Through An Angel's Eyes
FADE IN:

EXT. RESIDENTIAL FRONT YARD - NIGHT

LAGRANGE, GEORGIA -- 1955

A storm brews in the distance. Lightning flashes.

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

INT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

KITCHEN

The room is dark.

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

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

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

DEALER
Bet’s to you.

The scarred man studies his hand.

SCARRED MAN
I’m thinkin’.

DEALER
With what?

The scarred man looks up from his cards.

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

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

The remaining THREE MEN smile coyly.

DEALER
I’m shakin’.

The two men exchange cold stares.
DEALER
Bet’s to you. You in, or out?

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

The men are spooked. They pull their guns.

A wooden match strikes in the dark. The tall man in the Stetson hat lights a cigarette.

The dealer jumps from his seat and turns the hanging light on the intruder whose face is shadowed.

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

TALL MAN
I’m in.

The men stare from the lit match to its sender.

DEALER
Who are you? A cop?

One MAN takes notice of the uninvited’s stature.

MAN
They don’t make cops that tall.

DEALER
I’m gonna ask you one more time -- Who are you?

Thunder rumbles.

TALL MAN
Your destiny.

The men look to each other and laugh.

The scarred man pops a switchblade.

SCARRED MAN
I got your destiny right here, boy.

DEALER
(to scarred man)
Send him to hell.

TALL MAN
Let’s all go together.
The tall man sweeps his open hand across the room.

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

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The house explodes into a ball of fire.

Lightning bolts cross in the sky, the rain pours.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - MORNING

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

FRONT YARD

A MAN, JESS LYNCH, 70, with snow-white hair, picks up his morning paper. He strips the rubber band and opens it to the headline that reads:

“HOUSE EXPLOSION REMAINS A MYSTERY”

Jess turns back to the two-story white-framed house, still reading.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

BEDROOM

BUCK LYNCH, a twelve-year-old boy with average looks and serious eyes, finishes dressing.

KITCHEN

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

DELL

Buck?!

...and sets them on the stove top, then walks to the door at the foyer.

DELL

Buck!

BUCK’S BEDROOM

Buck ties his black, high-top sneakers.
DELL (O.S.)
Get on down here! You gonna be late
for school!

BUCK
I’m comin’, Grandma!

Buck grabs his book satchel.

He runs to a chest of drawers where a statue of a winged
angel with outstretched arms rests atop it. Behind the statue
a framed picture of another angel watches over two children
that cross a footbridge.

Buck drops the satchel, bows his head and clasps his fingers
together. He mumbles a prayer, then looks up at the angel.

BUCK
Amen.

HALLWAY
Buck gingerly opens a closed door...

BEDROOM
...and looks in.

Buck’s MOTHER, ESTELLE LYNCH, mid-30’s with a pretty face,
lies in bed. She turns her head toward the door and smiles.

BUCK
Didn’t know if you were asleep.

ESTELLE
Not asleep.

Buck walks to the bed.

BUCK
You all right, Mama? You feel okay?

Estelle pushes the hair off Buck’s forehead.

ESTELLE
Will you quit worrying about me?
I’m fine.

BUCK
You’re not fine, Mama -- How do you
feel today?

Estelle looks upon her son’s face with a quiet smile.
ESTELLE
So-so.

BUCK
Why don’t you try gettin’ up? You could sit in your wheelchair. It might make you feel better.

ESTELLE
I don’t have the energy -- And where would I go but this room?

BUCK
We need a one-story house.

DELL (O.S.)
Buck!

ESTELLE
We have what we have -- Go on now. You’ll be late for school.

BUCK
When I get home we’ll watch TV together -- Play a board game or something.

ESTELLE
I’ll look forward to it.

DELL (O.S.)
Buck Lynch!

Buck starts for the door.

BUCK
If you need anything you call Grandma.

ESTELLE
I will. Go on.

DELL (O.S.)
Buck!

BUCK
I’m comin’, Grandma!

He looks back to his mother.
Estelle smiles and waves goodbye.

KITCHEN
Buck rushes in...

DELL
You gonna be late.

...grabs a biscuit off the stove.

BUCK
I’m never late.

DELL
There’s jam on the table.

Buck halves the biscuit with his fingers then scoops the jam with a butter knife and spreads it.

Jess sits at the table reading the morning paper.

BUCK
What’s the news, Granddaddy?

Jess never looks up.

JESS
It says: “Buck Lynch to be expelled from school if late one more time.”

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

BUCK
(over the biscuit)
I’m never late.

Two cats rush in. The door slams. One cat arches his back and hisses.

DELL
(to cat)
Git!

The cat scurries.

Dell walks to the door and stares out.

DELL
Just not fair... him havin’ nobody but us.

Jess looks up from the paper.

JESS
Our daughter’s not dead yet, Dell.
DELL
Don’t you look at me like that,

Jess sighs.

JESS
You’d think a crippling car wreck
would have been enough for one soul
to bear in a lifetime.

Dell steps to Jess’ side. She touches the hair on the back of
his head.

DELL
You’d think.

Dell looks down at the newspaper’s headline.

DELL
See they still don’t know what
happened at the Callahan house.

JESS
Don’t ‘spect nobody cares.

He turns the page.

JESS
Crime rate’s gone straight down
since them boys left us.

A dinner bell rings from the floor above.

Dell looks to the ceiling.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Buck races down the sidewalk.

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

J.P. slows, pulls alongside Buck.

J.P.
When you gonna get a bike?

Buck doesn’t break stride.

BUCK
When I want one, J.P.
J.P.
You don’t want one?

BUCK
Don’t have one, do I?

J.P.
Boy, you crazy.

BUCK
You looked in a mirror lately?

J.P. laughs.

J.P.
You wanna go to the picture show Saturday? Ten Commandments is on.

BUCK
I dunno. What’s it about?

J.P.
What’s it about?!

He laughs.

J.P.
Boy, you are crazy!

J.P. speeds away.

Buck knows it was a stupid question.

BUCK
Damn.

INT. SCHOOL - LATER THAT MORNING

CLASSROOM

MISS ANITA FERKING, mid-40’s, old-maid looks and SCHOOL TEACHER, peers over the top of her glasses from behind her desk and the plaque that bears her name.

MISS FERKING
You’re late.

Buck stands by his desk.

BUCK
Yes, ma’am.
MISS FERKING
How many times have you been late this week, Buck?

BUCK
I dunno, Miss Ferking.

Miss Ferking raises her eye brows.

BUCK
Three times.

MISS FERKING
And what day is... today?

BUCK
Wednesday.

The other students laugh.

Miss Ferking scans the room with a frigid stare.

The class quietens.

MISS FERKING
Why won’t you be late tomorrow, Buck?

BUCK
Tomorrow?  
(thinking)
‘cause I’ll be on time?

Laughter in the class.

The look.

They quieten.

MISS FERKING
Because you won’t be here, Buck.

Buck’s heart sinks.

Miss Ferking writes on a sheet of paper. She folds it and holds it out to Buck.

MISS FERKING
Take this and report to the principal’s office.

BUCK
Yes, ma’am.
Buck takes the note, retrieves his satchel and lunch, then starts for the door with his head hung.

Miss Ferking continues with her class.

Hoss, the class bully and biggest of the kids, loads a spitball into the rubber band between his fingers.

Buck reaches the door.

Hoss launches the spitball to the side of Buck’s face.

BUCK  Ow!

The class goes quiet.

Everyone stares at Buck.

MISS FERKING  (to Buck)  Now what?!

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

BUCK  I... I stepped on my foot.

The class laughs.

Buck stares at Hoss with his own ‘snake eyes.’

Hoss drags his middle finger slowly down his face. He mouths, ‘bastard boy’ to Buck.

Buck takes a step toward Hoss before catching himself.

He leaves, defeated.

I/E. LYNCH RESIDENCE - NIGHT

BUCK’S BEDROOM

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

BUCK  I was just kiddin’ about the Ten Commandments.
      (reassuring)  I know about ‘em.

Thunder rumbles in the distance.
A gust of wind flaps the window curtains.

    BUCK
    Amen.

Hard rain begins to fall and blow in.

Buck rushes to the window.

Something outside catches his eye.

The tall man in the Stetson hat stands below his window in the pouring rain, looking up, his face hidden.

Lightning flashes.

Buck’s eyes squint.

He looks back to the yard below. The tall man is gone.

Buck sticks his head out the window and looks up and down the street.

The rain drives him back.

He closes the window and draws the curtains.

**EXT. STREET - MORNING**

Buck’s hotfooting it down the sidewalk with satchel and lunch in hand.

J.P. comes from behind on his bike.

    J.P.
    Where you goin’?

    BUCK
    To school you fool.

    J.P.
    I thought you got kicked out yesterday?

    BUCK
    I gotta spend the rest of the week in the principal’s office -- Do my studies there.

    J.P.
    Maybe you’ll be there when he calls Miss Perking in.

Buck doesn’t get it.
BUCK
Why would he do that?

J.P.
Because she’s Anita Ferkin’.

J.P. laughs.

BUCK
Ha-ha.

J.P.
Boy, when you gonna get a crew-cut?

BUCK
When you gonna shut-up?

J.P. speeds away.

J.P.
Never!

BUCK
Ditto!

Buck speeds up.

INT. SCHOOL - LATER THAT MORNING

OUTSIDE THE PRINCIPAL’S OFFICE

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

PRINCIPAL STERN’S OFFICE

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

AT THE OFFICE DOOR

Principal Stern steps out and addresses Buck.

PRINCIPAL STERN
You may attend morning break.

Buck closes the book.

BUCK
Thank you, sir.

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

BUCK
Yes, sir.

Buck walks away.

PRINCIPAL STERN
Buck.

Buck turns around.

BUCK
Sir?

Principal Stern holds one finger up.

PRINCIPAL STERN
Time... waits for no man.

A beat through Buck’s stare.

BUCK
Thank you, Principal Stern. I’ll remember that.

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

BUCK
No, sir. I wouldn’t.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - MINUTES LATER

Buck walks the schoolyard alone.

Hoss and some boys pass a football as others horseplay.

As Buck passes by a group of girls they murmur to themselves and giggle.

Buck knows they’re laughing at him. He ignores them and walks on.

HOSS
Hey, Buck-duck!

Buck hears, but ignores Hoss, too.

J.P. is standing by Hoss.
J.P.
Why you callin’ him, duck?

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

Hoss throws the football with full force toward Buck.

J.P.
Buck! Duck!

The ball hits Buck in the back of his head.

Buck turns to face Hoss and the other boys.

All but J.P. laugh.

J.P.
I told you to duck!

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

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

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

Hoss and the boys stop just short of Buck.

HOSS
Go get it!

BUCK
You go get it!

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

HOSS
Get up, bastard boy, and get that ball... ‘fore I kick you over there to it.

Buck stares up at Hoss.

J.P.
Don’t call him that, Hoss.

Hoss balls his fist up at J.P.

HOSS
You want some, too!!
J.P.

No.

HOSS
Then shut up!

J.P. takes a step back.

HOSS
That’s what he is. A bastard boy.
Ain’t got no daddy.

J.P.
Buck -- Get up.

Buck sighs. He rolls to his knees, then stops and stares across the school yard.

On the other side of a chain link fence Buck sees the tall man in the Stetson hat turn and walk away.

HOSS (O.S.)
You gettin’ up, bastard boy... or what?

Buck’s eyes narrow. He jumps to his feet with a clenched fist and pops Hoss right between his eyes.

Hoss falls flat on his back.

BUCK
Getcha own damn ball -- Hoss shit!

Buck looks at the other boys. They all step back.

Hoss sits up and shakes the cobwebs from his head.

J.P. smiles at Buck with admiration.

J.P.
Boy, you really are crazy.

Buck looks back to the fence. The tall man is gone.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - EVENING

KITCHEN

Buck, Dell and Jess eat their supper, quietly.

JESS
(to Buck)
Not sayin’ much tonight.
BUCK
I’m just thinkin’.

JESS
Thought you did enough of that at school?

Dell scolds Jess with her eyes.

Jess presses on.

JESS
Whatcha got on your mind, Buck?
Might as well spit it out. You know
I’ll find out anyway.

Buck puts his fork down. He pulls a folded sheet of paper from his pocket and holds it out to his grandfather.

BUCK
You gotta sign this.

Jess takes the paper.

JESS
What’s this?

BUCK
Note from Miss Ferking.

JESS
Miss Perking?

Jess pulls the reading glasses from his shirt pocket.

BUCK
I been late every day... except today.

Jess looks up from the paper.

JESS
This is dated yesterday.

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

JESS
He handed it to me!

BUCK
It’s too far to walk, Granddaddy!
JESS
Get up earlier.

DELL
(to Jess)
You could drive him.

JESS
And I do when it rains, but it
ain’t rainin’.
(to Buck)
Why’s this dated yesterday?

Dell pushes her chair back, disgusted with Jess.

DELL
Now nobody even knows what they’ve eat.

JESS
I know what I’ve eat!

BUCK
I was supposed to bring it back
signed today. Principal Stern said
if I didn’t bring it back tomorrow
I’d have to sit in his office all
next week.

JESS
So you lied?

BUCK
‘Bout the note?

JESS
‘Bout being late.

Dell stands -- picks up her plate.

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

JESS
I’ll eat it!

BUCK
I didn’t mean to, Granddaddy. I
need a bike!
DELL
(to Jess)
No you won’t!

JESS
(to Dell)
What?!
(to Buck)
Lyin’s got nothin’ to do with gettin’ somewhere.

Dell picks up Jess’ plate.

JESS
I’m not through with that.

DELL
Yes you are!

The bell rings from the second floor.

Dell sets the dinner plates on the counter.

DELL
I’m comin’, Estelle!

Jess looks up at Dell as she passes...

JESS
Dell?!

...then back to the note. He sighs at Buck.

BUCK
I need a bike, Granddaddy.

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

JESS
You know what this is, Buck?

BUCK
Your pocket watch.

JESS
No. It’s a railroad pocket watch, because it has to be precise. I watched my Daddy check this watch every time he heard that train whistle blow, until he passed on and left it to me. Now I do the same thing, and I’m never late. Old habits are hard to break...

(MORE)
especially when they’re handed down
-- Could be you need this watch
now, more than me.

A beat.

BUCK
Could I have the bike first?

Jess’ stare turns to a smile.

BUCK’S BEDROOM – LATER

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

BUCK
It don’t have to be a new one. I
don’t even care if the paint’s
scratched.

ESTELLE (O.S.)
Buck?

ESTELLE’S BEDROOM

Buck opens the door.

BUCK
Yes, Mama?

ESTELLE
Thought you’d forgot me.

Buck steps inside.

BUCK
Now that’s about the silliest thing
I ever heard of.

Estelle pats the bed.

Buck lays atop the cover next to her.

Estelle turns to face him. She pushes his hair back.

ESTELLE
It was silly of me.

BUCK
I’d never forget you, Mama. I’ll
always take care of you.

Estelle whispers...
ESTELLE
I know that.

...kisses his cheek.

ESTELLE
You’re my man.

Buck stares at the ceiling.

BUCK
Mama?

ESTELLE
Hmmm?

BUCK
How come you and Daddy never got married?

A beat.

ESTELLE
All this time you’ve never asked -- Why now?

BUCK
I wanted to -- Just didn’t.

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

BUCK
He didn’t love us?

ESTELLE
He never knew you.

BUCK
He know of me?

Estelle really doesn’t want to discuss it.

ESTELLE
He didn’t want to be a daddy, either.

Buck thinks.

BUCK
Do you miss him?
Estelle’s eyes smile.

    ESTELLE
    I miss dancing more.

    BUCK
    I remember dancing with you.

    ESTELLE
    Do you?

Buck nods.

    BUCK
    Well where’s he...

Estelle puts a finger to Buck’s lips.

    ESTELLE
    I don’t know, Buck -- I haven’t heard from him in years.

    BUCK
    Does he know where we live?

Estelle stares.

    ESTELLE
    He knows.

    BUCK
    I don’t even know what he looks like. There’s not a picture of him anywhere.

    ESTELLE
    He looks like you, Buck.

    BUCK
    (sarcastic)
    He looks twelve?

Estelle laughs.

    ESTELLE
    He’s tall.

    BUCK
    How tall?

Estelle blows a long breath.

    ESTELLE
    Tall, tall.
Buck presses his face into a pillow.

ESTELLE
Taller than me.

Buck raises his eyes to his mother.

BUCK
Does he wear a hat?

Estelle turns and lies flat.

ESTELLE
He used to, sometimes -- No more talk about the past. I’m tired. Give me a kiss night.

They touch lips, lightly.

Buck starts for the door.

BUCK
If you need me you just call out.

ESTELLE
I will. Good night, Buck.

Estelle turns away from Buck, her eyes sad.

ESTELLE
Sleep tight.

Buck stands in the doorway looking back with his own sadness.

BUCK
Night, Mama.

EXT. DOWNTOWN LAGRANGE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Buck and J.P. exit the theatre with others. The marquee above them reads, The Ten Commandments.

J.P.
Man! That’s the best movie I ever seen!

They walk up the street.

BUCK
It was too long.

J.P. laughs.
J.P.
You thought it was over at intermission.

BUCK
So? You didn’t?

J.P.
Course not! How could it end like that? Charlton Heston hadn’t even got the Ten Commandments yet...

BUCK
You mean, Moses.

J.P.
...or parted the water.

J.P. holds his arms out and stretches them apart.

J.P.
Behold His mighty Hand!

BUCK
I liked Yul Brynner best.

They walk on.

J.P.
Wanna get a shake at the drug store?

Buck feels in his pockets and pulls out two nickels. He puts them back.

BUCK
I’m not thirsty.

J.P.
You will be after you drink the shake.

They stop for the traffic light.

BUCK
I gotta get home.

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

J.P.
See ya Monday.

He stops in the middle of the street and shouts back to Buck.
Hey, Buck! You know the Yanks clinched yesterday?!

BUCK
Clinched what?

J.P. laughs.

Boy, go home and read the paper!

Buck looks across the street. He sees the tall man in the Stetson hat standing on the opposite corner.

The light changes.

Buck crosses the street with other pedestrians, his eyes locked on the stranger.

The tall man lights a cigarette then turns and walks down the street ahead of Buck.

Buck follows.

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

One BOY turns back, his arms outstretched.

Behold His mighty Hand!

The boy laughs as he turns and runs to catch up with the others.

The tall man is gone.

Buck stops and looks to both sides of the street for the disappearing stranger.

He walks on and passes an ALLEY

where the tall man is waiting in the shadows, leaning against the brick wall and smoking a cigarette.

Where you headed, Buck?

Buck stops, his stare frozen to the man.

Said... where you headed?
Buck stutters.

**BUCK**

Home.

The man lifts his head. His face breaks into the light.

He looks mid-30’s, clean-shaven, his eyes bright copper.

**TALL MAN**

Whatcha staring at, boy?

**BUCK**

Your... your eyes.

The man moves off the wall and takes a long drag.

He takes his free hand and moves it across the cigarette, then rubs his palms together.

Buck sees the cigarette is gone. His eyes scan the ground for it.

**TALL MAN**

What’s wrong with them?

Buck looks up.

**BUCK**

With what?

**TALL MAN**

My eyes.

**BUCK**

They’re different.

He remembers.

**BUCK**

Hey -- You called me Buck.

**TALL MAN**

So I did.

**BUCK**

How do you know my name?

The man stares with no answer.

**BUCK**

I seen you outside my bedroom window -- School, too.
Suddenly it hits Buck.

BUCK
Are you my daddy?

The tall man’s copper eyes take all of Buck in.

TALL MAN
Do I look like your daddy?

Buck just stares for a moment, absorbed with the stranger.

BUCK
I was just kiddin’ around -- I gotta go. I’ll be late.

Buck walks away in a quick pace.

The tall man steps out of the alley. He calls out to Buck.

TALL MAN
That’s what it’s all about, Buck -- Time.

Buck spins around.

BUCK
I’m sick of hearin’ about...

The man is gone.

BUCK
...time.

Buck turns and runs.

I/E. LYNCH RESIDENCE - EVENING

FOYER

Buck stands at the front screen door looking up and down the street that’s quiet but for a passing car.

LIVING ROOM

Dell sits in a rocker crocheting.

Jess watches TV. He turns toward the foyer.

JESS
(to Buck)
What are you watchin’ for?

FOYER
BUCK

Nothin’, Granddaddy.

Buck’s eyes drift away.

BUCK’S BEDROOM – MORNING

An alarm clock rings.

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

MINUTES LATER

Dressed, Buck grabs his satchel and breaks for the door before remembering and quickly turning back to the angel. He drops his satchel and says a quick prayer.

BUCK

Please make Mama well. You know I don’t have a daddy. Amen.

ESTELLE’S BEDROOM

Buck opens the door and looks in.

ESTELLE

I’m awake.

Buck rushes to his mother.

BUCK

I gotta go, Mama. I’ll be late.

He kisses her cheek and leaves in a rush.

ESTELLE

You eat a good breakfast now!

KITCHEN

The two cats lie close to the stove.

Dell’s at the sink.

Jess reads the morning paper at the table.

A train is heard in the distance.

JESS

Old 92’s barrellin’ this mornin’.

He pulls out his pocket watch and looks down at the cats.
JESS
Yep, she’s runnin’ late.

Buck races into the kitchen, grabs a biscuit off the stove and steps on one of the cats’ tails.

The cat screams then runs away chased by the other.

Jess puts the newspaper down.

JESS
Boy, you’re like a sudden storm!

Buck grabs a glass of milk off the table and guzzles it down.

DELL
(to Buck)
Don’t forget your jam.

Buck grabs his satchel.

BUCK
No time, Grandma. I’ll be late.

JESS
Get up earlier!

Buck hits the door like a whirlwind.

BUCK
Gotta go!

Dell grabs Buck’s sack lunch off the counter and runs to the door.

DELL
Buck! Your lunch!

Buck rushes back and grabs the sack from Dell’s hand.

Dell catches Jess’ eye with her stare.

Jess gives the paper a firm shake.

JESS
It ain’t rainin’.

INT. MISS FERKING’S CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Buck takes a seat at his desk. He’s out of breath.

The tardy bell rings.
Miss Ferking looks up at the wall clock, then around the classroom. She spots Buck.

MISS FERKING
Well, Buck. That wasn’t so hard was it?

BUCK
No, ma’am.

MISS FERKING
And what have we learned?

Buck swallows as he catches his breath.

BUCK
It’s all about time, Miss Ferking.

Hoss sits in the back of the room frowning at Buck, rubbing the bruise between his eyes.

BUCK
It’s all about time.

I/E. LYNCH RESIDENCE - NIGHT

BUCK’S BEDROOM

Buck lies in bed asleep.

He wakes suddenly and jumps out of bed, rushing to the window and looking out.

STREET

The tall man stands under the street light looking up at Buck. He lights a cigarette and walks away.

BUCK’S BEDROOM

Buck grabs his bathrobe.

EXT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

FRONT PORCH

Buck gently closes the door behind him. He looks down the street in the direction the tall man walked then starts down the steps.

CITY PARK
Buck comes to a small city park.

A Hoot Owl calls out followed by a Whippoorwill.

The tall man in the Stetson hat sits relaxed on a park bench, smoking his cigarette. He lifts his head to Buck, then his eyes to the starlit sky.

TALL MAN
Beautiful night.

He brings his eyes back to Buck.

TALL MAN
Wonderful, glorious night.

Buck can’t break his stare.

BUCK
Who are you?

TALL MAN
Who do you think I am, Buck?

BUCK
I don’t know.

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

Buck knows there’s only one answer.

BUCK
An angel?

TALL MAN
An angel.

Buck blinks, stares through his confusion.

BUCK
You’re an angel?

The tall man closes the cigarette up in his hand, then holds it out to Buck, empty.

TALL MAN
So nice to make your acquaintance.

Reluctantly, Buck takes his hand.

He gasps at the angel’s touch.
The tall man opens his hand and pulls it back. He motions Buck to the bench.

TALL MAN
Sit.

Buck sits. He stares down at his open hand.

BUCK
What was that... feeling?

TALL MAN
Just a touch of the spirit.

He smiles at Buck.

TALL MAN
Relayed through me.

Buck slides down the bench, away from the man.

BUCK
You’re not an angel.

TALL MAN
Okay -- Why not?

BUCK
You don’t have any wings.

TALL MAN
I don’t fly.

BUCK
And angels don’t smoke cigarettes.

The tall man leans back and crosses his arms.

TALL MAN
Why not?

BUCK
’Cause it’s bad for your health -- And because it’s a sin.

TALL MAN
I have no health. And where is that written?

BUCK
Grandma says anything bad for your health is a sin.
TALL MAN
That why your grandfather quit?

BUCK
No, he had a...

TALL MAN
Heart attack.

Buck has no comeback.

TALL MAN
You pray to a porcelain angel for the relief of your mother’s pain from the cancer within her body. You pray morning, you pray night -- You pray everyday.

Buck’s mouth falls open.

BUCK
Are you here to make my mother well?!

TALL MAN
I’m here to counsel you.

BUCK
Whadda you mean?

TALL MAN
Your life, death... your rebirth, is mapped and sealed.

BUCK
I don’t understand. All I prayed for was my mother to get well.

TALL MAN
He, Almighty, has deemed you a chosen one. You will flourish in the glory of Eden, marked as His warrior, as I.

BUCK
Eden?

TALL MAN
Paradise.

A beat.

TALL MAN
Heaven.
Buck’s stunned.

BUCK
I’m gonna be...

TALL MAN
An angel... and my apprentice.

Buck nods.

BUCK
I see -- Your name is?

TALL MAN
Whatever you’d like.

BUCK
All I know is you’re tall.

TALL MAN
Then call me, Tall Man.

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

Tall Man listens, amused.

BUCK
I dunno how you know all you do about me, but if you was a real angel, you’d make my mother well.

TALL MAN
All in time, Buck Lynch, all in time. Before I leave you, I will free your mother from her pain.

BUCK
If you’re an angel, do it now.

Tall Man’s stare is certain.

TALL MAN
It’s not time yet.

Buck jumps up.

BUCK
Time-time-time! Everything’s about time! Go to bed on time, get up on time! Get to school on time!
He shouts.

    BUCK
    It’s all about time!

Dogs bark.

    TALL MAN
    Yes, it is.

Buck flops back on the bench, exasperated.

He turns to Tall Man.

    BUCK
    So what’s Heaven look like?

    TALL MAN
    Would you like to see?

    BUCK
    How can I do that?

    TALL MAN
    Through my eyes.

Buck stares.

The angel points to his eyes, then Buck’s.

    TALL MAN
    Close.

Buck closes his eyes.

Tall Man lifts his copper eyes to the stars. They brighten... as does the street light.

Buck gasps.

    BUCK
    Oh, my!

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

A brilliant shooting star flashes by.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - MORNING

BUCK’S BEDROOM

An alarm clock rings.
Buck wakes, his arm extended in the air. He’s confused.

MINUTES LATER

Buck finishes dressing.

DELL (O.S.)

Buck?!

Buck goes to his door and shouts.

BUCK
Okay! I heard you!

KITCHEN

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

BUCK’S BEDROOM

Buck picks up his satchel. He walks to the angel on the chest of drawers. He stares at the porcelain figure for a moment, then puts it in the top drawer.

ESTELLE’S BEDROOM

Buck opens the door and looks in.

Estelle sees something different in his face.

ESTELLE
Buck? Are you all right?

BUCK
I didn’t sleep good.

ESTELLE
Why not?

BUCK
Just didn’t. I’ll be late, I gotta go. I’ll check on you when I get home.

ESTELLE
(hesitant)
Kisses.

BUCK
Kisses.

Buck closes the door.
Estelle stares.

KITCHEN

Buck grabs his lunch off the counter.

    DELL
    (to Buck)
    I already jammed your biscuit for you.

    BUCK
    I’m not hungry, Grandma.

He runs for the screen door.

    DELL
    You sick?

Buck throws the door back hard...

    BUCK
    No!

...and runs out.

Dell goes to the door.

Jess lets his paper flop.

    JESS
    Some kind of growin’ stage?

Dell stares down the street.

    DELL
    I don’t know.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Buck hotfoots it. He looks mad.

J.P. comes up from behind on his bike. He slows as he pulls alongside Buck.

    J.P.
    Better pick it up, Buck. You don’t wanna be late.

Buck grabs the back of J.P.’s pants belt. J.P. and the bike come to a halt.

    J.P.
    What are you doin’?!
A SHORT TIME LATER

Buck peddles the bike. J.P. sits atop the handle bars holding Buck’s satchel.

J.P.
You gonna wreck us!

The bike speeds away.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD – LATER

Buck walks alone in deep thought.

J.P. talks with some other boys. He sees Buck and leaves the others.

J.P.
Hey, Buck.

Buck
Hey.

J.P.
What’s wrong with you? I’ve known you since first grade. You ain’t never acted like this before.

Buck
I’m just thinkin’.

J.P.
’Bout what?

Buck
Stuff.

J.P.
What kinda stuff?

Buck stops and jerks his head toward J.P.

Buck
Stuff-stuff!

J.P.
Okay-okay!

They walk on.

J.P.
Just don’t be mad at me. Me and you buddies.
BUCK
I know.

Buck stops and turns to his friend

BUCK
J.P. -- You believe in angels?

J.P.
Angels?

HOSS (O.S.)
Hey, Lynch!

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

J.P.
Uh-oh.

They face off.

Hoss grinds his fist into his other hand.

HOSS
My brother wants to talk to you.

Hoss’ brother pushes his way through the boys to the front. He’s taller than the others.

BROTHER
Why don’t you try pickin’ on me instead of my little brother -- Bastard boy.

Buck looks up at the boy and balls his fist by his side.

INT. SCHOOL - LATER SAME DAY

PRINCIPAL STERN’S OFFICE

Principal Stern sits behind his desk. He pats his fingers together as he thinks. Finally, he holds one finger up.

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

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

Hoss’ brother rubs at the bruise between his eyes.
PRINCIPAL STERN
Buck Lynch.

BUCK
Yes, sir?

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

Buck stares at Principal Stern.

BUCK
Sir?

PRINCIPAL STERN
You heard me -- Apologize.

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

Buck gives a long sigh. He turns toward the boys then back to Principal Stern.

BUCK
No, sir.

PRINCIPAL STERN
What did you say?

Buck’s body goes limp in the chair.

BUCK
Said, no, sir. I won’t.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - EVENING

KITCHEN

Buck, Dell and Jess eat their supper.

Jess puts his fork down and stretches back.

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

DELL
Mr. Johnson’s apples looked poorly, and his peaches just as bad. There’s still cake from the other night if you want it.
JESS
No... just wanted to make sure
there weren’t a deep-dish loomin’
about.

He turns to Buck.

JESS
Spit it out.

Buck stops eating.

DELL
Jess?

Jess hands Dell his plate.

JESS
I’m finished, thank you.

Buck reaches into his pocket for the folded note. He holds it
out to his grandfather.

DELL
(to Jess)
You beat all I ever seen.

Dell takes her and Jess’ plate as she leaves the table.

DELL
I’m gonna check on Estelle.

Jess puts his glasses on and reads the note.

Buck stares straight ahead.

Jess lays his glasses and the note on the table.

JESS
What’s wrong, son?

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

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

BUCK
Last night I dreamed I was talkin’
to this angel ‘bout savin’ Mama...
Then he showed me Heaven, and it
was like...

Buck pauses.

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

Jess’ love for his grandson sparkles in his eyes.

JESS
I ‘spect if I saw Heaven then woke
up here, I’d feel cheated to --
I’ll talk to Principal Stern
tomorrow. No need for you to miss
your school work ‘cause of this.

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

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

Jess puts his reading glasses back in his shirt pocket.

JESS
I whipped their granddaddy for
messin’ with me over fifty-years
ago on that same playground.

BUCK
Did you get in trouble for it?

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

Buck hugs Jess’ neck.
BUCK
I love you, Granddaddy.

Jess’ embarrassed by the sudden attention, but he loves it.

JESS
Go on outside and enjoy the evenin’
‘fore it’s bedtime.

Buck, very serious.

BUCK
You ever have a dream like that?
See Heaven?

Jess smiles with his eyes.

JESS
I see heaven every time I look at your grandmother.

Dell steps in from the foyer.

Jess looks up at her.

JESS
You eavesdroppin’?

DELL
Maybe.

JESS
(to Buck)
Go on outside now.

Buck leaves by the screen door.

Dell walks over to Jess and kisses him on his cheek.

One of the cats jumps up into Jess’ lap.

JESS
Well, this must be my lucky night.

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

EXT. LYNCH RESIDENCE – CONTINUOUS

Buck walks alongside the house. He spots a bird with a broken wing trying to get airborne.

Concerned for the bird Buck runs to it and picks it up.
TALL MAN (O.S.)
A true knight.

Buck turns to sound of the familiar voice.
Tall Man sits on the front porch steps.

TALL MAN
Protector of the weak.

BUCK
You are real.

Dell steps out and onto the front porch.
Tall Man stands. He’s a few feet from Dell.

DELL
(to Buck)
Whatcha got in your hands?

BUCK
Hurt bird.

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

She turns to go back inside.

BUCK
Grandma?

Dell stops.

BUCK
Ain’t you gonna ask him who he is?

Dell hesitates.

DELL
You think you got a talkin’ bird there?

BUCK
Not the bird, Grandma. The man.

Dell looks around.
Tall Man smiles at Buck.

DELL
What man?
TALL MAN
She can’t see me.

BUCK
Don’t you hear him?

TALL MAN
Or hear me either.

Dell points her finger at Buck.

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

TALL MAN
Tell her you were only kidding around.

Buck stares at the angel before turning his eyes to his grandmother.

BUCK
I was just kiddin’ with you, Grandma -- Just playin’ around.

Dell sighs.

DELL
Thank the Lord -- Stay close to the yard. I’ll holler for you when the ice cream’s ready.

BUCK
Yes, ma’am.

Dell goes back into the house.

Tall Man walks to Buck and looks down at the injured bird.

BUCK
He’s gonna die.

The angel moves his open hand over the bird.

The bird spreads his wings and flies away.

Buck looks into Tall Man’s copper eyes.

BUCK
You cured him.
TALL MAN
Wasn’t his time -- No reason not to.

BUCK
Why couldn’t Grandma see you?

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

BUCK
Did last night really happen?

TALL MAN
Yes.

BUCK
And you really are an angel?

Tall Man nods.

TALL MAN
Yes.

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

TALL MAN
And you are. But I wanted you to see -- To know what awaits you.

BUCK
You’re not going to show me the bad place, are you?

Tall Man smiles with his eyes.

TALL MAN
You mean, hell?

Buck nods.

TALL MAN
Only His angels may see beyond those gates and return. But we never enter -- It’s where the fallen take delivery.

BUCK
Fallen?
TALL MAN
Read your Bible.

BUCK
I do.

Tall Man furrows his brow.

BUCK
Sometimes -- Why are you here?

TALL MAN
Because it’s time for me.

BUCK
Here?

TALL MAN
Yes.

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

TALL MAN
Didn’t I promise to free her from her pain when it was time?

BUCK
You did.

TALL MAN
I never break a promise.

BUCK
It’s really time?

Tall Man studies Buck’s face.

TALL MAN
Yes, Buck -- It’s time.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

FOYER

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

LIVING ROOM - FOYER

Dell is in her rocker in front of a black and white TV that shows the evening news. She crochets.
Buck stops outside the living room in the foyer with Tall Man beside him.

    BUCK
    Whatcha watchin’, Grandma?

Dell doesn’t look up.

    DELL
    Not watchin’, crocheting. News is on.
    BUCK (O.S.)
    Grandma.

Dell looks up.

    DELL
    What?

She stares.

FOYER

Buck knows what she doesn’t see.

    BUCK
    Tomorrow’s gonna be a great day.

He looks up at the angel and smiles.

LIVING ROOM

Dell stares at Buck.

    DELL
    Son, are you sure you feel all right?

FOYER

    BUCK
    Yes, ma’am. I feel great.

Tall Man looks down at Buck.

    TALL MAN
    See to your mother.

Buck runs up the stairs.

STAIRCASE - KITCHEN
Buck passes the open kitchen door on his way up. Jess is at the table cranking the handle on the ice cream maker.

KITCHEN

Jess sees Buck blazing up the stairs.

    JESS
    Hey, slow down!

Jess returns to the ice cream and shakes his head.

Tall Man appears inside the kitchen doorway.

Jess looks up from the ice cream. He stares, unsure.

Tall Man smiles.

    TALL MAN
    Hello, Jess.

ESTELLE’S BEDROOM

Buck opens the door.

Estelle looks up.

They hear a loud thud.

    DELL (O.S.)
    Jess?

Buck and Estelle’s eyes lock.

Dell screams.

    DELL (O.S.)
    Jess!

Buck bolts from the room.

Estelle covers her mouth. Her eyes glaze with fright.

    BUCK (O.S.)
    Granddaddy!

    DELL (O.S.)
    Oh, Jess!

Tears roll from Estelle’s eyes.

INT. CHURCH – DAY

A standing church choir sings, *Shall We Gather at the River.*
Buck sits on a front pew next to his grandmother. Estelle is in a wheelchair in the aisle beside Buck. They’re solemn and dressed in black.

Jess’ coffin rests in front of them.

The choir finishes. They sit.

Ceiling fans hang and turn in the sanctuary over the people.

Some use hand-held fans that bear a picture of Jesus.

The PASTOR begins Jess’ eulogy.

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

The pastor stares out over the filled pews. He holds up a Bible.

PASTOR
The first mention of ‘Grandfather’ dates back thousands of years to the Book of Genesis... but its meaning has not changed.

The pastor holds the Bible high and shakes it at the congregation.

PASTOR
Bring them to me that I may bless them!

He brings the Bible down.

PASTOR
Those words are filled with love, folks... and that’s what Jess Lynch had for his family -- Love. But it was the title of, “Grandfather,” that he cherished most dearly.

The pastor’s words fade.

A tear rolls from Buck’s eye down his cheek. He lifts his eyes to the hovering winged angel with outstretched arms in a large, stained-glass window.
INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - LATER

LIVING ROOM - FOYER

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

A LARGE, HEAVYSET MAN carries Estelle up the stairs in his arms. TWO WOMEN follow.

KITCHEN

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

Buck stands by himself, solemn.

Dell stacks a plate high with small sandwiches.

    DELL
    Have you seen your granddaddy’s pocket watch?

    BUCK
    No, ma’am.

    DELL
    I can’t find it anywhere.

She hands Buck the plate of sandwiches.

    DELL
    Here, run these sandwiches out to the living room for me.

Buck hesitates, but takes the plate.

    BUCK
    How can everybody eat so much? And laugh? I don’t see anything funny about my granddaddy dyin’.

    DELL
    They’re not laughin’ at death, Buck. They’re rejoicin’ for your granddaddy ‘cause they know where he is. They’re laughin’ because they’re rememberin’ good times they shared with him.

    BUCK
    Then I guess they’ll laugh their heads off when Mama’s dead, too.

Buck sets the plate of sandwiches down and runs from the kitchen.
Dell’s eyes drop.

FOYER - STAIRS

Buck brushes by the heavyset man as he hits the stairs.

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

Buck stops cold half-way up and turns back to the man.

    BUCK
    No, I ain’t runnin’ late!

He turns back, continuing his escape.

The heavyset man smiles.

BEDROOM HALLWAY

Buck’s about to enter his room, but he stops instead and walks across the hall to his mother’s room.

ESTELLE’S BEDROOM

Buck peeps in.

A WOMAN puts Estelle’s black dress on a hanger.

A SECOND WOMAN helps Estelle situate in her bed.

Buck eases the door shut.

BUCK’S BEDROOM

Buck enters his room. He stares at the porcelain angel atop the chest of drawers.

Buck closes the door, never taking his eyes from the angel he knows should be in the drawer.

He steps in front of the figurine and sees the reflection of Tall Man off the glass of the pictured angel, sitting in a chair behind him.

Buck turns quickly.

    TALL MAN
    Got in the top drawer somehow --
    Knew you’d be missing it.

Buck just stares.
TALL MAN
Nothing to say?

BUCK
(sarcastic)
Where’s your cigarette?

Tall Man stands.

TALL MAN
Looks like I’m fresh out.

BUCK
You lied to me.

TALL MAN
Never once.

BEDROOM HALLWAY
One of the women come out of Estelle’s room.

BUCK (O.S.)
You said you’d make my mama well.

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

BUCK’S BEDROOM

TALL MAN
Never once.

BUCK
Liar!

TALL MAN
I said before I left you, I’d take your mother’s pain.

BEDROOM HALLWAY
The second woman opens Estelle’s bedroom door. She stands in the doorway, alarmed at the shouting. The two women look at each other, confused.

BUCK (O.S.)
Shut up!

Estelle calls to the woman in the doorway.

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

The woman at Buck’s door looks to the second woman.
The second woman turns back to Estelle.

SECOND WOMAN
I think he’s playing some kind of game or something.

She steps back into the room and closes the door.

BUCK’S BEDROOM

BUCK
You’re not a good angel! I know who you are! You’re the angel of death!

TALL MAN
My duties vary.

BUCK
You didn’t have to take Granddaddy! He wasn’t even sick!

TALL MAN
It was his time.

BEDROOM HALLWAY

BUCK (O.S.)
Now you’re here to take my mama, ain’t you?!

The woman listening is disturbed. She walks quickly to the top of the stairs and calls down them.

WOMAN
Dell!

BUCK’S BEDROOM

TALL MAN
When it’s time.

BUCK
No you won’t! I’ll fight you!

Buck turns and grabs the porcelain angel behind him. He throws it at Tall Man.

Tall Man puts his hand up. The angel slows to a stop in mid-air. He takes it in his hand and sets it on the dresser.
TALL MAN
I hope you’re not going to be a hard case.

Buck’s anger explodes. He rushes to the dresser and grabs the porcelain angel, throwing it at the opposite wall.

The angel smashes against the wall and breaks.

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

Buck stands in the room, alone.

EXT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - LATER

The last of the people leave.

The woman who listened at Buck’s door fans herself with her hand and babbles to the heavyset man.

WOMAN
I’m tellin’ you the hairs on my arm stood straight up.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

FOYER

Dell closes the front door.

Her weary eyes look to the top of the stairs.

EXT. DOWNTOWN LAGRANGE - DAY

The hanging plaque outside the business reads:

Daniel D. Weissman MD Psychiatry and Spiritualist

INT. DR. WEISMANN’S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

DR. DANIEL D. WEISSMAN, mid-40’s, with salt and pepper curly hair and a bushy mustache, sits behind his desk, reading a file.

Buck and Dell sit across from the doctor, waiting.

BUCK
(whispers to Dell)
We can’t afford this, Grandma.

DELL
(whispers back)
We can’t afford not to.
The doctor lays the file down and removes his thick, black-rimmed glasses. He squints.

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

Dell leans forward.

DELL
What?

DR. WEISSMAN
Juju, it’s an... African thing. The belief of unseen beings with magical powers.

Dell and Buck stare, confused.

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

Dell sits back.

DELL
I’m lost.

BUCK
Me, too.

DR. WEISSMAN
I’m speaking of religious beliefs. Most all recognize the existence of super natural beings -- Angels.

DELL
Well I know there’s angels, Dr. Weissman, but one’s never visited me.

Dell looks at Buck.

BUCK
I’m tellin’ the truth, Grandma.

DELL
Then why didn’t I see him, Buck?
DR. WEISSMAN
That one’s easy to answer -- He didn’t want you to.

DELL
Are you tellin’ me this boy actually saw an angel?

BUCK
(to both)
I did!

DR. WEISSMAN
There’s actually no way to prove either way. If angels do exist, their folklore has always been to pick those they wish to be seen and heard by. Not to be picked by those that wish to see them.

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

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

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

BUCK
Yes, sir.

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

BUCK
Said he’d take her pain from her before he left.

Buck shrugs.

BUCK
That’s all.

DR. WEISSMAN
Hmmm. And she’s no better?
BUCK
No, sir.

DR. WEISSMAN
Then I’d say if your angel is real, he hasn’t left yet.

Dr. Weissman opens a side drawer on his desk.

DR. WEISSMAN
Don’t believe they’re prone to lie -- At least not the ones from heaven.

He pulls a brown paper bag from a drawer.

DR. WEISSMAN
So that’s what happened to it.

Buck and Dell stare, unsure.

DR. WEISSMAN
Yesterday’s lunch.

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

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

Buck and Dell strain trying to understand.

DR. WEISSMAN
You know them basically as, guardian angels.

He closes the book.

DR. WEISSMAN
Buck’s angel appears to be some sort of hybrid.

DELL
Hybrid?
DR. WEISSMAN
A cross between the two orders I just mentioned.

Dell shakes her head.

DR. WEISSMAN
You don’t need a psychiatrist, Buck -- Unless you’re seeing pink elephants.

Buck stares.

DR. WEISSMAN
You’re not, are you?

BUCK
Sir?

DR. WEISSMAN
Seeing pink elephants.

BUCK
Saw one at the fair once. But he was painted.

Dr. Weissman smiles.

DR. WEISSMAN
Those don’t count.

DELL
Well if my grandson don’t need to see you, and people see Buck talkin’ to nothin’ -- Whadda we do?

Dr. Weissman wags his finger.

DR. WEISSMAN
If I were you... I’d get corroboration.

DELL
How much is that?

Dr. Weissman laughs.

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

Buck and Dell stare at Dr. Weissman who...
picks up the brown paper bag.

DR. WEISSMAN
(to both)
Sandwich?

EXT. COUNTY FAIR - NIGHT

Bright lights and music. A Ferris wheel turns behind the entry banner that reads:

“Troup County Fair Oct. 20 - 23”

Crowds of people, children, enjoy the midway as hawkers call out.

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

J.P.
I never knew nobody that went to a psychiatrist before.

Buck doesn’t want to talk about it.

BUCK
It’s not a big deal.

J.P.
How you gonna get that... that uh -- What was it?

BUCK
Corroboration.

J.P.
Yeah, that.

BUCK
I don’t know -- Will you just drop it?!

J.P.
Okay!

They walk by a parked ambulance.

J.P.
Must be expectin’ trouble.

Buck considers the thought.

The boys approach a row of game booths.

A HAWKER spots them.
HAWKER
You! You two with the cotton candy!  
Step up and knock the doll over!

His outstretched arm introduces the booty.

HAWKER
Take your choice of prizes!

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

The hawker beckons them.

HAWKER
Come closer, I can’t hear you!

Buck and J.P. shrug to each other. They step into the web.

J.P.  
How much?

HAWKER
One shiny ‘Roosevelt’. One-tenth of  
a dollar getcha three balls.

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

HAWKER
Knock just one doll over and you’re  
a winner!

BUCK  
Whadda we win?

The hawker smiles.

HAWKER
Your choice.

Buck looks at the wall of trinkets and stuffed animals.

BUCK  
I don’t see nothin’ I want.

HAWKER
What?! You’re at the county fair,  
boy! You gotta see something you want!
J.P.
Go on, Buck. You knock ‘em over,
I’ll pick ‘em out.

Buck digs into his pocket.

BUCK
(to J.P.)
I only got two dimes left.

J.P.
So? You’ll still have a dime.

BUCK
No. I’m savin’ up for a bike.

HAWKER
You wanted a bike why didn’t you
say so? I got bikes.

Buck scans over the prizes again.

BUCK
Where?

A shifty smile crosses the hawker’s face.

HAWKER
In a box under the counter.

J.P.
Betcha have to put it together.

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

Buck slaps a dime down.

HAWKER
The bike cost you two dimes.

BUCK
You said one dime!

HAWKER
That’s right! One dime, one doll,
one doll, one choice, from the one-
dime one-doll box.

BUCK
What?!
HAWKER
The bike’s a two-dime, one-doll deal. The metal in the bike makes it more expensive. Now are you playin’ or not, kid? I got a business to run here.

J.P.
Go ahead, Buck. I wanna see what a twenty-cent bike looks like.

Buck slaps the other dime down.

The hawker grabs the two dimes in a quick swoop.

HAWKER
Smart choice -- Everybody stand back! Give the boy some room!

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

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

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

J.P.
C’mon, Buck! You can do it!

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

The ball strikes a doll knocking it over.

J.P.
You did it, Buck!

Buck’s eyes shoot open.

BUCK
I did it! Where’s my bike?!

The hawker reaches under the counter.

HAWKER
Right here.

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

HAWKER
One deluxe, metal bike key chain.

J.P.’s mouth falls open.
J.P.
(to Buck)
Boy! Did you get took!

BUCK
I can’t ride that! You give me my money back!

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

A hand suddenly rests on Buck’s shoulder.

Buck looks up and into the face of Tall Man.

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

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

HAWKER
Who are you, his pa?
(gruff)
Even if you are, he knew the stakes before he played the game.

Buck’s astonished.

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

J.P.’s totally confused.

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

BUCK
The angel’s here.

J.P. looks all around him.

TALL MAN
(to hawker)
Clarence, you’re straddling a thin fence to begin with.
(MORE)
TALL MAN (cont'd)
I don’t think you want those two dimes to be your last straw.

The hawker is confused.

HAWKER
How do you know my name? What’s wrong with your eyes?

Tall Man’s eyes brighten.
The hawker gasps and takes a step back.

J.P.
Buck -- What’s happening?

BUCK
You don’t wanna know.

The hawker steps forward, his eyes still on Tall Man. His hand quivers as he holds the dimes out to Buck.

HAWKER
Here.

Buck takes the money and hands the key chain back.

HAWKER
Keep it. I don’t want it.

TALL MAN
(to Buck)
Let’s go.

They turn and walk away.
The hawker breaks out in a sweat. He looks sick.

BUCK
(to Tall Man)
Is he gonna die?

J.P.
Is who gonna die?

Tall Man is gone.

BUCK
Tall Man?!

J.P. looks all around him.
J.P. Buck, stop it! You’re scarin’ the crap outta me!

A WOMAN screams.

People scurry toward the hawker’s stand.

An UNSEEN MAN calls out from the crowd.

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

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

BUCK No.

J.P. Why not?

BUCK It’s the man at the throwin’ booth -- He’s dead.

EXT. LA GRANGE CITY LIBRARY - AFTERNOON

Traffic is light.

INT. LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

Buck sits at a table with a number of open books around him, reading through one.

J.P. takes the latest edition of The LaGrange Daily News from the newspaper area. He walks back to Buck as he reads the front page.

J.P. sets the paper over the book Buck reads.

J.P. Look at this.

J.P. points to the headline.

It reads:

“Carnie Worker Dies of Brain Hemorrhage”

Buck pushes the paper off the book.

J.P. What are you lookin’ for?
Buck never lifts his eyes from the book.

    BUCK
    Help.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - NIGHT

BUCK’S ROOM

The room is dark but for a table light on the night stand. Buck lies on his bed engrossed in an open book.

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

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

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

EXT. TAYLOR’S JEWELRY - AFTERNOON

The front window bears the store’s name.

INT. JEWELRY STORE - CONTINUOUS

The OWNER of the store, MR. TOM TAYLOR, an average man in his late 60’s with a large pot belly, addresses his customer from behind the counter.

    MR. TAYLOR
    You’re lookin’ for what?

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

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

Mr. Taylor’s look answers before he does.

    MR. TAYLOR
    Are you serious?

Buck is very serious.

    BUCK
    Yes, sir.
Well I ain’t got nothin’ like that here.

Buck’s disappointment shows.

Let me see what you got there.

He takes the paper and scans over it.

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

No, sir, I’m lookin’ for a coin.

For good luck?

It’s supposed to protect people -- Make ‘em well.

Mr. Taylor nods.

The angel Michael slaying the dragon.

No, the devil.

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

Will it work?

They say faith moves mountains.

Sir?

You want this for you?

For my mother.
MR. TAYLOR
Somebody after her?

BUCK
Not exactly -- She’s sick.

Buck drops his head.

BUCK
She’s dying.

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

MR. TAYLOR
You Jess Lynch’s grandson?

Buck looks up.

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

MR. TAYLOR
I know -- And you still are.

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

MR. TAYLOR
Your name’s...

BUCK
Buck.

MR. TAYLOR
That’s right -- Buck.

He walks back to Buck with the chain.

MR. TAYLOR
I bet your grandma still makes the best deep-dish around.

BUCK
Best anywhere.

Mr. Taylor hands the medal to Buck.

MR. TAYLOR
This is what you’re lookin’ for -- Put this around your mama’s neck, and keep it there.
BUCK
I will. How much is it?

MR. TAYLOR
One large bowl of that deep-dish next time your grandma makes it. And don’t think I’ll forget about it.

He pats his large belly.

MR. TAYLOR
‘Cause I won’t -- You tell your grandma I expect an invite.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - LATER SAME DAY
KITCHEN
Buck comes in by the screen door.
He takes a seat at the table and examines the medal.
Dell’s washing pans at the sink. She knows Buck’s there but doesn’t look up.

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

Buck can’t take his eyes off the medal.

BUCK
When you gonna make another deep-dish, Grandma?

Dell stops washing.

DELL
I don’t know. Haven’t made one since...

She catches herself and returns to the pans.

DELL
If you’re wantin’ one I’ll make it.

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

Dell stops washing and turns to Buck.
DELL
Old Tom Taylor? Why’s he wantin’ my deep-dish?

She returns to the pan and scrubs harder.

DELL
He needn’t think ‘cause Jess is gone I’m...

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

The words make Dell remember. She softens.

DELL
He did?

BUCK
Yes, ma’am.

Dell rinses the pan and puts it in the drainer.

BUCK
You know Mr. Taylor?

Dell turns toward Buck, her eyes going back in time.

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

BUCK
Oh.

Dell fights back the tears that well in her eyes.

She dries her hands as she walks toward Buck.

DELL
What medal you talkin’ about?

Buck holds it up for Dell to see.

BUCK
This one -- It’s the angel Michael, slayin’ the devil during the war in heaven.
Dell takes the medal in her hand and examines it.

DELL
Looks like a dragon to me.

BUCK
It’s the same thing.

DELL
Whatcha want it for?

BUCK
It’s for Mama to wear. To protect her and make her well.

Dell takes a seat at the table, and Buck’s hand.

DELL
Buck, I want you to listen to me --
You got to stop this angel stuff --
Get it outta your head.

BUCK
If I don’t stop him he’s gonna take her, Grandma. I know who he is now.
He’s the angel of death.

DELL
Buck, there is no angel. It’s all in your head.

BUCK
It’s not, Grandma.

DELL
Your mama’s sick and you know that.

Tears roll from Buck’s eyes.

BUCK
I know but...

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

Buck wipes the tears from his face. He holds the necklace up.

BUCK
That’s why I got this.
ESTELLE’S BEDROOM - LATER

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

ESTELLE
It’s a... what?

Buck stands alongside Dell, beside the bed.

BUCK
A St. Michael’s medal.

ESTELLE
It’s kind of... scary looking.

BUCK
It’s ‘cause the dragon’s supposed to be the devil.

Estelle puts the mirror down.

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

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

Estelle looks from Buck to Dell.

ESTELLE
Safe from what?

Buck waits for his grandmother to bail him out.

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

BUCK
Please don’t take it off, Mama.

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

Buck sighs with relief.

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

DELL
All right then.

Dell leaves.

Buck backpedals to the door.

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

ESTELLE
No you're not!

Buck stops in his tracks.

BUCK
Why not?!

ESTELLE
Come here, Buck.

Buck sighs and ambles back.

Estelle pats the bed.

ESTELLE
Sit down.

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

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

BUCK
You eat alone.

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

BUCK
I would if I could.

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

Buck's eyes drift away.
BUCK
All right.

Estelle lifts Buck’s chin, bringing his eyes back to her’s.

ESTELLE
What, is wrong?

A tear rolls down Buck’s cheek.

BUCK
I’m just worried about you.

Estelle sighs.

ESTELLE
Buck...

She pauses, looking for the right words.

ESTELLE
Life is not always kind to us. Things happen to people.

Buck wipes his tears away.

BUCK
Bad things.

ESTELLE
Good things, too.

BUCK
Like what?

ESTELLE
You. You’ve been a blessing in my life. And what would your grandmother have if she didn’t have you in hers?

Buck’s eyes well with tears.

BUCK
She’d have you.

Estelle flashes a weak smile.

ESTELLE
I’m dying, Buck -- You know that.

For a long moment their eyes do the only talking.
ESTELLE
Come here.

Estelle pulls her son close to her and kisses his cheek.

Buck lifts his head.

BUCK
Granddaddy used to tell me to never give up.

He looks into his mother’s eyes.

BUCK
He should have told you too.

KITCHEN - LATER

Dell stands at the screen door, sullen, looking out at the autumn leaves that fall.

A train blows its horn in the distance.

She glances over at Jess’ chair where one of the cats is curled-up asleep.

A cool breeze hits her. She pulls her sweater tight, then closes the door.

BUCK’S BEDROOM

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

His eyes drop to the top drawer. He opens it and takes out the broken pieces of the porcelain angel and holds them in his hands.

ESTELLE’S BEDROOM

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

EXT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

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

TIME LAPSE - DAY

...it’s bare of its foliage.

A Christmas wreath adorns the front door.
INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

ESTELLE’S BEDROOM

A small Christmas tree occupies a corner of the room.

DR. HOLDER, a thin man in his 60’s, closes his medical bag.

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

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

Dr. Holder turns toward his patient.

DR. HOLDER
Could be I am the only doctor left
in LaGrange.

He smiles.

Estelle manages a weak reciprocal.

ESTELLE
You’re the best one -- I know that.

Dr. Holder searches for his words.

DR. HOLDER
Estelle -- I know you don’t want
to, but I could make you a lot more
comfortable in the hospital.

ESTELLE
No. I don’t want to die in a
hospital.

The doctor nods his understanding.

DR. HOLDER
Is the medication controlling your
pain?

ESTELLE
Not as much as it used to.

DR. HOLDER
More severe?

ESTELLE
(nods)
Sometimes.
DR. HOLDER
Having a nurse close by would take care of that.

ESTELLE
They make house calls, too?

DR. HOLDER
(smiles)
I’m going to leave a new prescription with the pharmacy. Buck can pick it up tomorrow.

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

DR. HOLDER
I don’t want to hear that.

The doctor picks up his bag and starts for the door.

DR. HOLDER
Felix Holmes fills what I tell him to if he wants my patients’ business.

At the door he turns back to Estelle.

DR. HOLDER
And he does.

ESTELLE
Thank you, Dr. Holder.

DR. HOLDER
I’ll check back in on you next week. If you need me before then... have Dell call.

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

DR. HOLDER
Buck, school out for the holidays?

BUCK
Yes, sir.

DR. HOLDER
When I was a boy it seemed like Christmas would never get here.
He looks at Dell.

    DR. HOLDER
    Now they come so quick I can’t remember one from the other.
    (to Buck)
    Need a minute with your grandmother.

Buck looks at Dell, he doesn’t want to leave.

    DELL
    Go on now.

    BUCK
    I’ll be outside.

Buck takes a jacket from the coat tree.

EXT. LYNCH RESIDENCE
FRONT PORCH

Buck closes the door behind him. He’s worried.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE
FOYER

    DR. HOLDER
    I’m going to call a prescription in for Morphine.

    DELL
    Morphine?

    DR. HOLDER
    She needs it. You can pick it up tomorrow. It’ll be in liquid form. Just dispense it with a dropper under her tongue -- I mentioned the hospital again, but she wants to spend her time left, here... at her home.

    DELL
    How long...

    DR. HOLDER
    Few weeks.

    DELL
    Oh, my Jesus.
DR. HOLDER
Don’t hesitate to call if you need me.

EXT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS
Dr. Holder pulls the front door closed behind him.
Buck leans against the large tree. He watches the doctor drive away.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS
FOYER - KITCHEN
Buck comes in quietly.
He stands in the foyer looking into the kitchen at Dell who...
has her back turned to him as she cries at the sink.
Buck looks to the top of the stairs.

ESTELLE’S BEDROOM
Buck walks in and closes the door.
Estelle turns to him.

ESTELLE
What is it? What’s wrong, Buck?

A beat.

BUCK
He’ll be comin’ for you any time
now -- I know it.

LATER
Buck sits on the edge of the bed. Estelle listens...

BUCK
And that’s the last time I saw him --
But I know he’s comin’ back.

Estelle strokes Buck’s hair.

ESTELLE
He said you’d be an angel one day?

Buck nods.
ESTELLE
Did you tell him you were already my angel?

BUCK
You don’t believe me, do you?

Estelle forces a smile.

ESTELLE
I don’t know, Buck -- What does grandma say about it?

BUCK
She don’t believe me either -- Nobody does.

Estelle lifts Buck’s face to meet his eyes.

ESTELLE
I believe you -- You wouldn’t say it if it weren’t so.

Buck shakes his head.

BUCK
No. I wouldn’t -- Promise me you won’t ever take the medal off.

Estelle clutches the medal tight.

ESTELLE
I won’t take it off -- I promise.

BUCK’S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Buck sleeps.

He wakes.

Shadows from the streetlight pattern the wall the chest of drawers sits against.

The porcelain angel, flawed with cracks and glued back together, bathes in the light.

Buck stares at it.

A shadow on the wall suddenly moves.

Buck turns quickly to the opposite wall, but there’s nothing there.

He hears the floor creak in the bedroom hallway.
Buck jumps from the bed and rushes to the door.

BEDROOM HALLWAY

Dell’s in the hallway. She’s bundled in a heavy bathrobe with a tied scarf covering her head as Buck bursts from his room.

DELL
Land sakes! Are you tryin’ to scare me to death?!

BUCK
I heard a noise.

DELL
It was just me. Now go back to bed and be quiet ‘fore you wake your mother.

It hits Buck.

BUCK
Mama.

Buck hurries to her door.

DELL
Buck, don’t wake her up!

ESTELLE’S BEDROOM

Buck throws the door open.

BUCK
Mama?

Estelle stirs from sleep.

ESTELLE
What? What’s wrong?

Dell steps in.

DELL
Heat’s out, honey, that’s all. I’ll call Gibsons in the morning -- You warm enough?

ESTELLE
I’m fine.

DELL
Go back to sleep. Buck was just worried you was cold.
BUCK
Night, Mama.

Estelle’s eyes close.

ESTELLE
Night.

BEDROOM HALLWAY
Dell gently pulls the door shut.

BUCK
I’m sorry, Grandma.

Dell nods.

DELL
Get back under the covers. It’s freezing out here.

BUCK’S BEDROOM
Buck closes the door. He stares at the repaired angel, then gets into bed.

He lies on his back and closes his eyes.

Buck turns in his sleep. His eyes open.
A shadowed figure sitting in a chair against the wall, moves.
Buck jumps from the bed and backs against the wall.
Tall Man moves his face into the light that pours into the window from the street.

TALL MAN
See you fixed it.

Buck stares, almost unable to speak.

BUCK
Wha-what?

Tall man stands.

TALL MAN
The angel -- You fixed it.

Buck nods.
BUCK
I did.

Tall Man’s stare is filled with concern.

TALL MAN
Your mother wears Michael’s legacy.

BUCK
You’ve been in her room?

TALL MAN
Why does she wear the image?

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

TALL MAN
It has great power.

BUCK
I hope so.

TALL MAN
Not that one -- This one.

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

Buck catches it.

Tall Man is gone.

Buck looks down at the gold coin in his hand that bears the image of Michael slaying the devil.

The coin disintegrates in his hand.

ESTELLE’S BEDROOM

Buck bursts into the bedroom.

Tall Man stands over Estelle.

Estelle wakes. She screams hysterically.

BUCK’S BEDROOM

The sound of cats screaming in the hallway.

Buck sits straight up in bed, in a sweat, out of breath.

He hears heavy steps outside his room.
DELL (O.S.)

Git!

Buck rushes to the door...

BEDROOM HALLWAY

...and into the hallway.

The cats scamper.

Dell’s half bent-over holding a pillow. She puts a hand to her back and straightens.

DELL
(to Buck)
This will be one night I ain’t likely to forget.

She sees Buck is covered in sweat.

ESTELLE (O.S.)
Mama?

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

Dell goes to Buck and touches his pajama top.

DELL
You’re soakin’ wet.

BUCK
I had a bad dream.

A beat through Dell’s concern.

DELL
Get changed.

The cats scream, fight downstairs.

ESTELLE (O.S.)
Mama?!

DELL
I hear ‘em! I’m fixin’ to throw ‘em out! Just go back to sleep!

ESTELLE (O.S.)
I’m trying!
DELL
(to Buck)
And you go back to bed.

Dell starts for the stairs, turning back to Buck as she walks with a warning finger.

DELL
And stay there.

Dell moves down the stairs...

DELL
Lord if I make it through this night.

...and fades into the dark.

BUCK
A-men.

ESTELLE’S BEDROOM - NEXT DAY

Buck and Dell maneuver a bed mattress through the doorway.

ESTELLE
There’s really no need for this.

Buck tugs on his end of the mattress.

BUCK
Yes there is.

The mattress is in.

Dell catches her breath.

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

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

DELL
Buck’s right, Estelle.

Buck assembles the bed frame.

BUCK
There’s plenty room on the other side of your night stand. And that’s that!
Estelle gives up the argument during a sudden flash of pain she hides.

    ESTELLE
    That's that.

THAT NIGHT...

Buck lies in the bed next to Estelle, watching TV.

Estelle dozes.

    ESTELLE
    Turn the TV off, Buck.

    BUCK
    Just two more minutes -- This goes off at eleven.

Buck hears something. His eyes shoot to the bedroom door. He stares, his body still.

Buck eases out of bed.

Estelle wakes from slumber.

    ESTELLE
    Buck? What...

    BUCK
    Shhhhh...

Buck stands at the door. He waits, then turns the knob slowly.

BEDROOM HALLWAY

Buck eases into the hallway. There's a sudden creak in the staircase.

He steps back to the bedroom doorway.

ESTELLE’S BEDROOM

    ESTELLE
    Please don’t wake your grandmother.

Buck whispers.

    BUCK
    I won’t -- It’s the cats again.
    I’ll put ‘em out.

BEDROOM HALLWAY
Buck eases the door shut.

STAIRS

Buck gingerly takes one step at the time. He finds a creaking step and stops before he continues.

FOYER

Buck stands at the foot of the stairs in the dark.

A light glows from the living room.

LIVING ROOM

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

FOYER

He back-steps to the umbrella stand at the door and pulls out a long, sharp-tipped one.

LIVING ROOM

Buck’s eyes are like saucers as he holds the umbrella out like a lance.

His hand trembles as he turns the TV off.

Sighing relief he turns just as a passing car’s headlights shoot through the window lighting Tall Man’s figure resting in a chair.

Buck jumps back, startled.

The TV comes on again.

Tall Man sits in the glow in his Stetson hat, grim-faced.

    TALL MAN
    I was watching that.

The umbrella drops to the floor.

    TALL MAN
    Expecting rain?

Tall Man stands.

Buck’s frozen in place. He lifts his eyes to meet with the angel’s.
TALL MAN
You need to prepare yourself, Buck.
Your mother’s time is close.

BUCK
No it’s not. The doctor said...

The TV goes black.

Buck looks all around him.

Tall Man is gone.

STAIRS

Buck runs up the stairs...

ESTELLE’S BEDROOM

...bursts into the room.

Dell is giving Estelle morphine. She steps back.

ESTELLE
Buck? Where were you?

DELL
Didn’t you hear her call out, son?
Where have you been?

BUCK
I thought I heard something. When I went downstairs the TV was on -- I turned it off and came back up.

DELL
TV went out on me last night. Won’t even come on.

ESTELLE
You’ve been gone over an hour.

BUCK
(to Dell)
The TV works!
(to both)
Honest!
(to Estelle)
I was only gone a couple of minutes, Mama! Look at the clock.

Buck looks at the clock. It reads ten past midnight.
DELL
When you gonna stop tellin’ them stories, Buck?

Buck’s eyes drop.

ESTELLE
I need to sleep, Mama. I’m not feeling very good.

DELL
The medicine should help you rest. I’ll call Dr. Holder first thing in the morning.

Estelle moans and turns away.

Dell motions Buck to the hall.

BEDROOM HALLWAY

Dell closes the door. She carries a disturbed look as she turns to Buck.

DELL
Where were you, Buck?

BUCK
I told you the truth, Grandma -- Least most of it.

DELL
Let’s hear the rest.

BUCK
The angel was downstairs.

DELL
The angel?

Buck nods.

BUCK
I don’t know what happened to the hour. I was only gone a few minutes -- He probably did somethin’ to the time. He’s always talkin’ about it.

Dell holds her stare.

BUCK
You don’t believe me, do you?
DELL
I want to believe you, Buck.

BUCK
But you don’t.

A beat.

DELL
Tell me what your angel said.

BUCK
Told me to prepare myself -- That Mama’s time was close.

DELL
You didn’t need an angel to tell you that, Buck. You could have just asked me -- But you don’t need anyone to tell you that -- You already know it.

Buck’s face becomes stern, his eyes defiant.

BUCK
No -- I won’t let him take her.

Dell has no words to offer.

BUCK
I won’t!

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE – CHRISTMAS EVE NIGHT

KITCHEN

Dell stacks the dinner dishes at the sink. She breaks down and cries, silently.

Dell regains her composure and wipes at her tears with the apron she wears.

There’s a knock on the back door.

Dell pulls the door curtain back. Tom Taylor smiles from the other side.

Dell hesitates at first, then opens the door.

MR. TAYLOR
Dell -- May I come in?

DELL
Tom, I don’t have any deep-dish...
MR. TAYLOR
Just for a minute?

Dell relents -- opens the door.

Tom steps in.

MR. TAYLOR
Jess came into the store a few months back.

He pulls Jess’ pocket watch from his jacket.

MR. TAYLOR
He left this to be engraved.

DELL
So that’s what happened to it.

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

MR. TAYLOR
He meant it to be a present for Buck -- Figured you’d want to wrap it.

Dell closes the case.

DELL
I don’t know what to say.

Mr. Taylor smiles.

MR. TAYLOR
How ‘bout, merry Christmas?

Dell stares at the pocket watch, then brings it to her lips and kisses it.

DELL
Merry Christmas, Tom -- Thank you.

Mr. Taylor nods.

MR. TAYLOR
Merry Christmas, Dell.

He leaves.

Dell puts the watch in her apron pocket and walks into the LIVING ROOM
where Buck sits by the Christmas tree, checking names and pulling presents.

BUCK
I’m gettin’ the presents sorted for in the morning.

DELL
Why don’t we open them tonight?

BUCK
Tonight?

DELL
Let your mother rest in the morning.

BUCK
But she always likes to get up early Christmas morning.

Dell manages a smile.

DELL
Let’s let her rest this one.

A beat through Buck’s thoughts.

BUCK
Can I take her soup to her now?

DELL
I’ll get it ready -- First get your jacket and run out to the garage. Bring in the bag of oranges I left in the car. I don’t want ‘em to freeze out there tonight.

Buck looks down at the present he holds.

BUCK
Grandma -- Did you know if you pray hard enough, nothing’s impossible?

Buck’s words take Dell aback.

DELL
I guess I do -- I’m the one that told you that.

Buck nods. He lifts his eyes to his grandmother.
BUCK
I just wanted to see if you remembered.

Buck leaving the room as Dell confides to herself.

DELL
Guess I needed reminding.

INT. GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Buck opens the side door and flips the light switch. Before him is a...

brand new red bicycle with ribbon tied in a bow around the handle bars.

Buck admires it, touches it. He takes the Christmas card taped to the seat and reads it.

The card is signed:

“Merry Christmas, Buck -- Granddaddy”

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - CONTINUOUS

KITCHEN

Buck pushes the door open, the bike by his side.

Dell, at the sink, smiles.

BUCK
Can I bring it in? Please?

Dell wipes at her sniffle.

DELL
Of course you can.

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

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

DELL
It was money from your granddaddy’s insurance that bought it -- He wanted to buy you a bike more than you wanted one -- No one else name needed to be on that card.
Dell turns to her stove.

DELL
Your mama’s soup’s ready.

DELL
You tell her you got your bike --
That’s the best present you could
give her right now.

ESTELLE’S BEDROOM

Buck pushes the door open and walks in, tray in hand.

Estelle’s smiling, laughing at the TV program.

ESTELLE
I’m not hungry, just set it down
somewhere.

BUCK
But you gotta eat to keep your
strength up.

ESTELLE
Not now.

She pats the bed.

ESTELLE
Sit with me and watch, The
Honeymooners.
(laughs)
They’re doing, Twas the Night
Before Christmas.

She looks at Buck.

ESTELLE
Do you remember that poem?

Buck sets the tray on his bed.

BUCK
Granddaddy used to recite it every
Christmas Eve.

ESTELLE
Yes he did.

She turns back to the TV with a smile, a laugh.
ESTELLE
He would have loved the show
tonight.

Buck’s not sure what’s happening.

BUCK
Mama?

ESTELLE
Hmmm?

BUCK
You seem... different.

ESTELLE
I just feel good.
   (laughs)
They are so funny!

BUCK
You feel good?

Estelle’s eyes meet Buck’s.

ESTELLE
I do -- I feel good.

Buck smiles.

BUCK
I got my bike.

ESTELLE
You like it?

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

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

BUCK
I know. I loved him, too.

Estelle’s eyes find the TV again.

ESTELLE
Daddy -- I’ll be seeing him again
soon.
BUCK
Don’t say that!

Estelle laughs. She turns back to Buck.

ESTELLE
What?

BUCK
I said, don’t say that.

Estelle motions to the dresser with nervous fingers.

ESTELLE
Get my medicine for me.

BUCK
Is it time for it?

Estelle grows more anxious with each moment.

ESTELLE
Get it now. I need it.

Buck goes to the dresser topped with medicine bottles.

BUCK
Which one?

ESTELLE
The morphine. Quick!

BUCK
Which one is it?!

ESTELLE
Mother!

BUCK
Just tell me which one!

ESTELLE
Mother!

BUCK
Oh, God.

ESTELLE
Mother!

Dell bursts into the room.

DELL
What’s wrong?!
Estelle shakes. She points.

    ESTELLE
    My medicine!

Dell rushes to the dresser and grabs the bottle. She administers the dosage to Estelle. Estelle labors hard with her breath.

    ESTELLE
    More.

Dell stares down at her daughter.

    DELL
    Honey...

    ESTELLE
    More!

Buck’s scared.

    BUCK
    Mama, stop it!

    DELL
    She’s hurtin’, Buck!

Estelle grabs Dell’s clothing.

    ESTELLE
    Please!

    DELL
    Alright, honey, alright. Just calm down. I’ll get it.

    ESTELLE
    Just hurry!

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

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

Buck and Dell sit on the corner of the bed. Buck takes his mother’s hand.

    BUCK
    Mama?
DELL
    Shhhh, let her rest.

Estelle’s eyes open. She looks past her son and mother.

ESTELLE
    Who’s that man?

Buck doesn’t turn. He knows. His eyes drop.

Dell turns quickly to an empty doorway, then back.

DELL
    What man, honey?

ESTELLE
    The tall man in the doorway.

Dell gently strokes Estelle’s forehead.

DELL
    There’s no one there, baby.

Buck sighs through his despair.

BUCK
    Yes there is.

Estelle raises a weak hand and points.

ESTELLE
    He’s right there -- So tall.

Dell turns again. Buck follows.

Tall Man stands inside the doorway.

TALL MAN
    The hour has come, Buck.

BUCK
    No!

Dell’s confused.

Buck jumps up.

BUCK
    You get out of here!

ESTELLE
    Who is he, Buck?

Dell’s panicked.
DELL
Jesus in heaven! Tell me who you’re talkin’ to!

BUCK
It’s the angel -- He’s here.

Estelle stares at the man.

ESTELLE
You’re an angel?

Dell gasps, her eyes frightened, her hand to her mouth.

TALL MAN
Yes, Estelle. I’ve come to take you home.

ESTELLE
I’ll see Daddy?

TALL MAN
You’ll see everyone. They’re all waiting for you.

BUCK
No! She’s wearing Michael’s medal!

Buck turns to his mother. He lifts the medal from her neck to show Tall Man.

BUCK
You see?! She’s protected! You can’t touch her!

Dell falls to her knees and begins to pray.

TALL MAN
(to Buck)
I knew you were gonna be a hard case -- Take the medal from her -- Relieve her suffering.

ESTELLE
I’ll take it off.

BUCK
No, Mama! He’ll take you from me!

ESTELLE
(to Tall Man)
Can’t we go now?
TALL MAN
That’s up to Buck.

BUCK
Then she stays! And you leave!

ESTELLE
Why is it up to Buck? Don’t I have a say?

TALL MAN
No one has a say. But in your case, Buck must let you go. Prove himself worthy of what awaits him.

Dell prays on.

BUCK
I told you he said I’m gonna be an angel someday.
(to Tall Man - hateful)
Like him.

ESTELLE
You really are?

TALL MAN
He is.

BUCK
If I am it won’t be like you.

TALL MAN
It will.

BUCK
It won’t!

TALL MAN
We’ll see -- Ecclesiastes 3 verse 2: “There’s a time to be born...”

ESTELLE
I know that one -- “And a time to die.”

TALL MAN
(to Buck)
It’s your problem with time in general that needs resolving.

BUCK
And it’s your problem with who you are you need to resolve!
TALL MAN
What do you mean?

BUCK
You heal a bird then take a life.
You’re a hybrid! Dr. Weissman said so!

TALL MAN
I’m not a hybrid.

BUCK
You are! You can’t be a death angel and give life too!

TALL MAN
My duties vary -- Now take the medal from her neck and free her.

Dell prays harder, louder.

BUCK
I won’t!

TALL MAN
Because you love her?

Tears stream down Buck’s face.

BUCK
She’s my mother! I don’t have anyone left but her and Grandma!

Suddenly, Buck, Dell and Estelle, freeze in place.

An OLD, WINGED ANGEL, RAGUEL, taller than Tall Man, his hair and long beard snow white, appears.

TALL MAN
(softly - to Buck)
Yes you do.

RAGUEL
(to Tall Man)
What are you doing?

TALL MAN
Hello, Raguel.

RAGUEL
The old woman is praying so hard He, Himself, sent me.
TALL MAN
This is...

RAGUEL
I know who he is.

Tall Man shrugs.

TALL MAN
I have a lot to make up for.

RAGUEL
You achieved salvation. Your debt is to Him, not them. You’re a death angel. Act like one!

TALL MAN
The boy says I’m a hybrid.

RAGUEL
Well a change of order is definitely possible. We can’t have a death angel that won’t perform. The population would explode! Now get on with your business here. I’m too busy to have to do my job and yours.

TALL MAN
There’s a problem.

RAGUEL
What?!

TALL MAN
Estelle. She wears Michael’s medal.

Raguel looks upon the necklace.

RAGUEL
So?

TALL MAN
The boy, Buck, thinks it protects her -- I... lead him to believe it does.

RAGUEL
You what?

TALL MAN
If I take her with the necklace on, I’ll be damned -- First angelic rule -- An angel can’t lie.
RAGUEL
I know -- I wrote it -- So take the necklace from her.

TALL MAN
The boy needs to do it. It’s the only way he’ll understand they’re only given so much time.

RAGUEL
What makes you think he’d remove the necklace?

TALL MAN
It’s the one factor that allows him to remove his mother’s pain, free her spirit, and understand the difference between selfish, and true love.

A beat through Raguel’s stare.

RAGUEL
You’ll have to answer to council for all of this -- How do you ever expect to get your wings?

Tall Man’s confident.

TALL MAN
I’ll make it up.

RAGUEL
You can start with the boy. We’ll move his time up. A few months difference won’t matter either way in his case.

A book appears in Raguel’s hands titled:
Apprentice Schedule

He flips through the book.

RAGUEL
Ah, here it is. Buck Lynch, scheduled this spring for a...

TALL MAN
Bicycle accident.
RAGUEL
Exactly. Amounts to no more than
you beginning the boy’s training
earlier than scheduled, that’s all.

TALL MAN
Good. He’s already one up on that
anyway.

RAGUEL
What do you mean?

TALL MAN
His training. I’ve already told him
what awaits him. Even showed him
Heaven.

RAGUEL
You can’t train someone before
their dead! Or even tell them about
it! It’s not permissible! It’s in
the book! And when did Heaven
become a sideshow?!

TALL MAN
A glimpse of Heaven would save a
lot more souls than just reading a
book ever would.

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

Raguel looks up.

RAGUEL
But who listens to me? The boy is
no longer your apprentice, or a
candidate for order.

Tall Man nods.

TALL MAN
That sounds appropriate.

RAGUEL
You planned this, didn’t you?

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

Raguel stares smugly.
RAGUEL
Still doing parlor tricks?

Tall Man shrugs.

TALL MAN
Disappearing hand stuff -- That’s about it.

RAGUEL
Make this mess disappear -- I’ll deal with you later.

Raguel vanishes.

Tall Man looks upon Buck and Estelle with loving eyes, then...

walks to Estelle’s dresser and removes a black and white photograph of a young man in a Stetson hat from inside his jacket. He places it under clothing in a drawer then...

repositions himself in front of Buck and waves an open hand across the room.

The three reanimate.

BUCK
Get out of here!

Dell prays harder, louder.

Tall Man shakes his head.

TALL MAN
Not without your mother.

ESTELLE
Let me go, Buck

BUCK
I can’t!

Estelle winces.

ESTELLE
I’m beginning to hurt again.

BUCK
I’ll give you more medicine.

TALL MAN
The medicine won’t help her. She’s past her time for living.
BUCK
I won’t let her go!

TALL MAN
Then she’ll suffer.

Estelle grimaces.

ESTELLE
Oh! It hurts!

BUCK
(to Tall Man)
Don’t let her hurt anymore!

ESTELLE
Oh! God help me. Please!

TALL MAN
Help her -- Let her go.

Estelle reaches out to her son.

ESTELLE
Please, Buck!

Buck takes his mother’s hand, his tears flowing.

BUCK
But what will I do without you?

TALL MAN
The time until you see her again is no more than the blink of an eye.

Buck stares, helpless, but calm and resolved.

BUCK
Just take the pain from her -- Please.

Tall Man moves his open hand across Estelle.

Estelle’s face glows.

Dell stops praying. She lifts her head.

The cats run into the room and jump on Estelle’s bed. She reaches out and strokes them.

ESTELLE
I don’t hurt anymore.

Dell stares at Tall Man.
DELL
Oh, my Lord.

Buck’s expression is one of sudden concern.

TALL MAN
Your grandmother’s not leaving you, Buck. I’m just giving you your... corroboration -- The necklace.

Buck removes the medal from around his mother’s neck.

ESTELLE
I’ll be waiting for you, Buck -- I promise.

TALL MAN
All you’ve learned, and all you’ve seen, will leave your memory with me. In exchange, I leave you, Buck, the gift of inner peace, an understanding of time, and the certainty of what awaits you.

Buck and Dell kneel beside Estelle’s bed.

Dell strokes her daughter’s hair and smiles though the tears welled up in her eyes.

Buck kisses his mother’s cheek.

BUCK
I’ll always love you, Mama.

Estelle’s face glows as she assures her son and mother.

ESTELLE
In the blink of an eye.

TALL MAN
Would you care to see Heaven, Grandmother?

DELL
How could I do that?

Buck stares up at Tall Man and answers for him.

BUCK
Through angels’ eyes.

Tall Man’s copper eyes smile at all three.
TALL MAN

Merry Christmas.

BUCK - DELL - ESTELLE
(overlapping)
Merry Christmas.

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

EXT. CEMETARY - PRESENT DAY CHRISTMAS EVE - AFTERNOON

The sun shines bright.

A sixty ish Buck Lynch stands in front of the graves of his grandparents’ and mother, holding his three-year-old GRANDSON, JESS.

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

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

CHILD JESS
Let’s go, Granddaddy! We’re gonna miss Santa Claus!

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

WIFE
Come here, Jess. Come to Grandma.

She takes the boy.

WIFE
Santa doesn’t come ‘till tonight.

A four-year-old girl, ESTELLE tugs at Buck’s pants.

CHILD ESTELLE
Let’s go, Granddaddy. I’m scared of the angel.

Buck strokes his granddaughter’s hair.

BUCK
There’s nothing to be scared of, Estelle -- Nothing at all.

Buck stares at his mother’s headstone and rubs the St. Michael’s medal around his neck between thumb and finger.

Buck’s wife lays her head against his shoulder.
BUCK
Long time ago... but I still miss her.

His eyes turn to his grandparents’ graves.

BUCK
Miss them all.

A train rumbles in the distance, its horn blaring.

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

“Old habits and hand-me-downs”

“Granddaddy -- Christmas 1955”

BUCK
Old 92’s barrellin’, Granddaddy --
Right on time.

Buck closes the watch.

BUCK (V.O.)
Many years have passed since the Christmas of 1955, but the memories of that time will always be with me.

INT. LYNCH RESIDENCE - MORNING - 1955

BUCK’S BEDROOM

Buck straightens a framed black and white photograph of a man wearing a Stetson hat by the porcelain angel.

BUCK (V.O.)
It was the Christmas, Mama found peace. I got Granddaddy’s pocket watch; and a mislaid picture of my father in his Stetson hat... turned up.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - MORNING

Buck pedals his bike, fast.

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

A train marked ‘92’ barrels down the tracks, passing Buck.
BUCK (V.O.)
And I was never-ever late for school, again.

FADE OUT.