

Thistles

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INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE - DAY (8MM)

Boring, plain, cheap. Only a degree and a certificate hang on the bland wall behind SAZHA DAVIDS, 12.

SAZHA

-- It was my mom who brought me here.
I didn't have much choice in the matter.

O.S., someone sucks on hard candy. It scrapes their teeth.

CUT:

Sazha's in a slightly different position.

SAZHA

(shrugs)

-- I'll live with it.

CUT:

SAZHA

-- I don't regret them. She regrets them.
She didn't want me with a white man.

CUT:

She shakes her head.

SAZHA

-- No, ma'am. She just said that at the
time because she was angry.

CUT:

Sazha slouches a little more.

SAZHA

-- Because I'm young.

O.S., a pen scratches a sheet of notebook paper.

CUT:

2.

SAZHA

-- I've always been good in English, but he made it better. He made it easier to learn.

CUT:

She stares at the floor.

SAZHA

-- I think I'm doing okay.

CUT:

Sazha jiggles the lock of a tiny wooden jewelry box on her lap to make sure it's latched.

SAZHA

-- No, ma'am.

CUT:

SAZHA

-- A plumeria box.

CUT:

SAZHA

-- Just a nickname for a box to keep things in.

CUT:

SAZHA

-- Keepsakes. Mementos. Anything you want.

END 8MM

INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE - DAY

Same cheap white-walled office.

CORA DAVIDS, mid-40's black woman with hair weave, sits across from DR. PATTON, a 50's black woman.

A video of Sazha is paused in the background. A camera hangs on the wall in a corner.

PATTON

She's very well spoken, but shy at the same time. Almost awkward.

CORA

She's always been like that.

PATTON

That's why it's going to be very hard to tell how she's feeling about everything right now. And whether she's working through this successfully or not.

Cora nods.

PATTON

I can't take her as a patient because you're one of mine already. But during her evaluation, I saw no reason to refer her for any services.

Patton thinks about her words carefully.

PATTON

The poor girl has just been through a number of tragic situations. Her brother, and so forth. But, she seems to be taking all this in stride. Just remain positive and supportive of her and she'll be fine.

CORA

It's just been her choices that have me worried about her. Not telling me about everything. Carrying that box around all the time, protecting it.

PATTON

Could be pictures of her brother. Pictures of 'him', even. You have to let her get through this whichever way she wants.

Patton reaches out to put a hand on Cora's forearm for support. Cora doesn't pull away.

PATTON

And you do too. You've been through a tragedy and you've admitted yourself you're not handling any of this well at all. You need to stick it through and work through it.

The video of Sazha unpauses.

PATTON

I promise you, the easier it is for you to get through this, the easier it'll be to help your daughter through.

Cora nods and looks at the TV. She watches Sazha tuck the wooden jewelry box snug under an arm.

FADE TO BLACK:

Fall

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

Shabby, drab, tiny, crowded.

PHILLIP CRANDALL, mid-30's, lectures to a small sea of students, almost all of them black.

Crandall is pale, with a receding hairline.

CRANDALL

-- Irregular full verbs differ from regular because the past inflection, or -ed participle inflection, are different.

The students yawn in boredom. Some blatantly ignore Crandall and conversate with the person next to them, or even the person a few desks over.

Crandall, visibly uncomfortable, does nothing to stop it. Just raises his voice a decibal higher than the commotion.

CRANDALL

Some of these don't have the regular *-ed* inflection, or they have a variant of it. 'Burn', for instance.

Crandall turns to the blackboard caramelized in chalkdust. He writes 'b-u-r-n'. Then under it, 'b-u-r-n-e-d'.

CRANDALL

The *-ed* inflection of course is burned, which occurs alongside burnt.

Underneath burned, Crandall writes 'b-u-r'-

SNAP!

A pop-it smacks off the blackboard, inches from Crandall's hand, and startles him.

He eyes the class, who giggle at the flattened silver fulminate rock and paper laying on the floor.

Balding and underweight, Crandall's not handsome; but he's not unhandsome.

He finishes the 'n-t' after 'b-u-r' on the blackboard.

CRANDALL

Irregular verbs typically have variation with their base vowel. Choose, chose, chosen. Write, wrote, writt-

ANTWAN

Why ain't we just reading?

ANTWAN sits in the middle of the class.

CRANDALL

What do you mean?

ANTWAN

Why ain't we just reading? Last year in English Miss Patty just made us read the whole time. It was still boring, but better than this.

Antwan gets a few nods and agreements on his side. Most, however, don't care.

Sazha sits up front, taking diligent notes.

CRANDALL

That was sixth grade Literature last year, and Mrs. Balantine had you read 'Penina Levine is a Potato Pancake'. This is seventh grade English. Your stories for literature next quarter are harder and you need to learn the rules to understand the books.

He flips to the next page in the textbook.

CRANDALL

Now since the *-s* and the *-ing* form are predictable for both regular and irregular verbs, the only forms you'll need to memorize for-

SNAP!

This one cracks high off Crandall's forehead and he jumps.

CRANDALL

Please!

The whole class breaks into hysterics. Except Sazha. She lowers her head and frowns, embarrassed for him.

STUDENT

His bald spot actually made it snap!

Crandall waits for the class to quiet, then reads word-for-word from the text again.

The faces continue to chatter and Crandall tries to keep his voice louder than theirs.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Crandall slumps over his desk. He stares at a pile of papers in front of him.

A paper bag lunch also sits on the desk, a sandwich taken out but no bites missing.

SAZHA
Mr. Crandall?

Crandall lifts his head to the sudden visitor in the doorway.

CRANDALL
Sazha. Hi. What can I help you with?

Sazha's polite and soft spoken. A handsome girl with dark cream-coffee skin, a round face, and pudgy stomach.

SAZHA
I was wondering if I might be able to get some extra help?

CRANDALL
You're doing fine. You're the last person in the class who needs help.

SAZHA
It's just- I know the rest of them are holding me back. I've already been skipping ahead on my own and I'm having trouble with the temporal since clauses.

CRANDALL
Have you talked to Mr. Clyde or Mrs. Griffin about skipping ahead a grade? Maybe up to a level you'll be par on?

SAZHA
That's the thing. I don't do so well in some of my other classes. At least not enough to be able and skip a year.

He nods.

CRANDALL

Well, I'll tell you what. Stop by the classroom after seventh period and I'll be able to give you a hand with them.

Sazha shuffles back and forth on her feet, biting her lip.

SAZHA

If you don't mind, I kind of don't want to do it here. If my friends see me- I just don't want them to think I'm above it or anything. They already tease me about how good my grade is.

CRANDALL

Well, there's not really anywhere else we'd be able to-

SAZHA

I saw that you live in the next building over from me and my mom and brother.

She looks outside the windows.

SAZHA

My friends and I watch them play ball after school where you park your car. When I see you leave here, I can go meet you at your place.

CRANDALL

I don't know about that, Sazha.

SAZHA

It'll actually work out better for me. That way, I can stop and tell my mom I'm getting some extra help and where I'll be.

Crandall takes a deep breath and considers.

CRANDALL

All right. I'll probably be leaving here around four.

SAZHA

I'll watch for you, Mr. Crandall.

Sazha smiles and walks out.

CRANDALL

Sazha?

She stops and turns back.

CRANDALL

I'm in apartment 4C.

SAZHA

I know.

Crandall watches her leave, perplexed.

EXT. PLAYGROUND COURT - DAY

Sazha straddles one side of a picnic bench while two of her classmates, ROBERTA GRIFFIN and TAMIKA HOWELL, sit across.

They watch the boys play basketball while Tamika braids Roberta's hair into tight cornrows.

TAMIKA

You think Rodney's got good looks?

ROBERTA

Yeah, he got some looks. He ain't got no game, but he got looks.

On the court, a tall RODNEY drives the ball to the basket, but gets it ripped from him in the process.

TAMIKA

I don't know about basketball, but I know at least one of the fingers on his right hand got game.

Sazha and Berta laugh loud. Tamika waits until Berta stops spasming from the laugh before she can finish a row of corn.

ROBERTA

How about you? He find out if your mouth got any game yet?

TAMIKA

He ain't gonna find that out for awhile. He's going to have to be happy with my hand for right now.

ROBERTA

I know who got better looks than Rodney, though.

SAZHA

You better not even say it, Berta.

TAMIKA

Who?

ROBERTA

Turrell.

Sazha can't help but laugh. She playfully reaches over and shoves Berta.

SAZHA

I knew you was going to go there!

ROBERTA

Ain't my fault your brother's the shit.

TAMIKA

Hecks yeah. If he'd lose some of those thugs he chills with, he'd be Youngstown's Taye Diggs.

ROBERTA

Huh-uh, girl. We already have our Taye Diggs.

TAMIKA

Who that?

ROBERTA

Two words- Mister Bobby.

TAMIKA

I give it. You're right.

Even Sazha nods her head at that.

ROBERTA

That man is going to be the reason I become one of them biochemical scientist doctors is because of his class.

TAMIKA

Mister Bobby only needs five minutes with me to find out my mouth has game.

Another fit of laughter.

Sazha keeps a constant eye on the entrance of the junior high across the street.

SAZHA

I think Mister Bobby and Miss Kim are seeing each other.

TAMIKA

Why you say that?

SAZHA

Last week my mom was off and we saw them at dinner together.

ROBERTA

They was?

Sazha nods. They think about it in silence.

TAMIKA

I always thought she was kind of a bitch.

ROBERTA

You said she was your favorite teacher!

TAMIKA

Not now!

Sazha watches Crandall walk out the small school and cross the street. He walks down the sidewalk towards his car.

SAZHA

What do you think of Mr. Crandall?

Tamika and Roberta look at each other, then burst.

Sazha joins them in the laugh, but half-hearted. Tamika and Berta notice and pipe down.

TAMIKA

He's all right for a white man, I guess.

ROBERTA

He's a little old.

TAMIKA

And bald.

Sazha watches Crandall as a shabby BLACK MAN with an unkempt afro asks him something MOS.

Crandall shakes his head and answers awkwardly in the negative. Shy. He fumbles the keys into the door of his old Volvo.

TAMIKA

He's too quiet.

The beggar continues to press Crandall for change. Crandall continues to shake his head and hurries to get in his car.

ROBERTA

My mom was who did his interview over the summer. She said something bad happened to him. That's why he's so sad all the time.

The black man finally gives up on Crandall and leaves him.

SAZHA

I think he's cute.

Tamika and Roberta look at her.

In the car, Crandall wipes nervous sweat from his face and sulks. Depressed.

Sazha watches him.

EXT. PLANNED PARENTHOOD - DAY

A dozen protestors crowd the sidewalk, holding various signs.

'Diapers are disposable, babies are not!', 'Vacuuming your conscience isn't as easy, is it?', and 'Death Roe survivor!'

PROTESTORS

(chant)

Real doctors don't kill babies! Real
doctors don't kill babies!...

A security guard outside the clinic's foyer keeps a close eye on them all.

Cora, donning a WRTA bus driver's uniform, stands among them. Her sign reads 'Planned Herodhood - Satan's Little Helpers!'

Sazha walks down the sidewalk towards her mother.

SAZHA

Hi mom.

Cora has to stop chanting to reply.

CORA

What are you doing here, baby?

SAZHA

I just wanted to tell you I'll be home
a little later tonight.

Cora continues to thrust her sign at any on-coming traffic. She also keeps her eyes peeled for any cars that might turn into Planned Parenthood's parking lot.

CORA

How much later? It's starting to get
dark already.

SAZHA

Just a little bit. I'm getting some extra help in English.

CORA

English? Why English?

SAZHA

Mr. Crandall's letting me jump ahead and he's helping me with some of the advanced stuff.

Cora barely looks at her. Instead, she makes sure the drivers-by read her sign.

CORA

I'm working the nightline tonight, so I won't be home til after midnight. Make a frozen dinner and make sure you go to bed early.

SAZHA

I will.

Sazha hurries off.

A car pulls into the parking lot and the protestors surround the car, thrusting their signs at the car's windows. They change the chant.

PROTESTORS

Don't be a murderer! Don't be a murderer!...

An embarrassed WOMAN sits in the passenger's seat of the car, her face in her hands.

EXT. CRANDALL'S APARTMENT BUILDING - EVENING

Downtown, Sazha walks a semi-crowded sidewalk surrounded by tall ten-story buildings.

She approaches one.

TURRELL

Sazha!

She sees TURRELL, 18, walk out of the next building over.

SAZHA

What?

He jogs over. Tall. Athletic. Muscular. He could probably take Taye Diggs.

He eyes her up and down.

TURRELL

Where're you goin'?

SAZHA

I'm getting some extra help in one of my classes.

TURRELL

You still been saving that money moms has been givin' you for lunch?

SAZHA

Come on, Turrell! You know I've been saving that!

TURRELL

I just need a Philly for tonight, that's all.

Sazha reluctantly, angrily, digs two one's out of her pocket and hands it over.

SAZHA

No more now. I'm serious. Or I ain't going to put your name on the present.

TURRELL

A'ight, a'ight. I hear you.

He hurries off. She walks into the building's foyer.

INT. CRANDALL'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Drab, tiny, crowded. Not shabby, though. Crandall keeps it clean, just dull and cheerless.

He and Sazha sit across from each other at the tiny kitchen table, his nose in a book. She stares at him.

CRANDALL

'He's been getting bad headaches since he has joined the army' entails that he's still in the army, while 'He's been getting bad headaches since he joined the army' leaves it open as to whether or not he's still in the army. So, based on that perspective, since-clauses can or can't have verbs in the perfect.

SAZHA

I see it now.

CRANDALL

Want to take a break?

She nods.

CRANDALL

Another glass of milk?

SAZHA

Yes, please.

CRANDALL

Sorry I don't have any pop.

He walks into the kitchen and Sazha looks around. A moment later, Crandall returns. Milk for her and water for him.

SAZHA

You live here alone, Mr. Crandall?

CRANDALL

Yep. Just me.

SAZHA

If you're so alone at home, why do you make yourself so alone at school?

CRANDALL

What do you mean?

SAZHA

Why do you eat lunch by yourself and not with the other teachers?

CRANDALL

What are you here for? English or Psychology?

SAZHA

(laughs)

English.

Crandall smiles himself.

SAZHA

I'm just saying, Mr. Crandall. The kids, especially the older ones, don't give you a lot of respect because they think you're a pushover. They think you're easy.

Crandall gestures to her book.

CRANDALL

Come on. Let's go. Back to pro-forms.

SAZHA

Can I use your bathroom first?

CRANDALL

It's through the bedroom and to the left.

SAZHA

Thank you.

She stands, walks through the bedroom and into the bathroom. She closes the door behind her.

Crandall laughs to himself and reads his book.

After several moments, the door opens and Sazha quietly steps up behind Crandall, nude, and presses her crotch against his elbow.

SAZHA

I don't want you to be lonely anymore, Mr. Crandall.

He's startled by the tufts of unkempt pubic hair against his arm and sees wetness drip down her inner thigh.

He quickly backs out of his chair.

CRANDALL

Sazha! What are you doing?

She steps towards him.

SAZHA

I want to be with you, Mr. Crandall.

She backs him against the wall. He still denies her, but is scared to use any physical force to push her away.

She presses her lips against his, but he doesn't kiss back. He does manage to turn his head from her, though.

CRANDALL

Sazha. I can't. You're only twelve-

SAZHA

Thirteen.

CRANDALL

It's illegal.

SAZHA

Not if I want it to happen.

She still tries to kiss him. He has to grab her by the wrists to keep her from groping at his crotch.

She presses her bare body against him.

CRANDALL

I'm more than twenty years older than you, Sazha. It's still illegal.

Crandall has to shove her to keep her from grinding her crotch against him. Not hard. Just enough so she knows he means no.

She looks at him. A tear dribbles down her cheeks.

Naked and embarrassed, she sobs and runs back into the bedroom.

CRANDALL

Sazha!-

She slams the door behind her.

INT. TURRELL'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sitting on his bed, Turrell rolls herbs into his Philly.

He looks out his window to the next building over, and sees Sazha in Crandall's bedroom, naked and wiping her tears from her face with a towel.

Turrell's face grows with fury.

EXT. CRANDALL'S APARTMENT - LATER

Crandall sits at the table. He turns when he hears her come out of the bedroom, fully clothed this time.

CRANDALL

Are you okay?

She collects her books at the table, embarrassed.

SAZHA

I'll leave.

CRANDALL

Sazha-

He thinks of the words.

CRANDALL

You have great vocabulary skills, and you're doing tremendous in English. You have it in you to be a great writer.

Sazha gives him an awkward look.

CRANDALL

What I mean is that the extra help'll benefit you. You're exactly right what you said earlier, about the class holding you back. You should be on an accelerated English program.

SAZHA

After what just happened- I don't even want to go to your class anymore. I'd be too embarrassed.

CRANDALL

Then let's forget it. It's behind us. We'll never look back. You have nothing to be embarrassed about. I won't tell a soul.

SAZHA

I don't know.

CRANDALL

Well, there is a little something to be embarrassed about.

SAZHA

What?

CRANDALL

You just tried seducing the ugliest teacher in school.

Sazha laughs. The ice between them breaks a little.

SAZHA

You're not ugly, Mr. Crandall.

CRANDALL

Trust me. I know I'm not that high on the totem pole of good looks.

SAZHA

Neither am I.

Crandall shoots her a 'stop that' look.

CRANDALL

So, are we still on for afterschool help?
In the classroom, though?

SAZHA

Yeah.

Sazha stares at a picture on a shelf. A younger, happier, muscular Crandall posing with a young woman and child.

SAZHA

Who's that?

CRANDALL

My wife. And son.

SAZHA

Where are they?

CRANDALL

They passed away. In a car accident.

She looks at the picture closer.

SAZHA

Were you high school sweethearts?

CRANDALL

No. College. We did a thesis together.

SAZHA

You've been sad since they've passed.

Crandall nods.

SAZHA

It shows.

Crandall looks at her.

SAZHA

Do you hate them?

CRANDALL

My family? No. It's not their fault-

SAZHA

I mean the kids at school.

She looks high on his forehead for a mark from the pop-it.

SAZHA

Do you hate them for what they do to you?

CRANDALL

No. Absolutely not. I was a student before. I know how cruel kids can be.

SAZHA

You should stick up for yourself. I'd hate them if they treated me mean.

Crandall walks over to a shelf and pulls out a thin book.

SAZHA

I mean, I know I'm ignored by a lot of them, but they've never treated me mean.

He opens the book and points out a passage to her.

CRANDALL

I came across this years ago. It's helped me realize things about myself when I needed it.

Sazha's eyes follow the passage.

SAZHA

I grow a white rose in January the same as in July for the sincere friend who offers me his helping hand.

CRANDALL

(from memory)

- And for the cruel one who tears me away from the dreams for which I live, I grow neither weeds nor thistles... I grow the white rose.

Sazha digests it.

SAZHA

It's beautiful.

CRANDALL

Do you understand it?

SAZHA

I think so. Treat everybody the same?

CRANDALL

Conflict and differences shouldn't base anybody's opinion on how they feel about someone else. You should look at everyone with the same eyes, through the same rose-colored glasses.

SAZHA

You should look at yourself the same way.

This stops Crandall for a moment.

SAZHA

Just don't let them walk all over you. Then, maybe one day, they'll look at you through those rose-colored glasses. Maybe you just need to connect with them.

Crandall nods. Sazha notices a jewelry box on a shelf.

SAZHA

Was that your wife's?

CRANDALL

Yeah. Her plumeria box.

SAZHA

Plumeria box?

Crandall wipes dust off it.

CRANDALL

She always kept it on her dresser with a plumeria-scented perfume bottle on top of it. She never used the perfume. Ever. So after about three years, I just started referring to it as her plumeria box and the name's stuck since.

Sazha nods.

CRANDALL

She never kept jewelry in it, though. Just pictures she kept close. Ticket stubs from movies or shows we went to. She did keep a locket I got her in there.

SAZHA

That stuff still in there?

CRANDALL

(nods)

I added a couple other things here and there.

SAZHA

I think it's really sweet.

Awkward silence.

SAZHA

It's getting late, huh? I should probably go eat before my mom comes home.

CRANDALL

She's not home?

SAZHA

Working. Don't worry. I told her where I was.

Sazha gathers up her books.

INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - NIGHT

Almost closing time. Crandall makes it just inside the doors before a LIBRARIAN is about to lock it.

He walks immediately to the urban section.

INT. THE DAVIDS' LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Clean and tidy. Sazha walks in and gently closes the door behind her.

She turns around and Turrell slaps her.

TURRELL

The hell you think you're doing?

Sazha grabs her cheek.

SAZHA

Ow! What the hell, Turrell?

TURRELL

The fuck you think you're doing with that white man?

SAZHA

What are you talking about?

Turrell throws her into his --

BEDROOM

-- and she lands on the bed.

TURRELL

I seen you with him, Sazha.

He points out his window and she looks. Crandall's bedroom and bathroom window are across the way.

SAZHA

You were watching me?

TURRELL

I saw you wiping his come off your face.

SAZHA

Turrell, you don't know what you saw.

He slaps her harder.

TURRELL

How you gonna go do that with a grown man?

She pushes him away.

SAZHA

Leave me alone! It's not what you think!

TURRELL

I'm gonna tell mom about this.

She looks at him, angry.

SAZHA

You do and I'll tell her you're smoking weed again. Just mind your own business!

She pushes him out of the doorway and leaves. He watches her go, shaking his head.

He looks out his window again to Crandall's bedroom.

INT. FRIAR HALL - A.A. MEETING - NIGHT

Twenty or so people sitting at different tables, listening.

Sitting next to Crandall, DERRICK CLYDE, 50's, speaks.

CLYDE

It was when I stopped living in the problem and began living in the answer, that the problem went away. And acceptance is the answer to all of my problems.

CLYDE (cont.)

When I'm disturbed or bothered by something,
I can't find any serenity until I accept
that something as being exactly the way
it's supposed to be. Nothing happens in
God's world by mistake.

A lot of people nod their heads. Crandall just listens.

CLYDE

Until I accepted being an alcoholic, I
couldn't stay sober. Unless I accept
life completely on life's terms, I cannot
be happy. I can't concentrate on what
needs changed in the world, I have to
concentrate on what needs changed in me
and my attitudes.

More nods and ad libs of approval.

CLYDE

And with that I pass.

GROUP

Thank you, Derrick./Thanks, Derrick.

Everybody's attention turns to Crandall. He clears his throat.

CRANDALL

My name's Phillip and I'm an alcoholic.

GROUP

Hello, Phillip./Hi, Phil./Welcome, Phillip.

Crandall thinks for an awkward moment.

CRANDALL

I want to thank everybody, for sharing...
But I just kind of want to listen today.

GROUP

Thank you, Phillip./Thanks, Phillip.

Crandall lowers his head and the next person begins.

EXT. FRIAR HALL - LATER

Crandall chases Clyde out the door.

CRANDALL

Mr. Clyde.

Clyde stops and turns around. Black, friendly, respectable.

CLYDE

Phillip? How are you?

CRANDALL

I'm good. I was wondering if I could speak to you for a moment.

Clyde notices a book in Crandall's hand.

CLYDE

Yeah. What can I do for you?

CRANDALL

Actually, it's about the kids. And a little bit of what you said about accepting and living in the answer.

CLYDE

Okay.

CRANDALL

You know the children are well below the average for the curriculum.

CLYDE

Yes, I do know. Miss Griffin and myself are currently putting together an accelerated Summer program. We just have to figure out how to squeeze it in under budget.

CRANDALL

And that is a fantastic idea. But the students are well beyond lost in my classes, and they really have no chance whatsoever to grasp any of the scholastic reading material the board asked us to assign.

Clyde smiles and looks again to the book in Crandall's hand.

FADE TO:

INT. THE DAVIDS' KITCHEN - MORNING

Cora finishes cooking while Sazha and Turrell just pick.

CORA

You's are quiet today. Everything okay?

Sazha shrugs. Turrell plays with his food.

SAZHA

Just tired, I guess.

CORA

There's another girl scheduled today, so I'll be there this afternoon. Then I have to work the nightline again tonight. There'll be pasta sauce warmed in the crock pot. Just boil some noodles for it. You going to be getting help again after school today?

Sazha eyes Turrell, who just stares at her back.

SAZHA

Yeah.

CORA

All right. Make sure you're home before dark.

Cora stands and grabs her purse.

CORA

There's money for lunch on the counter, baby. I love you guys.

She walks out the door.

Sazha immediately stands and grabs her bookbag before Turrell even has a chance to speak.

She grabs the fistful of one's off the counter and leaves.

After Sazha's gone, Turrell picks up the phone and dials.

TURRELL

'Sup, cuddy? ... Hey man, I need you to
do me a solid.

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

The kids talk loud, except for Sazha who sits with her book open ready to go.

Crandall walks in and the kids keep talking just as loud.

CRANDALL

Quiet down, guys.

They continue.

CRANDALL

(firmer)

Quiet, please.

The students don't even acknowledge him.

CRANDALL

QUIET!

It startles the kids and they stop, except for JUWUAN who talks to the girl in front of him. She realizes Crandall means business and tries to ignore Juwuan.

Crandall walks to the back of the classroom and drags Juwuan's desk, Juwuan still in it, against the back wall, away from the other students.

As Crandall starts to walk back to the front of the class, Juwuan scoots his desk back to where it was and Crandall turns sharply.

CRANDALL

Move that desk another inch and you'll be explaining to Mr. Clyde why you're hitting teachers in the head with pop-its. I'm sure your grandmother would love it if you get suspended a second time this month.

Juwuan stops scooting and stays quiet.

Before Crandall turns back around, he sees Roberta's cornrows and he smiles.

CRANDALL

I like your hair.

Berta blushes, and Tamika smiles.

ROBERTA

Thank you.

Crandall takes the front of the class again.

CRANDALL

I apologize for being a little late, but I was having a conversation with Mr. Clyde and Mrs. Griffin this morning. About you guys.

TAMIKA

What about us?

CRANDALL

Your reading level. I don't think you guys are ready for 'Mice and Men' yet. I'm going to have you read something else.

ANTWAN

Penina Levine?

Crandall smiles.

CRANDALL

No. Not Penina Levine. It'll still be a challenging story, but I think you'll find more interest in this one.

Crandall holds the book up.

ROBERTA

'Standing Against the Wind'? My mom's reading that book. I told her I wanted to read it after her.

CRANDALL

Mrs. Griffin's the one who ultimately talked Mr. Clyde into putting it in the curriculum.

TAMIKA

What's it about?

ROBERTA

A girl our age moves with her mother to a hood in Chicago.

ANTWAN

We'll be reading that?

CRANDALL

That depends.

TAMIKA

On what?

CRANDALL

Your performances for the rest of the semester. Like I said, it's still going to be a challenging story for you guys and there's still some simple sentence structure that needs to be learned.

Crandall looks at them, a little more confident now.

CRANDALL

Mr. Clyde and I really want to see you guys start buckling down and making the efforts to get your grades up.

Sazha smiles at him as he opens up his text book.

CRANDALL

Now, seriously, non-jokingly, who can confidently, actually give me an example of an adverb?

Sazha raises her hand. No one else does. But they do all open their book to look for the answer.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Turrell walks down a ghetto neighborhood, past \$300 cars with \$2,400 paint jobs parked in the street.

He walks up a driveway and onto a porch where a twenty-something THUG sits, smoking a Camel.

They talk MOS and the thug discreetly hands Turrell a small revolver.

Turrell shoves it into his shorts and gives the thug dab.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Crandall grades papers. Sazha knocks and he looks up.

CRANDALL

So? How'd I do today?

SAZHA

Better, Mr. Crandall. I still noticed a little bit of nerves, but you'll get there.

CRANDALL

Well, you know, this 'opening up' thing takes time.

SAZHA

I'm kinda mad I read 'Of Mice and Men' for nothing now, but I'll get over it.

CRANDALL

Did you like it?

SAZHA

Yeah, I did. It was sad.

CRANDALL

Then it wasn't for nothing.

Sazha smiles.

CRANDALL

I did want to talk to you about something, though. I have to see what I can do about ordering copies of that book for the class after school. I'm not too sure how long that'll take.

SAZHA

Okay.

CRANDALL

If you'd still like the help, you can come over to my place when I get home, as long as-

SAZHA

I know. Nothin' funny. I'm so sorry about that, Mr. Crandall.

CRANDALL

It's over. It's done with. There's nothing to be sorry for.

Sazha nods. Crandall stands and grabs his brown bag lunch.

CRANDALL

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a rumored teacher's lounge to find.

Sazha laughs.

EXT. CRANDALL'S BUILDING - DAY

Turrell walks into the foyer, trying his best to conceal something in his shorts.

INT. BUILDING HALLWAY

Turrell takes out his I.D. card and slips it into the door jamb of 4C.

INT. CRANDALL'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Turrell walks in and closes the door behind him.

He makes sure his gun is loaded and opens up a closet door. He tucks himself inside, pushing a few old coats out of the way, including a woman's coat and a coat for a young child.

EXT. PLAYGROUND COURT - DAY

Sazha, Roberta, and Tamika sit at the bench again, watching the boys play.

TAMIKA

That was cool of Mr. Crandall, though, to give us a book like that. I didn't want to read about mouses anyway.

SAZHA

It's not about mice. It's about a hard-working man who takes care of a friend that's retarded.

ROBERTA

You read it already?

SAZHA

I liked it.

TAMIKA

Straight up, though, how come we call Mr. Bobby Mr. Bobby and Miss Kim Miss Kim, but we don't call Mr. Crandall by his first name?

ROBERTA

Because we don't know his first name?

SAZHA

Phillip.

TAMIKA

Mr. Phillip. Sounds cooler than Mr. Crandall.

ROBERTA

How you find that out?

SAZHA

I heard another teacher call him it before.

TAMIKA

I never seen another teacher talk to him.

ROBERTA

Even my mom calls him Mr. Crandall.

Crandall walks out the school doors and to his car.

TAMIKA

Is it me or was he happy today?

SAZHA

He was happier.

ROBERTA

I wonder why.

Sazha smiles and shrugs.

Before Crandall gets into his old Volvo, he waves at the girls. They wave back.

SAZHA

I got to go now.

Sazha grabs her book bag. Berta and Tamika watch her walk away. Sazha is happy, too.

EXT. CRANDALL'S BUILDING - DAY

Sprinkling. Thunder roars from clouds in the distance.

Sazha approaches the building. She thinks nothing of the commotion in the foyer and walks towards the elevator.

INT. BUILDING HALLWAY

Sazha steps off the elevator and notices a small crowd huddled around apartment 4C.

She hurries and pushes her way through the tiny pack of people trying to look in the apartment.

INT. CRANDALL'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

People look in from the doorway, disgusted.

Crandall paces back and forth by the tiny dining table, talking on the phone.

CRANDALL

... He just jumped out of my closet,
screaming and threatening to shoot. I
couldn't understand anything else he was
saying...

Turrell lies on the floor, his forehead disintegrated.

Blood and brain puddles around his sharded skull.

CRANDALL

... I was able to grab the gun and we
struggled. Then the gun went off... Yes,
I do have a gun here, but I haven't even
touched it. It was his that discharged.

Sirens are heard outside the window.

CRANDALL

... I hear them now... All right.

Sazha shoves her way through the people at Crandall's doorway. She sees Crandall and seems relieved.

Then she sees the body on the ground.

SAZHA
Turrell?

She rushes to the lifeless body.

SAZHA
What'd you do?

She hugs him, despite the sticky mess. She speaks softly.

SAZHA
What'd you do, Turrell?

Crandall looks stunned.

CRANDALL
How do you know him, Sazha?

She gives Crandall an evil glare.

SAZHA
What'd you shoot him for?

Sazha loses it. She stands and begins slapping at Crandall.

SAZHA
What'd you go kill him for?

CRANDALL
Sazha! Stop!

He doesn't protect himself from Sazha's blows. The tiny crowd gathered around Crandall's door just watches.

Two POLICE OFFICERS make their way into the apartment and pry Sazha off Crandall.

OFFICER #1
Settle down.

She still tries to slap at Crandall.

OFFICER #1
Settle down!

Officer #2 notices Turrell's disintegrated head, then looks back at Sazha trying to get out of #1's grasp.

OFFICER #2
Who's she?

CRANDALL
She's a student where I teach at.

OFFICER #1
What's she doing here?

CRANDALL
She lives nextdoor. She knows him.

OFFICER #2
How?

CRANDALL
I don't know. After she saw him, she just started hitting me.

#2 looks at Sazha and points to the body on the floor.

OFFICER #2
Do you know who that is?

Sazha takes a moment and settles. A little. She nods.

OFFICER #2
Who is he?

SAZHA
He's my brother.

Crandall takes a deep, disgusted breath and shakes his head. He's saddened. He looks at the body laying on the ground.

The officers just look at each other.

EXT. PLANNED PARENTHOOD - EVENING - LONG SHOT

Thunderstorming. The protestors thrust their signs at passing cars through the pouring rain.

Cora is the loudest and angriest of the picketers, as they all dare one of the cars to pull into the parking lot.

The two police officers approach and it takes a moment for Cora to realize they want to speak with her. She finally walks off to the side with them and they speak MOS.

She breaks down, falls to her knees, and begins wailing in the rain, clawing at the wet sidewalk with her fingers.

The officers give her a moment of mourning before they help her stand and walk her off back to their cruiser.

INT. CRANDALL'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Crandall sits at his dining table, his head in his hands.

Turrell's body's been removed, but the blood puddle where Turrell's head was remains.

Crandall stares at it. He gets up and goes in the kitchen.

He comes back with a mop and bucket filled with hot water.

With the mop, he drips some water onto the puddle of blood to break it down a bit.

He quickly stops and takes a deep breath. He puts the mop down and grabs his keys off the dining table.

INT. LIQUOR STORE - EVENING

Crandall sets down two bottles of cheap vodka in front of an old clerk, GERALD SMITHERS, late 60's with a granite voice, behind the counter.

SMITHERS
Fifteen-ninety.

Ashamed and reluctant, Crandall hands the money over.

The old man notices Crandall's awkwardness.

He bags the bottles and Crandall takes them. He nods before he leaves.

Smithers watches him go.

INT. TURRELL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sazha and Cora sit in Turrell's bedroom on the floor, crying.

Cora stands and opens Turrell's closet door. She stares at his clothes.

She reaches out, grabs an empty sleeve of one of the shirts, and breaks down into tears again.

Sazha watches her run out of the room.

INT. CRANDALL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Crandall sops up the rest of the blood and bits of brain into the mop. The drying blood just smears at first, but begins to break apart with all the water.

He drinks straight from one of the bottles of vodka on the dining table and continues sopping up the puddle.

He pauses, bends down, and picks up a fragment of bone.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Turrell's burial service is massive.

Almost the whole school's there, students, teachers and administration, except for Crandall. Also a lot of Turrell's older friends, high-schoolers and thugs.

A minister leads everybody in prayer as Sazha holds and comforts her crying mother.

INT. CRANDALL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Crandall eats dry toast. He washes it down with a gulp of rum now. The empty vodka bottles sit haphazard on the table. He cringes at the taste, but shakes it off.

He puts his toast down and just stares straight ahead.

INT. TURRELL'S BEDROOM - DAY

Sazha cleans out Turrell's closet by herself. Most of the clothes are taken off their hangar and folded on the bed.

In a corner of the closet, Sazha discovers a loose piece of wood covering a small cubby hole.

She pulls the wood out and reaches her hand in.

A bag of herb, a rock, a clear pipe, a bowl, and pictures.

Sazha looks closer at the pictures. They're of her family when their father was still alive and Sazha was very young.

Most of the pictures are of a much younger Turrell and his father, and of Sazha as a baby.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A SUBSTITUTE TEACHER fills in for Crandall. He reads from a textbook to the kids, explaining himself MOS along the way.

Sazha's desk is empty.

INT. FRIAR HALL - A.A. MEETING - DAY

Clyde listens to the person speaking. He looks over at the vacant seat next to him.

Crandall's usual spot.

INT. CRANDALL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Crandall's passed out on the couch, a half-bottle of rum on the floor next to him

INT. DAVIDS' KITCHEN - DAY

Cora sits, sad. Sazha approaches from behind and sets the pictures in front of her mother.

Cora just glances at them.

CORA

Where you get these from?

SAZHA

Turrell's closet.

She fingers through them slowly. Sazha sits down across.

CORA

I was so mad at him when he stole those.
He said he tore 'em up and threw 'em out.

SAZHA

Why'd he take them?

Cora starts tearing again.

CORA

He was so mad at your dad for dying. He became so angry after that. Every single time I punished him he just rebelled worse and worse. He was mad cause I wouldn't let him go over a friend's house. That's when he took them.

She wipes away the tears.

CORA

And he's stayed mad since then. Right up to the end.

Cora stands and tosses the pictures in front of Sazha.

CORA

Burn 'em.

Cora picks up her purse and a picket sign and walks out the apartment.

Sazha picks up the pictures and looks at them. Nostalgic.

INT. CRANDALL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Crandall lays on the couch, staring at the ceiling. The phone rings and startles him up.

He takes a swig of the rum on the floor that's left and walks to the phone. He picks it up, tired.

CRANDALL

Hello.

Through the receiver, an angry voice spews out obscenities and threats, but not much can be made out because of the anger in the voice.

Crandall hangs the phone up. He shakes his head.

After a moment, the phone rings again and Crandall pulls the plug out the wall.

He walks back to the couch and throws himself down.

He takes another swig of the nearly empty bottle of rum and closes his eyes.

FADE TO:

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

The substitute still stands in for Crandall.

Crandall walks in, tired, and stops when he sees the substitute's still there.

CRANDALL

I'm sorry. I thought I was supposed to be back today?

SUBSTITUTE

Mr. Clyde's been trying to reach you. I think he might want a word with you.

Crandall nods. He looks at the class and sees that Sazha's seat is bare.

The rest of the students look at him with disdain.

INT. CLYDE'S OFFICE - DAY

Derek Clyde and MRS. GRIFFIN, 50's black woman, talk. Crandall steps in the doorway and knocks on the door jamb.

Clyde and Griffin, with genuine concern, stand to greet him.

CLYDE

Phillip. I'm glad to see you.

Crandall shakes his hand and nods.

GRIFFIN

How are you, Mr. Crandall?

Crandall actually thinks about the answer. Takes a moment.

CRANDALL

I'll be okay.

CLYDE

Please, have a seat.

Crandall does. Clyde sits behind his desk while Mrs. Griffin stands behind him.

CRANDALL

How's Sazha doing?

Clyde and Griffin look to each other.

CLYDE

We're not exactly sure. She still hasn't been back to school yet.

Crandall nods.

CLYDE

I've been trying to get a hold of you the past couple days.

CRANDALL

I'm sorry. I've had to keep the phone off. I've been getting a lot of angry calls lately.

CLYDE

You shouldn't have to be going through this. You did absolutely nothing but defend yourself from an attacker. In your own home. You don't deserve any of this harassment.

Behind Clyde, Griffin nods. Crandall shrugs.

CRANDALL

It's just a couple calls. I'm sure most of the time it's the same person anyway. Sounds like it, at least. Although I guess everybody sounds the same when they swear so profusely.

Clyde thinks about how to respond carefully.

CLYDE

Phillip. You do understand Turrell used to be a student here? Correct?

CRANDALL

I didn't know exactly, but I imagined so since he was Sazha's brother.

Clyde still has to think carefully. Griffin takes over.

GRIFFIN

A lot of the students here have older siblings that went to school with Turrell. And because of that, we've realized that a lot of the students are harboring some of the ill will of their older brothers and sisters, who don't understand what position you were in when you shot Turrell.

Crandall meakly tries to defend himself.

CRANDALL

I didn't point the gun and shoot him in the face. The gun discharged in the struggle. I never could've shot anybody even just defending myself.

GRIFFIN

And we do understand that. It's just that the board wants to take the proper steps to alleviate the situation. Take away any chances of a further confrontation.

CLYDE

We're not talking about our board here at the school, Phillip. Please don't think that. We are behind you one-hundred percent. This was the city board's decision.

CRANDALL

I'm fired?

CLYDE

We're trying really hard not to call it that. If you'd like to put a resignation in, we won't even call it a forced. I promise you, wherever you decide to go, we'll give you a full recommendation. Even if you'd like us to arrange a position for you somewhere, we'll do anything we can to help. I'll do anything I can to help.

GRIFFIN

Derek and I both agree about your idea for the new book. The students' performances have increased ten-fold since you brought up the idea the other week. You'd be a great addition to any school.

Crandall rubs a temple.

CRANDALL

I don't have any money whatsoever right now to be able to move again.

CLYDE

Like I said, I'll be more than happy to help you in any way.

Crandall doesn't know what else to say. He just sits there.

CLYDE

I'm very sorry this happened, Phillip.

CRANDALL

Do you need a statement from me?

GRIFFIN

I can type something up and all you'll have to do is sign it.

Crandall nods and stands up.

GRIFFIN

I'll do it real quick before you leave.

She hurries out the office.

CRANDALL

I guess I'll come back after the final bell and pack my desk. There's not much, so-

CLYDE

Between you and me, as your friend. Did you go out on a binge last week?

Crandall swallows and nods.

CRANDALL

Yeah.

Clyde doesn't say anything. Just nods back.

CLYDE

I hope to see you there tonight. I'll
save your seat.

Crandall just stands there. Finally, he gives an awkward nod
and leaves.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Alone in the park, wasting time, Crandall sits and watches a
creek flow by. He pulls out a pint of rum and drinks.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Crandall packs his stuff into a single box. CHESTER, a large,
warm-tempered black janitor, walks in.

CHESTER

You need help in here, Mr. Crandall?

CRANDALL

No, thanks. I got it Chester.

CHESTER

You sure?

CRANDALL

Yeah. This is about everything.

CHESTER

All right. I'll walk you out to your car, then.

CRANDALL

Mr. Clyde send you here to make sure I didn't
take anything from the school?

CHESTER

Naw. Ain't nothin' like that. He sent me to protect you from the school.

Crandall just looks at Chester, confused.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Chester escorts Crandall to his Volvo.

Every student, some even older and not students there, crowd around, glaring at Crandall. Evil stares, even from some of the school personnel, like crossing guards.

Chester has to clear some of the people aside to make room for Crandall to get through.

EXT. LIQUOR STORE - DAY

Crandall sits in the Volvo, debating what to do. His packed box sits in the passenger seat.

Finally, he gets out the car.

INT. LIQUOR STORE - DAY

Crandall searches for a bottle. The old man, Gerald Smithers, leans against the counter, on the telephone.

SMITHERS

(into the phone)

Can you close up the store for me a little later on? I got to get to the drug store before they close and get Martha her prescriptions... I appreciate it.

Smithers hangs up. Crandall settles for a fifth of rum and approaches the counter.

SMITHERS

You know you've become my number one customer these past weeks. That's not exactly a good thing. Especially in this town.

Crandall opens his wallet and only sees a dollar bill. He looks up to Smithers.

SMITHERS

Maybe you should take it as a sign.

Crandall folds the wallet back in his pocket and politely puts the fifth back where he had got it from.

EXT. PLANNED PARENTHOOD - DAY

The picketers scream out a chant. Cora screams the loudest.

PICKETERS

Real doctors don't kill babies! Real doctors don't kill babies!

She thrusts her sign almost into the on-coming cars' windshields so they see it.

Her sign has a drawn picture of a cartoon mom slashing her cartoon baby's throat wide open. Even has the blood spray coming out the baby's neck.

The sign reads 'Don't do this to your baby!'

Soon, a car pulls into the parking lot and the protestors swarm around it, changing their chant.

PICKETERS

Don't be a murderer! Don't be a murderer!

A security guard rushes over and does what he can to hold the crowd back.

A young woman gets out the passenger seat, embarrassed.

Cora, fury on her face, screams at the top of her lungs, shoving her sign into the woman's face.

Cora loses her emotions. She begins wailing the young woman over the head with her sign, screaming at her.

CORA

Don't be a murderer! Don't be a murderer!

The woman, startled, protects her head with her arms. Cora twists the sign by the handle and attacks from different angles to connect with the woman's head.

Even the protestors are taken aback as Cora keeps pounding and pounding the woman's head with the sign.

Soon, the wood handle of the sign splinters and snaps. She continues hitting.

The young man driving the car realizes what's happening and rushes to his girlfriend's side. The security guard gets to Cora and restrains her.

Cora, miserable, is in tears.

CORA

My baby just died! Ain't no child should
have to die.

INT. CRANDALL'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Crandall walks in with his cardboard box of things and kicks the door closed behind him.

He sets the box on his dining table and fishes through different dresser-tops and his underwear drawer, but finds only small change. He counts it up.

CRANDALL

(under his breath)

Shit.

INT. DRUGSTORE - NIGHT

Crandall approaches the counter, carrying a bottle of mouthwash. A knock-off of the anti-septic Listerine.

Smithers, the old man from the liquor store with the granite voice, a customer now, hands money over to a middle-aged WOMAN behind the counter for his wife's medication.

SMITHERS

Thank you darlin'.

Smithers goes to the door to leave, but stops when he sees who approaches the counter behind him.

Crandall shamefully pays mostly in dimes for the mouthwash.

SMITHERS

Hey.

Crandall looks at him.

SMITHERS

Would you like to get some coffee?

Crandall shakes his head.

CRANDALL

Coffee tears me up inside.

Smithers looks back to the bottle of mouthwash Crandall's paying for and laughs. Hard. He shakes his head.

Crandall even smiles, but only for a moment.

SMITHERS

Just thought you could use a friend.
If you ever need one...

Smithers shrugs and leaves.

Crandall has to count out a few nickels.

INT. FRIAR HALL - AA MEETING - NIGHT

Crandall's seat is empty. Clyde shakes his head at it.

A STRANGER walks into the room and leans down to Clyde.

STRANGER

Anyone sitting here?

Sorrowfully, Clyde shakes his head.

CLYDE

No.

Clyde pulls the chair out for the stranger, who sits.

INT. CRANDALL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Crandall sits on his couch. He takes several large gulps of the mouthwash. He cringes and shivers at the taste.

Someone knocks. Crandall just closes his eyes.

After a second knock, Crandall stands, sets the bottle on a shelf and answers the door, dazed.

CRANDALL

Sazha.

She stands there, sad, in a shirt and sweatpants.

CRANDALL

You okay?

She shakes her head and tears up. Her voice is strained.

SAZHA

Did he attack you?

Crandall just looks at her.

SAZHA

Did he come at you first?

He nods.

CRANDALL

Yeah. He came out of that closet.

She cries a little harder.

SAZHA

Did you aim for his head?

Crandall doesn't say anything, just looks down to the floor. He begins to tear up.

SAZHA

Did you aim to shoot him in the face?

He finally looks up at her through his tears.

CRANDALL

Yes.

Sazha closes her eyes.

CRANDALL

I didn't know what to do. I had no idea who he was. I didn't know it was your brother.

She collapses into his arms. He takes her inside and closes the door behind her.

CRANDALL

I'm so sorry.

She sobs. Then presses her lips against his.

It catches him off-guard. He pulls his face back from her.

CRANDALL

Sazha, don't.

SAZHA

You owe me this.

He just looks at her.

SAZHA

Don't deny me this time.

She presses her lips against his again. He doesn't kiss back, but he doesn't pull away, either.

SAZHA

(her lips still against his)

You owe me.

Sazha takes Crandall's hands and wraps his arms around her for him. He doesn't want to, but doesn't restrain.

She kisses him again, licking at his lips, and backs him to the couch.

Nowhere else to go, he falls back.

She slips her sweatpants off and kneels over him. She grinds against his crotch.

Soon, dazed, he accepts her tongue in his mouth and kisses back.

She takes one of his hands and makes him put it on one of her breast nubs.

SAZHA

You owe me this.

She digs him out of his pants, pulls her panties to the side, and slips him inside her.

EXT. CRANDALL'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Sazha steps out of Crandall's building.

Halfway there, she suddenly stops and looks down at her crotch. A huge smile on her face.

She walks into her own building.

INT. DAVIDS' LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Cora, exhausted and red-eyed, lays on the couch. She watches herself on the ten o'clock news.

She shakes her head at herself.

The door opens and she snaps the T.V. off. Sazha walks in.

SAZHA

Hey, momma.

Cora just lays there. She wipes snot from her nose with the back of her hand.

SAZHA

I'm sorry I'm late-

CORA

(stern)

Goodnight.

Sazha stands there a moment, looking at her mom. Cora doesn't even look back at her daughter.

SAZHA

Night, mom.

On her way out of the living room, Sazha quietly slides the portable phone off the hook and tucks it under her shirt.

Cora just stares at the blank T.V.

INT. TURREL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sazha dials a number and cradles the phone between her ear and shoulder. It rings.

She looks out the window and across the way to Crandall's bedroom and bathroom. It's empty.

The phone rings again.

INT. CRANDALL'S APARTMENT

Crandall sits on his couch and takes a swig.

The phone rings and it goes to the answering machine.

SAZHA (filter)

Hi, Phillip. I just wanted to tell you...
I was walking back to my place, and I could
feel you dripping out of me into my panties.

Crandall closes his eyes.

SAZHA (filter)

I'm rubbing it back up into me right now.
I can't wait to feel you again.

He pulls a long drink of the mouthwash. He doesn't cringe
anymore at the taste. It goes down smooth.

SAZHA (filter)

I'll see you tomorrow in class...
I love you.

The machine clicks off.

Crandall closes his eyes and massages the bridge of his nose.
He starts to cry.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CRANDALL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Sitting at the dining table, Crandall nears the bottom of the
bottle of mouthwash.

He writes on a piece of notebook paper and stands up, shit-faced
and unbalanced.

He walks into his --

BEDROOM

-- and sits on the edge of his mattress.

He opens a bedside drawer and takes out a small revolver.

Crandall loads it, slams the chamber shut, and closes the drawer back up.

He just sits and stares for a few long moments.

Finally, he cocks the gun.

Something catches his eye in the other room and Crandall stares at the floor next to the dining table, where he had sopped up Turrell's messy head.

Crandall turns around and looks at the wall and his pillow behind him.

He thinks things through, then stands up.

INT. TURRELL'S ROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Sazha's sound asleep on Turrell's bed.

In the window above the bed, across the way in Crandall's bedroom, Crandall stands up from his bed and, carrying his revolver, walks into the next room over, his bathroom.

Crandall kneels down on the floor in front of the toilet and leans his head over the toilet bowl, face first.

He presses the nose of the revolver to the back of his head and pauses.

Finally, Crandall pulls the trigger.

The shot isn't heard because of it being in the next building over, but Crandall's head snaps and jerks and his body goes limp.

His skull disintegrates and tissue splatters into the toilet bowl.

Sazha stirs just a little in her sleep.

FADE TO BLACK.

SLAM CUT IN:

INT. TURRELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

A siren roars outside and Sazha shoots her eyes awake.

She looks out Turrell's window and sees blinking police strobes revolving in the street below.

She looks across the way to Crandall's apartment and sees officers roaming the bedroom and bathroom.

Sazha looks closer and notices a body, face down in the toilet. The same clothes that Crandall was wearing earlier.

She backs away from the window, breathing heavy and starting to hyperventilate.

She puts her hand over her mouth to stifle her cries.

She paces back and forth, not knowing what to do.

INT. CRANDALL'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Officer #1 stands directly behind Crandall's body. #2 walks into the bathroom, holding up the piece of notebook paper off the dining table.

OFFICER #2
Definitely a suicide.

OFFICER #1
What's it say?

#2 reads from the note.

OFFICER #2
'I'm sorry about giving up on my recovery.
I can't live with what I did to that poor
child.'

#1 lowers and shakes his head.

OFFICER #1
Must've felt bad for shooting that kid
the other week. He couldn't live with it.

#2 nods.

OFFICER #2
It's a shame. He was just protecting himself.
And he still felt guilty.

OFFICER #1
(shrugs)
Thoughtful guy, though. He made for an
easy clean-up.

OFFICER #2
For the landlord.

#2 moves Crandall's head to the side and sees a huge chunk of
brain in the toilet water.

OFFICER #2
Not the coroner, though. He's got to fish
that out.

#1 squints his eyes shut, wishing he didn't see it.

INT. TURRELL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sazha looks out Turrell's bedroom window into Crandall's bedroom
and bathroom. It's empty.

The police cars with their strobing lights are gone below.

Sazha turns around and looks out Turrell's bedroom door.

Seeing the coast is clear, she grabs a card off the dresser and
walks out the room.

INT. BUILDING HALLWAY - NIGHT

Sazha approaches Crandall's door, 4C. It's police-taped.

She slides the card, Turrell's I.D., into the door jamb, and slowly pries it open.

She ducks under the police tape and closes the door behind her.

INT. CRANDALL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Sazha noses around.

She keeps looking back to the couch, where her and Crandall had made love earlier.

She walks into the bedroom and then the bathroom.

She looks at where she saw Crandall's body hunched over the toilet. The bloodsplatter is gone.

She puts the toilet seat and lid down. Blood and brown juice seeped into in the crack where no one had cleaned.

She walks back out into the main room and over to a set of shelves against a wall.

She picks up the picture of the happy, muscular Crandall with his wife and son, and runs a finger over his face.

Sazha tucks it under an arm and grabs a couple of his books off the shelf. The ones he pointed out as his favorite.

Then, she picks up his plumeria box.

She tip-toes back out the door, locks, and closes it behind her.

INT. TURRELL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sitting on the bed, Sazha opens the jewelry box.

More pictures of Crandall and his family, ticket stubs from movies and plays, a necklace, and a bracelet.

She also takes two plastic sandwich bags out. Each have locks of hair in them.

One bag has longer and flowing hair in it. A woman's hair. The other has short and fine hair. A child's hair.

Sazha puts them all back in and sets the box in the cubby hole in Turrell's closet.

INT. LIQUOR STORE - DAY

Gerald Smithers scans through the obituaries in a newspaper.

He comes across Crandall's picture, one taken recently for the school yearbook.

He grimaces when he recognizes the face.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Crandall's graveside service is lonely. Only Derek Clyde and a PERSON FROM A.A. sit in the pouring rain.

Smithers arrives and sits. A PRIEST leads them in prayer.

PRIEST

Our Father...

PRIEST AND TINY CROWD

(simultaneous)

... who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth
as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our
daily bread and forgive us trespasses as we
forgive those who trespass against us. And
lead us not into temptation, but deliver us
from evil.

PRIEST

Amen.

CLYDE AND PERSON FROM A.A.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the
glory of God. Amen.

Sazha watches it all from behind a distant tree, muttering to herself.

She closes her eyes and raises her face to the wet sky.

SAZHA

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done. Thy
kingdom come, thy will be done. Thy
kingdom come, thy will be done...

She trails off as she opens her eyes and sees the tiny service disperse.

SAZHA

Forgive us our tresspasses.

Smithers stays seated in his folding chair as the others leave. Even the priest.

He just stares at the cheap casket.

Sazha makes sure Mr. Clyde is gone and walks towards the gravesite, the hole already dug.

Smithers' eyes are shut in prayer as Sazha approaches.

She walks around and puts her hand on the coffin.

Smithers shoots his eyes open and watches her from behind.

Sazha's body trembles and she hangs her head. She kisses the palm of her hand and presses it on the casket.

She turns back around and Smithers is gone.

She takes a seat in a folding chair.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY - LATER

Sazha still sits in the folding chair in the pouring rain.

She watches the gravediggers finish burying the casket in the hole with dirty mud.

From a nearby road in the cemetery, Smithers watches her.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The substitute reads from a textbook.

Sazha's textbook and notebook are closed, and she stares out the window.

Suddenly, she puts a hand to her mouth to hold back a burp.

She raises her hand to get the teacher's attention.

INT. TURRELL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sazha's made it her own room, complete with the view of Crandall's old apartment.

She puts make-up on in the mirror.

After applying a touch of lipstick, she smacks her lips and smiles at herself in the mirror.

She's happy.

She picks something up off the dresser and looks at it. The smile on her face grows bigger.

She sits down on the bed and opens up Crandall's plumeria box. She throws the item in with Crandall's other things.

A pregnancy test. With two lines.

She closes the box again and hides it back in the small cubby hole that was Turrell's closet, but is now filled with Sazha's unflattering wardrobe.

She walks merrily out the bedroom.

INT. GYNECOLOGIST'S WAITING ROOM - DAY

An OB-GYN NURSE steps out from the back office.

OB-GYN NURSE

Sazha?

Sazha stands up and walks towards her. Other patients waiting look at her.

OB-GYN NURSE

Where's your mother at, sweetie?

SAZHA

It's just me.

The nurse lowers her voice so no one else can hear.

OB-GYN NURSE

Are you here for contraceptives?

Sazha shakes her head.

SAZHA

I'm pregnant.

OB-GYN NURSE

Oh, I'm sorry. We're going to need a parent here for that.

SAZHA

I thought I could get prenatal care and ultrasounds to make sure the baby's okay until I tell my mom.

OB-GYN NURSE

Not from here. You'll need a statement from the court saying you're independent for us to treat you.

SAZHA

But my mom'll find out if I go to court.

OB-GYN NURSE

I think that's the idea.

The nurse shrugs and looks at the next person's name.

OB-GYN NURSE

Maybe Planned Parenthood or a public clinic can help you a little bit, but the best thing for you to do is tell your parents and they'll be able to guide you from there.

Sazha just nods, dispirited.

OB-GYN NURSE

Trust me, honey. They'll seem mad at first, but they'll get excited and be buying things for the baby in no time.

Sazha hangs her head and walks to the doors, past the patients looking at her.

INT. DAVIDS' KITCHEN - DAY

Sazha makes her mother breakfast. Cora just sits there staring at nothing, depressed.

SAZHA

D'you get my report card yet?

Cora nods.

SAZHA

When'd it come?

CORA

Other day.

SAZHA

Did I do good?

CORA

You're the one who's been going. You know how you did.

Sazha goes back to making breakfast.

She sees the broken and splintered anti-abortion sign leaning in a corner. The one with the cartoon mother slitting her cartoon baby's throat.

There's also a new sign freshly painted.

Sazha motions to it.

SAZHA

You going there today?

CORA

This afternoon, another girl's scheduled.

SAZHA

I thought you couldn't go back.

CORA

We got to stay back across the street, now.

Sazha flips over an egg, careful not to break the yolk.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Sazha sits at a computer. She researches 'prenatal care'.

After a moment, she also looks up 'midwives in Ohio'.

INT. TURRELL'S BEDROOM - DAY

Sazha digs an envelope out the cubby hole. It's labeled 'Mom's Birthday'.

It's stuffed with ones. Sazha pulls out a huge wad.

INT. DRUGSTORE - DAY

Near the pharmacy, Sazha compares ingredients and prices on different bottles of over-the-counter prenatal vitamins.

LATER

Sazha approaches the middle-aged woman behind the counter with the bottle she had chose.

The woman eyes the young girl skeptically.

SAZHA

My mom's not feeling so good. She asked me to get 'em for her on my way home from school.

The answer appeases the woman and she rings up the vitamins.

INT. NURSE'S OFFICE - DAY

The SCHOOL NURSE stands over Sazha, who lays on a couch.

SCHOOL NURSE

You still feel a little dizzy?

SAZHA

A little.

SCHOOL NURSE

And you felt fine all morning until after lunch?

SAZHA

I still feel fine. I just got dizzy. I don't have a headache or stomach ache or anything.

SCHOOL NURSE

All right. Just lay down for a bit longer until it goes away, okay?

Sazha nods and closes her eyes.

SCHOOL NURSE

I'll be in to check on you from time to time.

SAZHA

Okay.

The nurse feels Sazha's forehead one last time and walks out to the main office.

Sazha quickly gets up, not dizzy at all, and checks to make sure no one's looking in and the nurse is gone.

She grabs a stethoscope hanging on a wall and walks over to the window.

She pries it open, reaches her hand out, and drops the stethoscope to the ground.

She closes and locks the window again and jumps back to the couch to lie down.

INT. DAVIDS' BATHROOM - NIGHT

Sazha, clothed, sits on the toilet.

She lifts her shirt above her belly and puts the ear tips of the stethoscope to her ears.

She presses the chestpiece against her belly and struggles to listen.

She maneuvers and remaneuvers herself into different positions until she feels comfortable and can hear the best.

She stays as still as she can.

After a few moments, she smiles.

FADE TO BLACK.

Spring

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Sazha doodles on the back of a notebook cover. She pays no attention to the teacher, who reads a chapter of 'Standing Against the Wind' to a quiet, attentive class.

She writes down a list of baby names, but only two are circled and have a question mark after them.

'Phillip Jr.?' and 'Turrell Jr.?'

She draws a heart around Phillip Jr.

INT. DAVIDS' KITCHEN - NIGHT

Cora just sits at the table, staring at nothing, while Sazha cheerfully cooks.

She sets a plate down in front of Cora and sits across.

CORA

Why we been eatin' nothing but vegetables?

SAZHA

I just want to eat more healthy.

CORA

It doesn't matter if it's healthy. You eat too much of anything it's still bad for you. Your cheeks are getting big.

Sazha, who has gotten plump, looks down at her food and picks at it. Cora just stares at hers.

INT. DRUGSTORE - DAY

Sazha walks from the vitamin aisle to the counter, where the middle-aged woman clerk waits.

Sazha sets the prenatal vitamins on the counter.

CLERK

Twenty ninety-five.

SAZHA

I thought it was sixteen.

CLERK

I'm sorry. The price has gone up the past couple of months.

The clerk looks at the weight Sazha has gained, but Sazha still hides it well, thanks to her big-boned frame anyway.

CLERK

When's your mother due?

SAZHA

Two months.

Sazha counts the crumpled ones and change in her hands.

SAZHA

I only need a couple more dollars. Can I give you the rest tomorrow?

CLERK

I'm sorry, we're not aloud to do that here. Especially with our new manager starting.

Sazha pockets her money and, deflated, leaves.

EXT. LIQUOR STORE - DAY

Sazha walks down the street. She sees Smithers sweeping the sidewalk in front of his store.

She crosses the street towards him and he looks at her.

SAZHA

Would you like help?

He stops sweeping and leans against his push broom.

SAZHA

I could really use a little money if you don't mind.

SMITHERS

I see you somewhere before?

SAZHA

Awhile ago. At my teacher Mr. Crandall's funeral.

Smithers remembers and nods.

SMITHERS

I was wondering how you knew him.

SAZHA

How did you know him?

SMITHERS

From around the neighborhood.

Sazha looks through the windows of the liquor store to the countless bottles inside.

SMITHERS

How much you need?

SAZHA

Just a couple dollars.

SMITHERS

Well, I can't put you on the payroll on a count of your age and this being a liquor store and all. But I suppose it couldn't hurt to give you a couple bucks out of the pocket for sweeping my sidewalk.

He hands the broom over to her.

SMITHERS

I appreciate it.

SAZHA

So do I.

Sazha begins sweeping and Smithers leans against the store.

SAZHA

How many times a week do you sweep?

SMITHERS

Whenever I get bored of being inside.
How many times a week do you want to sweep?

SAZHA

As often as you got money out of the pocket.

Smithers laughs.

SAZHA

I know I'm young, but I'll really need
the money soon.

Smithers looks at her belly.

SMITHERS

I'm sure I can find stuff for you to do
where you won't have to touch any bottles.

SAZHA

Thank you.

Sazha still hasn't stopped sweeping.

INT. TURRELL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sazha digs the new bottle of prenatal vitamins out of her
bookbag and shuffles a pill out.

She shoves the rest of the bottle into the cubbyhole in the
closet and takes the stethoscope out.

She tucks it under her shirt and walks out the room.

INT. DAVIDS' BATHROOM - NIGHT

Sazha closes the door behind her and lays the stethoscope on the
sink.

She pops the prenatal pill and cups a hand under the faucet.
She gulps the pill down with the water from the tap.

She sits up on the sink and lifts her shirt.

She puts the ear tips of the stethoscope in and expertly places the chestpiece on her bulging tummy.

She finds the heartbeat right away and listens with a smile.

Suddenly, the door opens and Cora walks in, surprised to find Sazha on the sink.

Sazha throws the stethoscope down and jumps off the sink, pulling her baggy shirt back down over her belly.

But Cora's already seen.

CORA

The hell you doin'?

Not knowing what to do and frantic, Sazha automatically starts washing her hands.

SAZHA

Nothin', momma.

CORA

Why you got that pressed against your belly?

SAZHA

No reason, momma.

Cora shoves Sazha back a little. She makes her look directly into her eyes.

CORA

Why you pressin' that against your belly?

SAZHA

I don't know, momma.

Cora shoves her back against the wall, now. Sazha's scared.

CORA

You better tell me.

SAZHA

Just because.

CORA
Because what?

Cora grabs Sazha by the shirt collar and keeps her pressed against the wall. Sazha just whimpers.

CORA
Tell me!

Sazha shuts her eyes. Tears squeeze out from the displacement.

SAZHA
Because I'm pregnant.

Cora slams Sazha back against the wall hard this time.

Sazha's head bounces off the drywall and Cora slaps her face hard on the rebound.

Sazha doesn't move. She's in shock.

CORA
The hell you mean you're pregnant, Sazha?

Cora slams Sazha in the nose with the palm of her hand.

CORA
Pregnant by who?

Sazha doesn't say anything. Cora grabs her throat.

CORA
Pregnant by who?!

Sazha shakes her head, trying to get out of Cora's grasp.

SAZHA
I don't know.

Cora throws her to the ground by the throat.

CORA
What 'shoo mean you don't know?

SAZHA

I don't know, momma... I don't know.

Cora kicks her in the bulging belly over and over. Sazha does her best to protect her stomach.

When she can't deflect the kick with her knees, she tries to soften the blow with her arms.

SAZHA

No, momma. Don't! Please don't.

CORA

You better tell me! Who got you pregnant?

Cora still kicks at her daughter.

SAZHA

I don't know, momma. Please, stop.

Cora stops and bends down to grab her by the shirt collar again.

CORA

Who you been sleeping with?

She slams the back of Sazha's head against the floor.

CORA

Huh?!

Sazha tries to answer, but nothing comes out. She cries.

CORA

You sleepin' with more than one person?

It takes her awhile, but Sazha finally nods.

Cora lets go of Sazha's shirt and stands up, frustrated.

CORA

What do you mean you're sleeping around,
Sazha?

Sazha takes the chance to stand up. She backs up against a wall and grabs her stomach.

She breathes heavily.

CORA

Didn't I teach you better than that?

Cora brushes an extension out of her face.

CORA

Huh?

SAZHA

Yes, momma, you did. I'm sorry, momma.

CORA

Who's is it?

SAZHA

I don't know. I really don't, momma.

CORA

Well who all you been sleepin' with?

Sazha's reluctant. But finally, she whispers.

SAZHA

Mr. Crandall.

CORA

What?

Sazha doesn't answer, and Cora just stares.

SAZHA

His name was Phillip Crandall. He was my teacher in-

Cora reaches out and shoves Sazha.

CORA

I know who he is. I remember who shot my son! And you been sleepin' around with him?

SAZHA

It's not like that, momma.

Cora shoves her again. Harder.

CORA
Wha'shoo doin' with a grown man, Sazha?
What'chu doin' with a blonde man?

Sazha shakes her head, crying.

SAZHA
I don't know, momma. I don't know.
I liked him.

Cora stops and looks her daughter up and down.

CORA
How long you been pregnant?

Sazha looks at her mom, the fear in her eyes.

SAZHA
Seven months.

CORA
You serious? You fuckin' serious?

Cora shoves her again.

CORA
The hell you thinkin', Sazha?

Sazha just shakes her head, not knowing how to answer.

Cora tries to control herself.

CORA
Who else?

Sazha's quiet.

She doesn't answer. She doesn't want to answer.

CORA
You said you don't know who's it is.
Who else been sleepin' with you?

Sazha still doesn't answer.

CORA

Who?

Sazha looks Cora straight in the eye.

SAZHA

Turrell.

Cora slaps her. Hard.

CORA

You watch your fuckin' mouth, little girl.

She grabs Sazha by the throat.

CORA

Don't you be telling no lies about your
dead brother.

She lets go of Sazha's throat and slaps her again.

CORA

Now who you be sleepin' with?

SAZHA

It was Turrell, momma.

Cora grabs both of Sazha's cheeks and squeezes. She pinches so hard her hand slips and Cora tucks them under her armpits so she won't do anymore damage.

SAZHA

He was comin' into my room at night.

Cora just stands there. Crying.

CORA

For how long?

SAZHA

The couple months before he died. I didn't
want to tell you because I didn't want you
to send him away.

Cora shakes her head in disbelief.

SAZHA

I didn't like what he was doing, but I didn't want him to leave, either.

Cora sobs.

SAZHA

I think he started doing harder drugs before he died. I found some in his room with the pictures and threw it away.

Cora looks at Sazha, then just walks out the bathroom.

Sazha turns around and looks at herself in the mirror. She sees how beat up she is.

She picks the stethoscope off the floor and positions herself to listen to the baby's heartbeat again.

She has to search, but finally finds it.

She closes her eyes and smiles in relief.

INT. DAVIDS' KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sazha walks out the bathroom, down the short hallway, and into the kitchen.

Cora tackles her to the floor, then grabs the nearby busted abortion sign, the one with the cartoon mother slitting the cartoon baby's throat.

She begins to wail Sazha on the head with it.

CORA

Ain't no child of mine going to be having her teacher's baby.

SAZHA

Momma, stop!

Cora sits on her and begins slamming her in her big belly over and over, double-fisted.

Sazha tries to block the blows to her stomach, and even tries to throw her mother off her, but Cora's too heavy.

CORA

She ain't gonna be walkin' around with her brother's baby, either. And I know you was seducin' him. Don't be tellin' me no lies.

SAZHA

Momma, please.

CORA

Ain't no way my baby would do something like that.

Cora stands up, readies herself, leaps up into the air and directly down onto Sazha's stomach with all her weight, leading with an elbow.

Sazha screams out in pain. Cora smacks her in the face.

CORA

Keep your mouth shut before someone hears you!

Sazha whines.

SAZHA

Please don't do this momma- I want to have the baby- I want to take care of it.

Cora stands and throws all her weight down on Sazha's pregnant belly again, elbow first.

Sazha grunts and screams out in pain again.

CORA

I said quiet!

Cora reaches for a nearby pan and slams Sazha over the head.

Sazha's eyes roll back in her head for a moment, then she comes to again, disoriented.

Sazha begins breathing heavy.

Cora continues to beat on Sazha's belly with her fists.

SAZHA
Momma. Don't.

Sazha's breathes heavier and heavier out her mouth. Cora stops and listens.

They're birthing breaths.

CORA
Bitch, don't you even... I swear to God
I'll strangle it.

Sazha, on her back, terrified, uses her elbows to crawl back away from her mother.

She breathes faster.

Cora grabs hold of Sazha's sweatpants and violently tugs them off her.

SAZHA
Momma, what are you doing?

CORA
I ain't letting that bastard out.

SAZHA
Please momma. Please leave me alone.
Please don't touch him.

Cora rips off Sazha's panties and sees how bad Sazha's dilated. The top of the baby's head peeks through.

Sazha takes deeper, stronger birthing breaths. Lamaze breaths.

Cora grabs the busted abortion sign, and aims the splintered end between Sazha's legs.

Sazha tries to clamp her legs shut, but Cora keeps them spread with an arm.

She jams the splintered, jagged handle of the sign up inside Sazha and into the baby's head.

Over and over, she jams and shoves.

Sazha screams and twists and writhes in agony, but Cora keeps slamming the wood up inside.

CORA

Hope I tear you up so bad you won't use
it anymore!

More shoving. In and out.

Sazha's screams finally turn into little whimpers, and her breathing slows.

Cora stops and throws the sign down on the floor.

She stares at her daughter and the wreck between her legs.

CORA

Go in the bathroom and finish. I don't
want that mess out here.

Sazha, still whimpering, gets to her hands and knees and carefully crawls towards the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Sazha lifts herself off the ground just enough to get in the empty bathtub.

She just sits there, spreading her legs as far as she can.

Her breathing gets heavy again. More Lamaze breaths.

Outside the door, Cora knocks.

CORA (O.S.)

And don't even try to fit it down the toilet,
neither. You put it all in a trash bag and
take it to the dumpster.

Sazha squints her eyes shut and shakes her head at her mother's coldness.

She continues her birthing breaths.

Finally, she starts to push. And push.

Her face freezes in pain and she gives one more giant push.

The bloody flops out into the tub, still connected to Sazha from the umbilical cord.

The mess of a head lays nearby, torn away in fractured pieces because of the splintered handle, soaking in a shallow puddle of blood and tissue.

Hair clings to flesh on the pieces of soft skull.

Sazha covers her mouth, sick at the sight. She moans.

After a moment, she forces herself to look closer.

It was a boy.

Sazha picks up one of the larger pieces of skull with flesh and hair still clung to it and washes the tissue and fluid off under the bathtub spicket.

Blonde hair. Caucasian.

Sazha cries and cuddles with the body and as much of the head as she can gather.

SAZHA

I'm so sorry, baby. I'm so sorry. I
promise I tried to protect you. I promise
I did.

She puts the body back down on the tub floor and leans back as far as she can.

She reaches down and grabs the umbilical cord still attached inside her.

She yanks and tugs at it. She takes deep breaths and pushes at the same time.

Finally, a bluish-hued placenta squeezes out of her and plops next to the body.

More tissue and amniotic fluid leak out of her.

Awkward, she stands up, sore and in pain.

INT. DAVIDS' KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sazha slowly steps out the bathroom and looks around, keeping an eye out for her mother.

Cora sits on the couch in the living room.

Sazha quietly walks into the kitchen and puts her sweatpants back on.

She grabs a garbage bag and a roll of aluminum foil off the refrigerator.

On her way out, she stops and looks at the pile of blank posterboards her mother uses to draw her picket signs on.

She grabs one and slips it under an arm.

INT. DAVIDS' BATHROOM - NIGHT

Sazha picks up the fragments of skull and face and wraps them in pieces of aluminum foil nice and tight.

She finds the piece with the nose and mouth.

She drops her head a moment, then wraps it in the foil.

Sazha lays the posterboard out on the ground. She reaches in the tub, picks up the placenta sac and gently places it down on the posterboard.

Careful not to rupture or puncture the sac, she presses lightly down on it and rolls it back and forth so it leaves blue, purple, and red hues on the posterboard, like watercolors.

She also presses the umbilical cord connected the sac down to leave its impression.

Satisfied with the tree-like image and shades on the posterboard, Sazha lifts the placenta sac up and sets it down in the garbage bag.

She reaches in the tub again and lifts out the tiny headless body, mashed and torn around the neck and shoulders.

She gently places it into the garbage bag with the placenta.

She looks at the rest of the ooze and tissue at the bottom of the tub. She turns on the hot water.

INT. TURRELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Sazha lays the posterboard on the desk and turns the lamp directly on it to dry.

She reaches in the cubbyhole in the closet and takes the plumeria box out.

She opens it and puts the pieces of head wrapped in foil in with Crandall's other keepsakes and mementos.

She closes the jewelry box back up and puts it back in the cubbyhole.

Sazha picks up the trashbag with the body and placenta in it and walks out the room.

INT. DAVIDS' HALLWAY - NIGHT

On her way out the apartment, Sazha stops and looks at her mother in the living room.

Cora just sits there, staring at the T.V. that's turned off.

Sazha walks out the door with the trashbag.

FADE TO:

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

At her desk, Sazha reads through her notebook with the list of baby names.

She goes straight to the Phillip Jr. that's circled with a heart and underlines it three times.

She looks at the name sadly.

She closes the notebook, lifts up her desk, and sets it inside, next to Crandall's plumeria box.

The jewelry box now has a lock on it.

Sazha opens it and stares at the tiny packages of foil inside and the baggies with the locks of a woman's and child's hair.

And the old pictures of Crandall and his wife and son.

She closes and locks it again.

INT. LIQUOR STORE - DAY

Smithers reads the paper behind the counter. Sazha finishes stocking plastic bottles of pop in a reach-in cooler.

Sazha walks over to him, slightly limping.

SAZHA

Anything else, Mr. Smithers?

SMITHERS

Naw. That's all for today. I appreciate it all.

He reaches in his pocket and pulls out a couple of bills.

SAZHA

How's your wife doing?

SMITHERS

She's doing better.

He hands the bills over to her.

SAZHA

Thank you again, Mr. Smithers.

SMITHERS

If ya don't mind me asking, what are ya saving so much up for, anyway?

Sazha grabs her bookbag and the plumeria box from behind the counter. She's hesitant to answer.

SAZHA

How close were you with Mr. Crandall, my old teacher?

SMITHERS

Not very, but enough that I felt bad when I saw him in the paper.

Sazha holds the jewelry box up.

SAZHA

Well, I kinda took this from his place after he died and before they cleaned it out. I shouldn't've. I think he wanted to be buried with it. I'm trying to save up enough to put it down in there with him.

SMITHERS

All these weeks you've been helping me, that's what you've been needin' the money for?

SAZHA

Mostly.

SMITHERS

How close are you?

SAZHA

It's too much for them to dig up the casket and put it in there, but I almost got enough for them to bury it above him. I suppose that'll be close enough.

Smithers just looks at her.

SAZHA

I kinda do need another favor from you, if you'll do it.

He smiles.

INT. DAVIDS' KITCHEN - NIGHT

In the kitchen, Sazha cooks dinner. Red meat. Cora sits at the table, staring at nothing.

All the abortion picket signs and posterboards are gone now.

Sazha turns off the stove and sits down with her plate. Cora looks, expecting hers.

Sazha doesn't even look at her.

Cora grunts at the rudeness and walks over to the frying pan on the stove. There's nothing in it.

CORA

You didn't make me none?

Sazha doesn't answer. Just eats.

INT. TURRELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Sazha glues her and Crandall's yearbook photos together and puts it in the plumeria box, on top of a photo with Crandall and his wife.

Sazha hears Cora in the hallway and hurries to close the box. She puts it on the dresser, sits down at the desk and starts browsing through a book and taking notes.

Cora walks in. Sazha doesn't even look at her.

CORA
We got to have a talk.

Sazha doesn't even stop writing.

Cora looks at the picture hanging above Sazha's desk. The placenta print.

CORA
You takin' up art now, instead of reading
and writing?

Sazha looks at the posterboard.

SAZHA
It'll be my only one.

CORA
It's pretty. What is it, a tree?

Sazha goes back to writing.

CORA
I want you to talk with the doctor I've
been seeing. I think that maybe she can
help you.

Sazha finishes writing her sentence before she answers. Cora walks around and sits on the edge of the bed.

SAZHA
Help me with what?

CORA
With everything that you're going through.

Sazha just stares at the wall. Cora reaches out and gently takes her daughter's hand.

Sazha finally turns and looks at her mom.

CORA

We have to talk about everything you can tell her about. And what you can't. If you tell her too much about everything, they'll take you away.

Sazha turns towards the wall again and swallows.

INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE - DAY

Sazha sits across from Dr. Patton, holding her school books and plumeria box on her lap.

PATTON

I know how much you don't want to be here. I appreciate you coming.

SAZHA

It was my mom who brought me here. I didn't have much choice in the matter.

Patton sucks on hard candy. It scrapes her teeth.

PATTON

Are you mad at your mother for making you come here?

SAZHA

(shrugs)
I'll live with it.

PATTON

She tells me you've done some things that you regret.

SAZHA

No.

PATTON

You didn't do those things?

SAZHA

I don't regret them. She regrets them. She didn't want me with a white man.

PATTON

Was it because he was white that she didn't want you with him?

SAZHA

No, ma'am. She just said that at the time because she was angry.

PATTON

Do you know why she didn't want you with him?

SAZHA

Because I'm young.

Patton scribbles on a yellow legal pad.

PATTON

You speak very well for someone your age, and for where you're from. Did he help you with that?

SAZHA

I've always been good in English, but he made it better. He made it easier to learn.

PATTON

What did you want from your relationship with him?

Sazha doesn't answer that one. She only lowers her head to stare at the floor.

PATTON

Do you miss him?

SAZHA

I think I'm doing okay.

Patton motions to the box on Sazha's lap.

PATTON

Is that a jewelry box you have?

Sazha jiggles the lock to make sure it's latched.

SAZHA
No, ma'am.

PATTON
What is it?

SAZHA
A plumeria box.

PATTON
What's that?

SAZHA
Just a nickname for a box to keep things in.

PATTON
What kind of things?

SAZHA
Keepsakes. Mementos. Anything you want.

PATTON
What do you keep in your plumeria box?

Sazha doesn't answer that one, either.

PATTON
Do you have something from him in there?

Sazha just stares at the floor. Finally, she shrugs.

INT. LIQUOR STORE - DAY

Sazha hands her bookbag to Smithers over the counter.

SMITHERS
Hey, little missy.

Sazha gives a polite smile.

SMITHERS
How was school?

Sazha
It was good.

SMITHERS
Your appointment go okay?

SAZHA
Yeah.

Smithers looks at the jewelry box under her arm.

SMITHERS
I called and talked to them for ya. I'll give it to them today and they said it'd be buried in the morning.

SAZHA
They'll do it, then?

SMITHERS
I had to lie. I told them I was his father. Though I guess I could've been his granddaddy.

SAZHA
Thank you.

Sazha pulls out a wad of small bills.

SAZHA
I'm sorry it's all ones. How much is it all exactly?

SMITHERS
Sazha, about that... Don't worry about it. You've been working hard for me. You keep saving up your money for something else.

SAZHA
No, Mr. Smithers, I can't let you-

SMITHERS
It wasn't that much really anyway.

SAZHA

I can't let you pay for my mistake.

SMITHERS

I don't want to hear another word of it.
Now you got a back room full of candy
boxes you got to arrange.

Sazha stops arguing and smiles. She takes her box and heads to the back room.

INT. BACK ROOM - DAY

All organized. Sazha sits on a milk crate, holding the box in her lap.

She cries. Hard.

Smithers peaks in, e leaves her alone to her good byes.

Sazha kisses her hand and presses it on the box.

INT. LIQUOR STORE - DAY

Sazha puts Crandall's plumeria box on the counter. She still has tears in her eyes.

SAZHA

I'm finished.

SMITHERS

I'll make sure they bury it for you.

SAZHA

I might be a little late after I get off
school tomorrow.

SMITHERS

(nods)

Take as long as you need.

Sazha takes one more sad look at the box, and leaves.

Smithers looks through the blinds to make sure she is gone, and he looks at the box.

He takes out a tiny screwdriver and holds it to the lock, then stops.

He reconsiders, and tucks the tiny screwdriver back into his pocket.

SMITHERS

(to himself)

It's none of your business, old man.

Whatever it is, it's over now. Just let
it all die.

Smithers goes back to reading the paper.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Sazha makes dinner. Cora sits at the table, staring straight ahead at nothing.

Sazha turns the stove top off and sets her plate at her own seat. Cora watches her.

Then, Sazha walks back over to the stove for another plate.

This one she sets down in front of Cora and takes the seat across from her.

Cora looks at the plate, then up to Sazha.

Sazha gives her a tiny trace of a smile. Not a big smile. But a smile.

Cora nods back.

CORA

Thank you.

Slowly, they each pick up their forks and eat.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Sazha writes on a piece of paper cut out.

Two popsicle sticks lay nearby on the desk, with a plastic roll of scotch tape.

CRANDALL (V.O.)

I grow a white rose in January the same
as in July for the sincere friend who
offers me his helping hand.

Sazha leans back and stares at what she wrote.

EXT. CRANDALL'S GRAVE - DAY

In a light rain, Sazha kneels down and shoves the two popsicle sticks into a tiny fresh mound of dirt in front of Crandall's tiny gravestone.

The piece of paper Sazha was writing on is scotch-taped between the two sticks.

'Phillip T. Crandall, Jr'

CRANDALL (V.O.)

And for the cruel one who tears me away
from the dreams for which I live...

Sazha gives a small, sad smile.

CRANDALL (V.O.)

I grow neither weeds nor thistles.

CUT TO BLACK.

CRANDALL (V.O.)

I grow the white rose.