

SHORT TERM 12

by

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OVER BLACK:

MASON (O.S.)
Don't worry about it. On my first
day, I forgot everything they
taught me in those classes.

NATE (O.S.)
Really?

EXT. GROUP HOME, COTTAGE -- MORNING

Standing in a circle is MASON, late-20s, a hug-able bear with
a good heart and sense of humor. JESSICA, 20s with a
clipboard, quiet, confident and looks like she could kick
some ass, and NATE, 20s, skinny and nervous as hell.

MASON
Yeah, I mean, day one's always a
little tough. It's like, you know,
no matter how the training goes,
there's always room for something
that's just totally unpredictable.
(realizing)
Oh, I've got a pretty good story
for you if you're ready for it.

NATE
Ok.

JESSICA
Hey, what's up?

NATE
Hey.

MASON
Did you guys meet?

NATE
No. Nate.

JESSICA
Hi.

NATE
Hey.

JESSICA
Jessica.

NATE
...Jessica.

MASON
Okay, listen up, so, this was like,
my first week on the job, and I'm
at gate duty.

NATE
What's that?

Grace hops off her bike and walks it up to a small group standing outside of the building.

Grace jumps in. Mason sees her for the first time.

GRACE
If a kid wants to leave, legally,
we can't stop them. So we put
someone at the gate to try to talk
them out of it.

MASON
Whoa. You got here quick.

GRACE
Yes I did. Good morning.

JESSICA
Hi.

MASON
Nate, this is Grace, she's your new
boss.

GRACE
Oh.

NATE
Hey.

GRACE
Hi. Nice to meet you.

NATE
Nice to meet you.

She shakes Nate's hand.

GRACE
I would lose the tie if I were you.
And if you're listening to a story
of Mason's, understand that there's
very little reality in it.

MASON
Hey, don't piss in the water before
we put our toes in.

Jessica hands Grace a clipboard of the night's report.

JESSICA
(to Grace)
Night shift was pretty mellow.

She goes through it as Mason entertains.

MASON

Okay, so, Grace, my wonderful new boss at the time. She leaves me at my gate duty for like 3 hours without a bathroom break, and I'm dying, because I ate the tacos that they serve here, and she failed to tell me that they're a known laxative. So, this kid, 16 years old, this big fucking intimidating dude, he's like a foot taller than me, he walks up, and he just cruises out the gate. It's my second day, so I don't know what the hell is going on, but Grace? She's standing right there and she just let's it happen.

GRACE

(interrupting)

Whatever, what I saw was Mason just sitting there, and Wesley smiling at me from the opposite side of the gate, because he knows that we can't touch him.

NATE

Why not?

GRACE

Once they're a foot outside the gate we can't touch 'em.

MASON

So Grace tells me to follow him, so I do. For hours, just walking, 8 feet behind him. Eventually, he gets on this bus, so, I get on the bus too. And at this point, I can't think of anything but whatever the hell these tacos are doing to my bowels, so I make up my mind, fuck this, I got to get off at the next stop or I'm going to lose it in my shorts right in front of all these people. And exactly as I make this decision, Wesley leans his big-ass head over to me from across the aisle and he says really calm, "I'm getting off at the next stop, and if you do too, I'm going to rip your fucking balls off and feed 'em to you."

NATE

Holy shit.

GRACE

Remember what I said.

MASON
 (to Grace)
 Hey now, this part is true, I was there.

GRACE
 Really? Are you sure?

MASON
 Yeah.
 (to Nate)
 So, bus stops. He gets off. I wait a second, I go over to the door, but he's just standing there on the sidewalk like 10 feet away, staring at me, waiting. What can I do? I have no other choice. So, I step off the bus, and the second that my feet touch the ground, it is like a knot in my asshole unties, and the fiesta in my stomach just comes pouring down my legs.

Jessica, Nate and Grace can't help but laugh.

MASON (CONT'D)
 So I'm just standing there, shit gushing down my thighs, I ruin my fuckin' favorite Nike's, and Wesley's just there, doubled over, losing it. I mean, he's fuckin' laughing so hard -

BOOM! The door from the unit flies open and Sammy comes running out in his underwear, swinging his doll around.

SAMMY
 Wooooohooooo!!!!

He takes off into the yard. Grace immediately takes off after him. Mason follows right behind.

MASON
 Here we go Nate!

NATE
 Wait, what?

GRACE
 Come on, Nate!

Nate looks to Jessica, real nervous.

JESSICA
 Go!

Nate runs after them.

Grace and Mason begin to gain on Sammy.

GRACE

Sammy!

Sammy fakes them out a couple of times, making them work for it.

Grace finally gets close enough to grab him. Sammy hoots, like he's having a blast.

Mason grabs his arm.

SAMMY

Let me go you fucking perverts!

Nate catches up.

GRACE

Nate, grab his feet please.

Nate nervously follows directions, grabbing the boy's feet. Together, Mason and Nate force him to sit down on the grass. Sammy SCREAMS!

MASON

We're just going to sit down here on the grass until you de-escalate.

SAMMY

De-escalate my asshole you duck fuckers!

The three sit down in the grass as Mason smiles to himself.

MASON

I'm not quite sure what you mean by that.

Grace holds Sammy's feet.

GRACE

You know the drill Sammy, just let it pass.

Sammy keeps struggling, but quickly realizes he can't do anything.

MASON

You alright buddy?

Sammy breathes heavily.

MASON (CONT'D)

You got pretty far that time, I think it's a new record.

The three sit until things calm down.

And when it's finally calm, Mason continues like nothing happened.

MASON (CONT'D)

So anyway, after all that, he ends up coming back with me, but only because he's so excited to tell everyone on our unit that I pooped my pants. And he does. He tells everyone, somehow it even got back to my mom. You heard that story, right Sammy?

Sammy catches his breath...he shakes his head "no", then nods "yes", then no again.

JESSICA

How you guys doing over there!

Jessica watches them from the door.

MASON

Fantastic!

GRACE

How ya feeling Sammy? You got it all out?

Sammy looks exhausted.

GRACE (CONT'D)

You wanna go take a nap?

Sammy nods.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Alright. Let's get you up.

(to Nate)

Alright, i'll see you back at the office.

Nate nods nervously as she walks off.

MASON

Welcome to Short Term 12, man.

Mason stands Sammy up.

NATE

Alright.

CREDIT SEQUENCE INTRODUCING THE GROUP HOME

INT. COOL DOWN ROOM -- MORNING

A static shot of the "Cool Down Room," a toy punching bag bobbing in the center.

INT. GIRL'S ROOM 1 -- MORNING

A large girl, lies in bed, feet on the wall, head hanging off the side, looking at the world upside down, filing her nails with a non-metal file.

INT. GIRL'S BATHROOM -- MORNING

A girl sits on the toilet (fully clothed) with wet hair wrapped in a towel, applying Nair to her legs.

INT. GIRL'S ROOM 2 -- MORNING

One girl braids another girl's hair.

INT. MARCUS' ROOM -- MORNING

MARCUS, 17, an intimidating quiet presence, sits on his bed reading a science book. He pinches some worms into a fishbowl and watches his pet fighting fish gobble them up.

INT. LUIS' ROOM -- MORNING

LUIS, 15, sleeps in bed with a pillow between his legs, drooling on his sheets. Family photos cover his wall.

INT. BOY'S BATHROOM -- MORNING

A few of the boys are at the sink, brushing their teeth and popping their zits.

INT. GIRL'S BATHROOM -- MORNING

A few of the girls are at the sink, plucking eyebrows w/ wooden tweezers, applying eye liner, brushing or flossing.

INT. SAMMY'S ROOM -- MORNING

SAMMY, 14 and small for his age, sits on his bed in only his white briefs, playing with his dolls. Piled on his bed are dozens of dolls and stuffed animals meant for a little girl. A big American flag is stuck to the wall behind him.

He grabs one of his dolls and makes her fly, standing up on his bed and bouncing high. Holding her up into the air.

END CREDIT SEQUENCE

INT. GROUP HOME, LOBBY BATHROOM -- MORNING

Grace fills a Super-Soaker water gun with water, screws the container back onto the gun.

She looks down at herself, at her stomach.

INT. GROUP HOME OFFICE -- MORNING

Grace briskly walks into the office. She grabs a big red binder from the counter-top and hands it to Nate, waiting nervously on the side. She doesn't stop for him, heading for the door.

GRACE
These are the files on our kids, to
give you an idea of some of the
crap they've been through.

Nate begins to thumb through the binder as Grace looks in her backpack.

NATE
How long do they stay here?

GRACE
Supposedly less than a year, but
some have been here for over 3. We
just keep 'em until the county
figures out where they go next.

Grace pulls a pair of jeans from her backpack. She looks out the window into the lounge and sees a kid lying on the couch. She pounds on the window.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Tom! Go brush your teeth!

She then turns to see Nate react to one of the files.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Remember, you're not their parent,
and you're not their therapist.
You're here to create a safe
environment for them, that's it.

NATE
Got it.

GRACE
And they're going to try to test
you to see what they can get away
with, so for now, just say no for a
while.

NATE
No. Okay.

GRACE
You have to kinda be an asshole
before you can be their friend.
(beat)
You're gonna be fine.

Grace walks out the door.

INT. GROUP HOME HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

GRACE
Community meeting is in 5 minutes!
(beat)
Luis, you better be up!

She storms into Luis's room, cocking her water gun.

INT. LUIS' ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Grace marches in to find Luis still sleeping. She rips the covers off him and pulls his pillow out from under his legs. She pumps the water gun a few more times and crouches to one knee, taking aim like a Navy seal.

Luis slowly opens his eyes and looks at her. She smiles at him coyly.

LUIS
So this is how it's going to be?

She nods.

GRACE
You got 5 seconds.

Luis smiles.

LUIS
(in spanish)
You don't have the balls.

He closes his eyes with a smile.

Grace aims for the head.

INT. GROUP HOME HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Luis SCREAMS from inside his room and comes running out, chased by a cold stream of water.

LUIS
(laughing)
Okay okay okay okay!

Grace doesn't stop, laughing and chasing him all the way to the bathroom.

Mason walks down the hall, carrying a pile of folded towels. A few other boys gather at their doorways with big smiles. Mason shouts into the bathroom.

MASON
(spanish)
I told you not to mess with her!

Grace shoots a stream right in Mason's face, puts the gun on his pile of towels, and keeps walking down the hall. Mason takes it without flinching.

MASON (CONT'D)
I love you too. That's not cool.

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- CONTINUOUS

All the kids are talking to each other as Grace takes a seat. There are 14 of them (7 boys & 7 girls) sitting in a circle. Sammy is holding one of his dolls.

GRACE
Kendra, can you be secretary for us today?

KENDRA, a bored girl, shrugs.

KENDRA
Sure, I guess.

GRACE
Thank you.

Grace tosses Kendra a tablet and pencil to take notes.

KENDRA
Community meeting is now in session!
(beat)
Community announcements.

Kendra surveys the room.

KENDRA (CONT'D)
No announcements?

Grace looks around the room at the dead faces. No one wants to participate.

GRACE
What's going on you guys? You look a little dead.

She looks back to Mason.

GRACE (CONT'D)
What'd you do to them?

MASON
I don't know. I farted when I was outside, maybe some of it followed me in.

LUIS
You shart yourself again?

MASON
No, Luis, I did not shart, thank
you very much. And that happened
one time and you weren't even here
yet, so...

LUIS
It's still funny.

GRACE
Ok, are we done. I've heard that
story like three times today.

MASON
Yeah, it's a good story.

LUIS
It *is* a good story.

GRACE
Okay, well, if no one has any non-
poop-related announcements, I have
one. As most of you are already
aware, Marcus is turning 18, and
will be leaving us.

LUIS
(taunting Marcus)
Can I have his room?

Marcus doesn't like that comment.

GRACE
We're going to be throwing him a
little party next week. Marcus,
you have any requests?

Marcus thinks about it for a second.

MARCUS
Can I shave my head?

GRACE
I was talking about food for the
party.

MARCUS
I don't want food, I just wanna
shave my head.

She shoots a look to Mason, who shrugs.

GRACE
Okay, as long as I hold the razor.

MARCUS
That's cool.

Cam holds on Marcus as Grace goes on.

GRACE
Okay, everyone else. Thoughts, food
for Marcus' party. What are we
gonna do?

LUIS
Cheetos!

SAMMY
Carne Fries!

KENDRA
KFC!

All the kids begin to shout their orders in a chaotic chorus.

GRACE
Okay, okay! Everyone, one at a
time!

Luis raises his hand. Grace looks at him.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Luis, thank you for raising your
hand.

LUIS
Who's that weird guy?

Luis points to Nate.

GRACE
Oh, that is Nate. Please do not be
jerks to him. It is first day.
(to Nate)
You wanna introduce yourself?

Nate smiles and waves.

NATE
Um, Sure. Yeah, um. As you know my
name is Nate and I, uh, just, uh, I
took a year off of school to get
some life experience and I've
always wanted to work with
underprivileged kids.

MARCUS
What the fuck is that supposed to
mean?

GRACE
Marcus, settle down.

MARCUS
No, I wanna know what you mean by
that 'underprivileged'.

NATE
That's not what I meant.

MARCUS
Then think about your fuckin' words
before you speak. Newbie.

GRACE
Hey! That's a level drop. Go to
your room.

Marcus stares at her, letting her know he doesn't have to go
if he doesn't want to. Grace doesn't back down, not the
least bit intimidated.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Go to your room.

Finally, he gets up and walks to his room.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Um, levels and feelings, you know
the drill...let's start with you
Luis.

She tosses him the little stuffed bear.

LUIS
Green, fine.

As the kids each take turns tossing the bear and saying their
levels and feelings, Grace looks off in Marcus' direction,
scratching the corner of her thumb with her fingernail.

Mason notices her.

CUT TO:

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE-- LATER

The phone RINGS. Grace picks up while writing a report on
Marcus' blow-up.

GRACE
Short Term 12 this is Grace.
(pause)
Right now?

INT. GROUP HOME JACK'S OFFICE -- DAY

Grace sits in an office, staring at a big, ugly, yellow lamp
in the corner of the room. JACK, an old guy with glasses,
finishes an email on his computer, typing very slow and loud.
He talks while he types.

JACK
So what do you think?

GRACE

Hm?

JACK

The new lamp.

She looks at the very normal looking lamp.

JACK (CONT'D)

It's really a trip. You can turn it on and off by just touching the metal part. Try it.

Grace reaches over and touches the lamp a few times, taking it through its various levels of illumination.

JACK (CONT'D)

Cool, huh?

He turns to Grace.

Grace shrugs and gives him a slight nod that says, "Maybe a little."

JACK (CONT'D)

Look I'm suppose to be in a group session like right now. You mind if we walk and talk?

Jack gets up and grabs a couple folders from his desk.

CUT TO:

EXT. GROUP HOME, COTTAGE -- DAY

Jack and Grace walk down the sidewalk passing the cottages. A small group of kids play dodge-ball in the foreground, supervised by a couple staff members. Kids and social workers pass through frame in the background.

Jack fumbles through his folders and hands her a file.

JACK

This is Jayden, she just got appointed to us this morning. Her father's a friend of a friend. Real nice guy, very cultured.

GRACE

Why isn't she with him?

JACK

He lost his wife a few years back and Jayden hasn't made it very easy for him. The past couple years she's been in and out of group homes for dangerous behavior. Last week she bit her therapist's nose.

GRACE

Great.

JACK

Yeah, so we'll have her during the week, but she has weekend home visits.

GRACE

Alright.

JACK

I told her father we'd take good care of her.

GRACE

I take good care of everyone.

Jack looks directly at her, a small smile on his face, reminding her who's in charge.

JACK

I know you do. That's why I'm trusting you to do the same for Jayden.

GRACE

(let's it go)

When does she get here?

Jack looks at his watch.

JACK

She might be here already.

He walks into his meeting.

INT. GROUP HOME OFFICE -- DAY

JAYDEN, 15, in worn jeans and high-tops with scribbles all over them, sits on the floor surrounded by all her belongings, drawing in a sketchbook, fixated on a dead roach lying on its back a few feet away.

GRACE

I like your name, Jayden.

JAYDEN

It's a boy's name.

GRACE

Really? I didn't think so.

JAYDEN

Will Smith did.

Grace goes through the last of her bags. She pulls out a belt and adds it to the pile of contraband. She pulls out a pair of scissors.

GRACE

Okay, well these things you can't keep in your room, but we'll keep it in a closet out here, and you can check it out whenever you want 'em.

JAYDEN

Yep, I know the rules: no belts, no razors, no scissors, no fucking freedom.

GRACE

No cussing.

JAYDEN

Oh shit, I forgot about that one.

Grace smiles at her and shakes her head, amused.

GRACE

I'm gonna let that one slide, only cause it was clever.

Grace heads to the door.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Let's go see your room.

Jayden watches her, wondering if this one may be different.

INT. JAYDEN'S ROOM -- DAY

GRACE

Here it is.

Jayden throws her stuff on the bed, including her sketch pad.

JAYDEN

Wow, it's so inviting.

GRACE

You can put up whatever you want on the walls, as long as it's appropriate.

JAYDEN

So no pictures of penises?

GRACE

Not unless they're very scientific.

Jayden walks over to check out the closet. Grace sees Jayden's sketch book and a really cool drawing of a dead roach with balloons tied to its feet, floating through the sky. Grace picks it up and smiles.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Oh, wow. This is really cool.

Jayden grabs the sketchbook and closes it.

JAYDEN
That's crap.

GRACE
If you call that crap, I'm jealous.

Grace takes in a breath and realizes Jayden doesn't want to chat.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Put your clothes outside the door before bedtime and the over-nighters will wash them. And, um, you can't keep your door closed...

JAYDEN
I don't do that anymore.

GRACE
I'm not saying you do...

JAYDEN
And if I did ever want to cut myself, keeping the fucking door cracked isn't going to stop me.

GRACE
I warned you about cussing. That one's gonna be a level drop.

JAYDEN
Oh no, a level drop, what am I going to do?

Grace looks at her for a moment before responding.

GRACE
Your attitude is not helping either one of us.

Jayden puts in her headphones. Grace watches her for a moment, then walks out of the room.

INT. GIRL'S ROOM 1 -- AFTERNOON

Kendra lies in bed, feet on the wall, filing her nails with a non-metal file.

INT. SAMMY'S ROOM -- AFTERNOON

Sammy plays with a plastic dinosaur.

INT. MARCUS' ROOM -- AFTERNOON

Marcus stares at his fish.

INT. GROUP HOME OFFICE -- AFTERNOON

Grace signs out her hours for the day and puts the binder away.

EXT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- AFTERNOON

Mason stands with Nate, smoking a cigarette after work. Nate has a back-pack on. Grace unlocks her bicycle.

NATE
What happened to that guy?

MASON
What guy?

NATE
The big kid who made you poop your pants.

MASON
Wesley?

GRACE
He ran away again, and then two days later someone found him dead in the bushes.

NATE
What?

GRACE
That's the real ending to the story.

MASON
I don't like that part.

Mason takes a drag as Grace gets on her bike.

MASON (CONT'D)
Sure you're not coming with me.

GRACE
I'm gonna clear my head.

She rides off.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Good first day Nate!

NATE
(unsure)
Thank you.

MASON
(sarcastic)
See ya!

NATE
Alright, man

MASON
Yeah, take it easy. See you
tomorrow.

He takes another drag.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREETS -- AFTERNOON

Grace rides her bike.

EXT. WOMEN'S CARE CLINIC -- AFTERNOON

Grace locks her bike to a railing.

INT. WOMEN'S CARE CLINIC LOBBY -- AFTERNOON

Grace sits in a waiting room with 4 teenage girls. She's visibly awkward and out of place. NURSE BETH, a plump 40 year-old with a weathered face, walks out from the back with a clipboard in hand.

NURSE BETH
Grace? Come on in, hon.

Grace gets up and walks back with her.

INT. WOMEN'S CARE CLINIC OFFICE -- AFTERNOON

Nurse Beth sits at her desk, looking at the testing results on the clipboard. She has a kind, motherly tone in her voice.

NURSE BETH
So, the test did come back
positive.

GRACE
(sarcastic)
Lovely.

NURSE BETH
How are you feeling?

GRACE
I already took like seven of those
tests at home, so I'm not really
surprised.

NURSE BETH
Okay, well you have a few options
to explore. And we can go over them-

GRACE
(interrupting)
Can we just make an appointment for
Saturday?

Nurse Beth looks at her, wondering if she's really thought it through.

NURSE BETH
You don't want to hear the other options?

GRACE
No.

Nurse Beth looks at her, looks down at Grace's hands.

NURSE BETH
Okay.

She grabs another clipboard.

NURSE BETH (CONT'D)
Have you ever been pregnant before?

Grace is a little thrown off.

GRACE
One time.

Grace picks at the corner of her thumb.

EXT. GRACE'S APARTMENT -- EVENING

Grace turns to see if anyone is watching her as she walks to her front door.

Grace stands outside her apartment door. She takes in a deep breath, composes herself, practices a fake smile, and walks in.

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT KITCHEN -- EVENING

Grace walks into her apartment to find Mason, wearing a tall chef's hat, cooking some authentic Mexican dish in the kitchen.

He turns to see her and smiles.

MASON
Hey stinker, what took you so long?

GRACE
(avoiding the question)
Oh, no. I didn't know you still had that stupid hat.

MASON
I will always have this stupid hat.

GRACE
What's going on in here?

MASON

Well since you were out cheating on me with your bike, I decided I'd make myself some chili rellenos, homemade tortillas, and my mom's famous salsa.

He uncovers the pot to let her have a whiff.

GRACE

Mmm. Looks like there's enough for two.

MASON

No, I doubt it.

GRACE

Mase, you don't have to be jealous of Floyd.

MASON

(laughing)

Floyd? Your bike has a name now?

GRACE

Of course he does. We're very close.

MASON

I don't know what you see in him.

GRACE

Nice grip. Comfy seat.

MASON

There is NO way his seat is as comfy as mine.

Grace smiles and touches his arm apologetically.

GRACE

You're right. I think I'm gonna go take a shower.

(while leaving)

Floyd got me all sweaty.

Mason smiles and shakes his head.

MASON

I hate that bike!

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT BATHROOM -- LATER

Grace sits in the shower, letting the water pummel her. She lets a glob of spit fall from her mouth. Lost. Empty. Scared.

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT LIVING ROOM -- EVENING

Two empty plates of (authentic Mexican dish) sit on the coffee table with a pot and wooden ladle.

Mason and Grace sit on the couch, facing each other, sketching in two separate tablets. They both are glancing up at each other and making adjustments to their illustrations.

GRACE
Okay, I'm done with mine.

MASON
Uh, yeah, okay. Yep, almost there.

GRACE
There's some crazy last minute changes you're making.

MASON
I really suck at noses.

MASON (CONT'D)
Okay. You go.

She turns hers over. It's a really great drawing of Mason smiling with a messy beard and stick-out ears.

MASON (CONT'D)
Aw, damn it. Yours are always so good.
(looking)
I look like a homeless guy though.

GRACE
You do kind of look like a homeless guy.

MASON
What's that on my face there?

He points to a spot on his beard.

GRACE
Oh, that. Well that's the piece of avocado that's on your beard.

MASON
(smiling)
No, no. Fuck.

He wipes the avocado off his beard.

GRACE
It's been there the whole time.

MASON
Ooo, yeah. Thank you for saying something sooner.

MASON (CONT'D)
Okay, alright here we go. Just take
it easy okay cause you're gonna
freak out when you see this. I
think it's my best one yet. Okay.

Mason flips his book to reveal the worst portrait of someone
ever drawn. Grace is incredibly distorted, doesn't look
anything like her, and has a HORRIBLE nose.

Grace laughs.

MASON (CONT'D)
Come on. You can't fuck with that.

GRACE
I can't fuck with that.

GRACE (CONT'D)
That nose is amazing.

MASON
Yeah, I was going for kind of a
mushroomy thing.

GRACE
Is that a beard?

MASON
No, I was trying to shade. I think
it looks pretty cool.

GRACE
What's going on on my head?

She points to the bed of flowers growing out of her head.

MASON
These? Flowers. They represent the
peculiar thoughts that grow out of
your gorgeous mind.

Grace smiles.

She meets his eyes for a moment and is reminded of how much
she loves him.

GRACE
Why are you so nice to me?

MASON
Are we being serious now?

Grace nods.

MASON (CONT'D)
Well, it's easy. It's because you
are the weirdest, most beautiful
person I have ever met in my whole
entire life.

Grace likes that. She leans in and gives him a really good
kiss.

MASON (CONT'D)
Whoa.

GRACE
What?

MASON
I don't know. It's just been a
long time since you've kissed me
like that.

Grace thinks about it.

GRACE
That's not true.

MASON
Uh huh. We haven't had sex in 9
days and 13 hours.

GRACE
Down to the hour, huh?

MASON
Did I do something?

Grace shakes her head.

GRACE
No, you're wonderful.

MASON
What is it then?

Grace looks away. She begins to scratch her thumb. Mason
notices and gently holds her hand to stop her.

MASON (CONT'D)
Please, you're gonna have to let me
in your head every once in a while
or I'm gonna go nuts...

Grace grabs his face with both hands and shushes him.

GRACE
Shhhh shhhh. Shhhh.

She kisses him on the cheek, the nose, the corner of his
mouth.

She pushes her lips against his and pulls him down onto the couch. She grabs Mason's hands and guides them, through her hair, her face, her neck, down her side, to her legs. He slides his hand along her skin, gently, carefully, always making sure that it's what she wants.

MASON

Are you gonna do this just for me?

She kisses him again and moves his hand up her legs, high under her shorts. Her breathing quickens. He slides his hand down her belly, slipping into her underwear, pausing there, reading her skin like brail. She obviously wants him to keep going, but he waits for eye contact to be sure. She looks at him, her hand tapping the back of his head with anticipation.

MASON (CONT'D)

You okay?

GRACE

Yeah.

MASON

Yeah?

MASON (CONT'D)

You don't want me to stop?

She shakes her head, and then he touches her. She gasps.

Mason kisses her again. Her legs pinch tightly around his hand. Her breathing quickens. The pleasure overcomes her and she loses control, pushing up against him. Eyes closed, gasping for air, squeezing his hair between her fingers. And then.

GRACE

(quietly)

Stop.

MASON

What?

GRACE

Stop!

Grace hits him hard with a straight palm to the nose and kicks him to the floor.

MASON

Ah! Shit!

She quickly curls up into the fetal position on the couch.

Mason touches his nose, bright red and bleeding.

MASON (CONT'D)

Uh...what the hell Grace?

She stays curled up on the couch without an answer.

He gets up and walks to the bathroom.

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT, BATHROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Mason stands at the mirror, washing the blood from his face. He takes a moment to let the frustration go.

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT -- MOMENTS LATER

Mason sits on the couch with Grace's head in his lap, stroking her hair. He holds his head back with a bloody tissue to his nose.

FADE OUT:

EXT. GROUP HOME, COTTAGE -- MORNING

Grace locks her bike to the gate and walks into the unit.

INT. GROUP HOME, LOUNGE -- MORNING

Grace sits in a circle with her 16 kids, Jessica, Mason and Nate observing.

GRACE

Okay everyone, I think most of you have already met her, but we have a new member in our community. Jayden, would you introduce yourself?

JAYDEN

Um. Please don't be offended if I'm not very friendly, but I'm going to be living with my dad soon, and I don't really like wasting time on short term relationships, so you know, it's nothing personal.

LUIS

Wow, she seems like a really nice girl.

GRACE

Hey! I think we all can respect her space, okay?

(beat)

Okay, what do we wanna play for rec today?

LUIS

Whiffleball!

MARCUS
No man, we always playing that
stupid game.

LUIS
Because you always suck at it.
Until you get good at it, maybe we
can stop playing it.

MARCUS
Watch your mouth, bro.

GRACE
(to Marcus and Luis)
Both of you cut it out.
(to the rest)
Any other suggestions?

Sammy, wearing a girl's top, raises his hand, which is
holding a doll.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Yes, Sammy?

SAMMY
Can we play big and small?

GRACE
Is that a real game or is that a
game you just made up?

SAMMY
It's a real game that I just made
up.

GRACE
Okay, maybe you can explain it to
me later.

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE-- LATER

JESSICA
Straight guys!

All the kids walk out the door in a straight line. Nate and
Mason carry all the equipment for a game of whiffle ball.

Grace walks up to Jessica and holds up a pair of latex
gloves.

GRACE
I'm gonna do room checks. So I'll
meet you out there.

Jessica nods and looks back to her kids.

INT. JAYDEN'S ROOM -- DAY

Grace pulls latex gloves over her fingers.

An upbeat song bumps through Grace's headphones as she goes to work.

She slides her hand across the top of the door, searches the curtains, pulls open a drawer and looks under the clothes.

She flips through a sketch book filled with amazing, emotional drawings. She can't help but look through a little more than she should.

She finds a few sharpie pens and a bottle of black nail polish that she takes as contraband.

As she leaves she shakes her head at Jayden's new wall decor: a few scientific illustrations of penis diagrams, showing all the inner workings of the male genitalia.

INT. SAMMY'S ROOM -- DAY

She looks at all the dolls and stuffed animals on his bed and begins to filter through them, squeezing each one to make sure they're clear.

While looking through a "junk drawer" full of weird toys and knickknacks, she finds an old PHOTO of Sammy and his sister when they were little.

INT. MARCUS'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Grace takes a moment to look closely at Marcus's fish.

GRACE

Hi Nas.

She pulls all the covers off the bed and runs her fingers through them, squeezes a pillow, tilts up a mattress and looks underneath.

About to drop the mattress back down, she notices something: a small strip of tape. She reaches in and carefully peels it off to reveal a small hole.

She carefully pushes her finger in and after a moment of searching, feels something. She carefully pulls out a small bag of marijuana, a pre-rolled joint, and a lighter.

She shakes her head.

EXT. RECREATION AREA -- DAY

The kids are spread out in the grass. Nate crosses his arms like Jessica, trying to be a leader.

KENDRA

Come on guys. Let's go Shawnta,
let's go!

NATE
Alright, we got baseball here.
There you go! You got this!

Shawnta hits the ball into the outfield towards Sammy.

Sammy's in the outfield looking at a bug (still holding his doll). The ball lands close to him.

LUIS
Hey, yo Sammy. Get the ball.

Sammy looks up at the ball but doesn't seem interested.

The girl makes it to home.

Mason walks up to Jayden, sitting in the grass with her headphones on.

Mason sits down next to her.

MASON
What? Too good for this game?

She takes out one of her headphones.

JAYDEN
What?

MASON
You too good for whiffleball?

JAYDEN
I don't like sweat.

Marcus steps up to the plate with the skinny bat.

LUIS
Hey, you know what Connor, just come closer. It's Marcus, he ain't gonna hit it.

LUIS (CONT'D)
You sure you don't want to get the fat bat? No?

Luis pitches the whiffle ball, taunting Marcus, who doesn't swing.

LUIS (CONT'D)
Strike one, everybody. Strike one!

He raises a finger to his teammates.

MARCUS
That wasn't no strike.

LUIS
That was right down the middle.
This is the big leagues boy. Can't
handle it?

MARCUS
Keep flapping them gums.

Kendra and another girl run up to Nate with a jump rope in hand.

KENDRA
Hey, you wanna jump rope with us?

Nate wants to say yes, but remembers what he's told.

NATE
No?

The girls turn away, defeated.

NATE (CONT'D)
Sorry, we're not suppose to...

JESSICA
That's not what we meant.

MASON
(to Jayden)
Can I hear?

She apathetically hands him one of her ear buds.

Grace arrives on the scene. She notices Mason sitting on the sideline with Jayden, listening to the same ipod, bouncing to the same beat.

Luis pitches.

Marcus swings and misses.

MARCUS
Fuck!

LUIS
Strick three! Change it up.

Marcus does his best to curb his frustration. Luis brushes by him, tauntingly.

LUIS (CONT'D)
Bet your mom's excited to see you
next week.

Marcus cocks his head, wondering if he heard correctly. Luis keeps walking but Marcus spins around and swings. BAM! He clocks him hard on the back with the plastic bat.

GRACE

Marcus!

Grace sees it and sprints to them. All the staff rush to the scene.

Luis winces in pain, spins around to face Marcus who grabs him by the face and throws him to the ground.

MARCUS

What'd the fuck you say about my
mom you little bitch?!

Marcus winds up to hit him again, but is pushed away by Grace.

She gets right up in Marcus's face and pushes him.

GRACE

Hey, Hey! What are you doing? Get
your ass over to the bench!

MASON

Guys, get Luis out of here!

JESSICA

Luis, come on, come on.

NATE

(to Luis)
Where does it hurt?

Nate and Jessica take Luis away.

Improvisation: w/ game in session, Jessica and Nate are checking with Luis.

JESSICA

(to Luis)
You okay, man? How do you feel?

NATE

Not good. I mean that was crazy.
They just fight like that?

JESSICA

Nate. I'm not asking you how you're
feeling, okay.

NATE

Right. I'm sorry.
(to Luis)
How are you?

EXT. RECREATION AREA -- MOMENTS LATER

The game is in session.

Grace sits on the bench next to Marcus. They sit in silence for a moment.

GRACE
You need to tell me what the hell
is going on.

Marcus doesn't look up.

Grace reaches into her pocket and pulls out the bag of pot she found earlier. She places it on the bench between them. Marcus gets a little uncomfortable.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Assault and drug possession? You
realize that's enough to get your
ass thrown in juvi.

MARCUS
You think I give a fuck?

GRACE
You're out of here in less than a
week. You're so much smarter than
this. I know it's scary out there.

MARCUS
I ain't scared of shit.

GRACE
All I'm saying is, getting thrown
in jail is not what you want to do.

Marcus shakes his head.

She looks off.

GRACE (CONT'D)
My dad's been in there for 10
years.

This catches his attention.

GRACE (CONT'D)
I don't want that for you.

EXT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- DAY

All the kids file back into the lounge, sweaty from their game of whiffleball.

Marcus walks through the door.

MASON
Straight to your room Marcus!

JESSICA
No free time until all your chores
are done!

Mason walks up to Grace after everyone has gone inside.

MASON
What's going on with him?

GRACE
He doesn't wanna leave.

Mason looks in Marcus's direction.

MASON
Should I go talk to him?

GRACE
Yeah.

MASON
Alright, I'll be inside, letting
Marcus kick the shit out of me.

GRACE
Have fun!

INT. MARCUS' ROOM -- DAY

Marcus sits at his desk with his headphones on, writing lyrics in his notebook.

Mason knocks on the door. Marcus pulls off his headphones and acknowledges him with a head nod.

MASON
You got some new lyrics you wanna
try out on me?

Marcus looks down at his notebook.

MARCUS
There's a lot of fucks in it.

Mason shrugs.

MASON
I won't tell.

CUT TO:

INT. MARCUS'S ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Mason sits next to Marcus on the bed, playing drums on an upside-down, rubber trash-can. He starts a very simple hip-hop beat.

MASON
Like that?

MARCUS
Yeah.

Marcus begins to feel it, holding his notebook of lyrics.
Then he spits it out.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

It don't matter now, damn near
eighteen, all the pretty pictures
in my fucking head is faded. And
when I think about that trick that
raised me, I think about sick,
cause the bitch is crazy. Fuck
that bitch, nigger, fuck that pain.
Your body's in a ditch inside this
turned up brain, I mean I can't see
how you claim it. You be a mom?
doctor snatch me out the snatch,
pair of evil eagle claws. Ho ho
ho, slut, fuck the way you want it.
Got your young dumb son pitchin
pigeons for money. I mean is colder
than the bitch when it's sunny.
Blow's raining down on the globe,
got the nerve to tell me you love
me? I said again? Again? Sell it
again? Bitch, I'm ten, let me go
outside and function with friends.

Marcus begins to pick up his intensity. Mason stops drumming
halfway through, too caught up in Marcus's performance and
raw honesty to continue.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

You say you ma? You mother? You
tha father fuckin' queen? I say
alright, I love her, so I flip it
again. Nah, not this time, bitch,
cause I'm stronger than you. Not
this time, bitch, swinging harder
than you. Nah, not this time,
bitch, you ain't leave me a choice,
you just a body in a ditch in the
brain of a boy. All fucked up now,
damn near eighteen, all the
pictures in my past ain't never
fading. I'm always wishing for
something amazing, but when your
life is shit, then there ain't no
trading. So put me in your book so
you know what it's like to live a
life not knowing what a normal
life's like. Put a label on my
head so you know what it's like to
live a life not knowing what a
normal life's like. Look into my
eyes so you know what it's like.
Look into my eyes so you know what
it's like. Look into my eyes so
you know what it's like to live a
life not knowing what a normal
life's like.

Marcus finishes, breathing heavy, staring at the floor.
Mason is dumbfounded.

MASON
I don't even know what to say.

MARCUS
It's cool, man. I just need to
shave my head. You think Grace
will still shave it?

Mason's a bit caught off-guard by the question.

INT. JAYDEN'S ROOM -- DAY

Grace knocks on Jayden's door. Jayden looks up from her bed
to see Grace standing with sketchbook in one hand.

GRACE
I like the new wall decor.

Jayden looks up, then glances at her penis diagrams.

JAYDEN
Thanks. They're actually very
informative.

Grace smiles and holds up her sketchbook.

GRACE
Can I draw with you?

Jayden looks at her, considering.

CUT TO:

INT. JAYDEN'S ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

The two sit on the bed, drawing portraits of each other in
their sketchbooks.

GRACE
When I was 9 or ten, I used to draw
portraits of all my mom's
boyfriends and then I'd sell them
to her for 10 bucks a piece.

JAYDEN
How many boyfriends did she have?

GRACE
Enough that I was able to save up
and buy one of those portable cd
player with anti-shock protection.

Jayden smiles a little.

JAYDEN
You're old.

GRACE
Whatever, those things were cool.

Grace is lost in the memory.

GRACE (CONT'D)
You know what's weird? Whenever I was drawing portraits of those guys, I would always take forever. Like 30, 40 minutes, just stringin' 'em along, like, "oh I just gotta do a couple more shadows, or finish fixing the nose." I don't know why I did that...I hated every single one 'em.

JAYDEN
Maybe you were just trying to keep 'em away from your mom.

Grace thinks about it for a moment.

GRACE
Yeah, maybe.
(beat)
Are you done?

JAYDEN
(sarcastic)
I just gotta do a couple more shadows, and fix the nose a little.

Grace smirks.

GRACE
You're such a little smart ass.

Jayden smiles back.

JAYDEN
That's a level drop.

GRACE
Oh, no. Not a level drop. I wanted to play foosball later.

JAYDEN
Well, too bad.

The two continue with their drawings, side by side.

INT. BATHROOM -- DAY

A razor slides across Marcus' shaven head.

Marcus sits in a chair in front of the bathroom mirror with a towel around him and hair all over the place. Grace stands behind him with a razor, finishing up the back of his head. Mason stands beside her.

GRACE
Okay, finished. Wanna take a look?

Marcus doesn't move, just stays sitting there, staring at the floor. Grace looks to Mason.

MASON
It looks great Marcus. Check it out.

MARCUS
Is it lumpy?

Mason and Grace exchange another confused look.

MASON
What do you mean?

Marcus still stares at the floor.

MARCUS
I usually keep my hair long, cause that's where she use hit me.
(beat)
Is it still lumpy?

MASON
No way man, not at all. See for yourself.

He stands up slowly and looks at himself in the mirror. He walks up closer, touches his head, feeling it, squeezing it, as if looking for something. He's amazed.

MARCUS
Pretty smooth.

Marcus turns to Grace and Mason with a big smile.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
What about the back? No scars, nothing?

GRACE
It looks really great.

Marcus looks at himself again in the mirror, then braces himself on the sink and begins to sob uncontrollably.

Mason walks up to him and puts his hand on his back.

Grace watches them, touched by the scene: he's going to be a good dad.

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT BATHROOM -- NIGHT

Grace sits in the tub.

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Mason and Grace lie in bed.

GRACE
Mason. I have something to tell
you.

MASON
What's that?

GRACE
We're going to have a baby.

MASON
What?

GRACE
We're going to have a baby.

Grace nods, unsure of how he'll take it. He thinks for a moment.

MASON
We are?

GRACE
Mmhmm.

MASON
Whoa.

He sits up, then stands. He paces.

MASON (CONT'D)
Um, ah, give me a minute.

Mason goes into bathroom.

MASON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Oh, boy. Holy shit.

Mason returns and looks down, notices Grace, senses her worry, bends to her, holds her hand in his, looks at her more seriously and adult-like than ever.

MASON (CONT'D)
Hey.

She looks at him.

MASON (CONT'D)
You know we can do this right?

She doesn't give him much of a response.

MASON (CONT'D)
We are going to be some amazing
parents.

She watches his eyes tear up as he looks at her with a giant, genuine smile...he tries to fight the tears but loses it.

MASON (CONT'D)
I love you so much Grace...
(shaking his head)
...so much it's insane.

She pulls him close, hiding her face in his chest.

As Mason glows with excitement, Grace still ponders what the hell she's doing.

MUSIC CUE

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT BATHROOM -- MORNING

Grace and Mason stand in the bathroom, brushing their teeth. They speak through bubbles and bristles.

MASON
Let me see.

He tries to lift up her shirt, but she doesn't let him.

GRACE
You can't tell yet.

MASON
Come on.

She keeps brushing her teeth, then nonchalantly lifts up her shirt to reveal her belly. Mason looks at it with a smile, then puts his hand on it.

MASON (CONT'D)
That is so crazy.

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT KITCHEN -- MORNING

The cooking timer goes off with a DING! Mason reaches into the oven and pulls out a batch of perfectly baked cupcakes. He has his chef hat on and an apron around his waist.

He opens a can of strawberry frosting.

He spreads the frosting over the final cupcake.

Opens a can of sprinkles.

He carefully applies the final sprinkles to the batch.

Mason is deep in thought as he goes through the steps.

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT BEDROOM -- MORNING

Grace sits at her sewing machine, braiding 4 strands of leather to make a wrap-bracelet.

She scratches a letter from a letraset onto a button.

We don't see exactly what it is.

INT. MASON'S CAR -- MORNING

(MS from back of car)

Grace and Mason drive to work, holding hands. She leans over and puts her head on his shoulder.

INT. GROUP HOME KITCHEN -- MORNING

Grace pops open a medicine container and dumps various colored pills into a paper cup. She fills a dixie cup with filtered water from a pitcher.

Jessica walks in and sits on the table, reading the report, as Grace preps the meds.

JESSICA
Did you hear about Sammy?

GRACE
(concerned)
What?

JESSICA
Last night they took away all his dolls. His therapist is calling it a lesson in "letting go."

GRACE
Bullshit.

JESSICA
Those were all his sister's, right?

GRACE
(nodding)
He's not ready for that.

INT. SAMMY'S ROOM -- MORNING

Sammy lies awake in bed in fetal position, sucking his thumb. Grace comes in with his water and meds. When he sees her, he pulls his thumb from his mouth.

GRACE
It's time for your meds, Sammy.

He doesn't move and she knows why. She sets the meds down and sits next to him.

GRACE (CONT'D)
I'm sorry bud.

She puts her hand on his shoulder, but he doesn't move.

INT. GROUP HOME OFFICE -- MOMENTS LATER

GRACE
Jayden, Meds.

GRACE (CONT'D)
How'd you sleep?

Grace hands her the meds.

JAYDEN
(apathetic)
Like crap.

She receives her meds and water and downs them like she's done it a thousand times.

JAYDEN (CONT'D)
Can you tell the doctor I need a higher dosage of trazodone.

She hands back the empty cups.

GRACE
Mmhmm, I will tell him.

Grace hands her a gift bag.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Happy Birthday.

She hands her a cupcake.

GRACE (CONT'D)
And it comes with this. Mason made it.

JAYDEN
Thanks.

GRACE
I heard your dad's picking you up.

JAYDEN
Yup.

GRACE
You excited?

She shrugs.

JAYDEN
Whatever.

Jayden turns and walks away. Grace watches her for a moment.

INT. JAYDEN'S ROOM -- AFTERNOON

Jayden looks at herself in the Bathroom mirror, adding a touch of make-up (this takes place in girl's b-room).

She puts on her shoes, laces them up, and makes sure her jeans fit over them nicely.

She opens the gift that Grace gave her and finds a home-made bracelet with a button that has a "J" on it. She puts it on, adding it to her collection.

She throws some clothes into her backpack and fits in her sketch pad.

She zips it up and sits on the bed, waiting.

We see her from outside the room, staring at the floor.

CUT TO:

Jayden lying down, staring at the ceiling.

Jayden gets up quickly, snatches her backpack and walks out into the lounge. (Camera follows her out)

JESSICA (O.S.)
Bye Shawnta!

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- DAY

Jayden walks to an empty couch on the far wall and sits down, backpack at her feet. She sees Shawnta standing at the doorway with her backpack on, getting picked up by her smiling aunt and uncle (a black family). Thom is also getting picked up by his uncle.

Grace is at the door with them, saying goodbye. Then she looks over at Jayden, sitting sadly on the couch with her headphones on.

CUT TO:

EXT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- LATER

Jessica sticks her head out the door as Mason walks back from the office.

Mason gives her a big shrug.

The yard is empty, no sign of her dad.

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- DAY

A few of the kids are watching TV with Nate.

Jessica walks into the lounge and shakes her head at Grace, who's braiding a girl's hair.

Grace lets out a sigh and looks over at Jayden.

Jayden sits in the same place, listening to her music. She looks down at her hand. She presses her thumbnail into her skin, carefully, with purpose, creating lines that begin to form a word.

Jayden finishes the carving in her skin. One last line. This time, she digs her thumbnail so deep she draws blood.

She pulls away and looks at her creation:

W H Y. The Y is bleeding.

She takes one more look outside, then suddenly stands and streamlines to her room, SLAMMING the door behind her.

All the staff react to it.

GRACE

Damn it.

Grace heads toward the commotion with Mason and Nate in tow.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Will you watch the kids?

JESSICA

Sure.

GRACE

Nate.

INT. GIRL'S HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Grace knocks on the door and then pushes slowly. She feels resistance.

GRACE

Jayden, come on. You know you can't keep the door closed.

(beat)

Stop pushing on the door.

Grace inches open the door enough to talk to her.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Hey, Jade, I'm really sorry about your dad.

NATE

(quietly)

Why can't she close the door?

MASON

She's a cutter.

JAYDEN (O.S.)
I can fucking hear you dick! Maybe
I'll cut myself right now and
you'll all lose your fucking jobs.

GRACE
Come on Jade...

JAYDEN (O.S.)
Don't call me fucking Jade you
bitch!

She slams the door shut again.

GRACE
Jayden, come on. Please just open
the door. If you just open the door
then we won't bother you anymore.

She doesn't respond.

GRACE (CONT'D)
If you're not going to open the
door, we're going to have to force
it.

Grace motions for Mason and Nate to start pushing. They all
slowly force the door open, inches at a time.

MASON
Wow Jayden, you're pretty strong.

WHOOSH! The door flies open. Grace falls in, only to be
greeted by Jayden's fist in full swing.

She takes the first one square in the face. BANG!

Color splatters across Grace's face as she slams into the
wall. Jayden comes after her, but Mason grabs her in time.

JAYDEN
AAAHHH!! Get the fuck out of my
room you fucking bitches!

MASON
Grab her right arm!

Nate struggles to grab the other arm. He finally gets it.

MASON (CONT'D)
Okay, against the wall!

They quickly back up to the wall in the hallway.

MASON (CONT'D)
One, two, three down!

JAYDEN
Don't fucking touch me!!!

They slide themselves and the fighting girl to the floor. They each pin her legs down with their own until she is virtually immobile, except for her vocal chords.

JAYDEN (CONT'D)
Fuck yooooooooooooooooou!!!!

Grace touches her face and realizes she hit her with the cupcake. She pulls off the paper cup, which was still stuck to her face.

INT. GROUP HOME HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Marcus steps out of his room and looks down the hall.

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- CONTINUOUS

The rest of the kids are playing video games on the couch. One kid stands up to take a look.

JESSICA
Luis! Sit down!

INT. JAYDEN'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

JAYDEN
AAAAAAAH!! You're fucking
squishing me fat ass!

Mason repositions himself.

MASON
Sorry, how's that?

JAYDEN
Let me go!!!

Jayden gets one foot loose and tries to kick her way out. Grace grabs her feet.

MASON
You shouldn't be here, Grace.

JAYDEN
What's wrong Mason? Can't hold my
feet yourself you weak ass fuck!
You need the bitch to do it for
you!

MASON
Hold her good Nate.

JAYDEN
Yeah hold me good Nate.

Jayden spits hard on Nate's face.

NATE
Oh...cool.

MASON
(calmly)
Sorry man.

Jayden catches her breath and begins to cry.

GRACE
It's going to be okay Jayden. It's
going to be okay.

JAYDEN
I fucking hate you.

GRACE
That's fine, you don't have to like
me right now. Just let it pass.

MASON
How you doing Nate?

NATE
Not so good.

Jayden continues to cry.

GRACE
You're doing good. Doing really
good.

Grace takes a deep breath and exchanges a look with Mason.

MASON
Grace. How's my cupcake?

Grace shakes her head.

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- DAY

Something else is playing on TV.

Nate walks up to Jessica at the door.

JESSICA
How is she?

NATE
She's in the cool-down room now. I
need that.

Jessica grabs a bottle of quick-dry, antibacterial hand
cleaner and squirts some in his hand. He immediately rubs it
all over the side of his face that Jayden spit on.

Marcus walks over to the coffee table where the kids are
playing a board game. He tosses a stack of colored paper and
pens onto the coffee table.

The kids look up at him.

MARCUS
Everybody grab one. Come on.

INT. COOL DOWN ROOM -- DAY

Grace and Jayden sit against the wall in silence. An inflatable punching bag, shaped like a smiling beagle, bobs a few feet in front of them.

Jayden makes more creases in her hand with her fingernail. Grace notices her.

GRACE
You wanna see mine?

Grace pulls down her sock to reveal an ankle riddled with scars. She has Jayden's attention.

JAYDEN
Shit.

She points to a really big scar.

GRACE
That one's from a sneeze. I
slipped and cut too deep. Almost
cut my achilles.

Grace laughs at the irony. Jayden looks off at nothing.

JAYDEN
Why?

Grace shrugs, looking at the scars, remembering each one.

GRACE
When my mom died, I had to live
with my dad...and...
(beat)
It's impossible to worry about
anything else when there's blood
coming out of you.

They sit in silence for a moment.

Jayden looks at her wrist, playing with the button of the bracelet Grace gave her. Grace notices her.

Jayden looks up to the smiling beagle punching bag. She throws a soccer ball, hitting it square in the head. It slams to the floor and gently floats back up with a smile.

JAYDEN
God, I hate that thing.

GRACE
Me too.

Through the small window in the door, we see Grace and Jayden kicking and punching and throwing the punching bag against the walls.

INT. GIRL'S HALLWAY -- DAY

Grace exits the CDR and holds the door open for Jayden. As they walk back to girls' side, she sees Marcus exiting with Jessica. Jessica nods to Grace as they head back to the lounge.

They reach Jayden's room and Grace stops at her door as she walks in.

GRACE
Take as much time as you need.

INT. JAYDEN'S ROOM -- DAY

Jayden walks in and sees 14 hand-drawn birthday cards neatly laid out on her bed.

Grace watches her from the door with a smile.

(Cue MUSIC)

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- AFTERNOON

Sixteen candles burn brightly, one in each of the 16 cupcakes that all the kids are holding together in front of Jayden. All the kids gather around Jayden, singing the last verse of Happy Birthday (or chanting Jayden, Jayden). They are all incredibly out of tune.

EVERYONE
Happy Birthday to
JAYDEEEEEEEENNanana!

Jayden blows out her candles and everyone claps loud enough to make her smile. When the room settles, Mason looks to Grace.

CUT TO:

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- AFTERNOON

The entire unit stands in a circle chanting together with their hands waving in the air. Mason leads them. As he chants they all clap and slap their thighs to the same rhythm. Nate joins in the group, very excited. This is his kind of game.

MASON
Big booty big booty big booty. Big
booty number three.

Mason sends the chant around the circle: "Number three, number 6" "Number 6, number 4" "Number 4, big booty" "big booty, number 2". Number two misses his turn and everyone laughs and teases him.

Zero in on Jayden, who catches herself laughing and having a good time. Her face changes, watching everything from the outside.

Mason starts another round, getting all the kids to lift their hands in the air and join in the big booty chant.

Jayden doesn't join this time.

INT. SAMMY'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

As the game continues in the lobby, Grace walks into Sammy's room with a cupcake. Sammy lies in the same spot as before, staring into space.

She places it on the bedside counter, runs her fingers through his hair before leaving the room.

After she leaves, Sammy looks at the cupcake.

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- CONTINUOUS

The circle of kids are still keeping a rhythm.

Jayden gets up and walks to her room. Grace watches her.

Mason looks to Marcus.

MARCUS

Slow this down a little bit. Y'all ain't go no rhythm.

MASON

Tell me about it. I'm trying to keep them in line. It's just, it's hard.

Marcus begins to spit out some freestyle lyrics, teasing some of the staff and the people in the circle. Nate is really into it, smiling and bouncing to the beat. When Marcus finishes, Nate immediately jumps in, picking up where he left off:

NATE

I'm out the gate. Right my name is Nate. When I came here, y'all try to playa hate.

Mason and Jessica exchange a what-the-hell-look.

All the kids erupt with hoots and laughter as Nate and Marcus break out into a friendly freestyle battle.

Sammy peeks out from the doorway to see what's happening.

Luis is having a great time, momentarily forgetting about his riff with Marcus.

The crowd goes wild.

Suddenly, an ALARM goes off.

Grace and Mason exchange looks of confusion.

Grace runs to the girls' side and sees the emergency door open at the far end of the hall.

She runs to the door.

GRACE
Everyone sit down please. We have
an AWOL!

Mason races after Grace. The other kids get up to take a look.

EXT. GROUP HOME -- LATE AFTERNOON

Grace bursts through the door and looks around frantically.

She sees Jayden running in the distance with her backpack bouncing, turning the next corner.

GRACE
Jayden!

She takes off after her

MASON
Grace!

GRACE
Stay with the kids! I'll call you
when I get her!

Mason watches her run.

Nate comes outside.

MASON
This happens. It's fine.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREETS -- LATE AFTERNOON

Grace chases Jayden down the sidewalk, but doesn't seem to be gaining on her.

GRACE
Jayden, can you slow down please?!
I feel like I'm gonna barf!

Jayden's visibly tired, her backpack sagging on her shoulders.

Jayden looks back at her and begins to slow down. Grace does the same.

JAYDEN
Keep the same distance!

GRACE
Okay, okay.

They slow at the same pace, and then finally stop to catch their breath.

JAYDEN
You can't touch me outside the grounds.

GRACE
Well, can I walk with you?

JAYDEN
Walk all you want, but I'm not going back there.

Grace looks at her, still breathing heavily.

GRACE
Let's walk then.

Jayden takes a few more moments to cool down. Then, she starts to walk again. Grace follows.

EXT. BUS STOP -- LATE AFTERNOON/EVENING

They sit together at a bus stop.

INT. BUS -- EARLY EVENING

They sit across from each other on the bus, neither of them talking. Jayden hugs her backpack on her lap. Grace waits for Jayden's lead.

Jayden pulls the cord and gets off. Grace follows.

EXT. JAYDEN'S DAD'S HOUSE -- EARLY EVENING

Jayden walks ahead of Grace who follows patiently behind her.

Then, finally, Jayden stops.

She stands in front of a beautiful two-story house. The lights are off inside. Grace stops with her.

Jayden walks to the side door of the garage, and Grace follows her. She reaches above the door and grabs a key from the frame.

GRACE
Jayden, you know you're not supposed to be here.

Jayden ignores her, opens the door and goes in, shutting it behind her. Grace doesn't follow. She takes out her cell phone and dials. Mason picks up.

MASON (O.S.)
What's going on?

GRACE
Hey, we're at her dad's house. I don't think that anyone's here, but she went in anyway.

MASON (O.S.)
I'm on my way.

GRACE
K, thanks.

Grace hangs up the phone.

CUT TO:

EXT. JAYDEN'S DAD'S HOUSE -- EVENING

Grace sits on the front steps. After a moment, the front door opens and Jayden comes out with her backpack. She sits down next to Grace.

GRACE
He's not here?

Jayden shakes her head and hides it in her arms. Grace wraps her arm around her.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Do you wanna go back?

Jayden nods.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Okay.

CUT TO:

INT. MASON'S CAR -- NIGHT

Mason grips the steering wheel, driving slow and steady. He looks in the rear-view mirror.

Grace sits in the seat behind him with her arm around Jayden, who leans on her shoulder, staring out the window.

Mason and Grace smile lovingly to each other through the reflection.

INT. JAYDEN'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Jayden sits on her bed, exhausted. Grace walks in with her backpack and sets it next to her.

GRACE
You okay?

Jayden nods.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Okay, I'll see you tomorrow.

She gives Jayden a side-hug and begins to leave.

JAYDEN
You wanna see a story I've been
working on?

Grace turns to her, a bit surprised.

GRACE
Of course.

CUT TO:

INT. JAYDEN'S ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Jayden opens her sketchbook to the back page, where there is a homemade pocket taped to the inside cover. She pulls out a folded piece of paper and opens it carefully. Grace watches her, patiently.

She flips back through her notebook to a page that is covered with cool illustrations of underwater scenes and creatures, particularly sharks and octopi.

JAYDEN
It's a kids' story, so there aren't
any big words.

GRACE
Okay.

Jayden begins. As she reads, she points to the illustration that she wants Grace to look at.

She points to a small sketch of a cute little octopus.

JAYDEN
Once upon a time, somewhere miles
and miles beneath the surface of
the ocean, there lived a young
octopus named Nina.

She points to various drawings of the octopus making funny artwork out of shells and sand.

JAYDEN (CONT'D)

Nina spent most of her time alone, making strange creations out of rocks and shells. And she was very happy.

(beat)

But then, on Monday, the Shark showed up.

She points to a drawing of a Shark swimming up to Nina.

JAYDEN (CONT'D)

"What's your name?" said the shark. "Nina," she replied. "Do you want to be my friend?" He asked. "Okay, what do I have to do?" Said Nina. "Not much," said the Shark, "Just let me eat one of your arms."

Grace watches Jayden read.

JAYDEN (CONT'D)

Nina had never had a friend before, so she wondered if this was what you had to do to get one. She looked down at her eight arms, and decided it wouldn't be so bad to give up one. So she donated an arm to her wonderful new friend.

Jayden points to a morbid drawing of the shark eating one of Nina's arms.

JAYDEN (CONT'D)

Every day that week, Nina and the Shark would play together. They explored caves, built castles of sand, and swam really really fast. And every night, the Shark would be hungry, and Nina would give him another one of her arms to eat.

Jayden points at various illustrations of the octopus and the shark playing together, and the shark eating her arms.

JAYDEN (CONT'D)

On Sunday, after playing all day, the Shark told Nina that he was very hungry. "I don't understand," she said. "I've already given you six of my arms, and now you want one more?" The shark looked at her with a friendly smile and said, "I don't want one. This time I want them all." "But why?" Nina asked. And the shark replied, "Because that's what friends are for."

Jayden points to another drawing of the shark, alone.

JAYDEN (CONT'D)

When the shark finished his meal that night, he felt very sad and lonely. He missed having someone to explore caves, build castles and swim really really fast with. He missed Nina very much. So, he swam away to find another friend.

Jayden folds up the piece of paper and grips it in her hand. She stares down at her drawings, waiting.

Grace watches her for a moment before speaking.

GRACE

Jayden, did your dad ever hurt you?

Jayden doesn't respond at first. But then shrugs without looking up. Grace watches her.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Does he still hurt you?

Jayden doesn't respond. She hides her face with her hand. Grace sits with her for a moment before putting her arm on her back.

She sees tears plopping down onto the drawings of the octopus and the shark.

The two sit side by side.

INT. GROUP HOME OFFICE -- EVENING

Push in fast on Grace writing a report of the day.

INT. GROUP HOME JACK'S OFFICE -- EVENING

Grace drops off the copy of the report at Jack's office. She is determined and confident.

INT. MASON'S CAR -- EVENING

Mason drives with Grace riding shotgun. Both are dressed for a party. Her head is on his shoulder.

Grace lets out a breath.

GRACE

We can't let her go back there.

Mason takes her hand into his and squeezes.

MASON

That's not going to happen. You were pretty amazing today.

GRACE

Thank you.

They sit in silence, watching the evening pass outside the window.

INT. MASON'S PARENT'S HOUSE -- EVENING

Members of Mason's family are gathered around the dinner table holding hands and singing a Spanish version of "Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow". There are a variety of ethnicities present: Caucasian, Filipino, Black, Japanese. But most of the people are hispanic. They all end with: "Amen."

MASON'S DAD, a Mexican-American in his 60's, speaks up.

MASON'S DAD
(in spanish)
Let's eat!

The table is filled with a plethora of food: heaps of crab, fish, seafood, shrimp cocktail, rice, salad, and some other traditional Mexican dishes. People grab their plates and begin to dig in, eating and laughing together like a good family should.

A father makes a plate for his daughter. A grandson pours a drink for his grandpa. People are laughing, teasing, having a great time together.

One of the mothers approaches Grace, holding her one-year-old child over her shoulder.

MOTHER
Hey Grace, can you hold Sylvia
while I make a plate for the other
ninos?

Grace is a little nervous.

GRACE
Oh, uh. Sure.

The mother doesn't wait, but plops the infant into Grace's arms and heads to the table.

Grace finds her footing, and looks down at the baby. She plays with its tiny fingers.

Mason clinks his glass with his fork and soon everyone in the room joins in.

MASON
(spanish)
This is going to be short. I just
have a couple things to say...
(english)
...And I'm going to say it in
English so I don't embarrass myself
any more than I need to.
(to his parents)
(MORE)

MASON (CONT'D)

I just want to take a moment to say thank you. Momma, Pops. I don't think anyone here thinks of you as just our foster parents. I don't even know what that term means... 'Cause to us, you're just ma and pa. And I think I speak for everyone here when I say thank you, for taking us in...

(laughs to himself)

...For taking me in when I was a punk kid who was scared of everything...when I had no one else, you accepted me, and showed me what it's like...

He begins to tear up a little, but pushes on. Grace watches him, moved by every word, holding the infant close to her.

MASON (CONT'D)

...What it's like to be loved. None of us would be here, if it weren't for you.

He motions to the rest of the people in the room.

MASON (CONT'D)

Look at this beautiful family you made...

Mason takes a moment to look around the room.

MASON (CONT'D)

(smiling)

So let's all lift your glasses to our king and queen.

(turns to them)

Happy 30th you guys. Everything good in my life is because of you.

Everyone begins to hoot and yell as they drink from their glasses and go back to their conversations.

Grace smiles at Mason as he wipes his tears and sees her and the baby from across the room. He nods and smiles at the sight of her with a baby. She smiles and shrugs: it's not so bad.

CUT TO:

EXT. MASON'S PARENT'S HOUSE -- EVENING

Grace and Mason jump in the jumping castle with 4 of his little 8-year-old cousins. The kids laugh and jump on him. He lifts a little girl into the air to protect her from the boys.

INT. MASON'S PARENT'S HOUSE -- EVENING

Salsa music fills the air and the dance floor explodes with motion. One couple is really good, spinning and dipping and hopping together. Mason and Grace dance together, doing their own silly/crazy rendition of the salsa. They've made up some of their own moves, like the tea cup tip, and the double hop. They're obviously great at being stupid and fun together.

Mason grabs Grace and holds her close, slowing their pace. They dance near his parents. Mason's mom sends a friendly smile to Grace.

Mason gets close to her ears and whispers.

MASON
Will you marry me?

Grace pulls back and looks at him, sees how serious he is. She's as ready as she'll ever be.

GRACE
Are you serious?

MASON
Yeah. I'm dead serious.

She smiles and nods, puts her head on Mason's shoulder and lets the moment seep through her pores.

SLOMO wide-shot of the dancing room.

FADE OUT:

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT BEDROOM -- MORNING

Grace and Mason lie in bed in the early morning light. The phone RINGS! Both of them wake up.

MASON
Who the hell is calling on the land line?

Mason gets up to answer it.

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

Mason picks up the phone.

MASON
Hello?

After hearing who it is, Mason turns his back to the bedroom and lowers his voice.

MASON (CONT'D)
Yeah.
(beat)
(MORE)

MASON (CONT'D)
This is actually her fiancée, if
this is about her dad, it'd
probably be best if you let me
relay the message.

Mason listens intently as he's given the information.

MASON (CONT'D)
Shit.

He rubs his head as he listens to the horrendous news.

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT BEDROOM -- MORNING

Mason walks back into the bedroom and finds Grace sitting at the edge of the bed, facing the opposite wall. She knows he's there.

GRACE
Who was it?

MASON
Um...someone from the probation
department.

Grace scratches frantically at her thumb with her pointer finger, waiting for Mason to say the thing she dreads most.

MASON (CONT'D)
He said your dad's probably going
to get released next month.

Grace lets it sink in.

She hides her face in her hands. When she takes them away, she leaves a streak of blood across her cheek.

She looks at her thumb and sees it's bleeding. She touches her cheek and sees the blood on her fingertips.

Mason climbs over the bed and tries to hug her from behind, but she brushes him off and leaves the room.

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT BATHROOM -- MORNING

She stands in the shower, violently scrubbing her skin with a rough washcloth. She holds the cloth to her face and screams as loud as she can.

EXT. GROUP HOME -- MORNING

Mason stands out in the yard, smoking by himself. Grace shows up on her bike and he quickly puts out his cigarette and walks up to her.

MASON
Hey, I really think we need to talk
through some of this stuff.

GRACE
Not right now Mason. I'll be fine.
I just need to work.

She heads into the office.

INT. GROUP HOME OFFICE -- MORNING

Jessica hands Grace the clipboard. She's eating cereal from
a plastic bowl. Nate stands by eating a banana.

JESSICA
Hey, Marcus's fish died last night.

GRACE
What?

JESSICA
He thinks Luis had something to do
with it.

GRACE
Did he?

Jessica shrugs.

Grace heads out the door, determined to keep her shit
together.

INT. LUIS'S ROOM -- MORNING

We follow Grace into the room as she goes straight for
sleeping Luis and rips the pillow out from under him. Luis
wakes up, slowly. Grace is in bad-ass mode.

GRACE
Tell me you didn't do something to
Marcus's fish.

LUIS
What?

GRACE
Luis, tell me!

LUIS
I don't know what you're talking
about.

She stares at him to see if he's lying. He's kind of scared
of her.

LUIS (CONT'D)
I swear.

She leaves as quickly as she came.

INT. MARCUS'S ROOM -- MORNING

Grace knocks and walks in. She finds Marcus sitting on the floor, writing in his lyric journal.

In front of him is his fishbowl tipped over, with its contents spilled on the floor.

GRACE
I'm really sorry Marcus.

She watches him as he writes. His face is dark and brooding.

GRACE (CONT'D)
It wasn't Luis.

Marcus shrugs.

MARCUS
It don't matter.

She watches him for a moment longer.

MARCUS (CONT'D)
I'd like to be left alone if that's cool with you.

GRACE
Okay.
(beat)
Just let me know if you need anything.

Grace keeps an eye on him as she leaves.

EXT. GROUP HOME HALLWAY -- MORNING

Grace walks out of Marcus' room. She looks uneasy, like something is wrong. We move with her as she walks.

She begins to pick at her bandaged thumb.

EXT. JAYDEN'S ROOM -- MORNING

Grace continues to walk, the uneasiness building inside her, the bubbling fear that everything around her is out of her control.

A few girls walk from the bathroom to their room w/ towels on their heads.

Grace stops at Jayden's room and looks in.

INT. JAYDEN'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Jayden's room looks as it usually does, except she isn't there.

EXT. JAYDEN'S ROOM -- MORNING

Grace is a bit confused, looking around the hall for an answer. She sees Spring brushing her teeth in the doorway.

GRACE

Have you guys seen Jayden?

Spring shakes her head.

Grace walks back to the office.

INT. GROUP HOME OFFICE -- MORNING

We continue to follow Grace as she walks up to Jessica, sitting at the door.

GRACE

Jess, where's Jayden?

JESSICA

Oh, her dad showed up last night and took her on pass for the weekend.

GRACE

What?

Grace looks at the log in front of Jessica.

JESSICA

Jack signed off on it.

GRACE

Are you fucking kidding me?

Grace storms out of the unit, heading for Jack's office.

INT. GROUP HOME JACK'S OFFICE -- MORNING

Grace blasts through the door and walks straight into Jack's office. Jack's on the phone but Grace doesn't care.

GRACE

How could you let her go?

Jack realizes this is serious.

JACK

Uh, Jan, let me call you right back okay?

He hangs up the phone and looks at her for a moment.

JACK (CONT'D)

The man called, he apologized. He had a personal emergency.

GRACE

That's not even the point, Jack.
Did you read my report?

JACK

Of course I did, and I was very concerned. But when Jayden's social worker asked her about it, she said her father has never been abusive in any way.

GRACE

Of course she said that, she's fucking scared! What the fuck do they teach you guys in grad school?

Jack's a bit taken aback by her temper.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Jack, in her mind, he is always right behind her, watching her, when she is sleeping, she is taking a shit, when she is alone with her therapist, he is right there, watching her, ready to pounce. And you just expect her to just come out and say it? Are you guys fucking stupid?! Because she was here asking for help and you just sent her back to the fucking shark!

Jack is very offended by her language and temper. He takes off his glasses and pinches the bridge of his nose and closes his eyes.

JACK

I realize you're upset, Grace, but yelling at me isn't an effective form of communication.

Grace realizes she won't get to him this way. She sits down.

GRACE

Okay, Jack. Jack I'm sorry. Please. Cancel the pass until we figure this out. Because I know her, and I know that things are not good at home.

JACK

And how do you know that? Because she read you a children's story?

GRACE

Don't fuck with me Jack. I am on the floor every day with those kids. And last night, that girl sat next to me and she cried and she tried to tell me the only way that she knew how.

JACK

Grace, you are a line staff. It's not your job to interpret tears. That's what our trained therapists are here for.

GRACE

Then your trained therapists don't know shit!

JACK

Did she tell you that she was being abused by her father?

GRACE

She didn't have to!

JACK

If I'm gonna take that child away from her biological parent, yes, she does.

GRACE

This is bullshit.

JACK

Grace, I have been working with these kids for longer than you've been alive, and there's not one of them that I wouldn't die for. I look into those broken eyes, I want to find the asshole who did that to them and beat the shit out of him. But although I feel that way every single day, I know I can't track down everyone who's hurt them. I know I can't heal all their wounds. And I can't start accusing all their parents of being sexual offenders.

Grace holds back her temper.

GRACE

Especially when their friends of friends, right Jack?

Jack looks at her, seriously.

JACK

We're finished here, Grace.

Jack picks up the phone, dials, and swivels his chair so his back is to Grace.

Grace stares at him for a moment, then looks at the big, ugly, yellow lamp on his desk.

JACK (CONT'D)

Hey Jan-

She grabs the lamp and walks out of the room. The electric cord pops from the outlet and drags behind her.

EXT. GROUP HOME, COTTAGE -- CONTINUOUS

We follow her out the front door of the main office, out into the parking lot, where she lifts the lamp over her head and hurls it down onto the pavement, shattering it into a thousand pieces.

Hold on wide shot for a moment.

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- AFTERNOON

Nate vacuums the couch, fluffing the pillows, sucking up all the dust. He grabs one of the main pillows and flips it over.

He stops. Sees something. Looks around to see if someone is watching. Then reaches for it.

INT. SAMMY'S ROOM -- AFTERNOON

Nate walks into Sammy's room, taking one more peek over his shoulder.

He walks up to Sammy, who is lying in his bed, acting like he's sleeping.

He places one of Sammy's dolls on the bed next to him. Sammy slowly opens his eyes, looks at the doll, looks at Nate.

Nate smiles, gets up and walks out, looking back in time to see:

Sammy slowly wraps his hands around the doll and brings her close to him, holding it like his little sister.

INT. GROUP HOME HALLWAY -- AFTERNOON

Grace unlocks the back door and enters, sneakily, SWOOSHING the smoke back outside and airing out her clothes a bit.

She walks over to Marcus's room. His door is closed, rap MUSIC blaring from inside. She opens the door and walks in.

INT. MARCUS'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

The music surrounds her like a rush of wind.

The room is empty, except for his fishbowl, now shattered in pieces in the middle of the floor.

She leaves the room, searching for Marcus.

INT. GROUP HOME HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

She exits the room.

Looks back toward the cool down room.

Down the hall.

GRACE
Marcus?

Peeks into Sammy's room, then another...nothing.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Marcus?

Then, she sees him, sitting on the floor just inside Luis's room.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Marcus, what are you doing in
Luis's room?

Marcus doesn't respond, but just stares blankly at nothing. And then Grace sees the large shard of glass in his hand, and the blood covering his fingers.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Oh God.

She drops to his level and pulls the glass from his fingers.

Marcus stares off, holding in the tears.

Grace reacts, moving quickly into the room. And then she sees Luis, lying face down on the bed, not moving.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Luis!

Grace runs up to him.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Luis!

She shakes him. Luis turns over and looks at her. He takes out one of his ear phones.

LUIS
What?

As Grace puts the pieces together, she hears a THUMP. She looks back to Marcus, who is now lying on the floor with a streak of blood across the door behind him. She rushes to him.

GRACE
No. Shit!

Grace kneels next to Marcus and turns over his arm to reveal the fresh cuts down his wrist.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Shit! Mason! Somebody! Anybody!
Come! Help me!!

She looks back to Luis, who looks really scared.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Luis! Luis, I need your pillow
case right now! Give it to me!

Luis rips off his pillow case and tosses it to her.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Quicker please.

Grace wraps the pillow case around Marcus' arm.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Marcus, Marcus! Marcus, please look
at me. Marcus, look at me. You're
gonna to be okay. I just need you
to look at me. Marcus, look at me.

Grace panics.

GRACE (CONT'D)
What the fuck is taking so long?!!

EXT. GROUP HOME -- NIGHT

The group home sits silently in the moonlight.

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- NIGHT

The kids are in the lounge playing a board game with Jessica guarding the door.

Luis sits on the couch watching tv, still shaken from the incident.

INT. GROUP HOME HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Nate is on all fours in the empty hallway, wiping Marcus's blood from the door. He stops, suddenly, unable to go on.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM -- NIGHT

Grace sits in the waiting room along with a few other injured and sick people. Grace is completely drained. Her hair is frazzled and she has Marcus's blood on her shirt. She stares off at nothing. A nurse walks by but doesn't say anything.

Mason walks up and sits down after talking to a nurse.

MASON
They still don't know anything.

He rubs his head.

Grace frantically picks at her bandaged thumb again. She nervously bounces her foot on the ground. She puts her head down for a moment, then quickly stands to her feet.

GRACE
I can't do this.

She walks out of the room.

MASON
Grace.

Mason follows her out.

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT -- NIGHT

Grace walks out to the parking lot and begins to unlock her bike from around the street lamp.

MASON
Hey, Grace, where are you going?

GRACE
I can't do this.

Mason finally reaches her.

MASON
Okay, let's go. I'll drive us home.

He tries to hug her but she shrugs him off and pushes him away. The gesture humiliates him.

GRACE
I don't want to go home. That's not what I'm talking about.

MASON
I know it's been a really fucked up day, okay?

GRACE
Mason, you have no idea what I'm going through right now.

MASON
Then tell me. That's how this works. Talk to me about it so that I can take your hand and fucking walk through this shit with you. That is what I signed up for, okay? But I cannot do that if you won't let me in.

Grace shakes her head.

GRACE
I can't. I'm sorry.

MASON
(beat)
You're sorry?
(beat)
Grace, are you serious?
(beat)
I've been waiting for you for a really long time, and I wouldn't take a second of it back, because I love you so god damn much, okay? But I have been waiting for three years for you to tell me why you still don't trust me. I've been waiting for you for three years for you to just once take the advice that you give your kids every fucking five minutes and learn to talk about what's going on inside your head. You can't do that for me?

Grace shakes her head.

MASON (CONT'D)
Whatever it is, okay? Just talk to me.

GRACE
I can't do this.

He watches her shift her weight, avoiding eye contact.

GRACE (CONT'D)
I can't...I can't marry you.

Mason stares at her for a moment, looking for something recognizable, but she just looks away.

GRACE (CONT'D)
I can't have your baby. I can't do any of it. I can't do it.

MASON
So what do you want to do? You want to get an abortion?

GRACE
I already made the appointment.

The statement sobers him. He realizes this time it's for real.

MASON
Do whatever you want, okay?
Because I'm done.

He turns and walks back to the hospital.

Grace watches him go, the panic bubbling up inside her.

EXT. CITY STREETS -- NIGHT

Grace flies down the road, peddling as fast as she can. A deep rage bubbles inside her.

EXT. JAYDEN'S DAD'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Grace throws her bike in the front lawn and walks quickly toward the house. A beautiful silver Audi sits in the driveway.

All the lights are off inside the house. She walks straight to the garage door, reaches up and grabs the key from above the door. Her hands are shaking. She ignores it, opens the door and walks in.

INT. JAYDEN'S DAD'S HOUSE, GARAGE -- NIGHT

She walks through the garage, tripping over a bucket of sporting equipment with a BANG. Tennis rackets, balls, and an old baseball bat scatter across the floor.

She stalls for a moment, staring at the metal bat, then instinctively grabs it and walks into the house.

INT. JAYDEN'S DAD'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Grace walks carefully down the hall to the back room, her fingers quivering. On the wall is a happy picture of mom, dad and Jayden. She reaches the door, listens for a moment, then carefully opens it and steps inside.

INT. JAYDEN'S DAD'S HOUSE BEDROOM -- NIGHT

As she slips into the room, Grace gets her first view of him, Jayden's dad.

He sleeps on his back, chin to the ceiling, mouth wide open, breathing loudly on the other side of the bed.

Grace nervously grips her bat and walks around the bed to his side, slow and quiet.

She stands over him, looking down at his open mouth. Her grip tightens around the bat.

Her breathing quickens as she positions the silver bat over his open mouth.

His hot breath fogs the shiny surface.

She slowly raises it over her head, keeping her eyes focused on her target. Her hands shake with adrenaline.

She stands there motionless for a long moment, muscles twitching, sweat falling from her chin to the floor. She squeezes down on the handle, shifts her feet, and takes one last look at his face.

Her body tenses.

JAYDEN (O.S.)
What are you doing?

Grace looks up and sees Jayden standing in the doorway looking at her.

They stare at each other for a moment.

JAYDEN (CONT'D)
That's a little extreme, don't you think?

Jayden turns and walks down the hall.

Grace stands awkwardly, realizing how stupid this idea was.

INT. JAYDEN'S DAD'S HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

Still holding the bat, Grace walks out of the bedroom and out to the living room.

EXT. JAYDEN'S DAD'S HOUSE -- LATER

Jayden and Grace sit together on the porch, like they've been there for a while. Grace thinks about it, wincing at the thought of what she almost did.

JAYDEN
Are you going crazy?

GRACE
Probably.

She starts to scratch her bandaged thumb, but stops herself with her other hand.

They sit in silence for a long moment.

GRACE (CONT'D)
When I was your age.

She thinks about it for a while.

GRACE (CONT'D)
I stood in a courtroom in front of a bunch of strangers and told them all the ways he abused me...what he hit me with, how he got drunk, how he forced me to take a shower with him, got me pregnant, and I sent him to prison.

(MORE)

GRACE (CONT'D)
I didn't talk about it, didn't
think about it...until I met
you...I don't know...
(beat)
I have a baby inside me and I don't
know, I don't know what I'm doing.

Grace shakes her head.

Jayden looks at her a little differently. This is a broken
human being, just like her.

GRACE (CONT'D)
I was just trying to help you.

Jayden continues to look at Grace. Maybe she can trust her.

Then, she lifts up her shirt to reveal the fresh wounds
across her lower back, swollen red stripes, bruised and
slightly bleeding.

GRACE (CONT'D)
Oh no.

JAYDEN
He loves the belt, such a cliché.

GRACE
Jayden, we have to do something
about this.

JAYDEN
Should we go bash his face in with
a baseball bat while he's sleeping?

Grace gets the point. The question sobers her.

Jayden looks back down.

CUT TO:

Jayden points to her bat. Grace hands it to her.

Jayden takes the bat and walks over to her dad's pristine
silver Audi.

Grace watches her wind up and swing, shattering the driver's
side window. She swings again and breaks the back window.

Then she turns and holds the bat out to Grace.

GRACE
We should get out of here.

JAYDEN
He'll sleep through anything.

Grace looks at the bat for a moment before taking it from
Jayden.

She steps up onto the hood of the car, holds it above her head and brings it down on the windshield with a SMASH.

She hits it again, SMASH! And again SMASH! SMASH! SMASH! Letting out all of her frustration until the entire thing is demolished.

She stands there as the bouncing cubes of glass settle on the pavement.

A dog BARKS across the street. Jayden notices.

GRACE

Okay, now we should get out of here.

EXT. CITY STREETS -- NIGHT

Grace packs Jayden on her bicycle as they cruise gently down the street. Jayden hugs her from behind.

EXT. GROUP HOME, COTTAGE -- NIGHT

Grace and Jayden ride to the gate and stop. Jayden hops off as Grace parks the bike.

GRACE

They're going to ask a lot of questions. It's gonna be hard.

JAYDEN

I'll try to leave out the part about you breaking into my house with a baseball bat.

They share a smile.

GRACE

Thanks.

JAYDEN

You're gonna be a really good mom.

Jayden turns and walks into the facility, leaving Grace with that thought.

INT. GROUP HOME JACK'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

Jayden sits in the office with Jack and a FEMALE SOCIAL WORKER, telling them the whole story.

JAYDEN

I told him this was going to be the last time I came home. I wasn't going to take his shit anymore. That set him off, of course. But I didn't care...

Grace watches them from the doorway. Jack notices her and gives her a knowing nod.

She acknowledges him and walks off.

EXT. CITY STREETS -- NIGHT

Grace rides home, light as a feather. She coasts down a long, steep hill.

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Grace walks in and sees Mason sleeping on the couch. She walks over to him and kneels down. She sees he's not sleeping.

GRACE
I'm sorry. I didn't mean what I
said earlier. I'm just really
messed up right now.

Mason looks at her for a moment, wondering. Then he lifts up his blanket to make room for her. She slides in beside him.

MASON
Marcus is going to get better.

Grace nestles in a little closer.

GRACE
I think I am too.

They lie together on the couch, content in each other's arms.

FADE OUT:

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE -- MORNING

Grace sits in a soft chair. She looks up at the therapist.

DR. HENDLER, a kind, older woman with a soft voice gives her a moment before hitting her with the next one.

DR. HENDLER
Grace, I know talking like this is
really hard, but this is our fourth
session together and I'd really
like you to try, okay?

Close-up of Grace's hand, with her drawing of a sea horse. She wiggles its tail.

GRACE
I don't really know what to say.

DR. HENDLER
Your Dad's getting out of prison in
a week. Do you wanna talk about
that?

Grace takes a moment.

GRACE
Okay.

INT. MASON'S CAR -- MORNING

Mason and Grace drive together in his car.

INT. WAITING ROOM -- MORNING

Mason and Grace sit in a waiting room together, similar to the one at the WOMEN'S CARE CLINIC.

MASON
Are you okay?

Grace nods.

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM -- MORNING

Grace lies on the examination bed with a gown on. Mason stands behind her, holding her shoulders. They watch the doctor as he goes through the steps of the procedure like he's done it a thousand times.

DOCTOR
Watch that monitor over my
shoulder. There we go. There it is.
Stay with it. Hang on a second.

The doctor aims the monitor so they can see. He moves the ultrasound camera around on her belly to give them a better view of their child.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
There's the heartbeat.

The monitor shows a tiny being, with a flickering heart. Grace and Mason stare at it in awe.

Grace looks at Mason with a smile. She grabs his hand and squeezes.

INT. GROUP HOME -- MORNING

Various shots. Music continues.

VARIOUS SHOTS, VARIOUS ROOMS

A static shot of the "Cool Down Room." The toy punching bag is deflated and sagging.

Luis lies in bed throwing a whiffleball against the wall.

Jayden pulls down the penis diagrams and carefully tapes her birthday cards up in their place.

Sammy stands in his underwear and carefully takes down his American flag.

EXT. GROUP HOME, COTTAGE -- MORNING

Grace and Mason stand in a circle with Nate. Mason and Grace are drinking coffee.

Jessica approaches and hands Grace the binder as Mason tells a story.

MASON

So, you need to get ready for this 'cause it's so fucking unbelievable it's going to seem fake, but I promise you it's not. Grace will vouch for me.

GRACE

It depends, if you tell it right.

MASON

There is no way not to tell this right, it's a storyteller's wet dream.

Grace spins her hand in a circle, telling him to get on with it. Jessica comes outside.

JESSICA

What?

GRACE

Get ready for this.

MASON

Okay, just in time. I'm gonna start at the beginning, okay. So, three years ago, right, we have this girl here named, Liza Green, she's 17, older than everybody else in the unit at the time, and I don't mean this in a pervy way or anything, but she's real pretty.

Mason looks to Grace for assurance.

GRACE

She was gorgeous.

MASON

All the guys on the unit want her but she won't give any of 'em the time of day 'cause she was busy, she was always studying.

GRACE

She was very smart.

MASON

Really smart. So, two weeks before she turns 18 and leaves, we get this new intake. This 15-year-old guy, he's really tough, really quiet, but he's cool, he's just kind of like kicking back and checking out the scene. And I swear I didn't hear him say a word the whole first week he was here. But then one day, we're doing a community meeting, and we ask for announcements, and this guy raises his hand. And he looks directly at Liza Green and he says, "I know you don't know me and I just got here, but I just wanna say that I've been watching you and I think you're the most interesting thing about this place. And I'm really sad I'm not going to get to know you before you leave. I just wanted to tell you that."

Mason motions to Grace to confirm his quote.

NATE

What a pimp. What did she say?

MASON

Nothing. Nothing, it got so fucking awkward I couldn't stand it, and then she left and never talked to him, and the kids teased him for like a year about it.

NATE

Ah, that blows.

MASON

Nah, he didn't give a shit. Didn't even phase him. Like he knew something everybody else didn't.

NATE

Who was this guy?

MASON

That was Marcus.

JESSICA

What! I never heard this story.

GRACE

Oh, wait. It gets so much better.

MASON

Yeah, yeah. So check this out.
Grace and I are getting coffee at
Ronnie's this morning, and we walk
in, and who do we see sittin' there
alone at a table, Marcus.

JESSICA

How's he doing?

MASON

He looks great.

GRACE

He's so good.

MASON

Button-up shirt, he was sipping on
a cappuccino.

NATE

Marcus drinks cappuccinos?

GRACE

Apparently now he does.

Grace nods.

MASON

So we're talking to him and we're
catching up and he's telling us
about his new job at the aquarium
and how much he takes home in tips
and how he's gonna start applying
for classes next semester and it's
weird 'cause I'm like, I have not
heard Marcus talk this much ever
since I met him. Like what is the
deal? Is he excited to see us? Is
he nervous about something? And
that's when I notice there's
another cappuccino on the table and
an empty chair next to him.

They're all glued to Mason's every word.

MASON (CONT'D)

And then, just like in the fucking
movies, the bathroom door flings
open and out walks Liza Green!

Everyone is smiling to the point of tears.

NATE

They were on a date?

GRACE

It was like their 5th one.

MASON
Yeah, and as soon as she sits down,
dude just goes beat red, so
embarrassed.

GRACE
(to Jessica)
It was so cute.

MASON
It was so fucking cute I almost
pissed my pants.

GRACE
Oh Jess, they look so happy
together.

MASON
So happy. And there she is-

BOOM! The door from the unit flies open and Sammy comes
running out in his underwear, holding his big American flag
over his head, screaming at the top of his lungs.

SAMMY
YOOOOHOOOOOOOO!!!!

GRACE
Here we go.

Grace takes off after him. Mason, Jessica, and Nate try to
keep up.

Grace leads, hair blowing as she runs, gaining speed with
every step.

As she does, the sound of the wind grows louder, rushing past
her ears, slowly drowning out all other sounds until all she
can hear is the wind against her face.

FADE TO BLACK