

Death Bed

Sample Pages
from the
Screenplay By
P.K. Silverson

Paul Silberberg
writing as P.K. Silverson
pksilverson@hotmail.com

REGISTERED WGAw No. 1352589

FADE IN:

INT. ROSTOV CASTLE, CORRIDOR, 1865 - NIGHT

Carpathian gloom fills every corner of the torch-lit hall.
Creeping along the stone wall...

ELKE CZERNY, 38, gypsy fire in a maid's uniform. Hears MOANING beyond the closed heavy wooden door of the master's bed chamber. Eyes blazing, she pushes the door open slowly.

ROSTOV CASTLE, MASTER BED CHAMBER

Exposed on the sprawling hand-carved wooden canopy bed...

BARON SERGE ROSTOV, 29, dark aristocrat, features as hard as his tyranny. Bare female legs wrapped around him.

Clearly agitated, the maid grabs a ceremonial battle axe from the wall. WHACK! The Baron's blood gushes freely.

EXT. HAMPTON, NORTH CAROLINA, NOW, SATURDAY - DAY

Sultry sunshine warms late summer Ozark air. A far-from-new SUV lumbers into a sleepy town nestled between gently rolling hills. Stuffed with the Pickett family and their worldly belongings. The slow pace hints at their reluctance to be here. The driver announces their arrival with false delight...

JEBEDIAH "JEB" PICKETT, world-weary at 40, a carefully crafted New York accent betrayed by the lilt of Southern roots.

JEB (O.S.)

Well, here we are!

INT. PICKETT SUV - DAY

In the back seat, his daughter's disgust more overt...

OLIVIA "LIVIE" CHANEY PICKETT, 16, the fallen princess pouts. Arms crossed around the family's Scottish terrier, FLANDERS.

LIVIE

There's no here here!

Her mother less opposed but not delighted at being uprooted...

ELEANOR "ELLIE" PICKET, 38, though fully grown into the role of Mom, a not-yet-faded hint of exotic beauty in her face.

ELLIE

If you check in the dictionary next to charming, you'll probably see a picture of this town.

LIVIE

These hillbillies probably don't even know what a dictionary is.

Exchanging a glance with Jeb, Ellie suppresses her amusement as she goes about the business of being a mother.

ELLIE

Olivia Chaney Pickett! That is a spiteful and ignorant thing to say.

LIVIE

Oh no. You've already started talking like them. What have you done with my real mother?

JEB

Livie...

Livie glances at the market around the corner. CHARLEY SIMMS, 16, strapping Southern gentleman-in-training follows his MOTHER carrying bags of groceries. Livie smiles... not bad!

LIVIE

Chill, Daddy. I'll adapt. Again.

JEB

That's my girl.

EXT. HAMPTON COURT - DAY

Climbing a steep grade, the Pickett SUV turns into an unkempt drive leading to a vine-covered mansion. Flat land stretches unbroken out to the surrounding hills. At the end of the circular drive, remnants of hitching posts recall a more stately time. The family gets out to scan the house.

LIVIE

You grew up here, Daddy? Shut up!

ELLIE

Just grab some boxes, Miss Scarlett.

LIVIE

And so the nightmare begins.

INT. HAMPTON COURT, FOYER - MORNING

Livie lugs a box through the front door. Sunlight floods the cavernous receiving room. Furniture draped in sheets. Large heavy drapes pulled to cover ceiling-to-floor windows. A grand staircase curves up to the second floor.

LIVIE

Well, lah dee dah!

Ellie follows her in.

ELLIE
I could get used to this.

LIVIE
Where should I put this?

ELLIE
Down might be a good start.

LIVIE
The good times never end.

Ellie flips the light switch on the wall. CLICK. No lights.
Tries again. CLICK-CLICK-CLICK.

LIVIE (CONT'D)
Great! We've moved into the stone
ages.

ELLIE
Jeb! Did you call the power company?

Jeb struggles through the door with a box.

JEB
Things move at a slower pace in the
South. They'll turn on the juice
when they're good and ready.

ELLIE
And what do we do in the meantime?

Jeb reaches into the box, pulls out a flashlight.

JEB
Check the cellar for storm lamps.

LIVIE
I don't want to go into any creepy
basement.

JEB
Or you could unload the rest of the
car.

ELLIE
The cellar it is.

HAMPTON COURT, CELLAR

The beam of Ellie's flashlight shows the way. Livie follows
her down the CREAKING wooden steps. A sweep of the room

reveals oil lamps on wall shelves. Jars of lamp oil stacked next to them. Rows of barrels line the walls.

ELLIE
It looks like a country store down here.

LIVIE
Any food?

Livie takes an oil lamp from a shelf. Finds a box of matches.

ELLIE
Let's see.

Lamp adjusted to light the room, Ellie looks around. Livie kicks a barrel.

LIVIE
What's in here?

Ellie finds a crowbar on top of one barrel. Offers it to Livie.

ELLIE
Care to do the honors?

LIVIE
No thank you!

Ellie hands her the lamp.

ELLIE
Suit yourself.

Pries open the barrel. Checks, dips her hand in. Tastes...

ELLIE (CONT'D)
Salt.

LIVIE
Swell.

Ellie pulls her cell phone out of her pocket.

ELLIE
That's what pizza delivery is all about. Grab some lamps.

HAMPTON COURT, DINING ROOM

Ellie sets lamps and oil on a sheet covered table.

LIVIE
This place is totally massive.

ELLIE
Close that cellar door, will you?

Livie kicks the cellar door shut. CLINK-CLINK! Glass lamps on the wall rattle gently.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
Be careful.

LIVIE
I didn't do it!

CLINK-CLINK! A low RUMBLE. Livie's eyes go wide.

LIVIE (CONT'D)
Don't tell me. It's haunted.

More fixtures RATTLE. RUMBLING fills the room. Livie and Ellie caught up in a spooky moment... then, WHOOSH! Airbrakes. Jeb calls from outside. Doesn't sound happy.

JEB (O.S.)
The movers are here.

Livie LAUGHS. Relieved, Ellie shakes her stupid thoughts away as she lets out her breath and heads out the front door.

EXT. HAMPTON COURT, DRIVEWAY - MORNING

In dread, Jeb circles a truck with a big hole bashed in the side. A burly MOVER and his ASSISTANT climb out of the cab.

JEB
What the hell happened?

MOVER
There were a couple of turns we didn't expect in the road.

ELLIE
How much damage is there?

ASSISTANT
Turn in an inventory to the company and their insurance will cut you a replacement check, Ma'am.

JEB
I didn't take out any insurance!

ELLIE
Jeb!

MOVER
Maybe it's not so bad.

ELLIE

Bring everything inside. We'll sort it out there.

INT. LIVIE'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Slice of pizza in one hand, Livie lugs in a final box under her arm. Cheerful glow from an oil lamp on her desk. Livie piles the box by the wall next to several others. Exchanges a glance with Flanders.

LIVIE

As God is my witness, I will never lift another box again.

Munching on a slice of pizza, Ellie walks in behind her.

ELLIE

Nice room.

LIVIE

Is it really all mine?

ELLIE

Short of the master bedroom, it's the biggest one. I don't see why not.

LIVIE

Which room used to be Daddy's?

ELLIE

I'm not really sure.

LIVIE

It's got to be weird sleeping in the same room his parents... you know.

ELLIE

And their parents and their parents' parents. This house has been in his family for a long time.

LIVIE

Is he bummed Great Aunt Jane left it to you?

ELLIE

She did us a kindness. If it was in your father's name, they'd have taken this, too.

LIVIE

It's hard to believe somebody can get in so much trouble just doing the right thing. I'm glad he's home with us now.

Ellie hugs her daughter.

ELLIE
Tell that to him, sweetie. It'll make
him feel a lot better.

From another room... CRASH! Surprised, Flanders BARKS.

JEB (O.S.)
Damn it!

LIVIE
Maybe later.

MASTER BEDROOM

The spacious chamber befits a lord of the manor. Twin doors open out to a broad balcony. Ellie pokes in. Mattress on the floor, Jeb sprawled on his back. Surrounded by the shattered remnants of their bed against a long wall under a pair of lamps converted from colonial candle mounts.

ELLIE
Another casualty?

JEB
I don't believe this.

Ellie settles next to him. Kisses his cheek.

ELLIE
We can still afford a new bed, right?

Jeb props up on his elbows, looks at her tenderly.

JEB
I can't believe you put up with this
whole mess, Ellie.

ELLIE
What's done is done. You couldn't
sit by and watch those bastards get
away with fraud. You had to come
forward.

JEB
I promised you better.

ELLIE
We still have a roof over our heads
and a healthy daughter.

Jeb kisses her gently. She leans into it. Kisses him firmly. He smiles, shifts to hold her. Their kisses more than affectionate. He pulls her down on the mattress.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Jeb... I'm a mess.

JEB

You sure look good to me.

ELLIE

Close the door. I hope the floor
doesn't creak.

INT. KITCHEN, SUNDAY - MORNING

Showered and shaved, Jeb shuffles in to find Ellie clattering around the stove. Wall and ceiling lights working now.

JEB

Breakfast?

ELLIE

Not unless they deliver pizza in the morning. At least the power's on.

From outside: SHRIEK! The frantic BARKING of the family dog. They bolt outside.

EXT. HAMPTON COURT REAR LAWN, SMOKING SHED - MORNING

Jeb and Ellie sprint across the vast and overgrown lawn. They reach Livie quickly. She holds the door open to a crumbling old shed.

LIVIE

Daddy! Mom! Look at this! There's bones all over!

ELLIE

Are you okay?

LIVIE

Well, duh! What is this, Daddy?

Ellie glances back at the big house. A vine covered trellis climbs to the foot of the their bedroom's balcony.

ELLIE

Wow.

INT. SMOKING SHED - MORNING

Jeb and Ellie follow Livie into the shed. Bones strewn over the dirt floor. In the middle sits a chopping block with a long-handled ax buried deep in the wood. Rusted metal hooks strapped to the rafters.

JEB

Once upon a time, princess, Hampton Court was a genuine working plantation. This is where they brought meat to smoke it. Those are pig bones, mostly.

LIVIE

Gross.

JEB

Maybe, but they hide an amazing secret.

LIVIE

Get out.

Jeb stamps around trying to locate something. No luck.

JEB

I never could find that thing. Come on, I'll take us out to breakfast and tell you about the mystery of Hampton Court.

INT. DINER - MORNING

Comfortably settled into a corner booth, Jeb hands the cheerful WAITRESS the family's menus.

WAITRESS

All right, sugar. We'll have that out in two shakes of a lamb's tail.

JEB

Thank you kindly.

The waitress flashes a dazzling smile and goes. Assorted TOWN PEOPLE at the counter and in the other booths. Among the few who pay the Picketts a second glance...

County Sheriff ROB NESSON, late-30's. Rugged respect in a crisp uniform. Drinks coffee with lazy curiosity at the counter. Not so indifferent...

TERRY SHERMAN, broken by life at 40. Carelessly dressed in exterminator's coveralls. Glares frequently at Jeb, who pointedly ignores him.

LIVIE

You really are a hick!

JEB

There are worse things to be ashamed of, you know.

ELLIE

Okay, you know I can't stand suspense.
Tell us the big secret.

JEB

There's a whole passel of mysteries
in that house. Like when I was growing
up, my mama always seemed to come
out of places I never expected. I
had to be careful whenever I got up
to any mischief. I always suspected
there were hidden passageways, but I
never saw one.

LIVIE

But what's the deal with the shed?

JEB

Oh, that. You've heard of Major
General George Pickett, of course.
You know, Pickett's Charge?

ELLIE

From the battle of Gettysburg?

JEB

That's right. He was more than a
true Confederate hero. He was a full
cousin.

LIVIE

Wow.

JEB

Thing of it was, my great-great-great-
great grandpappy didn't hold with
the notion of owning another human
being. When he inherited Hampton
Court, he freed all the slaves. Any
who wanted to stay on were kept as
paid workers. Colonel Stuart Pickett
was a loyal son of the South, but he
also turned Hampton Court into a
stop on the Underground Railroad.

ELLIE

Wow.

JEB

There's a tunnel under that smoking
shed. Our family sheltered escaped
slaves who were making their way
North in there. They built a passage
from the cellar so they wouldn't be
(MORE)

JEB (CONT'D)
seen taking food and clothing out to
the runaways.

LIVIE
I didn't see a tunnel in there.

JEB
I never have, either. I guess it was
boarded up. My father said they also
stored munitions down in the tunnel
to hide them from the invading
Yankees.

The waitress returns with plates loaded with breakfast.

WAITRESS
And now we know how long a jiffy
takes!

She sets the food out. Terry Sherman shuffles up behind her.

TERRY
We all know what you did, Jeb Pickett.
Time was Hampton wasn't good enough
for you. You up and moved to New
York City. How's it feel to tuck
tail and come on back to hide?

JEB
My debt is square. This is my family.
Show a little respect.

TERRY
Respect? For a Pickett?

Jeb stands slowly. He's much bigger than Terry.

JEB
All right. Maybe you'd like to take
this outside and we can discuss it
like old times.

The diner stone quiet. Sheriff Nesson SIGHS, sets down his coffee on the counter, picks up his hat, leaves the stool.

TERRY
Maybe I would.

ELLIE
Jeb, this isn't necessary.

TERRY
Maybe you should listen to the little
woman, Jebediah.

ELLIE

On the other hand, maybe it is.

Fury on Jeb's face as Nesson approaches.

NESSON

Morning, folks.

Terry nervous. Jeb calms down slowly.

TERRY

Morning, Sheriff.

NESSON

Problem here, Mr. Sherman?

TERRY

Just old friends jawin', Sheriff.

Nesson looks at Jeb.

NESSON

Is that right?

JEB

Sure.

TERRY

I got places to be, people to do. We can talk later.

JEB

Looking forward to it.

Nesson puts his hand firmly on Terry's chest.

NESSON

As long as its amiable, Mr. Sherman.
I don't cotton to trouble. You mind.

Terry's eyes sink. He nods and heads out of the diner. Nesson offers his hand.

NESSON (CONT'D)

Rob Nesson. I'm guessing you're the Pickett family.

JEB

That's right, Sheriff.

NESSON

Sorry about Miss Jane. She was a sweet old gal. Very proud of her kin.

ELLIE

Did you know her very well?

NESSON

She spent her last years chronicling
your family history to the internet.
Quite a group, you Picketts.

JEB

Thank you, I think.

NESSON

Welcome back to Hampton, Mr. Pickett.
Nice to meet you all.

Nesson tips his hat and strides away.

ELLIE

What was that all about, Jeb? Sit
down and have your breakfast.

JEB

I'm not hungry. How about we go see
about that bed?

LIVIE

Can we at least stop and pick up
some real food?

EXT. HAMPTON, DINER - DAY

Jeb sulks out the front door. Livie drags behind.

ELLIE

Come on.

LIVIE

I wasn't done.

ELLIE

I'll make it up to you at lunch.

LIVIE

I'm a growing teenager. I could starve
to death before then.

ELLIE

I'll take that chance.

JEB

We'll probably have to drive way
over to Ashville to find a decent
furniture store.

Ellie glances across the street. Down the block...

MALEK'S ANTIQUE STORE

Out of place compared to the town's bland architecture. Distinct antique Tudor look. In the bay-style display window: an ornate hand-carved four-post wooden-frame canopy bed with a royal insignia carved into the headboard.

DINER

Longing fills Ellie's face as she gazes across the street.

ELLIE

Jeb... what about there?

JEB

Looks a little out of our range.

ELLIE

Can't we look anyway?

JEB

I guess so. I don't have to be in
the office until...

He glances at his watch.

JEB (CONT'D)

Never.

Ellie drifts across the street, almost in a trance. Jeb follows, curious. Livie shakes her head.

LIVIE

You're both completely weird.

JEB

Deal with it, princess.

INT. MALEK'S ANTIQUE STORE - DAY

Ellie steps into a different world. Gracious polished wood appointments. Premium decor. Compounding the illusion, the thick Eastern European accent of the proprietor...

OSKAR MALEK, 80 going on ancient, as close to a walking skeleton as a man in a tweed jacket can get.

MALEK

May I be of service?

ELLIE

I couldn't help but notice the bed
in your display window.

MALEK

An exceptional piece. You have a fine eye, Madam.

JEB

Unfortunately, we have a limited budget.

Malek's smile cools slightly.

MALEK

As you can see, Sir, the local gentry has not exactly embraced my humble shop. Perhaps we can reach a mutually acceptable arrangement.

ELLIE

That would be lovely.

Malek's smile lights again.

MALEK

Yes. The piece suits you. I can see it. I'm convinced this is the work of destiny.

JEB

How much does destiny cost these days?

MALEK

Whatever the traffic will bear, of course.

JEB

That's too easy. What's wrong with the bed?

MALEK

I have learned over my years, Sir, not to interfere with destiny but to serve it faithfully. Your satisfaction is my sole concern. The bed is of the finest quality. A genuine original which has stood the test of time.

JEB

I suppose we'll have to wait a month to take delivery or pick it up ourselves.

MALEK

Or I can simply arrange to have a truck follow you home with your fine purchase instead.