

THE GIFT

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. PRATT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

It's a one-story structure of yellow brick. School has let out, and kids are heading home, on foot, on bikes, in yellow buses, and in the cars of their moms.

The CAMERA MOVES IN ON two brothers, MIKE, 11, and MILLER, seven. With them are a PUDGY BOY and a BIG-FOR-HIS-AGE BOY of Mike's age, and a BESPECTACLED LITTLE BOY of Miller's age. As they approach the street, a student crossing guard or "PATROL BOY" lowers a cane pole with a red flag attached to stop a car or two.

BESPECTACLED LITTLE BOY

(as they walk across the street)

When I get in sixth grade, I'm gonna be a patrol boy.

MILLER

Me too.

BIG-FOR-HIS-AGE-BOY

I could be one if I wanted to, but I don't want to.

PUDGY BOY

You don't make good enough grades to be one...

BIG-FOR-HIS-AGE-BOY

Shit on you, Tommy, you don't know shit.

MIKE (ending the matter)

Patrol boys are all queers.

EXT. A STREET - A LITTLE LATER - AFTERNOON

The boys are walking down a quiet residential street. It's spring in the little Arkansas town of Parker (Pop. 9,567). The trees are full of tender green leaves, bushes blossom and flower beds are crowded with bright flowers. The big-for-his-age boy gives Tommy the pudgy boy a "watch this" nudge in the ribs.

BIG-FOR-HIS-AGE BOY

Stanley knows what "fuck" means - don't you, Stanley?

STANLEY (BESPECTACLED LITTLE BOY)

Yeah. It means fartin' in the bathtub and swallowin' the bubbles.

The big-for-his-age boy and Tommy LAUGH and give each other a high five.

MIKE

It don't mean that, Stanley. Paul Dean's just playin' with you.

MILLER

What does it mean?

MIKE

You're too little to know.

The boys are walking through an intersection of two quiet streets at the top of a hill. Now Paul Dean stops, looks down the street to the right, and points at a modest one-story house of red brick, which has a couple of cars parked out front.

PAUL DEAN (BIG-FOR-HIS-AGE BOY)

Did you know a witch lives in that house right there? She puts hexes on people and turns some of 'em into pigs and dogs!

MILLER

Our mama ain't no witch!

MIKE (his face darkening)

Miller, you keep walkin'.

PAUL DEAN

Y'all's mama's the witch? Man!

TOMMY

That's weird. Dang, does she turn people into pigs and thangs for real?

PAUL DEAN (to Mike)

That's why you never told us where you lived, 'cause your mama's a -

Mike pops Paul Dean a good one right in the eye and then pounces on him. Tommy jumps in, and the three of them roll around fighting in the street. Miller and Stanley are looking on wide-eyed.

Mike's anger is great, and he's getting the better of the two boys. A car tops the hill, barely sees the boys in time, SCREECHES and swerves and HONKS.

An old woman and a three-year-old boy come out in the yard closest to the boys. It's Mike and Miller's younger brother, BEN, and his babysitter MRS. FRANCIS.

BEN
Mike!

Mrs. Francis heads toward the house next door: the brick house of the "witch."

MRS. FRANCIS (screeching)
Annie! Annie, come out, Mike's fightin' in the street!

The main entrance to the house is off of a carport where an old Oldsmobile Cutlass is parked. After a moment, the door and the screen door open, and out comes ANNIE WILSON.

The screen door BANGS shut behind her as Annie, early 30's, hurries across the fragrant green grass toward the street. She's wearing a simple loose pastel-pink dress, and white socks and tennis shoes. She's extremely lovely.

ANNIE
Mike! Mike, you get up from there, mister, right now!

Annie arrives at the street and reaches into the SNARLING, CUSSING, thrashing mass of boys, and pulls Mike up by the arm.

ANNIE
What do you mean, Mike? Y'all could've been run over!

MILLER
The boys called you a witch, mama, and Mike beat 'em up.

ANNIE
You boys go on home now. Mike, you know I've got appointments to see in there. Now you go get Ben from Miz Francis and watch him till I'm through.

Mike, wiping his slightly bleeding mouth off with the back of his arm, trudges off toward Ben and Mrs. Francis as Paul Dean and Tommy, cowed by the appearance of the "witch," start off down the street with much muttering and many a backward glance. But Stanley remains standing near Miller, and gazes up at Annie with his bespectacled, owl-like eyes.

STANLEY
You don't look like no witch. Witches are ugly.

Annie manages a slight smile.

ANNIE
You better get home, darlin'. Miller, go help your brother with Ben. And take out the trash too, honey. And feed Butch. My appointments are over at 5:30, and I'll get y'all something from Dairy Queen.

Annie heads back to her house, where a middle-aged BLACK WOMAN has come out on the carport.

BLACK WOMAN
Everything all right?

ANNIE

I think my sons play soldier a little too often.

Now the black woman opens up her huge purse, and begins to search through it a little dubiously.

ANNIE

Dorothy, I know you got a check comin' the first of the month.
We'll settle up then.

DOROTHY (BLACK WOMAN) (relieved)

You sure, Miss Annie?

ANNIE (as she opens the door to go back inside)

I'm sure.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Annie enters. The place is modestly furnished but neat as a pin. A coffee table is laden with magazines, as in a doctor's waiting room. A middle-aged WOMAN sits on a sofa by the coffee table looking through a magazine with a movie star on the cover.

In a chair sits a lanky man in overalls, who is sheepishly looking at the floor. He looks like Heckyl or Jeckyl with Alfalfa's haircut, and is missing every other tooth. On the floor beside him is a basket of rosy, down-covered peaches.

ANNIE

Cornelius, I'm ready for you now.

CORNELIUS rises, without looking at Annie.

CORNELIUS

Okay, Miss Annie.

ANNIE

Pretty peaches.

CORNELIUS

Yes ma'am.

Staring at the floor, Cornelius follows Annie down a narrow hallway to a room at its end.

INT. BEDROOM-READING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Annie and Cornelius enter, Annie closing the door behind them. The room is all in blue - blue walls, blue curtains, blue bedspread, blue everything. It is a calm and soothing room.

They sit down across from each other at a little desk. on the desk is a deck of small cards, which Annie begins to shuffle. The cards have been shuffled so many times that they have a tissue paper delicacy.

ANNIE
How have you been, Cornelius?

CORNELIUS
Oh, pretty good I reckon.

Annie divides the cards out into three stacks. They are ESP cards, with four different symbols on them: a cross, a square, a circle, and four wavy lines. During this scene Annie's constantly reshuffling and dividing the cards into stacks, concentrating on them the whole time.

ANNIE
Have you had a health problem since I saw you last?
Cornelius is very shy, and never makes eye contact with Annie.

CORNELIUS
Ma'am?

ANNIE
Have you been sick?

CORNELIUS
My back's been hurtin' a little.

ANNIE
No, it's not your back. Have you been bleeding somewhere?

CORNELIUS
Yes ma'am. A little.

ANNIE
Have you been to a doctor?

CORNELIUS
I don't much like goin' to no doctors.

ANNIE
Well, I think maybe you should go. It's not a venereal disease, I think it's just same kind of kidney or bladder infection. But it's been around for a while. It can lead to more serious problems.

A baffled look has appeared on Cornelius's face - this is all going way over his Heckyl-Jeckyl head.

ANNIE
You are bleeding when you urinate, aren't you?

Cornelius grapples with the word "urinate."

ANNIE (gently)
When you go to the bathroom.

CORNELIUS (bright red)
Yes ma'am.

ANNIE
Don't be embarrassed. It happens to lots of people. With your history you should be happy it's not a sexually transmitted disease.

Cornelius turns redder.

ANNIE
Would you like me to call a doctor for you?

CORNELIUS
All right.

ANNIE (after some shuffling and studying of the cards)
Have you lost one of your girlfriends this week?

CORNELIUS
Yes ma'am. Ruth Allen went back to her husband.

ANNIE
You shouldn't fool with married women out there in Lonsville, those old man out there are crazy. You'll get yourself shot.

CORNELIUS (alarmed)
Did you see that in the cards?

ANNIE
No, that's just common sense.
(pause)
How many women are you seeing now?

CORNELIUS
Not quite so many as I was a while back. I'm kindly scared of havin' any more childern. My pension check is just all eat up with payin' off for them four childern already.

ANNIE (patiently)
How many are you seeing?

CORNELIUS (thinks)

I reckon somewhere right about two dozen off and on. But some of 'em's kinda puny and cain't carry on too regular.

ANNIE

Cornelius, it doesn't take ESP to tell you, you shouldn't be seeing over 20 women at once.

CORNELIUS

I just cain't help myself, Miss Annie. I'm just geared up that way.

Annie smiles a little, continues shuffling the cards...

INT. KITCHEN AND LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Annie's clearing up the remnants of the Dairy Queen meal. She looks tired. In the b.g., the boys watch TV in the living room, the two younger ones on the floor in pajamas. Mike in an armchair, staring at the TV but not really paying attention.

Annie finishes up dumping the white sacks in the trash and wiping off the table, and now walks to her boys.

ANNIE

You kids get on to bed now, it's nearly nine.

MILLER

Aw Mama, can't we stay up just a little bit?

ANNIE

You heard me, mister.

Miller gets up reluctantly. He sees that Ben's fallen asleep, and he picks him up and begins to lug him out. But as Miller reaches the hallway, he stops.

MILLER

Mama, what does "fuck" mean?

ANNIE (taking it in stride)

It's a bad word for something nice.

MILLER

But what does it mean?

ANNIE

It means making love. That's how your daddy and me made your brothers and you.

This seems to satisfy Miller, and he goes off down the hall with Ben. Annie, a neatness freak, has begun straightening up the living room. Mike's still in the armchair.

ANNIE
Mike, did you hear me?

MIKE
What?

ANNIE
Get ready for bed.

Mike gets up and begins dragging out of the room.

ANNIE
Mike, your lip's draggin' the floor - it's gonna freeze like that if you're not careful.

MIKE
You act like I'm a kid.

ANNIE
You are a kid, honey. I'll come say good night in a few minutes.

Mike departs as Annie cleans.

INT. ANNIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Annie, in a flannel nightgown, sits at her little desk shuffling and dividing her cards into stacks. She is reading for herself. She looks sad and lonely, alone in her blue room.

After a minute, she sets the cards aside, gets up, and goes to her dresser. She pulls open a drawer, then takes out a framed photograph: it shows a smiling, handsome young man in a Navy uniform. She looks at it for a moment, then gently touches the man's face.

Annie smiles sadly, and turns off the light.

INT. AND EXT. ANNIE'S CUTLASS - DAY

Annie's driving down the street - the RADIO's on a country station. As she makes a right turn into the post office, the driver's-side door suddenly flies open.

ANNIE (pulling the door shut)
Damn -

Annie holds on to the door till she's in a parking space - then she looks at the door, sighs, and cuts the engine.

EXT. AN AUTO REPAIR SHOP - DAY

As Annie's Cutlass turns into the parking lot, the door flies open again.

Annie parks the car and gets out. A MAN in his 30's, moustached, baseball-capped, blue-jeaned, and T-shirted, comes out of the garage to greet her.

MAN (looking glad to see her)
Hey, Miz Wilson, how are you gettin' along today?

ANNIE
Pretty good, Buddy, except for the fact I can't keep my car door from flyin' open. Have you got time to fix it?

BUDDY (MAN)
(taking a look at the door)
I can get around to it in a hour or two. Did you want to wait?

ANNIE
I've got to get home. I've got people comin'.

BUDDY
Well, just leave it and I'll carry you home. I can bring it to you probably by six. That all right?

ANNIE
Yeah, that's fine.
(embarrassed)
Listen, Buddy, I'm a little low on money this week, can you -

BUDDY
You stop that. You know you ain't gotta pay me.

ANNIE
I feel bad about -

BUDDY
I said you stop it now. As much as you've - well, you know.

At first we've gotten the feeling that Buddy's attracted to Annie, but now we realize something different's at work: Buddy's looking at her as if she's a goddess or angel.

BUDDY
I just think the world of you. Well, you're about the only one I can call a friend to me.

He blushes.

BUDDY
I'll get the truck.

INT. AND EXT. TOW TRUCK, MOVING DOWN A STREET - DAY

Buddy is driving Annie home. Annie looks caringly at Buddy.

ANNIE

How have you been, Buddy? Really.

BUDDY (slowly)

Well, I have some bad thoughts. It's hard to concentrate on anything. But yesterday I felt happy. I didn't even feel like I needed my medicine, but I took it anyway. I think I might be hooked on it, sorta.

ANNIE

You're gonna have a lot of happy days. You're gonna get better and better.

BUDDY

Well, I hope. I believe you when you tell me.

They fall silent. Buddy's mood seems sad and dark and sweet. But then, as they drive, he begins to get tense. He shifts in his seat, and grips the steering wheel tighter and tighter. After a while he starts to shake, and then he makes LOW MOANING SOUNDS.

ANNIE

Buddy?

Buddy suddenly whips the truck off the street, bouncing it over a curb and across the sidewalk and half into somebody's front yard, where he stops it with a lurch.

ANNIE

Buddy, what's wrong?

Buddy turns to Annie, there are tears in his eyes.

BUDDY

You have to tell me! You have to tell me now! If you don't I'll have to kill myself before the sun goes down.

ANNIE

Calm down, Buddy, it's all right. I'll tell you, honey.

BUDDY (slowly and intensely)

If I look into a blue diamond, and think a negative thought - will I die?

ANNIE (takes his hand)

No, Buddy, you won't die. You won't die, hun.

BUDDY

Thank you. 'Cause if you'd said yes, I'd have to kill myself before sundown.

ANNIE

You don't have to kill yourself, Buddy. Everything's gonna be fine. I'll always tell you. I promise I'll always tell you.

Buddy lays his head on the steering wheel and cries, as Annie gently rubs his back. In the b.g., in the house they're in front of, we see a LITTLE GIRL peering curiously out through the curtains at the tow truck on her front lawn...

INT. ANNIE'S "BLUE" ROOM - AFTERNOON

The window is open in Annie's bedroom-reading room, and the diaphanous blue curtains are a luminous tangle of sun and breeze.

Annie is shuffling and studying her cards at her little table. Sitting across from her is a WOMAN in her mid 30's. She's wearing blue jeans and dark glasses. She's pretty, and would be prettier except for a hair-do that doesn't quite work, and the fact that her lip is swollen and blue.

ANNIE

Anita, you may as well take the glasses off, I know he's been hitting you again. I see your lip.

ANITA

I know, it just embarrasses me.

ANNIE

It's okay.

Anita removes the glasses - the flesh around her eyes is a rich and sickening configuration of blacks and blues and yellows.

ANITA

He's got worse. I went to the store yesterday 'cause we were out of some things, and he got bone from work before I got back. He was waitin' with a razor strap. My legs are all cut up. I've got welts the size of footballs on my back and legs.

ANNIE

I feel guilty you paying me money to tell you to get away from him. It doesn't take ESP to tell you that. You have to get help. Legal help.

ANITA

You just don't know Donnie Barksdale, Annie. He'll kill me if I leave him. He'll find me, he said he would.

ANNIE

He's not crazy enough to kill anybody. He's just an insecure redneck.

ANITA (beginning to cry)

You just don't know. I've seen him -

She stops herself.

ANNIE
What?

ANITA
He's just crazy. Crazier than you know.

ANNIE (studying the cards)
I really feel he won't kill you. He's too interested in himself to jeopardize his own life.

ANITA
I think he's got a woman on the side. He's been layin' out at night.

There's a KNOCK at the door, and then it's pushed open by Mrs. Francis, the old lady babysitter.

MRS. FRANCIS

Honey, the school's on the phone. They say Mike's got in some trouble.

INT. PRATT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

Annie comes through the front entrance, walks quickly down the empty hall.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Annie appears at the open door of the office.

Standing against one wall is a miniature basketball goal, and on the principal's desk is a miniature basketball. WAYNE PULLMAN, in his 30's, good-looking and fit, wearing a short-sleeve white shirt and a colorful tie, looks up from some paperwork.

WAYNE (gets up and shakes Annie's hand)
Hi, Mrs. Wilson, have a seat.

ANNIE (looking around)
Where's Mike?

WAYNE
In the infirmary.
(as Annie looks alarmed)
Now it's nothing to get worked up about, he's just got a few nicks and bruises - and I think he'll probably have a pretty good shiner by tomorrow.

Annie sinks down in a hard wooden chair in front of the desk, looking discouraged.

ANNIE
He was in another fight?

WAYNE
Yeah.

Wayne sits down on the edge of his desk, looks at Annie. His demeanor's professional, but still there's something that lets us know he thinks Annie's a mighty attractive woman.

WAYNE

His grades are getting worse too. How's he doin' at home?

ANNIE

Not much better. He's real distant.

WAYNE (hesitantly)

Mrs. Wilson, I don't pretend to be a psychologist - but it's obvious to me your boy's got a lot of anger in him.

ANNIE (after a pause)

It's about this time last year his father passed away. He's still real messed up over it.

WAYNE (gently)

I never met your husband, but I understand he was a fine man.

ANNIE (calmly)

Yes - he was.

There's a silence - Wayne moves on.

WAYNE

I don't know how you feel about therapy, but I know a good one in Little Rock. If you think Mike needs someone to talk to, I could set up an appointment and -

ANNIE

Mike doesn't need a therapist - he can talk to me.

WAYNE

Do you think he will though?

There's a KNOCK on the door frame - Annie and Wayne look and see:

A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN standing in the doorway. She's in her middle 20's, has long lustrous hair and long legs and her shapely body is sheathed in striking and obviously expensive clothes.

YOUNG WOMAN

I'm sorry, Wayne, I didn't know you had somebody in here. That old lady wasn't at her desk.

WAYNE

Ruby's out sick -

Wayne looks acutely uncomfortable as the woman walks in and gives him a kiss on the cheek.

WAYNE

Mrs. Wilson, this is Jessica King, my fiancée. Jessie, this is Annie Wilson.

ANNIE (as they shake hands)

Nice to meet you.

JESSICA (YOUNG WOMAN) (looking her over)

You too.

WAYNE (to Jessica)

I'll be done in a minute -

ANNIE (standing up)

I gotta go anyway, I got people waiting. Should I take Mike home?

WAYNE

Yeah, that might be best. I'll show you where the infirmary's at.

JESSICA

(putting a restraining hand on his arm)

You just go out the hall and it's to the left, you can't miss it

(brightly)

I had my first period there.

ANNIE (moving toward the door)

Thanks a lot, Mr. Pullman. I'm sorry about all this.

WAYNE

It's my job. He's just a boy, that's all.

JESSICA

You're not that Wilson that's a fortune teller, are you?

ANNIE (pausing at the door; a bit wary)

I don't call myself that.

JESSICA

I'd love for you to read my fortune.

ANNIE

I'm pretty booked up...

JESSICA

So do you think we'll live happily ever after?

Jessica has grabbed Wayne's arm, it's like she's posing with Wayne for a picture. Annie obviously wants to disengage as fast as she can - but now, as she looks at the two, an odd look appears in her eyes. For a long moment, she stares at them.

JESSICA (suddenly chilled)

What's the matter? You see something bad?

Now Annie seems to shake herself ever so slightly, as though coming back to herself.

ANNIE (softly)

'Course not. I'm sure y'all will be real happy together.

Annie moves to the door and, after giving them a final glance, shuts it behind her.

Jessica smiles, trying to shrug off her momentary unease.

JESSICA

She's kind of pretty... in a country sort of way - don't you think?

WAYNE

You shouldn't have said that stuff about her bein' a fortuneteller. Sometimes you don't have any tact, Jessie. You embarrass me.

JESSICA

She didn't care. What are you defendin' her for anyway?

WAYNE

I'm not defending her.

JESSICA

Anyhow, I have to meet Daddy for lunch at the Country Club.

(moving into his arms)

I've only got a few minutes, let's have a quickie.

WAYNE

Jessie, I can't do that. You're gonna get me fired -

JESSICA (kissing his neck)

Come on, Principal, get your britches down. Bend me over your desk like you do all these little 10-year-olds. I'll let you paddle me.

Jessica slides her hand down to Wayne's crotch. Wayne starts to smile.

WAYNE

God damn you, Jessie...

Suddenly Wayne pushes Jessica away, and moves to the door. He locks it - then turns and looks back at Jessica. Jessica smiles - picks up the miniature basketball from the desk.

JESSICA

Think I can... "put it in the hole"?

She tosses the ball towards the miniature goal. It bounces off the rim. She shrugs, then looks back at Wayne.

JESSICA (softly)

You try...

Wayne moves across the office towards Jessica, bends her back over his desk, wedging himself between her legs, kissing her ferociously...

INT. HALLWAY AND BOYS' BEDROOM AT ANNIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Annie, in her nightgown, stands at the doorway of her son's bedroom.

ANNIE'S POV: HER THREE SONS ASLEEP.

Miller and Ben are in one bed, Mike in another. A lamp on a table between the beds is still on. Mike's sporting his new black eye. A book is lying open across his chest.

Annie comes in quietly, picks up the book. it's a small photo album, turned to a page of pictures of Mike and his father at a zoo.

Annie puts the book on a shelf, and turns off the light.

As she moves back out into the hall towards her bedroom, she's startled by a sharp KNOCK at the front door.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Annie moves into the living room. She turns on the outside light and unlocks the door. There's a chain on it, and she opens the door a couple of inches and peers out.

ANNIE'S POV: A MAN ABOUT 35 IN BLUE JEANS AND COWBOY SHIRT.

ANNIE

Could I do something for you?

MAN (politely)

Yes ma'am, I'm Donnie Barksdale. I'm sorry to bother you so late, but I believe you know my wife Anita.

ANNIE (coldly)

Yes I do. I know who you are.

DONNIE (MAN)

Can I come in and talk to you, it's about my wife Something's happened to her.

ANNIE (alarmed)

What's happened? Is she okay?

DONNIE

Well no, she's not, ma'am.

Annie still makes no move to open the door.

DONNIE

Ma'am, I promise I'll just take a minute.

Annie reluctantly relents, unhooks the chain. She steps back a little as Donnie Barksdale comes in.

He's a big man with broad shoulders and a rough but not unhandsome face. Annie stands there in her nightgown, vary of him. He's smiling a little, looking her up and down.

DONNIE (with quiet venom)

What's happened to her is she's gettin' her head filled full of shit by a goddamned Satan worshipper or a damn good con artist, one of the two. I know she's been comin' over to see you and your damn voodoo. You tell her bad things about me, don't you? You ain't no better than a Jew or a nigger.

He reaches in his pocket and pulls out a cute squat little figure with long green hair - a children's toy, a "troll doll." He holds it up in front of her.

DONNIE

You know what this is? It's a voodoo doll. I'm gonna use this voodoo doll on you. Some of your own medicine, if you don't stop seein' my wife. I'm stickin' me a pin in this thing ever' night till you learn to leave folks alone.

He looks at something behind Annie. Annie turns, and sees her three kids, sleepy-eyed and frightened, standing in their pajamas all in a row.

ANNIE

You kids go back to bed. Everything's all right.

DONNIE

I bet you love those little childern, don't you? I bet they need their mama, don't they?

ANNIE (with cold fury)

You get your ass out of my house and don't you threaten me or my kids. You can whack your wife around but I'm not afraid of the likes of you. What I do is my business and if your wife has any sense she'll leave you so far behind you'll never find her. Now get out of here before I get you thrown in jail.

Donnie starts for the door, grinning. Just before he closes the door, he turns.

DONNIE

Messin' with the devil will get you burned. Everybody knows that. I'll see you soon, boys.

Now he leaves - and Annie hurries to lock the door behind him. Mike and Miller stare at their mom, bewildered and scared - but Ben has a mild look on his face.

BEN

Mama, can I have a troll doll?

EXT. BACK YARD OF ANNIE'S HOUSE - DAY

OPEN ON BEN, playing with Butch, a rather mean-looking bulldog who is tethered to a tree by a long chain.

Another ANGLE shows us Annie, hanging her wash on a clothes line. It's a beautiful mild spring day. Only a drifting white cloud or two interrupts the sky's blueness. Annie, HUMMING to herself, her and her wash drenched in sunlight, holds a clothes pin in her mouth as she hangs a sheet.

Suddenly a look of astonishment appears on Annie's face.

An OLD WOMAN in a gingham dress and a sun bonnet is walking towards her across the yard carrying a basket of fruit.

Now the old woman reaches Annie. Under the shadow of the bonnet, Annie can see the old woman's clear blue smiling eyes regarding her.

ANNIE (in an awed whisper)

Granny? Granny, what are you doing here?

GRANNY

Hey Annie Bell. I brought you some persimmons, hun. Some of 'em's kindly rotten though. You'll have to pick through 'em. Remember how much you liked persimmons when you was little?

ANNIE

Granny... is that really you?

GRANNY

Well of course it's me, child.

ANNIE

But Granny, you're -

Annie stops herself.

ANNIE

You're not supposed to be here. How did you get here?

GRANNY

Oh, it ain't fer to walk.

Annie stands there looking at the old woman, incredible love in her eyes. She starts to cry softly.

GRANNY

That boy's got your granddad's eyes.

Annie looks over at Ben, who's still absorbed in playing with the dog. Now the old woman smiles, and brushes the hair off Annie's forehead.

GRANNY

Well, hun, I better start back. It looks like they's a storm comin'.

ANNIE

No, Granny, it's clear.

But then suddenly the sunlight vanishes as a giant shadow covers the back yard. Annie looks up, and sees black surreal-looking clouds moving swiftly across the sky.

And now a wind kicks up, and the clothes on the line blow all around them. Annie takes a few frightened steps backwards, looking up at the sky and then at her grandmother.

Lightning flashes and there's a CRACK of thunder, and leaves and small branches ripped loose from trees are flying past Annie, and now the old woman, the sheet swirling around her, SHOUTS above the wind:

GRANNY

Annie, always use your instinct!

And the old woman smiles at Annie out of the swirling sheet, and the wind's blowing harder and the ominous blue-black clouds are whipping faster and faster above Annie's head and then suddenly:

The wind stops. Granny is gone. The white sheet is hanging limply in the sunlight.

Annie looks over at Ben. He's still playing happily with Butch, who's emitting a few gruff, half-hearted BARKS as he chases Ben around.

Annie, dazed, looks up at the sky. It is blue and bright...

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

INT. LIVING ROOM AND HALLWAY OF ANNIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Ben is on the floor, half watching a cartoon on television, half playing with his new family of troll dolls. A COUPLE OF RATHER OVER-DRESSED, OVER-STUFFED, AND OVER-ROUGED AND -POWDERED LADIES are waiting for readings, leafing through magazines. Miller, kneeling on some newspapers a few feet from Ben at the beginning of the hallway, has a can of paint and a paint brush, and is painting the wall maroon.

Now Ben looks around at the women with his face scrunched up.

BEN
Somethin' smells like cat pee.

MILLER (in a loud half-whisper)
That's perfume, Ben. And you're not suppose to cuss in front of
the pointments.

INT. ANNIE'S BLUE ROOM - DAY

Annie is reading for Anita Barksdale.

ANITA
He was serious when he came over here the other night. He'll hurt
you too. I think maybe you should start readin' for me someplace else.
Out on a road somewhere. Up under a bridge or somethin'.

ANNIE
I'm not worried about me, I can take care of myself. You have to start
listening to 'me though -

ANITA
I can't leave him, don't you understand?

ANNIE
He's gonna keep hurtin' you till he puts you in the hospital -

ANITA
Annie, I just don't have a thing to look forward to, you've just gotta give
me some hope-

ANNIE
Anita, I don't know how to make myself any clearer. Your only hope is to
-

There's the sudden sound of the front door SLAMMING, and then:

DONNIE (O.S.) (bellowing)
Anita!

Annie and Anita look at each other, their blood running cold.

ANITA
Oh my god, he's here!

Annie starts to get up from the table.

ANNIE
Just settle down, Anita, I'll call the law.

They hear cowboy boots CLOMPING down the hall, and Donnie SCREAMING ANITA'S NAME again.

ANITA (desperately)

If you're my friend you won't, Annie!

And now the nightmare that is Donnie Barksdale bursts through the door. His face is red and disfigured with rage.

DONNIE (to Annie)

I'll handle you later on you goddamn bitch! You goddamn witch!

(to Anita)

Get your whimperin' ass up from there, Anita, and get in the truck!

That ain't fast enough!

Donnie grabs Anita by the hair and yanks her out of the chair. The little table's knocked over, Annie's cards flutter and fly.

And now Donnie Barksdale drags his wife out of the room by her hair.

INT. HALLWAY AND LIVING ROOM - DAY

Donnie drags Anita down the hallway, Anita SCREAMING at the top of her lungs and Donnie CURSING her. Now Annie comes out of her room after them.

ANNIE

You let her go!

As Donnie passes Miller he kicks over his paint bucket, and Anita is dragged through the paint, leaving a smeary maroon trail as they pass into the living room before the horrified eyes of Annie's sons and the two waiting ladies.

Annie, running down into the hallway after them, slips in the paint and falls, and by the time she's up Donnie has dragged his wife out the door.

Annie moves into the living room, her white outfit stained with the maroon paint, and as she reaches the door she hears a truck START UP and SCREECH away. Now the older and heavier of the two ladies closes her magazine and stands up.

LADY (politely)

Miz Wilson, would you like me to come back some other time?

EXT. PARKER COUNTRY CLUB - NIGHT

It's a few days later. A Ford Saturn pulls into the parking lot, and Annie and her friend LINDA get out.

The Country Club's in the middle of the woods a few miles outside of town. There's a glowing blue empty swimming pool, a couple of tennis courts, a golf course somewhere out there in the dark, and a one-story brick restaurant-bar-rec-room building, from which the throbbing sounds of SOME 70'S ROCK SONG is drifting out.

Annie takes it all in, obviously for the first time, as they move toward the entrance of the building. This is an Annie we haven't seen before: in a sedate way, she's dressed to kill, in a modestly cut yellow chiffon dress that flows loosely around her body, and brand-new yellow matching pumps.

ANNIE

I don't know why I let you talk me into this.

LINDA

'Cause it's time you quit livin' like a nun.

Linda lights up a cigarette. She has bleached-blonde poofed-up hair and long painted nails, and is wearing a black satin dress with red sequins, cut low enough to reveal a bosom that jiggles as she walks.

LINDA (not kidding)

Don't worry, darlin', you'll be the prettiest girl here next to me.

INT. COUNTRY CLUB - NIGHT

Annie and Linda sit at a table near a dance floor, Annie nursing a glass of wine, Linda, enwreathed in tobacco smoke, belting down bourbon. A MIDDLE-AGED ROCK GROUP WITH AN ENORMOUSLY FAT LEAD SINGER is playing on a small stage. The dance floor is crowded with the Parker elite, nicely dressed people ranging in age from 20-something to 60-something.

LINDA (grabbing Annie's arm)

Annie, there he is!

ANNIE

Who?

LINDA

That man I was tellin' you about.

(pointing)

By the bar. Doesn't he look exactly like George Clooney?

Now Annie sees "GEORGE" - leaning on the bar, talking to the bartender. At best, he might resemble George Clooney on his worst... no, not even then... but he is reasonably tall, dark, and handsome; Now he happens to glance up and see Linda pointing at him. He smiles.

LINDA (jerking her hand down)

Oh my god he saw me. Annie, get your cards out quick, see if he's gonna come over here.

ANNIE

Linda, we'll know in a minute -

LINDA
But I can't stand the suspense.

ANNIE
I don't have my cards with me anyway - I'm off-duty tonight.

Now Annie's gaze drifts back to the dancers.

ANNIE'S POV: MIKE'S PRINCIPAL, WAYNE PULMAN, DANCING WITH JESSICA KING.

Wayne's an okay dancer, Jessica's spectacular. She looks spectacular too, in a black strapless stretch lycra dress, black hose, black shoes - her shiny hair cascades across her bare shoulders.

The SONG ends, and Wayne and Jessica move off the dance floor. Now Wayne sees Annie, smiles.

WAYNE
Hello.

ANNIE
Hi.

LINDA (still engrossed in "George")
Wayne, sit down, you're blockin' my view.

WAYNE
Sorry.
(as he and Jessica sit down; to Annie)
You remember Jessica -

JESSICA (with her bright smile)
Hi, Annie. I didn't know you were a member of the Country Club.

ANNIE
I'm not. I just kinda tagged along with Linda.

JESSICA
How nice... That's a great outfit. So... demure.

WAYNE
What's Mike up to tonight?

ANNIE
Mopin' around at his babysitter's.

WAYNE

Yeah? You know, I was thinkin' about Mike just today, I -

JESSICA (wearily)

Please don't talk shop tonight, Wayne. Let's just have fun -

A TALL MAN of 50 in an extremely nice suit comes up to the table.

TALL MAN (to Jessica)

How about a dance for Daddy?

JESSICA (arising with a smile)

Course I will, handsome.

WAYNE

Mr. King, I don't know if you've met Annie Wilson -

MR. KING (TALL MAN) (shaking Annie's hand)

I think I've seen you in church.

ANNIE

I've seen you too.

MR. KING (as he takes his daughter out to the dance floor)

That's quite a dress, Linda.

LINDA (vindicated)

I'm glad somebody noticed.

WAYNE (to Annie - with a nod toward the dance floor)

Wanna give it a try?

ANNIE (mildly panicked)

I don't think so.

WAYNE

I asked you to dance, not walk on hot coals. When was the last time you danced?

ANNIE

Awhile... but...

LINDA

I'll dance.

It's all probably part of a ploy to make "George" jealous - Linda pops up out of her chair and grabs Wayne's hand. Wayne looks over his shoulder at Annie and gives a little shrug as Linda leads him away.

Annie's left alone at the table - but only momentarily.

She looks up - not too far up - and sees standing at her side a YOUNG MAN who couldn't be older than 20 or taller than five feet six. He's grinning at her, a-tingle with testosterone.

YOUNG MAN
So...
(shooting his cuffs)
What do ya say?

DISSOLVE TO:

THE BAND, A LITTLE LATER.

The enormously fat lead singer and his middle-aged bandmates have donned dark suits and sunglasses and are doing a Blues Brothers number.

ON ANNIE AND LINDA, WATCHING.

Linda finishes off her fourth or fifth bourbon, then pointedly taps Annie's scarcely touched glass of wine.

LINDA
Darlin', if you don't drink it it's gonna evaporate.
(suddenly freezing)
Oh my god. Here he comes.

Annie looks and sees "George" making his way across the room toward them.

LINDA
Annie, what'll I say?

ANNIE (soothingly)
Just be yourself...

"George" reaches their table - smiles down at, to Annie's horror, Annie.

"GEORGE"
(in a deep, resonant voice)
Hi. I'm Eric Utman.

ANNIE
I'm Annie, and this is my friend Linda.

LINDA
(all but batting her eyes)
Hello, Eric.

Eric gives Linda a perfunctory nod.

ERIC ("GEORGE")
Hi.
(returning his attention to Annie)
I manage the restaurant here. I don't believe I've seen you here before. -

LINDA
She's my guest. I'm here all the time. Poor thing, she hardly ever leaves the house. She's got three kids to take care of. The oldest one's 11.
(patting Annie's hand sympathetically)
Sometimes we're a lot older than we look, aren't we, Annie?

ERIC
I love kids.

Annie suddenly stands up, putting a firm hand on Eric's big shoulder and pushing him down into a chair.

ANNIE
Eric, why don't you just sit yourself down, while I go lookin' for the ladies' room.

LINDA
(shooting Annie a grateful look)
It's on the other side of the band down that little hallway.
(as Annie moves away)
Take your time! -
(to Eric, who's wondering how Annie got away)
Now where'd you get that tie?

ON ANNIE, moving past the band. She reaches the indicated hallway, goes down it. She sees a door that says "WOMEN'S LOCKER ROOM." A bit uncertainly, she enters.

INT. WOMEN'S LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Annie sees a row of lockers and wooden benches along one wall, and another running down the middle of the room, and toilet facilities and a shower room directly in front of her. No one else is around. She moves forward; but as she passes the row of lockers in the middle, she hears a woman LAUGH.

ANNIE'S POV: AT THE FAR END OF THE ROOM, JESSICA, PRESSED UP AGAINST A LOCKER BY A HANDSOME YOUNG BLOND MAN.

Annie stares transfixed as the blond man pulls down the top of Jessica's dress, begins to kiss her breasts. But then, as though the man senses some third presence, he begins to look up - Annie steps back quickly out of sight.

BLOND MAN (O.S.)
Somebody might come in.

JESSICA (O.S.)
Then you better fuck me fast...

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Annie, looking somewhat shaken at what she's seen, comes back out. Two women walk past her, go into a room at the end of the hallway - the ladies' room. Annie follows...

EXT. THE COUNTRY CLUB - NIGHT

Annie comes out, seeking fresh air. She's at the back of the building - a covered wooden walkway runs along its side. A short distance away are the woods.

After a few moments Annie sees, at the other end of the walkway, leaning on the railing and drinking a beer, Wayne.

Annie hesitates, undecided about whether to make her presence known - but the decision's made for her when Wayne looks in her direction, gives her a rather forlorn wave.

Annie walks to him.

WAYNE
Havin' a good time?

Annie nods, unconvincingly.

WAYNE (with a little laugh)
Me neither... I've just come to the conclusion that I'm not the Country Club type.

ANNIE
I'm sure not.

WAYNE
Seen Jessica around?

ANNIE (after a pause)
No...

WAYNE
She up and disappeared on me. She's got a way of doin' that.

Wayne, obviously a little drunk, takes a pull on his beer.

WAYNE

What do you think of Jessica?

ANNIE

She's very ... beautiful.

WAYNE

The main thing about Jessie is - she's so full of life. Sometimes I don't think I really measure up in that department.

ANNIE

I think you do. I know it.

WAYNE (looking at her curiously)

What do you mean you "know"? You mean like in an ESP kinda way?

ANNIE (after a pause)

You don't believe in it...

WAYNE (with a shrug)

I just don't think there are any great mysteries in life. I kinda figure what you see is what you get.

(pause)

You wanna sit down?

ANNIE

Okay.

They move over to some wooden steps a few feet away and sit down. Wayne fishes in a pocket for his cigarettes, lights up. Annie takes off her shoes, rubs her feet.

ANNIE (ruefully)

I'm used to tennie shoes.-

For a few moments they sit in silence, facing the dark mass of the woods. Stars glitter above them. The air is a-throb with the sounds of FROGS and CRICKETS - Annie's listening to them.

ANNIE

This reminds me of when I was a kid - sittin' out an the well, and thinkin' so many thoughts you couldn't count 'em.

WAYNE

Where'd you grow up?

ANNIE

This T-tiny town called Alpine. Only had about a hundred people
(with a smile)

We were probably the last folks in Arkansas without indoor plumbin'.

WAYNE
How'd you wind up in Parker?

ANNIE
My husband got a job here... out at the cable plant...

WAYNE (after a pause)
Did you - "know" - that something was gonna happen to your husband?

ANNIE (quietly)
I didn't know there was gonna be an explosion. But the night before, I had bad dreams. I dreamed... that I was all by myself... that Ben wasn't around anymore. I tried to talk him out of goin' in to work the next day, but -
(pause)
You kind of remind me of him. Not the way you look. Just your manner.

Wayne, looking at Annie, takes a last drag on his cigarette, flicks it out into the grass.

ANNIE
Wayne?

WAYNE
Yeah?

ANNIE (softly; meaning it)
Lookin' at these trees and these stars - listenin' to these sounds - how can you think life's not a mystery?

They look at each other - there's a silence - it's not exactly a pre-kiss moment, but...

Footsteps begin to CLOP their way down the wooden walkway. It's Jessica.

JESSICA
Wayne? I've been lookin, for you everywhere.

WAYNE
I've been right here.

JESSICA (her gaze taking in Annie)
I see.

Annie inspects Jessica: there's a post-sex flush to her cheeks, brightness in her eyes. Wayne begins to stand up, and Jessica grabs his hand.

JESSICA
Come on, let's go talk to Daddy. He's feelin' depressed tonight, that big deal he was workin' on went bad -

Wayne exchanges a last look with Annie before being dragged away by Jessica.

Annie puts her shoes back on; but she doesn't get up - keeps sitting there. She looks at the orange glow in the grass of Wayne's discarded cigarette - then she gazes into the trees.

PULL BACK FROM ANNIE ON THE STEPS,

alone with the trees and crickets and frogs and stars, with the mystery...

EXT. MRS. FRANCIS' AND ANNIE'S HOUSES - NIGHT

Annie, back from her Country Club adventure, has fetched her kids. Mrs. Francis stands in the doorway waving, there are AD-LIBBED GOOD-BYES. Now Annie's moving with her sons across the yard to her house. Miller's walking alongside Annie, Mike's trailing, with Ben asleep in his arms.

Miller turns the pockets of his pants inside out, and crumbs and chunks of something spill out onto the grass.

ANNIE
What's that?

MILLER
Blueberry muffins.

ANNIE
What are you doin' with blueberry muffins in your pockets?

MILLER
Miz Francis cooked am.

ANNIE
Okay. But why are they in your pockets?

MILLER
They're in my pockets 'ause I put 'em there when she wasn't lookin' so I wouldn't have to eat 'em. Her blueberry muffins is terrible, Mama!

ANNIE (laughs)
Are terrible, honey.

She ruffles Miller's hair then kisses the top of his head. Mike watches, looking a bit jealous.

They move into the carport. Annie goes in her purse for her keys.

MIKE

Mama, look.

ANNIE'S POV: IN THE KITCHEN WINDOW, THERE'S A STRANGE FAINT BLUE GLOW.

ANNIE (quietly)

Y'all wait here.

INT. LIVING ROOM, KITCHEN, AND HALLWAY - NIGHT

Annie comes in, turns on the light.

She moves slowly into the kitchen, which is filled with a bluish glow. She looks toward the stove.

ANNIE'S POV: FOUR BLUE RINGS OF CLAW-LIKE FIRE.

Bewildered, Annie moves to the stove, turns the burners off.

Now she comes back out into the living room ... turns the light in the hallway on...moves down it.

When she reaches the boys' bedroom, she turns on the light, peers in. There's a baseball bat lying against the wall near the door, and Annie takes it.

Now she moves on down the hall towards her closed bedroom door. She reaches it... turns the knob... then, bat at the ready, throws it open, steps through, and turns on the light.

INT. THE BLUE ROOM - NIGHT

Annie's staring at something in disbelief.

ANNIE IS POV: ON HER TABLE, HIM CARDS HAVE VERY CAREFULLY BEEN LAID OUT, IN AN ARRANGEMENT THAT SPELLS:

SATAN

Numbly, Annie looks around the room. The only other area that's amiss is the dresser, where a pair of her panties are draped over a photograph frame.

She moves to the dresser, picks up the panties... then something about them makes her drop them in sudden disgust.

Now she sees that the picture of her husband is missing from the photograph frame.

MIKE (O.S.)

Mama?

She looks around and sees Mike and his two brothers standing fearfully in the doorway, staring at the table.

MIKE
Is everything okay?

ANNIE (putting the bat down)
Everything's fine.

As she passes the table she obliterates the word there by quickly sweeping her cards up into a pile. Then, ushering her sons out, she shuts the door.

EXT. ANNIE'S HOUSE - MORNING

A police car is parked in the driveway. Now the front door opens, and Annie comes walking out with a skinny policeman, OFFICER EFIRD.

OFFICER EFIRD (as they move to his car)
I'd put a dead bolt on that back door, I figure that's where he got in. I had a burglar myself a couple years back, he -

ANNIE
I told you, it wasn't a burglar.
(pause)
It was a man named Donnie Barksdale.

OFFICER EFIRD (surprised)
Donnie?

ANNIE
You know him?

OFFICER EFIRD
I go squirrel huntin' with him. What makes you think Donnie would bust into your house?

ANNIE
His wife's one of my... clients. He thinks I'm trying to break up their marriage.

OFFICER EFIRD
Are you?

Annie doesn't reply. Officer Efird climbs into his car.

OFFICER EFIRD
Well, I think you're barkin' up the wrong tree with Donnie. He's a little high-spirited, but...
(starting up the car)
Thanks for the coffee.

Annie, looking frustrated, watches the cop back his car out of the driveway. As he heads of f down the street, he meets a tow truck driven by Buddy Cole, the auto repair guy who fixed Annie's car door. Buddy pulls into the driveway, smiling at Annie, who forces a smile back...

INT. ANNIE'S BLUE ROOM - MORNING

Annie's reading for Buddy.

BUDDY

I just can't get through a wall of some kind in my head. or my soul.
Sometimes I don't know the difference between my head and my soul.

ANNIE

I think everybody has that trouble, Buddy.
(studying the cards)
Your daddy took things away from you when you were little, didn't he?

BUDDY

Yes ma'am. If he seen me havin' a good time with somethin', a toy or somethin', he I d take it away from me.

ANNIE

Did he take other things away from you? Not toys.
(Buddy is silent)
You have to find out why you hate him so much, Buddy.

BUDDY

Daddy's a good man. I don't hate him. He's good to Mama and me. Ever' kid needs hit with a belt sometimes.

ANNIE

Buddy, try to get past that wall you talk about. You need to talk about your daddy.

BUDDY

You tell my why I hate him! You're the goddamn psychic!
(takes a deep breath, tries to calm down)
I'm sorry. I didn't mean to yell at you.
(starts to cry)
Please help me feel better. Them pills ain't really doin' me much good - and I keep thinkin' about the blue diamond...

ANNIE

I think when you remember some things about your childhood and you can face up to them, you'll feel better.

BUDDY

Do you know things, you don't tell me?

For just a moment, Annie hesitates...

ANNIE

I tell you, Buddy. But I just think you need to think about things on your own.

BUDDY

I have a hard time concentratin' on anything.

ANNIE (with a sigh)

So do I, Buddy...

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT DAY

Miller and Ben are sitting on the floor, where Miller's attempting to teach Ben to play checkers.

The phone RINGS. Annie enters from the kitchen, looking weary, as Ban throws a checker across the room.

ANNIE

Miller, Ben's too little to understand checkers -
(picking up the phone)
Hello?

DONNIE (V.O.)

You like what I did to your panties? Did you lick it off?

As she hears the voice of Donnie Barksdale, Annie's heart, figuratively speaking, stops.

DONNIE (V.O.)

You ever see anybody skin a squirrel? You stick a knife in its belly,
and - zip? Well, that's what I'm gonna do to you and your children
if you call the police again -

Annie abruptly hangs up ... stares at her kids, obliviously playing...

INT. ANNIE'S BLUE ROOM.- THAT NIGHT

Annie's lying in bed under the covers in her nightgown, reading.

MIKE (O.S.)

Mama?

Annie looks over...sees Mike standing in the doorway in his pajamas.

ANNIE

How come you're not asleep?

MIKE
I don't know.

Annie notices Mike is looking at the baseball bat leaning on the wall beside her bed.

ANNIE
Don't worry, honey - just go back to bed.

But something else is on his mind.

MIKE
Mama? How come we never go out to the cemetery and see Daddy?

ANNIE
We went out there just last month - on his birthday.
(pause)
I've just been so busy -

MIKE
Seems like you have time for a lot of strangers.

ANNIE
If you're talkin' about my appointments, they're not strangers and they
put food on our table.

Annie goes back to her book - but Mike keeps standing there.

MIKE
Mama?

ANNIE
Mike, I'm tryin' to read.

A fleeting look of bitterness and hurt crosses Mike's face. After a moment, he disappears from the doorway. As soon as he does so, Annie glances toward the doorway, then lays her book down on her chest, and stares at the ceiling...

DISSOLVE TO:

ANNIE'S ROOM, LATER THAT NIGHT

The light's off. Annie's asleep.

The CAMERA MOVES IN CLOSE on Annie's face. She stirs in her sleep a little, sighs... and then suddenly:

HANDS ARE WRAPPED AROUND HER THROAT.

Annie's eyes pop open, she is choking, she can't make a sound, she can see above her the dark bulk of a man straddling and strangling her, one of her hands gropes frantically for the baseball bat, finds it, but before she can swing it it's no longer a bat but a:

THICK, TWISTING SNAKE.

She drops it. The snake writhes as it falls.

ON THE FLOOR: The bat lands with a clatter.

ON ANNIE, the hands no longer at her throat. She lunges for the lamp, turns it on. she's alone in the room. She looks down at the bat on the floor, and then at the clock on the bedside table. It says: 1:28.

Slowly realizing this has just been some sort of dream or vision, and leaving the light on, she lies back in her bed, pulling the covers up to her chin and settling in for the long wait to the dawn...

EXT. PARKER FIRST METHODIST CHURCH - DAY

Following the Sunday service, churchgoers are spilling out of the church and down the broad concrete steps, Annie and her sons among them. Annie looks exhausted. At the bottom of the steps they pass near Annie's friend Linda, who's talking to a couple of other women. Now Linda sees Annie and heads for her, an urgent look on her face.

LINDA (as though imparting a state secret)
Annie, I know why Kenneth King wasn't in church today!

ANNIE (truly and deeply not caring)
Why?

LINDA
His daughter's disappeared.

ANNIE (surprised)
Jessica?
(to her kids)
Y'all run on to the car, I'll be there in a minute.

When they're out of earshot, Annie turns back to Linda, who's lighting up a cigarette, and is ripe as a tick with her gossip.

ANNIE
What do you mean she's disappeared?

LINDA
Well, Kenneth woke up this mornin' and Jessica wasn't there and her bed hadn't been slept in. So he called over to Wayne Pullman's lookin' for her,

but Wayne hadn't seen her since last night. Now Kenneth and Wayne are out combin' the county lookin' for her. Annie, you think she ran off? I know her and Wayne were supposed to be married in June, maybe she got cold feet -

It is as though a shadow moves across Annie's face.

ANNIE
Maybe...

LINDA
Maybe this'll clear the way for you and Wayne - .

ANNIE
What are you talkin' about?

LINDA
I saw the way y'all were lookin' at each other Friday night - y'all both just had stars in your eyes -

ANNIE
Linda, that's nuts -

LINDA
Annie, love is nuts.
(giving her the once-over as she takes a drag on her cigarette)
You look just terrible, darlin', you oughta get more rest...

INT. ANNIE'S KITCHEN - LATE AFTERNOON

Annie's at the counter, mixing some cake mix in a big blue bowl. At the same time, she's gazing with a troubled expression at the front page of the Parker Daily Record.

There's a photograph of Jessica King, underneath a big headline that says:

SEARCH GOES ON FOR FOURTH DAY FOR PARKER WOMAN

AUTHORITIES "FEAR FOUL PLAY"

Behind Annie, Ben is sitting on the kitchen table, digging his hand into a can of Pillsbury frosting, putting some into his mouth and the rest into his hair. Now Annie turns and sees him.

ANNIE (rushing to him)
Ben, get your hand outa there! That's for y'all's cake tonight. Now what an I gonna ice the cake with?

BEN
I like it. I like icin', Mama.

ANNIE (cleaning him up)
I can see that, honey.

EXT. BACK YARD - LATE AFTERNOON

Miller's playing with his dog. Annie opens the screen door, at the same time going into her purse for money.

ANNIE
Miller, come here a minute! Go down to the store and get another can of icin'.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF ANNIE'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Miller comes walking out from around the house, heads off down the sidewalk. Now the CAMERA MOVES in the opposite direction from Miller, to show, about a block down the street, a parked pickup truck, a couple of men inside.

EXT. ANOTHER STREET - LATE AFTERNOON

ON MILLER, walking.

Behind Miller, we see the pickup truck turning a corner, moving slowly up the street. When it gets alongside Miller, we see Donnie Barksdale, his arm hanging out the window. Driving is a younger, fatter, less-handsome version of Donnie, his brother JED.

DONNIE (with a friendly smile)
Where ya goin', son?

Miller stops and looks at Donnie - he recognizes him - he's afraid, but tries not to let it show.

MILLER
Store.

DONNIE
Hop in and we'll give ya a ride.

Miller shakes his head, resumes walking. The truck creeps along beside him.

DONNIE
I got a question for you. You know my wife, Anita? She been around to see your mama lately?
(Miller keeps walking)
Hey boy! I asked you a question.

Miller stops again, turns to face the truck.

DONNIE
You know, I feel real sorry for you and your brothers - I mean your mama

bein' a witch and all. If she don't stop her evil ways, someday somebody's gonna burn 'er up - and then you boys are gonna be left without a daddy or a mama -

A tow truck, with a car hitched on, has topped a hill in front of them. Now it brakes to a quick stop in front of the pickup, and Buddy Cole gets out. He moves toward Miller, taking in the terrified look on his face, and casting a suspicious look at the men in the truck.

BUDDY
Miller, you okay?

MILLER (trying not to burst into tears)
He said Mama's a witch and they're gonna burn 'er up!

A strange smile comes to Buddy's face as he turns and looks at Donnie.

BUDDY
Oh, he did... ?

DONNIE (warningly)
Buddy, you better mind your own bidness...

BUDDY
I intend to, Donnie.

Buddy walks back to his truck, opens the door of the cab, reaches in and withdraws a tire iron, and walks back towards the pickup.

BUDDY
Stand back, Miller...

Buddy lifts the tire iron above his head, and smashes it into the pickup's windshield.

There follows a frenzy of GRUNTING and smashing as the windshield shatters and showers Donnie and his cringing brother with chunks and fragments of glittering glass.

ON MILLER, looking on wide-eyed at the violence.

Donnie reaches in the glove compartment, pulls out a .38 revolver, sticks it out the window at Buddy.

DONNIE (to get his attention)
Cocksucker!

Buddy looks at Donnie and the gun, panting, a wild look in his eyes - then he walks over to Donnie, bends over a little, and presses his forehead against the barrel of the pistol.

BUDDY (grinning)
Shoot me. Shoot me, motherfucker. Shoot me.

Donnie's brother Jed has had enough - as he knocks some glass off his lap:

JED
He's crazy -

He throws his pickup into reverse, backs up so he can get around Buddy's truck, then takes off down the street. Buddy, with a certain amount of satisfaction, watches them go - but when he turns back to Miller...

Miller's running back down the sidewalk, hellbent for home.

BUDDY (shouting after him)

Miller?

But Miller doesn't slow or look back.

A downcast look appears on Buddy's face. Now he notices an OLD MAN who's come out on the front porch of his house and is observing him and his tire iron.

BUDDY

What the hell you lookin' at?

The man scuttles back inside, as Buddy walks slowly back to his truck...

INT. ANNIE'S KITCHEN - EVENING

Annie and her sons sit around the kitchen table. They've finished supper, and are eating frostingless cake. Forks CLINK against saucers in the silence. Ben crams a chunk of cake into his mouth with his hand.

BEN

I want icin', Mama.

ANNIE

Honey, you've had icin, enough to put you in a coma.

Annie glances with concern at Miller, who's poking listlessly at his cake.

ANNIE

From now on, y'all gotta start stickin' close to home. I want to know where y'all are every minute of the day. Mike, I'm gonna start drivin' you and Miller to school -

MILLER (quietly)

I wish Daddy was here.

ANNIE (gently but firmly)

He's not, hun - but I am - and I'm gonna look out for y'all.

The phone RINGS. Annie gets up and answers it.

ANNIE

Hello?

(surprised)

Mr. King... Any news on - ? Yeah, I'll be here all evening.

(puzzled)

But - why does the Sheriff want to see me?

INT. ANNIE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Three men sit uncomfortably on Annie's couch; Wayne Pullman and Kenneth King, who both look pale and awful, and SHERIFF PEARL JOHNSON, who's a big tall man in his 50's with a full head of silvery hair. Annie's sitting across from them.

SHERIFF JOHNSON

Miz Wilson, I don't believe in what you do, I'll just be straight with you. Not only that, I don't like it. I believe it goes agin the Good Lord. But we've got to the end of the road in our investigation, we've looked under ever' rock there is to look under, and we'd like you to tell us what you can to help us. Not no hocus pocus or chantin' and carryin' on, but we know you talk to a lot of folks around here and know a lot of folks's bidness. You mighta heard somethin' or somethin'.

MR. KING

The only thing we know is, one of Sheriff Johnson's men found her car sittin' out on the parkin' lot of that honkytonk called Pee Jay's - but nobody that was there Saturday night admits to havin' seen her.

(greatly agitated)

I'm afraid somebody kidnapped her or - or -

ANNIE

I don't know anything about your daughter's disappearance, Mr. King. Wayne, I'm sorry about what's happened. I know you must be going through a hard time.

WAYNE

We all are. Isn't there anything you can tell us? I'm gonna lose my mind if I don't -

Wayne breaks off, distraught.

ANNIE

I can read for you. That's all I can do.

SHERIFF JOHNSON

Well if you want to call it readin' that's fine. Just start talkin'.

ANNIE

That's not really how it works -

SHERIFF JOHNSON

I told you I don't want any of that hocus pocus -

MR. KING

God damn it, Pearl, I'm a deacon in the church! I don't believe it either but I'm ready to try anything.

SHERIFF JOHNSON

Suit yourself. Let's get it over with.

INT. ANNIE'S BLUE ROOM - NIGHT

Annie sits at her table, shuffling her cards. Mr. King sits across from her, while Wayne and Sheriff Johnson stand behind him. It's a small space for so many big men. Annie looks ill at ease as she starts spreading her cards out on the table.

ANNIE

When were you getting married, Wayne?

SHERIFF JOHNSON

We ain't got time for no small talk.

ANNIE

This is not small talk.

WAYNE

In June.

SHERIFF JOHNSON

We're suppose to ask the questions, not you.

WAYNE

Please, Pearl -

MR. KING

Shut up, Pearl, god damn it!

ANNIE (taking a deep breath)

I have a hard time concentrating with more than one person in the room.

SHERIFF JOHNSON

I'm stayin' right here. I'm the law and I need to hear this.

MR. KING

Please, ma'am, just tell us what you see there.

ANNIE (after a moment)

The only thing I'm picking up is a fence. A long white fence around a pasture.

MR. KING
Is she there?

ANNIE (after a moment)
That's all I see. You see it doesn't work like -

SHERIFF JOHNSON
You know how many white fences and pastures they are in this county?

ANNIE
Does Jessica have some dogs she might have taken with her?

MR. KING
The dogs are all at home. We've got two poodles and a little old fat beagle.
But no, they're home.

ANNIE
No, they're not poodles or beagles -

SHERIFF JOHNSON
This is just mish mash. I told you this wouldn't lead to nothin'.

ANNIE (upset)
You're right! It won't. I can't concentrate today. I can't do this now.

Annie gathers her cards back up, then looks apologetically at Wayne and Mr. King.

ANNIE
I'm sorry, Wayne. Mr. King, I hope you find your daughter. I'm not the
person to help you on this.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SOMEWHERE OUT IN THE COUNTRY - NIGHT

We see a deserted two-lane blacktop road. Along one side of the road is a huge pasture and a long white fence.

Now Annie comes walking slowly up the road. She's in her flannel nightgown, and is barefoot, and looks bewildered. An uncanniness and surrealness about the scene lets us know that this is ANNIE'S DREAM.

Annie climbs over the white fence, walks across the lush grass of the pasture. And now ahead of her she sees, glimmering in the starlight, a pond.

She reaches the pond, begins to walk around its bank, eyeing it warily. There's the CROAKING of a myriad frogs. A snake wriggles across the pond's smooth surface, making ripples of starlight.

Annie comes upon what appears to be an old telephone pole, lying flat at the top of the bank. As she steps over it to take a closer look, she slips, and takes a tumble down the bank.

She slides into the shallow water at the edge of the pond. As she tries to escape the water and the weeds and the mucky bottom and climb back up the bank, her hand touches something.

She picks up one end of a logging chain. It's lying half in and half out of the water. It's muddy and has weeds in the links.

Now she hears an ENGINE, and headlights flare across the pond. She reaches the top of the bank and sees, heading across the pasture toward her, a four-wheel-drive truck. Besides the headlights, there are a row of square amber lights across the top of the cab.

Annie turns and runs toward some nearby woods. The truck follows, bouncing over a hillock, picking up speed. Annie reaches the woods. The truck goes right into the woods after her, snapping down small pine trees.

Annie runs through the dark trees. She reaches a thick briar patch and plunges in and hides there. Her nightgown is torn and her skin is ripped and bleeding from the thorns.

Annie watches the truck with its probing headlights and its cold row of amber lights - it moves slowly through the woods like a tiger looking for her. When it's out of sight, she gets up and runs out of the briars in the opposite direction.

Now, in the dark and tangled distance of the woods, Annie hears the faint sound of a FIDDLE being played - it's the kind of fiddling you might have heard during the days of the Civil War. As Annie continues on, the SOUND gets louder, and now we hear a VOICE yelling:

VOICE

Here Bell! Oh Bell! Here Buster! Oh Buster!

Annie comes upon a SKINNY CURLY-HAIRED MAN sitting on a stump playing the fiddle and occasionally loudly WHISTLING. Now the man sees Annie.

CURLY-HAIRED MAN (still fiddling)

Ain't that a pretty sound?

ANNIE

You play very pretty.

CURLY-HAIRED MAN (as he stops fiddling)

Aw, not that sound. The sound of them bluetick hounds of mine.

Smiling, he cocks his head in a listening posture - and now Annie hears it too: the distant, lonesome HOWLING of hounds.

CURLY-HAIRED MAN

It's the prettiest sound in the world. Makes me cry. They usually come runnin, when I fiddle but tonight's different. They're astray.

Annie looks around at the dark trees with a sudden surge of panic.

ANNIE

Do you know a way out of here?

CUT TO:

INT. ANNIE'S BLUE ROOM..- NIGHT

Annie, lying in bed, awakes with a start.

The bedroom's dark. She looks over at the luminous face of the clock on the bedside table. It says: 1:28.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Annie, at the sink, stands in her nightgown splashing water on her face. She turns the water off - looks into her own eyes in the medicine cabinet mirror.

EXT. BACK YARD - NIGHT

Annie pushes open the screen door, moves down the steps and out into the yard. She has a robe on over her nightgown, and is sipping a glass of milk.

The night is still. The sky is clear, and holds a big white moon. crickets CHIRRUP softly.

Under the big oak tree, the bulldog Butch is sleeping half in and half out of his doghouse. He opens his eyes and lifts his head as Annie wanders his way. Now he stands up, and move on his bowed legs towards her.

Annie leans down, scratches Butch behind his ears.

Out of the clear sky, a drop of water splashes the back of Annie's hand.

Annie looks up.

About 20 feet above her head, among the branches of the oak tree, floats the body of Jessica King. It is nude and bloated and wet and ghastly and white in the moonlight. A logging chain is wrapped around it. Jessica's beautiful hair floats around her head, and her body bumps gently against the branches as though moved by the undulations of unseen currents. Her eyes are open, and as empty as anything you'll ever see.

Annie's beholding this in sheer terror. Now Butch WHIMPERS, jumps up and puts his pawn on her. Annie looks down, stepping back and pushing Butch away.

When she looks up again, there is nothing in the tree that shouldn't be there: only branches and leaves, which stir and SIGH a little as a breeze comes up...

INT. PARKER CITY HALL - SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Pearl Johnson's tiny office has big glass windows through which he can keep an eye on the activity in the outer office. Right now, Johnson's sitting with his cowboybooted feet up on his desk, smoking a cigar, and skeptically eying Annie, who's sitting across from him.

SHERIFF JOHNSON

So you saw all this in a dream.

ANNIE

It wasn't just a dream.

SHERIFF JOHNSON

I don't investigate somebody's dream.

ANNIE

I think she's dead, Sheriff. And I think she's in the pond.

SHERIFF JOHNSON

(narrowing his eyes shrewdly at Annie)

What do you know about this thing that you ain't tellin' me? You can get in serious trouble for withholdin' information.

ANNIE

Does it sound like a place you know?

SHERIFF JOHNSON

A bunch of places I know. A white fence, a pasture, a pond, a fo'-wheel drive. Ever' raw-bone ol' boy in the county's got that.

ANNIE

What about the fiddler and the dogs?

Pearl takes a pensive puff on his cigar.

SHERIFF JOHNSON

Well, ol' Tommy Lee Ballard plays a fiddle and has a bunch of old dogs out on the ridge road, but he wouldn't kill nobody. I've known him since he was a kid.

ANNIE

No, it's not the fiddler. Who are his neighbors?

SHERIFF JOHNSON

Well, his closest neighbor would be, let's see here, I guess, well, his property borders on Donnie Barksdale's place.

Annie's face goes white - she sits silently.

SHERIFF JOHNSON

Do you know Donnie Barksdale?

(pause)

Are you all right? Ma'am?

EXT. TWO-LANE BLACKTOP ROAD OUT IN THE COUNTRY AFTERNOON

The countryside is green and serene. The only sound is BIRDSONG. But now a Sheriff's Department car suddenly tops a rolling hill, followed quickly by another Sheriff's Department car, this one towing a trailer with a small boat on it.

INT. THE FIRST CAR - AFTERNOON

Pearl Johnson's driving, Kenneth King's sitting beside him, with Annie and Wayne in the back seat. Annie's looking out the window tensely. Wayne, looking sick, stares at nothing.

SHERIFF JOHNSON (to Mr. King)

I think you and Wayne comin' along's a bad idea -

MR. KING (ignoring him)

You did got a search warrant, didn't you? I want everything to be legal and proper.

SHERIFF JOHNSON

Didn't have to. I got permission from the owner.

MR. KING (incredulous)

Donnie Barksdale gave his permission to - ?

SHERIFF JOHNSON

His wife did. I just told her it was routine, we're checkin' all the ponds in the county. (with a wry smile) Donnie's gone fishin' today.

And now, as they round a curve, Annie sees it: the big green pasture and the long white fence of her dream.

At the end of the fence there's a dirt road and a tin mailbox labeled "BARKSDALE." The two cars save the blacktop and turn onto the road.

EXT. DONNIE BARKSDALE'S POND - AFTERNOON

The boat, a couple of men in it, is very slowly motoring back and forth across the pond - a small winch is at the back of the boat, with a taut nylon rope running from it into the water.

Wayne and Mr. King stand together on the bank, watching the boat. Pearl Johnson's talking to one of his deputies. The Sheriff's relighting a half-smoked cigar - he's got one foot up on an old telephone pole. Now he looks over at Annie, who's standing nearby.

SHERIFF JOHNSON

You sure you ain't never been out here before?

ANNIE

No sir, I haven't.

The pond is exactly the place of Annie's dream.

ONE OF THE MEN IN THE BOAT

Pearl! We got somethin'l

The men cut the motor, and start cranking up the rope.

All eyes are on the pond. Annie glances over at Wayne and Mr. King. Mr. King puts his hand on Wayne's shoulder.

Now, out at the boat, at the end of the rope, a six-footlong metal bar breaks the water. Affixed to the bar is a row of gigantic gleaming hooks. Entangled in the hooks is

MAN IN BOAT

It's a old bicycle!

As the men haul into the boat the twisted, slime-covered bike, everyone sags visibly with relief. Now Wayne moves away from the pond, leans against the Sheriff's car, and goes in his pocket for his cigarettes.

CLOSE ON WAYNE, as he tries to light up. The lighter is shaking violently in his hand. Now another hand comes INTO FRAME, steadies his hand.

Wayne nods his thanks to Annie. He takes a long drag on his cigarette.

WAYNE

That day at school? You looked kinda strange at me and Jessie. Did you think somethin' bad then?

ANNIE (at a loss)

Wayne, I -

There's the SOUND of an engine. Annie turns and sees, bouncing down the rutted dirt road that leads to the pond, a four-wheel-drive truck, an unlit row of square amber lights across the top of the cab.

The truck comes to a halt, and out of it jumps Donnie Barksdale. Donnie heads toward Sheriff Johnson, blood in his eyes. His wife Anita timorously follows, her face marked with the signs of a fresh beating.

DONNIE

Pearl, god damn it, what are you doin' on my property?

SHERIFF JOHNSON (standing his ground)

I'm here on Sheriff's bidness. I got permission from your wife.

DONNIE

You think I let that damn little ninnie talk for me?

SHERIFF JOHNSON

How'd your arm get all scratched up?

Donnie glances at the three angry red furrows on his left forearm.

DONNIE (after a moment)

Stray cat. It didn't like it when I kilt it.

Anita's spotted Annie, still standing with Wayne by the Sheriff's car.

ANITA

Annie... what are you doin, here?

Annie moves toward Anita.

ANNIE

Anita, I'm sorry - I never meant to cause you any trouble -

Now Donnie's gazing at Annie with a look that is truly frightening.

DONNIE (one notch above a whisper)

I orta knew it was you...

And before anyone can stop him, Donnie walks quickly towards Annie and slaps her hard across the face. The blow knocks her down. Wayne lunges past her and decks Donnie with a tremendous punch in the mouth. Donnie spends a moment shaking off, the cobwebs and surprise - but when he starts to get up to go after Wayne, he suddenly finds himself looking down the gleaming barrel of Pearl's nine millimeter.

SHERIFF JOHNSON

I'm on County bidness, Donnie - don't play with me.

MAN IN BOAT

Pearl! Hey, Pearl!

All eyes move once again to the pond, where the men in the boat have cut the motor, and are slowly cranking up a new catch out of the murky green water.

Wayne's helped Annie back up - now his hand finds hers, squeezes it hard.

Kenneth King's breathing becomes labored.

Sheriff Johnson puffs furiously on his cigar.

And then it breaks the surface: bloated and white in the late-afternoon light, long hair limp and streaming... wrapped in a chain...

MAN IN BOAT (covering his nose with a rag)
It's her!

A low animal MOAN issues from Wayne, and he sinks to his knees.

Pearl Johnson takes the cigar out of his mouth.

Anita looks at her husband in bewilderment.

ANITA
Donnie?

Kenneth King struggles down the bank, and begins to wade out in the water towards the boat.

MR. KING
Get those hooks out of my baby! Get her off of them hooks!

SHERIFF JOHNSON (to a deputy, in regards to Donnie)
Watch him -

The Sheriff goes into the pond after Kenneth King.

Wayne's buried his face in Annie's skirt.

WAYNE
Help me... wake me up...

Pearl wrestles Mr. King back to the bank - where King collapses, fighting for breath.

SHERIFF JOHNSON (shouting to one of his deputies)
Get a ambulance! I think he's havin' a heart attack!

The deputy runs past Annie to one of the cars. Annie's holding Wayne's head, tears streaming down her face. She looks over at Donnie Barksdale. He's fixing her with a look of pure hatred.

VOICE
What the hell is goin' on here?

Annie looks around. A skinny man with curly hair is walking towards them from the direction of the woods. Numbly, without surprise, Annie recognizes the fiddler in her dream.

ANNIE
Did you find your dogs?

TOMMY LEE BALLARD looks at her strangely - then slowly nods...

EXT./INT. ANNIE'S CUTLASS, MOVING DOWN A STREET - MORNING

Ben and Miller are in the front seat with Annie, Mike is in the back. Miller, rummaging through his Ninja Turtles lunchbox, pulls out a pack of Twinkies.

ANNIE
Put those Twinkies back, Miller, they're for your lunch -

BEN (reaching for them)
I want one, Mama. I want a Twinkie.

ANNIE
Now see what you stirred up?

They pass a couple of patrol boys with their cane poles and red flags.

MIKE
I don't see why you gotta keep drivin' us to school, that guy's in jail -

ANNIE
Well he hasn't been tried and convicted yet, and he's got a bunch of brothers and cousins that are just as mean as he is so we're not takin' any chances. That reminds me, we're gonna start lettin' Butch sleep inside at night. Ignorant rednecks love to poison dogs.

MILLER
Oh boy, can Butch sleep with me?

BEN
I want a Twinkie, Mama.

They're in front of the school now. Annie pulls over to the curb to unload.

MILLER (leaning over to kiss Annie)
Bye, Mama.

ANNIE
Have a good day, honey.
(glancing at the school)
Hey Mike? Has Mr. Pullman come back to school yet?

MIKE
He's still out sick.

ANNIE (after a pause)
Okay, honey. Behave yourself.

Mike makes a sour face as he slams the back door. Annie pulls away from the curb.

BEN
I want a Twinkie, Mama.

EXT. ANNIE'S HOUSE - MORNING

Annie pulls her car into the carport. She and Ben get out.

ANNIE (exasperated)
Ben, from now on "Twinkie" is the T word. You don't say it, you don't think it, you don't -

Ben's face scrunches up, and he begins to CRY. With a sigh, Annie pulls her mail out of the mailbox. Among the usual bills and junk, a large manila envelope catches her eye. Her name and address is spelled out in big block printing with a red Magic Marker. The return address reads:

YOUR HUSBAND

HELL

With foreboding, Annie rips open the envelope. Inside is the stolen photograph of her husband in his Navy uniform. Printed across it in the red writing is this message:

SEE YOU SOON HONEY

CLOSE ON ANNIE, numbly staring at the photo as Ben continues to WAIL...

INT. THE COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

The courthouse is a three-story brick building, set in a lovely square of tall shade trees and neatly trimmed grass. Annie parks her car out front, gets out, and moves down the sidewalk past a couple of old man playing checkers on a bench.

INT. THE COURTHOUSE - DAY

Annie walks down a corridor - finds the room she's seeking: DAVID DUNCAN, DISTRICT ATTORNEY. She takes a deep breath, opens the door.

INT. D.A. SECRETARY'S OFFICE - DAY

A COMELY YOUNG WOMAN sits behind a desk, examining her nails.

SECRETARY
Can I help you?

ANNIE
I'm Annie Wilson. Mr. Duncan wanted to see me?

VOICE
Hi, Mrs. Wilson.

Annie looks and sees DAVID DUNCAN standing in the door of his office, a coffee mug in his hand. He's wearing an expensive and perfectly tailored grey suit with a pale-gold tie. He's blond and very handsome. The faintly startled look on Annie's face is there because she, and we, have seen David Duncan before: in the women's locker room at the Country Club, in a heavy-breathing clinch with Jessica King.

Now Duncan moves to a coffee machine, and steaming black coffee jets into his mug.

DUNCAN (with a nice smile, as he takes in Annie's charms)
You want some coffee?

INT. DUNCAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Duncan sits behind his big, very neat desk, sipping his coffee and studying Annie, who's sitting across from him. Annie notices a framed photograph on his desk of him and a beautiful wife and two beautiful kids, a boy and a girl.

Then she looks over at a huge oil portrait hanging on the wall of John F. Kennedy.

DUNCAN

A great man. One of my heroes.

ANNIE

It's nice to have heroes.

Duncan smiles, then assumes a let I s-get-down-to-business look.

DUNCAN

Mrs. Wilson, the people are going to trial tomorrow against Donnie Barksdale - and I feel we have a powerful case. The victim was found strangled to death in his pond, wrapped in his logging chain. Barksdale had three scratch marks on his arm, and the coroner discovered human tissue under three of the victim's fingernails. Then just last week, we had a witness step forward who's gonna testify that he saw Donnie Barksdale and the victim outside Pee Jay's that Saturday night, and that Barksdale was slapping the victim around. I only have one weak link I gotta worry about.

Duncan waits, forcing Annie to ask:

ANNIE

What?

DUNCAN

You.

(another for-effect pause)

You see, you're how we found out where the victim's body was - and how you found out - well, that could open up a real can of worms for us.

(wiggling his fingers to indicate weirdness)

"Psychic phenomena," "ESP," dreams, visions - and if that's not enough, I understand there was bad blood between you and Donnie Barksdale...

Duncan waits for Annie to respond, but she looks him levelly in the eye and remains silent.

DUNCAN

Look, Mrs. Wilson... Annie... I'm gonna do my best to keep you off the stand - but the defense may force as to put you up there. And then I'm gonna be in a hell of a position: If I don't give you credibility, I lose the case. If I do give you credibility, I'm gonna be a laughingstock. (creating an imaginary headline)

"D.A. Duncan Debunks Science, Proves That Magic Is Real!"
You know, that kind of thing.

ANNIE (with an edge)
What do you care what people think as long as justice is done?

DUNCAN (after a pause - with his easy smile)
I deserved that.

Duncan reaches for his mug of coffee - but then, seemingly disconcerted by Annie's steady and somehow knowing gaze, puts it back down without taking a drink.

DUNCAN
Annie, ever since you first saw me, you've been looking at me in the oddest way. I mean, do I have something in my nose, or - or is my fly unzipped?

ANNIE (dryly)
Most likely the latter. Is that gonna be all?

DUNCAN (slowly)
Yes ma'am...

Annie gets up and head out, as Duncan stands up politely - but when she reaches the door, she pauses.

ANNIE
You know, Mr. Duncan, the "victim" had a name - it was Jessica King.
Now Annie exits - leaving the young D.A. looking uneasy and perplexed...

EXT. ANNIE'S HOUSE - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

It's the middle of the night. Everything's quiet. The house is dark.

INT. THE BLUE ROOM - NIGHT

Annie turns over in her bed with a sigh for the dozenth time, unable to sleep.

Now she hears claws CLICKING steadily down the hallway. In a moment, the din shape of Butch appears in the doorway, stands there looking in.

ANNIE
Hi, Butch. Lonesome?
Butch turns and leaves, and Annie hears his CLICKING CLAWS receding down the hall.

ANNIE
Guess not.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE BLUE ROOM - MORNING

Annie's asleep. The early morning sun is filtering in through the diaphanous blue curtains, glimmering on her face. But now a faint shadow falls across her. Annie opens her eyes.

HER POV: A MAN IS STANDING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BED LOOKING DOWN AT HER.

ANNIE (incredulous)
Ben?

The man smiles a little - we recognize him from the photograph as Annie's husband. Tears suddenly fill Annie's eyes.

ANNIE (ecstatically)
I knew you weren't gone -

CUT TO:

ANNIE suddenly waking up. Her lashes are matted with tears.

HER POV: BESIDE THE BED, THERE'S NO ONE.

From out on the street comes the awful BANG and CLANGOR and MOANING of a garbage truck at work. Annie throws the covers off, swings her legs over the side of the bed.

Annie just sits there for a moment, her breathing shallow, trying to deal with the bitter realization that she's just been dreaming. Then, with an act of will, she pulls herself together, wipes her eyes with a corner of the sheet, reaches for her robe, and, slipping it on over her nightgown, gets up to begin the day...

EXT. PARKER BUSINESS DISTRICT - DAY

Mike's peddling his bike furiously down the street.

EXT. COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

Mike comes up on his bike, jumps the curb, peddles up the sidewalk to the entrance, hurriedly dismounts, locks his bike up with a chain, and runs up the steps.

INT. COUNTY COURTHOUSE COURTROOM - DAY

Mike slips in the door, stands at the back of the courtroom scanning the scene, where the trial of Donnie Barksdale in the murder of Jessica King is already underway.

David Duncan is questioning a witness.

Barksdale, wearing an uncharacteristic suit, sits at the defense table with his lawyer GERALD WEEMS, a small skinny bespectacled man wearing a blue blazer and a red tie.

Behind Donnie Barksdale sits his wife Anita, his brother Jed, and various and sundry others of the Barksdale clan.

Duncan's ASSISTANT sits at the defense table, and in the first row of spectators behind it are sitting Wayne Pullman and a thin and ill-looking Kenneth King.

The JUDGE is a distinguished- looking man in his 60's.

The JURY is seven men and five women, nine white and three black.

The trial's a Big Event in Parker, and the courtroom's crowded with spectators - and now, in the middle of the crowd, Mike spots Annie, sitting with her friend Linda. Mike shrinks back a little, obviously not wanting to be seen by his mother.

VOICE (in a loud whisper)

Mike -

Mike looks and sees Buddy Cole, sitting in the back row.

BUDDY (as Mike sits down beside him)

Why ain't you in school?

MIKE

I wanted to see this.

BUDDY

If she sees you your mama'll skin you alive -

Mike shrugs, settling in to watch the action.

ON ANNIE, watching. The handsome young D.A. is questioning ALBERT HAWKINS, a graying black man in his 50s, Who's wearing an old brown suit.

DUNCAN

Now, Mr. Hawkins, how long have you worked out at Pee Jay's?

HAWKINS

'Bout 10 years.

DUNCAN

And what are your duties there?

HAWKINS

I sweep and keep thangs stocked and that kind of thang.

DUNCAN

Now, were you working at Pee Jay's on Saturday night, April 11?

HAWKINS

Yes sir.

DUNCAN

Did you see the defendant Donnie Barksdale there that night?

HAWKINS

Yes air.

DUNCAN

Could you describe the circumstances when you saw him?

HAWKINS

The circumstance were I come outside to thow away some trash -

DUNCAN

And what time was it then?

HAWKINS

'Bout midnight, I reckon...

FLASHBACK TO PEE JAY'S

We see Alfred Hawkins coming out the back door of the beer and dance joint, toting a trash can. We hear the muffled sounds of a jukebox COUNTRY TUNE. Hawkins begins emptying the trash into a dumpster. Then he hears the angry sounds of MALE AND FEMALE VOICES.

HAWKINS' POV: DONNIE BARKSDALE AND JESSICA KING.

They're in the back part of the parking lot, standing between Barksdale's four-wheel-drive truck and Jessica's white Mazda Miata.

HAWKINS (V.O.)

Anyhow, I seen Donnie Barksdale out by his truck havin, a argument with this white lady.

Jessica turns away from Barksdale, moves to get into her car. Donnie grabs her. Jessica digs her fingernails into Barksdale's arm. Barksdale YELPS in pain, yanks back his arm, and slaps Jessica hard. Jessica falls, banging her head hard against the side of her car. She sits slumped against the car looking dazed, holding her head. Barksdale moves towards her, bends down.

HAWKINS (V.O.)

She scratch his arm, he slap the tar out of her, and then she fall down and bang her head on this little old white car.

At this point, Hawkins, looking a little nervous, takes his empty trash can and goes back into Pee Jay's...

HAWKINS (V.O.)

'Bout that time, I go back inside...

BACK TO THE COURTROOM

Duncan's showing Albert Hawkins a photograph.

DUNCAN

Is this the woman you saw with Donnie Barksdale?

HAWKINS

Yes sir.

DUNCAN

Your honor, let the record show I've just shown Mr. Hawkins a photograph of Jessica King.
(heading for his seat)
No more questions.

JUDGE

Mr. Weems?

As little Gerald Weems rises and moves toward the witness, Linda, watching Duncan appreciatively, leans toward Annie.

LINDA (in a whisper)

Annie, I'll bet that's a \$500 suit!

Annie glances at Duncan, then looks at Wayne, where he's sitting with Mr. King, leaning forward in his seat and rubbing his face with both hands.

WEEMS (with a smile)

How are you, Albert?

HAWKINS (returning the smile)

I'm fine, Mr. Weems.

WEEMS

We've known each other quite a while, haven't we?

HAWKINS

Yes sir. You got my oldest boy outa jail that time.

WEEMS

Your boy was wrongfully accused, wasn't he?

HAWKINS

Yes sir.

WEEMS

It happens sometimes, doesn't it?

HAWKINS

Yes sir.

WEEMS

Now Albert, did you have some trouble with Mr. Barksdale a couple years back?

HAWKINS

Yes sir, I guess it were trouble.

WEEMS

And clarify that for us. Tell us what happened.

HAWKINS

He had a bag on I reckon and he were out to the club there and he start callin' me a name. He call me a nigger. He say he don't like no nigger handlin' what he drank. See, I was totin' in a case of beer to the bar.

WEEMS (shaking his head)

Donnie Barksdale called you a nigger. Now if I were a black man, a hard-workin' man just mindin, my own bidness, that would make me angry.

HAWKINS

Yes sir.

WEEMS

I guess if you could you'd like to see Donnie Barksdale get what's comin' to him.

DUNCAN

Objection, your honor -

JUDGE

Sustained.

WEEMS

Now Albert, help me clarify somethin' else. You just testified you saw Mr. Barksdale and Miss King out at Pee Jay's the night of April 11 -

HAWKINS

Yes sir.

WEEMS

But on April the 12th - the very next day - you told a different story to Sheriff Johnson, didn't you?

HAWKINS (reluctantly)
Well -

WEEMS
Sheriff Johnson came out to Pee Jay's 'cause Jessica King's car was found out there, and he asked you pointblank if you'd seen her out there the night before and you said no -

HAWKINS
Well - I figure it were they bidness. I try to stay outa folks' bidness.

WEEMS
But Albert, isn't it still their bidness?

HAWKINS
When I found out 'bout that dead girl's body bein' found in that pond, I figure that it were my bidness too -

WEEMS
But the crux of the dilemma is you've told two entirely different stories. A man's life is at stake here, Albert. We have to clarify this point. Clarity is the reason your son is a free man today -

HAWKINS (sorrowfully)
Well, he ain't exactly free no more, Mr. Weems. He were wrongfully accuse
of robbin' a liquor store in Houston.

Weems opens his mouth to ask another question, then closes it without speaking, as Buddy, where he sits with Mike, gives a SNORT of laughter...

CUT TO:

SHERIFF PEARL JOHNSON, A LITTLE LATER.

He's on the stand being questioned by David Duncan.

DUNCAN
And after Mr. King filed the missing person report on his daughter, when and where did you discover her car?

SHERIFF JOHNSON
About five o'clock Sunday afternoon out at Pee Jay's.

DUNCAN

Describe the progress of your investigation over the course of the next five days.

SHERIFF JOHNSON

Well, there wasn't no progress. We couldn't find nobody to admit to having' seen Jessica past early Saturday evenin'. We just couldn't find hide nor hair -
(glancing uncomfortably at Mr. King)
we couldn't find no trace of the girl.

DUNCAN

Then on Thursday the 16th, was your attention drawn to Donnie Barksdale's pond?

ON ANNIE, paying close attention to this.

SHERIFF JOHNSON

Yes sir it was.

DUNCAN

And then what happened?

SHERIFF JOHNSON

Well, after first gettin, permission from Anita Barksdale, I took some of my boys out to drag the pond.

At the defense table, Donnie turns around to glare at his wife - and then his eyes meet Annie's, and if anything, his glare intensifies.

DUNCAN

Did the defendant show up while you were dragging the pond?

SHERIFF JOHNSON

Yes sir.

DUNCAN

What did you observe about the condition of the defendant's left forearm?

SHERIFF JOHNSON

He had three scratches on it.

DUNCAN

And did you ask the defendant how hold acquired the scratches?

SHERIFF JOHNSON

Yes sir. He said held kilt a stray cat, and she hadn't liked it when held kilt 'er.

A ripple of excitement moves through the courtroom, and several members of the jury look at Donnie Barksdale in disgust and horror...

DISSOLVE TO:

GERALD WEEMS AND SHERIFF JOHNSON, A LITTLE LATER.

WEEMS

Now Sheriff, you said your attention was "drawn" to the defendant's pond? In what way was it "drawn"?

The Sheriff shifts uneasily in his seat, glances toward David Duncan at the prosecutor's table.

WEEMS

Mr. Duncan didn't ask you that question, Sheriff - I did.

SHERIFF JOHNSON

Me and Wayne Pullman and Kenneth King went over to see a woman named Annie Wilson.

ON MIKE AND BUDDY.

MIKE

They're talkin' about Mama...

WEEMS

What made you think this woman could be of help to you?

SHERIFF JOHNSON

Well... word around town was that she was a... well, I don't know what the right word is...

WEEMS

Is it "fortuneteller"?

SHERIFF JOHNSON

I guess so.

WEEMS (his voice dripping with sarcasm)

NOW what did this fortuneteller see when she looked into her crystal ball?

SHERIFF JOHNSON

Well, she didn't have no ball. She had these funny-lookin' cards...

WEEMS (playing up to the jury)
"Funny-lookin' cards"...go on...

SHERIFF JOHNSON

And, well, she didn't actually see nothin' then - but next day she come to see me and told me she'd had this dream...

WEEMS

"Had this dream"...

SHERIFF JOHNSON (squirming in his chair)

And she'd seen this pond that looked a lot like Donnie Barksdale's - and then she'd woke up from her dream and went outside, and looked up in this tree and, uh...

WEEMS

I'm all ears.

SHERIFF JOHNSON

Well ... she seen Jessica King floatin' around in the tree nekkid with a chain wrapped around 'er.

WEEMS (turning to the jury - incredulously)

"Floatin' in a tree"!

Annie looks stunned at the mockery, Linda indignant. Now David Duncan at his table looks over his shoulder, pointedly catches Annie's eye...

EXT. THE COURTHOUSE - AFTERNOON

The trial's been adjourned for the day, and the spectators are leaving the courthouse, Annie and Linda among them.

LINDA

That little squirrel Gerald Weems! And to think I used to think he was cute -

ANNIE

He was just doin' his job -

Buddy's sitting on a bench, obviously waiting for Annie.

BUDDY (standing up)

Miz Wilson, can I talk to you a minute?

He fixes his slightly wild eyes on Linda, and she takes the hint.

LINDA

Annie, call me later, okay?

ANNIE

Okay.

Linda moves away. We can tell that the last thing Annie feels like doing now is dealing with Buddy. She resumes walking towards her car.

ANNIE

Buddy, I have a lot of things on my mind now. it's not a good time.

BUDDY

You said I should think and talk and I been thinkin'. Tell me why I do things to myself when I think about Daddy. I do somethin' weird when I think about him then I feel better.

Annie spots Anita and Jed and some other Barksdales gathered around a truck. They're all staring at her, Anita with a sort of helplessness, the rest with hostility.

ANNIE

What are you ramblin' about, Buddy?

BUDDY

I need your help. I need you to tell me things.

ANNIE

You and everybody else. Please Buddy, call me later and I'll talk to you.

BUDDY (grabbing her arm)

Please hold still! Stop and listen to me! I thought about Daddy and I played around with myself. Why?

ANNIE

You played around how?

(resuming walking)

Buddy, I don't want to talk to you now.

BUDDY

I jacked off god damn it! When I thought of the old bastard, I jacked off. I'm crazy, ain't I? Somethin' bad wrong with me, help me. I'm sick. Can we go to your house and talk?

They've reached Annie's car now. Annie's shocked by what Buddy has said, but is still in her own world.

ANNIE

Buddy, listen, I'll call you later on this week and we'll have a good talk.

I'm goin, through a hard time myself right now so I can't help you now.
(taking his arm and looking him in the eye)
Listen - if you look into a blue diamond, you won't think a negative
thought.

BUDDY
I won't? You promise?

ANNIE
I promise.

Now Annie gets in her car, starts it up, and drives away. Buddy remains standing where he is, staring after her...

INT. ANNIE'S LIVING ROOM - THAT NIGHT

Annie's sitting with her three sons on the couch. Ben's in her lap. Butch is at her feet, looking up at her.

ANNIE
First of all: Mike, I know you skipped school today and went to the trial.

MIKE (shocked at being caught)
How'd you - ?

ANNIE
It doesn't matter how I found out. A little bird told me. It's about time you started making things easier on me instead of harder, Mike. I'm very disappointed in you.

The phone begins to RING. Annie ignores it.

ANNIE
Now second of all: I'm gonna have to testify at the trial tomorrow. I don't want to, but I have to.

MILLER
The phone's ringin', Mama.

ANNIE
I'm not deaf, Miller - we'll let the machine get it. Donnie Barksdale's lawyer is gonna try and give me a hard time, so I just want y'all to be prepared if you hear any bad stuff about me. we're all gonna have to really be stickin' together -

The phone's stopped ringing, Annie's message has played, and now, as Annie and her kids listen wide-eyed, a hysterical female voice SHRIEKS out of the answering machine:

VOICE ON MACHINE

Annie Wilson, it's Buddy's mother, Buddy's gone crazy and he's threatenin' to kill his daddy!

(SCREAMS and CURSES in the background)

Please get here right now, he's done hit Oren with a hammer!

EXT. A RESIDENTIAL STREET IN PARKER - NIGHT

Annie's car pulls up in front of a small white frame house, and Annie gets out. A WOMAN in her early 60's has been waiting on the porch, and now she comes running down the sidewalk.

BUDDY'S MOTHER

Oh Annie, it's just terrible. He's got Oren tied up in the back yard.

He's accusin' 'im of horrible things. He's done hit 'im in the head.

He's bleadin'.

A couple of neighbors are standing, staring, on their front lawns. Annie and the woman hurry around the house. We hear SHOUTING in the back yard.

ANNIE

Did you call the police?

BUDDY'S MOTHER

He said if I did held kill Oren. He wants you.

EXT. BACK YARD OF BUDDY'S PARENTS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Annie and Buddy's mother come around the side of the house. Annie is shocked by what she sees.

Old snapshots are strewn across the grass. In the middle of the yard, his back to Annie, naked from the waist up, BUDDY'S FATHER is tied to a metal lawn chair. In a circle around his father, Buddy has carefully placed framed photographs of himself as a little boy, some of him alone, some with his parents, and some with just his father. Within the circle, Buddy's standing over his father, a belt in one hand and a can of gasoline in the other. He's dousing the old man's pants with the gas.

ANNIE

Buddy, let your daddy go! I'll talk to you.

Buddy's father looks over his shoulder at Annie. There's a knot on his head and a cut that's bleeding profusely, and a rag's stuffed in his mouth. Buddy looks at Annie with out-of-his-mind eyes.

BUDDY

It's too late for that, ma'am. It's too god damn late. This is a criminal in front of you. And he's gonna be punished.

Buddy starts to swing his belt, striking his father in the face and chest. Buddy's mother SCREAMS.

BUDDY

You ruined me you bastard! I was just a little kid! How could you do that to a little kid! You're sick and I'm sick! You made me sick!

ANNIE (moving towards them)

Buddy, stop it!

Now Buddy swings the belt wildly at Annie, keeping her at bay.

BUDDY

Why didn't you help me? You didn't help me! I thought you could tell the future! I thought you could tell the past and help me! I had you for a friend and now I don't have nobody! I'm killin' this! I'm killin' this thing! He stuck it in his little boy! His little boy!

Buddy suddenly drops the gas can and withdraws a lighter from his pocket.

ANNIE (lunging towards him)

No, Buddy -

But Buddy shoves her and sends her sprawling, then turns to his father and lights his gasoline-soaked pants.

Oren Cole goes up in flames, as his wife runs around to the front of the house SCREAMING hysterically for help. Annie comes to her feet, tries to get to the father again, but Buddy keeps her back with his belt, as though guarding his father. His father's trying to scream, but can't because of the rag in his mouth. And now Annie's moved to a position in front of the old man, and she stares in horror at his bulging, bare belly.

ANNIE'S POV THROUGH THE FLAMES: A LARGE TATTOO OF A BLUE DIAMOND.

Buddy points to his burning father's tattoo and looks into Annie's eyes.

BUDDY

Look into that goddamn thing and tell me what kind of thought you have!

EXT. THE COLE HOUSE - A LITTLE LATER THAT NIGHT

The quiet little street is quiet no longer. Neighbors crowd around, two cop cars and an ambulance are parked in front of the house, and Buddy's father, MOANING and semiconscious, is being trundled along on a gurney by two paramedics, his sobbing wife at his side holding his hand.

Annie's sitting on the curb, watching it all. Buddy's father's loaded in the ambulance, Mrs. Cole climbs in after him, and now the ambulance takes off, SIREN going and lights flashing.

And now Annie hears CUSSING and YELLING coming from the direction of the house.

Buddy's being removed from the house by two cops. His hands are cuffed behind his back, his ankles are cuffed together, and a third pair of handcuffs join his feet and his hands, so that the cops are carrying him like a human suitcase.

Annie watches as Buddy, snarling and twisting, is tossed into the back of a police car. The police car takes Buddy away.

ON ANNIE, all alone on the curb...

INT. THE COURTROOM - DAY

Annie, her hand on a Bible, is being sworn in by the clerk.

CLERK

Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help you God?

ANNIE

I do.

CLERK

Be seated.

Annie goes into the witness box and sits down. She looks pale, tense, and tired, with dark circles under her eyes following another sleepless night. As David Duncan approaches her, she scans the courtroom: sees the solemn faces of the jurors, sees Linda, who gives her an encouraging smile, Wayne and Mr. King, Anita Barksdale, Gerald Weems, and Donnie Barksdale, who seems to be trying to stare a hole through her.

DUNCAN

State your name please.

ANNIE

Annibelle Wilson.

DUNCAN

And your occupation?

ANNIE (after a pause)

Mother... and homemaker.

DUNCAN

Mrs. Wilson, your husband, Ben Wilson Sr., was one of the man killed last year in the explosion out at the Reinhold Cable Plant...

ANNIE

Yes...

DUNCAN

And you were left with three small children to raise on your own...

ANNIE
Yes sir.

DUNCAN
How do you provide for you and your sons?

ANNIE
I get a little bit of money from Social Security as a result of my husband's death. Also, I... give readings.

DUNCAN
Psychic readings?

ANNIE
Yes sir.

DUNCAN
Is "psychic" a fair word to use?

ANNIE
As good as any, I guess.

DUNCAN
How long have you known you were psychic?

ANNIE
Since I was a little girl. We had an old well out behind our house, and I used to look down into it and - and see things.

DUNCAN
What kind of things?

ANNIE
Things that hadn't happened yet, or things that were happenin' someplace else. My grandmother told me that I had "the gift." She said it ran in the family, and I shouldn't be afraid of it. Granny told me that where my gift was concerned, I should Just always use my instinct, and I'd be all right.

DUNCAN
Mrs. Wilson, you were in the courtroom yesterday when Sheriff Johnson testified to the chain of events involving you that led him to search Donnie Barksdale's pond. Did he give an accurate account of those events?

ANNIE
Yes Sir.

DUNCAN (emphatically)

So you're swearing before this court that you didn't get your information about this tragedy from any other means than your special ability, your... "gift."

ANNIE

Yes Sir... I am swearing that.

DUNCAN

Thank you, Mrs. Wilson.

(heading back to his table)

I have no further questions.

JUDGE

Mr. Weems?

Gerald Weems stands up, walks slowly over to Annie, his hands behind his back, giving her a friendly smile.

WEEMS

Miz Wilson - how many fingers am I holdin' out behind my back?

DUNCAN (jumping to his feet - disgusted)

Objection, your honor!

WEEMS

Your honor, my client is sittin' here before this court on trial for his life, in part because of special powers this woman claims to have. Now in all fairness, I think I oughta be allowed to test these alleged powers instead of all of us just takin, her word for it.

JUDGE

You have a point, Mr. Weems. Objection overruled.

Duncan sits back down, shaking his head. Weems, standing with his back to the jury, is holding out seven fingers.

WEEMS

Can the members of the jury see how many fingers I'm showin'?

The jurors, looking extremely attentive, nod.

WEEMS

How many fingers, Miz Wilson?

Annie, looking at a loss, is silent for several seconds. Finally:

ANNIE

Three?

Weems, smiling, holds up his hands for all to see.

WEEMS

Let the record indicate that I was holdin' out seven - repeat - seven - fingers.

ANNIE

Look, that doesn't prove anything. I can't do this at the drop of a hat -

WEEMS

How about at the drop of a dollar bill?

ANNIE

What do you mean?

WEEMS

I mean, maybe your "gift" doesn't work unless you get paid for it. As they used to say in the Army: No money, no honey?

ANNIE

No, that's not true -

WEEMS

Are you aware, Miz Wilson, that it's against the laws of the state of Arkansas for a so-called "psychic" to set up shop and charge money?

ANNIE

But I don't charge money -

WEEMS

But you just testified that you did -

ANNIE

I accept... donations... gifts...

WEEMS (glancing toward the jury with a chuckle)

A distinction worthy of a lawyer...

Annie is looking increasingly upset. Her eyes happen to meet Wayne's. Wayne, sitting by Mr. King on the front row, smiles a little, gives her a discreet thumb's-up sign.

WEEMS

Are you rich, Miz Wilson?

ANNIE

No...

WEEMS

Well, I'd be filthy rich if I was a psychic and could see the future.
I'd play the stock market, go over to Hot Springs and bet on the horses -

ANNIE

I did, once...

WEEMS

Did what?

ANNIE

I went over to Hot Springs and bet on the horses.

WEEMS (a bit warily)

What happened?

ANNIE

I lost every race.

Weems looks at the jury, raises his eyebrows with a whose-side-is-she-on? look.

ANNIE

You see, I don't think I was meant to use my gift for personal gain.

WEEMS

Except for the... what did you call them..."donations"...

(Annie doesn't reply)

Miz Wilson, isn't it true you had personal trouble with Donnie Barksdale?

ANNIE

Yes...

WEEMS

And isn't it true that, just a few weeks ago, you stood in front of
Donnie Barksdale and told him you - I think your exact words were -
you were gonna have his "ass" thrown in jail?

ANNIE (looking at Donnie)

Yes, but he was threatening my -

WEEMS

And isn't it true that, also just a few weeks ago, durin' one of your
famous "readin's" when you were usin' your so-called "ESP," you
told Anita Barksdale, Donnie's wife, that Donnie was just an insecure
redneck, and that he wasn't crazy enough to kill anybody?

Annie looks at Anita, suddenly remembering the conversation. Anita meets Annie's eyes somewhat guiltily, and then looks down at her hands.

ANNIE (quietly)
Yes - I did say that...

WEEMS
But now you're sayin' that he did kill somebody...

ANNIE
No, wait a second - I've never said that -

WEEKS
Well you might as well have.
(pointing to Donnie)
You swore you'd have that man put in jail, and now here he is on trial for his life.

ANNIE
I just told the Sheriff what I saw.

WEEMS (extravagantly)
And how can we forget? *Jessica King, a-floatin' in a tree!* It must be a lot of fun havin' all these dreams, and visions, and -

ANNIE (losing it)
Fun? You think it's fun that I feel the weight of this whole town's problems on my shoulders? You think it's fun to bury other people's dead babies or - or to be blamin' myself 'cause some poor crazy man tries to burn up his daddy? You think I'm doin' this for fun? You're crazy if you think that -

Annie breaks off, her breathing shallow, tears in her eyes. The whole courtroom's silent, looking at her.

WEEMS (softly)
I got no more questions...

DISSOLVE TO:

DONNIE BARKSDALE, ON THE STAND.

He's the first and only witness in his own defense. Gerald Weems is standing before him.

WEEMS
Mr. Barksdale, as they say in Hollywood, let's cut to the chase:
Did you or did you not kill Jessica King?

DONNIE (emphatically)
I did not.

WEEMS
Did you or did you not see Jessica King on the night she was killed?

DONNIE (after a pause)
Yeah. I seen her.

ON ANNIE, sitting with Linda.

WEEMS
Describe the circumstances.

DONNIE
Well, I'd been seein' her for quite a while -

WEEMS
Let's clarify what you mean by "seein'."

DONNIE
I mean her and me'd been havin' sex.

ANGLES ON WAYNE, AND ON DONNIE'S WIFE ANITA.

WEEMS
Okay ... go on.

DONNIE
Well, she called me about 11 o'clock, and said she was in the mood to have sex with me -

WEEMS
Were those the words she used, "to have sex"?

DONNIE
She was in the mood to fuck me, is what she said. So I told her I'd meet her out at Pee Jay's, and I told my wife I was .goin' out to have a beer...

WEEMS
And did you meet her out at Pee Jay's?

FLASHBACK TO PEE JAY'S:

Donnie is sitting in his four-wheel-drive truck in the back of the parking lot, smoking a cigarette. And now a white Mazda Miata pulls up by his truck, and Jessica King climbs out, sexy and smiling...

DONNIE (V.O.)
Yes air.

WEEMS (V.O.)
And then what happened?

FLASHBACK TO DONNIE'S TRUCK,

moving down a dirt road in the woods: Donnie stops the truck, turns off the motor, then looks over at Jessica hungrily...

DONNIE (V.O.)
We went in my truck down this little old dirt road - and then we did it.

BACK TO THE COURTROOM.

WEEMS
Had sex.

DONNIE
That's right.

WEEMS
Did you then return to Pee Jay's?

DONNIE
Yes Sir.

WEEMS
What happened then?

DONNIE
Well, we got in a argument. She told me she didn't want to see me no more.

WEEMS
Did she say why?

DONNIE
She said she was gettin' married in a couple of months, and she wanted to stop playin' around - at least till after the weddin'.

WEEKS
In the course of this argument, did you strike Jessica King?

FLASHBACK TO PEE JAY'S:

We've seen this action before, as recounted by Albert Hawkins - Donnie grabbing Jessica, Jessica clawing Donnie's arm, Donnie slapping her, Jessica falling back and hitting her head hard against her car.

DONNIE (V.O.)

I ain't proud of it, but - yes Sir.

BACK TO THE COURTROOM

WEEMS

What happened after you struck her?

DONNIE

Well, she banged her head purty hard when she went down -

FLASHBACK TO PEE JAY'S:

Jessica is slurped against her car, half knocked out. Donnie moves toward her, bends down, touches her face with concern - and then lifts her up.

DONNIE (V.O.)

So I decided to take her to the hospital to get her checked out...

BACK TO THE COURTROOM

DONNIE

See, a few years back my daddy hit his head in the barn, he didn't go the doctor and then he got one of them blood clots on the brain and he dropped dead right in front of me - so I was kind of scared for her.

WEEMS

Did you ever reach the hospital?

FLASHBACK TO DONNIE'S TRUCK:

He's driving through the dark spring night down a two-lane blacktop road. Jessica is on the seat beside him. She's touching the back of her head gingerly - she and Donnie are talking to each other - and now Donnie slows down, takes his truck into a u-turn, and heads back the way they've come.

DONNIE (V.O.)

No sir. Jessie said she was afraid somebody at the hospital would know her, and she said she was feelin' better anyhow...

FLASHBACK TO PEE JAY'S:

Donnie pulls up in his truck near Jessica's car. Jessica gets out. Now Donnie pulls out of the parking lot and back on the road.

DONNIE (V.O.)

So I took her back to Pee Jay's and dropped her off - and then I went on back home.

BACK TO THE COURTROOM

WEEMS

And that was the very last you ever saw of Jessica King.

DONNIE

Yes sir - the very last.

WEEMS

And you didn't strangle to death that poor girl and wrap her in a chain and hide her in your pond.

DONNIE

No sir.

WEEMS

You know that chain she was wrapped in was your chain.

DONNIE

Sure it was. I get this green scum on my pond, and ever' now and then I hook that chain up to this old phone pole and I drag the pole over the pond to get that green stuff off. That chain's been down by lay pond for years - hell anybody coulda come along and used it -

WEEMS

So you're not guilty of this charge.

DONNIE

I'm guilty of cheatin' on my wife, of bein' a bad husband and a bad Christian - but I ain't guilty of killin' Jessie. I swear to God!

WEEMS

No further questions.

Weems, looking pleased with himself, sits down. Now it's David Duncan's turn.

DUNCAN

Mr. Barksdale... You're a wife beater, aren't you?

WEEMS

Your honor, objection, the defendant's not on trial here for wife beatin', he

-

JUDGE

Overruled. The defendant will answer the question.

DONNIE (looking at Anita)
I've sworn on the Good Book to tell the truth here today. Yeah, I've hit Anita before. I guess it ain't no secret -

DUNCAN
So you admit to having a history of violence against women - and you also admit to having beaten up the victim an the night she was murdered -

DONNIE
I wouldn't say that I exactly beat 'er up -

DUNCAN
Just how badly do you have to beat a woman before it fits your definition of "beating up"?

Donnie's silent, beginning to seethe.

DUNCAN
So, Donnie, according to your story, you were actually kind of a good Samaritan that night - rushin' this woman to the hospital after she'd gotten a little bump on the head -

DONNIE
I told you about my daddy - and anyhow, I've took Anita to the hospital plenty of times...

DUNCAN
I'll bet you have...

There are a few mean-spirited SNICKERS from the spectators. Donnie begins to redden.

DUNCAN
Now your story is you'd been having an affair with the victim. But tell us why a beautiful young woman like Jessica King, from one of the finest families in Parker, just about to be married to a good, decent professional man, and with a bright, shining future in front of her - why would a woman like that get involved with somethin' like you?

DONNIE (with something like a sly smile)
I asked 'er that one time - and she said I was the only man in town who knew how to fuck.

David Duncan looks as though he's been slapped in the face.

DUNCAN
You're really disgustin', you know that?

WEEMS (squeakily indignant)
Objection, your honor!

JUDGE

Sustained.

(sternly)

Mr. Duncan, you'll refrain from personal comments of that nature.

DUNCAN (regaining his composure)

I apologize, your honor. It won't happen again.

ON ANNIE, who's been watching this exchange with intensified interest.

DUNCAN

So let's get this straight -

(with a sarcastic glance at Weems)

let's "clarify" this - you're saying it was just a coincidence that on the very same night you physically assaulted Jessica King, somebody else put her body in your pond?

Kenneth King has begun to sob now - Wayne puts his arm around his shoulders.

DONNIE

I'm not sayin' it was a coincidence -

DUNCAN

What are you saying?

DONNIE (looking straight at Annie)

I'm sayin' I got framed.

DUNCAN

What an original defense.

(suddenly gets right in Donnie's face - turning up the heat)

Did you think of Jessica King as a "stray cat"?

DONNIE

No -

DUNCAN

Did you tell Sheriff Johnson a stray cat had clawed your arm?

DONNIE

Yeah -

DUNCAN

And didn't you just tell the court that Jessica King scratched your arm?

DONNIE

Yeah, but -

DUNCAN

And didn't you tell Sheriff Johnson that you got scratched by the stray cat 'cause she didn't like it when you killed her?

DONNIE

Yeah, but I was lyin' - my wife was standin' right there -

DUNCAN

How do we know you're not lying now?

DONNIE (exploding)

'Cause I'm not god damn it!

(standing up, pointing at Annie)

it's her, god damn it! She's the reason I'm up here!

JUDGE

The defendant will be seated!

DONNIE

She's a goddamn witch! She's puttin' spells on ever'-damn-body in town!

The color drains from Annie's face. Everybody's looking at her. She stands up.

LINDA (touching her arm)

Oh, darlin'...

And now as the Judge POUNDS his gavel for order, and the young D.A. smiles with satisfaction at the outburst he's provoked, and Donnie Barksdale continues to BELLOW, Annie flees the courtroom.

DONNIE (his face red, his lips flecked with spit)

Witch! Witch!!!! WITCH!

INT. ANNIE'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING

OPEN CLOSE ON THE TV SET, where the six o'clock news is playing, with appropriate graphics.

NEWSCASTER

In Parker today, a sensational murder trial was concluded. Donnie Barksdale was found guilty in the sex and strangulation killing of Jessica King, daughter of prominent Parker businessman Kenneth King...

Another ANGLE shows us Annie and her kids watching.

MIKE

Is everything gonna be all right now, Mama?

Annie's face looks troubled - but she manages a nod and a smile.

ANNIE

We can get on with our lives now...

INT. ANNIE'S BLUE ROOM - DAY

Annie is reading for Dorothy, the middle-aged black woman we saw earlier. Annie is staring hard at the cards - she seems totally oblivious to Dorothy.

DOROTHY (anxiously)
You see somethin' bad, Miss Annie?

ANNIE (snapping out of it)
No - of course not.
(gathering up her cards)
Dorothy, listen, I'm sorry - I just can't do this today...

INT. THE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Annie's on the phone. Miller is at the table with Ben, coloring in a coloring book.

ANNIE
I'm cancelling all my appointments for the next few days. I'm just not feelin' too well. Thank you, Miz Kemp. I'll call and reschedule. Bye.
Annie hangs up, looks in her phone book for another number.

MILLER
Mama, are we gonna run out of money?

ANNIE (as she picks up the phone again)
We'll be fine, honey. You just color...

INT. THE POWER COMPANY OFFICE - DAY

Annie stands at a counter paying her electric bill. She gives a \$10 bill to the female CLERK.

CLERK (apologetically)
We're gonna have to have the rest of the balance soon, Miz Wilson.

ANNIE
I know... I'm sorry...

INT. ANNIE'S CAR - DAY

Annie pulls out of the power company parking lot onto the street. She's only gone a block or two when her attention is drawn to a man in gray athletic shorts and a T-shirt weaving down the sidewalk, obviously roaring drunk. When she gets up even with him, she sees that it's Wayne.

ANNIE (pulling over and cranking down the passenger window)
Wayne!

Wayne looks over, smiles, and then weaves her way.

WAYNE
Hi, Annie -

ANNIE
What do you think you're doin'?

WAYNE
Ran out of beer, and figured I was too drunk to drive -

ANNIE
Get in.

Wayne gets in the car, and Annie drives on.

WAYNE (still smiling)
You kidnappin' me?

ANNIE
I'm takin' you home. If people see you like this you're gonna get fired -

WAYNE (the smile fading)
You really think I give a shit?

EXT. WAYNE'S HOUSE - DAY

It's a modest but nice brick structure. Annie's car's parked in the driveway.

INT. WAYNE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Wayne's sitting on the side of the bed, as Annie kneels in front of him, taking off his tennis shoes. The room around them's a chaos of strewn clothes and scattered newspapers and empty beer cans and pop bottles and half-eaten articles of food.

ANNIE
Wayne, this is a pig sty... Just sleep it off, and you'll feel better.

WAYNE (gazing at her)
I'm not sleepy.

ANNIE
You will be.

Annie grasps his ankles, swings his legs up on the bed. Now Wayne reaches out, takes hold of Annie's hand.

WAYNE
Why don't you join me?

ANNIE (after a pause)
I don't think it'd be a good idea,

WAYNE

Can't we just forget our troubles awhile? You want to, don't you?
I know there's somethin' between us...

ANNIE (softly)

I've only been with one man in my life - and when I'm with another
one, I want it to be for the right reasons.

Wayne fingers Annie's gold wedding band, looks at her questioningly.

ANNIE

I guess I still feel married.

WAYNE

You're not though. Your husband's dead. You gotta got that through
your head. Just like I gotta got through my head that Jessie's dead.

Annie's sitting on the side or the bed now, looking down at Wayne, something obviously on her
mind...

ANNIE

Wayne - I don't think Donnie Barksdale killed her.

WAYNE

What do you mean?

ANNIE

I mean I see he didn't.

WAYNE (knocked for a loop)

Do you see who did?

ANNIE

No... I've tried... I just don't know yet...

WAYNE (after a pause)

What are you gonna do?

ANNIE

I don't know... I feel like lettin' the bastard rot in jail...

Wayne nods, seeing her dilemma. And now the full impact of what Annie has told him begins to
sink in, and he covers his face with his hands.

WAYNE (with soft horror)

Jesus... it's not over...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. A BACK YARD - DAY

Annie approaches an old stone well. It has a tiny roof, with wench, rope, and bucket beneath it. A circular wooden cover fits over the opening of the well.

As Annie reaches the well, tall oaks and elms surrounding the yard FILL with a sudden gust of wind. She looks up at the sky. Dark clouds are rolling in. A storm is coming.

Annie begins to push back the well's wooden cover. It makes a DRY SCRAPING NOISE. A daddy longlegs, its repose disturbed, climbs up out of the darkness and scuttles away indignantly.

INSIDE THE WELL

SHOOTING UP, we see the cover, pushed by Annie's arms, sliding the rest of the way back, and then her face appearing.

BACK ON ANNIE peering down into the well.

In the faint shimmer of dark water, Annie uses herself. And then, after a moment, her reflection begins to ripple and dissolve...

Now she's looking at herself again, but it's no longer her reflection, but a huge view of her head. And then, from behind, in SLOW MOTION, a long gleaming silver cylinder of metal, bigger at one end, comes crashing into her skull. Blood spurts from her hair, her eyes widen, then close, and her image dissolves into darkness...

INT. ANNIE'S BLUE ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Annie, lying on her bed fully clothed, awakes with a GASP from her dream -

EXT. A VERY NICE AND EXPENSIVE HOUSE - EVENING

Annie, standing at the front door, RINGS the doorbell. Behind her the spring night is dark and restless and wind-filled. There's a flicker of lightning, some THUNDER off in the distance. A storm is coming.

The door's opened by a LITTLE GIRL. We recognize her from the family photograph on D.A. David Duncan's desk.

ANNIE
Is your daddy home?

LITTLE GIRL (yelling)
Daddy? Daddy, some woman's here!

And now David Duncan appears, looks at Annie with surprise.

INT. DUNCAN'S HOUSE - A BOOK-LINED STUDY - EVENING

Annie's sitting on a couch, Duncan's sitting across from her in a comfortable leather armchair.

DUNCAN

Sure he did it. It was an open and shut case.

ANNIE

I'm tellin' you he didn't. The person that killed Jessica's still out there someplace.

DUNCAN (looking at her sceptically)

So what's the deal? The Barksdales been threatening you? I'll talk to Pearl Johnson, we won't let lea got away with it -

ANNIE

This has nothing to do with the Barksdales. Listen to me. I know that Donnie didn't kill Jessica the same way I knew her body was in his pond.

DUNCAN (after a pause)

Do you... "know" ... who did kill her?

ANNIE

No...

DUNCAN

So what do you care? The son of a bitch is in jail... you and your kids are safe...

ANNIE

I don't think we are. I got a warnin' today. I think someone's gonna try and kill me.

DUNCAN (after a pause)

So what do you want me to do?

ANNIE

Reopen the case. Find out who really did it.

DUNCAN

That's gonna make me look pretty silly, isn't it? Puttin' the wrong guy in jail...

ANNIE

I don't give a damn if you look silly!

(pause)

Listen - I know you were havin' an affair with Jessica.

Duncan turns pale.

ANNIE

You and I both know you should've disqualified yourself from this case. What do you think's gonna happen to your pathetic little political career if people find out you had sex with the "victim" the night before she was killed?

Duncan gets up from his armchair, moves over to his bar, pours himself a Scotch, takes a gulp. A gust of wind RATTLES the windows.

DUNCAN

Do you want money?

ANNIE (with a sigh)

No... I want you to reopen the case.

DUNCAN (carefully)

There's a saying about letting sleeping dogs lie. You think you're in danger now? Look at it logically. The real danger starts if this case gets reopened, and somebody starts worryin' you're gonna have another one of your damn dreams...

Annie sits there quietly for a moment, as this sinks in. Now she stands up, walks slowly toward the door. But when she reaches the door, she turns around.

ANNIE

Look, all I know is an innocent man's in jail, I don't care how awful he is, and I helped put him there. I can't live with something like that. Now you reopen this case, or I will.

Now Annie leaves. The CAMERA LINGERS on Duncan, as he takes another anxious drink of his Scotch.

EXT. AND INT. ANNIE'S CAR - NIGHT

Annie gets in her car, backs out of the driveway of Duncan's house. There's more lightning and THUNDER, and raindrops begin to spatter the windshield.

CUT TO:

ANNIE IN HER CAR

She turns a corner onto her street. It's raining hard now, her wipers are flailing.

She reaches her house. As she turns into her driveway and her headlights sweep the yard, she's startled to see, for just a moment, Buddy Cole standing in the rain.

She drives her car under the carport. She gets out, moves back to the edge of the carport, looks out at the rain-and-wind-swept yard. Lightning illuminates it. It's empty now.

ANNIE (calling)
Buddy?

No answer. Looking extremely uneasy, Annie moves to the door, unlocks it.

INT. ANNIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Annie comes in, and immediately locks the door behind her. She moves to the phone, picks it up and dials.

ANNIE
Hi, Miz Francis, I'm back. How are the kids? Listen, I was wondering if we could stay over at your house tonight. Thanks. I'll be there in a little bit. Bye.

As she hangs up, she thinks she hears a faint NOISE over at the kitchen window. She looks at it sharply.

ANNIE (calling)
Buddy?

Silence, except for the SOUNDS of the storm. Looking uneasier still, Annie moves down the hallway into her room.

She takes an overnight bag out of a closet, opens a drawer, puts her nightgown into the bag - and then suddenly freezes, as she hears a sharp KNOCK at the front door.

She moves tentatively into the hall. The KNOCK comes again. She walks back into the living room, advances toward the door as the third KNOCK sounds.

ANNIE (calling)
Who is it?

VOICE
Wayne!

Annie, looking relieved, unlocks the door. Wayne comes in, drenched to the skin.

ANNIE
Wayne, you're soaked -

WAYNE
I walked - the rain felt good...

Annie closes the door, staring at Wayne - he looks terrible, dripping and haggard and unshaven and pale.

ANNIE
Did you see Buddy Cole outside?

WAYNE (puzzled - shaking his head)
I thought he was at the nuthouse over in Benton -

ANNIE
He is... maybe I imagined it...

Wayne sits down heavily on the couch, looks up at Annie with haunted eyes.

ANNIE
What are you doin' here?

WAYNE
Ever since you told me what you told me today, I... I've been feelin' like I'm goin' crazy... Annie, you gotta tell me - who killed Jessie?

ANNIE
I told you, I don't know -

WAYNE
You said you didn't know yet. Look, I was a sceptic about all this stuff, but - you've convinced me.

ANNIE
Wayne, I've looked at my cards a hundred times and I just don't see anything.
(pause)
I'm startin' to think maybe I don't want to see...

WAYNE
What if we went out there?

ANNIE
Went out where?

WAYNE
To the pond. Maybe if you vent back out to where it happened - where Jessie was - maybe that'd help you start seein, some things -

ANNIE
Wayne, it's raining... it's dark... I'm exhausted...

WAYNE
Annie, I can't stand another night of this... I'm begging you...

As Annie looks at Wayne's pale, desperate face, we:

CUT TO:

EXT. AND INT. ANNIE'S CUTLASS - NIGHT

Annie's driving through the spring thunderstorm with Wayne. They're out in the country. The rain makes the pavement a black mirror. The windshield wipers throb and thrash. Lightning occasionally splashes the landscape with shuddering light.

Annie glances over at Wayne, who's smoking a cigarette, and staring straight ahead into the violent night.

Now off to her left Annie can make out the long white fence, the big pasture. She slows down... sees in her headlights the mailbox marked BARKSDALE... and now she turns down the dirt road.

Ahead of them they see among the trees the lights of Donnie Barksdale's house.

WAYNE

There's the road -

Wayne's pointing to a smaller dirt road angling off to the left. Annie turns down it.

The road's rutty and bumpy. Annie can't see much of anything except the bright bullets of rain hurtling through the headlights.

But now revealed to Annie, in some sudden lightning-light, is the pond.

She moves a little closer, then stops. She switches off the engine and the headlights.

The rain BATTERS the roof. Annie looks over at Wayne. He manages an encouraging smile.

WAYNE

Ready?

ANNIE

I don't know what's gonna happen...

WAYNE (softly)

Me neither...

EXT. THE POND - NIGHT

They get out of the car. Within seconds Annie is soaked. She looks over at Wayne, who's just standing by the car staring at the pond. Annie moves around the car and joins him.

WAYNE

Let's just kinda walk around.

ANNIE

All right.

WAYNE
You got a flashlight?

ANNIE
Yeah, in the glove compartment.

Wayne opens the car door again. The dome light comes on. Annie watches as Wayne opens the glove compartment, pulls out the flashlight.

ON ANNIE'S FACE, staring at the flashlight - and then we:

FLASHBACK TO HER VISION IN THE WELL:

A GLEAMING METAL CYLINDRICAL OBJECT BASHES HER SKULL, BLOOD SPURTS FROM HER HAIR...

BACK TO THE POND

Wayne shuts the car door, turns the flashlight on. Its beam pokes out into the night, plays over the pond which is being raked with rain, slides along its banks...

Wayne notices Annie is staring at him.

WAYNE
You okay?

Annie nods. She and Wayne begin to walk. The storm continues unabated. They reach the old phone pole that Donnie Barksdale used for skimming algae off his pond. Annie stops, gazes at it...

FLASHBACK To POND:

Jessica's nude body is lying at an angle across the pole, her throat and face discolored, her dead eyes staring at nothing. A man's hands are wrapping a chain around her...

BACK TO POND

WAYNE
You seein' somethin'?

ANNIE (quickly - too quickly)
No -

Wayne gives her a lingering look. They resume walking slowly around the pond. Annie glances at Wayne, at the flashlight in his hand - and now it is as though a dam is breaking inside Annie, and IMAGES of the murder of Jessica King come flooding in...

FLASHBACK TO PEE JAY'S:

Wayne's car enters the parking lot. He's got a beer in his hand, a six pack on the seat beside his. He's cruising, looking for Jessica. And now he sees her Mazda parked in the back of the parking lot...

BACK TO POND:

As she and Wayne walk, Annie looks up at the wild, lightning-ripped sky...

FLASHBACK TO PEE JAY'S:

Wayne's car is parked in the darkness of some trees across the road from Pee Jay's. Wayne's smoking a cigarette - he's got a view of the parking lot and Jessica's car. And now he sees Donnie Barksdale's four-wheel-drive truck coming down the road, turning into Pee Jay's. Wayne watches as Jessica gets out, and Donnie drives his truck back out on the road, and leaves. As Jessica moves toward her car, Wayne starts up his own car, and drives across the road into the parking lot.

Jessica's putting her key into the lock when she looks around and sees Wayne pulling up.

JESSICA (with a nervous smile)
Wayne - what are you doin' here?

WAYNE
Just drivin' around. I thought you were goin' to bed early tonight?

JESSICA
I couldn't sleep -

WAYNE
Wanna go for a ride?

JESSICA (after a pause - with a smile)
Sure.

Jessica gets in Wayne's car. They leave the parking lot, and pull out onto the road...

BACK TO POND:

Mud sucks at the shoes of Annie and Wayne...

FLASHBACK TO WAYNE'S CAR:

Wayne pulls off the blacktop onto a little dirt road running off into the woods.

JESSICA (with an uneasy smile)

Where we goin'?

Wayne shrugs, drains his beer, tosses the empty can out the window. He sees Jessica rubbing the back of her head, looking a little queasy.

WAYNE

What's the matter?

JESSICA (with a shrug)

Headache.

Now Wayne pulls the car over into a little roadside clearing, turns off the motor and the headlights. Jessica is looking at him questioningly.

WAYNE

Take off your clothes.

BACK TO POND:

Annie looks over at Wayne as they walk: rain drips steadily from his nose, his chin, his hand where it holds the flashlight...

FLASHBACK TO THE WOODS:

Wayne and Jessica are outside the car now. Jessica slips off her panties, and puts them with the rest of her clothes on the hood. Now she stands naked before Wayne. Out of the black woods come the sounds of frogs and crickets.

JESSICA (pulling Wayne to her)

Aren't you takin, yours off too?

WAYNE (with disgust)

I can smell it on you.

JESSICA

What?

WAYNE

Sex. You just fucked him, didn't you?

(in disbelief)

Donnie Barksdale...

Jessica, after briefly considering it, decides there's no point in lying.

JESSICA (with a mocking, defiant smile)

So?

WAYNE

"So"?

(grabbing her shoulders, shaking her)
I love you, Jessie ... why?

JESSICA

'Cause I felt like bein' with a man for a change.

(reaching for her clothes)

Listen, we're through. I don't like bein' spied on. I don't know why
I'm with you anyway - it's just 'cause Daddy likes you.

WAYNE (not letting her go)

You horrible little bitch!

JESSICA

I'll show you a bitch if you don't let me go-

(beginning to struggle)

Let me go, Wayne - you're drunk - Wayne -

Jessica hits Wayne in the face. Wayne, enraged, bends Jessica back over the hood of the car...

BACK TO POND:

A flash of lightning illuminates Wayne's face.

FLASHBACK TO WOODS:

Wayne's hands are wrapped around Jessica's throat now, squeezing, squeezing... As Jessica loses consciousness, bar hands cease to fight Wayne, fall back on the hood. The camera moves in close on her watch: the time is 1:28...

BACK TO POND:

The wind is blowing harder. Annie stares at a cottonwood tree by the pond thrashing wildly...

FLASHBACK TO WOODS:

Wayne's looking down at Jessica's body, which he's put in the trunk of his car. Now he slams down the trunk lid.

He moves to the front of the car, gathers up Jessica's clothes, hurls them into the woods. And then he just stands there, a look of horror and emptiness on his face, as he confronts the dark mystery of the trees, and listens to the CROAKING of frogs, the CHIRRING of crickets...

BACK TO POND:

Annie looks at the flashlight in Wayne's hand, raindrops glittering in its bright beam...

FLASHBACK TO POND:

Wayne's dragging Jessica's chain-wrapped body down the bank and into the pond. A thousand frogs are CROAKING. As he steps into the water, he sees a snake wriggling across the pond's smooth surface, making ripples of starlight.

Wayne wades into the water with Jessica's body in tow, till the water's up to his shoulders. Now he releases Jessica, and she sinks out of sight with a final mermaidish swirl of her beautiful hair.

Wayne wades back to the bank. As he's about to step out of the water, he gets the sensation of being watched. He looks up, and sees standing in a row on the top of the bank, gazing down at him, their tongues lolling, Tommy Lee Ballard's four lost bluetick hounds...

BACK TO POND:

Annie suddenly stops. She turns and looks at Wayne, trying to hide the horror and fear she feels.

ANNIE
I think we better go back -

WAYNE
Nothin's comin' to you?

ANNIE
No -

And now Wayne shines the flashlight full into Annie's face. Her hair's hanging loose and stringy and streaming with rain - she blinks in the light.

WAYNE (softly)
You know...

They're standing right at the top of the bank. Annie backs away from Wayne. One foot slips in the mud, she regains her balance, but now finds herself moving down the bank, toward the pond as Wayne advances on her, the flashlight never straying from her face.

WAYNE (pleading and desperate)
I'm a good man, Annie. I'm not some killer. You don't know what it was like -

Annie's into the shallow water of the pond now, still backing away from Wayne. The storm continues to rage.

ANNIE
Wayne, let's go to my house. I'll read for you - I'll talk to you -

WAYNE
You're a good woman. You'd have to turn me in -

The water's knee-deep on them, then hip-deep. All Annie can see is the blazing circle of the flashlight.

WAYNE

You know I think a lot of you. if it had been you with me instead of her, none of this would've happened.

(tears springing to his eyes - in anguish)

My God -

Wayne lunges for Annie, gets her by the arm, Annie struggles and punches, lightning flashes, thunder RIPS, she rakes his face with her fingernails, he SCREAMS and grabs her hair, he forces her head underwater, she is drowning, she bites his arm, he YELLS, she gets away, she is sloshing frantically toward the bank, he dives for her and tackles her, they thrash and roll in the water in the crazy light of the lightning, he lifts his flashlight over his head but before he can bring it smashing down on her skull -

His wrist is grabbed.

ANNIE'S POV: BEHIND WAYNE, LIT UP BY THE FLASHLIGHT, IS THE FACE OF BUDDY COLE.

Buddy wrenches the flashlight from Wayne's grasp, and before Wayne can turn around, he hits Wayne hard in the side of the head with it.

Wayne drops without a sound into the water.

Breathing hard, Annie stares at Buddy, as he stands in front of her, lashed by the wind and rain.

BUDDY (softly)

You okay, Miz Wilson?

Annie nods. She looks down at Wayne, who's floating face down in the pond - bubbles are burbling up around his head.

ANNIE

He's drownin' -

And Buddy and Annie grab Wayne under the arms, start dragging him out of the pond...

They drag Wayne up the bank, and then toward Annie's car. Buddy never says a word - Annie keeps looking at him, hardly able to believe he's actually here.

ANNIE (as they reach her car)

In the trunk...

Annie opens the trunk, and they lift and shove and roll Wayne inside. Wayne's breathing is heavy, and the hair on the side of his head is matted with blood. Annie picks up a tangled set of jumper cables, hands one to Buddy. They tie Wayne's ankles together, and his hands behind his back. Wayne gives a faint MOAN, moves his head a little.

Annie puts her hands on the trunk lid - looks down at Wayne for a long, uncomprehending moment - then shuts the trunk. Now she turns to Buddy, who's standing quietly at her side.

ANNIE

Will you go back into town with me?

Buddy nods.

INT. ANNIE'S CAR - NIGHT

Annie and Buddy get in. Annie starts up the car, turns on the headlights. Now she looks over at Buddy.

ANNIE

How'd you get out here anyway?

Buddy smiles a quiet, mysterious smile...

CUT TO:

EXT./INT. ANNIE'S CAR, MOVING DOWN THE BLACKTOP - NIGHT

The storm has passed over now, only an occasional raindrop spatters the windshield... Annie turns off the wipers.

Annie looks over at Buddy, who is sitting beside her staring straight ahead. There's an uncharacteristic calmness about him, an odd sort of... the only word is "serenity."

ANNIE

Buddy... you're supposed to be in the hospital...

Buddy looks over at Annie, and smiles.

BUDDY

I escaped, Miz Wilson. I'm free!

ANNIE (after a pause)

Buddy, I'm sorry I wasn't there for you. I should've -

BUDDY

Now don't you say nothin' else. You were the only one that was a friend to me. I love you. You're the soul of this town, Miz Wilson. You just need to keep on doin' what you're doin' ...

And now Buddy looks straight ahead again, with the same calm look...

EXT. PARKER CITY HALL AND-SHERIFFS DEPARTMENT - NIGHT

Annie's car pulls up in front.

INT. ANNIE'S CAR - NIGHT

Annie switches off the motor, then looks over at Buddy.

ANNIE

Buddy - you know you're gonna have to go back...

BUDDY

Yes ma'am... I know...

Now Annie gets out of the car.

EXT. CITY HALL AND SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - NIGHT

As Annie walks away from the car she hears a THUDDING NOISE from the trunk, and an anguished GROAN. Now she hurries up the sidewalk, and up the steps to the entrance.

ON BUDDY, sitting in the car, watching her go...

CUT TO:

INT. CITY HALL AND SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - NIGHT

Annie is walking with two deputies quickly down the hall back to the entrance.

EXT. CITY HALL AND SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - NIGHT

Annie and the deputies come out.

ONE OF THE DEPUTIES

Can I have your keys, ma'am?

Annie gives him her keys. The deputies move toward her car, drawing their guns - but Annie stops at the bottom of the steps.

ANNIE'S POV: THE CAR IS EMPTY.

INT. SHERIFF JOHNSON'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Annie sits in Sheriff Johnson's little glassed-in cubicle, a blanket around her shoulders, sipping a steaming cup of coffee. In the outer office, we see Pearl Johnson come in, confer a moment with a deputy. Now both Sheriff and deputy stare in at Annie.

Now the Sheriff comes in, takes a seat at his desk.

SHERIFF JOHNSON

How you doin'?

ANNIE

Okay.

The Sheriff pulls a half-smoked cigar out of his pocket, lights it.

SHERIFF JOHNSON

I just talked to Wayne. He pretty much admitted to ever'thing. He said he was sorry for what he tried to do to you. He said he just went pure-crazy -

He takes the cigar from his mouth, shaking his head as he inspects it as though It's the enigma.

SHERIFF JOHNSON

I've known that boy half my life - just goes to show you, you can know somebody and not know him.

ANNIE

How's his head?

SHERIFF JOHNSON

You put a pretty good dent in it.

ANNIE

No, Sheriff, I told you, it was Buddy Cole - he saved me -

SHERIFF JOHNSON

It weren't Buddy.

ANNIE (taken aback)

Sure it was. Ask Wayne.

SHERIFF JOHNSON

I did. He don't remember what happened. Head injuries is funny...

ANNIE

Sheriff, I'm tallin' you, it was -

SHERIFF JOHNSON

Ma'am, what I'm tryin' to say is, it couldn't've been Buddy. I just called ever to the state hospital -

ANNIE

Buddy escaped, he -

SHERIFF JOHNSON Ma'am - Buddy Cole is dead. He hanged hisself in the shower room at seven o'clock this evenin' ...

From Annie's stunned face, we:

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. A CEMETERY - DAY

Annie, Mike, Miller, and Ben are standing in front of a freshly dug grave.

Now we get a look at the name on the tombstone: "BUDDY COLE."

ANNIE (to Miller)

Go ahead...

Miller puts some flowers on the grave. They stand there quietly for a few more moments - and then Annie starts to usher her kids away.

MIKE (anxiously)

Mama?

Annie looks at Mike...she knows what he wants... Annie nods and smiles a little, and Mike smiles too.

The Wilsons walk across the cemetery. The grass is lush and green. It's a gorgeous spring day, with billowy white clouds sailing across the sky like ships. They pass among the tombstones and the flowers, till they reach another grave.

Annie and her kids stand there looking at it... the tombstone says: "BEN WILSON."

Annie's eyes moisten - she seems to be making an effort to control herself.

MILLER

Mama - can Daddy see us from out of the ground?

And now a low, terrible MOAN escapes from Annie, and, as though punched in the stomach, she drops to her knees in front of the grave. She cries, she sobs with all the pent-up hurt of her broken heart...

Her sons are looking at her, a little frightened by what's happening. Mike and Miller have begun to cry too, though Ben's too little to cry. And now Annie looks up at them, and she suddenly grabs Mike and hugs him hard, and then gathers up all three of the kids in her arms...

ANNIE

Daddy's not in the ground - but I think he can see us...

DISSOLVE TO:

THE CEMETERY - A LITTLE LATER

Annie and her sons are walking back to their car. Annie has her arms over Mike and Miller's shoulders, while Miller's holding on to Ben Jr.'s hand. They look sad, and yet at the same time, in their shared sadness, somehow close and happy.

The CAMERA PULLS AWAY from Annie and her sons as they reach the car and get in. Now Annie's car moves out of the cemetery onto a road as the CAMERA PULLS BACK FURTHER, to show both the cemetery and the little town to which the road leads...

FADE OUT

THE END
