

WE HEAR:

Delta blues guitar twanging long, soulful chords and a raspy voice...

BLUESMAN (V.O.)

(singing)

Gimme right o' passage, Lord.
Gimme right o' passage.
I hear her callin'.
I hear her callin'.
My Mary is pleadin', Lord.
She's pleadin' so hard.

FADE IN:

EXT. DRUG STORE - DAY

The out-of-place, fifties style drug store is a haven cut into the forest where TWO GRAVEL ROADS INTERSECT. Plopped on a bench just outside the entrance is THE BLUESMAN, dressed in black coat, boots and a wide brimmed hat, strumming a steel guitar, his head tipped down, hiding his eyes as he mournfully sings...

BLUESMAN

(singing)

I hear her callin'.
So I'm itching to go, Lord
I'm begging the man
Got the ripe ole age.
Gimme right o' passage.

EXT. GRAVEL ROAD - DAY

TIGHT ON bike wheel WE PULL BACK to see A TEN YEAR OLD GIRL peddling to the DRUG STORE.

BLUESMAN (O.S.)

(singing)

I hear her callin', Lord.
So I'm itching to go.

EXT. DRUG STORE - CONTINUOUS

She anchors her bike in the stand, eyeing the Bluesman whose head tips up at her. He has deep eyes and a fine black goatee. He grins and sings...

BLUESMAN

(singing)

I'm begging the man.

(MORE)

BLUESMAN (cont'd)
 Got the ripe old age.
 Gimme right o' passage.

The girl can't meet his eyes. She looks LEFT, up the long gravel road cutting through the forest, and then RIGHT, down the opposite direction, but exact same view. Something about the road troubles her. She glances at the Bluesman again. Something macabre about him. She goes into the...

INT. DRUG STORE - CONTINUOUS

Where she sees a GRUFF COUNTERMAN behind the till, haggard by time and a dull life, mulling through the daily paper.

THE NEWSPAPER BANNER

We see TODAY'S DATE then...

The man looks up, a slight, sad smile for the young girl while outside...

BLUESMAN (O.S.)
 (singing)
 I'm itching to go, Lord.
 Don't want here no mo'.

She looks at the odd counterman as if she knows something more than what she sees, then goes to the milk fridges, opens the glass door. Suddenly she gasps and IN THE GLASS she sees...

A BEAUTIFUL GHOSTLY 1940'S BRIDE

Clutching a bouquet of orchids and smiling at her.

BLUESMAN (O.S.)
 (singing)
 Let old Bill go, Lord.
 Let old Bill go.

The girl is mortified, held by the bride haunting her in the glass and the Bluesman's eerie singing and twanging. A sudden fear dawns on her and she runs for...

EXT. DRUG STORE - CONTINUOUS

HER BIKE

Yanking it out of the bike stand without so much as a glance at...

BLUESMAN
 (singing)
 I hear her callin' Lord.
 So I'm itching to go, Lord...

He watches the girl peddle like mad down the...

EXT. GRAVEL ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The girl racing down the forest road with everything she's got. She veers into a driveway.

BLUESMAN (V.O.)
 (singing)
 I'm begging the man.
 Gimme right o'passage

PULL UP to reveal...

A CABIN ON THE LAKE

A small hamlet nestled on the shore. The girl peddles full tilt for the front porch.

BLUESMAN (V.O.)
 (singing)
 Let old Bill go, Lord.
 Let old Bill go.

She hops off the bike and runs into...

BLUESMAN (V.O.)
 (singing)
 Gimme right o'passage

INT. CABIN - DAY

The delta blues guitar suddenly gone as she crashes through the door. She looks around apprehensively.

We see A FAMILY PORTRAIT OF THE GIRL, HER MOTHER, AND GRANDMOTHER hanging on the wall. All three of them resembling the beautiful ghost bride.

The girl breathes heavily. Something is wrong. It's too still. It's too quiet. She looks down the hall at...

POV - OPEN BEDROOM DOOR

Beyond the door we see A WEDDING PICTURE on a dresser.

SMASH CUT TO:

ECU on withered old man's EYES - at peace.

EXT. CABIN - LAKEFRONT - DAY

PAN from the front of the cabin to THE WITHERED OLD MAN sitting on a BENCH on A DOCK, looking out over THE LAKE. He's dressed in an ill fitted suit. He's just sitting there, his hand clutching his CANE.

INT. CABIN - BEDROOM - DAY

The girl walks in - uneasy. The bed is made but old photos are scattered over the bedspread. On the wall is a CALENDAR, a date 'x'd out. A SPILLED BOTTLE of pills and A MEMORIAM is on the night stand. Slowly she is drawn to...

POV - WEDDING PHOTO ON THE DRESSER

The picture taken back when the world was black and white. That beautiful bride we saw in the fridge glass with that happy smile, bouquet of orchids and tucked in the arm of her dashing groom, the younger resemblance to the old man on the dock.

In the mirror the girl sees...

HIS CANE

Leaning against the bed.

EXT. THE DOCK - DAY

The old man clutches his cane like it's an old friend, the symbol of life's final stage. Between his thumb and forefinger WE SEE a healed scar he's worn his whole life.

TIGHT - HIS HAND

A YOUNG BOY'S HAND comes out of nowhere, touching the old man's. There's a similar SCAR on the little hand - red and fresh - in exactly the same spot between thumb and forefinger. Child and man are one and the same.

The old man's eyes drift up to...

A YOUNG BOY

dressed in circa 1920 knickers and cap. His fresh face one big smile. The old man smiles back. And then...

INT. CABIN - BEDROOM - DAY

The girl looks over the scattered old black and white photos on the bed. She picks one up. It's the young boy in 1920 knickers and cap. She picks up another one. The same boy a teenager, a proud Letterman in high school sometime in the mid 1930's.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. DOCK - DAY

ANOTHER HAND with the same scar touches the old man's shoulder. The teenaged hand of...

THE LETTERMAN

Standing behind the old man, the image of his athletic youth.

The old man isn't surprised at all to see the two stages of his life.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

The opened PILL JAR on the nightstand draws the girl's attention - concern, confused.

WE HEAR:

That mournful delta blues guitar strumming and...

BLUESMAN (V.O.)

(singing)

I hear her callin'
My Mary is pleadin', Lord
She's pleadin' so hard

GIRL'S POV - THE MEMORIAM ON THE NIGHTSTAND

With an INSET PICTURE OF HER GRANDMOTHER who was once that beautiful bride in the wedding portrait. She passed away a year ago. Her name was Mary.

PAN - TO THE WALL CALENDAR

The X'd out date is - TODAY'S DATE. The one year anniversary of her death.

EXT. DRUG STORE - BLUESMAN - DAY

His worn hand strums across the strings, his steel guitar crying.

BLUESMAN (V.O.)
 (singing)
 Got the ripe ole age, Lord.
 Gimme right o'passage
 Gimme right o'passage

INT. CABIN - BEDROOM - DAY

THE GIRL

The girl looking back and forth between WEDDING PORTRAIT,
 pills, memoriam, calendar...

BLUESMAN (V.O.)
 (singing)
 Let old Bill go, Lord.

THE WEDDING PORTRAIT

The happy couple smiling at us - an era passed.

BLUESMAN (V.O.)
 (singing)
 Let old Bill go.

She gasps - *oh my God.*

EXT. THE DOCK - DAY

CU - THE OLD MAN

In complete shock. He sees...

HIS BEAUTIFUL 1940 BRIDE MARY

Hovering over the water in her wedding dress, clutching that
 bouquet of orchids. She smiles, alluring and wanting him.

BLUESMAN (V.O.)
 (singing)
 So I'm itching to go, Lord
 Got the ripe old age
 I'm begging the man
 Gimme right o' passage

ON THE DOCK

The old man notices another stage behind him. THE GROOM from
 the wedding portrait now standing with the Letterman and the
 boy.

The old man admires the three of them - the stages of his
 life that have passed on before physical death.

Then he looks back at his bride - the love of his life - a decision made. He looks down at his ailing legs, let's go of his CANE and pushes off the bench.

EXT/INT. THE CABIN - FRONT WINDOW - DAY

The girl steps up to the window.

GIRL'S POV - THE DOCK

No one on the dock, nothing but lake and forest.

EXT. THE DOCK - DAY

The old man stands on the edge of the dock, his bride hovering beyond him. He hesitates a beat then steps OFF THE DOCK, surprised by his own levity, then WALKS ON WATER to be with her.

INT. CABIN - THE FRONT WINDOW - DAY

BLUESMAN (V.O.)
(singing)
My Mary is pleadin', Lord...

The girl realizes something is horribly wrong, that fear we've seen before glazing her eyes.

BLUESMAN (V.O.)
(singing)
I'm missin' her bad

FLASHBACK:

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

The old man sitting on the bed, dressed in tie and shirt, poised for the end. His photos scattered over his bed. His cane waiting with him. His life as small and confined as the bedroom.

BLUESMAN (V.O.)
(singing)
So, I'm begging to go, Lord.
Don't want here no mo'.

On the NIGHTSTAND we see the UNOPENED bottle of pills beside Mary's memoriam. He stares at the calendar and 'x's out the date. A painful cross to bear.

BLUESMAN (V.O.)
(singing)
I hear her callin' Lord

He admires his wedding portrait one last time. The decision made.

BLUESMAN (V.O.)
 (singing)
 Gimme right o'passage
 Gimme right o'passage

He reaches for the pills. Pops the lid.

SMASH BACK TO:

EXT. CABIN - FRONTWINDOW - DAY

GIRL
 (breathless)
 No!

She explodes out of the cabin, running full out for the dock, but no old man for her to see.

GIRL
 (screaming)
 Gramps!!!!!!

WE SEE: GRAMPS ON THE WATER

Almost to his bride, but...he turns when he hears...

GIRL
 (screaming)
 NO!!!! Gramps!!!!

GRAMP'S POV - THE GIRL

She hits the dock barely in control of her legs. She collapses at the edge and peers down into the water.

GIRL
 (hysterical)
 NO!!!!

Guilt and regret collide for Gramps. He watches his granddaughter's torture then looks for his bride. Mary is gone. He's out there on the water, alone in the moment, head drooping - ashamed.

EXT. DOCK - DAY

As the girl pitches the pill bottle into the water with all her might.

GIRL
 (screaming)
 No!

THE PILL BOTTLE

Splashes into the water, pills swirling beside...

GRAMPS

face down in the lake at the foot of the dock - dead in his ill fitted suit.

The girl's sobs carry over the water where there's nothing but forest and lake.

CUT TO:

INT. CABIN - BEDROOM - DAY

THE WEDDING PORTRAIT

And that happy couple. An era over.

FADE OUT:

BLUESMAN (V.O.)
 (singing)
 Gimme right o' passage, Lord.

FADE IN:

EXT. DRUG STORE - BLUESMAN - DAY

As he plays one more strum.

BLUESMAN
 (singing)
 Gimme right o' passage.

Before him stands GRAMPS DRIPPING WET in his ILL FITTED SUIT, looking to the Bluesman for absolution. Slowly the black brimmed hat rises, the bluesman's deep eyes sovereign and deep.

GRAMPS
 Are you the man?

BLUESMAN
 I am, old Bill. I am.

Old Bill smiles, relieved he made the journey. To his RIGHT he sees his beautiful bride clutching those orchids, a relieved smile as well. Old Bill takes a step right, then...

BLUESMAN
Can't go right, old Bill.

Old Bill halts, confused.

OLD BILL
Mary was callin'.

BLUESMAN
(eyes the bride)
Mary don't decide, old Bill.

Now old Bill's worried.

OLD BILL
I thought I go right for passage.

BLUESMAN
Right of passage is for those who
wait to be chosen.
(eyes left)
Those who decide for themselves...

WE GAZE left, down the long, gravel road into the forest. Old Bill looks, scared of what it means, and takes a reluctant step left. Behind him we see the three stages of his life, all regretting the choice. The young boy in knickers and cap, his bottom lip trembling, looking at the Bluesman for forgiveness.

OLD BILL
Will I see her again?

Down the right road Mary is waiting in her wedding dress, her smile fading. Her image fading.

BLUESMAN
(eyes Mary)
Can't undo what's been chosen.

Old Bill reconciles himself.

OLD BILL
Are you going with me?

BLUESMAN
I don't go left, old Bill.

The Bluesman hits a mournful chord, the steel guitar crying again. Old Bill and his three stages cast one last look to their beautiful, fading bride Mary, then trudge left down the road to nowhere, heads hanging low.

Bride Mary watches them as one by one they fade, the boy, the letterman, the groom, until only OLD BILL is walking alone.

She dissolves and her bouquet of orchids tumble to the gravel road as the eerie steel guitar strums over the forest.

INT. GIRL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

She's weeping in her bed when her mom comes through the door and quickly cuddles her. She sobs into mother's bosom.

GIRL
(sobbing)
I didn't want Grandpa to go, Mom.

MOM
I know, baby. I know.

She takes her daughter's face in her hands.

MOM
He's in a better place now.

And as the girl sobs...

FADE TO BLACK.

BLUESMAN (V.O.)
(singing)
Looking at my life, Lord.
Don't like what I see.

FADE IN:

EXT. DRUG STORE - BLUESMAN - DAY

Strumming that sad sounding steel guitar on the bench just outside the store. The girl walks up to him, listening to...

BLUESMAN
(singing)
Been lonely and ignored.
A man no one sees.
I'm itching to go, Lord
Just wanna be free.
Just wanna be free.

The Bluesman stops strumming, looks at the girl then glances behind him, inside the Drug Store.

The girl looks through the window at...

THE HAGGARD AND DULLED COUNTERMAN

Putting his newspaper down, a solemn resolve fixed on his pate.

The girl leans to the Bluesman.

GIRL

Right or left?

A GUNSHOT rings from inside, the report echoing the forest. The Bluesman's deep eyes fix on the girl.

BLUESMAN

Left.