

"HAPPY TOWN"

"In This Home On Ice"

(Pilot)

by

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"Let's enjoy these aimless days while we can, I told myself, fearing some kind of deft acceleration into American magic and dread... "

-- Don DeLillo, *"WHITE NOISE"*

"There's a darkness on the edge of town... "

-- Bruce Springsteen

ACT ONE

EXT. SETON WOODS - HAPLIN, MINNESOTA - NIGHT

A dense, mossy-floored FOREST of pine, aspen, birch and tamarack. Vaguely-limned by a heavily-bruised moon, dimmed by angry clouds approaching from the southern sky...

WE GLIDE through this thick undergrowth, lashed by the wind and spit-on by a light rain, and WE HEAR:

GIRL'S VOICE (O.S.)
Maybe one of these days, you'll
actually be able to drop me off *in*
front of my house --

The response is male. And muffled. The sound of A CAR DOOR OPENING... Just as WE CREST a line of black fir trees on a hill brow.... To ARRIVE AT the mint '69 CUTLASS 442, splendidly-restored, parked on this promontory overlooking --

MAC'S POND

which is technically more of a lake, in that it covers some six square miles, most of which are now FROZEN-OVER. This is a popular make-out spot for the local high-schoolers...

Indeed. A GIRL emerges from the passenger side of the Cutlass. Her name is GEORGIA BRAVIN, 17. And, as she gets her bits together (coat, scarf, hat), after a heated session, we can see she is very pretty, almost in spite of herself.

She leans down to the passenger-side window...

GEORGIA
Late --

And she walks off. Straight into the pitch of the woods...

EXT. SETON WOODS - NIGHT

Georgia hews to the path that wends its way along the banks of Mac's Pond. It is quiet, but for the distant rumble of thunderheads, as she picks her way along the scrim of frost-rimed rock and dirt and branch...

When she hears what sounds like A SCREAM. Coming from the pond. Coming from the *middle* of the pond...

Georgia squints. She can barely make-out, in the occluded moonlight, the SMALL FRAME SHACK in the center of the pond...

It is an ICE FISHING HUT. And, oddly enough, there appears to be a LIGHT on inside of it...

Georgia frowns. As another CRY splits the night. Yes, that was definitely a *human* cry...

Georgia debates whether or not to investigate. All around her, dead branches rustle dryly, like dead men's bones...

In a birch snag, an OWL HOOTS, as they so often do in these instances, startling her... Georgia looks up at the treetops:

GEORGIA

Are you kidding me, dude?

Her eyes tick back to the ice shack. And she makes a decision. She steps out onto the pond's frozen surface... And begins to walk toward the ice shack, some 20 yards away.

When suddenly it *begins to POUR*. Coming down in thick, sideways sheets...

So Georgia gives up the sleuthing. And beats a hasty retreat the way she came...

We, however, remain at the shoreline. Staring directly at the ice shack. As a SHADOW moves across the lone window.

And we HARD CUT TO:

A KNOBBY FINGER PRESSING PLAY ON AN OLD-SCHOOL BOOM BOX.

As the crunchy aggro riff of Megadeth's metal classic, "*Symphony Of Destruction*" begins --

INT. ICE SHACK - MAC'S POND - NIGHT

Echoing through the interior of the ice shack, which is like an outhouse on runners, covered with wall board... A single, gas-fueled LANTERN provides a milky, cataract illumination --

-- of the *abject chaos* at work here. As a MAN - skinny and blonde and a little strange-looking - is being tossed about the ice shack as if he were made of mere gauze... This is JERRY FRIDDLE, mid-40s.

Friddle is punched. Kicked. Hurlled into the walls of the shack. By an unseen presence. But whoever this unseen presence is... This unseen presence is *furious*...

The music CRANKS. Friddle is thrown into a minnow bucket full of shiners... The small, silvery fish splatter across the floor, across Friddle's threadbare turtleneck sweater...

This should all be very elliptical... Frenetic jump-cuts... Friddle's head is thrust into the fish-hole hacked into the pack ice... And dunked into its frigid maw...

Only to be ripped out again... Sputtering gelid pond water from his mouth...

JERRY FRIDDLE

I don't know what you're talking about, man! *I don't... !!!*

Friddle is slammed into a hardback chair. Hands bound behind him with electrical tape... As Dave Mustaine's nihilistic fretwork provides a discordant soundtrack to the bedlam...

JERRY FRIDDLE

You got the wrong man, is what--

A FLASH OF SILVER. And there is a HANDGUN pressed to Friddle's face. A large frame revolver, like a .45 ACP. Long, gleaming bore glinting in the lantern light...

Friddle sobs.. Despite the chill, his forehead is cleated with sweat, eyes wild with fear... He weighs his options...

JERRY FRIDDLE

Okay, okay. *I'll tell you... !*

His attacker leans in... We only get a glimpse of the back of a male head... As it lowers to Friddle's mouth...

JERRY FRIDDLE

How 'bout you don't point the gun at me no more?

His attacker lowers the enormous sidearm. Friddle whispers into the man's ear... His words obscured to us, beneath the music, the rain, the thunder, the hissing lantern.

And whatever Friddle has said... It hasn't placated the man... Not at all... The man goes to a corner of the shack...

JERRY FRIDDLE

Okay? We good? Figure you let me go? Let the proper authorities do what they need to me? Court, jail, what have you -- ?

His attacker turns... And he holds something up to the lantern-light: A RAILROAD SPIKE.

And in his other hand, is a HAMMER...

JERRY FRIDDLE
Now, what the hell is--

The tip of the spike is pressed to Friddle's forehead...

JERRY FRIDDLE
Guy, I told ya what you needed to
know! I --

And the hammer is raised back...

JERRY FRIDDLE
-- TOLD YA WHAT YOU NEEDED TO KNOW!

And Dave Mustaine growls (*"just like the Pied Piper/led rats through the streets/we dance like marionettes/ swaying to the symphony... "*)...

The hammer begins its downward arc, toward the head of the spike... And, as they connect, and Friddle SCREAMS -- (*"... of destruction... "*)

We SLAM TO BLACK. Over which, in all its ironic splendor, our TITLE CARD appears:

"HAPPY TOWN"

FADE IN:

EXT. TRAIN STATION - HAPLIN, MINNESOTA - DAY

An old-school depot on the outskirts of town. A bright, sunny day. The storm has passed. Leaving us with a March morning, as crisp and clear as a flute of flat champagne...

The flashing SIGNAL GANTRY heralds the arrival of the TRAIN - a rambling, eleven-car affair. A few COMMUTERS get on. Heading to the Twin Cities.

Only one person emerges. A GIRL, early 20s. Her look is lonely-little-rag-doll meets early 90s Seattle Grunge. She carries a duffel bag and a guitar case. This is HENLEY. *

The train is quick to leave the station. And Henley is the only one left. She stands there. Unsure as to her next move. When --

A MINI-VAN pulls up. A spry little blonde, early 30s - all chirpy good cheer and blonde side-swept bangs - at the wheel. This is MIRANDA KIRBY, Real-Estate-Agent-cum-Welcome-Wagon-Envoy-cum-Former-Pep-Rally-General...

Miranda bounds from the van like a perfumed labrador.

MIRANDA KIRBY

It's Henley, isn't it? I'm
Miranda Kirby! How fun! Welcome
to Haplin! You are going to
loooooove it here!

And, yes, Miranda Kirby speaks in staccato bursts of joy that must have exclamation points affixed to them...

Miranda grabs Henley's duffel... Her words a non-stop gout, with what appears to be no pause for breathe:

MIRANDA KIRBY

Do you play the guitar? I always
wanted to play! Took lessons when
I was nine. But I didn't like my
teacher. He smelled. So I asked
my parents if I could quit. *And
they let me!*

Miranda tosses the duffel in the back of the van...

MIRANDA KIRBY

I have half a mind to sue them now!
Can you imagine if they hadn't let
me quit? I'd be flippin' Eric
Clapton today! My Jordan (she's
eight!), is going to start taking
lessons this summer. And if *she*
wants to quit? Sorry, customer!
No-can-doofus!

As Miranda goes around to the driver's side... Henley smiles slightly at this shiny, happy person and WE CUT TO:

EXT. CONROY HOUSE - TO ESTABLISH - DAY

A robust craftsman on a lovely cedar-lined street. A 28-foot performance FISHING BOAT - with a forward-casting platform deck and "*Dallas Alice*" painted on its transom in cursive curves - sits on a trailer in the driveway...

Next to it, is parked an SUV and a Welly Crown Victoria, with the words "*Haplin County Sheriff*" stencilled on the sides...

INT. CONROY HOUSE - DAY

Where 7-year-old EMMA CONROY is moving her egg whites around her plate, a look of supreme distaste on her precious face.

EMMA CONROY

Where's all the yellow?

Her mother, RACHEL CONROY, 27 - deep-dimpled, dishwater blonde hair, fierce but fair - is at the sink, making a cheese sandwich for Emma's lunch...

RACHEL CONROY
Those are egg *whites*. No yoke.

EMMA CONROY
Why?

RACHEL CONROY
Why what?

EMMA CONROY
Why no yoke?

RACHEL CONROY
It's healthier --

EMMA CONROY
The yoke is bad?

RACHEL CONROY
Eventually.

Emma frowns... But then an atonal SINGING approaches...

TOMMY (O.S.)
(singing)
*"As the son of a son of a sailor/I
went out on the sea for
adventure... "*

And in walks TOMMY CONROY, 32. Raw-boned and handsome, Tommy is jocular, relaxed, entirely comfortable in his own skin, as a lifetime of having things go your way is bound to engender.

TOMMY (SINGING)
*"Expanding their view of the
captain and crew/Like a man just
released from indenture... "*

*

RACHEL CONROY
Your father is getting his Jimmy Buffet on, Emm. That can only mean one thing --

TOMMY
Yes, indeedy. The *"Dallas Alice"* goes back in the water today!

RACHEL CONROY
It gets earlier and earlier every year...

TOMMY

Not true. The week of the "Thaw Fest" is always when we put her back in...

RACHEL CONROY

It's going to be a chilly "Thaw Fest" this year... It doesn't seem like it's warming up any time soon.

EMMA CONROY

Daddy, look. No yellow...

Tommy feigns concern...

TOMMY

The yoke's on you, Emma C.

RACHEL CONROY

It *is* ironic. Here I am making her egg whites for breakfast... But an American cheese sandwich for lunch.

Tommy comes up behind her, nuzzles her neck...

TOMMY

You can only protect them one meal at a time...

RACHEL CONROY

You look at these brochures?

She gestures... To a thin stack of BROCHURES - Chamber of Commerce-type pamphlets extolling the virtues of sun-splashed La Jolla, San Diego, Newport Beach, etc.

TOMMY

I did not. Emma C. Mommy wants to leave Haplin and move to California. What say you?

EMMA CONROY

I say "no".

TOMMY

How come?

EMMA CONROY

They have earthcakes there...

TOMMY

Yep. They do. And here we are. In the cradle of the heartland.

(MORE)

TOMMY (cont'd)

Daddy's the son of the Sheriff in a town with no crime. Mommy's got an important job at the bread factory. Daughter Emma is the brightest bulb in her 1st grade class. Mommy and Daddy still sneak off to smoochy-smooch, despite the fact they've been together since prom. The livin' is easy. Fish are jumpin'. And the cotton is high. Why, Emma C, would we trade any of that, to go to a place full of... *Earthcakes?* Why?

Rachel shakes her head with a smile...

EMMA CONROY

We wouldn't.

TOMMY

Tell her, Emma C. Tell Mommy of the glories of Haplin --

And we'll use this as our logical transition to --

EXT. HAPLIN - VARIOUS / INT. MIRANDA KIRBY'S MINI-VAN - DAY

As they pass the sign ("*WELCOME TO HAPLIN: WHERE THE BREAD ALSO RISES*") Miranda Kirby gives Henley the quickie tour of this small (population, 9,000), lake-spangled berg, some 40 miles from Minneapolis, clenched between empurpled, stratified cliffs and majestic strands of Norway pine forests... *

MIRANDA KIRBY

This area was first occupied by the Sisseton Indians. One of the seven original tribes of the Dakota...

We should be struck by the splendor here: the Victorian houses and family farms; the latticework of canoe trails and tawny oceans of wheat. Pheasants fly to the shelter of an alfalfa field; above abandoned copper mines, adits grown-over with bluegrass, decades after the ore went dry... *

MIRANDA KIRBY

The first white man to set foot here, was Wilmont Haplin, who came to map out the area in 1846...

They pass the entrance to an enormous GATED MANSE. It's one of those houses with a name: "WEEPING WALL"...

MIRANDA KIRBY

Wilmont Haplin is the great, great,
great grandfather of John Haplin,
whose mother, Mrs. Peggy Haplin
lives there. She's The Grand Dame.
Pretty much runs this whole show!

Henley notices a strange BIT OF GRAFFITI spray-painted on the
side of a building: it is A *QUESTION MARK WITH A HALO OVER*
IT... But before she can comment, they have driven into --

DOWNTOWN, HAPLIN

A bucolic sprawl of 19th century wood and brick structures,
with more modern buildings interspersed: the St. Paul Church,
with its patron saints carved in stone and set in apsidal
chapels. The Sheriff's Station. The shops and saloons. The
boardwalk, imprinted with the area's ranch brands...

MIRANDA KIRBY

So why have you chosen Haplin, hon?
Aside from wanting to display
impeccable geographic taste!

HENLEY

My mother vacationed here. As a
child. She recently passed away.
But she always spoke so fondly of
this place...

MIRANDA KIRBY

What do you plan to do?

HENLEY

Maybe open a candle shop. With my
inheritance? What do you think?

MIRANDA KIRBY

That's amazing! I adore candles!
Especially scented ones!

HENLEY

Then you'll love my "*Strawberry*
Fields Glow-ever" candle. I use
sweet sun-ripened strawberries in
the wax and hand-grubby the top with
banana slice wicks. The aroma!

MIRANDA KIRBY

Put me down for five! And when
you're ready to look at retail
space, I'm your girl -- !

Henley sniffs the air... She has noticed it since she here:

HENLEY

Speaking of aroma. Everything
smells so good here --

*
*

MIRANDA KIRBY

Of course it does, sweetie. Look --

Miranda gestures to the FACTORY, up on the hill, presiding
over all, smokestacks billowing smudgy fingers of industrial
cumulus across the otherwise perfectly blue sky...

MIRANDA KIRBY

That's the bread factory. "Our
Daily" Baking And Confectionery.
The locals call it "*The Bready*".
And, in this day and age, with
factories closing down all over the
country, not only does that
wonderful place employ 12 percent
of Haplin's residents, but it also
makes Haplin a place where the air
is alive, not with uncertainty, but
with the aroma of baking bread, all
the live-long day!

As the mini-van motors down Main Street, we recognize this
place for what it is: a glimpse of another era, frozen in an
amber untouched by the voracious predation of Starbucks and
Wal-Mart and Blockbuster...

*
*
*
*

But on a railroad trestle, Henley once again clocks the
GRAFFITI OF THE QUESTION MARK WITH THE HALO OVER IT...

*
*

Miranda follows Henley's look. Sees the question mark. She
grimaces. But it is only fleeting, as her chirp returns:

*
*

MIRANDA KIRBY

Welcome to Haplin. Or, as some
folks like to call it: "*Happy*
Town". Because they know, Henley.

*
*
*
*

Henley looks at Miranda and her rictus grin, which is almost
as unsettling as whatever it hopes to conceal; like the
disinfectant used in hospitals to cover the smells of decay.

*
*
*

MIRANDA KIRBY

They know.

*
*

OFF OF Henley. As they drive beneath the railroad trestle.
As she clocks that mysterious question mark, it is apparent
that cryptic glyph has great meaning for her...

*
*
*

END OF ACT ONE

*

ACT TWO

*

EXT. CONROY HOUSE - DAY

*

Tommy and Emma are eyeballing the "Dallas Alice", in preparation for taking it out of dry-dock...

TOMMY

What do you think?

EMMA CONROY

I think it's too cold.

TOMMY

You see that's where you're wrong. It's all about visualization. Yeah, it's too cold. But if you think on it. Wish on it. Visualize the "Dallas Alice" on Lake Spirit. Are you seeing it?

EMMA CONROY

Nope...

TOMMY

Are you seeing my string? With the glittering array of trout and sauger and walleye dangling from it?

EMMA CONROY

Nope.

TOMMY

Are you visualizing anything?

EMMA CONROY

Grilled cheese.

He looks at her. But then he clocks Georgia Bravin - the girl from our opening - ambling up the walk, with her backpack... Emma doesn't see her...

TOMMY

Okay, I'll prove that it works. Right now, I am visualizing your baby-sitter, Georgia, who has come to walk you to school... And, oh, hey, look -- !

Emma does, sees Georgia... Shakes her head...

GEORGIA

What are you guys doing?

EMMA CONROY
Daddy is being dumb.

GEORGIA
Daddy's do that...

She helps Emma put her knapsack on. To Tommy:

GEORGIA
You really putting her in the water today?

TOMMY
Yep.

GEORGIA
Pond is still frozen-over. I was by there last night...

TOMMY
Pond isn't the lake. And what were you doing by the pond last night?

He looks at her, vaguely suspicious... But before she can answer, another Haplin County Sheriff Welly Crown Vic pulls up... Georgia smiles for:

GEORGIA
Saved by the belly.

And out steps SHERIFF GRIFFIN CONROY, early 60s. Sheriff Conroy has managed to retain the giddy ebullience that's usually beaten out of men from these parts, when they get to be this age. And, yes, he's got an impressive gut. Although it looks to be made of poured concrete...

EMMA CONROY
Grampa -- !

And she goes and wraps her little arms around his legs...

SHERIFF CONROY
Hey, Li'l Bean --

He pats her head... Nods to Georgia...

SHERIFF CONROY
How's your father, Georgia?

GEORGIA
Sleeping one off...

SHERIFF CONROY
Ain't that much sleep in creation.

GEORGIA

Truth.

Sheriff Conroy turns to Tommy...

SHERIFF CONROY

We got a situation at the square.
Wanna ride along?

TOMMY

Not really. It's my day-off.
Gonna put the "Dallas Alice" in the
water...

Sheriff Conroy appraises the boat. Named for his late wife.

SHERIFF CONROY

Too damn early in the season to put
her in the water...

TOMMY

What, was there some meeting this
morning, where you all got together
to talk about the weather?

SHERIFF CONROY

Let's go...

TOMMY

Lemme put on my khakis...

SHERIFF CONROY

Your fine like you are. We'll see
ya later, Li'l Bean? Georgia.

GEORGIA

So long, Sheriff --

Tommy kisses Emma...

TOMMY

Tell Mommy I had to leave. 'Cause
my Daddy is meaner than *your* Daddy.

EXT. DOWNTOWN, HAPLIN - DAY

Henley and Miranda are on foot now... Walking along the
bustling Main Street...

MIRANDA KIRBY

Are you hungry, Henley?

HENLEY

I could eat.

As they go, they pass a SMALL POSTER affixed to a TELEPHONE POLE. It has the PHOTOGRAPHS OF FIVE CHILDREN, between the ages of 9 and 11, on it, beneath the SYMBOL Henley spied earlier: the question mark with the halo...

MIRANDA KIRBY

I know just the place.

As they walk, Miranda snatches the poster off the telephone pole. Balls it up. And tosses it into a trash can...

EXT. BIG DAVE'S PIZZA BARN - DOWNTOWN, HAPLIN - DAY

The words: *"The Home Of The Monster!"* are painted in spooky, horror-movie-style scrawl, on the plate glass window... *

INT. BIG DAVE'S PIZZA BARN - DOWNTOWN, HAPLIN - DAY

Where they not only know your name, they know the name of your dog; and the name of the sawbones that removed that funny-colored mole from your hide... It's a big, barn-style space... Tables and counter space and a large pizza oven...

Presided over by the gentle giant known as BIG DAVE DUNCAN, 30. The burly, affable proprietor we will also come to know as one of Tommy Conroy's best friends... Big Dave is talking to ANOTHER DEPUTY, in his khakis. This is LARRY "ROOT BEER" ROGERS, 28, pale and asthenic. A worrier. But a clever one.

BIG DAVE DUNCAN

Technically, it's not a "date". I never framed it as a "date"...

ROOT BEER ROGERS

The minute you ask a girl out, Big Dave, it's a date...

BIG DAVE DUNCAN

I only asked her out for omelettes.

ROOT BEER ROGERS

White wine and omelettes.

Root Beer turns to the kid, 17, sitting alone at the counter, eating a sandwich and reading a magazine. ANDREW HAPLIN. Handsome and sullen and silver-spooned...

ROOT BEER ROGERS

Andrew? You're a lothario. Talk to the man...

Andrew just looks at the two men... We can see it in his eyes: *"leave me alone, you Laurel and Hardy motherfuckers!"*

Miranda and Henley enter...

MIRANDA KIRBY
"The Monster" is the only 26-inch
 pizza maybe in the country!

Miranda gestures to the stack of enormous pizza boxes piled-up beside the regular-sized ones behind the counter...

MIRANDA KIRBY
 Big Dave has special boxes made.
 And since good pizza is all about
 the dough - and since New York
 pizza is the best - Big Dave has
 the water flown in especially from
 Manhattan. And mixed-in. And this
 is Big Dave! This is Henley. New
 to town. Henley, this is Big Dave.
 And Larry Rogers. They call him
 "Root Beer"!

Root Beer shrugs, slightly abashed...

ROOT BEER ROGERS
 Small towns. Everyone gets a nick-
 name...

HENLEY
 Nice to meet you...

She follows Miranda. Big Dave and Root Beer exchange a look.

BIG DAVE DUNCAN
 You thinkin' what I'm thinkin'?

ROOT BEER ROGERS
 White wine and omelettes...

His CELL-PHONE RINGS... He answers it... Listens... Hangs up

ROOT BEER ROGERS
 Gotta go. Trouble in the square.
Banner trouble.

*

And he exits, as we CUT TO:

A BANNER,

twelve feet long, four feet high. With the FACES OF FIVE CHILDREN - two boys, and three girls - on it from the poster Miranda Kirby tore off the phone pole. With the words: *"Remember To Never Forget"* written below it, book-ended by those curious question-marks-with-halos..

EXT. HAPLIN TOWN SQUARE - DAY

An expansive plaza of grass and wrought-iron fence and old-timey gas lamps. The square covers the equivalent of a city block, and is now being readied for the "Thaw Fest":

Vendor booths are set-up, to sell food, arts and crafts, face-painting, etc. And there are carnival-style games. Bleacher-seats and a band-riser are being erected...

But right now there is something of a brouhaha brewing. A barrel-chested BLACK MAN, 46 - in "OUR DAILY" coveralls - is regaling a GROUP OF WHITE MEN. This is CARL DANCO. And he is enraged. With him is a black woman, 40s, ZURI SORRELL.

CARL DANCO

And I'm saying this ain't close to right! We been excluded for 14 damn years! And it stops *now*. It stops *here*!

The target of Danco's rage is JOHN HAPLIN, 38, and pretty much the closest Haplin has to a Favorite Son... With him is PERRY STECKLER, 41... A large, angry, meat-faced fellow... *

CARL DANCO

It's a damn glaring omission, ya hear me? This woman's son not being included! A damn glaring omission -- ! *

PERRY STECKLER

Step back, Danco -- *

CARL DANCO

You put that boy's picture on that banner... Or I swear to God, I will get the Reverend Sharpton down here, with a bunch of TV cameras, and we'll do a number on the steps of your bread factory - your *white* bread factory - have the whole damn state in tears... ! *

JOHN HAPLIN

You keep trying to make this into a racial issue, Carl. And I keep telling you it's a question of geography: little Chad Sorrell was from Cook's Ridge. Which is *not* Haplin proper. Which is the only reason he is not included on the banner.

(MORE)

JOHN HAPLIN (cont'd)
 What all these kids have in common
 is that they are Haplin kids...

CARL DANCO
 What all these kids have in common
 is that they were taken by *The
 Magic Man* --

And there is stunned silence from the crowd. As if he has
 said some kind of incantation that should never be uttered.

PERRY STECKLER
 You sonuvabitch -- !

And he charges at Carl Danco... John Haplin and some of the
 other men intervene... Just as Root Beer Rogers has arrived,
 running up to the fracas, to separate the men...

ROOT BEER ROGERS
 Settle down now, people.

But they don't... Danco goes for Haplin, Steckler goes for
 Danco... Zuri Sorrell weeps... There is shouting and swearing
 and considerable hue and cry... And then there is a WHISTLE.
 An old-school wolf whistle...

All eyes turn... To where Sheriff Conroy and Tommy amble from
 their Welly... Sheriff Conroy, walks with authority, hands
 placed on either side of his belt, in proper "command
 presence" posture. He's as cool as a cobra. To John Haplin:

SHERIFF CONROY
 Thought we agreed this wasn't to be
 hoisted, John -- ?

JOHN HAPLIN
 We agreed to nothing of the kind...

SHERIFF CONROY
 Sure we did. We sat there. At
 that City Council meeting. And the
 talk was of healing. Of not
 dwelling in the past. And we
 agreed, then and there, this wasn't
 to be hoisted...

JOHN HAPLIN
 Which, I would imagine, is easy to
 do, when your own flesh and blood
 isn't pictured on it...

More shouting... Sheriff Conroy studies the banner for a
 beat... He looks at Tommy... Tommy, with his hands in his
 back pockets... Sheriff Conroy shakes his head.

JOHN HAPLIN

As long as they remain missing,
there is still hope, Sheriff...

SHERIFF CONROY

No doubt. I'm not trying to be
insensitive, John. Perry...

JOHN HAPLIN

Maybe you'd like to discuss this
with my mother...

SHERIFF CONROY

Maybe I would...

And Carl Danco rushes Steckler, swinging out wildly with a
fist like a lunchbox... Except that Tommy is in the middle...
Danco accidentally connects with Tommy's eye-socket... Tommy
goes down... Sheriff Conroy bellows:

SHERIFF CONROY

THAT. IS. ENOUGH!

And everyone settles down...

SHERIFF CONROY

Get up, son --

And Tommy's eye looks like it's going to develop a healthy
shiner... Sheriff Conroy looks mildly disgusted... But then
Root Beer Rogers approaches Sheriff Conroy, radio in hand...

ROOT BEER ROGERS

Hobbs got something, sir. Out to
Mac's Pond...

SHERIFF CONROY

The banner goes away. The "Thaw
Fest" is about corn dogs and
carousels. Ain't about darkness.
The banner goes away...
(turns to Tommy)
Come on then --

They walk off. We LINGER ON John Haplin. He is not pleased.

EXT. MAC'S POND - DAY

Tommy and Sheriff Conroy climb from the Welly, and begin to
walk across the ice... As they go:

SHERIFF CONROY

How's the eye?

TOMMY

Better than it's gonna be in a few hours...

SHERIFF CONROY

Your own damn fault --

TOMMY

How you figure -- ?

SHERIFF CONROY

We've had this conversation a million times. You don't act like a cop. You stand with your hands in your back pockets. Instead of properly "blading" 'em. Command presence. You act like you're selling ice cream...

TOMMY

You sound like Rachel. This is Haplin. Why make things difficult, when the world is offering this?

*

And he spreads his arms to include the level white plain of the frozen lake, and the high blue vault of sky overhead...

SHERIFF CONROY

Just know about the inevitability of the *Vis Major*...

TOMMY

The what?

SHERIFF CONROY

The *Vis Major*. It's a Latin term. "A natural and unavoidable catastrophe that interrupts the expected course of events." And every life can expect a visit from the *Vis Major*...

TOMMY

Yeah, well, I figure the trick is to avoid Major Vis. Or *Vis Major*. Or whatever the hell it is. For as long as possible...

SHERIFF CONROY

That is the trick. I would tell that to Chloe, if ever I saw her again...

TOMMY
What?

SHERIFF CONROY
What?

TOMMY
Who's Chloe?

SHERIFF CONROY
Who?

TOMMY
You just said--

But before the Sheriff can answer, they have neared the ice shack. Where another Deputy - the large, African-American KELVIN TOLLIVER, 35 - awaits them, near some EMTs... And a few scared, sniffing KIDS...

KELVIN TOLLIVER
These kids were skating... When they found him...

From out of the shack, steps the irascible ROGER HOBBS, 53. The Chief Deputy/Investigator, he is the Sheriff's number 2.

ROGER HOBBS
You ain't gonna believe this, Griff...

Hobbs holds open the door for them. Father and son approach.

INT. ICE SHACK - DAY

... where they see poor old Jerry Friddle. Still bound to his chair. Frozen and dead. A HOLE, an inch and a half in diameter, goes clean through his skull...

SHERIFF CONROY
Know what this is, Tommy?

And now we are looking at Tommy and the Sheriff.

But from the P.O.V. of the back of Friddle's head...

Actually, through the hole. As Tommy nods...

TOMMY
Yep. The *Vis Major*.

END OF ACT TWO

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ACT THREE

*

EXT. MANNING BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

An enormous three-story, neo-Jacobean pile, up on a hill overlooking town. The house looks mostly exhausted - crumbling gables, tarnished lead roof, a listing weathervane - although the landscaping is bright and well-tended...

Henley and Miranda Kirby pull into the circular drive...

MIRANDA KIRBY

I really do think you'll be quite comfortable here... Until we can find you something more... Permanent.

Henley nods. She eyes the house, a little warily...

INT. MANNING BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

Where we meet its jolly, aproned proprietor, DOT MANNING, 64 - round and soft like an overstuffed easy chair - as she leads them through the house... Which is cozily furnished - with nary a nod to anything post-1980...

DOT MANNING

I have seven boarders at this time, Henley... Including you and me...

Henley notices that Dot has *something* on her nose: a small, red splotch... But then we are off to --

QUICK CUTS - as Dot shows them around:

- The TV room. Big frilly couches surround a 32" Zenith... Dot holds up the REMOTE...

DOT MANNING

The only rule of the TV room is: first to arrive gets to drive.

- The dining room. A long table, with 10 place settings...

DOT MANNING

I just need to know the morning of, if you'll be joining us for dinner. Breakfast and lunch are come as you may...

Henley nods... Looking at that red splotch on Dot's nose.

- The kitchen. Spacious. More modern appliances here. Big work station. Pots bubble on the stove. A SMALL WOMAN in her mid-50s is slicing vegetables...

DOT MANNING

This is Colleen. She's from Ecuador. My chief cook and bottle-washer. Befriend Colleen, Henley, and life at Manning's shall be one well-lived. You're free to use the 'fridge. And the microwave. But the stove and the oven are off-limits...

She turns to Henley... And, at last, Henley can take it no more... She gestures to the splotch on Dot's nose...

HENLEY

You... Uh...

Dot wipes her nose, looks at the crimson blob on her finger.

DOT MANNING

Oh, dear. Just a little blood. I have been known to chop up an unruly boarder and serve them as stew...

And she holds up a large carving knife and smiles... Henley looks slightly freaked...

DOT MANNING

Joking, luv. It's chutney. I was making dinner when you arrived.
(to Miranda)
The kids today. So serious...

And then she's off... Henley looks at Miranda, who shrugs...

MIRANDA KIRBY

Chutney.

- The living room. Where FOUR WOMEN, in their 60s and 70s: ROSE PERKINS, ESTHER KLAPMAN, IRENE VAUGHN, and JOANIE JENKINS, are knee-deep in a game of bridge...

DOT MANNING

Henley, these are my widows: Rose, Esther, Irene, Joanie. This is Henley. She'll be staying here for a while...

Clucks of "welcome" and "hello"...

- The main staircase. They climb up to the second floor landing, where the bedrooms are... They pass another staircase, heading up to the 3rd floor:

DOT MANNING

The 3rd floor is strictly off-limits. Failure to adhere to this rule will result in termination of your stay here...

Henley smiles. Dot shakes her head, suddenly officious...

DOT MANNING

No, this time I'm not joking.

And she walks down the hallway... Again Henley looks to Miranda... Again Miranda shrugs...

They pass another room along the long, dark corridor. The door is ajar. Inside, sitting at his desk, is a man, late 50s. This is MERRITT GRIEVES.

He is handsome, in a slightly vampiric way. His accent is mid-Atlantic. He is reading from a file. Dot Manning stops at his door...

DOT MANNING

Will you be joining us for dinner tonight, Mr. Grieves? We're serving lamb. Mint-rubbed...

And Henley notices Dot Manning's chubby cheeks redden in the presence of this man...

MERRITT GRIEVES

Regrettably, no, Mrs. Manning. My stomach is sour. Has been all day.

DOT MANNING

Oh, dear. I'll send Colleen up with some bicarbonate of soda...

Dot walks off down the hall, Miranda following her... Henley and Merritt Grieves exchange a look... He smiles slightly... And then Henley catches up to the other women...

DOT MANNING

Mr. Grieves moved here six months ago. Opened a shop in town. This is your room --

She opens the door to a room. It is small but clean and well-lighted. A bed, a dresser, some floral prints, a small desk.

HENLEY

It's perfect.

DOT MANNING

I'm glad. We'll leave you to get settled...

MIRANDA KIRBY

We'll talk soon, Henley --

HENLEY

Thank-you for everything, Miss Kirby...

MIRANDA KIRBY

Miranda, silly.

And they are gone... And Henley exhales, as if she'd been holding her breath for the last 20 minutes... She looks out her second story window... And she can see, up on the hill, THE BREAD FACTORY... Smokestacks chuffing... Which will allow us our transition to --

INT. "OUR DAILY" BAKING AND CONFECTIONERY - DAY

The bread factory that allows Haplin to thrive. It's an enormous industrial space, fully-automated, yet employing some 1,000 workers, in white smocks and nylon hair-nets...

Rachel Conroy is giving a tour - to a FIFTH GRADE CLASS from a neighboring town...

RACHEL CONROY

Here we see the containers in which flour, water, salt, fat and yeast are mixed... The mix is then placed into these kneading troughs, to ferment the yeast... This takes three hours, and allows the dough to rise...

Rachel looks up, to the glassed-in aerie, two stories above. These are the executive offices, and they provide a view of the entire floor...

RACHEL CONROY

These huge mixers will then knead the dough for eight minutes, and then it is emptied into a large tub and loaded onto a slide above this machine - the dough-divider. The dough now weighs a little over a ton...

She glances up again to one office in particular: John Haplin's. In time to see Carl Danco (the furious African-American man from the town square imbroglio), enter...

INT. JOHN HAPLIN'S OFFICE - "OUR DAILY" - DAY

Danco stands before Haplin's desk, which is overcrowded with invoices and ledgers... We should also note the two FRAMED PHOTOGRAPHS on his desk: one shows John Haplin, his wife, CAROL, (a brunette in her mid-30s), and their son, Andrew, (the sullen 17-year-old eating at the counter in Big Dave's).

The second FRAMED PHOTO is of a sweet-faced 9-YEAR-OLD GIRL, with blonde spit curls, button nose, dimpled chin. This is ADDIE HAPLIN...

JOHN HAPLIN

From now on, Carl, you want to talk to me about something, you come in here... You don't do it in front of the town like that...

CARL DANCO

That's called having a forum. In here, you don't have to be accountable for nothing. Out there... Different story...

JOHN HAPLIN

It happens again... You're finished. That kind of public insubordination just can't be....

CARL DANCO

You ain't gonna do that. Else you'll be manning the ovens yourself. 'cause half the work force will walk with me. You forget: I am their beloved line foreman. Where as you... Are *not*.

INT. HAPLIN SHERIFF'S STATION - DAY

A smallish municipal building in the center of town, which houses the Sheriff's offices, records, dispatch center, and the four-cell county jail...

The Sheriff's Office includes 14 Patrol Deputies (Tommy Conroy, Root Beer and Kelvin are three of them); 2 Night Sergeants; 1 Day Sergeant; 2 clerical/records employees; a Dispatch Center with 3 full-time 911 Emergency Operators; 1 Chief Deputy/Investigator (Roger Hobbs); and the Sheriff..

And it's mostly bedlam now, as they deal with something they haven't had to deal with much, if at all: murder.

As Tommy and Sheriff Conroy walk through, they are braced by the Day Sergeant - SHELL JENKINS, 24 - who somehow manages to be mousy and wildly forceful at the same time...

Tommy sports a purplish shiner where Danco punched him...

SHELL JENKINS

State Police Barracks are sending a car over for the body, Sheriff --

SHERIFF CONROY

Izzat so? They're not even gonna give us 11 seconds with it... ?

SHELL JENKINS

Captain Frost orders...

She slaps a stack of phone messages into the Sheriff's hands.

SHELL JENKINS

And Peggy Haplin's office called. Six times. Then the great lady called herself...

The retinue follows Sheriff Conroy into his office - a smallish room at the back of the station... We should notice the array of decorative Sioux TOMAHAWKS adorning the walls... It would appear Sheriff Conroy collects tribal hatchets...

SHERIFF CONROY

How'd she sound?

SHELL JENKINS

Like she'd been eating hornets for breakfast...

INT. "OUR DAILY" BAKING AND CONFECTIONERY - DAY

Rachel Conroy continues to give the tour...

RACHEL CONROY

The dough is then rolled out to exact size and filled into baking molds, which shape the loaves...

Again, her eyes tick up to John Haplin's office... So --

INT. JOHN HAPLIN'S OFFICE - DAY

John Haplin dials the phone... It is answered by his wife, CAROL HAPLIN, 35, the same pretty brunette we saw in the photo on John Haplin's desk. But in person she has a slightly manic sheen to her brown eyes.... She is in A BEDROOM of their home... CROSS-CUT AS NECESSARY...

JOHN HAPLIN

You okay?

CAROL HAPLIN

I'm fine. Just... Reading.

Beat... And he senses something... So:

JOHN HAPLIN

You're in the room again, aren't you?

CAROL HAPLIN

(caught)

Just making up the bed. I washed the sheets. Spring cleaning and what not...

And we PULL WIDER: to reveal she is in a CHILD'S BEDROOM. Clearly a young girl's...

JOHN HAPLIN

Dammit, Carol -- !

CAROL HAPLIN

I found the book, "SPAGHETTI ON THE MOON". Remember it? You used to read it to her... ?

She is holding a CHILDREN'S BOOK... A sad smile on her face... And she absently hangs up the telephone without saying goodbye...

John Haplin looks at the receiver... Shakes his head... But then he looks out the window of his office... To see --

From the employees' entrance, Deputies Root Beer Rogers and Kelvin Tolliver have entered the factory...

Rachel watches as Root Beer asks a question to a WORKER manning the dough-divider... The worker points to another worker - a WOMAN, early 40s - who oversees the sifter...

Root Beer and Kelvin head over to the sifter... All eyes are upon them... The presence of cops never augurs anything good.

ROOT BEER ROGERS
Donna Friddle?

The woman tugs down her surgical mask. This is DONNA FRIDDLE. She is slightly sour-looking. Life has not been easy...

DONNA FRIDDLE
Yes?

ROOT BEER ROGERS
We are here about your husband.
Jerry...

Rachel watches, as Root Beer and Kelvin give her the news, Rachel sees Donna Friddle shakes her head.

And Donna Friddle wails and reaches into the sifter, and begins to hysterically toss clumps of flour all over the place, in a crazed flurry... The school children look afraid... Rachel tries to calm them...

RACHEL CONROY
Okay, kids... Let's go to the
tasting room, and see if we can't
get a nibble of some hot, fresh
rolls straight out of the oven!

And as she hustles them away, her eyes once again, go to John Haplin's office... Where he is watching Donna Friddle's histrionics, his face impassive...

END OF ACT THREE

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ACT FOUR

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EXT. HAPLIN HIGH SCHOOL - TO ESTABLISH - DAY

KIDS and cars are scattered about this public school, erected in the early 1930s. Brick and bramble and clinging ivy...

INT. HAPLIN HIGH - DAY

Georgia walks down the crowded corridor with her girlfriend, LANI, 17...

LANI

... and he was totally killed in Raymond Manning's ice shack...

GEORGIA

The one on Mac's?

LANI

Yes...

Georgia looks slightly freaked... After all, she may have come very close to witnessing to the murder...

GEORGIA

I can't picture him. Jerry Friddle...

LANI

He was the custodian at the library. "The Skulker"? Remember: they fired him 'cause he would hide behind the stacks and stare at the women and the girls...

GEORGIA

Oh, that guy. The skinny guy...

LANI

Yeah. He was so the creep. But still... He didn't deserve this...
(she sees)
Aw, no...

Georgia follows her look... To where Andrew Haplin and his CRONIES - in their letter jackets and zippy haircuts - cavort by their lockers...

Haplin and his crew are clearly the "popular crowd". Rich, athletic, college-bound... Andrew sees Georgia and Lani approaching...

ANDREW HAPLIN

Hey, fellas, look who it is!
Direct from the government-
subsidized sub-division known as
Cook's Ridge. Where Cockroaches Go
To Die...

His friends laugh... Lani stands strong...

LANI

Why don't you--

But Georgia backs her off...

GEORGIA

Don't even. Can't you see, Lani?
Being mean to girls is how these
clunks hide the fact that they are
deep in the throes of homosexual
panic...

LANI

Oh. I see....

The boys don't like this at all...

ANDREW HAPLIN

How's your dad, Georgia? Still
cooking the meth? 'Cause we saw
him last night on Truck Trail Two,
singing at the top of his tweaked
lungs... He was singing that old
song, "You're So Vain"? But he had
changed the words...

(sings)

*"In my veins/I think I'll shoot
some meth in my forearm..."*

Andrew's friends laugh. We can see that hurt Georgia... But she dismisses this cruelty and marches off, Andrew's singing following her down the hall... As we CUT TO:

INT. HAPLIN SHERIFF'S STATION - DAY

Where the phones are blazing... The hustle is bustling... We get the sense that Haplin is ill-equipped to handle a murder investigation... Especially as Root Beer Rogers and Kelvin Tolliver enter Sheriff Conroy's office, covered in flour...

SHERIFF CONROY

The hell happened to you?

ROOT BEER ROGERS
 Donna Friddle had a strong reaction
 to the news of her husband's
 demise... She's in Room 1...

SHERIFF CONROY
 You brought her here?

KELVIN TOLLIVER
 What were we supposed to do with
 her?

SHERIFF CONROY
 She's not a suspect! You give her
 the news... Then we question her at
 home after she's had time to
 process things properly...

Root Beer and Kelvin exchange a look...

ROOT BEER ROGERS
 Oh. Should we bring her home?

As they move for the interrogation room, Tommy is stopped by
 Big Dave Duncan, still in his pizzeria whites...

BIG DAVE DUNCAN
 Hey, T.C., what's going on?

TOMMY
 It's a whole magungle... What are
 you doing here?

BIG DAVE DUNCAN
 Thought we were putting the "*Dallas*
Alice" in the water today... ?

TOMMY
 It's not a good time... We got...
 There's been a murder...

BIG DAVE DUNCAN
 A murder? Who was murdered?

TOMMY
 I gotta go. Talk to you later.

*

And he follows the others into the interrogation room...

INT. HAPLIN HIGH - MUSIC ROOM - DAY

Georgia panthers the deserted room... Pacing nervously back
 and forth around the music stands and drum kits... When
 Andrew Haplin enters... They stare at each other a beat...

GEORGIA

You think that was gilding the lily
a little bit, dude? *My Dad?*

ANDREW HAPLIN

Sorry...

And, to our great surprise, he takes her in his arms... And
they kiss... Long and passionately... She breaks it for:

GEORGIA

I think we need ground rules...

ANDREW HAPLIN

Okay.

GEORGIA

My father is off-limits. So is my
taste in music. And my ass...

ANDREW HAPLIN

Your ass is beautiful.

GEORGIA

Exactly. Which is why it's off-
limits...

He nods... And kisses her again... He begins to unbutton her
shirt... She stops him...

GEORGIA

What should I do? About the ice-
shack... ?

ANDREW HAPLIN

What do you want to do? You didn't
actually see anything... And how
are you going to explain what you
were doing in Seton Woods, after
midnight, in the freezing cold?

GEORGIA

I could tell the truth: that I was
in a parked car snogging The Golden
Boy Of Happy Town. *His* grandma is
The Mayor. *My* grandma used to
dance for the money they'd throw.
His father owns the bread factory.
My father owns a meth lab...

ANDREW HAPLIN

Great way to guarantee I am never
allowed out of the house again...

GEORGIA

I'm just so over this whole Romeo
and Juliet thing...

He kisses her...

ANDREW HAPLIN

I know. But it's not going to be
like this forever...

GEORGIA

Right. Eventually a meteor will
hit planet earth, wiping out all
humanity as we know it. And then
you and I will be able to hold
hands in public...

He smiles...

ANDREW HAPLIN

I love you so much, most of the
time I don't even know what day it
is...

GEORGIA

It's Grow-A-Pair Day.

But she kisses him. Deeply. These two are clearly in love.

ANDREW HAPLIN

I'm late for practice... Can I see
you later?

(nothing from her)

Georgia? Can I see you later?

After a beat, she relents... Sighs...

GEORGIA

Fine. You bring the poison. I'll
bring the dagger...

He smiles... Kisses her... And then he's gone, leaving her
alone with the dusty musical instruments and her conflict...

INT. HAPLIN SHERIFF'S OFFICE - INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

Donna Friddle sits at a table. Sheriff Conroy and Roger
Hobbs question her, while the Deputies look on...

SHERIFF CONROY

Did Jerry have any enemies you can
think of?

DONNA FRIDDLE

He didn't have any enemies I *can't* think of...

SHERIFF CONROY

Mrs. Friddle --

DONNA FRIDDLE

My Jerry was persecuted here. Always. On account of he liked to look at the girls. Didn't bother me none. He was a looker. He looked. He didn't touch. And then he loses his job... A job he's had for 22 years?

ROGER HOBBS

He was making folks uncomfortable.

DONNA FRIDDLE

Looking isn't skulking. Looking isn't touching. But in this town, if you pay attention to people who aren't necessarily you're friends, well, you gotta be "Magic Man" material, don't you? Because - remember what they used to say back when it was happening: *"one thing you can count on: The Magic Man? He's somebody you passed by on the street today..."*

The lawmen exchange a look... As if the mere mention of the words *"Magic Man"* is like a hex...

DONNA FRIDDLE

But all you need is to start with the Stiviletto Brothers. They never left my Jerry alone. They picked on him every chance they had...

TOMMY

The Stiviletto Brothers pick on *everyone* every chance they have...

DONNA FRIDDLE

They especially picked on my Jerry.

SHERIFF CONROY

And at what point did Chloe contact you?

DONNA FRIDDLE

What?

SHERIFF CONROY

And did you realize the glow in her mouth was the silvery moon?

And Tommy and the others look at Sheriff Conroy, whose eyes have momentarily glazed-over...

DONNA FRIDDLE

What the hell is he talking about?

ROGER HOBBS

Griff?

TOMMY

Pop?

And just as quickly, he is back. Focused on Donna Friddle:

SHERIFF CONROY

Which Stiviletto brother in particular?

Roger Hobbs looks at Tommy. *"What the hell was that?"* But then Shell sticks her head in...

SHELL JENKINS

Doctor Pete is on line 3...

SHERIFF CONROY

Talk to him will ya, Tommy?

Tommy does leaving the interrogation room, and picking up the telephone at the front desk... INTERCUT WITH DOCTOR PETE WEAVER, early 30s. A quirky fellow and a pal of Tommy's...

TOMMY

Hey...

DOCTOR PETE

Hey, buddy. So they came to take the body to the State Barracks. They're gonna do a whole work-up. Don't have any faith in us here, at the helm of our turnip trucks...

TOMMY

Okay. Thanks. I'll let everybody know. Hey, Pete. When's the last time my Dad had a check-up... ?

DOCTOR PETE
Griff? I'd have to look at my
records. Last year some time?
Why?

TOMMY
I dunno. He's been acting funny...

DOCTOR PETE
He's got his first homicide ever.
Of course he's been acting funny...

Tommy looks into the interrogation room, where he can see his
father continues to question Donna Friddle...

DOCTOR PETE
Speaking of which... That big hole
in Jerry Friddle's head?

TOMMY
Yeah?

DOCTOR PETE
It was made by a spike.

TOMMY
A spike?

DOCTOR PETE
Yep. A railroad spike.

TOMMY
A railroad spike.

Tommy looks back to the interrogation room. And we CUT TO:

A RAILROAD SPIKE

hammered into the side of a ramshackle clapboard house,
holding up a home-made wood-carved sign that reads:
"STIVILETTO"...

EXT. STIVILETTO COMPOUND - DAY

It's a fetid cluster of tilting structures, surrounding a
MAIN HOUSE... This was clearly once a working farm... Only
now the pasture is a delta of mud; the tower silo leans to
the left; the machinery shed is missing its roof, etc.

All fronting - a half mile in the distance - the TOWN DUMP -
a veritable 30-acre landscape of dirt and discarded objects
atop of foundation of garbage and debris.

Gulls circle and dive-bomb and caw their strident caws... A pair of enormous EARTH-MOVERS gleam shiny yellow - as if they are the only things in this blighted place that are lovingly cleaned and tended-to...

Tommy and Sheriff Conroy pull-up in the Crown Vic...

TOMMY

God, I hate these guys...

SHERIFF CONROY

You and the rest of the free world.

They climb out of the car... A few chickens cluck and scabble in the dirt, avoiding the trio of nasty ROTTWEILERS chained to a buried spike by the former sheep shelter...

As Tommy and the Sheriff approach the front door, they see a MAN, 24, chasing a piglet around the yard... He is called BABY BOY, and he is mentally disabled, possessing the guileless curiosity inherent in his condition.

BABY BOY STIVILETTO

Hello, Sheriff Griffin Conroy. Top of them morning to you...

SHERIFF CONROY

Top of them morning to you, too, Baby Boy...

BABY BOY STIVILETTO

Greggy is coming home soon from The Long Place, Deputy Thomas Conroy. Are you scared?

TOMMY

Why should I be scared? Greggy is gonna come out of penitentiary a proper citizen...

And Baby Boy sniggers... Even he is not too slow to know there's not a fucking chance of that...

Tommy and Sheriff Conroy go around the back of the main house, where they find the rest of the Stiviletto Brothers. Who are:

- RONALD STIVILETTO. At 31, he is the putative leader, while the oldest brother - GREGGY - is away at prison.

- LINCOLN STIVILETTO, 29. A scrawny, weasel with a pinched face and a nasty disposition...

- WOMPER STIVILETTO, 27. Enormously fat and mean and dirty.

*** (A word about The Stiviletto Brothers. Every town has - and fears - a family like The Stiviletto Brothers. They were bullies in high school, piling up expulsions, DUIs, B&E arrests, and if there was trouble to be had, they found it. As adults, one would assume they are still up to no good.)

As Tommy and the Sheriff approach... We see that the Stiviletto Boys are building some kind of WOODEN TANK, like the kind used in "dunk-the-clown" games at carnivals:

There is a seat, above a tank full of water... And softballs are thrown at two targets on either side of the seat... It is almost finished... A painted SIGN, with the letters "DUNK-THE-DIMWIT" across it, hangs on the side...

A keg is buried in a barrel of snow. Stereo speakers in the windows of a tractor shed blast some old-school metal (not dissimilar to the Megadeth played in the ice shack)...

RONALD STIVILETTO

Look... It's Sheriff Andy Taylor and his boy, Opie, come-a-calling!

SHERIFF CONROY

Whatchoo boys doing??

RONALD STIVILETTO

It's our contribution to the "Thaw Fest". For 50 cents, you get three chances to "Dunk-The-Dimwit".

(gestures to Baby Boy)

And here's the dimwit!

SHERIFF CONROY

Well, that ain't particularly nice.

LINCOLN STIVILETTO

Also ain't particularly nowhere near your business --

TOMMY

Why don't you settle down, Ronald?

LINCOLN STIVILETTO

Don't even fake you're a hard guy, T.C. Your old man weren't the Sheriff, you'd be working for us at the dump, shooting rats...

WOMPER STIVILETTO

If he knew how to fire a gun...

And they chortle, as their kind will...

SHERIFF CONROY
Where were you boys last night?

RONALD STIVILETTO
We were here...

SHERIFF CONROY
All night?

RONALD STIVILETTO
All night.

SHERIFF CONROY
Break it down for me...

LINCOLN STIVILETTO
Why should we--

But his brother holds up a hand to quiet him...

RONALD STIVILETTO
Eazy-peezy, Sheriff. We were here all night. Exceptin' for when Lincoln went into town to get a pizza from Big Dave's. He come back. We ate the pizza. And then Ronald and Link worked on The Dunker. And then Baby Boy watched a little reality television. And then my girl, Kissy, came by and I made sweet love to her, while she read a movie magazine...

SHERIFF CONROY
You had a problem with Jerry Friddle?

RONALD STIVILETTO
Nah, he was okay. Other than he did a lot of around-town-pervin'...

Sheriff Conroy nods... Then:

SHERIFF CONROY
Chloe know you're here?

RONALD STIVILETTO
Who? What?

And Sheriff Conroy looks like he's momentarily lost his place in a novel he was reading...

TOMMY
Dad -- ?

Sheriff Conroy blinks and he's back... Just as Baby Boy comes around, climbing onto the seat in the "Dunk-A-Dimwit" tanks.

BABY BOY STIVILETTO
 Watch this, Conroy Men. Watch me
 go, go, go!!!

Sheriff Conroy would rather not... He turns to Ronald, as Womper picks up two softballs...

SHERIFF CONROY
 Don't leave town --

RONALD STIVILETTO
 We never leave town...

Womper whips a softball at the target. It goes wide left.

BABY BOY STIVILETTO
Womper stinks! Womper stinks!

Sheriff Conroy and Tommy begin to walk away... And the rottweilers start to bark their heads off... Straining their chains, jaws slavered with foam... Lincoln calls after Tommy:

LINCOLN STIVILETTO
 Hey, T.C.? Gregggy be gettin' out
 soon...

Womper has tossed another ball... This one connects... And Baby Boy gets dunked... The Rotts bark their heads off...

LINCOLN STIVILETTO
 He's gonna be two things when he
 does...

TOMMY
 And what's that, Lincoln?

LINCOLN STIVILETTO
 He's gonna be *rested*. And he's
 gonna be *mad*...

Lincoln grins and goes back to where his brothers carouse. Off Tommy, suddenly certain there are bad things ahead --

END OF ACT FOUR

*

ACT FIVE

*

INT. HAPLIN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

*

It is quieter now. A few UNIFORMS are here. And Sheriff Conroy, Kelvin Tolliver, and Roger Hobbs...

*

*

Tommy sits behind his desk, feet up, thumbing through the Stiviletto case file... But he does so with a certain detachment, knowing the weight of this investigation does not lie with him. He clocks the Sheriff, who is tasking Hobbs...

SHERIFF CONROY

We're gonna let those boys stew in their own filth for a couple days... Get cozy with the thought that they're off our radar... Use that time to load the cannons. For when they slip. 'Cause they will slip...

ROGER HOBBS

Sounds good, Griff...

The Sheriff goes into his office. Tommy, figuring he's off the hook, tosses the Stiviletto case file on his desk... Hobbs' phone rings... He answers...

ROGER HOBBS

Hobbs.

(listens; to Kelvin)

It's the lab... They found something on the victim.

(into phone)

Couldn't be discharge residue...

Our man didn't use a firearm.

Where on the body...? Okay...

Tommy and Kelvin listen --

ROGER HOBBS (INTO PHONE)

Well why didn't ya say so? If it *could* be baking flour, it *is* baking flour. Haplin's got the third biggest bread factory in the state. It *rains* flour around here! We're *all* covered in it!!! All right... Thanks...

He hangs up...

ROGER HOBBS

Believe these dopes? Friddle's
body tested positive for high
traces of baking flour! Since I
moved here, the back of my balls
would test positive for high traces
of baking flour! I'll go tell
Griff...

*

INT. MANNING BOARDING HOUSE - COMMUNAL BATHROOM - NIGHT

Henley finishes up a shower. She takes a moment to let the steaming water pulse onto her face. As if a small baptism, a cleansing... She shuts off the faucet and we CUT TO:

INT. MANNING BOARDING HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Henley exits the bathroom, hair still wet, wearing a robe. The wood floors are cold on her feet, the night chill a stark contrast to her flushed pink skin.

As she moves towards her room, things seem to *slow down*...
As her attention *drifts*...

To THE STAIRWELL... Which leads to the THIRD FLOOR... She stops in her tracks and considers it for a beat...

Is there a sound coming from up there? No. But what she *is* hearing is somehow more ominous... *It's the absence of sound*. The imperceptible hum of *hollow air*... Henley regards it for a beat, when...

DOT MANNING (O.S.)

You said you'd be joining us for
supper?

Startled, Henley turns to see Dot Manning. Who is none too pleased by Henley staring at the third floor. But she does not make text of this...

DOT MANNING

The soup is fresh cabbage.

With that, Dot Manning leaves. But we stay with Henley. And we are unsure if she was just foiled or *spared* from taking that forbidden journey up into the darkness, so we'll CUT TO:

*

INT. HAPLIN SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

It is quieter now. Tommy is at his desk. When he sees his father, in his office, packing up his things for the night...

*

*

Tommy goes to his father's office --

*

TOMMY
Heading out?

*
*

SHERIFF CONROY
Tonight, my boy, is a night I will
not sleep... I will *slumber*.

*
*
*

And this is hard for Tommy... Delicate...

*

TOMMY
Can I ask you a question?

SHERIFF CONROY
Always --

And this is hard for Tommy... Delicate...

TOMMY
Are you... Feeling alright?

SHERIFF CONROY
My knee is creaking on me. But
what else is new?

TOMMY
No. I mean... Today... You said
things...

SHERIFF CONROY
What things?

Tommy spills it out...

TOMMY
Who's Chloe?

SHERIFF CONROY
Chloe?

TOMMY
Yeah. Who is she?

SHERIFF CONROY
I don't know anyone by that name.

And Sheriff Conroy is sincere. Which troubles Tommy more...

TOMMY
Right. Maybe you should make an
appointment with Doc Pete? Have
him check under the hood?

SHERIFF CONROY
I'm fine...

TOMMY

You talk about forgetting the past.
Yet you still wear your wedding
ring. And Ma's been gone three
years now...

Sheriff Conway regards him for a beat... Then:

SHERIFF CONROY

The sense of touch is the most
unappreciated of the five senses.
As long as this ring is on my
finger, it's as if I'm still
holding her hand...

But Sheriff Conroy senses this hasn't eased Tommy's worry.

SHERIFF CONROY

Chin to the moon, son. This was a
dark day for Haplin. We have had a
seven year run of keeping that
darkness from the township...

TOMMY

You did.

SHERIFF CONROY

However you slice it, for seven
years there were no major felonies,
no *Magic Man*, no murders. Until
this morning...

(a beat)

And we'll get it back. *The good
yesterday.* Take station with that.

But Tommy isn't convinced... Sheriff Conroy grabs his
belongings and exits... But not before:

SHERIFF CONROY (CONT'D)

Hugs to the girls.

Tommy nods and watches his father go... And the love and
admiration he feels for his father is present on his face...
As is the worry...

INT. MANNING BOARDING HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Henley, now dressed, approaches the dinner table, where Dot
Manning and the four widows are eating their soup...

HENLEY

Sorry I'm late everyone...

Henley takes a seat in front of a bowl of soup...

HENLEY

This looks delicious.

She takes a spoonful... The women look at her, at each other... Then, finally:

ROSE

A woman travelling alone, they say, is either running *from* a man or *to* a man. Which is it for you, dear?

DOT MANNING

Irene -- !

IRENE

What? Girl-talk. Right, Henley?

HENLEY

Right. It's okay. And the answer is *neither*. There's no man on either side of my travels...

(a beat)

But, I *did* kiss a cute accountant on the train ride in. He was heading to Missoula and we made a point *not* to exchange phone numbers! It was verry 1970s.

IRENE

Well you've come to the right place. Don't let this trouble at the pond make you think otherwise.

HENLEY

What trouble at the pond?

ESTHER

Murder!

Henley looks at her...

DOT MANNING

The town weirdo. An awful man. I'm not saying he deserved to die. In my late husband's ice fishing shack, no less. But he angered a lot of people around here with his shifty eyes and perverted ways...

She finishes. They all look at her... Then, to Henley:

DOT MANNING

Gorgonzola on your soup?

She slides a bowl of crumbled cheese over... But the moment is interrupted by the SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS. The Widows sit up in their chairs, suddenly giddy...

IRENE

Here he comes!

Hair is fixed. Collars are smoothed-out. Henley is a little confused by this sudden eruption of primping... Until --

Merritt Grieves - the lone male boarder - enters the dining room, wearing his coat...

MERRITT GRIEVES

Good evening, ladies...

DOT MANNING

Feeling any better?

MERRITT GRIEVES

Regrettably, no. I'm hoping the night air will bring a fix...

ROSE

I'll leave some preserves on your night stand. On a slice of toast! That and some warm ginger ale always does the trick!

MERRITT GRIEVES

Thank-you, Rose. Ladies...

And Grieves smiles at them all... And gives Henley a nod... After he's gone, the Widows flit into a chorus of schoolgirl giggles... Esther swats Rose...

ESTHER

You trollop!

ROSE

I will make no apologies! In fact, I may just be laying across that slice of toast on his night stand!

Hoots and giggles. But Dot Manning who, while equally entranced by Grieves, clearly disapproves of the overt clucking of The Widows... Esther turns to Henley:

ESTHER

Mr. Grieves is from Manchester.

JOANIE

Manchester, England, England.
Across the Atlantic Sea...

DOT MANNING

Which is greatly exciting to some.

JOANIE

It's like living under the same
roof as Rex Harrison!

IRENE

He came to Haplin to open a
memorabilia shop!

Henley is amused...

HENLEY

So. Who's got first crack?

ESTHER

What do you mean?

HENLEY

Who's gonna bump his bones? Take
the paint off his porch? Squall
and ball and climb the wall?

There is a beat of stunned silence... And then the widows
collapse into a titter of nervous giggles and pointed
fingers, blushes and swoons...

ESTHER

That question may be the end of us!
You don't find men like Merritt
Grieves in Haplin County...

JOANIE

Stick around and you'll see!

More giggles and titters... Until, the ringing of a spoon
against a drinking glass (wedding kiss-style), silences them.

It is Dot Manning. Admonishing. Annoyed.

DOT MANNING

Soup is getting cold, ladies. Soup
is getting cold...

Uttered like a command. The Widows, properly chastised, pick
up their spoons. But Henley is pleased at her ability to
keep things lively...

Until she looks up... To see Dot Manning glowering at her,
eyes bloodshot with unbridled anger... An anger that appears
to be all out of proportion to the infraction...

END OF ACT FIVE

*

ACT SIX

*

INT. CONROY HOUSE - DINING AREA - NIGHT

Tommy, Rachel, Emma and Georgia eat dinner...

RACHEL

I saw Miranda Kirby at the produce counter today. She said they're expecting the biggest turn-out yet at Thaw Fest...

(to Emma)

Won't that be fun, cookie?

EMMA

I wanna wear my purple dress.

GEORGIA

I can't believe they're even going ahead with it. Considering...

RACHEL

Considering what?

And, of course, she is referring to the murder. But Tommy doesn't want to open up that can of worms in front of Emma.

TOMMY

Considering that the weather hasn't broken yet. Right, Georgia?

Tommy glares at Georgia - *agree with me*.

GEORGIA

Right. Crazy. A Thaw Fest with no thaw. It's like Thanksgiving with no... *Thanks*.

Problem averted. But only for a beat, as Rachel says:

RACHEL CONROY

I knew him. The Skulker.

GEORGIA

Really?

TOMMY

Do we have to talk about this now?

GEORGIA

How did you know him?

RACHEL CONROY
He skulked me on occasion...

This gets Tommy's attention --

TOMMY
He did?

RACHEL CONROY
Why is that surprising to you? Am
I not skulk-worthy?

TOMMY
No, it's just... Let's discuss this
later, yes?

And they go back to their food. Until --

EMMA
Someone got killed-did, I think.

Tommy and Rachel share a look --

RACHEL
Where did you hear that?

EMMA
Angela Ferelli told me it. She
said somebody got killed-did on the
pond. Where we skate...

Tommy takes a deep breath --

TOMMY
It's true, Emma C. Somebody did
die today. But we've talked about
this. Everybody goes up to Heaven
at some time. Just like Grammy...

EMMA
Did Grammy get killed-did?

TOMMY
No. Grammy was very old and very
tired and --

RACHEL
People die in different ways. That
man on the pond died because
someone bad hurt him...

Tommy looks at her... He doesn't want this conversation to
happen...

TOMMY

But most people die like Grammy.

This is now a battle of wills between Tommy and Rachel...
All Georgia can do is sit back and watch...

RACHEL

But sometimes, there are bad people
who--

TOMMY

Who you *never* need to worry about.
Because daddy spends all day making
sure bad things won't happen to
you. And Gramps, he's in charge of
all the people who make sure bad
things won't happen to you. And
there's nobody you love or trust
more than Gramps... Right?

EMMA

Yuh-huh.

TOMMY

Exactly.

Emma smiles and goes back to her pot pie... Unmindful of the
fact that her parents are engaged in a staring contest laden
with combustion. Georgia clocks it...

INT. BIG DAVE'S PIZZA BARN - NIGHT

Not much of a dinner crowd. Mostly take-out. Sheriff Conroy
is at the counter, picking up some food to-go from Big Dave..

BIG DAVE DUNCAN

Good meatballs today...

SHERIFF CONROY

I'll be the judge of that...

BIG DAVE DUNCAN

Jerry Friddle used to come in here
all the time. I didn't mind him.
People thought he was strange,
but... You know, he could name
every Viking, by position, since
the franchise started in 1960... ?

SHERIFF CONROY

Izzat so? Then maybe Roger Staubach killed him...

And he walks to the door... Big Dave frowns... But on his way out, Sheriff Conroy notices something... *Someone...* And it stops him in his tracks:

It is Merritt Grieves. The mysterious boarder. Seated in a BOOTH in the back, seriously gorging on an autumn pot roast, maple sweet potatoes, carrots, fennel, and cider gravy - all of which belie his earlier claims of a stale stomach...

Sheriff Conroy walks over to Grieves, who looks up at him with a piratical gleam --

MERRITT GRIEVES

Sheriff...

SHERIFF CONROY

I thought we had an agreement.
What are you still doing in my county?

MERRITT GRIEVES

My goodness. Did you really just utter a version of "*this town ain't big enough for the both of us*"? How splendid. A man can go his entire life without ever hearing a Sheriff say those words to him...

A beat... As Sheriff Conroy sizes him up... Until:

MERRITT GRIEVES

It appears you dropped something.

Grieves points to the linoleum floor. To where a SILVER STEEL RING lays at Sheriff Conroy's feet.

The Sheriff, suddenly concerned, looks at his LEFT HAND - it's bare. Grieves picks up the ring and holds it out...

MERRITT GRIEVES (CONT'D)

Your wedding band?

And we stay in this moment, as the Sheriff considers Grieves... Considers the ring and his bare hand... And then considers Grieves's deep grey eyes... And we GO TO:

INT. CONROY HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Georgia and Emma are watching TV, out of earshot, as Tommy and Rachel do the dishes. And the tension from their dinner conversation still lingers...

RACHEL CONROY

I was only telling her the truth.
If we don't, she'll be a pod...

TOMMY

She'll be a *kid*...

RACHEL CONROY

The more we shield her from these things, Tommy, the less equipped she'll be to face them... To protect herself from them...

TOMMY

Excuse me if I'd like to prolong the innocence of our daughter's childhood for as long as we can. What next? "*Hey, Emma, guess what: macaroni and cheese is bad for you and Jerry Garcia is dead!*"

They stare at each other. A fight is rare. But before it can be resolved, THE HOUSE PHONE RINGS. Rachel answers...

RACHEL CONROY (INTO PHONE)

Hello? Hi... It's Kelvin...

Rachel hands Tommy the phone...

TOMMY (INTO PHONE)

Yeah?

KELVIN TOLLIVER (O.S.)

You better get down to the station, T.C.

TOMMY

What is it?

KELVIN TOLLIVER (O.S.)

It's... It's your father

Tommy looks to Rachel. And we SMASH CUT TO:

INT. HAPLIN SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Tommy BURSTS through the door, where he is met by Kelvin Tolliver, Roger Hobbs and Root Beer Rogers...

The deep BARKING of a MAN'S VOICE can be heard in the near distance as Hobbs explains...

*

ROGER HOBBS

We were turning over the Stiviletto file when he came in...

ROOT BEER ROGERS

He stormed right past us, like we weren't there...

KELVIN TOLLIVER

He's outside himself, Tommy. This ain't him...

As Tommy tries to process all this, he realizes that the voice heard in the distance is that of his father - who has locked himself in his office...

Barricaded himself, in fact. Tommy pales, as he sees his father in a frenzy... Ranting and raving, disheveled and thrashing about...

SHERIFF CONROY

YOU CAN'T TAKE IT FROM ME -- !

Tommy moves toward his father's office --

TOMMY

Pop?

Tommy stands inches from the office window --

TOMMY (CONT'D)

POP! LET ME IN!

Sheriff Conroy turns to Tommy, not quite sure who he is...

SHERIFF CONROY

If you touch the Baby Jesus... I will make you wear the cow suit!

His eyes are aglow with something that can only be called madness. But then suddenly, he looks sad. Resigned...

SHERIFF CONROY

Chloe burnt the can...

With that, the Sheriff holds up his left hand... His wedding band glints in the light... Sheriff Conroy locks eyes with his son for the first time... *And he begins to sob.*

SHERIFF CONROY (CONT'D)

He'll be back...

TOMMY

Who?

SHERIFF CONROY
 Now that blood's been spilled
 again. Everything will unravel.
 And *he'll be back...*

Then a calm sweeps across his face. And, somehow, this is more chilling than the manic moaning of seconds before.

TOMMY
 Pop -- ?

SHERIFF CONROY
 He is only born in the instant
 flash of man's capacity for evil.
 And he will thrive in the shadows
 until that wickedness is
 vanquished...

*
*
*
*
*
*

Sheriff Conroy turns to the wall behind his desk and removes one of his collectible HATCHETS from its wall mount... Tommy pounds on the glass...

TOMMY (CONT'D)
 POP!

KELVIN TOLLIVER
Sheriff...!

Sheriff Conroy sits down at his desk. Places his LEFT HAND on the blotter...

TOMMY
 Look at me, Pop! Look at me!

And father looks to son. And then, with tearful resignation:

SHERIFF CONROY
 We can't stop him. We never could.

Just as the GLASS of the door SHATTERS... Roger Hobbs tossing a chair into it... Hobbs reaches through, trying to turn the knob... But before he can open the door, Sheriff Conroy has *raised the hatchet...*

SHERIFF CONROY
He's a Magic Man.

*

And Sheriff Conroy SWINGS the hatchet down on his wrist.

As Tommy cries out in horror, WE SMASH TO BLACK.

END OF ACT SIX
(END OF HOUR ONE)

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*

ACT SEVEN

*

INT. HAPLIN MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - MORNING

Tommy paces, talking on his cell-phone, with hushed urgency... He is leaving a message...

TOMMY (INTO PHONE)

It's Thursday morning.... He just got out of surgery... You need to call me back, Becca. You need to put the child-of-the-wild-blue-yonder stuff on hold and come on home...

He turns and looks through an OBSERVATION WINDOW, where he can see Sheriff Conroy, sedated, in a hospital bed. Tubes run out of him, his left hand is heavily bandaged...

TOMMY (INTO PHONE)

Because this is not a drill, Rebecca. Your father just chopped off his hand with a hatchet. So get on a plane or a train or your motorcycle, and get in the game...

Click. Tommy hangs up and heads down the hall to Rachel and Big Dave, who are being downloaded by Doctor Pete on the Sheriff's situation...

RACHEL

Is she coming?

TOMMY

I left a message.

Tommy takes a breath to calm himself, then to Doctor Pete...

TOMMY (CONT'D)

Tell me.

DOCTOR PETE

It's the best of a bad situation. The fusion was a success, but the ligature wasn't salvageable. So, regaining mobility will be a process... A long one...

TOMMY

What about the MRI?

DOCTOR PETE

It came up clean. But, obviously, we're dealing with something. I called in a neuropathologist from up St. Paul. He's a friend. Hopefully he can help us get a better sense of what we're up against...

TOMMY

Okay... That's... Thanks. Truly.

Doctor Pete heads off... Tommy looks to Big Dave...

TOMMY

You can take off, Dave. I'll call you later...

BIG DAVE

Yan't, moosh. I told Molly to cover the shop today. I'm here with you, T.C..

(a beat, then)

Part of me feels responsible. I saw him right before he... I didn't notice anything *off*...

TOMMY

Did he mention the name "Chloe"?

BIG DAVE DUNCAN

I don't think so. Who's Chloe?

But before Tommy can answer --

JOHN HAPLIN

Tommy -- ?

Tommy turns to see John Haplin...

TOMMY

Hey, John. How ya doing?

JOHN HAPLIN

My mother wants to see you --

TOMMY

Now? I appreciate her reaching out, but my father just got off the operating table and--

JOHN HAPLIN

Which means he has three hours before he wakes from sedation.

(MORE)

JOHN HAPLIN (cont'd)
 We'll have you back at his side by
 then and he'll never know you
 left...

Tommy looks at Big Dave. It is clear that when Peggy Haplin calls for you, however bad the timing may be, you do not argue... Tommy turns to Rachel and Big Dave...

TOMMY
 Call me if anything changes...

RACHEL CONROY
 Where are you going?

TOMMY
 To Weeping Wall.

To which Rachel and Big Dave look startled... As Tommy follows after John Haplin. And we CUT TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN, HAPLIN - DAY

Henley walks past the various shops... PEOPLE are out on the stroll... The town is dressed up for "Thaw Fest". Henley sees Miranda Kirby across the street, with her daughter, JORDAN. Jordan is on her knees, feeding their PUPPY the crust from her slice of pizza... Miranda sees Henley and waves...

Henley walks on... Passing cheese shops and ice cream parlors and a record store that actually sells vinyl...

When she comes upon Merritt Grieves, standing in the doorway of "THE HOUSE OF USHERS". Which is clearly a MOVIE MEMORABILIA SHOP, WHICH seems so out of place here, not only in its wares, but in a sense of gloom that pervades it.

MERRITT GRIEVES
 Absurdly cheery here, isn't it?

If she is surprised to see him, she hides it. In fact, we are not sure if this meeting is happenstance or well-planned.

HENLEY
 Hello.

MERRITT GRIEVES
 Come in. Please --

INT. "THE HOUSE OF USHERS" - DAY

Henley is the only soul in sight as she enters this dusty shrine to motion picture artifacts... On sale are weathered MOVIE POSTERS, LOBBY CARDS, ACTOR HEAD SHOTS, etc.

As she studies the antiquities, one might notice that they are all from a distant past.

MERRITT GRIEVES

I'm so happy you found us...

HENLEY

Business is slow?

MERRITT GRIEVES

With the prices of meat powder on the rise, the compulsion to buy remnants of cultural signposts from a flickering history is not high on the list of priorities in Haplin County. *But to an outsider...*

Thus begins a dance between these two, as Henley finishes Merritt's thoughts, which are intoned with curiosity...

HENLEY

... from Snoqualmie, Washington.

MERRITT GRIEVES

Visiting for reasons related to...

HENLEY

... the passing of a loved one.

MERRITT GRIEVES

And looking to find...

HENLEY

... comfort in breathing new air.

MERRITT GRIEVES

And also to...

HENLEY

Use my inheritance to open a candle shop...

MERRITT GRIEVES

Paraffin or tallow?

HENLEY

Soy wax.

Merritt smiles. Henley does, as well. But that was weird. To break the awkwardness, he extends his hand...

MERRITT GRIEVES (CONT'D)

Merritt Grieves. Room 2B.

HENLEY

Henley Boone. 2F.
 (a beat, then)
 You've got the ladies in the
 boarding house in quite a dither.

MERRITT GRIEVES

Yes, well. One of the burdens of
 being eternally... *Dashing*.

He shrugs with a smile... She smiles back... Maybe he's not
 so bad, after all. Henley looks around...

HENLEY

So, no offense... And really, what-
 do-I-know-about-anything? - but
 we're in the middle of the tundra.
 And this place would struggle in
 Berkeley. Did you really think
 this was the prime plot to peddle
 memorabilia that, unless I'm
 missing something, uniformly
 predates the 1950s?

MERRITT GRIEVES

Are you calling me a doddy?

HENLEY

No, sir. In fact, I'm not quite
 sure what a "doddy" is... But it
 sounds properly fusty and out-of-
 time. So, no, that is not what I'm
 calling you... But only because I'm
 too polite...

MERRITT GRIEVES (CONT'D)

Opening the minds of these fricky-
 frack townsfolk to the wonders of
 early cinema. If I can deliver one
 convert to the tick of time, then
 my investment will be well-placed.

His hands graze over several weathered LOBBY CARDS...

MERRITT GRIEVES (CONT'D)

I remember the overwhelming
 sensation I received when my dear
 mother exposed me to the wonder of
 live action...

He picks up a lobby card for a film called "*THE BLUE DOOR*".
 In which the titular door, open a crack, stands like the
 final bulwark between us and the darkness. Contrasty black
 and white inks make the image seem overtly confrontational...

MERRITT GRIEVES

Called "*The Blue Door*". Made in 1923 by a young auteur from Berlin. This film, seen by few, revealed to me the secrets of the universe... The Blue Door was a gateway... A portal into the heart of man...

Henley stands transfixed.

MERRITT GRIEVES

There's dread everywhere. Even in the sunniest plains. But Haplin County has lived under the false comfort of their Sheriff, who was able to keep the dread at bay for the last run of years...

HENLEY

The Magic Man.

Grievess smiles crookedly...

MERRITT GRIEVES

So the uninitiated has been slightly initiated...

HENLEY

One hears things. Why do they call him "*The Magic Man*"?

MERRITT GRIEVES

Because he had an ability. To make the children disappear so completely. That bordered on... The mystical.

Merritt puts down the lobby card...

MERRITT GRIEVES

Six children. Vanish. Never to be heard from again. The last one seven years ago. So why did he stop? Did he die? Was he jailed for another offense? Did he move away? Did he tire of it? Or did he slip, ever-so-quietly, back through *The Blue Door*?

Both of them glance to the lobby card... To that infernal blue door... The image at once banal and wicked...

END OF ACT SEVEN

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ACT EIGHT

*

INT. SUV - MOVING - DAY

Tommy rides alone in the back seat, John Haplin is shotgun. A DRIVER behind the wheel. They ride in silence for a bit. Then:

TOMMY
How's the family, John?

JOHN HAPLIN
Andrew is doing well. Grades are up. For the first time in years...

TOMMY
And Carol?

Haplin looks at him... Shakes his head...

JOHN HAPLIN
All these years later. And she still waits in the window. When she's not napping in Addy's room...

TOMMY
I'm sorry...

JOHN HAPLIN
Which is why the banner is about so much more than just the banner. You're father and I disagreed vehemently. But it was terrible to hear what happened to him last night --

TOMMY
Thank you --

Beat...

JOHN HAPLIN
Was your father any closer to finding who killed Jerry Friddle before he... ?

Tommy looks at him. As he himself realizes that:

TOMMY
I don't know.

Haplin nods. And they have arrived at the gates of --

EXT. WEEPING WALL - THE HAPLIN ESTATE - DAY

A huge COLONIAL MANSION of lush foliage, terraces and verandas, pools and fountains. An 800-foot canoe lake, 9-hole golf course, tennis courts, six-stall stable.

The view is breath-taking, even with the trees bare... And the sprawling property is center-punched, oddly, with the 30-FOOT LONG, 20-FOOT HIGH SECTION OF 17TH CENTURY DRY-STONE WALL, that gives the property its name...

The SUV takes them past the residence and toward a free-standing ICE RINK in the middle of the grounds...

Tommy can see the LONE FIGURE skating a precarious figure-8 in the center of the rink...

The SUV comes to a stop... Haplin turns to Tommy...

JOHN HAPLIN

She'd like to meet in private...

TOMMY

I'll see ya, John.

Tommy exits the vehicle and heads towards the skating rink. The lone figure glides to the lip of the rink to greet him...

This is PEGGY HAPLIN, late-70s, the town matriarch. Hers is an august bearing, a leonine elegance both austere and impenetrable, but still possessing a *certainty and confidence* which belies her age and the tentative way she skates...

PEGGY HAPLIN

Deputy Conroy.

TOMMY

Mrs. Haplin.

PEGGY HAPLIN (CONT'D)

Let me get a look at you...

She studies Tommy, who hates this kind of thing...

PEGGY HAPLIN (CONT'D)

You *are* your mother's son, aren't you?

TOMMY

That's what people say.

PEGGY HAPLIN

It's high praise. She had a strong composition. And was one of the best we ever had at Weeping Wall...

TOMMY

She liked working here. Always came home with a smile...

PEGGY HAPLIN

Her facility with perennials was uncanny. The gardens have never been the same since we lost her...

We now see the dynamic unfolding: Tommy is bred from the "downstairs" contingency of Haplin County that serves at the will of Peggy Haplin's "upstairs" command...

PEGGY HAPLIN (CONT'D)

And now, this with your father. It's heartbreaking...

TOMMY

Yes, ma'am. It is... Unexpected.

PEGGY HAPLIN

And ill-timed. With the incident at the pond...

She looks at him... Tommy nods...

PEGGY HAPLIN

Walk with me...

And he climbs under the fence-post... And walks with Peggy Haplin, while she slowly skates...

PEGGY HAPLIN

You still play hockey?

TOMMY

Not so much anymore. Big Dave and I go down to the rink once in a while and slap a bag of pucks...

Peggy Haplin nods... Skates on...

PEGGY HAPLIN (CONT'D)

The good work your father has done for this county - for me - during his tenure... It's needed now more than ever...

TOMMY

Roger Hobbs is a pretty capable guy. He was a cop in the Twin Cities before he came to Haplin...

PEGGY HAPLIN

Roger Hobbs mooches the stem. He couldn't solve the mystery of the cheese sandwich if you showed him the pumpernickel *and* the provolone.

And this is said with a savage bitterness... Tommy looks at her... Peggy Haplin gathers herself... Smiles sweetly for:

PEGGY HAPLIN

Which is why, until Griffin gets his right back: *I would like you to take over as Acting Sheriff of Haplin County...*

And Tommy couldn't look more surprised --

TOMMY

Me?

PEGGY HAPLIN

I'm effecting you as of this discussion...

And she executes a little butterfly spin...

TOMMY

With all due respect, Mrs. Haplin: I'm just a four-year Deputy. And I'm certainly not my father...

Tommy searches for a way to get out of this...

TOMMY

And there's a a chain of command. Hobbs is Chief Deputy and--

PEGGY HAPLIN

Roger Hobbs mooches the stem --

TOMMY

I don't know what that means!

Stated a little more forcefully than one speaks to the grand lady... She merely smiles...

PEGGY HAPLIN

It means: I think you'll be great.

TOMMY

What about John? Your son is not a big fan of my father. I don't see him sitting easy with another Conroy being perched...

PEGGY HAPLIN

My son is an obsessive. And though I share his agony over the disappearance of my granddaughter, his choice to fixate on The Magic Man has not only hurt the spirit of this community, it has rendered him an irrelevance. Particularly at this moment of crossroad...

Tommy clenches. He can only speak the truth...

TOMMY

I think you're making a mistake here...

PEGGY HAPLIN

And I think you can shift in your shoes all afternoon, young man. But I'm an old lady accustomed to standing in the cold. So I would suggest you do like your daddy did, and remind yourself whose founding capital pays for the apricots in your little girl's lunch pail...

She is not to be trifled with. And Tommy gets it. At last, he nods... She eases. Comforted by the victory...

PEGGY HAPLIN (CONT'D)

Good Luck. *Sheriff.*

With that, she skates off... Tommy watches Peggy Haplin resume her figure-8s, thinking back to a mere two days ago. When life was vastly simpler...

END OF ACT EIGHT

*

ACT NINE

*

INT. CAFETERIA - HAPLIN MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - NIGHT

It's late. But a few sad souls hold vigil for loved ones, trying to find distraction at the bottom of bowls and cups.

We find Georgia, seated alone at the counter with a take-out cup of coffee. She pours from her cream dispenser, only to find it empty...

She turns to the MAN, several stools down... He is early 30s, with a toothy, clean-cut wholesomeness. We'll call him HANDSOME SAM...

GEORGIA

Can I borrow your creamer?

HANDSOME SAM

Of course.

He hands it to her... She pours cream into her coffee...

HANDSOME SAM

You got someone upstairs?

GEORGIA

Yeah. Sadly.

HANDSOME SAM

Family or friend?

GEORGIA

Family. Kind of. "The grandpa I never had" sorta thing...

HANDSOME SAM

Is he going to be okay?

GEORGIA

No one can say...

There is something about Handsome Sam, whoever he is, that puts Georgia at ease... He is warm and friendly...

GEORGIA (CONT'D)

How about you? Who are you here for?

HANDSOME SAM

Me? No one. I just come for the tapioca...

Georgia grins... Sips her coffee...

HANDSOME SAM

I'm a firm believer that all of society's ills could be quelled if everyone was just given some pudding...

GEORGIA

Wouldn't that be nice?

Georgia finishes her coffee and rises...

GEORGIA

So long...

HANDSOME SAM

Your sorta-grandpa will be in my thoughts...

GEORGIA

And your tapioca will be in mine.

As Georgia heads off, we STAY with Handsome Sam. As he watches her go. His expression is neutral. It shouldn't be a cause for concern. But, somehow, *it is*.

INT. PATIENT ROOM - HAPLIN MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Georgia stands over Sheriff Conroy, who remains sedated, his reattached hand bandaged... She speaks to him, gently...

GEORGIA

It's a shame you're going to miss The Thaw Fest. I know how much you love it. *

She pours him a cup of water from a pitcher on his side table... *

GEORGIA

I'm hoping my dad doesn't show up. Remember what happened last year? *

Pours herself a glass. Takes a sip... *

GEORGIA

Get better soon, huh? You're the only one who I can do the Sunday crossword puzzle with in ink... *

She leans in and kisses him on the forehead, taking a moment to regard this man who represents uncommon kindness in her otherwise cruel world...

But then, *something happens*. She HEARS Sheriff Conroy SPEAK:

SHERIFF CONROY (O.S.)
 In my younger days, I felt sorry
 for myself that I had no gloves...

Only his mouth hasn't moved. And his eyes remain closed...

SHERIFF CONROY (O.S.)
 Until I met a man with no hands.

Georgia is entirely freaked, but all she can muster is a --

GEORGIA (CONT'D)
 Hello?

She waves her hand over Sheriff Conroy's face... And, in that moment, the whole room becomes inexplicably *wobbly*... She looks at her empty coffee cup...

Was Georgia just hearing things? She steps back, almost loses her footing. She steadies herself, turning out to --

INT. HALLWAY - HAPLIN MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Georgia walks down the long hallway which, at once, appears to ripple, as if she is looking at it through heat waves..

The ground beneath her unsure, she makes her way to the ELEVATOR BANK... She drops her coffee cup, and presses the DOWN BUTTON, catching, out of the corner of her eye --

Handsome Sam. Walking toward her. With a steady, precise stride. Again, he is doing nothing to engender fear...

But she fears him. And she cannot speak. It's as if she's been drugged. Or is in the throes of a seizure...

GEORGIA
 Don't...

*

The elevator door opens... Georgia sloppily slips inside... Searches for the LOBBY BUTTON... Finds it... Presses it... Her heart races... The doors begin to close... She is almost safe... Almost alone, when...

A HAND is thrust through closing doors... They part... And Handsome Sam slithers into the elevator...

INT. ELEVATOR - HAPLIN MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Trapped, Georgia's world continues to shift... Elongate and constrict... Handsome Sam just *stares* at her... Never saying a word... Again, she tries to communicate with him:

GEORGIA

Did you... Put something... In my..

Her vocal chords betray her, but she is able to get out one final word...

GEORGIA (CONT'D)

... *milk?*

He does not respond. In fact, *he's gone.*

She looks around the small elevator. But of course he's not there...

Georgia's eyes tick to the illuminated FLOOR NUMBERS. Watching them descend...

And then Handsom Sam is back. He looks at her. And, even though his mouth doesn't move, she/we HEAR:

HANDSOME SAM (O.S.)

It was *cream*, you silly bitch.

She stares at him... He looks back... His face becoming oddly fimbriated. As if were made of water colors... But then --

DING! The doors open... Georgia pours out into...

INT. LOBBY - HAPLIN MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - NIGHT

It is empty. Georgia's feet echo as she wills herself to the exit... Toward some sense of freedom...

But with each jagged, desperate step she takes, she is more unsteady... Her feet betraying her...

At last, she bursts through the glass doors --

EXT. HAPLIN MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Into the cool night air... But again, the ground is buckling, canting, as if her entire vestibular system has shut-down...

She turns... To look back into the hospital lobby... She can see Handsome Sam... Still in the elevator... Keeping the door from closing... *Watching her*... And she HEARS:

HANDSOME SAM (SINGING; O.S.)

*"I had some dreams/They were clouds
in my coffee/Clouds in my coffee.."*

Yep. Carly Simon. Georgia trips up... She sifts to the ground... With nary a sound...

It is only then that Handsome Sam exits the elevator... He moves towards her... With those signature steady steps...

He stands over her... Observes her... She looks up at him... At his kind face... Those concerned eyes... Those unmoving lips, which don't explain why she HEARS:

HANDSOME SAM (SINGING; O.S.)
*"You're so vain/You probably think
 this song is about you..."*

And Georgia gets to her feet. And she runs. Fast. Away from him. As fast as she can possibly go... And as she does, everything seems to waver... Not FADING... But *DRIFTING* --

TO BLACK

Over which, hyperkinetic, OVERLAPPING VOICES shuffle and twist their way into our aural passage... Volume and pitch fluctuate... Handsome Sam's singing, discordant and off-key, CROSS-FADES, as we SNAP OUT OF BLACK to --

AN OLD-SCHOOL TURNTABLE.

A vinyl record spinning on it. Playing the actual Carly Simon recording... And then we are looking up, from the ground, to --

Ronald, Lincoln and Womper Stiviletto. For we are in --

INT. STIVILETTO HOUSE - NIGHT

Ronald and Lincoln are having a heated argument...

LINCOLN STIVILETTO
*You're wrong, man. It's "you had
 one eye in the mirror, as you
 watched yourself 'GO BY'..."*

RONALD STIVILETTO
*No. It's "you had one eye in the
 mirror, as you watched yourself
 'GAVOTTE'..."*

Georgia is sprawled across the filthy shag rug... Dazed... Unnoticed by the brothers, as they continue their tiff...

LINCOLN STIVILETTO
 What the hell is "gavotte"?

RONALD STIVILETTO
 It's a French thing. A dance. The
 guy, the vain guy, was dancing...
 (MORE)

RONALD STIVILETTO (cont'd)
He was watching himself, in the
mirror, as he danced...

And Ronald goes to the turntable... Starts the record from
the beginning... They rock in time to the MUSIC...

CARLY SIMON
*"You walked into the party/Like you
were walking onto a yacht/Your hat
strategically dipped below one eye/
Your scarf it was apricot... "*

And Womper has noticed --

WOMPER STIVILETTO
I think she's awake -- !

He peers down at her... But Lincoln and Ronald can't be
bothered right now... Focused on the MUSIC...

CARLY SIMON
*"You had one eye on the mirror as
you watched yourself -- "*

LINCOLN STIVILETTO
GO BY!

RONALD STIVILETTO
GAVOTTE!

Georgia tries to get to her feet. Both brothers turn to her -

LINCOLN STIVILETTO / RONALD STIVILETTO
*"And all the girls dreamed/That
they'd be your partner/They'd be
your partner and... "*

As the light in the room seems to waver... From WHITE to
MAGENTA to COLD BLUE... And the Stiviletto Boys themselves
are appear to unravel. Their faces elongate and constrict...

GEORGIA
What am I doing here?

The Stiviletto Boys laugh... Georgia sobs in abject terror...

GEORGIA
I want... To go... Home.

RONALD STIVILETTO
Don't you wanna say "hi" to Baby
Boy first?

LINCOLN STIVILETTO
He's been sweet on you since you
was the only one come to his 14th
birthday party. When you was six.

WOMPER STIVILETTO

You brought him a rhino. A stuffed rhino...

RONALD STIVILETTO

And then you flew your Lear Jet up to Nova Scotia to see the total eclipse of the sun...

Before Georgia can answer, Baby Boy bounces into the room. He gently waves at Georgia, all smiles:

BABY BOY STIVILETTO

Hi, Georgia. Are you okay? Do you want some tapioca?

As the Carly Simon grows LOUDER... Georgia runs for the front door. Rips it open. Spilling out to the tattered lawn.

EXT. STIVILETTO HOUSE - NIGHT

Actually, it's dawn. The night has passed. Georgia looks out, to the dump, in the distance, lit by a pale, amber glow.

Georgia gets slowly to her feet... And she begins to run... Not quite sure where she is going... She looks behind her... Because the Stiviletto Boys are giving chase...

Her heart THUMPS. As she runs. Toward the dump. Turbid and confused. As they follow. Laughing...

Georgia comes to a stop. At the edge of the dump. Staring out... She looks behind her. But The Stiviletto Brothers are no longer about... She looks back to the dump --

Her face is lucent with the shimmering flicker of a debased light... And then we see what she sees --

Like something out of a Flemish painting. Beyond the dump is A VALLEY of great breadth and depth, a nameless gloom, with globes of black and red FLAMES rising out of the stinking pit...

We can hear rustling CRIES. Like souls undergoing torment. We can smell the smoke... And, in the distance, there are opal towers and sapphire battlements...

And the awful firelight dances, a twisting, guttering pyre.

And Georgia SCREAMS.

*

END OF ACT NINE

*

ACT TEN

*

INT. HAPLIN SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

In their version of a muster room, Roger Hobbs updates the morning roll call: a dozen or so COPS, including Kelvin Tolliver, Root Beer Rogers, and Shell Jenkins...

ROGER HOBBS

Our only clue (as we have not been able to rustle-up any eye witnesses, although we've canvassed practically the whole town) is a *powder* that was found on the victim. It appears to be some type of *baking flour*, and it's been sent off to the State Lab for further analysis...

Roger Hobbs' face turns sour... A few follow his gaze... To where Tommy has entered... And for the first time in our tale, Tommy is wearing his UNIFORM. The crisp, pressed khakis remind us of his newfound stature...

There is a tick of awkward silence... Until:

KELVIN TOLLIVER

How's Griff, T.C.?

TOMMY

He's resting.

Eyes dart around the room... Many land on Hobbs, sensing a confrontation. And Hobbs delivers:

ROGER HOBBS

So, what's the next move then on the Friddle case? *Sheriff?*

Tommy looks at him. At the others. Then:

TOMMY

Business as usual. You're still running lead on the case. You call the shots...

Hobbs wasn't expecting this. Tommy nods to all of them. And leaves the muster room.

INT. HENLEY'S ROOM - MANNING BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

Henley sits at a desk, writing in a journal. When there is a knock on the door. She opens it. But there is no one there.

But a PLASTIC BAG hangs from the doorknob. She opens it. Inside is a DVD. Of a film. We recognize the poster art from the lobby card: "THE BLUE DOOR".

Henley smiles to herself. Looks down the hallway. No one there. She goes back into her room...

INT. HOSPITAL - SHERIFF CONROY'S ROOM - DAY

Tommy sits by his father's bedside... The room is crowded with flower arrangement... Despite the fact that Griffin Conroy is asleep, Tommy talks to him:

TOMMY

Part of me... I'll tell ya... Part of me thinks she just wants a puppet. Not that you were a puppet. But you insisted on letting sleeping dogs lie. Which is what Mrs. Haplin wants. With me...

And he picks up his father's SHERIFF STAR, which is on the side table... Tommy turns it over in his hand... *

TOMMY *

I think she's of the mind that even if I *wanted* to wake up those sleeping dogs, I'm too much of a nincompoop to do it!

He smiles to himself... Puts the star back down on the table. *

TOMMY

And she's probably right...

Tommy goes to a flower arrangement Looks at the card. When -

SHERIFF CONROY

He'll be back.

Tommy turns... The Sheriff, eyes still closed, is muttering:

TOMMY

Pop?

SHERIFF CONROY

Now that blood's been spilled again. He'll be back...

Tommy goes to his father's bedside...

TOMMY

What? Who?

Eyes still closed, Sheriff Conroy continues his maundering:

SHERIFF CONROY

The serpent always hisses where the
sweet bird sings, Chloe...

And, just as quickly as he roused, Sheriff Conroy settles
back into his torpor...

TOMMY

Pop -- ?

But then Tommy's cell-phone RINGS. It's Rachel. CROSS-CUT
AS NECESSARY...

RACHEL CONROY

You need to come home. Right now.

Tommy looks at his father's slumbering form...

TOMMY

What is it?

RACHEL CONROY

Something's happened.

CUT TO:

GEORGIA

Sitting on the couch. Dirty. Disheveled. A SCRAPE on her
face. Clothes torn and muddy, she is wrapped in a blanket...

INT. CONROY HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Tommy paces, listening to the tail end of Georgia's ordeal.
Rage boils inside him, though he's doing his best to keep it
all under control...

GEORGIA

... and I just ran and ran and ran.
I don't even know if they were
chasing me at that point. I don't
know if they were ever chasing me
at all...

RACHEL CONROY

Her eyes were dilated when she got
here. The Stiviletto must have
drugged her --

Tommy looks out the window. To where Emma plays in the
backyard...

*
*
*
*
*
*

GEORGIA

No, that doesn't make sense...
Because I was... It was before--

*
*
*

Tommy, anger building, interrupts --

*

TOMMY

Did they hurt you?

GEORGIA

I don't--

TOMMY

DID THEY HURT YOU, GEORGIA??

RACHEL CONROY

Tommy, for God's sake -- !

Tears spill from Georgia's eyes... Rachel gathers Georgia in her arms... Rachel looks furious...

Tommy charges from the house.

EXT. STIVILETTO COMPOUND - FRONT GATE - DAY

Root Beer Rogers waits here, as Tommy slams his Welly to a stop and bursts from the car...

ROOT BEER ROGERS

Got your message. What's up, boss?
We making an arrest?

TOMMY

No. Not an arrest.

And Tommy hands Root Beer his badge. *And his gun.*

TOMMY

Not an arrest...

And before Root Beer can even ask --

INT. STIVILETTO HOME - DAY

The FRONT DOOR CRASHES IN, splintering the door jambs, as Tommy charges in --

Lincoln is the first one he sees... And he grabs two fistfuls of Lincoln's collars and hurls him into a wall...

Womper is there... Tommy turns and punches the fat man in the mouth, liberating a couple of infected incisors from the stank-filled orifice they previously resided in...

RONALD STIVILETTO
 What the hell are you doing,
 Conroy? You best have a warrant
 you stupid sonuva--

But Tommy whips a CHAIR at Ronald's head... Lincoln has found his feet... And he dives on Tommy... Bringing him to the floor... Ronald jumps in...

And the brawl is on: plates and glasses smash. Bodies lollop around the kitchen. Blows are exchanged...

Tommy's fury comes as a great surprise to us. As does his ability to bring the thunder: *

Tommy drops Lincoln with a whiplash-inducing uppercut, and pins Ronald by his throat to a cracked kitchen cabinet...

RONALD STIVILETTO
 I told you: we didn't do nothin'.

TOMMY
 You drugged her. A 17-year-old...

Suddenly Ronald gets it. This is about Georgia.

RONALD STIVILETTO
 The Bravin girl? We found her on our living room floor. Anyone should be pissed, it's us! She broke into the damn house -- !

Tommy cocks his fist --

TOMMY
 You're lying --

And Tommy is about to throw the punch, when Root Beer Rogers bursts in, waving his cell-phone... He is momentarily stunned at the tableau before him... But he hands Tommy his cell...

ROOT BEER ROGERS
 It's the State Lab -- *

TOMMY (INTO PHONE)
 Hello -- ?

The State Lab M.E. is guy called MURTAUGH. *

M.E. MURTAUGH
 Hey, there. This is Murtaugh at the State Lab? We got the organics back on the substance covering your homicide?

TOMMY

This really isn't a good time...

Because Womper and Lincoln are getting to their wobbly feet.

M.E. MURTAUGH

It most definitely is flour. But it didn't come from your factory. It's a special kind that contains, get this, a fluoride found only in New York City tap water, which was mixed into the dough. What do you make of that? Figure your guy got gooned by a pastry chef on vacation from Coney Island?

Murtaugh laughs at his own joke... But Tommy is not amused... Especially when he see it --

Laying on the floor by the door is A PIZZA BOX. An oversized pizza box... A pizza box able to hold a 26" pie... It's lid slightly agape, as if quietly scolding him.

And everything suddenly clicks for him. A moment of quiet washes over Tommy. Tommy hands Root Beer the phone... And he walks toward the splintered front door --

ROOT BEER ROGERS

What's up, T.C.?

Tommy looks back at Root Beer, at the brothers, at the tumult... Tommy looks utterly enervated...

TOMMY

It's like the man says: the serpent always hisses where the sweet bird sings...

And he walks out... Leaving Root Beer with the ravening Stiviletto brood... As the sound of a DOOR KNOCK takes us to:

INT./EXT. RANCH HOUSE - PORCH/FOYER - DUSK

Long shadows stretch across this well-kept lawn... A woman, DORIS, old and rimpled, answers her front door, her face immediately brightening when she sees Tommy...

DORIS

Tommy -- !

TOMMY

Hey, there... He home?

DORIS

No. I expect him soon for supper,
though...

TOMMY

No worries. I just wanted to grab
my drill gun... I can come back... *

DORIS

Don't be silly... It's in the
basement... You know the way...

And as Doris lets Tommy in, we can see, by the expression on his face, that this is exactly what he wanted.

INT. BASEMENT - RANCH HOUSE - DAY

Tommy comes down an creaky wooden staircase and begins poking around. He rummages through various items on the workbench, not sure what he's looking for.

Storage boxes on the far side of the room catch his attention... More specifically, DUST TRACKS leading to them... As if they've recently been moved...

Tommy pulls the boxes from the wall and, in short order, he finds a HIDDEN DOOR (one made to look like just another part of the wall). Cautiously, Tommy opens the door and enters...

INT. HIDDEN ROOM - BASEMENT - RANCH HOUSE - DAY

Tommy pulls the draw string on a hanging light bulb. The room illuminates. Dark corners. Tommy's eyes land on something. His face falls. Fear. Disappointment. Rage. Sadness. All wash over him...

We see what's given him such pause: the facing walls are covered with NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS, PHOTOS, NOTATED MAPS, HAND-SCRAWLED REMINDERS, and TORN PAGES from JOURNAL ENTRIES. *

And all these keepsakes on display form a reliquary; a veritable shrine. *To The Magic Man.*

Tommy is in shock. When, from behind him:

VOICE (O.S.)

You weren't supposed to see this.

Tommy turns. Standing in the shadows, menace in his eyes -- *

Is Big Dave.

END OF ACT TEN *

ACT ELEVEN

*

INT. BIG DAVE DUNCAN'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

To resume. Tommy stands there... Facing Big Dave...

TOMMY

I had no idea...

BIG DAVE DUNCAN

I know. No one did.

Tommy looks at him...

TOMMY

No, Dave. I had no idea that you've been obsessed with this...

BIG DAVE DUNCAN

Why is that important? What's important is that I solved it. I solved it and I saw that justice was served...

Tommy shakes his head...

TOMMY

Jerry Friddle was *not* The Magic Man...

BIG DAVE DUNCAN

Of course he was. I've been working on this for two years now, T.C. Surveilling. Gathering evidence. Making my case...

TOMMY

"Making your case"? Who the hell are you to "make your case"? You make pizzas...

BIG DAVE DUNCAN

I got rock-solid evidence.

TOMMY

You got nothing.

BIG DAVE DUNCAN

That's not true. I been shadowing Friddle for the last few weeks. And he was following little Gwen Simpson. All over the place. And she's only nine...

TOMMY

You know why he was doing that?
Because he had a thing for Leah
Simpson. Gwen's mother. She filed
a bunch of complaints over the last
year or so. Friddle skulked women,
Dave. Not kids...

BIG DAVE DUNCAN

You're wrong.

TOMMY

Don't you think my father ran down
Jerry Friddle eight ways to
Tuesday, back when he had that
trouble at the library? And then
did it again when he was found in
Raymond Manning's ice shack with a
hole in is head?

BIG DAVE DUNCAN

Things were overlooked --

Tommy looks at him for a long beat... Then:

TOMMY

Jerry Friddle was in Las Vegas for
a family reunion when Billy Mixon
disappeared.

The fury begins to bubble in Tommy:

TOMMY

And he was in the hospital with
gall stones when Lauryn Ward
vanished! But you! You stupid,
fat moron. You just killed an
innocent man based on half-baked
conclusions after doing some junior-
varsity detective work? Who the
hell are you? Who the hell are you
to even get involved -- ?

BIG DAVE DUNCAN

No one else was doing it... Even
Haplin and them had given up --

TOMMY

Okay. So supposing you're right.
Supposing Friddle was The Magic
Man. Then you just killed the only
person who knows what happened to
those kids...

Big Dave smiles...

BIG DAVE DUNCAN
He told me where the bodies are --

TOMMY
What?

BIG DAVE DUNCAN
He did. Friddle. He told me where
the bodies are...

When, from upstairs:

MRS. DUNCAN (O.S.)
DAVID? *EVERYTHING OKAY DOWN THERE?*

BIG DAVE DUNCAN
*EVERYTHING'S FINE, MA... ME AND
TOMMY JUST HAVING A GAB --*

MRS. DUNCAN (O.S.)
TOM WANT TO STAY FOR DINNER?

Beat... Big Dave looks at Tommy, like: *you gotta answer her.*

TOMMY
I'M FINE, MRS. D.

MRS. DUNCAN
*YOU SURE? MEAT PASTIES AND A
SPAGHETTI HOTDISH --*

BIG DAVE DUNCAN
HE'S OKAY, MA -- !

Once they hear her walk away:

TOMMY
He told you where the bodies were?

BIG DAVE DUNCAN
In Wisconsin. In a landfill. Just
outside of Solon Springs...

TOMMY
He told you that? Jerry Friddle?

BIG DAVE DUNCAN
He did... So you see -- ?

TOMMY
Did you have a gun pointed at his
head at the time he told you, Dave?

BIG DAVE DUNCAN

Yeah. So?

TOMMY

Maybe he was under duress? Maybe he was thinking if he told you anything, it would get him out of that shack?

And we see this land on Big Dave... He processes it... But then rejects it... Shakes his head...

BIG DAVE DUNCAN

That's not what happened...

Disgust washes across Tommy's face...

TOMMY

You idiot. You stupid, pathetic idiot...

BIG DAVE DUNCAN

He was taking kids...

TOMMY

HE WAS TAKING NOTHING!!

And Tommy lashes out, smacking Big Dave across the face with a closed fist... Blood leaks from Big Dave's nose...

Big Dave doesn't retaliate... He just looks at his friend...

TOMMY

What are we supposed to do now? Huh, Dave? What am I supposed to do now?

BIG DAVE DUNCAN

You do your job. You caught me. So we tell everyone what I did. And why I did it...

TOMMY

No, we don't, Big Dave. If we do - you go to jail forever. Because Jerry Friddle wasn't The Magic Man.

BIG DAVE DUNCAN

He told me where the bodies were.

Tommy picks up a wrench off the work bench...

TOMMY

You say that one more time I'm
gonna bury this in your head --

As they look at each other...

TOMMY

Okay. We gotta figure something
out. We just need some time... To
figure something out --

And the trouble they are in hangs there like a noose. As
we'll PRE-LAP a CHILDREN'S CHORUS rendition of Chicago's
"SATURDAY IN THE PARK" and CUT TO:

EXT. "THAW FEST" - TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

Town Square is all dressed-up for festival. Beneath the
"Remember To Never Forget" banner. As it flies, high over
The Thaw Fest, just getting underway...

The whole community has turned out.

The booths are thriving. The farrago swirl of candied apples
and corn dogs and cotton candy freight the air... There are
FORTUNE TELLERS, JUGGLERS, MAGICIANS, etc.

Calliope keens wrestle with the squeals of joyful children in
a scrum of pure Americana... The carousel glistens... The
Sunday CLOWNS make animal balloons...

It is the NINTH GRADE GLEE CLUB, on the riser, singing
"SATURDAY IN THE PARK" ("Can you dig it - yes, I can/And I've
been waiting such a long time/For Saturday...").

Henley walks through the festivities... Looking, all the
world, like a lost child... When, at once, there is Miranda
Kirby, her daughter, JORDAN, 9 and adorable and holding a
stuffed walrus --

MIRANDA KIRBY

Henley! This is my Jordan. And
this her walrus, Wally. Jords,
this is Henley, who I told you
about... The real guitar hero.

HENLEY

(to Jordan)
Hello --

JORDAN KIRBY

Hi...

MIRANDA KIRBY

Your first "Thaw Fest"! Are you having fun?

HENLEY

It's great...

Miranda is subsumed by the LADIES from the Garden Club... Henley wanders away... To where Dot Manning and The Widows are laying waste to the fried dough stand... Henley clocks the lot of them, suitably preoccupied...

Her time to go. She starts to leave --

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

Tommy and Big Dave pull up in the Welly... They climb from the car... Tommy clocks the banner... Hanging high... His scowl is apparent... He turns to Big Dave and barks:

TOMMY

Stay close. And let's just act normal until we can figure this out...

*
*
*

As Tommy enters the "Thaw Fest", he and Henley cross... There is a look, a moment, albeit a brief one... But then his attention is drawn to --

THE DUNK-A-DIMWIT

The Stiviletto Brothers' contribution to all of this... Baby Boy sits in the tank... Ronald, Womper, Lincoln hawking "*three tries for a buck*"...

Tommy and Ronald share a dark glance... But before things can get urgent:

RACHEL CONROY (O.S.)

Where have you been?

Tommy turns to his wife...

TOMMY

Just... All of a sudden... Stuff.

Rachel kisses him...

RACHEL CONROY

Happy "Thaw Fest", T.C...

He nods... Clearly mad-distracted...

RACHEL CONROY
Your father is going to be fine...

TOMMY
I know.

RACHEL CONROY
Remember how, when we were kids, we
used to hide from him every "Thaw
Fest"?

Tommy nods... She looks at him... He is clearly upset... She
touches his face...

RACHEL CONROY
You okay, baby?

He nods. His eyes say otherwise. She attempts to cheer him:

RACHEL CONROY
Starting to warm-up. Maybe you
will get the "Dallas Alice" in the
water after all...

TOMMY
Where's Emma C.?

RACHEL CONROY
Stockpiling goldfish...

She gestures... To a booth... Where you throw a ring-toss and
win goldfish... Emma is tossing, Georgia with her...

TOMMY
Keep an eye...

And he walks away... And Rachel frowns after him...

GEORGIA

cheerleads Emma's tosses...

GEORGIA
You go, Li'l Bean. You da man.

When Andrew Haplin appears... To Emma:

ANDREW HAPLIN
It's all in the wrist, Em. All in
the wrist...

Emma blushes... Clearly this older, cute boy has an effect.
Even on a 9-year-old...

EMMA CONROY

Okay...

Andrew notices the scrape on Georgia's face. This conversation is hushed, out of Emma's ear-shot and without looking at each other, so to a casual observer they are merely standing near each other --

ANDREW HAPLIN

What happened?

GEORGIA

It's nothing.

ANDREW HAPLIN

Did your father do that?

She considers what exactly to tell him. Then:

GEORGIA

Yeah. He was on a real bender last night...

ANDREW HAPLIN

I'm gonna kill that guy, I swear...

GEORGIA

It'll be fine, it'll be fine.

But maybe it won't be. Especially as we see --

TOMMY

On the other side of the park, keeping the peek on the Stiviletto Brothers... When --

HANDSOME SAM

is at his side...

HANDSOME SAM

Sheriff Conroy?

And Tommy is clearly not comfortable with this title...

HANDSOME SAM

Sam Dunning. I work with Captain Frost. State Police. And I am here to help...

TOMMY

You work with Frost?

HANDSOME SAM

I do. And I am here to help.

TOMMY

Surprised the Captain hasn't paid us a visit himself. Back in the day, he was a major presence...

HANDSOME SAM

He sent me. And I am here to help.

TOMMY

You said that...

HANDSOME SAM

How's your father?

TOMMY

At this point: we don't know...

HANDSOME SAM

I am here as a resource. We will get to the bottom of this. Not here to step on toes. Most of all not yours. But we will find this guy. A homicide. We don't get a lot of them. When we do... We are snap-sharp...

Tommy looks at him...

TOMMY

Snap-sharp.

Handsome Sam nods...

HANDSOME SAM

Snap-sharp.

We can see Tommy isn't happy with the appearance of this man, seeing as how his best friend is the culprit. And we aren't quite sure what this man's involvement was in Georgia's nightmare at the hospital...

END OF ACT ELEVEN

*

ACT TWELVE

*

EXT. "THAW FEST" - TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

To resume. There is the SQUEAL of FEEDBACK, and --

PEGGY HAPLIN

is on the stage... At the mike, John Haplin behind her:

PEGGY HAPLIN (AMPLIFIED)
Hello. Hello, everyone. I am
going to make this brief... So
everyone can get back to the
business at hand: which is having
a ball at, believe it or not, the
53rd Annual Haplin County "Thaw
Fest"!

There is a burst of applause and cheers... Womper Stiviletto
two-finger whistles...

PEGGY HAPLIN (AMPLIFIED)
I remember my Daddy taking me to -
and now I'm giving away information
I shouldn't - the very first "Thaw
Fest"...
(laughter)
And I won a stuffed walrus. I
still have that stuffed walrus.
Although he hasn't aged as well as
I have... !

There is more laughter... Doctor Pete sidles up to Tommy:

DOCTOR PETE
Think she mentions the murder?

TOMMY
Not a chance...

When Ronald Stiviletto walks by:

RONALD STIVILETTO
Hey, Tommy! Wanna give it a go?
Three tries for a buck? Proceeds
go to Baby Boy's college education!

He's holding three softballs... Womper and Lincoln hoot and
holler from beside "*Dunk-A-Dimwit*"...

Tommy turns away from them... He looks up to where Peggy
Haplin is finishing up:

PEGGY HAPLIN (AMPLIFIED)
 Anyhow. Have fun. Eat, drink, win
 walruses, and generally rejoice in
 the myriad pleasures of living here
 in Haplin... Thank-you!

Big applause... Tommy and Doctor Pete share a look... Tommy
 nods... Emma runs up to him...

EMMA CONROY
 I won! I won a dragon!

And she shows him the stuffed dragon... And Georgia trails
 her... And she sees Handsome Sam... She appears most rattled.
 Especially when he offers her a placed:

HANDSOME SAM
 Hello --

But before Georgia can respond, Kelvin Tolliver approaches...

KELVIN TOLLIVER
 Trouble --

And he gestures... To where a pick-up truck has pulled up to
 the entrance to the park... And out steps Carl Danco, the
 disgruntled Bready line foreman...

He's with a 7 equally ANGRY MEN... Most of them African-
 American... They march to the ropes securing the banner...
 And begin to tear it down...

Perry Steckler and some of the other Haplin MEN try and
 intervene... And, in seconds, there's a full-on skirmish
 erupting... And Tommy, Kelvin and Root Beer run over, to
 break it up... Tommy wrests Danco away --

CARL DANCO
 This has got to stop! They are
 flying that thing, it is like they
 are spitting in the face of little
 Chad Sorrell! Do you get that? Do
 you see that? Do you?

And one of Danco's men takes a swing at one of Steckler's
 men... And the upheaval takes a more dire bent... Fists are
 flying... Children are crying... Angry shouting and shoving,
 Root Beer and Kelvin are jostled and pushed...

When, at once, Tommy hears a voice. Above the din. A
 panicked voice. And Miranda Walsh appears. And she looks
 singularly crazed...

MIRANDA KIRBY

Jordan? Jordan, where are you?

JORDAN? JORDAN???

All eyes are on her... Nervous chatter... When she stops.
Bends down. And lets out A WAIL. A high, terrified PULING --

For she is holding the stuffed walrus, Wally...

MIRANDA KIRBY

JORDANNNNNN!!!!

As we MOVE IN ON Tommy... And, in absurd counterpoint, the jaunty piano and horn section OPENING of Chicago's "SATURDAY IN THE PARK" fades up... ("Saturday in the park/I think it was the 4th of July", etc.)

As everyone looks around... True panic setting in... Tommy looks over at Rachel... At Emma...

Bedlam ensues... Tommy looks at Root Beer and Kelvin... At Peggy Haplin... At John Haplin... At The Stiviletto Brothers as, oddly unmindful, Lincoln winds up and tosses a softball at the target of the "Dunk-A-Dimwit"... This one connects... And Baby Boy is dropped into the water tank...

Miranda continues to wail... Everyone seems to be looking to Tommy: Georgia, Andrew Haplin, Dot Manning, Carl Danco, Perry Steckler... CUT TO:

INT. HENLEY'S ROOM - MANNING BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT

CONTINUE MUSIC. Henley changes her clothes... She takes off her sweater... She is wearing a wife-beater tee beneath it...

Henley holds up a FLASHLIGHT. Switches it on and off, testing it... She dials a number on her CELL... Gets an ANSWERING MACHINE... At the beep:

HENLEY (INTO PHONE)

Hey. So I'm here. I'm going to go up now. It's 9:30 my time... I'll call if I find anything... Oh, it's me...

She looks at herself in the mirror...

HENLEY (INTO PHONE)

Chloe.

She hangs up... We are behind her, as she looks into the mirror... Steeling herself...

And then we see it: on her back, just below her shoulder. There is a TATTOO...

A tattoo of a question mark. With a halo.

EXT. "THAW FEST" - TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

CONTINUE MUSIC. As MOTHERS grab their CHILDREN. As Kelvin and Root Beer try and keep the peace...

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - "THAW FEST" - NIGHT

CONTINUE MUSIC. As FAMILIES run for their cars. And a hysterical Miranda Kirby rushes up to Tommy --

MIRANDA KIRBY

What are you going to do? *What are you going to do?* WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO? *WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO???*

INT. HAPLIN MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - NIGHT

CONTINUE MUSIC. Down the long, empty corridor we go... Through the ribbons of shadow... At last coming to Sheriff Conroy's room... CREEPING TOWARD his bed... Slowly...

A SHADOW falls over Sheriff Conroy's slumbering form... Looking at him... Only to recede. Back the way it came... And, after it is gone... Sheriff Conroy opens his eyes...

He looks terrified.

INT. SECOND FLOOR - MANNING BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT

CONTINUE MUSIC. As Henley walks out of her room. Walks over to the staircase, leading up to the third floor. The forbidden third floor...

She takes a deep breath. Turns on the flashlight.

And ascends the stairs.

Once she is out of sight, there is movement. A FIGURE steps out from the penumbra of a second floor wall sconce.

It is Merritt Grieves. He has seen Henley climb the stairs.

And he smiles.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - "THAW FEST" - NIGHT

CONTINUE MUSIC. Emma runs into Tommy's arms... He holds her tight... Looking at Rachel... And we HEAR:

SHERIFF CONROY (O.S.)
*He'll be back. Now that blood's
 been spilled again. Everything
 will unravel. And he'll be back.*

As Tommy holds his daughter, he looks across the violent swirl of panic that the "Thaw Fest" has become --

To find Big Dave. Their eyes lock. Big Dave looks lost. Lost and scared and terribly mistaken... And WE HEAR:

DONNA FRIDDLE (O.S.)
*One thing you can count on: The
 Magic Man? He's somebody you
 passed by on the street today...*

And Kelvin and Root Beer walk up to Tommy... *

KELVIN TOLLIVER
 What are we gonna do, T.C. -- ? *

He looks at them. Considers. Then he takes something from his pocket. Looks at it. It's the SHERIFF'S STAR. *

And Tommy pins it onto his chest. He turns to them -- *

TOMMY
We're gonna find that little girl. *

They look at him. As if seeing him for the first time. Which, in a sense, they are -- *

And, off Tommy, fully aware that everything he has known up till now is forever changed, we CUT TO: *

EXT. MAC'S POND - NIGHT

CONTINUE MUSIC. We begin at the banks of the pond. As a crack forms on the ice. The thaw finally taking hold...

And we FOLLOW THE CRACK. As it spider-webs across the surface of the pond. Filament striations radiating from the seam of the main crack...

We FOLLOW IT... OUT TO THE CENTER OF THE ICE...

Still the joyful tune PLAYS ON ("*People reaching/People touching/A real celebration/Waiting for us all...* ")...

As the crack leads up to Raymond Manning's ICE SHACK... ("*If we want it, really want it/Can you dig it...* ")

Its interior lit with a lantern glow... ("*yes, I can...* ")

As a SHADOWY FIGURE ENTERS... Dragging another FIGURE. A *much smaller figure...* ("And I've been waiting such a long time/For the day...")

... Closing the door behind the both of them.

And we can see, in the pearlescent glow of the FULL MOON, now skidding across the night sky, as if it, too, were melting, like a tatter of butter in a skillet:

The DOOR to the Manning ice shack. Because we hadn't noticed it before. The color of the door...

For it is blue.

THE END