

# EMPTY CHAIR

Original screenplay written by Debbie Croysdale

An Oregon farmer refuses to accept the premature death of his daughter, retreating instead into a world of denial that threatens not only the future of a secure family life but his very freedom.

## **GENRE PARANORMAL**

We are all spiritual beings having a human experience.

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EMPTY CHAIR

FADE IN

INT - DAY Dated kitchen diner, timber walls, buckets of drying herbs, walk in pantry, hung meat, oak table, 4 chairs.

KYLE 44, ruddy skin, well built, redhead, unkempt beard.

Sits hunched over breakfast staring at empty chair opposite, his eyes move down onto bottle of coke and empty glass.

KYLE

All that sugar's no good for you.

He tugs at his shirt braces, looking down onto his pot belly.

Yeah, know they got diet stuff in hypermarket but ain't got time to drive now your Mum don't help out. Hey though, got orange with juicy bits Fink's store, can get that?

He gets up to take his empty plate to the old butler sink and turns on a rusty tap that squeaks, tepid water spills.

My turn dishes, cranky old home but our piece of heaven, graduate and you'll get nice place city. Any ideas yet? Teacher? Or vet maybe? Come tend our herd if they sick? Hey you got science class, my day we got Bunsen burners and cut up rats but you kids lucky. Quantum particles, DNA, fancy microscopes.

He goes to hall, pulls on boots and buttons up long wax coat.

KYLE

Gearing up for pens, heifers in calf dump more manure and Isaac's coming help deliver Rita and Daisy.

He turns his face towards kitchen then nods his head.

Yes don't worry I'll remember. Store. Bread. Bye Susan.

He leaves by the front door.

INT - DAY Town. Sitting room, suburban house, chintz decor.  
Two women sit either side of settee waiting for TV news.

DORIS 63 Petite, designer trouser suit, grey curly hair.

CINDY 36 Tall, slim, brunette, long dark hair, pyjamas.

DORIS

Call Doctor again for Kyle's cos  
he's getting worse.

CINDY

No he's been through hell last four  
months, sides still does his jobs  
and it's a family issue, sensitive.

DORIS

Think of us. We been through enough  
surely and could get into trouble  
for keeping his secret in the  
closet? And what of your marriage?

Cindy lunges forwards to turn the volume up on TV.

CINDY

Be quiet Mum, it's on soon.

V.O

An update on the School shooting  
where a thirteen year old girl and  
two boys aged fourteen tragically  
died. The hand gun that was fired  
accidentally in playground ...

Doris gets up and suddenly switches TV off.

DORIS

Enough already, everyone's to blame  
not just boy that fired. Parents,  
lax county sheriff, school. Those  
darn films youngsters watch should  
be X certificate, money making  
major studio's got zero social  
conscience. Kid's mother should do  
time, her gun, my Granddaughter and  
nobody ever dare mention God to me.

CINDY

Lucky Tommy don't understand, can  
you collect him from nursery? Can't  
face the pitying eyes desperately  
searching for right words to say.

INT - EVENING - FARMHOUSE. Kyle sits in basement utility amongst growing piles of refuse . A washing machine buzzes on last spin cycle, he stares mesmerized as drum goes round.

INT - EVENING - FARMHOUSE. Kyle sit's in lounge by roaring log fire, perched in front is a clothes horse with a blue school uniform pegged up to dry, he feels thick end of socks.

INT - EVENING - FARMHOUSE. Kyle stands in girl's bedroom. Dresser with perfumes, clothes strewn over a rocking chair, a hockey stick in corner, poster of Lady Ga Ga on wall.

KYLE

Know you sneak cat in but you gotta stop cos Felix catches rodents that can carry disease. Last warning or your pocket money's docked and no white alpaca on your next birthday.

He clicks off the light switch and leaves slamming door shut.

EXT - DAY - Low acreage farm nestled in valley, small herd, row crop fields and barns. Kyle drives tractor along dirt road, a large truck carrying logs approaches opposite. Both vehicles halt, Kyle leans out window, other driver gets out.

BURL 55, sinewy, wrinkled tan skin, bald, cowboy gear.

BURL

Mandy sent me check on you. We're worried? Come visit us Kyle. Talk.

KYLE

Worried? What about?

BURL

Know Cindy moved out and why the long hair and beard? Like you in some cult or gone new age hippy.

KYLE

Rest of us are doing fine.

BURL

You got issues Kyle, which I can well understand but .....

KYLE

Since when you a wet fish domestic? Toughest caulk booted tree feller I know, even ran off suit and tie corporations and got rid poachers.

BURL

Trouble changed us all but you  
ain't alone your part of the fabric  
of this community, like it or not.

KYLE

Can beat fruit flies, kicked by a  
bull, knee deep in cow dung and  
really no big deal my dry farming  
failed so go pussy up with someone  
else, I got a man's work, so move.

BURL

Look around for miles, brown desert  
patchwork carved in forests, trees  
rightfully ours levelled to near  
stumps by big guns. But we fought  
back and held on dear to little we  
got left and you were one of those  
men Kyle, so why not save yourself?

Kyle starts his engine, forcing Burl to move away.

TWO MONTHS LATER INT - DAY Cindy and Doris sit kitchen.

CINDY

I served divorce papers but he  
won't answer, can't force him sign.

DORIS

But you must take over farm, him  
not being of sound mind anymore.

CINDY

Spoke to Dr Blythe, he said Kyle  
ain't harming anyone and still  
functions at work, in fact squash  
and corn row crops doing better.

DORIS

But Tommy needs a mentally stable  
father surely? God knows there's  
little else left here but good  
strong folk, even our library's  
gone and when he's older how will  
you explain Kyle's behavior?

CINDY

But stubborn mule refused police  
and church counselling. Worse, when  
Dr Blyth sent community care  
psychologist he slammed door in her  
face. Nothing gets through to him.

DORIS

It's not him needs getting through to now, authorities need take legal measures, sake of all our futures.

CINDY

You can't mean what I think?

DORIS

It's exigent we nip it in the bud with heavier powers that be.

CINDY

I won't be Judas Kyle's a good man. Social services and law enforcement are bulldog's, never let go. Worse than tough love, might section him.

DORIS

Won't help himself so we have to. All the people he's upset and now school's banned him for turning up home time. Ain't eating too, Gospel group said he's still refusing weekly delivery but don't go store.

Cindy begins to cry, head in hands.

EXT - DAY - FARMHOUSE Burl stands at front door knocking but no answer so he walks around to window to bang on glass.

BURL

Open up Kyle, it's important.

Kyle gingerly opens the window and pokes his head through.

KYLE

Your getting more eccentric Burl, creeping around, you need help.

BURL

Wake up from dream Kyle, came to warn you cos I'm only friend left, your on dangerous crossroads. Words out they're coming for assessment, get your act together or you lose visiting rights Tommy and the farm. Worse still lose liberty itself.

KYLE

What are you talking about?

BURL

Susan. You gotta stop. Dang Kyle I was hoping problem just a phase.

KYLE

Hope's a timid friend like you. Burl, outta here or I get my gun. Still private property this.

Window slams shut. Burl spits and looks up at sky.

BURL

Please, if there is a God or anyone or anything else out there? Look after him will you? Cos I'm beat.

EXT - DAY - Kyle sits on a high rock by a fishing lake amidst a copse of Ponderosa pines just below mountain ridge. Suddenly he spots a bright red peony right by his feet and bends to pick the flower up. A mist begins to fill the air.

KYLE

How a flower get here? Odd shape.

Suddenly he jumps and steps away, hearing a voice behind him.

GIRL 18, slim, perfect skin, long dark hair, cotton dress.

GIRL

This place, it's so special.

KYLE

Heck where did you spring from? Visiting a farm? Looking for work?

GIRL

Just passing through, my family originate from the great Oregon trail, settled here cos land rich for mind and spirit. Crops over Missouri gold my great grandad says and when his horses died en route he walked barefoot to get here.

KYLE

From these parts too and my great grandmother hated fog and needing a blanket on cold summer nights. But I sorta like it when mist comes.

She walks over to sit where he was sitting.

KYLE

That's my favorite place to sit  
since a boy, feels like always now.

She casts her eyes over the lake.

GIRL

In 1870 had to beat down eleven  
foot elephant grass to get to this  
lake, hands bled but worth it.

KYLE

Hell you know a lot, must be some  
history genius and only what?  
Guessing seventeen or eighteen?

GIRL

So ask me anything you need answer  
to? But it must be something you  
have never ever asked anybody  
before now and must be important.

He scratches his head and turns to look up at sky.

KYLE

Why do they all want rid of Susan?

GIRL

Folk can't make her go cos she's  
forever in the ether but you cage  
her so you both live exact same  
moments over again. Doors of  
perception are always open both  
ends but you shut one behind her.

He turns back to her anguished, hiding his face in his hands.

KYLE

Darn local gossip but she'll think  
I forgot her and barely a teenager,  
thirteen. Neither child nor woman,  
can't bare watch bugs turn into  
butterflies now. Hate most things  
and your only person I've told.

GIRL

Causes loved one's great pain you  
say she's still farm, cos universe  
is so full of rich discovery. End  
of time there's no yesterday or  
tomorrow but to simply be. Past and  
future are the now. All we were,  
are and could ever be meld as one.



KYLE

Easy to preach, it can all  
disappear in a single gun shot.

GIRL

Your world didn't vanish but you'll  
lose it soon and by your own hand.  
Unless you change your ways Kyle.

KYLE

Strange girl yet you seem familiar.

Kyle turns away and walks over to lake edge, picks up a stone  
and throws it in the water. He turns back but she's gone.

INT - EVENING - FARMSTEAD - Kyle gets a huge Hessian burlap  
from stable and takes to Susan's room to fill up with her  
things, lugging it downstairs he grabs her mug from kitchen.

INT - EVENING - FARMHOUSE Kyle sits by lounge fire and smiles  
into the dancing flames, then walks to land line and dials.

KYLE

Cindy, I put you through hell and  
to say sorry won't even cut it but  
I'm ready to move on and start  
fresh. And I've begun a hand  
carving like my folk used to make  
for me for Tommy's fifth birthday.

Pause.

Yes off course I'll start therapy.  
Anything, you and Tommy are my  
world. Still, hurts like hell to  
let her go but I'm out of limbo and  
acceptance's brought a kinda peace.  
Weird thing is, she feels closer.

INT - NIGHT - Town house. Cindy stands in hall, puts down  
telephone receiver and flashes Doris an excited thumbs up.

CINDY

Mum it's a miracle we all okay now.

EXT - DAY - Ranch bungalow, Douglas Firs, snow capped  
mountains distance. Kyle knocks front door, Burl opens.

KYLE

I've been an ass burl and I'm  
sorry. So how's things buddy?

BURL

Hell Kyle I always had faith, guess  
there is a God after all. Copyright DC.

INT - DAY - FARMHOUSE FIVE YEARS LATER Cindy, Tommy and Kyle sit around kitchen table, a toddler sits high chair close by.

KYLE

Over moon all celebrating together  
and you Tommy got day off school.  
Lovely spag bol honey, always been  
great cook, case I never told you.

CINDY

So finish off lunch everyone and we  
can open her cards and presents.

TOMMY

Yike's eighteen's like old.

They laugh, Cindy clears plates and brings a bouquet table.

CINDY

Think these look beautiful and  
kinda say what I'm feeling today. My  
first born's eighteenth birthday.

TOMMY

Look, us when I was four and picked  
up a spider to show her and she  
freaked screaming and ran to hide.

He brings a roll of paper off his knee and opens it out  
straight, holding up a freeze he drew in crayons at school.

CINDY

Lovely Tommy, she'd laugh for sure.  
Kyle you gone quiet, you okay?

KYLE

Just trying to think where I seen  
those very flowers before remember  
them cos they such an odd shape.

He pauses to look out of window, towards far valley.

Was day I recognized something  
familiar in a stranger's eye.

CINDY

Day dreamer, couldn't possibly have  
seen these anywhere before cos they  
only just been genetically  
harvested, paid a premium for them  
up at Hope's farm. New breed Peony.

KYLE

But? Oh nothing.

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FLASHBACK Five years earlier by copse and lake with girl.

KYLE

Guessing you seventeen, eighteen?

The girl nods her head as he says the word eighteen.

PRESENT Tommy turns to look at the toddler in high chair.

TOMMY

Hey Jane? Talking about your big sister, your only born once but can have as many birthdays as you want.

CINDY

She don't understand words yet son.

KYLE

So much, none of us understand yet but one thing I do know is love don't die, just grows and spreads.

CINDY

Oh and guess what? Mr. and Mrs. Hope are naming their new hybrid in memory of our Susan. Ain't that just the most wonderful gift we could possibly receive today? They calling flower Ponderosa Sue.

Kyle smiles and stares across at the empty chair opposite.

KYLE

My little miracle you.

CINDY

Just thought same as you honey, before we know, it'll soon be time to put Jane in grown up seat to eat with us. Time flies don't it? And now ya'll, do you want pecan pie or blueberry cobbler and ice cream?

FADE OUT