

Short Term 12

Destin Cretton

Destin Cretton

received one of the five Academy Nicholl Fellowships awarded in 2010

Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences  
Academy Nicholl Fellowships in Screenwriting  
25th Annual Competition

**[www.oscars.org/nicholl](http://www.oscars.org/nicholl)**  
**[www.facebook.com/nichollfellowships](http://www.facebook.com/nichollfellowships)**

**For additional information about the screenplay or the Academy Nicholl Fellowships in Screenwriting, contact: [Nicholl@oscars.org](mailto:Nicholl@oscars.org)**

INT. GROUP HOME SAMMY'S ROOM -- EARLY MORNING

A giant American flag hangs on the wall, along with some slightly inappropriate magazine cut-outs of scantily clad women.

SAMMY, 14 and small for his age, kneels down in only his underwear, carefully drawing a target onto the inside of his window with a red marker.

Satisfied, he stands and walks back to the opposing wall. He turns, stares at the target for a moment, then runs full speed toward the window, SLAMMING into it head-first and crumpling to the ground.

Both hands go into the air with a victory holler.

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT BATHROOM -- EVENING

Warm water shoots down from an aging shower head. GRACE PETERSON, 20s, sits on the bathtub floor, naked and beautiful, chin on her knees, surrounded by bouncing droplets.

She stares down at her toes, picking at the corner of her thumb with her pointer finger, nervously, repeatedly, violently.

She purses her lips and lets a glob of spit fall from her mouth to her feet. The water washes it away.

INT. GRACE'S BEDROOM -- EARLY MORNING

Grace sits in a soft chair with her wet hair wrapped in a towel and her legs tucked under her, early light glowing through the curtains. She draws on her hand with a fine-tip pen.

MASON, 20s, notices her from the bed.

MASON

You're up early.

GRACE

Yeah.

He senses something's wrong.

MASON

What's up?

Grace shrugs and finishes her drawing. It's a sea horse, with its tail stretching down the side of her pointer finger. She curls and extends her finger, making it swim.

Mason sits up in bed.

MASON (CONT'D)

I was gonna make us some breakfast before we go. You want an omelet?

She gets up and puts on her backpack.

GRACE

That's okay. I'm gonna ride my bike today.

She walks out the door.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I'll see you at work.

Mason sits on the bed, confused.

MASON

Okay.

EXT. CITY STREETS -- MORNING

Grace rides her old, 10-speed bicycle hard and fast. All we hear are the harsh sounds of the bicycle and her heavy breathing.

INT. GROUP HOME -- MORNING

VARIOUS SHOTS, VARIOUS ROOMS

LUIS, 15, lies in bed with headphones on. He searches his iPod for a song, then pushes play. Classical music blares through the small speakers on his ears.

MARK, 17, an intimidating quiet presence, sits on his bed with a dew rag on his head. In the corner of his room is a miniature drum set. He pinches some worms into a fishbowl and watches his pet fighting fish gobble them up.

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

KENDRA, 15, a little girl in a large body, lies in bed, feet on the wall, head hanging off the side, looking at the world upside down.

A girl sits on her bed with wet hair wrapped in a towel, applying Nair to her legs. Something goes wrong with her application and she gets pissed, yelling out the doorway.

GIRL

Wish we could just use an effing razor!

Sammy stands in only underwear, swinging around his toy light saber.

Mark and 3 other boys stand at the sink in their community bathroom, brushing their teeth. Luis pulls out a crazy electric brush and lets it whirl.

EXT. GROUP HOME -- MORNING

Grace rides up and locks her bike to the rack. She walks into the building.

INT. GROUP HOME, LOBBY BATHROOM -- MORNING

Grace quickly strips down to her underwear. She wets a paper towel and wipes her face, chest and armpits. She throws on her work clothes.

EXT. GROUP HOME -- MORNING

Grace walks up and sees Mason standing outside with two others: JESSICA, 20s, quiet, confident and looks like she could kick most people's ass, and SCOTT, 20s, skinny and nervous as hell.

BOBBIE, an older woman with a plump figure and a clipboard, walks out the door. A petite girl, NETTY, 13, stands behind her in her pajamas.

NETTY

Can I say hi to Grace?

BOBBIE

Sure hon.

Netty runs out to Grace and gives her a side hug.

GRACE

Aw, thanks Netty. You give the best hugs.

Grace pulls her away.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Okay, go get dressed.

Netty runs back in.

Bobbie joins Grace as they walk toward the rest of the crew.

Mason pops a smoke from his pack and offers one to Jessica, who takes it, and Scott, who refuses.

MASON

Yeah I didn't smoke before I started working here either.

GRACE

Hey guys.

MASON

How'd I beat you?

GRACE

I took the long way.

MASON

I'm about to tell our newbie Scott here the Wesley story.

GRACE

Hi, I'm Grace.

MASON

Grace is the supervisor here.

She shakes Scott's hand.

SCOTT

I'm Scott, nice to meet you.

GRACE

Just to warn you, Mason's stories usually have very little to do with reality.

MASON

Hey now, my stories are not meant for truth, they're meant for entertainment.

Mason hands her a cigarette, but she rejects it, surprisingly.

JESSICA

Alright, let's hear it.

Bobby hands Grace a clipboard of the night's report. She goes through it as Mason entertains.

MASON

Okay, so, this was like, my first week on the job. I'm at gate, right? Cause I'm the new guy and everyone hates gate duty.

SCOTT

What's gate duty?

GRACE

This isn't a jail, so it's against the law to lock the gate. So instead, we just sit there and make sure no kids run out.

SCOTT

Really?

MASON

So, Grace here, my wonderful new boss, leaves me up there for like 3 hours without a bathroom break. And I'm dying cause I ate the damn tacos they serve here and she didn't warn me that they're a known laxative...that's your warning.

SCOTT

Thanks.

MASON

So I'm thinking I gotta leave my gate duty or I'm gonna shit my pants, and right, almost exactly as I have this thought, this kid, his name was Wesley, he's 16, a big fucking intimidating gang banger. He's like a foot taller than me. He walks up, calm as shit and just cruises out the gate without blinking. Walks right past me. It was like my second day, I didn't know what the hell was going on. But Grace was right there, and just let it happen.

GRACE

(interrupting)

Whatever, when I got there, Mason was just sitting on his ass with Wesley smiling at me from outside the gate, cause he knows we can't touch him.

SCOTT

Why not?

GRACE

As soon as they're a foot outside, can't touch 'em.

SCOTT

So what do you do?

MASON

Well, homeboy takes off running. And Grace tells me to go after him!

GRACE

I thought it'd be good for him.

MASON

Oh really? You thought it'd be good for the new kid who's about to shit his pants, to go chase down the 300 pound gangster.

Grace shrugs playfully.

SCOTT

So what happened?

MASON

So I go after this guy, and catch up to him pretty quick, cause he's a big fatso and can only jog for like 20 paces before stopping to catch his breath. And, you know, I ask him nicely to come back with me, and he says 'fuck you'. So, I just follow him, for hours, just walking, 8 feet behind him. Eventually, he hops on a bus, and I follow. So, we ride the bus. We get off the bus. We get on another bus. And at this point, I can't think of anything else but whatever the hell those tacos are doing in my bowels, I mean, my leg is bouncing, sweat is running down my face. So I make up my mind, fuck this, I have 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 just as I make that decision, Wesley leans his big-ass head over to me from across the aisle and says very calmly, "I'm getting off at the next stop, and if you get off too, I'm going to rip your fucking balls off and feed 'em to you."

SCOTT

No way.

GRACE

Remember what I said.

MASON

(to Grace)

Hey now, this part is true, I was there.

(to Scott)

So, nothing mattered at this point, I had to get off that bus, I couldn't even...I couldn't think straight you know? So, the bus stops. He gets up and walks off. Then I get up and walk to the door and I see him standing there, about 10 feet away, staring at me, just waiting. And I knew, without a doubt, that if I stepped off that bus, he was going to fucking murder me.

(MORE)

MASON (CONT'D)

But, I had no other choice, so I stepped off the bus. And as soon as my feet touched the ground, it was like a knot in my asshole untied and that fiesta in my stomach came pouring down my legs.

GRACE

And he was wearing shorts that day.

SCOTT

Oh man.

MASON

(shakes his head)  
So the bus takes off and I'm standing there with shit gushing down my thighs, ruined my sneakers, and I'm about to get my ass kicked by a 16-year old. But then, as I'm bracing myself for his first blow, I hear this high-pitched, uncontrollable...laughter. And I look up and see Wesley, keeled over, just losing it, I mean, he was laughing so hard...

BOOM! The door from the unit flies open and Sammy comes running out completely naked, swinging his light saber around.

SAMMY

Wooooohooooo!!!!

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

MASON

Here we go Scott!

Scott looks to Jessica, real nervous.

JESSICA

Go!

Scott runs after them.

Grace and Mason begin to gain on Sammy.

GRACE

Jacket!

Mason takes his jacket off and throws it to her.

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

Grace finally gets close enough to fling the jacket over him, catching him on his waist. Sammy hoots, like he's having a blast.

Mason grabs his arm as Grace quickly ties the sweatshirt securely.

SAMMY

Let me go you fucking perverts!

Scott catches up.

MASON

(calmly)

Grab his right arm.

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

MASON (CONT'D)

Alright Sammy, chill out buddy.  
We're just going to sit down here in  
the grass until you de-escalate.

SAMMY

De-escalate my asshole you fucking  
duck fuckers!

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

MASON

(to himself)

Duck fuckers?

Grace holds Sammy's feet and adjusts his sweatshirt to cover him.

GRACE

You know the drill Sammy, just let  
it pass.

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

MASON

You okay buddy?

Sammy breaths heavily.

MASON (CONT'D)

You got pretty far that time, might  
be a record.

The three sit until things calm down.

MASON (CONT'D)

So anyway, after all that, he ended up coming back with me, only because he was so excited to tell everyone on our unit I pooped my pants. And he did. He told 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.

SCOTT

Where's he now?

MASON

Mm.

Mason looks to Grace.

GRACE

He ran away again, and two days later was found dead in the bushes.

SCOTT

Are you serious?

JESSICA

How you guys doing over there!

Jessica watches them from the door.

MASON

Fantastic!

GRACE

How ya doing Sammy? Get it all out?

Sammy looks exhausted.

GRACE (CONT'D)

You wanna go take a nap?

Sammy nods.

MASON

Welcome to Short Term 12, Scott.  
Weirdest job in the world.

INT. GROUP HOME OFFICE -- MORNING

Grace looks over the report from the night before. She nervously scratches the corner of her thumb with her pointer finger.

Mason, Scott and Jessica walk in the door.

MASON

He's cooling off in the CDR.

She shows them the report.

GRACE

We've got a new intake for girls-side coming in this afternoon, Jayden Kester. Her file's in there, so take a look.

Grace hands Scott a big red binder.

GRACE (CONT'D)

These are the files on our kids, to give you an idea of some of the crap they've been through. And just remember, you're not their parent, and you're not their therapist. Our job is to create a safe environment for them, that's it. You'll figure out the details as you go.

SCOTT

Got it.

GRACE

Just try not to let 'em see you're scared...the kids always feel an obligation to punish weakness.

SCOTT

Oh, okay.

GRACE

Alright, that's it, let's call 'em out for community meeting.

Jess and Scott head out the door. Mason lags behind with Grace, sensing something's wrong.

MASON

Hey. What's up?

Grace scans his face, wondering if she can tell him. She picks at her thumb.

GRACE

I'm fine.

She brushes past him and heads out the door.

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE-- MORNING

GRACE

Community meeting starts in 1 minute!

Jessica stands at a giant white board with all the kids' names and levels written on it.

SCOTT

So how does this work exactly?

JESSICA

All the kids earn their level based on behavior. There's 6: Gold, Silver, Green, Orange, Yellow, and Restriction. The higher the level, the more freedom they have.

Most of the kids are sitting in the living room, planted on couches and chairs in a messy circle. Grace sits among them, holding a small stuffed bear in her lap.

GRACE

Last call for Community meeting!

Luis, a small, hispanic 15-year-old, and another girl run into the circle just in time.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Alright, who's secretary today?

Kendra, a large 13-year-old, raises her hand. Grace tosses her a tablet and pencil.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Okay Kendra, kick us off.

KENDRA

Community meeting is now in session!  
(pause)  
Community announcements.

Luis raises his hand.

LUIS

Who's that weird lookin' guy?

GRACE

Luis.

SCOTT

No, you can call me 'weird lookin' guy' if you want. My mom calls me that too.

A few of the girls laugh.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

My real name's Scott, and, uh, I'm currently getting my masters in social work, and I've always wanted to work  
(MORE)

SCOTT (CONT'D)  
with kids who are less privileged  
than me, so...

MARK  
What is that supposed to mean?

SCOTT  
Mean? Uh, hm. Which part?

GRACE  
Settle down Mark, he didn't...

MARK  
No, I wanna know. What do you mean  
less privileged than you?

SCOTT  
Oh no, that's not...

GRACE  
He doesn't know what he's talking  
about, Mark. Settle down, or you'll  
be off Gold for the first time in 3  
months.

MARK  
Can you please have him leave our  
meeting until he knows what the hell  
he's talking about then?

Grace motions for Scott to leave the circle.

SCOTT  
Oh, gotcha. Great to meet you guys,  
sorry, that was a stupid thing to  
say...

MARK  
I got one more announcement.

KENDRA  
Mark.

MARK  
Yeah, Sammy, I know you flip out  
sometimes, and you know, that's  
expected cause this place sucks, but  
do you mind keepin' your dick in  
your pants?

GRACE  
Mark.

MARK  
Sorry, your penis.  
(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

I think the community's getting tired of seeing it.

KENDRA

Would you like to respond Sammy?

Sammy stares at him and mumbles something under his breath.

MARK

What?

Sammy just stares at him.

KENDRA

Well, for the record, Sammy, I like seeing your little dick.

GRACE

Kendra! That's a level drop and a time out. Please take it in your room.

KENDRA

Good. I'm bored.

Kendra throws the tablet on the ground as she walks to her room. Grace looks at them all very seriously.

GRACE

Anyone else want to say something stupid?

Grace looks around the room?

GRACE (CONT'D)

Okay, levels and feelings...Mark, start us off please.

She tosses him the little stuffed bear.

MARK

Gold, positive.

He tosses it to Luis.

LUIS

Green, fine.

As the kids each take turns tossing the bear and saying their levels and feelings, Grace watches them, blankly, then looks down at the sea horse illustration on her hand. She moves her finger, making it swim. Mason notices her.

CUT TO:

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE-- LATER

The phone RINGS. Grace picks up.

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

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.

JACK  
What do you think?

GRACE  
Hm?

JACK  
The new lamp.

Grace shrugs.

GRACE  
Seems fine.

JACK  
Just got it from Ikea. It's really cool. You can turn it on and off by just touching the metal part. Try it.

GRACE  
That's okay. I've seen those before.

She looks once more at the insignificant lamp as Jack finishes his email.

JACK  
Okay. Done.

He turns to Grace.

JACK (CONT'D)  
I have to run to a meeting. Mind if we walk and talk?

CUT TO:

INT. GROUP HOME JACK'S HALLWAY -- DAY

Jack and Grace walk down the hallway.

JACK

So, the new girl that's coming in today, Jayden Kester...

GRACE

Yeah?

JACK

I want you to make sure she's taken good care of.

GRACE

Okay?

JACK

Her dad's a friend of a friend. Real nice guy, very cultured.

GRACE

Then why isn't she home with him?

JACK

He's single...lost his wife a few years ago, and apparently Jayden hasn't made it very easy for him. She's been in and out of group homes the past 2 years for dangerous behavior. Last week she bit her teacher's nose.

GRACE

Great.

JACK

Yeah, I know. So we'll have her during the week, but she can still go home on weekends.

GRACE

That's good, I guess.

JACK

So anyway, I promised him we'd take good care of her...and I know I don't have to ask you that.

GRACE

Yeah. Of course.

JACK

Okay. Gotta run.

GRACE

When are they dropping her off?

Jack looks at his watch.

JACK  
She's probably here already.

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  
You like to draw?

JAYDEN  
No I hate it.

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  
What are these for?

JAYDEN  
Mmm, all the cool people use it to attempt suicide, but I just, you know, cut paper...kinda boring.

GRACE  
Alright, well all this stuff can't stay in your room, we'll keep it in a closet out here, and you can check it out with us when you want it.

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

GRACE  
No cussing.

JAYDEN  
Shit, forgot about that one.  
(beat)  
Can I see my room?

Grace stares at her for a second, then gives in.

GRACE  
Sure.

INT. JAYDEN'S ROOM -- DAY

Jayden walks in and sees the blank walls and sterile bed. She throws her stuff on the bed, including her sketch pad.

JAYDEN

Wow, it's so inviting.

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 smiles.

GRACE

Oh man, that's so great.

Jayden grabs the sketchbook from the bed and closes it.

JAYDEN

That's shit.

GRACE

Well, if that's what you call shit, I'm really jealous.

Jayden notices the drawing on her hand.

Grace takes in a breath.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Look Jayden, I know it sucks to be in a place like this. I wouldn't want to live here either.

JAYDEN

I don't live here. I get to go home every weekend.

GRACE

Yes, but the only way you'll get that privilege is if you're on good behavior. So can you please just try a little?

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

INT. GROUP HOME OFFICE -- AFTERNOON

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

EXT. GROUP HOME PARKING LOT -- AFTERNOON

Mason stands with Grace as she unlocks her bicycle.

MASON

You wanna just throw the bike in back and ride home with me?

GRACE

No, that's okay, I actually have some errands to run.

MASON

I'll do errands with you, I got nothin' to do.

GRACE

No, I just. I think I need some time to decompress you know?

Mason takes in a deep breath.

MASON

Okay.

GRACE

I'll be home soon.

She pecks him on the lips.

EXT. SAN DIEGO STREETS -- AFTERNOON

Grace rides her bike.

EXT. PLANNED PARENTHOOD CLINIC -- AFTERNOON

Grace locks her bike to a railing.

INT. PLANNED PARENTHOOD 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.

NURSE BETH

Grace. Come on in, dearie.

Grace gets up and walks in back with her.

INT. PLANNED PARENTHOOD CLINIC OFFICE -- AFTERNOON

Nurse Beth sits across the desk from Grace, looking at her computer screen.

NURSE BETH

Let me just pull up your record.

Grace shifts uncomfortably in her chair. Nurse Beth finds her in their database.

NURSE BETH (CONT'D)

So I see you've been with us before, back in... 95, when you were 14?...

Nurse Beth continues to read the record. Grace notices her change of expression. She tries to change the subject.

GRACE

How does this work? Do I set up an appointment or something?

After reading, Nurse Beth turns to Grace with a motherly tone.

NURSE BETH

Honey, look at me. No fourteen-year-old should ever have to go through what you did, and I'm so sorry.

GRACE

What are you talking about?

Grace stares at her, offended by her forwardness.

NURSE BETH

Is your father still in prison?

GRACE

I didn't come here for this shit.

She gets up to go. Nurse Beth stands with her.

NURSE BETH

Hold on now, baby. I'm sorry. I'm not trying to be nosey, but when I read a file like yours, it breaks my heart and I just want you to know that I care.

GRACE

I'm not here to be cared for, I just want an abortion.

NURSE BETH

Okay, that's fair, honey. I've said what I wanted to say, okay? Please sit.

Grace stands for a moment, then slowly takes her seat.

NURSE BETH (CONT'D)

So now, are you sure you're pregnant?

Grace pulls out four pregnancy tests from her backpack and tosses them on the desk. Nurse Beth picks them up and sees they're all positive.

NURSE BETH (CONT'D)

Wow. Alright. And where's the man?

GRACE

Oh, he's at home, we live together. He doesn't know about any of this.

NURSE BETH

That's okay. Why doesn't he know?

Grace thinks about it for a second, but doesn't know how to answer.

NURSE BETH (CONT'D)

Has he ever been abusive?

GRACE

Oh, no. No no no. Nothing like that. Mason's... he's not. He's really good to me. He's perfect.

NURSE BETH

Well, that's good. So, why haven't you told him?

She thinks for a minute.

GRACE

Because he'd be really happy about it.

Grace stares off at something.

NURSE BETH

You know baby, you're in a very different place now than you were 10 years ago. And those were extraordinary circumstances.

GRACE

Can you make the appointment or not? Otherwise I'll go somewhere else.

NURSE BETH

I just want you to be certain that this is definitely what you feel needs to happen.

GRACE

I'm certain.

NURSE BETH

Okay. Well, our next opening will be Tuesday, 6 pm.

GRACE

That's fine.

Nurse Beth types it in and hits enter on her keyboard.

NURSE BETH

Alright, come on back to the exam room and we'll find out how far along you are.

GRACE

Oh. Okay, sure.

EXT. SAN DIEGO STREETS -- AFTERNOON

Grace rides her bike home sweating and distraught. She wipes the tears from her eyes.

EXT. GRACE'S APARTMENT -- EVENING

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

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT KITCHEN -- EVENING

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

He turns to see her and smiles.

MASON

Hey stinker.

GRACE

I didn't know you still had that stupid hat.

MASON

I will always have this stupid hat.

GRACE

What are you doing?

MASON

Well, I knew you weren't having the best day, so I made some veggie spaghetti, extra garlic.

He uncovers the pot to let her have a whiff.

MASON (CONT'D)

And after we eat...

Mason slowly reveals a board game, Scrabble. Grace let's a little smile escape.

GRACE

Alright, let me hop in the shower before I whoop you.

She walks to the back.

MASON

Ooh. She wants a fight.

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT BATHROOM -- LATER

Grace stands in the shower, letting the water consume her.

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT LIVING ROOM -- EVENING

Two empty plates of spaghetti sit on the counter.

Mason and Grace sit on the couch drinking red wine. Mason reads from *Slaughter House Five*, as Grace stares at the Scrabble game on the coffee table.

MASON

Listen to this one: *Trout, incidentally, had written a book about a money tree. It had twenty-dollar bills for leaves. Its flowers were government bonds. Its fruit was diamonds. It attracted human beings who killed each other around the roots and made very good fertilizer. So it goes.*

GRACE

Stop talking, I'm trying to think.

MASON

How long do you need? I've almost finished a whole chapter. If you don't have anything, you can pass.

GRACE

I never pass.

Mason smiles.

MASON

I like it when you get all competitive.

Grace smiles to herself and finally looks up to meet Mason's gaze.

MASON (CONT'D)

What?

She shrugs playfully.

GRACE

Nothing.

Grace makes her move, putting down 4 letters onto an almost-filled scrabble table.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Triple-word.

MASON

*Prolix?*

GRACE

*Prolix.*

MASON

Use it in a sentence.

GRACE

You tell a lot of prolix stories.

Mason thinks for a sec.

MASON

Hilarious?

Grace counts up her points.

MASON (CONT'D)

Witty?

GRACE

That's 38.

Mason shakes his head.

MASON

That's it for me. I don't know how you're so good at this game.

GRACE

I'm not that good. I'm just a lot better than you.

Mason laughs as he grabs the wine glass.

MASON

Oh right. Well I'm happy to be here to make you feel smart.

Grace smiles.

MASON (CONT'D)

More?

Grace nods and watches him fill her glass.

GRACE

Why are you so nice to me?

He looks up at her.

MASON

Are we being serious now?

Grace nods.

MASON (CONT'D)  
Because you're the weirdest, most  
beautiful person I've ever met in my  
life.

Grace likes that. She gives him a really good kiss.

MASON (CONT'D)  
Wow.

GRACE  
What?

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

Grace thinks about it.

GRACE  
I guess it has been a while.

MASON  
You know we haven't had sex in 23  
days?

GRACE  
Really?

MASON  
(laughs)  
Are you serious? You don't even  
notice?

GRACE  
No, I mean, yes...I do, notice. I'm  
sorry.

MASON  
Why haven't you wanted to be close  
to me?

He looks at her, but she doesn't respond.

MASON (CONT'D)  
Did I do something?

Grace shakes her head.

GRACE  
No, you're wonderful.

MASON  
What then?

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

MASON (CONT'D)

Baby, please, you have to let me in your head every once in a while or I'm gonna go nuts....I'm just, I'm constantly trying to read you, is something bothering her? Does she just need space? Should I ask her? Should I leave her alone? Does she still love me? I honestly don't know anymore...

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 just doing this for me?

GRACE

Shhhh. No more questions.

She kisses him again and moves his hand up her legs, high under her shorts. Her breathing quickens. He pauses 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

You okay?

She nods.

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 then 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 was that Grace?

She just 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:

INT. GROUP HOME OFFICE -- MORNING

Grace pulls out a binder labeled sign-in and scratches her signature.

Grace, Mason, Jessica and Scott sit around a table in the office. Bobbie enters.

GRACE

How was the overnight, Bobbie?

BOBBIE

Not that good actually.

Bobbie hands her a clipboard with her report for the night-shift.

BOBBIE (CONT'D)

Kendra tried to sneak into Sammy's room again, we put her on restriction.

Grace shakes her head and looks at the report.

GRACE

That girl does not belong here.

She reads a little more of the report.

BOBBIE

I'd also keep an eye on Mark. No real problems, it's just pretty obvious he's not sleeping well. Seems anxious.

GRACE

Well, he turns 18 in 2 weeks.

SCOTT

Why is that bad?

GRACE

When you turn 18, the state kicks you out of here. And he doesn't have much to look forward to out there.

JESSICA

We should reward 'im, he's been on Gold forever.

MASON

Hell yeah, we should. I'll grab him.

Mason trots out of the room.

INT. MARK'S ROOM -- MORNING

Mark pinches some worms into his fish bowl as Mason trots in.

MASON

Hey Mark, could we see you for a sec before community meeting?

MARK

What'd I do?

INT. GROUP HOME OFFICE -- MORNING

Mark stands in the office with all four line staff.

GRACE

You've been on Gold for almost 3 months now, so we wanted to give you a reward for good behavior.

MARK

What kind of reward?

MASON

Whatever you want...you know, within reason.

MARK

Pft. I don't need nothing from you guys.

GRACE

Well, you can think about it, but either way, we just wanted to say thank you for setting a good example to the community.

Mark stands there, staring back at all four, confused at their smiling faces.

MARK

You guys are effing weirdos right now.

He turns to leave, then stops at the door, spins around.

MARK (CONT'D)

Can I shave my head?

Mason looks to Grace who shrugs a yes.

MARK (CONT'D)

With a razor?

GRACE

Uh, sure, as long as I'm holding the razor.

MARK

That's what I want then.

Mark turns and walks out. The staff look at each other with "whatever" faces.

INT. RESIDENTIAL HOME, LOUNGE -- MORNING

Grace takes a seat in a circle with her 15 kids. She's holding a Teddy Ruxpin stuffed-bear.

GRACE

Alright, first off, I know most of you have met her already, but we have a new member of our community, Jayden Kester, arrived here yesterday. Would you like to say anything Jayden?

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 like wasting time on short term relationships, so you know, nothing personal.

LUIS

Wow, nice to meet you too.

GRACE

Okay, levels and feelings, Sammy.

Grace tosses Sammy the bear.

SAMMY

Yellow, tired.

He passes to Tom.

TOM

Green. Happy.

Tom passes it to Luis.

LUIS

Naranja. I feel okay.

NETTY

Orange, blank.

Netty passes to Cassandra.

CASSANDRA

Orange, positive.

She passes to Kendra, who grabs the bear and begins to squeeze its neck.

KENDRA

Restriction, and I'm horny.

The kids laugh a little. Grace exchanges a look with Jessica, who walks a little closer to Kendra.

GRACE

Okay Kendra. Thanks for being honest. And that's a normal feeling. But, it's how you choose to deal with it that makes the difference.

KENDRA

So you get horny too miss?

GRACE

No. But that's just because I'm weird.

KENDRA

What am I s'posed to do then?

GRACE

You're supposed to respect the people around you.

KENDRA

What if I don't give a shit about any of them and just wanna have a quick fuck with a little dick?

Mark covers his mouth.

MARK

Damn.

Grace sees Kendra staring at Sammy, who is looking down at his toes. Jessica walks over and stands behind Kendra.

GRACE

Kendra. I gave you a chance to be a part of the community, even though you're on restriction. But you're obviously not ready yet. Please go back to your room, and you earned another 500 word essay on why you shouldn't be sexually inappropriate.

KENDRA

Big fucking whoop.

GRACE

And you're on a 10-foot with Sammy.

JESSICA

Let's go.

Kendra stands.

KENDRA

Hey miss.

GRACE

Yes Kendra.

KENDRA

Do you want me to fuck you instead?

Jessica grabs her arm.

JESSICA

Hey.

GRACE  
Is that a threat Kendra?

KENDRA  
No. Just a question.

GRACE  
Well then, no I don't. I just want you to stay in your room for now. Let whatever this is pass, and we'll talk later.

Kendra turns to her room.

KENDRA  
Okay miss! I can't wait!

GRACE  
Leave the bear here please!

Kendra turns around and tosses the bear's body back into the circle. Next she throws the head, which she has ripped off.

MARK  
Holy shit, she decapitated Ruxpin.

Grace changes the subject.

GRACE  
Who wants to go outside?

All hands go up.

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE-- LATER

JESSICA  
Straight line please!

All the kids, minus Kendra, walk out the door in a straight line. Scott carries all the equipment for a game of wiffle ball.

Mason checks in with Grace on the side.

MASON  
You alright?

Grace shakes her head.

GRACE  
We gotta get her out of here. She's targeting Sammy.

MASON  
Yeah, that was no joke.

Grace looks back toward Kendra's room.

GRACE

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

INT. SAMMY'S ROOM -- DAY

Grace pulls latex gloves over her fingers.

She slides her hand across the top of the door, searches the curtains, pulls open a drawer and looks under the clothes. She finds the lingerie section of a catalogue and crumples it up without hesitation.

She walks to the next room.

INT. MARK'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

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 gets in closer and works to pull out a small box cutter. She pushes the button and slides up the razor blade.

She shakes her head.

EXT. RECREATION AREA -- DAY

SAMMY

Batter, batter...

Scott and Jessica are in the outfield with the rest of the kids. Scott's pumped up from Sammy, and joins in the chant.

SCOTT

Batter, batter, batter...

He smiles like an excited kid, looks over to Jess, who shakes her head and shuts him down with one stern look. He stops immediately.

SAMMY

Batterbatterbatter, SWING Batter!

Sammy pitches the wiffle ball while taunting Mark at bat. Mark swings and misses.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Steeerriike one!

He raises a finger to his teammates.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Two outs! One strike!

MARK

Hey, chill out man, this ain't the majors.

SAMMY

Aw, don't cry just cause you can't handle my knuckle ball.

MARK

Alright, let's go mini-me.

Sammy gets ready for the pitch.

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

MASON

What? Too good for wiffleball?

She takes out one of her headphones.

JAYDEN

What?

MASON

You too good for this game?

JAYDEN

I don't like sweat.

Mason sits down next to her.

MASON

Can I hear?

She apathetically hands him one of her ear buds.

SAMMY

Batter, batter, batter batter.

MARK

Shut the fuck up and pitch.

Sammy pitches.

SAMMY

SWING Batter!

Mark strikes.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

STEEEEEERIKE TWO!

Mark picks up the ball and throws it back.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

What happened? Too fast?

MARK

I got distracted. I heard Kendra calling your name from her bedroom.

Sammy doesn't like that. He takes a moment and looks to the outfield, then turns around and pitches. Mark swings and misses.

SAMMY

Change it up!

Grace arrives on the scene as the teams trade places on the field. She notices Mason standing on the sideline with Jayden, listening to the same ipod, bouncing to the same beat.

Mark does his best to curb his frustration. Sammy brushes by him, tauntingly.

SAMMY (CONT'D)

Hey when they let you out of here are you going to start fucking your mom again?

Mark cocks his head, wondering if he heard correctly. Sammy keeps walking but Mark spins around and hits him hard on the side of the head with the plastic bat.

GRACE

Mark!

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

Sammy winces in pain, spins around to face Mason who grabs him by the face and throws him to the ground. Mark winds up to hit him again, but is pushed away by Mason.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Get Sammy out of here!

Scott takes Sammy away. Grace is at the end of herself.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Mark!

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

GRACE (CONT'D)

Get your ass to the fucking bench right now!

Mark gives her a double take, realizing she means business. He turns and walks to the bench.

EXT. SAME

The game is in session.

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

GRACE

Mark, you need to tell me what the hell's going on.

Mark doesn't look up.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Look, we all know you're turning 18 in two weeks, and I know it can be a scary transition leaving this place.

MARK

Pft. You think I'm scared to leave this shit hole? I can't fucking wait.

Grace reaches into her pocket and pulls out the box cutter she found earlier. She places it on the bench between them. Mark gets a little uncomfortable.

GRACE

That was a pretty good hiding place, under the mattress like that.

(beat)

Assault and possession of a deadly weapon. There's two perfectly valid reasons for me to send you straight to juvi right now.

Mark looks to her for the first time.

MARK

You really think I give a fuck about *Juvi*? Look at my life.

He looks back down, Grace doesn't know how to respond.

EXT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- DAY

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

JESSICA

Straight to your rooms! No freetime until all your chores are done!

MASON

Alright Jayden, I'll bring my laptop tomorrow and we'll swap some music.

JAYDEN

You better have something good.

Jayden walks in. Grace pulls Mason aside.

GRACE

Hey, could you hang out with Mark a little?

Mason sees she's serious.

MASON

Sure.

INT. MARK'S ROOM -- DAY

Mark lies on his bed with his headphones on, writing lyrics in his notebook.

MASON

Hey man.

Mark pulls off his headphones and acknowledges him with a head nod.

MASON (CONT'D)

You got any new lyrics you wanna try on me?

Mark looks down at his notebook.

MARK

There's a lot of cussing.

Mason shrugs.

MASON

I won't tell.

CUT TO:

INT. MARK'S ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Mason is on the tiny drum set in the corner of Mark's room. He starts a very simple hip hop beat.

MASON

How's that?

MARK

Little slower.

Mason slows it down. Mark begins to feel it, holding his notebook of lyrics. Then he spits it out.

MARK (CONT'D)

It doesn't matter now I'm almost eighteen. An' all the pictures in my head are fading. But when I think about the face that raised me, I think about shit cause she's fucking crazy. Fuck that bitch an 'er fucked up pain your body's in a ditch inside this fucked up brain. You can't claim that you're my mas jus' because You ripped me out of your womb with your fuckin' ass claws.. I hear your fuckin' voice CAW CAW CAW! Less talkin' more fuckin' that's the fuckin' law. Get a tall can, use your small hand, touch my bald skin, kiss me a-gain. Again? Again? You wannit again? I'm ten, let me go outside an' play wit' my friends. I'm just a boy, a boy, oh boy, oh boy. Don't call me motha fucka cause I'm only a boy.

Mark begins to pick up his intensity. He gets up, pacing, slowly escalating. Mason stops drumming halfway through, too caught up in Mark's performance and raw honesty to continue.

MARK (CONT'D)

You my Ma, you my Motha? You tha motha fuckin' queen? She's my ma, an' I love 'er, so I'll do it again. But not this time bitch, cause I'm stronger than you. And not this time bitch, I'm swingin' harder than you. Not this time bitch, you ain't my ma no mo'. You're just a body in a ditch in the brain of a boy. An' it matters even more now that I'm almost 18. I guess the pictures are never fading. I'm always wishin' of a life amazing, but if your life is shit, there ain't no trading. Put me in your books so you know what it's like. To live a life without knowing what a normal life's like. Put a label on my head so you know what it's like. To live a life without knowing what a normal life's like. Look in my eyes so you know what it's like. To live a life without knowing what a normal life's like. Look in my eyes, look in my eyes...Look in my motha fuckin' eyes!

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

MASON

Uh...holy shit, Mark. I mean, I'm not supposed to cuss, but that was pretty fucking incredible.

Mark doesn't respond, still catching his breath, looking at his notebook.

MASON (CONT'D)

I don't even know what to say.

MARK

You think Grace can still shave my head?

Mason's a bit caught off-guard by the question, but quickly decides.

MASON

Absolutely.

INT. BATHROOM -- DAY

Mark 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, smiling at the new look.

GRACE

Okay, finished. Take a look.

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

MASON

It looks great Mark. Check it out.

MARK

Is it lumpy?

Mason and Grace exchange another confused look.

MASON

What do you mean?

Mark still stares at the floor.

MARK

My ma used to make me keep my hair real long, cause that's where she'd hit me. Is my head still lumpy?

MASON

No man, it looks fine. Take a look.

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.

MARK

It's so smooth.

Mark turns to Grace and Mason with a big smile.

MARK (CONT'D)

No lumps! What about the back?

GRACE

Looks great.

MARK

Smooth?

GRACE

Perfectly smooth.

Mark 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.

MASON

She can't touch you anymore, Mark.  
She can't even come close.

Grace watches them, touched by the scene. She walks out, giving them space.

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- DAY

Grace unzips her backpack and pulls out her sketchbook and pencils. She walks to Jayden's room.

JAYDEN'S ROOM

Grace knocks on Jayden's door. Jayden looks up from her bed.

GRACE

Wanna draw?

Jayden shrugs.

JAYDEN

Whatever.

The two sit side by side, drawing their own separate illustrations. Let this shot settle.

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- LATER

The television is on, playing a nature show about the whale-shark and its eating patterns.

Grace walks out of Jayden's room and finds Jessica snoozing at the chair by the door. She puts her hand on Jess's shoulder.

GRACE  
(jokingly, friendly)  
Hey. It's nap time for the kids,  
not for us.

Jessica wakes up, apologetically.

JESSICA  
Oh god. I'm sorry. I don't know  
what happened.

Grace turns around and observes the hall. She watches the television for a moment, seeing the giant whale swim through a school of tiny shrimp with its mouth open wide.

Something is unsettling.

Mason walks out from Mark's room.

GRACE  
How's Mark?

MASON  
Sleeping.

GRACE  
Where's Scott?

Jess looks out the window and points.

JESSICA  
Oh, he's playing hacky sack with  
Luis.

Scott's outside the door, kicking a hacky sack in the air.

Grace looks back to the hall.

MASON  
What's wrong?

GRACE  
I don't know.

She walks toward girls' side and peeks into Kendra's room. She's not there.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Shit!

Grace runs over to boys' side.

MASON

What's going on?

Grace races to Sammy's room, bursts through the door and sees Kendra straddling Sammy on his bed, bouncing up and down on him while holding a pillow over his face.

GRACE

Kendra! Get off him!

Grace rushes her, grabs her by the neck and throws her off the bed.

She pulls the pillow off of Sammy's face and he gasps for air, tears flowing down his red cheeks.

She looks back to Kendra, sprawled up against the wall.

Grace walks up to her and SLAPS her hard across the face.

MASON

Grace!

Grace turns to see Mason staring at her.

MASON (CONT'D)

What the hell is going on?!

Grace stands up, defeated and brushes past him like a zombie.

GRACE

Kendra was raping Sammy.

MASON

What?

GRACE

I have to go home.

She heads out the door just as Jessica arrives.

JESSICA

What's up?

Grace shakes her head and keeps walking.

EXT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- CONTINUOUS

Grace walks by Scott and Luis, still playing hacky sack. He places the hacky in his eye socket.

SCOTT

Oh, Grace, watch this! Ready Luis?  
Eye to eye.

LUIS

I don't know what that means.

SCOTT

What do you mean you don't know what  
that means? That's what we've been  
practicing this whole time.

LUIS

No, that's what you've been  
practicing. I just wanna play.

Grace walks by them like they're not even there.

EXT. SAN DIEGO STREETS -- DAY

Grace pedals along the road, slow and steady, completely  
drained.

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT BATHROOM -- EVENING

Grace sits in the shower staring down at her feet.

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT BEDROOM -- EVENING

Grace lies in bed, facing the wall. Mason lies in bed next  
to her, as if they'd been sitting in silence for hours.

MASON

Did you see the sunset tonight?

GRACE

I'm too exhausted to care about pretty  
things.

MASON

They moved Kendra to another facility.  
(beat)  
She didn't say anything about you  
hitting her.

He turns over and faces her.

MASON (CONT'D)

You wanna tell me what's going on?

He runs his fingers through her hair.

GRACE

When you were a kid, on the  
playground, did you ever try to climb  
up the slide the wrong way?

MASON

No, I was too fat.

GRACE

My dad used to pretend he was a shark that lived in the sand, and I'd have to climb up the slide or he'd bite me. I figured out if I pushed my toes against both sides, I wouldn't slip as easy, and I could make it up like that. But every time I'd almost get to the top, he'd pull me by my ankles, and I'd slide all the way back down. I'd rest for a second and then just get up and do it again. Over and over. I could do it for hours. Cause I really thought that if I kept trying, eventually I'd make it up there. But I never did. The shark was always too smart for me.

Mason doesn't quite know how to respond.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Why is everything in my life always so fucked up?

MASON

You really think that?

Grace thinks about it for a second.

GRACE

This is the story of a girl who tries, as hard as she possibly can, to do good, to be a reasonable person, to not mess anything up, to make sense of the world, but she just, can't, do it. She just can't.

Mason wraps his arms around her and holds her tight. They lie together, without a word.

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT KITCHEN -- MORNING

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

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.

GRACE (O.S.)  
What's that for?

Mason looks up.

MASON  
Today's Jayden's birthday right?

Grace shakes her head, disappointed she forgot.

GRACE  
You're right. I need to go pick something up for her.

Grace begins to walk away.

MASON  
Hey, just ride with me and we'll stop at the store. Cause tonight's that party for my ma and pa.

GRACE  
Oh, that's tonight?

She thinks about it.

MASON  
Come on Grace, you promised.

GRACE  
Alright.

MASON  
Cool.

Mason turns around to get some tin foil.

GRACE  
Ugh, gross.

MASON  
What?

Mason looks back at her over his shoulder and reveals that he's completely naked under his apron. Grace shields her eyes and walks out of the room.

GRACE  
I didn't need to see that this early in the morning.

MASON  
No one forced you to look, pervert.

EXT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- MORNING

Mason lights up his cigarette, standing outside with his team: Grace, Scott, Jessica and Bobby.

GRACE

Anyone going on pass today?

Bobbie hands her the clipboard.

BOBBIE

Luis and Jayden.

SCOTT

What's pass?

JESSICA

Depending on their family situation, some kids get to go home on the weekends.

SCOTT

Oh, that's kinda cool.

Mason hands a cigarette to Jessica.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Actually, I think I'll take one of those.

MASON

Naw man, you don't want to start this shit, really.

SCOTT

Let me just try one.

Mason shrugs and hands him one.

JESSICA

Famous last words.

He looks to Grace.

MASON

You really quit smoking?

Grace shrugs.

GRACE

I'm not sure yet.

Mason takes a drag.

MASON

Sammy must be pretty shaken up.  
(MORE)

MASON (CONT'D)  
He'd normally be running naked out  
the door by now.

Grace seems disturbed by the thought.

SCOTT  
How often does he do that?

Scott lights his cigarette. Mason shrugs.

MASON  
Two or three times a week.

Mason looks at the door, no sign of Sammy.

MASON (CONT'D)  
What a strange thing to miss.

SCOTT  
How do I look?

Scott tries to look really cool with his cigarette. Everyone looks at him like he's an idiot and turns to walk inside, leaving him out there.

SCOTT (CONT'D)  
You guys are mean.

INT. GROUP HOME OFFICE -- MORNING

GRACE  
Come get your meds!

Grace walks into the office.

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

GRACE (CONT'D)  
How you guys doing?

She turns to find three tired kids waiting for meds: Luis, Merrily and Brook. Merrily and Brook already have theirs and are drinking them down.

LUIS  
Good.

She hands Luis his pills and water who seems quite happy.

GRACE  
Who's picking you up today?

LUIS

My uncle. We're going to a water park.

GRACE

No way, cool.

LUIS

Yeah, there's this one slide that's like straight down, it makes you go so fast it rips off all the girls' swim suits.

GRACE

Wow. How exciting.

Luis raises his eyebrows like an excited rascal and turns to leave just as Jayden enters.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Hey Jayden. How'd you sleep?

JAYDEN

(apathetic)

Like shit.

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

Sure, I'll have him look into it.

Grace grabs something off the counter.

GRACE (CONT'D)

And there's this too.

Grace hands her a gift bag.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Happy Birthday.

She takes it and pulls out a really cool sketch pad and colored pencil set. It's barely apparent that she likes it.

GRACE (CONT'D)

And it comes with a cupcake. Mason made it.

She hands her a cupcake.

JAYDEN

Thanks.

GRACE

I heard your dad's coming to pick you up for the weekend.

JAYDEN

Yup.

GRACE

You excited?

She shrugs.

JAYDEN

Whatever.

Jayden turns and walks away.

GRACE

Hey, where's Sammy?

Jayden shrugs and keeps walking.

Grace watches her for a moment.

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)

Kendra's gone, we moved her last night.

(beat)

Sammy. There is no excuse for what happened yesterday. I screwed up, and I'm so sorry. No kid should ever feel scared in their own home.

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

INT. GROUP HOME OFFICE -- DAY

Mason walks into the office and finds Scott looking through the red binder.

MASON

Pretty messed up huh?

Scott looks up, obviously affected by what he's reading.

SCOTT

Yeah. Um, does this mean?

Mason looks.

MASON

Sammy? Yup. When he was 10, his mom walked into his room and caught him having sex with his little sister.

SCOTT

Oh my god.

Mason goes to the sink and fills himself a glass of water.

MASON

She pressed charges and tried to get him thrown in jail, but the judge sent him here.

SCOTT

That's crazy.

Mason nods.

MASON

It's fucked up, but his mom had been doing the exact same shit to him his whole life. He's just too embarrassed to say anything.

SCOTT

I can't even...

Scott shakes his head, speechless.

MASON

You'll get used to it.

He takes a sip of his water, pondering.

MASON (CONT'D)

Unfortunately.

INT. JAYDEN'S ROOM -- DAY

Jayden looks at herself in a small mirror, reapplying her dark eyeliner.

She adds another drawing to her high-tops.

She laces them up to her feet and makes sure her jeans fit over them nicely.

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.

JESSICA (O.S.)

Bye Luis!

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

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- DAY

Jayden walks to an empty couch on the far wall and sits down, backpack at her feet. She sees Luis standing at the doorway with his backpack on, surrounded by his extended family: his aunt, uncle and 3 younger cousins. Grace and Mason stand at the door to say goodbye. Jessica and Scott are with the other kids in the lounge, playing a card game (*Rich Man, Poor Man.*)

LUIS

Catch you foos later!

Scott waves from across the room.

MASON

Have fun at the water park.

LUIS

I'll check out some boobies for you.

MASON

Oh, that's not necessary.

GRACE

Have fun!

Grace waves to them as they leave. Then she looks over at Jayden, sitting sadly on the couch with her headphones on.

She sits for a moment after Luis and his family leave. Then suddenly, she stands and streamlines to her room, slamming the door behind her.

All the staff react to it.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Shit, here we go.

Grace heads toward the commotion with Mason and Scott in tow. She passes Jess.

GRACE (CONT'D)  
Can you stay with these guys?

JESSICA  
Sure.

HALL -- CONTINUOUS

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

GRACE  
Jayden, you know you can't have this closed.  
(beat)  
Stop pushing on the door.

Grace inches open the door enough to talk to her.

GRACE (CONT'D)  
I'm really sorry about your dad, Jade. Maybe he had car trouble or something.

SCOTT  
(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  
I'm sorry, Jayden. Just leave the door open and we won't bother you.

She doesn't respond.

GRACE (CONT'D)  
Okay. If you aren't going to let go, we're going to have to force it open.

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

GRACE (CONT'D)

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 arm! Grab her arm!

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

MASON (CONT'D)

Okay, to the bed!

They quickly back up to the bed.

MASON (CONT'D)

Okay 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 her cupcake. She pulls off the paper cupcake cup, which was still stuck to her face.

INT. LOUNGE -- CONTINUOUS

Mark steps out of his room and looks down the hall. The rest of the kids are playing video games on the couch. Brook stands up to take a look.

JESSICA

Brook! Sit down!

INT. HALL -- CONTINUOUS

JAYDEN

AAAAAAH!! You're fucking squishing me fat ass!

Mason repositions herself.

MASON  
Sorry, how's that?

JAYDEN  
Let me go!!!

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

MASON  
Can you get her feet Grace?

GRACE  
Yeah yeah yeah.

Grace goes for her feet.

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 Scott.

JAYDEN  
Yeah hold me good Scott.

Jayden spits hard on Scott's face.

SCOTT  
Oh...cool.

MASON  
(calmly)  
Jayden. Stop that.

Jayden catches her breath and begins to cry.

GRACE  
It's going to be okay Jayden.

JAYDEN  
I hate you Grace.

GRACE  
That's fine, just let it pass.

MASON  
How you doing Scott?

SCOTT  
It's dripping down my neck.

Jayden continues to cry.

GRACE  
Doing good Jayden. Just deep breaths  
okay, Jayden.

Jayden snaps.

JAYDEN  
Stop saying my fucking name!!

She whips one leg free, winds up, and kicks Grace right in the stomach.

Grace falls back in pain. Jayden realizes she may have gone too far.

Grace gets up and walks out of the room.

MASON  
Ah, shit.

INT. BATHROOM -- DAY

Grace leans on the sink, still catching her breath, washing the cake from her face and hair. Mason walks in.

MASON  
Are you hurt?

GRACE  
I'm fine, just lost my wind. How is she?

MASON  
Better. She's in the cool down room.

GRACE  
That's good. I'll be there in a second.

Mason notices her scratching her thumb.

INT. LOUNGE -- DAY

Scott walks up to Jessica at the door.

SCOTT  
Can I get some of that antibacterial stuff?

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.

Mark 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.

MARK  
Everyone grab one.

INT. COOL DOWN ROOM -- DAY

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

GRACE  
You wanna see something?

Grace pulls up her long-sleeve shirt to reveal an arm riddled with scars. She has Jayden's attention.

JAYDEN  
Holy shit.

She points to a really big scar.

GRACE  
This one's from a sneeze. It made me slip and I went too deep. I almost died.

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

JAYDEN  
Why'd you do that?

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

GRACE  
Before my mom died, I asked her why my dad was like that. Why he did those things to us...and you know what she said? It was because of the way his parents treated him...like it wasn't even his fault. Like he was excused because they fucked him up.

Grace thinks about that again.

GRACE (CONT'D)  
After that, I thought what he was doing to me was okay. And then she fucking O.D.'s and dies and leaves me alone with all that shit. I didn't know what else to do...

Grace begins to lose it. She wipes her tears.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Sorry, I don't know why I'm telling you this. I got a lot of shit in my head right now.

They sit in silence for a moment.

JAYDEN

Sorry for kicking you.

GRACE

Don't worry about it. It's in the job description.

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

JAYDEN

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. HALL -- DAY

Grace exits the CDR and holds the door open for Jayden. As they walk back to girls' side, she sees Mark 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 long 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.

INT. LOUNGE -- EVENING

Sixteen candles burn brightly, planted in the cupcakes that Mason made. All the kids gather around Jayden, singing the last verse of Happy Birthday. They are all incredibly out of tune.

EVERYONE

Happy Birthday to yoooooooouuuu!

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

MASON

Alright, who wants to play Big Booty?

INT. LOUNGE -- EVENING

The entire unit sits 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. Scott 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.

GRACE

Sammy, you should try one of these cupcakes.

He doesn't respond.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I'll leave one here for you.

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, grabs it, and takes a bite.

INT. 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 Mark.

MASON

Let's hear some freestyle!

Mark begins to spit out some freestyle lyrics, teasing some of the staff and the people in the circle. Scott is *really* into it, smiling and bouncing to the beat. When Mark finishes, Scott immediately jumps in, picking up where he left off, and he's surprisingly good!

Mason and Jessica exchange a "What the hell?" Look.

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

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

Scott finishes with:

SCOTT

You all think I'm weird, and that I  
smell...but I still love it here at  
Short Term 12!

The crowd goes wild. Mark laughs at how ridiculous Scott is, but is also impressed. The battle ends and Mark and Scott shake hands with big smiles.

Suddenly, an ALARM goes off.

Grace runs to girls' side and sees the emergency door open.

She runs to the door.

GRACE

We have an awol!

Jessica gets on the phone. Mason races after her.

EXT. GROUP HOME -- EVENING

Grace runs outside and goes around back, toward the gate. She sees Jayden running in the distance with her backpack bouncing, turning the next corner.

GRACE

Jayden!

EXT. FRONT GATE -- EVENING

Grace reaches the front gate and finds the staff on gate duty asleep. She runs out the gate and sees Jayden running away from the grounds. She chases her. Mason reaches the gate just behind her.

MASON

Grace!

GRACE

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

Mason watches her run.

EXT. CITY STREETS -- EVENING

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

GRACE

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

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

GRACE (CONT'D)

Come on, I'll stop if you stop.

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

Let's walk then.

Jayden starts to walk again. Grace follows.

They sit together at a bus stop. A bus arrives.

INT. BUS -- 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 -- EVENING

Jayden walks ahead of Grace who follows patiently 10 paces 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.

GRACE

Is this your house?

Jayden walks to the front door and Grace follows her. She grabs a plastic rock from the flower bed and takes out a key.

GRACE (CONT'D)

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

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

MASON (O.S.)

Grace, what's going on?

GRACE

We're at her dad's house. I don't think anyone's home, but she went in anyway and I'm standing at the door.

MASON (O.S.)

I'm on my way.

GRACE

K, thanks.

Grace hangs up the phone. She looks in a window to see if she can see anything. Nothing. She turns around and 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 (CONT'D)

He's not here?

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

GRACE (CONT'D)

You wanna go back?

Jayden nods.

Mason pulls to the curb in a van. Grace carries Jayden's back pack for her as they walk to the van.

INT. VAN -- 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

Sure.

CUT TO:

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

Wow.

Grace watches Jayden read.

JAYDEN

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.

(MORE)

JAYDEN (CONT'D)

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 himself 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

Did your dad used to hurt you?

Jayden doesn't respond at first. But then nods 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.

Grace makes an extra copy of the report.

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.

GRACE

He's got everyone thinking he's a wonderful dad who can't control his crazy daughter...and no one even considers she's acting out cause he fuckin' hits her, and who knows what else.

MASON

I can't stand hearing shit like that. Makes me want to go over to his house with a bat and let him know what it feels like.

Grace lets out a breath.

GRACE

They can't let her go back there.

MASON

I'm sure they won't after reading your report.

Grace likes that. She leans over and snuggles up to Mason, feeling good about herself for a change.

MASON (CONT'D)

You were amazing today, you know that?

Grace takes his hand into hers and squeezes.

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

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

Mason's car pulls to the curb of an elegant home. There are cars cluttering the yard and street. A jumping castle is inflated in the front yard with a bunch of kids bouncing around inside.

INT. MASON'S CAR -- EVENING

Mason looks at Grace.

MASON

You ready for this?

Grace takes a deep breath.

GRACE

Yes.

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

50 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 is 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.

Grace watches everything, a father making a plate for his daughter, a grandson pouring a drink for his grandpa, people laughing, teasing, having a great time together.

Mason clinks his glass with his fork and soon everyone in the room joins in. Mason lifts his hands like a conductor wanting more from them, louder, louder. Then he cuts them off with a swipe, he does the motion again for some of the stragglers.

MASON

I just want to take a moment to say thank you. Momma, Pops. We all know your journey together wasn't perfect. You've been through good times and some really hard times, but you always chose to go through it together.

(beat)

None of us think of you as just our foster parents. To us, you're just mom and dad. And I think I speak for everyone here when I say thank you, for taking us in...

(MORE)

MASON (CONT'D)

(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.

MASON (CONT'D)

...What it's like to be loved. And without you both, none of us would be here.

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

MASON (CONT'D)

Look at this beautiful family you made...except for Roni, of course, I don't know what happened there.

RONI

Hey.

MASON

Lift your glasses to our king and queen. Happy 30th Ma and Pops. I love you with everything in me.

Everyone begins to hoot and yell as they drink from their glasses and go back to their conversations. Grace gives Mason a hug as he wipes his tears.

Grace watches Mason play a mini game of Nerf basketball in the living room with 4 of his little 8-year-old cousins. The kids laugh and jump on him to get the ball. He passes it to the little girl and lifts her into the air to do a slam dunk.

Merengue music pumps through a small sound system. All the couples are on the dance floor. Grace and Mason dance near his parents. Mason's mom sends a friendly smile to Grace.

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.

The party's winding down now. Mason's aunt sings the Spanish version of "I Swear" by All-4-One on a karaoke machine. A child lies asleep in his dad's arms. Three couples slow-dance on the floor. One of them is Grace and Mason.

Grace embraces him like she could do it forever. At this moment, she feels perfectly safe.

GRACE  
I loved your speech.

MASON  
Oh yeah? It wasn't too prolix?

Grace smiles at the reference.

MASON (CONT'D)  
Yeah, I looked it up, you little jerk.

Grace laughs and leans into him.

GRACE  
I have to tell you something.

MASON  
What?

Grace thinks about it for a moment. Takes a breath, and tells him.

GRACE  
I'm pregnant.

Mason looks at her to see if she's serious. He sees she is. He hugs her tight.

MASON  
Marry me...please?

She thinks about it for a moment.

GRACE  
Okay.

He picks her up and spins her around the dance floor.

MASON  
You wanna go home and play some Scrabble?

He smiles at her, flirting. She smiles back.

GRACE  
Heck yeah.

They laugh together, swaying to the slow beat of All-4-One.

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.

Grace holds up her fist and they play a quick round of rock-paper-scissors. Mason loses and gets up to answer the phone with a groan.

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)

Um. I'm her fiancée, and 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)

Oh God, when?  
(beat)  
Shit.

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. It was Officer Dan, 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 going to be released on parole in 2 weeks.

Grace lets it sink in.

She presses her hand against her forehead for a moment. When she takes it 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

Grace stands in the shower, letting the water pour over her head, breathing heavily.

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT KITCHEN -- MORNING

Mason cooks eggs for two. Grace walks in after her shower and stands there, facing him.

GRACE

I can't do this.

Mason turns around...concerned. He walks to her.

MASON

It's going to be okay. We can get through it.

He tries to hug her but she doesn't let him.

GRACE

No Mason. I can't do *this*. I can't marry you, I can't have this baby. I can't do any of it. I don't know what I was thinking.

Mason stares at her, confused.

MASON

Baby, I know this situation is really really hard for you.

GRACE

This has nothing to do with that.

MASON

What do you mean?

GRACE

I mean, I'm not just being emotional, I've been thinking about it a lot lately.

MASON

A lot? When? During your 10 minute shower?

GRACE

I'm sorry.

Mason takes it in and breaths it out.

MASON

This is the fifth time you're doing this to me, Grace. You know that? Five.

He raises five fingers.

MASON (CONT'D)

Is this one for real? Because I am not going to come back this time.

Grace doesn't look up at him.

MASON (CONT'D)

I need you to be sure of what you're saying.

(beat)

Are you sure?

Silence.

MASON (CONT'D)

(sternly)

Grace, are you sure?

GRACE

I don't know!

MASON

You don't know? After 5 years, you still don't know?

(beat)

All I've fucking ever done is wait in this relationship. I don't ask anything of you, give you all the time you need. I don't ever have a fucking clue what's really going on in your head, why you do the crazy shit you do. But I just let it go, thinking...oh, one day, one day she'll tell me why...why I don't know anything about her, why her dad's in jail and I can't mention his name without getting the silent treatment for a week, why she can go a month without touching me and then punch me in the fucking nose in the middle of a kiss?! I mean, we've only been together 5 fucking years...she just needs more time. She'll open up one day...right?

He watches her shift her weight, avoiding eye contact.

MASON (CONT'D)

And after all that waiting, this is what I get? A fucking I don't know? Is that really all I get Grace?

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

MASON (CONT'D)

And what are you going to do with our baby? Get an abortion?

GRACE

I already made the appointment.

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

MASON

I'm done.

He grabs the frying pan and carefully slides the omelet onto a plate and sets it in front of her. Then he turns and throws the pan as hard as he can across the room.

MASON (CONT'D)

I'm fucking done.

He walks back to the bedroom. Grace stares at the omelet.

EXT. GROUP HOME -- MORNING

Mason stands out in the yard, smoking by himself. Grace shows up on her bike, locks it up and walks inside. She glances at him but he doesn't look.

INT. GROUP HOME OFFICE -- MORNING

Bobbie hands Grace the clipboard. Jessica and Scott standby.

GRACE

How's Sammy?

BOBBIE

The same. Hasn't really moved, still not eating much. But I'd keep an eye out for him and Mark.

Mason walks in and goes for the sign-in book.

SCOTT

Morning Mason.

MASON

(apathetic)  
Hey guys.

GRACE

Did something happen?

BOBBIE

Mark's fish died last night, and I heard him saying he thought Sammy had something to do with it.

GRACE

Did he?

BOBBIE

Not unless he can walk through walls.  
He hasn't left his room.

Mason signs in and leaves the room, letting the door SLAM behind him.

JESSICA

What's up with him?

Grace walks out without answering, letting the door SLAM behind her too. Jess looks to Scott.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

This is going to be a fun day.

INT. MARK'S ROOM -- MORNING

Mark's stereo is pumping music.

Grace knocks and walks in. She finds Mark sitting on the floor, pissed. In front of him is his fishbowl with his fish floating on the surface of the water. She turns down his music. Then kneels down beside him.

GRACE

I'm really sorry Mark.  
(beat)  
Can I see...

Grace reaches for the fish, but Mark snatches her wrist and pushes it away.

MARK

Don't touch my fucking fish.

GRACE

Okay Mark, I'm sorry.

She watches him. His face is dark and brooding.

GRACE (CONT'D)

It wasn't Sammy you know.

Mark doesn't respond.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Look Mark, you're turning 18 in..

MARK

Yeah, fuck! I know! *I'm turning 18 and moving out and I shouldn't do anything stupid.*

(MORE)

MARK (CONT'D)

How many times a day I gotta hear that fuckin' rhyme from you assholes? I know you all think I'm scared shitless of all the crazy black gangsters with their big guns waiting for me outside...but you all don't know fucking shit. You know what's *really* waitin' for me out there?

Grace looks at him without answering.

MARK (CONT'D)

Nothin'.

He stares at her so deeply she grows uncomfortable.

GRACE

That's not true Mark...

MARK

Look Grace, I know you're trying to be cool, but I don't wanna hear your shit about bright futures and great fucking programs right now. I just wanna spend some time alone with my dead fish. Is that alright?

GRACE

I just need to know that you're calm.

MARK

I'm calm.

Grace studies him. He does seem quite calm.

EXT. SAMMY'S ROOM -- MORNING

Grace walks out of Mark's room and peeks into Sammy's. She sees him in his normal fetal position, sucking his thumb.

She continues on her way to the girls' side.

EXT. JAYDEN'S ROOM -- MORNING

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

GRACE

Spring. Have you seen Jayden?

Spring shakes her head.

Grace walks back to the lounge.

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- MORNING

Bobbie grabs her purse and is about to walk out the door as Grace approaches.

GRACE

Bobbie, where's Jayden?

BOBBIE

Oh, I'm sorry, I thought I told you, her dad showed up this morning and took her on pass for the rest of the weekend.

GRACE

What?

BOBBIE

He was very apologetic about last night and brought her some really nice birthday presents.

Grace is shocked.

GRACE

Wait, is this a joke?

Bobbie looks confused.

GRACE (CONT'D)

He brought some fucking *presents*? Didn't you read my report?

BOBBIE

Yeah, but Jack said she could go.

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

Hey Jan, let me call you right back okay? Alright.

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

JACK (CONT'D)

Grace, her dad called me personally and apologized for missing his initial appointment. He had an emergency.

GRACE

Did you read my report?

JACK

Yes, I read your report and I was very concerned. But when Jayden's county social worker talked to her about it this morning, she said her dad has never been abusive to her 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)

In her mind, he's always right behind her, watching her, when she's sleeping, taking a shit, when she's alone in a room with a therapist, he's always there, ready to pounce on her. And you think she's going to just come out and say it? Are you guys fucking stupid?! She's trapped and was asking for help and you 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. Grace realizes she won't get to him this way. She sits down.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Jack, I'm sorry. Please. Just cancel her pass until we figure this out. I know her, and I know things aren't 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'm on the floor with these kids every day.

(MORE)

GRACE (CONT'D)

And last night, I sat next to that girl and watched her cry while she tried to tell me the only way she could.

JACK

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

GRACE

Well, your trained therapists apparently don't know shit!

JACK

A lot of girls cry Grace. That doesn't mean we can start accusing all their parents of being sexual offenders.

Grace holds back her temper.

GRACE

Especially ones who are friends of friends, right Jack?

Jack looks at her, seriously.

JACK

We're done here.

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

JACK (CONT'D)

Hey Jan, sorry 'bout that. Where were we?

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

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

EXT. GROUP HOME -- CONTINUOUS

We follow her, through the courtyard, down the sidewalk, into the front door of the unit.

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- CONTINUOUS

Scott's standing there, reading the red binder. He looks up to see her.

SCOTT

Hey. What's the lamp for?

Mason, Jessica and some of the kids watch her, a bit confused.

She ignores them all, walks to the closet and opens it. A few balls and racquets fall out. She reaches in and pulls out a baseball bat and continues walking down the hall, lamp in one hand, bat in the other.

She walks to the end of the hall and enters the "cool down room". The door shuts behind her and mutes the sound, but we can still see her through the window in the door.

She sets the lamp down on the ground and slowly raises the bat over her head. Then, she brings it down. CRASH! BAM! BAM! BAM! She goes mental on it, smashing it to bits.

INT. COOL DOWN ROOM -- DAY

Grace sits alone in the cool down room with a deflated punching bag and a broken lamp, catching her breath.

CUT TO:

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- EVENING

MASON

Last call for dinner!

The last of the kids get in line. Mason looks to Jessica.

MASON (CONT'D)

How's Grace doing?

JESSICA

She said she's not hungry.

MASON

Well, she's been in that room all day, so let's just get her a plate anyway.

(to scott)

Scott, you stay here. Mark and Sammy are still in their rooms.

SCOTT

Yeah, sure.

EXT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- EVENING

All the kids walk in a line to dinner. Jessica leads them. Mason follows.

INT. COOL DOWN ROOM -- EVENING

Grace sits as she was before. Everything is quiet, except for the distant sound of Mark's hip-hop music playing in his room. Then, she hears a distant SHATTER, not loud enough to jolt her, but enough to make her wonder.

She sits for a few moments longer, listening for any other clues. Nothing.

She stands, slowly, stretching her muscles.

INT. GROUP HOME HALLWAY -- EVENING

Grace exits the cool down room and stands for a moment, listening. She walks over to Mark's room. His door is closed, rap MUSIC blaring from inside. She opens the door and walks in.

INT. MARK'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: the source of the earlier sound.

She leaves the room, searching for Mark.

INT. GROUP HOME HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

She walks to Sammy's room and notices Mark sitting on the floor just inside.

GRACE

Mark, what are you doing in Sammy's room?

Mark 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.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Mark what did you do?

Mark stares off, holding in the tears.

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

GRACE (CONT'D)

Sammy!

Grace runs up to him.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Sammy!

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

SAMMY

What?

As Grace puts the pieces together, she hears a THUMP. She looks back to Mark, who is now lying on the floor in a pool of blood. She rushes to him.

GRACE

No no no no.

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

GRACE (CONT'D)

Shit! Mason! Anybody! Help!!

She looks back to Sammy, who looks really scared.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Sammy! I need your pillow case!

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

Scott comes running down the hall. He sees Grace wrapping the pillow case around Mark's arm.

SCOTT

Oh my god.

GRACE

Call the medics! Then bring me the first aid kit! Hurry!

SCOTT

Okay.

Scott runs back to the lounge.

Sammy watches from his bed, worried.

GRACE

Mark, come on, look at me. Open your eyes. Mark, Mark! You're going to be okay. Just try to look at me. Okay Mark? Open your eyes.

Grace panics.

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

EXT. GROUP HOME -- NIGHT

The group home sits silently in the moonlight.

INT. GROUP HOME HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Scott stands in the empty hallway, mopping up Mark's blood. He stops, suddenly, unable to go on.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM -- NIGHT

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

Grace shakes her head, replaying this horrible incident and every other one she's ever had. She puts her head down, then stands up.

GRACE  
I can't do this.

MASON  
What are you talking about?

GRACE  
I have to go.

She walks out of the room. Mason lets her go.

EXT. CITY STREETS -- NIGHT

Grace peddles her bike as hard and fast as she can. She's in a panic.

EXT. PLANNED PARENTHOOD CLINIC -- NIGHT

Grace tosses her bike and runs up to the door of the clinic. She tries to open it, but it's locked. She knocks. Nothing. She knocks louder. She hears footsteps from inside and the door opens.

It's Nurse Beth, she immediately spots Grace's desperation.

NURSE BETH  
Grace. What's wrong?

GRACE  
I can't wait.

Grace opens the door and pushes herself in.

INT. PLANNED PARENTHOOD CLINIC LOBBY -- NIGHT

She paces the lobby madly.

GRACE

I have to do it right now.

NURSE BETH

Baby, everyone's already gone for the day. We have an appointment for you on Tuesday. Nothing's going to change between now that then.

GRACE

Cause I can't wait that long!

Nurse Beth notices the blood on her shirt.

NURSE BETH

Why is there blood on your shirt?

GRACE

Is there some other place I can go? There has to be some emergency place.

NURSE BETH

What's going on Grace? Is this an emergency?

GRACE

Yes! This is a fucking emergency! Everything keeps...my whole fucking life...

Grace is somewhere else. She can't put her thoughts together. She hides her face in her hand.

NURSE BETH

Okay hon, you need to tell me what's going on, and why you have blood on your shirt.

Grace speaks through tears.

GRACE

You don't understand. I have to get this thing out of me right now or I'm going to fuck her up like he did.

NURSE BETH

Who did?

GRACE

Everyone! They fucking all do!  
(MORE)

GRACE (CONT'D)  
 Have a kid and fuck 'em up, that's  
 what we do, right? Isn't that what  
 we all fucking do?!

The statement silences her.

NURSE BETH  
 Baby, look at me.

Grace looks at her through watered eyes.

NURSE BETH (CONT'D)  
 A lot of things in life are not black  
 and white, but this is a fact, I  
 promise you: You are not your dad.

Grace turns away from her and walks to the door.

GRACE  
 I'll see you on Tuesday.

The door slams shut behind her.

EXT. CITY STREETS -- NIGHT

Grace peddles even faster, with more vigor and determination.

INT. GROUP HOME LOUNGE -- NIGHT

Grace opens the door and walks quickly past Bobbie to the  
 equipment closet.

BOBBIE  
 Oh, hey Grace.

Grace reaches in and pulls out the baseball bat then heads  
 for the door.

BOBBIE (CONT'D)  
 Any word on Mark?

GRACE  
 Nope.

The door slams behind her.

EXT. CITY STREETS -- NIGHT

Grace flies down the road again, peddling as fast as she  
 can. She holds the bat across the handle bars. A deep rage  
 bubbles inside her.

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

Grace throws her bike in the front lawn and walks toward the  
 house with bat in hand.

A beautiful silver Audi sits in the driveway.

All the lights are off inside the house. She walks to the front door like someone with nothing to lose.

She grabs the plastic rock near the door and pulls out the key. Her hands are shaking. She ignores it, opens the front door and walks in.

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

Grace walks carefully down the hall to the back room, her fingers quivering. 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. Next to him is an empty bottle of scotch.

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

Her breathing quickens as she holds 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. Jayden's been severely beaten on the left side of her face, which is swollen and bruised.

They stare at each other for a moment.

JAYDEN (CONT'D)

That's a little extreme, don't you think?

She turns and walks down the hall.

Grace stands awkwardly, realizing how stupid this idea was.

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

Grace walks out of the bedroom and out to the living room. She sees Jayden sitting on the steps with her backpack on, just outside the open door.

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

Grace walks up and sits next to her. They sit for a moment.

JAYDEN

Why are you here?

Grace thinks about it.

GRACE

I don't know.

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

They sit in silence for a long moment.

GRACE (CONT'D)

You know I had an abortion once?  
When I was your age.

She thinks about it for a while.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I don't know, it's weird. I was...I was so numb about the whole thing. I had the abortion. I stood up in a courtroom and told a bunch of strangers all the different ways he abused me since I was 9...told 'em everything, what he hit me with, how he got drunk, forced me to take a shower with him and got me pregnant, and then I sent my dad to prison. And that was it. Then I went on like it never happened...never talked about it, never thought about it...until I met you...and now it's...I have no idea what I'm doing anymore.

(beat)

I have a baby inside me and I don't know what to do.

Grace shakes her head. Jayden looks at her, realizing she has never felt so connected to someone before.

Grace looks at her.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Did he do that to you?

Jayden nods.

JAYDEN

I don't ever want to come back here again.

Grace looks at her.

GRACE

Are you ready to talk to someone about it?

Jayden looks down and nods. She looks back up to Grace.

JAYDEN

Are you?

Grace looks away, trying to figure it out.

The two of them walk together across the lawn.

Jayden laughs a little.

JAYDEN (CONT'D)

I can't believe you were going to hit him in the face with a bat.

Grace smiles and shakes her head.

JAYDEN (CONT'D)

Could I see that?

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.

GRACE

Wow.

JAYDEN

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 PARKING LOT -- NIGHT

Grace and Jayden ride into the parking lot. Jayden hops off as Grace parks the bike.

GRACE

They're going to ask a lot of questions, you know? It might 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.

JAYDEN (CONT'D)

You're going to be a really good mom.

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

INT. GROUP HOME JACK'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

A police officer takes a polaroid photo of Jayden's bruised face.

Jayden talks to two officers about how she got the bruises. One of them makes a report.

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, I wanted something to remember him by. He came at me like he always does, he's pretty predictable....

Grace watches them from the doorway. Jack stands beside her.

JACK

Grace, I owe you an apology.

GRACE

You can save it for her.

She looks at Jayden, then turns and walks out.

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

Mason grabs her hand and kisses it. She slides onto the couch and spoons with him.

MASON

Mark's 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. GRACE'S APARTMENT BATHROOM -- MORNING

Grace takes off her pajamas and slips into a tub of hot water. She sits there for a moment, watching the ripples. Then, she takes in a deep breath and disappears underwater. The surface settles.

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE -- MORNING

Grace sits in a soft chair, drawing on her hand with a fine-tip pen. It's an octopus, and all her fingers are the legs.

A kind, older woman with a soft voice sits across from her. Her name is DR. HENDLER. Dr. Hendler gives her a moment before hitting her with the next question.

DR. HENDLER

Grace, I know talking like this is really difficult for you, but you have to try, okay?

(beat)

Your father is getting out of prison today. Can you tell me how you feel about that?

Grace closes her eyes and turns away. Dr. Hendler waits a moment for her,

DR. HENDLER (CONT'D)

Grace?

She doesn't budge.

DR. HENDLER (CONT'D)

Why don't we try something a little different right now. It's a visualization exercise. You're obviously a very creative person, and this is just a way to relax and let your imagination move wherever it wants to. Does that sound okay?

Grace doesn't look at her.

DR. HENDLER (CONT'D)

Grace?

She shrugs.

DR. HENDLER (CONT'D)

Okay. I'll take that as a maybe. First, I want you to relax all the muscles in your body. Start with your feet, then move up to your legs, your shoulders, your arms, your fingers. I just want you to be completely comfortable, like you're floating, weightless.

Grace repositions herself, and seems to be responding a little.

DR. HENDLER (CONT'D)

Now I want you to picture yourself in a peaceful place. Somewhere safe, where you feel perfectly at home.

Dr. Hendler waits. She sees Grace's eyes moving under her lids.

DR. HENDLER (CONT'D)

Are you there?

(MORE)

DR. HENDLER (CONT'D)

(beat)  
Can you tell me where you are?

Grace waits a moment before answering.

GRACE

Underwater.

DR. HENDLER

Okay, well. Try to just sit there and rest. Don't go after anything. Just sit and wait, and when you see something, just describe it to me.

Grace's fingers begin to move, tapping the chair like she were playing a piano.

DR. HENDLER (CONT'D)

What do you see?

GRACE

Those tiny shrimp, the shiny ones on the nature channel. They're everywhere.

DR. HENDLER

Keep going.

GRACE

I can feel them bouncing off my skin.

Grace tenses up a little.

DR. HENDLER

What is it?

Grace doesn't want to say.

GRACE

I don't want to do this.

DR. HENDLER

It's just your imagination, you can stop whenever you want.

Grace still keeps her eyes closed, obviously uncomfortable.

DR. HENDLER (CONT'D)

What are you seeing?

GRACE

A huge fish... a whale-shark. Its mouth is wide open and it's sucking in all the shrimp. It's coming straight for me.

DR. HENDLER  
Do you want to swim out of the way?

GRACE  
No.

DR. HENDLER  
Why not?

Grace shrugs.

GRACE  
What's the point?

Dr. Hendler waits for a moment to pass.

DR. HENDLER  
Now where are you?

GRACE  
In its stomach.

DR. HENDLER  
Are you going to stay there?

GRACE  
Probably.

DR. HENDLER  
For how long?

GRACE  
Years. Years and years and years  
and years...  
(trailing off)  
...And years....and years.

DR. HENDLER  
That's a long time.

Grace is in the zone.

GRACE  
Yeah. Too long. Too too long.  
(beat)  
I can't be in here anymore.

Grace grips down on the chair. Her eyes begin to move.

DR. HENDLER  
What are you doing?

GRACE  
I'm crawling through this tube, this  
tunnel. It's full of shit and slime.

She struggles for a moment.

GRACE (CONT'D)

There's a hole, but I can't make it through. It's too tight. But I can feel water on the other side. I can fit my head through.

Grace realizes something and laughs to herself.

DR. HENDLER

What's so funny?

GRACE

I just realized I'm trying to push myself out of a whale shark's asshole.

Dr. Hendler smiles to herself.

DR. HENDLER

Did you make it?

GRACE

Yes.

DR. HENDLER

And what do you see?

Grace's face changes. Her eyes begin to quiver.

GRACE

My kids. Mark, Sammy, Jayden,  
(beat)  
Mason.

DR. HENDLER

What are they doing there?

Tears squeeze out of her eyes and roll down her face. She tries to hold them back but can't.

GRACE

They're...cleaning all the shit off of me.

Dr. Hendler waits for her for a little while.

DR. HENDLER

What now?

GRACE

Bubbles. They're everywhere, like a million tiny balloons. They're pushing me up. Really really fast.

She grips down hard on the arms of her chair.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I see colors, blues and greens and yellows and...

She seems to lift herself in her chair.

GRACE (CONT'D)

I can see the surface. I'm pushing through it.

DR. HENDLER

What do you see?

Grace looks around with her eyes closed.

GRACE

Nothing. Just the ocean, in every direction. Endless ocean.

(beat)

I still have no idea which way to go.

Grace works through something for a moment.

GRACE (CONT'D)

But it's okay, I think.

DR. HENDLER

Why? What's different?

After a moment, Grace opens her eyes for the first time and looks at her.

GRACE

I can breathe.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. GRACE'S APARTMENT BATHROOM -- MORNING

Still underwater in the tub, Grace pushes through the surface and sucks in a lung-full of air. She wipes her face and continues to breathe.

Mason sticks his head in.

MASON

Grace?

GRACE

Yeah?

MASON

We have to leave in 10 minutes if we're going to make it to that appointment.

GRACE

Okay. I'll be right out.

INT. MASON'S CAR -- MORNING

Mason and Grace drive together in his car. Mason notices her scratching her thumb again. He reaches over and holds her hand.

She smiles, nervously.

INT. WAITING ROOM -- MORNING

Mason and Grace sit in a waiting room together, similar to the one at the abortion clinic. Grace looks nervous.

MASON

You okay?

Grace nods.

NURSE

Grace Peterson?

Grace looks up.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Come on in.

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM -- MORNING

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

DOCTOR

Okay, *there* you are. Looks like a healthy one. Take a look.

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.

She grabs his hand and squeezes, kissing him on the cheek.

EXT. GROUP HOME -- MORNING

MASON

Oh yeah, that's a pretty good one.  
(MORE)

MASON (CONT'D)

It was like, I don't know, 3 years ago?

GRACE

Four.

MASON

Really?

Grace nods. She and Mason stand in a circle with Jessica, Scott and ANDREW, 20s. Bobbie approaches as Mason tells a story to initiate their new staff member.

MASON (CONT'D)

Bobbie, this is our newest victim, Andrew.

Bobbie shakes Andrew's hand.

ANDREW

Nice to meet you.

Scott offers a pack of cigarettes to everyone. Only Jessica takes one. He offers one to Mason, who surprisingly passes.

MASON

So anyway, four years ago, Grace and I got stuck working this overnight. And at the time the boys' side was really old and the girls' side was really young. And so, these 3 boys, they were all over 17, they had this grand plan: at such and such o'clock, we're gonna get the girls, run away, and do it in the bushes.

ANDREW

Like, sex?

MASON

Like sex. And we get some wind of it, and are kind of prepared that it's going to go down. So, the time comes, I'm sitting at door, and one guy sprints out of his room, and just runs straight out. I let him go cause I knew he wasn't leaving without the girls. The other two guys truck it over to the girls' side runnin' down the halls yelling "Come on girls! Let's go do it!" And the girls had actually gotten ready to run away with them.

SCOTT

They knew about it?

GRACE

They knew they were going to run away, they didn't know they were expected to immediately have sex with them in the bushes.

MASON

So Grace talks them out of it.

GRACE

I just asked them if they actually wanted to have sex with these idiots.

MASON

And these girls, you know, they were young and not experienced in that arena, so they just said, "Ew gross, and went to bed." And that was it. They left the three stooges just standing there, not knowing what to do. So, they ended up getting in a fist fight over who screwed up the plan, and an hour later everyone was asleep in bed.

They all laugh, but only for a moment. Then they all seem to realize where they are, and what these kids have been through. They stand in silence for a few moments.

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

SAMMY

YOOOOHOOOOOOOO!!!!

Grace, Mason and Jessica take off after him.

Scott holds back for a moment with Andrew, who's standing in shock.

SCOTT

Welcome to Short Term 12, man.  
Weirdest job in the world.

He takes off after them, chasing them to the far end of the yard.

Fade to black: