

EXT. SMALL FARMING TOWN - DAY

A morning fog blows through a field of freshly bloomed Queen Anne's Lace so vivid it looks like it just rained.

THWACK.

A breeze pushes the fog around. The fog is too weak to defend itself. The sun shoots up into a blue, blue sky.

THWACK.

The air fills with blue and gold light and the fog ripples away, like reflections in a pond disturbed by a stone.

THWACK.

EXT. SMALL FARMHOUSE - DAY

The sunrise changes the shadows on the side of a plain white house that you can't say has seen better days.

THWACK.

An axe SLICES through a piece of wood. Morning insects buzz to life. A rough hand reaches for another piece of wood.

It belongs to TOBIAS FLOOD, twenty seven going on sixty seven, if his pallor is any indication.

Average height, slight frame, though he carries himself like someone used to handling a little more bulk.

He pushes a cigarette from one side of his mouth to the other, intent on the next piece of wood he plans to chop.

A shadow falls on him from above. MEDGER, an ancient, well preserved farmer, stands on the porch in a union suit.

MEDGER

Toby, you know what time it is?

TOBIAS

Six thirty, seven.

MEDGER

Quarter to six.

Tobias looks back at the sun and nods. He rests the axe on his shoulder.

TOBIAS

Noise wake you?

MEDGER

It ain't that, exactly.

He nods at the pile of wood. There's more than enough for a few winters worth of fires.

TOBIAS

Right.

Medger exhales a breath that's somewhere between a whistle and a sigh. He rubs his face with his enormous old hands.

MEDGER

Tractor needs tending to. Way over in the barn. May as well go bang on that, since you're here.

TOBIAS

Right.

Neither men move. Their faces point at each other but their eyes don't meet. Medger's posture softens.

MEDGER

Look, Tobias...

He tries for eye contact. Tobias looks down. They breathe.

MEDGER

I'll put the coffee on.

Tobias nods. The axe THWACKS into the chopping block and he heads for the barn. He moves slow but with purpose.

Slippered feet slide across the porch to Medger. LILLIAN, his ancient and well preserved wife, hands him a steaming mug.

They watch Tobias until he enters the barn. Medger shakes his head. Lillian takes a sip from his mug.

LILLIAN

You ought to tell him.

MEDGER

Not today.

LILLIAN

When, Medger? When he drives up one day and the new owners are having a fine old barbecue out back?

MEDGER

Only a couple of weeks left in the season. I'll tell him after.

LILLIAN

That would be the way, if we could even afford to pay him for today.

Medger stares at the barn.

MEDGER

After what happened to his little girl, I just...I can't. We can manage, mother. We can manage fine.

INT. FLOOD HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Sunlight limps through a window above the cluttered sink. Curtains made from old sheets blow into the room on a breeze.

A pair of scuffed, worn shoes kicks the leg of the chair across from it. A plate RATTLES with each impact.

EASTER MCAVOY sits alone in the kitchen. Her kicks have a rhythm known only to her.

She's a cute, mixed race girl of 12, right on the cusp of adolescence. She's a normal, healthy looking kid.

Except for the faded bruises on her exposed arms, a deeply hued black eye, and the fact that her jaw is wired shut.

Kick. Rattle. The plate in front of her is empty. Kick. Kick. Rattle. Her foot stops mid-swing.

She picks up the plate and SHATTERS it on the floor. Her body stays completely still as she stares at the pieces.

SQUEEEEEEE. A sound that would be a scream if she could open her mouth comes from her throat.

Bed springs CREAK upstairs. Footsteps hit the floor.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

The sun fades. A sliver of a moon emerges above the trees. The reaming daylight almost hides it from view.

Tobias guides a pickup that's a couple of decades older than he is down an endless road. Corn fields creak as they wave.

The world goes on forever on either side. The far off lights of a small town are the only break in the monotony.

He cracks open a beer and drinks half of it down in a single swig. The radio crackles static at him. He turns it off.

A half a beer later he pulls up to a cross roads equipped with the most futile stop light in the world.

No cars. None, save his. The light turns red. He pulls to a stop and opens another beer.

The light appears intent on staying red for a ridiculous amount of time. He sips. He rubs his face. His shoulders sag.

The light turns green. Tobias stays where he is. The light turns red. He polishes off his beer.

The lights in town brighten as the remaining light of day fades from the sky. Tobias looks like he might fall asleep.

An abrupt noise catches his attention. He looks at the side of the road. A lame dog drags its hind legs along the grass.

The light turns red. Tobias steps on the gas.

INT. FLOOD HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Headlights splash the walls of a run down, kicked in the ribs scrap of a room with a few nice things in it.

Old furniture from back when they used to make it right, well worn but solid. A few pictures in nice frames. An urn.

The headlights come to rest on a well built, well maintained fireplace. The mantle is full of pictures in cheap frames.

The one with the most light on it is of a lovely teenage black girl, eight months pregnant, in a cheerleader outfit.

The rest of her squad surrounds the belly that pokes out of her uniform. Everyone is all high-school-smiles.

Behind them, slightly out of focus, is Tobias, sitting on the bleachers in a football uniform, smoking.

The headlights disappear. The room settles.

He slides the glass to a stain on the wood and centers it. Mavis and Easter bow their heads for grace.

Tobias tucks into his meal with gusto. Mavis and Easter whisper a polite "amen" and join him.

They eat in silence.

EXT. FLOOD HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Tobias sits in the darkest corner of the porch, smoking. A faint SCRITCH-SCRATCH sounds at regular intervals.

Mavis pushes through the screen door, a blanket wrapped around her.

She looks to the orange glow of Tobias's cigarette.

MAVIS

Hope you're enjoying that. Two and a half more years then - fff. Done.

TOBIAS

I know it.

He exhales a healthy lungs worth of smoke. She watches it make thick shapes and disappear. SCRITCH. SCRATCH.

MAVIS

Give me a drag.

She takes the cigarette out of his mouth and sits on his knees. He secures the blanket on her shoulders.

TOBIAS

You ain't cold?

MAVIS

I'm alright.

She returns the cigarette to his mouth.

MAVIS

You might want to have a talk with The Girl. She smashed a plate this morning. Just. Smash. Right on the ground.

TOBIAS

You didn't have a talk with her?

MAVIS

Oh, we had words. It's different
when it's you, is all.

TOBIAS

It'll keep until tomorrow. I'm
meeting Dale. Saturday, after all.

Mavis tenses. SCRITCH. SCRATCH.

MAVIS

So you plan on keeping up
Saturday's with Dale? Truly?

TOBIAS

You plan on telling me who I can
and can't shoot pool with?

MAVIS

It ain't even been two weeks,
Tobias.

TOBIAS

We been through this. Dale's Dale.
His boys his boy.

She hops off his knee.

MAVIS

And she's your daughter.

She walks to the door and waits for a moment that never
comes. Tobias looks straight ahead. SCRITCH. SCRATCH.

The door CREAKS open. Tobias speaks.

TOBIAS

We ought to pick up more poison. I
can hear the mice in the damn walls
again.

MAVIS

I don't hear anything.

The door CREAKS closed.

INT. DALE'S HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

There's a soft KNOCK on a door with a broken screen. HOLLY,
a leathery, bronchial middle aged woman peeks out the
window.

She throws the door open with a sneer. Tobias stands there, hands thrust way down in his pockets.

HOLLY

Oh, it's you. He ain't ready yet.

TOBIAS

I don't mind waiting.

She forces eye contact. He does his best to avoid it.

HOLLY

Well come on in and wait. Screen's busted and we got ladybugs.

He steps in. She closes the door and moves into the living room, aimed directly at her lit cigarette.

HOLLY

Beer?

TOBIAS

No thanks.

She drops onto the couch into the cathode glow of an old TV. The lights are off around her.

Tobias shuffles his feet at the bottom of the stairs. The house is bigger than his but much, much messier.

Kids toys litter the floor, the walls are stained a dull, nicotine yellow. A few pictures hang crooked on the wall.

He peeks at one of he and Dale, fresh out of high school, at Dale's wedding. Holly lingers in the background.

She looks like an Aunt in a wedding dress. CRACK. Tobias looks away quickly as Holly gets into another beer.

When his eyes return to the stairs DALE JUNIOR, a predatory 13, stands at the top, wearing pajama bottoms.

There are scratches on his exposed arms and an adults eye-patch over a bandaged eye. He stares down, unmoving.

A slow, thin trickle of blood seeps out the side of the bandage. Dale Junior lifts the eye patch to wipe it away.

TOBIAS

Holly? Think I'll take that beer after all.

EXT. DALE'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - NIGHT

CRACK.

Tobias opens a can of beer from a six pack he holds by the plastic rings. The moon lights up the backyard.

He stares at an above ground pool with no water in it. Rust creeps along the side, like a stain spreading upward.

He polishes off his beer and opens another. DALE makes an unholy clatter when he struggles with the sliding door.

DALE

There you are. Jesus, why didn't you wait in the house?

Tobias shrugs. He hands Dale a beer. The puffy gut and redness in his cheeks suggest he doesn't really need it.

DALE

Was it D.J, he come out of his room? I guess that's the first time you've seen him since - with his eye and all. Shit, we could have just met in town. I didn't think.

TOBIAS

No trouble.

DALE

Aw shit, Toby, I know, I know. I want to make it right, is all.

TOBIAS

Dale.

He gives Dale a stern look. Dale wants to keep talking, but doesn't. He looks down at the six pack.

DALE

I thought you were meant to be taking it easy for a spell.

Tobias forces a grin.

TOBIAS

Shit, Dale. It's the weekend. This is taking it easy.

He lifts the beer to his lips.

EXT. SOUTH PAW - MAIN STREET - NIGHT

An empty can CLANGS into the garbage on the side of a broke down, busted, hard-times main street America.

The street runs five blocks long. A few businesses hang on by a thread but the only one open is the local V.F.W.

Off in the distance, at the edge of town, two CHURCHES face one another. One catholic, the other baptist.

Tobias stares at their long shadows while Dale cheers for his beer-can-basket.

DALE

Nailed it.

He mounts the steps to the squat, windowless V.F.W building and glances at Tobias.

DALE

You coming?

Tobias holds up his cigarette. Dale shrugs his way inside. A brief burst of VOICES fill the air when he opens the door.

It disappears completely when the door closes. The street is completely silent. The world is completely silent.

Tobias takes a deep drag. A muffled SCRAPE gets his attention. He looks across the street.

The lame dog from earlier crawls across a parking lot on its belly. Its hind legs twitch. It stops to stare at Tobias.

INT. V.F.W. - NIGHT

Tobias and Dale sit in a crowded booth in the corner of a square, boxy room. A bar runs the length of one wall. A pool table sits un-tethered somewhere in the middle.

The walls are lined with pictures of women in the military, though there are only two actual women in the room.

SHELLY, the squat-as-a-pile-of-bricks bartender, and RENE, who looks like a female version of Dale. Clearly his sister.

She's as gaunt as he is round, her expression as snide as his is friendly. She props up the end of the bar.

DALE

So Gabe says "You didn't come here to hunt."

A few bearded, leather skinned, kind of messed up looking PALS cackle around Dale in the booth.

GABE, a mostly thuggish man, misses a shot at the pool table.

GABE

Toby.

He and Tobias exchange places. Tobias reaches for the cue. Gabe holds onto it a second longer than he should.

GABE

How's that hellcat of yours?

Tobias yanks the cue away and moves to the table. Gabe sits at the edge of the booth, intent on Tobias.

GABE

Dale, when that sister of yours get back in town? She's looking proper.

He points at her with his beer as Tobias sinks a ball.

DALE

Aw, jeez, man. Don't start in on that shit again. She's my sister.

GABE

What, I wouldn't make a dandy enough brother in law for you?

The Pals razz Dale about his sister and the possible rewards her good looks might offer them.

Dale tries to laugh along until the razzes take a gross turn.

DALE

All right. OK. Haha. Ease it up. You had your fun.

Gabe chugs his beer.

GABE

Yeah, you're right, you're right. We all had our fun back in high school. One right after the other on occasion.

He makes a lewd gesture. Dale turns bright red. Tobias steps directly in front of Gabe.

TOBIAS

Stand up.

The table quiets down. Gabe keeps his eyes away from Tobias.

GABE

Take your shot, tough guy. We're just breaking balls.

TOBIAS

Stand. Up.

The Pals lean away from the table. Gabe reluctantly looks up. Their eyes have a full conversation in seconds.

One that Gabe can't hold up his end of. He leans back, mumbles a half-assed apology, and motions at the pool table.

GABE

Go on and beat me already.

Tobias does just that. He sinks two balls off one shot then gets the eight ball in without much effort.

He turns for the bar. WHAM. Rene's fist collides full force with his face.

RENE

You give that to your girl from me.
And my nephew.

A stunned look plants itself firmly on his face. She walks out the door without noticing.

Dale shuffles over and puts his hand on Tobias's shoulder.

DALE

Shit, man, I'm real sorry about that. She must be on the rag or something. She don't even like D.J that much.

He forces a laugh. It's more awkward than reassuring.

TOBIAS

Your tab good here?

DALE

Sure, I guess.

TOBIAS

Good. Lets get in to some drinking.

EXT. SOUTH PAW - MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Dale sits on a bench, a slight sway in his posture. His droopy eyes watch Tobias across the street.

Tobias staggers from car to car with a tire iron over his shoulder. He gets on one knee to look under each car.

It takes more effort than it should.

DALE

(Yells)

Told you. Ain't no dog, Toby.

The door to the V.F.W opens and a tall, wiry man walks out. FATHER OLIVER (50) is dressed in casual priest duds.

Black shirt, collar, jeans, and sneakers. He joins Dale. Their faces are equally as red, their speech equally slurred.

Despite the heavy tongue, Oliver can't hide the intelligence behind his eyes or his voice. He's a thoughtful man.

FATHER OLIVER

What's he up to over there?

DALE

Looking to kill a dog.

FATHER OLIVER

What's he got against dogs?

DALE

Nothing. Putting it out of its misery I guess. Only there ain't no dog. I told him.

FATHER OLIVER

"David said to Gad, "I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the lord, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into human hands."

DALE

That from the bible?

FATHER OLIVER

Come to church tomorrow and find out. Hang overs welcome.

SMASH. Tobias stands next to his own truck. The passenger side rearview is cracked, though all the shards are in place.

He lifts the tire iron up for another swing, but thinks better of it. His arm drops to his side.

EXT. FLOOD HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Tobias steers the truck carefully into his driveway. He pulls it into his spot at an angle.

INT. PICK UP - NIGHT

He stares at the clock. It reads 12:30am. He opens the door and moves to get out but his seat-belt pulls him back.

He doesn't struggle. He just sits there with the door open and the engine running. His eyes close.

When they open again the clock reads 3:00am. He looks around, confused about where he is.

A SHRIEK sounds from inside.

INT. FLOOD HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALL - NIGHT

Tobias bangs on the bathroom door in the dark hall. A commotion sounds inside. He bangs harder.

The sounds of heavy breathing follow a SQUEAL. Then nothing. Then something metal CLANGS on porcelain.

Tobias grabs the handle and pulls with his whole body. The door opens from the inside. He flies backward into the wall.

Mavis backs into the hall. Scratches line her arms. A trickle of blood spills from her hand with a steady PLIP PLIP.

Tobias looks over her shoulder into the -

FLOOD HOUSE - UPSTAIRS BATHROOM

- where Easter backs against the far wall. She crouches into a feral position, a wild look in her eyes.

She waves a blood stained nail file in front of her. A glass falls - of its own accord - off the sink and SHATTERS.

INT. FLOOD HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Tobias sits at the kitchen table with Mavis. He cleans a deep gash on her hand, right where the thumb meets the palm.

MAVIS
You're crazy drunk.

TOBIAS
I'm fine.

MAVIS
You think I don't know your shark eyes?

He presses a bandage on to her wound. She takes it from there. He studies the scratches on her arms.

TOBIAS
What happened?

Mavis tapes up the bandage in silence.

TOBIAS
You want I should ask her?

MAVIS
Go ahead. She won't tell you.

TOBIAS
I'm her father. She'll damn well answer when I speak to her.

MAVIS
It's not something girls talk to their daddies about.

Tobias leans back in his chair. Hard.

TOBIAS
Is it - was it about the...

He trails off. Mavis stares him dead in the face.

MAVIS
The attack. You can say it. Them boys attacked her and she defended herself.

His jaw clenches. He sits up straight.

TOBIAS
Well, was that what all this fuss here was about?

MAVIS

No. She got her first period.

TOBIAS

Oh. What? Already?

MAVIS

She's twelve, Tobias.

TOBIAS

Oh.

He looks slightly confused.

TOBIAS

And that's why...?

He looks at her bandage.

MAVIS

I only have what I use in the house
and she didn't want to use one. I
tried to show her how and she just
flipped out.

TOBIAS

What can I - what should we do?

She gets to her feet and puts her hand on his shoulder.

MAVIS

I'm taking her to talk to Father
Oliver tomorrow after church.

TOBIAS

That red faced hot-head? He was at
the V longer than I was tonight.

MAVIS

Something's changed in her. There's
something gone or something that
wasn't there before. I don't know.
We need help. I know that's not
your favorite thing in the world,
but there it is.

She moves to the door.

MAVIS

You coming to bed?

TOBIAS

No.

MAVIS
Suit yourself.

She turns the light out.

MAVIS
Medger called while you were out
getting pickled.

Her footsteps trail upstairs. The moon fills the window as
Tobias sits in the dark.

SCRITCH.

SCRATCH.