

CAT'S EYES

FADE IN:

EXT. MAGNOLIA TREE-SOUTH CAROLINA - NIGHT - 1939

A full, bright moon. The sound of DIGGING.

A SHOVEL digs soil out of a shallow hole.

A DEAD WOMAN, 20, black, slim, beautiful, a large magnolia blossom pinned to her long hair, wearing a tattered shift, lies on a thick white blanket.

Her unblinking eyes, oddly cat-like, reflect the moon. Her mouth slightly open, as if in surprise.

A pool of blood blossoms under her head, staining the blanket.

A MAN, face hidden, digs a hole near the sprawling tree. Moonlight gleams on his open silk vest, his frilled shirt sleeves rolled up to the elbow.

In the b.g., a majestic southern mansion, a few lights on.

At the edge of the blanket a large picnic basket, a bottle of wine, two empty crystal glasses and an elegant blue gown, vintage 1930's, tossed carelessly in a heap.

The shovel digs deeply into the hole, pulls out a heavy load of soil, stops abruptly, hesitates.

The Dead Woman's eyes, staring.

The shovelful of soil DUMPED on her face, covers it.

EXT. BUTLER HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A modest southern colonial house, dark, unoccupied.

An unseen WOMAN gasps in fear, whimpers.

Something LURCHES towards the house, jerky movements, to the front door.

The HOUSE. Vague, mournful MOANING emanates from within.

EXT. BUTLER HOUSE - DAY - THE PRESENT

The HOUSE. Looks much older, shabby but partially repainted.

The front door opens. CONTABELLO and his WIFE, mid-30's, distressed, frightened, and their two DAUGHTERS, 3 and 5, both crying, anxiously flee the house dragging suitcases, toys, other household items.

The younger child's head is bandaged, a cast around one arm.

The Contabellos rail at each other, their words unclear.

They walk quickly to their car in the yard, stuff their belongings into the trunk and drive away.

INT./EXT. CAR-LOS ANGELES STREET - DAY

ROBERT GOLDRING, 35, tousled hair, bookishly handsome, stops his car at a red light in a seedy neighborhood.

Group of HOMEBOYS crosses in front of him, fool around, laugh, shove each other, listen to loud, harsh SPANISH RAP MUSIC on a boom box.

He watches them, repelled. He sees the light turn green, starts to drive, nearly hits a lagging Homeboy, stops short.

Homeboy pissed, won't get out of the way. Goldring presses the car locks button, HONKS the horn.

The car instantly surrounded by Homeboys!
JEERING, CURSING through every window.
They POUND on the windows, yank the door handles.
They ROCK the car.
One of them picks up a stone.
Goldring panics, near tears.

Homeboys suddenly move off. Goldring sees a police car approaching in his side-view mirror.

The police car stops next to him, its passenger window slides down. The COP points to the green light, angrily gestures him to drive.

Exasperated, Goldring hits the gas.

INT. LAW FIRM TECH OFFICE - DAY

Computers, monitors, cables and parts lay around. Goldring enters, sits down at a cluttered cubicle, boots up his computer.

The SUPERVISOR, 35, comes in. Big, arrogant.

SUPERVISOR
Nice of you to drop by.

GOLDRING
Sorry.

SUPERVISOR
What's your excuse today?

GOLDRING
Today? Let's see... Today I was almost dragged out of my car and beaten to death by a gang of homeboys.

SUPERVISOR
Oh. Too bad. Anyway, I'm afraid we have a little problem.

GOLDRING
I'll stay late, okay?

SUPERVISOR
That won't quite solve the problem.
We have a woman problem.

GOLDRING
A what?

SUPERVISOR
A woman problem. Specifically, our
problem is that we don't have a woman
in this department. Now that the
firm has a contract to provide
personal injury defense to the LA
Buildings Department, we have to be
sensitive to that kind of problem.

GOLDRING
So hire a female tech support
specialist.

SUPERVISOR
Excellent idea, Goldring! We already
have. One of the senior partners'
granddaughters. She's fully
qualified, of course -- graduated in
the upper two thirds of her class at
DeVry Institute, I believe.

GOLDRING
So what's the problem?

SUPERVISOR
The problem is the firm doesn't want
to expand our staff.

GOLDRING
So?

SUPERVISOR
(waves an envelope)
So they've given you three months'
severance. A month for each year
you worked here. Quite generous, in
my opinion. Excessively so.

GOLDRING
But --

SUPERVISOR
You've been complaining about needing
a vacation. Here's your chance.
Get away, relax, take all the time
you want. I recommend the mountains.
Any mountains.

GOLDRING

There are three other guys in this department. Why me?!

SUPERVISOR

It's a question of seniority.

GOLDRING

No! I have seniority over Seymour. Seymour came four months after me.

SUPERVISOR

I suppose that's technically true, but there's a big difference between Seymour and you.

GOLDRING

What difference?!

SUPERVISOR

I don't like you.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Goldring emerges from the elevator carrying a box. He looks at a few apartment numbers, finds the one he wants, knocks on the door.

VANESSA (O.S.)

Who is it?

GOLDRING

It's me.

VANESSA (O.S.)

Who?

GOLDRING

Bobby.

VANESSA opens the door. 30, black, attractive dancer-type.

GOLDRING

I brought the rest of your things. I came into some free time today.

VANESSA

Oh. Thanks... Come in.

INT. VANESSA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

He comes inside, glances around.

GOLDRING

Nice place.
(chuckles)
Better than mine.

They stare at each other a moment.

VANESSA

Let me take it.

GOLDRING

It's all right. Where do you want it, the bedroom?

VANESSA

(grabs the box)

I said I'll take it!

GOLDRING

Okay. All right.

Her BOYFRIEND, 40, black, tall, well-dressed, opens the bedroom door.

BOYFRIEND

Any problem, Vanessa?

VANESSA

No. No problem. Go back inside...
And here, take this.

He takes the box, goes back inside the bedroom.

VANESSA

Well...

GOLDRING

I still don't understand why this is happening.

VANESSA

I told you, I got a gig across town.
Too far to commute from your place.

GOLDRING

Is he part of your gig?

VANESSA

That's none of your business.

GOLDRING

I suppose not.

VANESSA

Look, Bobby, we had some fun together,
but when it's time to move on --

GOLDRING

Can we still see each other?

VANESSA

Sure!

GOLDRING
But we can't live together.

VANESSA
No.

GOLDRING
I can remember when you didn't have
a place to live.

VANESSA
That's right.

GOLDRING
No gig, either.

VANESSA
That's right too. Thank you for all
you've done for me.

GOLDRING
Think nothing of it. Can I have
your number?

VANESSA
No. I'll call you.

She opens the door. He steps into the hallway, turns to
face her again.

GOLDRING
I still don't understand why this is
happening.

VANESSA
Look, Bobby, you're all stressed.
Go someplace quiet and chill out for
awhile. You'll see, it's... it's
just the way things are.

GOLDRING
But what's so bad about me?

She strokes his cheek.

VANESSA
There's nothing bad about you, Bobby.
You're just... just...

GOLDRING
Just what?

Can't find the words, shakes her head.

VANESSA
Nothing.

She closes the door.

EXT. DELI - DAY

Goldring pulls into the parking lot, gets out, enters the Deli.

INT. DELI - CONTINUOUS

NOISY lunchtime crowd. Goldring speaks to the HOSTESS, she points to a nearby table.

BAUER, 50, rumpled suit, two chins, sleazy, eats his pastrami on rye.

GOLDRING

Mr. Bauer?

BAUER

Yeah?

GOLDRING

Goldring. *Dark Age*.

BAUER

Oh, yeah, yeah. I remember. You wanna say thank you? So say thank you. Not a problem. Anything else?

GOLDRING

Can I sit down a minute.

BAUER

Do you have to? I'm having lunch. Didn't you notice?

GOLDRING

(sits)

There's some problems.

BAUER

What problems? You got your foot in the door, thanks to me. You just pulled ahead of five million other schmucks trying to sell their scripts.

GOLDRING

I want to make sure I'm not misunderstanding. Your check for \$8,000 -- that covers a ninety-day option on my script --

BAUER

Yeah. They'll pay a pro to rewrite it, then think it over.

GOLDRING

I understand. But your note said they also want to see something new from me. Same ninety days.

BAUER

Yeah, so? Make sure you're not a one-shot wonder.

GOLDRING

There's no way. There's no way I can write a decent script in ninety days.

BAUER

What?!

GOLDRING

It's -- it's very noisy where I live. I've got a lot on my mind -- personal problems. I... I'm having trouble writing lately. I need more time than that.

Bauer stops eating, stares at him a moment.

BAUER

How long have you been in the business, Goldring?

GOLDRING

I'm not in the business.

BAUER

Good. Here's some advice. When people offer you money, you take it and you shit just like they tell you.

GOLDRING

Look --

BAUER

Writers do it all the time, Goldring. Get away for a few months, find someplace quiet, focus. Just do it!

GOLDRING

I can't afford it at the moment. I just lost my job.

BAUER

What's with you?! Doesn't have to be Cape Cod. Find someplace cheap -- Utah, Iowa, Carolina -- what the hell difference does it make?!

GOLDRING
 (skeptical)
 Carolina?

BAUER
 Carolina!

GOLDRING
 North or South?

BAUER
 What is?

They stare at each other a moment. Bauer pulls out a business card, scribbles on the back of it, gives it to Goldring.

BAUER
 Here. See this guy. He handles properties all over. Rent something. Tell him I said Carolina. Problem solved!

Bauer takes another big bite of his sandwich.

GOLDRING
 (beat)
 They gave you ten, didn't they?

BAUER
 That's the story.

GOLDRING
 And you took out your commission.

BAUER
 Yeah? So?

GOLDRING
 Look, math wasn't my strongest subject, but ten percent of --

BAUER
 Overhead! Out of pocket expenses. You expect me to pick that up myself?

GOLDRING
 An extra thousand to drive over to their office and put a quarter in the meter?

BAUER
 LOOK! If you want, I can tell them you're not interested!

Other DINERS look at them.

GOLDRING

(subdued)

No.

BAUER

Good! Are we done here?!

Defeated, Goldring gets up, walks away.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Goldring emerges from a LIQUOR STORE carrying a bag. Its contents CLINK. More than one bottle.

Bummed out, distracted, he walks along. All the other stores closed, the street deserted. Refuse strewn about.

VOICES coming from an alley up ahead, angry, arguing. He walks to the

ALLEY

Looks down it. Well-dressed, tall, WIRY MAN, 30, rat-like face, hair slicked back, argues with a BLONDE WOMAN, 25, pretty, wearing a party dress.

WIRY MAN

Fucking bitch!

She grabs for his face. He blocks her hands, SLUGS her, sends her down.

She weeps on the ground. He looks down at her, casually KICKS her in the ribs.

GOLDRING

Stop it!

He turns towards Goldring, blinks.

WIRY MAN

What? What?!

GOLDRING

I, I said stop it.

WIRY MAN

Why?...

He advances slowly towards Goldring, palms outstretched, eyes wild.

WIRY MAN

CAN YOU GIVE ME ONE GOOD REASON?!

Goldring drops the bag. SMASH!

He walks quickly away from the alley, faster, faster, breaks into a sprint.

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