

THE PAST.

EXT. MISS ELIZABETH'S HOUSE - STORMY NIGHT 1940

LIGHTNING FLASHES, crack the pitch black night. Through the pouring RAIN we see on a hillside, a three story white HOUSE with a wrap-around porch, a screen-door slaps in the wind. There's a long sloping grass yard with a STONE WELL. Smash cut back to -

THE PRESENT.

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM - DAY

Sybill squints in pain. She rubs her temples. What was that? She looks out at her class bathed in sunlight.

SYBILL

(quickly recovering)

Um, good news. I'm dismissing you early today, which will give you extra time to work on your papers which are due tomorrow!

As students file out, Sybill gathers her things.

KATHERINE

Dr. Hess? I can't be here tomorrow. I was wondering if I could turn in my -

SYBILL

(no nonsense)

Katherine, you've read my syllabus. I do *not* accept late work.

KATHERINE

Yes Ma'am, but my mother's planned this whole *surprise* for my sister's birthday; she really wants me to be there.

Sybill stops packing her briefcase, considers the girl.

SYBILL

As it happens, it is my baby sister's birthday this weekend. Honestly, I can't stand to be in the same room with my siblings, but there is nothing I wouldn't do for my mother. I'll grant you a reprieve until Monday.

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The excited girl runs off, calling "Thanks, Dr. Hess!"

SYBILL
(calling back)
It's NOT for you - it's for your
mother!

I/E. MISS ELIZABETH'S HOUSE - DAY

The large white house from the flashback, now bathed in sunlight.

INT. MISS ELIZABETH'S HOUSE - FOYER - DAY

MISS ELIZABETH HESS (70s), Sybill's mother, an imperious southern matriarch, handsome for her age, bears a strong resemblance to Sybill. We catch glimpses of Miss Elizabeth's reflection in a MIRROR as she walks in and out of the foyer. She checks her purse, crosses things off a list, then exits out of frame.

Family PHOTOS adorn the foyer walls leading upstairs and cover the surface of a breakfront chest with a large MIRROR.

C/U., a current PHOTO of Miss Elizabeth with her four ADULT children including Sybill.

Next is a photo of the four children as TEENS, lined up on the foyer stairs; SYBILL in her cap and gown looking serious, next to her undeniably handsome brother ARTHUR, her sister CANDY, wearing a too-tight sweater dress, and the baby sister MYRTLE beams in her cheer outfit and pom-poms.

Next, a BLACK AND WHITE of a young Miss Elizabeth, circa 1950s, on a BEACH next to her FOUR YOUNG CHILDREN.

Miss Elizabeth descends the stairs with a large wrapped PRESENT.

EXT. BOOKER CREEK ROADSIDE - DAY

A red pick-up truck travels down a two-lane road amidst the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. The truck passes a sign that reads, "Booker Creek - The Crepe Myrtle City of the South, Population 2,303, Elevation 3,333."

I/E. ARTHUR'S TRUCK - DAY

Though he's older, we recognize ARTHUR HESS (late 40's), Sybill's brother, from the photos on Miss Elizabeth's wall. Arthur is road-worn but still has the charm and ease of a ladies man. Arthur adjusts the rearview MIRROR. Upbeat rock-a-billy plays on the radio, he cradles a beer between his legs. He passes TWO WOMEN on the sidewalk - checks them out in his rearview MIRROR and then swings a wide U-turn in the middle of the road, and rolls down his window.

ARTHUR

(whistles)

Mornin', ladies.

The women flip Arthur a bird. He nearly gets side-swiped by a passing motorist who HONKS at him and swears. Nothing is easy. Arthur cranks the radio up to full volume in defiance of his current sadness, banging his fingers on the steering wheel like two old drumsticks.

EXT. AUNT NETTIE'S ONE-STOP - DAY

Arthur's truck wheels crunch across the gravel parking lot of the One-Stop, a combination gas station and convenience store, a worn-looking place, that has been added onto many times. There are rockers on the front porch, and out back an old Chevrolet sits on cinder-blocks.

CLINUS CLINE (50's), a heavy, childlike, high-functioning autistic, changes the lettering on a portable sign. His sign has wheels on the bottom and a flashing yellow arrow with light bulbs on top. Clinus *lives* to change the sayings. Today it reads...

Save the planet!

It's the only one with cornbread.

Arthur rolls up to the gas pumps and is met by ROY LOONEY (20's) Aunt Nettie's new pump boy. Roy is a country boy, a hard worker, drop-dead gorgeous, and nobody's fool. Roy snaps shut his copy of THE HISTORY OF ANCIENT CIVILIZATION and lays it on the pump as Arthur gets out.

ROY

Hello there, Mr. Hess.

ARTHUR

(suspiciously)

Howdy. You the new boy?

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CONTINUED:

ROY
Yessir, Mr. Hess.

ARTHUR
(no clue)
Have we met?

ROY
Yessir, Mr. Hess.

ARTHUR
Hmm. What's your name?

ROY
Roy Looney, sir.

ARTHUR
(doubtful)
Roy Looney. We met here at Aunt
Nettie's?

ROY
Yessir. You were...well...

ARTHUR
Lemme guess Roy, I was inebriated.

ROY
Yessir. Mr. Hess.

Arthur notices Roy's textbook.

ARTHUR
Roy, you call me Arthur. What's
this? A little light reading?

ROY
Yes sir, Mr. Hess.

ARTHUR
Annnnh. Watch out college-boy,
Roy. Now, what did I tell you?
Call me, Arthur. You make me feel
old. Hell, Roy, I ain't likely to
be calling you Mister Looney.

Roy nods, point taken. Pause. The two men stare at each
other in a bit of stand-off.

ROY
Fill'er up?

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CONTINUED: (2)

ARTHUR

Thanks, Roy.

ROY

How are you doing today sir? I mean Arthur.

Roy starts *full-service* detail on Arthur's truck with skill and enthusiasm, checks the fluids, cleans the windshield, etc.

ARTHUR

Well son, truthfully... I am in a state of terminal despair. I have reached a sad pass. I got high blood pressure, a bad back, and I'm drinking Mylanta like it was water.

ROY

(polite but distant)
Sorry to hear that.

ARTHUR

I've been done in by a low woman with shameful behavior
(spitting her name
out like poison)
- Inez Nation. Robbed me blind. Some would say I've reaped what I've sewn. I had the prettiest little wife you've ever seen and hell, I couldn't keep it in my pants. No going back, Roy. My wife moved to Florida, took my girls, and married a postman.
(off Clinus)
Hell. He's a sight ain't he?

Clinus sits on the ground in front of his antiques/junk shed. He tinkers with an old-timey coffee grinder. Clinus sports a cowboy hat with feathers. His dog, Bert, lays beside him, snoring. Behind him is a hand painted sign that reads...

Antiques, Flea Market, 2nd Saturday every month.

ARTHUR (cont'd)

You're really raising the IQ bar out here at the One-Stop, aren'tcha Roy?

Roy finishes up. He is a whiz with a squeegee.

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CONTINUED: (3)

ROY

Clinus does pretty fair at his fleas.

ARTHUR

Yep. Retards know more than you think.

Roy puts his equipment away, he doesn't appreciate the word retard.

ARTHUR

You watch out for Clinus, ya hear? He's my bud.

Arthur tosses his empty, whistles, then waves. Clinus gives Arthur the "thumbs up" sign.

ARTHUR (cont'd)

Nettie here?

ROY

She's inside with Miss Fay.

ARTHUR

Fay. Lord. There's a job a work. I don't know how you take it, Roy. It's a damn looney bin out here at the One-Stop. Huh. Must be your name.

Arthur laughs at his own joke. Roy doesn't.

ROY

(polite)

Yes sir. If you want, I can pull your truck around back and give her a wash while you talk to Miss Nettie.

Arthur hands Roy his keys.

ARTHUR

Mighty nice of you Roy. You're going places boy. You got a real knack for *details*, customer service skills.

ROY

Naw. Just doin' my job.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

ARTHUR

Nope. You can't teach that. I know what I'm talking about. I've had several businesses. Play your cards right Roy, I *might* have a place for you in my organization.

Roy hops into Arthur's truck and backs away speaking through the rolled down window.

ROY

Sure thing, Mr... I mean Arthur.

Arthur watches Roy back up, contemplating, then heads into the One-Stop.

INT. CANDY'S BEAUTY SHOP - DAY

We recognize Sybill's sister CANDY SNIPES (44), a curvy redhead, as the girl in the tight dress from the photo in Miss Elizabeth's foyer. Candy folds towels in front of a large beauty shop MIRROR. Then she flips the door-sign to "OPEN" and gives a friendly wave to a passerby on the sidewalk. Candy straightens magazines, fills soap containers, cleans combs, getting ready for her day.

INT. CANDY'S BEAUTY SHOP - DAY

The phone rings, Candy picks up.

CANDY

(on the phone)

Beauty Barn, Candy speaking.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. MISS ELIZABETH'S HOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

Elizabeth talks on the wall phone with a long cord. On the table is the large wrapped present.

MISS ELIZABETH

Good morning, Candace. I'll be a little late. There's so much to do today for the party.

Candy frowns at the sound her mother's voice, but buoys herself with a cheerful tone.

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CONTINUED:

CANDY

I'm sure, Mother.

MISS ELIZABETH

What are you wearing to Myrtle's surprise party?

CANDY

I don't know, Mother. Haven't really thought about it. I'm slammed today. I'm doing Mrs. Brown's wig-let this afternoon. You know how particular she is.

MISS ELIZABETH

Well, leave yourself enough time. Don has gone to a lot of trouble. Did you get your sister a gift?

CANDY

Uh, I was thinking I could do her hair.

MISS ELIZABETH

(sighs heavily)

Oh. Well, you know Sybill will go *all out*, and I've found the *perfect* present.

CANDY

I'm sure that you have, Mother. I've got to go. Hurry in so I can make you pretty for the party. Bye-Bye.

Miss Elizabeth hangs up. Sits at the table and reads over what she's written on a birthday card, as she signs her name, her hand trembles.

Candy hangs up. Puts her face into a stack of towels and SCREAMS just as her cleaning lady DORIS, (60) African-American walks by carrying a mop.

DORIS

Lemme guess, ya mama called?

They share a laugh.

CANDY

No flies on you Doris.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DORIS

Do any a' y'all get on with ya
mama?

CANDY

Not me, Not Arthur and I think
Myrtle is afraid of her. She loves
Don, but he's an in-law. She and
Sybill have always gotten along
the best.

DORIS

Well that don't surprise me none,
Sybill and Miz Elizabeth is cut
from the same cloth.

END OF ACT ONE.
ACT TWO.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - THE NEXT DAY

Sybill's shiny new car idles in front of a brick ranch-
style house.

Inside the car -

The air-conditioning blares. Sybill notices a small sign,
"Office entrance in the rear." She opens her leather Day-
Timer calendar to THURSDAY, JUNE 16, 1983, paper-clipped
in the corner is the hypnotist's business card. She
adjusts the rear-view MIRROR and checks her already
perfect make-up.

Outside the car -

We follow Sybill as her high heels click gracefully down
the sidewalk.

EXT. DR. BOB'S GROOVY HOME OFFICE - DAY

Sybill knocks. DR. BOB (60) a short, balding man in
rumbled clothing opens the door. Sybill, fresh as a
flower, towers over him in her heels.

DR. BOB

Hello.

SYBILL

I'm here to see Dr. Diamond.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DR. BOB

I'm Dr. Diamond, but please just
call me Bob. Do come in.

SYBILL

(wary)

Well... I wasn't sure if this was
right because... it is a house.