

Ashes to Ashes

By Shane Simmons

Copyright 2001

FADE IN

EXT. PAUPER CEMETERY - DAY

A simple pine box is being lowered into an unmarked grave by a disinterested GROUNDSKEEPER.

There are two mourners present, one on either side of the grave. They are MR. and MRS. CARTER -- young, beautiful, and stylishly dressed in black outfits and shades better suited for club-hopping than funerals. Each holds a single red rose.

The groundskeeper gets the box to the bottom of the hole on his own, thanks to a rope and pulley system. As he takes a shovel to the piled earth and starts to fill the grave, they toss in their roses.

It's too odd. The groundskeeper can't help but ask:

GROUNDSKEEPER

You knew him?

MR. CARTER

Can any of us really know someone?

GROUNDSKEEPER

It's hard, I'll give you that.
Especially when it's some OD'ed John
Doe the cops pulled out of the river.

MRS. CARTER

Someone's son.

MR. CARTER

Maybe someone's father.

MRS. CARTER

I'm sure the family would have
appreciated us being here.

MR. CARTER

I'm sure he would have appreciated
it.

Their solemnness comes off as almost smug, or sarcastic. The groundskeeper, weirded-out by the couple, disengages himself from further conversation and hurries to cover over the grave.

INT. POSH CAR - DAY

The couple gets into their black European sports car. There's no back seat, but behind their chairs rests a bouquet of a dozen red roses, now less four.

Mrs. Carter consults a single newspaper page. It's the day's obituaries. Several of them are circled.

MR. CARTER

That cleansed the palate. I like these little no-name ceremonies. They lack the circus atmosphere of the priest and the family and the crying, but it's nice for a quiet change.

MRS. CARTER

It's not that much of a change, but it is quiet.

Mr. Carter catches the melancholy in his wife's voice and tries to cheer her up in his own special way.

MR. CARTER

If we wait around an hour, we can catch those two homeless people they picked out of a dumpster.

MRS. CARTER

No. Let's go where the action is.

INT. FUNERAL PARLOUR - DAY

The couple walks through an upper-class funeral home. They fit in better here, and soon find a FAMILY paying their respects to a dead relative. A WOMAN comes over to them almost immediately.

WOMAN

Thank you. I'm glad you could make it.

MR. CARTER

We wouldn't have missed it for the world.

As Mr. Carter signs the guest book, the woman asks:

WOMAN

I'm sorry, I didn't know all of Edie's friends. You are...?

MRS. CARTER

Mr. and Mrs. Ashley Carter. And you...?

WOMAN

You can call me Louise. Ah...?

MRS. CARTER

Ashley.

WOMAN

I'm sorry? You're both named...?

MRS. CARTER

Ashley. Ashley Carter.

WOMAN

That's quite unusual.

MRS. CARTER

Well, I thought I'd adopt my husband's name since I already had half of it. It makes co-signing things so much easier.

WOMAN

It's very romantic. I suppose.

MRS. CARTER

We're very close.

CUT TO:

Mr. and Mrs. Carter arrive at the coffin after waiting in line, and each place a red rose on the casket. They nod politely at one LADY as she heads for the back of the line. It seems they may genuinely know her, if only by sight. The BODY lies in state.

MR. CARTER

She looked quite young.

MRS. CARTER

Cancer's an ageless disease.

MR. CARTER

They say she was sick a long time.

MRS. CARTER

Not a bad job, puffing her up again for show.

MR. CARTER

Makeup job's a bit pedestrian.

MRS. CARTER

I wonder if the wig was her choice or theirs.

MR. CARTER

I would have gone with a more summery dress.

MRS. CARTER

I wish they opened the bottom half too. I want to see her shoes.

INT. FUNERAL HOME RECEPTION AREA - DAY

As the funeral ends, the couple comes back out of the parlour. They're among the last to disperse.

Mrs. Carter checks her watch and obituaries.

MRS. CARTER

Dammit, we missed the Farkas do.

MR. CARTER

Yes, but we're still in time for the will reading.

MRS. CARTER

I don't know, Ashley. Will readings don't play as well for me without the eulogy and a bunch of loved ones pretending to sob before the loot is divvied up. It's like skipping dinner and going straight for dessert.

MR. CARTER

What about your sweet tooth?

MRS. CARTER

All right. We'll make an appearance. But we want to leave in time for that suicide at one.

INT. LEGAL OFFICE - DAY

The couple sits in the back of the room as a LAWYER reads out the financial details of a will. There aren't many PEOPLE present for the reading, but they all nod solemnly when their names and their inheritance is read.

LAWYER

(reading)

To my daughter, Elaine, I leave all proceeds from the sale of the house and its contents. This is subject to the condition that all these items are put on the block and sold immediately upon my death.

ELAINE FARKAS looks like she expected this clause in the will, but appears even more grim about it when it's actually read out loud.

Mrs. Carter squirms uncomfortably in her chair and whispers to her husband:

MRS. CARTER
I don't like it. Nobody's here.
Someone's going to ask who we are
and what we're doing hanging around.

MR. CARTER
All right. It seems to be wrapping
up. Let's make a discreet exit.

They get up quietly and walk to the door at the back of the room. Before they can make it out, they're frozen in place when the lawyer reads:

LAWYER
To my dear friends, Mr. and Mrs.
Ashley Crater...

They turn around slowly, stunned and silent.

LAWYER (CONT'D)
...I entrust my mortal remains. I
have always found you a couple of
exceptional taste, and believe no
one is better suited to arrange for
their disposal in a tasteful manner.

The mortal remains sit on the lawyer's desk: a small box of cremated ashes.

Elaine leads the scattered group of mourners, turning around in her chair to see who these Carter people are. The others just look at the couple with mild curiosity, but Elaine's tear-stained face betrays genuine hurt, even a bit of anger.

INT. CONDO LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mr. Carter arranges Mr. Farkas's box of ashes on their mantel. It's a terribly plain, but appropriately morbid addition to their collection of knickknacks.

INT. CONDO BATHROOM - NIGHT

Mrs. Carter runs a bath, turning on the cold water only.

MRS. CARTER
I think it was a lovely gesture just
the same.

Her husband calls from the other room.

MR. CARTER (O.S.)
I can't argue that. But the man was
a total stranger.
(MORE)

MR. CARTER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I mean, don't you find it odd? We
never knew he existed until we read
his name in the morning's obituaries.

Mrs. Carter slips off her robe and lowers herself slowly
into the tub. The water is icy and uncomfortable, but she's
done this enough to not cringe too much.

MRS. CARTER
It's obvious he knew us somehow.

INT. CONDO LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mr. Carter strolls through their living space. The lighting
is dim, the decor dark and morbid, but never gothic. They
are, after all, yuppies.

MR. CARTER
But from where? We don't know any
old people. None living at least.

INT. CONDO BATHROOM - NIGHT

Mrs. Carter lies low in the cold bath water. She wears a
shower cap to keep her hair dry.

MRS. CARTER
He must have been keeping an eye on
us somehow -- from a distance -- to
know so much about us.

INT. CONDO LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mr. Carter pauses to shake some fish food into a large
aquarium. The tropical fish inside are all dead.

MR. CARTER
He knew our names. That's all.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

As Mrs. Carter finishes drying off, she begins to pad white
powder all over her naked body.

MRS. CARTER
He knew we would be at the will
reading. Even before we did. And
he knew we had impeccable taste.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Mr. Carter leafs through their mail, piled on a coffee table:
bill, bill, bill, funeral director's trade journal, bill.

MR. CARTER
He didn't say "impeccable," he said
"exceptional." That doesn't
necessarily mean good.

There's no noise coming from the bathroom anymore.

MR. CARTER (CONT'D)
You ready?

No answer. He stops flipping through his trade journal and goes to a room in the back.

INT. CONDO BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mr. Carter walks in and finds his wife lying on their large, plush bed. White silk netting is draped over the high framework, allowing only a ghostly view inside. He pulls aside the fabric and looks at his wife.

She lies still, stiff and deathly pale, in a lacy pure-white dress. She doesn't appear to be breathing. Her hands are clasped on her chest like a corpse. Red roses fill the bed, framing her. Two large old-style pennies rest on her closed eyelids.

Her husband brushes his fingers across her cold flesh. Taking a small mirror from the end table, he holds it under her nose for a few moments. It doesn't fog.

He starts to undo the elaborate Victorian clasps on the dress and the corset underneath, then reaches down to force apart her stiff legs.

His wife never moves. She plays dead like an expert. Her husband starts to remove his own clothing and reaches for a handy bottle of lubricant.

INT. CONDO LIVING ROOM - DAY

It's the next morning, and the couple is dressed (stylishly in new black outfits), and getting ready to go about their day's business.

The doorbell rings and Mr. Carter answers it. It's a COURIER with a package. He signs for it and checks the return address.

MR. CARTER
Thank you.

Mrs. Carter steps closer.

MRS. CARTER
Who's that from?

MR. CARTER

Him.

MRS. CARTER

Who?

He nods at the mantel -- at the box of ashes.

Mr. Carter opens the package. There's an urn inside -- tastefully painted, it clashes with the modern well-off condominium where everything is either black or white with straight edges and sharp corners.

MR. CARTER

Not quite what I would have chosen
for my final resting place.

MRS. CARTER

They're not your ashes. Besides, I
think it suits him.

Mrs. Carter goes to fetch the box of ashes.

MR. CARTER

How do you know it suits him? We
don't know a thing about the man.

MRS. CARTER

On the contrary. I think we're
learning more about him by the minute.
Now hold it steady.

She's referring to the urn, which Mr. Carter holds open for her. Mrs. Carter carefully shakes the box's contents -- ashes and bits of crushed bone -- into the urn. Half-way through the transfer, there's a metallic clinking noise the Carters immediately notice.

MR. CARTER

What was that?

MRS. CARTER

Something that wasn't a part of Mr.
Farkas.

They look inside the urn, but see nothing in the dark remains.

Among the couple's knickknacks is a pair of hand-crafted chopsticks. Mr. Carter uses these to fish around in the ashes. He strikes something metal. Moments later, he manages to pull out a pair of rings. They aren't gold, but some duller, more heat-resistant element.

MRS. CARTER (CONT'D)

They look like wedding bands.

MR. CARTER
How'd they get in there?

MRS. CARTER
You don't suppose...? No.

MR. CARTER
That he was wearing them when they
cremated his body?

MRS. CARTER
No, they would have been removed
before that. Unless...

MR. CARTER
He swallowed them. Before he died.
In the hospital.

MRS. CARTER
Why would he do that?

MR. CARTER
Hospitals are full of thieves.
Especially during visiting hours.
No one could get their hands on them
this way.

MRS. CARTER
They must have meant a lot to him.

The Carters look at the rings closely. There are inscriptions
in both of them -- numbers.

MR. CARTER
(reading the first)
One, four, comma.
(reading the second)
Eight, seven, three.
(to his wife)
It's hardly a declaration of undying
love.

Mrs. Carter takes one and slips it onto her husband's ring
finger.

MR. CARTER (CONT'D)
I thought we didn't do jewelry.

He nevertheless follows her guide and slips its twin onto
her finger.

MRS. CARTER
These are too charmingly macabre not
to wear. I let you get away with
skipping the whole engagement ring
routine, so you can indulge me now.

MR. CARTER
The price is right.

MRS. CARTER
I want to know a great deal more
about Mr. Farkas. How about you?

MR. CARTER
Where do we start?

MRS. CARTER
Where better than the end?

INT. HOSPITAL MORGUE - DAY

The couple knocks on a heavy steel door in the basement of a downtown hospital. A shifty CORONER cracks it open and looks out. Mr. Carter holds out a fresh pack of cigarettes for him. A modest wad of twenty-dollar bills has been slipped down one side, next to the smokes. The coroner breathes in deeply, almost like his catching the aroma of tobacco and money mixed. He takes the pack and comes out into the hall.

CORONER
Ten minutes.

The Carters are obviously regulars. As the coroner goes on his break, they let themselves into the morgue.

MRS. CARTER
What have they got for us today?

She strolls down the row of body-drawers like she's window shopping. Mr. Carter reads off a clipboard that hangs on the wall.

MR. CARTER
Couple car wrecks. A floater.

Mrs. Carter has stopped at one drawer.

MR. CARTER (CONT'D)
That's a Jane Doe. The verdict isn't
in.

Mrs. Carter pulls out the drawer in question and unzips the body bag. There's a DEAD YOUNG WOMAN inside. She was probably a prostitute.

MRS. CARTER
Nice. Bet he couldn't keep his hands
off this one.

Mr. Carter is rifling through the files in a desk's "out" box.

MR. CARTER
Farkas, Andrew.

He pulls the file.

MR. CARTER (CONT'D)
He was here all right. Died just a few days ago. The body was claimed almost immediately.

MRS. CARTER
Cause of death?

MR. CARTER
(reading)
Admitted after complaining of diarrhea, severe stomach pains. Pronounced dead six hours later.

MRS. CARTER
Sounds like the flu.

Mrs. Carter has unzipped the body bag farther. She runs a finger along Jane Doe's stitched-up autopsy scars.

MRS. CARTER (CONT'D)
(to herself)
Very nice.

An extra test result has been clipped to the file. Mr. Crater consults it.

MR. CARTER
It sounds like a lot of things. They didn't narrow it down until this morning.

MRS. CARTER
What's so special about this morning?

MR. CARTER
The blood tests came back. Someone was paying attention and ordered a toxicology.

MRS. CARTER
And?

MR. CARTER
Positive for arsenic.

MRS. CARTER
An oldie but a goodie. I don't suppose the police have been tipped off.

Mr. Carter returns the file to its box and begins to unbutton his shirt.

MR. CARTER
I'm sure they'll want the body back
for a full autopsy.

MRS. CARTER
That may be difficult.

Mr. Carter, now topless, is dropping his pants. Mrs. Carter checks the clock on the wall.

MRS. CARTER (CONT'D)
How are we for time?

MR. CARTER
Better make this quick.

MRS. CARTER
I won't be long.

She shoves the body drawer back in place. When she turns around, Mr. Carter is naked and lying prone on an empty metal autopsy slab. He's playing dead.

Mrs. Carter approaches the slab. She takes a blank toe tag from a pile of them and snaps the elastic around Mr. Crater's big toe. He doesn't react.

Mrs. Carter pulls up her dress and climbs onto the table to mount her husband. In short order, his wife is riding him hard. The toe tag jiggles with each thrust. Her passion builds, but she's distracted, talking through it all.

MRS. CARTER (CONT'D)
It's obvious he was in the funeral
club -- one of the other casket
chasers we always see lined up to
pay their last respects to people
they've never met. I've been
rerunning their faces in my head all
day, trying to guess which one might
have been him.

There's no response from her husband, but she doesn't expect one.

MRS. CARTER (CONT'D)
There's the young woman in the old
hat, the old woman with the orthopedic
shoes, and the lady who's missing a
joint of one of her fingers.

Mrs. Carter rides her husband, half into the sex, half running through her mental list.

MRS. CARTER (CONT'D)
Obviously not any of them. The men
I'm not as clear on. There's that
young guy who looks like he's about
ready to be fitted for a box himself.
There's the one who goes just to hit
on widows. And the man who's probably
a funeral director himself and makes
the rounds to check out the
competition.

Mrs. Carter suddenly gets a brainstorm.

MRS. CARTER (CONT'D)
Ah, yes! There was an old man. I
nearly forgot, it's been so long.
He liked outdoor, grave-side services.
He got around on a cane, but he was
always alone. We haven't seen him
since the weather turned cold.

Mr. Carter speaks up, but keeps his eyes shut.

MR. CARTER
I remember.

MRS. CARTER
Shut up. You're dead.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY

As the coroner returns to his station, he flicks the ash off
the end of his cigarette butt and pockets it for later.
Opening the door to the morgue, he catches the Carters just
as they're buttoning up the last of their clothes. They
head for the door as he comes in, slipping past him with a
polite nod.

MRS. CARTER
Call us if you get in anything really
messy.

Before they go, the coroner waves them back.

CORONER
I have something else you might be
interested in.

MR. CARTER
Something messy?

CORONER
Only the handwriting.

He flashes them an inter-office envelope. There's only one
name listed on the back in uneven print: Ashley Carter.

MR. CARTER

What is it?

CORONER

It was bouncing around the hospital all day yesterday until it came through here. I was the only one who recognized the name, so I held onto it. Interested?

They look at the large brown envelope. It has to be from Farkas and they must have it. The agreement is reached silently but decisively. But their relationship with the coroner is based on so much more than mutual interest.

MRS. CARTER

How much?

Mr. Carter dutifully starts flipping through his cash-on-hand.

CORONER

A hundred.

Seeing the Carters are perhaps a little too eager to have the envelope, he adds:

CORONER (CONT'D)

...and fifty.

Mr. Carter pauses briefly. He walked into this last little bit of extortion, but his eyes tell the coroner clearly: Don't push it.

The money and envelope are exchanged. As the coroner shuts the heavy door behind them, he breaks into a horrid smoker's hack.

MR. CARTER

See you soon.

The coroner pauses briefly, uncomfortably, then closes the door and latches it.

EXT. HOSPITAL GROUNDS - DAY

The couple sits on a bench in the green space behind the hospital and reads their mail. Convalescing PATIENTS stroll along the path under the supervision of NURSES.

While Mrs. Carter recites the letter, one ELDERLY PATIENT is having difficulty on his walk. He slowly collapses.

MRS. CARTER

(reading)

If you've received this letter, I know I've chosen wisely. You remind me so much of my Emma and I when we were your age and newly married. We were the only ones who could understand each others' fascination with the state of death and the act of dying. You're wearing the rings, aren't you? I knew you'd appreciate them as we did when we obtained them from a private collector who claimed they'd been on the fingers of Tsar Nicholas and his wife when they were executed by the Bolsheviks. I don't know how true that story is, but I know you'll understand why we chose them as our wedding bands. Forgive me for dwelling on the past. It's a terrible habit I've been trying to break myself of. Perhaps you can help me.

Mr. Carter looks over his wife's shoulder at the weak handwriting. It trails off rather abruptly, even prematurely.

MR. CARTER

That's it?

Mrs. Carter flips the page over to confirm:

MRS. CARTER

That's it.

MR. CARTER

A man -- a total stranger -- at the end of his life. And he spends his last moments writing us a letter.

MRS. CARTER

It's sweet. Cryptic but sweet. I wish we could send him a get-well card.

Nurses come running to assist the elderly patient as he hits the ground, unconscious. They begin artificial respiration, but it doesn't look promising.

In the pandemonium, only Mr. and Mrs. Carter sit still. They watch the futile efforts to save the man, detached, holding hands.

INT. CONDO LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The couple sits on their sofa in the dark. Mr. Carter strokes a black and white cat on his knee.

It's been stuffed and mounted. He operates a slide projector with his free hand while his wife cuddles up to him. We never see any of the slides, and they don't react to any of them as they go by, but the light reflecting from the screen is predominantly red.

MRS. CARTER

We can't just let it go at that.

MR. CARTER

If we get another letter, fine. But I'm not comfortable dipping into the man's family history. Especially when it was probably someone in that family who bumped him off.

MRS. CARTER

He called us his dear friends in the will. No one's going to be suspicious if we politely ask a few innocent questions.

MR. CARTER

Details like what sort of exit wounds he and his wife got off on?

MRS. CARTER

Wouldn't you like to compare notes?

MR. CARTER

If anyone knows about their fetish, I'm sure it's a dirty little secret.

MRS. CARTER

Perhaps we can find someone who's open about it. Maybe they'll talk if we let on we already know. Think of the possibilities. They may have been into all sorts of things we haven't even thought of yet. Things that could spice it up for us.

MR. CARTER

Bored?

MRS. CARTER

Maybe a little jaded. I'd like to go further towards the edge.

Mr. Carter switches to another slide. This one's really red.

MRS. CARTER (CONT'D)

Nasty!

MR. CARTER

I thought you'd like this one.
Aluminum smelter accident. Guy fell
into the rolling machine. He was
alive up until the moment they cut
him out. It seems the roll of metal
that encased him was the only thing
holding him together.

MRS. CARTER

Worker's comp must have paid off
like the lottery.

MR. CARTER

Actually no. He was a non-unionized
scab.

MRS. CARTER

Well then. I guess he had it coming.

EXT. FARKAS HOME - DAY

The couple stops their car outside a big old house that must
be worth a lot for the property alone. The place is buzzing
with activity as MOVERS carry the furniture out to waiting
trucks. A "For Sale" sign has been hammered into the lawn.

MR. CARTER

I don't think anyone's home.

MRS. CARTER

All the better. We can go through
his private papers.

MR. CARTER

If anything's left.

INT. FARKAS HOME - DAY

Furniture is sitting all over the place, mostly in the middle
of the floor, among piles of packed boxes. Nothing is where
it should be as the house is systematically emptied.

As they enter, the couple spots a woman with her back to
them. It's Elaine.

MRS. CARTER

Elaine! Wonderful to see you again.
How are you holding up?

Elaine turns. Tears roll down her cheeks from watching her
old life being dismantled.

ELAINE

Oh. It's you.

She wipes away the tears with the back of her hand.

ELAINE (CONT'D)

Pardon me. I'm a sentimentalist. It breaks my heart to see all these old memories sold off to any antique store, furniture dealer or pawn shop that will have them. But that's what Daddy wanted.

MR. CARTER

We understand he wasn't big on remembering the past.

Elaine nods.

ELAINE

Since mother died. Everything he owned reminded him of her, but he couldn't part with any of it. Not until he joined her.

MRS. CARTER

They were very close, weren't they?

ELAINE

Oh yes. They shared everything -- had all the same interests.

MRS. CARTER

Interests?

ELAINE

Oh, you know. Gardening. Travel. They liked to bowl together.

This isn't what they wanted to hear, but Elaine says it so honestly, it's apparent she didn't know anything about her parents' fetish.

ELAINE (CONT'D)

He scattered her ashes on his last trip to Egypt. Of course, I don't expect you to arrange for something so exotic.

MR. CARTER

We have a nice spot with a view in mind.

ELAINE

He must have thought a great deal of you -- both of you.

MRS. CARTER

We were wondering if your father had maybe left a letter or a note with you. For us?

ELAINE

A letter? No, nothing like that.
There's still a box or two of old
tax returns, receipts, a few bills.
Nothing very interesting.

MR. CARTER

Could we have a look?

Elaine stares at the couple with growing suspicion.

INT. FARKAS HOME BEDROOM - DAY

The room has nearly been emptied. There's a secretary in
the middle of the floor with its drawers piled on top of it.

The Carters help themselves, picking through what's left
like a couple of hounds sniffing out contraband. Elaine
stands between them, looking increasingly uncomfortable about
this intrusion.

Mr. Carter rifles through the secretary's numerous cubby
holes, quickly but thoroughly. He's rewarded with a tiny
envelope he finds taped to the wood inside one of the slots.
"A. Carter" is written on it. He hands it to Mrs. Carter,
who dumps the contents into her hand: a small key.

MRS. CARTER

What's this for?

ELAINE

I don't know. I've never seen it
before.

MRS. CARTER

Is there something left in the house
it would fit?

ELAINE

My parents didn't keep things under
lock and key. I can't imagine what
it might be for, unless...

MR. CARTER

Yes?

ELAINE

My parents kept a safe deposit box
for years. I don't know where, or
what was in it. But it must have
been important to them because they
had the number inscribed on...

She trails off, looking into Mrs. Carter's hand. Elaine
isn't staring at the key anymore. She's spotted the ring.
He glances at Mr. Carter's hand and sees its twin.

ELAINE (CONT'D)

(upset)

He gave you the rings? And now he wants you to have what's in the box too? Who are you people? I never saw you before in my life and now you're inheriting everything in the world that was important to my father. The lawyers won't even let me keep the family photo albums!

MRS. CARTER

I'm sure your father knew what was best for all...

ELAINE

What's in the safe deposit box? What else won't he let me have?

MR. CARTER

We honestly don't know.

ELAINE

Give me the rings!

MRS. CARTER

What? No.

Elaine gets into a struggle with Mrs. Carter, trying to pull the ring off her finger by force. It's been a rough day for Elaine, and she's getting hysterical. Mr. Carter tries to separate them, but Elaine lashes out at him.

The struggle is getting violent. Elaine is sobbing uncontrollably, becoming more desperate. She finally manages to get the ring away from Mrs. Carter. Mrs. Carter tries to take it back, but Elaine shrugs her off.

Looking to her husband for help, Mrs. Carter works her arms around Elaine's neck and pulls her back sharply. Mr. Carter grabs one of the loose secretary drawers, winds up, and smashes it across the back of Elaine's head. The drawer splinters and she drops to the floor with a thud. Mrs. Carter snatches up the ring the instant it bounces free of Elaine's limp hand.

Catching their breath and composing themselves, it takes a while for the Carters to realize Elaine isn't getting up. She isn't doing much breathing, either. They crouch down, flip her over, and observe her closely.

Elaine's eyes are open, pupils dilated. She doesn't move at all. Mr. Carter puts a finger on the side of her neck, feeling for a pulse that isn't there.

The couple stands up again. They're silent, maybe a little shocked, but not especially put out by the whole nasty incident. They exchange a long, meaningful look.

MR. CARTER
I've never killed anything before.

They break their gaze and look back at the corpse.

MR. CARTER (CONT'D)
I think I enjoyed it.

INT. FARKAS HOUSE HALL - DAY

Mr. and Mrs. Carter come out of the room and shut the door behind them. One of the movers approaches.

MR. CARTER
There's nothing left in there. Try
that room down the hall.

The mover does as he's told. The Carters head down the stairs. Other movers pass by them, busy. No one heard a thing or realizes what's happened.

MR. CARTER (CONT'D)
You think we're going to get into
trouble over this?

MRS. CARTER
No one here knows who we are.

MR. CARTER
That's true. But just in case, I
think we should swing by the bank
right now while we have the chance.
Before anyone asks us any questions.

MRS. CARTER
Sounds good. But which bank?

MR. CARTER
That's a five-digit number on our
rings. I only know one bank with
that many safe deposit boxes.

As they arrive at the bottom of the stairs, the Carters freeze, scared stiff. A police car pulls up and parks behind their own car. Two OFFICERS get out and come up the path. Stepping inside, they stop to address the couple.

OFFICER
We're here to see an Elaine Farkas.

MR. CARTER
Oh?

The Carters notice one of the movers upstairs making a room-by-room sweep of the building, opening and shutting doors, checking for remaining pieces of furniture. He's approaching the room with Elaine's body.

OFFICER

We'd like to talk to her about her father's death.

MRS. CARTER

Tragic, untimely.

MR. CARTER

I think she's stepped out for a moment.

The mover is just opening the door to the scene of the crime when Mrs. Carter interrupts him by shouting:

MRS. CARTER

Excuse me!

MOVER

Yes?

MRS. CARTER

Have you seen Miss Farkas recently?

MOVER

She was downstairs five, ten minutes ago. Maybe she went out back.

MR. CARTER

That would be...?

MOVER

Through that door, down the hall, and out by the kitchen.

OFFICER

Could you show us, sir?

The mover closes the door again and comes downstairs to show the cops the way out back.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

(to the Carters)

Thank you.

As the cops follow the mover into the heart of the house, the Carters take this opportunity to leave.

EXT. FARKAS HOUSE - DAY

With the police out of sight, the Carters break into a frantic trot and pile into their car. They drive off a second later.

INT. LARGE CITY BANK - DAY

The Carters arrive at the counter of a cavernous old-money bank. Mr. Carter holds up the safe deposit key so a TELLER can see.

MR. CARTER

I'd like to check on the contents of
my safe deposit box. Number one
four eight seven three.

TELLER

Yes sir. Your name?

MR. CARTER

Andrew Farkas.

INT. SAFE DEPOSIT VAULT - DAY

Mr. and Mrs. Carter seat themselves at a table that's been set up in the vault for customer convenience. The teller steps onto a footstool after scanning the thousands of armoured boxes for the right one. She pulls out the Farkas deposit box and brings it to the couple.

TELLER

Ring for me when you're done.

MRS. CARTER

Thank you.

The teller leaves, shutting the vault's iron door behind her. The Carters are alone in the room.

Mr. Carter unlocks the box with the key and pops the top. Inside are several old personal journals.

There's a letter on top addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Ashley Crater. Mr. Carter opens it and begins reading while his wife pores through the journals. Everything inside speaks of a couple's absolute death-obsession. It's truly disturbing, snuff-oriented stuff. Mrs. Carter is openly excited by the find.

MR. CARTER

(reading)

The obsession we share has led you
here as I expected it would. As you
look through the years of notes and
experiences Emma and I accumulated
in our time together, you'll
understand why I couldn't entrust
them to anyone but a similarly-minded
couple. Allow me to share this legacy
with you: You must let the past
die.

(MORE)

MR. CARTER (CONT'D)

I believe that absolutely, but I couldn't bring myself to destroy these mementos of our happy marriage in my lifetime -- a lifetime I plan to end myself, tonight.

Mrs. Carter picks up a few more journals, revealing the contents at the bottom of the deep box. We can see a woman's head and hands -- and perhaps a few other choice pieces of anatomy -- mummified by time and the dry climate of the vault.

Mr. Carter stops reading.

MR. CARTER (CONT'D)

This would be Mrs. Farkas.

MRS. CARTER

I guess the good bits never made it to Egypt.

Mrs. Carter stares at the dead woman's remains, fascinated. Mr. Carter reads the rest of the letter.

MR. CARTER

(reading)

For obvious reasons, I can't face the prospect of them falling into anyone else's hands, especially my daughter's. She knew nothing of our special interests, and that's the way I wish it to remain. To assure that, I had to arrange for the contents of this box to be burned. This task falls to you, with my thanks. As you have done me a service, so shall I do one for you. I leave you this gift which I know you will appreciate: It is the fondest thing which all couples of our particular bent might wish for -- what my wife and I were denied -- to die together.

As Mrs. Carter lifts Mrs. Farkas' dried head out of the box for a closer look, she uncovers something underneath it. It's an incendiary device -- two sticks of dynamite wired to an alarm clock which, in turn, is hooked up to the hinges of the box. The clock has been activated and is running down the last five seconds till twelve o'clock.

The Carters stare at the bomb that's about to go off in their faces. They glance at the door, shut and locked tight. There's no chance to escape in time.

They reach for each other and grasp hands tightly. Looking into her husband's eyes, Mrs. Carter gushes:

MRS. CARTER
How romantic!

There's a blinding flash.

INT. LARGE CITY BANK - DAY

The vault door puffs out and crumples with a loud pop: the impact of an explosion within. Smoke leaks out from the cracks in its frame, but the armoured door holds, saving anyone else from injury.

Fire alarms go off in the bank, and SECURITY MEN move to evacuate the building. The vault is left as-is until firemen and paramedics can respond to the call.

FADE OUT

END