

THE GRAVEDIGGER'S WIFE

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

Rows and rows of HEADSTONES stand like stiff, gray soldiers under the noon sunshine. The grounds are well tended. The grass is trimmed. There are even manicured rose-bushes and a white clapboard two story house on the outskirts.

It is almost easy to forget that this is the final resting place for the dead.

SARAH (OS)

Mom, hurry up!

EXT. STROBEL HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

MARGARET STROBEL walks out into her backyard carrying a first-aid kit. She's around fifty, starting to thicken around the middle with streaks of gray in her blond hair. Her face hints at past beauty.

Margaret takes the kit and kneels next to her daughter SARAH, who's eighteen and has inherited the beauty that her mother has lost. Her hair spills down her back like gold. She's beautiful and pristine like a flower blossom.

Sarah holds onto a small DOE that has a gash on its right leg.

SARAH

I think it must have been a wolf.

MARGARET

(inspecting the wound)

Tell your father the wolves are back and we hafta to deal with his gun goin' off like thunder again. Nope, looks to me like the little fella nicked himself real good on a protruding branch. Hold this leg steady, I'm gonna add some peroxide. It's gonna sting.

Sarah helps her mom diligently. They've done this before.

SARAH

The bird feeders are empty. We're going to need to put out more carrots for the rabbits. I think we should keep Bambi here until he's healed.

MARGARET

Bambi?

SARAH
Original, isn't it?

Mom and daughter share a laugh.

JEREMIAH (OS)
Now, whatcha you two laughin' about?
Don't be tellin' jokes without me
around!

JEREMIAH STROBEL is a large man, thick all through, with thinning hair and in his mid fifties. Despite being such a large man, he has a pleasant demeanor and is quick to smile.

Margaret points to the DIGGER that her husband has parked just outside of the backyard fence.

MARGARET
Why do you always hafta bring that
thing all the way into the house?

JEREMIAH
Into the house? It's outside of
the fence. Do you know how much
diggin' I still have to do? I have
three comin' in this weekend.
They're droppin' like flies this
summer.

Jeremiah sees the injured doe.

JEREMIAH (CONT.)
Now, what have we here?

SARAH
He was injured in the woods, daddy.

MARGARET
Before you get any ideas, it wasn't
wolves.

SARAH
Can we keep him with us, until he's
healed?

JEREMIAH
Sweetheart, we run a graveyard --
not a zoo. This is the third --

SARAH
Oh, daddy, please. He won't
survive by himself. Please.

Sarah's pleading eyes and gorgeous smile melts Jeremiah easily. He grabs a bandage out of the kit.

JEREMIAH

All right, let me show you how this is done.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

The Strobels always eat together. There's a breakfast table in the modest kitchen, sparsely furnished with dated furniture; but everything is neat and clean. This is not a wealthy family; but it's rich in love.

Sarah is seated at the table with her father, fidgeting impatiently.

SARAH

Mom, what's taking so long?

MARGARET

You don't want to eat raw food, do you, honey? What's the rush?

Sarah glances at the wall clock.

JEREMIAH

She's hungry, Margaret. I worked myself an appetite today too.

Margaret removes a roast from the oven and sets it on the table and takes a seat.

MARGARET

Don't you be fussin' at me if this is not cooked.

Before anyone starts to eat, Jeremiah leads the prayers and thanks the Lord. This is a religious family.

He carves the roast and passes portions to his wife and daughter. The table is modestly set; but the food is filling.

They start to dig in. Jeremiah eats heartily.

JEREMIAH

Now, that's good. Not raw at all. Margaret, you've outdone yourself once again!

Sarah mostly plays with her food. Her mother notices.

MARGARET

I thought you were hungry, Sarah?

SARAH

I am.

MARGARET

Then why are you playing with your food?

JEREMIAH

Oh, leave here alone. She's watching her figure. Just a month away from college, isn't that right, honey?

SARAH

Thirty-two days.

MARGARET

Have you decided on a major yet?

SARAH

No. There's too many things I'm interested in.

JEREMIAH

Jack of all trades. Master of none. Now, you don't want to end up as a gravedigger.

MARGARET

Over my dead body.

JEREMIAH

You'll have to wait till next week. I'm all booked up.

MARGARET

See, your father can't bury me this week. Don't do anything that will kill me.

SARAH

I'll try, mom.

They all share a laugh. This is a close family. They enjoy each other's company. Laughter comes easily.

JEREMIAH

Sarah, you should become a veterinarian. You're always helpin' the animals.

Sarah nods noncommittally. Glances at the wall clock again.

What's she late for?

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

Dinner is finished. Sarah helps her mother to clean the dishes. Jeremiah is seated in a corner, smoking a pipe and reading the paper.

Sarah dries the last dish and puts it away. Glances at the wall clock again.

SARAH

We're done. Are you guys going to bed now?

MARGARET

Boy, you sure are fidgety tonight. Everything all right, Sarah?

SARAH

Yes, mom. Why are you giving me the third degree?

Jeremiah rises and stretches his huge frame and YAWNS.

JEREMIAH

Aw, leave her alone, Margaret. She's right. I'm all worn out digging today. Let's go to bed.
(goes over and kisses
his daughter's forehead)
Early to bed, early to rise --

SARAH

Makes a person, healthy, wealthy and wise.

JEREMIAH

Good night, darlin'. Don't let the bed bugs bite.

Margaret gives Sarah a kiss and follows her husband out of the kitchen.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

A door quietly opens. Sarah steps out into the hallway. She presses her ear against her parent's bedroom. Listens. Then smiles.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - SARAH'S ROOM - LATER

The lights are off, but it's bright enough to see with the moonlight streaming through the window.

Sarah is seated on the edge of her bed. She hasn't changed since dinner.

She stares fixedly at the digital clock on her table. It reads:

9:00 PM

A sudden sound at the window captures Sarah's attention immediately. It comes again. It's the sound of small stones striking the window.

Sarah rushes over the window and waves then quietly leaves her room.

EXT. STROBEL HOUSE - NIGHT

Sarah quietly slips out through the front door. There is a car waiting on the road. Its headlights are off.

Sarah quickly gets into the car and it drives off.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

PEGGY (PEG) THOMAS is driving. She's Sarah's age; but dressed provocatively with a tight tank top and a short, short skirt.

PEGGY

You gotta change in the car. You can't arrive at the party like little miss goody two-shoes!

SARAH

My parents would die if they found out I sneaked out of the house!

PEGGY

You'll be back before they know it. Come on, change your clothes! The bag's in the back seat.

Sarah grabs a duffel bag and starts to take clothes out.

SARAH

They're so skimpy!

PEGGY

I know. That's how the boys like it. Stop being such a prude!

EXT. DANLEY LODGE - NIGHT

A car drives up the long driveway that leads to a oversized lodge.

It's surrounded by tall pines and mountains in the distance. The lawn is well-manicured and hedges have been shaped into topiary "bears", "buffalo" and "moose". It's the residence of somebody with money.

A bunch of vehicles are parked in front of the garage. Pickups and 4x4s outnumber cars.

Peg and Sarah get out of the car and ring the front doorbell.

Music blasts out when the door opens. There's a party going in. The girls go in.

INT. DANLEY LODGE - LATER

The place is packed with YOUNG FOLK. Peggy leads Sarah through the crowd introducing her.

Sarah looks stunning in her tight red top, short black skirt and high heels. Many of the guys do a double take when they see her. They know her but can't believe she's at the party and in this outfit.

Sarah looks lost. She's very nervous and very shy. She's a fish out of water and totally out of her element.

Peg leads Sarah to a tall, young man. He's talking to a shorter man, who's built like a fire plug.

PEGGY

Hey, Russ!

The tall man is RUSSELL DANLEY. He's in his early twenties and has movie star good looks and the cockiness to match. They boy was born with a silver spoon in his mouth and one up his ass.

The shorter man is STAN FOGEL. He's Russell's best friend and errand boy.

RUSSELL

Peg! Hey, you made it.

PEGGY

What's up? Russ, this is Sarah.

Russell sees Sarah and his reaction is immediate. He's captivated by her good looks and openly surprised to see her here.

STAN

Hey, you're the gravedigger's --

SARAH
He's my father.

RUSSELL
Sarah, I'm really glad you came.
Would you like a beer?

SARAH
Sure.

STAN
Shit, Sarah. I didn't recognize
you. You look -- you look hot!

Sarah openly blushes.

Russell elbows Stan, making him GRUNT.

RUSSELL
Shut up, moron.

COLTON (OS)
Peg!

COLTON HARRIS, a big bear of a man comes over and grabs
Peggy's hand. He's another one of Russell's buddies.

COLTON
Come on, sugar, let's dance. I
thought you'd never get here!

Colton starts to tear Peggy away. Sarah doesn't want to be
left alone.

PEGGY
Russ, take care of Sarah. She's a
little lost lamb!

Russell nudges Stan again.

RUSSELL
Go get the girl a beer.

Stan rushes to obey.

INT. DANLEY LODGE - MAIN HALL - LATER

Russell's giving Sarah a tour of the lodge. Sarah's taking
small sips of her beer. She's not a big drinker.

RUSSELL
We have a couple of places in town.
My father keeps this place mostly
for parties.

The lodge is big. The timbered ceiling is at least twenty feet high. There are lots of mounted animals on the wall and a great big fireplace that's tall enough for a man to walk into.

RUSSELL

All the timber's from our lumber operation. You know my, father, he owns --

SARAH

Everyone in this town knows who your father is.

RUSSELL

He's been grooming me to take over, but I'm more interested in the car dealership. I'm thinking we should expand and buy another. I've got big plans.

Russell's full of himself. His eyes constantly dart to Sarah's cleavage. He's only interested in getting into her pants.

RUSSELL (CONT.)

You look really nice tonight, Sarah.

SARAH

Thanks.

RUSSELL

Haven't seen you at any parties before.

SARAH

I haven't gone to many.

RUSSELL

Just church gatherings, right?

SARAH

(nods)

Peg dragged me out tonight. Said it would broaden my horizons.

RUSSELL

I'm glad she brought you. It gets stale with the same people coming all the time. That's the problem with small towns --

SARAH

But we all know each other. Sometimes that's a good thing.

RUSSELL

Right. Do you wanna dance?

INT. DANLEY LODGE - DANCE FLOOR - LATER

A DJ plays tracks. Music blares. Lots of YOUNG FOLK on the dance floor.

Sarah's on the dance floor with Russell. She's a decent dancer; but isn't gyrating like some of the other girls.

Peg dances with Colton. She sees Sarah and smiles.

Sarah nods. She seems to be enjoying herself.

Hank is gyrating like a madman, dancing with no one in particular. He sees Russell and gives him a big thumbs up sign.

Russell smiles back. It's a lecherous smile.

INT. DANLEY LODGE - LATER

Russell draws Sarah away from the dance floor and offers her some hors d'oeuvres. While she munches, he goes over to the bar and to get drinks.

Hank meets him there and they exchange words. Hank nods and removes something carefully from his pant pocket and slips it to Russell.

Russell glances back at Sarah. Peg has come over and they're talking. They're not looking this way.

Russell surreptitiously slips what Hank gave to him into Sarah's drink and then stirs it until the powder is fully dissolved.

Hank slaps Russell enthusiastically on back before he goes back and says hello to Peg and gives Sarah the drink. It appears that she wants something else, probably water, but he coaxes her to take a sip.

Colton beckons Peg away. Russell appears pleased. He encourages Sarah to drink more.

INT. DANLEY LODGE - LATER

Russell has drawn Sarah away from the action in the main hall. She is woozy and leans against him for support. He says something to her. She shakes her head. No.

Russell's impatient. He grabs Sarah's elbow and steers her up towards stairs to the second floor. She appears powerless to resist.

Peg watches from a distance. She want to go to Sarah. Colton, grabs her and tries to lead her back to the dance floor. Peg gives in.

Hank also watches. There a big grin on his face.

INT. DANLEY LODGE - MASTER BEDROOM - LATER

Russell's got his hands on Sarah's shoulders and tries to draw her to him. She's clearly not lucid but manages to shake him off.

Russell goes for her again. Tries to push her back onto the bed. He gets on top of her and grabs a breast and tries to grind into her.

Sarah struggles helplessly for a minute as he tries to remove her clothing; but then she manages to knee him in the groin and slide out from underneath him.

Sarah's back on her feet, disheveled, barely able to stand. The drug Russell slipped her has made her very woozy. But she has just enough sense to make it for the door.

Russell leaps out of the bed and blocks her away. Sarah runs into his arms, struggles with him and then manages to twist away. She's frightened and desperate. She rushes towards a set of slider doors and runs out onto a...

BALCONY

Russell pursues Sarah onto the balcony. Bright moonlight casts them in a spotlight.

Russell's horny for her. He's had a enough bullshit. He's cornered Sarah on the balcony. There's nowhere else for her to go.

He grabs her roughly and plants his mouth onto hers.

Sarah's powerless to resist. Her strength is completely sapped now.

Russell grabs a breast and starts to play with it. Sarah helplessly tries to pull back, but Russell won't let go. He tries to put his hand under her skirt.

Sarah bites Russell on the lips. He draws back in pain. As she tries to get away, he grabs her roughly by the arm and spins her around.

He draws back and strikes her with a bunched fist. Then hits her again. Hard.

Sarah's standing close to the balcony railing. Reels back from the second blow. Hits the railing. It breaks away.

She loses her balance and goes over.

INT. HOSPITAL - INTENSIVE CARE - NIGHT

Sarah lies like a broken Barbie doll on the bed. There is a bandage around her head, tubes snaking from her hand and nose and a respirator over her mouth. A loud red gash stands out on her pale face.

Margaret and Jeremiah watch over their daughter with red-rimmed eyes. They look like zombies. Margaret quietly weeps. Jeremiah stares at his daughter in a daze.

Peggy is there with her mother, SALLY THOMAS (late forties, overweight and matronly). They've both been crying too.

Peg stands guiltily in the corner of the room, trying not to look at Sarah.

SALLY

You hafta trust in the Lord,
Margaret. He'll pull her through.

MARGARET

I don't how this coulda happened.
Sarah's such a good girl. I can't
believe she sneaked away in the
middle of the night...

Patty lets out a cry of anguish and quickly exits the room.

SALLY

I didn't know Peg was going to
those parties. I swear! Oh,
Margaret, it was always so hard to
pry them apart. She didn't mean to
lead Sarah into trouble! If I had
know Peg was sneakin' out --

Margaret hugs SALLY fiercely.

MARGARET

It's no time to point fingers.
Just pray for my girl.

DOCTOR RIVERS walks in. He's a thin man, mid thirties and wears wire-rimmed glasses. They all look to him immediately.

DR. RIVERS

Sally, if you don't mind, I'd like to talk to Margaret and Jeremiah in private please.

Sally sees the grave expression on River's face.

SALLY

Oh, Lord.

Sally gives Margaret another hug and leaves the room.

Jeremiah turns to Rivers.

JEREMIAH

Is my little girl gonna make it?

Rivers hesitates.

MARGARET

Dr. Rivers, tell me honest and true. What are her chances?

DR. RIVERS

Margaret. Jeremiah. We've stabilized Sarah's vital signs. But the fall... it was very bad... She landed on concrete at an awkward angle and struck her head... There was damage to her brain and her spinal cord was damaged severely.

JEREMIAH

What does that mean? Is she gonna be all right?

DR. RIVERS

(beat)

Sarah's paralyzed below the neck... She's going to be a quadriplegic the rest of her life.

MARGARET

Jesus!

DR. RIVERS

She's... she's also in a coma.

Jeremiah breaks down. He goes back to Sarah's bedside, collapses to his knees in anguish.

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

The station's small, with a few desks and a rack containing nothing more than a few shotguns.

FLOYD GRIFFITH is sipping a beer and playing solitaire on his PC, bored out of his mind. He's in early twenties, with peach fuzz on his face and a skinny little mustache. He looks like an emaciated rat.

GEORGE (O.S.)

Where's my son?

Floyd is startled and instantly goes for his gun at his holster. When he sees who's walked in, he quickly hides the beer and stands up pronto.

FLOYD

Hello, Mr. Danley.

George Danley's got the build of a lumberjack. He's in his fifties and looks fit enough to snap Floyd in half.

GEORGE

Where's Russell?

Floyd points to a door.

FLOYD

He's in a cell.

GEORGE

Take me to him.

Floyd instantly walks over to the door and unlocks it with a key hanging from his pocket.

George follows him into a...

A SMALL CELL BLOCK

There's two jail cells. One is occupied by Russell. He's lying quietly on a cot staring up at the ceiling.

Russell instantly stands up when he sees his father. His drawn face relaxes into a smile. His father's presence gives him instant comfort.

RUSSELL

Dad.

GEORGE

They treat you all right?

FLOYD
Of course I did. Why, Russ and I
went to high school together!

GEORGE
Get him out of the cell.

FLOYD
Well, I'm not really supposed to
without --

GEORGE
Get him out of the fucking cell, Floyd.

Floyd's wearing the badge, but George is the one in charge.
He reluctantly opens the cell door.

Russell steps out.

GEORGE
He's coming home with me tonight.

FLOYD
I can't let that happen, Mr. Danley.
Why, Russ' gotta be formally booked
tomorrow. The judge hasta set bail --

GEORGE
He's not spending the night here,
you hear me? It was an accident.
I'll have a dozen witnesses say so.
You know where we live. When he
needs to be here again, he'll come
here with his lawyer. Let's go, Russ.

Floyd musters up enough courage to stand in the way.

FLOYD
Let me call Sheriff Colton and
square this away with him first.

GEORGE
You think Tom's gonna say no to me?

FLOYD
I just need to call and clear it--

GEORGE
When you call him, make sure you
give me the phone so I can tell him
that his deputy's been drinking on
the job.

Floyd instantly steps out of the way.

GEORGE
 (to Russell)
 Let's go.

George walks briskly out of the jail with Russell.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

A small clapboard white church. A forest of pines and pristine mountains in the distance. The sky is a cobalt blue. The parking lot's full.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The place is filled to capacity. Not a pew is empty. It's a religious community. Most of the TOWNSFOLK have turned out for Sunday service.

FATHER PAULSON is presiding over the podium. He's a affable man in his sixties, with a bald head and a healthy paunch. He could be mistaken for Friar Tuck.

FATHER PAULSON
 We're a small community. When tragedy strikes one of us, it strikes us all. Jeremiah and Margaret Stobel have suffered a momentous tragedy in their lives. Their daughter Sarah has been hurt...

The CONGREGATION turns as one to Jeremiah and Margaret, who are sitting with eyes downcast in one of the front pews. There is great sympathy for them on everybody's face.

George Stobel is there with Russell and his wife CAROL. She's in her forties, clearly had plastic surgery, wears the best clothes and has the fanciest hairdo among all the women. She's dressed well for church with lots of jewelry.

The Danleys are seated at one of the front pews as well, but away from the Stobels. For someone who might be in a lot of trouble, Russell doesn't look very contrite. His mother and father also stand proud and with dignity.

FATHER PAULSON
 We're a loving and caring community. The Stobels will not suffer through their tribulations alone. In their hour of need, I have no doubt that each and every one of us will be there for them. Today we will pray for their daughter Sarah...

EXT. CHURCH - LATER

Service is over. PARISHIONERS spill out. Many stop to talk to one another.

Margaret and Jeremiah attract the most attention. Most stop to offer words of comfort and hug them.

George Danley and his wife step out with Russell in tow. Many say hello to them, more out of respect than open friendship. They are paying homage to the richest family in town.

George points for Russell to go and wait at the car. He approaches the Strobels with his wife. People give them space; but they still watch from a respectable distance.

GEORGE

Margaret. Jeremiah. Good morning.

The Strobels are wounded people. They acknowledge the greeting wordlessly. There is no visible anger on their face. Only weariness.

CAROL

How is Sarah doing? Is she better?

MARGARET

Her... her condition's stable. But she's still in a coma.

(voice breaks)

My daughter's gonna be paralyzed forever.

George and Carol visibly wince.

GEORGE

Do you have insurance, Jeremiah? Anything it doesn't cover, I'll cover. Don't worry about expenses.

JEREMIAH

Your boy hurt my girl.

GEORGE

You gotta understand, it was a mistake... a terrible mistake.

JEREMIAH

They say she was drugged.

GEORGE

Now, Russ had nothing to with that!

MARGARET

Your boy punched Sarah in the face. She's got a mark to prove it. He's got a mean streak. Everybody in town knows it.

CAROL

That's a lie! Russ wouldn't hit a girl. She hit her face when she hit the ground.

GEORGE

My boy didn't hit your girl. I'll get the witnesses to prove it. Like I said, it was all a big mistake. We hafta get past this.

MARGARET

Can you make Sarah whole again? How would you feel if this happened to your son?

George and Carol are silent. They have no words.

Margaret walks away. Jeremiah follows her.

EXT. BLACK BMW - MOMENTS LATER

Russell waits by the vehicle anxiously as his parents approach.

RUSSELL

Well, what did they say?

GEORGE

They're not in a forgiving mood. They say you hurt Sarah on purpose.

RUSSELL

Look, I didn't mean to --

GEORGE

Save it for court. I don't want to hear anything. Not a thing. You just remember that it was a mistake. You got that?

Russell nods meekly. He's intimidated by his dad.

CAROL

(to George)

You better not let my boy go to prison!

At the word "prison" Russell goes pale. He looks towards his dad for support.

GEORGE
Over my dead body.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

JUDGE LEROY DILLER (fat, bald and sixty) presides over the trial. The court is packed. There is not a stranger among the crowd.

Russell is sporting glasses and an impeccable suit. He's been made to look studious and clean cut. His parents George and Carol sit next to him; the perfect portrait of anxious parents.

Representing them is a high-powered lawyer named JAMES FLEMMING (only outsider at court; tall and dignified with specks of gray in his hair) expressly brought in by George to defend his son.

Margaret and Jeremiah sit at the front behind the prosecutors table. Sarah is in a wheelchair tied to a portable respirator staring off into space. Her breathing is the loudest sound in the room.

Most try not to stare at Sarah openly; but clearly her presence in the court is hard to stomach for some.

The prosecutor is WALTER "WALLY" CIPRICH (forty with a paunch), who is used to prosecuting drunks and louts. This is his biggest case ever. He looks a little nervous.

Ciprich approaches the bench.

CIPRICH
Your Honor, I would like to request
a change of venue for this trial.

Diller looks like Jabba the Hut with robes and a gavel. He has a no-nonsense attitude.

JUDGE DILLER
Change of venue? Why in god's name so?

CIPRICH
This is a small town. The jury is
composed of many acquaintances of
the defendant. I feel there may be
bias --

JUDGE DILLER

It's also filled with acquaintances of Sarah Strobel. I'd say that cancels your concerns out. What happens in this town will be decided by this town. Your motion is denied!

Diller slaps his gavel down for good measure.

INT. COURTROOM - LATER

Russell is on the witness stand. Flemming questions him.

FLEMMING

Can you describe to the court what happened leading up to Sarah Strobel's tragic fall from the balcony.

RUSSELL

Sarah arrived at the party with Peg --

FLEMMING

Peggy Thomas?

RUSSELL

Yes.

FLEMMING

Did you invite her?

RUSSELL

No. As I said, she came as a guest of Peg's. I was surprised to see Sarah there.

FLEMMING

Why?

RUSSELL

Because she didn't socialize much.

FLEMMING

Were you aware that she had sneaked out of her home to come to the party without her parent's knowledge or permission?

RUSSELL

Absolutely not.

FLEMMING

Did she have anything to drink?

RUSSELL

The first thing she had was a beer. Then she wanted something harder. She told me that she was tired of being cooped up at home and was letting herself go. She had a gin and tonic. I told her to take it easy, but Sarah wouldn't go for it. She kept on drinking.

Russell's testimony sounds rehearsed.

FLEMMING

How did Sarah and you end up upstairs?

RUSSELL

We danced some. She was having a good time, I could tell. All of a sudden, she wanted to go upstairs with me. I wasn't so sure it was a good idea, but she insisted. I think she had a crush on me.

FLEMMING

What happened then?

RUSSELL

She came on to me strong. She was totally drunk... She practically jumped on me.

MARGARET

That's not true!

Diller gives Margaret a sharp stare but refrains from rebuking her.

JUDGE DILLER

Strike that from the record. The jury is directed to disregard Mrs. Strobel's statement. I'll have no more outbursts in my courtroom. Continue, Mr. Flemming.

FLEMMING

What happened then, Russell?

RUSSELL

I told Sarah we should go out on the balcony. Maybe the fresh air would help clear her head. As soon as we were there though, she came on to me strong again.

(MORE)

RUSSELL (CONT'D)
I tried to pull away, but she bit me on the lip. I tried to get away, but when she came at me again, I pushed her away. She -- she lost her -- her balance...

Russell breaks down. It's all theatrical.

RUSSELL (CONT.)
I'm sorry. I'm so sorry it happened. It was an accident!

FLEMMING
I have nothing further.

INT. COURTROOM - LATER

Colton is on the witness stand. He glances at Russell and smiles.

FLEMMING
Were you at the party on the night that Sarah Strobel was injured?

COLTON
Yes.

FLEMMING
Would you be able to describe how she was behaving that night?

COLTON
Sarah was having a good time. She was having a lot of fun. She was letting it all hang out.

FLEMMING
Did she appear drunk to you at any time during the part?

COLTON
She got totally wasted. Yeah, she was drunk.

FLEMMING
Did you see her with Russell Danley?

COLTON
She was all over Russell. She pulled him off the dance floor and dragged him upstairs.

FLEMMING
You witnessed this?

COLTON
The whole thing.

FLEMMING
You're corroborating Russell
Danley's testimony?

COLTON
Uh-huh. Every word Russell said is
true.

Colton catches Peg's eyes. She knows he's lying and looks totally shocked. He looks away quickly.

INT. COURTROOM - LATER

Stan is on the stand. He too glances at Russell and smiles.

FLEMMING
Mr. Fogel, were at the party too,
is that correct?

STAN
Yes, sir.

FLEMMING
Were you a witness to the events on
the balcony?

STAN
Yes, sir.

FLEMMING
Can you describe to me what you saw?

STAN
Yes, sir.

FLEMMING
Please, go ahead.

STAN
Well, it was like Russell said. I
saw him on the balcony with Sarah.
She was all over him. He tried get
way, then she comes at him again
and he pushed her back a little.
Then all of a sudden, she loses her
balance, hits the railing and over
she goes.

Stan's clearly not the sharpest pencil in the pack; but he's corroborated Russell's testimony. Flemming is satisfied.

FLEMMING

I have nothing further.

Ciprich gets up and approaches the witness stand.

CIPRICH

Mr. Fogel, I remind you, you're under oath.

STAN

I know. I'm a regular churchgoer. I read the bible.

CIPRICH

Mr. Fogel, were you the only person outside?

STAN

No, like I said, Russell and Sarah were --

CIPRICH

Besides them and yourself.

STAN

Yes, sir. There was nobody else outside, besides, I guess wild animals.

There is laughter. Diller silences them with a stern glance.

CIPRICH

Why were you outside during the party when everybody else was inside?

STAN

Well... you know, I had to... I had to take a leak.

CIPRICH

You went outside to relieve yourself even though there were bathrooms inside?

(glances at his notes)

In fact, there were five bathrooms in that house.

STAN

Hey, I couldn't wait on line. I had to go real bad.

CIPRICH
Did anyone see you go outside?

STAN
I dunno. Probably not.

CIPRICH
So you have no one to corroborate that you were actually outside and witnessed the incident on the balcony?

JUDGE DILLER
Stop badgering the witness. If he says he was answering nature's call, then so be it. He's not on trial here. If you have nothing worthwhile to ask him, sit yourself down.

CIPRICH
Just one more question. Mr. Fogel, when you witnessed Sarah fall from that balcony, how did she land?

STAN
(long pause)
Uh, I don't remember.

INT. COURTROOM - LATER

TAMMY WYCKOFF is on the stand. She's a bleached blond wearing too much make up. She looks like a hooker dressed up in a business suit. Her nose has a noticeable bump; it looks like it was broken in the past.

CIPRICH
Ms. Wyckoff, do you know the defendant, Russell Danley?

TAMMY
Yes, Your Honor.

JUDGE DILLER
Little lady, you address me as Your Honor. Just answer the questions without titles.

TAMMY
Yes, Your Honor.

There is some laughter throughout the court room. Diller SLAMS his gavel down and that shuts up everybody quickly.

CIPRICH

Ms. Wyckoff, how do you know Russell?

TAMMY

We dated a couple of times.

CIPRICH

When you went out with Russell, was he ever abusive towards you?

FLEMMING

Objection! Mr. Russell is not on trial here for any supposed injury to Ms. Wyckoff. This has no relevance whatsoever.

CIPRICH

Your honor, Ms. Wyckoff can testify to the defendant's character, which certainly has relevance here.

JUDGE DILLER

(grudgingly)

Overruled. Tread lightly, Mr. Ciprich.

CIPRICH

Ms. Wyckoff, did Russell Danley ever strike you?

Tammy glances at Russell and then at his father. They glare back at her; but she musters up enough courage to answer.

TAMMY

Yeah, Russell hit me a bunch of times. He's got a short fuse.

(rubs her nose)

The last time he hit me, he broke my nose, so I broke up with him.

INT. COURTROOM - LATER

Dr. Rivers is on the witness stand. Ciprich questions him.

CIPRICH

Doctor Rivers, will you please describe Sarah Strobel's present condition.

DR. RIVERS

As a result of her fall, Sarah suffered significant damage to her temporal lobes and also injured her spinal chord. Until recently, she was in a coma.

CIPRICH

Doctor, in plain English. What does that mean for Sarah?

DR. RIVERS

She's suffered severe brain damage and is a quadriplegic. Her cognitive skills are severely limited. She can't talk, respond to stimulus, or is even aware of what's around her. She's in what we call a vegetative state. She has no awareness of the world around her. She's also paralyzed from the waist down and has no ambulatory skills whatsoever.

CIPRICH

In your professional opinion, what are the chances of Sarah's recovery?

DR. RIVERS

None.

CIPRICH

None?

DR. RIVERS

Yes, barring any new medical breakthroughs, Sarah's condition is permanent.

CIPRICH

PERMANENT!

Margaret GROANS and buries her face in her hands and starts to cry. The JURY notices. They also look upon Sarah with great sympathy.

CIPRICH (CONT.)

It's a tragedy for this to happen to one so young. Truly tragic!

JUDGE DILLER

Counselor, keep your opinions to yourself. While this court has all the sympathy in the world for Sarah's condition, I won't allow theatrics in this room. Do you have any more questions for the witness?

Ciprich nods and turns back to Dr. Rivers.

CIPRICH

Doctor, on the night that Sarah was hurt, what was her blood alcohol content?

DR. RIVERS

It was point zero four.

CIPRICH

The legal limit in this state is point one zero, is that correct?

DR. RIVERS

Yes.

CIPRICH

Sarah's BAC was LESS THAN HALF the legal limit!

DR. RIVERS

Yes.

CIPRICH

Is it a correct statement that under the laws of this state, Sarah Strobel was not legally drunk on the night of her accident?

DR. RIVERS

That's correct.

CIPRICH

Would you agree then that Sarah Strobel could not possibly have been drunk that night and that the defendant lied about her condition?

FLEMMING

Objection! Your Honor, legal limits are subjective. Alcohol inebriation can be affected radically by a person's body weight, gender and body fat percentage. Sarah Strobel is a small girl. According to studies, neither BAC nor the number of drinks consumed are necessarily accurate indications of the level of impairment. Tolerance to alcohol varies from one person to another.

CIPRICH

Doctor Rivers, based on Sarah Strobel's gender and body fat percentage and the level of alcohol in her blood, is it your professional opinion that she was drunk?

Before Rivers can answer, Diller cuts in.

DILLER

Mr. Flemming has made an effective counter argument. Move on, counselor.

FLEMMING

Your honor. I think the jury has a right to hear Dr. River's response.

DILLER

Don't beat a dead horse to death. Move on.

Diller's tone brooks no argument. He exchanges glances with George Danley. They're friendly with one another.

Ciprich is angry but he doesn't have the courage to stand up to Diller.

CIPRICH

Dr. Rivers, according to the medical report, there was a drug in Sarah Strobel's system. It's called --

(struggles with word)

keta -- mine --- hydro -- cholo --- ride.

DR. RIVERS

Yes.

CIPRICH
In layman's terms, what type of
drug is this?

DR. RIVERS
It's a date rape drug.

CIPRICH
This date rape drug was found in
Sarah's system?

DR. RIVERS
Yes.

CIPRICH
What does it do?

DR. RIVERS
Once the full effects of the drug
takes hold, it usually makes
victims physically helpless and
open to sexual assault.

FLEMMING
Objection! There was no evidence
of sexual assault on Sarah Strobel.

JUDGE DILLER
(to Ciprich)
Don't even go there, counselor.
I'll throw you out of this court.

CIPRICH
I had no intentions, Your Honor.
But Dr. Rivers, there was evidence
of a injury to Sarah Strobel face,
is that correct?

DR. RIVERS
Yes. She had a large bruise on her
left cheek.

CIPRICH
Was that from the fall?

DR. RIVERS
No.

CIPRICH
Are you absolutely certain?

DR. RIVERS

Yes. When she fell, she landed on her back. The police report verifies this. She did not land on her face.

CIPRICH

What do you believe happened?

DR. RIVERS

She was struck with a fist, repeatedly. The force of the blows propelled her backwards against the railing. It gave away and she fell.

FLEMMING

Objection! Dr. Rivers was not a witness to the events on the balcony.

JUDGE DILLER

Dr. Rivers, you will limit yourself to medical diagnosis. You are not a crime scene investigator, do I make myself loud and clear?

Rivers nods meekly.

CIPRICH

Dr. Rivers, let me lead you back to medicine then. How does the date rape drug keta -- mine --- hydro -- cholo --- ride usually end up in a person's system?

DR. RIVERS

Ketamine can come in the form of a powder. It is usually slipped into a drink and is colorless and odorless.

CIPRICH

Do you believe this date rape drug was slipped into Sarah's drink?

DR. RIVERS

Yes.

CIPRICH

By Russell Danley?

DR. RIVERS

Yes.

FLEMMING

Objection! There is no evidence that Russell slipped the drug into the system. It could have been someone else!

JUDGE DILLER

That's it! Dr. Rivers you are excused from the witness stand!

Ciprich musters up the courage and turns to the jury.

CIPRICH

Ladies and gentleman of the jury, if someone else slipped her the drug, why did Russell Danley end up with her alone in the upstairs bedroom? Who else had the motive? Who struck her with the fist?

INT. COURTROOM - LATER

Peggy is on the witness stand. She looks overwhelmed. Ciprich is about to question her, but Diller cuts in.

JUDGE DILLER

I warn you, counselor, behave yourself.

Ciprich bows.

CIPRICH

Yes, Your Honor.

(turns to Peggy)

Now, Ms. Thomas, Sarah came to the party with you, is that correct?

PEGGY

Yes.

CIPRICH

Did she sneak out of her house to come?

PEGGY

It was my fault. She didn't want to disobey her parents, but I kept pressing her. Called her chicken.

(looks at Sarah in the wheelchair and breaks down)

Oh, Sarah, I'm so sorry!

Ciprich gives Peggy a few moments to compose herself.

CIPRICH

Peggy, you're not on trial here. Russell Danley is. As a close friend of Sarah's, can you tell us whether she drank at all?

PEGGY

Hardly ever. Mr. and Mrs. Strobel frowned upon drinking. They taught her good values. Sarah never got into trouble. Ever. We all called her miss goody two-shoes.

CIPRICH

Did she drink at the party?

PEGGY

She told me she would only have one beer. She didn't like the taste. She only had one beer at the party.

CIPRICH

Are you sure?

PEGGY

I knew it was her first big party. She was really innocent, you know, so I tried to keep an eye on her. She had one beer and then later I saw Russell get her something else from the bar. But it wasn't a beer though.

CIPRICH

Russell got her another drink? You are sure?

PEGGY

Yes.

CIPRICH

Did Sarah spend time with anyone else at the party? Could it have been someone else who got her the drink?

PEGGY

No. She never got the chance to mix with anyone else. Russell was all over her as soon as we arrived. He got her another drink after they finished dancing. That was before... before he led her away.

CIPRICH
To where? What did you see?

PEGGY
I saw Russell taking her up stairs.

CIPRICH
Willingly?

PEGGY
It didn't look that way. He was urging her to come. Then when she resisted, he pulled her along. She seemed, you know, too weak to resist.

CIPRICH
Did you think she was drunk?

PEGGY
No, I know drunk and it didn't look that way. She looked... woozy.

CIPRICH
Why didn't you try to help her?

PEGGY
(long pause)
Colton pulled me back to the dance floor. I was having too much of a good time and just let it go. I -- I didn't know something bad would happen to Sarah.

Peg hangs her head in shame.

INT. COURTROOM - LATER

Ciprich turns to Diller.

CIPRICH
Your Honor, I'd like to call the defendant back to the witness stand.

Diller is not pleased.

Flemming rises to his feet.

FLEMMING
The prosecution had ample opportunity to cross-examine the defendant earlier!

CIPRICH

I wish to cross examine him based on testimony given by the other witnesses.

FLEMMING

You're going to be wasting the court's time by treading old ground.

CIPRICH

Your Honor, according to trial procedures, I do have the right --

DILLER

Don't try to teach me the law, counselor!

The courtroom appears shocked by Diller's vehemence.

He quickly composes himself.

DILLER

You may cross examine the witness. Tread lightly.

INT. COURTROOM - LATER

Russell's back on the witness stand. He doesn't look too happy and glances at his dad for support.

George nods imperceptibly, indicating that everything will be all right.

CIPRICH

Mr. Danley, how long have you been friends with Colton Harris and Stan Fogel?

RUSSELL

A long time. Since grade school.

CIPRICH

Are you three close?

RUSSELL

We're like brothers.

CIPRICH

Do you do things for each other?

RUSSELL

Like what?

CIPRICH

Oh, let's say, if one of you were
in a bind, would you help each
other out?

RUSSELL

I told you. They're like my brothers.

CIPRICH

I'll take that as a yes. Mr.
Danley, would you lie for each other?

FLEMMING

Objection! Objection! Your Honor,
Colton Harris and Dan Fogel are not
on trial here!

CIPRICH

But the defendant is! I --

DILLER

Strike that from the record!
Counselor, I warned you --

CIPRICH

My apologizes, Your Honor, I was
trying to establish --

DILLER

You're establishing mischief in my
court. I think you should rest
your case. I won't allow any more
of your shenanigans in my courtroom.

CIPRICH

Please, Your Honor, just one more
thing!

DILLER

No.

CIPRICH

I beg you. I place myself at this
your mercy. You're free to hold me
in contempt if I cross the line
again. But please, please allow me
to ask a few more questions.

Diller considers for a long moment.

DILLER

You're a hair away from being
tossed out of this courtroom. Tread
carefully.

Ciprich is visibly relieved. He turns back to Russell.

CIPRICH
Mr. Danley, may I see your hands.

Russell glances at the judge.

FLEMMING
Your Honor, what relevance does
this have to this trial?

CIPRICH
I assure you, this has relevance.
I'm staking my reputation on it.

DILLER
(to Russell)
Show us your hands.

Russell grudgingly takes his left hand and puts it forward.

CIPRICH
Your other hand please.

Russell hesitates.

CIPRICH (CONT.)
Please, Mr. Danley, show us your
right hand.

Russell slowly obeys.

CIPRICH (CONT.)
Please spread your fingers and let
us see your knuckles.

Russell does so. There are fresh cuts on his knuckles.

CIPRICH (CONT.)
Mr. Danley, will you explain to
this court how you sustained those
cuts on your right knuckles?

RUSSELL
I -- I punched the wall in
frustration... because... because
of what happened to Sarah.

CIPRICH
You injure yourself over Sarah's
plight? That's touching. Do you
still maintain that you never
struck her with your fist?

RUSSELL
I didn't hit her.

CIPRICH
That ring on your right hand, what
is it?

RUSSELL
My high school ring.

CIPRICH
Do you always wear it?

RUSSELL
Yes.

CIPRICH
Can you please take it off and show
it us?

FLEMMING
Where is this leading to? This
ring has no relevance whatsoever!

CIPRICH
I'll show you where this is going
if the defendant shows us his ring.
And I absolutely assure you, it has
relevance.

Ciprich turns to Diller.

Diller looks displeased. He takes a long moment to respond
and does so reluctantly.

DILLER
Let's see the ring.

Ciprich takes the ring from Russell's finger and examines it
closely.

CIPRICH
This class ring has a dragon on it,
which I believe is the mascot of
our local high school. I would
like to pass it to the jury for review.

Diller nods; but he's none too happy about it.

Ciprich passes it over to the JURY MEMBERS, who start to
examine it.

He goes back to the prosecution table, removes two blown up pictures and tacks them onto a board at the front of the courtroom.

One picture shows Sarah with a large red welt on her cheek. The second picture is a close up of the injury. There is the clear impression of a dragon on her skin.

There a murmurs throughout the courtroom.

Ciprich turns to the jury.

CIPRICH

These pictures of Sarah were taken after her fall off the balcony on the night in question. The impression of the dragon on her face EXACTLY matches the mascot on the defendant's ring.

Ciprich turns back to Russell. He has a smirk on his face.

CIPRICH (CONT.)

Now, Mr. Danley, do you still maintain that you did not hit Sarah?

INT.COURTROOM - LATER

Ciprich is finishing up his closing arguments. He's addressing the jury.

CIPRICH

(points to Sarah)

Sarah Strobel had her whole life ahead of her. She was beautiful and bright. She was ready to go off to college. But now she is PERMANENTLY paralyzed and PERMANENTLY brain damaged. She's in a vegetative state. She can't walk. She can't talk. She can't feed herself or answer nature's call by herself. She can't even lift her arms to hug her parents. She is virtually dead to this world. Why should this happen? Why did it happen? Who was RESPONSIBLE?

(points to Russell)

Sarah Strobel's present condition is as a direct result from the vicious actions of the defendant.

(MORE)

CIPRICH (CONT'D)

Despite his claims of an accident, the truth of his actions are clearly revealed by the evidence. Witnesses have testified to his temper. They have testified to his actions on the night in question. And testimony clearly shows that Russell Danley KNOWINGLY drugged Sarah with a DATE RAPE drug. He KNOWINGLY tried to take advantage of her. He PURPOSELY struck her in the face and caused her to fall off the balcony. We have CLEAR evidence from the ring he was wearing. IRREFUTABLE PROOF. His callous actions caused her serious injury and irreparable harm. Russell Danley DESTROYED Sarah Strobel's life!

INT. COURTROOM - LATER

Now it's Flemming's turn to address the jury. He makes an impassioned plea.

FLEMMING

The evidence that the prosecution has spoken of with such conviction is CIRCUMSTANTIAL at best. Medical data has to be weighed against mitigating factors. Doctors make mistakes. They make informed opinions based on data; but their judgment is NOT irrefutable. While each of our hearts go out to Sarah, we have eyewitness testimony of her actions that night and what happened on that balcony. Sarah sneaked out of her house and, without her parent's knowledge, went to a party. She consumed alcohol; but she clearly wasn't a drinker and became drunk. She was attracted to Russell and made advances on him. Now, under normal circumstances, these things happen. Young people get drunk. Young people are attracted to each other. Young people become amorous. But as to what happened on that balcony, we have an EYEWITNESS to the events.

(MORE)

FLEMMING (CONT'D)
 Somebody who saw exactly what happened. IRREFUTABLE evidence. Russell Danley did not intend to hurt Sarah Stobel. It was an ACCIDENT. A terrible, terrible accident. A young man should not be railroaded into jail because of an ACCIDENT!

As Flemming finishes, George makes eye contact with the jury members. Many look away. They are intimidated by him.

INT. COURTROOM - LATER

HAL JONES (fifty something, gray-haired) rises. He's the jury foreman.

JUDGE DILLER
 Has the jury reached a verdict?

HAL
 We have, Your Honor.

Diller beckons.

Hal walks over to Diller, hands him the verdict written on a piece of paper, which he peruses and then hands back. He nods as if satisfied by the result.

JUDGE DILLER
 Let's hear it.

HAL
 In the case of people versus Russell Jacob Danley, we find the defendant... innocent of manslaughter.

Margaret and Jeremiah rise and cry out in dismay. They are crestfallen.

Russell has a big smile on his face.

George nods as if the outcome was never in doubt.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - BACK PORCH - DAY

Sarah sits on the back porch in a wheelchair basking in the sunshine. Her golden hair and pink skin glow with health, but her eyes stare out into space. There is no recognition from her of the beautiful day outside.

BAMBI, the doe Sarah rescued, is inside the fenced yard. He walks up to Sarah and licks her hand.

There is no acknowledgement from Sarah. No movement at all.

Bambi licks her again. Nothing. Sarah is still as a statue. Only the gentle rise and fall of her breast indicates that she's alive.

Bambi walks away.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Margaret cuts carrots. She has a clear view of Sarah on the porch from the window above the sink. She checks up on her daughter regularly as she works. She sees Bambi walkway without any response from Sarah.

Margaret turns away in anguish. She starts to cut the carrots faster... and faster... until she slices her left thumb open.

Margaret stares at the blood welling out of her wound as it pools around the carrots. Tears well up into her eyes. A drop falls into the blood.

Margaret still doesn't move. She stares at the blood and shoulders the pain, draws it into her as if it will help her forget her paralyzed daughter outside.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

The hole is almost six feet deep. Jeremiah takes several scoopfuls out with his digger and piles the dirt in a heap near the grave.

He gets out to inspect the hole. The day is hot. He wipes sweat from his brow. He nods, satisfied with the depth of the hole.

Jeremiah goes back to the digger and starts to drive it back towards the house.

EXT. STROBEL HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

Jeremiah has parked the digger a good distance from the house. He walks the rest of the way and comes upon Sarah sitting in her wheelchair on the back porch.

Jeremiah stares at his daughter. His face is impassive but the pain is evident in the depths of his eyes. He goes over to inspect Bambi's leg and appears satisfied with his recovery.

He turns back to Sarah, clears away strands of hair from her face. Looks directly at her face, sees how beautiful his little girl is; but she doesn't respond.

Jeremiah swallows thickly and wheels Sarah back into the house.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

The family is seated for dinner. Sarah's sitting in the wheelchair with a bib around her neck. Margaret wipes drool dripping from her mouth and then proceeds to feed Sarah.

Jeremiah stops her.

JEREMIAH

Shouldn't we say grace?

Margaret shrugs.

Jeremiah says grace and they proceed to have dinner.

This dinner is in marked contrast with past dinners, when Sarah was whole. There used to be laughter; a strong familial bond. Now, dinner is just a routine and there is lots of silence. They are all dead husks, with little life in them.

Margaret has mashed up Sarah's food and feeds it to her with a spoon, holding her mouth open with one hand and feeding her with the other. Sarah is paralyzed below the waist, but she has some movement in her face. When Margaret puts food in her mouth, Sarah reflexively swallows. A lot of the food dribbles out of her mouth, but Margaret patiently wipes it away.

Jeremiah hears Margaret wince in pain and notices the bandage on her left thumb.

JEREMIAH

What happened to your thumb?

MARGARET

I cut it chopping carrots.

JEREMIAH

Do you want me to feed her?

Margaret shakes her head "no".

Jeremiah goes back to eating.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - LATER

With Margaret looking on, Jeremiah gently lifts Sarah out of her wheelchair and carries her upstairs. She is like a small rag doll in his huge arms.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - SARAH'S ROOM - NIGHT

Jeremiah gently lays Sarah down into a sitting position on her bed and holds onto her. He looks away as Margaret starts to change Sarah's clothes.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - OUTSIDE BATHROOM - NIGHT

Jeremiah waits patiently outside the door. A toilet FLUSHES. Margaret opens the door.

Jeremiah walks into...

THE BATHROOM

Jeremiah lifts Sarah off the toilet and carries her back to her...

BEDROOM

Jeremiah lays Sarah down on her bed and pulls the sheets up.

Sarah eyes are open. She stares at the ceiling.

Jeremiah closes her eyelids with his hand as Margaret looks on with a bitter expression on her face.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - MARGARET AND JEREMIAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Margaret and Jeremiah are in bed. The lights are still on. Jeremiah retrieves a bible from a night stand next to the bed and props himself up on a pillow.

Margaret lays down and pulls up the covers.

Jeremiah turns to his wife.

JEREMIAH

(surprised)

You're not reading tonight?

MARGARET

No.

Margaret turns off the light next to her side of the bed and goes to sleep.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

It's a small town. Quaint shops line both sides of the street. There are two gas stations in the distance, on opposite sides of the street.

An van drives along the main street.

INT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

Margaret is behind the wheel. She's alone. She glances out the passenger window and sees:

Judge Diller is walking with George Danley towards a restaurant. George puts his arm around Diller and they laugh about something.

George turns and sees Margaret in the van. They lock eyes.

George hurriedly rushes inside of the restaurant with Diller.

Margaret's eyes narrow in anger.

EXT. TOWN - CONTINUOUS

Margaret drives a few blocks down and parks next to a meter along the side of the street.

INT. RORY'S DINER - DAY

A bell RINGS. Margaret steps in. There's a good lunch crowd. When they see who has entered, all eyes turn to Margaret.

There are no strangers in the diner. Everybody knows each other. Many shout out greetings to Margaret.

RORY, the owner is behind the long counter. He greets Margaret with a big smile.

RORY

Margaret!

MARGARET

Hi, Rory.

RORY

How are you doing?

MARGARET

I'm a... hanging in there. Mabel all right? Heard she had a spill.

RORY

Oh, she'll be back on her feet in no time. Her power-walkin' days are on hold though. How's Jeremiah?

MARGARET

He's all right.

RORY
How... how's Sarah?

It's a painful subject to broach. Margaret's reply is subdued.

MARGARET
She's... the same.

There's an uncomfortable silence. Rory tries to change the subject.

RORY
Have a seat. Nellie put a fresh peach cobbler in the oven. It'll be out in a jiffy.

MARGARET
I don't want to be away from Sarah too long. Can you just wrap me up roasted chicken, buns and some mashed potatoes?

RORY
Sure thing!

Rory fills a glass to the brim from the soda fountain and passes it to Margaret.

RORY
On the house.

Margaret takes a seat on a stool and sips the soda quietly. She turns and notices people in a booth. Hal and ALMA STEWART (forty, fat) are having lunch together. They were jurors at Russell's trial.

Margaret gets up and walks over to them. They glance up at her and greet her nervously.

ALMA
Hi, Margaret.

HAL
Hiya, Margaret.
(beat)
Is Sarah all right?

Margaret ignores the question.

MARGARET
You were both on the jury and you let him scott free.

HAL

Um... well, you see... the evidence...

MARGARET

Evidence? Did you even pay attention to it or were you too afraid of him to notice?

Hal and Alma visibly cringe. They know who Margaret's referring to.

ALMA

Now, Margaret that's not fair.

MARGARET

Fair? What about what happened to Sarah. Was that fair? Why? Why did you do it?

Hal and Alma look down at their plates, ashamed to speak.

MARGARET (CONT.)

You owe me an answer!

Alma lifts up her head slightly.

ALMA

You know my husband works at the lumberyard. I -- I was afraid of the consequences...

HAL

You gotta understand, Margaret, he's got influence... He wasn't pleased with Dr. River's testimony. I heard that he was fired from the hospital. You know George sits on the board.

Margaret turns to the other DINERS, who have been looking on.

MARGARET

(shouts)

So, his can boy get away with anything? Is that right?

Nobody answers.

MARGARET (CONT.)

Does George Danley own this town?

Not a peep anybody.

MARGARET (CONT.)
Has he bought you all?

There is dead silence in the diner.

Margaret turns around and walks out of the diner without getting her food.

In back corner, not visible before, Carol Danley sits quietly with a deep frown on her face.

INT. VAN - DAY

Margaret gets into the vehicle and grasps the steering wheel with both hands.

She's breathing heavily. Take a moment to catch her breath.

Then she puts her head down on the wheel and starts to cry.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

An OLD PICKUP drives down the two lane black top at a leisurely pace. There are no other cars on the road.

INT. PICKUP - CONTINUOUS

Jeremiah is behind the wheel. A country station plays on the radio.

He glances out the window as he passes a BIG SIGN next to a turnoff. It shows a smiling George Danley standing next to a lumber truck. It reads:

DANLEY LUMBER

Jeremiah looks away.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

Jeremiah's pickup has entered town. He passes a huge billboard with a picture of George and Russell Danley grinning widely in front of a Ford pickup. The caption reads. DANLEY FORD -- THE BEST DEALS AROUND!

A hundred yards down the road, the pickup passes a card dealership. It's Danley Ford.

The pickup keeps driving along as small shops start to line both sides of the street.

Jeremiah passes a gas station. DANLEY EXXON.

There's another station directly across the street. JOE'S SERVICE STATION.

Jeremiah turns into that one.

EXT JOE'S SERVICE STATION - DAY

An African-American man, JOE WASHINGTON (sixty, gray hair and affable) steps out of the garage to greet Jeremiah as he gets out of his pickup.

JOE

Look who it is. It's Jeremiah Strobel!

Joe's got huge white teeth and a big, big grin. He shakes Jeremiah's hand vigorously.

JEREMIAH

Joe, how are you?

JOE

Good. Good. Can't complain.

JEREMIAH

Bess and the kids all right?

JOE

Oh, they're the same. Joe do this. Daddy buy me this. They're as right as sunshine. How's Margaret?

JEREMIAH

She's all right.

JOE

(beat)

Little Sarah?

JEREMIAH

She's... ah ... well, the Lord is seein' after her.

JOE

(nods)

Oh, yeah, you hafta trust in the Lord, Jeremiah. There's nothin' else we can do. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. The Lord can perform any miracle if we beg him. I'm always prayin' for Sarah. Bess and I do it, right and regular.

Jeremiah grasps Joe's arm in gratitude.

JEREMIAH
 (really meaning it)
 Thank you, Joe.

JOE
 Sure, sure. Wouldn't be a good
 Christian if we didn't. Are you
 here to fill up?

JEREMIAH
 That's right.

JOE
 You came at a bad time. My pump's
 not workin' since this morning. I
 called service, but those slowpokes
 haven't arrived yet. I don't
 expect the pumps to be operatin'
 till tomorrow.

JEREMIAH
 I'm running real low. It's in the
 red. I don't want to risk driving
 the pickup back home.

JOE
 Go across the street. Danley's
 pumps are workin'.

JEREMIAH
 (beat)
 That's all right. Joe, can I
 leave my pickup overnight?
 Margaret will drive me in tomorrow.

JOE
 Why, you just hafta go across --

Joe stops himself. Jeremiah won't get gas at the Danley's.

JOE (CONT.)
 There's nowhere to turn in this
 town without runnin' into something
 owned by Danley. If you leave your
 pickup here, how you gonna get home?

JEREMIAH
 I'll walk home.

JOE
 Walk?!? Why that's a good six,
 seven miles!

JEREMIAH

Oh, I can do it.

JOE

If you wait another hour, I can drive you home.

JEREMIAH

It's all right.

(pats his stomach)

Could use the exercise. Margaret's home cookin', you know.

(takes out pickup

keys hands them over)

Thanks, Joe. I'll be back tomorrow.

Jeremiah starts to walk away with Joe looking on.

EXT. ROAD - LATER

Jeremiah's worked up a sweat. It's a hot day. He wipes his brow. It's a empty road, not a car in sight, until...

A HUGE EIGHTEEN WHEELER barrels out onto the road from Danley Lumber carrying a full load. It almost swipes Jeremiah, but he hastily scoots out of the way.

The trucker BLARES his horn at Jeremiah and drives away.

Jeremiah is not fazed. He keeps on walking.

EXT. ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Jeremiah's about a hundred yards past Danley Lumber.

In the distance a BLACK BMW with tinted windows comes out of the lumberyard and starts down the road in Jeremiah's direction. It's going fast.

The BMW passes Jeremiah and then SCREECHES to a halt about a hundred feet down. When Jeremiah reaches the car, the driver side window comes down.

It's George Danley. He looks surprised.

GEORGE

Jeremiah, what are you doing?

Jeremiah's not happy to see George. There's the briefest flicker of anger on his face.

JEREMIAH

I'm walking home.

GEORGE
Where's your pickup? Did it break
down?

JEREMIAH
It's at Joe's shop. He couldn't
fill me up. His pumps weren't workin'.

GEORGE
Why didn't you go across the street
to my --

George stops himself. He's not a stupid man. He understands
in an instant.

GEORGE (CONT.)
Look, this thing that's happened
between us... about your girl.
This isn't a big town. We have to
put it past us somehow...

Jeremiah's stiff lipped.

GEORGE (CONT.)
Get in. I'll drive you home.

JEREMIAH
I've got legs.

Jeremiah starts walking.

GEORGE
Chrissakes! Jeremiah, get in!

Jeremiah keeps on walking.

GEORGE (CONT.)
(under his breath)
Asshole.

George snorts and drives away.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jeremiah walks into the kitchen through the back door. He's
dusty.

Margaret looks up from feeding Sarah.

MARGARET
You're late. I was about to call
around town for you.

Jeremiah gets himself a glass of water and drains it in one gulp.

JEREMIAH
I walked home from town.

MARGARET
Walked?

JEREMIAH
The tank was running on empty.
Joe's pumps were not working, so I
left the pickup there until
tomorrow. You'll have to drive me in.

MARGARET
You didn't go to Danley's across
the street?

JEREMIAH
Nope.

Margaret nods in approval.

MARGARET
Come and eat.

Jeremiah comes over to Sarah and touches her hair and strokes her cheeks.

JEREMIAH
How's my little girl doing today?

Of course Sarah doesn't respond.

Jeremiah takes a seat and starts to eat.

JEREMIAH (CONT.)
Passed the lumberyard while walking
home. George Danley saw me.
Offered me a ride...

Margaret looks at him sharply.

JEREMIAH (CONT.)
Wouldn't take his charity. I
walked home. All the way.

MARGARET
Good.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Margaret sits on the edge of the bed and sighs heavily.

MARGARET

I'm so tired.

JEREMIAH

You're tired? I'm the one who
walked home!

Jeremiah comes over and starts to knead her shoulders.

JEREMIAH (CONT.)

You got so much more to do with
Sarah nowadays. You can't do it
all by myself. Maybe we should get
you some help.

MARGARET

You know we can't afford it.
Insurance is only covering so much.
Sarah has to go to regular therapy
now. I don't even know how we're
going to pay for that new van we
had to get for her.

JEREMIAH

The hospitals and clinics... they
have a thing called charity care...

Margaret is silent for a bit. She looks drawn, tired and sad.

MARGARET

Is that what we come down to now.
To charity? To taking handouts?

Jeremiah is silent. He doesn't answer.

Margaret lays down on the bed and goes to sleep.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jeremiah feeds Sarah carefully, with even more care than
Margaret. He talks to her as he's doing so.

JEREMIAH

Now, you remember the time that we
went out to the pond in woods and
had that fishin' contest?

Of course Sarah is silent.

JEREMIAH (CONT.)

You caught three sunnies! Remember
how big they were?

Margaret has started to do the dishes. She watches quietly with a frown on her face.

Jeremiah is still talking to Sarah.

JEREMIAH (CONT.)

Today they buried Mr. Hobson. Remember how good he was to you in fifth grade? Drove you all the way home when you fell down when those those bad kids pushed you. I'm gonna take extra good care of his plot. I'll put fresh flowers on it every chance I get.

There is not a flicker of reaction from Sarah. She just swallows reflexively as her dad puts food in her mouth.

JEREMIAH (CONT.)

Some day you're gonna get off this chair and we're gonna walk into those woods together again. We're gonna go over to that pond and we're gonna have another contest. Then I'll show you who's the real fisherman!

(beat)

Someday, you'll tell your children, how ole grandpa --

Margaret suddenly turns around.

MARGARET

Stop! Stop it!

Jeremiah is taken aback by Margaret's sudden outburst.

JEREMIAH

Margaret --

MARGARET

She's never gonna talk! She's never gonna walk! She's never going to have children! Do you hear me? Never!

Margaret slams down a dish breaking it and runs out of the kitchen crying.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - BEDROOM - LATER

Jeremiah is seated at a small table in the corner with an assortment of tools. There's a light shining on the table to see better. He patiently carves wood with a sharp knife.

It's his hobby.

Margaret walks in. Jeremiah does not turn, quietly continues to carve wood.

MARGARET
(softly)
I'm sorry.

Jeremiah nods but doesn't say anything.

Margaret walks away.

INT. STROBEL - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Peg and Sally are over. They have brought over a pie.

Sally hands it over to Margaret.

SALLY
The peaches are from Herb's orchard.
I baked it before we came here.
It's hot and fresh.

PEGGY
I helped mom.

Sally and Peg glance around. They look uncomfortable.

SALLY
Peg's going off to college tomorrow.
We came to see Sarah.

PEGGY
I haven't seen her since the trial.

SALLY
Where's is she?

MARGARET
She's out back.

They follow Margaret out to the...

BACK PORCH

Sarah basks in the sunshine, oblivious to the world. Bambi lays under the shade of an overhanging oak, snoozing.

Margaret notices a mosquito that's settled onto Sarah's nose. She rushes over and shoos it away.

MARGARET
 (fiercely)
 Damn bugs!

Sarah and Peg appear surprised by Margaret's strong reaction.

Peg picks up a hand fan lying on a small table next to Sarah. It also has a pitcher and glass of water.

PEGGY
 Mrs. Strobel, I'll watch over Sarah.
 (voice cracks with emotion)
 I haven't talked to her in such a
 long while. You and mom go ahead
 and talk.

Margaret nods.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Margaret shares iced tea and slices of pie with Sally.

SALLY
 It's gonna be lonely around the
 house without Peggy.

MARGARET
 You should get a hobby, keep
 yourself busy. Maybe a even a job
 in town.

Sally nods.

MARGARET (CONT.)
 She's going off to college alone.
 It should have been Sarah and her
 together. That was always the plan.
 They talked about it since they
 were little.

SALLY
 Peggy almost didn't have the heart
 to go. She still blames herself...
 for what -- what happened.

MARGARET
 She didn't do anything. It was
 that damn boy!

Sally is surprised by Margaret's repeated use of the word "damn".

SALLY

Haven't seen you at Church for a couple of weeks.

MARGARET

My hands are full with Sarah. It's not easy to get her all the way over there. Besides, I don't want everybody staring at her.

SALLY

There's talk around town about what happened at Rory's. I'm glad you gave Hal and Alma a piece of your mind. We're supposed care about each other in this town. They knew that Russell was guilty.

MARGARET

The only thing they care about are their own hides -- and George Danley's shadow!

SARAH

Did you know Carol Danley was at Rory's when you were there?

MARGARET

No. I hope she heard it all.

SARAH

The word's out that Jeremiah left his car at Joe's instead of going to the Danley's station across the street... Carol told Katie -- who told me -- that Jeremiah refused a ride from her husband. She's mad as heck.

MARGARET

She's mad? Does she know how mad I am that her good-for-nothing son destroyed my Sarah's life and got away with it because her hoodlum husband strong-arms this town! No, she won't know the meaning of mad until somebody brings misery down upon her house!

Sally's taken aback by Margaret's overwhelming anger. This is not the gentle, kind-hearted soul she's known all of life.

Sally reaches out and places her hand on top of Margaret's.

SARAH
Margie, are you all right?

Margaret takes a long time to answer.

MARGARET
I'm drained. I'm... hollow inside.
The only thing I can muster up
anymore is anger. I'm sorry.

SALLY
You're depressed.

Margaret doesn't deny it.

SALLY (CONT.)
I've known you all my life. I've
never seen you like this. You're
under a lot of stress. Go see the
doctor. Treat yourself for the
depression, They have pills.

Margaret remains quiet.

SALLY (CONT.)
If you won't do it for yourself, do
it for your husband and your child.
You hold this family together.
They need you. Sarah needs you.
Promise me you will?

Peg comes back. Her eyes are red-rimmed. She's been crying.

Margaret rises.

MARGARET
I shouldn't leave Sarah alone
outside for too long.

SALLY
Margie, you'll listen to what I said?

Margaret nods her head slowly.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

DR. GRAINGER (sixty and gray) checks Margaret's blood
pressure and then her heartbeat. He appears satisfied.

Grainger writes something in her chart and turns back to
Margaret.

GRAINGER

Your pressure and heart are just fine. I don't see anything wrong with you. What seems to be the problem?

MARGARET

I need some pills. I'm tired all the time.

GRAINGER

Oh, that's easy! I can write you a script for vitamins. You can even get it over the counter.

Margaret shakes her head. She looks worn. Her eyes are hollow.

MARGARET

Everything inside of me is dead. If I could, I would wither... but I can't. I have to be there for her.

Grainger is silent. He appears to be aware of Margaret's situation and nods sympathetically.

GRAINGER

Margaret, taking care of Sarah is draining you physically and emotionally. I can help you with the physical part, but I think you should also see a psychiatrist. I can recommend someone who will help you.

MARGARET

No one can help me.

GRAINGER

You're under tremendous stress. I've never seen you like this. Take the vitamins and talk to a professional --

GRAINGER

You're depressed. I see that. I can prescribe something for you, but that won't fix your head. Talk to a therapist about what you're feeling. Dr. Bothwell is a wonderful doctor. I'll call her for you myself.

MARGARET

No.

GRAINGER

Be reasonable --

MARGARET

Give me some pills.

GRAINGER

Margaret --

Margaret grabs the side of her head.

MARGARET

Did you hear me? I need to stop
this pain!

Grainger sees the depth of Margaret's despair and nods
grudgingly.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - SARAH'S BEDROOM - DAY

Jeremiah walks in, dressed for church. He frowns when he
see that Margaret and Sarah and not ready.

JEREMIAH

Why, you two aren't ready yet.
We'll be late.

Margaret is on the bed with Sarah, slowly brushing her hair.

MARGARET

We're not going.

JEREMIAH

Now, Margaret, I thought we agreed --

MARGARET

I won't go.

JEREMIAH

You don't even say grace anymore.
You've given up readin' the bible.
You haven't been to church since
Sarah's accident.

MARGARET

Go by yourself, Jeremiah.

JEREMIAH

Now, you know it won't look seemly.
People will talk.

MARGARET

I don't care.

JEREMIAH

I know how you feel. You're angry and confused. But being angry at the Lord won't help none. That's a sin.

MARGARET

You go. You pray to god and ask him why he did this to my daughter. Do you understand me? You ask him why he did this.

JEREMIAH

You can't blame --

MARGARET

I want you to be the good Christian. Go to church.

JEREMIAH

Margaret --

MARGARET

Go!

JEREMIAH

That's all I have now. God's keepin' me sane!

Jeremiah storms out.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - SARAH'S BEDROOM - LATER

Margaret continues to brush Sarah's hair to work out the knots.

Her eyes are as distant as her daughter's. She stares out into space.

SMASH CUT

Sarah's on a balcony.

Russell comes at her and hits her hard. Once. Twice.

Sarah's lurches back and hits the railing. It breaks away and she falls, screaming.

Sarah lays on the ground in a broken heap.

Russell looks down at her, breathing heavily. He has a wicked grin on his face.

Beat.

Suddenly Margaret appears out of nowhere, screaming in rage and tackles Russell.

They tumble off the balcony together...

SLAM CUT BACK

Margaret drops the brush and runs out of the room.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Margaret rushes in and makes a beeline for the medicine cabinet. She takes out a bottle and swallows several pills.

She puts the medicine away and looks into the mirror.

She looks terrible.

EXT. STROBEL HOUSE - BACK PORCH - DAY

Father Paulson leans over Sarah and pushes her hair out of her face. He mutters a prayer under his breath and then makes the sign of the cross.

Margaret (who has witnessed the prayer) comes outside with a tray of biscuits and lemonade. She pours two glasses, gives one to Paulson and sits next to him on a chair.

Paulson takes a long sip of the lemonade.

FATHER PAULSON

I've told you for years, you should sell this lemonade. I've missed it at Sunday gatherings.

Margaret nods without comment.

FATHER PAULSON (CONT.)

It's so good to see Sarah again. That hair, it's a beacon of light. It glowed like burnished gold when I Christened her.

Margaret takes a sip of lemonade without a word.

Paulson stares out at the rows and rows of gravestones beyond the backyard fence.

FATHER PAULSON (CONT.)

I've Christened half of this town and perform services when they depart.

(points to the graveyard)

I've spent more time out there -- why, second only to you and Jeremiah.

MARGARET

Would you like more lemonade?

Paulson nods gladly and Margaret pours more. He takes a long sip and sits quietly for a few moments.

FATHER PAULSON

Jeremiah came to church alone the other day.

Margaret says nothing.

FATHER PAULSON (CONT.)

You didn't come. It's been weeks.

MARGARET

You hafta know how I've been with Sarah. It's -- it's a chore to move around with her.

FATHER PAULSON

Yes, of course...

(beat)

Margaret, I've talked to Jeremiah. He's a man of few words, as you know, but -- well, let me be plain spoken with you. Have you -- have you lost your faith in God?

Margaret doesn't say anything for a long time. Father Paulson is about to say something, when Margaret finally speaks.

MARGARET

I believe there is a Lord, father. I believe in a heaven and a hell. I believe I'm a good Christian. I've striven to do good all of my life. I've never knowingly hurt a soul. But when you ask me about "faith", I think of "trust". I trusted in God all of my life. I had faith. But --

(glances at Sarah)

Look at what happened to her! She didn't deserve this!

Paulson takes Margaret's hand and squeezes it.

FATHER PAULSON

My heart goes out to you. Oh, the pain you must be going through. I'm so sorry for you. Truly I am.
(beat)

Why do bad things happen to good folk? I've preached about it. You've heard my sermons. The Lord works in mysterious ways. How can we fathom what His will is? How dare we?

MARGARET

I have to. I'm a mother!

FATHER PAULSON

It's these extraordinary events that prove our composition. If we prove spiritually weak --

MARGARET

That boy should have been punished!

FATHER PAULSON

He will get his due. He will. On Judgment day, he will have to atone for all of his sins. That's the faith you must place in God.

MARGARET

Sometimes... sometimes, I'm so angry. Where was the justice? Why wasn't he punished? I -- I want to punish him! I want to tear him apart!

Paulson is surprised by the the depth of Margaret's anger. This is so unlike her.

Margaret sees him staring at her in shock. She is embarrassed and takes a moment to compose herself.

MARGARET

I'm sorry, father.

Paulson shakes his head. He appears to understand. Says in a quiet, sobering voice.

FATHER PAULSON

We all have bloody thoughts, Margaret.

(sighs)

It's human nature.

EXT. STRIP MALL - DAY

Margaret steps out of the van and goes around to open the side door. Sarah is in her wheelchair, which is strapped down.

Margaret pushes a button that extends a wheelchair ramp and brings Sarah out of the van, then slides the ramp back up.

There are a number of stores in the strip mall, including a physical therapy place with a handicap ramp.

Margaret starts to wheel Sarah towards the ramp... then comes to an abrupt halt.

A hulking pickup parks in the middle of two spaces in front of the TAXIDERMY SHOP. Russell finishes off a beer and gets out with buddies Colton and Stan.

They're dressed in hunting gear, back from a successful outing. There are two deer in the back of the pickup. The bigger deer's head is hanging over the side.

They're all laughing... until they see Margaret and Sarah.

Colton and Stan instantly become sober and avert their eyes.

Russell boldly locks eyes with Margaret. He sees Sarah, but there is no sympathy in those eyes.

Stan suddenly cries out.

STAN

Hey, I think the big one moved!

Russell draws a big hunting knife from a sheath at his heap, grabs the deer by the antlers and slices its neck. Blood gushes out onto the pavement.

Russell glances back at Margaret and smiles.

Margaret is disgusted. She turns away and quickly pushes Sarah up the ramp and goes inside.

INT. PHYSICAL THERAPIST - LATER

Margaret sits in a chair. She looks grim as she watches the THERAPIST tend to Sarah, who lays lifelessly on her stomach as her limbs are being exercised.

THERAPIST

Mrs. Strobel, are you all right?

Margaret is in a daze.

MARGARET

Huh?

THERAPIST

Are you all right -- you seem, well, you looked a little pale. Do you want something to drink?

MARGARET

No. No thank you.

THERAPIST

Sarah's looking thin. Do you feed her enough?

MARGARET

I try.

THERAPIST

I think you need to bring her in more often. She needs more -- oh, this looks bad.

Margaret instantly rises and walks over.

MARGARET

What's wrong?

The therapist hesitates

MARGARET (CONT.)

Tell me what's wrong!

The therapist lifts back Sarah's gown and reveals big red sores on her hips.

MARGARET

What's wrong with her?

THERAPIST

I think you should talk to the doctor.

INT. PHYSICAL THERAPIST - MOMENTS LATER

Margaret rises from the chair as the doctor walks in. She's surprised to see that it's Dr. Rivers.

MARGARET

Dr. Rivers.

DR. RIVERS

(smiling)

Hello, Margaret. Surprised to see me here?

MARGARET

I thought... Well, you're not working at the hospital anymore.

DR. RIVERS

Well, yes, that's right. I was let go from the hospital and happened to land here. It's not a bad place.

MARGARET

I heard you lost your job. George Danley wasn't happy about your testimony. I -- I'm sorry.

DR. RIVERS

Don't be sorry for anything! It's hard to believe that he has so much influence in this town. He seems to sit on every board. Anyway, let me take a look at Sarah.

Rivers goes over to Sarah and lifts back her gown and looks at the sores. When he turns back to Margaret, he face looks grim.

MARGARET

What's wrong with her?

DR. RIVERS

Margaret, Sarah needs more activity. She needs to be moved around more often. She's developed pressure sores.

MARGARET

Sores?

DR. RIVERS

It's common in paralysis patients. It happens when the body remains in one position for a long time. I wish we'd discovered this earlier. She's reached stage two.

MARGARET

Oh, my god.

DR. RIVERS

Don't worry just yet. I think we've detected it early enough. I want you to make sure Sarah doesn't sit or lie in one position for too long. You need to clean the sores with warm water and keep them dry.

(MORE)

DR. RIVERS (CONT'D)

Also, you need to bring her in more often. This can become a very serious problem and lead to infections. So, please be diligent.

MARGARET

How serious can it get?

DR. RIVERS

It can prove fatal.

INT. VAN - LATER

Margaret comes to an abrupt halt at the red light at the last second. She's in a daze.

A pickup, coming in the opposite direction, barrels through the intersection without coming to a stop at the red light.

A car going across the intersection, barely careens out of the way.

As the pickup zooms by, Margaret catches sight of the driver.

It's Russell.

Margaret's eyes narrow and her anger boils over. She abruptly turns the van around and goes after Russell.

INT. RUSSELL'S PICKUP - CONTINUOUS

Russell is chugging on a beer. He takes a long swallow and glances in the rear-view mirror and notices the van on his tail. It's almost on top of him.

RUSSELL

What the hell?

INT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

Margaret pulls up even with Russell's pickup and slides the driver's side window down.

MARGARET

Pull over! Pull over!

INT. RUSSELL'S PICKUP - CONTINUOUS

Russell hands his beer over to Stan. Colton puts on his seat belt next to him.

STAN

What going on?

COLTON
She's going to hit us!

Russell gives Margaret the finger.

RUSSELL
Crazy bitch!

EXT. ROAD - CONTINUOUS

It's an open stretch of road. A two lane black top.

The pickup outpaces the van and pulls ahead.

The van catches up again. Swerves a hard right, forcing the pickup onto the shoulder.

The pickup swings back onto the road and nearly clips the van.

INT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

Margaret makes a hard left to avoid hitting the pickup and falls back behind the pickup. She glances back at Sarah.

Her daughter sways with the movement of the van but is secure in her wheelchair. She is not aware of what is happening.

Margaret turns back to the van. There's a sheen of madness in her eyes.

She guns the van even with the pickup and jerks the steering wheel to the right.

EXT. ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The pickup careens onto the shoulder again and nearly hits the guard rail.

One of the DEER is ejected from the back and splatters onto the pavement in a spray of gore.

EXT. ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The van is almost even with the pickup again. But suddenly a PATROL CAR appears. It's coming towards them in the opposite lane.

The van makes a hard right, forcing the pickup onto the shoulder and takes a spot on the right lane -- narrowly missing the patrol car.

The patrol car zooms by, but then its lights go on and the sirens start to BLARE. It makes a hard U-turn.

EXT. ROAD - SHOULDER - MOMENTS LATER

Sheriff TOM HARPER (mid fifties, rugged with short, cropped hair) approaches Margaret, who stands outside of the van with Sarah in her wheelchair.

The pickup is parked a few paces away. Russell, Colton and Stan stand next to it frowning.

RUSSELL

I want you to arrest her!

STAN

She's crazy! She tried to kill us!

The sheriff glances around.

TOM

Now, I told you boys to keep the hollerin' down. I want to hear her side of the story.

(to Margaret)

Margaret, are you all right?

Margaret shrugs.

TOM

Sarah, all right?

MARGARET

She's fine.

TOM

What happened? They said you were trying to run them off the road.

Margaret stares at Russell with venom in her eyes.

MARGARET

You arrest him. He ran a red light.

TOM

Well, if he did, we'll take care of that, but did you try and chase him off the road? Margaret, I saw you in the other lane!

MARGARET

You go look in that car. He was drinking!

TOM

I will, but why were you --

MARGARET

Go look, Tom! You throw me in jail,
I don't care. But you go look and
do some justice!

The sheriff is surprised by Margaret's passion, but he turns around and goes and looks inside of Russell's pickup. Moments later, he brings out a three open bottles of beer and turns to Russell and his friends.

TOM

Looks like you boys are gonna take
some breathalyzer tests.

EXT. ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Tom makes Russell take the breathalyzer test and looks at the reading.

TOM

You're legally drunk.

Russell doesn't look concerned.

RUSSELL

So?

Margaret strides up to them.

MARGARET

Are you going to arrest him? Or is
he going to get away with this too?

RUSSELL

Look, sheriff, you know my dad --

MARGARET

(to Tom)

Does he own you too? Does he own
everybody in this town. Arrest him!

Tom looks like he's between a rock and a hard place, but finally takes out his handcuffs.

TOM

Russell, turn around.

RUSSELL

My father's going to have your ass.

TOM

He's not the sheriff. I am. Now,
turn the hell around!

Russell glares at Margaret. There's bloody murder in his eyes. He spits at her feet and turns around.

The sheriff cuffs him.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The door bell RINGS. Margaret comes out of the kitchen and opens the front door. It's Sheriff Harper.

MARGARET

Have you come to arrest me, Tom?

The sheriff smiles.

TOM

Evenin', Margaret. Can I come in?

Margaret steps aside and closes the door behind him.

TOM

Where's Jeremiah?

Margaret points to the kitchen.

MARGARET

Come on, you can join us for some soup.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

They're seated around the small dining table. Margaret's feeding Sarah. Jeremiah and Tom savors spoonfuls of soup.

TOM

This is mighty fine. Just like always.

JEREMIAH

Well, Tom, what do we owe the pleasure? Margaret told me about the incident. Hope she's not in trouble?

TOM

Nope, she's in the clear. She may have acted like Rambo... but she did her civic duty. Maybe I should deputize her. She'd be a lot more useful than Floyd!

They all laugh.

TOM

(to Margaret)

Next time you get a hankerin' to nab some miscreants, call the police first. It's a lot safer.

MARGARET

(snorts)

Is he in jail?

TOM

Nope. George bailed him out.

JEREMIAH

Is he going to get away with this too?

Tom is silent for a moment.

MARGARET

(angry)

He's going to get away with it, isn't he?

TOM

It's out of my hands. You know George Danley and Judge Diller --

MARGARET

He should be ashamed to wear that robe!

TOM

Well, I'm may be the sheriff, but Diller's the real authority in this town.

JEREMIAH

Thought it was George Danley?

TOM

Let's just say they look out for each other.

MARGARET

So Russell gets away with it again?

TOM

Not exactly. The judge put him on probation... but he didn't lose his license.

MARGARET

He's not serving any time?

TOM
 (shake his head)
 No. The other boys got the same
 thing.

MARGARET
 (turns to Jeremiah)
 Why do you keep us in this town?
 (points to Sarah)
 Did she get any justice in this town?

Jeremiah has no good response. There is a long awkward silence.

Tom gets up.

TOM
 Thank you kindly for this soup and
 your hospitality.
 (glances at Sarah
 with great pity)
 Now, you need anything -- anything
 at all -- you call me direct.

The Strobels nod wordlessly.

TOM (CONT.)
 Look, I've known you two for a long
 time. You're good folk. The best
 we have in this town. You don't
 deserve what's happened to you.
 You know, I'll always watch your
 back. But take my advice; try to
 avoid Russell. He's... bad inside.
 That boy's trouble.

Margaret nods grimly.

MARGARET
 Someday, he's going to get his due.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Margaret sits in front of the TV with Sarah. She watches a
 television show.

The doorbell RINGS.

Margaret answers.

It's Carol Danley.

Margaret is clearly surprised to see her. Doesn't make a
 move to welcome her in.

CAROL

Can I come in?

Margaret hesitates but then steps aside grudgingly and closes the door behind her.

Carol, as always, is dressed stylishly and makes Margaret look frumpy. Carol's a peacock among the penguins of the town.

Carol glances around the sparsely furnished living room. The place is too simple for her. It's beneath her. Her eyes land on Sarah in the wheelchair in front of the TV. She uncomfortably looks away.

Margaret is displeased to have Carol here. She doesn't offer her a seat and stands stiffly waiting for an explanation.

CAROL

Margaret, I'd like to talk to you about a few thing.

MARGARET

I'm listening.

CAROL

Maybe you didn't see me at Rory's the other day when you were there --

MARGARET

Oh, I heard you were there.

CAROL

George told me Jeremiah refused a ride from him.

MARGARET

My husband can still walk.

CAROL

There's been talk from you about George. Negative talk.

Margaret says nothing.

CAROL (CONT.)

Why should George be penalized for success? Half this town would be out of work, if it wasn't for him. Do you know how many dollars he pours into the economy? He keeps the town running.

MARGARET

Does that make us all beholden to him? Does that make him our Lord and master?

CAROL

Now, you have no good cause to sully his good name.

Margaret walks over and stands next to Sarah.

MARGARET

Is that a fact? I don't have good cause?

Carol tries to take a softer tone.

CAROL

You know George and me are really sorry about your daughter. It was an accident. We've made every effort to help you. Just tell me what you need.

Margaret remains stiff lipped.

CAROL (CONT.)

Listen to me, we're from a small town. We have to learn to get along with one another. It --

MARGARET

You're not even from this town! Everybody knows George found you dancing on a stage in the city.

CAROL

I was a showgirl!

MARGARET

Whatever you were, you weren't wearing much clothes when he found you. What do you understand about small town values? Did you teach any of it to your son?

Carol is livid. The gloves are off.

CAROL

You almost killed him the other day!

MARGARET

He's a menace to society. They should lock him up and throw away the key. He'd be rotting in jail if there was any justice in this town!

CAROL

How dare you?

MARGARET

He killed my daughter! He killed every hope that she had!

CAROL

It was an accident!

MARGARET

He's a killer! He killed my girl! She's dead! Do you hear me? She's dead!

Margaret walks over to the front door and jerks it open.

MARGARET (CONT.)

Get out of my house!

Carol's shocked by the abrasive behavior. She's used to everybody kowtowing to her. But she composes herself and nods stiffly.

Just before she leaves, she turns to Margaret.

CAROL

We Danleys don't take kindly to harassment. Stay away from my boy. I taught him to bite back!

Carol walks out in a huff.

Margaret SLAMS the door behind her. She's breathing heavily.

Glances at Sarah who sit lifelessly in the wheelchair.

It's too much for her. She runs out of the room.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Margaret rushes in and grabs pills out of the medicine cabinet and swallows a handful.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Margaret sits on the edge of the bed in her nightgown.

Jeremiah carves wood at the corner table, his back to Margaret.

MARGARET
Carol Danley stopped by today.

JEREMIAH
Saw her car. What did she want?

MARGARET
She warned me not to harass her family, There was a lot of hollerin' between us.

JEREMIAH
Oh.

MARGARET
I threw her out of the house.

JEREMIAH
That's my, Margaret.

Margaret smiles.

MARGARET
What are you carving?

JEREMIAH
It's not finished yet.

MARGARET
Just let me see it.

Jeremiah turns around and shows Margaret the piece of wood he's been carving. It's Sarah's face. The features are perfect and almost life-like. Once the wood is stained, it will glow.

Tears spring into Margaret's eyes.

MARGARET
It's beautiful.

Margaret approaches Jeremiah. He pulls her to his great big chest. As he holds her, she starts to sob.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - SARAH'S BEDROOM - LATER

Margaret walks in humming a tune. She's actually in a good mood. She's come to check up on her Sarah before going to sleep.

Sarah lays lifelessly on the bed. Not unusual. But Margaret immediately senses something is not right.

She sees that her her chest is not rising and falling.
 Margaret rushes over to Sarah and checks for signs of breath.
 Nothing. Sarah's unconscious and not breathing.

MARGARET
 Oh, my god. Jeremiah!

At first, Margaret is not quite sure what do to. Then she reacts and starts to administer mouth-to-mouth.

There is no response from Sarah.

MARGARET
 Baby, please breathe. Please!

Margaret tries again. Nothing. Sarah's still not breathing.

MARGARET
 Oh, my god. Oh, my god. Jeremiah,
 get over here!

Jeremiah runs into the room

MARGARET
 She's not breathing!

Jeremiah rushes to his daughter.

EXT. COUNTY HOSPITAL - NIGHT

A WAILING ambulance rushes past the Emergency sign outside.

INT. COUNTY HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Margaret sits lifelessly on a plastic bucket chair in a daze.

Jeremiah comes up to her and offers her a coffee. She shakes her head no.

Their faces are drawn tight with strain. They look like punctured balloons.

Sally enters the room and immediately rushes to Margaret and hugs her.

INT. COUNTY HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - LATER

DR. WOPAT enters. He's come out of the emergency room wearing scrubs. He's had a workout.

Margaret and Jeremiah instantly rise to greet him. They are almost too afraid to ask about Sarah's condition.

DOCTOR WOPAT
We've stabilized her. She's
breathing with the assistance of a
ventilator.

JEREMIAH
Thank god.

MARGARET
I thought she was going to die!

DOCTOR WOPAT
She was very lucky that you were
able to revive her before the
ambulance arrived.

JEREMIAH
What happened to her?

DOCTOR WOPAT
She suffered complications from an
infection as a result of her
bedsores. It's a problem many
paraplegics face. We have her
sedated and are administering
antibiotics.

MARGARET
What's going to happen to her? Can
she come home?

DOCTOR WOPAT
Sarah can be released in a few days,
but she'll have to be monitored
closely.

(beat)
Look, taking care of someone in
her condition is a tremendous
responsibility. I would recommend
that she be admitted to a care
facility --

MARGARET
No.

DOCTOR WOPAT
I strongly urge you to reconsider.

MARGARET
I'm going to take care of her! I'm
not going to abandon her!

Doctor Wopat sees the fierce determination on Margaret's
face. He nods reluctantly.

DOCTOR WOPAT

All right.

EXT. STROBEL HOUSE - BACK PORCH - DAY

Sarah sits lifelessly in the wheelchair. She has a respirator over her mouth. A tube leads to a cylinder of oxygen on a dolly next to her.

She's pale and thin. The once lustrous hair has lost its sheen. She's barely hanging on to life.

Bambi approaches her. He's grown healthy. His limp is gone. He licks her hand almost in sympathy and, seeing no response, turns away.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - CONTINUOUS

Jeremiah watches Bambi walk away from Sarah. There is visible anguish on his face.

He wipes tears from his eyes and gets back into his digger.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

It's a dark night. The moon is hidden behind thick clouds.

A big pickup with oversized tires comes to a stop on the gravel shoulder.

TWO FIGURES jump out. They're wearing dark clothing.

It's Russell and Stan.

Russell pulls a ski mask over his face.

RUSSELL

(whispers)

Put your mask on!

Stan follows his lead.

Russell pulls something out. Even in darkness; it's possible to see that it's a LARGE HUNTING KNIFE.

Russell glances around. It's the dead of night. There's no traffic in sight.

Across the road is the Strobel house. All the lights are off. Everyone's asleep.

RUSSELL

Let's go.

They make their way across the road towards the house.

EXT. STROBEL HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Russell and Stan quietly approach the garage in a crouch. There is a van parked outside.

RUSSELL

Let's get this.

Russell rushes over to the van and slashes a tire. Air HISSES out.

Stan slashes the back tires.

STAN

This is fun!

EXT. STROBEL HOUSE - BACK PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Russell and Stan approach the back fence.

Russell quietly lifts the latch on the gate and they both enter.

STAN

(a little too loudly)

Are we going inside?

RUSSELL

Shut up!

Russell sees Bambi asleep on the back porch, curled up into a ball.

He approaches the deer with the knife.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jeremiah and Margaret are asleep. Jeremiah SNORES.

The window is open. A soft breeze blows against the curtains.

A sudden SQUEAL pierces the night.

Margaret stirs awake. Turns to Jeremiah. She speaks in a hushed whisper.

MARGARET

Jeremiah.

Jeremiah doesn't respond.

Margaret shakes him.

MARGARET
Jeremiah, get up!

Jeremiah stirs awake.

JEREMIAH
What's wrong?

MARGARET
I think I heard something.

EXT. STROBEL HOUSE - BACK PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

The porch lights go on and the back door CREAKS open slowly. Jeremiah steps out still in his pajamas. He's holding a shot gun.

Jeremiah looks around. Sees nothing. Then almost slips but catches his balance.

He looks down at his feet. The porch is flooded with blood. There is more on the door and the siding. It looks like a massacre.

Jeremiah's eyes come to rest on Bambi's severed head.

JEREMIAH
Oh, Lord!

He hears a sound. It's somebody's voice. He leaves the porch and walks around to...

THE GARAGE

Jeremiah spots TWO DARK FIGURES crossing the road towards a parked pickup.

JEREMIAH
Hey, stop right there!

Russell and Stan glance around.

STAN
Shit!

They bolt towards the pickup.

Jeremiah chases after them with his gun.

The boys make it into the pickup just in time and peel away.

EXT. STROBEL HOUSE - BACK PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Jeremiah opens the fence gate and walks into the yard. He's out of breath.

Margaret has come out onto the porch in her nightgown. She's seen Bambi and all the blood. She looks sick to her stomach.

Margaret turns to Jeremiah. There are tears in her eyes. She vomits.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

Jeremiah has dug a small grave underneath the shade of a massive oak.

There is a small body wrapped in black plastic at the bottom of the shallow grave.

Jeremiah glances at the body. He shakes his head in great sorrow and starts to fill the grave.

EXT. BACK PORCH - CONTINUOUS

The blood has been cleaned up; but there are dark stains on the wood.

Margaret watches Jeremiah filling up the grave in the distance. Her eyes are red from anguish.

She glances at Sarah, who is sitting in her wheelchair.

She closes her eyes in pain.

EXT. BAR - NIGHT

Music filters out of the bar. The lot's half full. There are a few pickups. One of them has oversized tires.

There's also a BEATUP PICKUP that's seen many years parked outside.

SOMEONE sits inside.

INT. BEATUP PICKUP - CONTINUOUS

Jeremiah DRUMS his fingers on the dashboard. He has his eyes fixed on the front door of the bar. He's waiting for someone to come out.

EXT. BAR - LATER

Russell and Stan come out of the bar. They're laughing as they head towards their pickup.

Jeremiah steps out of his pickup and walks towards the boys. There's a purpose in his stride.

JEREMIAH

Russell!

Russell turns around. He looks surprised to see Jeremiah; but there is an arrogant jut to his jaw.

Stan looks openly nervous.

RUSSELL

What do you want?

JEREMIAH

You boys were at my place last night. There was a lot of damage... desecration. You killed that poor little animal.

STAN

That's not true! We were -- hey, I was home!

Jeremiah points to Russell's truck.

JEREMIAH

I saw that pickup. It was you boys. I'm sure.

RUSSELL

Go home, old man!

Russell turns around and opens the pickup door.

Jeremiah grabs Russell's shoulder and spins him around, still holding on to him.

JEREMIAH

You think you can get away with anything, don't you?

Jeremiah looms large over Stan and Russell. The gentle giant looks intimidating when he's angry.

Russell twists out of Jeremiah's grasp.

RUSSELL

Get your fucking hands off of me!

Stan laughs nervously.

STAN

What you gonna do, grandpa, try and beat us up? It's two against one!

Jeremiah takes a step forward.

JEREMIAH

You're coming to the station with me. You're going to admit your guilt to the sheriff. You're going to admit to hurting my daughter!

Russell snorts. He withdraws a hunting knife from his belt. The blade gleams in the darkness.

RUSSELL

(to Stan)

Get your bat!

Stan rushes to obey and jumps into the pickup.

Jeremiah takes that moment to react. He steps forward and grabs Russell's knife hand and twists it hard.

Russell's cries out in pain and drop the weapon.

Jeremiah kicks the knife away with his boot.

Russell knees knees in the groin.

Jeremiah GRUNTS in pain but doesn't let go. He raises his fist to strike Russell but then sees a blur behind him.

He reacts too late as Stan's bat connects with the side of his head. He is stunned.

Stan hits him again and Jeremiah falls to his knees.

Russell starts to kick him viscously in the side.

Jeremiah tries to rise, but the bat hits him again. He collapses onto the ground.

Stan and Russell continue to beat him.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Margaret is feeding Sarah. She glances at the clock. She looks worried.

The back door opens. Margaret is relieved to see Jeremiah walk in. But her look immediately turns to horror.

Jeremiah is bloodied and bruised. He's barely able to stand.

Margaret rushes to him.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Jeremiah is seated at the breakfast table all battered and blue. His face is swollen. There's a bandage around his forehead and a cane resting next to him. He's not a pretty sight.

Sarah is there in the wheelchair. She stares at her father with vacant eyes, oblivious to his pain.

Margaret comes over from the stove and gives Jeremiah some oatmeal.

MARGARET

Do you want me to feed you?

Jeremiah lifts a spoon. WINCES in pain.

JEREMIAH

I can manage.

Margaret nods, tries to avoid looking at her husband's injuries because it hurts her. She sits down and starts to feed Sarah.

MARGARET

(without looking at Jeremiah)

You should have gone to the hospital.

JEREMIAH

Aw, you're just as good at healing as they are.

(sighs)

Besides, there'd be too many questions to answer.

MARGARET

Are you going to the sheriff?

Jeremiah eats a spoonful of porridge and chews for a while.

MARGARET (CONT.)

Well?

JEREMIAH

What's the use? So, he can see my shame? George would get the boys off anyhow.

MARGARET

Shame?

Jeremiah is silent.

MARGARET (CONT.)

Do you blame yourself because those hoodlums hurt you?

Jeremiah doesn't answer.

MARGARET (CONT.)

Jeremiah, answer me.

Jeremiah is suddenly emotional.

JEREMIAH

I wasn't strong enough! I wasn't even there to protect her!

He looks at Sarah, on the verge of tears.

Margaret goes around and wraps her arms around her husband from behind, careful not to hurt him.

MARGARET

You hush now. There's nobody stronger than you. Nobody. Do you hear me? Nobody!

Jeremiah composes himself. He looks a little embarrassed, tries a stab at humor.

JEREMIAH

Now you see why I didn't tell anybody? They'd see me bawlin' like a baby.

But Margaret is not amused. Her face is set into a grimace.

MARGARET

Someday that boy's sins are gonna catch up with him. He'll get his due. God in heaven won't be able to help him then.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Russell is grinning with his dad on the big Danley Ford billboard. The road is empty.

A lone VAN drives by the sign.

INT. VAN - MOMENTS LATER

Someone sits behind the wheel. In the darkness it's not possible to see who it is.

The hands gripping the steering wheel are feminine.

THROUGH THE WIND SHIELD:

The last lights wink out at Danley Ford. Russell locks up and walks out. There is no one else around.

EXT. DANLEY FORD - CONTINUOUS

Russell is by his pickup, searching for his keys.

The moonlight suddenly casts a LONG SHADOW next to him. Russell turns, startled.

A SHOT GUN is pointed at his chest.

Margaret holds the gun.

Russell is shocked, a little frightened, then his cockiness takes over.

RUSSELL

What the hell are you doing?

Russell tries to push the gun aside with his hand.

Margaret COCKS the trigger. There is a zeal in her eyes. The anger is palpable. She means business.

Russell goes pale.

INT. VAN - MOMENTS LATER

Russell sits in a wheelchair. His hand and feet are bound. There is a gag in his mouth. He looks frightened.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Sarah sits in front of the television set in her wheelchair. She has a respirator over her mouth and a tube snaking to a tank of oxygen on a dolly. The HISSING sound fills the room.

She is emaciated and thin. A glimmer of her former self.

Jeremiah limps out of the kitchen with a cane and shuffles over to Sarah. He brushes her hair back with a hand, which is now dull and lifeless.

JEREMIAH

Your mother's running late. Where
the heck could she be?

Of course, Sarah doesn't answer.

Jeremiah shrugs. He goes over to the TV which is already on.
He slips a tape into the VCR, takes a seat and starts to watch.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - NIGHT

A van drives up a small dirt road a few hundred feet from
the Strobel house and comes to a stop.

Margaret steps out holding the shotgun. She goes around and
opens the side door and presses a button that lowers the ramp.

She goes inside and tries to push Russell down the ramp. He
looks totally frightened and is whimpering thorough his gag.

Margaret tries to steer the wheelchair down with one hand,
while still holding onto the gun. She loses her grip on the
wheelchair. It slides down the ramp too fast and hits the
ground hard, spilling Russell out.

Russell GROANS in pain but doesn't appear to be badly hurt.
He tries to rise, but can't because his hand and feet are
bound. He lays on the ground and looks up at Margaret
imploringly.

She stands over him with the shotgun. There is no pity in
her eyes.

This is a different Margaret. A hard Margaret.

She points the gun at him and he flinches. But she uses it
to turn him over onto his stomach and leans over to loosen
the knot binding his feet.

Russell turns back over.

She waves the gun in his face.

MARGARET

Stand up.

Russell is too afraid to stand up.

MARGARET

I said stand up!

Margaret presses the gun into his chest.

Russell rises onto shaky feet.

MARGARET

You try to run, so help me, I'll
shoot you!

Margaret points towards the graveyard with the shotgun.

MARGARET

Start walking.

Russell reluctantly obeys.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - NIGHT

Jeremiah watches the video completely enraptured .

There is the sound of his voice and Margaret talking and a child's laughter, but it's not possible to see what's on the screen.

Jeremiah is moved by the video. He looks emotional.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - NIGHT

Margaret approaches a grave with Russell. It has been freshly dug.

The big DIGGER is parked next to it.

Russell sees the grave and GROANS. He looks directly into Margaret's eyes, sees the unflinching hatred and tries to bolt.

But Margaret is prepared. She sprints forward and cuts him off and pushes him.

Russell loses his balance and falls into the open grave.

EXT. DANLEY LODGE - NIGHT

The big grand place gleams like a jewel under the moonlight. However, the topiaries have taken on a sinister look tonight.

INT. DANLEY LODGE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

George and Carol are seated at a huge dining table with more than a dozen seats. Dinner has been served but they haven't touched their meals yet.

Carol glances at the wall clock. She looks worried.

They are waiting for somebody to arrive.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

Russell stands in the grave buried up to his chest in dirt.

Margaret impassively pours dirt into the hole with the digger.

Russell struggles fiercely with his bonds. He somehow manages to loosen a hand and brings it out of the dirt. He tears the gag away from his mouth.

RUSSELL
Let me go! Please!

Margaret ignores him and pours more dirt on top of him.

RUSSELL
Help! Help! Somebody please help me!

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jeremiah continues to watch the video with great sadness.

A sound from outside manages to distract him.

He cocks his ear and then hears it again.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

Russell is buried up to his neck. He is crying hysterically. Looks up at Margaret and begs.

RUSSELL
Please, Mrs. Strobel, let me go!
Please! Mercy!

Margaret pause her work. She looks down upon Russell, sitting high above on the digger.

MARGARET
Admit what you did to my daughter!

RUSSELL
Let me go!

MARGARET
Admit it!

RUSSELL
OK. OK. I did it! I pushed her!
Oh, my god, please let me go!
Don't kill me!

Margaret's got the answer she wanted and pours more dirt on top of his face.

Russell nearly gags as some goes into his mouth. He looks resigned to his death, when suddenly he relaxes his struggle and then a moment later manages to pull his other hands out of the dirt.

He's holding a CELL PHONE.

INT. DANLEY LODGE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

George and Carol have started to eat dinner. They look worried.

Somewhere a phone RINGS.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

Jeremiah rushes onto the scene breathless. He's limped all the way over with his cane. The exertion shows on his face.

He glances at the open grave and sees Russell's head poking out and his two hands.

Then he glances up and he sees Margaret behind the controls of the digger. He looks somewhat surprised, but makes no move.

Russell is exhausted from his struggle. His mouth is barely above the dirt, but he pleads to Jeremiah with his remaining strength.

RUSSELL

Please help me! Please!

Jeremiah ignores Russell and continues to look at Margaret. They appear to be communicating without words.

Finally, he holds out his hand to her. She takes it and comes down off the digger.

Jeremiah gives the cane to her and, with some effort, gets onto the digger and takes the controls.

He takes a great scoopful of dirt and drops it on top of Russell, completely burying him.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

A black BMW tears through an empty road.

A deer hastily jumps out of its way.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jeremiah and Margaret walk into the room and see Sarah in her wheelchair sitting in front of the TV.

They look a little dazed but their heartache is plain on their face.

Margaret glances over at Jeremiah. He pauses a moment and then nods.

He goes behind wheelchair and starts to push Sarah out of the room as Margaret brings along the oxygen tank behind him.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - NIGHT

The BMW screeches to a halt. George and Carol jump out. They look greatly concerned.

George spots fresh footprints on the dirt that lead into the graveyard.

He starts to run. Carol rushes after him..

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - GARAGE - NIGHT

It's a two car garage. One bay is empty. Jeremiah's pickup is parked in the other. The doors are closed.

Sarah has been wheeled in to the empty area. Margaret stands next to her. She is openly weeping now.

Jeremiah retrieves two folding chairs hanging on the wall and opens them next to Sarah.

Margaret sits down in one of them.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - CONTINUOUS

George and Carol come upon the freshly covered grave out of breath.

TWO PALE HANDS stick out of the dirt, locked in rigor mortis.

Carol screams.

She and George fall to their knees and starts to furiously dig away the dirt with their bare hands.

After a moment, the top of a head appears. Then after more digging, Russell's entire head is revealed. His face is blue. He's dead.

George and Carol cry out and fall onto their son's grave in anguish.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Jeremiah starts the engine and steps out of the pickup.
Carbon monoxide starts to fill the garage.

He limps over to Sarah and kisses her on the forehead and
removes the respirator from her mouth.

He takes a seat next to Margaret. They each grab one of
Sarah's hands and start to take deep breaths.

Their pain is going to be over soon.

INT. STROBEL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The tape still plays on the VCR.

There are the sounds of laughter.

The video is visible.

It shows Sarah as a five year old child, with golden, golden
hair, as she plays with her parents in a green, green meadow.

FADE OUT.