

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL THEATER -- DAY

NATALIE (12) stands on stage, wearing large glasses and loose robes. She raises a wooden staff.

TWO KIDS holding CARDBOARD PROP WAVES move apart. Natalie walks in between the waves. Two more KIDS follow Natalie through the partition.

Quiet applause. Only four people are watching the play.

EXT. SIDEWALK -- DAY

Natalie, still in her glasses and robes, walks with a RAG DOLL alongside BERT (40s), a well-dressed man with a gentleman's combover, and JUDY (40s), who walks with CRUTCHES.

NATALIE

Why didn't anyone come to my show?

Judy kisses Natalie.

JUDY

I don't care if anyone came. We are so proud of you.

They pass a BALLOON MAN holding a bunch of balloons. Bert gives the balloon man a quarter.

BERT

Which one you want, sweetpea?

Natalie points to a white balloon. The man hands it to her. The trio keep walking.

NATALIE

I worked so hard on the play.

BERT

I know sweetie. It's your first play. You can't expect it to be Broadway.

JUDY

She doesn't need to hear that on her big day. You did a great job.

As Judy reaches for another hug, Natalie trips over her crutches. She lets go of the balloon which flies off.

BERT

We'll get you another one sweetie.

NATALIE

I don't want another one. I want that one.

The balloon is now far into the sky.

BERT

Don't be silly. What's the difference between one white balloon and another?

Judy silences Bert.

JUDY

Don't worry honey. We'll get you the balloon back.

INT. HOUSE -- PARENT'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Natalie puts on some eyeliner and mascara. Her rag doll sits next to her. Judy walks in on crutches.

JUDY

Natalie, I told you time and time again.

She snatches the eyeliner from Natalie's hands.

JUDY (CONT'D)

This is my make-up!

INT. HOUSE -- LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Bert fixes the TV. Natalie walks in.

BERT

Hey Natalie, dad got you a surprise.

Natalie turns her head.

BERT (CONT'D)

I found your balloon.

Bert grabs a white balloon from behind the TV. Natalie takes it.

NATALIE

It's the same exact one as the one I lost?

Bert nods his head.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

You promise?

BERT

I promise.

Natalie smiles. Judy crutches in, made-over in a polka dot dress.

NATALIE

Mom, you look pretty.

BERT

Sit down sweetie. I'm almost done.

She leaves. Bert tightens his face.

BERT (CONT'D)

Natalie, can you ask your mom to come back?

INT. HOUSE -- PARENT'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Natalie opens the door and walks in. Her mom is dead, hanging from a rope, crutches on the floor.

INT. THEATER -- 4 YEARS LATER

Ropes are pulled. Lights flash on. The theater is dark except for two spotlights. RYAN (16) comes into a spotlight, clad in a dull robe and tights.

RYAN

Where wilt thou lead me? I will go no further.

TYLER (16) appears in the other spotlight, clad in complete black with white balloons tied around his neck.

TYLER

My hour is almost to come, when I to sulphurous and tormenting flames...

NATALIE (O.S.)

Cut!

The lights turn on to reveal Natalie (now 16) standing on stage. She still has thick glasses, though now her hair wraps in a curly bun. She approaches Tyler and reattaches his balloons.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Tyler, you're saying the words like they don't mean anything.

(MORE)

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Remember, you've only got till sunset to tell your son what you've got to say. Desperate. I want desperate.

Natalie accidentally pops the balloon. Both her and Tyler are taken aback.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

It's alright. I'll get another one.

Natalie ties the other balloon successfully.

TYLER

Maybe we can go without the balloons? I feel like a clown.

NATALIE

You're from the heavens, Tyler.

She finishes attaching the balloon and walks off stage.

TYLER

Why don't you just fly me in then?

NATALIE

Not in the budget, diva. Try it again.

The lights turn off.

INT. THEATER -- LATER

Ryan pulls on a shirt and Tyler takes off his black coat. Natalie walks up to the two boys.

NATALIE

You both good for a rehearsal tomorrow?

Ryan nods.

TYLER

Do you think we have a budget for a men's dressing room because I feel a little weird undressing in front of you.

Natalie gives him a dirty look.

TYLER (CONT'D)

Sure Nat. For you, I can make it.

Tyler shuffles Natalie's hair.

NATALIE

Watch the nest.

Tyler smiles and walks over to a HUMAN who has his eyes closed and is plugged into an electrical socket. Tyler pulls the plug and plays with Human's neck.

Human opens his eyes.

HUMAN

Hello Tyler.

NATALIE

I can't believe you bring that thing to school.

Tyler puts his clothes inside a backpack and hands it to human.

HUMAN

Thank you Tyler.

TYLER

He saves my back.

EXT. SIDEWALK -- DAY

Natalie walks down the sidewalk and meets the balloon man. She gives him a quarter.

INT. HOUSE -- LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Natalie walks into the house with a white balloon. JENN (40s) vacuums the floor.

JENN

Hello Natalie. How was your day?

Natalie doesn't respond.

JENN (CONT'D)

Would you like to play with me?

Natalie walks past her.

JENN (CONT'D)

What's wrong? Are you sad?

Natalie looks at Jenn.

NATALIE

Sad is when little wet spots come out of your eyes. I'm just angry.

JENN
Maybe we should play.

Natalie thinks for a minute.

NATALIE
Alright, let's play.

Jenn smiles.

JENN
I am so excited.

NATALIE
Turn around. Let me do your hair.

Jenn turns. Natalie brushes the hair off Jenn's neck to find an ON/OFF switch. She switches it off. Jenn closes her eyes and sinks her head.

INT. HOUSE -- NATALIE'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Natalie grabs a polka-dot dressed rag doll and ties a rope around its neck. She hangs the doll from her bed, placing its leg on a chair.

INT. HOUSE -- STAIRWELL -- DAY

Natalie looks at the door. She runs in.

INT. HOUSE -- NATALIE'S BEDROOM -- DAY

BEGIN FANTASY

Natalie runs into the room. Judy is standing on the chair with a rope around her neck. Natalie runs onto the chair.

NATALIE
Don't do it!

She hugs Judy tight. Judy does not move.

NATALIE (CONT'D)
Why aren't you hugging me? Why don't you love me?

She grips Judy tighter.

END FANTASY

Natalie is hugging her doll. She realizes this and throws the doll to the floor. The doll hangs off the bedpost.

INT. HOUSE -- LIVING ROOM -- EVENING

Natalie sits watching TV at the dining table across Bert. Jenn cooks in the kitchen.

BERT

How come you're always turning off Jenn?

NATALIE

She's a creep.

BERT

Look, if you want to cook and clean, you can turn her off. But she is here to make our lives easier. You keep her on from now on.

Natalie doesn't respond. Jenn serves food on the table.

BERT (CONT'D)

Thank you Jenn.

JENN

You're welcome, Bert.

BERT

Sweetie, I've got a surprise for you.

He pulls out tickets from his pocket.

BERT (CONT'D)

We're going to New York next week to catch some Broadway. Isn't that a nice surprise?

NATALIE

My play is next week, dad.

BERT

What day?

NATALIE

All week. Didn't you remember? You know how important this is to me, and you just have to go buy some tickets for some other play.

BERT

I'm sorry. I just thought it would make you happy. That's all.

INT. THEATER -- LATER

Ryan sits across a bed from ASHLEY (16), who are both dressed in Shakespearean period outfits.

RYAN

A king of shreds and patches.

Ryan stops and stares as Tyler enters with balloons tied to him.

RYAN (CONT'D)

Do you not come to chide your tardy son?

ASHLEY

Alas, he is mad!

TYLER

Do not forget. This visitation is but to wet thy almost blunted purpose.

NATALIE (O.S.)

Cut!

The lights turn on.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

What are you doing Tyler? The word is whet not wet. You can't wet a purpose. You whet it. Like an appetite.

TYLER

Okay, sorry. Cool it.

NATALIE

Look, I just want this play to be good, and I can't be worrying about stupid mistakes like this.

She walks away.

TYLER

You're a bit of a prick, you know that?

Natalie turns around, surprised.

NATALIE

I don't mean to be.

Tyler watches her walk off.

EXT. SIDEWALK -- DAY

Natalie rushes past the balloon man.

INT. HOUSE -- STAIRWELL -- DAY

Natalie runs into her room.

INT. HOUSE -- NATALIE'S ROOM -- DAY

BEGIN FANTASY

Judy stands on the chair with a rope around her neck. Natalie jumps on the chair and hugs Judy. Judy's arms are limp. Natalie grabs Judy's arms and puts them around her, but the arms fall limp again.

NATALIE

Mom, just hold me. Just hold me!

A knock on the door.

END FANTASY

Natalie turns. She's holding the doll. She unties the doll and opens the door. Its Bert.

BERT

I'm sorry about forgetting your show.

He offers her a box of chocolates. Natalie doesn't respond.

BERT (CONT'D)

I just wanted to make you happy.

NATALIE

I hate Broadway.

BERT

Why are you not nice to me? What did I do to you?

Natalie doesn't respond.

BERT (CONT'D)

I love you Natalie.

NATALIE

I just want people to come to my show.

BERT

Natalie, it's just a school play.

NATALIE

No, it's not. You don't understand.

Bert strokes Natalie's face.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Sometimes, I... nevermind. It's stupid.

BERT

Come on, tell me.

NATALIE

Sometimes, I think that if I put on a good show, maybe Mom will come back and watch it. I don't know. It's stupid I know.

Bert doesn't respond. He puts the box of chocolates down and kisses Natalie on the forehead. Bert leaves.

Jenn watches Natalie.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Why can't you just hold me?

She wipes her tears.

JENN

Natalie, are you feeling sad?

NATALIE

Just leave me alone.

Jenn touches her own eyes.

INT. THEATER

Human is plugged in sleeping. Tyler buttons on his clothes. Natalie unties the balloons from his neck.

NATALIE

Do you really think I'm a prick?

TYLER

I was just joshing, Nat.

NATALIE

I don't want to be a prick.

TYLER

Uh oh. The big, tough Nat isn't a bit insecure is she?

She smiles as Tyler wraps up his clothes. Natalie waves goodbye to Ryan.

NATALIE

Do you think people will come watch?

TYLER

I think the audience could be a failure, but I think the play will be a success. You're a great director.

NATALIE

Really?

A silence. Natalie finishes untying the balloon. She kisses him. Tyler leans back.

TYLER

I'm sorry. I didn't think we were...

NATALIE

No, I'm sorry.

EXT. SIDEWALK -- DAY

Natalie rushes down the sidewalk. At first, she's steadfast in her stride, but her tears catch up to her. The balloon man watches.

INT. HOUSE -- LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Natalie walks through the door in tears. Jenn stops her vacuum.

JENN

Hello Natalie.

Natalie wipes a tear. Jenn puts her finger to her eye.

JENN (CONT'D)

Are you feeling sad?

She blocks Natalie from walking to the stairs. Natalie tries to walk around, but Jenn embraces her. Natalie surrenders to the hug.

NATALIE

Maybe we should play together.

INT. HOUSE -- PARENT'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Natalie pulls out a box. She ruffles through it and grabs a polka-dot dress.

Natalie applies make-up to Jenn's face.

INT. HOUSE -- PARENT'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Natalie puts on make-up and looks in the mirror. Jenn walks in.

JENN

Hello Natalie, how many times have I told you this is my make-up.

She gently takes it from Natalie.

NATALIE

No! You force it out. Like this. And the line is "I told you time and time again." Let's do it again.

INT. HOUSE -- PARENT'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Natalie smothers on make-up. Jenn walks in.

JENN

I told you time and time again.

She grabs Natalie's make-up.

JENN (CONT'D)

This is my make-up!

INT. HOUSE -- LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Natalie and Jenn peek around the corner. Bert is watching TV.

NATALIE

We only have one chance at this. You sure you understand?

JENN

I understand.

Natalie puts a touch of make-up on Jenn and places it on the stairs. She walks into the living room and pours herself cereal. Bert listens to the pouring milk while watching TV.

BERT
Why you eating cereal? Jenn can make you something.

Jenn walks in.

NATALIE
Mom, you look pretty.

Bert turns around and sees Jenn.

BERT
Nat, what's going on?

Jenn runs up the stairs. Natalie gets up and follows.

NATALIE
No mom!

Bert follows.

Natalie runs up the stairs, but trips on the make-up. She falls down and screams in pain. Bert runs to Natalie.

NATALIE (CONT'D)
I wasn't good enough to save her.

Bert kisses Natalie.

NATALIE (CONT'D)
I wasn't good enough.

Bert hugs Natalie. She wraps her hands around Bert.

INT. HOUSE -- PARENT'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Bert opens the door. Jenn is hanging from the ceiling in her polka dot dress. Bert sits down, thinking.

EXT. SIDEWALK -- DAY

Natalie, now on crutches, walks down the sidewalk. She gives the balloon man a quarter.

INT. HOUSE -- PARENT'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Bert puts an arm inside a "Send for Repairs" box.

INT. THEATER -- LATER

Ropes are pulled. Spotlight turns on. In the spotlight, Natalie takes out her doll from a bag.

INT. HOUSE -- PARENT'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Bert looks at himself in the mirror.

BERT

Natalie, I know I haven't talked to you much about what happened. Your mom really hurt me.

He stops.

INT. THEATER -- LATER

Natalie ties the balloon around the doll's neck.

INT. HOUSE -- PARENT'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Bert at the mirror.

BERT

The truth is I don't want to lose you like I lost her. The truth is I love you.

INT. THEATER -- LATER

Natalie lets the balloon float away.

INT. HOUSE -- PARENT'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Bert stands by the phone, talking to himself.

BERT

The truth is I love you. The truth is I love you.

He picks up the phone. Applause.

INT. THEATER -- LATER

Natalie smiles receiving the applause. She opens her eyes. There's nobody else there. Her phone rings.