

EXT. FEARL HOUSE, HUTCHINSON KANSAS - DAY (JUNE 17, 1934)

A nearly new a '34 Ford sits in the driveway, immaculate and shiny. The house is modest but neat. Sunflowers grow in the front yard. Voices from inside, YELLING, indistinct. Somewhere, a DOG BARKS.

INT. FEARL HOUSE, UPSTAIRS BEDROOM -- DAY

It's a typical boy's room of the era; western themed lamp, a movie poster for Frederic March's "Death Takes a Holiday", a shiny new, leather-bound copy of "I, Claudius", a photo of Babe Ruth, another poster for Claude Rains's "The Invisible Man". The room seems empty as we hear --

GRANDFATHER (O.S.)

Because I said so.

HELEN (O.S.)

I'm his mother, dammit.

GRANDFATHER

And I'm your father.

HELEN (O.S.)

Only when it's convenient -- and you're sober!

During the previous, we DISCOVER **FRANKIE**, 13, huddled between the foot of his bed and the wall, trying to distract himself with a copy of "Amazing Stories," but it's not working. Another door SLAMS, then silence. Nothing, then footsteps in the hall; someone bangs into a wall.

GRANDFATHER (O.S.)

Goddamn...

A shadow approaches under the door. Frankie holds his breath. The door opens and **GRANDFATHER** sticks his head in. Graying and distinguished, he looks almost benign, but he teeters like a shed in a tornado. He wears a catcher's mitt on his left hand, holds a baseball in his right.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)

There he is.

Frankie curls up, apprehensively.

FRANKIE

Hi, grandpa.

GRANDFATHER

Happy birthday.

FRANKIE

You remembered?

(CONTINUED)

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GRANDFATHER  
Why would I forget?

Frankie chooses not to answer. Grandfather gestures to him.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)  
I told your mother you don't have  
to go to church today. Want to  
throw a few in the yard?

FRANKIE  
You told her?

GRANDFATHER  
Well, I said the words. You know  
how well she listens. C'mon...

He holds up the baseball. Frankie stands.

EXT. FEARL HOUSE, BACK PORCH -- DAY

Grandfather steps out the back door.

HELEN (O.S.)  
You ought to be ashamed of  
yourself. On a Sunday.

GRANDFATHER  
Thirteen years of Prohibition just  
ended, let an old man catch up.

Grandfather teeters down the porch. Frankie races out,  
wearing his own mitt, SLAMMING the door as he passes.  
Grandfather cringes and ducks.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)  
Do not slam doors.

EXT. FEARL HOUSE, BACK YARD -- DAY

Grandfather and Frankie toss the ball back and forth,  
Grandfather missing more than not, even though Frankie isn't  
the most aggressive tosser in the world. They play in silence  
for a while, then;

GRANDFATHER  
Any big plans for the day?

FRANKIE  
No.

GRANDFATHER  
No? Thirteen's an important age.

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CONTINUED:

FRANKIE

Maybe I can get Mom to take me to a movie.

GRANDFATHER

On a Sunday? Sure...

FRANKIE

Or you could take me to a movie.

GRANDFATHER

Movies. Don't you kids read anymore?

FRANKIE

Sure.

GRANDFATHER

Books without out pictures?

FRANKIE

Yeah, all the time.

GRANDFATHER

That's all we had when I was your age. Books without pictures.

FRANKIE

(smiling)

And you walked barefoot in the snow twenty miles each way to school?

GRANDFATHER

Don't be an idiot. It doesn't snow in Kansas that much. Life was very different then. For example --

Grandfather throws the ball, hard, toward Frankie's head. Frankie barely has a chance to duck as it whizzes past.

FRANKIE

Hey!

GRANDFATHER

That's what life was like then. Hell, that's what it's like now, except the ball moves faster.

FRANKIE

Grandpa...

GRANDFATHER

Go get the damn ball.

Frankie runs off to get the ball. Grandfather takes a slug from a silver hip flask, replacing it as Frankie returns.

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CONTINUED:

He's just put it in his pocket when Frankie throws the ball back -- beaming Grandfather and knocking him on his ass.

FRANKIE

Oh sh... oh...

Frankie races over and kneels by Grandfather.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I... I thought you were.. I wasn't trying to --

But Grandfather sits up, laughing like a lunatic.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

What?

GRANDFATHER

Damn, you learn fast, boy. Guess I don't need to give you the rest of that lesson.

FRANKIE

Lesson?

GRANDFATHER

Life throws crap at you, you throw it back harder. And you did.

Grandfather laughs and Frankie can't help but laughing himself. He reaches out to hug Grandfather.

FRANKIE

I love you, grandpa --

But Grandfather intercepts the contact, holding Frankie at arm's length.

GRANDFATHER

So, you want your present or not?

Frankie brightens.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)

Yeah, of course. You're thirteen. "You want" is the phrase you most love to hear. Never stop being a greedy little bastard. It'll get you far. And I mean that.

Grandfather reaches into his pocket, pulls out a flat, wrapped box, about six inches square. Frankie reaches for it but Grandfather pulls it back.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)

But first... this is a very important gift.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)  
Probably the most important one  
you will ever receive.

FRANKIE  
What is it?

GRANDFATHER  
What it is, is a gift that comes  
with a story attached. You want  
this, you get the story first.

Frankie pouts.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)  
Or, we could just go on up to  
church, listen to some old Bible  
story, with all that smiting and  
begating and everything. A lot  
more interesting than old family  
history, I'm, sure.

Frankie sits next to Grandfather, all ears.

FRANKIE  
Tell me. Please.

GRANDFATHER  
All right. But just remember one  
thing.

FRANKIE  
What?

GRANDFATHER  
Well, for our family, this story  
is like *Alice in Wonderland*.  
(off his look)  
You won't be the same person on  
the other side of the looking  
glass.

Grandfather pulls out his flask, takes a swig. He offers it  
to Frankie, who starts to reach for it, but then looks toward  
the house and demurs. Grandfather smirks.

GRANDFATHER (CONT'D)  
It was sixty-two years ago, and  
about four counties east.

FRANKIE  
What was there?

GRANDFATHER  
Burlington, Kansas... The house I  
grew up in, with my brothers and  
sister --

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FEARL FARMHOUSE, BURLINGTON KANSAS (MARCH 11, 1872) - DAY

A large, fairly new, Italianate-style house next to a small cornfield and barn.

GRANDFATHER (V.O.)

The farmhands. And our maid --

Near the house, **LIZZIE DEEVER**, 22, pretty, in maid's uniform, hangs laundry on a line. The scene is sunny, serene, bucolic.

GRANDFATHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It's where my mother and father lived... And where my mother died.

-- a GUNSHOT breaks the silence. Lizzie startles and a murder of crows bursts from the cornfield, squawking into the sky.

**SILAS FEARL** bursts from the house. He's tall, thin, 39, handsome in a severe way. He rushes to the horses tied nearby, unties one, jumps on and races off.

EXT. BURLINGTON MAIN STREET, SHERRIF'S OFFICE - DAY

Silas reins his horse up to the hitching post, jumps off and ties it, all in a rush.

INT. SHERRIF'S OFFICE - DAY

The Sherrif, **SAMUEL CARTER**, 40, a round, jovial man with large moustache, sits behind his desk when Silas bursts in the door. Samuel looks up.

EXT. FEARL FARMHOUSE - DAY

Lizzie sits on the porch, hugging her legs, looking distraught. Next to her sits **FRANK FEARL**, 8, Silas's son. Silas and Samuel arrive, jump off their horses and rush up the porch.

INT. FEARL FARMHOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Silas and Samuel enter the kitchen. Samuel stops dead, takes his hat off. On the floor lies the body of **DORA FEARL**, 35. Once pretty, she's a bit overweight and haggard, even in death. There's a single bullet hole in her chest, blood pooling across the kitchen tile. Samuel feels her throat for a pulse, then closes her eyes.

EXT. FEARL FARMHOUSE - DAY

Two Orderlies load a blanket-covered stretcher into a horsedrawn wagon with "Wm. Manson, MD" painted on the side.

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Lizzie, Frank and the rest of the family -- **CHARLES**, 10; **MARY**, 5; and **JAMES**, 3 -- huddle on the porch. Silas stands with Samuel, both staring off, Silas smoking a cheroot. Both speak with Massachusetts, but non-Boston, accents.

SAMUEL

Any ideas?

Silas smokes in silence. Finally;

SILAS

I'm not one to make accusations, Sam. But notice anyone missing?

SAMUEL

(looks at porch)  
Don't reckon I do --

SILAS

Elisha. Her brother.

SAMUEL

Trouble between them?

SILAS

The boy had an eye for the maid, and my wife thought she was beneath him. They'd... argued.

SAMUEL

Any idea where to find him?

SILAS

Try Stillman's. He's probably still drunk.

SAMUEL

I'll ride on out there, see if I can find him.

SILAS

And, Sam...? I'd appreciate you trying to keep this quiet.

SAMUEL

How is the campaign going?

SILAS

Chances are, you're talking to this town's next mayor.

SAMUEL

(nods)  
Sorry for your loss, Silas.

Samuel mounts his horse and rides off. Silas watches after him. Lizzie hurries to his side.

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LIZZIE  
Where's he going?

SILAS  
To find my brother-in-law.

LIZZIE  
He thinks Elisha did it?

Silas says nothing, nods.

LIZZIE (CONT'D)  
Elisha...?

EXT. FEARL FARMHOUSE - DAY (JANUARY 8, 1872)

Frosty plants, steel-gray sky and mud. Frank, bundled up against the weather, sits on the porch, playing with a top.

We discover **ELISHA DENEKE**, 22, attractive in an offbeat way; the kind of face that inspires parental instincts in everyone. He's in the hayloft of the barn, knocking small icicles off the eaves with a pitchfork.

He watches Lizzie, as she takes laundry from the line, where it's hanging over an open fire, folding it into the basket. She looks up and he pretends to not be looking. She watches him. He notices a bit of ice on the edge of the hayloft opening, takes out his Bowie knife and chips at it, glancing down at Lizzie, who's now pretending not to watch him.

Frank watches them not look at each other.

She finishes working, putting the last of the laundry in the basket. Elisha notices, leaps from the hayloft to the ground, pauses to toss his knife into the barn wall, then hurries over to Lizzie. His accent is flat Midwestern; Lizzie's is Tennessee.

ELISHA (O.S.)  
Lizzie!

Elisha rushes up, starts to lift the basket.

ELISHA (CONT'D)  
That's got to weigh as much as a horse. Let me help you.

LIZZIE  
Thanks, but --

DORA (O.S.)  
Elisha!

REVEAL Dora, on the porch, looking not pleased. She has a slight German accent, more pronounced when upset or angry. Frank rushes from the porch to avoid the storm.

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CONTINUED:

DORA (CONT'D)

Let Lizzie do her own work, and  
you do yours.

ELISHA

I was just trying to be helpful.

DORA

She doesn't need your help.

Dora turns and goes back inside. Frank has noticed Elisha's knife in the barn, approaches it, unnoticed.

Elisha watches Lizzie as she finishes her work and lifts the basket, both awkward. She struggles.

ELISHA

Aw, to hell with her. Er, heck.

Elisha helps her with the basket.

Frank reaches for the knife, which is just beyond his fingers.

Silas rides up and sees Elisha with Lizzie, not pleased. The basket starts to teeter. Elisha grabs it and they both slip. The basket lands on the ground and Elisha falls into it, Lizzie tumbling on top of him.

Frank stands on his toes, fingers almost at the knife...

Silas dismounts.

SILAS

Enough of that, you two!

Elisha and Lizzie quickly extricate themselves. Elisha heads back for the barn as Lizzie grabs the basket, Silas watching them sternly.

Frank has the tips of three fingers on the knife blade, pinkie bent down beneath it. Elisha sees this.

ELISHA

Frank -- no!

Frank turns and the knife falls...

SILAS

Frank!

Silas is there in a heartbeat. Frank holds his left hand, blood pooling between the fingers of his right. Silas grabs a handkerchief, wraps it around Frank's hand. Frank is screaming and crying.

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SILAS (CONT'D)  
 (to Elisha.)  
 Get the buckboard. Get the goddamn  
 buckboard now!

Elisha races off. Dora, the family and the farmhands rush  
 out at the commotion, Dora nearly fainting.

SILAS (CONT'D)  
 Frank? Frank -- you're going to  
 be fine. I want you to hold onto  
 this very, very tight, all right?

FRANK  
 Dad --

SILAS  
 It's all right. It's not your  
 fault your fool uncle left his  
 knife there. But you shouldn't  
 play with things like that. Hold  
 on, understand?

Elisha leads the horsedrawn buckboard out of the barn. Silas  
 picks Frank up in his arms, sets him in the back and climbs  
 in after him.

SILAS (CONT'D)  
 Go!

Elisha cracks the whip and the buckboard hurries off.

Dora watches from the porch, Lizzie standing below her.

INT. BURLINGTON, DR. MANSON'S OFFICE - DAY

**DR. MANSON**, a somewhat scattered man, is finishing stitching  
 up Frank's injury -- he's lost two knuckles from his left  
 pinkie. Silas watches, concerned. Elisha tries not to watch,  
 ill.

DR. MANSON  
 You still have that Steinway up  
 at your place?

SILAS  
 Yes, but --

DR. MANSON  
 Well, he won't be playing it the  
 same.

He laughs at his own joke. No one else does.

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