

FADE IN:

EXT. RESIDENTIAL FRONT YARD - NIGHT

SUPER: NEWNAN, GEORGIA 1955

Lightning flashes as a storm brews in the distance.

A TALL MAN wearing a wide-brimmed Stetson hat stands sullen staring at a house. The hat's brim hides his eyes.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The room is dark.

A shaded light bulb hangs from the ceiling casting a circle of light over a table cluttered with liquor, beer bottles and money. FIVE MEN play poker, filling the air with cigar and cigarette smoke.

They're all near drunk and sport hard, mean faces.

The DEALER holds the cards. He speaks over a cigar to a MAN with a JAGGED SCAR below one eye seated across from him.

DEALER
Bet's to you.

The scarred man studies his hand.

SCARRED MAN
I'm thinkin'.

DEALER
With what?

The scarred man looks up from his cards with eyes that burn into the dealer.

SCARRED MAN
Don't you get sassy with me. I'll
cut your heart out.

The dealer brings a .45 pistol from his side and rests it on the table.

The other THREE MEN smile coyly at the two.

DEALER
I'm shakin'.

The dealer and scarred man's eyes are locked onto each others.

DEALER

Bet's to you. You in, or out?

A gold coin flies from outside the light to the hands pot in the middle of the table.

TALL MAN

I'm in.

The men are spooked. They pull their guns.

The dealer jumps from his seat and turns the hanging light on the intruder: The tall man in the Stetson hat from outside. His eyes still hidden.

The men are confounded. They stare at the tall stranger.

DEALER

Who are you? A cop?

One MAN takes notice of the uninvited's stature.

MAN

They don't make cops that tall.

The dealer clutches the .45.

DEALER

I'm gonna ask you one more time.
Who are you?

THUNDER rumbles.

A wooden match magically ignites in the mysterious man's hand.

He flips the match. It lands still lit, straight up, atop the gold coin engraved with an angel that slays the devil.

The tall man lifts his head, bringing his BRIGHT COPPER EYES into view. He's clean shaven and appears to be in his late 30's.

TALL MAN

Your destiny.

The tall man sweeps his open hand across the room.

Pitch blackness and blood-curdling SCREAMS surround the burning match.

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The house EXPLODES into a ball of fire as lightning bolts flash across the night.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - MORNING

A BOY on a bike throws rolled newspapers to yards from a mounted front basket.

A MAN, JESS LYNCH, 70, with snow white hair, picks up his morning paper. He strips the rubber band from around it and opens it to the date September 14, 1955 printed above the headline:

HOUSE EXPLOSION REMAINS A MYSTERY

Jess turns back to the two-story white-framed house, reading as he walks.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

BUCK LYNCH, a twelve year-old boy with serious eyes that never smile and uncombed dark hair, finishes dressing.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

DELL LYNCH, Buck's GRANDMOTHER, is 65 and wears her hair in a tight bun. She takes a pan of biscuits from the oven.

DELL

Buck?!

She sets the biscuits on the stove top, then walks to the door at the foyer.

DELL

Buck!

BUCK'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Buck hurriedly ties his black, high-top sneakers.

DELL (O.S.)

Get on down here! You gonna be late for school!

BUCK

I'm comin', Grandma!

Buck grabs his book satchel.

He turns to a chest of drawers where a porcelain winged angel with outstretched arms rests atop it.

Behind the angel a framed picture of another angel watches over two children that cross a footbridge.

Buck drops the satchel, bows his head and clasps his fingers together as he mumbles a prayer.

BUCK

Amen.

BUCK'S MOTHER'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Buck gingerly opens the closed door and looks in.

Buck's MOTHER, ESTELLE LYNCH, mid 30's with a pretty face and long blonde curls, lies in bed. She looks frail as she turns her head toward the door and smiles.

BUCK

Didn't know if you were asleep.

ESTELLE

Not asleep.

Buck walks to the bed. He's in no hurry at all now.

BUCK

You all right, Mama? You feel okay?

Estelle pushes the hair back from his forehead.

ESTELLE

Will you quit worrying about me?
I'm fine. And why didn't you comb
your hair?

BUCK

I thought I did. You're not fine,
Mama. How do you feel today?

Estelle looks upon her son's face with a quiet smile.

ESTELLE

So-so.

DELL (O.S.)

Buck!

BUCK

When I get home we'll watch TV
together. Maybe play a board game
or something.

ESTELLE

I'll look forward to it.

DELL (O.S.)
Buck Lynch!

Buck back-peddles toward the door.

BUCK
If you need anything you call
Grandma.

ESTELLE
I will. Go on now.

DELL (O.S.)
Buck!

BUCK
I'm comin', Grandma!

Estelle and Buck wave goodbye.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Buck rushes in and grabs a biscuit off the stove.

DELL
You gonna be late.

Jess sits at the table reading the morning paper.

BUCK
Mornin' Grandma. What's the news,
Granddaddy?

Jess never looks up.

JESS
It says, "Buck Lynch to be expelled
from school if late one more time."

Buck hits the screen door with his sack lunch in one hand,
satchel in the other, and biscuit in his mouth.

BUCK
I'm not gonna be late!

Two cats rush in. The door SLAMS. One of the cats arches his
back and hisses.

DELL
(to cat)
Git!

The cat scurries.

Dell walks to the door and stares out.

DELL
Just not fair, him havin' nobody
left but two old people like us.

Jess is still scanning the paper.

JESS
I assume you're speaking of his
father, Robert.

DELL
I'm speaking of Robert and Estelle.

Jess looks up from his paper.

JESS
Our daughter's not dead yet, Dell.
Just paralyzed.

DELL
Don't you look at me like that Jess
Lynch. You know what I mean. Dr.
Holder said if the mass was removed
from her spine he believes she
could get her legs back. But she's
just too weak to survive the
operation.

JESS
I can still see that little girl
dancin' round the yard, chasin'
them lightnin' bugs.

DELL
Remember how proud she was the way
the audience clapped for her after
she danced in the school play?

Jess shakes the paper. He's ready to change the subject.

JESS
I remember.

Dell steps to Jess' side and touches the hair on the back of
his neck.

DELL
You need a haircut.

JESS
It ain't Saturday.

Dell glances down at the newspaper's headline.

DELL
Paper say what caused the explosion
at the Callahan house?

JESS
Nope. Don't 'spect nobody cares.
Crime rate's gone straight down
since them boys left us.

A dinner bell RINGS from the floor above.

Dell's eyes look to the ceiling.

JESS
You need me to help?

Dell gives a weak smile--

DELL
No.

As Dell walks away Jess' eyes say he's concerned about them both.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Buck races down the sidewalk swallowing his last bite of biscuit.

A BOY, J.P., Buck's age with a crew cut and freckles, comes up from behind on a bike.

J.P. slows as he pulls alongside Buck.

J.P.
When you gonna get a bike?

Buck doesn't break stride.

BUCK
When I want one, J.P.

J.P.
You don't want one?

BUCK
Don't have one do I?

J.P.
Boy, you crazy.

BUCK
You looked in a mirror lately?

J.P. laughs.

J.P.
You wanna go to the picture show
Saturday?

BUCK
I dunno. What's on?

J.P.
Don't matter what's on! It's
Saturday!

J.P. speeds away.

Buck slows to a stop.

BUCK
I need a bike.

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - LATER THAT MORNING

MISS SMITH, mid 40's, a SCHOOL TEACHER who wears no makeup and carries a fixed stare on her face, peers over the top of her glasses from behind her desk and the plaque that bears her name.

MISS SMITH
You're late.

Buck stands by his desk.

BUCK
Yes, ma'am.

MISS SMITH
How many times does that make this
week?

BUCK
I dunno, Miss Smith.

Miss Smith raises her eye brows.

BUCK
Three times.

MISS SMITH
And what day is today?

BUCK
Wednesday.

The other students laugh.

Miss Smith scans the room with a frigid stare.

The class quietens.

MISS SMITH
And why won't you be late tomorrow,
Buck?

BUCK
Tomorrow?
(thinking)
'Cause I'll be on time?

Laughter in the class.

The look.

They quieten.

MISS SMITH
Because you won't be here, Buck.

Buck's heart sinks.

Miss Smith writes on a sheet of paper, folds it and holds it out to Buck.

MISS SMITH
Take this and report to the
principal's office.

BUCK
Yes, ma'am.

Buck takes the note, retrieves his satchel and lunch. He starts for the door with his head hung.

HOSS, the class BULLY and biggest of the kids, loads a spitball into the rubber band between his fingers then launches it to the side of Buck's face.

BUCK
Ow!

Buck has the class's attention.

MISS SMITH
(to Buck)
Now what?!

Buck looks at Hoss who returns a mean pair of snake-eyes.

BUCK

I... I stepped on my foot.

The class laughs.

Buck stares back at Hoss with his own snake-eyes.

I/E. LYNCH RESIDENCE - BUCK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Buck stares at the angel atop the chest of drawers, his fingers interlaced under his chin.

BUCK

Amen.

THUNDER rumbles in the distance.

A gust of wind flaps the window curtains as hard rain begins to fall and blow in.

Buck rushes to the window. Something outside catches his eye.

The tall man in the Stetson hat stands below his window in the pouring rain, looking up, his face hidden from Buck's view.

LIGHTNING FLASHES. The tall man is gone.

Buck sticks his head out the window and looks up and down the street, but the rain drives him back.

He closes the window and draws the curtain.

INT. SCHOOL - OUTSIDE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - NEXT MORNING

Buck sits at a desk working a math problem outside PRINCIPAL RALEIGH STERN'S private office, his name across the frosted glass door.

PRINCIPAL STERN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Principal Stern, an older, balding man, looks down at his pocket watch.

AT THE OFFICE DOOR - CONTINUOUS

Principal Stern steps out and addresses Buck.

PRINCIPAL STERN

You may attend morning break.

BUCK
Thank you, sir.

PRINCIPAL STERN
Be sure you're back in that desk at
the proper time now.

BUCK
Yes, sir.

Buck closes the school book and stands.

PRINCIPAL STERN
Buck.

BUCK
Sir?

PRINCIPAL STERN
Time, waits for no man.

BUCK
Yes, sir. I'll remember that.

PRINCIPAL STERN
I believe I see a gleam of hope in
you. Don't let me down.

Buck has one hand behind his back with crossed fingers.

BUCK
No, sir. I won't.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - MINUTES LATER

Buck walks the schoolyard alone and in deep thought.

Hoss, J.P. and some boys pass a football while others
horseplay. Hoss calls out to Buck.

HOSS
Hey, Buck-duck!

Buck hears, but ignores Hoss.

J.P.
Why you callin' him, duck?

HOSS
Ain't callin' him nothin'. Just
givin' advice.

Hoss hurls the football toward Buck.

J.P.
Buck! Duck!

The ball hits Buck in the back of his head.

All the boys but J.P., laugh.

J.P.
I told you to duck!

HOSS
(to Buck)
Throw the ball back, butt-head!

Buck picks up the ball and throws it in the opposite direction.

The boys stop laughing. They run toward Buck. J.P. follows.

Hoss and the boys stop just short of Buck.

HOSS
Go get it!

BUCK
You go get it!

Hoss punches Buck in his stomach. He falls to the ground.

HOSS
Get up mama's boy and get that ball, 'fore I kick you over there to it.

Buck tries to get his breath back as he stares up at Hoss.

J.P.
Don't call him that, Hoss.

Hoss balls his fist up at J.P.

HOSS
You want some, too?!

J.P.
No.

HOSS
Then shut-up!

J.P. takes a step back.

HOSS
That's what he is. A mama's boy.
Ain't got no daddy.

The words anger Buck. He jumps to his feet with a clenched fist and pops Hoss right between his eyes.

Hoss falls flat on his back. The other boys step back.

Buck catches a glimpse of the tall stranger as he walks away from the other side of the chain link fence surrounding the schoolyard. His eyes say, "Who is this man?"

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - EVENING

Buck, Dell and Jess quietly eat their supper.

JESS
(to Buck)
Not sayin' much tonight.

BUCK
Just thinkin'.

JESS
Thought you did enough of that in school?

Dell scolds Jess with her eyes but Jess presses on.

JESS
What are you worried with, Buck?
Might as well spit it out. You know
I'll find out anyway.

Buck pulls out a folded sheet of paper from his pocket and hands it to his grandfather.

BUCK
You gotta sign this.

JESS
What is it?

BUCK
Note from Miss Smith.

Jess pulls the reading glasses from his shirt pocket.

BUCK
I been late every day this week,
except today.

JESS
This is dated yesterday.

DELL
(to Jess)
We're not supposed to talk about
such at the table.

JESS
Why were you late?

BUCK
It's too far to walk, Granddaddy.

JESS
Get up earlier.

DELL
(to Jess)
You could drive him.

JESS
And I do when it rains.
(to Buck)
Why's this dated yesterday?

Dell pushes her chair back, disgruntled with Jess and his questions.

DELL
Now nobody even knows what they've
eat.

JESS
I know what I've eat!

BUCK
I was supposed to bring it back
signed today.

JESS
Why didn't you give it to me
yesterday?

BUCK
I don't know. I think I forgot.

JESS
Buck...

BUCK
How bout', I didn't want you to
feel bad about me not havin' a
bike?

JESS
Feel bad? Now you're lyin'!

Dell stands like a soldier snapping to attention and picks up her plate.

DELL
(to Jess)
I had baked a deep-dish for you tonight.

JESS
I'll eat it!

DELL
No you won't!

BUCK
I'm sorry Granddaddy. I didn't mean to. Please just sign the note. Principal Stern said if I didn't bring it back signed tomorrow I'd have to sit in his office all next week.

JESS
Buck...

BUCK
I just need a bike!

JESS
And lyin' has got nothin' to do with gettin' somewhere!

Dell picks up Jess' plate with her other hand.

JESS
I'm not through with that.

DELL
Yes you are!

The bell RINGS from the second floor. Jess questions the removal of his plate.

JESS
Dell?

Dell sets Jess' plate back down in front of him.

DELL

Here. I need more than two hands to take care of this family. I'm comin', Estelle!

Dell scurries out of the kitchen.

BUCK

I need a bike, Granddaddy.

Jess stares at his grandson for a long moment, then pulls out his pocket watch and opens the case.

JESS

You know what this is, Buck?

BUCK

Your pocket watch.

JESS

No. It's a railroad pocket watch, because it has to be precise. I watched my daddy check this watch every time he heard that train whistle blow, until he passed on and left it to me. Now I do the same thing and I'm never late. Old habits are hard to break. Especially when they're handed down. Could be you need this watch now, more than me.

BUCK

Could I have the bike first?

Jess can only stare at his grandson while he fights back his smile.

BUCK'S BEDROOM - LATER

Buck is in his pajamas. He stands in front of the angel, his fingers interlaced under his chin.

BUCK

It don't have to be a new one. I don't even care if the paint is scratched.

ESTELLE (O.S.)

Buck?

Buck finishes his prayer--

BUCK

Amen.

ESTELLE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Buck opens the door and looks in.

BUCK

Yes, Mama?

Estelle pats the bed for Buck to sit.

Buck takes a seat on the bed next to his mother.

ESTELLE

How was your day?

BUCK

My day? It was okay.

(changes the subject)

How come you and Daddy never got married?

ESTELLE

Where in the world did that come from?

BUCK

I don't know. Just thought of it I guess.

Estelle's a little reluctant to answer.

ESTELLE

Some men aren't the marrying kind, Buck. Sometimes a woman doesn't find that out soon enough.

BUCK

Well where is he?

ESTELLE

I don't know, Buck. I haven't heard from him in years.

BUCK

Tell me what he looks like. There's not a picture of him anywhere.

ESTELLE

He looks like you.

BUCK
(sarcastic)
He looks twelve?

Estelle laughs.

ESTELLE
He's tall and his hair was dark
like yours.

BUCK
Tell me more.

ESTELLE
Buck...

BUCK
Please, Mama.

It's obvious Estelle doesn't like the conversation, but she continues.

ESTELLE
He was a good man, most of the
time. But he had a lot of ways I
didn't agree with.

BUCK
Like what?

ESTELLE
He liked to have too good of a
time, too often.

BUCK
I like to have a good time.

ESTELLE
Yes, I know you do.

BUCK
Did he make you laugh?

The question gets a smile from Estelle.

ESTELLE
Well, sometimes when he would do
things that made me angry he'd make
up little tunes and put his own
words to them.

BUCK
That made you laugh?

For a moment Estelle lets her mind return to the memories of those days. Her eyes say they weren't always pleasant memories.

ESTELLE
Most of the time.

BUCK
Why doesn't he ever come see me? I know a boy in school whose daddy doesn't live with him but he comes and gets him sometimes.

ESTELLE
He doesn't know about you, Buck.

BUCK
Why doesn't he know?

ESTELLE
Because I told you. I don't know where he is. Now I'm tired and it's time for sleep.

BUCK
Maybe if we looked for him again now we could...

Estelle is through with the conversation and lets Buck know, firmly.

ESTELLE
Good night, Buck.

Buck gives his mother a kiss on her cheek.

BUCK
Good night, Mama. I love you.

ESTELLE
I love you. Now go on. Get to bed.

Buck starts for the door.

Estelle turns away from Buck so he can't see the tears forming in her eyes.

The bedroom door closes.

EXT. DOWNTOWN NEWNAN - DAY

Buck and J.P. exit the theater with other boys and girls.

J.P.

Wanna get a shake at the drug
store?

Buck reaches into his pocket and pulls out two nickels, then
puts them back.

BUCK

No. I'm savin' up for a bike.

J.P.

You'll be savin' for a car before
you save enough nickels for a bike.

They stop for the traffic light.

BUCK

Ha-ha. I gotta get home.

The light changes. J.P. leaves Buck standing on the corner.

J.P.

See ya Monday!

BUCK

See ya Monday.

Buck suddenly sees the tall man in the Stetson hat standing
on the opposite corner across from him staring straight at
him.

The light turns green. Buck crosses the street with the other
pedestrians, his eyes locked on the stranger who turns and
walks down the street ahead of him.

A group of kids run by Buck. They block his vision.

The tall man is gone.

Buck looks to both sides of the street for the disappearing
stranger as he walks on.

At an alleyway he finds the tall man waiting in the shadows,
leaning against a brick wall.

TALL MAN

Where you headed, Buck?

Buck stops, his eyes frozen to the man.

TALL MAN

Said... where you headed?

Buck almost stutters.

BUCK

Ho-Home.

The tall man lifts his head, letting his face and copper eyes break into the light.

TALL MAN

Whatcha starin' at?

BUCK

Your... your eyes.

TALL MAN

What's wrong with them?

BUCK

They're different. And you called me, Buck.

TALL MAN

Yes I did.

BUCK

How do you know my name?

The tall man's eyes soak Buck in.

TALL MAN

Must have heard it somewhere.

BUCK

I seen you outside my bedroom window. And at school, too.

It suddenly hits Buck--

BUCK

Are you my daddy?

TALL MAN

Do I look like your daddy?

Buck stares at the tall stranger, unsure of what to say.

BUCK

I was just kiddin' around. I gotta go. I'll be late.

Buck walks away, picking up his pace with every step he takes until he's in a full run.

The tall man calls out to Buck.

TALL MAN

That's what it's all about, Buck.
Time.

Buck puts on the brakes and spins around to face the stranger.

BUCK

I'm sick of hearin' about...

The stranger is gone.

BUCK

Time.

Buck takes off running for home as fast as he can.

I/E. LYNCH RESIDENCE - FOYER - EVENING

Buck stands at the front screen door. He looks up and down the street.

LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Dell sits in a rocker, crocheting.

Jess watches TV. He turns toward the foyer.

JESS

(to Buck)

What are you watchin' for?

FOYER - CONTINUOUS

BUCK

Nothin', Granddaddy.

Buck's eyes drift into thought.

BUCK'S BEDROOM - MORNING

An alarm clock RINGS.

Buck's eyes shoot open. He jumps out of bed.

- Dressed, Buck grabs his satchel and breaks for the door. He stops and turns back to the angel on the chest of drawers for a quick prayer.

BUCK

Please make mama well. You know I don't have a daddy. Amen.

ESTELLE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Buck cracks the door and peeps in.

ESTELLE

I'm awake.

Buck rushes to her with a quick kiss.

BUCK

I gotta go. I'll be late.

He's out the door in a flash.

ESTELLE

You eat a good breakfast now!

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The two cats lie close to the stove.

Dell's at the sink.

Jess is at the table, reading the morning paper.

A TRAIN'S WHISTLE is heard in the distance.

JESS

Old 92's barrelin' this mornin'.

He pulls out his pocket watch.

JESS

Yep, she's runnin' late.

Buck races into the kitchen, satchel in hand. He grabs a biscuit off the stove and takes a bite as he steps on a cat's tail.

The cat SCREAMS, then runs away chased by the other.

JESS

Boy, you're like a sudden storm!

Dell pours Buck a glass of milk.

DELL

(to Buck)

Here.

Buck puts the half-eaten biscuit back on the stove and guzzles the milk down. He grabs his lunch sack and hits the door like a whirlwind.

BUCK
Gotta go!

Dell catches Jess' eye with her stare.

JESS
It ain't rainin'.

I/E. LYNCH RESIDENCE - BUCK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

It's a quiet night. A gentle breeze blows through the open window and rustles the curtain.

Buck, asleep in his bed, begins to stir.

He wakes. He leaves the bed like something is calling to him and walks to the window. He looks out and sees --

-- the tall man standing under the street light looking up at him, then walking away.

Buck grabs his bathrobe.

EXT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Buck gently closes the front door behind him. He looks in the direction the tall man walked.

CITY PARK - CONTINUOUS

Walking, Buck comes to a small city park.

The air is filled with the SOUNDS of a summer night. A HOOT OWL calls out followed by a WHIPPOORWILL.

The tall man sits relaxed on a park bench. He lifts his eyes to the starlit sky.

TALL MAN
Beautiful night. Wonderful,
glorious night.

Buck can't break his stare.

BUCK
Who are you?

TALL MAN
Who do you think I am, Buck?

BUCK
I don't know.

TALL MAN
Every night, and every day you pray
to..?

Buck knows there's only one answer.

BUCK
An angel?

TALL MAN
Bingo.

The smirk on Buck's face says he doesn't believe one word of that.

BUCK
You're, an angel?

The tall man holds his open hand out to Buck.

TALL MAN
Nice to make your acquaintance.

Cautiously, Buck takes the man's hand in his. He GASPS.

The tall man pulls his hand back and motions Buck to the bench.

TALL MAN
Sit.

The bedazzled Buck takes a seat.

BUCK
What was that?

TALL MAN
That what?

BUCK
That feeling in my hand.

TALL MAN
Oh, that. Just a touch of the
spirit.

Buck slides down the bench, away from the angel.

BUCK
I don't know who you are, but
you're not an angel.

TALL MAN
Okay. Why not?

BUCK
You don't have wings.

TALL MAN
I don't fly.

BUCK
All angels fly!

TALL MAN
No, they don't.

BUCK
You are not an angel.

TALL MAN
Then how do I know you pray to one?

BUCK
You've seen me through my bedroom window.

TALL MAN
You've seen me in the tree across from your window?

BUCK
What tree? There isn't any tree outside my window.

TALL MAN
No, Buck. There isn't.

This is all very confusing to Buck.

BUCK
I don't understand. How do you know so much about me?

TALL MAN
I know your grandfather stopped smoking last year.

BUCK
He had to, he...

TALL MAN
Had a heart attack. And your mother suffers from the cancer within her body that you pray day and night for her relief from.

BUCK
Are you here to make my mother
well?!

TALL MAN
I'm here to counsel you.

BUCK
Counsel me?

TALL MAN
As my apprentice. Do you know what
an apprentice is?

BUCK
It's the person that sets the
printer for the newspaper.

The angel laughs out loud.

BUCK
What's so funny?

TALL MAN
Apprentice, in a way you'll
understand, means being trained to
follow another's vocation.

BUCK
Vo-what?

TALL MAN
Line of work.

BUCK
Oh -- I'm gonna be..?

TALL MAN
An angel. In the future to come.

BUCK
I see. And your name is?

TALL MAN
Call me whatever you'd like.

BUCK
All I know is you're tall.

TALL MAN
Then call me, Tall Man.

BUCK
Okay, Mr. Tall Man. I believe
you're about two cards short of a
full deck.

Tall Man listens, amused, but attentive.

TALL MAN
Really?

BUCK
I don't know how you know all you
do about me and my family, but if
you want me to believe you, make my
mother well.

TALL MAN
All in time, Buck Lynch, all in
time. Before I leave here, I will
relieve your mother of her pain.

BUCK
Do it now.

TALL MAN
It's not time yet.

Buck jumps up like a rocket is in his pj's.

BUCK
Time-time-time! Everything's about
time! Go to bed on time, get up on
time! Get to school on time!

He SHOUTS.

BUCK
It's all about time!

Neighborhood dogs begin to BARK.

TALL MAN
Yes, it is.

Buck flops back onto the bench.

BUCK
(sarcastic)
So what's heaven look like, Mister
Angel?

TALL MAN
Would you like to see?

BUCK
How can I do that?

The angel points to Buck's eyes.

TALL MAN
Close.

Buck closes his eyes.

Tall Man lifts his copper eyes to the stars. His EYES
BRIGHTEN along with the STREET LIGHT.

BUCK
Oh, my!

Buck, eyes still closed, reaches an open hand to the
TWINKLING sky above.

A brilliant SHOOTING STAR flashes by.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - BUCK'S BEDROOM - MORNING

An alarm clock RINGS.

Buck wakes, his arm extended in the air. He's confused.

MINUTES LATER

Buck finishes dressing.

DELL (O.S.)
Buck!

BUCK
Okay! I heard you!

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Dell's standing by the stove. She looks over at Jess with a
questioning stare that Jess returns.

BUCK'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Buck picks up his satchel. He walks to the angel on the chest
of drawers and puts it into the top drawer.

ESTELLE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Buck looks in.

Estelle sees something different in his face.

ESTELLE
Are you all right?

BUCK
I didn't sleep good.

ESTELLE
Why not?

BUCK
Just didn't. I'll be late, I gotta go.

ESTELLE
(hesitant)
Kisses.

BUCK
Kisses.

ESTELLE
Eat a good...

Buck closes the door, HARD.

ESTELLE
...breakfast.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Buck grabs his lunch off the counter and breaks for the screen door.

DELL
(to Buck)
Don't you want your biscuit?

BUCK
I'm not hungry, Grandma.

DELL
You sick?

Buck throws the door back, yelling over his shoulder as he runs out.

BUCK
No!

Dell steps to the door and stares out. Jess lets his paper flop.

JESS
Some kind of growin' stage?

DELL
I don't know.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - LATER

Buck walks alone in deep thought.

J.P. talks with some other boys. He spots Buck.

J.P.
Hey, Buck.

BUCK
Hey.

They walk along, quietly.

J.P.
What's wrong?

BUCK
I'm just thinkin'.

J.P.
'Bout what?

BUCK
Stuff.

J.P.
What kinda stuff?

BUCK
Stuff-stuff!

J.P.
Okay-okay!

They continue on.

J.P.
Me and you still buddies?

BUCK
Still buddies.

Buck can't hold it any longer. He stops and turns to his friend.

BUCK
J.P., do you believe in angels?

J.P.
Angels?

HOSS (O.S.)
Hey, Lynch!

Hoss is coming toward the two with a group of boys behind him.

J.P.
Uh-oh.

The boys and Hoss face off with Buck and J.P.

Hoss grinds his fist into his hand.

HOSS
My brother wants to talk to you.

Hoss' BROTHER, taller and older than the others, steps to the front.

BROTHER
Why don't you try pickin' on me
instead of my little brother.
Mama's boy.

Buck looks up at the taller boy and balls his fist.

INT. SCHOOL - PRINCIPAL STERN'S OFFICE - LATER SAME DAY

Principal Stern sits behind his desk with a not so pleasant look across his face.

PRINCIPAL STERN
I will not tolerate bullying, or
fighting, on school grounds. Is
that understood?

He addresses Buck, Hoss and Hoss' brother who all sit across from him.

BUCK/HOSS/BROTHER
Yes, sir.

Hoss' brother rubs at the bruise between his eyes.

PRINCIPAL STERN
Buck Lynch.

BUCK
Sir?

PRINCIPAL STERN
I think you owe your fellow
students an apology.

BUCK
Sir?

PRINCIPAL STERN
You heard me. Apologize.

The brothers cut their eyes at Buck with a wry smirk.

BUCK
No, sir.

PRINCIPAL STERN
What did you say?

Buck's body goes limp in the chair.

BUCK
Said, no, sir. I won't.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - EVENING

Buck, Dell and Jess share their evening meal with a warning stare from Dell to Jess who returns a confident smile.

Jess finishes his meal and stretches back.

JESS
(to Dell)
Did you bake a deep-dish?

DELL
Mr. Johnson's apples looked poorly
and his peaches just as bad.
There's still cake from the other
night if you want it.

JESS
No, just wanted to make sure there
weren't a deep-dish loomin' about.
(to Buck)
Spit it out.

Buck drops his head and pushes his plate away.

DELL
Jess?

Jess hands Dell his plate.

JESS
I'm finished, thank you.

Buck reaches into his pocket for the folded note and holds it out.

DELL

(to Jess)

You beat all I ever seen. I'm gonna go check on Estelle.

Jess pulls his glasses from his shirt pocket and reads the note.

JESS

What's wrong, son?

BUCK

Hoss and his brother picked on me, Granddaddy. I couldn't apologize for somethin' I didn't do.

JESS

I believe you, Buck. Plus I know those boys' family. The apple don't fall far from the tree. What I'm askin' is what's wrong with you? Why'd you act like you did this mornin'?

Buck's hesitant.

BUCK

Last night I dreamed I was talkin' to this angel 'bout savin' mama. Then he showed me heaven, and it was like...

Buck can't find the words.

BUCK

I can't even say what it was like, Granddaddy. I don't know if there are words for it. Then I woke up. I can't explain it. I just felt... cheated.

Jess' love for his grandson sparkles in his eyes.

JESS

I 'spect if I saw heaven then woke up here I'd feel cheated to. I'll talk to Principal Stern tomorrow. No need for you to miss your school work 'cause of this.

BUCK

Maybe he could let me sit in his office again. I'll tell him I'm sorry about everything.

JESS

You can tell him you're sorry 'bout
disruptin' school, but we ain't
apologizin' to them boys.

Jess puts his glasses back in their place.

JESS

I whipped their granddaddy for
messin' with me sixty-years ago on
that same playground.

BUCK

Did you get in trouble for it?

JESS

Let's just say it was worth every
extra log I had to split, and then
some.

Buck hugs Jess' neck.

BUCK

I love you, Granddaddy.

Jess wipes at the unexpected tear in his eye.

JESS

Go on outside and enjoy the evenin'
'fore bedtime.

Buck, very serious--

BUCK

You ever have a dream like that?
See heaven?

JESS

I see heaven every time I look at
your grandmother.

Dell steps in from the foyer.

JESS

(to Buck)
Go on outside now.

Buck leaves by the screen door.

Jess looks up at Dell. His eyes scolding her, now.

JESS

You eavesdroppin'?

DELL

Maybe.

Dell leans over Jess and kisses him on his cheek.

One of the cats jumps up into his lap.

JESS

Well, this must be my lucky night.

DELL

You'll have your deep-dish tomorrow
night, Jess Lynch.

EXT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

Buck walks off the back porch steps toward the front of the house and spots a bird with a broken wing trying to get airborne.

He runs to it and cradles it in his hands.

TALL MAN (O.S.)

A true knight.

Buck turns to the sound of the familiar voice.

Tall Man sits on the front porch steps.

TALL MAN

Protector of the weak.

BUCK

You are real.

Dell steps out and onto the front porch.

Tall Man stands. He's a few feet from Dell.

DELL

(to Buck)

What's in your hands?

BUCK

Hurt bird.

DELL

Wash 'em up good when you come in.
And don't go far. Granddaddy is
gonna make us some ice cream.

BUCK

Grandma? Ain't you gonna ask him
who he is?

DELL
You think you got a talkin' bird
there?

BUCK
Not the bird, Grandma. The man.

Dell looks all around her.

DELL
What man?

TALL MAN
(to Buck)
She can't see me.

BUCK
Don't you hear him?

TALL MAN
Or hear me either.

Dell points a stern finger at Buck.

DELL
Don't! I got enough worry on me
without you actin' like you seein'
things.

TALL MAN
Tell her you were only kidding.

BUCK
I was just kiddin', Grandma. Just
playin' around.

DELL
Thank the Lord. Don't wander off.
I'll holler for you when the ice
cream's ready.

BUCK
Yes, ma'am.

Dell goes back inside.

Tall Man walks over to Buck. Buck shows him the injured bird.

BUCK
He's gonna die.

The angel spreads his open hand across the bird.

The bird spreads his wings and flies away.

BUCK
You cured him.

TALL MAN
Wasn't his time. No reason not to.

BUCK
Why couldn't grandma see you?

TALL MAN
Only those I have business with can see, or hear me.

BUCK
Did last night really happen?

TALL MAN
It did.

BUCK
And you're really an angel?

TALL MAN
I am.

BUCK
You shouldn't have showed me heaven. I feel like I'm missin' somethin' now.

TALL MAN
I wanted you to see. To know what awaits you.

BUCK
Why are you here now?

TALL MAN
Because it's time for me.

BUCK
To be here?

TALL MAN
Yes.

BUCK
You're here to make my mama well?!

TALL MAN
I promised you I'd free her from her pain when it was time.

BUCK
You did.

TALL MAN
I never break a promise.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - FOYER - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Buck and Tall Man enter the house through the front door.

Dell is in the living room in her rocker, crocheting, in front of a black and white TV that plays the evening news.

Buck and Tall Man stop in the foyer just across from Dell.

BUCK
Whatcha watchin', Grandma?

Dell doesn't look up.

DELL
Not watchin'. Crochetin'. News is on.

BUCK (O.S.)
Grandma.

DELL
What?

Buck looks up at Tall Man and smiles.

BUCK
Tomorrow is gonna be a great day.

Dell stares at Buck. She's still a little concerned about him.

DELL
Son, are you sure you feel all right?

BUCK
Yes, ma'am. I feel great.

Tall Man looks up the stairs to the floor above.

TALL MAN
Better see to your mother, Buck.

Buck takes off in a sprint.

STAIRCASE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Buck passes the open kitchen door on his way up. Jess is at the table cranking the handle on the ice cream maker. He sees Buck flying up the stairs.

JESS
Hey, slow down!

Tall Man appears inside the kitchen doorway.

Jess stares at him like he's seeing a ghost.

TALL MAN
Hello, Jess.

ESTELLE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Buck flings the door open and bursts into the room.

Estelle flinches, unnerved by the sudden entry.

ESTELLE
Buck, you scared me!

They hear a LOUD THUD from the floor below.

DELL (O.S.)
Jess?

Buck and Estelle's eyes lock onto each others.

Dell SCREAMS.

DELL (O.S.)
Jess!

Buck bolts from the room.

Estelle face is glazed with fright.

BUCK (O.S.)
Granddaddy!

DELL (O.S.)
Oh, Jess! No!

Tears roll from Estelle's eyes.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The church is an old, large, one room sanctuary. Long wooden benches line each side along open windows for air flow.

A standing choir sings, Shall We Gather at the River.

Buck sits on a front pew next to his grandmother. Estelle is in a wheelchair in the aisle beside Buck. They're solemn and dressed in black.

Jess' coffin rests in front of them.

The choir finishes the hymn. They sit.

Ceiling fans turn over the congregation that use handheld fans bearing a picture of Jesus to battle the heat.

The PASTOR wipes at the sweat on his face with a handkerchief as he begins Jess' eulogy.

PASTOR

When Israel saw his son Joseph with his own sons, he asked, "Who are these?" Joseph answered, "They are my sons, whom God has given me." Israel answered back, "Then bring them to me, that I may bless them."

The pastor holds his Bible up.

PASTOR

The first mention of "grandfather" dates back thousands of years to the Book of Genesis, but its meaning has not changed -- Jess Lynch cherished that title most dearly.

The pastor's words fade.

A tear rolls down Buck's cheek as he lifts his eyes to the hovering winged angel in the large stained glass window.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - FOYER - LATER

The house is filled with people, condolences, and laughter.

TWO WOMEN follow A LARGE, HEAVYSET MAN as he carries Estelle up the stairs in his arms to her bedroom.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The table and counters are lined with food in covered dishes.

Buck stands solemn as Dell stacks a plate with small sandwiches.

DELL
Have you seen your granddaddy's
pocket watch?

BUCK
No, ma'am.

DELL
I can't find it anywhere.

She hands Buck the plate of sandwiches.

DELL
Take these sandwiches out to the
livin' room for me.

It's obvious Buck doesn't want to, but he takes the plate.

BUCK
Why do we have to feed them? And
why are they laughing? I don't see
anything funny about death.

DELL
They're not laughin' at death,
Buck. They're laughin' because
they're rememberin' the good times
they shared with your granddaddy.

BUCK
Well they won't have nothin' to
laugh about when mama's dead!
'Cause she don't have good times!

Buck sets the plate down and runs from the kitchen.

FOYER - STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Buck brushes by the heavysset man coming down as he hits the
stairs going up.

HEAVYSET MAN
What's your hurry, Buck? You
runnin' late?

Buck stops cold halfway up the stairs and spins back to the
man.

BUCK
No, I ain't runnin' late!

Buck continues his escape as the man laughs heartily.

BEDROOM HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Buck's about to enter his room, but he stops instead and walks across the hall to peep into his mother's bedroom.

ESTELLE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

A WOMAN puts Estelle's black dress on a hanger while a SECOND WOMAN helps Estelle get situated in bed.

Buck eases the door shut.

BUCK'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Buck enters his room and closes the door. The porcelain angel he had placed in a drawer catches his eye back atop the chest of drawers.

He steps in front of the figurine and sees the reflection of Tall Man off the glass of the pictured angel hanging above.

Buck's expression is filled with contempt as he turns to face the angel.

TALL MAN

Got in the top drawer somehow. Knew you'd be missing it.

BUCK

You lied to me.

TALL MAN

Never once.

BEDROOM HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

One of the women comes out of Estelle's room.

BUCK (O.S.)

You said you'd make my mama well.

The woman hears Buck. She goes to the door and listens.

BUCK'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

TALL MAN

Never once.

BUCK

Liar!

TALL MAN

I said before I left I would relieve your mother of her pain.

BEDROOM HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The second woman in Estelle's bedroom opens the door and stands in the doorway, alarmed at the shouting. The woman at Buck's door exchanges a confused stare with the other woman.

BUCK (O.S.)
Shut-up!

Estelle calls to the woman in the doorway.

ESTELLE (O.S.)
Is that Buck, shouting?

SECOND WOMAN
(to Estelle)
I think he's playing some kind of game.

She steps back into the room and closes the door.

BUCK'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

BUCK
I know who you are now! You're the Angel of Death!

TALL MAN
One of them. There are many.

BUCK
You didn't have to take granddaddy!
He wasn't even sick!

TALL MAN
It was his time.

BEDROOM HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

BUCK (O.S.)
Now you're here to take my mama!

The woman listening steps briskly to the stairs and calls down.

WOMAN
Dell!

BUCK'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

TALL MAN
When it's time.

BUCK

No you won't! I'll fight you!

Buck grabs the porcelain angel off the chest of drawers and throws it at Tall Man.

Tall Man puts his hand up and slows the figurine to a stop in midair. He takes it and sets it on the dresser.

TALL MAN

I hope you're not going to be a hard case.

Buck's anger explodes. He rushes to the dresser and grabs the porcelain angel, slinging it to the opposite wall where it breaks into pieces.

The bedroom door shoots open. Dell and the woman that called to her stand in the doorway.

Buck stands in the room, alone.

EXT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - FOYER - LATER THAT DAY

Dell closes the front door as the last of the people leave.

She lifts worried eyes to the top of the stairs.

EXT. BUSINESS DOWNTOWN LAGRANGE - DAY

The hanging plaque outside the business reads:

Daniel D. Weissman MD of Psychiatry and Spiritualist

INT. DR. WEISSMAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

DR. DANIEL D. WEISSMAN, is mid 40's, with salt and pepper curly hair over thick, black rimmed glasses and a bushy mustache. He sits behind his desk, reading a file.

Buck and Dell sit across from the doctor, waiting.

BUCK

(whispers)

We can't afford this, Grandma.

DELL

(whispers back)

We can't afford not to.

The doctor looks up from the file.

DR. WEISSMAN

Juju. Not to be confused with voodoo, which is totally different.

DELL

What?

DR. WEISSMAN

Juju. It's the African belief of unseen beings with magical powers.

Buck and Dell have no idea what the doctor is talking about.

DR. WEISSMAN

I uh, dabble in the occult as a hobby. The professional word for it is theosophy. Which means 'direct mystical contact with divine principles.'

DELL

I'm lost.

BUCK

Me, too.

DR. WEISSMAN

I'm speaking of religious beliefs. Most all recognize the existence of super natural beings. You would recognize them as, angels.

DELL

Well I know there's angels, Dr. Weissman.

(looks at Buck)

But one's never visited me.

BUCK

I'm tellin' the truth, Grandma.

DELL

Then why didn't I see him, Buck?

DR. WEISSMAN

A good question with a simple answer. He didn't want you to.

DELL

Are you tellin' me my grandson actually saw an angel?

BUCK
(to both)
I did!

DR. WEISSMAN
Unfortunately there's no way to prove either way. If angels do exist their folklore has always been to pick those they wish to be seen and heard by. Not those that wish to see them.

DELL
But people will think he's crazy, talkin' to thin air like that.

BUCK
I don't see him all the time, Grandma. I haven't seen him since granddaddy died.

DR. WEISSMAN
Buck, you said you believed your angel was here to heal your mother, but that he took your grandfather instead.

BUCK
Yes, sir.

DR. WEISSMAN
Did he actually say he would heal her?

BUCK
Said he'd take her pain from her before he left. That's all.

DR. WEISSMAN
Hmmm. And she's no better?

BUCK
No, sir.

DR. WEISSMAN
Then I'd say your angel hasn't left yet.

Dr. Weissman opens a side drawer on his desk and rummages through it.

DR. WEISSMAN
Don't believe they're prone to lie.

He pulls a brown paper bag from the drawer.

DR. WEISSMAN
So that's where it was.

Buck and Dell are unsure of what the doctor is speaking of.

DR. WEISSMAN
Yesterday's lunch.

Dr. Weissman pulls a book from the same drawer and flips through the pages.

DR. WEISSMAN
Ah, yes, here it is. There are nine orders of angelic beings. The, "Powers" order are angels that deal primarily with birth and death. The "Angel" order, which is really nothing more than its name, are just plain old angels. They're the ones closest to humanity. Concerned with human affairs.

Buck and Dell strain to understand.

DR. WEISSMAN
You know them as guardian angels. Buck's angel appears to be some sort of hybrid.

DELL
Hybrid?

DR. WEISSMAN
A cross between the two orders I mentioned -- You don't need a psychiatrist, Buck. Unless you're seeing pink elephants.

BUCK
Sir?

DR. WEISSMAN
Pink elephants. Not seeing them are you?

BUCK
Saw a painted one at the fair once.

DR. WEISSMAN
Those don't count.

DELL

Well if my grandson don't need to see you, what do we say when people see Buck talkin' to nothin'?

DR. WEISSMAN

How 'bout, 'Mind your own business.' Or you could get corroboration.

DELL

How much is that?

DR. WEISSMAN

No-no, corroboration simply means you find someone else who sees and hears the same thing Buck does.

Buck and Dell just stare at Dr. Weissman.

Dr. Weissman smiles and offers them the contents of the brown paper bag.

DR. WEISSMAN

Sandwich?

EXT. COUNTY FAIR - NIGHT

Bright lights and music accompany a Ferris wheel that turns behind the entry banner over the gateway that reads:

Coweta County Fair Oct. 20 - 23

The midway is crowded with adults and children as HAWKERS call out to passersby.

Buck and J.P. share cotton candy on a stick.

J.P.

I never knew nobody that went to a psychiatrist before.

BUCK

It's not a big deal.

J.P.

How you gonna get that... that uh...

BUCK

Corroboration?

J.P.

Yeah, that.

BUCK
I don't know. Will you just drop
it?!

J.P.
Okay!

They walk by a parked ambulance.

J.P.
Must be expectin' trouble.

The boys approach a row of game booths.

CLARENCE, an older HAWKER, spots them.

CLARENCE
You! You two with the cotton candy!
Step up and knock the doll over!

His outstretched arm introduces the booty.

CLARENCE
Take your choice of prizes!

J.P.
(to hawker)
How much does it cost?

The hawker beckons them closer.

CLARENCE
Come closer, I can't hear you!

Buck and J.P. shrug to each other as they step into the
hawker's web.

J.P.
How much?

CLARENCE
One shiny "Roosevelt." One-tenth of
a dollar gets you three balls.

He points to the wall of cloth-covered bags with painted
faces.

CLARENCE
Knock just one doll over and you're
a winner!

BUCK
Whadda we win?

CLARENCE
Your choice.

Buck looks at the wall of trinkets and stuffed animals.

BUCK
I don't see nothin' I want.

CLARENCE
What?! You're at the county fair,
boy! You gotta see something you
want!

J.P.
Go on, Buck. You knock 'em over,
I'll pick 'em out.

Buck digs into his pocket.

BUCK
I only got two dimes left.

J.P.
So? You'll still have a dime.

BUCK
No. I'm savin' up for a bike.

CLARENCE
You wanted a bike why didn't you
say so? I got bikes.

BUCK
Where?

A shifty smile crosses the hawker's face.

CLARENCE
In a box. Under the counter.

J.P.
I bet you have to put it together.

BUCK
I don't care! I'll put it together!

Buck slaps a dime down.

CLARENCE
The bike cost you two dimes.

BUCK
You said one dime!

CLARENCE

One dime, one doll, one doll, one choice, from the one dime one doll box.

BUCK

What?!

CLARENCE

The bike's a two dime one doll deal. The metal in the bike makes it more expensive. Now are you playing or not, kid? I got a business to run.

J.P.

Go ahead, Buck! I wanna see what a twenty-cent bike looks like!

Buck slaps the other dime down.

The hawker grabs the two dimes in a quick swoop.

CLARENCE

Smart choice. Everybody stand back! Give the boy some room!

Buck takes a deep breath. He hurls the first ball. Misses.

He bites down on his lip and hurls the second ball. Misses again.

CLARENCE

You got one more chance, boy. Make it good.

J.P.

C'mon, Buck! You can do it!

Buck bites down on his lip and draws back. He closes his eyes and cuts loose.

The ball strikes a doll and knocks it over.

J.P.

You did it, Buck!

Buck's eyes shoot open. He's thrilled.

BUCK

I did it! Where's my bike?!

The hawker reaches under the counter.

CLARENCE
Right here.

He holds out a small metal bike on a key chain to Buck.

CLARENCE
One deluxe metal bike key chain.

J.P.
(to Buck)
Boy! Did you get took!

Buck takes the key chain.

BUCK
I can't ride this! You give me my
money back!

CLARENCE
Never said you could ride it. Said
it was metal. Now move on boy,
you're gettin' in the way, others
wanna play.

A hand comes to rest on Buck's shoulder.

Buck looks up and into the face of Tall Man.

TALL MAN
(to hawker)
I think you better give the boy his
money back.

The hawker is taken aback at Tall Man's sudden appearance.

CLARENCE
Who are you, his pa? Even if you
are, he knew the stakes before he
played the game.

BUCK
(to hawker)
You can see and hear him?

J.P.'s totally confused.

J.P.
(to Buck)
Who's he talkin' to? And what are
you talkin' about?

BUCK
The angel. He's here.

J.P. looks all around him.

TALL MAN

Clarence, you're already straddling
a thin fence. I don't think you
want those two dimes to be your
last straw.

CLARENCE

How do you know my name? And what's
wrong with your eyes?

Tall Man's copper eyes BRIGHTEN. Clarence gasps at the sight.

J.P.

Buck? What's happening?

BUCK

You don't wanna know.

The hawker holds his quivering hand clutching the two dimes
out to Buck.

CLARENCE

Here.

Buck takes the money and hands the key chain back.

CLARENCE

Keep it. I don't want it.

TALL MAN

(to Buck)

Let's go.

They walk away with J.P. beside Buck.

Clarence breaks out in a sweat. He looks sick.

BUCK

(to Tall Man)

Is he gonna die?

J.P.

Is who gonna die?

Tall Man is gone.

BUCK

Tall Man?!

J.P. looks all around him.

J.P.
 Buck, stop it! You're scarin' the
 crap outta me!

A WOMAN SCREAMS.

People scurry toward the hawker's stand.

An UNSEEN MAN calls out.

UNSEEN MAN (O.S.)
 Somebody get the ambulance!

J.P.
 C'mon, let's go see what happened!

BUCK
 No.

J.P.
 Why not?

BUCK
 It's the man at the throwin' booth.
 He's dead.

EXT. NEWMAN CITY LIBRARY - AFTERNOON

Traffic is light outside the building marked, "Library."

INT. LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

Buck sits at a table with a number of open books around him.

J.P. takes the latest edition of The Newnan Times-Herald from the newspaper area. He walks back to Buck as he reads the front page.

J.P. sets the paper over the book Buck is reading.

J.P.
 Look at this.

He points to the headline that reads: Carnie Worker Dies of Brain Hemorrhage

Buck pushes the newspaper away.

J.P.
 What are you lookin' for?

BUCK
 Help.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - BUCK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The room is dark but for a table light on the night stand.

Buck lies on his bed engrossed in an open book.

He turns the pages filled with illustrations of angels fighting demons during the war in heaven.

Buck stops on a page that shows Michael slaying the devil.

He looks up from the book to the unoccupied space on the chest of drawers where the porcelain angel had set.

EXT. TAYLOR'S JEWELRY AND CRAFTS - AFTERNOON

The front window bears the store's name.

INT. STORE - CONTINUOUS

The OWNER of the store, MR. TOM TAYLOR, is in his late 60's with a large pot belly. He addresses his customer from behind the counter.

MR. TAYLOR

You're lookin' for what?

Buck pulls a sheet of paper out of his pocket and reads from it.

BUCK

I'm lookin' for one of Henry the Eighth's gold coins. First issued in 1509.

Mr. Taylor's look answers before he does.

MR. TAYLOR

Are you serious?

Buck is very serious.

BUCK

Yes, sir.

MR. TAYLOR

Well I ain't got nothin' like that here.

Buck can't hide his disappointment as he turns away.

MR. TAYLOR

Hold on. Let me see what you've got there.

Mr. Taylor takes the paper from Buck and scans over it.

MR. TAYLOR

What you're lookin' for is a St. Michael's medal.

BUCK

No, sir, I'm lookin' for a coin.

MR. TAYLOR

For good luck?

BUCK

It's supposed to protect people. Make 'em well.

MR. TAYLOR

Yep. The medal is what you're lookin' for. It bears the same image as the coin of the angel Michael slaying the dragon.

BUCK

No, it's not a dragon, it's the devil.

MR. TAYLOR

Dragon, devil, means the same. The dragon represents evil, which the charm is also used to destroy.

BUCK

Will it work?

MR. TAYLOR

They say faith moves mountains.

BUCK

Sir?

MR. TAYLOR

You want this for you?

BUCK

For my mother.

MR. TAYLOR

Somebody after her?

BUCK

Not exactly. She's sick -- She's dying.

Mr. Taylor knows who he's talking to now.

MR. TAYLOR
You Jess Lynch's grandson?

BUCK
Yes, sir. Guess I still am. He's
dead.

MR. TAYLOR
I know. And you still are.

Mr. Taylor walks to another counter and searches through it. He pulls a medal on a neck chain from inside the glass enclosure.

MR. TAYLOR
Your name is..?

BUCK
Buck.

MR. TAYLOR
That's right. Buck. I bet your
grandma still makes the best deep-
dish around.

BUCK
Best anywhere.

Mr. Taylor hands the medal to Buck.

MR. TAYLOR
This is what you're lookin' for.
Put this around your mama's neck,
and keep it there.

BUCK
I will. How much is it?

MR. TAYLOR
One large bowl of that deep-dish
next time your grandma makes it.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - LATER SAME DAY

Buck enters by the screen door.

He takes a seat at the table and examines the St. Michael's medal.

Dell is washing pans at the sink. She knows Buck's there but doesn't look up.

DELL

There's fresh pound cake, but it needs to cool-a-spell 'fore you cut it.

Buck can't take his eyes off the medal.

BUCK

When you gonna make another deep-dish, Grandma?

DELL

I don't know. Haven't made one since...

Dell turns solemn for a moment.

DELL

If you're wantin' one I'll make it.

BUCK

It's not for me. It's for Mr. Taylor, down at the jewelry store.

DELL

Old Tom Taylor? Why's he wantin' my deep-dish?

Dell has her dander up now. She scrubs the pan she's washing even harder.

DELL

He needn't think 'cause Jess is gone I'm...

Buck interrupts her.

BUCK

He traded me this medal for a bowl of your deep-dish. Said it was the best he ever tasted.

The words make Dell remember. She softens.

DELL

He did?

BUCK

Yes, ma'am. You know Mr. Taylor?

Dell turns to face Buck as her eyes drift back in time.

DELL

He courted me awhile a long time ago, before I met your granddaddy. They worked together down at the railroad yard back then. He's the one introduced me to my Jess.

BUCK

Oh.

Dell fights back the tears that well up in her eyes.

DELL

What medal you talkin' about?

Buck holds it out for Dell to see.

BUCK

This one. It's the angel Michael slayin' the devil during the war in heaven.

Dell takes the medal and examines it.

DELL

Looks like a dragon to me.

BUCK

It's the same thing.

DELL

Whatcha want it for?

BUCK

It's for mama to wear. To protect her. Make her well.

Dell takes a seat next to Buck, and his hand in hers.

DELL

Buck, I want you to listen to me. You got to stop this angel stuff.

BUCK

If I don't stop him he's gonna take her, Grandma. I know who he is now. He's the Angel of Death.

DELL

There is no angel, Buck. It's all in your head.

BUCK

It's not, Grandma. It's not.

DELL
Your mama's sick and you know that.

Tears begin to roll from Buck's eyes.

BUCK
I know but...

DELL
She don't have a long time to live,
son. I wish she did, but she don't.

Buck wipes the tears from his face as he takes the medal back from Dell's hand.

BUCK
That's why I got this.

ESTELLE'S BEDROOM - LATER

Estelle lies in bed studying the design of the medal on the necklace around her neck with a hand held mirror.

ESTELLE
It's a, what?

Buck and Dell are standing beside Estelle's bed.

BUCK
A St. Michael's medal.

ESTELLE
It's kind of scary looking.

BUCK
It's 'cause the dragon's supposed
to be the devil.

Estelle lays the mirror down to pull the necklace off.

ESTELLE
Buck, I don't think I want to wear
this.

Buck stops Estelle from removing it.

BUCK
You gotta wear it, Mama! It's to
keep you safe!

ESTELLE
Safe from what?

Buck looks to his grandmother to bail him out.

DELL
It's just a good luck charm, honey.
That's all it is.

BUCK
Please don't take it off, Mama.

ESTELLE
I declare. How you worry about me --
All right, Buck. I won't take it
off.

DELL
I got to get supper on.
(to Estelle)
You take your medicine?

ESTELLE
I took it.

DELL
All right then. Just ring the bell
if you need me.

ESTELLE
I will.

Dell leaves.

Buck backpedals to the door.

BUCK
I'm gonna bring my supper up here
and eat with you tonight.

ESTELLE
No, you're not.

BUCK
Why not?!

ESTELLE
Come here, Buck.

Buck ambles back. Estelle pats the side of her bed.

ESTELLE
Sit down.

Buck does more of a flop than a sit. He knows what's coming.

ESTELLE
Your grandmother is not going to
sit in that kitchen and eat alone.

BUCK
You eat alone.

ESTELLE
Are you going to carry me down
those stairs? Bring me back up?

BUCK
I would if I could.

ESTELLE
I know you would. But you can't,
and I can't walk down them, or back
up.

Reluctantly, Buck concedes.

BUCK
All right.

Estelle lifts Buck's chin to meet his eyes with hers.

ESTELLE
What, is wrong?

A tear rolls down Buck's cheek.

BUCK
Nothin'.

ESTELLE
Buck?

BUCK
I'm just worried about you. That's
all.

Estelle strokes through Buck's hair as she searches for the
right words.

ESTELLE
Life is not always kind to us,
Buck. Things happen to people we
love sometimes.

BUCK
Bad things.

ESTELLE
Good things, too.

BUCK
Like what?

ESTELLE

Like you. You've been a blessing in my life since the day you were born. And what would your grandmother have now if she didn't have you in hers?

The tears flow freely from Buck.

BUCK

She'd have you.

ESTELLE

There's a verse in the Bible, Buck, that explains for all things there is a season, and I believe, a reason, behind everything -- I may not be here to watch you grow.

Estelle places her fingers over Buck's heart.

ESTELLE

But I'll always be with you.

For a long moment their eyes do the only talking.

BUCK

Granddaddy used to tell me to never give up. He should have told you, too.

MONTAGE:

KITCHEN - DAY

Dell stands at the screen door, sullen, looking out at the autumn leaves that fall as a train BLOWS its HORN in the distance.

She glances over at Jess' chair where one of the cats is curled up, asleep. A cool breeze hits her. She pulls her sweater tight and closes the door.

BUCK'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Buck stands in front of the chest of drawers. He stares at the framed picture of the angel guarding the children.

He opens the top drawer and looks down at the broken pieces of the porcelain angel.

ESTELLE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Estelle clutches the medal at the end of the necklace around her neck. She stares out her window, then grimaces from a wince of pain.

EXT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The large tree in the front yard sheds its colored leaves with every gust of wind until...

TIME LAPSE - DAY

...it's bare of its foliage.

A Christmas wreath adorns the front door.

END OF MONTAGE**INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - ESTELLE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

A small Christmas tree occupies a corner of the room.

DR. HOLDER, a thin man in his 60's, listens to Estelle's heart and checks her breathing.

Estelle lies in her bed. She looks frail and weak.

The doctor puts his stethoscope away and closes his medical bag.

ESTELLE

You have to be the only doctor left
in Newnan that still makes house
calls.

DR. HOLDER

Could be I am the only real doctor
left in Newnan.

Estelle manages a weak reciprocal.

ESTELLE

You're the best. I know that.

DR. HOLDER

Estelle, I know it's not something
you want to do, but I could make
you a lot more comfortable in the
hospital.

ESTELLE

No. I'll die here in my home. Not
in a hospital.

The doctor nods his understanding.

DR. HOLDER
Is the medication controlling your pain?

ESTELLE
Not as much as it did.

DR. HOLDER
More severe?

ESTELLE
Sometimes.

DR. HOLDER
Having a nurse close by would take care of that.

ESTELLE
They make house calls, too?

Dr. Holder smiles. He knows he's beating a dead horse.

DR. HOLDER
Alright, Estelle. No more talk of hospitals. I'm going to call in a new prescription for you though. Dell can pick it up at the pharmacy tomorrow.

ESTELLE
Dr. Holder, if it's real expensive...

DR. HOLDER
I don't want to hear that. Leonard Holmes fills what I tell him to if he wants my patients' business.

ESTELLE
Thank you, Dr. Holder.

Dr. Holder smiles at his patient with eyes closer resembling a father to his daughter.

DR. HOLDER
I'm an old man, Estelle. I only know one way to doctor. I brought you into this world and I may leave before you, but as long as I'm here you'll get what you need. I'll check on you next week.

(MORE)

DR. HOLDER (cont'd)
 If you need me before then, just
 have Dell call.

FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Dr. Holder comes down the staircase to a waiting, Dell and Buck.

DR. HOLDER
 Buck, school out for the holidays?

BUCK
 Yes, sir.

DR. HOLDER
 When I was a boy it seemed like
 Christmas would never get here.
 (to Dell)
 Now they come so quick I can't
 remember one from the other.
 (to Buck)
 I need a minute with your
 grandmother.

Buck eyes plead to stay.

DELL
 Go on now. And take your jacket.
 It's cold out.

Buck takes his jacket from the coat tree, but stops dead at the door.

BUCK
 Grandma...

DELL
 Please, son. Just wait outside.

DR. HOLDER
 I'll only be a minute, Buck.

EXT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Buck closes the front door behind him. He's worried.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

DR. HOLDER
 I'm going to call in a prescription
 of morphine for Estelle.

DELL
 Morphine?

DR. HOLDER

She needs it, Dell. You can pick it up tomorrow. It'll be in liquid form. Just dispense it with a dropper under her tongue. I mentioned the hospital again but she'll have nothing to do with it. She wants to spend her time left here at her home. Can't say I blame her.

There's fear in Dell's eyes with the next question she asks.

DELL

How long?

DR. HOLDER

Few weeks. Maybe. She's getting close.

DELL

Oh, my Jesus.

DR. HOLDER

I'll be back next week, but don't hesitate to call if you need me before then.

EXT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

Buck leans against the large tree in the yard as Dr. Holder drives away.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - FOYER - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Buck eases into the foyer and gently closes the door.

He looks into the kitchen at Dell who cries quietly at the sink, then turns his eyes to the top of the stairs.

ESTELLE'S BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER

Buck sits on the edge of Estelle's bed.

BUCK

That's the last time I saw him. But I know he's comin' back.

Estelle strokes Buck's hair with a loving smile.

ESTELLE

And he said you'd be an angel one day?

Buck nods.

ESTELLE

Did you tell him you were already
my angel?

BUCK

You don't believe me, do you?

ESTELLE

What does grandma say about it?

BUCK

She doesn't believe me. Nobody
does.

Estelle lifts Buck's chin to meet her eyes with his.

ESTELLE

I believe you. You wouldn't say it
if it weren't so.

BUCK

No. I wouldn't. Promise me you
won't ever take the medal off.

Estelle clutches the medal tight.

ESTELLE

I promise.

BUCK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Buck wakes from a restless sleep. He stares at the porcelain
angel flawed with cracks and glued back together. Shadows
from the streetlight pattern the wall the chest of drawers
rests against.

A shadow on the wall suddenly moves.

Buck sits straight up.

Tall Man moves his face into the light.

TALL MAN

See you fixed it.

Buck stares, almost unable to speak.

BUCK

Wha-what?

TALL MAN

The angel. You fixed it.

Buck nods.

BUCK

I did.

TALL MAN

Your mother wears Michael's legacy.

BUCK

You've been in her room?

TALL MAN

Why does she wear the image?

BUCK

I gave it to her. To protect her from you.

TALL MAN

It has great power.

BUCK

I hope so.

TALL MAN

Not that one. This one.

Tall Man flips a gold coin to Buck that seems to slow as it passes through the light streaming into the room.

Buck catches the coin in flight. Tall Man vanishes.

Buck looks down at the gold coin that disintegrates in his hand.

ESTELLE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Buck bursts into the bedroom.

Tall Man stands over Estelle.

Estelle wakes. She SCREAMS hysterically.

BUCK'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Buck's asleep in his bed, but the noise of cats fighting in the hallway cause his eyes to shoot open.

He sits straight up, soaked in sweat. FOOTSTEPS are heard in a run outside his room.

DELL (O.S.)

Git!

Buck hurries to the bedroom door and flings it open.

BEDROOM HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The cats scamper as Dell swings at them with a pillow.

Her eyes find Buck in his wet pajama top.

ESTELLE (O.S.)
Mama?

DELL
It's all right, Estelle. Just them
dang cats fightin'.

Dell touches Buck's pajama top.

DELL
You're soakin' wet.

BUCK
I had a bad dream.

The sound of CATS FIGHTING downstairs.

ESTELLE (O.S.)
Mama?!

DELL
I hear 'em! I'm fixin' to throw 'em
out!

DELL
(to Buck)
Get changed and back to bed. I'll
check on you after I'm through with
them cats.

Dell moves down the stairs mumbling to herself.

DELL
Lord help me make it through this
night.

Buck watches his grandmother fade into the dark.

BUCK
Me too.

ESTELLE'S BEDROOM - NEXT DAY

Buck and Dell maneuver a mattress through the doorway.

ESTELLE

There's really no need for this.

Buck tugs on his end of the mattress.

BUCK

Yes there is.

The mattress is in.

Dell catches her breath.

ESTELLE

I just don't see the need. I'd call out if I needed someone.

BUCK

You would if you could. I'm gonna make sure I'm here if you can't.

DELL

Buck's got a point, Estelle. It can't hurt, him being closer.

BUCK

There's plenty of room on the other side of your night stand. And that's that!

Estelle gives up the argument during a sudden flash of pain she attempts to hide.

ESTELLE

That's that.

THAT NIGHT...

Buck lies in his bed wide awake with a watchful eye on his sleeping mother.

A noise from outside the room catches his attention.

STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

From the top of the stairs Buck sees a light glowing from the living room.

FOYER - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Buck peers in from the corner of the wall and sees the TV is on and the sound turned low.

He back-steps to the umbrella stand at the front door and pulls out a long, sharp tipped one then steps into the living room, the umbrella held out like a sword.

His hand trembles as he turns the television off.

A passing car's headlights shoot through the window lighting Tall Man's figure resting in a chair.

The TV comes to life again.

TALL MAN
I was watching that.

The umbrella falls from Buck's hand.

Tall Man stands.

TALL MAN
Expecting rain?

Buck's frozen in place. He lifts his eyes to meet with the tall angel's.

BUCK
Tell me the truth. Does the necklace protect her from you?

TALL MAN
I haven't taken her have I?

BUCK
You didn't answer.

TALL MAN
And I won't.

Tears well in Buck's eyes.

BUCK
If you take her you have to take me too.

TALL MAN
That's not the way it works.

Buck breaks down as the tears flow.

BUCK
She's all I have! You know I don't have a father! You've already taken granddaddy and one day you'll be back for grandma and I'll have no one!

(MORE)

BUCK (cont'd)
If you take my mother, you'll have
to take me too!

Tall Man stares down at Buck, his copper eyes saying more
than his words.

TALL MAN
I knew you were going to be a hard
case. Why can't you just accept the
inevitable?

Buck looks up into the angel's eyes and wipes the tears from
his face.

BUCK
Because faith can move mountains.

The TV goes black. Buck finds himself alone as Tall Man is
gone. Sudden fear crosses Buck's face.

BUCK
No!

STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Buck runs up the stairs as fast as he can--

ESTELLE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

--and bursts into the room out of breath, his eyes fixed on
Estelle who sleeps peacefully.

With a sigh of relief Buck quietly closes the bedroom door
and locks it.

He checks the medal around Estelle's neck and finds it safely
in place, then eases himself onto his mother's bed and puts
his arm around her as he wipes his tears away.

BUCK
The medal works. He can never take
you from me now.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

SUPER: CHRISTMAS EVE

Dell stacks the dinner dishes at the sink, crying silently to
herself.

There's a KNOCK on the kitchen door.

Dell wipes her tears away. When she pulls the door curtain back she finds Tom Taylor's face smiling at her from the other side.

Dell's hesitant at first, but opens the door.

MR. TAYLOR

Merry Christmas, Dell. Hope you don't mind me stopping by like this.

DELL

Tom, I don't have any deep-dish.

MR. TAYLOR

That's not why I'm here. I just need to see you for a minute.

Dell steps aside as Tom enters.

MR. TAYLOR

Jess came into the store the day before he died.

He pulls Jess' pocket watch from his jacket.

MR. TAYLOR

He left this to be engraved.

DELL

So that's what happened to it.

Dell takes the watch and opens the case to read the inscription.

MR. TAYLOR

He meant it to be a present for Buck. Figured you might want to wrap it.

Dell closes the case.

DELL

I don't know what to say. Did he owe you anything?

MR. TAYLOR

Jess was my friend. That's payment enough for me. As to what to say. Just a, "Merry Christmas, Tom," would be fine.

Dell manages a shy smile.

DELL
Merry Christmas, Tom. I'll stop by
your store 'fore too long with some
deep-dish.

MR. TAYLOR
Now that, I'm going to hold you to.

Tom opens the door and steps out. The cold hits him hard.

MR. TAYLOR
Feels like snow.

DELL
In Newnan, Georgia? Never snows on
Christmas here.

As Tom walks away--

MR. TAYLOR
Never say never, Dell.

Dell closes the door. She brings the pocket watch to her
lips, closes her eyes and kisses it. Then in a soft
whisper...

DELL
Merry Christmas, Jess -- I miss you
so.

Dell puts the watch into her apron pocket and walks into
the...

LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...where Buck sits by the Christmas tree, pulling out the few
presents under it.

BUCK
I'm getting the presents sorted for
in the morning.

DELL
How many you got there?

BUCK
I count six all together.

DELL
I could have swore there were more
than that.

BUCK
Where else would they be?

DELL
I don't know. Maybe under a
lollipop tied to a big red bow?

BUCK
Where?

Dell changes the subject that Buck quickly forgets also.

DELL
I got to go heat your mama's soup.

BUCK
Can I take it to her?

DELL
Soon as it's ready, but first get
your jacket and run out to the
garage. I think I might have left a
bag of oranges in the car. I don't
want 'em to freeze out there
tonight.

Buck looks down at the present he holds with his mother's
name on it.

BUCK
Grandma. Did you know if you pray
hard enough anything is possible?

Buck's words take Dell aback.

DELL
I guess I do. I'm the one told you
that.

BUCK
I just wanted to see if you
remembered.

Buck leaves the room, and Dell to her thoughts.

INT. GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Buck opens the side door of the garage and flips the light
switch. He can't believe the brand new red bicycle with a red
Christmas bow tied to a lollipop around the handle bars that
sets before his eyes.

He admires it, touching it from wheel to wheel before taking
the Christmas card taped to the seat and reading it.

The card is signed:

"Merry Christmas, Buck -- Granddaddy"

EXT. GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Buck comes out of the garage with the bike to find SNOW FALLING.

BUCK
(to himself)
It's snowing.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The kitchen door opens with Buck standing alongside his bike. Snow flakes cover his jacket.

Dell, standing at the sink, smiles at Buck, then sees the snow.

DELL
Well I declare. It is snowing.

BUCK
Grandma, it's beautiful. Can I bring it in?

A little happy snuffle from Dell.

DELL
Of course you can.

Buck wheels the bike in and lets it rest on the kickstand.

BUCK
Now I won't be late for school anymore. I know you got it for me, but you put granddaddy's name on the card.

DELL
He had told me he was going to get you a bike for Christmas. I just picked it out for him. No one else name needed to be on that card.

Dell turns back to her stove.

DELL
Your mama's soup is ready.

BUCK
Can I take her one of her presents?

DELL
 Just tell her you got your bike.
 That's the best present you could
 give her right now.

ESTELLE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Buck walks in, tray in hand.

BUCK
 Mama, it's snowing outside.

Estelle doesn't hear. She's watching a program on TV. She looks somber, but shows no pain. She glances over at Buck holding the soup tray.

ESTELLE
 I'm not hungry. Just set it down
 somewhere.

BUCK
 But you have to eat to keep your
 strength up.

ESTELLE
 Sit with me and watch, "The
 Honeymooners." They're doing, "Twas
 the Night Before Christmas."
 Remember that poem?

Buck sets the tray on his bed.

BUCK
 Granddaddy used to recite it every
 Christmas Eve. Did you hear me say
 it's snowing?

The TV plays on. Estelle's captivated with the story and nothing else.

ESTELLE
 He would have loved the show
 tonight.

Buck is picking up on something in Estelle's manor that's different.

BUCK
 Mama?

ESTELLE
 Hmmmm?

BUCK
Are you all right? You seem...
different.

If Estelle hears Buck she makes no notice of it. Her attention is directed to the TV only.

BUCK
Mama?

Estelle snaps at Buck.

ESTELLE
What?! What is it now?! Can't you
see I'm watching TV?!

BUCK
I'm sorry!

Estelle turns her focus back to the television.

BUCK
I got my bike.

That got through to Estelle.

ESTELLE
What?

BUCK
My bike. I got it just before I
came up.

ESTELLE
You like it?

BUCK
Mama, of course I like it. I love
it!

ESTELLE
I wish your granddaddy could see
the look on your face. He loved you
so.

BUCK
I loved him, too.

Estelle's eyes drift.

ESTELLE
Daddy. I'll be seeing him soon.

BUCK
Don't say that!

Estelle grimaces. She motions with trembling fingers toward the dresser.

ESTELLE
Get my medicine for me.

BUCK
Is it time for it?

Estelle grows more anxious with each moment.

ESTELLE
Get it now! I need it!

Buck stands in front of the dresser topped with medicine bottles trying to find the right one.

BUCK
Which one?!

ESTELLE
The morphine! Quick!

BUCK
Which one is it?!

ESTELLE
Mother!

BUCK
Just tell me which one!

ESTELLE
Mother!!

BUCK
Mama, please! I'm trying to help
you!

Estelle's shouts have grown so loud they're unnerving.

ESTELLE
Mother!!!

Dell bursts into the room, frantic and shaking.

DELL
What's wrong?!

Estelle's entire body quivers.

ESTELLE
My medicine!

Dell rushes to the dresser and grabs the bottle of Morphine.
She administers the dosage as Estelle labors with her breathing.

ESTELLE
More.

Dell stares down at her daughter, the fright evident in her face.

DELL
Honey...

ESTELLE
More!

Buck's scared. He doesn't know what to do.

BUCK
Mama, stop it!

DELL
She's hurtin', Buck!

Estelle grabs Dell's clothing.

ESTELLE
Please!

DELL
Alright, honey, alright. Just calm down. I'll give you more.

ESTELLE
Hurry!

Dell wipes the back of her trembling hand across her forehead, then draws the dosage and administers it to Estelle.

After a moment Estelle's breathing slows. She relaxes and closes her eyes.

Buck reaches out and touches his mother's hand.

BUCK
Mama?

DELL

Let her rest, Buck. Stay by her side. I'm gonna go call Dr. Holder.

Dell fights her tears back as she walks away on legs of rubber that force her to stop and compose herself.

BUCK

Grandma?

Dell catches her breath.

DELL

I'm okay. Don't leave her. I'll be right back.

Buck turns the TV off just as the cast is wishing the viewers a "Merry Christmas."

He turns slowly, like he's on a revolving stand, to every corner of the room.

BUCK

I know you're here.

He kneels by Estelle's bed and takes the medal at the end of the necklace around her neck into his hand, holding it out like he's showing it to someone who isn't there.

BUCK

You can't have her -- You can't.

LATER THAT NIGHT

Estelle sleeps. Dr. Holder checks her pulse and breathing.

Buck and Dell stand close by.

DR. HOLDER

How long has she been asleep?

DELL

Around two hours.

The doctor packs his stethoscope away.

DELL

She wanted more medicine. She was hurtin'. I didn't know what else to do but give it to her and call you.

DR. HOLDER

And you did exactly the right thing.

DELL

I hate you havin' to come out on
Christmas Eve in this weather, Dr.
Holder.

DR. HOLDER

I would have been upset with you
had you not called. I'm Estelle's
doctor. A title I take very
serious.

DELL

I know you do.

BUCK

Mama is going to be fine. You just
have to have faith, Grandma.
Remember?

DR. HOLDER

Faith is the light of this world,
Buck. But it still might be a good
idea for you and your grandmother
to pull a chair up by her side
tonight.

DELL

You won't find us anywhere else.

LATER SAME NIGHT

The light in the bedroom is dim, lit only by a night light
plugged into the wall. A TICKING CLOCK the only sound, its
second hand, the only movement.

Estelle moans from time to time in her sleep.

Dell is in a rocking chair with a shawl wrapped around her,
rocking and praying continually in a mumbled whisper.

Buck is propped against his bed's headboard, asleep, a
baseball bat in his hands.

Suddenly the night light BRIGHTENS, then DIMS. The second
hand on the clock stops moving and the clock STOPS TICKING.

Everything is frozen in time. Dell's rocker stops in place as
does her prayers.

Out of the shadows of the room Tall Man appears. He stares
down at Estelle. His copper eyes soak her in.

He begins to sing softly to Estelle as she wakes.

TALL MAN

*Pretty Golden flowing hair, you
have my heart so don't despair.
Shed not one tear while I'm away,
for I'll be back for you one day.*

Estelle stares at the intruder like she's seeing something that can't possibly be.

TALL MAN

Do you remember that?

ESTELLE

It's the last thing you said to me
the night you left.

TALL MAN

That's right.

ESTELLE

I like dreams like this. But they
always end so sudden.

TALL MAN

You're not dreaming, Estelle.

ESTELLE

Of course I am, Robert. You've been
gone for years. Why would you come
back now?

TALL MAN

Because I told you I'd be back for
you.

ESTELLE

You did. But I'm dying, Robert. Did
you know that?

TALL MAN

Yes, Estelle.

ESTELLE

Mother let you in to surprise me,
didn't she?

Estelle sees Dell is by her side and Buck on his bed.

ESTELLE

Mother you should have told me
Robert was here. I look so bad. I
could have fixed my hair if I'd
known he was coming.

But Dell doesn't respond.

ESTELLE
Mother? Don't you hear me?

She turns to Buck.

ESTELLE
Buck? Buck, wake up. Your father is here.

She catches herself.

ESTELLE
Oh, my. You don't know about Buck, do you?

TALL MAN
I know about Buck. And they can't hear you, Estelle.

ESTELLE
What do you mean they can't hear me? Why can't they hear me? They're right here beside me. They should be able to hear me.

TALL MAN
Time is standing still, my love. They remain in the living world, while you're in between, with me.

ESTELLE
In between? With you?

TALL MAN
With me. Between this life and the next.

A bewildered Estelle finally notices.

ESTELLE
Robert? What happened to your eyes? And you're taller than I remember -- Much taller.

TALL MAN
It's all a part of who I am now.

Now Estelle knows who Robert is.

ESTELLE
You're Buck's angel, aren't you?

TALL MAN

I am.

ESTELLE

Oh -- I see now -- Well, you kept your word. You've come back for me.

TALL MAN

That is my purpose for being here.

ESTELLE

Buck told me you said he would become an angel himself one day.

TALL MAN

He has been chosen.

ESTELLE

I know what's inside of Buck, so that's not so hard for me to believe. But, Robert. How in the world?

TALL MAN

I was wicked in my ways with your love being the only good thing in my life. But the worldly things I desired clouded my feelings for you. So I left. But I never knew then, that you were with child.

ESTELLE

I didn't know I was when you left. When I found out I tried to find you. I looked everywhere I knew to, but all in vain. After Buck was born, I stopped looking.

TALL MAN

I didn't stay in one place long. Always had that itch, no matter what I had, for something different. Then, one drunken night, like the old cliché', I saw the light. I put the bottle away for good and was on my way back to you. Another driver crossed the line and hit me head-on.

ESTELLE

I bet he was drunk.

TALL MAN

Ironic, isn't it? But I was lucky.
Salvation found me before my end
did. As to how I became an angel?
Seems I'm working my sins off.

Suddenly the bedroom begins to GLOW and Estelle falls back to sleep.

An OLDER WINGED ANGEL, RAGUEL, appears. He's in a long white robe and taller than Tall Man. His hair and beard are white as snow.

RAGUEL

(to Tall Man)

What are you doing?

TALL MAN

Hello, Raguel.

RAGUEL

The old woman is praying so hard
HE, Himself, sent me.

Tall Man introduces Buck.

TALL MAN

This is...

RAGUEL

I know who he is. Get on with your
business here. You're needed
elsewhere.

TALL MAN

There's a problem.

RAGUEL

Then solve it. Do your job and move
on.

TALL MAN

Estelle. She wears Michael's medal.

RAGUEL

And I wear wings which I'm
beginning to feel you'll never
earn.

TALL MAN

The boy thinks it protects her. I
led him to believe it does.

RAGUEL

What do you mean you've led him to believe? He's seen you?

TALL MAN

We've spoken.

RAGUEL

You know that's not permissible.

TALL MAN

I was assigned as his mentor. I saw no harm in him knowing.

A large book titled: Apprentice Schedule, appears in Raguel's hands.

RAGUEL

Buck Lynch.

The book opens. The pages peel back like a flowing wave then suddenly stop.

RAGUEL

Buck Lynch. Scheduled to arrive in the spring after a...

TALL MAN

Bicycle accident.

RAGUEL

Knowledge of his future is considered training begun. Take him now with his mother. A few months difference won't matter either way.

TALL MAN

I told you, I led the boy to believe the necklace protects her. I can't take her. First Angelic Rule, "An angel shall not lie."

RAGUEL

I know the rule. I wrote it. Take the boy. I'll have to address the High Council on a new date for his mother.

TALL MAN

He'll be happy to get started. I've already shown him heaven.

RAGUEL
You can't show someone heaven
before their demise! It's not
permissible!

A second book appears in Raguel's other hand, titled: Angels
Standard Operating Procedure.

RAGUEL
It's in the book!

Both books Raguel holds disappear.

RAGUEL
I knew making you the boy's mentor
would be a mistake.

Raguel lifts his eyes skyward.

RAGUEL
But who listens to me -- Buck is no
longer your apprentice or a
candidate for order. Understood?

TALL MAN
Understood.

RAGUEL
I hope you're proud of yourself.
Your actions have doomed this boy
to a long life now.

TALL MAN
I accept full responsibility.

RAGUEL
That, is a given. Finish here and
move on to your next assignment.

Raguel gives Tall Man a long hard stare.

RAGUEL
You planned this, didn't you?

TALL MAN
The boy was a hard case. He would
have never fit in.

RAGUEL
Seems he has his father's traits.

TALL MAN
And Estelle?

Raguel has run out of tolerance for his angel.

RAGUEL

Clean up this mess. I'll deal with you later.

Raguel vanishes.

Tall Man walks to the sleeping Buck and takes the bat from his hand.

TALL MAN

You won't be needing this tonight.
But when the time comes for it,
always keep it high and to your
back. Keep your eye on the ball and
follow through with your swing.

He sets the bat by the side of the bed and lays his hand on his son's uncombed hair.

TALL MAN

In a day or so you'll be looking
for a squirrel that's gotten into
the attic. While you're there
you'll come across an old box in a
dark corner that's filled with
pictures of your father. Every time
you look at one you'll feel the
love he has for you, and in your
heart, is where he'll always be.

He turns to the sleeping Estelle and takes her hand in his.

TALL MAN

Better days lay ahead, my love. And
on one of those days you're going
to the library because something
tells you to. You'll search the
microfilm for old out of town
newspapers where you'll come across
Robert's accident. You'll find
peace of mind and know in your
heart he was on his way back to
you.

(to Buck and Estelle)

All memory of me, and the memory of
others you spoke of me to, will
leave with me. But...

(singing soft tune)

*Just search your dreams and I'll be
there, each other's heart we'll
always share, never fear what lies
ahead...*

(MORE)

TALL MAN (cont'd)
 (not sung)
 Your own angel... is always near.

Tall Man lifts his hand to wave across the room, but before he can...

Estelle, still asleep--

ESTELLE
 Merry Christmas, Robert.

And Buck--

BUCK
 Merry Christmas, Daddy.

Tall Man is unsure of what just happened. He lifts his questioning eyes to the ceiling.

TALL MAN
 Raguel?

RAGUEL (O.S.)
 What?

A side of Raguel Tall Man hadn't seen.

TALL MAN
 Nothing.

He pauses for a long moment in the quiet of the room just staring at Buck and Estelle. Then with a slight smile and soft whisper...

TALL MAN
 Merry Christmas. I love you both.

The bedroom is pierced by streams of white light that spin faster and faster, until the room is consumed.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CEMENTARY - AFTERNOON

SUPER: CHRISTMAS EVE PRESENT DAY

The sun shines bright.

A tall and lean in his seventies Buck Lynch stands in front of the graves of his grandparents' and mother, holding his five year-old GRANDSON, JESS. Dell's grave is dated 1965, Estelle's 1987.

Buck's WIFE, his age, finishes arranging poinsettias around the headstones.

A large masonry statue of a winged angel with outstretched arms resides over the graves.

CHILD JESS

Granddaddy! We're gonna miss Santa Claus!

WIFE

Give him to me, Buck.

Buck's wife holds her arms out to the boy.

WIFE

Come here, Jess. Come to Grandma. Santa doesn't come until tonight.

ESTELLE, a six year-old girl with blonde curls, tugs at Buck's pants.

CHILD ESTELLE

Let's go, Granddaddy. I'm scared of the angel.

Buck strokes his granddaughter's hair.

BUCK

There's nothing to be afraid of, Estelle -- Nothing at all.

Buck stares at his mother's headstone and rubs the St. Michael's medal around his neck between thumb and finger as his wife lays her head against his shoulder.

BUCK

I'm thankful to have had those extra years with you, Mama. But I never stop missing you.

His eyes turn to Jess and Dell's graves.

BUCK

Or both of you.

A train rumbles in the distance, its HORN BLARING.

Buck pulls a pocket watch from his pants pocket and opens the case. It's engraved:

"Old habits and hand-me-downs"

"Granddaddy -- Christmas 1955"

BUCK
 Old 92's barrellin', Granddaddy.
 Right on time.

Buck closes the watch.

BUCK (V.O.)
 I heard somewhere, though I don't
 remember when, or how, that if you
 looked into an angel's eyes you'd
 see heaven. I have no proof of
 that, but I do know it had to be an
 angel that touched my mother
 Christmas of '55 and put her cancer
 into remission, giving her the
 strength to have the tumor removed
 from her back and walk again.

It was a Christmas spent with great
 friends like J.P. who some years
 later gave his life for his country
 in a place called the A Shau Valley
 during the war in Vietnam. And not
 so friends, like Hoss and his
 brother who turned to crime and
 died in a house explosion, the
 cause of which remains a mystery to
 this day.

It was the best Christmas ever,
 filled with grandparent's love and
 big surprises. Like the box that
 turned up in the attic stuffed with
 pictures of my father nobody knew
 we had.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - MORNING IN THE PAST

Buck pedals his bike, fast.

BUCK (V.O.)
 And the gift of a brand new shiny
 red bike that flew like the wind.

He passes J.P. like he's standing still.

A train marked '92 barrels down the tracks passing Buck.

BUCK (V.O.)
 And I was never-ever, late for
 school, again.

FADE OUT.

