

The Skeleton Key

by

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DEAN



01/19/03

SF

FADE IN:

A LANDSCAPE, BEYOND A WINDOW

A crooked oak tree, laden with Spanish moss, with branches swaying in the breeze.

CAROLINE (O.S.)

I lost no time, of course, in telling my mother all that I knew, and perhaps I should have told her long before, and we saw ourselves at once in a difficult and dangerous position.

AN OLD MAN

lies in an institutional bed. Wisps of white hair, a sunken face, skin taut against bones. He stares outside...

CAROLINE (O.S.)

Some of the man's money -- if he had any -- was certainly due to us; but it was not likely that our captain's shipmates, above all the two specimens seen by me, Black Dog and the blind beggar, would be inclined to give up their booty in payment of the dead man's debts.

TO THE LANDSCAPE

...across the room, beyond the window, as a new sound rises: the branches RUSTLING from the wind outside.

CAROLINE (O.S.)

The captain's order to mount at once and ride for Doctor Livesey would have left my mother alone and unprotected, which was not to be thought of.

THE OLD MAN'S GAZE

sharpens slightly, with the aural shift. The exterior WIND rises...as the man's breathing slows...

CAROLINE (O.S.)

Indeed, it seemed impossible for either of us to remain much longer in the house...

WHILE THE TREES OUTSIDE

sway, the wind stronger now. ANGLE closes, on the tree's branches, Spanish moss trailing like gossamer strands...

CAROLINE (O.S.)
...for the fall of coals in the
kitchen grate, the very ticking of the
clock, filled us with alarms...

...while the lulling, restless breeze gets louder, now
DROWNING OUT the voice. It's as if we've moved outside.
Hearing only the trees, the winds, some birds--

REVEAL INT. BEDROOM - DAY

--and suddenly silence.

CAROLINE ELLIS, 25, casually pretty, a gentle toughness about
her, is at the man's bedside, reading softly from her dog-
eared copy of "Treasure Island":

CAROLINE
...and it occurred to us at last to go
forth together and seek help in the
neighboring hamlet. No sooner said
than done. Bate-headed as we were, we
ran out at once in the gathering
evening and the frosty fog.

Caroline glances up. And then stops reading. The elderly
man's eyes are now closed.

She studies his chest for a long moment. Then calmly sets
the book aside, rises and takes his hand. Feels for a pulse.

She walks to the door, revealing it's an institutional space,
not a personal bedroom. A NURSE passes in a hall beyond--

CAROLINE
Sandra, when you get a second?
(the nurse stops)
Mr. Talcott's gone.

INT. HOSPICE OFFICE - DAY

A heavy-set black NURSE is at her desk, on the phone:

DESK NURSE
Hiya, this is Gail over at the
hospice. You got the honors for a
William Talcott? Mmm-hmm. Time to
get packing.

INT. PATIENT'S ROOM

A BODYBAG is unzipped. A toetag gets tied. A catheter bag
unhooked. A medical bracelet snipped off. Two young
MORTUARY WORKERS prepare to transfer the corpse--

MORTUARY WORKER

Ready and -- lift!

Caroline's at the doorway, shown paperwork by an OFFICIAL:

HOSPICE OFFICIAL

Print and sign at the bottom there.

(turns page)

Sign and date.

(hands her a pen)

Initials, print and sign.

INT. PATIENT'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

NURSING ASSISTANTS are busy. The bodybag sits on its gurney; a silent witness. SHEETS are stripped. TRASH is bagged. A VACUUM CLEANER blares.

Caroline waits by the door as a CNA empties drawers, tossing junk into a box labeled "William Talcott - Personal Effects." Baseball cards, "Treasure Island" and a beat-up shoebox of cassettes. The nurse sees Caroline watching; hands her the box of possessions:

CNA

Front desk. Use anyone shows.

INT. MORTUARY VAN

Loading doors are opened and the workers slide the bodybag gurney inside. It BANGS to a halt; the doors are SHUT. Footsteps, laughter fade away. Leaving darkness and silence.

INT. HOSPICE OFFICE

Gail the heavy-set nurse is still on the phone:

DESK NURSE

Hiya, this is Gail over at the hospice. Is this Mr. Womack? Mr. Womack, I'm calling with good news. We have space now available for your mother. Nice room, lovely view. It's a fine piece of real estate.

INT. LOBBY

Caroline sits alone, with the "William Talcott" box. Waiting. She examines his shoebox of cassettes -- all home-compiled tapes, labeled "Best Big Band Songs," "Best 30's Delta Blues", "Best Breaking-Up Songs", etc.

Caroline smiles at the meticulously-labeled collection...as a starched, older NURSE passes, sees her and stops.

OLDER NURSE
You expecting someone?

CAROLINE
Whoever's coming for Mr. Talcott.

OLDER NURSE
You'll be waiting awhile, hon.

CAROLINE
Didn't we call? He said he had family.

OLDER NURSE
Couple kids by an ex, out west. They don't want nothing to do with him. Who knows why.

CAROLINE
(lifts the box)
But...what about all his--

OLDER NURSE
Trash it out back, hon.
(shrugs)
That's the one good thing about dying. You ain't around to see how soon the world forgets.

EXT. HOSPICE BUILDING - DAY

A back alley. "William Talcott - Personal Effects" hits a trash bin. Caroline stares regretfully, lowers the lid.

She walks away, then stops. Hustles back to the trash, fishes out the shoebox of cassettes. A private smile.

CAROLINE
It's all right, Mr. Talcott. Stick with me...

She tucks the tapes under her arm and walks on...as jangling, upbeat ZYDECO MUSIC rises, taking us into--

INT. NEW ORLEANS BLUES CLUB - NIGHT

Where a ZYDECO BAND rocks away onstage, to a dancing downtown crowd. Among them is Caroline, dancing her heart out. With her is JILL DUPAY, 26, her black and flirty roommate -- smiling as she fends off the attention of some suitors... while Caroline lets it all hang out...

...dancing away like there's no tomorrow...

AT THE BAR - MOMENTS LATER

Caroline and Jill shove through the crowd, laughing together--

CAROLINE

Hey, you know what I want 'em to do when I die? I want a headstone with a jukebox. Right there in the cemetery, with MP3's of like my twenty favorite songs of all time. That's what they should do. Not some stone marker. Remember people with their music.

JILL

I don't know. I'm not sure I'd want to be associated for all eternity with "Little Red Corvette"--

As they reach the bar, a handsome BARTENDER recognizes them--

BARTENDER

Hey -- Caroline! How you doin'? I haven't seen you in forever! How's Eric? What's up with the band?

CAROLINE

(tightens, shifts faces)
Can't help you. I wouldn't know.

BARTENDER

Come on. What do you mean you wouldn't know?

CAROLINE

Two shots of Cuervo, two Coronas.

She turns her back on him, surveys the crowd. The bartender looks to Jill, affronted. Jill repeats, louder.

JILL

Two Cuervos, two Coronas!

The bartender backs off, gets the drinks.

JILL

Man. There any clubs in this city where they don't know you?

CAROLINE

They know him. Now you see why I'm checking out the job.

JILL

So you can ditch town and never be heard from again?

CAROLINE

It'd be just for a few weeks. Plus it pays.

JILL

Lots of jobs'll get you into nursing school. Why'd you have to pick hospice? You and your jukebox for the dead.

Caroline glares gently. Jill smiles, but with some worry.

JILL

Y'know, I actually became a nurse to help people get better.

CAROLINE

And I once had a dream where I had a friend who was supportive.

She smiles, looks off. Then tightens, seeing a handsome ROCK MUSICIAN-type enter the bar, late 80's. He's got a sexy BRUNETTE on his arm. He smiles, embraces some friends, as a GIRL sidles over, requests his autograph.

JILL (O.S.)

Hey. Drinks.

Drinks arrive but Caroline doesn't move. Jill now follows her gaze -- as the Musician spots Caroline. He tenses, then gives a weak smile and wave. Caroline doesn't wave back. The Brunette pulls the Musician away as the crowd fills in, cutting off Caroline's view. Jill's face falls.

JILL

Aw shit. Are we leaving?

CAROLINE

We're leaving.

Caroline downs her tequila shot. Then downs Jill's too.

CAROLINE

After two more.

She slams her shot glass on the bar, signals for refills. Jill gives Caroline a sympathetic look:

JILL
So maybe getting out of town wouldn't
be such a bad thing.

EXT. CITY OUTSKIRTS - DAWN

AN AERIAL TRACK as the sun glints off the never-ending swamps
and inlets of Lake Pontchartrain...as a Honda Civic leaves
the New Orleans skyline, speeding the bayou causeway west.

EXT. BAYOU ROADS - DAY

The Civic drives past moss-laden oaks and palmettos sprouting
from the lush June swamps. Lonely towns and floating shacks
dot the landscape -- cheap bayou hideaways. A sign reads
"Entering Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana."

In the car, Caroline puts in one of the late Mr. Talcott's
cassettes, revealing a flyer reading "Seeking Full-Time
Hospice Caregiver -- Terrebonne Parish -- Paid Position"--

--as she drives past a RAMSHACKLE GAS STATION. Where a wind-
chime made of wishbones sways in the breeze.

EXT. BAYOU ESTATES - DAY

The scenery soon becomes less rural, more landscaped: large
tree-lined lots -- some with gated entrances -- with long
driveways curling to Reconstruction-era homes.

She stops at a pair of open IRON GATES. Checks directions.

CAROLINE

No way.

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - DAY

Through a CANOPY OF OAKS, a faded white plantation-style
house appears. It's small for a mansion -- but built with
small columns and galleries in grand local tradition.

Caroline's Civic follows the gravel drive to a circle at the
front veranda, where a Ford Bronco is parked. Ivy vines
creep up the house's exterior, in minor disrepair.

She steps out, surprised by the scale of it. Cicadas buzz.
A summer breeze whispers. And as she approaches...

...we follow her in reflection...as ANGLE CREEPS INTO her
car's driver-side MIRROR...

SF

INT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE

Caroline steps through the open front door to a large foyer, with an arcing staircase. A dusty chandelier hangs above. A faded painting of St. Peter on the wall.

The room (like the whole house) is slightly over-furnished: mismatched bookshelves and armoires. The general decor bespeaks an old-fashioned Southern sensibility.

CAROLINE

Hello?

There's no answer.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Antique furniture and a painting of St. Michael frame a wall of large windows overlooking the backyard. A grassy lawn and gardens slopes to the banks of a marshy bayou.

Near the water, an OLD WOMAN is giving a haircut to an OLD MAN in a wheelchair. A tablecloth beneath his feet. She wears a kitchen apron. Hear SNIP-SNIPS from outside...

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Here for a haircut? She did mine.

She turns to see LUKE MARSHALL, a handsome man in a rumpled suit, leaning in the doorway. He smiles his hair with a smile and a gentle Southern accent.

LUKE

I'm kidding. It's Caroline, right?

CAROLINE

Sorry I -- the door was open--

LUKE

Upstairs, didn't hear you. It's a big house.

CAROLINE

Yeah.

He reaches her, extends a warm hand.

LUKE

Luke Marshall. His estate lawyer. We spoke on the phone--

CAROLINE

Yes, hi. That's him?

LUKE

They say a few weeks, maybe. He's pretty far gone.

CAROLINE

I understand.

LUKE

His wife's kinda having a rough time with it.

CAROLINE

That's natural.

LUKE

(nods, regards her)
Caroline -- that's a nice name. Means something to do with singing, I bet.

CAROLINE

I'm sorry -- is the interview with you or with Mrs. Devereaux?

LUKE

Oh, I'm just here to help.

CAROLINE

Help who?

Luke offers a hopeful look.

LUKE

Listen, when I introduce you...let me do most of the talking.

EXT. BACK GARDENS - DAY

The Old Woman gathers up the tablecloth with the fallen hair, takes her jar of combs and scissors and heads for the house--

LUKE (O.S.)

Violet, you have a visitor.

--and sees Luke and Caroline approaching. She's VIOLET DEVEREAUX, 71, a grandmotherly, long-faded Southern belle.

LUKE

This is Caroline Ellis, with Hospice of New Orleans. Caroline, this is Violet Devereaux, Ben's wife.

CAROLINE

It's a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Devereaux. You have a lovely home.

Caroline offers a smiling hand. Violet looks her over.

VIOLET

Humph.

And walks right past, into the house.

Luke sighs, leads Caroline on, toward the Old Man -- still in his wheelchair facing the swamp...

LUKE

I'm sorry, it's just hard -- the idea of a stranger in her house--

CAROLINE

I understand. Really.

LUKE

She's old South, y'know? She thinks women still curtsy. So what got you involved with hospice?

CAROLINE

I'm applying to school for the fall. Kind of a change.

LUKE

Change from what?

CAROLINE

A friend of mine had a band. Helped manage it for him, helped him tour.

LUKE

What's the band? Maybe I know it.

CAROLINE

Thanks. I wouldn't want you to.

She defers politely as they reach the Old Man -- BEN DEVEREAUX, 76, an emaciated wraith of a man, bones brittle, face vacant. Totally still. Luke stays behind him:

LUKE

Well, here's the man of the hour.

(over-loud)

Ben, I want you to meet Caroline Ellis! You see her, Ben?! Can you show her you see her?!

The old man's eyes vaguely find Caroline's. His head doesn't turn. A sad and faraway look, slightly haunting.

CAROLINE
He can't talk at all?

LUKE
The stroke pretty much paralyzed him;
he's just wasting away.

CAROLINE
Which side was affected?

LUKE
Both.

CAROLINE
(frowns)
Both?

LUKE
Yeah, the docs said it's really
severe. Happened a month ago. Up in
the attic, that's where she found him.
Caroline takes Ben's left hand. It tremors steadily.

CAROLINE
Hello, Ben. I'm Caroline.

VIOLET (O.S.)
She's not right.

They turn to see Violet on the back steps, still in her
kitchen apron but now with a cigarette.

VIOLET
I don't want her.

LUKE
Violet, you haven't even--

VIOLET
She's not from here. Look at her.
She won't understand the house.

LUKE
She's from New Orleans!

VIOLET
Wasn't raised, though. Hear how she
talks. Who knows where she's from--

CAROLINE
I'm from Elizabeth, New Jersey.

VIOLET

Hmmph.

LUKE

Violet! It's an accent -- you'll get used to it.

VIOLET

We liked the last girl better.

LUKE

We? Who is "we"? You're reading Ben's mind now? The last girl left, Violet. And this is why. You know you need help with him--

VIOLET

She won't understand the house. She's not right.

She goes back inside. Luke throws up his hands, exasperated. He sighs and looks to Caroline in apology.

CAROLINE

So the last girl left, huh?

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Caroline gets in her car to go, as Luke protests--

LUKE

Wait, please, let me talk to her--

CAROLINE

I can't help anyone who doesn't want me helping.

LUKE

She does want help. She's just scared.

CAROLINE

Of what? Politeness?

LUKE

He's the love of her life and he's dying.

Caroline stops, key in the ignition. Luke's desperate:

LUKE

They've been together forever. Sweethearts, soulmates, all that crap. And now she's gotta go it alone.

(MORE)

LUKE (CONT'D)

I don't know about you, but that'd probably put some sandpaper up my ass.

CAROLINE

Aren't you a romantic.

LUKE

I try.

CAROLINE

Keep trying.

LUKE

Look, I do wills and trusts -- not searching for caregivers. But it's a service the firm provides. The last one she hired quit, you're the tenth interview since -- she's shot down every one.

(desperate)

See, to her -- if you're here, it means it's really all over.

CAROLINE

It's all over whether I'm here or not.

She glances to the house, and sees a curtain rustle closed in an upstairs window. Luke sighs.

CAROLINE

What'd she mean about the house?

LUKE

What?

CAROLINE

She said I wouldn't understand the house. Why'd she say that?

LUKE

She has her quirks. Look, she's a porcupine, I know. But her checks clear, trust me. And she has to have somebody.

(pleads)

Can I talk to her? Will you wait?

CAROLINE

You can talk to her.

Luke smiles gratefully, about to head for the house--

CAROLINE

About how my salary just went up.

INT. CAROLINE & JILL'S APT. - DAY

Jill watches Caroline pack, in a funky bedroom with vintage rock tour posters. Shelves upon shelves of albums and CD's.

CAROLINE

Two rules: you play any of my stuff, put it back where you found it. It goes genre, band alphabetical, year of release. Bands that switch genres go on more than one shelf, not the same shelf.

JILL

What's the second rule?

CAROLINE

No listening to anything by him.

She hefts a plastic crate filled with CD's, tapes and demos (labeled "The Infrequencias"), dragging it into a closet.

JILL

Why don't you get rid of all that?

CAROLINE

You don't get rid of six years of your life.

She snatches an armful of sheets and blankets and drops it on the closet floor in a pile, covering the music crate.

JILL

You just bury it.

EXT. APT. BLDG. - NEW ORLEANS - DAY

Caroline stuffs one last suitcase into her Honda Civic...

JILL

Well, you better not start feeling at home out there, drinking mint juleps and joining a bridge club--

CAROLINE

I'll be back before you know it.

JILL

And you better call me, okay? Whenever you wanna talk to someone who wasn't around for World War Two.

CAROLINE

What's with you and old people?

JILL
They terrify me.

She's straight-faced, then smiles. Gives a heartfelt hug.

JILL
Be careful out there.

EXT. BAYOU COUNTRY - DUSK

The sun casts deep shadows as ANGLE SWEEPS through the scrub oaks, dripping with moss -- skirting the bayou and finding Caroline's Civic, headed back for Terrebonne Parish...

EXT. RAMSHACKLE GAS STATION - DUSK

Caroline pumps gas at a rundown general store. Somewhere unseen, a BABY is crying. She replaces the pump, grabs her wallet and enters the store...passing its wishbone chimes.

INT. STORE

At the screen door, she notes a trail of RED DUST crossing the doorway. Sparsely stocked shelves, buzzing flies. No one's behind the register. The CRYING baby is louder -- from a door left ajar to a stockroom hallway.

CAROLINE
Hello? I need to pay for some gas!

No answer. The baby's WAIL grows deafening. Unnerving her. She holds a \$20 bill, steps toward the back hall...

CAROLINE
Um...hello?!

The BAWLING continues, a SHRIEK now, as Caroline reaches the doorway...and then suddenly SILENCE.

Caroline takes a step back. Then puts her \$20 bill on the counter and hurries out.

EXT. RAMSHACKLE GAS STATION

Caroline returns to her car...as the unseen CRYING resumes. Disturbed, she looks back to the store. No signs of life.

CAROLINE
Welcome to the neighborhood...

INT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - CAROLINE'S ROOM - NIGHT

A PHOTO is set on a side table: of a blue-collar DAD teaching a LITTLE GIRL to play guitar.

Caroline regards it, then surveys her room: faded curtains and a four-poster bed. Small flowerpots with white violets. Her new home.

INT. ADJOINING BATHROOM

Caroline enters with some toiletries...and stops as she faces the sink. There's a medicine cabinet above -- but a small framed watercolor hangs where a mirror should be.

Caroline frowns. There's no mirror in the bathroom at all.

INT. LOWER HALL - NIGHT

Caroline walks the faded floral carpet, looking for--

CAROLINE

Mrs. Devereaux? I'm all unpacked!

She finds herself at the foyer, beside another open door to a bathroom. She leans inside and takes note.

There's no mirror in this bathroom either.

INT. UPPER LANDING/HALL - NIGHT

An antique-decorated hall, lit by wall sconces, runs the length of the house -- bisected at the staircase. At one end, a closed door is flanked by sconces gone out.

At the other end hangs a large painting of black swans in flight. Beside it, a bedroom door is open.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Caroline enters to see the old man in bed, wheelchair nearby. He's in near-darkness, staring into space. Zydeco MUSIC plays faintly on a vintage phonograph.

CAROLINE

Remember me, Mr. Devereaux? I'm gonna be staying with you...for awhile.

(tries a smile)

All right if I call you Ben? I like Ben better.

She steps to his bedside, adjusts his blanket.

CAROLINE

Not a lot of light in here for you. That how you want it?

The old man stays expressionless. She lifts his arms to tuck the blanket higher, taking his hand in hers--

CAROLINE

I'm Caroline, I don't know if you remember. I like your music--

--and suddenly finds she can't free her hand--

--because his hand GRIPS it tight. She jerks back, spooked, but he won't let go. He clutches fiercely...and his distant eyes meet hers. His grip stays resolute.

CAROLINE

Ben, hey -- ouch, what's the--

VIOLET (O.S.)

He needs his remedies.

Ben's grip releases. Caroline spins to see Violet entering with a tray -- a small mortar & pestle and a water glass.

VIOLET

He has the spasms when he hasn't had his remedies. Scott, child.

(edges her acid)
Pale, pale. Always so pale.

She puts a hand to Ben's cheek, as if taking temperature.

VIOLET

Nine in the morning and nine at night.
Needs his pills in a powder-- I'll show you where. Help him drink it down.

She pours the pestle's powder into the water glass, stirs it with a spoon. It clouds into silty gray.

VIOLET

Have your remedies now.

She tips the glass to Ben's lips, holding a kerchief beneath. He drinks with difficulty, spilling some. Violet wipes his chin, kisses his forehead--

VIOLET

And a kiss to make it taste.

She smiles sadly, squeezes his hand. Caroline notices that this time Ben doesn't grip back.

Violet sighs, then looks Caroline up and down, appraising:

VIOLET
Scrawnier than I'd like. Pretty
though. Bet you're all marked up,
aren't you.

CAROLINE
Marked up?

VIOLET
Written on. You young folks, you're
always jabbin' yourselves with ink and
needles. Written on, aren't you.

CAROLINE
Not where you can see.

Violet gives a grouchy look of distaste.

VIOLET
Humph.

INT. VIOLET'S ROOM NIGHT

A DOOR opens, casting light onto an antique-furnished, four-
poster bedroom. Musty but warm.

VIOLET (O.S.)
This here's my room, right 'cross the
hall. You'll not be needed here and
I'll respect your room the same.

INT. UPPER HALL

Violet shuts the door, leaving the bedrooms' end and walking
Caroline back toward the stairs...

VIOLET
If he makes a ruckus in the night, I
can hear him. Leave him to me.

CAROLINE
Does he have those often -- spasms?

VIOLET
Don't mind 'em. He's to be fed twice
a day, plus his remedies. I make his
meals myself; you're not to share
them. That was a problem with the
last girl, so you know.

CAROLINE
Understood.

VIOLET

He's to be bathed daily and his linens changed. He spends his afternoons in the gardens -- the porch if inclement-- and evenings he rests with some music.

At a side table, she gives a cluck of distaste, picking some dead stalks out of a vase of flowers.

CAROLINE

How long've you lived here?

VIOLET

Oh, let me think. Since '62. We moved down from Savannah. Convinced the owners to sell the property, I was a realtor back then--

CAROLINE

Must have quite a history.

VIOLET

Humph. Some greedy old banker built it. We used the space for my husband's antique business. All the riff-raff he couldn't sell, it's in here. 'Cept the attic--

She stops at the stairs, motioning to the hall's end: the door with the unlit wall sconce.

VIOLET

--it's for china and crystal and such.
(eyes her)

I keep a close count of all that, so you know.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

A CABINET is opened, a JEWELRY BOX is removed, and unlatched to reveal...an old-fashioned IRON KEY.

VIOLET (O.S.)

There's more than thirty rooms in all. They made a separate key for every door in the old days, depending who was allowed where.

She stands with Caroline at a sideboard, amidst the room's stacks of bookshelves, filled to brimming.

VIOLET

For the owner they made a skeleton key. Every room, it'll open. This one's yours, I have the other.

She hands her the key. Then, almost an afterthought:

VIOLET

It's an old house; makes noises. Sometimes shadows play tricks. But don't pay 'em no attention. You be good to it and it'll be good to you.

Caroline frowns at her tone. But Violet's already leaving--

VIOLET

Next is the pantry -- I may send you into town now and again--

CAROLINE

Was there a mirror here once?

Violet stops. Caroline's pointing at the sideboard: an inset section has a different wood stain, as if once covered.

CAROLINE

I was just...I noticed in the bathrooms, for instance. There aren't any mirrors.

VIOLET

Child, you get as worn-out and wrinkled as we are, you don't need reminding. You want a little one for your own use, it's fine with me.

CAROLINE

What'd you do with yours?

VIOLET

(a strange shrug)
We put them away.

INT. LOWER HALL - NIGHT

They reach Caroline's room, finishing the tour--

VIOLET

Now the boy tells me you don't smoke. I smoke, I smoke often and I enjoy it. I trust that won't be an issue.

CAROLINE

It won't be.

VIOLET

Then be aware that in most respects
I'll live as if you weren't in
residence. We're not kin, after all.
Your own parents still living?

CAROLINE

No.

VIOLET

(stops, surprised)
Oh? Must've been young.

CAROLINE

My father died last year -- of cancer.
He raised me.

VIOLET

Oh my. So you cared for him as well?

CAROLINE

I would've.

Violet raises an eyebrow. Caroline shifts, uncomfortable...

CAROLINE

We'd had...kind of talking out. But
I would've. If I'd known how little
time we had left.

Violet studies her. Caroline expects admonishment. But
Violet nods, with a rare touch of warmth:

VIOLET

You think too much about the time you
have left, child...you don't spend it
living.

Caroline smiles. Violet approximates one.

VIOLET

You be good to my husband. You be
good to his house. He'll need his
remedies at nine.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

BOTTLES OF PILLS sit on a counter. Handwritten labels, not
typed. Five pills are placed in the small pestle...as
Caroline grinds them to powder.

INT. UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - DAY

A faucet churns water. Ben's in his wheelchair: slumped, naked skin and bones. A lifeless stare.

CAROLINE

Don't mind me, I've seen it all before...let's get you clean here...

Her pants rolled up, she sets his feet in the tub -- then lifts at the shoulders, guiding him to the tub's edge. She steps into the water, pivots her patient and eases him in--

--and notes the wall above the sink. No mirror.

INT. FOYER - DAY

Caroline locks Ben's wheelchair onto a motorized DESCENDER built into the wall of the curved staircase. He's freshly dressed, his face is blank. It carries him down.

EXT. BACK GARDENS - DAY

Caroline wheels Ben toward a swampfront patch where Violet -- with sunhat and cigarette -- is gardening.

VIOLET

Just set him there, child. Let him face the water -- he likes that. You don't see gardens like these in New Jersey, I expect.

CAROLINE

Actually, it's the Garden State.

VIOLET

Oh, I doubt that very much. Nothing more glorious than a garden. Gone every winter, back every spring.

(searching garden-box)

Fiddlesticks, where's my Jack-in-the-Pulpits? Do me a blessing and run up to the attic, child. There's a box of my seed packets -- it's right by the stairs, could you fetch it for me?

CAROLINE

We're not related, Mrs. Devereaux.

Violet frowns. Caroline's firm, but friendly:

CAROLINE

My name's Caroline. It's not "child."

INT. UPPER HALL'S END - DAY

The attic door sits flanked by the dark sconces. Caroline mounts the main stairs, reaches to open it--

--and finds it locked. She frowns, as if it's the first one she's come across.

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The skeleton key is swept up from Caroline's dresser.

INT. UPPER'S HALL'S END

Caroline puts the key into the attic door's lock. It rattles until the teeth catch -- and turn -- as she opens--

--to reveal an enclosed SPIRAL STAIRWELL, with water-damaged wooden steps. She flips a wall switch -- a dim sconce turns dull yellow somewhere above.

She surveys the claustrophobic space. And steps in.

INT. SPIRAL STAIRWELL

She climbs it to find it ends at a second door -- faded from water damage. She turns the knob. This one's locked too.

Her brow furrows. Two doors locked to the same place?

She inserts the skeleton key. Jiggles, rattles -- unlocks. The upper door creaks open to reveal

INT. ATTIC

A dark, angled-roof storage space. Water stains warp the floor, shelves and boxes. Shapes under drop-cloths, tattered rolls of insulation, boxes of tile, paint cans.

The only dim light spills from the stairwell. Caroline feels for a wall switch, but finds none.

Instead, her foot kicks a shoebox beside the stairs -- laden with gardening seed packets. She picks it up--

--and then stops. She peers ahead in the dimness. At the far side of the attic, thirty feet further into the shadows, is a backless shelving unit of tile boxes and paint cans.

This shelf is blocking a DOOR.

Intrigued, she steps closer. Floorboards CREAK underfoot.

She pushes tile boxes aside, to glimpse the door -- dark, heavy wood, badly warped, hinges rusted. It appears to have been re-hinged many times. Its knob is rusted black, but its keyhole looks like all the rest.

She sets the seed-box down, puts the skeleton key into the keyhole. And turns.

But the warped door doesn't open. The key sticks and won't rotate. It remains locked.

Caroline jiggles the key, tries to twist the knob and force it -- but it doesn't budge.

She steps back, removes the key. Another floorboard CREAKS. She spins at the sound, then relaxes. She's all alone.

CAROLINE

Huh.

EXT. BACK GARDENS DAY

Violet's on her knees, in the garden, weeding thatch--

CAROLINE

I thought the key opens everything.

She squints up to see Caroline, arriving with the seed-box.

VIOLET

The key, what key?

CAROLINE

The key you gave me for the house.
There's a door in the attic it doesn't work for.

VIOLET

The attic? Oh, in the attic -- no, it's never opened that. I thought you meant the staircase.

(rifles seed-box)

Jack-in-the-Pulpits. There we are.

CAROLINE

What's in there?

VIOLET

Seeds, child.

CAROLINE

In the attic. Behind the door.

VIOLET

I've no idea. Been shut since we first moved in. The other keys don't work it either. Another closet, I expect.

CAROLINE

You've never opened one of the doors in your own house?

VIOLET

Well, we never wanted for space. Now be a dear and see to Mr. Devereaux -- I wonder if he wouldn't like some iced tea.

CAROLINE

(stares at her)

Right.

Violet returns to her gardening. Caroline looks to Ben -- who stares emptily into the bayou...where a RUSTED CANOE drifts, moored by ropes to a post on the backyard bank.

CAROLINE

When your husband had his stroke...he was in the attic Mr. Marshall said.

Violet sets down her trowel with a sigh.

VIOLET

So he was.

CAROLINE

Do you know what he was doing?

VIOLET

As much as I know what you were. I ~~assume~~ he was up there looking for something. It's since been difficult to engage him on the subject.

She gives her a snappish look. Caroline nods, retreats.

CAROLINE

Sorry.

VIOLET

Oh, and Caroline...
(a curt smile)

Extra sweet, please, the tea. I wouldn't mind some myself.

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM - NIGHT

RAIN patters the window. Caroline's in bed, in T-shirt and panties, reading a Tulane School of Nursing course catalog.

Her gaze shifts to the skeleton key. It sits on her side table. She looks away, but her gaze sidles back.

Distracted, she opens the table's drawer and sweeps the key inside. Shuts it and springs from bed.

INT. CAROLINE'S BATHROOM

A COMPACT is snapped open to reveal its tiny MIRROR, as it's placed on the sink ledge.

In its reflection, we see Caroline turn on a hot shower, and then strip off her clothes, her back to us...

ANGLE CLOSES on the compact, as she climbs beneath the spray and pulls the curtain...and the mirror starts to FOG...

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM

Dark and late. ANGLE CREEPS along bedsheets and a form beneath, to find Caroline sprawled, asleep, headphones on--

--as there's a LOUD THUMP from upstairs. Caroline stirs.

Then a faint, muffled scrape -- SKRRIIICH! Then silence.

Caroline's eyes open. She looks to the ceiling.

Again, short and muffled -- SKRRIIICH!

Caroline sits up in bed.

INT. FRONT FOYER

Caroline, in a flannel robe, peers up the staircase. Only darkness above. She waits. Rain PATTERS. And then, again, faint but clear -- SKRRIIICH!

She hits the switch for the chandelier. Light FLOODS the foyer and upper landing. Nothing to be seen.

INT. UPPER LANDING/HALL

Caroline arrives at the top, listening for another sound. She checks both directions, then frowns at something.

From a new switch, she shuts OFF the chandelier. The hall goes dark again...save for a dim strip of LIGHT--

SF

--emanating from beneath the attic stairway's door.

Caroline's breath hitches. She reaches into her pocket...and retrieves the skeleton key, as--

SKRRRIICH! She spins. It's behind her.

Thrown, she's now facing the hall end with the bedrooms. She marches for them, desperate to locate the sound. Reaching Violet's door first, she silently tries the knob--

INT. VIOLET'S ROOM

--and opens it to see Violet sleeping, grey hair tangled and back turned. The RAIN'S harder now. Caroline shuts it--

INT. HALLWAY

--and turns to Ben's room. She turns the knob--

--but this one doesn't open. Caroline's surprised. Key still in hand, she inserts it and turns--

INT. BEN'S ROOM

--and reveals a shadowy room with bed empty. Ben's gone!

Caroline hits the lights: his wheelchair's still there. His bed is disheveled. His phonograph still turns, needle stuck and POPPING at the end of a record.

Caroline spins with alarm as -- SKRRRIICH! -- another scrape. Not here, but it's somewhere close--

INT. HALLWAY

Caroline runs out, noting the attic stairway with the LIGHT still on beneath. There are several doors between her and it -- as another SCRAPE sounds, to her right -- behind one--

INT. UPPER ROOMS - SERIES OF SHOTS

The KEY unlocks a door -- LIGHTS ON in a sitting room, cluttered with furniture. Another KEY, another REVEAL -- a guest bedroom, laden with books. Another REVEAL -- a sewing room, more quilts and clutter still--

--and as Caroline nears the hall's end, she stops still -- key already in another door -- as she realizes--

CAROLINE
His was locked...

INT. BEN'S ROOM

She rushes back, scanning the room, throwing open a closet and then noticing for the first time--

--the water puddle beneath the closed windowsill.

She races over, where RAIN batters the roof eaves over the backyard sunporch. She thrusts open the window--

EXT. BACK OF HOUSE - SUNPORCH ROOF

--to see a drenched Ben DRAGGING himself away along the roof, level with his window! SKRRIIICH! with each struggling pull. His legs useless, his palsied arms clawing weakly--

CAROLINE

BEN!

The old man manages a glance back -- of pure terror--

--as he reaches for an iron TRELLIS at the porch roof's edge, clutching with both hands, dragging full weight onto it--

--as it SNAPS AWAY from the house, and Ben goes with it--

CAROLINE

BEN, NO!!!

--with a twelve-foot ARCING fall to CRASH HARD on the sodden ground! The trellis lands atop him, as comes furious RAIN.

INT. UPPER LANDING/HALL

Caroline POUNDS on Violet's door, but doesn't wait--

CAROLINE

MRS. DEVEREAUX! WAKE UP! WAKE UP!

--as she rushes straight for the staircase--

EXT. BACK GARDENS

Caroline BURSTS out the sunporch door, seeing the trellis flat on the ground...and Ben struggling to pull himself away, fifteen feet from it, headed toward the swamp.

Caroline reaches him, turning him over--

CAROLINE

Ben, what are you doing, Jesus--

--and his hand LASHES for her throat! His other for her wrist! Caroline recoils, needing a shocked moment to realize he's trying to fend her off--

CAROLINE
It's me! Hey, it's me!

But weak as he is, he keeps struggling, with choked, grunting MOANS. They're the first sounds he's made. Caroline manages to pin his hands -- and he stares with horrified eyes--

CAROLINE
What is WRONG with you?!

--as Violet now runs from the house, in her nightgown--

VIOLET
Mother of mercy, what's he done?

CAROLINE
He got out the window! I thought he was bedridden!

VIOLET
He has nightmares -- oh, Ben -- is he bleeding? Oh sweet Ben!

Violet collapses beside him, kissing his forehead, stroking his hair. He seems to go remote, one more--

CAROLINE
God, if he broke something, would he even feel it?

VIOLET
(rocking him)
What'd you do. What'd they make you do...

Caroline notes her strange use of words--

CAROLINE
His door was locked.

VIOLET
I always lock it. It's the nightmares. They make him struggle in his sleep. He spasms, he crawls. He's fallen before--

CAROLINE
From his window?

VIOLET

The stairs. Fetch his chair, child.
He'll catch his death. We've got to
get him warm--

CAROLINE

What about a doctor?

VIOLET

In the morning. Fetch his chair!

Caroline recoils at her sharpness. Drenched, she backs away,
then turns and hustles into the house. Thunder ROLLS.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Caroline hurries in, grabs Ben's wheelchair, then sees she
left his window open. She jumps to shut it -- and freezes.

One of Ben's bedsheets hangs half-off the bed, bundled into a
twist. STREAKS of dirty water discolor it. Caroline lifts
it up straight...fanning the streaks out to form letters -- a
ragged, spastic scrawl that reads...

..."HELP ME".

VIOLET (O.S.)

CAROLINE!

Astonished, she spins to the window -- where Violet still
tenderly rocks her husband in the hard backyard rain.

Caroline considers. Then whips the sheet off the bed,
balling it up -- as she grabs the wheelchair--

INT. UPPER HALL

--and rolls it to the stairs, where she stops short.
Noticing the light under the attic door...is now off.

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM - NIGHT

The crumpled sheet gets STUFFED in Caroline's suitcase.

VIOLET (O.S.)

Caroline?!

EXT. BACK GARDENS

Caroline finally hustles out, rattling the wheelchair across
the yard to reach the soaked old couple--

VIOLET

What in damnation took you?

SF

CAROLINE

I came as fast as I could.

Violet struggles to lift Ben into the chair--

VIOLET

Help me with him. Help me, would you?
Help me now, help me--

Off her repetition of the words, Caroline's eyes meet Ben's. She lifts him, staring right into his eyes -- somewhere pained, lost, unknowable--

CAROLINE

I will.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - DAY

Sun streams in. A balding COUNTRY DOCTOR with stethoscope examines Ben, back in bed, while Violet smokes, looks on.

VIOLET

It's like something comes over him at night -- when he's sleeping -- the medication, maybe it's not enough...

DOCTOR

What've I told you about your smoking, Violet?

VIOLET

Oh, fiddlesticks. You're here for him, not me.

Around the corner, Caroline's in the hallway...listening.

EXT. BACK GARDENS - DAY

The trellis leans against the sunporch, upright again. Caroline's re-tracing the path of Ben's crawl...

CAROLINE

Where were you going...

...and looks ahead to the bayou. In this direction lies the rusted canoe. Beyond it, a distinctive moss-laden oak.

Caroline approaches the canoe. At the water's edge, the ground turns soggy. She looks down and now notices--

--a trail of REDDISH DUST in the grass, like crushed pebbles. (Just like at the doorway of the creepy gas station.) It forms a trail along the waterline, into the gardens--

LUKE (O.S.)

So Dr. Kevorkian. You're here a week
and he's trying to kill himself.

Luke's on the back steps, rumpled suit and briefcase.

LUKE

You must have quite the bedside
manner.

CAROLINE

Among my many charms.

LUKE

What the hell happened? I come out to
work on her will and she's in with the
doc. She says he fell.

CAROLINE

He did fall.

LUKE

Fell where?

Caroline glances from the sunporch roof to the ground. Luke
follows her gaze. Blinks. Caroline nods.

LUKE

There is no way you are serious.

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM - DAY

The door shuts, with a confused Luke led in by Caroline--

LUKE

Please don't tell me you're quitting.
I'm the one who'll have to replace
you, I'll have to start all over--

CAROLINE

Relax. I want to show you something.

She motions to the unmade bed, then rummages her closet.
Luke sits on the bed, regarding the room--

LUKE

Y'know, where I come from...a girl
will usually ask you to dinner first.

Caroline glares. She drags out her suitcase, opens it to
reveal the balled-up BEDSHEET. As she uncrumples it--

CAROLINE

Look at this. It's from Ben's room.
I think he meant for me to find it--

...and trails off, with the sheet now unfurled. It's completely white. The dirty water-writing's not there. She checks the other side, upends it. Nothing.

LUKE

To find...his laundry?

CAROLINE

No, there was...it had...

She's perplexed. Luke looks oddly at her...

LUKE

Had what?

(gets no response)

Hey, the old lady ask you if you're
"written on" yet?

Off her distraction, he rolls up a sleeve to reveal a tattoo:

LUKE

She hates 'em. And don't ever get her started about piercings. Or women with short hair, for that matter. She's not much of an adapter.

Caroline nods -- balling the sheet back up. A mystery.

CAROLINE

Forget it. I thought...I don't know what I thought...

LUKE

You thought something about Ben.

She doesn't readily respond.

LUKE

I admire you, you know. What you do.

CAROLINE

Don't.

LUKE

I'm serious. If my own parents were sick, I don't think I could take care of them--

CAROLINE

You'd regret it.

Luke now notices the photo of the Dad and Daughter on her side table. But before he can ask--

CAROLINE

When I was eighteen, I ran off with my boyfriend. He had a band; a good band, he was going somewhere. My dad hated the guy but I didn't care. I figured home would always be there to go back to. Figured my dad and I'd one day patch things up.

(beat)

Before I ever found out he had cancer, he was dead. He thought it was his way of sparing me. From this.

LUKE

I'm sorry.

CAROLINE

Turns out he was right about the boyfriend.

She gives a bittersweet smile. Then decides to risk it:

CAROLINE

Have you ever... Have you ever felt like Ben was asking you for help?

LUKE

Asking me?

CAROLINE

In any way. A look, a touch. For help.

Luke hesitates, as if recalling something when suddenly--

VIOLET (O.S.)

Mr. Marshall?! Where in damnation are you? Caroline, have you seen--

A SHARP KNOCK on the door, as Caroline swiftly grabs the balled sheet from the bed and hides it behind her back. Luke notices her strange action -- as the door swings open--

--and Violet stops in mid-sentence to see Luke spring up from the bed, Caroline standing beside him--

VIOLET

I...well...I see...

Luke steps out, waltzing Violet a couple steps into the hall--

SF

LUKE

Now, Violet, you know you're the only woman in my life.

VIOLET

I know no such thing and I would like you to remove your perspirations.

She swats his hands, with a stern look to Caroline--

VIOLET

Humph.

(beat)

The physician's departed, young man, so I'm prepared to discuss my paperwork. If in fact that's why you're here.

She harumphs off. Behind her back, Luke dutifully bows for effect -- then hands Caroline a business card--

LUKE

When you have time to talk.

Violet spins back, eyeing them. Caroline innocently takes his card, and as he follows Violet away--

--Caroline chucks the balled-up sheet back in her closet.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - DAY

A PADLOCK has been rigged to Ben's window.

Caroline regards it from the foot of the bed, carrying a tray of gumbo. She looks to Ben -- sleeping soundly.

She sets the tray down, steps to the window. On a side table is a weathered 1962 PHOTO of Violet & Ben (early 30's) and their house -- beside a "Sold" sign. A couple in love.

Outside the window, Violet's gardening below. Caroline looks from the snapshot to the woman...with a look of resolve...

INT. UPPER HALL - DAY

The SKELETON KEY unlocks the door to the attic stairwell. Caroline glances over her shoulder.

INT. SPIRAL STAIRWELL

She climbs the dim-lit, narrow passage. At the top, she unlocks the second door...

INT. ATTIC

...and confronts the cluttered room, with the warped wood door still blocked by the shelving unit. Caroline takes a breath...then switches OFF the stairway's light.

Pitch black until a FLASHLIGHT pops on. She makes her way to the shelves and warped door--

--and pushes tile boxes aside again, to find the blackened doorknob. She kneels, shines her light in the keyhole. Something's blocking it.

There's a GROAN of roof-beams -- an outside wind. She spins the light, scans the attic...sees nothing...

So she returns to the keyhole. She pulls a piece of coat hanger, jimmies the hole to try and clear it. It CLINKS something metal. Caroline abandons her attempt--

--and switches to a bobby pin. She feels around, gets leverage, and retracts carefully...pulling out--

--a distinctive SHARD OF IRON that PLINKS to the floor. Caroline shines the light: it's a broken piece of key. She holds the end of her own key to it. It's a match.

The walls GROAN again; this time she ignores. She rises, inserts her key into the keyhole.

This time it turns. CLICK.

Caroline swallows.

And pushes open the door.

A RUSH of air sweeps out, stirring up dust within the attic and forcing Caroline's eyes shut momentarily.

The door sticks, opening only a foot. Caroline clears the tile boxes to one side, and puts her arms and torso through the shelving unit, putting weight into it--

--and as the door opens wider, she climbs fully through.

INT. THE SECRET ROOM

It's the size of a walk-in closet. Slats of natural light come from a small ventilation-grate above, dappled by swaying oaks outside. Dust motes swirl in the half-light.

Hanging from a string overhead, like a drying bouquet, are a cluster of animal WISHBONES.

There are numerous CRATES and BOXES, a WHEEL OF FORTUNE with runic symbols, and two unfinished CANVASES propped up on the floor. There's a rolltop desk with nails protruding from odd angles. A snake-headed SCEPTER in the shape of a cross.

Caroline, on all fours, now rises. Flashlight off.

More faint GROANS from the attic floorboards beneath her.

Her head jangles the wishbones as she stands; like dead chimes. She turns the two canvases away from the wall--

One is a painting of a black wall and oval mirror, with a BLACK MAN's face. The face has no features. The second painting is the same, but in the mirror is a BLACK WOMAN. Featureless -- just concavities and raised ridges. Both paintings look weathered and ancient.

Caroline shudders, turns to the rolltop desk. Opens it to reveal a Mason Jar full of HUMAN TEETH.

INT. SUNPORCH - SAME

The screen door BANGS as Violet enters, wiping her brow and pulling off gardening gloves.

VIOLET
Caroline? I'm making sweet tea -- can I interest you? Caroline.

She frowns at the silence.

INT. SECRET ROOM - SAME

Caroline opens more desk drawers: finding faded vials of various preserved ROOTS, POWDERS and HAIR. Beneath the desk is a massive round HATBOX made of alligator skin.

She opens the box to find a stack of RECORDS inside. She removes the top one from its sleeve: "August 24, 1909. New Iberia Parish. Papa Justify's Conjure of Sacrifice."

INT. BEN'S ROOM

Violet regards the lunch tray beside her sleeping husband. She lifts a spoonful of the gumbo to her lips, touches her tongue to it. Still warm.

INT. UPPER HALL

Violet shuts Ben's door with a wary look...

VIOLET
Caroline, you in the house?

...and stops, gaze settling on the attic stairway door.

INT. SECRET ROOM

Caroline turns to the boxes and crates: there's a thick SCRAPBOOK atop the stack, covered in dust. It has a mosaic of stones, beads and mirror shards for a cover.

She opens it to a photo of the DEVEREAUX HOUSE, circa 1912. A group poses on the front lawn: a WEALTHY COUPLE and two REDHEADED CHILDREN, flanked by GUESTS in summer formalwear. At the edges, an African-American BUTLER and MAID.

She turns the page. Another photo: the same two children, a BOY and GIRL, both 10. The butler and maid standing behind them, hands on shoulders. Unsmiling.

The next page, in ragged script, reads "Conjure Book of Uncle Justify and Blessed Teachings."

She flips pages, finding instructions, recipes and sketches -- with labels like "Conjure for a Wandering Eye," "Conjure of Coins-in-Pocket," "Conjure for a Lying Tongue."

INT. UPPER HALL'S END

Violet inserts her skeleton key in the attic stairway door, stares strangely as it won't turn. But the knob does.

It was unlocked already.

INT. SECRET ROOM/ATTIC

Caroline spins at the sound of the DOOR below. The top stairwell door is still closed -- but yellow LIGHT now spills through beneath it.

She shuts the book, scrambles out -- accidentally KICKING the 1909 record under the shelving unit and into the main attic! Violet's FOOTSTEPS climb the stairs...

Caroline SCRAMBLES back through, jerking her legs and catching a falling paint can from smacking the floor! She spins to pull the door shut, reconfigures the shelf...and then searches her pockets for the broken end of key--

--which she tries to shove back in the lock. Her hands are trembling, it won't fit in. It hits the floor.

INT. SPIRAL STAIRWELL

Violet's marching up the steps, almost there--

INT. ATTIC

--as Caroline sees the under-door light blocked by shadow. She abandons the effort, snatches the key-piece and crawls for hiding behind a dusty-mirrored dressing table--

--and then sees, ten feet away, the 1909 record lying in the middle of the floor--

INT. SPIRAL STAIRWELL

--as Violet reaches for the second door's knob, not even bothering with the key this time--

INT. ATTIC

--and stepping into...a dark, empty attic.

The record's not on the floor. The warped door, blocked by the bookshelf, is shut. The room is silent.

VIOLET
(dark monotone)
Caroline?

Behind the dresser, Caroline holds her breath, clutching the 1909 record. Hidden from view.

Violet surveys from the doorway, in yellowed silhouette.

VIOLET
You're forgetful, child.

She says it to herself, sighs, and descends the stairs. Shutting -- and locking -- the top stairwell door.

Caroline takes a breath. Waits until she hears the lower stairwell door shut -- and lock -- and then hits her FLASHLIGHT. Rises from hiding, still trembling.

She leans on the dresser to steady herself, glancing at her own face in its dusty mirror--

AS A SHADOW MOVES SLOWLY

right behind her, in blurred reflection. A DARK, FORMLESS SHAPE. Caroline spins, raising hands to defend--

--as a DARK DUSTCOVER slips off a standing DRESSING MIRROR.

Caroline relaxes, steps to re-cover it. It has an ornate, gilt-silver frame. Oval. Etched with figurative detail.

But as she replaces the cover, she notices a whole GROUP of sheet-covered objects leaning against the wall nearby. She removes the sheet to find...MIRRORS. Dozens of them. Large, small, fancy, plain. Some of them have faces WARPED -- the glass BUBBLED, DISTENDED or SCRATCHED.

Caroline turns a troubled circle -- scouring the attic with the flashlight beam. Shadows and silence.

INT. UPPER HALL'S END

An EYE through a keyhole. A beat later, the door opens and Caroline slips out into the empty hall.

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM

She pulls the 1909 record from under her shirt, stuffing it under her pillow as--

VIOLET (O.S.)
Where've you been?

Caroline spins. The old woman's in the doorway.

CAROLINE
I...I fell asleep. I just woke up--

VIOLET
He has his gumbo.

CAROLINE
Yeah. He was sleeping, though, so...I just left it--

VIOLET
Best to wake him up and feed him or the gumbo gets cold.

CAROLINE
I'm sorry, Mrs. Devereaux. I'll warm it up again right away.

VIOLET
No harm. I know how it is...to be tired.

She holds Caroline with an enigmatic look.

VIOLET
When you next have time to go into town, I left a list in the kitchen--

CAROLINE
I have time today.

Violet nods, then seems to soften. Smiles.

VIOLET

Thank you for all your help -- with my husband. It's so nice not to be alone. In this house.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS STREET - DAY

Caroline's Civic travels the towering city, passing a Garden District streetcar.

INT. CAROLINE & JILL'S APT. - CLOSET - DAY

An old RECORD PLAYER gets dug from a packed closet, amidst stacks of CD's, albums, laminates and posters.

A framed picture clatters free -- of a smiling, leather-jacketed Caroline in the arms of the MUSICIAN she encountered in the club, surrounded by bandmates and equipment.

She tosses it brusquely aside.

INT. APT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The dusty record labeled August 24, 1909 -- New Iberia Parish -- Conjure of Sacrifice hits the turntable.

Caroline lowers the needle.

SCRATCHES and POPS. Heavy background noise, as if an amateur -- possibly outdoor -- recording. Then a fuzzy DRUMBEAT and CLAPPING. RATTLING from a sand-filled gourd, a WASHBOARD and then a woman's soulful HUMMING--

--which soon takes on the rhythms of an old Negro spiritual--

FEMALE SINGER (ON RECORD)

Lawdy lawd, come to free my soul--

GROUP CHORUS (ON RECORD)

Lawdy lawd, come to free my soul--

SINGER

Lawdy lawd, let the good times roll--

CHORUS

Lawdy lawd, let the good times roll--

SINGER

Rattlesnake, rattlesnake, shed that skin--

SF

CHORUS

Rattlesnake, rattlesnake, shed that
skin--

SINGER

Split me open, let the lawd roll in--

CHORUS

Split me open, let the lawd roll in--

The call-and-response picks up the pace--

SINGER AND CHORUS

Rolllllll on! Rolllllll on! Rolllllll
on! Rolllllll on! Roll! Roll! Roll!
Roll! Roll! Roll! Roll! Roll!

As the shouts of "Roll" hit like drum-strikes, a MAN's guttural CHANTING begins -- low and steady, building ominously, words unintelligible. And a WOMAN's wordless SONG -- an open wail, changing wildly in pitch and volume.

Caroline stares at the spinning record, stepping closer, trying to make out the CHANT... as the SONG builds into a SHRIEK -- someone screaming? -- and then goes SILENT...

Caroline hovers, breathless.

Only the MUSIC continues...the rattling, lurking beat...

And now Caroline turns...to see Jill in the front door, with her handsome African-American DATE. Speechless.

Caroline slaps the record needle, shutting it off.

CAROLINE

Hey, didn't hear you come in. I was,
uh...just playing some music.

EXT. FIRE ESCAPE - NIGHT

Caroline and Jill sit alone, feet dangling. Through the window, Jill's date waits patiently. Jill holds the record:

CAROLINE

The wife says it's been locked up the
whole time they've lived there. Maybe
that's true, maybe that's bullshit,
but either way--

JILL

You found yourself a hoodoo room.

CAROLINE

A what?

JILL

You know what hoodoo is?

CAROLINE

I know what voodoo is.

JILL

Voodoo's a religion, slaves brought it from Africa. Hoodoo's different -- it started here in the South. It's like a homegrown version.

CAROLINE

How's it different?

JILL

More secular. It's less about God and more about magic. And more popular with you whites. You Cock Asians.

Jill hands the record back, smiling wryly.

CAROLINE

Magic.

JILL

Spells, conjures...my aunt Lola's into it. She shops at this place in the Quarter--

CAROLINE

She believes in it?

JILL

She keeps a recipe book. Y'know, get your man back, make your man leave -- that stuff always sells.

CAROLINE

She stick the pins in the dolls?

JILL

I think that's only on TV. She mostly lights candles and sprinkles powder and gives you dirty looks.

CAROLINE

Does she get a lot of men that way?

JILL

She dates women now.

Jill's date RAPS on the window, motions to his watch. Jill blows him a kiss -- just a sec.

JILL

Me, of course, I'm blessed with natural irresistability.

Caroline doesn't smile. Jill sees she's still bothered.

JILL

Look. You said the house had a history, right? I wouldn't worry about it -- hoodoo magic's pretty harmless.

CAROLINE

Harmless how?

It's like all that mumbo jumbo.
(shrugs)
It can't hurt you if you don't believe.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Late. Ben lies sleeping as Caroline checks in on him. She steps to his side and adjusts his blanket.

The old man twitches slightly, shuddering. His mouth moves but he remains asleep. Caroline sadly strokes his hand...

INT. UPPER HALL

Reluctantly, she re-locks his door with the skeleton key... and then looks to Violet's closed door.

INT. ATTIC

The door edges open, as a SHADOW falls upon the boxes and furniture...and then the covered mirrors in the corner.

It's Caroline. With a determined look in her eye.

INT. VIOLET'S ROOM - MORNING

Sun streams brightly. Violet's just dressed, bed made, as she empties a vase of dying flowers and exits--

INT. UPPER HALL

--crossing to unlock Ben's door, humming to herself--

INT. BEN'S ROOM

--as she opens it and GASPS. The vase drops and BREAKS.

REVERSE to see Ben in bed, staring at her with a wide, frightened gaze. But Violet's eyes are not on him.

They're on the MIRROR now hanging on his wall.

INT. FRONT FOYER

Violet hurtles downstairs, clutching the mirror. She hits the foyer and stops still--

--at the sight of ANOTHER MIRROR now hanging beside the door.

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM - MORNING

A POUNDING brings Caroline to the door. She's in her T-shirt, just out of bed -- as she opens to see--

VIOLET
I TOLD YOU ABOUT THE MIRRORS!

She's clutching three wall-mirrors, her eyes wild--

CAROLINE
I don't understand, what's--

VIOLET
This is not your house! There's order here! There's order in this house!

CAROLINE
What, I found 'em -- I needed one in my bathroom and--

VIOLET
I told you! You heard me! NO MIRRORS!

Violet storms off. Caroline allows a small smile.

INT. ATTIC - MOMENTS LATER

Violet puts the mirrors back in the corner, re-covering them with a dropcloth as Caroline enters behind her--

CAROLINE
I've seen the room.

Violet spins, tense.

VIOLET
What room?

CAROLINE

The room you say you've never seen.

She pulls the half-key from her pocket -- the broken metal bit that was wedged in the lock.

CAROLINE

It's not locked anymore.

Caroline starts for the warped door -- as Violet DARTS to defend it. Blocking the shelves with her body! Caroline stops still. A tense silence...

VIOLET

You don't know...you don't know what you've seen...

Her voice, for the first time, is scared. Caroline nods.

CAROLINE

No. You do.

EXT. BAYOU SWAMP - DAY

Spanish moss sways in the breeze, dangling from oak and cypress. Their twisted trunks soak in the duckweed waters.

VIOLET (O.S.)

You're not from the South, you won't understand.

CLOSE on Violet's face, beaten and resigned. She takes a long drag from a cigarette, flecks the ash away.

VIOLET

A room like that -- you don't throw those things away. It just brings trouble on you. Best to leave 'em where you find 'em.

(distant)

House is theirs as much as ours.

CAROLINE

The house is whose?

REVEAL they sit at opposite ends of the rusted canoe -- drifting -- in the waters just off the backyard. Ben is in the gardens, a wheelchair still-life.

Caroline has her arms folded, a skeptical inquisitor. Violet nods to the paddle in Caroline's lap, with annoyance--

VIOLET

I told you to row where he can't hear.

She nods in Ben's direction. Caroline paddles a bit...

CAROLINE

Whose things are in that room?

VIOLET

Back a hundred years ago...the banker that lived here, Thorpe was his name. Made his fortune cheating the poor, the way I heard it. It was him and his family and a couple of colored servants. Names of Mama Cecile and Papa Justify.

(beginning a tale)

What Thorpe didn't know was Justify was what people called a two-headed doctor. A conjure man. Cecile too. They believed in this sort of magic -- Southern magic --

CAROLINE

Hoodoo.

Violet looks up sharply. Nods.

VIOLET

That was their room.

FLASHCUT - PAPA JUSTIFY

BOOM! A black butler in 1910's-era suit and tails, PAPA JUSTIFY, 45, stares at us from a dark hall. He holds a flickering black candle. An ominous, unsmiling face.

FLASHCUT - MAMA CECILE

BOOM! A black maid, MAMA CECILE, 32, stares soullessly too, from the darkest depths. Holds another black candle.

BACK TO THE BAYOU

VIOLET

They were famous in the bayous; healed the sick, righted wrongs -- that's what the coloreds said anyway. To Thorpe, they were just the help. Cared for his house, cared for his kids -- what they did on their time was their business. Till, the story goes, one night there was a party...

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK (1912)

Vintage MOTORCARS fill the drive, as FOOTMEN escort PARTY GUESTS in black tie into the lit-up, elegant mansion.

VIOLET (V.O.)

It was the bank's anniversary and all the muckety-mucks came -- politicians, sugar barons, riverboat tycoons...

INT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE

The privileged CROWD mingles from room to room. A JAZZ BAND plays. Champagne flows. In the foyer, some GUESTS take their coats and bid farewell to the elegantly-dressed ROBERTSON THORPE, 40's, and his wife MADELEINE.

VIOLET (V.O.)

Well, there was drinking and dancing and a try at or two, I'm sure, and when came the time to say farewells, some guests wanted to say goodbye to Thorpe's children. But no one knew where they'd gone to. No one'd seen 'em for hours.

INT. UPPER HALL

Several drunken GUESTS stumble upstairs, calling "Martin" and "Grace." They're followed by Thorpe.

VIOLET (V.O.)

So they all made a game out of it. Searching the house for the children, full of hooch as they were. And then someone heard music...and voices...and shouting. From the attic.

Thorpe turns toward the white door at hall's end...

INT. ATTIC STAIRCASE

Thorpe charges up the spiral stairwell and slams into--

INT. ATTIC

FLASHCUTS: a PHONOGRAPH playing. Cracked, warped MIRRORS. BLACK CANDLES around the room's perimeter. Chalk CIRCLES. POWDERS and HAIR. WISHBONES jangling, casting shadows...

...on the innocent faces of redheaded MARTIN (9) and GRACE (7), sitting cross-legged, their eyes wide.

Beside them sit PAPA JUSTIFY and MAMA CECILE, in sweat-soaked underclothes and convulsing as if possessed.

VIOLET (V.O.)
The servants were up there with 'em.
They'd been teaching 'em how to
conjure up hoodoo.

Thorpe SNATCHES up his children -- but Justify and Cecile spasm on, eyes rolled back. Thorpe screams for help.

VIOLET (V.O.)
Well, the banker went mad. And his
guests were with him. Who knows how
many months it'd been going on.

INT. UPPER HALL/ATTIC

GUESTS come racing, piling upstairs as Thorpe's wife rushes little Martin and Grace away, teary and protesting--

VIOLET (V.O.)
All that money, all of them drinking.
They'd thought the party was over. It
was just getting started.

EXT. BACK GARDENS

A HANGMAN'S NOOSE goes over an oak branch. A MOB of guests piles out, carrying Papa Justify and Mama Cecile as prisoners. They struggle to no avail-- their hands are bound and they're dragged into boats.

Beneath a gnarled oak, tuxedoed GUESTS set two nooses around their necks. More guests haul on the rope. The two servants are strung up, jerking and twisting. The mob hurrahs.

Some WOMEN in gowns rush out with bottles of rum. Other GUESTS douse the hanging corpses, as a cummerbund is LIT...

In an upstairs window, teary Martin and Grace stare in horror. As the two reflected figures go up in FLAMES...

Until their mother steps into view and lowers the shade.

INT. BAYOU SWAMP - BACK TO PRESENT DAY

The same gnarled oak remains. Caroline stares up, from where their canoe floats right beneath it...

VIOLET
It was horrible. Rumors got out, but
no arrests. No trial. Money has a
way...

CAROLINE
What happened to the family?

VIOLET
Thorpe's bank went under. He shot his wife to death, then shot himself. People said it was the servants' revenge. The children stayed to '62.

CAROLINE
They stayed here?

VIOLET
We bought it from 'em. All grown by then -- strange people. Let the place fall apart around 'em -- it's us who fixed it up. And we never asked 'em why a room was blocked off -- in the attic. Or why they had no mirrors.

Caroline stares sharply. Violet surveys the house...

VIOLET
But we know now.

CAROLINE
You know what?

VIOLET
You see 'em now...in the mirrors.

CAROLINE
Who...

VIOLET
The servants. Ever since my husband went into their room.

FLASHCUT - THE WARPED DOOR

BOOM! The door in the attic, unblocked. Beckoning.

FLASHCUT - PAPA JUSTIFY AND MAMA CECILE

BOOM! Staring at us from a MIRROR's reflection. With a curtain of FLAMES burning behind them.

BACK TO SCENE

Caroline blinks, incredulous. Violet looks to Ben's lonely perch on shore. A quiet tremble:

VIOLET
I've read some hoodoo books. They say
putting brick dust down keeps harm
away. I've put it everywhere--

CAROLINE
Mrs. Devereaux--

VIOLET
--around the house, around my bed--

CAROLINE
Mrs. Devereaux! For God's sake!

Violet glances up like a wayward child, then into her lap--

VIOLET
I don't expect you to believe me.

CAROLINE
You don't. You don't expect me to
believe that you see ghosts in your
mirrors.

VIOLET
Not till you see them too.
(beat)
Or see their light on. Or hear
whispers up there...

CAROLINE
Your husband had a stroke.

Violet's gaze holds. She crushes her dying cigarette.

VIOLET
When we moved in and saw that room, we
swore we'd never touch it. Well, a
month ago Ben went in there. I don't
know what he wanted, I don't know what
he did. But that's how I found him.
(scared)
They're here now. And whatever they
did to him...I won't let 'em do it to
me.

There. She's said it. She won't meet Caroline's eyes, but
looks to her husband with infinite sadness...

VIOLET
And now you'll leave like all the
rest.

And off Caroline's look...

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - YARD - DAY

A sprinkled trail of RED BRICK DUST meanders the weeds along the property line. Caroline tracks it to where it crosses the gated driveway. She kneels and swipes a red finger...

INT. GARDEN SHED - DAY

A mower, bags of fertilizer and tools. Caroline kneels at a homemade trough of pulverized BRICK DUST. Beside it, a sledgehammer and a stack of bricks labeled "Botanica Bricks -- Blessed for Spiritual Uses." She shakes her head:

CAROLINE
Gotta love the South...

INT. UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - DAY

Ben stares into space as Caroline's arms reach under and lift his helpless body into the bathtub.

CAROLINE
C'mon, here we go. Nice and easy.
You'll feel lots better after.

She gets his legs in, swings him around and lowers him gently. She senses a presence and turns--

--to see Violet behind her, with a lined face and a grateful smile.

VIOLET
Thank you, Caroline. For
understanding...our house.

Caroline nods. Violet moves on. Caroline splashes water on Ben's chest and starts soaping his arms--

CAROLINE
You married a headcase, y'know that?
She thinks you got hexed in that attic
by ghosts. Nice, huh? You had the
stroke and she's the one with the
messed-up head.

She drops the soap, which splashes WATER into her face. Soap stings one of her eyes--

CAROLINE
Ahh--

--and she goes to the sink to flush it with cold water. She rifles her purse for her COMPACT, checking her reddened eye in reflection. To Ben:

CAROLINE

She says they show up in your mirrors.
Ghosts in the mirrors...

She sets the compact on the sink's edge, and as she turns back...it falls off. Hits the floor and SNAPS SHUT.

Caroline picks it up...and then sees Ben staring at it. His eyes are wide, rapt. She frowns, studies him--

--and then places the compact on the far ledge of the tub. Ben's eyes follow it as if it's a small predator.

Intrigued, Caroline slides it closer -- along the tub's edge. Closer...closer...closer...

...and as she brings it nearer to him, his entire body starts TREMBLING, eyes scared, water rippling and splashing as if he wants to run but can't. She brings it toward his face--

--and snaps it open so he can see the MIRROR--

--and suddenly Ben erupts with CONVULSIONS! Eyes panicked, he FLAILS his whole body and MOANS, SPLASHING water everywhere. An arm JERKS out and sends the compact flying--

CAROLINE

Ben, stop! I was just kidding--

She tries to calm him, but he keeps moaning. Caroline darts to shut the bathroom door, hoping Violet can't hear -- and then collapses at the tub, holding Ben's shoulders...

CAROLINE

Shh, shh, I didn't mean to scare you.
I'm sorry, Ben. I'm so sorry...

...until he finally calms and quiets. Caroline regards the fallen mirror and her helpless patient...

CAROLINE

You see them too...

INT. NEW ORLEANS HOSPITAL - DAY

Jill wears a nurse's uniform, checking the chart of a PATIENT as she exits his room, into a hospital hall--

CAROLINE (O.S.)

You said the whole thing's about believing it, right?

She spins, surprised to see her roommate standing there--

JILL

Hi, what are you--

CAROLINE

The hoodoo thing. You said it's like hypnotism. When it works, it's 'cause the person believes it works.

JILL

Cary, I'm working here--

CAROLINE

Hear me out. If you thought some kind of magic made you sick, you'd believe in a magic cure, right? Even though it's total bullshit -- because you believe, y'know, mind over matter, it might actually help you, right?

Jill narrows her eyes, suddenly suspicious.

JILL

What do you mean by a "cure"?

INT. FRENCH QUARTER BOTANICA - DAY

Shelves are stacked with JARS and BIALS: all manner of herbs and extracts. Chicken heads, snake skins and murky mysteries preserved in fluid are on display.

TOUR DIRECTOR (O.S.)

Okay, ladies and gentlemen, let's wrap things up and make your purchases. The bus leaves in five minutes sharp. Next stop's the grave of Marie Laveau herself!

REVEAL a cramped store with pre-packaged spiritualist paraphernalia, filled with guidebook-toting TOURISTS...as Jill leads Caroline in. They edge past a Midwestern Housewife examining a bug-eyed African tribal figurine -- as Caroline shoots Jill a skeptical look.

JILL

Not here.

INT. BACK OF BOTANICA

Jill and Caroline push through a BEADED CURTAIN to find themselves in a cluttered inventory corridor, where an uneven STAIRCASE leads upward. Ominous.

JILL

There.

SF

INT. UPSTAIRS STOREROOM

The chatter of tourists fades as Caroline -- alone -- enters a dusty storeroom, stepping over a line of RED DUST. Wall-to-wall shelves -- boxes of roots, bones, powders -- but unlike downstairs, it's all unlabeled and unpackaged.

MAMA CYNTHIA, a heavysset dark-skinned Creole in her 40's, sits at a counter. A BOY nearby does homework. Music on a radio in French, as the woman studies Caroline dully:

MAMA CYNTHIA

Help you find something, child?

Caroline surveys the room.

CAROLINE

The dust, at the door. How's it work?

MAMA CYNTHIA

You lay line down, nobody who means you harm can cross it. It's how you tell your friends from your enemies.

(regards her)

You want the store downstairs, child.

CAROLINE

No, I...

She approaches the counter, gathering her bravado:

CAROLINE

Say I knew someone, who thought he'd been -- whatever you call it, put under a spell--

MAMA CYNTHIA

Fixed.

CAROLINE

Right. And if there's a fixed... there'd be an unfixed?

MAMA CYNTHIA

(her gaze softens)

Someone been conjuring on you, child?

CAROLINE

No, it's not for me...I just...I'm just trying to help someone who believes in...this stuff...

Mama Cynthia nods sagely. Motions for her to sit:

MAMA CYNTHIA

Tell me.

CAROLINE

He can't speak. Or move. He had a stroke but he doesn't think he did. He -- he seems to think someone made him that way.

MAMA CYNTHIA

You want to know what happened to him.

CAROLINE

Yes.

MAMA CYNTHIA

You want him to tell you.

CAROLINE

If it were possible.

MAMA CYNTHIA

Would you be here if you thought otherwise?

CAROLINE

What I think has nothing to do with it.

The woman muses, then grabs a cigar box and shuffles down an aisle, picking out crushed herbs, a silk sachet and a white candle. Humming to herself.

Caroline smiles at the Creole Boy. He doesn't smile back. Unnerved, she gets up to pursue Mama Cynthia--

--who opens a Chinese Cabinet of tiny rolls of parchment. She picks one out, holds it up. Adds it to the cigar box.

MAMA CYNTHIA

When I tell you what you have to do, you need to do it exactly the way I tell you. Every step and every word. Exactly -- or I'm not responsible. No one on this earth's responsible. Save for you, child. You understand?

Caroline nods.

CAROLINE

And what happens then?

Mama Cynthia smiles, gleaming gold-capped teeth.

MAMA CYNTHIA

And then you pay me.

EXT. FRENCH QUARTER BOTANICA - DAY

The tour bus pulls away as Caroline exits, cigar box in hand, to meet up with Jill, waiting on a bench outside.

JILL

You bought something. Holy shit, you bought something.

CAROLINE

Let's go.

She heads off across the street, as Jill follows--

JILL

What the hell's happened to you--

CAROLINE

Come on. Don't tell me there's nothing in medical literature about psychosomatic treatments.

JILL

Okay, doctor. State doctor.

CAROLINE

How much of a patient's recovery depends on his believing he can?

JILL

Recovery? What recovery? You work for a hospice! Your job is to help this guy die!

She stops, Caroline doesn't. No longer amused:

JILL

He's not your dad, Cary. Not this one, the last one or the one before.

Now Caroline stops. Spins with a hurt stare.

CAROLINE

All I want is to help somebody. Why do you have to make it like it's something for me.

JILL

I'm sorry.

CAROLINE
Go to hell, Jill.

JILL
Hey, I said I'm--

CAROLINE
Go to hell. But thanks for helping.
Sorry nothing was in it for you.

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - DUSK

THUNDER rolls as Caroline's Civic returns, under the oaks' ominous shadows. Luke's Bronco is there...

INT. LIVING ROOM - DUSK

Caroline slips by with two grocery bags and her cigar box -- passing a doorway where Violet sits with Luke, who's directing her signature on several papers:

LUKE
Once for the power of attorney, again for your living will, and that one's the big basic whatchamacallit--

VIOLET
I plan to read these, as you know. See that you haven't slipped in any gifts for yourself.

LUKE
It's just as you wanted it, Mrs. Devereaux. To the letter.

INT. KITCHEN

Caroline sets the hoodoo cigar box down, hurriedly unpacking groceries. As her back's turned for a moment--

LUKE
Thought you were gonna call me.

She spins to see Luke in the doorway. A hushed voice:

LUKE
About Ben.

CAROLINE
It was nothing.

LUKE
Oh. Oh, okay.

Caroline nods, glancing to the cigar box left on the counter. It's right beside him -- within his reach.

LUKE

You mean nothing like when you touch him and he holds on like crazy? Or nothing like how he stops the second she walks in? You mean nothing like that?

Caroline regards him, surprised.

LUKE

Just 'cause justice is blind doesn't mean lawyers are.

(beat)

But it's nothing, you're saying. I can forget about that weirdness and just do my job from now on, you're saying.

He tries a smile, ~~hoping for~~ reassurance.

CAROLINE

I don't know.

LUKE

Will you know?

VIOLET (O.S.)

You may witness a signature now, Mr. Marshall! Mr. Marshall?!

LUKE

I was hired to help him, just like you. If there's something I should be doing...please tell me.

His voice is genuine; Caroline nods. And then Luke notices the cigar box. He lifts it, with a shake of his head--

LUKE

Christ. That woman's gonna smoke herself into the grave.

Caroline hitches her breath, but he puts it down, unopened. And takes his leave.

INT. CAROLINE'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Shadowy. THUNDER rolls. A HOT FAUCET steams as Caroline stealthily fills a large bowl. Checking over her shoulder.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Violet sleeps in a chair, some quilting on her lap, a RADIO on. A SHADOW passes silently, carrying a tray...

RADIO VOICE (O.S.)

...with forecasters calling for up to a foot of rain in coastal areas as the storm makes its way across the Delta starting overnight...

INT. UPPER LANDING/HALL

Caroline mounts the stairs, with a bowl of steaming water and the hoodoo cigar box. She reaches the landing...

...and she walks on, ANGLE DRIFTS toward the attic door...

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ben sits in near-darkness, his phonograph playing soft BLUES. A key sounds in his lock. His eyes shift.

CAROLINE

Hi, Ben.

She slips in, sets her tray down... and re-locks the door. Ben's eyes shift to the tray. Soft THUNDER rumbles.

CAROLINE

I want to show you something... that'll be our secret, okay? You and me.

Ben tremors slightly. His eyes meet hers.

CAROLINE

Violet says you didn't have a stroke up in the attic. She says something made you this way. With a spell. Is that what she told you? Is that what you believe?

Caroline sets the tray on the bedside table. She adds the sachets of herbs to the water...

CAROLINE

Well, I know a spell too, Ben.

She circles Ben's bed with the bowl, trickling a spatter-line across the floor. Ben's eyes widen.

CAROLINE

I know a spell that makes you better.

She brings the bowl back to the table, lights and floats the white candle. Then takes Ben's bedsheet; tears a swatch:

CAROLINE

And all you have to do is believe it.

By flickering candlelight, Caroline soaks the cloth, and touches it to the crown of Ben's head. She unrolls the scrap of parchment...and takes a deep embarrassed breath:

CAROLINE

(feeling stupid)

Babbling brook, babbling brook, send back this poor tongue you took.

Ben trembles, wide-eyed. Warm water trickles his face. Soft THUNDER outside. She touches the cloth to his forehead:

CAROLINE

(a little stronger)

Babbling brook, babbling brook, send back this poor tongue you took.

Water trickles. More soft THUNDER. His shaking stare remains. Caroline sighs but summons her strongest voice yet as she touches the cloth to his lips--

CAROLINE

Babbling brook, babbling brook, send back this poor tongue you took!

A SUDDEN THUNDERCLAP sounds outside -- Caroline jumps, spins--
--as Ben gives a CHOKED CRY, a rasp of a speech--

BEN

Cccc...cccc...ccc...

Caroline jerks back, shocked.

BEN

Cccc...cccara...ccarra...

(sputtering)

CccCaroline...

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME

ANGLE RUSHES across the room...to Violet. As if awakened.

INT. BEN'S ROOM

BEN

Cccaroline, hhh...hnh...

CAROLINE
(astonished)
It's all in your head...

BEN
Hehhh...hehhpp...

CAROLINE
Talk, Ben, talk to me. Keep talking--

BEN
Hehhppme...hehhppme...

CAROLINE
Help you how? How, Ben?!

Ben's desperately intense, mouth struggling to say--

BEN
Ggggmeoutofhere--

VIOLET (O.S.)
CAROLINE?!

There's a POUNDING on the door. Caroline spins--

VIOLET (O.S.)
CAROLINE, ARE YOU IN THERE?!

--and Ben jerks in bed, arms spasming in fright--

BEN
Gggmeotofere! Ggmeotofere! Now, now,
gggmeotofere!!!

--knocking the water bowl off the table! It SPILLS to the floor, DOUSING the floating candle out! And the second it goes out, Ben's choked silent!

CAROLINE
No -- NO!
(to the door)
Just a second, I'm here, one second--

VIOLET (O.S.)
WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH HIM?!

Ben SPASMS again, flailing and falling off the bed. Caroline tries to catch him but he collapses--

CAROLINE
Ben, why? Get you out of here why?!

VIOLET (O.S.)
CAROLINE, OPEN THIS DOOR!

CAROLINE
ONE SECOND!

She cradles Ben's head -- his mouth is struggling but no words come. A KEY is rattling in the lock.

CAROLINE
I'll help you, I promise -- just talk to me. What happened in that attic? What're you afraid of? Tell me what you're afraid of!

He raises a shaking arm...struggling higher and higher...

...as the lock turns and Violet's silhouette fills the doorway. To see Ben's condemning finger pointed...at her.

VIOLET
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE!

Caroline's frozen. Glances to the spilled water. The doused candle. Violet charges in--

VIOLET
What is this?!

CAROLINE
He...he was crawling again...in his sleep. He fell. I brought water...

VIOLET
Get away from him!

She shoves her aside, hauling Ben back into bed. He stops protesting, goes limp and passive in her arms--

--as Caroline steps back, snatching up the spilt bowl, the parchment and candle. Violet strokes Ben's face, unaware--

VIOLET
It's all right now. I'm here, it's all right. Need your remedies, don't you. Need to sleep...

Caroline edges for the door, trying to rub out traces of the "water circle" as she goes. Violet turns her way:

VIOLET
You were talking to him?

CAROLINE

I was just...telling him a story. To settle him down.

VIOLET

What kind of story?

CAROLINE

Just a story. No ghosts.

Violet studies her stare.

VIOLET

That'll be all for tonight, I think.

CAROLINE

I'll come back to clean the room--

VIOLET

It's all right. Thank you.

(nods to door)

That'll be all.

She remains at her husband's side, holding his hand. But Caroline sees only Ben's frightened eyes...

INT. UPPER HALL

She backs away, clutching her empty bowl...as there's the sound of a LOCKING KEY.

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM - NIGHT

CLICK! As Caroline locks her own room's door.

She opens her closet, digs out her suitcase. Inside is the "Conjure of Sacrifice" record she stole from the attic room. She adds the candle and parchment, re-closets it.

Then hears faint phonograph ZYDECO resume upstairs. As RAIN patters the window outside. Storm's here.

INT. LOWER HALL - NIGHT

Silent. Empty. Darkness. A strange ANGLE moves toward Caroline's door. It seems to float the hallway...closing fast...and then drifting INSIDE THE KEYHOLE...

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM

...to where Caroline sleeps. Tangled in sheets, tossing in discomfort. As ANGLE closes TIGHT ON HER FACE...

FLASHCUT - PAPA JUSTIFY

BOOM! The black butler staring, with his black candle.

BACK TO CAROLINE

twisting fitfully, as if seeing the image in her dreams...

FLASHCUT - MAMA CECILE

BOOM! The black maid staring, with her black candle.

FLASHCUT - THE WARPED DOOR

In the attic, the door THUMPS as if struck from behind. No shelves block it. Mirrors hang on either side, SHIVERING.

BACK TO CAROLINE

turning again, shoving the sheets off...

FLASHCUT - THE REDHEADED CHILDREN

From the 1912 lynching, burning at the window, with the reflected FLAMING CORPSES, as their mother draws the shade.

FLASHCUT - THE WARPED DOOR

Getting BATTERED from behind, straining at its hinges, making the hanging mirrors SWAY. THUMP...THUMP...THUMP...

A PAIR OF SCISSORS

SNIPS closed in darkness, BLADES SLICING TOGETHER--

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM

As Caroline wakes with a GASP, bolting up in bed. She grabs sheets, getting her bearings. She collapses back, turns over to check the windowsill clock, beside her compact--

--and sees a SHADOWY SHAPE in the compact's mirror -- a figure pulling her bedroom door shut!

Caroline spins -- the door now closed. She leaps from bed, tries the knob. It's locked. Just like she left it.

INT. LOWER HALL

A key RATTLES as Caroline jerks open her door -- to see an empty hall.

CAROLINE
Mrs. Devereaux?

Just darkness and silence.

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM

She shuts and re-locks her door. Flips on the light and surveys the room. Nothing seems amiss.

She pulls an end table to block the door, then looks to the compact in which she saw the shadowy movement. She strides over...and snaps it resoundingly shut.

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - MORNING

A SCATTERING OF BRICK DUST. Violet's in a raincoat, in a steady rain, humming privately as she shakes a fresh trail of the red powder around the perimeter of the yard.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Caroline watches from a window, arms folded. Ben's on the sunporch, in his chair, eyes vacant once more...

INT. ATTIC - MORNING

The stairwell door opens, casting dim light on the shelf-blocked warped door. Rain PATTERS the roof.

Caroline marches in and grabs an end of the bookshelf. She strains, PULLING it aside, scraping the floor, but she doesn't care. The warped door creaks exposed.

She hesitates a beat. Then inserts the skeleton key.

INT. HOODOO ROOM

Caroline warily re-enters to see everything as she left it... as she lifts a CAMERA and starts taking pictures.

And as FLASHES go off, one after another...ANGLE CREEPS TOWARD the stack of MIRRORS in the attic, toward an uncovered corner, to spy her in reflection...

EXT. HOUSE - FRONT STEPS - DAY

Caroline slips out, in a raincoat -- only to see Violet on the front veranda, in a rocking chair. Staring off...

VIOLET

All that rain. The way it hits our trees like that. The sound it makes. He loves that. Or a warm brandy. The way heat ripples off a summer road. Those things are him.

She studies the wisping smoke of her cigarette...

VIOLET

He had years left. Good years.

Caroline edges toward the steps, unsure how to respond:

CAROLINE

I...have to pick up some shopping...in town. I've got your list. I'll--

VIOLET

Whatever you were doing...last night. I know you were only trying to help.

CAROLINE

I was, Mrs. Devereaux.

VIOLET

What you were doing. Whatever it was.

Violet looks up, with a grain and tired smile.

VIOLET

Hurry home.

EXT. PARISH ROAD/INT. CIVIC - DAY

Raining. Caroline speeds the road, cell phone to her ear...as she locates Luke's business card.

INT. LUKE'S OFFICE - DAY

PICTURES of the hoodoo room are dealt down on a desk. The faceless paintings. The jars of teeth and hair. The "Conjure Book of Uncle Justify and Blessed Teachings."

CAROLINE

It's in the attic. For conjures and hexes and spells. They're in books and on records. They believe in this, both of them--

REVEAL Luke's office, a disorganized room in an old downtown law firm. Luke, in suit and tie, is at his desk. He studies the photos; Caroline waits, on edge.

LUKE

Well, I see your cause for concern... but my family's superstitious too. We're called Baptists.

CAROLINE

This is different.

LUKE

Why? 'Cause it hasn't made it up to Jersey? It's harmless. Local color. It's New Orleans--

CAROLINE

You said yourself you were worried about him.

LUKE

Well now I'm worried about you.

There's a KNOCK on Luke's door, as a timid SECRETARY enters--

SECRETARY

Mr. Marshall, Mr. Tennary wants to know if you've found those files yet. Also, Mr. Macombe has asked to see you in Mr. Dodd's office--

Luke presses hands to his temples, shuts his eyes. Overload. He waves a dismissive hand. The secretary retreats.

LUKE

Estate law, I thought. That sounds good. How hard can that be.

CAROLINE

When did you first meet the Devereauxs?

LUKE

A couple weeks before he had his stroke. They wanted a lawyer to update their wills.

CAROLINE

Was it his idea or her idea?

LUKE

What do you mean?

CAROLINE

Did it ever seem like she knew something was going to happen to him?

LUKE

How, from her tarot cards in the attic? From a visitation in her sleep? What's it matter?

He throws up his hands in frustration, scattering Caroline's photos. Then calms, sits back, regrets it.

LUKE

This is not what I was hoping for when
I gave you my number.

He tries a smile. Caroline doesn't return it.

CAROLINE

I want to know why the last caregiver
quit.

INT. RURAL NURSING HOME - DAY

A POV tracks a faded hall, glimpsing elderly black RESIDENTS
through the open doorways of shabby rooms. Most lie in bed,
watching TV game shows or the ceiling.

In a final room, a weary black volunteer, HALLIE (20's), is
at the bedside of an emaciated WOMAN. Hallie's massaging the
woman's hands, whispering to her--

HEAD NURSE (O.S.)

Hallie?

She looks up, sees an older NURSE with Caroline and Luke.

HEAD NURSE

Some folks wanting a word.

EXT. NURSING HOME BACKYARD - DAY

Still raining. A brown-grass lot. Caroline and Luke sit
with Hallie under a ratty awning, as she smokes...

HALLIE

Ever hold someone's hand while they
died, Mr. Marshall? Nuh-uh. What's
dying to you. I ain't gotta give my
reasons to you.

She stares Luke down, challenging. Then to Caroline:

HALLIE

How is he?

CAROLINE

He's hurting. He's been trying to
tell me.

Hallie studies her as she takes a drag. Offers the pack.

CAROLINE

I don't smoke.

HALLIE

You a superstitious person, Caroline?

CAROLINE

No. Not particularly.

HALLIE

I told my mama where I was workin', she said nothing good never happened there. Said the last folks who owned it went crazy. Rich folks -- brother and sister. Blew all their money and sold the place. Then the sister had a heart attack, they locked the brother in a padded room.

LUKE

What, because of the house?

Hallie ignores him, stays focused on Caroline:

HALLIE

All I know is that old woman's got her hands in it no.

CAROLINE

Do you know about the attic?

HALLIE

She said they shut it up when they moved in.

CAROLINE

Do you know about the mirrors?

HALLIE

She said you see the servants there.

CAROLINE

She told you too?

HALLIE

May be their room and their conjures. But ain't no ghosts put no spell on her husband. She did.

Caroline wavers at Hallie's conviction:

CAROLINE

You really believe that?

HALLIE

You don't?

LUKE
 (throws up his hands)
 I am not here. This is not happening.

CAROLINE
 But...why would she?

HALLIE
 I think she found something in that
 attic. And she's trying to use it.

LUKE
 I am not hearing this!

He leaves the table, utterly frustrated. Left alone, Hallie
 meets Caroline's eyes. Caroline swallows.

CAROLINE
 I heard it can't hurt you. It can't
 hurt you if you don't believe.

HALLIE
 Then I suggest you leave that house
 before you do.

EXT. BAYOU COUNTRY - DAY

RAIN POURS harder as Caroline dares, with Luke beside--

LUKE
 For God's sake, were you buying that
 stuff?

CAROLINE
 It doesn't matter if I'm buying it.
 He's buying it.

LUKE
 So what? You're gonna take him away
 from his wife? From his home?
 Because somehow you know what he
 wants?

CAROLINE
 You tell me why everybody knows a
 ghost story about that house.

LUKE
 Because I-don't-know. What do you
 mean everybody? Who's everybody?

CAROLINE
 You want to see?
 (a stern look)
 You'll see.

--as she suddenly brakes hard and swerves another way.

EXT. RAMSHACKLE GAS STATION - DAY

Still RAINING as Caroline pounds on its familiar door. A "Closed" sign hangs. Luke's beside her--

CAROLINE
 See the line across the doorway? It's brick dust. Hoodoo. Keeps your enemies from coming across. See the wishbones hanging? Let's ask these people about that house and see what they have to say.

She pounds again. No response from inside.

LUKE
 Sign says closed, Caroline.

Caroline stops. Faces him.

CAROLINE
 This stuff's got a hold on people out here. It doesn't matter if it's not real. It's real to them--

LUKE
 So why's that mean Ben's in danger?

Caroline has no answer...as she suddenly stops still. There's MUSIC coming from nearby. Low but building. A kind of DRUMBEAT CHANT. Similar to one we've heard before...

LUKE
 What -- what's wrong...

Caroline grabs Luke's hand and pulls him around the side of the store. There's a low-slung HOUSE on the back of the lot: torn screen door, laundry hanging.

EXT. RURAL HOUSE

Rain pours down as they approach. The MUSIC's coming from inside. Another ominous call-and-response...

SINGER AND CHORUS
 Heal the spirit from the sickness...
 Heal the spirit from the sickness...
 (MORE)

SF

SINGER AND CHORUS (CONT'D)

Cast it out if you be strong...
Cast it out if you be strong...

Caroline creeps closer, seeing RED DUST around the house.
There's a baby CRYING inside; the same WAIL as before.
SHADOWS of figures behind a curtained window...

LUKE

What are you doing?

CAROLINE

The music...it's not just music...

As the music's DRUMBEAT builds, the baby's CRIES intensify,
now a steady SHRIEK...as through the curtain, a BABY's
silhouette is raised into view--

CAROLINE

It's for a spell--

--and Caroline races ahead, opening the screen door and--

LUKE

Caroline, wait!

INT. RURAL HOUSE

--storming into the candlelit living room's wild tableau: a
young CREOLE HUSBAND and WIFE, 20's, in nightclothes. The
wife's hands are slathered with ointment. The husband holds
the crying BABY over a basin of salted water. The baby's
body is covered in SORES...from chicken pox.

What seemed like some nightmarish ritual is just two parents
trying to comfort their child.

Caroline strides in and stops short. So does Luke. The
couple's surprised, but they've been up all night. Worn out,
they just stand there and stare.

CREOLE HUSBAND

She's got the chicken pox.

Caroline surveys the room -- as Luke pulls her back--

LUKE

Sorry, we -- she heard it crying, she
thought -- sorry, really, sorry for
troubling you. We shouldn't have--

--but Caroline doesn't budge. Eyes on their turntable:

CAROLINE

Where'd you get that record.

EXT. FLOATING BAYOU SHACK - DUSK

An ominous shack sits atop a murky patch of swamp, deep in the bayous. A post-and-plank footpath navigates the thicket of trees. Rain continues to pour.

Caroline's Civic reaches the end of an overgrown dirt road. She and Luke regard the floating shack.

LUKE

Mama raised a gentleman.
(smiles weakly)
After you.

INT. SHACK - DUSK

Caroline and Luke step inside, off the tiny porch. Bones, skulls and dried roots hang. It's a ratty home and a hoodoo supply store all in one. Piles of books; several caged ferrets. The walls are bare boards; the roof leaks.

A decrepit African-American BAYOU WOMAN, 90's, sits in a rocking chair, sewing a gris-gris. Facing away.

CAROLINE

Ma'am? We were told you loan records.
A certain...kind of record.

The woman keeps rocking. Rain drips around her.

BAYOU WOMAN

Doan loan nuthin' to no one here.

CAROLINE

What if we had one to ask you about?
To...to offer you--

BAYOU WOMAN

Wouldn't want it.

Caroline surveys, frustrated; then has a thought--

CAROLINE

What if it was made by a man named
Justify?

The Bayou Woman stops rocking. And turns to reveal she's BLIND. Wizened face, dirty dress, cracked dark glasses.

BAYOU WOMAN

Who else is in here?

LUKE

I am.

SF

BAYOU WOMAN
How you know that name?

CAROLINE
How do you?

BAYOU WOMAN
That's the most powerful conjurer who
ever done lived. The legend of
Terrebone Parish. Some say his spells
still hidden there.

CAROLINE
Hidden where?

BAYOU WOMAN
Big ol' house. Hoodoo folks round
here try to get their hands on it --
long time ago. But some young couple
outta Georgia bought it up. Prob'ly
no idea what's hid inside.

CAROLINE
Caroline--

He gestures to a crate of records. Caroline rifles through
them; labels like "Broken-Heart Conjure," "Money-Come
Conjure", all recorded in the 1910's and 1920's.

BAYOU WOMAN
Oh, records, you said. I hope I may
loan a few.

The woman weakly rises, fumbles closer to do business--

CAROLINE
How about a record called the Conjure
of Sacrifice?

The woman's face goes stone. Her hands shake as she feels
her way closer to them--

BAYOU WOMAN
What'd you say?

CAROLINE
That's the one we have.

The Bayou Woman's breathing sounds louder, accelerated...and
then relaxes. Shakes her head with a smile:

BAYOU WOMAN
You're funning with me. You had that,
you wouldn't say so. No, no.

CAROLINE

You know it.

BAYOU WOMAN

That's the greatest conjure on God's green earth. They say Justify done discovered it, but he got kilt 'fore he could use it. Him and his poor wife both. It han't never been found.

LUKE

What's so special about it?

BAYOU WOMAN

Keeps you from dying, that's what.

Caroline stares at her.

BAYOU WOMAN

Not forever, but for awhile.

(then, nervous)

Who else is in here? There someone else in here with you?

CAROLINE

It keeps you from dying, how...

BAYOU WOMAN

You has to sacrifice a person and take the years that they have left.

LUKE

Wait, sacrifice as in human sacrifice?

BAYOU WOMAN

You get what they had coming. And it's longer life for you.

CAROLINE

That's what the record does? Helps you kill someone?!

The Bayou Woman's toothless smile goes grim...as a sickening feeling again overtakes her.

BAYOU WOMAN

You han't found it. No, no. You wouldn't tell if you'd found it...

She steps forward, arms feeling out. Caroline and Luke pull back, as she sweeps her arms from side to side--

BAYOU WOMAN

You han't found no record of
Justify's. Tell me that you HAN'T!

She lunges out, as Caroline skips aside -- sending the Woman
crashing into boxes of roots--

LUKE

We're going -- get out, go--

He shoves Caroline toward the door, shaking the Woman off as
she flails for his legs.

BAYOU WOMAN

No! I'm just a poor old nuthin'!
Tell me you han't found it. I'll
trade you anything! ANYTHING!

EXT. FLOATING BAYOU SHACK

Caroline and Luke hurry across the bayou footpath, leaving
the poor woman's cries behind.

EXT. MUDDY ROAD - NIGHT

The rain pounds down as they reach the Civic--

CAROLINE

I've got to get back! She's all alone
with him--

LUKE

Hang on, wouldya wait -- just for one
goddamn second?!

He grabs her shoulders, resists her attempt to fend him off.
They meet eyes in the downpour. Luke lets go.

LUKE

You got me scared now.

CAROLINE

If I found proof she means to harm him
-- would I have grounds to get him out
of that house?

LUKE

All you have is crazy stories--

CAROLINE

If I found proof, would you stand by
me? Would you stand by me?

They search each other's eyes.

LUKE
It's gotta be proof.

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - NIGHT

RAIN continues, relentless now, with huge PUDDLES OF STANDING WATER in the yard as Caroline returns...

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

THUNDER rumbles as RAIN sheets the windows. Violet stands by Ben's wheelchair, facing away. The front door SHOTS o.s.

CAROLINE (O.S.)
Mrs. Devereaux? I'm home!

Violet doesn't look up -- her eyes on Ben. A SNIP-SNIP of scissors. She's cutting his hair.

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM

Caroline scampers in, drenched. She locks her door, rubs her hair in a towel and opens her closet--

--to open the suitcase where she stashed the "Conjure of Sacrifice" record and cigar box gear. She grabs the album--

--only to find the label reads "Arista Records Zydeco Hits". It's a totally different album.

CAROLINE
No. No, where are you, no--

Caroline searches the case, shoves it aside, searches the closet. Nothing. The conjure record is gone.

INT. GARDEN SHED - DUSK

Caroline SLAMS inside, checks stealthily over her shoulder. She drops to the trough of pounded BRICK DUST...and scrapes handfuls into a paper bag...

CAROLINE
It won't work...because none of it works...none of it...

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Caroline pulls away the area rug at the base of her door, scattering a line of the BRICK DUST across it.

She then lowers the area rug back to conceal the line. She wipes her hands clean, then nervously opens the door...

CAROLINE
Mrs. Devereaux?!

INT. KITCHEN

Violet wears an enigmatic stare, putting towels on a leaking windowsill. Some pots steam on the stove.

CAROLINE (O.S.)
Mrs. Devereaux, could you come here?

INT. LOWER HALL/CAROLINE'S ROOM

Violet rounds the hall, with apron and handtowel. THUNDER rolls as she stops in Caroline's doorway--

VIOLET
You were off for some time.

Caroline's at the far side of the room, by her window.

CAROLINE
When's it supposed to stop raining?

VIOLET
S'posed to pour all night. Stays this way, the swamp'll start rising.

CAROLINE
Rising...?

VIOLET
Rarely reaches the house. Takes a toll on my flower beds, though.
(regards her oddly)
You wanted me for something?

CAROLINE
I was wondering if you could take a look at this -- there's a leak here--

She points to the cracked ceiling above her windowsill.

VIOLET
Oh, they're all over. Just rainwater.

CAROLINE
Yes, but if you look at it -- could you come over and look at it?

Violet narrows her eyes, takes a step across the threshold--

--and stops. Hesitates there -- one foot in the room, one foot out. As if sensing something unpleasant.

She retracts the foot that had entered the room.

VIOLET

I've supper on the stove. I shouldn't leave it.

CAROLINE

It'll just take a second to show you.

VIOLET

I can see fine from here.

Caroline's smile fades. Violet holds her gaze, searching it.

VIOLET

Why don't you put this on the sill.

She holds out the handtowel she has with her.

CAROLINE

All right.

Caroline holds out her hand. But doesn't move.

Neither woman takes a step toward the other.

CAROLINE

(a pathetic waver)
Could you just come in the room, just for a second, so I could show you... what I'm seeing? From where?

Violet regards her gravely, then shakes her head:

VIOLET

You're an odd one, Caroline.

A tea kettle starts WHISTLING o.s. Violet smiles and -- from the doorway -- tosses her towel onto Caroline's bed.

VIOLET

I've made tea.

She heads back down the hall. Caroline shudders a touch, crossing the room to shut her door--

--as Violet stops at hall's end. Turns.

VIOLET

Caroline, after you see to Mr. Devereaux's remedies, perhaps you'd be so kind as to join an old woman for supper. It'd mean a great deal to me.

CAROLINE
Well...I wouldn't want to--

VIOLET
Wonderful. We should have done it
days ago.
(a pleasant smile)
I'll make you something.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ben lies in near-darkness as Caroline brings his medicine tray. His eyes look to her expectantly--

CAROLINE
Brought your pills for you, Ben.

--as she sits at his side and pours the powder from the mortar-and-pestle into his water. Watches it dissolve...

CAROLINE
I'm getting you out. Tonight.

INT. UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - NIGHT

Caroline rifles a medicine cabinet, finding prescription SLEEPING PILLS. She dumps several into the pestle on Ben's dinner tray. She grinds them into dust...

...beside a handful of carefully hollowed-out SUGAR CUBES.

VIOLET (O.S.)
Caroline! Supper!

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A CHUNKY RED BOWL OF GUMBO and a glass of iced tea sits before Caroline as THUNDER crashes outside.

Violet sits at the table's opposite end, already eating. Caroline warily eyes the meal before her...

VIOLET
It's strange, isn't it, how one gets attached? I miss you now, when you're not around the house. Ben and I...we never had children of our own.

CAROLINE
Why was that.

VIOLET
Selfish, I suppose. How's your gumbo?

CAROLINE
I'm just starting. Did you want, um,
sugar for your tea? I put it out--

She nods to the bowl of SUGAR CUBES between them.

VIOLET
Oh, I don't think I'll take sugar
tonight.

CAROLINE
But I thought you liked it...with
sugar. Two sugars.

VIOLET
Do I? I suppose I do.

CAROLINE
(thinks, gets up)
I should bring the pitcher out, in
case we want more--

VIOLET
Eat your supper, don't be silly. Eat.

Violet eyes her...until she retakes her seat. Caroline stirs
her gumbo, but doesn't eat. Another THUNDERCLAP.

VIOLET
You think I'm senile, don't you.
Ghosts in the attic with spells on her
husband -- she's just a senile old
woman, isn't she.

CAROLINE
I just don't understand -- if there
are "ghosts" -- why they'd put a spell
on him and not on me. I've been in
that room too.

VIOLET
Maybe they can't.

CAROLINE
Why not.

VIOLET
Maybe you don't believe in them.
(beat)
Maybe all houses have spirits, and
it's just we don't see them...until we
believe we can.

Caroline sets down her spoon, eyes on the sugar cubes--

CAROLINE

Y'know, I'm not really that hun--

There's a FLASH OF LIGHTNING outside and an immediate LOUD THUNDERCLAP -- as the electricity SUDDENLY GOES OUT!

VIOLET

Fiddlesticks. Don't move, I'll fetch candles -- eat your gumbo, dearie me--

In the dark, Violet rises -- and takes the bowl of sugar cubes...as she feels her way into the kitchen--

Once she's gone, Caroline jumps at her new chance: fumbling in her pocket to find her sedative vial -- still with a dozen PILLS. She shakes them all into her napkin, balls it up--

--and CRUSHES it underfoot quietly. She darts up, feeling along the table to Violet's end...and funnels the huge dose into Violet's iced tea. She stirs it quickly, as CANDLELIGHT flickers, coming closer--

--and Caroline darts back to her chair -- just as Violet enters with two tapered CANDLES--

VIOLET

By candlelight it

--and sets them in the centerpiece sticks. She doesn't notice Caroline grab her fallen napkin, re-settling.

VIOLET

There we are.

CAROLINE

So. Was that the storm or the ghosts?

Violet sits with a self-pitying look.

VIOLET

Say what you will about spirits. I've always wondered if there wasn't something to be learned from them.

She takes a drink of her tea...and frowns at the taste...

CAROLINE

Like a spell?

A dark look flickers as Violet lowers her glass.

CAROLINE

I have great respect for your husband. Whatever's happening to him...whatever he's been told is happening... he's fighting it.

VIOLET

You haven't touched your gumbo.

CAROLINE

What are you doing to him, Violet--

VIOLET

I made you that gumbo and you haven't even touched it.

CAROLINE

What are you doing to--

VIOLET

I AM HIS WIFE AND HE IS MY HUSBAND AND WHATEVER I WISH TO DO TO HIM, I'LL DO!

She BANGS the table and stomps to her feet -- and then sways unsteadily. She turns pale, a tiny slur to her voice--

VIOLET

What is this...

CAROLINE

He's not safe in this house.

VIOLET

No...you...what've you done...

CAROLINE

Not with you.

VIOLET

What've you...issmyhouse...

CAROLINE

I'm taking him away, Violet.

VIOLET

NO!!!

She lunges for Caroline, but the drug's already taking effect -- she loses balance, hits the table on her way to the floor--

VIOLET

(slurred, sluggish)
...toolate, toolate, not again too late...you whore, little whore...

--as she struggles to take a stick of GOLD CHALK from her pocket. She tries to draw a circle around herself--

VIOLET
...keepimindishouse...keepim, oh
keepim...keepimindishouse...

Fading fast, she pulls a folded piece of parchment...but then collapses. Caroline snatches the paper from her grasp -- it's labeled "Conjure of Ultimate Protection." Concentric circles marked with crosses, blood and hair. Violet MEWLS--

--as Caroline steals the paper and runs.

INT. UPPER LANDING/HALL

Caroline races upstairs with a CANDLE lighting her way. As she passes the door to the attic--

--there's a ROAR OF WIND outside from the storm. It sounds otherworldly. She glances to the attic door...but runs on...

INT. VIOLET'S ROOM - NIGHT

Caroline THROWS OPEN the door--

--and SCREAMS to see a GREY-HAIRED FIGURE lying in Violet's bed! She leaps back -- but the figure doesn't move, facing away. Caroline pulls away the sheet--

--to reveal a trio of bunched, tied PILLOWS and a white wig. It's a dummy. Caroline reacts, then leaps to the closet--

CAROLINE
Proof...show me proof...

--to see a stack of Mason jars full of RED BRICK DUST. She tosses clothing aside, quilt swatches, knick-knacks...and turns back to the bed. Which she suddenly SHOVES aside--

--to reveal a CIRCULAR CHART OF RUNES "burned" into the hardwood floor beneath, like an arcane calendar. Against the wall, there's a SMALL FOOTLOCKER. She opens it--

--and finds a white sheet, which she unfurls to see the words "HELP ME" scrawled in dirty water. Beneath it is the "Conjure of Sacrifice" record. It's her evidence.

And finally she lifts a tied SWATCH OF HAIR. Dark hair. As she lifts it to see the color matches her own.

INT. BEN'S ROOM

She kicks open the door, carrying the footlocker--

CAROLINE
Time to go.

INT. UPPER LANDING/HALL

She struggles to carry Ben down the stairs -- bypassing the motorized lift -- awkwardly reaching the door--

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE

Rain SHEETING down. The yard saturated, starting to flood. Caroline carries Ben to her Civic, into the backseat--

CAROLINE
I'm coming right back, I swear--

INT. UPPER LANDING/HALL

She scrambles back upstairs, grabs her footlocker of "proof"--

VIOLET (O.S.)
...Carrrrrline...

Caroline freezes. The voice is weak but chilling.

INT. DINING ROOM

Violet still lies on the floor, eyes shut. Her hand opens and closes, as if trying to fight...

VIOLET
...Carrrrrline...

The front door SLAMS o.s.

EXT. HOUSE/INT. CIVIC

The car's wheels SPIT water as it REVS away from the house, WIPERS flaring to keep the deluge away--

Caroline glances to the backseat, where Ben lies slumped against the footlocker--

CAROLINE
Hang on, Ben, just hang on--

--and looks ahead to see the driveway's IRON GATES closed! Caroline YELLS and slams on the brakes. The car hydroplanes to a stop at the thick metal bars -- always open heretofore.

CAROLINE
It's never closed...never...

She scrambles out, tries to pull them open. They're locked shut. Caroline rages, getting drenched...and leaps back in the car. She REVERSES it swiftly--

CAROLINE

Hold on tight.

--and then ACCELERATES, a thirty-foot slam right at the GATES! And BANG! The gates hold. The Civic's hood crumples. Caroline's head hits the dash.

INT. DINING ROOM

Violet struggles to her knees, sluggish, disoriented...

VIOLET

...keepinthishouse...

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE -- AT THE GATES

Caroline pounds the wheel as the engine dies. Ben has slipped to the car floor, in a crumple--

CAROLINE

No, no, no, no...

The car's dead. Desperate, Caroline tumbles back into the downpour. She struggles with Ben's door, clutching him beneath the arms and dragging him out.

CAROLINE

We've gotta hide you--

--and as she desperately surveys the waterlogged yard, LIGHTNING flashes, illuminating the distant garden shed.

INT. GARDEN SHED

Caroline drags Ben in. There's a foot of water on the ground. She sweeps clear a storage shelf of tools--

--and struggles to lift Ben onto it, lying him flat and pulling a rain tarp over him. He's scared--

CAROLINE

I'll get help, I'll find help -- I'll be back with help.

(grabs his hand)

I will not leave you.

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE

Caroline splashes back to the Civic, retrieving the footlocker and turning toward the house as--

SF

--Violet appears on the front porch, in silhouette. Drowsy, she braces with a HUNTING RIFLE for support. In her other hand, she shines a FLASHLIGHT across the yard.

VIOLET
Carrrrroline...

Caroline darts to tree-cover, splashing across the yard. Violet tracks the splashes with her light--

--but Caroline makes it to hiding. Violet shines onward, missing her. Caroline creeps further--

VIOLET
Where's my husband, child? He's mine, now, he belongs to me. Till death do us part.

EXT. SIDE OF HOUSE

Caroline stays shrouded in trees, with the RAIN soaking her, edging away from Violet's voice, toward the back--

VIOLET (O.S.)
You think you'll take him from this house? Think you're stronger than me?

The rising bayou now floods the back gardens, encroaching on the house. And in the gardens...floats the rusted canoe.

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE

Violet surveys the front yard with the flashlight...

VIOLET
You have no idea how strong I am...

...as she hears SPLASHES somewhere in back.

EXT. BACK OF HOUSE

Caroline shoves the CANOE into the bayou, with the footlocker aboard, and scrambles into it herself.

At the house, Violet struggles around, shining the beam, rifle raised and ready.

VIOLET
Carrrrroline...

But the canoe slips silently toward the cover of mossy oaks, RAIN cloaking the sounds of Caroline's paddle--

VIOLET
Carrrrroline...

And Caroline and the footlocker slip further away--

VIOLET
CAROLINE!

--as Violet grows panicky now, sweeping the light across the swamp, well short of the canoe's location now--

VIOLET
WHERE'S MY HUSBAND, CAROLINE!!!

In the bayou, soaked and shivering, Caroline paddles and paddles...into the watery darkness...away...away...

EXT. WATERFRONT ROADHOUSE - NIGHT

Still raining. Parking lot half-full. ZYDECO plays from inside, as a CANOE plunks against a dock piling.

Caroline shudders as she ties off the boat. Her eyes are on a TAXI parked in the roadhouse lot.

INT. TAXI - MOVING - NIGHT

Caroline looks like a drenched cat, slumped to the window. A CABDRIVER looks her over, and the footlocker she clutches:

CABDRIVER
Hey there. What you got there?

CAROLINE
Proof.

EXT. GARDEN DISTRICT ROWHOUSE - NIGHT

A DOOR OPENS to reveal Luke in jeans and "LSU" T-shirt. He's stunned to see Caroline there, shivering and pale--

LUKE
Jesus, Caroline, what are you--

CAROLINE
We have to help him. We have to help him, he's still at the house--

She pushes her way inside, drops the footlocker. He shuts his door, totally confused -- as she opens the locker--

--to unfurl the muddy "HELP ME" scrawled sheet--

CAROLINE

This is what he wants us to know.

INT. LUKE'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Caroline's shivering badly as Luke puts a blanket over her, then another -- but she won't stay on the couch--

LUKE

Lie down, wouldya? How long've you been out there? Look at you!

CAROLINE

I have to get back to the house--

LUKE

You're not going back. I'll go, cops'll go, you're not going.

CAROLINE

I left ~~him~~ there--

Luke grabs her shoulders, trying to get through to her--

LUKE

Caroline! You didn't leave anyone.

She settles at his tone. He pushes the wet hair off her forehead, gives her face a tender touch.

LUKE

I know a guy who's an A.D. He'll get the cops out there. I can call him and tell him...what do I tell him? I want to report an act of hoodoo?

His CELL PHONE rings, startling them. They trade a wary look...as Luke picks up.

LUKE

Luke Marshall.
(swallows hard)
Mrs. Devereaux, to what do I...

Caroline scrambles upright on the couch. Luke stills her:

LUKE

From who? You mean from the hospice? Why would I have...whoa, wait -- firing her's one thing but...what the hell happened?

He holds up a finger to Caroline, then runs to a desk. Opens a drawer and pulls a mini-tape recorder. He hits "Record," puts it to the receiver by his ear:

LUKE
Wait, Mrs. Devereaux, start from the start. Tell me everything.

He pulls the recorder back -- it's not turning. He opens up the back -- no batteries inside--

LUKE
Hang on, hang on, one second--
(low, to Caroline)
I want this on the record.

He rifles the drawer again, then hustles to the kitchen, opening drawers there, then into the back bedroom--

LUKE (O.S.)
Hurting him, she's been hurting him
how?

Caroline sits alone, shivering. She surveys the room...and Luke's desk lined with photos. She steps to it--

--to see PHOTOS of Luke with a girl friend, Luke with parents, Luke in a graduation gown. The books on the desk have titles like "Fundamentals of Estate Law," "The Law for Beginners," "Basic Wills and Trusts." She raises an eyebrow--

LUKE (O.S.)
So when did you first suspect she
wished him any harm?

--as beneath them, she catches a glimpse of her own photo. It's a "surveillance"-type shot, from when she first arrived at the house. She shoves the books aside to see more--

--and KNOCKS OVER a glass of water, which spills into the desk's middle drawer -- which Caroline opens on instinct--

--to see JARS of HERBS and POWDERS. A jar of WISHBONES, a SWEETENING GLOVE, a DOG'S PAW, FINGERNAILS, HAIR...

Caroline's chilled. She swiftly rifles the drawer--

LUKE (O.S.)
Well, look, if I do hear from her,
what do you want me to say?

--as over her shoulder, Luke steps into silhouetted view in his bedroom doorway, without the phone--

--as Caroline lifts up a broken piece, all but the tip--
 --of a skeleton key.

And over her shoulder, Luke MARCHES toward her. She doesn't see him, doesn't hear him, so focused on the key--

--that the first danger she senses is the CORD AROUND HER THROAT. Pulled tight in an instant -- and back--

--jerking her backward off her feet! The wind's knocked from her and before she can recover--

CAROLINE'S POV

--an upside-down Luke SLAMS her head to the floor--

LUKE
 Goodnight, child.

--and into DARKNESS.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FLOODED LANDSCAPE MOVING - NIGHT

Black and rippling water, trees emerging from it. Whether bayou swamp or newly-flooded land, it's impossible to tell. The HISS of a slick roadway. The rain has stopped.

INT. LUKE'S BRONCO

REVERSE to find Caroline's eyes opening, pressed to a window. She's lying prone in the passenger seat, hands bound behind her and gagged. With Luke at the wheel...

LUKE
 Hell of a thing, isn't it? Everywhere you look. A whole new world all around you. It's like being born.
 (considers)
 Or dying. I wouldn't know.

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - NIGHT

The Bronco enters the now-open gate, edging past the stranded Civic, easily navigating the slightly-flooded drive...

...and approaches the house. Windows all lit with CANDLES.

EXT. FRONT OF HOUSE

Luke hauls Caroline from the Bronco to the steps. She resists him, so he yanks her hair back:

OF

LUKE

Hush, Caroline. I know it's hard the way things turned out. But you will be helping. After all...it's what you were hired for.

INT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE

The door BANGS open as Luke drags Caroline in. The foyer is eerie and candlelit. Tall shadows flicker.

LUKE

Anyone home?

Violet appears at the top of the stairs with her flashlight and hunting rifle. She fixes both on Caroline:

VIOLET

He's missing. She's hidden him somewhere.

She descends the stairs as Luke removes Caroline's gag. She gasps for air, sputtering on her knees--

LUKE

Where is he, Caroline?

She looks to Violet, shaking, with cruel understanding...

CAROLINE

It's not him, it's me.
(horrified)
You want to sacrifice me.

VIOLET

WHERE IS HE, CHILD?

CAROLINE

Why are you helping her...?

Luke flickers a conflicted glance. Then to Violet:

LUKE

Is everything ready?

VIOLET

We can't fix her until we know where he is. We need him here.

She hands Luke the rifle and drops to a knee, gripping Caroline's hair -- her grandmotherly smile no more:

VIOLET

You'll tell me where my husband is...
because he's as your father was.
Nothing you can do to help him. So
there's no need to even try.

Caroline's trembling -- a tear streaks her face. She looks
away, down the hall. At the end is the door to her room.

She stares for a long moment.

Then something registers in her face. She seems to subtly
strengthen. And she meets Violet's stare head-on.

CAROLINE

He's in the garden. The shed.

VIOLET

(to Luke)
Don't scratch her up any more than she
is.

She goes out the front door. Alone with Luke, Caroline
manages to struggle to her feet.

LUKE

Whoa, you'll stay there. Right there.

CAROLINE

I want his picture.

LUKE

(raises the rifle)
As you were, Caroline.

CAROLINE

My dad's picture.

She stumbles forward, leaning against the wall as she ignores
him, headed for her bedroom.

CAROLINE

I want it with me...

She keeps going, and Luke lowers the rifle. He allows her
onward...and stays several steps behind.

EXT. YARD/INT. GARDEN SHED - SAME

Violet SPLASHES across the lawn, reaching the shed--

--and forcing the door open. There's two feet of standing
water, floating tools...and above, a FIGURE under a tarp.

VIOLET

Well, now. There you are.

She throws the tarp aside--

--just as GARDEN SHEARS come flashing at her -- and she GRABS BEN'S WRIST in the nick of time, leaving the points mere inches from her face!

Violet twists his arm; the shears drop. Poor Ben stares with desperate eyes -- wet and shivering. Violet tut-tuts:

VIOLET

Oh Ben. And after all I've done for you.

INT. LOWER HALL/CAROLINE'S ROOM - SAME

Caroline still moves slowly, bracing with the wall, hands bound behind her. Almost to the door--

LUKE

Stay there! I'll get the damn thing.

--as Luke picks up the rifle, strides right by her--

--and as he puts a foot to her room's threshold, he stops. He gets a strange look...as he looks down...and then turns back toward Caroline...

CAROLINE

And no one who means me harm can cross it.

And as Luke's eyes widen, Caroline BURSTS into movement--

--darting right at him before he can raise the rifle -- and scampering through the doorway! Luke tries to grab her but snatches air--

And she's inside! He flails with a hand, refusing (or unable) to take a step across the threshold--

--so he raises the rifle instead, as she SLAMS against the door with her back, driving it SHUT! She grabs her skeleton key off the dresser -- locks the door with her bound hands--

INT. HALLWAY

--while Luke aims the rifle at the lock! CLICK. Luke frowns, cracks the stock. It's not loaded.

SF

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM

Caroline tumbles over the bed, leaps to her windowsill--

INT. HALLWAY

--as Luke SLAMS against the door, hearing GLASS SHATTER--

LUKE
She's outside--
(calling)
VIOLET! SHE'S OUTSIDE!

EXT. YARD/GARDEN SHED

Violet BURSTS from the shed -- seeing Caroline outside the shattered window, sawing her bonds with a GLASS SHARD--

VIOLET
CAROLINE!

--and splitting them! Caroline darts from sight, hands now free. Violet sprints after her, feet splashing--

EXT. FRONT OF HOUSE

--as Luke SPRINTS out, rifle held around the side--

EXT. BACK OF HOUSE

--as Caroline CLIMBS the lattice onto the sunporch roof and then RIPS the lattice free. She SMASHES an upstairs window as Violet and Luke converge below--

VIOLET
She's -- why's she--
(realizes, to Luke)
GET BACK INSIDE!

INT. VIOLET'S ROOM

Caroline BURSTS in and flings open the closet. To find the Mason jars full of BRICK DUST.

INT. FRONT FOYER - SECONDS LATER

A TRAIL OF BRICK DUST comes spilling across the front doorway -- just as the door FLIES OPEN!

Caroline leaps back, a Mason jar in her red-stained hand -- to see Luke staring at the dust-line like it's the plague--

LUKE
SHE'S DONE THE DOOR!

SF

Caroline spins to the flanking windows, scattering a handful of brick dust there too--

Luke sees, and immediately races sideways, out of sight--

As Caroline scatters another handful across the door to the main hall--

--as a WINDOW SHATTERS somewhere in that direction--

--while Caroline scatters a line across the doorways to the dining room, and to the living room, effectively "sealing" off the foyer -- then sprints up the staircase--

--as Luke darts into view from a room halfway down the main hall. He rushes to the foyer threshold, stops still at the dust-line, watching her escape--

LUKE
I CAN'T GET TO THE STAIRS!

INT. UPPER HALL

Caroline CHARGES to the top landing, racing to the far end, scattering dust across Ben's doorway, Violet's doorway--

--as there's another WINDOW SHATTER -- upstairs--

--and Caroline scatters a line at the next door, and the next, the jar running out, she's nearing the bottom--

--just a couple last doors to go--

AS ONE OF THEM FLIES OPEN

--as Caroline's bent before it. Violet charges out, knocking Caroline backwards and sending the Mason jar flying--

--over the railing to SHATTER in the foyer below--

--as Violet snatches hold of Caroline's hair, twisting it viciously as Caroline struggles up--

VIOLET
Try to use my conjures on ME?!

--and Caroline spins, sending them both crashing into a side table. A corded phone hits the floor. They pivot off, stumbling to the stairs just as Caroline finds leverage--

--and rips herself free with an enraged CRY, leaving Violet unbalanced, at the stairs' edge--

--as the old woman pinwheels and FALLS BACKWARDS. She SLAMS the steps, somersaulting over, smacking off the wall as the stairs curve to the foyer--

--and landing violently, her legs broken at nasty angles.

LUKE

NO!!!

Caroline sees Luke's vengeful stare from a foyer doorway, rifle in hand -- and then he darts from sight. His steps run off...as there's a low MOAN from Violet's crumpled figure.

Caroline spins, shaking, not knowing where to turn...so she turns around. To face the attic stairwell's door.

INT. SPIRAL STAIRWELL

Caroline darts in, pulling the corded phone from the hall's end table. She locks the door. The cord runs beneath--

--as she sits on the dimly lit stairs and dials 911.

911 OPERATOR (O.S.)

9-1-1 Emergency.

There's a mechanical CLUNK and a HUM. It's the motor of the staircase wheelchair lift. Ascending...

CAROLINE

Please, my name is Caroline Elms, I need police and paramedics. I'm at 1750 Bayou Chapelet in Terrebonne Parish. There are people hurt and in trouble! Please hurry!

She hangs up, shaking, then pounds in another number. The mechanical HUM is getting closer--

JILL'S VOICE (O.S.)

Unnnh...what time is it?

CAROLINE

Jill, I'm in trouble, I'm in the house! It's real, it's all real--

JILL'S VOICE

Cary? You're where, what?

CAROLINE

I'm in the Devereaux house!

Jill's reply gets lost as the line goes DEAD. Caroline pulls at the phone -- the cord's severed end slips under the door.

There's a THUMP against the door. Caroline jumps--

VIOLET (O.S.)
Carrrrroline...

Weary, but still strong. Caroline scrambles further up--

VIOLET (O.S.)
Carrrrroline...

INT. ATTIC

Caroline rushes inside and shuts the door, locking it with the skeleton key. As the lock CLICKS home--

--there's the sound of a familiar DRUMBEAT. Distant, but pulsing through the house. Music we've heard before.

Caroline pales.

INT. BEN'S ROOM

A MAN'S HAND moves away from Ben's spinning phonograph... REVEALING LUKE, setting familiar album sleeve aside.

It's the "Conjure of Sacrifice."

INT. ATTIC

The MUSIC BUILDS -- clapping joins the drumbeat, the rattling gourd, the washboard and the woman's soulful humming--

--as the lower stairwell door is heard OPEN and SHUT. Candlelight FLICKERS beneath the upper door--

--as Caroline backs away, trembling, as she hears--

FEMALE SINGER (ON RECORD)
Lawdy lawd, come to free my soul--

CHORUS (ON RECORD)
Lawdy lawd, come to free my soul--

SINGER
Lawdy lawd, let the good times roll--

CHORUS
Lawdy lawd, let the good times roll--

Caroline snatches a folded parchment from her pocket and spins for the door to the Hoodoo Room--

SINGER

Rattlesnake, rattlesnake, shed that
skin--

CHORUS

Rattlesnake, rattlesnake, shed that
skin--

--fumbling with the key to unlock it and enter--

SINGER

Split me open, let the lawd roll in--

CHORUS

Split me open, let the lawd roll in--

INT. HOODOO ROOM

Caroline stumbles in, leaving the door open. There's faint
starlight through the slatted roof-grate--

--as she sets her paper down, scanning the instructions for
Violet's "Conjure of Ultimate Protection."

CAROLINE

Chalk, sawdust, blood, hair -- chalk,
sawdust, blood, hair

--and rifles the rolltop desk, finding a jar of BROWN
SAWDUST, sticks of GOLD CHALK, and a jewel-handled KNIFE--

As the music's call-and-response picks up the pace--

SINGER AND CHORUS

Rollllll on! Rollllll on! Rollllll
on! Rollllll on! Roll! Roll! Roll!
Roll! Roll! Roll! Roll! Roll!

--Caroline grabs a red candle and scampers back out, knocking
over the 1912 picture of Papa Justify and Mama Cecile, with
the redheaded Thorpe children--

INT. ATTIC

--to drop to her knees on the floor. She lights the red
candle, puts the conjure instructions beside it--

--which depict a pair of concentric circles, "eyes" drawn at
the compass points, chalk lines radiating from the center and
blood, hair and sawdust filling the outer ring--

--so Caroline copies it, drawing two CHALK CIRCLES around
her, then slashing lines and drawing eyes--

WOMAN AND CHORUS (O.S.)
 Roll! Roll! Roll! Roll!

--as the male guttural CHANTING joins the music. And the female wordless WAIL, changing pitch, building steadily--

--as a shadow blocks the light beneath the attic door--

--and Caroline spreads the brown sawdust around her, then taking the knife to her hair--

CAROLINE
 Protect me, protect me, protect me--

--and hacking off the ends, spreading them with the sawdust and then bringing the knife to her left forearm--

--slicing a long surface cut to DRAW BLOOD--

--as the MUSIC builds faster and faster, the wail a SHRIEK--

--as the attic door FLIES OPEN!

And the music goes SILENT.

Out of the shadows, a FIGURE CRAWLS into view. It's Violet, on her elbows, dragging her twisted lower torso.

VIOLET
 Why, child. I believe you broke both my legs.

Caroline smears her blood around the circle, waving the knife defensively--

CAROLINE
 You can't touch me. You can't come near me. See this? It's the Conjure of Protection.

VIOLET
 Is that what that is now...

The old woman's smile turns wicked:

VIOLET
 And just who gave you that?

Slowly, so slowly...Caroline stills...

As Violet reveals a lighter, holds it to the floor at the doorway, and FLICKS it alight--

--as it sets a preset TRAIL OF KEROSENE aflame, racing both ways around the room and LIGHTING BLACK CANDLES that have been placed along the perimeter floor and furniture!

Revealing the DOZEN MIRRORS that now hang on the walls, previously obscured by the darkness.

The kerosene trail burns out, but the black candles stay lit. The attic's AGLOW in macabre candlelight -- and now looks exactly the same as in the 1912 flashback, where the servants were found with the Thorpe children...

VIOLET

All that circle there protects is you...from leaving it.

Caroline stares at her self-drawn circle with horror...

...while Violet pulls the ornate OVAL DRESSING MIRROR from behind a cabinet. It's on wheels, gilt and ornamental.

VIOLET

We've been waiting for you, child. To believe.

Caroline faces her own scared reflection, as Violet uses the mirror for leverage, getting to a standing position despite her broken legs--

VIOLET

It doesn't work if you don't believe.

CAROLINE

But I...I don't believe...I don't believe...

VIOLET

Ohh. I think you do.

The MUSIC has resumed, DRUMBEAT building, CHANTING returning, many voices now, speaking in tongues, chanting faster--

--as Violet TURNS the mirror on its swivel, so that the backing faces Caroline and the mirrored side faces her -- with her body pressed flush, clutching it tightly to her--

INT. UPPER HALL

Luke carries a BLACK CANDLE, eyes closed, bathed in sweat. He steps solemnly toward the attic--

LUKE
 (sotto, trance-like)
 ...the spirit is willing, the flesh is
 weak, the spirit is willing...

INT. ATTIC

Violet's obscured, BODY SHAKING, quaking the mirror and its
 rolling stand--

--as Caroline waves the knife desperately, still inside her
 own chalk circle, terrified--

CAROLINE
 Stay back, I'll kill you, stay away--

INT. UPPER HALL

Luke stalks closer, eyes shut, candle held, his chant getting
 faster as the MUSIC gets louder...

LUKE
 ...the flesh is weak, the spirit is
 willing, the flesh is weak...

INT. ATTIC

Behind the mirror, Violet's SPASMING UNCONTROLLABLY. And now
 the very room starts to SHAKE -- other furniture, the hanging
 mirrors on the walls, the candles--

CAROLINE
 (now shuts her eyes)
 I don't believe, I don't believe, I
 don't believe, I don't believe--

INT. UPPER HALL

As Luke reaches the attic stairway, bathed in sweat, his
 chant builds to an unintelligible FRENZIED CRY and his black
 candle SHATTERS INTO EMBERS--

INT. ATTIC

CAROLINE
 I DON'T BELIEVE!!!

As a bone-curdling SCREAM erupts from behind the mirror and
 Violet JERKS BACKWARDS, hitting the wall--

--as the MIRROR SHOOTS FORWARD, rolling across the floor and
 pivoting over as it does -- to now reveal the mirrored side--

--except instead of Caroline's reflection, it's Violet--

SF

AS HER REFLECTED IMAGE CHANGES

before our very eyes...as Violet (in the mirror) DE-AGES, a woman of seventy-one, then of forty-five, of twenty-eight--

--like history itself is hurtling backwards...as the mirror ROLLS closer and closer and now--

IN THE MIRROR, VIOLET VANISHES

replaced by a RED-HAIRED WOMAN of fifty-five, then of forty, of twenty -- like snapshots melting impossibly fast--

--until the reflected image is now the REDHEADED GIRL we've seen before. Little Grace Thorpe from the 1912 flashbacks.

AS SHE VANISHES TOO

replaced by a woman we've seen before. An African-American woman. A conjure woman. In a familiar maid's outfit.

It's MAMA CECILE. And the victorious screams are hers--

--as the MIRROR ROLLS CRASHING into Caroline's outstretched arms and horrified stare and then SHATTERS--

--throwing Caroline backwards ACROSS THE ROOM, SLAMMING into the warped door at full force--

--just as the MUSIC and CANDLES all blow out!

And the dark room falls silent.

SMASH CUT TO:

BLACKNESS.

FADE IN:

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - NIGHT

The dark house LIGHTS UP, room by room, as the electricity sputters back on.

INT. ATTIC

The wall sconces COME ON for the first time, illuminating the space. It's like a storm blew through.

Caroline lies crumpled on the floor, in sawdust, glass shards and grime. She stirs, struggles up. She blinks to clear the cobwebs, checks her body for wounds.

Then sees Violet lying face-down by the stairway door.
Motionless.

Caroline gets to her feet, wincing. She limps to Violet,
kneels beside her...

...and snares a CIGARETTE peeking out of Violet's pocket.
Violet's lighter is on the floor. Caroline flicks it alight:

CAROLINE

Thank you, child.

And takes a good long smoke.

LUKE (O.S.)

Cecile?! You all right, Cecile!?

Luke arrives in the doorway, surveys the scene. Caroline
stands, nods to the motionless old woman:

CAROLINE

I'm fine now, Justify.

Luke nods, relieved, and follows her gaze to Violet's body:

LUKE

A fair bit harder than the lawyer,
wasn't she.

CAROLINE

It's harder every time. They can't
believe like they used to. You gotta
get 'em riled up.

She surveys the mirrors on the walls, regarding her own body,
as if she's trying on a new outfit--

CAROLINE

Told you I wanted a black one,
Justify.

LUKE

The black ones wouldn't stay. Beggars
can't be choosers.

CAROLINE

Humph.

Luke approaches from behind, puts his arms around her--

LUKE

I think it fits you beautifully.
Better than Violet, or even Grace.

(MORE)

LUKE (CONT'D)

(smiles)

We'll get used to them. We always do.

On the floor, Violet now stirs. Disoriented, she turns over, looks at her body, her broken legs. Raises trembling arms. And feels the contours of her face.

She stares at Caroline in shock...as the girl approaches...

CAROLINE

What folks don't understand 'bout sacrifice, child...is it don't always mean dying.

(beat)

Sometimes it's more of a trade.

Violet's agape. Caroline smiles. Violet's shaking, her dry mouth cracking open, her liver-spotted arms--

VIOLET

Gggg...gggg...gemoot...gemectof...

(swallows, stronger)

Getmofere... get me out of here...!

GET ME OUT OF HERE!

Her eyes well up, her face full of horror--

CAROLINE

I know, child. I know.

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - DAWN

Jill drives up the waterlogged drive to the house, passing Caroline's damaged Civic with a worried look--

--and reaching the house to find two POLICE CARS and an AMBULANCE already there.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Violet lies on a gurney, legs immobilized and staring into space. Her arms have slight tremors, her eyes dart with paranoid helplessness -- just like Ben.

CAROLINE (O.S.)

We thought it was just the fall, but now it's like she can't move anything. She can't even speak. It's like it triggered, I don't know--

LUKE (O.S.)

Like a stroke or something--

REVEAL Jill hurrying through the doorway to find Caroline and Luke talking with two PARAMEDICS, beside Violet--

SF

JILL

Cary!

She runs over -- as Caroline turns, confused--

CAROLINE

Dearie me. I'm sorry, are you with the police?

JILL

What? It's me. You called me.

Violet's eyes widen to see Jill, she gives a choked MOAN--

PARAMEDIC

(to his partner)

C'mon, let's move her in with her husband. And keep that mirror away from her, wopaiya? -- she goes nuts when she sees that thing...

--as the Paramedics roll Violet out. She shakes, moans, to no avail...as Jill stares Caroline with a perplexed look--

CAROLINE

I called you?

JILL

For help. Don't you remember?

LUKE

(offers a swift hand)

Cary's not herself right now -- I'm Luke Marshall, the Devereaux's lawyer.

JILL

I...hi, Jill Dupay, her roommate--

CAROLINE

Jill! Yes, I did call. Fiddlesticks! I don't know what possessed me -- the storm, it flooded -- then she fell--

JILL

Hey, I'm here, it's all right.

CAROLINE

They'll need real care now -- a full-time facility -- they'll have to leave, they can't stay here--

JILL

(arms around her)

Cary. It's okay.

Luke nods sympathetically too. Caroline calms.

CAROLINE
 Could you ride with them, Jill? To
 the hospital -- we'll meet you there?

JILL
 Hey. Whatever you need.

Caroline smiles sadly. Nods to Luke.

CAROLINE
 We just need more time.

She departs, leaving Jill with Luke. Jill surveys the room,
 still confused...noticing spattered red dust...

LUKE
 It meant so much to them -- her being
 here. I know it wasn't for long, but
 they loved her.

JILL
 How do you know that?

LUKE
 (a confidential smile)
 In their wills? They're leaving her
 the house.

INT. AMBULANCE - DAY

Violet's gurney gets LOADED in, rolling to a stop...right
 beside Ben's. Violet turns her sad eyes...

...to meet Ben's. There's understanding there now.

SHADOWS enter the ambulance. Doors shut, engine REVS. And
 as Violet struggles...to reach a trembling hand...

INT. LIVING ROOM

WE SEE PICTURES on a mantel. As ANGLE SLIDES from left to
 right...starting on a 1906 wedding photo of Papa Justify and
 Mama Cecile. Next, the 1912 photo of Justify and Cecile with
 the two Thorpe children, Martin and Grace...

INT. BATHROOM

...while Luke hangs a MIRROR back in place...

INT. AMBULANCE

...and Violet's hand reaches, straining with all she can...

INT. LIVING ROOM

TRACKING PAST PHOTOS...of redheaded Martin and Grace Thorpe as teens, holding hands. Then in middle-age (50's), arm-in-arm -- shaking hands with a smiling young Ben and Violet (20's), beside a 1962 "Sold" sign at the Devereaux house.

Then, a photo of elderly Ben and Violet, cheek-to-cheek...

INT. DINING ROOM

...while Caroline re-hangs a sideboard MIRROR...

INT. AMBULANCE

...and Violet's trembling hand is still desperate to grasp...

INT. LIVING ROOM

ENDING THE TRACK...on the photo of Luke, in his graduation gown, getting his law degree. Next to the photo of Caroline as a child, learning guitar. With her father.

INT. AMBULANCE

...as Violet's hand clutches Ben's, reaching out from his gurney. They clasp and hold on tight.

Sitting by the door, Jill and a paramedic look on, witness to two elderly faces lost in each other, hand-in-hand:

PARAMEDIC

Man. I hope I never grow that old.

JILL

Yeah? Well, take a look at them.

Nothing wrong with growing old.

(beat)

Long as you're together.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Where the TWO HANDS CLASPED are Caroline's and Luke's. They're kissing, a tender kiss, both familiar and new...

...in a room with all its mirrors now re-hung...

...as ANGLE PULLS AWAY, out the window, leaving them there...

...two young bodies in love...

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE

...in the home they've always known...

...as ANGLE RISES, moving into the swamp..into the mossy oaks, past the hanging tree...

...and as the ambulance disappears down a distant road...we ASCEND high above the bayou and into the Southern sky...

...all mortal cares left far below.

CUT TO BLACK.

DEAN

