

THE HARROW

Written by

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EXT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE - DUSK

A century-old three-story building of brick and iron on an urban street in Birmingham AL, wire encased in the dirty glass of the industrial windows. The building is beyond use but not entirely abandoned.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO ROOM - DUSK

A sparsely decorated open space on the ground floor. A floor of old wooden beams, brick walls, workbench and carpentry tools, a bed, old appliances comprising a kitchen.

A line of portraits, faces on the wall, various sizes, styles and ages, kitsch. They stare out in inquisition and judgment.

Miller - 31, pale and aged beyond his years - is hunched over an antique bureau. He works a metal file meticulously through the crevices of the intricately carved wood.

Suddenly he stops. His mind is drifting.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO ROOM - EVENING

Miller paces the room in repetitive motion: He crosses from wall to wall, walks a few paces along the wall tapping and scraping a file on the brick in steady intervals, then crosses back to where he started.

ECU: Miller's shoes. They are nearly worn out. His endlessly repeated steps have etched a path in the floor.

AUDIO: a slow shuffling of footsteps is audible from the floor above.

Miller repeats the triangle again, precisely the same as the first time.

He stops pacing, listens. He hears the footsteps again.

He begins a third repetition, taps the file on the wall as he walks. Miller speaks to drown it out.

MILLER
No. No. No.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE - NIGHT

Miller tosses a knife at a wooden board he has leaned against a wall twelve feet away.

Crude concentric circles are painted on the wood, forming a target. The knife spins end over end - THWACK! - the blade digs into the wood, sticks.

CU: The board. Hundreds of gashes are clustered around the knife blade.

Miller walks to the board, pulls the knife out, takes his position again - twelve feet back. He throws the knife again - THWACK!

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE - NIGHT

Miller runs his hand across his scalp and through his hair in a single rapid motion, gazing into the darkness.

MILLER
I found it.

He repeats the motion.

MILLER (CONT'D)
I found it for you.

Repeats the motion.

MILLER (CONT'D)
I found it.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE - NIGHT

Miller paces again, along the same path as before.

MILLER (V.O.)
Time don't march or walk or even
move in a straight line. It skips
around like a pinball. Last year.
Ten years ago. Yesterday. It's all
now.

AUDIO MATCH CUT:
WIND THROUGH A
FIELD OF GRASS

EXT. A FIELD OF WILD GRASS IN RURAL ALABAMA - AFTERNOON - TEN YEARS AGO

Miller's POV: GALE, age 21, in a simple country dress, walks through the tall grass. She is backlit by the glare of the afternoon sun as the heat of a summer day subsides.

Miller, younger - age 21, follows a few steps behind. Gale reaches down and brushes her fingers gently over a wildflower as she passes, turns back to him and smiles.

She reaches back, holds out her hand, Miller takes it.

GALE
I love you, Miller.

She pauses, awaiting a response.

GALE (CONT'D)
Did you hear me?

MILLER
Yes, ma'am.

GALE
I truly do.

MILLER
Yes ma'am.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO ROOM - DUSK - PRESENT

Miller stands motionless staring at an old fish tank that stands on a steel frame, as sparse as the room around it. A single fish swims inside it.

Miller returns to himself, glances at the antique bureau, then down at the file in his hand.

He returns to the bureau, runs his finger over a gap where a piece of the carving has been broken out. He places a replacement piece in the gap - a perfect fit. He takes it out again, puts a thin line of glue in the gap. He puts the replacement piece back. Leans in to inspect the fit.

INT. DINER - MORNING

A spoon CLANGS, rattles on a plate as the WAITRESS sets two coffee cups, saucers down on the table.

SHERIFF, age 60, in uniform, sits at a table. Opposite him sits RUTH, age 20, her back to us.

SHERIFF
(to Waitress)
Thank you, darling.

Waitress smiles, leaves.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

(to Ruth)

Listen, uh, that all was ten years ago. Don't know how much I can tell you now.

RUTH

Anything at all would be real helpful.

Sheriff studies her a beat, then nods.

SHERIFF

Uh huh.

(leans back, exhales)

We never had that sort of thing around here, not since I been sheriff anyway. Uriah and the missus, them bodies ... hell it was a goddam mess. I didn't know the uh ... your sister too well. Knew Uriah though,

(holds hand two feet high)

since he was like that. Decent man, far as I knew.

RUTH

What'd he do it for, if he was so decent?

Sheriff doesn't have an answer.

RUTH (CONT'D)

I heard he had a sister.

SHERIFF

(nods)

Next county over. Still there, far as I know.

RUTH

What about the farmhands?

SHERIFF

Migrants, most of 'em. Move on after the harvest's done. 'Cept one, lives downtown.

RUTH

How do I find him?

SHERIFF

I could get you an address. Think you'd be wasting your time, though.

(MORE)

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Man's become some kind of recluse,
from what I hear. Shut himself up
completely. People bring him things
to fix.

RUTH

Things to fix?

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - DAY

Miller, viewed from behind in silhouette against the window
across the room, sits motionless on his bed.

A KNOCK on the door. Miller doesn't react. A SECOND KNOCK,
same.

A THIRD KNOCK. Miller's head turns toward the door.

EXT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, FRONT DOOR - CONTINUOUS

RAY, age 50, stands in the doorway, getting impatient. Miller
squints in the bright sun.

RAY

Guess you know what I'm here for.
(beat)
Owner's got himself pretty worked
up at this point. Says I bring it
to him today or he'll come get it
himself.

Miller looks at Ray, no response.

RAY (CONT'D)

Well hell, let me see it at least.
I gotta tell him something.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Ray and Miller cross the room to a work area, where an
antique bureau stands, half restored. Ray examines it.

RAY

Mm hmm.
(at replacement piece)
That's looking good.
(looks up at Miller)
Fine work, like always.

Ray looks the piece over some more.

RAY (CONT'D)
Well goddammit, how long do I tell
him?

MILLER
A week. I think a week.

Ray gives Miller a wary glance.

RAY
You're killing me here. Look, you
do the work, you can keep on living
here. You don't, then get the hell
out! I ain't running a charity.

MILLER
I paid a hundred for materials. Can
you cover me?

RAY
Christ Almighty! I come here for
the furniture, I leave empty handed
and a hundred dollars lighter. Now
ain't that wonderful!

Ray glances around. Bed, kitchen, are clean and orderly.
Miller worries the file in his hand.

RAY (CONT'D)
Keep the place this clean, you
gotta have a woman around here
somewhere.

MILLER
Just like things a certain way.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, HOLDING ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

POV: Camera stands at the top of the staircase leading to the
studio room, looking down the steps. Voices heard through the
door below.

RAY (O.S.)
Huh! Well, Becky keeps fussin' at
me to have you over for dinner one
night.

POV: Camera descends the steps.

RAY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Says she can't stand to hear about
a person got nobody to care for
'em.

MILLER (O.S.)
I'm all right.

POV: Camera comes to the locked door, stops.

RAY (O.S.)
Becky says, you being all by
yourself, that's the worst thing
for a man.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

RAY
She says in prison they put a man
in solitary just to torture him.
I mean, go figure that: a man'd
rather spend his days with killers
and psychopaths than be by himself.
(considers)
Well, I guess that explains
marriage too, don't it?

MILLER
Got that cash on you?

RAY
All right, yeah. In the car.

Ray leaves.

A beat of SILENCE.

AUDIBLE: Footsteps on the floor above.

Miller looks up, stares. He hears a CREAKING BOARD, then
another.

Ray returns, opens the door. Inaudible conversation as Ray
hands Miller the cash.

AUDIBLE: The footsteps continue a slow pacing. A turntable
needle lands on a scratchy LP record. Seconds later, a waltz
begins.

Miller stares at Ray, seeking an indication Ray hears it too.
Ray talks on, oblivious.

Ray departs, Miller shuts the door behind him.

Miller turns to the door that leads upstairs, stares at it.

INT. UPSTAIRS, SLAUGHTERHOUSE HOLDING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Darkness. A door opens below, shining a beam of light up the staircase. A cavernous empty room of windowless brick walls and century-old floorboards becomes visible.

AUDIBLE: A soft steady CHIME of metal on metal. Then the sound of slow-moving FOOTSTEPS.

Miller rises into view, flashlight in hand. He walks across the main room, over creaking floor boards.

He shines the light into a corner, where an old turntable sits on the floor. It is switched off, dusty, the needle in its saddle.

He turns the light from corner to corner, empty. He walks to a doorway to an adjoining room.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, REFRIGERATOR ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Miller enters the refrigerator room, shines the light on two century-old industrial meat refrigerators. The beam reflects off chrome handles.

Miller scans the room until the flashlight finds a CAT - sitting still on the floor, its eyes lit up by the beam.

MILLER

Back again huh?

The cat stands up casually, trots to the doorway and is gone.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, SLAUGHTER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The flashlight's beam precedes Miller, then he steps into view. The light reveals dark liquid stains, long since dried, running into a large drain in the center of the room. To one side, steel meat hooks dangle from the ceiling.

Miller sees the source of the clanging: One of the hooks swings slowly back and forth, tapping into another one. He stares a moment, then turns back to the Holding Room.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, HOLDING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Miller scans the room, empty. He turns and walks to the stairway leading down. As he reaches it, he hears a languid, sultry voice.

GALE
Come on, Miller.

He turns, shines his light to the source. Gale sits on the floor in a corner in a country dress, legs straight like a rag doll. She is pale, sickly, her left eye swollen and black.

She stares at him, her eyes empty, somnolent. She raises her dress, slowly, to her thighs.

Miller glances down at the exposed skin of her legs.

GALE (CONT'D)
I want you to.

Miller approaches her. Her stare remains fixed upon him, as he places the flashlight on the floor and kneels down in front of her.

He reaches down, places his hand tenderly on her swollen cheek.

MILLER
I'll get him. I promise I will.

Gale reaches up, takes hold of his hand.

GALE
Shhh...

She slides his hand down her torso, under the hem of her dress, up between her legs.

Gale closes her eyes. Miller leans his face in close to hers until their lips almost touch.

WIDE SHOT: Miller kneels in front of the wall, the flashlight on the floor shining on him, casting his shadow on the wall. He is alone.

Miller lies on his side, alone and motionless on the wood floor.

EXT. STREET IN BIRMINGHAM - SIMULTANEOUS

Ruth walks up the sidewalk, a cell phone at her ear.

AUDIBLE: From within the phone, the RINGS of Ruth's call going through. The CLICK of the call connecting.

ADELE (V.O.)
 (through receiver)
 I'm not here. Leave a message.

RUTH
 Hello Mrs Taylor, my names' Ruth
 Young. I-I'd really like to talk to
 you about your brother ... um ...
 if you don't mind. I'm sorry, it's
 a little hard to explain over the
 phone. Can you call me please?

Ruth walks a few steps to the front of the

ABATTOIR

She glances about the front of the building, double checks
 the address, steps up to the door, pauses, knocks.

No answer.

She looks around her, then leans in toward a window, cups her
 hands over her eyes to peer inside. Nothing.

She returns to the door, knocks again, silence.

She searches her purse with her hand for a pen.

A click of a lock, Ruth looks up.

The door opens halfway, Miller stands in the doorway.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 I'm looking for Miller Lee.

Miller stares at her a beat.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 Am I at the right address ...?

MILLER
 What do you want?

RUTH
 Well, I was wondering if I could
 talk to you.

MILLER
 Ain't you?

RUTH
 Well, it's a little involved. Is
 there somewhere we could sit down?
 (MORE)

RUTH (CONT'D)
 I, uh ... I tried calling you but
 you got no phone, apparently.

He moves to close the door.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 I think you mighta known my sister.
 Her name was Gale.

The door stops.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 You work on the Taylor farm some
 years back?
 (nothing)
 I talked to the Sheriff this
 morning and he ...

MILLER
 Then you heard all there is to
 know.

RUTH
 All right. But I thought since you
 worked there and all ...

MILLER
 Some time ago.

RUTH
 Yessir. But see, I haven't seen her
 since I was six years old. I just
 want to ... I mean, it'd be
 wonderful to know what she was
 like. I guess that sounds strange
 coming from her kin, don't it.

MILLER
 (hesitates ... then)
 I can't help you.

Ruth stares at him a beat. Reaches down into her purse for a
 piece of paper.

RUTH
 I ... I could leave you my number
 in case you ...
 (realizing no point)
 All right, well ... all right.

Ruth puts the paper back in her purse. She looks up to see
 the door closing. The CLICK of a lock.

RUTH (CONT'D)
(under her breath)
Shit!

She turns to go, stops, turns back, thinks better of it, turns and leaves.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - NIGHT

Miller stands at the window, watching from inside as Ruth walks away. She has gotten his attention.

When she is out of view, he returns to the bureau, wipes sawdust off it, stares at his work.

He sets his tools down in an orderly row. He glances around the room, then at the door leading upstairs.

He walks to it, opens it, climbs the stairway.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, HOLDING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

AUDIO: The sound of a turntable needle scratching at the end of a record.

Miller stands beside it, staring at it, mesmerized, alone.

Miller's POV: Closeup on the turning disc. A hand reaches in, lifts the needle, places it at the beginning of the record.

AUDIO: A waltz plays.

Miller looks up. Gale stands before him, young, fresh, unblemished. She smiles.

GALE
Dance with me. Don't you know how
to dance?

Miller steps in, puts his hand around her waist, takes her other hand in his.

Gale looks up at him tenderly. She closes her eyes, leans her head on his shoulder. They move together, slowly, in step with the music.

EXT. A FIELD BESIDE A STREAM - DAY, PAST

Miller's POV: Gale steps beside a stream in the afternoon of a late summer's day.

She ducks under tree branches as she walks. The water trickles beside her. She glances back at him.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, HOLDING ROOM - NIGHT, PRESENT

Miller and Gale sway slowly, turning as the music plays. Her eyes are closed, she appears at peace.

AUDIO: The music begins to slow as the turntable's pace become unsteady.

Miller turns Gale slowly until her back is to us.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - DAY

A KNOCK at the door. Miller, in bed, awakens.

He gets up, pulls his pants on, dons a shirt, goes to answer.

Sunshine. Ruth.

RUTH

I was in the neighborhood.

MILLER

Ain't but one neighborhood in this town.

RUTH

Right ... Sir, I'm just asking you ... I don't believe it's too much to ask ...

MILLER

I told you ...

RUTH

(more resolute)
... because I seen it on your face when I said her name that you knew her. Okay, well, I'm her little sister and all I'm asking you for is ... Look, I know what that man did to her. I just need to know why. You worked on that farm. You gotta have some idea.

MILLER

How come it's so important to you?

Ruth stares at him a beat.

RUTH
I don't know ... I think ... maybe
I'm responsible myself, some way.

Miller's expression softens slightly. He's puzzled now. He relents, turns his body to admit her into the slaughterhouse.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Ruth enters.

She gazes around the room, taking it in. Miller watches her closely.

RUTH
Interesting place. Looks old.
(beat)
What was it, a factory?

MILLER
Abattoir.

Ruth turns to look at him.

MILLER (CONT'D)
A slaughterhouse.

RUTH
I know what an abattoir is.

Ruth glances at the bureau and an old door beside it.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Mind if I have a look?

Miller indicates that she can.

Ruth walks to it, leans down to touch a detail.

MILLER
Don't touch it.

Ruth stops her hand before it touches.

RUTH
Is it valuable?
(beat)
How'd you come by it?

MILLER
Rich family bought a plantation
outside of town. Restoring every
piece of it.

Ruth stands up, eyes him.

RUTH
I heard you don't get out much.
(beat)
How come you don't talk to no one?

MILLER
What for.

Ruth considers the answer. Her eye catches the fish tank. She walks over, leans down, taps on the glass.

RUTH
Just one? Ain't he lonely?

MILLER
He's all right. They say fish got
no memory anyhow.

RUTH
(smiles)
Now how'd anyone know if that's
true?

MILLER
Well ... Guess you can't.

He stares at Ruth until she blushes.

RUTH
What you starin' for?

MILLER
I seen that smile before.

She looks off.

RUTH
Gale and me, we was just half
sisters, - same momma. Her daddy
died in a coal mine when she's
little. Momma got married again,
and there I came. Soon as Gale
turned sixteen, she was gone. Momma
never told me she was killed. I
only just found out.

MILLER
Guess you don't talk much in your
family.

Ruth eyes him, not amused.

RUTH

I been around to see the neighbors,
talk to anyone I can find. I ain't
looking to stir nothing up. I just
want to know is all.

MILLER

Where you come from?

RUTH

Mobile. Gale never said nothing
about us?

MILLER

Not to me.

Ruth frowns, disappointed.

She reaches into her purse, takes out a photograph of Gale at sixteen, standing next to Ruth, six. Gale holds her sister's hand.

She hands him the photo, he looks down at it.

RUTH

Momma took that about a month
before Gale left us. She seemed all
grown up to me then.

Miller studies the PHOTO: Gale, bright-eyed, determined. Ruth squinting up awkwardly.

RUTH (CONT'D)

When I look at it now ... she was
just a girl.

Miller hands the photo back to her.

MILLER

What'd she leave for?

RUTH

I guess her and my daddy didn't get
along too well.

(beat)

Can't you tell me something about
her? Just any old thing?

Miller eyes her, considering ...

AUDIO MATCH CUT:
GRIND OF BLADES
SPINNING IN
EARTH

EXT. FARM - DAY - PAST

Midday heat, early fall.

CLOSEUP: Spinning blades of machinery churning through dirt.

Then, a piercing SCRAPE of metal on rock as the blades come to an abrupt stop.

URIAH, 37, tall and burly, cuts the engine and steps down from the vehicle. He kneels down to examine the blades.

URIAH
Sonofabitch!

A large stone is wedged between two blades, jamming them. Uriah reaches in among the blades and takes hold of the stone, attempting to twist it free. No luck.

He lifts his cap, wipes his forehead, glares at the combine. He turns and makes his way to a barn off in the distance.

Uriah's dog, REX, a German Shepherd, falls into step beside him.

INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

Uriah scans his tool bench, grabs a hammer, a wrench, a crowbar. Rex lies in a corner, watching him.

Rex emits a low growl. He gets to his feet, barks angrily. Uriah looks up, sees Miller silhouetted in the doorway.

URIAH
Quiet now!

Rex continues barking.

URIAH (CONT'D)
Quiet!

Rex stops. Uriah looks back at Miller.

URIAH (CONT'D)
What d'you want?

MILLER (O.C.)
'Scuse me, sir. I'm lookin' for
Uriah Taylor.

Miller steps into the barn. Rex starts up barking again.

URIAH
God dammit! Shut the hell up!

He takes a menacing step toward Rex, hammer in hand.

Rex scampers out of the barn. Uriah turns back to Miller.

URIAH (CONT'D)
I asked you what you want.

MILLER
Heard you're hiring for the season.

Uriah sizes Miller up without a word. Miller shifts, then to break the silence ...

MILLER (CONT'D)
Y'know, a month or two is just fine for me, if you got something. I ain't looking to outstay my welcome.

URIAH
You ever worked a farm before?

MILLER
No sir, but I got no problem with hard work. Besides that, I can fix most any mechanical thing you got around here.

URIAH
That so ...

Uriah considers.

URIAH (CONT'D)
You want to work, be here at five tomorrow morning. Pay's at the end of the week. Least I'll get a few days out of you, before you run off and drink it all.

MILLER
Ain't like that.

URIAH
Huh?

MILLER
Said I ain't like that, sir.

URIAH

Well, you can drop that "sir"
bullshit. You know my name.

Miller touches the brim of his cap.

MILLER

Mine's Miller.

He exits.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF BARN - CONTINUOUS

As Miller leaves the barn, he sees Gale. She steps down the front porch steps, holding a dish of water. Rex circles her, tail wagging.

She sets the dish down. Rex slurps it up, clearly thirsty. She leans down, pets him as he drinks.

Miller notices a chain fall out from inside her collar.

CLOSEUP: A man's wedding band hangs at the end of it.

Gale straightens up, notices Miller staring. She gazes at him a beat as she drops the ring back down into her shirt. She turns, climbs the steps back to the front door.

Miller watches her as she enters, shuts it behind her. He stares at the door a beat, continues back to his car.

RUTH (V.O.)

What was she like, all grown up?

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - DAY, PRESENT

RUTH

I bet she was beautiful.

Miller nods.

RUTH (CONT'D)

That ring. Was her daddy's wedding band. She wore it like that since he died. Kept it like it was some kind of treasure.

(beat)

Tell me more about her! I mean, what kind of a person was she? I bet she was real strong inside.

MILLER

I ain't the one to tell you all
them things.

Rebuffed, Ruth glances around the room, chooses another tack.

RUTH

This place don't look like
something to live in.

Miller shrugs.

RUTH (CONT'D)

I mean, it ain't exactly typical,
living in a slaughterhouse.

Miller smiles at the remark, turns his gaze to the front
door.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - DAY - PAST

AUDIBLE: A RATTLE and CLICK of a key turning in the front
door.

The door opens, spilling daylight inside. Ray, now ten years
younger, enters. Young Miller walks in behind him, glances
around.

RAY

Been empty since I bought it.
Thought I'd convert it into
apartments, but the historical
commission got word. Told me I
wasn't changing a damned thing.

Miller wanders around, checking out the place.

RAY (CONT'D)

Place sits abandoned 40 years,
suddenly it's a landmark.

Miller turns the knob of a faucet. Nothing.

MILLER

Water work?

RAY

Yeah, it works. Just have to turn
it on for you. How long you
thinking?

MILLER

Few months I guess.

Miller opens the door leading upstairs.

MILLER (CONT'D)
Where's this go?

RAY
Upstairs. Back in the day, they took the cows up there by elevator, kept 'em all in the big room over our heads, killed 'em in a room on the other side. Look, uh, like I said, I can't do nothing to spruce the place up. It'd be pretty much as is.

Miller turns, gazes around for a last look.

RAY (CONT'D)
So you want it or don't ya?

EXT. FARM - DAY

Miller works in the tomato field, digging a row. He glances around, sees three Mexican MIGRANTS picking tomatoes in distance.

He looks back at the sound of an approaching tractor. Uriah is at the wheel.

URIAH
Miller! Hey!

Miller stops what he's doing. Uriah gets down, walks up to him, gets in Miller's face.

URIAH (CONT'D)
Thought you were some kind of mechanic. That's what you said, ain't it?

MILLER
What d'you mean?

URIAH
I asked you to fix the fuel line in that truck. Didn't I do that?

MILLER
I did fix it.

URIAH

That so. Well, how come I got that Mexican telling me it's conkin' out on the highway? I lost a truckload yesterday, fryin' in the sun on the roadside. You think I can afford that?

MILLER

I fixed it's all I know.

URIAH

Well, one of you's full of shit.

Uriah sizes Miller up a beat. He gazes off at the Mexicans working in the field.

URIAH (CONT'D)

God dammit! Ain't the first batch I lost. God damn if she didn't bring back a lazy pack of 'em this season.

Uriah gazes off at the house, sees Gale carrying a bucket from the barn. He turns back to Miller.

URIAH (CONT'D)

Listen, I need them fields across the way turned over. You get on that. I dragged the til up there already.

MILLER

All right.

Uriah waves him off. Miller walks off toward the field.

Uriah mounts the tractor, drives off toward the house.

Miller walks through the field, glances back to see Uriah, in the distance, arrive at the house.

Gale stops as he climbs down. He walks up to her.

Miller stops, watches them.

They speak, it quickly escalates to an argument.

Their hands gesture emphatically. Uriah reaches out to grab her shirt. Gale tears free, her necklace caught in his grip.

Uriah glances down at the ring in his grip. He frowns, jerks the necklace from her neck, it comes loose in his hand.

He lifts the chain so the ring slides down into his palm, coming to rest beside his own wedding band on his finger.

GALE

Give it to me.

URIAH

What the hell you keep this for?

GALE

Give it to me!

Uriah turns, throws the ring far off deep into the tall grass beside the field. Miller sees the spot where it lands.

Gale glares at Uriah, then erupts, slapping at him furiously.

Uriah shoves her back, she stumbles and falls.

Gale gets up, glares at Uriah. She storms up the porch into the house, slams the door behind her.

Uriah kicks the dirt angrily, looks off, sees Miller watching.

Miller turns, continues on in the direction he was going.

Uriah glares after him, then mounts the tractor, drives off.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO ROOM - DUSK

Ruth stares down at the floor.

RUTH

I was hoping ... better things
maybe.

(reflects a beat)

When we were girls, she'd come into
my room, turn the radio on, shut
the door. We'd be jumping around,
all barefoot, screaming like crazy.
If she was happy or sad, 'stead of
talking, that's what she'd do.

(beat)

I'd just wish all day long I could
be like her, just a little bit.

A beat of silence.

RUTH (CONT'D)

I can't find no peace about her
dying. Truth is ... since I found
out, I can't sleep no more.

Ruth's remark registers with Miller.

RUTH (CONT'D)
It got late. I didn't mean to stay
too long.

Ruth waits for him to disagree, he doesn't. She stands up to go.

RUTH (CONT'D)
All right, well, I'll say goodnight
then.

Ruth walks toward the door, stops, turns back.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Maybe I'd come by again, if that's
all right.

MILLER
Ain't no reason to. I done what I
can for you.

Gale nods.

GALE
All right.

She leaves. He shuts the door behind her.

Miller glances around the room a beat, walks back to the bureau. Looks it over, picks up a knife, leans in. Pauses. Sits back again.

EXT. FIELDS OF FARM - DAY - PAST

Miller, dirty and sweating, works the field. He straightens his back, wipes the sweat from his forehead, looks off and sees Gale searching through the grass near where Uriah threw her ring.

She parts the grass, turns one way then the next.

Miller watches her. He hears shouting, turns in the other direction to look, sees the other MIGRANTS working, talking loudly among themselves to pass the time.

He returns to his work.

He stops, glances off to where Gale was. Disheartened, she is making her way back toward the house. She searches the grass as she walks.

Miller's gaze follows her.

EXT. FRONT PORCH OF FARMHOUSE - DAY

Miller approaches the house, climbs the porch steps, knocks on the door. No answer. He looks around, cups his eyes, gazes in a window, knocks again.

As he turns to go, the door opens. Gale stands in the half-open doorway, looks at him, her brow furrowed. Her cheek is purple. She turns her face slightly away trying to hide it.

MILLER

Ma'am, I wonder, could I trouble you for a glass of water?

GALE

Who're you?

MILLER

Name's Miller. I'm working for your uh ... Well, I'm a little parched.

Gale glances out at the field, looking for Uriah.

GALE

There's a well pump over the other side of the field.

Miller glances that way, looks back at her.

MILLER

Well, uh ... next time I'll know better.

Gale sizes him up a beat.

GALE

Wait here.

Miller nods, steps back.

EXT. FIELDS - SIMULTANEOUS

Uriah, driving the tractor, looks toward the house, sees Miller standing on his front porch. He stops, watches.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

Gale emerges holding a glass of water.

GALE
Ain't too cold.

He reaches out, takes the glass, nods.

MILLER
I don't mind.

He gulps down half the glass as Gale looks him up and down.
Miller hands back the glass.

MILLER (CONT'D)
Thank you, ma'am.

Gale takes it.

MILLER (CONT'D)
I know it ain't my business ... you
okay?

Gale eyes him a beat.

GALE
You're right the first time. Ain't
your business.

She shuts the door, leaves Miller standing on the porch.

EXT. FARM - DUSK

Miller is working, tilling the field. He stops to rest.
Uriah approaches from behind, lead pipe in hand. Miller
glances up, sees him.

Uriah looks around, then back at Miller. He twists the pipe
between his hands.

URIAH
Saw you at my house.

Miller stands up, turns to face him, dusting off his hands.

MILLER
I just wanted something to drink.

URIAH
That so.
(steps in close)
My wife ain't none of your concern.

Miller looks down, sees Uriah's grip on the pipe tighten.

URIAH (CONT'D)

That clear?

Miller looks back up. He nods assent.

Uriah eyes Miller a beat, spits. He turns, walks off.

Miller watches him go.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, HOLDING ROOM - NIGHT - PAST

Miller paces back and forth across the holding room. His thoughts are scattered and troubled. He bounces an old tennis ball on the floor as he walks.

He tosses the ball at the brick windowless wall, catches it as it bounces back. He stares at the wall a beat.

MILLER (V.O.)

Take from someone what's his, well,
you best think twice about that.

He whips the ball at the wall harder - POP!

MILLER (V.O.)

Come's a time though, you can't see
past what you want.

Then harder, then harder - POP! POP! POP!

MILLER (V.O.)

Desire.

He works himself into a fury.

MILLER (V.O.)

Can't feel nothing else.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, HOLDING ROOM - NIGHT

Miller, now ten years older, repeats the same action. POP!
POP!

MILLER (V.O.)

You step into a river. Water
rushing. Your feet leaving the
earth.

EXT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE - DAY

Ruth, standing outside, knocks at the door. No answer. She calls:

RUTH
Miller! You home?

She walks to a window, cups her hands around her eyes to peer in. Sees nothing. Steps back and glares at the front door.

RUTH (CONT'D)
(under her breath)
Damn you!

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - SIMULTANEOUS

AUDIO: The sound of a turntable needle scratching on paper at the end of a record.

Miller stands motionless, staring at the door to the attic.

AUDIO: a KNOCK at the door.

RUTH (O.C.)
Miller?

EXT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

RUTH
Dammit, I know you're there!

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - SIMULTANEOUS

Miller becomes aware, glances that direction. Indifferent, he turns his attention back to the door.

AUDIO: another KNOCK.

Beat.

RUTH (O.C.)
I ain't goin' nowhere.

Miller turns, gazes at the front door a beat before going to answer it.

Miller, opens the front door, daylight hits him. He squints.

Ruth stands in the doorway. She holds two cups.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 (smiles)
 You deaf?

He's not amused.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 I brought you coffee. Thought you
 might like some.

Miller shakes his head.

Ruth leans in looks past him to the bureau inside.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 You working?

She sees his tools are lined up neatly. No sign that he's
 getting anything done. She looks back at Miller

RUTH (CONT'D)
 I'd just stay a little while.

MILLER
 I don't want to do this.

RUTH
 Do what? We're just talking.

She takes another tack.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 Well what if I help you?

MILLER
 Like how?

RUTH
 Well, gotta be something. I got two
 hands don't I?

INT. ABATTOIR, STUDIO ROOM - MIDDAY

Ruth holds up the door while Miller fills in cracks on it.
 She accidentally moves the door, breaking his concentration.

MILLER
 Hold it steady now. C'mon, you
 doing this or not?

RUTH
 I'm doing it.

Miller shakes his head, resumes working.

RUTH (CONT'D)
How you know what these old things
used to look like?

He stops, looks up at her.

MILLER
They tell you. Things get this old,
they come to life.

Miller points to scratches around the doorknob.

MILLER (CONT'D)
People put life into 'em. Them
marks around the keyhole? That's
all the keys they had. Owned a
lotta property, I expect.

Miller points to a series of gouges on the bottom corner of
the door.

MILLER (CONT'D)
That there? Had a dog, was scared
of thunder. Tryin' to get in when
it stormed.
(beat)
Hand me that knife, would you?

She does.

RUTH
Some things don't change.

MILLER
How's that?

RUTH
When I was a girl, my daddy never
let me do anything. It was always
just holding stuff. Flashlight,
screwdriver, hold this, hold that.

MILLER
Yeah? Well that's called
apprenticeship.

RUTH
It's called boring.

MILLER
When'd you see him last?

RUTH
A while I guess.

MILLER
How come? Something happen to him?

RUTH
I don't mean to be ... I just don't
know if it's your concern is all.

Miller goes back to working.

MILLER
Ain't none of this my concern.
You're the one come here asking
questions.

Ruth stares at him, uncertain what to say.

MILLER (CONT'D)
Hell, my old man ... he beat on me,
I mean good. I grew up trying to be
invisible. Hiding, you know? I was
five years old, he knocked me out
cold. Does something to you,
getting your head knocked around
like that.

He looks up.

MILLER (CONT'D)
Hey, uh, hand me that file?

She does. She notices deep SCARS on his arm as he reaches out
for it. She stares at them.

Miller notices her gaze, looks down at his arm.

MILLER (CONT'D)
How it is, you know?

He takes the file from her, begins working the door with it.

RUTH
Looks pretty painful.

Miller shrugs.

MILLER
Old man up and died some years
back. Funny thing though, I was
sorry about it. Now I'd just want
to see him.

RUTH

What for?

He looks up. Ruth stares at him.

MILLER

I'd just like to know him is all.

(beat)

More to a man that what he done
when he was too young to know
better. I mean, say he don't act
the same or think the same.

Ruth's fingers dangle close to where Miller is working.
Miller taps them gently.

MILLER (CONT'D)

Watch your fingers.

Ruth moves them back, out of the way.

MILLER (CONT'D)

After a few years, not a single
piece of you's what it was,
physically. You know that?

Ruth shakes her head.

MILLER (CONT'D)

Well, it's a fact. Every cell in
your body, every hair on your head,
it's all died, been replaced by
something new. You shed your skin a
hundred times. What you've done,
you can't shed that.

Ruth stares at him as he gets up, walks to the tool bench for
a knife. He opens it, checks the sharpness of the blade.

RUTH

I ... I started having dreams ...

(off his look)

you asked why I can't sleep.

MILLER

Dreams ...

Ruth nods.

RUTH

I'm home, Momma's away.

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - DAY

YOUNG Ruth, age six, plays with a doll in a cardboard box.

RUTH (V.O.)

I hear something, makes me go out
in the hallway. She's crying, real
quiet. Doing all she can to hold it
in.

Young Ruth stands up, walks to the hallway.

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Young Ruth stands transfixed in the hallway, gazing at the
bathroom door.

RUTH (V.O.)

There's a man's voice, just a
whisper. Then it goes quiet.

The doorknob turns, the door swings open. Gale stands in the
doorway, a robe over her shoulders, open, barely covering her
breasts. Her eyes watering.

RUTH (V.O.)

She stares at me like she needs to
tell me something. Her mouth opens
but she don't have the voice to
speak.

Gale runs into her bedroom, shuts the door.

Ruth's POV: the bathroom mirror. The reflection of a man's
torso, tucking his shirt in his pants, fastening his belt.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

RUTH

I was so little ... I ... I
wondered what she'd done to make my
daddy punish her like that.

Ruth's jaw tightens. Miller studies her a moment.

MILLER

(hesitates, then ...)
I don't sleep much no more. Like
you. I can't work neither lately,
some reason.

Ruth turns to look at him.

MILLER (CONT'D)

World's a different place when you're carrying something, ain't it? Thoughts keep going in circles, don't lead nowhere 'cept back to one thing. I don't trust my own mind no more. I ain't sure what really happened, or what I'm just dreaming.

RUTH

Then ... you know how it is for me.

MILLER

Guess I do.

RUTH

(considers)

Hey Miller?

He looks at her.

RUTH (CONT'D)

That man, Uriah. How come?

EXT. FARM FIELD - END OF DAY

Miller works. He pauses, stands up, squints into the sun.

He looks off to the grass where Gale's ring landed. Gazes around to see if anyone is watching, then walks toward the spot.

MOMENTS LATER -

Miller searches through the grass, leaning over, pushing the blades aside.

He hears shouting in the distance. Looks up to see Uriah gesturing violently, arguing furiously with one of the MIGRANTS. Uriah shoves him, slugs him in the face.

Miller stands up, looks on as they fight. The other two Migrants step in to support their friend. They grab Uriah.

Miller takes off running toward them.

When he arrives, Uriah is still fighting but the Migrants are getting the better of him.

Miller shoves one of them to the ground.

Uriah knocks another Migrant down, grabs the Third, jams his forearm into the Migrant's throat, choking him.

Miller watches, growing alarmed.

MILLER
Uriah! Hey!

Uriah, his expression empty, continues to choke him.

MILLER (CONT'D)
You're killing him!

Miller steps in, seizes Uriah from behind in a bear grip.

Uriah breaks Miller's hold, throws an elbow to Miller's jaw, knocking him down. He leans down over Miller, cocking his fist back to hit him again.

Miller raises his hands in defense.

Uriah comes back to himself, stops himself.

MILLER (CONT'D)
Jesus Christ!

Uriah looks over at the Migrant, now coughing, trying to get up.

Miller, winded, stares at Uriah. Uriah steps back.

URIAH
Get the hell off my farm! All you fuckers!

They all stare at Uriah.

URIAH (CONT'D)
I said get!

The Migrants turn and walk off.

Miller glares at Uriah a beat, then walks off in the other direction. Uriah turns to Miller.

URIAH (CONT'D)
Hey!

Miller continues walking.

URIAH (CONT'D)
Hey!

Miller keeps walking.

URIAH (CONT'D)
Goddammit, hold on a minute!

Miller stops, turns back.

URIAH (CONT'D)
Listen, uh, it's late. How 'bout
you come on in, have supper. Reckon
I owe you that.

Miller sizes Uriah up - stay or go?

INT. FARMHOUSE - EVENING

The table is set, food is passed among Uriah, Miller and
Gale. Gale glances at Miller's plate.

GALE
(to Miller)
Don't you want more?

MILLER
No. Thank you.

Uriah swallows a mouthful.

URIAH
Where you going after the season's
up?

MILLER
South.

URIAH
Like what? Florida?

MILLER
Way down. Brazil. Argentina.

Uriah stares at Miller.

URIAH
What for?

Miller shrugs.

MILLER
No reason. I just want to.

Uriah eyes Miller another beat, goes back to eating.

URIAH

I seen a lot pass through here,
drifting, don't own nothing but
their clothes. Most of 'em running
from something.

(beat)

You ever done time?

Miller shakes his head.

URIAH (CONT'D)

I have. Banker man, right here on
my property, telling me he might
take this farm. Talking and
talking. I just watched his jaw
moving til I couldn't stand it no
more. CRACK! I put my fist right
into it. I keep going on him too.
Gale here, she's screaming at me.
Even turned the hose on me, like I
was some kinda rabid dog. Didn't ya
darlin?

GALE

God's sake, Uriah! You gotta tell
that story?

Uriah eyes her a beat, then back to Miller.

URIAH

I cracked his skull, busted his eye
socket in. Looked more like a cut
of meat than a man. Like a goddam
sirloin you'd toss on the grill,
you know what I mean?

Uriah puts his hand behind Miller's neck, pulls him in close.

URIAH (CONT'D)

I did three years for that. Got no
regrets about it neither. Man can't
defend his home, he ain't worth
shit.

The phone RINGS, startling Miller. Gale goes to pick it up.

GALE

Hello?

(beat)

Hang on ... Uriah!

Uriah releases Miller, gets up, takes it from her.

URIAH

Yeah.

(beat)

Hey Jimmy.

(beat)

No, it ain't too late. What's the deal?

Uriah walks out into the living room.

URIAH (CONT'D)

Shit, Jimmy.

(beat)

I ain't sayin' I won't do it, but god dammit some notice woulda been nice!

(trailing off ...)

How many days?

(beat)

I just said I'd do it, didn't I?

Gale and Miller are alone. An awkward pause, then Gale begins cleaning off the table, carries Uriah's plate to the sink.

Miller grabs his plate, carries it to the sink.

GALE

Don't bother about it.

MILLER

I don't mind.

Gale turns, begins washing the dishes.

GALE

You want another beer or something?

MILLER

All right.

Gale nods toward the refrigerator.

GALE

Got my hands all wet. You can help yourself.

Miller does, opens it, takes a drink. He looks her over as she works.

MILLER

How long you two been married?

GALE

Why you want to know that?

Miller shrugs, glances around the kitchen.

MILLER
Place is real nice.

GALE
(indifferently)
You think so ...

Uriah enters, sets the phone down. He goes to the refrigerator, grabs a beer, opens it.

GALE (CONT'D)
Well?

URIAH
Need someone to run the paver for that new tunnel they're putting in on Highway 83. Union wage.

GALE
How long?

URIAH
Few days.

GALE
You gonna take it?

URIAH
No choice.

MILLER
You got another job or something?

Uriah eyes him a beat.

URIAH
You think anyone's making a living from farming? You take work where you find it.
(beat)
So uh, you stickin' around?

MILLER
Guess I could.

URIAH
Good. Need you to go into town tomorrow, round up some help for the field. Some that can work.

Gale frowns at the dig.

URIAH (CONT'D)
Think you can do that?

Miller nods.

MILLER
All right.

EXT. FARM - MORNING

Miller looks on as Uriah tosses his bag into his car, Gale looks on.

Uriah walks over to where Miller is standing.

URIAH
They'll be hanging out around
Montgomery street. Get three.
Minimum wage.

MILLER
Yeah, all right.

URIAH
I'm back on Friday. All the
tilling's done by then, right?

Miller nods.

URIAH (CONT'D)
All right.

Uriah walks back to the car, where Gale awaits. He shares a few inaudible words with her as Miller looks on. He pulls Gale in and kisses her hard.

Uriah gets in his car. Gale watches as he pulls out.

EXT. FARM - MID DAY

Miller drives up in his truck. Three MEXICANS arrive in a truck beside him. They all come to a stop and step out.

The front door to the house opens and Gale steps out. Miller smiles to her. She nods in return.

EXT. FARM - DAY

Miller works with the Mexicans, turning the soil in a field.

EXT. FARM - END OF DAY

Miller walks together with the migrants toward where their trucks are parked. He breaks off toward the farmhouse, they continue to their vehicle.

Miller walks up the front porch steps, knocks on the front door. Gale answers.

The setting sun shines on her face, making her squint.

MILLER
Done for the day.

GALE
You get the tilling done?

MILLER
Just about. It'll be done tomorrow.

Miller looks at her a beat too long.

GALE
Something else you need?

He reaches into his pocket, pulls out her ring.

She gazes down at it.

He takes her hand, turns it over, puts the ring in her palm.

She turns it over between her fingers. Stares up at Miller.

MILLER
Saw you looking for it. Little big
for you, ain't it?

Gale smiles in joy and relief. Miller is happy at the sight. He turns to go.

GALE
Well ... hey ...

He turns back to her.

GALE (CONT'D)
Thank you!

Miller nods.

MILLER
That's all right.

He heads back toward his truck.

GALE

Hey!

He stops.

GALE (CONT'D)

All this about going south ... how come? You running?

MILLER

That Uriah's take on it?

GALE

(shrugs)

He thinks you're kinda strange.

MILLER

Well, that's mutual.

GALE

So?

MILLER

Just curious to see something of this world. Ain't you?

GALE

I'm okay where I am. 'Cause somewhere's different don't make it better.

MILLER

Well, you might look around a bit first, 'fore you decide.

GALE

Hard enough belonging where you are, my opinion.

Gale gazes over at the Migrants, as they start their vehicle. They gaze at Miller and Gale, drive off. Gale looks back at Miller.

MILLER

Well, I guess that's fair.

(beat)

I'll see you in the morning.

He walks off to the truck.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - NIGHT - PRESENT

Miller works the bureau as Ruth looks on. She watches him as he finishes the day's work, intently focused, lost in it.

Ruth turns, looks out the window at the darkness.

RUTH

Funny working alongside you. Like you don't even know the time's passing.

(beat)

What goes through your mind, all these days you're alone?

Miller shrugs.

Ruth stares at him, then back to the window, contemplating for a beat.

Miller stops working, looks up, gazes at her.

MILLER

You look an awful lot like her, you know.

RUTH

Nice if that was true. I know it ain't. Gale's much prettier than I'll ever be.

Ruth feels the weight of his stare, begins to blush.

Miller gets up, goes to the workbench, opens a drawer. He takes out a [HAND CARVED FIGURE]

MILLER

For you.

Miller hands it to Ruth, she takes it.

RUTH

You made this?

MILLER

Over the years.

She looks it over, then looks back up at him.

RUTH

You givin' this to me?

MILLER

If you want it.

RUTH
I do. Thank you.

They gaze at each other a moment, until the silence becomes tangible.

RUTH (CONT'D)
(to say something)
Guess it's late. S'pose I should go.

MILLER
All right.

Ruth nods, walks to the door, stops, turns back.

RUTH
I was thinking about what you said.
You, uh, you think people can change...

MILLER
People are always changing.

Ruth smiles, turns, takes hold of the front doorknob, turns it.

AUDIBLE: a THUMP of small feet hitting the floor above. Ruth looks up.

RUTH
You got neighbors?

MILLER
Stray cat. Likes to kill the mice.

She gazes over at the locked door leading upstairs.

RUTH
What's up there anyway?

MILLER
Nothin' much. Lotta old junk.

Her gaze fixes on the door. Then she turns back to Miller.

RUTH
I don't really know if I helped you any today.

MILLER
You did. Being here, I don't know, company. Cleared my head a little.

RUTH

It's good to talk about things,
ain't it? Truth will set you free.
Jesus said that.

MILLER

Jesus huh?

RUTH

(smiles)

Yeah.

(beat)

Good night, Miller.

She leaves, he watches her go.

EXT. A RIVERBANK NEAR THE FARM - LATE AFTERNOON - PAST

Miller follows Gale as she steps beside a stream. She walks heel-to-toe, following an imaginary line just above where the water meets the bank.

Gale stops, stares down into the water.

GALE

This river, I think it's what
time'd look like if you could see
it.

Miller's gaze is fixed on her as she speaks.

GALE (CONT'D)

You ever close your eyes and feel
the change that's coming?

MILLER

How do you mean?

GALE

Them moments when you just know
your whole life's turning. That
there's gonna be a before and an
after. I mean, we're always
changing, that's sure. But most of
the time, it's so slow you don't
notice at all. And then, something
happens and that moment you know
nothing's ever gonna be the same
again. You can feel the earth shift
right under your feet. Just close
your eyes and feel it. You know
what I mean?

MILLER

Guess I do.

Gale searches his face a moment, then her thoughts shift.

GALE

Where you staying anyhow?

MILLER

Place in town.

GALE

Whereabouts?

MILLER

Old place on Martin Street. Used to be a slaughterhouse, originally.

GALE

You're living in a slaughterhouse...

Miller smiles, nods a confirmation. Gale shakes her head.

GALE (CONT'D)

I was almost starting to think you might be normal.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, HOLDING ROOM - EVENING - PAST

A light goes on in the staircase, then footsteps climbing the stairs, a shadow of a man and woman ascending.

MILLER (V.O.)

Like I told you, ain't much to see.

Miller and Gale emerge into the holding room.

Gale walks around the room, taking it in.

GALE

Looks like time stood still. They kept cows here?

MILLER

So I'm told.

GALE

(glances around)
No windows.

MILLER

They're just here to die. What
d'you need windows for?

Miller points to a dark hallway leading to the hanging room.

MILLER (CONT'D)

Killed 'em in there, hang 'em up to
bleed out.

He nods to another hallway, leading to a room with old
freezers in it.

MILLER (CONT'D)

They'd freeze 'em, store 'em in
there.

Gale looks around the holding room.

GALE

Think they knew they were gonna be
killed?

Miller shrugs.

MILLER

Well now, that's a question.

Gale spots a dead half-eaten mouse on the floor. Miller picks
it up.

A soft patter and a CAT trots out into view.

GALE

Well! So you're the culprit.

The cat approaches Miller, rubs up against his leg.

Gale notices a bowl of food on the floor in the corner.

GALE (CONT'D)

You feed him? Don't it spoil his
appetite?

MILLER

Ain't slowed him down yet. Guess
killing's more a habit than a
hunger.

Gale glances around, notices the old turntable.

GALE

Jesus, look at that old relic! Does
it work?

MILLER
Ain't tried it.

Gale walks over, flips through a pile of records beside it.
She flips through them, commenting on the titles. She pulls one out - A vintage FIFTIES Album
She takes it out of its sleeve, sets it on the turntable.
She turns to Miller, smiles.

GALE
The moment of truth.

She turns it on, the table spins. She sets the needle down on the record - it plays!

Gale looks up at Miller, laughs in delight. She mimics a fifties dance move. Miller laughs.

She takes his hand. He stands still.

GALE (CONT'D)
Don't you know how to dance?

He doesn't.

GALE (CONT'D)
Well, all right. I'll show you.
Hang on ...

She changes the record to a slow dance.

GALE (CONT'D)
I'll make it easy for you.

She places his hands on her. They move together.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO ROOM - AFTERNOON

Gale and Miller sway slowly. She glances at him. He reaches out, touches her face.

He leans in to kiss her. She draws back.

They stare at each other a beat, the Gale leans back in to kiss him. After a moment, she leans away again.

GALE
What time is it?

MILLER
About four.

GALE
He'll be back soon.

She steps out of his embrace. He pulls her back.

GALE (CONT'D)
Don't play with me now. I gotta go.

MILLER
Don't go.

GALE
I'm serious.

MILLER
So am I.

GALE
You're crazy. C'mon Miller, let go.

MILLER
You could come with me.

GALE
What?

MILLER
I said, you could come with me. I'd
take you so far from here, you
wouldn't ever have to come back.

Gale gives him a sharp look.

GALE
You don't know much, do you? Ain't
no simple thing, a wife leaving her
husband. Now let me go, c'mon!

Miller lets her go. She steps away, walks to the door, stops,
turns back.

Their gazes lock for a moment. Then she turns, leaves. He
watches her go.

INT. FARMHOUSE - EVENING

Gale steps into the house. The shadows have grown long.

URIAH
Where you been?

Gale jumps, sees Uriah slouched in a chair in a darkened corner, glaring at her.

GALE

I ... I didn't know you were back.
I would've made you something ...

URIAH

I asked you a question. Where you
been?

GALE

Nowhere. Just walking.

URIAH

Walking where?

Uriah gets up, moves toward her. Gale tenses as he nears.

URIAH (CONT'D)

I said, walking where?

GALE

I told you. Just walking.

Uriah grabs her by the hair, pulls her head in close.

URIAH

You wouldn't make a fool outta me,
would you?

Gale winces. Uriah tightens his grip.

URIAH (CONT'D)

You ever did ... I don't know what
I'd do.

GALE

Uriah ... please ...

Uriah loosens his grip. He strokes her head.

URIAH

Don't you forget who you belong to.

Uriah releases her. He eyes her up and down.

URIAH (CONT'D)

You're so pretty. Take your dress
off.

Gale hesitates.

URIAH (CONT'D)
You heard me. Take it off.

Gale opens her mouth to speak, stares at him silently.

URIAH (CONT'D)
Do it!

Gale flinches.

She relents, undoes her dress, lets it fall. She stands before him in her underwear, wanting to cover herself.

URIAH (CONT'D)
Keep going.

Gale pauses. She undoes the clasp of her bra, takes it off.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO, PRESENT - DAY

Miller stands, stares at the front door. He walks toward it.

The sound of a doorknob turning, then the front door opens.

Blinding light of day.

Miller comes into view. He stands inside the doorway, gazing out into the sunlight that streams through the open front door.

MILLER (V.O.)
I dream I walk through this door.
And you're there.

He steps out into the daylight, he is younger. Gale awaits him there.

MILLER (V.O.)
Same as you were. Same as I was.

Miller approaches her, they stand face to face.

MILLER (V.O.)
Time. Everything played out
different.

She smiles, takes his hand.

INT. FARMHOUSE, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Gale lies naked on the sheets of their bed, Uriah on top of her. She stares off. Her body jerks with every violent thrust of his hips between her legs, a trace of hurt in her eyes.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, HOLDING ROOM - NIGHT

Miller's gaze turns to anger, as if he sees what Gale is going through.

He begins swinging, punching the air.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, HOLDING ROOM - NIGHT

Miller sits alone, staring out at the walls.

AUDIBLE: the sound of CHEWING, TEETH CRUSHING BONES

Miller looks to the source. The Cat is tearing up the carcass of a mouse it has killed.

Miller stares, fixated.

EXT. FARM - DAY

Miller works alongside Uriah in the field. The swing pick axes into the earth, loosening the soil.

Uriah strikes a large stone - CLANG! He curses, bends, works with his hands to loosen it from the dirt.

Miller stops, looks at Uriah, whose back is turned, vulnerable.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - DUSK - PRESENT

Miller turns, glances off to a dirty window, the morning sun streaming in. He walks toward it, the day lighting him in silhouette. He stops before it, looks out.

He glances at the two paper coffee cups Ruth brought, now sitting empty on his workbench. He turns to the bureau with clarity and resolution.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - NIGHT

Miller sits at the bureau, works diligently, leans in closely to examine his work, fine tunes it to perfection.

Moves on the next section. He is fully absorbed, his attention to detail complete.

INT. ABATTOIR, STUDIO ROOM - AFTERNOON NEXT DAY

Miller is seated in front of the bureau, putting the finishing touches on his work. He has restored it to its original beauty.

He hears footsteps on the street outside, knows that it is Ruth. He stops his work, gets up.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF ABATTOIR - CONTINUOUS

Ruth approaches the front door, holding a brown paper bag in her arms. She reaches up to knock.

The door opens the instant she raps on it. He's happy to see her.

MILLER

Hi, Ruth.

RUTH

(taken aback at the
welcome)

He speaks my name!

Miller looks down at the bag.

MILLER

What's that?

Ruth reaches in, pulls out a bottle of wine.

RUTH

They told me this one ain't too
bad.

MILLER

I ain't much of a drinker no more.

RUTH

Oh Jesus! Please don't be one of
them recovery people.

Miller laughs.

MILLER

All right.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Ruth sets the bottle down on the table.

RUTH

You got an opener in this place?

Miller goes to a cabinet, takes out glasses and a corkscrew.

Ruth sits.

Miller opens the bottle, sets the glasses in front of Ruth, pours.

RUTH (CONT'D)

I guess you think this is some kind of tactic. Get you drunk and get the truth out of you.

Miller smiles thinly. Ruth raises her glass.

RUTH (CONT'D)

I hope you're a happy drunk.

They touch glasses, drink.

MILLER

I can't get drunk no more.

RUTH

Huh?

MILLER

Drink don't make me feel nothing one way or the other. I tried it often enough.

RUTH

Yeah, well, I'm the opposite. I'll probably pass out just when you start talking.

Miller smiles, lifts his glass. Ruth raises hers.

MILLER

Well, here's to that.

Ruth laughs. She gazes around at the portraits.

RUTH

You know something ...?

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, HOLDING ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

POV: Camera tracks slowly across the wooden floor to the staircase.

RUTH (O.S.)
 ... For someone who doesn't like
 people, you sure got a lot of 'em
 around.

It pauses at the top of the stairs, looking down.

MILLER
 Guess so, yeah. Gotta have some
 company right?
 (beat)
 Most folks ain't much different
 than them pictures to me. These are
 just quieter.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - SIMULTANEOUS

Ruth eyes Miller.

RUTH
 You're quite a case, ain't you.

Miller shrugs. Ruth shakes her head.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 God help you ...

She glances over at the bureau, notices it's finished.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 (standing up)
 Sweet Jesus! Look at that!

She walks over to it, examines it.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 This looks goddam amazing!

He steps up behind her, looks over her shoulder.

MILLER
 Yeah?

RUTH
 Are you kidding? It's great! It's
 beautiful! You must've gone through
 the night to get this done.

MILLER
Something like that.

She leans over the bureau, continuing to examine the work.

MILLER (CONT'D)
You know, I'm grateful to you.

She straightens up, looks at him.

RUTH
To me? For what?

Miller takes a second to put his words together.

MILLER
You being here - brought me a
little peace. Made my thoughts go
quiet. For one night, at least.

She gazes at him, pleased at the thought. She glances back at the bottle on the table.

RUTH
Well now, how about we celebrate!

SERIES OF SHORT SCENES INTERCUT:

Miller and Ruth sitting, talking, he makes her laugh. They are easy in each other's company.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - NIGHT

AUDIBLE: The KNOCK of Ruth's empty wine glass hitting the table as she sets it down.

Ruth eyes the glass, tilts it.

RUTH
All good things come to an end,
right?

Miller considers.

MILLER
Not always.

He gets up, goes to the cabinet, takes out a bottle of Scotch whiskey.

MILLER (CONT'D)
Customer gave me this a while back.
Guess he was happy with my work.

He holds it up to Ruth.

MILLER (CONT'D)
This okay for you?

RUTH
Pour it!

He does. Pours one for himself.

She lifts her glass in a toast. They drink. A beat of silence between them.

Ruth walks to the fish tank, leans down to look at the fish.

RUTH (CONT'D)
You know, I was thinking about you today.

MILLER
Yeah? What about me?

RUTH
Well, just, you all cooped up in here. I thought maybe I could get you out for an afternoon. We could drive out to Jasper. You seen it ever? I mean, all right, it ain't Brazil or nothing, but hell, it'd be a start.

MILLER
I don't ...

RUTH
Provided you ain't too busy, that is.

MILLER
You know it ain't that.

She walks back to the table.

RUTH
Well how about tomorrow then? They're calling for sunshine.

MILLER
Look, I don't know.

RUTH
Well I do. Tomorrow I'm taking you out. That's just how it's gonna be.
(MORE)

RUTH (CONT'D)
Sunshine! Freedom! Your
independence day.

Miller tries to smile. The silence becomes suddenly awkward.
Ruth sits down beside him. She refills her glass, then his.
She takes a drink.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Hey, Miller? I gotta ask you for
one more thing.

MILLER
What's that?

RUTH
Tell me about her last day. Please.
Everything you remember. I gotta
know.

Miller looks off, unhappy to be returned to a memory he'd
forgotten for a brief moment.

MILLER
(frowns)
Why you gotta ...? What good is it
gonna do?

RUTH
Just tell me ... Please! Tell me
and I won't ask you for nothing
else.

Even worse. Miller seethes a beat, then -

MILLER
You know, you're something. Coming
in here, all these questions. Like
I oughta bare my soul to you, like
I owe you something.

RUTH
I never said ...

MILLER
Now you got some notion of, hell, I
don't know what. But you ain't told
me nothing. What about you?

RUTH
What about me?

MILLER

A girl you ain't seen your whole
life - what's she to you? How 'bout
you tell me that!

RUTH

Ain't it enough she's my sister? I
care about her, that so strange?

MILLER

Cared about her so much, you mighta
come looking for her before now.

Ruth's gaze becomes sharp.

RUTH

You're a real bastard, you know
that?

(beat)

I told you. I feel responsible,
that's all.

MILLER

"That's all..." Huh. Sounds like
another riddle.

Ruth stares at him, turns, looks off at the fish tank.

RUTH

It was pretty simple actually.
Momma wasn't gonna have another
fatherless child on her hands.

Miller watches her, fingers his glass.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. BACKYARD OF RUTH'S CHILDHOOD HOME - AFTERNOON

Ruth's mother sits on a folding chair in the back yard,
visible from behind, fingering a glass of iced tea.

Young Ruth, six, plays nearby, chattering to herself. She
approaches her mother.

YOUNG RUTH

Momma? Momma? How come Daddy
doesn't love me like he loves Gale?

RUTH'S MOTHER

(pause)

Well of course he does, honey. He
loves you both the same.

Young Ruth considers.

YOUNG RUTH
How come he doesn't kiss me like he
kisses Gale?

A beat of silence. Ruth's Mother takes her by the arm, draws her in close.

RUTH'S MOTHER
What'd you just say?

INT. LIVING ROOM OF RUTH'S CHILDHOOD HOME - DUSK

Ruth sits alone, staring wide eyed, fearful.

AUDIBLE: Voices heard yelling upstairs.

Ruth covers her ears, as the yelling persists, starts to cry.

It grows louder, becomes intelligible.

RUTH'S MOTHER
What'd you do? What the hell did
you do?!

GALE
Nothing! I didn't do nothing!

RUTH'S MOTHER
You're a liar!

AUDIBLE: A door swings open, hurried footsteps on the staircase.

RUTH'S MOTHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(full volume)
You're nothing but a lying whore!

Gale descends the staircase, in tears, clutching a backpack.

RUTH'S MOTHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
That's what you are!

GALE
You can go to hell, Momma!

Gale scampers down the stairs to living room, sees Young Ruth and stops.

Young Ruth looks up, her eyes frightened and glistening. Gale walks over to her, leans down.

She wipes her cheeks, wipes Ruth's cheeks, touches Ruth's hair. Gale smiles weakly, can't comfort Ruth.

She turns and leaves.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - NIGHT, PRESENT

RUTH

Keeps coming back to me, what I
done, what I done. Til I ...

(beat)

I need to know that ... I just
wanted to believe that someone
loved her, took care of her. She'd
a kept her secrets to stay with us.
I brought it all to light. I made
her go.

Moment of silence as Miller takes it in, gazes at Ruth in sympathy.

He struggles to know what to say. Then ...

MILLER

I did my best to care for your
sister. I want you to know that.

RUTH

(confused)

Care for her? Why would you?

MILLER

You want to know about Gale? I
could tell you a million things.
What made her smile, how she wore
her hair, what she felt like to
touch.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - DAY

Miller and Gale make love.

She straddles Miller on his bed, gyrates slowly back and forth, eyes closed, moaning quietly under her breath.

She leans down over him, her hair touching his face. He runs his fingers over her shoulder, down her arm with tenderness and fascination.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - NIGHT

Gale lies beside Miller, still naked.

GALE

I never made love to no one before.
Just had men take what they want.
Ain't the same thing.

She turns to Miller.

GALE (CONT'D)

When you go I'd go with you,
if you still want me to.

Miller turns to her.

MILLER

What do you mean?

GALE

Just what I said. Do you still?

Miller stares at her, trying to believe it's real.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - NIGHT, PRESENT

MILLER

She was real to me. She's all that
ever was.

Ruth stares off, the truth settling in. Her jaw tightens. She looks back at Miller.

RUTH

That why he killed her?

Silence.

RUTH (CONT'D)

That why you never told nothing
about you and her?

She glares at Miller.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Goddamit, tell me!

MILLER

What's it matter now?

RUTH
 'Cause it does! 'Cause it's the
 truth!

MILLER
 Like that's some precious thing.

RUTH
 What do you think? That I'm some
 little girl that you gotta shield
 my eyes? You're the one's all caged
 up in here, hiding! You're the
 one's scared!

Miller stares at her, jaw clenching.

RUTH (CONT'D)
 I don't even care that you fucked
 my sister. Just tell me why he did
 it! Was it 'cause of you? Is that
 why she's dead?

MILLER
 Watch your mouth!

RUTH
 That's why he killed her, ain't it?
 'Cause you fucked her!

Miller lunges, grabs her by the wrist.

Ruth glares at him defiantly. Miller comes back to himself,
 releases her.

MILLER
 (getting confused)
 I'm sorry. Ruth, I ... I didn't
 mean that.
 (beat)
 Jesus! We was so careful. So goddam
 careful.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - NIGHT

Gale lies beside Miller.

GALE
 He'll come looking. I know he will.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - NIGHT, PRESENT

Ruth stares at Miller as he speaks.

MILLER

I told her, don't be scared. Said I'd take care of her. She said I'd be scared too if I knew him.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, HOLDING ROOM - NIGHT

Gale stares at Miller.

MILLER (V.O.)

She said we oughta wait til he goes off again. Another highway job.

GALE

We're gonna be all right, ain't we?

Miller stares at Gale.

MILLER (V.O.)

Each day seemed like forever. I was going crazy thinking of her sleeping in the same bed as him.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - NIGHT, PRESENT

Ruth listens as Miller speaks.

MILLER

Uriah, he needed me then, just to get through the season. But his mind was going in all directions and all of 'em crooked. Suspicious of everything. Of what he didn't know.

EXT. FARM - AFTERNOON

Miller's at work. Uriah steps up behind him, stares at him a beat until Miller realizes he's there.

URIAH

What're you doing?

Miller gestures at what he's doing.

MILLER

What you see.

Uriah continues to scrutinize him.

URIAH

What do you do, when you're down
there in Birmingham? At night?

MILLER

Ain't too much going on.

URIAH

Got yourself a girl there?

MILLER

I'm just passing through.

URIAH

Yeah. That's right. I forgot.

Uriah stares at Miller.

EXT. FARM - DUSK

Miller, finished work, starts to head home.

AUDIBLE: a high-pitched yelp of a dog, coming from inside the
barn.

Miller walks to the barn, enters.

AUDIBLE: A faint whimper.

Rex lies on the ground, his coat bloody, his back broken.
Uriah stands nearby, blood-stained shovel in hand. His arm is
bleeding, he appears dazed.

Uriah glances at Miller, just noticing he is there.

Miller stares at the dying animal.

URIAH

Thing went out of its goddam mind.

Miller kneels down over Rex. Rex pants heavily, growling
weakly but too broken to move.

URIAH (CONT'D)

Came right at me.

MILLER

I think his back is broken.

Uriah examines the wound on his arm.

URIAH
Goddam dogs! You trust 'em, and
they turn on you.
(looks at Miller)
Help me bury it.

Miller looks at Uriah, then back at the still-living dog.

INT. ABATTOIR, STUDIO ROOM - NIGHT

Miller paces back and forth, agitated.

MILLER
Time was getting short. I knew that
much. Something was gonna happen.
Next day he got called away again
to work on the highway. Just for a
day. I told her that was good as it
was gonna get for us. So that was
that. We was gonna go.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Uriah drives, staring intently through the windshield. He slows, pulls to the roadside, comes to a stop.

He turns the car around, heads back home.

INT. FARMHOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

Gale descends the stairs to the basement, searches around in the darkness for a suitcase. Finds it.

INT. ABATTOIR, STUDIO ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Miller paces. Checks the time. Sits at a chair. Stands up again.

He grabs his bag, carries it out to his car, sets it in the trunk.

He comes back in for a last bag, glances around the studio room for a last look.

EXT. STREET ON THE EDGE OF URIAH'S FARM - SIMULTANEOUS

Uriah pulls to the roadside within view of the house, parks.

He gazes up at the farmhouse, a single window lit upstairs.

INT. FARMHOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

Gale ascends the stairs from the living room to the bedroom.

INT. FARMHOUSE BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Gale enters, sets the suitcase on the bed, opens it.

She goes to the closet, pulls out a few dresses.

INT. FARMHOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

Gale takes clothes from her dresser, places them in the suitcase.

URIAH (O.C.)
Where you going?

Gale jumps, spins. Uriah stands in the doorway. He walks slowly toward her.

Gale steps back.

GALE
I ... nowhere ...

Uriah eyes her.

URIAH
Nowhere ...

He glances at the suitcase. He steps closer.

URIAH (CONT'D)
Nowhere ...

He steps closer as Gale steps back. Uriah approaches until they are face to face.

He reaches out, touches her hair.

URIAH (CONT'D)
I love you, girl. Don't you know that?

She nods her head, trembling.

URIAH (CONT'D)
Don't you?

GALE
Yes...

URIAH
What you want to leave me for?

GALE
I don't.

URIAH
Hurts me when you lie like that.
You know how much?

GALE
Uriah ...

He punches her in the stomach. She doubles over, grabs hold of his arm to steady herself as her knees buckle.

CU: Gale's GRIP on Uriah's arm. His tattoo and cuts are visible.

He grabs her by the arms, lifts her up.

She gasps for air, her wind knocked out.

EXT. ROAD - SIMULTANEOUS

Miller drives, staring silently at the road.

INT. FARMHOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

A series of RAPID CUTS: Uriah beating Gale.

Gale tries to fight back, to protect herself, at first.

Then she becomes punch drunk, takes the hits, numb.

Uriah drags her up, raises his fist to hit her again.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Miller arrives at the farmhouse in his car. Pulls up, stops.

The house is silent, completely dark.

AUDIBLE: a SHOTGUN BLAST.

A flash of light from inside the farmhouse.

Miller turns his head sharply to the source.

INT. ABATTOIR, STUDIO ROOM - NIGHT

Miller leans over his workbench.

MILLER

He beat her bad enough to kill a man. Broke her neck 'fore he shot himself. I wondered ever since, how that must've been, her last breaths, knowing she was gonna die. All that pain.

(beat)

They say a person blacks out sometimes, 'fore it's done. I hope she did. I hope so. Police carried her body out in a white sheet, stained red.

Miller grabs a hammer and pounds it into the bureau.

MILLER (CONT'D)

Where the hell was I? Where in the hell was I? I can see her dying. I can see her eyes, staring at me. And I ain't man enough to save her.

Miller smashes holes in the bureau CRASH! CRASH! until it's in pieces.

MILLER (CONT'D)

Where was I? God dammit! God dammit! Where was I?

Ruth looks on, startled by the violence.

Miller goes quiet, leaning over the bureau, breathing heavily.

MILLER (CONT'D)

Oh god! Forgive me! You gotta forgive me!

Ruth sees blood trickling down from Miller's hand.

She goes to the kitchen, grabs a towel, back to Miller.

Ruth puts her hand tenderly on his back. Her eyes are wet. She puts her arms around his shoulders.

She touches his face.

RUTH

You'd a done something for her, if you could have. I know you would.

She reaches down, touches his hand.

She turns his hand over to reveal the gash. She wraps the towel around it carefully.

Miller watches her, as she tends to his cuts.

RUTH (CONT'D)

I'm sorry what I said. You was just telling me what I asked. I know it wasn't easy to do.

(glances around)

Don't suppose you got any disinfectant around here.

Ruth eyes the bottle of whiskey. She gets up, takes another towel, tips the whiskey bottle into it.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Much as I hate to waste it ...

She squeezes it out into Miller's wound.

He gazes at her throughout, no reaction to the pain.

RUTH (CONT'D)

Whatever's here in this building, it's just eating you away. Tomorrow, you and me, we're gonna walk right out, leave it all behind us.

MILLER

Ain't as easy as all that.

RUTH

It ain't impossible neither! Listen to me: something new, someplace else, that's how you start. Time passes, you'll make your peace. I want to help you. Will you let me?

He looks up at her.

MILLER

I'm sorry. Every damn day of my life, I'm sorry.

RUTH

I forgive you. Even if it ain't my place to, I do. For everything you done. It's true what you said.

(MORE)

RUTH (CONT'D)

You and me ain't gonna change
nothing. Time we let go of all that
now.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO ROOM - NIGHT

Miller lies on the bed, a glass in his hand. He rubs his eyes, the alcohol has kicked in, the adrenaline worn down. He's fading.

Ruth picks up the splinters of the bureau. Tries to salvage a few pieces.

RUTH

Jesus, Miller, you really did a
number on it.

She gazes at it, if any of it can be saved. She closes her eyes.

RUTH (CONT'D)

You know, you said you look at
people and you don't see nothing.
What about me? What happens when
you ...?

AUDIBLE: the CLINK AND RATTLE of a Miller's glass hitting the floor.

Ruth turns to look. Miller has passed out.

Ruth walks over to him, looks down. The towel is taped around his hand, an improvised bandage.

She reaches down, touches his head.

INT. ABATTOIR, STUDIO ROOM - NIGHT

Ruth drapes a blanket over him, covering him to his shoulders.

She sits on the bed beside him. She lies down on top of the blanket beside him, gingerly, not to wake him.

She stares at his back, reaches out her hand. Her fingers trace the air around his shoulder blades, not making contact.

INT. ABATTOIR, STUDIO ROOM - NIGHT

Ruth and Miller lie side by side in bed, Miller under the blanket, Ruth above it, asleep.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, HOLDING ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

AUDIBLE: the turntable needle scratches against the paper at the end of the album, skips back, repeats.

POV: from the top of the stairs, looking down. It tracks down the stairs to the door.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The door leading upstairs opens. Darkness behind it.

POV: Camera tracks in slowly from the door to the bed where they sleep. It stops beside the bed, leans over Ruth, tracks down closer to her face.

EXT. BACKYARD OF RUTH'S CHILDHOOD HOME - NIGHT

Young Ruth plays alone, chattering to herself. The house is dark.

She wanders to a tree in the backyard, touches it with her hand. She begins circling the tree, tapping it with her hand.

As she comes full circle, she looks up. She sees Gale, her face and body pale, bruised, swollen, bloody. Her head tilted to one side.

Ruth stops and stares.

GALE

I want to come home.

Gale takes a labored step toward Ruth.

GALE (CONT'D)

Take me home, Ruth.

INT. ABATTOIR, STUDIO ROOM - MORNING

Ruth awakens. She sees the half-open door across the room.

She looks down. Miller lies beside her, still sleeping.

She gets up carefully so as not to wake him. She puts her shoes on, walks to the door.

She grasps the doorknob. The door opens with a creak.

RRRING! Her cellphone sounds. She digs frantically into her back pocket, pulls the phone out before the second ring, taps to answer it.

She places her hand over the phone to speak.

RUTH

Hello?

(beat)

I, uh, yes, thank you for calling.

I was hoping we could ...

(beat)

Well how far from the city are you?

(beat)

All right.

(beat)

All right.

(beat)

What's the address?

INT. STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Ruth looks down over Miller, still asleep. She places a note on his workbench.

NOTE: "Went to see Uriah's sister. Back soon, Ruth"

Ruth grabs her purse and leaves.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Miller lies in bed, still sleeping.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, HOLDING ROOM - NIGHT

The phonograph plays. Miller holds Gale in his arms, her back to us, her head on his shoulder.

They sway slowly, his arm around her waist, holding her up.

Gale slumps against him, lifeless. Her feet drag across the floor.

EXT. A BIRMINGHAM HOUSE - DAY

AUDIBLE: The SLAM of a car door shutting.

Ruth walks from her car across the front yard to the front door of a middle class suburban home. She knocks on the door.

ADELE, age 50, trim, opens the door, admits her in.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Miller awakens. He looks around.

MILLER

Ruth?

He glances over to the workbench, the furniture in pieces.

He walks over to it, surveys the damage like someone else did it. He picks up a splintered piece of wood.

MILLER (CONT'D)

Ruth?

He sees the note, picks it up, reads it.

He gazes over at the fish tank. It is empty.

He looks off to the door leading upstairs. It is open.

INT. BIRMINGHAM HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Adele stands by the counter, looking Ruth over. Ruth looks around, ill at ease.

ADELE

You want some coffee?

RUTH

That'd be real nice.

(beat)

I like your place.

ADELE

Thanks.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, STUDIO - SIMULTANEOUS

Miller begins to pace manically, following the path his footsteps etched into the floor.

AUDIBLE: The sound of a needle scratching on the turntable.

INT. BIRMINGHAM HOUSE, KITCHEN - SIMULTANEOUS

Adele steps to a steaming coffee pot, pours two cups.

ADELE

Why don't you sit down.

Ruth sits at the kitchen table. A cardboard shoe box sits on the table in front of her, covered by the lid.

Adele brings the cups to the table, sits across from Ruth.

ADELE (CONT'D)

I'm awful sorry about your sister.
My brother loved her deeply.

Ruth forces a thin smile.

Adele lifts the lid from the box. A disorganized collection of old photos lie inside it.

ADELE (CONT'D)

I don't know what you came for
exactly. But I found these for you.
Thought you'd like to see them.

She reaches in, takes out a photo of Gale and Uriah on their wedding day.

PUNCH IN:

PHOTO: URIAH AND GALE ARE YOUNG, SMILES ON THEIR FACES.

Ruth studies the photo. She is moved by the image of her sister in a happy moment.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE STUDIO ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Miller runs his finger roughly along the brick wall as he walks.

ADELE (V.O.)

I remember when she showed up.
Uriah took her in like some kinda
lost kitten. She looked like one
too - skinny, broke, run away from
somewhere.

CU: spots of blood on the wall where it has worn through the skin of Miller's finger. He turns, makes his way toward the staircase to the attic.

INT. BIRMINGHAM HOUSE, KITCHEN - SIMULTANEOUS

ADELE

He told me once, said he knew she was too pretty to keep. Well, he went and married her all the same.

Ruth stares at her as she speaks.

INT. HOLDING ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Miller ascends to the top of the stairs and emerges into the holding room.

ADELE (V.O.)

Too pretty! Young and wild is what she was. I guess that counts for pretty to some.

INT. BIRMINGHAM HOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

ADELE

I apologize for saying that. I don't mean anything against your sister.

Ruth nods.

ADELE (CONT'D)

For two days I got no answer on Uriah's phone. I called the neighbors, told them to go by the house and check in. They called me a few hours later, told me what they found. I drove right over. Police didn't want to let me go in. Said it'd be more than I could take, to see it.

Adele pauses a beat to collect herself.

ADELE (CONT'D)

Uriah was just an old farmboy. Maybe he wasn't a genius, but I never knew him to be cruel. Never once.

RUTH
Not to dogs neither?

ADELE
What?

RUTH
People change, ma'am.

ADELE
You think so?

RUTH
To do what he did ...

Adele eyes her.

ADELE
What do you think he did?

RUTH
I know what he did.

ADELE
None of you knew my brother. If you
knew him at all, you'd know he
wasn't capable.

Ruth looks off, shakes her head. She turns back to Adele.

RUTH
If that's true, then what'd he do
time for?

ADELE
Time? Uriah never did time.

RUTH
Maybe you didn't know him as much
as you thought.

Adele eyes her.

ADELE
You think I don't know my own
brother?

INT. HOLDING ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Miller shines the light around the room. It sweeps across a corner. As the light passes, a figure in a dress is seen from behind, doubled over, kneeling in a corner, clawing furiously at something on the floor.

Miller directs the light back into the corner. The figure is gone. In its place he spies a small tangle of blood, bone and flesh.

He approaches, shining the light on it. As he comes close enough to see it, the mangled carcass of his fish comes into focus, its mouth gasping for oxygen.

Miller hears a sound from the Hanging Room.

He spins, shining the light in that direction. The cat sits in the hallway, licking its lips.

EXT. BIRMINGHAM HOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

Ruth steps outside, lets the screen door slam behind her. She descends the steps to the front yard, stops, turns back to the house. Adele has not followed her out.

She turns, walks to her car, gets in, shuts the door.

She glances back at the house, frowning. Turns her attention ahead, starts the car.

INT. HOLDING ROOM - PAST

Miller stands in a corner of the room staring. He hears footsteps on the stairs.

Gale emerges from the shadows in the doorway.

MILLER

Gale?

She takes a step toward him into the light. Stops.

Miller is young again.

MILLER (CONT'D)

What're you doing here? I thought ... I got everything packed up. I was comin' for you.

GALE

Miller ... I-I can't no more.

MILLER

What do you mean?

GALE

I love you, Miller. I truly do.

Miller stares at her, not comprehending.

GALE (CONT'D)
I ain't going with you. I can't.

MILLER
He do something to you?

She shakes her head.

MILLER (CONT'D)
Then ... what?

GALE
I'm expecting.

He stares at her, lost for words.

GALE (CONT'D)
You hear what I said?

MILLER
Well ... well so you are. That
don't change nothing between you
and me.

GALE
It changes everything.

MILLER
But ... but that's all the more
reason to. Baby, I'm not the kind
of man who's just gonna run away on
you. You know that, don't you?

GALE
I know you got good intentions
But Miller, it ain't yours.

MILLER
Well ... Well, wait a minute. You
don't know that.

She stares at him, unwavering.

MILLER (CONT'D)
Gale, you ... This don't make no
sense ... You can't!

She remains resolute.

MILLER (CONT'D)
Why? Just tell me why.
(eyes narrow)
(MORE)

MILLER (CONT'D)
Is it 'cause you're still fucking
him?

(yells)
Are you still fucking him??

Gale flinches.

GALE
He's my husband.

MILLER
No way you love that man! Look, we
... we got to try! We'll go and
we'll find someplace to settle.

GALE
We got no chance at that. Miller,
you're a good man. You are. But one
thing I know: a man won't ever love
another man's baby.

Miller stares at Gale, struggling to take it in.

MILLER
You love me. You said you did.

He reaches out to touch her. She draws back.

GALE
It's decided. I just came to ... I
wanted to tell you goodbye.

MILLER
No ... No! That ain't how it goes.

She takes a step back. A last look, turns to go.

MILLER (CONT'D)
You can't go.
(beat)
Gale, that ain't how it is.

Gale continues away.

MILLER (CONT'D)
Gail, wait!

Miller rushes after her, grabs her.

Gale'S POV: She turns to get down the stairs, a last VIEW OF
THE DOOR before she is pulled back.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Ruth drives, gazes at the road, contemplating what she has been told.

EXT. FRONT OF SLAUGHTERHOUSE - NIGHT

Ruth steps out of her car, shuts the door, walks to the front door. Inside is dark.

She opens the door, enters.

INT. STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Ruth steps in, scans the darkened room.

RUTH
Miller?

She turns, eyes the upstairs door. It is open. She walks toward it, pauses at the bottom step. Looks up the stairs.

INT. HOLDING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Hesitant footsteps climbing the stairs. Ruth reaches the top step, enters the dark empty room. She looks around the room.

RUTH
Miller? You up here?

She hears a faint, slow, clanging of metal hooks coming from the hanging room. She walks toward the sound.

She hears a board creak, spins, sees Miller.

Miller stares at her, looking dazed, disoriented.

MILLER
You came back.

RUTH
You scared me!

Miller scrutinizes her.

MILLER
You been gone so long.

RUTH
I-I left you a note. I been to see
Uriah's sister.

MILLER
How come you went there?

RUTH
She ... she called me.

Miller eyes her intensely.

MILLER
What'd she want?

RUTH
She ... nothing.

Miller takes another step, staring at Ruth.

MILLER
Nothing?

RUTH
She's uh ... I mean, she's all
confused. Told me some neighbor
found my sister's body. Some days
after she died. That ain't right,
though. You'd a known right away
something happened to her.

Miller stares at her blankly.

RUTH (CONT'D)
You wouldn't a left her there.

Miller stares.

RUTH (CONT'D)
You wouldn't have ...
(beat)
Miller?

Miller reaches out his hand, a closed fist.

MILLER
I got something for you.

He opens his hand. Ruth looks down at it. He holds Gale's
ring in his palm.

She stares, her face goes white.

RUTH
That's Gale's.

MILLER

It's for you. I brought it back for you.

Ruth stands frozen, afraid to take it.

RUTH

Brought it back?

Miller stands, his palm open, offering it to her. Ruth's gaze fixes on the ring.

RUTH (CONT'D)

How'd you get it?

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, HOLDING ROOM - NIGHT

Miller drags Gale back from the top of the staircase.

Gale SCREAMS.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, HOLDING ROOM - PRESENT

Miller takes another step toward Ruth, his hand outstretched with the ring in it.

MILLER

I brought it for you.

Ruth stands frozen.

MILLER (CONT'D)

Take it.

RUTH

Uriah's sister, she says he couldn't a done them things. I was thinking about what you said and all ... and about that dog.

She gazes down at his arm.

Miller, you ... you got them scars.

INT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT.

Miller stands alone in darkness in the living room. He hears a low growl. Rex emerges from the shadows, growling fiercely at him. Rex lunges.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, HOLDING ROOM - PRESENT

Ruth gazes at Miller as he blinks in confusion, struggling to keep the visions at bay. He is melting down.

MILLER
He did! Goddammit, he did all of
it!

Ruth flinches as Miller yells.

MILLER (CONT'D)
She loved me! She came here to tell
me. She ... she loved me!

Ruth takes a breath to steady herself.

RUTH
Where, Miller? Where was she? Here
in this room?

Miller looks to Ruth's left.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Where?

MILLER
There. She was standing right
there.

He stops.

RUTH
What happened then?

Miller stares, getting lost.

RUTH (CONT'D)
What happened then?

Miller's expression hardens.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE HOLDING ROOM - NIGHT, FLASHBACK.

Miller has Gale in a tight grip. She SHRIEKS as she fights to break free.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, HOLDING ROOM - PRESENT

MILLER
I-I took hold of her. I just wanted
her to see sense.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE HOLDING ROOM - NIGHT, FLASHBACK

Gale SCREAMS as she flails her fists at Miller.

MILLER (V.O.)

She swung out at me like she's
hitting out at everyone that ever
put hands on her. She hit me hard
... I ... I'm somewhere else. He's
beating her. I can't stop him. I
can't.

Miller hammers Gale in her stomach, she grabs hold of his arm to steady herself as the wind goes out of her.

CU: [MATCH CUT TO PRIOR SCENE WITH URIAH] Miller's TATTOO.

INTERCUT a series of quick shots: Miller BEATS Gale with his fists until she's punch drunk. Her legs give out, she falls, her head hits the floor with a crack.

MILLER (V.O.)

There's blood spreading out around
her head like a halo. I ... oh God!

Miller, his hands bloodied, looks over Gale's battered body, the blood spreading. He lifts her head tenderly, cradles it.

He lifts her body, holds it as if they were dancing.

He turns her. Her body slumps, her head tilts to the side.

Miller cradles her head tenderly, puts it back on his shoulder.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, HOLDING ROOM - NIGHT, PRESENT

Miller gazes off as if he's somewhere else.

MILLER

I loved her. I loved her so much.
I ... I had to stop her blood from
spilling. I couldn't stop it.

Ruth stares at him, not believing.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, HOLDING ROOM - NIGHT, FLASHBACK

Miller covers a cut in the back of Gale's head with his hand, the blood trickles out between his fingers.

MILLER (V.O.)
Her blood was running out. I
couldn't stop it!

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, HOLDING ROOM - NIGHT, PRESENT

MILLER
It's all wrong. I didn't do that. I
did not do that!

Ruth stares at him, frozen.

MILLER (CONT'D)
She couldn't have been bleeding
here. I mean, why'd she do that?

He struggles to think.

MILLER (CONT'D)
She was bleeding up there at that
house. That's how it was!

Miller fights his memory.

MILLER (CONT'D)
Up there where her husband done it.
He done it!

EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Miller approaches the house, Gale's body in his arms. It is wrapped in a blanket.

He walks toward the front door, ascends the steps.

INT. FARMHOUSE LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Miller enters, carrying Gale's body. He glances around, sets her down gently on the couch.

He places a pillow under her head, straightens her legs so she is at rest.

He kneels over her, shaking, his eyes red.

He kisses her cold lips.

INT. FARMHOUSE KITCHEN - HOURS LATER

The glare of headlights moves across the room as Uriah's truck pulls up. The house is dark.

The engine cuts. The sound of the door opening and Uriah enters. He turns on the kitchen light.

URIAH

Gale?

The light from the kitchen shines into the living room. Uriah spies Gale's lifeless legs on the couch. Her upper body is obscured in the shadows.

URIAH (CONT'D)

Gale?

Uriah goes to the couch, his eyes adjusting to the darkness. He brushes her hair out of her face, but she is still.

He takes her hand, feels that it is cold.

URIAH (CONT'D)

Oh Jesus!

He looks her body over, searching for wounds. He sees his hands are now sticky with blood.

URIAH (CONT'D)

Gale? Oh Jesus!

Miller steps silently out of the shadows behind Uriah. He holds a crowbar in his hand.

He raises it above his head, brings it down on the back of Uriah's skulls. A CRACK of shattering bone.

Uriah's eyes convulse, roll up into his skull. He falls across Gale's body.

INT. ABATTOIR HOLDING ROOM - PRESENT

Miller is in a highly agitated state. He looks past Ruth like she isn't there.

MILLER

That fuckin' killer! That fuckin' murderer!

(beat)

He's gonna pay for what he done!

Ruth stares at him a beat.

RUTH
What'd he do?

Miller continues to stare.

RUTH (CONT'D)
What did he do?

Miller turns to her. Her voice has brought him back.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Dammit, Miller! What did he do?

Miller glares at her.

MILLER
He took her! He took her away from
me!

Miller hears his own words.

MILLER (CONT'D)
He took her away ...

INT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT, FLASHBACK.

Miller lifts Uriah's body, sets it down on a chair beside the couch.

He takes Uriah's shotgun, places it in Uriah's mouth. He puts the stock between Uriah's legs, his left hand on the barrel, his right hand around the trigger. He gazes at Uriah for a beat.

BANG! Blood and pieces of flesh spray the wall.

INT. ABATTOIR HOLDING ROOM - PRESENT.

Ruth gazes at Miller, stunned. Miller stares off.

MILLER
I come back here and I waited. I
knew they'd come for me. I wanted
'em to.
(a beat to recall)
Well they did come. Asked their
questions. Went away. I knew, I
knew they'd be back. But they never
... I ...

Miller drifts again.

RUTH

All this time ... You let everyone believe

Miller stares at her, disoriented, manic.

MILLER

I ain't that man. I ain't! It ain't me no more.

Miller takes a step toward Ruth. She shrinks back. Miller stops, sees her fear.

MILLER (CONT'D)

Don't be scared of me. Baby, d-don't be scared of me!

Ruth glances around for a way out.

MILLER (CONT'D)

I-I waited for you. I been waiting for you to come back. We're going away from here, you and me.

Miller takes another step. She backs up into to the hallway that leads to the hanging room.

MILLER (CONT'D)

What're you doing? Where you going?

He steps to follow her. She quickens her retreat, exits.

INT. ABATTOIR HANGING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ruth backs into the room, backs into one of the hooks. It clangs into the one beside it. She jumps, glances around desperately. There is no exit but the door.

Miller appears in the doorway. He eyes her with suspicion.

MILLER

You, you said we'd go away. You said that.

RUTH

Stay away from me!

Miller steps in closer. She's cornered.

MILLER

You want to leave me?

Ruth looks at him, trying to compose herself.

She makes a break to get past him. He grabs her by the shoulders.

RUTH
You bastard! You goddam bastard!

Miller leans in closer, scrutinizing her face.

MILLER
You said you was gonna help me!

RUTH
Oh god!

MILLER
That what you want? You want to
leave me?

Ruth struggles to compose herself, breathing heavily.

MILLER (CONT'D)
Answer me, Gale! Answer me!

RUTH
I don't! I swear I don't.

Miller glares at her, his eyes angry and vacant.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Please, Miller!

Ruth reaches her hand out to him, turns her palm up.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Please ...

Miller looks down at her hand, then back at Ruth. He pauses a beat then reaches out, puts the ring in her palm. She closes her fingers around it.

RUTH (CONT'D)
I want to stay.

Miller eyes her, his anger beginning to dissipate.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY, FLASHBACK.

Gale stands in front of Miller. She closes her fingers around the ring he has returned to her. She looks up at him, smiles.

INT. ABATTOIR HANGING ROOM - PRESENT

RUTH

I'll stay with you. I-I want to.

Miller reaches up to touch her hair.

MILLER

I ... I done these things. I done these things.

(beat)

I'm begging you, forgive me!
Please! Forgive me!

RUTH

I love you, Miller. I truly do.

She places a hand on his cheek. He closes his eyes, feeling her touch.

He leans into her, she shuts her eyes. Miller kisses her softly.

Ruth's eyes open wide. She takes hold of the dangling meat hook. Miller hears the tinkling of the chain, opens his eyes.

Ruth swings the hook into his ribs, driving it in.

Miller's eyes go wide. He screams in pain.

Ruth falls back against the wall. Miller lurches toward her. The chain goes taut, pulls him back.

Ruth scrambles to her feet, backs out of the room as Miller claws at the chain, wailing, fighting to free himself from the hook.

Ruth scrambles to her feet. She backs toward the door, wide-eyed, keeping Miller in her sight.

She turns, rushes out of the room.

INT. ABATTOIR HOLDING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ruth backs into the holding room.

Miller has gone silent. She hears the clanging of hooks, one into another.

She backs herself into a corner. Her eyes lock on the doorway to the hanging room.

INT. SLAUGHTER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Miller, wincing in pain, slides the hook out. Blood runs down from the open wound. He slumps to his knees.

He places a hand on the wall, struggles to stand.

He gazes around, searching desperately.

MILLER

Where are you, girl?!

INT. HOLDING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ruth collects herself. She gazes at the door across the room, leading to the stairway down.

She glances back at the darkened hallway leading to the hanging room.

She takes a breath, steps silently past it, toward the stairs.

AUDIBLE: Ruth hears a CRASH that makes her spin back to the hallway. Empty.

Her eyes locked on the darkened hallway, she backs into the staircase leading to the studio. She falls down a step, smacks her head into the wall.

She winces as she lifts herself up and stumbles down the stairs to the studio.

INT. REFRIGERATOR ROOM

Miller stumbles in the darkness, searching.

MILLER

Where are you, girl?

INT. STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Feeling her way along the wall, Ruth stumbles to the front door.

AUDIBLE: She hears Miller upstairs, CALLING FOR Gale. She stops, looks back.

INT. HALLWAY UPSTAIRS

Miller stumbles along the hallway, growing frantic.

INT. STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Ruth takes hold of the doorknob, turns it. She opens the door, steps out onto the street.

INT. HOLDING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Miller steps into the room, gazes around. Emptiness.

MILLER

Baby? Where'd you go?

Miller holds his hand over his open wound. He glances down. Blood runs through his fingers.

He stumbles along the wall, searching the vacant spaces. He stops to gather his strength. His breath is shallow.

He looks up.

Gale stands at the doorway at the top of the staircase leading down. She stares at him, echoes of tenderness in her eyes.

Miller stands still, wanting to believe. He takes a step toward her.

His legs give way under him. He falls to his knees. He lifts his head, fighting to keep sight of her.

Gale turns, walks down the staircase.

MILLER (CONT'D)

Don't go, Gale!

Miller stares intensely at the empty space of the doorway. Then quickly from side to side.

MILLER (CONT'D)

Gale! Don't go!

He spins to look behind him. His eyes search the darkness.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE, HOLDING ROOM - HOURS LATER

AUDIBLE - phonograph NEEDLE SCRATCHES ON PLASTIC

A view across the holding room floor. The camera tilts up to reveal Miller, across the room, lying on his side on the floor in front of the phonograph, back to camera, alone.

Camera RISES AND TRACKS IN and we see that Miller is lying motionless in a puddle of blood. Camera TRACKS AROUND as it reaches him, revealing his face.

His eyes are open, empty, lifeless.

EXT. EMPTY, SCENIC ROAD IN ALABAMA

A lone car travels on it.

INT. CAR - DAY

Ruth drives, looking through the windshield, lost in thought.

AUDIBLE: The RATTLE of coffee cups being set on a table.

BETH (V.O.)
Two coffees.

INT. DINER IN BIRMINGHAM - DAY

Ruth sits in a booth with Sheriff. BETH, the waitress, 20s, is setting two cups of coffee on the table, then a glass of water.

SHERIFF
(to Beth)
Thank you, darling.

Beth smiles, leaves.

Sheriff picks up the glass, tosses two aspirins in his mouth, chases them with the water.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)
Lord, I've gotten old. I'm retiring
this year, you know.

Ruth smiles thinly, an acknowledgment.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)
My wife, she says she wants to see
Alaska while we can still walk.
She's sure put up with a lot all
these years, guess I owe her that.
(eyes Ruth a beat)
So, uh, far as this situation ...
(MORE)

SHERIFF (CONT'D)
You can go on, as you please.
(beat)
I guess you got what you came for.

RUTH
I don't really feel that way.

She looks down.

RUTH (CONT'D)
He was trying to tell me ...
confessing the only way he could.
Like it was a story. Changing the
names.

SHERIFF
To protect the innocent?

Ruth looks up at him.

EXT. INSIDE RUTH'S CAR - DAY

The conversation plays in Ruth's head as she drives.

SHERIFF (V.O.)
Man's a criminal. Plain and simple.
I met more of 'em than I care to
remember. They're always lookin'
for a way to make you feel sorry
for 'em.

Ruth ponders.

RUTH (V.O.)
What if I never showed up here? I
mean, what if he'd just gone on
living there, keeping to himself.

SHERIFF (V.O.)
Well now, I don't know.
(beat)
That sound like justice to you?

Ruth looks out at the road. She drives off toward Mobile.

WIDE SHOT of the car driving away.

FADE OUT.