

4TH OF JULY

Written by

Erin Cardiff

Inspired by true events

eireu2@rocketmail.com

FADE IN

EXT. TRAILER PARK - DAY

THREE GIRLS - aged 3, 6 and 10 - take turns playing with a giant mutt of a DOG in an open space near a run-down trailer.

SUPER: Allenstown, New Hampshire

The girls' faces are obscured as they each howl with laughter, taking turns running after the dog.

MARY (V.O.)

There are just so many blessings to be had. I try to remind myself. Those girls are blessings.

The smallest girl topples over, as the other two stop to pick her back up.

MARY (V.O.)

To them, it doesn't matter where we are or what we have. The little ones haven't even seen snow before. Ever. I just want them to be comfortable here. To have a home.

They are all still laughing, together.

MARY (V.O.)

For those girls, though, this is an adventure. They've already seen the whole country. At least.

EXT. THE PORCH OF AN OLD TRAILER - DUSK

MARY WADE - age 25 now - squints into the fading sunlight from the doorway, looking out on an empty field, concerned.

She slouches her tall frame to pry open a sticky inside door, then pushes gently through a screen door that's already very near falling off its hinges. Both doors stay open.

Mary's loose, wavy light brown hair gets caught by the breeze as she lands on the rickety porch of the run-down trailer.

Run-down as in falling apart, including evidence of a recent fire, with singed boards covering the corner of the trailer.

Mary pulls an oversized beige cardigan sweater tightly around her shoulders. She stops. Takes a deep breath.

Right now - standing in this doorway, hands on hips - she looks as though she belongs to another era altogether.

Surveying the scene before her, with the sun about to disappear over the horizon, she shakes her head.

She yells.

MARY

Girls! Time to eat!

As if from nowhere, THREE GIRLS - aged 3, 6 and 10 - appear at the door, nearly knocking Mary over as they all try to hug her at once, and quickly file in through the trailer door.

INT. OLD TRAILER - MOMENTS LATER

Mary pushes what is obviously a meagre amount of food around in an old pot on an ancient stove.

The three girls settle into mismatched chairs, all wedged into the cramped space, the smallest space left for Mary.

Mary moves to hover over the girls, portioning out fat noodles between the four plates on the table, keeping the smallest portion for herself.

As Mary returns the pot to the stove, STEPHANIE - the oldest girl now age ten who, aside from her long blonde hair is the spitting image of her mother - bows her head.

A movement the other two girls immediately copy.

STEPHANIE

We ask you, oh lord, to bless this house. And we thank you for the blessings of this meal.

Mary puts a reassuring hand on her shoulder.

MARY

We ask you for the blessings of health and happiness for these three wonderful girls...

JESSICA - the youngest at barely three, with her eyes squeezed tight, and long blonde hair hanging over her face and folded hands - interrupts, in a loud but squeaky voice.

JESSICA

And thank you a bunch for our mom too. Amen.

Mary laughs as she pats Jessica's hand before moving to sit in her small space at the table.

MARY

Thank you, Jessie. Now who's hungry?

Stephanie pushes the noodles around on her plate as she tries to keep her voice bright.

STEPHANIE

Weren't we supposed to have dinner at Gramma's tonight?

Mary nods, trying to hold her big smile.

MARY

Gramma wasn't up to it tonight. But we'll see her soon.

Mary's smile doesn't crack as she continues.

MARY (CONT'D)

In fact, we might stay at Gramma's house for a while, once school starts.

All three girls' faces brighten instantly.

MARY (CONT'D)

Do you like Gramma's house?

The girls nod eagerly, in silence, as their forks click against their mostly empty plates.

KIMBERLY - age six, her features darker and rounder than the other two girls - uses the question as an opportunity to put her fork aside and stop pretending to eat.

KIMBERLY

Gramma is so nice! Her house smells like flowers.

Mary nods, tries to keep up her waning smile.

MARY

It's not for sure yet, but we're working on it. We have to figure out school first, for all of you.

Young Jessica's face falls in shock.

JESSICA

Even me?!

Mary laughs, reaching her hand to cuddle the girl.

MARY

Yes! You'll go someplace like
school each day, when I work.

Jessica's face screws up around the words.

JESSICA

Go where?

Stephanie jumps in, matter-of-factly.

STEPHANIE

She had a job before you were born.

Jessica nods big, obviously without any understanding.

KIMBERLY

Like daddy's job?

Mary nods, almost blankly.

MARY

Oh. Well...

JESSICA

Can daddy come to Gramma's house?

Still trying, with that big smile.

MARY

Yes, baby. As soon as he can.

Stephanie sighs as she also puts her fork down.

STEPHANIE

I'd miss it here. I like the grass.
And space to play.

Mary pushes herself back out of her chair.

MARY

Space? To play? You haven't seen
what's at Gramma's!

The girls pay close attention as Mary becomes animated.

MARY (CONT'D)

Gramma's house has a huge backyard!
There are so many trees and they
cover the whole place in leaves
every fall.

(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)

There's a hill that leads to a
ravine in the back. It's beautiful
there, all year!

But the attention of the girls has drifted.

Even Jessica has given up the pretense of eating altogether,
now looking glum, still holding her fork.

JESSICA

I miss daddy.

Mary reaches to Jessica again. Still trying to sound upbeat.

MARY

We all do. Let's eat up. It's
getting late, OK? Lots to do
tomorrow!

INT. OLD TRAILER - LATER THAT NIGHT

Mary, now alone, pulls back a ratty curtain. It's just gone
dark enough that she can't see anything outside.

Until...

BANG.

A loud firework travels a few feet into the air, not far from
her window. A distant holler goes up following it.

She lets go of the curtain, trembling a bit, as she grapples
for her purse and digs inside.

Everything around her is dark. She flicks a lighter. It
doesn't light.

It's flicked again. Again.

The lighter finally opens up and finds its way to a
cigarette. Mary's silhouette is illuminated briefly as the
light passes nearer to her lips and then further away.

Another BANG. Another holler.

She looks out again, increasingly nervous, quickly stamping
out one cigarette into a watery glass.

Immediately, she lights another. She inhales in a slow and
measured breath, still staring out the window.

She leaves the window, cigarette clenched between teeth.

She grabs a stack of papers - loose Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Transformers comics among the pile - as if making a half-hearted attempt to tidy the shabby trailer's insides.

Another BANG. Another holler.

The firework gets her back to the window, squinting back out.

She puts out the cigarette in the watery glass again.

Fumbling behind her, Mary reaches to wrap her oversized beige sweater around her.

She looks hard into the distance, as if she could will the sun to rise herself.

A dog barks, somewhere outside. Nearby.

Another BANG. Another holler.

Then, a muffled THUMP on the door, made nearly inaudible by the booming fireworks outside.

LOUD MALE VOICE

MARY!

EXT. GRAVEL DRIVEWAY - DAYBREAK

The door of a dark sedan SLAMS shut.

INT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY

In a shabby and small curtained room that looks like time stopped here at the same time the 1970s did, a closed casket sits in an otherwise empty room.

There are no flowers. No pictures. No cards. No guestbook.

There are not even guests.

The FUNERAL DIRECTOR - a dour man in his 50s, dressed in an ill-fitting and old-looking black suit - stands in the doorway, hands tucked behind his back.

He looks around, pausing for a beat, until he shuts the double doors, slowly sliding a cardboard nametag from the door that reads *C. Wade*.

He crumples the cardboard in his hand as he walks, quickly, from the empty room.

EXT. EMPTY ROADWAY - EARLY MORNING

A dark, late-90s era 4-door sedan is the only car on the road as the sun rises.

INT. PARKER'S DARK SEDAN - EARLY MORNING

MUSIC blasts out of the speakers. Loud.

Accompanied only by thumping on the steering wheel.

The driver is PARKER WALLACE - an alpha-looking male, early 30s, with his dark hair slicked back and a toothpick clamped between his completely symmetrical teeth - wearing a dark button-up shirt and mirrored aviator sunglasses.

The slick voice of a RADIO DJ booms out of the speakers.

RADIO DJ

A-HA with *Take On Me* brings us to the end of another 30 minute block of the best non-stop music for your workday! A new block starts right now! Here's the new single from Nelly - *Ride Wit Me*.

Parker suddenly shakes his head hard, as if his hearing just dropped out.

Out of nowhere, a formal-sounding FEMALE VOICE crackles.

FEMALE POLICE DISPATCH (V.O.)

This is dispatch. Repeat. What's your 20?

Parker stops drumming, suddenly, gripping the wheel with one hand as he reaches down to fumble with the car radio.

The music goes off.

Bringing his other hand back up, gripping the steering wheel hard and uncomfortable, he refocuses on the road in silence.

INT. OFFICE WAITING ROOM - DAY

A FEMALE OFFICE ASSISTANT - in her mid 20's and dressed straight out of 9 to 5 - carries an ancient cork clipboard. She calls out. Loudly.

OFFICE ASSISTANT

Mary Wade?

She looks up after a beat. No answer. Louder.

OFFICE ASSISTANT (CONT'D)
Miss Wade?

With a few steps around the cramped office, she's vaguely checking faces. She doesn't see who she's looking for.

She shakes her head, flipping the clipboard up to her and checking a box on a form next to the word NON-COMPLIANT.

EXT. CITY STREET - MORNING

The dark sedan turns into the long driveway, in front of a sign marking the local courthouse.

INT. OFFICE WAITING ROOM - DAY

The office assistant - dressed just as flash and holding the same old clipboard - calls out, loudly.

OFFICE ASSISTANT
Miss Mary Wade?

Mary jolts out of her chair as if she's just been bitten.

The assistant nods, giving her a vague look of sympathy.

OFFICE ASSISTANT (CONT'D)
How are you today? Better?

Mary nods as the woman waves her toward another door.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Mary is ushered into a small room that's practically bare - with only an older model metal desk and two rickety chairs.

OFFICE ASSISTANT
Have a seat. Doctor Stephens will
be with you shortly.

Mary sits hesitantly in the chair facing the door and folds her hands nervously into her lap.

After a beat, the door creaks open. DOCTOR STEPHENS - an older, white, sour-looking man in a tweed jacket with elbow patches - stands in the doorway, clipboard firmly in-hand.

DOCTOR STEPHENS
Ms. Wade?

The doctor glares down at the clipboard, not acknowledging Mary, other than to confirm her name.

MARY

Yes, sir.

He steps in and shuts the door behind him in a smooth motion, without looking up from the clipboard, still.

DOCTOR STEPHENS

So. We begin. Again.

EXT. PARKING LOT IN FRONT OF THE COURTHOUSE - MORNING

Finally, Parker steps confidently out of the car, tugging on the bottom of his black, button-down shirt.

Dressed in full uniform, Parker reveals himself to be a police officer, headed for the door of a county courthouse.

INT. OFFICE WAITING ROOM - DAY

The office assistant - dressed colorfully, still clutching her clipboard - calls out, loud.

OFFICE ASSISTANT

Miss Mary Wade?

Mary pops off her chair in the cramped waiting room before the woman even finishes reading her name.

INT. DOCTOR STEPHENS' OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

She is ushered into the same small room. Alone.

OFFICE ASSISTANT

You'll be meeting with Doctor Stephens. He'll be right with you.

After a beat, he doctor enters, with his clipboard.

Head down.

DOCTOR STEPHENS

Miss Wald?

Mary blinks, unsure

MARY

Um, it's Wade? W-A-D-E.

The doctor nods.

DOCTOR STEPHENS
Your first name?

MARY
It's Mary. Mary Wade.

She reaches to shake the doctor's hand.

He finally looks up at her. Instead of reciprocating, though, he looks back down at his clipboard with a frown.

DOCTOR STEPHENS
I'm Doctor Stephens. I facilitate this program, on behalf of the state of New Hampshire.

He does not look at her. Keeps talking. Monotone.

DOCTOR STEPHENS (CONT'D)
And, as mandated by the state of New Hampshire, you are expected to attend this drug rehabilitation and harm reduction program for a total of not less than twelve sessions. Do you understand that you must attend all of these sessions in order to fulfil the conditions of your sentence?

He is still looking down, checking boxes on a form.

DOCTOR STEPHENS (CONT'D)
That you will be in further violation of the law and in contempt of the court's verdict if you do not fulfil this sentence, and further action will likely be taken by said court in that case?

Mary, face dark, doesn't know when she should speak.

DOCTOR STEPHENS (CONT'D)
Miss Wade? Do you understand these conditions?

Still looking stunned, Mary nods as the doctor unclips a folder and drops the whole clipboard in her lap.

DOCTOR STEPHENS (CONT'D)
You need to sign all of these. Wherever there's an x.

Mary nods again, tucking loose hair behind her ear.

The doctor settles into the chair across from her, as she signs away, quickly and quietly.

After a beat, he sighs audibly, before punching through the names of the children he reads from the file.

DOCTOR STEPHENS (CONT'D)

You have three minor children in your care: *Stephanie*, age ten, *Kimberly* age six and *Jessica* age three, correct?

Mary nods again, as she tries to scramble through all the papers awaiting signatures in front of her.

DOCTOR STEPHENS (CONT'D)

Are any and/or all of these minor children in your care currently enrolled in school, Miss Wade?

Mary nods, distractedly.

MARY

They will be, in time for fall.

Noticing the silence, she tries to look up at the doctor between signatures.

MARY (CONT'D)

We just moved back here. From out west. Jessie - Jessica - was born out there. She's only three. But she'll be in daycare whenever I'm at work.

The doctor shakes his head as he jots down notes, enunciating certain words as if he doesn't understand them.

DOCTOR STEPHENS

Did you have a job *out west*?

Mary nods.

DOCTOR STEPHENS (CONT'D)

Were you abusing drugs while you were *working* out there?

His hard stare, combined with the condescension in his voice, makes Mary shiver.

MARY

I've never abused drugs, sir.

The doctor pulls off his glasses to rub at his eyes.

DOCTOR STEPHENS
Do you understand you plead guilty
to a drug-related offense?

Mary stops, mid-signature. She nods, timidly.

DOCTOR STEPHENS (CONT'D)
Since we have twelve sessions to
discuss your drug-related offense,
I'd hope there's something to
discuss. Or you and I will have to
have a different conversation.
Regarding those children.

Silence.

DOCTOR STEPHENS (CONT'D)
I take it we understand each other
better now.

He takes the time to enunciate her name insanely.

DOCTOR STEPHENS (CONT'D)
Miss Wade.

Mary blinks, pausing a second, until she nods again.

DOCTOR STEPHENS (CONT'D)
Good. Let's start again.

INT. COURTHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY

An ARMED OFFICER - white and male, in his 30s - stands just
inside the main courthouse door, as Parker strides in.

The officer glances at Parker's gun and badge, and hands him
a clipboard to sign in, quickly waving him through.

He leans in to speak to Parker, in a near-inaudible voice.

ARMED OFFICER
You're practically a goddamned
hero. Ask anyone in here.

Parker looks up sharply before the two exchange knowing nods.

Walking quickly, Parker reaches in his pants pocket, pulling
out a clunky flip phone.

He looks at it for a hard second, before flipping it open,
not breaking stride.

A light on top blinks for a message. He presses a button.
The chipper voice of his mother ANDREA hums into his ear.

ANDREA (V.O.)

Hi Parker! It's mum. I know you're busy. Just wanted to call and say I hope you have a good day. I know this has been tough on you. Love you, no matter what. Call me later. Let me know how it goes. Love you.

Still walking, Parker sharply snaps the phone closed before he jams it back in his pocket.

Just as he reaches to push open a courtroom door, Parker locks eyes with a BANDAGED MAN - dark skinned, younger than him, with an arm in a sling and a gauze patch over one eye.

Parker rolls his eyes away from the man, shaking his head almost too slightly for anyone to notice.

The bandaged man notices, though, and looks like he's about to move in Parker's direction.

This minor action sets off commotion, as the armed officer barks something indistinguishable into his radio and he moves to keep the bandaged man separated from Parker.

Parker doesn't break his stride, pushing confidently through the large double doors into the courtroom.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

The mostly empty courtroom is near-silent.

Mary sits, looking small and frightened, at the defendant's table, her hands folded in her lap.

Next to her stands a rumpled MALE LAWYER - who doesn't look any older than Mary - wearing a retro hipster-looking 80s suit at least a full size too small.

An OLDER MALE JUDGE peers down from the bench.

OLDER MALE JUDGE

Miss Wade.

Both Mary and the lawyer scramble to their feet.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

A large group of UNIFORMED POLICE OFFICERS - very white and entirely male - are gathered, loud and rowdy, each with a full pint in front of them.

Parker sits among them as they finish a toast.

Glasses clink.

UNIFORM #1
They gotta learn.

UNIFORM #2
They don't wanna mess with us!

The men grumble and cheer, indistinguishably.

The officer closet to Parker wraps a friendly arm around him.

UNIFORM #1
Right, Parker? They ain't gonna
mess with us again!

Parker nods, with a knowing smile.

INT. BAR - LATER THAT NIGHT

Most of the former group has since dispersed, though a few random officers are still scattered around the bar.

There is also now a GIRL AT THE BAR - early 20s, long blonde hair, wearing lots of jewelry, including a large ring on almost every finger, with a big smile - nursing a drink.

She's talking at Parker, who nods along, randomly.

GIRL
I mean, I'm not a hundred percent
sold on criminal justice as a
major. Like, what would I do? You
know, for a job? But it seemed
cool, and I gotta study something
in school, you know?

Parker leans forward to the girl, whispering something unintelligible in her ear.

She nods, sounding unsure.

GIRL (CONT'D)
Uh, sure.

INT. PARKER'S CAR - EVEN LATER

Parker leans over to the girl, who's now belted into the passenger seat of his car, trapped.

He whispers something else unintelligible in her ear.

The girl squirms.

GIRL

Uh, it's OK. My parents are home now, anyway.

Parker undoes his seatbelt.

GIRL (CONT'D)

If you've, like, had too much to drink, I can call somebody? Like, once I go inside?

He rolls into her, nuzzling into her neck. She freezes.

GIRL (CONT'D)

Uh, I really need to get home.

Parker wraps a hand into her hair, pulling her head down.

GIRL (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

He pulls harder. She gets louder.

GIRL (CONT'D)

Seriously. Stop!

He jerks her head back up, rolling out of his seat entirely, to climb on top of her.

She pushes against him, almost gently, at first. Her voice now almost quiet.

GIRL (CONT'D)

Stop it.

As his free hand slides down to her lap, she pushes harder against him.

When he moves to tug at her skirt, his knee slips, and she takes the opportunity to hit him as hard as she can in the side of the head.

At least one of the large rings she wears lands against his cheek. Hard.

Parker immediately shrinks down.

She struggles with her seatbelt and pushes her way out the door, SLAMMING it in his face.

As Parker is about to reach his hands up to rub his own face, he notices a clump of blonde hair still clenched in his fist.

From nowhere, a female voice crackles through.

POLICE DISPATCH (V.O.)
This is dispatch. Repeat. What's
your 20?

Parker slumps back into his seat and closes his eyes.

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Mary sits, glassy-eyed, with her hands clenched into fists, balled in her lap. Her clothes are muddy and wet in spots.

She picks up her left hand to examine her fingers.

The white shadow of a wedding band still visible, she is surprised to see her fingertips covered in ink.

But when she moves her right hand, it jerks back.

She's handcuffed to the bench she's sitting on. Alone.

INT. POLICE STATION - MORNING

Parker sits at his desk, eyes barely open.

He is trying to prop himself up on his elbows. He is trying to shuffle some papers. He is trying to look busy.

The red mark on his cheek from the night before is threatening to come out as a very bad bruise.

He dips his fingers into a glass of water, touching his face gently with the water. It hurts.

He's startled forward by a clap on the back from CAPTAIN JAMES ANDERSON - a silver-haired man in his late 50s - obviously the man in charge.

CAPTAIN ANDERSON
How does the other guy look?

Parker tries to lean back in his chair, casually, attempting a sly smile. It hurts.

PARKER

Worse.

He nods, but his head stays down when he speaks. It hurts.

PARKER (CONT'D)

What is the good word this morning,
Captain Anderson?

The Captain squints, lowering himself to Parker's face.

CAPTAIN ANDERSON

Hmm. If you don't need that face of
yours checked out, you might want
to get it into some casework. Take
a deep dive into cold storage if
nothing else comes in.

PARKER

Yes sir.

The Captain picks up on Parker's low mood and claps his
shoulder again.

CAPTAIN ANDERSON

I don't want you getting bored. Get
out there and see what's going on.

EXT. TRAILER PARK - DAY

TWO VERY INEBRIATED MEN are currently shouting at each other
in unintelligible maybe-English words in an open space very
near Mary's run-down trailer.

You can tell the men apart only because one is wearing a very
muddy shirt and pants. The other wears only muddy shorts.

A SCREAMING WOMAN stands nearby, incoherently directing her
rage at the two men.

Mary walks toward the scene cautiously, cradling two paper
grocery bags. She can hear the commotion, but has to juggle
the bags to see what's going on.

Now, as she spots the men start to tussle, Mary also clocks a
fire burning near the mess, which is very near her trailer.

As she hurries toward it, she can hear sirens approaching.

Moving toward the trailer in the opposite direction is CURT -
30s, with dark and fluffy but thinning hair and a charming
smile to match - waving frantically at Mary. Shouting.

CURT
Are the girls inside?

Mary's eyes widen as she shakes her head no.

Still calm, she hands off the grocery bags to Curt near the porch and ducks quickly into the trailer, as the fire grows even closer to her front door.

She tosses a small bucket of water onto the fire, but it doesn't do much. She ducks back inside.

When she comes back out with another bucket of water, a LARGE MALE POLICE OFFICER tackles her to the ground.

The bucket and water go flying.

The combination of water, fire, sirens and lights flood through her senses.

As the fire still burns on, Mary has the officer's knee in her back and her face in the dirt as she's handcuffed.

INT. PARKER'S HOUSE - EVENING

Parker stomps through his front door, still in uniform, with his gun still strapped to his side. He clutches at the neck of a bottle through a brown paper bag.

As soon as he's in the house, his face turns sour. He's smelling something odd and hears a ticking sound.

His hand moves quickly to his hip.

Suddenly, popping out of his kitchen, is his mom, Andrea.

She's been caught, in the middle of cooking and cleaning.

ANDREA
Parker! Do you really not keep your door locked? I worry about you, you know. An unlocked door does not help anybody.

Parker looks deflated, suddenly trying to stash the bagged bottle in his hand.

PARKER
Mom? What are you doing here?

Andrea comes back out of the kitchen, hands on hips. She's got both a bandana and an apron on. A cleaning machine.

PARKER (CONT'D)
Are you making cookies?

ANDREA
They're already in the oven, kid,
and the timer is a-tickin! So
technically they're already made.

She walks to him, slapping him in the chest with an oven mitt
and winking.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
And out in fifteen minutes, kid.

Parker turns away, seething, finally dropping the bottle on a
side table with a thud.

PARKER
You don't need to be here! I don't
need you to clean up my messes or
kiss my boo-boos and make them
better. I need you out of my space.

Andrea reemerges from the kitchen, looking crestfallen.

ANDREA
I'm worried about you! Trying to
keep you on the straight and
narrow, you know.

Parker explodes.

PARKER
BULLSHIT! The real reason you're
here is because you don't believe
me. That message you left this
morning? Yeah, I got that message.
Your fake "no matter what" garbage?

He yells.

PARKER (CONT'D)
I heard that. Loud and clear.

Andrea takes a few hesitant steps toward him.

ANDREA
Parker, what are you talking about?

PARKER
You've been saying it to me all
along. No matter what, Parker. No
matter what.

ANDREA
Because I love you, kid.

Still yelling, now red-faced, he moves to stand right in front of her.

PARKER
NO! Because you think I'm guilty.
You think I'm capable of terrible things. You worry about me because of what you think I've done. Or what you think I'll do.

As her eyes fill with tears, Andrea grabs her coat.
Then, she whips around to grab up the brown bag, too.

ANDREA
You're right, kid. I'm worried about what you could do.

The timer goes off in the kitchen.

ANDREA (CONT'D)
Your cookies are done.

And she's out the door, bottle in-hand.

INT. THE WADE FAMILY HOUSE - DAY

All three girls burst through the door of a run-down house that looks like it hasn't been touched since the 1960s.

Squealing all the way down the hall, they are swept into the waiting arms of CELESTE - an elegant-looking woman in her 60s, her head tied in an elaborate scarf, wrapped in an elaborate half-apron with *C. Wade* embroidered on the pocket.

Looking like an old Hollywood glamour model.

CELESTE
Here are my girls!

The girls swarm her in a hug.

MARY
Be careful. Gramma is...

Celeste shoots Mary a cold, withering look.

CELESTE

Gramma is happy to see you! And wants to make cookies! Who wants to be the special helper?

The girls cheer, hopping in a chorus of raised hands.

CELESTE (CONT'D)

Well, aren't I lucky? Three very special helpers!

Only Mary notices the slight hesitation before Celeste straightens back up.

CELESTE (CONT'D)

Right! Everyone wash hands, then in the kitchen! There are aprons in there for each of you.

The girls make a beeline for the kitchen.

Mary leans against the wall with a sigh as the girls scatter.

MARY

You don't have to do any strenuous activities with them. They're happy just to come here and to see you.

Celeste waves her hand, dismissively.

CELESTE

I want to do everything I can. We wouldn't even have to argue about this if you would be here full time. All four of you.

Mary smirks at her.

MARY

You really don't need three screaming kids.

Celeste smiles back.

CELESTE

Or four.

Mary's smirk fades. Celeste's smile does not.

CELESTE (CONT'D)

You should move in now. Save yourself from that awful trailer, and the hassle of waiting me out a few more months.

Mary shakes her head.

MARY

You shouldn't talk like that.

Celeste shoots her another stern look.

CELESTE

What? Talk like what? You should really take a look around sometime.

Celeste extends a multi-colored, heavily-bruised arm.

Realizing she's exposed, she quickly reaches up, pulling her sleeves down and folding her arms firmly in front of her.

Stephanie pops back out of the kitchen at the same moment, wearing a big smile and an ornate half-apron. She pauses, looking at her grandmother intently for a second.

STEPHANIE

Gramma? The girls have clean hands and aprons on. Do you need me to do anything else?

Celeste smiles warmly at her.

CELESTE

Not at all, dear! You supervise the little ones. We'll be right there!

Once Stephanie is back in the kitchen, Celeste turns back to Mary. Closer, quieter.

CELESTE (CONT'D)

Since your father is gone, there isn't much left here for me. You and the girls should at least get some use out of it.

She pats Mary on the shoulder.

CELESTE (CONT'D)

You might hate it here, but it's still your home.

Mary shakes her head. But, before she can reply, Celeste gives her a firm push toward the kitchen.

CELESTE (CONT'D)

Come on. Time to make cookies.

INT. CAPTAIN ANDERSON'S OFFICE - DAY

Today, Captain Anderson is parked at his desk. And he isn't in such a jovial mood.

Parker sits across from him, head down, hands in his lap.

The Captain offers a deep sigh.

CAPTAIN ANDERSON

I got a phone call this morning.
From a, ahem, a *concerned citizen*.

He glares at Parker, who is trying not to squirm.

CAPTAIN ANDERSON (CONT'D)

Said you assaulted a woman the
other night. I assume it has
something to do with that.

He waves his hand at Parker's cheek, now swollen and turned a telling shade of purple.

PARKER

No, sir.

Even though it hurts to shake his head, Parker does it vigorously, hoping his captain is convinced.

PARKER (CONT'D)

This was a result of a
misunderstanding.

The Captain sighs again.

CAPTAIN ANDERSON

Look, what you do off-duty is your
business. But if you're out
partying with the boys, still in
uniform, and then you get in
trouble? Then it's back to being my
business. Understand?

Parker nods, slowly.

CAPTAIN ANDERSON (CONT'D)

Now, since I don't want to be
involved in your business, I hope
we understand each other.

PARKER

Yes, sir.

CAPTAIN ANDERSON

I told her she could come in and talk to me about it, if she wanted. File a report, even, if she wanted. She declined.

Parker nods again, looking relieved. The Captain notices.

CAPTAIN ANDERSON (CONT'D)

But, if she changes her mind, I can't do anything about that. You understand?

He sighs again.

CAPTAIN ANDERSON (CONT'D)

Look, I know you're struggling. You've been through a lot. I also know you're a good cop. I don't question that. I don't.

He stands, looking down at Parker.

CAPTAIN ANDERSON (CONT'D)

Keep your head down. Do good police work. Stay welded to your desk. Wrangle what you can from cold storage.

PARKER

Sir, I...

CAPTAIN ANDERSON

This is not a negotiation. Find yourself a case. Get to work.

Parker hops out of his chair, fists clenched, aimed quickly toward the door.

PARKER

Yes sir.

INT. SHABBY OFFICE - DAY

Mary shifts uncomfortably in her seat as the SWEATY BESPECTACLED MAN looks well under his glasses at her.

His palms sweat through the piece of paper he's holding, which he quickly drops on his desk.

Though he stands up, he stays behind his desk and leans forward to address Mary.

SWEATY

You got any real waitressing
experience?

Mary stares at him, wide-eyed.

SWEATY (CONT'D)

I don't mean at titty bars. I'm
asking about respectable, family
establishments.

Mary can barely blink. In shock, she sputters.

MARY

I think you have me confused with
someone else.

SWEATY

I certainly do not.

He leans further in, snorting at her.

SWEATY (CONT'D)

Young lady, women only go out west
to get their tits out for money.
Prostitution is booming out there.
Don't think because I'm from a
small town that I don't know what
goes on out there, in the world.

Mary leans in now, putting her elbows on the desk.

MARY

Sir, I worked as a waitress, at a
diner. Not too different from your
place here.

He waves his hands at her, dismissively.

SWEATY

Well. I gotta lotta girls to
interview. So I'll let you know.

Before he's even done his sentence, Mary has pushed back the
wobbly chair and turned to leave the room.

INT. LOBBY OF SHABBY OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Mary stomps out, angry, until she sees Curt - who's waiting
in one of the rickety chairs for her.

She takes a deep breath to speak, but no words come out. Just
a deep, hard sigh.

Curt stands, putting an arm around her waist, smiling down at her sweetly.

CURT

Do not worry, my girl, you'll definitely get 'em next time.

EXT. WOODS - LATE AFTERNOON

The brush crunches underfoot as Parker reluctantly pushes overgrown tree branches out of his path, until he reaches a small clearing.

Littered around, stretching even further into the dark woods, there are groupings of big blue metal barrels, looking as though they've been scattered randomly around.

He steps to the nearest one and nudges it with his foot.

The hollowness echoes around him, but quiet.

He kicks it, harder. Same sound, just louder. Much louder.

Pushing past more trees and underbrush, he reaches another barrel. Kicks. Hard. Same clang.

A third barrel, further out of the way, is half-sunk into the sandy earth at an awkward angle.

He runs at that one, losing his footing in the muck, and topples it over with a muffled thunk.

With that, the lid has come loose and fallen to the side.

Tattered fabric spills out the top.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - EVENING

The scenery outside the old bus blurs past as the bus whips down a nondescript highway.

Mary stares out the window as she cuddles Jessica, who shifts around sleepily, but stays cradled safely in her lap.

Stephanie sits beside her, with her head propped against the window. Both girls are asleep. Drained.

Mary rolls her head around, stopping to look up at the weirdly plush ceiling, which she studies intently. Until a deep, charming MALE VOICE interrupts her thoughts.

MALE VOICE

You look like you could use this.

A big hand comes in with a sweatily cold can of soda.

MALE VOICE (CONT'D)

I got a few different flavors at the last stop, if you'd rather something else? It looked like you weren't going to be able to get out anytime soon.

Mary blinks her blurry eyes, making sure she's not dreaming.

She strains her neck to look over her shoulder, seeing the vague outline of the man seated across the aisle and back one seat from her that the outstretched hand belongs to.

He quickly moves up one, so he's now seated across from Mary.

Mary lets out a nervous laugh.

MARY

At least they're asleep. Finally.

The man rubs at his eyes, gesturing back over his shoulder to his former seat, where there's a heap of blankets. He smiles.

MALE VOICE

There's a kid under there, I swear.

Mary smiles, turning toward him.

MARY

Boy or girl? How old?

MALE VOICE

Girl. Six. Yours?

Mary smooths Jessica's hair and pats Stephanie's side.

MARY

Girls. Three and Ten. And you are?

He smiles, running his hands through his dark, thinning hair.

CURT

Uh, my name's um, Curt. Curtis, but you can call me Curt.

Mary pulls back, blushing, tucking her hair behind her ear again. Beaming a big smile.

MARY

Well. It's nice to meet you, um,
Curt.

Curt and Mary share a smile between them.

EXT. WOODS - LATE AFTERNOON

Parker is on his back, next to the overturned blue barrel.

Muddy and sore, he rolls around to the ground in front, to try and get a look at what's inside the barrel.

He steadies himself, one hand in the mud, with his clean hand reaching toward the tattered fabric in the barrel.

Reaching forward, he pulls on one of the exposed fabric ends.

Something in the barrel shifts, causing the whole thing to roll to the side.

He recoils.

PARKER

Jesus.

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS TERMINAL - NIGHT

Jessica squirms in Mary's arms, clambering as if she could climb over her shoulder.

Mary tries to keep hold of the squirming toddler, increasingly losing her grip.

She turns to Stephanie, trying to keep her cheerful face on.

MARY

Are we ready?

Stephanie and Mary charge ahead as Jessica still squirms, getting more fussy by the second.

Mary tries to balance Jessica on her hip but, by the time they reach the open door, with the BUS DRIVER standing aside, the wee girl has nearly squirmed free.

Then, Jessica starts to cry.

JESSICA

NO! You promised to take us to
daddy! You promised!

Jessica wallops Mary on the chest.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
I want daddy! Where's daddy?

Mary tries to miss Jessica's fists, unsuccessfully. She tries cooing in her ear instead.

MARY
Shh, baby. Daddy can't come with us
right now. We'll see him soon.
Promise promise promise. OK? Shhhh.

Jessica cries, inconsolable.

She keeps wailing, squirming and pounding Mary's chest as they approach the bus.

The driver gestures to Jessica, frowning.

BUS DRIVER
I can't allow her on the bus in
that state, ma'am.

Blinking slowly, Mary nods. She turns to the other girls.

MARY
Steph, can you get us a couple of
seats? We'll be there in just one
sec, OK?

She stays at the bus door until Stephanie gets to a seat near the front and waves to her.

Jessica wails the whole time, as the bus driver looks on, growing impatient.

BUS DRIVER
Ma'am. We have to get a move on.

Mary nods again, the look of murder seeping into her eyes. She bounces Jessica on her hip as the girl still wails on.

Mary turns back to the driver.

MARY
Do I have time to get her a juice
before we go?

He nods, though slow and reluctant.

Mary hustles back toward the terminal, but instead turns off to a dark corner near the bus.

Mary kneels to put Jessica down on the pavement as they're both now headed into melt down. Her voice is thin and hard.

MARY (CONT'D)
Jessie, honey, daddy can't come with us right now. He has to stay here. And we have to get on that bus, OK?

Jessica still cries, still flails her arms. When Mary moves to scoop her up, Jessica clips her chin.

Mary, incensed, shakes Jessica hard.

MARY (CONT'D)
Your sister is on that bus and I'm getting on it too. If you want to keep crying, I'm leaving you here.

Mary stands up and turns to walk back toward the bus.

Jessica wails louder, latching onto to Mary's leg.

JESSICA
MAMA! NO! NO! NO!

Mary scoops her back up. As Jessica clings to her neck, Mary's voice stays firm.

MARY
You have to be quiet from now on. We're leaving.

Quickly, Mary walks back to the bus, past the bus driver, who nods and hops on the bus behind her, shutting the door.

EXT. SQUAD CAR - DUSK

A woman's voice comes through his patrol radio, loud and clear.

POLICE DISPATCH (O.S.)
This is dispatch. Repeat. What's your 20?

Parker clicks off the radio.

He slinks, sideways, back down into the driver's seat.

Dropping his head between his knees, Parker's feet still sink into the muddy ground beneath him.

POLICE DISPATCH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Backup is on route to your
 location. Do you require EMS?

Nothing but radio static.

POLICE DISPATCH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Officer Wallace?

Static.

POLICE DISPATCH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Officer Wallace?

Silence.

POLICE DISPATCH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Parker?

INT. RUN-DOWN MANAGEMENT OFFICE - NIGHT

A BURLY SECURITY GUARD gives Mary a long once over before he swings open the door into the office marked "MANAGEMENT".

There are still sticky remnants of a now-illegible name that used to also be on the door, below the title.

On the other side of the door, LARRY - a slight Asian man in his 30s with a wannabe Magnum P.I. mustache - sighs heavily as he's seated, quiet, on the business side of a heavy desk.

Mary walks in hesitantly, head down, as he gestures for her to take a seat across from him.

Larry talks in a quick staccato rhythm that makes him sound like a cocaine addict.

LARRY
 Baby, it is a god damn shame what
 happened to Bear.

Mary nods, hands folded in her lap, chin still down.

Larry nods along with her, into a shrug.

LARRY (CONT'D)
 What's important, I guess, is that
 you and the girls are OK?

Mary looks up at him, a bruise suddenly visible on her cheek.

MARY

Thanks. The girls are fine. I don't think they understand what's happening, really.

Larry nods again. Blank.

LARRY

How are you?

MARY

Me? Worried, I guess. About the girls. And Bear. He called though.

LARRY

Yeah?

MARY

He said everything would be fine, and he didn't want me or the girls visiting. That we should just go ahead with our plans.

Larry's ears finally perk.

LARRY

Plans? What plans?

MARY

We've been packing up, anyway. Or we were going to.

LARRY

Packing up? What? You gonna move?

MARY

It's my mother. There's no one else to take care of her. Sick. Cancer. She doesn't have anyone else, so I - we - were planning to move. Anyway.

Larry shakes his head.

LARRY

Did Bear know all that?

Mary nods. She is not a good liar.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Well, he won't be out anytime soon. You gotta look after those girls.

Larry sighs again as he stands. Immediately, he leans back over to frantically dig around his desk.

Finally, he fishes out a thick but small brown envelope.

LARRY (CONT'D)

You gotta do what you gotta do.

Instead of handing over the envelope, he drops it on the desk, out of Mary's reach, and sighs.

He leans in, uncomfortably close, to Mary.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Honestly, he shoulda been smarter. He got cocky there for a while. A stint in the big house should straighten him out, though.

Larry smiles briefly until his face contorts into a snarl.

LARRY (CONT'D)

But it's all so fucking unnecessary, you know? Fucking Reagan. Fuck him and his fucking war on drugs bullshit.

He sighs again, hopping back up to pace.

LARRY (CONT'D)

It's this city, too. As much as I hate to see you go. This city's going down the toilet. Ten years from now, this bullshit neon and glitter capital of the world! Bullshit! It won't even exist. Anymore. Like it ever did! It'll be a crater, carved in the middle of the desert. The second coming of the Grand Canyon!

Mary shrugs, small in her chair, as Larry raves on.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Once Bear gets back on his feet, I'm sure he'd prefer someplace, well, quieter. Anyway.

Larry finally slides the envelope toward Mary, but stops to pick it back up off the desk.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Don't worry about dinner tonight. It's on the house. Whatever you want. Whatever you need.

He shakes his head, tsk-ing and sniffing as he slides around the desk.

LARRY (CONT'D)
Goddamn cops! I'd bet they tossed
your place too.

Mary nods, still keeping her eyes focussed on her hands in her lap, until she's startled by Larry's hand gripping her shoulder. Tight.

She looks up at him, looking down. He lingers far too long.

LARRY (CONT'D)
If you need a place to stay in the
meantime...

Mary quickly shakes her head, plotting her escape.

MARY
Thanks. But we're OK. Thanks for,
um, dinner too. For everyone. I
have to get back to the girls.

LARRY
Bet those girls are having the time
of their lives.

Larry waves the brown envelope in the air with his free hand, holding it aloft, just above her reach.

LARRY (CONT'D)
You could stay for a while.

Her eyes trail up and meet Larry's, with more than a flash of genuine fear.

Mary struggles to stand even though his hands haven't moved. She grabs the envelope, timidly. Slowly.

MARY
Thank you. Your father meant the
world to me, and I appreciate
everything he did.

She catches herself.

MARY (CONT'D)
And that you have done. For our
family. Thank you.

Larry pats her on the shoulder, eyes still blank, as Mary tries to slip quickly back out the office door.

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

The loud murmur of the station falls silent as Parker hulks in, slowly, uniform still caked with mud.

The Captain approaches quickly, patting the now hardened mud on Parker's back, reflexively.

He leans in, talking low.

CAPTAIN ANDERSON
Why don't you head home? Get
yourself cleaned up. Change.

PARKER
Don't I need to be out there?

The man pats him again distractedly. Almost like a push.

CAPTAIN ANDERSON
We've got it under control. You
need anything before heading out?

Parker, in a daze, doesn't respond. Keeps his head down.

CAPTAIN ANDERSON (CONT'D)
This is a major operation. A lot of
people we need to round up. We will
need your help. Hang tight, OK?
I'll get Chip to take you home.

As the Captain waves another OFFICER over, the CHIEF OF POLICE - an older, even whiter man than the Captain - strolls to the pair, interrupting in a booming voice.

CHIEF OF POLICE
This must be Officer Wallace.

Parker finally looks up.

CHIEF OF POLICE (CONT'D)
We'll call a press conference, just
as soon as we can get a few more
details sorted. It'll take a few
days. My office will be in touch.

Parker stares straight ahead, hollow-eyed.

CHIEF OF POLICE (CONT'D)
You'll be called on at the press
conference to make a brief
statement to the media, but
otherwise, this one needs to be
quiet for now. You understand?

Parker nods, just barely.

The Chief turns to the Captain, as if Parker was never there.

CHIEF OF POLICE (CONT'D)
Now, we've got the real work to do.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Inside a large, mid-century ranch style house with a sprawling, open interior.

The whole place is currently flooded with moonlight from an front window that's had the blinds fully torn down.

Sparse living room furniture includes a leather couch with all the cushions pulled off and tossed around. Overstuffed rattan chairs wobble sideways near half-rolled area rugs.

Aside from the mess, the house looks like no one's lived in it since the 80's.

The front door slams shut.

Absolutely everything inside is in disarray.

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Parker is still standing, muddy and dazed, right behind his department brass.

Next to him, a phone rings, but no one moves to answer it.

The officer that the Captain had motioned in tries to manoeuvre Parker out of the room in silence.

The two senior men's voices are the only audible ones, and they talk only to each other.

CHIEF OF POLICE
We aren't running with this too early. Give the boys a chance to do their job.

The Captain shakes his head in disbelief.

CAPTAIN ANDERSON
Never thought we'd be back here.

CHIEF OF POLICE
With this case? We were always back here, Jim.

INT. MUSTANG - LATE NIGHT

The girls are piled in a sleepy heap in the back seat of a pristine old Mustang. Each is dressed in their pyjamas, as if they'd been brought straight from their beds.

Mary slides into the driver's seat and revs the engine before she puts on her seatbelt.

The engine noise half-wakes Jessica.

JESSICA
Mama? Where's daddy?

Mary's voice is cold.

MARY
Shhh, baby. Go back to sleep.

INT. PARKER'S CAR - NIGHT

Parker gets into his car, fists immediately clenched hard onto the steering wheel.

He suddenly shakes his head hard, as if his hearing just dropped out.

Out of nowhere, a formal-sounding female voice crackles.

FEMALE POLICE DISPATCH (V.O.)
This is dispatch. Repeat. What's
your 20?

Parker breathes hard, grips harder, trying to refocus.

INT. RETRO DINER - NIGHT

Mary has just pushed through the door, into a large, retro-themed diner, setting off the loud DOOR CHIME.

A few PATRONS are scattered through the place, hunched over tables in pairs, as a lone WAITRESS rushes between them.

Mary trembles as she pulls a long, fully-covering beige cardigan sweater tight around her body.

She looks different - her face swollen with obvious bruises, clumsily half-covered with makeup.

Commotion floods into the dining room, fast.

She stops as she sees FOUR UNIFORMED POLICE OFFICERS struggling, trying to drag A BIG GUY out of the kitchen. Already handcuffed.

He's wearing chef's whites, tall, with the distinct face of a guy who's been in too many fights and had his nose broken too many times.

The embroidery on his chest reads BEAR.

BEAR

You got the wrong guy.

Mary steps back, far from the door, as if she's trying to blend in with the furniture.

Larry stands off to the other side of the kitchen, talking in hushed tones to ANOTHER UNIFORMED OFFICER.

There is an overstuffed black duffel bag at their feet. The uniform kicks it over.

A large puff of white powder spills out the top.

Larry becomes more animated, hands waving in the air. Their conversation is louder now, but still unintelligible.

The officer motions for Larry to follow him, and they both follow the commotion out the door.

Everyone left in the diner is silent, frozen in place.

No one noticed Mary had even been there.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE LIVING ROOM - THE PREVIOUS NIGHT

In the house now, everything is neat, tidy and in its place. The house looks lived in.

The silence is broken by loud stomping through the room.

BEAR

You're gonna wake the girls.

Bear trails through the house just behind Mary. She is the one doing all the stomping.

Though, neither face looks happy.

BEAR (CONT'D)

Baby, come on.

Bear, exasperated, finally catches Mary by the wrist.

BEAR (CONT'D)
You don't understand.

She pulls away, hard. Voice low. Quivering.

MARY
No, you don't understand. We are
supposed to have a life together,
and most of the time...

He grabs both wrists this time. Holds tight.

BEAR
Hey, hey. Look at me.

She does.

BEAR (CONT'D)
I'm not doing any of this because
it's easy. I'm doing it for you.
For us.

His eyes stay locked with hers.

BEAR (CONT'D)
It hurts to be away from you.

Mary glares back at him, a hint of defiance. She squirms, but he's not letting go of her.

MARY
Yeah. It hurts you. You are hurt.
Do you ever worry about me? About
the girls? About what happens, in
our house? When you just disappear?

BEAR
I only do any of this because of
you. To help. None of it is meant
to... I'm not trying to hurt you.

Mary finally pulls out of Bear's grip, rubbing her wrists.

MARY
No? I honestly think you're trying
to break my heart.

Bear shakes his head.

BEAR
Some of this stuff... You know I
don't want to get you involved.

MARY

Well, the *stuff* that goes on here,
in this house that we share, I want
you - I need you - involved in
that. All of that *stuff*.

BEAR

You know I'm trying.

Mary's eyes fill with tears of frustration as she pokes Bear square in the chest.

MARY

Stop trying. Just be here. Show up.
Let's change what's been happening.

Bear hangs his head as her pointed finger softens to a gentle hand on his chest.

MARY (CONT'D)

There are people - actual, real
living and breathing people who
love you - who want you involved in
their lives. People that need you
and love you. Here. Right here.

She taps on his chest. Harder.

He looks up at her, putting an arm against the wall on either side of her head.

BEAR

Baby, I love you so damn much. You
gotta know I'm doing all of this
for you.

MARY

Saying that is not enough. Show me -
show us - what that means. Start by
staying home. For once.

His head bobs down again.

BEAR

Not tonight. You know I can't.

Mary pushes back on his chest.

MARY

I want all of you. I need all of
you. Here. Or this isn't worth it.

Silence, until a car horn sounds outside.

Bear steps back, grabbing an overstuffed black duffel bag.

BEAR

I'm working on it. You know I am. I will be here. I promise. You gotta trust me to do right by my family. You trust me.

It's a statement, not a question. And, with that, Bear disappears out the door.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE LIVING ROOM - THE PREVIOUS AFTERNOON

The girls are in the front room with Mary, quietly working on a complex puzzle spread out across the floor.

Stephanie helps Jessica, directing where pieces might fit. A picture of horses running through a field is coming together.

At least until the loud rumble of the mustang coming up the driveway is heard in the front room.

Mary's head snaps up to check the window.

MARY

Bed. Now.

Stephanie quickly scoops up Jessica, and quickly exits the room. As smoothly as if it had been rehearsed beforehand.

Immediately, the front door of the house flies open.

Bear is on the other side, nostrils flared, breathing hard. He breaks into a manic smile, dropping a bunch of overflowing plastic shopping bags on the ground.

BEAR

Where are the girls?

Mary is on her hands and knees, frantically trying to scoop up loose puzzle pieces off the floor.

Bear reaches down, grabbing her by the wrists.

BEAR (CONT'D)

I asked you a question. Where. Are. The. Girls.

Mary keeps her head down. Voice quiet.

MARY

In bed. Asleep.

Bear laughs, yanking her up off the floor.

BEAR

It's four in the afternoon! There's
no way they're asleep!

As Bear drops Mary's arms, stepping to the direction of the girls' exit, Mary changes course.

She steps in front of him, clings to him, pleading.

MARY

Bear, sweetheart, they're tired.
Leave them play where they want.

Bear stops, suddenly grabbing Mary by the shoulders.

BEAR

Which is it, Mary? Are they playing
or are they sleeping?

Mary's eyes are filled with tears now.

MARY

Please! Everything's fine! Just
leave them alone. Please.

BEAR

You're not going to let me see my
own kid?

Bear shakes her as he squeezes her shoulders hard.

MARY

Let's have some dinner, OK? You
must be hungry.

Over her shoulder, Bear notices the puzzle, as if for the first time.

He starts to yell.

BEAR

Oh, I get it. I can bring toys for
those ungrateful brats every damn
day. That's not good enough?

He whips back around, grabbing Mary by the shoulders, dragging her over to the puzzle and starts kicking it apart.

BEAR (CONT'D)

I'm glad this all fun for you,
while I work my ass off. Providing.

He's pulling Mary's hair now, getting in her face.

BEAR (CONT'D)

Maybe you should clean this up.

Stephanie runs back out into the room, grabbing anything she can out of the shopping bags Bear just brought in.

She shouts, trying to distract Bear, who's now twisting Mary's arm really hard.

STEPHANIE

Mama! Look! These are great!

Bear shakes his head to the side, as if everything he'd done should be forgotten in that motion.

He lets go of Mary to crouch down next to Stephanie.

BEAR

Right? Look at this.

Stephanie looks up at Mary, fear in her eyes, as Bear digs through the bags with her.

INT. BEDROOM - LATE - THE PREVIOUS NIGHT

Bear slouches in, through the pitch black room, with an empty black duffle bag bunched between his fingers.

Mary is curled on her side of the bed, eyes clenched shut.

She is definitely not asleep, but she's trying desperately to hide under the blankets.

After Bear slips into bed, he reaches over to smooth his hand over Mary's reddened, tear-stained face. The nightgown she's wearing shows off massive bruises up her arms and shoulders.

BEAR

You make me so mad sometimes. You know I don't want to hurt you.

Mary nods, trying not to wince as tears spill from her eyes.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - AFTERNOON - THE PREVIOUS WEEK

Mary is curled in an oversized rattan chair, tears running down her face.

She grips tight onto a phone base in one hand, with the receiver pressed to her face with the other.

Using the sleeve of her oversized beige cardigan sweater to mop up some of the overflowing tears, she tries to keep her voice composed.

MARY

Are they sure? I mean, how do they know for sure?

INTERCUT - RENTAL HOUSE AND WADE FAMILY HOUSE

Celeste is dressed in a sharp, 80s-style power suit, her long brown hair flowing behind her.

CELESTE

It's fine, you know. I think it's not as bad as it sounds.

MARY

It sounds serious...

Celeste cuts her off, cold.

CELESTE

It's nothing. I just wanted to make sure you heard it from me and not some old gossip around here. Now, how are you? How are the girls?

Mary keeps swatting away tears.

MARY

Fine. Fine. Everything is good out here.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - THE PREVIOUS NIGHT

There is a dinner set out on the table, untouched.

Two small candles in the middle of the meal are melted, almost to the table.

Bear has Mary pushed up against a wall. He pulls her back into him and kisses her deeply.

Even though she's not reciprocating, he keeps insisting.

His hands find every inch of her body, making her squirm.

Mary tries to push him away.

MARY

Don't. We were supposed to have a quiet dinner.

BEAR

Come on. You want this.

He presses his face hard into her neck. He growls softly into her ear.

BEAR (CONT'D)

You know I only do this because you want me to.

He pushes her harder into the wall.

BEAR (CONT'D)

Come on. You know I love you.

Mary's eyes fill with tears.

MARY

Stop. Not like this.

BEAR

Like what? Baby, I'm like this. I was like this when you met me.

He pushes her harder, into the wall. Grinds into her. Growls into her ear.

BEAR (CONT'D)

This, baby. This is all you've ever wanted. Come on. Tell me how much you love me.

Mary pushes back on his chest, but he doesn't stop.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE KITCHEN - AFTERNOON - THE PREVIOUS MONTH

The girls are sitting around the table, chattering happily.

Until Bear crashes in, throwing a dirty uniform of his onto the middle of the table.

BEAR

You're here all goddamned day, doing nothing. You can't even wash my whites?

He growls, lunging at Mary when he doesn't get a reply.

One of his hands goes to her neck, as the girls gasp in horror behind him.

Mary comes back with her most soothing tone.

MARY

Bear, it's OK. Your clean clothes are all in the closet. Everything's clean. There's two sets of your whites there. Clean. Promise.

Quickly, Bear shakes his head to the side, as if everything he'd done should be forgotten in that motion.

Mary crumples the dirty uniform off the table, whisking it into a laundry basket immediately. She pats Bear sweetly on the shoulder.

MARY (CONT'D)

Come on. Let's have some dinner.

He sits, calmly, at the table while Mary passes him a plate with a shaking hand.

The girls are frozen in place throughout.

INT. RETRO DINER - NIGHT - SIX MONTHS EARLIER

The diner is packed with CUSTOMERS tonight. Every table is overflowing with families, children and groups.

Mary is one of only two waitresses out on the floor, rushing busily from place to place as quickly as humanly possible.

She tries to keep her fake smile plastered on, but that ends when she runs into a table of SIX LEERING BUSINESSMEN.

The loudest one yells. Very loud.

BUSINESSMAN #1

Honey! Think you can get your sweet ass over here for a minute?

Mary smiles and nods in their direction, trying to make her way over.

BUSINESSMAN #1 (CONT'D)

I didn't ask you to smile at me, sweetheart. I said I want your ass over here. Right now!

The whole table laughs as the OTHER WAITRESS frowns in the direction of the men.

In hopes of keeping them quiet, Mary makes her way over to the table.

But as soon as she gets within grabbing distance, the man reaches out with both hands.

Mary yells, at the top of her lungs.

MARY
GET YOUR GODDAMN HANDS OFF ME!

Everything in the restaurant goes silent. Instantly.

INT. RUN-DOWN MANAGEMENT OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Larry is seated behind a menacing-looking desk. He's lecturing Mary, who barely lifts her head.

LARRY
Maybe your head and or heart or whatever isn't in this, you know? Maybe it's time to stay home. The new baby! Bear is making good money now. And he's paranoid about you working, anyway.

Mary shakes her head in disbelief.

MARY
Paranoid? About what?

Mary shakes her head, anger rising.

MARY (CONT'D)
Besides, Larry, the tips really help us out.

LARRY
But you don't need 'em! Bear can make all the money he needs. The girls need you at home more. So maybe it's time to give it up.

Mary balls her fists in her lap, tears welling in her eyes.

Larry comes around the corner of the desk, sliding a creepy arm around Mary's shoulder.

LARRY (CONT'D)
Why don't you take the rest of the night off? Give it some thought. I'm here for you, anytime.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Mary slams the front door on her way in the house.

After a beat, Bear follows in.

Mary hands the waiting FEMALE BABY-SITTER a wad of cash from her purse. She smiles her big, fake smile.

MARY

You need a ride home?

The woman shakes her head no, disappearing out the front door Bear left open.

He follows behind her, shutting the door, before he turns back to address the room.

BEAR

Unless the neighbors need to hear more of this fight?

MARY

We're not fighting. I was just hoping you'd care about my feelings. About work.

BEAR

Just because I agree with Larry doesn't mean I don't care.

He folds his arms across his chest.

BEAR (CONT'D)

The girls are asleep. That's where I'm headed. If you need to yell more about this, don't wake us up.

With that, Bear walks toward the bedroom.

EXT. ALLEY BEHIND THE DINER - NIGHT - THE MONTH PREVIOUS

Bear has both hands wrapped around one of Mary's arms as they push through the door to the alley behind the diner.

Mary glances around, nervously.

MARY

Why are we out here?

Bear almost smiles before he hangs his head to his chest with a deep sigh.

BEAR
Out here? Well, I wanted to ask you
somethin'.

He pauses to undo his belt.

BEAR (CONT'D)
You remember that, uh, conversation
we had recently?

Mary freezes.

MARY
What conversation?

BEAR
You know the one. When you were
threatening to take my kids away.

MARY
What are you talking about?

He gives her an icy look, yanking the belt out of place.

MARY (CONT'D)
No, baby, it wasn't that. I was
tired. It didn't mean anything.

BEAR
Right. You know Jackson got himself
picked up at home tonight.

He slowly wraps his belt around his hand as he talks in a
slow monotone.

BEAR (CONT'D)
But you didn't know that, right?
You didn't have anything to do with
that.

MARY
I don't know anything more than
what you tell me.

Bear grits his teeth.

BEAR
You really think we're chumps, huh?
That we want to work in a shitty
restaurant for the rest of all of
our miserable lives?

Mary is shaking now.

MARY

I thought you liked cooking.

Bear laughs. He grabs her by the chin.

BEAR

You serious? Sorta like the way you like whoring yourself out while pretending you're a waitress?

MARY

What are you talking about?

BEAR

Do you think I can't see the way you look at guys in the diner?

Mary tries desperately to wriggle away while Bear slowly pulls her closer.

BEAR (CONT'D)

You daydreaming about taking it up the ass from whatever fucker offers you the biggest tip.

MARY

Bear, please, I really don't know what you're talking about. Please, can we go back inside?

BEAR

What are you afraid of? Think about that. Think about why we're standing here right now.

MARY

Please, just stop. Nothing's going on that you don't know about. Nothing. I swear.

Bear snorts, grabbing Mary by the hair with his free hand.

BEAR

Ah. You swear?

Mary pleads.

MARY

Yes, yes! I swear. Let's just go back inside. Please.

He lets her take a few steps toward the door, then yanks her back. By the hair.

BEAR

You think you're leaving me? Taking my kid? Where? Gonna run back to that momma of yours that hates your guts?

He drags on her, harder.

BEAR (CONT'D)

You wanna whore yourself out? Good.

He yanks her down, onto her knees.

BEAR (CONT'D)

What else do you think you're good for? Huh? How else could you support those kids?

Mary has a moment of defiance.

MARY

At least I'm not dealing drugs to support those kids!

He picks her back up by the hair, brings her to his eye level, and backhands her across the face.

Mary's crying and choking as she spits out blood.

Bear's eyes are steely, but completely glazed over, as his monotone never wavers. Emotionless and dead inside.

BEAR

Yeah. You're a regular Mother Teresa.

After a long beat, he finally lets go of Mary's hair, letting her stumble back to the ground.

BEAR (CONT'D)

Do you have enough of those generous tips from your male clientele to call yourself a cab? I'm guessing not.

He throws a \$50 bill at Mary as he glares at her, shaking, prone on the ground.

BEAR (CONT'D)

Larry wanted me to let you know you're done for the night. Anyway.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE BATHROOM - LATE NIGHT - THE MONTH PREVIOUS

Mary is standing in front of the bathroom mirror when she's grabbed from behind, violently.

Bear claps one hand over her mouth, pulling her toward him with the other.

BEAR
Gotta be quiet, baby. Girls are
sound asleep.

He leans in to kiss the back of her neck.

BEAR (CONT'D)
You can fight me all you want.

Mary quiets down immediately, into still silence.

He takes his hand from her mouth, but doesn't let her go.

BEAR (CONT'D)
Gotta go to work, anyway. See you
in the morning.

Mary struggles to get free of his hands.

MARY
Work? Right. Fine. Go. We won't be
here when you get back.

Bear pushes her forward, hard, over the sink and pushes up her nightgown in one motion.

BEAR
When are you gonna learn to shut
that smart mouth?

INT. RENTAL HOUSE BEDROOM - NIGHT - THE PREVIOUS MONTH

Bear is surprised to see a light on in the bedroom when he comes home in the middle of the night.

He opens the door to see Mary, propped up on a pillow, nursing baby Jessica.

His face softens, momentarily.

That is, until he spies a open, stamped envelope sitting on the foot of the bed.

On top of the envelopes is a small, blurry, black and white photo booth-style photo of a woman holding a little girl.

Mary is finishing up the feeding, putting Jessica back in her crib. She's already sound asleep.

Mary has her oversized beige cardigan sweater on over her nightgown, which she wraps tighter around her as she stands and watches Bear reach to pick up the envelope.

BEAR
What's this?

Mary shrugs.

MARY
It came in the mail today. Just like that. That photo inside that envelope. No return address.

Bear flips the photo over.

Mary pulls her sweater tighter around her, slowly taking a deep breath.

MARY (CONT'D)
Who's Sondra, Bear?

On the back of the photo, now held in Bear's hand, "What Happened To Sondra?" is written in pencil.

Bear mirrors Mary's shrug, trying to play it casual.

BEAR
I dunno. I guess it's someone's idea of a joke.

He crumples both the envelope and photo and tosses them in the garbage can very near his feet.

BEAR (CONT'D)
Don't worry about it.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE LIVING ROOM - DAY - MONTHS EARLIER

Jessica's 2nd birthday party is in full swing at the house.

It's all sugar and candy, in a house full of TODDLERS in party hats on a sunny afternoon.

There's a massive cake topped with a Care Bear decoration and a giant number 2 candle in the middle.

Mary is helping unwrap presents, when Bear finally slumps through the door, dressed head to toe in black.

JESSICA

DADDY!

The noise seems to startle Bear, who does nothing more than wave feebly in the direction of the sound.

He pats Stephanie on the head as he walks by her, straight to the bedroom, looking like he hasn't slept for a few days.

Mary turns to the other MOTHERS scattered around the room, with an apologetic smile.

MARY

They're always needing him to work doubles. Overnights are bad enough, you know?

She hears a low thud in the other room.

MARY (CONT'D)

Excuse me, just for one second. I will be right back.

Stephanie comes over to take Mary's place, and helps Jessica open more presents from the pile.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The oohs and aahs continue far in the background as Mary pushes the already ajar bedroom door all the way open.

Bear is slumped against the closet, looking like he literally fell asleep on his feet.

Mary leans over him, considering trying to wake him back up.

But he's passed out cold.

Instead, she turns him around to lay him out on the floor, propping his head up with a pillow. She pulls off the jacket he's wearing, to make him comfortable.

When Bear's arms are exposed, Mary notices there are puncture marks up his left arm.

She crouches next to him, sad-eyed, watching him sleep peacefully for a beat.

Until a loud cheer goes up from the living room, reminding her of the party she needs to return to.

She moves to quickly cover Bear with a blanket from the bed, and shuts the door quietly on her way out.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING - THE PREVIOUS YEAR

Mary cradles her newborn daughter in her arms.

They're alone, together, in a hospital room. Her voice just above a whisper.

MARY

Hi baby. You are just so perfect,
aren't you? I can't wait for you to
meet your whole family. Jessica
Annabelle Rose.

Mary's eyes dart up and around the room.

It registers hard that she's alone with her baby.

Bear is nowhere to be seen.

MARY (CONT'D)

Your daddy can't wait to meet you.
He will be here soon. Promise.

Tears are streaming down Mary's face non-stop, soaking into the brand new baby blanket.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - TWO MONTHS PREVIOUS

Stephanie braids and undoes her own hair over and over, sitting quietly in the middle of the living room floor, with a few toys scattered around her.

Mary is perched, watching her, on a nearby chair.

They both hear Bear's car roar into the drive.

Mary struggles to get up. She's very pregnant.

As Bear wanders in, looking dazed, Mary approaches slowly, trying to get a read on him.

MARY

Did you finish work?

BEAR

Yeah. They needed me late tonight.

Mary frowns.

MARY

Mister Bruce called a few hours
ago, asking where you were.

His eyes flash anger. His voice matches.

BEAR

So? I went in late. He shouldn't have called you.

Mary is surprised by the response.

MARY

He didn't know where you were.

BEAR

Why would that matter? To either one of you?

Silence falls on the room, until Stephanie speaks up, in a near-whisper.

STEPHANIE

Mama? We were going to...

Mary doesn't break eye contact with Bear.

MARY

It's OK, honey. It's bedtime.

Bear points at Stephanie as she quickly leaves the room.

BEAR

You want her to be afraid of me, is that it? Talk bad about me. Lie about me.

Mary shakes her head in disbelief.

MARY

Do you know how crazy you sound? Where is this coming from?

Bear turns to walk away from her.

MARY (CONT'D)

Since you didn't go to work, you could at least tell me where you were all night.

Bear stops, back still turned.

MARY (CONT'D)

You promised me you weren't using. You said it was a one-time thing. You weren't into this long-term, I think, is what you said to me.

His eyes flash as he turns back to face her.

BEAR

So?

Mary stands her ground.

MARY

So? I trust you to tell me the truth.

BEAR

So? What does it matter if I'm truthful to you? Faithful to you? What do you fucking care?

MARY

What are you talking about?

He is shouting now.

BEAR

How many goddamn times do I need to tell you this isn't your business?

He lunges forward to grab her.

BEAR (CONT'D)

What am I gonna need to do to get it through your thick, stupid head.

Bear hits Mary in the side of the head with the palm of his hand. Hard.

He then grabs back, clamping down onto both of her arms and shakes her. Harder.

Mary's face can't land on a single emotion.

MARY

You are hurting me. Stop it, Bear. You're acting crazy.

Mary feels like her whole body is seizing up. She clenches her fists as she feels her body start to convulse.

Bear is still shaking her.

MARY (CONT'D)

Stop it, Bear. You're really hurting me. I feel sick.

BEAR

Yeah? Maybe you'll learn you need
to keep your nose outta other
people's business, then.

He pushes her, so she falls back into the chair she'd been
sitting in.

But she lands hard, and her body goes rigid.

Mary grabs for her stomach, instinctively, as she cries out
in pain.

It takes a full second for Bear to register what he's done.

But he doesn't really react until Mary is covering her face,
heaving out heavy sobs.

BEAR (CONT'D)

Baby, oh god, no, no!

Bear crumbles to the floor, kneeling next to Mary, trying to
pry her hands from her face.

BEAR (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I didn't mean
that. You're right, you're right.
We gotta be better. We can't have
this stuff around the kids.

When he reaches to rub her stomach, she slaps his hands away.

MARY

Don't touch me!

She struggles to get back out of the chair, keeping her voice
low as tears still run down her face.

MARY (CONT'D)

I'm going to bed. You can go
anywhere else you want.

Mary turns away, hearing the front door open and click
closed, before she can even get herself out of the room.

EXT. RENTAL HOUSE - DAY - TWO MONTHS PREVIOUS

The mustang rolls up the arid desert driveway.

Bear leaves the car running as he hops out, running around to
open the passenger side door.

He carefully helps Mary out the door, paying careful attention to her growing stomach.

BEAR

This is it! What do you think? It's all yours baby. This is for us.

Mary smiles as tears fill her eyes.

MARY

It's perfect.

INT. MUSTANG - NIGHT - THE PREVIOUS WEEK

Mary and Bear are alone in the car, and in the middle of a heated conversation.

MARY

No, we're not going straight home. I'm not bringing this conversation anywhere near where our family sleeps. I don't get why you think this is OK...

Bear, in the driver's seat, is gripping the wheel harder as he raises his voice to talk over Mary.

BEAR

This is a one-time thing. And I'm not anywhere near it, myself. Honestly. I just wanted to tell you about it. It'll pay for the house for the year - first, last, security - all of it. We can get out of that shitty apartment and into a house of our own. Don't you want that?

Mary folds her arms.

MARY

Not if we can't afford it.

BEAR

We can afford it! We just need a little help to get started. It's gonna be all good, I promise.

Mary doesn't unfold her arms.

INT. RETRO DINER KITCHEN - LATE - THE PREVIOUS NIGHT

Mary is pulling off her uniform apron as she walks into the darkened kitchen.

She is talking as if she's expecting to be alone in the room with Bear.

MARY

It was crazy out there tonight,
babe! Maybe I'm just getting more
impatient or something, but it
seemed like...

In an even darker corner of the kitchen, Bear and Larry are huddled around a black duffle bag, exchanging silent glances with each other.

Next to them stands JACKSON - a lanky 20-something weirdo that everyone seems to have a different nickname for - wearing a name badge denoting he's another part-time manager at the diner.

JACK

Well, boys?

Bear clears his throat, causing Jackson to turn around and notice Mary for the first time since she walked in.

He seems to position himself to try and shield the bag from her view.

Bear steps up, addressing his boys, then Mary.

BEAR

We're good, we're good. Don't
worry. Hey baby.

Mary doesn't approach any further.

MARY

What are you boys up to?

Bear steps over his boys, putting an arm around Mary.

BEAR

We're just figuring out something
quick. Head out to the car and I'll
be there in a second, OK?

Mary nods, making a quick exit.

INT. RUN-DOWN MANAGEMENT OFFICE - NIGHT - THE PREVIOUS WEEK

Mary and Bear are sitting side by side in the office, both with tense, anxious faces.

Across the desk, a genteel and elderly Asian man - wearing a name tag that reads LAWRENCE BRUCE SR., OWNER, which also matches the lettering on the office door - reaches out to shake Mary's hand, then Bear's.

His rich Texan drawl fills the room with warmth as he gestures to Mary's growing stomach as she's perched on the edge of her chair.

MISTER BRUCE

I have a feeling I know what this is about.

He stands, smiling down at both of them.

MISTER BRUCE (CONT'D)

Congratulations. Whatever you need, let me know.

Everyone leaves the office all smiles.

INT. CHEAP MOTEL ROOM - DAY - TWO MONTHS PREVIOUS

Bear, hands steady, concentrates on tying a skinny necktie as he looks himself over in the mirror. He smiles.

BEAR

Mrs. Rose. Mary Rose. I like that. You like the sound of that, baby?

Mary is standing behind him, in a frilly lace off-white dress that makes her look even more pale than usual.

Though, as she nods, her cheeks flush pink. The dress almost fully hides her tiny-but-growing stomach.

Bear flips down his collar over the tie and turns around, his full attention now on Mary.

BEAR (CONT'D)

God, you are just a dream come true, you know that?

Standing behind her, he wraps his hand around her waist, moving down to her stomach. He leaves his hand there.

BEAR (CONT'D)

You ready?

INT. HOSPITAL EXAM ROOM - DAY - THE PREVIOUS MONTH

A DISTRACTED DOCTOR breezes in, chart in-hand.

Mary sits, barely covered by a threadbare wrap-around hospital gown, on the cold metal slab table covered only in flimsy paper.

The doctor is looking only at her chart. He sighs.

DISTRACTED DOCTOR
Well, Miss? Missus?

MARY
Mary.

The doctor snorts, audibly.

DISTRACTED DOCTOR
Well, Mary. You are pregnant.

He looks down his nose at her.

DISTRACTED DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Are you currently married? Do you
have other children?

She nods.

DISTRACTED DOCTOR (CONT'D)
You are married and have other
children?

Mary pauses, swallowing hard.

MARY
I have a daughter.

DISTRACTED DOCTOR
Same father?

Mary shakes her head no, feeling the hard emotion rising in her throat.

Finally, the doctor puts the chart down and looks up at Mary for the first time.

He stops, leaning against the counter. Sighing again.

DISTRACTED DOCTOR (CONT'D)
I'll take a wild guess. This wasn't
a planned pregnancy. Are you here
to find out what your options are?

His eyes go back to the chart as Mary squirms.

MARY

I'm not sure.

He moves to a plastic rack on the wall and pulls down a couple of pamphlets, throwing them onto the exam table.

DISTRACTED DOCTOR

This is the best I can do. I could also recommend, as soon as you take care of this little problem of yours, that you go on birth control.

MARY

I am, I mean, I was. On birth control.

He sighs. Again.

DISTRACTED DOCTOR

Well, honey, I don't know what else to tell you. Maybe try keeping your knees together.

Mary's eyes burn with tears.

The doctor doesn't notice. He scribbles on a notepad instead.

DISTRACTED DOCTOR (CONT'D)

If you need anything else, the nurse will be back in a moment. She can schedule whatever other care you decide you need.

Mary keeps her head down, to hide the tears now rolling down her face, until the doctor leaves.

INT. CHEAP HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT - THREE MONTHS PREVIOUS

Bear, holding Mary's shoulders hard, is pushing her, backwards, through a door and into a hotel room.

He kisses her hard. Pushing her back, again, until he pushes her down onto the massive bed.

Without disturbing the covers, even.

Mary winds her hands into his hair as she struggles up, onto her elbows.

He keeps kissing her neck, regardless.

MARY

Wait. Don't you think we're moving
a bit too fast?

Bear smiles up at her.

BEAR

Don't worry. I'm definitely not a
fast kinda guy.

Her head falls back down on the bed as she laughs.

MARY

I'm serious! This is fast. For me,
it is, anyway.

Bear pauses, brushing some stray hair from Mary's face.

BEAR

Not for me.

He stares into her eyes.

BEAR (CONT'D)

I think I've been in love with you
since the first time you walked
into my kitchen.

Mary looks shocked.

MARY

Really?

Bear smiles, tracing an X on her chest with his finger.

BEAR

Swear to god.

He moves back quickly to kissing her neck.

Trailing his hands down her frame, he traces to the hem of
her delicate dress.

In one motion, Bear pushes the skirt up to her waist and rips
off her underwear.

Shocked, Mary tries to sit up, but he keeps her pinned down
to the bed.

He holds her down with one hand on her waist, allowing her to
prop herself back up onto her elbows.

BEAR (CONT'D)

Baby, I love you so much.

He grabs her around the chest, collapsing her back down against the mattress.

He refocuses all his grip on holding her down as he climbs on top of her.

BEAR (CONT'D)

I want you. All of you. Everything.

He moves to hold her face in both hands, stroking her cheeks as he moves closer to her mouth.

Hovering over her, he finally, forcefully, pushes one of his thumbs into her mouth.

BEAR (CONT'D)

There's my girl.

INT. RETRO DINER - EARLY MORNING - TWO WEEKS PREVIOUS

Sunlight beams through the windows as the diner doors burst open, flooding in very early morning arrivals.

Suddenly, the diner is half-full with SEVERAL SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN and their PARENTS, including some of the staff previously seen working in the diner.

Mister Bruce stands near the front door, welcoming each FAMILY as they arrive.

A banner in the corner reads "HAPPY 6TH BIRTHDAY STEPHANIE".

Bear pushes through the door after the rush of people, carrying a squirmy toddler-age girl - SASHA - in one arm and an ornately wrapped box in the other.

He's trying to hang onto the little girl, but she's hanging fully upside down by the time they get over to Mary.

Mary tilts her head to see the girl's face. She giggles.

MARY

Who is this little monkey?

Bear tips the girl back upright, as she squeals and giggles.

BEAR

This is my niece, Sasha. I can tell she's pleased to meet you, based on how badly she's behaving right now.

Bear kisses the little girl on the cheek as she tries to return herself upside down, hanging off his arms. She giggles the whole time.

BEAR (CONT'D)

I hope you don't mind me bringing her here.

MARY

Of course not! She seems lovely, even upside down. Steph loves babies anyway.

A rush of pre-schoolers run by them.

MARY (CONT'D)

Besides, more adult supervision is always better!

Now-6-year-old Stephanie crashes into Mary's legs.

STEPHANIE

Mama!

Mary hugs her shoulders as she bounces in place, happily.

MARY

This is Stephanie.

Mary leans down to her daughter.

MARY (CONT'D)

Stephanie, this is Bear, and his niece Sasha.

Bear leans over to Stephanie and shakes her hand gently.

BEAR

It's very nice to meet you. Happy Birthday!

He hands over the ornately wrapped box as Stephanie's eyes grow wide.

STEPHANIE

It's beautiful! Thank you! You should come color with us! Is that OK, mama?

In Bear's arms, Sasha suddenly claps. Bear and Mary share a sweet and brief smile.

BEAR

Let's go color!

Mister Bruce finally makes his way from the front door to where Mary stands. He hands her a piece of birthday cake.

MARY

Thank you so much for letting us crash the place this morning.

MISTER BRUCE

Don't thank me, thank him.

He gestures to Bear.

MISTER BRUCE (CONT'D)

It was his idea.

Mary looks over at Bear, who's now crouched on the floor, coloring with the girls. He smiles up at her.

She smiles back.

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - NIGHT - THE PREVIOUS WEEK

Bear pulls out a chair. Mary stares at him blankly.

BEAR

Ma'am.

She sits awkwardly as Bear pushes the chair in for her.

An EAGER WAITER is at their table in a second.

EAGER WAITER

Welcome! Tonight's special is an Asian fusion shrimp reduction over a mixed seafood grill.

Bear nods, fully taking charge.

BEAR

Thank you. We'll start with wine, I think? If you have a wine list.

He looks to Mary, who smiles, hesitantly.

The waiter nods to Bear.

EAGER WAITER

I'll bring that back for you with some water right away, Sir.

The waiter disappears.

Mary shakes her head, looking embarrassed.

MARY

I really don't know anything about wine. I know that's silly. I'm glad my job doesn't depend on it!

Her voice trails as Bear grabs for her hand.

BEAR

Nah. It's alright. I've been in kitchens since I was a kid, and it still took me forever to really get it. With parents who loved the stuff, even.

Mary's quizzical look prompts Bear to change the subject.

BEAR (CONT'D)

Honestly, I bluff my way through.

Mary nods with a hard swallow, picking up the dinner menu in front of her.

MARY

Wow. It's even an, um, intimidating menu. For food.

BEAR

Like me, you've been spending too much time at the diner, I see.

Bear scoots his chair closer to her as she laughs.

BEAR (CONT'D)

There are always only a couple of dishes that are worthwhile.

His finger traces over the menu until he notices Mary is staring at him and not the menu.

He looks back at her.

BEAR (CONT'D)

How about I order for you?

Mary smiles.

MARY

I would like that.

He keeps his chair right next to hers as the waiter returns with two waters and the wine list.

EXT. MARY'S APARTMENT BUILDING - LATER THAT NIGHT

Bear springs from his mustang and gets quickly around to the passenger's door to help Mary out.

He walks her to the building door.

MARY

Thank you for tonight. I don't remember the last time I was out on a real date.

BEAR

Come on. You deserve better than that.

He takes her face in his hands, studying her.

BEAR (CONT'D)

I really want to kiss you. You make it very hard to be a gentleman.

Mary almost laughs.

MARY

What a dilemma!

Bear impulsively pulls Mary in for a kiss.

He reels backward before he speaks again.

BEAR

Before I get into any more trouble tonight, I'm gonna go. But I hope we can do this again.

Mary beams as they share a laugh.

MARY

We really should.

Bear walks himself backwards as Mary fumbles for her keys.

Once she opens the security door, she turns back over her shoulder, sneaking a look at Bear's smiling face in the moonlight.

MARY (CONT'D)

Good night, Bear.

He nods to her. Still smiling.

BEAR

Ma'am.

INT. DINER BACK ROOM - LATE - THE PREVIOUS NIGHT

Mary's hand lingers over the punch clock, the time card with her name on it still in its pouch.

She glances at the time, and away, and back again.

After a deep breath, she slowly turns to the clock again, as if willing it to move.

As she exhales, it's as if all her nerve leaves with her breath. She grabs her card and punches out in a smooth swipe.

BEAR
Clocking out early?

Mary tries to suppress a smile, hearing Bear behind her. She doesn't turn toward him.

MARY
They didn't need all of us tonight,
so I volunteered to go.

Bear looks bashful, almost.

BEAR
Get some extra time with your
little girl?

Mary shakes her head, finally turning to him.

MARY
No. I mean, she's asleep. Honestly,
I don't think she misses me. Or
even notices I'm gone, sometimes.

Bear moves closer.

BEAR
No way she doesn't miss her mamma.

He smiles, leaning in.

BEAR (CONT'D)
Lately, the nights you haven't been
at work, speaking for myself, I've
missed...

Another WAITRESS maneuvers around Mary to clock out. When she's done, Jackson is waiting there for her.

His face bandaged, he tries to pull an obviously sore arm around the girl's shoulders. He also tries, painfully, to smile and nod.

JACK
Have a good evening, you two.

Bear and Mary both nod back.

BEAR
'Night, Jackie.

Mary waits a beat before turning to follow them. But, after a couple of steps, she turns back to Bear.

MARY
Wait. Were you saying something before?

Bear relaxes into a grin.

BEAR
If you're not in a hurry to get back to your girl some night, I'd like to take you out someplace nice, for dinner.

Mary smiles back.

MARY
Hmm. I'm scheduled out early tomorrow, if you're free?

Bear nods eagerly.

MARY (CONT'D)
Sure. Why not?

INT. DINER KITCHEN - THE PREVIOUS NIGHT

Bear comes charging through the kitchen like a man possessed.

He picks Jackson up by the throat, dragging him the whole way out the back door.

EXT. ALLEY BEHIND THE DINER - CONTINUOUS

Mary is pulling her beige cardigan over her uniform, walking away from the diner, when she hears the muffled voices.

Ducking into an even darker corner, she turns back to see two men in shadow just behind the diner. One shadow has the other by the throat.

She does recognizes their voices.

BEAR

Is that what you wanna do, huh? You think it's OK to act like that?

JACK

Bear. You serious? She's nothing. Just another piece of ass working here. Probably worse of a whore than Sondra was, man. Think about what you're doing here.

Bear punches Jackson hard in the stomach, crumbling him to the ground.

BEAR

Don't do that. Don't.

He picks up Jackson's face to force him to look up at him.

BEAR (CONT'D)

You are a dumb piece of shit, aren't you? You gotta learn. Don't ever disrespect the women who work here! Don't.

JACK

Why do you care? She's nothing!

Bear punches him again.

BEAR

It's not about her. You listening to me, Jackie?

Jack shakes his head. No, he isn't.

JACK

Please. Go fuck yourself.

BEAR

You wanna go out in the world and act like that, fine. But not in here. Not with the girls in here.

JACK

Nah. Not like you and Sondra, right? Me leaving her alone really helped that situation.

Bear punches him again.

BEAR

I'm not sure you're hearing me. Aren't you hearing me yet?

Panting, Jackson almost nods as Bear pulls him by his ears.

BEAR (CONT'D)
You hear me yet, Jackie Boy?

He drags Jackson all the way to his feet. By his ears.

JACK
I'm hearing a pussy-whipped asshole
try and defend his fancy new little
bitch of a girlfriend. Am I hearing
you right, man?

Bear punches Jackson in the stomach again, dropping him
violently back to the ground.

BEAR
I still feel like we're not
understanding each other just yet.

Jackson tries to nod again, but instead opens his mouth and
spews blood all over the ground. And Bear's shoes.

BEAR (CONT'D)
I'd risk ruining my shoes to
correct you here. I've always been
happy to enforce your rules on your
behalf, whenever you've needed me
to. So I hope we can respect each
other on this matter, hey?

Bear wipes his shoes on Jackson's pants.

BEAR (CONT'D)
I hope we can *understand* each other
much better now.

Jackson finally gives a nod before Bear helps him up off the
pavement and walks him back, slowly, toward the restaurant.

Mary, still in the shadows, watched this whole scuffle.

She doesn't move until the men are back in the kitchen door.
Then, she scurries quickly away, in the opposite direction,
wrapping her sweater even tighter.

INT. RUN-DOWN APARTMENT - THE PREVIOUS NIGHT

In her cramped apartment bathroom, as Mary wrestles with a
curling iron, there's a knock at the apartment door.

She perches the curling iron on the edge of the sink, coming
out of the bathroom wrapped in a bathrobe to answer the door.

Mary steps over Stephanie, who's dressed in her pyjamas, in order to answer the door.

There stands a TEENAGE BABY-SITTER - a girl that looks a lot like a teenage version of Mary - who breezes in, waving at Stephanie and heads straight to the tiny apartment kitchen.

Mary turns her attention back to Stephanie.

MARY

I won't be gone long. Be good, OK?
Love you.

She reaches down to hug and kiss Stephanie who is playing, quietly, with a doll on the floor.

Mary disappears back into the bathroom, dousing herself in a ton of hairspray, reemerging after a beat.

She slips on a pair of stilettos and, finally, pulls off the bathrobe to reveal a slinky, black 80s-style cocktail dress.

The baby-sitter, with her mouth already full, gives Mary two enthused thumbs up.

Mary smiles nervously as she opens her apartment door, giving one more tiny wave back.

MARY (CONT'D)

Be back soon, OK? I'll call too.

And she's out the door.

INT. FLASHY DOWNTOWN CASINO - LATER THAT NIGHT

Mary walks into a party that's already in an obvious and very full swing.

Almost instantly, Larry has an arm around her, with a glass of champagne in his hand.

He shouts over the 80s soundtrack, into her ear.

LARRY

Welcome to the party!

Jackson and Bear hover nearby, but out of earshot.

Bear gives a Mary a wave, trying to look all low key and distantly slick.

A loud cheer goes up from the nearby gamblers, spread in bunches across the casino floor.

Most of the women Mary recognizes from the diner have clustered around a high rollers table, already littered with nothing but sleazy-looking characters.

Mary looks uneasy. Lost.

TIMELAPSE shows very little changes over the course of hours.

Then, Mary lingers far away from the clusters of people, clutching the receiver of a payphone.

MARY

It's ok. She always has a hard time sleeping. Put her on the phone.

As Bear catches her eye, Mary looks away, angling her whole body into the phone.

Mary hums something unintelligible into the phone for a beat.

Bear waits until Mary hangs up before making his way over.

But Jackson makes it over before he does.

JACK

Hey there! What are you doing all alone? Callin' your boyfriend?

Mary shakes her head, her voice quiet.

MARY

My daughter.

Bear looms large, right behind Jackson.

BEAR

You call your daughter on your break every night, don't you?

Mary makes eye contact with Bear, with a small nod.

BEAR (CONT'D)

Don't worry about her. She just needs to hear her momma's voice before bedtime.

Jackson steps on the moment, putting his arm around Mary.

JACK

So, what can I get from momma before bedtime tonight?

Jackson reeks of booze as he wraps his other arm around her.

Holding her too tight, his hands wander. Jack starts kissing at her neck.

Mary freezes.

Bear rolls his eyes, breaking out a stern voice.

BEAR
Jackie. Don't be an asshole.

This doesn't deter Jackson, so Bear gets louder.

BEAR (CONT'D)
Jack, enough. Knock it off.

He still doesn't stop. Bear snaps.

BEAR (CONT'D)
Jackson!

Bear leans in and pulls Jackson off Mary with such force that Mary's dress is ripped.

Jackson only laughs, maniacally.

JACK
Bear, come on! I'm happy to share.

Bear comes at him harder, with a scowl, wrapping a strong arm around Jackson's neck in a near-headlock.

BEAR
We're all having a nice time,
Jackson. Cool it. Now.

Jackson rips himself out from under Bear's grip

JACK
Fuck off!

He points to Mary.

JACK (CONT'D)
Girls like her? They are a disease.
No one knows that better than you.

He pokes Bear in the chest to make his point

JACK (CONT'D)
And don't forget that, Bernard.

He turns sharply, stalking back towards the high rollers and the assembled girls nearby, immediately groping onto them.

Bear turns back to Mary, red-faced.

BEAR

I'm real sorry about your dress.
You need a drink? Or if you wanna
go home...

Mary roots around in her purse.

MARY

Don't worry about it. I was about
to head home anyway.

BEAR

Let me give you a ride. It's the
least I can do.

Mary demurs.

BEAR (CONT'D)

I insist.

Bear extends an arm, which she accepts, and they walk
together, toward the exit.

INT. MUSTANG - LATER THAT NIGHT

The car is stopped in front of Mary's apartment building,
engine running.

Both stare straight ahead, sitting in complete silence, for a
long beat.

Bear's voice is quiet when he does finally speak.

BEAR

I'm real sorry about Jackson's
behavior tonight. He doesn't
understand women. Or anything,
really.

Mary's voice is thin and weary.

MARY

Don't worry about it. He was just
drinking and having a good time.
It's OK.

BEAR

It's not OK. You deal with enough
drunk assholes at the diner.
Shouldn't have to do it on your day
off, too.

Mary laughs.

MARY
It's OK. They're kind of
everywhere, anyway. You.

She turns toward Bear.

MARY (CONT'D)
You should go back to the party.

BEAR
Nah. I think I'm way over my quota
for drunk assholes for the night
myself, too.

They both laugh.

MARY
Thank you for driving me home.

She puts her hand on his, both resting on the gearshift. He looks down at this new development, and then over to her.

MARY (CONT'D)
All things considered, it was one
of the better parties I've been to.

BEAR
If that's true, you really need
someone to show you a good time.

Silence.

BEAR (CONT'D)
Some other time, I mean.

She still doesn't move her hand.

BEAR (CONT'D)
I can walk you to your door?

MARY
I'm OK. But, really, thank you. See
you tomorrow?

BEAR
Yes ma'am.

With that, Mary slips out of the car and she's gone.

INT. RETRO DINER - NIGHT - THE PREVIOUS MONTH

It's a slow night. The diner is near-empty.

Another WAITRESS slowly moves between the smattering of patrons, including an OLDER COUPLE and a COUPLE WITH A BABY in a booster seat.

Mary is planted by the hostess stand, alone.

She slips a stockinged foot out off a pointy black patent pump, trying to wiggle her toes around.

BEAR

Those cannot be comfortable.

Startled, Mary whips around and the loose shoe goes flying.

Bear laughs.

BEAR (CONT'D)

Hang on. I got it.

He picks up the shoe. She reaches out her hand to take it, but instead he bends down to slip it back onto her foot.

MARY

Prince charming.

BEAR

Nah. Just trying to be a gentleman.
Ma'am.

Mary blushes, hard.

MARY

You can call me Mary, you know.

BEAR

Mary doesn't seem like enough of a name for you, if you don't mind me saying.

Mary looks surprised.

MARY

Really? What would you call me?

BEAR

I dunno. Something more, uh, romantic? Sorry. I guess I don't know you well enough to say that.

The one baby in the diner cries out.

Mary and Bear both turn to toward the sound, stopping to watch the parents doting on their baby.

Bear leans on the podium.

BEAR (CONT'D)
I don't miss that age.

Mary leans in on the podium next to him.

MARY
You have kids?

Bear smiles.

BEAR
Yeah, I do, actually. Baby girl
just turned two years old.

Bear pulls out an ornate wallet, flipping it open to a small, blurry photo booth style picture of a woman holding a baby.

He quickly tries to flip to another picture, but Mary reaches over and flips the picture back.

She runs her finger over the picture.

MARY
She's beautiful!

Mary looks Bear in the eye.

MARY (CONT'D)
Is that her mom?

Bear hangs his head for a beat before he looks up at Mary.

BEAR
Yeah. She's, uh, long gone though.
Took the kid with her.

MARY
I'm sorry.

BEAR
I talk to her, when I can. It's
tough, but when she wanted to
leave, well, nothing I could do.

He flips to another picture.

MARY
What's her name?

BEAR

Kimber-Ann Rose. Everyone mostly calls her Timber. The girl earned that nickname.

He smiles.

BEAR (CONT'D)

She's bull-headed - just plows through whatever's in her way.

Mary is trying hard not to laugh.

MARY

Of course, there's no way she takes after her daddy, right?

Bear laughs.

BEAR

Exactly. She's absolutely, exactly nothing like her daddy.

Mary doesn't take her eyes off the photo.

BEAR (CONT'D)

I heard you have a daughter, too.

They are side by side now. Elbows touching.

MARY

I do. Though I don't have a picture with me.

BEAR

I'm sure she's as beautiful as her momma.

Mary shakes her head, smiling.

MARY

Way better! Seriously gorgeous. She's a really great kid. Stephanie. She's 5. Already.

BEAR

No way you have a 5 year old kid!

Mary blushes.

MARY

I was young...

BEAR

Was?

Bear interrupts with his eyebrows raised.

Mary blushes as she smiles. She touches his shoulder.

MARY

You're sweet.

BEAR

Nah. Observant. And her dad?

MARY

I'd imagine still on the other side of the country? Made it clear he was not interested at all.

BEAR

Really? I cannot imagine that.

Mary rolls her eyes, nudging his elbow.

MARY

Really. So, any chance you're going to the holiday party?

BEAR

I wasn't going to, but now that you mention it...

The two spot a pair of OLDER COUPLES wandering toward the front of the restaurant.

Bear gives Mary a last nudge with his elbow and a wink, heading back toward the kitchen as Mary hauls out menus.

MARY

Welcome! For four?

She glances over her shoulder, catching a smile from Bear as he sinks back through the kitchen doors.

INT. DINER MANAGEMENT OFFICE - NIGHT - THREE MONTHS PREVIOUS

Mister Bruce - wearing his nametag that reads LAWRENCE BRUCE SR., OWNER - reaches to shake Mary's hand.

His rich Texan drawl fills the room with warmth.

MISTER BRUCE

It is very nice to make your
acquaintance, Miss Wade. Welcome to
Las Vegas!

He scoops her out of her chair, pointing her toward the door.

MISTER BRUCE (CONT'D)

And welcome to our little family!
I'll take you out to the kitchen,
to introduce you to the boys.

INT. RETRO DINER KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Mister Bruce opens the door for Mary, into an expansive,
gleaming kitchen.

MISTER BRUCE

Boys! Our new waitress is here!

Mary tucks her hair behind her ear as the three men line up
quickly, in front of her.

MISTER BRUCE (CONT'D)

The manager when I'm not around,
and my eldest boy, Lawrence
Junior...

He leaps forward to shake Mary's hand, interrupting his
introduction with the same Texas drawl as his father.

LARRY

Everyone 'round here calls me
Larry.

Mister Bruce nods with a smile.

MISTER BRUCE

Or Knucklehead.

The boys laugh.

MISTER BRUCE (CONT'D)

This here is Jackson Wiles. He
really runs the place, behind the
scenes.

Jackson smiles, extending a hand to shake.

JACK

And mostly everyone calls me Jack.

Mister Bruce shoots Mary a knowing look.

MISTER BRUCE

They've got a pretty good Three Stooges routine going. Don't let them get to you.

Mary smiles.

MISTER BRUCE (CONT'D)

Last, but certainly not least, let me introduce you to Bernard Rose, our, uh, head chef?

The assembled men laugh again.

MISTER BRUCE (CONT'D)

He runs our kitchen, anyway.

Mary tilts her head, looking at this man intently.

Her eyes are fixed on the embroidered line over his breast pocket - it says BEAR.

MARY

Bernard? Why does your uniform say Bear?

The three men's faces register surprise at hearing Mary's low voice for the first time.

BEAR

I assure you ma'am, it doesn't speak to my character. Bernard is a bit too formal for my liking. You can call me Bear, if you want.

As the assembled men chuckle around them, Bear leans in, conspiratorially whispering in her ear.

BEAR (CONT'D)

Everyone I like around here, except the bossman, calls me Bear. So you can, too.

Mary pulls back, blushing, tucking her hair behind her ear again. Beaming a big smile.

MARY

Well. It's nice to meet you, um, Bear.

Bear and Mary share a smile between them.

They don't shake hands.

Mister Bruce nods to the group.

MISTER BRUCE
Why don't you tell the boys a
little bit about yourself?

I/E. -NEW HAMPSHIRE MONTAGE STARTS HERE-

OUTSIDE - the expansive wooded back yard of the Wade family house in New Hampshire:

-YOUNGER MARY (now age 16) kicks through autumn leaves, laughing. She reaches to hold the hand of an OLDER MAN (pale, in his 30s, very tall, with a shock of bright blonde but thinning hair).

-The pair are goofing around in the pile of leaves.

-A decade-younger version of Mary's mother CELESTE is standing in the window. She shuts the curtains.

-Younger Mary and the older man kiss.

INSIDE - the Wade family house:

-Younger Mary and Celeste are having an unintelligible, screaming fight.

INSIDE - a small hospital room:

-The older man is in the room with her.

-They kiss again.

-His hands on her visibly pregnant stomach.

INSIDE - a larger hospital room:

-Younger Mary is has her feet up in stirrups, with a DOCTOR and NURSE shouting directions, unintelligibly.

-Younger Mary is crying, holding her baby, by herself in the hospital room.

INSIDE - the Wade family house:

-Younger Mary puts the baby down in a crib.

-Younger Mary and Celeste are having another unintelligible, screaming fight.

-Mary is holding TODDLER STEPHANIE by the hand.

-Younger Celeste stands across from them. She throws her hands up in the air.

YOUNGER CELESTE

If you're stupid enough to think he's going to take care of you, by all means, go ahead and run off with him! Don't call me when he changes his mind again, though. I'm done with him. And you!

OUTSIDE - a small regional bus terminal:

-Mary is talking on a payphone. Though her conversation is unintelligible, her sobs are loud and clear.

-She slams down the phone with one hand. Her other hand holds the hand of now-5 year old Stephanie.

STEPHANIE

Mama?

Mary swipes at her eyes with her sleeve.

MARY

Come on baby, we gotta get going.

She digs in her purse, pulling out a bus ticket.

Drying her eyes, she leans down to Stephanie with the most fake smile you have ever seen.

MARY (CONT'D)

Ready, love? We've got to go.

STEPHANIE

Do we, mama?

Mary tries to muster a strong, determined face.

MARY

Yes.

EXT. WOODS - LATE AFTERNOON

The brush crunches underfoot as Parker reluctantly pushes overgrown tree branches out of his path, until he reaches a small clearing.

Littered around, stretching even further into the woods, there are groupings of similar big blue metal barrels, looking as though they've been scattered randomly around.

He steps to the nearest one and nudges it with his foot.

The hollowness echoes around him, but quiet.

He kicks it, harder. Same sound, just louder. Much louder.

Pushing past more trees and underbrush, he reaches another barrel. Kicks. Hard. Same clang.

A third barrel nearby is half-sunk into the sandy earth at an awkward angle.

He runs at that one, losing his footing in the muck, and topples it over with a muffled thunk.

The lid has come loose and fallen to the side. Tattered fabric spills out the top.

Parker is on his back next to the overturned blue barrel.

Muddy and sore, he rolls around to the ground in front, to try and get a look at what's in the barrel.

He steadies himself, one hand in the mud, with his clean hand reaching toward the tattered fabric inside the barrel.

Reaching forward, he pulls on one of the exposed fabric ends.

Something in the barrel shifts, causing the whole thing to roll to the side.

He recoils.

PARKER

Jesus.

INT. PARKER'S HOUSE - MORNING

Parker's mother, Andrea, whips open the drapes in his room.

She squints into the sunlight.

ANDREA

I still wonder why you do this to yourself.

Parker awakens suddenly, to see his mother folding his clothes, as she stands at the foot of his bed.

PARKER

Mom. Jesus.

ANDREA

Your door was unlocked, even.
Completely unlocked. So much for
law and order.

Parker can't shake the stupor out of his head.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

I left you alone, like you wanted.
It's been three whole days and I've
been worried for three whole days,
but you said you needed your space.
So I wanted to give that to you.

She pauses to pick up a clean shirt that had fallen on the floor. When she bends down, she taps Parker's foot, still under the covers.

ANDREA (CONT'D)

But you've got to be at that press
conference, and I know it's
important. I knew you'd sleep right
through that if you could. So I
wanted to make sure you couldn't.

PARKER

Christ. What time is it?

Andrea smiles down at her son.

ANDREA

Don't worry, kid. You've got more
than an hour. I made sure your good
uniform got cleaned and pressed.
It's hanging up in the bathroom.
You needed toothpaste, so I got you
some. I know you'd be mad about
that, but I thought it was better
than not having toothpaste.

Parker pulls his knees up, under the blanket.

PARKER

I'm not mad about toothpaste, mom.
I'm not.

Andrea nods.

ANDREA

I know, kid. I know. Let's just get
you through today, first.

Andrea finishes folding Parker's laundry in silence as he rubs his eyes in bed.

INT. POLICE BRIEFING ROOM - DAY

SUPER: May 10, 2000

In front of a crowd of reporters, a phalanx of MALE POLICE OFFICERS, all in dress uniforms, hold court confidently.

Even as the sticky heat from the cameras and constant, flashing lights feel as though they're threatening the collapse of the whole room.

Parker slides in at the end of the row nearest the door, with the Captain rushing over to greet him immediately.

CAPTAIN ANDERSON

Parker.

They shake hands.

CAPTAIN ANDERSON (CONT'D)

I'm going to introduce the Chief. After his remarks, he'll introduce you. Keep it brief. You'll have plenty of time to answer questions after your statement, OK?

Off to the side, the Chief nods to the Captain.

CAPTAIN ANDERSON (CONT'D)

Heads up: Martinez is here. We put him at the other end of the line, so you two can avoid each other. We made him take off that ridiculous sling for the occasion! He wanted to be here. For support.

Parker looks down the line, seeing the dark-skinned and still-bruised OFFICER MARTINEZ at the very end of the row, staring straight ahead. He doesn't acknowledge Parker at all.

The last run-in Parker nearly had with him was at the courthouse several days before.

Remember the bandaged man in court? That was Martinez. Parker was why he needed the bandages.

The Captain steps up to the podium to address the room, with flashes going off in every seeming direction.

CAPTAIN ANDERSON (CONT'D)

Good morning.

Parker leans slightly on the wall, still feeling fuzzy and unable to focus on anything.

The sound drops out as Parker scans the room.

He watches the Chief step to the podium.

The Chief is in the middle of his supremely confident speech, though Parker's brain seems impervious to the sound and fury of the speech. Signifying nothing.

Parker doesn't tune back in until he sees the Chief turn toward him, extending a welcoming arm.

As Parker steps to the bank of microphones, dazed and unsure, the flashes seem to fire endlessly. Everywhere.

Before he can say a word, however, a young and pretty FEMALE REPORTER - in her 20s, with loose and wavy light brown hair - seated in the second row, leaps to her feet.

She stands firm, half-shouting a question right at Parker as he stares, blank, straight over her head.

FEMALE REPORTER

We understand the location and placement of the bodies you found earlier this week were similar to where the two unidentified bodies were found in 1985. Could the bodies you located be connected to the still-unsolved case from '85?

The Chief steps back to the podium, in front of Parker, before he can even say a word.

CHIEF OF POLICE

There will need to be a thorough investigation before we can comment on anything related...

The Chief's voice fades out, as Mary's voice overtakes it.

MARY (V.O.)

We ask you for the blessings of health and happiness for these three wonderful girls...

INT. OLD TRAILER - NIGHT

SUPER: July 4th, 1985

The three girls settle into mismatched chairs, all wedged into the cramped space, the smallest space left for Mary.

JESSICA

And thank you a bunch for our mom
too. Amen.

Mary laughs as she pats Jessica's hand before moving to sit
in her small space at the table.

MARY

Thank you, Jessie. Now who's
hungry?

INT. OLD TRAILER - LATER THAT NIGHT

Mary, alone, pulls back a ratty curtain. It's just gone dark
enough that she can't see anything outside.

Fumbling behind her chair, Mary reaches to wrap an oversized
beige cardigan sweater tight around her.

She looks hard into the distance, as if she could will the
sun to rise herself.

A dog barks, somewhere outside. Nearby.

Then, a muffled thump on the door, made nearly inaudible by
the booming fireworks outside.

LOUD MALE (O.S.)

MARY!

Mary steps quickly to the door, wrenching it open.

The MAN, face unseen, who stands on the other side pulls the
screen door back so hard it rips off its hinges.

The fireworks pop off in rapid succession behind him. Flames
of red, white and blue.

Mary stands frozen, staring out at the shadow figure.

The man pounces to charge inside, pushing past Mary, knocking
her down, winded.

He tears through the whole trailer.

He quickly doubles back, putting a foot on Mary's chest.
Yelling. Mary can only see the boot in the darkness.

LOUD MALE (CONT'D)

WHERE ARE THEY?

Mary struggles hard against him.

MARY

What are you doing? The girls would be so excited to see you if you'd just calm down.

LOUD MALE

Calm down? You ... You expect me to be *calm*?

He pushes the boot down, harder, into her chest.

LOUD MALE (CONT'D)

I swear to god, I will crack your skull open if that's the only way I can find...

Mary gasps for air, trying to force the words out.

MARY

Find what? Please! Stop! Let's just go outside and talk.

The sound of Kimberly wailing especially loudly compels the man to finally pull his foot off Mary's chest.

He stomps away as Mary chokes, struggling to catch her breath and get up from the floor, as she can hear the man quickly and loudly ransacking the trailer.

Then, the whole phone smashes to the ground next to her.

Mary covers her head as everything goes flying, all at once.

Once the place has been tossed, the man disappears for only a second, out of Mary's view, quickly reemerging with Jessica under one arm and Kimberly under the other.

Kimberly is wailing, loud. Jessica is eerily silent.

Mary stops him at the door.

MARY (CONT'D)

You can't take them! They want you to be here! With us! Stop! Please!

As Mary tries in vain to keep everyone inside the trailer, the man elbows her hard, into the wall with the arm that holds Kimberly.

Mary's vision goes blurry as Kimberly's cries stop.

Mary tries to shield Stephanie as they're both knocked hard to the ground.

Their bodies go limp.

The last few seconds are a blur.

The man's hands. They are covered in blood.

Over his shoulder, looking out beyond the still-open trailer doors, is a cluster of big blue metal barrels, all scattered out near the tree line.

EXT. TRAILER PARK - LATER THAT NIGHT

In shadow, against the backdrop of constant fireworks, a hulking human outline carries a bundle under each arm, toward a cluster of trees lined by the big blue metal barrels.

EXT. TRAILER PARK - DUSK

Three girls - ages 3, 6 and 10 - are playing with a big mutt of a DOG in an open space near a run-down trailer.

The girls howl with laughter as they take turns running after the dog.

SUPER: Allenstown, New Hampshire

November 10, 1985

The faces of the three girls playing with the dog are now revealed. These are three girls not seen before.

A GROUP OF CHILDREN run past them, through the field, surrounded by dense woods.

Scattered around them stand big blue metal barrels, staggered at random intervals among the trees.

A few more DOGS run in behind the children, followed by THREE MEN IN HUNTING GARB.

One of the hunters clangs against each barrel he passes, with each ringing out with the same light tone.

The hunter notices the lid on the next barrel is ajar, so he walks toward it, tapping the side lightly with the muzzle of his rifle.

The sound from this barrel is hard and almost entirely muffled. There is something inside this one.

As the man reaches over it, the lid pops off immediately.

All the dogs gather close around it this barrel, sniffing and circling intently. One starts to howl.

The hunter looks in.

His eyes widen as he scrambles backward, quickly away from the big blue metal barrel.

He shouts, unintelligibly. The rest of the dogs now howl.

There is a flurry of activity, slowly falling silent, as the whole crowd runs out of the woods, shouting.

Mary's voice overtakes the action, all of which now creeps forward in slow motion.

MARY (V.O.)

For those girls, though, this is an adventure. They've already seen the whole country. At least.

Her voice sounds full of hope.

MARY (V.O.)

They remind me why I have to be brave. Even if I'm on my own from now on, I have to make sure they're looked after. Safe and protected. Happy and healthy. Give them the chance to grow up. For the world to remember their names.

Over the top of the newly-opened big blue barrel now hangs a tattered sleeve of Mary's oversized beige cardigan sweater.

SUPER:

The bodies of four girls - a woman in her twenties and three children ranging in age from three to ten years old - were discovered in a wooded area near Allenstown, New Hampshire.

The first two bodies were found in 1985, but the second pair were not discovered until 2000. All four were murdered sometime in the early 1980s. Three of the four were related.

None have ever been identified.

If you have any information about their identities, please contact the New Hampshire State Police, the FBI or the National Centre for Missing & Exploited Children.

CUT TO BLACK