

The Handy Man

By

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FADE IN:

IN BLACKNESS, A TITLE CARD APPEARS:

NOVEMBER 30

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD - DAY

ANGLE ON - A WEATHERED WOODEN SIGN "HANDY MAN WANTED"

LOW ANGLE ON - CALEB TUCKER'S FACE as he reads the sign, lighting a cigarette. He puffs, looks up, studies the horizon a moment, then moves OUT OF FRAME.

WIDER as Caleb adjusts his bag, walking down a long dirt road leading to a small farmhouse in the distance.

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. FARMHOUSE/KITCHEN - DAY

CLOSE ON - A WHISTLING TEAKETTLE as a hand removes it from the burner.

WIDER revealing JULIA PARCHANT, a woman of simple, almost harsh beauty as she pours the boiling water into Caleb's cup.

CALEB

Thank you ma'am.

She pours water for herself, returning the kettle.

JULIA

Please continue Mister Tucker.

CALEB

Well Miss Parchant, like I said, I come outta south Oklahoma originally.

Caleb fixes his tea, stealing glances at Julia as she moves to the other end of the small table. As she does we notice the odd limp, more a leaning to one side, that she displays. She sits, lifting a limp useless arm and gently placing it on the table.

CALEB (CONT'D)

Not much family to speak of... not much schoolin' either I guess. Anyway, done most every kind'a job you can think of; road construction, ranch hand, carpenter, mechanic -- you name it I done it. I'm sure I can handle the work, whatever it is ma'am.

JULIA

Ever been arrested Mister Tucker?

Caleb is caught off-guard and looks it.

CALEB

Yes ma'am I have. Nothing more than drinking and fighting, both of which I gave up some time ago.

There is a long pause as Julia studies him. Caleb starts to rise.

CALEB (CONT'D)

I won't waste any more of your time ma'am.

JULIA

Please sit Mister Tucker.

Caleb lowers himself back into the chair.

JULIA (CONT'D)

I can only pay you two-hundred a month, plus a comfortable room and meals; I'm a good cook Mister Tucker. This house is old and in constant need of minor attention. As you can see, I'm... limited... and as such I don't drive. You'd go into town once or twice a week, that is if you can keep that old truck running. I bake for Greely's Market and the Chat 'n Chew diner -- pies mostly.

(beat)

That's it.

(beat)

Well Mister Tucker, what do you say?

CALEB

I'd say that sounds just fine ma'am.

JULIA

Fine then.

Julia picks up a polaroid camera.

CALEB

What's that for?

JULIA

Just a picture Mister Tucker -- a record of this moment in time. Problem?

CALEB

(shrugging it off)

No ma'am. Shoot away.

Julia raises the camera to her eye. Caleb smiles.

JULIA  
 (suddenly barren)  
 Are you a bad man Mister Tucker?

Caleb's smile slides right off his face. FLASH!

CALEB  
 No ma'am, I'm not.

JULIA  
 (lowering the camera)  
 Good.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP - THE PHOTOGRAPH laying on the table as it develops.

CUT TO BLACK:

EXT. ROAD - DUSK

The help wanted sign, now tied-off with a burlap sack.

CUT TO BLACK:

IN BLACKNESS, A TITLE CARD APPEARS:

DECEMBER 5

CUT TO BLACK:

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Caleb straddles a ladder, nailing home a piece of new trim against one of the window frames.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

Julia stands in the shadows watching through the window, a deep longing in her eyes.

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Julia and Caleb are eating dinner.

CALEB  
 You never said how it was you came to live here all by yourself.

JULIA  
 Your right, I didn't.

There is a long pause.

CALEB  
 Okay then.

Another long pause.

JULIA

My mother killed herself when I was nine. She walked down to the creek and drowned herself one night. I didn't think a person could do that -- drown themselves... but she did.

(beat)

My father was an alcoholic, and after that he just started drinking more and more. Then one day when I was nineteen, he went off to the barn... and never came back.

CALEB

I'm sorry about that ma'am.

JULIA

I wasn't.

(beat)

He was a bad man.

Julia stands, taking her plate to the sink as Caleb follows her with his curious eyes.

CUT TO BLACK:

IN BLACKNESS, A TITLE CARD APPEARS:

DECEMBER 17

CUT TO BLACK:

EXT. HOUSE/PORCH - DAY

Caleb lifts a 2x4 from a small pile nearby, resting it across two sawhorses. He begins cutting it with a handsaw.

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

AT THE SINK where Julia is washing dishes. The dish drops, shattering. She clutches her hand, the blood washing over it.

JULIA

Ow!

At this moment the door opens and Caleb enters, dressed in his overcoat.

CALEB

Looks like a storm coming in tonight.

(pausing to notice)

You alright Miss Parchant?

She grabs a towel covering her hand as Caleb rushes over. He takes hold of her arm, causing Julia to spin away from him with a terrified look.

JULIA  
 DON'T TOUCH ME! DO YOU HEAR ME?!  
 DON'T TOUCH ME!!!

CALEB  
 (palms out)  
 Okay ma'am, okay. I'm sorry. Just  
 relax.

JULIA  
 JUST DON'T YOU TOUCH ME YOU MOTHER  
 FUCKER!!!

CALEB  
 I'm not, I'm not!  
 (beat)  
 I just wanted to do is make sure  
 you was okay.

Julia stares at him wide-eyed, breathing heavily. She suddenly bolts past him. We hear her CLIMB THE STAIRS followed by a HEAVY SLAM of an upstairs door.

CLOSE ON - CALEB alone, stunned.

CUT TO BLACK:

IN BLACKNESS, A TITLE CARD APPEARS:

DECEMBER 18

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Julia sits at the small table surrounded by pies. She is neatly wrapping them with cellophane and boxing them. Behind her, leaning against the counter is HAL EASTON, an older man dressed in one-piece coveralls, topped by a floppy bombers hat. He demonstrates his deftness at the art of talking while eating, as he wolfs-down a large wedge of pie.

HAL  
 The Broken Hearted Killer -- that's  
 what they call'em. Wanna know why?

JULIA  
 No.

HAL  
 'Cause after he butchers'em, he  
 draws big broken hearts all over  
 the walls... with their blood.

JULIA  
 Wonderful.

CUT TO

THE WOODS - CALEB - SAME TIME as he wields an ax back and forth at a rapid-fire pace at some unseen target.

THE KITCHEN

HAL

You know, Burt says he could be in the area.

JULIA

I thought you said the last victim was in Des Moines.

HAL

Yeah?

JULIA

Hal, Des Moines is two hundred miles. Not exactly what you'd call the area.

HAL

Well I'd say Burt outta know what he's talking about. And for your information, Des Moines is only a hundred eighty-seven miles!

JULIA

Burt is the only cop in a little town, with nothing better to do than sit around the Chat 'n Chew all day talking big and scaring people.

HAL

Well nineteen women in three years is serious business I'd say.

CLOSE ON - HAL his mouth full.

HAL (CONT'D)

(foreboding)

Chopped up... all of 'em...

THE WOODS

as Caleb grits his teeth, menacing as he continues to swing the heavy ax.

THE KITCHEN

where we now find Hal sitting next to Julia, still eating.

HAL

All I'm saying Julia is what do you know about this Tucker guy. For that matter, what do you know about any of the strange men you let live in this house with you.

JULIA

Been hiring these men for a lot of years now Hal -- think I know what I'm doing by now.

HAL

It ain't safe I tell 'ya! For all you know this guy could be him!

THE WOODS - LOW ANGLE - CALEB

as we PULL ON HIM, the ax resting on his shoulder as he walks.

THE KITCHEN

HAL (CONT'D)

Why not? Grace and me got nothing but a big empty house to ourselves.

Touched, Julia pauses in her work, offering a smile.

JULIA

I appreciate all these years you looking out for me Hal. I really do. And I know you mean everything you said. But this is my home -- I could never live anywhere else. Never.

HAL

All I'm saying is this world has been hard enough on you Julia. You suffered enough. And I don't care what them fancy doctors said; years of living alone ain't good for nobody -- it ain't healthy Julia.

JULIA

Thank you Hal. But I'm fine. Really.

WIDER as Hal rises from the table, snapping his chin strap.

HAL

Guess I better be going before it gets dark.

Julia rises, cradling a pie, offering it to him.

JULIA

You take this with you Hal.

HAL

I couldn't Julia.

JULIA

Go on now, take it.

HAL

I really couldn't.

JULIA  
 (putting it down)  
 Okay.

HAL  
 (reaching out)  
 Okay then.

Taking the pie, Hal opens the door, turning back.

HAL (CONT'D)  
 You be careful now, hear?

Julia smiles reassuringly. Hal smiles, closing the door behind him.

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Julia and Caleb are having dinner. There is a long silence between them.

JULIA  
 I uh... I just wanted to say how sorry I was about... well... you know... last night.

CALEB  
 It's alright Miss Parchant.

JULIA  
 Please, call me Julia.

Caleb considers a moment before...

CALEB  
 Alright. But only on the condition you call me Caleb. Fair enough?

Julia's sheds her shyness, working up to agreeing.

JULIA  
 Fair enough... Caleb.

They share a small bit of laughter. Caleb wipes his mouth, rising from the table.

CALEB  
 Wait here. Got somethin' to show you.

JULIA  
 What?

CALEB  
 Just hold on.

Caleb steps through the back door and a moment later reappears with a small fir tree. He gives it a few raps against the floor, shaking free the clinging snow.

CALEB (CONT'D)  
Well, what do you think?

JULIA  
(overwhelmed)  
Oh my goodness! It's beautiful!  
But where...

CALEB  
Would'ya believe I found this little  
fella all by hisself in the middle  
of the woods -- lookin' just like  
he was waiting all these years for  
me to come by.

JULIA  
(moved)  
Thank you... Caleb.

CALEB  
Your welcome Julia.

CUT TO BLACK:

IN BLACKNESS, A TITLE CARD APPEARS:

DECEMBER 20

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

ANGLE ON - THE SHOWER - CALEB his naked form discernable  
behind the chalky plastic curtain. We HOLD on him a long  
moment, then slowly PAN to reveal Julia standing there.  
She watches, transfixed.

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. JULIA'S ROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON - JULIA standing motionless in front of her mirror.  
We HOLD on her while she looks into her own eyes, devoid  
of expression.

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. JULIA'S ROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON - JULIA sleeping soundly. We TILT UP to reveal  
Caleb's dark form alongside the bed. Hunched over her, he  
reaches out carefully, getting as close as he can without  
touching her to "feel" the shape of her body. Then, leaning  
closer, he smells her hair. Julia stirs, causing Caleb to  
retreat. After a moment, he lifts himself up, silently  
MOVING OUT OF FRAME.

CUT TO BLACK:

IN BLACKNESS, A TITLE CARD APPEARS:

DECEMBER 24

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Julia is sitting at the table peeling potatoes when Caleb enters, carrying two bags of groceries. He moves to set them down on the counter.

JULIA  
(feigning a SOUTHERN  
accent)  
Hey.

CALEB  
(smiling)  
That's real good Julia. Hey  
yourself.

JULIA  
Thanks. How were the roads?

CALEB  
Almost didn't make it back. More  
snow coming too.

JULIA  
At least you got the groceries.

CALEB  
Got more than that.

JULIA  
(curious)  
What?

Caleb reaches in the bag, pulling out a bottle of champagne, moving to show her.

JULIA (CONT'D)  
Oh my gosh!

CALEB  
Can't celebrate Christmas without  
a little holiday cheer now can we?

JULIA  
But... I don't drink.

CALEB  
(crestfallen)  
Don't drink?

JULIA  
No.

CALEB  
But Julia, it's Christmas Eve.

JULIA  
No really Caleb, I don't drink.

Caleb starts pouting, his face growing long.

CALEB  
Please Julia? Please?

JULIA  
Caleb... no.

Caleb drops to his knees, crawling over to her.

CALEB  
Pretty please Julia? Please? Please?

She begins to snicker at his childlike pleadings, finally giving in.

JULIA  
Okay okay.

CALEB  
(hoisting the bottle  
high)  
Alright!

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON - AN OLD RECORD PLAYER as an album spins, filling the room with the tinty sound of OLD CHRISTMAS STANDARDS.

WIDER to reveal Caleb lounging in the old sofa, drinking champagne.

JULIA (O.S.)  
I'm ready.

Caleb puts the glass down, standing up.

ANOTHER ANGLE It is nothing short of stunning to see how the new dress has transformed Julia. She is beautiful. Julia enters the room, approaching Caleb who motions her to turn around. She does so, timidly.

CALEB  
(quite sincere)  
Julia... do you know your beautiful?

JULIA  
(looking off)  
I'm not.

CALEB  
Yes Julia, you are.

JULIA

(softly)

Thanks. But I feel awful Caleb. I wish I could've gotten you something.

CALEB

Tell you what.

JULIA

What.

CALEB

This is my favorite Christmas song. Dance with me and we'll call it even.

Panic flashes across Julia's face.

JULIA

No, I could never.

CALEB

You can Julia.

(beat)

Do you trust me Julia? Do you?

JULIA

Yes.

CALEB

(softly)

Then will you dance with me?

After a long pause, finally...

JULIA

Yes.

CALEB

(cautiously)

We have to touch to dance Julia, you know that, right?

JULIA

I... I know.

CALEB

It's okay then... that I touch you.

JULIA

Yes.

CALEB

Okay then. I'm just gonna touch your arms okay... nothing else. Alright?

Julia takes a deep sigh, nodding. Caleb carefully positions her arm on his shoulder, then takes her hand in his.

CALEB (CONT'D)  
Everything okay Julia?

Julia nods.

Slowly there is movement side to side.

CALEB (CONT'D)  
(smiling)  
Your doing just fine Julia. Just  
fine.

Julia begins to smile herself, relaxing, enjoying. They  
continue dancing several moments until...

CALEB (CONT'D)  
Julia?

JULIA  
Yes Caleb?

CALEB  
I really want to kiss you Julia.  
(beat)  
Would you let me kiss you?

A long pause as Julia gazes into his eyes, contemplating.

JULIA  
(nodding slightly)  
Yes.

CALEB  
Sure?

She nods again. Caleb bends his head, gently touching his  
lips to hers. Starting soft and innocent, the kiss slowly  
elevates until reaching, then surpassing passionate.

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. JULIA'S ROOM - LATER

In the darkness, Julia and Caleb make love under the heavy  
quilts.

CUT TO BLACK:

IN BLACKNESS, A TITLE CARD APPEARS:

CHRISTMAS DAY

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. BATHROOM - DAYBREAK

CLOSE ON - CALEB standing in front of the mirror, his face  
hidden with shaving cream. He gazes long into his own  
reflection, eyes locked upon themselves in a wide,  
unblinking stare. He shakes the razor out in the sink water,  
raising the blade to his face.

The WHISKERS CRACKLING as he draws it slowly and especially heavily across his face. He rinses the blade again, once more digging it into his face. He suddenly winces, stopping.

THE SINK where first one drop of blood, then another PLUNKS into the water.

CALEB as he studies himself. Reaching out with a finger, he dips it into the blood now streaking his face.

He uses the blood to slowly draw the shape of a heart on the glass. Dipping again, he completes his gory sketch with a jagged crack running from one corner, down and across to the opposite.

He looks long into the glass, his distant expression slowly supplanted by one of wrath. Suddenly...

... soft, almost unnoticeable RAPPING at the door. Caleb continues to stare.

CALEB

I'm busy.

Again... the soft, slow RAPPING upon the wood. Caleb raises his wet hand, smearing away the bloody heart from the glass, while shifting his eyes in the mirror toward the door.

CALEB (CONT'D)

I said I'm busy.

Again... more RAPPING.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Caleb spins, his bare chest rising and falling with his rapid breathing.

CALEB (CONT'D)

I... said... I'm... busy! ...

more rapping. Seething, Caleb turns from the door.

INSERT - A DUFFLE BAG

as Caleb rifles through it.

BACK TO SCENE as Caleb pivots to once again face the door, only now with an enormous hunting knife alongside his contorted face.

CALEB (CONT'D)

Okay! I'm coming!

INSERT - THE DOOR KNOB

as Caleb grasps it.

THE DOOR as it swings wide to reveal Caleb brandishing the knife! But fear suddenly sweeps his face! HE GASPS!

CRASH CUT TO:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - SAME TIME

BANG!!! as an intense flash lights up frosted window. Silence as we HOLD on the farmhouse, imbued with the dim bluish cast of dawn.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - SAME TIME

JULIA in FULL SHOT, framed by the open bathroom door which, along with the walls, is splattered with blood. She lowers the shotgun.

CLOSE ON - JULIA as she stares dispassionately at the bathroom floor.

JULIA

Your a bad man daddy... and I'm  
not going to let you hurt me no  
more.

FADE TO BLACK:

EXT. FIELD - LATE DAY

LOW ANGLE - WIDE SHOT Her back to us, Julia dons a heavy overcoat and scarf while laboring against the rope across her shoulder. Weighted down by a corpse wrapped in blood-soaked linen, the child's sled cuts a path through the field of white, bare feet dragging in the snow.

In the distance, the old barn looms dark and ominous against the fading light. It seems to watch -- to wait.

FADE TO BLACK:

INT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

EXTREME CLOSE SHOT - CALEB'S POLAROID as a hand inserts a push-pin, affixing it to the wall.

CLOSE ON - JULIA stepping back to study the photograph as she cradles a cup of tea in both hands, sipping.

A glow of satisfaction crosses her face as she turns, WIPING FRAME. We hear the DOOR CLOSE.

CALEB'S PICTURE forever capturing that odd expression. As we DOLLY BACK slowly, other photographs penetrate THE FRAME until we can see that the neatly spaced polaroids approach filling the wall.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ROAD - DAY

A farmer sits atop a large tractor, crawling stridently toward us. We PAN as he passes by, finally revealing the

weathered wooden sign on the opposite side of the road. It reads: "Handy Man Wanted"

FADE OUT:

THE END