

**BIG DRIVER**

FADE IN

BLACKNESS.

OVER we HEAR a recording machine BEEP and Robot Voice stamp the date. Then, the even-toned voice of TESS THORNE:

TESS (V.O.)  
"Murderer drowns victim with a mouthful of snow. It melts. No evidence."

Another voice -- Tess's neighbor PATSY -- reacts with an ironic tease:

PATSY (V.O.)  
Different. Could expand your Eskimo readership.

Another BEEP. The robot date stamp. Another message from Tess:

TESS (V.O.)  
"The girls find a dead Siamese Twin holding a fired gun and must determine which twin tried to kill the other."  
(beat)  
Further thought: was it suicide or murder? Research: Siamese Twins."

INT. TESS THORNE'S HOME OFFICE - DAY

PAN floor-to-ceiling bookshelves. A zillion titles. Known and obscure. Whimsical knick knacks. And her twelve, cozy mystery novels which feature "**The Willow Grove Knitting Society.**"

PATSY (V.O.)  
Got it. Wrote 'em down.  
(beat)  
Personally, I'd go with the Siamese Twins. Enemies sharing the same organs. It's twisted.

TESS THORNE

in tailored Anne Taylor, packing a small overnight bag. Pre-occupied with leaving on time. She's 30-ish and slight with a shy smile, slightly elfin face. More than pretty with watchful, perceptive eyes.

Her 30-ish neighbor PATSY, a lover of free time and binge viewing, is flopped on sofa. Imagines the title:

PATSY

**"The Willow Grove Knitting Society Goes to Siam."** The girls use the needles as chopsticks. Classic.

TESS

Can't go to Siam. It was renamed Thailand in 1948. And Doreen hates to fly.

(looks around)

What am I forgetting?

ADJUST to see more of the office. Sunny, cozy and feminine. Oversized sofa and desk. Big windows overlooking an upscale Connecticut block.

PATSY

Earrings?

Tess nods; that's it. She finds them in a special box, puts them on: pear-shaped diamonds.

On the walls are framed **"Willow Grove Knitting Society"** jacket photos that show the Knitting Society; four, conservatively-dressed, older women. There's also a laminated PEOPLE Magazine article about Tess with photos that capture her appeal.

There are several **"BEST NOVEL OF THE YEAR"** Awards. A plaque of honor from the **DETECTIVE FICTION GUILD** for **"The Willow Grove Knitting Society Go to Miami."**

PATSY (CONT'D)

... you know what? They should make your novels into movies. Get like Jennifer Lawrence to play the enigmatic, seductive neighbor. She would so nail me.

TESS

I'll tell Hollywood your feelings.

Hanging near her desk are gold-plated knitting needles, mounted on mahogany.

A gift from her publisher, inscribed: "*For Tess Thorne and the Girls for another stellar best seller! Your friends at RANDOLPH Publishing*"

TESS (CONT'D)

I have got to get out of here.  
Gonna hit traffic.

Tess's cat, FRITZ, snoozes on window ledge.

TESS (CONT'D)

Is Fritz going to be any trouble?

PATSY

Not as long as he likes  
Margarita's. Borrow some dvds? I'm  
across the hall. I have no life.  
You can trust me.

Tess smiles. Patsy looks at the countless dvd's in the bookcases.

PATSY (CONT'D)

Seriously... you must have every  
movie ever made.

TESS

I have movies that haven't even  
been thought of yet.  
(snaps fingers)  
CHAPSTICK. My lips go tumbleweed  
around strangers. Why do I agree to  
these things?

PATSY

Hard cold cash. Take the \$1500, do  
something fun.

TESS

I put all my speaker's fees in the  
bank. That's fun. Right?

Patsy looks at her. Oh, yeah. Tons of it.

TESS (CONT'D)

I gotta get on the road. Please be  
nice to Patsy, Fritz. She'll be  
your questionable guardian until I  
get back.

She pets her kitty. He MEOWS.

TESS (CONT'D)

Lock up and set the alarm when you  
leave. Thanks, sweetie.

PATSY

Knock 'em dead.

Tess grabs her bag and heads out the door. The door SLAMS.

PATSY

Sighs. Calmly gets up. Grabs the stick of CHAPSTICK Tess forgot. Walks to the closed door. Holds out the tube. Waits.

Suddenly, the door opens, again. Tess looks at her. Patsy hands her the CHAPSTICK.

TESS

Right. See ya.

TESS

Putting her bag into the back seat of her EXPEDITION. She opens the driver's door. Gets in. Closes the door, starts the engine.

Looks up at her house. Sees

HER UPSTAIRS WINDOW

Four older women, dressed conservatively, looking down at her; the very ones from Tess's book covers. They hold knitting needles and yarn. Stare, worriedly, as if she's abandoning them. Or might be headed toward unknown menace.

TESS

Reacts. An appreciative look upward.

TESS (CONT'D)

... I'll be back soon, girls.

She drives off.

THE EXPEDITION

Disappears around the corner.

THE OLDER WOMEN

Gradually vanish. OVER we HEAR a pleasant, man's VOICE: a Tomtom GPS.

TOM'S VOICE  
*Take the next exit in eight miles  
 on Browning Street, Tess.*

EXT. HIGHWAY

Tess's Ford Expedition cruises toward the speaking engagement. She listens to jazz. Her GPS, named TOM, leads with calm omniscience.

TESS  
 You got it.

CUT TO:

EXT. LIBRARY - RAMONA NORVILLE

Waiting for Tess in the middle of the parking lot, beside the parking space reserved for: "**TODAY'S AUTHOR OF NOTE.**"

TOM'S VOICE  
*We're here, Tess. Right on time.*

INT. EXPEDITION

She smiles.

TESS  
 Thanks, Tom. Nice job.

TOM'S VOICE  
*My pleasure.*

TESS  
 I should let you out of there  
 sometime... must get cramped.

TOM'S VOICE  
*My pleasure.*

She smiles. Gets a kick out of Tom; fellow road dogs.

TESS'S EXPEDITION

Parks. She gets out, stretches.

RAMONA (O.C.)  
 ... you come by the '84?

Tess turns to see

RAMONA NORVILLE

Big, mannish. This is no ballerina. Sixty easy. Someone unloaded a lot of heft and no-fashion-sense on Ramona. Her smile is warm, her haircut a bit U.S.M.C.

THE TWO

Ramona plunges right in:

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Ramona Norville. I sent you the invite for the speaking engagement?

TESS

Of course. How are y..

RAMONA

(interrupts, peers at dash)

... that a GPS?

She likes to talk. Her turn or not.

TESS

Gift from my agent after the last book sold to Italy. It talks.

RAMONA

My ex-husband couldn't even do that. Welcome to the space age.

(beat)

Imagine the way it just... sucks the information down from some whirling metal ball of technology high above.

Tess can see Ramona is an odd person. Likes her.

TESS

What'll they think of next?

(extends hand)

I'm Tess. So nice to...

That's as much as she can get in.

RAMONA

...ditto. Like I mentioned in my e-mail, we're all rabid fans of the Knitting Society gals. I'll be the one writing your check from our "**Books & Brown Baggers**" account soon as you're done today. I'm the President.

(MORE)

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 (winks)  
 I even have my own pen.

TESS  
 Well, that's very impres...

Ramona isn't done. Maybe ever.

RAMONA  
 ... very glad you got here safe,  
 Tess. 84's worst highway in  
 America, in my humble opinion not  
 to mention the long way around.  
 Walk here faster. I can save you  
 ten miles easy, heading back.  
 Scenic drive. Deer out of a Disney  
 movie.

TESS  
 I am a sucker for a short-cut.

RAMONA  
 As your most finely realized  
 character, Doreen Marquis, said in  
 '**The Willow Grove Knitting Society  
 Goes to Dallas,**' *"The two best  
 things in life are warm croissants  
 and a quick way home."*

Tess smiles. Ramona smiles.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
 The "Three B" high rollers paid  
 extra to meet you before your  
 speech. Gonna love 'em.

CUT TO:

EXT. PATIO WITH FOUNTAIN - THE HIGH ROLLERS

All women. Dressed-up for the special event. Lots of hats,  
 artisan jewelry, scarves and comfortable pumps. Sipping  
 plastic glasses of wine, nibbling Gruyere. All thrilled to be  
 rubbing shoulders with Tess.

We ROAM and meet a few: MOLLY, JANINE, LESLIE and DORIS. A  
 few have gold-plated, crossed-knitting needle broaches pinned  
 to lapels. All wear "**BOOKS & BROWN BAGGERS**" nametags.

MOLLY  
 ... and where do you get your  
 marvelous ideas, Tess?

TESS

They find me, actually. They always seem to know where I am.

JANINE

My life, written by Tess Thorne would be a best-seller.

(sotto to Tess)

An erotic potboiler. The fifty-first shade of gray.

Janine nods with humid implication. Tess manages a smile. An intense woman, LESLIE, sidles up.

LESLIE

May I ask: how can I get an agent?

The ambitious glint in Leslie's eyes suggest she paid the extra twenty dollars just to ask the question.

TESS

Just keep writing letters until one of the hungrier ones looks at your stuff. They're always looking.

Leslie stares with ambition.

LESLIE

I can spot hungry.

An effusive lit-fan, DORIS, gets close.

DORIS

May I get a photo with you, Tess?

TESS

Sure.

Tess nods. The woman gets in close with Tess and extends her arm, holding her iphone. Presses her cheek to Tess's as if old friends.

DORIS

Say "Homicide!"

They smile. CLICK. Doris giggles, over the moon. Someone pours Tess more Cabernet; fine with her. Janine is back: suggestive as ever.

JANINE

(sotto)

I have a fully detailed outline if you ever want to see it.

Tess smiles. Does her best to charm the high-rollers, OVER we HEAR Ramona's introduction.

RAMONA (V.O.)

She has written over twelve popular "**Willow Grove Knitting Society**" murder mysteries, including her latest "**The Willow Grove Knitting Society Goes Spelunking**," which, as you dedicated fans know, is a thrill a minute and filled with twists, turns, claustrophobia and bats! Spoiler alert: it is *fantastic*. She has very generously agreed to be with us all here today and talk about how she works her literary magic!

INT. LIBRARY AUDITORIUM

PANNING the eager crowd; a quirky bunch who identify with these books and beam as one, poised to hear Tess.

RAMONA - CLOSE

A ringmaster's cheer.

RAMONA

Please welcome, the quite wonderful Tess Thorne!

Applause explodes.

ONSTAGE - TESS

Trots on. Takes a small, cute bow. Removes the microphone from the podium, strolls the stage; seeming more friendly than she truly feels among strangers. (NOTE: This sequence is quickly paced, back and forth with the lively/rapt crowd.)

TESS

Well, *wonderful* I can live with. Quite wonderful may be going a bit too far.

(off applauding  
disagreement)

Ok...ok... I give in.

(beat)

Thank you, Ramona. And also all you "**Books & Brown Baggers**" for inviting me here today.

(spooky voice)

So let's talk about murder and mayhem.

(MORE)

TESS (CONT'D)

They are the flip side of the American dream, after all. You know, my mother used to say a woman writing books about killing people isn't feminine. But in my books, the women of the Knitting Society solve all those murders, so take that, Mom!

The audience cheers; putty and polyester in her hand. A sip of water. A swipe of CHAPSTICK. She paces. The audience hangs on her every word.

TESS (CONT'D)

I'll give you fair warning... as I appear to casually wander the stage, I'll try to cleverly make sure you don't notice that I slip the title of **"The Willow Grove Knitting Society Goes Spelunking"** into my talk at least three times as a promotional plug.

(beat)

So, when I mention **"The Willow Grove Knitting Society Goes Spelunking"** the second time, you'll know what I'm doing. And by the third time I mention **"The Willow Grove Knitting Society Goes Spelunking,"** you'll see right through it. So look for that.

Amid laughs she keeps pacing to keep it lively. Ramona is sitting right up front and smiling at Tess. She texts into her cell, obviously excited to tell someone about Tess's talk.

TESS (CONT'D)

I'm often asked if I draw my characters from real life. Actually my very strange and diabolical aunts are the inspiration for The Willow Grove Knitting Society... who by the way are featured in my newest book...

Tess holds her microphone out to the audience who yell out the title.

TESS (CONT'D)

I would never have mentioned it *four* times... but if you insist.

The audience loves her. We can see she's worked crowds this way before; good at it.

CUT TO:

INT. A DARK CORRUGATED DRAINAGE PIPE

A pale, lifeless hand. Gnawed to bone by an animal; mottled by dried blood. A spider crawls over it. OVER we HEAR

TESS (V.O.)

So, if I may share a personal confession: ever since I was a child, I had lots of voices inside me. All kinds: men, women, old, young. There may have even been a parrot. I guess I was either going to end up in a padded cell or as an author.

CUT TO:

RESUME TESS

Crisscrossing the stage. A PHOTOGRAPHER gets shots of her.

TESS

Actually, one of my early report cards from grade school, which I still have framed in my office, said "*this girl has too much imagination for her own good*" Some of my critics would say I have too much imagination for anyone's good.

The crowd boos; damn the critics. Tess smiles.

TESS (CONT'D)

Sometimes I wonder how many unsuspected selves a person might have, hiding deep inside. I've been making up people since I was little... maybe I do prefer living in my imagination. It's safer than real life anyway.

Ramona beams. Enjoying every second.

CUT TO:

A TABLE SAW - EXTREME CLOSE

Starts up. The orbital blade WHIRS.

CUT TO:

RESUME TESS

A thoughtful pause. Then:

TESS

When folks ask me if I have any tips about writing I tell them number one: don't forget ideas that come to you. Good ideas are gold. I forget things a zillion times a day, so I write stuff down on whatever I can find... I even leave messages on my phone machine with ideas and plot twists. How's that for old school? God, I'm still mourning the death of typewriters.

The audience likes that.

TESS (V.O.)

And where do ideas come from? Everywhere. Just listen and watch and connect the dots, however fuzzy they are at first. Also read a lot. And watch films. I was always obsessed with movies and books and remembered the best parts by heart. I still do. My thought process should come with ushers and popcorn.

The audience chuckles. Ramona looks very pleased and smiles; uses her cellphone to take photos of Tess. Tess faces the crowd. Drops her amusing guard; sharing deeper truths.

TESS

I think the most important things I can tell you about writing is this: as a writer, you have to try and understand human nature. See through the contradictions each of us is. The lies we pretend are truths. The fears we pretend are strengths. The greed and revenge people feel but never admit to.

(MORE)

TESS (CONT'D)

(beat)

And then, just as importantly, when you write the kind of books I do, crime mysteries, you have to be completely logical about it.

CUT TO:

A DIRTY HAMMER

Held by a construction-gloved hand.

CUT TO:

RESUME TESS

Sips water. Then:

TESS

As far as I'm concerned, too much emotion will get your characters into messes that make no sense. And that will kill the book. Not to sound like the Department of Motor Vehicles but... I always try to stay logical and rational with my plots. The Willow Grove Knitting Society would have it no other way.

(long beat)

In my books and I guess in my life, logic is king.

(considers)

Well... queen.

The crowd applauds. Tess takes in the adoration. Maybe these moments are the reason she does this.

RAMONA'S VOICE

You were wonderful, Tess. Worth every penny.

INT. RAMONA NORVILLE'S OFFICE

Tess looks at a signed photo of RICHARD WIDMARK which Ramona has prominently displayed.

TESS

They were all great. Plus I sold some books.

(beat)

Richard Widmark?

(MORE)

TESS (CONT'D)  
Loved him in "The Long Ships,"  
playing the Viking who gets  
captured by the Moor sheik played  
by Sidney Poitier.

ADJUST to see Ramona, writing a check. She looks up with an appreciative tilt of head.

RAMONA  
You know your films.

TESS  
(smiles)  
Just showing off.

RAMONA  
Mr. Widmark is my favorite actor. I  
fell in love with him when I was a  
girl, if you want the whole truth,  
after seeing "**Kiss of Death**". He  
was so powerful, so intense. I got  
him to sign that for me ten years  
before he died. He was very old  
then but it's a real signature not  
a stamp.

Ramona hands her the check in a sealed envelope with the little window for a peek inside.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
I'll make sure you get the photos  
that were taken. Now let's get that  
route for you. Better a straight  
shot through Robin Hood's barn than  
all the way around it.

TESS  
Thanks. I have a cat that bullies  
me if I'm not home to feed him  
personally.

RAMONA  
We'll use that talking GPS of yours  
to program the route. Intersections  
the whole thing.

TESS  
I'm never alone with Tom in the  
car. He's very protective.

Tess smiles.

INT. EXPEDITION - RAMONA

Is programming Tom. Tess watches.

RAMONA

... we'll input Stagg Road and U.S. 47 like so. BTW Stagg is very scenic, not used much. Parched asphalt and all that but not too bumpy last time I took it and that was in the Spring when the worst bumps show up. And I hate bumps.

TESS

Who doesn't?

RAMONA

... you'll ramble along it for sixteen miles, give or take.

TESS

Hey, great.

RAMONA

And *then*, when you get to 47...

Off Tess's reaction

CUT TO:

EXT. TWO-LANE COUNTRY ROAD - DAY (OVERHEAD SHOT)

This one made even made Rand *and* McNally sigh.

RAMONA (V.O.)

... you'll spot a sign pointing you to the I-84. But you'll only need to take the turnpike for twelve miles or so, that's the beauty part. And you will save tons of time and aggravation and you'll put hours on your life and thank me and the "Three B's" later. Have a safe trip home!

ADJUST to find Tess's Expedition, way down there, curving through the postcard.

INT. TESS'S EXPEDITION - DAY

The countryside flames with October color. ADJUST to Tom's screen: displayed green arrows and street names.

TOM

*Stagg Road is approaching, Tess. In  
one mile, turn right.*

TESS

You got it.

ADJUST to the sign for STAGG ROAD. Pocked with shotgun pellets; almost unreadable.

EXT. TESS'S EXPEDITION

Speeding down the scenic country road. But it's starting to feel lonely. ADJUST as it takes a wide, sleepy curve and on the other side sees

A DESERTED STORE

Ahead on her left. A faded sign over some dead gas pumps is barely readable: **ESSO**.

INT. EXPEDITION

She listens to music on the radio; a drifting signal. Fiddles with the knob. Glances around. ADJUST to see trees ominously huddled. No other cars.

TESS (CONT'D)

... where the hell am I?

Suddenly, she sees

THE ROAD SURFACE

Splintered pieces of wood. Rusty nails jutting.

INT. EXPEDITION

Tess swerves to avoid them.

Too late. She feels a tire punctured. Clack-Thump-Thud. The Expedition lurching up and down like a lame horse. It veers toward shoulder and Tess turns toward the

THE DESERTED STORE

Into its weed-stuffed parking lot.

EXT. EXPEDITION

Slows. Limp to a halt. Surrounded by pristine, somehow unnerving vistas. The engine PINGS. The Expedition slouches.

INT. EXPEDITION

Tess sighs.

TESS (CONT'D)  
Fabulous.

TOM'S VOICE  
*Would you like me to recalculate  
your route, Tess?*

No answer. She suffers the lopsiding effect of three good tires. After a beat:

TESS  
No.

She peers out at the isolation. A beat. The wind whips up. Then:

TOM'S VOICE  
*I don't like it out here.*

She reacts. Did the GPS just say that? She turns it OFF.

TESS  
What do you mean you don't like it  
out here?

She's more than slightly thrown. Fiddles with the GPS. It's definitely OFF. She reacts. Her imagination...

EXT. ROADWAY - TESS

Examining the dead tire. A splintered piece of wood impaled on it by a large, rusty nail. She softly curses. Glances around. The middle-of-nowhere stares back. The **ESSO** sign creaks.

TESS (CONT'D)  
... the scenic route.  
(beat)  
Goddamn you, Ramona.

She flips open her cellphone. On the screen, unhelpfully: "NO SERVICE"

TESS (CONT'D)  
... right. Too simple.

She hears an indifferently muffled engine approaching. ADJUST as an

OLD WHITE VAN

Rattles around the curve. On its side is a cartoon skeleton pounding a drum kit made of cupcakes. In drippy, horror-movie script is written "ZOMBIE BAKERS." It swerves around the boards as...

TESS

... waves for it to stop. Watches it speed away. She picks up a rock and throws it after them.

TESS (CONT'D)

Hey thanks, Zombie Bakers! By the way, that's a really... STUPID name!!

She's almost amused. But only for a moment. She stares at the boards with nails. Goes to clear them from the road; a charitable instinct. OVER we HEAR her darkly, ironic voice:

TESS (V.O.)

... of course, in a mystery or horror movie, this wouldn't just be carelessness. It would be a plan. A trap. And only the talking GPS sees it coming...

She half-smiles at her own dark imagination.

TESS

Walking toward the abandoned store's weedy yard. She looks moodily at the Expedition. 30K of rolling iron, 4-Wheel drive, disc brakes. Useless.

EXT. DESERTED STORE

Dilapidated. Left to die. In front: a porch where you could once sit-a-spell. A tin sign hangs askew from its roof: "**YOU LIKE IT IT LIKES YOU.**" ADJUST to Tess, stepping onto the porch, reacting to the sign; a critic of bad punctuation.

TESS

... anybody ever hear of a friggin' comma?

Suddenly, she hears a Glass-Packed engine rumbling closer and the SCREECH of thin brake shoes. She quickly turns to see a

FORD - 150 PICK-UP TRUCK

With a bad, blue paint job, Glass Pack mufflers, Bondo around the headlights. A BIG MAN in bib overalls and gimme cap sits behind the wheel.

The pickup stops; idling.

THE BIG MAN

Seen in profile. He looks at the litter of wood scraps Tess had moved. ADJUST to Tess.

TESS (CONT'D)

Hello?

(beat)

Pardon me, sir?

He turns, sees her standing there. Flicks a hand in salute, pulls beside her Expedition. Kills his engine. Rolls down his window. Looks-out with a friendly face.

BIG MAN

Hey, there. You pick-up that happy crappy off the road?

ADJUST to include Tess.

TESS

All but the piece that got my left front tire.

BIG MAN

Some luck.

TESS

Yeah. Thought I'd try the AAA but...

Tess looks at him. He's big. An unknown. She decides to avoid detail about no cell service.

BIG MAN

I know. No phone signal out here. Welcome to nowhere. Tell ya what, I'll change it forya if you got a spare.

THE TWO

He gets out and Tess reacts to his size. Six-six, deep in the belly, thick thighed. Wide as a doorway. He notices her reaction. Grins.

BIG MAN (CONT'D)

Didn't think you were gonna meet  
the Jolly Green Giant out here in  
williwags, didja?

Tess notes his eyes are brown, cap faded, a bit bleached.

TESS

Sorry. It's just I was thinking you  
don't ride in that truck of yours,  
you wear it.

BIG MAN

(laughs)

Never heard it put that way before.  
But when I win the lottery, I'm  
gonna buy myself a Hummer.

TESS

Maybe get two and weld them  
together.

BIG MAN

Like the way you think.

TESS

I'd buy them for you if I could.  
But if you change my tire, I'd be  
happy to pay you fifty dollars.

BIG MAN

You kiddin'? Charging a damsel in  
distress? It's un-American.

He winks. She starts to relax.

TESS

That's very nice.

BIG MAN

Hey, you saved me a mess of my own  
when you picked up that scrap wood.  
We good Samaritans gotta stick  
together.

TESS

Somebody went past in a funny truck  
with a skeleton on the side but he  
swerved around it.

The Big Man heads for Tess's flat front tire, but turns back  
to her, frowning.

BIG MAN  
Someone went by and didn't offer to  
help you out?

TESS  
I don't think he saw me.

BIG MAN  
Didn't stop to pick up that mess  
for the next fella, either, did he?

TESS  
No. Didn't.

BIG MAN  
Just went on his way.

TESS  
Pretty much.

There's something about the questions she doesn't quite like.  
The Big Man smiles. She finally does, too. Feels silly  
worrying.

BIG MAN  
Spare under the cargo compartment  
floor, I suppose?

TESS  
Yes, I think so. All you have to do  
is...

BIG MAN  
... pull up the handle, yep, yep.  
Been there... done that.

He ambles to the back of her Expedition. She's getting a kick  
out of him; local color.

INT. REAR CARGO - DOOR

Opening. The Bib Man looks in. ADJUST to see boxes of books  
she brought to sign. He sees her pretty photo on the jacket  
of one. Reacts to that.

BIG MAN (CONT'D)  
You some kinda book writer, eh?

TESS  
Uh-huh. Mystery novels.

BIG MAN  
Love a good mystery. You should get  
one made into a movie.

She smiles to herself. Everyone's an expert.

THE BIG MAN

Finds the spare tire and jack. Grabs them.

TESS

Notices the door to his truck not closed all the way, dome light on. She opens the door, slams it shut. Sees through the cab's back window

THE PICK-UP'S BED

Several pieces of wood are scattered across the rusty, ribbed metal. Painted white, rusty nails sticking out.

TESS

stunned; feeling as if she's having an out-of-body experience. ADJUST to the ticking sign: "**YOU LIKE IT IT LIKES YOU**" as the noise of it begins to sound like a ticking bomb.

THE BIG MAN

Jacking up the Expedition with strong arms.

TESS - CLOSE

Should she pretend she saw nothing... run for the woods?

HER FANTASY

*Running for her life, into the woods.* (NOTE: Tess's ongoing fantasies are fragmentary, nightmarish. Oddly edited.)

RESUME TESS

ADJUST to see him standing behind her; a man so tall he blocks out the sun. She slowly turns, looking directly up into his unblinking eyes. She tries to sound normal.

TESS

So... how's the tire?

His voice is pleasant. He looks into her eyes.

BIG MAN

Good.

He doesn't say more. Tess asks another way:

TESS

Is it... done now?

He shrugs, looks at sky. Back at her.

BIG MAN

Well... tell ya what, instead of  
changing your tire... how about if  
I screw you?

TESS

The planet seems to stop for her. Eyes filling with dread.

HER FANTASY

*Running more desperately for her life, into the woods.  
Falling, getting cut by rock and thorny brush. Looking back  
in terror.*

TESS

In the real world, frozen. Standing pressed against his  
truck, looking up at him; in his massive shadow. ADJUST to  
include the man. Her voice is paper thin.

TESS

... please don't kill me.

BIG MAN

You bitch. You whiny whore bitch.  
Gosh sakes.

HIS RIGHT HAND

Exits his pocket. It's big, banged-up. In the b.g., the sign  
creaks warning. "YOU LIKE IT IT LIKES YOU." Without warning,  
his hand turns into a fist and comes speeding toward...

TESS

...who watches it get bigger, nearing her face. OVER we HEAR  
a troubling, squeaking sound. HOLD.

DISSOLVE TO:

SOMETHING DARK AND SHAPELESS

Taking form. Fading. Here. Gone. Here. Gone. Slowly coming  
into focus, whirling like a broken merry-go-round. It's an

OLD PADDLE FAN

Hanging crookedly from the ceiling; spinning with slow  
nausea. Below it, something nightmarish:

TESS BEING RAPED - OVERHEAD SHOT

A brutal weave of flesh and cruelty. Impressionistic; inexact.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Tess on wooden floor, naked from waist down. The Big Man thrusting into her as if stabbing her to death. His weight and size crushing her, her breath trapped, eyes stricken.

Her hands claw. Nose a swollen lump. Her panties pocketed in his overalls; like a scalp taken.

RESUME TESS - CLOSE

Drained of color. Agonized. The Big Man creaks back and forth inside her; an uncoiled hinge.

TESS

... please...oh please, no more.

BIG MAN

Lots more.

As she tries to resist, she bites his hand hard, breaking skin.

BIG MAN (CONT'D)

You bit me, you bitch!

He hauls off to hit her.

HER POV - HIS FIST

Again, filling her field of blurred vision. As blinding white light seems to ignite the sky...

TESS

... blacks out. All goes silent. HOLD.

DISSOLVE TO:

FADE IN

A soundtrack from hell: slowly getting louder... a squalling, mocking, atonal voice singing "MUSTANG SALLY."

## THE BIG MAN

Dancing around her in his overalls, slashing air-guitar, singing. The sound of his massive, cludding workboots is apocalyptic. Behind him...

## THE DESERTED STORE WINDOWS

... the sun fades, glass blood-red. The big man's shadow dances behind him, capering down the floorboard, crawling up the wall.

## THE OLD PADDLE FAN

Wobbles.

## TESS

Swimming back to consciousness. The world black and silver. She watches it, one eye puffy. ADJUST to the fan: its crippled orbit.

## RESUME TESS - CLOSE

Feels like she's floating. She hurts bad. Face. Chest. Most of all, down below, where she feels torn apart.

## HER POV

Blurry from the assault. Just able to make out her heels and Anne Taylor slacks crumpled under the counter.

## TESS

Can smell her own blood. As her breath lurches pain and fear, O.C. the man stops singing. ADJUST as his giant's boots clomp toward her. Her wet eyes plead. Finally close; futility. ADJUST as he grins down, a spire of sadism.

## BIG MAN

... you trying to play dead, bitch?  
Guess what? Little while you won't  
have to.

Her eyes pop open. She screams but his hands grip her throat, choke her. She struggles for air. Notices sunset, afire in the windows. Again, bright light bleaches everything.

CUT TO:

TESS - OVERHEAD SHOT

Floating above her ravaged form. Looking down at herself as the monster continues to rape her.

Though sickened, she keeps watching herself. Sees her own agonized eyes below look up at her.

TESS LOOKING DOWN AT HERSELF

As her eyes meet her own... we HEAR the sound of something scraping gravel.

TESS

Being dragged across the parking lot of the deserted store. The bruised shape of his hands a ghastly necklace. The Big Man hums "Mustang Sally." They pass his truck. Her Expedition is gone.

THE TWO

He stops at road's edge. She can smell his sweat... feel the rise and fall of his wide chest. The night air on her bare legs. Can hear the sign ticking nearby: **"YOU LIKE IT IT LIKES YOU."**

TESS - CLOSE

Limp in his massive arms. Staring into space; seeming half-dead. His deep breathing a malignance.

She can hear his work boots on the parched tar of Stagg Road: Clud-Clump-Clud. Hear him kicking away the chunks of wood she carefully cleaned-up and threw in the ditch.

She listens for the ticking sign. Hears nothing.

Then, hears... running water.

Without warning, the Big Man kneels before her. Voice kindly.

BIG MAN (CONT'D)

Hey, girl.

She doesn't reply; sees him studying her half-lidded eyes. Her V.O. is a weak whisper; barely audible.

TESS (V.O.)

... play dead. Don't move... no matter what.

THE TWO

He pops the flat of his bitten hand against her cheek. Tess lets her head roll to one side as if dead.

BIG MAN

Hey!

He slaps her on the other cheek. Tess lets her head roll back the other way.

Through her blouse and bra, he pinches her nipples - not enough pain for her to respond. She remains limp; silent. He studies her, tilting his head.

BIG MAN (CONT'D)

Sorry I called you a bitch. You was a damn good screw. Snug as a bug. I like 'em a little older.

He picks her up, again.

TESS

Trying to hide her reaction to his rank scent. Beard bristles tickle the side of her face and she fights to hide reaction.

THE TWO

As he kisses the side of her mouth. His voice a seducer's rasp.

BIG MAN (CONT'D)

... guess I was a little rough.

ADJUST as he places her down in 4-5 inches of still, icy water. So cold she almost cries out. He drags her by the feet. A sharp tree branch cuts her back, slicing it. Tess makes no sound. Eyes a forced oblivion.

After another ten feet, he finally lets go of her.

TESS

Doesn't hear him. Doesn't move. Lays in the rotting leaves and sluggish water, terrified; in anguish.

Time creeps. A *gray fugue*.

She feels putrid water running under her. The only sound.

Then she HEARS it: his truck engine. Starting. Idling. Floored to redline; a beast's victory howl. Tires screech and the motor's basso throb fades-off down Stagg Road.

Tess slowly raises her head, wincing at stabs of pain. Abused throat raw. Smells the rot around her. Peers into the murk,

HER POV

Down the huge, ominous culvert, toward its mouth; a hazy circle of moonlight.

TESS

Starts to wriggle toward it. Stops herself. Is it a trick? She stares into the darkness of the pipe; its fetid gloom.

Is he patiently waiting for her? The water is so cold it makes her ache. She shivers. *Can he hear her teeth chattering?* She covers her bloodied mouth with cut hand.

Scans for any sign of him. Looks at her broken watch.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Tess turns onto belly, gets to elbows. Begins to crawl the pipe's length. As she moves through the wet grime and darkness, she recoils, shocked to see

TWO CORPSES

One is a skeleton, bony hands stretched in supplication. With enough hair to see it's a woman.

The other seems a badly defaced store mannequin; bulging eyes, protruding tongue. Dried lips pulled into ghastly grin. The body is fresher... but animals have been at it. (NOTE: this is the one we saw earlier during Tess's speech)

A beetle lumbers from the mannequin's hair, down the bridge of nose.

TESS

Screams; a hoarse rasp. Backs-out of the culvert, bolts half to her feet. Clothes soaked from the waist up, her abused body naked from the waist down.

DRAINAGE PIPE - LONG SHOT

Tess's silhouette stumbles to the end of the dark culvert, holding on to its sides.

EXT. DRAINAGE PIPE - NIGHT

As Tess crawls from it. Bloody, filthy. In shock.

She moves, breathing jaggedly, through bramble, terrified the Big Man will jump from the darkness and get her.

ROADSIDE

Tess crawls up the steep shoulder and reaches the two lane blacktop. Sees, across the roadway

HER POV - THE DESERTED STORE

A grim cameo. It looks blurry from the facial blows she endured.

TESS

Forcing herself across the road, limping with pain, breath jagged. She gradually gets to the other side. Moves toward

THE DESERTED STORE

ADJUST as Tess manages to pull its front door open. Go inside.

INT. THE DESERTED STORE - TESS

Looking around... not even sure for what, making miserable sounds. It's now a big central room, once divided into aisles. Frozen food case at back, beer cooler running length of wall. All in ruin.

She fishes her slacks, three-quarter inch heels and smashed phone from under a counter. Sees a carpet remnant.

EXT. BEHIND THE STORE - NIGHT

Tess wears the carpet for warmth; a squalid shawl. She begins to realize she's pacing in a circle; traumatized repetition.

The ticking of the tin sign stops her. She looks up at it, shivering. "YOU LIKE IT IT LIKES YOU." Voice weak.

TESS

...7-Up. That's what it is. You like it, it likes you.

She's aware of her voice; now deep. A rasp worthy of Bonnie Tyler. She weakly tests it; a dark absurdity she can't resist.

TESS (CONT'D)

"... it's a heartache... nothing but a heartache..."

Her voice catches, the violated horror of what's happened cutting her in half. She begins to vomit.

EXT. BOULDER - MOMENTS LATER

Not visible from market or road. Tess sits on it, crying her eyes out. The carpet remnant still around her. Her crotch aches and burns. Her body shakes with choked sobs.

Then, she's silent. Motionless.

From a place of survival and rage, she tilts her head skyward and SCREAMS at the universe; a deafening exorcism.

VARIOUS

The SCREAM echoing through forest, over silent road. HOLD

DISSOLVE TO:

STAGG ROAD - TESS - NIGHT

Walking/weaving down the center of the blacktop. She whirls and almost falls, hearing a vehicle approaching from behind.

HEADLIGHTS

Flare over the rise of road.

TESS

Freezes. *It's him. She's sure of it.* The whole horrid sequence is in her haunted eyes: *He came back, found her gone from the pipe. Is looking for her. Will murder her.*

She bolts into a ditch, blunders into bushes that cut her cheek. Hears herself sobbing with fear, on hands and knees, hair hanging in her eyes. As she waits, in silence, suddenly...

HER FANTASY

*... the Big Man is behind her with a cannibal smile. He furiously bellows, like a primitive creature, rips-away the carpet remnant and tears at her blouse.*

*She runs in terror... but he catches her, pins her like a butterfly, his giant hand covering her shrieking mouth.*

*Begins to rape her, again.*

RESUME TESS

Shaking-off the horrorshow. Tears streaming. She watches the car get closer. Suddenly realizes she left...

THE CARPET REMNANT

...on the roadway. The car is getting closer. It slows down, the carpet remnant in its headlights.

TESS

Panicked. Afraid it's him.

HER FANTASY

*The Big Man stops. Gets out. Turns to the shoulder; senses her there. Get our of his truck. Runs to catch her. She tries to outrun him but can't. He catches her. Begins to choke her to death.*

TESS

Relieved as she sees it's not a truck but..

A CAR

... that swerves around the remnant, stereo blaring vintage BTO: "B-B-B-Baby, you just ain't seen n-n-nothing yet." Its taillights shrink; disappear.

ROADWAY - TESS

Picks up the carpet remnant for warmth, realizes her diamond, drop earrings are gone. Bursts into tears again.

TESS

... you sonofabitch.

She finally calms. A simple clarity settling.

TESS (V.O.)

...Tom said it's four miles from the intersection of Stagg Road and US 47.

She feels herself: blood on her fingers from where he raped her. She forces herself to deal with it.

TESS

Four miles...

She knows she can do it. Begins to walk, despite trauma and pain. So shaky she falls. Gets back up. Keeps walking.

TESS - LONG SHOT

A tiny figure on a long, black road. Fighting to push forward.

ROADSIDE SIGN

Trembling in night breeze. **"YOU ARE NOW ENTERING COLEWICH TOWNSHIP. WELCOME FRIEND!"**

TESS (V.O.)  
 ... you like Colewich, it likes  
 you.

ADJUST to see her standing near it. She keeps walking, her own shadow on the moonlit roadway startling her; stretched and menacing. She feels her bruised neck. Sees the dried blood on her blouse and fingers.

Keeps walking.

HER POV

Blurry from the blows during the assault. But she begins to notice a **"NEW YORK POST"** style headline forming, hovering in the air before her; a Bodoni font mirage.

**"WILLOW GROVE" SCRIBE RAPED**

**AFTER LECTURE**

She shakes the image away. Walks on. Eyes straight ahead, unblinking; a trance of trauma. As if moving through a charcoal tunnel.

HER FANTASY - AN AUDITORIUM

*Another gathering of her fans. Seated and staring at stage. But this one festers with sick mood. Hard faces.*

THE FANS

*One's a cop who stares at the stage where Tess awaits questions. He holds a copy of one of her earlier books. ADJUST to see the photo on the back: Tess is exaggeratedly alluring; sexy. Ten years younger, blond hair cascading, tanned legs in a short skirt. Too much cleavage; a caricature.*

*There are accusing questions:*

COP  
*Did you encourage him?*

ADJUST to include other fans. Expressions filled with contempt.

ANOTHER WOMAN

He shot his load in you? Was all that terrible? Did you give him your autograph?

A SECOND WOMAN

News says he took your panties. Blue Victoria's Secret hip-huggers trimmed with lace. You've always been a publicity whore. You must like it that people know everything.

ADJUST CLOSER to see Tess standing there, ten years older than on the jacket photo. No longer a dazzling ingenue. Her clothing ripped, bloodied. Her neck and face bruised and swollen. A rape victim.

A THIRD WOMAN

Are you going to write about this? Make money from it? Buy more pretty panties? Take more slutty photos for your books.

A FOURTH WOMAN

What about the two dead women in that drainage pipe, Ms. Thorne? Aren't you going to help them? Or is everything all about you?

TESS

Searches their faces. Septic with indictment. She finally sees the

BIG MAN

Seated in the back row. Smiling depravity, her blood-flecked panties in his pocket. Sucking his dirty middle fingertip.

The room starts to wobble; spin.

RESUME TESS

Reacting to the awful fantasy. Emotions raw. Rubbing her temples; trying to think clearly .

She begins to hear a rhythmic thudding, rising from the road itself. Recognizes the heartbeat of a bass guitar. Detects light on the horizon; the white arc of sodiums, red gleam of neon.

She walks toward it, faster and faster. Hears laughter drifting. People. Civilization. A place someone can help her...

Her face gradually fills with dread as she begins to recognize the song: "**MUSTANG SALLY.**" As the crowd roars.

CUT TO:

EXT. "STAGGER INN" ROADHOUSE - TESS

A big, honky-tonk barn with a jammed Friday night crowd. ADJUST to find Tess, standing at the edge of its filled parking lot. Her eyes search for the Big Man's truck, don't see it.

She notices a white van; skeletons playing cupcake drums on its side. She looks up at the marquee: "TONITE: THE ZOMBIE BAKERS!!"

She catches her

DISTORTED REFLECTION

In the window of a parked car. She looks ravaged.

TESS

Fights tears. She sees

PAYPHONES

On the wall of the Roadhouse. But they're being used by laughing customers.

TESS

Fears and imagines the other...

CUSTOMERS

... using the payphones notice her bleeding wounds. Don't help. Disdain obvious.

TESS

The "STAGGER INN" isn't somewhere she can handle being right now.

CUT TO:

## INTERSECTION OF STAGG ROAD AND ROUTE 47 - LATER

Tess walks closer, wearing the carpet remnant, staying to the shadows, looking homeless. She looks ahead, seeing something beautiful...

## A "GAS AND DASH"

Two pay-phones are screwed to the cinder block wall between rest rooms. OVER we HEAR Tess stifling a cry.

## INT. WOMAN'S RESTROOM - STALL - TESS

On the toilet, hand over mouth, as her urine starts to flow; pain as if someone lit a book of matches in there.

When she gets up, fresh tears roll down her cheeks. He took her panties. The water in the bowl is pastel pink and she blots herself very gently with a pad of toilet paper. Then flushes.

She pauses to look more closely at herself in the water-spotted metal mirror. ADJUST to see her reflection. A bruised, wide-eyed woman. OVER we HEAR the upbeat:

TESS (V.O.)

"Hi, this is Tess. Leave me a message."

In response, is her vulnerable voice, trying to stay on track; make sense.

TESS (V.O.)

... it was a truck... and the man was... he didn't say but... it was a blue truck and he fixed the tire and then he choked me and hit me and raped me. A pickup truck. Did I say that? I can't remember exactly. He didn't have a name. He was so tall and huge and... I want to leave this before I forget it all because I... I can't think.

## EXT. "GAS AND DASH" - PAY PHONE WALL

Tess on a phone that's askew on the cinder block: the casualty of a bad call. Trying to leave herself a message. Struggling to remember details. Fighting emotion

TESS

My watch is broken. I don't know what time it happened. I had to walk here... I'm hurt.

(MORE)

TESS (CONT'D)

He sang a song... after he dragged me into a drainage pipe. It was so cold... the water and there was... a dead woman, and he used these boards on the road with nails and I got a flat and then... I saw myself being raped... I could look down and see me... and there were two woman in the drain... dead. He hurt me so bad.

A SKINNY MAN

Walks up to the next pay phone beside her. ADJUST as Tess turns away. Glances to see him check the change slot for coins. He looks her over. Concern or judgement? Is he going to hurt her, too? He walks off.

TESS

Can't continue. Hangs-up. Weeps into her sleeve. Tries to keep it together. Realizes what she must do. Dials OPERATOR. Listens as it rings.

OPERATOR'S VOICE

Operator. How may I help you?

TESS

... can you connect me to Royal Limousine?

OPERATOR (V.O.)

No, ma'am, you have to dial it yourself in order to utilize your calling card.

TESS

... you give me their number?

OPERATOR

Yes, ma'am, I can.

Tess listens, writes the number on the dusty cinder block with her fingertip. Hangs up and before dialing, notices a truck pull in. Her heart launches itself through her throat and when

TWO LAUGHING BOYS

With high school jackets get out... ADJUST to see Tess leans her head against the cool, dirty wall, gasping for breath. She closes her eyes.

Suddenly, a MAN runs around the corner of the store, right toward her. There is no time for her to scream; paralyzed with terror.

She bends with relief seeing it's

ONE OF THE TEENAGE BOYS

Running past her without looking, getting back into the truck.

TESS

Tries to calm her breathing. Reaches to dial the number written in dust. Listens to it ring. An answer:

ANDREA'S VOICE

Royal Limousine. This is Andrea.

TESS

I need a ride home... to Connecticut. I'm near the "Stagger Inn" out on Stagg Road. I've used you before. My credit card... should be in your computer.

From somewhere to her left, she hears cars rushing and turns to see the sign for I-84. The road she would have taken if she hadn't tried to save time.

TESS (CONT'D)

I-84...

CUT TO:

INT. LIMOUSINE - TESS - NIGHT

Riding in the back. Silent. Staring out as the car nears city twinkle. She notices the Driver glancing up into rearview, at her.

His eyes unnerve and she looks away. Harrowed to the bottom of her soul. She tries to get comfortable, her whole body hurting. Curles up on the leather seat, comforting herself.  
HOLD.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TESS'S BUILDING - LATER

A flower-lined path leads to the front entry. The limo is parked in front and Tess signs the bill.

TESS

...I need you to wait to make sure I get in. And keep the head-lights on me.

DRIVER

Of course, Ms. Thorne.

FOLLOW as Tess walks up the path, tilts the mailbox and removes her hidden key. She walks to her front door, slips in the key. Can HEAR a hungry Fritz in there.

She gets the door open and is met by the polite BEEPING of the ALARM. And a meowing Fritz who she picks up.

TESS

I have never been so glad to see you.

Fritz licks her dirty face. She smiles. Waves to the limo driver who drives away.

TESS

Closes the front door, locks it and immediately enters the ALARM Code. The BEEPING stops. She re-sets the ALARM. Looks at the blinking word in the little green window: "**ARMED**"... some reassurance.

She moves down the hall, Fritz jumping from her arms and following.

FOLLOW as she quickly checks the doors to the backyard and side patio, Makes sure both are locked. Then, the windows.

Fritz meows and twines around her legs, as she checks the wall clock. Astounded to see it's only quarter past eleven. A lifetime of torment in a few hours.

She moves to the

FRONT HALL CLOSET

Reaches up and takes down a box from the top shelf. She opens it.

INSERT - PISTOL

A Smith & Wesson .38 Model.

TESS'S FLASHBACK - A GUN STORE

As Tess holds the gun in her hand, the Gun Store Owner tries to close the deal.

GUN STORE OWNER

I call it a Lemon Squeezer. All the crime today... good idea to have some protection. I don't sell guns. I sell peace of mind.

TESS

I'm a crime writer. I sell just the opposite.

He looks at her. Lifts a strange smile.

GUN STORE OWNER

Weird karma.

She says nothing.

RESUME TESS - CLOSE

Loads the pistol. Feels safer with each filled chamber. ADJUST to see she's at the kitchen counter. She places the gun down, opens a can of FANCY FEAST for Fritz. Checks her answering machine. Hits the button. BEEP.

PATSY

"Hey. It's me. Didn't see any lights tonight, so I guess you decided to stay over."

(yawns)

"You fall in lust with some hottie fan, run off to Maui? I fed Fritz and put your mail on the hall table."

(another yawn)

"Sorry, just bored. Nothing interesting ever happens to me. Unlike someone I know."

BEEP. Tess looks down at Fritz. The second message starts. Tess at the PAY PHONE, trying to make sense. Tess listens, getting more upset.

TESS'S MESSAGE

... it was a truck... and the man was... he didn't say but... it was a blue truck and he fixed the tire and then he choked me and hit me and raped me. A pickup truck. Did I say that? I can't remember exactly. He didn't have a name. He was so tall and huge and...

She turns it off, too disturbed to hear more.

HER POV

Wings of grayness come over her vision.

TESS

Grabs hold of the kitchen table, almost sprawling onto the linoleum. She utters a cry of surprise that sounds faint; faraway.

She straightens up. Holds onto the table for safety's sake. Manages to open the fridge. ADJUST to see the contents as she grabs cottage cheese with strawberry jam; eats it eagerly. Scraping the plastic container to get it all.

She then swigs Apple Juice straight from the bottle. She notices the cuts and blood, all over her arms. OVER we HEAR a shower.

INT. BATHROOM - SHOWER

Tess under water hot as she can stand. Washing the places that can bear to be washed. Letting water rinse the rest. Working shampoo into her hair, skipping the painful spot where he hit her. The deep scratch on her back stings; inflamed.

DRIED BLOOD

From her pubic area runs down her leg, into the drain.

BATHROOM - TESS

Naked. Examining her wounds. Applying Alcohol; a painful process. NEOSPORIN. Band-Aids on the worst.

She looks at herself in the magnifying mirror. Above it are the words: "PRETTY ME". She examines eyes; bloodshot. Pupils the same size. She kills the bathroom light, counts to twenty. Turns it back on, watches the pupils contract.

TESS

... probably no skull fracture.  
Light concussion maybe.

She examines neck bruises. More on her inner thighs.

TESS (CONT'D)

My god...

## TOOTHBRUSH

As she brushes hard. Uses lots of mouthwash. OVER we hear the clicking of computer keyboard.

TESS (V.O.)

The message I left for myself didn't make much sense. But I'm starting to remember and will write it all down, what I can remember. When I'm done, what I do know is no doctors... or this all becomes public.

## TESS

Examines her nose in the mirror: swollen but not broken. The rest of her looks thrashed. Blooming shiners, swollen cheek and throat. Assorted bumps, bruises, scratches.

TESS (V.O.)

I'll get an AIDS test, get checked for STDs... but that's it.

She gently tries to straighten her nose but it makes her cry out.

## INT. TESS'S OFFICE

At her computer, typing; her PC confessional. INTERCUT on the screen as we HEAR her speak the words.

TESS (V.O.)

Even if the doctor stays mum about the lady mystery writer who got beaten raped and robbed, what about the other patients who see me in the waiting room? I wouldn't just be another woman with a bruised face that practically screamed beating... I'd be the famous novelist who lived among them, I can hear them talking about it already.

## TESS'S FANTASY

Women in the doctor's waiting room. Quietly gossiping.

GOSSIPING WOMAN

"... you know the one. They made a TV movie about her old lady detectives? It was on LIFETIME. God, you should have seen her.

(MORE)

GOSSIPING WOMAN (CONT'D)  
Just awful. Her boyfriend must beat  
her."

RESUME TESS

Typing.

TESS (V.O.)  
Respect turns to contempt when they  
smell weakness or suspect  
hypocrisy. And then I'm just blood  
in the water.

She sips more Apple Juice. Glances at the pistol on her desk.  
Fritz sniffing it.

TESS  
Fritz! Get away from that!

He jumps away. She feels a chill. Moves to her office closet.

CLOSET DOOR

As she opens it to reach for a sweater, the Big Man's hands  
SUDDENLY grab her throat from inside. She tries to SCREAM but  
his hand covers her mouth.

*And just as suddenly, he's gone.*

She takes a deep breath. Tears welling. Her mind torturing  
her. OVER we HEAR her keyboard.

TESS

Typing.

ONSCREEN  
... my nerves are raw from the  
assault. I have nothing to be  
ashamed of. But public exposure  
would make me ashamed.

She pauses. SAVES it all. A difficult thought rises.

TESS (V.O.)  
But what about the dead women in  
the pipe that he killed?

She looks at the pistol.

TESS (V.O.)

I don't know. I'll think about them. I'll let the cops know. But not tonight.

(beat)

All I know is: if he were here, I'd kill him. But you know what I'd say first?

TESS

(the dark answer)

You like it, it likes you.

With that, she saves the doc, turns off the computer. The SCREEN goes black.

TESS'S BED

She lays with all the lights on. Lemon Squeezer on the night table. Fritz curls himself beside her. She starts to relax slightly.

Finally home.

Then, her eyes slowly open. She looks at Fritz.

TESS (CONT'D)

What if he took my purse and has my address?

She reaches for the Lemon Squeezer. Wraps hand around it.

TESS (CONT'D)

I should make an anonymous call to the cops. Give them the location, describe him. They could find him. A man that big, with that truck.

Fritz studies her with his luminous green eyes. She thinks it over. Then, to him:

TESS (CONT'D)

You're right.

(beat)

What's in it for me?

The thought seems her new conviction. She pets Fritz. OVER we HEAR:

PATSY (V.O.)

Oh, my God! Look at you!

INT. KITCHEN - TESS - NEXT MORNING

Wearing a long tweed skirt and turtleneck. A layer of concealer. She makes coffee as Patsy goes on...

TESS  
I really am fine.

PATSY  
You need to go to the doctor. What if you're concussed or something?

TESS  
I'm not concussed, just colorful. And I'd be ashamed to go to the doctor because I was three drinks over the limit. Smartest thing I did was call a limo.

PATSY  
Sure your nose isn't broken?

TESS  
I'm fine. Just tripped going down the stairs when the smoke alarm went off and almost killed myself. Didn't want you to scream when you saw me.

She pours them coffee. Patsy uses lots of sugar: the secret to her red line delivery.

TESS (CONT'D)  
Want some coffee with that sugar?

PATSY  
I like sugar. Makes my heart race. I enjoy the drama.

Tess smiles. Two good friends having coffee. But not so good Tess can tell her the truth.

TESS  
If I had an ex you'd probably think he paid me a visit, way I look.

PATSY  
Nobody would dare lay a hand on you. You're feisty girl.

TESS  
That's right. I take no crap.

PATSY

(beat)  
You sound hoarse.

TESS

... top of everything else, getting  
a cold.

PATSY

If you need something tonight...  
chicken soup... some old  
Percocets... Johnny Depp dvd...

Tess smiles. The phone RINGS breaking the silence.

TESS

Hello?

BETSY NEAL (V.O.)

Yes, this is Betsy Neal, day  
manager for the "Stagger Inn."

Tess's wall instantly gets higher. Patsy notices but doesn't  
comment.

TESS

Uh-huh.

She mouths to Patsy: "I have to take this." Patsy gulps her  
coffee down, makes her eyes dramatically widen to indicate  
the sugar hitting. Gives Tess a hug, Fritz a head pet and  
heads out.

BETSY NEAL (V.O.)

(a canned speech)  
... as part of our effort to  
discourage drinking, our policy is  
to courtesy call people who leave  
their cars in our lot after  
closing.

TESS

Hold on... it's there?

INTERCUT with BETSY NEAL

Calling from the "Stagger In" in the bar area. Mostly in  
shadow as she checks inventory.

BETSY NEAL

You own a Ford Expedition,  
Connecticut license plate 775 NSD?

TESS

Yes.

BETSY NEAL

Well, it will be available for pickup until five PM this evening. After five, it will be towed at your expense. Please note we don't have your keys, ma'am. You must have taken them with you.

TESS

Yes. I must have.

BETSY NEAL

We have other property of yours, so come on by the office. I'll need to see some ID. Have a good one.

She hangs up. Tess considers it all. Laughs. A missing piece of her life is now accounted for.

CUT TO:

EXT. "STAGGER INN" - PARKING LOT - DAY

As a cab pulls up and Tess gets out. Last night's sea of cars gone; now deserted. She spots

HER POV - EXPEDITION

At the back of the lot. Punctured tire replaced with a plain, black wall. OVER we HEAR

TESS (V.O.)

... he must've driven it down here, parked and walked back to his truck.

TESS

Leans-in to the cabbies open window. He's fat, fifty and wheezy. Not long for this world.

TESS

Pay you an extra ten dollars to wait until I come out. Want to make sure it starts.

DRIVER

No problemo.

TESS - OVERHEAD SHOT

Looking vulnerable in the vast, empty lot. OVER we HEAR her urgent anxieties:

TESS (V.O.)  
 ... what if he lured me back? What  
 if that woman who called is the  
 giant's girlfriend who's just as  
 crazy as he is?

TESS

Tries to get past that fear. Walks to the main door. A sign says **WE ARE CLOSED**. She knocks; no response. Tries the knob. It turns. She hesitates...

Looks over at the cab: still there. Feels the Lemon Squeezer in her purse. Heads in to the road house.

INT. "STAGGER INN" - DAY

Tess walks through the foyer. Walls covered with publicity stills; all kinds of bands. All hand-signed with love and affection "**TO BETSY & THE STAGGER-INN!!**"

The bar is just beyond; a glowing BUDWEISER sign its beacon. Tess walks cautiously toward it. The red sign tints her the color of blood. She takes off her sunglasses, heads into

THE MAIN BAR AREA

Dark. Still. A disco ball sleeps. The stage and dance floor are battered; seen a lot of blues. OVER we HEAR

TESS (V.O.)  
 ... hello?

TESS

Sliced by shadow.

TESS  
 Hello?

SUDDENLY a woman's soft voice is behind her.

BETSY NEAL  
 I'm right here.

Tess whips around

## THE TWO

BETSY is 40-ish. Teased black hair, smoke-damage mascara. A woman who's been around booze and bad amps too damn long. She blinks like a creature who lives in darkness and her eyes don't quite match; a Picasso girl.

TESS  
... you startled me.

BETSY NEAL  
You the Expedition lady or the  
Honda lady?

TESS  
Expedition.

BETSY NEAL  
Have ID?

TESS  
Passport.

She looks at Tess more closely. Noting the swollen cheek. The bruises concealer can't mask. Betsy has seen it all, too many times.

BETSY NEAL  
Rough night, huh?

Tess doesn't answer.

## TESS'S FANTASY

The Big Man's fist coming right at her face.

## RESUME THE TWO

Tess shrugs. Betsy doesn't press for detail.

BETSY NEAL (CONT'D)  
This way.

Tess follows her through the beer-soaked place.

## INT. "STAGGER INN" OFFICE - TESS AND BETSY

Crummy but filled with morning sunshine. Outside, Tess can see the shadow of the waiting cab. Betsy goes to her desk, sits.

BETSY NEAL  
See the passport?

Tess opens her purse, fumbles past the Lemon Squeezer and her AUTHORS GUILD CARD. Hands-over the passport.

Betsy gives it a cursory glance. Her eyes widen when she sees the Guild card.

BETSY NEAL (CONT'D)  
Hey... you're the Willow Grove  
lady! The knitting chicks.

Tess smiles, gamely. Mouth sore.

TESS  
Guilty as charged.

BETSY NEAL  
My Gran loves those books.

TESS  
Lots of them do. When the affection  
finally filters down to the next  
generation who don't have blue hair-  
- gonna buy myself a chateau in  
France.

Betsy smiles. A transforming effect of stern to sunny. She looks more closely at Tess. Indicates her bruises.

BETSY NEAL  
Hey, I hope that didn't happen  
here.

TESS  
Happened after I left.

BETSY NEAL  
I'm sorry... don't mean to offend.  
But you probably got no business in  
a place like this to begin with. It  
gets in the papers... well, my Gran  
would be disappointed.

Tess gets her meaning.

TESS  
Did you happen to find my purse?

BETSY NEAL  
Nope. Maybe you stashed it under  
the seat. We only look in the glove  
compartments. Your phone number was  
on the insurance card.

(beat)

(MORE)

BETSY NEAL (CONT'D)  
 You know, a bad boyfriend is  
 sharper than a serpent's tooth.

Betsy swivels in her chair, opening one of her file cabinets.

TESS  
 I think the Bible says that. Or  
 maybe it's Dr. Phil. Anyway, I  
 broke up.

BETSY NEAL  
 Lot of women say that, then weaken.  
 And a guy who does it once...

Tess notices there's an old, framed photo and ALBUM cover of  
 a country chick singer named "HELENA DOVE" behind her. Signed  
 to Betsy. "For Betsy... for everything you did. Love, Helena"

TESS  
 Helena Dove. Nice name.

BETSY NEAL  
 She was great. Moved to L.A. We  
 lost touch.  
 (beat)  
 Hey, I got something for you.

Betsy brings out Tom the GPS. Tess is delighted to see her  
 old traveling buddy.

BETSY NEAL (CONT'D)  
 We're not supposed to remove  
 anything from patron's cars but I  
 didn't like to leave this. Thieves  
 bust the glass, take what they  
 want.

TESS  
 Thanks. Tom and I go everywhere  
 together... maybe he even missed  
 me.

Betsy gets an odd look on her face -- a diffidence.

BETSY NEAL  
 Ms. Thorne... mind signing an  
 autograph for my Gran?

Tess nods. Betsy takes a piece of business stationary and  
 uses a ruler to tear off the "STAGGER INN" logo at the top  
 before handing it to Tess.

BETSY NEAL (CONT'D)  
 Make it "*To Mary, a true fan.*" Can  
 you do that?

Tess can.

EXT. "STAGGER INN"

As Betsy walks from the blues cave with Tess. They squint as  
 the sunshine blinds.

TESS  
 ("casually")  
 ... a guy helped me when my  
 boyfriend and I were... you know.  
 Anyway, if not for him, I might  
 have been hurt worse. Like to thank  
 him. But I don't know his name.

BETSY NEAL  
 Doubt if I could do you much good  
 there. Folks come and go.

TESS  
 I met him at the little store down  
 the road... Gas & Dash? It's where  
 we got into our fight and he came  
 along in an old blue pickup truck  
 with a loud exhaust. When he got  
 outta that truck I remember  
 thinking he wasn't driving it, he  
 was wearing it.

BETSY NEAL  
 Was he big or was he *real* big?

TESS  
 Like... *giant*.

BETSY NEAL  
 That's Big Driver, you're talking  
 about. Don't know where he lives  
 but it must have high ceilings.  
 He's local. I see him around...  
 Walmart places like that. Name is  
 Al... something-Polish.

They both chuckle. Betsy doesn't realize she's being reeled  
 in.

BETSY NEAL (CONT'D)  
 Something hard to pronounce.  
 Strelkowitz? Stancowitz?  
 (MORE)

BETSY NEAL (CONT'D)  
Probably find him in the phone  
book. Him and his brother own a  
trucking company.

TESS  
That right?

BETSY NEAL  
Hawklane.... or maybe Eagle Line.  
Something to do with a bird.

TESS  
If you happen to see Al Something-  
Polish around, do me a favor and  
don't mention that you talked to  
me. I wanna surprise him. Give him  
a little gift or something.

BETSY NEAL  
That's nice.

TESS  
By that way, I love your eyes.  
Every writer has their thing... I  
notice eyes.

BETSY NEAL  
Don't quite match, do they? Used to  
make me self-conscious. Like I was  
a Picasso girl. I wanted to model  
before I looked like I do now.  
(beat)  
Things happen.

To that, there seems nothing to say.

INT. EXPEDITION

Tess waves to the departing cab and plugs Tom back into the  
cigarette lighter receptacle. Tom's lights flicker; glow.

TOM'S VOICE  
*Hello, Tess. I see we're taking a  
trip.*

TESS  
Just home, Tommy boy.

ADJUST as she pulls out of the parking lot.

TESS (CONT'D)  
One stop on the way.

TOM'S VOICE

*I know what you're thinking, Tess,  
but you should be careful.*

She reacts to that.

EXT. EXPEDITION

Rolling down the highway. The GAS & DASH up ahead.

EXT. GAS & DASH - TESS

Examining the ROYAL LIMO number she wrote on the dusty cinder block wall. The digits crooked, written by a finger unable to stay steady.

A chill shivers up her back. She picks up a receiver on a pay phones. Looks at the number for the local POLICE and FIRE Departments on a faded sticker. Dials the POLICE.

POLICE STATION OPERATOR (V.O.)

Colewich Police Department. How may

I direct your call?

(off no response)

Hello? Can I help you?

Tess changes her mind. Hangs-up. Thinks. Begins to realize:

TESS

Not yet...

INT. EXPEDITION

Tess is driving away from the "GAS & DASH" and Tom's screen indicates the intersection of Stagg Road and Route 47. Tess is struggling with what she wants to do. Tom's voice is calm as a priest.

TOM'S VOICE

*If you were to kill him and then  
get caught, you'd go to jail, Tess.  
Raped or not. Let the police handle  
it. Call them back.*

She reaches over and turns Tom off. Keeps driving on the big highway. Then:

TOM'S VOICE (CONT'D)

*Are you sure what happened was an  
accident?*

Tess is shaken. Tom is still turned off. She pulls the connection wire from the cigarette lighter. Keeps driving. Cleans her window; needs to see the world more clearly.

Beat. Then:

TOM'S VOICE (CONT'D)

*You would have driven home this way, on I-84. But someone else had a better idea. They had a shortcut.*

She isn't reacting to Tom speaking, only to his logic.

TESS

Ramona Norville. Pretty far-fetched. God, I'm losing my mind.

She presses on the horn in frustration; all of it making her feel nuts.

TOM'S VOICE

*If you're losing your mind and I'm you... why are you making such good suggestions?*

TESS

Leave me alone.

She keeps driving. OVER we HEAR the sound of her computer keyboard, clacking curiously.

CUT TO:

INT. TESS'S OFFICE - TESS

At her computer. ADJUST to watch Tess sipping tea, with Fritz nearby on the window sill catching rays. For no particular reason she types in: RICHARD WIDMARK.

The computer screen fills with Websites. Wikipedia. And a site featuring "**BEST LOVED FILM CLIPS**" of Richard Widmark. Tess brings one up.

FILM CLIPS OR RICHARD WIDMARK

The old b/w thriller "**KISS OF DEATH**," where Widmark with piercing eyes and skeletal face, plays giggling psycho killer, Tommy Udo.

In the scene that shocked audiences, he menaces an old lady in a wheelchair.

TOMMY UDO

"Where's that squealin' son of yours?"

(off her silence)

"You know what I do to squealers? I let 'em have it in the belly, so they can roll around for a long time, thinkin' it over."

But he doesn't shoot her in the belly. He ties her to the wheelchair with a lamp cord.

TESS

Watching, rapt.

TOMMY

Pushes the old lady down the stairs, giggling maniacally as she fatally tumbles.

TESS

Transfixed. Fritz looks at her with all-knowing eyes.

TESS

(to Fritz)

So, Ramona loves him and this was her favorite of all his films... big deal. He did lots of other roles... played good guys, too.

(beat)

But she was an odd person.

She Googles:

RAMONA NORVILLE

And gets 44,000 hits. She adds "Chicopee" and gets a more manageable 1200. She stops at one that catches her interest:

**LIBRARIAN RAMONA NORVILLE ANNOUNCES "WILLOW GROVE FRIDAY" WITH FAMOUS AUTHOR TESS THORNE.**

TESS

Pulls up the clipping but the only photo is her own bare-shouldered publicity shot. She wrinkles her nose, returns to Google. Finally, finds a photo of

RAMONA NORVILLE

Standing on Library steps, smiling, squinting into sun. A bad photo. It accompanies a story from the WEEKLY REMINDER:  
**"BOOKS & BROWN BAGGERS ANNOUNCE SPEAKING SCHEDULE FOR FALL"**

TESS

Staring at the photo. Something about it drawing her in. Trying to get a fix on the face. Closing eyes, forcing herself to remember. OVER we HEAR:

BIG MAN'S VOICE

... didn't think you were going to  
 meet the Jolly Green Giant out here  
 in the williwags didja?

HER FLASHBACK - THE BIG MAN

On the roadway beside her Expedition, his face momentarily turned away. When he turns with a cheerful, you-can-trust-me grin, he more than slightly resembles Ramona.

RESUME TESS

Looking, again, at the photo of Ramona. Feeling sick inside. Closing eyes, again. Seeing

HER FLASHBACK - THE BIG MAN

Looking into her eyes. The spitting image of Ramona. Too young to be a brother.

TESS

Silent. Can it be? Tess tries to be logical. Makes her case to Fritz.

TESS

So what if they're related? Maybe  
 she drove Stagg Road to visit him.  
 Why wouldn't she recommend the  
 route?

(her V.O.)

By why didn't she say "I go that  
 way all the time to visit my son."  
 Wouldn't that be natural?

RAMONA'S PHOTO

Smiling. Too old to be his sister. Somehow looking more sinister now. ADJUST to Tess.

TESS (V.O.)

She took my photo on stage. I saw her. Maybe she e-mailed it to him? Gave him an advance look? Texted him, said "*I'm sending you a juicy one...*" Was the trap waiting for me?

Fritz watches her. Waits for her to figure it out.

TESS

You're right, Fritzy. If I visit her, I'll see it in her eyes. If she's surprised I'm alive... I'll know.

She doesn't want to believe it. Things have been awful enough.

SINK FAUCET

Water cascades down into CAMERA.

KITCHEN - TESS

Drinks a glassful; to calm herself. ADJUST as she goes to a cabinet, withdraws a bottle of tequila. Nips directly from it, stinging mouth and throat.

In her still semi-blackened eyes, rage grows. She begins to pace, circling the kitchen, as she'd circled the deserted store after crawling from the pipe the Big Man meant for her tomb

HER FLASHBACK

Tess brokenly circling the deserted store. Bloodied, feeling helpless.

RESUME TESS

Circling. Faster and faster. Becoming furious. Angrily knocking things off the counter. Sweeping it clean.

She finally stands perfectly still. Breathing hard. Eyes unblinking with loss and pain. And a need for payback.

TESS

Back at her computer. **(NOTE: this sequence moves urgently with fast cuts.)**

She checks for: COLEWICH TRUCKING FIRMS.

Quickly finds the: "RED HAWK TRUCKING" website -- a badly animated big rig with a red hawk on the side and a bizarre, smiley-head man behind the wheel. The truck crosses back and forth. The company motto flashes above it: "**THE SMILES COME WITH THE SERVICE!!**"

There's also phone numbers, rates, testimonials.

*And a slightly murky photo of the Big Man, sitting behind the wheel of shiny cab-over with the logo on the door. Looking like his mother.*

TESS

Reacts to that.

HER FLASHBACK

The Big Man grins darkly.

BIG MAN

... instead of changing your tire,  
how about I screw you? How would  
that be?

RESUME TESS

A pounding in her temples; rage cycling faster.

ONSCREEN PHOTO

The caption under reads: "*Al Strehlke, President of Red Hawk Trucking, seen here behind the wheel of our newest acquisition, a 2009 Peterbilt 389. This horse of a hauler is now available to our customers who are THE FINEST IN ALL THE LAND. Say! Doesn't Al look like a Proud Papa?!*"

TESS

Stares at it. OVER we HEAR

BIG MAN (V.O.)

... bitch! Whiny whore bitch!

ADJUST to her fingernails sinking into her palms, clenched tightly.

TESS

*Proud Papa.*  
(beat)  
Bastard.

She Googles RAMONA NORVILLE, again. Finds her address via public tax records. **75 Lacemaker Lane.**

TESS (CONT'D)

There you are...

Tess gets up, brings her laptop computer with her. FOLLOW as she moves to the..

KITCHEN

... and quickly pours a cup of coffee. Sits before the laptop. Looks angrier; vindictive.

LAPTOP SCREEN

As Tess Googles: Weekly Reminder's "**OBITUARIES**" and types in "STREHLKE".

Finds: Roscoe Strehlke. Died suddenly at age 48. Survived by wife, Ramona. Two sons: Alvin (23) and Lester (17). ADJUST to Tess. Connecting dots.

TESS (CONT'D)

Died suddenly...

She types in a list of newspapers is western and southern Massachusetts and finds the SPRINGFIELD REPUBLICAN. Types in ROSCOE STREHLKE. Reacts to an ONSCREEN headline:

**"CHICOPEE BUSINESSMAN COMMITS SUICIDE"**

TESS

Reading from the article.

TESS (CONT'D)

"...the body was found hanged and no note was found. A neighbor said Mr. Strehlke had been distraught over some trouble his older boy had been in."

She sips coffee. Thinks. Writer's mind drilling.

TESS (CONT'D)

"Some trouble"...assault maybe. Sexual battery? Working up to bigger things. Maybe the old man offed himself because he couldn't take it. Or maybe Ramona strung him up? What do you think Fritzzy?

Fritz stares at her, cleans his paws.

TESS (CONT'D)

I know... I *should* stop playing detective, call the cops and let them get into all this including those girls...

She's sore. Grabs two Tylenols.

TESS (CONT'D)

I really should.

Gulps them with the black coffee. HOLD.

CUT TO:

NETFLIX LOGO - CLOSE

On her flatscreen TV as Tess selects a film. Jodi Foster in "**The Brave One**" which boots up.

TESS

Immediately FAST FORWARDS to a good part, where Jodi goes after the guys who killed her boyfriend. Tess FAST FORWARDS to another part, where Jodi guns-down assorted punks.

TESS - CLOSE

Watches with Fritz. Absorbing the vengeful story.

TESS

... wish Richard Widmark had met Jodi Foster instead of the old lady in the wheelchair.

Tess rewinds a violent scene of revenge. Re-plays it. Almost studying it. To herself, quietly:

TESS (CONT'D)

... get 'em, Jodi.

TESS'S BEDROOM

As she tries to sleep. Fritz and the Lemon Squeezer by her side. She stares at the ceiling, into darkness. Thinking.

TESS

... you're right, Fritz. I have to take care of this myself. Given what I've been through, I have to.

As her eyes drift, sleepily, on the other side of the room, in shadows, she suddenly sees the silhouette of an

OLDER WOMAN

...dressed with conservative panache. It's DOREEN MARQUIS, the doyenne and senior member of the "**Willow Grove Knitting Society.**" She sips tea, a cozy presence.

DOREEN

That's fine, dear. In "**The Willow Grove Knitting Society,**" though we've never acted violently, we don't disparage vindictive musings when circumstances are sufficiently heinous. But there is one caveat.

ADJUST to Tess.

TESS

... what's the caveat, Doreen?

DOREEN

Well, it's very simple, isn't it? Don't get caught.

Tess thinks about that. Looks back. Doreen is gone.

CUT TO:

TESS'S KITCHEN - YELLOW PAD

As she writes "**DON'T GET CAUGHT**" across it. Then begins making notes.

INT. TESS'S CLOSET - TESS - NIGHT

Donning black turtleneck sweater and black cargo pants. She ties hair into a bun, yanks on a black gimme cap.

HER BASEMENT

Tess searches past her kayak, takes a reel of yellow boat-line from the shelf above it. She uses her hedge clipper to cut off four feet and winds it around her forearm. Slips the coil into pant's pocket.

HER KITCHEN

Tess tucks her Swiss Army Knife into the same pocket. The Lemon Squeezer into the other.

She spoons out double rations for Fritz. He hops up onto the counter, looks at her as if reading her mind.

TESS

I heard Doreen loud and clear,  
Fritzy. I'll try not to get caught.  
Promise.

She glances over at her "**DON'T GET CAUGHT**" memo and burns it on the stove top. Takes its ashen corpse to the sink, rinses it down the drain. Gives Fritz a final hug.

TESS (CONT'D)

I love you, you scruffy old thing.

ANOTHER ANGLE

She puts on a leather jacket, thin leather gloves. Slips a butcher knife into the jacket's deep inner pocket.

FRONT DOOR

Tess sets the burglar alarm. Heads out.

EXT. TESS'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Cold wind whips around her, flapping jacket collar and legs of her cargo pants. She looks up at onyx sky.

TESS (CONT'D)

... good night for a horror movie.

INT. EXPEDITION

As she slams the door. Starts the engine. Turns on Tom.

TOM'S VOICE

*Hello, Tess. I see we're taking a trip.*

TESS

Yeah. A big one.

She reaches to program Tom.

INSERT- TOM'S SCREEN

*75 Lacemaker Lane.*

CUT TO:

EXT. BREWSTER - NIGHT

A safe New England town. Headlights blade around the corner of a quiet street on its outskirts. The houses are far apart.

INT. EXPEDITION

Tess searches. Sees what she's looking for. ADJUST to see the street sign for: *Lacemaker Lane*.

She slowly drives down the lane, past Number 75, determining the lights are on and only a single car in the driveway; a Subaru.

TESS  
(re: Subaru)  
... kinda screams "librarian."

But there's no sign of a cab-over Pete, big rig or Bondo-patched pickup.

The street ends in a turnaround. Tess takes it, comes back.

EXT. RAMONA NORVILLE'S DRIVEWAY

As the Expedition pulls in. Parks. Kills lights.

INT. EXPEDITION

Tess hesitates. From his place on the dashboard:

TOM'S VOICE  
*Come back safe, Tess. Then, we'll  
go to your next stop.*

She grabs her yellow legal pad: nothing yet written on it.

TESS  
Right.

EXT. RAMONA NORVILLE'S WALKWAY - TESS

Holds the yellow pad in front of her jacket. She notes her moonshadow -- perhaps all that is left of the Old Tess -- walking beside her. Gradually... JULIE ANDREWS can be HEARD belting out "*The Sound of Music*."

EXT. RAMONA'S FRONT DOOR

Glass panels on either side reveal the interior. Nice wallpaper, polished wood floor. Big room at hall's end. The sound of a TV. Julie keeps singing.

ADJUST to Tess, ringing the doorbell. From inside, is the sound of CHIMES: the opening notes of "DIXIE."

RAMONA

Opens the door. Wearing a big blue housecoat. Man's shoes.

RAMONA  
Yes, can I help y-

The shock on Ramona's face, the utter drop-jaw shock, tells Tess everything she needs to know.

RAMONA (CONT'D)  
You? What are you doing h-

THE TWO

As Tess pulls the Lemon Squeezer from her right front pocket.

TESS  
Move back from the door.  
Get inside. If you even start to yell, I'll shoot. You better believe me bitch because I'm not even close to kidding.

Ramona looks like a rat caught outside its hole.

RAMONA  
You fire that gun, the whole neighborhood will hear.

TESS  
Won't matter to you because you'll be dead. Get inside. You behave yourself and answer my questions, you might still be alive tomorrow morning.

Ramona backs up and Tess enters with the .38 held stiffly in front of her.

INT. RAMONA'S HOUSE

Tess closes the door with her foot. Ramona stands beside a small table with heavy decorative candles on it. Tess sees her mouth twitch.

TESS (CONT'D)  
Uh-uh-uh... no grabbing. No throwing. I can read you like a book, Ramona. Why else would I be here.

RAMONA  
Why are you here?

TESS

Keep backing up. All the way to the living room.

(listens)

Just love the Von Trapp family when they're really rocking.

RAMONA

You're crazy. What're you doing here?

TESS

Where'd you expect to see me? Dead in a drainage pipe?

Ramona doesn't know what to do. But still seems dangerous; unstable.

RAMONA

I have no idea..

TESS

Angered by her deceit.

TESS

Don't lie to me, *Mommy!* Don't you DARE! It was all on your face when you opened the door. You thought I was dead. Didn't you?

RAMONA

I don't know what you're--

TESS

It's just us girls, so why not fess up you sick bitch?

They're in the living room now.

LIVING ROOM

The walls hung with sentimental paintings -- clowns, waifs with big eyes. Shelves and tables cluttered with knickknacks, snow globes, troll babies. Hummel figures. Care bears. A ceramic candy house ala Hansel and Gretel.

Facing the tv is a La-Z-Boy with TV tray beside it. On it, a bag of Cheez Doodles, big bottle of Diet Coke.

THE TWO

The gun makes Ramona nervous.

RAMONA  
Can you please...

TESS  
How long you been doing it, Ramona?

RAMONA  
I don't know what you're talking about.

TESS  
Pimping for your homicidal, rapist son?  
(off no answer)  
When did it start? How old was he? Fifteen? Did he claim he was just "fooling around?" That's what a lot of them claim when they first start.

RAMONA  
I have no idea what you mean. You come to the library and we all welcome you and pay you a very generous honorarium and next thing I know you're on my doorstep, pointing a gun and making all sorts of wild...

TESS  
It's no good, Ramona. I saw his picture on the Red Hawk Website. He raped me and tried to kill me. He thought he *did* kill me. *And you sent me to him.*

Ramona's mouth drops open in a gruesome blend of shock, dismay and guilt.

RAMONA  
That's not true! You don't know what you're talking about.

TESS  
(raising gun)  
Nuh-uh, don't do that. No!

The Von Trapp Family is singing in the b.g., half driving Tess crazy. She keeps the Lemon Squeezer trained on Ramona, grabs the TV remote. MUTES the TV. She's about to put the remote down but something catches her eye

A CANDY DISH

On top of the TV. The sparkles aren't only coming from the cut-glass sides. They're coming from something inside.

TESS

Looks into the dish. Sees her diamond earrings... along with other stolen jewelry.

ADJUST to include Ramona who suddenly grabs the Hansel and Gretel candy house from its shelf and throws it hard at Tess who ducks. The dish just misses her and shatters on the wall behind her.

Tess steps backward, trips over the hassock and goes sprawling.

THE LEMON SQUEEZER

Flies from her hand. ADJUST as they both go for it.

THE TWO

Ramona drops to her knees, slams her shoulder against Tess's arm and shoulder like a football tackle. Grabs the gun, at first juggling it, then securing her grip. Tess reaches into her jacket, closing

HER HAND

Around the butcher knife.

TESS

Gets up on her own knees, hand still inside the jacket. Both are breathing hard. Ramona's face gets cruel; ugly.

RAMONA

You're a crappy writer and you were a crappy guest speaker!

TESS

("hurt")

But you said my new book was fantastic in your introduction.

RAMONA

I lied! Our other speaker cancelled. I called you because I had no one else.

She talks faster and faster. Voice a poison stream.

RAMONA (CONT'D)

Your plots are pedestrian. Those old ladies are a joke!

TESS

That's harsh, Ramona.

RAMONA

You phoned-in your talk with all your... *stupid* jokes the same way you phone in your worthless books. You were perfect for him and he was going to do someone. I know the signs. I sent you that way and worked out right and I'm glad he screwed you. He should've killed you! I don't know what you thought you were going to do coming here, but this is what you get.

She pulls the trigger. Nothing but a dry click. Tess reaches into her own pocket. Holds up a bullet.

TESS

First rule of gun ownership: don't put a bullet in the chamber that first falls under the hammer. In case it's pulled by accident.

Ramona half smiles. It almost makes her young again.

RAMONA

Thanks for telling me.

She's about to pull the trigger again when Tess draws the knife from the inside jacket pocket, stumbles forward and jams it up to the hilt into Ramona's belly.

RAMONA

Tries to scream but can't. Makes a terrible sound. Drops the .38 and staggers against the wall. Looking down at the handle of the knife. One failing arm strikes a rank of Hummel figures that tumble and shatter.

Blood begins to patter from beneath the hem of her housecoat onto her house slippers. She tries to tug the knife free; can't.

THE TWO

As she looks at Tess in disbelieving shock. Tess gets close to her; speaks with polite sadism.

TESS

Y'know Ramona, I'm feeling a certain... what would you call it... *kinship* with your boyfriend Richard Widmark right now.

(beat)

This is what we do to squealers, honey.

Ramona stands in a puddle of her own blood and her housecoat blooms with blood-poppies. Face pale. Dark eyes huge, glittery with shock. Her tongue swipes slowly across her lower lip.

TESS (CONT'D)

Now you can roll around for a long time thinkin' it over -- how would that be?

Ramona begins to slide. Groping for shelves and pulling them off the wall. A platoon of Care Bears tilt forward, fall to their furry doom.

TESS - CLOSE

Feels no regret; no remorse. She bends to pick-up the Lemon Squeezer. From her right cargo pant pocket, she removes a quilted oven glove she brought with her.

RAMONA

Looks at her. Fears what's next.

RAMONA

No... please.

ADJUST to Tess. Stunned by her own violence. But calm; reasonable.

TESS

Should never tell a writer their stuff is crap, Ramona. Brings out the worst in us. I take my work very seriously and do a lot of research before I start a book. Perfect example: for "**The Willow Grove Knitting Society Takes A Mystery Cruise,**" I discovered the most interesting thing: you can use an oven mitt for stuff much more complicated than just taking-out hot pies.

(beat)

You can take-out a person.

RAMONA

You don't understand...  
 (a harsh whisper)  
 You can't do this. It's a mistake.  
 Take me... hospital.

TESS

The mistake was yours, Ramona.

Tess pulls the oven mitt over the pistol.

TESS (CONT'D)

It was not having your worthless  
 son castrated as soon as you found  
 out what he was.

She places the oven mitt glove to Ramona's temple. Turns her own head to one side and pulls the trigger. There is a low, emphatic PLUH sound like a big man clearing his throat.

TESS

Reacts to the dead body. Savors the justice minus bureaucracy. Still, her hands are shaking. She takes a deep breath. Getting used to the universe shifting into strange, blood-soaked balance.

TESS (CONT'D)

You like it, it likes you.

FOLLOW as she looks around the room for something. Into the kitchen, going through drawers. Frustrated, she heads upstairs into

RAMONA'S OFFICE

A converted spare bedroom. A wall covered with autographed photos of authors who spoke at the "**Books & Brown Baggers.**" All except Tess.

ADJUST as she stands before the wall of photos and reacts to that. There are no family photos of her late husband or sons.

She sees Ramona's MAC with dark screen but glowing light--only napping. She pushes one of the keys with gloved fingertip.

RAMONA'S COMPUTER SCREEN

Tess types quickly: scrolls through "R"s to "Red Hawk Trucking" and its address: **7 Transport Plaza, Township Road, Colewich.**

She scrolls further. Finds photos of the two sons

## ALVIN AND LESTER

Big Driver. Little Driver. Neither photo is very clear. Both are tall, thick and look very similar. Both live on Township Road, near the company they clearly inherited from dad. Alvin at Number 23. Lester at Number 101.

Tess clears the screen. Turns off the MAC.

## RAMONA'S HOUSE - DOWNSTAIRS

Tess plucks her earrings from the candy dish, slips them into pocket. Looks without pity at the dead woman slumped against the wall with a knife protruding. Then, a concern:

TESS (V.O.)

Did I leave evidence...?

She glances at the murder scene. Confident she has left none. She pockets the oven mitt with its frayed, cyclops hole. Looks at the butcher knife flag-poled from Ramona's gut. Goes over and pulls it out.

TESS (V.O.)

They sell knives like that everywhere... it was her's, that's all.

She takes a final look around.

TESS

Now comes the hard part...

She walks to the front door. HOLD on Ramona's dead eyes watching her go.

CUT TO:

## INT. EXPEDITION - NIGHT

Tess programs Tom: **23 Township Road, Colewich.**

TOM

*Hello, Tess. Did you have a good visit?*

TESS

Yeah. We caught up on everything.

She slowly backs-out of Ramona's driveway. Drives off.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRANSPORT PLAZA - VARIOUS - LATER

Big prefab buildings. Three trucking firms. A moving company. All dark; closed.

The smallest belongs to "RED HAWK TRUCKING." Beyond: acres of parking circled by Cyclone fence, lit with arc lights.

The depot lot is full of parked cabs and freight haulers. At least one cab-over has the "RED HAWK" logo on the side.

A TRUCK STOP

Adjacent to the depot area. A few truckers come and go... the Sunday night graveyard shift. A single vehicle is parked at the pumps:

A FORD-150 PICK-UP

With Bondo around the headlights.

EXT. EXPEDITION

It rolls up. Parks.

INT. EXPEDITION

Tess reacts to the pick-up truck at the truck stop pump. Pole-mounted arc lights blind. ADJUST as she sees

EXT. TRUCK STOP - DRIVERS

Through the big windows. Getting coffee. Paying up. One of them much taller than the others -- even seen from across the street. OVER we HEAR Tom's Zen calm.

TOM'S VOICE

*Now what, Tess?*

INT. EXPEDITION

Tess watches the Big Man.

TESS

He's gassed-up. Maybe gonna take a trip. But I don't think so. Think he just came down for beer and decided to top off his tank. I don't wanna be behind him. I want to be waiting for him.

TOM'S VOICE

*What if he's married? What if he's  
got a wife?*

TESS

Guys like that don't have wives...  
not ones that stick around, anyway.  
There was only one woman in Al's  
life... and she's dead.

HER POV - THE BIG MAN

Exiting the Truck Stop Shop. Eating a donut.

TESS

Reacts to seeing him. A despising stare. HOLD.

EXT. TOWNSHIP ROAD - LATER

The Expedition rounds a corner. Nothing suburban about this  
road -- houses are glimmering islands of electric light. OVER  
we HEAR

TOM'S VOICE

*Tess, you are approaching your  
destination.*

The Expedition crests a rise and there, up ahead, is a  
mailbox; ominous and mundane. The Expedition stops. Idles.

INT. EXPEDITION

Tess stares at the mailbox. ADJUST to see it's marked:  
"STREHLKE" and Number 23. Shuddering in night wind. Beside  
it, is a long driveway. Paved; smooth as black ice.

She turns-into the driveway without hesitation. But  
apprehensions drop over her as she drives further up the  
long, curving driveway; dread. ADJUST to the headlights  
striking bushes and trees; a menacing effect.

TOM'S VOICE (CONT'D)

*What if they're both up there,  
Tess?*

TESS

I got here first.

TOM'S VOICE

*What if you didn't? What if they  
heard about their mother and know  
you did it?*

(MORE)

TOM'S VOICE (CONT'D)

*They could be waiting for you. You can still go back. You can turn around.*

TESS

(angrily)

No. I can't!

Tom says nothing more. She turns off headlights. Drives by moonlight. The driveway seems to go on forever. She begins to see the lights of the house through the trees.

HER POV - STREHLKE HOUSE

At the top of the hill. Well-kept. Bigger than a cottage, smaller than a farmhouse.

Parked alongside the house is a long, trailer-box with "RED HAWK TRUCKING" on the side. Parked at the end of the driveway, in front of the garage, is the cab-over Pete from the website.

TESS - CLOSE

Sizing it up.

TESS - FLASHBACK

As the Big Man hovers over her in a bestial, lusty haze. He hauls back to slap her hard. A bright light suddenly blinds.

TESS

Flooded by a harsh, albino white that illuminates the lawn and driveway. ADJUST to see a MOTION-ACTIVATED POLE LIGHT glaring down.

She jams on the brakes, scared. Vulnerable; visible. The shadows from the parked cab-over and long box seem to reach for her with long, bogeyman fingers.

TOM'S VOICE

*This isn't good, Tess. He'll notice the lights on.*

TESS

Deer probably trip it all the time.

DOREEN'S VOICE

He may be right, dear.

Tess looks into the rearview and sees Doreen smiling sweetly, as if dressed for church.

DOREEN

He could return any minute and you don't know how long the timer is on that thing. You had trouble with the mother. He's much bigger than her. If you're going to stay, I really would recommend you get out of sight. But I'd do it before the light goes out, dear. If you move your vehicle after it does, you'll only trip it, again. Soonest begun, soonest done.

To make it all worse, a dog starts BARKING from inside the house.

DOREEN (CONT'D)

Well. That's not good.

Tess looks into her side mirrors. Nothing coming. She looks in the rear-view. Doreen is gone. And nothing is coming. The dog continues to BARK.

Tess gets an idea. Throws the Expedition into 4-WHEEL Drive and starts to swing around the Cab-Over.

ANOTHER ANGLE

In the pitiless glare of the pole light, Tess drives onto the lawn and toward one side, beside the long box, hiding the Expedition in its shadow. Kills the engine.

INT. EXPEDITION

Tess listens to the dog bark. Waits for the motion-light to go off. When it does, everything is dark. Just starry sky. She gets out. Quietly closes the door, making little movement.

TESS

Under a talc of moonlight. Moving slowly and methodically across the lawn to not activate the motion-sensor light.

She holds the pistol and oven-mitt. Realizing it has the hole she blasted through it. Useless now. She pockets it. Slips her gloves on.

Stops. Looks at the isolation of the little, hilltop house. Appraises. Feels the Lemon Squeezer.

TESS (V.O.)

... only four shots left. Why didn't you bring more bullets?

(MORE)

TESS (V.O.) (CONT'D)

(beat)

Make it count.

She realizes the dog has stopped BARKING. The world silent, again. Only the sound of clawing wind.

FOLLOW as she moves along the long-box which provides cover and scurries around the back of the house, afraid of tripping another motion light.

THE MOON

Goes behind a cloud and...

TESS

...stumbles over the cellar bulkhead. Almost hits her head on the wheelbarrow. Goes to her knees.

TESS

(sotto)

... goddammit.

She gets back on her feet. Steps over rotting pumpkins in a dying garden. Rounds the far corner of the house. Stops. Looking directly at

THE CAB-OVER

Malefic under moonlight. Its chrome the liquid silver of sword blades in fantasy novels. ADJUST to Tess coming up behind it, kneeling beside a chin-high front wheel.

TESS - ANGLE

Removes the Lemon Squeezer from her pocket. In pain. Gobbles two Tylenols. Swallows them dry. Checks her watch.

INSERT - WATCH

9:35

TESS

Listening to the wind. Imagining noises. Car engines? Footsteps? She catches her reflection in the big truck sideview mirror.

HER REFLECTION

Dressed in black. A speck of Ramona's blood on her cheek. Her eyes sunken, socketed from exhaustion and pain. She looks half crazy.

TESS (V.O.)

No... he's the crazy one. Remember  
how he danced after raping you?  
Wanted you to die?

TESS

Remembering.

TESS (V.O.)

You wait for him, Tessa Jean. You  
wait until hell freezes over.  
You've come too far to turn back.

As wind howls, she begins to HEAR the badly-tuned THUMP of an engine... just before headlights splash up the curve of driveway.

She gets on one knee, yanks the brim of her hat down so the wind doesn't take it. She breathes unevenly; her nerves tangle.

TESS'S FANTASY

*Running up to him as he sits in the truck cab with its open window... surprising him. Shoving the pistol into his mouth: blasting off the back of his head.*

TESS

Reacts to that. Seeing the truck getting closer, coming up he drive; seeming demonic.

TESS'S SECOND FANTASY

*Kneeling before the Big Man and shooting him in the face as he exits the truck... shooting him in the face; destroying his features with a ruthless blast.*

TESS

Knowing this whole mess may backfire.

TESS (V.O.)

... you have no plan!

She grips the Lemon Squeezer more tightly. ADJUST to see the truck pulling-in. Parking. She nervously licks lips as the pole-mounted light sprays forensic white on everything.

She swallows. Sees

THE BIG MAN

Winces against the glare, as she had; momentarily blinded.

TESS

Blinks... flashes to:

HER FLASHBACK - JODI FOSTER

Being fearless in "**The Brave One.**"

TESS

It's now or never. FOLLOW as she walks around the back of the cab-over; taking sure strides. The wind gusts, flapping her clothing. Without hesitation, she opens the passenger door.

INT. PICKUP TRUCK

The Driver is grabbing a carry-carton of beer. He turns to see Tess staring at him.

TESS'S - FLASHBACK

The rape. His savoring eyes.

THE TWO

As she looks at his broad face. Lines around his mouth. Soulless eyes she hadn't noticed that awful day. She lifts her hat brim so he can see her.

TESS

Remember me?

As his mouth drops open in shock, under the albino glare, the Lemon Squeezer BARKS twice in her hand.

Bullet one opens a red drain in Strehlke's throat, below chin.

Bullet two pops a neat hole above his bushy right eyebrow and shatters the side window.

He falls backward, against the door. Gives a monstrous, whole-body twitch. His hand thuds against the horn. Inside, the dog begins to BARK, again.

TESS - CLOSE

Gun in hand. Wind whipping. She's shaken; strangely calm. ADJUST as she rushes around the front of the pickup, loses her balance, goes to one knee. Gets up, yanks open the driver's door.

STREHLKE

Falls out, all 6'9" of him. Hitting head on the smooth asphalt of his driveway. His brown hat falls off. Right eye, pulled-out of true by the bullet, staring at moon. The left eye stares at Tess.

She appraises his features, pitted with old, acne scars she hadn't seen before.

TESS (CONT'D)

... he looks different.

She's unsure: did she kill the wrong one? She forces herself to look at his hand where she'd managed to bite him, during the assault.

HIS HAND

No bite mark.

TESS

Looks down at him. Starting to panic.

TESS - FLASHBACK

Betsy Neal at the "STAGGER INN" casually asking in her office:

BETSY NEAL

... was he big. Or real big?

TESS

Realizes.

TESS

Oh my god... oh my dear god what have I done?

As wind moans and Tess stands over the huge, lifeless body, the dead man's eyes open. She screams.

STREHLKE

You killed me, Tess... just like you meant to.

Tess is horrified. The strength leaves her muscles and she falls to her knees beside him.

TESS

I don't understand! The hat! The truck!

DOREEN'S VOICE

It's really very simple, dear.

Tess turns to see Doreen. Assessing the mess in her kindest, old lady voice.

DOREEN

Be logical. He must wear that simply ghastly hat when he goes "hunting" for girls. Drives the pickup truck with "Bondo", god forbid. When he's sitting down driving, people think he's the other one... smoke and mirrors. Voila.

TESS

Rubs her brow. Is she's unraveling? Is this her own mystery writer's mind creating desperate logic? But she's trapped in it. Her voice racked by terrible guilt:

TESS

No, Doreen! Why would he do that?!!

DOREEN

My professional opinion? Because he's out of his mind. Whole family is. You read about them online. It's all there, every unsavory pathology in the book.

She indicates the dead man: Al.

DOREEN (CONT'D)

I'd say they've been playing this vile game for years, dear. Impersonating one another for psychotic fun... two giant brothers, fooling the world. Even if one was far worse.

(to dead man)

Isn't that right, Mr. Strehlke? Or may I call you Al?

TESS

You don't know any of this!

DOREEN

Just being logical, dear. You love logic. In your life, it's everything. Remember?

(to Al)

The more intriguing question is whether your father killed himself out of shame about his son. Or: was Dad was going to tell and Mom killed him? Made it look like suicide.

(philosophically)

The sensitive so often wed the cruel.

Tess considers it. Gets up close to Al. Looking at the bloody damage.

DOREEN (CONT'D)

Which was it, Al? Tell her!

Al says nothing, blood gurgling from throat, creaking from brow. Doreen sighs. She's cracked tougher.

DOREEN (CONT'D)

Tell her!

TESS

Stop it, Doreen! Enough.

DOREEN

It's never enough until it's fully worked out, dear. You know that, it's your obsession. Your gift from your chaotic childhood. You taught us all.

The wind blows harder. Tess shivers.

TESS

I'm listening to a character I created... and to a dead man. I've lost it.

DOREEN

Well, people always said you would. Why fight it?

TESS

(remembering)

Ramona told me I didn't understand. That it was a mistake...

DOREEN

Mother knows best. Ask the dead  
guy.

Tess hesitates. Then, getting into the madness of it all,  
kneels beside him.

TESS

Did you know?

But Al has no more to say.

TESS (CONT'D)

When girls disappeared did you ask  
your mother?

Finally, he speaks. Voice a death rattle, blood trickling  
between his lips.

AL

... no one asked my mother  
anything. Ever.

The pole-light goes off again. The dog stops BARKING.

AL (CONT'D)

I didn't deserve to be shot for the  
terrible things my brother did.

DOREEN

Siblings can be so troublesome. In  
our third novel, there were these  
truly nasty triplets who really had  
it out for each other. And here's  
the good part..

TESS

Doreen!

(to Big Man)

Why didn't you tell anyone about  
your brother?

DOREEN

He was scared. Obviously.

AL

Yes. I was.

TESS

Of your kid brother?

AL  
Not him. Her.

Tess considers that.

TESS  
Why are you driving his truck?

AL  
It's mine. He borrowed it. He  
always takes whatever he wants.

Tess looks at the ground in thought. Looks back up. Doreen is gone. The Big Man is silent. Wind scrapes everything.

Her emotions collide; confused and anguished. She feels cornered by it all.

THE EXPEDITION - PARKED IN AL'S YARD - TESS

Hating what she has become.

TESS (V.O.)  
... everything's wrong now. You  
killed an innocent man. They'll put  
you away forever.

Tom's calm voice stops her.

TOM'S VOICE  
*There was no way you could know,  
Tess. It all happened so fast.*

TESS  
Doesn't matter, Tom. I act like  
some goddamned vigilante in a  
movie. I've sent myself to hell.

TOM'S VOICE  
*Maybe. But why not make sure Lester  
gets there first?*

She thinks about that.

TESS  
*Lester.*

She unhooks Tom. Grabs him. Gets out of the Expedition.

TESS

Stands over Al's body. Leans down to grab his fallen hat. Removes her own, pockets it. Dons his, tightens the back strap. Looks at the blue Pickup truck. HOLD.

CUT TO:

EXT. LESTER'S DRIVEWAY - SAME NIGHT

On Township Road. Not long or paved. Just a pair of ruts with bushes growing close enough to scrape the sides of the

INT. BLUE F-150 PICKUP

As Tess drives it. Tom hooked-up to the cigarette lighter. ADJUST to the little house at driveway's end.

LESTER'S HOUSE

Nothing neat about this one. A huddled old creep-manse that could have been straight out of "**The Texas Chainsaw Massacre.**"

TESS

Drives up to the house. Concentrating on the dark driveway. She parks by the back door of the house. Kills the engine. Gets out.

ANOTHER ANGLE

As Tess grips the Lemon Squeezer and moves cautiously through starry darkness, the pistol leading the way. The motion-sensor lights suddenly go on like they've spotted an escaping prisoner.

She freezes.

TESS

Damn...

She waits. Lets the lights go off. Quickly approaches the one-story house. Tries the door: unlocked. She's about to step in when she HEARS a muffled, grinding sound coming from somewhere in the house. She goes inside, not making a sound.

INT. LESTER'S HOUSE

Dingy and dark. Not cheerful like Ramona's. She glances, searching as she moves down the main hallway. Sees

HER POV - VARIOUS

The living room; a practical mess. The dining room; the table stacked with old mail, magazines, junk. The kitchen: dirty dishes on sink, stove filthy. OVER we HEAR the sound of something being loudly grinded, coming from somewhere in the house.

TESS

Moves slowly through the house. Drawn and repelled by the nerve-racking noise. Grips the...

LEMON SQUEEZER

...tightly.

HALLWAY

She peers into

BEDROOMS - VARIOUS

Empty. A mess. Hears the GRINDING noise stop. A muted laugh track. A man chuckling. Then, the sound of HAMMERING.

TESS

Moving down the hallway. Comes to a closed door. The sounds emanate from behind it. When they get loud again, she slowly turns the knob. Opens the door. Sees

A DIM STAIRWAY TO THE BASEMENT

Dimly lit. A sea of junk at the bottom. Shadows move down there.

TESS

Reacting. Creeping down the stairs into Lester's basement. The grinding starts to sound like SAWING. It stops and laughter beings: a laugh track for a sit-com.

HER POV - BASEMENT

Jammed with shadows and junk. Disorganized boxes stacked high. A narrow path between old furniture and storage bins.

The SOUND of the grinding become more clear... a table saw cutting wood.

TESS

Staying low. In-between the loud saw cutting, is the laugh track. The glow of the set, around the corner of an old, upright sofa. Joining the laugh track are the deep chuckles of the man sawing.

Then, more table saw noise. Lumber falling to the cement floor. Then, hammering.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Tess peers between two columns of storage bins to see

LESTER

Standing at his workbench area. A toxic immensity. Florescent lights are autopsy bright. He wears woodworker's apron and gloves. Goggles.

A PHOTO is tacked on the tool wall: Lester and Ramona hugging; a boy and his mum.

As he works, he watches the sit-com on a junky set and feeds lengths of old, painted 2x4 into the table saw; a shrill sound. After they fall, he hammers rusty nails into them.

TESS

Extends the Lemon Squeezer.

HER FLASH MEMORY

Jodi Foster, pressing lips together with determined bravery.

LESTER

Sawing, back to CAMERA.

TESS

Walking slowly toward him, raising the Lemon Squeezer. ADJUST as his goggle lenses shimmer light. She puts the barrel of the pistol in his ribs.

THE TWO

His face freezes in shock.

TESS (CONT'D)

Turn around.

He slowly turns, towering over her. She keeps the pistol pointed at him.

Lester is stunned. Like he's seeing a ghost. He slowly lifts the goggles. His bloodshot eyes go dead

LESTER  
You're dead.

TESS  
No. Not this time.  
That's you.

He makes a feeble effort to grab his hammer. But it's too late. Tess pulls the trigger and a bullet pierces his gut. He looks at her with shock.

LESTER  
YOU BITCH!

He grabs for her gun. She shoots him again, in the right knee.

Lester SCREAMS with pain. Grabs her, trying to shove her arm into the whirring

TABLE SAW.

Her jacket sleeve gets caught in it and she slashes his cheek with the pistol's barrel-tip site, fighting back. His cheek bleeds and he lunges for the stairs to escape, knocking over storage boxes, some full of light bulbs and Xmas ornaments that shatter on cement floor.

LESTER

Clutches his gut, pulling himself up the stairs.

TESS

As the blade yanks at her sleeve, threatening to take her arm, she manages to get her jacket off. The saw blade tears it apart.

She moves toward the stairs, holding the Lemon Squeezer. Looks down onto floor and sees:

AN OVERTURNED PLASTIC STORAGE BOX

Next to purses and panties, including her own, are rope and duct tape; the tools of abduction. Also scattered, from the box, on the floor are *POLAROID PHOTOS* of Tess and other women being assaulted and raped by Lester. The flash adds ghoulish starkness. ADJUST to see Tess, reacting to these.

HER FLASHBACK

As she's raped, there is blinding, white light. But it was never from the blows to her head.

TESS

Quickly sifts through more photos: *Lester and Al smiling next to various dead women. Each took a photo of the other.* She's shocked. Sickened. Quickly gathers and pockets the photos in her cargo pants.

Grabs one of the 2x4's with rusty nails Lester was assembling.

Heads up the staircase, pistol extended.

INT. HALLWAY

Tess sees a bloody trail... red finger paint on walls, droplets on carpet.

EXT. HOUSE

Tess runs out, Finds him limping toward his own car. To drive him mad, she walks quickly to the car and stabs one tire with her Swiss Army Knife, pulled from pant's pocket. Mocks his earlier words to her before he began the assault.

TESS (V.O.)

... tell your what... instead of letting you live, how about if I kill you?

THE TWO

To her disbelief, Lester turns and comes at her. Tess swings the 2x4 with rusty nails. Strikes him brutally across the face.

The nails pierce his forehead and Lester SCREAMS, managing to pry it off, grabbing onto his blue pickup, for strength, smearing blood on it.

TESS

Savoring.

LESTER

Stumbles. SHRIEKS in pain. Rises a final time to try and grab at her until

TESS

Reaches into her pocket. Slips the final bullet into the chamber. Aims.

TESS - FLASHBACK

Lester raping her. An animal. Tess beneath him, helpless; eyes pleading.

RESUME TESS

As his eyes plead with her. He whimpers.

LESTER'S VOICE

Don't...

She stands there thinking it over. In the corner, Doreen steps out of the darkness. Coiffed and unruffled as ever. She appraises. Advises:

DOREEN

If I may weigh-in, dear? Waste the whiny bitch.

RESUME TESS

Lowers the barrel, to shoot Lester where it counts.

THE LEMON SQUEEZER

FIRES again, muzzle-flashing.

LESTER - CLOSE

Mouth twisted in agony. He looks down. Can't believe it.

THE TWO

As he stands in front of her. A bloodied edifice, ready to topple.

LESTER

... goddamn whore.

She says nothing. Finally gives him a small shove, making him fall; collapse.

LESTER

Falls onto the hard asphalt. One glove now missing. Tess can see the hand she bit.

TESS

Stares at his fallen form. Unblinking. Taking the horrid inventory. Three dead in one night by her hand. Then, a voice of reason:

DOREEN

Probably a good time to head out, dear. Take the photos. And don't forget your jacket in the sawblades.

TESS

Right.

DOREEN

Given the brutal denouement, if you'll pardon my french, I would suggest you drive the blue pickup truck back to where you left your Expedition and swap them. Then, go home and lay low.

Tess stares at the dead man. Lester's eyes suddenly pop open, startling her.

LESTER

... you'll never get away with this, you bitch.

Doreen clucks with polite annoyance

DOREEN

Oh, for heavens sake, you grotesque freak, it's over. Of course she will.

TESS

Says nothing. All the violence, the bloodshed. It's all sickeningly real. Not a plot. Or a story. Or a cozy mystery for retired old ladies. It's true carnage. She pulls out the photos. Looks through them.

TESS (V.O.)

... now at least I knew I hadn't killed an innocent man. Al had been in on the whole thing. They were all guilty.

(beat)

But thinking about the three of them dead... I figured either my problems were over... or about to get much worse.

HOLD on her expression. The motion-detection lights go out, leaving her in darkness.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERTED MARKET - SAME NIGHT

The Expedition parked in front. Idling in the cold.

INT. EXPEDITION

Tess looking at the forgotten place. The mundane setting of her nightmare. She warms her hands, chilled just to be here; to see it.

TESS (V.O.)

I didn't want to think about the place again. And I didn't want to forget it.

She closes her eyes.

TESS - FLASHBACK MONTAGE

An accelerated montage of the assault. How Lester drove up, smiled, promised to help, violently raped her, dragged her into the drainage pipe.

RESUME TESS

Wanting it to stop. But able to deal with it.

TESS (V.O.)

I never believed in life after death. But part of me died here and what came back was stronger. So, maybe I was wrong.

TOM'S VOICE

*Are you ready to go home, Tess?*

TESS

I need to call the police. Report those dead women.

TOM'S VOICE

*May I suggest the GAS & DASH pay phones? They're anonymous. You could also buy a soda. You've had a long night.*

Her voice is faraway. Her inner world trying to re-connect; mend.

TESS

Yeah. That's a good idea, Tom.

EXT. DESERTED MARKET - EXPEDITION

Drives away from the haunted place. Wreckage of every kind left behind. HOLD.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TESS'S HOUSE - SHOWER - TESS

Under the reviving downpour. Tess's voice is weary; changed by it all.

TESS (V.O.)

... Doreen used to say female detectives should sometimes think like a man to understand certain kinds of crimes. I now think I understand Al and Lester just fine. Damage creates damage. But crime and murder never change. Someone gets hurt or dies. And someone has to pay.

INT. KITCHEN - TESS

She sips her coffee, looking at her laptop computer. Looks better; swelling and bruises mostly healed. A chyron reads: **"ONE MONTH LATER."**

TESS (V.O.)

I will not make excuses for what I've done. Nor can I say I did it while of unsound mind. I was furious and wanted an eye for an eye. End of story.

(beat)

But not quite. Like Doreen always says, it's never enough until it's fully worked out.

ADJUST to see her local paper online on laptop screen. An article: **"TWO DEAD WOMEN FOUND IN DRAINAGE PIPE."** The sub-head reads: "Anonymous tip includes gruesome photos"

TESS

Turns it off. Gets up, walks to stove.

TESS (V.O.)

I wrote Helena Dove's name down on the back of her photo. Maybe that'll help her family. I hope so. With any luck, the police will identify the others.

ADJUST to see Tess is at the stove, burning the Polaroid photos of her own assault.

TESS (V.O.)

If it all leads to me, if they find my blood somewhere along the way in their investigations... I'll welcome more truth. But I won't volunteer it. For me, justice has been served.

(beat)

Sometimes even all bad things come to an end. No matter what the price.

HER TREADMILL - TESS

Running.

TESS (V.O.)

As for Betsy Neal, at the "Stagger Inn", I showed her the photos. Including the one of Helena who never made it to L.A. Together, we'll keep my secret. That's our truth.

INT. TESS'S OFFICE

As she writes, Fritz plays with a ball of yarn. FOLLOW as it rolls to the floor and ends up at the practical footwear of

THE WILLOW GROVE KNITTING SOCIETY

Including Doreen. They all sit, quietly chatting among themselves, sipping tea and knitting. They look up at Tess with patient, accepting smiles. In their eyes, she can do no wrong.

TESS

Looking at her computer screen.

TESS (V.O.)

I suppose I was always violent... somewhere deep down.

(MORE)

TESS (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I denied it like most of us do. But it enabled me to dream up 12 novels where people were murdered. I was just out of touch with it and let my characters live it for me. But like Betsy Neal said... things happen.

She stops to review what she's written.

TESS

Doreen... can you read this for me? I want to hear how it sounds. It's something a little different.

DOREEN

Of course, dear.

Doreen comes over and reads it.

DOREEN (CONT'D)

"Given that emotion and not logic is the key to all human behavior and to crime, itself," said Doreen Marquis, as the other Knitting Society members listened. "I propose we fully change our investigative focus from forensic to psychological, from the crime to the perpetrator."

(to Tess)

I like this, dear. It's provocative.

TESS

It's the start of the new one. Read the rest.

DOREEN

(reads)

"Logic will only get us so far in solving a crime," said Doreen with her meticulous syntax. "We must understand the overwhelming emotion that motivates that crime in order to fully comprehend why people do the unthinkable."

The other Knitting Society members listen with interest.

DOREEN (CONT'D)

"Because in the very absence of logic or concern for reasonable consequence, every one of us make some of the most profound decisions of our lives."

TESS

What do you think?

DOREEN

I think it's about time, dear. We can't always be polite and logical can we? Sometimes it just has to be about payback.

The others don't disagree. Continue to knit and quietly chat.

TESS

Sips her coffee. ADJUST to the title of her new novel at the top of the screen.

**"The Willow Grove Knitting Society Fights Back"**

By

Tess Thorne

FADE OUT

**THE END**