

BELLE

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A one-hour thriller about Belle Gunness, one of America's most prolific but relatively unknown serial killers.

FADE IN:

INT. CANDY SHOPPE-DAY

CHYRON: SELBU, NORWAY, 1884

We open on a quaint CANDY SHOPPE in the town of Selbu, Norway. We slowly take in the myriad treats: bright ribbon candies in glass jars, chunks of black licorice piled in barrels, pastel taffy in colorful sheets.

There's something almost sensual in all this sweetness. It feels safe and nostalgic here.

But suddenly, there's spark of a flame, and then the flame spreads-fast. We watch as taffy melts and licorice barrels are consumed by fire. The ribbon candies disintegrate in their jars. A glass cabinet cracks loudly, then explodes.

TITLE CARD: BELLE

INT. GUNNESS HOUSE-DAY

CLOSE ON a woman's hands, darning socks. They're hardy hands, hands that have seen work. These are the hands of BELLE GUNNESS (37), a woman of great contradictions: by turns cold and gentle; lonely and desirous; maternal, cunning, sexual, mean...though never capricious.

Belle's children, LAILA (16) and BJØRN (a young 7), read quietly at her feet. The children look nothing alike. Laila is fair and willowy, while Bjørn has dark hair and intense features.

A sudden KNOCK at the door pulls Belle to her feet. She stands and we see how imposing she actually is. She's a big, tall, fat, strong woman.

Belle opens the door and seems surprised to find TWO POLICEMEN there. The children look on.

The first policeman takes off his hat.

POLICEMAN #1
Det har skjedd en ulykke.
("There's been an
accident.")

BELLE
 En ulykke? Hvor?
 ("An accident? Where?")

POLICEMAN #1
 Butikken din.
 ("Your shop.")

Belle steps onto the porch, closing the door behind her.

EXT. GUNNESS HOUSE-DAY

Belle stands on the porch with the two policemen.

BELLE
 (worried) Mads?

Policeman #2 shakes his head: *Mads didn't make it.*

BELLE (CONT'D)
 Det er ikke sant! Det kan ikke
 vaere sant!!
 ("It can't be true! It
 can't be true!")

She pulls her APRON to her face and wipes away tears.

BELLE (CONT'D)
 Hvem vil fortelle barna mine? Det
 kan ikke vaere sant!!
 ("Who will tell my
 children? It can't be
 true!")

A glimpse of Laila's face, watching from behind the curtain.

ACT ONE

EXT. CEMETERY-DAY

A humble cemetery overlooking a lake. A PRIEST recites Latin before a small group of mourners, Belle and the children among them.

CLOSE ON Belle as she wipes away tears. She holds her children close. The mourners recite portions of Latin as two men lower the coffin into the ground.

Suddenly, a SHRIEKING rises up from somewhere in the crowd. A tiny, ELDERLY WOMAN is screaming, hysterical. She begins to lunge towards Belle but two men restrain her.

ELDERLY WOMAN

(Det var deg! Monster!
Djevel! Det var deg!
("It was you! Monster!
Devil! It was you!")

Belle covers Bjørn's ears. The woman has become crazed. She shouts incoherently and swings her arms. The men begin to carry her off.

Belle cradles Bjørn. Laila bows her head.

BELLE

Bestemoren din har det ikke bra.
("Your grandmother is not well.")

The woman continues to shriek as she is escorted away. The priest closes his Bible and shakes his head.

PRIEST

Himmelen må nåde oss alle.
("Heaven have mercy on us all.")

INT. LAWYER'S OFFICE-DAY

Some weeks later. MR. BERG (60s), a bespectacled lawyer, sits at a desk in a tiny office, across from Belle and the children, who all wear mourning clothes.

MR. BERG

Fru Hansen sa at du skal til Amerika?

("Mrs. Hansen said you're going to America?")

BELLE

Ja. Vi drar på fredagens skip.

("Yes. We leave on Friday's ship.")

Berg nods. A beat. Finally, he reaches into a drawer and slides a CHECK across the desk.

MR. BERG

Det er en kjekk sum.

("It's a handsome sum.")

(pause)

To summer faktisk, siden begge policyene ble utbetalt på samme dato.

("Two sums, actually, since both policies paid out on the same date.")

(off Belle's silence)

Du trenger ingenting i Amerika.

("You'll want for nothing in America.")

BELLE

Barna vil ha etter en far, Mr. Berg.

("The children will want for a father, Mr. Berg.")

MR. BERG

Selvfølgelig.

("Of course.")

Belle pulls Bjørn onto her lap and caresses his face, kisses his cheek. Laila stays quiet. After a beat, Belle reaches for the check and puts it in her purse.

CUT TO:

EXT. SELBU-DAY

The trio exits the lawyer's office and stands for a moment on the street.

LAILA
 Skal vi virkelig, mor?
 ("Are we really going,
 mother?")

BELLE
 Hva har vi sagt om spørsmål? Du
 spør for mange av dem.
 ("What have we said about
 questions? You ask too
 many of them.")

Laila nods, hanging her head. An older couple passes, just barely acknowledging Belle and the children. Belle does a quick nod in return.

BELLE (CONT'D)
 Men ja, kjære. Vi drar på fredag.
 ("But yes, darling. We
 leave on Friday.")
 (pause)
 Så vi må begynne å øve nå.
 ("So we must start
 practicing now.")
 (in English)
 Good morning. How is your day?

LAILA
 (in English, unsure) My day is
 fine, thank you.

BELLE
 Utmerket!
 ("Excellent!")
 (to Bjørn)
 Would you like a little cake?

BJØRN
 I would like a little cake!

BELLE
 Would you like two little cakes?

BJØRN
 I would like two little cakes!

Belle laughs and turns to Laila. She now caresses Laila's cheek. Laila ducks her chin but lets herself be touched.

EXT. SELBU-DAY

Friday morning, Belle and the children take a hired wagon to the train station, the carriage piled high with their bags and trunks. Neighbors watch them pass. Belle keeps her gaze forward, her chin high.

A TEENAGE GIRL stands watching with her MOTHER on their porch.

GIRL

Tror du det er godteri i Amerika?
 ("Do you think there is
 candy in America?")

MOTHER

Nok vitser! Gå og varm opp brødet.
 ("Enough jokes! Go warm
 the bread.")

The girl turns to go back in the house, but not before pausing to catch Laila's gaze. Something long and quiet passes between them, unsaid.

EXT. DECK OF SHIP-DAY

Belle and the children stand on the deck of a ship bound for America. Bjørn tosses BREAD SCRAPS to the gulls circling the ship. The mood is playful, happy.

INT. CABIN OF SHIP-NIGHT

Belle tucks her children into bed in their bunks, both of them asleep.

ESTABLISHING-ANDERS NILSEN'S OFFICE-DAY

CLOSE ON a shop sign in a window: Anders Nilsen, Etterforsker. ("Anders Nilsen, Investigator")

INT. ANDERS NILSEN'S OFFICE-DAY

ANDERS NILSEN (35), a private investigator, sits behind a desk in his office. Anders is young and eager to make his way in the world of private investigation.

He looks up as the door opens. TWO WOMEN step in. We recognize one of them as the woman from the funeral, and gather that the other is her daughter. Anders stands to welcome them.

ANDERS

Velkommen, kom inn. Kan jeg tilby deg te?
 ("Welcome, please come in. Can I offer you tea?")

DAUGHTER

Nei takk. Ikke for meg.
 ("No, thank you. Not for me.")

The old woman lifts a hand: *None for me.* Anders nods as they sit.

ANDERS

Hva bringer deg inn?
 ("What brings you in?")

DAUGHTER

Vi har hørt om deg og ønsker å spørre om tjenestene dine.
 ("We've heard of you and want to inquire about your services.")

ANDERS

Jeg skjønner. Hva er saken for händen?
 ("I see. What is the matter at hand?")

The daughter looks at her mother, who begins to cry. Anders offers a HANDKERCHIEF from across the desk.

DAUGHTER

Min bror ... han døde og ...
 ("My brother...he died and...")

She glances again at her mother, who nods for her to continue.

DAUGHTER (CONT'D)

Vi mistenker at det ikke kan ha vært en ulykke.
 ("We suspect it may not have been an accident.")

ANDERS

Hvem mistenker du?
 ("Who do you suspect")?

OLD WOMAN

(somewhat vehemently)
 Hans kone. Hun er et monster.
 ("His wife. She is a monster.")

DAUGHTER

Det har vært ... andre dødsfall.
Hun har reist til Amerika, og vi
vil sørge for at hun ikke rømmer.
("There have been...other deaths.
She's gone to America and we want
to make sure she does not escape.")

ANDERS

Jeg skjønner. (pause) Vel, jeg har
erfaring i saker som disse ...
("I see. (pause) Well, I do have
experience in matters like
these...")

The women nod, listening.

ANDERS (CONT'D)

Men Amerika ... en etterforskning
av denne st̄rrelsen ...
("But America...an investigation of
this size...")

OLD WOMAN

Vi betaler hva som helst. Enhver
pris.
("We'll pay anything. Any price.")

Anders regards the women, then reaches for some PAPERS to
draw up a contract.

INT. DINING ROOM OF SHIP-DAY

It is morning on the ship and Belle and the children are in
the dining room, nicely dressed. The children eat but Belle
seems content to just look around. She sees a woman with a
baby on her lap. Belle stares as if slightly entranced. A
beat.

AIDAN KELLY (39), a fellow traveler, approaches Belle's table
to chat. He speaks with a thick Irish accent.

KELLY

Good morning! Lovely day to be at
sea!

Belle smiles tightly.

KELLY (CONT'D)

I spoke with the captain last
night. He says it should be smooth
sailing all the way over.

Belle nods, but says nothing. Laila eats quietly and Bjørn dances his spoon around, in his own little world.

KELLY (CONT'D)

Where will you go once we land?
I've got family in New York, some
cousins and an aunt. Have you got
family there?

(off Belle's silence)

My apologies! I assumed you spoke
English.

(laughing)

You may not be understanding a
word...

BELLE

We're not feeling well this
morning.

KELLY

Are you seasick? You might have a
tea.

BELLE

Thank you, we'll manage.

A long pause.

KELLY

(softer now)

Are you traveling alone?

Belle gives him a look.

KELLY (CONT'D)

My wife passed two years ago March.

The silence continues. Kelly finally takes the hint.

KELLY (CONT'D)

Well. May the Lord bless you in
your travels.

Belle nods and Kelly tips his hat, then wanders away. Belle shakes her head as he goes.

INT. CABIN OF SHIP-NIGHT

It is late and the children are asleep, tucked in their beds on the ship. Belle sits at the foot of Bjørn's bunk, lost in thought.

She stands and reaches for a SHAWL, opens the door and steps out.

EXT. SHIP-NIGHT

Belle pulls the shawl around her shoulders, walking along the quiet deck of the ship. She steps to the railing and looks out at sea.

Kelly rounds the corner. He is remarkably drunk.

KELLY

If it isn't my favorite lady! What are you doing out this late?

BELLE

(polite, annoyed) Good evening.

KELLY

She speaks! She has a voice!

BELLE

Of course I speak. We spoke before. Mr...?

KELLY

Kelly. My name is Aidan Kelly. I didn't catch your name.

BELLE

Mr. Kelly, it appears you've had quite a bit to drink.

KELLY

She speaks! She speaks!

He looks out towards the waves.

KELLY (CONT'D)

(drunkenly) Her name was Aileen. My wife. Beautiful Aileen. She died in a terrible accident, my Aileen.

(pause)

Did you ever lose someone you love? It's like the Lord took your arm. Snatched your arm right off.

BELLE

You have a nice evening, Mr. Kelly.

She begins to step away but Kelly, extremely drunk, reaches out and grabs her arm. Belle is shocked.

BELLE (CONT'D)
 You would do well to mind your own
 body, Mr. Kelly, and keep your
 hands off of mine.

She yanks her arm away. Kelly looks dumbfounded.

EXT. SHIP-NIGHT

Belle reaches her cabin and stops before the door. She stands, practically panting, staring at her feet.

EXT. ELLIS ISLAND-DAY

Belle and the children disembark into the CHAOS of Ellis Island. Belle looks around, grapples with luggage, tries to orient herself, and so on.

Suddenly, a COMMOTION within the commotion. A ripple runs through the crowd and the chatter grows louder and more harried. TWO STRANGERS speak behind Belle.

MAN ONE
 What's happened?

MAN TWO
 Someone's gone missing from the
 ship.

MAN ONE
 Missing? You mean overboard?

The first man makes a face: *You never know.*

MAN TWO
 It wasn't a woman or a child, was
 it?

MAN ONE
 No, no. An Irishman.

There's a SHOUT from the deck of the ship as the crew panics and runs around. Quickly, Belle scoops up their luggage and hurries the children along.

CUT TO:

INT. TRAIN-NIGHT

Belle and the children ride in their own car on a train. Laila and Bjørn are curled sleeping against their mother.

Belle stares out the window of the moving train. We move closer and closer to her unreadable face.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. DECK OF SHIP-DAY

We move slowly down the quiet, empty deck of the ship in the early morning.

A CREWMAN makes his way along the deck. He stops at a kind of BROOM CLOSET and opens the door. A confused look passes over his face, and then he shouts to some other CREW.

CREWMAN
Look what I've found!

The others run over.

CREWMAN TWO
Aw, there he is! What a stupid sot!

CREWMAN
How long has this bastard been in here? Two days?

CREWMAN THREE
Stinks like piss.

We peer now into the closet, where Kelly lays slumped against BUCKETS AND MOPS. He rouses, dazed.

KELLY
I thought I'd died!

CREWMAN TWO
C'mon, you lousy mick.

The men reach into the closet and hoist him out.

INT. BARN, LA PORTE, INDIANA-DAY

CLOSE ON Belle's MUDDIED BOOTS, standing in inches of DARK BLACK MUCK. We hear the sound of HOGS: loud, jarring squeals.

We PULL OUT to see that Belle and the children are in a barn, being shown around by a FARMER.

FARMER
...it was a dairy farm at one point,
though he went out of business when
his wife got sick.
(pause)
Plenty of hogs though.

BELLE

And the hogs come with the property?

FARMER

Yes, ma'am. The hogs and the chickens and the one cow and whatever barn kittens you can find.

He winks playfully at Laila, who stands quietly off the side. A look passes over Belle's face, but she moves on. She turns to Bjørn.

BELLE

What do you think, Bjørn? Shall we buy it?

BJØRN

Yes! Let's buy it!

The farmer smiles tightly, unsure what to make of this little family.

EXT. FARM-DAY

The farmer escorts the family back to the main road.

FARMER

It does have six bedrooms and a working well...

He trails off.

BELLE

We received a handsome settlement in my husband's death.

FARMER

Yes, ma'am.
(pause)
My condolences.

Belle nods and gazes out over the property.

FARMER (CONT'D)

Lot of work, running a farm this size.

(off her glance)

I'm sure you'll manage.

(pause)

(MORE)

FARMER (CONT'D)

If you do need assistance, there's plenty of fellas in town that would be happy to help. Folks are always looking for work.

He cuts himself off, cowed by her look.

BELLE

Thank you. I will discuss purchase with the bank.

EXT. FARM-DAY

The family prepares their new home.

...Belle chops wood, sweat glistening on her brow, the sinews standing out on her neck and arms.

EXT. FARM-DAY

...Laila beats a rug hanging from a line.

INT. BARN-DAY

...Bjørn pours milk into a saucer for the kittens in the barn.

INT. BARN-NIGHT

...Belle feeds the hogs a bucket of loud, wet slop.

INT. KITCHEN-NIGHT

...Night, and Belle is in the kitchen alone. She reads a copy of *The Daily Herald*, intrigued by the personal ads.

EXT. SOUTH BEND TRAIN STATION-NIGHT

CLOSE ON a pair of MEN'S SHOES deboarding a late train in South Bend. PAN UP to reveal Anders Nilsen, the investigator from Belle's hometown.

EXT. LA PORTE-DAY

A few days later, the family walks through La Porte, a BASKET slung over Belle's arm. People make their way in and out of shops.

Laila catches sight of a boy her age, on the street harnessing his HORSE. This is LUCAS (17), and he is striking. His horse is striking too—bright white with brown spots.

Belle notices her daughter staring and gently reaches for her chin.

BELLE
De vil bare skade deg.
("They will only hurt
you.")

Laila looks down. They've had this discussion before.

INT. GENERAL STORE-DAY

A small BELL chimes as Belle and the children enter the general store. She hands Laila the basket and the children move off down the aisles.

Belle goes to stand before the tools. Her eyes catch on a MEAT CHOPPER sitting on an upper shelf. She reaches and takes hold of it, swinging it into her arms.

The CLERK rounds the corner.

CLERK
Oh, that one's heavy. Need some
help?

A look flashes over Belle's face but the look quickly transforms and she's neighborly again.

BELLE
Thank you.

She hands him the meat chopper—he struggles with its weight—and follows him to the front of the store. Laila and Bjørn return. The clerk tallies their items.

CLERK
You're the new family, bought the
Stonewell place there?

Belle ignores him and Laila averts her eyes. Bjørn is busy with something near the floor.

CLERK (CONT'D)
You might come to church this
Sunday, meet the pastor.

Belle counts out money and lays it down.

CLERK (CONT'D)
 (clueless, persisting) People come
 from two counties over just to hear
 him preach.

BELLE
 We're Lutheran, but thank you for
 the offer.

She hands the full basket to Laila and hoists the meat
 chopper back into her arms. She nods once at the clerk and
 the children follow her out. The BELL chimes as they leave.

INT. HOUSE-DAY

The family has returned from town and are in the kitchen
 putting things away. Belle seems cheerful now, upbeat.

BJØRN
 Mamma, kan jeg spille?
 ("Mama, may I go play?")

BELLE
 In English, my darling. Yes. Go
 play.

Bjørn runs out the back door and Belle turns to Laila.

BELLE (CONT'D)
 Help me here.

She stands holding the meat chopper at the counter. As she
 steadies the machine, Laila screws it into place. Belle test-
 wiggles it with her hands, then nods towards the ICE BOX.

Laila brings out a PACKET OF MEAT. She hands it to Belle, and
 there's a DULL THUMP as Belle sets it down. She undoes the
 string and picks up a loin.

CLOSE ON Belle's hands turning the crank. Wet ribbons of meat
 spiral out of the machine.

The back door BANGS open and Bjørn is back, cradling
 something in his hands.

BJØRN
 Mamma!

Belle and Laila turn to see that he is holding a WOUNDED
 MOUSE.

BELLE
 Det er sykt.
 ("It is sick.")

CLOSE ON the mouse—it is barely alive. Belle takes it into her hands.

BELLE (CONT'D)
 Where did you find him?

BJØRN
 En katt hadde ham.
 ("A cat had him.")

He begins to cry.

CLOSE ON Belle's hands as she gently massages the mouse, trying to coax it back to life. She mutters soft words in Norwegian. A beat, and then the mouse falls still.

BELLE
 Han er med Gud nå.
 ("He is with God now.")

She gently wraps the dead mouse in a SCRAP OF NEWSPAPER.

BELLE (CONT'D)
 Your sister will help you bury it.
 (to Laila)
 Ja?

Laila nods. She takes the mouse packet in one hand and Bjørn's hand in the other. Bjørn cries quietly and allows himself to be led outside.

Belle goes back to the meat chopper. She gazes out the window while her hands, as if on their own, grind meat.

INT. HOUSE-NIGHT

It is late and we move through the quiet upstairs of the darkened house.

Slowly—almost painfully so—we make our way into Belle's room, where she kneels at the side of the bed, a small BIBLE in her hands, praying.

INT. HOUSE-DAY

It is morning and Belle descends the stairs in her FINEST CLOTHES. The children are eating breakfast.

LAILA
 (concerned)
 Hvor går du?
 ("Where are you going?")

BELLE
 Jeg har bedt deg om å snakke
 engelsk.
 ("I've asked you to speak
 English.")

She adjusts her hat and gloves.

BELLE (CONT'D)
 Jeg skal til byen for forretninger.
 Hjelp broren din med studiene mens
 jeg er borte.
 ("I am going to the city for
 business. Help your brother with
 his studies while I am gone.")

Belle steps to Bjørn and kisses his cheek, then leaves
 without another word.

INT. TRAIN TO SOUTH BEND-DAY

Belle, silent and stoic, rides the crowded train to South
 Bend.

EST. SOUTH BEND DOWNTOWN-DAY

Belle makes her way down the main street of South Bend. She
 glances at a SLIP OF PAPER and peers around for an address.

She makes her way towards a shop. CLOSE ON its sign: MUTUAL
 LIFE INSURANCE OF INDIANA.

INT. INSURANCE OFFICE-DAY

Belle sits before an empty desk in the life insurance office,
 waiting. She's been waiting for a while. Finally, an AGENT
 comes and takes his place behind the desk.

AGENT
 Thank you for waiting, Ms...

BELLE
 Guinness. Belle Guinness.

AGENT

Thank you for waiting, Ms. Gurnes.
How can we help you today?

Belle's face registers annoyance. He's pronounced her name wrong and he's not really looking at her, just moving papers around on his desk.

BELLE

I've come to inquire about policies.

AGENT

Yes, well, that's why we're here.
How many policies do you need?

BELLE

One for myself and each of my children.

The agent makes a face, squints.

AGENT

I'm sorry, come again? I don't do well with accents.

BELLE

(slower now) I need policies for myself and my two children.

AGENT

Ah, yes, I see. And your husband?

BELLE

My husband is deceased.

AGENT

I'm sorry to hear that.

It's clear he's not all that sorry. He reaches into a drawer and pulls out a SANDWICH, begins eating.

AGENT (CONT'D)

(mouth full) What are the children's ages? What amount were you hoping for?

Belle regards this not-unfriendly but entirely dismissive man.

BELLE

I am not sure of the amount. That's why I came. For information.

The agent nods. He pulls a HANDKERCHIEF from his pocket, wipes his hands, takes out some FORMS, continues to chew. He starts talking and indicating the forms, but his voice has become **warbled and washed out**.

CLOSE ON his mouth: spittle, his lips flecked with food.

CUT TO:

EXT. GUNNESS PORCH-DAY

CLOSE ON a pair of men's shoes ascending the front steps of the Gunness house. They're the same shoes that descended from the train. We scale out and take in Anders as he lifts a hand to knock on the door.

CUT TO:

INT. GUNNESS HOUSE-CONTINUOUS

Laila sits with Bjørn at the kitchen table when she hears Anders' LOUD KNOCK. She startles, then stands to see who it is.

CUT TO:

EXT. GUNNESS PORCH-DAY

Laila peers through the curtain. Anders sees her, tips his hat. She opens the door.

ANDERS

God dag, frøken. Er moren din
hjemme?
("Good day, miss. Is your mother
home?")

LAILA

Kan jeg fortelle henne hvem som
ringer?
("May I tell her who is calling?")

ANDERS

Jeg heter Henrik.
("My name is Henrik.")

Laila pauses, waits for more. Bjørn comes and stands beside her. Anders smiles and nods.

LAILA
 Forventer hun deg?
 ("Is she expecting you?")

ANDERS
 Jeg antar at hun ikke er det. Jeg
 er her for Å presentere meg selv.
 Jeg er en venn av sÅ,steren hennes
 i Norge.
 ("I suppose she isn't. I'm here to
 introduce myself. I am a friend of
 her sister's in Norway.")

Laila looks down at Bjørn.

LAILA
 Mor er ikke her akkurat nå.
 ("Mother isn't here right now.")

Anders quickly peers over her shoulder.

ANDERS
 Jeg prøver henne igjen snart da.
 Dere to har en fin dag.
 ("I'll try her again soon then. You
 two have a nice day.")

Laila ushers Bjørn back inside.

EXT. SOUTH BEND DOWNTOWN-DAY

Belle exits the insurance office with a SHEAF OF PAPER in hand. Her lips are tight as she crosses the street towards a TROLLEY CAR.

INT/EXT. TROLLEY CAR-DAY

Belle joins a line of passengers waiting to board the trolley. The crowd is mostly women running errands at this time of day.

The ATTENDANT steps down from the trolley, reaching out to help the women board.

ATTENDANT
 Good morning, Mrs. Jones! Lovely
 hat you have on.

One by one, he helps the women board. Belle watches and waits her turn. All of the other women are notably young, beautiful, and thin.

Belle reaches the front of the line and the CONDUCTOR says something to the attendant. Both men laugh. Finally, the attendant turns to Belle.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)
Come on, then. We haven't got all day.

He does not reach out to help her.

Belle boards and watches the attendant as she rides. He is friendly with everyone but her.

Finally, he sits in his seat next to her. He looks down to where her skirt is brushing against his leg.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)
You mind scooting over a bit?
There's others on this train.

Two women behind Belle snicker. Belle adjusts her skirt. The ride goes on.

INT. SOUTH BEND TRAIN STATION-DAY

Belle sits on a bench waiting for her train home. The station is full of people. Two boys play loudly nearby. Belle makes a face but otherwise ignores them.

One boy playfully shoves the other, and he bumps into Belle's leg. She snaps and grabs him by the arm.

BELLE
Enough of this! Where is your mother? Hasn't anyone taught you how to behave?

She jostles the boy and he begins to cry. She releases him and the children scurry off, terrified.

INT. GUNNESS KITCHEN-EVENING

Belle returns from her trip. The children are eating dinner.

BELLE
(to Laila, exhausted) It's late for dinner.

LAILA
We wanted to say good night.

Belle kisses Bjørn then goes to the stove to prepare a plate of food. Laila waits until she is settled.

LAILA (CONT'D)
Mama...?

BELLE
Mm?

LAILA
A man came here today asking for you.

BELLE
(shocked, angry)
A man? What man?

LAILA
His name was Henrik. He was from Norway.

BELLE
Hva mener du, "Henrik fra Norge"?
("What do you mean, 'Henrik from Norway'?")

LAILA
(frightened now)
Han sa at han var en venn av tante Anne.
("He said he was a friend of Aunt Anne's.")

BELLE
Tante Anne?! Hva ville han?
("Aunt Anne?! What did he want?")

LAILA
Jeg vet ikke. Han sa ikke.
("I don't know. He didn't say.")

Belle stands and slams her plate into the basin.

BELLE
A man comes to the house and you ask no questions! Who was he? What is he after?

LAILA
(tearfully) You told me not ask questions.

Bjørn is unfazed by all of this. He keeps eating.

BELLE

Ask questions when it makes sense
to ask questions! How foolish are
you?

Belle storms out of the room. Laila tries not to cry.

CUT TO:

INT. BELLE'S BEDROOM—CONTINUOUS

Belle enters her room and throws her hat and gloves onto the
bed.

BELLE

Dum jente!
("Stupid girl!")

She goes and stands before the mirror, lifts a COMB to her
hair. She begins to shake as she looks into her own eyes. Her
fingers clench and she snaps the comb in half.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. GUNNESS HOUSE-DAY

Early morning, and Belle is at the kitchen table. A newspaper is open to the CLASSIFIED ADS. She scribbles on a piece of paper, studying the newspaper as she writes a PERSONAL AD.

A VOICEOVER of the ad begins, intercut with scenes of Belle as she moves throughout her day.

BELLE V.O.

"Personal..."

INTERCUT Belle folding the sheet of paper and slipping it in her pocket.

BELLE V.O. (CONT'D)

"...comely widow who owns a large farm in one of the finest districts of La Porte County, Indiana..."

INTERCUT Belle in front of the mirror, adjusting her hat and gloves.

BELLE V.O. (CONT'D)

"...desires to make the acquaintance of a gentleman equally well provided with view of joining fortunes..."

INTERCUT Belle waiting in line at the newspaper office.

BELLE V.O. (CONT'D)

"...No replies by letter considered unless sender is willing to follow answer with personal visit..."

INTERCUT Belle walking home.

BELLE V.O. (CONT'D)

"...Triflers need not apply..."

INTERCUT Belle back at the house, removing her hat and gloves.

CUT TO:

INT. BROTHEL-DAY

Anders stands in a dim hallway lined with doors. He knocks gently on one, and we hear a woman's young and sexy voice respond.

WOMAN'S VOICE O.S.

Come in!

Anders enters to find "KITTY" (28) sitting on the bed, dressed in stockings and a corset, smiling coquettishly.

As he closes the door, we hear LOUD SEX SOUNDS coming through the wall. We are in a brothel.

KITTY

Well, hello there, handsome.

Anders nods towards a chair: *May I?*

KITTY (CONT'D)

You sit wherever you please, mister. This half hour belongs to you.

Anders sits and, unprompted, Kitty comes over and starts to maneuver herself between his legs. Anders stops her with his hand.

ANDERS

I'd like to just talk, if that's okay.

Kitty backs off, gives a flirty smile.

KITTY

Whatever you want. Lotta fellas just want to talk.

She sits on the bed and eyes him suggestively.

KITTY (CONT'D)

What do you want to want to talk about?

He clears his throat, chooses his words.

ANDERS

I'm new here and getting acquainted with the area. I'm hoping you can tell me a little about this place.

KITTY

Where you from? You got that cute little accent.

ANDERS

Norway.

KITTY

Lotta folks from Norway in these parts.

She kind of runs a hand along her body.

KITTY (CONT'D)

What do they like to do in Norway?

Anders gives her a look and she gets it: this isn't kinky talk, just talk. She shrugs and sits up and the sexiness slides away.

KITTY (CONT'D)

Okay. So what do you wanna know?

ANDERS

Nothing in particular. I'm interested in meeting someone who has their ear to the ground.

She rolls her eyes: *Sure buddy.*

KITTY

Like a spy?

ANDERS

Not quite, but yes.

Kitty's all business now.

KITTY

You know, the price is the same whether we're talking or fucking. You know that right?

As if to echo her sentiment, more LOUD SEX SOUNDS come through the wall.

ANDERS

I am aware.

She shrugs, bored.

KITTY

Okay. So what?

ANDERS

I need to know if you've heard anything about the Guinness farm.

KITTY

The what?

ANDERS

The Guinness farm, Belle Guinness. She just purchased the Stonewell place.

KITTY

Yeah, I knew Stonewell. Nice man.

She smiles, remembering a good customer, but then her expression changes.

KITTY (CONT'D)

But you're talking about a lady?

ANDERS

She's a widow, yes. Belle Guinness.

KITTY

(scoffs) I don't know if it's occurred to you, but we don't get a whole lot of ladies in here.

He pulls the NEWSPAPER AD from his pocket, hands it over. Kitty waves it off.

KITTY (CONT'D)

Tell me what it says.

ANDERS

She's looking for help. A man to come help on her farm.

KITTY

Okay.

ANDERS

So I need you to keep an ear out. If anybody comes through and mentions her place, I'd like to know.

Kitty shrugs: *I can do that.*

ANDERS (CONT'D)

Wonderful. And of course, discretion is crucial.

(MORE)

ANDERS (CONT'D)
 (off her look)
 Let's keep this between you and I.

Kitty smiles, nods towards the wall where the SEX SOUNDS have continued.

KITTY
 Comes with the territory.

Anders stands, puts on his hat.

KITTY (CONT'D)
 And what should I call you?

ANDERS
 John.

KITTY
 Kitty.

Neither of these are their real names. Anders reaches into his pocket and hands her some CASH. She tucks the money into her bra, they shake hands, he leaves.

EXT. LA PORTE-DAY

Anders leaves the brothel. A beat while we stay on the door, and then another man steps out. This is JAMES MORRISON (39), handsome with a somewhat mysterious air. He looks like he's had a few drinks today.

A boy runs up and sells him a paper. James stands on the street and flips through. CLOSE ON the personal ads, then James' face as he reads.

INT. LAMPHERE HOUSE-DAY

A simple bedroom in a nice farmhouse. RAY LAMPHERE (38) sits on the edge of his bed, tying his BOOTS. He's a good-looking man, if a bit scruffy.

Suddenly, IMPATIENT SHOUTING from downstairs.

MAN'S VOICE O.S.
 Dammit, Ray! Hurry up!

Ray, frustrated now, stands and heads downstairs.

EXT. LAMPHERE HOUSE-DAY

Ray comes onto the porch where his father, WILLIAM LAMPHERE (late 60s), sits on the bottom step. William has the look of a man whose life slid very quickly downhill. He's sipping from a bottle and it's not even noon.

WILLIAM

You take too damn long. What the hell are you doin' up there?

RAY

Nevermind. Let's get to it.

William stands, sways.

WILLIAM

(angry, drunk) You don't say when we get to it. I say when we get to it.

Ray nods: *Yeah yeah.*

The two men climb into a HITCHED WAGON and Ray steers them towards the far end of the farm.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

I need all that hay bundled by this afternoon.

RAY

I know. You said so yesterday.

William looks at him, glares. There's a drunken pause.

WILLIAM

Did you talk to Stein yet?

RAY

Yeah, I talked to Stein. Said he'd let me know.

WILLIAM

That sonofabitch owes me about fifty favors. Least he can do is give you a job.

Ray nods again.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Whatever happens, you better figure something out. I won't have you suckin' off my teat till you die.

(MORE)

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Your mother's rolling over in her grave.

Ray winces then turns his head, trying to hide any feeling from his father. They arrive at the HAY STACKS and Ray jumps down, grabs a PITCHFORK, sets to work.

William stays put.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

I want neat bundles now. Clean stacks.

Ray nods, carries on.

INT. GUNNESS HOUSE-DAY

MR. WILSON (30's) sits in one of the chairs in the Gunness living room. He's here in response to the ad, and Belle is rather displeased with this greasy, unkempt man.

BELLE

Have you lived on a working farm?

MR. WILSON

Yes, ma'am. My daddy had a cattle ranch out in Wyomin' when I was growin' up.

BELLE

And what do you do now?

MR. WILSON

Odd jobs here and there, wherever I can find 'em.

BELLE

And you have no family to speak of? No wife or children?

MR. WILSON

No, ma'am. And I don't drink.

She regards him coldly. Suddenly, Wilson bursts into a VIOLENT FIT OF COUGHING. He pulls a HANDKERCHIEF from his pocket and coughs up what might be blood.

BELLE

(disgusted) Thank you, Mr. Wilson. That'll be all.

Wilson stands without protest. He gestures in thanks and leaves.

BELLE (CONT'D)
 Umulig!
 ("Impossible.")

INT. GUNNESS HOUSE-DAY

A **quick succession** of the interviewees:

...A man who is clearly drunk.

...A man who is so shy he just stares at his feet.

...A man so frail and thin he looks like he'd blow away in a breeze.

CUT TO:

EXT. FARM-DAY

Belle watches as the thin man attempts to chop wood. She finally steps forward to show him how it's done.

INT. GUNNESS HOUSE-DAY

CLOSE ON a man's hands, clean and manicured but hardy. The hands hold a CUP OF COFFEE and a SAUCER. CLOSE ON his mouth now—a fine mouth, blowing on the steam.

PAN OUT, and we take in his whole frame. We recognize him as James Morrison, the man buying the paper outside the brothel.

He's so handsome that Belle is flustered. Laila stands to the side, unsure what to do.

BELLE
 Mr...

JAMES
 Morrison.

BELLE
 Yes, of course. Mr. Morrison. Have you lived on a working farm?

JAMES
 (vague, confident) I've tended some animals in my day, yes.

James sips his coffee. Belle watches him. A beat. She remembers that Laila is there and sends her out with a nod.

James watches Laila go over the rim of his cup.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 She's a beautiful girl.
 (a beat)
 Takes after her mother.
 (another beat)
 Are there other children?

BELLE
 A boy, yes.

JAMES
 I see.

He looks around the room, taking it in: the hearth, the lamps, the books. A GRANDFATHER CLOCK ticks.

BELLE
 I'm hoping to find someone to help around the farm. Help keep things in order. (pauses) We've also had some men poking around. Seems people can't mind their own business.

JAMES
 They never do. (sips) A farm is a lot of work for any woman, but especially a widow.
 (to Belle, directly)
 Seems a woman such as yourself should be occupied with other things.

His eyes sparkle with a suggestive gleam. Something shifts in Belle and she meets his gaze.

BELLE
 Perhaps I should give you a tour.

They both stand. She's a tall woman and he's a tall man.

BELLE (CONT'D)
 Laila!

Laila appears again in the doorway.

BELLE (CONT'D)
 Hvor er broren din?
 ("Where is your brother?")

LAILA
I fjøset.
("In the barn.")

BELLE
Gå og lek med ham.
("Go play with him.")

Laila looks from one adult to the other but does not protest. She turns and leaves. We hear the BACK DOOR open then close.

Belle steps towards James, their faces so close she can smell his breath.

BELLE (CONT'D)
Are you drunk, Mr. Morrison?

JAMES
Off you, Ms. Guinness, perhaps.

Belle smiles coyly. CLOSE ON her hands at his tie.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. KITCHEN-DAY

The next morning. CLOSE ON James' wet mouth as he eats.

We PAN OUT. Belle sits across from him, smiling. The children eat quietly beside them.

BELLE
Quite the appetite.

James catches her drift, winks. He peers into his empty cup. Belle stands for the coffee.

JAMES
So, today we will work.

BELLE
Yes! There is much to do.

Laila makes a face: *Is there?*

BELLE (CONT'D)
Laila can work in the garden and do house chores. The other things are for a man.

James wiggles his eyebrows then looks over at Bjørn. The boy feeds bits of egg to a KITTEN.

JAMES
And what about you?
(to the room)
What will the boy do? Play with kittens all day?

BELLE
Bjørn has studies.

JAMES
Studies?

BELLE
He must learn his English.

BJØRN
(in faltering English, as if from a book)
There are bats in the belfry.

Belle smiles proudly.

JAMES
 Won't they go to school?

A look passes over Belle's face.

BELLE
 There is no God in school.

JAMES
 And there's God here?

BELLE
 God is everywhere.

BJØRN
 There are bats in the belfry!

BELLE
 Good. What else, my dear?

BJØRN
 The milk has begun to sour!

BELLE
 Wonderful!

BJØRN
 The stove is hot!

Belle looks at James: *See?* He says nothing but looks over at Laila, quickly scanning her with his eyes.

JAMES
 Don't you want to go to school?
 Make friends?

Belle stands abruptly and begins clearing the table.

LAILA
 I like it here.

James nods. This is a strange family.

BJØRN
 A storm is coming!

EXT. FARM-DAY

Everyone does chores now, except Bjørn.

...James pitching hay.

...Belle chopping wood.

..Laila hanging clothes on a line.

..James repairing a fence.

..Belle milking a cow.

..Bjørn in the barn, playing with kittens.

..James butchering a HOG, slicing open its neck. Its **blood** spills into the dirt.

CUT TO:

EXT. FARM-DAY

Late afternoon, and James is at the WELL-PUMP washing pig blood from his hands. He catches a glimpse of Laila in the garden, stares. She looks towards him but he quickly turns away.

INT. HOUSE-NIGHT

Night in the dark hallway. It is late. Laila stands in the doorway of her room, her body pressed to the frame. Traveling down the hall are the sounds of LOUD SEX.

The sounds come to a crescendo, but Laila's expression does not change. A beat. The door to Belle's room opens and she comes down the hall, a LANTERN in her hand.

She stops short when she sees Laila.

BELLE

Min lille sommerfugl! Det er så sent. Du burde være i sengen.
 ("My little butterfly!
 It's so late. You should be in bed.")

Laila looks evenly at her mother.

LAILA

De vil bare skade deg.
 ("They will only hurt you.")

Belle lifts a hand and slaps Laila, hard. She continues down the hall while Laila brings a hand to her cheek.

INT. KITCHEN-DAY

The next morning, Laila is at the table with Bjørn, an obvious RED WELT on her face. She stares at nothing while Bjørn eats.

Laila slowly turns her gaze towards the bread box, thinking.

LAILA
 Vil du ha en liten kake?
 ("Would you like a little
 cake?")

Bjørn nods eagerly. Laila stands and goes to the box. It's empty except for two SMALL CAKES. Laila glances over her shoulder, pockets the cakes.

LAILA (CONT'D)
 Så synd! De er alle borte.
 ("What a shame! They are
 all gone!")

BJØRN
 Men jeg vil ha en kake!
 ("But I want a cake!")

She returns to the table and lovingly pats his arm. Belle and James come downstairs, giddy and flushed. Belle begins to prepare breakfast.

James grunts while he pulls on his boots. Laila looks on in disgust. He stands, scratches himself, stomps outside.

Laila rises and moves towards Belle.

LAILA
 Mamma, jeg beklager i går kveld.
 ("Mama, I am sorry for
 last night.")

BELLE
 In English. We are in America now.

LAILA
 I am sorry for last night. I should
 not concern myself with adult
 things.

BELLE
 You should not. You are still just
 a girl.

LAILA
 Yes, mama. I am still just a girl.

BELLE
A silly, impulsive girl.

LAILA
A silly, impulsive girl.

BELLE
Who needs to learn.

LAILA
Who needs to learn.

Belle continues to cook. Laila returns to the table.

LAILA (CONT'D)
(a beat)
Also, mother. We are out of little
cakes.
(pause)
And Bjørn would like a little cake.

BJØRN
I would like a little cake!

BELLE
Then you will have to go to town
and get some.

She pulls MONEY from a TIN, lays it on the table. Laila pockets the money and smiles to herself.

EXT. FARM-DAY

Laila steps outside in her CITY CLOTHES, the BASKET over her arm. She starts down the road towards town. James, chopping wood, catches sight of her and watches her go.

INT. KITCHEN-DAY

Belle is at the counter rolling DOUGH. James comes in, stomping his boots.

JAMES
We've run out of hay seed. I'm
going to town.

BELLE
There's another sack behind the
barn.

JAMES
 I used that one up.
 (*Did he?*)
 Besides, we need another ax.

BELLE
 The ax is brand new.

JAMES
 It's too small for my hands.

BELLE
 Won't you eat?

JAMES
 Later.

Off her look, he steps towards her and speaks into her ear.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 Why don't you take a bath and the
 children can go play when I get
 back?

She blushes and nods, and then James is out the door.

EXT. ROAD TO LA PORTE-DAY

James rides the HORSECART to town. He pulls a FLASK from his coat pocket and sips, yells at the horse to speed up.

INT. BATHROOM-DAY

A little while later, and now Belle luxuriates in the bath. She takes a SPONGE and runs it along her arms, her neck, a lifted leg. A long, slow moment.

Bjørn enters, a BOOK under his arm and a little TOY PIG in his hand. He does a kind of circle with the pig along the sink, wanders to the bathtub, walks the pig along Belle's arm. We get the sense that he visits her often while she's in the bath.

BELLE
 Come, sit. Read to your mother.

Bjørn positions himself on a STOOL in a corner. He places the pig on a shelf and opens the book.

BJØRN
 (*sounding out words*) My father is a
 butcher.

Belle laughs, loud.

BELLE

Your father was most certainly not
a butcher.

BJØRN

My mother is a seam...seamstress.

Belle leans back, closes her eyes.

BJØRN (CONT'D)

My mother is a teacher. My father
is a judge.

BELLE

Your father was a slouch.

BJØRN

("reading")

My father was a slouch.

BELLE

Your father was a useless mole.

BJØRN

My father was a useless mole.

BELLE

Your father is dead.

BJØRN

My father is dead.

Belle smiles, sinks further into the bath.

BJØRN (CONT'D)

My father was a useless mole.

BELLE

Good. Again.

BJØRN

My father was a useless mole.

We SLOW towards the ceiling as Bjørn recites:

BJØRN (CONT'D)

My father was useless mole. My
father was a useless mole. My
father was a useless mole.

EXT. LA PORTE-DAY

Laila steps out of the bakery holding a PACKET OF CAKES. She spots Lucas, the handsome boy from before, and begins to walk towards him.

As Laila walks, her expression transforms. She's no longer a passive girl, but a young woman in full command of her body.

She approaches Lucas and indicates the horse.

LAILA
Is she yours?

LUCAS
Yes. Her name is Lady.
(pause)
You can pet her. She would like that.

Laila pets the horse's nose. A beat.

LUCAS (CONT'D)
Here. She likes it here.

He takes Laila's hand and guides it to the horse's cheek. CLOSE ON his fingers as they cup Laila's wrist and she moves her hand along the horse's jaw.

LUCAS (CONT'D)
Like that. Gentle. (a beat)
I'm Lucas.

LAILA
Laila.

LUCAS
Lucas, Laila, and Lady.

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small length of BRIGHT BLUE RIBBON.

LUCAS (CONT'D)
I found this today. Walking on the road. I didn't know it was for you, but now I know.

He presses the ribbon into her palm.

EXT. LA PORTE-DAY

James arrives in town and parks the cart. He surveys the street, sips from the flask, tucks it under the bench. He goes towards the general store.

EXT. LA PORTE-A FEW MINUTES LATER

James exits the store with a NEW AX and a BAG OF SEED. He drops the seed into the cart, lays the ax on top, glances up and down the busy street, squints. He sips again from the flask.

INT. TAVERN-DAY

James enters the tavern and gestures for a drink. A FEW DRINKERS are scattered here and there. We recognize one of them as Ray Lamphere.

The bartender pours James a WHISKEY and he goes and sits near the window.

He looks out and something in his face changes as he catches sight of Laila talking to Lucas. He downs his drink and stands.

As he exits, we move to a back booth, where Anders is drinking alone. Anders watches him go.

EXT. LA PORTE-DAY

James steps out of the tavern and staggers across the street.

JAMES
 (to Laila)
 Does your mother know you're here?

Laila startles. She holds up the basket.

LAILA
 I came to buy cakes.

JAMES
 You didn't come for cakes.

Lucas reaches out a hand.

LUCAS
 Mister...

LAILA
He's not my father.

JAMES
Get in the cart.

Laila follows him to the cart and does not look back. Lucas stands at the corner looking frightened and confused. We catch a glimpse of Anders, watching from the tavern's door.

EXT. ROAD TO THE FARM-DAY

James drives the cart back to the farm, swaying drunkenly in his seat. Laila sits beside him, stoic and enraged.

EXT. FARM-DAY

James parks the cart, sits swaying. Laila starts to climb down but he reaches over and crudely grabs her leg. He is very, very drunk.

JAMES
What do you think that boy will do for you? Huh? That boy don't know nothin'.

Laila looks down at his filthy hand.

LAILA
I will tell my mother that you touched me.

JAMES
Your mother wants me to touch you.

Laila slaps at him in disgust and jumps down from the cart.

EXT. PORCH-DAY

Laila stomps onto the porch just as Belle comes outside, freshly bathed.

BELLE
Hvor har du vært? Du tok for lang tid.
("Where have you been? You took too long.")

LAILA
Jeg kjøpte kaker.
("I was buying cakes.")

She pushes past her mother through the door. Belle looks out and watches James as he walks towards the barn.

INT. BARN-DAY

James stumbles drunkenly into the barn. He's surprised to see Bjørn there, playing with KITTENS.

JAMES

What're you doing here in the dark?
Don't you have chores?

Bjørn ignores him.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I'm talking to you! I said don't
you have chores? Don't you know how
to talk?

Bjørn tucks a kitten inside his shirt, makes meowing sounds.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I've heard you talk before. I know
you can talk.

BJØRN

My father was a butcher.

James stumbles over a LOG and half-falls until he is sitting. He starts to drunk-laugh. Belle rounds the corner and stands for a moment, taking in the scene.

BELLE

(to Bjørn)
Gå opp og vask deg.
("Go wash up.")

Bjørn does as he's told. James watches him go.

JAMES

That boy is soft.

Belle begins moving LOGS around.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Too soft. He's gonna have problems
if you're not careful. Soft as
porridge.

BELLE

His father just died.

JAMES

My father died and I wasn't soft.

BELLE

You're drunk. Mind you should head up to bed.

JAMES

You want your boy to be soft? Is that what you want?

Belle chucks a log and it slams against the wall.

BELLE

I will remind you, Mr. Morrison, of your place here.

James sneers, stands. He can barely walk.

JAMES

My place.

He stumbles out. Belle listens as he fumbles around on the other side of the wall. He grunts. Says something to the horse. Undoes his pants, takes a piss.

A loud SMACK as he tosses the new ax and it lands in a stump.

EXT. FARM-DAY

Orbit by Phillip Glass plays as we slowly...

...CLOSE ON a tiny mouse grave, a cross made of sticks and a circle of small stones.

...PAN over the new vegetable patch.

...CLOSE ON a pile of freshly pitched hay.

INT. KITCHEN-DAY

...SLOW PAN through the empty kitchen.

INT. LAILA'S ROOM-DAY

...SLOW towards Laila, who's standing in the corner of a small closet in her room, her back towards us but one hand clearly moving inside her skirt, the blue ribbon clutched in her fist.

INT. BELLE'S ROOM-DAY

...CLOSE ON Belle, face-down and expressionless on the bed, being fucked from behind by James.

EXT. BARN-DAY

...CLOSE ON Bjørn, in the barn surrounded by kittens, caressing the belly and throat of a SMALL MOUSE. Slowly, methodically, he moves his fingers up and snaps the mouse's neck.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

INT. KITCHEN-DAY

The next morning. Everyone at the table. James shovels food into his face, upbeat, as though he has no memory of the day before.

Belle sits across from James, watching him. He has lost all of his charm.

JAMES

Today I'll start the ditch. The boy
can help.

No one says anything. James turns to Laila.

JAMES (CONT'D)

And you? You're going into town?

Laila says nothing, glares.

JAMES (CONT'D)

We crossed paths yesterday, didn't
we?

Belle looks from one to the other.

BJØRN

Mamma, kan kattungen ha litt melk?
("Mama, can the kitten
have some milk?")

BELLE

Ja.

JAMES

What did he say? I can't understand
you people if you don't speak
English.

LAILA

His cat wants milk.

She goes to the ICE BOX, pours MILK into a saucer.

LAILA (CONT'D)

(to Bjørn)
La oss sitte ved bålet.
("Let's go sit by the
fire.")

James watches Laila openly this time, his eyes on her breasts and then her backside as she leaves. When Belle stands for more coffee, he reaches out and caresses her ass.

JAMES

Her father was a lucky man.

Belle stiffens but her face does not change. A beat. She moves towards the counter.

BELLE

(calling)

Laila!

Laila comes back and Belle hands her MONEY from a tin. She's not looking at her; we don't know where she's looking.

BELLE (CONT'D)

Ta med broren din for å kjøpe kaker.

("Take your brother to buy some cakes.")

LAILA

Men vi har kaker. Jeg har nettopp kjøpt dem.

("But we have cakes. I just bought them.")

BELLE

Gå.

("Go.")

Laila looks frightened but says nothing, leaves. Belle continues to stare. James eats.

LAILA O.S.

La oss gå.
("Let's go.")

BJØRN O.S.

Hvor?
("Where?")

LAILA O.S.

Komme.
("Come.")

We hear the OPENING AND CLOSING OF THE FRONT DOOR.

JAMES

I saw her in town yesterday with a boy.

He chews while Belle stares at the back of his head.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 ...talking on the street like it was
 nothin'. You'd better keep an eye
 on her. You'll have more kittens
 than you know what to do with.

He laughs at his own joke, shovels food into his mouth.

Slowly, Belle reaches over and begins to unscrew the MEAT
 CHOPPER, as if in a trance.

EXT. ROAD TO LA PORTE-DAY

Laila and Bjørn walk to town. Bjørn marches ahead, singing,
 silly. Laila slowly turns her head to glance back towards the
 house.

BJØRN
 (singing)
 Min far er slakter! Min far er en
 føfleck!
 ("My father is a butcher! My father
 is a mole!")

INT. KITCHEN-DAY

James is still eating and talking loudly. Belle almost has
 the meat chopper unscrewed.

JAMES
 A girl like that will get a
 reputation if you're not careful.
 Real fast. There was a girl in my
 town, had three babies by the time
 she was sixteen, all from different
 fathers. One of the babies had a
 twisted-up arm and half-shut eyes.
 (chewing, loud)
 You oughtta let me talk to her.
 Boys like that one in town? Men?
 They're all just-

Swiftly, Belle lifts the meat chopper over her head.

EXT. ROAD FROM LA PORTE-DAY

Belle stands stone-still on the path between the house and
 the road.

There are small differences in her appearance: her apron is gone, her hair is tied back. She watches as the children approach.

Belle speaks to Laila as she and Bjørn get close.

BELLE

Du må gå tilbake og be om lensmann.
Det har skjedd en ulykke.
("You must go back and ask
for the sheriff. There's
been an accident.")

LAILA

(terrified)
En ulykke?
("An accident?")

BELLE

Gå! Nå! Ingen spørsmål.
("Go! Now! No questions.")

Laila starts to back away, stumbling, looking between Belle and the house. She turns, runs.

Bjørn plops himself in the dirt at his mother's feet. He sings to himself in Norwegian, walking his TOY PIG along the ground.

CLOSE ON Belle's feet, and Bjørn's hand marching his pig across her toes. **Blood splatters** shine on her boots.

END OF ACT FIVE

INT. KITCHEN-DAY

The CORONER (40s) and his ASSISTANT (30s) stand in the kitchen of the Guinness house. We can't see James' BODY but we know they're standing over it.

CORONER
She said it was an accident?

The assistant nods, covers his nose with a HANDKERCHIEF.

ASSISTANT
(nauseated) She said the meat
chopper fell.

He points towards a high shelf. The coroner glances up, thinking. A beat.

CORONER
Okay. Let's load him up.

Both men stoop to gather the body. We see them hunched but not much else.

CORONER (CONT'D)
Get the grey matter. The grey
matter!

The assistant retches, pukes.

CORONER (CONT'D)
Good god. Let me do it then. Move.

The men switch positions, continue.

EXT. GUNNESS HOUSE-DUSK

Orbit plays once more. Belle is on the porch with the children, holding them close as the sheriff questions her. The coroner and assistant wheel James' body down the steps.

Belle lifts her apron to her face, as before, and wipes away tears.

We go WIDE as the body is loaded into the coroner's wagon. The expansive farm, grass blowing in the breeze.

INT. KITCHEN-EVENING

Belle and the children stand at the threshold of the kitchen, looking down at what is left of James' death. Laila puts her nose into her sleeve.

BELLE

(to Laila)
 Det er tid for senga. Hjelp broren
 din.
 ("It's time for bed. Help your
 brother.")

BJØRN

Vi har ikke spist middag! Jeg er
 sulten!
 ("We haven't had dinner! I'm
 hungry!")

He pouts, seemingly unconcerned that the kitchen is covered in blood.

BELLE

Om morgenen skal vi ha en stor
 fest. Men nå må du legge deg.
 ("In the morning we will have a big
 feast. But now you must go to
 bed.")

Laila leads him upstairs. We hear him whining as they go.

Belle rolls up her sleeves, pours water into a bowl, grabs a rag, sets to work.

INT. KITCHEN-DAY

The next morning, Belle and the children are at the table, finishing their feast. Not a drop of blood in sight.

Bjørn finishes eating and lets out a little burp.

BELLE

(subdued)
 Utmerket appetitt. Nå kan du
 spille. Det er en vakker dag.
 ("Excellent appetite. Now go play.
 It's a beautiful day.")

She nods at Laila: *You too.* The children stand and go outside, Bjørn running ahead.

INT. BELLE'S BEDROOM-A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Belle enters her room and goes to kneel by the side of the bed. She folds her hands in prayer.

BELLE

Vår Fader, som er i himmelen,
helliget være ditt navn...
("Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name...")

She prays the Our Father in Norwegian, over and over, fervent and sincere.

Her VOICE CONTINUES as we move through La Porte, taking in the web of people who will come to play a critical role in the story of Belle Gunness.

EXT. GUNNESS HOUSE-DAY

...the children outside, Bjørn playing cheerfully, Laila sitting quietly on a stump.

INT. LA PORTE CHURCH-DAY

...Lucas placing HYMNALS on benches in a church. His father, the preacher, arranges the altar.

BELLE V.O.

Vår Fader, som er i himmelen,
helliget være ditt navn...
("Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name...")

INT. BROTHEL-DAY

...the madame of the brothel opens a SAFE and places a large sum of money inside.

INT. BELLE'S BEDROOM-DAY

...Belle stands, but her **prayer** continues.

She goes to a TRUNK and turns the key. Inside, James' things: his clothes, his hat, some papers. She rifles through the items and pockets a bundle of CASH. She closes the trunk, locks it, pockets the key.

INT. CORONER'S-DAY

...The coroner stands over James' body and pulls back the sheet. He squints, thinking.

INT. ORPHANAGE-DAY

...A nun places a baby into a bassinet.

BELLE V.O.

Vår Fader, som er i himmelen,
helliget være ditt navn...
("Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name...")

INT. LAMPHERE HOUSE-DAY

...Ray comes into his room and closes the door, fleeing some kind of conflict with William. He sits on the bed, sighs.

INT. GUNNESS HOUSE-DAY

...Belle drags the trunk down the hall.

INT. BROTHEL-DAY

...Anders enters Kitty's room at the brothel. She is sprawled and waiting on the bed.

INT. GUNNESS HOUSE-DAY

...Belle unlocks a door at the end of the hall and pushes the trunk inside.

BELLE V.O.

Vår Fader, som er i himmelen,
helliget være ditt navn...
("Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name...")

INT. GUNNESS HOUSE-DAY

...James' trunk sits in the empty room. A beat as Belle's **prayer** goes on.

SLOW PAN to the other side of the room, where ANOTHER TRUNK sits against the wall.

Hanging above the trunk, on tiny hangers: two sets of BABY DRESSING GOWNS.

BLACK.

END PILOT.