

Youthless

Written by

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INT. BEDROOM. DAY.

A woman's brightly manicured hands fill the frame. One hand maneuvers a cuticle trimmer around a piece of broken skin at the base of her thumbnail.

She cuts it too close and flinches. Blood fills in the outline of her thumbnail.

DUSTY

Shit.

DUSTY is closer to fifty than forty, a little too tan, with a head of perfectly dyed hair and a husky smoker's voice. She sits at a wicker vanity stocked with beauty supplies.

The bedroom is done up in floral patterns and lace. A gun rack hangs on the wall.

Dusty presses a tissue over her bleeding cuticle. She checks her face in a magnifying mirror—

Carefully applied make-up. Crow's feet. Fine lines.

She stands, straightens her brightly colored sundress, and slips on a pair of wedge heels.

INT. LIVING ROOM. DAY.

GENE, mid-fifties with a farmer's tan and mustache snores in a recliner. On the T.V. a man wearing a Tennessee Volunteers hat casts a fishing line into a lake.

Dusty walks briskly past him, picks up her purse and a Bible from a side table, and heads out the door.

INT. CAR. DAY.

Dusty drives a dilapidated Camry down a rural Southern road.

EXT. CHURCH. DAY.

The church is a boxy, modular building with no windows. Music wafts from the open door as congregants walk in.

Dusty parks in the back of the parking lot and walks toward the church.

INT. CHURCH. DAY.

Dusty sings along with a contemporary worship song, the lyrics projected above a simple stage at the front of the auditorium.

The congregants greet each other with handshakes and hugs. Dusty smiles gamely and returns their greetings.

Dusty puts a folded check into the offering plate and passes it on.

A young male PASTOR stands at the podium.

PASTOR

Now we have a special Mother's Day treat, Miss Kayla Tucker will do our scripture reading for today. If you brought your bibles go ahead and turn to Proverbs 31. Take it away, Kayla.

KAYLA, a girl of about ten years old, stands at the podium and begins to read. The words are too soft to hear at first, so the pastor steps up to point the mic down to her face. The congregation chuckles.

KAYLA

"An excellent wife who can find?
She is far more precious than
jewels.
The heart of her husband trusts in
her,
and he will have no lack of gain..."

Dusty looks around at her fellow church goers.

A YOUNG MOTHER corrects a squirming toddler. A man's arm rests on the back of the pew behind his well-dressed WIFE. A MIDDLE AGED WOMAN fans herself with the church bulletin, her gold jewelry catching the light.

KAYLA

"...She rises while it is yet night
and provides food for her
household..."

Dusty fusses with the broken skin on her cuticle.

KAYLA

"...Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:
'Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.'
Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.
Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates."

I love you, Mom!

The congregants laugh adoringly. Dusty smiles but her eyes are sad.

The pastor steps into the pulpit.

PASTOR

Are there any prayer requests this morning?

A man in the front raises his hand and speaks loud enough for the whole church to hear.

MAN WITH PRAYER REQUEST

Pray for Betty Little's son, he was in a car accident last night.

The pastor makes a note of this.

PASTOR

Thank you, Bill.

An older woman near the back stands up.

WOMAN WITH PRAYER REQUEST

My daughter, Bethany. She's having surgery on Tuesday.

A young woman near Dusty stands up.

YOUNG WOMAN WITH PRAYER REQUEST

My sister's baby came early, she's in the NICU. Her name's Emma.

The pastor nods, making a note.

PASTOR
Anyone else?

No one else speaks up.

PASTOR
Any unspoken prayer requests?

Several hands go up in the crowd. Dusty raises her hand.

PASTOR
Thank you. Thank you. Let's pray...
Heavenly Father, we know you hear
our prayers, spoken and unspoken. We
pray your blessings on Betty's son,
heal his broken body. We pray for
Bethany, that you would guide the
doctor's hands and give her a fast
recovery. And we pray for little
Emma, that she comes home to her
family soon. And Lord, we thank you
for our mothers today, for
everything they've done for us, and
the sacrifices they make every day
for their families. In your name we
pray, amen.

The congregation murmurs "amen." The pastor looks up and smiles.

He motions to the back of the church and several people with buckets full of carnations make their way to the front.

PASTOR
Now this is one of my favorite
traditions here at New Hope.
Children, kids and adult children,
if your mother is in the church
today, come on down now and get her
a flower.

Kids and a few adults make their way down to the front and back again. Flowers are given and hugs exchanged. Dusty watches, forcing a pleasant expression.

PASTOR
Husbands, if your children are not
here, come on down and get your wife
a flower.

A few older men head down the aisle, then deliver their carnations with kisses and hugs. Dusty stares down at her Bible.

PASTOR

Now, do we have any mothers whose children or husbands are not with us? Raise your hands. Mothers, raise your hands...

A couple hands go up. The flower-givers walk out to deliver carnations to a few elderly women.

Dusty slowly raises her hand. A young man hands her a red carnation and squeezes her hand.

YOUNG MAN

Happy Mother's Day.

Dusty smiles again.

INT. DOLLAR STORE. DAY.

Dusty, still in her church clothes, browses an aisle of off-brand cleaning products. She puts a bottle of dish soap in her basket.

She peruses the grocery aisle, adding a few cans to her basket.

A stack of cake mix boxes catches her eye. She stops and examines them for a moment. Then she decidedly puts one in her basket.

On her way back to the register she stops in front of a display of kitschy figurines. She picks up an angel figurine that says "Mothers are angels with invisible wings." She puts it into the basket.

Dusty approaches the register. DEANNE, a young cashier, greets her enthusiastically.

DEANNE

Hey there, Dusty! Long time, no see!
How you been?

DUSTY

Doing fine Deanne, hope you are.

DEANNE

Had to move back in with Mama. Got evicted from my old place.

DEANNE (CONTINUED)

Eh, what're you gonna do? Least I still got my job.

DUSTY

Yeah, that's right.

Deanne is taking her sweet time ringing up the items. Dusty sighs impatiently.

DEANNE

How's Britney doing? I haven't talked to her since... well, since she quit coming to work.

DUSTY

She's doing real good.

Dusty swipes her debit card and they both wait in awkward silence.

DEANNE

Can you give me her number? I'd love to get up with her again...

Dusty scrutinizes Deanne for a moment. Red eyes, bad teeth, unkempt hair.

DUSTY

No. No I can't. She's very busy. She has a daughter you know, she doesn't have time to get up to no good with God knows who.

DEANNE

(taken aback)

Oh, alright. Alright. I see how it is.

Deanne hands Dusty her receipt, and she collects her bags.

DUSTY

You take care of yourself, Deanne.

DEANNE

Oh yes ma'am. You know it.

INT. CAR. DAY.

Dusty drives, her purchases heaped in a pile on the passenger seat. The red carnation wilts on the sun-drenched dashboard.

EXT. NURSING HOME. DAY.

Dusty parks her car and gets out. She carries a plastic shopping bag and a pink caddy full of nail polish.

INT. NURSING HOME. DAY.

Dusty walks down an echoing hall. She stops in front of a room and slowly pushes the door open.

INT. MAMA'S ROOM, NURSING HOME. DAY.

DUSTY

Mama?

MAMA

Yeah?

Dusty's mother sits in an armchair in the corner. She looks older than her years, though her salt and pepper hair is perfectly coiffed.

DUSTY

Happy Mother's Day, Mama.

MAMA

You missed breakfast. Mother's Day breakfast.

DUSTY

I'm sorry about that, I was at church.

MAMA

P'shaw.

DUSTY

Well, Mama, if they want people to come they shouldn't schedule it during church now should they??

INT. MAMA'S ROOM, NURSING HOME. DAY.

The TV drones on in the background, Mama's eyes fixed on it. Dusty perches on a stool next to the armchair, diligently painting Mama's nails a bright shade of coral.

Mama's hand flinches slightly and the brush streaks coral up to the first knuckle on her index finger.

MAMA

Goddammit! Look what you're doin'
girl!

DUSTY

If you would hold still...

Dusty soaks a cotton pad with nail polish remover and tries to dab it on her mother's finger. The older woman is belligerent.

MAMA

Useless! You're useless! I tell you
what...

She grabs the cotton from Dusty and shakily wipes away the errant nail polish.

Dusty looks sickened, but not surprised. She stands up.

DUSTY

(defeated)

Well, I reckon we're done here.

She picks up her bags and heads for the door. Before she steps out, she pauses and takes the angel figurine out of the bag. She unceremoniously plunks it onto a table by the door.

Mama flings the soiled cotton ball in her direction. It hits the wall in front of Dusty.

DUSTY

See you next week, Mama.

She leaves.

EXT. DUSTY'S HOUSE. DAY.

Dusty's house is a small, prefab house with white vinyl siding and a little porch. The yard is sprawling and haphazardly landscaped. Gene is buzzing around on a dusty riding mower.

The Camry pulls up and Dusty gets out. She frowns at the site of Gene on the mower.

DUSTY

Gene, I told you to quit mowin' on
Sunday!

He doesn't hear her. She waves her arms, shopping bags dangling.

DUSTY

Gene!

He looks her way.

DUSTY

I told you not to mow on Sunday!

He raises a hand to his ear and squints.

DUSTY

NO MOWING ON SUNDAY, GODDAMMIT!

He shrugs, grins at her, and turns the mower around. Dusty storms into the house.

INT. DUSTY'S KITCHEN. DAY.

Dusty pours cake mix into a bowl and adds oil and eggs. She whisks it into a batter.

She pours the batter into a cupcake tin and places it in the oven.

Later, she sits at the kitchen table applying frosting from a jar to the cupcakes. Gene comes in from outside, sweaty and flecked with grass clippings.

He picks up one of the frosted cupcakes. Dusty swats his hand and he looks at her perplexed.

DUSTY

These are my Mother's Day cupcakes.
You didn't even know it was Mother's
Day did you?

GENE

(lying)
Yeah, yeah I knew.

DUSTY

Then why didn't you get me nothin'?

GENE

Oh hell, Dusty. I don't know. You
gotta remind of these things.

DUSTY

I gotta do everything around here.

A four year old girl steps into the kitchen doorway. She's wearing mismatched pajamas and yesterday's ponytail. When she speaks, she has a lisp. This is MADDY.

MADDY

Mawmaw!

DUSTY

Hey sugar! Are you hungry, I brought you some lunch!

MADDY

Is it chicken??

DUSTY

Yes, it's chicken. I got up this morning and I says to myself, I'm gonna get some chicken for my little chick-a-dee.

Maddy giggles and Dusty steps into the kitchen. There are puddles of milk on the floor and table, an open cereal box and bowl of half eaten cereal on the table.

Dusty frowns and sits the food down on the counter.

DUSTY

Maddy, what happened here?

MADDY

I got some cereal.

DUSTY

Did you get it all by yourself?
Where's your Mama?

MADDY

She's sleeping.

Dusty turns around and walks down a short hall to a bedroom.

INT. BRITNEY'S BEDROOM. DAY.

Dusty opens the door. The bedroom is messy, strewn with clothes and towels and empty cups. A couple of band posters are tacked up on the wall, as well as an old-fashioned Jack Daniels sign.

BRITNEY is in the bed asleep. She's in her mid-twenties, with over-plucked eyebrows and a lip ring.

Dusty crosses to the window and yanks open the floral-print curtains.

DUSTY
Britney, wake up! It's almost
lunchtime.

Britney moans and covers her face with the pillow.

Dusty puts her hands on the mattress and gives it a good shake.

DUSTY
Time to get up! You got a hungry
child to feed.

BRITNEY
Damn it, Mama!

She's not a morning person.

DUSTY
Get that sorry ass out of bed and
see to your daughter! Maddy's out
there making her own breakfast while
you sleep till noon. Something's
wrong with that picture!

Britney practically leaps from the bed and storms down the hall. Dusty follows.

INT. BRITNEY'S KITCHEN. DAY.

Britney enters and sees the milk spilled on the floor and Maddy holding a chicken leg that she's pilfered from the bucket.

BRITNEY
Maddy, what the hell! Did you make
this mess?

Maddy flinches at her mother's raised voice. Dusty ushers Maddy into the living room.

DUSTY
What'd you expect, Britney? She's
got to eat!

BRITNEY
If she makes a mess she ought to
clean it up!

Dusty pulls some paper towels off a roll and starts wiping up the spilled milk.

DUSTY

Britney, forget about the damned milk and just, just eat something. I brought some chicken.

Britney reaches into the paper bag and pulls out a round container of mashed potatoes and a plastic spork. She carries them into the living room.

DUSTY

There's gravy in there!

BRITNEY (O.S.)

Don't want no gravy!

DUSTY

Well, fine then.

She finishes her cleanup and drops the paper towels in the trash. She follows Britney into the living room.

INT. BRITNEY'S LIVING ROOM. DAY.

Britney is curled up in the corner of the couch, eating mashed potatoes and flipping through the DVR on her television. Maddy has abandoned her chicken leg on the coffee table and is playing on the floor with a doll.

Dusty starts picking up around the living room, straightening pillows and piling toys into a plastic basket.

DUSTY

Did you go down to the Pit Stop and talk to Glinda like I told you?

BRITNEY

Yeah.

DUSTY

And did she give you the job?

BRITNEY

Yep.

DUSTY

Well that's great! Are you excited?

BRITNEY

Yeah Mama, real excited.

DUSTY

Well you ought to be. Glinda says if you do good you might get full time in a few months.

BRITNEY

Yeah.

DUSTY

Hey. Lose the attitude. I stuck my neck out to get you this job. I been cutting Glinda's hair for years and she's doing this as a favor to me. She knows about you walking out on the Dollar Store...word gets around, you know. And I told her you were looking to settle into a good job. So you best not fuck it up.

Britney lights a cigarette and tunes her mother out. Dusty sees that Britney is shutting down and changes her tone.

DUSTY

We got this new choir at church. Lots of young people in it. Not teenagers, just young adults. Thought you might like to come.

Britney stares at the television. On screen are the opening credits of Grey's Anatomy. She's absorbed in a sweeping aerial shot of the Seattle skyline.

DUSTY

I thought it might be nice for you to try singing again. Thought it'd be good for you to get back into it.

Britney snaps out of it for a moment.

BRITNEY

I don't sing anymore. Never sang that kind of music anyway.

She exhales a puff of smoke.

DUSTY

Britney, don't smoke in here. It's not good for Maddy. Not too good for you either.

BRITNEY
Mmmhmm. Talk to me when you quit.

DUSTY
I did.

BRITNEY
Bullshit.

DUSTY
Well, I did!

Britney is losing interest.

BRITNEY
Mmmhmm.

Dusty folds a blanket and drapes it over an arm chair. She spots an old acoustic guitar in the corner. She picks it up.

DUSTY
Why don't you get up with your old buddies and play some music? That could be fun!

Britney sighs impatiently.

BRITNEY
Mama, everybody I went to school with either has kids, or is in rehab, or both. 'Cept Christy, I think she's in Atlanta. Ain't none of us got time to mess around with that shit. And besides, I don't sing anymore.

Dusty looks dejectedly around the room. Then she opens the curtains to let some light in.

BRITNEY
Mama! Close those things, you're blinding me!

Dusty flings the curtains closed.

DUSTY
Maddy, how would you like to come home with Mawmaw? Get you out of this gloomy house?

MADDY
Yeah!

DUSTY
Come on, let's get you changed.

Maddy runs ahead of Dusty, who casts a look back at her daughter as she walks away. Britney sinks into the couch, her eyes never leaving the television.

INT. MADDY'S ROOM, DUSTY'S HOUSE. DAY.

Maddy's room is a small second bedroom that's part storage and part playroom. There's a small cot in the corner with a pink comforter and stuffed animals piled on top. Assorted items have been pushed to the perimeter to make a play area in the center of the room.

Dusty stands in the doorway looking down at Maddy, who's fallen asleep on the floor, surrounded by toy ponies. Dusty tiptoes around the toys, scoops Maddy in her arms, and with great effort, lifts the child from the floor.

Dusty lays Maddy on the cot and covers her with the blanket. Then she places the doll next to her.

INT. DUSTY'S LIVING ROOM. DAY.

Dusty pads quietly across the carpet, picking up toys and the remnants of lunch that are strewn about the living room.

The door swings open and Gene comes in, dirty from work and stomping his feet on the mat.

GENE
(loud)
How's my girls??

DUSTY
Shhhhhhhhh!!!

GENE
(normal voice)
What?

DUSTY
(angry whisper)
Damn it, Gene! Maddy's finally asleep. You wake her up now she's gonna be ill as a hornet.

GENE
Alright, alright.

Gene heads into the kitchen. Dusty shakes her head in disgust and flips on the TV, quickly turning the volume down.

EXT. DUSTY'S SALON. DAY.

An old cinder block building sits at the corner of two country roads. The faded sign reads "Dusty's Hair Studio."

INT. DUSTY'S SALON. DAY.

Dusty's salon is decorated in pink, mauve, and teal with white wicker furniture. It's a modest establishment but it's clear she takes pride in it.

LISA, a blonde middle-aged woman sits in the chair while Dusty removes foils from her hair.

LISA

I tried to tell her but she's 22, you can't tell her nothing, but anyway, I said, 'Christy, what does a gay man know about doing a woman's hair? He don't know what men like in a woman.' Just don't make sense to me. But she's in Atlanta now, getting a little too big for her britches. Oh, and get this: she's paying that guy \$75 just for a hair cut! Says she gets a scalp massage and a glass of wine, included.

Dusty rotates the chair and leans Lisa back into the shampoo sink and begins to shampoo her hair.

DUSTY

(laughing)

There's an idea, maybe I should try that!

LISA

Girl, you know I wouldn't complain. Anyway, did you hear about Sue's husband?

DUSTY

Sue Bilford?

LISA
No, Sue Buckley.

DUSTY
Well, yeah I heard something, but
what did you hear?

LISA
He's got him a woman out at Tybee
Island. Says he's going to work out
there but he's really galavantin'
with her. Thing is, Sue don't even
care! She just lets him carry on
like that... Is that what you heard?

DUSTY
Mmmhmm, except I heard the woman was
Mexican.

LISA
Well, now.

DUSTY
Can't say I blame her. You ever met
Billy? All he does is talk about
golf. Say, did you hear the Littles
are selling their homeplace?

LISA
Who, Davie and them?

DUSTY
No, not them Littles. Rod and Bobby.

LISA
Oh! No, I hadn't heard that.

DUSTY
Yeah, you know their old man wanted
that to stay in the family, but
Bobby's got power of attorney so...

LISA
Mmm. Such a shame.

DUSTY
Just awful.

LISA
How about your girl? How's she
doing?

DUSTY

Britney? She's doing so well. So so well. Got a new job at the Pit Stop off the highway. I'm keeping Maddy this afternoon while she's at work.

Dusty wraps a towel around Lisa's head and sits her up in the chair.

LISA

How old is Maddy now?

DUSTY

Four going on forty.

Dusty adeptly blows out Lisa's hair with a hair dryer and round brush. They raise their voices to be heard over the dryer.

LISA

Sassy like her grandma, I bet.

DUSTY

Girl, you have no idea! Sharp as a tack though. Like her mama. Britney always was a smart girl.

LATER:

Lisa writes out a check, her hair now perfectly blown out and teased. Dusty takes the check and puts it in a small cash box.

LISA

Dusty, I just love those earrings.

DUSTY

Oh, Gene gave me these for Mother's Day. Got them on sale at Penney's.

LISA

Well isn't he the sweetest thing!

DUSTY

He made me cupcakes too. From a mix, but suited me just fine.

LISA

Well happy belated Mother's Day. I'll see you in six weeks, right?

DUSTY

Six weeks, yes. And you remember what I said about that deep conditioner.

LISA

Yes ma'am!

DUSTY

And don't call me ma'am!

The bells on the door chime as Lisa exits. Dusty watches her go.

EXT. DUSTY'S HOUSE. DAY.

Dusty sits on the porch smoking a cigarette and thumbing through a Woman's Day magazine. A blue Civic from the early 2000s pulls into the driveway.

Dusty puts out the cigarette and walks to the car with a spring in her step. The passenger window rolls down revealing Britney. Dusty peers into the car, confused.

TRAVIS is in the driver's seat. He's also in his twenties, a little too thin with a dull look on his face.

Dusty leans down to the passenger window.

DUSTY

Britney, what's going on?

BRITNEY

Nothing's going on, Mama. Just dropping Maddy off, remember? You said you'd keep her.

DUSTY

No, I'm talking about *him*. That guy driving your car. Hello, Travis! Can't say I've missed having you around.

(to Britney)

Are y'all back together?

BRITNEY

Mama! It's none of your damn business but Travis has been helping his uncle in Jacksonville and now he's back.

DUSTY
And what's he doing in your car?

BRITNEY
He's taking me to work!

Dusty eyes Travis, who looks away. He's wearing a long sleeved hoodie despite the heat.

DUSTY
Little warm for long sleeves ain't it, Travis?

Travis shrugs. Britney crosses her arms.

TRAVIS
Feels fine.

Maddy's voice interrupts from the back seat.

MADDY (O.C.)
Mawmaw!

DUSTY
Hey pumpkin!
(to Britney)
We'll talk about this later.

BRITNEY
Oh no we won't.

Dusty opens the rear passenger door and finds Maddy strapped into a car seat and clutching a doll.

Dusty gives her a kiss.

DUSTY
Hey there sweetie pie, let's get you out of here...Damn it, Britney this car seat's not right! What the hell are you doing??

BRITNEY
It sure as shit is right, I buckled her in myself!

DUSTY
Get it through your head, the clip has to be in line with the armpits! Not the belly!

BRITNEY

Mama—God! Just get her out of the seat!

Britney jumps out of the car, pushes Dusty out of the way, and yanks Maddy out of the car seat. Maddy squeals and runs across the yard to the house.

Dusty looks at Britney's outfit: a long sleeve plaid shirt over a tank top and shorts.

She grabs Britney's arm and tries to roll the sleeve up. Britney tries to pull her arm away and they struggle for a moment.

BRITNEY

Mama, what the fuck?!

She tears her arm away. Dusty looks distraught.

DUSTY

Britney, you're doing so good. Don't go down this road again.

BRITNEY

I don't need your lectures, Mama.

TRAVIS

Hey, let's go!

BRITNEY

He's just taking me to work. Leave it alone.

She gets back in the car and they drive away. Dusty watches them, dismayed. Maddy runs up to her.

MADDY

Mawmaw, I'm hungry!

Dusty picks her up.

DUSTY

Come on baby, let's get you something to eat...Ooh, you're getting heavy.

MADDY

No I'm not.

DUSTY

Yes you are.

INT. DUSTY'S KITCHEN. DAY.

Maddy sits in a booster seat with a bologna sandwich and a glass of milk in front of her. The doll sits on the edge of the table, facing Maddy.

Dusty sits at the other end of the table with a pair of pink reading glasses on the end of her nose. She taps warily on an old smartphone.

On the PHONE SCREEN, she has typed "Travis Daley criminal history." She hits the search button. She taps another link and the page fails to load.

Dusty stands and holds her phone up, looking for a better signal.

The doll slumps over and Maddy straightens it.

Dusty's page finally loads and she sees Travis' mug shot. Below the photo a list of his charges.

Possession of heroin.

Possession of cocaine.

Possession of drug paraphernalia.

Dusty stares at the phone, a worried look on her face.

MADDY

Youthless! You're youthless!

Dusty snaps out of it and sees Maddy swatting at her doll, which has fallen over and spilled the glass of milk. The child's lisp has turned "useless" into "youthless."

She's shaken to hear Maddy use this word.

DUSTY

Maddy, it's okay, it's okay. Don't be mean to your baby doll.

She helps Maddy down from her booster seat.

DUSTY

Oh honey, you're soaked. Let's take those clothes off.

MADDY

Stupid, stupid baby!

DUSTY

Maddy, hush. The baby didn't mean to...

As she lifts off Maddy's wet shirt, she sees bruises on her little back. Dusty looks stricken.

She grabs the child and holds her still. Maddy squirms.

DUSTY

Maddy, look at me. It's okay, look at me. It's okay, pumpkin. I have to ask you a question.

Dusty smooths Maddy's hair and looks into her face.

DUSTY

Did somebody hit you?

Maddy nods.

DUSTY

Who was it? Who hit you?

MADDY

Aiden.

DUSTY

Who's Aiden?

MADDY

A big boy. He's six.

DUSTY

Oh. No, I mean did a grown up hit you?

Maddy nods.

DUSTY

Was it Travis? Did Travis hit you?

MADDY

No...

DUSTY

Did he...touch you?

MADDY

(laughing)

No.

DUSTY
Maddy, you can tell Mawmaw. Did
Travis hit you?

MADDY
No!

DUSTY
Who was it then?

MADDY
Mommy.

Time slows and Dusty freezes. The sound goes out of the room and her eyes glaze over. She doesn't let go of Maddy.

FLASHBACK:

INT. DUSTY'S KITCHEN, CIRCA 1994. DAY.

A younger Dusty wears a Jennifer Aniston-inspired haircut and Britney is close to Maddy's age.

LITTLE BRITNEY is throwing a tantrum on the floor. Dusty grabs her arm and pulls her up hard.

DUSTY
Stop it. Get up. Get up!

INT. DUSTY'S LIVING ROOM, 1990'S. DAY.

Dusty spanks Little Britney, her face red and angry.

INT. DUSTY'S KITCHEN, EARLY 2000'S. DAY.

TEENAGE BRITNEY screams at Dusty.

TEENAGE BRITNEY
I hate my life! I hate this house! I
hate you!

Dusty slaps her across the face. Britney stands stunned for a moment, then runs out.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. DUSTY'S KITCHEN. DAY.

Dusty is still holding on to Maddy, her face stricken.

MADDY

Mommy always hits. She yells too.

Dusty pulls Maddy close, squeezing her tight. Her eyes are desperate. After a moment she stands, lifts Maddy and carries her out of the kitchen.

INT. MADDY'S ROOM. DAY.

Dusty frantically dresses Maddy.

INT. DUSTY'S KITCHEN. DAY.

Dusty grabs her purse and Maddy's doll from the table.

INT. DUSTY'S CAR. DAY.

The sun is setting. Dusty buckles Maddy into a car seat in the back of the Camry. Then she gets in and starts the car.

EXT. DUSTY'S HOUSE. DAY.

The Camry peels out of the driveway just as Gene pulls up in his pick-up.

INT. DUSTY'S CAR. DAY.

Dusty drives fast, her face intense.

Maddy kicks her feet in the car seat.

MADDY

Mawmaw, where are we going?

Dusty doesn't answer.

FLASHBACK:

INT. DUSTY'S LIVING ROOM, 1990'S. DAY.

Dusty lies on the sofa, knees up, cradling an ash tray on her chest. She's watching TV and smoking a cigarette.

Young Britney taps her mom on the shoulder. She's holding a drawing on a piece of notebook paper.

DUSTY
Not now, baby.

YOUNG BRITNEY
Mama...Mama!

DUSTY
Leave me alone, goddammit!

As she yells, she reaches her arm out and pushes Britney away. Britney runs away crying.

DUSTY
Can't get a moment's peace in this
god-forsaken house!

INT. KITCHEN, LATE 1960'S. DAY.

YOUNG DUSTY, about eight years old sits at a Formica table next to JOEY, six or seven years old.

The two children are fighting over a doll, tugging it back and forth.

YOUNG DUSTY
Give it back! It's my doll!

JOEY
No! I want it!

MOTHER (O.C.)
Joey! Dusty! Quit messing around!

YOUNG DUSTY
Stop it, Joey!

JOEY
You're supposed to share!

With a loud BANG, two adult hands come crashing down onto the table, rattling plates and glasses and stopping the children cold.

Their MOTHER is bearing down on them, leaning close, her palms flat on the table. She yells and the children flinch in fear.

MOTHER
I said to cut it out! DO NOT make me
tell you again!

Joey and Young Dusty join hands under the table.

INT. DUSTY'S CAR. NIGHT.

Dusty comes back to the present. She's still driving. Tears are running down her face.

It's dark. Maddy is asleep in the car seat.

She looks out at the road. It's a wide, two lane highway. Up ahead there's an exit for Interstate 75 South.

She wipes her eyes and takes the exit.

Once on the interstate, she passes a sign that reads

Gainesville	90 miles
Orlando	210 miles
Miami	390 miles

She drives on.

EXT. GAS STATION. NIGHT.

Dusty pulls the Camry up to a gas pump and gets out.

EXT. DUSTY'S CAR. NIGHT.

Dusty pumps gas and peers through the window at Maddy, who's still sleeping.

She takes her cell phone out of her purse and makes a call.

It rings and rings, no answer.

INT. DUSTY'S LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

Gene snores in the recliner, TV blaring.

EXT. GAS STATION. NIGHT.

DUSTY
Damnit, Gene.

She dials again.

INT. DUSTY'S LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

Gene wakes with a start and scrambles to find the cordless phone.

GENE

Hello...

EXT. GAS STATION. NIGHT.

DUSTY

Gene! It's about time. Listen, I need a favor. Look on that shelf by the phone. No, the old phone...Uh huh. My address book should be there...Uh huh. Now, can you tell me Joey's address?

INT. DUSTY'S LIVING ROOM. NIGHT. / EXT. GAS STATION. NIGHT.

Gene stands by the rotary phone, holding the address book.

GENE

Joey?...Where are you??

DUSTY

I'm...I'm on the road. Can you just give me the address?

GENE

Dusty! Where are you? Is Maddy with you??

DUSTY

Yes, Maddy's with me.

GENE

Dusty, what the hell?

DUSTY

Honey, I can't explain right now.

Gene sits and shoves his feet into his boots.

GENE

Tell me where you are I'm coming to get you.

DUSTY

No, no, don't do that. We're fine, we're fine! We're just...taking a little trip, okay?

GENE

Just up and leaving, not telling nobody, have you lost your mind?

There's an uncomfortable pause. Gene wishes he hadn't said it.

DUSTY
We're fine, I promise. I'll...I'll tell you about it when we get home. Can you just...give me the address please?

She fishes a piece of paper and pen out of her purse and scribbles it down.

46 Riviera Lane

Miami, FL

INT. DUSTY'S CAR, MCDONALD'S DRIVE-THROUGH. NIGHT.

Dusty leans out the car window and speaks into the drive-through order station.

DUSTY
Kid's meal with juice. A large coffee—

MADDY
I want a biscuit!

Dusty sighs.

DUSTY
I'm sorry, can you make that kid's meal an egg biscuit?

DRIVE-THROUGH ATTENDANT (O.C.)
We're not serving breakfast.

DUSTY
That's okay, the kid's meal then.
(to Maddy)
Baby they don't have biscuits right now, those are for breakfast.

Maddy squeals.

MADDY
I want a biscuit!!

DUSTY
They don't have biscuits, you can
eat a hamburger!

Maddy squeals and kicks the back of the seat in front of her. The seat's back panel comes loose during the kicking and falls off.

Dusty twists herself around and grabs Maddy's feet to stop the kicking.

DUSTY
Stop it! STOP IT! What's the matter
with you??

EXT. MCDONALD'S. NIGHT.

Dusty's car pulls forward to the drive-through window, Maddy wailing. Dusty takes the food from the attendant.

INT. DUSTY'S CAR. NIGHT.

In the back seat, Maddy eats a hamburger, her face tear-stained.

In the front seat Dusty sips coffee and drives.

EXT. INTERSTATE HIGHWAY. NIGHT.

The Camry barrels down the mostly empty highway.

INT. DUSTY'S CAR. NIGHT.

Dusty looks at Maddy through the rear view mirror. She's asleep.

Dusty rummages in her purse and pulls out a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. She cracks the driver's side window a little. The sound of roaring air fills the car.

She checks on Maddy. Still asleep.

Dusty lights a cigarette and blows smoke out the window as best she can. Her hand is shaking a little.

EXT. MIAMI NEIGHBORHOOD. EARLY MORNING.

Sunrise reveals a world vastly different from the one Dusty left the night before. She drives wide-eyed past palm trees and Spanish style-architecture. The sky is a pale pink and the buildings are painted in bright pastels.

She looks nervously at the map on her phone. Impatient drivers speed past her.

EXT. JOEY'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Dusty parks the Camry in front of a large stucco house with a well-manicured lawn.

INT. DUSTY'S CAR. DAWN.

Dusty looks at the paper she wrote the address on, then at the mailbox in front of the house. The numbers match.

Dusty leans back in the seat and rests her eyes on the house. The windows are all dark.

Dusty fidgets. The sun gets brighter.

A light comes on in one of the rooms.

A few moments later the front door opens and a scruffy little dog runs out to do his business. Dusty squints at the figure in the doorway. It's a woman.

The woman and the dog go back into the house.

It's daylight now and Maddy is starting to stir.

EXT. DUSTY'S CAR. DAY.

Dusty leans into the back seat to unbuckle Maddy.

MADDY
Where are we?

DUSTY
We are...in Florida.

MADDY
What's Florida?

Dusty sighs.

DUSTY
It's a...well, it's where your Uncle
Joey lives.

MADDY
Uncle Joey?

DUSTY
Your great uncle. My brother.

MADDY
We're going to see Uncle Joey?

DUSTY
Yes that's right. That's why I need
you to behave okay? Like a good
girl.

MADDY
I have to pee.

DUSTY
Okay, just hang on baby girl. Let's
see if Uncle Joey has a bathroom.

Dusty adjusts her purse on her shoulder, takes Maddy's
hand, and together they walk up the driveway.

EXT. JOEY'S HOUSE. DAY.

Dusty rings the doorbell and stands on the front porch
holding Maddy's hand. Inside, the dog barks.

As the door begins to open, Dusty affixes a wide smile to
her face. Maddy clutches her doll.

The door opens and JOLENE, a tall woman, stands in the
doorway. Her hair is colored and styled much like Dusty's,
and they have the same color eyes.

Dusty's smile fades and she stares at the woman.

DUSTY
Joey??

JOLENE
Dusty?!

DUSTY
Is that really you? Lord have
mercy...

JOLENE
 What are you doing here?? Who is
 this?

Dusty is looking her up and down.

JOLENE
 Dusty!

DUSTY
 I came to see my brother!

Jolene fixes her with a withering stare. Dusty looks
 defiant.

JOLENE
 It's Jolene now. My name is Jolene.

DUSTY
 Like the song??

JOLENE
 (defensive)
 Yes. As a matter of fact, yes. Like
 the song.

Dusty pinches her forehead and mutters as if she has a
 terrible headache.

DUSTY
 Joey, what in the hell have you—

MADDY
 Mawmaw! I have to pee!

DUSTY
 Just a minute, pumpkin.

MADDY
 But I have to pee!!

Jolene sighs.

JOLENE
 Come in, come in.

INT. JOLENE'S LIVING ROOM. DAY.

Jolene leads them through the living room. The house is
 spacious and well-appointed, with modern furniture and lush
 house plants.

A MOMENT LATER:

Jolene, Mercedes, Dusty, and Maddy sit around the table.

JOLENE

Dusty, what are you doing here?

DUSTY

Well, Maddy and I decided to take a little trip. A spontaneous trip.

JOLENE

A spontaneous trip to my house?

DUSTY

We thought we'd stop by while we're here.

MERCEDES

Were you trying to go to Disney World? That's in Orlando, not Miami...

MADDY

Disney World?!

DUSTY

No! No, not Disney World. Just a change of scenery, that's all.

JOLENE

Where are you staying?

DUSTY

I haven't decided yet...

MERCEDES

Well of course they'll stay here!

DUSTY

Oh no...

JOLENE

Honey...

MERCEDES

I won't take no for an answer! You can sleep in the guest room. That's what it's for, after all. Guests...

DUSTY

Okay. Well, thank you.

MERCEDES

You're very welcome. Now, I have to get going, I have a meeting with a contractor... Jo, why don't you take the day off. Spend it with our guests...

JOLENE

Mmhmm. Sure. Love to.

Mercedes grabs her coffee mug and heads out the door.

MERCEDES

Bye Maddy, Dusty! Nice to meet you! I'll see you tonight. We can have dinner, yeah?!

DUSTY

Can't wait!

MADDY

Bye!

With Mercedes gone the kitchen is uncomfortably quiet. Jolene stares at Dusty in disbelief.

JOLENE

Ever hear of calling first??

DUSTY

I'm sorry, Joey, I didn't think it through.

JOLENE

Jolene.

MADDY

Is this Uncle Joey?

JOLENE

No.

DUSTY

Yes.

Dusty throws her hands up in exasperation.

DUSTY

How am I supposed to explain this to a child? I'm an adult and I don't understand it.

JOLENE

Well, that isn't saying much. Maddy honey, I used to be your Uncle Joey but now I'm your Aunt Jolene.

MADDY

Why?

JOLENE

Because I used to be a man and now I'm a woman.

MADDY

Why?

JOLENE

Because deep down in my heart I knew I was a woman. So I decided to be a woman.

MADDY

I'm a girl. I'll be a woman when I'm big.

Maddy reaches for the salt and pepper shakers and starts playing with them. Jolene gives Dusty a "take that" look.

MADDY

I'm hungry!

INT. JOLENE'S KITCHEN. DAY.

Jolene cracks an egg into a bowl. Dusty leans on the counter next to her.

DUSTY

You don't have to go to all this trouble. She'd be just as happy to eat cereal.

JOLENE

We don't have any cereal. Mercedes and I are avoiding carbohydrates.

DUSTY

Oh...

Jolene cracks more eggs. Dusty looks out the window to the backyard: there's a stylish patio and a swimming pool.

When she turns back around, Jolene is vigorously beating the eggs with a whisk, her brow furrowed.

DUSTY

Something bothering you?

Jolene slams the bowl on the counter, the whisk clanging inside it.

JOLENE

Dusty, do not take that tone with me.

DUSTY

Believe me, when I take a tone you'll know it.

JOLENE

You do not get to act high and mighty. You do not get to show up at my house, after fifteen years...

DUSTY

Don't blame me for that when you're the one that left! The road goes both ways, you know!

JOLENE

You know why I left, Dusty! You know good and well!

Dusty abruptly walks out of the kitchen and into the dining area.

DUSTY

This was stupid. I don't know what I was thinking.

Dusty pulls Maddy's chair away from the table.

Maddy, come on. We're going.

MADDY

Nooo!

DUSTY

Yes! Now come on!

JOLENE

Dusty, stop.

Dusty pulls Maddy toward the front door.

MADDY

No! I don't want to go!

JOLENE

DUSTY!

Dusty stops and turns around.

JOLENE
Stay. Okay? ...I want you to.

INT. JOLENE'S KITCHEN. DAY.

Maddy and Dusty sit at the kitchen table. Jolene puts plates of scrambled eggs in front of them and walks away.

DUSTY
Do you have any—

Before she can finish Jolene plunks a bottle of hot sauce in front of her. Dusty smiles.

The trio quietly eat their scrambled eggs.

JOLENE
So Maddy, what would you like to do today?

MADDY
I don't know.

JOLENE
Well, what kinds of things do you like to do?

MADDY
Play. Watch TV.

JOLENE
You can do those things at home. We should do something special while you're here. How about we go to the beach?

Maddy looks to Dusty, uncertain.

DUSTY
Maddy's never been to the beach.

JOLENE
Oh, then we have to go! Maddy, we can swim, and build sandcastles...
(reading Dusty's expression)
Oh no. Am I overstepping? Maybe Britney should be the one to do the first beach trip...

DUSTY

No, that's okay. We should go. But,
I didn't pack her a bathing suit.

JOLENE

Dusty! You came to Miami and didn't
bring a bathing suit!

Jolene's surprise fades and is replaced by the sense that something's up.

JOLENE

It's okay, don't worry about it.
We'll go to Target.

INT. JOLENE'S LIVING ROOM. DAY.

Maddy sits on the floor playing with the dog. Dusty is touching up her make-up in a decorative mirror over the mantle.

Jolene breezes in, wearing a gauzy beach cover-up and sandals. Her make-up and hair are perfect. Dusty gawks.

JOLENE

Okay ladies, I've packed us a little
picnic for the beach.

She opens her woven tote bag to reveal clear containers full of vegetables, fruit, and cheese.

JOLENE

Sunglasses, sunscreen, beach
blanket, towels... am I forgetting
anything?

DUSTY

Looks like you thought of
everything.

Jolene pulls a large straw sunhat from a hook by the door and places it perfectly atop her head. Then she dons her sunglasses.

JOLENE

Come on, Maddy! Let's go! It's beach
time!

EXT. JOLENE'S DRIVE-WAY. DAY.

Maddy and Jolene watch as Dusty lugs the car seat up the driveway. She quickly brushes some crumbs away before she hoists it into Jolene's pristine SUV.

INT. JOLENE'S CAR. DAY.

The SUV rides smooth and quiet. Dusty admires the leather seats and high tech dashboard.

DUSTY
Pretty nice ride.

JOLENE
Thank you. It's a little large for just the two of us, but I need the extra space for hauling furniture or artwork, or plants. The back seats come out, it's a lot bigger than it looks.

DUSTY
Furniture?

JOLENE
Mercedes and I have our own real estate company. We flip houses.

DUSTY
Oh.

JOLENE
Mercedes deals with the business transactions and contractors. I handle the remodeling, you know, selecting tile, paint colors, furniture, artwork...

DUSTY
You always did like fancy stuff.

JOLENE
Yeah, I guess I did.

DUSTY
Looks like y'all are doing pretty well.

JOLENE
We are, thank you. What about you? How's the salon?

DUSTY

Oh, so good. Just doing so good. My book's always full. Sometimes I have to turn folks away. Thinking about getting a pedicure chair with a foot spa...

JOLENE

Sounds lovely...

EXT. TARGET PARKING LOT. DAY.

The SUV pulls into a parking space and Dusty and Jolene get out. Dusty helps Maddy out of the car seat.

INT. TARGET. DAY.

Jolene guides them through the brightly lit aisles. Dusty grabs a red shopping basket.

JOLENE

Maddy, what's your favorite color?

MADDY

I don't know.

DUSTY

Oh you do too, Maddy. Tell...tell Aunt Jolene your favorite color.

MADDY

No!

DUSTY

Maddy! You better quit talkin' back!

JOLENE

Oh, that's okay, I bet I can guess. Hmm...is it...brown?

MADDY

No!

JOLENE

Is it...beige??

MADDY

(laughing)

No!

JOLENE

My goodness, I really thought you'd be into neutrals. I've got you all wrong, Maddy!

MADDY

It's pink! Pink, silly!

JOLENE

What?! A little girl that likes pink?? I tell ya, they broke the mold when they made this one!

Jolene playfully jostles Maddy by the shoulders, sending her into a fit of giggles. Dusty watches the two, not amused.

INT. TARGET, CHILDREN'S SECTION. DAY.

Jolene has taken the lead on the bathing suit search, picking one after another from the rack and holding it up to Maddy, who is enjoying the attention.

Dusty discreetly moves to a stack of little girls' pajamas and puts a set in her basket. She also grabs a pack of underwear.

When she returns to Jolene and Maddy, Jolene is holding up two pairs of flip flops for Maddy to choose from.

JOLENE

Pink with sparkles or pink with polka dots? Sparkles. Polka dots.

MADDY

Sparkles!

JOLENE

A girl after my own heart.

EXT. DUNES. DAY.

Maddy, Dusty, and Jolene hike up and down sand dunes on their way to the beach. Maddy leads and the ladies carry their bags and a blanket.

As they top the last dune Maddy stops and stares. The ocean stretches out before her. She is amazed.

Dusty smiles and watches Maddy's face.

EXT. BEACH. DAY.

Jolene and Dusty spread the blanket on the sand and weigh it down with their bags. Maddy jumps up and down with excitement.

Dusty takes one of Maddy's hands and Jolene takes the other. They walk toward the waves.

Maddy is afraid at first but after a wave or two laps over her feet, she pulls on their hands, wanting to go further in.

They release her hands and she stoops down to splash in the water. Dusty is smiling, looking more relaxed than she has the whole trip.

Then her smile fades. Her eyes land on the bruises on Maddy's back, visible because of her bathing suit. Jolene has seen them too, but says nothing.

EXT. BEACH. DAY.

Jolene, Dusty, and Maddy sit on the blanket, their picnic laid out in front of them.

MADDY

What's this?

JOLENE

It's quinoa.

MADDY

What's keen-wah?

JOLENE

It's a complete protein. Try some.

DUSTY

I remember when your favorite food was fried bologna sandwiches.

JOLENE

Lord, I haven't had one of those in a long time.

DUSTY

Not on the diet?

JOLENE

Not even close. I gave all that up when I started dietitian school.

DUSTY
You're a dietitian too?

JOLENE
Well, no. I didn't finish.

DUSTY
(laughing)
Uh huh. Remember when you wanted to
be a mortician?

JOLENE
Mmm. I'd rather not.

DUSTY
Best thing about that was the look
on Mama's face.

Jolene laughs but her face is pained.

There's a pause while they eat.

JOLENE
How are you doing, Dusty?

DUSTY
Doing just fine.

JOLENE
I'm being serious. Are you doing
okay?

DUSTY
Well, yeah. I guess we all have our
moments but...

JOLENE
Have you had any more...episodes?

FLASHBACK:

EXT. GROCERY STORE PARKING LOT, 1990'S. DAY.

Dusty stands in the middle of the parking lot, young
Britney a few feet away. Dusty's eyes are crazed, her face
sweaty.

A crowd is gathering, people with shopping carts and
children in tow stopping to stare as Dusty quotes
scripture, her finger pointed to the sky.

Britney is crying.

DUSTY

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother! Which is the first commandment with a promise... That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long...

And, ye fathers—and mothers; provoke not your children to wrath...but bring them up in the nurture...the nurture of the Lord.

An ambulance pulls up and Joey jumps out. He's wearing a paramedic uniform. His partner waits in the driver's seat.

JOEY

Hey! What y'all looking at? Get out of here! Go on, go!

The crowd reluctantly disperses.

Joey shepherds Britney into the ambulance.

DUSTY

Provoke not your children to wrath!

Dusty begins to shake.

Joey puts his jacket over her shoulders and helps her into the ambulance.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. BEACH. DAY. CONT'D.

Dusty comes back to the present.

DUSTY

No. No episodes.

JOLENE

Dusty, what's—

She breaks off and follows Dusty's gaze a couple yards away. Two men in board shorts and a woman in a bathing suit and sun visor are openly staring at Jolene.

Jolene looks away.

Dusty watches as the woman mutters something to the men, and one of the men points at Jolene.

DUSTY
 (quiet)
 What the hell is this?

JOLENE
 Just ignorant people, it happens.
 Dusty...just ignore them.

DUSTY
 They need to get some fuckin'
 manners.

JOLENE
 Dusty, I'm not kidding. Don't make a
 scene.

DUSTY
 (yelling)
 Y'all got a problem?!

The men look at each other and the woman laughs. Dusty stands up.

DUSTY
 I asked you a question. Do you have
 a problem?

WOMAN
 Yeah, we got a problem with
 trannies!

Dusty launches off the beach blanket toward the woman and two men.

DUSTY
 Oh, no the hell you didn't just say
 that. Bitch, I will snatch you bald-
 headed!

The trio begins to back away as Dusty approaches. Dusty takes out her earrings, still advancing toward them.

DUSTY
 I'm taking off my jewelry, y'all. I
 am not fucking around! I will whoop
 your redneck asses!

The group is half-jogging now, looking over their shoulders at Dusty and grumbling curses.

DUSTY
 That's right, keep movin' chicken
 shits!

Dusty fumes, watching them head down the beach. A few people have looked up from their sunbathing and paperbacks to see what the commotion is.

Dusty turns back to the blanket. Jolene is stunned. Maddy's eyes are big. Dusty sits back down.

DUSTY
There's an episode for you.

Jolene laughs uncomfortably but she's a little touched by Dusty's protectiveness.

EXT. BEACH. DAY.

Jolene and Dusty are folding up the blanket and packing their things. Maddy carries a plastic pail and her sparkly flip-flops.

DUSTY
You know what? I should get a picture of Maddy.

She pulls out her phone, but it's dead.

DUSTY
Oh, shi—shoot. Shoot, shoot shoot.

JOLENE
What's the matter?

DUSTY
My phone's dead.

JOLENE
Here, use mine.

Jolene hands Dusty her iPhone. The phone's background is a photo of Mercedes and Jolene with big smiles.

Dusty opens the camera and holds Maddy in the frame for a moment. She snaps a photo while Maddy's not paying attention, clutching her flip-flops, hair blowing in the wind.

DUSTY
Maddy honey, smile for the camera.

She takes a couple photos of Maddy smiling and posing.

Jolene and Dusty stand together for a moment, Jolene holding Maddy on her hip, to snap a selfie.

EXT. JOLENE'S HOUSE. DAY.

Jolene's SUV pulls up and Dusty helps Maddy out of the car seat. She scampers to the front door.

INT. JOLENE'S GUEST ROOM. DAY.

Maddy jumps on the bed. She's wearing the pajamas Dusty bought at Target and her hair is wet. Dusty wears the same clothes she's had on since her arrival, and has not showered.

DUSTY

Maddy, get down from there!

Maddy ignores her.

Dusty rummages through her purse. She finds a sample size deodorant that's nearly used up. She reaches under her shirt to apply it to her arm pits.

There's a knock at the door and Jolene sticks her head in.

JOLENE

Chicken or steak for dinner?

MADDY

Chicken nuggets!

DUSTY

Whatever you want is fine, thank you. Maddy, I said get down!

Jolene looks at Dusty, then around the room.

JOLENE

(hesitant)

Dusty? Did you bring a change of clothes?

Dusty avoids Jolene's eyes. She shakes her head. Jolene looks concerned but her voice is nonchalant.

JOLENE

That's okay, I'll loan you something. I mean, it'll be a little too big, but we'll make it work. Come on...

She motions for Dusty to follow her. Dusty obeys. Maddy stays behind to jump on the bed.

INT. JOLENE'S BEDROOM. DAY.

Jolene's bedroom is airy and luxurious, with a bed made up with lots of pillows and a fluffy down comforter and sophisticated mahogany furniture.

Jolene goes into the walk-in closet and comes out with an armful of garments. She holds a pair of Capri pants up to Dusty, who looks overwhelmed.

JOLENE

Lord, you'd be swimming in these.

She holds up a pair of shorts and shakes her head.

JOLENE

No, it's going to have to be a dress.

She hands Dusty a casual floral print dress and ushers her to the en suite bathroom.

INT. JOLENE'S MASTER BATHROOM. DAY.

Dusty steps out of her clothes, leaving a little pile of sand on the bathroom floor. She turns the knob in the shower and stands under the water.

Her hair flattens and her make-up begins to run.

INT. JOLENE'S BEDROOM. DAY.

Jolene hears the water running in the bathroom. She turns and leaves the bedroom, closing the door behind her.

INT. JOLENE'S KITCHEN. DAY.

Jolene stands over a cutting board, chopping vegetables. Maddy stands next to her on a foot stool. Dolly sits on the floor and stares up at Maddy.

JOLENE

Okay, here are some red peppers. Can you put those on the salad?

Maddy scoops the diced peppers with both hands and drops them on top of a salad bowl full of lettuce.

JOLENE

Fabulous job! This is shaping up to be a beautiful salad.

MADDY

Beautiful salad.

Dusty walks into the kitchen and watches them from the doorway. She's wearing Jolene's dress. It's a little loose, making her appear smaller.

Her hair is still wet and her make-up is gone. Without make-up her face looks older, but her eyes look younger, vulnerable.

Maddy tosses a piece of red pepper to Dolly. Dolly sniffs it but leaves it on the floor.

JOLENE

I don't think Dolly likes red peppers very much. Do you like red peppers?

Maddy shrugs.

JOLENE

Well, if you don't know maybe you should try one.

(to Dusty)

Oh, hey Dusty. I've got some white wine in the fridge. Help yourself to a glass.

Dusty opens the fridge. It's full of neatly organized healthy food. And wine.

Dusty pulls the wine bottle from the fridge and unscrews the cap. Jolene hands her a glass. She pours a little wine in the glass.

EXT. JOLENE'S PATIO. NIGHT.

Jolene, Mercedes, Dusty, and Maddy sit around a patio table lit by some candles and string lights overhead.

Maddy feeds bits of chicken to Dolly under the table.

JOLENE

Babe, how did the meeting go today?

MERCEDES

Oh, it went pretty well. I tried to talk them out of the subway tile, but they have their hearts set on it.

JOLENE

Mmm. Figures.

MERCEDES

What did you ladies do today?

JOLENE

We went to the beach, had a little picnic...

MERCEDES

Maddy, what did you think of the beach?

Maddy shrugs.

Dusty nudges the child.

DUSTY

Maddy, tell Mercedes what you did at the beach.

MADDY

Went in the ocean!

DUSTY

Mmmhmm, and it was warm, like bath water.

Jolene decides to test the waters.

JOLENE

Maybe sometime Britney can come down too. I'd love to see her again.

Dusty looks down at her plate.

Mercedes doesn't notice and chimes in.

MERCEDES

Oh absolutely! We love having guests. Maybe this winter. I'm sure you'd like an escape from the cold.

Dusty reaches for her wine glass, her face tight. She drains it.

JOLENE

Dusty, what is it?

MERCEDES

Oh no, is something wrong?

Dusty's eyes tear up and she clears her throat loudly.

JOLENE

Honey, what's the matter?

Maddy watches Dusty's face. Dusty sees her and shakes her head.

JOLENE

Mercy, honey, why don't you take Maddy inside and let her watch some Netflix?

MERCEDES

Sure. Sure. Come on, Maddy.

Mercedes takes Maddy's hand and leads her into the house. Dusty watches them through the sliding glass door.

JOLENE

Dusty, talk to me.

Dusty sighs through tears.

DUSTY

We ain't...we ain't on no trip. I took Maddy...

JOLENE

Took her?

Mercedes comes back out and takes her seat. Through the glass door Dusty sees Maddy on the couch, contentedly watching cartoons.

DUSTY

Yesterday I was keeping her. And I saw...bruises on her back.

JOLENE

Oh.

MERCEDES

Bruises?

DUSTY

I thought it must be Britney's no-count boyfriend... But when I asked Maddy, she said it was her Mama.

A sob escapes her throat and Dusty covers her mouth. Jolene gets up and sits beside Dusty. She rubs her back and exchanges a concerned look with Mercedes.

JOLENE

Oh, Dusty.

DUSTY

I don't know what came over me. I just panicked. I snatched her up and got in the car. Next thing I know... It's night time and I'm still driving.

JOLENE

So you came here.

DUSTY

Yeah. I just...didn't know what else to do.

JOLENE

It's okay, you did the right thing.

MERCEDES

Hold on a second, please. Does Maddy's mother know where she is?

There's a pause as Dusty and Jolene consider the ramifications of this question.

DUSTY

I don't know.

MERCEDES

Did you tell her?

DUSTY

Well, no...

MERCEDES

Has she tried to reach you since last night?

DUSTY

No. Well, I don't know. My phone's dead.

MERCEDES

And you took her across state lines.

JOLENE

Mercedes.

MERCEDES

Jolene, this is serious.

JOLENE

I know it's serious, babe, a child is being abused.

MERCEDES

I understand that, but kidnapping the child is not the right way to deal with it.

JOLENE

It's not kidnapping!

DUSTY

(quiet)

Yeah it is. I knew that the whole time. But by God, I'm not letting that little girl get hit again.

JOLENE

No. Absolutely not...But Dusty, are you positive it's Britney? Maybe Maddy's just...telling stories?

DUSTY

No, it's Britney. She's using again.

Dusty fights back the tears with anger, slamming her fist on the table.

DUSTY

I'll be damned if I let her lay a hand on my grand-baby.

JOLENE

No. We can't let that happen.

MERCEDES

I understand this is serious. But we cannot have a kidnapped child here. You've got to take her home, Dusty.

JOLENE

Mercedes! This is not an Amber Alert, this is my sister!

MERCEDES

Yeah, that's right! A sister who hasn't talked to you in years! Until she shows up on our doorstep with a small child. A kidnapped child!

JOLENE

Hey! Our past is between me and her. You have no right to comment on it!

MERCEDES

I do when it affects me. And it most certainly affects me if we get charged with aiding and abetting a kidnapping.

JOLENE

Mercedes, this is family we're talking about!

MERCEDES

YOU are my family. And I'm yours!

JOLENE

This is my—

DUSTY

She's right. We can't hide here.

JOLENE

...You want to go back?

DUSTY

I've got to.

JOLENE

Then I'll go with you.

Dusty looks at her gratefully.

DUSTY

Alright then.

Mercedes reaches across the table and takes Dusty's hand.

MERCEDES

Dusty. I know your heart is in the right place. And you have my full support, Jolene and I are here for you. Just not...not like this.

DUSTY

I understand.

Mercedes squeezes her hand and stands up.

MERCEDES

I'll give you two some time.

Jolene and Dusty sit in silence for a moment, then Jolene gets up and returns to her seat, where her glass of wine is still half full.

Jolene reaches for an unopened bottle of wine in the middle of the table and uses a corkscrew to open it.

She fills her own glass and pours some for Dusty. Dusty rubs her eyes.

DUSTY

Ah, Joey, what am I gonna do?

JOLENE

We're going to get a good night's sleep, and tomorrow we're going to drive back home and...we'll have a talk with Britney.

DUSTY

And then what? Maddy goes home with me? Am I supposed to raise a child? At my age?

JOLENE

Dusty, you're not exactly a Golden Girl. You're only forty-six.

DUSTY

I'll be forty-seven in July, and it don't matter how old I am, I'm not fit to raise a child.

JOLENE

Of course you are. Don't be silly.

DUSTY

Why? Cause I did such a great job with Britney?

JOLENE

Dusty, some things are out of your control. You can't hold yourself responsible for...Britney. She's an adult.

DUSTY

I am responsible though. If I'd been better, a better mother, she might not be like this.

JOLENE

You don't know that for sure.

DUSTY

It's just not who I am. I don't have my shit together. I'm not a patient person. I don't make enough money. I hate housework. I'm not a Proverbs 31 woman!

JOLENE

(rolling her eyes)

Oh Lord...

DUSTY

I mean, I've tried to be that for Maddy. I've tried to make up for what Britney lacks...but Britney's just like me. And I'm just like Mama. Women in this family are shit mothers.

JOLENE

First of all, you're not Mama. Okay? You're better than Mama. And second, speak for yourself.

DUSTY

What do you mean?

JOLENE

I mean, I'm a woman in this family and I believe I would make a pretty good mother.

Dusty nods slowly.

DUSTY

Yeah, you would. Much better than me, anyway. Shit, look at you. You're a perfect woman. Beautiful house, loving...wife, lots of money, good hair...is that a weave?

JOLENE

No honey, this is all me.

DUSTY

Figures.

JOLENE

Listen, Dusty. Forget about Proverbs 31. I think you're more of a Rizpah.

DUSTY

A what now?

JOLENE

Remember when I was in seminary?

DUSTY

(laughing)

Yeah, for a hot minute.

JOLENE

In my Old Testament class, I wrote a paper about a woman named Rizpah. She was one of Saul's concubines. And Saul and David were at war with one another, and eventually Rizpah's sons got caught in the crossfire. Her sons were slain and their bodies strung up in the desert. But Rizpah wouldn't leave them. She stayed there, scaring off birds and animals that came to scavenge their bodies. She guarded them day and night for five months.

The story resonates with Dusty.

DUSTY

What happened to her?

JOLENE

David found out about her and gave her sons a proper burial.

Dusty nods, circumspect.

JOLENE

Why don't you and Maddy get some rest, and tomorrow we'll drive back and figure this out. Okay?

DUSTY

Okay.

Jolene gets up and starts clearing plates. When she opens the sliding glass door, Dusty can hear the sound of cartoons from the living room, and see Maddy sitting on the edge of the couch, engrossed in the show.

INT. JOLENE'S GUEST ROOM. NIGHT.

Dusty helps Maddy into the pajamas she bought at Target earlier.

She tucks Maddy into one side of the bed.

DUSTY
You had a big day today, didn't you?

MADDY
(sleepy)
Mawmaw, can we go to the beach tomorrow?

Dusty crosses to the other side of the bed and gets under the covers.

DUSTY
No, baby. We're going home tomorrow.

MADDY
I don't want to go home!

DUSTY
We got to, baby. But don't worry about it, alright? Mawmaw's going to make sure everything is okay. Nobody's going to hurt you anymore, Maddy.

She kisses Maddy's forehead and turns out the light.

Maddy is soon asleep but Dusty lies awake.

INT. JOLENE'S GUEST ROOM. DAY.

Dusty lies awake as dawn's first light begins to fill the room. Maddy still sleeps.

Dusty gets up and puts her clothes on, the same outfit she wore yesterday. She sits down in front of a dresser with a vanity mirror and pulls a zippered make-up bag and a hair brush from her purse.

INT. JOLENE'S BEDROOM. DAY.

Jolene gets out of bed, Mercedes is still asleep.

INT. JOLENE'S GUEST ROOM. DAY.

Dusty examines herself in the mirror. Then she methodically begins her routine.

She squeezes a small dollop of face cream into her hand and warms it between her palms. Then she pats it onto her face using gentle upward strokes.

INT. JOLENE'S MASTER BATHROOM. DAY.

Jolene finishes applying moisturizer to her face and dabs eye cream beneath her eyes.

INT. JOLENE'S GUEST ROOM. DAY.

Dusty puts the finishing touches on her foundation. Her face is all one color and mask-like.

INT. JOLENE'S MASTER BATHROOM. DAY.

Jolene applies blush and bronzer over her cheekbones.

INT. JOLENE'S GUEST ROOM. DAY.

Dusty swipes eyeshadow over her eyelids. Then she carefully lines them with eyeliner.

INT. JOLENE'S MASTER BATHROOM. DAY.

Jolene applies mascara to curled lashes. She fills in her eyebrows with a pencil.

INT. JOLENE'S GUEST ROOM. DAY.

Dusty puts on lipstick and blots her lips on the back of her hand.

INT. JOLENE'S MASTER BATHROOM. DAY.

Jolene curls her hair away from her face with a large barrel curling iron. She runs her fingers through the curls, loosening them up.

INT. JOLENE'S GUEST ROOM. DAY.

Dusty brushes her hair upside down, then flips her head upright and tousles it with her fingers. She parts it on the side and uses the brush to back-comb her hair at the crown.

She smooths a few fly-aways and looks at herself in the mirror.

She looks strong.

INT. JOLENE'S MASTER BATHROOM. DAY.

Jolene puts in a pair of earrings and smooths lotion over her hands and forearms. She looks in the mirror.

She looks strong.

EXT. JOLENE'S HOUSE. DAY.

Jolene, Mercedes, Dusty, and Maddy stand on the front porch saying goodbye. Mercedes hugs Dusty.

MERCEDES

Dusty, I really hope you will come visit again soon. Maybe we can do Thanksgiving together.

DUSTY

Yeah, maybe. Thanks for putting us up for the night.

MERCEDES

You're always welcome.

(to Maddy)

Maddy, it was so nice to meet you.

She gives Maddy a hug. Then she looks to Jolene.

They kiss lightly and embrace.

JOLENE

I love you. I'll call you tonight.

MERCEDES

I love you too. Drive safe, okay?

Jolene shoulders her overnight bag and they walk to the car.

Jolene and Dusty, with their hair perfect and their make-up on point, are serious. Maddy clutches her doll.

DRIVING MONTAGE

INT. DUSTY'S CAR. DAY.

Dusty drives, Jolene sits in the passenger seat holding her phone, which is plugged into the stereo's auxiliary port. They are both singing along to Dolly Parton's "Backwoods Barbie." Maddy does her best to sing the lyrics too.

DUSTY, JOLENE

"I'm just a backwoods Barbie, too
much makeup, too much hair.
Don't be fooled by thinkin' that the
goods are not all there.
Yes, I can see where I could be
misjudged upon first glance;
But even backwoods Barbies deserve a
second chance..."

INT. DUSTY'S CAR. DAY.

Jolene drives, Dusty sleeps with her mouth open.

INT. GAS STATION BATHROOM. DAY.

Jolene holds Maddy's hand while Dusty layers strips of toilet paper over the toilet seat. Layer, after layer, after layer.

INT. MCDONALD'S. DAY.

Dusty and Maddy sit at a table. Jolene brings a tray full of food and doles out the hamburgers and fries. She gives herself a Big Mac and large fry.

Dusty scoffs.

DUSTY

What happened to no carbs?

JOLENE

Special circumstances, Dusty! You gotta stay flexible, roll with the punches. Take one for the team.

Jolene bites down on a handful of fries.

EXT. GAS STATION. DAY.

Jolene parks the car and goes inside. Dusty pumps gas.

Jolene comes out of the convenience store swigging from a bottle of antacid.

Dusty laughs.

INT. DUSTY'S CAR. DAY.

Maddy's asleep and Dusty is driving. They pass a sign marking the Georgia state line. Dusty's expression is serious now.

INT. DUSTY'S CAR. DAY.

The sun is low in the sky as Dusty slows the car to a crawl on the small town Main Street. Jolene looks out the window at the churches and dilapidated buildings. She looks apprehensive.

Jolene looks over at Dusty.

JOLENE

How are we going to do this?

DUSTY

I'm going to have a word with my daughter. Then Maddy's coming home with us.

JOLENE

You think Britney will be okay with that?

DUSTY

She'll have to be. I'm not taking no for an answer.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD. DAY.

Dusty's car passes fields of corn and soybeans and far-flung houses. The sun is setting.

INT. DUSTY'S CAR. DAY.

The mood in the car is tense. Dusty turns the car into Britney's driveway.

There are a few other cars outside the house. Dusty parks behind them.

DUSTY
 (to Jolene)
 You stay in the car with Maddy.

Jolene nods. Maddy sleeps.

Dusty takes a deep breath and steps out of the car.

EXT. BRITNEY'S HOUSE. DAY.

Dusty walks through patchy, dry grass to the house. She climbs the steps of the tiny, weathered front porch.

Dusty knocks on the door.

She hears movement inside the house but no one opens the door. She looks back to the car. Jolene is watching intently.

Dusty knocks again, louder.

Finally, JESSICA, a woman in a ratty t-shirt opens the door. It is most definitely *not* Britney. She scowls at Dusty.

DUSTY
 Who are you??

JESSICA
 Who are you?

DUSTY
 Britney's mother, that's who.
 Where's my daughter?

JESSICA
 She ain't here.

DUSTY
Where is she?

JESSICA
I don't know.

DUSTY
What about Travis. Is he here?

JESSICA
No, he ain't here neither.

DUSTY
I need to know where they are.

JESSICA
Sorry, can't help you.

Jessica begins to close the door. Dusty pushes it back open, catching Jessica off-guard.

DUSTY
Uh-uh-uh. I believe I'll just have a look around.

INT. BRITNEY'S HOUSE. DAY.

Dusty steps inside and sees a quick movement out of the corner of her eye. As her eyes adjust to the dim light, she realizes there are other people in the house.

A SKINNY YOUNG MAN sits on the couch, and is straightening a blanket over the top of the coffee table, but the smoke escaping from his mouth and nose gives him away.

A HEAVYSET GIRL with greasy hair smokes a cigarette in an arm chair. The TV is on. It's a rerun of an old sitcom.

The living room is still scattered with Maddy's toys.

Dusty picks her way across the living room and into a little hallway that leads to the bedrooms.

INT. BRITNEY'S BEDROOM. DAY.

Dusty opens the door and looks in. It's empty. Messy, but empty.

INT. MADDY'S BEDROOM. DAY.

Maddy's bedroom is less messy, but also empty.

Dusty steps inside and looks around. She finds a pink backpack and begins filling it with Maddy's clothes. She zips it up and takes a stuffed bear from the bed.

INT. BRITNEY'S LIVING ROOM. DAY.

Dusty emerges from the hallway with the pink backpack slung over one shoulder and the bear tucked under her other arm.

DUSTY

Alright, which one of you lousy burnouts knows where Britney is?

JESSICA

I done told you, we don't know.

DUSTY

Well you're gonna help me figure it out, or I'm calling the landlady and telling her some squatters are smoking crack in her rental house.

The heavysset girl stands up and puts out her cigarette on a magazine. She steps imposingly toward Dusty.

DUSTY

You wanna tangle with me big girl? Better be sure you can take me...and my brother. Yeah, that's right. He's in the car. Probably getting ready to come check on me.

The heavy set girl backs away, but no one speaks. Dusty reaches into her purse and pulls out her phone.

She holds the screen away from them so they can't see it's dead.

DUSTY

Alright, I'm making the call.

The skinny man speaks.

SKINNY MAN

Her and Travis went to the mill.

DUSTY

Uh huh. Who's at the mill?

SKINNY MAN
They was looking for Shorty.

DUSTY
Shorty's a dealer?

SKINNY MAN
Y-Yes, ma'am.

DUSTY
What's he look like?

SKINNY MAN
He's...short.

DUSTY
What else, dipshit??

SKINNY MAN
I don't know, brown hair?

JESSICA
Naw, Shorty's got red hair.

DUSTY
Something I can work with, please.

JESSICA
He likes to wear gold chains. Got
some tattoos.

DUSTY
Alright then.

Dusty hikes the bear up under her arm and walks to the door. Then she turns around.

DUSTY
If I come up here tomorrow and find
y'all still here...your sorry asses
are gon' wish you never met me. You
hear??

They nod.

She stares them down for a moment, then leaves, slamming the door.

EXT. BRITNEY'S YARD. DAY.

It's dusk now. Dusty crosses the yard with a quickness. At the car she motions to Jolene, who leans over and pops the trunk. Dusty puts the bear and the back pack in the trunk and gets back in the driver's seat.

INT. DUSTY'S CAR. NIGHT.

Dusty peels out of the driveway, fastening her seat belt on the road.

She checks the rear view mirror. Maddy is still asleep.

JOLENE

How'd it go??

DUSTY

She wasn't there.

JOLENE

What? Who answered the door?

DUSTY

Some of her junkie friends. Said her and Travis went to the mill.

JOLENE

Ooh. Is it still...

DUSTY

Yeah. That place ain't changed much since you left.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD. NIGHT.

Dusty's car passes over more country miles before entering a slightly larger town.

They drive through the main drag, lined with chain stores and restaurants.

INT. DUSTY'S CAR. NIGHT.

Jolene watches out the window as they pass the local Wal-Mart. Her expression is grim. She looks back at Maddy.

JOLENE

Maybe we should drop Maddy off.
Gene's probably home now, don't you
think?

Dusty hesitates.

DUSTY

There's no time.

JOLENE

I'm just afraid she'll see
something... I don't want her to see
something upsetting.

DUSTY

There's no time. I just have a
feeling.

Jolene acquiesces.

EXT. STREET. NIGHT.

Dusty turns the car into an industrial neighborhood. Most
of the buildings are dark. At the end of the street an
entire block is taken up by an abandoned textile mill.

The red brick mill rises above cracked pavement, with
broken windows and smokestacks standing tall. Weeds have
grown up around the building and the sidewalk along the
street.

INT. DUSTY'S CAR. NIGHT.

Dusty turns the car into the abandoned mill parking lot.
She spots a group of cars at the opposite corner of the
lot, and points the car in their direction.

As they near the group of cars, they can see three men
standing around and watching them approach.

JOLENE

Dusty, I don't know about this.

DUSTY

It's fine, just stay in the car.

Dusty leaves the car running and gets out.

EXT. ABANDONED MILL PARKING LOT. NIGHT.

Dusty hesitates only for a moment before striding up to the men.

One of the men looks like a DANGEROUS HIPSTER. He has a mustache and a plaid shirt buttoned all the way up. Another has more of a REDNECK vibe.

DANGEROUS HIPSTER

Hey mama, you lost?

DUSTY

Which one of you degenerates goes by Shorty?

A short man in his late twenties steps forward. He has reddish brown hair, freckles, and lots of gold chains.

SHORTY

I'm Shorty. What you want, lady?

DUSTY

Did you sell to a girl named Britney tonight?

SHORTY

I don't know, who's asking?

DUSTY

Her mother.

SHORTY

How I know you not a cop?

DUSTY

Do I fuckin' look like a cop??

SHORTY

If you did, would I have to ask?

DUSTY

I'm looking for my daughter! Have you seen her or not?!

REDNECK

Damn, this biddy's wound up tight!

DUSTY

Is that you, Thomas Lawry? Your mama still got that perm?

REDNECK

...Yeah I guess.

DUSTY

How you reckon I know that?

He shrugs.

DUSTY

Cause I fucking rolled it myself!
I'm not a cop, you assholes, I'm a
beautician. Now have you seen my
daughter or not?

SHORTY

Yeah, she was here.

DUSTY

Okay, where'd she go?

SHORTY

Her and Travis went to party with
Richie.

DUSTY

Where?

SHORTY

Said they were going back to
Richie's place.

DUSTY

Are you talking about Richie Burris?

SHORTY

Yeah.

DUSTY

He still live off Clark's Ford Road?

SHORTY

I don't know lady, I don't party
with him. I just sell him shit.

Dusty growls in frustration and paces back and forth.

REDNECK

Hey, hey, chill. That's him, that's
the dude. Clark's Ford Road.

Dusty wheels around and starts walking back to the car.

SHORTY
Yo, you're welcome!

DANGEROUS HIPSTER
Hey, you need to relax, mama! I got
some shit that can help you with
that!

Without turning around Dusty raises a middle finger and gets in the car.

INT. DUSTY'S CAR. NIGHT.

Dusty slams the car in gear and loops it back to the entrance. Jolene looks alarmed.

JOLENE
Dusty! What was that??

DUSTY
She went off with Richie Burris.

JOLENE
Burris...Donna Burris' boy?

DUSTY
Yeah.

JOLENE
My God, he's got to be close to our
age. What's she doing with him?

DUSTY
Heroin, that's what she's doing with
him.

JOLENE
Heroin? I thought it was pills...

DUSTY
(grim)
Started that way.

JOLENE
Oh, Jesus.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD. NIGHT.

Dusty's car speeds through curves and bumps over rail road tracks.

INT. DUSTY'S CAR. NIGHT.

Maddy wakes up.

MADDY

Mawmaw!

DUSTY

It's okay, Maddy baby. We're still in the car. Aunt Jolene is here.

MADDY

Are we almost home?

DUSTY

Almost! Just one more stop! Mawmaw has to...Just one more stop, okay?

Jolene pulls a pack of crackers from her purse and passes them back to Maddy.

JOLENE

Here you go sweetie.

Dusty slows the car and turns onto a winding country road. She drives slowly and looks at each house as they pass.

DUSTY

Help me look for Britney's car. It's a blue Civic.

JOLENE

Okay.

Jolene peers out the passenger side.

DUSTY

The Burrises all live out here. Except Donna, she moved to Macon after Jimmy died.

JOLENE

I don't see any blue cars, but it's so dark...

Dusty slows the car to a crawl.

DUSTY

Hang on a minute, there's a bunch of cars over there.

JOLENE

Is that...

DUSTY
A blue Civic. Yep, that's her.

Dusty swings the car into the driveway.

It's a trailer, and in bad shape. The front porch is slumping, and the skirting around the bottom of the trailer has fallen away in places, allowing the car's headlights to beam into the underpinning.

Dusty puts the car in park.

Jolene looks at her and nods.

DUSTY
Maddy, I'll be back in a minute
okay? You listen to Aunt Jolene.

She gets out of the car and closes the door.

EXT. DILAPIDATED TRAILER. NIGHT.

Dusty walks determinedly across the yard. She climbs the steps to the front door. Instead of knocking, this time she just opens it.

INT. DILAPIDATED TRAILER. NIGHT.

Inside the trailer is dark and smoky.

She's in the kitchen. A man and woman sit at the kitchen table. The man sucks a straw over a piece of foil while the woman runs a lighter over the back of the foil.

Neither of them acknowledges Dusty's presence.

A cat licks food off a dirty plate in a sink full of dishes and trash.

Dusty moves forward carefully.

In the living room a TV is blaring. The blue glow highlights bodies reclining on the floor and couch. All the surfaces are covered in beer bottles, full ash trays, aluminum foil, pipes, and needles.

She steps over their legs and arms, peering at their faces. None of them are Britney.

INT. TRAILER, HALLWAY. NIGHT

She steps into the narrow hallway. It's much darker here.
She tries the first door.

INT. TRAILER, BEDROOM. NIGHT.

It's a bedroom. She sees frenzied movement on the bed and quickly closes the door.

She stands for a moment, realizing she can't move on until she's sure. She winces and opens the door again.

The movement continues. She can make out two bodies in silhouette.

She gropes blindly for a light switch. Finally she finds one and flips the light on.

Two sets of sunken eyes, four pock-marked arms, two angry mouths yelling obscenities at her. No Britney. She turns off the light and closes the door.

INT. TRAILER, HALLWAY. NIGHT.

Dusty sees light flickering below the next door. She opens it slowly.

INT. TRAILER, SECOND BEDROOM. NIGHT.

It's another bedroom, packed with furniture and stacked with books, papers, knickknacks, and clothes.

An old recliner is wedged between the foot of the bed and the closet.

It takes Dusty's eyes a moment to register what she's seeing.

And OLD WOMAN rests in the recliner, under blankets, a little dog on her lap. Her eyes are glassy and her hair thin and unkempt.

The old woman lifts her eyes from the TV and struggles to focus them on Dusty.

OLD WOMAN

Richie?

Dusty stares at her, shaken. The dog begins to bark at her.

The old woman's feet stick out from a blanket. Her toes are twisted and the nails thick and overgrown. There are piles of dog excrement on the floor.

Dusty raises a hand to her nose.

OLD WOMAN

Richie?

From a pile of junk on the dresser, an old magnifying mirror catches Dusty's reflection and distorts it.

Dusty turns away in horror.

INT. TRAILER, HALLWAY. NIGHT.

She runs down the hall but only makes it a few steps. Her foot crashes through a hole in the floor.

She cries out, catching herself on the wall. She pulls her foot back up. The hole is illuminated by her car's headlights, shining from outside. She stares down at the dust and cobwebs for a moment.

Then she presses on.

At the end of the hall is a back door. A figure is slumped in a chair by the door.

She gets closer. It's Travis. He looks like he's sleeping, but in an upright position, his head at an uncomfortable angle.

DUSTY

Travis!

He moves slightly but his muscles seem unable to support his head.

She notices a needle in his lap. She slaps his face.

DUSTY

Travis! Wake up! Travis!

TRAVIS

Huh?

DUSTY

Where's Britney? Where's Britney??

Travis looks into her face and nods out again. She shakes him.

DUSTY

Wake up you son of a bitch! Where is Britney?!

Travis looks toward the back door and lifts a limp hand in its direction. She leaves him and approaches the door.

EXT. TRAILER, BACK PORCH. NIGHT.

The door opens onto a back porch, lit by a single bare light bulb. There's an old mattress on the floor of the porch, which is strewn with trash and beer bottles.

Britney lies on the mattress. She's unconscious and her pants are around her ankles. A man kneels over her, his hands between her legs. RICHIE.

Dusty gasps hard and rushes Richie, whose back is to her. He doesn't hear her coming until her foot connects with the side of his head.

He falls to the floor, groaning. Dusty casts about the porch for something, anything...

There's a rusted metal patio table covered in junk. Dusty heaves it on top of Richie, pinning him under it.

While he's incapacitated, she runs to Britney. She pulls her pants up and a needle out of her arm.

DUSTY

Britney! Come on baby, wake up!

Britney doesn't move. Richie is moving under the table, angrily swatting away trash.

DUSTY

Oh God. Oh God...

She strains to lift her daughter from the mattress. Britney's legs give way. Dusty hooks her arms under Britney's and drags her through the back door.

INT. TRAILER, HALLWAY. NIGHT.

She drags Britney past Travis, down the hall, and into the living room.

INT. TRAILER, LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

She steps over and on and around the people in the living room. She grunts in fear and determination.

INT. TRAILER, KITCHEN. NIGHT.

In the kitchen the man and woman laugh as she drags Britney across the dirty linoleum.

EXT. DILAPIDATED TRAILER. NIGHT.

Finally she bursts through the front door and onto the porch.

Dusty's breathing is fast, her eyes bright with fear. She begins to drag Britney down the porch steps.

Jolene rushes up and grabs Britney's legs.

JOLENE

Oh my God, Dusty!

DUSTY

Maddy—

JOLENE

In the car, she's fine.

Together they carry Britney across the yard, through the blinding headlights to the back seat of the car.

Richie flings open the front door of the trailer and yells at them.

RICHIE

What the fuck?!

Dusty pushes Britney into the back seat, folding her legs in behind her. Maddy wails.

DUSTY

(to Jolene)

Drive!

Jolene gets in the driver's seat. Dusty squeezes in next to Britney and slams the door.

INT. DUSTY'S CAR. NIGHT.

Jolene puts the car in gear and backs out fast. Richie slams his fists on the hood of the car. Jolene hits the gas and he jumps out of the way.

Out on the road again, Jolene floors it.

DUSTY
Shit! Shit! Britney, wake up! Come on!

JOLENE
Is she breathing??

DUSTY
Oh God, I don't know, I don't know!

She puts her face over Britney's mouth. Maddy wails, panicked.

Dusty puts her finger under Britney's jaw, checking for a pulse.

DUSTY
I think so. I don't know. Drive faster!

JOLENE
I'm going as fast as I can.

DUSTY
Oh fuck! Do you even remember where the hospital is??

JOLENE
I remember, I remember!

Britney begins to convulse. Dusty sobs.

DUSTY
Joey, what do I do??

JOLENE
Turn her. Turn her on her side.

Dusty rolls Britney onto her side and holds her while she convulses. Maddy shrieks and cries.

MADDY
Mama!!!

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD. NIGHT.

The car speeds through the night.

EXT. HOSPITAL. NIGHT.

Dusty's car careens into the hospital's emergency bay, horn blaring.

Dusty jumps out of the back seat and begins to hoist Britney out of the car. Jolene runs around to help her.

JOLENE

We need some help over here!

A MAN in his sixties and a NURSE on break run up to the car.

NURSE

What did she take??

JOLENE

Heroin. Get some Narcan, now!

The nurse runs into the hospital. The man helps Jolene and Dusty carry Britney toward the emergency room doors.

Some DOCTORS and NURSES run out with a stretcher and help lift Britney onto it. They whisk her away as fast as they can go.

Dusty runs after them. Jolene returns to the car where Maddy is shaking and crying. She extracts the child from the car seat and picks her up holding her tight.

JOLENE

It's okay, Maddy. It's okay, you're safe. Sshhh....

INT. HOSPITAL. NIGHT.

Dusty stands outside a pair of double doors staring through the glass. Her face is drained and frozen in a distraught expression.

Jolene rushes up, Maddy in tow. Maddy's face is red and tear-stained, but her sobs have faded to hiccups.

Jolene puts an arm around Dusty and leads her back toward the waiting room. Dusty dissolves into tears. Jolene squeezes her tight and fights back tears of her own.

INT. DUSTY'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Gene is asleep in the recliner, the cordless phone resting on his chest. He's fully dressed, shoes still on.

The phone rings. He shoots upright and scrambles for a moment to answer the phone.

GENE

Dusty??...Joey? Where are you,
what's going on?...Is she okay??

With the phone still to his ear, he closes the recliner and heads for the door, grabbing his keys on the way out.

EXT. HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM. NIGHT.

Jolene stands near the entrance, holding Maddy, who's asleep on her shoulder. Jolene rocks back and forth gently. Her eyes land on Gene as he crosses the parking lot toward them.

Gene approaches and stops in front of Jolene, taking her in. She holds his gaze.

GENE

Joey...

Jolene extends her hand.

JOLENE

It's Jolene now.

A little bewildered, Gene shakes her hand.

GENE

Where's Dusty?

JOLENE

She's with Britney. She's okay.

GENE

Dusty's okay?

JOLENE

They're both okay. Well...under the
circumstances.

Gene reaches out for Maddy and Jolene passes her to him. Maddy doesn't wake up.

JOLENE

Maddy's had a bad scare.

Gene nods. They stare at each other for a moment.

JOLENE

I'm going to stay here with Dusty.
I'll drive her home.

Gene nods. Then he turns and walks slowly across the parking lot, Maddy asleep on his shoulder.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. DAY.

Sunlight is starting to filter through the hospital room's window.

Britney sleeps fitfully on the bed. Dusty sits next to the bed watching her.

Britney moans and pulls the blanket over her shoulders. Then she throws the blanket off.

Britney wakes up and looks around. She's pale and her eyes are sunken.

Dusty stands up and pours water into a plastic cup.

DUSTY

Drink.

BRITNEY

No...

DUSTY

Drink.

Britney takes a few sips. Dusty sits the cup back on the tray.

DUSTY

Britney, this has gotten out of control.

BRITNEY

Not now, Mama. I feel like shit.

DUSTY

We are having this conversation, Britney! After what I went through last night—

Her voice catches.

DUSTY

...You don't even remember it do
you?

Britney turns away from her.

DUSTY

Well I won't soon forget it.

(leaning in)

Britney. Britney! You're going to
kill yourself with this shit! It's
gonna take your life. Is that what
you want?

Tears stream down Britney's face.

DUSTY

I been on the phone with Preacher
Benton. He knows a rehab that will
take you. Will you do it, Brit? Will
you go and take care of yourself?

Britney stares at the wall for a few moments. Finally she
nods. Dusty exhales.

DUSTY

Okay. Okay, good.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM LOBBY. DAY.

Jolene is asleep in a chair. Dusty sits down beside her and
she snaps awake.

JOLENE

Oh my God...

DUSTY

It's okay, it's okay.

JOLENE

Lord have mercy.

DUSTY

Gene came and got Maddy?

JOLENE

Yeah.

DUSTY
I had a talk with Britney. She said
she'd go to rehab.

JOLENE
That's great. She's okay?

DUSTY
Yeah, she's okay. Feels like shit.
Doctor said the Narcan will give her
bad withdrawal...That's why I'm
trying to get her right into rehab,
no messing around.

JOLENE
Yeah, I think that's best.

DUSTY
Thank God for Preacher—

She stops and jumps up. Britney is walking down the hall
toward the exit doors.

Dusty runs to her.

DUSTY
Britney honey, why don't you go lay
down? You need to get hydrated.

BRITNEY
No, I'm done with this place.

DUSTY
Okay baby, let's take you home. I'll
put you up in Maddy's room.

Dusty puts her hand on Britney's arm but she shrugs it off.

BRITNEY
No. No, just leave me alone!

DUSTY
Britney!

They've passed the waiting room now and Britney continues
on toward the automatic doors.

Through the glass Dusty sees Britney's blue Civic.

DUSTY
What? No, no! You said you were
going to rehab! You said you'd get
help!

BRITNEY
Changed my mind.

The automatic doors open and they step outside.

DUSTY
No, baby, no! You can't do this!
This, this... Britney, you almost
died!

Britney walks toward the car.

DUSTY
(angry)
What about Maddy? Huh?! What about
your child??

Britney doesn't say anything but she stops for a moment.
Then she opens the car door.

Dusty sees Travis in the driver's seat. She lunges at the
car.

DUSTY
You sorry sack of shit! Get out of
that car! GET OUT! If she dies it
will be your fault! Your fault, I
tell you!

Travis pulls the car away from the curb and drives off.

Dusty bends over like she's been punched in the gut. Then
She sits down on the curb and cries.

EXT. DUSTY'S HOUSE. DAY.

Dusty's car parks in front of the house. Jolene gets out of
the driver's seat and walks around to open Dusty's door.
Dusty stands up slowly. She looks utterly exhausted.

Gene flings open the front door and rushes up to Dusty.

GENE
Dusty! Don't do that to me, okay
baby? You got a problem, you come to
me, you understand? Don't run off
like that!

Dusty nods. Gene puts an arm around her and helps her into
the house, where Maddy waits in the doorway. Jolene follows
with their bags.

INT. MADDY'S ROOM, DUSTY'S HOUSE. DAY.

Jolene's brightly manicured fingers turn an allen wrench around and around.

She and Dusty are spread out on the floor putting together a child's bed.

The walls are now princess pink. Gene is in the corner, stripping painter's tape from the baseboards.

INT. DUSTY'S KITCHEN. NIGHT.

Dusty stands over a hot frying pan. In the pan, four slices of bologna sizzle. They are browned pink circles, each with a slit cut to the center.

Dusty applies a square of American cheese over each bologna slice.

Next to her, Jolene spreads yellow mustard and mayo on white bread.

Maddy plays on the floor.

JOLENE

Aww, why'd you cut them? I like it when they curl up.

DUSTY

We're grown ups around here, we eat grown up sandwiches.

They assemble the sandwiches while they talk.

JOLENE

Well, I guess we have to grow up sometime.

DUSTY

Actually, I bet Maddy would like one...

She tosses another slice of bologna into the hot pan. They watch as the edges begin to curl up.

JOLENE

Maddy, check this out! This is your culinary heritage.

Dusty lifts Maddy up so she can see inside the pan.

DUSTY
See? It makes a little bowl. What
should we put in it?

Maddy thinks for a moment.

INT. DUSTY'S LIVING ROOM. NIGHT.

Gene sits on the couch watching TV. Maddy carries in two plates. One plate has the "bologna bowl" with a few potato chips inside. The other plate has a sandwich and a handful of chips.

Gene takes his plate from Maddy and she settles on the couch next to him. She contentedly eats a potato chip.

INT. DUSTY'S KITCHEN. NIGHT.

Jolene has her head in the refrigerator.

JOLENE
You got any potato salad?

DUSTY
Yeah, I got some store-bought in
there.

JOLENE
Dusty, you really ought to get some
fruit and vegetables in this house.

DUSTY
I got fruit and vegetables!

JOLENE
Cans don't count!

Dusty huffs. Jolene settles at the table with her and takes a bite from her sandwich.

Jolene closes her eyes in rapture.

JOLENE
Mmm. Mmm-mmm-mmm!

Dusty smiles.

DUSTY
Hey, Jo? Can I call you that?

JOLENE

Jo is fine.

DUSTY

I thought we might go see Mama
before you leave.

Jolene puts down a forkful of potato salad.

JOLENE

Why?

DUSTY

Well, since you're here. And God
knows when you'll be back.

JOLENE

No.

DUSTY

No?

JOLENE

Dusty, she doesn't want to see me.
And I don't want to see her.

DUSTY

That has nothing to do with it!

Jolene's polished veneer begins to crack.

JOLENE

(emotional)

I said no!

(more calmly)

Damnit, Dusty. She never did
anything but make me feel like shit.
And I finally have a life that...I
have a good life. And she has no
place in it.

DUSTY

But she's your mother...

JOLENE

I know.

Dusty stands up and gathers the plates from the table, even
though Jolene hasn't finished her food.

DUSTY

Did you do your hair like mine on purpose? It looks exactly like mine, you know.

JOLENE

Dusty.

DUSTY

It does. I guess I should be flattered. But it's hard to feel sorry for you, *Jolene*. You got to go out there and...find yourself. Trying on mascara and bras. You know what I was doing while you were—transforming—or whatever you want to call it. I was looking after Mama. Think about that for a minute. You think I wanted to do that? Much less do it by myself? Do you know the day we moved her to the nursing home she grabbed the door frame on the way out of the house. Wouldn't let go. Screaming for Joey the whole time. Gene just about had to break her fingers to get her out of the house. But where were you? South Beach? Wearing a bikini? Mama cussed me up and down the whole way to the nursing home, 'Where's Joey? He'll take me home!' You reckon I should've told her the truth? Told her she didn't have a son anymore? Ah, hell, why do I bother? You don't care. You always kept us at arm's length. I don't even blame you. We're a goddamn shit show. But we're your family! And when family needs you they shouldn't have to ask!

JOLENE

Dusty, you have a very selective memory! I did ask you for help! We sat at this kitchen table and I told you I was transgender. And do you remember what you said to me? When I was at my most vulnerable, you said—abomination. Disgusting. You sent me away—

DUSTY

I did not!

JOLENE

Dusty you did so! Don't fucking deny it now! You sent me away and said you couldn't have a crossdresser around your child! Like I was some stranger! Like I hadn't looked after you and her both for all those years! Like I hadn't kept Britney all those days you couldn't get out of bed. Or the times I picked her up at school because you were having an episode? But no, you don't want to remember those times because you'd have to admit you're not blameless here.

DUSTY

We're your family! You don't abandon family!

JOLENE

(through tears)

What kind of family is it when you have to pretend all the time?? How can you call yourself my family if you don't see me for who I really am??

There's a long pause.

DUSTY

I see you. I do! You're my brother.

Jolene turns away in frustration.

DUSTY

...Sister. You're my sister. Aren't you?

Jolene nods.

Dusty steps up to Jolene and awkwardly put her arms around her.

EXT. ATLANTA AIRPORT. DAY.

Dusty's car pulls up to the departures gate.

Jolene and Dusty get out of the car. Jolene leans into the back seat and kisses Maddy goodbye.

Dusty and Jolene unload her bag from the trunk.

They stand awkwardly for a moment. Then Jolene pulls Dusty into a tight hug.

JOLENE
Call me, okay?

DUSTY
I will. I will.

JOLENE
Alright, I guess I better go.

DUSTY
Have a good flight. Say hello to Mercedes.

Jolene blows her a quick kiss and walks into the terminal.

EXT. BRITNEY'S HOUSE. DAY.

Dusty gets out of her car. She walks up to the front door, tries the knob, but it's locked. She reaches under the mat, pulls out a key, and opens the door.

INT. BRITNEY'S HOUSE. DAY.

The house is empty. It's still a mess, but it looks like no one has been there for awhile.

As her eyes adjust to the dim light, Dusty sees that the flat screen television is gone. There's just a bare wall and an outline in the dust where it once stood.

She walks around the living room, picking up a few of Maddy's toys. In the corner she finds an empty guitar stand. The guitar is gone.

INT. MADDY'S ROOM, BRITNEY'S HOUSE. DAY.

Dusty takes clothes from Maddy's closet and drops them into a large black trash bag. She empties drawers and pulls the covers off the bed. She puts dolls and stuffed animals in another trash bag.

EXT. BRITNEY'S HOUSE. DAY.

Dusty lugs the trash bags out the front door, a grim look on her face.

INT. CHURCH. DAY.

Dusty sits in the pew alone, wearing another of her Sunday dresses. She gazes straight ahead, as the sound of an acoustic guitar fades in.

On the stage, a group of six or seven twenty-somethings gather around two microphones and sing a contemporary hymn. One of them plays an acoustic guitar.

Some people in the congregation clap along, others nod their heads.

Dusty just watches, tears streaming down her face.

INT. NURSING HOME. DAY.

Dusty walks down the hall, wearing a Sunday dress and carrying a basket of beauty supplies.

INT. MAMA'S ROOM, NURSING HOME. DAY.

Mama sits in a folding chair in the center of the room, wearing a pink cape over her clothes. She stares at the TV, not acknowledging Dusty, who stands behind her, trimming her hair.

INT. DUSTY'S HOUSE. DAY.

Dusty tosses wet clothes from the washer into the dryer.

She loads the dishwasher with dirty dishes.

She drops ice into a glass and fills it with iced tea.

EXT. DUSTY'S HOUSE. DAY.

Dusty reclines in a plastic lounge chair, sunglasses on, cigarette in hand. She sips iced tea.

Below her, Maddy plays on a blanket, next to a wagon full of stuffed animals and toys. Her doll is on the blanket next to her.

In the driveway, Gene stands over a charcoal grill, flipping hamburgers.

Maddy becomes frustrated with her play and angrily swats the doll.

Dusty puts down her tea.

She reaches down to the blanket and sits the doll upright again. Then she smooths Maddy's hair.

DUSTY

Easy, baby girl. Take it easy.

