



**AWARDS  
2006**

**FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION**

**THE  
DEAD GIRL**

**BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY**

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FADE IN:

EXT. FIELD - DAY

The hem of a brown dress snags on dry brush, then pulls free as ARDEN, 30's, lurches through a wide, barren field.

Arms crossed against her chest, mouse-gray hair tied in a messy knot at the back of her head, she stumbles over rocks and weeds, her mouth set in a permanent grimace.

EXT. CREEK BED - DAY

Arden sits on a rocky incline above rushing water. She spreads a napkin on her lap, removes a thin sandwich from a plastic baggie, and takes a bite.

As she chews, she watches the water below her swirl and flow, surging over rocks, carrying leaves and debris.

She looks up. Branches from a blackened tree shift in the wind.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Arden returns through knee-high weeds toward an old two-story house stuck at the end of the field, hemmed in by a low, rusted fence.

Arden notices something ahead of her, then suddenly stops, staring down.

A naked female corpse lies in the weeds, legs splayed.

A thin purplish abrasion encircles the woman's neck, her blond hair matted with blood and leaves. She looks young. Maybe twenty-five.

Arden steps closer. Bloody stab wounds cover her torso. 12:13 is tattooed above her wrist.

Ants swarm around the woman's mouth and staring eyes. Flies buzz and land. Buzz and land.

Arden kneels.

A broken necklace lies in the grass, caught in the woman's hair. A gold charm reads:

*taken*

INT. MOTHER'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Arden closes the side door and locks it.

MOTHER (O.S.)  
(calling from upstairs)  
Arden? Are you down there?

As Arden shakes crumbs from the sandwich baggie into the garbage, she notices a bleeding scratch on her hand.

She puts her hand under the tap. Water washes away the blood, but a new, finer line of blood emerges.

MOTHER (O.S.)  
Arden!?

Arden opens the tap fully, drowning out her mother's voice.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Arden supports her invalid MOTHER, who slowly shuffles to the bathroom.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Arden waits by the bathroom door, listening to her mother strain to urinate.

MOTHER (O.S.)  
I need you in here.

Arden opens the door, goes inside.

INT. MOTHER'S HOUSE, BATHROOM - DAY

Water drips from a lime-encrusted tap as Mother soaks in the bath.

Arden sits on the toilet lid squeezing blood from her scratch. She sucks on it.

Mother heaves a sigh, lets her head drop forward.

MOTHER  
Alright.

Arden reaches for the washcloth and scrubs her mother's back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Mother raises an arm and rests it on the edge of the tub.

MOTHER

Get it good under there. I don't  
wanna stink.

Arden scrubs her mother's flabby armpit, then her neck, then  
her sagging breasts.

INT. MOTHER'S BEDROOM - DAY

Arden changes the bed sheets as Mother, damp and flushed from  
the bath, sits slumped in her chair.

Arden bundles the soiled sheets, opens a window.

MOTHER

I don't want it open.

Arden closes the window.

Outside, at the far edge of the field, the pale body of the  
dead girl is barely visible.

Arden stares at it for a moment, then pulls the shade.

She lifts her mother under the arms and maneuvers her into  
the bed.

MOTHER

A few more years and you'll have  
more gray than me.

Arden follows Mother's gaze to the mirror where both women  
are reflected. The resemblance is striking.

MOTHER

These damn pills make my mouth so  
dry.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Arden takes a glass from a cupboard. She hesitates, pulls  
something from her pocket.

It's the necklace from the dead girl.

*taken*

A strand of blond hair is still caught in the clasp.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Arden pulls down a cracked teacup and drops the necklace inside. She places the cup back on the highest shelf.

INT. ATTIC - NIGHT

Arden works at her sewing machine, finishing a brightly colored apron.

She clips a thread, looks out the dark window.

Beyond her reflected face, the field is black and vast.

INT. ATTIC - DAY

Morning light filters through the attic window as Arden irons a stack of aprons.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Arden sits at the kitchen table staring at the phone.

She picks up the handset, listening to the dial tone. Finally, she dials 9-1-1.

INT. SLEEPING PORCH - DAY

Arden stands at the window, watching as a police car turns off the two-lane highway, heading toward the house.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

The crunch of dried weeds. Arden leads TWO COPS through the field.

When the body becomes visible in the long grass, Arden stops.

ARDEN

Right there.

One of the cops hangs back with Arden. The other cop approaches the body.

COP 1

Oh, man. Aww, god.

COP 2

Whattya got?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Arden throws a fearful glance back toward the house.

INT. MOTHER'S BEDROOM - DAY

Mother strains to see out the window, where police cars and news vans are parked.

Arden brings in breakfast on a tray.

ARDEN

Do you want to eat in bed or in your chair?

MOTHER

What's going on out there?

The doorbell rings. Arden turns.

MOTHER

Don't answer it! What did they say to you?

ARDEN

Nothing.

MOTHER

Twenty-five minutes of nothing?

ARDEN

Nothing. There's a dead girl... They just asked questions.

MOTHER

Why are they asking you? You don't know anything.

The doorbell rings again. Arden turns toward the door. Mother's eyes narrow.

MOTHER

Why are they asking you?

ARDEN

I found her.

MOTHER

And you didn't tell me? You told strangers but you didn't tell me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARDEN  
I just told you.

MOTHER  
You called the police?

The doorbell rings. Arden looks down, making herself smaller.

MOTHER  
You're the reason these  
bloodsuckers are swarming all over  
my yard--

ARDEN  
I just told 'em I found a dead girl-

MOTHER  
Ringing my bell like they know me!  
Before I know it they'll be in here  
pawing through my cupboards,  
climbin up my stairs--

ARDEN  
No --

MOTHER  
Are you stupid? You *found* her! So  
what! Just keep walking! Just  
keep your mouth shut! Are you an  
*idiot?!*

Arden's face turns red. She wraps her arms across her chest.

MOTHER  
*Are you?!? Are you an idiot?!?*

EXT. MOTHER'S HOUSE - DAY

Arden rushes toward her rusted car, keeping her head down as a reporter pursues her.

REPORTER  
Excuse me, ma'am? You found the  
body?

ARDEN  
Sorry... I'm sorry...

REPORTER  
Did you know her--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Arden shuts her car door. She struggles with her keys, finds the ignition, and pulls out.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Arden pushes a cart down the cool aisles of a small grocery.

A CHECKER gossips with a CUSTOMER:

CHECKER

That's her. That's the lady who found her.

CUSTOMER

Oh, my god. Can you imagine?

Arden looks back to see both women watching her. She lowers her head and turns into another aisle.

Arden stops in front of a bin of frozen foods, takes a box of fish sticks and puts it in her cart.

Through a dirty plastic curtain, she can see into the stockroom where a guy in an apron, RUDY, sits on a crate, smoking. The tattoos on his arms and neck aren't fully covered by his shirt. He glances up at Arden as she passes.

Before she turns the corner, Arden glances back. Rudy's still looking.

INT. CHECK STAND - DAY

Arden keeps her eyes on the checker, as Rudy bags her groceries.

CHECKER

Seventy-one cents is your change. You want help out?

ARDEN

That's okay.

CHECKER

You have a nice day.

Arden reaches for her cart, but Rudy is already pushing it out the automatic door.

EXT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Arden follows Rudy into the parking lot.

RUDY  
Where's your car?

Arden hesitates, then leads him to her car.

RUDY  
You looked sweet on TV.  
(pause)  
It was you, wasn't it? Some people  
are mean. You can see it...  
(pointing to his eyes)  
Right here. But you looked sweet.

Arden just stares at him, a little frightened.

RUDY  
The back, or in the trunk?

ARDEN  
The back.

Arden stares at the tattoo on Rudy's neck: a skull with a snake in its mouth.

ARDEN  
You have to open it.

Arden digs for her keys at the bottom of her purse, unlocks the car.

RUDY  
I'd like to take you out sometime.

ARDEN  
I don't really--

RUDY  
You don't want to go out with me?

ARDEN  
Oh, no, I didn't--

RUDY  
Come on. Let's go out. I get off  
at eleven.

He loads the bags into the back seat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARDEN

I can't.

RUDY

(following her)

Why? You got a boyfriend?

ARDEN

No.

Arden reaches for the handle on the driver's side door, but Rudy grabs it first. Arden gasps, jumps back.

Rudy opens the door for her.

Arden gets into the car and jams her key into the ignition.

Rudy leans on the door, staring down at her.

RUDY

I won't hurt you.

ARDEN

Thank you.

Arden bites her lip, waiting for him to close the door.

RUDY

So, I'll see you at eleven?

ARDEN

Okay.

RUDY

My name's Rudy. What's yours?

Arden stares up at him, paralyzed.

INT. MOTHER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Arden cuts a greeting card into squares. She writes on a square:

*flowered apron \$4*

Mother eats dinner from a tray, watching TV.

On TV, local newscasters talk over footage of police scouring the field behind Arden's house.

Arden looks up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

On TV, Arden is speaking to reporters.

MOTHER  
Oh, they got ya now. They  
*gotcha...*

Arden grabs the remote and turns off the TV.

MOTHER  
Turn it back on!

ARDEN  
I don't want to see it.

MOTHER  
*Turn it on.*

ARDEN  
No.

Mother grabs for the remote, turning the TV on in the process.

ARDEN (ON TV)  
I just saw her... I don't really  
know anything--

MOTHER  
*Zip!* That's what she knows...  
Prancing around like a goddamned  
movie star...

Arden searches for the right button, changes the channel.

Hurricane coverage: People, dogs, cars, houses drift in a river of brown water.

MOTHER  
Now they know the way to this  
house. You made sure of that.  
(pause)  
They'll be back.

Mother stares at the TV, fear and misery etched deep.

MOTHER  
And you'll just let them take me.

Mother's body starts to shake. Tears fill her eyes. She furiously wipes them away with bony fists.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Arden pulls tissue from a box. She moves to Mother on the bed and holds her.

On TV, a house slowly sinks into ocean waves.

INT. MOTHER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Arden lies in bed with Mother, Mother's head nestled against her neck.

Arden stares at the clock on the night table, listening to Mother's soft snoring. The numbers change from 11:00 to 11:01.

Arden closes her eyes.

INT. MOTHER'S BEDROOM - LATER

Pre-dawn. Arden rises from the bed and pulls the covers over Mother. Mother's eyes are open.

MOTHER

You look pretty with your hair down. Just like my mother.

ARDEN

Go back to sleep.

MOTHER

(takes Arden's hand)  
Please don't leave me.

Mother looks up at Arden, frightened.

MOTHER

I'd die without you.

INT. FARMER'S MARKET - DAY

Arden sits behind a small table selling aprons, homemade preserves, almonds, and honey.

A YUPPIE WOMAN holds up one of Arden's aprons as she laughs to a friend.

YUPPIE WOMAN

Oh, my god! Mark would die! I have to get this!  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

YUPPIE WOMAN (cont'd)  
(to Arden)  
How much is it?

ARDEN  
Four dollars.

YUPPIE WOMAN  
Will you take three?

ARDEN  
Okay.

Arden puts the apron in a bag, and gives the woman change.

INT. MOTHER'S HOUSE, BATHROOM - NIGHT

Arden stares at her pale face in the mirror. She steps closer, focusing on the reflection of one eye.

Inside the iris, the mirror is reflected. Inside the mirror, there's a dark abyss.

Arden opens a drawer. Tweezers, scissors, dusty combs. In the depths of the drawer she finds an ancient zippered bag.

INT. MOTHER'S HOUSE, ARDEN'S BEDROOM - LATER

Arden wears a slip, her head wrapped in a towel. She applies red lipstick, then presses her lips together. She looks fragile and glamorous.

MOTHER  
Arden!

Arden wipes off the lipstick with toilet paper, rubs blush from her cheeks.

INT. MOTHER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Arden pulls her robe more tightly around herself, as she steps into the doorway.

MOTHER  
What'd you do to your face?

ARDEN  
(biting at her lip)  
Nothing.

Mother eyes her suspiciously.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOTHER  
What's that stink?

ARDEN  
*Nothing.*

Pause. Mother motions toward her tray.

MOTHER  
The milk's sour.

As Arden moves to take the glass, Mother grabs for the towel. Arden jerks away, holding it in place.

MOTHER  
Take it off.

ARDEN  
No.

MOTHER  
Take it off.

Pause. Arden pulls the towel from her head. Her hair is bleached blond.

MOTHER  
You look like a two-dollar hooker.  
(laughing)  
You'd have to pay *them*.

As Arden reaches for the glass of milk, Mother grabs it and sloshes it at Arden, drenching her.

Arden blinks, milk running down her face and body.

MOTHER  
Where's the camera now? Miss  
America, prancing up and down...  
"Look at me! Look at me!"

ARDEN  
(wiping her face)  
Shut up.

MOTHER  
Don't you dare tell me to shut up!  
In my own house! Spending my money  
on this crap! Looking in the  
mirror all day and night like a  
goddamn *whore*! Oh, Jesus... He  
took the wrong one!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Arden's jaw is tightly clenched.

MOTHER  
It should have been you. Not my  
boy--

Arden suddenly runs at Mother, prying the glass from her hands.

ARDEN  
Don't you talk about him! Don't  
you ever...!

The glass breaks. Mother screams.

Arden holds the broken glass against mother's chest.

Mother cowers, paralyzed with fear, staring into Arden's eyes.

Arden drops the glass and runs from the room.

INT. ATTIC STAIRS - NIGHT

Arden pulls a suitcase from the attic stairs and drags it to her room.

MOTHER (O.S.)  
They'll arrest you! They'll put  
you in jail!

INT. MOTHER'S HOUSE, ARDEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Arden takes off her robe, puts on a worn dress, then a sweater. She throws her meager belongings into the suitcase.

MOTHER (O.S.)  
I'll tell them what you did! You  
filthy thing!

INT. MOTHER'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Arden drags her suitcase down the stairs.

MOTHER (O.S.)  
Then you'll have nothing! Do you  
hear me?  
(pause)  
I'm bleeding!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Arden gets to the front door, then pauses.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Arden!

Arden returns to the kitchen, opens the cupboard.

MOTHER (O.S.)

There's blood on me!

Arden retrieves the dead girl's necklace from the chipped teacup.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Arden?!

Arden walks out the door.

INT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

Arden, wearing work gloves, searches the aisles until she sees Rudy pushing a hand-truck stacked with boxes. Arden follows him with her cart.

ARDEN

Hi.

RUDY

(looks back)

Hey.

Rudy parks the hand-truck in the produce aisle and begins stacking apples.

Without looking up, he tosses one to her. Arden tries to catch it. It thuds to the floor and rolls.

Arden grabs the apple. She probes the bruises with her thumb.

ARDEN

I'm sorry I couldn't make it last night.

Rudy shrugs, keeps stacking. Silence.

ARDEN

You're mad at me?

RUDY

What do you think?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Pause.

ARDEN  
I'm sorry.

Rudy doesn't answer. Arden puts the bruised apple back on the pile.

ARDEN  
(tears in her eyes)  
It was nice meeting you.

Arden walks away, then turns back.

ARDEN  
I'm leaving... I'm going to Arizona, so... If you still wanted to go out, it would have to be tonight.

INT. ARDEN'S CAR, MOVING - NIGHT

As Rudy drives, he offers Arden a beer from the six-pack at his feet.

ARDEN  
No, thanks.

RUDY  
Ever tried it?

ARDEN  
No.

He pops the top, holds it out.

RUDY  
You might like it.

Arden takes a sip. She makes a face, tries to hand it back.

RUDY  
It grows on you.

Arden takes another sip. She looks out the window at the unlit road.

RUDY  
So what was it like?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ARDEN  
What was what like?

RUDY  
Finding the dead girl.

ARDEN  
I don't know...  
(pause, shrugs)  
Sad, I guess.

RUDY  
There were cuts in her hands,  
right?

Arden looks at him, wary.

ARDEN  
How do you know?

RUDY  
Defense wounds. It means she tried  
to fight. Her clothes were cut,  
too, right?

Arden looks at him confused.

ARDEN  
She wasn't wearing any clothes.  
(pause)  
Why would her clothes be cut?

RUDY  
"Non-functional cutting". That's  
what they call it when the cuts  
don't serve any purpose.

Arden stares at him, uneasy.

RUDY  
The 405 killer did the same thing.  
All of his victims had these cuts  
in their clothes that the cops  
couldn't really explain, cause they  
didn't make sense with the wounds  
the girls had? But, then, once  
they caught him, they realized it  
was part of his foreplay.  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RUDY (cont'd)

Then when they looked back in this guy's record, they found out that he got caught stealing woman's clothes off a clothesline when he was twelve. When the cops came to his parents' house and asked him why he did it, he started crying and handed over a box. It was filled with women's underwear. Bras and nylons and, you know, underwear stuff, *all cut up*. Right then, those cops let a serial killer slip through their fingers.

ARDEN

Why did he do it?

RUDY

It made him feel better. If he got frustrated or something he'd cut up things.

ARDEN

No, why did he kill the women?

RUDY

Probably something to do with his mother.

(pause)

That's what it usually is.

Arden considers this.

RUDY

(re: the beer)

It's good, right?

ARDEN

It's okay.

Arden takes a big swig, looks out the window.

Rudy turns the car into an unpaved road.

ARDEN

Her eyes were open.

RUDY

Yeah?

ARDEN

She looked like she was just lying there... looking at the sky.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RUDY

I always thought it would be so cool if, when somebody died, you could just peel off the top layer of their eyeball and develop it like film, so you could have a picture of the last thing they saw--

ARDEN

It was trees. And sky.

The car bumps to a stop in a clearing ringed by trees.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

Arden, kneeling in the headlights, peels back the plastic from a roasted chicken. Rudy plops himself on the ground beside her, cradling the remaining beer.

ARDEN

I forgot to get plastic ware.

RUDY

Aisle nine.

Rudy opens the coleslaw cup, hands it to her.

RUDY

Chug-a-lug.

Arden smiles.

RUDY

You got a nice smile.

Arden's smile disappears.

Rudy rips a leg from the chicken and starts to eat. He rips off the other leg and offers it to Arden.

RUDY

You gonna eat with your gloves on?

Arden nods, takes a delicate bite. Rudy digs his fingers into the coleslaw, stuffs a handful in his mouth.

RUDY

I almost didn't recognize you.

Arden ducks her head, touching her hair.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

                  ARDEN  
I know...

                  RUDY  
You look good.

Rudy leans over to kiss her. Arden turns her head so his lips hit the side of her head.

                  ARDEN  
Sorry. Sorry...

Arden wipes her mouth, self-conscious. She waits for Rudy to try again.

He takes another bite of chicken.

                  RUDY  
Why do you think I brought you here?

                  ARDEN  
I don't know.

Pause.

                  RUDY  
You think it's because I like you?

                  ARDEN  
I don't know.

                  RUDY  
Do you want to kiss me?

Pause.

                  ARDEN  
Okay.

                  RUDY  
So, do it.

Arden blushes, uncomfortable.

                  RUDY  
You don't want to kiss me?

                  ARDEN  
I don't know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RUDY  
Want me to kiss you?

Silence. Arden nods.

RUDY  
Are you gonna stay still this time?

ARDEN  
Okay.

RUDY  
I don't need to tie you up, do I?

Rudy sucks the last bit of flesh from his chicken bone.

ARDEN  
Maybe.

RUDY  
Maybe what?

ARDEN  
Maybe you should tie me up.

Rudy looks at her, surprised. He tosses the chicken bone.

RUDY  
Or maybe you should just stay  
still.

ARDEN  
Okay.

Rudy kisses her. Arden seems overwhelmed by the sensation.

RUDY  
Your lips are soft.

Arden smiles, then shivers.

She looks at Rudy, then reaches into her pocket and pulls out the necklace.

ARDEN  
This was hers.

RUDY  
The dead girl's?

Arden nods.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RUDY  
Can I hold it?

Arden pours the necklace into his hand.

RUDY  
You're not yankin my chain?

Arden shakes her head.

Rudy fingers the strand of blond hair still caught in the chain.

RUDY  
This is her actual hair.

ARDEN  
I know.

Arden holds out her gloved hand for the necklace.

Rudy gives it to her, then kisses Arden hard.

Arden submits, opening her mouth for his tongue.

RUDY  
Will you get in the back seat with me?

Arden shakes her head: no.

RUDY  
Why not?  
(pulls back)  
Why not?

ARDEN  
You might have to make me.

Rudy looks at her, gauging her.

Arden touches his belt. She unbuckles it, pulling it free, and places it in his lap. She folds her hands.

RUDY  
What's this for?

ARDEN  
I don't know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Rudy takes the belt and lays it over her wrists. Arden waits.

RUDY  
Is this what you want?

Arden stares at her lap. Rudy wraps the belt around her wrists a few times, then buckles it.

ARDEN  
I could probably get out of that.

Rudy tightens the belt.

Arden looks up at Rudy as he rises. He pulls her by the belt-end, leading her toward the car.

Rudy opens the car door. Arden sits into the back seat, scooting across to the far side.

EXT. CLEARING/INT. ARDEN'S CAR (CONTINUOUS) - NIGHT

Rudy comes in after her, kneeling between her legs, kissing her.

Arden pushes her gloved hands up between them, raising her arms above her head in a posture of submission. She opens her legs.

Rudy leans in to kiss her again, his hands touching her breasts, groping between her legs.

Arden starts to writhe against the seat.

Rudy unzips his pants. He pulls Arden's underpants away and tries to push himself inside her. He bucks and grunts, but can't seem to get inside.

RUDY  
Shit.

Arden keeps her eyes closed, silently writhing against him.

Rudy pulls her underwear off. He tries to guide his penis inside her, but still can't make it work.

RUDY  
Fuck!

Rudy pulls out of the car, yanking up his pants. He bumps his head on the way out.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RUDY  
Goddammit!

Arden opens her eyes as Rudy angrily stalks away from the car.

Arden scoots toward the open door, pulling her dress down.

ARDEN  
What's the matter?

RUDY  
Fucking stupid... *fucking...*

ARDEN  
What's wrong?

RUDY  
Let's just go.

ARDEN  
Why? What--

RUDY  
I can't do it like this!

ARDEN  
(panicking)  
Like what? What do you mean? Like what?

RUDY  
Like *this*, with you... You don't even touch me or kiss me back... Just lying there like I'm raping you or something.

ARDEN  
Okay.

RUDY  
Okay? Okay what? You want me to rape you?!

ARDEN  
I'll kiss you back.

Rudy stares at her.

RUDY  
And take your gloves off.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Arden slowly pulls off one of her gloves, revealing a deep, bloody gash in the palm of her hand.

Rudy stares at the gash, surprised and concerned.

RUDY  
You might need stitches.

ARDEN  
It doesn't really hurt.  
(pause)  
Not when you were kissing me.

Rudy kisses her wounded hand. He kisses her mouth. Tender at first, then harder.

EXT. CLEARING - DAWN

Arden lies on the damp ground, naked, eyes open, bloody palm up, a blade of grass grasped between her fingers.

RUDY (O.S.)  
Some serial killers use objects  
because they can't get it up.

There are tears in Arden's eyes as she stares up at the sky. It's just beginning to lighten.

RUDY (O.S.)  
They find bottles, virgin Mary  
statues, pennies, all sorts of  
things up there.

Arden turns her head. A tear falls as she examines the tender white root of the grass.

ARDEN  
I don't want to talk about serial  
killers anymore.

INT. ARDEN'S CAR - DAY

Arden drives. Rudy sits in silence.

RUDY  
So, what's in Arizona?

ARDEN  
My brother.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Silence.

RUDY  
You guys close?

ARDEN  
He's dead. My father killed him.

Rudy stares at her, wide-eyed.

ARDEN  
They buried him in the desert. In  
Arizona. I'm not sure where.  
(pause)  
My mother told everyone he ran  
away.

Arden looks out at the road.

RUDY  
Is that true?

ARDEN  
You're the only one I ever told.

RUDY  
Jesus...

Silence.

ARDEN  
You know how I said it felt sad to  
find the dead girl? I lied. It  
felt *right*.

EXT. PAYPHONE - DAY

Arden holds the receiver, looking out at Rudy, who waits in  
the idling car.

OPERATOR (O.S.)  
(through phone)  
Nine-one-one emergency. Operator-  
five-four-one.

Arden notices a missing person's flier taped inside the phone  
booth.

*MISSING: JENNY FOLGER*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Below are two photos: a smiling girl of twelve, and the same girl, age-progressed to late twenties.

OPERATOR (O.S.)  
Nine-one-one emergency. Can I have  
your name and address?

ARDEN  
There's a woman...

Pause.

OPERATOR (O.S.)  
I'm sorry, ma'am, what's the nature  
of your emergency?

Arden stares at the age-progressed photo. It looks like the  
dead girl.

ARDEN  
A woman needs help...  
(pause)  
Her daughter left her...

OPERATOR (O.S.)  
The woman who needs help... Is she  
there with you?

Arden looks toward Rudy, waiting in the car.

ARDEN  
No. She's in the house. Where  
they found the dead girl.

CUT TO BLACK

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - DAY

LEAH, 20's, sits opposite a THERAPIST.

LEAH  
I really believed that if I prayed  
hard enough, and if we hung enough  
posters, and told enough people,  
eventually we'd find her and she'd  
be okay.  
(pause)  
But, by the time I was in high  
school, I'd read about other girls  
being kidnapped and what happened,  
so I figured, you know...  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LEAH (cont'd)

Chances are she probably wasn't still alive. But I kept praying. Only, then, it was basically:  
*Please, God, if You had to take her, at least let someone find her body.*

Leah stares at the wall, tears in her eyes.

LEAH

If that happened, it would be terrible. It would be the worst thing anyone could ever imagine. But eventually we'd move on.

(pause)

It's not knowing for sure... It's that tiny bit of *hope* that kills you.

Pause.

THERAPIST

What do you think it might look like to "move on"?

Silence.

LEAH

My mom and dad and me... We'd pack up the stuff from her room... and we'd take all the boxes--the newspaper articles, and the false leads, and the police reports, and the posters--and we'd burn everything in a big bonfire. And we'd cry and hold one another... And we'd fall asleep for like a thousand years. And then, in the morning, we'd wake up, and the sun would be shining, and my mom would go back into the kitchen and start making breakfast, and my dad would smile and say, "Go get ready for school," and everything would be okay again.

(pause)

Or, not okay yet, but it had a chance to be.

(pause)

But either way, it would be over.

Leah looks at her therapist, tears running down her cheeks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LEAH

I don't pray anymore. She's been gone for fifteen years. It'll never be okay.

(pause)

It'll never be over.

TITLE: *THE SISTER*

INT. LEAH'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Leah stands at the sink, filling a glass. The wall is covered with faded newspaper clippings, held in place by layers of yellowed tape. Headlines read:

*NORTHRIDGE GIRL BELIEVED KIDNAPPED*

*AREA GIRL STILL MISSING*

*POLICE ABANDON SEARCH FOR MISSING GIRL*

*FAMILY VOWS TO 'NEVER GIVE UP HOPE'*

Leah turns off the tap.

BARBARA(O.S.)

...finally okayed our proposal to post a missing children's board in the park, near Jenny's bench.

Leah glances over at her mother, BARBARA, 50's, sitting at the kitchen table. The table is covered with "missing" fliers identical to the one Arden noticed in the phone booth.

BARBARA

It'll be just one more way of spreading the word.

Leah pushes a pill from a foil package, swallows it.

BARBARA

Your father thinks we should use the yellow dress...

Barbara shows Leah a smiling candid of six-year-old Jenny.

BARBARA

But I'm leaning toward the age-progression...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Barbara holds up the computer-generated picture from the flier.

Leah looks at her mother without expression.

LEAH  
Whichever you think.

INT. MORGUE, LEAH'S CUBICLE - NIGHT

Leah stares at a copy of the age-progressed photo of Jenny. A note is clipped to it:

*I'm going with this one. Do you agree? -Mom*

Leah's colleague, DEREK, 30's, steps into the doorway, briefcase in hand.

DEREK  
I'm heading out...

LEAH  
Okay.

DEREK  
Murray wants to do the Acton Jane Doe in the morning. She's parked in the deep freeze. Can you prep her?

LEAH  
Sure.

Derek starts to leave, then pauses in the doorway.

DEREK  
My roommate and I are having a little get-together tomorrow night. A little post-dissertation, throw-the-computer-out-the-window celebration thing. If you feel like stopping by...

LEAH  
I'll probably be stuck in the library. But, thanks.

DEREK  
You could come over after.

Leah looks at him, guarded. His smile is sweet and crooked.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LEAH  
I'll see.

INT. MORGUE, AUTOPSY - NIGHT

The oppressive drone of massive refrigeration units. Leah, in surgical apron, mask, and latex gloves, unzips a body bag, works it off a female corpse.

She carefully removes the bag covering one hand, marks it, seals it, sets it aside.

She lifts a wrist bearing a rose tattoo. She uses an orange - stick to scrape beneath the fingernails, then pours the scrapings into a fresh evidence bag.

Leah moves around and removes the bag from the other hand. As she starts scraping the nails, she stops. Between the middle and ring fingers is a red, irregular-shaped birthmark.

Leah stares at it.

Leah moves to the dead girl's face, carefully pushes back blood-encrusted hair. Brown eyes stare.

Leah has stopped breathing.

The dead girl looks like the age-progressed photo of Jenny.

INT. MORGUE, MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Leah searches through a stack of folders. She pulls one out and opens it.

A DMV photo of the dead girl is attached to a Missing Persons Report.

Leah scans the report:

*Name: KRISTA ANNE KUTCHER aka Christy Kinkirk, Krissy Kinkirk; Krystal Tallridge*

*Scars/Marks/Tattoos: Tattoos: 12:13, bunny, rose.*

*Birthmark on hand.*

*Relatives: Unknown*

Leah sits at the computer and types: 12:13.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She clicks *search*.

The top entry reads:

*Gen 12:13. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister*

Leah looks stunned.

INT. LEAH'S PARENTS' HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Leah places the dead girl's DMV photo beside the age-progressed photo of Jenny. They are virtually identical.

Her parents, Barbara and BILL, both in pajamas, stare down at the photos.

BARBARA  
(confused)  
Who is this?

LEAH  
Detectives sent the photo as a possible match for a Jane Doe we have in the morgue.

As Barbara scrutinizes the photo, tears come into her eyes.

BARBARA  
No...  
(pause)  
Her eyes weren't that dark.

LEAH  
She has a birthmark on her hand.

Barbara shakes her head, upset.

BARBARA  
It's not Jenny! Those aren't her eyes.

LEAH  
I checked the report. They can't find any family.  
(pause)  
It's her.

Barbara, still shaking her head, starts to sob. Bill takes her in his arms.

INT. MORGUE, MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE - DAY

Leah, red-eyed from lack of sleep, waits as MURRAY, 40's, reviews the two photos.

MURRAY

But, hasn't your sister been missing... a long time?

LEAH

She was taken from a state park less than ten miles from where this girl's body was found.

Murray stares at Leah, trying to make sense of it.

MURRAY

Leah, with age-progressed photos--

LEAH

I know. They're a guess. She has a birthmark on her hand. Just like Jenny. I want Andy to do the dentals.

INT. JENNY'S ROOM - DAY

On a bedroom door, rainbow stickers spell out *JENNY*.

Leah opens the door, and steps inside the small blue room.

It contains the preserved remnants of Jenny's short life: stuffed bunnies of all shapes and sizes, Barbies, an earring tree, a pink floral bedspread, a child-sized rocker.

Leah turns. Bill is standing in the doorway.

BILL

It's hard to believe it's over.

Leah connects with her father's sad eyes.

LEAH

I know.

INT. DEREK'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Music blares. Leah walks through a crowd of strangers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Derek comes up behind her.

DEREK  
Hey! You came!

LEAH  
Yeah.

DEREK  
Alright! You want something to  
drink? Beer, soda, Champagne?

Pause.

LEAH  
Champagne.

EXT. DEREK'S BACKYARD - NIGHT

Derek and Leah sit on a rusted swing-set at the edge of an  
overgrown garden, drinks in hand.

Music blares from the house.

DEREK  
So why tonight?

Leah gives him a questioning look.

DEREK  
I've been inviting you to my  
parties for three years...

LEAH  
You have?

DEREK  
I don't know about you, but every  
now and then I like to hang out  
with somebody that's not dead.

LEAH  
I guess.

Silence.

DEREK  
How's it going so far?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LEAH  
So far so good.  
(pause)  
You're more talkative.

Derek smiles. Leah looks down at her feet scraping in the grass as she swings.

LEAH  
I'm on anti-depressants.

DEREK  
(surprised)  
Oh, yeah?

LEAH  
I used to spend most of my free time in bed.

DEREK  
Oh. Well... Bed can be nice.

LEAH  
It can also be depressing.

DEREK  
Yeah. It's good to get out of bed sometimes.

LEAH  
Kinda hard to make friends...

DEREK  
In bed? Yeah. *Although...*

Derek smiles.

LEAH  
(smiling)  
Yeah...

Derek takes her hand.

INT. DEREK'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Derek leans in and kisses Leah. He pulls back, smiles at Leah.

She smiles, then looks away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEREK  
You have excellent posture.

LEAH  
(laughs)  
Do I? Oh, no.

DEREK  
No, it's nice.  
(pause)  
I feel like if I let go of you,  
you're gonna run away.

Leah looks at him, uncertain.

LEAH  
Then don't let go.

INT. DEREK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Naked, Leah straddles Derek. They clutch at each other, grabbing hold of ass, shoulders, hands, and tits.

Leah's fucking and bucking, eyes shut, trying desperately to get a release.

Derek puts his hand on her face, causing Leah to open her eyes. Leah looks down at him. He makes a silly face. She smiles.

EXT. DEREK'S HOUSE - DAWN

Leah stands in the door with Derek.

DEREK  
You can stay. I promise, I'll let  
you sleep.

LEAH  
No, I should go.

DEREK  
Yeah, alright. I'm getting pretty  
sick of you anyway. Ha ha.

Derek kisses her.

DEREK  
I'm really glad you came. Really  
glad.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LEAH

Me, too. I wanted to. For a long time.

DEREK

Good. Okay. Good.

He leans in and kisses her, deeply.

INT. LEAH'S CAR - DAWN

Leah starts her car. As she puts it in gear, she starts to cry.

Leah's tears come from someplace very deep; grief mixed with joyous relief.

INT. LEAH'S CUBICLE - DAY

Leah picks up the phone, dials.

DEREK (O.S.)

Speak.

LEAH

Derek?

DEREK (O.S.)

Hey, how's it goin'?

LEAH

Okay.

(grins)

Good, actually.

DEREK (O.S.)

Yeah? Missing me?

She laughs.

MURRAY (O.S.)

When you get a minute...

Leah turns to see Murray waiting.

LEAH

(to Derek)

Sorry, I need to call you back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DEREK (O.S.)

Okay.

Leah hangs up, stands.

LEAH

Did Andy get the stuff?

Pause.

MURRAY

It's not her.

LEAH

He checked the films?

MURRAY

They were negative for a match.

Leah stares at Murray, tears in her eyes, unable to move.

MURRAY

I got a call this morning from Detective Greile. They've tracked down the girl's mother. She's driving down from Washington to I.D. the body.

Leah just stares at him, shaking her head.

LEAH

That's wrong. It has to be...

MURRAY

The woman's name is Melora Kutcher. Her daughter was Krista Kutcher. She faxed detectives a birth certificate and a photo.

Leah looks devastated.

MURRAY

I'm sorry.

INT. MORGUE SECURITY DESK - DAY

Leah watches on a black and white surveillance monitor as MELORA, long graying hair, looks at the body of the dead girl. As she reaches out to touch her daughter's hand, she starts to cry.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Leah watches for a moment longer, then turns away, stone-faced.

She walks down the long, gray hallway.

INT. LEAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Leah lies curled in ruffled sheets, awake, numb.

The phone rings.

And rings again.

Finally, the machine picks up.

DEREK (O.S.)

Leah, it's me. You around, you  
okay, you alive? What's going on?  
(sighs)

Okay. I'm just, uh... Trying you  
again.

(pause)

Just call me back, okay? Even if  
it's just to tell me to, you  
know... leave you the hell alone.  
Just want to know you're okay.  
Okay, bye.

Leah doesn't move.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Leah sits across from her parents, staring down at the table.  
She looks pale and distracted.

BARBARA

He billed me three thousand dollars  
for a couple internet searches! I  
could do that! Tim gave me the  
name of another investigator,  
somebody the Carters used.

BILL

Hm. Mm-hm.

Bill keeps his head down, eating.

LEAH

I want to have a memorial service  
for Jenny.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Silence.

BARBARA

What?

LEAH

Jenny's dead. I want to have a memorial.

Bill casts a worried glance at Barbara.

BARBARA

Why would you say that?

LEAH

Because it's true.

BILL

Honey--

BARBARA

She isn't dead. For all we know--

LEAH

SHE'S DEAD! She didn't run away! She wasn't raised in the woods by wolves! She didn't hit her head and forget her name and where she lived, and she isn't staying with some nice family of *Gypsies!* *Some man took her* and did terrible things to her, and hid her body so well we'll never find it--

BILL

Leah, honey, we don't--

LEAH

It doesn't matter how many posters we hang, or how many petitions we sign, or which picture we put up near Jenny's bench! No one will recognize her because she's dead and she's never coming back!

Barbara glares at Leah.

BARBARA

If she were dead, don't you think I'd know it in my heart? I know she's alive.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BARBARA (cont'd)

I know she's out there somewhere  
and the only way I'm going to see  
her again is if we don't give up!  
*Someone out there knows my baby.*  
They know her. They just don't  
know that we're looking for her.

(pause)

I will *never* give up on her. Just  
like I'd never give up on you.  
Ever. *Ever.*

Barbara rises. Bill tries to catch her hand, but she yanks  
it away.

BARBARA

No. You always make excuses for  
her because she's sick, but there's  
no excuse for this.

Barbara walks across the room and pushes out the door.

Around the restaurant, people are staring.

Leah looks at her father. There are tears in his eyes. Leah  
reaches for his hand.

Bill gives Leah's hand a quick squeeze as he rises.

BILL

I'd better make sure she's okay.

Leah watches her father head toward the door.

LEAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Leah stands at the sink, filling a glass, staring at the wall  
covered with old clippings.

*FAMILY VOWS TO 'NEVER GIVE UP HOPE'*

Leah turns off the tap, throws back a pill, chases it with  
water.

Leah looks back at the headline, focusing on one word:

HOPE

Leah reaches out and claws the clipping off the wall,  
crushing it. She pulls down another one. And another. And  
another.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Leah lights a burner on the stove. She piles the crumpled clippings on the fire, watching them flame up and burn until there are only black cinders left.

She turns, staring at the bare wall.

The stain of the clippings remains in the faded paint.

Leah starts to weep.

Doubled over with grief, Leah reaches for the phone. She punches in a number.

DEREK (O.S.)

Speak.

Pause.

LEAH

Please help me.

CUT TO BLACK

INT. SHERIFF STATION - DAY

Melora Kutcher sits with Detective GREILE, 50's, at his desk.

GREILE

When was the last time you saw your daughter?

Melora nervously taps her knuckles against her lips, her hands nearly hidden in her sleeves.

MELORA

Um. It would be about...  
nineteen... ninety-three, I think.  
No. I don't think that's right...  
Um, well, she was sixteen. She  
left home when she was sixteen...  
(pause)  
That was the last time.

TITLE: *THE MOTHER*

Melora watches the detective take notes.

MELORA

I tried to write her. I called and  
left messages when I had a  
number...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MELORA (cont'd)

(pause)

She was very angry. She made it very clear that she didn't want me or her stepfather involved in her life.

GREILE

Did you know she'd relocated to Los Angeles?

MELORA

No. Well, um... eventually. I thought she might have gone to Hollywood. She always talked about wanting to be on TV when she was little. But you don't really expect... You know, they're just dreams a child has.

Melora pulls her sleeves completely over her hands.

MELORA

A few years ago, when my husband died... I hired a private investigator.

(pause)

He told me what she was doing. You know, about the arrests. That's how he found her, I guess. From her record.

Melora crosses her arms, her fingers on her mouth again.

MELORA

I called her.

(a sad smile)

She didn't want to talk to me. She said some nasty things, a lot of F-words. And then she hung up. That was the last time.

GREILE

Was your daughter religious?

MELORA

No. She hated church. We tried to take her when she was young. But...

Pause.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GREILE

Okay.

(looks over his notes)

Alright. If you just hang out here  
for another minute--

Melora nods. Greile walks across the bullpen to confer with  
another officer.

Melora glances down at the paperwork on the desk.

*Name: Krista Anne Kutcher*

*Last known address: Silver Saddle Motel,*

*31613 Lavado Boulevard*

There's a Xeroxed DMV photo of Krista. Below it, half  
hidden, is a crime scene photo of Krista naked in the field.

GREILE (O.S.)

You'll be in town for another day?

Greile returns to the desk and pushes the photos and reports  
back into the folder.

MELORA

I was planning to drive back  
tomorrow, but if you needed me to  
stay--

GREILE

Anything else we need we can  
probably take care of over the  
phone.

MELORA

Okay.

(rises)

Okay.

The detective nods, returning to his work.

INT. MELORA'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Melora sits on the bed, a suitcase at her feet.

The sliding window is open, the breeze stirring the sheers.  
From outside, happy sounds of kids splashing and laughing in  
the hotel pool.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Melora listens, utterly lost.

INT. MELORA'S CAR - DAY

A map on the seat beside her, Melora drives down a busy boulevard, checking a line of cheap motels.

On the sidewalk, girls in too-tight dresses and stilettos wait for cars to stop.

A run-down motel surrounded by scrawny palm trees advertises rooms with "cable & mini frig". It's the Silver Saddle Motel.

INT. SILVER SADDLE MOTEL, OFFICE - DAY

A butch woman, DEL, watches TV behind the counter. She glances up as Melora walks in.

DEL  
I help you?

MELORA  
Um... I was wondering if, um... If  
Krista Kutcher lived here?

Pause.

DEL  
Yeah.  
(pause)  
She *did*.

MELORA  
I was hoping I could see her room.

DEL  
Somebody's in there.  
(points out the window)  
See the girl on the phone? If she  
wants to let ya see it, be my  
guest.

EXT. SILVER SADDLE MOTEL, PARKING LOT - DAY

Melora waits by the phone booth as ROSETTA, 20's, wearing a short skirt and an eggplant-colored wig, pleads on the phone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROSETTA

Baby, please? Come on, Tommy, just  
come get me...

Rosetta turns, glancing at Melora through the dirty glass.  
There are fading bruises on her face and arm. She turns her  
back to Melora.

ROSETTA

Yes, you do, baby-- Who the fuck  
was that? Who was it?

(upset)

Go fuck yourself.

Rosetta slams the phone down and heads back toward the motel.  
Melora follows.

MELORA

Excuse me...

(pause)

I, um--

ROSETTA

(whirls around)

Do I know you?

MELORA

No. No, sorry. I just wanted...  
I talked to the woman at the  
desk... I was wondering if I could  
see your room.

Rosetta stares at Melora like she's nuts.

INT. ROSETTA'S ROOM - DAY

Melora counts out five twenties. Rosetta takes the cash and  
moves back, allowing Melora to enter.

Melora steps into the room. One of two twin beds has been  
stripped. Beside it, a torn lampshade is topped by a paper  
crown.

MELORA

Did you know the girl who used to  
stay here?

Rosetta drops onto the other bed.

ROSETTA

Yeah, I knew her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MELORA  
Were you friends?

ROSETTA  
We lived together.

Rosetta reaches for a pack of cigarettes from the nightstand.

Melora looks at a wall of photos:

KRISTA AND ROSETTA DRESSED AS SEXY BUNNIES AT A HALLOWEEN PARTY.

KRISTA AND ROSETTA HANGING ON A BURLY MAN.

KRISTA LAUGHING.

Melora stares at Krista's laughing face.

MELORA  
It's a nice picture.

Rosetta takes a drag from her cigarette.

ROSETTA  
Yeah, she liked that one.

Melora looks around the room. Below a rack of empty hangers, a ratty Marlboro duffel bag holds rumpled clothes.

Cheap toiletries line the sink in the bathroom. Plastic animals are perched on the edge of the tub.

Melora looks at Rosetta in the mirror. If it weren't for the bruises and chipped teeth, she'd be beautiful.

MELORA  
What kind of things do they make you do?

Rosetta looks up from picking polish off her toenail.

ROSETTA  
What?

MELORA  
The men who pay you.

ROSETTA  
You're asking what I do on a date?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MELORA

When they're paying you.

ROSETTA

Yeah. That's a "date".

(pause)

I don't know. Whatever they want.  
Head, usually.

MELORA

(pause)

How much do they pay you?

ROSETTA

Are you a reporter? Gonna do a  
story on me? Let's see. My mom's  
dead. She was a junkie. She got  
shot in the head in a parking lot.  
My dad-- Never knew him. I got  
two half brothers. I grew up in  
Compton. Now I live here and suck  
off assholes for cash. That's  
about it. Whattya think of that?

MELORA

I think it's sad.

ROSETTA

Yeah, well.

Rosetta takes another drag from her cigarette.

MELORA

Did Krista ever say where she was  
from?

ROSETTA

Awallawalla Washington? Some  
fucking place, I can't remember.

MELORA

Did she say why she ran away?

Rosetta looks at Melora more closely.

ROSETTA

She probably wasn't happy.

MELORA

Did she say why?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROSETTA

Besides her stepfather sticking his dick in her? No, I don't think so.

Melora looks stricken.

ROSETTA

She probably just thought, "Hey, man, fuckit. If I gotta do it, I might as well get paid." Her fuckin mom was too much of a dishrag to do anything. Typical, you know, the kid or the husband. They always choose the husband.

MELORA

Did she tell you that?

ROSETTA

What?

MELORA

That... that her mother knew... And chose him?

ROSETTA

Her mom prob'ly *liked it*, right? Takes some of the load off. Like having one of your kids help with the laundry.

As Melora stares at Rosetta, her body starts to shake, tears welling. She drops her head into her hand, weeping.

ROSETTA

Oh, shit. You're her mom?

Rosetta watches Melora weep for a long time before she goes into the bathroom and comes out with a handful of toilet paper. She sets it next to Melora.

INT. ROSETTA'S ROOM - LATER

Rosetta smokes in the open door. Melora splashes water on her face, then blows her nose. She catches Rosetta watching.

MELORA

I *didn't* know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROSETTA  
(shrugs)  
Okay.

MELORA  
I had no idea.

ROSETTA  
Well now you know.

Rosetta puts her cigarette out on the wall, then searches through a pile of shoes.

ROSETTA  
This's been fun and all, but I  
gotta go to work.

She finds a pair of scuffed white high-heeled boots, pulls them on.

MELORA  
Maybe I could take you to dinner.

ROSETTA  
That's okay.

MELORA  
I'll pay you.

ROSETTA  
(pause)  
You're gonna pay me to *eat*?

INT. PANCAKE HOUSE - DAY

Melora sits in a booth with Rosetta, watching her devour a pile of chocolate chip pancakes drenched in syrup.

MELORA  
Was she happy?

ROSETTA  
Every now and then she'd get a guy  
with a shitload of coke. That made  
her pretty happy.

MELORA  
She was on drugs?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROSETTA

Yeah, usually. This one time, she went totally straight. No drugs. No hooking. She got this job doing nails? She was like a fuckin Mormon. All she talked about was how she was gonna get her shit together so she could bring her kid to live with us, but then Del said she'd have to pay extra, so she gets, like *three jobs*, she's doing more drugs than ever just to stay awake, so she gets nail polish on this lady's *wedding ring*--

MELORA

Krista has a child?

ROSETTA

Yeah. When she got fired from that nail place, she went on this fucked-up drug binge like you wouldn't believe. But she was doing good for a while.

MELORA

Is it a boy or girl?

ROSETTA

Girl. Ashley. Krista was really into that kid. She couldn't even read and she'd be writing out cards for her, and little notes. She didn't want her to grow up hating her.

Rosetta looks at Melora, apologetic.

MELORA

Where is she?

EXT. LOW INCOME APARTMENT - DAY

Rosetta leads Melora up a graffitied staircase. She stops at a dented door. Rosetta knocks.

A little BOY opens the door.

Inside, an OBESE WOMAN sits in the center of a sunken couch, balancing a wobbly, diapered infant on her legs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAN ON THE COUCH  
¿Quién es?

INT. LOW INCOME APARTMENT - DAY

Melora looks around the squalid apartment, Rosetta next to her.

WOMAN ON THE COUCH  
¡Ashley! Tu abuela quiere verte.

In the kitchen, ASHLEY, 3, sucks an ice cube held by a slightly OLDER BOY. Ashley tries to grab it, and it slips through her fingers.

WOMAN ON THE COUCH  
Sotero, tráila aquí.

The boy grabs Ashley by the arms and pulls her over to Melora.

WOMAN ON THE COUCH  
¿Tú eres la mamá de Krista, no?

MELORA  
I'm sorry, I don't speak Spanish.  
(kneels, smiling, to  
Ashley)  
Hi. Hi, sweetie.

Ashley doesn't look at Melora. Her nose is running, her face and body filthy.

WOMAN ON THE COUCH  
(to Rosetta)  
Por favor, puedes decirle que ella  
todavía me debe por dos meses.  
(pause)  
Siento mucho por lo que ha pasado--

ROSETTA  
(to Melora)  
She wants money.

Melora checks her wallet.

WOMAN ON THE COUCH  
...Me descompuso el estómago. Estoy  
cansada de vivir en esta mundo...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MELORA

(to Rosetta)

I have two hundred. Is that  
enough?

Rosetta takes the money and hands it to the woman.

EXT. LOW INCOME APARTMENT/INT. MELORA'S CAR - DAY

Melora holds Ashley in her arms as she unlocks her car.

MELORA

(to Rosetta)

Maybe you could sit in back with  
her while I drive.

ROSETTA

She really stinks.

MELORA

She needs a bath.

ROSETTA

Yeah, with a fuckin fire hose.

MELORA

Please watch your language.

Ashley struggles as Melora tries to put her in the car.

ROSETTA

Aren't you supposed to use one of  
those baby seats?

MELORA

That's why I'm asking you to sit  
with her.

ROSETTA

If you got in a accident, she could  
go flying through the windshield.  
You expect me to catch her?

Melora slams the door, turns to Rosetta.

MELORA

Would it be better if I just left  
her here? Would that be better?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROSETTA

Hey, man, whatever. I'm just saying-

MELORA

I have no idea where I'd even find a car seat around here. At this hour.

ROSETTA

Yeah, okay. It's not my kid.

Pause.

MELORA

(upset)

I'll buy one tomorrow.

Pause.

ROSETTA

So, you're gonna keep her?

Melora just stares at Rosetta, the enormity of the situation beginning to dawn on her.

INT. MELORA'S HOTEL ROOM, BATHROOM - NIGHT

Melora sits on the edge of the tub, trying to bathe screaming Ashley.

MELORA

You're okay, honey. You're okay.  
We're just gonna get you clean.

Ashley flails in the water, red-faced and crying, her body going rigid.

MELORA

No, sweetie, come on, it's okay...  
(trying to keep it  
together, singing)  
"You are my sunshine... My only  
sunshine... You make me hap-py...  
When skies are gray..."

Melora sees Rosetta standing in the doorway, watching.

MELORA

"You'll never know, dear, how much  
I love you..."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Rosetta walks away.

INT. MELORA'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Melora makes a nest of blankets and pillows around Ashley, asleep on the bed.

ROSETTA  
Are you gonna keep her?

Rosetta stands by the door, fidgeting with the chain lock, looking like she's about to bolt.

MELORA  
You don't have to go--

ROSETTA  
(fighting tears)  
I just need to know. Are you?

Melora looks at Rosetta, uncertain.

MELORA  
I suppose I'll have to discuss that with the father.

ROSETTA  
Yeah, good luck. Could be, like, five thousand different guys.

Melora absorbs this.

ROSETTA  
I woulda taken her. I almost went and got her. But, how'm I gonna keep a kid?

Tears course down Rosetta's cheeks.

ROSETTA  
Whatever. If you do decide to keep her, just... take care of her.

Melora watches Rosetta closely.

MELORA  
Did you love my daughter?

Rosetta shrugs, crying harder. She turns away, hiding her face in the door.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROSETTA

She tried to give me a necklace...  
But I didn't take it. I wanted  
to... I just couldn't...

Melora goes to Rosetta and holds her. Rosetta weeps.

EXT. SILVER SADDLE MOTEL/INT. MELORA'S CAR - DAY

Melora pulls up in front of the motel. Rosetta opens the door.

ROSETTA

Wait a minute.

Rosetta runs to her room and disappears inside.

Melora turns to look at Ashley, asleep in a new car seat. She stares at Ashley's sweet, sad little face.

Melora turns back to see Rosetta returning.

When Rosetta reaches the car, she holds out a photo. It's the one of Krista, laughing.

ROSETTA

She said it made her look like she  
wanted to feel.

Melora takes it, moved.

MELORA

I live alone now. You could come  
stay with me and try to get back on  
your feet.

(pause)

There couldn't be any drugs in my  
house. That's something I just  
couldn't have. But, if you want,  
you're welcome to stay.

Rosetta looks at her, all emotion carefully hidden away.

ROSETTA

I don't think so.

Melora reaches into her purse, rips a deposit slip from her checkbook, and offers it to Rosetta.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MELORA

That's my address. Maybe you could write me sometime.

Rosetta takes the slip, reads it.

ROSETTA

Awapaho, Washington... I knew it was something like that.

Rosetta walks back to the motel.

INT. MELORA'S CAR, MOVING - DAY

Melora drives in silence, the blurred world outside her window rushing past.

She looks down at the photo of Krista, lying on the empty seat beside her.

Melora takes a deep breath.

She glances back at Ashley.

CUT TO BLACK

INT. TRAILER, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

RUTH, middle-aged, in a pale blue nightgown, looks up from painting her nails.

Her husband, CARL, stands by the door.

RUTH

You're going out now?

CARL

I just feel like driving.

RUTH

Where are you gonna go at midnight on a Tuesday?

CARL

I just wanna take a drive.

RUTH

You ever think I might want to go out once in a while? You ever think of that?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CARL

Yeah.

RUTH

But, if I want to go somewhere you don't want to go. If I want to go bowling... Or dancing--

CARL

Dancing?

RUTH

I was a good dancer! You don't know because you never took me!

CARL

Come on, Ruth.

Carl fidgets with the lock on the door, eager to escape.

RUTH

When are you coming back?

CARL

I don't know.

RUTH

Tonight? Tomorrow? A week from Wednesday?

CARL

Don't be like this.

RUTH

I just want to know. Maybe I want to make my own plans.

Carl looks at his feet, sighs. Ruth rises, picking up soiled cotton balls and nail supplies.

RUTH

I'm not doing this anymore. You expect me to step in and do your business, while you go gallivanting *Mike* only knows where, with *Mike* only knows what kind of filth--

CARL

Jim's working tomorrow.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RUTH

Well I won't be here when you  
decide to come back! Who's gonna  
wash your clothes and feed you?  
Who's gonna talk your boss outta  
firing you when he comes breathing  
down your neck again--

CARL

I just said, Jim'll be here  
tomorrow.

RUTH

But not you?

CARL

I don't know. Maybe.

Ruth looks at him, hopeless. She drops her head into her  
hand and starts to cry. Her weeping is quiet, like a mouse  
squeaking.

CARL

I'll see you later, okay?

Ruth shakes her head.

CARL

Come on, Ruth.  
(pause)  
I gotta go.

RUTH

Why do you hate me so much?

CARL

I don't hate you.

RUTH

Then why do you want to get away  
from me all the time?

CARL

I don't hate you.

RUTH

Liar.

CARL

I DON'T HATE YOU! I JUST WANT TO  
TAKE A DRIVE! JESUS CHRIST! I  
just want to take a drive!  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CARL (cont'd)

Why do you have to make a federal case out of it!

RUTH

You and your mouth! Just go! Go! Get the hell out!

CARL

Jesus!

RUTH

Don't you ever take the name of the Lord in vain--

Carl goes out and slams the door.

RUTH

(screaming after him)

Don't you ever take His name in vain in my house!

TITLE: *THE WIFE*

INT. TRAILER, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ruth looks out the window, watching Carl's tail-lights recede.

Ruth opens a cupboard. She pulls down a box of Frosted Pop-Tarts, rips open the foil wrapping, and starts eating.

INT. TRAILER, BEDROOM - DAY

Ruth, alone in her twin bed, opens her eyes to sunlight streaming through the curtained window.

Ruth rolls over.

Carl's bed is still made.

INT. TRAILER, BATHROOM - DAY

In the bathtub, a white bunny trembles in a metal cage.

Ruth opens the cage door and lifts the bunny out. She cuddles it for a minute, then puts it on the linoleum floor. The bunny cowers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RUTH

Go. Go on. What are you waiting for?

INT. TRAILER, KITCHEN - DAY

Ruth sits at the kitchen table, talking on the phone, watching the bunny devour a pile of lettuce from the floor.

RUTH

...Well he doesn't show it. He doesn't and I-- How do you think it makes me feel to be left here? I did tell him--

(wipes her eyes with tissue)

No, he doesn't. He has no idea how lucky he is. He's lucky he's got both of us. I know it... I can't promise you that--

A loud knock rattles the trailer.

RUTH

That's the door; I gotta go. If he shows up there, you call me, okay? I'd appreciate it-- Okay-- Because I can't go through it anymore-- Okay-- You, too.

Ruth hangs up and moves to the front door. She pulls aside the ruffled curtain.

Two college-aged GUYS wait outside.

Ruth leaves the chain on and opens the door.

RUTH

Can I help you?

TALL GUY

Yeah, we need a storage space.

BUFF GUY

The office says it's supposed to be open, but there's nobody there.

Ruth looks across the dirt lot toward another small trailer with a Public Storage sign on it. Behind that are six garage-style storage structures.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RUTH  
Jim's not there?

BUFF GUY  
Uh, nope, nobody's there.

RUTH  
Well, I don't have anything to do  
with it. It's my husband's job.

TALL GUY  
Is he around?

Ruth blows air and rolls her eyes. She wanders back into the trailer, searching the counter. She finds a set of keys.

She slides off the chain.

RUTH  
Come on.

She pushes out the door past the guys.

EXT. PUBLIC STORAGE OFFICE TRAILER - DAY

Ruth jiggles the key in the door, irritated, as the guys wait.

RUTH  
He's the one who had to take this  
job in the first place. And where  
is he when customers come? *Mike*  
only knows...

She finally gets the door open and steps into the small office.

INT. PUBLIC STORAGE OFFICE TRAILER - DAY

Ruth tries to work the credit card machine as the buff guy fills out a form.

RUTH  
(frustrated)  
Dang it! Excuse me.  
(softer)  
Stupid thing...

BUFF GUY  
Thanks for helping us.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RUTH  
(still struggling)  
I'm sorry. It's not you. He's the one should be doing this, that's all.

TALL GUY  
Maybe you could just take our credit card number.

RUTH  
I need to get the authorization.

She tries again to get the credit card machine to work. The buff guy gives an irritated look to his friend.

BUFF GUY  
How about this. Why don't you take our credit card number, and when your husband gets home, he can run it.

RUTH  
(worried)  
That's not the way you're supposed to do it.

Ruth looks at him, deciding.

RUTH  
Fine.

Ruth checks a roster, writes a key number on the form.

RUTH  
And if it's no good, it's his own fault.

Ruth finds the key on the board, hands it to the tall guy.

INT. PUBLIC STORAGE OFFICE TRAILER - DAY, LATER

Ruth looks around the dusty office. Coffee rings on the Formica counter. Stacks of papers and unsorted mail. An answering machine, red light blinking.

Ruth pushes the play button.

JIM'S VOICE (O.S.)  
Hey, Carl, it's Jim. I can't make it in today--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ruth hits the erase button. The intercom buzzes.

Ruth looks out the window toward the security gate where the guys wait.

She presses the speaker button on the intercom.

RUTH

Yes?

TALL GUY

Somebody's stuff is in there.

RUTH

No, it was listed as an *empty*.

BUFF GUY

Uh... it's not.

EXT. PUBLIC STORAGE - DAY

Ruth marches down the row of storage containers, the guys following.

INT. STORAGE SPACE - DAY

Ruth pushes up the door. Inside, there's an old wooden dresser.

RUTH

(shakes her head)

Somebody made a mistake.

BUFF GUY

Maybe you could just give us another space.

Ruth notices an orange extension cord snaking from a shadeless lamp. She yanks the cord free.

RUTH

They're not supposed to have power.

TALL GUY

Yeah, well--

RUTH

It's supposed to be empty! They keep a list...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ruth opens a dresser drawer. Inside are dozens of sealed Ziploc baggies containing pieces of brownish fabric.

Ruth looks closer. The fabric pieces are actually different colors and textures, each stained reddish-brown. The color of dried blood. A maggot writhes beneath the plastic.

TALL GUY  
(stepping in to help)  
So, are we moving this?

RUTH  
No!

Ruth nearly slams his fingers in the drawer.

RUTH  
I'll get you another space.

INT. PUBLIC STORAGE OFFICE TRAILER - DAY

Ruth watches the guys unload their truck into a different storage space.

Her eyes shift to the corner storage space. The one with the dresser.

INT. STORAGE SPACE - DAY

The metal door clatters up. Sunlight creeps half way in, leaving the back half of the space in shadow.

Ruth approaches the dresser, circling it. She pushes it forward, into the light. She opens the top drawer.

Ruth takes out a baggie and shakes the contents onto the dresser.

The fabric is actually a sleeve from a blouse. It's streaked with something blackish-brown. There are small tears in the fabric.

Ruth opens another baggie. Nude pantyhose snagged with bits of dirt and twigs and a crust of moldy blood.

Ruth empties another baggie containing a fragment of a girl's panties torn just above the crotch. A piece of dead leaf clings to the silky fabric. The cotton crotch panel is stained yellow and blackish-brown.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ruth sweeps everything into the drawer and shuts it.

For a moment, she stands frozen.

She opens each of the other drawers, one after another. They all contain baggies of fabric, except for the bottom drawer. It contains a black garbage bag.

Ruth dumps out the contents of the bag: a collection of women's purses.

A wallet falls open, revealing credit cards and a driver's license.

Ruth stares at the license with a photo of a young, smiling redhead. Next to the photo, a name:

*Georgia Denby*

INT. PUBLIC STORAGE OFFICE - DAY

Ruth rifles through a tall stack of old newspapers. She finds one bearing the headline: "KILLER CLAIMS EIGHTH." Underneath are photos of eight young, white women.

Ruth focuses on a smiling redhead. It's the woman from the driver's license, Georgia Denby.

INT. TRAILER, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ruth watches TV. Headlights sweep across the wall.

She turns the volume up. On the TV, macho cops bust a scrawny drug dealer.

Carl comes in, walks down the hall to the bedroom, and shuts the door.

Ruth pinches her eyes shut and silently counts to ten.

She opens her eyes. Carl comes down the hall, dressed in different clothes.

Carl gets himself a beer, pours it into an insulated mug, and sips it through a straw.

Carl grabs a stack of mail. The newspaper is on top, open to the pictures of the dead girls.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ruth watches Carl look at it. There's a scabbed scratch across his cheek.

Expressionless, Carl sets the paper aside and sorts the mail. He lingers over a grocery store circular, tearing coupons, then tucks them in his wallet.

Carl brings his beer into the living room and sits in the recliner next to Ruth.

CARL

They've got the five all torn up again.

Ruth stares at the TV cops kneeling on the scrawny drug dealer's back.

CARL

I don't know when they're gonna finish that thing. It's been more than a year.

RUTH

What happened to your face?

Pause.

CARL

Some guy at a bar... thought he'd pick a fight with me.

RUTH

You got in a fight?

Carl looks at the TV, shrugs.

RUTH

*I'm done with it.*

The strain in her voice makes Carl look at her. Ruth is shaking, her eyes fixed on the TV.

RUTH

Leaving me here to rot while you're off doing *Mike* only knows what perverted thing with *Mike* only knows what kind of slutty gutter trash! Come home, all scratched up! You think I don't know what goes on?

Carl sucks on his straw.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RUTH

I called my niece in Chula Vista. She says Steve and the kids would be happy to have me. Then you'll see what it's like when you have *no one* to come home to when you manage to drag yourself back to this h-hole!

Pause.

CARL

I'm sorry.

RUTH

So, you went to a bar?

CARL

Mostly I just drove around. Went to see Ray.

RUTH

I called Ray. He hadn't seen you.

CARL

That's cause when you called I hadn't got there yet.

RUTH

Were you visiting prostitutes again?

CARL

No!

It comes out like a whine.

RUTH

I'm not stickin by you this time if the cops come sniffing around. I'm done with that filth. Do you hear me? I'm done with it! If you've been sniffing around prostitutes, wetting your little noodle--

CARL

Shut up.

Carl is turning red, upset.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RUTH

You don't like it when I talk dirty, but what do you do, huh? Sticking your thing in anything that moves! *Why can't you just keep that thing in your pants!*

CARL

(exploding)  
*MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS!*

RUTH

(struggling out of her chair)  
You stop leaving me here to mind your business and I will! I see the scratches on you! *I know what you do!*

Carl storms off to the bedroom.

Ruth stands stewing for a moment, then goes into the bathroom.

INT. TRAILER, BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ruth slams the door, and locks it. She stares at the bunny quivering in its cage in the tub.

She can hear Carl rummaging in the kitchen. The front door slams.

Ruth pulls the curtain back.

Carl opens his trunk, pulls out a partially filled garbage bag, heads toward the corner storage space, disappearing from view.

Ruth hears the metal door of the storage space rattle open.

INT. TRAILER - NIGHT

Ruth wakes in her recliner. Carl sits down in the recliner beside her, facing the TV.

Ruth pulls herself up and goes into the kitchen.

She removes a frozen dinner from the toaster oven, then gets a napkin and fork.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ruth carries the food into the living room and sets it beside Carl. She peels back the foil.

CARL  
Thank you.

Ruth settles back into her recliner.

Carl puts his napkin in his lap and begins to eat.

RUTH  
Do you know anything about those  
dead girls?

Carl finishes chewing and wipes his mouth.

CARL  
No.

Ruth stares at him for a moment longer, then looks back at the TV.

INT. TRAILER, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ruth lies awake watching Carl, in the twin bed next to her, softly snoring.

Ruth stares at his sweet, childlike face. A bit of spittle on his bottom lip trembles with each intake of breath.

INT./EXT. STORAGE SPACE - NIGHT

Ruth, wearing a robe, shines a flashlight into the storage space.

In the corner, the lamp is again plugged into the orange extension cord.

Ruth turns on the lamp.

A women's skirt and blouse lie on newspaper, near an empty garbage bag. The clothes are cut and stained with fresh blood.

Ruth uses the newspaper to gather up the skirt and blouse, pushing them into the garbage bag.

She pulls out the dresser drawers and empties them into the garbage bag, too.

INT. RUTH'S CAR - NIGHT

Ruth drives, glancing at the dark fields that run along the side of the road.

Suddenly, a young woman appears, illuminated by Ruth's headlights. She stands by her disabled car, surrounded by flares.

As Ruth approaches the woman, she speeds up.

Ruth looks in her rearview mirror.

The woman recedes until she is lost to the darkness.

EXT. SHERIFF STATION - NIGHT

Ruth watches police officers drift in and out of the station.

She looks in the rear-view mirror and attempts to neaten her messy hair. There's a smear of blood on her forehead. Ruth tries to wipe it away.

A burly police officer walks toward her car.

Ruth throws the car into gear and drives off.

INT. RUTH'S CAR - NIGHT

Ruth's car bounces over gravel and deep potholes, then bumps to a stop. Mounds of garbage and rusted dumpsters are illuminated by the headlights.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Ruth gets out of the car, retrieves two garbage bags from the trunk, walks to the nearest dumpster, and throws them in.

EXT. STORAGE SPACE - NIGHT

Ruth, sweating, hauls the dresser from the storage space.

She opens the drawers and stuffs them with newspaper, douses the paper with lighter fluid, then strikes a match.

Ruth watches the dresser burn.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ruth strips off her robe, nightgown, and tennis shoes, and adds them to the pyre. She takes off her bra and panties and throws them on, too.

Naked, Ruth walks back toward her trailer.

INT. TRAILER, BATHROOM - NIGHT

Ruth steps out of the shower. She stares at herself in the mirror.

Thin hair plastered to her red scalp. Wet. Naked. Clean.

INT. TRAILER, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ruth quietly pulls on a clean nightgown. She gets into her bed, facing Carl, and shuts her eyes.

CUT TO BLACK

INT. MALL TOY STORE - DAY

KRISTA, blond ponytail, tank top, tiny athletic shorts rolled at the waist, looks at a huge pink bunny dressed like a princess.

The bunny has realistic glass eyes, long velvety ears poking out of a rhinestone crown, and a sparkly toile skirt.

Krista checks the price tag.

BOY'S VOICE (O.S.)

Get out!

Across the aisle, a BOY elbows a LITTLE GIRL hard in the chest, making her cry, then turns back to a rack of action figures.

BOY

You're so *stupid*.

The little girl cries harder.

Krista watches the boy for a moment. She walks toward him, carrying the huge bunny, and shoves him hard into the metal racks as she passes.

KRISTA

Fuck, I'm sorry.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Krista extends a hand to help him up. When he takes it, she digs her nails into his hand hard enough to draw blood, then yanks her hand back.

KRISTA  
Ow! That hurt!  
(accusing look)  
That's not very nice.

Krista walks to the check-out. She places the princess bunny on the counter.

BOY'S MOTHER (O.S.)  
What did you do?

BOY  
Nothing!

Krista looks over her shoulder.

BOY'S MOTHER  
Get up off the floor! What's wrong  
with you?

The boy looks at Krista.

She smiles.

TITLE: *THE DEAD GIRL*

INT. JEWELRY STORE - DAY

Krista, holding the bagged bunny, joins TARLOW, an aging surfer with bleached hair and a red eczematous face, at the jewelry counter.

TARLOW  
What the hell is that?

KRISTA  
Shut up. It's for my kid.

A JEWELER slips a gold watch over Tarlow's wrist, fastens it.

KRISTA  
Can you give me a ride out to  
Norwalk?

TARLOW  
I gotta go to work.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KRISTA  
Not 'til tonight. Come on, it's my  
kid's birthday tomorrow.

TARLOW  
Just fuckin FedEx it.

KRISTA  
You could be back in time. It'd  
just take like... two hours.

TARLOW  
You think I wanna haul your ass to  
fuckin Norwalk?

KRISTA  
(smiles)  
Yes.

TARLOW  
Shit...

Tarlow pushes a box toward Krista. The jeweler steps away.

KRISTA  
Oh, fuck. You gonna propose to me?

TARLOW  
Yeah, right.  
(pause)  
Open it.

Krista picks up the jewelry box, grins.

KRISTA  
Take me to Norwalk and I'll blow  
you.

TARLOW  
You'll blow me anyway.

KRISTA  
For *free*.

Tarlow rolls his eyes. Krista opens the box.

Inside, there's a gold necklace, with a charm that reads:

*taken*

KRISTA  
I'd rather have a ride to Norwalk.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Tarlow takes a roll of cash from his pocket.

TARLOW  
Just take the fuckin necklace.

INT. FOOD COURT - DAY

Krista, wearing the necklace, with the bunny beside her in the booth, examines the end of her pony-tail.

She selects a strand and puts it in her mouth. As she gets her teeth on it, she notices a LITTLE GIRL standing by the next table, watching.

LITTLE GIRL  
Why are you eating your hair?

Krista bites off the split end, picks it off her tongue.

KRISTA  
Because it's *dee-licious*.

Krista finds another split end and puts it in her mouth. The little girl looks skeptical.

LITTLE GIRL  
What does it taste like?

KRISTA  
Strawberry... Pop-tarts.

The little girl grins. She comes closer and hangs on the edge of Krista's table.

LITTLE GIRL  
You know what?

KRISTA  
What?

LITTLE GIRL  
Cat butt.

The little girl howls with laughter. Krista smiles.

WOMAN (O.S.)  
Maddy, are you bothering that lady?

The little girl's MOTHER is breast-feeding an infant. A little boy sits next to her, playing with a plastic toy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The little girl leans over Krista's table, whispering.

LITTLE GIRL  
You know what?

KRISTA  
What?

LITTLE GIRL  
(loudly)  
Turtle butt.

The little girl giggles.

KRISTA  
Come on! Turtles don't have butts!

More giggles.

LITTLE GIRL  
(whispers)  
You know what?

KRISTA  
What?

LITTLE GIRL  
*Penis* butt!

Instant hysterics.

MOTHER  
Madison, come over here and sit by  
me.

KRISTA  
She's okay.

TARLOW  
(to Krista)  
You making friends?

Tarlow, carrying two bags of food, pops a paper crown on  
Krista's head.

KRISTA  
Everywhere I go.

TARLOW  
Alright, let's hit it.

The little girl moves back to her mother.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Krista slides out of the booth, grabs the bunny.

KRISTA  
(to the mother)  
How old is she?

MOTHER  
Three and a half.

KRISTA  
My daughter's three tomorrow.

MOTHER  
(smoothes Maddy's hair,  
smiling)  
It's a great age.

KRISTA  
Yeah.

Krista's smile fades as she heads out with Tarlow.

INT. TARLOW'S TRUCK - DAY

Tarlow devours a burger as he drives. Krista, wearing her paper crown, looks out the window, ignoring her food, the bunny on her lap.

TARLOW  
Practicing your multiplication  
tables?

Silence.

KRISTA  
When I was a kid... every birthday,  
we'd go through the Sears catalogue  
to pick out what we wanted? And  
we'd spend, like, days lookin  
through that thing. And I'd look at  
each thing, trying to decide, you  
know, was that the thing I most  
wanted? So, one year I decide I  
want this ventriloquism doll, and I  
tell my mom. And I'm really  
excited about this fuckin  
ventriloquism doll. So, you know,  
it's my birthday, and my mom puts  
this big box in front of me, and  
I'm like, cool, you know? And I  
open it, and she got me, like...  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KRISTA (cont'd)

this weird *puppet* thing. Like a big *puppet* thing, with strings. And I just felt sick, you know? And I tried to pretend I was happy. "Oh, great!", you know? But it fuckin happened like that every year. And I could never figure it out: Did I give her the wrong page? Did I circle the wrong thing? Then I realized my fucking *mother* could never buy anything that wasn't on sale. Just couldn't do it. You go into a store to get, like, jeans. It didn't matter which ones you wanted. It didn't matter which ones looked best, you had to get the ones that were on sale.

TARLOW

So *that's* why you're so fucked up.

Silence.

KRISTA

I just don't want my kid growing up like that. I want her to get what she wants. Not all the time, you know, so she gets spoiled. But sometimes.

(pause)

Sometimes you should get the thing you really want.

(pause)

On your actual birthday.

TARLOW

Jesus Christ, I'll take you to goddamn Norwalk.

Krista leans over and kisses him.

KRISTA

You're the best, man.

TARLOW

(re: the bunny)

So, that's what she wanted?

KRISTA

I don't know. I didn't have the fuckin Sears catalogue.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Krista laughs, bouncing the bunny on her knee.

KRISTA  
Isn't she pretty?

INT. TARLOW'S HOUSE, LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY

Krista pulls laundry from her garbage bag and stuffs it into the washer. She finds a box of detergent, opens it, sniffs, shakes a hefty amount of powder into the machine.

Krista strips off her clothes adds them to the washer. She pulls on an oversized Lakers jersey and a pair of white athletic socks.

INT. TARLOW'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - DAY

Tarlow, in bed, shirtless, sucks on a crack pipe, changing channels with the remote.

Krista climbs on top of him, straddling him. She takes the crack pipe and takes a long hit. She unbuttons his jeans.

Tarlow reaches up and pulls the ponytail holder from her hair, causing it to fall across her face.

KRISTA  
Now it's gonna get in my way.

TARLOW  
I don't care.

Krista takes another hit from the pipe, then gives it to Tarlow as she moves down his body.

KRISTA  
I do. I don't want to wash it  
again.

She tugs off his pants and underpants. His flaccid penis falls against his belly.

KRISTA  
You're only supposed to do it every  
three days.

Krista licks her index finger and inserts it into his asshole.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TARLOW  
So don't wash it.

KRISTA  
Then I'll have your cum in my hair.

TARLOW  
That's nice.

KRISTA  
(laughing)  
Yeah, for the next guy.

She begins to suck him off. After a few seconds, she lifts her head, pretends to sniff her own hair.

KRISTA  
"Oh, baby, you smell *real* good."

Tarlow smiles, breathing more deeply as Krista pumps up and down on him with her mouth.

Tarlow yanks up her jersey, holding it against her neck so he can see her breasts.

He takes another hit from the crack pipe and watches her work.

INT. TARLOW'S HOUSE - DAY

Krista wraps the bunny doll in sparkly, silver paper.

The phone rings.

On a birthday card cut in the shape of a bunny holding a bunch of balloons, Krista writes:

*Ashley, Mommy loves you and misses  
you very much.           XXXXX000000*

Tarlow comes in from the bedroom, pulling on a sport shirt with an Amtrak logo.

TARLOW  
I gotta go to work early. Some  
shit's going down...

KRISTA  
But you said you'd take me to  
Norwalk--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TARLOW

I don't have time to deal with that right now.

KRISTA

But you *promised*--

TARLOW

(explodes)

I don't have time to fuckin deal with your shit! Get in the fuckin truck and I'll drop you, or find your own fuckin ride.

KRISTA

You're such an asshole.

Krista, on the verge of tears, stuffs the card in the envelope.

TARLOW

Just leave the fuckin bunny and I'll take it to FedEx tomorrow.

KRISTA

Her birthday's tomorrow!

TARLOW

So, she'll get it the day *after* her birthday!

Krista grabs the bunny and the extra wrapping paper.

KRISTA

Selfish *asshole*...

TARLOW

Just... get your stuff.

Krista goes to the dryer, yanks out her still-wet laundry, and stuffs it back in the garbage bag.

KRISTA

Gimme my fuckin money.

Tarlow whips out his wallet and hands her some cash. Krista pockets the money and heads for the door.

EXT. TARLOW'S STREET - DAY

Krista, dragging the garbage bag and the bunny, puts her thumb out.

Tarlow pulls up in his truck, rolls down his window.

TARLOW  
Get in. I'll drop you at the  
corner.

Krista changes her thumb for her middle finger, holds it up in his face.

TARLOW  
Bitch.

Tarlow guns it, tires squealing, leaving Krista in his exhaust.

INT. SILVER SADDLE MOTEL OFFICE - NIGHT

The bell on the office door jangles as Krista, looking bedraggled, walks in carrying the garbage bag and bunny. Del is behind the counter watching TV, her thick arms folded across her chest.

KRISTA  
Can I borrow your bike?

DEL  
You got rent for me?

KRISTA  
It's in the room. Can I borrow it?

DEL  
If it'll start. Just don't take it  
too far.

INT. SILVER SADDLE MOTEL, KRISTA & ROSETTA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Krista closes the door, puts down her garbage bag of laundry, and flicks on the light.

Rosetta moans, face down on her bed.

KRISTA  
Sorry, baby.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Krista goes to Rosetta and kisses the back of her neck. Rosetta cries out, flinching.

KRISTA  
What the...?

Rosetta's face is bruised and swollen, her lower lip split.

KRISTA  
*What the fuck?!*

ROSETTA  
No, baby, don't--

KRISTA  
Who the fuck did this?  
(pause)  
Tell me who the fuck did it 'cause  
I'm gonna fuckin kill the  
motherfucker.

Rosetta reaches out for Krista, but she pulls away. Rosetta starts to cry, turning her face away.

Krista crawls onto the bed with Rosetta and holds her.

KRISTA  
I'm sorry, baby. I'm sorry, okay?

Krista gently smooths back Rosetta's dark hair revealing purple thumbprints on her neck.

KRISTA  
Was it *Tom*? Don't tell me it was  
fuckin *Tom*.

ROSETTA  
It wasn't Tom.

KRISTA  
Who was it?

Rosetta rolls over and kisses Krista on the mouth. The kiss becomes hotter.

Krista pulls back, looking Rosetta in the eyes.

KRISTA  
Just tell me.

Rosetta can't meet her gaze. She touches Krista's necklace.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROSETTA  
That's nice.

KRISTA  
I got it for you.  
(unhooks the clasp)  
It's got a diamond.

Krista holds out the necklace.

ROSETTA  
You wear it. It looks good on you.

KRISTA  
I just said I got it for you.

ROSETTA  
I can't wear stuff on my neck. It  
turns green.

Pause.

KRISTA  
It's because of Tom, right?

Rosetta shrugs, unable to deny it.

KRISTA  
I'm gonna fuckin kick his ass!

ROSETTA  
No, don't, baby... Just--

KRISTA  
I'm gonna fuckin kill that  
motherfucker.

Rosetta catches Krista's hand.

ROSETTA  
Stay with me... Please?  
(pleading)  
Will you make me feel good?

KRISTA  
Baby, I gotta go.  
(smacks the wall)  
I gotta drop something off to my  
kid.

ROSETTA  
Help me, baby... Please?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Rosetta tries to pull Krista down with her on the bed.

Krista yanks away.

KRISTA  
I said I gotta go.

Rosetta turns toward the wall.

Krista leans down to kiss her. Rosetta slaps her away.  
Krista grabs her wrists.

KRISTA  
When I get back, I'll fuck you,  
okay? Okay? I'll make you feel  
good, okay?

Rosetta doesn't answer.

KRISTA  
(releasing her)  
This is so fucked up.

EXT. MOTEL STRIP - NIGHT

Krista rides down the boulevard on Del's old motorcycle, hair whipping her face, the wrapped bunny in a make-shift pack strapped to her back.

She turns into the parking lot of a cheap motel.

EXT. CHEAP MOTEL - NIGHT

Krista makes a loop through the parking lot, checking out the cars. She stops at a yellow, souped-up Saleen Mustang convertible.

Krista kills the motor. Moaning comes from an adjacent motel room.

Krista takes off her backpack and removes a can of spray-paint, she shakes it, balls banging, as she strides up to the hood of the Mustang and sprays:

*FUCKER*

She looks around, spots a truck nearby. She looks in the flatbed, finds a tire iron, and goes back to the Mustang, smashing the driver's side window.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The car alarm blares.

TOM, 40's, bursts from the motel room, flabby belly hanging over briefs.

TOM  
Fuckin bitch!

He goes after Krista as she snatches up the backpack and bunny.

KRISTA  
(backing up, screaming)  
Don't you fuckin touch her again,  
motherfucker--

Tom punches Krista in the jaw. She staggers back, bleeding.

He charges her, grabbing a handful of hair. Krista screams in pain, kicking him.

KRISTA  
Fuckin motherfucker!

Krista wrenches up her arm and sprays paint in his face.

Tom grabs her arm, cuffs her in the side of the head.

Krista rabbit-kicks him in the groin until he releases her.

Tom covers his balls, stumbles, falls.

Krista kicks him in the face, still clinging to the bunny.

KRISTA  
You fuckin touch her again and I'll  
kill you!  
(kicks his body)  
Do you hear me, motherfucker? I  
will fuckin KILL YOU!

She spits, then backs away, heaving.

Two naked women stand in the doorway to Tom's motel room, screaming at Krista.

KRISTA  
Get out of my face, you fucking  
cunts!

Krista mounts the bike, fires it up, and swerves out of the parking lot.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Krista flies down the highway, ecstatic.

A truck speeds toward her, headlights flashing, horn blaring.

Krista screams and swerves back into her own lane.

She laughs, then screams:

KRISTA  
MOTHERFUCKER!!!!!!!

Suddenly, the bike sputters and dies.

Krista steers the bike onto the shoulder and rolls to a stop.

Ahead, a sign for a freeway interchange reads:

*to Norwalk*

Krista looks at the bunny in the backpack, head poking through tattered wrapping, dirt and blood on the velvety ears. The card and tiara are gone.

KRISTA  
Motherfuck.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Krista walks along the shoulder holding the dirty bunny. She sees a car approaching. She puts her thumb out. The car speeds past.

KRISTA  
Fuckers!

EXT. PAY PHONE - NIGHT

Krista stands at a phone booth next to an abandoned gas station, lower-lip swollen, holding the phone.

KRISTA  
I just want you to know I'm not  
gonna let anyone hurt you again.  
Ever.

Krista drags her finger along the dirty glass.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KRISTA

You believe me, baby?

(pause)

We're getting out of here.

ROSETTA (O.S.)

Yeah? Where we gonna go?

KRISTA

I don't know. Someplace where there's trees and sky and you can breathe the fuckin air. And everything's not so fucked up. Tomorrow, we'll go get my kid and just go. Okay? You There?

ROSETTA (O.S.)

Yeah.

KRISTA

You sound sleepy.

Headlights come over the hill, moving toward Krista.

KRISTA

Are you mad at me...? Don't be mad at me, okay, cause I fuckin love you.

The car slows, headlights illuminating Krista.

KRISTA

Do you love me?

ROSETTA (O.S.)

(sighs)

I gotta go back to bed.

KRISTA

Say it, okay?

(her voice breaks)

I just want to hear it...

Silence.

KRISTA

Can't you just say it? Just once?

(pause, on verge of tears)

Whatever. I gotta go.

Krista hangs up the phone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The car has stopped about ten yards away.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Krista, in the passenger seat, stares out into darkness.

KRISTA  
Do you know if they got a FedEx  
around here?

CARL  
I don't know.

Carl, the driver, keeps his eyes on the road.

CARL  
Even if there was, it'd be closed.

KRISTA  
Shit.

Silence.

KRISTA  
You think you could take me to  
Norwalk?

CARL  
Where?

KRISTA  
Norwalk? I don't think it's that  
far from here.

Pause. Carl glances over at her face, noticing her bloody lip.

CARL  
Is that where you live?

KRISTA  
My daughter lives there.  
Tomorrow's her birthday. Actually,  
it's already today.  
(pause)  
She was born at twelve-thirteen in  
the morning.

Krista looks down at the tattered rabbit.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KRISTA

This was supposed to be for her,  
but... I kinda fucked it up.

Krista looks like she might cry. She turns away.

KRISTA

Do you have kids?

CARL

No.

Silence.

KRISTA

They're like these sponges. They  
just want to be filled up, you  
know? They just want you with  
them... all the time, you know?

Silence.

CARL

I have to make a stop. Then I  
could probably take you to Norwalk.

KRISTA

Really?

CARL

Yeah.

KRISTA

That'd be so cool...

Pause.

KRISTA

I could be there when she wakes up.

Krista looks out at the landscape, desolate and wooded.

KRISTA

I could bring her chocolate chip  
pancakes...

Carl turns on his blinker for the next exit.

KRISTA

Having your own kid... it's an  
amazing thing, you know?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KRISTA (cont'd)

Her father was a fucking asshole--  
The whole time she was in me, I was  
afraid she'd come out and look just  
like him, but she doesn't.

(pause)

She looks like me. Only prettier.  
And not as crazy.

Krista smiles at Carl, then turns back to the window.

The reflection of her face is overlaid with the blurred  
blackness of the passing landscape.

EXT. ROAD/CARL'S CAR (CONTINUOUS) - NIGHT

Carl pulls onto the shoulder. Out Krista's window, an empty  
lot strewn with industrial garbage stretches into darkness.

Ahead, in the distance, red and white lights from a freeway  
overpass arc across the sky.

Carl unbuckles his seat belt.

CARL

There's a map in the glove box.  
Could you get it for me?

His voice is a strange monotone.

Krista hesitates, looking over at him.

Carl's face is flushed. A thin film of sweat makes his skin  
shine.

Krista looks at him. Sad. Hopeful.

She reaches for the glove box.

There's no handle. A small digital clock reads:

12:13

As she turns, Krista sees something dark and solid in Carl's  
hand, coming toward her head.

SMASH CUT TO BLACK

MELORA'S VOICE OVER BLACK, SINGING.

MELORA

You are my sunshine. My only  
sunshine. You make me happy.  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MELORA (cont'd)

When skies are gray. You'll never  
know dear. How much I love you.  
Please don't take my sunshine away.