

God Fearing Man
an original screenplay by
John M. Broadhead

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630 Bryn Mawr Dr NE
Albuquerque, NM 87106
505-999-8551
jbrelectionfilms@gmail.com

EXT. CHURCHYARD - DAY

A SNAKE slithers slowly across the ground. A HUMAN HAND moves toward it slowly.

This is TIM. Early 30s, rough-hewn but gentle and simple. He picks up the snake, looking at it lovingly.

A woman's VOICE calls to him across the field.

ABBY

Tim. Tim!

This is ABBY [delicate, early-30s]. She's pregnant, running as best she can across the field.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Hell, Tim, what are you doing with a snake?

TIM

It doesn't wanna hurt anyone. It only bites to protect it from bigger creatures who wish to do it harm.

ABBY

I've been looking for you everywhere. He asked me to marry him this morning. He asked me in front of everybody!

A wide smile breaks across Tim's face.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Two years have passed.

Tim stares ahead, sweating, breathing heavily. Lifts his hand to wipe the sweat, leaving BLOOD smeared on his face.

Before him on the ground lies a DEAD BODY. Neck bloody. FRANK. He's a well-built, handsome black man, wearing a small goatee.

Tim's body lurches. He panics, breathing faster. Covers his mouth with his arm. In that hand is a small, bloody KNIFE.

He looks up at the sky, then down at the body. He dry-heaves. He turns to run. Trips over his own feet, but goes on.

There's an old PICKUP TRUCK nearby. Tim goes to it. He fumbles with the door. Smears BLOOD on the handle.

He reaches for a dirty SHOP TOWEL and wipes off the handle.

The KNIFE he sets on the roof of the truck.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Tim sits in the driver's seat. Seeing his face in the mirror, he panics, and uses the shop towel to wipe the blood away.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

The truck roars off quickly. The knife bounces on its roof.

INT. TOWN HALL - NIGHT

In this town meeting, all eyes are fixed on REVEREND PAUL, who is in his forties with graying hair. Powerful presence.

PAUL

Screeeeeeetch. I remember that noise. It was simply metal scraping on metal but it was all I could hear. My brain was rattling. I knew I was hurt, from the warm pool collecting around my head; I could feel it in my ears and it could only be blood. My blood. There was the girder, the giant hulk of steel sliding away, as if it'd had a predestined appointment to swing smashing into my head. Now it's job was done, so away it slid, *screetching* as it went, to ensure I would have no peace as I slipped away into death. And I did slip away. Like I was suddenly made of, soap; I couldn't hold on anymore and I fell, right out of my body. Then everything stopped. I was in a blank, lonely space. I didn't see it. I felt it.

Into the back of the room quietly treads ABBY [not now pregnant]. She comes around behind Paul, places a hand on his shoulder, whispers in his ear. Paul pauses.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Forgive me. I am summoned by powers greater than I. My lovely wife.

As Paul begins to stand, a younger man, SHERIFF THOMAS [30s], clean-cut, handsome and out-of-place, calls out.

THOMAS

Not going to finish your story, Reverend? It was just threatening to get interesting.

The older, overweight MAYOR JONAS speaks.

MAYOR

If you'd like, I could tell the rest.

PAUL

You could now, Mr. Mayor. Then Sunday morning, the young Sheriff will come to my service to ask why your version had a cow-headed demon breathing fire and chasing me with a pitchfork.

Suppressed laughter fills the room.

THOMAS

Cow demon it is, then.

MAYOR

No, I'd tell it like you tell it...

ABBY

Paul. Please.

PAUL

You should come on Sunday, Sheriff.

Paul and Abby exit together.

MAYOR

I suppose we'd better get this town hall meeting back on track.

THOMAS

Yes, I'd like to get back to the young women that've been disappearing all through the county.

MAYOR

Now, now; no women have disappeared from our town. Sheriff Thomas. The people of Fireweed want to welcome you and make you feel at home, but we do ask that you keep your theories about mystery murderers to yourself.

Thomas sighs, and sits back in his chair.

INT. TIM'S HOUSE/ LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Paul rushes through the front door, Abby behind him.

PAUL

Where was he all day?

ABBY

I told you, we don't know.

SARA [30s], Abby and Tim's younger sister, comes around a corner. She's tall, alluring, with dark hair.

SARA
Just go ahead and come into our house
without knocking, why don't you?

ABBY
It's Tim's house.

Paul calms down and Sara takes his coat for him.

PAUL
Is he still asking for me?

SARA
Well, he hasn't said anything since
an hour ago. He's in the bedroom.

Paul looks around the room.

PAUL
Where's Frank?

SARA
Ain't seen him.

Paul mildly panics, and goes into the bedroom.

ABBY
Poor Tim. Do you think it's the
night terrors again?

SARA
He hasn't had the night terrors since
Ma died. I thought he outgrew them.

INT. TIM'S HOUSE/ BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tim is awake in bed, sweaty, dirty and breathing heavily.

PAUL
Tim.

No answer. Paul shuts the door behind him.

PAUL (CONT'D)
You did right to ask for me. Whatever
is causing you such consternation,
know that you can share it with me.

Tim looks at Paul and his eyes swell with tears. Paul, moved, sits on the bed beside him. Tim collapses into sobs, reaches out and puts his arms around Paul, who is startled.

PAUL (CONT'D)
What have you done, Tim?

TIM
I've done...my worst sin.

There's a KNOCK on the door.

ABBY [OS]
Paul? Is he alright?

PAUL
He's just tired. Just tired.

He holds Tim, but stares off into empty space.

EXT. TOWN/MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Sheriff Thomas walks through the street, thoughtfully.

FLOYD [40s] stands nearby, and waves "goodnight."

Thomas sees something on the side of the road: a KNIFE.
Flecks of DRY BLOOD spot the blade. Thomas picks it up.

FLOYD
What's you got there, Sheriff?

THOMAS
Knife on the road.

FLOYD
Shit, is that blood?

Thomas looks closer at the engraved initials.

THOMAS
"F.L."

FLOYD
Well that's gotta be Frank L'Angel.
Are you gonna take it back to him?
I can go with you.

THOMAS
Not necessary. Thanks. I'll look
into it.

FLOYD
Have a good evening, Sheriff.

Thomas walks on.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE/BEDROOM - NIGHT

Paul lays awake in bed, staring up at the ceiling. Abby lays beside him, though there's a healthy distance between them.

Paul reaches over. His arm finds the empty space. He sighs.

INT. TIM'S HOUSE/ BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tim tosses and turns. Something catches his eye outside his window. He sits to look.

In the distance, a moonlit FIGURE is walking toward the house. The figure stops. Standing in place, it stares at Tim.

BAM. The WINDOW BLIND suddenly falls closed without warning.

BEGIN FLASHBACK.**EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY**

Sara rushes out of the train door. Abby runs up to meet her.

SARA

Abby!

ABBY

Sara! It's been so long, so long!

They give each other a long, warm embrace.

SARA

Two years isn't so long! Not when you're living in New Orleans. But, where is he? Where's the little...

Paul approaches from behind, carrying a small BABY.

SARA (CONT'D)

Oh my God. There he is!

ABBY

Meet Jonathan.

SARA

I can hold him, can't I?

PAUL

Of course!

Paul hands the baby to Sara.

SARA

He's so...light!

(MORE)

SARA (CONT'D)

And look at his face. He looks like his father. Are you a little bitty preacher man?

ABBY

I think he looks like Tim did.

Sara gives the baby back to Abby as Tim approaches.

SARA

And there's Tim! You're looking well.

TIM

Did you get your graduation?

SARA

The hat and the paper...all of it. I'm now, officially, smarter than any of you.

TIM

School never was quite right for me.

ABBY

Where are your bags? Who's that?

All eyes look back at the train. A dark figure, FRANK, steps onto the platform, BAGGAGE in hand. Immediately, he gives a knowing glance to Tim, then turns his gaze to the others.

SARA

Oh. This is...my husband.

Beat. Consternation is on everyone's faces.

FRANK

Frank. Frank L'Angel.

SARA

You hear that? I'm not Miss Sara Akers anymore. Call me Mrs. L'Angel!

She and Frank grab each other over-affectionately.

ABBY

You didn't write us you were getting married...

FRANK

Sara wanted to keep it a surprise.

SARA

I'm still getting over the surprise myself.

Frank and Sara kiss. The others wait awkwardly.

PAUL
Congratulations!

Abby passes the baby back to Paul.

ABBY
Oh my. What am I doing? I'm so happy
for you! Both of you!

FRANK
Sara, I'm still waiting to be
introduced! Who am I meeting here?

SARA
Where are my manners? Abby, of course.
Her husband, Paul. Reverend Paul.

FRANK
A Church-man.

SARA
This is my brother. It's his house
we'll be able to stay at. And oh, my
nephew, whom I've just met: Jonathan.

Frank looks at the baby.

FRANK
Awww...So fragile and innocent. That
never does seem to last, does it?

Nobody responds. Frank turns and locks eyes with Tim.

FRANK (CONT'D)
What was the name of your brother?

SARA
Tim.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. TIM'S HOUSE/ BEDROOM - MORNING

SARA
Tim!

Tim wakes up abruptly, to see Sara standing over him.

TIM
Ssss...Sara...

SARA
Wake up, sleepyhead. It's Sunday
morning. Are you gonna come to church?

Tim nods and rubs his eyes. He stands slowly out of bed.

SARA (CONT'D)
Good. I made you breakfast; in the
kitchen. I woulda had to prepare
something anyway but Frank still
never came home. So you get his food.

She leaves the room before Tim can say anything.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE/ BATHROOM - DAY

Paul splashes water onto his face, and looks into the mirror.
Abby comes around behind him, holding his preacher's JACKET.

ABBY
Is everything alright?

Paul forces a smile and puts on the jacket.

EXT. TIM'S HOUSE - MORNING

Sheriff Thomas knocks on the door of the house. No answer.
He knocks again. Tim answers the door.

THOMAS
Morning, Mr. Akers. How are things?

TIM
Things are fine.

THOMAS
Is Frank home?

Tim looks at him with fear in his eyes.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
I'd also gladly speak with Mrs.
Frank, if she's in.

Then Sara appears behind Tim, wrapped in a TOWEL.

SARA
I'm here, Sheriff. Just showering.

Thomas averts his eyes respectfully.

THOMAS
A moment alone, Tim?

Tim looks first at Sara, as if waiting for permission.

SARA

It's okay.

Tim sheepishly disappears back into the house.

Thomas produces the KNIFE.

THOMAS

I have something that might belong to your husband. Is this Frank's? I found it on the road.

SARA

Oh, yeah. He musta dropped it. I'll make sure he gets it!

Thomas nods, and starts to walk away. But he turns back.

THOMAS

Do you know where Frank is?

SARA

You know, I haven't seen him. You just never know with Frank...

Thomas considers this for a moment, then turns to go.

THOMAS

Hm. Pleasant day, ma'am.

Sara watches after him for a moment, drying her hair. She goes back inside without glancing at the knife in her hand.

EXT. CHURCHYARD - DAY

Paul greets his congregation as they enter the church.

PAUL

Good morning. Mrs Abramson, good to see you. Floyd, good morning... Sheriff Thomas! You came!

THOMAS

I'm just curious how your story ends.

PAUL

Then you shall hear it, and more!

Sara and Tim arrive just after Thomas.

PAUL (CONT'D)

My little family. You are looking lovely as usual, sister Sara.

Abby approaches from behind Paul.

ABBY

Sara, how's Tim? Did he seem better?

Paul looks at his watch, before Sara has a chance to respond.

PAUL

It's that time, isn't it?

INT. CHURCH - DAY

It's a small church, with only a pulpit for a sanctuary. The congregation is silent, all eyes on the Reverend.

PAUL

I don't claim to be a perfect man. I don't claim to be an example for all to follow. But in the years before my accident, I was a downright bad man. Now, I pretended not to be. To the world, I was respectable, kind, generous. But the things I did - well, you all know about many of them. Then I had a moment of grace, a moment of revelation. On that hot summer day I was working in the steel jungle of the city I called my home, when a girder came loose from its fastening. Still hoisted up by the crane, it swung toward me and, well, it killed me. That's right, my brothers and sisters, I have died. A strange statement, you might say, coming from a man standing before you, fully intact, with a lovely wife and a healthy appetite she can attest to! But yes, I came to the brink of death, and then fell over the brink, into a place of emptiness that I couldn't comprehend - where my comprehension was no longer relevant. Everything I'd heard, everything I'd seen before - none of it mattered. God, and right and wrong, and angels, and death, everyone talks about it, and talks about it, but it all seems like nonsense when you're dead. Suddenly I understood his justice, in the same way God wants us all to understand. I heard a voice, when I was in that place. I heard a voice that said: "No use hiding. I see your sins."

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

"No use hiding. I see your sins."
Was it the voice of God? Of the devil?
I don't know. It doesn't matter.
Because with all my faults, my
greatest sin...

He pauses for a moment. Then he continues, more passionate.

PAUL (CONT'D)

My greatest sin had been hiding the
fact that I was a sinner. God knows
us. He knows we're humans with
weakness, with indecency, with an
inclination to fall. God didn't make
us angels! So what do we expect to
gain by pretending we are? Why add
a lie to our list of sins?
Retribution is coming. It's coming
for us all, whether we like it or
not. Maybe it'll be fire and brimstone
from the sky, or a drought that wilts
our crops until we starve. Our only
chance to step out of the path of
his retribution is to tell God that
we are done hiding! Admit it! Admit
it all! And the ears of God aren't
up in the sky. They're our own
families, our friends, the ones who
can hear us, here and now!

Most of the congregation has been worked into a frenzy as
Paul passionately shouts and walks through the pews.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Who will be first? Who will set the
example for the rest of us? Mayor
Jonas, are you a sinner?

MAYOR

I am a sinner.

PAUL

Say it so God can hear you!

MAYOR

I am a sinner!

PAUL

And what's your sin?

MAYOR

I've cheated, I'm a cheater!

PAUL

Tell us about your cheating, Mayor!

MAYOR

I'm dishonest when I play cards. In my younger days I won a good deal of money by arranging for the decks to be stacked.

PAUL

That may have been a long time ago, but God remembered. Now the secret is out of your heart, and you're clean! Mrs. Abramson, will you share?

RUTH ABRAMSON [50s] stands up, eager to share.

RUTH

I'm a sinner! I've stolen things!

PAUL

What sorts of things?

RUTH

Silverware, jewelry, little things. I can't help myself, I'm weak!

GRUFF GARRISH [burly, in his 40s] stands up.

GRUFF

I'm a sinner! I was restocking my bar and I lied on my inventory so I could get a free shipment of whiskey.

PAUL

And now, you're clean!

Sara stands up.

SARA

I'm a sinner too!

PAUL

Even my own family must bare their souls to be spared divine retribution! What's your sin?

SARA

I've touched myself. In a perverse and sexual manner. I do it a lot.

Paul grimaces imperceptibly, and changes the subject.

PAUL

Now I'll share a sin of mine with you all! Not long ago I was walking through town. I was tired, I was trying to think. And a dog wandered up to me; an ugly brute of a dog. It looked at me, and with my eyes I told that dog to get away, not to make a sound because I was mighty aggravated. But that dog, that old, lame dog started to bark. And something inside of me snapped. I walked up to that helpless beast and I kicked him. Kicked him in the face. And away it ran, whimpering. I hurt an innocent, a helpless creature that likely didn't mean me any harm. Now why don't you all tell me how you cheated a little, or stole a little, and how it compares to kicking a dog in the face! Who's next?

EXT. CHURCHYARD - DAY

A small, unfinished STONE WALL nearly circumvents the Church.

The people socialize. Paul, the Mayor and Gruff all AD LIB. Tim sits apart on the wall, watching.

Abby sits at a distance and watches, introspective. Sheriff Thomas approaches her.

THOMAS

So how long have you known him?

ABBY

My husband?

Thomas nods.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Known him four years, married three. He came to town and started running the church, and things happened fast.

She absent-mindedly puts a hand to her belly.

THOMAS

As they do. Where's he from, anyway?

ABBY

Midwest somewhere. Chicago? Detroit? One of those. I've never been.

Ruth walks over to Abby.

RUTH

Abigail Deming, you are one lucky lady. Most women would kill to be in your shoes - oh, I don't mean that for real! But Reverend Paul...what a man to be married to!

ABBY

I know I am blessed.

Ruth looks up and sees a man walking down the path near the church. This is DOCTOR ISAAC [30s], handsome and well-kept. Locked with his arm is a YOUNG WOMAN.

RUTH

Good morning Doctor!

Isaac moves away from his companion and walks toward Ruth.

ISAAC

It is a beautiful morning! And how are you, Mrs. Abramson?

RUTH

I'm wonderful! Sheriff, you've met the Doctor, haven't you?

THOMAS

I have.

ISAAC

Sheriff. Mrs. Deming.

Isaac shake's Thomas' hand warmly.

Sara makes her way through the mingling crowd, toward Isaac.

SARA

Good to see you, Doctor! Though it would be better to see you in church.

ISAAC

It's not for me, I'm afraid. I'm just enjoying my morning walk.

Sara raises an eyebrow and glares at the YOUNG WOMAN, who is fiddling with her hair down the path.

SARA

Least you could do is stay and chat.

ISAAC

Unfortunately I do have a patient appointment.

(MORE)

ISAAC (CONT'D)

I hope I'm not imposing Mrs. Abramson, but if you've finished with the pressure cooker I lent you...

RUTH

It slipped my mind after the dinner party. But the roast was a success! I'll be borrowing it again for the centennial dinner!

ISAAC

And you're welcome to it. Perhaps I might stop by and pick it up on my way back from the city around six?

RUTH

By all means.

SARA

Do you make it to the city often?

ISAAC

Several times, most weeks.

SARA

I do miss the city. New Orleans spoiled me.

ISAAC

Accompany me sometime?

SARA

Who's your friend? A special lady?

Isaac smiles widely and laughs.

CUT TO - From a distance, Reverend Paul watches as Abby sits beside Thomas. His eyes narrow. He turns and sees Sara chatting with Isaac, and his eyes narrow even more.

CUT TO - Tim sits idly by himself, watching everyone.

Isaac approaches from behind him.

ISAAC

Mister Akers! Your wall is coming along nicely. Since your working companion is notably absent, I'd be more than willing to lend you a hand if you should need the help.

TIM

Thank you doctor. I'll be alright.

ISAAC

I do know a spot, a few miles out, where a bit of digging will produce some excellent clay. I doubt the church can afford much concrete, so if you're looking for a good bonding agent, I'll show you the place!

TIM

Thank you.

Isaac walks off, rejoining his companion.

Tim looks at the gathered crowd, and sighs.

CUT TO - In the mingling crowd, Thomas has approached Paul.

PAUL

So. Will you be back next Sunday?

THOMAS

Do you ever tell your own sins?

PAUL

You heard me in there. What sort of leader would I be if I didn't practice what I preach?

THOMAS

So, they know everything you've done?

Paul furrows his eyebrows and looks at him for a long moment.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Anyway, I know my predecessor was a devout member of your congregation, but I don't see why I shouldn't treat each and every testimony as an admission of criminal activity.

PAUL

Whatever you hear in there is between my people and our divine judge. It's not meant for you. Do you understand?

Thomas smiles a little, nods, and walks away.

CUT TO - Tim still looks at the dispersing crowd. Abby approaches.

ABBY

What's bothering you, Tim?

TIM
I try so hard to do right. Everyone
else is so good, all the time.

BEGIN FLASHBACK.

EXT. CHURCHYARD - DAY

The pickup truck is filled with rocks. Tim, and with him Frank, are unloading the truck. The unfinished STONE WALL stands beside them. For the most part they work in silence.

FRANK
We lost a couple off the truck.

TIM
I'll get them.

Frank grabs a WHEELBARROW and follows Tim with it.

FRANK
What is it like in there? What does
everyone talk about?

Tim looks toward the church.

TIM
The same as always. Sins, mostly.

FRANK
A lot of talk about sins. I reckoned
so. Did you ever tell your sins?

TIM
Yes. I did.

FRANK
What's the worst thing you've ever
done, Timothy?

Tim pauses a moment as they reach the ROCKS in the road.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Don't be afraid. If you told all
those other fools, you can tell me.

TIM
I don't know the worst thing. If I
knew, I wouldn't tell everybody.

They pile the rocks into the wheelbarrow for a few moments.

FRANK
I can't imagine not knowing. Me, I'd
be in constant suspense.

TIM
What do you mean?

FRANK
I know the worst thing I ever did.

Frank relishes the memory for a moment, before continuing.

FRANK (CONT'D)
I could tell you about it.

TIM
I don't need to know.

FRANK
Knowing what it was, I figure I probably wouldn't do that thing again, or anything half as bad. And there's comfort in that.

TIM
There would be comfort in that.

FRANK
The worst thing, I think, would be to know that your most evil sin is the one you ain't done yet.

He fixes his gaze on Tim. Tim becomes uncomfortable.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. GRUFF'S BAR - DAY

This is "Gruff's Grub and Draft House."

Sheriff Thomas stands at the counter, holding an ENVELOPE. Gruff stands across from him, with a NEWSPAPER.

GRUFF
"Detectives say the perp...perpa..."

THOMAS
Perpetrator.

GRUFF
"Perpetrator likely drugged and raped the women, before b..."

THOMAS
Bludgeoning.

GRUFF
"Bludgeoning them and..." Does this word mean what I think it does?

THOMAS

"Cannibalizing?" Yes it does.

GRUFF

It's a goddamned awful world out there, fulla strange people. That's why I don't stray too far from town.

Thomas holds up his envelope.

THOMAS

Will this make today's mail?

GRUFF

They'll pick up tomorrow morning. Where's this going anyway? "For...forins..."

THOMAS

"Forensics."

GRUFF

Don't know that word. What's it mean?

THOMAS

Doesn't matter. Thanks for the coffee.

Thomas walks idly out of the shop with his COFFEE. He stops for just a moment to overhear the beginning of a conversation: Sara and Ruth sit at a nearby table.

SARA

Disappeared. Or ran off, I suspect. Not sure I care which.

RUTH

From what I know of your husband, it doesn't seem out of character for him to go "missing" for a few days.

SARA

It's only a matter of time till he goes and stays gone.

Gruff walks over to their table.

GRUFF

You ladies talking about Frank? About how he's missing?

SARA

What's it to you?

GRUFF

Floyd told me he found Frank's knife.
It was covered in blood.

Ruth covers her mouth with her hand.

SARA

The Sheriff brought me that knife.
Wasn't any blood.

GRUFF

I'm just telling you. It was probably
just a rabbit or a snake or something.

SARA

Probably.

GRUFF

Probably. But, maybe not.

RUTH

Maybe not.

Gruff leaves their table.

SARA

Word spreads fast.

RUTH

I'll bet your brother knows something.
He and Frank got along. I never
understood how. He's so odd.

SARA

Frank has his qualities. I married
him after all.

RUTH

Oh I meant Tim. He's the odd one.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE/ KITCHEN - NIGHT

Potatoes boil on the stove.

Tim watches them idly, staring at the bubbling water.

SARA

Are you gonna burn?

Tim jumps to awareness.

TIM

Huh?

SARA
I said, are you gonna just stand
there and let them burn?

Tim grabs the pot off the stove. He uses his bare hands.

SARA (CONT'D)
Tim!

TIM
Oh!

Tim realizes he is in pain, and drops the pot. Hot water and potatoes go everywhere.

TIM (CONT'D)
I am so sorry, Sara.

SARA
Your hands? Are your hands alright?

He looks at his hands. For a moment he imagines they are dripping with BLOOD.

TIM
They've got blood on them.

She looks: there is no blood and the hands are fine.

SARA
No. No blood. You'll be fine.

She kisses his palm in a sisterly way, then bends down to start picking up potatoes.

BEGIN FLASHBACK.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE/ DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Tim sits at the table, along with Paul, Sara, and Frank.

Abby is holding the BABY, trying to hush it as it cries.

FRANK
Blood? No, sir, no blood in my steak.
Sara my dear, my lover, this animal
may as well still be alive, roaming
and eating and shitting.

Embarrassed looks all around.

PAUL
Your language, Frank.

FRANK
Rightly so, brother Paul, rightly
so.

PAUL
Reverend Paul, that is.

FRANK
Sure, Reverend. But you're my brother
now, no? So, brother Paul.

Paul reaches for a serving plate. His hand crosses with
Sara's by accident. For a moment they share a glance.

ABBY
What about just "Paul?" We're all
family here.

Paul glares at Abby, then at Frank.

FRANK
Well, I suppose I'll eat the bloody
cow this time, like some heathen god
hungry for a sacrifice.

He digs in, stuffing a bloody chunk of steak into his mouth.

PAUL
Shall we pray first, Frank?

SARA
Yes. Let's pray.

ABBY
Hurry please. Jon's gettin' restless.

FRANK
Let me. I'll lead the prayer tonight.
I know a good one.

PAUL
You?

TIM
I want to hear Frank's prayer.

PAUL
This isn't just a joke, you know.

FRANK
No joke at all. I'll say it real
respectful. I can sing it too, if
you folks down here do much of that.
Oooooohhhh Looooorrrddd.

Frank begins to sing a bluesy gospel tune. Tim smiles.
Paul rubs his eyes and mutters.

PAUL
I said this isn't a joke.

SARA
(to Frank)
I don't think this is something you
ought to be doing.

ABBY
Let him finish, Paul!

PAUL
The prayer is MINE!

Paul slams his palm onto the table. Everyone goes silent but
the baby starts to cry.

Paul holds out his hands and everyone joins.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE/ DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Once again the family sits to dinner, but without Frank.

PAUL
Lord, for what you've given us, we
thank you. What you've taken from
us, we relinquish to you. Give us
the good sense to fear you, so we
may be ready when retribution comes.

ALL
Amen.

They begin to dig in, silently. Tim looks at the empty chair
that stands between him and Sara.

SARA
Ruth is doing another dinner party.
For the big town centennial.

ABBY
I got that invitation too.

PAUL
You think you'll go?

SARA
She's a good hostess.

PAUL
That she is.

SARA
The sheriff seems nice.

Paul looks pointedly at Abby.

PAUL
He'll warm up to us, I think.

ABBY
Does he seem cold now?

PAUL
I think we may have taken old Sheriff
Abel for granted, yes. Rest his
soul, it was a sad day when I buried
him.

Tim, who has not been listening, perks up.

TIM
Buried who?

SARA
The old Sheriff.

Anguish falls over Tim's face.

TIM
What are we talking about?

Tim stands up and, clumsily, picks up the EMPTY CHAIR.

All watch in silence as he THROWS the chair outside, then
comes back and sits down.

ABBY
What did you do that for?

TIM
We don't need it anymore.

Silence reigns for a moment. Abby turns to Paul, questioning.
Paul holds up his hand to her, but keeps his eyes on Tim.

PAUL
Sara, Abby, would you excuse us?

Abby and Sara get up to leave. They exit.

Paul and Tim sit in silence for a moment.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Tim, oh Tim. What are you thinking?

TIM

Why is nobody talking about Frank?

PAUL

Had you considered, maybe, there's nothing to talk about?

TIM

I can't...not talk about it anymore!
I wanted to mention something in Church today, when everyone was talking about their sins...

PAUL

Sh... That...ha. That would've been inadvisable.

TIM

My worst sin. I gotta tell someone.

PAUL

You can tell me. Don't be afraid.

TIM

I killed Frank.

Paul pretends to be horrified.

PAUL

Did you? Oh, dear Lord.

TIM

You already knew. I can see in your face. You already knew I did it.

PAUL

I...had guessed.

TIM

Who else knows? Sara?

PAUL

Nobody, Tim.

TIM

It's best if Abby doesn't know.

PAUL

It is. Best if nobody else knows.

Beat.

TIM
Did I do a good thing?

PAUL
Frank was not a God fearing man.

TIM
He was not a bad man.

PAUL
That's for God to decide. What you
did was for your sister. And what
you do for your kin, you do for God.

Paul moves closer to Tim, comforting him.

PAUL (CONT'D)
The justice of God works in mysterious
ways. This time it worked through
you. You were his hand of retribution,
but now your job is done. Now. Are
you as hungry as I am?

Paul stands up and goes to the door of the room.

Tim, sitting at the table still, breathes in and out deeply.

EXT. CHURCHYARD - NIGHT

Sheriff Thomas makes his way through the darkness, toward
the church. He lights his way with a flashlight.

He reaches the door of the church. Tries it. Locked.

THOMAS
Hello?

He gently taps on the door. No answer.

He walks around the side of the church and finds a window.
Shines the flashlight inside and sees nobody.

He puts his hand on the window and nudges it. It slides.

Looking around, Thomas begins to climb through the window.

As he lifts his feet off the ground, a SNAKE hisses...

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Thomas clambers on in through the window, then points the
flashlight around. The church is empty.

Reaching the pulpit, he studies it with his flashlight.

The light illuminates the prints of Paul's hands from the morning's sermon.

Thomas takes out a roll of TAPE from his pocket.

Carefully he sticks the tape to the pulpit.

He lifts the fingerprint.

Quickly he stashes the tape in his pocket and makes his way back to the window.

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Thomas climbs out of the window.

Setting his foot on the ground, he slides the window shut...

The SNAKE hisses and strikes, biting his leg.

THOMAS

Agh! Shit!

Startled, he drops his flashlight and falls backward.

He fumbles for the light. Finding it, he shines the light at the angry SNAKE, still hissing and rattling at him.

Wide-eyed, Thomas limps away.

EXT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Thomas knocks at the door. A moment later the door opens.

There stands Isaac, wiping his hands.

ISAAC

Good evening Sheriff! I'm sorry, I was just finishing up dinner.

THOMAS

I've got a snake bite.

ISAAC

I'm on call at all hours. Come in.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Thomas sits down as Isaac pulls back his pant leg, revealing two small PUNCTURE WOUNDS.

ISAAC

Well it's not swollen. You don't feel woozy?

THOMAS
No. Should I?

ISAAC
This was probably a bull snake. No harm done except a couple skin punctures and an adrenaline rush.

THOMAS
The damn thing was rattling.

ISAAC
That's how it'll fool you. Bull snakes, they'll coil up and shake their tails. They make the rattle with their mouths. Shkshkshkshk. You didn't kill it, did you?

THOMAS
No. I meant to, but I panicked.

ISAAC
Good. They aren't dangerous to us, but to rattlesnakes? They eat *them*.

Isaac smiles and opens a cabinet, grabbing some disinfectant.

THOMAS
Well I'm getting quite the education.

ISAAC
What is it a man of the law finds himself doing that leads to late night snake bites?

Isaac uses the alcohol and cotton swab to tend to the wound.

THOMAS
Following a gut instinct. Probably won't lead anywhere.

ISAAC
Gut instincts are all we've got. Always follow them.

THOMAS
You weren't at the service this morning. What do you think of the Reverend?

ISAAC
Ah, the Reverend. He's a storyteller. A good one. But in all his stories, he's the main character.

THOMAS

Does he seem like a man who might be
hiding something?

ISAAC

Sheriff, I have yet to find a person,
in Fireweed or anywhere else, who
isn't hiding something.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

Only the moon lights the expanse. That, and a tiny speck of
light which is Tim's flashlight, walking across it.

After walking for some distance, he shines the flashlight at
the CORPSE of Frank.

Tim shudders, then releases a sigh of relief.

He picks a spot, and begins to dig. The flashlight sits beside
him, as he digs in the darkness, unrelenting.

EXT. DESERT - DAWN

Tim's knees are below the ground level as he digs.

Not far away are several other patches of loose dirt, as if
someone else has been digging here. Tim doesn't notice.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

The sun is high in the sky. The desert swelters.

Once the hole is about six feet deep, Tim finally pauses,
wiping the sweat off his head and rasping for breath.

Tim climbs out, drops the shovel and turns for the body...

Frank's EYES are open, looking directly at him.

Tim, startled, jumps backwards. The SHOVEL falls in the hole.

Lying several feet away from the body Tim looks again. The
body's eyes are now shut.

Recovering himself, Tim stands up, brushing off the dirt.

A CAR approaches, coming slowly up the rough dirt road.

Tim freezes, watching the car.

It stops. Isaac steps out, and takes a few steps toward Tim.

Tim exhales sharply. His lips twinge as exhausted sobbing
nearly comes over him.

ISAAC
I wasn't expecting to see you out
here, Tim. What are you digging up?

Tim stands frozen, wide-eyed and sweating.

Isaac sees the body on the ground.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
Hmm.

Tim can't bring himself to say anything. He's panicking.

Isaac takes a step closer.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
Frank, huh? Did you...?

TIM
Doctor Isaac...

ISAAC
I have to say, I'm surprised.

Isaac squats down and looks intently at the body, as if doing
mental calculations.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
Huh. I'll be right back.

Isaac stands up and walks toward his car.

Immediately, Tim dashes toward the hole. Clambering inside,
he retrieves the shovel. Pulling himself out, he brandishes
the shovel, holding it like a weapon.

Isaac, meanwhile, whistles casually, opening the trunk of
his car. He produces a SHOVEL of his own and some WATER
BOTTLES, and trots back toward Tim.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
What can I do to help?

Tim, seeing the shovel, is confused.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
You don't see a friend with a body,
or the body of a friend, and just
keep driving by.

Tim is incredulous.

TIM
What are you doing out here?

ISAAC

I drive this way to town sometimes.
More...scenic. Are we going to dig?

TIM

You're not gonna tell anybody?

Isaac is actually taken aback.

ISAAC

Now why would I do that?

TIM

I don't know. It seems like the thing
most people would do.

ISAAC

I trust you had your reasons. I liked
Frank. I did think you liked him
too, but I can't always be right.

Tim glares at Isaac, then grabs the corpse and begins to
drag it toward the hole.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

Let me help with that.

TIM

No!!

Isaac pauses. Tim continues pulling the body.

ISAAC

Let me offer you a water. It's
sweltering out here and you're looking
dehydrated.

Isaac takes a long drink of water. Tim ignores him.

Tim gets the body to the edge of the hole. Pausing for a
moment, he lets the body balance...then drops it in.

Frank lands with a thud, rolling over onto his back.

Tim stands up straight, cringing as he does so. He's sweating.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

You're not looking so well, Tim...

Tim holds out his hand for Isaac to stop. Then Tim looks
down into the grave. The body is staring up at him.

TIM

Frank?

The sun beats down on Tim's head.

The corpse's mouth begins to move.

FRANK'S CORPSE

Timothy.

Tim leans in, shaken.

TIM

I'm sorry Frank. What I did was right
with the Lord. The Reverend said so!

FRANK'S CORPSE

The justice of God works in mysterious
ways, and this time it will work
through you.

TIM

What?

The corpse's mouth moves again, with the VOICE of Paul.

FRANK [PAUL'S VOICE]

You are his hand of retribution, and
your job ain't done yet.

A STORM seems to be gathering in the sky.

Hallucinations begin to flash before Tim's eyes.

He sees, repeatedly, the IMAGE of REVEREND PAUL'S MOUTH saying
that word:

PAUL

Retribution.

The sun continues to blaze down on Tim's head. His eyes
roll back into his head. He faints, falling into the hole.

Isaac stands in silence. There is no storm, no voices.

He looks around, walks over toward the hole and looks inside.
Tim lies in the grave, sprawled over Frank's corpse.

Isaac takes a long drink of water.

He looks back at his car, then shrugs.

Using his own shovel, he starts to shove the pile of dirt
into the grave, covering up both Tim and Frank.

BEGIN FLASHBACK.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

A small crowd watches as a TINY BOX is lowered into a grave. Ruth is singing "Amazing Grace."

Paul is distraught. Abby clutches his arm. Frank stands arm in arm with Sara.

Frank casts a glance toward Tim. Tim is crouched on the ground, watching from a distance.

Paul breaks down in tears. Sara turns to him, and puts her arms out. They embrace. Frank watches, his eyes shining.

EXT. MAIN STREET - EVENING

The whole group walks, sullenly, down the town street, on their way home. Frank turns and sees Tim trailing behind.

FRANK

I'll catch up. I'll catch up.

He leaves Sara's side and holds back for Tim.

As Tim catches up, Frank indicates the door of the BAR.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Drink?

INT. GRUFF'S BAR - DAY

The bar is mostly empty except for Frank and Tim.

TIM

Do you reckon it was painful?

FRANK

Oh, don't think about it that way.

TIM

It was a pretty bad fever. It must have been painful.

FRANK

The thing about pain...it wouldn't be so bad for a child, or for any innocent creature, because he can't make it worse by thinking about it.

TIM

Maybe. But maybe its much worse because a child doesn't understand about there being bad things in the world. So he'd be awfully confused.

Frank smiles and nods.

FRANK

Fortunately, everyone ends up dead.
There's no more pain after that.

TIM

Little Johnny doesn't deserve to be
dead. It's not fair.

FRANK

"Fair's" a funny word. People spend
their whole lives wishing everything
was fair. But nothing was ever fair
to begin with, so how does anyone
even know what fair is?

TIM

God's fair. Or he should be. Maybe
there isn't a God. Do you think
there's no God? Or angels even?

Frank starts snickering, then laughing giddily.

TIM (CONT'D)

What?

Frank controls himself and calms down.

FRANK

Nothin'.

They drink in silence. Then Frank starts softly singing.

FRANK (CONT'D)

*"Sometimes I ramble, get drunk and
gamble/ nobody's business if I do/
It's nobody's business, nobody's
business/ nobody's business if I
do."*

Frank turns to Tim.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Why don't you join me?

TIM

I don't know if we should be singing
today.

FRANK

We should always be singing. If you
decide not to do happy things because
you're supposed to be sad, then you'll

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)
 get sadder, and then you'll not do
 even more happy things, and then
 you'll just die sad.

Frank empties his BEER, and taps the counter for another.

FRANK (CONT'D)
 But if don't want me singing my glad
 song, then you may go ahead and sing
 your favorite dismal song. Go on!
 What's your favorite song?

TIM
 Amazing Grace.

FRANK
 Really? No no. Pick another song.

Tim thinks for a moment. Then he starts to sing, gently.

TIM
*"You can run on for a long time/ Run
 on for a long time/ Run on for a
 long time..."*

TOGETHER
*"Sooner or later God'll cut you down/
 Sooner or later God'll cut you down."*

Frank becomes blissfully thoughtful.

FRANK
 I do have a particular fondness for
 that song. I like you, Tim. I could
 use a fellow like you.

TIM
 For what?

Frank takes a deep drink of beer and smiles.

FRANK
*"Go and tell that long-tongue liar/
 Go and tell that midnight rider/
 Tell the rambler, the gambler/ the
 back-biter/ Tell 'em that God's gonna
 cut 'em down/ Tell 'em that God's
 gonna cut 'em down."*

Tim clinks his beer against Frank's, and drinks.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Time has passed since Isaac filled in the hole. The sun is lower in the sky, and Isaac's car is gone.

A STORM is rolling in, slowly.

The freshly-dug ground begins to stir. A HAND emerges.

Tim pulls himself out of the ground, covered with dirt.

For a long moment he remains on the ground, holding himself up on all fours. He does not breathe and his eyes are shut.

LIGHTNING flashes across the sky in the distance. The thunder rumbles through moments later, and Tim's eyes SNAP OPEN.

He stands up, breathing heavily. He looks fearfully at his arms and hands, as if they belong to somebody else.

He looks at the ground, and then he runs away.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE/ LIVING ROOM - DAY

The camera lingers on a PHOTO of the family (baby still present). Frank is NOT in the photo.

Paul sits on the couch, reading a book.

There's a KNOCK at the door. Paul stands and opens the door. It's Sara.

PAUL

Hello, Sara.

She stands at the threshold for a moment, then moves quickly toward him, giving him a long embrace.

PAUL (CONT'D)

How are you doing?

SARA

I don't want him to come back, Paul.

Paul smiles a little, but doesn't answer. Sara pulls away.

SARA (CONT'D)

Abby's not home, is she?

PAUL

She went to the farmer's market. She needed a little time to herself.

SARA

Much as we do.

Paul makes direct eye contact with her.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Ruth's hand knocks on the door. There's no answer. She waits a moment, then knocks again.

PAUL (O.S.)
Who's there?

RUTH
Ruth Abramson!

The door opens quickly. There stands Paul, disheveled, sweat on his T-shirt. He's holding something behind his back.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Reverend?

PAUL
Pardon me; you caught me napping.

RUTH
I'm sorry. I should have come at a better time. But I have something for you. Here!

She produces a WINE BOTTLE and hands it to Paul.

PAUL
Why, thank you! What's the occasion?

RUTH
You bring us such peace every week. Such openness, laying ourselves whole and honestly before the Lord and each other...you're a gift to us.

PAUL
Your token is appreciated.

RUTH
I was hoping you would bring this by my dinner party tomorrow night. Wouldn't mind a taste of it myself! I have to run. God bless you Reverend!

Humored, Paul watches after her. He shuts the door. As he turns, we see a PISTOL held behind his back.

He sets the pistol in the top shelf of a BUREAU.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE/ BEDROOM - DAY

He goes back to the bed and lays down, wine bottle in hand.

Sara walks out from the bathroom, mostly naked.

SARA
Who was it?

PAUL
Mrs. Abramson. With a gift.

SARA
Oh!

She takes it greedily. Then she gestures to the living room.

SARA (CONT'D)
You grabbed your gun, I saw you.
Don't tell me you were about to shoot
Mrs. Abramson.

PAUL
Old habits.

SARA
Because the life of the beloved
Reverend is in so much danger.

Paul's face becomes more serious. Sara settles onto the bed, opens the wine bottle, sniffs it, and drinks a little.

SARA (CONT'D)
It's cheap.

PAUL
Do you think...maybe we shouldn't be
doing this just now?

Sara sighs.

SARA
This? What part of "this" do you
mean?

PAUL
This.

He leans over and gives her a kiss.

PAUL (CONT'D)
That.

SARA
When you said that last time, it was
because we were worried Frank was
going to find out. But now...

She looks pointedly at him.

SARA (CONT'D)
He isn't coming back, is he?

PAUL
I...I told you I could find a way.

Paul's face betrays guilt. Sara leans in for another kiss.
Paul pulls away.

PAUL (CONT'D)
No.

SARA
What is the matter now then?

PAUL
It's too soon.

Sara, flustered, stands up and starts to put on her clothes.

PAUL (CONT'D)
And...it's Tim.

SARA
Tim? You're worried about Tim?

PAUL
Sara...

She leaves the room, but not before grabbing the BOTTLE.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Thomas sends a fax: the FINGERPRINT on a piece of paper.

The old, dust-covered fax machine sputters. Thomas waits patiently until it goes through.

A LITTLE LATER

Thomas sits at his desk, on the PHONE.

THOMAS
I already told you there is no Paul Deming; it's not his real name. Well how long will it take?... Okay. What about the blood sample I sent?... I already figured it was human blood... No matches at all?... No, I'm not jumping to any conclusions! This isn't at all like...this is not what happened in Houston. Why do you need to bring that up?

He slams down the phone, in frustration.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. TRAIN - EARLY MORNING

Thomas is sitting calmly on the train. A NEWSPAPER is in his hand, but he's looking out the window. The car is empty.

A large man, the TRAIN GUARD, walks into the car. He approaches Thomas, takes his ticket and studies him.

With a tiny shrug, the Guard hands back Thomas' ticket, and proceeds into the next car.

FRANK

He didn't recognize you, is all.

THOMAS

Pardon?

Turning around, Thomas sees FRANK, sitting in a chair that was empty a moment before.

FRANK

You're wondering why he looked at you funny. It's because you're a new face. There aren't many of those on the Fireweed train. Say, friend, are you planning to read that paper?

THOMAS

Oh, reading in trains makes me sick.

Frank rises and takes the paper, sitting beside Thomas.

FRANK

Do you mind?

THOMAS

No, go right ahead.

FRANK

Good. I love the comics most of all.

He flips to the comics and becomes utterly engrossed.

THOMAS

Have you lived in Fireweed long?

FRANK

I have sojourned a little while.

THOMAS

Any advice you'd give to a newcomer?

Frank looks up for a moment to study Thomas' face.

FRANK
Advice? Not really. I'm more of a
traveler passing through, myself.
What brings you out here?

Thomas pulls out his SHERIFF'S STAR.

FRANK (CONT'D)
A lawman!

THOMAS
Yessir.

FRANK
First time out of the city?

THOMAS
Well, no. Country boy, originally.
I've been stationed in the city but
I had to get out before I went crazy.
Out here maybe the world will make a
little more sense.

Frank starts laughing hysterically. It's at the comics.

FRANK
I'm sorry...Peanuts gets me every
single damn time. So. You think
you'll be staying?

THOMAS
If things work out.

FRANK
If things work out. But ain't that
the way of all things? When you're
just a slimy babe and you step off
that train into life, you're really
only bound to stay around as long as
things work out. 'Sides that, we're
all just travelers passing through.

Thomas starts to reply, but Frank is absorbed into his comics.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. FIELD NEAR TOWN - DAY

Mayor Jonas is carrying a SHOTGUN and standing at one end of
a field. A young ASSISTANT has a cage full of PIGEONS nearby.
Sheriff Thomas is standing nearby.

MAYOR

The Akers family were here as long as I can remember. And that's a long time, considering I was born here.

THOMAS

Their dad was the old preacher, yeah?

MAYOR

That was a long time ago. He wasn't a good man. Used to beat the hell out of Tim. Made him into the idiot he is. Pull!

The assistant releases a pigeon. The Mayor shoots and misses.

MAYOR (CONT'D)

Dammit!

THOMAS

Neither the Reverend nor Frank L'Angel are from here, are they? Both rolled in within a couple years of each other, without much background.

MAYOR

Sheriff...what kinda sensationalist criminal conspiracy are you inventing?

THOMAS

I don't know, Mayor. I see dots. I'm trying to connect them, is all.

MAYOR

I thought it was the cannibal thing that had your balls in a bind.

THOMAS

Doesn't mean I can't keep my eyes open. If I see something suspicious I've got to look into it.

MAYOR

Come here, Thomas.

The Mayor steps uncomfortably close to Thomas.

MAYOR (CONT'D)

You came out to podunk Fireweed so you could be the big fish in a small town. Maybe you could see through our foolish ways and catch some big bad criminals, make a name for yourself. Well, we may be simple but

(MORE)

MAYOR (CONT'D)
we ain't stupid. We don't like heroes
here. And I don't much like you.

The Mayor steps back, and begins to reload his shotgun.

THOMAS
Would it help if I told you Paul
Deming is a fake name?

MAYOR
Oh? Is that your big proof?
Personally I respect a man who can
put his past behind him, start new
and come out here, where it's
peaceful. Pull!

The assistant releases another pigeon. The Mayor shoots it
and it disappears into a puff of feathers.

INT. TIM'S HOUSE/ LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Sara walks in the door, throws her things on the table.
She's surprised to see Abby sitting on the couch.

SARA
Abby?

Abby is equally surprised, and turns around.

ABBY
Oh, I didn't know if you'd be home...

SARA
I thought you were at the market.

ABBY
That's what I told Paul. Really, I
just didn't know where to go.

SARA
Is something the matter?

ABBY
I was hoping to talk to Tim.

SARA
I figured he's probably working on
that wall of his.

ABBY
It's Paul's wall. Tim only works on
it because Paul told him to.

Beat.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Well, maybe I'll see you later.

SARA

Wait. Abby. Talk to me.

ABBY

Paul and I get distant sometimes.
After Jonathan... I almost left him.
And Tim helped me through that.

SARA

You never came to talk to me?

ABBY

I'm sorry.

Abby brushes a tear out of her eye, and leaves the house.

EXT. PIG FARM - EVENING

Thomas is speaking with FLOYD, who is feeding his pigs.

FLOYD

I don't know Frank, per se. He helped
me build the enclosure, but I never
spent much time in his company.

THOMAS

I'm having a hard time finding anyone
who has spent time with him.

FLOYD

I'm not surprised. Strange fellow.

THOMAS

What kind of a relationship did he
have with the Reverend?

FLOYD

Hell if I know. He never talks
personally with anyone. Except his
wife, that is. And the Akers Idiot.

THOMAS

Who?

FLOYD

Tim. Talk to him.

THOMAS

When he worked with you, did you see
any behavior you'd call questionable?

FLOYD

Like I said, I don't pay much heed to him. All I can tell you for certain is that not many of us like him.

THOMAS

Why is that?

FLOYD

Have a strange feeling about him. And...well, he's a nigger.

EXT. DESERT - EVENING

Tim treks through the desert, keeping his eyes pointed straight ahead.

He hears a voice behind him.

FRANK [OS]

I could use a fellow like you!

For a brief moment, FRANK appears, walking behind Tim.

Tim turns around. Frank has vanished.

Tim turns to keep walking.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE/BEDROOM - EVENING

Paul finishes putting the sheets on the bed.

Abby walks into the room.

ABBY

Good of you to do the laundry.

Paul smiles.

Abby lies down in the bed. Paul turns off the room light, leaving only a dim lamp. He sits beside her in the bed.

PAUL

Abby.

ABBY

Yes dear?

Paul puts his hand on her shoulder and kisses her ear.

PAUL

I love you.

ABBY

I love you too.

PAUL

Good.

He begins to roll her over, and lowers himself on top of her. He deposits several kisses on her face, with no response.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Is everything alright?

ABBY

What do you want me to say?

PAUL

I want you to say that you're happy.

He kisses her more. She pushes him away.

ABBY

Fine. Everything's fine. I'm happy.
May I go to sleep now?

Paul sits back up, away from her.

PAUL

If you're not going to talk to me,
then at least...

ABBY

At least what?

Paul leans in again, kissing her more intensely. He reaches for her dress, begins to grab her and pull it off...

Abby struggles and slips out of his grasp.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Not tonight.

PAUL

Then when? Then when, Abigail?

She runs out of the room. Paul leaps up, chases her.

As she reaches the threshold he lunges out and grabs her, pulling her back into the room.

He throws her onto the bed.

Fearfully she looks up as Paul begins to unzip his pants.

Breathing heavily, Paul stops. He looks at her as realization dawns in his eyes.

Abby's fear gives way to tears.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Oh. I didn't...I'm sorry.

Paul zips his pants back up and moves to sit on the bed, putting out a comforting hand.

As he reaches out to touch her, she pulls away.

Gingerly Paul moves back. He turns and leaves the room.

EXT. PAUL'S BACK YARD - NIGHT

Paul walks into the yard, away from the house.

He looks up at the sky. His face contorts with grief and anger. Tears come into his eyes.

He lets out an angry, despairing scream.

PAUL
Aaaahhhh!

He listens as the sound of his voice fades into the night.

EXT. TOWN/ MAIN STREET - DUSK

Paul walks down the street from his house, striding quickly.

EXT. CHURCHYARD - DUSK

Paul stands at the foot of the path to the Church, recollects himself for a few moments.

Then LIGHTNING strikes. Silent lightning in the grey sky.

Paul looks around him. He's startled. He starts to make his way up the path, aiming for the Church.

The lightning becomes more and more frequent around him.

He manages to make it into the Church just as the wind starts to howl. But just as the door closes, the wind and the lightning stop all at once...

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Paul, exhausted, collapses into one of the pews near the back of the church. But he doesn't notice Tim is there.

Tim has lit all the CANDLES in the little shrine, the light of which gives him an unearthly appearance.

TIM
The weather's been strange today.

Paul turns around quickly, startled by Tim.

PAUL
How'd you get in here?

TIM
You gave me keys when it was time to
paint the walls. The walls do look
better now, don't they? If you could
see them, I mean. It's dark in here
right now.

PAUL
Why are you here?

TIM
I was praying.

PAUL
That's good. It's good to pray.

TIM
I pray when I'm scared.

PAUL
Are you scared now, then?

Long pause. Tim doesn't say anything.

TIM
Reverend, did you tell me a lie?

PAUL
Why would you think that? What kind
of lie?

TIM
Would you tell me if you did?

Long pause again. Paul deliberates.

At long last, Paul stands up silently. Turns on the LIGHTS.
He walks up to the pulpit as if addressing a crowd.

PAUL
Tim, come sit up here, closer.

TIM
I can hear. Your voice is pretty
loud.

Paul leans in, supporting himself on the pulpit.

PAUL

The day the girder hit me on the head, killed me for a moment...I heard the voice.

TIM

"No use hiding. I see your sins."

PAUL

Yes. And those are the words I embraced, and tried to remember. But there was...there was something else it said too. I haven't ever told anyone, because I've never understood what it meant. It said: "You can't die yet, because your worst sin is the one you haven't done yet."

TIM

Hmm. He said it like that?

PAUL

In those words. And then I woke up.

TIM

Why don't you understand?

PAUL

Because I don't know what that sin might be...

Tim turns to walk out of the church.

TIM

Goodnight, Reverend.

PAUL

Tim, I'm sorry for lying, to you and to everyone.

TIM

That wasn't the lie. That was just not telling the whole truth.

Paul's shoulders sag at the pulpit as he's left alone.

EXT. DESERT - MORNING

The sun rises. A few birds make for a pleasant waking sound.

INT. GRUFF'S BAR - MORNING

Gruff goes about opening his diner.

He pulls aside the curtain of his front door. TIM is standing there, staring inside.

Gruff startles, but then chuckles and opens the door.

GRUFF
You startled me, Akers.

Tim walks inside.

TIM
Can I have eggs and coffee?

GRUFF
You betcha.

Gruff moves back behind the counter, a little uncomfortable.

GRUFF (CONT'D)
You can have a seat while you wait.

Tim seems surprised by the suggestion, and sits down.

GRUFF (CONT'D)
You going early to work on the wall?
You've been fixing up the church
real nice.

Tim stares aimlessly. Gruff sets the coffee in front of Tim.

GRUFF (CONT'D)
How do you want your eggs?

Gruff looks at Tim. Tim makes eye contact with him.

TIM
What?

GRUFF
Your eggs? Scrambled? Fried?

Tim's eyebrows raise up in alarm. He jumps back from the counter. The coffee cup falls off the counter and SHATTERS.

GRUFF (CONT'D)
What's the matter with you?

TIM
I...I...

GRUFF
Come on, Akers, I'll need you to pay
for that coffee.

Tim stumbles back, speechless, and makes for the door.

GRUFF (CONT'D)
Akers! The hell?

The door opens, and the Mayor comes in.

Tim stops abruptly, face to face with the Mayor. They make eye contact and again Tim freezes. Terror comes over him.

MAYOR
Whoa there! No need for such a hurry
so early in the morning.

Rudely Tim pushes past him, out the door.

The Mayor looks at Gruff.

GRUFF
What the hell got into him?

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Tim walks quickly and urgently down the street, frightened.
He passes several people, and tries to keep his eyes averted.

RUTH
Why Tim! Will I see you at dinner?

Tim doesn't respond.

A CAR pulls up alongside Tim, and rolls along keeping pace with him. It's THOMAS.

THOMAS
Tim! Just the man I'm looking for.

Tim keeps walking.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Where are you headed? Would you like
a ride?

TIM
No.

THOMAS
What if I insist? I was actually on
my way to talk to you.

Tim pauses at last.

TIM
Talk to me?

THOMAS

I wanted your advice on a project of mine. And I have some coffee brewing at the station.

Keeping his eyes averted, Tim climbs into the car with Thomas.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Tim sits at the desk across from Thomas, wolfing down coffee and canned food.

THOMAS

That's an appetite.

TIM

I haven't eaten.

THOMAS

It's like you're eating for two.

Tim pauses a moment at this, then continues.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

So, I don't want to take up too much of your time. I have a few questions about your family.

Tim pauses again.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

I'm trying to get to know this town a little better, trying to better acquaint myself with the people. Your family is real tight-knit.

TIM

We are.

THOMAS

Specifically I'm wanting to talk to you about your brother-in-law, the Reverend. And also Frank.

Tim looks up and makes eye contact with Thomas.

At this, he jumps up in horror.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Now hey, you don't have to...it's just a couple little questions.

TIM

Am I in trouble?

THOMAS
No. Why would you be...no!

Tim keeps backing away slowly.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
You can sit down again. I'll make
you more coffee.

TIM
I'd like to go home now.

THOMAS
I'm not keeping you here, but I'd
really like it if you could stay.

Tim turns to go.

Thomas jumps up and runs to the door, trying to block Tim
from leaving.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Please, Tim. It's just that everyone
says you know Frank best of all.

Tim looks at Thomas again.

TIM
When you were in Houston, why did
you shoot that old man when you knew
he might be innocent? I thought you
were good.

This brings Thomas to a dead stop. He stammers.

THOMAS
Who...who have you been talking to?

Tim turns around and leaves.

Thomas, speechless, collapses into his chair.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Tim continues walking doggedly, his eyes fixed ahead. Terror
is written on his face.

BEGIN FLASHBACK.

EXT. DRY RIVER BED - DAY

Tim and Frank work together to load the truck with ROCKS.

FRANK
Timothy, would you kill a man?

TIM

Why would you ask me that?

FRANK

To hear the answer.

TIM

What answer did you expect?

FRANK

What would it take for you to kill somebody?

TIM

I guess...If the man was really bad.

FRANK

What makes really bad stand out from just regular bad?

TIM

Maybe if he did bad things, just to hurt somebody who was innocent. I think that's the worst thing a person can do.

Frank smiles, interested.

FRANK

Like kicking a dog.

TIM

Kinda like that. But, with people.

FRANK

That's a good reason. But I think you'd kill for another reason. To defend your kin. Timothy: *would* you kill a man?

Tim, thoughtful, keeps working without responding.

INT. TOWN HALL - NIGHT

The Town Hall has been cleared of furniture and a BARN DANCE is ongoing. Everyone from the town is present. A trio of MUSICIANS sit in the corner, playing hoedown music.

Most everyone sits in the sidelines, watching. Only a few couples are dancing, among them Isaac and another YOUNG WOMAN.

Frank jumps out onto the dance floor.

FRANK

Is most everybody going to sit around
and watch the doctor, or is anybody
gonna dance? Sara?

Sara jumps out with him and they begin to swing dance.

Others begin to join until the room is rollicking.

Paul and Abby make their way out and dance together tamely.
Sara and Paul make continual eye contact. Frank clearly
sees this but ignores it.

Tim hangs back and watches. Frank goes over to him.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Timothy, if you don't start dancing,
I'm going to have to dance with you.

Sara pulls herself away from Frank.

SARA

Why don't I. Tim, come on.

TIM

I don't dance.

SARA

Now you do.

Sara pulls Tim aside and starts dancing with him. It's
awkward, but sweet. Frank looks after them, smiling widely.

Ruth, partnerless, passes by him.

FRANK

Ruth, I'm needing a partner now.

She ignores him, making her way over to the Mayor instead.
Frank sighs, and a pained look comes over him for a moment.

The dance number comes to an end.

ABBY

I think I'm done, for now.

Isaac and his companion make their way off the floor.

ISAAC

That's it for me, ladies and gents.
It's nearly past my bedtime, and I
haven't had dinner yet.

RUTH

Oh, I've brought a whole plate of
meat and cheese.

ISAAC

It's alright. I have plans.

He smiles at his partner and they leave.

Paul approaches Sara.

PAUL

Miss Sara, may I?

SARA

My pleasure, Reverend!

The next dance begins.

Tim sits beside Abby. Both are in good spirits and they start
to clap along with the music.

Frank looks around the room. He meets Paul's eyes for a brief
moment. Paul smiles a little, and quickly averts his eyes
back to Sara. She and Paul are dancing very closely together.

Frank turns to Tim and Abby. He starts to say something, but
doesn't. Instead, he takes a long look at Tim.

Then, Frank quickly turns to Abby.

FRANK

Sister Abby?

Abby reluctantly stands up and joins Frank.

Frank spins her around dramatically. She begins to smile
and enjoy herself. Frank looks up and meets Paul's eye.
Paul is watching angrily. Frank smiles.

Frank and Sara nearly bump into Gruff and his GIRLFRIEND.

FRANK (CONT'D)

'Scuse me Gruff. Let's switch.

GRUFF

No, I don't think so...

Frank intrudes, taking over the dance and whirling his
Girlfriend around.

Frank begins to dance more closely and provocatively with
the girl. She doesn't mind, but Gruff seems enraged.

Gruff steps back in.

GRUFF (CONT'D)

Hey, Frank...

Frank skillfully steps out of the dance and moves on to RUTH, grabbing her and dancing despite her stiff resistance.

FRANK

Loosen up and you'll make a fine
dancer someday! But you're gettin'
old, so you'd better start now!

Before she can reply, he moves on.

Without missing a beat, he switches from one partner to another. His dance moves become more provocative. The women don't mind but the men become uncomfortable and angry.

Tim stands up, confused and concerned by what he sees.

Finally, Frank makes his way back to Abby. She smiles and joins him in the dance.

This is too much for Paul, who pulls away from Sara and moves closer to Gruff, whispering in his ear.

PAUL

Get him out of here.

Gruff nods. He taps Floyd on the shoulder and they move toward Frank.

At that moment the song ends.

Frank scurries away from the men and makes his way to the musicians. He shouts loudly so the room can hear.

FRANK

Women and men! I'd say Ladies and
Gentlemen, if only it were true.
How about something slower, to cool
ourselves down? Just follow along.

The musicians look a little confused, but prepare.

FRANK (CONT'D)

*Ten years ago on a cool dark night/
There was someone killed 'neath the
town hall light/ There were few at
the scene and they all did agree/
That the man who ran looked a lot
like me.*

Most everyone begins to slowly two-step. The musicians catch on and play their accompaniment.

Paul glares at Frank. Sara lays a hand on his shoulder. Abby sees this, and her eyes go down to the floor.

FRANK (CONT'D)

The judge said, son, what is your alibi?/ If you were somewhere else, then you won't have to die/ I spoke not a word, though it meant my life/ 'Cuz I had been fucking my best friend's wife.

Most of the people in the room stop in horror at these lyrics. The confused musicians keep going with the interlude.

Gruff and Floyd move up toward Frank again. He slips away and steps toward Sara and Paul.

He taps Sara on the shoulder.

FRANK (CONT'D)

May I have this dance, my sweet?

He takes her hand and pulls her close. She smiles at him. With his other hand, he reaches around and grabs her ass.

Paul immediately lays one hand on Frank's shoulder, and with the other lays a PUNCH onto him. Frank is knocked back squarely onto the floor.

The music stops. All eyes turn to the action.

Paul stands a moment, holding his hand.

As Frank lies on the floor, he starts to laugh.

Ruth breaks the silence.

RUTH

This heathen dance was a terrible idea. It's just an opportunity for sin and horrible behavior to fester. Like Sodom and Gomorrah, we're calling down God's wrath the longer this goes on. Am I right, Reverend?

Nobody has words with which to respond. Some townsfolk begin to stream out of the building.

RUTH (CONT'D)

But don't go. I brought appetizers!

She runs off to keep people from leaving.

Gruff and Floyd pick up Frank and take him out the door. Still he laughs.

Paul turns to Tim discreetly.

PAUL
Do you trust that man near your
sisters, Tim?

Paul moves off to do his part in comforting people.

Tim, confused, wanders out the door, following Frank.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Tim finds Frank standing against the wall of the town hall. Frank turns and sees Tim, and smiles. He pulls out a CIGARETTE and lights it with a match.

Then he hands the MATCHBOOK to Tim, who eyes it curiously before putting it in his pocket.

FRANK
They want everything to make sense.
Sooner or later, they'll learn they
don't have things as figured out as
they think they do.

Beat. Frank takes a draw.

TIM
We should go home. Are you waiting
for Sara?

FRANK
Funny thing, about Sodom and Gomorrah.

TIM
What about it?

FRANK
It's the story in the Bible.

TIM
I know the story.

FRANK
'Course you do.

He takes another draw, and slides down the wall to sit on the ground. He gestures to Tim to do the same.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Three men, or angels, came to Abraham,
to tell him the cities were evil,
and needed to be destroyed. And then
two of them went on to do the
(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)
destroying. But they couldn't destroy
the city, no, God wouldn't let them
do it, as long as there was one good
man left alive.

Tim, interested, sits beside Frank.

FRANK (CONT'D)
So the angels went through all the
trouble to get that good man out of
the city, before they rained down
the fire and the brimstone.

TIM
It's not right to hurt an innocent
person.

FRANK
But if I was God, or the angels, or
whoever, I would have thought there
was another way. If they'd only
waited a while, one of two things
would have happened. Either the bad
men of the city would have finally
killed the good man by themselves,
thus eliminating the problem...or
the good man, surrounded on all sides
with evil and sin...would have become
a bad man himself. Either way...Boom.

Frank insinuates an explosion.

TIM
That's not fair.

FRANK
"Fair." There's that funny little
word again.

Frank's cigarette is gone to ash. He flicks it away.

END FLASHBACK

INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY

There are two chairs in this tiny barber's shop. Paul sits
in one of the chairs and Isaac in the other. WILSON BETTS
[60s] cuts Paul's hair while Isaac reads the paper.

WILSON
Keeps teasing rain but I think we're
in for another dry spell.
(MORE)

WILSON (CONT'D)

I was telling Sally, we should talk to the Reverend, have him put in a good word with the Lord for moisture.

PAUL

Ah, if it were that simple, there are a good number of things I'd be asking the Lord for right now.

ISAAC

Such as? What sorts of things?

PAUL

That's between me and him, I think.

The door opens and FLOYD walks in.

WILSON

Tonight's dinner party is good for business. Morning Floyd!

FLOYD

Trying to look spick and span. Say, Reverend, is Tim alright?

PAUL

Why?

FLOYD

I didn't know if maybe he was in some trouble. Saw him walking out of the Sheriff's this morning.

Isaac looks up, incredulous.

ISAAC

Tim?

PAUL

The Sheriff's?

FLOYD

That's right. Musta been in there talking for a half hour.

Paul tries to hide his anger and confusion.

Isaac nonchalantly smirks and shrugs.

PAUL

Yes. Yes I sent him there. Had some questions about building codes and such, for the church work.

FLOYD

Ah. That does make sense. And here I
thought something bad had happened.

Paul grits his teeth.

EXT. TIM'S HOUSE - DAY

Paul strides toward the house. He pounds on the door.

PAUL

Timothy. Timothy!

There's no answer. Paul tries the door. He shakes it loose.

INT. TIM'S HOUSE/ LIVING ROOM - DAY

Paul storms inside.

PAUL

Timothy!

He reaches the door to the bedroom and opens it. It's empty.

Paul clasps his head in his hands and falls to the floor.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Thomas watches his fax machine impatiently.

At long last it sputters to life, printing out a page
containing a CRIMINAL RECORD.

It contains fingerprints, MUGSHOTS of a [young] Reverend
Paul, and the name "ERIC STOLARSKI."

Thomas quickly swipes the paper off the printer.

EXT. DRY RIVER BED - DAY

Tim works collecting rocks and piling them in his truck.

He's sweating under the hot sun but never pausing.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE/ LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sara is looking at the PHOTO of the still-happy family. Sara
sighs. Abby walks into the room.

ABBY

Looking at our photos?

SARA

There's no pictures of Frank.

(MORE)

SARA (CONT'D)

He took this one. In all the others,
somehow or another, he never showed
up.

Abby shrugs.

ABBY

Did you want some water? Some tea?

SARA

Tea sounds wonderful.

Abby walks into the kitchen, puts some WATER on the stove.

When she walks back into the living room, Sara has sat down
on the couch and broken down into sobs.

ABBY

Sara...Oh...Sara.

Abby sits beside Sara and puts her arm around her.

SARA

I'm sorry, Abby. This is...very
selfish of me.

ABBY

Have you cried since Frank left?

SARA

Not enough. I'm not a crier.

ABBY

You always made fun of me for it.

SARA

Sorry.

ABBY

It helped me grow up faster.

SARA

Why don't...why don't you tell me
how you've been? I see you all the
time but we don't talk.

ABBY

Would you like the honest answer?

SARA

Aren't we too old for the other kind?

ABBY

I'm not doing good. I wish, a lot of the time, that I'd gotten on that train with you, to New Orleans. Except, I wouldn't have come back.

SARA

Maybe that's where I went wrong. Coming back. That, or marrying a man I barely knew anything about. Not sure which was more foolish.

Sara's eyes well with tears, which she quickly wipe away.

SARA (CONT'D)

But you couldn't leave us, Abby. We're a family.

ABBY

Do you remember my ghost?

Sara's smile fades.

ABBY (CONT'D)

You never believed me. And I can't talk to Paul about it, because he doesn't put stock in such things...

SARA

I'm listening.

Abby calms, and continues.

ABBY

It's back again. Most nights, I look up after Paul's asleep, and there it'll be, standing in the corner.

SARA

It's night terrors, Abby. Like Tim.

ABBY

It's something real. I know, because the first time it came, Pa died. And then it was Ma, and then, Johnny.

SARA

That doesn't mean anything at all.

ABBY

How does it not mean anything? Something bad is about to happen. And I'm just waiting, because that's all I've ever been able to do.

Sara holds Abby, comforting her in her turn. The WATER has started to boil, WHISTLING in the background.

Paul opens the door and walks in. He stops for a moment when he sees the sisters, but then goes to the kitchen.

PAUL

Have either of you seen Tim?

Both look at him, and shake their heads.

He turns off the tea kettle.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I'm going to pour myself some tea.

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ruth's house is full. A table is set with appetizers. Paul is surrounded by a crowd. Ruth chats with the Mayor.

RUTH

That's a lovely watch, Mayor.

MAYOR

Thank you, yes. I've been feeling a little spendthrift this month.

Abby wanders the room, a DRINK in her hand. She comes across Paul, talking to Gruff's GIRLFRIEND.

GIRLFRIEND

Mrs. Deming! I've been talking with your husband. I'm starting to wish I'd married a preacher.

ABBY

Is that what you wish?

PAUL

I'm honored, but you indulge me.

The young woman disappears into the crowd. The Mayor, from across the room beckons for Paul.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Excuse me honey. I'm needed to give a toast or something of that nature.

Abby stands alone, with Paul walking away from her. She spots Sheriff Thomas, standing by himself in a corner apart.

She walks toward him.

ABBY

Unlike me, you aren't obliged to come to these little gatherings.

THOMAS

I keep telling myself I'm just here to keep the peace.

ABBY

Doesn't seem like the peace needs keeping.

THOMAS

It's a lie I tell myself. Really, it's just better than being alone.

ABBY

You'd think that. But then you get here, and you're alone all the same.

Thomas looks at her. Reverend Paul speaks up.

PAUL

Brothers and sisters! The good Mayor has asked that I propose a toast in honor of a hundred years of Fireweed. What this means to me, of course, is an opportunity to offer a prayer before our delicious meal. So if you could all take your seats...

Everyone begins to sit down at prepared tables.

ABBY

More of this. I hear it every day.

Exasperated, she turns and walks outside. Thomas follows.

Paul watches their departure together.

EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Outside, Thomas and Abby share a wordless glance. Thomas takes out a pack of CIGARETTES and lights one up.

ABBY

Is it four months you've been here?

THOMAS

Little less. Feels like more.

ABBY

I'm going to venture a guess that you'll be leaving us soon.

Thomas shrugs.

THOMAS

I can always put in for a transfer. Yes, sooner would be better than later. But I'm waiting until I can get my career back on track.

ABBY

To have that kind of freedom, to move around wherever you'd like... Have you ever been married?

THOMAS

Yeah.

Abby puts out her hand for a cigarette.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

You smoke?

ABBY

Nobody knows. I started after my baby died.

She lights up.

ABBY (CONT'D)

After marrying once, would you do it again?

THOMAS

Depends on too many things.

Abby nods. Thomas maintains a respectful silence.

ABBY

I was the good little daughter of the preacher, and now I'm the good little wife of the preacher. I've spent my whole life in Fireweed, doing everything right. That doesn't show any sign of changing unless I do something about it myself.

THOMAS

You'd leave, if given the chance?

ABBY

If I wait until the chance is given to me, it'll never happen. Thomas, don't get so wrapped up in your affairs here that you never leave.

Gruff clumsily joins them outside.

GRUFF
 Sheriff!

THOMAS
 What now?

GRUFF
 You brought in the Akers Idiot this morning, didn't you?

THOMAS
 The who?

Abby rolls her eyes, exasperated by the nickname.

ABBY
 That's Tim. You brought in Tim?

THOMAS
 Just for...just to ask a question.
 What? Why?

GRUFF
 Cuz, he's here. And Sheriff, he's in a mood. Been making a lot of people real nervous all day long.

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Everyone is sitting down, digging in to the food.

Tim walks around the table, reaching over peoples' shoulders to fill up his plate with food.

FLOYD
 Wait your turn, Akers!

MAYOR
 Beg your pardon, son!

PAUL
 Tim...may I speak with you?

Tim doesn't respond in any way. He circles around to a seat between Sara and Ruth, across from the Mayor, Paul and Floyd.

RUTH
 Oh Tim dear, this seat was for Doctor Isaac. He did say he'd try and come...

Tim ignores her. Ruth doesn't press the issue.

SARA
 Something smells delicious, Ruth.

RUTH

Thank you dear. That would probably be the stew.

She gestures toward the PRESSURE COOKER.

SARA

The doctor's pressure cooker? I thought he needed it.

RUTH

He never stopped by to get it.

Tim looks directly at Ruth.

TIM

I wish you wouldn't tell lies.

RUTH

Excuse me?

TIM

You made sure you weren't home when the doctor came, so that you could keep the pressure cooker for tonight.

Ruth is speechless.

RUTH

Oh. Maybe I told him the wrong time? He's not here to ask! Excuse me.

Ruth stands up and makes her way into the kitchen. Sara leans in toward Tim.

SARA

What are you doing?

Tim ignores her question and digs in to his food.

Gruff, Abby and Thomas all come back to their seats, Abby sitting beside Paul. Paul gives her a long, pointed look.

Others at the table all watch Tim as he huffs down his food.

GRUFF

Easy there. Are you eating for two?

MAYOR

Have some decency.

FLOYD

With a brain of a cow, he's gotta have the stomachs of a cow too.

Tim looks up at Floyd. Unexpectedly, he giggles to himself.

FLOYD (CONT'D)
Why are you laughing?

TIM
I'm laughing at you.

FLOYD
What about me is so funny?

TIM
Sexual relations with farm animals
is funny.

Floyd's eyes widen. Gruff looks at both strangely.

FLOYD
What did you say?

TIM
I said, sexual relations with farm
animals is funny. Your farm must be
a lonely place, except for the pigs.

Floyd flushes bright red, and stammers.

GRUFF
What are you talking about?

MAYOR
This kind of conversation is
completely inappropriate.

Thomas watches the interactions with interest.

PAUL
Tim. Come outside. I need a word.
Timothy. Now.

Tim ignores him.

ABBY
Tim, what's going on with you?

MAYOR
Listen to your family, boy! If you're
not going to mind your manners, you
should relieve us of your company?

Tim raises his head and looks the Mayor in the eye.

TIM
Oh no, Mayor. I thought you were
honest. I thought you were good.

MAYOR
Sheriff! Get him out of here!

Thomas slowly stands up, too intrigued to move quickly.

TIM
You told me the town couldn't pay
for the wall, and the fence, and the
sidewalk. So I did all that work for
free. But the town couldn't pay for
it because you took extra money from
the treasury every month, to pay for
your fancy watch.

Silence holds. Thomas freezes where he stands. The Mayor
looks around guiltily as Ruth walks back from the kitchen.

RUTH
Is that true?

MAYOR
I don't know what the hell he's
talking about. Just get rid of him!

Thomas finally makes his way to Tim, as the room explodes
into noise and yelling.

TIM
I don't mean to offend anybody! I
only said what came to my mind!

THOMAS
It's probably a good time to go.

ABBY
I'll take you home, Tim. Let's go.

PAUL
No! Abby, wait for me!

Disregarding her husband, Abby and Thomas take Tim away.

Paul is caught in the turmoil of the yelling crowd.

INT. TIM'S HOUSE/ BEDROOM - NIGHT

Abby tucks Tim into bed. Thomas is in the room.

ABBY
Why did you say those things, Tim?
Why make everyone so angry?

TIM
I didn't think I said anything wrong.

THOMAS
You accused the Mayor of embezzling.

TIM
I don't know that word.

ABBY
I'm so confused. Sheriff, what'd you say to him this morning, anyway?

Thomas has an idea, he approaches Tim.

THOMAS
Tim. Can you answer a question?

ABBY
Not now, Sheriff. Not now.

THOMAS
When you looked at the Reverend, Reverend Paul, what did you see?

ABBY
What?

TIM
I didn't try to look at him, cuz I was too scared. All I saw was that he feels bad about telling me a lie.

THOMAS
What lie? What does that mean?

ABBY
Stop it, Sheriff. Don't bother Tim anymore, alright? Do you understand?

Thomas nods sheepishly.

THOMAS
G'night ma'am.

Thomas exits. Tim opens his eyes.

TIM
Can you hum a song? Like Ma used to?

Abby sits on his bed. She starts to hum "*Amazing Grace*."

TIM (CONT'D)
No. A different song.

ABBY
Which song?

TIM
It goes like this...

He begins to hum "*Ain't Nobody's Business.*"

ABBY
I don't know that song, Tim.

TIM
Oh. Okay. I can hum it to myself.

Abby gets up to go.

TIM (CONT'D)
Abby, you're not just pretending to be good, are you?

ABBY
I'm no good at pretending.

She kisses Tim on the head and walks out of the room.

INT. TIM'S HOUSE/ LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The Reverend is already standing in the living room.

PAUL
What was the Sheriff doing here?

ABBY
I didn't know I couldn't spend time in the company of friends.

PAUL
Is Tim in there?

ABBY
Please. Let him rest.

PAUL
He needs to learn to watch his mouth. If he's not going to grow up, maybe he shouldn't be seen in public!

He opens the door. Tim's bedroom is EMPTY.

PAUL (CONT'D)
He's gone. Again. I'm not waiting or watching for him any more. He's your brother. Stay here tonight. Be at the Service in the morning.

He storms out of the house. Abby collapses on the floor.

INT. GRUFF'S BAR - NIGHT

Paul sits alone at the bar. GRUFF brings him a DRINK.

GRUFF

Here you go, Reverend. No...no charge.

Thomas, drinking elsewhere in the bar, sees him. Waving, they acknowledge each other. Thomas comes over to join him.

THOMAS

He drinks. He is a man after all,
like the rest of us.

PAUL

Life is hard enough. I can't deny
the small comforts God gives us.

THOMAS

Cheers to that.

PAUL

What do you think of me, Sheriff?
Of my message?

THOMAS

How do you want me to answer that?

PAUL

I want you to tell me that you think
everything I say is bullshit. Because
that is really what you think.

THOMAS

I think most of what you say is
bullshit.

PAUL

There. Now we understand one another.

THOMAS

Is it though?

Paul becomes thoughtful and a little melancholy.

PAUL

Is it bullshit? No. It's not.

THOMAS

So the voice, and all that, really
happened?

PAUL

Yes. I sometimes wish it hadn't.

THOMAS

Whatever did or didn't happen, I'll give you credit for one hell of a good show. And you seem to make your people happy.

PAUL

That's my goal. The least I can do for this world is dispel some of the darkness that lies within people.

THOMAS

Does that...does that include your own darkness, Eric?

Paul stares long and coldly at Thomas.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Why change your name? Why pose as a Reverend unless you have something you're hiding yourself?

Paul grimaces and slaps his hand against the countertop.

PAUL

Is this what you were speaking with Tim about?

THOMAS

Leave Tim out of this. What matters is that I know who you are.

PAUL

Alright. Alright, Sheriff Thomas, why don't you tell me who I am! Let's hear it!

Thomas looks at Gruff and Floyd, but finds his confidence.

THOMAS

Eric Stolarski, you were charged with a mob-related conspiracy to murder twenty five years ago in Chicago. You disappeared for two years before you decided you'd found God, and turned yourself in. Eight years ago you were given parole for good behavior, before disappearing again. And here you are. Reverend Paul, preacher and family man.

Long pause. Everyone in the bar watches in silence.

PAUL

Yes. And?

Thomas looks at Gruff and Floyd. Neither look surprised. Thomas begins to realize his mistake.

PAUL (CONT'D)

You found all that by yourself? You could have just asked. Or you might have made a habit of coming to my services. I tell that story too.

GRUFF

You've gotta be the only one in town who doesn't know.

THOMAS

Doesn't anybody care?

PAUL

I've bared the worst of my sins, as I hope they will.

THOMAS

You broke your parole. That's something you'll need to answer for.

Again Paul slaps the counter in anger.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

If I'm presented with an opportunity to perform justice, I'll take it.

Paul explodes in a rage.

PAUL

Perform justice? What kind of a man strides into another man's home so he can teach him about justice? How do you know so much about it? Where did you learn justice? Tell me, Thomas! Did you sit at a little desk? Answer True or False when it asked what was good, and what was bad? I've seen the justice of man, Thomas! I've seen it fail, and I've seen it kill! Would you like to hear my admission of guilt? Alright. I was responsible for the killing of a man, a man who was not innocent but over whose life I should have had no dominion. Have you ever killed a man? Can you say with any certainty that you've never killed a man who didn't deserve to die?

THOMAS

This...this isn't about...

PAUL

Fourteen years I spent in prison. Fourteen years I paid for my sins as human justice demanded. But what you can't know, Thomas, man of the law, is that my years in prison did nothing! They turned me into a sour, angry wretch with a lustful heart and a bone to pick with God. "What is justice" I shouted to the sky, because I couldn't see it. It was in remembering my brush with death that I found peace again. Prison or no prison, it was God's justice, his promise of retribution, without which I would still be a snake, stealing and fucking my way to hell. Do not walk into my church with your justice.

Thomas is taken aback. He looks around the bar and sees the hardened eyes of Floyd and Gruff.

Thomas grits his teeth and stands up.

THOMAS

I'm placing you under arrest for parole violation. I'll be calling Chicago in the morning.

Paul responds by PUNCHING Thomas in the face. Thomas falls flat to the floor. He pulls himself up slowly.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Eric Stolarski, you're under arrest for assault on an officer.

Paul punches him again. Again, Thomas stands.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

I...I...

He looks helplessly at Gruff and Floyd. They walk in front of the bar, standing beside Paul and shaking their heads.

PAUL

Don't come to church in the morning.

Paul turns and sits back down at the bar. Thomas is left facing Gruff and Floyd. Gruff tilts his head toward the door.

Thomas wipes some blood off his face, and leaves the bar.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Fuming, Thomas storms into his office and sits at his desk.

His VOICEMAIL is beeping. He hits the button and it plays.

FEDERAL MARSHALL [OS]
 Sheriff, this is Doug Blaine, with
 the Federal Marshals. There's another
 missing person, a young girl, same
 profile as the others, and she was
 last seen in your neck of the woods.
 A couple Marshal's are gonna be
 heading to Fireweed to make some
 inquiries about the cannibal case.
 We'd love to hear any leads you have.

Frustrated, Thomas picks up his criminal folder on Paul and
 THROWS it across the room.

EXT. DRY RIVER BED - NIGHT

Tim sits on top of a pile of rocks, staring at the sky and
 singing softly to himself.

TIM
*"You can run on for a long time, run
 on for a long time. Run on for a
 long time, sooner or later God'll
 cut you..."*

He breaks down into pathetic tears.

EXT. CHURCHYARD - MORNING

The night passes by and morning comes. Tim lifts rocks out
 of his truck, piling them onto the wall. He works feverishly.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Sara knocks on the door. There's no response.

SARA
 Paul! Reverend! Are you home?

Impatient, Sara walks around the outside of the house.

EXT. PAUL'S BACK YARD - DAY

She finds Paul out in the back yard. He is on his knees, but
 slumped and slouched. His head is hanging.

SARA
 Paul? What are you doing out here?

PAUL
 I tried to pray. I was just...Trying.
 But the more I talk to Him, the more
 (MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)
he tries to confuse me. Why didn't
the voice just say what it meant?

SARA
This isn't a good time...

PAUL
No. Stay.

Sara approaches him slowly, cautiously.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I've been thinking on my sins, and
trying to make sense. But I don't
want to think about it anymore.

He stands up and faces Sara.

SARA
There's a look in your eyes I haven't
seen in a long time.

PAUL
I want you, Sara.

SARA
Let's go inside.

PAUL
Our first time, we were outside
because we had to be secret. This
time, I want it to be outside like
there's nothing we need to hide.
Can't hide from God anyway.

SARA
Does it bother you that God knows?

PAUL
I know it's a sin. But I know it's
not my worst sin.

They kiss passionately. Sara starts unbuttoning Paul's shirt.

EXT. CHURCHYARD - DAY

Tim pauses in his work on the wall, sweating profusely.

He goes to his truck.

Inside is pinned a small PHOTO of the family, the same that
sits in Paul's living room.

Tim smiles as he looks at the photo, at the smiling faces of each member of the family.

Then he looks closer at the image of Sara, and at Paul.

As if a wave of information hits him, he blinks and stumbles.

EXT. PAUL'S BACK YARD - DAY

Paul and Sara continue their tryst. She grasps the grass beneath her as she pants. He breaths furiously.

EXT. CHURCHYARD - DAY

As if watching the scene between Paul and Sara, Tim holds his hands to his head and closes his eyes. Shakes his head.

He tries to distract himself, picking up a rock or two.

He throws the rock that's in his hand. He kicks the next. He starts to yell, roars, then KICKS his wall over.

He finally ceases his rampage. A WIND starts to blow.

From across the churchyard, Abby watches him, afraid.

EXT. PAUL'S BACK YARD - DAY

Aside from the rustling of branches in the yard, the only sound is the rustling of clothes being put back on.

PAUL
What time is it?

A WIND starts to grow in the distance.

EXT. CHURCHYARD - DAY

The community files in to the church. WIND is blowing.

Tim stands near the wall, watching with wide eyes as the people stream by. The wall is almost completely demolished.

The townspeople look at him uncomfortably before each averting his/her gaze and going hurriedly inside the church.

Abby is the last. She watches Tim, too frightened to approach him. At last she walks into the church.

The doors of the church close. Far behind Tim, a massive DUST STORM is approaching.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Paul has begun speaking, loudly over the sound of the wind.

PAUL

Anyone who thinks he is perfect in the sight of the Lord is in for a surprise on the last day, when we all gather one final time and remind each other of the many ways we faltered. I'm not perfect, and today I will share with you a great failure of mine. I have not been completely forthright with you in the telling of my brush with death. The Voice I heard, it said something more, something I have not related to you.

Someone looks out the window. The DUST STORM has hit. The lone figure of Tim still stands outside, patiently.

EXT. CHURCHYARD - DAY

Tim stands and stares at the Church. A deep resentment, hate even, shines in his eyes. He doesn't mind the blowing DUST.

He takes up a SHOVEL from the truck, walks toward the church.

Slowly he slides the handle of the shovel into the handles, so that the doors can not be opened from the inside. He tests this theory, shaking the doors back and forth.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Paul continues.

PAUL

But, I could not have told you the whole story until I myself understood. It would not have been right; the story would not have been complete. And now, my new understanding has clarified my spirit. It gives me hope, which now I pass on to you.

EXT. CHURCHYARD - DAY

Tim reaches into his pocket. He produces the MATCH BOOK Frank had given him. He takes out a single match.

Tim is surprised to find ISAAC has approached behind him.

ISAAC

You could either burn the building down, or you could do it the easy way and wait till they all start to starve to death and eat each other.

Tim gets defensive, turning around to face Isaac.

TIM

You don't know what I'm doing.

Isaac in turn is taken aback.

ISAAC

Oh...You really are going to burn it down? Well, it's certainly not that I haven't thought about it. Sheep taste better cooked.

Tim quickly takes the shovel out of the doors. He's shamefully silent. The crazed anger is gone. He sets down the shovel.

TIM

No. Abby's in there.

ISAAC

So you don't think it would be right to burn the good with the bad?

Tim looks Isaac directly in the eyes. Tim becomes doubtful and confused. Isaac tilts his head, expectantly.

TIM

I don't see anything.

Tim turns away, confused. Isaac shrugs.

ISAAC

Why don't we go inside? I want to hear what all the fuss is about.

He and Tim enter the church.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Isaac and Tim walk into the back.

PAUL

"Your greatest sin is the one you haven't done yet." Those words made me fear the sin that was still ahead, but I was wrong to be afraid. The words were meant to strengthen me when the day came and I realized what the sin was. So with that, I invite you all today to join me in finding a sin in your past that...that brings you comfort. Comfort in the knowledge that it's behind you, that it's one less stumbling block between you and God.

A HAND is raised in the crowd. Abby's hand. Silence falls.

PAUL (CONT'D)

There's no need to raise your hand
like a nervous school girl, my love!
Shout out what you'd like to shout!

ABBY

But I want to ask something. Maybe
it was unclear if you said it already.
What was the sin?

PAUL

Excuse me?

ABBY

What was the sin that was so bad?

Paul pauses for a long beat. All eyes are glued on him.

PAUL

Why...it was the thing I already
said. My sin was in not telling
you...you all, the whole truth about
what the Voice said. It was a test!
A test of my ability to understand
the path the Almighty has laid out
for my salvation! Until today I
failed that test, which is why I am
laying that sin at your feet.

Most of the congregation smiles and nods.

ISAAC

(to Tim)

They love this circular bullshit.

PAUL

But now it's your turn. I want you
to shout out a sin of your own that
was a test from God. A sin that you've
managed to put behind you in order
to stave off his retribution. Why
don't you lead us, Abby?

She looks at him and shakes her head vigorously.

PAUL (CONT'D)

My loving wife. Every day she is a
lesson to me. She'll be a lesson to
you too! Abby, tell us about a
hopeful sin. "Hopeful sin." That's
what we'll call it. The Lord's test
requires us to fall at least once.
That failure is the hopeful sin.
Abby?

Abby is getting frustrated at being singled out. She's turning red in the face, looking back and forth for a way out.

Tim's eyes begins to drift. He sees FRANK walk out from the back of the church and stand beside Paul at the podium.

All the noise fades from the room. Tim's eyes lock on Frank.

Then Tim closes his eyes. His head starts to shake as his teeth clench. The anger, the rage is back.

FRANK

Timothy.

Tim shakes his head.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Timothy!

Tim opens his eyes.

PAUL

TIMOTHY!

Silence. Tim's head stops shaking. Now that his eyes are open, he's surprised to see that he is STANDING.

Everyone is looking uncomfortably at Tim. Tim looks around the room for a few more moments before bellowing.

TIM

I...SEE...YOUR SINS!

The crowd stirs nervously.

TIM (CONT'D)

All of them, even the ones you haven't talked about. You are all liars! You pretend to be good people, but you are not! You're not really making things right with the Lord, because the sins you like to talk about...you make them sound different than they really are. And you only tell the normal sins. WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER SINS. THE ONES THAT I SEE?!

He screams out these last words, staring at Paul.

PAUL

Thank you, Tim. Please leave now.

TIM

I have a sin! I have a bad, bad sin!
(MORE)

TIM (CONT'D)

I tried to tell myself it was the right thing, but I knew it wasn't.

PAUL

Timothy...no...

SARA

Tim?

TIM

I killed Frank L'Angel! And he was my friend.

Horrified stirs and murmurs fill the room. Paul looks at Sara. Sara looks back and forth at the terrified faces.

RUTH

Arrest him! Where's the Sheriff?

ABBY

Stop it. What are you saying, Tim?

RUTH

What is everyone waiting for? Sara, why don't you say anything?

Sara has no words. She looks up at Paul, who returns her glance for a moment before looking away.

ISAAC

(to Tim)

So, this means Sara is unattached now?

Tim glares at him. Isaac smiles widely.

GRUFF

I knew there was something messed up in his head.

FLOYD

We obviously can't trust a single thing he's done or said.

RUTH

Somebody go find the Sheriff!

Isaac stands up quickly.

ISAAC

Quiet, please! Didn't the Reverend just say this isn't a classroom? Did you even hear what Tim said?

He places a hand on Tim's shoulder.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

What he just did was a brave thing but you're missing the point! You only heard what he said about himself, but you didn't hear what he had to say about you! I'm...I'm a doctor. When a patient comes in and says he's developed a rash, I need him to tell me more than that. If I'm going to help him at all, I need to know what the rash looks like, where the rash is, and how he thinks he got the rash! Now the Almighty, he sees everything...right? And if he's like me, he must hate discrepancies. Your story about how you got your rash had better match your symptoms. You want to announce your sins? Be honest about them! Stop prancing around and trying to be polite.

He turns to Tim and smiles a friendly smile. Tim just glares at Isaac.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

Is that what you were trying to say?

The murmurs of the crowd grow louder. Finally, Abby stands up. All eyes turn.

ABBY

I had impure thought about a man. I imagined him unbuttoning my dress, kissing my neck, using his fingers inside me. He wasn't my husband.

She glares at Paul. Paul is beyond the point of disbelief.

Abby strides out of the church. On the way, she stops to look for Tim. Tim has slipped away.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Where's Tim?

Isaac shrugs and points toward the door. Abby exits.

Gruff stands up.

GRUFF

I caught a rabbit in a cage. He was meant for dinner, but I was feeling sort of strange, so I tore his ears
(MORE)

GRUFF (CONT'D)

off one by one, because I like the sound they make when they scream. And then I lit him on fire. That was...last week.

Paul is flabbergasted. He falls back from the pulpit.

MAYOR

You all know I've never been very successful with women. Well, every month I still send letters to the first lady who ever broke my heart. Those letters are all copies of the blackmail letters I used years ago to ruin her family, for revenge.

RUTH

My husband...my husband was a devout Jew. Most of you knew him. Whenever I was angry with him, or after any little argument, I would buy bacon fat and melt it onto his dinner. He never found out that I was violating his silly religion that was so important to him.

Paul cringes, terrified, at each terrible revelation. Sara continues to sit in the pew, her head in her hands.

EXT. CHURCHYARD - DAY

The service is over. The congregation streams out of the church. But now there are no smiles, no words spoken.

INT. CHURCH - AFTERNOON

Paul is sitting behind the pulpit, but the church is empty except for Sara, who is slowly approaching the pulpit.

She comes around it until she can see Paul. She glares at him for a moment. He glares back.

Without a word, she turns away, leaving Paul all alone.

BEGIN FLASHBACK.

EXT. TIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Tim sits on his front porch and watches as Frank stumbles up to the house. Frank sings loudly, "Amazing Grace."

Sara puts her head out the door.

SARA
Do you know what time it is?

FRANK
Oh? Whether I know or not, does that
change the time that is?

SARA
Where have you been? You were supposed
to be here for supper.

He sniffs his fingers.

FRANK
Can I wash my hands first?

SARA
You're not coming in here like that.

FRANK
Like what am I like?

SARA
Drunk.

FRANK
I like you. I loooove my Sara.

SARA
Not good enough.

Sara shuts the door.

Frank's demeanor changes. It becomes loud, raucous, cruel.

FRANK
Sara! This ain't your house and you
can't shut me out! It's Tim's house,
and he won't say nothin' about me
kicking down the door.

Tim frowns.

SARA (O.S.)
Do you want me to shoot you? I have
a friend whose got a gun.

FRANK
A gun? Oh, you would love to use a
gun on me, wouldn't you?

SARA (O.S.)
I'm not listening anymore. You can
find someplace else to sleep.

Frank looks over at Tim. Once again his whole demeanor changes. Quietly and steadily he walks to Tim and sits.

FRANK
You are a busybody. Always watching,
always listening.

TIM
What's the matter with you?

FRANK
With me? Ain't that the wrong
question?

Beat.

TIM
Why do you pretend?

FRANK
Pretend?

TIM
I don't like it when people pretend.
You're not really like that.

FRANK
Aren't we only what we are to the
people around us? The things we
keep away from folks, are they real?

Tim processes this.

TIM
The secret things that nobody sees,
those are most real of all.

FRANK
Now you're getting it.

Suddenly, Frank looks the other direction and stands up.

FRANK (CONT'D)
How about you and me go for a walk.

TIM
Right now?

FRANK
When's better for you?

Tim sheepishly stands up. The two of them walk off the porch.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Frank knocks on the door to Paul's home, Tim behind him.

TIM
You're gonna wake him up.

FRANK
Well he ain't gonna answer the door
if he's asleep.

TIM
He might get mad.

Frank smiles widely and knocks again.

Mutters, shuffles are heard from inside the house. The door opens, and Paul, disheveled, faces them.

PAUL
It's an ungodly hour, you realize...

He sees Frank, and a swell of bitter anger passes over him.

FRANK
Evening, most Reverend.

PAUL
It's very late.

FRANK
Nah. It's very early.

PAUL
What can I help you with?

FRANK
Help? No, there's no helpin' for the
things I got to do. I just wanted to
stop by and ask how my Sara is doing?

Beat. Paul's face turns white.

FRANK (CONT'D)
You know, my wife. How's she doin'?

PAUL
I'd hope she's well, but you'd get a
better answer asking her yourself.

FRANK
I could, but I wanted to ask you.

Beat. Fire flies between their eyes.

PAUL
Why are you here?

FRANK
Retribution.

PAUL
I asked you a question.

FRANK
Retribution.

Paul, anger heating up, steps out of his door threateningly.

PAUL
You get the hell off my property!

FRANK
If you get off my property.

The fire continues to fly. Frank finally takes a step back.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Retribution. I just like the way
that word sounds.

He walks away. Tim is left helpless and confused. Paul watches after Frank for a few moments, angry. Then he turns to Tim.

PAUL
Tim. See me in the morning.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Tim digs once again, churning up the original grave.

Once he's about halfway down, another SHOVEL joins his. Then Tim looks up and sees that it's FRANK helping him.

Tim jumps backward, and Frank disappears.

Tim doubles down, digging more urgently than before.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Abby opens the door to the Sheriff's office, and knocks gingerly on the door.

Thomas is seated at his desk, a bottle of whiskey half-drunk on the desk surrounded by a pile of cigarette butts.

Startled by the knock, he sits up and straightens his desk.

THOMAS

Oh, come in. I'm sorry for the mess.

ABBY

It's alright.

THOMAS

The last few days have not been smooth sailing around here.

ABBY

I understand. May I sit?

THOMAS

Please.

Abby notices his bruised eye and bloody lip.

ABBY

Oh...what happened to you?

Abby moves toward him and touches his face.

THOMAS

It's nothing.

ABBY

Somebody beat the shit out of you.

THOMAS

Yes. I was drunk and I said some things I shouldn't have.

Abby leans up on the desk, beside him.

ABBY

That's not the full truth. But I should expect nothing more from the people in my life, at this point.

Thomas grimaces.

THOMAS

Your husband. I brought up his past.

Abby is not at all surprised. She nods slowly.

ABBY

I can see that.

THOMAS

But you must be here about Tim.

ABBY

So you've heard what happened?

THOMAS

Mrs. Abramson came by. And the Mayor called. I'm supposed to "arrest him on sight."

ABBY

When he turns up, you won't just listen to what everyone else says about him, will you?

THOMAS

Did he say he killed Frank, or not?

ABBY

He's really just a child.

THOMAS

I don't know. Nothing makes any sense.

ABBY

If something doesn't make sense, don't trick yourself into thinking it should. Just let it be.

THOMAS

I can't let this be.

Abby thinks for a moment, then reaches into her pocket. She pulls out three TRAIN TICKETS.

ABBY

These are one way tickets, out of Fireweed. One is for me, one is for Tim. I got a third, too.

Thomas stares at her. Abby smiles and leans toward him.

ABBY (CONT'D)

May I kiss you?

Thomas nods uncertainly.

Abby kisses him gently on the lips. She shuts her eyes.

ABBY (CONT'D)

I've never been kissed like that.

THOMAS

Like what?

ABBY

Like I wasn't a meal.

Blushing, Abby turns and leaves the office.

Thomas sits still, speechless. The train ticket sits on the desk in front of him.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Tim, digging still, uncovers the corner of a PLASTIC BAG. Curious, he pulls it out and tosses it to the side.

He digs to the bottom. His shovel uncovers a dead HAND.

He stoops down and uncovers the arm and then the rest of the body, finally scooping the dirt out of Frank's face.

Tim sighs in relief, and smiles. He stands up and pulls himself out of the hole.

TIM

I was worried you weren't still here.
Maybe I didn't bury you quite good
enough the first time. I'm sorry.

He drops the shovel and crosses his hands in prayer.

TIM (CONT'D)

Lord, I don't know if my prayer is
as good as the Reverend's, so I hope
you will listen to mine. Bless Frank,
your servant. Or, at least I think
he was your servant. He wasn't a bad
person, so I think you should let
him into your eternal life. Or, at
least, let him someplace else that
isn't here with me. Amen.

He takes up the shovel and prepares to continue filling in the hole, when he glances the plastic bag again.

Curious, he goes to it and tears it open.

Shock and disgust fill his eyes as he sees what's inside.

In a daze he steps back.

Then he looks around, seeing all the spots of fresh-dug dirt.

Taking the shovel, he starts to dig another spot. A few feet under he finds another plastic bag.

Then another. And another.

Tears of horror fill his eyes as he looks over the ground, where he has dug up six or seven shallow graves.

In each plastic bag: rotting SKELETONS.

INT. GRUFF'S BAR - NIGHT

The bar is empty except for Sara, sitting alone at a table.

Isaac walks in, stands at the bar.

ISAAC

Evening Gruff! I'll take your palest.

Gruff walks over to him, looking nervously at other patrons.

GRUFF

I like you, Doctor, but you have a lot of nerve coming in here tonight.

ISAAC

That's a new one. Why?

GRUFF

You stood up for the Idiot today.

Sara stands up quickly and runs to the bar.

SARA

Call my brother the Idiot one more time and I'll run this bottle right through your eye.

She grabs him by the hair.

GRUFF

What! It's your husband he killed!

ISAAC

Don't talk back to the lady. Think about the emotional stress of her family situation right now.

SARA

Why *did* you stand up for him?

ISAAC

It was that, or watch these barbarians carve him up and eat him for lunch.

GRUFF

Akers used to be a respectable name.

SARA

Bring us the damn drinks. On me.

Gruff reluctantly pours a LAGER for Isaac and one for Sara. Isaac nods and holds up his glass to Sara. They "cheers."

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The light turns on. Isaac and Sara enter, laughing.

SARA
Your office?

ISAAC
If you can respect doctor-patient confidentiality, I can show you the back room where I sleep and eat.

SARA
It's got a bed? Sounds good to me.

She leans against him. Isaac smirks and walks to the back.

INT. ISAAC'S ROOM - NIGHT

Isaac shuts the door behind them as they enter.

There is a small bed, a bathroom and a stove.

ISAAC
It's simple. Enough for someone like me who lives alone.

SARA
Best part of living alone? There's nobody to bother us.

She pushes her face into his and they kiss.

They keep kissing. Their clothes begin to quickly shed.

CRASH. With the sound of thunder outside, the lights go out.

ISAAC
Fine. It's better in the dark anyway!

EXT. CHURCHYARD - NIGHT

The wind blows. LIGHTNING with THUNDER tears across the sky.

Paul has his sleeves pulled up, and he's frantically working on rebuilding the WALL around the church.

INT. FRANK'S HOUSE/ BEDROOM - NIGHT

Isaac is in the bed with Sara. Softly, quietly he stands up.

In the dark, he lights a CANDLE.

Then he switches on the STOVE.

INT. TIM'S HOUSE/ LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Tim rushes into his house.

He finds Abby sitting on the couch, patiently.

ABBY

Thank God Tim, you finally came home.

TIM

Where's Sara?

ABBY

Where have you been? Everyone has been trying to find you. Tim, if they had gotten to you first, I don't know what they might have done...

TIM

It doesn't matter. Where's Sara?

ABBY

I don't...I don't know.

TIM

Do you know where Doctor Isaac is?

ABBY

Doctor Isaac...no.

TIM

I need to find him.

He turns back to the door. Abby grabs his arm.

ABBY

Stop for just a minute and listen to me. This is important. You're not safe in Fireweed anymore.

He pauses and looks her in the eye. Tears come into her eyes.

TIM

No. Guess not.

ABBY

If I ran away, would you come with me?

TIM

Run away? Where?

ABBY

I don't know. It doesn't matter. But I got you a train ticket.

She hands him the TICKET. He looks at it for a long moment, wheels slowly turning in his hand.

ABBY (CONT'D)

I want us to be able to tell each other stories and sing each other songs again, without worrying about anybody or anything else.

Tim starts to laugh. It's crazed, it's uncomfortable, and it goes on for a long moment. Abby frowns.

Tim stops laughing and becomes grim.

TIM

I'd like that. But I have a job to do.

ABBY

What job? Not that silly church wall.

TIM

Not the wall.

ABBY

Well what then? When'll you be done?

Tim stares at her intently.

TIM

You can't understand.

ABBY

You're different now, Tim. You're frightening.

Tim takes a step back from her.

TIM

But you're still good.

He turns and walks quickly out of the front door.

ABBY

But you'll be at the station? Tim?

He disappears into the night.

INT. ISAAC'S ROOM - NIGHT

In the dim light of the CANDLES, Isaac reaches into a drawer for a long, serrated KNIFE.

He produces a slab of MEAT and slices it into several pieces. Sprinkling SEASONING, he drops the meat onto the stove.

He shuts his eyes, smelling the sizzling meal. He smiles, looking eerie in the candlelight.

EXT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Tim, SHOVEL in hand, storms toward the door of the Doctor's office. He grabs the handle but it's locked.

He pulls back the shovel and prepares for the blow. Then CRASH, he begins to beat down the door.

INT. ISAAC'S ROOM - NIGHT

Isaac hears the crash, blending with the sound of the wind.

ISAAC

Did that sound like the wind to you?

There is no response from the darkness behind him.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

Hmm. To me either.

He brandishes his long knife, and waits by the door.

The meat sizzles and begins to smoke.

The CRASHES get louder and closer. The door of the room begins to buckle with repeated heavy blows.

Isaac holds up the knife...

The lights FLICKER and TURN ON. Isaac is dazed by the light.

Tim BREAKS down the door and charges at Isaac.

The SHOVEL, Tim's weapon, swings madly left and right.

Isaac gets a hold of the shovel, twists it out of Tim's hand.

Tim grabs Isaac by the neck and by the knife hand and pushes him up against the wall.

SARA

Tim!

Sara sits up in bed, and screams.

Tim freezes. Silence takes hold for a moment. Isaac smiles.

TIM

Are you alright Sara?

SARA

What the hell are you doing here?

TIM
I'm protecting you.

SARA
First Frank, and now are you gonna
kill the doctor too?

TIM
He was gonna eat you.

SARA
He was just makin' dinner for me!

TIM
He's killed a whole lotta girls and
eaten them all!

SARA
Get outta here Tim! They all thought
you'd gone completely crazy, and
they were right. Get out! Help! Help!

She screams at the top of her lungs.

ISAAC
You're more than welcome to stay for
dinner, Tim. It's not too late for
it to be a quiet and civil affair...

Tim, confused and cornered, SLAMS Isaac's head against the
wall. Isaac goes out cold.

SARA
Aaah! Somebody, help!

Tim picks Isaac up, slings him over his shoulder, and exits.

EXT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Tim runs with Isaac, unsure where to turn or where to go.

Sara's SCREAMS pursue him from inside the office, and he can
hear VOICES of men from down the street.

He drops the unconscious Isaac into the passenger seat of
his TRUCK. He climbs into the cab, and drives away.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE/BEDROOM - NIGHT

Abby is in bed alone. She tosses and turns, unable to sleep.

In the dark corner of the room there stands a DARK SILHOUETTE.
The GHOST. It can be heard softly BREATHING.

Nervous, Abby reaches to turn on a LAMP. The figure vanishes.

Making up her mind, Abby stands up.

She goes to the closet, places some SUITCASES on the bed.

Taking the first DRESS out of her closet, she folds it and places it in the case.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Gruff sits beside Sara, comforting her. Thomas stands.

SARA

I've just been so patient with him,
but maybe that was a mistake. He
came in here smashing with a shovel.
Hit the doctor in the head.

GRUFF

What were you doing in the Doctor's?

Thomas pointedly bypasses the question.

THOMAS

Where did Tim go?

SARA

I heard his truck driving away.

THOMAS

Any reason you know that Tim might
have had to attack the doctor?

GRUFF

Reason? Reason's got nothing to do
with anything now. Tim's a lunatic.

THOMAS

Any reason you can think of, Mrs.
L'Angel?

Sara continues to hyperventilate and grow more hysterical.

SARA

He was screaming nonsense, about
saving me and about how the doctor
was eating people and was gonna eat
me...What's wrong with Tim, Sheriff?
What's wrong with Tim?

RUTH enters the office.

RUTH

You poor thing! What are these brutes
doing to you? Sheriff, this is no
time for an interrogation!

THOMAS

I'm not...if I'm going to find Tim...

SARA

I told you everything I know!

RUTH

She told you everything she knows!
Come with me, dear. I'll get you
some tea and we can get your mind
off of things. Maybe I can get your
sister or the Reverend Paul.

SARA

No. Don't bother Abby or Paul. Don't.

Ruth ushers Sara out of the room. Gruff stands to join Thomas.
Thomas takes a swig from a FLASK.

GRUFF

Floyd went to wake the Mayor. What
do you think we should do, Sheriff?
Are we going out to look for Tim?

Thomas lights up a CIGARETTE.

THOMAS

Let me have a few minutes alone.

GRUFF

But Tim's gettin' away. He's gonna
hurt the doctor if we don't act fast!

THOMAS

Dammit! I just need a few minutes!

Gruff grimaces and turns away. He hurries out the door.

Pensively, Thomas puffs the cigarette and looks around.

The lights FLICKER and go out again. Thomas, alone in the
dark, exhales smoke and shuts his eyes in silent disbelief.

INT. TIM'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Tim drives through the night as the sky begins to glow.

In the other seat, Isaac begins to stir and wake up.

INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ruth, Sara, Gruff, Floyd and the Mayor have all gathered
around the table. Ruth is pouring COFFEE for everyone.

MAYOR

See now, Frank was one thing. I for one never much liked him anyway.

GRUFF

He wasn't a kind soul; that's a fact.

FLOYD

Wanted to do it myself, on occasion.

RUTH

He never stopped talking.

MAYOR

True. And, he was a nigger.

Sara looks up at them, wide-eyed through her tears.

MAYOR (CONT'D)

But Doctor Isaac is a different story altogether! We should be outraged!

RUTH

The doctor's never been anything but kind to Tim. To all of us.

FLOYD

To break in and kidnap him, your brother ain't right in the head.

GRUFF

He's never been right in the head.

MAYOR

Tim even ruined the Sunday service.

FLOYD

It won't be the same again.

GRUFF

Pity, for the good Reverend.

RUTH

I warned Tim's mother she should have dropped him in a ditch. He's always been a downright inconvenience.

GRUFF

I say we go find the idiot ourselves. the Sheriff won't be bothered; his priorities are ass-backwards.

FLOYD

Count me in.

MAYOR

Right. I'll get my truck.

The men all hurry out the door. Ruth and Sara are left alone.

SARA

They'll hurt him, won't they?

Ruth nods matter-of-factly, with not a hint of guilt. Sara stares straight ahead, in a daze.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE/ LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Paul comes in the front door. He's covered in sweat. Pacing around the house, he is met with initial silence.

PAUL

Abby? Are you here?

A voice calls out, softly, from the bedroom.

ABBY

I'm here.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE/ BEDROOM - NIGHT

As Paul walks into the room, he sees the bags, fully packed, sitting on the bed. His jaw quivers.

ABBY

Are you angry with me?

Paul swallows his pride. His posture sags weakly.

PAUL

Abigail, before you make any decisions... I must bare my soul to you. I've asked you to do so for me on many occasions, but never did you had the need to do so as I have now.

Abby sits down on the bed, expectantly listening.

PAUL (CONT'D)

As I am a man, I am filled with weakness. I've tried to cover that weakness, to hide it beneath my other sins. But I lied to you. Your sister and I...we grew close after...

ABBY

After the baby.

PAUL

It was hard. We fell to talking more
and more. Then we were...consorting.

He stammers. Abby watches him, silently enjoying his struggle.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I've been with her, thirteen times.
The first was about a year ago. The
most recent was...yesterday.

He cannot go on. He can't find more words.

ABBY

Is that all?

PAUL

What?

ABBY

If that's all, I have an early train
to catch.

PAUL

Don't leave, Abigail. You are the
only salvation I have. The light of
my life, whom I love, so very much.

Abby stands up. She holds the door open for Paul. Wordlessly,
she motions for him to go. He slowly stands.

ABBY

I'm glad you finally told me yourself.
But the only bad things we can save
ourselves from are the ones that
haven't happened yet. When things
are done, they're done.

Paul leaves the room and Abby shuts the door.

INT. ISAAC'S ROOM - NIGHT

Thomas walks into the room where the fight had taken place.
He looks around at the signs of the struggle.

Glances at the MEAT on the grill, suspiciously.

He opens several CABINETS. Finds nothing but usual housewares.

There is another DOOR leading out of the room. Thomas tries
it. Locked.

He turns and shuts the main door behind him and picks up the
SHOVEL from the floor.

Using the shovel, he bashes down the new door.

A dark corridor of stairs leads downwards. Thomas turns on his FLASHLIGHT and descends.

INT. ISAAC'S CELLAR - NIGHT

He flicks a SWITCH on the wall. No lights come on.

The flashlight reveals a butchering table, complete with meat cleaver. Everything is very clean and tidy.

A CAGE in the corner catches his eye.

There is a MEAT FREEZER in the corner.

Slowly, Thomas opens it, illuminating the inside.

He gags, holding his mouth in horror.

Inside are several frozen HUMAN BODY PARTS. An arm, a leg, and some cuts of meat.

INT. TIM'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Tim is driving out into the desert. Isaac wakes up.

ISAAC

Stars are beautiful out here.

Tim ignores him.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

Before you kill me, I would love to know how you got out of that grave.

TIM

What?

ISAAC

When you fell in, with Frank. I figured you for dead.

TIM

I think I was dead. And I came back.

ISAAC

What, you mean like the Reverend? It's not a very scientific theory. Was it afterward that you started seeing...?

TIM

Why couldn't I see your sin?

ISAAC

What is a sin, anyway? I don't think any such thing exists. Maybe it's guilt you've been seeing. Guilt's the thing that keeps people afraid of themselves and angry with everyone else. What do you think my sin is?

Tim stops the truck abruptly.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

The truck comes to a screeching halt. Tim pushes Isaac out. Isaac falls to the ground. Tim jumps out of the truck.

Tim pushes Isaac to the edge of Frank's open GRAVE.

TIM

You pretended to be nice. But you were gonna kill and eat my sister!

Isaac starts to laugh.

ISAAC

Your sister, Sara? I'd never eat her, Tim! There's not a single resident of Fireweed worth my palate. They're all hypocritical, backstabbing vermin posing as humans. It would be like eating a pastry full of maggots.

Tim takes a step back, considering this.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

Though I'm sure Sara would taste wonderful. I'd have to ask Frank about that, but he's...

He indicates Frank's nearby GRAVE.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

Oh! I could ask Reverend Paul. He would have some idea about her flavor.

TIM

You should stop talking now.

Isaac grows more confident, laughing and carefree.

ISAAC

It doesn't take a visionary to see a man's sins. Or a woman's. You've just never looked until now.

(MORE)

ISAAC (CONT'D)

I thoroughly envy your innocence.
Like a dog, you're just barking at
the wind because you don't understand
it. But the wind won't stop for you!

Tim cries out loudly, and grabs Isaac. He drags him the rest
of the way toward the GRAVE, and throws him in.

The bottom of the grave is in darkness. Neither Isaac nor
Frank's corpse can be seen. Tim starts tossing in dirt.

ISAAC (CONT'D)

That's more like it, Tim! Don't just
bark, use those teeth of yours, haha!
Point you in the right direction and
take off your chain, and you're an
angel of death! That's what you are!
Because everything has to be fair,
right? It has to make sense. Everyone
has to get what's coming to them!

TIM

Retribution.

ISAAC

Oh, that word. Hahaha!

Isaac's laughter fades as Tim pushes in the rest of the dirt.
Tim madly completes the job of burying the hole.

The sun is just starting to light the sky a little.

Tim climbs into his TRUCK. He drives the truck so that the
wheel is directly over top of the hole.

Then he climbs out. Tired, he leans back against the truck.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAWN

Abby walks out of her house, carrying several BAGS.

A TAXI is in front of the house. Abby sets her bags in the
trunk, then sits down in the car.

ABBY

The train station.

The car pulls away.

EXT. MAIN STREET - MORNING

Ruth walks with Sara, arm in arm down the street.

The CAR with Abby passes by them. Abby looks out the window.

RUTH
Is that Abigail?

Sara looks directly at Abby. They share a long glance.

SARA
Abby, no!

Abby says something to the driver, and the car keeps moving.

SARA (CONT'D)
Where are you going, Abby? Abby!

The car disappears. Sara runs after it for a few pathetic steps, then gives up. Tears appear in her eyes.

RUTH
Just as well. Running away from her
sinfulness. You heard what she said
in church. And with such a perfect
husband, too.

SARA
Shut your mouth.

RUTH
And let's not forget she was pregnant
before she'd married. I'm just saying
what I see. Of all the Akers children,
it looks like you're the only one
who's not a cheater or a murderer!

Sara SMACKS Ruth across the face.

Their eyes meet for a moment, then Sara storms away. Ruth holds her hand over her face, staring out in disbelief.

Behind her approaches Sheriff Thomas, running.

THOMAS
Ruth! I can't find the Mayor, or
Gruff.

RUTH
About time you showed up, Sheriff.
Where were you when we needed you?

THOMAS
Needed me? Where did everybody go?

RUTH
The men did what they had to do in
the absence of their Sheriff. That
terrible Akers boy is out there doing
unspeakable things to our dear doctor.

THOMAS

The doctor...he's the rapist! The murderer and the fucking cannibal!

RUTH

Oh...

THOMAS

Tim Akers was right. He knew, somehow. Now, where did they all go?

RUTH

They went out into the desert to find him. I hope they save the doctor.

THOMAS

Save the doctor? Did you hear a word I just said?

RUTH

Take a deep breath, Sheriff, and let me ask you something. Of all the women this cannibal has supposedly killed, were any of them from around here? Are they anybody we know? No, they aren't! Why should we care?

Thomas is completely lost for words.

He turns and runs back to his car.

EXT. DESERT - DAWN

Tim sits lifelessly beside the fresh grave. Another TRUCK pulls into the frame. Mayor Jonas is driving, while Gruff, Floyd, and several others are riding in the bed.

FLOYD

Well, hell. There he is.

GRUFF

And no sign of the doctor.

MAYOR

Go get him.

The men jump off the truck and run towards Tim. Tim looks up at them, but he's too tired to fight or run. He looks upward.

The men knock him over and begin to pummel him.

GRUFF

Alright, that's enough.

As they pull Tim up, Gruff looks down into one of the GRAVES.

GRUFF (CONT'D)

Holy hell, there's a dead skeleton
in here.

FLOYD

This one too!

The Mayor waddles toward them and looks inside the graves.

MAYOR

Shit. Is this your work too, Tim?

GRUFF

You know what I bet? I bet these are
the cannibalized women.

FLOYD

You think Tim's the cannibal?

The Mayor squints at Tim.

MAYOR

Doesn't strictly speaking matter
either way, does it? You know what
we're here to do.

He unfolds a ROPE he's been holding.

INT. TIM'S HOUSE/SARA'S ROOM - MORNING

In her room, Sara sits alone. She stares straight ahead at
the floor, and starts to sob.

There's a KNOCK at her door.

She looks up. Slowly, she stands to open it.

Paul is standing there.

They look at one another for a moment, then Paul moves in.

PAUL

She's gone.

He sits on the bed.

SARA

I know.

Paul smiles at her gently. She sits on the bed beside him.

He turns to her and tries to kiss her neck. She edges away.
He tries again. She moves away further.

Confused, he grabs her around the waist and pulls her close.

She pulls herself free for a moment.

SARA (CONT'D)

No! Don't you see? We thought we could have it all. Now we've got nothing.

Paul doesn't give up. Instead he grimaces. He grabs her with both hands and pushes her against the wall.

She struggles and murmurs as Paul tears off her dress.

EXT. DESERT - MORNING

The sun has risen over the horizon.

Tim is standing beneath a large BRANCH of the tree. A NOOSE is around his neck. He's surrounded by the men of the town.

MAYOR

We don't want there to be any hard feelings, Tim.

FLOYD

But there are. Lots of hard feelings.

MAYOR

Is there anything you'd like to say?

TIM

No.

GRUFF

That's your last word? "No?"

TIM

Don't bury me out here.

MAYOR

Fine. We'll put you in the churchyard. Anything else?

TIM

I'm scared.

The men all look at each other. They're reluctant.

GRUFF

Do we have to do this?

FLOYD

Yes. We owe it to the town.

MAYOR

And we owe it to God.

TIM

(softly)

You owe more than that. I see your
sins.

The Mayor nods. Floyd and Gruff begin to haul him up.

Tim struggles as he dangles from the noose. His eyes water.

With his distorted vision, he sees a lone FIGURE walking
leisurely across, whistling *Nobody's Business*.

Tim tries to say something, tries to warn the men, but the
noose constricts his throat.

It's Frank, covered in blood and dirt. He stops for a moment
just behind Gruff and Floyd. He smiles widely at Tim...

Tim, helpless and hanging, looks back at him...

Frank, with one motion, punches Gruff and takes his gun.

The rope slacks and Tim plummets to the ground.

FLOYD

Hey!

MAYOR

What in God's name...

Frank shoots Floyd in the face. Blood splatters everywhere.

The Mayor pulls a pistol and shoots at Frank. The bullet
makes a hole, but no blood follows. Frank smashes the Mayor's
head against a tree.

The last one to go is Gruff. Frank forces his head down,
eyeball first, onto a SHOVEL handle.

Tim has been lying on the ground watching the bloodbath.
When it's all done, Frank walks over to him. But Tim does
not seem afraid. His eyes reflect a silent acceptance.

Frank holds a hand out to Tim. Tim takes it and stands up.

FRANK

Timothy. Time to do the Lord's work.

Tim walks away quickly, back in the direction of town, leaving
Frank smiling in the middle of the desert.

INT. TIM'S HOUSE/SARA'S ROOM - DAY

Paul lays with Sara on the bed. Sara is exhausted and spent.

Paul rolls over and puts a hand to his face. He starts crying.

Sara, disgusted, rolls away. She stands shakily, and darts out of the room as quickly as she can.

PAUL

Sara...

Paul, moaning and crying, pulls himself off the bed, and onto his knees. He looks upward.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I'm not...not that man anymore...

He grabs a SHIRT from the bed beside him, puts it on and stands up. Wiping tears away from his eyes he walks out of the room.

EXT. TIM'S HOUSE - DAY

Sara walks out the front door, toward Paul's house.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE/ LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sara pushes open the door and goes to Paul's BUREAU. She opens up the top drawer and finds the GUN there.

EXT. CHURCHYARD - DAY

The town is silent as Paul trots toward the church, still reaching up to wipe the occasional tears from his eyes.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The door can be heard unlocking, and then it opens. Paul walks inside, shutting the door behind him.

For a moment he stands with his eyes closed, his face pressed against the shut door. Then he turns around.

There's a figure standing at the pulpit. TIM.

Paul, confused, walks toward Tim.

PAUL (CONT'D)

You're not supposed to be here.

TIM

You did lie, Reverend. And your lie killed the innocent.

PAUL

Innocent? No, Frank wasn't innocent.

TIM
I'm talking about Tim.

PAUL
What?

Paul walks slowly closer to Tim.

TIM
You can't understand justice, like
you think you can.

PAUL
Where have you been, Tim?

TIM
Retribution doesn't come from the
sky, with fire and brimstone. It
comes to town unexpected, on a train.

Paul stares at him.

PAUL
Stop talking like that.

TIM
Retribution.

Something in Paul's mind snaps. He looks at Tim with terror.

PAUL
Frank?

TIM
When you've committed your most evil
sin, then you can die. That's your
retribution.

PAUL
I don't know what my most evil sin
is. I don't know.

Tim smiles, an eerie smile similar to Frank's.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Tell me my worst sin has been done.
Just tell me it's been done. I can't
keep waiting for it!

Tim just continues to smile at Paul, who has fallen into a
crazed state of tears and anger.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Why don't you answer me? Whenever I
pray, you don't answer me!

TIM
Retribution.

PAUL
Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!

Paul jumps at Tim. He wraps his fingers around his neck, but Tim's smile stays. Paul bears down, choking him out.

As Tim chokes, he suddenly changes in demeanor. His smile disappears. Acting like Tim again, he sputters.

TIM
Why did you lie to me, Reverend?

Paul's eyes open wide, and he lets go of Tim. Tim's lifeless body falls to the floor of the sanctuary.

The church door OPENS. Sara walks in, holding the GUN behind her back.

She sees Paul leaning against the pulpit, though she can't see Tim's body.

Paul looks up at her, startled.

Sara lifts up the gun. Hesitates a moment... SHOTS.

Pain and shock come over Paul's face. He looks down at the WOUND in his chest. Fatal.

He looks back up at Sara. Relief spreads across his face.

PAUL
Thank you...

He falls, his body lying right beside Tim's.

Sara begins to shake a little and breathe heavily. She turns and leaves the church.

Paul and Tim are both lifeless, their eyes open but dead.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Abby is waiting, alone on the platform. The TRAIN rolls in.

Abby prepares to board. Looking off the edge of the platform, she sees a GOVERNMENT vehicle pull in. She looks on hopefully.

Out of the car steps a man in uniform, but he's not the Sheriff. He's a MARSHALL. Two other MARSHALLS step out.

Downcast, Abby sighs, looks at the TICKET in her hand...and boards the train.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

The Sheriff pulls up to the scene of the carnage.

He stands up out of his vehicle. Slowly approaching the scene, he is bewildered by the sight of all the bodies.

Frank's BODY is among them, laying where it had last stood.

Thomas, overwhelmed, crouches as he surveys the scene, unable to stand much longer. A RAINDROP falls onto his hand.

He looks up in wonder. RAIN starts to trickle, then pour from the sky.

BEGIN FLASHBACK.**EXT. PAUL'S BACK YARD - MORNING**

Paul walks with Tim. Paul's hand is still BANDAGED.

PAUL

I know that you might consider yourself his friend. But I fear God's anger, the longer he stays in our town. And I fear what he might do to us. To your sister. Retribution must come for all of us, even Frank. You know what I'm saying is right.

EXT. DRY RIVER BED - DAY

Tim and Frank clamber into Tim's TRUCK.

FRANK

Won't be much longer till we're done with that wall of yours.

TIM

It's the Reverend's wall, really.

FRANK

Time to finish it then. Time to go do the Lord's work.

TIM

First I...I think we should go dig for some clay. In the desert.

FRANK

I know just the spot.

Pointedly, Frank sets his KNIFE on the dashboard.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Paul's eyes snap open.

He looks up, a mixture of fear and despair.

His chest is still bleeding, but he moves without difficulty. He sits up, looks beside him.

The body of Tim has been replaced by the body of FRANK, lying there, smiling at him.

Complete despair comes over Paul. He drags himself to his feet, supporting himself on the pulpit.

He looks again at the body, and his sobs turn into laughter. Maniacal, hysterical laughter.

The church door opens, and Sheriff Thomas walks in. He sees the Reverend, and the body (which is indeed Tim's).

He reaches for the HANDCUFFS on his belt. Paul keeps laughing, ignoring him, as Thomas walks up the aisle toward him.

BEGIN FLASHBACK.

EXT. PAUL'S BACK YARD - MORNING

PAUL

Drunkenness, violence, perhaps even consorting with other women. These are not the marks of a God fearing man. If you were the sort to defend your kin, you would do more than stand by.

INT. TIM'S TRUCK - DAY

Tim and Frank ride along, Tim driving.

TIM

I want to you ask you something. The sin. The worst sin you ever did. You never told me what it was.

EXT. PAUL'S BACK YARD - MORNING

PAUL

Unrepentant sinners. Men like him, they don't deserve to live this life.

TIM
Then...would it be right with the
Lord, if a man were to be killed.
For the right reasons.

Paul looks straight at Tim.

INT. TIM'S TRUCK - DAY

Frank looks right at Tim.

FRANK
The worst sin? You want to know what
it was?

EXT. PAUL'S BACK YARD - MORNING

PAUL
Yes. It'd be the right thing to do.

Paul feels guilt over the lie, as he tells it.

INT. TIM'S TRUCK - DAY

FRANK
I told a little boy that, if he
squeezed a frog hard enough, it would
shit gold.

Tim looks at him and starts to laugh. But then he realizes
Frank is completely serious. They drive on.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

At a distance, the truck stops in the middle of the desert.

Tim and Frank step out. As Frank looks out, Tim comes up
behind him, KNIFE in his hand, and grabs Frank by the throat.

Blood spatters everywhere. Frank barely struggles.

PAUL (V.O.)
This isn't about our will. It's about
the will of God. Whether we like it
or not, we are his instruments of
justice. We'd be doing right by him,
if we were to send that man right
down to hell. Because, you know,
he's not gettin' there soon enough.

Frank falls to the ground. The SNAKE from earlier looks on
from the desert floor.

END