

EXT. QUIET NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

A two-story white house sits at the end of the street, between a small home half-hidden by trees and a large pasture.

A makeshift wheelchair ramp runs up one side of the wide front porch. Even in the bright sunlight, the house has a desolate, deserted air.

Two white pickup trucks with DEL'S RENOVATIONS stenciled on the side sit in the narrow driveway.

INT. THE HOUSE/ENTRY HALL

A square entry hall dominated by a straight staircase with a broken bannister. Bits of plaster, tape, and other remodeling debris litter the scuffed hardwood floors.

A BEARDED MAN starts up the stairs, steps around a YOUNG MAN working on the broken bannister.

INT. THE HOUSE/UPSTAIRS HALL

A long hallway with a window at one end. Two open doors show empty bedrooms; a third shows a narrow stairwell leading up.

The Bearded Man reaches the top of the stairs and walks into one of the bedrooms.

INT. THE HOUSE/MASTER BEDROOM, BATHROOM

Pale squares on the walls of the large, empty room show where pictures once hung. A doorway leads to a small, gutted bathroom.

An OLDER MAN measures one wall of the bathroom, jotting a figure down on a notepad. Bearded Man enters.

BEARDED MAN
Where do you want this?

OLDER MAN
Just set it any old place. Here.

He hands Bearded Man the tape measure.

OLDER MAN
Get a measurement on that broken window
in the attic.

INT. THE HOUSE/ATTIC STAIRWELL

Bearded Man climbs the attic stairs. A CLICK sounds.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He turns around; the hallway door is closed. Bearded Man frowns, then shrugs and continues up the stairs.

INT. THE HOUSE/ATTIC

A long room with two windows; one window is divided by a spidery crack. Boxes and old furniture lie near the door.

The door opens; Bearded Man enters. A faint, unidentifiable WHISPERING begins. Bearded Man frowns, glances about the room. From behind him, a STAIR CREAKS.

BEARDED MAN

Del?

(glances at the empty stairs)

Someone there?

He starts toward the window, rubs the back of his neck. At the window, he turns around.

BEARDED MAN

Is someone up here?

(beat)

Goddamn old houses.

He stretches the tape measure along the window. The WHISPERING continues; the faint shadows on the floor darken, shifting like fog.

He takes a pen from his shirt pocket, jots numbers on his hand, then looks up to see a reflection of BONNIE -- a pretty seven-year-old in a long, blue-flowered nightgown -- in the broken window. She holds a small, worn stuffed rabbit and looks both frightened and sad.

He turns his head, looks at the empty room. The reflection in the window vanishes.

BEARDED MAN

(to himself)

What?

The WHISPERING increases. The shadows on the floor lengthen, seeming almost to writhe, then pull back and fade as the whispering builds into a long SIGH and trails into silence.

Bearded Man dashes to the door. It's stuck. He utters a wordless CRY and yanks on the handle; the door opens.

INT. THE HOUSE/UPSTAIRS HALL

The Older Man steps out of the master bedroom; Bearded Man emerges from the attic stairwell.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OLDER MAN

Something wrong?

BEARDED MAN

I ain't going up there again.

OLDER MAN

Why? What'd you see up there?

BEARDED MAN

Nothing. I didn't see nothing, and I don't ever want to see it again.

CREDITS ROLL

EXT. THE HOUSE - DAY

The house has a fresh coat of white paint and a re-shingled roof. A Realtor's FOR SALE sign pokes up through the autumn leaves in the yard. A silver Cadillac is in the driveway.

INT. THE HOUSE/KITCHEN

The REALTOR, a well-dressed woman in her late 30s, stands near the sink of the spacious, square kitchen. A door with a window inset leads to the tree-filled backyard; an archway leads to the long, bare dining room.

SAM WHITTEN, in her late 20s with a face that's more cute than pretty, looks out the window at the backyard, her hands stuck in the back pocket of her blue jeans.

REALTOR

It's on 1.8 acres; most of the property is out back. The pasture is part of a two hundred acre tract; the owner uses it for his horses and has no plans to sell, so you don't need to worry about apartments going up next door.

SAM

What about the house next door? Who lives there?

REALTOR

It's a rental. But this is a good neighborhood; mostly families. I've shown this place -- oh, at least a dozen times, and there's never any noise from the kids in the area. And of course, with the pasture on one side you're assured of having more peace and quiet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM
Unless the horses make a racket.

REALTOR
Oh, I hardly think--

Sam turns from the window.

SAM
Just kidding.
(calling out)
Andy! Honey? Come in the kitchen.

ANDREW WHITTEN, tall, late 20s with a pleasant but serious face, walks into the kitchen, frowning slightly.

ANDREW
I think there are mice in the attic.

REALTOR
I don't think so. We had an exterminator out here as soon as it was listed.

ANDREW
Thought I heard something up there.

REALTOR
Probably just the house creaking. It's the oldest house on the street, built in...1918, I think.

SAM
Let's go look at the backyard.

Andrew gives Sam a "don't-look-too-eager" warning glance, which she cheerfully ignores.

ANDREW
The kitchen's been remodeled, anyway.

REALTOR
The kitchen and the bathrooms. All the sinks are new, a lot of the plumbing was redone--

ANDREW
Right. Could we look at the attic?

REALTOR
Of course.

She heads out of the kitchen. Sam puts a hand on Andrew's arm to slow him down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SAM
(barely above a whisper)
Andy.

ANDREW
What?

SAM
Don't be so rude.

ANDREW
I'm trying to get a balance here. Your gasping and drooling will make her raise the price.

SAM
I was not drooling.

ANDREW
Were too.

SAM
Was not.

REALTOR
(turning back toward them)
Hmm?

SAM
Nothing. Let's go look at the attic.

INT -- HOUSE/ATTIC

The attic appears to be the one room spared from renovation. A few pieces of wood, some boxes and a broken chair are in one corner. The Realtor stands by the door to the stairs. Sam looks out the window toward the backyard; Andy rummages through the wood, looking for mice.

SAM
There are so many trees I can't even see the house behind this one.

ANDREW
Just think how much fun it'll be to rake up all the leaves.

SAM
You know, this could be turned into a room. The ceilings are low, but--

ANDREW
So why is the owner selling?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

REALTOR

He's an older man, a widower. I'm sure it just became too much for him. I believe he's moving to Florida.

ANDREW

Why's the house empty?

REALTOR

He moved out before the remodeling was done; he's staying with friends.

SAM

Let's go look at the backyard.

EXT -- HOUSE/BACKYARD

The yard contains several trees and a shed on one side. Sam and Andy stand by the pasture fence. The Realtor sits a distance away on the edge of the screened-in porch.

SAM

I think we should make an offer.

ANDREW

I don't know. I thought we were going to buy a new house.

SAM

But they're all so boring. And this yard. The dogs would love it.

ANDREW

What if it ends up needing more work? And it'd be hard to resell if you change your mind and want to move back to L.A.

SAM

I'm not going to change my mind; I love it here already. And the attic would make a perfect studio for you.

ANDREW

It's too cheap. There's got to be something wrong with it.

SAM

It's Arkansas. Everything's cheap.

ANDREW

Yeah? I bet lawnmowers aren't.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Rain falls heavily. The Realtor steps out of the silver Cadillac and places a red and white SOLD sticker over the for sale sign.

MARTIN, mid-30s, fair-haired and boyish-looking, stands in the yard next door, partially hidden by dripping tree branches. He watches the Realtor, an enigmatic smile on his face, then turns toward the house, the smile fading to be replaced by an expression of deep thought.

EXT. TITLE COMPANY - DAY

A small brick building on a semi-busy street. The Realtor's Cadillac turns into the parking lot.

INT. CAR

Sitting next to the Realtor, CHARLES HANNOWAY -- mid-70s, a once-big and imposing man, now worn down -- stares impassively out the windshield. A folded wheelchair rests in the back seat.

REALTOR

It won't take long.

CHARLES

Said I changed my mind.

REALTOR

But -- it's all been settled, you just have to sign--

CHARLES

My back's acting up -- don't feel like getting in that old wheelchair. I reckon Lisa Richards knows me well enough she can come out here to the car and have me sign whatever I got to sign.

REALTOR

Charles, I have to go in to meet with the buyers, I can't let you sit out here--

CHARLES

Seems that's all I do nowadays, is sit. Don't mind it much. You tell Lisa to come out here, and I'll sign, and then you call Barry over to the diner and he'll come carry me back to his house.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

REALTOR

But -- the buyers are waiting--

CHARLES

Reckon you'd better get on with it, then.

(checks his watch)

My flight leaves in five hours. You go on now. Lisa won't mind; she's used to dealing with old farts like me.

INT. TITLE COMPANY/OFFICE

A small, plushly-appointed room. Sam and Andy sit at one end of a long table, looking rather uncomfortable in their "nice" clothes. Sam drums her fingers on the table; Andy pulls surreptitiously at the sleeves of his blazer.

SAM

Stop that.

ANDREW

What?

He tugs at a sleeve without thinking and Sam swats his hand.

ANDREW (cont'd)

I don't know why I had to wear this; my shirt's clean. I think I've outgrown it.

SAM

Idiot. You're too old to grow.

ANDREW

Then it shrunk.

EXT. TITLE COMPANY/PARKING LOT

Charles sits stiffly in the Realtor's car. An unseen disturbance causes several small birds to burst in panicked flight from under the eaves of the building.

INT. CAR

Charles' eyes are closed; his hands rest on his knees. LISA RICHARDS, a heavysset woman wearing too much makeup, raps on the window. Charles jumps, then rolls down the window.

LISA

Charles, why don't you come inside and--

CHARLES

Give me what I got to sign.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LISA

I have to read them to you.

CHARLES

I sold houses before, I don't need you explaining--

LISA

Well, it's sort of the law, I have to make sure you understand.

CHARLES

I'll pretend you did. Just tell me where to sign.

Lisa reluctantly hands him a folder of papers and a pen.

LISA

Charles....Bob and I, we -- we were real sorry about what happened.

CHARLES

Just show me where to sign.

INT. TITLE COMPANY/OFFICE

Sam stands by the window, looking out at the parking lot; Andrew is by the door, clearly anxious to leave.

SAM

He looks so sad. I hope he has family in Florida.

EXT. TITLE COMPANY/PARKING LOT

Sam and Andrew step outside. A small red owl flies from the roof of the building into a tree and perches on a branch, its yellow eyes unblinking.

SAM

Andrew, look.

She points to the owl.

SAM (cont'd)

I thought owls were nocturnal.

ANDREW

They are. Maybe it's sick.

They stare at the owl; it turns its head and stares back.

INT. THE HOUSE/ MASTER BEDROOM - EVENING

Sam stands in the middle of the room. Andrew comes through the door.

ANDREW

They didn't get the shed all cleaned out.
The broken lawnmower's still out there.

SAM

Let's stay here tonight. We could put
our sleeping bags on the floor, camp out.

ANDREW

On the floor?

SAM

Just for one night. The moving van will
be here tomorrow.

ANDREW

So...you think you're going to be happy
living in a small town?

Sam leans comfortably against Andrew.

SAM

I think it'll be fun. Can you imagine
what this place would've cost back home?

ANDREW

Any regrets?

SAM

Dozens.

(beat)

Oh -- you mean about the house.

Andrew ruffles her hair and she grins at him.

SAM

I think we're going to be disgustingly
happy. No more tiny apartments, no more
sirens in the middle of the night...just
peace and quiet, fresh air, crickets--

ANDREW

And mosquitos.

SAM

Chiggers, too.