

HONEY MUSTARD

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. STELLA'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Animalistic grunts as OSCAR, mid 30s, naked Dad-bod glistening with sweat, lies on top of --

STELLA, mid 20s, beautiful mocha-colored complexion marked with bruises. She stares off, distant, as Oscar thrusts into her, absolutely no rhythm to his stroke. Just pounding away.

Oscar, cold demeanor and beady eyes, stops when he notices Stella's indifferent expression. She's in her own world.

Frustrated, he gets off of her, leaving bed. Stella still wearing a faraway look.

As he slips into clothes OS:

OSCAR (O.S.)
You making breakfast or what?

She continues to stare off, dispirited.

STELLA
What do you want?

INT. STELLA'S KITCHEN - LATER THAT MORNING

Stella carefully prepares Eggs Benedict over the stove.

MOMENTS LATER

Oscar sits at the table wearing a police uniform.

Stella sets a well-presented plate in front of him. Followed by a small bowl of honey mustard off to the side.

He drizzles honey mustard over his breakfast with a spoon.

Dressed in a yellow, skirted waitress's uniform with white trimming, Stella sits across from him, only eating toast.

An awkward silence as Stella just gazes down at her plate, taking quiet mouse bites.

Chewing his food, Oscar locks his intense gaze on her.

OSCAR
How are you getting to work?

She flashes a furtive glance before her eyes return to her plate. A sense of forboding.

STELLA
I got a ride.

Oscar just stares at her coldly, making her uncomfortable.

OSCAR
From who?

Avoiding the question, she bites off a piece of toast.

He bangs on the table, startling her.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
I said, from who?

Frightened, she slowly looks up at him.

STELLA
She's just a co-worker.

Oscar leans back in his seat, hand to his face as he studies her closely. Thinking.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Nothing's going on.

He takes a deep breath. Then sets his firearm on the table.

Looking to the gun, he then looks across to her.

OSCAR
Is that why she brings you home
late every night? Because nothing's
going on?

Stella slinks into her seat, taking another bite...

Suddenly, Oscar lunges across the table, grabbing her by the back of her hair, holding her face close to his.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
(seething)
Look at me... I told you to stop
fucking around with that girl, did
I not?

Tears stream down her face.

STELLA
(voice trembling)
Oscar, you're hurting me...

He grabs the bowl of honey mustard, dumps it over her head, drawing more tears.

OSCAR

Listen, you stupid, dike-cunt... if you think this hurts...

He yanks back on her hair again, drawing a painful shriek.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

... Keep fucking around with that girl and see what happens.

Oscar lets go of her scalp. Sits down in his seat again, wiping his hands off with a napkin. Motioning to the mess.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Clean this shit up before I take you to work.

Honey mustard trickling down her face from the top of her head, Stella glares at him, tight-jawed.

STELLA

(through her teeth)
Fuck you.

Oscar, with a threatening, measured look:

OSCAR

What was that?

Chest heaving with rage, taking deep, angry, grunting breaths, she continues to glare at him.

STELLA

Fuck you!

Oscar jumps out of his chair and snatches her by the back of her hair again.

OSCAR

Fuck me? That's how you talk?

WHAM! He bashes her face down onto the table, busting her nose and throwing her hard to the floor.

On all fours, Stella pulls a tooth from her bloodied mouth.

Oscar yanks her up to her feet and throws her like a rag doll into the stove.

Battered, she looks to a nearby knife block. Oscar notices.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
You want that knife, don't you?

He snatches a knife out of the block, holds it to her throat.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
What do you wanna do with it, huh?
You wanna cut me?

Oscar slaps the knife onto the counter, in front of Stella, daring her to take it.

He takes a step back, taunting her. Beckoning her.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
Go ahead.

She looks to the knife. Then to him.

Oscar turns his back to her, urging her on.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
Stab me right in the fucking back.
Come on, do it.

Stella considers it. But doesn't grab the knife.

Smirking, Oscar turns, faces her.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
That's what I thought.

Suddenly, she grabs the knife and plunges it into his throat!

Stunned, Oscar jerks back, staggering, eyes practically bulging out of his sockets as he gurgles on his own blood.

Desperately trying to pull the knife out, Oscar drops to his knees, gasping for air.

In a frenzy, Stella grabs a frying pan off the stove and swings it at Oscar, driving the knife all the way through his throat, blood spluttering out.

The sharp tip of the knife poking out through the back of his neck, Oscar goes limp. The counter behind him keeping him propped up, leaned back while still on his knees. Silent. No longer moving.

Catching her breath, Stella drops the frying pan.

Blood-tinged honey mustard dripping down her face, she stares down at Oscar with angry, tear-filled eyes...

INT. STELLA'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Hastily gathering her purse and keys, Stella stops.

Shaken, she looks down at Oscar's still, lifeless body, his back still propped up against the counter. Merely a lifeless heap on the floor.

With a trembling deep breath, she slowly steps over him...

Seemingly in the clear, she exhales, walking away...

Oscar's body suddenly topples to its side!

Alarmed, Stella whips around, jolted with fear.

She snatches Oscar's gun off the table and points it at his body, now lying on its side, not moving.

Waiting for a sign of life, she keeps aim, her trembling hand barely able to hold the gun straight...

But he doesn't move.

HONK! The CAR HORN startles Stella, sending shock-waves through her nerves.

Another hush. Followed by a nervous gulp as Stella slowly extends her foot towards Oscar...

Until nudging his shoulder - no movement.

She nudges him again with her foot, harder - no reaction.

Nerves shot, she waits for him to jolt back to life...

But nothing.

With a deep, shuddering breath, she conceals the gun into her purse and leaves.

INT. YELLOW TOYOTA COROLLA (PARKED) - CONTINUOUS

MATILDA sits behind the wheel, waiting.

A petite, sassy redhead in her mid 20s, she looks to the front of Stella's house.

She checks the time and sighs in frustration. Finally...

Matilda sees Stella leaving her front door.

EXT. STELLA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Stella locks up. All nerves.

She leaves, approaching Matilda's car while cautiously scanning her surroundings...

INT. YELLOW TOYOTA COROLLA (PARKED) - CONTINUOUS

Stella sits in the passenger's seat without even making eye contact with Matilda. Oddly quiet.

Matilda sniffs the air.

MATILDA

Why do you smell like Grey Poupon?

She just notices the fresh bruises.

MATILDA (CONT'D)

That son of a bitch.

Stella turns away, failing to hide her battered appearance.

STELLA

It's fine.

MATILDA

Bullshit, it's fine...

Matilda opens her door, ready to step out.

MATILDA (CONT'D)

Someone needs to say something...

Panicked, Stella tugs on her shoulder sleeve, keeping her in the vehicle.

STELLA

Just leave it alone.

Heartbroken, Matilda pores over every nick and contusion marking Stella's mocha complexion.

MATILDA

You can't keep letting him get away with this.

Overwrought and jumpy, Stella looks to her house. Then turns back to Matilda.

STELLA

Can we just go? Please?

With a disappointed, defeated sigh, Matilda shuts her door.
She continues to hold a careworn gaze on Stella.

MATILDA
We should call the police.

STELLA
He is the police.

MATILDA
I could call my Dad. I know for a
fact he can't stand Oscar.

Grateful for her concern, even touched by it, Stella gives
her a melancholy smile.

STELLA
I can't make you do that.

Matilda smiles, equally as melancholy. If not more so.

She delicately reaches out, runs her fingers along Stella's
bruises. Then through the front of her locks.

MATILDA
I swear to you, once we get enough
cash together, I'm gonna get us
outta this fucking town. And it'll
be just you and me.

Stella's eyes well up.

STELLA
You promise?

Matilda lovingly cradles Stella's face with both hands.

MATILDA
Cross my heart. Soon.

Looking deep into Stella's eyes, Matilda leans in with a
warm, gentle embrace. Pressing her lips to Stella's, as if
she could kiss away all the pain.

Their lips break apart. Both women looking deep into each
other's souls.

MATILDA (CONT'D)
You're a fighter. I just need you
to keep fighting for me. Okay?

Stella nods. The love between them palpable, hearts
practically beating in unison.

EXT. BUFORD'S HOUSE - LATER THAT MORNING

A ramshackle, one-story home in the middle of the woods with a RUSTY PICK-UP TRUCK parked in the gravel driveway.

A "For Sale" sign sits posted on the front lawn.

INT. BUFORD'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

BASEMENT DOOR - Closing shut. A hand locking it with a key.

Fifteen year-old NEWTON, awkward and bookish, watches closely from the table as his father, BUFORD BLUMPKIN finishes locking the basement door.

Early 40s, every-man looks, wearing a loose-fitting, Thrift-shop suit, Buford hangs the keys on a nearby wall rack.

Eggs sizzling on a frying pan, toast pops up nearby as GERTRUDE, early 40s, wholesome and pleasant, prepares breakfast over the stove.

Buford lovingly hugs her from behind, drawing playful laughter as he kisses her neck.

Joining Newton at the table, Buford musses his son's mop before sitting across from him.

Newton fixes his messy hair back into place, annoyed.

BUFORD
Anything going on today? Any tests?

NEWTON
(nods)
Math.

BUFORD
You study?

NEWTON
Always.

As Gertrude serves them eggs and toast:

BUFORD
Good boy.

Newton stares down at his plate, pouting.

NEWTON
Can I have more toast?

GERTRUDE

Baby, we need to save some bread
for the rest of the week.

Newton hangs his head, bummed out.

Taking notice, Buford takes a piece of toast off his own
plate and sets it on Newton's.

Grateful, Newton smiles.

INT. BUFORD'S LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT MORNING

Gertrude sits at her desktop computer, scrolling through
screens. In deep concentration.

Buford, pokes his head in.

BUFORD

We're heading out.

Buford eyes her computer screen while approaching her from
behind, looking over her shoulder.

BUFORD (CONT'D)

What are you up to?

GERTRUDE

(sighs)

Oh, just trying to find a buyer.

He nods, shame-faced.

Gertrude turns, looks up at him with a warm, loving gaze.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)

You look handsome.

Buford smiles. Gives her a manly twirl, showing off his suit.

BUFORD

Not bad, huh?

GERTRUDE

You're gonna knock 'em dead today,
I know it.

Crestfallen, Buford pretends to agree with her but can't hide
his hangdog expression.

Noticing, she stands up and embraces him with a tender,
comforting hug.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)
 Things will get better.

She kisses him.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)
 And, one day, we won't have to be
 doing this no more.

She turns his face, gently forcing eye contact. Giving him an assured, persuasive look.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)
 Okay?

Not fully convinced, Buford nods.

She kisses him again.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)
 Good luck.

EXT. BUFORD'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Newton waits inside the RUSTY PICK-UP TRUCK as his father leaves the house.

About to get in, Buford stops. He looks to the "For Sale" sign posted up on his lawn.

A rebellious strength suddenly flushes over him -- Buford marches over to the sign and pulls it out of the grass, bringing it to his truck.

He tosses it into the bed of his truck before getting in.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL GROUNDS - MINUTES LATER

TEENS wearing backpacks flock in CLIQUES, getting in their hang-out time before the bell rings.

INT. RUSTY PICK-UP TRUCK (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

Buford cruises through, en route to the school's entrance.

His son aimlessly gazes out his window, dreading the day ahead. Until something catches his attention...

Newton straightens his posture, eyes coming to life as they coast past his DREAM GIRL walking with her small CLIQUE of friends...

Everything moves in SLOW MOTION as Newton stares longingly at her. ROMANTIC OLDIES MUSIC playing inside his mind.

As she gossips with her peers, she turns and meets eyes with Newton for just a moment. But, for Newton, the moment lasts forever...

BUFORD (O.S.)
You talking to any girls?

Moment over. The excitement fades from Newton's eyes. Back to stupid reality.

Buford waits for an answer. But Newton's silence is telling.

Finally, they pull up to the front of the school.

Buford narrows his eyes at a small group of 16 year-old PUNKS smoking cigarettes.

STEERING WHEEL - Buford's knuckles tighten around it.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
That boy and his little friends
still picking on you?

The PUNKS feel Buford's tense stare, looking back at he and his son in the car.

They break huddle, tossing their cigarettes and escaping Buford's eyesight, into school.

NEWTON
Not anymore.

He looks to his father, curious.

NEWTON (CONT'D)
What did you say to his dad?

Buford shrugs, side-stepping the question. Unable to look Newton in the eye.

BUFORD
Just long as they ain't picking on
you no more.

Newton nods, thinking to himself. Then quietly leaves, shutting the car door behind him.

Buford curiously watches him mope into school. All alone.

INT. EMPLOYMENT OFFICE - LATER THAT DAY

Desperate to make a good impression, Buford sits uncomfortably across from an authoritative, sharp-dressed African American FEMALE SUPERVISOR in her mid 30s.

She sits behind her desk, poring over Buford's resume.

Her eyes sneak a judgmental glance at him before returning to his resume again.

ON THE RESUME - "Have You Ever Been Convicted of a Crime".
The check box is marked "Yes".

The Female Supervisor slides the resume across her desk, returning it to Buford.

Puzzled, he reluctantly picks up the resume. Not a good sign.

FEMALE SUPERVISOR
Thank you for coming by. If
anything, we'll give you a call.

He fails to accept the obvious rejection.

BUFORD
That's it?

The Female Supervisor shuffles papers.

FEMALE SUPERVISOR
That's it, we're good for today.

A brief, awkward silence. Buford desperate. Agitated.

BUFORD
What's that mean, good?

She stops shuffling papers. Looks across to him, annoyed.

FEMALE SUPERVISOR
It means we'll let you know.

A part of him refuses to accept reality, his desperation reaching DEFCON 5.

BUFORD
I can start right away, that's what
the ad says right? You needed
someone to start ASAP?

The Female Supervisor sighs, very short on patience.

FEMALE SUPERVISOR
Look, we have a long list of
applicants we need to get through,
Mr. Blumpkin. If we like you, we'll
call you. Okay?

Buford just lingers there in defeat.

EXT. MEL'S DINER - AFTERNOON

An old-fashioned diner in the middle of nowhere. Barely any
cars in the parking lot.

INT. MEL'S DINER - LADIES ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Stella opens her mouth in front of the mirror, staring at a
gap where a tooth used to be.

She shuts her mouth, continues gazing at her sad reflection.

After a long, deep breath, her eyes welled up, she forces a
generic, animated smile.

STELLA (V.O.)
Hi, my name's Stella...

INT. MEL'S DINER - CONTINUOUS

The place near-empty, Stella stands over a table in her
apron. Pad and pen ready, she greets her only customer with
that same generic smile.

STELLA
I'll be taking care of you, today.
How are we doing?

Purposely distant, Buford reads over his menu without even
looking up at her.

BUFORD
Oh, I'm just peachy.

STELLA
Can I start you off with something
to drink?

He shoves the menu into her hands.

BUFORD
Chicken fingers. Side of honey
mustard.

Momentarily flustered, she takes the menu from him.

STELLA

Okay. Chicken fingers with a side
of honey mustard.

(a beat)

Anything to drink?

BUFORD

No.

Ill-prepared for his unpleasantness, she holds a tight-lipped smile. Tries to maintain her professionalism.

STELLA

Are you sure I can't get you a
glass of --

BUFORD

(firmly)

I said, no.

He glares up at her, staring daggers.

Confused and offended, Stella studies him for a few moments. But nods, turns and walks away.

KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Stella waits at the food line, out of it. Mind wandering.

The cooks, DONNIE and BO, wannabe frat-boys, both in their early 20s, goof off behind the line, slap-boxing each other.

STELLA

Those chicken fingers almost ready?

Donnie, the Batman to Bo's Robin, looks to Stella with a cocky smirk, chewing gum obnoxiously.

DONNIE

That depends. Is my blowjob almost
ready?

Donnie and Bo high-five each other, enjoying a good laugh.

Matilda comes to the rescue.

MATILDA

Isn't that what your boyfriend
there's for?

Donnie makes a face, gives her the "jerk-off" hand gesture.

STELLA

Can I just get my chicken fingers?

Donnie slides a plate of chicken fingers over to her. As Stella reaches for them, Donnie pulls them away coyly.

DONNIE

What do I get in return?

Stella takes a deep breath, trying hard to keep it together.

STELLA

Not today, Donnie.

She reaches for the chicken fingers again, but Donnie pulls them further away, out of her reach.

With a hazy look in his eyes, he scans every inch of her figure like she were a piece of meat.

DONNIE

Just one night, that's all I'm asking. It'll be fun.

STELLA

Donnie, please...

DONNIE

(smiles)
Please, what?

STELLA

Just, please, give me the chicken fingers before they get cold?

DONNIE

Not until I get some of that chocolate.

She stares daggers into him.

STELLA

If you so much as touch me in a dream, I will cut your dick off and feed it to you. Now stop fucking around and give me my food?

Donnie taunts her with an obnoxious chuckle.

DONNIE

Wow, someone's on their period.
What? You only date your own kind?
(mocks ebonics)
Ain't down with the swirl?

Just as Stella appears as if she's about to snap...

Matilda swoops in.

MATILDA
(to Donnie)
Keep it in your pants, Cosby.

She snatches the chicken fingers and gives them to Stella.

DONNIE
Don't be jealous.

Matilda turns to Stella, concerned.

MATILDA
You okay?

Stella takes a deep breath. Nods. Then turns, walks away.

Matilda scolds Donnie with a look, arms akimbo.

MATILDA (CONT'D)
You ever hear of sexual harassment?

DONNIE
Oh, suck a dick for once in your
life, huh?
(under his breath)
Fucking muff diver...

DINING ROOM

Stella brings Buford his chicken fingers.

As she turns to leave...

BUFORD
Excuse me?

She stops. Slowly turns and faces him.

He points to his plate.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
Forgetting something?

Stella doesn't catch on, her mind not all there.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
Honey mustard?

She forces a smile.

STELLA
Coming right up.

Turns, continues to the kitchen.

KITCHEN

Stella retrieves a platter from the food line, heads back to the dining room.

But as she reaches the double-doors...

Donnie flings a tater-tot at her rear end, both he and Bo holding in laughter.

Stella freezes. A stoic look on her face barely hiding the rage slowly boiling to the surface.

But she takes a deep, angry breath. And continues on.

DINING ROOM

Stella exits the kitchen, making a beeline right past an annoyed Buford, carrying her tray to another table.

Losing his patience, Buford waits for her to return as she heads back his way.

But, again, Stella completely ghosts him.

BUFORD
My honey mustard?

She disappears into the kitchen without acknowledging him.

KITCHEN

Stella approaches the food line again.

STELLA
Can I get a side of honey mustard,
please?

DONNIE
(sarcastically)
Why, anything for my Nubian
princess.

He slides a souffle dish of honey mustard hard across the food line, at Stella...

THE SOUFFLE DISH - Like a shuffleboard puck, it skids towards her until hitting her smack-dab in the pelvic area, causing it to splash honey mustard onto her uniform.

Like a shell-shocked, wounded war vet, she touches the mess on her uniform. Then looks to the honey mustard on her fingers as if it were blood.

HER PANICKED EYES - Leave her mustard-covered fingertips, looking across the line --

Oscar stands in Donnie's place, grinning at her, the knife lodged into his throat.

Stella shuts her eyes. Then opens them again --

Donnie and Bo stare at her with puzzled expressions.

DONNIE (CONT'D)
Relax. It's just honey mustard.

Her wits crumbling, Stella storms off in a panic.

She passes a glass case on the wall with an ax inside, a sign reading "Break Glass in Case of Emergency".

DINING ROOM

Stella hurries through, struggling to keep it together.

Just as she passes Buford's table --

He grabs her by the wrist, forcing her to a halt.

BUFORD
(firmly)
Excuse me.

A ticking time-bomb at this point, Stella turns and looks to Buford's hand as if it were Oscar's.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
I've asked nicely, several times now. And I'm starting to get the feeling that you're trying to ignore me.

Her panic fades, now bristling with anger.

She violently pulls her hand away from his grasp, giving him a look that could peel skin.

STELLA
Touch me again, asshole, and I promise, it'll be the last thing you ever do. Cross my heart.

Stunned speechless, Buford appears threatened as she stares him down like a mountain lion stalking its prey.

A tense silence until...

She walks away from him in a huff.

EXT. QUIET RURAL NEIGHBORHOOD - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

TELEPHONE POLE - Someone staples a homemade "Missing" flier onto its wooden, splintered surface. A photo of a teenaged girl on it.

A GRIEVING MOTHER, middle-aged and haggard, shuffles on while cradling a pile of fliers in her arm.

Dark circles under her eyes, as if she hadn't slept in days, she continues down the sidewalk.

She stops at a mailbox and stuffs a flier inside.

The Grieving Mother shuts the mailbox and continues to the next house...

EXT. STELLA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

As she shambles her way to the mailbox at the curb...

Stella's front door opens in the background, behind her.

Oscar emerges from the house, crawling his way out, knife still lodged in his throat.

He continues crawling towards her, reaching his hand out for her, leaving a trail of blood leaking from his throat.

The Grieving Mother's back still turned to him, she opens Stella's mailbox and stuffs a flier inside.

She turns. Freezes.

Oscar, almost at her feet, gradually slides the knife from out of his throat...

A splash of blood smacks the concrete as he gets the knife all the way out.

The Grieving Mother shrieks in horror, dropping the pile of pamphlets onto the ground and running.

Desperately reaching for her, Oscar finally drops flat to his chest. Letting out one final, garbled gasp.

Dead. For real this time.

His lifeless eyes frozen open, a gust of wind blows the pamphlets everywhere.

INT. MEL'S DINER - DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Buford sneers up at the smart-alecky manager, CHAD, late 20s, wearing his "MANAGER" name-tag like a sheriff's badge.

CHAD

What seems to be the problem?

BUFORD

Your waitress is the fucking problem...

CHAD

Whoa, hey, sir... I understand you're upset. But there's no need for that kind of language in here, okay? I'm a Christian.

Buford takes a long, deep, seething breath.

BUFORD

(reads name tag)

Listen, Chad. You can read, right?

Buford shows Chad the KID'S MENU and points to the CHICKEN FINGERS where its says "HONEY MUSTARD".

BUFORD (CONT'D)

What's that say?

Chad lets out an exasperated sigh.

BUFORD (CONT'D)

Honey mustard. It says right here that the chicken fingers come with HONEY. MUSTARD.

Motions to his plate.

BUFORD (CONT'D)

Do you see any honey mustard?

Chad looks down at Buford's empty plate - not a crumb left.

CHAD

Looks like you did just fine without it.

Buford beholds Chad with a blisteringly, disquieting gaze. An unsettling calmness to him.

BUFORD

(measured)

Listen, I've had a very, very bad day. All I wanted was honey mustard with my chicken fingers.

Drunk with authority, Chad just crosses his arms firmly.

CHAD

Well, sir, what exactly would you like for me to do?

Buford's steady, serpent-eyed gaze makes Chad uneasy. The taut, overlong silence piercing through Chad's ego...

But Buford breaks eye contact, the tension diffused.

BUFORD

Just bring me the check.

Once again in control, Chad's confidence returns. Another victory in his win column, he smiles churlishly.

CHAD

Be back in a jiff.

And he leaves. Buford left with yet another defeat.

EXT. MEL'S DINER - CONTINUOUS

Stella, out of it, smokes a cigarette out front again. Streaming tears juxtaposed against her vacant expression.

Behind her - Chad pokes his head out the entrance door.

CHAD

Stella?

He steps out, Stella not reacting. Her mind astray.

CHAD (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, did I say you could take a smoke break?

Exhaling smoke, she looks back at him with a dark expression.

CHAD (CONT'D)

I just had to listen to your dickhead table carry on about honey mustard for the past five minutes.

Stella only stares at him, completely numb. Her absence of emotion quite unsettling.

STELLA

I'm having a really... really bad day.

CHAD

I don't give a good fuck what kinda day you're having. We've had enough shit Yelp reviews this week, okay? One more, your ass is fired.

(mocking Ebonics)

You feel me?

He storms back inside.

Stella's empty gaze lingers on the door long after Chad's agitated return inside. Her already-fragile sanity crumbling more and more...

OSCAR (O.S.)

You know what you oughtta do?

She turns, looks across to --

Oscar smiling at her deviously. That proverbial devil on her shoulder. Knife still lodged in his imaginary throat, cop uniform drenched in blood.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

You oughtta just march right in there...

He pulls the knife out of his throat with ease. No pain.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

... And stick this knife right in his fucking throat.

Stella just stares at him, in a trance.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Might as well just... kill them all. What do you have to lose? Only a matter of time before they find me and throw your black ass in jail for the rest of your shit life.

(a beat)

What exactly was the plan? Just leave me there to rot and go about your day like nothing happened?

Oscar studies her as if reading her mind.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
 Self defense? Is that what you're
 thinking?

Oscar chuckles mischievously, shaking his head at her.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
 You think anybody's gonna believe
 some poor, black girl with a
 history of mental illness? Not only
 did you leave the scene of a
 crime... but you had a motive.

Stella turns, glances into the diner's windows and catches a
 glimpse of Matilda carrying a tray to a table.

She turns, slowly faces Oscar again.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
 You really are out of your fucking
 mind, aren't you?

With a twisted, grotesque shit-grin, Oscar's evil chuckle
 becomes maniacal, hysterical laughter...

Until he stops abruptly. No longer smiling. Just staring at
 her, dead serious.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
 Kill them all.

INT. MEL'S DINER - DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Stella picks up Buford's bill fold at his empty seat. She
 opens it --

CREDIT CARD RECEIPT - Instead of a number on the tip-line,
 "Honey Mustard" is written on it.

Just about at her breaking point, sanity further and further
 into her rearview...

Something captures her attention -- a wallet wedged into the
 crack of the seat.

Curious, Stella digs it out and opens it -- Buford's ID.

She looks closer, at his name -- "Buford Blumpkin".

In the background, Oscar comes into focus. Watching over her.
 Driving her over the edge.

FRONT ENTRANCE

Stella watches as Buford storms his way out, passing the host's stand.

She pockets the wallet into her apron.

STELLA
Have an amazing day.

Buford stops at the front door. For just a moment. The sarcastic comment immediately eating at him.

But he takes a deep breath and continues out the door.

Stella continues to watch him leave. Her mind in a very, very dark place...

OSCAR (O.S.)
Are you gonna be okay?

A hand sets down on her shoulder from behind --

Startled, Stella whips around, slapping the hand away --

But it's only Matilda. Disheartened and disturbed, she storms off, away from Stella.

Expression blank, Stella only stares off. Then slowly turns, looking to the front door again.

Chad appears in the background, hands on his hips.

CHAD
Stella? Do you WANT to get fired?
(a beat)
Get back to work.

Shaking his head, Chad leaves frame.

STELLA'S FACE - Catatonic. An eerie blankness as she stares off, dark thoughts consuming her already-shattered psyche.

EXT. QUIET RURAL NEIGHBORHOOD - CONTINUOUS

A crime scene -- AMBULANCES and POLICE CARS flood the block, most of the traffic crowded in front of Stella's house.

A POLICE SUV darts onto the scene, screeching to a halt and whipping hard into parking position.

The decal on the side of the SUV reads - "Keaufax County Sheriff".

SHERIFF'S SUV - The driver's side door swings open, SHERIFF DICK HARDLEY stepping out. In his early 50s, he sports slick aviator shades and a ten-gallon, shit-kicker cowboy hat.

HIS BADGE - Reads "Sheriff Dick Hardley".

Sunshine sparkles off his aviators as he saunters his way towards the edge of...

STELLA'S PROPERTY

At the end of the driveway.

Sheriff Hardley stands over Oscar's sheet-covered body, blood puddles branching out from under it.

He removes his shades, revealing cold and piercing eyes.

DEPUTY ROY, mid 30s bumbling sidekick, joins his side, shaking his head at the grotesque scene.

DEPUTY ROY

No call, no show... figured he had himself another one of them benders.

SHERIFF HARDLEY

Well, that certainly doesn't appear to be the case, Deputy Roy.

He peels the sheet up high enough to catch a glimpse of Oscar's bloodied face.

Making a sour face, Deputy Roy looks away in disgust.

DEPUTY ROY

Damn it to hell, that shit just grosses me right out, Sheriff.

Lying the sheet back down over Oscar's frozen, lifeless face, Sheriff Hardley gets a little blood on his hand.

Not fazed, he wipes the blood off on the sheet.

But he notices one of the "Missing" fliers on the ground.

Standing up straight, he picks it up. Gives it a once over. Then stuffs it into his pocket.

INT. STELLA'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Trailing in from the next room, a streak of blood spatter decorates the floor like a Jackson Pollack painting.

Sheriff Hardley casually follows the crimson trail into the room. Deputy Roy shadows him, cautiously tiptoeing around it.

DEPUTY ROY

No signs of a break-in, doesn't seem like anything is missing...

They stop, beholding the mess.

DEPUTY ROY (CONT'D)

All signs point to his wife.

SHERIFF HARDLEY

Makes sense, I suppose. He probably had it coming.

He turns, faces Deputy Roy.

SHERIFF HARDLEY (CONT'D)

Any word on her whereabouts?

DEPUTY ROY

I imagine she's a long ways from here. If it were me, I'd be halfway to Mexico by now.

SHERIFF HARDLEY

Couldn't hurt to pay the diner a visit, see if anybody knows anything.

DEPUTY ROY

Why don't you just call Matilda?

With an exasperated breath, Sheriff Hardley gives his counterpart a stern look - clearly a hot-button topic.

SHERIFF HARDLEY

We don't talk.

Deputy Roy nods, sort of catching on.

EXT. MEL'S DINER - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Brusquely pulling into the parking lot, Sheriff Hardley's SUV SCREECHES suddenly to a halt --

Stepping out immediately, Sheriff Hardley removes his sunglasses, revealing a horrified expression --

The manager of the diner, Chad, lies face down over a massive puddle of blood just outside the entrance.

Deputy Roy pulls up, darting out of his vehicle, urgently jumping onto his radio.

DEPUTY ROY

This is Deputy Roy, we have a code 18 at Mel's Diner, we need back-up immediately! I repeat, we have a code 18 at Mel's Diner!

Sheriff Hardley's forboding eyes leave Chad's body, looking to the restaurant's front entrance.

He draws his massive .357 Magnum. And starts towards the diner with slight apprehension.

DEPUTY ROY (CONT'D)

I think it's best we wait for back-up to arrive, Sheriff.

But the Sheriff doesn't listen, making his way inside.

DEPUTY ROY (CONT'D)

(under his breath)

Damn it!

He draws his firearm, follows in after him.

INT. MEL'S DINER - FRONT ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Hardley kicks in the front door, cautiously scanning the perimeter with his hand-cannon.

An eerie hush as he slowly moves past the host's stand, Deputy Roy covering him, firearm drawn.

DEPUTY ROY

Back-up should be here any minute now, Sheriff...

SHERIFF HARDLEY

(firmly)

Cover me.

DINING ROOM

A drawn out, deafening silence as the two continue through, moving past a booth where an ELDERLY MAN sits slumped over his table, blood leaking from his forehead...

Then passing an ELDERLY WOMAN dead on the floor...

Sheriff Hardley keeps his sights ahead, Deputy Roy surveying the perimeter with his firearm pointed.

SHERIFF HARDLEY (CONT'D)

Hello?

Silence.

SHERIFF HARDLEY (CONT'D)

This is Sheriff Hardley with the
Keaufax County Sheriff's
department...

He stops. Freezes.

Then lowers his weapon, a quiet devastation in his eyes as he catches something in his sights ahead. Hoping it's not what he thinks it is --

Something keeps the kitchen doors opened - a body.

Sheriff Hardley hurries over with a panicked gait, a grief-stricken Deputy Roy already sensing who the body belongs to.

KITCHEN

Matilda lies dead in the doorway, her motionless body keeping the doors open. Blood soaking through her yellow uniform, her eyes still open.

Sheriff Hardley kneels by her side, tears in his eyes.

SHERIFF HARDLEY (CONT'D)

(voice trembling)

Matilda...

Deputy Roy lowers his firearm, his expression downcast.

DEPUTY ROY

I'm so sorry, Sheriff.

DOORS BURST OPEN from the front of the diner!

Alert, Deputy Roy points his weapon -- but it's just TWO OFFICERS entering with their guns drawn.

SHERIFF HARDLEY - Gently places his hand over Matilda's eyes, closing them.

Deputy Roy scopes out the rest of the kitchen...

And stops in his tracks, finding the mutilated corpses of Donnie and Bo on the floor, their heads merely piles of meat.

His stomach churning, Deputy Roy's cheeks puff out. He hurries to a nearby sink and spews vomit.

TWO OFFICERS enter, guns still drawn.

OFFICER #1
Everyone's dead.

Sheriff Hardley stands to his feet. He conceals his tear-filled eyes, placing his aviators back on.

SHERIFF HARDLEY
Her car's not in the parking lot.

Deputy Roy wipes vomit from his mouth, taking deep breaths. Bent over, he looks to Sheriff Hardley.

DEPUTY ROY
What's that, Sheriff?

Sheriff Hardley turns, faces the Deputy.

SHERIFF HARDLEY
My daughter drives a yellow Toyota Corolla. Fucking thing sticks out like a sore thumb, you can't miss it. And it's not here.

Clueless, Deputy Roy only shrugs. No answers.

Looking past him, Sheriff Hardley sees something that draws his attention -- the shattered glass case, ax missing.

But he walks up to a punch-in clock on the wall next to it.

He looks over a few time cards. Leans in for a closer look, grabbing one off the wall.

TIME CARD - The name at the top reads "Stella Ray".

SHERIFF HARDLEY (CONT'D)
Deputy Roy? Put out an APB on a colored woman driving a mustard-colored Toyota Corolla?

Trying to get the rest of the vomit off his mouth, Deputy Roy takes out his radio, about to speak into it.

But he stops. Looks to Sheriff Hardley.

DEPUTY ROY
Do I have to say colored?

Impatient, Sheriff Hardley turns to him.

SHERIFF HARDLEY
Whatever you feel best describes my
daughter's vehicle, Deputy.

EXT. BUFORD'S HOUSE - EVENING

Just after sunset.

Buford's RUSTY PICK-UP TRUCK pulls in, crunching over the gravel driveway.

INT. RUSTY PICK-UP TRUCK (PARKED) - CONTINUOUS

Buford shuts off the engine and kills the lights.

He takes a deep breath. Looks to his reflection. But he notices something through the mirror. Behind him.

Adjusting the mirror for a better look, all he can see is darkness behind him.

He turns his head, looking back. Staring off into darkness enveloping the stretch of woods.

Buford ponders to himself - *Did I just see something?*

His watchful eyes continue to carefully scan the woods edging his property...

Silence...

Buford takes a breath, shaking it off - *Probably nothing.*

INT. BUFORD'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Buford enters, setting his keys on the counter as Newton and Gertrude sit silently at the table.

The mood unusually quiet, Buford turns to them, curious.

BUFORD
What's going on?

NEWTON'S FACE - A bruise around his eye.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
Jesus Christ, what happened?

Buford gets in close for a better look, touching his face.

GERTRUDE

He got into a fight at school.

He looks Newton dead in the eye.

BUFORD

Was it that boy again?

Newton looks to Gertrude, who nods at him - *Tell the truth.*

Taking a deep breath, Newton turns to his father, avoiding eye contact.

NEWTON

No.

GERTRUDE

It was a girl.

BUFORD

What?

He looks to Newton again, waiting for an explanation.

NEWTON

I asked out a girl from school. And she said, no.

Buford waits for him to continue...

BUFORD

Okay, so?

NEWTON

She laughed at me. They ALL laughed at me. So, I pushed her. And then she hit me.

His rueful eyes look across to his father. Ashamed. In tears.

NEWTON (CONT'D)

So... I hit her back.

A beat.

GERTRUDE

The principal wants him expelled.

BUFORD

Jesus Christ, Newton, you can't just hit people because they don't like you!

Newton scowls at his father.

NEWTON
Why not? You do.

Buford and Gertrude trade a furtive glance.

INT. BUFORD'S HALLWAY - LATER THAT NIGHT

Just outside of Newton's bedroom, Gertrude and Buford have a heated discussion.

GERTRUDE
(whispers)
He broke her God damn jaw, Buford!

BUFORD
I know, I know, I'll talk to him...

GERTRUDE
Her parents wanna sue us. We can't afford that shit right now.

Buford sighs. Looks into Newton's room, the door cracked open, Newton in bed.

INT. NEWTON'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Sitting at the edge of the bed, Buford has a father-son, heart-to-heart with his boy.

BUFORD
Look... I know where you get that temper from. I know what that anger feels like. To be humiliated. Sometimes, it makes you wanna hurt people. Do bad things to them. But you still got a lot of good left in you, you understand? You're not like me. You're not even like your mother. You're better than that.

(a beat)

I don't want you living like this, okay? No matter how angry you get, no matter how loud that little voice inside your head gets... you can NOT let it take over. You understand?

Newton lowers his eyes. Nods.

EXT. BUFORD'S FRONT PORCH - LATER THAT NIGHT

An eerie silence lingers in the still night as Buford smokes a cigarette on his front porch, staring off into the dark, endless stretch of woods.

On edge, Buford keeps a close watch. As if he sensed something amiss. As if it were almost... too quiet.

INT. BUFORD'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Buford heads back into the house, making it a point to lock the door. Pulling on the knob just to be sure.

He looks to Gertrude, at the computer. Standing behind her, he looks to the screen -- PHOTOS of TWO GIRLS.

BUFORD

About ready to turn in?

She turns, looking up at him, overjoyed. Excited.

GERTRUDE

I think we found a buyer.

BUFORD

Really?

With a delighted smile, she nods.

Buford leans in closer to the computer screen.

BUFORD (CONT'D)

How much we talking about here?

GERTRUDE

Enough. More than enough.

She can barely hold back her excitement.

BUFORD

So, we don't have to sell the house? Right...?

Her excitement fades.

GERTRUDE

I was thinking...

Buford's expression falls.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)

Maybe it'd be nice if we could find something else, you know? Something nicer. Another town, maybe? Another state? Country?

He sits down, ambivalent look on his face.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)

I know this house means a lot to you. But I really think a change of scenery might be the best thing, right now. For Newton. For us.

Conflicted, Buford thinks it over. Considering it.

The SOUND of GRAVEL CRUNCHING from outside captures his attention, distracting his thoughts.

He stands up, drawing closer to the window.

Pulling the curtains open, he peers out --

A CAR pulls in, onto his property.

Its make and model indiscernible at first, the CAR eventually makes a turn -- a YELLOW TOYOTA COROLLA.

The vehicle just sits there ominously. ENGINE RATTLING. Its headlights cutting through a foggy mist.

Gertrude joins Buford's side, concerned as she looks out.

After a few moments...

The YELLOW TOYOTA COROLLA turns, pulls out...

Leaving the property and disappearing back into the woods.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)

Who was that?

His temperament guarded, Buford watches the vehicle's rear lights disappear into the darkness.

BUFORD

Probably just lost.

INT. BUFORD'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Gertrude lies asleep under the covers.

Barely awake, Buford aimlessly stares at his television screen, a blue hue flickering off his tired face.

FEMALE NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)
 (from the television)
 I'm standing in front of Mel's
 Diner in the small, rural town of
 Keaufax where six people were found
 brutally murdered earlier today...

Interest suddenly piqued, he rustles himself to attention, sitting up. Intrigued.

ON TELEVISION--

A FEMALE NEWS REPORTER stands in front of MEL'S DINER, speaking on camera, using a microphone.

FEMALE NEWS REPORTER
 The police are still on the lookout
 for 25-year-old Stella Ray...

Stella's photo appears on the screen.

FEMALE NEWS REPORTER (CONT'D)
 ... Whom authorities have narrowed
 down as their main suspect. A
 Keaufax resident and waitress at
 Mel's Diner, police say it's likely
 that the African American woman was
 also responsible for the murder of
 her husband, Oscar Goode...

A wedding photo of Oscar and Stella together appears on screen, Oscar smiling, Stella looking way, less enthusiastic.

FEMALE NEWS REPORTER (CONT'D)
 ... A Keaufax County police
 officer.

--BACK TO SCENE

His nerves rattled, Buford continues to watch. Stunned.

FEMALE NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)
 (from the television)
 Authorities believe she may be
 driving a yellow, 1977 Toyota
 Corolla with the plate number --

CLICK. Buford shuts the television off. But continues to stare at the black screen. Staggered.

He looks to his window, sees it open.

Quiet as a church mouse, Buford tiptoes out of bed, to the opened window. And shuts it.

He peers out the window, overlooking his property, into the still, dark night.

INT. NEWTON'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

CREAK. The door slowly opens.

Buford quietly pokes his head in, sees Newton asleep, a heap hidden beneath bedsheets.

After a few moments, Buford shuts the door.

EXT. BUFORD'S FRONT PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Buford smokes a cigarette while watching over his property.

He senses something off. Thinking back...

INT. MEL'S DINER - EARLIER THAT DAY (FLASHBACK)

Stella pulls her wrist away from Buford sitting at his table.

STELLA

Touch me again, asshole, and I
promise, it'll be the last thing
you ever do. Cross my heart.

EXT. BUFORD'S FRONT PORCH - NIGHT (BACK TO PRESENT TIME)

Buford continues to think back while smoking his cigarette.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)

Authorities believe she may be
driving a yellow, 1977 Toyota
Corolla...

INT. BUFORD'S LIVING ROOM - EARLIER THAT NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Buford and his wife watch the YELLOW TOYOTA COROLLA leaving their property, disappearing into the woods.

GERTRUDE

Who was that?

BUFORD

Probably just lost.

EXT. BUFORD'S PORCH - NIGHT (BACK TO PRESENT TIME)

On edge, Buford tosses his cigarette. He gives his property another long, meticulous look...

An eerie silence...

Buford turns. Faces his door. Glancing back at his property cautiously as he reaches to his doorknob.

But he draws his hand back, turning forward, facing the door.

He brings his hand closer to his face -- a yellow substance covers his fingers.

Bemused, he gives it a sniff. Another sniff. Then licks it.

His eyes widen in terror as they look to the door itself --

Written across his door in the yellow substance:

HONEY MUSTARD

Buford whips around in a sudden panic, on high alert.

His frantic eyes scan the property scrupulously, surveying every inch.

Bated breath... silence...

POP! A GUNSHOT rings out, just missing Buford, nailing the siding of the his house!

Buford ducks when --

POP! He catches a bullet right above the knee!

He drops to his rear, clutching his wound...

BUFORD

Fuck!

Adrenaline pumping, he gets to his feet, hurrying back into the house --

INT. BUFORD'S LIVING ROOM - FRONT DOOR - CONTINUOUS

Frantic, Buford immediately locks the door, catching his breath, suddenly glazed in sweat.

He looks down at his bloody leg wound, hand trembling as he gingerly touches it -- he lets out a painful bellow.

Gritting his teeth, he hobbles to the door's peephole and looks out... bated breaths...

Then backs away from the door.

Buford hobbles to his window and peeks out from between his curtains, looking to his RUSTY PICK-UP TRUCK in the driveway.

INT. RUSTY PICK-UP TRUCK (PARKED) - CONTINUOUS

X-RAY SHOT: Looking right through the glove compartment where a pistol sits.

INT. BUFORD'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

As Buford stares out at his RUSTY PICK-UP TRUCK:

BUFORD

Shit.

INT. BUFORD'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Buford yanks a drawer open, pulling out a sharp kitchen knife. He turns, immediately startled --

Gertrude, in her robe, stands in front of him, worried.

GERTRUDE

What's going on?

She flicks the light on -- sees Buford bleeding leg.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)

Oh, my God!

Concerned, she reaches out to touch it -- Buford quickly slaps her hand away.

BUFORD

(urgent)

I need to you get Newton and take him to the basement.

Gertrude can't look away from his leg, blood dripping down his shin and over the bridge of his foot.

He pounds his fist on the counter to get her attention.

She looks up at him, spooked.

BUFORD (CONT'D)

Now!

GERTRUDE

What the fuck is going on?

Buford looks around the kitchen, jittery. Heart pounding.

BUFORD

There's somebody outside...

Shutting the window above the sink and locking it, he closes the curtains shut.

GERTRUDE

Who?

Buford turns, faces his wife.

BUFORD

A waitress. And I'm pretty sure she wasn't aiming for my leg.

GERTRUDE

A waitress?

BUFORD

I was at a diner earlier and there was this waitress...

GERTRUDE

What in God's fucking name does ANY of that gotta do with this?

A beat.

BUFORD

I may or may have not pissed her off a little bit.

GERTRUDE

What did you do?

Still catching his breath, Buford isn't sure how to put it.

BUFORD

I didn't tip her.

Gertrude narrows her eyes at him, perplexed.

GERTRUDE

You're telling me there's a
waitress outside, trying to kill
you... because you didn't tip her?

He can't come up with a better way to word it.

BUFORD

Pretty much, yeah.

GERTRUDE

Why didn't you tip her?

BUFORD

What?

GERTRUDE

You always tip the waitress!

He narrows his eyes at her, incredulous.

BUFORD

She's TRYING to kill us.

GERTRUDE

Well, God damn, Buford, she
wouldn't be here if you'd left a
fucking tip. Maybe if you leave her
a couple bucks on the doorstep,
she'll leave.

Beside himself, Buford clutches his leg wound again, gritting his teeth in pain.

BUFORD

I doubt leaving her a tip at this
point is gonna make her happy.
(urgent, catching breath)
Now get Newton and take him to the
basement, please.

Gertrude nod, turns. But before she leaves the room, she turns back with a wary expression.

GERTRUDE

Are you sure bringing him down
there's a good idea?

Buford thinks about it, not so sure. But there's no other choice right now.

BUFORD

It's the safest place in the house.

Not fully convinced, Gertrude nods, leaves the kitchen.

Still out of breath, Buford hobbles backward, leaning up against the kitchen counter.

He grabs a towel, wraps it around his leg and ties a knot. Tightening it, he gives it hard jerk --

BUFORD (CONT'D)
Motherfucker!

He runs the sink and hydrates, his mouth to the faucet.

INT. NEWTON'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Gertrude hurries in.

GERTRUDE
(whispers)
Newton, baby? We gotta wake up...

She shakes the pile under the covers - something feels off.

Disturbed, she yanks the covers off, revealing only pillows piled up underneath.

Horrified, she turns, looks around.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)
Newton?

Then hurries out of the room.

BEDROOM WINDOW - A gust of wind gently blows apart the curtains, the window wide open.

INT. BUFORD'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ducked low, Buford peeks out through his curtains again and scans the front of his property, knife in hand.

Gertrude hurries in, from the kitchen.

GERTRUDE
He's not in his room.

Buford turns, looks back at her, bewildered.

BUFORD
What do you mean, he's not in his fucking room?

And then it hits him - a realization.

INT. BUFORD'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

BASEMENT DOOR - Buford and Gertrude stand in front of it, trading a foreboding glance.

GERTRUDE

You know how teenagers are, maybe he snuck out.

BUFORD

For what? He ain't got no friends to sneak out to.

Buford places his hand on the knob...

BUFORD (CONT'D)

Told that boy a million fucking times not to go down there...

As he's about to turn the knob, a motion-sensor light illuminates from the backyard, through the window's thin curtains --

Gertrude looks back just as --

A FIGURE passes the kitchen window.

With a frightened gasp, she squeezes Buford's shoulder, pointing to the window.

GERTRUDE

(whispers)

She's in the backyard.

Buford turns, looking to the window.

Something dawning on him suddenly, he urgently brushes past Gertrude, snatching his keys off the kitchen counter.

LIVING ROOM

Buford speed-hobbles to the front door, Gertrude following him, trying to keep up...

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

BUFORD

My gun's in the car.

GERTRUDE

You can't go out there!

Stopping at the door, he turns and faces her.

BUFORD

Stay by the door, do NOT open it
unless I say so.

Buford forces the handle of the kitchen knife into her palm.

BUFORD (CONT'D)

Lock it.

And he leaves, shutting the door in her face.

EXT. BUFORD'S FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Buford sprints across his lawn, his running FOOTSTEPS
CRUNCHING across the gravel as he races to his PICK-UP TRUCK.

INT. RUSTY PICK-UP TRUCK (PARKED) - CONTINUOUS

He hops in, jerking the glove compartment open, rummaging
through it frantically...

His eyes light up -- he pulls out his pistol. Relieved.

POP! The passenger's side window explodes, shards of glass
blasting into him.

Buford ducks -- POP! Another SHOT DINGS off the side of the
pick-up truck.

POP! Another window shatters.

Buford suddenly falls into a trance -- the sound draining
out. A muffled GUNSHOT blows out another window, glass shards
shattering onto the top of his head.

HIS FACE - Fear suddenly absent from his eyes, a quiet rage
simmers to the surface, reaching a boiling point. It's almost
as if he's transforming into another person. His aura glowing
fire-engine red...

He lets out a ferocious, animalistic war cry!

EXT. BUFORD'S FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

With no regard for human life, including his own, he leaves
his RUSTY PICK-UP TRUCK...

POP! Another GUNSHOT just misses him and DINGS off the side of his vehicle...

On autopilot, he moves towards the GUNFIRE --

POP! A GUNSHOT wings Buford's shoulder, but he continues forward as if he didn't feel it.

He raises his pistol -- BOOM-BOOM-BOOM! Unleashing a hail of bullets at everything in his path.

Silence.

Buford stops. His dark, soulless eyes scanning the treeline.

SCAMPERING FOOTSTEPS from the brush -- a yellow flash sprints across the lawn, disappearing around the side of the house.

BOOM! BOOM! Buford FIRES TWO MORE SHOTS.

Another hush.

Buford circles around to the...

SIDE OF HIS HOUSE

Rounding the corner. A man possessed. No longer the victim.

His pistol covers a lot of ground, pointing it at everything in his vantage point...

But he stops. Crouches down. Finds Stella's gun. Empty.

SNAP!

Buford stands straight, alert. He turns, looks to the side of his house --

Stella watches from Newton's window, inside the house. Gives Buford an evil smile while cradling an ax.

And she disappears, further into the house.

His eyes fluttering, Buford snaps out of his trance, the unfeeling killing machine gone for the moment.

Reality hits him.

BUFORD

Gertrude!

FRONT PORCH

Hobbling, he races as fast as he can to his front door, frantically trying to open it --

Locked - *Shit!*

He pounds his palm against the door frantically.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
GERTRUDE!!!

No response, Buford has to act quick.

He steps back. Points his pistol at his doorknob --

But the door swings open, Gertrude at the doorway.

Relieved for the moment, Buford hurries inside, Gertrude following behind him.

INT. BUFORD'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

He slams the door shut.

BUFORD
I told you to open the fucking door!

GERTRUDE
I heard a noise, I'm sorry.

He gets in front of her, keeping her back while pointing his pistol firmly ahead. Moving through the room.

BUFORD
She's in the house.

GERTRUDE
What?

BUFORD
Newton must've left his window open, I saw her in his room.

Confused, she shakes her head.

GERTRUDE
Are you sure? I was just in there.

He leads the way, moving cautiously into the...

KITCHEN

Pistol pointed firmly.

BUFORD
Any sign of Newton?

His eyes focused ahead.

GERTRUDE
I was calling for him, but no.

They creep closer to the dark hallway leading to their rooms.

BUFORD
Did you check the basement?

GERTRUDE
No, I didn't get the chance. I
heard a noise, thought he was in
his room again.

Gertrude notices the fresh wound to his shoulder. She touches it gently, careworn expression on her face.

BUFORD
It's a flesh wound, I'll be fine.

HALLWAY

He keeps his shoulder hugged to the wall as he points his weapon securely, making sure the coast is clear.

They continue forward, Gertrude behind him.

Silence.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
I know you're in here. And I know
you're all out of bullets.

Gertrude sticks close behind him as he continues to move cautiously forward.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
Might as well just come out.

He turns, kicks open Newton's bedroom --

Empty. So it seems.

Buford shuts the door. His attention turning to the bathroom across the hall.

He creeps up... slowly...

BATHROOM

And kicks the door open. Flicks the light on.

Clear.

About to move on to the next room, Buford stops. Turns and faces the bathroom again. His eyes locked in on the shower curtain closing off the tub.

With his pistol, he opens the curtain --

Empty.

HALLWAY

Buford keeps Gertrude behind him as he peeks out from the bathroom, looking both ways.

The coast clear, he and Gertrude continue towards their bedroom at the end of the hall -- their door closed.

BUFORD (CONT'D)

Was that closed before?

Her mind clouded with fear, she shakes her head.

GERTRUDE

I don't know. I don't remember.

They continue forward, towards their bedroom...

One... step...

At a time... getting closer...

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)

(blurts out)

I'm sorry he didn't tip you!

Buford glares back at her - *Shush!*

His attention fixed on his bedroom door again, they near closer... and closer...

His hand slowly reaching for the knob...

A PITTER-PATTERING of swift-moving FOOTSTEPS behind them stops him from opening the door.

He whips around, his weapon trained towards the opposite end of the hallway.

Leading the way, Buford keeps the pistol pointed ahead.

He slows his pace, looking down at the floor -- a trail of bloody shoe prints lead back to the kitchen.

BUFORD
Oh, I got you now...

KITCHEN

Shoulder hugged to the wall, Buford peeks around the corner, keeping stiff aim.

GERTRUDE
Maybe if we just tell her to leave?

Buford continues to follow the trail of bloody shoe-prints decorating the floor...

Stopping at the basement. The door closed.

BUFORD
She ain't going nowhere.

He nudges Gertrude back, urging her to move back further.

Nerves shattered, she looks on. Backing away. Frozen with anticipation.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
(delayed)
Might as well just come out. You're trapped... ain't nowhere to go.

No response, Buford opens the basement door, immediately pointing his weapon inside and flicking on the light --

But he looks down -- a pair of shoes sit on the top step.

Confounded, he turns and looks to Gertrude, who stands at the edge of the hallway watching. Petrified.

Looks to the shoes again, shutting the door...

Gertrude's eyes widen in terror, looking past Buford as he continues shutting the door --

Revealing Stella, looming behind him, gripping an ax, paper towels stuck to her blood-covered jaw.

GERTRUDE
BUFORD!!!

Just as he glances back --

THWACK! She smashes the ax into his back, driving him to the floor -- He lets out a roaring bellow!

His pistol slides across the floor...

Gertrude drops to her knees, shrieking. There's nothing she can do but watch.

Standing over Buford, Stella yanks the ax out, drawing another painful roar.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)
(crying hysterically)
Please! Stop!

Stella raises the ax into the air again, about to perform the final death blow...

But Gertrude reaches onto the counter, hand trembling, Stella looking on curiously.

Gertrude grabs a few wrinkled dollar bills off the edge of the counter.

Hand shaking, Gertrude, on her knees, offers the cash.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)
Please...

Tosses the money onto the floor, towards Stella.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)
Just... take it and leave...

Stella glares at the cash indignantly. Then at Gertrude.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)
I know it's not much...

STELLA
(speech impaired)
You think this is about fucking
money?

She glowers down at Buford. Shakes her head.

STELLA (CONT'D)
You have no idea, do you?

With her foot, she nudges Buford, rolling him to his back.

STELLA (CONT'D)
You see, Buford here has been a
very, very bad boy.

Buford licks his parched lips. Takes a few labored breaths. Then looks up at Stella, the end nigh.

 BUFORD
 You... you're supposed to be
 dead...

CUT TO BLACK:

OVER BLACK--

EARLIER THAT DAY

FADE IN:

EXT. MEL'S DINER - DAY

The parking lot near empty. Buford's RUSTY PICK-UP TRUCK parked near the back. The YELLOW TOYOTA COROLLA parked closer to the front.

INT. MEL'S DINER - FRONT ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

As Buford makes his way out the door...

 STELLA (O.S.)
 Have an amazing day.

He stops at the door.

HIS FACE - Eyes suddenly cold. Distant. Tension simmering, his inner-rage reaching its boiling point. His aura glowing beet red, like a fire siren.

Stella's figure is OUT OF FOCUS in the background as Buford falls under his psychotic trance...

Buford leaves, out the door.

EXT. MEL'S DINER - PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

On autopilot, Buford marches to his RUSTY PICK-UP TRUCK, across the parking lot.

He walks right to the passenger's side, opening the door and dipping inside.

INT. MEL'S DINER - FRONT ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

Standing behind the host's stand, Stella gazes down at Buford's open wallet - at the photo ID inside.

EXT. MEL'S DINER - PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Buford comes out of the passenger's side with his pistol.

Moving with a methodical, Michael Myers-like gait, we follow him as he heads back into the restaurant...

INT. MEL'S DINER - FRONT ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

The front door opens --

Stella looks up to see Buford with his pistol raised, his expression absent of emotion.

At the last second, she picks up a stack of menus off the host's stand, holding them up in front of her --

BOOM! Buford shoots through the stack of menus, hitting her in the face, dropping her.

STELLA - Motionless. Unconscious. Blood leaking from her jaw.

BUFORD'S FEET - Passing her.

EXT. MEL'S DINER - CONTINUOUS

An eerie silence...

BOOM-BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! GUNSHOTS ring out, accompanied by screaming. Shouting. BOOM-BOOM!

BOOM!

Then silence.

Chad comes running out of the diner --

BOOM! Buford emerges from the door, popping Chad in the back and dropping him just outside the entrance.

Chad tries to crawl away, but Buford stands over him.

BOOM! To the back of his head.

He stands there, staring down at Chad for a moment.

Then heads back inside.

INT. MEL'S DINER - DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The aftermath -- ELDERLY MAN shot dead at his table. His ELDERLY WIFE on the floor, also expired.

The entrance DOOR OPENS from OS.

Buford walks past the horrifying sight.

HIS FEET - Moving towards the kitchen, stepping over Matilda's dead body in the doorway.

KITCHEN

Bo smashes open the glass case holding the ax with his elbow, snatching the ax out.

He squares up to Buford who quickly approaches...

BOOM! Buford shoots him, dropping him, ax hitting the floor.

Gagging from a nasty gunshot wound to his neck, Bo can only watch as Buford conceals the pistol into his waist and picks the ax off the floor.

BO
(garbled)
No... no...

Buford raises the ax into the air and THWACK! Splits his head completely apart.

Buford turns, sees Donnie holding his hands up submissively.

DONNIE
Listen, man, I won't say anything.
Just let me go...

Buford charges at him with the ax -- THWACK! He mows Donnie down to the floor.

THWACK! Blood spatter shoots up onto Buford's cheek.

He raises the ax again, over Donnie -- THWACK! More blood spritzes onto his face.

INT. MEL'S DINER - MEN'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Buford cleans up in front of the mirror, splashing water onto his face, blood washing off into the drain.

Beholding his reflection, he fixes his hair. Straightens his collar. And leaves.

INT. MEL'S DINER - FRONT ENTRANCE - MOMENTS LATER

STELLA - Her face matted to the floor, lights out. Blood leaking from her jaw creates a small puddle.

FOOTSTEPS approaching...

BUFORD'S FEET appear right next to her.

A few beats...

BUFORD (O.S.)
Next time, don't forget the honey
mustard, bitch.

And his feet leave frame, a DOOR OPENING and CLOSING from OS.

The SOUND of BUFORD'S TRUCK, ENGINE RATTLING. Then VEERING out of the parking lot, outside.

Suddenly, Stella's eye cracks open.

INT. MEL'S DINER - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

MATILDA'S DEAD BODY - Motionless. Eyes open. Terror still frozen on her face.

Dazed, Stella shuffles over. Looking down at Matilda. Reality hitting her. Tears streaming.

Sobbing, she collapses to her knees. At Matilda's side. Her hand sadly caressing her lifeless face.

STELLA (V.O.)
You killed her.

INT. BUFORD'S KITCHEN - NIGHT (BACK TO PRESENT TIME)

Angry tears in her eyes, Stella continues to stand over Buford...

STELLA
She was all I had...

Her grip tightens around the handle of the ax.

STELLA (CONT'D)
And you took her away from me.

She raises the ax into the air.

Gertrude screams, crying on her knees.

GERTRUDE

No, please!

Glowering down at him, she raises the ax even higher.

STELLA

Next time, don't forget to tip...
bitch.

She strikes down with the ax --

But Buford suddenly rolls out of the way --

WHAM! The ax smashes into the floor.

SLOW MOTION - On his gut, Buford meets eyes with his wife, motioning to the pistol on the floor. Gertrude takes his queue, getting to her feet, diving for the gun...

Stella raises the ax into the air again, about to smash down on Buford and put an end to him --

BOOM! Gertrude POPS Stella in the shoulder -- the ax thuds hard to the floor.

BOOM-BOOM! Stella ducks, shots just missing her, blasting into the drywall.

In a flash, Stella pulls open the basement door, making her retreat --

BOOM! Another SHOT just misses, hitting the door and blasting wood splinters into Stella's face --

She loses her balance at the top of the stairs...

BASEMENT

Stella tumbles hard down the stairs until...

Thudding to the bottom.

Dazed and in excruciating pain, Stella looks up --

BOOM! Gertrude FIRES another SHOT, hitting the concrete wall behind Stella.

A perfect shot locked in, Gertrude hits the trigger again --

CLICK. Empty.

Letting out a relieved exhale, Stella rolls out of view, disappearing to the side of the staircase.

Catching her breath, Stella hugs her back to the wall.

She groans, grabbing at her shoulder wound.

STELLA (CONT'D)
All I wanted was your husband!

After a few beats...

GERTRUDE (O.S.)
You can't have him!

Stella's eyes desperately pore over the basement, all concrete, pink insulation stuffed between the wooden beams in the ceiling.

Her eyes stop at a tool bench - a chainsaw.

She picks it up, returns to the side of the staircase.

A brief silence. Stella peeks around, catching a glimpse of the top of the stairs.

Quickly bringing her head back, she looks over the chainsaw.

Ready for war, she yanks on the rip chord -- a CHOKING SPUTTER. She yanks harder -- a promising RATTLE but it SPUTTERS again.

About to give the rip chord a mighty tug --

Stella stops. Suddenly distracted, she turns. Eyeballing a door leading to another room behind her.

Her curiosity draws her towards the room.

INT. BUFORD'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Gertrude shuts the basement door.

She turns, looks to her badly injured husband. Hurries to his aid, kneeling by his side.

Buford somehow sits up, groaning in agony.

GERTRUDE
Oh my God, baby, are you okay?

He glances back, over his shoulder and sees blood sputtering out from his back, dotting the floor behind him.

BUFORD
How bad is it?

She delicately lifts the back of his shirt, peeling it away from the wound...

Wincing in disgust, she turns away.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
No good, huh?

INT. BUFORD'S BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Still carrying the chainsaw, Stella draws closer toward the mysterious room, its door just cracked open.

She apprehensively opens the door, a slow CREAKING as she cautiously pulls it open...

Until staring into complete darkness. Listening...

A FAINT RUSTLING... then MUFFLED MOANS...

STELLA
Hello?

The MUFFLED MOANS become more desperate. Frantic. The RUSTLING more frenetic...

Stella sets the chainsaw down, looking to the nearby tool bench and grabbing a flashlight.

She takes a step inside...

DUNGEON ROOM

And shines her flashlight --

SOMEONE lunges at her from out of the dark!

Stella jumps, startled, dropping the flashlight.

With heavy breaths, Stella keeps back, terrified. But she picks up the flashlight and shines it again --

On her knees, a CAPTIVE WOMAN in her early 20s, wearing only dirty undergarments, is chained to the wall, hands cuffed behind her back and duct-tape over her mouth.

STELLA (CONT'D)
What the fuck?

She shines the flashlight further into the room, the beam of light stopping on another IMPRISONED WOMAN, crumbled to the floor -- *Is she asleep?*

Stella moves in closer for further inspection, keeping the flashlight beam fixed on the IMPRISONED WOMAN.

But she stops, covering her mouth in shock -- the IMPRISONED WOMAN lies lifeless over a massive puddle of blood, her head bashed into a pile of mush.

Sickened, Stella backs away, not noticing a SILHOUETTE looming behind her. Calculating.

Sneaking up on her, the SILHOUETTE steps forward --

It's Newton. Covered in blood. Soaked.

HIS HAND - A bloody hammer hangs from his grip.

WHAM! He puts her lights out.

CUT TO BLACK:

A long silence...

Then SOFT WEEPING... taking us to...

FADE IN:

INT. MEL'S DINER - KITCHEN - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Stella wipes tears, kneeled over Matilda's lifeless body.

OSCAR (O.S.)
It's your fault.

She turns, looks back at Oscar, knife lodged into his throat. Smiling back at her.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
You do know that, don't you?

Stella turns back to Matilda, mourning her lost soulmate.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
She died in pain. Alone. Because of you.

Overcome with emotion, Stella practically crumbles, completely falling apart at Matilda's side.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
You know what the worst part is?
There's not a fucking thing you can
do about it but sit there and cry.

A dark expression suddenly crosses her face.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
This is what happens to people when
they get close to you, Stella.

Her jaw tenses up in anger.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
I told you not to mess around with
that girl. And now she's dead. All
because of you.

Blistering with rage, she stands up.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
Oh, what are you gonna do? Huh? You
think you're tough now?

He laughs at her, taunting her as she brainstorms to herself,
trying to block him out.

And then it hits her -- she reaches into her apron and brings
out Buford's wallet.

Opening it, she glares down at Buford's photo ID.

Determined, she turns, brushing past Oscar.

She searches the kitchen, looking over Donnie and Bo's
mutilated corpses decorating the kitchen floor.

Stella sets her sights on the ax sticking out of Donnie's
mutilated torso.

Stepping over Bo's dead body, she yanks the ax out of Donnie.

Then snatches off a few paper towels from a nearby spool,
sticking them onto her face as if she cut herself shaving.

EXT. MEL'S DINER - MOMENTS LATER

Stella, purse over her shoulder, leaves the diner, ax hanging
from her grip. Walking with purpose. Determination.

She steps over Chad's dead body on the cement walkway.

INT. YELLOW TOYOTA COROLLA (MOVING) - MOMENTS LATER

Behind the wheel, Stella stares off at the road ahead with a focused anger.

She turns to her purse on the passenger's seat, opens it to see her dead husband's firearm inside.

But next to it sits a photo.

She takes it out and looks it over wistfully -- a photo of her and Matilda together.

CUT TO BLACK:

FADE IN:

INT. BUFORD'S DUNGEON ROOM - NIGHT (BACK TO PRESENT TIME)

STELLA'S EYES - Fluttering open. Barely conscious.

Hands cuffed behind her back, chained to the wall, she looks up at Buford and Gertrude. Vision blurred.

The sadistic couple just stares down at her. Studying her.

GERTRUDE

What do you think? Clean her up a little bit? Patch her up?

Buford doesn't seem so sure.

BUFORD

I dunno. Look at her. She's damaged goods. What kinda sick fuck would spend money on that?

Gertrude shrugs.

GERTRUDE

It's the dark web. You'd be surprised by some of the sick shit they're into.

Buford grimaces in disgust.

Then a beat.

BUFORD

What can we get for her?

Gertrude shrugs.

GERTRUDE

It won't be as much as the other
girl, obviously.

BUFORD

(under his breath)
Fucking Newton.

GERTRUDE

Better than nothing.

Gertrude lifts a camera, points it at Stella and takes a
snapshot, the flash blinding her.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

A dark, desolate back road flanked by woods.

Suddenly, headlights cut through the darkness...

A POLICE CRUISER coasts along, into view.

INT. POLICE CRUISER (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

OFFICER HAYDEN, late 20s, round-faced and rotund, whistles to
an OLDIES TUNES playing on his radio.

But he stops whistling as he comes up on something off to the
side of the road.

He slows the vehicle, pulling alongside an old, beaten up,
YELLOW TOYOTA COROLLA.

INT. DIVE BAR - CONTINUOUS

The place near empty, SAD COUNTRY MUSIC plays on the Jukebox.

Sheriff Hardley sits at the bar a drunken mess, pouring his
heart out to the MALE BARTENDER. Showing him old photos.

ONE OF THE PHOTOS - Matilda as a child at a dance recital.

SHERIFF HARDLEY

She was nine years old, here.

The Male Bartender gives the photo a look. Then smiles sadly
at Sheriff Hardley, feeling for him.

Sheriff Hardley continues to stare at the photo, lost.

SHERIFF HARDLEY (CONT'D)
Time flies, doesn't it?

Wiping a tear from his eye, he stashes the photo back into his jacket pocket.

The Male Bartender pours him another shot.

SHERIFF HARDLEY (CONT'D)
I haven't talked to her since, I dunno... January? Maybe longer?

He knocks back his shot. Drifts off into thought again. Unable to fight off tears.

SHERIFF HARDLEY (CONT'D)
Last time we talked, we had an argument. Found out she was seeing some girl...
(chokes up)
... I told her I never wanted to see her again.

Falling apart, he lets out a deep exhale to combat his emotions. Trying to keep it together.

SHERIFF HARDLEY (CONT'D)
Fucking shit, huh?

The Male Bartender pours him another shot.

EXT. POLICE STATION - CONTINUOUS

Quiet night. Only one PATROL CAR parked out front, marked "Deputy, Keaufax County".

INT. POLICE STATION - DEPUTY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Deputy Roy sits at his desk, in the middle of a late-night phone conversation as he reviews surveillance footage on his computer screen.

DIXON COUNTY SHERIFF (V.O.)
(filtered)
Send my condolences to Sheriff Hardley for me, will you?

DEPUTY ROY
I will.

DIXON COUNTY SHERIFF (V.O.)
How's he doing, anyhow?

DEPUTY ROY
Taking it pretty hard.

ON HIS COMPUTER - Deputy Roy hits pause, the traffic cam capturing Stella sitting at a red light, behind the wheel of the YELLOW TOYOTA COROLLA.

DIXON COUNTY SHERIFF (V.O.)
(filtered)
Who wouldn't? God damn tragedy...

DEPUTY ROY
(deflated)
Yeah...

Deputy Roy rewinds the footage, then hits play again, capturing Buford in his RUSTY PICK-UP TRUCK speeding through a red light.

DIXON COUNTY SHERIFF (V.O.)
(filtered)
Had ourselves a bit of a fracas of our own up here in Dixon. Not sure if you've watched the news at all.

ON HIS COMPUTER - Stella in the YELLOW TOYOTA COROLLA stops at the red light and sits there.

DEPUTY ROY
Haven't had the chance.
(interested)
What kinda fracas?

DIXON COUNTY SHERIFF (V.O.)
(filtered)
Another shooting. Two dead.
Happened at an employment agency,
just outside Haddonfield.

Deputy Roy shakes his head while eyeing his screen.

DEPUTY ROY
Hell of a world we live in...

DIXON COUNTY SHERIFF (V.O.)
Thought it might be related to your incident at the diner.

DEPUTY ROY
Yeah?

DIXON COUNTY SHERIFF (V.O.)

(filtered)

A little coincidental if you ask me. I mean, Christ, two shootings in the same day, two towns apart?

DEPUTY ROY

You put it that way, it is a little funny, I suppose.

DIXON COUNTY SHERIFF (V.O.)

Hell, outside of that shit-show in Springwood a few years back with that Blumpkin fella, I can't recall anything close to a serious crime happening around these parts.

Deputy Roy rewinds again, pausing on Buford's truck.

DEPUTY ROY

(to himself)

Blumpkin.

He switches to another traffic cam, zooming in on Buford's license plate number.

INT. DIVE BAR - CONTINUOUS

Three sheets to the wind, Sheriff Hardley knocks back yet another shot. A faraway look on his face as he drifts into deep thought again.

SHERIFF HARDLEY

I've tried to understand it all.
God knows, I've tried.

(a beat)

Think maybe this world is just moving too fast for me, can't keep up. Girls kissing girls, boys kissing boys... just never understood any of it.

The Male Bartender forces a nervous smile, growing uncomfortable with the direction of the conversation.

At that moment, another MALE PATRON sits at the bar, a few seats away from Sheriff Hardley.

The Sheriff looks over, tipping his hat to him.

He watches as the Male Bartender leans over the bar and kisses the Male Patron on the mouth.

Dumbfounded, Sheriff Hardley turns, facing straight ahead again. Trying to hide his discomfort.

Suddenly, his RADIO CRACKLES:

OFFICER HAYDEN (V.O.)
(on the radio)
This is Officer Hayden, I'm out
here on Rural Road 12 right on the
outskirts...

EXT. RURAL ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Officer Hayden shines his flashlight into the YELLOW TOYOTA COROLLA while speaking into his radio.

OFFICER HAYDEN
Got ourselves an 11-24...

He shines the flashlight into the direction of a back road cutting into the woods.

OFFICER HAYDEN (CONT'D)
Right up the road from the Blumpkin
residence.

INT. DIVE BAR - CONTINUOUS

Disinterested with the radio call, Sheriff Hardley throws back yet another shot. Barely able to sit up straight.

OFFICER HAYDEN (V.O.)
(on the radio)
Make and model is an 87 Toyota
Corolla. Yellow.

Sheriff Hardley picks his head up, the last part of the transmission grabbing his attention suddenly.

Stumbling, he leaves his bar stool, on his feet. He sets his massive .357 Magnum on the bar, drawing wide-eyed stares from the Male Bartender and Male Patron.

Fishing through his pockets, Sheriff Hardley slaps a few wrinkled bills on the bar.

He grabs his gun and heads out.

MALE BARTENDER
(concerned)
Are you good to drive?

Sheriff Hardley stumbles out the door.

SHERIFF HARDLEY
Keep the change.

INT. POLICE STATION - DEPUTY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Deputy Roy types in a license plate number on his computer.

The name "Buford Blumpkin" pops up on screen.

Pondering to himself for a few moments, Deputy Roy dials up someone on his cell phone.

EXT. RURAL HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

The SHERIFF's SUV swerves and careens along the road at a dangerous speed.

INT. SHERIFF'S SUV (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

Gun on his lap, Sheriff Hardley squints his eyes at the road ahead, having trouble seeing.

Meanwhile, his cell phone lights up, glowing from inside his pocket. On silent.

INT. POLICE STATION - DEPUTY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Antsy, Deputy Roy doesn't get an answer, reaching voice mail.

DEPUTY ROY
Hey Sheriff, it's me. Listen, I think we're going after the wrong person. In regards to the diner, at least. I was just looking at some surveillance footage here. And I really think we should be looking into this Buford Blumpkin fella. Now, I know his previous run-ins don't exactly scream mass murder, but I think it's something worth looking into.
(a beat)
Just give me a call as soon as you get this message.

He hangs up. Brainstorms. Something bothering him.

Then, as if in a sudden hurry, he hastily slips into his jacket and leaves his desk.

INT. BUFORD'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

COMPUTER SCREEN - A photo of Stella on a super sketchy-looking website on the dark web. A bid pops up... then another. And another. Each dollar amount getting higher.

The light from the screen glows onto Gertrude's face.

GERTRUDE
Sick sons of bitches.

INT. BUFORD'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Buford, shirtless with blood-soaked gauze covering his horrific ax wound, sits down at the table, groaning in pain.

Also caked in blood, Newton sits across from him, downtrodden. The bloody hammer on the table in front of him.

BUFORD
How long have you known about this?

Newton gives him a dejected shrug, hanging his head.

Overwhelmed with disappointment, Buford does his best to hold in his frustration.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
I told you not to go down there.

A pregnant silence.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
Have you said anything to anybody else? Anyone from school...?

Newton looks into his father's disappointed eyes.

NEWTON
There is nobody else.

Browbeaten, Buford nods solemnly.

BUFORD
I didn't want this. Not for you.

On the brink of tears, Buford beholds his son's macabre appearance, the blood covering him.

BUFORD (CONT'D)

It was my job to protect you from this mess. I failed. And there's no coming back now. Not from this.

EXT. BUFORD'S FRONT PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Sitting at the front steps, Buford takes a furious drag from his cigarette. Angry with himself.

His wife joins him, sitting next to him. Lovingly rubbing on his shoulder.

GERTRUDE

You okay?

He takes another drag, not responding.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)

We found a buyer. He's picking up first thing in the morning.

Buford takes a deep breath, the news somewhat encouraging.

BUFORD

They want her as is?

GERTRUDE

He'd appreciate it if we'd clean her up a little bit. Stop the bleeding.

With a somber nod, Buford gets to his feet.

BUFORD

Maybe you're right. About getting out of this town.

Looks down to her.

BUFORD (CONT'D)

Might be the best thing.

She rises to her feet. Gives Buford a tender kiss.

GERTRUDE

It's not too late for him, Buford. He still has a chance.

Ashamed, he nods. But as he looks into his wife's eyes, he knows that it isn't true.

INT. BUFORD'S DUNGEON ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Hands behind her back, chained to the wall, Stella jerks forward, trying to break free.

She jerks forward again -- the duct-tape muffles her painful bellows with each thrust.

After another try, she lies flat on her belly, out of gas.

A PAIR OF FEET appear next to her -- Stella looks up.

Oscar, knife lodged in his throat, smirks down at her.

OSCAR

What goes around really DOES come around, doesn't it?

Tears fill her desperate eyes. Losing hope.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

What do you think Matilda would say if she saw you like this?

Her angry eyes narrow at him.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Oh. I forgot. She's dead.

An evil, taunting laugh motivates her.

As if injected with an adrenaline shot, Stella fights back to her knees with determination.

With all her might, she jerks forward again. And again. And again, the cuffs cutting into her wrists.

She thrusts forward again --

Several items fall out of her apron: A pen. A note pad. And some bobby pins.

Another thrust -- the photo of her and Matilda falls to the floor, from her cleavage.

Her energy drained, she lies flat on her stomach again, lying the side of her head on the floor.

As she weeps...

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Just give up. It ain't happening. You're just not strong enough.

FOOTSTEPS approach from OS...

Buford enters, flicking on the blinding light.

He sets a wash bucket full of water on the floor, dropping a big spool of gauze next to it.

While glaring down at her, Buford removes the firearm from his waist and loads a fresh clip into it.

The Captive Woman cries hopelessly, taking his attention.

Buford takes a deep breath, trying to look away. But the Captive Woman's sad, puppy-dog eyes keep drawing him back.

He sticks the gun into his waist.

BUFORD
I'm not a monster.

A charged silence.

Overwrought with guilt, Buford looks to the dead IMPRISONED WOMAN, a bloody heap on the cold, cement floor.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
This wasn't supposed to happen.
Nobody was supposed to get hurt.
It's just... sometimes in life, we
get dealt a shitty hand.

Discomforted, he looks to the dead body again. His eyes casting down in shame.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
And, unfortunately, that's what
happened to your friend, here.

Turns to Captive Woman, sadly looking down at her.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
I'm sorry. I'm sorry about all of
this. I don't like it anymore than
you do.
(a beat)
But family comes first.

THE DEAD BODY - Her lifeless, opened eyes stand out in contrast to the crimson coating masking her mutilated face.

INT. BUFORD'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

NEWTON - Blood covering his face. His eyes cast down.

A long, thick silence as Gertrude studies him closely from across the table.

NEWTON
(delayed)
I didn't wanna hurt her.

GERTRUDE
How long have you been going down there?

He shrugs.

NEWTON
Couple days.

GERTRUDE
Why?

Becoming distraught, Newton wipes a tear.

NEWTON
To talk to her. Look at her.

Gertrude sighs.

NEWTON (CONT'D)
(trembled voice)
I thought maybe that she'd like me.

The tears stream down.

NEWTON (CONT'D)
I've never been with a girl before.
I've never even kissed a girl.
(shaking his head)
She promised me she wouldn't try to leave...

Crying hysterically, he buries his face into his hands.

NEWTON (CONT'D)
I didn't know what else to do...

Gertrude sits beside him, hugging a supportive arm around his back. Hushing him as he cries into her shoulder.

GERTRUDE
One day, you're gonna find a very special girl, baby.

She cradles his face with both hands, looking into his eyes.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)
But that girl? She wasn't it.

He nods, understanding. But stares at his mother, perplexed.

NEWTON
Why are they down there?

She sighs, standing up and sitting across the table again, distancing herself.

GERTRUDE
It's just something me and your
father have to do to put food on
the table.

Newton tries to comprehend.

NEWTON
You sell them?

GERTRUDE
Trying to.
(a beat)
It's wrong what we do. But
desperate times call for desperate
measures. And what you did to that
girl down there cost this family a
lot of money.

Like a scolded puppy, Newton bows his head again.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)
Imagine for a second that we owned
a store. Selling vacuum cleaners,
for example. Now, if one of those
vacuum cleaners is broken, we can't
sell it. You understand? Because it
ain't worth nothing. So, because of
what you did, what we have now is a
broken vacuum cleaner.

INT. BUFORD'S DARK BASEMENT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Winching in pain, Buford gingerly squats down next to Stella.

Noticing the photo on the floor, Buford picks it up and gives it a long look. Then looks to Stella.

He turns the photo, showing her.

BUFORD
That's what this is about, huh?

He gives the photo another long look.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
And here, I thought it was about a
fucking tip.

Drops the photo -- Stella watches it flutter to the floor.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
Love is one hell of a motivator,
ain't it?

Buford grabs her chin firmly, closely looking over the bullet wound to her jaw.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
Sometimes, it can make you do the
impossible.

He pushes his thumb into the wound, drawing a muffled shriek.

Drawing his hand back, Buford tries flinging the blood off his fingers before wiping it on his bare chest.

INT. BUFORD'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Gertrude sets a glass of water in front of Newton.

Newton takes a sip, his mother gazing at him warmly.

DING-DONG! The DOORBELL RINGS.

Mother and son exchange a worried glance.

She looks to the door, through the living room.

GERTRUDE
Baby? Go to your room.

NEWTON
Who is it?

She remains focused on the door.

GERTRUDE
(firmly)
I said go to your room.

INT. BUFORD'S DARK BASEMENT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Stella grunts in agony as Buford digs into her shoulder wound with a pair of needle-nosed pliers...

Painful tears build up in her eyes as he pulls out bullet fragments, dropping them to the floor.

BUFORD
See? Like pulling off a Band-Aid.

He cleans off some of the blood with a wet rag.

But then he brings out a small blowtorch -- a flame whooshes out from the end of it.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
Now this, on the other hand, is
gonna hurt a lot.

INT. BUFORD'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Gertrude peeks out the window from between the curtains --

TWO POLICE CRUISERS sit parked out front.

INT. BUFORD'S DUNGEON ROOM - CONTINUOUS

STELLA'S EYES - Watch in horror as the flame from the blowtorch gets closer and closer to her shoulder wound...

GERTRUDE (O.S.)
(hisses from upstairs)
Buford!

Buford kills the flame. Turns.

He sees Gertrude halfway down the stairs, summoning him.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)
Can we have a word?

INT. BUFORD'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

At the basement doorway, Buford and Gertrude keep their voices low.

BUFORD
What the fuck are they doing here?

She glares at him.

GERTRUDE
What do you think?

Buford lowers his eyes in shame.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)

That temper of yours is what put you behind bars in the first place, which is why you can't get a fucking job to support this family. Now, I'm trying to run an operation, here, so we can make some God damn money. But ain't none of that's ever gonna happen if you're out there acting crazy, giving the fucking cops a reason to come by!

She hits his arm.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)

What the fuck is wrong with you? All those programs they put you in, medications, anger management classes... and you go and kill a bunch of people?

Buford thinks about it and shakes his head.

BUFORD

They're not here for me... they're here for HER. I saw it on the news, they think she's the one who did it, not me. They specifically said they're looking for an African American girl.

DING-DONG! The DOORBELL RINGS again.

GERTRUDE

Well, what exactly do you want me to do about THEM?

He quickly thinks it over. Shrugs.

BUFORD

Get rid of them.

INT. BUFORD'S DUNGEON ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Stella thrusts forward again, desperately trying to break free. But the chains show no signs of giving.

Another thrust... but nothing.

She takes another reprieve, exhausted, catching her breath. Starting to accept her fate.

Her eyes fixate on the photo of her and Matilda with sadness. Memories flashing through her mind.

MATILDA (O.S.)
He's wrong, you know.

Stella looks up -- Matilda stands before her, almost angelic in appearance.

MATILDA (CONT'D)
It isn't your fault.

More tears.

Matilda kneels at her side. Gently cradling Stella's face, stroking her hair lovingly.

MATILDA (CONT'D)
You've been through a lot of hurt.
But you're still here. Because
you're strong.

Stella smiles sadly behind the duct-tape.

MATILDA (CONT'D)
Love can make you do the
impossible.

The words of motivation begin to resonate.

Matilda kisses her forehead softly.

A beat as Matilda looks her in the eye, inspiring her.

MATILDA (CONT'D)
You're a fighter.

A look of determination crosses Stella's face.

MATILDA (CONT'D)
So fight.

With a sudden exuberance, Stella thinks. Then looks to the pen on the floor. The bobby pins.

Matilda steps back, coaching her through it.

MATILDA (CONT'D)
Now you're thinking.

Inching backwards, the chains behind her sag down, giving her just enough leeway.

She then leans forward, digging her heels into the wall behind her for leverage so that she's elevated off the floor... her cuffed hands behind her forming a loop...

Bending her knees to her chest, she sticks her rear end into the air, maneuvering it through her looped arms behind her...

Squeezing the cuffs past her hamstrings, her feet leave the wall so that she can get her legs all the way through... until finally...

She drops to her knees, her cuffed hands now in front of her.

MATILDA (CONT'D)

Now, pick the lock.

Stella's fingertips snatch a bobby pin off the floor.

INT. BUFORD'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

DING-DONG! The DOORBELL RINGS again.

Gertrude opens the door --

Deputy Roy and Officer Hayden greet her with a smile.

DEPUTY ROY

Sorry for coming by so late, Mrs. Blumpkin.

INT. BUFORD'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Out of sight, Buford hides just around the corner, his back hugged against the wall.

He listens carefully while gripping his pistol.

INT. BUFORD'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Officer Hayden shows Gertrude a photo of Stella.

GERTRUDE

I'm sorry, I don't know who that is.

(a beat)

Is that what you came by to ask me?
At this ungodly hour?

Officer Hayden nods apologetically.

OFFICER HAYDEN

We're just looking out for your
safety, is all.

She labors a smile.

GERTRUDE

Appreciate that. Have a good night.

Ready to shut the door, Deputy Roy stops her, stiff-arming
the door open again.

DEPUTY ROY

Wait, Mrs. Blumpkin?

Perturbed, Gertrude puts her hands to her hips.

Deputy Roy sneaks a look past her, into the house.

DEPUTY ROY (CONT'D)

Is your husband around?

GERTRUDE

He's in bed.

Deputy Roy nods.

DEPUTY ROY

You mind if I have a quick word
with him?

She narrows her eyes at him.

GERTRUDE

I said he was asleep.

DEPUTY ROY

You said he was in bed.

GERTRUDE

Sleeping. That's what people do
when they're in bed, right?
Especially this time of night?

DEPUTY ROY

I understand that, Mrs. Blumpkin.
But maybe you can help me out. Can
you tell me where your husband was
today? At around four o'clock?

Gertrude thinks back. Shrugs.

GERTRUDE

Right here, home with me.

He knows she's lying.

DEPUTY ROY

Was he?

GERTRUDE

Listen, gentleman, it's really,
really late and I could use some
much needed sleep.

Deputy Roy labors a smile, studying her closely. Almost as if he wanted her to know that he knows.

OFFICER HAYDEN

Sorry again, Mrs. Blumpkin. Have a
good night.

Meeting eyes with a suspicious Deputy Roy, Gertrude smiles again and shuts the door.

Officer Hayden gives the Deputy a curious look.

OFFICER HAYDEN (CONT'D)

What was that about?

INT. BUFORD'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The SOUND of the DOOR CLOSING.

Buford relaxes, letting out a relieved sigh. He returns to the basement, disappearing downstairs again.

EXT. BUFORD'S DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Deputy Roy waits on his phone as he and Officer Hayden return to their vehicles.

DEPUTY ROY

Come on, pick up...

INT. SHERIFF'S SUV (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

Glancing down, Sheriff Hardley catches his cell phone glowing from his pocket.

Barely able to drive straight, he answers.

SHERIFF HARDLEY

Yeah?

But it's too late, the call already reaching voice mail.

EXT. BUFORD'S DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Deputy Roy leaves an urgent message.

DEPUTY ROY

Sheriff, it's me again. I was just at the Blumpkin residence, had a talk with Gertrude. I asked her where her husband was earlier. And she just flat out lied to me. Listen, I'm not a 100 percent, but I'm about 87, 88 percent sure that it was Buford.

(a beat)

Call me back.

And he hangs up.

OFFICER HAYDEN

Hey, Deputy?

DEPUTY ROY

Yeah?

He turns, sees Officer Hayden shining his flashlight on Buford's RUSTY PICK-UP TRUCK -- it's windows shattered.

INT. BUFORD'S BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Stuffing his pistol back into his waist, Buford nonchalantly heads back to his little dungeon.

But as he reaches the doorway --

Stella ambushes him, jabbing the pen into his neck!

Stunned, he staggers back while drawing his pistol.

Stella pounces on him, tackling him to the floor --

BOOM! A GUNSHOT hits the ceiling!

EXT. BUFORD'S DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Hearing the GUNSHOT, Deputy Roy and Officer Hayden exchange a look -- *Oh, shit.*

They both turn to the house.

INT. BUFORD'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

At the sink washing dishes, Gertrude freezes, also hearing the loud GUNSHOT.

INT. BUFORD'S BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Stella wrestles on top of Buford, the pen in his neck.

But he reaches up, squeezing his hands around her throat.

Stella counters, pressing her thumbs into his eyes...

WHAM! He punches her in the face, sending her flying back.

Buford rolls to his belly, sees his pistol lying on the floor, just out of reach.

He crawls towards it, but Stella gets to her feet.

Just as Buford gets close to it, Stella stomps down on his badly wounded back.

BUFORD

Fuck!

She kicks away the pistol.

Then WHAM! A double stomp to the back of his head bashes his face into the concrete -- driving the pen all the way into his neck.

A hush as Buford lies incapacitated. Motionless.

INT. BUFORD'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A FEW VIOLENT BANGS at the front door --

The door bursts open!

Deputy Roy enters with his gun drawn. But as Officer Hayden comes in after him --

Gertrude, hiding at the side of the door, sneaks up on Officer Hayden with the kitchen knife and slices his throat from behind!

As Officer Hayden topples, Gertrude snatches the gun from his limp, loose grip.

Deputy Roy turns, stunned --

BOOM-BOOM! She drops him with TWO SHOTS.

Standing over him -- BOOM! Ending him.

She turns, sees Officer Hayden gasping for air on the floor. Walks right up to him and -- BOOM! A head-shot.

A hush.

Gertrude turns, side-stepping Deputy Roy's body.

ON THE FLOOR - Deputy Roy's phone sits just outside his pants pocket -- on silent, the phone lights up.

The caller ID reads - "Sheriff Hardley".

INT. BUFORD'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Gertrude enters, Newton standing by the hallway, frightened.

GERTRUDE
Go to your room!

She heads to the closed basement door, Newton lingering.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)
I said, now!

Spooked, Newton does as he's told.

Gertrude opens the basement door, immediately sees Stella marching up the stairs with Buford's gun.

BOOM! She SHOOTS Gertrude in the gut!

The gun jumps out of Gertrude's hand and slides far across the kitchen floor.

Dropping to her knees, holding her gut, Gertrude sees Stella rushing up the stairs.

TOP OF BASEMENT STAIRS

As Stella reaches the top -- WHAM! Gertrude slams the door into her face --

Stella drops the gun, watching it tumble down the stairs.

Time of the essence, Stella plows her shoulder into the door.

KITCHEN

Her forward momentum propels her far into the room.

Gertrude, hiding to the side of the door, jumps onto Stella with the kitchen knife, knocking her to her back.

On top of her, Gertrude drives the knife into Stella's already-wounded shoulder -- Stella shrieks in pain!

Yanking the knife out, Gertrude stabs at her again --

Stella moves her face just in time, the knife sticking into the floor just centimeters away.

Stella kicks Gertrude off of her.

But Gertrude grabs Stella by her feet, pulling her forward and jumping on top of her again --

Gertrude comes down with the knife --

Stella grabs her wrist, keeping the knife at bay.

But Gertrude uses her leverage to overpower her, the knife slowly getting closer and closer to Stella's face...

Using all the strength she has left, Stella slowly redirects the point of the sharp kitchen knife...

WHAM! Gertrude head butts Stella, smashing her nose and dazing her.

Stella's arms go limp up, freeing up Gertrude.

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)

You fucked with the wrong family!

With both hands, Gertrude comes down with the knife --

But, at the last moment, Stella maneuvers out of the way, using Gertrude's downward momentum against her.

The edge of the knife slips against the floor, leaving Gertrude's hand as Stella slips behind on her, getting her into a choke hold.

Losing consciousness, Gertrude reaches for the knife again.

But Stella grabs it, pointing it upward from the floor --

And then comes down with all her weight onto Gertrude's back, slamming her face down into the sharp end of the knife!

Stella gets to her feet, staring down at Gertrude who barely clings to life. The knife keeps her face lifted away from the floor like a kick-stand.

THE AX - Stella picks it off the floor.

She glowers down at Gertrude. Raises the ax into the air --

THWACK! Smashes down into the back of Gertrude's skull, driving her face into the knife, all the way to the handle.

Newton watches from the hallway in shock.

HIS EYES - Turn from fearful to cold. A dark, unsettling calm, void of emotion. That same look as his father.

In SLOW MOTION -- Newton marches towards Stella, each FOOTSTEP towards her like a THUNDERING ECHO.

Without breaking stride, Newton plucks the bloody hammer off the kitchen table. On autopilot.

At the last second, Stella looks up and sees Newton quickly converging on her with the hammer --

Stella falls backwards, just ducking the blow.

On her back, she moves away from Newton as he continues to swing down with the hammer.

WHAM! He hits the floor, missing her... WHAM! Just misses her head... WHAM! Missing again...

She squirms away, backwards, into the...

LIVING ROOM

Desperately kicking her feet up at him, he swings the hammer at her leg -- WHAM! Nailing her in the knee, drawing screams.

She tries getting to her feet but WHAM! A grazing blow knocks her back to the floor.

Newton stands above her. Ready to deliver the final blow --

Captive Woman appears in the background. With the chainsaw.

She yanks back on the rip chord -- a RATTLE before the MOTOR RUMBLES to life.

Distracted, Newton turns, faces her.

Captive Woman grips the chainsaw with a vengeful fervor as smoke sputters from its fast-moving chained saw-blade.

From her back, Stella gives Captive Woman a nod...

Stella sits up and shoves Newton in the back, pushing him towards Captive Woman --

KITCHEN

Right into the chainsaw -- BUZZZZZ!!!

Newton screams as the chainsaw saws through his neck, blood spitting from the chainsaw's jagged blade, splattering everywhere --

Until decapitating him completely, his head falling off.

His headless body drops to its knees. Then falls flat.

Drenched in blood, Captive Woman hits the off switch.

CAPTIVE WOMAN
That was for my friend.

Another silence.

Stella gets to her feet, both she and Captive Woman staring down at Newton's decapitated corpse.

CAPTIVE WOMAN (CONT'D)
What now?

Exhausted, Stella thinks about it while clutching her wounds.

She shrugs.

STELLA
We leave, I guess.

INT. BUFORD'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The two women limp through like battle-scarred war vets, Stella clutching her wounds, still holding the ax.

Stella reaches the door, opening it --

WHAM! Sheriff Hardley gun-butts her in the face, smashing her nose, sending her to the floor, the ax leaving her grip.

He enters, pointing his .357 Magnum at Captive Woman, who raises her hands and backs away cautiously.

Sheriff Hardley turns his attention back to Stella, yanking her up by the front of her shirt.

He presses the barrel between her eyes.

As his finger grazes the trigger --

CAPTIVE WOMAN (O.S.)

Stop!

Sheriff Hardley glares up at her, frowning his brow.

SHERIFF HARDLEY

And you are?

Nervous, Captive Woman's voice trembles...

CAPTIVE WOMAN

My name is Jessica... Jessica
Curtis... we were drugged... and
kidnapped... I don't know how long
I've been here...

She fights tears.

CAPTIVE WOMAN (CONT'D)

They killed my friend...

With a trembling breath, she motions to Stella.

CAPTIVE WOMAN (CONT'D)

They were keeping us in the
basement... and we escaped...

Confused, Sheriff Hardley glares down at Stella while holding her up by the shirt. Easing up a bit as he takes in her appearance. Her wounds. Her face.

He releases her shirt, dropping her back to the floor.

The photo falls out of Stella's cleavage as she rolls to her side, in pain.

Sheriff Hardley crouches down, picking up the photo.

He nearly falls to tears when he sees that it's a photo of Stella and his daughter.

Saddened, he looks to Stella again. Back to the photo. Taking a long, saturnine breath.

SHERIFF HARDLEY

I should've tried harder... to
understand.

He looks across the room, to Captive Woman again. Staring at her if she looked familiar.

SHERIFF HARDLEY (CONT'D)

What did you say your name was?

BOOM! Sheriff Hardley flinches as Captive Woman drops like a sack of potatoes!

Alarmed, he jolts up straight, staring down at Captive Woman horrified, blood leaking from a shot to her head.

Sitting up, Stella cringes, heartbroken for the girl.

FOOTSTEPS from the kitchen, Sheriff Hardley holding aim --

Buford comes out, sliding the pen out of his neck, blood shooting out like a broken sprinkler.

SHERIFF HARDLEY (CONT'D)

What the fuck, Buford!

Still holding the gun, Buford puts his hands up.

SHERIFF HARDLEY (CONT'D)

Put down the God damn gun!

Plugging his neck with his palm, Buford tries to explain.

BUFORD

You don't understand...

SHERIFF HARDLEY

Put it down!

BUFORD

These girls, they broke into my house...

He looks to the dead, grotesque bodies of his wife and son.

BUFORD (CONT'D)

(sotto)

And they killed my family.

His expression turns to one of sheer rage.

BUFORD (CONT'D)

(gritting his teeth)

They killed my fucking family!

Sheriff Hardley eyeballs Captive Girl again. Then he remembers something.

His gun fixed on Buford, Sheriff Hardley digs into his pocket with his free hand.

He pulls out a flier with the Captive Woman's face on it. The name reads "Jessica Curtis".

Still putting the pieces together in his head, Sheriff Hardley tightens his grip on the gun, pointing it firmly into Buford's direction.

SHERIFF HARDLEY

It was you... wasn't it?

Stunned, Buford shakes his head.

BUFORD

I have no idea what the fuck you're talking about!

Sheriff Hardley's jaw tenses up, the realization really starting to set it...

SHERIFF HARDLEY

My daughter... Matilda... you killed her. At the diner.

Stella groans while getting to her feet, wiping at her busted, bloodied nose.

STELLA

It was him.

Sheriff Hardley gives her a glance, still unsure about her.

Stella stares daggers into Buford, eyes welling up in anger.

STELLA (CONT'D)

(to Buford)

You forgot your wallet.

Stella takes the wallet out of her apron and tosses it onto the floor.

Sheriff Hardley looks to the wallet, then up at Buford.

Buford, his hands still raised, one of them still gripping the gun, looks to Stella indignantly.

His wild, nervous eyes shift back to Sheriff Hardley.

BUFORD

You're not gonna believe her over me, are you?

Sheriff Hardley's mind is still clouded with uncertainty.

BUFORD (CONT'D)
(emphatically)
This black, cop-killing dike?!

Stella grabs the ax off the floor, takes an angry step towards Buford.

STELLA
You took her from me!

Sheriff Hardley turns to her, pointing his gun.

SHERIFF HARDLEY
You put that shit down --

BOOM! Quick on the draw, Buford takes advantage and shoots Sheriff Hardley right in the chest, dropping him --

SHERIFF HARDLEY'S HAND - Hits the floor, the .357 just leaving his fingers.

Buford marches forward -- BOOM-BOOM! Hitting Sheriff Hardley twice more in the chest.

In SLOW MOTION -- the gun turns to Stella, aimed right between her eyes as she backs into the wall, cornered. Buford about to take the shot...

BOOM! Buford jumps back, stunned, Sheriff Hardley able to get a shot off, hitting him in the chest.

Just as quickly, Buford counters, kicking the .357 out of Sheriff Hardley's weakened grip.

Buford stands over him, about to end the lawman's existence...

In a spinning, shot-put style motion, Stella swings her ax at Buford like a baseball bat --

THWACK! Smashes the ax into his face, releasing the handle --

The ax embedded into the front of his skull, Buford staggers backwards, losing complete control of his motor skills...

Sheriff Hardley sits up, pulling his shirt open -- revealing a bullet proof vest.

He possesses his .357 again -- BOOM-BOOM-BOOM! His hail of bullets sends Buford stumbling back, until dropping him.

On his back and somehow still clinging to life with an ax buried into his face, Stella's feet appear next to him.

She stands above him, yanking the ax out.

STELLA

Next time, don't forget to tip...
bitch.

Raising the ax high into the air, she smashes down into Buford's face again -- the coupe de grace. Finito.

Getting to his feet, Sheriff Hardley stares at Stella, mesmerized. She turns back to him, feeling his look.

STELLA (CONT'D)

You had to be there.

He nods, staring around at all the mayhem and death scattered across the floor.

Exhausted, he takes a seat on the couch, gun set aside.

He groans while feeling his sore chest.

Moving gingerly, he slowly removes a pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket.

Letting a cigarette hang from his lips, he pats himself down for a lighter, unable to find one.

Stella slips into her apron, finding one, holding it out.

Sheriff Hardley leans his head forward, Stella lighting the cigarette for him.

Taking a few puffs, he leans back into his seat. Taking a much needed reprieve.

Stella watches him, still a bit on edge. Sharing a long, unsure silence with him.

Hardley leans his head back, blowing smoke up at the ceiling.

SHERIFF HARDLEY

Still gotta take you in. For your
husband.

A beat before he looks across to her, studying her.

He offers her a cigarette. She looks to him, unsure, but ultimately accepts it.

She sits next to him, lighting her cigarette. Keeping her eyes locked on him. Not sure quite what to think.

As Sheriff Hardley gazes off while drifting into thought...

SHERIFF HARDLEY (CONT'D)
I assume it was self-defense?

Waiting for a response, he turns to her again.
Studying him for a few moments, Stella eventually nods.
Sheriff Hardley flashes a sad smile, eyes casting down.

SHERIFF HARDLEY (CONT'D)
We all knew about Oscar. The way he
was beating on you and what not.

He turns to her again, sincere.

SHERIFF HARDLEY (CONT'D)
I'm sorry we didn't do something
sooner.

Though angered, Stella accepts his apology.
Another shared silence...

SHERIFF HARDLEY (CONT'D)
And I'm sorry about cold-cocking
you like that. It's just...

He drifts back into thought, shaking his head.

SHERIFF HARDLEY (CONT'D)
It's just been a really, really
shitty day.

They share another silence, exhaling cigarette smoke.

FADE TO BLACK:

OVER BLACK--

ONE YEAR LATER

FADE IN:

EXT. TIMES SQUARE NYC - DAY

Hustle and bustle. PEDESTRIANS flooding the sidewalks. A HOT
DOG VENDOR on every corner. HORNS HONKING. YELLOW CABS
weaving through traffic on the busy streets.

A vibrant SPORTS BAR/RESTAURANT sits at a nearby corner.

INT. SPORTS BAR/RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Every seat in the house occupied, the bar filled with PATRONS watching television.

AT A BOOTH

A FEMALE MILLENNIAL and her MALE MILLENNIAL companion discuss the bill together.

MALE MILLENNIAL
What should I tip her?

The Female Millennial gathers her coat, putting it on.

FEMALE MILLENNIAL
Well, we waited an hour to get sat.
And the food took forever...

MALE MILLENNIAL
We should leave her something.

She shakes her head, combative.

FEMALE MILLENNIAL
Fuck that. Did you see the portions? For that price?

MALE MILLENNIAL
That's not really HER fault, is it?

Fed up, she snatches the check and pen from him, hastily scribbling a zero onto the tip-line.

She snaps the billfold shut.

FEMALE MILLENNIAL
There. Was that so hard?

The Male Millennial shrugs - *Oh, well.*

They get up, gather their jackets and leave.

ON THE TABLE - A hand snatches the billfold, opening it.

FRONT ENTRANCE

As the Millennial Couple heads out the door...

STELLA (O.S.)
Hey, folks?

The couple turns, sees Stella with the billfold.

Stella stares them down for a moment...

But she just winks at them.

STELLA (CONT'D)
Have an amazing day.

The couple exchanges a wary glance.

MALE MILLENNIAL
Thanks. You, too.

Stella's hawk-like stare follows them out the door.

A MALE CUSTOMER at a nearby table grabs her by the wrist.

She slowly turns, looking to his hand. Then at him.

MALE CUSTOMER
Excuse me, I asked for ranch
dressing with my salad? You gave me
honey mustard.

STELLA'S FACE - Seething, ready to snap, dark expression in
her eyes...

But she lightens up. And smiles at him.

CUT TO BLACK:

THE END