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MILES DOWN THE GRAVEL ROAD

by

Summer Jenkins

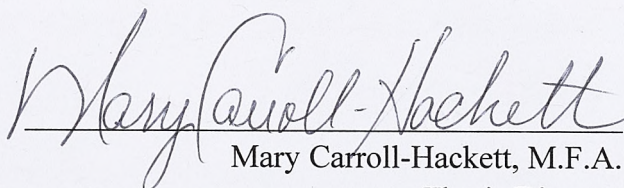
A thesis in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts in English

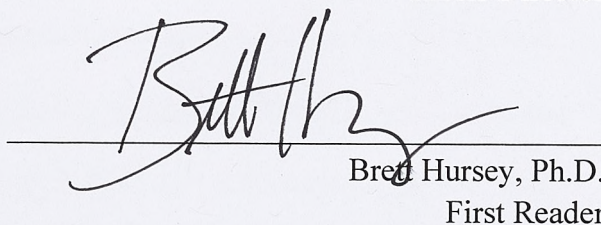
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Department of English and Modern Languages

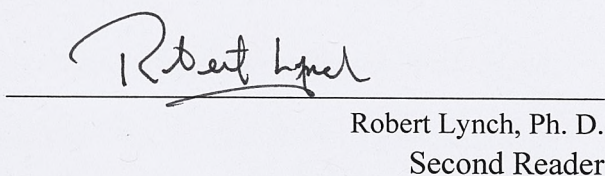
April 2012


Mary Carroll-Hackett, M.F.A.

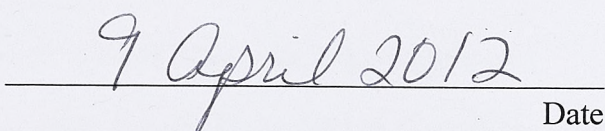
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Date

Summer Jenkins. MILES DOWN THE GRAVEL ROAD. (Under the direction of Mary Carroll-Hackett.) Department of English and Modern Languages, May 2012.

The purpose of this thesis is to develop my personal viewpoint of the modern family against my childhood Southern values and constrictions. The pieces that I have selected for inclusion in the collection all focus on the specific chances, especially the missed ones, that can lead my characters to either struggle or give in to familial pressure as the characters Emily and Alice find out in my longer selections, *Traveling Light* and *Ride the Line*. The dynamic of the parent-child relationships in my pieces emerges as the overall theme throughout several of my shorter screenplays, including *Dirt Church* and *Dialed*. The family ties are strained through hard times or difficult decisions that ultimately push the characters apart; the healing of these broken bonds remains the forefront of my main message.

I often incorporate a touch of the supernatural in order to emphasize the connections between Southern superstition and the natural inheritance of certain fears from parent to child, or the classic argument of Nature versus Nurture. It is these supernatural moments, such as in one of my principle pieces, *Found Objects*, in which death stalks Cecelia throughout her life, that makes my own inherited fears of dying come to life on the page. The existence of elves, or yetis as a childhood story goes, draws on a young woman's desperations and desires in *Wish For It*, refining the saying be careful what you wish for. This attention to specific emotions and details reflects back on the writers that I have studied during the development of this thesis, such as Joyce Carol Oates in her short story, *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been*, or in the short fiction of Hannah Tinti in her collection, *Animal Crackers*, where the supernatural and blood connections surpass those connections that are made through logic and not through the

heart. My characters' spontaneous reactions are much like the actions of those in such films as *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Sunshine Cleaning*, and *Lars and the Real Girl*; all of these concentrate on family, particularly the perpetual circle of inherited values and actions.

Nothing has ever gone according to plan in either my life or my characters' lives as they stumble through what I believe to be a personal representation of my own instinctual, emotional journey through thesis, family, and the bond of my roots. I find myself firmly placed in the tradition of those writers and filmmakers that chose to capture the quieter moments in life that can so often be missed and the mysteries that so few believe in. Overall within the collection a struggle for personal identity ensues outside the demands of others and the failure to live beyond the expectations of the family at large. The absence of parental guidance can be just as damaging as in the case of my piece, *Wish For It*. The collection represents my personal battle within the last few years including those related to breaking free of my expected heritage from which it becomes apparent that no matter how far I go, I will never truly break the bond. I will never want to for the most part. Some of my best material comes from stealing a car and driving down a long dusty road.

To my mother who without which none of this would have ever been possible. I've come a long way and it is all because of you.

And to El. You left us far too soon. I would never have discovered writing without you by my side.

Miles down the Gravel Road

Summer Jenkins

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Dialed

EXT. GAS STATION: EARLY AFTERNOON, BRIGHT AND SUNNY

Through the smeared glass, we see a shadow figure open the door. A bell CHIMES as the door swings open. CRAIG(17) emerges, dressed in an oil coated, ripped garage attendant's uniform. He wears glasses in a self-conscious way, constantly pushing them up the bridge of his nose.

He wanders over to the soda machine next to the window front. It blinks a few times. He kicks it in an expert, familiar way and a can drops down.

INT. GAS STATION: FRONT OFFICE

We see the soda can dropped onto the desk. Pulling back, we slowly see the rest of the office, filled with leftover furniture and broken parts. Everything has a thin film of oil and dust.

Craig drops down into the office chair. He leans toward the computer screen, the newest and least broken item in the office. He clicks furtively a few times, his face squinting at the screen. We hear game music, cartoonish CLANGS and BANGS, battle noises.

INSERT

The computer screen flashes in bright yellows and greens as Craig destroys several demons. Taped to the right corner of the screen is a faded photograph, a group shot. Craig grins from his spot in the very back of the group, the words MASCOT written across his shirt. Front and center is a young woman, a cheerleader.

Craig strokes her image with a finger tip before returning to the game.

END INSERT

The bell above the door CHIMES again. Craig jumps, quickly cutting the computer off.

INT. GAS STATION: DOORWAY

DANIEL (mid 40s) looms in. He wears the same oil coated garage attendant's uniform and a gold band on his left hand. He crumbles a soda can in his hand and tosses it into the trash can next to him.

He glances over at Craig, triggering a:

FLASHBACK: Montage

Small, white hospital room with flowers and balloons everywhere. It appears fresh and clean.

YOUNG DANIEL(early twenties)smiles and waves as us. He slings his arm around YOUNG MAUREEN(early twenties)shoulders. She holds in her arms YOUNG CRAIG (newborn), holding him towards us in triumph and pride.

The scene flickers and changes into a darker version of hospital room. The lights pulsate as older Daniel sits in a chair beside the now empty bed. He collapses forward, his hands digging into the blanket.

The room turns as we see CRAIG in the corner, watching Daniel. He yanks his glasses off and clenches them in his hands.

CRAIG

Da..d?

The scene flashes again as the lights in the room pulse out.

END FLASHBACK: MONTAGE

INT. GAS STATION: FRONT OFFICE

Craig cringes in his chair.

CRAIG

Hey Dad. How's the car look?

DANIEL

You put the distributor cap on backwards.

CRAIG

Oh.

Daniel sniffs, rubbing the back of his hand across his eyes. Craig takes a noisy sip from his soda, gulping loudly.

DANIEL

Maybe you can watch the shop for a bit? I'm going to rest in the back.

CRAIG

(nodding) Sure.

Daniel suddenly droops, looking much older than his years. He pats Craig on the shoulder, squeezing once before going into the back.

Craig pauses for a second before turning the computer back on. We hear the BANGS and CLANGS of the game world again.

The bell above the door CHIMES for a third time.

INT. GAS STATION: DOORWAY

ASHLEY(16) stands in the doorway. She is the dream of every teenage boy, a Cindy Crawford soda commercial in real life.

ASHLEY

I need some help, please? The gas pump doesn't seem to be working.

INT. GAS STATION: FRONT OFFICE

Craig nods slowly, still disbelieving. He glances back at the photograph, then at Ashley in the doorway.

INT. GAS STATION: DOORWAY

Ashley yawns, tosses her hair, and exits back outside.

INT. GAS STATION: FRONT OFFICE

Craig pauses his game quickly and races around the desk.

EXT. GAS STATION PUMPS

Ashley stands next to her car, shiny and extremely expensive. The car is still running. She points towards the pumps.

ASHLEY

Do you think you could?

CRAIG

Yeah.

INSERT:

His hands as he snaps open the tank door, slips the pump in and clicks it on. The pump hums, everything seems to be fine.

END INSERT.

EXT. GAS STATION PUMPS

Daniel steps outside and leans against the wall, watching as the two teens interact from a distance. He folds his arms and clears his throat. He remembers Ashley from somewhere:

FLASHBACK

The school bleachers, two weeks earlier, at the big game of the season.

Daniel sits back at the top of the bleachers, shading his eyes with his hands.

Down on the field, Ashley stands with the rest of the CHEERING SQUAD(teens). They all whisper and stare as Craig, now dressed in a ridiculous chicken suit as the team mascot, lumbers over to them.

Daniel winces from his vantage point.

Craig flaps his arms a little and grins as the girls burst into laughter. He does not realize that Ashley is behind him, silently mocking his movements.

Noticing his dad, Craig waves frantically.

Daniel sighs and waves back.

END FLASHBACK.

Keeping his distance still, Daniel moves closer to the pumps, listening quietly.

After pumping her gas, Craig opens the door for her so that she can slide in. She hands him twenty-bucks.

ASHLEY

You can keep the change.

Craig glances at the gas pump. It says \$19.50 on the dial.

CRAIG

Thanks. Are you...I think we have class together? We were on the cheering squad too.

ASHLEY

Yeah, I know.

Craig shuffles his feet. She stares up at him, a blank expression across her face. The engine of her car roars as she starts the car.

CRAIG

So...you know...the dance?

Ashley turns away, fumbling in her purse for her beeping phone.

ASHLEY

Ahm...ahuh. Yeah.

She taps at the screen furtively, ignoring Craig, who stands, uncertain and nervous, beside the car.

Craig pulls himself to his full height, taking in a deep breath.

CRAIG

Could we, maybe, go?

Ashley freezes for a second before slipping into her front seat.

ASHLEY

No.

He lets the door go abruptly, watching as she slams the door and takes off, driving and chatting on her phone. She pulls in front of a car at the intersection. Honks and angry shouts reach him as he turns back towards the office.

Watching his son's shoulder's fall as the car speeds away, Daniel quickly ducks back into the shop before Craig turns around.

INT. GAS STATION: FRONT OFFICE

Daniel sits at the desk as Craig makes a beeline for the Phone. Avoiding glancing at Craig, he stars down into his hands.

INSERT:

An old photograph, curled and nicked with age, rests in his palms. A young woman, startling similar to Craig, smiles in the photograph, a baby in her arms.

END INSERT.

Daniel rubs the photograph between his palms.

He remains silent as Craig picks up the phone, looks down at it. The young man toys with a slip of paper before dropping it into the trashcan beside the desk.

Craig drops the phone onto the desk with a hard clunk.

Daniel clears in his throat.

DANIEL
I'm sorry, son.

Craig shakes his head. Leaning across his father, he snatches off the photograph from the screen and tosses it into the trash.

CRAIG
It doesn't matter, Dad.

Daniel rubs the back of his head.

DANIEL
You know, it took me quite a while
to find your mom.

CRAIG
And you lost her.

Craig sighs, tapping his fingers in a rhythm on top of the computer.

DANIEL
I didn't. I haven't. She's still
here.

Daniel stretches.

DANIEL
It takes time, son.

CRAIG
I know, Dad.

DANIEL
How's about we sit down here and
you show me how to work this battle
stuff?

Craig grins. He settles on the stool next to his father and clicks the screen back on.

CRAIG
You have to start here..

FLASHBACK:

A large, green cemetery, empty of visitors except for Daniel, who stands in front of a fresh grave.

Craig walks up to him, their coats in his arms.

CRAIG

Dad?

Daniel shakes his head.

CRAIG

Come on, Dad. We need to go.

He slips his hand around Daniel's wrist and glances at him.

CRAIG

What do you always tell me? It just
takes time.

DANIEL

And nothing is ever lost forever.

Craig smiles softly and gently pulls on his father's arms. They stumble a few steps before Daniel wraps his arm around his son's shoulders. They carry each other away from the grave, together.

Traveling Light

EXT. NORTH COUNTRY ROAD-EARLY MORNING

Our eyes follow the line of the road, as the green trees and random breeze pass on each side. The view is like watching from the interior of a car peering outside the windows, slow and fast at the same time. The road curves, revealing at its apex the:

EXT. SMALL BRICK HOUSE

More trees and tilled fields surround a small, well-kept house, trimmed with neat hedges, although weeds and flowers are absent. A single window is open, the breeze of a spring day drawing the curtain out into the air. We follow through the open window into:

INT. NARROW HALLWAY

The wooden floors narrow into a bright rectangle of light, drawing the attention away from the perfectly aligned photographs, all in black and white. The PHOTOGRAPHS are school photos, showing a young man growing from childhood into adolescence.

There is only one of a young girl, small and spunky for her age. The photograph is placed at the end of the line, near the window and washed out from the sunlight pouring in. There is the faint ECHO of tapping footsteps, as the bright rectangle enlarges, overtaking sight for just a moment.

INT. WHITE KITCHEN

INSERT:

A metal TRASH CAN pops open, as small hands rifle through its contents. We see particles of food, empty boxes and cans fall to the floor, littering the area like a junk yard. We see clumps of mud mingling in with the trash, possibly from the large black bundle that slips into her small hands and is quickly stowed away. We hear the clatter of the metal can over the sound of a television in the background, generic soap operas. Her hands pause on top of the can as if listening before they fall out of sight.

END INSERT.

INSERT:

A bag, worn and patched, thrown with a THUD onto the wooden floor. A piece of black fabric sticks out of the top. We see the same hand hurriedly push the fabric down. We hear the sound of drawers opening as we watch from the viewpoint of the bag, a pair of feet race back and forth.

They are encased in scruffy sneakers that squeak across the floor. Hands shove juice packs and crackers into the opening before the bag is lifted and tossed across a set of determined child's shoulders, bowing under the weight.

END INSERT.

INT. NARROW HALLWAY

EMILY (a precocious child of ten) struts towards the window, glancing around as she first tosses the bag outside the window, the curtain blowing gently around her.

With a glare towards the living room beyond the WHITE KITCHEN, she slips through the window into the outside.

EXT. GRAVEL DRIVEWAY

As the gravel crunches under her feet, Emily shifts the bag on her shoulders. She swiftly draws closer to the small children's car parked underneath a tree.

Faintly, the NOISE of a television again drifts from the open window, and a burst of laughter startles her. She glances again over her shoulder, before tucking the bag into the passenger side.

EMILY
(quietly) Shush now. I'll let
you out as soon as we get
going, Fluff.

The young girl climbs clumsily into the driver side and turns the key. The car refuses to start or come to life. Emily heaves a big sigh that shakes her entire body.

She climbs back out, giving the car a vicious kick as she walks around the back to the battery. She peers at it for a few moments before pushing down on one of the wires. A sputter from the car causes her to giggle.

EMILY (CONT'D)
I knew I could do it...its not that
hard.

Climbing back in, she imitates a perfect driver, checking behind her before turning the car around in a perfect arch.

EXT. SOUTH COUNTRY ROAD-MORNING

The sound of a SLAPPING noise, a tire running flat, follows a red pickup truck as it coasts to a stop beside a barn

house mailbox. We see the gravel beneath the tires crunch as the truck rocks to a stop. Tan work boots stomp down as the truck door creaks open. They walk the perimeter around the car before stopping beside rear of the truck. Worn hands slowly strokes the sides of the tire, returning to pause over the same spot. We hear a heavy SIGH before the hands vanish, and the feet move from the frame.

INSERT:

The mailbox tilts slightly to the side. It creaks ominously as the same worn hands open its flap and reach inside. An manila envelope emerges. The hands pass over the address. Clenching the envelope in one fist, we see broad shoulders, tight with years of tension, shiver slightly, even in the bright sun.

END INSERT.

EXT. NORTH COUNTRY ROAD

A few moments later, Emily is on the side of the road, the car perched precariously in a ditch. She jerks at the knot in the bag's strings and fishes through the contents until she carefully pulls out a stuffed cat, FLUFF. She places it in the seat of honor beside her, smoothing the bare patches of fur.

EMILY

See, Fluff? On our way now.

With a large smile, Emily turns the car back onto the road, glancing every so often behind her.

EMILY (CONT'D)

You'll see, any minute now, Fluff.
They'll see us gone and be so
scared...scared like when I thought
I'd left you in that tree when we
were playing house..and I thought I
lost you...they'll come running
like I did..

Emily glances briefly at the stuffed animal, nodding after a second.

EMILY (CONT'D)

And they'll never try to toss you
away again..cause you're mine. Not
Trevor's or Mom's, just mine.

The little car moves at a snail's pace, passing the same debris and trees as before. The breeze drifts across the

little girl and cat.

EXT. SOUTH COUNTRY ROAD-MID DAY

BILL (early 50s) kneels next to the rear right tire of his truck, scratching his forehead with the bill of his cap. He is dressed in casual jeans and a button flannel, a little warm for the spring weather. The print on his truck labels him as a day laborer, a way to pay the bills.

BILL
(mutters) A hell of a day it
is.

As he leans back into his truck, we see over his shoulder the manila envelope from before, its contents spread across the ripped leather seats.

We see a thin film of dust rise as he ruffles through what is revealed to be photographs.

INSERT:

The photographs depict an middle aged woman, LOUISA (early forties) still attractive in a mature, docile way, as she and a much younger MAN are wrapped around each other intimately, the photographs more provocative as Bill shuffles through them.

END INSERT.

Bill grimaces and tosses these to the floorboard as he reaches further across to the yellow lined paper that came with the photographs.

BILL (CONT'D)
(reads) Just thought you might
want to see these, Bill.

He laughs, a deep throaty laughter that fills the empty road. Bill glances back towards the barn mail box, and tosses the note back in.

His CELLPHONE beeps three times.

Bill reaches through the open window of his truck pulling out a battered cell phone next to his wallet on the dash. He clicks it open only to shut it a second later as a miniature car appears on the road ahead.

He waits as the little car pulls next to his and stops with a jerk. He and Emily stare each other down for a second,

assessing each other.

BILL (CONT'D)

Aren't you Charlie's girl's
youngest?

EMILY

Don't you own a broken truck?

Bill snorts and spits on the pavement between them, earning a grimace from Emily as she places a protective hand around Fluff.

BILL

That's a nice cat there, gal. Looks
like you're packed for a trip.

EMILY

You need help? I'm pretty good
at handing Trevor his tools...and
breaking things..at least that's
what he says anyway.

Bill smiles, showing a tobacco stained set of teeth.

BILL

Now what would Charlie think if I
had a little girl like you acting
like a grease monkey? I should be
pointing you back on your way home.
You, your brother, and your ma live
around that corner there don't you?

EMILY

So? I've got business of my own.

BILL

I can see that. Although, I think
it'd be better going back that way,
myself.

Emily shakes her hair over her shoulder, unabashed. She points down at the tire, a knowing look on her face.

EMILY

Shouldn't you take that off? Trevor
always does when his wheel does
that.

Bill glances down at the tire and shrugs.

BILL

I'll get to it in time.

EMILY

So you don't want to go home
either.

Bill's eyebrows raise as he gives the young girl another
appraising glance.

There is a brief pause between them as a breeze drifts
across the road. Bill hears his phone VIBRATE on the dash
and ignores it.

BILL

And what would you know about that,
gal?

EMILY

(mutters) I'm too big for a best
friend anymore.

BILL

Well, Kitty there seems like it's
had better days.

Emily clenches her hand around the cat, rubbing its ear
between her fingers.

EMILY

I'm heading out of here. Trevor
always says he will when he gets
big enough...and if I'm a big girl
now then I can too.

Bill rubs a hand across his eyes, and turns away tossing the
cell back into his truck. He kneels down next to the smaller
car, eye to eye with Emily.

BILL

I can appreciate that. Not wanting
to give something up, especially
when you have a care for it.

He reaches a tentative hand out to pat Fluff on its head.
Emily relaxes her grip.

BILL (CONT'D)

She cares, sweet. If she didn't, she'd never want you to grow up. She'd always want you to be innocent. And your brother, Trevor, right? He wouldn't be trying to teach you these things neither.

Emily gazes at Bill, before reaching into her bag. She hands him a juice pack, which he takes slowly, nodding as she takes out her own.

BILL (CONT'D)

Nice on a day like this, isn't it?

Emily taps her box against his.

They drink slowly in silence, watching the empty road.

BILL (CONT'D)

You'll need to get on then, where ever you're going.

Emily turns the key on her car again, as the battery sputters the car to life.

EMILY

Sure you don't want me to hand you tools?

Bill shakes his head and gestures his cell phone towards her.

BILL

I've got someone to call first.

The miniature car pulls away and continues down the road, leaving Bill and his truck on his side pointed south. He opens his phone again, smiling as he dials a number on his speed dial.

BILL (CONT'D)

Hey, Charlie? Yeah, she's heading up this way. Tiny car, little stuffed cat? She's pretty determined actually. Seems like she's all about being a big girl now. I'd send the boy to come get her.

He drops his phone back down, ignoring the three missed calls.

EXT. FURTHER DOWN NORTH COUNTRY ROAD-EARLY EVENING

Emily sits on top of the hood of her little car, the battery torn apart at her feet. She scoffs at it, shuffling the pieces with her toe. Fluff sits at her side, slightly more ruffled by the altercation.

EMILY

Stupid battery, stupid brother. He said he changed it...What'll we do, Fluff?

The cat remains silent, which perturbs Emily even more. With a harsh slap, she tosses the stuffed animal to the ground. It lays in the dirt, staring at Emily with blank, glassy eyes. Emily grinds her eyes with the heels of her hands as headlights fall on the roadside in front of her. She wraps her arms around herself as the car pulls behind the smaller. The light falls on the stuffed animal on the ground, its missing fur on the back and arms more visible in the direct light than before.

Emily stares at her feet as a car door slams, and footsteps come closer until a larger pair of hightops stop next to her seat. One taps her feet softly and she lets her arms fall.

EMILY (CONT'D)

(grumbling) I'm not going back.

TREVOR (late teens) stoops beside her. He hasn't grown into his legs and arms yet; he throws a clumsy arm over the young girl's shoulders. Emily shivers as the last of the heat fades from the day. She curls against her brother, who coughs and turns his head.

TREVOR

Ah, Em, did you have to?

EMILY

(sniffing) She tried to throw Fluff away..

TREVOR

After you tracked mud all over the house, and your clothes. I told you, if you wanted to, we could go down to the creek later..Why can't you just act like a girl, Em?

EMILY

I don't want to...I don't want to be girly, or old. I don't want to be like HER.

Trevor kicks at the battery on the ground, and picks Fluff up dusting him off.

TREVOR

I don't know...you seem pretty girly to me. I mean, a little sister always is. Especially when you have such a cute cat.

He rubs the same ear as Emily, peeking from behind the stuffed animal. He PURRS, imitating a cat well enough to make Emily laugh.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Now, see that? That was a girl laugh. Didn't sound too bad to me.

Emily turns her head away, glaring at her feet.

EMILY

If I go home now, Momma will want me to say I'm sorry, and I'm not.

TREVOR

Fake it.

He wiggles his eyebrows at Emily, who breaks into a smile.

Trevor grabs her bag and cat, tucking both under his arm as he offers the young girl his free hand. She takes it, hopping off the hood of the small car.

EMILY

What are we going to do about this?

TREVOR

We're traveling light, Em. Fluff is all we need..

He peeks into the bag, frowning slightly.

TREVOR (CONT'D)

Did you take my crackers?

Emily giggles, snatching Fluff from his hands.

EMILY

I guess I can just run away tomorrow.

TREVOR

Good, I don't have to be at work til three. Did you know Gramps called me at the Mario's and told me you were driving out on the road. Said you ran into Bill.

EMILY

The grumpy man with the truck? We shared juice packs together.

Trevor huffs, lifting her into her seat and buckling her in.

TREVOR

You gave him a juice pack? Wait til Gramps hears that. What'd you talk about?

Emily pulls Fluff closer to her, staring ahead as Trevor turns the car around, back towards the house.

EMILY

We both like being away from home. I hope he has someone to come get him.

Trevor shrugs, glancing thoughtfully at his younger sister.

TREVOR

You know Mama can't help it when she...gets like she does sometimes.

EMILY

(mumbles) I know.

TREVOR

She still loves you.

Emily buries her face into Fluff's back.

EXT. SOUTH COUNTRY ROAD-EVENING

Bill sits in his truck, the lights off. He watches as the sky slowly darkens, his cell phone on his dash. It vibrates, bouncing along the dash into his hand. The screen reads HOME. Flipping the phone open, he puts it to his ear.

BILL

Hello, sweetie...Yes, I know, I was in a tight spot, couldn't answer.. I'll be home soon. We can talk then.

He places a cigarette to his lips, blowing a stream of smoke towards his open window.

BILL (CONT'D)

Do you want anything from the store before I get home? They have those chocolates you like.

He leans his hand out the window, tapping the ash out away from the truck.

BILL (CONT'D)

I'm sure it's still open...I'll get them on my way home. I love you.

He slowly flips the cell phone shut, tossing it back onto the dash. The stars slowly appear above his head. With a sigh, he turns the truck on, waving a hand as a car passes him. As he turns down the road next to the barn mailbox, Bill kicks at the photographs in the floorboard under his feet. His headlights sweep across the trees, as he speeds up down his driveway. The beam of light begin to bleed together until the frame is filled with light, dimming into:

FLASHBACK:

EXT. SOUTH COUNTRY ROAD-EARLY MORNING

Bill holds the envelope in his hands, as his fingernails start to gouge into the thin parchment. He takes an even, slow breath and places it carefully next to him on the leather seat. He grabs up his phone, pausing briefly over his pack of cigarettes. Dialing slowly, he lets out another smooth breath before there is an audible CLICK on the other line.

BILL

Louisa? You there?

He pauses for an answer.

We hear a muffled woman's voice rising and falling in irritation. Bill pushes the speaker button down firmly until the phone beeps, and sits the phone down on the dash. His hands come back with his cigarette pack and lighter. He tosses them idly from hand to hand.

LOUISA (O.S.)

I've got it boiling on the stove now, William. I haven't the time for this. Aren't you going to the store now to get it or do I need to get it done myself?

He taps a cigarette out into his fingertips, rolling it back and forth smoothly.

LOUISA (CONT'D)

Got your damn head in the clouds again, don't ya? I'm setting here waiting to get the beginnings of my canning starting, the water's set, and you call me to just chat? I need those lids, William.

Bill huffs, placing the cigarette firmly between his lips. He turns his head to the side as he lights, mindful of the thin smoke drifting up.

LOUISA (CONT'D)

William, you'd better be listening. I need those lids now. Parhams will have them and its ten minutes up the road.

He exhales towards the phone, driving the smoke towards the speaker with a sardonic grin.

BILL

Louisa, who's Grady?

LOUISA (O.S.)

What's this? Grady?

Bill's grin widens.

BILL

Yes, Grady. He sent me a nice note in the mail this morning.

Louisa stays silent on the phone. He scoots closer to the dash and steering wheel, his ashes falling into his lap. He brushes at them absently.

LOUISA (O.S.)

You're just trying to get out of getting those lids. Coming up with this nonsense. You're too old for that, William.

BILL

I'll get those damn lids, Louisa Parker. Now, who is this Grady?

LOUISA (O.S.)

I've got other things to do at the moment and its not talking about some busboy down at that dive you like to drink at.

Bill picks up the phone in both hands. His hands clench and unclench around the speaker.

BILL

So you do know of him, at least. He sent me something interesting. Thought you just might want to know.

LOUISA (O.S.)

And what would I want to know?

We can hear a clinking noise in the background behind Louisa's voice, much like dishes in a sink full of water.

INSERT:

Pale, freckled hands dip in and out of a soapy sink full of water. They deftly swipe a rag in and out of a glass, dipping it down rhythmically to fill and refill with water.

END INSERT.

BILL

There's some nice portraits here. You seem really proud of yourself.

INSERT:

The glass drops from her hands into the water, creating a splash that dots her arms with small water drops.

END INSERT.

BILL (CONT'D)

You and Grady seem to be really aware of each other, Louisa Parker. And now, I couldn't care less about your damn canning.

Bill flicks the burning cigarette out the truck window, leaving the cell phone beside him on the seat. He turns his head towards it.

LOUISA (O.S.)
Are you coming home?

BILL
I just might...after I wrangle with the
flat I managed to get by the mail
box.

LOUISA (O.S.)
But when are you?

Bill glances at the phone before flipping it shut.

BILL
When I feel ready.

END FLASHBACK.

The driveway curves in front of the truck, flashing the headlights against the trees in a blinking glare that makes Bill blink. Pulling into the drive, he turns the truck off, slipping the keys into his pocket. He crumbles up the photographs into his fist, taking those and the envelope with him as he steps out of the truck.

EXT. GRAVEL DRIVEWAY

Trevor pulls the car up to the house. Emily hops out beside him. The light shines from the hallway window of the house. Our eyes are drawn back towards the window. The curtain lays flat inside, the breeze from earlier gone.

INT. NARROW HALLWAY

The light is dimmer now in the bare hallway, the pictures gloomier as noise from the television drifts down from the living room. The bag lays in the floor, abandoned.

INT. WHITE KITCHEN

We see Emily perched at the table, a plate of food in front of her. Fluff is back in its seat of honor next to her.

A pale hand, delicate and smooth, pushes her hair back from her head. She smiles up at someone who is just out of sight.

EMILY
I'm sorry, Mama, honest. I just
wanted Fluff back. You know I've
never wanted anything but Fluff
when you get like that...

The hand shivers slightly before returning to Emily's hair.

EMILY (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry, Mama.

Trevor is on the phone in the other room, talking in hushed, excited tones. His voice carries into the kitchen, occasionally drawing Emily's attention.

TREVOR (O.S.)

Can you believe she got that piece of junk a mile and a half away from home before the battery died? And get this, Gramps..She gave Bill juice. Juice.

EMILY

I did not!

TREVOR (V.O.)

Hush you! Mom's fine now. She, you know, freaked out until I got her home though. She still has that raggedy cat though. Mom can't get it from her. She's not talking to it any more.

EMILY

I don't have to anymore. I can fend for myself.

INT. DARK LIVING ROOM-ACROSS TOWN

Bill takes another drag from his cigarette, rubbing the remains out into a chipped mug. A box of chocolate lays on the floor beside his armchair, forgotten. The room, and the house, are completely silent, desolate in a way that Emily's is not. There are bare spots on the walls and shelves where rings of dust marks missing personal items. His are obviously still there.

BILL

We both had to grow up, didn't we?

He has a small trash can placed in front of his chair. The fire coming from the can casts a eerie glow over the older man's face.

INSERT:

We see the figures in the photographs twist and warp as the fire slowly begins to burn. We watch as a gold ring falls into the ashes.

END INSERT.

Across the room, a scrap of paper lies on the coffee table, the brightest object in the room.

INSERT:

The scrap of paper reads: Bill, I've got somewhere to be. It isn't waiting here. Burn the photos.

Louisa.

END INSERT.

Bill sighs the same heavy breath, fingering the keys in his pocket, as he leans back in his armchair, sitting in the dark.

Wish For It

EXT. TWO STORY APARTMENT BUILDING, EARLY MORNING

ANNE (early 20s) sits on the steps leading towards her apartment. She is a faintly attractive young woman with a few extra pounds.

The apartment house is in a old, fallen down section of town.

Inside, Anne hears the sound of an ALARM going off, followed by the sound of a loud THUD as it crashes to the floor.

She takes one last puff of her cigarette and flicks it away. Pulling herself up with the railing, Anne makes her way to the top of the stairs.

A SCREECH of screen door coming from downstairs startles her. She knows this sound and rushes inside.

INT. ANNE AND TOBY'S APARTMENT

Anne kicks aside the piles of clothes that litter the floor from the small kitchenette to her right to the couch area at her left. She makes her way to the bedroom, really a small closet, in a carefully chosen path that is seemingly known only to her.

Easing the door open and listening for a second, she stands in the doorway. TOBY (early 20s) lies nude in the bed, a blanket tossed carelessly across his stomach. He moans and flops over on his side.

INSERT:

The glowing alarm clock reads 6:22 am.

END INSERT.

ANNE

Tob, hun? You need to wake up?

Toby groans again and yanks the covers over his head.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Wake up, Toby.

INT. BEDROOM

Anne moves over to the side of the bed and jostles Toby until he opens his eyes.

TOBY

What..what? I'm asleep.

ANNE

Work.

Toby tosses the blanket aside and stumbles to his feet. He pats Anne roughly on the shoulder and pushes past her to their tiny bathroom in the living room. Anne begins to clumsily make the bed.

TOBY (O.S.)

I don't have any clean khakis.

ANNE

You should have told me that last night.

Anne gives up with the bed and begins gathering the abandoned clothes into a basket. Most of what she picks up are men's clothes.

ANNE (CONT'D)

I'll get them done today before class.

TOBY (O.S.)

Oh, you've got class again?

ANNE

I do every Wednesday.

Anne shoves the rest of the clothes into her basket and heaves them into the living room.

INT. ANNE AND TOBY'S APARTMENT

Toby follows her, dressed in yesterday's clothes.

TOBY

Thanks, hun. Love you. Got to go.

Anne cringes away from Toby for a second, which he at first notices and then quickly ignores. She tries to turn the reaction into a joke, waving her hands towards his clothes and pinching her nose.

ANNE

Love you too. See you tonight.

Toby crashes out of the door, keys in hand. Anne putters around for a few more moments before heading out of the door with the now overflowing basket of laundry.

EXT. TWO STORY APARTMENT BUILDING, EARLY MORNING

She carefully scales the stairs down to the ground. Turning to her left, she props open the screen door with her foot and drags herself and the basket through the opening.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM

Not bothering to sort the clothes, Anne chucks as much as she can into the washing machine.

A black lace bra falls from the pile. Anne stops, dropping the rest of the clothes against the machine.

Pushing it with her foot, Anne toes it back behind the washing machine.

She gives the machine a swift kick before sighing and leaving it to do its thing.

EXT. TWO STORY APARTMENT BUILDING, EARLY MORNING

Anne shuffles over to the bottom of the stairs and plops down. She pulls out a paperback which she tosses down beside her and another cigarette.

After a few minutes, the dreaded screen door screeches again. AMELIA (70s) pokes her head out. She glances over at the stairs, notices Anne, and comes out to stand beside her.

AMELIA

That your stuff in the washer?

Anne nods.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Was planning on doing my own this morning.

ANNE

I'm sorry. I haven't had the time to get mine done lately.

AMELIA

It's a wonder with all the coming and going you do that you still have a boyfriend.

ANNE

Fiance, actually. I'll have our stuff out as soon as I can.

Amelia stares pointedly at Anne's cigarette as she takes another drag. She stares until Anne offers her one.

AMELIA

So..I ever told you about the Yetis?

Anne shakes her head, allowing her hair to fall in front of her face.

ANNE

No, you haven't.

AMELIA

When I was a kid, clothes, socks mostly, kept coming up missing. Never could tell where they'd go. We had so many arguments about it. Got to where we would have to buy more socks then wash them. That was back when we actually owned this house instead of renting it from the bank now.

Anne nods again, grinding out her cigarette beneath her feet.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

We started to get wise, me and my brother. We started leaving them out for them. Sure enough, we'd have them lined up all in a pretty row the next morning. They'd fix anything if you left them something like a treat, or a...a...

ANNE

You left them candy most of the time. Or dental floss.

AMELIA

So I have told you the story.

Anne pushes herself up.

ANNE

I haven't noticed anything missing lately.

AMELIA

Your boyfriend sure hasn't been here.

ANNE

Fiancé.

AMELIA

No ring on your finger that I can see.

ANNE

Good day, Mrs. Franklin.

Anne makes her way back of the stairs, paperback in hand.

AMELIA

I was just saying. Seems like you're always in a rush for things.

INT. ANNE AND TOBY'S APARTMENT: EVENING

Anne sits at the small couch, carefully folding each individual piece of laundry. As she lines up the socks with their matches the phone RINGS. She leaves it for the answering machine.

TOBY (O.S.)

Hi Hun. Love and miss you. I won't be there tonight. Stuck at work, you know. Call me if you need anything. Anything at all.

Anne stares down at the socks. In her hands are two different matches. Setting them down, she glances first in the basket and then down on the floor.

ANNE

Hmm.

Shrugging, she goes into the kitchen and pulls down an old tin of Christmas candy left over from the holidays.

ANNE (CONT'D)

She said...if you leave something sweet.

She leaves it open on the counter and wanders into the bedroom, shutting the door behind her.

INT. BEDROOM, NEXT MORNING

Anne startles awake to the sound of the door SLAMMING. She can hear Toby moving around the apartment.

TOBY (O.S.)

Hey, hun? What's with the tin you left out on the counter? And what's with the socks.

Anne pulls herself out of bed and goes into the kitchenette.

INT. ANNE AND TOBY'S APARTMENT

There on the counter top is a row of neatly matched socks, socks that Anne thought was missing the night before. Toby frowns down at the tin.

TOBY

Why does it have teeth marks? Looks like we might have mice.

Anne stares, bewildered.

ANNE

Yetis.

TOBY

Whatever, sweetie. I'm hopping onto the X-Box for a bit.

He leans over and gives her a quick peck on the cheek. While he starts up his game, Anne grabs herself a instant cup of coffee and watches him silently.

Every few moments his cell goes off. Each time Toby lurches for the phone, grins as he reads the texts and feverishly messages back before returning to his game.

Anne shakes her head and goes out the door.

INT. ANNE AND TOBY'S APARTMENT: NEXT DAY

Toby is once online with his gaming buddies. Anne sits at the far end of the couch, her school books spread around her. She frowns as the noise from his games and his constant chattering interrupts her concentration.

Anne sighs loudly and drops her book onto the coffee table.

TOBY

What?

ANNE

Nothing.

Toby suddenly cuts of his controller and stands up.

TOBY

I hate when you do that.

ANNE

What?

Anne stands up and follows him into the kitchenette. He stalks around her, opening and closing the fridge and cabinets.

TOBY

I want something to eat.

ANNE

What did I do?

TOBY

You always make me feel like I've done something and I haven't.

ANNE

You haven't?

Toby groans and rubs his eyes. Grabbing his coat, he pauses at the door.

TOBY

You've always got a problem but never a way to fix it.

He slams the door behind him, leaving Anne, stunned, in the apartment alone.

ANNE

What the hell?

EXT. TWO STORY APARTMENT BUILDING

Anne spots Amelia waiting at the bottom of the stairs. She pulls out her pack and hands it over, lighting one instantly.

AMELIA

They're back. Found me a whole load of pennies waiting for me.

ANNE

They do that?

AMELIA

Hun, if you're nice to them, they're nice to you. You can ask them to find anything for you. They

will. It's their favorite thing to do, playing seek and find. By the way, I found something of yours behind the washing machine.

ANNE

OH. Oh, that isn't mine.

AMELIA

Didn't look like something that a nice gal like you would wear.

Anne blinks back tears that suddenly appear.

AMELIA

Could have been a past tenant, I thought at first. 'Cept you've been staying here for two years now. Then I remembered that your boyfriend's sister visited last week while you were gone-

ANNE

Toby doesn't have a sister. We're both an only child.

AMELIA

Maybe you don't need my help. Maybe you should be talking to our yetis.

ANNE

OUR yetis?

AMELIA

You just tell them what you want.

ANNE

So why do you even call them that?

AMELIA

I always called them elves. My brother thought it was more manly to call them yetis. Makes more sense really. Nasty little things, yetis can be.

Amelia pats her knee and then slowly stands.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

But be careful. You might not like what you get.

Anne smiles for the first time.

ANNE

Fine by me.

INT. ANNE AND TOBY'S APARTMENT, NIGHT

Anne carefully presses the note down in between the two candy bars. She cuts the light out, returning to an empty bed.

INT. BEDROOM

She is shaken awake hours later by Toby, who frantically pulls her into his arms.

TOBY

I shouldn't have done it. I'm so sorry, hun. I love you. I went there tonight and something hit me. I just couldn't go in and sleep next to her knowing that you were here alone.

ANNE

The Yetis brought you back.

TOBY

(laughing) What?

ANNE

They did. I asked and they did.

Anne peels back the covers and runs into the kitchen.

INT. ANNE AND TOBY'S APARTMENT

On the counter are two empty wrappers and Anne's note. Glancing down at the note, she sees little chocolate paw prints. Toby comes up behind her.

TOBY

Have you been talking to Amelia again?

Anne smiles.

EXT. TWO STORY APARTMENT BUILDING, NEXT MORNING

Anne and Amelia are back in their seats, sharing a cigarette.

AMELIA

You should have asked for money.

ANNE

They wouldn't have liked me then.
It isn't in their nature.

AMELIA

I always could say that dirty
laundry tells all.

ANNE

Does. Though now I'm not sure if I
want him.

Amelia grimaces for a second, rubbing her hands together and wincing in pain.

AMELIA

I used to think I wanted to live
for a long, long time. Now I'm just
waiting for someone to come by and
give me a cigarette. Sit for a
spell.

Anne stares at her for a moment, astonished.

ANNE

You mean you asked for?

Amelia coughs and pulls herself up by the railing of the stairs. She glances back up towards their apartment.

AMELIA

You wanted him. Now you have them.

Toby's voice drifts down from the screen door of the apartment.

TOBY (O.S.)

Anne? ANNE?

Anne closes her eyes and shivers for a second.

ANNE

You're right. Now I do have him.

AMELIA

Better want him then.

Amelia slowly walks back towards her own apartment door and Anne makes her way up the stairs.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Spiteful things, them yetis.

INT. ANNE AND TOBY'S APARTMENT: LATE EVENING

Anne slowly tiptoes into the kitchen, avoiding turning the light on. In her hands she carries another recycled Christmas tin.

ANNE

I'm really not sure why I'm trying this but...he's back and now I just want him to stop acting like a bad Fabio impersonation. I want him to be Toby.

Shadows start to crowd in on the tin as Anne positions it on the counter. She shakes her hands after drawing away, rubbing them briskly.

ANNE (CONT'D)

I want him to really love me again.

A light snaps on in the bedroom behind her.

TOBY (O.S.)

Hun?

ANNE

Yeah?

Anne brushes her hands down her gown and turns away from the counter towards the bedroom.

Behind her the NOISES of SHUFFLING and the tin CLATTERING against the counter follows her out of the kitchen.

INT. BEDROOM, NEXT MORNING

Toby and Anne are curled together in the bed. His cellphone begins to vibrate on the night stand next to his side of the bed. He groans and snatches it up.

He fiddles with it for a second before reading the new text.

INSERT:

A text message on Toby's cellphone screen.

Missed you babe. Mwah. Hope to see you tom night.

END INSERT.

Toby grins and types back a quick response while glancing furtively at Anne.

Anne stretches and suddenly freezes as she sees the phone in Toby's hand.

ANNE

What is it?

Toby quickly shoves his phone underneath his pillow.

TOBY

Nothing, sweetie.

Anne rolls back over to her side of the bed. Reaching towards her nightstand, she quietly slides open the top drawer.

Using her fingertips, she slowly draws a box labeled pregnancy test from the drawers. She tucks it beneath her pillow along with a snack size candy bar and rolls back towards Toby.

ANNE

Babe?

Ride the Line

INT. RUSTED MAIL BOX, DARK.

We see a shot of bright light before a set of eyes and a nose appears, filling the opening. A hand reaches forward and pulls out a few bills, all marked PAST DUE in red. They vanish from view.

EXT. DRIVEWAY, WARM SPRING DAY

CAROL (early 30s) sighs as she tucks the bills inside the front of her shirt. She is sweet and petite, looking younger than her years. She dresses like a cross between her lost teen years and the ideal mother.

Her hands on her hips, she stands staring at the dilapidated house in front of her. Over her shoulder, the house looks crumbled inside itself.

Carol scuffs her heel against the pole of the mailbox and pulls a pack of cigarettes from her back pocket. She taps one out and slips it between her lips.

A car horn HONKS behind her and she tosses the cigarette away into the weeds.

Her daughter, ALICE (18), hops out of the car. She dresses in a much different style than her mother, comfortable t-shirts and cargo pants. She slings her backpack over her shoulder and races past Carol, who reaches towards her.

CAROL

Alice...honey...wait.

Alice snubs her and runs through the yard into the house. Carol kicks at the mailbox pole, rattling it.

CAROL (CONT'D)

Shit fire.

INT. FRONT HALL

The home is slightly better maintained than the outside. Unpacked boxes line the hallway, along with discarded coats and shoes. A cat winds itself around Carol's feet as she picks her way towards the kitchen. She shoos at it, pushing the cat away with the toe of her heels.

CAROL

Alice? We need to talk about this.

She walks toward the light coming from the kitchen at the end of the hallway. She trips and catches herself with the door frame leading into the kitchen.

INSERT:

Alice's backpack lies in the floor with papers falling out of it. Carol bends down to pick up a few.

END INSERT.

INT. KITCHEN

Carol glances down at the papers in her hands as she walks into the kitchen. Alice rolls her eyes and pulls her headphones on as she digs in the fridge.

ALICE

There's nothing in here. Again.

CAROL

So go get money out of my purse and order some pizza for dinner like you always do. We need to talk about this first.

She drops the papers on the table.

ALICE

Oh yeah, those. Eh.

Alice shrugs and slams the fridge door closed with her hip.

CAROL

When were you going to show these to me?

ALICE

(mutters) Never.

CAROL

These are acceptance letters. There's one for State, one from AMC, one from GA State?

ALICE

You mean, the scholarships and loans I would have to take out since you have crap credit. Doesn't really mean acceptance.

CAROL

Alice!

Alice shrugs and walks out of the kitchen. Carol clenches her hands into fists, glaring down at the table.

ALICE (O.S.)

Where's your purse, Carol?

CAROL

That's Mom to you, Alice Marie.

Carol picks up the closest letter, the one from State, and gives it another look.

CAROL (CONT'D)

It says here that you have an open house scheduled tomorrow afternoon and afterwards you can meet with head of the department for whatever degree program you like. I have some time off built up from work—we could go and check out State. It's the closest.

We hear Alice drop Carol's purse with a THUD.

ALICE (O.S.)

You mean Hooter's actually gives vacation time now? Or did you take some kind of side job I don't know about?

CAROL

Don't get smart with me, young lady. I had to switch jobs because you needed a different school district, a better one.

ALICE (O.S.)

You. You. You.

Carol shakes the paper at Alice as she reappears in the kitchen, money in hand. Alice goes directly to the phone, pushing buttons methodically.

CAROL

Alice, it's a open house. All you have to do is take a look around and, if you like it, convince them that you are actually a human being. Or smart. They'll take that over the other.

ALICE

Look around you, Mom. Do we look like college material? Where's your husband and two point five children? Where's the happy family

with money to spend? They don't want us.

Alice hangs up the phone without ordering.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Really, Mom? How much luck do you think it's going to take here? I've had three expulsions from three different schools. Strong test scores aren't going to help.

CAROL

How do we know that if we don't at least try and talk to someone? We're going. It's not like you ever minded missing school before.

Alice stoops down to snatch her bag up from the doorway.

CAROL (CONT'D)

Where are you going now?

ALICE

Out. I'll be in later. There's got to be something better to eat somewhere else.

CAROL

We're going! I don't care if I have to strap you into the car myself.

Carol crumbles the letter in her hand as the door SLAMS behind Alice in the hallway. She tosses the paper into the overflowing trash and pulls another cigarette out of her hidden pack. As she blows smoke into the air she pulls the overdue bills out and tosses them into the trash as well.

The door SLAMS again. Carol jumps.

CAROL (CONT'D)

What did you forget?

ALICE

Don't forget the bills in the mailbox. They're way overdue.

Carol stares down into the trash.

CAROL

Damn.

She pulls the acceptance letter back out, shaking the food off. She pins it up onto the fridge. The magnet is weak. The

letter slides down to the floor.

CAROL (CONT'D)

Double damn.

Reaching over on the pile of mail, Carol takes the first off the top.

INSERT:

The letter is addressed to Alice from a Mr. Martin Andrews.

END INSERT.

Carol frowns and tosses it into the trash, pushing it down with the toe of her heels.

INT. CAROL'S BEDROOM: NEXT MORNING

The room itself has very little furniture and no knickknacks. Most of the room is taken by a large mattress piled with blankets and pillows.

Carol watches from her window as the rain pours down. She turns back to the bed. Two dresses, one modest and black, the other bright red and strappy, lie across the bed.

She fingers the hem of the red dress and picks it up, modeling it in the floor length mirror attached to the closet.

ALICE (O.S.)

They both look like crap, Carol.
Just wear whatever. I'm not going
to make an effort so you'll be
doing it for the both of us.

CAROL

Just help me pick one. We don't
have much time. It takes about two
hours or more to even get to the
highway.

ALICE

Whatever. Wear the red then.

Carol glances down at the red in her hands, tosses it to the floor and picks up the black dress.

CAROL

Right. The black.

EXT. DRIVEWAY, RAINY DAY

Carol and Alice race to the car and climb in. Alice immediately turns the radio on, going back and forth between the channels until Carol smacks her hand away and turns it off.

CAROL

At least let me get out of the damn driveway first.

ALICE

Jesus, Carol. The least you could do is tell me why I should go along with this anyway. What's it going to cost you?

CAROL

You need this. You don't want to regret it later when you can't find a decent job and you've got a mouth to feed.

ALICE

Hah. You can't feed me now. You have to have at least eighteen years waitressing and bill evasion.

Carol turns the radio back on.

CAROL

Leave the station where I put it.

They drive on in silence for a few moments before Carol digs through the paper and plastic in the floorboard.

CAROL (CONT'D)

Didn't we have a map in here?

Alice snorts.

CAROL (CONT'D)

It should have been right around here.

The car swerves and Carol frantically grabs for the wheel. The car drifts back into the right lane.

ALICE

Carol! Drive much?

CAROL

I just needed the damn map, Alice Marie. If you'd help me for even a minute...

ALICE

Tell me what I'm going to get out of today and I will.

Carol slams her hands against the steering wheel hard. Alice startles for a second before reaching over and slowly turning the radio volume louder.

The tiny car begins to vibrate. Carol deflates. She pops her turn signal on.

CAROL

I need a damn bathroom. My eyes are floating.

She swerves the car again, this time on purpose, into a gas station parking lot.

EXT. GAS STATION PARKING LOT

A seedy gas station parking lot. Carol jerks the car into a space. Alice looks over at her mother.

ALICE

A Coke would be great. Thanks.

CAROL

If I hadn't given birth to you...

ALICE

You might have been a good girl and gone to college.

Alice reaches over and turns the radio up even louder, the car humming with every beat.

CAROL

Alice...That's...that's it. I'll be back in a sec.

Carol reaches for the door handle then hesitates. She glances over at Alice, then the keys.

CAROL (CONT'D)

Don't take off anywhere. I mean it.

ALICE

Eh.

EXT. GAS STATION FRONT DOOR

Carol dodges through the rain into the gas station. She returns a few moments later with a two bottles of soda in her arms.

EXT. GAS STATION PARKING LOT

She grabs for the door handle and misses. The second time she pulls at the handle but the door won't budge. Carol taps on the glass. Alice points at the radio, then her ears, and shrugs.

CAROL

Little shit. Open the door.

Alice mouths a few words Carol doesn't catch. She points at her daughter then at the lock emphatically. She is getting drenched. Alice throws up her hands.

CAROL (CONT'D)

Open...the...damn...door!

Alice reaches over and unlocks the driver side. Carol, drenched, slips in, shaking water everywhere. She throws the drinks into the floorboard and starts the car.

ALICE

So what took you so long?

Carol pulls the car slowly back out on the highway. They drive in complete silence. Alice gets antsy, drumming her fingers on the door.

ALICE (CONT'D)

So why haven't you ever told me about my father?

The car jerks and Alice rolls her eyes.

CAROL

You never asked.

ALICE

That's not true. I've asked you before plenty of times. Last year around my birthday.

CAROL

I've never told you because you never asked. I did give you the address I had of his. You wrote to him.

ALICE

And the letters were all returned. Seriously, I am old enough to know what happened. He was military, right?

Carol grabs at her purse.

ALICE (CONT'D)

No cigarettes, just talk.

CAROL

We got married right out of high school. You were born. He was stationed in Oklahoma. We lived there until you were three and then he left us. That's all you need to know.

Alice glares at her mother.

ALICE

So he left because of you.

Carol stares forward through the windshield into the rain.

CAROL

No, he left before you were even born. He came back once when you were three but you don't remember any of it.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. MILITARY BASE: HOUSING DISTRICT

Younger Carol (18) stands outside of her housing unit, gazing down the street. A NEIGHBOR waves from down the road. Carol half-heartedly returns the wave. She is extremely pregnant and very close to birth. A tan car rises over the hill and pulls into her driveway. She waits until the officer makes his way to her.

SERGEANT OLIVIER

You're Carol Andrews?

Carol nods.

SERGEANT OLIVIER (CONT'D)

So your husband is E4 Specialist Martin Andrews?

CAROL

Yes.

She hugs her belly.

SERGEANT OLIVIER

You remember what I told you on the phone, ma'am? I was serious. I'm having your husband court marshaled for indecent actions towards my wife. I've already had him removed from the base. Have you spoken to your husband?

She shakes her head.

CAROL

He hasn't called me...I don't really know where he is.

SERGEANT OLIVIER

Well. Mrs. Andrews, you'll have to contact your family and find somewhere to stay soon. They'll be moving you out as well.

CAROL

I don't have any family.

SERGEANT OLIVIER

I can have someone come help you to pack. Hopefully your husband will contact you soon.

Carol curls up as if struck.

SERGEANT OLIVIER (CONT'D)

Ma'am?

CAROL

My stomach...cramps.

SERGEANT OLIVIER

Mrs. Andrews, do you need to see a doctor?

CAROL

I've had them all day.

Sergeant Olivier takes her by the arm and leads her to his car.

SERGEANT OLIVIER

I'd better take you to the hospital.

Carol starts to cry as he helps her into the car.

CAROL
I'm so sorry. I shouldn't do this
to you.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. STATE UNIVERSITY MAIN OFFICE

An average university campus filled with students and faculty. It is a busy weekend; Carol and Alice are in the back of the line full of an ASSORTMENT OF PEOPLE (all ages).

ALICE
This doesn't look like a private
open house.

CAROL
A lot of students show up to open
house. No problem.

ALICE
Hah. More like we're all audition
for the Next Model Student.

Carol shuffles her purse from hand to hand while staring past the others in line to the front door.

CAROL
We're almost there...just a few
more people.

ALICE
I'm not going on some stupid tour.
Can't we just talk to some one and
go? I should get the car
permanantly for having to even be
here. You never should have looked
in my bag to begin with.

CAROL
Is it too much to ask that you wait
in line with your mother for a
tour? I would have killed to be
here when I was your age.

Alice picks at the brick wall beside them.

ALICE
Well, I didn't get knocked up.

FLASHBACK:

INT. YOUNG CAROL'S SMALL APARTMENT

Matthew (early twenties) stands in YOUNG CAROL'S kitchen, pacing back and forth. Young Carol blocks the play pen where TODDLER ALICE plays from his sight.

MATTHEW

You gotta believe I didn't mean to leave you and the baby behind, sweetie. I had to leave before they tossed me out. You know that.

Young Carol draws in a sharp breath as he moves closer to them.

YOUNG CAROL

You left me with nothing but a baby and an empty house.

Alice gargles and giggles behind her, drawing Matthew's attention.

MATTHEW

Is that...is that her? Let me see her?

Young Carol ducks around and pulls Alice into her arms. Alice, startled, starts to hiccup, the precursor to her cries. Carol bounces her on her hip.

YOUNG CAROL

I don't think you should.

MATTHEW

Come on, Carol. She's my daughter.

Matthew crosses the distance between them and pulls Alice from her arms. Young Carol nibbles at her nails as he juggles Alice roughly in his arms. Alice begins to whimper and then cry.

YOUNG CAROL

Careful, Matthew. Please.

MATTHEW

What's wrong with this kid? What kind of kid cries when you hold them?

YOUNG CAROL

Matthew, just give her back.

Matthew starts to shake Alice, gently at first and then harder as the child's cries grow louder. Young Carol cringes as Alice's head flops back and forth.

YOUNG CAROL

Stop it, damn it.

She snatches Alice from him, holding her close.

YOUNG CAROL (CONT'D)

Get out, Matthew. We don't need you.

Matthew backs away to the door as Carol advances.

YOUNG CAROL (CONT'D)

All you want is someone to take care of you and I'm sick of it. Where were you when I needed help?

MATTHEW

Baby, I didn't mean it.

He stands in the doorway. Carol kicks the door shut.

YOUNG CAROL

Just get out.

She struggles to sooth the now screaming Alice as her own nerves sing.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. STATE UNIVERSITY MAIN OFFICE

Carol sucks in a breath and turns her back to the teen.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Did you hear what I said? I said at least I didn't- People in front of them start to stare, turning around.

CAROL

(low and angry) I heard you. I think we all heard you. I get it. I never should have had you. I should have kept my legs shut. But you know what? I got married, I thought, hey, I'm from a fucked-up family but maybe, just maybe I can show this baby the love I wanted.

ALICE

Carol...

CAROL

(interrupts) She'll get so many different things that I never had with a dead beat dad and a mom who drank more than she cooked. I'd work any job, I'd even strip for her. Hooter's, that's a walk in the park. I've got the tits for it. And it'll all matter in the end because I loved her.

Alice grabs at Carol's purse strap.

ALICE

Mom, that's not what I meant.

CAROL

No, you did mean it. I'm a horrible mother to you. I guess I didn't do the things I needed for you but at least I tried. You should have never been.

Alice slowly lets her mother's purse strap go. She pulls back away from her mother, as far apart as she can get while waiting in the line.

CAROL (CONT'D)

Just do the damn tour and we'll go home. I'm sick of this shit.

ALICE

Fine.

INT. STATE UNIVERSITY MAIN OFFICE

A few chairs line the room along with generic plastic plants and pamphlets marked State U is the right one for U. Carol pushes through the CROWD (all ages) that linger in chairs and around the front desk. A SECRETARY (60s) glances up as Carol approaches, looking down through her glasses to the end of her nose.

CAROL

Excuse me...

The secretary ignores her, flipping through the files on her desk. Carol pulls on the hem of her red dress and fluffs her hair.

CAROL (CONT'D)

Excuse me, my daughter's here for her tour today.

The secretary waves her hand at the chairs and goes back to the files, ticking off lines with a red pen. Carol slaps her hand down on the counter. The SLAP startles the secretary, who slashes a red line across the document.

CAROL (CONT'D)

Listen, I've brought my brat of a daughter all the way here for the tour. Where do I need to go?

Alice quietly slips behind her mother, pulling her first gently, and then firmly from the counter.

ALICE

Give it up, Carol. We have to wait in line like everyone else.

CAROL

We came here like everyone else, we deserve the same treatment.

SECRETARY

They all have an appointment so you'll just have to wait.

Carol pushes herself away from the desk and storms over to one of the chairs. She plops down, pulling her cigarettes from out of her pocket.

CAROL

It would have been better if I'd just went to work today instead of this.

Alice sats down next to her, crossing her arms.

ALICE

You know what I thought about it.

CAROL

Shut up.

ALICE

So the daughter replaces the mother.

Carol sticks a cigarette into her mouth and lights it.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Carol, no.

CAROL

If I have to wait, I'm going to enjoy it.

ALICE

You were supposed to have quit. Remember, I did better in school—you quit.

CAROL

That was before you got yourself expelled the last time. Now I feel like I'm entitled to it.

The secretary behind the desk sniffs and glares in their direction. Alice slides further down in her seat.

ALICE

Mom.

CAROL

I can smoke if I damn well please.

The secretary begins to stand.

ALICE

(hissing) She's coming over here. You're going to get us thrown out.

CAROL

So? You don't care. Who needs college right? You can just come work with me—we'd make good mother/daughter team.

ALICE

Not what I had in mind.

She yanks the cigarette out of Carol's hand and tosses it into the potted plant beside them. A little stream of smoke starts to rise from the pot.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Shit.

The secretary storms over.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Double shit.

SECRETARY

Perhaps you two should wait
outside?

Carol pushes herself to her feet, yanking at the hem of her
dress.

CAROL

We have every right to be waiting
in here.

The crowd around them start waving and pointing at the pot,
which has small flames reaching out.

ALICE

Mom.

SECRETARY

I think you had better leave.

The secretary then notices the fire and scurries away,
returning with a fire extinguisher. She sprays the entire
area, including Alice and Carol.

ALICE

Mom, we're going.

EXT. STATE UNIVERSIT PARKING LOT

Carol and Alice stand in the rain outside the car while they
dig through Carol's purse for the keys. Covered in foam and
drenched in the rain, neither seem particularly happy.

Carol opens her door and jumps in, slamming the door.

Alice pulls on the handle. Nothing.

ALICE

Carol?

Carol ignores her, cranking the engine.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Mom, please?

Alice bangs on the window.

Carol looks at her blankly.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. MILITARY BASE: HOUSING DISTRICT

Younger Carol stands in the open door to her assigned living quarters. From the door we see that everything gone, the furniture, the clothes, all of the things we might find in the home.

In the center of the room is a box labeled Baby Things.

It is the only thing Young Carol has left. She glances down in her arms to the her newborn, YOUNG ALICE.

Crossing the room to the box she falls to her knees, sobbing into her chest as the Young Alice pulls at her hair.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. STATE UNIVERSITY PARKING LOT

Carol leans over, ignoring Alice, and unlocks the door. Alice hops in.

ALICE

She was just an asshole.

CAROL

Alice, don't use that language.

ALICE

God, would you stop trying to get me to be you? We're never going to be perfect. We're losers.

Carol backs the car slowly out of the lot.

CAROL

We're going to have to move soon.

ALICE

Because of the bills.

CAROL

No, because I won the lottery and we finally can afford that mansion we always wanted.

Alice rolls her eyes and flips the radio station on. They drive on in silence for a few moments. Alice leans her forehead against the window.

ALICE

Maybe I could try a few classes

over at the community center over
the summer

CAROL
Do what you want.

ALICE
Carol.

CAROL
I almost thought we would work. But
it wasn't you that got us thrown
out. It was me. Me and my fucking
cigarette.

Alice clicks off the radio.

ALICE
I don't care about my dad.

Carol shakes her head. Alice shifts so that she can reach
into her jean pocket. She fishes out a wrinkled letter and
tosses it on the dash.

ALICE (CONT'D)
Why didn't you tell me?

Carol reaches towards her pack of cigarettes and hesitates
before putting her hand back onto the wheel.

CAROL
He has nothing to do with us.

ALICE
I know. But still-

CAROL
(interrupts) He left us. He left
you. He's never seen you.

Alice draws her knees up until her feet rest on the dash.

ALICE
Then why now?

CAROL
I don't know. Guilt? Mid-life
crisis? All I know is that he
hasn't been there. You're my child,
Alice. Mine.

She slams her hands down onto the wheel.

ALICE
I know, Mom.

CAROL
No, you don't. I want everything
for you. I'd do anything for you.

Carol glances back at the cigarettes again. She grabs the pack. Ignoring the rain, Carol rolls the window down and chucks the pack out.

CAROL (CONT'D)
I promise you if you want to read
that letter I won't stop you. If
that's what you want.

ALICE
I don't want to.

They drive on in silence, Alice ignoring the letter on the dashboard.

EXT. DRIVEWAY, RAINY

They pull into the driveway some time later.

ALICE
You didn't make a mistake.

CAROL
What?

ALICE
I'm glad you had me.

CAROL
You're welcome.

ALICE
I don't hate you.

Alice yanks the door open and races into the house.

CAROL
Brat.

INT. CAROL'S BEDROOM, NEXT MORNING

Carol looks through her window at her yard. In her hand is the letter. She glances down at it and drops it silently back into the trash can.

Dirt Church

EXT. OVERGROWN BACKYARD: SUNNY DAY

A barn tilts at the edge of the weed infested, overturned dirt. A tree stretches over a small hill between the house and the barn. The hill approaches closer, close enough so that we can see clumps of vibrant red mud flying into the air. The clumps land in a loud SPLAT.

EXT. LARGE HOLE IN THE GROUND.

A chipped shovel dips in and out of the hole. JACOB (13-16) stamps down on the top of the shovel, forcing it deeper into the mud. He is covered in bits of grass, dirt, and mud. A solemn and determined boy about to bridge the gap into young adulthood. An imprint of sadness stays in his face throughout, never truly lifting even when he smiles. He lets another clump fly up above him. A SHOUT startles him. He drops the shovel and looks up.

EXT. OVERGROWN BACKYARD: SUNNY DAY

TIFFANY (13-16) hovers over the hole, looking down. She is dressed in her Sunday best and clenches a pure white bible in her hands.

TIFFANY

What are you doing?

EXT. LARGE HOLE IN THE GROUND.

Jacob shrugs and turns back to his shovel, picking off gobs of mud that clings to the metal and dropping it at her feet.

TIFFANY (O.S)

(annoyed) Your mama sent us
out here to find you. Daddy is
inside with her.

Jacob grimaces and pushes the shovel into the dirt so that it stands on its own.

EXT. OVERGROWN BACKYARD: SUNNY DAY

Jacob gingerly pulls himself out of the hole and flops on the grass.

TIFFANY

Whatever possessed you to do that?
Your mama is going to die when I
tell her where I found you. Digging
in the dirt like a heathen.

Tiffany frowns, picking at an invisible thread on the hem of her dress.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)

You nearly got nasty dirt all over my Church dress.

JACOB

Oh, shut up Tiff. That's your old one anyway-the one you bragging about giving away to charity when you're done with it.

TIFFANY

Sunday school is sacred. You shouldn't denounce what I've said or done in our time with the lord.

Jacob laughs, a deep, throaty laugh like a man.

JACOB

I'm not one bit of mean. I'm only reacting to you.

Tiffany rolls her eyes and stomps away from the hole towards the house.

GEORGE (O.S.)

Phew, the coast is clear.

GEORGE (early 40s, late 30s) emerges from the hole. At first he appears to be a normal middle aged man, wearing jeans and a flannel shirt. He's scruffy but not overly so. When the sunlight hits him the woods are visible through him.

Jacob snorts.

JACOB

It's not like she would even see you, Dad.

George smiles.

GEORGE

Gotta love God to see me.

FLASHBACK

INT. GEORGE'S CAR: ONE YEAR AGO

George sits in the driver's seat, impatiently honking the horn at a stalled car in front of him. Jacob sits in the back, a book in his lap. He tilts it towards him and sighs, revealing Chinese writing and a vibrant dragon on the cover.

JACOB

Hey, Dad? Do you remember that time I tried to talk you into digging a hole in the back yard? Remember? That older kid on the bus said you could make it to China that way. How come we never started that?

George punches at the numbers on his Blackberry impatiently, jamming at the keypad while keeping one eye on the road. He ignores Jacob. George looks much different than the earlier scenes. He has his hair slicked back and a striped grey suit on, the tie knotted dangerously close to his Adam's apple.

Jacob is dressed for school, his backpack at his feet.

JACOB

Dad? Dad? Why haven't we started that yet? You said we would when I was a kid. Might be cool.

George honks his horn again, slamming his fist into the dash. Jacob jumps.

GEORGE

Jacob, I am seriously late for my meeting and you should have been at school an hour ago. Do we really need to talk about this now?

JACOB

But you do this every time. You say we're going to do something and then you back out. You wouldn't even have taken me to school today if I hadn't missed the bus.

Jacob kicks at his bag and glares at George's head.

GEORGE

Don't you think it's about time you learn to act like a man? Digging holes and whining like a child will get you nowhere. Just like missing this meeting will get me out of a job.

Jacob wilts back into his seat.

GEORGE

Oh, screw it.

George signals and floors it around the stalled car, startling the PASSENGERS(various) beside it.

JACOB

DAD?

George swerves as an oncoming car appears in his lane.

Metal and steels crunches as the two cars hit together.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. OVERGROWN BACKYARD: SUNNY DAY

He attempts to pat Jacob on the shoulder but his hand passes through. A dark look crosses their faces.

JACOB

You can't even touch me today?

GEORGE

Guess not, son.

JACOB

Getting closer?

GEORGE

Yeah.

Jacob kicks at the dirt that litters the ground around the hole.

JACOB

We're never going to finish it, are we?

GEORGE

No. I promised you that we would dig this hole. I'm going to finish that promise.

JACOB

I was ten. You told me I could make it to China if I tried hard enough.

GEORGE

But you pestered and pestered me about "How would you do it, Daddy? How do I build it so it doesn't fall down?"

George shades his eyes with his hand and glances over at the house.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Your mama home with her new beau?

JACOB

Yeah. The bastard.

GEORGE

Jacob. I taught you better than that. She's happy. That's what counts.

JACOB

But you're still here. She shouldn't be..be..eating supper with another man!

George sighs. He goes over to stand next to his son. Jacob blinks back tears.

GEORGE

Only you can really see me, son. You've got a touch more than anyone else. Your mama doesn't want to see me nor need to. You're the one that needs me.

Jacob snarls, a noise that startles George.

JACOB

Then why aren't you here? Why aren't you keeping that..that..ass from moving into our lives, our house?

George shrugs.

GEORGE

It's not my time anymore. It's yours. And I'm beginning to think I've over-stayed my welcome here.

Jacob shakes his head.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

There's that gal again, Tiffany? She's looking hotter around the ears than she did before.

JACOB

Don't go, Dad.

George frowns.

GEORGE

I have to, son, I thought you knew that.

Jacob picks up the shovel and throws it down into the hole.

JACOB

Then get the hell back down there.
I don't care.

George slowly pulls himself back down into the hole.

GEORGE

Yes, you do.

FLASHBACK:

INT. BARNHOUSE'S LIVING ROOM: ONE YEAR AGO

George lies in state as VISITORS (various) mill around the coffin. JOAN (30s) stands, occasionally speaking with visitors as she scans the room for Jacob, who appears to be hiding. Joan is elegant and quietly dressed. Her face reflects the hard times, although laugh lines are still peeking from the corner of her eyes.

She catches Jacob's attention finally and beckons her towards him. He refuses, dashing out of the door as Joan watches, helpless.

JOAN

Jacob Lee?

JACOB (O.S.)

I hate him, Mom. I hate him.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. OVERGROWN BACKYARD: SUNNY DAY

Jacob stays silent for a moment. He watches Tiffany stumble across the yard in her ridiculous heels.

TIFFANY

Your mama says it isn't funny anymore. She says that digging that hole is morbid. Daddy said he'd come out and yank you inside but I said it wasn't Christian to do that and offered to get you. So are you coming inside or what?

JACOB

Yeah, I'm coming.

EXT. BACK PORCH: SUNNY DAY

Joan and THOMAS (40s) sit on a wicker bench watching as Tiffany and Jacob walk across the yard back towards the house. They see Jacob glance back several times towards the large hole dug into the hillside. Thomas looks much harsher and stiffly put together, sitting straighter than an arrow in his seat. Neither are affectionate with each other. They sit close but not touching on the wicker bench.

JOAN

I don't have any idea what has gotten into him.

THOMAS

He needs a man around to put him in the right direction. He needs the Lord to show him a better path.

JOAN

(hesitant) I know, Reverend. That's why I'm glad that you and Tiffany have chosen to spend so much time with us since...since his father passed last year.

Joan waves at Jacob. She frowns when he doesn't wave back.

THOMAS

There is something I want to ask you, Mrs. Joan.

JOAN

Yes?

Thomas scoots slightly closer.

THOMAS

Tiffany has reached that age where she needs another woman to talk to, to provide her with things I cannot. Since my dear wife passed shortly before your husband, I've had time to think about this.

Joan coughs, covering her mouth to disguise a laugh. She waves again at Jacob in a "hurry up" motion.

JOAN

Well, she is certainly welcome to come over and talk to me as much as she may need.

THOMAS

That's..not quite what I meant,
Mrs. Joan. I know that your boy
there needs a father.

JOAN

(flatly) He had a father.

FLASHBACK:

INT. JOAN AND GEORGE'S BEDROOM: ONE YEAR BEFORE

Joan paces in front of the bed where George sits, appearing slightly dejected and angry at the same time. His phone goes off every few seconds, constantly interrupting them.

JOAN

You have got to spend more time
with him. I spoke with the teacher
today and she said he spends most
of his time alone outside of class.
He always has the damn book you
bought him with him everywhere.

George huffs and darts his eyes towards his phone, which lights up almost on cue.

GEORGE

I do spend time with him. But with
the merger-

JOAN

The merger, the merger. If I hear
one more time about the freaking
merg-

George suddenly stands.

GEORGE

That merger will give us the money
for this house that you wanted to
buy. It's ninety minutes away from
his school and work. I have to drive
everywhere.

JOAN

Don't change the subject. We both
wanted a more peaceful place to
live, one where Jacob could get out
more.

Joan pokes her finger into his chest as she says "We".

GEORGE

Don't do that and quit interrupting me.

George pushes her hand away.

JOAN

God, George, what do you want?
You're never here. Always gone.
Your phone is your family more than we are.

George shakes his head.

GEORGE

I'll take the kid to school tomorrow, how about that? We can talk along the way.

Joan purses her lips and nods. She picks up his phone and hands it to him.

JOAN

Alright. Just leave that here, please? Pay attention to your son.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. BACK PORCH: SUNNY DAY, PRESENT

Thomas stands, walking in front of the bench in a jerky, nervous manner. Joan struggles to see around him, watching for the children. Jacob and Tiffany have stopped about half-way and are haven't a fervent argument full of waving arms and pointed fingers. Joan sighs.

THOMAS

I would like to provide him with that.

JOAN

I already did. That's how he arrived nine months after the date, Reverend.

THOMAS

(unaware) I would like to provide you with protection as well. A pretty young woman like yourself needs a man around.

JOAN

It's a shame I'm much older than young. That might make sense. Reverend?

Jacob and Tiffany finally reach the steps.

THOMAS

I would hope that you knew the affection I have for you and your son.

JOAN

Reverend?

THOMAS

I would like to ask, truthfully, in the name of the Lord, that you might-

JOAN

(interrupts) REVEREND! Jacob, sweetie. Come here.

Jacob wanders over and plops down next to Joan, who immediately begins to fuss with his hair and clothes. Tiffany glances at her and then her father, who appears to be growing a deep violet the longer he is quiet.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I thank you both for coming over but I believe Jacob and I have a few things we need to do today. Like filling in that hole.

Joan glances pointedly at her son, who sighs and stretches.

JACOB

Gee, Tiff. Sure you don't want to help us? Tiffany glares.

THOMAS

We would feel obligated to help you out in your time of need, Mrs. Joan.

JOAN

Well, I don't think there is a particular need, Reverend. We've got all we need between the two of us.

Thomas wrings his hands and shoves them back into his pockets.

THOMAS

If you feel that way...Tiffany, I believe it's about time to head home.

JOAN

But Reverend?

THOMAS

Yes, Joan?

JOAN

I believe Amelia Bank was just mentioning at Church the other day that she may need some help around her house. Said she hadn't had solid help since her son went into service.

Thomas nods. Jacob coughs and hides a laugh, much like his mother before him.

THOMAS

Yes. Yes.

He gestures for Tiffany to follow him. Joan and Jacob watch as they get into their car and drive back down the long driveway in front of their house.

JACOB

I hope that's the last we see of that ol' bastard.

JOAN

Jacob Lee!

Joan stands and swats Jacob on the head as she reaches for the door into the house.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Let me change and we'll clean up that hole you've dug in my yard.

EXT. LARGE HOLE IN THE GROUND.

Moments later, Jacob and Joan are slowly but surely shoveling dirt back into the hole. Jacob feels a soft breeze drift past him and a soft but firm pat on his shoulder.

GEORGE

Looks like the ol' bastard's gone.

Jacob nods.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

I didn't think your mother would fall for the flowers and Christianity act. It took more than that for me to get her. She looks great.

A breeze ruffles Joan's hair.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

I don't think I should be coming back any time soon. Maybe we should wait for a better time?

Jacob nods again. George slowly starts to fade into the dimming, afternoon light.

JACOB

Love you, Dad.

GEORGE

You too, son.

As George fades completely we see Joan shiver slightly. She glances at Jacob with an odd look on her face.

JOAN

You looked just like your father for a second. Now hurry up. I want this done before dinner.

Jacob starts back in, shoveling dirt back into the hole. A clump of dirt hits him in the face, causing him to sputter. Joan's laughter fills the air. She tosses another one at him that he dodges.

JACOB

Mama!

JOAN

Dirt doesn't hurt remember? God made it.

JACOB

Then you're in for a blessing.

Joan hoots with laughter and tosses down the shovel. They face off, clumps of dirt in their hands. George appears for a brief moment beside the hole, shaking his head as the sun drops down behind him.

EXT. LARGE HOLE IN THE GROUND: EVENING

As the daylight slowly fades, Jacob stands with his mother beside him. The hole is nearly full now. Jacob holds in his hand the book from before, well worn and loved.

He bends down and slowly digs a smaller hole in the dirt with his hands. Placing the book inside, he gently pats the dirt back down around it.

Once he is finished, Joan pulls him to her. Jacob allows her to hug him for a minute before pulling away and marching back towards the house.

Found Objects

INT. BROWN NARROW HALL

The floor appears to have a thin layer of dust on it, with spots like footprints at intervals. The walls and floors speed past suddenly, as the scene zooms outward. The narrow hall is then revealed to be:

INSERT:

A wooden shelf, built into four tiers of squares, each square containing an odd object or knickknack. On closer inspection, the footprints are fingerprints in the dust.

END INSERT.

As the scene expands, we see a rocking chair beneath the shelf, idly rocking in place. Someone has just left the chair, o.s. There is a bag of knitting beside the chair, with needles sticking out that shine and flicker in the moving sunlight. We HEAR wind chimes; a low HUMMING drifts in between the notes, soothing.

INT. METAL BASIN

Brown, lined hands twist and turn as the skin of a red apple curls between them into the metal basin below. The peel twirls beneath the practiced hands. We follow the lines of the hands to the sleeves of a well worn housecoat in blue paisley. From there we emerge into:

INT. BRICK KITCHEN

A well-lived in kitchen, the walls are whitewashed brick, with cast iron pans hung on nails along the wall. The white Formica table tilts slightly to the right, held up by the wall on the far right. CECELIA (late 80's) stands at the left of the table, stooped over the sink. The ingredients of a perfect apple pie are lined up meticulously beside her. She seems rushed, as her hands tremble slightly.

INSERT:

Brown hands shift the slices of apple back and forth in a red ceramic bowl. Butter and sugar tint the slices golden yellow. The HUMMING increases, tunelessly.

END INSERT.

Cecelia places the bowl carefully on the counter, wiping her hands between the folds of her housecoat. She shakes her head, squinting at the large clock on the wall.

CECELIA

Just don't have enough time before
that child gets here.

She carefully wraps a white cloth around the top of the bowl, covering its contents. Another bowl, same as the first, is quickly placed in the fridge. As the clock chimes, Cecelia shakes her head again.

CECELIA (CONT'D)

Just never the time for anything
that I want, that's sure.

Slices will brown before the child's done. We hear a brisk knock at the door, followed by three in rapid succession.

CECELIA (CONT'D)

She sure isn't patient, is she? I'm
coming.

EXT. FRONT DOOR

A green door surrounded by a broken down screened porch. The porch is covered in dead or dying plants, despite the bright sunlight and the various watering cans spread throughout.

CATELIN(early 20s) stands in front of the door. Pale and willowy, she appears to have been protected and guided all her life. A bag rests across her shoulders, weighing her down. She raises her hand to knock again, when the door opens abruptly.

CATELIN

Mrs. Perkins?

She hesitates for a moment before stepping through the crack in the door, snagging her bag. The door claps shut behind Catelin, making her jump.

INT. SMALL FRONT ROOM

Cecelia stands, unabashed, and waits until Catelin has resettled herself.

CECELIA

You'll want to leave that bag
there. Won't be needing much for
this besides your brain and a
pencil.

Catelin pulls from her bag a small recorder, its light blinking manically. Cecelia peers at it for a moment through her glasses, then back at Catelin.

CECELIA (CONT'D)

All right then, use it.

Catelin shrugs her bag down and starts to take a seat in the sitting area. Cecelia hums at her.

CECELIA (CONT'D)

And you'll be wanting to leave those shoes off your feet at the door. I like to keep my rooms nice.

Catelin flushes and toes her shoes delicately off, one by one. She clasps the recorder in her lap carefully. Cecelia sits down in the rocking chair across from her, the bag of knitting in her lap, the shelf of squares behind her head.

CATELIN

Mrs. Perkins, I just need you to state your full name and age so that I can verify the tape.

CECELIA

Verify?

CATELIN

Prove that it was you that recorded it.

Cecelia snorts.

CECELIA

But you the one doing all the work. I just sit here and talk.

Catelin coughs, tucking one leg neatly across the other.

CATELIN

Please.

CECELIA

Fine. My name is Mrs. Cecelia Perkins. I am 104 years old.

CATELIN

Thank you. Let me start this interview by saying congratulations. How's it feel to be the oldest resident of Newridge?

Cecelia hums and starts the rocking back and forth. The CREAKING runs in tandem with Catelin's words, a fact that annoys her.

CATELIN (CONT'D)

Mrs. Perkins? Could I ask you to stop that? It destroys the quality of the tape.

CECELIA

Child, it's my home. I'll do what I like. Where you from?

CATELIN

I don't see how that matters.

CECELIA

You from around here you'd know that I'm not that old. Just not dead. This here is a small city. Everyone knows everyone.

The CREAKING slows slightly as Catelin purses her lips. Her grip tightens on the recorder.

CATELIN

So how does it feel?

CECELIA

Don't matter how it feels. Just what it means.

Catelin blinks rapidly before clearing her throat in short, bursting hiccups.

CATELIN

How did you do it, though? Survive all this time, healthy and sane? Did you exercise, or eat right?

CECELIA

If by exercise, you mean raise children, then you're right 'bout that. But that's not important. What's important is I wasn't waiting to live. I was waiting to die.

Catelin chokes suddenly, the recorder bouncing to the floor. She scrambles to pick it up and compose herself, under Cecelia's watchful gaze. Catelin rubbed the bridge of her nose.

CATELIN

So you'd rather be dead?

CECELIA

No, now that's not what I said.
I've been waiting for death, not
asking for it.

CATELIN

Oh, this is just great.

Catelin fidgets with the recorder, rolling the volume button
up and down with the edge of her thumb.

CECELIA

I'm surprised you haven't asked me
why? Smart white girl like you
would never be waiting on him,
that's for sure.

Cecelia stands slowly, revealing a lot more effort than
before. She reaches up to the shelf, taking down a small
fountain pen.

CECELIA (CONT'D)

Have you ever noticed how well
objects can become a part of their
owners? Like God just decided to
give you your whole life's meaning
in that one thing, telling you just
what you need to know.

Catelin sniffs, plucking at the battery cover on the back of
the recorder.

CATELIN

I don't think God meant for people
to die. He meant for them to live.

CECELIA

Hush, you're not listening. Let
that talking box do its work.

She slowly climbs back into her rocking chair, the fountain
pen held up in front of her like a pendant. Cecelia and
Catelin stare at it for a moment, before the young girl
glances away.

CATELIN

Objects aren't anything more than
what you do with them.

CECELIA

Well, at least now I know you've
got some sense. I knew that too.
What I'm talking about is that
piece of something that you leave

behind in a favorite thing. You become so attached that you leave a little bit behind, really. Like you linger on.

Catelin shivers for a moment, rubbing at the goosebumps on her arms.

CATELIN

What does all that have to do with that old pen? Cecelia sighs deeply, collapsing further into the chair.

CECELIA

It means that I am going to give you a story. Just not the one you expected I'd do.

INSERT:

A grey fountain pen, permanently stained with the ink prints of a careful, steady hand. The light reflects on it, making the marbled prints begin to move. As the movement speeds up, the light changes.

END INSERT.

FLASHBACK:

INT. SMALL FRONT ROOM, 50 YEARS AGO

HAROLD (early 30's) leans over the rickety desk as it shakes with each one of his pen strokes. We see the same fountain pen as before, though slightly newer, in his left hand. He murmurs to himself and angrily rips the paper from the pad, tossing it onto the floor.

HAROLD

Damn ending just won't come out right. Articles never write themselves anymore. Balls of paper litter the floor in a layer around the sofa, desk and rocking chair. Leaning against the wall next to the rocking chair is a brand new shelf, built into small squares of four in a row.

As Harold struggles over his work, YOUNG CECELIA (early 30's) remains silent in the doorway, waiting for the right moment to approach. She is undeniably pregnant, her small cotton dress and blue paisley apron stretching against her growing stomach. She wrestles with the end of her apron, waving a breeze.

CECELIA

Harold? Why don't you put that down and come into the kitchen? I have some of your favorites ready.

HAROLD

It's too damn hot for apple pie, Cecie.

She smooths a protective hand down her belly, earning a hardened glance from Harold.

CECELIA

Good food means a good baby. I want sweets for a sweet is all.

HAROLD

I haven't got the time. If I don't get this piece down to the office on time for once, the boss will give me the boot. Our little "sweet" won't have a home then.

Harold rubs the palms of his hands against his eyes, wincing. Cecelia leaves her vigil at the doorway and comes behind Harold, rubbing his shoulders firmly. Harold leans into her, relaxing.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

I just don't know how we're going to make it, baby. I've got no time for the extra work we need to fix up this dump, take care of the new baby.

CECELIA

It'll work out, Harold. It always does. We couldn't have planned for this anyway, the new baby, or the overtime. At least you'll have the cash coming to you. That's one stress we don't have.

Harold LAUGHS, a deep hearty laugh that echoes throughout the room. Cecelia joins him, a CHIMING bell. She HUMS a lullaby in his ear, tickling him.

HAROLD

You're always a glass half filled, aren't you, Cecie Perkins?

Cecelia shook her head, standing back up, her hands firmly

on her hips.

CECELIA

Someone's gotta be around this place. Otherwise we'd never have sweet food or good laughter. It'd be an empty room, filled with things.

Harold slipped his fountain pen into the pocket of his shirt. He stands up, smirking.

HAROLD

I wouldn't have it any other way. It wouldn't be the same.

He winces suddenly, rubbing his left arm. Cecelia drops her act, taking his hand.

CECELIA

What's wrong, Harold? Your heartburn back?

HAROLD

My arm's numb. Must have been leaning on the pen too hard. You're right, Cecie, you always are. I need a break.

Cecelia smiles uncertainly.

CECELIA

I have that pie if you want it. Are you sure you shouldn't lie down?

HAROLD

I'll be fine. I'll take a break with you, then come back to this article.

Harold places a large, spread hand across her belly.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

I'm not the one that needs to be taking care of themselves anyhow.

Cecelia places her hand over his, her belly making it difficult to lean forward and place a kiss on his cheek.

CECELIA

Come on. It's waiting for us in the kitchen.

She turns from him, his hand falling softly from her belly.

INT. KITCHEN DOOR WAY-50 YEARS AGO

She makes it to the kitchen before an loud CRASH startles her. She grabs her belly.

CECELIA

Harold? Harold, are you all right?
The fountain pen rolls across the
floor, bumping against her feet.

Cecelia finds herself glued to the ground, the fountain pen next to her. She stares through the doorway into:

INT. KITCHEN-50 YEARS AGO

The room is virtually the same as it will be. The table is set carefully, the centerpiece a steaming apple pie with gold juices dripping down its sides. Cecelia spies a MAN (early twenties) in the corner of the kitchen, a fedora shading his face from her sight. He is cast in shadows and carefully dressed in a simple black suit and tie.

CECELIA

Who the hell are you? HAROLD?

END FLASHBACK.

INT. SMALL FRONT ROOM- MODERN DAY

Cecelia and Catelin stare across the room at each other, as Cecelia pauses in her tale, rolling the fountain pen between her fingers, woolgathering.

CATELIN

So you lost your husband? Who was
the man in the black suit?

CECELIA

Child, some answers just don't fit..
I know that it wasn't my Harold
there..his heart attack claimed him
the moment he fell to the floor.
Harold would have never worn a suit
during his eternal rest anyway. Too
much like work. You want some
lemonade?

Catelin blinks and stares down at her hands. The recorder's light is dark, signaling a need for batteries.

CATELIN

Please?

She places the recorder back into her bag, zipping it shut.

FLASHBACK:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM-50 YEARS AGO

A barren room, with a single night stand and metal bed. A plain white curtain surrounds the bed; it's pulled back at this point to reveal a pale Cecelia, resting in the bed. There are no flowers, no get well cards. A single bag sits next to her bed. Cecelia moans, clasping her belly, which pushes the blanket up. The Man stands solemnly in the corner of the room across from her, next to the door. He does not speak, his eyes covered by the fedora.

CECELIA

I know you're there, you suit. I can feel you. Why? He was young, younger than most men. He had a job, a family.

The Man ignores her, tilting his head towards the door as if listening.

CECELIA (CONT'D)

I've got a child with no father, you rat bastard. You understand that? I know who you are.

The door opens, hiding the man from view for a moment. A NURSE bustles in, carrying a tray. She carefully sets it down on the night stand, pulling the covers tightly around Cecelia, who struggles with her.

NURSE

Now, honey, stop. The doctor said you needed to rest comfortably. You'll be just fine if you do.

The door slowly swings back, revealing the Man. Cecelia struggles with the Nurse more, frightening the woman.

CECELIA

shouting) You're not getting away with this. You're not. You took him, you coulda took me. You should have took me!

Cecelia pushes at the nurse, forcing her back from the bed. She tosses the blankets aside.

NURSE

Mrs. Perkins, please!

CECELIA

I know you. She points her shaking
finger at the man, who shows no
reaction.

INSERT:

We see a thin pair of lips beneath the brim of a hat. They
move to speak.

MAN

You'll wait.

END INSERT

CECELIA

What? Come here and let me tell you
something.

The Nurse forces Cecelia back into the bed.

NURSE

I need some help in here.

As Cecelia falls back onto the bed, her hands are covered in
blood. She cries, silently, as she clenches her belly. The
doctor and nurses rush in, taking over. The Man stands
beside her bedside, unseen by anyone but her. He places his
hands across her belly.

MAN

You'll wait.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. SMALL FRONT ROOM- MODERN DAY

Catelin stares down in her glass, glaring.

CATELIN

So he took your child too?

Cecelia nodded, rising from her seat. She and takes another
object down.

INSERT:

A glass vial, containing a few strands of dark, curly hair.

END INSERT.

Cecelia rolls the vial between her hands, just as the fountain pen before. She returns to the rocking chair, sighing as she sinks back.

CECELIA

Our baby girl keeps Harold company now, until I get there. Do you want any more to drink?

Catelin shakes her head, placing the glass down next to her feet.

CATELIN

May I see the vial?

She tightens her hold on the vial.

CECELIA

It's not anything against you. It's like your recorder, it can't be touched by just anyone.

Catelin stares down at her bag, pressing it against her feet.

CECELIA (CONT'D)

You can have it on, if you like.

CATELIN

It's not important right now. What did you do after that?

Cecelia slips the vial into her pocket, along with the fountain pen. Shaking her hand at the young woman, she gestures towards the kitchen door.

CECELIA

I've got some baking to finish. You can help while I finish the rest.

INT. KITCHEN

Moments later, Catelin is seated at the Formica table, crimping the edges of a pie crust with a fork. She is meticulously accurate. Cecelia rolls the dough out next to her, pressing down and swaying into the motion. She hums tunelessly, distracting Catelin.

CATELIN

With all these things that have happened to you, why last this long? I mean I'm sure there are ways for you-

CECELIA

It's not a Christian thing to do. It's never the right thing to do, child. You should always wait your turn.

Catelin pauses, her flinch ruining the edge of the crust. She toys with the edge, pushing the pieces back together.

CATELIN

But, I mean, what if that's your only opinion. What if you just can't see waiting as wise?

Cecelia stares down at her for a moment, before leaving the dough. She takes the bowl of apple slices, butter, and sugar from the fridge. Setting it down on the table, she huffs into the seat across from Catelin.

CECELIA

It's like this pie here. Without waiting for the moment, the crust won't be the right golden brown. The apple will be too soggy, or uncooked.

Catelin drops her fork, pushing the pie crust across the table towards Cecelia.

CATELIN

It's just the easy way out, isn't it? Jumping ahead of the line.

Cecelia nods. She carefully pours the contents of the bowl into the crust.

CECELIA

I knew that if I waited to make this, it wouldn't be good. I put myself into this pie and I leave a bit of me behind, just like my baby and husband did. I keep those things close to me, to keep them close to me.

CATELIN

I don't know what I'm going do
about this interview. My editor
won't believe me.

Cecelia lays the dough across the crust, slicing the
overhang and away and crimping the edges. She keeps her eyes
on her work as Catelin worries at her nails, biting the
tips.

CECELIA

Sometimes you find yourself waiting
without any effort because you know
that it's not the right thing,
child. You're smart. You don't need
some man in a black suit telling
you to wait.

CATELIN

And my reasons aren't as important
as losing family.

FLASHBACK:

EXT.FRONT YARD, DRIVEWAY, ONE HOUR BEFORE

Catelin sits in the front seat of her car, her bag tossed
beside her. She glances a few times at the mailbox, then the
address in her hands. Sighing, she rolls down the window and
leans out. The house seems dark and unkept.

Leaning back into her car, Catelin reaches over to the glove
box, flipping it open. A file folder falls out as she
shuffles through the items in her glovebox, finally coming
up with her recorder.

She slips it into her bag and glares down at the papers in
her floor board.

INSERT:

Medical files with the heading, Jackson, Catelin, across the
top of each page. In bold letters on the top page we see a
low t-cell count, and a percentage, 95%.

END INSERT.

Catelin's bag rattles as she picks it up. She reaches in and
tosses to the floor a few large pill bottles, all mostly
full. Hopping out of the car, she slams the door and races
across the yard.

END FLASHBACK.

Catelin stands up, taking the bowl from Cecelia.

Cecelia freezes.

Catelin has her back to the older woman, diligently scrubbing the bowl and rolling pin.

The Man has returned, standing by the fridge. He looms over Catelin's shoulder, shaking his head.

CATELIN

I FEEL better, just by being here,
knowing that I'm not the only one
that worries over death . Although,
I really think you were
hallucinating the man in the suit
though. It doesn't fit.

Cecelia rushes back against the table, shaking the pie on the table. It falls to the floor, spreading out in a pool of apple and butter. The SPLASH alerts Catelin, who turns around, startled.

CATELIN (CONT'D)

What's the matter, Mrs. Perkins?
Are you feeling well?

CECELIA

No, No, No.

CATELIN

Mrs. Perkins, it's just me.

Catelin holds her hands out towards Cecelia, who pushes them away. The Man watches them both carefully; he slowly takes off his fedora, revealing a slender, pale face with sharp, pointed features.

INSERT:

Two glowing eyes, white orbs, stare out. They are piercing, enchanting, and frightening.

END INSERT.

Catelin sees none of this. She continues to walk towards Cecelia, her hands out, entreating.

CATELIN

I want to help you, Mrs. Perkins,
but you have to tell me what is
going on. Are you ill?

CECELIA

He's here, child. What do you want,
you damn demon. Are you finally
here for me now?

The man sets his hat down on the table, leaning in towards
Cecelia.

A cool breeze lifts Cecelia and Catelin's hair and clothing.
Catelin shivers.

CATELIN

(panicked) What is going on?

CECELIA

Answer me for once, you bastard.
Are you taking me now, finally? My
patience is wearing thin.

The man shakes his head solemnly. He inclines his head
towards Catelin, who shivers again.

MAN

Wait.

CECELIA

I've waited fifty years.

He slowly places his hand on Catelin's shoulder. The young
girl freezes. Her eyes widen and skin pales as blood slowly
trickles from her nose and ears. She gasps and falls into
his arms.

CECELIA (CONT'D)

You're one evil son of a bitch, you
know that. I spent all afternoon
with this one, convincing her that
she needed to wait and you bump her
up in line?

The man slowly lowers Catelin to the ground, arranging her
in a sprawled position. He returns to Cecelia's side, taking
the fedora from the table and placing it down, low over his
brow. He winks.

MAN

Patience.

Cecelia shakes her fist at him, barely avoiding the spill in the kitchen.

CECELIA

It's my turn.

The man smiles, pointed teeth shining in the afternoon light.

CECELIA (CONT'D)

Don't smile at me, silly fool. This is one too many bodies that I have to explain.

She stoops over, pulling Catelin's in close to the girl's body. Ignoring the mess on the floor, she drags Catelin across the floor, to the cellar door.

INT. CELLAR

Catelin's body bounces as it hits each stair, causing Cecelia to curse and moan at each pull.

CECELIA

You'd think you'd help me. You never clean up your messes. All you ever want me to do is clean up otherwise you'll make me "wait" more right?

She reaches the bottom of the stairs, tossing Catelin on top of a fresh dirt pile. The shovel leans against the cinder block walls, mud and dirt clumps clinging to the metal. The Man sits on the stairs, watching as Cecelia digs down into the pile, until the tips of a pair of hands appear. She tosses Catelin on top, and starts to reshovel the dirt back on top.

CECELIA (CONT'D)

This really burns me. I've cleaned up after every mess you've made. The random relatives that had heart conditions, the odd repairman. But all you ever say is wait. Wait.

She pats the top of the pile with her shovel, smoothing the earth down until it appears undisturbed. The Man has moved again, watching Cecelia as she waves the shovel about.

CECELIA (CONT'D)

And it doesn't work when I try to jump the line either, now does it? Shot myself, bullet bounces off. Drowned, and I just drifted back to

shore. All you ever let me do is
age. And hide your mess so that I
don't get blamed for it.

He tips his hat to her, flourishing it towards the stairs.
Cecelia climbs them, stomping.

INT. KITCHEN

Cecelia returns and begins to clean up the mess across the
floor.

INT. KITCHEN DOOR WAY

Through the open door, she can see Catelin's bag. She takes
clothes from the counter and mops up the blood and spilled
pie. Tossing these into the trash can, she spies the Man
perched on top of the table.

CECELIA

You can't say anything? Not even a
wait?

The Man shakes his head, grabbing her attention.

CECELIA (CONT'D)

So you can?

MAN

You never asked me to. You've had
questions but not courtesy.

He hops down from the table, pulling his fedora up away from
his eyes. Cecelia flinches away.

CECELIA

If you could speak, then you have
no excuse. Making me wait for so
long.

The man drags a finger down her cheek. She shivers. The
light in the room darkens, shadowing the couple where they
stand.

MAN

I made you wait so that it will be
sweeter. Isn't that what you said
before. Sweet food and a good
laugh, right?

His voice is like molasses, dripping down. He hums as the
wind picks up outside, as the wind chimes shrill. Cecelia
turns back to the cellar, pulling away from him as he
follows her.

MAN (CONT'D)

You taste sweeter from the aging.

Cecelia hiccups, backing into the beginning of the staircase. She claws at the door frame, putting as much distance as she can between herself and the Man.

CECELIA

I've waited. I waited patiently. I don't understand why you look this way. You took everyone else as peacefully as you could.

MAN

I was biding my time for you, darling.

He presses her down, until her foot slips against the top stair. She tumbles down into the dark, o.s. He laughs, a deep throat, chilling sound. His feet smears the last bit of apple pie across the steps as he vanishes into the darkness of the stairs.

INT:CELLAR

The STOMPING as he enters the cellar echoes. Cecelia's body is crumbled at the end of the stair. He kneels beside her, placing a hand over her heart.

MAN

That is a good laugh.

INT: SMALL FRONT ROOM

INSERT:

Slim white hands dip into Catelin's bag. They reappear with her recorder in hand.

END INSERT.

The Man wanders over to the shelf of squares. He carefully places the recorder in one of the empty spots, whistling as he taps the rocking chair with his toes. The rocking chair rocks idly alone.