

THING OF DARKNESS

Based on a true story

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OVER BLACK

CASSIE (V.O.)

You won't believe this, but it's true. It was in all the papers. You can look it up if you like: the more than fifty people murdered with an axe in Louisiana in 1911, the dozens more killed a year later throughout the state... and the most infamous case of all, the murders in New Orleans in 1918 and the "*Night of the Axeman's Jazz*". It's all documented, all true. But of course not everything that happened made it into the papers. Some of it was just too hard to believe, I suppose, but still true. I know, I was there. Not from the very beginning, whenever that was, but long before the end, if there truly was an end.

FADE IN:

A rundown house on poverty row.

TITLE:

Mermentau, Louisiana 17 October, 1911

TWO LITTLE GIRLS and a BOY, all under ten, play in their yard, their older sister keeping an eye on them.

CASSANDRA "CASSIE" LACROIX (13) is a burgeoning beauty with caramel skin and wavy black hair. She sits on an old swing hung from a tree, spinning lazily side to side, ruminating on her future and a hazy red sun in the distance.

Suddenly Cassie stops swinging and looks toward the porch of her house. Turns back to her siblings.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

All right ya all, time to go in.
C'mon now, Mama wants us.

The little kids stop playing and migrate toward their sister.

A moment later "Mama", MARIE LACROIX, a pretty black woman in her thirties, comes out onto the porch wearing an apron.

MARIE

Cassie! C'mon, girl, get your brothers and sisters in here and help me get supper on the table.

INT. CASSIE'S CHILDHOOD HOME - NIGHT

Cassie eats dinner with her family. Marie and CHARLES LACROIX, her white father, seated at one end of the table.

There is LAUGHTER and CROSS-TALK. A poor but happy family convening over the one square meal of the day.

MOMENTS LATER

Marie comes out of the kitchen into a darkened dining area carrying a birthday cake covered with FORTY candles.

Charles blows out the candles and the children clap and CHEER.

Marie hands Charles a small present. He shakes it and holds it up to the kids.

CHARLES

So what is it, a new rake?

The kids LAUGH and Charles opens the present: a pewter flask.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Oh, now that's perfect. It's just what I need: a little somethin' to keep me warm on those cold winter nights.

13-YEAR-OLD CASSIE

Read it, Papa, read it! Mama had it inscribed.

Charles reads the inscription.

CHARLES

"For Medicinal Purposes - To the Finest Man in my Life".

Charles leans over and kisses Marie.

13-year-old Cassie smiling, savoring the love between them.

INT. BEDROOM - CASSIE'S CHILDHOOD HOME - LATER

Cassie tucks her younger brother, BOBBY, in bed. The little guy looks up at her mischievously, his mouth closed tight.

CASSIE

What's that, Bobby, hmm? What you got in there? C'mon, open up.

The little boy smiles proudly and reveals a missing tooth.

CASSIE (CONT'D)
Ah, look at that. That stubborn
little tooth finally came out, didn't
he. But where'd he go, huh?

She tickles Bobby.

CASSIE (CONT'D)
C'mon, where's he hiding?

Bobby LAUGHS, pulls his hand out from under the covers and
shows Cassie the tooth.

CASSIE (CONT'D)
Okay now, let's do like I told you.
We'll put it under your pillow and
the tooth fairy will come. All right?

Bobby nods and Cassie puts the tooth under the pillow.

CASSIE (CONT'D)
Make sure you go to sleep now. That
old tooth fairy's really shy and she
won't come if you stay awake.

Cassie looks around at the other two children, one of her
little sisters watching her.

CASSIE (CONT'D)
You too, Miss Nosey, go to sleep.

The little girl turns over.

Cassie stands and looks down lovingly at her baby brother
and sisters. Turns down a bedside lamp and leaves.

CUT TO:

A MOONRISE

And a night breeze rustling through the trees.

The old swing swaying back and forth as if ridden by a ghost.

Cassie comes out the back door of the pitch dark HOME wrapped
in a shawl and enters an OUTHOUSE.

CLOSE ON: A WOOD PILE

At the side of the home. An axe on top of it.

A TALL SHADOWY FIGURE enters frame and picks up the axe.

Carries it through the back door INTO THE HOME.

Bumps an apple cart that falls to the floor.

CHARLES LACROIX

Wakes up in bed. Rises onto an elbow and listens.

CHARLES

You hear that?

Marie groans and turns over, mutters sleepily.

MARIE

It's the wind, Charles.

Charles thinks. Leaves the bed.

Turns into the hall.

MARIE

Lies there with her eyes closed. An abrupt THUMP, THUMP comes from the hall. Marie stirs, concerned. She gets out of bed and goes to look for her husband.

Turns into the hall when WHOOSH!... the silvery blur of an axe caught in the moonlight whirls through the air and lands with a sickening THUD!

INT./EXT. OUTHOUSE - NIGHT

Cassie stands and leaves.

She approaches the house, the back door BANGING.

Cassie enters the HOME. Closes the back door curiously then turns and stumbles against the apple cart. She puts it back in place and listens. Wary.

Cassie walks through the blue darkness inside the house. Comes upon a dark mound obstructing the hall.

Moves closer and sees her mother and father lying in a pool of blood.

Cassie SHRIEKS and rebounds into the wall. Slips and falls in the blood.

She pulls herself to her feet in a panic, her bloody hands slipping on the wall.

Cassie staggers out of sight into the kid's room and lets out a gut-wrenching WAIL.

CASSIE (O.S.)

NOOOOOO!

OPENING CREDITS

FADE IN:

A BLACK ROOSTER PAINTED ON A SIGN

Outside a French Quarter bar.

INT. BLACK ROOSTER - DAY

A real dive, more cave than bar, where JUSTIFY JONES, a tall black bartender, plays checkers with METHUSELAH. A WORKING GIRL a stool away rubbing her feet, her highball and high heels on the bar before her.

CASSIE LACROIX (20)

Sits in a booth in the darkest corner of the bar slumped up against the shoulder of a handsome BLACK SAILOR.

Cassie sips a glass of bourbon. Misplaces the glass and spills ice on the table. She ponders the ice. Flicks it off the table with the tip of her finger.

CASSIE

Give me a cigarette.

Black Sailor lights a cigarette and puts it in Cassie's mouth.

BLACK SAILOR

Yeah, my mama didn't raise no fool.
I'll put my time in with Uncle Sam
and get me a pension. That's what
I'll do. Then I'll get my own boat.

Cassie listens at the edge of her attention, taking in the working girl at the bar still rubbing her feet.

CASSIE

(thinks out loud)

I bet she walks ten miles a day.

Cassie sits up and takes a pewter flask from her purse. Fills it with what's left of a bottle of bourbon.

BLACK SAILOR

Hey, baby, what do you say we blow
this joint? Go back to my room. I
don't ship out till midnight.

Cassie puts away the flask and weighs the offer. Decides.

CASSIE

Why don't you take her? She looks like she could use a break... and the cash.

(flashes a glance at
Black Sailor)

And don't tell me you never pay for it. After that sad performance last night, baby, you need lessons.

BLACK SAILOR

Hey, what's that supposed to mean?

Cassie shoulders her purse and slips out of the booth.

CASSIE

It means, lover, this party's over. I'm blowing this joint, just not with you.

She takes a drag and blows a veil of blue smoke at Black Sailor. Walks out.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

(as she goes, to
Working Girl)

He's all yours, hon. His name's Lamar, but I call him Speedy. Charge him by the hour and you won't make a dime.

EXT. BOURBON STREET - DAY

Cassie walks under the porticos on the world famous street past other French Quarter bars pumping out JAZZ.

A group of SAILORS on a balcony across the street CAT-CALL at Cassie who ignores them and boards a

STREETCAR

Cassie drops into the nearest seat and lays her head against the window, bone-tired.

She gazes out the window with idle, lusterless eyes at all the color and seediness of the Big Easy in 1918:

WWI RATIONING and RECRUITMENT banners festooning the stores.

Quaint Creole Cottages with stained and decaying masonry.

The omnipresent signs of Jim Crow up and down the street: "Whites Only", "No Dogs, Negroes, Mexicans", "Colored Served In Rear", etc.

Soldiers and sailors, both black and white, cruising in packs by the bars, hellbent on a good time or the trouble it brings.

Flatfoot cops. Hustlers and shoeshine boys. Street musicians and working girls.

A DAPPER WHITE MAN in a polished roadster pulls up alongside the streetcar. Looks up at Cassie and smiles.

Cassie looks down at him with a blank expression. Casually raises her hand and flips him off.

EXT. TOULOUSE STREET - TWILIGHT

Cassie approaches an old Creole Townhouse, heavily-shadowed in the light of a dying day.

INT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - SAME

She pads through a dingy lobby where her FAT WHITE LANDLORD lies on a couch behind a counter reading a paper.

FAT LANDLORD

Well, look who finally decided to come home, the Oreo. Where the hell have you been?

CASSIE

Out feeding the kitty, tubs, as if it's any of your business.

FAT LANDLORD

Hey, I want my rent!

Cassie pauses at the bottom of the stairs.

CASSIE

You fix the hot water?

FAT LANDLORD

I'll get around to it.

CASSIE

(start up the stairs)
Yeah, right. And I'll get around to rent... one of these days.

INT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Cassie enters her dark coop-like home.

Pulls the flask from her purse and takes a swig of the bourbon. Sets the flask and her purse on a nightstand.

An inscription on the flask reads: "*For Medicinal Purposes - To the Finest Man in my Life*"

Cassie slips out of her clothes and gets into bed.

LATER - A MELANCHOLY LIGHT FILTERS

Through Venetian blinds laying a soft glow on Cassie half in and out of the sheets, her nude shadow-draped body and soft black curls the envy of Aphrodite.

LATER STILL

Cassie sits up in bed and turns on a light. Listens to JAZZ MUSIC coming from outside.

She goes to a window and peeks through the blinds. SEES...

A BAR ACROSS THE STREET

People drinking and dancing.

CASSIE

Observes them for a time. Turns away and goes back to bed.

INT. NEWSROOM - NEW ORLEANS TRIBUNE - DAY

The newsroom of the first Black-owned daily newspaper in the country. It's like any other newsroom, the way a backwoods airfield is like any other airport, only less so.

Cassie, dressed in a long skirt and white blouse, walks in the front door. Threads her way through a HALF-DOZEN BLACK MEN and WOMEN working at their desks.

One by one they take notice of Cassie, watching her walk to a doorless small office on the side of the room.

HELEN, an elderly black woman, stops Cassie as she walks by.

HELEN

Hey, Cass... How are things? We missed you.

Helen gives Cassie a look, more than a meeting of eyes. Helen indicates with a glance a co-worker at another desk.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Earl and I came by your place... We was lookin' for ya.

Cassie's gaze goes from EARL to a glass-enclosed OFFICE across the newsroom where editor ROY JENKINS (40s) sits talking on the phone.

He sees Cassie. Stares coldly then turns away.

Cassie bypasses Helen and goes into her office.

Finds a YOUNG BLACK MAN seated at her desk. A box on a sideboard filled with Cassie's things.

CASSIE

Who are you? What are you doing at my desk?

Helen has followed Cassie in.

HELEN

Cass, this is Andy...
(voice faltering)
He's new.

Cassie takes it all in then makes a beeline for the EDITOR'S OFFICE where she opens the door and slams it behind her.

Roy, still on the phone, swivels in his chair and looks up at Cassie who just stands there fuming.

ROY

Let me call you back.

He hangs up.

CASSIE

I don't deserve this. You back-stabbing sonofabitch, after all I've done for you and this paper. How could you?

Roy just looks at Cassie without batting an eye.

ROY

Sit down, Cass. Go on, take a seat.

Cassie glares, breathes, calms down a little then takes a seat across from Roy.

ROY (CONT'D)

So where've you been?

CASSIE

You know where I've been, same place I always go, doing the same things I always do.

ROY

Better now?

Cassie has no retort, 'cause they both know that ain't true.

CASSIE

What do you want from me?

ROY

I don't want anything, never have,
except maybe a little accountability.

CASSIE

We've been over this, Roy. I may
have my faults, but I'm a hard worker
and you know it. It's just now and
then I need a little time to myself.
You know, to work things out. I
thought you understood.

ROY

I understand. But it's not now and
then, and it's not a little time
either. And I've given you a lot of
leeway, probably too much. So here...

He takes an envelope from a drawer and tosses it on the desk.

ROY (CONT'D)

take all the time you need.

Cassie looks bitterly at Roy then takes the envelope and
flips through the cash inside.

ROY (CONT'D)

That squares us.

CASSIE

Hardly.

Cassie exchanges a last meaningful look with Roy then heads
for the door.

ROY

Hey, Cass.

Cassie stops in the doorway and turns.

ROY (CONT'D)

For what it's worth I think you're a
helluva reporter.

CASSIE

For what it's worth, I don't give a
damn what you think, you or anyone else.

Cassie leaves.

CUT TO:

A DARK AMBER LIQUID

Poured over ice, for Cassie, sitting at the bar in the BLACK ROOSTER, taking solace in her favorite bourbon.

START MONTAGE OF CASSIE ON ANOTHER BENDER

- a.) Drinking alone with Justify, the bartender.
- b.) With other PATRONS as the establishment fills.
- c.) A handsome LATIN MAN lays cash on the bar, buys a round for Cassie. Clinks glasses and toasts.
- d.) Cassie and LATIN MAN walk arm-in-arm down a sidewalk into a DANCE BAR.
- e.) Where sweaty JAZZ MUSICIANS play under halos of light.
- f.) Cassie dances. Drinks. Laughs. Lives it up like there's no tomorrow.
- g.) Deeper into the night Cassie and Latin Man slow dance. He fondles her ass. Kisses her.
- g.) A SAXOPHONIST plays a lilting, soulful tune beneath the conical throw of a dome light attached to a ceiling fan.

The flat wood blades of the fan turn in time with the music.

END MONTAGE ON A MATCH CUT TO:

A SIMILAR FAN

Above Cassie lying in a HOTEL ROOM staring up at the ceiling, her nude Latin lover lying beside her.

Cassie slips out of bed and wobbles into a BATHROOM.

Washes up at a rust-stained sink.

Stares into a mirror with bloodshot eyes, a woman weighed down by fatigue and self-loathing looking back at her.

Cassie shuts her eyes and we CUT TO BLACK.

After a long silence we hear a WOMAN WEeping.

FADE IN ON:

MRS. CYNTHIA ELLIS (40s) a black charwoman hunched over on a bench out in front of a neighborhood GROCERY STORE, a bag of cleaning supplies at her feet.

Up the street a HEFTY uniformed POLICEMAN greets DETECTIVE PAUL HAWLEY (30s) exiting a 1915 Chevy 490 police car.

The Hefty Policeman ushers Paul from the black sedan over to Mrs. Ellis.

HEFTY POLICEMAN
(huffing and puffing)
This is the woman who called it in...
She's the one who found them.

Mrs. Ellis looks up at the stolid, handsome detective with tears streaming down her cheeks.

PAUL
(noting her cleaning
supplies)
You work here?

MRS. ELLIS
Yes, sir. I comes here every day
except Sunday to help Mrs. Maggio.
I always open the store while they
sleep in.
(holds up a key)
But today, they didn't come out...
So I went into the house to check on
em.
(breaks down and sobs)
Who could do such a thing.

Paul and the Hefty Policeman exchange helpless looks.

INT. MAGGIO'S GROCERY AND HOME - DAY

Paul walks down a narrow aisle lined with canned goods to a rear door that leads into the home.

Moves through a parlor into a dim hallway.

At the far end is a back door to the home with a LOWER PANEL REMOVED spilling light onto the hardwood floor.

Paul stops and stares at the murderer's entry point: the small square opening below the lock and the removed panel set carefully against the wall.

PLOP! PLOP! PLOP!

Blood drips from a hand hanging off a bed.

Detective Hawley in the doorway beyond it, viewing the bodies of JOSEPH (33) and CATHERINE MAGGIO (31) under the sheets.

Blood and brain matter splattered across the headboard.

Joseph's throat is cut and his head split in two at the ear.
Catherine face-down beside him with an axe stuck in her skull.

ON PAUL

His expressionless eyes.

EXT. TOULOUSE STREET - DAY

Cassie walks down the sidewalk toward her apartment building.

Climbs the front steps then stops. Feels something. She turns and looks up the street at a CROWD outside a store about a block away.

Cassie approaches the group of people gathered out front of

MAGGIO'S GROCERY STORE

Weaves her way toward a policeman guarding the crime scene. Opens a purse slung from her shoulder and shows her employment card, the ID of the times, to the policeman.

THE CARD READS

NEW ORLEANS TRIBUNE
Identification Certificate

Name: CASSANDRA MARIE LACROIX

Occupation: REPORTER

Age: 20 Sex: FEMALE

The card also shows Cassie's address, an editor's signature and the date it was issued.

The policeman lets Cassie through to Detective Hawley who stands under the store awning questioning Mrs. Ellis.

As Cassie approaches Paul hands Mrs. Ellis over to Hefty Policeman and walks off toward his police car up the street.

CASSIE
(hurrying after him)
Detective Hawley. Detective!

Paul stops and turns.

CASSIE (CONT'D)
What's going on? Has something
happened to the Maggios?

PAUL
You know these people?

CASSIE

Yeah, I shop here all the time. I live down the block. What's homicide doing here? Are they all right?

PAUL

No, they're not all right.

Paul walks on to his car.

CASSIE

(keeping pace)

What were they robbed? Do you have a suspect?

PAUL

I'll brief the press when I get back to the station. You can find out then.

CASSIE

Aw, come on, Detective, I'm first on the scene... and I know these people.

Paul walks into the street and opens his car door. Pauses and takes a good look at Cassie. Seems to like what he sees.

PAUL

It doesn't appear to be a robbery, and we have no suspects.

He gets in his car and Cassie hurries to the open window.

CASSIE

How were they killed? What was the murder weapon?

PAUL

An axe.

Paul starts the car and drives away and Cassie stares after him, stunned.

EXT. BLACK ROOSTER - DAY

Cassie crosses a street and enters her local watering hole.

INT. BLACK ROOSTER - DAY

Justify Jones is alone behind the bar cleaning a mirror. He turns when Cassie enters.

JUSTIFY

Cass. A little early isn't it?

CASSIE

For what?

Justify smiles and goes back to his cleaning.

JUSTIFY

If you want something to eat go next door. The cook called in sick again.

Cassie sits at the bar and fires up a cigarette.

CASSIE

That's 'cause he's been eating your food. Is your phone working?

JUSTIFY

Yeah, since I paid the bill.

Justify passes a candlestick phone behind the bar to Cassie then proceeds to set up a drink.

CASSIE

No, I just want to use your phone.

Cassie thinks about it.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

You know what, all right, go ahead, just one.

Justify grins wryly then pours the bourbon and goes back to cleaning the mirror.

Cassie dials a number.

INTERCUT between CASSIE in the bar and the TRIBUNE NEWSROOM.

RECEPTIONIST

New Orleans Tribune.

CASSIE

Hi, Gail. Let me talk to Roy.

RECEPTIONIST

Sure Cass, hold on a sec, he's not in his office.

The young RECEPTIONIST sets down the phone and walks over to Roy who is engaged with Helen at her desk.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)

Sir, I have Cassie Lacroix on the phone.

Roy gives Helen a chagrined look.

ROY
Put it through to my desk.

Roy goes to his glass enclosed office.

Cassie waits.

Roy picks up the phone.

CASSIE
Hi Roy, it's Cassie.

CLICK - the phone goes dead.

CASSIE

Sets the ear-piece back in place and stares at the phone.
Downs her drink.

CASSIE (CONT'D)
(to Justify)
Hey!

Justify turns and Cassie points at her empty glass.

EXT. BLACK ROOSTER - NIGHT

Cassie comes out of the bar with yet another HANDSOME MAN.

They walked down the street together, LAUGHING, weaving and stumbling, pretty well gone.

HANDSOME MAN
(slurred)
Hey, hold up, I gotta take a piss.

He turns into an alley and pees against the wall.

HANDSOME MAN (CONT'D)
You ever notice that once you start
pissin' you just can't stop. Huh?
Why is that?

He looks back at Cassie and sees an empty street.

FIND CASSIE

Riding a STREETCAR (#2).

Gazing out with glazed eyes at the passing streets. Worn thin by her destructive habits.

CASSIE

Walks up stairs and enters her APARTMENT. Shuts the door.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS TRIBUNE - DAY

A maroon 1916 Renault DM Tourer comes down the dusty unpaved street. Parks outside the Tribune's front door between a tarp-covered wagon and a donkey-drawn cart packed with fruit.

Roy Jenkins steps out carrying a briefcase.

He approaches the Tribune's front door fumbling with his keys. Looks up and stops in his tracks.

Cassie sits on a bench out front. She stands and stares. There is a moment here, finally...

ROY

If I didn't think you were going to come through with one helluva story, I wouldn't even consider this.

CASSIE

I won't let you down.

ROY

Don't let yourself down.

Something in Roy's eyes suggests he's more than on her side.

ROY (CONT'D)

Helen said you might've known the victims.

CASSIE

Yeah, I knew them. They were nice people.

ROY

Murdered with an axe.

Cassie and Roy exchange a meaningful look.

ROY (CONT'D)

You think there might be a connection?

CASSIE

Maybe. I don't know. But something doesn't feel right. I don't know how else to put it.

Roy comes up close to Cassie.

ROY

Just remember this isn't a crusade; no matter how personal it might feel to you. Treat it like any other story.

Cassie concurs with a nod.

ROY (CONT'D)

And keep an eye on your deadlines.

CASSIE

Count on it.

EXT. MAGGIO'S GROCERY STORE/HOME - DAY

Cassie walks down a narrow alley to the back entrance of the Maggio's home.

A sign posted on the back door reads:

KEEP OUT - RESTRICTED AREA - NEW ORLEANS POLICE

Cassie looks at the damaged back door.

FLASH CUT

To her own family's back door.

NOTE: Cut-ins of Cassie's memories are in BLACK AND WHITE.

CASSIE

Reaches up through the missing panel and unlocks the door.
Steps inside the

MAGGIO'S HOME

She walks slowly down the narrow hall, her shoes CLICKING
off the hardwood floor.

CUT TO Cassie's parents lying on the hallway floor.

CASSIE

Stops outside the Maggio's bedroom.

FLASH the entrance of the bedroom in her childhood home.

CASSIE

Steps into the scene of the crime.

QUICK SHOTS OF BOTH BEDROOMS:

Bloodstained mattresses, lamps and toys.

Pools of blood and splattered headboards.

The bloody arms and legs of Cassie's siblings.

Blood-matted hair. Gaping wounds.

CASSIE GASPS

And wheels from the room and puts her back to the wall, her hand over her mouth as she chokes back tears.

CUT TO:

AN OLD BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPH

Of seven-year-old Cassie in her white First Communion dress holding hands with her three-year-old sister. Mama behind her with infant Bobby in her arms.

CASSIE

Sips a cup of coffee and stares at the framed photo set out on a desk in CASSIE'S APARTMENT.

She opens the desk drawer and takes out a scrapbook. Flips through it as she has her coffee and a smoke.

THE SCRAPBOOK

Is filled with newspaper clippings from the serial axe murders of 1911-1912. Dates and headlines read:

FEBRUARY 13 1911 - AXE-MURDERER KILLS 4 IN CROWLEY LOUISIANA

MARCH 22 1911 - ANDRES FAMILY MURDERED IN THEIR BEDS

MOTHER AND 3 CHILDREN VICTIMS OF AXE-MURDERER

2ND AXE MURDER IN LAFAYETTE!

FAMILY OF 8 MURDERED!

AXE KILLER STRIKES AGAIN IN CROWLEY!

LOUISIANA TERRORIZED BY SERIAL AXE MURDERS

WHO WILL BE NEXT IS THE QUESTION FOR LOUISIANANS.

DEATH TOLL HITS 49 IN AXE MURDER MYSTERY!

Zero in on a headline... 13 YR OLD GIRL SOLE SURVIVOR OF MERMENTAU AXE MURDERS.

Accompanying the article is a PHOTOGRAPH of Cassie's home with the old swing out front.

CASSIE

Stares at the photo, flooded with memories. Takes her pewter flask off a counter and gets her coffee up on its feet.

She pages through the articles - pausing on one:

High Priest of Voodoo Cult Questioned in Axe-Murders

Cassie scribbles on a note pad: *Napoleon Dufay, Sacrificial Church, Crowley.*

CUT TO:

A welcome sign in a one-horse RAILROAD DEPOT:

CROWLEY

Louisiana

"The Rice City of America"

CASSIE

The lone passenger to step off the TRAIN.

She crosses the street to a two-story HOTEL.

A car out front with a hand-painted sign on the door:

FOR HIRE BY HOUR OR TRIP

INT. CROWLEY TAXI - DAY

Cassie rides through the sparse little town of low red brick and wooden buildings, as many wagons as cars on the street.

FARTHER ON

The taxi travels a dirt road into a WOODS.

CASSIE

How far is the church?

A wiry white CAB DRIVER glances at Cassie.

CAB DRIVER

It ain't no church, ma'am. Never was.
It's an unholy place if you ask me.
Even now, with what's left of it.

CASSIE

Has it closed?

CAB DRIVER

See for yourself, ma'am. There it is.

Ahead of them is a BURNT OUT BUILDING in the shade of a huge oak tree draped with Spanish moss.

CASSIE
You might have told me it burnt down.

CAB DRIVER
You didn't ask.

The taxi stops outside the charred remains of the church.

CAB DRIVER (CONT'D)
What you wanna' come out here for anyway?

CASSIE
I'm a reporter for a newspaper.

CAB DRIVER
You? Get out.

CASSIE
Yeah, imagine that.

CAB DRIVER
No offense, ma'am. I just never heard of such a thing.

CASSIE
What happened to the priest who ran the church, he still around?

CAB DRIVER
Sheee, ma'am, he weren't no priest, no kind of pastor neither if you ask me. The folks around here tried to get him to move on, but he wouldn't budge. So God took a hand and burnt down his church, so the story goes.

He flashes a row of tobacco-stained teeth at Cassie.

CASSIE
Do you know what happened to him?

CAB DRIVER
He lit out for New Orleans, last I heard. Put a curse on us the day he left. A blessing to see the back of him, if you ask me.

Cassie looks at the charred stone altar still standing, a black fallen beam lying across it like a sacrificed victim.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

A cat ferrets a dinner out of a garbage can. Tips it over with a CLANG and scurries away.

AXEMAN'S POV:

Of the cat running off under the squares of light emanating from the back windows of a row of homes.

A TALL DARK FIGURE

Approaches a window. Spies a LITTLE BOY and GIRL at play. The children chasing one another out of the room.

THE AXEMAN

Follows them, moving along the side of the house. Catching glimpses of the kids and their parents through side windows.

INSIDE THE HOME

Their FATHER flips through a rack of records.

KID'S FATHER
You kids get out of here. Go play
in your room.

The tall dark figure passes by in the window behind him.

THE EYES OF THE AXEMAN

Scan a wood pile at the side of the home. The handle of an axe hidden under a tarp.

He picks up the axe. Fingers the blade.

Turns toward the house, its side-alley door.

He tries the handle. Opens the unlocked door!

Suddenly a JAZZ TUNE blares from the home: "*Livery Stable Blues*" by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band.

The Axeman shuts the door. Moves into the alley and listens.

CLOSE ON

The Victor record. The emblem of the dog looking into the gramophone spinning round and round...

As the LIVELY TUNE PLAYS we INTER-CUT SHOTS of the record spinning with the attack on...

HARRIET LOWE and LOUIS BESUMER

A middle-aged couple lying together in bed.

Harriet comes awake. Senses something.

Looks at Louis asleep beside her, the open window beyond him where a lace curtain rises and falls... rises and falls.

Harriet turns over in bed and looks into the deeper shadows of the room where a TOWERING FIGURE in a hat and coat suddenly balloons out of the dark. Axe raised. Face in shadow.

A terrified Harriet CRIES OUT! Her ABORTED SCREAM stifled by a sweep of the axe.

The blood-glistening blade wielded violently, hatefully, over and over again.

As the JAZZ TUNE PLAYS, winds down and ends.

The spinning record SUPERIMPOSED over the bedroom carnage.

Louis's head a pool of blood and mashed brains.

A piece of Harriet's scalp thrown across the pillow.

The Axeman reaches down and takes it.

Drops the axe and walks out.

HARRIET'S HAZY POV

Of the tall dark figure leaving the room.

Her lips mouthing a SOUNDLESS CRY, for she isn't dead.

THE CLICK-CLICK-CLICK

Of hard-soled shoes on tile takes us to

INT. CHARITY HOSPITAL - DAY

A stern-looking NUN wearing an enormous white cornette strides down the sterile hallway of one of the wards.

Detective Paul Hawley waiting for her at a NURSE'S STATION.

NUN

(arriving)

Detective. The doctor says you may speak with her now, but only briefly. Do you understand?

The Nun stares hard at Paul, sets the detective straight about who's in charge here, his badge be damned.

PAUL

(amused)

Of course, whatever you say.

The Nun squints critically then turns on her heels and marches down the hall, her absurd cornette flapping like a pet albatross perched on her head.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Harriet Lowe lies in bed with a bandage around her head.

The Nun leads Paul into the room. Goes over to Harriet and speaks in her ear then turns to Paul to proceed.

PAUL

Mrs. Lowe, I'm Detective Paul Hawley with the New Orleans Police. I'd like to ask you a few questions.

NUN

She knows this. I told you to be brief.

Paul bypasses the Nun and comes closer to Mrs. Lowe.

PAUL

Who did this to you?

HARRIET

(just above a whisper)
I don't know. A man.

PAUL

Can you recall anything about him, anything distinctive?

HARRIET

Tall. He was tall... and dark.

PAUL

Was he a Negro?

HARRIET

I don't know, could be. He was like a shadow.

PAUL

Did he speak, say anything?

Harriet stares at Paul and shakes her head "no". Then her attention wanders, her eyes disengage.

NUN

I think that's enough for now, Detective. She needs her rest.

Paul looks sympathetically at Harriet. Nods to the Nun and starts out of the room.

HARRIET
(softly)
He smelled.

PAUL
(turns back)
Excuse me, what was that?

HARRIET
The man, he smelled like lilacs.

CUT TO:

THE LOBBY

Where Paul gets ambushed by Cassie waiting for him by the front door of the hospital, smoking a cigarette.

PAUL
Miss Lacroix. How is it I knew you'd turn up.

CASSIE
Maybe you have second sight.

PAUL
What's that?

CASSIE
An ability some people have to sense certain things before they happen.

PAUL
I sense you have an ability to pester me. Does that count?

CASSIE
Is she going to live?

PAUL
Yeah, scarred and without a husband, but she'll live.

CASSIE
How about a description? What do you have to go on?

PAUL
He's tall, that's it.

CASSIE
So then it's a man, by himself?

PAUL
Looks that way.

CASSIE
Nothing else?

PAUL
(jesting)
Maybe he's an Indian.

Paul grins and walks off.

CASSIE
What makes you say that?

PAUL
(turns briefly)
He took part of her scalp. But I
better not see that in the papers.

Paul walks out and Cassie stares after him.

CUT TO:

A WHITE MARBLE SCULPTURE OF MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

Casting Lucifer out of Heaven, a figurehead atop a tomb in
the city's ST. LOUIS CEMETERY.

CASSIE

Shielding her eyes from the SUN as she looks at it.

She moves on. Walks through the "City of the Dead" a
sprawling cluster of vaults, mausoleums and parapet tombs.

She comes to a wrought iron fence at the edge of the cemetery.

Views an OLD CHURCH outside the back gate.

Cassie approaches the entrance, passing a sign that reads:

"SACRIFICIAL CHURCH OF NEW ORLEANS"

Cassie enters the old wooden building. Walks between the
pews toward a colorful altar. Looking around at the

Peeling plaster walls and several paintings of Voodoo gods:

BONDEYE, the Creator. DAMBALLAH, the Serpent god. OGUN,
the god of iron and rum and some other minor deities.

She halts before a lime green ALTAR adorned with candles and
skulls, hats, charms and mock coffins with crosses in them.

Beside the altar is a frightful, erotic painting of the skull-
faced BARON SAMEDI seducing a black maiden in a cane field.

Cassie stares at the picture. Senses something and turns to find NAPOLEON DUFAY standing in an open doorway at the side of the church with a broom in his hand.

Napoleon's about 30 and Creole like Cassie, tall and extremely handsome; a man who has a way with women and knows it.

NAPOLEON DUFAY

Hello. Is there something I can do for you?

CASSIE

I was visiting the cemetery and saw your church. It's charming. I couldn't resist a closer look.

NAPOLEON DUFAY

Now is that any way to greet a stranger, Miss Lacroix, with a lie? I read the Tribune and frequent Bourbon Street so I know who you are. Why don't we try this again. Now, is there something I can do for you?

CASSIE

I'm doing a story on the axe murders.

NAPOLEON DUFAY

Oh, yes, the Italian grocer and his wife.

CASSIE

No. I'm more interested in the murders of 1911. In particular, the ones that occurred in Crowley.

NAPOLEON DUFAY

Oh, I see. And you think there's a connection.

CASSIE

Could be.

NAPOLEON DUFAY

Am I suspect?

CASSIE

You were back in Crowley.

NAPOLEON DUFAY

And now I am here and the murders have started again. Is that it?

CASSIE

Yeah, that's it.

Napoleon saunters out of the doorway over to Cassie.

NAPOLEON DUFAY

Left me save you a lot of time and trouble, Miss Lacroix. I'm not the one you're looking for. I wasn't charged back then and I had nothing to do with what happened the other night.

CASSIE

Then perhaps it was another member of your church?

NAPOLEON DUFAY

I think I can say with absolute certainty that the one responsible for the murders in 1911 was not a member of my church.

CASSIE

And the Maggio murders?

NAPOLEON DUFAY

The same. Even if they are connected you're barking up the wrong tree.

Napoleon leans on a pew and holds the broom between his legs.

NAPOLEON DUFAY (CONT'D)

You don't usually write articles on crime, do you? Politics is your beat, civic affairs? Why are you so suddenly interested in murder?

CASSIE

It's a big story, could be my ticket out.

NAPOLEON DUFAY

To where? Who's going to hire a woman reporter, a Creole; except that struggling little paper you work for.

CASSIE

There's work out there: Chicago, New York, Paris. Someone will hire me.

NAPOLEON DUFAY

I suppose. Attractive woman always manage to open doors, one way or another. Don't they?

CASSIE

Have the police questioned you?

NAPOLEON DUFAY

Not yet.

CASSIE

They will.

NAPOLEON DUFAY

Let them come. I have nothing to hide. People who commit crimes, no matter how clever they are, can rarely stand up to scrutiny. Most murderers are found out the moment the police interview them. They ooze guilt and the police can smell it. Only an innocent person or someone with remarkable composure can stand up to their questions. Now I ask you, do I strike you as a man with remarkable composure, or am I just innocent?

Napoleon looks at Cassie with a wicked glint in his eye.

CASSIE

You strike me as arrogant. And arrogant people think they can get away with anything, but rarely do.

Cassie brushes past him and heads for the door.

NAPOLEON DUFAY

Miss Lacroix!

Cassie turns.

NAPOLEON DUFAY (CONT'D)

I'm having a gathering tonight, a small ceremony, a Voodoo ritual I'm sure you'll think primitive. But you may find it quite enlightening. It might even help you in your quest.

CASSIE

Help me find who murdered the Maggios?

NAPOLEON DUFAY

Who, Miss Lacroix, or what?

The words hang in the air. Napoleon turns his back to Cassie and starts sweeping the church.

NAPOLEON DUFAY (CONT'D)

(throws out)

We start at midnight.

INT. 7TH PRECINCT - NIGHT

Paul sits at his desk reviewing crime scene photos of the murders of Louis Besumer and the Maggios.

A thin bald detective, call him RHODES, walks up with a folder full of newspaper articles and drops one in front of Paul.

RHODES
Get a load of this.

Paul picks up the article about Cassie's family: "13 YR OLD GIRL SOLE SURVIVOR OF MERMENTAU AXE MURDERS."

IN THE FINE PRINT

"Little 13-year-old Cassandra Lacroix hospitalized in shock after having discovered the bodies of her murdered family."

PAUL
I'll be damned. It explains a lot, doesn't it?

RHODES
Why she's hot for the story or a lush that sleeps around?

PAUL
Where do you get this crap?

RHODES
Take a run by the Black Rooster on any Friday night and see for yourself.

Paul ponders the article then stuffs it in his shirt. Grabs his coat and walks out.

RHODES (CONT'D)
I didn't mean tonight!

PAUL
(calls back amicably)
Fuck off.

CUT TO:

BLACKNESS

And BEATING DRUMS!

Suddenly a torch flares to life illuminating the skeleton-painted face of BARON SAMEDI, the "Spirit of the Dead."

Baron Samedi dances around the church COURTYARD in a long coat, loin cloth and top hat painted with a white cross.

A crowd of WORSHIPERS in a circle around him, CHANTING, CLAPPING, SINGING as the Baron whirls around handling a snake.

INT. SACRIFICIAL CHURCH - NIGHT

Cassie enters.

The church is empty except for FRANCINE, a beautiful black woman in her 30s, sitting at a table next to the open back door. The RHYTHMIC DRUMS coming in from the courtyard outside.

Francine wears a tignon and colorful clothes. She counts out cash, a glass of wine, a small box and a ledger on the table before her.

CASSIE
(approaching)
Good evening.

Francine glances up at Cassie then finishes the count and puts the money in the box. Stands to go.

FRANCINE
You're too late. It's after midnight.
The ceremony's already started.

BOOM! The front door to the church is closed.

Startling Cassie. She looks back at a CHURCH JANITOR walking away from the front door and turns again to Francine.

CASSIE
I'm sorry. It's my first time here.

FRANCINE
Being on time shows respect for our
religious practices, and our deities.

Francine gives Cassie the once over. Polishes off her wine and sets down the glass then flips opens the ledger.

CASSIE
Thank you.

Cassie looks at the ledger:

A date, printed names, donation amounts, here and there the word "Guest".

Cassie signs in and Francine closes the ledger and looks expectantly at Cassie who fishes a few bills from her purse and puts them in the box.

Francine picks up the box and the ledger.

FRANCINE

This way.

She leads Cassie into the old church sacristy, now a SUPPLY ROOM between the church and courtyard. The POUNDING DRUMS and CHANTING of the ceremony coming louder from outside.

Francine puts the ledger among others on a shelf. The arrayed church records have a year written on the spine.

Cassie notices.

Francine escorts Cassie to the back door where they look out at the CROWD gathered in the courtyard.

FRANCINE (CONT'D)

If you haven't been here before,
remain quiet and don't ask questions.
And whatever you do, don't faint.

CASSIE

Thanks. I'll do my best.

Cassie walks outside. Francine stares after her, something more than idle curiosity in her eyes.

CUT TO:

BARON SAMEDI

Dancing erotically with TWO SENSUOUS WOMEN OF COLOR wearing tignons and flowing white dresses held high over their thighs.

NAPOLEON DUFAY

The houngan or high priest, overseeing the ritual in a white ceremonial robe and colorful headdress of skull and feathers.

PICKUP CASSIE

A face among the crowd, peering over the shoulders of the worshipers in front of her.

The DRUMS STOP and Baron Samedi and the women exit a white circle painted on the ground and disappear into the crowd.

MOMENTS LATER

An inverted chicken flutters and CLUCKS. Napoleon holding it up to the crowd. Drawing a knife.

Blood spills.

And a shirtless drummer begins a RHYTHMIC, HYPNOTIC BEAT.

Napoleon waves a spear in front of a line of men and women dancing in a trance. He points to a THIN YOUNG MAN.

HOUNGAN/NAPOLEON DUFAY
Kalfu, esprit de la nuit, avance!

CASSIE

Whispers to a YOUNG BLACK WOMAN next to her.

CASSIE
What's going on?

YOUNG BLACK WOMAN
The houngan has invoked the spirit
Kalfu, Loa of the Night. A possession
is about to take place.

The crowd grows perfectly silent and Cassie watches as the DRUM BEAT ROLLS and the ritual unfolds.

The thin young man shimmies and shakes. Lets out a CRY.

His eyes roll and he drops to the ground.

Lies there shaking... writhes and rolls. Pops up to his knees then goes rigid and CRIES OUT IN A DEEP VOICE.

He falls back on the ground clasping his throat, choking.

The DRUMMING HALTS and members of the crowd GASP.

The thin young man froths at the mouth, shakes horribly, with his eyes rolled back in his head.

Napoleon Dufay springs toward him with the outstretched spear.

NAPOLEON DUFAY
Pars, Kalfu, libere ton serviteur.
Laisse le partir! LAISSE LE PARTIR!

The thin young man grimaces in pain, arches his back at an insane angle then faints and collapses in a heap.

With a COLLECTIVE SIGH the crowd rushes toward him pushing Cassie aside.

She moves away from the commotion into the quiet of the

SUPPLY ROOM

Stops and catches her breath. Thinks. Then noses around.

She checks the door behind her and a side window to be sure she's alone then goes to the shelf lined with old ledgers.

She fingers through the years. Finds 1911 and takes it out.

Pages through it. One page the same as another. More names and dollar amounts and some occasional notes.

Cassie passes a page with a BLACK LINE blotting out a name. Scans another page or two then pauses and just stares blankly into space, struck by something, a thought? A feeling? An urging from her second sight?

She flips back to the page with the blacked-out name. Zeros in on the date atop the page:

JANUARY 7th 1911

She tears out the page. Folds it and tucks it in her pocket. Replaces the ledger then senses something and turns.

Napoleon Dufay stands in the doorway.

NAPOLEON DUFAY (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

Cassie smiles, a bead of sweat trickling down her cheek.

CASSIE

I had to get out of that crowd.
It's so hot. The woman who signed
me in was drinking wine. I was hoping
to find some, have a drink.

Napoleon walks over to Cassie who stands between the shelf and an old sink filled with dirty glasses and plates.

NAPOLEON DUFAY

She brought her own bottle and, if I
know her, drank it all herself. I don't
keep any wine or liquor here. My
congregation is poor and I don't want
to put any temptations in their path.

Napoleon captures the bead of sweat on Cassie's face with his finger, sensually.

NAPOLEON DUFAY (CONT'D)

You know people, always giving in to
temptations.

He gives Cassie a look that all women understand. Cassie turns away. Changes the subject trying to alter the mood.

CASSIE

That was quite the ritual. Is that
young man all right?

NAPOLEON DUFAY

He's fine.

CASSIE

What happened to him?

NAPOLEON DUFAY

I called forth the Loa Kalfu, but tonight I don't think he came alone. It was a bit much for a boy his age.

CASSIE

So he was possessed?

NAPOLEON DUFAY

Briefly.

CASSIE

By more than one spirit?

NAPOLEON DUFAY

It happens sometimes. When you create a rift into the spirit world, you don't always know who will come through. You don't believe that, do you?

CASSIE

I believe what I saw.

Napoleon closes the space between them. Gently moves one of Cassie's curly bangs out of her eyes.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

I should be going.

She turns to go but Napoleon grabs her arm.

NAPOLEON DUFAY

What were you really doing in here?

CASSIE

I was nosing around. It's what I do. I'm a reporter.

Napoleon keeps hold of her. The tension builds.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

You're hurting me.

Napoleon let's go of her arm.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Thank you for an interesting evening. We should do it again sometime.

Cassie walks out.

Napoleon lingers, then looks at the ledgers on the shelf.

The 1911 ledger slightly out of place.

He pulls it out. Flips through it to the torn out page.

EXT. TULANE UNIVERSITY - DAY - GIBSON HALL

The heart of the institution, a four story rectangular structure done in the Romanesque style.

A monument sign on the manicured front lawn reads:

TULANE UNIVERSITY
Est. 1834

CASSIE

Climbs steps leading to the arched entrance.

CUT TO:

THE PAPER WITH THE BLACKED-OUT NAME

Dipped into a pan filled with a clear chemical solution.

CASSIE AND AN OLD CHEMISTRY PROFESSOR

At a sink in a LAB trying to uncover the concealed name. A periodic table of the elements on the wall behind them.

OLD PROFESSOR

So if I figure this out are you going
to put my name in the paper?

CASSIE

Sure, if you want.

OLD PROFESSOR

Heavens, no. The only time I'd want
my name in print is for an obituary.
And then just to thumb my nose at my
creditors.

He takes out the page and dips it in a second red solution then lays it on a cloth.

CASSIE

So how does this work?

OLD PROFESSOR

It's magic. See...

He shines a red light on the page and a name rises out of the black ink... "Alton Baylor"

A soft lamentable RIFT ON A TRUMPET begins to play.

CUT TO:

An old black man holding his hat over his heart, watching a
NEW ORLEANS FUNERAL PROCESSION

On the STREET in front of CASSIE'S APARTMENT.

CASSIE

Looks down from her window at a large black family behind the musicians, the pall-bearers and a wreath-topped coffin.

They march down the street one slow step at a time.

Suddenly the TRUMPETER hits a note and the band breaks out in a LIVELY TUNE. The whole procession springs to life and starts dancing down the street.

Cassie pulls herself away from the window and goes to a map of New Orleans spread across a table.

ON THE MAP

Labelled pins indicate the location, order and year of the axe murders: #1/1911... #3/1911... #1/1918(Maggios)... #2/1918 and so on.

Cassie studies the map. Places her finger near a pin tagged SACRIFICIAL CHURCH - the hub in the wheel of murders.

EXT. CREOLE TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Cassie turns off a sidewalk into a rundown building.

INT. CREOLE TOWNHOUSE - DAY

An OLD CREOLE WOMAN in a rocker knits a shawl behind a counter. She gets out of her chair as Cassie walks in.

OLD CREOLE WOMAN

Bon jour.

CASSIE

Bon jour, memere. I wonder if you can help me?

OLD CREOLE WOMAN

I'll certainly try. Are you looking for a room?

CASSIE
No, ma'am, my husband.

OLD CREOLE WOMAN
Oh, I see.
(gravely)
Is he with someone?

CASSIE
I don't know. Could be. I'm just
trying to find him.

OLD CREOLE WOMAN
Oh, you poor dear. I know exactly
what you're going through. The same
thing happened to me. My Lem chased
every skirt in town. But I fixed
him good. I shot him with his own
gun. You aren't plannin' to shoot
your husband are you?

CASSIE
No.

OLD CREOLE WOMAN
Good. The sonsofbitches ain't worth
it. Got me five years, and that
from a black jury.

CASSIE
He owes me some money. I've been
checking the whole neighborhood. I
know he's around here somewhere.

OLD CREOLE WOMAN
Well let's just see.

She puts on her glasses and opens a registry.

OLD CREOLE WOMAN (CONT'D)
What's his name?

CASSIE
Alton, Alton Baylor.

CUT TO:

A SERIES OF SHOTS OF CASSIE CHECKING THE NEIGHBORHOOD:

Going in and out of shabby and quaint APARTMENT BUILDINGS.

COUNTER CLERKS and LANDLORDS. Being rude or helpful. Opening
doors... and SLAMMING them.

Cassie wearing out her shoes on the stone-block streets.

Walking in sight of the SACRIFICIAL CHURCH.

Exiting a BUILDING and checking her map on the stoop.

Passing a group of men and women drinking in front of a BROTHEL, ignoring their ad-libbed CRUDE COMMENTS and LAUGHTER.

She detours into an ALLEY where a large dog leaps out BARKING.

Rests on a SIDEWALK bench. A red sun setting in the west.

END WITH CASSIE approaching a house with a sign out front.

FURNISHED ROOMS

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - TWILIGHT

IDUS, a skinny old man, peers over the top of his glasses.

IDUS

Nope. Sorry. Can't help ya.

Cassie stands across a counter from him making inquires.

IDUS (CONT'D)

There's no one here by that name.

FAT WOMAN (O.S.)

(a voice from a back room)

What name's that, Idus?

IDUS

(snaps back)

Taylor!

CASSIE

No, sir. It's Baylor, Alton Baylor.

A FAT WOMAN in a wheelchair rolls in from the other room.

FAT WOMAN

What are you saying now, old man?
We have a Mister Baylor. He's in
unit twelve.

CASSIE

Alton Baylor?

FAT WOMAN

I don't recall his first name. Let
me see.

The Fat Woman opens a drawer and comes up with a card.

FAT WOMAN (CONT'D)
 Yep, that's him. Alton Baylor, no
 previous address.

CASSIE
 Is he in?

FAT WOMAN
 I don't know. We don't see much of
 him. He keeps strange hours. Paid
 his rent six months in advance.

IDUS
 Oh, that fella', the rude bastard.
 (to Cassie)
 What do want with him anyway? I'd
 stay clear of that man, missy,
 somethin' definitely odd about him.

FAT WOMAN
 Oh, shush. He's not odd, he's just
 the quiet type.
 (to Cassie)
 He don't say much, but a lot of soldiers
 come back from the war that way.

CASSIE
 How do you know he was in the war?

Fat Woman and Idus exchange looks.

FAT WOMAN
 We just figured on account of him
 being blind and all?

On Cassie, intrigued.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE SHACKS - TWILIGHT

Cassie walks through an old version of a trailer park, a
 couple dozen shack-like homes occupying a dirt lot, the smoke-
 spewing chimney of the Jackson Brewery and the spires of St.
 Louis Cathedral in the skyline behind her.

She stops and looks around at the impoverished setting
 reminiscent of her youth:

Piles of junk. Laundry lines. Rusty bicycles and wooden
 carts. Even a shade tree with an old swing.

SHACK 12

Cassie checks the #12 on the door of a unit up to its windows
 in weeds, off by itself as if banished by the other homes.

She KNOCKS on the door. Listens. Tries the lock then peeks through a front window at an interior too dark to see.

Cassie circles the shack. Finds a back window facing a field. Unlocked. She raises the window and crawls inside.

INT. SHACK 12 - SAME

Cassie rises and dusts herself off, peering through the dying beams of sunlight in the heavily shadowed room.

She comes upon a lantern on a table in the middle of the room. Strikes a match to light it. Decides against it and moves through the dark with the match.

Finds a painting on an easel: a macabre abstract with agonized faces, graphic nudes and anatomical gore: the artistic melange of a mad or evil mind.

The match goes out and Cassie strikes another.

Illuminating a cot on the floor and canned goods on a shelf.

She slides open a closet revealing a tall dresser, a travel bag and hats on an upper shelf. Coats and clothes on hangers.

A bottle of eau de toilette on the dresser. It reads:
"Essence of Lilac".

CUT TO:

A SHEPHERD'S CROOK STREETLAMP

And the CLICK-CLICK-CLICK of a blind man's cane tapping the wooden planks of a duckboard sidewalk.

ALTON BAYLOR

Walks home. A tall, broad-shoulder man obscured from prying eyes under a long coat, black hat and dark glasses.

CASSIE

Opens the first dresser drawer. Newspaper articles, stacks of them, all related to axe murders, many of the ones that Cassie has, but others too from Texas and Kansas.

CUT TO:

ALTON BAYLOR

Turning the CORNER down the street from the office.

CASSIE

Strikes another match and opens the 2nd drawer.

More papers: sheet music and pen and ink drawings of demonic faces and body parts - a hand, a breast, lips, ears and teeth, etc. And a fine drawing of the city at dusk.

Cassie shuts the second drawer and checks the one below it.

More papers and parchments covered with strange characters, a kind of code or ancient language. The odd characters drawn in lines, circles, triangles and pentagrams.

Cassie pockets several of the papers and the match goes out.

CLICK-CLICK-CLICK!

ALTON BAYLOR

Walks past the OFFICE down the path to his shack.

IN THE OFFICE

Idus reads a paper at the counter unaware of Alton's return.

CASSIE

Strikes another match, her face aglow in the flare. She kneels and opens the bottom drawer.

Holds out the match and reveals a collection of old blood-caked scalps. Cassie GASPS... when RAWH-RAWH-RAWH! a DOG SUDDENLY BARKS. Cassie turns. SEES...

Alton Baylor through the front window approaching the shack with his cane, a leashed dog BARKING behind him.

HEAVY FOOTSTEPS stomp outside the door.

A KEY JIGGLES the lock.

Cassie shuts the dresser drawer and blows out the match.

CUT TO:

ALTON BAYLOR

Stepping into his home. He sets his cane by the door and walks to the table. Opens the lantern and lights it.

Goes to the closet, opens the door and hangs up his coat.

Cassie tucked into a ball in a corner of the closet, concealed by the hanging clothes, Alton Baylor's legs just inches away.

He leaves the closet open and walks away.

CASSIE'S POV - FROM A LOW ANGLE BETWEEN THE CLOTHES

Of Alton Baylor arranging dinner. Moving in and out of view as he gathers a spoon and a can opener.

A glass of water and some Libby's canned beef.

He sets his dark glasses down on the table.

Opens the can and eats with the spoon.

Cassie glimpsing his profile, his sharp nose and goatee.

CLOSE ON ALTON BAYLOR'S

Yellow neglected teeth.

His filthy black nails.

CASSIE WATCHING

Waiting.

Trembling with fear. She holds tight to her knees and shuts her eyes, fighting to contain her terror.

ALTON BAYLOR

Lies down on the cot. Fully clothed. Boots on. Leaving the lantern lit on the table.

CASSIE

Waits. And waits...

CUT TO:

THE MOON RISING

In the still of the night.

BACK TO CASSIE

Creeping out of the closet on her hands and knees.

Alton Baylor asleep on his side with his back to her.

Cassie crawls to the door.

Turns the lock ever so slowly... CLICK! Cassie freezes. Looks back at the tall man, now laid out flat on the bed.

Cassie watches, making sure.

She cracks open the door, rises out of her crouch and bolts out the door but is suddenly grabbed by her hair and yanked back into the room.

Cassie SCREAMS! Flails and fights back. The room whirls.

Flashes of a wicked face - the lantern - a window.

Alton Baylor drags a struggling Cassie across the room.

They crash into the table. Knock the lantern to the floor.

FLAMES SHOOTING up Alton Baylor's leg. He releases Cassie and beats out the flames.

Cassie clammers across the floor. Grabs a fallen chair and bull-rushes it out the window.

SMASHING the glass. Landing hard on the ground. Staggering to her feet and racing away.

ALTON BAYLOR

Snuffs out the flames on his pants.

Walks past a fire on the floor and looks out the window at Cassie running away.

He bends down and picks up Cassie's fallen purse. Walks casually to the closet as the FIRE SPREADS to the table.

He takes the travel bag off the shelf and packs some clothes. Opens the drawer and removes the scalps.

Puts on his hat and coat and looks around for his glasses.

He picks them up off the floor and puts them on. Grabs his cane and walks out.

EXT. SHACK 12 - NIGHT

Alton Baylor walks away from the BURNING SHACK, his tall dark figure blending into the velvety blackness of the night.

INT. BEDROOM - SCHNEIDER HOME - NIGHT

MARY SCHNEIDER (28) eight months PREGNANT, rolls over in bed and looks through a mosquito netting at a nightstand clock:

Five minutes after midnight.

She turns over and faces an empty pillow.

CUT TO:

EDWARD SCHNEIDER (EARLY 30s)

Heading home from the night shift, walking down a dark MOONLIT STREET dressed in overalls, carrying his dinner-pail.

MARY

Pulls the covers up to her neck and shuts her eyes. After a moment, the COVERS START MOVING SLOWLY BACK DOWN THE BED.

Mary opens her eyes, looks at the receding covers then peers through the mosquito net at the outline of a man and smiles.

MARY

(drowsy)

Oh, Ed, you scared me.

The shining steel tip of an axe blade moves the net aside.

Mary stares with her mouth agape. Paralyzed with fright.

The Axeman steps onto the bed and brings down the axe.

Mary SCREAMS! Turns. The blade glancing off her head, knocking her unconscious and slicing off her ear.

CUT TO:

ED SCHNEIDER

Hearing the SCREAM, flinging away his pail and sprinting the last few yards to a garden gate in front of his house.

THE AXEMAN

Reaches into a river of blood and picks up the ear. HEARS JOHN whipping open the gate with a CLANG!

The Axeman walks calmly from the room into a REAR HALLWAY and out a back door with a missing panel.

EXT. SCHNEIDER HOME - NIGHT

The Axeman emerges into an ALLEY and tosses the axe aside then walks off into the night.

CLOSE ON THE AXE

Still dripping with blood.

INT. 7TH PRECINCT - DAY

An exhausted Cassie sits across a desk from Detective Rhodes who fills out a report.

Across the room Paul speaks with a PATROLMAN.

Rhodes bites a nail between scribbles then looks up at Cassie and self-consciously lowers his hand as Paul walks over.

PAUL
So how long have you been here?

CASSIE
Feels like forever. Why, what time is it?

PAUL
(checks his watch)
It's almost four. Why don't you go home and get some sleep.

CASSIE
I was hoping to go with you.

PAUL
Where?

CASSIE
His house. Aren't you going to check it out?

PAUL
(re: the patrolmen)
He already did. There's nothing there but a bunch of cinders.

CASSIE
Did you read my statement?

PAUL
Yeah, and you're lucky I don't have you arrested.

CASSIE
Wait a minute, am I missing something? I'm telling you, this guy's the Axeman.

PAUL
Come here.

Paul leads Cassie to the CITY MAP behind Rhodes's desk.

PAUL (CONT'D)
(points to the map)
Okay, you were here, right, with the Axeman, at about what, eleven thirty?

CASSIE
Yeah.

PAUL

You sure about that?

CASSIE

Yeah, I'm sure.

PAUL

All right then, you tell me how the hell he got clear over here on the other side of the river in less than half an hour.

CASSIE

There was another murder?

PAUL

Not quite, the victim will live, a pregnant lady in Gretna. But she's only alive because her husband came home at the time of the attack. The same time he comes home every night, about five minutes after midnight.

Cassie stares at the map.

PAUL (CONT'D)

You got one ferry running at that time of night and that's at one fifteen in the morning. Over an hour too late if it's the same guy.

CASSIE

What if he used a boat?

PAUL

He rents a shack for ten cents a day and owns a boat?

CASSIE

Maybe its a rowboat.

PAUL

If he used a rowboat he should head to Antwerp and enter the Olympics. That's two miles against the tide in twenty minutes. Who is he Hercules?

CASSIE

But it has to be him. What about the scalps I saw?

Paul opens Rhodes's desk and tosses out a toupee.

PAUL

You mean like this?

Cassie stares at the toupee.

PAUL (CONT'D)

A guy woke up and found you in his house and got a little upset. Who wouldn't?

Cassie is silent. Seeds of doubt taking root in her mind.

PAUL (CONT'D)

C'mon, Cassie, you've had a long day. Go home and get some sleep. Leave something for us to do. We'll look into it. I doubt he's our man but we got a name, maybe we can find him.

Cassie stares at the pin marking the latest attack on the map. Uncertain. Nods to Paul and walks out of the room.

Rhodes picks up his toupee and looks at Paul.

RHODES

Is nothing sacred?

EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVER - DAWN

The "*HAROLD WALKER*", an old oil tanker steamship, cruises up river toward the docks, her twin white funnels spewing ribbons of black smoke into the pale morning sky.

AT THE WATERLINE

A tarp-covered skiff lies concealed in the weeds near the base of an abandoned brick warehouse.

Out from under the tarp comes Alton Baylor, his face obscured.

He puts on his hat and dark glasses. Takes his bag, cane and coat from the rowboat and walks off through the weeds.

EXT. BOURBON STREET - DAY

Cassie steps off a trolley and walks down the street.

Comes to the Black Rooster and stops and stares at its blood-red door.

INT. BLACK ROOSTER - DAY

Cassie enters the moody room and takes a seat at the bar as far from the other CUSTOMERS as she can. Justify breaks off a conversation and approaches Cassie.

JUSTIFY

Mornin', Cass. What are you just getting started or is this the end of your night?

CASSIE

What's it to you?

Justify sloughs off the crack with a smile and makes her a drink. Cassie watching him as if he were loading a shotgun.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Hey, I need the key.

Justify takes a key off the back of the bar and sets it down with the drink.

Cassie takes the key and goes to a

BATHROOM BEHIND THE BAR

Washes her face at the sink. Looks in the mirror.

BLACK ROOSTER - SAME

Cassie emerges from the bathroom.

Lays the key on the bar and walks straight out the door.

Justify watches her go, amused, then downs her drink.

EXT. DOCK - DAY

A pair of Charity Hospital Model-T ambulances are parked on the dock next to the "HAROLD WALKER".

Two sick men on stretchers are carried down a gangplank toward an anxious CAPTAIN and SHIP'S DOCTOR engaged in a discussion with a group of HOSPITAL PERSONNEL.

CLOSE ON

The blue face of one of the sick men, feverish and coughing. The great Spanish Flu epidemic has arrived in New Orleans.

INT. NEWSROOM - TRIBUNE - DAY

Cassie is on the phone at her desk, the newsroom STAFF going about there usual business around her.

CASSIE

... Yes, thank you. I've been trying to reach Father Silvestri. I was told he was reassigned to this parish.

Roy Jenkins approaches, tie off, shirt sleeves up, some newspaper copy in his hand, stressed to make a deadline.

ROY

All right, Cass, what have you got? I need something hard for above the fold.

(waves the copy)

All this tripe's softer than church music. Where're you at on that latest attack.

Cassie holds up a hand for Roy to wait.

CASSIE

(on the phone)

Oh, he is, that's great. May I see him today? One o'clock will be fine. What's your address?

Cassie writes down the address and hangs up. Gathers some papers and stands to go.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Sorry, Roy, nothing yet, but I think I know who the axeman is.

ROY

Yeah, me too, my mother-in-law.

Cassie walks by Roy and pats him on the chest.

CASSIE

It's not wishful thinking... and it's more than a hunch. Just give me some time.

ROY

(calls after her)

You run it by the police?

CASSIE

(stops and turns)

Yeah.

ROY

And?

CASSIE

And they don't agree... yet.

Helen looks up from her desk.

HELEN

Oh, hey, Cass, hold on. I almost forgot.

She hands Cassie a card.

CASSIE
Oh, perfect. Thanks, Helen.

ROY
What's that?

CASSIE
I lost my employment card.

Cassie turns and goes.

ROY
(calls after her)
So someone's running around with
your press credentials?

CASSIE
Don't worry about my card it burned
up in the fire.

ROY
What fire!

CUT TO:

A STAINED GLASS WINDOW

A striking motif of a winged, red-eyed Satan tempting an enfeebled Christ in the desert. A placid sheet of colorful light refracting through the panes onto

CASSIE

Walking through the nave of ST. ANTHONY'S CHURCH.

CUT TO:

FATHER OTTAVIO SILVESTRI

The old Italian priest pours two cups of coffee. Carries them over to Cassie seated at a table in his small OFFICE.

FATHER SILVESTRI
I hope you like it strong. I prefer
espresso myself. I had a lovely
machine gifted to me by my old
parishioners but I had to leave it
behind. I told the bishop it was
the one luxury afforded an
impoverished priest. He was not
sympathetic.

Cassie takes her cup and drinks.

CASSIE
It's fine. Thank you.

FATHER SILVESTRI
You know most of the reporters I've met have been fat bald men. So you are a pleasant surprise. Are you Italian?

CASSIE
No, Father, Creole...
(with a hint of shame)
I come from mixed parents.

FATHER SILVESTRI
Wear that badge proudly, my child. In Italy we know the very finest wine comes from the cross-breeding of grapes, but in this country, ahh...
(scoffs in disgust)
so much ignorance.

He smiles at Cassie.

FATHER SILVESTRI (CONT'D)
So, let me see what you have for me, hmm. What is this great mystery?

Cassie takes out the writings of Alton Baylor and spreads them out on the table.

FATHER SILVESTRI (CONT'D)
(examines them)
Ahh, yes, yes... These are extraordinary. Where did you get them?

CASSIE
I'd rather not say.

FATHER SILVESTRI
They are the work of one person?

CASSIE
I think so.

FATHER SILVESTRI
Hmm.

Father Silvestri studies a page, fascinated, puzzled.

CASSIE
Can you translate it?

FATHER SILVESTRI

Given time I can translate some of it, but much of this writing is unrecognizable to me.

He goes over the pages with Cassie.

FATHER SILVESTRI (CONT'D)

What I think you have here are five or six distinct languages. These wedge shaped characters are Sumerian cuneiform, the oldest known writing system which goes back about five thousand years.

(refers to another page)

And this is Aramaic. But these others...

He makes a gesture of bewilderment.

FATHER SILVESTRI (CONT'D)

Can you leave them with me? I would very much like to share them with some colleagues, if that's acceptable to you.

Cassie assents with a nod.

A PALE SKULL-LIKE MOON

Hangs high over ST. LOUIS CEMETERY where a big rat scurries through the miniature city of crypts, tombs and mausoleums.

The rat climbs onto a crypt and sniffs the air. Suddenly a man's heavy fist crashes down on its head.

ALTON BAYLOR

Picks up the rat by the tail and walks off.

After a few steps he swings the rat in a circle and launches it into the night.

Revisit the MOON, the only witness to the murder, as the pure, contralto voice of MARION ANDERSON sings "DEEP RIVER".

START MONTAGE

Of the Spanish Flu Epidemic.

Soar over the CITY AT NIGHT, the shining urban sprawl between the mighty Mississippi and the banks of Lake Pontchartrain.

INTERCUT old photos of the pandemic's impact on New Orleans with SHOTS that convey the widespread panic and suffering.

Signs being posted:

PUBLIC NOTICE - INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC!

SCHOOLS CLOSED BY REQUEST OF THE MAYOR!

People in their HOMES dying in bed.

Penniless bums succumbing to the flu out in the STREETS.

Widowed wives in black.

Orphaned children at their parent's GRAVES.

Men and women in hospital WARDS, coughing.

A dying boy so blue it's as if he'd been put on ice.

A young woman with blood seeping out of her nose and ears.

AS MARION SINGS...

The dead are carried out of a TENEMENT.

Loaded onto wagons lining the STREET.

CHARITY HOSPITAL overflowing with patients.

A group of men with masks carrying bodies into a MASS GRAVE.

A newspaper headline:

ALL SHOWS, CHURCHES CLOSED TO FIGHT EPIDEMIC

CASES IN THE STATE TOTAL 100,000

Workers shuttering the windows of the FRENCH OPERA HOUSE.
The marquee posted with the Health Board ordered closure.

Father Silvestri locking the front doors of his CHURCH.

Cassie at her typewriter with a white cloth mask hung around
her neck, the NEWSROOM around her filled with empty chairs.

Detective Hawley with his own mask over his mouth, watching
a group of cops set fire to a SHANTY TOWN.

An orderly carries a bucket through a WAREHOUSE past row
upon row of dying patients on cots like a scene out of *Gone
with the Wind*.

END MONTAGE on CASSIE sitting alone in her APARTMENT listening
to the *Voice of the Century*, Marion Anderson, on the radio.

The SONG ENDS and someone KNOCKS on the door.

CASSIE

Answers. It's Paul.

PAUL

Hey.

CASSIE

Hey, yourself. This is a surprise.

PAUL

I was in the neighborhood. I thought I'd stop by.

CASSIE

Officially?

PAUL

No. I'm off duty.

CASSIE

I'd ask how you knew where I lived, but then you're a cop.

PAUL

Got to be good for something. You want to come out for a drink?

CASSIE

I stopped drinking.

PAUL

Everything or just booze?

CASSIE

What else is there?

PAUL

Coffee?

INT. TAVERN - NIGHT - PAN ACROSS

A poster in the foyer of a classy bar of a soldier sneezing in front of a family.

COUGHS AND SNEEZES SPREAD DISEASES

AS DANGEROUS AS POISONOUS GAS SHELLS!

Entering the tavern we pick out Cassie and Paul seated at a table off by themselves. A dozen other brave souls scattered around the bar giving the finger to the Grim Reaper.

A white COCKTAIL WAITRESS (40) comes up to their table and looks Cassie up and down.

COCKTAIL WAITRESS

(to Paul)
You two want somethin'?

PAUL

Just coffee.

COCKTAIL WAITRESS

You want it black, hon?
(smiles falsely)
Is that how you like it?

Before Paul can answer Cassie cuts in.

CASSIE

Yeah, he likes it black, hot and
fresh, especially fresh. Nothin'
old and bitter for a handsome young
man like him... hon.

Cassie glares at the waitress who turns and goes.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

(calls after her)
Thank you!

Paul looks over at Cassie and smiles.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

(side-eyed at the waitress)
Bitch.

Cassie pulls out a cigarette, a little steamed. Paul lights
it for her, his hand just touching hers.

Their eyes meet. An understanding between them that lowers
Cassie's temperature.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

So what's this about, Detective, my
wild notions about the Axeman?

PAUL

It's Paul, or the tab's on you.
(off her smile)
I had your friend checked out, just
in case. But since you burned down
his house we can't find him.

CASSIE

Doesn't that tell you something?
Why didn't he go to the police?

PAUL

Half the people in the Quarter want nothing to do with the police. It doesn't make them murderers.

Paul takes out a report and hands it to Cassie.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Some background on your guy. His name is Alton Lee Baylor, thirty-five, a struggling Jazz musician from the wrong side of the tracks in Crowley.

CASSIE

Is there a right side in that town?

PAUL

People remember him doing portraits at carnivals for side money, so he's something of an artist too. But not enough of one to support himself. He's worked mostly for the railroad from what we can find. There's nothing in his background even remotely criminal. All we can learn about him is that he was quiet and kept to himself.

Cassie scans the report and sets it aside.

CASSIE

It's him. I know it.

PAUL

Yeah, maybe. I rather doubt it, but if he had access to a boat it's not totally out of the question. We're still looking for him. But right now he's not the focus of the investigation.

CASSIE

What is?

PAUL

I can't tell you.

CASSIE

What, the underworld?

(off Paul's look)

C'mon, word gets around: the victims are mostly Italians so you guys think it's the Black Hand. But Mrs. Schneider isn't Italian.

PAUL

And she wasn't killed either. Could be they were just trying to cover their tracks.

CASSIE

It's not the mob.

The waitress drops off the coffee and hurries off, wants no part of Cassie. The break in their talk alters its tone.

Paul watches Cassie add sugar to her coffee, quite a bit.

PAUL

What are you doing all alone on a Saturday night?

CASSIE

I'm not alone, I'm with you.

PAUL

Is that it, someone always knocks on the door?

CASSIE

They knock, but I don't always answer.

PAUL

And what's special about me?

CASSIE

You're the police.

Cassie sips her coffee and eyes Paul.

Takes in his left hand with no wedding ring.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Why aren't you married? You have a good salary, I'm sure, and you're not hard to look it. How come you're not settled down with a bunch of kids?

PAUL

How do you know I'm not?

CASSIE

I just know. Besides you don't wear a wedding ring. What are you a butterfly?

PAUL

You mean like a little thing with wings?

CASSIE

Yeah, a handsome one that likes to go from flower to flower getting his fill of nectar, never settling down.

PAUL

I'll settle down. When I meet the right woman.

There is a moment between them, more than just his words hanging in the air.

CASSIE

You know after you take me home, you can't kiss me good-night.

PAUL

Why not?

Cassie looks at a sign on the side of the booth. It reads:

DON'T DO THESE THINGS!

Don't kiss you sweetheart while Spanish Flu is on! You might kill her - or him, passing a deadly germ along.

Paul's eyes go from the sign to Cassie.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I'll take my chances.

CASSIE

Not with me you won't.

INT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Cassie puts her key in her apartment door. Turns to Paul.

CASSIE

I have an early start. Got a crazed axe-murderer to track down.

PAUL

Yeah.
(leans in)
Me too.

Paul kisses Cassie.

After a moment she pushes back on the door and they both slip inside still locked in a kiss.

EXT. CORTIMIGLIA HOME - NIGHT

A humble abode in a sleepy, dirt road area of the city.

INT. CORTIMIGLIA HOME - SAME

Two-year-old MARY CORTIMIGLIA lies in her crib, CRYING.

Her exhausted mother, ROSIE CORTIMIGLIA (25) pulls herself out of bed and picks up the child. Feels the girl's head and turns to her husband lying in bed.

ROSIE

Charles, she's got a fever again.

CHARLES CORTIMIGLIA (28) rolls over.

CHARLES

Wet a cloth and cool her down. She'll be okay.

Rosie carries Mary across a HALL into a moonlit KITCHEN and wets a cloth at the sink.

Outside the window, the front gate BANGS LIGHTLY in a breeze.

Rosie notices, as if it seems a little odd.

She walks back through the HALL into the bedroom.

Lingering on the hall we pick out a spot of moonlight on the floor at the far end, something unnoticed by Rosie.

Moving in on the spot and around a corner we make the ominous discovery of a back door with a lower panel removed.

FIND ROSIE

Now back in bed cooling Mary's head with the cloth.

The feverish little girl soothed by her mother's love.

After a time Rosie looks past her sleeping husband at a free-standing mirror across the room...

At a vague reflection in the glass, growing larger... and larger... a strange dark figure entering the room.

Mary's eyes go wide with fright and she turns to see...

The black tower of the Axeman standing next to the bed, the RAISED AXE FALLING.

Rosie SCREAMS!... and all goes BLACK.

In the blackness we hear the THUMP! THUMP! THUMP! of the axe striking the Cortimiglia family again and again.

EXT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

A PATROLMAN comes down the sidewalk on his rounds. Stops and checks out PAUL'S POLICE CAR parked on the street.

CUT TO:

THE PATROLMAN

At a call box, calling it in.

INT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT - DAWN

Cassie sits by the window with her morning coffee, watching the sunrise. Paul asleep in the bed beside her.

She looks over at Paul. Studies his handsome face in the soft morning light. He turns and reveals a network of SCARS all over his back.

Suddenly Cassie is struck by a thought, a premonition. She's not thinking or listening, just immersed in her second sight.

CASSIE

(softly)

Hey.

Paul turns over and looks at Cassie, drinks her in, a lovely sight with her flawless complexion and riot of curls.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Someone's here for you, better see who it is.

Before Paul can respond there comes a KNOCK at the door.

Though a little perplexed, Paul rousts himself from out of the sheets and heads toward the door.

PAUL

This better not be an angry boyfriend;
I'm too worn out for a fight.

Paul opens the door for Detective Rhodes and the Patrolman.

CASSIE

Sips her coffee and revisits the sunrise while Paul speaks in HUSHED TONES at the door.

Paul shuts the door. Comes and sits at the table.

PAUL (CONT'D)

He struck again last night.
(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

Three victims this time, one of them
a two-year-old girl.

Off Cassie's reaction.

CUT TO:

BEDDING AND PILLOWS

and a child's blanket soaked with blood. Paul in the
CORTIMIGLIA HOME taking in the aftermath of the carnage.

A FLATFOOT COP approaches.

FLATFOOT COP

Detective Hawley... we found the
murder weapon.

EXT. BACK ALLEY - CORTIMIGLIA HOME - DAY

Paul bends down and peers under some steps at the discarded
axe all caked with blood and BUZZING with flies.

INT. NEWSROOM - NEW ORLEANS TRIBUNE - DAY

Cassie types up an article at her desk. Details of the murder
POUNDED into the page:

"Charles and Rosie Cortimiglia... two-year-old Mary..."

"Butchered... The whole city in the grip of fear..."

"Panic... suspicion... hapless police without any leads..."

CUT TO:

A SERIES OF SHOTS

Of the public's reaction to the serial murders:

A line of people, wearing masks, in a HARDWARE STORE buying
locks, boards and other home security supplies.

An anxious woman holds an infant while watching her HUSBAND
re-enforce a door in their HOME.

A COP patrols a NEIGHBORHOOD at night. Waves his baton at
another cop just a half block away.

Newspapers are taken out of a stand. The banner headlines
changing each time:

AXEMAN STRIKES AGAIN!

WHO WILL BE NEXT?

IS THE AXEMAN A JEKYLL AND HYDE?

A quiet BOURBON STREET. Dormant bars. Just a handful of pedestrians, some masked, some not, out on the sidewalks.

EXT. GROCERY STORE #2 - NIGHT

Cassie, masked, comes out of the store carrying a package.

INT. CASSIE'S BUILDING - NIGHT

Cassie clears the stairs to her floor. Finds a vase of flowers with a card in front of her apartment door.

INT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A bowl of shrimp is dropped into a pan of butter.

Cassie cooks dinner.

Eats alone at the table. The vase of flowers and card in front of her.

On the card: *Sorry, taking a raincheck on dinner tonight. I'm on stakeout. Coffee and donuts. Lucky me! Paul*

LATER

Cassie turns out a light and slips into bed.

EXT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

A grimy hand with black nails holds up Cassie's employment card with her address: *12555 Toulouse Avenue unit 3C Vieux Carre, New Orleans.*

ALTON BAYLOR

Pockets the card and walks across the street.

Stops in front of Cassie's building and stares at the front double doors.

Goes around to a BACK ALLEY where he shimmies up a pipe to a fire escape. Moves like a shadow up the side of the building.

CASSIE

Lies in bed, faint light and JAZZ MUSIC from the tavern across the street filtering into the room.

Cassie turns away from lights seeping through her blinds and shuts her eyes.

After a moment, her eyes pop open. She feels something, knows something, he's coming!

She bolts up and looks at the door.

CUT TO:

ALTON BAYLOR ON THE FIRE ESCAPE

Reaching the third floor. Jimmying a window at the end of a HALL with a railroad pin.

He climbs inside. Proceeds down the dimly lit hall past apartment doors - 3F... 3E... 3D...

Stops in front of 3C, Cassie's apartment.

He picks the lock and slips inside.

INT. CASSIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Alton Baylor pulls out a straight razor, shining blue in the faint light in the room.

He moves toward the bed.

Slowly takes hold of the blanket then rips it aside and SLASHES with the blade.

Cutting the pillow. Launching feathers into the air.

CASSIE

under the bed, inches from his boots, watching in terror.

The Axeman snorts like an animal and runs into the bathroom.

And Cassie slides out from under the bed and sprints to the door. The Axeman darting after her, getting the door SLAMMED in his face.

CASSIE

Runs down the hall and BANGS on a neighbor's door.

CASSIE

Help me! HELP!

Alton Baylor comes barreling into the hall.

Hot after Cassie who sprints to the STAIRS

And flies down them three at a time.

Wheeling around the balustrades.

Finally stumbling down the last few steps to the ground floor.
Alton Baylor thundering down the dark stairs after her.

Cassie clambers to her feet and runs through the dark. Crying
out as she goes.

CASSIE (CONT'D)
Somebody! Help!

A COWARDLY NEIGHBOR

Peeks out his door into the hall. Cassie's CRIES FOR HELP
echoing up the stairs from the ground floor.

WHERE CASSIE

Crashes into the front door.

Opens it -- CLANG! Caught by a chain.

ALTON BAYLOR

Suddenly right behind her. Slashing with the razor.

Cassie ducks - just in time.

The tip of the razor nicking her shoulder, DRAWING BLOOD.

Cassie dodges her attacker and dives over the counter.

Landing on the landlord's couch.

She comes up throwing anything at hand...

A bowl... a radio... a wooden stool.

Alton Baylor knocking them aside. Coming on.

Cassie backs up into a NOOK-LIKE OFFICE and locks the door.

ON THE 2ND FLOOR

The Fat Landlord comes out of his unit clutching a bat.

FAT LANDLORD'S WIFE
(at his sleeve)
What are you doing? Don't go down
there!

FAT LANDLORD
Shut up and call the police.

He moves toward the stairs, but not quite at light speed.

CASSIE

Backs into a corner in the windowless OFFICE. The heavy FOOTSTEPS of Alton Baylor halting outside the door.

A moment of silence then BLAM! The door is kicked open.

Alton Baylor stands there under his hat and coat, his face in shadow, the bloody razor in his hand.

Cassie backs against the wall, trapped.

She looks for a weapon. Grabs a scissors off a shelf.

CASSIE
(terrified)
Get away! No!

Alton Baylor takes a step, halts and looks above the door. The Fat Landlord now coming down the stairs behind him.

Alton Baylor SNORTS in frustration then dashes off, away from the stairs toward the back of the building.

Cassie crumples to the floor, SOBBING.

Moments later, the breathless landlord arrives at her side brandishing his bat. He helps Cassie to her feet.

FAT LANDLORD
He's gone, Miss Lacroix. He ran off.

He leads Cassie out of the office.

His wife and two men holding kitchen knives now creeping down the stairs.

FAT LANDLORD (CONT'D)
Did you call the police? C'mon, he
went out back into the alley.

He leaves Cassie. And with the courage of numbers he and the two men head toward the back of the building.

Cassie wipes away tears then looks back at the office, puzzled why Alton Baylor wouldn't enter the room.

She looks above the door and sees a horseshoe.

CUT TO:

"LES HUGUENOTS"

A colorful poster of Meyerbeer's opera on the front of the FRENCH OPERA HOUSE, a mammoth Greek Revival edifice at the corner of Toulouse and Bourbon street.

A banner across the entrance reads:

ALL THEATERS CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

AT THE REQUEST OF THE MAYOR

CASSIE

stares out the window of PAUL'S CAR at the Opera House.

CASSIE

Where're you taking me, Storyville?

PAUL

(chuckles)

Yeah, right. Out of the frying pan into the fire.

Paul pulls the car over in front of an APARTMENT BUILDING just down the street from the Opera House.

PAUL (CONT'D)

This was my mother's place. She never liked it but she loved the opera.

(looks back at Opera House)

Took me to a lot of matinees when I was a kid trying to enlighten me - pure torture.

INT. PAUL'S MOTHER'S APARTMENT - DAY

The quaint, cluttered home of an old woman with garish floral-print furniture and clashing bric-a-brac.

Paul opens the door and carries Cassie's bag inside. She follows him in and takes in the room.

PAUL

It's just till we catch this guy.

CASSIE

It's fine. A lot better than any hotel I can afford.

PAUL

I'll bring some food by when I get off work. But there's a grocer around the corner if you get hungry.

CASSIE

I'm okay. I'll just take a shower
and go to work.

PAUL

All right, but be safe, and let me
know if you need anything.

Paul gives her a kiss, turns to go.

CASSIE

And, Paul... thanks.

INT. BACK ROOM - TRIBUNE - DAY

A masked SECRETARY sorts through the newspaper's mail.

Places a letter aside addressed to: *CASSANDRA LACROIX*.

INT. NEWSROOM - SAME

The Secretary walks among the desks handing out mail. Drops
off the letter with Cassie.

Cassie glances at the letter and continues to type. After a
moment, she pauses and looks again at the letter. Stares at
it like it's a coiled snake.

She opens the envelope and reads.

EDITOR'S OFFICE

Roy, wearing glasses, sits at his desk working on an opened
pocket watch, screwing a tiny winding wheel back into place.

Cassie barges in and startles Roy who fumbles the watch parts
onto his desk.

CASSIE

Roy, you've got to see this.

Roy surveys the scattered parts.

ROY

'Take some time out of your day and
relax', that's what my doctor says.

(looks up at Cassie)

I spent over an hour on that.

CASSIE

Sorry, Roy, but you're not gonna
believe this.

She hands him the letter and Roy gives her a look.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Go on, read it.

Roy opens the letter and reads.

ROY

(breathes out)

You're kidding me.

CASSIE

I want to print it.

ROY

No way.

CASSIE

No way? C'mon, Roy, think about it.
If you bury that and someone gets
killed...

Roy studies the letter.

ROY

It's probably a hoax... or he's nuts.

CASSIE

So what if he is? What difference does
it make? C'mon, it's dynamite, you'll
sell papers like mad.

Roy thinks it over, far from certain. He decides.

ROY

No... We're not going out alone with
something like this. It could ruin
us. I'll print it, but only if you
send it to the other papers.

CASSIE

But it's my exclusive.

ROY

And it's my paper. I'm not gonna risk
it over something as chancy as this.
There's no one on top in this town that
wants this paper to last. Things are
hard enough as it is. Whatever happens
as a result of this letter I can't risk
the ridicule or the blame. Share it or
I don't print it.

INT. 7TH PRECINCT - DAY

Paul works at his desk in front of the wall map of the city.
His phone rings. INTERCUT Cassie in the NEWSROOM and Paul.

PAUL
Homicide... Hey, there you are. I
was just going to call you.

CASSIE
Oh, what for?

PAUL
I'm pretty backed up here, I'm gonna
have to take another raincheck on
dinner.

CASSIE
No, don't, I have something to show you.

PAUL
C'mon, Cass, I'm working.

CASSIE
So am I.

INT. CAFE - NIGHT

Paul and Cassie have dinner in a small cafe, empty but for a handful of diners.

PAUL
All right, we're here. So what was
so urgent we had to meet? Are you
going to propose?

CASSIE
Don't get your hopes up. I'd tie
the knot with a priest before I
married a policeman.

They share a moment. Neither one really believes that.
Cassie pulls the letter from her purse.

CASSIE (CONT'D)
I got a letter from the Axeman.

PAUL
Seriously?

CASSIE
I don't know, you tell me. But we're
going to print it.

PAUL
What the hell for? If it's really
from him, let us handle it. It might
give us a lead. Why would you want
to print it?

CASSIE

Read it.

Cassie hands him the letter.

PAUL

(reads aloud)

"Esteemed Mortal..."

(looks at Cassie)

Interesting. Does he mean you?

Cassie doesn't answer and Paul reads on.

PAUL (CONT'D)

"They have never caught me and they never will. Because I am not a human being, but a demon from the hottest Hell. I am what you Orleanians and your foolish police call the 'Axeman'.

Paul looks at Cassie a bit more seriously.

PAUL (CONT'D)

If you wish you may tell the police to be careful not to rile me...

FADE PAUL'S VOICE and overlay the deep-throated VOICE OF THE AXEMAN reading the letter. Accompanied by FLASHBACKS of the bloody murder scenes, timely SHOTS of the police investigation and the city at large.

AXEMAN (V.O.)

Of course, I am a reasonable spirit. I take no offense at the way they have conducted their investigation. In fact, they have been so utterly stupid as to not only amuse me, but his Satanic Majesty. But tell them to beware. Let them not try to discover what I am; for it would be better they were never born than to incur the wrath of the Prince of Hell. Undoubtedly, you Orleanians think of me as a most horrible murderer, which I am, but I could be worse if I wanted. If I wished, I could visit your city every night and slay thousands of your citizens. Now to be exact, next Tuesday night I am going to visit New Orleans again and I have a little proposition for you people. I am very fond of Jazz music, and I swear by all the demons in the nether regions that every

(MORE)

AXEMAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
*person shall be spared in whose home
 Jazz music is playing. If everyone
 has Jazz going, well so much the
 better for your people. One thing
 is certain, those people who do not
 Jazz it up on Tuesday night, if there
 be any, will get the axe. Well, as
 I am cold and crave the warmth of my
 native Hell, and it is about time I
 leave your earthly home, I will cease
 my discourse. I am and will always
 be, the most vile spirit that has
 ever existed in this or any other
 realm. - The Axeman"*

Paul looks up at Cassie.

PAUL
 What am I supposed to make of this?
 The guy's crazy.

CASSIE
 Are you sure about that?

PAUL
 Yeah, I'm sure. If this was even
 written by the guy doing the killing
 and not some crackpot running a gag.

Cassie thinks.

CASSIE
 Okay, he's crazy. But crazy how,
 like Jekyll and Hyde?

PAUL
 I don't know. Maybe it's just a guy
 with a bloodlust, someone who gets a
 kick out of splitting open people's heads.

A woman at the next table looks over at this remark.

CASSIE
 What if it's something else?

PAUL
 Like what?

Cassie doesn't give voice to her thoughts.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 Aw, c'mon, don't tell me you think
 this guy is really a demon.

CASSIE

Well, why not? People believe in God and angels. Why not demons? The Catholic Church thinks people can be possessed.

PAUL

The Catholic Church thinks a piece of bread is the body of God.

Cassie lowers her eyes and toys with her coffee spoon.

Paul appears to regret the remark.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Look, I'm not making fun of your religion. It's just that I'm a policeman: I have to deal in facts.

CASSIE

I've been in his presence, Paul, twice, and there's something deeply evil about him - something you can feel. I don't know if he's possessed or not, but I'm sure of one thing, this guy really believes he's a demon.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS - TWILIGHT

The sun sets over the city, dropping slowly in the west toward Vacherie, Lafayette and the Atchafalaya river.

INT. PAUL'S MOTHER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Cassie looks out a window and listens to JAZZ MUSIC emanating from homes and businesses up and down the street.

Someone KNOCKS on her door. She goes and opens it.

PAUL

Hey. What, no Jazz music?

CASSIE

The radio's broken, but there are plenty of records. Think opera will keep me safe?

PAUL

I bet it draws him like flies.

Paul comes in, gives her a kiss and holds her.

CASSIE

I was wondering when you were going to show up. I just about gave up on you.

PAUL
I couldn't leave you alone on a night
like this.

CASSIE
Oh? What about any other night?

PAUL
Not a chance.

They kiss again.

LATER

Cassie lies in bed with Paul, faint light from the streetlamps
outside and the incessant JAZZ MUSIC filtering into the room.

Paul runs his fingers through Cassie's rich black hair.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Hey, tell me something. The other
morning, how did you know Rhodes was
looking for me? Did you see his car?

CASSIE
No. I just knew.

PAUL
What do you mean you just knew?

CASSIE
Every since I was a kid I've had
this ability to know certain things
before they happen. I just feel it.

PAUL
Sounds useful.

CASSIE
Not really, brings more trouble than
anything else. The kids at school
shunned me for it, called me "Voodoo
Child". My mama called it second
sight. Said my grandmother had the
same gift. More like a curse for
all the good it's done.

PAUL
You mean Mermentau?

Cassie looks sharply at Paul.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I didn't pry into your past, Cass, I swear.
I'd never do that. I was looking at the
attacks back in 1911 and came across some
articles. I can't tell you how sorry I am.

Cassie weighs how she feels about this. Sits up and takes a
smoke off the nightstand and lights it.

CASSIE

(looks down at Paul)
Be sorry for what happened, not for
me. Okay?

PAUL

(softly)
Okay.

Cassie is quiet for a time then opens up to Paul.

CASSIE

I don't want sympathy, I hate that.
Mostly because it just brings it all
back again. No... that's not right,
it doesn't bring it back because
it's always right here.

(holds her hand beside her face)
I just don't like to face it. When I
do it crushes me... every time.

Cassie's eyes get big with tears. She takes a moment.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Then all I wanna' do is hide. I'll
slipped down the darkest hole just
to get some relief.

She takes a drag and thinks. Turns to Paul.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

You know ever since that day people
have tried to help me get over it.
Get over it? You never get over it
and you don't want to. I could kill
this fiend with my own hands and it
wouldn't change a thing. What happened
was so wrong it spans the universe...
and nothing, not even God, can undo
that.

After a quiet moment, JAZZ MUSIC erupts outside.

CUT IN: A BAND OF MUSICIANS parading down the street.

Cassie and Paul listen to the MUSIC, the SHOUTS of revelers.

PAUL

What do you say I take you for a ride?

CASSIE

(looks down at Paul)

I thought you just did.

EXT. BOURBON STREET - NIGHT

Paul's car cruises Bourbon Street on a night as loud and obnoxious as any Fat Tuesday.

Everywhere people play jazz. LIVELY TUNES come from street-side BARS, CREOLE TOWNHOUSES and upper floor APARTMENTS. Not every single home but enough not to make a difference.

Paul's car crawls along in second gear behind a streetcar, people crossing the road all around him.

INT. PAUL'S CAR - NIGHT

Cassie looks out at the CROWD.

Some people decked out in Mardi Gras masks, others wearing the little white masks that ward off the flu.

CASSIE

What Spanish Flu, it looks like Mardi Gras.

PAUL

You gotta love the Big Easy, people here would throw a party at the end of the world.

A DRUNK MAN bumps up against the car.

DRUNK MAN

Hey, nice ride.

He offers Paul a bottle in a paper bag.

DRUNK MAN (CONT'D)

Here, have a drink to the Axeman.
He don't scare me, Papa!

He LAUGHS and staggers off into the crowd.

PAUL

All right, enough of this.

Paul turns onto a side street out of the crowd.

EXT. STREETS OF NEW ORLEANS - NIGHT

Paul's car cruises through a neighborhood.

Nearly every other home alight with activity, the faint JAZZ MUSIC from their phonographs and radios keeping them safe.

PAUL AND CASSIE

Ride in silence for a time. Then...

PAUL

Look at this. This lunatic has got the whole city playing Jazz. Talk about nuts. I mean really, what are the odds he's going to pick your house?

CASSIE

It's not about the odds, people just want to feel safe.

PAUL

Nobody's safe, it's an illusion. If your number's up, you're done, lights out.

CASSIE

Where'd you come up with that, the war?

PAUL

No, homicide. My flat feet kept me out of the war.

CASSIE

Then how'd you get all those scars on your back? It looks like you've been on the Front.

PAUL

It was the Front alright, but not in France... in the District. I went after a pimp for murdering one of his girls and got jumped by his friends. They cut me up good and left me for dead.

CASSIE

And you still wanted to be a cop?

PAUL

Yeah, why not? It's what I do. They patched me up and in three months I was back on the job, fightin' the good fight at home.

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

Same thing as the war really, people
murdering each other, just not by an
Act of Congress.

Paul turns back onto BOURBON STREET by the FRENCH OPERA HOUSE.

A group of DRUNK REVELERS pour into the street in front of
the car, blowing on trumpets and horns, shaking tambourines.

Paul waits for them to pass then pulls up to his MOTHER'S
OLD APARTMENT BUILDING.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Well, my dear, rides over. Enjoy
yourself?

CASSIE

I've had worse dates. You coming
back up?

PAUL

I can't. I gotta be at work...
(checks his watch)
an hour ago. I'll see you as soon
as I get off.

CASSIE

(playful)
Not if I see you first.

Cassie gives Paul a kiss then gets out of the car and heads
into her apartment building.

Paul waits until she's safely inside before he drives off.

Revealing a black Model T Couplet parked behind them.

ALTON BAYLOR

At the wheel wearing his hat and coat. His face in shadow.

He looks up at the building. At a number of units with open
windows blaring out JAZZ.

A light goes on in a second floor apartment.

CASSIE

at the window drawing a curtain.

ALTON BAYLOR

Just sits there for a time looking up at Cassie's apartment.
Finally starts the car and drives away.

CUT TO:

A NEWSPAPER HEADLINE:

NIGHT-LONG JAZZ ORGY DELAYS MUSIC LOVING KILLER

The paper is one in a stack bound with a cord. A BLACK NEWSIE
cuts the cord.

Walks down a SIDEWALK hawking the paper.

BLACK NEWSIE

Papers, folks! Papers! The Axeman
spares the city. Read all about it.

He passes a CLOTHING STORE, an advertisement in the window
with a drawing of a woman dressed in the latest fashions.

FALL FASHION CATALOGS

FREE EDITIONS LIMITED!

CUT TO:

CASSIE

At work typing an article.

CLOSE ON THE WORDS: "...murders unsolved."

PAUL

Casing a NEIGHBORHOOD with another COP.

Interviewing a witness who wears a white flu-mask.

ALTON BAYLOR

Working on a painting, a kaleidoscope of gore.

PAUL AND CASSIE

Enjoying a candlelit dinner.

A POLICE BRIEFING

With Paul in front of a map of the city marked with the
locations of the murders briefing a gaggle of REPORTERS,
Cassie at the very back of the group.

ALTON BAYLOR

Putting the finishing touches on his painting.

THE BLACK NEWSIE

Hawking another paper before the CLOTHING STORE. The owner placing a CHRISTMAS WREATH on the front door.

STORM CLOUDS

Roll in over the CITY.

CASSIE

In PAUL'S MOTHER'S APARTMENT, curled up on the couch, gazing out a rain-streaked window at the storm.

MATCH CUT:

To another rain-streaked window, the only porthole in Alton Baylor's latest TENEMENT-LIKE HOME.

He hangs his painting on the wall.

CLOSE ON: The heart of the painting, the severed head of a woman with flowing black curls, a bloody depiction of Cassie.

CUT TO:

Another painting, a protrait of a large happy family, the antithesis of the depraved work of Alton Baylor.

The painting hangs over a living room couch in the

HOME OF MICHELE "MIKE" PEPITONE (36) - NIGHT

Mike sleeps on the couch with a book resting on his chest.

ESTHER

His wife, dozing alone in their BEDROOM.

THEIR SIX CHILDREN

In a SEPARATE ROOM sleeping as peaceful as angels.

MIKE OPENS HIS EYES

Looks past a bar of blanched moonlight into the deep shadows on the far side of the room.

A black mass in the shadows separates from the wall. Comes toward him like a phantom. Into the moonlight...

A tall man in a hat and coat holding an axe over his head.

MIKE

Oh God!

THWUMP! THWUMP! THWUMP!

The axe rises and falls...

Splattering blood onto the family protrait, heavy droplets streaming from Mike's handsome face.

The hollow DONG! DONG! DONG! of a bell takes us to:

ST. ANTHONY'S CHURCH - DAY

The clock tower bell calling the faithful to their knees.

INT. FATHER SILVESTRI'S OFFICE - SAME

Alton Baylor's writings are spread out on a table.

FATHER SILVESTRI (O.S.)

We have never seen anything like this.

Father Silvestri sits at the table beside Cassie reviewing the mysterious pages.

FATHER SILVESTRI (CONT'D)

Neither I, nor any of my colleagues, know quite what to make of it.

CASSIE

Were you able to translate it?

FATHER SILVESTRI

Yes, the Cuneiform and Aramaic portions.

He sets these pages aside.

FATHER SILVESTRI (CONT'D)

The rest of this is done in languages that have yet to be translated.

(holds up a page)

This we recognize as Wadi-el-Hol or the 'Gulch of Terror' tongue, from ancient Egypt. And these...

He points out writings formed into the shape of PENTAGRAMS and INVERTED CROSSES.

FATHER SILVESTRI (CONT'D)
 are proto-Elamite characters, a Middle
 Eastern language more than five
 thousand years old.

(smiles at Cassie)

My colleagues and I were practically
 falling all over ourselves in our
 excitement. We were hopeful these
 texts were just different versions
 of the same subject, like a Rosetta
 Stone, then the Cuneiform and Aramaic
 would be keys to unlocking the mystery
 of the other languages. Unfortunately
 that was not the case.

CASSIE

Oh, I see. But what does it say?

FATHER SILVESTRI

That is a further mystery. The
 writings in Aramaic and Cuneiform are
 simply rants, curses and blasphemous
 prayers. Like the ramblings of a
 madman or a depraved poet.

Cassie looks at the pages with a new sense of dread.

FATHER SILVESTRI (CONT'D)

May I ask how you acquired these?
 What do you know of their history,
 the person who had them?

CASSIE

He's a musician and an artist. I
 thought they might be some kind of
 coded diary.

FATHER SILVESTRI

No. No, there's no chance of that.
 Only a handful of scholars are well-
 versed in these languages. And I am
 aware of no one who is adept at all
 of them. I am sure these are not
 the original work of one person but
 are copies from other texts.

CASSIE

I see. Well, thank you, Father.

Cassie gathers the papers into a stack and Father Silvestri
 puts out his hand.

FATHER SILVESTRI

Tell me something.

(MORE)

FATHER SILVESTRI (CONT'D)

Do these papers have anything to do
with the recent murders?

CASSIE

Maybe. Why do you ask?

Father Silvestri slides out a couple of the pages.

FATHER SILVESTRI

Here, you see these Cuneiform
characters...

(he shows Cassie)

And here again in Aramaic. They are
the signature of the author, "Angul".

CASSIE

Who's that?

FATHER SILVESTRI

It's not so much who, but what.

He pulls out an old book from under the table. Opens it.

FATHER SILVESTRI (CONT'D)

Years ago an obscure Italian monk
had a revelation, much like Saint
John or Nostradamus. Part of his
revelation was a list of angels cast
out of heaven who became demons.
Angul is one of them.

He points to the name listed in the book: "*ANGUL - A high
prince of hell who slays with an axe.*"

You could knock Cassie over with a feather.

FATHER SILVESTRI (CONT'D)

Does this man believe he is Angul?

CASSIE

(breathes out)

I think so.

FATHER SILVESTRI

You should share this with the police.

CASSIE

I have. They don't exactly take me
seriously. Even so they can't find him.

Cassie looks at the writings again, the pentagrams and
inverted crosses.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Father, is it possible this man is actually possessed?

FATHER SILVESTRI

Possible, yes, but possession is extremely rare. It is far more likely he imagines himself possessed, or is masquerading as such.

CASSIE

But if he were possessed, can he be killed? How do you fight a demon?

FATHER SILVESTRI

A possessed person is not invulnerable, they are still flesh and blood. And the demon may be exorcised or driven out, but they cannot be killed in the literal sense. Death is for corporal beings and does not apply as such to evil spirits. But a true encounter with a demon can only be withstood by the most stout-hearted among us. They are clever fiends, masters of lies, with preternatural knowledge about things they could not possibly know, often times the most personal matters about us. However, they can be fought. Anything holy will be abhorrent to a demon - a crucifix, holy water, an image of Christ or the utterance of a prayer. All are effective against the denizens of Hell.

CASSIE

How about a horseshoe?

FATHER SILVESTRI

(chuckles)

Oh, no, not unless you believe in folklore. There is an old wives' tale of a pious blacksmith who was forced to shoe the Devil's hooves. The clever man shod him with red-hot pieces of iron and the Devil howled and begged him to take them off. Part of their bargain was that the Devil nor any of his minions would ever cross a threshold with a horseshoe over the door. Or so the story goes.

INT. ST. ANTHONY'S CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Cassie walks out of the priest's office into the quiet church, her hollow footsteps resounding off the plaster walls.

She stops next to a font of holy water and thinks. Takes her father's flask from her coat pocket and fills it.

EXT. ST. ANTHONY'S CHURCH - DAY

Cassie exits the church and hurries over to a

STREETCAR #3

where a half-dozen parishioners board.

STREETCAR #3

Cassie slides into a seat. Glances out the window then does a double-take.

A man wearing dark glasses, hat and coat inside a 1917 Model T Couplet parked across the street.

The streetcar moves off and Cassie cranes to keep sight of the black two-door car as it recedes into the distance.

Cassie watches the car to see if it follows. She waits and waits... then the Model T makes a U-turn and starts heading after her.

Cassie whips around in a panic. Thinks. Leaves her seat and moves through passengers to the rear of the streetcar.

She peers out the back window at the Model T now caught at a cross street, waiting for a horse and wagon to pass.

The electric streetcar stops to pick up more passengers and Cassie looks back and forth from

The BLOCKED CAR to

An OLD LADY, wearing a flu mask, boarding the streetcar an inch at a time.

The cross-traffic clears and the Model T comes on.

Finally the old lady boards and the streetcar moves.

Cassie watches the car, the dark ominous figure of Alton Baylor behind the wheel coming closer and closer.

She moves from the window to the rear vestibule of the streetcar, brushing by a FAT WOMAN in her way.

FAT WOMAN

Well, excuse me. Some people!

Cassie crouches on a step in the vestibule, her eyes on the black car following in the road.

A COAL TRUCK pulls into the road and blocks the Model T as the STREETCAR moves around a corner out of sight of the car.

Cassie leaps off the STREETCAR and dashes into the doorway of a GENERAL STORE and plants herself against a wall.

ALTON BAYLOR

Comes around the corner and drives by in his car.

CASSIE

Watches him pass.

Lets out a SIGH of relief.

A little boy eating a lollipop eyeing her curiously from inside the store.

EXT. GENERAL STORE - MINUTES LATER

Paul's police car pulls up to the curb and Cassie gets in.

INT. PAUL'S CAR - TWILIGHT

Paul drives with Cassie through the STREETS OF NEW ORLEANS.

CASSIE

So how did he find me?

PAUL

Where were you before you went to the church?

CASSIE

At work. That's when I got the call from Father Silvestri.

PAUL

So he's tailing you. He knows where you work and where you used to live. We found your purse burnt up in the fire, but I bet he found your employment card.

Paul weaves around a horse-drawn wagon and BEEPS his horn.

PAUL (CONT'D)

There aren't any vehicles registered to an Alton Baylor, so he probably stole the car. I can check the stolen vehicle reports over the last few weeks. Remember what it looked like?

CASSIE

Not really, it was just a black car. Don't ask me what kind. I know more about the back end of the moon.

PAUL

All right, so what do we got? He's from Crowley. Tall, right? A musician and artist. Maybe he's played with some of the bands in the Quarter.

CASSIE

I think he might be Creole or Sicilian. He has dark features and black hair.

PAUL

Okay. That's something to go on. I'll check it out. How 'bout you, you gonna be all right?

CASSIE

No.

EXT. BOURBON STREET - TWILIGHT

Paul's car cruises through the French Quarter.

CASSIE

Gazing out the window as they pass a side street in sight of the SACRIFICIAL CHURCH.

CASSIE

Hey wait, stop! Let me out here.

PAUL

What for?

CASSIE

Just pull over, there's someone I want to see.

Paul pulls to the curb.

PAUL

All right, so who is it?

CASSIE

No one really, just another priest I want to talk to. He's in that church back there.

Paul looks back at the old Voodoo church on the side street.

PAUL

Want me to come along?

CASSIE

No, it's better if you don't. I'll be okay. We're close to the apartment. I can walk from here.

PAUL

I get off at seven. I'll come straight over. All right? Be careful.

Cassie gives Paul a kiss.

CASSIE

Don't be late.

She exits the car.

INT. SACRIFICIAL CHURCH - TWILIGHT

Cassie walks into the quiet church. The once colorful altar now covered with black cloth, somberly lit with candlelight.

Cassie stares at the accouterments of Voodoo mourning.

MOMENTS LATER

She walks down a hallway in the back of the church and comes upon an open door.

FRANCINE

adorned in a black tignon and clothes sits in a chair against the white stucco wall, attending to Napoleon Dufay who lies in bed across the room.

There is a bluish tint to Napoleon's face and a little blood at the edge of his mouth, telling signs of the Spanish Flu.

Francine stares coldly at Cassie.

Napoleon rolls his head and sees Cassie and motions his mistress out of the room.

Cassie approaches the bed and looks down on Napoleon who lies within the shadow of death's door.

NAPOLEON DUFAY

I told her you would come. No one else will come near me now. Except...

He waves a languid hand toward his beautiful mistress waiting outside the door.

CASSIE

Why would you expect me? I didn't even know you were sick.

NAPOLEON DUFAY

You need help. Who else can you turn to?

CASSIE

He's after me.

NAPOLEON DUFAY

Naturally, it was only a matter of time. He goes after anyone he perceives as a danger.

CASSIE

Alton Baylor?

Napoleon nods then is convulsed by a WICKED COUGH. He spits into a bedside pail, into a pool of bloody sputum.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

What happened to him?

NAPOLEON DUFAY

I don't know. He was a good man and a true believer, an eager participant in the rituals of our church. More than once did I call forth the benign spirits of our belief, our Loa, to possess him. And he was always a suitable and willing receptacle. But one night, something else came through, something malevolent.

He coughs again and Francine comes back into the room.

She gives him a drink of colored water and then Napoleon waves her off and she steps away from the bed.

NAPOLEON DUFAY (CONT'D)

He left in the middle of the ceremony quite disturbed. I went to him shortly afterward and he was not the same man.

(MORE)

NAPOLEON DUFAY (CONT'D)

At that time I think he was at war with whatever had entered him. I saw glimpses of the old Alton struggling to gain control. But inevitably he lost the battle. When I tried to intervene he came after me. Burned down my church in an attempt to kill me. That's when I came to New Orleans.

He coughs again.

NAPOLEON DUFAY (CONT'D)

Tell me, is he collecting souvenirs?
(off Cassie's puzzled expression)
Is he taking things, locket, hair, teeth?

CASSIE

The latest victim's finger was missing, and before that he took an ear, someone's hair.

Napoleon nods, understanding.

NAPOLEON DUFAY

He'll be leaving soon.

CASSIE

To go where?

NAPOLEON DUFAY

I don't know, another city, a small town; perhaps this time he'll go home.

CASSIE

Where's home?

NAPOLEON DUFAY

Don't you know?... Hell, of course.

Napoleon coughs violently and Francine rushes to his side and gives him a drink. Turns a pair of fiery eyes on Cassie.

FRANCINE

Go away, woman, and take your foul luck with you. Let him die in peace!

EXT. SACRIFICIAL CHURCH - NIGHT

Cassie comes out of the church under a brooding night sky. THUNDER and lightening in the distance.

FARTHER ON

She passes the corner of TOULOUSE and BOURBON STREET, hurries by the FRENCH OPERA HOUSE as it starts to rain.

INT. PAUL'S MOTHER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Cassie comes in through the door, soaking wet.

Enters the BEDROOM and strips out of her clothes.

Heads into the bathroom to take a shower.

The PHONE RINGS.

Cassie comes out with a towel around her.

CASSIE

Hello, Paul?

ALTON BAYLOR

Hello, Cassandra.

CASSIE

Who is this?

ALTON BAYLOR

You know who.

(CHUCKLES wickedly)

Don't you?

NOTE: Alton's voice should be deep and demonic with perhaps some words in a higher pitch to convey the evil, other-worldly nature of the possessing spirit, but never quite over the top.

Cassie peels back a curtain and peeks out the window.

Nothing but rain and empty sidewalks all along the street.

CASSIE

How did you get this number?

ALTON BAYLOR

I know lots of numbers.

(shifts tone)

Like the number five.

The change in voice sends a chill through Cassie and she pulls the earpiece away. Slowly brings it back and listens.

ALTON BAYLOR (CONT'D)

(in a deep even tone)

You know that number don't you, Cassie? That's how many members of your family you left to die.

Glints of fear and rage flare in Cassie's eyes.

ALTON BAYLOR (CONT'D)
 You knew I was coming, didn't you?
 But you didn't warn them. Poor little
 Bobby.
 (chuckles)
 I took his tooth... still have it.

CASSIE
 You evil bastard!

Alton Baylor LAUGHS.

ALTON BAYLOR
 Does Paul, know? SWEET PAULIE!

He CACKLES, then speaks in a DEMONIC TONE.

ALTON BAYLOR (CONT'D)
 I'm coming, Cassie... It's your turn.

Cassie HANGS UP the phone and rushes into the bedroom.

Comes out fully dressed.

Locks the windows.

Latches the chain on the apartment door.

Checks a wall clock - 6:30.

She takes a knife from a kitchen drawer.

Clutches it and thinks.

Pulls out the flask with the holy water and sets it on the
 kitchen table... And waits.

MINUTES LATER

The clock reads: 6:45.

Cassie dials the phone.

CASSIE
 Detective Hawley, please... Oh, when?
 I see... Thank you.

She hangs up. Sits there. Sensing something.

CUT TO:

THE MODEL T COUPLET

Just down the street from Cassie's apartment.

ALTON BAYLOR

In the car, cocooned in the downpour.

He sits there a moment then removes his dark glasses and unveils a pair of demonic-looking BLOOD-RED EYES.

He exits the car and turns up his coat collar.

Holds his hat against the rain and walks off toward Paul's mother's apartment.

CASSIE

Sits at the table clutching the knife, steeped in her second sight, eyes unseeing as she focuses on the images in her mind.

She rushes to the window holding the knife and peers outside.

The front end of a black car in sight just up the street.

She opens the window to get a better look. Puts her head in the rain and looks past a fire escape at

THE MODEL T

when there's a KNOCK at the door.

PAUL (O.S.)

Cassie, it's me. C'mon, open up.

Cassie hurries to the door holding the knife.

CASSIE

Oh, Paul, thank god you're here.

She puts the knife on a side table and reaches for the chain. Hesitates. Sensing something.

She lets go the chain and listens at the door.

OUTSIDE THE DOOR

Stands a tall man in a hat and coat, dripping wet.

CASSIE

feels the danger.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Paul?

PAUL'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Yeah, Cass, what wrong? It's me.
 C'mon, open up, I'm soaking wet.

CASSIE
 Where's your key?

PAUL'S VOICE
 My car broke down with all this rain.
 I gave my keys to the tow-truck driver
 who gave me a lift here. Come on,
 what's wrong, let me in.

Cassie quietly moves a chair toward the door.

CASSIE
 Paul... those scars on your back,
 the ones you got in the war. Where
 did you get them?

CLOSE ON

The man outside the door.

His wet hat dripping water on the floor.

MOVE IN ON HIS MOUTH

his jagged yellow teeth, goatee and sharp nose.

AXEMAN
 (imitating Paul)
 In France. Where else? C'mon, Cass,
 what's wrong? Open the door.

CASSIE

Quietly wedges the chair against the door when BAM the Axeman
 bashes against it.

CASSIE
 NOOO!

CUT TO:

EXT. PAUL'S MOTHER'S APARTMENT BUILDING - SAME

Paul's police car pulls up through the rain.

He hops out and hurries through puddles into the building.

THE AXEMAN

slams his shoulder against door again.

CASSIE

terrified, bracing the chair.

AS PAUL

Comes up the stairs.

AND THE AXEMAN

bolts off toward a window at the end of the hall.

CASSIE

listens to the FOOTSTEPS out in the hall.

In the next moment Paul's key opens the lock and he tries to open the wedged door.

PAUL

Hey Cassie, are you all right?

Cassie removes the chair, opens the door and throws her arms around Paul.

CASSIE

Oh, Paul, he was here! He tried to get in.

Paul pulls his gun and runs into the hall. SEES...

A closed window at the end of the empty hall.

He comes back in and shuts the door.

Tucks his gun in its holster and holds Cassie.

PAUL

It's all right, he's gone. Don't worry, you're safe. I won't let him hurt you.

Cassie wipes away tears.

PAUL (CONT'D)

C'mon, get your things. We're gettin' out of here.

CASSIE

No, Paul, please, let's stay. I'm sure he's still out there. I saw his car outside.

PAUL

Where?

CASSIE

Outside the window, it's right up
the street.

PAUL

All right, I'll call for backup. Don't
worry, we're gonna get this guy.

Paul goes to the open window and looks out at the car while
Cassie turns and latches the chain on the door.

CASSIE

Oh, Paul, how did he find me? He
even has your phone--

Cassie stops midsentence when she sees Paul isn't there.

The curtain flutters in the open window and the downpour
rages outside.

Cassie freezes. Stunned.

Seconds pass, like an eternity as she moves toward the window.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Paul?... Paul!

Suddenly a gloved hand grabs hold of the sill and the hat-
covered head of the Axeman appears in the window.

A terrified Cassie whirls and darts for the door... only to
slip on a rug that slides from under her feet.

The Axeman comes off the fire escape into the apartment...

Grabs Cassie as she gets to her feet...

And shoves her up against the wall.

Cassie SCREAMS. Fights back...

Grabs the knife off the table and stabs his thigh.

The Axeman buckles and GROANS.

And Cassie plants her feet on the wall and launches backward.

The two of them careening off the kitchen table onto the
floor. The pewter flask falling from the toppled table.

The Axeman lies under Cassie with one arm around her throat
and the other reaching into his coat for his razor.

Cassie's flask on the floor beside her.

She reaches. Grabs it. And brings to her chest...

As the Axeman's finds the razor. Flips it open. And puts it to her throat when...

SHE DUMPS THE HOLY WATER ONTO HIS HEAD.

The Axeman WAILS. Drops the razor and rolls, clutching his face as if he were burned.

Cassie hops up and runs out the door, blood trickling from a cut on her neck.

She flies down the STAIRS...

And out onto the STREET...

Over to Paul laid out on the sidewalk.

RAIN POURS

as she cradles his head and wipes blood from his brow.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Paul! Paul!

Paul peels open his eyes, on the edge of consciousness.

Cassie looks up and down the empty street, rain pouring down.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

Help!

Paul raises his hand and points.

PAUL

(weakly)

Run... Run!

THE AXEMAN

hobbles toward them on his injured leg, razor in hand.

Cassie stands, backs up and cries out through the rain.

CASSIE

Help! Please!

The torrential DOWNPOUR drowns out her voice.

Cassie looks up at the buildings.

Every window shut tight, no one heeding her cries as the Axeman comes toward her through the pouring rain.

Cassie backs up in terror then turns and runs down the street.
The Axeman breaking away from Paul and hobbling after her.

A DAZED PAUL

pulls himself to his feet and wipes blood from his eyes.
Draws his gun and staggers off through the rain after them.

PICKUP CASSIE

Stopped at a lamppost catching her breath.
Alton Baylor coming toward her through the rain.
Cassie runs over to a SHOP and BANGS on the door.

CASSIE (CONT'D)
Help! Somebody help! Call the
police!

Cassie looks back at the Axeman.

Coming headlong through the rain, limping fast now on his
injured leg.

Cassie runs off up BOURBON STREET.

The Axeman following, closing the distance between them.

Cassie runs under the eaves of the FRENCH OPERA HOUSE and
slips and falls on the wet cement.

Comes to her feet and turns to the Axeman now right in front
of her - razor out, arms wide, cutting off her escape.

CASSIE (CONT'D)
NOOO!

Cassie backs up against the building.

The Axeman closing in...

His red eyes and horrible face coming closer and CLOSER...
as he raises the blade and...

Cassie cringes and turns, revealing a CROSS on the poster
behind her - an advertisement for "LES HUEGONOTS", an opera
set during the religious wars in France.

The Axeman covers his eyes as if hit by a searchlight.

And Cassie bolts away.

She peels around the corner of the OPERA HOUSE.

Sprints down an ALLEY next to the theater.

SPLASHES through puddles and rain, passing trash bins and crates until she's stopped by a high wooden fence.

Cassie wheels and sees...

Nothing but the walls of buildings around her.

Suddenly Angul, the Prince of Hell, appears from around a stack of crates. He stops and stares, dripping with rain, his blood red eyes like twin beacons of hate.

Cassie stands there, trapped, as the possessed man comes toward her again. This time no poster can save her.

Angul raises the blade, ready to strike.

When at the last possible moment Cassie dashes to the side and dives, arms-crossed, through the glass pane of a basement window.

INT. FRENCH OPERA HOUSE - NIGHT

Cassie crash-lands in the BASEMENT.

One of her arms cut and bleeding.

She gets to her feet and runs off.

Running in the dark past a maze of PROPS, COSTUMES and SETS.

THE AXEMAN

Climbs down through the window into the basement.

CUT TO:

PAUL

Staggering through the rain down BOURBON STREET. Turning into the ALLEY.

CASSIE

rushes through the dark BACK STAGE of the OPERA HOUSE.

Pauses to breathe next to a macabre Mardi Gras head of the Devil. Soaking wet, blood streaming down her arm and neck.

THE AXEMAN

Creeps along through the dark. Listening for Cassie.

He comes upon a FIRE-AXE.

Pockets his razor and takes the axe off the wall.

PAUL

Climbs down through the basement window. Gun drawn. Rivulets of blood and rain water streaming down his cheek.

CASSIE

rounds a curtain onto the stage.

Scurries down stairs into the dark AUDITORIUM and runs up the aisle.

Into the LOBBY where she tries the front doors. Locked.

She retraces her steps. Looks out at the auditorium.

At a black void pierced by a STREAM OF LIGHT coming through a window from a streetlamp outside.

The bright outline of an EXIT DOOR at the side of the theater.

Cassie creeps down an aisle one careful step at a time.

Closing in on the exit with her eyes fixed on the darkness obscuring the seats.

She stops outside the throw of the streaming light. Shields her eyes and scans the darkness for any sign of the Axeman.

Checks behind her and at that moment a pair of DEMONIC RED EYES flash in the black void on the far side of the exit.

When Cassie looks back the eyes are gone.

Cassie breathes and waits... then makes a dash for the door.

Reaches it and grabs the latch when the Axeman springs out of the dark SWINGING HIS AXE.

Cassie SCREAMS and ducks as the axe THUDS into the exit door.

Cassie wheels and runs.

Sprinting up the aisle with the Axeman on her heels.

She comes upon STAIRS.

Flies up them three at a time.

The Axeman right behind her.

Reaching out. Tripping Cassie. But stumbling himself.
He drops the axe, which slides down the stairs.
And Cassie kicks free of the Axeman's hands.
Clambers to her feet and runs on up the stairs.
The demon Angul going back for his axe.

CASSIE

comes off the stairs onto an UPPER TIER.
Looks around the dark halls, deciding which way to go.
She takes off down a corridor but then trips in the dark.
Comes back to her feet and turns a corner when WHAM! The
axe sails past her head into the wall. Startling Cassie.

CASSIE

NOOO!

She turns and runs through the dark as if the Devil were
behind her, which in a way he is.

CUT TO:

PAUL - BACK STAGE

Hearing the ECHO OF CASSIE'S CRY.

Moving frantically through the maze of props and sets in the
back of the theater.

THE DEMON ANGUL

Pulls his axe from the wall and goes after

CASSIE

who runs breathlessly through the darkness of the UPPER TIER.

Arriving at the PRIVATE BOXES, at a dim array of doors.

She selects a BOX. Darts inside.

Covers her mouth and backs away from the door.

Staring at it, listening.

HEAVY FOOTSTEPS rush by outside then suddenly stop.

Cassie watches the door with bated breath, waiting, waiting...

Slowly the doorknob turns.

Cassie moves to the edge of the box, trapped.

When the GAS LIGHTS COME ON and the MASSIVE ELLIPTICAL AUDITORIUM is suddenly brought into view with its red and white color scheme, multiple tiers and 80 foot loft.

PAUL - BACK STAGE

Flips the switches that turn on the gas lights.

CASSIE

Slips behind a curtain at the side of the box just as the Axeman throws open the door and barges inside.

He looks around the empty box. Turns to go then stops and looks down at a SPOT OF BLOOD on the floor.

He looks back for Cassie. SEES...

The tip of her shoe under the curtain.

His red eyes flare and he smiles wickedly as he draws back his axe and SWINGS.

But Cassie, senses it, and dives out onto the curtain at the perfect moment. Out of reach of the axe that cuts through the curtain and SEVERS A GAS LINE.

The curtain tears and Cassie falls...

SCREAMING as she clings to the cloth.

PAUL

rushes out onto the STAGE far below, SEES...

Cassie dangling from the torn curtain and the Axeman at the edge of the box.

Paul aims. FIRES! Empties his gun at the Axeman.

Bullets WHIZZING into the upper tier.

Missing the Axeman.

But piercing the LEAKING GAS which ignites with a fiery gush.

WHOOSSHH! The whole UPPER TIER suddenly in flames.

The Axeman backs into the hallway away from the fire.

THE TORN CURTAIN

now burning, peels away from its supports.

Dropping Cassie into the folds, daggers of flames rising all around her.

PAUL

holsters his gun and runs past the ORCHESTRA PIT and jumps off the stage.

CASSIE

clammers through the BURNING CURTAIN when Paul is suddenly there.

He helps her into the aisle, and together they run back to the STAGE.

THE SPREADING FIRE

racing through the gas lines around the theatre, EXPLODING and shooting out flames.

CASSIE AND PAUL

run toward an exit behind the stage, only to be halted by a gout of flame.

They race back to the stage and run straight into the path of the demon Angul.

Paul draws his gun and aims... CLICK-CLICK... Out of bullets.

He throws the gun...

And Angul ducks then comes forward swinging the axe.

Paul and Cassie turn to run when

PART OF A BURNING CATWALK

falls onto Paul and traps his legs.

Cassie tries to help Paul, but the catwalk won't budge.

The demonic mad-man bearing down... Nearly upon them...

When Cassie looks at the set, a ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH with a drape that covers the altar.

Cassie runs. Dives. Grabs a rope and draws open the drape.

Unveiling a painting of CHRIST ON THE CROSS.

The demon ANGUL drops his axe and throws up his hands, shielding his eyes from the King of Kings.

Cassie picks up a piece of the burning catwalk and sticks it in the Axeman's face.

She drives him back and he falls off the stage, landing among the chairs in the ORCHESTRA PIT.

Cassie drops the flame and rushes back to Paul.

Kicks loose a piece of the catwalk and uses it as a lever to free Paul's legs, pillars of FLAMES rising around them.

IN THE ORCHESTRA PIT

Alton Baylor, the demon Angul, clambers to his feet among the burning chairs, the flaming sheet music fluttering in the air around him.

The possessed musician is trapped in the pit, the grand piano, harp and kettle drums allied against him, encumbering his escape as the INFERNO CLOSES IN.

CUT TO:

CASSIE

helping an injured Paul hobble back stage.

She leads him down an egress filled with SMOKE.

To an EXIT... that's locked!

They hammer at the door - futilely.

Cassie looks around and sees a dolly.

CASSIE

C'mon!

She helps Paul to the dolly. BURNING TIMBERS falling around them, choking SMOKE filling the air.

Together they load sandbags, blocks, pulleys and tackles onto the dolly then rush through the smoke and SMASH THE DOLLY into the door.

EXT. FRENCH OPERA HOUSE - NIGHT

Cassie and Paul spill outside through a cloud of smoke.

Stagger away from the burning building, COUGHING.

They cross BOURBON STREET in the POURING RAIN. Turn and look back at the BURNING OPERA HOUSE.

RINGING FIRE BRIGADES

Arrive on the scene: water trucks and horse-drawn carts long as limousines piled high with ladders.

CASSIE AND PAUL

Watch as the center of Creole cultural and the beating heart of the French Quarter goes up in flames.

CUT TO:

THE FLAPPING WHITE WINGS

Of Stern Nun's large cornette. The CHARITY HOSPITAL nurse carrying a tray down a hall.

She enters a ROOM where Paul recovers from his wounds, his head bandaged and his leg in traction. Cassie bedside with white dressings on her neck and arm.

The Stern Nun sets down Paul's dinner.

STERN NUN

I don't want see anything left on this plate, Detective. Is that clear?

PAUL

Clear as a church bell.

She looks hard at Paul then walks out without another word.

PAUL (CONT'D)

What can I say, she's crazy about me.

CASSIE

Can't imagine why.

There is a moment here, a look between Cassie and Paul: two people steeped in a genuine connection.

Cassie adjusts the tray for Paul and he eats his food.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

I brought you a Christmas present. I know it's a little early, but I'm sure it'll make the nuns more bearable.

Cassie takes a wrapped present from her purse and lays it beside Paul. Gives him a kiss.

CASSIE (CONT'D)

I have to go. I'll be back this evening. I'll see you then.

PAUL

Not if I see you first.

Cassie smiles. Leaves. Paul takes a bite then looks at the present. Opens it. It's a pewter flask.

An inscription on the side reads: "*For Medicinal Purposes - To the Finest Man in my Life*".

EXT. FRENCH OPERA HOUSE - DAY

The crumbled, smoldering ruins of the once opulent House. CITY FIREMAN crawling over the charred rubble like ants.

Cassie at the corner of TOULOUSE and BOURBON STREET watching the postmortem of the cultural center of the city.

A soot-covered FIREMAN walks by carrying an axe.

CASSIE

Excuse me. I'm with the Tribune. Have you found any bodies?

FIREMAN

No, ma'am. And thank God for that.

On Cassie, not so sure.

CASSIE (V.O.)

Officially the French Opera House fire of 1919 was declared a mystery. They never knew what started it and without a body neither Paul nor I felt inclined to enlighten them. The murders had stopped and the Axeman of New Orleans was never heard from again. In the end that's all that mattered. I know, you have your doubts. I told you at the start of this you wouldn't believe me. But next time you hear of some crime or act so inexplicably evil that you have to ask yourself "What could have possessed someone to do such a thing?" Well, you tell me.

THE END