

DEAD CITY

EXT. PAVED ROAD - NIGHT

Darkness. A small town in the distance.

A Sheriff's car slows down by the side of the road.

INT. CAR - CONT'D

SHERIFF DICK GABLES, 50's, large mustache, drives while  
LIEUTENANT DICK GABLES JUNIOR, 30, small mustache, rides  
shotgun.

Sheriff Dick Gables squints at something up ahead.

SHERIFF DICK GABLES  
(disgusted)  
Animals.

The two men park and exit the vehicle.

Dick Senior grabs a bucket from the trunk, Dick Junior grabs  
a ladder.

They both walk towards a giant sign that reads:

"WELCOME TO BORING, KY."

Over "Boring", dripping red graffiti reads "HELL"

Dick Junior extends the ladder and Dick Senior climbs up with  
the bucket.

With a wet sponge he wipes away the graffiti, making a  
SQUEAKY-SQUEEAY-SQUEAK sound, revealing the word "Boring."

He inspects his work, satisfied.

SHERIFF DICK GABLES (CONT'D)  
All better.

PAN TO town.

CLOSE ON a modest house warmly lit from within.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

A messy living room, riddled with "home schooling" items: a  
blackboard, alphabet blocks, notebooks.

LUCY (V.O.)  
From the moment I was born, they  
never let me leave the house.

A chest full of costumes in one corner, exploded boardgames all over the floor.

LUCY (V.O.)  
I never knew why.

PAN TO hallway where lines mark Lucy's height over the years.

LUCY (V.O.)  
Until I turned 6.

Pan ends on kitchen, where a 6-year-old LUCY, dolled up and cute as a button, sits between MA, 40's, passed out face forward on the table with a bottle of whiskey in her hand, and PA, 40's, passed out face forward in a birthday cake, with a single candle shaped like a "6" still lit inches from his face.

LUCY  
(sing-song)  
Happy Birthday to meee.

Lucy makes a wish and blows out the candle.

Eternal, sad silence.

Suddenly, a NOISE from outside.

Lucy studies her parents. She's not supposed to, but...

She runs to the front door.

CLOSE ON Lucy unlocking ten different locks and bolts going from the top of the door all the way down to the bottom.

The door swings open with a slow creeeeeeeeak.

**TITLE CARD OVER BLACK SCREEN READS "6"**

EXT. PORCH - CONT'D

Lucy hesitantly steps out - it's her first time. She looks around. She shivers.

LUCY  
Hello?

A beat. A FIGURE emerges from the shadows. Dark, and scary, and from the looks of it, DEAD.

Lucy shrinks back.

The face of the figure is veiled in shadow, Lucy studies his clothes: ripped and old and moldy. His hands: bulging veins, white and shaky.

He takes a step forward, the light hits his face.

Lucy loses control of her bladder. Piss trickles down her leg, staining her fancy birthday dress, socks and shoes.

He's white as a sheet, tortured expression, pale and gaunt. Probably died in his late 30's, he's handsome, for a dead guy, but not in a way Lucy can understand at 6.

The Man raises his hand. Lucy gasps.

He brings the hand to his face, miming a cigarette lighter.

Lucy doesn't understand and stares at him blankly.

He mimes a matchstick being lit.

Lucy doesn't understand and stares at him blankly.

He rolls his eyes, frustrated. He thinks.

He rummages through his pockets, finds an old wrinkled cigarette. He puts it to his mouth. He wiggles his fingers in front of the cigarette, miming a flame.

Lucy finally understands. She runs inside.

INT. KITCHEN - CONT'D

Lucy gently moves Pa's head off the birthday cake and picks up a matchbox resting by its side.

EXT. PORCH - CONT'D

She runs back out and proudly shows him the matchbox.

He smiles and nods. He takes the matches and tries to light one, but his hands are shaking and he can't do it.

Hesitantly, she takes the matchbox from him, and motions for him to kneel.

He does, they're at eye level. She strikes a match. He leans towards her small fire, lighting his cigarette.

He takes the longest drag and jerks his head back, exhaling a thousand years of pain.

Finally snapping out of his daze, he cocks his head forward, looks at Lucy and cracks a smile.

She smiles back. He takes a step forward.

Lucy gasps shrinking back.

He stops, gesturing, "it's ok." He mimes drinking from a cup.

Lucy nods and runs inside.

INT. KITCHEN - CONT'D

Lucy grabs a mug and fills it with water from the tap.

EXT. PORCH - CONT'D

Lucy proudly hands him the mug.

The man sniffs it, drinks it, spits it, and throws the mug behind his shoulder.

Lucy looks at him, confused.

He mimes drinking again. But now adds a loopy intoxicated expression.

Lucy nods more somberly and runs back inside.

INT. KITCHEN - CONT'D

Lucy pries the bottle of whiskey from her mother's hand.

EXT. PORCH - CONT'D

Lucy hands the whiskey bottle to the man.

He snaps his fingers, "good job", takes the bottle, tilts his head back and takes a giant swig.

He smiles at her, content. Then, starts coughing uncontrollably. He's choking.

Lucy doesn't know what to do.

He falls to his knees, wheezing, going even whiter.

She wraps her skinny hands around his scrawny waist and squeezes.

Once, twice, three times. Finally, he spits out some whiskey and falls to the ground, gasping for air.

Lucy hovers over him, concerned.

A beat. His breath steadies. He manages a smile. He lifts his hand to Lucy's face. She doesn't shrink back.

He caresses her cheek. He speaks in a hoarse inhuman voice.

MAN

My hero. What's your name?

Lucy smiles and begins to speak -

BARKEEP (O.S.)

Lucy!

CUT TO:

**TITLE CARD OVER BLACK SCREEN READS "16"**

CLOSE ON a hand rummages through sheet music.

BARKEEP (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Lucy, you're up!

INT. BAR - BACK ROOM - DAY

Lucy, 16, pretty but awkward teen, goes through a box filled with sheet music.

BARKEEP, 50's, a jolly uncle type, peers through the door.

BARKEEP

How about something cheerful for a change?

Lucy grabs some music sheets, smiles at Barkeep, and steps out.

We follow her up close through the door, as she takes a seat by a massive piano.

She arranges the sheet music in front of her. The sheets read: Rachmaninov's "The Isle of the Dead, Op. 29 Part I".

She places her hands on the piano, her fingers caressing the keys.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Lucy?

FLASHBACK: EXT. LUCY'S HOUSE - PORCH - NIGHT

We pick up where we left off with 6-year-old Lucy and the Dead Man collapsed on the ground after choking on whiskey.

DEAD MAN

I'm Bob.

He reaches his hand up for her to lift him up, but he's way too heavy, her pulls do nothing, and he ends up doing most of the work. She helps him over to a porch swing and they both sit down. A beat. He looks her over.

BOB

Well aren't you fancy looking.

LUCY

It's my birthday.

BOB

Happy Birthday. Where are your parents?

Lucy points at his bottle of whiskey, then mimes dramatic passed out poses. Bob smiles.

BOB (CONT'D)

Well then. What do you want for your birthday, Lucy?

Lucy hesitates, then crawls on top of Bob and whispers in his ear.

LUCY

(loud whisper)

A pony.

BOB

Huh.

THUD. Across the street from Lucy's house, Bob spots two drunk DEAD MEN taking axes to an already beat up piano, destroying it completely.

BOB (CONT'D)

Wait here.

Lucy watches as Bob walks across the street to the DEAD MEN, exchanges a few words with them. They hesitate, then drop their axes, and all three of them start wheeling the piano over to Lucy's porch. Bob shakes the men's hands and they leave.

Bob wheels the piano in front of Lucy. She looks it over with disinterest. It's a beat up skeleton, nothing much to look at.

BOB (CONT'D)

Ta daa!

LUCY

(snooty)

I said a pony, not a piano.

Bob sits down by her side on the swing opposite the piano. He lifts up the wooden key cover.

BOB

What are you talking about, this thing is great.

Bob starts a sloppy one hand rendition of PETER AND THE WOLF (Peter's Theme). Lucy's face lights up.

BOB (CONT'D)

Here, now you try.

Bob takes Lucy's tiny hand and guides it as he plays the same melody.

Lucy giggles in delight. She leans her head on his shoulder.

LUCY

Can you give me lessons?

A pained expression fills Bob's face.

PRESENT DAY: BAR - CONT'D

16-year-old Lucy places a metronome on the top of the piano, and flicks her finger to start it up. Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.

LUCY (V.O.)

When I got older I started asking around. And every person I spoke to had their own crazy story about our little town and the strange men who come here in the dead of night. Of all the stories, my favorite was always Pa's.

Lucy begins playing. She strums on the low keys, a dramatic angry sound.



PA (V.O.)  
 You see baby girl, the people in  
 hell were becoming... indifferent.

Lucy strums even harder, building up a fast rhythm of booming  
 low keys.

PA (V.O.)  
 Now I know you're gonna say, of  
 course they're indifferent -  
 They're in hell.

Lucy starts expanding towards a melody.

PA (V.O.)  
 But I suppose they were  
 exceptionally indifferent. Whatever  
 that means. Enough so that lawyers  
 were called. Lawyers, Lucy! How  
 fitting. Lawyers in hell. It's  
 their birthplace, you know.

INT. HELL - BOARDROOM - DAY

THREE LAWYERS, cocky but nervous, in identical suits huddle  
 in a corner whispering.

A FIGURE sits in a large chair with his back to us. He clears  
 his throat.

The three lawyers sit down facing him/us.

LAWYER 1  
 Sir,

LAWYER 2  
 With all due respect, Sir,

LAWYER 3  
 The people are uninspired.  
 Indifferent. Lackluster.

LAWYER 1  
 Now I know what you're going to  
 say, Sir.

LAWYER 2  
 Of course they're uninspired -  
 they're in hell.

LAWYER 3  
 That's the point, isn't it?

The three Lawyers chuckle nervously. Awkward Silence.

LAWYER 1

But we believe it exceeds what is acceptable.

LAWYER 2

Frankly, it's become destructive, Sir.

LAWYER 3

They're ruining the decor, Sir.

LAWYER 1

The cleaning bills alone, Sir...

LAWYER 2

They're going to run us under, Sir.

LAWYER 3

More under.. More under than now. Sir.

LAWYER 1

Financial times are rough, Sir. Above as below.

Silence. The FIGURE drums his fingers on the arm of his chair. The Lawyers shuffle papers nervously and clear their throats.

LAWYER 1 (CONT'D)

But we think we found a solution, Sir.

LAWYER 2

An easy way to re-introduce passionate, unwavering misery, Sir.

LAWYER 1

We know how much you like that, sir.

LAWYER 3

Nothing drastic, of course. Sir.

LAWYER 2

A vacation.

LAWYER 1

That's right, a vacation.

LAWYER 3

Something to look forward to.

LAWYER 2

Hope. Hope is everything, Sir.

LAWYER 1

Hope is a limitless treasure. Sir.

LAWYER 2

And statistically, life's single most destructive force.

LAWYER 1

There's nothing more demoralizing than hope, sir.

LAWYER 3

And the best part: it's free.

LAWYER 1

Hope costs nothing, Sir. At least according to our calculations.

LAWYER 2

Here's how it works.

LAWYER 3

Every ten years a man spends down here,

LAWYER 1

They get one day up above.

LAWYER 2

A vacation!

LAWYER 3

We'll stick'em somewhere. Some small town nobody cares about.

LAWYER 2

Ahhh?

LAWYER 3

Now here's the kicker --

LAWYER 2

Just like with money, each man can decide whether they want to spend... or save.

LAWYER 1

Meaning, come ten years, you can choose to save your day.

LAWYER 3

And at twenty years, take two days off!

LAWYER 2

Or at thirty years, take three days off!

LAWYER 1

And so on and so forth.

LAWYER 2

Think about it, Sir. They get out, remind themselves how good they had it up there.

LAWYER 1

Then come back to us rejuvenated and ready to suffer eternally, just the way we like it.

LAWYER 3

Hope, Sir. Hope.

LAWYER 2

Man's greatest treasure. Sir.

The FIGURE drums on the arm of his chair.

MATCH CUT: Lucy's hand on the piano, attacking the keys.

She stops playing abruptly.

LUCY (V.O.)

That's the first part of the story.

She flips the sheet of music over to a new page.

She begins playing again.

LUCY (V.O.)

The second part of the story, and everybody pretty much agrees on this part, is that behind the book shop...

EXT. BOOKSHOP - NIGHT

Bird's eye view of the town, we travels like a ghost overhead.

LUCY (V.O.)

...A few hundred feet west...

Pan across empty fields.

LUCY (V.O.)  
 ...There's a small hole in the  
 ground.

Pan ends on A SMALL HOLE IN THE GROUND.

LUCY (V.O.)  
 And that hole leads straight down  
 to hell. Sheriff forbids steppin'  
 foot in that field, says if you go  
 have a look see you're signing your  
 own death warrant and he ain't  
 gonna come rescue you even if you  
 scream all night long.

Suddenly, a tiny figure runs into frame, hiding behind a  
 rock. This is LUCY at age 6.

LUCY (V.O.)  
 But one time, I just couldn't help  
 myself.

Lucy peeks from behind the rock, as a HAND RISES out of the  
 hole - cold and dead and clawing.

A MAN pulls himself up from the hole. Then another man.  
 Before long, the field is riddled with them. Wobbling,  
 coughing, walking around.

Lucy's eyes grow wide as she watches.

Suddenly, a HAND on her shoulder. She jumps. It's SHERIFF  
 DICK GABLES and he looks mean and creepy.

SHERIFF DICK GABLES  
 Just what do you think you're doing  
 here, missy?

Lucy shivers. Sheriff Dick Gables cracks a weird smile and  
 reaches out his hand.

SHERIFF DICK GABLES (CONT'D)  
 Come on, I'll take you back home.

MATCH CUT Lucy's hand on the piano.

LUCY (V.O.)  
 All I know for sure is that ever  
 since I can remember, these dead  
 folks been coming here to our  
 little town.

(MORE)

LUCY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Some stay a day, others stay two.  
Then down below they go.

INT. BAR - CONT'D

Lucy plays the final dramatic notes of the piece.

She stands and turns to face the room. Silence.

It's completely empty except for a few drunks, alive and dead, asleep on their tables.

Barkeep applauds enthusiastically.

BARKEEP  
Brava!!! Bravo!!!!

Lucy smiles and takes a bow.

Barkeep puts his arm around Lucy's.

BARKEEP (CONT'D)  
You're getting real good, little one. When you play it's like you're telling a story. But why you gotta keep using that metronome?

LUCY  
It helps me keep track of time.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.

BOB (O.S.)  
Hold your hands up!

FLASHBACK: PORCH - CONT'D

6-year-old Lucy holds her hands up.

BOB (CONT'D)  
I will be back in this many years.

LUCY  
Will you come visit me?

BOB  
Of course. Will you wait for me?

Lucy nods.

BOB (CONT'D)  
Good. Practice every day.

LUCY

I will.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.

The sound of a match being lit.

CLOSE ON a hand brings a match to a cigarette.

PRESENT DAY: EXT. BAR - BACKYARD - DAY

16-year-old Lucy leans against the fence smoking a cigarette. She jerks her head back and exhales the way she saw Bob do when she was 6.

Suddenly, a sound of labored breathing nearby. It's a creepy wheezing sound, growing stronger.

Lucy looks around.

A FRIGHTENING DEAD MAN sneaks up behind her, she jumps.

His face is green, patchy and half-eaten. He lets out a BELLOWING MOAN. It's animalistic and scary.

They stare at each other.

A beat. He starts coughing hysterically.

FRIGHTENING DEAD MAN

Who.

His breathing slows down.

FRIGHTENING DEAD MAN (CONT'D)

Sorry about that, little lady.  
Ain't so used to this voice box no  
more. Down boy.

He chuckles and hands Lucy a can of soda.

FRIGHTENING DEAD MAN (CONT'D)

Could you be a dear and open this  
here can of coke for me? My fingers  
aren't quite what they used to be.

The Frightening Dead Man shows Lucy his hands, they're shaking uncontrollably, and most of his fingers are missing.

She opens the can for him and hands it back.

He takes a sip and gurgles it in his throat, contemplating the taste.

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