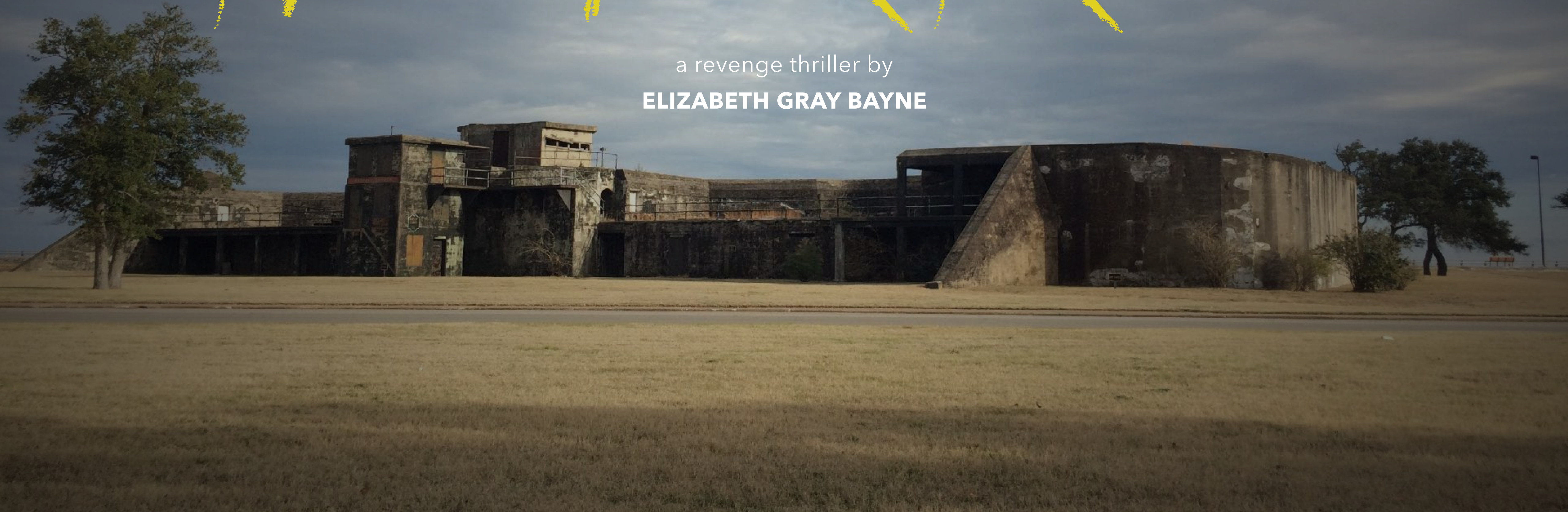


# THE FORTRESS

a revenge thriller by  
**ELIZABETH GRAY BAYNE**



"The greatest miracle Christianity has achieved in America is that the black man in white Christian hands has not grown violent [and] risen up against their oppressors ..."

**- Malcolm X**

WELCOME  
TO "FREEDOM'S FORTRESS"  
DROPOFFS ARE HAZARDS  
KEEP PETS & CHILDREN  
UNDER CLOSE CONTROL



# logline

When a well-respected law professor discovers the men responsible for the disappearance of numerous black women in her city are on the police force, she questions her faith in the legal system and seeks her own form of justice. The Fortress is a revenge thriller exploring the ethics of citizen's arrest and the trauma of rape culture.

# synopsis

It's 2005, gas is \$3.18 a gallon, George W Bush has started his second term and Hurricane Katrina won't hit landfall for another three months. For Professor Audie Partem, all is right with the world and God is good. As she eyes the maintenance sign on her dash board, her two biggest concerns are breaking down on the Norfolk tunnel and being late to teach her college course. The radio airs a report on the disappearance of Natalee Holloway and she turns the station, rolling her eyes at America's latest case of "missing white woman syndrome." She has no idea that in less than 24 hours, she herself will become a kidnapping victim, trapped inside Fort Monroe – the nation's largest stone military installation, just a few miles away.



# director's statement

On a jog along the top of Fort Monroe, I was struck by the decayed stone facade and morning sun glinting off the ocean waves below. The view was breathtaking, but I also realized how alone I was. Instinctively, I patted the cell phone in my breast pocket and wondered if I had service. The concept of *The Fortress* was born...

For it to make sense, you have to understand that I – like many women – live in constant fear of being raped. "Rape and the fear of rape are a daily part of every woman's consciousness" wrote feminist Susan Griffin in 1971. It guides nearly every decision, where to park, where to walk home, who to be alone with. Society puts the burden on women to avoid assault and "victim blame" when we are unsuccessful. It's unsurprising then that 2 out of 3 sexual assaults go unreported.

I couldn't help but wonder whether the anger and resentment a victim of rape might feel could ever boil over to seeking physical vengeance. Well worn territory with a whole sub-genre of "rape revenge thrillers" like *Ms 45* (1981), *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978), *Rolling Thunder* (1977) and *Death Wish* (1974). *THE FORTRESS*, however, features characters we've never seen before on screen – the psychological narrative of a middle class black woman dealing with respectability politics and a social system that fails to protect her.

Film details "ripped from the headlines" include criticism of the disproportionate media coverage that goes to missing white girls and women; nonprofit Black and Missing's twelve year fight to raise awareness about the one in five missing persons cases that go ignored; the conviction of former Officer Daniel Holtzclaw for the sexual assault of 16 Black women within a single year; and the racism, white supremacy and far-right militancy in law enforcement.

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Still from *Ms. 45* (1981)



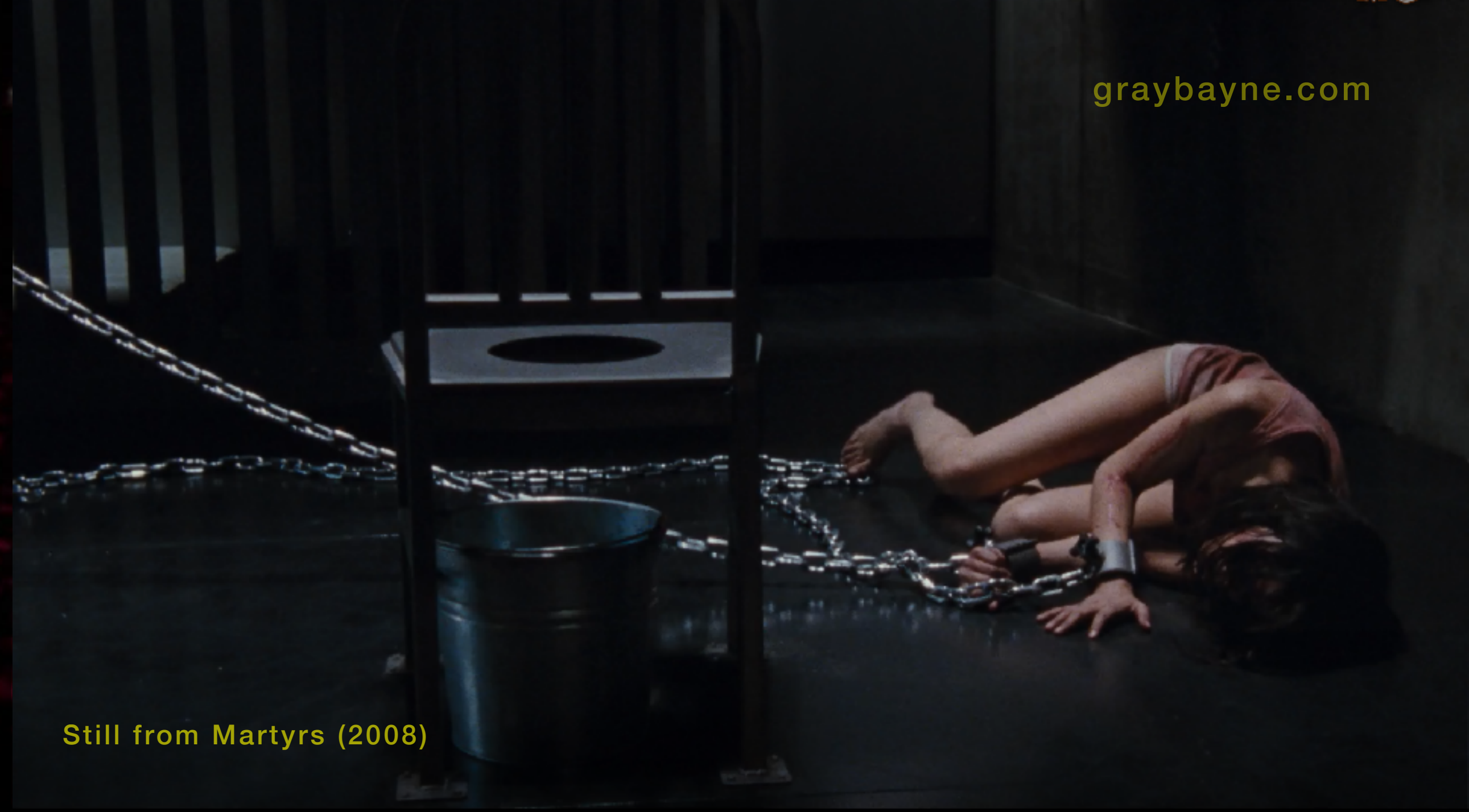
Still from *I Spit On Your Grave* (1978)



Still from *Rolling Thunder* (1977)



Still from I Spit on Your Grave (1978)



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Still from Martyrs (2008)



Still from Ms. 45 (1981)



Still from Martyrs (2008)

# characters



# audie

**Audie (HERO/SHADOW) is a Black 30-something law professor at Hampton University, a well known HBCU. A firm believer in due process, her strong faith in God and the criminal justice system was shaped by her mother being brutally beaten and raped in their home over twenty years ago. Audie blames her neighbor for fatally injuring her mother while trying to perform a Citizen's arrest and believes she would still be alive had he just called the police. Traumatized by her mother's death, Audie spent her teen years in and out of treatment. She is now a staunch critic of anything remotely resembling the vigilante justice she once sought as a teenager and believes "respectability" and cooperation will protect her community.**





# mel

**Mel (ALLY/SIDEKICK)** is a Black 30-something fun-loving divorcée and colleague in Audie's department. She is also Audie's lifeline to the outside world, literally and figuratively, first urging her friend to get out and date and later keeping her connected to her humanity when she spirals after being kidnapped. Mel is the first person to notice when Audie has gone missing and struggles to get police to take her friend's disappearance seriously.



# prince

**Prince (RIVAL/ALLY)** is a late-30s Black ex marine and current police detective enrolled in Audie's college course on criminal justice reform. Once optimistic about serving his community and "creating change from the inside," he's become disillusioned after years of egregious racial discrimination and abuse on the force and plans to quit. He's dubious about the "community policing" that Audie advocates for and has taken the militant stance that Black communities should police themselves.





# thomas

Thomas (HERALD/SHAPESHIFTER) is a late-30s White police detective and Prince's partner on the force. He accompanies Prince on a double date with Audie and Mel at the campus watering hole, where he flirts heavily with Mel. He heralds the danger posed by a group of off-duty officers seen harassing a young Black waitress. Initially a neutral figure in the story, he's later revealed to be an emissary of the villain — a new pledge to the police gang they encountered earlier at the bar.



# daniel

Daniel (SHADOW) is a 40-something White paleoconservative, veteran and enigmatic leader of a secret police clique within the local police department. He is a physical manifestation of Audie's deepest fears about herself - the anger and violence bubbling just beneath her well-medicated veneer. A holdover from the Antebellum South and Jim Crow era, he sees systemic sexual violence as a way to terrorize and keep Black people in their place. He uses his veteran status to access the unused buildings on Fort Monroe to house his victims.

# locations





Fort Monroe, Hampton VA



Battery DeRussy, Fort Monroe

# visuals

**THE FORTRESS** is inspired by films of the American New Wave (1967-1982) and our visual style will pay homage to the realism and intensity of this counter culture movement. Limitations in technology and technique meant motion pictures from this period had to mimic real life to look good. In contrast, contemporary films are so produced and stylized that they border on cartoonish or grotesque in their depiction of violence. **THE FORTRESS** will return to the more natural aesthetic of the American New Wave.

The film will utilize many of the camera moves, blocking and framing popularized during this period, both for style and economy. For example, today's elaborate tracking and dolly shots will be abandoned in exchange for blocking movement within a frame to create multiple angles in a single shot, as in George Miller's **MAD MAX** (1979). This approach will also allow us to play with tension and scale to reinforce the improbability of rescue or escape when our characters are dwarfed by the massive fort or an open field. Character reactions will be framed tightly to emphasize the subtext communicated through expression and the emotion of passing looks, as in Arthur Penn's **BONNIE AND CLYDE** (1967).

Finally, the color palette will shift from natural and soft to hard edged shadows and gloomy darkness to reflect Audie's state of mind as her orderly world descends into the messy chaos of moral ambiguity. Brilliant colors will become muted and gray as the lines between right and wrong begin to blur. As her medicated sunny disposition gives way and her shadow self fights to emerge, Audie will become increasingly cloaked in shadow with part of her face or body always just out of the light, as in Jack Hill's **COFFY** (1973).



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Blocking references from Mad Max (1979)



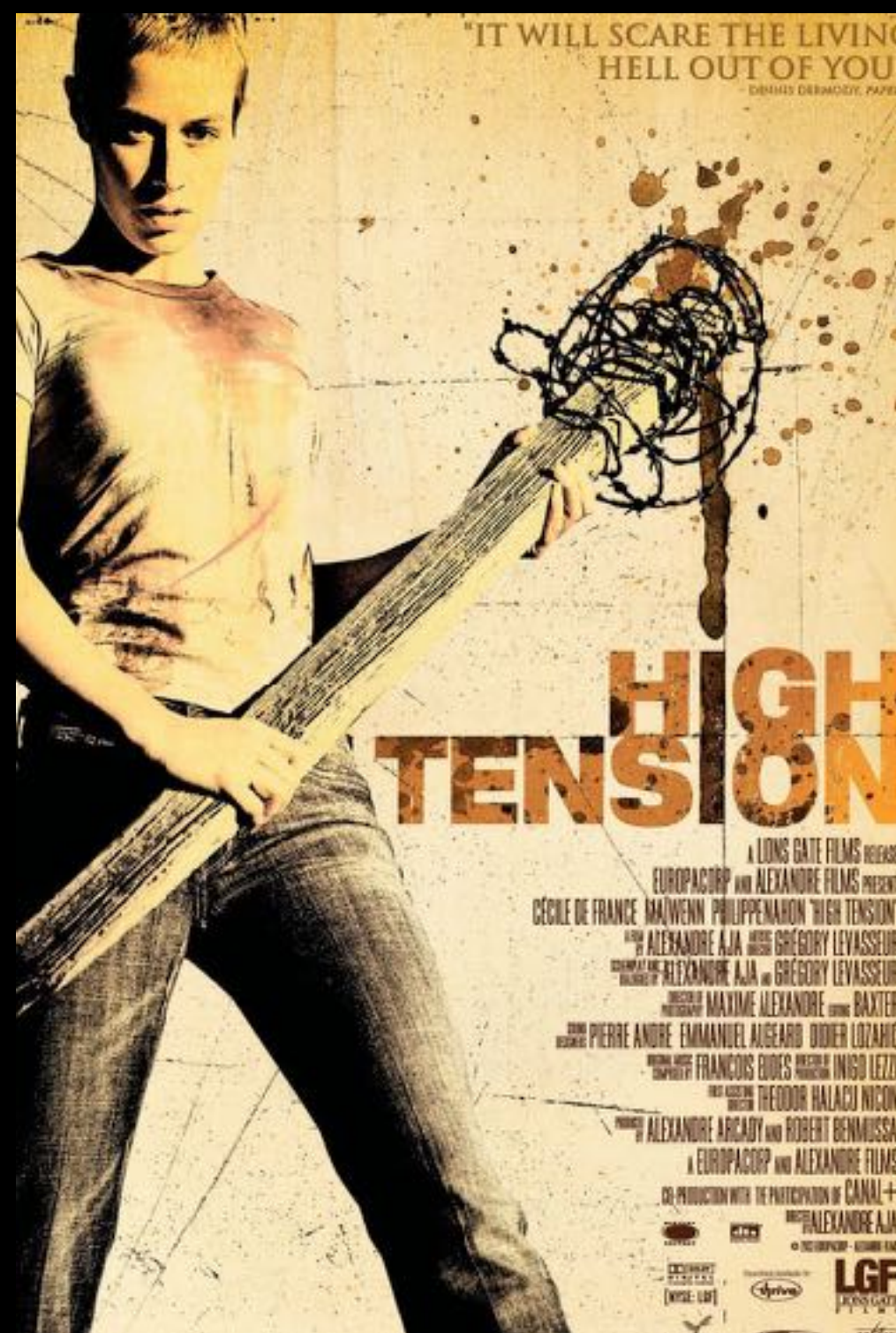
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Lighting references from Coffy (1973)

Framing references from Bonnie and Clyde (1967)

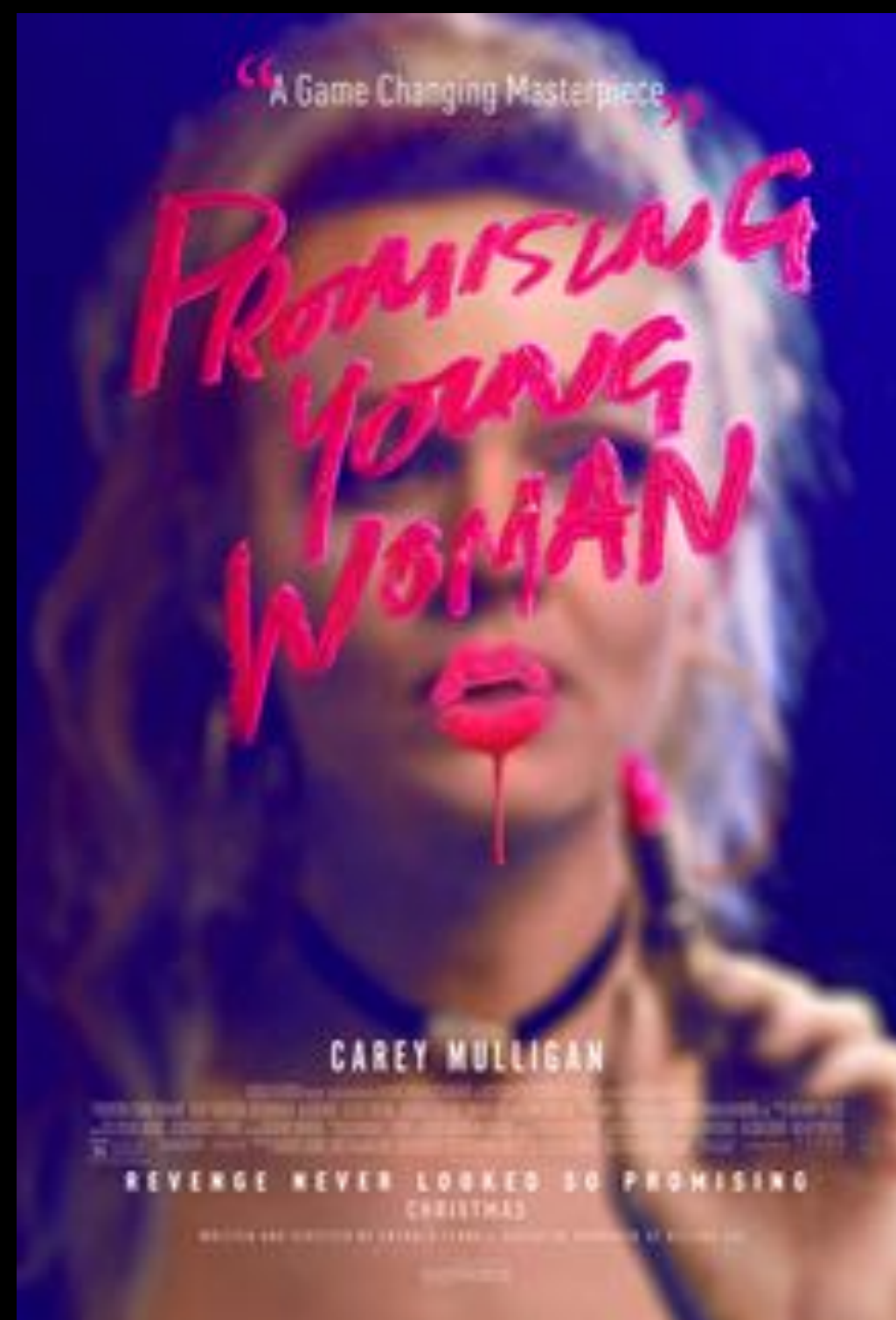
# comparables



**budget**  
**\$2.5 million**

**domestic distribution**  
**Lionsgate**

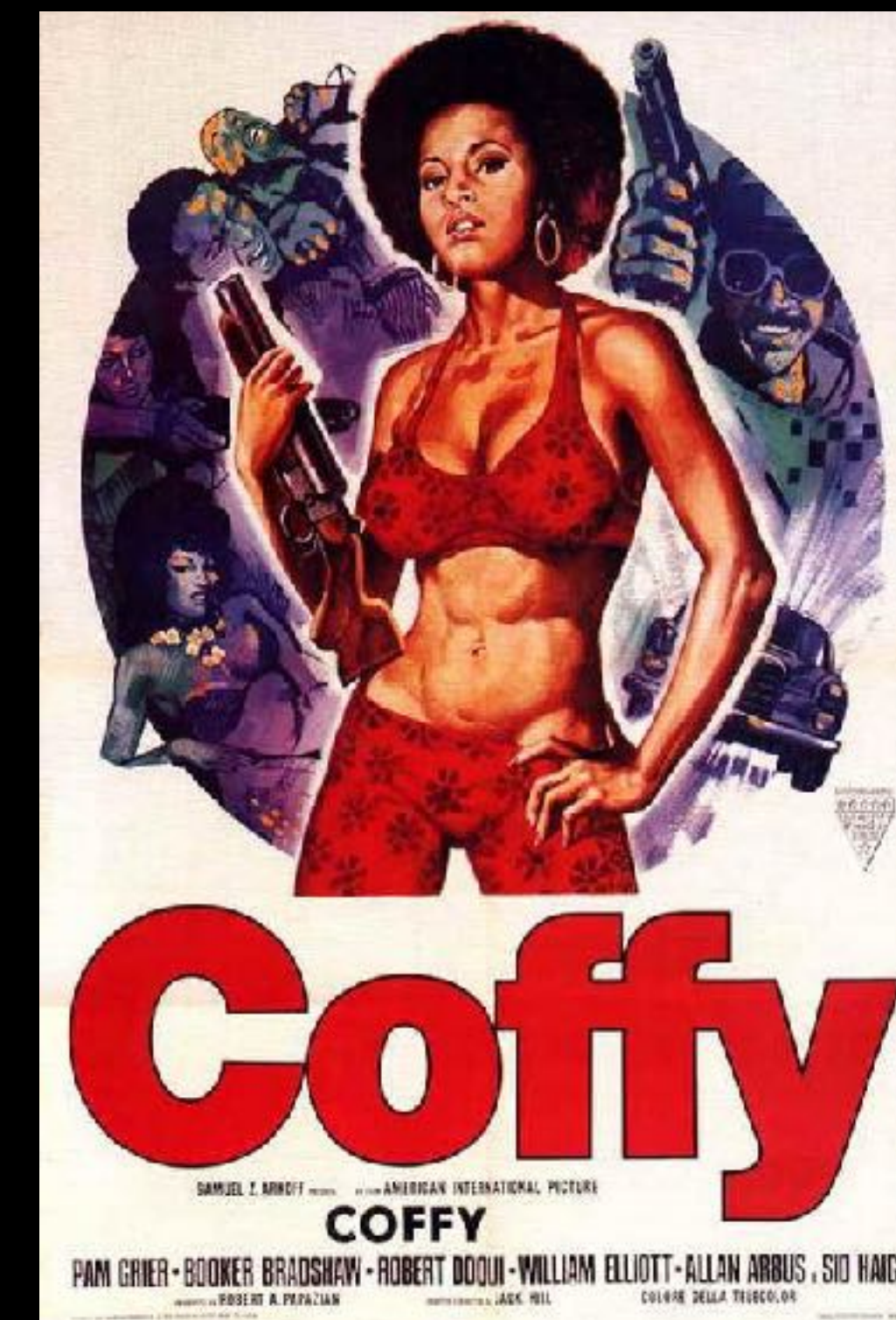
**worldwide gross**  
**\$6.3 million**



**budget**  
**\$5-6.9 million**

**domestic distribution**  
**Focus Features**

**worldwide gross**  
**\$11.9 million**



**budget**  
**\$500,000**

**domestic distribution**  
**American Int'l Pictures**

**worldwide gross**  
**\$43.90 million**



# director's bio

Elizabeth Gray Bayne is the founder of graybayne film/media, a health and social issue-based production company, where she produced films, PSAs and digital content for universities, nonprofits and government agencies, as well as teaches community-based storytelling and documentary filmmaking to high school students in the Los Angeles Unified School District. She is a recipient of generous grants from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Glassbreaker Films, and the Center for Cultural Innovation.

Previews of her debut feature film CHOCOLATE MILK have screened in over 275 communities nation-wide across 36 states and is currently in late-stage post-production. Elizabeth's short film LAS CHICAS screened at the 2017 Picture Farm Film Festival in Brooklyn, NY before being licensed along with her student film MY BEST ASSETS to air on Magic Johnson's cable television network Aspire TV. Elizabeth's last project is the short documentary CONTINUING A LEGACY about an 11-year old Black girl from a family of Black cowboys, striving to become the next barrel racing champion in California's state junior rodeo.

An award-winning filmmaker, her work has been recognized with Davey, CASE, and numerous Telly Awards. A second round finalist in the Sundance Institute | YouTube New Voices Lab, the Black Public Media Open Call and the Latino Public Media Open Call and a finalist in the Women In Film | Sundance Financing Intensive, the screenplay for her next feature film THE FORTRESS was a second round finalist in the Women in Film | Blacklist Feature Writing Lab and Project Greenlight's Clive Barker Reel Fear Horror Pitch Contest.

[graybayne.com](http://graybayne.com)



**“...justice too long delayed  
is justice denied.”**

**- Martin Luther King, Jr.**

*(quoting Chief Justice Earl Warren)*