

VOICES HEARD CONVERSING--

SHINBERG (O.S.)

We've resurfaced most of the main roads. We even put in a new filling station. I'm sure you've noticed that.

GENTRY (O.S.)

Uh huh. Biggest one I ever saw.

12 INT. GENTRY'S OFFICE - MORNING

12

LARRY GENTRY (70s), sits across his desk from BILL MULLINS and LOU SHINBERG. Mullins and Shinberg dressed professionally. A LARGE LEATHER CASE open to the side.

Start

SHINBERG

Biggest one he ever saw. How about that, Bill?

Mullins smiles as he unrolls a MAP, lays it across the desk.

When Gentry says 'uh huh' he says it in a slow manner but he isn't simple, but rather contemplative in his manner.

MULLINS

You being an assemblyman in town and all--

GENTRY

--Only assemblyman in town.

MULLINS

Even better. We're going to be very candid here, Mr. Gentry. Your town's all but dead. The only thing keeping it alive is our company's interest. The improvements we're making in town, think of them as investments on our part. They go hand in hand with our plans to harvest oil from the shale.

GENTRY

Uh huh. Sort of a revitalization?

MULLINS

Yes sir, that's the way we see it.

SHINBERG

As you know, the surrounding areas of your town are shale rich.

(MORE)

~~SHINBERG (CONT'D)~~

~~Our biggest hurdle here is the risk
of holdouts. There's always one or
two.~~

A moment between the three of them.

SHINBERG

You own the General Store here in town, isn't that right, Mr. Gentry?

GENTRY

Been in our family near eighty years now.

SHINBERG

Eighty years? Well that's something. I'm sure all these farms closing have put a bit of a dent in things for you.

Gentry smiles politely.

MULLINS

Well, why don't we just cut to the chase here, Mr. Gentry. Any help we can get in acquiring these outlying properties, we'd see as a real asset to us.

SHINBERG

We're prepared to offer generous commissions.

Gentry lets this sink in and leans over the surveying map. He points at one area of the map.

GENTRY

Oh, this here's Willow Road, the Graham farm. That'll be a tough sell.

SHINBERG

Most have a price.

Mullins reaches into his case, pulls and places FORMAL LETTERS on Gentry's desk. They're legal-like, the OIL COMPANY LOGO dominates the letterheads.

MULLINS

We've prepared preliminary offer sheets to any parties in question. The parties involved will clearly see the compensation we're offering is more than market value.

GENTRY

Well, that Graham farm's got a bad history to it.

End

SHINBERG

Is that right?

GENTRY

Uh huh. Anyone still left around these parts will tell you. Something awful come about.

Gentry is a bit reluctant to bring it up.

SHINBERG

Cat's left that bag, Mr. Gentry.

GENTRY

Well. Some time back... we're talking decades. It happened on a Sunday. Most folk gathered for worship, not so much these days. But back then, it was important. The wife, her name was Miriam, folks 'round here called her Mim. Big in the church. Always made sure the twins and the youngest boy, Tommy, were present, dressed proper. Saint of a woman, really. But that particular Sunday Mim was nowhere to be found. Wasn't like her. Tommy, he was especially close to his mother, kept looking at that church door, waiting on her to show. Never saw a boy so lost. He run out, mid-sermon, figured he gone to fetch her. Sermon ran long that day.

13

EXT. FARMHOUSE - OAK TREE - DAY

13

Young Thomas sits at the trunk of the tree motionless, head in his knees. So still, it's as if he's not real in a way.

PULL BACK VERY SLOWLY FROM YOUNG THOMAS eventually revealing a pair of feet dangling in the air in front of Young Thomas. We catch the edge of her summer dress.

GENTRY (O.S.)

Found her hanging from that old oak tree, swinging dead from her neck, left to right.