging this -- don't sit on
the headstones, Al -- just digging
this grave for Mr. Carpenter.

She stands, swings her hymnal by her side.

ALBERTA

Sounds like a real fun Saturday,
Daddy.

He drives the shovel into the ground.

HUBERT

He ain't gonna dig it himself.

ALBERTA

I'm gonna grab lunch at the diner.

His eyes meet hers.

HUBERT

Don't be talking to anyone you
don't know up there.

ALBERTA

Daddy --

HUBERT

-- I mean it.

She looks out over the graveyard for a subject change.

ALBERTA

You need to eat out here. It's hot.
Want me to bring something back?

He shakes his head.

HUBERT

I had a good breakfast. I'll see
you at home for dinner later.

She looks unsatisfied.

ALBERTA

All right.

She walks away.

HUBERT

Walk the street home, Al. Don't cut
through nowhere.

She doesn't look back.

ALBERTA

I know; I know.

She strolls off through the rows of graves.

INT. SMALL DINER

Alberta sits alone at a table by the window reading a menu.

A KIND WAITRESS (50) approaches.

KIND WAITRESS

Grilled cheese and a pink lemonade?

Alberta looks up, smiles.

ALBERTA

Thanks, Myrtle.

The waitress takes her menu and walks away.

Alberta stares out the window as SIMON (19) slides into the chair across from her, taps his knuckles on the hymnal in front of her.

SIMON

Hey, you.

Her reaction goes from surprised to lukewarm.

ALBERTA

Hey, Simon.

SIMON

So what's a girl with a fresh high school diploma doing this summer?

She picks at the tablecloth.

ALBERTA

Oh, just singing for sad people, saving up money, leaving.

Simon looks at her, suspicious.

SIMON

Leaving? Where are you going?

ALBERTA

Far away.

SIMON

And what's there?

Alberta places her hands in her lap, sits up straight, looks at him head on.

ALBERTA

I don't know yet. I'll tell you
after I get there.

The waitress delivers Alberta's lemonade.

KIND WAITRESS

You want anything, Simon?

SIMON

I'll get the same thing.

The waitress walks away. Alberta looks at the table.

ALBERTA

Can't even pick your own lunch.

Simon leans back on two legs in his chair.

SIMON

Your daddy's okay with you leaving?

Alberta looks out the window.

ALBERTA

He doesn't know.

Shocked, Simon lets his chair fall back on four legs.

SIMON

You're goin' away and you haven't
told your daddy? It's a good thing
Hubert Bluedove digs graves 'cause
he's gonna kill you.

She looks around the restaurant, leans into Simon.

ALBERTA

It's not everybody's business.

She sits up straight, crosses her arms over her chest.

SIMON

What money you doing this with?

She glances at the envelope in her hymnal.

ALBERTA

I've been saving.

He shakes his head.

SIMON

Ain't right. Your daddy's not gonna know what to do. I bet he gets mad.

ALBERTA

It's not him being mad I'm worried about.

The waitress sits a pink lemonade down in front of Simon, walks away.

Alberta and Simon look at each other, silent.

EXT. ALBERTA'S HOUSE - LATER THAT DAY

Alberta carries her shoes, hymnal under her arm. She walks with Simon, his hands in his pockets, up her gravel driveway towards the house.

ALBERTA

Did you know somewhere in the Carolinas it rains apple cores?

SIMON

Rains apple cores?

Alberta nods.

ALBERTA

Just the cores. And they've got clothespins stuck in them. These old women live in a house on a hill. The cores only rain on them and nobody else ever sees it happening.

Simon looks skeptical.

SIMON

But why not the whole apple?

She SIGHS.

ALBERTA

Shouldn't you be asking why apple cores are raining out of the sky?

SIMON

Okay. Why are apple cores falling out of the sky?

ALBERTA

I don't know.

He looks at her like he's been tricked.

ALBERTA

The women can sense the one night the apple core rain is coming. So they get out of bed at midnight, and just like clockwork the apple cores come.

Simon looks more interested in Alberta than the story.

ALBERTA

They stand out in their yard with buckets and bags and whatever they can find, and they gather up as many as they can. They figure the cores must come for good reason, so they put them to use.

SIMON

Doing what?

ALBERTA

Well, Simon, I can't exactly tell you that. But I can tell you the women seem to be getting younger, and not older. And I'm going to find them.

Simon CHUCKLES.

SIMON

Maybe they're witches.

ALBERTA

If they are, they're good witches.

SIMON

Is that so?

She throws him a warm look.

ALBERTA

Yeah.

They lean against the house's front porch. Alberta stares down the driveway.

ALBERTA

Do you ever just think about leaving? Just walk out the house one day and keep walking until you're in a new place?

SIMON

Sure don't. You're set on this leaving business.

ALBERTA

I'm going to. Soon.

Simon shakes his head.

SIMON

I don't think you will. You'd go crazy worrying about your daddy back here alone.

Alberta stares at the ground, silent. Simon nudges her.

SIMON

You wanna come out with me later? There's gonna be a field party behind the drugstore.

ALBERTA

I guess my invitation got lost in the mail.

SIMON

Oh, Al, the only reason they don't talk to you is because they only see you out when somebody dies.

He LAUGHS. Alberta looks defensive, chips at porch paint.

ALBERTA

Nobody in school even knows my name but you. They just call me "The Bluedove Girl."

SIMON

Well, I'm coming to get you later.

ALBERTA

I'm sure.

He leans toward her a bit. She doesn't pull back, so he leans in a little closer, just a couple inches from her face. As he's about to kiss her, she turns her head and walks up the steps, quick and unapologetic.

ALBERTA

Bye.

Embarrassed, he walks away.

SIMON

Bye.

She enters the house. The screen door SLAMS behind her.

INT. BLUEDOVE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Alberta and her father sit across from one another at the table. She sits with one knee pulled up to her chest. They eat cereal. A third chair sits empty between them. CRICKETS CHIRP in the B.G..

HUBERT

That was mighty nice of Simon
Hinkle to walk you home today.

Alberta looks up from her bowl.

ALBERTA

Yep.

HUBERT

Heard you two had lunch together
today, too.

They both CRUNCH a bite of cereal.

ALBERTA

Yep.

HUBERT

You like him?

She lowers her spoon into the bowl, sits back a little.

ALBERTA

No. Simon Hinkle was born and
raised here, and I'll bet you money
he'll die here, too.

HUBERT

Well, let's hope so. More money in
our pockets, right?

She rolls her eyes as if she's heard this joke before.

HUBERT

There's nothing wrong with sticking
around here, Al. What's so wrong
with it?

She shakes her head as if to say "nothing."

He pushes his bowl away. A chicken SQUAWKS from outside.
Hubert turns toward the sound, stands up.

HUBERT

Time to feed the noise-makers.

He goes to pick up his bowl.

ALBERTA

I'll get it.

He leaves the bowl, walks away. A door SMACKS the frame
O.S..

Alberta stands, puts the bowls in the sink, walks away from
it like her determination is weakened.

INT. ALBERTA'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Alberta stares at the ceiling in bed, one arm under her
head. Moonlight streaks her face.

Her window BREAKS in one pane and a small rock ROLLS across
the floor.

She springs out of bed, looks out the window, lifts it.

ALBERTA

(in an angry whisper)

What are you doing?

SIMON

I told you I was coming to get you.

ALBERTA

My daddy's asleep upstairs, Simon.

SIMON

Well, I didn't put that much
thought into it.

They freeze, listen for movement upstairs: coast seems
clear.

ALBERTA

You could've called, ya know? Or knocked. Or some other civilized approach.

She pulls her nightgown up closer to her neck.

SIMON

More of an adventure this way. Get some clothes on and let's go.

ALBERTA

I'm going back to bed.

SIMON

Get your clothes on. Get out of the house. Come on.

She SIGHS, considers.

ALBERTA

Hold on.

Simon smiles and faces away from the window.

Alberta removes her nightgown in the darkness and throws it on the floor. She pulls a tank top and shorts out of a drawer, puts them on.

She slides her feet into shoes, leaves a note on the dresser, hangs a leg out the window. Simon helps her out.

ALBERTA

I'm gonna have to fix that hole, you know that, right? You better hope a lot of people die this week.

He LAUGHS, grabs her by the wrist, pulls her from the house.

EXT. FIELD - BEHIND THE DRUGSTORE

Simon walks Alberta into the center of the field where a gathering of teens sits on truck beds and blocks of wood. The boys smile as she walks by; the girls do the opposite. A PARTY GIRL (18) stares, motions to a friend.

PARTY GIRL

Isn't that the Bluedove girl?

Alberta overhears, shakes her head.

ALBERTA

(to Simon)

I feel awkward.

SIMON
You are awkward.

She looks insecure.

ALBERTA
I'm awkward?

He smiles.

SIMON
In a good way. Here.

He pulls a block of wood up beside another and dusts it off.
She sits.

Simon walks over to a group of teens. Alberta looks around
at her peers talking in clumps.

Simon comes back with two cups, sits, hands her one.

SIMON
When are you planning on telling
him?

ALBERTA
Tell who what?

SIMON
Tell your dad you're leaving.

She looks into her cup.

ALBERTA
I don't know if I'm going anywhere
for sure anymore.

SIMON
I knew it. Like it or not, you're
stuck here with the rest of us.

Alberta looks deflated.

DELIA (18) walks up to a clump of teens a few feet away from
Alberta and Simon. She looks in Alberta's direction as she
speaks to the clump.

DELIA
I didn't know Wednesday Addams was
coming.

The clump shoots a quick look back, huddles back together.

ALBERTA

See, this is why I don't go places.

SIMON

Oh, don't worry about it. Delia's just ornery 'cause the flies won't leave her alone with all that perfume she's got on.

He nudges her arm. She LAUGHS, surrendering.

ALBERTA

I will leave one day.

SIMON

What for?

ALBERTA

Because this is life. I don't wanna stay in the same place forever. All anybody does around here is sit in a field and then they die. Don't you wanna go places and see other people and apple cores falling out of the sky?

He shakes his head.

SIMON

I know at the end of it I'd end up right back here, so why not save the time?

She looks disappointed.

ALBERTA

You don't get it. I'm just the Bluedove girl if I stay here.

They both take a sip and look away from one another.

EXT. STREET - LATER THAT NIGHT

Alberta and Simon walk by lamp posts as a police car pulls over next to them.

An OFFICER (50) rolls his window down further, adjusts in his seat.

OFFICER

Your daddy's been looking for you.

Alberta touches her fingertips to her chest.

ALBERTA

Me?

The officer nods.

EXT. BLUEDOVE PORCH

Alberta walks up the steps as the police car drives away.

She takes a deep breath, opens the front door.

INT. BLUEDOVE KITCHEN

Hubert stands with his back to the door. He has one hand on the wall, propping himself up. The other holds a telephone attached to the wall. The floor CREAKS as Alberta enters the room.

He turns, releases the phone to dangle against the wall on its cord. He looks haggard.

HUBERT

Where have you been?

ALBERTA

Behind the drugstore.

HUBERT

Do you know how many ways a person can die? I've imagined about sixty in the last hour.

ALBERTA

I left a note.

He stares at her like he's trying to read her mind.

HUBERT

A kidnapper can write a note, Alberta.

ALBERTA

I'm not a kid.

HUBERT

Well, you sure acted like one tonight, didn't you?

He looks at the floor. He then raises his eyes again like he has an idea.

HUBERT

I don't want you going anywhere I don't know about anymore.

She cocks her head like she doesn't understand.

HUBERT

I mean it. If you're not in this house I better be able to see you.

Alberta's expression flares, then relaxes.

ALBERTA

Daddy...

He pulls a chair out from under the table, sits with his face buried and CRIES.

Alberta comes over to his side, places a hand on his shoulder, takes another deep breath. She looks as though she's about to speak again, but doesn't.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAYS LATER

Alberta rests on her mother's grave with her eyes closed. A TRAIN goes by in the distance.

She sits up, looks in its direction, eager.

She looks to the other side of the graveyard where Hubert works on a push mower.

She focuses her attention back to the train, then looks at the headstone, places a hand on it. Alberta pulls herself up on her scrawny legs, looks back at her dad.

She walks, determined, toward the graveyard's exit.

EXT. OUTSIDE GRAVEYARD - CONTINUOUS

Alberta exits the graveyard, looks to each side.

She walks away from the graveyard toward the train's sound. She picks up speed, then stops not too far outside the gate. She stands, fists clenched, absorbs the moment, turns and walks back to the graveyard.

INT. TRUCK - LATER THAT DAY

Hubert drives as Alberta looks out the window, her cheek sitting on her palm. She reaches to turn on the radio, but he stops her. The truck HUMS.

HUBERT

Al, I'm sorry if...uh....

He looks uncomfortable.

Alberta looks over at him, nods, letting him off the hook.

INT. ALBERTA'S BEDROOM - THAT EVENING

Alberta sits on her bed, a phone between cheek and shoulder. She writes on a notepad in her lap.

HUBERT (O.S.)

Alberta!

She brings the receiver closer to her mouth.

ALBERTA

I'm gonna have to call you back.

She hangs up the phone and scoots off the bed.

INT. BLUEDOVE KITCHEN

Timid, she steps into the kitchen. Hubert leans against the counter.

HUBERT

What's this?

She looks at pages of notepad paper in his hand. The trashcan sits in front of him.

ALBERTA

What is it?

HUBERT

Pages of addresses, hotels, rooms
for rent in places nowhere near
here.

Alberta doesn't say anything. Her eyes initiate for him to add the math.

He gathers his words.

HUBERT

Were you just gonna take off
without tellin' anybody?

Her face musters some courage.

ALBERTA

I'm leaving. I found a room for --

He puts his hand up as if to cut her off.

Stunned, she watches him walk away.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - LATER THAT EVENING

Alberta sits on the edge of the porch, feet planted on the steps.

She tears bits off a blade of grass and throws them on the ground.

INT. KITCHEN

Hubert sits at the table. He leans back in his seat, rubs his eyes and forehead.

EXT. FRONT PORCH

Alberta tears another piece off the blade, throws it. Hubert steps out the front door behind her. He leans against the house beside the door, hands in his pockets. She lets the grass fall on the steps and looks straight ahead.

HUBERT

If you wanna hide something you probably shouldn't throw it right on top of the trash.

She doesn't look back.

ALBERTA

Maybe I wanted you to see it.

He nods to himself.

HUBERT

Alberta, I just...

He collects himself, stands straighter.

HUBERT

You're the only noise in the house...ya know?

She runs her hands over her shins.

ALBERTA

Did you know people call us the Addams Family?

He shakes his head behind her, looks down.

ALBERTA

They call us that because the only things they hear about us happen in a graveyard. We've got no other claim-to-fame than that.

She plays connect-the-dots with the freckles on her leg.

ALBERTA

And you only work there to be near her.

He walks up and leans on a post right behind Alberta, pinches his nose between his eyes.

HUBERT

I'm happy doing that.

ALBERTA

I know. That's not where she is to me, though.

He nods.

Alberta turns, looks up at him.

ALBERTA

Did Mama ever tell you the story about the apple core rain?

He LAUGHS.

HUBERT

Yeah, she did. All the time.

Alberta smiles, stares at him.

ALBERTA

I'm gonna be okay, Daddy. You know that, right? I just need an adventure for a little while. Didn't you ever need an adventure?

He stares at her for a brief moment, tries to memorize her face, INHALES.

HUBERT

You grew up faster than I was expecting. Seems like I just woke up from a nap and you were all grown up.

He scratches the back of his head, runs his boot over the porch's floor.

HUBERT

Well, does sound like you got things figured out. I take it you got money saved. I haven't seen anything of my spare change for months.

He almost smiles, nudges a rock off the porch with his foot, looks out at the yard.

HUBERT

I just don't wanna do the big goodbye.

He heads back inside.

HUBERT

Don't want that at all.

She looks out ahead like she hadn't thought about that.

INT. ALBERTA'S BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT

Alberta sits up in bed, her pillows propped against the wall. She turns on a lamp beside her, raises her knees, pulls them to her chin. Her eyes soak up the room. Careful, she gets out of bed.

She writes "IOU" on a slip of paper, tapes it to the window.

She pulls a suitcase out of the closet.

INT. KITCHEN

Now changed out of her nightgown, Alberta places a bowl and cereal box on the table in front of Hubert's chair.

She puts a spoon on top of a note by the bowl, and sets an apple core with a clothespin in it next to it.

She turns to walk away, then stops, turns back and pulls out his chair, careful not to make noise, and dusts it off with her hand.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - EARLY MORNING

The sun rises. Alberta closes the screen door with control and tiptoes down the front steps with suitcase in hand.

She walks through the yard, stops to look back at the house, then walks off down the driveway.

THE END

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ROGER RAMONE

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - MORNING

A MOM (30s) opens the front door, picks up the newspaper, steps back in, shuts the door.

INT. FOYER

A loud COMMOTION from above turns her attention up the staircase.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY

Quizzical, Mom walks down the hallway toward an open door. A shoe flies out.

She picks it up.

INT. ROGER'S ROOM

ROGER RAMONE (6) sits amidst the mess of clothing he just threw around his room.

He focuses hard on tying his shoe, completing his 1970s R&B crooner costume. His look says Marvin Gaye. His pale, scrawny stature does not.

Mom stands in the doorway, leans against the frame.

MOM

What 'cha doing, Roger?

Roger expression says, "Duh."

ROGER

I'm tying my shoes.

Mom looks at the mess of clothes on the floor.

MOM

Well, we need to pick out an outfit first. The bus will be here soon. We can't be late again.

He stands, looks down at his groovy ensemble.

ROGER

I already picked an outfit. I picked this one.

MOM

Sweetie, that's your Halloween costume. We can't wear a Halloween costume to school.

She picks up a shirt and pair of pants.

MOM

How about these?

He shakes his head.

She picks a new outfit from what's left in his closet.

MOM

This is nice. What about this? Grandma bought it for you.

Another head shake. She SIGHS.

MOM

Roger Ramone, you can't --

ROGER

-- I'm going to wear this outfit today, Mom. I like it.

MOM

Why this?

His eyes take in his outfit.

ROGER

I look so fly.

Defeated, she nods.

EXT. HOUSE

Unsure, Mom stands at the end of the sidewalk, waves Roger off as he climbs the school bus steps.

His BUS DRIVER (40s) looks at him like he grew a third arm.

INT. SCHOOL BUS

Confident little Roger walks down the aisle, though no one is excited to offer him a seat.

A SECOND GRADER (8) rolls his eyes, scoots over.

Roger sits down, a smile ear to ear.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY

A swarm of confused ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS (5-10) moves to either side of the hall as Roger struts through in his flashy duds; no shame in his game.

INT. CLASSROOM

Roger's TEACHER (30s) stands and looks out at her FIRST GRADERS (6-7). She holds up a calendar like she's Vanna White.

TEACHER

Good morning, class. Today we're gonna work some more on the months of the year. We tried really hard on this yesterday, so who thinks they can come up and say all the months in order for us?

The students look around at one another.

Roger's teacher spots him and his odd attire. She furrows her brow.

TEACHER

Roger?

His wandering gaze whips toward her.

TEACHER

Can you come up and do that for the class?

Timid, he stands, walks to the front of the room by his teacher, turns and faces his peers.

His classmates look him up and down, GIGGLE.

Roger looks down at his outfit.

INT. ART CLASS - LATER THAT DAY

Roger sits at a table with several of his classmates. They all have their sleeves pushed up, smocks on. They each focus on painting a picture on the paper in front of them.

Roger's ART TEACHER (40s) walks around the table to assess the pictures. He first looks at a painting of the sun.

ART TEACHER

Oh, the sun. Very nice, Jack.

He moves onto the next student's picture.

ART TEACHER

A flower! Beautiful, Jenny.

He stands behind Roger, looks over his shoulder at a painting of a large, glittery disco ball. He appears caught off guard, not sure what to say.

Roger looks up and smiles.

JENNY (6) looks over onto Roger's picture.

JENNY

(smug)

What is that?

Roger's smile fades.

INT. CAFETERIA - LATER THAT DAY

Roger carries his lunch over to a table of BOYS (6-8). He sits down, but they all look at him and get up.

Upset and alone, he tries to open his milk carton. AGNES (6) sits down across from him. He attempts the carton again, spills milk in his lap. Embarrassed, he gets up.

Agnes watches him slink away.

INT. BATHROOM

He stands in front of the mirror, wipes his foxy trousers with a paper towel.

BILLY (9) walks out of the stall behind Roger, LAUGHS at him.

BILLY

What a baby.

Roger turns around, offended.

ROGER

I am not a baby.

BILLY

You're wearing a Halloween costume.

ROGER

I am not. These are my regular clothes.

BILLY

You are a baby. Only a baby would wear Halloween stuff to school and think it's real clothes. You look weird.

The frustration builds in Roger's face until he punches Billy.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

The PRINCIPAL (50s) sits at his desk.

Arms folded, Roger stares from the other side.

PRINCIPAL

Mr. Ramone, you know better than to hit other people.

Roger offers him a blank stare.

PRINCIPAL

What made you do that?

More staring.

PRINCIPAL

Roger, are you going to answer me?

Roger looks over at the wall.

PRINCIPAL

Well, I'm going to have to give your mother and father a call today. And I'll be telling your teacher you may not participate in recess this afternoon.

Roger's feet dangle beneath the chair.

PRINCIPAL

That's all. Head to your gym class.

Roger stands to exit.

PRINCIPAL

Roger, I suggest you just keep your gym clothes on for the rest of the day. You'll blend in better that way.

Roger drags his feet out of the office.

INT. SCHOOL GYM

Kids run down the gym's court playing basketball. In his gym clothes, Roger halfway tries to keep up.

Without warning, the ball hits Roger in the face, knocking him to the ground.

Kids gather around him. A WHISTLE blows O.S..

INT. NURSE'S OFFICE

Roger sits alone in his gym clothes. He holds an icepack to his eye, his crooner clothes beside him.

Agnes walks in, a thermometer under her tongue. She sits across from him, eyes him.

The NURSE (30s) walks in, takes out the thermometer, exits.

AGNES

Why do you dress like that?

Roger looks at the ball of clothes next to him, scoots them further away, focuses on the floor.

AGNES

Why do you wear those clothes?

He looks down at his puny frame.

ROGER

I just like them. They make me feel...bigger.

He wipes water off his temple.

ROGER

Like a big kid.

Agnes considers, shrugs.

AGNES

Oh. Okay.

She looks like she just got an idea.

AGNES

My name is Agnes. I'm in your class now.

Roger stares at his ball of clothes.

Agnes picks at the seat of her chair, looks up.

AGNES

I like your clothes.

Roger looks away.

AGNES

You should dress big every day.
That would be fun to do.

He looks back at her, halfway smiles, pulls the clothes closer.

INT. ROGER'S HOUSE - LAUNDRY ROOM - THAT NIGHT

Roger's mom walks into the laundry room, sorts through clothes in the laundry basket.

She recognizes his costume in the pile, pulls it out.

EXT. SCHOOL ENTRANCE - NEXT MORNING

Roger steps off the bus in his fresh costume, grips his book bag straps, marches into the school with assurance.

INT. CLASSROOM

He takes his seat, adjusts his costume.

Agnes walks up, sits beside him. Braids in her hair, she wears a viking helmet and vest.

Intrigued, Roger observes.

ROGER

I like your clothes.

AGNES

I like your clothes, too.

They exchange a smile.

THE END