

PENANCE

Written by

Richard Russell

FADE IN

EXT. ED'S HOUSE - DAY

Under a bright sun, ED, 60, pads on knees, pulls weeds from a bed of bright flowers. Behind him, a sheriff cruiser pulls into the drive of this upper middle class home.

Ed, a man with middle age spread, stands and removes his gloves as SHERIFF TATE, 40, skinny and bald, slips out of the cruiser.

INT. ED'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Sheriff Tate sips coffee at the table. Ed, with lemonade, slides onto a chair.

SHERIFF TATE

Why is it we drink coffee in the middle of a hot day? I swear it's nothing more than habit, crazy ass habit.

Ed doesn't offer anything. He wipes his brow with a napkin.

SHERIFF TATE (CONT'D)

I guess if it's the worst habit I have, that's a good thing.

ED

Bad habits always outnumber good ones.

SHERIFF TATE

It seems that way, don't it. I suppose if it weren't for my bad habits, my wife would have nothing to bitch about.

Sheriff Tate stops and looks at Ed who calmly sips his lemonade.

SHERIFF TATE (CONT'D)

Sorry about that.

ED

No harm done, Sheriff, no harm done.

SHERIFF TATE

Yeah, well, that's me and my big mouth.

ED
What's the news?

SHERIFF TATE
I'd like to tell you there's been
progress, but I got nothing.

ED
I figured as much.

SHERIFF TATE
We're not giving up, Ed, not by a
long shot. It's just...

ED
I understand.

SHERIFF
There were twenty people who heard
the shots.

ED
And no one saw a thing.

SHERIFF TATE
I'm sorry.

Ed half smiles and sips.

INT. DINER - MORNING

Ed sips coffee and eats bacon and eggs in a mom-and-pop
diner, a place every town has. Counter, booths, Formica and
vinyl.

CLAIRE (O.S.)
Edward?

He looks up at CLAIRE, 50 but looks 40, attractive, svelte, a
woman who has taken good care of herself.

ED
Claire?

She smiles, and she has a 100 megawatt smile.

CLAIRE
You remember. I'm so glad.

ED
What are...hey...sit, sit, sit
down.

She slides into the booth.

ED (CONT'D)
How, how, what are you doing here?

CLAIRE
I wanted to see you, talk to you.

ED
I...it's been what eight, nine
years?

CLAIRE
Ten but who's counting?

ED
You haven't aged a day.

CLAIRE
I wish that were true.

She reaches out and takes his hand.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
I'm sorry about Alice.

ED
Thank you. You heard?

She nods.

ED (CONT'D)
It was a bad business.

They look at each other for a long moment.

ED (V.0.) (CONT'D)
This is my favorite spot.

INT. ED'S HOUSE - SCREEN PORCH - DAY

Claire and Ed sip lemonade at the table as a fan wafts a gentle breeze. They look into the back yard and beyond to a creek and a grove of trees.

ED
Since I retired, this is where I
read the paper and drink my morning
coffee.

CLAIRE
It's just as nice as you said it
was.

ED
I guess I did brag about it, didn't I?

CLAIRE
You told me about the house, the creek, everything, even Ed Jr..

ED
He's in Oregon, you know. Loves the life style. Your's was...was...

CLAIRE
Evelyn. She's doing fine. Lives in Texas, has a baby boy, Jaden.

ED
Evelyn. How could I forget? And your husband?

She looks away.

CLAIRE
Paul died two years ago.

ED
I'm sorry to hear that. How?

CLAIRE
Hunting accident. Another hunter mistook him for a deer.

ED
My god, that's awful.

CLAIRE
The hunter felt so bad, well, he used the gun on himself.

ED
Jesus, I didn't know. I'm so sorry.

She touches his hand..

CLAIRE
Thank you for caring. It was traumatic.

ED
I, for one, can understand.

CLAIRE
Do you ever think about our summer?

He turns away, embarrassed.

ED

To tell the truth, I have thought about it some over the years.

CLAIRE

Remember what we said?

ED

We said a lot of things.

CLAIRE

Oh, I don't mean those things you said while we were making love. Although those were very sweet. All men say those things.

Ed squirms.

ED

As I recall, you were having problems with your husband, and I, well, I was wondering about what I had done with my life.

CLAIRE

It was more than a mid-life crisis, Edward. We discovered our soul mates. You and me.

ED

We were alone. I was working on a project, and your husband was gone a lot.

CLAIRE

It wasn't a tawdry affair. Don't make it sound that way. We were destined for each other.

ED

It was long ago.

She plays with his fingers, his hand.

CLAIRE

We were on the lake, on the pontoon boat. We had made love under a full moon. We were like ghosts, but we weren't ghosts. We were lovers, more than lovers, we were one, complete. I'll never forget. Remember?

ED
We damn near floated over the dam.

She laughs.

CLAIRE
There was that. But before that,
remember what I said?

Ed looks over. He doesn't remember.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
I told you I wanted to grow old
with you. I wanted to share our
last years.

ED
I do remember.

CLAIRE
And I told you it would happen. We
would watch each other turn white
and bent.

ED
Claire—

CLAIRE
Those weren't just words, Edward,
not for me. There's little else
I've thought about for the last ten
years.

He's surprised.

ED
I meant to keep in touch.

CLAIRE
I've learned it's that men don't
handle long-distance relationships
well. I suppose their urges get
the best of them.

ED
You don't understand. When I came
home that fall, Alice was sick, and
Ed Jr. was having problems at
school. I couldn't just pack up
and leave.

CLAIRE
Did I tell you I went to a psychic
after you left?
(MORE)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Of course not, we didn't talk. Well, she told me, straight out told me that you would never leave Alice, not ever. She said you and Alice shared too much baggage from earlier lives. You were bound to each other.

ED

A psychic? Really?

CLAIRE

As the months passed, I came to believe that she was right. You weren't going anywhere, not without help.

ED

Help? Look, I have never believed psychics. You can blame me for telling lies, but Alice and I weren't chained together by the distant past. That's psychobabble.

She takes his hand and puts it on her breast.

CLAIRE

Remember what you used to do?

ED

Claire—

CLAIRE

No man has ever touched me like you. No man ever excited me like you.

He pulls free his hand.

ED

Ten years, a decade, we aren't the same. We can't go back.

She grabs his thigh.

CLAIRE

Oh, but we can. We will. You just need a little time to get used to the idea.

ED

(removing her hand)
Six months, she's been gone only six months.

CLAIRE
I'll make it seem like a lifetime.

ED
That's not going to happen.

Her smile hardens; her eyes narrow.

CLAIRE
Do you remember the books I read
that summer?

ED
I seem to remember romances and
mysteries.

CLAIRE
Mysteries, lots of mysteries. You
know, when you read nothing but
mysteries, you learn to think in
mysteries.

ED
What?

CLAIRE
Means, motive, and opportunity.
That's what detectives determine.
Means, motive, and opportunity.

ED
What are you talking about?

CLAIRE
Means? A firearm. Motive? Life
insurance. Opportunity? Now,
opportunity is the tough one.

Ed's perplexed.

ED
What are you saying?

CLAIRE
Alice.

He's stunned.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Alice.

ED
You think I killed Alice?

She smiles.

ED (CONT'D)

First, I don't own a firearm. I never have. Two, there was no life insurance policy on Alice, and I confess that was a mistake. Three, I was out of town when she died. Halfway across the country.

CLAIRE

Firearms are easily concealed. If the police knew where to look... You know, there is no life insurance clearing house. A friend could take out a policy on Alice. Of course, that friend would also be available to use the firearm. No reason to suspect a friend, right? Means, motive, and opportunity.

ED

Are you crazy? You think I'm that kind of monster?

CLAIRE

No, Edward, I think you simply needed help.

ED

No friend of mine would ever consider such a scheme. It's insane.

CLAIRE

I wish you wouldn't say that. You'll offend Woody.

Ed's mouth drops open.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Well, you might have offended Woody if he were still alive.

ED

Wait, wait, wait, what are you implying, Claire? What's going on?

CLAIRE

You're more than smart enough to figure it out. That's one of the things I love about you. You're so smart.

Ed stands and walks around the porch. Claire watches calmly, beautiful and sure.

ED
Means. A firearm I don't own but
could be found...here?

Claire sips, coy.

ED (CONT'D)
Motive. A life insurance policy I
know nothing about but might come
to light if...

Claire nods, happy.

ED (CONT'D)
Opportunity. I was out of town,
but my friend Woody wasn't. He had
ample opportunity. Did I get it
right?

Claire claps.

CLAIRE
Well done.

ED
You, you did this?

CLAIRE
I couldn't very well wait for Alice
to just kick off. That might take
years and years.

Ed steps away as far as he can. He merely stares.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Think of it as freeing you from
her, from the shackles of those
previous lives.

ED
You're mad.

CLAIRE
Please, Edward, let's be adult
about this.

ED
What? Adult? This is crazy.
You're crazy, as crazy as—

His face hardens.

ED (CONT'D)

Why?

CLAIRE

I thought that was obvious. We're going to grow old together.

ED

You think you can force me?

CLAIRE

I believe that you will come to love it, to love me. We are so good together.

ED

What's to keep me from calling the Sheriff?

CLAIRE

You'd rather go to prison?

ED

You'll go with me.

She laughs.

CLARIE

Oh my, no, no. I'm in no way involved. It was all you and Woody.

ED

And if something happens to you, I still go to prison, right?

CLAIRE

God, I love you.

ED

Tell me, tell me, did you kill Woody too?

She shrugs.

ED (CONT'D)

And your husband? That guy who shot Paul didn't really commit suicide, did he?

She stands and moves to him, all sex and sizzle, nipples hard.

CLAIRE
All this murder talk, doesn't it
get your juices flowing?

She reaches out and rubs his thigh.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Let's do it here. No one can see.
Right here, right now. I can feel
how much you want me.

ED
Claire.

CLAIRE
I'm better than I used to be.
You'll see. You'll want it even
more.

He lets her grope him, looking into her lustful face.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Kiss me.

Slowly, perhaps against his will, he bends down to kiss her.

FADE OUT