

THE CALLING

an original screenplay by

by William Gilmore

William Gilmore
12506 Emelita St.
Valley Village, CA 91607
718-702-6685
william@williamgilmore.tv

"THE CALLING"

FADE IN:

EXT. HICKORY NUT FALLS - 1905 - DAY

Sunlight streams through a canopy of crimson and gold, bathing a 30' waterfall in an ethereal light. The water tumbles and spills into a pond where an assemblage of mountain folk have gathered for a religious service.

Though dressed in their Sunday best, their clothes are worn and simple, reflective of their hard scrabble life in Appalachia, circa 1905.

The congregation sings as EBEN MYERS (60s), gaunt and wiry, performs a baptism in the pond. He gently leans a young woman back and presses her face below the surface of the pond, then jubilantly pulls her upright.

The woman weeps with joy as the onlookers rejoice in her salvation.

Eben looks to the bank. His smile fades.

At the edge of the pond, SARA JANE (6), Eben's towheaded granddaughter, awaits her turn with redemption. She clutches a tiny doll fearfully.

Eben beckons Sara Jane to join him.

EBEN

Come, child.

An older woman attempts to pull the doll from Sara's hands. Sara refuses to relinquish the doll and steps into the water. Her white dress billows about her.

EBEN

Behold the sin made flesh, the unhallowed spawn of a harlot daughter who left this child to bear her transgression against our Saviour.

(to Sara Jane)

Repent, child, and follow me sayeth the Lord.

Eben plunges Sara Jane beneath the water. Sara Jane struggles in his grasp. He pulls her up, sputtering and coughing.

EBEN

Repent and know the glory of God.

He thrusts her beneath the water again.

EBEN

Repent!

He drags her to the surface.

EBEN

Confess thy sin!

SARA JANE

(choking)

I didn't do--

Eben submerges the child once again. She flails and kicks.

EBEN

Repent thy wickedness for only through
Him shall thou find eternal Grace!

On the bank, a woman turns her head. She can't bear to watch.
Her husband turns her face back.

Eben pulls Sara Jane to the surface. She manages a single
gasp and is plunged once more beneath the churning water
again. The child's limbs thrash violently.

EBEN

Repent, child. REPENT!

Sara Jane's contortions wane then cease. Eben releases her.
Sara Jane's body floats to the surface of the pond, her arms
outstretched. Her eyes stare blankly at the heavens, her
mouth filled with water.

EBEN

Let us pray.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. BRECC LAKE HOUSE - THE PRESENT - DAY

A cluster of homes huddle together for warmth on the edge of
a small finger-slip of lake in the Georgia mountains. It's
only December, but winter is already in full effect.

In front of one house, CONNER BRECC (30s), the kind of
strapping hunk that makes a sweatshirt look like formal wear,
lurks behind an SUV.

He opens a velvet jewelry box and stares down at a glittering
sapphire pendant.

CONNOR

Perfect.

MRS. POWELL (O.S.)
Whatcha got there, Connor?

Connor snaps the box shut and whirls to face his neighbor, MRS. POWELL (70s), an eccentric busybody.

CONNOR
Jeez, Mrs. Powell! You shouldn't
sneak up on people like that.

Mrs. Powell cranes her neck, trying to peer around Connor's back.

Connor reluctantly takes the box from behind his back.

CONNOR
It's a Christmas present. For Dara.

MRS. POWELL
Isn't that sweet. What kind?

Connor glances toward the house.

CONNOR
A necklace.

MRS. POWELL
Diamond?

CONNOR
Sapphire.

MRS. POWELL
Oh. Should've gotten a diamond.

CONNOR
She has a diamond.

MRS. POWELL
A woman can never have too many
diamonds.

CONNOR
She picked it out.

MRS. POWELL
Of course she did.

Mrs. Powell fingers a crystal hanging around her neck with one hand while making circular motions around Connor's face with the other. She makes a strange humming sound.

CONNOR
Mrs. Powell?

MRS. POWELL
Shush, dear. I'm concentrating.

CONNOR
On--?

MRS. POWELL
Shhhhhhh. I'm giving you a blue
aura. For luck.

CONNOR
Blue?

MRS. POWELL
With just a hint of pink. There.

Mrs. Powell smiles warmly and lowers her hand.

MRS. POWELL
I'm sure she'll love it.

CONNOR
The necklace or the aura?

Mrs. Powell just smiles as she toddles off to the dumpster.

CONNOR
Crazy old coot.

DARA (30s), Connor's wife, with a big city sophistication
that stands out in small town America, exits the house.

Connor hastily tosses the gift box into the SUV and slams
the tailgate.

CONNOR
C'mon, already!

DARA
Relax, they're not gonna run out of
trees.

CONNOR
They might.

DARA
It's a tree farm, Connor. I'm sure
they have plenty.

MRS. POWELL
Hello, Dara!

DARA
(strained)
Mrs. Powell.

MRS. POWELL

The Historical Society is having a holiday gala next week. You should come meet some folks. Find out about the history of your new hometown.

DARA

It's just a vacation home. Not permanent.

CONNOR

(covering)

We'll be there if we can. Thank you.

Dara rummages in her purse.

DARA

So what was the crazy cat lady chatting you up about?

CONNOR

She gave me a blue aura.

DARA

Really?

CONNOR

Yeah, but with just a touch of pink.

DARA

The only thing touched is her. Ah ha.

Dara pulls a crumpled cigarette from her purse.

CONNOR

Wait, I thought you quit.

DARA

I did. This is my reward.

CONNOR

You don't reinforce the breaking of a habit with the habit.

DARA

It's not a habit. It's a reward.

(on Connor's look)

Fine. I quit. Again. Let's get a damn Christmas tree.

EXT. TREE FARM - NIGHT

Connor pulls Dara along a row of trees glowing festively under colorful strings of Christmas lights.

They sidestep streams of squealing, laughing, crying children. The heightened energy has Connor like a kid in a candy store. Dara, however, is on her last nerve.

DARA

Where is this tree?

CONNOR

Right up here.

DARA

You said that three rows ago. Jesus, do there have to be so many kids?

CONNOR

It's Christmas. Where's your holiday spirit?

DARA

With my cigarette. Crumpled and broken. Just show me the tree.

CONNOR

Ah, there it is. C'mon.

Connor runs ahead to to a squat, shapeless ball of needles.

CONNOR

Ta-da!

DARA

It's a bush.

CONNOR

It's a tree.

DARA

No. It's a bush.

CONNOR

C'mon, look how thick the needles are.

DARA

Yeah, there're no holes. No gaps.

CONNOR

Who wants a Christmas tree with gaps?

DARA
Layers, Conner. You have to get the ornaments inside. Create visual depth and character.

CONNOR
It's a Christmas tree, not a romance novel.

DARA
Christmas trees can be very romantic, like a good bottle of wine. This tree? It's a six-pack. Domestic.

Dara leads Connor across the row.

DARA
What you want is a Frasier Fir. Like these over here. What do you think?

CONNOR
Well, it's ... tall. And thick.

DARA
Densely needled.

CONNOR
But with gaps.

DARA
Layers.

CONNOR
And it smells good.

DARA
Soooo ...

A young BOY (10) runs excitedly ahead of his FATHER (30s).

BOY
What about this one, Dad? Or this one? This is a good one. What about this--

The boy stops in front of Connor.

BOY
Hi.

CONNOR
Hey.

BOY
I'm lookin' for a Christmas tree.

CONNOR
Me, too.

FATHER
You folks takin' that one?

CONNOR
Sorry?

FATHER
That tree. Is it yours?

Connor looks to Dara. She nods.

CONNOR
Yeah. It's ours.

FATHER
You got a nice one.

DARA
Guess I just lucked out.

Dara kisses Connor's cheek.

FATHER
Merry Christmas.

CONNOR
Merry Christmas to you, too.

Connor wistfully watches father and son move down the row.

DARA
We could still adopt.

CONNOR
The doctor said it only takes one,
right? Maybe tonight's the night?

DARA
(secretively)
Maybe.

INT. BRECC LAKE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Connor gazes up at the twinkling lights of his masterpiece.

Dara joins him with a plate of cookies.

CONNOR
Mmmm, me love cookie.

Connor munches away as Dara sizes up his handy work.

DARA
It's beautiful. A little off kilter,
but beautiful.

CONNOR
It's not off kilter.

DARA
It is, but it's beautiful.

CONNOR
Hmm.

DARA
What?

Connor growls and makes a dunking motion with his cookie.

DARA
Sorry. No milk.

CONNOR
(cookie monster)
What good's cookie without milk?

DARA
You can run to the store.

CONNOR
Let's substitute wine. I hear it
can be very romantic in front of a
Christmas tree.

DARA
Mm-mm. No wine for me.

CONNOR
You're giving up drinking and smoking
at the same time? That can't possibly
be healthy.

DARA
(smiles)
God, you are so dense. Hold on.

Dara retrieves an envelope from the desk. Hands it to Connor.

CONNOR
What's this?

DARA
Early Christmas present.

CONNOR
Kind of light, isn't it?

DARA
You don't want it, I'll take it back.

CONNOR
Now just hold on. Let's see what
you got in here so special you gotta
give it out early.

Connor lifts a small section of the envelope's flap.

CONNOR
Don't see much in there.

DARA
Open the damn thing already.

CONNOR
Okay, okay. The envelope, please.

Connor tears the envelope open. He finds an ultrasound photo.

CONNOR
Is this--?

DARA
Merry Christmas, Daddy.

CONNOR
Oh, my God! How? I mean how long?
When?

DARA
July.

CONNOR
July. A summer baby. A patriotic
baby. A Christmas in July baby!
We're gonna have--

DARA
A baby.

CONNOR
Boy or girl?

DARA
That you'll have to wait for.

They embrace and fall back onto a bearskin rug.

CONNOR
Wait, is this--Can we--