

SAVING GRACE OF NUMBERS

FADE IN.

EXT. OUTER BANKS COASTLINE - NIGHT.

Water crashes over barrier reefs. A large low moon silvers the beach and the dense salt marshes. Beach oats sway in the wind.

EXT. SMALL ISOLATED COTTAGE ON A LONELY BEACH ROAD OUTSIDE RODANTHE, SMALL OUTER BANKS TOWN

Several cats slink through the dark around the cottage. In the distance, another cat yowls, and a dim yellow light comes on inside, somewhere in the back of the cottage.

INT. SMALL DINGY COTTAGE BATHROOM

ELIZA (mid-30s) haggard-looking, stands at the mirror. A pull-chain swings from a dull yellow bulb. She glances at the hall, listening. Then she jumps as another cat yowl comes through the open bathroom window.

She steps into the tub, staring out the window into the darkness. Cat sounds snarl through the dark outside.

She steps out of the tub, closes the window, locks it, checks the lock, then walks out into the hall.

She steps into the bedroom where NATHAN (40s), her husband, sleeps; his large fisherman's frame fills the small iron bed. She lifts a folded blanket carefully from the end of the bed, then steps out, pulling the door closed behind her.

INT. THE HALL BETWEEN ELIZA'S CHILDREN'S ROOMS.

The moon reveals BENJAMIN (6) and TOBY (8) asleep in their room. In the next room, LIA (10) sleeps with her lips open wide. Eliza stands between the rooms, listening. The children's sleeping breath can be heard softly.

Eliza slides down, sitting against the wall, tugs the blanket over her.

ELIZA
(softly)
One, two, three. . .

The sound of her children breathing grows progressively louder, until it roars around her.

FADE

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Nathan rolls over in the bed, his arm searching for Eliza. He sits up, looks over at the closed door. He gets out of bed.

INT. HALL

Eliza sleeps sitting against the wall. He leans down and gently shakes her.

NATHAN
Liza? Liza. Wake up.

She stirs awake, immediately turns a frightened look in at her kids, then back at him. He holds a hand out to her.

NATHAN (CONT' D)
(softly)
Get up now.

Eliza takes his hand, gets to her feet.

ELIZA
I'll get your coffee.

She turns but Nathan puts a hand on her shoulder.

NATHAN
It's not time. Come back to bed.

ELIZA
(ashamed)
The cats. . .

NATHAN
(pulling her to him)
You got to stop. They're just cats.

ELIZA
(her face in his shoulder)
But I heard Toby--

NATHAN
(looking into her face)
Sleeping. You heard him sleeping,
s'all. Look.

He turns her to face the kids' rooms, wrapping his arms around her from behind.

NATHAN (CONT' D)
Sleeping, see? They're fine.

Eliza looks doubtful. She pats his hand, then pulls away.

NATHAN (CONT' D)
Come on now.

He leads her by the hand back to bed.

INT. BEDROOM

He snuggles up to her, going back to sleep. Eliza stares wide-eyed into the dark. The children's breath can be heard like a wind.

ELIZA
(whispering)
One, two, three. . .

INT. KITCHEN - JUST BEFORE DAYBREAK

Eliza closes a large metal thermos, slides it into a fisherman's gear bag, and closes the bag. Nathan comes in, ready for his job on a fishing boat. He leans against the door jamb.

ELIZA
I'll get your coffee.

She pours coffee into a large mug and hands it to him.

ELIZA (CONT' D)
Late tonight?

NATHAN
Don't imagine so. Shrimpin'. Then over to Wanchese. (beat) Liza, listen, you can't keep staying up all night. The kids are fine. We need to talk about--

She shoves the bag into his hands, kisses his rough cheek, and turns to wipe her hands on a dish towel.

ELIZA
You'll be late. Johnny won't like it.

He sets the coffee down, steps to her, turning her to look at him

NATHAN
I know how you feel--

ELIZA
Stop! You do not know how I feel. I
carried those babies--Those babies
I lost--

NATHAN
Were mine too.

Eliza stops, turns away from him. Nathan hesitates, then picks up his gear bag, leaves the room. A screen door bangs OS. Eliza looks out a window. Outside, Nathan gets in his truck, and starts it.

Eliza turns to the hall as the sound of the truck roars outside.

ELIZA
(calling out)
Lia! Ben! Toby--time to get up.

EXT. ROAD IN FRONT OF THE COTTAGE

A big yellow school bus lumbers toward the cottage.

EXT. FRONT YARD OF THE COTTAGE

Eliza, Ben, Toby and Lia wait for the bus.

BEN
(hopping around on one
foot)
When can I go fishing with Daddy?

TOBY
Me too, I wanna go.

BEN
He said he'd take us--

ELIZA
Not on a school day.

LIA
Not on any day.

TOBY
Uh huh, Daddy said--

LIA
(looking at Eliza)
Not Daddy won't let you go.

ELIZA
Lia, hush.

LIA
True though, Daddy said you're
scared we'll fall off the boat or
something.

BEN
We won't fall off, Mama. 'Sides, I
can swim.

TOBY
Me too.

BEN
Cannot.

The bus arrives and stops, door swinging open.

ELIZA
Time to go.

She kisses each of them, straightens Toby's jacket. The kids
get on the bus.

ELIZA (CONT'D)
(calling out)
Lia, watch after your brothers.

The bus roars away, drowning out her voice. She watches
worriedly until the bus disappears. Finally, she turns and
goes back into the house.

EXT. SHRIMP BOAT DECK - DAY.

Nathan works on deck, drawing shrimp nets. JOHNNY (20s), his
crewman, emerges from below.

JOHNNY
Good run today, huh, boss?

NATHAN
Pretty good.

JOHNNY
Need to make some money now, that's
for sure.

NATHAN
(glancing up)
Now? Finally getting rid of that
piece of shit truck?

JOHNNY
(grinning)
Naw- - baby.

NATHAN
What?

JOHNNY
Penny's pregnant, found out
yesterday.

Nathan straightens up, wipes his hands, holds one out
formally to Johnny, who shakes it.

NATHAN
That's good news, yeah it is.
(beat) Just be careful, hear?

JOHNNY
(confused)
Careful? Oh you mean fuckin' and
all, yeah well, Penny says that's
cool for a while yet and--

NATHAN
(looking out at sea)
I'm sure it'll all be fine.

INT. COTTAGE FRONT ROOM

Eliza sweeps the floor. A timer sounds from the kitchen. She
rests the broom against a wall and moves into the kitchen.

She takes two loaves of fresh bread from the oven, sets them
on the stove top to cool. She opens the fridge, takes out a
package wrapped in white butcher paper, drops it on the
counter.

Her hands unwrap the white paper, revealing the soft pink
flesh of uncooked flounder. Her hands begin to tremble. Tears
slide from her eyes.

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