AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY

BEST WRITING (ADAPTED SCREENPLAY)
Tracy Letts
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Written by

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AN ENDLESS SKY AT TWILIGHT

Foreboding. Heat lightning in the distance. Miles of unforgiving, summer-scorched prairie.

BEVERLY (OS)
...“Life is very long...”

MILES OF STRAIGHT ROAD

Two lanes, not a car in sight. Cracked asphalt undulates over gentle, browned hills, disappears into an infinite horizon.

BEVERLY (OS)
TS Eliot. Not the first person to say it, certainly not the first person to think it.

A LAKE IN THE GATHERING DUSK

Flat, still. An empty aluminum rowboat lolls listlessly, tied haphazardly to an old wooden dock.

BEVERLY (OS)
But he’s given credit for it because he bothered to write it down.

AN OLD FARM HOUSE SITTING ATOP A LOW HILL

At the end of a long gravel road. Surrounded by towering black walnuts and lace-bark elms. A farm once, no one’s put a plow to earth here in decades.

BEVERLY (OS)
So if you say it, you have to say his name after it. “Life is very long:” TS Eliot. Absolutely goddamn right.

Wrap around porches, forgotten gardens. Imposing in the gathering gloom. A single downstairs window glows.

BEVERLY (OS) (CONT’D)
Give the devil his due. Very few poets could’ve made it through Eliot’s trial and come out, brilliantined and double-breasted and Anglican.
And now, a face fills the screen --

INT. BEVERLY’S DIMLY LIT STUDY - TWILIGHT

BEVERLY WESTON. A craggy, wise and deeply sad Okie. We take a long moment, just to study that face.

BEVERLY
Not hard to imagine, faced with Eliot’s first wife, lovely Viv, how Crane or Berryman might have reacted, just foot-raced to the nearest bridge; Olympian Suicidalists.

Stares out the window at the darkening, ominous horizon.

BEVERLY (CONT’D)
Not Eliot: after sufficient years of ecclesiastical guilt, plop her in the nearest asylum and get on with it.

He sits at a cluttered desk, his face damp with sweat. Nurses a glass of whiskey, his staggered delivery due more to his careful selection of words than drunkenness. He’s talking to someone we do not yet see.

BEVERLY (CONT’D)
God-a-mighty. You have to admire the purity of the survivor’s instinct.

From somewhere upstairs, a THUD. He looks to the ceiling.

BEVERLY (CONT’D)
Violet. My wife. She takes pills, sometimes a great many. They affect... among other things, her equilibrium. Fortunately, they eliminate her need for equilibrium...

INT. VIOLET’S BEDROOM - TWILIGHT

Full of shadows. She sits up slowly from rumpled sheets. We’re on her profile, CLOSE, silhouetted against the faint light from the open bathroom door. She hesitates on the edge of the bed, getting her bearings. Finds a pack of Winstons, lights one. Listens to the voices filtering up from below.
INT. THE STUDY - TWILIGHT

Beverly shifts, waiting for the sound of more movement from the rooms overhead. When there is none --

BEVERLY
My wife takes pills and I drink. That’s the bargain we’ve struck.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. VIOLET’S BEDROOM/UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - TWILIGHT

She gathers herself to stand. Moves to the door. We FOLLOW HER CLOSELY. Her hair unkempt, her steps unsteady, into --

BEVERLY
The reasons why we partake are anymore inconsequential.

The hallway, walls lined with photos of long-dead pioneer ancestors and faded school photographs of three daughters.

BEVERLY (CONT’D)
The facts are: my wife takes pills and I drink. That’s the bargain we’ve struck, just one paragraph of our marriage contract... cruel covenant. And these facts have over time made burdensome the maintenance of traditional American routine.

She makes her way to the stairs starts down.

BEVERLY (CONT’D)
Rather than once more vow abstinence with my fingers crossed in the queasy hope of righting our ship, I’ve chosen to turn my life over to a Higher Power and join the ranks of the Hiring Class.

The light from the study slices across the living room.

BEVERLY (CONT’D)
It’s not a decision with which I’m entirely comfortable. I know how to launder my dirty undies. Done it all my life, but I’m finding it’s getting in the way of my drinking.

She can see a portion of Beverly’s desk, a woman’s legs.
BEVERLY (CONT’D)

Sorry about the heat in here. My wife is cold-blooded and not just in the metaphorical sense. She does not believe in air-conditioning... as if it is a thing to be disbelieved. I knew your father, you know. Bought many a watermelon from Mr Youngblood’s fruit stand. He did pass, didn’t he??

JOHNNA

Yes, sir.

BEVERLY

May I ask how?

JOHNNA

He had a heart attack. Fell into a flatbed truck full of wine grapes.

BEVERLY

Wine grapes. In Oklahoma. I’m sorry.

VIOLET

Bev...?!

BEVERLY

Yes?

VIOLET

Did you pullish? Did you...Oh, goddamn it... did. You. Are the police here?

BEVERLY

No...

She stands in the shadows of the living room, confused.

VIOLET

Am I looking through window? A window?

BEVERLY

Can you come here?

She steps into the study, emerging from the darkness into light to reveal: VIOLET WESTON. Dissipated, dishevelled, late sixties. She wears pajamas and a much slept-in robe.

VIOLET

Oh. Hello.

She’s staring at a woman sitting in front of Beverly’s desk: JOHNNA. Thirty, Native American, simply dressed.
BEVERLY
Johnna, the young woman I told you about.

VIOLET
You tell me she’s a woman. Wo-man. Whoa-man.

BEVERLY
That I’m hiring --

VIOLET
Oh, you hire women’s now the thing. I thought you meant the other woman.

BEVERLY
To cook and clean, take you to the clinic and to the --

VIOLET
(over-articulating)
In the int’rest of ...civil action, your par-tic-u-lars way of speak-king, I thought you meant you had thought a whoa-man to be HIRED!

BEVERLY
I don’t understand you.

VIOLET
(winsome, to Johnna)
Hello.

JOHNNA
Hello.

VIOLET
I’m sorry.
(curtsies)
Like this.

JOHNNA
Yes, ma’am.

VIOLET
You’re very pretty.

JOHNNA
Thank you.

VIOLET
Are you an Indian?
JOHNNA
Yes, ma’am.

VIOLET
What kind?

JOHNNA
Cheyenne.

VIOLET
Do you think I’m pretty?

JOHNNA
Yes, ma’am.

VIOLET
(curtsies again)
Like...this?
(curtsies again)
Like this?

She stumbles, catches herself.

BEVERLY
Careful...

VIOLET
You’re the house now. I’m sorry,
I took some medicine for my musssss... muscular.

BEVERLY
Why don’t you go back to bed,
sweetheart?

VIOLET
Why don’t you go fuck a fucking sow’s ass?

BEVERLY
All right.

VIOLET
I’m sorry. I’ll be sickly sweet. I’m
soooooooo sweet. In-el-abrially sweet.

She smiles at Johnna, goes. Beverly watches her disappear back up the stairs, then --
BEVERLY
We keep unusual hours here. Try not to differentiate between night and day. You won’t be able to keep a healthy routine.

JOHNNA
I need the work.

BEVERLY
I myself require very little attention, thrive without it, sort of a human cactus. My wife has been diagnosed with a touch of cancer, so she’ll need to be driven to Tulsa for her final chemotherapy treatments. You’re welcome to use that American-made behemoth parked out in the drive. Welcome to make use of anything, everything, all this garbage we’ve acquired, our life’s work. Do you have any questions?

JOHNNA
What kind of cancer?

BEVERLY
My God, I nearly neglected the punch line: mouth cancer.

JOHNNA
What pills does she take?

BEVERLY

Beverly wobbles to his feet, explores his bookshelf.

BEVERLY (CONT’D)
“By night within that ancient house, Immense, black, damned, anonymous.”

(and)

My last refuge, my books: simple pleasures, like finding wild onions by the side of a road, or requited love.

He takes a book from the bookshelf, gives it to her.
BEVERLY (CONT’D)
TS Eliot. Read it or not. It isn’t a job requirement, just for your enjoyment.
(beat)
Here we go, round the prickly pear...
Prickly pear prickly pear...
Here we go round the prickly pear...

OPENING TITLES

We’re underwater. Light fractures and scatters above. The surface undulating gently as we GLIDE through a lake’s dark, tenebrous waters on a moonlit night.

A rowboat SLIPS across our field of vision. It’s aluminum hull cutting through the calm above, sending out small waves as it makes it’s way SLOWLY past.

Oars dip in on either side, propelling the small craft toward deeper water. It slows. Stops. Bobs gently. We wait, watch --

And then suddenly, something large hits the surface above, indistinct, exploding the calm, coming towards us, sinking fast as TITLES END --

A SHAPE

Prone, silhouetted against a sunlit window across the room. A body, her back to us. The phone RINGS. Once, twice. The body doesn’t move. A girl’s voice calls from downstairs.

JEAN (OS)

Mom...?

The phone continues to RING. Still no movement.

JEAN (OS) (CONT’D)

Mom...!

Nothing. The ringing stops. A moment of silence, followed by irritated teenage footsteps on the carpeted stairs.

JEAN (OS) (CONT’D)

...Mom...?

The hallway door opens, we’re in --
INT. BARBARA’S BEDROOM - DAY

JEAN, fourteen, precocious, sticks her head in.

JEAN
...Mom?

A sound from the body, still no movement.

BARBARA
Mmm...

JEAN
You didn’t hear the phone?

BARBARA
If it’s your father, tell him to fuck off.

JEAN
It’s Aunt Ivy in Oklahoma.

New deal. She sits up. CLOSE ON: BARBARA FORDHAM, late-forties, fully dressed. She gropes for the phone.

BARBARA
...Ivy? ...what’s wrong?

Barb stands, moves slowly to the window. Outside: identical suburban homes, neutral house colors, lawns.

We STUDY Barb as she listens. Greying roots, no make-up, a few extra pounds. A woman who, for reasons we don’t yet understand, has decided to stop giving a damn.

BARBARA (CONT’D)
...When...?

Jean passes in the hall. Stops, watching as her mother slowly dissolves, reaches for the sill, lowers herself to sit.

INT/EXT. WESTON HOUSE (PAWHUSKA, OKLAHOMA) - DAY

A battered Honda Civic makes it’s way up the long drive from the highway below, dust swirling behind it. It’s hot. Bright.

The Honda parks. IVY WESTON, forties, shy and soft-spoken, attractive enough but expert at hiding it, climbs out. Stares up at the trees surrounding the old farm house. The precarious old barn out back and untended flower beds.
INT. WESTON KITCHEN - DAY

Johnna washes a dish at the sink. Watches Ivy’s arrival through the kitchen window. Makes no motion to go to her --

INT. THE WESTON HOUSE - DAY

Ivy steps into the dark house. Drapes drawn, lights off.

    IVY
    Mom...?  
    (no answer)
    Mom?

Steps into the open door of her father’s study. His vacant desk chair, untouched papers, dust mots settling in the sunlight. She takes a moment, then heads upstairs. CARRYING US with her. Finds Violet, in her bedroom, sitting in front of her vanity in near darkness, smoking and on the phone.

    VIOLET
    ...You’ve been out there...?

Barely acknowledges Ivy’s arrival. The room is unruly. Bed unmade. Clothes draped over chairs. Dresser and night-stands cluttered with pills, tissue boxes, creams and lotions.

    VIOLET (CONT’D)
    ...You’re going out yourself...?

Ivy wanders into the bath. More pills, wet towels on the floor. She turns off the dripping faucet. Picks up towels.

    VIOLET (CONT’D)
    Stop that...

Violet is off the phone, standing in hall, watching Ivy. Ivy stops, briefly chastened. Violet opens a bottle of pills.

    VIOLET (CONT’D)
    You call Barb?  What’d she say?

    IVY
    She’s on her way.

    VIOLET
    What’d you tell her?

    IVY
    I told her Dad was missing.
VIOLET
Did you tell her how long he’d been missing?

IVY
Five days.

VIOLET
What did she say?

IVY
She said she was on her way.

VIOLET
Goddamn it, Ivy, what did she say?

IVY
She said she was on her way.

VIOLET
You’re hopeless.
(heads back into her room)
Goddamn your father for putting me through this. Seen that office of his, all that mess? I can’t make heads or tails of it. He hired this Indian for some goddamned reason and now I have a stranger in my house. What’s her name?

Ivy follows her mother, returns to tidying up.

IVY
Johnna. Who was on the phone?

VIOLET
This house is falling apart, something about the basement or the sump pump or the foundation. I don’t know anything about it. I can’t do this by myself.

IVY
I called Karen.

VIOLET
What did she say?

IVY
She said she’d try to get here.

VIOLET
She’ll be a big fat help, just like you.

(MORE)
I need Barb.

What’s Barb going to be able to do?

Ivy moves on to hanging clothes back in the jammed closet.

What did you do to your hair?

I had it straightened.

You had it straightened. Why would anybody do that?

I just wanted a change.

You’re the prettiest of my three girls, but you always look like a schlub. Why don’t you wear makeup?

Do I need makeup?

All women need makeup. Don’t let anybody tell you different. The only woman who was pretty enough to go without makeup was Elizabeth Taylor and she wore a ton. Stand up straight.

Mom.

Your shoulders are slumped and your hair’s all straight and you don’t wear makeup. You look like a lesbian.

Violet takes another pill.

You could get a decent man if you spruced up. A bit, that’s all I’m saying.

I’m not looking for a man.
VIOLET
There are a lot of losers out there, don’t think I don’t know that. But just because you got a bad one last time doesn’t mean --

IVY
Barry wasn’t a loser.

VIOLET
Barry was an asshole. I warned you from the jump, first time you brought him over here in his little electric car with his stupid orange hair and that turban --

IVY
It wasn’t a turban --

VIOLET
You work at a college. Don’t tell me there aren’t people coming through the door of that library every day.

IVY
You want me to marry some eighteen year old boy from one of these hick towns?

VIOLET
They still have teachers at TU, right? They did when your father taught there.

Violet takes another pill.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
How many was that?

IVY
I wasn’t counting.

Violet takes another pill.

IVY (CONT’D)
Is your mouth burning?

VIOLET
Like a son-of-a-bitch. My tongue is on fire.

IVY
Are you supposed to be smoking?
VIOLET
Is anybody supposed to smoke?

IVY
You have cancer of the mouth.

VIOLET
Just leave it alone.

IVY
(after a moment)
Are you scared?

VIOLET
Course I’m scared. And you are a comfort, sweetheart. Thank God one of my girls stayed close to home.

Outside, the sound of a CAR pulling up. Ivy pulls back the drape and the shade, finds a big Cadillac arriving.

IVY
Aunt Mattie Fae’s here.

VIOLET
She means to come in here and tell me what’s what.

IVY
I don’t know how Uncle Charlie puts up with it.

VIOLET
He smokes a lot of grass.

IVY
He does?

VIOLET
He smokes a lot of grass.

INT/EXT. CHARLIE’S CADILLAC/WESTON HOUSE - DAY

MATTIE FAE
I told Vi, “Take all those goddamn books he’s so fond of and make a big pile in the front yard and have yourself a bonfire.”

MATTIE FAE AIKEN, sixty-one, Violet’s baby sister, larger than life, is in the passenger seat. CHARLIE, Mattie Fae’s husband, easy-going, is behind the wheel.
CHARLIE
You don’t burn a man’s books.

MATTIE FAE
You do, if the situation calls for it.

CHARLIE
The man’s books didn’t do anything.

MATTIE FAE
You get any ideas about just up and taking off, Charlie Aiken, you better believe --

CHARLIE
I’m not going anywhere.

Charlie parks, they climb out into the blinding sunlight.

MATTIE FAE
I’m saying if you did, I’ll give you two days to get your head straight and then it’s all going up in a blaze of glory. Not that you have any books lying around. I don’t think I’ve ever seen you read a book in my life.

CHARLIE
That bother you?

MATTIE FAE
What’s the last book you read?

CHARLIE
Beverly was a teacher; teachers read books, I’m in the upholstery business.

Ivy comes out of the house to meet them. Mattie Fae spots her, makes a beeline for her, envelopes Ivy in a hug.

MATTIE FAE
Ah, sweetie. Your daddy’s done this before. Just takes off, no call, nothing. I told your mother, “You pack that son-of-a-bitch’s bags and have ‘em waiting for him on the front porch.”

Mattie Fae sweeps past Ivy into the --
INT. WESTON HOUSE - DAY

Ivy and Charlie follow.

MATTIE FAE
Where’s your mother?

IVY
Upstairs.

CHARLIE
They’ve always had trouble, Ivy.

MATTIE FAE
He’ll come back again, I know he will, he always does. Beverly is a very complicated man.

IVY
Kind of like Charles.

CHARLIE
Yes, like Little Charles. Exactly --

MATTIE FAE
Oh. He’s nothing like Little Charles.

CHARLIE
She just means in their sort of quiet complicated ways --

MATTIE FAE
Little Charles isn’t complicated, he’s just unemployed.

The phone begins to RING. Ivy eyes it apprehensively.

CHARLIE
He’s an observer.

MATTIE FAE
All he observes is the television. (and)
Why is it so dark in here?

CHARLIE
So you can’t even see Ivy’s point? That Little Charles and Beverly share some kind of... complication.

MATTIE FAE
You have to be smart to be complicated.
The phone STOPS. Violet’s answered it upstairs.

CHARLIE
Are you saying our boy isn’t smart?

MATTIE FAE
Yes, that’s what I’m saying.

Ivy steals glances upstairs, concerned about the phone.

MATTIE FAE (CONT’D)
I’m sweating. Are you sweating?

CHARLIE
Hell, yes, I’m sweating, it’s ninety degrees in here.

MATTIE FAE
Feel my back.

CHARLIE
I don’t want to feel your back.

MATTIE FAE
Sweat is just dripping down my back.

CHARLIE
I believe you.

MATTIE FAE
Feel it.

CHARLIE
No.

MATTIE FAE
Come on, put your hand here --

CHARLIE
Goddamn it --

MATTIE FAE
Sweat’s just dripping...

Mattie Fae pulls back a set of drapes, finds the light is blocked by shades sealed with tape.

MATTIE FAE (CONT’D)
Ivy, when did this start? This business with taping the shades?

IVY
Been a couple of years now.
Mattie Fae starts peeling off the tape.

MATTIE FAE
Is it that long since we’ve been here?

CHARLIE
Do you know its purpose? You can’t
tell if it’s night or day.

IVY
I think that’s the purpose.

Ivy goes, Charlie notices Mattie Fae pulling off tape.

CHARLIE
Don’t do that. This isn’t your place.

MATTIE FAE
The body needs sunlight.

INT/EXT. RENTAL CAR (MOVING) - AFTERNOON

Jean has on headphones, listening to her Walkman in the back. Barbara’s estranged husband, BILL FORDHAM, drives the rental. Barb’s in the passenger seat beside him, watching the brown countryside pass by.

BARBARA
What were these people thinking... the
jokers who settled this place. Who
was the asshole who saw this flat hot
nothing and planted his flag? I mean
we fucked the Indians for this?

BILL
Well, genocide always seems like such
a good idea at the time.

BARBARA
Right, you need a little hindsight.

BILL
If you want me to explain the creepy
character of the Midwest, you’re --

BARBARA
Please, the Midwest. This is the
Plains: a state of mind, right? A
spiritual affliction, like the Blues.
BILL
“You okay?” “I’m fine. Just got the Plains.”

They laugh. He reaches across, touches her tenderly.

BARBARA
Don’t.

He withdraws quickly.

INT. VIOLET’S BEDROOM - DAY

Violet hangs up the phone. Sits for a long moment, absorbing what she’s heard. Mattie Fae watches from her spot sitting on the corner of the bed, concerned. Ivy is in the door.

VIOLET
They checked the hospitals, no Beverly.

MATTIE FAE
Who’s this now? The highway patrol?

VIOLET
No, the sheriff, the Gilbeau boy.

IVY
What else did he say?

VIOLET
The boat’s missing.

IVY
Dad’s boat?

VIOLET
I asked the sheriff to send a deputy out to the dock to check if anybody had seen him and his boat is gone.

Ivy watches her mother being comforted by Mattie Fae. Wants to go to her. Doesn’t.
INT/EXT. RENTAL CAR/WESTON HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Bill slows the rental car to turn. Barb looks down the road and across the field to where the farm house peeks out through the trees, beckoning, threatening, ominous.

Bill pulls the rental in front of the house. Turns off the ignition. Neither moves to get out. Jean realizes they’ve stopped, pulls off her headphones.

JEAN
I’m gonna grab a smoke.

Jean heads for the relative privacy of the fence at the edge of the yard. Leaving Bill and Barb alone, watching.

BARBARA
You’ve encouraged that.

BILL
I haven’t encouraged anything.

BARBARA
You admire her for getting hooked at fourteen, makes her seem even more mature.

Barbara climbs out. Bill follows.

BARBARA (CONT’D)
Goddamn, it’s hot.

Bill unlocks the trunk, begins unloading luggage.

BILL
Suppose your mom’s turned on the air conditioner?

BARBARA
You kidding? Remember the parakeets?

BILL
The parakeets?

BARBARA
I didn’t tell you about the parakeets? She got a parakeet for some insane reason, and the little fucker croaked after two days. So she went to the pet store and raised hell and they gave her another parakeet. That one died after one day.

(MORE)
So she went back and they gave her a third parakeet and that one died too. So the chick from the pet store came out here to see just what in the hell this serial parakeet killer was doing to bump off these birds.

They head for the house with suitcases, wilting in the heat.

BILL
And?

BARBARA
The heat. It was too hot. They were dying from the heat.

BILL
Jesus.

BARBARA
These are tropical birds, all right? They live in the fucking tropics.

He laughs. Barb looks over to Jean smoking by the fence.

BARBARA (CONT’D)
What, is she smoking a cigar?

BILL
Are you ready for this?

BARBARA
No. No way.

INT. WESTON HOUSE – AFTERNOON

Charlie is poking around the old stereo, finds an LP, the TV beside him is tuned to a Royals game.

CHARLIE
Violet’s a Clapton fan?

Johnna passes through, Charlie holds up his empty bottle.

CHARLIE (CONT’D)
‘Scuse me, dear...could I trouble you for another beer?

MATTIE FAE
Goddam it, she’s not a waitress.
CHARLIE
I know that.

MATTIE FAE
Then get your own beer.

JOHNNA
(takes the empty/goes)
I’ll get it.

MATTIE FAE
I don’t believe you. Watchin’ a ball
game, drinkin’ beers. You have any
sense of what’s going on around you?

CHARLIE
Am I supposed to sit here like a
statue? You’re drinking whiskey.

MATTIE FAE
I’m having a cocktail.

CHARLIE
You’re drinking straight whiskey!

MATTIE FAE
Just... show a little class.

BARBARA
...Mom?

Barbara and Bill have entered, are quickly descended upon by
Mattie Fae and Charlie. Hugs, overlapping dialogue.

MATTIE FAE (CONT’D)
BARBARA
Oh my God, Barbara --! You
Hi, Aunt Mattie Fae --
give me some sugar!

MATTIE FAE (CONT’D)
BILL
Bill! Look how skinny you
Hi, Mattie Fae.
are!

BILL
Hi, Charlie.

Jean enters behind her parents, stands sheepishly.

MATTIE FAE
Oh my gosh, will you look at this one?
Come here and give your Aunt Mattie
Fae some sugar!
MATTIE FAE (CONT’D)
My gosh, you’re so big! Look at your boobs! Last time I saw you, you looked like a little boy!

CHARLIE
‘Lo, Bill. Man you have dropped some weight, haven’t you? Hello, sweetheart.

BARBARA
Hi, Uncle Charlie.

CHARLIE
How was the flight from Denver?

BILL
Fine...

Violet appears on the stairs, rushes to Barbara.

VIOLET
Barb...

BARBARA
It’s okay, Mom. I’m here, I’m here. Shh, it’s okay, I’m here.

Ivy appears at the top of the stairs, watches her mother in her sister’s arms. Bill turns to Charlie, quietly:

BILL
No word then?

CHARLIE
No. MATTIE FAE
No, huh-uh.

VIOLET
What am I going to do? BARBARA
It’s okay, Mom.

BARBARA
Did you see Bill and Jean?

Violet takes them in, disoriented.

VIOLET
Yes. Hi, Bill.

BILL
Hello, Violet.

VIOLET
I’m just so scared.

MATTIE FAE
Of course you are, poor thing.
VIOLET
(see Jean)
Well, look at you.

MATTIE FAE
Isn’t she the limit? Look at her boobs!

JEAN
O-kay, we’ve all stared at my tits now.

MATTIE FAE
They’re just so darn big.

Vi hugs Jean. Johnna slips in, leaves a beer for Charlie.

VIOLET
You’re just the prettiest thing. Thank you for coming to see me.

BARBARA
Ivy, I didn’t see you up there.

Ivy, still standing above on the stairs.

IVY
It looked crowded.

BARBARA
God, you look good. Doesn’t she look good, Bill?

BILL
Yes, she does.

BARBARA
I love your hair, that looks great.

VIOLET
She had it straightened. Barbara, or Bill, it doesn’t matter, I need you to go through Beverly’s things, help me with this paperwork.

BARBARA
Well... we can do that, Mom.

IVY
I was going to help with --

VIOLET
No, now that desk of his is such a mess and I get confused --
BILL
I’ll take care of it, Violet --

BARBARA
(to Charlie)
Which room are you in?

MATTIE FAE
We’re gonna head home soon.

VIOLET
You’re going back to Tulsa?

MATTIE FAE
We have to, we left in such a rush we didn’t get anyone to take care of the damn dogs. Anyway, I know you want to spend some time with these girls.

VIOLET
How about Little Charles, can’t he take care of the dogs?

CHARLIE
Well, yeah, I guess he could --

MATTIE FAE
No, he can’t. We have to get back. Maybe we should call him, Mattie Fae --

MATTIE FAE
We talked about this.

BARBARA
Mom, can Jean stay in the attic?

VIOLET
No, that’s where what’s-her-name lives.

IVY
Johnna.

BARBARA
Who’s Johnna?

VIOLET
She’s the Indian who lives in my attic.

BARBARA
She’s the what?
EXT. THE YARD - LATE AFTERNOON

Jean steps out onto the porch. Sees Johnna across the road by the fence. Heads for her --

JEAN

Hi...

Johnna is cutting off sprigs of wild mint entangled in the fence, standing in what was once a vegetable garden.

JOHNNA

Hello.

JEAN

I’m Jean.

JOHNNA

Johnna.

Johnna keeps working, Jean watches.

JEAN

I like your necklace.

A beaded pouch in the shape of a turtle.

JOHNNA

Thank you.

JEAN

Did you make that?

JOHNNA

My grandma.

JEAN

Is there something in it?

JOHNNA

My umbilical cord.

Jean recoils. Johnna smiles.

JEAN

Ewww, are you serious?

JOHNNA

When a Cheyenne is born, their umbilical cord is dried and sewn into a pouch.
JEAN
You’re Cheyenne. Like that movie
*Powwow Highway*. Did you see that?

JOHNNNA
Yes. We wear it for the rest of our
lives. If we lose it, our souls
belong nowhere and when we die our
souls walk the Earth looking for where
we belong.

Johnna starts back for the house with her mint. Off Jean --

INT. THE BACK PORCH – LATE AFTERNOON
A screened in back porch off the kitchen. Bill and Barb sit
at an old linoleum table.

BILL
This was when?

VIOLET
Saturday morning. The Indian girl
made us biscuits and gravy. We ate
some, he walked out the door, this
door right there. Got into his
truck. And that was it.

Johnna enters with her mint, crosses into the kitchen.

BARBARA
He just left...?

VIOLET
I went to bed Saturday night, got up
Sunday... still no Beverly. I didn’t
make much of it, thought he’d gone
out on a bender.

BARBARA
Why would he do that? Not like he
couldn’t drink at home. Unless you
were riding his ass.

VIOLET
I never said anything to him about his
drinking, never got on him about it.
BARBARA
Really.

VIOLET
Barbara, I swear. He could drink himself into obliv-uh, obliv-en-um...

BARBARA
Oblivion.

BILL
So Sunday, still no sign of him...

VIOLET
Yes, Sunday. No sign. I started getting worried, don’tcha know. That’s when I got worked up about that safety deposit box. We kept an awful lot of cash in that box, some expensive jewelry. I had a diamond ring in that box appraised at seven thousand dollars --

Johnna returns with glasses of iced tea, each with a sprig of mint, delivers them to Bill and Barbara.

BARBARA
Wait, wait, wait, I’m missing something. Why do you care about a safety deposit box?

VIOLET
Well, I know what you’ll say about this, but, your father and I had an urge-ment... arrangement. If something were to ever happen to one of us, the other one would go empty that box.

BARBARA
Because...

BILL
The money and jewelry gets rolled into the estate, bank seals the box until probate is settled. Can take months.

VIOLET
Right, that’s right --

BARBARA
You’re such a fucking cynic.
VIOLET
I knew you would disapprove --

Johnna cuts into a freshly baked apple pie in the kitchen.

BARBARA
Okay, what about the safety deposit box?

VIOLET
I had to wait for the bank to open on Monday. And after I emptied that box, I called the police and reported him missing. Monday morning.

BARBARA
And you only had Ivy call me today?

VIOLET
I didn’t want to worry you, honey --

BARBARA
Jesus Christ.

BILL
Vi, you sure there wasn’t some event that triggered his leaving, some incident.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
You mean like a fight.

Johnna places pieces of pie in front of Bill and Barb.

BILL
Yes.

VIOLET
No. And we fought enough... you know... but no, he just left.

BARBARA
Maybe he needed some time away from you.

VIOLET
That’s nice of you to say.

BARBARA
Good old unfathomable Dad.

VIOLET
Oh. That man. What I first fell of with -- fell in love with, you know, was his mystery. I thought it was sexy as hell.

(MORE)
You knew he was the smartest one in
the room, knew if he just said
something... knock you out. But he’d
just stand there, little smile on his
face... not say a word. Sexy.

INTERCUT WITH:

INSIDE THE KITCHEN

Ivy enters with her coffee cup, runs water in it at the sink.
Outside, her mother, sister, and Bill on the back porch.

BILL
You can’t think of anything unusual --

Johnna sits at the kitchen table behind Ivy. Johnna stands,
joins Ivy at the sink. Ivy hadn’t seen her there.

VIOLET
He hired this woman. He didn’t ask me,
just hired this woman to come live in
our house. Few days before he left.

BARTHA
You don’t want her here.

VIOLET
She’s a stranger in my house. There’s
an Indian in my house.

Ivy looks to Johnna, embarrassed. But Johnna just takes
Ivy’s cup from her, finishes cleaning it.

BILL
You have a problem with Indians,
Violet?

VIOLET
I don’t know what to say to an
Indian.

BARBARA
They’re called Native Americans
now, Mom.

VIOLET
Who makes that decision?

BARBARA
It’s what they like to be called.
VIOLET
They aren’t any more native than me.

BARBARA
In fact, they are.

VIOLET
What’s wrong with Indian?

BARBARA
Why’s it so hard to call people --

VIOLET
Let’s just call the dinosaurs “Native Americans” while we’re at it.

BARBARA
She may be an Indian, but she makes the best goddamn apple pie I ever ate.

Johnna smiles, nods to Ivy. Leaves the kitchen.

VIOLET
He hired a cook. It doesn’t make any sense. We don’t eat.

BARBARA
And now you get biscuits and gravy. Kind of nice, huh?

VIOLET
Nice for you, now. But you’ll be gone soon enough, never to return.

BARBARA
(a warning)
Mom...

VIOLET
When was the last time you were here?

BARBARA
Don’t get started on that --

VIOLET
Really, I don’t even remember.

BARBARA
I’m very dutiful, Mom, I call, I write, I send presents --

VIOLET
You do not write --
BARBARA
Presents on birthdays, Mother’s Day --

Ivy eavesdrops at the sink, unsure if she should stay or go.

VIOLET
Because you’re “dutiful.”

BILL
All right, now --

VIOLET
I don’t care about you two. I’d like to see my granddaughter every now --

BARBARA
Well, you’re seeing her now.

VIOLET
But your father. You broke his heart when you moved away.

BARBARA
That is wildly unfair.

Bill stands, picks up a plate, pushes his way back into the kitchen. Ivy hears him coming, but doesn’t have time to escape. Goes to the refrigerator instead.

BILL
Am I going to have to separate you two?

VIOLET
You know you were Beverly’s favorite; don’t pretend you don’t know that.

Barbara follows Bill. Ivy finds iced tea, pours herself some. Tries to make herself invisible -- it’s not hard to do.

BARBARA (CONT’D)
I’d prefer to think my parents loved all their children equally.

VIOLET
I’m sure you’d prefer to think that Santy Claus brought you presents at Christmas, too. If you’d had more than one child, you’d know a parent always has favorites. Mattie Fae was my mother’s favorite. Big deal. I got used to it. You were your Daddy’s favorite.
Barbara notices Ivy, standing there, Christ. This isn’t a conversation she’d like to be having in front of her sister. Violet sees Ivy too -- could care less.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
Broke his heart.

BARBARA
What was I supposed to do?! Colorado gave Bill twice the money he was making at TU --

BILL
Why are we even getting into this?

BARBARA
You think Daddy wouldn’t have jumped at the chance Bill got?

VIOLET
You’re wrong there. You never would’ve gotten Beverly Weston out of Oklahoma.

BARBARA
Daddy gave me his blessing.

VIOLET
’S what he told you.

BARBARA
Now you’re going to tell me the true story, some terrible shit Daddy said behind my back?

BILL
Hey, enough. Everybody’s on edge --

VIOLET
Beverly didn’t say terrible things behind your back --

BILL
Vi, come on --

VIOLET
He just told me he’s disappointed in you because you settled. He thought you had talent, as a writer.

BARBARA
Daddy never said anything like that to you. What a load of absolute horseshit.
VIOLET
Oh, horseshit, horseshit, let’s all say horseshit. Say horseshit, Bill.

BILL
Horseshit.


INT. BATHROOM - LATE AFTERNOON
Violet is closing the bathroom door. Barb stops her.

BARBARA
Are you high?

VIOLET
Excuse me.

BARBARA
I mean literally. You taking something?

VIOLET
A muscle relaxer.

BARBARA
Listen to me: I will not go through this with you again.

VIOLET
I don’t know what you’re talking about.

BARBARA
These fucking pills? Calls at three AM about people in your backyard?

VIOLET
Stop yelling at me!

BARBARA
The police, all the rest of it?

VIOLET
It’s not the same thing. I didn’t have a reason.

BARBARA
So now it’s okay to get hooked because you have a reason.
VIOLET
I’m not hooked on anything.

BARBARA
I don’t want to know if you are or not, I’m just saying I won’t go --

VIOLET
I’m not. I’m in pain.

BARBARA
Because of your mouth.

VIOLET
Yes, because my mouth burns from the chemotheeeahh --

BARBARA
Are you in a lot of pain?

Violet starts to break down, sits on the lidded toilet.

VIOLET
Yes, I’m in pain. I have got... gotten cancer. In my mouth. And it burns like a... bullshit. And Beverly’s disappeared and you’re yelling at me.

BARBARA
I’m not yelling at you.

VIOLET
You couldn’t come home when I got cancer but as soon as Beverly disappeared you rushed back --

BARBARA
I’m sorry... you’re right. I’m sorry.

Barbara kneels, takes her mother’s hand.

BARBARA (CONT’D)
Know where I think he is? I think he got some whiskey, a carton of cigarettes, and a couple of good spy novels... I think he got out on the boat, steered it to a nice spot, close to shore... and he’s fishing, and reading, and drinking, maybe even writing a little. I think he’ll walk right through that door any time.
INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY/STAIRS/ATTIC ROOM - TWILIGHT

Jean walks down the hall, perusing photos of her ancestors. Rail-thin, sunburned dust bowl farmers, WWII GIs standing in front of battered Packards before shipping out to die on the beaches of Normandy. Violet and Bev on their wedding day. Jean’s mother and aunts in grade school, with prom dates.

The photos end in a doorway that leads to a narrow, wooden staircase. Jean climbs it to --

INT. THE ATTIC BEDROOM - TWILIGHT

Finds Johnna on her bed in the small ascetic attic room, reading T.S. Eliot. Jean KNOCKS on the open door.

JEAN
Hi, again... Am I bugging you?

JOHNNA
No, do you need something?

JEAN
No, I thought maybe you’d like to smoke a bowl with me?

JOHNNA
No, thank you.

JEAN
Okay. I didn’t know.
(beat)
Do you mind if I smoke a bowl?

JOHNNA
I. No, I --

JEAN
Mom and Dad don’t mind. You won’t get into trouble or anything.

Johnna is clearly a bit uncomfortable. But:

JOHNNA
Okay.

JEAN
Okay. You sure?

From her pocket, Jean takes a glass pipe and a bud.
JEAN (CONT'D)
I say they don’t mind. If they knew
I smuggled this on the plane? And sat
there sweating like in that movie
Midnight Express. Did you see that?

JOHNNA
I don’t think so.

JEAN
I just mean they don’t mind that I
smoke pot. Mom kind of does. I think
cause Dad smokes pot too, and she
wishes he didn’t.
(smokes, offers pipe)
You sure?

JOHNNA
Yes. No. I’m fine.

Jean notices a framed photo on the night stand.

JEAN
Wow, are those your parents?

JOHNNA
Mm-hm, their wedding picture.

JEAN
Their costumes are fantastic. Are
they still together?

JOHNNA
My father passed away last year.

JEAN
Oh. Sorry.

JOHNNA
That’s okay. Thank you.

JEAN
Were you close?

JOHNNA
Yes. Very.

JEAN
My Mom and Dad are separated now.

JOHNNA
I’m sorry.
JEAN
He’s fucking one of his grad students.
I don’t care --aside from the pathetic
English and Humanities cliche, like
all those departmental dicks fucking
their students -- he can fuck who he
wants and that’s who teachers meet,
students. He was just a turd the way
he didn’t give Mom a chance to respond
or anything. What sucks now is she’s
on my ass cause she’s afraid I’ll have
some post-divorce freak-out and become
some heroin addict or shoot everybody
at school. Or God forbid, lose my
virginity. I don’t know what it is
about Dad splitting that put Mom on
hymen patrol.
(then)
Don’t say anything about Mom and Dad;
okay? They want to play it low key.

INT. BEVERLY’S STUDY - NIGHT

Bill stands in Beverly’s empty study. Absorbing the room, the
man, the stillness. Picks at the papers on the desk without
specific purpose. Turns to one of the many bookcases,
eventually finds a book, smiles.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Barbara sits on the front steps. It’s dark now, but still
very hot. Moths bat at the porch lights. Bill comes out
carrying a Coke, shares it with Barb.

BILL
Ivy leave?

BARBARA
(she nods)
I’d forgotten about the lightning
bugs.

Around the yard, flitting in and out of the low hanging
boughs of the trees.

BILL
Look what I found...

She turns, he holds a thin hardback copy of *Meadowlark.*
We have copies.

I don’t remember a hardback edition. Think this is worth something... first edition, hardback, mint condition? Academy Fellowship, Wallace Stevens Award? This book was a big deal.

It wasn’t that big a deal.

In those circles, it was.

Those are small circles.

He opens the book, perusing the first pages. Reads.

"Dedicated to my Violet." That’s nice. Christ, probably every word he wrote after this he had to be thinking, “What are they going to say, are they going to compare it to Meadowlark?”

Jean go to bed?

Just turned out the light. You’d think at some point, you just write something anyway and who cares what they say about it. I don’t know --

Will you shut up about that fucking book?! You are just dripping with envy over these thirty poems my father wrote back in the late sixties, for God’s sake. Y’hear yourself?

Bill’s taken aback, but doesn’t want to overreact.

I have great admiration for these poems --
BARBARA
My father didn’t write anymore for a lot of reasons, but critical opinion was not one of them, hard as that may be for you to believe.

BILL
What are you attacking me for? I haven’t done anything.

BARBARA
I’m sure that’s what you tell Sissy, too, so she can comfort you, reassure you, “No, Billy, you haven’t done anything.”

BILL
Why are you bringing that up?

BARBARA
They’re all symptoms of your male menopause, whether it’s you struggling with the “creative question,” or screwing a girl who still wears a retainer.

BILL
All right, look, I’m not going to be held hostage here while you attack me. And her name is Cindy.

BARBARA
I know her stupid name -- do me the courtesy of recognizing when I’m demeaning you.

BILL
Violet really has a way of putting you in attack mode, you know that? You feel such rage for her you can’t help dishing it --

BARBARA
Psychoanalyze me right now, I skin you.

BILL
You may not agree with my methods, but you know I’m right --
BARBARA
“Your methods.” Thank you, Doctor, but I actually don’t need any help from my mother to feel rage.

BILL
You want to argue? Is that what you need to do? Pick a subject, alright, let me know what it is, so I have a fighting --

BARBARA
The subject is me! I am the subject, you narcissistic motherfucker! I am in pain! I need help!

Barbara heads into the yard to get away from him.

INT. WESTON HOUSE, UPSTAIRS ROOM – CONTINUOUS

Jean’s on the small bed in the darkened room. Staring at the ceiling, listening to her parents argue.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE FRONT PORCH – NIGHT

Bill chases Barbara into the yard.

BILL
I’ve copped to being a narcissist. We’re the products of a narcissistic generation.

BARBARA
You can’t do it, can you? You can’t talk about me for two seconds --

BILL
You called me a narcissist!

BARBARA
You do understand that it hurts, to go from sharing a bed with you for twenty-three years to sleeping by myself.

BILL
I’m here, now.
BARBARA
Oh, men always say shit like that, as if the past and the future don’t exist.

Jean listens in the dark to her parents fighting -- as she has many times before. Heads out into the hallway to screen door leading to the upstairs porch.

BARBARA (CONT’D)
It’s just horseshit, to avoid talking about the things they’re afraid to say.

BILL
I’m not necessarily keen on the notion of saying things that would hurt you.

BARBARA
Like what?

BILL
We have enough on our hands with your parents right now, let’s not revisit this.

BARBARA
When did we visit this to begin with? I still don’t know what happened. Do I bore you, intimidate you, disgust you? Is this just about the pleasures of young flesh, teenage pussy? I really need to know.

BILL
You need to know now? With Beverly missing, and your mother crazy as a loon? You want to do this now?

BARBARA
You’re right. I’ll just hunker down for a cozy night’s sleep upstairs. Next to my husband.

BILL
This discussion deserves our care. And patience. We’ll both be in a better frame of mind to talk about this once your father’s come home.

Bill turns, starts back for the house.
INT. WESTON HOUSE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jean sees her father coming, hears his footsteps approaching across the wooden porch below, the screen door opens quietly. She slips back into her room and bed, but he doesn't stop.

Jean waits, listening for her mother. She doesn't come.

EXT. SKIATOOK LAKE - NIGHT

We're on the old wooden dock, watching a man walking away from us toward an aluminum rowboat tied haphazardly to the dock in the moonlight. He leans down to untie the boat, looks back at us, directly into camera -- Beverly.

Now we're traveling BELOW the surface of the lake, through its dark, tenebrous waters on the moonlit night. The rhythmic SLAP of gentle waves. We're underwater, light fractures and scatters above us. We've been here before as --

A rowboat SLIPS across our field of vision. It's aluminum bottom cuts through the calm above.

Oars dip on either side, propelling the small craft. It slows. Stops. Bobs gently. We wait, watch --

Until, suddenly, something hits the surface above, exploding the calm, coming at us fast, sinking.

INT. THE ATTIC - NIGHT

Johnna wakes with a start. Sits up, listens intently.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE - NIGHT

Johnna steps out onto the second floor porch balcony, finds a police car approaching in the distance, headlights cutting through the dark country night.

INT. WESTON HOUSE STAIRWAY - NIGHT

Barefoot, Johnna quietly descends the stairs. Approaches the front door, left open to let in the cool night air. Undoes the screen door latch. Steps outside.

 Watches the car arrive. The driver's door opens, a sheriff gets out, silhouetted against the police flashers behind him.
INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Barbara, bleary-eyed, moves quickly down the dark hall in her robe. Bill follows in his boxers and T-shirt, pulling on pants. Barb goes to Vi’s door, KNOCKS.

BARBARA
Mom?

She opens the door. Over her we FIND: Violet, entombed in her room. Squinting against the intrusive hall light.

BARBARA (CONT’D)
Mom, wake up, the sheriff’s here.

VIOLET
Did you call them? I dig in call them.

BARBARA
Mom. The sheriff is here.

VIOLET
Inna esther?

BARBARA
What?

VIOLET
Inna esther broke. ‘N pays me ‘em...sturck...struck.

BILL
Come on. Leave her there.

Barbara does, starts for the staircase, meets the just awakened Jean coming out of her room, concerned.

BILL (CONT’D)
Go back to bed, sweetheart....

Barbara descends the stairs, trailed by Bill. The SHERIFF waits on the porch, late-forties, handsome, Stetson in hand.

They go to him, but WE HANG BACK with Jean, watching the scene outside unfold. Bill shakes the Sheriff’s hand. The Sheriff speaks earnestly to Barbara and Bill.

We can’t hear what’s being said, only murmurs until -- Barbara sinks to her knees. Bill holds her. Jean watches.
INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Johnna enters, snaps on the light, starts a pot of coffee. Stoic, inscrutable.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE DRIVEWAY - JUST BEFORE DAWN

A big pre-dawn sky is changing from black to blue. The Sheriff walks to his cruiser, kills the flashers. Bill joins him, still barefoot.

BILL
What happened?

SHERIFF
Couple old boys running jug lines in the lake hooked him. Pulled him up.

BILL
He drowned. That’s how he died, from drowning?

SHERIFF
Looks it. Yes, sir.

Bill looks off. Song birds begin their pre-dawn chatter.

BILL
Is there any way to determine if he... I mean is this an accident, or suicide --?

SHERIFF
There’s really no way to tell.

BILL
What’s your guess?

SHERIFF
...Suicide.

And now the full weight of it hits Bill. After a moment --

BILL
How does a a person jump in the water... and choose not to swim?

INT. WESTON GIRL’S BEDROOM - PRE-DAWN

Barb pulls on clothes, rakes a brush through her hair. Jean appears in the door, watches her. After a moment:
JEAN
What about Aunt Ivy?

BARBARA
I guess we’ll stop on the way.
Christ, I need to call Karen, too.
Why the fuck am I brushing my hair?

She drops the brush. And then an odd sound intrudes from downstairs, a song: “Lay Down, Sally” by Eric Clapton.

INT. LIVING ROOM - PRE-DAWN

The music is LOUD. We follow Barbara and Jean halfway down the stairs to REVEAL: Violet, high as a kite, doing a jerky little dance by the stereo. The Sheriff stands uncomfortably by the door, his hat in hand. She shuffles over to him.

VIOLET
Izza story. Barely’s back. Did sum Beer-ley come home?

SHERIFF
Ma’am?

VIOLET
Gizza cig... some cigezze? Cig-zezz, cig-zizz... cig-uhzzzz...

She laughs at her inability to speak. He takes a Pall Mall from his shirt pocket, hands it to her. Lights it for her.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
In the archa, archa-tex? I’m in the bottom. Inna bottom of them.
(and)
Mm, good beat, right?

He nods. Bill comes back in from outside.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
Barbara?! Is Barbara here?!

BARBARA
(quietly)
Right here, Mom...

Johnna steps in from the kitchen, pensively observing.

VIOLET
Mm, good beat, right? Idn’t it’s a good beat?

(MORE)
Mmmm, I been on the music... pell man onna sheriff. Armen in tandel s’’lossle, s’’lost? Lost?! From the day, the days. Am Beerly... and Beverly lost?

Violet abandons her dance, separates invisible threads in the air. The others stand frozen, staring at her.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
And then you’re here. And Barbara, and then you’re here, and Beverly, and then you’re here, and then you’re here, and then you’re here, and then you’re here, and then you’re here...

EXT. SKIATOOK LAKE ROAD - DAWN

The sun’s just topped the horizon, throws long early shadows across the flat expanse of prairie. Scattered trees, a ribbon of asphalt leading to a distant lake, telephone poles.

We’re HIGH ABOVE the country road, following the Sheriff cruiser below. Barb’s rental sedan trails behind.

BARBARA (OS)
I used to go out with that boy. That man.

INT. RENTAL CAR (MOVING) - EARLY MORNING

Bill drives, Ivy up front with him. Barbara sits in the back with Jean. Watches the sheriff’s car ahead.

JEAN
What man? The Sheriff?

BARBARA
In high school. He was my prom date.

JEAN
You’re kidding.

BARBARA
Day of the prom, his father got drunk and stole his car, stole his own son’s car, went somewhere, Mexico. Deon showed up at the door. He’d been crying. Confessed he didn’t have a way to take me to the prom.
The cruiser slows, pulls through a pipe gate and over a cattle-crossing, heads for a small collection of emergency vehicles parked around a brush-strewn cove. Bev’s old Chevy pick-up truck sits to one side.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
So we got a six-pack and broke into the chapel, stayed up all night talking and kissing. Now here he is, showing me --
(fights her emotions)
It’s so surreal. Thank God we can’t tell the future. We’d never get out of bed.

The cars stop. The Sheriff gets out.

BILL
Let me go first, see what they need.

Bill goes. Barb fixes Jean with a look.

BARBARA
Listen to me: die after me, all right? I don’t care what else you do, where you go, how you screw up your life, just... survive. Outlive me, please.

They watch the men. A resolute Bill returns to get Barbara and Ivy. The sisters climb out, follow him to the water’s edge. Jean waits a moment, then steps out of the car.

Watches her father lead her mother down the small cracked concrete boat ramp to where the Sheriff waits by a covered body. As the Sheriff pulls back the tarp --

INT. A STERILE ROOM - DAY

White walls, bright overhead light. We’re CLOSE on a man’s pale, lifeless hand. Another hand enters frame with a sponge, begins cleaning off the mud, filth.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE - DAY

The Weston clan walks to Beverly’s Lincoln, Bill, Jean. Barb and Ivy help a distraught Violet. All wear mourning black.

INT. THE STERILE ROOM - DAY

Beverly’s sodden shoes are removed, his socks.
His limp, greyish arm is guided into a starched white shirt-sleeve. The buttons carefully buttoned.

INT. BEVERLY’S CAR (MOVING) – DAY

Bill drives. Jean beside him. Barbara and Ivy sit in the back seat, flanking Violet. They ride in silence. We study their faces, the brown countryside outside.

Bill notices something in his rearview, a red speck, coming up fast, very fast. A sports car.

It’s suddenly right behind them, filling his mirrors. It waits for a semi loaded down with massive circular hay bales to pass in the opposite lane, then --

ROARS around. A Ferrari, it’s throaty V-10 RUMBLING as it SCREAMS past, accelerates down the road. Bill and Jean exchange a look, watch it disappear.

INT. THE STERILE ROOM – DAY

Strong male hands lift Beverly’s now dressed body carefully and place it into the casket. Adjust the pillow, comb his hair into place, fold his hands across his chest.

We never see his face, never see his whole body. Only these small, intimate pieces.

INT/EXT. CAR/FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF PAWHUSKA – DAY

A few mourners enter the church as Bill pulls in to park, discovers the Ferrari already there. A woman emerging.

BARBARA
Holy shit, that’s Karen.

KAREN WESTON, forty, lithe, climbing from the car.

BARBARA (CONT’D)
Do you remember your Aunt Karen?

JEAN
Kind of...

STEVE HEIDEBRECHT, fifty, greying, athletic, tan and handsome, gets out of the driver’s side.

BARBARA
That must be this year’s man.
Mattie Fae and Charlie are waiting for them, start over as Violet emerges into the blinding sun. Recoils slightly. Mattie Fae catches her, whispers comforts into her ear, helps her toward the church steps.

We stay back, watching the Westons enter the church --

  KAREN (VO)
  I spent so much time in our bedroom
  pretending my pillow was my husband
  and did he like the dinner I made and
  where were we going to vacation that
  winter and he’d surprise me with
  tickets to Belize and we’d kiss.

INT. BEVERLY’S LINCOLN (MOVING) - AFTERNOON

Barbara drives, Karen beside her. Heat radiates off the road. They follow Charlie’s Caddie, Vi and Ivy visible in the Caddie’s back seat window ahead of us.

  KAREN
  I mean I’d kiss my pillow, and then
  I’d tell him I’d been to the doctor
  that day and I’d found out I was
  pregnant. I know how pathetic that
  sounds, but it was innocent enough.
  Then real life takes over, cause it
  always does --

  BARBARA
  -- uh-huh --

Here comes the red speck in the rearview again. The Ferrari ROARS up behind them, pulls around to pass, HONKS as it goes. Barb catches a glimpse of Jean in the passenger seat, Bill jammed into the tiny back seat.

  KAREN
  Things don’t work out like you
  planned. That pillow was a better
  husband than any real man I’d ever
  met; this parade of men fails to live
  up to your expectations, all of them
  so much less than Daddy or Bill. You
  punish yourself, tell yourself it’s
  your fault you can’t find a good one.
  I don’t know how well you remember
  Andrew...

  BARBARA
  No, I remember.
KAREN
I loved him so intensely, so the things he did wrong were just opportunities for me to make things right. If he cheated on me or called me a cunt, I’d think “No, love is forever, so here’s an opportunity to make an adjustment in the way you view the world.”

The AC isn’t working, Barb’s sweating, rolls down her window, let’s the wind whip her hair around.

KAREN (CONT’D)
And thank God one day I looked in the mirror and said, “Moron,” and walked out, but it kicked off this whole period of reflection, how hard I had screwed it up, where’d I go wrong. That’s when I got into those books and discussion groups --

BARBARA
And Scientology too, right, or something like that --?

KAREN
Exactly, and finally one day, I threw it all out, I said, “It’s me, just me with my music on the stereo, my glass of wine and Bloomers my cat. I don’t need anything else, I can live my life with myself.” I got my license, threw myself into my work, sold a lot of houses, and that’s when I met Steve.

Charlie slows, signals, turns onto the gravel road leading to the Weston house. Barb follows, Karen still going strong --

KAREN (CONT’D)
That’s how it works, you only find it when you’re not looking, you turn around and there it is: Steve. Ten years older than me, but a thinker, and he’s just so good. He’s a good man and he’s good to me and he’s good for me.

INT. WESTON HOUSE STAIRWAY/UPSTAIRS HALL - AFTERNOON

Barbara leads Karen upstairs, Karen carries her suitcase, Barbara carries Steve’s. Karen’s still talking.
KAREN
The best thing about him, for me, is that now what I think about is now. I live now. My focus, my life, my world is now. I don’t give a care about the past anymore, the mistakes I made, the way I thought. And you can’t plan the future cause as soon as you do, something happens, some terrible thing happens --

BARBARA
Like your father drowning himself.

They enter a bedroom, dump the luggage on the bed.

KAREN
That’s exactly what I mean. You take it as it comes, here and now! Steve had a huge presentation today for some big-wig government guys who could be important for his business, something he’s put together for months, and as soon as we heard about Daddy, he cancelled his meeting. He has his priorities straight. And you know what the kicker is?

(beat)
Do you know what the kicker --?

Barbara heads for the fan on the dresser, flips it on.

BARBARA
What’s the kicker?

KAREN
We’re going to Belize on our honeymoon!

Barb sticks her face into the fan. Karen watches, what?

BARBARA
Sorry. Hot flash.

INT. VIOLET’S BEDROOM – DAY

Violet pulls a dress from the closet; Mattie Fae sits, rooting through a box of photos; Ivy stands by the door.

VIOLET
It won’t kill you to try it on --
MATTIE FAE
Oh, this is a sweet one, Vi --

IVY
I find this a tidge morbid, frankly --

MATTIE FAE

VIOLET
Look at this, Ivy -- What’s morbid about it?

IVY (CONT’D)
It’s not my style, Mom.

VIOLET
You don’t have a style, that’s the point.

MATTIE FAE
Where was this taken?

VIOLET

IVY
I don’t have your style, I have a style of my own.

VIOLET
You wore a suit to your father’s funeral. A woman doesn’t wear a suit to a funeral.

IVY
God, you’re weird; it’s a black suit.

VIOLET
You look like a magician’s assistant.

MATTIE FAE
Little Charles has been talking about moving to New York. Can you picture that?

VIOLET
Don’t discourage him now --

MATTIE FAE
He wouldn’t last a day in that city. They’d tear him apart.

MATTIE FAE (CONT’D)

IVY
I could kill that kid -- Why do you feel it necessary to insult me?
VIOLET
Stop being so sensitive.

MATTIE FAE
He overslept? For his Uncle’s funeral? A noon service?

IVY
I’m sure there’s more to the story --

MATTIE FAE
Don’t make excuses for him. That’s what Charlie does. Thirty-seven years old and can’t drive? Who can’t drive?

Violet pulls more and more clothes from the closet, dumping them on the bed. The pile is getting very large.

MATTIE FAE (CONT’D)
I’ve seen a chimp drive.

IVY
Why are you giving away your clothes?

VIOLET
All this shit’s going. I don’t plan to spend the rest of my days looking at what used to be. I want that shit in the office gone, I want these clothes I’m never going to wear gone. I mean look at these fucking shoes --

(holds up spiked heels)
Even if I didn’t fall on my face, can you imagine anything less attractive, my swollen ankles and varicose veins? And my toenails, good God: anymore they could dig through cement.

INT. THE KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Johnna’s at the sink, washing and breaking beans, every kitchen surface is covered with the large dinner she’s preparing. Barbara enters, Karen still pursuing her.

KAREN
You get a read off Steve? Did you like him?

BARBARA
We said two words to each other --
KAREN
You get a feel, though, don’t you?
Did you get a feel?

BARBARA
He seemed very nice, sweetheart --

Barb grabs a glass from the cabinet, opens the freezer for ice, lets her head linger in the cold.

KAREN
He is, and --

BARBARA
-- but what I think doesn’t matter.
I’m not marrying him --

KAREN
I guess what I’m telling you is that
I’m happy. I’ve been unhappy most of
my life, my adult life. I doubt
you’ve been aware of that. I know our
lives have led us apart, you, me and
Ivy. Maybe we’re not as close as, as
close as some families --

Barb gives up on the freezer, fills her glass with iced tea.

BARBARA
Yeah, we really need to talk about
Mom, what to do about Mom --

KAREN
-- but I think I haven’t wanted to
live my unhappiness in view of my
family. But now I’m just really
happy. I’d like us to get to know
each other a little better.

Barbara stares at her, what is she talking about?

BARBARA
Yes. Yes.

Karen wraps her arms around Barbara.

BARBARA (CONT’D)
Okay. Yes.
EXT. PAWHUSKA LIQUOR STORE PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

The Ferrari pulls into the lot. Bill crawls out, heads for the store. An anxious Jean calls after him.

    JEAN
    Hurry, okay?

    BILL
    I will, sweetheart.

Steve joins Jean, leans against the car. Throughout the following they watch Bill shop for wine inside.

    STEVE
    Is it always this hot?

    JEAN
    Usually it’s hotter.

    STEVE
    Hard to imagine.
      (a beat)
    How old are you, about, seventeen?

    JEAN
    Fourteen.

    STEVE
    Fourteen, right... Know what I was doing when I was fourteen? Cattle processing. Know what that is?

    JEAN
    It doesn’t sound good.

    STEVE
    Slaughterhouse sanitation.

    JEAN
    That’s disgusting.

    STEVE
    I don’t recommend it. But hey. Put food on the table. Get it?

An impatient Jean watches her father comparing wines inside.

    STEVE (CONT’D)
    What’s that smell?

She sniffs. Doesn’t smell much of anything really.
JEAN
Dumpster over there?

STEVE
Nah, that’s not what I’m smelling.

He sniffs the air, then sniffs her.

JEAN
What are you doing?

STEVE
Do I smell what I think I smell?

JEAN
What do you smell?

STEVE
What do you think I smell?

JEAN
I think you smell that dumpster.

He whiffs, hard, breathing her in.

STEVE
Is that... pot? You smoking pot?

JEAN
No.

STEVE
You can tell me.

JEAN
No.

STEVE
You a little dope smoker?

(beat)
Then you are in luck. Because I just happen to have some tasty shit. And I am going to hook you up.

Bill pays inside, motions to Jean that he’s hurrying.

JEAN
That’d be so great. I just smoked my last bowl and I really need to get fucked up.

STEVE
You what?
JEAN
I really need to get fucked up --

STEVE
You need to get what?

JEAN
You’re bad --

Bill hustles out of the store, carrying several bags.

BILL
No Pinots, but they had some decent California Merlots.

Crawls into the car. Steve grins to Jean over the roof of the car, climbs in behind the wheel.

INT. VIOLET’S BEDROOM – DAY

The closet is mostly empty now, the bed overflowing with discarded clothes. Mattie Fae nurses a cocktail, hands a photo to Violet.

VIOLET
Look at me.
(shows photo to Ivy)
Look at me.

IVY
You’re beautiful, Mom.

VIOLET
I was beautiful. Not anymore.

MATTIE FAE
Oh, now --

IVY
You’re still beautiful.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
One of those lies we tell to give us comfort. Women are beautiful when they’re young and not after. Men can still preserve their sex appeal into old age. Not those men like you see with shorts and those little purses around their waists. Some men can maintain a weary masculinity. Women just get old and fat and wrinkly.

MATTIE FAE
I beg your pardon?
VIOLET
Think about the last time you went to the mall and saw some sweet little gal and thought she’s a cute trick. What makes her that way? Taut skin, firm boobs, an ass above her knees.

MATTIE FAE
I’m still very sexy, thank you very much.

VIOLET
You’re about as sexy as a wet cardboard box, Mattie Fae, you and me both. Look, wouldn’t we be better off if we stopped lying about these things and told the truth? “Women aren’t sexy when they’re old.” I can live with that. Can you live with that?

MATTIE FAE
What about Sophia Loren? What about Lena Horne? She stayed sexy till she was eighty.

Violet finds something else in the closet for Ivy to try.

VIOLET
The world is round. Get over it. Now try this dress on.

IVY
I’m sorry, I won’t.

VIOLET
You don’t know how to attract a man. I do. That’s something I always --

IVY
We just buried my father, I’m not trying to attract --!

VIOLET
I’m not talking about today, dummy, this is something you can wear --

IVY
I have a man. All right? I have a man.

VIOLET
You said you weren’t looking for a man --
IVY
And I’m not. Because I have one. Okay? Now will you leave it alone?

VIOLET
No, I won’t leave it alone.

MATTIE FAE
No, let’s not leave it alone.

IVY (CONT’D)
I wish you both could see the brainsick looks on your faces --

VIOLET
Who is it?

IVY
Nobody. Forget it --

MATTIE FAE
Tell us, is he someone from school? How old is he, what’s he do --?

IVY
I’m not telling you anything so --

MATTIE FAE
You have to tell us something!

IVY
No, I really don’t.

VIOLET
Are you in love, Ivy?

IVY
I...I don’t...I’m...

Ivy bursts into awkward laughter, Vi and Mattie squeal.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE - AFTERNOON

The Ferrari ROARS up the drive. Jean jumps out, races into the house. Bill and Steve emerge, grab the wine.

STEVE
No, we maintain the accounts offshore, just until we get approvals.

BILL
To get around approvals?
STEVE
To get around approvals until we get
approvals. There’s a lot of red tape,
bureaucracy, I don’t know how much you
know about Florida, Florida politics --

BILL
Only what I read and that’s --

STEVE
Right, right, this kind of business
in particular.

Charlie, keys in hand, comes out, heading for his Caddie.

BILL
...Charlie?

CHARLIE
Picking up Little Charles.

Charlie climbs in behind the wheel, pulls away.

STEVE
Little Charles?

BILL
His son. I’m sorry, what is your
business again?

They start up the porch steps with the wine.

STEVE
You know, it’s essentially security
work. The situation in the Middle East
is perpetually dangerous, so there’s a
tremendous amount of money involved.

BILL
Security work. You mean... mercenary?

INT. KITCHEN/WESTON LIVING ROOM — AFTERNOON

Bill and Steve enter. Barbara’s in the dining room with
Karen and Mattie Fae setting the table. Goes for the men.

BARBARA
Give. Me. The wine.

She pulls a bottle of Merlot from Bill’s grocery bag. Hears
something, looks into the living room as she passes. Jean
has just turned on the TV, LOUD. Barbara stares for a beat.
BARBARA (CONT’D)
Is that what you were in such a hurry to get home for? What the hell’s on TV that’s so important you?

JEAN
Phantom of the Opera, 1925.

BARBARA
For God’s sake, you can get it at any Blockbuster.

JEAN
They’re showing it with the scene in color restored.

Steve’s appeared in the living room archway.

STEVE
Cool.

BARBARA
Let me make sure I’ve got this: when you threw a fit about going to the store with your dad... Hey, look at me.

(Jean does)
And you were so distraught over the start time of your Grandpa’s funeral. Was this your concern? Getting back here in time to watch Phantom of the Fucking Opera?

JEAN
I guess.

Barb gives Jean a withering look, exits. Bill takes the wine from Steve, follows. Steve lingers, watching the TV.

STEVE
Phantom of the Opera, huh?

JEAN
Huh-uh.

Karen enters from the dining room, sidles up to Steve.

KAREN
Hi, doodle.

STEVE
(focused on the TV)
Hey, baby.
KAREN  
(in super-baby-voice)  
Hi, doodle!

Steve turns to her, embraces her. They kiss. His hands wander, squeeze her ass. She giggles, then breaks it.

KAREN (CONT’D)  
Come on, I want to show you our old fort. Man, the air in here just doesn’t move.

She goes. He starts, but stops. Quietly to Jean:

STEVE  
Hook you up, later.

INT/EXT. GREYHOUND BUS/PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

We’re inside the bus, sitting next to a man, LITTLE CHARLES, thirty-seven, rangy and awkward. He stares pensively out at the passing Pawhuska storefronts as the bus SLOWS, pulls into a parking lot next to the bank.

He spots Charlie, waiting, drinking a Coke. Little Charles exhales, stands. Steps reluctantly out into the heat.

LITTLE CHARLES  
I’m sorry, Dad.

CHARLIE  
No need to apologize.

LITTLE CHARLES  
I know Mom’s mad at me.

CHARLIE  
Don’t worry about her.

LITTLE CHARLES  
What did she say?

CHARLIE  
Your mother, she says what she says.

LITTLE CHARLES  
I set the alarm. I did.

CHARLIE  
I know you did.
LITTLE CHARLES
I loved Uncle Bev, you know that.

CHARLIE
Stop apologizing.

LITTLE CHARLES
The power must’ve gone out. I woke up and the clock was blinking noon. That means the power went out, right?

CHARLIE
It’s okay.

LITTLE CHARLES
I missed his funeral!

CHARLIE
It’s a ceremony. It’s ceremonial. It doesn’t mean anything compared to what you have in your heart.

(And, then)
Hold on, comb your hair.

Charlie hands Little Charles his comb.

LITTLE CHARLES
Uncle Bev must be disappointed in me.

CHARLIE
Your Uncle Bev has got bigger and better things ahead of him. He doesn’t have time for spite. He wasn’t that kind of man anyway --

Charlie starts for the driver’s side, stops when he sees Little Charles weeping. Returns to him, comforts him.

CHARLIE (CONT’D)
Hey, hey. It’s okay. It’s okay, now...

LITTLE CHARLES
Just... I know how things are. I know how they feel about me and something like this... you want to be there for people, and I missed Uncle Bev’s funeral, and I know how they feel about me --

CHARLIE
How who feels about you? Feels what about you?
LITTLE CHARLES
All of them. I know what they say.

CHARLIE
They don’t say things about you --

LITTLE CHARLES
I see how they are. I don’t blame them. I’m sorry I let you down, Dad.

CHARLIE
You haven’t let me down. You never let me down. Now listen...you’re wrong about these people, they love you. Some of them haven’t gotten a chance to see what I see: a fine man, very loving, with a lot to offer. Now take this...
(a handkerchief)
Give me my comb. Stand up straight, look folks in the eye. Stop being so hard on yourself.

LITTLE CHARLES
I love you, Dad.

CHARLIE
Love you too, son.

EXT. WESTON BACKYARD - AFTERNOON
Barbara bursts out of the back porch screen and into the yard, heading to the old barn. Bill follows.

BARBARA
Phantom of the Opera --

BILL
You don’t remember what it was like to be fourteen?

BARBARA
She’s old enough to exhibit a little character. But that’s something you normally learn from your parents.

BILL
That’s a shot across my bow, right? I missed something.
BARBARA
Really? Instilling character: our burden as parents.

BILL
I got that part.

BARBARA
And you really haven’t been much of a parent lately, so it’s tough to --

BILL
Just because you and I are struggling with this Gordian knot doesn’t mean --

BARBARA
Nice, “Gordian knot,” but her fourteen-year-old self might view it differently, might consider it “abandonment” --

BILL
Oh, come on, she’s a little more sophisticated than that, don’t you think?

Barbara kicks at an old, stuck, door. Enters --

INT. THE WORKSHOP AT THE BACK OF THE BARN - DAY

Makes her way to the back where old dinner chairs hang from nails pounded into the overhead beams.

BARBARA
Pretty fucking sophisticated, the restored whatever from Phantom of the Opera, I know that makes your dick hard --

BILL
Barbara --

BARBARA
Precocious little shit.

BILL
I’m not defending her.
BARTER

(voice rising)

I’m not blaming her, because I don’t expect her to act any differently when her father is a selfish son-of-a-bitch.

BILL

(voice rising)

I’m on your side. How can we fight when I’m on your side? Barbara...Barbara, settle down!

BARBARA

Be a father! Help me!

BILL

I am her father, goddamn it!

BARBARA

Her father in name only!

BILL

I have not forsaken my responsibilities!

Barbara hands dusty battered chairs back to Bill.

BARBARA

It’s “forsaken,” big shot!

BILL

Actually, “forsook” is also an acceptable usage --!

BARBARA

Oh, “forsook” you and the horse you rode in on --

Each now with chairs in hand, head out into --

EXT. THE BACK YARD - DAY

And the blinding sunlight. Start back for the house.

BILL

You don’t fight fair.

BARBARA

I’ve seen where that gets me! I’m sick of the whole notion of the enduring female. GROW UP! Cause while you’re going through your fifth puberty, the world is falling apart and your kid can’t handle it!
BILL
Our kid is just trying to deal with this goddamn madhouse you’ve dragged her into.

BARBARA
This madhouse is my home.

BILL
Think about that statement for a second, why don’t you?

BARBARA
Jean is here with me because this is a family event.

BILL
Jean’s here with you because she’s a buffer between you and the shrill insanity of your mother.

BARBARA
Y’know, you’d have a lot more credibility if you had any credibility.

BILL
You can’t resist, can you?

BARBARA
You’re a pretty easy mark.

BILL
You’re so goddamn self-righteous, you know? You’re so --

BARBARA
Surely you must’ve known when you started porking Pippi Longstocking you were due for a little self-righteousness, just a smidge of indignation on my part --

BILL
Maybe I split because of it.

They’ve reached the back porch stairs. She turns on him.

BARBARA
Is this your confession, then, when you finally unload all?
BILL
You’re thoughtful, Barbara, but you’re not open. You’re passionate, but you’re hard. You’re a good, decent, funny, wonderful woman, and I love you, but you’re a pain in the ass.

Bill pushes past her up the stairs, disappears inside.

INT. BEVERLY’S STUDY – AFTERNOON

Violet stands in the middle of the room. Sunlight streams in through the windows surrounding her. Approaches Beverly’s swivel chair, touches the back, ...slowly spins it ...sits.

VIOLET
August... your month. Locusts are raging, “Summer psalm become summer wrath.” ‘Course it’s only August out there. In here... who knows?
(and then)
All right... okay. “The Carriage held but just Ourselves,” dum-de-dum...mm, best I got... Emily Dickenson’s all I got... something something, “Horse’s Heads Were Toward Eternity...”

Produces a bottle of pills, shakes one out, takes it.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
That’s for me. One for me.

Surveys the photos behind his desk. The girls. Vi and Bev together in happier times. Picks up the hardback Meadowlark Bill left. Finds Beverly’s reading glasses on the desk, puts them on. Thumbs through it, finds the dedication: simply:

VIOLET (CONT’D)
For My Violet...

Violet smiles ruefully, takes another pill.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
For the girls, God love ‘em.


BARBARA (OS)
Mom?! Food’s on the table!

She takes a final look around, takes one last pill.
INT. DINING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Johnna, Karen, Steve and Mattie Fae carry in serving dishes, set them down on the already overladen table. Charlie pours himself a sweet tea.

KAREN
This is lovely! You do all this?

JOHANNA              MATTIE FAE
Mm-hmm.               She’s a wonder, this one.

Bill passes through, carries us into the living room where he finds Jean, still watching the movie.

BILL
Turn that off, it’s time to eat.

JEAN
Don’t suppose I could eat in here?

BILL
You suppose right.

Ivy comes down the stairs, looking.

IVY
Did I hear Little Charles?

CHARLIE
He went back out to the car.

EXT. BACK YARD - AFTERNOON

Ivy steps out onto the porch. Little Charles is by his father’s car, retrieving a Pyrex dish.

LITTLE CHARLES
Mom’s casserole.

Shuts the door, rests the casserole on the hood.

IVY
They said you overslept.

LITTLE CHARLES
Maybe I purposely accidentally overslept. I don’t know. I’m sorry.

IVY
Please.
LITTLE CHARLES
I know you had one of the worst days
of your life and I’m sorry if I --

IVY
We don’t have to do that with each
other.

She embraces him, kisses him. He looks toward the house.

LITTLE CHARLES
You’re breaking our rule.

IVY
They’re on to me. Not us, just me.
I told them I was seeing someone. I
didn’t tell them who. I just wanted
you to know, in case it came up.
(he stares at her)
What?
(beat)
Charles...

LITTLE CHARLES
I adore you.

INT. DINING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Barbara, Bill, Mattie Fae, Charlie, Karen, and Steve are
already seated. The men have removed their suit coats.

CHARLIE
Pass the casserole, please?

MATTIE FAE
My casserole’s coming.

CHARLIE
I’ll eat some of yours, too --

BARBARA
(calling out)
Mom?! Let’s eat!

Little Charles and Ivy enter with the casserole.

MATTIE FAE
There he is. I wanted to put you at a
kid’s table but they wouldn’t let me.

LITTLE CHARLES
Where do you want this?
Ad-lib greetings, hugs, handshakes, Karen’s introduction of Steve. Ivy slips in and takes her seat. Little Charles goes to put Mattie Fae’s casserole on the table, but drops it.

It lands on the floor with a sickening SPLAT.

LITTLE CHARLES (CONT’D)
Oh Jesus --!

BILL
Whoops.

MATTIE FAE
Goddamn it --!

STEVE
O-pah!

MATTIE FAE
You goddamn clumsy goofball!

LITTLE CHARLES
Mom, I’m so sorry --

CHARLIE
All right, nobody’s hurt.

Little Charles helps Johnna clean up the mess.

MATTIE FAE (CONT’D)
What about me? I’m hurt.

CHARLIE
You’re not hurt.

LITTLE CHARLES
Mom, Jesus, I’m sorry --

IVY
It’s just an accident.

MATTIE FAE
That’s my casserole!

CHARLIE
Let it go, Mattie Fae.

STEVE
It’s not a party until someone spills something.

CHARLIE
Jean, you didn’t get any chicken.

BARBARA
No, she won’t --

JEAN
I don’t eat meat.

CHARLIE
You don’t eat meat.

STEVE
Good for you.

CHARLIE (CONT’D)
“Don’t eat meat.” Okay. Who wants chicken? Little Charles, chicken?

MATTIE FAE
Just put it on his plate for him or he’s liable to burn the house down.
CHARLIE
All right, Mattie Fae.

BARBARA
Mom...!

Violet enters with a small framed photo of her and Bev.

VIOLET
Barb... will you put this?

BARBARA
Yeah, sure.

Barbara takes it, places it on the sideboard.

MATTIE FAE
That’s nice.

KAREN
That’s sweet.

VIOLET
I see you gentlemen have stripped
down to your shirt fronts. I thought
we were having a funeral dinner, not
a cockfight.

An awkward beat. The men glumly put their suit coats back on.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
Someone should probably say grace.
(no response)
Barbara?

BARBARA
Uncle Charlie should say it. He’s
the patriarch around here now.

CHARLIE
I am? Oh, I guess I am.

VIOLET
By default.

CHARLIE
Okay.
(clears his throat)
Dear Lord...

All bow their heads.

CHARLIE (CONT’D)
We ask that you watch over this family
in this sad time, O Lord...
(MORE)
A cell phone RINGS, playing the theme from Sanford and Son. Steve digs through his pockets, finds the phone, checks it.

STEVE
I have to take this.

Steve hustles into the kitchen to talk on the phone.

CHARLIE
We ask that you watch over Beverly, too, as he, as he... as he... makes his journey. We thank thee, O Lord, that we are able to join together to pay tribute to this fine man, in his house, with his beautiful daughters. We are truly blessed in our, our fellowship, our togetherness, our... our fellowship. Thank thee for the food, O Lord, that we can share this food and replenish our bodies with... nutrients. We ask that you help us... get better. Be better people.

Steve reenters from the kitchen, snapping his phone shut.

CHARLIE (CONT’D)
We recognize now more than ever the power, the... joy of family. We ask that you bless and watch over this family. Amen.

STEVE
Amen. Sorry folks.

BILL
Let’s eat.

They begin to eat. Everyone but Violet, who smokes instead.

VIOLET
Barb, have any use for that sideboard?

BARBARA
Hm?

VIOLET
That sideboard there, you have any interest in that?
BARBARA
This? Well... no. I mean, why?

VIOLET
I’m getting rid of a lot of this stuff and I thought you might want that sideboard.

BARBARA
No, Mom, I... I wouldn’t have any way to get that home to Colorado.

KAREN
Really pretty.

VIOLET
Mm. Maybe Ivy’ll take it.

IVY
I have something like that, remember --

VIOLET
Clearing all this out of here. I want to have a brand new everything.

BARBARA
I. I guess I’m just sort of... not prepared to talk about your stuff.

VIOLET
Suit yourself.

STEVE
This food is just spectacular.

KAREN
It’s so good --

LITTLE CHARLES
Yes, it is --

IVY
You like your food, Mom?

VIOLET
I haven’t tried much of it, yet --

BARBARA
Johnna cooked this whole meal by herself.

VIOLET
‘S what she’s paid for.

A silent moment.
VIOLET (CONT’D)
Y’all did know she’s getting paid, right?

CHARLIE
Jean, so I’m curious, when you say you don’t eat meat, you mean you don’t eat meat of any kind?

JEAN
Right.

CHARLIE
And is that for health reasons, or...?

JEAN
When you eat meat, you ingest an animal’s fear.

VIOLET
Ingest what? It’s fur?

JEAN
Fear.

VIOLET
I thought she said --

CHARLIE
How do you do that? You can’t eat fear.

JEAN
Sure you can. What happens to you, when you feel afraid? Doesn’t your body produce all sorts of chemical reactions?

CHARLIE
Does it?

LITTLE CHARLES
It does.

IVY
Yes.

LITTLE CHARLES
Adrenaline, and, and --

JEAN
Your body goes through a whole chemical process when it experiences fear.
LITTLE CHARLES
-- yep, and cortisol --

JEAN
Don’t you think an animal experiences fear?

STEVE
You bet it does. I used to work in a cattle processing plant, lot of fear flying around that place.

JEAN
So when you eat an animal, you’re eating all that fear it felt when it was slaughtered to make food.

CHARLIE
Wow. You mean I’ve been eating fear, what, three times a day for sixty years?

MATTIE FAE
This one won’t have a meal ‘less there’s meat in it.

CHARLIE
I guess it’s the way I was raised, but it just doesn’t seem like a legitimate meal ‘less it has some meat somewhere --

MATTIE FAE
If I make a pasta dish of some kind, he’ll be like, “Okay, that’s good for an appetizer, now where’s the meat?”

VIOLET
“Where’s the meat?” Isn’t that some TV commercial, the old lady says, “Where’s the meat?”

KAREN
“Beef,” “Where’s the beef?”

VIOLET
(screaming)
“Where’s the meat?! “Where’s the meat?! “Where’s the meat?!”

BARBARA
That’s pleasant.
CHARLIE
I thought the services were lovely.

KAREN  STEVE
Yes, weren’t they --?  Preacher did a fine job.

Vi sticks her hand out, flat, wiggles it back and forth.

VIOLET
Ehhhhh!  I give it a...
   (repeats gesture)
Ehhhhh!

KAREN  BARBARA
Really?  I thought it was --  Great, now we get some
   dramatic criticism.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
Too much talk about poetry, teaching.
He hadn’t written any poetry to speak of since ’65 and he never liked
teaching worth a damn. Nobody talked about the good stuff. Man was a world-
class alcoholic, more’n fifty years. Nobody told the story about that night
he got wrangled into giving a talk at that TU alumni dinner...
   (laughs)
Drank a whole bottle of Ron Bocoy White Rum -- don’t know why I remember
that -- and got up to give this talk, and he fouled himself! Comes back to
our table with this huge --

BARBARA
Yeah, I can’t imagine why no one told that story.

STEVE
I don’t know much about poetry, but I
thought his poems were extraordinary.
   (to Bill)
And your reading was very fine.

BILL
Thank you.

VIOLET
   (to Steve)
Who are you?
KAREN
Mom, this is my fiance, Steve, I introduced you at the church.

STEVE
Steve Heidebrecht.

VIOLET
Hide-the-what?

STEVE
Heidebrecht.

VIOLET
Hide-a-burrr...German, you’re a German.

STEVE
Well, German-Irish, really, I --

VIOLET
That’s peculiar, Karen, to bring a date to your father’s funeral. I know the poetry was good, but I wouldn’t have really considered it date material --

BARBARA
Jesus.

KAREN
He’s not a date, he’s my fiance. We’re getting married on New Year’s. In Miami, I hope you can make it.

VIOLET
I don’t really see that happening, do you? Steve. That right? Steve?

STEVE
Yes, ma’am.

VIOLET
You ever been married before?

KAREN
That’s personal.

STEVE
I don’t mind. Yes, ma’am, I have.

VIOLET
More’n once?
STEVE
Three times, actually, three times before this --

VIOLET
You should pretty much have it down by now, then.

STEVE
(laughs)
Right, right --

Everybody’s eating, passing food. Vi turns to Mattie Fae.

VIOLET
I had that one pegged. I mean, look at him, you can tell he’s been married.

KAREN
I took Steve out to show him the old fort and it’s gone!

IVY
That’s been gone for years.

KAREN
That made me so sad!

BILL
What is this now?

KAREN
Our old fort, where we used to play Cowboys and Indians.

IVY
Daddy said rats were getting in there.

VIOLET
Karen! Shame on you! Don’t you know not to say Cowboys and Indians? You played Cowboys and Native Americans, right Barb?

BARBARA
What did you take? What pills?

VIOLET
Lemme alone --

Charlie’s silverware clatters to the floor. He appears to be having some kind of attack.

CHARLIE
Uh-oh!
MATTIE FAE
What is it?

CHARLIE
UH-OH!

MATTIE FAE
What’s the matter?

LITTLE CHARLES
Dad --?

IVY
You okay, Uncle --

CHARLIE
I got a big bite of fear! I’m shakin’ in my boots! Fear never tasted so good.

Laughter. Charlie digs into his plate ravenously.

STEVE
Right, right, it’s pretty good once you get used to the taste.

BARBARA
I catch her eating a cheeseburger every now and again.

JEAN
I do not!

BARBARA
Double cheeseburger, bacon, extra fear.

JEAN
Mom, you are such a liar!

More laughter. Violet stares at Jean.

VIOLET
Y’know...if I ever called my mom a liar? She would’ve knocked my goddamn head off my shoulders.

Silence.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
You girls know there’s a will.

BARBARA
Mom...
VIOLET
We took care of it some time back.

BARBARA
Mom, we don’t want to talk about this.

VIOLET
I want to talk about it. What about what I want to talk about, that count for anything?
(beat)
Bev made some good investments, believe it or not, and we had money for you girls in his will, but we talked it over after some years passed and decided to change things, leave everything to me. We never got around to taking care of it legally, but you should know he meant to leave the money to me.

BARBARA
Okay.

VIOLET
Okay?
(looks to Ivy, Karen)
Okay?

IVY
Okay.

VIOLET
Karen? Okay?

Uncertain, Karen looks to Steve, then Barbara.

BARBARA
Okay.

KAREN
Okay.

VIOLET
Okay. But now some of this furniture, some of this old shit you can just have. I don’t want it, got no use for it. Maybe I should have an auction.

MATTIE FAE
Sure, an auction’s a fine idea --
VIOLET
Some things, though, like the silver, that’s worth a pretty penny. But if you like I’ll sell it to you, cheaper’n I might get in an auction.

BARBARA
Or you might never get around to the auction and then we can just have it for free after you die.

IVY
Barbara...

Beat. Violet coolly studies Barbara.

VIOLET
You might at that.

LITTLE CHARLES
Excuse me, Bill? I’m wondering, the reading you did, those poems --?

VIOLET
Where are you living now, Bill? You want this old sideboard?

BILL
I beg your pardon.

VIOLET
You and Barbara are separated, right? Or you divorced already?

BILL
...We’re separated.

VIOLET
(to Barbara)
Thought you could slip that one by me, didn’t you?

BARBARA
What is the matter with you?

VIOLET
Nobody slips anything by me. I know what’s what. Your father thought he’s slipping one by me, right? No way. I’m sorry you two’re having trouble, maybe you can work it out. Bev’n I separated a few times, course we didn’t call it that.
BARBARA
Help us to benefit from an illustration of your storybook marriage.

VIOLET
Truth is, you can’t compete with a younger woman. One of those unfair things in life. Is there a younger woman involved?

BARBARA
You’ve said enough on this topic, I think.

BILL
Yes. There’s a younger woman.

VIOLET
Y’see? Odds’re against you there, babe.

IVY
Mom believes women don’t grow more attractive with age.

KAREN
Oh, I disagree, I --

VIOLET
I didn’t say they “don’t grow more attractive,” I said they get ugly. And it’s not really a matter of opinion, Karen dear. You’ve only just started to prove it yourself.

CHARLIE
You’re in rare form today, Vi.

VIOLET
The day calls for it, doesn’t it? What form would you have me in?

CHARLIE
I just don’t understand why you’re so adversarial.

VIOLET
I’m just truth-telling. (to Barbara) Some people get antagonized by the truth.
CHARLIE
Everyone here loves you, dear.

VIOLET
You think you can shame me, Charlie? Blow it out your ass.

BARBARA
Three days ago... I had to identify my father’s corpse. Now I’m supposed to sit here and listen to you viciously attack each and every member of this family --

Violet rises, her voice booming.

VIOLET
Attack my family?! You ever been attacked in your sweet spoiled life?! Tell her ‘bout attacks, Mattie Fae, tell her what an attack looks like!

MATTIE FAE
(Honey --)

VIOLET (CONT’D)
Stop telling me to settle down, goddam it! I’m not a goddamn invalid! I don’t need to be abided, do I?! Am I already passed over?!

MATTIE FAE
Honey --

VIOLET
(points to Mattie Fae)
This woman came to my rescue when one of my dear mother’s many gentlemen friends was attacking me, with a claw hammer! You think you been attacked?! What do you know about life on these Plains? What do you know about hard times?

BARBARA
I know you had a rotten childhood, Mom. Who didn’t?

VIOLET
You DON’T know! You do NOT know! None of you know, ‘cept this woman right here and that man we buried today!
(MORE)
Sweet girl, sweet Barbara, my heart breaks for every time you ever felt pain. I wish I coulda shielded you from it. But if you think for a solitary second you can fathom the pain that man endured in his natural life, you got another thing coming.

Do you know where your father lived from age four till about ten? Do you?

No one responds.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
Do you?!

BARBARA
No.

IVY
No.

VIOLET
In a Pontiac Sedan. With his mother, his father, in a fucking car! Now what do you want to say about your rotten childhood? That’s the crux of the biscuit: we lived too hard, then rose too high. We sacrificed everything and we did it all for you. Your father and I were the first in our families to finish high school and he wound up an award-winning poet. You girls, given a college education, taken for granted no doubt, and where’d you wind up?

(jabs a finger at Karen)
Whadda you do?

(jabs a finger at Ivy)
Whadda you do?

(jabs a finger at Barbara)
Who’re you? Jesus, you worked as hard as us, you’d all be President. You never had real problems so you got to make all your problems yourselves.

BARBARA
Why are you screaming at us?

VIOLET
Just time we had some truth’s told ’round here. Damn fine day, tell the truth.
There’s a long pause as everyone gathers themselves, then:

       CHARLIE
       Well, the truth is... I’m getting full.

       STEVE
       Amen.

       JOHNNA
       There’s dessert, too.

       KAREN
       I saw her making those pies. They looked so good.

Little Charles suddenly stands.

       LITTLE CHARLES
       I have a truth to tell.

       VIOLET
       It speaks.

       IVY
       (softly pleading)
       No, no --

       CHARLIE
       What is it, son?

       LITTLE CHARLES
       I have a truth.

       MATTIE FAE
       Little Charles...?

       LITTLE CHARLES
       I...

       IVY
       Charles, not like this, please...

       LITTLE CHARLES
       The truth is...I forgot to set the clock. The power didn’t go out, I just...forgot to set the clock. Sorry, Mom. I’m sorry, everyone. Excuse me...I...I.

He stumbles from the room. A long moment, then --
VIOLET
Scintillating.

MATTIE FAE
(to Charlie)
I gave up a long time ago... Little Charles is your project.

IVY
(near tears)
Charles. His name is Charles.

VIOLET
Poor Ivy. Poor thing.

IVY
Please, Mom...

VIOLET
Poor baby.

IVY
Please...

VIOLET
She always had a feeling for the underdog.

IVY
Don’t be mean to me right now, okay?

VIOLET
Everyone’s got this idea I’m mean all of a sudden.

IVY
Please, momma.

VIOLET
I told you, I’m just telling the --

BARBARA
You’re a drug addict.

VIOLET
That is the truth! That’s what I’m getting at! I, everybody listen... I am a drug addict. I am addicted to drugs, pills, specially downers.

She pulls a bottle from her pocket, holds them up.
VIOLET (CONT’D)

Y’see these little blue babies? These are my best fucking friends and they never let me down. Try to get ‘em away from me and I’ll eat you alive.

Barbara lunges at the bottle, she and Vi wrestle for it.

BARBARA

Gimme those goddamn pills --

VIOLET

I’ll eat you alive, girl!

Bill and Ivy try to restrain Barbara; Mattie Fae tries to restrain Violet. Others rise, ad-lib. Pandemonium.

STEVE

Holy shit --

IVY

Barbara, stop it --!

CHARLIE

Hey, now, c’mon --!

KAREN

Oh God --

Violet wrests the pills from Barb. Bill pulls Barb back into her seat. Violet shakes the bottle, taunting Barb. Barb lunges again, grabs her mother by the hair, toppling chairs, they crash into the --

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Tumble to the floor. Pandemonium, screaming. The family rushes after them into the living room. Barb has her mother pinned on the floor and is strangling her. Bill and Charlie struggle to pull Barbara off, pry her fingers off Violet’s throat and get her away.

Johnna and Mattie Fae rush to Violet, get her to a chair.

VIOLET

Goddamn you... goddamn you, Barb...

BARBARA

Shut up!

Okay. Pill raid. Johnna, help Ivy in the kitchen; Bill and Jean upstairs with me.

(to Ivy)

You remember how to do this, right?

IVY

Yeah...
BARBARA
Go through everything. Every closet, every drawer, every shoebox.

CHARLIE
What should we do?

BARBARA
Get Mom some black coffee, a wet towel and listen to her bullshit. Karen, call Dr. Burke.

VIOLET
You can’t do this! This is my house! This is my house!

BARBARA
You don’t get it, do you?

She strides to her mother, looms over her.

BARBARA (CONT’D)
I’M RUNNING THINGS NOW!

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY – LATE AFTERNOON

The hallway is empty, but we hear the sounds of the search coming from the bedroom. Barbara appears, looks through the linen closet, looking behind stacked towels and old electric blankets. Finds a bottle of pills in the back.

Ivy comes upstairs, followed closely by Karen. Hold out pill bottles, Barb adds them to the ones she’s already collected in a large Ziplock bag.

IVY
That’s all we could find.

Barb heads for the bathroom, lifts the toilet seat. Begins dumping pills into the bowl. Karen examines the bottles.

KAREN
Why’d Dr. Burke write her so many prescriptions? Doesn’t he know --?

IVY
It’s not just him. She’s got a doctor in every port.
BARBARA
You knew this was going on again?

Ivy shrugs. Finished emptying the pills, Barb flushes the toilet, steps to her mother’s open bedroom door, looks in.

INT. VIOLET’S BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Violet lays motionless on the bed in the semi-darkness, facing the wall, still fully clothed. Ivy and Karen join her. They stare at their mother’s comatose form. Finally:

KAREN
Now what?

BARBARA
Wine... lots of wine.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE YARD/GAZEBO - NIGHT

Barbara, Ivy, Karen and the remains of the dinner wine sit around the table in the backyard gazebo.

BARBARA
Think we can goad Mom into giving Burke her “greatest” generation speech tomorrow, tell him about the claw hammer?
IVY
Won’t do any good, he’s part of the same generation.

BARBARA
“Greatest Generation,” my ass. What makes them so great? Because they were poor and hated Nazis? Who doesn’t fucking hate Nazis? Remember when we checked her in the psych ward, that stunt she pulled?

IVY
Big speech, she’s getting clean, making this incredible sacrifice for her family, she’s let us down but now she’ll prove she’s a good mother.

KAREN
I wasn’t there.

BARBARA
She smuggled Darvocet into the psych ward ... in her vagina. There’s your Greatest Generation for you. She made this speech to us while she was clenching a bottle of pills in her cooch, for God’s sake.

KAREN
God, I’ve never heard this story.
IVY
Did you just say “cooch”?

BARBARA
The phrase “Mom’s pussy” seems gauche.

IVY
You’re a little more comfortable with “cooch,” are you?

BARBARA
What word should I use to describe our mother’s vagina?

IVY
I don’t know, but --

BARBARA
“Mom’s beaver”? “Mother’s box”?

IVY
Oh God --

KAREN
Barbara!

As their laughter slowly dies down --

KAREN
One thing about Mom and Dad. You have to tip your cap to anyone who can stay married that long.

IVY
Karen. He killed himself.

BARBARA
Is there something going on between you and Little Charles?

IVY
I don’t know that I’m comfortable talking about that.
BARBARA
Because you know he’s our first cousin.

IVY
Give me a break.

KAREN
You know you shouldn’t consider children.

IVY
I can’t anyway, I had a hysterectomy last year.

KAREN

Why?

IVY

Cervical cancer.

KAREN

I didn’t know.

BARBARA

Neither did I.

IVY

I didn’t tell anyone except Charles. That’s where it started between us.

BARBARA

Why not?

IVY

And hear it from Mom the rest of my life? She doesn’t need another excuse to treat me like some damaged thing.

BARBARA

You might have told us.

IVY

You didn’t tell us about you and Bill.

BARBARA

That’s different.

IVY

Why? Because it’s you, and not me?

BARBARA

Because divorce is an embarrassing public admission of defeat. Cancer’s fucking cancer, you can’t help that. We’re your sisters.

IVY

I don’t feel that connection very keenly.

KAREN

I feel very connected, to both of you.

IVY

We never see you, you’re never around, you haven’t been around --
KAREN
I still feel that connection!

IVY
I can’t perpetuate these myths of family or sisterhood anymore. We’re just people, some of us accidentally connected by genetics, a random selection of cells.

BARRA
When did you get so cynical?

IVY
That’s funny, coming from you.

BARRA
Bitter, sure, but “random selection of cells?”

IVY
Maybe my cynicism came with the realization that the responsibility of caring for our parents was mine alone.

BARRA
Don’t give me that. I participated --

IVY
Till you had enough and got out, you and Karen both. I’m not criticizing. Do what you want. You did, Karen did.

BARRA
And if you didn’t, that’s not my fault.

IVY
That’s right, so don’t lay this sister thing on me, all right? When I leave here I won’t feel any more guilty than you two did.

KAREN
I can’t believe your world view is this dark.

IVY
You live in Florida.
BARBARA
You’re thinking of leaving?

IVY
Charles and I are going to New York.

Barb bursts out in derisive laughter. Karen joins her.

BARBARA
What are you going to do in New York?

IVY
We have plans.

BARBARA
Like what?

IVY
None of your business.

BARBARA
What about Mom?

IVY
What about her?

BARBARA
You feel comfortable leaving Mom here?

IVY
Do you?
   (then)
You think she was tough when he was alive? Think what it’s going to be like now.
   (to Karen)
You’re going back to Miami, right?

KAREN
Yes.

Ivy stands, gathers up her wine glass.
IVY
There you go, Barb. You want to know what we’re doing about Mom? Karen and I are leaving. You want to stay, that’s your decision. But nobody gets to point a finger at me. Nobody.

Ivy starts back for the house.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE YARD - NIGHT

The Weston women head for the house.

VIOLET
My girls all together. Hearing you just now gave me a warm feeling.

Violet, sits on the swing in the semi-darkness, smoking, her hair wrapped in a towel. They hadn’t seen her. How long has she been there?
BARBARA
You had a bath?

VIOLET
Uh-huh...

BARBARA
You need something to eat? More coffee?

VIOLET
No, honey, I’m fine.
(then)
This house must have heard a lot of Weston girl secrets.

Karen moves to her mother, sits next to her on the swing. Barb leans against a fence post, Ivy hangs back.

KAREN
I get embarrassed just thinking about it.

Karen takes a tube of hand creme from her purse.

VIOLET
Oh... nothing to be embarrassed about. Secret crushes, secret schemes. Province of teenage girls. I can’t imagine anything more delicate, or bittersweet. Some part of you girls I always identified with... no matter how old you get, a woman’s hard-pressed to throw off that part of herself.
(to Karen, re: hand creme)
That smells good.

KAREN
It’s apple. You want some?

VIOLET
Yes, please.

Violet puts out her cigarette. Karen passes her the creme.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
I ever tell you the story of Raymond Qualls? Not much story to it. Boy I had a crush on when I was thirteen or so. Rough-looking boy, beat-up Levis, messy hair. Terrible underbite.
(MORE)
VIOLET (CONT’D)
But he had these beautiful cowboy boots, shiny chocolate leather. He was so proud of those boots, you could tell, way he’d strut around, all arms and elbows, puffed up and cocksure. I decided I needed to get a girly pair of those same boots and I convinced myself he’d ask me to go steady. He’d see me in those boots and say “Now there’s the gal for me.”

Violet lights another cigarette.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
Found the boots in a window downtown and just went crazy: praying for those boots, rehearsing the conversation I’d have with Raymond when he saw me in my boots. Must’ve asked my momma a hundred times if I could get those boots. “What do you want for Christmas, Vi?” “Momma, I’ll give all of it up just for those boots.” Bargaining, you know? She started dropping hints about a package under the tree she had wrapped up, about the size of a boot box, nice wrapping paper. “Now, Vi, don’t you cheat and look in there before Christmas morning.” Little smile on her face. Christmas morning, I was up like a shot, boy, under the tree, tearing open that box. There was a pair of boots, all right... men’s work boots, holes in the toes, chewed up laces, caked in mud and dog shit. Lord, my momma laughed for days.

Silence.

BARBARA
Please don’t tell me that’s the end of the story.

VIOLET
Oh, no. That’s the end.

Ivy shakes her head, goes inside. She’s had enough of Violet to last a lifetime.

KAREN
You never got the boots?
VIOLET
No, huh-uh.

BARBARA
Okay, well, that's the worst story I ever heard. That makes me wish for a heartwarming claw hammer story.

VIOLET
My momma was a nasty-mean old lady. I suppose that's where I get it from.

An awkward moment.

KAREN
You're not nasty-mean. You're our mother and we love you.

VIOLET
Thank you, sweetheart.

Karen leans her head against her mother's shoulder, takes her mother's hand. Off Barbara, watching this --

INT. GUEST ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Barbara wakes, takes a moment to get her bearings. Early sunlight pours in. Bill's still asleep. She sits up, studies him. Surprised to find him beside her.
INT/EXT. BACKYARD - EARLY MORNING

Barbara stands in the door. Closes her eyes, letting the early morning sun warm her. After a long moment, Johnna appears with a coffee mug. Barb takes it, nods her thanks.

BARBARA
Last time I spoke with my father, we talked about the state of the world, and he said, “You know, this country was always pretty much a whorehouse, but at least it used to have some promise. Now it’s just a shithole.” I think maybe he was talking about something else, something more specific, personal... this house? This family? His marriage? Himself? There was something sad in his voice—not sad, he always sounded sad -- hopeless. As if it had already happened. As if whatever was disappearing had already disappeared. And no one saw it go. This country, this experiment, America, this hubris: what a lament, if no one saw it go.

JOHNNA
Mrs. Fordham, are you going to fire me?

BARBARA
What? No. But I’ll understand if you want to quit. I mean, there’s work. And then there’s work.

JOHNNA
I’m familiar with this job. I can do this job. I don’t do it for you or Mrs. Weston. Or even for Mr. Weston. Right? I do it for me.

BARBARA
Why?

JOHNNA
I need the work.

BARBARA
Johnna, did my father say anything to you?
JOHNNAA
He just seemed like maybe he had... he talked about...
(beat)
He talked a lot about his daughters, his three daughters, and his granddaughter. That was his joy.

BARBARAA
Thank you. That makes me feel better.
Knowing that you can lie.

Johnna smiles.

INT. DOCTOR’S OFFICE/WAITING ROOM - DAY
Barbara sits opposite DR. BURKE, a genial, charming and remotely creepy small town doctor. Ivy stands. Violet is visible out in the waiting room, Karen sitting with her.

DR. BURKE
The chemotherapy and the radiation, coupled with the overuse of pain medications --

BARBARAA
-- right --

DR. BURKE
-- and without the benefit of more thorough testing, an MRI or CT scan, I believe your mother is showing signs of Mild Cognitive Impairment.

BARBARAA
Mild Cognitive Impairment?

DR. BURKE
Brain damage. It may be time to consider placing her in a long term care facility. I’d certainly feel more comfortable knowing she was receiving that level of supervision.

BARBARAA
That would make you comfortable? You would be comfortable with that?

DR. BURKE
Of course, it’s a family decision.
BARBARA
You want us to send her to where, a psychiatric hospital?

DR. BURKE
Well, Beverly’s gone.

BARBARA
Right. Not “gone” so much as “dead,” but I see your point.

Ivy suppresses a laugh. Burke looks at Ivy, confused.

DR. BURKE
Legal guardianship for you and your sisters, with my recommendation, should be a simple --

IVY
Leave me out of this, thanks.

BARBARA
So you’re thinking that if the three of us cooperated with you on a commitment end-around, we’d be less likely to sue your ass?

DR. BURKE
I’m sorry?

BARBARA
“Mild Cognitive Impairment?” Are you fucking kidding me? You really want to go before a judge and make a case for a couple radiation treatments and some chemo causing brain damage? Think you can make that stand up in court? When I’m sitting at the other table, doing this?

Barbara pulls out the Ziplock bag, throws a pill bottle at Dr. Burke, bouncing it lightly off his head.

DR. BURKE
All right, I think --

Thinks another pill bottle at him.

BARBARA
Know whose name is on these bottles?

She hits him with another pill bottle.
DR. BURKE
Your mother is a very --

She hits him with another pill bottle.

IVY
Barb...

She hits him with another pill bottle. He relents, waits for her to get it out of her system. Only one problem with that idea, though --

She hits him with another pill bottle.

Another pill bottle. And another pill bottle.

She pauses. It seems she’s done.

But then, another pill bottle. And another.

BARBARA
We’ll hang on to the bucket of these we have at home. For evidence. For your trial.

She gets up to go, gets to the door, turns and fires one last pill bottle at him. Leaves. Ivy lingers, grins at Burke.

INT/EXT. TALLGRASS PRAIRIE PRESERVE/BEV’S LINCOLN - DAY 78

The sun parched Indian grass and Turkey Toot are wilting but stirred by prairie winds. Bev’s old Lincoln follows a thread of blacktop through the tall grass. Barb drives, Ivy up front. Karen’s in the back with Violet.

VIOLET
Pull the car over.

BARBARA
We’ll be home in a few minutes.

VIOLET
Pull the car over.
(beat)
I’m going to be sick.

Barbara looks back, sees her mother means this literally, pulls to the side of the road. Violet gets out quickly.

We stay with Barbara as she climbs out of the car, stares across the road, waiting for Violet, who can be heard retching. Karen and Ivy still in the car.
The sound fades as Barbara contemplates the prairie and for a long moment... loses herself, back to this land, to her home. Her expression is unreadable, enigmatic.

Then behind her, out of focus, we become aware of Violet running away, across the prairie, through the tall grass.

Barbara turns, simply to get back in the car, sees Violet running through the field.

    BARBARA
    Mom?

Violet keeps running.

    BARBARA (CONT’D)
    Mom?! Where are you going?

Barbara watches for another moment.

    BARBARA (CONT’D)
    Goddamn it. Mom!

Barbara takes off after her. Ivy and Karen climb out, but don’t follow. Shield their eyes to watch the chase.

It’s an odd sight, the two women, racing through the grass. One almost seventy, the other nearing fifty.

Barbara is slow in her pursuit at first, maybe because of her shoes, or maybe because she just feels silly. Then realizes that Violet is not stopping... not unless Barbara stops her.

Violet runs through the tall grass, puts a foot wrong, goes down. Barbara catches up, out of breath, collapses. They lay on the ground, wheezing, sweating.

    BARBARA (CONT’D)
    Where the fuck are you going, Mom?

And now we see the full beauty of the land, the distant horizon, the high cumulous clouds, the endless blue sky. Barb and Violet two dots, lost in the unforgiving prairie.

    BARBARA (CONT’D)
    There’s nowhere to go.

INT/EXT. LINCOLN/WESTON HOUSE DRIVEWAY - AFTERNOON

Barb pulls the Lincoln in beside Charlie’s Caddie and Ivy’s Honda. Shuts off the engine. Ivy and Karen climb out, start back for the house. Barbara turns to Violet.
BARBARA
I’m sorry.

VIOLET
Please, honey --

BARBARA
No, it’s important I say this. I lost my temper at dinner and went too far.

VIOLET
Barbara. The day, the funeral... the pills. I was spoiling for a fight and you gave it to me.

BARBARA
So... truce?

VIOLET
(laughs)
Truce.

They take a long moment, then --

BARBARA
What now?

VIOLET
How do you mean?

BARBARA
Don’t you think you should at least consider a rehab center?

Karen turns, realizing they’re not following. Should she go back to the car? She decides no, continues inside.

VIOLET
I can’t go through that again. No, I can do this. You got rid of my pills, right?

BARBARA
All we could find.

VIOLET
I don’t have that many hiding places.

BARBARA
Mom, now, come on.

VIOLET
You wanna search me?
BARBARA
Uh... no.

VIOLET
If the pills are gone, I’ll be fine. Just need a few days to get my feet under me.

BARBARA
I can’t imagine what all this must be like for you right now. I just want you to know, you’re not alone. If you need any help --

VIOLET
I don’t need help.

BARBARA
I want to help.

VIOLET
I don’t need your help.

BARBARA
Mom.

VIOLET
I don’t need your help. I’ve gotten myself through some... I know how this goes: once all the talking’s through, people go back to their own nonsense. I know that. So, don’t worry about me. I’ll manage. I get by.

Violet gets out, heads inside. Barbara watches her go.

INT. WESTON HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Ivy finds Little Charles watching television.

IVY
Is the coast clear?

LITTLE CHARLES
Never very.

Ivy waits until Karen passes through, heads upstairs.

IVY
What are you watching?
LITTLE CHARLES
Television.

IVY
Can I watch it with you?

LITTLE CHARLES
I wish you would.

She sits beside him on the couch.

LITTLE CHARLES (CONT’D)
I almost blew it last night.
    (she nods)
Are you mad at me?

IVY
Nope.

They hold hands.

LITTLE CHARLES
I was trying to be brave.

IVY
I know.

LITTLE CHARLES
I just... I want everyone to know
    that I got what I always wanted.
And that means... I’m not a loser.

IVY
Hey. Hey.

He turns to look at her.

IVY (CONT’D)
You’re my hero.

He considers this... then breaks into a huge smile, mutes the TV, goes to the ancient, oak, electric piano, turns it on.

LITTLE CHARLES
Come on, help me push the pedal.

She joins him on the piano bench.

LITTLE CHARLES (CONT’D)
I wrote this for you.

He plays, and quietly sings a gentle but quirky love song. It’s charming, touching.
She smiles, he smiles back. Midway through, Mattie Fae enters, watches for a moment. Then breaks the spell.

MATTIE FAE
Liberace. Get yourself together, we have to get home and take care of those damn dogs. They’ve probably eaten the drapes by now.

Charlie comes down the stairs with their overnight bag.

CHARLIE
I’m sure the house is fine.

MATTIE FAE
(notices the TV)
Oh, look, honey, Little Charles has got the TV on.

LITTLE CHARLES
No, I was just --

MATTIE FAE
This one watches so much television, it’s rotted his brain.

IVY
I’m sure that’s not true.

MATTIE FAE
What was it I caught you watching the other day?

LITTLE CHARLES
I don’t remember.

CHARLIE
Mattie Fae --

MATTIE FAE
You do so remember, some dumb talk show about people swapping wives.

LITTLE CHARLES
I don’t remember.

MATTIE FAE
You don’t remember.
(to Ivy)
Too bad there isn’t a job where they pay you to sit around watching TV.
CHARLIE
C’mon, Mattie Fae --

MATTIE FAE
(still to Ivy)
Y’know he got fired from a shoe store?

CHARLIE
Mattie Fae, we’re gonna get in the car and go home and if you say one more mean thing to that boy I’m going to kick your fat Irish ass onto the highway. You hear me?

MATTIE FAE
What the hell did you say--?

CHARLIE
You kids go outside, would you please?

Ivy and Little Charles go.

CHARLIE (CONT’D)
I don’t understand this meanness. I look at you and your sister and the way you talk to people and I don’t understand it. I can’t understand why folks can’t be respectful of one another. I don’t think there’s any excuse for it. My family didn’t treat each other that way.

MATTIE FAE
Maybe that’s because your family --

CHARLIE
You had better not say anything about my family right now. I mean it. We buried a man yesterday I loved very much. And whatever faults he may have had, he was a good, kind, decent person. And to hear you tear into your own son not even a day later dishonors Beverly’s memory. We’ve been married thirty-eight years. I wouldn’t trade them for anything. But if you can’t find a generous place in your heart for your own son, we’re not going to make it to thirty-nine.

He goes. She takes a moment to collect herself, turns to follow, finds Barbara standing out in the open kitchen door. There’s an awkward moment.
BARRA
I didn’t mean to eavesdrop. I froze.

MATTIE FAE
That’s -- you have a cigarette, hon?

BARRA
No, I quit years ago.

MATTIE FAE
So did I. Just sounded good to me. I thought at dinner... at that horrible dinner last night, seemed like, something might be going on between Ivy and Little Charles. Do you know if that’s true?

BARRA
Oh, this is...I’m not sure what to...

MATTIE FAE
Look, just. Is it true?

BARRA
Yes. It’s true.

MATTIE FAE
Okay. That can’t happen.

BARRA
This is going to be difficult, uh... Ivy and Little Charles have always marched to their own... and I’d expect this to be toughest on you --

MATTIE FAE
Barb...?

BARRA
They’re in love. Or they think they are. What’s the difference, right?

MATTIE FAE
Honey --

BARRA
I know it’s unorthodox for cousins to get together, at least these days --

MATTIE FAE
They’re not cousins.
BARBARA
-- but believe it or not, it’s not as uncommon as you might --

MATTIE FAE
Listen to me. They’re not cousins.

BARBARA
Beg pardon?

MATTIE FAE
Little Charles is not your cousin. He’s your brother. He’s your blood brother. He is not your cousin. He is your blood brother. Half-brother. He’s your father’s child. Which means that he is Ivy’s brother. Do you see? Little Charles and Ivy are brother and sister.

Karen and Steve enter from outside.

BARBARA
Go away.

KAREN
We’re just going to --

BARBARA
Go away! NOW! GO AWAY!

Karen and Steve retreat. Barbara stares at Mattie Fae.

BARBARA (CONT’D)
You and Dad.
(Mattie Fae nods)
Who knows this?

MATTIE FAE
I do. And you do.

BARBARA
Uncle Charlie doesn’t suspect?

MATTIE FAE
We’ve never discussed it.

BARBARA
What?!

MATTIE FAE
We’ve never discussed it. Okay?
BARBARA
Did Dad know?

MATTIE FAE
Yes. Y’know, I’m not proud of this.

BARBARA
Really. You people amaze me. What, were you drunk? Was this just some --

MATTIE FAE
I wasn’t drunk, no. Maybe it’s hard for you to believe, looking at me, knowing me the way you do, all these years. I know to you, I’m just your old fat Aunt Mattie Fae. I’m more than that, sweetheart, there’s more to me than that. I don’t know why Little Charles is such a disappointment to me. Maybe, well, I don’t know why. I’m disappointed for him, more than anything. I made a mistake, a long time ago. Okay? I paid for it. But the mistake ends here.

BARBARA
If Ivy found out, it would destroy her.

MATTIE FAE
I’m sure as hell not gonna tell her. You have to find a way to stop it. You have to put a stop to it.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE BACKYARD - NIGHT

It’s late, the house still. We MOVE through dark rooms, drawn to the murmur of SOUND and a faint sound coming from outside the kitchen --

JEAN (OS)
You weren’t kidding, this stuff is strong.

STEVE (OS)
Florida, baby. Number one industry.

JEAN
Who cares?
Slowly DISCOVER: Jean and Steve sharing a joint, out by the fence. She wears a long T-shirt; he wears sweat pants and a sleeveless T-shirt. Both are barefoot.

STEVE
Number one by far. Want a shotgun?
(off her look)
You don’t know what a shotgun is?

JEAN
I know what a shotgun is.

STEVE
Not that kind of shotgun, here. Just put your lips right next to mine and you inhale while I exhale.

JEAN
Okay.

He puts the joint in his mouth, lit end first. Their lips nearly touch as he blows marijuana smoke into her mouth in a steady stream. She nearly chokes.

STEVE
Hold it. Don’t let it out.

She finally gasps, exhales, coughs.

STEVE (CONT’D)
That’s a kick, huh?

INT. THE ATTIC ROOM - NIGHT

Johnna wakes. Listens. Sits up.

INT. ATTIC STAIRS/UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Johnna makes her way down the attic stairs and into the second floor hallway, the whispers below unintelligible.

INT. MAIN STAIRCASE/HALLWAY

Johnna steps into the main hallway. Drawn to whispers, and giggling from outside in the yard.

STEVE (OS)
...Show ‘em to me... I won’t look.
JEAN (OS)
If you won’t look, there’s no point
in showing them to you.

STEVE (OS)
Okay, okay... I’ll look.

JEAN (OS)
You’re just an old perv...

STEVE (OS)
Christ, you got a great set. Show you
mine if you’ll show me yours.

JEAN (OS)
I don’t want to see yours, perv.

Johnna approaches carefully, can’t yet see them.

STEVE (OS)
You ever seen one?

JEAN (OS)
What are you doing?

STEVE (OS)
Nothing.

JEAN (OS)
You’re gonna get us both in trouble.

STEVE (OS)
I’m white and over thirty. I don’t
get in trouble.

Johnna pushes out the screen to DISCOVER: Steve kissing and
groping Jean, sliding his hand down between her legs.

Johnna grabs a shovel leaning against the storm cellar door.
Jean and Steve, clothes in disarray, quickly separate.

JEAN
Oh my God...

STEVE
Ho, fuck!

Johnna approaches Steve menacingly.

STEVE (CONT’D)
Hold up there, lady, you don’t --

Johnna SWINGS the shovel, barely misses Steve’s nose.
Bedroom lights above SNAP ON.
STEVE (CONT’D)
Hey, goddamn it, careful!

She swings again, HARD. The shovel SMACKS into the arm he puts up to block her smashing his head with the spade.

STEVE (CONT’D)
Ow, goddamn --!

He holds his arm in pain. She wades in with a strong swing and CONNECTS with his back. He goes down. Johnna stands above him, arm cocked, watching for him to try and get up. He doesn’t. Karen rushes out, sees Steve on the floor.

KAREN
What happened?!

JOHNNA
He was messing with Jean --

KAREN
Honey, you’re bleeding, you okay?

He groans, tries to sit up. Bill and Barbara run in.

BARBARA
Jean, what are you doing up?

JEAN
We were, I don’t know --

BARBARA
Who was? Are you alright? BILL
Do I need to call a doctor?

JEAN (CONT’D) KAREN
Yeah, I’m fine. I don’t know.

BARBARA
Johnna, what’s going on?

JOHNNA
He was messing with Jean, so I tuned him up.

BARBARA
Messing with, what do you BILL
Mean, messing with? What...what’s that mean?

JOHNNA (CONT’D)
He was kissing and grabbing her.
This information settles in... then Barbara attacks Steve, who’s just gotten to his feet. Karen gets between them. Bill grabs Barbara from behind, trying to pull her away.

BARBARA
I’ll murder you, you prick!

STEVE
I didn’t do anything!

JEAN
Mom, stop it!

KAREN
Settle down --!

BARBARA
You know how old that girl is?

STEVE
(to Jean)
Tell them I didn’t do anything!

BARBARA
She’s fourteen years old!

BARBARA (CONT’D)
Are you out of your goddamn mind?

KAREN
Barbara, just back off!

Karen manages to get Steve up the porch steps and into the house. Barbara, Bill, Jean, and Johnna remain.

BARBARA (CONT’D)
Son-of-a-bitch is a goddamn sociopath!

JEAN
What is the matter with you? Will you please stop freaking out?

BILL
Why don’t you start at the beginning?

BARBARA
What are you even doing up?

BILL
Please, sweetheart, we need to know what went on here.

JEAN
Nothing “went on.” Can we just not make a federal case out of every thing? I came down for a drink, he came in... end of story. All right?
BARBARA
That’s not the end of the story.

BILL
That’s not the end of the story.

JEAN (CONT’D)
We smoked pot, alright? We smoked a little pot, and we were goofing around, and then everything just went crazy.

BARBARA
What have I told you about smoking that shit?! What did I say?

BILL
Then Johnna just chose to attack him with a shovel?

JEAN (CONT’D)
It’s no big deal, nothing happened.

BARBARA
Just tell me what he did!

JEAN
He didn’t do anything! What’s the big deal?

BILL
The big deal, Jean, is that you’re fourteen years old.

JEAN
Which is only a few years younger than you like ‘em.

Barbara SLAPS Jean; Jean bursts into tears.

JEAN (CONT’D)
I hate you!

BARBARA
Yeah, I hate you too, you little freak!

Jean tries to head into the house. Bill grabs her.

BILL
Jean--

JEAN
Let me go!

Jean pulls free, runs off. Bill gets in Barbara’s face.

BILL
What’s the matter with you?
CONTINUED:

Bill exits, pursuing Jean. Barbara and Johnna are left standing there, then:

WE FOLLOW Barb into the kitchen and up the stairs to --

INT. THE GUEST BEDROOM - NIGHT

Karen is pulling on a sweatshirt, grabbing their clothes, stuffing them into a suitcase.

KAREN
I can do without a speech.

BARBARA
Where is he?

KAREN
Out at the car. We’re leaving. Back to Florida, tonight, now. Me and Steve, together. Want to give me some grief about that?

BARBARA
Now wait just a goddamn --

KAREN
You better find out from Jean exactly what went on before you start pointing fingers. Cause I doubt Jean’s blameless in all this. And I’m not blaming her, just cause I said she’s not blameless doesn’t mean I’ve blamed her. I’m saying she might share in the responsibility. It’s not cut and dried, black and white, good and bad. It lives where everything lives: somewhere in the middle. Where the rest of us live, everyone but you.

BARBARA
Karen--

KAREN
He’s not perfect. Just like the rest of us, down here in the muck. I’m no angel myself. I’ve done some things I’m not proud of. Things you’ll never know about. I may even have to do some things I’m not proud of again. Cause sometimes life puts you in a corner that way.

(MORE)
KAREN (CONT'D)
And I am a human being, after all.
Anyway. You have your own hash to settle. Before you start making speeches to the rest of us.

BARBARA
Right...

KAREN
Come January... I’ll be in Belize. Doesn’t that sound nice?

Karen pushes past Barb, rolling her suitcase behind her.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE AND DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Karen bursts through the screen door, rushes down the steps to Steve’s waiting Ferrari, it’s lights already on, engine running. Throws her suitcase in the back.

Barb steps out onto the porch as it reverses, SLAMS into gear and accelerates down the drive, spewing gravel as it goes.

Bill comes out, watches it disappear with Barbara. Then:

BILL
I’m taking Jean with me, heading back to Colorado in the morning.

But Barb’s still focused on the distant Ferrari.

BILL (CONT’D)
She’s too much for you right now.

BARBARA
Okay.

BILL
I’m sure you’ll find a way to blame me for all this.

BARBARA
Yeah, well...
    (beat)
I can’t make it up to Jean right now. She’s just going to have to wait until I get back to Boulder.

BILL
You and Jean have about forty years left to fight and make up.
BARBARA
(confused)
Why, what happens in forty years?

BILL
You die.

BARBARA
Oh, right.

BILL
I mean --

BARBARA
No. Right. I fail. As a mother, as a daughter, as a wife. I fail.

BILL
No, you don’t.

BARBARA
I’ve physically attacked Mom and Jean in the span of twenty-four hours. You stick around here and I’ll cut off your penis.

BILL
That’s not funny.

He starts back inside.

BARBARA
You’re never coming back to me, are you, Bill?

BILL
Never say never, but...

BARBARA
But no.

BILL
But no.

BARBARA
Even if things don’t work out with you and Marsha.

BILL
Cindy.

BARBARA
Cindy.
BILL
Right. Even if things don’t work out.

BARBARA
And I’m never really going to understand why, am I?

Bill struggles... seems he might have more to say, but then:

BILL
Probably not.

Bill goes. She watches him leave. Fights back tears.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE - DAY

A blistering hot late August day. The Weston house sits in bucolic, heat-weary silence. The driveway no longer crowded with cars. Barb stands nearly where she did the night before, in her sweats and robe. Watching yet another car go.

Their rental, Bill behind the wheel, backing up. Jean in the seat beside him. Jean stares blankly at her mother, as she rolls past. Bill never looks back.

The rental heads down the drive, passing Ivy’s Honda arriving. Bill slows for a moment to let Ivy pass. Then continues on it’s way back to Tulsa and the airport.

Ivy pulls in next to Bev’s big Lincoln. Climbs out. Walks to her sister, looks back to the rental leaving.

IVY
Where are Bill and Jean going?

Barbara doesn’t answer, just stands there.

IVY (CONT’D)
Karen, too?

BARBARA
Yeah...

Barb turns, heads for the house, Ivy follows --

IVY
Is she clean?

BARBARA
She’s moderately clean.
IVY
Moderately?

BARBARA
You don’t like moderately? Then let’s say tolerably.

IVY
Is she clean, or not?

BARBARA
Back off.

IVY
I’m nervous.

BARBARA
Oh Christ, Ivy, not today.

IVY
I have to tell her, don’t I? We’re leaving for New York tomorrow.

BARBARA
That’s not a good idea. For you and Charles to take this any further.

IVY
Where is this coming from?

Barbara heads up the porch steps and into --

INT. THE WESTON HOUSE/KITCHEN - DAY

BARBARA
Lot of fish in the sea. Surely you can rule out the one single man in the world you’re related to.

IVY
I love the man I’m related to--

BARBARA
Fuck love, what a crock of shit. People can convince themselves they love a painted rock.

They find Johnna cooking in the kitchen.

BARBARA (CONT’D)
Looks great. What is it?
JOHNNA
Catfish.

BARRBARA
Bottom feeders, my favorite. You’re nearly fifty years old, Ivy, you can’t go to New York, you’ll break a hip. Eat your catfish.

IVY
I have lived in this town, year in and year out, hoping against hope someone would come into my life—

BARRBARA
Don’t get all Carson McCullers on me. Now wipe that tragic look off your face and eat some catfish.

They head into the dining room, find Violet smoking, working on her jigsaw puzzle.

BARRBARA (CONT’D)
Howdy, Mom.

VIOLET
What’s howdy about it?

BARRBARA
Look, catfish for lunch. Johnna! (to Violet)
You hungry?

VIOLET
Ivy, you should smile. Like me.

Johnna enters from the kitchen.

BARRBARA
Mom needs her lunch, please.

VIOLET
I’m not hungry.

BARRBARA
You haven’t eaten anything today. You didn’t eat anything yesterday.

VIOLET
I’m not hungry.

IVY
Why aren’t either of you dressed?
BARBARA
We’re dressed. We’re not sitting here naked, are we?

VIOLET
Yeah...

Johnna reenters with plates, then goes.

BARBARA
Eat.

VIOLET
No.

BARBARA
Eat it. Mom? Eat it.

VIOLET
No.

BARBARA
Eat it, you fucker. Eat that catfish.

VIOLET
Go to hell.

BARBARA
That doesn’t cut any fucking ice with me. Now eat that fucking fish.

IVY
Mom, I have something to talk to you--

BARBARA
No you don’t.

IVY
Barbara--

BARBARA
No you don’t. Shut up. Shut the fuck up.

IVY
Please--

VIOLET
What’s to talk about?

IVY
Mom--
BARBARA
Forget it. Eat that fucking fish.

VIOLET
I’m not hungry.

BARBARA
Eat it.

VIOLET
NO!

IVY
Mom, I need to--!

VIOLET
NO!

IVY
MOM!

BARBARA
EAT THE FISH, BITCH!

IVY
MOM, PLEASE!

VIOLET
Barbara...!

BARBARA
Okay, fuck it, do what you want.

IVY
I have to tell you something.

BARBARA
Ivy’s a lesbian.

IVY
Barbara--

VIOLET
No, you’re not.

IVY
No, I’m not--

BARBARA
Yes, you are. Did you eat your fish?

IVY
Barbara, stop it!
BARBARA
Eat your fish.

IVY
Barbara!

BARBARA
Eat your fish.

VIOLET
Barbara, quiet now--

IVY
Mom, please, this is important --

BARBARA
Eat your fish eat your fish eat your fish--

Ivy stands, hurls her plate of food, smashes it.

BARBARA (CONT’D)
What the fuck --

IVY
I have something to say.

BARBARA
Are we breaking shit?

Barbara takes a vase from the sideboard, smashes it.

BARBARA (CONT’D)
’cause I can break shit --

Violet throws her plate, smashes it.

BARBARA (CONT’D)
See, we can all break shit.

IVY
Charles and I --

BARBARA
You don’t want to break shit with me, muthah-fuckah --

IVY
Charles and I --

BARBARA
Johnna?! Little spill in here!

Ivy gets in Barbara’s face.
IVY
Barbara, stop it!
(returning to Violet)
Mom, Charles and I --

BARBARA
Little Charles --

IVY
Charles and I --

BARBARA
Little Charles --

IVY
Barbara --

BARBARA
You have to say Little Charles or she won’t know who you’re talking about.

IVY
Little Charles and I...

Barbara relents. Ivy will finally get to say the words.

IVY (CONT’D)
Little Charles and I are --

VIOLET
Little Charles and you are brother and sister. I know that.

Freeze. Silence.

BARBARA
Oh... Mom.

IVY
What? No, listen, Little Charles --

VIOLET
I’ve always known that. I told you, no one slips anything by me.

IVY
Mom --

BARBARA
Don’t listen.
VIOLET
I knew the whole time Bev and Mattie Fae were carrying on. Charlie should have known too, if he wasn’t smoking all that grass.

BARBARA
It’s the pills talking.

VIOLET
Your father tore himself up over it, thirty some-odd years, but Beverly wouldn’t have been Beverly if he didn’t have plenty to brood about.

IVY
Mom, what are you...?

BARBARA
Oh honey...

VIOLET
Better you girls know now though, now you’re older. Never know when someone might need a kidney.

Ivy looks from Violet to Barbara... suddenly lurches away from the table, knocking over her chair.

IVY
Why in God’s name did you tell me this?

VIOLET
Hey, what do you care?

IVY
You’re monsters.

VIOLET
Come on now --

IVY
Monsters...

VIOLET
Who’s the injured party here?

Ivy flees from the dining room, pursued by Barbara --
INT. FRONT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

BARBARA
Ivy, listen --

IVY
Leave me alone.

BARBARA
When Mattie Fae told me, I didn’t know what to do --

Ivy runs from the house.

EXT. WESTON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ivy rushes to her car, still followed by Barbara.

BARBARA
I was trying to protect you --

IVY
We’ll go anyway, we’ll still go away.

Ivy gets in the car, starts it, revs the engine. Barbara tries to open the car door.

BARBARA
This is not my fault.

Barbara pounds on the car window.

BARBARA (CONT’D)
I didn’t tell you, Mom told you!
It wasn’t me, it was Mom!

The car window slides down.

IVY
There’s no difference.

Ivy floors the car, roars out of the driveway, leaving Barb standing there. After a moment, Barb turns, stares up at the house, angry, resolute. Starts back inside.

INT. WESTON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Finds Violet still at the table, lighting a cigarette.
VIOLET
We couldn’t let Ivy run off with
Little Charles. Just wouldn’t be
right.

Barbara doesn’t respond, keeps her distance.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
She’ll be back. She’s a sweet girl,
Ivy, and I love her to death. But she
isn’t strong. Not like you. Or me.

BARBARA
You knew about Daddy and Mattie Fae?

VIOLET
Oh sure. I never told them I knew.
But your father knew. He knew I knew.
But we never talked about it. I chose
the higher ground.

(and then)
If I’d had the chance, there at the
end, I would’ve told him, “I hope this
isn’t about Little Charles, cause you
know I know all about that.” If I’d
reached him at that motel, I would’ve
said, “You’d be better off if you quit
sulking about this ancient history.”

BARBARA
...what motel?

VIOLET
I called over there on Monday after I
got into that safety deposit box. But
it was too late, he’d checked out.

BARBARA
How did you know where he was?

Violet is growing agitated with the interrogation.

VIOLET
The note. He said I could call him
over at the Country Squire Motel --

BARBARA
He left a note?

VIOLET
And I did, I called him on Monday.
BARBARA
After you got the money out of your safety deposit box...

VIOLET
We had an arrangement. You have to understand, for people like your father and me, who never had any money, ever, as kids, people from our generation, that money is important.

BARBARA
If you could’ve stopped Daddy from killing himself, you wouldn’t have needed to get into your safety deposit box.

VIOLET
Well, hindsight’s always twenty-twenty, isn’t it?

Barbara stares at her mother for a long moment. Then --

BARBARA
Did the note say he was going to kill himself?

No response.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
Mom?

VIOLET
If I had my wits about me, I might’ve done it different. But I was, your father and me both, we were...

Barbara looks off, quietly:

BARBARA
You were both fucked-up... You were fucked-up... You are fucked-up.

VIOLET
You’d better understand this, you smug little ingrate. There’s only one reason Beverly killed himself and that’s you. Think there’s any way he would’ve done what he did if you were still here? No, just him and me, here in this house, in the dark, left to ourselves, abandoned, wasted lifetimes devoted to your care and comfort.

(MORE)
SO STICK THAT KNIFE OF JUDGMENT IN ME, GO AHEAD, BUT MAKE NO MISTAKE, HIS BLOOD IS JUST AS MUCH ON YOUR HANDS AS IT IS ON MINE.

Barbara is reeling, trying to comprehend.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
He did this though, not us. Can you imagine anything more cruel, to make me responsible? Just to weaken me, make me prove my character? So I waited, to get my hands on that safety deposit box. But I would have waited anyway. You want to show who’s stronger, Bev? Nobody’s stronger than me, goddamn it. When nothing is left, when everything is gone and disappeared, I’ll be here.

Violet YELLS up to the empty house.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
Who’s stronger now, you son-of-a-bitch?!

Barbara feels sick, the floor giving away beneath her. She takes a moment. Then:

BARBARA
You’re right, Mom. You’re the strong one.

She goes to her mother, kisses her. Turns, heads into the hall, grabs her purse and Bev’s keys from the dish.

Violet only slowly realizes Barbara’s gone.

VIOLET
...Barbara?

Hears the sound of the screen door opening and SLAPPING shut.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
Barbara?

Violet follows her into the hall, stops at the screen door.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
You and me. We’re alike.

Barb doesn’t turn around, keeps moving. Quietly:
BARBARA

No...

Sees Barb heading across the yard for Beverly’s pick-up.

VIOLET
Barbara, please.

BARBARA
I’m nothing like you...

VIOLET
Please, Barbara.

Watches Barbara climb into the truck, back slowly out, go.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
...Barbara?

Barbara drives off. The driveway now empty again. Violet alone outside on the walkway. She turns back to the house, yelling, moving from empty room to empty room.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
Ivy?! Ivy, you here?!

Silence. The dining room, the kitchen.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
Barb?! Ivy?!

And into the living room, Bev’s study.

VIOLET (CONT’D)
Bev?! ...Bev?!

She stumbles to the stereo, puts on her Clapton... stares at the spinning album...

VIOLET (CONT’D)
Johnna?!

She reels to the stairs, crawling up --

INT/EXT. BEVERLY’S PICK-UP (MOVING) - DAY

Barbara is nearly catatonic as she drives, the house receding in the rear window behind her.

A few large rain drops splatter her windshield, the rumble of distant thunder, lightning and towering, ominous clouds in the distance.
INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY/ATTIC STAIRS - DAY

Violet climbs the staircase on all fours.

    VIOLET
    Johnna... Johnna... Johnna...

Johnna sets down her TS Elliot, goes to Violet, holds
Violet’s head, smooths her hair, rocks her. Quietly --

    VIOLET (CONT’D)
    And then you’re gone, and Beverly,
    and then you’re gone, and Barbara,
    and then you’re gone, and then
    you’re gone, and then you’re gone --

Johnna quietly sings to Violet.

    JOHNNA                                      VIOLET
    “This is the way the world ends...”          --and then you’re gone, and
    then you’re gone --

INT. BEVERLY’S PICK-UP - DAY

ON Barbara as she drives --

    JOHNNA (OS)
    “...this is the way the world ends,
    this is the way the world ends...”

    VIOLET (OS)
    --and then you’re gone, and then
    you’re gone...

We stay on Barb as she slowly pulls herself back together.
Brushes tears from her cheeks. Laughs darkly. Notices her
hands are shaking from the adrenaline.

Slows, pulls the pick-up to the side of the road at the top
of a small rise. Climbs out, stares out over the miles of
prairie. The wind gently ruffles her clothing, her hair.

CLOSE ON her as she settles into exhausted relief, unsure of
what comes next, but finally on her way as we --

    FADE TO BLACK.