

RATTLERS

Characters

SNAKE HOULIHAN, 30s, a rattle snake rodeo wrangler
OSLEY CLAY, 30s, a preacher
ERNELLE HARPER, 30s, SNAKE's girlfriend
TED FARRELL, mid-20s, a mortician
EVERETT RIVERS, 30s, an oil pipe layer
MATTIE HARPER, 50s, ERNELLE's mother
SHANE FARRELL, 17, Ted's brother
KATE RIVERS, 20s, EVERETT's wife, ERNELLE's sister,
MATTIE's daughter (can be played by the actress playing ERNELLE)

Setting and Time

Hollis, Oklahoma, in the summer of 1975.

The action takes place in three locations:

SNAKE's garage, where his truck is parked.

The staff parking lot and the back porch area of Farrell's Funeral Home.

A lonely stretch of back road at a railroad crossing. A wrecked trucked is on the side of the road.

RATTLERS
BY JOHNNA ADAMS

1. I didn't hear nobody pray

(SNAKE HOULIHAN's garage. A large room that is set up as a modest, functioning mechanic's space, with machines and tools. One wall of the garage has a dozen or so cages containing rattlesnakes organized on shelves.

There are lots of rattlesnake skins and rattles in the room. The tailgate of the truck is covered in rattlesnake skin and rattlers hang off the antennae and hitch post. Some of the walls are hung with skins.

OSLEY CLAY is tied to a kitchen chair. His hands are tied together with duct tape behind his back and his mouth is duct-taped shut. His face is bruised and bloody. There are four rattlesnake cages arranged around the chair within easy striking distance.

Suspended above his head, from a chain and pulley system designed for lifting engines out of trucks and cars, is a cage of live rattle snakes. The door to the cage is right over OSLEY's head.

SNAKE HOULIHAN is walking in circles around OSLEY, kicking the rattlesnake cages to make the snakes angry. He shakes the cage over OSLEY's head and sets it to swinging. OSLEY screams into his gag and struggles.

SNAKE sings "Wreck on the Highway" by Dorsey Dixon (Sony Music Entertainment, Inc.).

SNAKE (singing):

When I heard the crash on the highway
I knew what it was from the start
I went to the scene of destruction
And a picture was stamped on my heart
There was whiskey and blood all together
Mixed with glass where they lay
Death laid her hand in destruction
But I didn't hear nobody pray
I didn't nobody pray, dear brother
I didn't hear nobody pray
I heard the crash on the highway
But I didn't hear nobody pray!

(SNAKE hits OSLEY in the stomach.)

SNAKE (CONT.): Sona' bitch. You know how many ways you can kill a fellow with a rattler? A buncha'. A buncha' of ways. Drop the rattler down on him when he's in a crapper stall at a bar. That's one way. (giggles) I did that once to a fella'. Well, didn't kill him, though. But he

SNAKE (CONT.): was in the crapper stall, on the john. And he an' I was fighting over some girl. Not Ernie, some other girl. And I drop a snake in the crapper stall. Five foot rattler. Rattler name of Thunderbolt. He strikes so damn fast he all a blur. Hsssst! That fella' in the crapper took to screaming and flailing. Like to break that whole crapper stall apart. He run out of there with his pants around his ankles and dragging ol' Thunderbolt behind him, with Thunderbolt's teeth sunk in his thigh. *(giggles)* That Thunderbolt didn't have no venom sacs though. I cut 'em out. Didn't kill that fella'. Coulda', though. Coulda'. But these here snakes ain't ones I's cut the venom sacs offa'.

(SNAKE kicks the snake cages again and OSLEY flinches. We hear a car drive up and park on a gravel drive. A car door slams.)

ERNELLE (O.S.): Snake? Snake, you back yet?

(ERNELLE HARPER comes into the garage carrying a paper bag of groceries. She wears a garish sundress and has a beehive hairdo. Her face is brightly painted.)

SNAKE: Yeah, sugar, I'm back.

ERNELLE: What on earth is you doing?

(ERNELLE sets the groceries on the floor and glares at SNAKE.)

SNAKE: I got him, just like you said.

ERNELLE: I didn't say tie him up like a pig for slaughtering, did I?

SNAKE: Well, you don't want him running off do you?

ERNELLE: Good grief! What am I going to do with you? You been beating him up, too. There is blood on his face. Didn't I say to be as nice as pie? Is this nice as pie, Snake? . . . Well? Is it?

SNAKE: Oh, now. Now, you said get him. So I got him. That's how it stands.

ERNELLE: I don't know what I'm going to do with you.

(ERNELLE goes over to OSLEY and rips the duct tape off his mouth.)

ERNELLE (CONT.): Hi, Osley. I'm sorry about him.

SNAKE: You said if he needs some persuading, I can go to work on him. You said.

ERNELLE: We don't know that he needs persuading.

SNAKE: Aw, shit.

(ERNELLE smiles at OSLEY.)

ERNELLE: Do you remember me? It's been a few years. Well, it's probably been twelve years, huh? Maybe more than that. Fifteen?

OSLEY: Ernie.

ERNELLE: That's right. The years has sure been kind to you. Do you think I look any different?

OSLEY: What are you doing, Ernie?

ERNELLE: I know it must be a shock for you, hearing from me again after all this time. But, I never stopped thinking about you, Osley. You been in my thoughts ever since we said goodbye to one another.

SNAKE: Hell, you say! That sona' bitch ain't been in your thoughts since you been with me! Ernie, you tell him that! You tell the sona' bitch I'm your man now! 'Cause that's how it stands.

ERNELLE: It's true that I'm seeing someone, Osley. Snake and I been together for a good while now.

SNAKE: Damned skippy.

ERNELLE: I ain't wanted to see you again for no romantic reason.

SNAKE: No, you sure ain't!

ERNELLE: Hush your mouth! I ain't going to tell you again! Osley and I are talking.

SNAKE: Shit.

ERNELLE: I just wanted Snake to ask you to come talk to me is all. It's real important, Osley.

OSLEY: What's going on?

ERNELLE: I need to ask you a favor.

SNAKE: A favor you're going to say yes to, sona' bitch. Or you'll damned straight regret it.

ERNELLE: Snake! Good grief!

SNAKE: All right, Ernie. All right.

(SNAKE retreats to his truck and begins unloading snake cages from the truck bed and moving them to the shelves. He glares at OSLEY occasionally.)

ERNELLE: I have a real important favor to ask you, Osley.

OSLEY: Ernie. I have a wife. I have a daughter.

ERNELLE: Someone told me that you did. A friend of my mama's goes to your church in Lubbock. Ain't that a small world?

SNAKE: Shit.

ERNELLE: And you're the head pastor, now, ain't you? That's sure something. I'm real proud of you.

(SNAKE spits.)

OSLEY: What do you want?

ERNELLE: Well. You might say that what I want is religious in nature, Osley. A religious service I want to ask of you. A blessing.

OSLEY: You had your boyfriend kidnap me from the church parking lot 'cause you want me to pray for you?

SNAKE: Hell, no, that ain't it. Dumb shithead. Fuck kinda' kidnap plot would that be? No, no, I say we ask that church for money--

ERNELLE: No!

SNAKE: Well, I'm the one that went to all the trouble to--

ERNELLE: Shut up! So help me God, Snake, we are not extorting a church for money to get their pastor back. Good lord!

(SNAKE spits.)

SNAKE: . . . All right then, sugar.

ERNELLE: Get yourself focused.

SNAKE: All right. I am.

ERNELLE: I am sorry he was rough with you, Osley. I just want a favor from you. For old times sake.

OSLEY: What?

ERNELLE: I want you to do what your brother used to do.

(Pause.)

OSLEY: Oh, God. You want-- . . . Oh, god.

ERNELLE: Like when we were dating and you took me to meet him after the revival show?

OSLEY: You weren't supposed to see that.

ERNELLE: You said it was a gift that ran in the family. Your aunt had the same gift. Maybe you do too.

OSLEY: No, I don't.

ERNELLE: My sister died. Osley, Katie died. Someone killed her.

SNAKE: Some sona' bitch damned well beat her to death.

OSLEY: Katie?

ERNELLE: Little Katie. Someone killed her.

OSLEY: Oh, Ernie.

ERNELLE: I need you to do what your brother could do. Like he did at the cemetery that night after the revival. When you told me to stay in the car and I followed you out to the that fresh grave instead.

OSLEY: I'm sorry for your loss, Ernie. But you got this all wrong.

ERNELLE: You do that for Kate, okay?

OSLEY: I can't!

ERNELLE: Don't say that! You have to!

(SNAKE grabs OSLEY's chair and shakes it.)

SNAKE: Don't you say can't to her! Don't you dare say you can't! You damned well can, I tell you what! Sona' damned bitch!

(He puts his hand on the lever of the snakes' cage above OSLEY's head.)

OSLEY: No!

ERNELLE: Snake! For heaven's sake, Snake! You stop that! Let go of that! I said let go!

(ERNELLE yanks SNAKE's hand away from the cage.)

ERNELLE (CONT.): What on earth has got into you?

SNAKE: Now, honey. I didn't go to all the trouble snatching him off the street and tying him down in the back of the truck just to have him get smart with you. He's going to do what's damned well asked of him and say thank you, ma'am, for the privilege! Yes, sir, he is. Or I'm going to start attaching rattlers to his body like leeches and that's a fact.

ERNELLE: Darling. Baby. Sweetheart.

SNAKE: Yeah?

ERNELLE: Calm down right now. You did real good snatching him for me and bringing him here.

SNAKE: Well, it's what you wanted, gum ball.

ERNELLE: Thank you for kidnapping and getting him here. It means a lot to me.

SNAKE: I's happy to make you happy. Even if what you need to be happy is one of your ex-boyfriends for some reason or other.

ERNELLE: Well, thank you for doing this. I'll do something nice for you sometime.

SNAKE: Well, I won't let you forget you said that. I sure won't.

(SNAKE giggles. ERNELLE gently pushes him back toward the snake cages and he returns to unloading the truck, grinning.)

ERNELLE: I'm sorry, Osley.

OSLEY: Ernie, let me go.

ERNELLE: Not until you say you'll do it.

OSLEY: I walked away from all that. I don't involve myself with that anymore. You don't understand. There's evil in it.

ERNELLE: He was your twin brother, Osley. I don't believe that he inherited a power you didn't. You can do this for me.

OSLEY: I went over to God. I'm God's man. And my family's man, Ernie. Have a heart. You don't know what you're asking.

ERNELLE: I know exactly what I'm asking. I'm asking you to bring my sister back from the dead. Just like your brother brought that little girl back from the dead. He and your daddy pried open her coffin with a crowbar, and brought her back to her family. Well, I don't like to get ugly, Osley. But you can do this for me. And if you don't, I'll make sure you'll regret it.

(SNAKE bangs the tailgate of the truck down. He takes a small mouse from a cage in the truck.

He takes the mouse over to the rattlesnake cage on the floor that is closest to OSLEY. He quickly opens the cage and tosses the mouse in. The rattlesnake's head bangs against the cage lid as SNAKE slams it shut. The cage shakes violently and we hear hissing and rattling from the snake inside.

SNAKE puts the cage on OSLEY's lap and his hand on the cage lever.)

2. No place to go where you're a stranger

The back door of Farrell's Funeral Home.

The back door of the funeral home opens onto a small staff parking lot. There is a broken church pew serving as a bench and a rusted metal ashtray near the door. The building is a low, modern structure built sometime after the war.

It is a grey afternoon with patches of melting snow on the ground.

TED FARRELL sits in an untidy heap on the ground to one side. He is huddled against the wall, crouched so that he can't be seen from any of the windows. He is crying softly. He wears a conservative brown western-cut suit, western boots, and has his hair slicked down.

EVERETT bursts through the back door of the funeral home. He dressed in jeans, a rumpled western shirt over an undershirt, and a sports coat.

EVERETT: Goddamn! Goddamn. . . . Oh.

(EVERETT runs his hands through his hair. He leans over gasping, as if he might be sick. He spits on the ground and kneels down, holding his stomach.)

EVERETT: Goddamn. Goddman. Goddamn. Ohhhhhhhhhh.

(EVERETT rubs his face and stays there kneeling a moment. Then he stands and fumbles through his pockets until he finds a pack of cigarettes. He puts one in his mouth. He goes through all his pockets and can't find a lighter.)

EVERETT: Shit.

(EVERETT turns toward the door and sees TED. They stare at one another a moment.)

EVERETT:

TED:

(EVERETT sighs heavily.)

EVERETT: You got a light?

TED: What?

EVERETT: A light?

TED: Oh.

(TED finds a lighter in his pocket. He shuffles over to EVERETT and lights his cigarette.)

EVERETT: Thanks.

TED: All right then.

EVERETT: Those women.

(EVERETT takes a draw on his cigarette.)

TED:

EVERETT: Crying in there.

(Smokes again.)

TED:

EVERETT: Makes it tough.

TED:

EVERETT: You know what I mean?

TED: Well.

EVERETT: I get to where I cain't breathe.

TED: Well.

EVERETT: Like my chest is caught in a vice.

(EVERETT leans over and holds his stomach. He spits again.)

TED: Well, then.

EVERETT: If those women weren't crying. Maybe. You know? Get through this here.

TED: Surely.

EVERETT:

TED:

EVERETT: That how you feel?

TED: Well, yes, sir. That's how everyone feels, I expect. Just get through this here.

EVERETT: You knew her?

TED: I did.

EVERETT: Hell of a thing.

TED: Yes, sir.

EVERETT:

TED:

EVERETT: I hate places like this. Goddamned places like this.

TED: Well, I surely don't think--

EVERETT: What's that?

TED: Well, not that.

EVERETT: ?

TED: Not goddamned is all I mean. Not places like this. No, sir.

EVERETT: I'm sorry.

TED: Well, no.

EVERETT: You religious?

TED: Yes, sir.

(EVERETT spits again.)

EVERETT: I'm sorry.

TED: No need.

EVERETT:

TED:

EVERETT: I'm not.

TED: Religious?

EVERETT: No.

TED: Well, I'm sorry for that.

EVERETT: Fair enough.

(EVERETT smokes. TED wraps himself tighter in his jacket. A train sounds in the distance. Both men look toward the sound.)

EVERETT (CONT.): I hate places like this.

TED:

EVERETT: Sick joke calling it a parlor. Funeral parlor. Like is was some goddamned parlor-- sorry.

(TED shrugs.)

EVERETT (CONT.): Like it was some welcoming place. Home. Like it was home. . . . Am I talking too much? Do you want to be private with this or do you want to hear me talk?

TED: No.

EVERETT: I do that sometimes. Talk to distract myself.

TED: Go on.

EVERETT: Oughta' be some damned funeral director in there, I tell you what. Taking care of them damned crying women. Dereliction of damned duty. I mean you pay these people. It's not like you're imposing on them. Shouldn't be so goddamned empty and full of those crying women just milling about like loose hens in a yard.

TED: Privacy.

EVERETT: What?

TED: For grieving. Some folk likes privacy, is all.

EVERETT:

TED:

EVERETT: Well. . . . How'd you know her?

TED:

EVERETT: Went to school with her?

TED: Yes, sir.

EVERETT: Yeah.

TED: First through twelfth grade with her.

EVERETT: Did you love her or something?

TED:

EVERETT: I'm sorry. . . . I'm sorry. . . . You live here? You live in this town?

TED: I do.

EVERETT: How do you stand it?

TED: It ain't easy.

EVERETT: I bet. I grew up in a town about this size. I live out in Midland now. They got enough bars in Midland that there's always a place to go where you're a stranger. You know what I mean?

TED: Well.

EVERETT: Yeah. Got a country club.

TED: You a member?

EVERETT: *(laughs)* Oh, hell, no.

TED:

EVERETT: But, I work for some of them folks. Oil-rich wildcatters. On the oil rigs.

TED: So, that's where you know her from? Midland?

EVERETT: Right.

TED: What's she like in Midland?

EVERETT: Same as she's like around here I guess.

TED: No, I doubt that. Not in Midland.

EVERETT: She ain't the type to be different in the city.

(EVERETT's stomach hurts again and he leans over and cradles it.)

TED: Well, she was down to earth all right. She was down to earth. I bet in Midland she shown just right. That's what I bet.

EVERETT:

TED: She stayed pretty. She stayed real pretty.

EVERETT: *(straightening up and taking a drag on his cigarette.)* With all that damned make-up they got on her, how can you tell?

TED: You don't like how she looks?

EVERETT: Looks like a damned street walker.

TED: No. I didn't mean to---

EVERETT: It ain't her.

TED: You have to put lots of make-up on. 'Cause of the way folks skin changes when they pass on. You know?

EVERETT: You think she looks good like that? That crap on her face?

TED: I don't know. I guess. I guess she does.

EVERETT: That ain't her.

TED: She always had a high color. That's what I remember.

EVERETT: She looks good with nothing on her face. She looks good
She looks good with Oh, god. . . .

(EVERETT kneels and puts his head in his hands.)

TED:

EVERETT:

TED:

EVERETT: I hate this shit.

TED: Yeah.

EVERETT: Those crying women and all this shit. And them all watching you. The pettiness. Imagine if this was your whole life. This damned building and those crying women. What do they pay the poor fucks that work here? Peanuts and shit. Ain't worth it.

TED: Yes, sir.

EVERETT: I'd go nuts. But, I guess it's a dying town. Busiest industry hereabouts is probably the death industry. Can't be much else to do in this fuckhole. Bet all the jobs are shit. . . . What do you do? What do you do here?

TED: I'm the undertaker. And funeral director when my uncle's not here.

EVERETT:

TED:

EVERETT: Oh.

TED: Yes, sir.

EVERETT: Oh.

TED:

(EVERETT takes a draw on his cigarette.)

EVERETT: Well, you did a good job.

TED: You think her make-up's too thick.

EVERETT: No. . . no.

TED: I was trying to get her cheeks the color I remembered.

EVERETT: From school?

TED: And I kissed her once.

(EVERETT laughs.)

TED (CONT.): Why's that funny?

(EVERETT laughs again.)

TED (CONT.): What?

EVERETT: Naw, it ain't you.

TED: But that's funny to you?

(EVERETT laughs and holds his stomach as if it hurts him.)

EVERETT: Joke's on me.

TED: Maybe you knew her off in Midland. Maybe you did. But I knew her when she was young. And maybe her kissing me isn't serious. But it's something that happened. Something that happened to me and that I remember. I'm not going to say for sure that it meant something. Except to me. That's all. It did to me.

EVERETT: You loved her?

TED: I did. . . . I did that.

EVERETT: Well. Shit.

TED: How'd you know her off in Midland?

EVERETT: She's my wife.

TED:

EVERETT:

TED: Oh.

EVERETT: Yeah.

3. The young lawn boy

(A lonely stretch of highway intersected by railroad tracks. A wrecked pickup is in a nearby ditch. The ground is littered with broken glass and bits of wreckage. There are skid marks on the asphalt.)

MATTIE and SHANE are standing in the middle of the road, between the railroad tracks, kissing.

MATTIE is trying to get away and SHANE is holding her tightly, urgently forcing the kiss on her. A fallen coffee thermos is on the ground beside them, along with MATTIE's purse and SHANE's jacket. SHANE tries to unfasten MATTIE's jacket and she breaks away from him.)

MATTIE: Jesus Christ.

SHANE: I'm sorry. I couldn't help it!

MATTIE: Good lord. Your mother was younger than me in school.

SHANE: I couldn't stop myself. It was like I was being controlled by space aliens or something, ma'am, I swear. My heart made me do it without consulting my brain. I'm sorry, ma'am. Can I call you Mattie?

MATTIE: No. Does your mother know what you get up to? I oughta' tell her. Good lord.

SHANE: I been in love with you since I first mowed your lawn for you. Since I was 12. I been in love all that time. I can't fight it. All I know about love is mixed up with smell of cut grass and gasoline because of you. I would open my veins and bleed for you on the asphalt if you wanted.

MATTIE: Don't you know any girls your own age?

SHANE: They's shallow! They's so shallow, ma'am. No! No way!

MATTIE: I don't believe this.

SHANE: Please? Please, let me love you? You don't got no one to be with you. But, I want to be with you. I want to be with you right now. Right here. Because you need a man in your life. To help you through this here. I want to be that for you. I want to be your rock. I love you!

(SHANE starts to unbutton his pants. MATTIE grabs his hands and stops him.)

MATTIE: Wait. Wait up, cowboy.

SHANE: Oh. Okay.

MATTIE: Just hush a minute. Hush.

SHANE: But I want to love on you. You need loving.

MATTIE: Hold up. You need to listen to me.

SHANE: Oh. Okay. What?

MATTIE: It ain't going to work.

SHANE: Why?

MATTIE: Both my girls are older than you.

SHANE: I don't care.

MATTIE: I ain't looking for a man right now.

SHANE: But, I'll be a good one.

MATTIE: Someday.

SHANE: No. Now.

MATTIE: You think that's what I need? What's in your pants?

SHANE: Well. Yeah. I guess.

MATTIE: My girl's dead.

SHANE:

MATTIE: Someone beat my little girl and hit her in the head with a rock until she died. We are standing five feet from the spot where her blood is staining this road. You think I need what's in your pants?

SHANE: Uh . . . No. . . I didn't meanNo.

MATTIE: With pieces of my girl's brains on the gravel over there?

SHANE: No. I'm just

MATTIE: I don't need what's in your pants, Shane. You know what I need.

SHANE: I don't know.

MATTIE: Look at my face. Then you can tell me what I need.

SHANE:

MATTIE: Can you tell? Are you looking?

SHANE:

MATTIE:

SHANE: Revenge?

MATTIE: Good boy. I knew I had a clever boy mowing my lawn.

SHANE: I just want to make it better for you.

MATTIE: You will.

SHANE: Comfort you.

MATTIE: I didn't ask you to come up here with me for that, honey.

SHANE: What did you ask me up here for then?

MATTIE: I want your opinion on something.

SHANE: On what?

MATTIE: How she died.

SHANE: Well, the paper said--

MATTIE: Not what the paper said.

SHANE: Ma'am?

MATTIE: What the car crash and blood stains say. You tell me what you see up here. You look at this and tell me how she died.

SHANE: You want me to--?

MATTIE: I want your opinion.

SHANE: You have some suspicions about--?

MATTIE: I want to run some ideas passed you.

SHANE: But, the police--

MATTIE: Won't have nothing to do with punishing whoever killed my girl.

SHANE:

MATTIE:

SHANE: You want revenge?

MATTIE: I do.

SHANE:

MATTIE:

SHANE: I'll help you. If it kills me, ma'am. I'll do anything for you.

MATTIE: I know.

SHANE: You want my opinion, then?

MATTIE: Yes.

SHANE: Well, that husband of hers ain't no good. That Everett. He's a mean one.

MATTIE: I know it.

SHANE: And he's a drinker, ain't he? When they was home at Christmas, that Everett spent every night almost at my cousin's bar. And he got into fights. He's violent.

MATTIE: All right, then.

SHANE: That's who I'd suspect right off.

MATTIE: Show me how it happened, then.

(SHANE looks at the ground and studies the skid marks. He looks over the wreckage in the ditch and the bloodstains.)

SHANE: Well, her car got forced off the road. That's what the paper said happened, ma'am, and I see the skid marks. See there? Someone hit her car on the driver's side and forced her into the ditch. Then, most likely, the car that forced her off the road pulled on to the shoulder there where the grass is all flattened.

MATTIE: So, whoever did this has got a big dent on the passenger side of their car.

SHANE: Does that Everett have a car he could of used?

MATTIE: He and my girl only had the one car. The one in the ditch. They drove up from Midland in it.

SHANE: Could he have used someone else's car?

MATTIE: I don't know. What do you think?

SHANE: Let's say he did. Then your girl, Kate, gets out of the car. She's hurt some from the crash, but not real bad. And she comes over here to where she died.

MATTIE: So, she walks over here. She walks toward the car that forced her off the road.

SHANE: She did. So, she must have thought it was an accident. She didn't feel threatened.

MATTIE: Seems like if your husband were to force your car off the road with a stolen car, you might feel a little threatened, don't it? Especially if he's a mean, violent drinker. I would be. I would have sat in the car and locked the doors.

SHANE: She must have thought she could talk to him. Talk him out of being mad.

MATTIE: But she couldn't. And he picked up a rock and hit her in the head about forty or fifty times it looked like. I saw her body. Over there at the funeral home.

SHANE: I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, ma'am.

MATTIE:

SHANE:

MATTIE: I was on a train to Nacogdoches one time. . . . Would have been before you was even born. It was before my girls was born. . . . And there was a group of slow children in the same train car. They was traveling with a Sunday School teacher, I think. Or, maybe they was moving these slow children from a group home into some church home. Some institution. I don't remember. . . . But there was this one little girl with these white, yellow pigtails. Just the brightest little smile you ever saw. You could tell by her face that she was slow. She had that look. . . . And she had a book with pictures of angels in it. And she kept wanting to show me her book. And she was calling all those angels by the names of birds. "See pigeon?" She'd say to me and then point to a picture of the Archangel Michael. Gabriel with his horn was a blue jay. The whole heavenly host arrayed in the clouds welcoming Jesus' ascension to heaven was sparrows, swallows, flycatchers and hawks, she said. I must have looked through that book with her a hundred times on that trip to Nacogdoches. "See the pigeon?" "See the eagles?" You could see how proud she was of herself. How proud she was of knowing names. I got to my aunt's house. My aunt was a big Church of Christ woman and she told me I should have corrected that little slow girl. I shouldn't have let her get off that train not knowing the right names of the Lord's angels. I shouldn't have let her believe that they was nothing but birds. But, I couldn't have done that. Not to that little girl. She loved them angels better for being birds. I hope nobody ever told her. . . . There's something fragile like that inside us. Everybody.

(SHANE kisses her.

MATTIE grabs him roughly by the shoulders and pulls him to the ground. She takes control of the kiss and rips his shirt open, scattering buttons on the asphalt.)

SHANE: Oh! Ma'am?

MATTIE: You want this?

SHANE: Um. Yes, ma'am.

MATTIE: You gonna' to do what I tell you to do? No matter what I tell you to do?

SHANE: Yeah. Yes. Yes.

MATTIE: You can call me Mattie. And not ma'am no more, Shane.

SHANE: All right then.

4. Honeybun and Tootsie Pop make him eat

(SNAKE's garage. Some time has passed since the end of the last scene.

SNAKE is cutting the head off a thrashing rattle snake on the tailgate of his truck.

OSLEY is still tied to the chair. The snake cages have been moved closer to him. There is a bucket on his lap holding two dead, headless rattlers.

ERNELLE sits on a kitchen chair near OSLEY going through a recipe box, looking at recipes typed on index cards.)

ERNELLE: They was having a special on macaroni and cheese at the Piggly Wiggly, so I got four boxes of that. So, I was thinking I might make this here. It's a rattle snake and macaroni casserole. Well, the recipe calls for chicken. But I have to get pretty creative with the meat I have at hand. And rattler tastes pretty close to chicken. A little gamier is all. Do you need to eat anything special? To do what you do?

OSLEY: Ernelle. Kate is at peace now.

ERNELLE: Well, I'm not.

SNAKE: Neither will you be if you don't shut up.

ERNELLE: From what I remember, your brother's gift worked just like a sineater's gift. Am I right?

SNAKE: Little shit sack. Talking back to her.

(SNAKE drops his dead snake into the bucket on OSLEY's lap and smacks OSLEY in the back of the head.)

ERNELLE: He ate off of that little girl's dead body there in the cemetery and she came back to life. So, that's how it works, right?

OSLEY: Our Father who art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done--

ERNELLE: *(Grabbing OSLEY's chin and forcing him to look at her.)* Look. If macaroni and rattlesnake casserole does not sound good to you. I have a whole box full of recipes here. We will find something that you want to eat. And you will bring my sister back from the dead after eating it. I bought fifty dollars worth of groceries at that Piggly

ERNELLE (CONT.): Wiggly. And that money, coupled with your gift, is bringing my sister back to me. Do you hear me?

SNAKE: Did you get me my dipping tobacco at the store?

ERNELLE: Yes, I did, sugar. It's in the bag.

(SNAKE goes rooting around in the grocery bag for his tobacco. He finds it and takes a mouthful.)

OSLEY: There is a price to pay for it, Ernelle. My brother didn't want the power. Daddy forced it on him. Our daddy wasn't no good man. You know why you never saw my brother without a hat?

SNAKE: Was his head funny-shaped?

(SNAKE giggles.)

ERNELLE: No, Osley, I don't know. Why did your brother wear a hat?

OSLEY: He grew horns. From the power. He grew devil horns straight out of his forehead. Every time he used that evil gift the horns grew longer. By the time he finally died he was wearing a ten gallon Stetson even to bed. Those damned horns looked like a rack of antlers and they grew out gilded and covered in strange symbols. They made my brother more animal than human. Before every resurrection, as the power gathered in him, the blood poured down his forehead like a waterfall and those damned horns were just pushing relentless out of his head. You could smell the sulphur and the brimstone. Ernelle, please believe me.

(ERNELLE takes the baseball cap off SNAKE's head and puts it on OSLEY.)

ERNELLE: That's all right. Snake's got hats you can borrow.

(SNAKE giggles.)

ERNELLE (CONT.): How about rattlesnake shish-kabobs? Or rattle-snake pot pie? What sounds good?

OSLEY: She won't come back the same.

ERNELLE: But she will come back.

OSLEY: I cain't open that door and find out, Ernelle. There is no going back.

ERNELLE: I know what it'll be. Rattlesnake tartar.

(ERNELLE takes one of the rattlers from the bucket and carries it over to the tailgate.)