

SCREECH OWLS

By

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FADE IN:

EXT. OLD FARM HOUSE - DAY

The house appears to be the only one for miles around.

EXT. OLD FARM HOUSE - NIGHT

The windows in the rear of the house glow a soft yellow.

The CALL of a SCREECH OWL.

INT. OLD FARM HOUSE - KITCHEN

The kitchen is time-worn.

DIXIE ROSE, 42, cooks at the stove. She is not a happy woman.

Her husband, THORTON "Thorn" WILEY, 45, sits at the table drinking a beer.

Two empty beer bottles stand nearby.

He is angry.

THORN

Why don't I use the new grinder? I
said because the old grinder works
jist fine.

Dixie Rose is making gravy for the grits.

The spoon slowly stirs the thickening sauce.

She looks at the counter.

She sees a large butcher knife there.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Dixie Rose carries two plates of grits and gravy to the table.

KITCHEN TABLE

Dixie Rose and Thorn eat in silence.

Then,

THORN

God-damned foreman didn't say
another word all day. He knew how
pissed I was.

DIXIE ROSE

You can't get angry at ever thing
that happens, Thorn.

Thorn points a fork in Dixie Rose's direction.

THORN

I git into that opening over at
Thrush Tool and Die I'm my own
boss.

DIXIE ROSE

You never operated a lathe.

THORN

Charlie Smith operates a lathe and
he cain't tell his left foot from
his right!

DIXIE ROSE

Charlie got a certificate.

THORN

Git me a God-damned certificate
too.

DIXIE ROSE

You should of stuck with farming.

THORN

Yeah, right. Drive that rickety
tractor over eighteen acres of clay
soil under a blazin' sun.

DIXIE ROSE

You were too stubborn to ask
anyone's advice about how to farm.

THORN

A man's got his pride.

The two eat in silence.

THORN (CONT'D)

(needling)

Maybe your old boyfriend Billy
Bob would give me a job washin'
cars at his used car lot.

DIXIE ROSE

Billy Bob probably wouldn't recognize the two of us if we walked onto his lot.

THORN

Did you fuck him?

DIXIE ROSE

My, God, sometimes I wonder if you were born with a brain.

Thorn stands and glares at Dixie Rose.

SHERIE (CHERISH), 18, their daughter comes into the house.

She has become alienated from almost every aspect of her existence.

Thorn watches her go into another room and just as quickly come back into the kitchen.

DIXIE ROSE (CONT'D)

Cherish, honey, there's still some grits.

THORN

Why the hell do you call her that?

SHERIE (CHERISH)

I don't eat grits any more.
(to father)
Every one of us needs love.

THORN

Yer Sherie to me.

CHERISH

I'm nothing to you.

DIXIE ROSE

Cherish!
(beat)
Are you going out with Robert tonight?

CHERISH

He's taking me to El Rancho.

THORN

El Rancho? You keep an eye about in that place.

CHERISH
You spend ten hours a week there.

THORN
Don't get smart with me, girl.

CHERISH
Or what? You'll hit me like you hit
momma?

DIXIE ROSE
Cherish! Thorn!

Thorn stands and makes to slap Cherish but holds his position because a knocking comes from the back door.

Thorn sits down.

Cherish answers the door. It's ROBERT FREELY, 21, gangly and polite, in slacks and a sport coat.

He steps shyly into the kitchen.

Cherish kisses him lightly on the cheek.

ROBERT
Good evening, Mr. and Mrs. Wiley.

DIXIE ROSE
Hello, Robert.

Thorn doesn't look at him.

Robert stands awkwardly in the silence.

CHERISH
I'll get my purse and coat.

She goes into the other room.

SCREECH of an OWL, louder than before.

ROBERT
(making conversation)
Screech owls make a terrible
racket.

DIXIE ROSE
Thorn's always threatening to go
after 'em with the .22.

Cherish re-enters the kitchen.

Cherish and Robert prepare to leave the house.

ROBERT
Good bye, Mr. and Mrs. Wiley.

DIXIE ROSE
Good bye, Robert.

Cherish and Robert leave.

DIXIE ROSE (CONT'D)
You were rude to Robert.

THORN
All dressed up like he's already a
CPR.

DIXIE ROSE
A CPA.

THORN
CPR. CPA.

DIXIE ROSE
A Certificated Public Accountant.

THORN
Don't criticize me, Dixie Rose.

DIXIE ROSE
Or what? You'll give me the back of
your hand?

SCREECH of an OWL, louder than before.

Thorn stands, enraged.

THORN
I'll God-damned kill you!

Dixie Rose takes the butcher knife from the counter and
sticks it in the kitchen table in front of Thorn.

DIXIE ROSE
I would be better off dead than
continue living with you.

Thorn pulls the knife from the table.

THORN
Then yer gonna be knee deep in
clover.

He walks toward Dixie Rose, the knife raised above his head.

She lets out a strangled scream and runs into the bedroom, Thorn just behind her.

The SOUNDS of STRUGGLE come from the bedroom. And three screams as Thorn stabs Dixie Rose three times.

Thorn emerges from the bedroom as if in a trance. He lays the bloody knife on the counter.

He takes a beer from the refrigerator and sits at the table.

He takes a swallow of beer and stares morosely into space.

SCREECH of an OWL, louder than before.

INT. KITCHEN - TABLE - LATER

There are more empty beer bottles on the table.

Thorn is drunk by now.

The back door opens and Cherish enters the kitchen.

She quickly picks up on Thorn's drunkenness.

CHERISH

You told mamma you wouldn't get drunk again in the house.

THORN

Well yer mamma ain't in no condition to complain.

CHERISH

Meaning what?

THORN

She tried to stab me.

Cherish looks around the kitchen.

She sees the bloody knife on the counter.

CHERISH

What've you done, daddy?

She heads into the bedroom.

THORN

Wouldn't go in there if I was you.

Cherish screams when she finds her mother.

INT. KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

Thorn sits drunkenly at the table.

 CHERISH (O.S.)
You killed momma!

Cherish enters the kitchen.

 CHERISH (CONT'D)
You killed my momma!

SCREECH of an OWL, louder than before.

Drunk as he is, Thorn begins to realize how serious his situation is.

 THORN
It was kill or be killed. I had no
choice.

 CHERISH
Your stupidity and cruelty have
finally dragged you over the edge

 THORN
She come at me with the knife.

 CHERISH
You'll go to prison.
(epiphany)
And I'll be rid of you.

Thorn stands wobbly.

He holds the bloody knife in his hand.

 THORN
Think yer too good to eat grits.
Wanna hang out with that future
CPR.

 CHERISH
CPR?

 THORN
You know what I mean.

 CHERISH
Robert and me are gonna get married
and move out west.

 THORN
The hell you are!

CHERISH

Put the knife down, daddy. I'm
calling the sheriff.

THORN

You'll have a hard time doing that
with a cut throat.

SCREECH of an OWL, louder than before.

Cherish goes over to the wall phone.

She lifts the receiver and leans against the wall, her eyes
on Thorn.

CHERISH

Operator, give me the sheriff.

Thorn takes a step toward her.

THORN

Hang that phone up.

CHERISH

Hello. Eleven five forty-four
Dickson Road. My daddy's killed my
momma and he says he's gonna kill
me.

(beat)

Cherish Wiley. Ya'll hurry now.

Cherish drops the phone as Thorn comes within striking
distance of her.

He slashes at her, the knife blade coming within six inches
of her waist.

Cherish crouches and puts her hands up defensively.

Thorn stumbles as he tries to slash her again.

Cherish pushes him from the side and he goes down.

She resumes her defensive crouching position.

Thorn turns over with difficulty.

The knife handle protrudes from his stomach.

Just then the back door opens. It's Robert.

SCREECH of an OWL, louder than before.

ROBERT
I heard fighting.
(sees knife)
Oh, my God!

He comes over to Cherish.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
You left your doggie bag in the
car.

CHERISH
Daddy killed momma.

Thorn looks at the knife handle as if trying to figure out
what it is.

He puts a hand on it.

CHERISH (CONT'D)
Then he tried to kill me. He's
drunk. He fell on the knife.

Thorn looks at Cherish and Robert in confusion.

A deputy sheriff's CAR PULLS UP outside, its red light
swirling across the kitchen walls.

SCREECH of an OWL, louder than before.

THORN
Those God-damned owls, they...

CHERISH
What about the owls, daddy.

THORN
The owls, they just...

Thorn dies.

The deputy, service weapon in hand, comes into the kitchen.

He takes in the scene.

DEPUTY
What happened?

Robert moves to Cherish and puts his arm around her.

ROBERT
Her daddy killed her momma.

CHERISH

My boyfriend and me will be sellin'
this farm and headin' out west just
as soon as we can.

SCREECH of MANY OWLS, louder than before.

THE END

(CONT'D)