

Grandma's Hands
an original screenplay by
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FADE IN.

EXT. SIDE STREET - DAY

A frosty, breath-seeing day in the city.

BILLIE BLOCK, 30, hustles out of an alleyway, up the sidewalk. A petite Black woman with a don't-fuck-with-me gait.

Close on: Her gloved hands. Brown leather. Shearling lining. Curled into fists.

Billie glances over her shoulder, then down at her hands. Opens them--

The fingers are dotted with blood.

AT THE MOUTH OF THE ALLEY: A man's Timberland boots peek out. Toes up. Stone still.

Billie tucks her hands in her pockets, jogs around the corner.

EXT. BLOCK HOUSE - DAY

SUPER: "Three Days Earlier."

A well-kept West Philly row house.

INT. BLOCK HOUSE - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

A queen-size bed, well made with floral covers. It's littered with stacks of things--

Shoe boxes. Hat boxes. Jewelry boxes. Papers.

DODIE BLOCK, 55, stands at the foot of the bed. Flips through a binder-clipped file.

Billie sweeps in, plops on the bed. A tower of shoe boxes threatens to topple. Dodie catches them.

DODIE

Girl!

BILLIE

Does it really have to be us doing this? The woman had a tribe of children.

DODIE

Be respectful.

BILLIE

I could have said "litter."

Dodie gives her a look.

DODIE
That's my mother.

Billie sighs.

BILLIE
I know. Sorry, Mom. I'm just saying--
if she left us something, I could
see-

DODIE
She ain't leave nobody nothing,
period. You know how them backwoods
folks are about lawyers and papers.

Dodie sighs.

DODIE (CONT'D)
Here--

Dodie sets the down papers, hands Billie a wooden jewelry
box.

DODIE (CONT'D)
For your troubles.

BILLIE
You don't have to say it like that.

Billie flips the lid, frowns.

BILLIE (CONT'D)
Costume.

DODIE
There's more in the closet.

Billie hops up, throws open the closet door--

Mumus. Hawaiian floral button-ups. She pulls a face. Not
a chance in hell. Something catches her eye.

Hanging from the pocket of an ancient overcoat: the leather
gloves.

Billie grabs the gloves, slips one on. Her sweater sleeve
shifts up.

Reveal: a nasty purple bruise around her wrist.

She slips on the other glove. Wiggles her fingers. Perfect
fit. Billie admires them.

Dodie glances over her shoulder.

DODIE (CONT'D)
Almost one o'clock.

Billie snaps-to.

BILLIE
Dang it. Alright. Thanks.

Billie grabs her puffy coat off the back of a chair.

BILLIE (CONT'D)
Be back after my shift.

She kisses Dodie on the cheek, rushes out.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - LATER

Billie hustles down the street, waves to--

JACK, late 30's. Quintessential hipster: all Pabst and pretentiousness. He holds a clipboard to his chest, glares her way.

Billie stops at his side.

BILLIE
I'm so sorry--

JACK
Forty-five minutes, dude.

BILLIE
I know--

JACK
You couldn't pick up your phone?

BILLIE
The train goes underground.

JACK
Whatever.

He shoves the clipboard at her. She fumbles with it.

BILLIE
I was handling family stuff. I told you, my grandma passed--

JACK
The one you didn't even like? Yeah. Three weeks ago.

Billie recoils, blinks.

BILLIE'S POV: Jack, in an old suit and fedora. 1940's style. He points in her face.

JACK (CONT'D)

If you don't want this job, just say the word. I've got list of candidates a mile long.

She blinks again--

Jack's clothes are back to normal. She stares. So does he.

Billie holds his finger gripped tight in her fist.

JACK (CONT'D)

What the-- You're hurting me, dude!

She lets go, perturbed.

JACK (CONT'D)

It's cool.

Jack shoulders past her, power-walks down the street. He glances back at her, quick. Freaked out.

Montage:

1) Billie flags people down on the street. Most pass without eye contact.

2) A TEEN GIRL fills out Billie's clipboard, holds out to her. Billie trades her a big sticker with an equal sign on it.

3) Billie flags down more people. They pass her again. And again. And again.

4) Billie sits against the side of a building, clipboard beside her. Knees hugged to her chest.

INT. BLOCK HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Dodie wraps old picture frames in newspaper, packs them into boxes.

Billie comes in the front door.

DODIE

Runnin' you ragged, huh?

Billie nods, shrugs off her coat.

BILLIE
Into the ground.

She lays her coat across the couch.

DODIE
There's some wings in the kitchen.

BILLIE
Thanks.

Billie crosses toward the kitchen. Dodie stops her.

DODIE
Ain't you forgetting something?

BILLIE
Huh?

Dodie lifts Billie's gloved hands.

BILLIE (CONT'D)
Oh.

Dodie eyes her, concerned.

INT. BILLIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A tiny apartment. Cramped. Dilapidated. But tidy.

Except around the couch. Beer bottles and take-out containers litter the table. SPORTS COMMENTARY BLARES on the small TV.

Billie opens the door. Glances at the mess. Sighs. Heads for--

KITCHENETTE - CONTINUOUS

TY digs through the fridge. He's mid-30's. Rough around the edges. More than the edges, really.

He closes the fridge, scratches his stomach.

TY
We ain't got no more ketchup.

BILLIE
What about the packets?

TY
"No more" means "no more."

A beat.

TY (CONT'D)
Can you run to the store?

Billie rolls her eyes.

BILLIE
I just got in from work--

TY
And I don't work?

Billie crosses to the counter, pulls open the drawer. Rifles through.

TY (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

BILLIE
Looking for the ketchup packets.

TY
Hey--

He spins her around, rough. Grabs her by the shoulders.

BILLIE'S POV: Ty, in tank top, suspenders. His hair's conked.

TY (CONT'D)
Didn't I say there ain't no more?
Huh?

He shakes her.

TY (CONT'D)
You think I'm a liar or something?

BILLIE
Get off me!

Billie pushes him back. He falls on his ass.

She looks down at the gloves. Then back at him--

He's back in his tee and basketball shorts. Shocked. Pissed.

TY
You must've lost your damn--

Billie jets for the door.

Ty runs after her, stops short of the door. Glances down at his bare feet.

TY (CONT'D)
Fuck. BILLIE!

She's already gone.

INT. BLOCK HOUSE - BEDROOM - LATER

It's late. Dark. Save for the street light that streams through the blinds.

Billie lies in bed, covers up to her neck. Cast in stripes of light.

She tosses in troubled sleep. She dreams--

INT. BLOCK HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

BILLIE'S POV:

Sunlight pierces lace curtains. Herbs hang-dry under the cabinets. A country kitchen in the city.

An old woman shells peas at the table. Her white hair says 70's. Her smooth skin says otherwise. This is WILHELMINA.

She turns up her nose.

WILHELMINA

Girl, you smell just like them
outdoors. Don't you wanna smell
sweet? Like a little lady?

Close on: Wilhemina's hands at work. Lightning fast.

EXT. BLOCK HOUSE - DAY

Wilhelmina sits on the porch, in her rocking chair. She crochets a gaudy place mat.

Dodie perches on the stairs, tense.

DOUBLE-DUTCH CHANTS drone in the background. The sound of rope smacking pavement.

Wilhelmina speaks to someone who's out of frame.

WILHELMINA

You're getting too old to wear them
shirts like that without a brassiere.
You don't want folks thinking you
one of them fast-tail girls.

Wilhelmina stops. Undoes a bad stitch. Fixes it. Her eyes never leave her work.

INT. BLOCK HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

An old brass picture frame lies face-down on the floor.
Glass shattered around it.

Wilhelmina fumes. An extension cord dangles from her hand.

BILLIE'S POV: Wilhelmina glares down at her. Dodie moves
between them, a couple decades shaved off her age.

DODIE

She said she didn't do it--

WILHELMINA

Then she's lying or I'm lying, which
one is it?

DODIE

Maybe it just fell!

Wilhelmina grips the cord.

WILHELMINA

You spoil her rotten, Dodie! You
don't set her straight, she ain't
never gonna be shit!

Dodie gapes, stung.

DODIE

Why would you--

BILLIE'S POV: Everything's a blur as she breaks into a run
out the door--

EXT. BLOCK HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Down the front stairs--

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Down the block, through the neighborhood--

She trips, falls to the concrete. Braces herself on the
door of a car, pulls herself up. In the car window--

Billie catches her reflection: Wilhelmina's face and body.
In the pigtails and overalls of a little girl.

END DREAM SEQUENCE.

INT. BLOCK HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Billie jumps awake, flails--

DODIE (O.S.)

Hey, hey--

Dodie rushes to Billie's side.

DODIE (CONT'D)

What are you--

Dodie stops. Her jaw drops. She reaches out--

Dodie's hands trace bruises on Billie's upper arm and shoulder, exposed by her tank top.

MOMENT'S LATER -

Billie throws on yesterday's clothes.

Dodie watches from the bed, shakes her head.

DODIE

How long, Billie?

BILLIE

How long, what? I told you what happened--

DODIE

Bullshit!

Billie jumps.

DODIE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, I just-- Let me pick up some of your stuff today, then we can think about next steps--

BILLIE

I gotta go to work, Mom.

DODIE

Billie.

Billie kisses her on the cheek.

BILLIE

Later. I promise.

Billie whisks from the room.

EXT. SIDE STREET - LATER

Billie hustles up the street. She shivers. Blows in her bare hands. Rubs them together.

She stops, glances down at her fingers--

The tips are turning red. Billie sighs, reaches in her pocket. Pulls out the gloves. Just up the street--

A large MAN in a puffy vest and Timberland boots. 40-ish. He leans against the side of the building, cigarette in his mouth. He watches her.

MAN

Hi, beautiful.

BILLIE

(curt)

Hi.

She puts on her gloves. Passes him.

He pushes off the wall.

MAN

Slow down, baby. Where you going?

She rolls her eyes, speeds up.

BILLIE

(sotto)

Lord, not today.

The Man follows her.

MAN

You ain't talkin' today or something?

Billie glances over her shoulder.

BILLIE

I'm taken. Happily. So.

MAN

Your man don't let you have friends?

Billie double-times it up the street.

MAN (CONT'D)

So, you just gonna ignore me?

BILLIE

Looks like it, yeah.

MAN

Fuck you, too, bitch--

He grabs her shoulder--

Billie slaps him. Hard.

MAN (CONT'D)

What the fuck--

He shoves her. Billie staggers back, into a littered alleyway.

The Man menaces her. Pushing her backward--

Billie thuds against a dumpster. She looks around, helpless.

BILLIE'S POV: The Man's apparel has changed-- a polyester leisure suit. He pulls straight from a glass bottle of Thunderbird, retro label. He raises it, brings it down--

The sound of SHATTERING GLASS.

Back to reality: The man holds a hand to his bleeding head.

Billie looks down at her hand-- A broken beer bottle, clutched in her trembling fist.

The Man looks at the blood on his hands. Lunges, enraged--

He freezes. GURGLES. Billie backs away, out of the alley.

The broken bottle protrudes from the Man's gut. He takes a few steps toward her. Collapses.

Billie speeds up the street. Glances down at her bloody gloves.

BILLIE

FUCK.

Billie rounds the corner, out of view. Stops. She tugs at the gloves.

BILLIE (CONT'D)

No. Nononono.

She tugs and tugs. They don't budge. She gapes. Horrified.

INT. BILLIE'S APARTMENT - LATER

Billie bursts in, runs for--

KITCHENETTE - CONTINUOUS

She flips on the faucet. Scrubs her gloved hands, hard.

The bedroom door opens. Billie glances over her shoulder.

BILLIE

I thought you were at work.

Ty approaches her.

TY
That's all you got to say to me?
Really?

BILLIE
I can't right now. Ty, please.

He looms closer.

BILLIE (CONT'D)
Ty.

Ty towers over her.

BILLIE (CONT'D)
Ty, I said DON'T FUCK WITH ME RIGHT
NOW!

Billie stares him down.

EXT. BILLIE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Close on: the bloody doorknob.

Noise from inside-- A SCUFFLE. POTS CLATTER. DISHES BREAK.

BILLIE UNLEASHES A GUTTURAL SCREAM.

Then, silence. Lingering silence.

INT. BLOCK HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Dodie sorts through a box of papers on the couch.

KEYS JANGLE outside the front door. A struggle with the lock.

Dodie frowns, goes to the door. Opens it--

Billie shivers in the doorway. Hair disheveled. Face bruised. A fragile mess. Her coat's gone. But she wears the gloves.

INT. BLOCK HOUSE - BEDROOM - LATER

Billie sits in the armchair, in her bathrobe. Dodie stands behind her. Braids her damp hair.

BILLIE
Is it true? What Uncle Leon and
them say about Grandma?

DODIE
What about Grandma?

BILLIE
You know. What really happened to
Pop-Pop.

Dodie stops mid-braid.

DODIE
You know Leon's been on that stuff.

BILLIE
Mom. Please.

Dodie bites her lip.

DODIE
I loved my father. But folks got a
way of showing different masks to
different people. Especially men.
And especially when they drink.

Dodie rubs Billie's shoulder, tender.

DODIE (CONT'D)
But you know that.

Dodie gets back to her braiding.

DODIE (CONT'D)
They got a way of stripping off all
your softness and hating you for
feeling like stone. He'll back you
into a corner. And back you, and
back you, and back you. But when
you hit up against that wall and you
finally bare your teeth-- Somehow
you come out the monster.

Dodie finishes the braid, makes her way to the closet.

DODIE (CONT'D)
I found something today.

Dodie pulls out the old jewelry box, presents it to Billie.
Billie takes it, confused.

BILLIE
I saw this.

DODIE
No. You didn't.

Dodie opens the jewelry box, turns it over in Billie's lap.
Pulls out the velvet tray.

In the box's hollow bottom: an envelope, stuffed full.

DODIE (CONT'D)

Take it.

Billie opens it--

It's stuffed full of cash. She thumbs through the bills,
awe-struck.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

Billie stands in front of Wilhelmina's grave. A large rolling
suitcase rests beside her.

She stoops, places the gloves at the base of headstone.
Grabs her suitcase. Walks away.

THE END.